

2021 QUALITY SERVICE AWARDS WINNERS

AUSTRALIA

# Reader's Digest



## Christmas Dream Makers

*One Family's Passion*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# *Power of Positive Actions*

**FOR EVERYONE**, 2020 has witnessed too many changes to list. Like so many workplaces, we changed to a remote-based office within just a few short weeks. Face-to-face meetings became Zoom productions (see picture, right). I'm proud to say the initial disruption was not reflected in the magazine. In so many positive ways, the magazine remained the constant focus that kept us all sane.

Despite the uncertainty and loss that we've witnessed across the world, the importance of local concerns has never been more pronounced. Individual to individual we are stronger and even though some leaders may have faltered in their indecision, our families, neighbours, colleagues, healthcare workers, shopkeepers and teachers have never been more valued.

This issue we meet Alexander Albon, a young Formula One driver (page 36), encounter a family living on a Christmas tree farm (page 30) and marvel at the COVID-19-related acts of kindness among strangers that have occurred over the past year (page 132).

Quality customer service is a vital



part of business – more so during this year's pandemic. We are proud to announce the Quality Service Awards for 2021; each winning business has risen to the daily challenge of making the customer's experience a positive one (page 163).

A special note of thanks goes to Raimo Moysa, International Editor-in-Chief, who retires this month after 40 years. His mentorship and dedication to Reader's Digest magazine has kept its DNA intact for generations.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

**LOUISE WATERSON**  
Editor-in-Chief



# AUSTRALIA Reader's Digest

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## LETTERS

### *Reader's Comments And Opinions*

#### **Possum Commotion**

Reading 'Possum Magic' (Smart Animals, October) reminded me of when I was living in the middle of an apple orchard in the Huon Valley in southern Tasmania. On moonlit nights, a group of possums would climb a tree at the end of the house, race along the ridge of the iron roof, skid with a loud screeching of nails on metal, then jump to the ground. Round they'd go again, over and over for hours. It made for little sleep.

LORNE HENRY



#### **Ramsay Turns Up the Heat in the Kitchen**

Since I bear the needs of chefs in mind when I sell oysters in Brisbane, I loved Paul Dargan's profile on Gordon Ramsay (October). With this magazine's typically high standard of reporting, it shows Gordon as a chef whose convictions are buffered

with enthusiasm and a wry, self-deprecating sense of humour. It's easy to see that his life in a busy kitchen is like life in a pressure cooker. Yet he manages it so well. It was a delicious read to savour, Readers Digest. Food for thought, if you'll pardon the pun.

BRUNO MAROT

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.



### Treasured Writing Tool

Like Sue Thompson, author of 'Ode To My Fountain Pen' (My Story, October), I treasure my first fountain pen, which my father bought me in 1967. It has taken me through exams and lots of letter writing. I keep it nicely, and it still works. Its sentimental value is beyond words.

MARY EU

### Project Inspiration

'Koh's Project Dignity' (October), the story of a man who risked his own personal finances to help others who are less fortunate, is so inspiring. Koh points out that having a job can help provide dignity and self-esteem. How true. He is going from strength to strength setting up in other parts of the world.

PETER RIGGALL

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### GIDDY UP!

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

Once again he made a fool of himself at the party.

MICHAEL GOATHAM

I have a feeling this race will be a tie.

JOSEPH BAKER

The transformation of cowboys during COVID-19.

LAKIRA JAYASUMANA

I 'wooden' back him winning this one!

JUDITH HOOKWAY

Congratulations to this month's winner, Michael Goatham.



WIN!

### CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win \$100. To enter, email [editor@readersdigest.com.au](mailto:editor@readersdigest.com.au) or see details on page 8.

### Gratifying Habit

The article 'My Thank-You Year' (August) really struck a chord with me. It was inspiring to learn that writing simple thank you notes can make a huge difference in one's life. Obviously, the recipients of those notes felt appreciated. But what truly amazed me was how the sender became more aware and thankful of the gestures of others – the big ones as well as the little ones of which we normally take little notice. **GERALDINE ANG WEE WEE**

### Returning Reader

I received a complimentary copy of the October 2020 edition and am pleased to see it has reverted to the more traditional style, with non-glossy pages and a host of interesting features. I will definitely be a returning reader. A suggestion – one of my favourite features in the old Digest was 'My Most Unforgettable Character' and I suspect to bring this back would be a popular move among readers. **RANDAL WILLIAMS**

### Checking Out Symptoms

Thank you for the article '11 Pains You Must Never Ignore' (September). It is especially useful in these times when a lot of people are still reluctant to visit their doctor due to the fear of exposure to COVID-19. Hopefully this will encourage anyone with symptoms to go and get them checked out. **AYESHA AZEEM**

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## NEWS WORTH SHARING

### Whales Find Sanctuary After Life in Captivity

**T**wo 12-year-old beluga whales that spent years in captivity entertaining humans at an aquarium in Shanghai, China, have found freedom at an open-water sanctuary in Iceland.

The four-metre-long whales, which each weigh about 900 kilograms, were flown almost 10,000 kilometres in a 747 aircraft fitted with purpose-built containers from Changfeng Ocean World to a sanctuary in a bay at Iceland's Heimaey Island.

The whales, both females and previously known as Little Grey and Little White, will enjoy open water for the first time since they left a Russian whale research centre in 2011.



Andy Bool, head of the charity Sea Life Trust, said, "We're delighted that they are safely in their sea sanctuary care pools." The conservationists hope the sanctuary will be a model for rehoming the 3000 whales and dolphins currently housed in traditional facilities or performing in shows.



COMPILED BY VICTORIA POLZOT



## Volunteering Can Lead to Longer Life

**A**ltruistic acts such as volunteering can lead to a longer life, according to a Harvard University study.

The study focused on 13,000 adults aged over 50 who volunteer for two hours a week and found that they have a substantially reduced risk of mortality, less chance of developing physical impairments and an

improved sense of wellbeing compared to those who don't.

A growing body of research has linked volunteering to health and wellbeing benefits. Eric Kim, the study's co-author says, "Our results show that volunteerism among older adults doesn't just strengthen our

bonds to others, helping us feel a sense of purpose and wellbeing, and protecting us from feelings of loneliness, depression and hopelessness."



## School Pupils Apply Science Lessons to Sensory Garden



**A**uckland's water shortage has given pupils of Reremoana School a valuable and practical science lesson: how to irrigate gardens with rainwater.

The children, concerned about how wasteful it is for treated water to be used on gardens, received \$20,000 in funding from SouthSci, part of the Government's

strategic plan to encourage New Zealanders to become engaged with science and technology. The students designed and built a system for non-mains water to be collected, filtered and used to water a sensory garden.

The garden, which caters to neurodiverse students, is made up of wooden planter boxes built by the students in an underutilised part of the school grounds. Autism New Zealand was on board to advise on suitable plants that people with neurodiversities will most enjoy for their colour, texture and fragrance.

## MY STORY



# Needle Phobia

*A patient's open and honest experience of being diagnosed with lymphoma*

BY Robin Keown

Syringes for blood tests or inoculations used to be a one-second wonder for me and I never turned a hair. But after five months of intravenous (IV) therapy every four weeks plus weekly blood tests, I began to brace myself and tense up as I waited for the jab – sometimes two in a row if the vein didn't flow. I started to wonder what sort of a wimp I had become.

I was diagnosed with mantle lymphoma – a rare and aggressive blood cancer – in October last year. It had made itself known when lymph glands in my neck enlarged and persisted. The other symptoms – night sweats, fatigue, shortness of breath and itchy skin – I had put down to post-menopause and my increasing age. So I was slow to seek my doctor's opinion.

My recommended treatment plan was six months of monthly



chemotherapy received over three days. After the initial shock of the diagnosis, the thought of the regimen filled me with both apprehension and anticipation. Untreated lymphoma of my type has a prognosis of a year but treatment can prolong life. Remission can be reached through chemotherapy which can extend life, but the condition itself is incurable.

Once the process started, I found it was less daunting than I had imagined. I had heard

stories of nausea, fatigue and bowel problems following chemotherapy. The actual three-day hospital IV process was a not unwelcome rest in a chair all day. I had time to read without feeling guilty. However, the two days after treatment were the worst of the month's off-days from treatment. The nausea and fatigue were debilitating, and either diarrhoea or constipation would also occur.

I am 70 years old, and longevity runs in both sides of my family.

---

Robin Keown finished her treatment in October, a year after her diagnosis. She is very pleased to be back home in Golden Bay, New Zealand. Although her recovery will be exhausting, she is looking forward to a long life and returning to her hobbies of reading, gardening, painting and writing.

My mother and all my aunts and uncles lived into their 90s, with the exception being my father, who died in his 80s. Cancer was also almost unknown among my immediate forebears, so to have a double whammy – suddenly a short life expectancy plus an aggressive cancer – was a terrible shock.

Having done my own research on treatments, and after talking it over with my haematologist, I learned that stem cell transplants were an emerging new treatment for different sorts of cancers. However, she said that patients my age were very unlikely to receive such drastic treatment. The usual upper limit was age 65.

**I FELT CRUSHED,  
AS I KNEW THAT  
THIS TREATMENT  
COULD  
PROLONG LIFE**

I felt crushed, as I knew that this treatment could prolong life more than chemotherapy alone. Moreover, I felt (and acted, according to many friends and family) more like a 60 year old than a 70 year old. For that I could thank my genetic inheritance, an excellent diet and athleticism over a lifetime. I also had never smoked and didn't have serious underlying health conditions. But rules are rules, the health system had a limited budget, and I realised I was just a statistic.

Treatment proceeded with the odd blip – a few temperature spikes,

one of which, paired with a worrying blood test, resulted in a helicopter dash to hospital where I received a transfusion and was in isolation for four days.

Because chemotherapy reduces one's immunity, the risk of catching infections is high. I had put myself in isolation at home for the duration of treatment to minimise this risk. Ironically, three months into my treatment the COVID-19 virus spread and New Zealand, like many places around the world, went into lockdown. So the whole country was doing what I had done for several months.

I also suffered an attack of rigors one night due to a rise in temperature. I had not had this strange reaction – feeling cold and shivering when in fact the body has a high fever – since I had been a child. Remarkably, I remembered my mother giving me aspirin to bring the fever down. This time I promptly took paracetamol and the rigors receded. The memory is an amazing part of our brain, and learning caused by a traumatic experience can lock in information which can be life-saving.

I also suffered a terribly itchy skin rash, which started in my lower limbs, then spread to the upper limbs, trunk, neck and face and scalp. It was most likely a reaction

to one of the three drugs I was taking and my specialist omitted this drug for the last two rounds of chemotherapy and prescribed an oral steroid. I had a short but welcome break for six weeks from IV treatment – and needles. Throughout my treatment I was thankful for the team of specialists and nurses who cared for me so professionally and empathetically.

Behind the scenes my

### I HAD A SHORT BUT WELCOME BREAK FROM IV TREATMENT AND NEEDLES

haematologist had been consulting a nation-wide team of lymphoma experts for advice on treatment, as well as the stem cell transplant team. She had been

quietly advocating for a chance for my case to be reconsidered for stem cell treatment, despite the fact that during the COVID-19 crisis everything had been delayed.

Then, out of the blue, came the wonderful news that I had been accepted. I felt as if a lifeline had been thrown to me – as indeed it was. A chance at enjoying life for longer – and, once the process was completed, an end to the dreaded needle jabs!

---

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## SMART ANIMALS

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### Clever as a Fox

BRONWYN HUDSON

I awoke one day last December to find the drystone wall in my front yard toppled; small holes were all over the garden and mulch was scattered over the neatly manicured lawn. I replaced the stones and mulch and refilled the holes. The next morning, the same thing happened. This occurred night after night.

It wasn't long before I saw the culprit. The fox, who we nicknamed Dastardly, sat brazenly staring at me – sporting his red bushy tail, pointy nose and long whiskers.

He was timid at the start

although each day he became more emboldened. Sometimes he would ignore me. At other times, he would slink close by me, stop as if he was saying 'hello', and then continue on his merry way.

He always knew when it was garbage night. Tuesday mornings he was a familiar figure, galloping down the footpath with a bin-scavenged shopping bag in his mouth.

He was nimble. He could slip

---

**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.**



through the fence with the greatest of ease to avoid you, and stand stock-still, camouflaging himself in the undergrowth.

I admired him for his clever ways and over time we developed a bond. The fox had become an unlikely friend. He thought he owned the place and he trotted around as if he was the king.

But when my prize rose bushes were decimated, enough was enough. So, a cage was set up and baited with a fox's favourite treat – chicken drumsticks.

I followed the instructions given to me by a man from an indigenous land-care group and created a soft bed of magnolia leaves. Apparently foxes don't like stepping on bare wire. They're not stupid.

I watched as he climbed the verandah steps to get a better view of the cage. You could almost see the cogs turning in his mind as he tried to work out how to get to the meal.

He circled the cage, surveying it from every angle. Still, he sensed something was wrong and wouldn't enter.

Twice the neighbour's ginger tom cat was caught in the cage, much to my embarrassment and the cat's indignity. Not to mention a couple of hapless birds.

As I write the fox is still on the run. He has my admiration.



## Musical Magpies

LORIS HAWKINS

A pair of magpies made a nest quite close to our house and, of course, we fed them occasionally. They produced two cute babies who would turn up on our back verandah for a feed. I called them Heckle and Jeckle.

One Sunday morning they were on the verandah. I had the radio tuned to the ABC. The presenter, Ian McNamara, usually plays a recording of different bird songs. He played it that morning and when it was the magpie's turn to sing, Heckle and Jeckle puffed out their fluffy chests and sang along with the magpie on the radio.

It was a magical moment.

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# Guide Dogs



## Transforming lives through the power of trust Guide Dog Jet helps Erin reach new heights

When it comes to choosing a travel buddy, we all know trust is key. We need someone we can trust to be at the airport on time, someone we can trust to be up early for that 6 am tour, and to help us find our way back to the hotel at the end of a long night. But how many of us think of a travel buddy as someone we need to trust with our life?

For Erin, one of approximately 575,000 Australians living with blindness or low vision, being able to trust her travel buddy Jet means just that. Jet is a Guide Dog; one of hundreds bred, raised, and trained each year by Guide Dogs organisations around Australia to enable people like Erin to live safely and independently.

Every day, Erin – along with thousands of other Australians – puts her trust in her Guide Dog to help her overcome barriers and achieve her goals. Every day, these iconic dogs open up new and unimagined possibilities for their Handlers, just like Jet did for Erin on a recent trip to Cradle Mountain, Tasmania.

With Jet by her side, Erin conquered a three-hour hike – navigating uneven footpaths, boardwalks with steep drop-offs, and unconventional stairs – something she says she never would have had the confidence to tackle if it wasn't for Jet.

This was a huge achievement and one Erin will be proud of for many years to come; just as Guide Dogs Australia has been proud to support people with low vision or blindness for over 60 years.





## Give the gift of independence this Christmas

It has been a challenging year for us all, but even during the toughest times, there have still been heroes – just like Guide Dog Kamin has been for his Handler, Sean.

"I used to struggle getting our four-year-old daughter to childcare but with Kamin's help, I can now spend much more time with my daughter. We can now stop at our favourite local café on the way and enjoy a hot chocolate together – something we could never have done previously. We love our morning walks and I am able to hold my daughter's hand as I know Kamin will get us there safely."

It takes \$50,000 and two years to breed, raise and train each Guide Dog – and this is all made possible thanks to the generosity and support of our community, who trust Guide Dogs Australia to make a difference.

You too can make a difference by donating to Guide Dogs and giving the gift of independence this Christmas.

Simply use the envelope insert to send your donation or donate securely online at [guidedogsaustralia.com/trustedbrand](https://www.guidedogsaustralia.com/trustedbrand)

To achieve this, trust must be at the heart of everything we do; from the trust our Clients put in us to provide the support and care they need, to the trust between a Handler and their Guide Dog.

It is also vital that this trust extends to the community who help fund over 80% of our services and who have named Guide Dogs Australia "**Australia's Most Trusted Charity Brand**" seven times in Reader's Digest's annual survey.

The trust of our community has been more important in 2020 than ever before. With your help, we have been able to continue the crucial work we do every day under even the toughest of circumstances. Together, we are transforming lives, all through the power of trust.



**PETS**

# Moving House with Pets

*How to settle them in their new place*

BY *Dr Katrina Warren*



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

Moving house can be stressful for the whole family, including our pets. Owners are often concerned about how their pet will cope with the move and whether they will remain safe and secure when they arrive in their new environment. Veterinarian Dr Katrina Warren shares her expert knowledge and advice on how to make the transition easier for everyone.

**PREPARE ROUTINES IN ADVANCE** Animals, like people, enjoy a routine so change can upset them. Set up a routine before the move and follow it in the new place. Feed your pet at the same time each day or play a special game with them at a set time to establish a routine your pet will look forward to. Start the routines in your old home and continue after the move, so although the house has changed, the pleasurable routines of feeding and playing are the same.

**BOARDING DURING THE MOVE** Some pets become anxious when suitcases or boxes appear or when there is lots of activity. If this happens to your pet, consider boarding them for a few days before and after the move. That way they won't be around when their surroundings change, and will arrive at a settled environment with familiar objects. It also safeguards against cats disappearing before you can put them in a carrier.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES





**Familiarise your pets with their crate before you set out**

### UPDATE CONTACT

**DETAILS** Update your contact details associated with your pet's registration and microchip, if they have one, by contacting your local council and the microchip database register. A collar and tag with your phone number can also help to reunite you with your pet if they do stray.

**WHEN YOU ARRIVE** It's best to confine cats to a few rooms at a time. When they're comfortable eating and using their litter tray, then gradually extend the territory so they become familiar with the whole house. It's also better for cats to be kept indoors for a couple of weeks before letting them into the garden. Always supervise your cat when they first go outside and let them out just before a meal, so they are more likely to want to come back inside.

### ANXIOUS BEHAVIOUR

A stressed dog or cat may start barking or meowing excessively and may go to the toilet in an inappropriate place. A smaller number over-groom themselves, become destructive, aggressive, very timid or hide or lose their appetite because of stress. This will often settle down but if your pet continues to be anxious, then you may need to see your veterinarian or qualified animal behaviour consultant for advice.

## TRANSPORTING YOUR PET SAFELY

### Car Travel

- Confine cats and small dogs to a crate and have large dogs harnessed.
- Take a water bowl and lead, be sure to stop for regular breaks and always have your dog on a lead at these times.

- Offer cats a litter tray inside the car unless they are trained to use a lead or harness.

### Air Travel

- Always book your pet in before the flight and ensure they are in a secure crate.

- Train them several weeks before so they are comfortable in a crate.
- Arrive at the airport at least 90 minutes before the flight.
- Discuss special needs of your pet with your vet well before travel time.







5

# Surprising Health Benefits of Coffee

*A morning cup may be good for your heart and reduce inflammation*

BY Amy Gorin

Here's good news for coffee drinkers everywhere: having a daily coffee habit may actually be a good thing.

Yes, coffee once had a reputation for being bad for you. However, "the past 25 years have yielded better-quality data and expanded our understanding of coffee's impact on health," says diabetes educator Shahzadi Devje. "And the case for coffee is stronger than ever!"

## REGULAR AND DECAF COFFEE CONTAINS ANTIOXIDANTS

"Coffee is one of the most plentiful and consistent sources of cell-protecting antioxidants, since many people consume it daily," says certified athletic trainer Dana Angelo White. Indeed, coffee is one of the main sources of antioxidants in the Western diet. "A humble cup of coffee is a very complex substance, containing more than 1000 compounds with high-antioxidant capacity," adds Nieves.

What about decaf? When it comes to antioxidants, "both regular and decaf coffee have similar amounts," explains Nieves. "However, it seems that the caffeine extraction process may somewhat reduce the amounts of phenolic acids and antioxidant capacity in decaf coffee." In a nutshell: regular coffee may offer more health benefits than decaf, but you'll still get health perks from a cup of decaf.

## COFFEE MAY HELP REDUCE INFLAMMATION

"Most of the reported health benefits of coffee bank on the premise that coffee may have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that, over time, may reduce inflammation," says Devje. Reducing inflammation may ultimately decrease your risk of chronic disease. A 2017 review study in *Annual Review of Nutrition* found that coffee intake was associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes >>



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>> and Parkinson's disease, among other conditions.

**COFFEE MAY AID HEART HEALTH** Here's great news to anyone with a family history of heart problems: having a coffee habit may lower your risk of heart disease. A review in *Circulation* found the biggest benefit to fall at three to five cups of coffee a day. It may help reduce risk of other types of heart problems, too. "The American Heart Association observed that drinking coffee was associated with decreased risk of developing heart failure by seven per cent and stroke by eight per cent with every additional cup of coffee consumed per week, when compared with non-coffee drinkers," says Nieves.

And finally, regularly consuming up to 300 mg a day of caffeine (one espresso shot equals 100 mg while one cup of instant coffee equals 60mg) may be protective against heart rhythm disorders, according to a 2018 study in the *JACC: Clinical Electrophysiology*.

**COFFEE MAY ENHANCE YOUR FOCUS** "Caffeine improves performance on simple and complex attention tasks, as well as alertness," says Devje. A small March 2020 study in *Consciousness and Cognition* found drinking coffee may improve your concentration, but



not your creativity. In the study, the researchers gave a 200 mg caffeine pill or a placebo to a small group of 80 people. Upon reviewing caffeine's effect on problem-solving, idea-generation, working memory and mood, the researchers found caffeine enhanced their problem-solving abilities. These effects have to be tested in larger populations.

**WHERE SCIENCE IS STILL CAUTIOUS** "Observational studies have linked coffee consumption with a probable decreased risk of breast, colorectal, colon, endometrial and prostate cancers," says Devje, referring to the previously mentioned *Annual Review of Nutrition* study. Drinking several cups of coffee a day was associated with lower risk of developing some cancers, but "keep in mind that the data is observational in nature, and we cannot assume a cause and effect relationship," she says.



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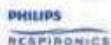
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**HEALTH**

# Summer Hazards to Avoid

BY *Susannah Hickling*

**FOOD POISONING** We love barbecues, but there's a risk that your grilled chicken and salads could make you ill. Don't leave meat out of the fridge too long in warm weather or bacteria might spread, and make sure it's cooked right through. Avoid letting raw meat come in contact with other foods via utensils or chopping boards, and wash your hands after touching it. Chill cold foods until serving.

**SUNBURN** We all know the score, but we can still find ourselves caught unawares. Try to avoid direct exposure to the sun between 11am and 3pm – ideally by staying indoors or in the shade, or by covering up. Use sun cream of at least SPF 30.

**WEIL'S DISEASE** While rare, Weil's disease, also known as leptospirosis, is spread in the urine of infected animals, such as rats and mice. If you enjoy swimming, fishing or kayaking



in rivers, there's a chance you could catch it. It causes flu-like symptoms initially. These can be treated with antibiotics. But leave it and Weil's disease can potentially lead to liver or kidney failure. To prevent it, shower after being in freshwater.

**BITES AND STINGS** Attacks by mozzies, horseflies, wasps and the like are unpleasant but the consequences clear up quickly. Wash bites and stings with soap and water, and apply an ice pack to reduce pain. However, some people suffer a severe allergic reaction with swelling in the mouth and throat and difficulty breathing. This requires urgent medical attention.

**ATHLETE'S FOOT** Dry your feet well after washing them, particularly between the toes, to avoid the cracked, painful skin that's the tell-tale sign of this fungal infection. Pharmacy treatments work but might take a few days. Change your socks daily and avoid shoes which make your feet sweaty.





## Chris O'Brien Lifehouse

### A LEGACY OF HOPE

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is a comprehensive cancer centre treating both public and private patients. When Professor Chris O'Brien AO was diagnosed with brain cancer, he used his diagnosis to advocate for his vision of bringing together all elements of cancer care in one place.

Today, Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is the leading referral centre in Australia for rare and complex cancers. We offer every type of treatment and service that people with cancer need under one roof. Our clinicians are world-leaders in cancer research, determined to find better ways to treat patients, improve outcomes and deliver uncompromising, patient-centred care.



**Professor Chris O'Brien AO**  
3 Jan 1952 - 4 Jun 2009

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is not only Chris' legacy, but the legacy of our community of gift in Will supporters. As a not-for-profit hospital, our model of care relies on our generous supporters, who enable major breakthroughs in world-first cancer research and further advance our standards of specialised and holistic care.

By leaving a gift in your Will to Chris O'Brien Lifehouse, you leave a legacy of hope for people with cancer and their families, both now and into the future.

To find out more about how you can make an impact, please contact Rebecca Scott for a confidential discussion on 02 8514 0988 or [Rebecca.Scott@lh.org.au](mailto:Rebecca.Scott@lh.org.au).





## WORLD OF MEDICINE

### WHEN NOT TO SWITCH ON AN ELECTRIC FAN

When the temperature soars past 35°C, an electric fan may not prevent problems like heat exhaustion, according to the World Health Organization. In fact, it could actually add to heat stress by blowing warm air over your skin. However, an *Annals of Internal Medicine* study found evidence that fans are counterproductive only when the air is very hot and dry, such as in arid conditions, but can help lower core temperatures and heart strain in hot, humid weather. During the vast majority of heatwaves, switching on a fan does still help.

### BUYING-SHOPPING DISORDER: AN EMERGING DIAGNOSIS

To what extent do you experience irresistible impulses to buy items you don't necessarily need? To what extent do you experience emotional distress because of buying behaviours? These are the type of questions on the newly created Excessive Buying Rating Scale (EBRS).

"Our level of spending lies along a continuum," explains Australian clinical psychologist, Mike Kyrios. "Most people are somewhere around the middle." The group at the top tends to see their buying habits lead to distressing effects, such as family discord, work impairment and financial problems. They often use buying to chase an emotional high or to escape from negative feelings, Kyrios says. That's why a diagnosis called 'buying-shopping disorder' is in the works: to help identify people who are suffering and develop treatments for improving their lives.

### ERRATIC SLEEP-WAKE PATTERNS AND HEART HEALTH

In a study of the effects of sleep timing, participants aged over 45 without a usual bedtime and wake time were nearly twice as likely to develop cardiovascular disease, compared with people who more or less stuck to a schedule – even on weekends. Harmful disturbances to the body's circadian rhythm may help to explain this link.



# GUT HEALTH MICROBIOME SUPPORT BLOATING OR CONSTIPATED? INDIGESTION AND HEARTBURN? FOOD INTOLERANCE? FODMAP?



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# Oh, Christmas Tree

*The smell of a fresh Christmas tree evokes fond memories. We meet a Queensland family ensuring that pine trees continue to be a part of Yuletide tradition*

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BY *Cath Johnsen*

**I**n the rocky farmlands of the aptly named Granite Belt region in South West Queensland, local farmers Brad and Katrina Fraser are as happy as pigs in mud, or perhaps a more fitting idiom might be, as merry as reindeers in snow.

It often surprises visitors to hear that it *does* occasionally snow in this elevated patch of Queensland countryside, or at the very least, it receives a decent and regular frost,



**Rocking around the Christmas tree ... farmers Katrina and Brad Fraser with daughter Evelyn and son Weston**

perfect for the region's burgeoning wine industry.

But it's not grapes that this enterprising couple are growing on their eight-hectare property at Applethorpe, but Christmas trees.

Groves of deep green radiata pine trees line the fields by the thousands, ready for the annual harvest in December when tourists come from far and wide to choose their perfect yule tree, direct from the farm.

And it's not just the fresh Christmas trees that draw in the crowds, it is the Fraser's menagerie of Christmas animals, including deer, donkeys, turkeys, chickens, ducks,

sheep and goats, which can be petted and fed by visitors.

Having previously spent numerous years working on remote cattle stations in the far reaches of Queensland, Brad admits that he feels happiest when he's out on the land pruning the trees or tending to his animals.

More often than not though, you'll find him behind the counter of the farm's beautifully presented Christmas store and café.

Originally an apple storage shed, the store is the result of Katrina's flair for styling and decorating. Inside is an arresting sight: from floor to ceiling and wall to wall there's enough twinkly lights, glittering decorations and Christmas paraphernalia of every description to rival Santa's own stash.

Brightly coloured candy canes sit alongside gingerbread-scented candles and intricately decorated nativity scenes. There's also an enticing range of Katrina's home-made Christmas treats on offer, such as Turkish

delight, rocky road and caramel fudge.

Behind the counter is the stocky farmer, Brad, work boots on and sleeves rolled up to his elbows, bantering good-naturedly with a visitor about a variety of topics, especially the lack of rain, drawing out each word in his broad Queensland accent.

## **TWINKLY LIGHTS AND GLITTERING DECORATIONS RIVAL SANTA'S OWN STASH**

“Well, at least the weather gives us something to talk about, mate!” Brad laughs as he pours the customer a thick, Belgian hot chocolate.

The lack of rainfall in the area has been an ongoing talking point for the locals, culminating in the nearby township of Stanthorpe completely running out of water in January this year, and having to import up to 42 truckloads of water per day to meet residents’ basic needs.

No strangers to drought, in the five years since the Frasers planted their first pine tree they’ve had to draw on the life-sustaining strategies they learnt while working on parched cattle stations, such as making use of bore water, keeping the trees well supplied with nutrients, and shaping the trees throughout the year by hand with a machete.

But Brad says that nothing works quite as well as Mother Nature’s rain, and it takes a lot of hard work to prevent the trees from becoming sparsely foliated or dwarfed in height. According to Brad, a good-quality Christmas tree should be so dense that “you can’t see daylight through it”.

While the drought had been hard, the Frasers agree that the biggest challenge they’ve had to face were last summer’s bushfires. Coming within sight of the Fraser’s property, the fires forced the closure of the main highway leading to their farm and kept visitors away during peak season.

Mercifully, their farm was spared, although Brad had a number of sleepless nights waiting and watching with hoses at the ready. Katrina, who had driven their two children to safety, reflects: “It certainly puts life in perspective. Our house started filling up with smoke and I thought, *I’ve got to get out of here*, because all I could think of was our two young children.”

Drought and bushfires aside, life on the family’s Christmas farm makes for an idyllic childhood for Evelyn, 5, and Weston, 3, who even at their tender ages, help out with all aspects of farm life.

In the early days, Katrina recalls pushing the kids along the fields in prams and breastfeeding Weston while planting pine trees.

***Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way!***  
**The Christmas shop is open all year**





## READER'S DIGEST

Giggling at the memory, she adds that growing up on a Christmas farm that is open all year round means that her kids will spontaneously sing 'Jingle Bells' in August and offer pointed opinions on Christmas styling.

When asked if they ever tire of listening to Christmas carols, Katrina chuckles again and says that this is the question they are most often asked.

Brad jokes that it was "a bit rough" having to listen to carols all day at first but concedes that they've grown so accustomed to hearing them now that [any other music] just wouldn't feel right.

***I'm a little star ... young Evelyn does her bit to help the family business***



## CHRISTMAS MUSIC IS CRUCIAL TO CREATING THE RIGHT AMBIANCE, ALL YEAR ROUND

Katrina agrees that Christmas music is crucial to creating the right ambience, whichever month it is.

Earlier this year, the hard-working Fraser family were dealt another blow when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down their business for two months

over a usually busy Easter season.

Ever innovative, the pair listed their stock online, and were overwhelmed by the supportive response from customers. Despite

having to "count every dollar", they were able to stay afloat, and once their doors were able to safely open again, visitors began flocking back.

With no option but to holiday locally, many visitors to the farm tell the Frasers that they had planned to celebrate a white Christmas in Europe, Canada or North America, but have instead opted for the next best thing - a visit to the Granite Belt Christmas Farm and Queensland's coldest town.

Ironically though, despite owning a Christmas farm with all the trimmings, the Frasers plan to spend a quiet Christmas day away in their caravan, with their holiday beginning on Christmas Eve after the last Christmas tree has been felled and wheeled out through the farm's gates.

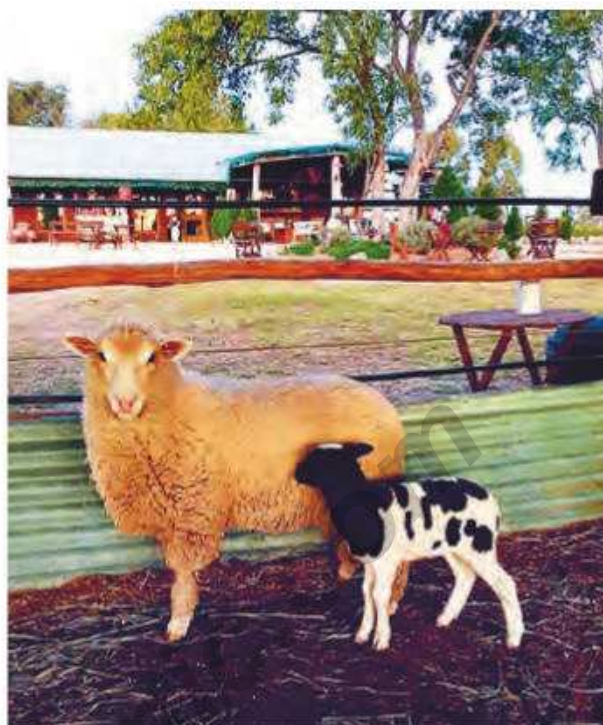
Christmas Day will consist of an

uncomplicated lunch and cocktails by the pool, Katrina says, while the kids will simply be overjoyed that Santa has remembered to deliver their gifts to the caravan, and not the farm.

“For me, Christmas is about joy, magic and family,” Katrina says, looking fondly at her children. “I think you go through different stages of Christmas in your lifetime - there’s your own childhood Christmas, and then when you’re in your 20s its more about partying, but once you’ve had kids, it takes on a whole new meaning.”

Brad agrees and says that it gives him great satisfaction to help other families start or continue the tradition of having a real Christmas tree in their home.

“We’re not just here to sell a product and make a coin,” he enthuses.



**Away in a manger ... petting the farm animals is popular among the visitors**

“We’re trying to help people create great memories. I mean, lots of kids are going to receive the best presents under my tree. They’re never going to forget that.” **R**

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### World’s Slowest Music

A musical composition designed to take well over 600 years to play had its first chord change in seven years in September. Entitled ‘As Slow as Possible’, the composition by the late avant-garde American composer John Cage is due to be played out over 639 years at the St. Burchardi church in Halberstadt in Germany. Needless to say, no one will hear the piece in its entirety. Fans flocked to the church to witness the event and there was also a livestream. The performance started in 2001 on an organ specially built for the super slow-paced recital. If all goes to plan, the performance will come to an end in 2640. Fans will have a relatively short wait for the next momentous occasion, however, as the next chord change is due in February 2022. CNN



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...



# ... RACE IN FORMULA ONE

*“We’ve got the best people in the world working for us, and we all want to win,” says the Aston Martin Red Bull Racing team driver*

---

BY *Alexander Albon*

AS TOLD TO *Stewart Bell*

**“W**hen you’re on the grid, the adrenaline is at its peak. You spend your whole build-up to a race with so many people around you – the team, engineers, the media, and fans. But, that’s the only point where you feel truly alone. You can almost hear yourself, your heartbeat, and you’re just waiting.

You get the final call over the radio that the







**In 2019, Alexander Albon became only the second driver to represent Thailand on the Formula One circuit**



last car is on the grid. The build-up is there. You can feel it, and you're ready and kind of anxious to get going.

But then once the lights go out, it's like a switch and everything feels very automated. It's almost robotic. It's like you're just starting what you normally do.

Long before you approach turn one, you've already done your research on the best positioning. But, of course, circumstances change – and you always end up somewhere else on-track. You just try to look for opportunities, cover yourself, and try to get through it cleanly – that's the main point.

But it's strange, because it's the only time on-track, up until that point of the race weekend, that you're actually fighting right next to another car. Normally, during practice and qualifying, you're never close to anyone. It feels very normal, though. I've spent a few years in single seaters and go-karts. But, it's kind of that elbows-out approach, but staying clean on the run to turn one.

When you're racing, the sensations of the Formula One (F1) car are similar to what you would feel in your road car, in terms of what you feel through your hands, and your backside. Of course, it's hard to feel

it in a road car when you're driving at the speed limit. [You would have felt it] if you've driven on a circuit, or even on a wet road when it's quite slippery and you can feel the car moving around or aquaplaning.

In an F1 car, the forces are much higher through a corner. I wish people could experience it because even if the cars look quick, I can guarantee you they feel far more impressive than how they look. You have to imagine: it's like we are on a quicker version of a roller coaster all the time for two hours. And the margins are extremely small, because one loss of grip, and it's a crash – purely because

the speeds you're doing are so high, easily over 200 km/h.

Also, when the cars slide, they lose downforce\* because the car is not meant to be sideways, so it's

almost like an instant crash. So what we're fighting with are tiny movements and subtleties of the car with huge consequences. And that's where the difficulty lies.

---

*\* a force, produced by a combination of air resistance and gravity, that acts on a moving vehicle, having the effect of pressing it down towards the ground and giving it increased stability for higher cornering speeds.*

**“WE’RE ON A  
QUICKER VERSION  
OF A ROLLER  
COASTER FOR  
TWO HOURS”**



**Albon achieved his first F1 podium at the 2020 Tuscan Grand Prix**

**THE THOUGHT OF F1** when I was a kid was daunting. It was like, *wow!* Look at these fast cars going around the track! I remember I went to Silverstone, the home of the British Grand Prix, when I was five or six. The cars had the loud V10 engines, and I saw them go past and it was a 'wow' moment. They were doing a winter test before the season started, and to hear the noise and see the speed, it was like 'oh my god'.

Even at that time, I wanted to be an F1 driver, but I didn't really know what it involved. I had seen it on TV, but then when I saw it in real life for the first time on circuit, it was like a 'this is no joke!' I was blown away by it. Of course I still wanted to do it. It was daunting but at the same time I knew that was what I wanted to do.

I'm now an F1 driver for Aston

Martin Red Bull Racing, and scored my maiden podium at the Tuscan Grand Prix. It was really nice to give the team something back after they've supported me since day one and show them what I can do. It was a tough race and definitely not one of the easy ones. The Mugello track is brutal, especially the high-speed corners in sector two, and with so many re-starts to manage we had our work cut out. We struggled to get off the line so I knew I had to be aggressive to get all the overtakes done but we had a really good car and we knew it was good on the brakes so we used that to our advantage.

When we lost two positions on the final re-start, I was fired up as I wasn't going to let the opportunity of a podium go by so I pushed hard to get third and I'm over the moon with the result.





**At the age of eight, in 2005, Albon began racing go-karts, before a switch to cars in 2012, rising up through Formula Renault, GP3-now-F3 and F2**

Obviously Red Bull doesn't need an introduction. It's a very cool brand. And you get that vibe also in this team. Everyone's super cool, basically, but there is an atmosphere where you realise you're part of a much bigger family of top athletes who are downhill skiers, surfers, and even rock climbers. To be part of this family, and to speak to each other - we all have our areas in which we excel, and to hear their side of it and their stories, I think it's a really cool privilege to have.

And at Aston Martin Red Bull Racing in F1, we do things no other team does in terms of media activations.

We played camel polo last year, we've raced dune buggies in the desert, and we had a lot more planned this year [than what we actually got to do]. Not many F1 teams can say that they

would allow their drivers to do something like that, so it is cool.

It's amazing when you see how they started off, to where they are now. It's gone from

**“WE’RE FIGHTING AGAINST OTHER CAR MAKERS TRYING TO DO THE SAME THING”**

a party team with a strong competitive streak back in 2005 to a successful race-winning outfit, with four-straight F1 World Championship doubles. There are a lot of brains behind this team. We have a relaxed exterior, but inside we've got the best people in the


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

world working for us, and we all want to win. So we are competitive, we do our best, and of course we have the results to prove it – and we're fighting against other car makers that are also trying to do the same thing.

**I AM JUST THE SECOND THAI FI DRIVER** in history. The first was Prince Bira, a member of the Thai royal family, who took part in 19 World Championship races between 1950 and 1954. In terms of my home support, it started off in Formula Two, and there really was not much to it in the sense that I didn't have a following or anything like that – especially given that four-wheel motorsport isn't as big in Thailand as other countries.

I remember coming into Toro Rosso – now AlphaTauri, Red Bull's sister team – for the first time, and I went to Thailand to see my family, friends and business partners. To see the

initial growth and interest straight away was pretty incredible.

And then I recall coming back five or six months after that, so mid-way through my rookie season [before being promoted to Aston Martin Red Bull Racing], and my picture was on the trains, I was on billboards, and things like that. It's pretty crazy. I'm definitely not one to enjoy the spotlight, but to see it obviously means a lot and it made me very proud to be representing not just Thailand but Southeast Asia in the sport. I hope it can lead to some inspiration for young kids, and fuel interest in motorsport in general. I'd love to see more people from Asia becoming engineers, mechanics and drivers, of course, in top-level motorsport because the main source of competition is in Europe. It will be like that for a while, but I think we can do our part to try and help on the Southeast Asian side.” 

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### Magic Number for Mars

Tired of the goings-on on Earth? The good news is that it might not take as many people to start a new civilisation in outer space as previously believed. French scientists have crunched the numbers and report that just 110 people are required to initially build a self-sustaining colony on Mars, living in an oxygen-filled glass dome and focusing on agriculture. With entrepreneur Elon Musk eager to start colonising the red planet, this future might be an option. However, the scientists caution that the small community would still come with risks such as infertility, inbreeding, fighting between individuals and lack of resources. MSN




# Knocking Out






HEALTH



# Diabetes



*Striking new studies show how  
you can control, or even reverse,  
this common disease*

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BY *Anita Bartholomew*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Antoinio Uva/colagene.net*



# W

*hen Michael Trailovici began feeling unusually hungry and thirsty, the 42-year-old editor didn't imagine they could be symptoms of a condition, let alone a serious one. He didn't see his doctor. That was in 1997. Today Michael, now 65, is one of approximately 416 million people around the world with type 2 diabetes. Nearly half of those are unaware of their condition. The disease is so prevalent that the World Health Organization is calling it an 'epidemic'.*

If type 2 diabetes is left untreated, or is not managed well, the consequences can be devastating. Risks include damage to the blood vessels, heart, liver, kidneys and eyes. It can also increase the risks of Alzheimer's disease, and lead to amputation – and even death.

According to Diabetes Australia, an estimated two million Australians are at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

But there is hope. Experts say that the numbers of type 2 diabetes cases are so high and climbing so fast due largely to our modern diet; this means the disease and its severity are mostly within our control.

Recent research has found that with attention to lifestyle and diet alone, these numbers can be reduced, and future cases prevented. In some cases, we may even be able

to force the illness into remission. Here is the latest research on type 2 diabetes and diet. There are some actions you can take to help reduce your chances of developing it, and if you have already been diagnosed, how to maintain control.

## **WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT**

It starts with sugar. Cells throughout your body need it, in the form of glucose, as a fuel in order to function. But for the glucose to get past the cells' membranes, it needs a 'key' to get in. Insulin is that key.

When a person has type 2 diabetes, their body produces enough insulin, at least at first – this is unlike type 1 diabetes, when the pancreas fails to produce much or any insulin. But in type 2 diabetes, though they produce insulin, their body is 'resistant' to using it. The insulin key



doesn't work. The cells have trouble recognising the insulin and resist the call to open up.

When glucose can't get where it's needed, it keeps circulating in the blood, acting as an inflammatory agent, slowly but relentlessly causing damage.

### HOW CAN I HAVE DIABETES?

Although Michael at first ignored his increased hunger and thirst, some weeks later he began getting dizzy, and decided to see his doctor.

His diagnosis: type 2 diabetes. And his was a serious case. His blood glucose level, tested after he had fasted overnight, was above 16.7 millimoles of glucose per litre of blood (mmol/L). Left untreated, that amount of circulating glucose, over time, would wreak havoc throughout Michael's body. Normal blood glucose levels will generally range between 4.0–7.8 mmol/L.

His doctor immediately admitted him to hospital where he was prescribed insulin, an injectable treatment reserved for advanced cases.

Michael's case is classic. Because his symptoms were so subtle he dismissed them. As well as hunger and thirst, early symptoms can include fatigue, weight loss, frequent urination and blurry vision. And sometimes, there are no symptoms at all.

Because symptoms often aren't alarming, explains the Mayo Clinic's Dr Rozalina McCoy, younger people

will often ignore them. But the damage continues slowly.

Michael's diagnosis shocked him. However, he soon learned that his diet, which included a lot of processed food, white bread and sweets, wasn't healthy. He hadn't realised his lifestyle put him in such danger.

"Usually, younger people will have worse blood glucose control and be harder to manage," says Dr McCoy. "For a young person to have enough insulin resistance to develop type 2 diabetes, it must be a severe case." And that's true, even with milder symptoms.

If Michael wanted to avoid serious long-term complications, his doctor explained, he needed to completely change his lifestyle.

### DIET AND DIABETES

For decades, when recommending dietary changes to combat type 2 diabetes, doctors focused on reducing sugar and other carbohydrates. But researchers have now found it's not enough to simply step away from sugary foods. Ultra-processed and convenience foods also contribute to the illness, as recently reported in a French study published last year in the *European Journal of Public Health*.

The riskiest of these processed foods, surprisingly enough, was found to be processed meat: salami and hot dogs, for example. And, perhaps more surprisingly, a Spanish

review and analysis of earlier studies, also published in 2019, found that meat in general – the mainstay of the low-carb diets that many with type 2 diabetes have followed – also appears to both promote the illness and make it worse.

But what does meat have to do with blood sugar? Our cells' membranes are comprised, in part, of fat, which comes from what we eat. "So, if we eat a lot of meat, then we end up eating a lot of fat that will make our cell membranes more rigid," explains endocrinologist Dr Hana Kahleova. "And if they become more rigid, the insulin receptor embedded in the cell membrane cannot function properly."

In other words, the cells become 'insulin resistant'.

By contrast, says Dr Kahleova, the fats in olives, nuts and seeds make the cell membrane more pliable, and as a result, insulin receptors function better.

Michael committed to eating healthier foods, substituting whole grains and vegetables for his former poor diet choices. He also exercised more. After a few months, his blood glucose had come down enough for him to switch from insulin to metformin, a diabetes medicine in pill form that is typically used for milder cases.

Study after study confirm this relationship between meat and type 2 diabetes. Oddly enough, that still holds true for leaner meats. A 2017

meta-analysis of numerous earlier studies found a strong association between eating any kind of meat, including lean cuts, and type 2 diabetes.

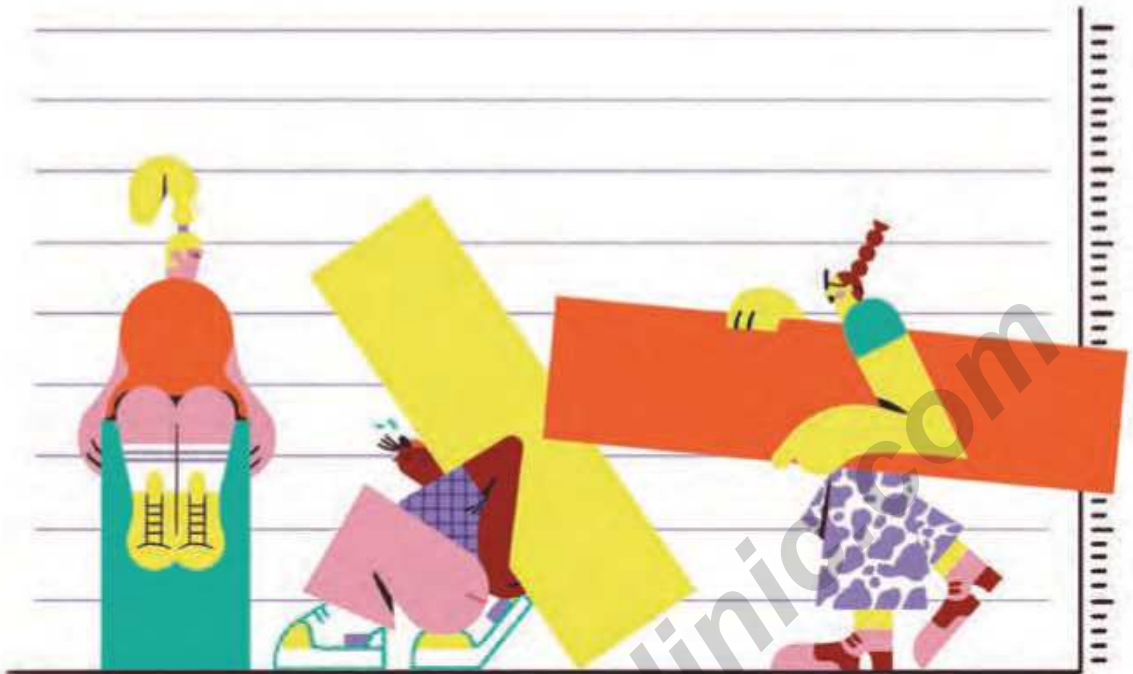
Meanwhile, this and other studies found eating whole grains was protective and, when included in a diet that relied on fruit, vegetables, dairy and minimising sugar, lowered risk of developing diabetes by 42 per cent.

There is also research that indicates that a healthy, meatless diet might also reverse diabetes. A 2006



### DIABETES RISK FACTORS

- ◆ Being overweight or obese or carrying more weight in the abdomen (a waistline of 101.6 or more centimetres for a man, or 88.9 cm for a woman).
- ◆ A diet heavy on sugar, especially sugar-sweetened drinks; processed foods; and/or meat, especially processed meat
- ◆ Taking statins
- ◆ Family history of type 2 diabetes
- ◆ South Asian, South East Asian, Middle Eastern, North African, Latino, Pacific Islander, Māori, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.



**What's normal? For a person *without* diabetes, throughout the day blood glucose levels will generally range between 4.0–7.8 millimoles of glucose per litre of blood (mmol/L) regardless of how they eat or exercise, or what stress they're under**

US study led by Dr Neal Barnard divided people with type 2 diabetes into two groups.

One was put on a completely plant-based diet and the other group was instructed to follow the American Diabetes Association (ADA) diet, which included animal products. Those on the plant-based diet were allowed to eat as much as they wanted. No limits. Those on the ADA diet had restricted kilojoules.

At the beginning of the study, participants had A1c (glucose) levels of 6.5 per cent (7.8 mmol/L) to 10.5 per cent (14.1 mmol/L) per cent with an average A1c of about 8 per cent (10.1 mmol/L).

After 22 weeks, among those who adhered to the plant-based diet, with no changes in their medication, A1c had been reduced by an average of 1.48 percentage points versus only 0.81 percentage points for the ADA group. For some on the meatless regimen, their A1c levels dropped to 5.7 per cent (6.5 mmol/L) and that meant their diabetes was, effectively, reversed.

“A reduction of that magnitude is bigger than you would see with typical oral medications,” says Dr Barnard.

That's not to say that all those who try veganism will reverse their diabetes or avoid getting it in the first





place. A 2016 study of about 200,000 people, age 25 and up, by Harvard researchers suggests a possible reason why: it's not enough just to go animal product-free. It has to be a healthy diet, too.

People who ate a mostly vegetarian diet based on healthful foods had a 34 per cent lower risk of developing diabetes. But people who ate a mostly vegetarian diet that included unhealthy foods like

sweetened drinks, fruit juices, refined grains, potatoes and sweets, had a 16 per cent increased risk of developing diabetes.

Diabetes is strongly associated with obesity. Being even a little overweight can increase the risk. But losing weight early in the disease can sometimes reverse it, even if you just lose ten per cent of your weight, it's been found to reverse diabetes for up to five years.

What about the low-carb and keto diets that are popular today – can they play a role in managing the disease? Yes, with caveats. Low-carb diets can sometimes result in rapid weight loss and with it, a reduction in high blood sugar. When followed for no more than three months, the benefits could be worth the risks. But for long-term diabetes management, such diets can increase risk because of the diets' reliance on animal products.

### OVER 65s TAKE NOTE

Everything that's true for younger people with diabetes – diet and lifestyle – is also true for people aged over 65 with diabetes, except for one very important difference. If you have type 2 diabetes, are older, and have other serious chronic conditions, intensive or aggressive treatment can lead to significant problems.

The more ailments an older person has in addition to diabetes, the greater risk he or she faces



## ABOUT BLOOD TESTS

**Different tests are used to determine the level of glucose (sugar) in your blood.**

**Diabetes may be diagnosed when:**

- ◆ Test blood glucose: Fasting blood test result is at or above 7.0mmol/L or a random blood glucose (RGB) test result is at or above 11.1 mmol/L.
- ◆ Test HbA1c: HbA1c blood test result is at or above 6.5% (48 mmol/mol).
- ◆ There have been no symptoms and two abnormal blood glucose tests (as above) on separate days.

**For more information about testing, speak to your doctor.**

from bouts of severe hypoglycaemia (big drops in blood sugar) that can lead to increased risk of heart disease, falls and bone fractures – even death. Even lesser instances of hypoglycaemia brought on by aggressive treatment can decrease the quality of life while not offering much, if any, benefit.

That's one reason why older people who have other serious, chronic conditions are usually better off trying to keep levels no higher than 10.1 mmol/L, says Dr McCoy. She says treatment needs to be individualised, so those 65 and over, with no other chronic conditions, would probably aim for 9.4 mmol/L. But generally speaking, aiming for a 10.1 mmol/L instead of trying to keep it lower after age 65 with other illnesses leads to better outcomes.

### **DON'T LET DIABETES WIN**

Today at 65, Michael Trailovici is a trim 78 kilograms, still needs only metformin, and feels great. And he enjoys a sense of accomplishment, knowing that he took control of his type 2 diabetes instead of letting it control him.

If you're one of the millions who've been diagnosed with the illness, you've heard the dire warnings. But the good news is how much you are in control of what happens. Changing your diet and getting enough exercise can assure a better, healthier future. And if you've only recently been diagnosed, lifestyle and dietary changes might even lead to remission.

There is a lot you can do to take care of yourself today, to ensure a better tomorrow. **R**

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### **Cong-Rats!**

**Rats have a bad reputation, especially for carrying diseases. However, one rat may have redeemed his species by becoming the first rodent to receive a gold medal for animal gallantry in sniffing out unexploded landmines and saving lives in Cambodia. Magawa, an African giant-pouched rat, has been presented with a mini-gold medal by British veterinary charity PDSA. Using his finely tuned sense of smell and memory, and after having been trained for a year, Magawa has discovered 39 landmines and 28 items of unexploded ordnance. The rodent can search an area the size of a tennis court in half an hour, something that would take a human with a metal detector several days. Unlike metal detectors, he ignores scrap metal and only sniffs out explosives. NBCNEWS.COM**

## LIFE'S LIKE THAT

*Seeing the Funny Side*



### Repeat Vowels

I was explaining to my ten-year-old son that sometimes married couples declare their love for each other by having a second ceremony where they say their vows again to each other. He replied, "What? They say 'A, E, I, O, U?'"

SUBMITTED BY NICKY TORODE

### Adioats

My two children stayed at their grandparents' house for a night. When they came back home, they woke up the next morning,

came down to breakfast and started asking me for a bowl of "bye bye" cereal.

Nonplussed, I gave my mum a call. "Ah-ha" she laughed. "They mean Cheerios!"

SUBMITTED BY JENNIE GARDNER

### No Show

A club that features exotic dancers near where my daughter lives shut its doors for a while in response to COVID-19. A billboard outside announced: "Sorry, we're clothed!"

SUBMITTED BY KATHLEEN O'HAGAN



## Life in Song

I love seeing people panic at karaoke when they realise how long and repetitive their song is. It's like their eyes are asking, "Will I be singing 'My Sharona' forever?"

@ISABELZAWTUN

## Ruling the Roost

I overheard my daughter speaking to our next-door neighbours over the garden fence. They asked her which parent was the boss in our house. Chloe retorted, "Daddy". But then added, "until Mummy gets home".

SUBMITTED BY JONI COOPER

## Try Again

At the Christmas Eve service at my church last year, the pastor, quizzing some children about the nativity, asked, "What gifts did the three wise men give the Christ child?"

"Gold!" one child yelled.

"Frankincense!" shouted another.

After a pause, a third child asked, "Gift cards?"

SUBMITTED BY ALAN SHAW

## Confidence Boost

If you're ever feeling down on yourself, just remember how in 2018, when I hosted a holiday dinner for my family, I told them to park in the wrong spot and every single person's car got towed.

@DXXNYA



## THE GREAT TWEET OFF: CHRISTMAS EDITION

**December has arrived, bringing twinkling Christmas lights, inflatable Santa Clauses and over-excited tweeters.**

It's that lovely, peaceful time of year when my husband spends all his time alone in the garage detangling the Christmas lights.

@HOUSEWIFEOFHELL

Hey, let's drive around and look at Christmas lights so that the kids can whine about not wanting to drive around and look at Christmas lights.

@SIX\_PACK\_MOM

Weird, my neighbour is putting up his Christmas lights while at the same time, I am taking down my Christmas lights from last year.

@CHEESEBOY22

Billion dollar idea: holiday decorations that dissolve after six days.

@JENNIKONNER

Mentioned that I upgraded to LED Christmas lights in front of a bunch of rival dads. No big deal.

@SIMONCHOLLAND

"Be more careful!" I yell to my kids, as I dangle from the roof putting up Christmas lights.

@LHLODDER

I like to put up Christmas decorations in stages. This is the stage where I sit on the couch with lasagne and stare at the boxes.

@ABBYHASISSUES

*I Am the*  
**FOOD  
ON YOUR  
PLATE**



## *I Am Mango ...* Majestic, regal and delicious

BY *Diane Godley*

**S**weet and juicy, I am deservedly known as ‘the food of gods’ – and the ‘queen of fruits’. My fragrant aroma is summer’s bouquet, and the first whiff of me on the fruit stands sends upstanding citizens into a frenzy – yes, my sweet scent heralds not only the arrival of mango season, but also that summer is just around the corner.

Golden in colour, I am the embodiment of sweet, sweet sunshine and

often tied to happy childhood memories. Bite into my flesh and you will delight in my deliciousness as sweet, sticky juice cascades down your chin.

But not only am I a joy to eat, I am bursting with nutritional value.

High in energy and low in fat, I am a great source of calcium and vitamins A and C. In fact, just one 200-gram mango provides up to three times your recommended daily intake of these vitamins.

Healthy as a snack, I am also versatile in the kitchen. I am perfectly paired with chicken and prawns, can be tossed in a salad, made into a salsa, and thrown in cocktails, smoothies and desserts.

But, as Queen Victoria found out during her long reign on the British throne, ending in 1901, I demand even higher maintenance than a monarch. I have a short shelf life and am a reluctant traveller. So, it was hardly surprising that when she ordered that my supreme presence be shipped from India – a voyage that took six weeks – for a royal tasting, she was somewhat disappointed to find a shrivelled and foul-smelling specimen of me presented to her on an ornate tray.

To get the best out of me, I need to be stored at room temperature (18–22°C) out of the sun until I ripen. You can then pop me in the fridge where I should last a few days to a week. And please don't put me in a plastic bag to sweat, I need to breathe.

When selecting me, don't be fooled by colouring. Contrary to popular belief, the blush of colour on some of my varieties does not indicate ripeness. Popular varieties of me such as Kensington Pride and Calypso are ready to eat when I am slightly soft to the touch and smell like, well, a mango!

**FOOD OF THE GODS** Native to India, Myanmar and Bangladesh, I have grown in the Indian subcontinent for over 4000 years when I was

first cultivated – although fossil evidence indicates that my early ancestors have been around for some 25 million years.

Around the fourth and fifth century BCE, Buddhist monks took my plants on voyages to Malaya and eastern Asia. But it was the Portuguese who arrived in India in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and were so enamoured by my sweet nature, they started my spread throughout the world, taking me to the Philippines, South America and Africa. By the 1800s, I had arrived in Australia. Today I am commercially grown throughout tropical and subtropical areas around the globe.

I am adored by the Filipino people, who eat me fresh, processed, as flavourings to ice creams and pastries, and have crowned me their national fruit. Of the three well-known varieties of me grown in the Philippines, the Carabao is the most popular and the only variety exported.

In Thailand, it's my Nam Doc Mai cousin who reigns supreme. Meaning the sweet juice of a flower, some argue her aroma resembles that of daffodils. She is also the largest, sweetest, least fibrous, and yellowest of my Thai cousins, some of which are green and others red when they are ripe.

For all these reasons it is no wonder I have been linked with gods and royalty. Legend has it that Buddha was meditating in the cool shade of my tree when he found tranquillity. In Hindu folklore, I am the beautiful



## READER'S DIGEST

princess Surya Bai, the daughter of the sun god, Surya.

With so many myths and legends surrounding my regal nature, it is hardly surprising that I am still used today by several cultures in rituals such as weddings, public celebrations and religious ceremonies.

**HOW TO EAT ME** While the eating of me is wrapped in ritual, some people find I can be a slippery beast. But I am quick and easy to prepare if given the 'hedgehog'.

1. Simply hold me so my fattest parts, my cheeks, are to the side, then slice them off with a sharp knife, as close to the seed as possible.
2. Taking care not to cut through



my skin, score three or four lines vertically down each cheek and again horizontally to form a hatched pattern.

3. Take hold of the edges of my cheek and turn inside out.
4. The cubes of my flesh can then be either sliced off to put in recipes, or simply bitten off to enjoy straight away.

### MANGO SALSA

*Mango salsa is a perfect topping for fish, seafood, chicken, tacos and salad.*



- 1 mango, about 400 g
- 3 spring onions, finely chopped
- 1-2 tsp pink peppercorns in brine, rinsed and chopped
- 1/4 cup (15 g) chopped fresh coriander
- 2 tbs lime juice
- 2 tbs extra virgin olive oil
- Tabasco sauce to taste

#### Method

- Prepare the mango using the hedgehog method (see above)
- Place mango cubes into a large bowl with the spring onions, peppercorns, coriander, lime juice, oil and Tabasco. Lightly mix. Add chopped capsicum if desired.

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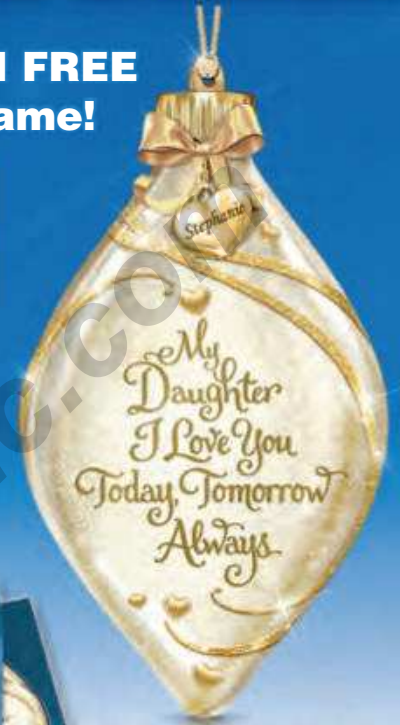
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# ...DIFFERENTLY

## Japan's Hitachi Seaside Park

in the Ibaraki Prefecture, sees thousands of summer cypress (*Kochia scoparia*) transform a small hill into a fiery red sea. In autumn, the round plants take on their crimson colour, luring thousands of visitors to the popular spot on the Pacific coast north-east of Tokyo. The shrub, although classified a weed in many countries, is also enjoyed by gourmets who eat the seeds of these metre-high bushes. Shelled and cooked, they are referred to as 'land caviar' and in parts of Japan are considered a delicacy.

PHOTOS: KIYOSHI HIJIKI/GETTY IMAGES; PIITH HANT/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO











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DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

# *A Scream in the Wild*

*Alone and pinned under a grizzly bear,  
Colin Dowler struggled for his life*

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BY *Omar Mouallem*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Ryan Garcia*

Reader's Digest





**E**ver since he was a kid, Colin Dowler pushed himself to do more, go faster and scale bigger heights, despite having a small physique and a nagging congenital knee disease. Jenifer, his wife of 16 years, often found herself telling him to slow down. When he skied, he raced the double-black diamond runs. When he rode his mountain bike, it was on the bumpiest terrain. If he wasn't a little scared doing something, he didn't think he was doing it right.

In July 2019, to celebrate his 45th birthday, he booked a week's holiday from his job on Vancouver Island in Canada, where he lives with Jenifer and one of their daughters. He planned to spend two days on his own, scouting a route he'd eventually use to climb Mount Doogie Dowler with his older brother, Paul. The peak, standing around 2000 metres in the Coast Mountains in southwestern British Columbia, was named after Colin's late grandfather. It had always been a point of pride for their family that Grandpa Doogie was immortalised in nature. But none of the Dowlers had ever climbed to its summit.

Jenifer didn't like the sound of her husband's latest plan. She was used to Dowler going on solo adventures, but this time he'd boat to an obscure bay, bike an unpopulated road, hike through grizzly bear country, and camp overnight – alone. There was too much room for disaster.

“If I'm not home by eight o'clock Monday evening, you should start to worry,” he said.

Jenifer laughed. It was practically her husband's motto.

The night before his journey Colin packed sparingly. He ditched his usual tent to experiment with a bivy sack – a one-person portable shelter. He filled the remaining pockets of his bag with a handheld GPS, hiking poles, his homemade venison pepperoni and a few other essentials. Instead of his usual Swiss Army knife, he took an eight-centimetre stainless steel pocket knife given to him by his dad.

**JENIFER - WHO WAS PLANNING** her own overnight trip with some of her family – and their daughter were still in bed when Dowler left at 7am, his bike and boat in tow.

The weather that July Sunday was nice, which meant the parking spots at Campbell River's boat launches would



fill up fast. Colin intended to stop at a tackle shop for bear spray, but as he thought about the time it would take, he drove past it, deciding the likelihood of a bear attack was small.

He knew he couldn't completely rule out the possibility, though. He'd had two grizzly sightings and countless black bear encounters in the past. But he'd always escaped unscathed.

Colin pulled into the Campbell River port and quickly launched and set off in his motorboat. More than an hour later, he arrived at Ramsay Arm, an inlet on the mainland, and

have something to put on the milk cartons if you don't come home," he joked.

With the bear mace in one pocket and the knife from his dad in the other, Colin started hiking. After traversing steep terrain and thick forest for about an hour, he started marking his trail with blue ribbons. He made lots of noise to ward off any curious creatures. Near the end of the day, he realised the canister of mace was gone. It must have slipped out of his pocket when he had stopped to rest and check his position.

But he didn't want to risk getting

## HE'D HAD TWO GRIZZLY SIGHTINGS AND COUNTLESS BLACK BEAR ENCOUNTERS IN THE PAST. BUT HE'D ALWAYS ESCAPED UNSCATHED

found a spot to tie the vessel near a logging camp.

As a former worker in the logging industry, Colin knew it was good practice to check in at the mess hall. "Is there anything you need?" Vito Giannandrea, the cook asked him.

"Bear spray," said Dowler.

After finding a can of mace, Vito offered him a lift part of the way in. They trucked along an overgrown logging road until the forest got too thick. As Colin leaned his mountain bike against a bush to retrieve on the way back, Vito took a picture of him with his phone. "So we

caught in the dark looking for the spray. Instead, he spent an hour searching for a place to camp, eventually settling on a flat, dry surface with branches low enough to set up his bivy sack. Colin strung his food and clothes high up in a nearby tree, and crawled into the bivy by 9.30pm, satisfied with what he'd accomplished that day.

**THE NEXT MORNING,** Colin tried without luck to locate the spray on his way down the mountain. He gave up by the time he recovered his bike, then carried on, pedalling and

daydreaming about getting home early to enjoy some family time and a beer or two.

As he passed a seven-kilometre marker for camp-bound logging trucks, he came around a bend and suddenly clenched his brakes – a mangy grizzly stood in the middle of the narrow road, 30 metres away. Colin immediately announced his presence, “Hey bear,” he bellowed. He then calculated his chances of turning around for a quick escape, but the bear could easily tackle him by the time he picked up speed.

The animal looked from him to the bush, back and forth, and then

them closed to ten metres. Colin stepped off his bike, which seemed to startle the animal. It shuddered from the paws up to its rump, then continued to stalk closer. Colin shielded himself with his bike as the bear went past him. Then, suddenly, it stopped, turned and looked right at him.

Colin calmly raised a hiking pole and pushed it against the bear's big forehead, right between the eyes. This held the bear in place, until the rubber tip rolled down and off its muzzle. Before Colin could try again, the bear chomped on the pole. “Oh, come on now, we don't need to do this,” he said, careful not to react ag-

## THE BEAR WALKED ALONG THE ROAD UNTIL THE GAP BETWEEN THEM CLOSED TO TEN METRES. THEN IT CONTINUED TO STALK CLOSER

began heading in his direction. Colin flung his backpack off his shoulders, snatched a hiking pole and extended it in front of him. As the bear approached, he started to make out its features. The bear was about five years old, 2.7 metres from toes to snout, and 160 kilograms, nearly three times Colin's weight. Although it showed no signs of aggression, its curiosity was piqued.

**THE BEAR WALKED ALONG** the opposite side of the road, coming closer and closer, until the gap between

gressively. “I'm your friend.”

Colin let the pole drop. He tossed his backpack beside the bear, hoping the pepperoni scent would entice him away. One sniff, and the bear turned back with his paw in the air, then delivered a light swat that Colin blocked with his bike. Then he dodged a second, heavier swat, and another and another, each stronger than the last.

After the bear again raised a threatening paw high in the air, Colin threw his bike at it, but the creature barely stumbled. Instead, it lunged

forward and with one swift chomp snatched Colin's flank in its mouth, its teeth in his abdomen and back. The bear then lifted Colin and carried him to the edge of the road. Colin felt no pain, just warmth. He didn't resist, thinking only that if it carried him into the bush, he'd be too incapacitated to get back to the road and would die before anyone found him.

The grizzly placed him by the ditch and lifted its head for another bite, sinking its teeth once again into Colin's abdomen and back. There was no roar, no growl, just huffing while it chewed.

Colin tried to gouge its eyes – grabbing at the fur on its face and poking as hard as he could into the bear's left eye. Agitated, the bear swung him 180 degrees, put Colin down again, and hoisted itself high, and then down to chew into Colin's left leg. Over and over, the bear lifted his head and then took hold of Colin's leg again.

Thoughts of leaving behind his family, of missing every part of his daughters' lives, raced through Colin's mind. He regretted that he'd put himself in such a dangerous position.

As he tried to pry the animal's jaws open, saliva trailed off its yellow teeth. It chomped through his hand. "Stop!" Colin screamed. "Why? Stop!" It didn't make sense. He knew that grizzlies typically only attack briefly, then leave humans alone. *When would this end?*

The bear moved on to taste his other leg. As he heard the sound of his femur grating in its teeth, Colin remembered the knife in his pocket. But as he reached for it, the grizzly hit a nerve. Colin arched in pain and yelped.

*OK, he thought, I'll play dead.*

But the bear hit another leg nerve and Colin screamed even louder. *I can't play dead while I'm screaming. I have to get the knife.*

As the bear leaned across Colin's body to continue chewing his leg, the weight of its chest was on Colin's stomach, pinning both his arms to his left side, the opposite side to his knife. With all his strength Colin managed to wiggle his left hand between their bodies and into his pocket. He pulled the knife out and opened the blade, inadvertently slicing the bear's chest as he pulled his left arm free.

Colin stabbed the bear's neck as fast and strongly as he could. Blood gushed from the wound. Even the grizzly seemed surprised.

"Now you're bleeding too, bear," he said.

**THE BEAR STEPPED OFF HIM** and walked slowly away, trailing blood on the gravel. As it disappeared into the forest, Colin assessed the damage to his body. His sides and legs were riddled with punctures. A femoral artery wound in his left leg drenched the lower half of his body





**A hike in July this year on Vancouver Island – with bear spray on his belt**

in blood. He had to stop the bleeding. Colin cut his left shirt sleeve with his knife and tied it around his left leg. Once it was tightly knotted, he flopped on to his backside and painfully made his way to his bike. He pulled himself onto it and concentrated on resting his feet on the pedals. He collapsed off the bike after one push.

He got back on, and pedalling with his right leg, he started down the logging road, keeping a tight grip on his knife. He felt his seat warming as blood from his wounds flowed down his back. As he focused on his breathing, he felt his odds improve.

He pushed ahead for 30 minutes until the road sloped towards the logging camp. He bounced over the bumps, all the way to the mess hall

where he fell off the bike onto his side.

Colin flung himself onto the landing, legs flopping on the stairs. “Help! Call a helicopter. I’ve been mauled by a grizzly,” he yelled through a screen door. Five men, including Vito, found Colin streaked with blood and dirt, smelling like an animal.

The logging crew performed lifesaving first aid, while keeping Colin talking for 40 minutes until a medevac helicopter arrived. He received two units of blood at the camp and was then airlifted to hospital.

Colin was in surgery for six-and-a-half hours. Doctors repaired the artery wound in his left leg, and treated more than 50 gashes and bite wounds. In all, he needed close to 200 staples and stitches.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF COLIN DOWLER

**IN LATE AUGUST 2019**, Colin was transferred to his local hospital, and soon after started working on his rehabilitation, including physiotherapy, to rebuild the strength in his badly injured left leg.

The damage to his femoral artery and other injuries were serious, but the more enduring injury was to the nerves in the left leg. Colin saw a specialist and was told that a large nerve for an important quadriceps muscle had been completely severed by the bear. It was questionable whether he would be able to walk naturally again.

“Is there anything I can do?” Colin asked the specialist with stubborn optimism. He was told that the nerve could possibly regenerate as long as he listened to his physiotherapist.

So, Colin worked hard. When he visited his specialist again in January

this year, the nerve was beginning to work again. So much so that in early February, Colin ran 200 metres on a treadmill. Then there was no stopping him. The treadmill, stair climber – anything that would help him regain strength. It worked: Colin is again jogging and mountain biking the trails near his home, and in late July, he was able to go on a backpack-laden alpine camping trip with his wife.

The attack had exacted an emotional toll. “In the beginning I was crying almost daily,” Colin says.

“It wasn’t in self-pity; thoughts of the attack and my recovery were completely consuming. But I also had tears of joy. The way people came together to help me. How lucky I have been.” He now always carries bear spray when he’s out in the bush, he adds. **R**

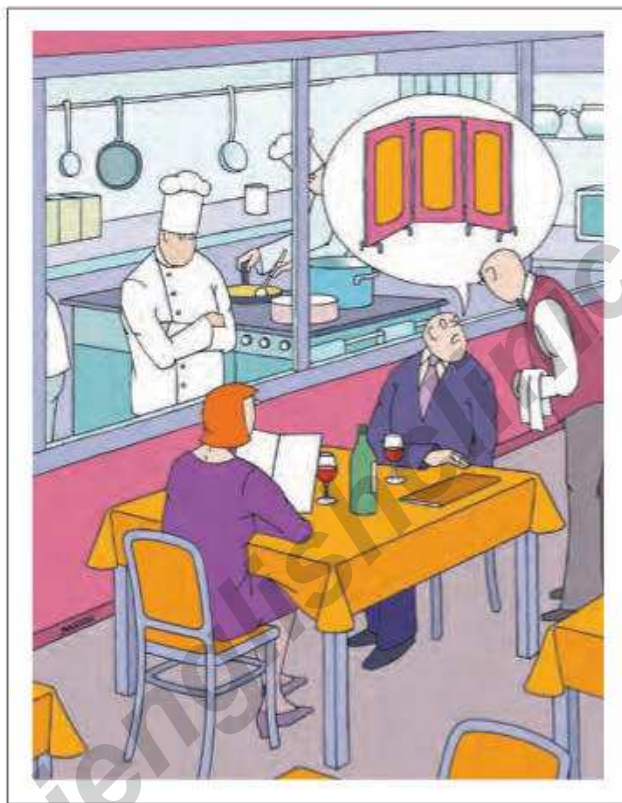


### Relive Joys of a Long Flight

What do you miss most about travelling? If you answered, “being stuck on a plane in economy class with crying babies”, then this is the game for you. **Airplane Mode**, a video game developed by **Hosoji Auji** for **AMC Games**, is a flight simulation game “where players can experience the intense excitement of being an economy class passenger on a long-haul flight”. Players can read an in-flight magazine, do **Sudoku** puzzles, watch movies and look out the window, which features realistic satellite imagery of the flight path. They are also treated to bad in-flight meals, long announcements, turbulence and wifi outages. “Crying baby not guaranteed on every flight,” the game’s description reads. **UPI**

# LAUGHTER

## *The Best Medicine*



### **Vegetable Punnet**

A girl recently said she recognised me from her vegetarian club, but I've never met herbivore.

SUBMITTED BY PAUL MADDOCKS

### **Place Your Bets**

When I grow up I want to be a gambling counsellor. It's the easiest job in the world. All you have to say is, "I bet you can't quit!"

JOHN MELAMED, COMEDIAN

### **Scrooge Budget**

On a tight budget? Experts agree the best way to save money on gift giving this holiday season is by alienating all your friends and family.

@22\_MINUTES

### **Unexpected Pleasure**

My internet went out for a while the other day. Met my family downstairs. They seem like nice people.

SEEN ON THE INTERNET

CARTOON BY: MIROSLAV BARTÁK



## Wrapping Away

**MY WIFE:** How many presents did you get wrapped?

**ME [PROUDLY]:** Four.

**WIFE:** In an hour?

**ME:** They were oddly shaped.

@DEJAVUDAD

## Ring in the New Year

- I can't wait till New Year's Day 2021. Then I can say hindsight is really 2020.
- I hereby resolve not to catch fire while riding a flaming hoverboard... again.

SEEN ON THE INTERNET

## Seeking Investors

Startup idea: a gym named Resolution that runs for the first month of the year, collects subscription fees, then converts to a bar named Regret. @SIDDHARTH3

## Runs in the Family

It's good I never became a parent, because I overheard a guy saying that his son is grounded because he got all Cs on his latest report card. All I was thinking was that my son would be getting a hero's dinner and a nice gift.

DAN REGAN, COMEDIAN

## Head Start

Whenever I see a man with a beard, moustache and glasses, I think, *There's a man who has taken every precaution to avoid people doodling on photographs of him.*

CAREY MARX, COMEDIAN



**Q:** What's red and white and falls down chimneys?

**A:** *Santa Klutz.*

**Q:** Which of Santa's reindeer has the worst manners?

**A:** *Rude-olph!*

**Q:** What do you call a kid who doesn't believe in Santa?

**A:** *A rebel without a Claus.*

**Q:** What do the elves call it when Father Christmas claps his hands at the end of a play?

**A:** *Santaplause!*

**Q:** What do sheep say to shepherds at Christmastime?

**A:** *Season's bleatings!*



EXCUSES,  
EXCUSES,  
EXCUSES!

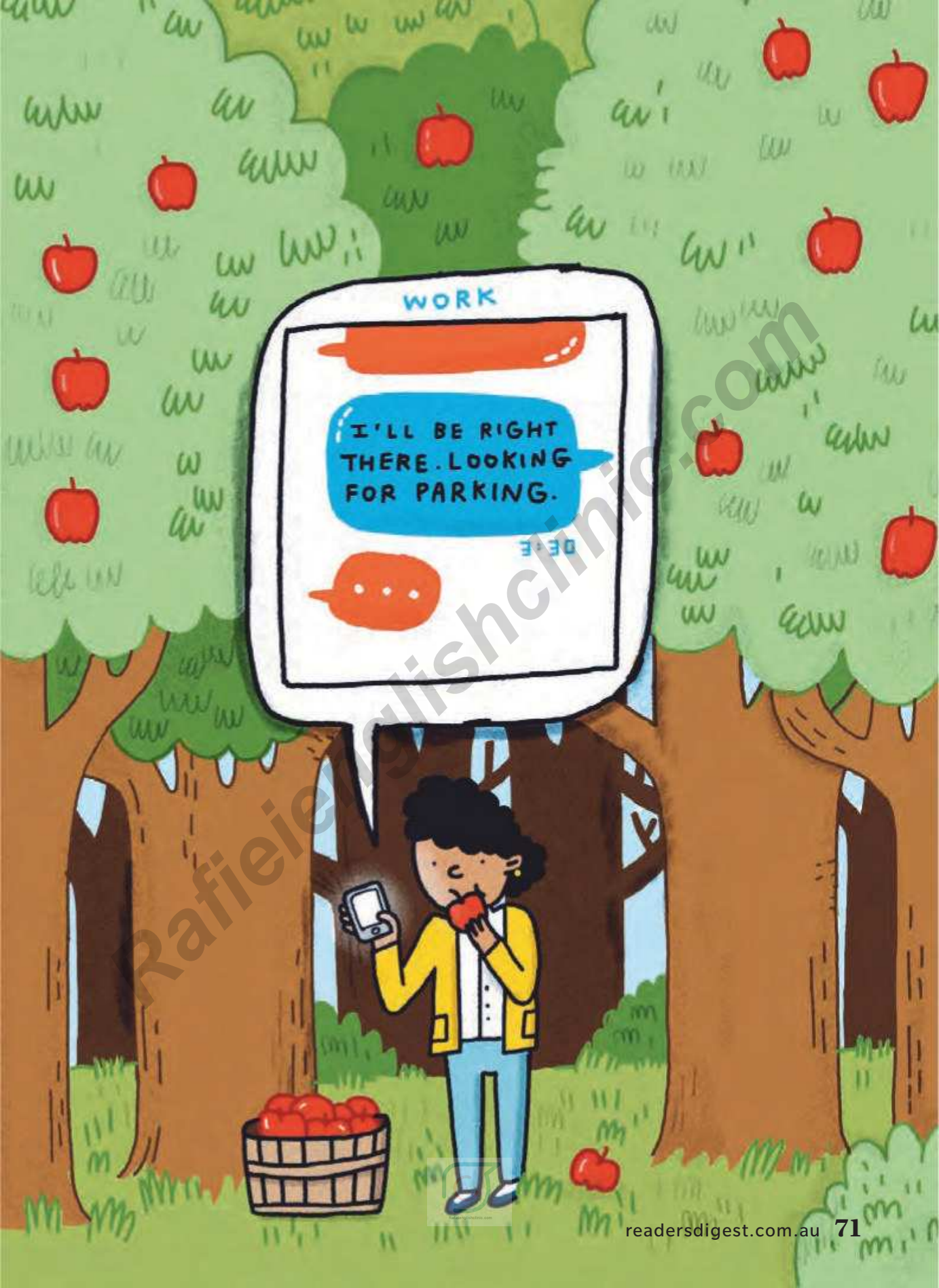


*Forget 'The dog ate my homework'.  
These inspired whoppers will leave you  
shaking your head – and laughing*

---

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Mike Lowery*





WORK

I'LL BE RIGHT THERE. LOOKING FOR PARKING.

DEF



# SORRY I'M LATE.

BY Noah Gebstadt

FROM **NEWYORKER.COM**

Hey! Sorry, but I'm running a bit late. I'm heading out the door right now, I promise. I just need to get out of bed, shower really quickly, and then stare at my cupboard for ten minutes while I air-dry.

Five minutes out, I swear. I just need to paint my room. It'll take, like, three minutes, tops.

Around the corner! Just have to pop into a bookstore to buy and then read *The Goldfinch*. I never got around to it, and I heard it was really good. No spoilers. :)

Ah! I'm on my way. I had to perform an exorcism on my neighbour's dog. I think it's one of those golden retriever-poodle mixes. Anyway, she had a demon from hell inside of her, so what else could I do — *am I right?!*



Literally crossing the street now. I had to stop for a snack. I was craving an apple, so I went to an orchard just outside town. I'll tell you all about it when I get there, which is going to be very soon.

I'm SO sorry - three minutes away. I had to wrap production on my biopic about a speed skating

champion. I think you're really going to dig the story. There's already an award-season buzz.

Truly a block away! Remember that demonic golden-doodle? Well, her owner and I fell in love and got married. We had a child right away. Oh, and I live in another state now.

Trains are awful. But I'm still coming to meet you - by boat!

The boat was hit by a rogue wave, and it capsized. We all washed ashore on an island. Things have become pretty political and the survivors have split into factions. I've been made leader of one of the groups. We're going to have a final showdown on the beach to see who gets control over our very limited supplies, but



then I'm heading right over!

Truly close now. I ended up walking the wrong way and saw a notorious crime lord being assassinated in an alleyway. The police had to put me into witness protection under the name Hubert Tingleman. I now own a small but successful hardware store in a little country town. Mum's the word on that, though.



Hey! Don't hate me, but I thought you were talking about the café near my apartment. I didn't realise that you wanted to meet at the one near your place. That might be a little too far for me - I'm pretty tired. You think we could take a rain check for next weekend? Love you lots!



NEWYORKER.COM (JUNE 1, 2019), © 2019 BY NOAH GEBSTADT.

## SO, WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?

*We asked RD readers to share their all-time favourite excuse stories from real life*

◆ Working as an apartment manager, I've heard every excuse for why the rent is late. Husband got retrenched. Kids were sick. I lost a money order. Or simply, "I forgot". But the most creative excuse of all was this: "I only had half the rent. So I went up to the casino to try to double my money."

**Mikki Sams Everett**

◆ My husband hasn't been to the gym in over a year. One day, I asked him to





come with me. "No," he said. "I need to lose a few kilos before I go back."

**Sandra Curran**

◆ I recently invited my neighbours over for dinner. When they were about an hour late, I gave them a call to see what time we might expect them. The wife was nonplussed. "Oh," she said. "I thought that was last night." **Jim Godfrey**

◆ A student of mine claimed he didn't have his homework because it had

fallen into a pile of snow and was quickly covered by a snowplough. Of course, I didn't believe him. Still, I gave him credit for concocting such an original excuse and allowed him to redo the assignment.

Two months later, after the snow melted, he presented me with the ragged folder containing the faded original version of his homework.

**Michael Lorinser**

◆ Years ago, as a young man driving a very old

station wagon, I was pulled over for speeding.

"You know, you were going 80 in a 60km/h zone," the officer said. I knew he was wrong and told him. "Honestly, Officer, I don't think this piece of junk can go that fast."

"You know, that's the best excuse I've heard in a long time." He then got back into his car without ticketing me.

**Arnie Maestas**



◆ One of my chronically late employees showed up later than usual. At least he had a good excuse: "The train that gets me here ten minutes late was ten minutes late."

**Patricia Johnson**

◆ I was in the middle of marking my students' homework when my husband and I decided we were hungry. So I left all the papers organised in neat piles, and we ducked out. I returned an hour



later to discover that my puppy had found the papers.

The next day, I called three of my students over to my desk to explain why I was giving them all 100 per cent on their assignments: "My dog ate your homework".

**Joanne Beer**

◆ I was an hour late for my appointment at the sleep-disorder clinic. My excuse: "I overslept".

**Lou Fleury**

◆ Once, when my dad received an invitation to do something he obviously didn't want to do, he replied, "I can't go. I have to change the air-conditioner filter." Now

whenever anyone in my family doesn't want to do something, that's what we tell each other.

**Debra Nelson**

◆ I was interviewing a young man for his security clearance. I knew that he'd been arrested for speeding a few years earlier, but he hadn't said so on his application. When I asked him why, he said he didn't think the arrest counted.

"Why wouldn't it count?" I asked.

"Because I didn't have a driver's licence."

**Miriam Kitmacher**

◆ When our new employee didn't show up for work, I phoned her.

She explained that her mother had passed away and that she would need a few days off for bereavement. "Of course," I said.

A week went by, and she still hadn't returned to work. So I called again. This time, she said, she had good news and bad. The good news: her mother had come back to life. The bad news: her mother was sick again, so she still had to stay at home. **Benjamin Weber**



### Parrots Ruffle Feathers

Five foul-mouthed African grey parrots had to be separated at a zoo in the UK after teaching each other how to swear. The parrots, called Billy, Eric, Tyson, Jade and Elsie, joined Lincolnshire Wildlife Park's colony of 200 parrots in August. However, they soon taught each other profane language, and swore at visitors as well as passing staff. A zoo spokesperson said he's "hoping" the birds will learn more appropriate words. "But if they teach the others bad language and I end up with 200 swearing birds, I don't know what we'll do." Certain African grey parrots can manage 1000 words or more in their vocabulary. The X-rated parrots are now kept out of earshot of children. NEWS.COM.AU, BBC.COM



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

# *No Ordinary Day at the ZOO*

*A bushfire had been raging for over a month when it came bearing down on a private zoo containing over 200 exotic species. While residents and holidaymakers fled to the beach, 16 dedicated staff of Mogo Wildlife Park stayed to defend their animals*

---

BY Diane Godley





Rafieenglishclinic.com

**As the fires surrounded the zoo's parklands, the decision to go or stay had to be made**





**C**had Staples woke at 6am on the morning of December 31, 2019, to a Rural Fire Service (RFS) order to evacuate. The 40 year old had taken over the position of director of Mogo Wildlife Park just a month earlier. A few short minutes later, he stepped outside his house on the grounds of the 26-hectare zoo and was greeted with an ominous reality. Even at that time in the morning, the heat was intense. The sky had turned an unsettling pinky-orange tone, and except for the wind, everything was eerily quiet. Not a single bird was singing. But Staples would not be heeding the advice of RFS. He would be staying put.

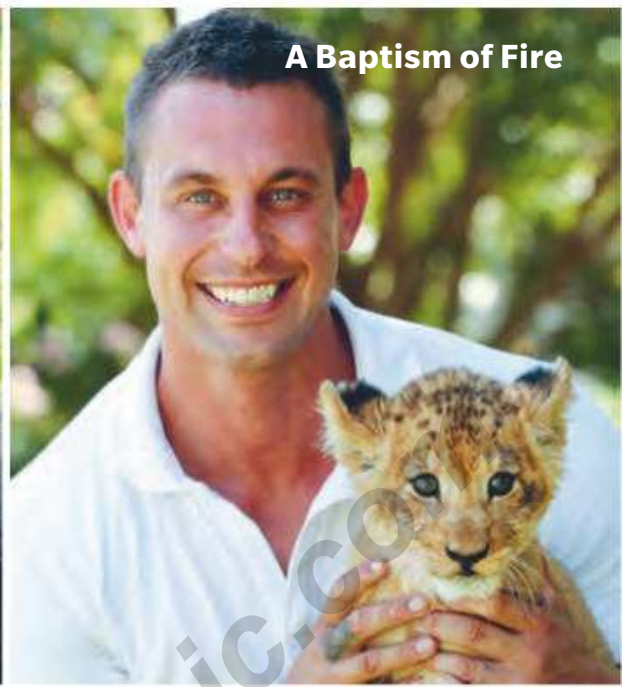
For residents of the hamlets around Mogo on the South Coast of New South Wales, the weeks leading up to the end of 2019 had been nerve-racking. A fire, sparked by lightning in the Currowan State Forest in late November, some 40 kilometres to the north, had been burning for over a month and had spread in every direction. Everyone had been on high-alert to what could unfold. Up until New Year's Eve, the fire had remained on the other side of the Kings Highway, 25 kilometres away.

A decade of dry conditions and two years of drought gave the fire plenty of fuel. In the early hours of December 31, the fire jumped the Kings Highway. The RFS sent out an alert to everyone in the area to evacuate. Instead of preparing for New Year's celebrations, thousands of residents and holiday makers packed their cars and gathered up pets then drove to the beach to escape the 'monster on the loose' that was heading their way.

Staples is director of both the Featherdale Wildlife Park on Sydney's western fringe – a place he has worked ever since leaving school 23 years ago – and the Mogo Wildlife Park, where he took over the reins on November 29. Located some 300 kilometres apart, he knew it wasn't going to be easy juggling both positions, but he was up for the challenge. What he hadn't reckoned on though, was being in the path of a raging bushfire one month into the new job.

### **STAY AND DEFEND**

For the new director and the zoo's operations manager, Clive Brookbanks, 55, who also lives on site, that morning was a waiting game. Although they had made preparations to defend the zoo weeks earlier, they had no idea whether any of the staff, whose homes were also in the line of fire, would come to their aid. "The whole morning felt ominous, just waiting for the fire to arrive," Staples recalls.



## A Baptism of Fire

**Kisane, the male gorilla, checking out the camera, with his favourite female, Kipensi, behind; Chad Staples with lion cub Phoenix, who was named after the fire**

Evacuating the 200-plus animals – some of which are dangerous, such as the big cats, and some, like the giraffes, water buffalo and rhino, are just really, really big – was never an option. When the bushfire got out of control early in December, Staples and his team had several meetings to ensure they were prepared and ready to defend the zoo. Equipment they were lacking was brought in and fashioned into tools they could use to put out fires, while staff were designated roles.

A 1000-litre tank with a hose and a pump system was installed on each of the two Toyota Land Cruiser flat-back utes, converting them into makeshift firefighting vehicles that a couple of people could operate to put out spot fires. The water would come from two 120,000-litre tanks

containing treated grey water. Usually used on gardens and to fill the dams in times when rain doesn't fall, both tanks were full due to a prudent decision and foresight in the months leading up to that summer to stockpile the water as an insurance policy against fire. Staples also let the RFS know that they would be staying to defend the zoo, and was assured backup if needed.

The morning of December 31, Staples and Brookbanks didn't have to wait long to find out if any of the staff would come to the rescue. Unlike most jobs, zoo keepers have a special relationship with their charges, and a strong sense of kinship with each other. By 7.30am, ten zookeepers and four maintenance staff had turned up – choosing to drive towards the fire to help protect the animals, instead

of fleeing to save themselves. Zoo-keeper William Coombs even had to argue and plead his way through a roadblock to get to the zoo.

The amateur firefighting team jumped into action. While half the team started wetting down dry areas that were combustible, such as garden beds, guttering and the wooden maintenance buildings, the other half began placing animals in safer locations.

As the bushfire had been burning for over a month, the animals were used to the choking, acrid smoke that filled the air, and weren't particularly alarmed by the unusual activity going on that morning.

The red pandas and smaller primates, including pygmy marmosets, golden and emperor tamarins and capuchin monkeys, whose enclosures were near the boundary fence and nearest the oncoming fire, were caught and placed in pet crates and rehoused in Staples's living room. Although the primates are pretty nimble little creatures, they were reasonably easy to catch - unlike the red pandas. Trained to come down from the trees and go into the crates, that day they were spooked. Instead of climbing down the trees, they climbed higher, leaving Staples and his staff no other option but to climb after them and

try and coax the pandas down with netted poles. At any other time, this would have been funny. But today, the clock was ticking.

Dangerous beasts, such as the lions, Sumatran and Bengal tigers, cheetah, snow leopard, serval and gorillas, were placed in their night dens - underground locations where they could be confined. If the fire did come close, there would only be a small area to wet down.

*Giraffes, rhinos, zebras, ostriches and deer were herded into open paddocks*

Larger primates, such as the lemurs, siamangs and gibbons that reside on a specially created island, remained where they were. And the large herbivorous animals, like the giraffes, rhinos, zebras, ostriches and deer, were herded into open paddocks where they were free to run and evade the fire if it got near.

**MONSTER ON THE LOOSE**

All through December, the general consensus by the Mogo staff was that the fire would bypass the zoo. So, when it changed direction and started bearing down on them, it was a shock. It was also moving really fast.

Just before 10am, the fire front was upon them. The first thing they experienced was the ember attack. Resembling a snowstorm, grey ash fell from the sky, followed by small embers, then larger pieces of debris



and burning leaves. Small grass fires sprung up everywhere. And the heat was so intense they felt like they were sitting in an oven.

Then, a noise, like the sound of the ocean waves crashing, came rumbling over the treetops. The wind whipped up into a frenzy. The sky, an eerie orange, grew dark. "It felt like Armageddon," says Staples.

Staff were strategically placed around the zoo and in contact by two-way radio. Brookbanks, a long-serving employee, who knew the layout of the zoo intimately, ran the operations. When a spot fire appeared, he was alerted and swiftly dispatched one of the water tank utes to the area.

It was important to put these small fires out quickly before they had a chance to escalate and start racing away and up trees - something the zoo team was not equipped to deal with. It also took them ten minutes to refill the tanks, so time was of the essence.

This pattern of filling tanks and rushing to put out fires continued for hours. Around midday, the wind grew fiercer and the sky turned totally black - it felt more like midnight than the middle of the day. They couldn't see anything except for the fires, which were now practically surrounding the zoo. Staples decided it was time to make the emergency call for backup on the only communication available, a fleeting mobile phone signal.

Having never called the emergency number before, Staples had no



**Found in rainforests of Java, silvery gibbons are endangered in the wild**

experience of what to expect and imagined fire engines would arrive immediately. He was so excited he radioed everyone at the zoo to tell them that help was on the way. Little did he know that the bushfire had brought down telegraph poles in the area and electricity and all communication had been cut. Also, the RFS was so stretched trying to save homes and businesses on several fronts, that they had no available fire engine to send.

Time ticked by at the zoo and no one turned up. Staples called again just after 1pm, although he knew by then that no one was coming. With a feeling of total abandonment, they had no other option but to carry on by themselves and hope that

## FIRE, FLOOD AND PESTILENCE

Like nearly everyone around the world, 2020 has not been a good year for Mogo Wildlife Park. The mega bushfire forced it to close its doors for two months for repairs. They opened again on March 1, only to be

forced to close again weeks later due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With low case numbers in New South Wales, they were able to open again in time for the July school holidays, which is when I visited. When I was to interview

Staples a few weeks later, the wildlife park was having a very different problem. Nearly 200mm of rain had been dumped in two days – making it one of the wettest Julys on record – and the zoo was flooded.

the forecast southerly wind change would come soon. Without internet connection, they were totally in the dark about when, or if, it would arrive

Another hour passed, and another, with the zoo staff chasing ember attacks and putting out spot fires.

Around 3.30pm the weather change came. But instead of calming things down, it whipped the wind up into a frenzy, and for half an hour, fuelled it more. At about 4pm the southerly wind blew in, fanning the fire in the opposite direction. The temperature dropped from 40°C to 20°C in a matter of minutes, and the fire front vanished as quickly as it had appeared.


Hot, dirty and exhausted, there was a collective sigh of relief from all those defending the zoo.

The Currowan fire, which eventually scorched half a million hectares and destroyed hundreds of properties, may have gone, but zoo staff weren't able to let their guard down. For six

days, spot fires kept appearing. It was not an easy time to sleep at night.

The wildlife park started filling up with stranded people. Staff who couldn't return to their homes because of the fire risk arrived with their families and pets and camped in any space available.

The public started bringing injured wildlife to the zoo for treatment, though the numbers were less than Staples had expected. "I was prepared to be inundated with injured animals, but there weren't that many, which just goes to show how fierce the fire was," he says. Wildlife killed across Australia from bushfires in the summer of 2019/20 is now conservatively estimated to be around three billion.

A week after the fire – in which no zoo animal was lost and the only real damage was to the perimeter fence – rain fell and finally extinguished the 'monster on the loose'. 

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# SOURCE

*From the ocean down to the tiniest droplet,*

—  
BY *Cornelia Kumfert*







PHOTO FEATURE

# OF LIFE

*water is the essence of our entire planet*



PHOTO: ACTION PRESS/AGORA/SWNS.COM/SWNS

▲ **THE RAINY SEASON** in East Timor starts in December. The rivers on the Southeast Asian island swell with up to 3000 litres of rain per square metre until they burst their banks. Sweeping along vast quantities of soil and debris, the floodwaters create a spectacular border as they hit the sea: muddy river water on one side and azure blue ocean on the other. The fish seem to like it, too, as vast shoals magically appear – much to the delight of East Timor anglers.





Rafieja@alishclinic.com





◀◀ **AN ORDINARY CUMULUS CLOUD**

of roughly one cubic kilometre in size holds around 300,000 litres of liquid water, while a towering thundercloud may carry as much as 18 million litres. But for the residents of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, a heavy downpour remains nothing but a pipedream. The cotton wool-like layer of clouds enveloping the skyline of the desert metropolis usually just evaporates. And when it does rain, very little falls. Less than 100 litres per square metre falls here – and that’s per year!

◀ **SEEN FROM ABOVE**, the floating islands off the coast of Lanzarote, Canary Islands, do not look like cages. But if you take a closer look, you can make out the large, fenced tanks used to breed fish in their natural environment. This process of underwater animal farming is called *aquaculture* and is designed to help feed our planet’s steadily growing population. However, the farms are also set up in marine reserves and the waste products they generate contaminate the seawater, making them a rather controversial method of fish farming.

◀◀ **SURFING PROBABLY ORIGINATED** in Polynesia. Cave paintings there show people riding on waves as far back as the 12th century – presumably without a board, though. It was most likely the Hawaiians who added the surfboard to give the surfer more buoyancy. Hawaii also hosts the annual World Surfing Championships every December. Surfing through the wave in our photo is Brazilian Gabriel Medina, who missed out on his third World Championship title by a whisker to take second place in 2019.





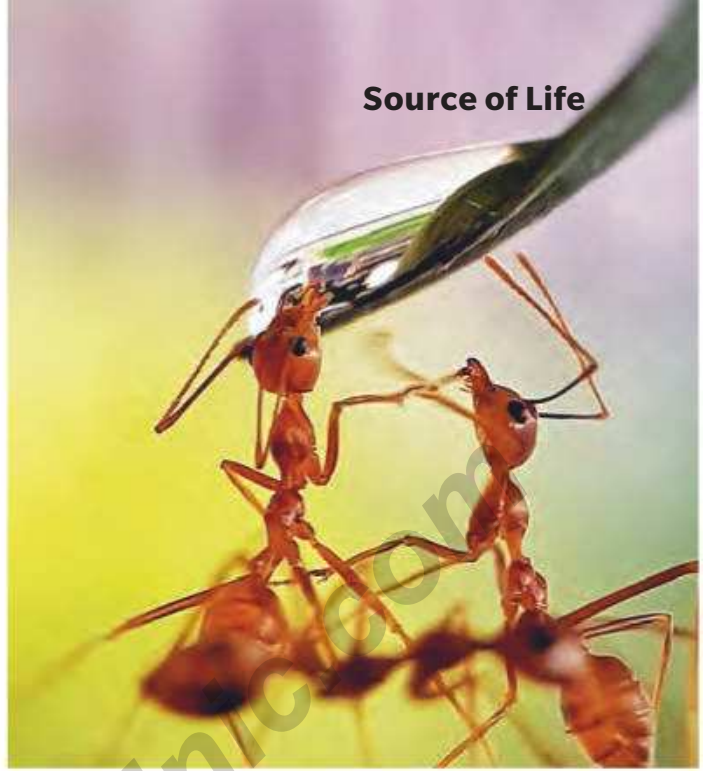
ajenglish.com







## Source of Life



### ▲ **EVEN ANTS GET THIRSTY!**

Creepy-crawlies love a good drop of water, especially in very arid regions. Photographer Analiza Daran De Guzman thought the same thing when she put some water out for the creatures in her garden in the Philippines. Nobody knows exactly how much they drink, but if the insects do the same as they do with food, they would drink as much as they can and then regurgitate the liquid again inside the anthill. Not only would they satisfy their own thirst, but also look after the rest of the colony.

### ◀ **THIS FARMER IN MYANMAR**

built a waterwheel so that he could safely reach the waters of the river below. The principle is similar to that of a mill: the force of the flowing water moves the wooden barriers attached to the wheel. But unlike most mills, this wheel is not used to drive something like a millstone. All it does is carry the water from the bottom to the top, using bamboo canes.



# STRENGTHEN YOUR *Relationship*

*Ways to protect your partnership and show your  
affection and appreciation*

---

BY *Sari Harrar*



## *Make Your Union a Priority*

After Greg and Priscilla Hunt said ‘I do’ in 1976, Greg worked hard to master the grammar of an unfamiliar new language: marriage. “I remember consciously shifting the way I talked, going from I and me to us and we,” says Hunt. “I was constantly rephrasing as I moved from thinking in individualistic terms to thinking of us as a couple.”

Getting to ‘we’ seems like a given for newlyweds: you’ve planned the wedding together, tied the knot in front of friends and family, earned the marriage licence that proves the two of you are an official legal entity. Yet experts say it’s important to make a concerted effort to heighten and reinforce this new sense of oneness – and then to guard and protect it.

“It’s so important that couples form their own new, separate union together,” says Claudia Arp, who with her husband, David, founded Marriage Alive International and co-authored marriage books. “But we see a lot of couples who never, ever reprioritise their relationship

after marriage. They’re still entwined with their family of origin, putting their parents and siblings first. Or they’ve been on their own for years and don’t realise that their friends or job or other interests no longer take precedence. You need to be able to say ‘My spouse comes first.’”

While loving and respecting your parents and getting together with your friends is very important, “this is your anchor relationship”, she says. If you establish this now, it will be easier to hold on to when life becomes more complicated later in your marriage.

The mental shift from me to we can be startling. You can’t go home to your old apartment (or your childhood bedroom) anymore if you’re bored or angry or need quiet time. You can’t arrange a girls’ night out or a day’s fishing without fac-

## **YOU’RE A TEAM AND RESPONSIBLE TO SOMEONE ELSE IN A NEW WAY**

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toring in your partner. You’re a team, and responsible to someone else in a new and profound way.

When University of Minnesota researcher Dr David Olson and his daughter Amy Olson-Sigg surveyed over 10,000 married couples, they

found that togetherness was a top priority for 97 per cent of happy couples but for only 28 per cent of unhappy pairs. Enjoying free time together was important to 97 per cent of the happy group but only 43 per cent of unhappy couples. Nearly twice as many happy couples as unhappy twosomes made most decisions in their marriages jointly. And perhaps most telling of all: 81 per cent of happy couples said their partners' friends and family rarely interfered with the relationship, compared to just 38 per cent of unhappy couples.

Establishing a healthy boundary around your union isn't always easy. When University of California researchers interviewed 172 newly married couples, problems with in-laws and other relatives ranked with communication, money management and moodiness as top challenges.

"You really are forming a new system when you get married, and it needs care and feeding," says marriage and family therapist Pat Love. "The Japanese have a concept called *amae*, which loosely translated means the delicious experience of interdependence. It's a goal worth striving for."

The first step for newlyweds? Revel in your exclusivity. You want to be together, just the two of you, so give yourselves permission to cocoon. Then try these couple-building tips.

**Create couples rituals.** Do something regularly that bonds you, such as ten minutes to chat before bed or always having coffee together in the morning.

**Institute a daily check-in.** Marriage experts recommend couples do something that big business has employed for decades to keep workers happy, productive and in the loop: hold regular team meetings. Luckily, yours will be more fun than listening to Bob from accounting go over the last month's sales figures. One version of the daily check-in helps couples keep communication flowing freely with an agenda.

### *Start by appreciating something about each other*

- Offer up some new information about your day.
- Ask your spouse something about them that has puzzled you, or tell them something about yourself.
- Make a complaint-free request such as: "Please fold the towels when you do the laundry. I couldn't find any this morning after my shower."
- And end with a hope that could be small: "I hope we can go and see that new movie on Friday night"; or lavish: "I'd love to retire at age 50 and sail the Mediterranean with you."
- Ask: is it good for our relationship? When you bump up against any important decision in your marriage, don't just talk about whether it's good



for you and for your spouse. Make it a point to talk about and think about whether it's good for your marriage. "You'll know the answer almost intuitively if you stop and ponder it," Love notes.

This may come down to how much time something will take away from your time together, whether it will make things stressful between you, or if it involves people who in some way threaten your relationship – lunch with your ex, for example. If you don't even want to ask the question, that's a red flag that whatever it is – from working late to 'surprising' your spouse with an expensive new living room sofa to making individual plans on your usual date night – isn't going to be good for your marriage.

**Build healthy boundaries.** Marriages need what experts call a semi-permeable boundary that allows friends and family to connect with you but that doesn't interfere with your own desires and plans. This can be especially complicated when it comes to your families of origin.

The biggest challenge is often deciding how you'll handle the holidays. Will it be his family's house for Christmas or yours? Or will you start a new tradition in your own home? How often will you talk on the

phone – and how much will you share about the details of your marriage? If in-laws are nearby, decide how often you'll visit – and when you'll be at home to receive family visitors.

Some parents and siblings respect a new couple's needs; others may need gentle reminders. "Parents can work with or against a new couple," Arp says. "They need to be getting

on with their own marriage, going from being child-focused to partner-focused.

Your marriage can be a transition time for them as well. Don't cut them off – you really need that love and support. Do com-

municate your decisions about your needs in a kind, calm way."

**Cheer each other on.** "One of the most important things to me is that my wife, Rebecca, is for me and I'm for her," says Lee Potts, a retired computer programmer. "It sounds simplistic, but it's really important." Arp suggests that encouraging your partner is one of the most important things you can do for your relationship. "If we don't, who will? Our bosses and co-workers? Don't count on it! Our children and teenagers? Ridiculous!" she says. "Our mates need our encouragement."

Three strategies she and her husband recommend in their workshops: look for the positive in your new

### DO SOMETHING TOGETHER REGULARLY THAT BONDS YOU

spouse; develop a sense of humour; and give honest, specific praise – describe what you appreciate about your spouse.

**Schedule time for your marriage first.** Don't relegate your relationship to scraps of leftover time. "In mapping out your schedule for the next several weeks, why not start with writing in date times for you and your mate?" suggest Claudia and David Arp. "Then add discretionary things like golf, shopping and community volunteer activities."

**No time? Wonder why?** Do a calendar review. You're over-committed if friends, visits with your parents and extended family, hobbies, overtime hours on the job, or community commitments have crowded out the three kinds of time you need with your beloved: casual catching-up, scheduled dates and intimate encounters. Same goes if your evenings are TV marathons. "Unless you're willing to make your relationship a higher priority than other relationships and activities, you won't have a growing marriage," notes Claudia Arp.


**Disconnect from the 24/7 office.** Push the 'off' button! Heavy use of phones – the little gizmos that keep us connected with family, friends and the office – can dial up stress in your home, University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee researchers found recently. The study tracked the technology use and moods of 1367 women and men for two years. Those who sent and received the most calls and messages were also most likely to say that this 'work spillover' left them tired and distracted at home. "Technology is really blurring the lines between home and work," says

lead researcher Noelle Chesley. "That's not necessarily a bad thing. It may give you more flexibility. But your boss doesn't tend to call you with the good news – you don't hear that you've done a great job on

the project; you do hear that suddenly there's a deadline crisis."

**Setting limits could lift on-call stress.** Talk with your boss or your company's human resources department if work calls are burning you out. Check email once in the evening. If a call's not urgent, muster the courage to say, "I'll look into it first thing in the morning." And simply turn off your mobile phone and laptop at a certain time in the evening.

**Create a code word for love.** Find a secret way to express your love that only the two of you understand. It comes in handy if your spouse calls when the boss is standing beside your desk, and creates that 'just us' feeling anytime you use it. 

## DON'T RELEGATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO SCRAPS OF LEFTOVER TIME

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## ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

### *Humour on the Job*



### **Losing the Script**

Our nephew was getting married to a doctor's daughter. At the wedding reception, her father stood to make his speech, which he had scribbled on a piece of scrap paper earlier. He stopped several times, overcome with what we could only assume were moments of deep emotion. But, after a particularly long pause, he explained, "I'm sorry. I can't seem to read what I wrote. Is there by chance a pharmacist in the house?"

SUBMITTED BY JANA RAHRIG

### **One Step Ahead**

My wife teaches young children. One of her pupils was wearing a Fitbit watch, which prompted my wife to ask, "Are you tracking your steps?"

"No," said the little girl. "I wear this for Mummy so she can show Daddy when he gets home."

SUBMITTED BY JAMES AVERY

### **Permit Denied**

I work for the transportation department at a university. One day, a student came in to buy a parking

permit. "What's your licence plate number?" I asked. She replied, "Front or back?"

SUBMITTED BY MARQUI MOSS

### Office Meteorologist

I deleted my weather app on my phone because there's a guy at work who always tells me what the weather is anyway, and the app never asks how my weekend was.

@LEAKYPOD

### Random Excuse Generator

Sorry I'm late. Traffic is exactly how it's been every day for the past five years and I was not expecting that.

@KARENKILGARIFF

### My First Day on the Job as Bank Manager

**CUSTOMER:** I'd like a car loan.

**ME:** I'm not lending you my car.

@DAVID8HUGHES

### Strengths and Weaknesses

**INTERVIEWER:** Would you call yourself a hard worker?

**ME:** Absolutely. I make almost everything harder than it has to be.

@THENATEWOLF

### Thanks?

It's amazing how a person can compliment and insult you at the same time. Recently, when I greeted my colleague, she said, "You look so gorgeous, I didn't recognise you."

SUBMITTED BY ELAINE SCHYVE

## 'TIS THE TIME TO BE JOLLY

*Three employees who made their respective holiday season office parties memorable:*

★ The man who tried to photocopy his rear end, only to smash the glass and end up in the hospital.

★ The poor soul who fell asleep on the toilet at a restaurant and woke up to find that the entire place was empty – and he was locked in.

★ The manager who took his staff out for a lavish three-course Christmas meal and 'had an emergency' when dessert arrived, leaving his team with the huge bill.

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HOME



# HOME PARTY

## *Survival Tips*

*Keep your gathering fun and stress-free for everyone, you included*

BY *The Editors*

**HOSTING A PARTY AT HOME** is the perfect opportunity to bring friends together to enjoy each others' company with no unwanted distractions. While eating out can be nice, cooking at home is usually much cheaper, and experiencing new recipes with other people can be fun. You also don't have to wait

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



around for a table, or rush to finish your meal, when you are hosting a dinner party at home. Here's our guide for hosting a great evening.

**FORGET BEING PERFECT** There's often something we don't like about our homes but don't let this put you off throwing a party. Most people simply like to be invited to a fun evening and will probably pay little attention to their surroundings.

**KEEP THINGS SIMPLE** Minimise stress by taking a few shortcuts. Not a great cook? Order in a takeaway or prepared food. Don't want to handwrite invitations? Send a customised online card invitation. You don't need exquisite cuisine or cocktails to throw a great party. Just have a couple of nice details here and there, and the rest will take care of itself. Some bright paper straws, a bunch of flowers or some balloons go a long way and are all inexpensive.

**DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE** Forget the 'one size fits all' party. Work it out your way. Don't simply throw a party the same way it's always been done. Instead, shake things up and do something that suits your own values. Remember, don't let activities get in the way of allowing people to have a good time. If people don't want to get involved in a game of charades, let them watch instead.

**USE SPACE WELL** Having a large house doesn't guarantee the best party. In fact, larger venues can be problematic, as people can become segregated – meaning they're less likely to bump into each other and start a conversation. At the other end of the spectrum, you need to ensure your guests don't feel as though they're standing on top of each other. People tend to sit down more at daytime parties, so have a seat for each guest. But a night party can be a different story.

**SEND INVITES CAREFULLY** Firstly, send personalised invites, as people are more likely to attend. Also, think about who you're going to invite. Your more reserved friends might not enjoy an action-packed games night, so consider asking them to your next dinner party instead.

**SET THE TONE** According to various studies, people remember the beginning and end of parties the most. Considering that most hosts focus on the food and activities in the middle, we might all be getting it wrong! So, consider a speech, a toast or some drinks, and don't forget the music.

**HOST WITH RULES** The best hosts will circulate the room and talk to one person at a time while connecting guests together as well. Don't let one person dominate the

## READER'S DIGEST

conversation. Consider separating people who already know each other and encourage them to mingle with others they don't know. Also, be sure to specify whether the party is child-friendly on your invitation.

**PLAY FUN GAMES** Aside from card and board games, there are other great games you can play as well, such as 'Heads Up', a mash-up of Celebrity Heads and charades, where you have to guess the word on the post-it note on your forehead

from the clues your team gives you. Karaoke and Cards Against Humanity (a party game where players fill in the blanks to finish the sentence using words or phrases typically deemed offensive, risqué or politically incorrect) are also popular choices.

**CLOSE THE NIGHT** Have an exit time planned so guests don't outstay their welcome and you have plenty of time to tidy up. Encourage people to have one last drink and thank them when they leave.



### Tastes a Lot Like Christmas

*Gone are the days when we would have been happy with a fruit-  
mince pie, some festive chocolate or a bowl of nuts. These days,  
retailers are experimenting with some whacky seasonal snacks.*

US store Archie McPhee is offering candy canes flavoured with tomato sauce to get condiment lovers into the holiday spirit.

Pizza for Christmas dinner? In the UK, Adsa had a limited edition pizza with two different types of cheese, turkey, pigs in blankets, and sage and onion stuffing balls, along with a sachet of cranberry sauce to drizzle on as a condiment.

Many fast food chains also offer seasonal burgers, boasting everything from hand-carved roast turkey and sage and onion fries to cranberry bacon chutney, kale and a country gravy dipping sauce.

Also in the UK, a company offers 'Luxury Christmas Tree Flavour Salted Hand Cooked Crisps' – if you've ever wondered what pine trees tasted like.

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ADVENTURE



# SAILING *Into* HISTORY

*A journey aboard a replica sailing ship offers  
a glimpse into life during a crucial  
moment in the 18th century*

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BY *Paul Robert*



PHOTO: MAXIME FRANUSIAK/ASSOCIATION HERMIONE LA FAYETTE; GRAPHIC: GETTY IMAGES





## READER'S DIGEST

The command comes from deep within the sailor's chest: "Heave!" It rises towards the sails of the *Hermione*, a replica of an 18th-century French Navy frigate that now lies off the coast of Normandy.

On this May morning in 2019, eight crew - the topmen - climb the shrouds of the foremast. Their silhouettes move like giant spiders against the rising sun as they spread out along the yard to undo the ropes.

As they release the handmade linen sail, the crew on deck pull on other ropes. "Heave!" yells the foreman. "Ho!" answers the team on the rope, again and again. The procedure is repeated on the main mast and the mizzen-mast, until the *Hermione* rides the waves in all its glory.

The original *Hermione's* claim to fame was to carry the 22-year-old Marquis and General, Gilbert de Lafayette from Rochefort, France, to Boston in 1780 on a top-secret mission: to deliver military support from Louis XVI to George Washington, commander of the insurgents in the American Revolution.

Construction of the replica began in 1997, initiated by the International Centre of the Sea, the museum that encompasses Rochefort's 17th century naval dockyards. Using traditional construction techniques, the project



**The topmen prepare to release one of *Hermione's* sails**

took 15 years. The new *Hermione* set sail for the first time in 2012 with a crew of professional sailors and volunteers.

As a self-financing operation, the *Hermione* takes part in naval events and makes appearances at ports where it allows paying visitors on board. Although individual guests are invited to sail along occasionally, the ship is not allowed to take on paying passengers.





**O**n average 80 crew, about a quarter of whom are professionals, staff the modern *Hermione*, working in shifts. The volunteers are all regulars who sail for at least two weeks on this travelling exposition, which calls in at cities along the French coast.

I came aboard as a guest at Dieppe for the journey to Ouistreham, barely 40 kilometres down the coast as a bird flies. But, at the mercy of the winds, we'll be forced to sail across the English Channel and back to reach our destination. The journey

will take more than 24 hours. I look forward to a taste of 18th-century travel.

The original *Hermione* was a fast and intrepid fighting ship. "It really was the best of what 18th-century technology had to offer," says Captain Yann Cariou, 58. A former career officer in the French Navy and captain of another famous tall ship, the *Belem*, Cariou has led the crew of the *Hermione* since its first journey in 2012. Before that he was a volunteer during the planning phase of the reconstruction.

“When the original *Hermione* was built, every shipbuilder had his own secrets and specialties. A frigate from Brest would be different from one from Rochefort,” says Cariou. “Louis XVI ordered his best mathematician and scientists to develop the best possible sailing ship. That is why this ship was so fast.”

And it was deadly. “The *Hermione* had its 32 regular guns and for this trip, the crew posted two more guns on the forecastle,” Cariou explains. “Those and the muskets in the gun racks on the replica have the look and weight of the real thing but they can no longer sow death.”

While there are concessions to the 21st century below decks – a modern kitchen, toilets and laundry – on

**Unlike its 18th-century counterpart, the modern *Hermione* welcomes female crew members on board**



deck, the experience is as authentic as possible. One exception: about a third of the crew are female. There are 30 kilometres of rope, hundreds of pulleys and 800 points where ropes are attached. The crew needs to know them all by their 18th-century names.

With 80 people on board, the 1200-ton frigate, which is 44 metres long and 11 metres at its widest point, looks crowded to me. In 1780, there were at least 200 sailors, plus a baker, a butcher, cooks, carpenters and soldiers, not to mention chickens and sheep. When Lafayette crossed the Atlantic there were no less than 330 people on board. I can barely imagine the smell on the lower decks, where hundreds of men took turns sleeping in hammocks.

When I boarded the previous night, it hardly took me two seconds to understand what 18th-century travel meant. “Mind your head,” said my hostess, Tiphaine Gauthier, 32, as she led the way down a wooden stairway to the lower deck. At 1.93 metres tall, I needed to fold myself nearly in half to pass through the door of my cabin, which was barely 150 centimetres high.

Inside were four bunk beds, two on each side, with barely half a metre of space between them. When it was time to sleep, I bent over and rolled



myself sideways onto my sleeping bag, fully dressed. I managed two hours sleep that night. I hope this wasn't where Lafayette slept for the 38 nights of his crossing to the new American republic.

"In fact, the captain gave up his own bed," says Cariou, when I meet him in the comfortable captain's cabin. The young general outranked the commander of the *Hermione*, Louis-René de La Touche, who had received orders to provide "a closed and decent dwelling" for Lafayette.

As soon as Gilbert de Lafayette came aboard on March 10, 1780, at the small harbour of Port-des-Barques, close to Rochefort and about 50 kilometres north of Bordeaux, the frigate, loaded with enough food to last six months, set sail. Once they were at sea the commander was allowed to open the King's orders about the route to be taken.

Listening to the cries of "Heave! Ho!" on deck, I think about why a 22-year-old man, an aristocrat himself, risked his life to cross the ocean on a mission to combat the British king.

Lafayette wasn't two years old when his father was killed by British soldiers, and he joined the French



**The crew works in unison to set the *Hermione's* sails**

king's musketeers when he was 13. But when introduced to the royal court at Versailles after his marriage to Adrienne de Noailles, daughter of one of the most powerful families in France, he rejected what he saw. "I live with contempt for the greatness and pettiness of the court," he wrote in his memoirs.

Instead, he discovered the philosophers Rousseau and Voltaire, and read Father Raynal's scathing attack against despotism and colonialism, which was banned by the





**The *Hermione's* deck is supposed to reflect the life of an 18th-century war ship as much as possible. Modern conveniences and comforts are hidden away below deck**

government. He attended Masonic gatherings in Paris, where the most subversive ideas were discussed, and was dazzled by the American rebels' Declaration of Independence of 1776, which states that "All men are created equal" and that the power of rulers comes "from the consent of the governed".

In 1777, despite the opposition of his family and the king, Lafayette financed his first trip to support the American insurgents, who made him a major general in the American revolutionary army. He returned to France two years later as a hero. He was 21.

Despite his disobedience

- Lafayette paid for it with an eight-day prison sentence, which he served at home - he was now considered to be the best link between France and the young American republic.

**THE WIND BEGINS** to pick up in the afternoon. The captain, who monitors conditions on instruments hidden inside a wooden casing behind the wheel, orders a complicated manoeuvre to take down some of the sails and turn the ship back towards France.

As the wind increases further, the *Hermione* starts to dance energetically across the waves. In the mess room, I try to move with the rhythm

of the waves, but I nearly shower one crew member with hot tea. We have crossed the Channel's busy sea-lane and the English coast is barely visible on the horizon behind us.

"I would love to sail once with one of those crews from the 18th century," Captain Cariou confides to me. "Those men had muscles and they were more than twice as numerous. That is what we lack on board with the volunteers. Many of them are students. They are not strong enough, so I can never take this fast frigate to the limits of its abilities."

For a moment, as our boat sails towards the French coast, I think of what these men of 1780 must have felt: the fear of not returning home and dying on the other side of the world. On board was a surgeon, as well as a reverend for when the time came to hand one's soul to God.

**A**fter six weeks, the *Hermione* reached the American coast on April 27, 1780. Lafayette immediately joined George Washington and entered the battlefield. In accordance with the king's orders, the *Hermione* remained to fight. On June 7, off Long Island, New York, they encountered the HMS *Iris*, a 32-cannon British ship. "Battle stations!" commanded de La Touche.

Men raised gunpowder and cannonballs from the hold while others stretched vertical nets to avoid wooden splinters when the ship was hit by

gunfire. In the kitchen, the fires were extinguished. The surgeon prepared his instruments.

Both ships survived the hour-long fight. "I fired 260 cannon shots," de La Touche proudly wrote afterwards. But the *Hermione's* mainsail alone was hit by 30 cannonballs, and the main mast was damaged. Thirty-seven sailors were wounded and ten died.

**WE ARE NEAR** our destination, the port of Ouistreham, early in the morning of May 14. The wind has died down. Small boats have come out to welcome us. As the sails are folded, a pilot comes on board to lead us into the harbour, where a large crowd has gathered to witness the arrival of this historical ship. The crew dresses up in period rags and Captain Cariou appears in a splendid red uniform with matching tricorne hat. This show, which includes cannon demonstrations, is what the towns pay for.

A couple of hours later I am on the dock. I turn back to look upon the fabulous silhouette of the *Hermione*. The original returned to France after taking part with Lafayette in the 1781 victory of the American revolutionaries at the Battle of Yorktown, in Virginia.

Today, even moored at the dock and sails folded away, the replica ship reminds me of the winds of liberty that sped the original *Hermione* across the Atlantic, earning it its nickname: 'The Frigate of Freedom.'





# What Your Walking Style Reveals

*Medical experts share what your gait – from limping to a buoyant stride – can reveal about your overall wellbeing*

BY *Martica Heaner*





**W**hen we traipse around the house or step out for a stroll, most of us don't think twice about putting one foot in front of the other. For many people, it's a given to take the ability to walk – and to walk well – for granted. That is, until something goes wrong. Then we develop a new-found appreciation for our former ambulatory prowess.

Your walking style can reflect a host of physical, physiological, neurological and even psychological influences and problems. “Your gait reveals a lot,” says physiotherapist Jessica B. Schwartz. “I see health issues manifested not only in my patients' steps, but among the general public, say at a mall or airport,” she says.

So, wonder what your walking style can reveal about your health? We spoke with medical experts who share how certain walking styles can shed light on specific health conditions.

### LIMPING

Favouring one leg when bearing the weight and impact of each step suggests that a joint injury is present. This can come from structural problems, like a muscle strain, sprained ligaments, a torn meniscus, or damaged joint structures, arthritis, leg length differences or foot problems. And it can get worse, because an off-balance stride affects other body parts.

"The body is amazing at creating compensation mechanisms for ailments of the lower extremity," says foot and ankle surgeon, Dr Henry C. Hilario. "Some patients may have always had one leg that is shorter but might only notice it later in life as their body's compensation, over time, eventually wears joints out faster and contributes to back, hip, knee and foot pain. The foot and ankle also compensate for being flat-footed or having a high instep, which can then lead to arthritis later in life."

If pain in your lower extremities becomes chronic and actually alters your gait, it's important to get help. "The causes of limping can be evaluated and treated by a skilled physiotherapist," adds Schwartz.

### SLOW STRIDE

"Age can be tied to how fast or slow a person walks," says Dr Hilario. Lower body muscles, like the glutes, tend to weaken with age, according to a 2017 study published in *BMC Geriatrics*. Also, the fast-twitch muscle fibres in the lower body can decline, suggests a 2013 study in *Experimental Gerontology*. Together, these two things may result in a loss of power and, therefore, slower walking.

"Someone with obesity, pain from joint injuries or osteoarthritis tends to walk slower as well," adds Schwartz. "With obesity, a person may have a wider stance and spend a longer time in each phase of the

stepping motion since transferring the excess body weight quickly can be more difficult, especially if a person is out of shape."

Of course, walking, along with a nutrient-rich, lower-fat diet, is a great way to help a person who's obese lose weight if done frequently and for long enough.

### SHUFFLE STEPS

A shuffling step where the feet don't lift high off the ground and instead scoot, rather than roll, through the full heel-to-toe range of motion could be indicative of Parkinson's disease, according to Schwartz. If your walking is altered by pain or dysfunction you need to see a doctor or physiotherapist.

Many people do not realise that you do not need a referral from a doctor to see a physiotherapist. "There are often things we can do to help with pain and dysfunction," says Schwartz.

Heel and knee lifts can help strengthen the muscles that lift your feet with each step. To do heel lifts: rise up and down on the balls of your foot to develop calf strength, which helps to push your body weight forward with each step. To perform knee lifts: raise your thigh to hip level to strengthen the hip flexors, which help raise your leg and foot with each step.

### WOBBLY WALKING

Some people have a tough time staying centred and appear to waddle

from side to side. Sometimes veering in a sideways direction from the continual imbalance with each step. “This can be a sign of gluteal muscle weakness,” says Schwartz.

“This sideways pattern, known as the Trendelenburg gait and resembling a penguin walk, is often due to hip osteoarthritis,” she says.

Exercise can help since the condition stems from muscle weakness and imbalances in the pelvis. “You can do the old-style fire hydrant exercise also known as doggy kicks, where you get on your hands and knees and raise your bent leg up and down on each side,” says Schwartz.

## BOUNCY STEPPING

Think about when you’ve felt happy, excited about something or even in love. These emotions can carry over into your walking style. “You can tell a lot about a person’s mental state from their physical demeanour,” explains Dr Barry Gritz. “Someone who is in a good place ambulates differently, almost gliding when they walk.”

Since you’re energised when you’re experiencing positive emotions, it’s a good idea to take a walk. Walking more and bumping up your intensity a notch can help you reap even greater physical and mental benefits from your workouts.



**If your gait is causing pain and discomfort, see a doctor in case you have an underlying condition**

## CRAMPY LEGS

Some people experience those out-of-the-blue, muscle-clenching cramps that leave you frozen until the pain resides. “If leg muscles cramp when walking, it could indicate the presence of a disease that has not yet been diagnosed like pulmonary disease or peripheral artery disease, (PAD)” says Dr Jenna Yentes, an assistant professor in biomechanics. PAD is caused by clogging of the arteries that supply the legs with blood and is a risk factor for heart trouble. “Rather than thinking that this is just a sign of ageing, it’s not normal and it’s better to speak to your doctor. Even if you have a serious health condition, early diagnosis is typically better.”

## TRIPPING OFTEN

Stumbling over the occasional crack in the footpath is normal. But don’t write yourself off as clumsy if you



have a regular habit of tripping. There can be a neurological undertone to tripping," explains Schwartz. "Diabetic neuropathy is common – and commonly under-diagnosed." As diabetes progresses the feet can become numb and a person may not feel temperature changes in their feet, or have a solid awareness of where their body is in space.

Eventually, this condition can become painful. Controlling blood sugar with exercise, healthy eating and medication, if necessary, can reduce the risk of diabetic neuropathy.

### BREATHLESS STROLL

If you're power-walking with fast feet and pumping arms, then you should get out of breath. If you're walking, even slowly, but it's uphill or upstairs, it's normal to end up huffing and puffing, too. But if you are walking slowly on flat terrain, or walking for just a short time before you start to feel breathless, that could be a warning sign that you have a heart or lung condition.

Many conditions can cause shortness of breath, including asthma or a respiratory infection. These conditions can make it tough to get enough oxygen. A common lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), leaves those who have it at higher risk of falls, explains Professor Yentes.

"You can do exercises such as pursed lip breathing to improve your


lung function and be able to walk further or for longer periods," she says. "But you should speak with a doctor and start with pulmonary rehabilitation so you can start an exercise programme in a safe environment."

### LISTLESS WALK

A person who is feeling down, whether it's from sad or stressful moments in life or due to diagnosed clinical depression, is going to walk just like they feel. "If they have depression, their posture may be stooped or slumped and their gait slower," says Dr Gritz.

Of course, walking and other types of exercise are one of the best antidotes for depression. "Exercise is definitely one of the non-pharmacological treatments I recommend for depression," explains Dr Gritz. "In fact, we can tell when a patient is feeling better through these non-verbal indicators – they will tend to walk faster and with a lightness in their step."

### TAKING STEPS

So, how much should you walk? Most health guidelines recommend that adults do at least two-and-a-half to five hours per week of moderate intensity exercise, or 75 minutes to two-and-a-half hours per week of moderate-to-vigorous intensity aerobic activity, preferably spread throughout the week. If you're just starting out, begin with easier and shorter sessions, and build up to longer harder ones. 

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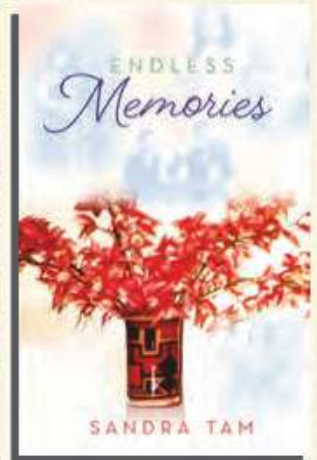
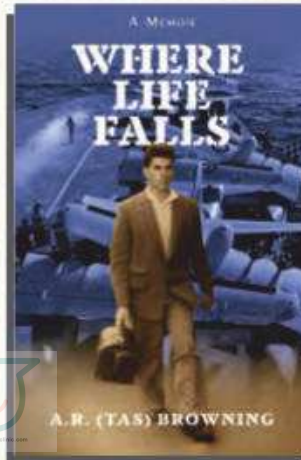
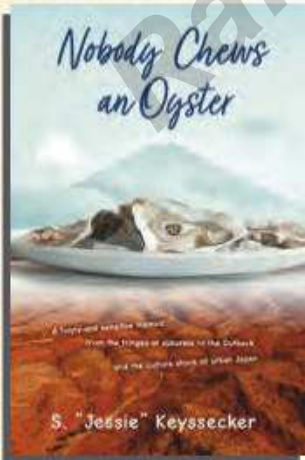
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HOME

# What to Write in a Christmas Card

*We're here to make writing your message in a Christmas card a lot easier this year*

BY Isabel Roy

There's nothing we love more than getting Christmas cards in the post, but when it comes time to draft our own cards, deciding what to write can be hard, even for the people we love the most. Just remember, you don't have to write a novel. Whoever gets your season's greeting will be so pleased you thought of them, a simple message wishing them well will make them smile.

When working out the perfect Christmas card message, think about the person you're writing to and try to personalise it. Let them know they're getting something straight from you and not as part of an obligatory mass mailing list. Would they appreciate some holiday-themed humour or something a bit more heartfelt? Choose a suitable card then take a look at our list of messages to see if something fits. If not, they are sure to give you the inspiration to write your own.

## HEARTFELT MESSAGES

- *Feeling incredibly blessed to have you in my life this holiday season. Wishing all the best to you and your family.*
- *The holidays are extra magical this year because I get to spend them with you.*
- *Holidays like Christmas remind me what I'm grateful for: you.*
- *Having you in my life is the best*

## READER'S DIGEST

Christmas present I could ever ask for.

- *I know this past year has been tough, but I hope this holiday season brings you joy and happiness. All the best in the New Year. You deserve it!*
- So lucky to be spending another Christmas with you.
- *May your holidays be filled with as much joy and laughter as you've given me.*
- You light up my life like a Christmas tree. So lucky to have you in my life!

## FUNNY CHRISTMAS CARD MESSAGES

- *Because I definitely won't be organised enough to get even more cards out in the New Year: Happy holidays. (That covers all the ones from now until Easter.)*
- The true gift of Christmas is the time we spend together. (That's why I didn't get you anything else.)
- *Here's hoping you survive the holiday season with your sanity and bank account intact. Merry Christmas.*
- Since I'm pretty sure you're not getting anything from Santa this year, I thought I'd send you this so you'd have something to open.
- *Just to show I care I went to a real post office and bought actual stamps to send you something old fashioned: real mail.*
- Marjorie Holmes once said, "At Christmas, all roads lead home." I wonder how much Mum paid her to say that.



- *Eat, drink and be merry – in moderation. Happy holidays!*
- At this time of year, we so often are reminded of what's truly important: home cooking.

## WHAT TO WRITE IN A CHRISTMAS CARD FOR YOUR COLLEAGUES

- *Enjoy some well-deserved time off – looking forward to working with you more in the New Year!*
- Thank you for all you've done this year. Enjoy your holiday break!
- *Wishing all the best to you and your family this holiday season. See you in the New Year.*
- Thanks for the great year! Hoping you have a great holiday season.
- *See you at the Christmas party for HR-approved merriness!*
- Thank you for all your hard work this year!
- *You've done such a great job this year. Enjoy your holiday!*

## CHRISTMAS CARD QUOTES

- “Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful.” **NORMAN VINCENT PEALE**
- “My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others.” **BOB HOPE**
- “We are better throughout the year for having, in spirit, become a child again at Christmastime.”

**LAURA INGALLS WILDER**

- “Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing, but of reflection.”

**WINSTON CHURCHILL**

- “I wish we could put up some of the Christmas spirit in jars and open a jar of it every month.” **HARLAN MILLER**
- “Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts.” **JANICE MAEDITERE**

## GENERAL CHRISTMAS CARD MESSAGES

- *Merry Christmas! Wishing you health and happiness this holiday season and a wonderful New Year.*
- *May your holidays be filled with warmth and laughter.*
- *From our family to yours, wishing you a truly Merry Christmas.*
- *Happy holidays! Wishing you joy and laughter this Christmas, and all through the New Year.*
- *Hoping all your Christmas wishes come true.*
- *May you have joy, laughter, and the makings of wonderful memories this holiday season. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*

**For more Christmas ideas, advice and fun, go to [www.readersdigest.com.au](http://www.readersdigest.com.au)**



## Ladies and Gentlemen: The Beagles!

Can you ruin a great band name by changing only one of its letters? That’s the idea behind a digital parlour game that has made the rounds on reddit.com and Twitter. Here are some of our favourites:

Boys to Meh

The Mamas and the Tapas

Destiny’s Chili

The Six Pistols

Few Kids on the Block

Public Enema

The Why

Radio Dead

The Beach Toys

The Spite Girls



## QUOTABLE QUOTES

*I have a confidence now that comes from a combination of years of experience and not caring anymore.*

ALTON BROWN,  
TV PERSONALITY



**Don't say yes to everything. "No" is also an answer, and it can be a full sentence.**

CYNTHIA ERIVO, ACTOR

*They say every generation is defined by a great struggle. Our kids will never know there was a time you had to choose between being on the internet or being on the phone.*

HASAN MINHAJ, COMEDIAN



**ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE. BUT A LITTLE CHOCOLATE NOW AND THEN DOESN'T HURT.**

CHARLES M. SCHULZ,  
CARTOONIST



**THE TRUTH IS, THE HARDER YOU FIGHT, THE SWEETER ARE THE REWARDS IN THE END.**

MARY KOM, OLYMPIC BOXER



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READER'S DIGEST

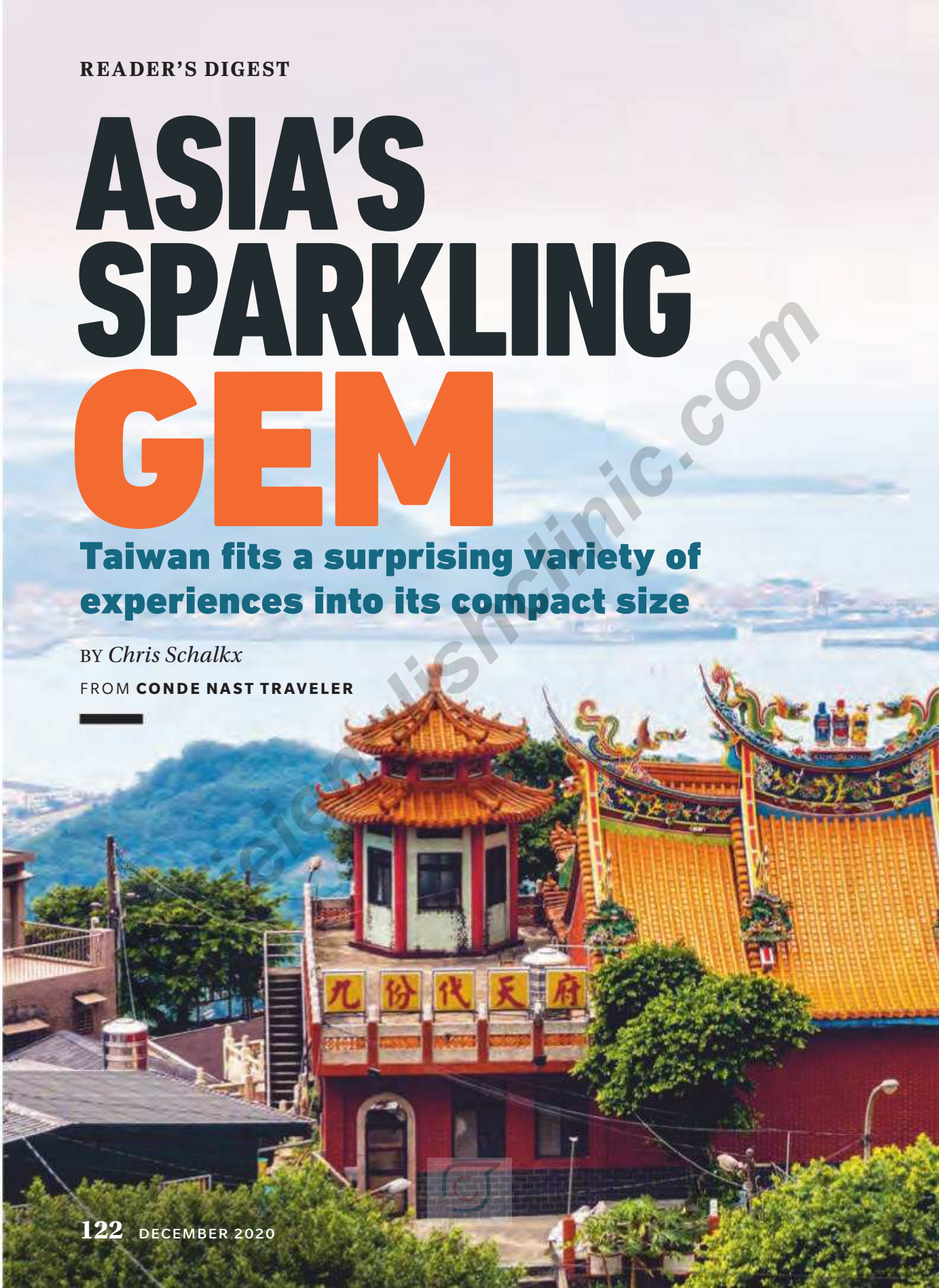
# ASIA'S SPARKLING GEM

Taiwan fits a surprising variety of experiences into its compact size

BY *Chris Schalkx*

FROM **CONDE NAST TRAVELER**

---







TRAVEL



**Colourful temples, such as this one in Jiufen, can be found all over Taiwan**



## READER'S DIGEST

**W**ith a toot of its horn and a metallic screech, the Alishan Forest Railway rumbles out of Chiayi, a mid-sized city in south-western Taiwan. The humid jumble of roaring motorcycles and bubble tea shops makes way for betel nut plantations and clotheslines in small-town backyards that straddle railroad tracks first built for loggers.

The train, a popular attraction that brings travellers up and down the mountains, sputters through rice paddies and citrus orchards so close I can almost reach out and nab the fruit from my window. Bamboo and sugar palms tickle the sides of the train. As we coil higher towards the peak, around Z-shaped bends and through mossy tunnels, the views fade behind a veil of cold fog held up by ancient

red cypress trees whose cobra-size roots cover the ground like noodle soup.

My journey to the mountain resort of Alishan is a two-hour slideshow of kaleidoscopic green that sums up the diversity of Taiwan. At just under 400 kilometres from north to south, this is a land where a traveller can go from tropical coast, through soaring mountains, to dense woodlands in under two hours – part of the appeal of exploring this eggplant-shaped nation.

Alishan is one of my favourite stops on a road trip through the country, beginning in the capital, Taipei, in the north; continuing through some of the nine national parks full of hot springs, waterfalls, gorges and evergreen tropical rainforest; over cloud-shrouded mountaintops; and on to the crystalline beaches of the far south.

Taiwan has been close to my heart since I first came, in 2012, wide-eyed on an eight-month gap-year jaunt around Asia. My guide was a girl named Etty, whom I'd first contacted via Couchsurfing and met for coffee in Bangkok to share travel tips (she was planning to visit my home country of the Netherlands). We happened to be in Taiwan at the same time, and I



**The Alishan Forest Railway takes passengers through a wide variety of landscapes**



### Tea plantations colour the Alishan countryside in an intense green

ended up meeting her parents in the country's second city of Taichung - a town of skyscrapers and steaming, neon-glowing night markets.

We were soon planning trips through Japan, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, while it dawned on us that this was more than a holiday fling. We moved back to Bangkok and are now married with a one year old who has a Taiwanese middle name and a Dutch last name.

**VISITING TAICHUNG** two or three times a year, I've come to see it through my wife's eyes - as a home of sorts, a place for crammed dinner tables and toasts with *kaoliang*, sorghum liquor, to Popo, ETTY's late grandmother. Over Auntie Chao's beef noodle soup, my father-in-law

sometimes gets misty-eyed talking about the sunrise over Yushan, Taiwan's highest peak, or the volcanic landscapes, cherry blossoms, and bubbling waterfalls of the Yangmingshan National Park, on Taipei's northern fringe.

A retired forestry official, my father-in-law helped found some of the country's national parks and was posted to many of its wilder corners. He reminds us that 60 per cent of the country is covered in forest, and that it was for good reason that Portuguese sailors christened it *Ilha Formosa*, or Beautiful Island, when they washed up here in the 16th century.

Taiwan was partly ruled by the Dutch and the Spanish in the 17th century, then held completely by the mainland Chinese until it was invaded



## READER'S DIGEST

by the Japanese in 1895. The new rulers built railroads, tunnels and factories, turning Taiwan into a supplier for Japan's booming industry until they were ousted after World War II.

Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese Nationalist leader who fled the newly Communist mainland in 1949 to set up a stronghold in Taiwan, envisioned a Confucian society with respect for the past, along with a Western-friendly form of capitalism. Even as the country emerged as one of the four Asian Tigers, the genteel culture he nurtured has endured.

### I FEEL THE JAPANESE INFLUENCE

at Jiufen, one of my first stops, a seaside town in the lush mountains east of Taipei. Its teahouses on the hill-sides and lantern-lined alleyways were mostly built by Japanese gold seekers in the late 19th century. Today, the majority of visitors are still

Japanese, though they largely come because Jiufen is said to be one of the inspirations for the setting of the Japanese animated movie *Spirited Away*.

We hike upwards through grassy plains to a stack of colossal boulders on top of Teapot Mountain as our softly spoken Taiwanese guide, Steven Chang, talks of *mô-sîn-á*, the folk creatures believed to cause hikers to lose their way. From the summit I see a lone octagonal pavilion on a distant jagged mountaintop. In the valley behind me are the crumbling remnants of a Japanese Shinto shrine; beyond, the deep-blue nothingness of the East China Sea.

Wherever you are in Taiwan, temples are never far. Their crowns jut from suburban neighbourhoods and far-flung forests, topped with multicoloured dragons, phoenixes and intricate scenes dancing from one gabled roof to another. Every feather,

every scaled claw, every whisker is painstakingly created from smashed-up plates and tiles, a traditional Chinese craft that has withered on the mainland in tandem with religion. In Taiwan, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and curious folk customs have flourished together.

We drive to Shitoushan, 90 minutes southwest of Taipei, passing verdant rice paddies

**The Qingshui Cliff meets the ocean at the edge of Taroko National Park**





**Yushan Mountain is Taiwan's highest peak**

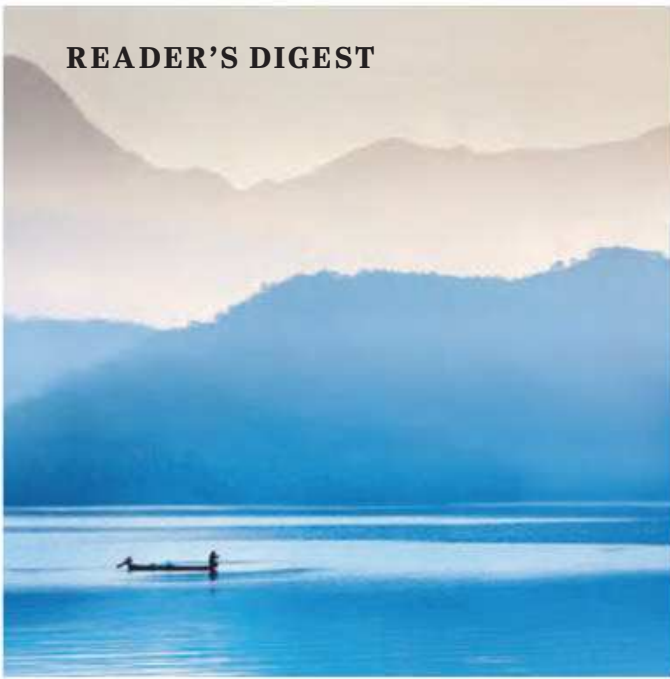
and one-street townships where women in tartan bucket hats hawk plump pomelos (a large citrus fruit) and football-size cabbages. Our lodgings this night is the Taoist Quanhua Temple, a sprawling mess of staircases, pagodas and ceramic cranes built into a sandstone cliff face. I step onto my balcony to find the sky a shade of gold, the air sweetly fragrant from smouldering joss sticks. The valley echoes with chirping crickets and the mumbling of prayer, interrupted only by the occasional clang of a gong.

Somewhere in the distance I hear a wail. Leaving the temple to trace its source, I discover a little shrine half-embedded in a cave. A woman wearing a pink tracksuit is crying in front of the altar. A short man with salt-and-pepper hair joins me and

explains that the woman is hearing otherworldly voices. "It's the language of gods," he concludes, as the woman does ballerina-like jumps of ecstasy. "She has the gift."

That night I am in bed by eight, lines of prayer still droning from monastery speakers.

**SOUTH OF SHITOUSHAN**, the Central Cross Island Highway connects Taiwan's populous west with the wild east, through the peaks and gorges of the Taroko National Park, eventually arriving at the Qingshui Cliff - 20 kilometres of forested bluffs that plunge almost vertically into the Pacific Ocean. We stop at the Tunnel of Nine Turns viewpoint, where Korean, Thai and Japanese voices mingle with the hypnotic gurgle of waterfalls



**Sun Moon Lake in central Taiwan is the country's largest natural lake**

feeding into the gorge. Swallows sweep in and out of cliffs that are like layered cakes of swirling marble. Below me the Liwu River rages around mammoth boulders.

Deeper inland, it is just us and the road, silent black tunnels opening into muffled bamboo forests or curious villages smothered in moss. Mr Wang, the driver for this section of the trip, occasionally breaks the silence to talk about Formosan black bear encounters, boar-hunting trips and ambushes by wild macaques.

One story is halted by the sound of a gunshot in the distance. "Mountain rats," he mumbles, of the poachers who kill wild boar and muntjac, a type of deer. "But nothing compares to the head-hunting tribes who once roamed these forests."

Beer cans, cigarettes and areca

nuts wrapped in betel leaves are laid on crumbling roadside walls, folksy cries for good fortune.

As we rise and the pressure increases on our eardrums, needles replace tropical foliage. Conifer-covered peaks huddle like giants with hairy backs. The road finally reaches Sun Moon Lake. We pull into a nondescript restaurant to eat beef noodles. From the kitchen comes the chack-a-chack of a ladle hitting a fiery wok; behind us, a lady sells 'frog eggs drink' – kumquat lemonade laced with

basil seeds. I spend the better part of the afternoon lolling around the lakeshore, watching bushy-tailed squirrels steal papaya from vendors, and listening to a lone violin player scratching out Chinese folk tunes.

**SOUTH OF THE LAKE** we stop to visit one of the region's tea plantations, which grows oolong and is prized like Champagne. Between two of thousands of neat lines of shrubs, we meet a troupe of tea pluckers in traditional hats draped with colourful Hello Kitty-emblazoned cloths. A man in his 50s with a tar-black betel nut smile waves us closer, showing me a razor blade taped to his gloved index finger. "We harvest all our tea by hand," he tells me. "None of that machine stuff. Only the freshest leaves, the highest quality."

PHOTO: CHUNG HU/GETTY IMAGES



## TRAVEL TIPS

**When to visit:** The best time to visit Taiwan is between November and April when the weather is generally dry and warm. Summers are hot (30°C+) and wet, and the typhoon season runs from June to October.

**Getting there:** China Airlines, Taiwan's national carrier, flies non-stop to Taipei from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and major Asian destinations.

**Lodging:** Hoshinoya Guguan, surrounded by 3000-metre-tall mountains in the hot-spring enclave of Guguan, has 50 rooms, each with its own mountain-fed onsen, [hoshinoya.com/guguan](http://hoshinoya.com/guguan); Villa 32, at the Beitou hot springs in the lush Yangmingshan National Park, north of Taipei, offers the choice between marble-clad Western suites or Japanese tatami ones, [villa32.com](http://villa32.com).

**Tours:** Remote Lands runs seven-day trips around Taiwan, [remotelands.com](http://remotelands.com); Intrepid Travel, [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com).

Heading south, a different Taiwan emerges, one I remember from my first journey. The dialects are trickier than the crisp Mandarin up north, the food sweeter. Everything seems to be bathed in a permanent golden glow.

We stop at a giant fibreglass pineapple, manned by a chirpy woman in a frayed straw hat. "I've never seen foreigners stop here before," she says

as she hands me a slice of pineapple. I can barely finish one slice before another is in my hand; as we try to pull away, she rushes out with three bottles of pineapple juice. Anyone who has ever visited Taiwan, or met my mother-in-law, knows that this is typical in a country where, "Have you eaten yet?" is everyone's first question.

The next morning we arrive in Dulan, a seaside town where wind-swept palms fill the land between the sea and mountains. Convenience stores alternate with hostels and a couple of surf schools. At the WaGaLiGong hostel, where psychedelic murals cover the tiled façade, I meet co-owner Mark Jackson, a surfer from Durban, South Africa, who arrived 17 years ago.

"When I first saw this place, the colours just hit me," he says. "It's kinda like a little Hawaii, with its own rhythm."

Work has begun on a resort in the nearby mountains. "It's not going to stay like this forever," Mark says, shrugging.

Nothing ever does. But, sitting on the black sand beach east of Dulan, watching the surfers paddle out to the roiling swells, I feel that happy sense of otherness I felt during my first trips here. Taiwan still feels different from the rest of Asia. It may have become a home of sorts, but it remains somewhere else entirely. **R**

FROM CONDE NAST TRAVELER (FEBRUARY 7, 2020).  
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# THAT'S OUTRAGEOUS!

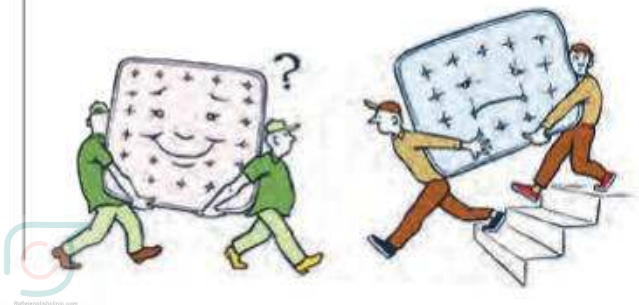
BY Alex Manley

**SMELLY PROTEST** US Customs and Border Protection staff near the southern border with Mexico are coming up against an unlikely foe: a flock of some 300 vultures. Legislation that forbids the killing of these migratory birds means the vultures roost where they see fit. But their excretions – including the birds' corrosive vomit – seem to have damaged a customs radio tower in Texas. Online commenters claim the birds are protesting the mistreatment of many migrants detained at the US border. Whatever their motivation, the vultures sure know how to make a stink.

**BED ON ARRIVAL** Quality sleep is important, and investing in a good mattress can help. But in 2016, New Yorker Karan Bir recognised a potential loophole – mattress returns. For over a year, he slept on a rotating series of free trial mattresses, sourced from online companies with money-back guarantees. Bir realised he could hack the system by simply returning his purchases within 100 days. By the time he bid a bed adieu, he'd ordered another to take its place.

Enough brands offered refunds that he could go years without actually paying for one. He gave up after he moved to a building without lifts, however – lugging a mattress up or down several flights of stairs each time wasn't something he was willing to lose sleep over.

**MELONHEADS** Police in the US state of Virginia released footage of two men accused of robbing a convenience store with hollowed-out watermelons on their heads, after they managed to elude authorities thanks to their 'brilliant' disguises. Candice Wendt, a customer at the shop where the robbery took place, thought the disguises fell in that thin line between stupid and clever. "The amount of work that you have to do to actually hollow out a watermelon to stick it on your head, I think, is kind of crazy," she told the media.



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**BONUS READ**

# *Kindness* *in the* *Time of* **COVID**

*From making facemasks for hospitals to making music to entertain neighbours, the COVID-19 crisis is sparking countless acts of generosity. Here are stories from around the world*

---

BY *Tim Hulse*

PHOTO: OPENING SPREAD: LUCAS UEBEL/GETTY IMAGES

# TUNEL DO ABRAÇO



**A son hugs his father through protective plastic at the Três Figueiras care home in the city of Gravataí, Brazil**

**J**aime Coronel is not a doctor or a nurse. He hasn't saved any lives or invented a vaccine. He's an ordinary member of the public. But in his own way, like many others around the world, he helped to improve the lives of others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Altruism takes many forms, as this year has shown, but it largely stems from a simple desire to help make things better. Indirectly, good deeds can also bring meaning to our lives in times of crisis and can make us feel a greater sense of connection with others, especially when we are starved of company.

Jaime's story is one of many examples. It began with a chance discovery and ended with a desire to make

when my four-year-old daughter Mara saw me, she asked to put on her costume of Elsa, the princess in the film. We spent all day hanging out dressed as characters from *Frozen*."

At that time in Spain, every evening at 8pm people would go to their windows and balconies to clap and cheer the health workers who were putting their lives at risk on the front line of the pandemic.

"I decided that this would be a good time to take out my garbage while still dressed as Olaf," says Jaime. When he did, he received a rousing ovation from his neighbours. And so a tradition was born.

Every day, just before 8pm, Jaime would take out the garbage wearing a different costume. One day he would be an Egyptian mummy, the next a dinosaur, or Freddy Krueger from *A*

## THANKS TO HIS INSTAGRAM POSTS, JAIME HELPED TO BRING A SMILE TO A GLOBAL AUDIENCE

a positive impact on children's lives.

Jaime, who runs his family removal company in the Spanish city of Puertollano, came across a fancy-dress costume of Olaf – the goofy snowman from the Walt Disney fantasy film *Frozen* – while cleaning out the storage room in the early days of lockdown.

"I thought to myself, *Let's do something silly*," he says, laughing as he recalls the day. "So I put it on. And

*Nightmare on Elm Street*, or a robot, or an Arab sheikh. He already had a store of costumes from carnival and Halloween parties, and when they were exhausted, he ordered more online; costumes were also donated to him by a company in Aragon, north-eastern Spain. He even made some himself, helped by Mara and Mara's grandmother, a former seamstress.

Each time, he would receive rapturous applause from his neighbours





**Jaime Coronel and his daughter Mara donned fancy-dress costumes when they put out their rubbish during lockdown – much to their neighbours' amusement.**

and then post a video on social media. Jaime did this for 29 days, and when lockdown rules were relaxed, allowing children to go outside, Mara joined him on his daily excursion. The two dressed up together and made a further nine trips. On the last day of their joint outings, local ambulance crews surprised Jaime by arriving to thank him for cheering people up, and they gave Mara some sweets.

By this time, thanks to his Instagram posts, Jaime was known around the world and had helped to bring a smile to a global audience.

“People on social media thanked me for doing it and making people feel good, at least for a while,” says Jaime proudly.

“Part of my motivation was my daughter and children in general,”

he says. “They are fragile and don’t understand what is happening. My daughter didn’t want to go out for walks, but she was happy to go out with her dad in costume.” Jaime hopes his actions helped other children to feel a little less scared about venturing into the outside world.



**I**n France, two comedians took inspiration from the town criers of olden times to bring some human warmth to the locked-down inhabitants of their apartment block in Lyon.

Every evening the residents would gather on their balconies to hear Valéria Cardullo and Alex Repain announce requests for help or birthday wishes, or offer some puzzles to do.



**Olivia Haynes took to playing her ukelele in her apartment window – and in doing so helped to foster a sense of community among her neighbours in Vienna**

“When we started, we didn’t think it would have such a big impact, but after a while there was a real spirit of solidarity,” recalls Alex.

Elsewhere, music proved a popular means of raising the spirits. In Budapest, members of the MAV Symphony Orchestra drove two cars mounted with loudspeakers around the city and surrounding area blasting out past performances for the benefit of those confined to home.

In Vienna, American musician Olivia Haynes decided to strum her ukulele in her apartment window to bring some light and fun into her neighbours’ lives. To her surprise, not only did she entertain them, but she also helped to build a sense of community.

“I love helping people come together, especially people who wouldn’t normally meet,” she says. As the days went on, some of her neighbours would come down to the courtyard just to listen to her play and afterwards they would chat together.

But it wasn’t just human beings who suffered the effects of isolation brought by lockdown. In Ireland, fisherman Jimmy Flannery realised that Fungie, the famous dolphin that has been living off the coast of Kerry since 1983, was suddenly deprived of the attention from his normal array of sightseers.

He noted how Fungie would speed over to fishing boats leaving the local port in hope of company or a treat.

“But they didn’t have time for him, they were too busy heading for the fishing grounds,” says Jimmy, who decided to pay a couple of visits a day to Fungie, just to keep him company. “I hope he appreciated it,” Jimmy says, laughing. “And I hope he hasn’t forgotten me now his admirers have returned.”



**A**part from dealing with the spiritual effects of isolation, lockdown brought with it other challenges. For some, making sure they had enough food was a serious issue – and no more so than for those living in Australia’s remote outback.

Gary Frost, who owns a roadhouse in the Northern Territory, hit on perhaps the most extreme solution to the

people didn’t have to leave their properties. It’s something unique, I suppose. I don’t know of anyone else who has done it in the world.” Gary is keen to stress he didn’t do it as a commercial venture, but as “a friendly gesture to try and help people out”.

Young Parisian entrepreneur Maud Arditti was inspired by the experiences of her nearest and dearest to provide food for health workers. “A good number of my family and friends are doctors and work in hospitals,” she says. “I was talking to my aunt and discovered that hospital restaurants were often closed and five people could end up sharing a single plate of pasta.”

Maud began by making cakes and pizzas and small quiches for her local hospital, but soon realised she

## A CALL FOR HELP ON SOCIAL MEDIA GARNERED A REMARKABLE RESPONSE

challenge of delivering food to those who needed it: as he has a pilot’s licence, he decided to fly meals out to people locked down in cattle stations at no extra charge.

“Nobody could go anywhere, so they were limited to how they got their food and refreshments. We thought we might do something to help them out a bit,” recalls Gary.

“We make pizzas anyway, so we thought we would fly them out, so

wouldn’t get far on her own. A call for help on social media garnered a remarkable response: in the end, around 1600 helpers were making cakes all over Paris to be sent to hospitals. Soon Maud’s *Vos Gâteaux* (Your Cakes) initiative spread to other French cities.

“We were in a moment of standstill and I think there are three types of personalities in these moments,” reflects Maud. “Those who are a



## READER'S DIGEST

little paralysed, those who criticise everything that's done... and those who are not afraid and tell themselves they'll give all their energy with the means they have, to be able to help. With our cakes, we could feed and bring some sweetness to all our hospitals."

Elsewhere, food for the needy arrived from unexpected sources. That included a group of female gondoliers in Venice, who delivered organic produce to the elderly, and a temporarily unemployed violinist from the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra who delivered food to pensioners by electric bike.

"It was a big thing for the people who received it, and so it became a big thing for me as well," says Teppo

Ali-Mattila, one of many culture and sports workers in the city who offered their help to the elderly.

In Lisbon, a young Syrian couple, Ramia Abdalghani and Alan Ghumim, offered free food from their restaurant to local hospital workers. Having arrived in Portugal as refugees four years before, they were more than happy to help their new community.

"When you flee a war you feel the disaster, but you also realise who is there for you," says Alan. "So in all things we do here in Portugal, we try to give back to the people who welcomed us with open arms." One of those grateful hospital staff was nurse Nuno Delicado. "It was a big life lesson for all of us," he says. "It



**The Vos Gâteaux initiative made cakes and pastries for health workers; word spread fast on social media and before long the idea was widely copied across France**

showed us that as a society we must be there for each other.”

A similar spirit inspired five Syrian women in Aberystwyth, Wales, who donated 100 meals to their local hospital to thank the health service for its work. “The people are very lovely here, it is very important to help them,” says Latifa, one of the women. “In these worrying times, we should

create personal protective equipment for healthcare workers.

In the small city of Elda, south-eastern Spain, a group of women who stitch shoes in their own homes for a living switched to making thousands of masks for the nearby hospital. They used fabric provided by the hospital and rubber bands donated by a local business. Their efforts brought

## THEIR EFFORTS BROUGHT A FLOOD OF REQUESTS FROM GROUPS WANTING TO DO THE SAME THING

all work together. I really care about our new community and I wanted to say thank you.”

One man in the UK gave the gift of food anonymously. A mystery donor in the Oxfordshire village of Denchworth bought fish and chips for every resident once a week through three months of lockdown.

“He doesn’t want to be the focus of attention for this, he thinks people like him who are fortunate to be in their situation should do something for their communities if at all possible,” says local publican Stephen Davidson, who was recruited to provide the meals.



**T**he pandemic also demonstrated how ingenious we can all be given the chance. In particular, many people used their skills and imagination to

a flood of requests for information from groups all over Spain wanting to do the same thing.

Even children joined in with creating vital protective equipment. In Ireland, 14-year-old Conor Jean and his 11-year-old brother Daire set up a small facemask production line in their home in County Kildare using a 3D printer.

They even incorporated special design features so that the masks could be worn more easily by a doctor or nurse in glasses or goggles. “I couldn’t be prouder of these two boys,” commented their mother, Lorraine Duffy.

Perhaps the most kooky example of ingenuity came from Romanian shoemaker Grigore Lup, who unveiled a pair of shoes in European size 75. The idea was that wearers would be forced to keep 1.5 metres apart from others and thus ensure



**The Três Figueiras care home in Brazil came up with the idea of a Hug Tunnel. The plastic sleeves allowed residents and visitors to embrace safely**

social distancing. A pair takes the 55-year-old Transylvanian cobbler two days to make, using one square metre of leather.

A desire to care for the elderly, who are particularly at risk from the coronavirus, also got people thinking outside the box.

Take Tristan Van den Bosch, for example, an operations manager at a cleaning and maintenance company in Brussels. Driving to work one morning, he saw a man shouting at an elderly woman. The man was on the footpath, and the woman – his mother – was three storeys up, in a care home. Like many senior citizens, she was unable to receive visitors because of the

virus. Tristan thought to himself, *We can help this man!*

Work had all but dried up at Tristan's company, which meant it had cranes standing idle at the depot. Why not use those cranes to lift people up, so they can get closer to their loved ones? And so Tristan began driving around Belgium in his crane, bringing families to the windows of relatives on the upper floors of care homes.

"OK, it cost us money," Tristan says. "But in the end we're happy that we were able to help people."

In Brazil, staff at the Três Figueiras care home in Gravataí displayed similar ingenuity in creating an entirely



new way to safeguard elderly residents when they received visitors.

“We noticed that our senior residents were feeling sad,” says owner Luciana Brito. “And we thought they would be much happier if we found a way for them to hug their relatives.”

Inspired by a viral video showing a woman in the US using a plastic curtain to hug her mother, Luciana and her colleagues created a *Túnel do Abraço* (Hug Tunnel) consisting of a large plastic sheet with arm holes, which was attached to one of the care home’s entrances. The arm holes also had plastic sleeves, allowing visitors to hold their loved ones without actually coming into direct contact with them.

“It was so gratifying to see them hugging each other,” says the home’s administrator, Rubia Santos.


and nurses to join her in what she expected to be a three-week quarantine period.

Some 29 employees volunteered for what turned into a marathon of 47 days and nights, with 12 employees remaining for the entire time. And it paid off. At the end of the stint, when the national average of new cases had fallen dramatically and the gates of Vilanova were unlocked, coronavirus tests came back negative for all 106 residents.

The caregivers, who had named themselves “the happily confined”, left in a parade of cars, honking their horns on their way back to reunions with partners and children.

Valerie was hailed a hero for her efforts, but says it wasn’t such a huge sacrifice in the end. “It was a bit like

## “WE THOUGHT THEY WOULD BE MUCH HAPPIER IF THEY COULD HUG THEIR RELATIVES”

  
**W**hen Valerie Martin, head of the Vilanova care home near Lyon in France, heard how those in homes all over Europe were suffering from the virus, she decided on drastic action. “I said to myself, *No. Not mine. My residents still have so much to live for,*” she says.

Valerie’s answer was to completely close the building and invite staff

entering a holiday camp,” she says, laughing. “Living in lockdown with 130 people is extremely rewarding.”

In the Netherlands, 150,000 elderly people in care homes or living alone at home were surprised to receive a colourful bouquet of flowers on Good Friday. The initiative was led by Dutch rapper Ali B and organised by the country’s floriculture industry.

The bouquets were accompanied by a message of love and hope. “Loneliness has never come this

close,” said Ali. “Now it is your mother. Or the neighbour.”

And in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the UK and Switzerland, elderly people in isolated care homes received notes of hope and happiness from total strangers, thanks to a group of ten cousins in France who launched the *1 Lettre 1 Sourire* (One Letter, One Smile) website.

“We had feedback from people receiving the letters, saying how they were rays of sunshine in their daily life,” says co-founder Alienor Duron. “And we had feedback from people taking care of the elderly in these care homes, telling us how amazing this initiative was for them as well, seeing that they were supported like that. We’ve also had great feedback from the people writing the letters, telling

it, “How do you ‘stay at home’ when you’re homeless?”

In Berlin, around 2000 people officially live on the streets, although the figure is thought to be much higher. Nadolny’s kitchen had to close its doors, but it continued to serve sandwiches and hot drinks through a window to the street. “And despite all the problems, new kinds of solidarity emerged,” says Wilhelm.

One example was a special bus brandishing the slogan *#Gemeinsam-FürBerlin* (Together for Berlin), which toured the city delivering grocery packages to the homeless from 20 of Berlin’s supermarkets. And in many German cities so-called ‘*Gabenzäune*’ (donation fences) started popping up – local fences on which people would hang bags containing food, hygiene

## “PEOPLE RECEIVING THE LETTERS SAID THEY WERE A RAY OF SUNSHINE IN THEIR DAILY LIVES”

us how it was something heartwarming for them.”

Another group particularly vulnerable to the pandemic were the homeless. In many places, public toilets were closed and homeless shelters temporarily shut down. Fewer people out and about meant fewer opportunities to make a little money selling newspapers or making music. And as Wilhelm Nadolny, head of the soup kitchen for homeless people behind the Berlin Zoo railway station puts

products and clothing for the homeless.

France saw the birth of the *#PourEux* (For Them) movement. Volunteers cooked meals at home, which were then delivered by other volunteers to those in need. “Everyone could help at their own level,” recalls Maxime Klimaszewski, a 28-year-old volunteer. “It didn’t take a lot of time or a lot of money, but it really helped the daily lives of a lot of people.”





**A decision taken in desperation: Jyoti Kumari cycled 1200 kilometres in the searing heat carrying her disabled father as a passenger**

Perhaps the stories that will linger longest in the memory are those that involved great personal sacrifice for the benefit of others. Take 15-year-old Jyoti Kumari, for instance, who cycled 1200 kilometres across India, carrying her disabled father on the back of her bike.

Their ordeal began in New Delhi, where her father, Mohan Paswan, earned a living driving an auto rickshaw before being injured and losing his job. All non-essential travel had been banned, but their landlord was demanding rent, which they couldn't afford to pay, and he was threatening to evict them, recalls Jyoti with tears in her eyes.

So Jyoti decided the only course of action was for her and her father to spend their remaining money on a cheap bike and return to their home village of Darbhanga in Bihar state.

Jyoti pedalled for ten days in searing temperatures, living on food and water given by strangers. For two days there was only enough for her father and she had to remain hungry.

"It was a difficult journey," she says now with great understatement. "The weather was too hot, but we had no choice. I had only one aim in mind and that was to reach home."

By the time the pair finally reached their destination, news of their journey had spread and Jyoti had become famous, but she says fame was the last





**Approaching his 100th birthday, Captain Tom Moore set out to raise a modest sum for health charities by walking 100 laps of his garden... He raised much, much more**

thing on her mind when she began the journey. “It was a decision taken in desperation,” she says.

The potential of a simple gesture to capture the public’s imagination in a time of crisis was illustrated when the then aged 99-year-old British army veteran Captain Tom Moore decided to raise some money for health workers and patients.

Inspired by the excellent treatment he had received in hospital for skin cancer and a broken hip in 2018, in early April he pledged to complete 100 laps of his garden, using his walking frame for support, before his 100th birthday at the end of the month. His aim was to raise a modest £1000.

But news of Captain Tom’s efforts soon reached the ears of a nation desperate for some good news amid the lockdown. He was featured in newspapers and on TV, and even teamed up with the singer Michael Ball and a health-workers’ choir to record a charity version of ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ (famous as the anthem of Liverpool Football Club), becoming the oldest person ever to top the charts in the UK.

On April 16, Captain Tom completed his 100 laps ahead of schedule, having raised more than £17 million. “I never dreamt I would be involved in an occasion such as this,” he announced.

But this was just the beginning. Captain Tom mania showed no sign of abating as people paid tribute to his efforts in different ways, such as knitting dolls and painting murals. By the time he reached his 100th birthday on April 30, he had raised nearly £33 million. He was honoured with a flypast by Britain’s air force, and the public sent more than 150,000 birthday cards.

His response? “To all those people who are finding it difficult at the moment... the sun will shine on you again, and the clouds will go away.”

In honour of his remarkable achievement, Captain Tom was promoted to the rank of Honorary

Colonel, granted the Freedom of the City of London and awarded a knighthood on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. The money he raised was used to provide comfort and care for National Health Service workers.

“I’ve never been someone that’s sat around,” he laughs, adding that he enjoyed the challenge.

“The first lap was the hardest, but after that I just got used to it.”

And he believes the secret for his success – and also his long life – is simple: “It’s all about having the right mindset. You’ve got to be optimistic and to think that things will get better.” **R**

**Puzzle Answers**

From pages 156-158

**MATCHING IS SO LAST YEAR 90**

**FICKLE FRIENDS \$400**

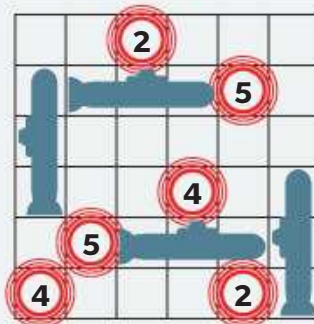
**DOUBLES OR NOTHING**

Your odds of winning are 1/8 whether you pay to set aside a die or not, so you should not waste the extra \$5 to do so. If you win, you get back only six times your bet. With 1/8 odds, you’d need the prize to be at least eight times your bet in order for this game to be worth playing in the long run.

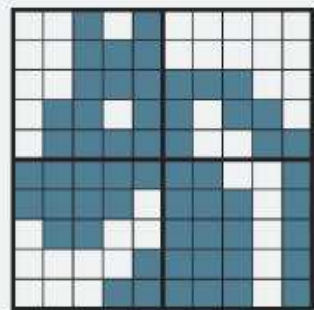
**SUDOKU**

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

**SUB HUNT**



**PIC-A-PIX: KNIGHT**



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ROY  
MORGAN



## RD RECOMMENDS



**Roasted and Pickled Celeriac with Sweet Chilli Dressing**

### Ottolenghi FLAVOUR

**Yotam Ottolenghi & Ixta Belfrage**

PENGUIN RANDOMHOUSE

**F**LAVOUR, the third instalment in Ottolenghi's award-winning PLENTY series, celebrates the limitless potential of vegetables. This pair has created innovative dishes with new ingredient combinations to inspire home chefs, such as Sweet and Sour Sprouts with Chestnuts and Grapes. The dishes are beautifully photographed, with meal suggestions and make-ahead tips.



COMPILED BY DIANE GODLEY



## 7 Ways

**Jamie Oliver**

PENGUIN

In this user-friendly cookbook, Jamie Oliver takes 18 hero ingredients, all popular supermarket staples, and shows you seven new ways to cook them and reinvigorate your weekly meal repertoire. From trusty traybakes to family favourites, Oliver simplifies and inspires everyday cooking with all your usual ingredients.

## Use It All

**Alex Elliott-Howery  
& Jaimee Edwards**

MURDOCH BOOKS

Unlike other cookbooks, *Use It All* helps home chefs run a more sustainable kitchen. It provides interrelated recipes, driven by produce, and focuses on educating readers on making the most of what they buy. Each chapter features a shopping basket of complementary ingredients to create nutritious meals.

## To Asia, With Love

**Hetty McKinnon**

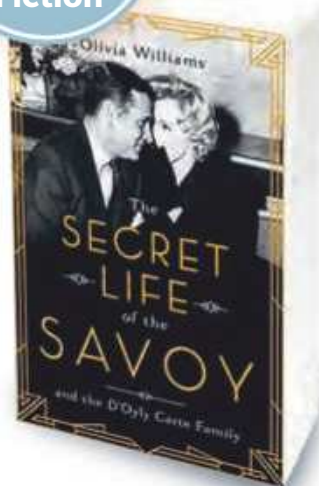
PAN MACMILLAN

If you love Asian-inspired food and are trying to eat less meat, this is for you. The creator of Sydney salad-delivery business Arthur Street Kitchen, Hetty McKinnon, returns to the meals of her childhood in this book, providing big-flavoured vegetarian dishes using everyday ingredients. The recipes are inspired by tradition but are modern in spirit.





Non  
Fiction



## The Secret Life of the Savoy

**Olivia Williams**

HACHETTE AUSTRALIA

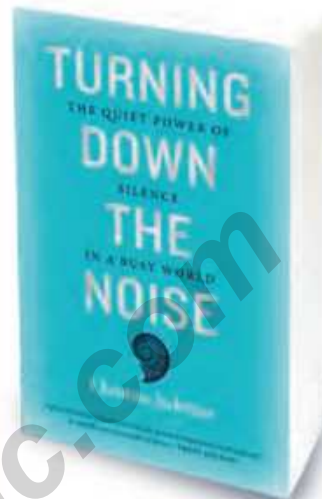
'Savoy, the home of sweet romance' goes the song by Louis Armstrong, who adored the iconic London hotel, as it installed sound-proofing so he could play his trumpet in bed. Everything was done to please esteemed guests, from bringing in a silver bathtub for a Maharajah to greeting actress Marlene Dietrich with 12 red roses and her favourite suet pudding. Fantasy worlds were the stock in trade of the fascinating D'Oyly Carte family, who owned the Savoy from 1889 until 1985. **M.Egan**

## Wild Thing

**Philip Norman**

HACHETTE

Fifty years after Jimi Hendrix's lonely death, acclaimed biographer Philip Norman charts the life and times of the megastar and musical genius. Onstage he pushed the boundaries of the swinging 60s permissiveness, but offstage he was polite, shy and sweet-natured. Norman explores these contradictions, bringing together the splendour and sadness of his brief life, and investigates the peculiar conditions around his death in an attempt to finally put Jimi's ghost to rest.



## Turning Down the Noise

**Christine Jackson**

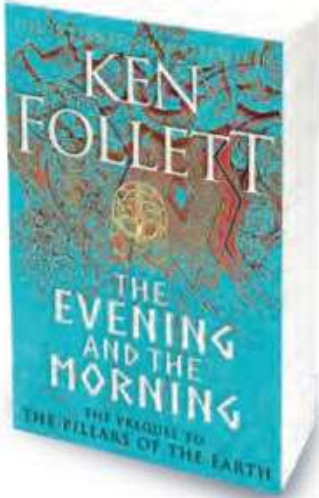
MURDOCH BOOKS

In a world where being 'busy' is considered a virtue, "how can we justify simply being still?" asks author Christine Jackson. To answer her question, she sets out on a mental and physical odyssey in search of peace and quiet. She finds it in a meditation retreat, a silent order of Benedictine monks, and forest 'bathing'. But, most of all, she discovers that it is up to ourselves to reclaim the gentleness and wonder of silence, and escape the incessant babble of daily life. **M.Egan**





## Fiction



### Ken Follett

#### **The Evening and the Morning**

PAN MACMILLAN

Fans of historical fiction will be delighted that Ken Follett has written yet another 800-plus page tome about life in early England. The prequel to *The Pillars of the Earth*, it starts in 997 CE, at the dawn of the Middle Ages, when the Anglo Saxons are facing attacks from the Welsh in the west and Vikings in the east. As is his style, Follett follows three people into an uncertain future, engaging the reader from page one with his immersive storytelling. An epic tale of passion, ambition and rivalry.

### The Sentinel

#### **Lee Child and Andrew Child**

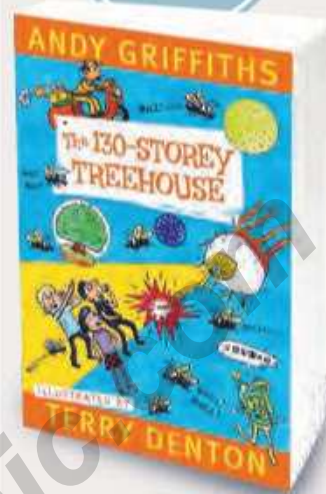
BANTAM PRESS

Drifter Jack Reacher is staying on the road. To continue the series, Lee Child, now 65, has formed a writing partnership with his younger brother Andrew. In their first joint book, Reacher heads into a small town hit by an IT outage. In less time than it takes to pour a cup of black coffee, he somehow manages to come up against Russian assassins, an ultra-right biker gang, corrupt townfolk and assorted thugs – all of whom soon live (or don't) to regret challenging him.

*M.Egan*



## Kids Books



### The 130-Storey Treehouse

#### **Andy Griffiths & Terry Denton**

PAN MACMILLAN

The treehouse has grown another 13 storeys in the tenth edition of this award-winning series. For kids who love ridiculous tales – such as being abducted by giant flying eyeballs – this book is a no-brainer to put under the Christmas tree. Every page is packed with Denton's hilarious illustrations with just the right number of words so that even kids who struggle with reading will love it.



## Podcasts

**Boy in the Stream**

When a neighbour pulls an unconscious toddler from an icy stream, the little boy's family fears the worst. But one determined doctor won't give up hope. So how did the boy who, by every objective measure, was dead for nearly two hours come back to life unscathed?

**The Night Driver**

After a young woman, Janine Vaughan, disappears into the rain-soaked night, residents of the country town of Bathurst are left wondering if a murderer lives among them, and no one is safe from rumour and speculation. The team behind the acclaimed *The Teacher's Pet* is back with a chilling new investigation.

**Tinsel Tunes – Christmas Music**

What would Christmas be without music and carols? From the beauty of 'The First Noël' and 'Silent Night' to the season's worst and overplayed supermarket songs, and the Beatles to Bing Crosby, this podcast goes in-depth into the history and meaning behind popular Yuletide songs.

**Fairytales and Short Stories**

By Hans Christian Andersen

Available free on Apple Podcasts are 29 tales from the beloved Danish fairytale author. The compilation includes *The Little Mermaid*, *The Emperor's New Suit* and *The Princess and the Pea*. These are not the Disney versions, but the original fascinating tales.



**Audio  
Book**

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**THE  
GENIUS  
SECTION**

*Sharpen Your  
Mind*





# YOUR BRAIN WAS MADE FOR Walking

*Creative inspiration is only a short stroll away*

BY Jeffrey Davis

If a legendary philosopher, president, and one of the best-selling authors of all time credited the same secret for their success, would you try to follow it, too? What if the secret was something you already knew how to do? In fact, you probably do it every day. Here's what philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: "It is only ideas gained from walking that have any worth." Thomas Jefferson: "Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very far." And Charles Dickens made his point with uncharacteristic brevity: "If I could not walk far and fast, I think I should just explode and perish."

Are you still sitting there reading this? Get walking! It's not just these three great minds who made a case for walking as a prime creativity booster.

Researchers have traced numerous connections between walking and generating ideas. A Stanford University study found that participants were 81 per cent more creative when walking as opposed to sitting. According to the study, walking outside – versus on a treadmill – produces the most novel and highest-quality analogies in participants who walked and then sat down to do creative work.

Another example: as part of his daily writing routine, novelist Kurt Vonnegut would take a morning break from his office to walk and then swim before eventually returning to work. I would argue that this habit wasn't just a habit but an intentional, necessary element of his creative process.

The movement aspect of walking is obviously key. You've probably

## READER'S DIGEST

heard the phrase, 'Exercise your creativity', which refers to the brain as muscle. Our creative mindset is triggered by physical movement, which is exactly why walking – with your dog, a friend, or alone – feeds creative thinking.

**NEW POSSIBILITIES** But the scenery is almost as important as the sweat. Many of us spend up to 80 to 90 per cent of our time indoors. Being inside, you're more prone to stagnation, the opposite of energy. Without energy, you can't wonder or create.


Disrupting your routine with a walk can be a catalyst for garnering fresh insights into problems or projects. Just by going outside, you are stepping out of your habitual surroundings and your comfort zone, which is necessary if you want to open your mind to new possibilities. You can walk through a tree-filled neighbourhood. You can walk through a park and observe people sauntering or birds singing. Even when you walk down a busy street, you can't help but get distracted by the delicious smells wafting from a bakery or the child pointing to a building you had never noticed before.

Our brains work harder to process in different environments, so walking

outside fosters our ability to glean new ideas, to take in new sights, sounds, smells and flavours.

**NATURE IMMERSION** *Shinrin-yoku*, or 'forest bathing', is a common form of relaxation and medicine in Japan. It was developed in 1982, and recent studies demonstrate that being in the forest and walking among the trees lowers your stress levels.

But you don't have to live near a forest to receive the psychological benefits. Research has shown that immersion in nature, and the corresponding disconnection from multimedia and technology, increased performance on a creative problem-solving task by a full 50 per cent in a group of hikers.

So instead of setting a fitness goal, why not set a creativity goal that starts with walking? Engage more closely with your surroundings for the next four weeks. Turn off your phone and give yourself the chance to be present in the world, to hear conversations and natural sounds, to notice the way people move, the way the sun reflects in a puddle. Walk not just for exercise. Walk for wonder. 

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY (DECEMBER 28, 2018), © 2018  
BY JEFFREY DAVIS, PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM.



### Did I Turn Off the Stove?

A journey of a thousand kilometres begins with running  
back in the house for something you forgot.

@STEVEKOEHLER22

[infusinginsights.com](http://infusinginsights.com)

# TRIVIA

## Test Your General Knowledge

**1.** Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) is a very sturdy plastic. That's why it hurts to step on what Danish-designed ABS toys? **1 point**

**2.** You may know her better as a nurse, but who became the first female member of the UK's Royal Statistical Society in 1858? **2 points**

**3.** What movie star's first claim to fame was being part of a hip-hop duo called DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince? **2 points**

**4.** According to peer-reviewed research, wearing what colour might give an advantage to boxers? **1 point**

**5.** Besides his most famous portrait, what artist also painted others that included *Lady With an Ermine* and *Ginevra de' Benci*? **2 points**

**6.** Activist Greta Thunberg's mother, Malena Ernman,

represented Sweden at what event in 2009? **2 points**

**7.** What is the name of Han Solo's starship in *Star Wars*? **1 point**

**8.** Omura's whale, the Lord Howe stick insect, and the New Zealand storm petrel are both examples of what kind of animal? **2 points**

**9.** Although actress and comedian Bea Arthur hated cheesecake, what TV show's cast ate some 100 of them on camera? **1 point**

**10.** Which Disney character's family name is Fa, even though it was Hua in the source material? **1 point**

**11.** By what name is the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences better known? **2 points**

**12.** In early 2020 in Hong Kong, armed men stole 600 of what item that was highly coveted at the time? **1 point**



**13.** Who's won two Grammys for comedy recordings and three for playing the banjo? **2 points**

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

**ANSWERS:** 1. Lego. 2. Florence Nightingale. 3. Will Smith. 4. Red. 5. Leonardo da Vinci. 6. The Eurovision Song Contest. 7. *Millennium Falcon*. 8. They're 'Lazarus animals', meaning they were thought to be extinct only to be rediscovered. 9. *The Golden Girls*. 10. Mulan. 11. The Nobel Prize for Economics. 12. Rolls of toilet paper. 13. Steve Martin.



# PUZZLES

*Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 145.*

### Pic-a-Pix: Knight Moderately Difficult

Reveal a hidden picture by shading in groups of horizontally or vertically adjacent cells. The numbers represent how many cells are in each of the corresponding row or column's groups. (For example, a "3" next to a row represents three horizontally adjacent shaded cells in that row.) There must be at least one empty cell between each group. The numbers read in the same horizontal or vertical order as the groups they represent. There's only one possible picture; can you shade it in?

				2							
			3	6		1	2				
		2	5	8	1	2	8	5	4	2	6
	1	1									
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	2	3	1								
	4	1									
	5	1									



### Matching Is So Last Year Difficult

A man has five pairs of pants (black, blue, brown, green and grey), five shirts (blue, green, red, white and yellow) and five hats (black, brown, red, white and yellow). How many different outfits of a hat, shirt and pair of pants can he assemble if an outfit cannot contain two garments of the same colour? (You may assume that if they have the same colour name, they're the same colour.)

(PIC-A-PIX: KNIGHT) DIANE BAHER. MORE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS AVAILABLE AT LEARNPICAPIX.COM.  
 (MATCHING IS SO LAST YEAR) DARREN RIGBY; (ILLUSTRATION) ISTOCK.COM/HEIN NOUWENS





### Fickle Friends **Easy**

Nisha's friends want to buy her a gift. Originally, ten friends were going to chip in equally, but then two of them dropped out. Each of the remaining eight friends had to chip in another \$10 to bring the total back up to the original amount. How much money did they plan to collect?



### Doubles or Nothing **Moderately Difficult**

A gambler proposes a game: pay \$10 and roll two evenly weighted eight-sided dice with the sides labelled 1 through 8. If you get doubles (two numbers the same), you win \$60. The gambler will allow you to set aside one die with any number showing and just roll the other one to get doubles if you pay \$5 more. If you play, should you set aside the die? Should you play at all?

(FICKLE FRIENDS) EMILY GOODMAN; (DOUBLES OR NOTHING) DARREN RIGBY

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available in

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and  
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**Puzzle Answers**  
PAGE 145

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

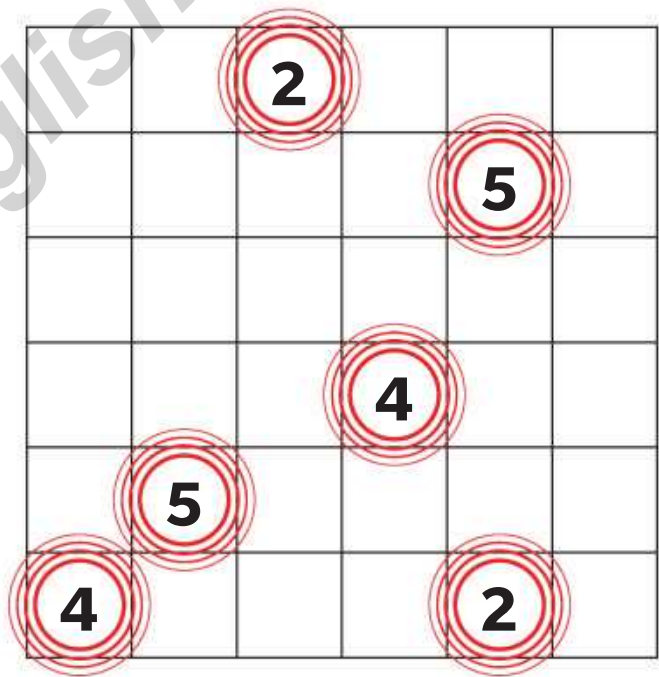
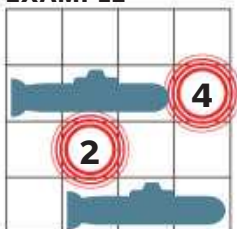
**Sudoku**  
**To Solve This Puzzle**

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.

**Sub Hunt**  
**Difficult**

Four submarines must be located. The grid to the right is a sonar display. The numbers represent sonar sensors telling the total number of sea squares at any distance directly north, south, east and/or west from the sensor that are occupied by submarines. The subs are each three sea squares long. Can you find all four sneaky submarines?

**EXAMPLE**



(SUB HUNT) RODERICK KIMBALL, ENIGAMI.FUN





## WORD POWER

### *Bouquets and Brickbats*

*In search of a kind word – or perhaps the perfect put-down? Before you start doling out compliments or throwing stones, take this quiz to brush up on words of esteem and contempt*

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

- 1. Adonis** – A: handsome man.  
B: star player in a sports team.  
C: evil witch.
- 2. popinjay** – A: sneaky thief.  
B: unwelcome visitor.  
C: vain windbag.
- 3. impeccable** – A: flawless.  
B: unruly. C: charming.
- 4. adroit** – A: idiotic. B: vulgar.  
C: masterful.
- 5. churl** – A: ill-bred person.  
B: friend to many. C: lazybones.
- 6. magnanimous** – A: coarse.  
B: self-centred. C: big-hearted.
- 7. pessimist** – A: criminal.  
B: fool. C: person who expects bad outcomes.
- 8. nonpareil** – A: unequalled.  
B: useless. C: sweet.
- 9. braggadocio** – A: arrogant boaster. B: womaniser.  
C: conquering hero.
- 10. urbane** – A: playful and enjoys playing tricks. B: sophisticated.  
C: prone to anger.
- 11. skinflint** – A: skilled artisan.  
B: cheapskate. C: fraud.
- 12. busybody** – A: misfit.  
B: a meddling or prying person.  
C: nitpicker.
- 13. smarmy** – A: insincerely earnest.  
B: well dressed. C: inadequate.
- 14. congenial** – A: sharing the same temperament. B: short-tempered.  
C: scrumptious.
- 15. brick** – A: careless person.  
B: reliable person.  
C: obstinate person.



## Answers

**1. Adonis** – (A) handsome man. Arya has fallen hard for a blue-eyed Adonis at the gym.

**2. popinjay** – (C) vain windbag. Please don't seat me next to that popinjay; he'll talk my ear off.

**3. impeccable** – (A) flawless. After an impeccable performance on the balance beam, Jada received a perfect score.

**4. adroit** – (C) masterful. Harry Houdini was an adroit escape artist, freeing himself from handcuffs and straitjackets.

**5. churl** – (A) ill-bred person. Remove your elbows from the table while eating, you churl!

**6. magnanimous** – (C) big-hearted. The magnanimous dentist treated needy patients for free.

**7. pessimist** – (C) person who expects bad outcomes. An optimist sees the rose, a pessimist the thorn.

**8. nonpareil** – (A) unequalled. Luca's baking skills are nonpareil – his cakes are almost too beautiful to eat.

**9. braggadocio** – (A) arrogant boaster. Kate's boyfriend is a

loudmouthed braggadocio who loves talking about his fancy car.

**10. urbane** – (B) sophisticated. Witty and urbane, Pablo speaks three languages and has travelled the world.

**11. skinflint** – (B) cheapskate. Does reusing coffee filters make me a skinflint?

**12. busybody** – (B) a meddling or prying person. "Maybe I'm just being a busybody, but I do think you should wear your blue dress instead of the red," Mum said.

**13. smarmy** – (A) insincerely earnest. The heiress was wooed by smarmy suitors interested only in her money.

**14. congenial** – (A) sharing the same temperament. Her congenial and easy-going manner made her a pleasant travelling companion.

**15. brick** – (B) reliable person. My best friend has been an absolute brick during my illness.

---

### VOCABULARY RATINGS

**5-8:** Fair

**9-11:** Good

**12-15:** Word Power Wizard

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# QUALITY SERVICE AWARDS 2021

*See the brands Australians have voted as  
offering the best service in the country*

[www.qualityserviceawards.com.au](http://www.qualityserviceawards.com.au)





# WHEN CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMMUNITY UNITE

*The Quality Service Awards recognises those businesses who achieved customer service excellence in an extraordinary year*

**IN 2020, SOMETHING REMARKABLE TOOK PLACE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE.**

An interplay occurred between businesses, large and small, over the first weeks and then months of the pandemic, that saw a shift in values. Economic considerations took a back seat to moral responsibility. Caring and individual attention shown to customers was more genuine than ever.

At the top, the profit for shareholders no longer was seen

as the chief responsibility of doing business. This shift put the community as the most important stakeholder. And as a result, corporations and businesses turned their focus to see what they could do to share the burden of keeping the community safe from a virus that moved silently and ever so fast.

This year, customer service team members helped out customers beyond what's been generally needed. Because of unprecedented





vulnerabilities and confusion, customers have sought more than just remedies to their purchase problems. Customers have come seeking help with life's ups and downs, to share a laugh, to remind themselves that there are people who genuinely care.

And while it's also been a time of extreme difficulty for customer service – with upheavals of long-standing ways of doing business – the staff of the businesses listed in the Quality Service Awards rallied. Each day during the peak of the pandemic, they remained savvy, clever and calm in their approach to customers, so much so that the importance of kindness and understanding once again became paramount.

In the years leading up to the new century, some 21 years ago, the world faced the Y2K bug, and responses were prepared based on 'worse-case' scenarios that would help manage the fallout of a potential worldwide computer collapse. Banks could shut down, airlines might be unable to fly, lifts in buildings wouldn't work, and from factories to telecommunications, the infrastructure of modern society was at risk of simply not functioning. Years of planning went into ensuring if this happened, we would manage until the problem was fixed. Fortunately, nothing happened. But even back then, operationally, audits were done to ensure that essential staff had what they needed to keep customers happy. Key among

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES



those staff were customer service personnel, the people at the front-of-shop.

Fast forward to early March, and we faced a scenario far worse than anything that a computer programming glitch could cause.

The pandemic had a significant impact on the way customer service departments operated.

The customer service professionals we spoke with all shared a single aim: to help the person seeking assistance, clarification or advice in any way they could. Many consumer concerns weren't business related, either. In their isolation and confusion many people wanted to make personal connections where they knew a friendly face or voice would be there to help.

Customer service teams have long known the reality of their jobs extends well beyond making sure the customer is satisfied sufficiently enough to want to return their custom.

According to Victoria Simpson, who has managed call centres for more than 20 years, a remarkable thing started to happen during the COVID-19 lockdown: customers would call just for a chat. "We soon realised how difficult it was for many people who lived alone, and were now unable to leave their house to socialise like they normally did," she told Reader's Digest. "One woman told our call centre staff member that she was just



### THE COMMUNITY SEES WHAT GREAT WORK THESE BUSINESSES DO

calling to hear another person's voice. It's calls like that which remind us that customer service call centres serve a dual purpose; we owe our customer a community service as well."

Unlike pre-COVID times, customers and customer service staff were living a shared experience. Advice was offered on ways to ease boredom, anxiety or loneliness. And in some instances, emergency health line numbers were provided. Follow-up calls also became an important measure, just to ensure the customer was OK, and perhaps to ensure they didn't go days without hearing someone's voice.

Corporate and business responsibility came to be viewed in a broader sense, as a social service as well as a profit-making function.

Being a Reader's Digest 2021 Quality Service Award winner means

that the businesses listed in this supplement share a business legacy – recognition of having values that sets their customer service apart from others in the marketplace. Businesses who won the thanks of customers this year by winning a Quality Service Award, have done so because they possess robust, caring and talented teams. Their management style also says much about that success. The community sees what great

work these businesses do, and they appreciate it.

While the pandemic of 2020 may have shifted the standard markers of business success, customer service remains core among those success markers. Congratulations to the businesses who have been rewarded by their customers for providing benchmark service. Your success in the Quality Service Awards is well deserved.

## Survey Methodology

We commissioned independent market research agency Catalyst to survey a representative sample of 2500 Australians. In an initial survey, a representative sample of 500 Australians were asked which companies they previously had experience with across 40 categories, to build a brand list reflective of today's market. In the second survey, completed by approximately 2000 Australians, data was captured on which of those companies – over the past 12 months – had provided the highest levels of customer service across the 40 categories, rating each organisation from 1 to 10 across five key pillars of customer service:

■ **PERSONALISATION:** How well was the company able to provide the consumer with an individualised customer experience?

■ **UNDERSTANDING:** How effectively was the company able to demonstrate a genuine insight into the customer's needs?

■ **SIMPLICITY:** How quick and easy was the process of dealing with the company?

■ **SATISFACTION:** To what level did the company meet or exceed the customer's expectations?

■ **CONSISTENCY:** Did the company deliver ongoing quality service?

To calculate each company's Quality Service Score (QSS), the average score of the five key pillars was determined, and then multiplied by 10 to obtain a metric score out of 100.

The highest rated company in each category has been awarded the status of Gold Standard Winner, with the second-highest rated company awarded the status of Silver Standard Winner. This prestigious award recognises companies that truly understand consumers' needs.

**Turn over to see which companies Australians voted as offering the nation's finest customer service.**



# QUALITY SERVICE

CATEGORY	WINNER	SILVER
Accounting & Tax Service	★ Etax Accountants	★ H&R Block
Aged Care & Retirement Villages	★ Anglicare Southern Queensland	★ Australian Unity
Airline	★ Singapore Airlines	★ Qantas
Car Rentals	★ Avis	★ Hertz
Car Service	★ Toyota	★ My Car
Chemist/Pharmacy	★ Chemist Warehouse	★ TerryWhite Chemmart
Credit Card Suppliers	★ Commonwealth Bank	★ American Express
Cruise Operator	★ Royal Caribbean Cruises	★ Princess Cruises
Electrical Appliance Stores	★ JB HI-FI	★ Appliances Online
Electricity Provider	★ Alinta Energy	★ Energy Australia
Financial Advisors	★ Commonwealth Bank	★ ANZ
Funeral Insurance	★ Australian Seniors	★ Suncorp
Funeral Service Provider	★ Simplicity	★ White Lady Funerals
Furniture Stores	★ Harvey Norman	★ IKEA
Gas Suppliers	★ Simply Energy	★ Lumo
Hardware Stores	★ Bunnings	★ Mitre 10
Health Insurance Provider	★ HCF	★ Bupa
Hearing Service	★ Hearing Australia	★ AudioClinic/Audika
Holiday Tour Operators	★ Scenic	★ Cosmos

# AWARDS 2021



CATEGORY	WINNER	SILVER
Home & Contents Insurance	★ GIO	★ Apia
Home Loan Mortgage Brokers	★ Aussie	★ Mortgage Choice
Home Loans	★ Suncorp	★ National Australia Bank
Internet Service Provider	★ MyRepublic	★ Aussie Broadband
Life Insurance	★ Allianz	★ AAMI
Mobile Phone Service Provider	★ ALDImobile	★ Amaysim
National Car Insurance	★ AAMI	★ Allianz
Online Supermarkets	★ Woolworths	★ Coles
Optometrist	★ Specsavers	★ Optical Superstore
Parcel/Carrier Service	★ Australia Post	★ DHL
Personal Banking	★ ING Direct	★ Commonwealth Bank
Pet Insurance Service	★ Petplan	★ Real Insurance
Petrol Station	★ Shell	★ Caltex
Real Estate	★ First National Real Estate	★ McGrath
Self Storage Service	★ Kennards Self Storage	★ National Storage
Serviced Apartments	★ Quest	★ Adina
Superannuation	★ Australian Super	★ BT
Taxi Service Provider	★ 13cabs	★ Yellow Cabs
Travel Insurance	★ Cover-More	★ Allianz
Tyre Retailers	★ My Car	★ Bob Jane
Wine Delivery Service	★ Cellarmasters	★ Get Wines Direct



**GOLD**

*Aged Care & Retirement Villages*

**ANGLICARE  
SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND**

**FOR 150 YEARS, ANGLICARE SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND** has been one of the state’s most experienced and trusted not-for-profit health and community service organisations, with a proud history of delivering an exceptional standard of service to senior members of the community and their families.

When it comes to in-home care, Anglicare Southern Queensland has a range of services to help people maintain their independence and to enhance their wellbeing, including allied health, nursing and personal care, domestic assistance, home maintenance, shopping assistance, carer support, transport, companionship and spiritual support.

The organisation also offers both independent living retirement villages and fully accredited residential aged care homes, providing a range of accommodation and care services throughout Brisbane and southern Queensland.

Anglicare Southern Queensland has four vibrant retirement villages that

enable Queenslanders the freedom to enjoy their golden years, make new friends, discover new interests and enjoy their surroundings.

It operates eight accredited residential aged care homes, supporting people in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Hervey Bay and Bundaberg.

To accommodate residents’ needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the homes organised video calls so residents could stay in touch with their families while adhering

to the regulations set in place by Queensland Health.

With clinical nurses on staff at their various homes, residents are given individual, tailor-made care 24/7.

Anglicare Southern Queensland is focused on enhancing wellbeing and independence and putting residents’ needs and preferences at the centre of what they do. Always.

● Visit [anglicaresq.org.au](http://anglicaresq.org.au)





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**GOLD**

*Car Service*

**TOYOTA**



**AT TOYOTA, THE EMPLOYEES PRIDE THEMSELVES** on being the most trusted automotive brand year after year. In 2020, they were again bestowed with the Reader's Digest Gold Quality Service Award. Not only have they achieved this through hard work, but measures such as its 'Capped Price Servicing'\* – which provides Guests (customers) with upfront costs of a service so there is never a bill shock when they pick up their vehicle - through to its Toyota Warranty Advantage (5+2 years warranty)^, and its 'Kaizen' mindset – Japanese for continuously improving.

Toyota employees never rest on their laurels, they are always looking for ways to make the Guest experience better than the last, setting a high benchmark for customer satisfaction. To ensure their customer service strategy is first class, Toyota has created a set of standards for its Dealer network. Firstly, it looks

for people who are self-motivated, have a genuine desire to provide solutions to meet Guests' needs, and demonstrate the Toyota Way values – respect for people and Kaizen. Toyota also provides its people with the training and facilities needed to deliver exceptional Guest experience at every Toyota Dealership across the country.

With the onset of COVID-19, Toyota noticed more Guests using its online services, including booking a service online or on the myToyota App, which also provides Guest rewards. Anticipating the growing need of its Guests' requirements in both the showroom and online, Toyota came up with innovative approaches to ensure Guests' needs were met and to promote contactless environments.

As one of Australia's best-loved and most reputable automotive names, Toyota wants every Guest who visits a dealership to walk (or drive) out as a firm advocate for the brand.

● **Visit [www.toyota.com.au](http://www.toyota.com.au).**

*\* Standard scheduled logbook servicing only. T&C's apply. Visit [Toyota.com.au/advantage](http://Toyota.com.au/advantage) ^ T&C's apply. Visit [Toyota.com.au/owners/warranty](http://Toyota.com.au/owners/warranty)*



# TOYOTA GENUINE SERVICE SAYS THANKS A MILLION



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**OH WHAT A FEELING**

\*Upfront quote only applies to vehicles less than 10 years old.

T2020-015725

**SILVER**  
*Cruise Operator*

# PRINCESS CRUISES



**AMID THE CHALLENGES OF THE CURRENT PANDEMIC**, the Princess Cruises® customer service team adapted to a new way of working with the objective of maintaining brand loyalty during a worldwide pause in cruising. Building on its existing solid work from home platform, the team could almost immediately pivot to remote working exclusively.

A seamless transition enabled the team to efficiently and empathetically handle increased call volumes from guests whose travel plans had been affected by the

pause. Specific in-house training and regular briefings ensured the team had the latest information to assist guests with confidence in relation to cruise cancellations or future bookings.

As Princess Cruises looks forward to the safe resumption of cruising, it continues to focus on sustainability, compliance, health and safety, and, when the time is right, to delivering cruise excellence.

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**GOLD**

*Funeral Insurance*

# AUSTRALIAN SENIORS



**SINCE IT LAUNCHED IN**

**1998**, Australian Seniors has helped protect the financial future, valuable assets, and long-planned retirement of older Australians from all walks of life.



Meeting its vision of providing easy-to-understand insurance for the over 50s market, Australian Seniors' high-quality products, award-winning customer service team, and customer-first approach, have been recognised by both its customers and the wider industry.

In the new year, Australian Seniors is committed to delivering the best possible customer experience. It understands that customers expect a high level of service, which is why its dedicated sales, support and claims specialists are based in Australia, so customers can be confident they will always be able to speak with a real person and not a machine (or bot).

The Talent Acquisition team and managers ensure the right personnel are working for Australian Seniors, by looking for personality traits of empathy, compassion and customer

advocacy. All new team members undergo a dedicated training programme and are supported so they are confident in delivering positive customer outcomes.

By providing multiple channels for the voice of the customer to be heard, Australian Seniors is able to use all feedback to inform process and service improvements. This assures it is constantly creating and supplying the products that Australians over 50 want and need. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, the team worked hard to help customers who were suffering financial hardship, enabling them to keep their cover in place through financial assistance processes.

Australian Seniors also recently launched *DARE* magazine, a bi-monthly publication for the over 50 community with news, advice, interviews and more.

● **Call 1300 248 703**  
**or visit [seniors.com.au](http://seniors.com.au)**





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**GOLD**

*Gas Suppliers*

# SIMPLY ENERGY



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**GOLD**

*Holiday Tour Operators*

# SCENIC LUXURY CRUISES & TOURS



**FOR OVER 34 YEARS**, the proudly Australian-founded company Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours has worked tirelessly to earn its world-class reputation for creating and delivering the ultimate cruising and touring itineraries for travellers who seek wondrous experiences and exceptional five-star service.

This pursuit of wonder led them to explore more than 60 countries to create unique itineraries, whether on board the *Scenic Eclipse* for an ultra-luxury ocean voyage; a five-star truly all-inclusive river cruise along spectacular waterways of Europe or South East Asia, or on one of Scenic's famous handcrafted land journeys.

The ultimate guest experience is at the forefront of everything the luxury operator does, including helping you to personalise your trip to your own pace and interests. With

a wide selection of exclusive Scenic Enrich experiences and all-inclusive Scenic Freechoice activities, Scenic endeavours to give you many once-in-a-lifetime moments.

To ensure this happens, Scenic staff adhere to its customer service strategy of going to the 'nth degree'. This means identifying and attending to guests' wishes, even before they may realise what they need themselves.

Because no two people are the same, and everyone's holiday plans are unique, Scenic staff are dedicated to providing all-inclusive luxury – so the only thing you need to focus on is marvelling at the treasures around you and enjoying every amenity and inclusion you could wish for.

After more than three decades in the business, Scenic is as passionate about travel and committed to guest satisfaction as it was in 1986 – going to the nth degree to ensure guests have the holiday of a lifetime.

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So start to dream and plan with your friends and family – to explore Europe's winding rivers and history, the beauty of Antarctica's pristine environment and unique wildlife, or the magic of Australia and New Zealand.

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Harvey MacKay, businessman

“Be family. Be fun. Be amazing and be growing and learning constantly. Treat people like family. No matter what, there’s no right way, there’s no wrong way. When it comes to the customer, you just make it right.”

Keegan Hodges, businessman

“Customers often know more about your products than you do. Use them **as a source of inspiration** and ideas for product development.”

David J. Greer, business strategist

“In the world of internet customer service, it’s important to remember your competitor is only one mouse click away.”

Doug Warner, banker

“Customer service isn’t a department, it’s a philosophy!”

Shep Hyken,  
customer service expert





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If you're sending presents within Australia,  
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Or for Express Post, before **19 December**.

See [auspost.com.au/christmas](https://auspost.com.au/christmas) for all Christmas cut-off dates.

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**GOLD**

*Real Estate*

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**EVER SINCE THE FIRST NATIONAL GROUP OF INDEPENDENT REAL ESTATE AGENTS LIMITED**

was incorporated as a public company in December 1981, its broad goals were to develop leading-edge marketing techniques, let member offices retain independence to provide local expertise, and provide professional training to agency staff to ensure customers would enjoy the very best outcomes.

To foster an environment for agents to work cooperatively, it created a culture of support between agencies as well as providing access to professional development programmes, which benefits customers' interests without the pressure from a corporate administration demanding higher sales.

Today, First National is Australia's most advanced real estate network, with more than 320 offices throughout Australia, New Zealand, Noumea and Vanuatu.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, First National implemented hundreds of digital innovations and operational protocols to assure customer safety, the success of property sales, and



the continuity of rental management services to protect tenants. It continues to monitor government announcements and COVID-19 directives to assure members are fully compliant.

With more than 90,000 rental properties under its management nationally, among its goals for the following year is to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on its tenants and landlords. As always, putting its customers first, First National will continue to assure they are fully and safely supported in all their property services requirements.

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