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ASIA

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SIMON HEMELRYK



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& DANIEL GRIZNER

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Constantly updated, our Facebook feed offers stories, videos, advice, humour, quotable quotes, cartoons, quirky photographs and more.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Benefits of a Gentle Recovery

"YOU SHOULD TAKE IT EASY," is a common response we all offer to friends and family recovering from an illness or injury. "Don't try to do too much." But paying lip service to this advice really doesn't help anyone. In 'Re-kindling Convalescence' (page 56) we look at how recovering from an illness is a stage of being sick, and should be taken seriously. It's a stage society valued one hundred years ago; a stage where you're neither sick nor well. You're 'repairing' from the illness and its treatment, but not quite ready to return to the ordinary pace of life and work. With many COVID-19 survivors reporting a long struggle to get back to full recovery, perhaps the value of convalescing may find its way into mainstream thinking once again. Could this be what's needed to kickstart a new age of slow healing?

For those of us who find maths a bit of a challenge, 'Anybody Can Learn Anything' (page 44) by John Mighton offers a wonderful insight – all is not lost! Himself a mathematician who mastered the discipline only after leaving school, Mighton draws on his own experience to urge people not to give up on maths – rather, to think of the subject as being accessible to learners of all ages. Something lovers

of sudoku (page 122) are happy to confirm. We hope you enjoy the other stories in our March issue. Write to us to share your feedback. Happy reading,

Louise

LOUISE WATERSON Editor-in-Chief



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Reader's Comments And Opinions

Banding Together for Positivity

When I stepped into my favourite bookstore, I couldn't believe my eyes: familiar youthful faces on the cover of December's Reader's Digest. I picked it up to have a closer look, and yes, it was BTS, the K-Pop boy band. Unbelievable, but then 2020 was an unbelievable and unexpected year.

In their earlier days, I was not really a fan, until I watched their speech at the UN General Assembly about their 'Love Myself' campaign. I was so impressed I started following them and listening to



their music. There is something unique about each member of BTS; they bring so much love and positivity through their actions and songs, which is what the world needs now. CHARMAINE CHUA

Campbell Island's Own Story

'Shark Attack!' (January) was a fascinating story of the rescue of snorkeller Mike Fraser off Campbell Island, which has an interesting history. The isolated island was discovered in January 1810 by Captain Fredrick Hasselburgh, who named it after his employer, Robert Campbell & Co. of Sydney. Campbell Island was farmed, used as a base for sealers and whalers and served as a wartime coastal defence site. Today it is an internationally recognised nature reserve and a UNESCO world heritage site. **SYED ALI**

Unlikely Heroine

In wartime Joey Guerrero turned the scourge of leprosy to advantage

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.

Letters

('Joey's Quiet War', January). In peacetime she fought just as tenaciously to expel it from her homeland. Both humanitarian and heroine, Joey Guerrero lived long enough to defeat the illness that had racked her body but not her spirit.

MICHAEL WOUTERS

Going Out of His Way

Gary Frost ('Kindness in the Time of COVID', December) should be nominated for an award for his genuine kindness in going out of his way and piloting fresh food and drinks to those who were struggling in remote areas. I love to read stories like this, and they do really make my day. Kindness to others will always give quality of life, and it also makes you feel good and brings people together. RON AIREY

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PILOT



SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN We asked you to think up a clever caption for this photo.

Just checking it twice: Nemo's address. MARY LIM

I'm enjoying my Christmas down under. ELIZABETH IRVINE

Hey Santa, sea you soon! PARI META

He knows when you've been nautical, he knows when you've been nice. CHRIS RAMOS

Congratulations to this month's winner, Elizabeth Irvine.



CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win \$100. To enter, email asiaeditor@readersdigest.com.au or see details on page 8.

READER'S DIGEST

Variety of Topics

I wrote to the Editor earlier this year expressing some concern over an article on classical music education (and received a kind reply, I might add). This time I write to you collectively for the most excellent volume '2021 Classic Collection'. Such a collection of really well-written stories on a wonderful variety of topics!

You did indeed provide many hours of great reading, which I shall be passing on to an ailing relative.

PHILIP R. BELL

Here's to Good Health

I read with interest that volunteering can lead to a longer life (News Worth Sharing, December).

I can't help thinking that people that are in good health are the ones who volunteer. Either way, they are a marvellous help to society.

MARGARET O' REILLY

Welcome Return

How wonderful that after so many years absence from our household the Reader's Digest has returned like a long-lost friend to be read and re-read by our family. It is always full to the brim with diverse stories, articles, information and humour.

Well done to all who contribute to its publication.

VALORIE BOTTROFF

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Anecdotes and jokes \$50-\$100

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Smart Animals Up to \$100

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

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Buong Puso para sa Kapuso

Driven by our passion for creativity and excellence, we pour our hearts into everything we do - for you, our Kapuso. With unwavering faith in God and belief in ourselves, we face each day with optimism, courage, and determination. Always remaining true to who we are, we endeavor to succeed for the ones we love with commitment, hard work, and integrity.

> We are GMA, and we remain, Buong Puso para sa Kapuso.



READER'S DIGEST NEWS WORTH SHARING

The Little Yellow Car Created From Waste

group of 22 students from the Technical University of Eindhoven in the Netherlands has created a fully functioning electric car made largely from recycled waste.

Named 'Luca', the bright yellow, two-seater sports car is made from plastics fished out of the sea and household garbage. Its light weight, streamlined profile and narrow tyres enable it to reach a top speed of 90km/h, with a reach of 220 kilometres when fully charged. The hard plastics usually found in televisions, toys and kitchen appliances have been used for the car's body, while the seat cushions are made from coconut and horse hairs. Project manager Lisa van Etten told Reuters the chassis was made out of flax and recycled PET bottles.

About 95 per cent of the car is comprised of waste materials. Production team member Matthijs van Wijk hopes that car companies will use waste materials, adding, "More and more companies use waste or bio-based materials in the interior, and we want to show that it's also possible to build a chassis out of it."

News Worth Sharing

Speaking Two Languages Helps Protect the Brain

eople who regularly use two or more languages may have a lower risk of the cognitive decline associated with ageing, say Barcelona university scientists.

Speaking and switching between two languages on a regular basis – and having done so throughout life – enhances cognitive reserve and delays the appearance of symptoms associated with cognitive decline and dementia, the study found.

The prevalence of dementia in countries where more than one language is spoken is 50 per cent lower than in those regions where the population uses only one language to communicate, says researcher Marco Calabria.

Bonjour Hola Hej Hello Ciao Salut



Baby Elephant Receives CPR and Survives

Rescue worker Mana Srivate has performed CPR dozens of times throughout his 26-year career, but never before on an elephant.

Off duty and on a road trip in the eastern Thai province of Chanthaburi, Mana was called into action when a baby elephant was struck by a motorcycle. Mana says that he located the elephant's heart based on human theory and a video clip he quickly looked up on YouTube.

In a video of the incident posted on social media, Mana is seen giving two-handed compressions to a small elephant lying on its side. "When the baby elephant started to move, I almost cried," he said. After ten minutes, the young elephant stood up and was taken away for treatment before being returned to the scene of the accident where his mother and the herd returned for him after he called out.



Finding the Right Parting Words

Sharing our thoughts and feelings to honour Jack was a heavy responsibility

BY Gail Galloway

here are now only 12 of us cousins left. Jack is gone. We all struggled to comprehend this loss that awful afternoon before his funeral, just a few weeks before Christmas in 2012. He was everyone's favourite.

It's late when I go to help write the eulogy. Four of us squeeze into the motel room on the Mitchell Highway, as the afternoon heat sinks. Me filling the gap between his brother and sisters. The only one with a laptop. The funeral is at nine the next morning but this is the first chance we've had to compare notes.

He'd just turned 50. There is no shortage of love or stories. Even

after the ambulance delivered him to the hospital, he had joked with the nurses. It was typical of his ability to disarm a situation with his dry, jocular lines.

How do we best sketch Jack's character? The wheels of thought are whetted. Memories evoke laughter between tears. It's still over 30 degrees outside. A couple of beers help take off the edge. A communion drink.

I scribe, helping as best I can until it is time to go to the family gathering – back at Jack's place for tea, with Renee, his widow, and the kids.

I'm not looking forward to it. All of us are trying to make sense of the accident, the loss, and it hurts



to feel the effect on those closest to him.

Champagne is poured. Jack's sister, Joy, looks like she needs it. In our family alcohol is a good anaesthetic, often used to fortify ourselves against hardship or grief. But today I refuse its protection.

I have a job to do – that is my defence. We have the bones of a eulogy stored safely on my computer, but it still needs ordering and a final polish. I need a space to concentrate.

I try to avoid socialising but

Gail Galloway is a writer, poet and artist from Tasmania who enjoys gardening and growing garlic. She has had her work published in magazines and anthologies. there are other cousins arriving and Jack's boys to see in among the crowd of personal friends. The older boys are composed, but we cousins all clutch each other in tight grips of support. My eyes stay dry except for a little welling.

I am stunned too, but I have a job to do.

I find the office desk and search for a lead for my laptop. The house has been rearranged since I last visited. The last time we sat together here, in this very spot, Jack entertained us all with yarns showing his great mastery of mimicry. As usual he had us rolling in laughter. The thought unsettles me now.

All the power points are in use. I put my computer on the floor

READER'S DIGEST

near the laundry. It too has been renovated. Crouched on the cool floor, I run the lead and hit the switch. In my head, Jack's voice is mocking me – in that amused way of his, trying to raise a bite from me.

I tell him to shut up, feeling resentful that he has left us. It is then that I look up and see Renee staring at me. She is doubled over, with her dark hair spilling forwards. The pain of her ripped heart crippling. We cling to each other and our sobs break free.

I try to tell her some rehearsed condolence about strength that neither of us believes. No words are adequate

but you have to try. Words are supposed to be my specialty.

I let her go. I have a job to do.

But it's not working out. A warm dusk has fallen. I go outside and phone my brother and sister who should be in town by now. Out on the street by my car, I tell them what's happening. Allowing my tears to fall. Let them know I'm not coping and that I need to use a printer.

I go to them on the other side of town, reporting how Renee is broken and that Joy is a mess. We are pleased to shelter away from this. When I tell them about the crowds at



WE CLING TO EACH OTHER AND OUR SOBS BREAK FREE

Jack's place, my shy sister is relieved, "They don't need us then," she says. "They won't miss us."

They are settled around the verandah table, at our aunt's place, quietly drinking. I forgo the offers

> of liquor, determined to keep a clear head.

We are gutless when it comes to grief. None of us really reconciled with the death of our sister, decades earlier. But when Dad died recently, we forged a better way of dealing with loss. We found our strength in bonding to write him a good eulogy. Together we gave him a proper send off. It was what he deserved.

In crafting a fitting yarn, the three of us proved surprisingly good. We were good at comedy writing – at least on the page. But a good laugh is not just about the story; it's the way you tell it.

And when it comes to delivery, our cousin Jack was the master funny man; the ultimate story teller. It was important to do him justice. We had a job to do.

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



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READER'S DIGEST



... Are intent on achieving their purpose



Intrusive Wombat

BILL FORREST

On a camping trip with my wife, Ruth, to the southernmost point of the Australian mainland, Wilsons Promontory National Park, we came across some very cheeky wildlife.

On arrival at the campground, a flock of beautiful crimson rosellas greeted us, wishing to come into our caravan. We declined their request and settled down for the night.

In the middle of the night we were woken – I think the entire campsite woke up – by a very loud, piercing and repeated scream. I jumped out of bed to investigate, as did others, and headed to where the noise and commotion was coming. A number of wombats live in the area and some enjoy wandering through the campsite lines. A mother wombat with her joey had apparently found an ideal place to sleep – in the cosy sleeping bag of a teenage girl, and they were trying to wriggle their

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. way into her bag to spend a warm night. The frightened girl, however, objected, rather loudly, to her new companions.

Whether the girl settled down after that intrusion we never found out, but the two wombats simply wandered off looking for another warm burrow that didn't scream.

DNA Detector Dog

FAY GRIMSEY

When my friend and I arrived to meet my new-found paternal cousin, the summer after my father died, her little terrier dog Sooty was at her front gate. He knew my companion and greeted her briefly, then, to my surprise, instead of treating me as a stranger he acted as if he already knew me and that I was special to him.

With his body pressed against my leg, walking was awkward as he insisted on staying with me when we visitors were welcomed inside.

For the whole visit, Sooty sat on the sofa beside me with his head on my lap, gazing up at me affectionately. Worried that he was bothering me, my cousin tried several times to remove him but he wouldn't budge. She apologised, explaining that he only behaved that way with family.

That was an especially profound revelation because she was the first blood relative of my father's that I had ever met – and Sooty was treating me as family. When I stood up to leave, Sooty repositioned himself firmly against me for an ungainly walk back to the gate. He wouldn't part himself from me and had to be forcibly removed.

Several years later I revisited my cousin. An ageing Sooty was crippled with arthritis and unable to walk, but when he saw me, he perked up, dragged himself from his bed and greeted me fondly, surprising my cousin.



As I was leaving, Sooty not only came over to me again but somehow he managed to accompany me to the gate, dragging himself all the way – and he hadn't done that with anyone for a long time.

His owner and I bonded as cousins and Sooty bonded with me, too. Did he sense something in the shared family genes? I like to think so.



Reasons Why Pets Are Good for Children

Caring for animals teaches responsibility and empathy

BY Dr Katrina Warren



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

FOR MANY OF US PETS ARE PART of everyday family life. But more than that, pets can actually aid childhood development by teaching children about responsibility and helping them learn nurturing skills. Research shows children with pets are more positive, have higher selfesteem and demonstrate increased empathy. While all pets offer benefits, dogs in particular have been shown to encourage children to exercise. Veterinarian Dr Katrina Warren shares her expert knowledge about the positive impact pets have on children.

PETS CAN ACT AS A FRIEND AND CONFIDANTE

Children often call them their 'best friend', trusting them with their secrets because pets don't get cross at them and don't judge. Pets are loyal, affectionate and can provide a gentle shoulder to cry on, while the simple act of cuddling them can be soothing and calming. Children love to include their pet in household events and celebrations such as birthdays.

CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT Animals help children learn empathy and respect as well as develop nurturing and social skills. Developing positive feelings about pets can aid self-esteem and help children develop nonverbal communication. Children often enjoy reading out loud to their pets, helping them gain confidence and reading skills.

LEARN RESPONSIBILITY

Looking after a pet teaches the responsibility that comes with caring for another living being as well as the importance of routine. Depending on the age of the child and the individual pet, children can be involved with tasks like feeding, grooming or walking the dog.

ENCOURAGE ACTIVITY Playing safe games with pets or walking the dog encourages kids to turn off technology and get moving outside.

POSSIBLY REDUCE ALLERGIES

Western cultures report increasing rates of asthma and allergies, with pets often implicated as a causal factor. In recent years, however, research has demonstrated the



Guinea pigs make excellent little pets and are usually cuddly and affectionate

opposite may in fact be the case: the presence of cats and dogs in the home from an early age may actually 'acclimatise' the developing immune system so that it is less sensitive to allergens in later life.

TEACH IMPORTANT LIFE LESSONS

Pets are often the first experience a child has with birth, death and the process of grieving. Visits to the vet can also help reinforce the importance of providing good health care to all living beings.

THREE EASY-CARE PET CHOICES FOR KIDS

FISH are pretty to watch and young children can help feed them. Guppies are a relatively easy variety to maintain. As goldfish generate more waste, tanks require regular cleaning. **RATS** (called fancy rats and sold in pet stores) make good pets for kids if they have been handraised. They are social animals, so ideally keep a pair. Their life span is about three years. GUINEA PIGS are good for older children who will handle them gently. They should also be kept in pairs and have specific dietary requirements. Their lifespan is five to seven years.



Ways to Keep Your Kidneys Healthy

Lifestyle choices that reduce the risk of kidney disease

BY Susannah Hickling

hronic kidney disease (CKD) affects one in ten people and a staggering one in two aged over 75. Here is how you can cut your chances of developing it.

1 KEEP YOUR PEE PALE

Your urine should always be the colour of straw. Contrary to popular

belief, you don't necessarily need to down a full eight glasses of water to keep your kidneys working well. Even with just four to six glasses of water a day, your kidneys are probably fine, says nephrologist Dr James Simon. But drinking only a glass or two a day could challenge the organ.

2 KNOW YOUR PRESSURE -AND TREAT IF IT'S HIGH

Having high blood pressure puts extra strain on your kidneys, so keep yours as low as possible. If you haven't had a blood pressure check recently, visit your GP or invest in your own monitor – and take medication to lower it if necessary.

ODON'T SMOKE

They're not just cancer-sticks; cigarettes can increase your risk of heart disease and make any mild kidney problems worse.

STAY SLIM Making sure you remain a healthy weight will cut your blood pressure – and, by extension, your chances of developing CKD.

5 GO EASY ON THE ALCOHOL Stick to recommended daily limits and consider not consuming more than ten standard drinks a week to keep hypertension and CKD at bay.

6 AVOID COMMON PAINKILLERS

Long-term use and overuse of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin and ibuprofen can up your risk of kidney disease.

EXERCISE Staying fit will help keep your blood pressure down and your kidneys healthy. You should be looking at undertaking around two-and-a-half hours a week of moderate exercise such as fast walking or cycling.

8 STAY AWAY FROM PROCESSED FOODS

Most processed food is full of sodium, which isn't just bad for your heart, it can also lead to kidney problems.

WHAT ABOUT CRANBERRY JUICE AND KIDNEY STONES?

While cranberry juice, in general, is a healthy way to promote bladder and urinary health, drinking a lot can lead to kidney stones in certain people, says urology professor Dr Kethan Badani. Kidney stones are small,

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hard mineral and salt deposits that form in the kidneys and can cause sharp pain in the abdomen. Consuming cranberry products may not be a safe home remedy for kidney stones because they contain oxalates. If you're prone to kidney stones, limit salt, drink adequate and appropriate fluids and minimise sugar. Speak to your doctor about substitutes for oxalatecontaining liquids such as apple, orange and cranberry juice.

READER'S DIGEST

Do You Need a Probiotic?

HEALTH

Good bacteria may benefit your general health

BY Lindsay Tigar

hese gut-friendly bacteria restore the bacterial populations in your body – and that can heal a surprising number of ailments, according to probiotic expert Dr Tsippora Shainhouse. Probiotics are live micro-organisms that are found in yoghurt, fermented foods, aged cheeses and supplements.

YOU'RE GASSY If you often find yourself bloating after meals or eating certain foods, you may want to consider a bifidobacteria probiotic. "Bifidobacteria may also help improve glucose tolerance and hyperglycaemia and could also reduce the uncomfortable symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome such as bloating or slow molility," says Dr Shainhouse.

YOU CAN'T HANDLE DAIRY

Some people don't produce enough of the enzyme lactase in the digestive tract, which is where a probiotic containing *Streptococcus* thermophilus might help. "It produces the lactase in the gut," says Dr Shainhouse, "and can be helpful in the management and prevention of lactose intolerance."

YOU HAVE DRY SKIN When your gut is healthy, your whole body shows it. "There is a strong link between gut health and skin conditions like eczema, psoriasis, rosacea and acne," says endocrinologist Dr David Borenstein. He says that there is promising research indicating that probiotics and strong gut health overall can maximise the function of the skin.

AFTER TAKING ANTIBIOTICS One

of the popular uses of probiotics is to replenish the gut microbiome after a course of antibiotics. The logic is that antibiotics wipe out your good gut bacteria along with the harmful bacteria that might be causing your infection, so a probiotic might help restore order to your gut.

News From The

WORLD OF MEDICINE

HIGH-INTENSITY EXERCISE BOOSTS MEMORY ...

When it comes to improving memory, an old adage may be true: no pain, no gain. In a Canadian study, 64 sedentary adults between the ages of 60 and 88 were divided into three groups. One group did four sets of high-intensity interval exercise, alternating between walking fast for four minutes and at a leisurely pace for three minutes. A second group simply walked at a medium intensity for about 45 minutes, and the third did stretches.

After doing their routines three times a week for 12 weeks, the high-intensity group improved its performance on a memory test by up to 30 per cent; the medium-intensity and stretch groups didn't improve at all. However, both the high- and medium-intensity groups did better on tests measuring reaction time, focus and accuracy.

... WHILE A GOOD STRETCH AIDS HEART HEALTH

A simple stretching routine can boost your heart health. In a recent Italian experiment, participants who performed a series of leg stretches five times a week for 12 weeks saw improvements in vascular function [the arteries' ability to dilate and constrict] and in how stiff their arteries were – even beyond the legs. These changes may reduce health risks, since arterial stiffness and vascular function both play a role in diabetes and heart disease.

LACK OF SLEEP HURTS TEENS' MENTAL HEALTH

The teen years bring an array of new threats to sleep, including the end of parent-set bedtimes and a naturally late sleep-wake cycle. While inadequate sleep may not seem like a big deal, it can contribute to mental health issues. A UK study found that 15 year olds who were getting less shut-eye on school nights were significantly more likely to develop depression or anxiety in their teens or early 20s. Cognitive behavioural

therapy for insomnia can help address the underlying causes, whether they're related to bad habits such as screen time in the late evening, for example – or other factors.



'UNADOPTABLES' FIND





After the death of his beloved dog Wolfgang, Steve Greig started rescuing older dogs and giving them forever homes in their golden years

BY Alex Frost

hen accountant Steve Greig lost his dog Wolfgang seven years ago, his life changed forever. Since that loss, he has adopted more than a dozen dogs – all of whom have been in their last few years of life. He chose to rescue senior dogs because they otherwise wouldn't have had a home.

Greig started posting family photos of his eclectic bunch on Instagram, and his following has grown quickly to more than one million Instagram followers. In addition to nine dogs, which is a number he always maintains, adding to his brood when others pass away, he has a pig, two rabbits, two ducks, four chickens, two cats, and a 22-kilogram turkey.

His mission didn't begin with the intent of going viral, but rather simply to honour Wolfgang's memory. He wanted something good to come out of the tragedy, so he went to a local animal shelter and adopted the oldest dog there. After that, he started photographing his daily life with his animals.

"I'm the last person you'd expect to have any kind of social media success. It grew organically - people just responded to it," he says. "It was certainly never intentional. They are just such a part of my life. I'll come into a room and there's a chicken sitting on a dog and it will be a great picture."

He also didn't originally intend to inspire others, but that's exactly what happened. Shortly after he started posting, his inbox filled with



STEVE GREIG & MARY RAND HESS . ILLUSTRATED BY NADJA SARELL

messages from people who had also adopted senior dogs. His fame led to a book, which teaches kids about valuing what is old instead of looking for the next new thing. He now keeps nine elderly dogs at a time, and when they pass away, he adopts new ones in their honour - and in honour of Wolfgang.

LIFE IN THE ANIMAL HOUSE

Greig's animals have two areas in his house in which they live while he works. His house is equipped with dog doors and has a secured kitchen area.

While it sounds like a recipe for disaster, Greig has things under control, but he admits that he couldn't do it without his housekeeper, who comes three times a week. "I'm a fairly neat person," he says. People are usually

> shocked at the cleanliness and can't believe how many animals he has - and in the house. at that. Tofu the turkey, however, stays in the front yard, while Bikini the pig is 100 per cent potty-trained, according to Greig.

> "She has a doggy door, and she'll use it unless I'm there because she'd

Left: Greig's book tells the story of his oddly wonderful pet family

rather wait for me to open the door," he says, adding that pigs are actually really clean creatures, despite popular misconceptions. Bikini tries to go to the bathroom as far away from where she sleeps as possible.

Greig has had numerous direct messages on Instagram asking how he can bear to adopt senior dogs, knowing the end is near. The answer is simple for him: "Love doesn't have a time frame."

He has never regretted

taking in any of his animals. "Whether it's three months, three years, or ten years, it's still love, and it enhances your life," he says.

While health care is a considera-

tion when adopting an older dog, it's not a major source of concern for Greig, who has dogs with special diets and health concerns, including cancer. Instead, he encourages all pet owners, regardless of the age

of the animal, to make sure they have the budget to care for their pets in case they need medical attention.

He also believes that they should seriously consider getting animal health insurance. "Three of my senior dogs are as healthy as can be, and other ones have health issues," he says. "I have friends that have young dogs with health issues, too." Illness can strike at any age.

> Greig's dogs aren't fazed by their farm-animal brothers and sisters. He laughs about how normal his dogs think it is to have a 22-kilo turkey hanging out in the kitchen as he disperses evening medicines to

them. "The dogs don't even blink. It's a zoo," he says. His animals get along well because they're used to animals coming in and out of the house whenever a dog passes away.

However, Greig knows his limits:



HIS DOGS THINK IT IS NORMAL TO HAVE A 22-Kilo Turkey Hanging Out

quality time with Greig

Bikini the pig joins two old friends for some





Greig believes that dogs, like people, become better versions of themselves as they age

he can only care for nine senior dogs at a time.

Part of Greig's popularity on social media stems from his family portraits and his updates of the an-

imals, but the other part stems from the unique names he gives his pets. Besides Bikini and Tofu, which he named "because it was funny," his other pets have 'elderly' names like Loretta and Wilhelmina.

He has a new dog named Edsel after the failed Ford model from 1958. He chose the name "because when it originally came out it was worthless, but now it's a collector's item." His attitude towards Edsel is his attitude towards all of his pets, and it demonstrates his value for life in general.

The animals are buddies, that's for sure, but even Greig's brood forms cliques. They pair off into groups of "better friends", he says, but generally, they are all together as a group. He knows which animals get along best when he sees them playing or sleeping together. Bikini the pig definitely favours Enoch the Irish wolfhound, and Loretta and Edsel are BFFs. Sadly, the animals

grieve the loss of their friends when they pass.

"Eeyore and Engelbert used to be inseparable," he says. "Engelbert died a few months back, and I

> brought in a new little dog named Wilhelmina and she's always snuggled up to Eeyore, which is just the best thing because he was so lonely for so long."

> When Greig adopted another Chihuahua

named John Henry, he anticipated him befriending his current Chihuahua, Eeyore, but "it turns out it's more complicated than that." They did not turn out to be very close. "That was shallow on my part that I thought just

THE ANIMALS ARE BUDDIES, BUT EVEN GREIG'S BROOD FORMS CLIQUES

because they were both Chihuahuas they'd get along," he jokes. "I had put them in a box."

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Greig's touching experience with older animals has helped him value humanity even more. Whether he's helping an overlooked and forgotten ageing dog or a homeless person, there's a common thread: compassion. They deserve attention, conversation, and help, he says.

"You'll see a homeless person – and it's so easy to ignore them. But if that was a homeless dog, I'd immediately love it, and so I'm trying to help myself make that connection with people, too," he explains.

"People end up in bad circumstances beyond their control and that's the same thing that's happened to these dogs."

He also says that animals, like

people, become the best versions of themselves as they get older.

Greig's Instagram posts are certainly adorable and heart-warming, but there's more to it for him. He hopes that they inspire his followers to adopt a senior dog of their own. "If you're a bit unsure, I can say that of all the messages I get (and I get so many), I never had one person say that they wish they wouldn't have done it," he says. Instead, he gets message after message saying, "Oh, my gosh – that was the best two years of my life."

If a future pet owner isn't ready to jump all in, he recommends first investigating the many foster programmes offered by shelters and rescues so you can interact with an animal without the potential costs and responsibilities.

Find Steve Greig's profile on Instagram @wolfgang2242.

Sun's Identical Twin

000

It is thought that somewhere out there, the Sun has a twin - born not just in the same stellar nursery, but an almost identical twin, a binary companion made of the same star-stuff. And astronomers from Portugal think they might have found it. Located roughly 184 light-years away, it's called HD 186302, and it's almost certainly at least a long-lost sibling of our home star. Solar siblings are the thousands of stars which formed in the same massive stellar nursery - up to 4.6 billion years ago. "Studying these stars can help us understand where in the galaxy and under which conditions the sun was formed," says lead researcher Vardan Adibekyan.

SCIENCEALERT.COM

FIRST PERSON

SINNONS

Rock legend, one-time ladies' man and TV personality Gene Simmons, 71, has sold over 100 million albums as bassist and colead singer with the band Kiss. Here, he talks about the moments that shaped him

BY Simon Hemelryk

...My first kiss, aged about two. Some relative or neighbour came to our home in Israel, where I was born, wearing bright red lipstick, which I'd never seen before. There wasn't a lot of infrastructure in the country back then, so my mother, Flora, didn't use much make-up.

I wound up dancing a jig on the coffee table and this woman squealed and kissed me. I was horrified. It affected my attitude to kissing for a while.



...Being terrified by something hiding in my hat.

We had to wear caps to keep out the sun at school, and one day, mine just wasn't sitting right – because there was an enormous spider sitting underneath. I was scared of insects for years. Then, after Kiss formed, I found a black belt with a huge tarantula on the buckle. I must have worn it every day for more than a decade – it was a sort of confront-your-fears approach.

...Being taught to really value life by my mother. She died in 2018, aged 93, but had been in a concentration camp as a teenager, and to say her family was wiped out is too soft. They were tortured, starved and finally put into gas chambers. She didn't talk about it, but it gave her a decidedly different world view. My father abandoned us when I was about six and my mother had to work 12-hour days to provide for me, but she made sure I had a stand-up, be-proud attitude, and didn't use drugs, smoke or drink. Being alive was too precious, she thought. You only get about 80 years – and you're asleep for a third of that. And I have yet to consciously get high, drunk or smoke cigarettes.

...Moving to the US was a born-again moment. My mother and I arrived in New York when I was eight. We had a hole in the ground for a toilet in Israel and didn't even have a radio, but now I was in a place with cars, refrigerators and a flying man in a cape on TV. Anything seemed possible.

I couldn't speak English and had to run the gauntlet of "What, are you

The original Kiss line-up, 1975 (Simmons far right)



stupid?" But this gave me a thick skin and. because I didn't have many people to talk to, I was able to spend a lot of time day-dreaming. I'm now connected to my subconscious and I know where I've been and I certainly know where I want to go. Having that clarity means you're less stressed and more confident, which helps a lot in life.

...Small, skinny English people with funny haircuts changed my life.

When The Beatles first appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964, I'd never encountered anything like it. The only British voices I'd heard were the posh ones Nazis had in black and white war films. When George spoke in a Scouse accent, I was transfixed. Even before I knew how to play an instrument, I started singing in bands. For at least a year, I went around with a fake accent, trying to persuade chicks I was English.

...Moving from office junior to rock star. After school, while I was getting bands together, I worked as an assistant at *Vogue*: a Man Friday who did everything the editor wanted me to do. The entire floor was covered with females. That didn't hurt. The male of the species has the primordial urge to merge. But by 1973, Kiss had formed after Paul Stanley [the band's guitarist and other lead singer] and I had been in a band called Wicked Lester.

Kiss's first records weren't big successes, but we were much more of a live band, and started selling 10,000seat arenas very quickly.

We opened for a lot of British groups, such as Manfred Mann and Argent. But they would kick us off tours – for the simple reason that we blew them off the stage. We just let it all hang out. It was like scream therapy, this safe place where you could be your goddamn self.



Gene with his mother, Flora Klein

...A trip to Woolworths created our image. In early 1973, we were rehearsing in a cockroach-infested loft in New York. We found ourselves taking a break and going down to Woolworths and buying clown make-up. We had no idea what we were doing – it was like kids playing with mud. But we always wore make-up on stage after that.

...Riding the tsunami of success modestly. It wasn't long before we were playing stadiums and millions and millions of dollars were getting thrown in our faces. All of a sudden, everyone was buying houses and cars. Except yours truly. I was paying



your garage, you're so excited. But being in a band is more arduous than a marriage – and it's difficult to keep it going.

...Meeting my wife, Shannon, at the Playboy mansion. I was filming a movie in 1984, called *Runaway*. Naturally, I was the bad guy. I had a weekend off and, since I was living with

Simmons with Hugh Hefner and Playboy Bunnies in 1999

\$200 a month for an apartment and I had a female housemate – whom I never touched! – so she took care of it. I didn't buy a car or anything like that until I was 34.

...Rome started falling from within. By 1979, we had been the Gallup poll number one group in America, three times in a row, sold millions of records and truckloads of merchandise. But, cliché of clichés, drugs and alcohol started to affect Ace [Frehley, guitarist] and Peter [Criss, drummer], and they eventually left the band. It felt like the end at the time, but we got new members and have had many different line-ups since.

I'm sorry in my heart that Ace and Peter aren't still playing with us, to enjoy the fruits of their labour. If you start something together, you'd like to think you can finish it together. When you're first forming a group in Diana Ross at the time, I asked her permission to go to LA. I was seeing a Playboy playmate on the side and she'd told me about an event called Midsummer Night's Dream at Hugh Hefner's house. "There will be 300 playmates, scantily clad, and about 100 guys – movie producers, celebrities..." she said, and asked if I wanted to come. I said "OK!"

Shannon [a model and actress] was there. She is six feet tall. With the heels and big hair, it was a sight. We had a connection and I phoned Diana and told her what had happened. We talked it through and there's no bad blood to this day. Shannon and I have been together ever since.

...Crying when my son, Nick, was born. As an only child, I hadn't really opened up to anybody. Other kids used to call me Spock. I suppose when my father left, I shut down
emotionally. But when Nick arrived, I just broke down. The tears wouldn't stop. I was shaking. I believe, at that moment, I finally got over myself. It had always been about me. "I'm hungry!", "I've got a papercut!" Then, suddenly, here was a new life to focus on instead.

...I used rock to stop kids taking drugs when I was filming the documentary Rock School. They lived in Suffolk [in the UK], and didn't have much to do, but I got them to form a band and have something to care about. You could see the lights go on in their young eyes and hearts. In the end, we flew them to California to open for Judas Priest at Long Beach Arena, playing their own song. I just love children and want to help them - what can I say? village. People there lived in huts made of cow dung and most of the men had got the women pregnant, then left, partly because there are so few jobs in poor places like that. But Joseph was still there. The smile of love on his partner's face when he cradled the child really struck me.

...Getting up on stage with Kiss on End of the Road World Tour in 2018 and feeling unbelievable. This was one of the highlights of my career. I've seen audiences of all ages wearing our make-up. We have fun. We're just alive.

...That all the things your mother told you about having children are true. You can buy most things, but not the feeling they bring. Nick and my daughter, Sophie [now aged 31 and 28], share a house, pay the

...Crying again, this time when I visited Zambia. I had been sponsoring several African kids anonymously for years through ChildFund International. But, in 2012, the makers of my Gene Simmons Family Jewels [reality] programme, arranged for me to meet one of them, Joseph - now a young man with a partner and baby - in his home

With his wife Shannon and daughter Sophie in 2018





Simmons proving he still has what it takes on stage in 2019

mortgage and work in the music industry, but they still go out to the movies or a restaurant with Shannon and me, every other day. I'm proud of them, not for the profession they're in, but because they've made their own life choices and take responsibility for them.

...I'm the most blessed human being. I'm a partner in a restaurant chain, I've got a film company, a soft-drink line in 7 Eleven and much more. People might say I don't need to work, but that's a loser's phrase. Working

shouldn't be about money, but the love of labour. Stop watching reruns of *Coronation Street*, get out there and pump that heart.

A Most Unusual Year

We may have been pleased to close the door on 2020 but the year was filled with record-breaking scientific discoveries. Earning the title of 'oldest' was the seven billion-year-old stardust found inside the Murchison meteorite, which fell in Australia in 1969. This is the first time that researchers have discovered grains that predate the sun in our planet's rocks. New analysis using acid discovered the presolar grains. The 'longest' accolades included a bird that travelled for 11 days straight from Alaska to New Zealand. A male bar-tailed godwit, tagged as '4BBRW', set off from southwest Alaska and flew for 11 days straight to New Zealand last September, travelling a distance of about 12,200 kilometres. Also of interest is a lightning 'megaflash' that, after being analysed using new satellite technology, was revealed to have stretched for more than 700 kilometres. SCIENCEDIRECT.COM



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READER'S DIGEST



Seeing the Funny Side



Rich Food

I wasn't well so I'd given my father a list of food to buy for me. I got a phone call from him in the supermarket aisle.

"There are two sections" he said, "One's organic and the other is food you can afford. Which kind do you want me to get?"

SUBMITTED BY DAN PALFREY

Slippery One

HUSBAND: Don't be angry at me, but I accidentally spilled grease all over the oven. **ME:** How about I won't be angry at you, but you have to clean it. **HUSBAND:** I'd rather you be angry at me.

SUBMITTED BY LINDA GOLDFINGER

Not Th-air for You

A serious lung problem landed me in a rehabilitation centre, connected to oxygen 24 hours a day. One day the oxygen ran low, so I asked an attendant for a fresh tank.

"You'll have to wait," she told me. "We're out of tanks and waiting for a delivery." As she walked away, she

Life's Like That

muttered, "This wouldn't happen if patients would just stop using them all up."

SUBMITTED BY PHILLIP RADCLIFFE

Stamina Required

I called to congratulate my parents on their 24th wedding anniversary. "So, next year's your 25th," I said to my stepmum. "Is that silver, or wood or what?" "Guts, I think," she replied.

Submitted by Lynette Combs

Easy Peasy

Why drive eight minutes to the supermarket when I can spend an extra \$43 to have the food delivered right to my doorstep?

@brandonslaterr

The New Normal

I'm OK with never shaking hands again. Never liked it in the first place. Just tip your hat at me like the young lady that I am.

MORGAN JENKINS, AUTHOR

Correct Me If I'm Wrong

Our four year old, Sandra, was sitting at the breakfast table, staring intently at a bottle of children's vitamins.

Slowly she said, "There is..." "There are," my wife cut in, correcting her.

Without batting an eye, Sandra continued, "There are one pink one left." SUBMITTED BY HAL DEVINS



THE GREAT TWEET OFF: WORKING FROM HOME EDITION

The toilers of Twitter were quick to transition to new office spaces.

My cat is my favourite colleague and the hanging plant in the corner is my least favourite. @ALLIEHAYES

Imagine being a spy right now, stuck at home trying to convince your family you have a normal job. @_BILLIEBELIEVES

Now that my boyfriend is working from home, I've asked that we liven things up by pretending we're having an office affair. @FERNBRADY

Zoom meetings are basically modern séances. "Elizabeth, are you here?" "Is anyone else with you?" "We can't see you." "Can you hear us?" @MCCLELLANDSHANE

My boss just called me and told me I've been spending too much time on Twitter. Hold on, he's saying something else now. @DANMENTOS

Please quit telling me to "keep up the good work". The good work was an accident and impossible to replicate. @HOUSE_FEMINIST





BY Kate Lowenstein AND Daniel Gritzer Ithough I have been grown and cultivated for at least 7000 years, my origins are sketchy, as my wilder self is extinct. Traces of me have been recovered from Bronze Age settlements in China, while the Egyptians revered my bulbous shape and viewed my concentric rings as symbols of eternal life.

In first-century Pompeii, I was used medicinally by the Romans to aid sleep and improve eye ailments, to heal minor complaints such as toothache and dog bites, as well as for serious maladies such as backache and dysentery.

And when European settlers migrated to North America, I was one of the first crops they planted – only to later discover I was already readily available and widely used in Native American gastronomy.

Today I play key roles in stocks, soups, stews, braises and sauces all over the world. But more about that later. When you see me sitting in your pantry or in the produce section at the supermarket, I look innocent enough. Whether brown, red or white, I am a simple dirt-growing bulb, with stem and root ends.

But when you cut into me, the forensic truth reveals itself: I am one of several plants in the botanical genus *allium*, which includes garlic, leeks, spring onions, shallots and chives. All of us were built to defend ourselves by producing noxious, eye-watering fumes. When my cells are crushed or cut, an enzyme called *alliinase* and another called *lachrymatory factor synthase* react via a molecule called *syn-propanethial-S-oxide*. Plainly speaking: I fight back.

The more I'm cut, the more vigorously I fight. Finely puréed raw onion will be more noxious than thick slices. Cut me in rings and I am more pungent than if you cut me stem to root, since pole-to-pole slicing damages fewer of my cells. Even knife selection makes a difference: a dull blade crushes more of my cells than a sharp one, which means more tears on your cutting board.

That combative tendency is what made humans fear me, along with garlic. Turkish folklore has it, when God tossed Satan from heaven, the ground where his foot landed

ONION-TOPPED PUFF PASTRY Preheat the oven Unfold a sheet at 200°C. of defrosted puff Peel and slice a pastry on a tray brown onion into lined with baking 3 mm-thick rings. paper. Arrange on a plate Leaving a onein a single layer, centimetre border, season lightly with spread the cheese salt, brush with olive mixture over the oil, and microwave pastry and carefully on high until onion top with onion is very soft and rings. turning golden with Bake until pastry some browned is puffed and golden spots (about 15 and onions are more minutes). Repeat deeply golden, with one red onion. 20-25 minutes. In a small bowl. Sprinkle with whisk 140 grams fresh thyme and fresh goat's cheese rosemary, drizzle with 1/4 cup milk with olive oil. until smooth. cut into squares, Season with pepper. and serve.

READER'S DIGEST

sprouted garlic; the other gave you onions.

But for modern humans, with your hankering for pungent flavours and the willingness to cry to get it, nearly every cuisine has repurposed me from bad omen to bedrock aromatic vegetable.

In France, I'm a component, along

with carrot and celery, of the ever-present *mirepoix*; I'm a member of the holy trinity in Cajun and Creole cooking alongside celery and green capsicum; and I'm pounded, often in the form of shallots, into Thai chilli pastes. In Italy, I'm sautéed into the *soffritto* that adds depth to everything from meatballs to Bolognese sauce.

The list of my uses in

cooking is endless, and these aren't even my starring roles (see: French onion soup, stuffed onions, caramelised onion tarts, to name but a few).

To you today, there seems to be only one rule about me: eat me often, and any which way – pickled or boiled in soups and sauces, dried and pulverised into onion powder, raw on bagels and sandwiches and in all sorts of salads.

If you love raw onion but want less intensity, soak me sliced or diced in cold water, or wash me briefly in warm running water, or soak me in vinegar to make a quick pickle in 15 to 30 minutes. And of course, cooking tames me, turning me increasingly soft and sweet as my natural sugars caramelise and the Maillard reaction (browning) takes place.

Enjoy me grilled, sautéed, slowly sweated, caramelised and roasted. Or

roast me whole in my skins directly on live embers. (I don't have that thick papery exterior until I'm 'cured', which basically means dried, by the way.)

There is no culinary downside to me! Plus, I'm high in vitamin C and antioxidants, especially an anti-inflammatory one called *quercetin*.

As for avoiding eye irritation, there are

tricks that work and tricks that don't. Chilling onions seems to help reduce the enzymatic reactions, as does avoiding the root end – the stubbly bit which has higher concentrations of the fumes than the stem end. Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay has even devised a method to dice me that leaves my root end intact so you can dice and slice me without tears.

Alternatively just get over it – it's all part of my acrid, controversial, entirely lovable package.



I DEFEND MYSELF BY PRODUCING NOXIOUS, EYE-WATERING FUMES

QUOTABLE QUOTES

I have been a scoundrel all my life. Selfish, cruel at times, hard to work with. I'm grateful that so many have given me a second chance. That's when we're at our best – when we support each other. Not when we cancel each other out for our past mistakes, but when we help each other grow, when we educate each other, when we guide each other to redemption. IOAOUIN PHOENIX, ACTOR





If you're grateful for what you have and you focus on the positives, it has tremendous benefits for heart health, mental health and reducing stress.

DANIEL LEVITIN, NEUROSCIENTIST

Some of these very large tech companies are simply too big ... with billions and billions of users, you essentially have a company that is ungovernable.

CLIVE THOMPSON, TECH WRITER



Today me will live in the moment. Unless it is unpleasant. In which case me will eat a cookie.

COOKIE MONSTER, MUPPET



PERSPECTIVE

Why we're all so much smarter than we know

Anybody Can Learn Anything

BY John Mighton FROM ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL

READER'S DIGEST



othing comes easily to me. I'm a mathematician, but I didn't show much aptitude for maths until I was 30. In high school, I had no idea why I had to turn a fraction upside down when I wanted to divide by it, or why, when I wrote a square root sign over a negative number,

the number suddenly became 'imaginary' (especially when I could see the number was still there).

At university, I almost failed my first calculus course. Fortunately, I was saved by the bell curve, which brought my original mark up to a C minus.

I often wish I was more like my scientific heroes, who seemingly could solve intractable problems in a blinding flash of inspiration. Now that I teach maths at university and publish books and papers on the discipline, I console myself with the thought that my struggles to educate myself produced an intense curiosity about how we achieve our potential.

In 2000, during the final year of my doctoral programme, I persuaded some of my friends to start a free, after-school tutoring programme called JUMP Math (Junior Undiscovered Maths Prodigies) in my apartment. The programme's methods, which can be used by people of any age, are easy to understand and apply, and they reinforce confidence in your abilities rather than assigning you to a particular skill level.

Twenty years later, 200,000

students and educators in North America use JUMP Math as their main maths instruction resource, and the programme is spreading into Europe and South America. And after teaching maths and other subjects to thousands of students of all ages, I am convinced that our society vastly underestimates the intellectual potential of children and adults.

ver the past two decades, cognitive-science researchers have discovered that our brains are plastic and can learn and develop at any stage of life. A variety of psychological studies – in which people have been trained to develop musical abilities that were once considered to be innate (like perfect pitch) or to significantly improve their exam scores (by becoming better at seeing analogies) – indicate that experts are made, not born.

I remember seeing newspaper articles and books about the remarkable

intellectual potential of children and the surprising plasticity of older brains as long ago as the 1990s. It strikes me as odd, then, that although the research has long been publicised, its existence has done very little to change the way that people think about their own intellectual abilities or how they are taught.

When people complain about problems in education, they often speak as if those problems would be solved if students were able to perform as well on international tests as students from countries that achieve the highest scores. For instance, Singapore is sometimes singled out in the media as having a superior education system because its students do better on standardised maths tests – like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA),

which measures 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance in 80 countries every three years.

It's worth looking at the results of these tests, but

we should be looking for what they reveal about our beliefs in children and their potential, rather than what they prove about education. In 2015, only nine per cent of American students and 15 per cent of Canadian students scored at PISA's highest levels, compared with 35 per cent in Singapore. However, in that country almost 40 per cent of students scored average or below.

So while it would be a good idea for educators to find out how maths is taught in top-performing countries – as many people consistently have suggested – we might also want to find out how countries that produce such strong students still manage to teach so little to almost half their populations.

ide differences in mathematical achievement among students appear to be natural. In the many schools I have visited, on several continents, I have always seen a significant number of students who are two or three grade levels behind by the end of primary school. In my home province

> of Ontario, where children do rather well on international tests, fewer than 50 per cent of Year 6 students met grade-level standards on the 2018 provincial

exams.

Maths ability is

extremely fluid

and teachers can

produce dramatic

improvements

However, in my work with children and adults, I have seen a great deal of evidence that mathematical ability is extremely fluid and that teachers can produce dramatic improvements with very simple interventions. One example is a Year 5 class in which the teacher, Mary Jane Moreau, incorporated strategies from JUMP Math. This meant teaching concepts and skills in steps that were much smaller than the ones she normally followed, constantly asking questions and assigning exercises and activities to assess what her students knew, giving frequent practice and review, and most importantly, building excitement by giving students incrementally harder challenges where one idea builds on the next.

Before beginning the programme, the average mark for Moreau's students on a standardised test was in the 54th percentile, with the lowest

mark in the ninth percentile and the highest in the 75th. After a year of JUMP, Moreau retested her students. The average score rose to the 98th percentile with the lowest mark in the 95th percentile.

This teacher was able to shift the bell curve in her class so dramatically because she made all of her students feel like they could accomplish roughly the same things. In her classroom, students worked to compete against the problem, not each other. They got caught up in the excitement of their peers, and this

Students need to love learning for its own sake, not because they're afraid of failing

excitement helped them to engage more deeply, remember what they learned and persevere in the face of challenges. They were encouraged to learn and to love learning for its own sake, not because they were afraid of failing or wanted to be ranked higher than other students.

nequitable learning environments are extraordinarily unfair and inherently inefficient, too. They're not good for any learners – including the ones at the top of the academic hierarchy – because they

> train people to give up too easily or to exert themselves for the wrong reasons. They destroy our natural sense of curiosity and create negative

mindsets and anxiety in learners – making our brains function in the most inefficient ways possible.

Nurturing curiosity has impacts outside of school, too. In the *Harvard Business Review*'s 'The Business Case for Curiosity', Professor Francesca Gino presents evidence that curiosity produces a wide range of benefits for organisations, leaders and employees. For example, in a state of curiosity, we are less susceptible to confirmation biases (looking for information that confirms our beliefs rather than evidence suggesting we

Anyone Can Learn Anything

are wrong) and to making generalisations about people based on their race or gender. As well, a culture of curiosity creates more open communication and better team performance, since curious people will readily share information and listen more carefully.

Many people believe, based on their experience of learning maths at school, that it is a rigid and sterile subject that stifles curiosity and leaves no room for creativity. But progress in mathematics has actually been driven by remarkable flights of imagination. And I've found that when maths is taught the right way, it is the subject in which learners of all ages can most easily unlock their true intellectual potential.

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Show Me the Money

\$ \$ \$

An ancient gold coin described as a "shameless celebration" of the assassination of Julius Caesar, featuring a portrait of one of the men who stabbed him, has set a new record for a coin sold at auction. Bought by an anonymous bidder for \$3.5 million, the 'aureus' coin (an ancient Roman gold coin originally valued at 25 pure silver denarii – the standard Roman silver coin at the time) features a portrait of Marcus Junius Brutus – one of the ringleaders in the assassination of the Roman emperor in 44 BCE. The coin also features daggers and the inscription EID MAR, designating the Ides of March (March 15) as the fateful day. *Et tu Brute?* CNN

Cartoonish Tax Refund

The US state of Rhode Island mistakenly sent more than 175 tax refund cheques signed by Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse, rather than the state treasurer and controller. The Rhode Island Division of Taxation uses the signatures on test files, which were mistakenly printed on the real cheques. AP

Real Odds

There is a very easy way to return from a casino with a small fortune: go there with a large one. JACK YELTON



ALC: NO.

..DIFFERENTLY

Arun Kumar Bajaj from Punjab, India, has a very unusual skill - he can 'paint' with a sewing machine. Technically, it's embroidery, not painting, but the 37 year old's artworks are so incredibly detailed, that they pass as hyper-realistic paintings to the untrained eye. And the fact that he does it all with a sewing machine just makes it that much more impressive. The tapestry on the previous page of the court of Sikh Ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh took Bajaj a year to make. PHOTOS: COURTESY ARUN KUMAR BAJAJ

BA.

READER'S DIGEST



The Best Medicine



Two by Two

Young Billy and young Willy were walking home from Sunday school, where they had just learned about Noah's Ark. Willy asked, "Do you think Noah did much fishing?"

"How could he?" said Billy. "He had only two worms." Theadvocate.com

Knit Wit

A traffic policeman pulled alongside a speeding car on the freeway. Glancing at the car, he was astounded to see that the elderly woman behind the wheel was knitting. The policeman cranked down his window and yelled to the driver, "Pull over!"

"No!" the woman yelled back. "It's a cardigan!" Knittinghelp.com

Fire and Brimstone

A lawyer had a minor operation. He woke up in his hospital room afterward and saw that all the blinds were shut.

When he asked the nurse why, she said, "There was a fire across the street, and we didn't want you to think that the operation had failed!" SUBMITTED BY C.H.

Laughter

High Level

Did vou hear about the corruption scandal in the ladder industry? It goes all the way to the top! SUBMITTED BY IOSIAH STOVELL

Coffee Run

My wife left me because she thinks I'm too insecure. No, wait, she's back, she just went to get coffee.

Seen on Reddit

Plane Speaking

A group of engineering professors were invited to fly on a plane. Just as they were comfortably seated, they were informed that the plane had been built by their students.

All but one professor jumped from their seat in a panic, and frantically headed to the exits.

When the lone professor who stayed put was asked why, he replied, "I have plenty of confidence in my students. Knowing them, this piece of junk won't even start."

Seen on Reddit





HOME, SWEET HOME What's standing between you and the perfect house?

I love it when people use the phrase 'colour scheme', because it sounds so sneaky. "OK, we're going to make this room look great, and here's how we're going to do it: blue, grey, beige, shhh! Somebody's coming, don't talk about colours!" DEMETRI MARTIN. COMEDIAN

I'm in the process of transforming our home into a relaxing and timeless retreat and my husband keeps trying to ruin it with his "input" because he "lives here too". SARA BUCKLEY

Literally everyone on those reality TV shows that help people find their dream house: "We're looking for a lot of space for us and our 49 kids. Need a six-acre beachfront backyard for entertainment. And a moat full of printer ink, Hogwarts, Gordon Ramsay on call as the pastry chef, and a man cave. Our budget is \$172." **ROB FEE**

rdasia.com 55

READER'S DIGEST

The Convalescent (1862), by British painter William Gale PHOTO: ARTEPICS / ALAMY STOCK P

56 MARCH 2021



Re-kindling CONVALESCENCE

With long-tail coronavirus recovery featuring in the news, perhaps it's time we remembered the forgotten importance of rest for recovery

BY Lizzie Enfield

hundred years ago *convalescence* was seen as a necessary part of the recovery process. The word was part of the vernacular, describing a liminal space between health and illness: a phase when people were neither 'sick' nor 'well' but somewhere in between.

Today the word is almost obsolete and, rather than taking time to rest and



recuperate, most people return to work as soon as humanely possible. They are helped by wonder drugs like antibiotics, which, by dealing effectively with the extreme symptoms of illness, con the body into thinking it's fully recovered when often it's only part way there.

COVID-19 has re-introduced us to the concept of a prolonged recovery, with numerous patients claiming they are not back to full health after more than 100 days. It has also seen the dusting off of the noun *convalescence* and its associated verb.

The notion of convalescence is largely a Victorian construct and often involved travel to spa towns or coastal resorts to recuperate after illness. But only the wealthy could afford to do this. The poor had access to charitable hospitals, but soon returned to overcrowded slums and this had a pronounced impact on their chances of recovery. Enter the 'convalescent home', built away from cities in the countryside or by the sea and funded by social reformers and philanthropists.

By 1900, there were over 300 convalescent homes in England and convalescence became a regular feature of Victorian life and its art and literature.

Characters in Jane Austen novels slip away to country retreats to sip broth, take the waters and breathe in lungfuls of healthy sea air. Meanwhile author Robert Louis Stevenson finished writing *Treasure Island* in the Swiss mountains while recovering from tuberculosis and artists like Gwen John, Degas and Tissot took on 'the convalescent' as their subject, painting pale and wan looking women in lace nightdresses propped up on pillows reading.

TODAY, CONVALESCENCE, defined as a gradual return to health after sickness or injury, is something of a lost art. No sooner are we past

the acute phase of an illness than we are discharged, sent home and all too often expected to be up and running again in a matter of weeks.

"Convalescence is not just about where you are but about accepting the fact that your body needs this time to repair itself," says Verity Holloway, a writer who suffers

from the connective tissue disorder Marfan's disease. Two years ago, then aged 32, Verity developed an enlarged aortic route and needed open-heart surgery. After ten days in hospital she was sent home. But it was almost a year before she was fully recovered.

Initially, Verity took three months off work and went to weekly cardiac rehabilitation classes at her local hospital, but found she couldn't cope at home because of her limited mobility and open wounds.

"You need to accept that your body will take time to get back to normal. To rush this process will impede your recovery"

Verity went to stay with her aunt for five weeks to convalesce. "She cooked, washed and helped me exercise every day," she says. That time and her aunt's care were vital. Verity says that when you are recovering from something as major as open-heart surgery, "you need to accept that your body will take time to get back to normal and trying to

> rush this process, or push yourself because there's nobody to do things for you, will impede rather than aid your recovery."

> AS THE 20TH CEN-TURY PROGRESSED, several factors began to undermine convalescence as a distinct form of medical care, including the introduction of physical

and occupational therapy, improvements in urban housing and advances in modern medicine.

"Convalescence and its central role in systems of health and medicine suggest that our contemporary understandings of health and illness – which often tend to categorise patients as either 'sick' or 'well'– can de-emphasise or even exclude important elements of recovery," says historian Eli Anders, whose research has focused on its role within the health sector.

READER'S DIGEST

While modern medicine and surgery are extremely effective in addressing many acute conditions, he says, "we sometimes lose sight of the intersections between the world of medicine and the world of work," he says. The reality is patients may need time and space to recuperate before they are able to return to their everyday lives.

I DISCOVERED THIS THE HARD WAY a few years ago when I suffered a nasty bout of pneumonia. "Take time to recover," was the instruction from my doctor, but this was impossible. I had three children and work to do. I came home from hospital and carried on as before. A month later I was back in hospital with kidney failure, regretting that I had

not heeded my doctor's words.

The doctor who treated me this time likened the immune system to a military unit and an infection to a terrorist attack on part of your body. The cells required to deal with the attack suddenly rush to that location and fight the infection and if you don't rest afterwards, then rather than returning to base camp ready to fight another attack, those cells

"The doctor who treated me this time likened the immune system to a military unit and an infection to a terrorist attack on part of your body"

are still busy. So, if you're exposed to another bacteria or virus you may not be ready to fight it as effectively. "Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lung tissue, usually caused by a bacterial infection but it can also be linked to a virus like COVID-19", explains Dr Swapna Mandal, a consultant respiratory physician.

"If it's caused by a bacterial infec-

tion, then antibiotics will kill the bacteria but they do not repair the inflammation and damage to the lungs. It can take anything between one week to several months for them to return to normal after a respiratory infection of this type."

She says that often patients start to feel better, push themselves, and then they enter a cycle of boom and bust.

Before the advent

of so called 'wonder drugs', the only way to get better was to rest and allow the body to recover in its own good time.

Anders says that the long and uncertain recovery time that many COVID-19 patients have been facing serves as a reminder that patients are often not fully 'recovered' after being treated for an illness.

"Antibiotics, vaccines and other



pharmaceuticals are, of course, vital to the success of modern medicine," he says. "But our healthcare systems and culture often emphasise these and de-emphasise other forms of treatment and care that may also be vital to patients' recovery, including convalescence."

MOST COUNTRIES' NATIONAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES are overstretched and the taxpayer is unlikely to fork out for people to spend weeks in the countryside taking the air, or lying outside in a Swiss sanatorium.

Into this gap has stepped spas, spa hotels and travel companies offering medical breaks, providing places to rest and recuperate for those who can afford it.

Melanie Walker booked herself

into a spa for a week after having treatment for breast cancer and described her stay there as a necessity to counteract the shock and pain of her diagnosis and treatment. The treatment had left her body depleted and weak. "That time allowed me to process what had happened and to recognise that my body needed rest and nourishment to begin to heal itself," she says. "It enabled me to take things more slowly than I might otherwise have done when I went home."

THIS IS PERHAPS WHAT COVID-19 has reminded us of. When I had pneumonia, my husband wondered what would have happened to me had I not been admitted to hospital and been injected with infection-fighting



antibiotics. The answer is that I might not have recovered at all, or that I would have had to sweat it out and been forced to take my time resting and recovering. Perhaps then I would not have succumbed to the secondary infection, which saw me back in hospital.

I can only speculate but, ask anyone who has been forced by

illness or surgery to slow down and take time out and they will tell you that, while the word *convalescence* may be almost obsolete, the concept still has an important part to play in the recovery process.

"The long and uncertain recovery time many COVID-19 patients face reminds us that patients are often not fully 'recovered' after being treated" "As an historian, I'm always wary of drawing contemporary lessons from very different historical contexts," says Anders. "But the long and uncertain recovery time that many COVID-19 patients have been facing certainly reminds us that patients are often not fully 'recovered' after being treated for an illness."

This needs to be kept in mind, he says, when considering the design of social supports, housing arrangements and labour conditions upon which the ability to convalesce may depend.



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Red-tailed black cockatoo, Kununurra, Western Australia

The Art of STUDYING BIRDS

ANIMAL KINGDOM

Growing up with bantams, this artist mastered drawing and painting birds through 'citizen science'

BY *Richard Weatherly* FROM **A BRUSH WITH BIRDS**

am not an ornithologist; I am not a specialist of any kind and have not really been trained for any of the pursuits I have followed during my life. Indeed, my mother argued that I was not even house trained.

At university I studied history – an excellent mind-trainer – but I did not pursue it. Somewhere I read that 'An eagle may soar, but a weasel is seldom sucked into jet engine.' I have not soared in any particular field, I have remained a generalist, eschewing the specialist training so beloved of the modern era. I am an interested naturalist.

A strong fascination with both science and art had completed matters. The discipline of science can inhibit creativity, whereas the creativity of art can be the impediment to sound science. But both seek answers, and search for a deeper truth.

If I were to paint wildlife, then it was imperative that I learn some science. I have worked with amateurs



Pencil study of a brown goshawk, originally drawn for a CSIRO publication

and experts, and each has increased my understanding. As a boy, one of my first paintings was of a little brown bird, identified by a neighbouring farmer who was one of many amateur naturalists who contributed brilliantly to the science of natural history. Increasingly these 'amateurs' were sidelined as science withdrew into professional institutions. But good science is based on good questions and good observations, and 'citizen scientists' are once more increasingly involved in research.

I was fortunate to learn from artists who emphasised the need to draw, to get to know and understand one's subject and its character, and to commit to memory its particular features. This instruction has been a blessing, training my visual memory and leading me to spend time in the field observing and learning. Digital photography and the internet allow an artist to copy a photograph, sometimes with amazing technical skill, but without subtlety or understanding, the result is a crow, but not 'crowmanship'.

Making art is a selfish pursuit, often done in isolation, with great concentration and occasional deprivation, but it brings great rewards, great friendships and extraordinary experiences and opportunities. These often lead to a story, sometimes a humorous one, and add to the joyful experience of what we regard as 'the wilds'.



Forest Flight. Crimson rosellas, Ottoway Ranges, Victoria

THE BANTAMS BELONGED TO MY SISTER. She had been given them by a benign uncle and she adored them. They were wily, wiry, diminutive chickens of enormous individual character. One was the soft and fluffy Grace, with a cascade of glorious golden hackles centred with black stripes on her nape. Her back was pencilled with the finest vermiculations, as though a bored telephonist had doodled restlessly with grey lead on each feather. The black feathers of her quirky little tail were arranged vertically, quite different to the horizontal tail-structure, and she was friendly and totally unafraid.

With her came two cockerels, clearly derived from the wild stock of Asia's red jungle fowl. They were fighting birds, each dressed in resplendent military uniform of glossy rich colours. Shining purples and greens glowed from nearblack feathers and were enhanced by gleaming bronze hackles and back feathers, russet epaulettes and golden wings.

It could be wrong to assume that these roosters were friends. One, who was presumptuously named Monsieur le Coq, was wily, lean and conniving. His rival, the arrogant Chanticleer (a name featured in *Aesop's Fables*



A banded stilt, a bird known to plunge its head deeply in water to search for food

and dating back to Chaucer's stories) seemed aware of his natural authority. In short, they loathed each other.

Two roosters and a hen. There were other hens, less memorable than the favourite, who was unimaginatively named 'Speckledy', rather than the traditional name of Chanticleer's mate, Pertilote. Speckledy had a problem: she would lay numerous eggs, but nothing could induce her to begin incubation until she had 21 gathered in her nest. It was as if she could count. As this large clutch required sitting alternate days on each half, since she could not cover them all, her hatching rate was disappointing to say the least. Nevertheless, there were constant gains in bantam numbers from other less fastidious hens and their numbers increased abruptly until a paternal decree: the feed bill was too great, so bantam numbers must diminish.

Natural attrition might have resolved the problem, but the bantams lived securely in a large fox-proof cage which was roofed with pig-netting. This netting had sufficiently wide apertures for a reasonably large bird to drop through, but prevented such immigrants from escaping, as they could not fly out with their wings spread.

The Art of Studying Birds

One day, a young Brown Goshawk slipped through this netting in pursuit of the bantams, but brave Monsieur le Coq launched a savage attack to protect his wives. Making good use



of his spurs, he had the goshawk on its back, battling for survival, while Chanticleer alerted all the world to the outbreak of hostilities. Before this duel could end, I intervened and rescued the goshawk. No bird can have such a fierce, penetrating stare as a goshawk. Never had I seen one so close and I found it fascinating. Holding it at arm's length by the carpal joints of each wing in my left hand, I set off to share my catch with my parents.

The chook yard was fenced, and featured a large, five-barred wooden

gate secured by a chain. This was simple to latch with one's left hand, but that hand was holding a wild bird. Stretching to reach the pin with the chain, my concentration wavered and - Whack! - the goshawk's rapier claws shot out and clawed my left eye. Fortunately, the powerful hind talon snagged on my cheekbone and its opposing front toe caught on my eyebrow, so my eye was protected.

But how to escape its

pulsating clutch? I dared not let it go lest it turn and attack my face with both feet. My left hand was occupied keeping it far enough away, now at its arm's length, to protect my right eye from its

other foot. Each time I tried to reach up and extricate myself from its grasp, it snatched my hand with its free foot. Eventually, I loosened its hind claw from my cheek and managed to make my way to the house, where I remember a family more interested in my welfare than in the goshawk.

Monsieur le Coq had triumphed. Sadly, flushed with his success he over-reached. He challenged Chanticleer and the challenge was accepted. There was a bitter fight to the death. Both birds were evenly matched and

> blood and feathers flew until each had lost; they both died.

> I am reminded of the words of an elderly station hand who was attempting to convince a young man from the Netherlands of the danger of snakes. "They eat each other, you know, Hans."

> "They vould not do that!"

"Yes, I put a couple in a box one day, and when I came back, they'd both gone."



This is an edited excerpt from the book A Brush With Birds by Richard Weatherly © 2020. Published by Hardy Grant Travel. Available now.



ou remember them as babies. You cherish the days when they were innocent, loving and eager for your hugs. Maybe that's why it's so hard to remember that your children are now teenagers or – where did the time go? – actual adults. Once a parent, always a parent.

And yet, as your children grow and evolve, so must your relationship with them. You need to be supportive but not intrusive; offer emotional support without being overly involved in their lives; and hope they make wise choices, while understanding that those choices are theirs to make.

The tips below can help you bond with your kids even though they're no longer children. And remember: this, too, is a matter of health for you. For nothing can break your heart as much as a strained or ruined relationship with your grown son or daughter. While nothing can make your heart soar as much as watching their lives prosper – and them wanting you to be an integral part of it.


SET A STANDING DINNER DATE There's something comforting and secure about the family gathered around the dinner table, perhaps because that tradition is rapidly disappearing. Yet the evening meal is often the one time of day when the family can gather in one place and reinforce their unity. So make dinner a family affair, even if you're sharing takeaways at the dinner table. You can use the opportunity to share the news of the day, make weekend plans, and enjoy one another's company.

As a bonus, research shows that adolescents who have dinner with their families at least several times a week are less likely to smoke and use drugs and tend to achieve higher grades.

BACK OFF, BUT STAY CLOSE "It's normal for teens to want to spend more time with friends than parents," says clinical psychologist and parenting expert Debbie Glasser. But don't take this as your cue that your job as a parent is diminished. Find ways to remain involved in your children's lives. For example, while your years of volunteering in the classroom may be over, you can still remain involved in your child's school by attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings.

While play dates are a thing of the

past, you can still get to know their friends by inviting them to the house. "Staying involved during these years may be more challenging now, but it's an important way to enhance your relationship with your child," says Glasser.

SHARE YOUR OWN FEELINGS WITH YOUR TEEN Of course, spare the intimate details of very personal subjects, but confiding that you, too, occasionally feel angry, insecure or awkward shows your teenager that you're not just a parent - you're human. Not only will your child feel closer to you, but he or she may feel safe enough to disclose uncomfortable issues when they arise.

RESPECT YOUR TEENS' PRIVACY Don't read their diaries, eavesdrop on phone calls or badger them with questions. If their behaviour is troubling you, address it directly, using five little words: "Can we talk about it?" Some examples: "I've smelled smoke when you walk into the room several times now. Have you been smoking? Can we talk about it?" Or, "You seem very quiet lately, and I'm worried about you. Can we talk about it?"

SEEK THEIR OPINIONS Teenagers have opinions about, well, everything, and they aren't shy about sharing them, says Glasser. So allow them to make more independent decisions. For instance, let them decide when and where to study, what to wear, what after-school activity to pursue, what sports team to join.

However, keep in mind that some decisions are non-negotiable. "Parents need to set limits that protect their child's health, safety and wellbeing – at every age," says Glasser. These might include curfews, decisions about drinking and sexual activity, issues around grades and university. Still, find opportunities to solicit your teens' opinions when you can. Promise not to make decisions without considering their perspective and preferences.

TRUST YOUR CHILDREN TO MAKE SMART CHOICES Of course, they'll make the wrong ones occasionally. But, give them the chance to figure out solutions to problems on their own, without interference, especially if they're over 18. After all, didn't you want the same from your parents when you were their age?

CALL BEFORE YOU DROP BY If you have adult children, call them before you visit, unless it's absolutely necessary. If you're the parent of a teen or an adult child living at home, knock before you enter her room. ACCEPT THEIR HOLIDAY ABSENCES WITH GRACE Yes, you may be disappointed that your children – and their children – spend some holidays without you. But don't nag or complain about it. You may win a battle over which inlaw's house they visit at times, but you may lose your child's respect – and a strong, enduring relationship.

WHEN YOU CATCH YOUR-SELF ABOUT TO SAY, "IF I WERE YOU ... " Change the subject or leave the room for a few minutes to collect yourself. Your reward: a closer relationship with your child who appreciates that you respect his or her autonomy.

10 THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU VALUE IN YOUR OTHER RELATIONSHIPS It's a good bet that trust, respect and attention top the list, along with shared good times and unconditional acceptance. There you have it: the recipe for the perfect parent-child relationship.

STATE YOUR VIEWS, THEN INVITE REACTION "Does that seem fair to you? Can you think of a better way to deal with this? What would you do in my position?" It's easy for a teen to be unreasonable if you take on the burden of reasonableness all by yourself. Share it and they'll find it harder to

Building Better Parent-Child Bonds

dismiss your position. Plus, you're more likely to find middle ground you both accept.

12 BE THERE WHEN THEY NEED YOU, RATHER THAN WHEN YOU WANT TO BE A lifetime of love and respect will ensue if you are reliably around whenever a reasonable request is made of you.

BE HONEST Many parents offer praise when they shouldn't, as well as when they should. That just undermines trust. We've all heard, "When you haven't got anything nice to say... " But in fact, if both your praise and criticism are heartfelt and valid, your child will learn to trust you.

14 CULTIVATE LOVE, BUT DEMAND RESPECT Don't try so hard to be your child's friend that you fail to set limits. Protect your own integrity and earn respect. You can be friends long after your child is grown as long as you are the parent first.

15 ACKNOWLEDGE THINGS HAVE CHANGED SINCE YOU WERE THEIR AGE And they have. Music, clothes, technology, language, educational methods, the job market, even sexual attitudes have evolved significantly in recent years. And the speed of change is only accelerating. You cannot keep up with it all, nor should you. But you do need to strike a balance: don't live in the past, but don't try to bluff that you know exactly what's going on among teens today either.

The middle ground is to live in the present, but your grown-up present. That includes being abreast of the internet, mobile phones and the economy. Your kids will respect you if you are contemporary in a mature way, and don't base your observations of their lives on a past irrelevant to them.

16 LIVE YOUR PRIORITIES Your children should be among your priorities, but should not replace them. If you lose yourself in the process of indulging your kids, they will likely grow bigger egos than is healthy for them or you, and belittle the value of your life.

DECODE YOUR CHILD'S 'LOVE LANGUAGE' While you may love your children dearly, they may not understand the ways you show your love - and you may not understand the ways they're best able to receive it. Some children need lots of hugs; others may not be as touchy-feely. Some children want you to spend time with them, while others need lots of independence. The next time you spend time with your child, pay attention to the cues he or she sends so you can better interpret the way your child needs to be loved. R

WHO KNFW?

Facts About **Dictionalies** From dropped words to fake definitions discover

From dropped words to fake definitions, discover more about our most useful language resource

BY Meghan Jones

The first-ever dictionary

The earliest single-language dictionary in the English language was known as *A Table Alphabeticall*. Produced by Robert Cawdrey in 1604, it contained around 3000 words. It didn't give definitions so much as synonyms; the author's purpose, he wrote, was to introduce more complicated words to "ladies, gentlewomen, or any other unskillful persons", so they could better understand scriptures and sermons.

The word with the most meanings

You might be surprised to learn that the most 'complicated' word in English – the word with the largest number of separate definitions – is a

Fascinating Facts About Dictionaries

three-letter word. Although *set* held the title in the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, published in 1989, with 430 separate definitions, in more recent times it has been outrun by a competitor. According to the editors, the word *run* has now amassed 645 separate meanings for the verb form alone. It's amazing to think that a three-letter word can carry so much meaning.

The longest word is a joke

Move over. antidisestablishmentarianism. The longest English word that generally appears in dictionaries is pneumonoultramicroscopicsili*covolcanoconiosis*, the name of a lung disease. It has 45 letters. According to Lexico, this word was actually created to poke fun at long, overly technical medical terms. But the mastermind behind the word hadn't seen anything yet. Another, much longer word is actually considered the longest in English with 189,819 letters - and it's another scientific term. It's the name for a protein nicknamed 'titin'. It would take a full 12 pages to write the word in full, so, understandably, dictionaries choose to omit it.

Less-long longest words

Yes, the 28-letter antidisestablishmentarianism does get a title of its own. It's considered the longest 'noncoined, non-technical' word in most dictionaries. Admittedly, it's not in common usage today, as it was created to refer to the Church of England in the 19th century. But another word deserves a shout-out. According to Grammarly, *incomprehensibilities*, at 21 letters, has been named the longest word 'in common usage'.

A murderer was a contributor to the first Oxford English Dictionary

This is one of the quirkier tales about the creation of the dictionary. William Chester Minor was an American army surgeon and US Civil War veteran who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia following the war. He moved to England but had repeated nightmares of an intruder in his room. One night in 1872, Minor shot at what he was sure was an intruder - it turned out to be an innocent passer-by, and Minor had killed him. Minor confessed to the murder, explained what made him do it, and was committed to the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

While imprisoned at the asylum, Minor started contributing to the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s mail-in volunteer system, sending in words to the dictionary's editor, James Murray. Murray found that Minor, whom he did not know was in an asylum, was one of the most prolific and by far one of the most valuable contributors. The two men would eventually meet almost 20 years after the start of their correspondence.

Lots of new words are added every year

At the end of every year, you'll probably see a few lists of the funniest, most surprising, and slang words that get added to dictionaries. But such lists contain only a hand-picked few of the 500 to 2000 words added to dictionaries annually. For instance, in 2019, the online *Oxford English Dictionary* added 650 words from September to December. Of course, such additions are offset by dictionary words that go extinct, for better or worse.

The dictionary included a 'fake' word for five years ...

Dictionary editors are only human, so they do make mistakes. Perhaps the most famous dictionary error of all time is *dord*. While editors were compiling words for the 1934 *Webster's New International Dictionary*, a card for an abbreviation accidentally ended up in the pile of word cards. The abbreviation was 'D or d', a capital or lowercase D short for 'density'. But since it ended up in the word pile, it was printed in the dictionary as 'Dord', meaning 'density'. Little harm was done as no one noticed the error for five years.

... and was missing a 'real' word for 50

If it seems like it'd be virtually impossible for dictionary editors to remember every single solitary word, you are correct. The first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary was originally published in 'fascicles', or bound instalments, between 1884 and 1928. In a fascicle published in 1888, it was missing the word bondmaid - and it was forgotten for another 50 years. An old-fashioned (even then) term for an enslaved woman, bondmaid had been in common use in the 16th century and was derived from a Biblical translation. You might find it remarkable that it took until 1933, when a one-volume supplement of the dictionary was published, for the word to finally appear.

Poems complicate things

In addition to the famous Dord, there are quite a few other fake words that have ended up in the dictionary. A couple of these were derived from poems. One such word, which appeared in Richard Paul Jodrell's *Philology on the English Language* in 1820, was *phantomnation*. While it sounds like the loyal fan base of some sort of ghost creature, it's actually a word that comes from the epic poem *The Odyssey*. Odysseus travels to the Underworld and makes offerings to 'the phantom-nations of the dead'.

The most misused word?

Of all the words that have been mixed up with other words and had their meanings diluted over

Fascinating Facts About Dictionaries

time, dictionary.com has declared one the most abused of all. Any guesses? It's *ironic*. Its argument is that in some countries, the word is almost never used correctly. You'll often hear it used to mean something that is funny, coincidental or unexpected.

However the real meaning, according to the *Macquarie Dictionary*, is: "a figure of speech or literary device in which the literal meaning is the opposite of that intended ... employed in ridicule or merely playfully."

Noah Webster and the reason we have British v American spellings

'Color' and 'colour'. 'Catalog' and 'catalogue'. 'Center' and 'centre'. Why are there variations between British and American spelling?

Well, shortly after the Revolutionary War, the very pro-independence Noah Webster was adamant that America, officially its own country, should have a distinct way of spelling from the British. He thought many British spellings were overly pedantic and stuffed with superfluous letters. So he wrote an essay in 1789 arguing that Americans were downright treasonous if they weren't totally on board with spelling reform.

Years later, in 1806, he published A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language, which featured many of the Americanised spellings used today.

However, not all of Webster's proposed changes became reality. According to Vox, he wanted Americans to spell tongue as 'tung'.

The least popular letter

The letter that starts the fewest words in English is not particularly surprising: X. It still starts a good 400 words in the current Oxford English Dictionary. But when good old Noah Webster first produced his Compendious Dictionary of the English Language, the number of listed words beginning with X was a grand total of one. It was, of all things, xebec, which describes a three-masted vessel of the Mediterranean.

Undercover Investigation

Brazilian Senator Chico Rodrigues was caught in a police raid with money hidden in his underwear, amid an investigation into the misuse of COVID-19 response funding. Police video allegedly showed Rodrigues with Brazilian reais banknotes worth about \$5800 stuffed into his briefs during their search of his home. The politician was suspended while investigations continue. CNN

ENVIRONMENT

John Garcia (left) with trackers displaying how they communicate using silent hand signals while searching for poachers

POORIES VER

Dogs are four-legged game-changers in the

SUS POACHERS

struggle to save Africa's endangered wildlife

ight years ago, a family holiday to Africa changed John Garcia's life. At the time he was a 21 year old with no definite career plan. "We had a two-week holiday in Kenya, Zambia and Tanzania, places I never imagined I'd

ever get to," he says. "It was incredible; it was all the things we'd seen on *National Geographic* and *Animal Planet*. It really took my breath away."

An interest was sparked, which turned to a firm sense of purpose as John learnt about Africa's critical problem with wildlife poaching, which threatens to drive many iconic species into extinction. "I started to ask questions about what was going on, and what I found out tore me apart," he says. The more articles he read, the more he knew he had to be part of solving this problem.

For John, that meant taking on poachers in the African bush – a daunting and dangerous task. To gain the skills, he enlisted in the military, serving until honourably discharged in 2017 after an injury. Within a month, he was in Africa. That first year John worked across Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa getting to know the environment, the deeper issues in each country, who was doing a good job and who wasn't and why; basically everything he needed to know to coordinate his own wildlife protection organisation. "I wanted to learn as much as I could and make as many connections as I could."

In July 2017 John formed Soldiers For Wildlife (SFW), which has been protecting Katungwi Conservancy, 20,000 hectares near Kafue National Park in one of Zambia's most poached regions. SFW expects to be operating in Botswana soon. Although several key SFW people are ex-military, the name was chosen to honour the frontline nature of the high-risk work done by local indigenous rangers, at the business end of stopping poachers.

"The more people I met out there, the more I realised how much they sacrifice defending our world's heritage, and losing their lives occasionally doing it," John says.

THE KATUNGWI AREA has long since lost its rhinos, and John estimates elephants could vanish locally in two years if poaching isn't addressed. Currently there are an estimated 10,000 poachers in and around the national park where SFW operates. "That's a lot of guys killing a lot of animals," John says, and wildlife numbers are decreasing steeply.

No wonder, then, he's keen to adopt a relatively recent – and very effective – initiative: dogs trained in multiple counter-poaching roles.

The dogs best suited for this complex and arduous work are Belgian Malinois, a breed known for its high



Dogs can alert trackers to the presence of a poacher up to one kilometre away

energy levels and intelligence. However, SFW lacked the funding to purchase the dogs.

That's where Dogs4Wildlife stepped in. A UK-based non-profit outfit, Dogs4Wildlife trains and supplies dogs for anti-poaching programmes globally. Four of its puppies, born in June 2020, will join SFW in Africa as John's first canine recruits in mid-2021, once they have completed months of training in the UK. Preparation is so thorough it includes time at a zoo, ensuring the pups arrive well versed in the sight and scent of the species of African animals that they'll encounter.

An average human tracker can track at a walking pace, but a dog can track at a fast walk or running pace. This decreases the time needed to locate a poacher, making it less likely that they can get away. On a routine patrol, these dogs can smell human sweat and body odour that is up to three hours old.

Dogs are especially useful on nocturnal patrols, negating the advantage poachers have under the cover of darkness. "[For humans] tracking at night is close to impossible," John says. "Sometimes we've got lucky, catching fires that poachers light up, but you don't want to use a light because that's just giving them room to escape."

Dogs can track in pitch black, leading trackers at a fast walk or run.

Racing about the African bush in the dark carries other risks apart from armed poachers. John says that SFW also utilises drones to let



The puppies undergo extensive training to turn them into crack anti-poaching dogs

patrollers know if they're approaching elephants, buffalo or a pride of lions – "the last animals they want to run into in the middle of the night."

On patrol, the rangers proceed entirely according to the dog's reactions; they don't even need to look at the ground.

The dog stays within reach of its handler who follows at a slow run or jogging pace. "If the dog loses the scent it will stop, and you do a semi-circle to find out where the tracks are and to see whether the dog can pick up the scent again."

The dogs are taught to sit when it senses a poacher up ahead, as a signal to its handler. In response, the handler will move up and stand beside the dog. Then, the dog will start barking ferociously, at which point the poacher will usually run, only to have the handler release the dog which will chase and catch the poacher with an immobilising bite-grip on an arm, then drag him to the ground. Then the game scout and ranger will order the dog off the poacher and place him under arrest.

Generally, the poachers are so shaken by the dog's controlled attack, that they don't shoot. "But if they do, we pray to God they miss," says John.

"That's a risk we take chasing poachers, the dogs as well as us." Simply having dogs as part of wildlife protection is beneficial. Word spreads throughout various communities and this tends to act as an immediate deterrent.

Dogs trained in a single skill, such as scent detection, tracking or apprehension, have long been an anti-poaching resource, but the use of dual- and triple-role dogs - introduced in Kenya seven years ago - is still in its infancy.

Expense is a big obstacle for SFW's plans to maintain dogs in the field. Training a single dog can cost as much as US\$12,000 and since the outbreak of COVID-19, fundraising has been badly affected. The pandemic has also seen poaching increase in Africa, with lost tourist revenue crippling both conservation funding and tourismdependent livelihoods.

THE POACHERS SFW **OPPOSES** have come in two main types. Some target elephants for tusks, which are sold to make ivory ornaments and jewellery. On average, 96 elephants are poached every day in Africa

and about 70 per cent of the ivory is sold illegally in China, despite being banned there in 2018. The illegal ivory trade is operated by criminal syndicates and their poachers are more likely to be violent, willing to shoot at rangers and game scouts.

Other poachers hunt bushmeat - any wild animal killed for food which affects some 500 African species and is sold domestically. "Bushmeat's a big problem because once you wipe out prey species you lose predator species and the whole ecosystem falls apart," says John.

Bushmeat poachers typically work in small groups and carry high-calibre rifles. Sometimes they camp out for a week, killing as much wildlife as they can. They cut up the animals on site and load the meat onto the back of their bicycles. John says these poachers can take ten to 20 animals at a time. The illegal bushmeat trade is more than a major threat to wildlife survival. It's also a deadly health hazard. linked to the transmission of Ebola, HIV/AIDS, SARS and anthrax.

> One ray of hope for Africa's wildlife is the close bond SFW has forged with local people. "The community has become our first radar. They usually know who's not supposed to be there and who the suspects are." Anoth-

er advantage is that some of John's game scouts are former bushmeat poachers, who know how poachers think and operate. Unswerving dedication, strong community ties, helping poachers switch sides - it sounds like a formula for success, or at least hope.

And soon, enhanced by a crack squad of canine wildlife warriors, John's passion for protecting Africa's big game could stand its best chance yet of being a winning game. R





PARIS NO SIGN OF STOPPING!

The lack of stop signs in the French capital is because of traffic laws... and a possible stop sign heist

BY Meghan Jones

hether you're close to home or far away, it's always a little nerve-wracking to drive in a big city. Navigating the sea of cars, one-way streets and traffic lights can be stressful, even if you're a seasoned city driver. Take Paris, for instance. The City of Lights is famous for its chaotic roads, including the Champs-Élysées, a massive eightlane thoroughfare without a median

strip, and the *Étoile*, or star, an enormous roundabout circling the Arc de Triomphe that connects no fewer than 12 separate roads. Even cruising on the River Seine can be chaotic. You'd think stop signs would be a necessity – and yet the city doesn't have a single one.

In Paris, cars don't come to a full stop at any intersection without a traffic light. Cars on the right have the right of way, at both regular



READER'S DIGEST

intersections and on roundabouts. While there are plenty of traffic signs in Paris, red octagons are not among them.

Paris hasn't always been a stop-sign-free metropolis, though. According to a Paris police report, the city did have a stop sign at one point. Yes, just one – a single

red octagon reading 'STOP' stood at the exit of a construction facility. In case you're wondering why a French sign said 'stop', *stop* is "considered a valid French word, borrowed from English." Yes, the only stop sign in the city was basically at the exit of a glorified driveway.

It was situated on the Quai Saint-Exupéry, a riverside road in Paris's 16th *arrondissement* (district). And despite this sign's unique claim to fame, it seems that no one paid much attention to it – until it suddenly vanished. Sometime between May 2012 and September 2014, the



The sole stop sign in Paris before it mysteriously disappeared some years ago

stop sign disappeared right off the post that held it, and it hasn't been returned. Whether it was an authorised removal or the work of a thief, we can only guess.

There may not be stop signs, but plenty of other signs keep the Parisian streets from devolving into chaos. One of the most common is the red circle with the line through it, meaning 'Do Not Enter' which indicates a one-way street. There are plenty of 'No Left Turn' signs as well, just like the one that stood next to the stop sign. Basically, if you ever find yourself behind the wheel in Paris, drive carefully.

Precious Painting Found in Bin

A painting by French surrealist Yves Tanguy, worth more than a quarter of a million dollars, was left behind by a businessman at Düsseldorf International Airport and recovered from a nearby recycling bin. The businessman, whose identity was not given, accidentally left the painting wrapped in cardboard at a check-in counter as he boarded a flight from the German city to Tel Aviv, according to police. AP





More Than Meets the Eye

The silence of the man on the plane taught this writer a crucial lesson

BY Mohan Sivanand

He must have had that nice window seat all the way from London. He looked under 40, medium height, slim and wore a blazer. It was October 2003 when I boarded the Emirates flight in Dubai and found that I had the aisle seat next to him. I attempted a smile as I sat down but his blank, distant look made me stop mid-smile. *One of those*, I thought.

Each time I take a flight, I try to chat with the passenger next to me. Most people are responsive when they're alone at 12,000 metres. Only those few, who barely even nod, make me keep to myself. So flying has helped me get to know perfect strangers. To a journalist, this could be the seed of an unexpected story or simply a chance to hear something different. In any case, with good company above the clouds, time flies.

In recent times I've flown while

seated next to a young agricultural banker and a financial consultant. I've had conversations with a medical engineer from Germany who holds patents on heart transplants,

an event manager from Paris, and a Mumbai grandmother on holiday. One time, I even flew with a couple of Iranian soldiers returning from Europe. You never know who you'll meet next, and they're usually interesting once you've broken the ice.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHO YOU'LL MEET NEXT, AND THEY'RE USUALLY INTERESTING

But the man wearing the blazer on my left, on that three-hour-long Dubai-Mumbai flight, was a puzzle. I glanced his way a couple of times but he just looked through me. *What do you lose if you just smiled at a fellow human being*? I wondered. Most of the time, he stared fixedly at the seat in front of him. *Why are some people so full of themselves*?

When the stewardess brought lunch, the unfriendly man had his eyes shut. She gave me a should-I-

> wake-him-up look. I didn't say anything, and he didn't get his lunch.

Serves him right.

He soon woke up and saw me eat. But he didn't ask for his meal. He could just have pressed a but-

ton. That's his problem.

WE STILL HAVE ALMOST TWO HOURS of flying time left. I read a magazine, I try to play a video game, I listen to music. He does nothing.

At times our eyes meet, but he

isn't all there. He's like no other passenger I've ever sat next to. By the time our jet lands in Mumbai, I find his presence almost uncomfortable.

As we taxi down the runway, the intercom doles out the usual closing messages. It ends with a request to keep all mobile phones switched off a little longer.

That's when I hear the man speak for the first time – on his mobile phone. The cheek! He seems to be discussing his connecting flight. About somebody receiving him ... it all sounds like some special arrangements.

I have half a mind to tell him to shut up and switch it off.

Just before the aircraft comes to a halt, he's the first to stand up. "Excuse me," he says to me. "May I leave? I can't miss my connecting flight."

Hmm ...! I get up to make way for him when he goes on mechanically:

"My wife and child died in a road accident in Delhi."

"Oh?" I exclaim inadequately. "I'm so sorry."

As I see the man rushing out before the other passengers could block the aisle, I'm shell-shocked by the revelation. Suddenly, everything falls into place. The tables have turned. I'm the bad guy for having judged him so hastily – and so wrongly.

I could have spoken first.

Despite his terrible loss and the torment he has been enduring, he was calm, controlled and dignified throughout. And, maybe, in the midst of his soul-crushing sorrow, he didn't want to burden a stranger with his pain.

That was a brave man, a fellow traveller from whom I learnt an invaluable lesson: to look beyond the façade and to never assume anything until you have walked in another person's shoes.

Platypus Whisperer

It may be known for being an elusive animal, yet in the heart of a capital city, one man has developed a special bond with a platypus. Nature-loving Hobart man Pete Walsh helped one of the city's semi-aquatic mammals free itself from plastic netting and industrial waste. Now, whenever the citizen scientist visits the creek, at least three times a week, the female platypus swims straight up to him, wiggles her bill around in the air, and climbs up on the rock to take a good look at him. ABC.NET.AU

READER'S DIGEST



Humour on the Job



Colt Following

During recess, I sat on the bench with my first-grade girls as they whiled away the time playing with my long ponytail.

"Mrs Rudiak, you are so beautiful!" one of them said. She then followed with the ultimate compliment: "You look just like a horse."

SUBMITTED BY LINDA RHODE-RUDIAK

Fall Guy

We have a team member called Jimmy who has a habit of writing

rude, dismissive messages to difficult customers. If they complain about Jimmy, we apologise and say he's been fired. Of course, Jimmy is totally made up. @WORKI_LEAKS

Pray Be Seated

My dad, a pastor, was attending a national church convention when a woman pointed to an empty seat and asked, "Is this seat saved?"

Dad replied, "No, but we're praying for it."

SUBMITTED BY CHERYL STRICKLAND

All In a Day's Work

Strip Lighting

"I had just hired a young man for my office. It was his first day on the job, and in his first hour one of the fluorescent lights went out. I asked him if he wouldn't mind changing it, and of course, he didn't. He hopped up on a desk, switched the bulb, then promptly jumped down.

"It was as he landed that the seam of his pants blew out. *'KRRSCHW!'* He looked mortified at the sound of tearing fabric. I, ever the professional, cracked up. With tears in my eyes I told him to go to the bathroom, take off his pants and give them to me.

"I sewed up the seam for him. Could you imagine having your new boss sew up your pants on your first day of a new job? I knew from that moment on that he was going to be a great employee."

> MELISSA HILL, AUTHOR, HONEYBEEPUBLISHING.COM

Advanced Capacity

It's a problem that the machine I use to do my work also has a function where you can shop for a new doona cover for three hours. @CAITIEDELANEY

Not-So-Bright Future

The little girl I babysit asked if I have a boyfriend. I said, "Not anymore."

"Boyfriends are a waste of time," she told me.

Then she turned to her brother and told him, "You're going to be a waste of time." @ITSMADIMAY



LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Teachers share the funniest things their students have said:

★ I wrote this on the whiteboard during discussion,
"William Shakespeare (1564-1616)," and a student asked me,
"Is that Shakespeare's real phone number?"

★ I once overheard a student say, "I used to write my name in cursive. Now I just write it in English."

★ I commented in class that if your parents have glasses, then you will probably end up having to get glasses, too. One of my students yelled out, "Oh no! My mum has glasses! Oh, wait. I'm adopted!"

weareteachers.com

Winter ROYA

Every now and then, you come across a wild animal that appears to seek human company

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY Megan Lorenz



The Canada lynx takes a last look at Megan before disappearing into the forest for the night n March 2018, I got a call from some friends in northern Ontario, Canada: "There's a female lynx on our property," they told me. I'm a professional wildlife photographer and they knew I'd want to come and take a look. I dropped everything, packed my bags and was out the door by 4am the next morning. My friends lived the better part of a day's drive from my home in Toronto, but this was a once-in-alifetime opportunity. Canada lynx are not endangered but are typically elusive and secretive. I hoped this one would still be there when I arrived.

I became a wildlife photographer about 15 year ago, and although it has become my passion, it came about out of necessity. I had always had a love for animals – pets and wildlife – despite having grown up in the city, and so I got a job working in a veterinarian's office as an emergency nurse. I loved photography, too, and did pet portraits. But unfortunately, asthma eventually forced me to quit these indoor pursuits, after I ended up in emergency due to attacks so severe I had to be put on life support.

Becoming a wildlife photographer allowed me to pursue my passion for animals and photography while keeping safely away from the asthma-inducing animals and spending more time in a clean-air, outdoor environment.

As I got out of the car, my friend

gestured towards a nearby snowbank – and there was the Canada lynx, sitting and watching me closely but without any apparent fear. I stood frozen in place, worried that I would spook her. Then, when the shock wore off, I realised this might be my only time seeing a Canada lynx up close. So I pulled my camera from the car and started taking photographs. She stayed around until dusk, and then she wandered into the dense forest and disappeared into the night.

When I awoke the next morning, I looked out my bedroom window and saw her curled up, sleeping on a dug-out bed she'd made in the snow. She stayed for a few hours, disappeared for a while, and then came back in the afternoon to sit underneath the bird feeder, waiting for unsuspecting birds and squirrels.

Winter Royalty

Top: The lynx checking what's behind her after hearing Megan on the crunchy snow. Bottom: Sneaking a peek while sitting behind Megan's chair

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READER'S DIGEST

The lynx intently watching birds

96 MARCH 2021

This almost daily routine lasted for weeks, and I had many chances to photograph her. She became accustomed to my presence and I maintained my distance, allowing her to choose a proximity that was comfortable to her. I decided that I would never follow her into the woods, because when she was ready to move on, I wanted her to be able to do so without feeling pursued. This

was a hard decision as I would have loved to see where she went and have a chance to photograph her in different settings, but it was important that she trusted me and felt safe.

During my time at my friend's house up

north, I spent many hours watching the lynx sleep, sometimes from my chair outside the house, when the only movement was an occasional stretch, or flick of her ear. Occasionally, I was able to watch her hunt, groom herself, or walk around the areas bordering the forest. One day, I returned from a walk in the woods to find her sitting right underneath my chair.

But what's even better than seeing one Canada lynx in the wild? Seeing two! One day that March, I saw a different lynx on the driveway. The newcomer left very quickly, obviously not comfortable with my presence. But the next day, I was watching the first lynx sleep when I saw movement in the bush. The other lynx came out into the open and walked up and sniffed the female. At this point, I was sure the new one was a visiting male. The female raised her head but didn't get up, and the male gave up and walked away. The sounds of them calling to each other were haunting and beautiful, and could be heard often.

> I visited my friends' home frequently over the winter and last saw the female in early May. There had been the sound of lynx screaming the night before – previously, I'd only heard those sounds in online videos. It's purely a guess,

but I think yet another male lynx was in the area and drove the pair away.

It was difficult knowing that my time with her was now over, and I never expected to be that lucky again. It was impossible not to worry about her safety after spending so much time with her. I felt that we had shared a special bond, and while I was grateful for the time I'd had with the lynx, it led to a feeling of loss when she left.

Then, after Christmas in 2018, I received another text from my friend telling me that the female was back again, arriving much earlier than she had the previous winter. How could

WHAT'S EVEN BETTER THAN SEEING ONE CANADA LYNX IN THE WILD? SEEING TWO

Top: Taking a long stretch after rising from a nap. Bottom: Looking at Megan's camera

in and the start is

I be this lucky? This time, the Canada lynx visited the area for more than four months, and much of my winter was spent up there. Sometimes she'd be gone for a few days, but more often than not she would be in one of

her favourite spots when I woke up each morning.

Every now and then, you come across an animal that doesn't follow the expected behaviour of its species – and I'm not referring to habituated animals that have learned to beg for food.

Some wild animals appear to develop a bond with a specific person or people they have chosen, while avoiding others. Canada lynx are commonly thought to be elusive and secretive, but that hasn't been my experience. I can't explain the behaviour of this particular lynx, but I'm lucky to have witnessed it.

Although I wasn't home much

I CAN'T EXPLAIN THE BEHAVIOUR OF THIS LYNX, BUT I'M LUCKY TO HAVE WITNESSED IT

over those winters, I was exactly where I wanted to be: in the company of my friends and this very special lynx, and exploring the outdoors.

I enjoyed every minute of it, including some intense snowstorms and temperatures that, with the

wind chill, occasionally hit -50°C. It was the experience of a lifetime that included moments I will always treasure.

Almost Good Enough to Eat

⊗ ⊗ ⊗

Conservators at the National Library of Australia have unearthed one of the world's oldest boxes of chocolates, dating back 120 years to the time of the Boer War. The souvenir chocolate tin was discovered at the bottom of a box of personal papers from the estate of Australian bush poet Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson. Remarkably, the chocolates – which were commissioned by Queen Victoria to provide comfort to Boer War troops at the turn of a new century – were not only intact after more than a century, but still looked almost good enough to eat. Although intended only for troops, the commemorative chocolate tins became hot items of trade at the front.

ABC.NET.AU

Indonesia's SNAKEBIE Doctor



One woman leads the way in stopping snakebite from killing and mutilating thousands in Indonesia. Meet Maha, the snakebite doctor

> BY Yao-Hua Law FROM MOSAIC



The white-lipped pit viper is a venomous species endemic to Southeast Asia he evening that a snake bit Mahfudin was one like any other. The sun had set behind Mount Lawu, to the west of Mahfudin's village in Central Java, Indonesia. Crickets chirped in the hedges. Goats bleated in a shed. An uneven path lit by two dim lamps led to Mahfudin's house: bare bricks and plywood on brown hardened earth, topped

by a roof of dried palm leaves. He'd built that house, and when he could afford it, he would paint the walls and tile the floor.

That evening in December 2017, orchards and bamboo thickets melded into a shapeless black shroud around the house. Mahfudin's fiveyear-old nephew was crying in the living room. *A biscuit from the shops would cheer the boy up*, Mahfudin thought. He walked out the door, stepped on something soft, then jumped back in a jolt of pain. He slammed the door and looked down at the two puncture holes on his left ankle. "A snake bit me!" he shouted.

Blood oozed from his wound. Mahfudin panicked. He had seen snakes around, and other villagers had been bitten. He tied a T-shirt tightly around his leg above the ankle, just like he'd seen in a movie.

Soon Mahfudin was vomiting blood, and then he passed out. His uncle got him to a nearby community clinic. There was just one nurse on duty and she didn't know what to do. So she cut small incisions on the bite wound hoping it would release some of the venom – then referred him to the larger district hospital.

By the third day, Mahfudin was bleeding from every orifice. His faeces and urine ran red. The doctors were as bewildered as the nurse – nothing they did worked. That's when they called her: Maha, the snakebite doctor.

MAHA OF KEDIRI

Tri Maharani – popularly known as Maha – grew up in Kediri, a city in East Java. Her family lived in a simple house on a street of shops. Her father and mother – a military officer and nurse, respectively – couldn't afford luxuries. At 28, she qualified as a doctor and left Kediri. Over the next 20 years, Maha moved between hospitals and universities. She specialised in emergency medicine and completed a PhD in biomedical science, which she'd sold her land to fund.

Indonesia's Snakebite Doctor

Maha had envisioned a career tackling infectious or cardiovascular diseases. But her life pivoted in 2012 when she attended a snakebite envenomation seminar given by Professor Ahmad Khaldun, a Malaysian emergency medicine specialist. What she heard shocked her.

Worldwide, about 93 million people live near venomous snakes in rural areas with little access to healthcare. Up

to 2.7 million people a year are envenomed by snakes – with about 100,000 dying and many more being maimed. Most victims are people like Mahfudin who work on farms or near forests. But divers and hikers get bitten too, as do people in cities who keep, study or perform with snakes.

In Indonesia alone, snakebites run to the

tens of thousands. The country is home to 270 million people and over 70 species of venomous snake. Almost a third of Indonesian jobs are in agriculture, where snake encounters are common.

Yet what shook Maha in that seminar was that everything she had learned about snakebite treatment in medical school was wrong. When Mahfudin tied a T-shirt round his leg, he thought it would slow the blood flow and stop the venom being carried to his heart. He didn't know that snake venom is a cocktail of toxins, many of which are too large to penetrate our blood vessels. Or that the toxins can enter the lymphatic vessels and move around the body through these instead. Mahfudin's makeshift tourniquet wouldn't have stopped the venom, but would deprive his foot of oxygenated blood – a costly mistake

that has forced many doctors to amputate gangrenous limbs. When the panicked community clinic nurse cut into Mahfudin's wound, she wasn't to know she was actually aggravating the bleeding and leaving Mahfudin at risk of infection.

Who knows how many snakebite patients we have killed with the wrong pro-

cedures, thought Maha. From that point in her career, unable to stomach more mistakes and encouraged by Professor Khaldun, Maha focused on snakebite management in Indonesia, learning the correct treatments through courses and workshops in Malaysia, Thailand and Australia.

It is shockingly rare to find people who know how to treat snakebite correctly – and those that do often don't have the means to do so. Fatalities



sometimes trigger a public outcry, but the concern is otherwise sidelined. Snakebite is so common it's a fact of life in low- and middle-income countries like Indonesia, India and Mozambique – yet crucially, it isn't a problem that generally concerns the high-income world.

That's why, in 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) listed snakebite envenomation as a prior-

ity neglected tropical disease. And in May 2019, the WHO launched a roadmap aiming to halve the number of deaths and disabilities caused by snakebite by 2030. The document was drafted and reviewed by a nominated 28-person working group containing just one Indonesian: Maha.

MAHFUDIN NEEDED AN ANTIVENOM FROM THAILAND, BUT MAHA HAD NONE TO GIVE HIM

flash of green Mahfudin had seen after he felt the bite signalled a green pit viper, either *Trimeresurus albolabris* or *T. insularis*, species native to Java that cause systemic haemorrhage. If so, Mahfudin needed an antivenom made by the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute (QSMI) in Thailand.

But Maha had none – the antivenom is not registered or stocked in Indonesia – and QSMI couldn't deliver some

in time. Maha was desperate. She fired off messages and calls to anyone who might have green pit viper antivenom. Finally, she heard from another Indonesia snake expert who had some, albeit 11 years expired.

Having friends who work with snakes is one of Maha's strongest weapons in her fight against snake-

FOUR DAYS AFTER HE WAS BITTEN, Mahfudin was transferred to Dungus Lung Hospital in Madiun, where Maha was working at the time. His skin was bluish, streaked with blood both old and fresh.

Venom was destroying the tissues of Mahfudin's body, and could only be neutralised by an antivenom. But first, Maha needed to know what species of snake had bitten the man dying before her. She had a clue: the bite. She is always roping more people into snakebite management – "I must show them that snakebite victims can be saved" – and she never shies away from reaching out to those who deal with snakes. Her network has grown out of necessity.

When she first looked for official snakebite numbers in Indonesia, she found none. The country doesn't register deaths from snakebite. So she began asking doctors across Indonesia for snakebite cases. Few responded, likely because they didn't know Maha and because snakebite wasn't a priority. But as Maha expanded her network by giving talks and running workshops on snakebite first aid, her reputation grew, and more doctors asked her for help. Now when she scrolls through her phone, there are too



Snakebite survivor Mahfudin in front of his family home in the village of Dukuhturi in Central Java

many chat groups to count. Some are numbers of doctors who've found Maha's contact details; most are participants from her workshops.

They send her photos: dead snakes, fang wounds, clinical readings, patients' swollen limbs, drooping eyelids. Her phone is always busy, and so is she. She zips across Indonesia to see snakebite patients and conduct workshops. She buys antivenom from colleagues overseas and delivers it free to Indonesian doctors. She talks fondly of sleeping on trains ("flights are too expensive and don't reach small towns") and showering at the stations.

But on this particular occasion, she needed speed. Maha jumped on the only available flight to grab the expired antivenom.

Less than a day later, she gazed down at Mahfudin's agonised face and weighed up her choices.

She knew that the WHO guidelines

advise that 'recently expired antivenom' may be considered as a treatment, but only as a last resort. She'd highlighted that sentence and read it repeatedly. Maha had also consulted a Thai expert from QSMI, who said that an expired antivenom could work and that the worst outcome would be acute kidney injury.

She ordered her staff out of the room. She knew this decision might ruin her career. *If anything bad happens, I will bear the blame,* she told herself.

Maha tended to Mahfudin for the next two days. Days later, Mahfudin walked out, fatigued and limping on a swollen leg, but otherwise healthy. His mother prohibited him from working his various jobs: no spraying pesticides in fields, no mixing cement or stacking bricks, no earning to save money. His dreams of painting and tiling his house would have to wait – but he lived to dream another day.



Siti Raudoh, whose husband Iskandar died from snakebite, with the youngest of her three children

A GOOD MAN NAMED ISKANDAR

In August 2019, 45-year-old Iskandar was one of four security guards on duty at Cluster Michelia, a relatively upscale residential community on the western side of Jakarta. His shift would be ending in 30 minutes. He'd been away from home since 7am, and his wife and three children would be expecting him.

Just before the end of the shift, a resident called asking for help. A snake was in the garden next to his house. The guards didn't expect to be handling snakes in the city, though this was the fourth snake report that year. Iskandar and a colleague responded to the call. They saw the snake, its tail sticking out of a hole, white bands alternating with black saddle-like marks on its back – a Malayan krait, *Bungarus candidus*, one of the most venomous snakes in the region. Its venom attacks the nerves and paralyses the muscles that control breathing. Iskandar and his colleague tried to trap the snake with a broom. But the snake slithered away, so they chased it around the benches and chairs in the compound. When his colleague finally pinned the snake down with the broom, Iskandar grabbed it. Suddenly, the snake whipped around to face Iskandar. He panicked and flung it into the gar-

den. The two guards scrambled to catch the snake again, got hold of it and killed it.

But in the commotion, the snake had somehow bitten or grazed Iskandar's left index finger with its fangs. Residents asked Iskandar to check into a hospital, but he brushed the concern aside. He sucked on the wound and told the others not to worry. Then he sat on a bench, looking pleased with the snake in his hand, showing it to the gathering residents. The resident who reported the snake, however, insisted on taking Iskandar to a nearby private hospital.

Within 30 minutes, Iskandar was nauseous and almost fainted. But the hospital had neither antivenom nor personnel trained to handle a snakebite. They referred Iskandar to the Tangerang public hospital instead, where he was put on a drip and given Biosave, the only antivenom produced in Indonesia.
Indonesia's Snakebite Doctor

Meanwhile, Iskandar's wife Siti was waiting at home without news. At around 9pm, her brother informed her that Iskandar had been hospitalised, and they went to see him. By then, Iskandar was aching all over and keeping his eyes closed most of the time. But a doctor told them that he was fine and could go home. However, her brother worried about Iskandar's deteriorating condition, and refused to take him away.

At around 3am, Iskandar was gasping for air. He tried to talk but could only squeeze out a few words to his wife. He whispered that he would like to lie on his back, and Siti helped him turn over. She never heard him say another word. He stopped moving, then stopped breath-

ing. Iskandar died shortly after 4am.

Iskandar's death shattered Siti's world. In the living room there's a portrait of the two of them huddling with their children, beaming in their matching purple suits. When I speak with her, Siti struggles to put her feelings into words. Her loss was too sudden, too deep. The week before, they had celebrated her 38th birthday. Their youngest child was born just eight months ago. "He was a good man. Hardworking and always praying. He makes a good role model for our children," Siti says. Iskandar was the sole bread winner of the family. Siti needs to stay at home to care for the children. Fortunately, she's making ends meet with support from her siblings. But still, she worries for her children.

Iskandar's death is tragic, and more so because Biosave, the an-

tivenom he was given, is sadly ineffective against Malayan krait venom. The doctors did not know that. They thought it would save him. None of that matters to Siti. Her husband is gone.

Iskandar's story went viral on social media and the news. About ten days later, Maha visited Cluster Michelia to train the

guards and residents. She jumped on the opportunity to teach people about snakebite, even the doctors in the area and the head nurse from the private hospital that turned Iskandar away. One guard, Rizky, says he didn't expect to handle snakes, didn't know how, but now is better prepared after Maha's training.

Where snakes and people coexist, people will get bitten. And when severe envenomation happens, doctors



can rely only on antivenom to save the patient.

An antivenom consists of many proteins, including antibodies that bind to and deactivate venom molecules. These antibodies are harvested from an animal – usually a horse or sheep – that has been injected with a snake's venom to stimulate an immune response. An antivenom works only against venom from the snake

species that has been used to make it.

Even if Iskandar's doctors had known that he was bitten by a Malayan krait, they wouldn't have had the antivenom to save him. The antivenom for the Malayan krait is produced by QSMI. Like most antivenom produced outside the country, QSMI's products aren't registered in Indonesia, and

hospitals do not stock them.

A doctor must first identify what snake has bitten the patient to know which antivenom will work. But the correct diagnosis is still futile without antivenom, says Dr Liao-Chun Chiang, a snake venom toxinologist at Taipei Veterans General Hospital in Taiwan.

Taiwan produces about 4000 vials of antivenom yearly, more than enough to cover the 1000 local cases of snakebite envenomation that happen each year. While Maha advises Indonesian doctors to use antivenom only for severe envenomation, doctors in Taiwan use it in every case. Because Indonesia lacks antivenom, its doctors are reluctant to use it freely, says Dr Chiang.

Experts and doctors are calling for more and better antivenom in Indonesia. The sole Indonesian producer,



Bio Farma, can produce only 40,000 vials of Biosave a year - far short of the number of estimated yearly cases of snakebite, which Maha says is over 100,000. Moreover, Biosave is only effective against three of the 19 venomous snake species considered 'medically important' in Indonesia - it cannot neutralise the venom of the pit

viper that bit Mahfudin or the cobras and kraits of Eastern Indonesia. What's more, an independent laboratory report published in *Scientific Reports* in 2016 found that while Biosave can "moderately neutralise" the venom of two of its targeted snakes, it is "weak" against the third. An antivenom that lacks potency means several vials are needed to treat one patient.

Antivenom shortages are further strained by logistics. Biosave is a

liquid, must be kept refrigerated at 2-8°C and has a shelf life of two to three years; storage facilities needed for liquid antivenoms like this are absent in rural areas where snakebite is a big problem. In contrast, freeze-dried antivenom – such as that produced in Thailand, Taiwan and Myanmar – can be stored at room temperature with a shelf life of five years.



Members of a snake enthusiast and education group deliver a first-aid presentation in Peloksari, Indonesia

AN EDUCATION

Twenty-four-year-old Hendik liked to hunt palm civets every night in the forest. Not for food or money, he says, but "entertainment". When hunting, he would walk barefoot – "I didn't want the civet to hear me," he says. He wasn't concerned about the snakes he had seen in the forest. But he didn't see the green pit viper before it bit his left leg.

His friend sent him to a hospital, where doctors administered Biosave, which was ineffective. They discharged him after an hour. But Hendik's brother, who is a nurse, felt uneasy, and so rushed him to another health centre, Marsudi Waluyo Hospital. There, doctors had been trained by Maha four months before. They called their mentor, and she arrived via train a few hours later with vials of Thailand green pit viper antivenom. Hendik survived. "I am scared and can't hunt now," he says, lying on his hospital bed. "But eventually I will." He appears to have learnt only one lesson: "I will wear boots up to my knees."

It is because many Indonesians, like Hendik, either ignore or misunderstand snakebite threats and management that Maha focuses on education.

She teaches across Indonesia, not just to doctors and nurses but to farmers, miners, snake hobbyists and hotel workers. Because the Indonesian government doesn't sponsor snakebite management, Maha pays to run most of her talks. She accepts that to promote snakebite education in Indonesia somebody has to be willing to work for free.

Then there's education for her fellow doctors and healthcare professionals. Maha knows that mistakes made by well-meaning but wrongly taught medical staff complicate or delay life-saving treatments. She knows these mistakes are not made out of malice. In Indonesia, medical lectures on snakebite management are few and far between and the contents variable. They often recommend procedures like tourniquets and incisions. These methods – along with suction (to suck out the blood like you sometimes see heroes doing on TV), electric shocks and topical herbal remedies – are described in the WHO guidelines as "harmful and useless" techniques that "should never be used".

Hospitals that mismanage snakebite erode public confidence, says clinical toxinologist Dr Simon Jensen, an honorary research fellow at the Australian Venom Research Unit at the University of Melbourne, who has helped develop snakebite management in Papua New Guinea. He wonders if many victims avoid hospitals because their relatives have died there from lack of antivenom. Eventually, "it becomes a tradition to go with traditional healers and not to go with Western medicine".

I meet a family of traditional healers in Kediri. The patriarch, called Samijan, started his practice in the 1980s. Today, he divides his work with his son Suprianto and daughter-in-law Nanik, whose father was also a traditional healer. A big red banner in front of their house shows a hissing cobra. The banner lists more than 20 ailments, including cancers, eczema, acne and weak libido. Below the banner, a cage made of wire netting and wood holds cobras and other snakes. After greeting me, Suprianto unlocks the top flap of the cage and, in a slow steady motion, dips his right hand into the writhing pile of cobras. He reaches under one and lifts it out of the cage. His moves are as smooth as his smile.

They receive five patients daily, mostly for chronic ailments. Snakebite is common and treated with a concoction of snake blood, bile and spinal cord, preferably from the same type of snake that bit the person, they say. Otherwise a cobra works fine, too. The concoction is mixed with Chinese herbs, honey and medicinal wine, and drunk. The key curative ingredient is the bile, says Nanik. Once, they had to treat a snakebite on a baby. So they replaced the wine with a sweet soft drink. The baby recovered, as have all their snakebite patients, says Nanik. There is no set price for snakebite treatment - patients pay as they like.

It's easy to scorn traditional methods like Samijan's for lacking the evidence-based approach of Western medicine and science. But traditional healers are inherent to local culture and trusted by many. To dismiss or confront them might trigger a fierce backlash. Rather, the WHO guidelines suggest involving traditional healers when educating communities about how to manage snakebite.

WHEN ALL IS DONE

On October 3, in a restaurant southwest of Jakarta, Maha sets up her

Indonesia's Snakebite Doctor

laptop for a talk. It's 9.30am, and doctors and nurses are trickling in to hear about snakebite.

Over coffee, Maha tells me that she's working with others on an app to report snakebite and a field kit to identify snakes from bite wounds. Then her voice dips. She speaks of bickering among colleagues that hampers their efforts to save lives. Snakebite is a life-threatening issue,

but not everyone agrees on the best way to solve it.

Her friends worry about burnout. Dr Chiang has known Maha for four years. Because it takes time for Maha to reach the faraway patients she is called to help, many are near death by the time she reaches them. All that time spent travelling is

inefficient, says Dr Chiang. "She should get more support from her government."

After seven years of uphill struggle, Maha's efforts are bearing fruit. At a recent seminar, a senior officer from the Indonesian antivenom producer Bio Farma offered her something she has long sought – a collaboration to develop more antivenom. Maha sees this as an opportunity to start a new era of antivenom in Indonesia. But she knows that snakebite management in Indonesia is missing the government support needed for nationwide changes. Maha has drafted a national plan: education reforms within five years, then antivenom development, after that rehabilitation programmes for snakebite patients. With a comprehensive plan, Maha thinks Indonesia could reduce snakebite deaths and disability by

> 20 per cent by 2030. Government officials, citing funding issues, have always declined her draft.

> The key to convincing the government might already be within Maha's grasp. Since 2012, Maha has been sending forms to doctors, asking them to fill in their observations of snakebite patients. Few doctors respond-

ed in the first two years. So, Maha switched tactics. She took to the road, visiting hospitals to talk to doctors. She attended conferences just to meet health officers and researchers. As the hours and kilometres stacked up, so did her data.

She now has about 5000 separate observations of snakebite from more than 68 hospitals across all Indonesian provinces. It's a huge dataset detailing patients' age, occupation, how





The venom of the Malayan krait, also known as the blue krait, is neurotoxic and attacks the human nervous system, shutting it down

they came to be bitten and what happened when they were treated. Data that reveals deaths, disability and hospitalisation, and thus the health and economic impact of snakebite. Data that could help health officers plan cost-effective responses in the right regions, saving lives and money. Data that could convince the government to tackle snakebite head on. Data that nobody had seven years ago.

Maha knows that this data could turn the tide for snakebite management in Indonesia. Seven years ago, how little Indonesians knew about snakebite pivoted Maha's career. Now, how much

Maha knows about snakebite, and the people she has trained with that knowledge, could make the change to her country she's longed for.

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Yates: Top 50 Edible Plants for Pots

Angie Thomas HARPERCOLLINS

W ith more of us taking up smaller living spaces, growing a garden can be a challenge. But fret no longer. In this beautifully illustrated book, Angie Thomas shows us how to grow edible plants in pots without killing them. Providing information on which palatable plants grow well in pots and how to care for them, no matter how green your thumb is, she writes about herbs, vegies and fruit. Plus, she explains how to plant seedlings, feed your edible garden, when to water, and how to control pests. A good resource for budding gardeners wanting to make the most of a patio or balcony.



COMPILED BY DIANE GODLEY

Retirement Made Simple Noel Whittaker

he fastest growing demographic group in many countries around the world is retirees. And although often touted as a worryfree time, retirement can

NOEL WHITTAKER Retirement made simple Simple Simple Simple Simple Simple

also be a time of unique challenges. Noel Whittaker, AM, a respected financial commentator, explains basic disciplines to help everyday people to create a viable retirement fund, how to use and grow it, and how to enjoy life. Whittaker discusses investing in shares, real estate and cash, understanding risk and scams, downsizing and budgeting, accessing your retirement funds, and much more.



How I Built This Guy Raz

MACMILLAN

Based on his acclaimed podcasts, Guy Raz's book offers insights from the world's top entrepreneurs on launching and building a successful venture. Highlights include New Zealand footballer Tim Brown who turned unused wool into shoes, how lames Dyson started his vacuum cleaner empire by redesigning a wheelbarrow in his tool shed, and the beginnings of Airbnb. **Raz shares inspiration** and advice on raising capital and finding your market, as well as cautionary start-up tales. M.Eaan



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

RD Recommends



FLY (Financially Literate Youth): The Handbook

Jai & Marlies Hobbs

PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

This is an empowering quide from a husbandand-wife team: Marlies, an ex-property development lawyer, and lai, a mortgage broker with over 15 years' experience. The handbook gives young adults and parents the skills to navigate financial literacy and help them make the right decisions. Subjects include opening a bank account. earning money, rights and entitlements, budgeting, and saving.

The Last Thing to Burn Will Degn

Fiction

HACHETTE

A harrowing psychological thriller. The Last Thing to Burn is set in a damp, decrepit farmhouse in the bleak landscape of the Fens in the UK. The narrator. a human-trafficked woman from Vietnam, named 'lane' by her farmer 'husband' and captor, tells of resilience and bravery. Heartbreaking and deeply disturbing, it is also about love of family and friendship, and raises the question of whether this could be happening to other trafficked M.Eaan women.





The Strays of Paris

Jane Smiley,

PAN MACMILLAN

This is a delightful read from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of A Thousand Acres and is about a racehorse. Paras, a German short-haired pointer, Frida, an opinionated crow, and a small boy. Étienne. Paras wanders into the city one night, ending up in the lush green 'pastures' near the Eiffel Tower, and befriends Frida and a crow. But when hunger and cold drives Paras to look for shelter. Étienne provides her with the unlikeliest of homes, and a friendship between the human and animals blossoms.



Before the Storm Di Morrissey

MACMILLAN

Top-selling and popular author Di Morrissey is a prolific writer, having published 27 novels featuring strong female protagonists. After being double-crossed at work, IT project manager Ellie Conlan retreats to the quiet seaside community of Storm Harbour. Deciding to help her grandfather at the local newspaper, she is drawn into a controversial property development that could spilt the town. With a violent storm about to hit, it is time for Ellie to confront a secret she has kept for many years. M.Egan

Lucky's Andrew Pippos PAN MACMILLAN

Lucky's is a charming family saga full of Australian humour and Greek tragedy. Set around a fictional Australian-Greek diner chain. named after its owner, the novel follows several families in this multi-generational tragicomedy: Lucky, his wife, who he meets in the 1950s after a performance in which he impersonates a famous clarinet player, and a journalist who is trying to find what ties her father to Luckv's chain of diners. This debut novel is beautifully written and full of wonderful characters. I didn't want it to end.





Tell Me Lies J.P. Pomare HACHETTE

New Zealand-born award-winning author I.P. Pomare spins another intriguing tale in his latest thriller. Psychologist Margot Scott has a successful career and a pictureperfect life in an affluent suburb - until a friend persuades her to take on a new client. Cormac has an Irish lilt, a way with words and a charismatic smile that pulls people in, even Margot, who, after a misstep as a rookie when she nearly lost her licence as a psychologist, should know better. But this time, it could cost her family's lives.

RD Recommends



My Friend the Mouse

The hilarious and touching story of a determined small boy who makes friends with a wild mouse, to the horror of his well-meaning parents. This classic tale is an excursion into the meaning of love and loyalty and will stay with you forever.



You're Wrong About

Digging up the past and then casting it in a new light, journalists Michael Hobbes and Sarah Marshall examine media controversies that have been misunderstood in the public imagination. Subjects include Princess Diana, the O.J. Simpson trial, and plenty of digressions into other topics.



Happy Place

Fearne Cotton, author of the best-selling book Happy, shares her personal experiences and offers practical tips on navigating stress. She also chats to interesting and well-known people on how they work through feeling blue and find different ways of unlocking inner happiness.



Selected Shorts

Produced by NPR, and for lovers of literature, top actors and hosts read both classic and new short stories and novellas, loosely grouped together by themes such as 'Extended Families' or 'Modern Fables'. Authors featured have included Umberto Eco, Anton Chekhov, Alice Walker and Zadie Smith.



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

TO LISTEN TO RD TALKS GO TO

www.rdasia.com/podcasts and click on the play button.

SECTION Sharpen Your Mind

THE

GENIUS

THE TRUTH ABOUT MEMORY

Your brain doesn't work like a tape recorder. Sometimes that's a good thing

BY Guy P. Harrison FROM **PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM** hat would you be without your memories? How important is your ability to remember the past and to draw on it to inform your next move? I'll answer for you: it's right up there with breathing and eating.

One would think that understanding how memory works would be a high priority for all people in all societies, considering memories form the foundation of our personalities and give meaning to our lives.

> The truth, however, is that most people, regardless of intelligence or education, know

little about memory. Research psychologists Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris asked people simple questions about memory and then compared their answers with those of experts in memory research. The results show how far removed from reality the public's beliefs about memory are. For instance, to the question "Is there a 'video camera' in your head?" 63 per cent of people surveyed strongly agreed or mostly agreed that human memory "works like a video camera, accurately recording the events we see and hear so that we can review and inspect them later." None of the experts - zero per cent - strongly agreed or mostly agreed that memory works like a video camera.

When asked, "Is confident testimony necessarily accurate testimony?" more than a third of people (37 per cent) strongly or mostly agreed that "the testimony of one confident eyewitness should be enough evidence to convict a defendant of a crime." Not one expert used in the study strongly or mostly agreed with this; 93.8 per cent strongly disagreed.

So how does memory work? I

prefer to describe it as something like an old man sitting by a campfire somewhere deep in your brain. He means well and wants to help, but he doesn't show you your past like some wizard with a time portal. The best he can do is tell

you stories. And like all good storytellers, he edits for impact, efficiency, functionality and clarity. He tells you what he assumes you need to know.

Sometimes he may even embellish the tale by adding a bit of flavour, accuracy be damned. Or the old man might decide to leave out a few things in order to spare you pain or shame. He also makes honest mistakes – lots and lots of them. Sometimes he just gets confused or sloppy and leaves out something important. He could even include inaccurate information by accident. Maybe that special memory of your first kiss has been infiltrated with portions of a scene from a movie you saw many years ago.

LIKE ALL GOOD STORYTELLERS, HE EDITS FOR IMPACT, EFFICIENCY AND CLARITY

In other words, memory is associative and constructive – there is no consistent, orderly or rational sense to it. It's not like files on a computer hard drive arranged by subject or placed in chronological order. A memory will be tucked away and connected to other memories or concepts in ways that are not necessarily practical or logical. This is why a particular smell or sound may bring up a memo-

ry even though it wasn't important in the original experience. It's also the reason we can't always recall in an instant a memory we need, even if it's there somewhere in our neural jungle. Memories come to us in a way that is similar to

how archaeologists and police detectives use bits of information – artefacts and clues – to construct stories about past people and events.

It also helps to remember what memory cannot do. The first and most important lesson is that human memory is not reliable. Not even close. Our memory processes did not evolve to keep accurate and detailed accounts of the events in our lives. The brain is not your personal record keeper. You may believe you can replay something from the past, but you can't. You may see the past crystal clear in your mind, but that's not personal history you are watching. It's a docudrama at best. When

you remember, your memory tells your brain a story – and much may be lost in transit.

Your memory is best thought of as helpful input. It's packaged information sent to help us cope in the present and plan for the future. It is not meant to provide foolproof transcripts or recordings of what really happened. And while this can complicate our lives, it works just fine most of the time.

For more than two million years of human existence, we have survived and thrived in large part because our memory worked well enough. Even in our information-soaked, hyperconnected and fast-changing world, it still does.

FROM PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM (JANUARY 3, 2020)

THREE REASONS TO CELEBRATE YOUR FAULTY MEMORY

Faulty memories can give self-esteem an artificial leg up. One of my favourite demonstrations comes from a study of university students asked to remember their high school grades. The researchers had the students' high school transcripts for crosschecking, so there was no reason to lie. The A's and B's generally stuck in their memories very well, whereas the D's and F's tended to be recalled as slightly higher grades. In other words, what we remember fits by and large with reality, but the details can get skewed in ways that make us feel better about ourselves.

They help us recognise our core values. Studies show that liberal-minded people will more readily develop false memories offictional events that would embarrass conservative political leaders. whereas conservative mindedpeople will more readily remember fictional events that would embarrass liberal leaders. Our memory biases benefit us by making us feel better about ourselves and our social groups.

3 They also help us build bonds. We often describe past events to others depending on our social goals. Sometimes we want to entertain our audience: other times we want to accurately inform them. One line of research has shown that retelling in different ways can actually change our own memory of what really happened - the memory can morph to fit the way we tell the story, becoming more similar over time to what we think our audiences want to hear. Reshaping our memories might help us feel more connected to people and perhaps help us integrate into groups and avoid conflicts.

By Professor Robert Nash, School of Psychology, Aston University, UK.



Spot the Difference

There are ten differences. Can you find them?



Three Dice

Three dice are arranged side by side. Seven sides are visible. What is the total of the other 11 sides?



Check your answers for Family Fun on page 128.



Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 112. By Marcel Danesi

Str8ts Difficult

Fill in the white cells with digits from 1 through 9 so that no number repeats in any row or column. Black cells divide the rows and columns into 'compartments'. Each compartment needs to contain a 'straight'. A straight is a set of numbers that have no gaps between them, but they can appear in any order (for example, 2, 3, 5, 4). A clue in a black cell removes that number as an option in the cell's row and column, but it is not part of any straight.





Feeling Lucky? Easy

You enter a casino and are presented with a game where you must draw the ace, king, queen and jack of diamonds, in that exact order, out of a standard deck of 52 playing cards. What's your probability of winning?

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

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.



Symbolism Moderately Difficult

Based on these equations, what's the missing symbol?





Lighten Up Difficult

Three digital alarm clocks are sitting in a pile. The numbers inside the squares of this grid indicate how many of the lines adjacent to that square are lit. Can you fill in three numbers (with three digits each) so that the numbers on the two top clocks add up to the number on the bottom clock? The digits 0 through 9 are shown for your reference.







Times Square Moderately Difficult

Fill in each cell of the grid with a digit from 1 through 9. Each number outside the grid is the product of multiplying the digits in its row or column. The number 1 will appear exactly once in each row and column. Other numbers can be repeated, and not every digit from 1 through 9 will be used. Can you complete the grid?

WHAT'S NEW IN RD TALKS

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



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

When a group of kayakers find themselves stranded at the top of a waterfall, their only way to call for help seemed like a desperate long shot... but it worked.

read by Zoë Meunier



BEATRIX POTTER Who would have believed that this unassuming woman would write the incomparably favourite books "that bring grownups and children together in a shared delight"?



TRAPPED UNDER THE CITY SQUARE

One minute, the 12-yearold boy was splashing in Melbourne's civic fountain. Then, as his friend looked on in horror, he suddenly disappeared.





Test Your General Knowledge

1. What is the longest living mammal? 1 point

2. Which of the following items would you not need to complete a modern pentathlon: a horse, a bicycle, a sword, a pistol, a swimsuit? 2 points

3. Barack Obama's mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, studied and worked in what academic field? 2 points

4. How long is Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights? 1 point

5. Roughly what fraction of the world's population caught the infamous 1918 flu? 1 point

6. Winter is caused when the Earth is furthest from the sun. True or false? 1 point

7. In 2020, a British man was sentenced to four years in prison for trying to steal what national relic?

2 points

14. For which ancient Roman god is March named? 1 point

countries, commemorating Ireland's patron saint and celebrating Irish culture in general. Why was this date chosen? 1 point

9. How long did it take Erno Rubik to solve his own invention, the Rubik's Cube. the first time? 1 point

10. In which country is the world's longest fence located, which stretches for 5531 kilometres? 1 point

11. Behind Greenland and New Guinea, what is the third largest island on the planet? 2 points

> **12.** Bacteria called *Xylella* fastidiosa can infect certain trees and may drive up the price of what fatty cooking staple? 2 points

13. What African-American athlete annoved the Nazis by setting three world records at the 1936 **Olympics in Berlin?** 2 points

8. March 17 is observed as St Patrick's Day in some

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

fence. 11. Borneo. 12. Olive oil. 13. Jesse Owens. 14. Mars, the god of war. (although some sources put the year earlier or later). 9. Over a month. 10. Australia, known as the dingo T. An original copy of the 1215 Magna Carta. 8. It is believed to be the date of 5t Patrick's death in 461 5. One-fifth. 6. False. It's caused when your hemisphere is tilted away from the sun. Ausweks: 1. The bowhead whale can live up to 200 years. 2. A bicycle. 3. Anthropology. 4. Hive days.



First Section

What do an academic, a debacle and feedback have in common? They are words spelled with letters from only the first half of the alphabet, a to m — just like all those in this quiz.

BY Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

1. affable – A: easygoing. B: humourless. C: qualified.

2. filial – A: ornamental. B: of sons and daughters. C: on horseback.

3. edifice – A: steep cliff overlooking water. B: inspiration. C: large building.

4. calcified – A: hardened. B: wasted away. C: completely rusted through.

5. malleable – A: cruel. B: sickly. C: pliable.

6. Gallic – A: British. B: French. C: Roman.

7. allege – A: compare and contrast.B: approach cautiously.C: assert without proof.

8. fallible – A: autumnal. B: fertile. C: imperfect. 9. abide – A: stare or gawk.B: give generously.C: adhere or act in conformity.

10. blackball – A: exclude socially.B: demand money.C: cancel without notice.

11. **ebb** – A: rise slowly. B: decrease. C: encourage.

12. jackal – A: wild canine.B: another name for mackerel fish.C: thatched hut.

13. addled – A: egg-shaped. B: confused. C: extra.

14. imam - A: electronic message.B: atomic particle.C: Muslim prayer leader.

15. bemedalled – A: made from metal. B: interfered in something not one's concern. C: wearing or having won medals.

Answers

1. affable – (A) easygoing. Guillermo is always affable, even when facing big deadlines at work.

2. filial – (B) of sons and daughters. "Is some filial respect too much to ask around here?" Mum joked.

3. edifice – (C) large building. The Gothic edifice will be restored by a team of experts.

4. calcified – (A) hardened. Mary's extreme political opinions only calcified as she grew older.

5. malleable – (C) pliable. After her first yoga class, Emily found that her muscles weren't all that malleable.

6. Gallic – (B) French. Crepes are a classic Gallic dish.

7. allege – (C) assert without proof. At the time you allege my dog dug up your azaleas, he was at the vet.

8. fallible – (C) imperfect. The captain may think he's always right, but even his judgment is fallible sometimes.

9. abide – (C) adhere or act in conformity. If the employee decides not to abide by the contract, he will surely lose his job.

10. blackball – (A) exclude socially. Ann was blackballed from the gardening club after she missed four meetings in a row.

11. ebb – (B) decrease. Tamika's

enthusiasm for knitting began to ebb after she made a few scarves.

12. jackal – (A) wild canine. There are always lions and jackals waiting to circle the herd.

13. addled – (B) confused. Uncle Paul can get addled when he doesn't take his medications.

14. imam – (C) Muslim prayer leader. Local imams, rabbis and priests formed a task force to promote religious tolerance.

15. bemedalled – (C) wearing or having won medals. She was the most bemedalled female athlete in Olympic history.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

5-8: Fair 9–12: Good 13–15: Word Power Wizard

FAMILY FUN ANSWERS See Page 121



THREE DICE: 40 Each dice has a total of 21 spots. We can see 23 spots, so there are 63 - 23 = 40 hidden from view.



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