

Reader's Digest



JUNE 2020

The Best
**STRESS
BUSTER**

By DAN HARRIS

**FIND YOUR
HAPPY
PLACE**
We're Here to Help!

A Small Town's
INSPIRATION

From the book **IF YOU LIVED HERE**

A New Way to
**SAY
THANK
YOU**

By GINA HAMADEY

Weird &
Wonderful
INVENTIONS

By ANDY SIMMONS

20
**PAINS
to Never
Ignore**

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JOLEEN ZUBEK (2), CAROL YEPES/GETTY IMAGES (MASK)

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DEAR READER

Staying Positive

AFTER STOCKING UP at the shopping center we both frequent, my friend John was half a mile up Danbury Road, at the mom-and-pop wine store he likes, when he reached into his pocket to pay. Uh-oh. No wallet.

The stay-at-home order had just been issued in our state, and the last thing anyone needed was to be cut off from all bank and credit cards with no driver's license. You can imagine how John felt.

He retraced his steps. Car. Kohl's. The Stop & Shop parking lot where he'd loaded everything up and then wiped it down because no way was the coronavirus getting near his 80-year-old mother. She has asthma, and he was headed to her home to deliver some goods.

But the wallet wasn't anywhere. He must have left it on his roof and driven off.

If you've read *RD* for long, you know the wallet test, in

which we arrange to "lose" hundreds of wallets in plain sight and count how many get returned. Last time we did it, in 2013, Helsinki proved most honest, but New York City scored well, with 8 out of 12 wallets returned. Now my Connecticut town faced its own little wallet test with the anxiety of a pandemic as a backdrop.

On his drive home, John was feeling bereft. This was going to be a living nightmare. Then his cell phone rang. "Is this John?" a man said.

Five minutes later, John and the man, name of Alex, met up at a local gas station. Alex stood next to his big tree-service truck and told John how he'd spotted the wallet and braked to a stop in the middle of busy Danbury Road to retrieve it. Then his son, riding shotgun, went to work, apparently using teen whiz-kid savvy to suss out John's cell number from social media. Now Alex, grinning from ear to ear, handed John his billfold.

John was dumbfounded at their determination. "Here, let me pay you or something," he said, offering the \$20 bill from his wallet. No, said Alex, he couldn't take money; he needed nothing. John thanked him again, and they began to part. Then John had another idea. "Hey, do you need toilet paper?"

Alex looked sheepish. "Well, my wife



MATTHEW COHEN



PLEASE ALLOW THIS ISSUE TO HELP YOU FIND THAT HAPPIER PLACE, IF IT CAN.

has been looking ..." he conceded. John handed him several rolls from his newly purchased stash.

"Thank you, thank you!" Alex exclaimed, as if John were the hero.

I write this column at a terribly uncertain time. By the time you read it, six weeks or more after the magazine has gone to press, COVID-19 may have killed many more of my town's residents than the 12 it has so far—I can't know. Our economy may be recovering or in ruins—I can't know. I can't know how many of us will have been brought low by this unprecedented medical crisis.

But there's one thing I do know, with no uncertainty. The best way to

fight back against a foe like this is for each of us to stay as positive as we can. Through the Depression, World War II, 9/11, and other times of great change, it has been the role of *Reader's Digest* to help readers do that. Please allow

this issue to help you find that happier, more optimistic place, if it can, with its stories of gratitude and family and kindness, and of an even more remarkable toilet paper exchange.

"The spirit of this guy," John recalls of his exchange, shaking his head. "He was just so sweet."

And please share stories of local heroes and kindness from your own life. Across America, neighborhoods, workplaces, hospitals, churches, community groups, and whole towns and cities are coming together to help others. Our annual Nicest Places search is a powerful way to put them in lights. Now is when we rely on you to go to rd.com/nicestplaces to tell the world about them.

Just write from the heart. It's urgent for us all to hear positive stories, now more than ever.

Bruce Kelley,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Write to me at letters@rd.com.

GREGORY REID (WALLET), ARTISTEER/GETTY IMAGES (MONEY)



They Got Away with Murder

I await each *Reader's Digest* issue with the anticipation of a child awaiting Christmas. Seeing the April cover was tantamount to getting everything one wants for Christmas. The unsolved murders article was great. The detective work that goes into solving crimes amazes me.

—CHARLES DOUGHERTY *Hicksville, New York*

How to Connect with Strangers

As I worried about starting a 14-day quarantine (my son might have been exposed to COVID-19), I got a big laugh at this article. Thanks for always pulling me out of my funk.

—MARY JENSEN
Woodbury, Minnesota

Heroes in the Heartland

Thank you for your article on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal

Building bombing in Oklahoma City 25 years ago. I wondered if young victim Joseph Webber survived the bombing, so I went on the Internet and found that he did indeed, and he went on to attend university. He seems to have grown into a fine, compassionate young man. Knowing that certainly made the story all the more inspiring.

—MARION BALDWIN
Winfield, Illinois

I remember visiting the memorial and gazing at the tree that survived the blast. If anything, this should remind us to treasure life, for you never know when it will end.

—REESE LAWSON
(age 12) Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Food on Your Plate

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

—KAY PALERIOS
Santa Margarita, California

Why Are Military Families on Food Stamps?

I was shocked, dismayed, even angry to read that we don't pay our soldiers enough to live on. This is

disgraceful! How can we ask them to risk their lives but not pay them enough to live decently?

—WAYNE GUTHRIE
Collierville, Tennessee

Piece of Mind

When I was supposed to be doing my homework, my father and I often worked jigsaw puzzles. Now my husband and I have a puzzle in process most of the time. I'm an artist and my husband is an engineer, so we approach it quite differently, but we get it finished and have a good time together.

—DONNIE GENE WOODS
Ridgecrest, California

How I Know It's Spring

My first sign of spring is not the early blooms of the crocuses or the little snowdrops but the beautiful bright yellow color of the forsythia bush in full, glorious bloom.

—C.D.M. *via rd.com*

A Very Special Tax Break

The story of Michael Evans paying an elderly woman's real estate taxes brought tears to my eyes. What a wonderful man. I wish there were more people like him in the world, now more than ever.

—EVELYN MITCHELL
Fredericksburg, Virginia

DELIGHTFULLY WACKY TEAM NAMES

♦ As far as funny team names go, here in Macon, Georgia, we had a minor league ice hockey team named the Macon Whoopee.

—Avery Oakes
Duluth, Georgia

♦ My basketball team was named Tee and Cookies (Tee was our coach), but it took us seven years to win a game. So I don't think it has to do with the names being offensive—our name was sweet, but victory eluded us anyway.

—Mrs. Markell
Raphaelson West
Laurel, Maryland



A Few Good Books—in One Place

A NANNY TAKES A JOB at a seriously creepy manor house in the Scottish Highlands. A play-it-safe salesman embarks on a dangerous quest. A young woman aims to fulfill her mother's dying wish. A small-town sheriff tracks a murderer. What do these intriguing scenarios have in common? They're the plots of the four novels featured in the latest volume of Select Editions, our curated reading series celebrating its 70th birthday this year. Order at selecteditions.com/rdjune20.

EVERYDAY HEROES

An imperfect man finds the perfect way to give back

The Serial Samaritan

BY Genevieve Looby

JEAN-PAUL "J.P." LAPIERRE IS NO stranger to long, strange trips. When he was young, he worked as a master pastry chef, then as a real estate agent. But at age 30, he discovered crack cocaine. Within months, he went from living in a penthouse to sleeping under a Massachusetts bridge, a bridge that happened to be on the route of the Boston Marathon. LaPierre would watch the runners speed past, longing to take part, join the throngs, pull his life together. Marathons became a symbol and an inspiration—surviving for the long haul.

When he got sober, about two decades ago, LaPierre started running in as many marathons as he could. To date, the 54-year-old storage facility manager has crossed the finish line 32 times. Without a doubt, his most recent race was the most memorable.

LaPierre had flown from Boston to Chicago last fall, sleeping in O'Hare Airport to save money. Early on the morning of October 13, he boarded the city's Blue Line L to head to the Chicago Marathon. The train was full of energized marathoners. LaPierre took a seat next to a fellow runner



"Sometimes in life you're called upon, and you've got to act," says Jean-Paul LaPierre.

and began chatting. Before long, LaPierre noticed a man who seemed to be homeless moving from passenger to passenger, asking for spare change. His demeanor struck LaPierre as “really weird,” especially the way he stared down anyone he felt hadn’t given him enough.

At the Cumberland station, several stops before the one for the marathon, most of the passengers suddenly fled the car. LaPierre, startled, rushed out to see what was going on, only to hear panicked people shouting that the

“YOU DON’T MOVE!” LAPIERRE SHOUTED, LEANING INTO THE ARMED MAN.

man asking for money was, in fact, armed and robbing people.

Just then, the armed man himself exited the train car and hopped onto the next one. LaPierre followed him. “I could not walk away knowing there were innocent children and people just trying to get to a race,” he says.

The man was standing in the middle of the car when he turned and saw LaPierre, his head down, bull-rushing him. LaPierre plowed into the far larger and younger man, pinning him against the closed doors. “Once I got a few feet from him, I knew he wouldn’t be able to react fast enough to shoot me,” he told the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

The two men fought for the gun—and their lives.

“You don’t move!” LaPierre shouted, leaning into the armed man with his left side. The man tried shoving past him, but LaPierre muscled him back against the door, grabbing the gun and handing it to a passenger, who quickly walked it off the train.

But LaPierre wasn’t in the clear. The man had accomplices who now surrounded LaPierre and began to threaten him. His one chance to save himself, he believed, was to be more menacing than the bad guys. Looking the original crook in the eye, he growled, “I’m a boxer. I’ll break your head in one punch!”

“Let me go!” the man begged. Then the police swarmed the train, and LaPierre let them take over. He had a marathon to run.

This was not the first time LaPierre has jumped into the fray. In 2015, he helped rescue a one-year-old and his mother from a car wreck. Last summer, he volunteered to search for a python that went missing from a backyard cage in Newton, Massachusetts. (He found it.) And a few years back, he helped foil a CVS drugstore robbery. “I just happen to be at the right place at the right moment,” he says.

LaPierre knows there’s more to why he’s become a serial good guy than that. “I’ve lived a hard life,” he says. “But I believe change starts within yourself. For the last 25 years, I’ve tried to make myself into a good man.”

The TP Exchange

BY Rob Nikolewski AND
Hayne Palmour IV

FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

BACK IN MARCH, when the COVID-19 virus had just started its deadly trek across the country and people were panicked about shortages of just about every staple of daily life, Jonny Blue focused on one particularly urgent need. Blue, a 33-year-old physical therapist and avid surfer from Encinitas, California, saw reports of people hoarding toilet paper. He came up with a simple yet brilliant solution.

One Saturday morning, Blue took a piece of cardboard, wrote “Share Your Toilet Paper” on it in huge letters, and camped out on the corner of El Camino Real and Encinitas Boulevard.

“It just inspired me to remind people, listen, if you have a lot of something, that probably means there are people who don’t have very much of it because you took it all,” Blue said. “So sharing it is probably a good thing to keep in mind.”

The response was immediate and positive, with motorists honking horns in support. Drivers stopped to drop off spare rolls, and, just as



Jonny Blue, above, said his sign made drivers ask themselves why people were hoarding toilet paper.

quickly, Blue handed them off in an impromptu TP stock exchange.

“This guy said he just ran out and was going to a bunch of stores and couldn’t find any,” Blue said as cars whizzed by. “Somebody had given me some, so I gave it to him. He was stoked. He was like, ‘Do you want me to pay you?’ I said, ‘No, man. Take it!’”

A moment later, a driver in a white pickup truck slowed down just enough to toss out a roll to add to Blue’s burgeoning bundle.

“People are loving it,” Blue said. “They’re honking, smiling, laughing. It’s kind of a rough time right now. People want a sense of community.”

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HAYNE PALMOUR IV/SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE/ZUMA PRESS

QUOTABLE QUOTES

A couple that golfs together stays together.
Where else can I walk six miles and talk to my husband
for four hours without distraction?

—Norah O'Donnell, JOURNALIST

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

—Anthony Hopkins, ACTOR

A party without cake is really just a meeting.

—Julia Child, CHEF

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

—Hasan Minhaj, COMEDIAN

The world is not yours for the taking, but for the trying.
Try hard.

—Scott Galloway, ENTREPRENEUR

**My husband and I have both forgotten anniversaries.
He was hunting, and I was, like, asleep.**

—Kelly Clarkson, SINGER AND TV HOST

In a dream, Brad Pitt offered me a helicopter ride.
But it didn't have lights, so I had to shine a flashlight.
I'm sure it means something!

—Octavia Spencer, ACTOR

You're never too broken to be fixed.

—Jonathan Van Ness, TV PERSONALITY

POINT TO PONDER

Families are like pieces of art—you can make them from almost anything, any kind of material. Sometimes they look like you and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they come from your DNA and sometimes they don't. The only ingredient you need to make a family is unconditional love.

—Mitch Albom, AUTHOR



GETTY IMAGES (7)





The International CHERRY PIT SPITTING Championship

KEVIN BARTZ, age 53,
Edwardsburg, Michigan

So what's your trick?

One of the keys is curling your tongue, kind of creating a tube to shoot the pit out of. A lot of it is the trajectory, too, so that when it hits the ground, it rolls. My personal record is 58 feet 10 inches.

That's so unfair! Not everyone can roll their tongues, you know.

Approximately 75 percent of the human population can roll their tongues. It is thought that tongue rolling is purely genetic, but that is most likely not the case. There are probably also environmental influences as well as



some learned neuromuscular factors.

You sound like a high school biology teacher.

I am a biology teacher and a football coach.

But pit spitting might be genetic, right? You come from a family of spitters.

I do, and all three of my children are spitters. My daughter Chloe [shown above, with her dad], who is in college, won last year. She's been doing it since she was five.

Did your wife approve of teaching the kids to spit?

She liked the shared

family interest and would practice with us in the driveway on occasion. However, we couldn't persuade her to spit competitively in public with us.

After all these years, do you still like cherries?

I love cherries, but the official competition uses tart cherries, so they aren't that good. **R**

The International Cherry Pit Spitting Championship has been held in Eau Claire, Michigan, every year since 1974.

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Tanned, relaxed, and unshaven, I landed at the Denver airport after returning from my bucolic Caribbean vacation. As the customs agent handed my passport back to me, she cheerily welcomed me home by declaring, "Back to reality for you!" —BRUCE NEAL
Colorado Springs, Colorado

My friend's dad, a professor, travels a lot. Once, when returning from a conference in Australia, he spotted a familiar-looking man but didn't know where he knew him from. So he confronted him. **FRIEND'S DAD:** You look familiar. Were you at the conference this week for international trade law?



"You can call me dude or keep the ponytail ... pick one."

MAN: Uh, no, I wasn't.
FD: I definitely know you. Are you in law?
MAN: No, I'm not.
FD: Well, I must have seen you at a conference somewhere. Which university are you with?
MAN: I don't work at a university.
FD: Well, what's your name, at least?
MAN: Matt Damon.
—NOT_A_DON on reddit.com

The Customer Is (NOT) Always Right

♦ Customer's child is doing a project on dinosaurs. Customer cannot believe our bookstore doesn't have a single book with actual photographs of real dinosaurs.
—@WATERSTONES PCCC
♦ While I was working at a gas station, a guy asked me for a refund on gas he just pumped

If you put away the clean laundry on the same day that you wash it, I feel like that's what you should lead with on your résumé.

—@ABBYHASISSUES

because he changed his mind.

—@OBSUREAARON

♦ I work at a pet-supply store. A customer once called to set up a delivery. Among the items he wanted was a dog toy, but he didn't know which one. I had to

pick out toys and squeak them into the phone for him until he heard the "right one."

—@KRISTINNEUMAN

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

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

—@PANICKEDIDIOT

♦ I watched a woman demand that my coworker give her a haircut. I work at a bookstore.

—@LINDSEYFEVER

ANYTHING FUNNY happen to you at work? It could be worth \$\$\$
For details, go to page 4 or RD.COM/SUBMIT.

THE MILITARY-TO-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

We can thank soldiers and sailors for the words *umpteen*, *skedaddle*, and *raunchy*. Here's more military slang that deserves widespread use in the civilian world.

Crumb catcher: mouth

Five-sided puzzle palace: the Pentagon

Flight suit insert: pilot

Football bat: an odd way of doing something

Fruit salad: ribbons and medals worn on a uniform

Galloping dandruff: lice

Geardo: a soldier who obsesses about gear

Gofasters: sneakers

Ink stick: pen

Jesus slippers: military-issued shower footwear

Left-handed monkey wrench: a nonexistent item recruits are tricked into looking for

Oxygen thief: someone who talks too much



Soup sandwich: a situation that has gone horribly wrong

Voluntold: forcibly volunteered for an assignment

—MILITARY.COM

EVERYDAY MIRACLES



A Little Life Saved, a Big Friend Made

BY *Kristen Warfield*

WHEN MIKE MUSHAW swabbed his cheek to join the national bone marrow registry nearly three years ago, he never really gave it a second thought. After all, he did it only because his college football

coach had encouraged him and his teammates to register.

"The odds are you're just going to sign up and probably be in it for the rest of your life," Mushaw, a student at Central Connecticut State University,

told NBC. "You probably won't get a call."

About six months after the sign-up, he did get a call. The now 21-year-old linebacker's bone marrow matched a patient in Virginia. Mushaw had to decide whether to go all in. It would mean spending a night in the hospital and undergoing general anesthesia, which carries some risk. And he'd likely never know whether his donation worked.

"Right away I said yes," Mushaw told WTNH. "Once they took 17 vials of blood, I was like, 'All right, this is real. This is going to happen.'"

Mushaw didn't know it at the time, but his donation would go to a five-month-old girl named Eleanor who was sick with a rare immunodeficiency disease that was diagnosed when she was only three months old. Eleanor had rarely left her house other than to travel to the hospital or the doctor. Her immune system was far too weak to risk even the most casual human contact. As the days and weeks passed, her condition had become only more dire.

"Eleanor was going to die without a bone marrow transplant," her mother, Jessica, told NBC. "The options were to either get a transplant or face fatality in toddlerhood." (The family has chosen to withhold its surname to maintain privacy.)

Still, there was no guarantee of success. Eleanor's family had hoped that she would have some improvement

from the transplant, enough to live a more normal life. Instead, after a few weeks, the doctors at Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC, came back with shocking news: Eleanor's condition hadn't just improved—Mushaw's bone marrow had cured her.

"She's doing amazing," Mushaw says. "Better than they ever expected her to be. It was a little surprising just because of how serious her condition was, but it was more of a relief and happy feeling than anything."

"WHEN THEY TOLD ME IT WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I GOT A LITTLE CHOKED UP."

Mushaw didn't know any of this until months after his donation. In most cases, the donor and recipient remain anonymous to each other. But about six months after the procedure, Eleanor's parents sent him an e-mail to thank him for saving her life.

"When they told me it was a little girl, I got a little choked up," Mushaw says. "Just to hear that someone so young has the odds stacked against her and her only hope is in your bone marrow is a heavy feeling."

But their surprising connection was only beginning. Mushaw asked whether he and Eleanor could FaceTime regularly so he could check

on her progress. "It was amazing to watch her and be a part of her life," he says. "It felt amazing and surreal to see it all, just knowing her situation. Now she's a perfect, normal little two-year-old."

Eleanor kept tabs on him, too, by watching his football games on TV. In August, about a year after Eleanor's life-changing transplant, Mushaw invited her family to drive from Virginia to Connecticut to meet at one of his games. From the stands one weekend in November, little Eleanor stood dressed in a royal blue jersey with Mushaw's number printed on the back. On the front of her jersey was "Be the Match," the name of the organization that facilitated the donation.

Mushaw himself, by then a senior, was wearing his own special symbol that day: a pair of cleats with Eleanor's name printed on them.

Tiny shouts of "Mike! Mike!" could be heard from the stands as the little girl cheered on her very own hero: a six-foot-two, 225-pound linebacker with a very generous heart. She ran

around and jumped for joy with her parents, pointing at the field as she watched Mushaw play.

"They sent me a picture during the game when she was watching and pointing to me," Mushaw says. "Afterward, when I saw my phone, I just couldn't stop smiling at the picture. I set it as my background."

He wasn't the only one smiling. "I had waited by that point well over a year to finally give a hug to this guy who saved my daughter's life," Jessica says. "We felt like we were on cloud nine all weekend getting to spend time with him and have him be with Eleanor. I don't think I've ever smiled that much."

In January, Mushaw reunited with Eleanor, this time in Virginia, to celebrate her birthday. It will likely be the first of many celebrations together. "As a parent, it feels really great to watch someone love your kid as much as you do," Jessica says. "We were two complete strangers, and now we've become such a big part of each other's lives." **R**

Mis-Nomenclature

The funny bone isn't a bone; it's a nerve.

Catgut isn't made from cats; it's made from sheep.

French fries were invented not in France but in Belgium.

Koala bears aren't bears; they're marsupials.

A ten-gallon hat holds only about three quarts of liquid.

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HOW TO

Find Peace Anytime, Anyplace

Meditation is simpler than it sounds. Follow these directions from a skeptic who tried and liked it.

BY Dan Harris AND Jeffrey Warren WITH Carlye Adler
FROM THE BOOK **MEDITATION FOR FIDGETY SKEPTICS**



PETER DAZELEY/GETTY IMAGES (CHAIR); WEERAYA SIANKULI/FATANKU/GETTY IMAGES (SIGN)

IF YOU HAD told me as recently as a few years ago that I would someday become a traveling evangelist for meditation, I would have coughed my beer up through my nose.

In 2004, I had a panic attack at work. Unfortunately for me, that meant in front of millions of people, as I was delivering the news, live, on ABC's *Good Morning America*. In the wake of my nationally televised freak-out, I learned that I had undiagnosed depression. For months, I'd been having trouble getting out of bed in the morning and felt as if I had a permanent low-grade fever.

The panic attack ultimately led me to embrace a practice I had always dismissed as ridiculous. For most of my life, to the extent that I'd ever even considered meditation, I ranked it right alongside aura readings and Enya. Further, I figured my racing type A mind was way too busy to ever be able to commune with the cosmos. And anyway, if I got too happy, it would probably render me completely ineffective at my hyper-competitive job.

Two things changed my mind. The first was the science. In recent years, there has been an explosion of research into meditation, which has been shown to reduce blood pressure, boost recovery after your body releases the stress hormone cortisol, strengthen the immune system, slow age-related atrophy of the brain, and mitigate the symptoms of depression

and anxiety. Studies also show meditation can reduce violence in prisons, increase productivity in the workplace, and improve both the behavior and the grades of schoolchildren.

Things really get interesting when you look at the neuroscience. In recent years, researchers have been peering into the heads of meditators, and they've found that the practice can rewire key parts of the brain involved with self-awareness, compassion, and resilience. One study from the *Harvard Gazette* found that just eight weeks of meditation resulted in measurable decreases in gray matter density in the area of the brain associated with stress.

The second thing that changed my mind about meditation is that it does not necessarily entail a lot of the "weird" stuff I feared it might. Contrary to popular belief, meditation does not have to involve folding yourself into a pretzel, joining a group, or wearing special outfits. The word *meditation* is a little bit like the word *sports*; there are hundreds of varieties. The type of meditation discussed here is called mindfulness meditation, which is derived from Buddhism but does not require adopting a belief system or declaring oneself to be a Buddhist.

I began my practice slowly, with just five to ten minutes a day, which is what I recommend everyone aim for at the start. (Frankly, if you find time for even one minute a day, you can count that as a win.)

The practice does get easier the

longer you keep at it, but even after doing it for years, I get lost all the time. Here's a random sample of my mental chatter during a typical session:

In.

Out.

Man, I am feeling antsy. What's the Yiddish term my grandmother used to use for that? Shpilkes. Right.

Words that always make me giggle: ointment, pianist.

Wait, what? Come on, man. Back to the breath.

In.

Out.

Likes: baked goods.

Dislikes: fedoras, dream sequences, that part in techno songs where the French accordion kicks in.

Dude. Come. On.

In.

Out.

In.

Alternative jobs: papal nuncio, interpretive dancer, working double time on the seduction line ...

You get the idea.

To give you a sense of exactly how simple it is, here are the three-step instructions for beginning meditation.

Sit comfortably. It's best to have your spine reasonably straight, which may help prevent an involuntary nap. If you want to sit cross-legged on the floor, go for it. If not, just sit in a chair, as I do. You can close your eyes or, if you prefer, leave them open and adjust your gaze to a neutral point on the ground.

Bring your full attention to the feeling of your breath coming in and out.

Pick a spot where it's most prominent: your chest, your belly, or your nostrils. You're not thinking about your breath; you're just feeling the physical sensations. To help maintain focus, make a quiet mental note on each breath and out breath, like "in" and "out."

Every time you catch yourself wandering, escort your attention back to the breath.

This third step is the key. As soon as you try to focus on your breath, you'll start having all sorts of random thoughts, such as: *What's for lunch? Do I need a haircut? What was Casper the Friendly Ghost before he died? Who was the Susan after whom they named the lazy Susan, and how did she feel about it?* This is totally normal. The whole game is to notice when you're distracted and begin again. And again. And again. It is like a biceps curl for the brain. It is also a radical act:



PETER DAZELEV/GETTY IMAGES (CHAIR), VEEERAYA/SIRIKULPATANAKU/GETTY IMAGES (SIGN)

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TAKE IT FURTHER

- ♦ Count your breaths from one to ten, and then start over. Breathe in, one, then out. Breathe in, two, then out, and so on.
- ♦ Some people like to recite a short phrase to help them stay focused. "Just this breath" is a good one. It reminds us not to start anticipating the next breath, or to think about the last one, or to imagine in

any of the innumerable ways the mind can cook up that anything else is supposed to be happening—"just this breath."

- ♦ Recruit an image. Sometimes I imagine the in breath as a gentle wave moving up the beach, *pshhhh*, and on the out breath, the wave recedes, *ssssshh*. Back and forth. Find an image that works for you.

- ♦ Give guided audio meditations a shot. Some people wrongly assume that guided meditations are a form of training wheels—or cheating. I disagree. Instructions are quickly forgotten. Having someone in your ear can be really helpful. My advice is to experiment with both audio and solo meditations and see what works best.

You're breaking a lifetime's habit of walking around in a fog of rumination and projection, and focusing on what's happening right now.

People assume they can never meditate because they can't stop thinking. I cannot say this enough: The goal is not to clear your mind but to focus your mind—for a few nanoseconds at a time—and whenever you become distracted, just start again. Getting lost and starting over is not failing at meditation. It is succeeding.

I have been meditating for eight years, and I am still plenty ambitious. However, these days I'm not as sweaty, agitated, and unpleasant about it as I used to be. Meditation has helped me sort out my useless rumination from what I call constructive anguish.

I have learned that the less enchanted you are by the voice in your

head, the more you can make room for entirely new thoughts and feelings to emerge. It has enabled me to take even more delight in my work, my wife, and our son, Alexander, who suffuses me with warmth whether he's offering me a chicken nugget or wiping macerated muffin on my sleeve. I am less in thrall to my desires and aversions, which has given me a wider perspective and, at times, a taste of a deep, ineffable unclenching. In sum, meditation empowers you to tap into what lies beneath or beyond the ego. Call it creativity. Call it your innate wisdom. Some people call it your heart. Ew. **R**

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK *MEDEATION FOR FIDGETY SKEPTICS* BY DAN HARRIS AND JEFFREY WARREN WITH CARLYE ADLER, PUBLISHED BY SPIEGEL & GRAU, AN IMPRINT OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE LLC. COPYRIGHT © 2017 BY DAN HARRIS.

STEP 3
You're done!

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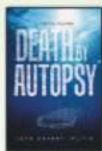
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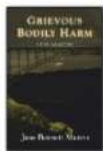
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In anticipation of the 2020 election, this book describes Donald Trump's public life, from his mob connections in the 1980s through his first two stumbling years in the White House.

**WE
FOUND
A FIX**
9 TRICKS TO
Improve Your Life*

1

Give Broth to Your Thirsty Pet

PETS Some dogs and cats are too stubborn for their own good. If yours won't stay hydrated, coax her to the water bowl by adding a teaspoon of low-sodium chicken or bone broth. Just be sure it's free of onions and garlic, and change the water daily.

MAGNONE/GETTY IMAGES



*From RD.COM and THEHEALTHY.COM

2

Best Bleach Practices

HOME Many of us recently rediscovered the versatility of this old-time disinfectant but might need a refresher on some basic dos and don'ts. Do dilute bleach with water before cleaning with it, but don't keep your solution in a plastic bottle for more than a few days. The bleach can degrade some containers, and it can lose its potency when exposed to light. If your solution has no bleach "smell," it's time to toss it.

3

Clean Bugs Off Your Car

AUTO In the heat of summer, dead bugs can get stuck to a car's paint job. Wax such as Rain-X will help keep those little pests from sticking. For those that hold on, try wiping them off with a fabric softener sheet dipped in water.

4

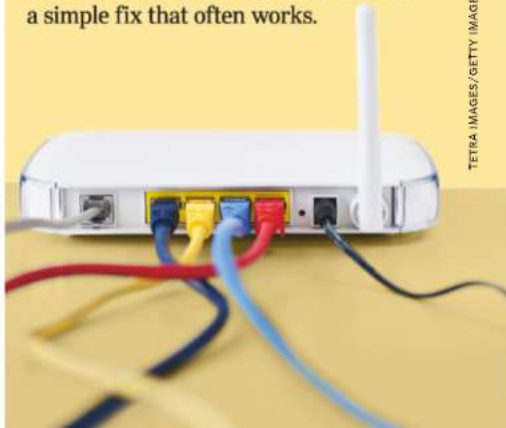
Where Else Cleanliness Can Pay

MONEY You can save the cost of replacing a burned-out hair dryer by vacuuming the dust regularly from the back vent. Over time, dust collects there and clogs it, which in turn makes the motor work harder. That can cause the blow-dryer to burn out faster.

5

Fix Spotty Wi-Fi Signals

TECHNOLOGY Electronic devices such as radios, televisions, and even computer monitors emit frequencies that can interfere with your Wi-Fi signal. If you're having recurring connection issues, try moving some of the lesser-used devices from your home or office (or unplugging them) before you try anything else. It's a simple fix that often works.



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6

Stop Your Garbage from Stinking Up the House

HOME Summer heat can sometimes cause garbage cans to give off an unpleasant odor. Reader Michael Sienkowski of Norwich, Connecticut, has a suggestion: "If you grow mint, cut a fresh sprig and place it in the garbage can every day. It keeps the can smelling fresh all season long."



7

Relieve an Eyestrain Headache

HEALTH Try some acupressure on a pressure point known as Yu Yao. Using the tips of your fingers, press the middle of each eyebrow for a minute, then release. This can also help alleviate the tension that builds up from blocked sinuses.

8

Chop Onions Without Tearing Up

COOKING You may have seen Sunions in Costco, Whole Foods, or Price Chopper and wondered, What are those? They are a new onion cross-breed designed to virtually eliminate the standard onion's tear-jerking ability. The good news is they are not genetically modified. But there is one potential drawback: Some culinary experts say that Sunions taste sweeter and milder than traditional yellow onions.

9

Need a New TV? Now's the Best Time to Buy

MONEY If you've been waiting to buy a new TV, now is the time. Early March through May is when you'll find lots of closeouts on the prior year's top-selling models. **R**

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13 THINGS

The Truth About Wildfires

BY Elizabeth Yuko



1 IT MAY seem as if wildfires have multiplied in recent years, but that's not the case. Since 2000, there have been on average 72,400 fires annually, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Last year saw 49,786 fires. In 2018, there were 55,911.

2 THE REAL problem is the intensity of the blazes. In 2015, for the first time, fires burned more than ten million acres nationwide. It happened again in 2017. In California, eight of the state's 20 worst

wildfires have occurred in the past ten years. The 2018 Camp Fire, which claimed 85 lives in Northern California, was the deadliest in a century.

3 COMBATING LARGE-SCALE fires could prove more challenging than ever this year. To help teams of firefighters access a blaze quickly, they often live together in "fire camps." But health officials fear that if the COVID-19 virus persists, that kind of communal living will be dangerous.

4 PREVENTING FOREST fires (which, like bushfires, are a subset of wildfires) first became a large-scale concern after the attack on Pearl Harbor, as people worried that our World War II enemies would target the mainland. The Forest Service enlisted an ingenious not-so-secret agent: Smokey Bear. The Smokey Bear Wildfire Prevention campaign is still on the job; in fact, it's the longest-running public service advertising campaign in American history.

5 THE WORST wildfire in terms of lives lost was the 1871 Peshtigo Fire in Wisconsin, in which at least 1,200 people died. Never heard of it? Perhaps that's because it was overshadowed by another terrible blaze that happened the same night: the Great Chicago Fire.

6 HUMANS STILL cause more than four out of five wildfires, through carelessly tossed cigarettes, poorly extinguished campfires, and arson. Another major spark

of wildfires is lightning. According to the Natural History Museum of Utah, lightning strikes the earth more than 100,000 times a day. Anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of those strikes cause fires.

7 ONE OF the most bizarre human-sourced wildfires occurred in Arizona's Coronado National Forest, in 2017. It wasn't a camping bonfire that got out of control; it was a gender-reveal party, CNN reported. A man shot a rifle at a target laced with an

explosive substance called Tannerite. The explosion was rigged to produce the appropriately colored cloud of smoke: pink or blue. Instead, it touched off a fire that ultimately burned 47,000 acres of the forest.

8 ONE OF the many challenges of dealing with wildfires is that they can overtake even a very fast human. According to *National Geographic*, the fires can travel up to 14 miles per hour, or about one mile every four minutes.

9 UNLIKE PEOPLE, wildfires move uphill much more quickly than downhill. Fire needs air to burn, and a steep hill allows more air to come from below the blaze than from above it, which in turn encourages the fire to climb.

10 IT'S NO wonder, then, that to join a "hotshot" crew—a specially trained team that travels to the most dangerous fires—firefighters have to meet certain physical requirements. These include running 1.5 miles in 10.6 minutes or less

and completing 40 sit-ups in a minute.

11 WILDFIRES ALSO burn money. In 1991, the Forest Service spent 13 percent of its budget on "wildfire suppression." By 2025, fires will eat up two thirds of the agency's money, at an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion.

12 IF A wildfire gets large enough, it can actually affect the local weather. Researchers who studied the July 2014 El Portal Fire in Yosemite National Park learned that the

wildfire created updrafts and eddies that changed the wind patterns more than a mile away. The blaze also caused the formation of dense clouds called pyrocumulus clouds.

13 BEETLES OF the genus *Melanophila* are actually attracted to fires—they're sometimes called fire chasers. They prefer to lay their eggs in freshly burned (or still-smoldering) wood, according to the American Museum of Natural History. It turns out their eggs are safer from predators in a just-burned landscape. **E**



Working-from-Home Haiku

Cherry blossoms fall
And gently float downriver
On my screen saver.

Is it Thursday? Or
Is it Friday? I don't know.
Everything's a blur.

Got a midday snack.
It's not fruit or healthy food.
HoHos are my shame.

JOHN TOMKIV

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LIFE

IN THESE
United States

I was perusing the shelves at a bookstore when a customer asked an employee where the birding section was. After pointing it out, the employee asked, "Is there anything specific you're looking for?"

"Yes," said the customer. "My husband."
—A.H. via rd.com

Our fourth grader celebrated his birthday on crutches, so he couldn't carry the cupcakes into school without help. I asked our sixth grader, Noah, to help his brother carry them in.

"I could," he said, "but I'd prefer not to." Spotting a teaching moment, my husband asked Noah, "What would Jesus do?"

Noah answered,



"I think we're named after computer passwords."

"Jesus would heal him so he could carry his own cupcakes."

—RACHEL NICHOLS
Richmond, Missouri

I had a chance encounter with a pastor who told me about a wonderful event held at his church. "We had a singing group the other day that performed without instruments," he said.

"A cappella?" I asked.

He shrugged.

"I don't remember the name of the group."
—WADE HAMPTON
Martinsburg,
West Virginia

My 85-year-old grandfather was rushed to the hospital with a possible concussion. The doctor asked him a series of questions: "Do you know where you are?"

"I'm at Rex Hospital."
"What city are you in?"

"Raleigh."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Dr. Hamilton."

My grandfather then turned to the nurse and said, "I hope he doesn't ask me any more questions."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because all of those answers were on his badge."

—WEBB SMITH
Marietta, Georgia

Concerned that he might have put on a few pounds, my husband exited the bathroom and asked, "Do you think my chin is getting fat?"

I smiled lovingly and replied, "Which one?"
—JULIE ECHELMEIER
Corder, Missouri

GOT A FUNNY STORY about friends or family? It could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, go to RD.COM/SUBMIT.

I would prefer that the sun die forever than apply sunscreen to my children one more time.

—[@ROBCORDDRY](https://twitter.com/ROBCORDDRY)

LAUGHTER /
GOOD MEDICINE!

More proof that sometimes people need a bit of humor to get through the tough stuff:

◆ Somehow reassuring in the midst of coronavirus shopping frenzy to know that people still have the sense not to buy chocolate hummus and buffalo hummus.

—[@noahgo](https://twitter.com/noahgo)

◆ CDC: To prevent coronavirus, stay home, avoid physical contact, and don't go into large crowds. **Introvers:** I've been preparing for this moment my entire life.

—[@CrowsFault](https://twitter.com/CrowsFault)

◆ Prediction: There will be a minor baby boom in nine months and one day in 2033, we shall witness the rise of the QUARANTEENS.

—[mustbethedragon](https://twitter.com/mustbethedragon) ON [IMGUR.COM](http://imgur.com)

◆ Due to local cases of #COVID-19, the Puyallup (Washington) Police Department is asking all criminal activities and nefarious behavior to cease. We appreciate your cooperation in halting crime & thank the criminals in advance. We will let you know when you can resume your normal behavior. Until then #washyourhands.

—[@PuyallupPD](https://twitter.com/PuyallupPD)



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THE FOOD ON YOUR PLATE

I Am Tuna ... **Actually, King of the Sea**

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

YOU MAY THINK of me as palatable and bland, the sight of me packed into cans reminiscent of school lunches and childhood picnics. But here's what they don't tell the kids: There's very little that's tame about me. One of the ocean's fastest fish, I can grow to be 1,500 pounds of pure muscle. I fetch millions at Japanese fish markets. Forget the "chicken of the sea" pabulum. I am the Schwarzenegger of the sea, superlative and dominant.

Consider my body: My slick skin defines hydrodynamic elegance, my half-moon-shaped tail resembles a dragster's, and my dorsal fin collapses into a pocket on my back just like the

door handles on a Tesla. Given what a baller this all makes me, it should come as no surprise that I'm honored in cave paintings dating back to 3000 BC. Phoenician coins from 2000 BC feature Hercules on one side and me on the other. Five years ago, modern Navy scientists pinpointed just how perfectly evolved I am for efficient speed: They modeled their new underwater spy drone, the GhostSwimmer, on me. Maybe it's time they renamed their vaunted SEALs the TUNAs.

OK, you're wondering how I can be both such a ho-hum part of everyday life and so high-rolling. How is it that a can of me costs a dollar while the same little puck-size quantity of my raw meat could go for \$100 in a different context?

I'll tell you how. The fish you colloquially call tuna is actually seven species of fish. Bluefin is the largest, as long as a BMW sedan and at the top of the food chain. (A single bluefin sold for \$3 million last year.) Along with the only slightly less prized bigeye and yellowfin species (the ahi steak popular in poke bowls and at the fish-monger's), it is one of the three sushi-worthy tunas.

On the other end of the spectrum is the smaller albacore tuna, plus my stepbrother, skipjack. Biologically speaking, skipjack is in a different category of tuna from the others, if you look solely at the evolutionary tree. But commercially it's my most important



FOR GREAT NEW YORK DELI-STYLE TUNA SALAD

In a medium mixing bowl, very finely flake 2 drained 5-ounce cans tuna (water-packed is fine) using a fork. Mix in 1 cup mayonnaise, ½ cup minced white onion, ½ cup minced celery, 3 tablespoons minced fresh dill, and ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sweet relish or dill pickle relish (or a combo!). Season with salt and pepper. Makes enough for at least 4 sandwiches.

variety, easier to catch and can in bulk and thus accounting for \$18 billion of the \$42 billion worth of me that gets sold hither and thither each year.

No matter the species, I'm always lean and mean, with meat very high in protein and low in fat. That leaves human diners with two ways to go: You can eat me raw or almost so, with edges seared and the inside still red, or you can cook me through and accept that I'll dry out quickly. Americans in particular have devoured me in the driest possible way: superheated into shelf-stable cans. Until the '90s, you ate more and more of me every decade for 50 straight years!

It's true that I can be delicious canned, provided you don't go light on the mayo—or, for a more heart-healthy and deliciously fatty tuna salad, the olive oil. In terms of taste, any old can from the supermarket will do, whether skipjack ("light"), albacore ("white"), or yellowfin.

If you want to do right by the ocean, however, opt for troll-caught or pole-and-line-caught tuna. These "one fish, one hook" methods nab me without nearly as much bycatch. Longlines and purse seines, or huge nets, often wipe out entire schools, including tuna too young to have had a chance to reproduce. And lately there's renewed concern about mercury levels in my meat (including in my steaks). For the record, since cans of "chunk white" and "solid white" albacore have nearly three times as much mercury as canned "light" skipjack, it's recommended that young children and women of childbearing age dine on me in that form no more than once a week.

My tinned meat will be more flavorful and less chalky if packed in oil, while my belly meat, in cans labeled

"ventresca," is silkiest of all. But if mayo is going to be involved, none of that matters much. Mix me with onions, celery, capers, and the like (some of you add halved grapes for a sweet crunch), and you have a flavorful, high-protein filling for your sandwich.

When you do splurge on my high-end versions, either as sushi or by ordering that rosy-red ahi steak at your local fish joint, keep a few things in mind. Take a pause on eating my bluefin brothers for a while, because they are in deep trouble. In the northern Pacific and in the Southern Hemisphere, the current populations are estimated to be only 3 to 4 percent of what they were before you overfished us. If all you humans made that one sacrifice, we could recover pretty quickly. Don't forget that getting rid of an apex predator like me has grim repercussions all the way down the food chain. **R**

Kate Lowenstein is a health editor currently at Vice; Daniel Gritzer is the culinary director of the cooking site Serious Eats.

What're the Odds ...

... of finding a four-leaf clover? One in 10,000.

... of seeing a black cat? One in three. According to the ASPCA, 33 percent of cats taken in by shelters are black.

... that Friday will fall on the 13th? On average, a Friday the 13th occurs once every 212.35 days.



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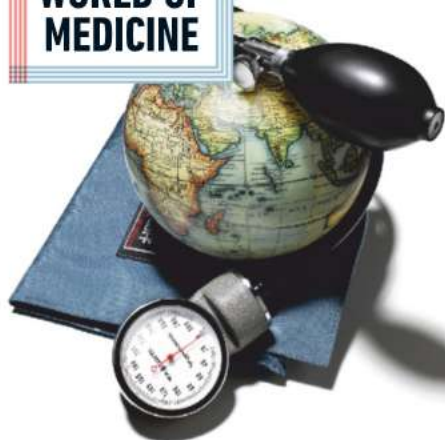


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News FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**



**BREAST CANCER
MORE DEADLY FOR MEN
THAN FOR WOMEN**

Of the approximately 279,000 breast cancer diagnoses in the United States each year, fewer than 1 percent are in men. But in a study of more than 1.8 million subjects, male patients had a 19 percent higher death rate than female patients. Researchers believe that undertreatment of the disease in men, along with differences in clinical characteristics between male and female patients, accounted for the higher mortality rate.

**Stressed Out?
Fire Up a Game on
Your Smartphone**

The Web is filled with programs designed to help ease your mind—mindfulness meditation apps, they're called. But a British study suggests that playing an enjoyable game on your phone will help relieve work-related stress just as well. Participants in the study spent ten minutes a day over five days with either a shape-fitting game (similar to Tetris) or a meditation app. Their recovery from work strain was measured by how relaxed, detached from work, capable, and in control they felt. The meditation app produced more relaxation on day one, but the game offered increasing benefits over time, perhaps because players were getting better at it, which added to their enjoyment. So go ahead and spend a few minutes with your favorite game—it's good for you!

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Hypertension Help Is a Group Effort

Most hypertension patients get treatment from only one person: their doctor. In an experiment conducted in Colombia and Malaysia, more people were added to the support team. Half the patients received traditional one-on-one care. For the other half, doctors shared some tasks (e.g., counseling patients, monitoring treatments) with nonphysician health workers. The researchers also recruited "treatment supporters"—friends or relatives to accompany these patients to health appointments and encourage them to take their medication and follow lifestyle advice. After a year, the patients who worked with a team saw their overall cardiovascular risk score decrease almost twice as much as those who saw only their doctor.



SHIFTING SLEEP CYCLES

Night owls taking part in a trial published in the journal *Sleep Medicine* were able to adjust their cycles by an average of two hours within three weeks. Each day, they got up earlier than usual, had breakfast, took in as much outdoor morning light as possible, ate lunch at a set time, avoided caffeine and napping from late afternoon onward, ate dinner before 7 p.m., limited light in the evening, and went to bed early. This routine saw them performing better and feeling less sleepy, less stressed, and less depressed. A similar schedule can help avoid jet lag.

The Most Hydrating Drink? It's a Surprise

Researchers at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland studied 13 common beverages to see how much water the body retained two hours after they were ingested. Surprisingly, plain water (still and sparkling) was near the bottom of the list. The winner: skim milk. Its sugar, protein, and fat slow the emptying of fluid from the stomach, and its sodium acts as a sponge, keeping water in the body. Oral rehydration solutions, such as Pedialyte, are effective in keeping water in the body as well. Sodas and juices, with their higher concentration of sugars, also empty more slowly from the stomach than water. However, the body pulls water into the small intestine to dilute the sugars, making them less hydrating.

NASA Scientist Harnesses Surprising Ingredient to Help Block Arthritis Pain

Dr. Phil Barbara knew a thing or two about solving space-age problems. As a NASA chemist, he helped crack the code on creating drinkable water and breathable air to help humans survive in space. But it's his knowledge of natural chemicals found in plants that's making a big difference here on earth—thanks to his patented, proprietary formula that provides 24-hour joint pain relief to arthritis sufferers.

The Secret Ingredient is Found in Chili Peppers!

We've all experienced the "instant heat" sensation that comes from an unexpected bite into a hot pepper. Well it turns out that capsaicin, the natural ingredient that gives chili peppers their eye-watering strength, works amazingly well to relieve pain—offering new hope for arthritis sufferers and anyone looking for long-lasting pain relief from aching muscles and joints.

Use for a Week. Get Relief for a Month!

PainBloc24[®] is made with the highest concentration of pharmaceutical-grade capsaicin allowed by the FDA without a prescription. It relieves pain at the source by deactivating certain nerve fibers that transmit pain signals to the brain, for relief that builds with each use. Within a week, the maximum pain-blocking power of capsaicin takes hold, providing round-the-clock pain relief. In fact, PainBloc24[®] is so effective, use it every day for a week as directed, and your pain relief will last up to a month.

24 Hour Pain Relief

PainBloc24[®] is not a gimmick or a fad. Its patented formula has been clinically shown¹ to provide long-lasting relief of arthritis pain by helping to block arthritis joint pain at the source of the pain signal. In fact, the ingredient in PainBloc24[®] is now recommended by the American College of Rheumatology.² PainBloc24[®]

is different than other pain relievers. Its pain relief BUILDS with daily use and is so effective, use it every day for a week, and feel relief that lasts for 24 hours a day all month long². It comes in a no-mess, easy-to-use roll-on applicator and is odor-free.



See What Arthritis Sufferers are Saying:

"I am a handyman and I am on my knees and up and down ladders all the time. At first I used it twice a day then I went to once a day now about every 3 days. It's the best thing I have ever used! Thank you very much."

Jeff

"For the first time in a LONG time I do not have joint pain! The product works great on myself as well as my mother who has arthritis. Love it!"

Q.R.D.

We and our retail partners are working tirelessly to keep PainBloc24[®] in stock and available for purchase from the comfort of your own home. PainBloc24[®] is available online and in store at these retailers:



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Use as directed.

¹Patent Nos. 9956190, 10085956, 10206892, and 10581180
²Clinical study in osteoarthritis knee pain
³Conditional recommendation for OA knee in the American College of Rheumatology (Arthritis Foundation Guideline for the Management of Osteoarthritis of the Hand, Hip, and Knee - 2019)

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TATIANA MAGOVAI/GETTY IMAGES

ELECTRIC STIMULATION TURNS BACK THE CLOCK

FROM ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY (often called shock treatment) to deep brain stimulation, there is a long history of applying electrical currents to the brain to treat neurological and mental health issues. Now two studies suggest the benefits of this type of therapy might be more widespread.

In one experiment, researchers used electrodes embedded in a skullcap to deliver alternating current to certain regions of the brains of 42 adults ages 60 to 76. Doctors know that brain waves tend to fall out of sync with one another as we age. They also theorize that this disconnect is what slows the transfer of information from one part of the brain to another—the areas controlling reasoning and memory, for instance. To test this theory, the researchers tuned their electric currents to the natural oscillations of each subject's brain waves to help get them back in sync. After the treatment, the older adults' scores on tests of their working memory matched the scores of a comparison group of 20-somethings.

In another study, an electric current was used to stimulate the vagus nerve. As we get older, the branch of the nervous system that controls fight-or-flight impulses gets more active, while the branch that affects "rest and digest" functions slows down. Together, these changes make us more prone to a wide variety of diseases. Shocking the vagus nerve, which helps control breathing, digestion, heart rate, blood pressure, and other bodily functions, rebalanced study participants' nervous systems, helping them counteract the effects of aging.



Faster Lyme Disease Diagnosis

Early diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease gives sufferers a much better chance of complete recovery. But symptoms of the disease can easily be mistaken for those of other illnesses, and test results can take up to three weeks. Two new tests are being developed to detect the disease more rapidly, one by identifying its DNA and the other by testing for a protein associated with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease.

Testosterone Therapy Risks

A study of 15,401 men ages 45 and older found that those who used testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) to improve their sex drive and energy levels had a 21 percent greater risk of stroke or heart attack than nonusers. The risk was highest in the first six months to two years of TRT use. **R**

LAUGH LINES

Anybody want to buy some exercise equipment?
I'm having a going-out-of-fitness sale.

—[@JohnLyonTweets](#)

Accidentally went grocery shopping on an empty stomach, and now I'm the proud owner of aisle seven.

—[@DomesticGoddss](#)

My wife does this cute thing now and then where she goes out shopping for next year's yard sale items.

—[@cravin4](#)

One of the World's Strongest Man events should be "Pulling apart two shopping carts that are stuck together."

—[@Cheeseboy22](#)

Two salespeople approached me at the furniture store. I'm following the one who called me "miss." The "Hello, ma'am" one should take note.

—[@AnniemuMary](#)

If I worked in a used-record store, I would tell every customer that "all sales are vinyl!"

—[@WoodyLuvsCoffee](#)



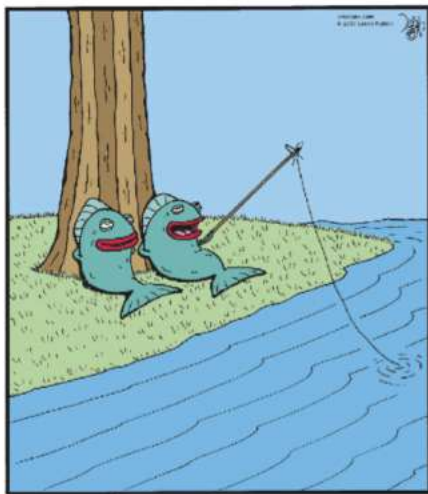
Going,
Going,
Sold!

LIFE ON WHITE/GETTY IMAGES

LUCA SAGE/GETTY IMAGES

LAUGHTER

THE BEST Medicine



"You know, from this end, it really is remarkably relaxing."

At an event famous for giving out awards in bizarre categories, the emcee enthusiastically announces, "The next prize will go to the laziest person in the

audience. If you think you qualify, raise your hand." Everyone raises their hands except a middle-aged man who seems to show little interest.

"Congratulations! You are the winner," says the emcee to the man. "Your prize is this \$100 bill!" Still showing no emotion, the man replies, "Would you mind coming over here and putting it in my pocket?"
—Submitted by
JOSÉ J. ZULUAGA
Canóvanas, Puerto Rico

Gimme the Scoop

♦ Just saw a guy walking down the street eating a gallon of ice cream right out of the container. I hired him as my life coach.

—@GOLDENGATE
BLOND

♦ My husband just bought ice cream with raisins. So, that was a fun marriage.

—@SMEROBIN

♦ I'm going to start eating clean. How do you wash ice cream?

—@JESSIEDOLL22

I can give you the cause of anaphylactic shock in a nutshell.
—GARY DELANEY,
comedian

I was raised by my grandfather clock because my biological clock was never there.

—@BLACK_ELVIS

A statistician's wife gave birth to twins. Shortly after, he rang the minister, who was delighted.

"Bring them both to church," he said,

"and we'll baptize them."

"No," replied the statistician. "Baptize one. We'll keep the other as a control."

—STATS.STACKEXCHANGE.COM

One of the shortest wills ever written: "Being of sound mind, I spent all the money."
—Submitted by
ARTHUR BLAND
Sunrise, Florida

GOT A FUNNY JOKE?
It could be worth \$\$\$.
For details, go to
RD.COM/SUBMIT.

NOT MAKING THE GRADE

When you were in high school, did you feel as if your teachers failed to recognize your true talent and potential? This guy likely would have felt the same way.

Student: **J. Christ** Grade: 10

COURSE	GRADE	COMMENT
English	C	Tends to write in archaic forms ("sayeth," "maketh," etc.) and relies overly on outmoded figures of speech.
History	B	Excellent and enthusiastic pupil of ancient history but is baffled by the modern era.
Earth Science	Incomplete	Totally misinterpreted a major assignment on the age of rocks and instead reported on the "Rock of Ages." Needs to repeat.
PE	D	A troublemaker—e.g., during our unit on swimming, refused to work on technique and instead tried to walk across the pool.

General Comments: A charismatic boy but social concerns persist. Most disturbing is that he has organized a gang of 12 of his peers. Also, he should keep his hair at a tidy length and not wear sandals, in accordance with the school uniform guidelines. —PLEACHER.COM

The first and only overactive bladder (OAB) treatment in its class.



IS YOUR BLADDER ALWAYS TAKING YOU ON A TRIP OF ITS OWN?

- ! Urgency
- 🔄 Frequency
- 💧 Leakage

In clinical trials, those taking Myrbetriq made fewer trips to the bathroom and had fewer leaks than those not taking Myrbetriq. Your results may vary.

**TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR
OAB SYMPTOMS BY TALKING
TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT
MYRBETRIQ TODAY.**



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USE OF MYRBETRIQ (meer-BEH-trick)

Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) is a prescription medicine for adults used to treat overactive bladder (OAB) with symptoms of urgency, frequency and leakage.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Myrbetriq is not for everyone. Do not take Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any ingredients in Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

Myrbetriq may cause allergic reactions that may be serious. If you experience swelling of the face, lips, throat or tongue, with or without difficulty breathing, stop taking Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take including medications for overactive bladder or other medicines such as thioridazine (Mellaril™ and Mellaril-S™), flecainide (Tambocor®), propafenone (Rythmo®), digoxin (Lanoxin®) or solifenacin succinate (VESicare®). Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Before taking Myrbetriq, tell your doctor if you have liver or kidney problems. The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include

Like us on Facebook 
and visit Myrbetriq.com

increased blood pressure, common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis), dry mouth, flu symptoms, urinary tract infection, back pain, dizziness, joint pain, headache, constipation, sinus irritation, and inflammation of the bladder (cystitis).

For further information, please talk to your healthcare professional and see Brief Summary of Prescribing Information for Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) on the following pages.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.



Myrbetriq®
(mirabegron)
extended-release tablets
25 mg, 50 mg



Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) extended-release tablets 25 mg, 50 mg

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

Read the Patient Information that comes with Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This summary does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment.

What is Myrbetriq (meer-BEE-trick)?

Myrbetriq is a prescription medication for adults used to treat the following symptoms due to a condition called overactive bladder:

- Urge urinary incontinence: a strong need to urinate with leaking or wetting accidents
- Urgency: a strong need to urinate right away
- Frequency: urinating often

It is not known if Myrbetriq is safe and effective in children.

Who should not use Myrbetriq?

Do not take Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any of the ingredients in Myrbetriq. See the end of this summary for a complete list of ingredients in Myrbetriq.

What should I tell my doctor before taking Myrbetriq?

Before you take Myrbetriq, tell your doctor about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have liver problems or kidney problems
- have very high uncontrolled blood pressure
- have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if Myrbetriq will harm your unborn baby. Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Myrbetriq passes into your breast milk. Talk to your doctor about the best way to feed your baby if you take Myrbetriq.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Tell your doctor if you take:

- thioridazine (Mellaril™ or Mellaril-S™)
- flecainide (Tambocor®)
- propafenone (Rythmol®)
- digoxin (Lanoxin®)
- solifenacin succinate (VESIcare®)

How should I take Myrbetriq?

- Take Myrbetriq exactly as your doctor tells you to take it.
- You should take 1 Myrbetriq tablet 1 time a day.
- You should take Myrbetriq with water and swallow the tablet whole.
- Do not chew, break, or crush the tablet.
- You can take Myrbetriq with or without food.
- If you miss a dose of Myrbetriq, begin taking Myrbetriq again the next day. Do not take 2 doses of Myrbetriq the same day.
- If you take too much Myrbetriq, call your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.

What are the possible side effects of Myrbetriq?

Myrbetriq may cause serious side effects including:

- **increased blood pressure.** Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq.
- **inability to empty your bladder (urinary retention).** Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder if you have bladder outlet obstruction or if you are taking

other medicines to treat overactive bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you are unable to empty your bladder.

- **angioedema.** Myrbetriq may cause an allergic reaction with swelling of the lips, face, tongue, throat with or without difficulty breathing. Stop using Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include:

• increased blood pressure	• dizziness
• common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis)	• joint pain
• dry mouth	• headache
• flu symptoms	• constipation
• urinary tract infection	• sinus (sinus irritation)
• back pain	• inflammation of the bladder (cystitis)

Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away or if you have swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat, hives, skin rash or itching while taking Myrbetriq. These are not all the possible side effects of Myrbetriq.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

How should I store Myrbetriq?

- Store Myrbetriq between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C). Keep the bottle closed.
- Safely throw away medicine that is out of date or no longer needed.

Keep Myrbetriq and all medicines out of the reach of children.

General information about the safe and effective use of Myrbetriq
Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in the Patient Information leaflet. Do not use Myrbetriq for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give Myrbetriq to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about Myrbetriq that is written for health professionals.

For more information, visit www.Myrbetriq.com or call (800) 727-7003.

What are the ingredients in Myrbetriq?

Active ingredient: mirabegron

Inactive ingredients: polyethylene oxide, polyethylene glycol, hydroxypropyl cellulose, butylated hydroxytoluene, magnesium stearate, hypromellose, yellow ferric oxide and red ferric oxide (25 mg Myrbetriq tablet only).

What is overactive bladder?

Overactive bladder occurs when you cannot control your bladder contractions. When these muscle contractions happen too often or cannot be controlled, you can get symptoms of overactive bladder, which are urinary frequency, urinary urgency, and urinary incontinence (leakage).

Marketed and Distributed by:

Astellas Pharma US, Inc.
Northbrook, Illinois 60062



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Revised: April 2018
206813-MRVS-BRFS
057-2652-PM



MY
**Thank
you** YEAR

How writing 365 notes of appreciation reconnected me to what's important in my life

BY Gina Hamadey
PHOTOGRAPHS BY Andrew Hetherington

In

January 2018, I was commuting from Brooklyn to New Jersey. I have two little kids and a busy consulting business, so a quiet train ride felt like a mini vacation. Yet I found myself spending that precious time slack-jawed, scrolling through my social media feeds. One day, I put down my

phone and started writing thank-you notes to people who had contributed to a fundraiser I had organized.

When I got off the train that day, I was in a noticeably better mood. The next day, I wrote more thank-yous—and felt the same afterglow. When I finished writing the notes, I counted them up. There were 31—one for every day of the year so far. Something clicked. What if I kept it up?

I decided to write one thank-you note for every day of that year. I had no shortage of people I was grateful for. So I picked out a different theme for each month to keep on task. January was charity—and, thankfully, I had already completed that goal.

February would be dedicated to neighbors, I decided, and I thought of a dozen names right away. I remembered when the owners of our local bookstore let me and my five-year-old son, Henry, in before the store opened and offered to play his favorite soundtrack (*Mary Poppins*). I recalled when our 14-year-old babysitter dropped off a bag of old board games for our kids to play.

Writing the notes wasn't all that time-consuming: Each was two or three sentences long, taking just a few minutes to compose. I focused on the person I was writing to and what I wanted to say, and the words came fairly easily. I quickly learned I couldn't do it while listening to a podcast or toggling between articles. That focus felt refreshing. It was good for my brain, which had been trained to wander, alighting on this feed or that e-mail, darting from app to app. It felt meditative to look at a blank white space with a pen in my hand, thinking about a person and the way he or she had helped me.

While writing the notes, I eventually realized why this task was the perfect antidote to my social feeds. What was I actually doing when I scrolled through Facebook? Too often, I was spiraling into rage. Writing thank-you notes was time spent on something purely positive. What was I doing when I scrolled through Instagram? More often than not, I was admiring other people's lives—their beach vacations, their chubby babies, their

organized kitchens. Writing thank-you notes was an act of noticing and honoring my own life.

After handing the first batch of notes to my neighbors, I spent a few days trying to remember times when other neighbors did something nice for me. And funny enough, I started noticing kindnesses that were happening in real time.

There was the driver who waited

I wrote each note by hand, with a pen, never on a computer, and mailed or hand-delivered them all.

for me as I bolted down the street to catch his shuttle bus. There was the cashier at Trader Joe's who chased me with a bag of groceries I'd left behind.

On the day I delivered that card to Trader Joe's, my mother-in-law, Louise, dropped off a week's worth of dinners. OK, I thought, Louise is not technically a neighbor. But if I was going to thank grocer Pete for three minutes of his time, I needed to acknowledge Louise for hours of hers.

It was important for these months to be flexible, I decided. I would use each month's theme as a starting point, but I'd also watch for anyone going above and beyond, regardless of whether he or she fit into the monthly theme.

So in the ensuing months, as I wrote to friends, doctors, career mentors, and parenting role models, I also dashed off missives to my husband,



HAND LETTERING BY MARIA AMADOR

Jake, as well as my siblings, in-laws, and parents. And I found that doing so changed the fundamental dynamics of these relationships in small but impactful ways. I was smoothing out any prickly bumps and buffing them to a new shine. It is a powerful thing, I learned, to fully appreciate and feel fully appreciated by the people closest to you.

By the time I got to July, my “food” month, I had become fairly adept at retrieving memories and identifying people to thank. Among that month’s recipients was a chef, Julie, who had cooked at my favorite but now defunct restaurant. Here’s what I wrote to her:

Dear Julie,

I've been finding myself missing Little Giant lately, as if it were a person. Thank you for creating such a warm and special place, and for hosting me and cooking beautiful and thoughtful food.

The Little Giant menu has informed my cooking—I am always trying to re-create some of that magic. Jake and I will never forget when you sent out biscuits shaped into the Roman numeral VI for our sixth anniversary. We talk about it every year.

Thank you. We miss Little Giant and you.

*Love,
Gina*

Better How to Write a Thank-You Note

- ◆ Don't bother to buy expensive cards.
- ◆ Don't make a preliminary outline—it's fussy and takes too long.
- ◆ Do spend a minute or two focusing on the recipient before you start writing.
- ◆ Don't worry about crafting poetic or perfect sentences.
- ◆ Do speak from the heart.
- ◆ Do clear away distractions. Turn off the TV and your phone while you're writing.
- ◆ Don't fret about your messy handwriting, and if you make an error, just cross it out.
- ◆ Don't expect a response—but enjoy a grateful surprise when you receive one.

I was delighted to receive a note back from her. Julie replied, “I don’t think I’ve ever received such a touching letter before. Out of the blue and incredibly thoughtful. And so needed at a time when I’m struggling professionally. Your letter was a fabulous reminder that looking back is a good motivator for moving forward.”

I COMPLETED MY GOAL WITH HOURS TO SPARE, WRITING TO JAKE ON DECEMBER 31.



It was one of many responses throughout the year that said something along the lines of, “I’m going through a tough time right now, and this helped.” It turns out a lot of people are going through something a lot of the time. And I wouldn’t have known if I hadn’t reached out.

Part of the magic of what I am calling my Thank-You Year was reconnecting

with people like Julie—people on the periphery of my life who nevertheless made a lasting impact. And here’s another huge bonus: I was reminded to acknowledge people in the moment, too—to smile or say hello, or thanks, or “Here, let me help you with that.”

I admit, I fell behind more than once during the year. But I completed my goal with hours to spare—writing my last card (to Jake) on December 31. That night, we hosted a big New Year’s Eve dinner, and I looked around at my guests. There was Alonso from Berlin, whom I’d written to in my “travel” month. There were Nick and Ro, in from Minneapolis, who’d received cards in my “friends” and “career mentors” months. There was Mollie, who racked up notes as a mentor, friend, and neighbor. There was Jake, of course. Henry had fallen asleep on the couch; his brother, Charlie, was upstairs in bed. I snapped a picture of the scene so I could remember the feeling welling up inside me. Gratitude.

A Low Point for Pizza Lovers

Pie fans, let’s never go back to 2018. That’s the year emergency room visits for pizza-related injuries nationwide skyrocketed. Whether someone slashed a finger with a pizza cutter or tripped walking down some stairs during a delivery, this cheesy Italian meal proved to be a hazardous one. Other reported incidents include a man who poked the roof of his mouth with a fork while eating pizza and a woman who swallowed her tongue ring along with her slice.

NYPOST.COM



WE MOVED TO THE
**WORST
 PLACE
 IN
 AMERICA**

*It started out as something of
 a joke—almost a dare. We've been
 living here for four years now.*

BY Christopher Ingraham

FROM THE BOOK IF YOU LIVED HERE
 YOU'D BE HOME BY NOW

The author with
 his wife, Briana, and
 their children,
 William (far left),
 three, and twins
 Charles and Jack, six



WHAT WAS IT THAT STOPPED THE TRAIN THAT DAY?

Signal problems? Wet leaves? A body on the tracks? Whatever it was, the train was running late again. Which meant I'd be an hour, maybe two, maybe three, late to work again. Which meant I'd be staying late and not getting home until long after the kids had gone to bed. Again.

I was well into my second year writing for the *Washington Post*, a dream job by any measure. Except for one tiny problem. The *Post* is based in Washington, DC. My wife, Briana, and I, along with our two-year-old twins, Jack and Charles, lived just outside of Baltimore. Between our home and the *Post* newsroom lay about 80 miles of commute, 90 to 120 minutes by car, train, subway, and foot. On a good day.

That damp August morning in 2015? Not shaping up to be a good day.

But what choice did we have, given that the median home value in Washington, DC, is somewhere north of half a million dollars, which was well out of the realm of affordability for Briana, who worked for the Social Security Administration, and me. We knew we had to do something about our situation. But no matter how far outside the box we started to think, we couldn't make the numbers add up.

Then, later that summer, I wrote an article that would change my life. I had stumbled across an obscure

project of the U.S. Department of Agriculture examining the physical characteristics that most people would agree make a place pleasant to live in—things like hills, valleys, bodies of water, nice weather. The project ranked America's 3,000 counties from "ugliest" to the most scenic.

Ventura County, California, came in at number one on the list—not surprising, given the shore, the hills, and the temperate climate. The county that came in last was a little place I'd never heard of called Red Lake County, in the northwest corner of Minnesota. It turns out Red Lake County doesn't have any actual lakes. Or any hills. The summers are hot, and the winters are brutally cold. You crunch all those numbers together on a spreadsheet, and you wind up with "the worst place to live in America."

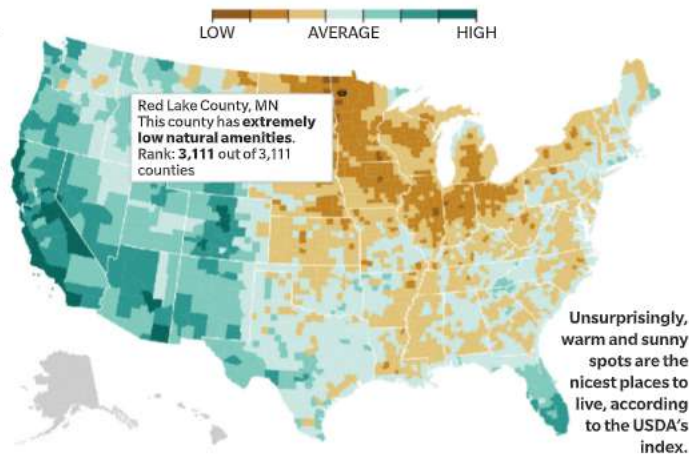
My story went up on the *Washington Post* website at 9:27 on a Monday morning. By 9:32, the hate mail had started rolling in. By midmorning, people had started sending me

photographs of golden wheat fields, meandering rivers, and deep blue prairie skies. "This is what the 'worst place in America to live in' looks like in late summer," one of them said. The photographs eventually morphed into a hashtag campaign, #ShowMeYourUglyCounties.

In a lighthearted attempt at amends-making, I rounded up a bunch of the best responses and published them in a follow-up piece titled "Thick Coats, Thin Skins: Why Minnesotans Were Outraged by a Recent *Washington Post* Report." Shortly after, I got an e-mail with the subject line "An invitation

to come visit Red Lake County." It was from a guy named Jason Brumwell. His family, he wrote, owned a river tubing business based in Red Lake Falls, the county seat, with a population of 1,427. "I would like to cordially and officially invite you to come and check out our little county, which has now been dubbed 'The Worst County in the United States,'" he said. "I would also like to reassure you that you would be given plenty of good-natured 'ribbing' but would be greeted with open arms and a lot of people showing you why they feel our county is far from the worst."

PREVALENCE OF NATURAL AMENITIES MAKING EACH COUNTY A NICE PLACE TO LIVE



OPENING SPREAD: COURTESY CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM (FAMILY); MARIA AMADOR (MAP AND HAND LETTERING)

SOURCE: USDA ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE, PUBLISHED AUGUST 14, 2015. GRAPHIC: CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM/THE WASHINGTON POST

A few days later, I was on a plane. The closest “major” airport (with just two gates) is in Grand Forks, North Dakota, 40 miles away. As I flew in, the view outside the airplane window was a rigid grid, straight roads stretching out to the horizon, interrupted only by other straight roads running perpendicularly. Everything was flat, square. It certainly looked as if it could be America’s worst place to live.

I had done some reading to find out what kind of place I’d be parachuting into. By most economic measures,

THE COUNTY WAS HOME TO TWICE AS MANY COWS AS PEOPLE.

the county seemed to be doing OK. The unemployment rate that July was 4.4 percent, well below the national average. The median household income was \$48,000—less than half the typical income in the Washington suburbs where I lived. The median home value, on the other hand, was \$89,000, or one fifth the typical home price in our area.

The county was home to just a hair over 4,000 people, 95 percent of whom were white. The median age was 42. The big business was farming; just 1.6 percent of the land area

was devoted to towns and residences. It was home to approximately twice as many cows as people. A picture was starting to emerge in my head of a place not unlike the hardscrabble farming communities that surrounded Oneonta, New York, where Briana and I had grown up.

Jason Brumwell had warned me to prepare for “a huge helping of Minnesota nice.” At his suggestion, I took the “back way” from Grand Forks to Red Lake Falls. What struck me wasn’t the flatness or the emptiness or the complete lack of people or cars; it was the sky. Unencumbered by hills and valleys, the sky seemed impossibly vast to my East Coast eyes, a clear blue dome dotted by poofy clouds straight out of a children’s book. The horizon was truly infinite, the sense of scale and space and openness almost humbling.

A large wooden sign proclaimed “Welcome to Red Lake Falls,” and there weren’t just a handful of people waiting to meet me, as Jason had suggested—there were dozens, including four or five camera crews and a color guard from the high school.

Jason and his dad, Dick Brumwell, found me, and after a quick press conference, they loaded me and a gaggle of reporters and local luminaries onto a roofless red bus—one of the fleet they used to ferry tubers to the river launch—and took us to a dairy farm owned by brothers Carl and Joe Schindler. Carl asked whether I wanted to check out the inside of the barn,



From top: Guitar-playing congressman Collin Peterson; Carl Schindler with son Isaac; the author (left) and county commissioner Chuck Simpson

COURTESY CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM (3)

and, yes, of course I did. I had some experience with dairy farms growing up. My dad was a large-animal veterinarian, and in my childhood I would ride around to farms with him in lieu of day care or any other more structured and costly activity.

When we got to the farm, I bounded off the bus and made my way over to the calf pens. A newborn calf suckled my thumb as the Schindler brothers told me about life on the farm. A member of one of the camera crews tried to follow us into the barn but ended up retching, overcome by the smell.

“Smells great to me,” I said. “Smells like home.”

The next activity was a kayak ride down the Red Lake River. The river was tranquil, carving deep meanders through the landscape. Dusty cliffs rose up on one side and then the other, pocked with holes where swallows nested.

Afterward I stopped by my motel room to get a shower before dinner at T&J’s, the local bar and grill. The folks at T&J’s were outgoing and eager to talk about what made their community so special. Al Buse, for instance, who at 101 was the oldest resident of Red Lake Falls—and “like everyone’s grandpa,” Jason told me. Al was the grandson of one of the town’s original founders, and he was, it seemed, the living, breathing avatar of what made the town tick. Every morning when the weather was nice, he would load his tools in the back of his bright yellow

golf cart and make his way through town, fixing things that needed fixing, watering plants, generally doing whatever he could to keep the town tidy.

When I settled in for the night, I let Briana know I was safe, untarred and unfeathered. I had dozens of Facebook notifications, friend requests from Minnesotans I had met earlier in the day. Minnesota nice, indeed.

The next day, Jason showed up in a bus with a sign reading "America's Worst Tour" displayed above the windshield. We visited a wheat farm in Brooks (population 139), where fourth-generation farmer Alex Yaggie let me drive his combine. We stopped at an asparagus farm and sampled from a jar of fiercely flavorful pickled asparagus. We stopped at the Plummer Area Sportsmen's Club, where county

commissioner Chuck Simpson—who'd said in response to my original story that I could kiss his butt—showed me around the shooting range.

Spend a little bit of time in Red Lake County and you'll notice that people here are highly invested in their community. See that little park with the gazebo on Main Street? Dick Brumwell built it as a memorial to his late wife. See the garden on the hill across the street from the county courthouse? That's a project of the local Lions Club. And that train-shaped light display on the old railroad trestle during the holidays? That's the brainchild of Jim Benoit, who thought people should have something nice to look at when they drive into town.

People rarely lock their doors in Red Lake County, even when they're

not home. People trust each other so much that they often leave their cars running with the keys in the ignition when they run into Brent's to pick up some groceries. Kids often run around unsupervised well into the evening hours—not a problem when you trust the folks in your neighborhood to keep an eye out for any trouble.

When I returned home, Briana noticed that I wouldn't stop talking about how great the people were. Their warmth, their friendliness, their determination to make their community better. Jammed into a hot, overcrowded train, I thought of the guy who complained about how getting stuck behind a tractor could add five minutes to his 15-minute commute. When I'd told people in Red Lake Falls that sometimes I spent five hours a day commuting to and from work, their jaws had dropped.

They had their own trials and headaches, of course. Downtown wasn't what it once had been. Affordable health care was a challenge. The sheriff's office had the occasional speeder or shoplifter to deal with. But the people were rising up to meet their challenges. When the town pool needed work, they held a carnival and other events to pull together \$70,000.

Once I was back at the grind in DC, my days in Red Lake County took on a positively Norman Rockwellian cast. The pressures of modern life seemed manageable there. I wanted to take my family to a place with wide-open

spaces of possibility, with room to breathe. I wanted what the people in Red Lake County seemed to have.

One weekend, my mom and stepdad flew in from Tampa to visit. The boys were in bed, and the four adults were unwinding in our tiny living room. Briana and I were talking through all these issues—the boys, the house, the jobs, the commutes, and how we couldn't find a way out of any of it.

THE PEOPLE OF RED LAKE FALLS BRING WARMTH TO THE COLD.

My mom said, "Well, what if you moved to that nice little Minnesota town Chris visited over the summer?"

We all laughed.

"No, really," she said.

The room went quiet.

For me, in that moment, suddenly all the pieces fell into place. One of us would work from home. The other would take a break from working to be with the kids, which we could afford given the low cost of living.

Over the next few days, a plan gradually came into focus. Once my bosses approved my request to work remotely, it was official. We sat down with the boys, then two and a half, and said, "We're going to live in Minnesota."

When he got out from behind his computer and visited the "worst place to live in America," Ingraham discovered plenty of amenities the USDA index had missed.



COURTESY CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM



The beauty in Red Lake County, both natural and man-made, is abundant, including veterans' ceremonies, sunflower fields, and the majestic county courthouse.

"Minsota," they said. They had no idea what it meant, but the word soon became a universal totem of anticipation in the house, encompassing all our hopes, dreams, anxieties, our struggle for a better life. *Minnesota*.

The following May we moved to Red Lake Falls. Our family—me; Briana; Jack; Charles; Tiber, our 70-pound beagle-basset mix; and Ivy, our 12-year-old cat—arrived on a Sunday. The closing on the house was scheduled for the following day, but the previous owners, the Kleins, told us they'd leave the door open and the keys on the kitchen counter. We hadn't even gotten the kids out of their car seats before we were enthusiastically greeted by our new neighbor, who wanted to know whether we played any instruments because there was a great little community band and they were always looking for new players.

The Brunwells and the Kleins came over to help us get all our stuff out of the moving van. A few neighbors wandered over to pitch in as well, and with their help, we wrapped up the job in just a couple of hours.

It was an auspicious beginning, and our family quickly acclimated to small-town life. Briana volunteered for the Civic and Commerce Committee and was persuaded to run for city council, an election she handily won. The boys soon thrived under the personal attention at J. A. Hughes Elementary—even Charlie, who was diagnosed with autism and might've gotten lost in the crowd in a larger public school, like the one we had left in Maryland.

Most of the things we missed, including curry paste, sparkling wine, and books the tiny library doesn't offer, we were able to order online or ask local proprietors to stock for us. We found plenty of culture and diversity, although we had to actively seek it out rather than experiencing the world simply by walking down the street, the way you can in a big city. The twins, now six, have spent more birthdays in Minnesota than they did in Maryland. And we have another son, William, who is three. I can honestly say that there would have been no William had we not moved to Red Lake Falls.

It is my job to write about data. I'm

a big believer in its power. But our relocation has been a humbling reminder of the limitations of numbers. It has opened my eyes to all the things that get lost when you abstract people, places, and points in time down to a number on a computer screen.

Yes, the government's natural-amenities index accurately captures the flatness of midwestern farm country. The summer heat. The bitter winter cold. But it misses so much about that landscape: the sound of the breeze rustling the grain or the way the wheat catches the light, the dry-sweet smell of a field of sunflowers. It doesn't tell you how a family can keep itself warm through the coldest of winters

by building igloos and sledding down the town hill. Or how the vast winter night sky shines with the light of thousands of stars that people who live in cities will never know. It doesn't tell you about the heat put off by a big roaring fire in a park at the darkest time of the year, how the glow dances on the faces of those gathered around.

The people of Red Lake Falls bring light to the darkness and warmth to the cold. Glancing around the bonfire at last winter's train-lighting ceremony, when everyone clapped and cheered, I felt certain: We were home. **R**

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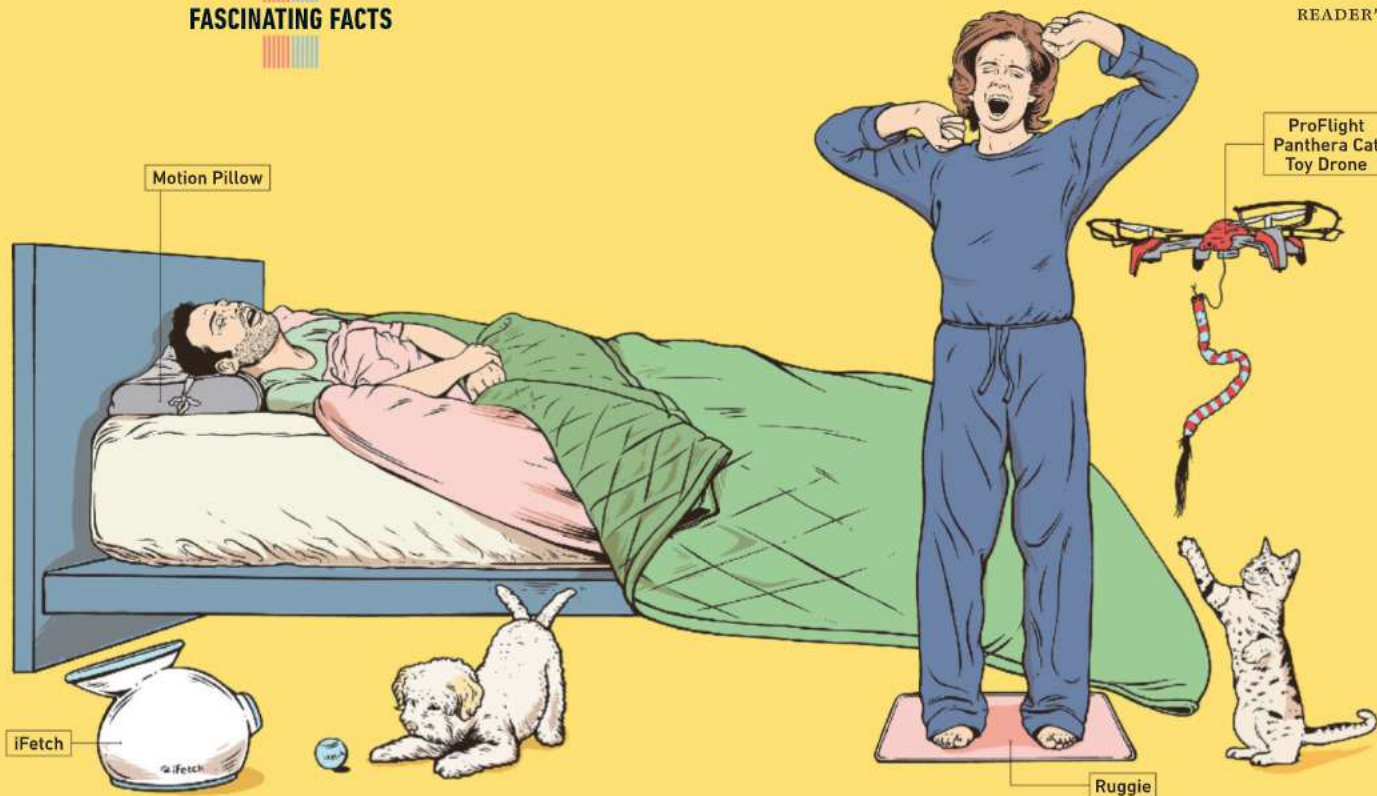


Blue Moon

NASA was so concerned that Apollo 12 astronaut Charles "Pete" Conrad would start cussing during the live transmission from the moon that they hypnotized him—without telling him. In transcripts from that voyage (which occurred 50 years ago last November), Conrad is humming "dum de dum dum dum" when his brain really wanted to say "%@*^&!!"

SMITHSONIAN

FROM LEFT: BONNY COTE/COURTESY OKLEE HERALD; JORDAN MCALISTER (2)



Weird and Wonderful Inventions

BY *Andy Simmons*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Louise Pomeroy*

From a bicycle that rides on water to a pillow that stops you from snoring,

these 18 innovations will blow your mind—and a hole in your wallet

For years,

Donna had been desperate to get a good night's sleep. The problem: her husband. He snored. Like a freight train. Donna tried the standard fixes: earplugs for her (uncomfortable and ineffective), mouth guards and nose gizmos for him (ditto), and shoving him (again, ditto). Then she heard about a really out-there solution called the **Motion Pillow**.

Made by Korean company TenMinds, the pillow has four pressure-sensing airbags that connect to an outside microphone on a nightstand. Once the mic detects her hubby shaking the shingles, it automatically inflates the airbags, which gently reposition his head until he stops sawing logs. Donna doesn't always go for the expensive gadgets—inexpensive ones are another matter—but when she heard that the Motion Pillow won an Innovations Award 2020 from the Consumer Technology Association, she decided to take the \$378 plunge. And it works! In fact, when she's mad at her husband, she makes snoring

sounds just so the pillow will take his head on a roller-coaster ride.

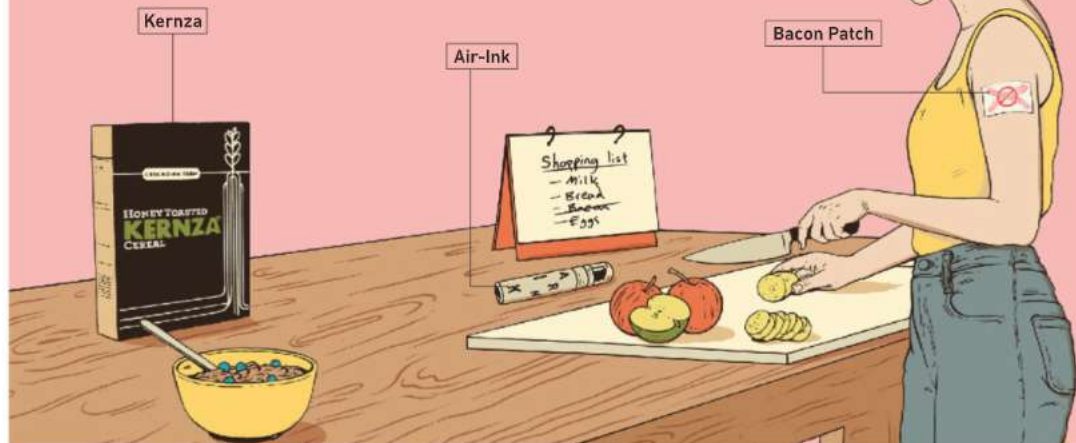
These days, her husband's snoring no longer wakes Donna up—some strange woman does: "Morning, Champ! Remember, all our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them!" Who is this ridiculously peppy morning person? It's Donna's new alarm clock. Bitten by the gadget bug, Donna bought the **Ruggie** for \$69. It's the only clock that gets her out of bed—quite literally.

First, it rouses her using music, those perky words of affirmation, or an alarm

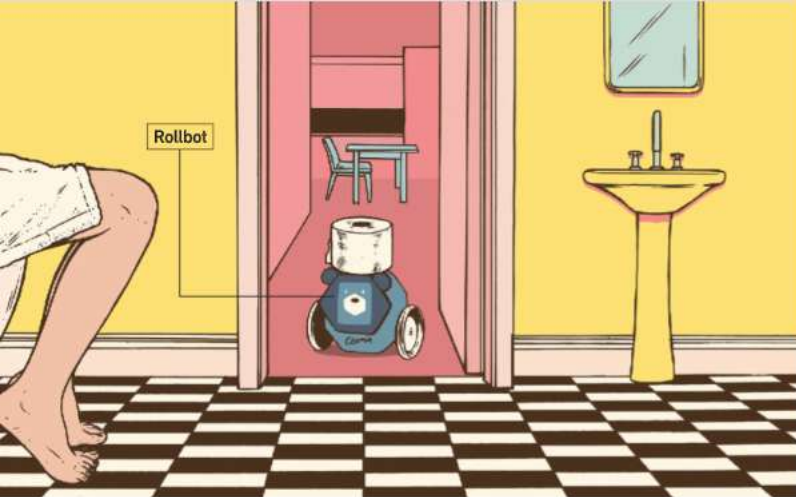
that can hit 120 decibels—a din akin to a pneumatic drill. When Donna reaches for the snooze button, she is confronted by the fact that the Ruggie doesn't have one. To make it stop, she has to haul herself out of bed and stand on a foam mat—the "rug" in *Ruggie*—for up to 30 seconds. At that point, she is soundly awake.

Now that you know all about Donna's sleeping habits, here's something else you should know about her: She's not

real. But all the devices she encounters in this story are. A few are still in the development stage, but most are available right now. They might not change the world or your life, but they are delightful in their own quirky ways. Even if you wouldn't benefit from owning, say, a robot designed to help out in the bathroom (more on that below), it's awfully fun to read about the weird things that marketers and inventors are coming up with.



Aside from cereal, Kernza (above left) has also been used in bread and snacks—and beer.



Which brings us back to Donna. As it happens, she has high cholesterol, and her weakness for bacon doesn't help. Fortunately, a professor at England's hallowed University of Oxford is developing the **Bacon Patch**. It's a nicotine-style patch you wear on your arm; scratch it, and it releases an aroma redolent of fatty, bacony goodness. "Studies have shown that scent can reduce food cravings," insists its creator, Charles Spence. Really? That smells fishy to some skeptics. "If I can smell bacon," one feral bacon eater told the *Telegraph* when it reported on the faux-porcine product, "I'll want to eat bacon."

Donna's actual healthy breakfast is a non-earth-shattering bowl of Honey Toasted Kernza Cereal from Cascadian Farm. Developed by Kansas's non-profit Land Institute, **Kernza** is a new grain that has been touted as a possible savior for our warming planet. Because it's a perennial—unlike wheat, oats, and barley—it sucks greenhouse gases from the air and traps them in its roots, much like a tree. It also soaks up nitrogen, a fertilizer ingredient that has been blamed for polluting streams and rivers. (Not a cereal person? Patagonia Provisions makes beer with Kernza. Talk about the breakfast of champions.)

Alas, Kernza is high in fiber, so off to the bathroom Donna goes. "Poop anxiety is real," a spokesperson for Charmin, the toilet paper brand, told CNN. And Donna agrees, especially when, after conducting her business, she realizes she's out of toilet paper. She calls to her husband, but of course he's still asleep. So she fires up the Charmin app on her phone, and the **Rollbot** comes to the rescue. Using infrared sensors, the self-balancing robot emblazoned with a teddy bear face arrives bearing a precious roll of preloaded toilet paper. (Alas, Charmin has made only one Rollbot so far.)

Saved by the robot, Donna continues to get ready for her day. She opens her dresser drawer and pulls out a pair of **Sensoria Smart Socks**. The socks (\$199—OMG!) have a dock for a microelectronic chip that wirelessly relays data about cadence, pace, heart rate, and more to an app on Donna's phone. You can't wear low-tech shoes with high-tech socks, so Donna also bought a \$400 pair of self-lacing sneakers, the **Adapt BB 2.0**, which were created by Nike for athletes (NBA star Ja Morant of the Memphis

Grizzlies wore them). All Donna need do is insert her foot into the sneaker, and digital sensors inside the sole do the rest by deducing her foot size and automatically closing around it.

"Pollution is bad, but it happens to be a good raw material to make inks."

Donna may be in good shape, but her pudgy pets could use some help. For her dog, she bought the **iFetch** (\$115), a small blue-and-white machine that sits on the floor and automatically launches a tennis ball up to 30 feet. The dog retrieves the ball and drops it into the hole at the top, and the iFetch launches it again.

When cats dream, they envision themselves prowling the Serengeti stalking wildebeests. So Donna bought Kitty the **ProFlight Panthera Cat Toy Drone**. As its name implies, it's a drone, but this \$100 novelty flies around the room dangling a small toy for the cat to chase. It even has a built-in camera so Donna can watch Kitty from her phone. Donna's not concerned about the damage a drone might cause indoors because certapet.com assured her that "the safety features, including a collision avoidance system and auto altitude, help protect you from flying the drone into your cat or surroundings."

Adapt BB 2.0



The Adapt BB 2.0 sneakers (right) sitting atop their charging pad.

Before leaving the house, Donna stops to write a note for her hubby. She reaches for a pad and her favorite pen ever, the **Air-ink** from Graviky. The pen (available only as a prototype) literally writes with polluted air from captured carbon emissions. A cylindrical device called **KAALINK** fits around a car's tailpipe and captures up to 99 percent of its black particulate matter, which in turn is converted into inks and paints. "Pollution is

Users can scroll through text or watch videos on a smart contact lens.

bad," Graviky cofounder Anirudh Sharma told *Time* magazine. "But pollution happens to be a really good raw material to make inks."

Donna opens the door to a beautiful day. If she were wearing the **Mojo Lens**, a smart augmented reality (AR) contact lens from Mojo Vision, she'd know it was 72 degrees outside because the lens would tell her. Donna has been coveting one for a while, though it's not for sale yet. The lens is activated by eye movement and powered by a minuscule battery that lives on the lens itself. Microelectronics are used to project images on the tiniest of built-in displays. Users can call up information, scroll through text, and even watch videos.

Because "the technology fades away when you want to focus on the world around you," says Mojo Vision CEO Drew Perkins (the lens hides whatever was being displayed), it makes walking the busy streets safe, unlike when you're looking at your smartphone. Which, luckily, Donna doesn't happen to be doing at the moment—or else she would have been clipped by a speeding suitcase gunning for her at six mph.

That's right: Created by a Chinese company called ForwardX Robotics, the **Ovis Suitcase** (\$640) is a self-propelled carry-on that uses cameras, facial-recognition technology, and a tracking algorithm to travel hands-free with its owner, avoiding collisions as it winds its way through crowds. "Essentially," says Nicolas Chee, founder and CEO of ForwardX, "we've given the Ovis Suitcase a pair of eyes and a brain."

It's like luggage and a pet all in one, but you don't have to pick up after the suitcase.

The Ovis does a U-turn and returns to Donna, this time accompanied by its owner, a German tourist. He holds two **Ambassador** earpieces, audio devices with built-in microphones that translate on the spot. He puts one earpiece over his ear, and Donna does the same with the other. He asks in German how to get to the train station, but Donna hears the question in English. She responds in English, and he nods, understanding everything



since her words are relayed in German. The two could have spoken in Japanese, Mandarin, or Hebrew—the **Ambassador** translates 20 languages and 42 dialects. Donna bids the tourist and his **Ovis auf Wiedersehen**, then walks to her favorite restaurant and grabs a table.

Minutes later, her friend enters the eatery wearing stylish sunglasses. "Elaine!" Donna calls out. Elaine slowly walks over and takes a seat without assistance, remarkable because she is blind. Since she was fitted with the **Orion Visual Cortical Prosthesis System** from California-based Second Sight, she has led a more active life.

Those stylish sunglasses carry a camera and video-processing unit (VPU). Implanted in the visual cortex of Elaine's brain is a tiny chip containing 60 electrodes. The wireless VPU converts images from the camera into electrical pulses, which are transmitted to the electrodes on Elaine's brain, which then figures out what she is looking at. People and objects appear as dots of light. "You don't even need to have eyes for the device to work," says Nader Pouratian, MD, PhD, a neurosurgeon at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center who has implanted the device in patients. Elaine was sold when she

The Ovis Suitcase's battery allows it to faithfully follow its owner for up to 13 miles.

learned from onezero.medium.com that a participant in a clinical trial was able "to see his birthday candles for the first time in more than seven years."

Orion Visual Cortical Prosthesis System



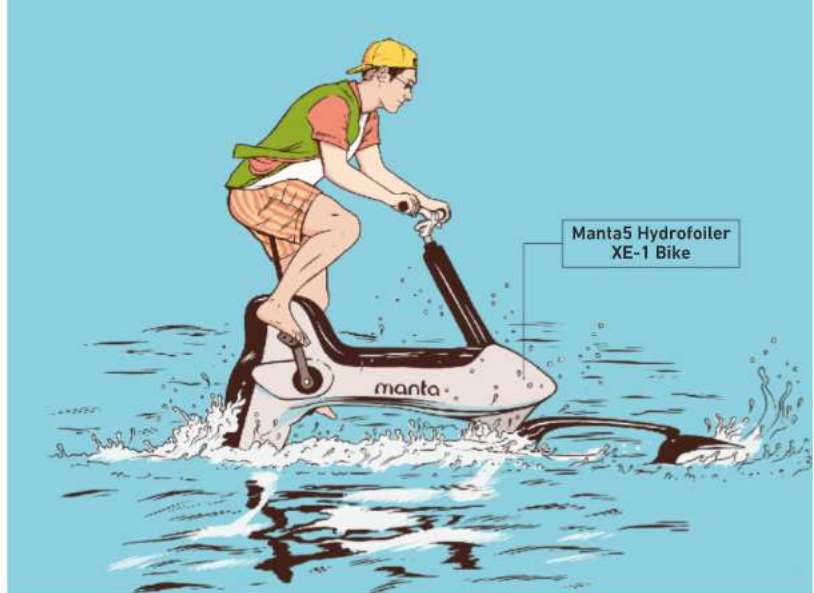
The waitress comes by, and Elaine orders an Impossible Burger. Tempted by a bacon cheeseburger at the next table, Donna wishes again that she had that Bacon Patch. Instead, she orders a salad, and the two chat away. Elaine brags about the vacation her son took: He rode a bicycle across a lake.

Well, not exactly. He rode a **Manta5 Hydrofoiler XE-1 Bike**, which digitaltrends.com calls "the unholy offspring of a boat, an airplane, and an e-bike." (It also has an unholy price tag: \$8,990.) Instead of wheels, the Manta5 is "equipped with a set of hydrofoils, which essentially function like wings in the water. As you pedal and propel the bike forward, water passes over these wings and creates lift, much like airplane wings create lift." One customer review swears, "It really is like flying on water!"

After lunch, Donna leaves Elaine to run an errand. As she's crossing the street, she gets a text from her husband: "How do I turn off the @\$\$^ iFetch?!" With her head buried in her phone, she texts back, "I'm coming home!!" Donna's an irreformable "twalker," someone who texts while walking, and this time it's not a suitcase but a car that almost gets her.

She knows she has a dangerous habit—pedestrian deaths are climbing—but is happy about the protection on the way. Fred Jiang, assistant professor of electrical engineering at Columbia University, is working out the kinks on his **Smart Headphones**. When they're perfected, four miniature microphones will "differentiate car sounds from background noise," says mashable.com, and work with an app to calculate the distance and position of cars in order to alert wearers when they are in danger of being run over. That sounds wonderful to Donna.

Back home, she switches off the iFetch and joins her frazzled husband on the couch to watch TV. But the screen is nowhere in sight. Donna taps a button on a remote, and a 65-inch screen unfurls from a rectangular box sitting on a stand, "emerging gloriously like an entertainment cobra from a basket," says cnet.com. It's an early version of the not-yet-available **LG Signature OLED TV R9**. Kept erect by numerous thin horizontal bars and a pair of riser arms on its back, the screen can be raised some 50,000 times before



The Manta5 water bike can slice through water at 13 mph.

potentially breaking down from wear, according to LG.

Donna's husband puts an arm around her. Overcome with love for him, snoring and all, she wants to tell him how she feels. But their smart speakers and virtual assistants, such as Amazon Echo and Google Home, may be listening, so she opens a coffee table drawer, pulls out the **Bracelet of Silence**, and slips it on her wrist.

The brainchild of Ben Zhao and Heather Zheng, married computer science professors at the University of Chicago,

this piece of "digital armor," as the *New York Times* calls it, "will jam the Echo or any other microphones in the vicinity from listening in on the wearer's conversations." Not yet on sale, the large, clunky plastic cuff is dotted with 24 small speakers that emit imperceptible ultrasonic signals to jam prying microphones.

After whispering sweet nothings into her husband's ear, Donna calls up Amazon Prime Video and orders a classic, *Casablanca*. Sometimes the old stuff is still the good stuff. **■**



20 PAINS TO NEVER IGNORE

We all feel a twinge once in a while. When is it no big deal, and when is it a warning sign that something needs attention—now?



BY Jen Babakhan AND Tracy Middleton
FROM THEHEALTHY.COM

Maybe your feet have started to tingle every so often or you've developed a mild fever. Nothing to worry about, right? Maybe. But given the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, you don't have to be a hypochondriac to think hard about whether a niggling symptom is a clue that something more serious is happening in your body. How can you tell when to shrug—and when to panic? These stories feature people who faced that quandary and discovered that their discomfort emanated from conditions far different from what they had suspected. The welcome result: After a proper diagnosis, they each got the treatment they needed. Consider their journeys to be a guide for all of us.

ABDOMINAL PAIN

“The Burning Sensation Turned Out to Be Colon Cancer.”

When Amy Driben-Salcedo felt a burning sensation in her abdomen in the summer of 2017, she ignored it for four or five months. “I have three kids and was just busy with life,” says the high school guidance counselor, who was 47 at the time.

After the pain moved to her back, “I googled my symptoms and decided it

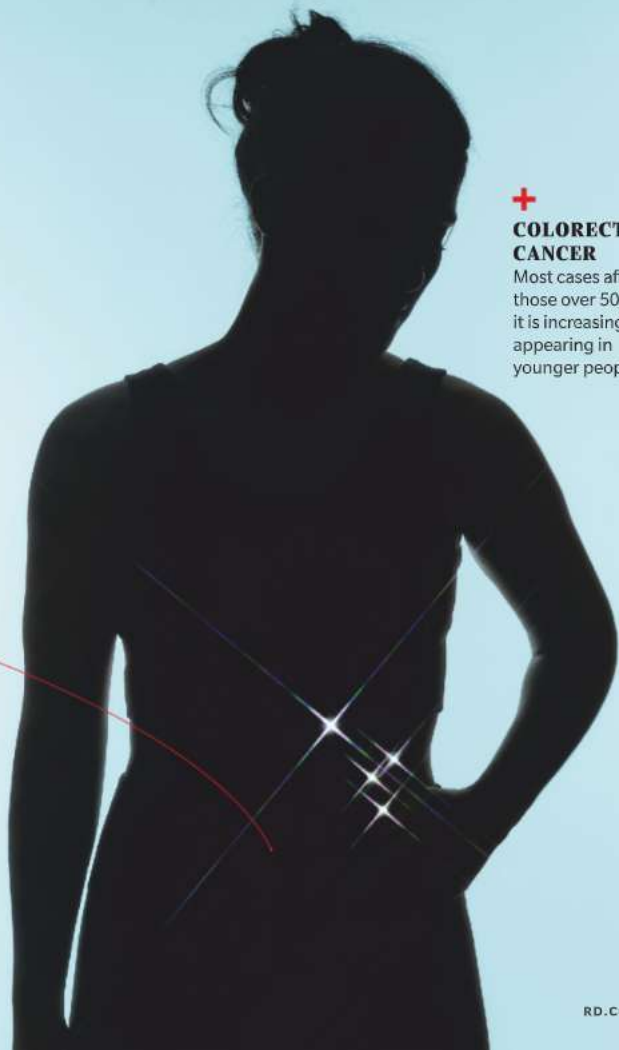
must be an ulcer, so I changed my diet to bland foods,” she recalls. Then she began losing weight rapidly.

Further googling showed that her abdominal pain and weight loss were both classic signs of colorectal cancer (often called colon cancer), but Driben-Salcedo dismissed the possibility because she felt she was too young. By the time she made it to a doctor's office, she had dropped 25 pounds. Her gastroenterologist did blood work and X-rays, but everything came back normal. He prescribed medication for irritable bowel syndrome. After taking it for a few weeks with no relief, Driben-Salcedo called the doctor again. “On the way to the

HAIR: PAUL WARREN USING AMIKA FOR JUDY CASEY INC.; MAKEUP: ALLISON BROOKE MACPHERSON

+ COLORECTAL CANCER

Most cases affect those over 50, but it is increasingly appearing in younger people.



CT scan he ordered, I told my husband, "This must be what cancer feels like. I'm in so much pain." The scan showed a shadow on her liver.

A follow-up colonoscopy revealed the truth—she did indeed have colorectal cancer. Driben-Salcedo had three days of chemotherapy every other week for a year. The treatment caused brutal side effects, including sleepless nights and weakness and numbness in her hands and feet. But it was worth it; the treatment wiped out her tumor.

Unfortunately, Driben-Salcedo is now battling a new tumor in her liver. Still, having beat cancer once, she is optimistic that she can do it again—and she says, "I'm now vigilant about listening to my body and taking care of myself."

WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

We all have tummy troubles now and again, but belly pains sometimes signal serious conditions. A sharp pain in the lower right side of the abdomen could spell **appendicitis**; in the lower left, **diverticulitis**; in the middle to upper right, **gallstones**; and closer to the pelvis, **ovarian cysts** or a **urinary tract infection**. Dull or burning pain or cramping is sometimes caused by an **ulcer**, **irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)**, or an inflammatory bowel disease such as **Crohn's** or **ulcerative colitis**. Stomachaches accompanied by fever could be **viral gastroenteritis**.

MOUTH PROBLEMS

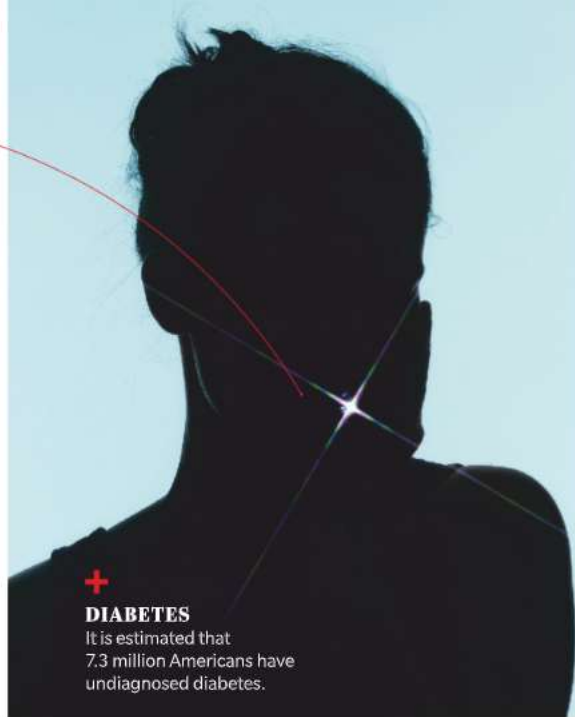
"My Insatiable Thirst Turned Out to Be Diabetes."

Carol Gee stood at the car-rental desk at Rapid City Regional Airport in South Dakota and began to tell the agent her last name. That's when she noticed her mouth had gone completely dry. Finding it hard to speak, she finished the paperwork and handed her husband the keys.

Gee, 59 at the time, says she tried not to panic. "It was the weirdest feeling I've ever had. There was no moisture in my mouth whatsoever." She attributed it to the city's elevation and the long flight she had just taken, though the dry mouth became a feeling of endless thirst. "Water wasn't helping at all. I drank and drank. That led to me using the restroom constantly. I was miserable the whole day."

A few months earlier, she'd had a checkup with her doctor, who had noted that Gee's blood glucose level was higher than usual. Says Gee, "Since she didn't offer medication, I assumed it wasn't a big deal."

Though she did her best to enjoy her stay, Gee remembers the fatigue that hit her on the way home. "Walking from the airport to our car, it took every bit of strength I had to roll my carry-on luggage. It was so hard to put one foot in front of the other."



DIABETES

It is estimated that 7.3 million Americans have undiagnosed diabetes.

The next day, she called her doctor, who recommended a trip to the emergency room. "When they tested my blood glucose, the doctor said, 'You have type 2 diabetes, and you're in bad shape. Your glucose level is so high, it's a wonder you're not in a diabetic coma or worse.' That's when it hit me how serious it was." When Gee was admitted, her blood glucose was 900 mg/dl, a long way from a normal result of less than 140 mg/dl.

Now 70, Gee says she's obsessive about taking her insulin and testing her blood. "I wish I had been more proactive and asked my doctor about my high glucose level when she first found it. I would have said no to that cake, my blood sugar never would have gotten that high, and this all wouldn't have been such a surprise," she says.

WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

Smell something funky when you

open your mouth? If you also have white spots on your tongue, it could be an **oral yeast infection**—or a **tumor**. If your breath smells like sour milk, you might be **lactose intolerant**; like nail polish remover, you're probably **eating too much protein**. Red lesions on the tongue, loose teeth, canker sores, or red or white patches inside the mouth that last longer than two weeks could signal **cancer**. White, yellow, or brown spots on your



COUGHING

Coughing accounts for more than 30 million doctor visits a year.

teeth might indicate **celiac disease**. A glossy red tongue is a sign of a possible **vitamin B12 deficiency**.

COUGHING

"My Cold Turned Out to Be COVID-19!"

Earlier this year, 20-year-old Jonah Stillman, an author and a public speaker, traveled to Thailand, South Korea, Australia, and England. On the flight home to Minneapolis, he says, "I had a minor sore throat and cough."

News about the spread of COVID-19 was just breaking then, but at the time it seemed to be affecting mostly older people, so he didn't think that could be what he had. "I don't get sick often, I work out six days a week, and I have a very clean diet," he explains. Still, because he has family members with underlying conditions that he'd heard could raise the risk of complications or death from the virus, he called his doctor the next day.

"Once they heard all of the places I had been," Stillman says, the doctors "definitely wanted to test me. They met me at the back door of the office in full personal protective equipment and led me to a room. The entire process took about 15 minutes. That was on a Wednesday."

That Saturday, he received the news that he had tested positive for

COVID-19. His was one of the first cases diagnosed in Minnesota. "It was shocking because it was still relatively new. It still seemed like a foreign issue," he says. By Sunday, his sore throat had worsened considerably, his violent coughs would not stop, and his fever spiked to 103 degrees. "The body aches were unlike anything I've experienced. I could barely move."

Among the most disturbing symptoms was his lack of taste and smell. "I couldn't differentiate between cake and pizza. The texture was the same, and there was absolutely no taste. I had to force myself to eat because my gag reflex was so strong. I didn't attribute this to COVID-19 originally, but now I see that it's one of the defining symptoms," Stillman says.

His recovery took two full weeks, and Stillman started to tell his story as a way of urging other young people to take the disease and social distancing seriously. "Even if you don't have symptoms, this impacts other families and individuals," he says now.

WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

Coughs can linger a long time, but if yours persists without other cold symptoms, you might have **acid reflux, chronic bronchitis, heart failure, pneumonia, or lung or throat cancer**. ACE inhibitors and beta-blockers taken for high blood pressure can also cause a cough. Generally, if you're coughing up blood or green or yellow phlegm, let your doctor know.

NUMBNESS AND TINGLING

“My Numb Feet Turned Out to Be MS.”

Cathy Chester was fresh out of college and making a name for herself in Manhattan. When she noticed numbness and tingling in her feet, she attributed it to stress and walking long city blocks in cold weather. “I chose to ignore the symptoms, and they grew incrementally worse,” she says. When the numbness began to move up to her lower legs, Chester decided to get some medical advice. The doctor told her that her shoes were too tight.

She bought larger shoes, but deep down she knew that he was wrong. The numbness progressed toward her knees and thighs, causing her to stumble. A few times she was even accused of being drunk. Along with weakness, fatigue often overtook her. “I figured I was exhausted from living on my own and trying to keep up in a competitive job market. It felt like I had the flu, but a thousand times worse,” recalls Chester, who was working as a copywriter at the time.

One evening when on her way to catch the bus home, she says, “I looked down and saw that one of my high heels had come off ten feet behind me. I didn’t even notice it because my feet were so numb. That was a real wake-up call.”

After a neurologist ordered a spinal tap, a CT scan, and an MRI, she finally discovered what plagued her: multiple sclerosis (MS), a disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information to the brain. Chester had endured five years of numbness, weakness, and fatigue. Still, she says, “I was one of the lucky ones who got an immediate diagnosis from the scans. My test results were very clear. That brought a sense of relief because I finally knew what to do to help myself.”

Today, Chester, 61, says, “I never got the feeling back in my right leg, even after therapy, and the fatigue is awful—I have to take a nap every day at two, no matter what.” Chester, now a health advocate, looks to the future with hope. “It’s my mission to educate, inspire, and bring awareness about MS. For so long, none of us had a voice.”

WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

A pins-and-needles or numb feeling is often just a sign that a part of your body has “gone to sleep.” But if the feeling lingers, it could be a **blood clot**, a **pinched nerve**, or **peripheral neuropathy** (itself often caused by **diabetes**). If you also have trouble seeing, speaking, or understanding words, you may be having a **stroke**. A feeling of numbness in the chest that has lasted longer than 30 minutes could be a **heart attack**, especially if accompanied by dizziness or nausea.



+ MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

MS is most commonly diagnosed in people between ages 20 and 50. Women comprise 75 percent of patients.

HEADACHES

“My Nagging Headache Turned Out to Be a Stroke.”

In 2013, Latarsha Jones got a doozy of a headache. Jones, a mother of three,

assumed that her busy schedule and long hours working as an assistant principal of an elementary school were just taking their toll.

The aching persisted for several weeks and was often so bad that Jones had to hold her head when she coughed or sneezed. One afternoon, the pain suddenly intensified. “I felt like everything was going in slow motion. I couldn’t get words out, and my

speech slurred. I was numb on the left side.”

When first responders arrived, Jones was unable to lift her left arm or say her ABCs, two tests used to determine whether a patient has suffered a stroke. At the hospital, an MRI revealed she had indeed experienced an ischemic stroke, which occurs when a vessel supplying blood to the brain becomes blocked.

“Doctors are still looking into factors that may have caused it, because my blood pressure was not extremely high and the other tests were borderline. I believe my obesity was the main factor,” Jones says.

In response to her terrifying ordeal, Jones has stepped up her activity and cleaned up her diet. Today, the 47-year-old is an American Heart Association Go Red for Women Real Women volunteer. She is still recovering from her stroke and takes medication daily to prevent another.

WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

Nearly everyone gets skull-throbbers. Dehydration, poor posture, certain foods, and stress are common causes, but some head pain indicates a bigger issue. If a headache wakes you up in the morning or doesn’t get better with medication, it might be a **brain tumor**. And if it’s coupled with a high fever and a stiff neck, you might have **meningitis**. Headache accompanied by blurry vision or trouble focusing could be an **aneurysm**.



15 More Symptoms to Get Checked

MUSCLE PAIN

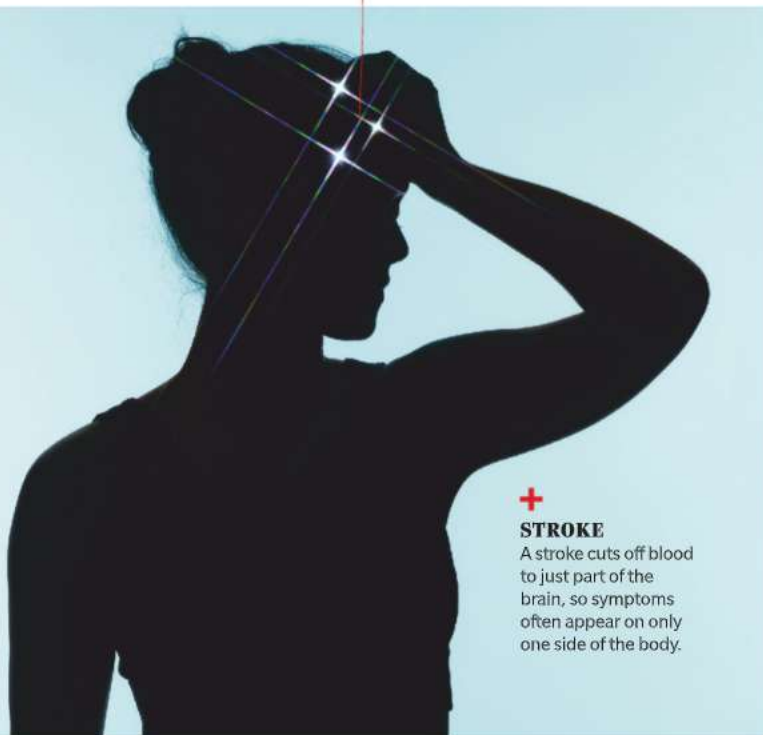
Muscle soreness is likely normal if you can pinpoint the reason and it dissipates over time. If it doesn’t, ask your doctor whether it could be **arthritis**, **influenza**, **Lyme disease**, **lupus**, **fibromyalgia**, **polymyalgia rheumatica**, or **rhabdomyolysis**. Some medications can also cause muscle pain.

BREATHING PROBLEMS

When you just can’t get enough air, the reason could be a **bacterial infection**, **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**, **lung cancer**, or **COVID-19**. Call your doctor if your breathing troubles come on suddenly or worsen after 30 minutes of rest.

BRAIN FOG

Dementia, **fibromyalgia**, **multiple sclerosis**, **menopause**, or an **underactive thyroid** can all cause changes in concentration and memory. Some medications, such as beta-blockers and statins, can also be the culprit.



STROKE

A stroke cuts off blood to just part of the brain, so symptoms often appear on only one side of the body.

BACK PAIN

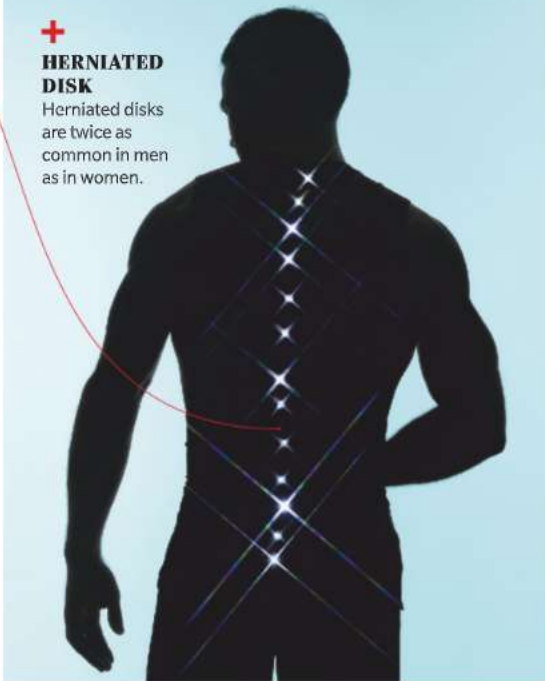
Dehydration, stress, inactivity, a poor diet, or the wrong wardrobe (high heels or too-tight outfits) could be to blame for backaches. If your back hurts when you first get out of bed in the morning, the pain may be from **osteoarthritis**. Pain in the lower and upper back, on your side, or in your groin can be a sign of a **urinary tract infection** that has spread to the kidneys. A **herniated disk** can hit the nerves in your spinal cord, causing pain.

CHEST PAIN

Chest pain can be a scary red flag for a heart attack—and you should call 911 if you think you're in cardiac arrest or if you also experience shortness of breath, cold sweats, nausea, lightheadedness, overwhelming fatigue, and/or a feeling of doom. But those pangs in your chest could also be a sign of **anemia**, **shingles**, **pancreatitis**, a **stomach ulcer**, a **panic attack**, or **lung cancer**. If the pain gets worse

+
HERNIATED DISK

Herniated disks are twice as common in men as in women.



when you take a deep breath, you may have **costochondritis**.

FATIGUE

You might blame your exhaustion on an insanely busy schedule or just feeling lazier than usual. But **anemia**, **depression**, **diabetes**, **heart disease**, and **sleep apnea** are other possible causes.

FEVER

A body temperature of 100.4 degrees F or above is normally a sign that your immune system is working to fight off an infection, such as **strep throat**, **influenza**, or **COVID-19**. But if you also have abdominal pain, you might have **appendicitis**; tenderness and swelling in your legs, **deep vein thrombosis**; skin that is red and painful to the touch, **cellulitis**; a cough or shortness of breath, **pneumonia**; or bloody urine or pain when you urinate, a **urinary tract infection**.

HEARING PROBLEMS

If you didn't spend last night at a rock concert and your ears are sore, it could be an **ear infection**, referred **pain** from an infection in your teeth or jaw, or **temporomandibular joint (TMJ) syndrome**. If you're experiencing hearing loss on one side or a constant ringing sensation (tinnitus), you might have a **tumor** in the temporal lobe, the part of the brain responsible for processing sounds and language. Some diuretics for heart disease, chemotherapies, and antibiotics can damage your ears, as can **type 1 and type 2 diabetes**.

NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Feeling queasy is often a side effect of **motion sickness**, **pregnancy**, or **gastroenteritis**. But **heart attack** symptoms can also mimic stomach problems such as nausea, vomiting, or overall GI upset—especially in

women. If your nausea is accompanied by pain in the upper right side of the abdomen, you may have had a **gallbladder attack**. If you have back pain and a fever along with nausea, chances are a **urinary tract infection** has morphed into a full-blown **kidney infection**. **Stomach ulcers** and **pancreatic cancer** can also cause nausea.

RASH OR HIVES

An intensely itchy, blistering rash can signal **celiac disease**, while dark skin patches called *acanthosis nigricans* are often a sign of **diabetes**. A red, angry rash can be a symptom of **leukemia**. A painful rash that appears in a strip on one side of the face or body is characteristic of **shingles**. And if you've recently been hiking, you may have **Lyme disease** or **Rocky Mountain spotted fever**.

ACNE

Although most acne can be attributed to clogged pores or fluctuating hormones, blemishes can also indicate **leaky gut syndrome**, **polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)**, or **stress**.

BREAST PAIN

"The vast majority of women who come in with breast pain do not have cancer," says Diana Ramos, MD, co-chair of the National Preconception Health and Health Care Initiative. Other culprits could be **pregnancy** or an **infection**. Men who feel breast pain might have **testicular cancer**.

**CONSTIPATION AND
DIARRHEA**

Going to the bathroom too much—or too little—can be a sign of **celiac disease**, **Crohn's disease**, **irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)**, **leaky gut syndrome**, **depression**, or **too much protein**. If constipation becomes severe and persistent, it could indicate **colorectal cancer**. Constipation or diarrhea accompanied by bloating or needing to urinate often might mean **ovarian cancer**. NSAID pain relievers, magnesium-containing antacids, and proton pump inhibitors can cause the runs, while narcotics, diuretics, iron supplements, and antacids can stop you up.

NAIL PROBLEMS

When your nail bed is concave, or spoon-shaped, you have a condition known as **koilonychia**, which is usually caused by anemia. Suddenly swollen skin near the cuticles with nails that are bulbous can be a sign of **lung disease**. Tiny little dents along the surface of the nail are associated with **psoriasis** or **alopecia areata**. Nails that are white with a pink or brown band at the tip are associated with **kidney**, **liver**, or **heart problems**. **Melanoma** can appear under your nails as a black spot on the nail bed or a dark-colored line. Brittle nails that peel or split can be caused by an **underactive thyroid**. Ridges in nails

**KIDNEY
DISEASE**

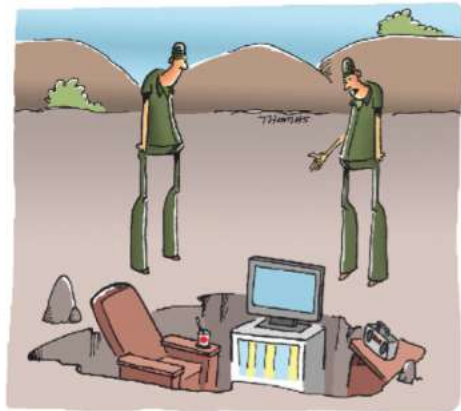
In one study, 36 percent of patients with chronic kidney disease had half-white, half-brown nails.

can signal that you're not making enough stomach acid.

VISION AND OTHER EYE PROBLEMS

Blurred vision that worsens over time may be **cataracts** or **glaucoma**. Bleeding in the retina may signal **diabetes**. Antihistamines, sleeping pills, anti-anxiety pills, and some pain relievers cause eye dryness and redness by reducing tear secretion. And **cancers** that start in the brain or spinal cord can affect vision, while those that start in the pancreas can cause **jaundice**—yellowing of the whites of the eyes. **■**

With additional reporting by Charlotte Hilton Andersen, Alyssa Jung, Marissa Laliberte, Karyn Repinski, Jenn Sinrich, and Lindsay Tigar



"It's the officer's foxhole."

HUMOR *in*
UNIFORM

Anyone wanting to take pictures on our base's airfield needs a letter from public affairs, which happens to be me. One day, while out snapping photos, I was stopped by the military police, who asked for my letter from public affairs.

"But I *am* public affairs," I said.

"Without a letter from public affairs, we'll have to take your camera."

I did the only thing I could do: I pulled a notepad and pen from my bag and wrote a letter giving myself permission to take photos. The MPs read the letter, saluted, and left.

—JOE MACRI
Winchester, Virginia

Aboard a troop carrier crossing the Atlantic, I noticed a seasick pal

of mine losing it over the railing alongside several other soldiers.

"I never knew you had such a weak stomach," I said.

"It's not weak," he replied. "I'm throwing up just as far as the rest of these guys."

—GEORGE MAHATHY
Franklin, Tennessee

YOUR FUNNY MILITARY STORY could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, go to RD.COM/SUBMIT.

On Dad's Trail, Forever

He taught me how to ride and all the rules of the road

BY Taylor Brown
FROM GARDEN & GUN

GROWING UP IN St. Petersburg, Florida, my dad had a paper route on his bicycle and then his scooter—perhaps discovering then his love of two wheels. I picture him as a teenager on his Vespa, sky blue with bloody clouds of rust, crackling and



smoking across the bridges of Pinellas County. The evening papers, hot from the press, are rolled like warm loaves in his leather satchel. His taillight is a red ruby in the falling darkness.

Fifty-six years later, in the fall of 2017, I left my home in Wilmington, North Carolina, on Blitzen, my 1989 Harley-Davidson Sportster—a bike my dad and I had built together—bound for New Orleans. My route would take me down the old coastal highway, U.S. 17, stopping overnight at my parents' house south of Savannah, where I grew up, before heading across the Gulf Coast to New Orleans. My longest solo ride yet.

I wasn't even out of town before the bike gave me trouble, a slight misfire. I called my old man. We usually spoke a few times a week. I'd been riding on the back of his Harley since I was in grade school. When I was in my teens, we'd hunted the back roads of South Georgia for places to ride our dirt bikes. Now, with me in my thirties, we were becoming closer friends than we'd ever been. We'd worked side by side on Blitzen with hardly a tiff—no small feat when wrenching on a 30-year-old motorcycle. What's more, we'd begun to share a love of riding like never before. I still remember the knowing light in his eyes when I described the feeling of my first long solo ride.

I'll never forget the first time he let me ride his prized 90th Anniversary Harley-Davidson Wide Glide. I was 16,

and we were on country roads south of the Florida line. When we stopped for gas, I pulled up next to him, overly excited, and my foot slipped in a patch of gravel. Almost in slow motion, I dropped the bike, 600 pounds of Milwaukee iron. I could see the pain and frustration in his face. But instead of lashing out, he gritted his teeth and brought his emotions to heel, even

FOR ME, THERE'S NOTHING AS THERAPEUTIC AS A LONG RIDE.

as he thumbed the new dents and scratches in his once-perfect machine.

"Happens to the best of us," he told me. True, everyone who rides a motorcycle will drop one sooner or later. Still, how easy to forget in the heat of the moment. Rick Brown—my dad—didn't. I believe that's one of the great lessons I learned from him: that character often requires us to place what is right over what is easy.

Back in Wilmington, after a few minutes on the phone, we decided that Blitzen's misfire was only a fleck of rust or debris that made it through the fuel filter—the engine was throbbing low and steady now, like a mechanical heart.

I hit the road.

On rides like these, I always avoid the interstates, just as he taught me.

There's so much more to see on the back roads and byways. The roadside produce stands and junk shops, the Pentecostal churches and mom-and-pop restaurants and gas stations that serve coffee in tiny Styrofoam cups—the best coffee in the world when you're just off your motorcycle, rain-soaked and shivering.

For me, there's nothing as therapeutic as a long ride on the back roads. It feels like the wind gradually blows away the nests of doubt and anxiety that gather inside us. I think on motorcycles we are uniquely vulnerable. We are, perhaps, closer to death, and that puts the lesser worries of everyday life back in their place.

After spending the night in Charleston, I took off early the next morning, riding south over the green-brown

marshes and blackwater rivers, bound for Georgia. My old man met me in downtown Savannah. We ate lunch and went to a bookstore and sat at one of the hotel bars high over the water, watching the river traffic chug past. It was an unexpectedly special day. A gift.

The next night, we sat side by side at the kitchen counter while we planned the next legs of my trip. I made note cards as he traced his fingers across the worn atlases he'd used time and again. I was taking many of the same roads he'd ridden in times past, following his path across the Gulf Coast.

There are sons who want to be like their fathers and sons who don't. I've never doubted which I am.

When I slung my leg over Blitzen the next morning, our note cards were safe in my front pocket, in a plastic

sandwich bag to protect them from the elements. It was October 16, two days before my 35th birthday. In a photo taken that morning, I'm wearing my secondhand black leather



COURTESY TAYLOR BROVIN

Dad and me in 2016, suited up for a fundraiser, the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride

jacket and my red backpack, and my dad's old weatherproof duffel is tied over the back of my saddle.

The weather was foggy. I rode over the bridges and causeways of the Georgia coast, where the water looked pale beneath the mist, almost white, winding through the darkened cordgrass of the falltime marsh. I rode down Highway 17 through a string of small towns, skirting the Okefenokee Swamp and the Osceola National Forest, making my way to the Panhandle.

I still have the note cards that tell me the towns—Folkston, Macclenny, Sanderson, Lake City, Branford—along with the trip checklist my father gave me, listing such necessities as “Tire patch kit/pump” and “Duct/electrical tape” and “Cigars/lighter/cutter.”

Around lunchtime, I stopped in Mayo, Florida, where I took photos of the Udder Delight ice cream shop. I texted with my old man. He'd ridden to a diner called Steffens near the Georgia-Florida border for lunch and sent me a photo of a die-cast 1940 Ford coupe sitting on a shelf there—a model like the bootlegging car from my novel *Gods of Howl Mountain*, which we'd “researched” together at vintage car shows and moonshine festivals.

He told me he'd checked the weather and the heavier rain was staying north of my route. He said Wakulla County, Florida—my night's destination—was partly cloudy and 88 degrees. I didn't reply. I was already back on the road.



When I got the call from my mom, I was at the lodge in Wakulla Springs, south of Tallahassee. I'd just arrived. I knew from the sound of her voice that something had happened, though details were scarce. There had been an accident. A concrete truck had pulled out in front of my dad on his way home from lunch, on Highway 17 just north of the Florida line—the same highway I'd ridden that morning.

I was at the local airport, about to rent a car for the drive home, when Mom called to tell me he was gone. I found myself standing in the parking lot, staring up at the sky. It was sunset, and the sky was almost the color of fire. I thought how many times Dad had ridden south to watch this same sky turn to flame.

I started out early the next morning in the rental car, leaving Blitzen under a cover in the parking lot. My sister took the red-eye from San Francisco, and I picked her up at the airport on my way home. When we got there, Mom had a big manila envelope

labeled with a single word: IF. Inside were letters addressed to each of us. Here is a little of mine:

Taylor,

If you are reading this, something has happened to me. I assume it was sudden and I didn't have the chance to say goodbye and for that I am truly sorry ...

I know this is a difficult time but remember the good times we share—Sun & Fun, Sturgis, dirt bikes, Moonshiners' Festival, Blitzen, Austin, and on and on. I have truly enjoyed all the time we spent together throughout your life (other than a couple of times playing golf :)) ...

What I want to stress in this letter is how much I love you and how proud that I am and always will be ...

I don't need to tell you that it takes a special kind of man to write letters like that. Though he shied away from speaking of it, his relationship with his own father had been fraught with difficulty and pain. How easy it would have been for him to follow that same pattern with his own children. Instead, he went against the grain.

A week after the accident, one of my closest childhood friends drove me back to Wakulla Springs. I needed to finish the ride.

I left early the next morning for New Orleans. I stopped at a gas station and realized my chain was loose. I was sitting in the parking lot trying to break

the axle bolt free with an ancient crescent wrench when a man appeared. I followed him to his rusted-out Ford, and he produced a fancy Snap-on ratchet set. He went inside for breakfast, where there weren't even any windows to make sure I didn't run off with his tools, and told me to come find him when I was done. I can't tell you how much that meant to me.

The next day, I made it to my aunt's in New Orleans, where my dad always

I THINK OF MY DAD EVERY TIME I THROW MY LEG OVER THE SADDLE.

stopped on his long rides, and Blitzen broke down right in her driveway, as if the machine knew just how much it meant to me to finish the ride for him.

He may have left the world too early for us, but I take some comfort in knowing he would have wanted to go too soon rather than too late. Rick Brown would have wanted to die with his boots on, and he did. He died doing what he loved, and that is rare indeed.

These days, I'm more vigilant than ever on the bike. But there's no place I feel closer to my dad. I think of him every time I throw my leg over the saddle. I think how much I learned from him, how lucky I am to be his son. **✎**

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I WAS **SCAMMED** BY MY **BEST FRIEND**

*She swindled me out of \$92,000,
forcing me into bankruptcy and
destroying my once sunny outlook.
But I finally got justice.*

BY Johnathan Walton
FROM HUFFPOST.COM



I fell hard for one of the oldest cons in the book. But this scheme wasn't cooked up by some fictional Nigerian prince soliciting me through a sketchy e-mail. I fell under the spell of an immensely lovable woman who inserted herself into my life and became my best friend. She was also an international con artist on the run.

She snared me in an age-old con called the Inheritance Scam, ultimately bilking me out of nearly \$100,000. She simultaneously destroyed my sense of self and darkened my once joyful outlook. As she was ruining my life, she was also scamming dozens of others around the world by impersonating psychics, mortgage brokers, psychologists, lawyers, and travel agents and even pretending to be a cancer victim.

She was a true queen of the con, using disguises and plastic surgery to alter her appearance. I was a reality TV producer, working on shows such as *American Ninja Warrior* and *Shark Tank*, and I never saw through her masterful performances. She might have gotten away with cheating many more people if she hadn't turned me into a vigilante. I started my own investigation, uncovered other victims, and helped bring her to justice.



Today, she's in jail, probably wondering how on earth she became the victim of one of her own victims.

Allow me to explain.

She introduced herself to me as Mair Smyth in May 2013, when she joined a group of angry neighbors in my living room to discuss what to do about losing access to our building's swimming pool because of a legal spat with a neighboring building.

"I can help," she told us. "My boyfriend is a lawyer who can get the pool back!"

I liked her immediately. We all did. She was brash. Funny. Intelligent and outspoken. Ironically, for someone who turned out to be a liar and a con artist, she came across as a woman who would always "tell it like it is."

PREVIOUS SPREAD (INSET) AND THIS PAGE: COURTESY JOHNATHANWALTON.COM

She also came across as extremely wealthy. She wore expensive Jimmy Choo shoes and once showed me her closet filled with more than 250 pairs. I later discovered they were all fake.

After our initial meeting in my apartment that night, Mair invited my husband, Pablito, and me to dinner. Over the next year, she frequently wined and dined us at fancy restaurants and always insisted on picking up the bill. "I have a lot of money—let me pay!" she'd plead convincingly.

We'd hang out almost every evening in our barbecue area, exchanging intimacies under the cool Los Angeles sky. Mair told us she was originally from Ireland. One night she pointed to a framed document hanging in her living room. "This is the Irish

Soon Mair became more than just a neighbor or even a close friend. She and my husband (right) and I were family.

Constitution," she said. "See that signature at the bottom? That's my great-uncle's." I had no idea that, like her shoes, that tale was fake.

Mair brought me Irish tea and pastries and regaled me with stories of how when she was a young girl, her

**OVER SEVERAL MONTHS,
I LENT MAIR \$15,000.
I WASN'T WORRIED.
SHE WAS MY BEST FRIEND.**

grandmother, who was supposedly in the Irish Republican Army, would take her to the top of a bridge and teach her how to hurl Molotov cocktails down on British soldiers. I was captivated and horrified.

When I tearfully confided in her that part of my family had disowned me for being gay, she pounced. "My family disowned me, too!" she said as she fought back tears. "They're trying to get me disinherited."

Mair told me that an uncle, the patriarch of her family, had recently died, and her cousins were dividing up an estate worth 25 million euros (about \$32 million). She said she was supposed to receive 5 million euros as her share of the inheritance and showed me angry text messages and e-mails

HOME THE VICTIMS HOW SHE CONNED ME PRESS



A queen of the con, Mair took on dozens of personas, using disguises and even plastic surgery to change her look.

immediately paid back the \$4,200 I used to bail her out of jail, so I felt confident she'd pay me back any other money I loaned her.

But that's the thing: The term *con artist* is short for *confidence artist* because these individuals are skilled at gaining your confidence and then using it to scam you out of your money.

Over the course of several months, I lent Mair

from her cousins threatening that she wouldn't get a dime.

Mair told me she had taken a lot of family money with her when she left Ireland many years ago, so she never needed to work. But she claimed she enjoyed working, so she got hired at a travel agency where her family did a lot of business.

Fourteen months into our friendship, Mair and I were like sister and brother, even ending our phone calls with "I love you." She told me that her barristers (I had to look up the word to learn that it means "lawyers") were having trouble trying to secure her inheritance and that they had warned her about a clause in her uncle's will stating that if any family member were convicted of a felony, the

person would forfeit his or her share.

"You'd better be careful!" I cautioned her. "One of your disgruntled cousins might try and set you up!" Many of her family members certainly appeared to hate her. Why wouldn't they set her up? I thought.

On July 8, 2014, my phone rang. "You have a collect call from an inmate at the Century Regional Detention Facility. Press one to accept," the computerized voice instructed me.

It was Mair. I quickly pressed one. "You were right!" she sobbed. "I was arrested today. My family set me up to make it look like I stole \$200,000 from my job."

"I told you this would happen!" I yelled. I was distraught. I found a bail bondsman and paid him \$4,200

to get her out of jail. That's when I first learned that her legal name was Marianne Smyth, not Mair Smyth. But she paid me back the next day, when she was released from jail. Or, rather, the married man she was dating at the time paid me back. Little did I (or he) know she was scamming him too.

As the months passed, Mair showed me e-mails from her lawyers assuring her that the case against her was falling apart. I had no idea those e-mails were from fake accounts she had created herself, just like the messages she claimed were from her cousins.

Then, almost three years into our friendship, she told me that the district attorney prosecuting her case had frozen her bank accounts. So I started lending her money. She had

nearly \$15,000. You'd think I'd be worried about giving her that much money, but I wasn't. Not only was she my best friend, but she also claimed she was about to inherit millions of dollars. I never even considered that anything sinister could be taking place.

One day, Mair called me and said the DA was demanding \$50,000 to dismiss the case against her. I didn't have \$50,000 in cash. But I did have an 840 credit score. So I let her charge the \$50,000 on my credit cards to get the criminal case against her dropped.

A few months later, Mair was arrested again. She said the judge had charged her with money laundering, something to do with her using my credit cards, and punished her with 30 days

COURTESY, JOHNATHAN WALTON.COM

I was a TV producer, not a detective. But I was determined to get justice.

in jail—a “slap on the wrist.” She assured me, once again, that as soon as she got out and received her inheritance, she would pay me back.

Mair called me collect from jail every day. When I said I wanted to come visit her, she

begged me not to. “I don’t want you to see me like this,” she said. But I insisted. So I logged on to the jail’s website to schedule a visit. That’s when the true devastation she had wrought on my life started to reveal itself.

The website showed that Mair was serving time for felony grand theft. This was no slap on the wrist.

I took the day off and rushed to a Los Angeles courthouse. With trembling hands, I reviewed every record I could find from Mair’s case. I discovered she had lied to me about everything. I suddenly couldn’t breathe.

I learned that the \$50,000 I let her charge on my credit cards had gone to pay \$40,000 as part of a plea agreement to a felony grand theft charge she faced for stealing more than \$200,000 from the travel agency she worked for. Had she not been able to come up with that \$40,000, she would have received a five-year jail sentence, not the measly 30 days she actually served.



Her bank accounts had never been frozen. There was no wealthy Irish family or inheritance. She’s not even Irish! Those were all lies she used to entrap me.

I went home and collapsed in my husband’s arms. “How could I let this happen to us?” I sobbed.

Eventually, my pain was replaced by breathtaking anger and the determination to do something.

The day Mair was released from jail, I confronted her in the parking lot outside our apartment building. She denied everything. “That’s not true, Johnathan! That’s not true!” she protested as tears streamed down her face.

But I was done believing anything she had to say. I balled up my fists, clenched my jaw, and walked away. We never spoke again.

I went to the police days later, in March 2017, and filed a report. The officer interviewing me seemed skeptical that there was anything they could

do. “Don’t give strangers your money” were his parting words. So I started my own investigation.

I dug up Mair Smyth’s high school yearbook and learned that she was born Marianne Andle in Maine and graduated from Bangor High in 1987. She later moved to Tennessee, where, according to estranged family members I spoke with, she claimed she had breast cancer and allegedly scammed friends and neighbors out of thousands for “treatments.” They told me Mair was oddly obsessed with wanting to be Irish. In 2000, she went to Ireland on vacation. She ended up marrying a local and stayed for nine years.

In the same way that wooden stakes kill vampires and silver bullets kill werewolves, publicity kills con artists. I began turning my pain into a profound sense of purpose. I started a blog, johnathanwalton.com, detailing how Mair had scammed me. Soon, other victims of hers from all over the world started reaching out.

I heard from one who claimed Mair had scammed her out of \$10,000 by impersonating a psychologist. She allegedly tricked our landlord out of \$12,000 in rent by pretending to have cancer. Mair had iron-deficiency anemia and would purposely avoid iron-rich foods so she could get admitted into hospitals for iron infusions. While sitting in a hospital bed, she’d ask a nurse to take her picture and then e-mail that photo to her victims to better sell her cancer story.

She used this particular scam a lot.

A police detective in Northern Ireland told me that authorities in Belfast had been looking for Marianne Smyth for years. The detective said she had worked as a mortgage broker in 2008 and had scammed many people and then vanished.

All in all, Mair Smyth used at least 23 different aliases and has been charged with fraud and grand theft in Florida and Tennessee.

I was determined to get justice and called the Los Angeles Police Department every day.

THE PROSECUTOR WENT OVER IN EXTREME DETAIL EVERY DOLLAR MAIR HAD SCAMMED FROM ME.

A year after I’d last seen her, Mair was arrested and charged with grand theft for scamming me. She was released on her own recognizance. I never went near her, but one month before trial, Mair filed for a restraining order against me, asserting that I was threatening her with violence. It cost me \$1,500 to hire an attorney to fight her bogus claim. “If a judge grants the restraining order, you would be prevented from testifying against her at her criminal trial,” my lawyer explained.

Could this be her checkmate move? I wondered. I was apoplectic.

Thankfully, the judge refused to grant the restraining order, and Mair's trial proceeded. The prosecution presented a mountain of irrefutable evidence. Though she was charged with scamming only me, the judge allowed testimony from three other victims to demonstrate a pattern.

Mair did not testify in her own defense. As witnesses described how she had scammed them, she just sat there with an emotionless look on her face. That was probably her biggest tell to the jury. She was a brilliant actress while she was conning people, but remarkably, she didn't know how to act innocent.

The only defense her attorney had was that I was making the whole story up. Supposedly I had persuaded all of the other witnesses—people I didn't even know before Mair scammed me—to lie under oath. He was terrifyingly convincing.

The prosecutor went over in extreme detail each dollar Mair had scammed from me. Reliving that experience in front of a roomful of strangers ignited fury and embarrassment and regret in a new, painful way.

I spent two years pursuing Marianne Smyth. I had to file for

bankruptcy because of what she had done to me. And the 24 court appearances I made even before the trial—for continuances, pretrial motions, and hearings—meant I missed a lot of work and lost even more money. Not to mention the cost of hiring private investigators in multiple states and countries to ferret out all her scams.

But it was worth it.

On January 9, 2019, Marianne Smyth was found guilty of conning me out of \$91,784—the money she had borrowed plus thousands of dollars of interest that had accrued on my credit cards. She was sentenced to five years behind bars.

Besides me, only two of Mair's other marks reported her to the police. That enabled her to continue scamming people for years. Most of her victims, like most victims of any con artist, were too ashamed to tell anyone what had happened to them.

I am now suspicious of everyone and everything. Making new friends is not something I'm good at anymore. And I'm ashamed too. But my desire to stop her from hurting other people is much stronger than my shame. **X**

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The Fast and the Furious

The speed limit is the maximum speed you can go by law and also basically the minimum speed you can go without ticking everybody else off.

LORDPOUNCE ON REDDIT.COM

YOUR TRUE STORIES

IN 100 Words

An Ode to Dad

When I was a little girl, my father always let me help him with car and home repairs. Afterward, he used to say, "I couldn't have done it without you!" If he deemed a job too dangerous, he would seat me out of harm's way and have me read poetry aloud to him. He insisted this eased his work and would thank me just the same. I didn't write my own poetry until my father's late years. Now I have two published poetry collections and several awards. I couldn't have done it without you, Dad!

—Laura Grace Weldon
LITCHFIELD, OHIO

TO READ MORE true stories or submit one, go to RD.COM/STORIES. If we publish yours in the print magazine, it could be worth \$100.

A Little Bird Told Me

On a self-imposed COVID-19 isolation, I felt increasingly depressed from living alone. After a long, spiritless walk, I remembered to feed the birds before settling in for the evening. Loading the feeder, I noticed a chickadee (my favorite bird) alighting on a nearby branch. As I stepped away, the bird flew to the feeder, pausing on a perch. Looking me straight in the eye, it sang a high-pitched "cheep, cheep," then grabbed a seed and flew off—a thank-you I'll never forget! Tears welling up, I knew God had not forgotten me. His little messenger reminded me of that.

—DAVID GREGORSKI *Coventry, Connecticut*



The Long and the Short of It

I am an 84-year-old gentleman who stands five feet four inches tall, from the basketball-crazy state of Indiana. Recently, my wife and I were having dinner at a local restaurant. Our waiter was a young man, around six foot eight. Naturally, I asked him if he played basketball. He looked down at me, replied, "Yes, I do," and then asked me if I played miniature golf.

—Paul Kinghorn
RISING SUN, INDIANA



THE GENIUS SECTION

10 Pages TO SHARPEN
Your Mind



STORY TIME IS FOR EVERYONE

Reading aloud, even to other adults, yields surprising rewards

BY Meghan Cox Gurdon

FROM THE BOOK *THE ENCHANTED HOUR*

NOT LONG AGO, Linda Khan was sitting by a hospital bed in Houston, feeling ill at ease. Beside her lay her 88-year-old father. His heart was faltering. He needed surgery.

What troubled her almost as much as his health was the fact that all day the two of them had engaged in nothing but depressing small talk. She and her father had always had good conversations, but now he seemed to be sunk in querulous contemplation of his predicament. He talked about the lousy hospital food, the tests, the doctors, the diagnosis, the potential outcomes. The scope of his once wide-ranging interests seemed to have shrunk to the size of the room.

"It is really hard to sit with a person in a hospital," Khan says. "It feels like there's nothing to talk about except their medical situation."

That day in the hospital, her eye fell on a stack of books that people had

brought as gifts. Her father had always been a reader, but lately he didn't have the energy or focus. She picked up *Young Titan*, Michael Sheldon's biography of Winston Churchill, and started to read it out loud.

"Right away it changed the mood and atmosphere," she says. That afternoon, Khan read to her father for an hour. It was a relief and a pleasure for both of them. Reading gave the daughter a way to connect with her father and help him in a situation that was otherwise out of her hands. Listening allowed the father to travel on the sound of his daughter's voice, up and out of the solipsism of illness and back into the realm of mature, intellectual engagement, where he felt himself again.

"He's in and out of the hospital a lot now," Khan says, "and I always read to him."

That may be just what the doctor ordered. In a 2010 survey in the United Kingdom, elderly adults who joined

JOLEEN ZUBEK (MAN ON STOOL), GETTY IMAGES (4)

weekly read-aloud groups reported better concentration, less agitation, and an improved ability to socialize. The survey authors attributed these improvements in large part to the “rich, varied, nonprescriptive diet of serious literature” that group members consumed, with fiction encouraging feelings of relaxation and calm, poetry fostering focused concentration, and narratives of all sorts giving rise to thoughts, feelings, and memories.

The second-century Greek doctor Antyllus even prescribed daily recitation to his patients, recommending it as a kind of health-giving tonic and declaring that “epic verse is the best for one’s health.”

An epic poem might be a tall order, but in truth almost any kind of reading to another person can be beneficial. That seems to be especially true for Alzheimer’s patients, according to a 2017 University of Liverpool study of 800,000 men and women with dementia. “Reading a literary text together not only harnesses the power of reading as a cognitive process; it acts as a powerful socially coalescing presence, allowing readers a sense of subjective and shared experience at the same time,” the study’s authors wrote.

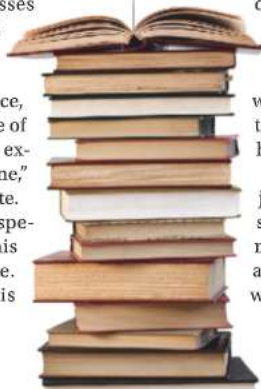
We are not the only species to benefit from this kind of oral medicine. Dogs do, too, which is

why, since 2014, volunteers at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have read to the animals under the group’s care.

“Ten or fifteen years ago, I was essentially the only person who worked with the neglect and abuse cases,” says Victoria Wells, the organization’s senior manager for behavior and training. “I used to sit with them, in front of their kennels, and play guitar and sing. I used to play the Beatles. I noticed that the dogs who were very fearful, in the back of their kennels shivering and cowering, would slowly creep forward to the front. They would appear to be listening, and they would become very relaxed.”

The dogs’ response to music led in a natural way to the idea of reading aloud. It was a practical means of allowing a larger number of volunteers to minister to recovering animals. Some volunteers keep the animals apprised of current events by reading the newspaper, some choose children’s books, and others prefer adult fiction. On the day I stopped by, a retired opera singer was reading the sci-fi thriller *Logan’s Run* to half a dozen dogs.

“The dogs really enjoy the reading,” Wells says. “The fact that it’s not threatening but it’s attention all the same is what’s most beneficial.



TETRA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

We noticed that it really does assist in the standard behavior treatment. The dogs are much more receptive to us, and they seem more comfortable in their kennels in general ... I think it’s that soothing, even tone of voice and the presence of somebody to keep them company that really, really benefits them.”

Readers get rewards too. For Neil Bush, the late-life hospitalizations of his famous parents, George H. W. and Barbara Bush, became opportunities

WE ARE NOT THE ONLY SPECIES TO BENEFIT FROM THIS KIND OF ORAL MEDICINE.

to repay a debt of gratitude. “When I was a kid, [my mother] would read to me and my siblings,” he told a reporter in the spring of 2018. With his parents in and out of care, he said, “we’ve been reading books about Dad’s foreign policy and, more recently, Mom’s memoir.”

Bush went on, his voice thick with emotion: “And to read the story of their amazing life together has been a remarkable blessing to me, personally, as their son.”

Reading to a spouse, sibling, or parent might seem so far outside the normal range of most people’s regular activities as to be eccentric and a little peculiar. Linda Khan told me

that right before she started to read the Churchill biography to her father, she was tempted to put the book down. It felt odd and even improper to presume to read to a man who, for her entire life, had always been strong and independent. She didn’t want him to feel patronized. Her fear was misplaced; they both ended up loving the experience. Like so many others who brave the momentary weirdness of reading to another adult, they were, to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth, surprised by the joy of it.

Who wouldn’t want that? One night years ago, a friend of mine wandered into his family’s living room after supper and picked up a copy of Michael Shaara’s Civil War novel *The Killer Angels*. Without thinking much about it, he started to read the preface out loud. Immediately, he was joined by his eldest son, who was about 12 at the time. A moment later, his wife came in, followed by the couple’s two young daughters, who at six and eight were not perhaps the target audience for an introduction to Robert E. Lee and Joshua Chamberlain but wanted to be part of a family moment. Within a few minutes, everyone seemed so comfy and engaged that my friend kept reading. It went on for an hour that night. He picked the book up again after dinner the next night, and the next, until he had finished it. **■**

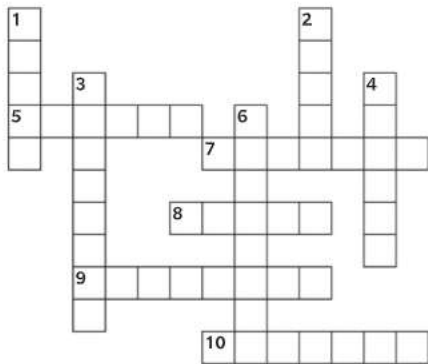
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BRAIN GAMES

Quick Crossword

EASY It's beach weather, so place these waterside retreats in the grid.

- MYRTLE
- ORANGE
- CHIMNEY
- PISMO
- CRANE
- MIAMI
- OCRACOCKE
- LANIKAI
- KALALOCK
- BRIGHTON



Summer Camp

MEDIUM Abigail, Oliver, Rosa, and Blake all attend the same summer camp, where they can cook, kayak, rock climb, and zip-line. Each child has a different favorite activity. Can you figure out who likes what best based on the following clues?

- ♦ Abigail's favorite activity isn't rock climbing.
- ♦ Oliver is afraid of heights.
- ♦ Rosa can't do her favorite activity without a harness.
- ♦ Blake likes to keep his feet on the ground at all times.



MARIA MADDOX (4)

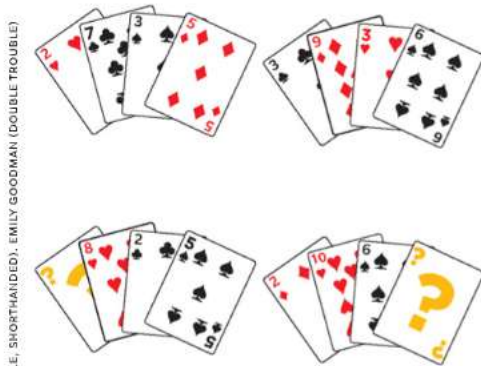
Full Circle

EASY What number should appear in place of the question mark?



Shorthanded

DIFFICULT Which cards are missing in the third and fourth hands?



MARCEL DANESI (FULL CIRCLE, SHORTHANDED), EMILY GOODMAN (DOUBLE TROUBLE)

Double Trouble

MEDIUM Rephrase each item below as a pair of rhyming words. Hint: A phrase's number is also the number of syllables in each word in the answer.

1. A purse from northern Europe
2. A manly tortilla chip covered in cheese
3. An eatery with a blasé attitude
4. A docile teenager
5. An association specializing in spontaneity

For more Brain Games, go to RD.COM/CROSSWORDS.

For answers, turn to PAGE 126.

WORD POWER

What do an academic, a debacle, and a Miami Beach clambake have in common? They are words spelled with letters from only the first half of the alphabet, *a* to *m*—like all those in this quiz. (Answers on page 124.)
Next issue: the second half of the alphabet.

BY Emily Cox AND Henry Rathvon

1. affable *adj.*
(‘af-uh-bull)

- A easygoing.
- B humorless.
- C qualified.

2. filial *adj.*
(‘fih-lee-uhl)

- A ornamental.
- B of sons and daughters.
- C on horseback.

3. edifice *n.*
(‘eh-duh-fiss)

- A steep cliff.
- B inspiration.
- C large building.

4. calcified *adj.*
(‘kal-sih-fyd)

- A hardened.
- B wasted away.
- C rusted through.

5. malleable *adj.*
(‘mal-ee-uh-bull)

- A cruel.
- B sickly.
- C pliable.

6. Gallic *adj.*
(‘gal-ik)

- A Scottish.
- B French.
- C Roman.

7. allege *v.*
(uh-‘lej)

- A compare and contrast.
- B approach cautiously.
- C assert without proof.

8. fallible *adj.*
(‘fal-uh-bull)

- A autumnal.
- B fertile.
- C imperfect.

9. kalimba *n.*
(kuh-‘lim-buh)

- A tea service.
- B thumb piano.
- C motor scooter.

10. blackball *v.*
(‘blak-ball)

- A exclude socially.
- B demand money.
- C cancel without notice.

11. ebb *v.*
(eb)

- A rise slowly.
- B decrease.
- C encourage.

12. jackal *n.*
(‘jak-uhl)

- A wild dog.
- B trickster.
- C thatched hut.

13. addled *adj.*
(‘ad-uhld)

- A egg-shaped.
- B confused.
- C extra.

14. imam *n.*
(ih-‘mom)

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

15. fiddlehead *n.*
(‘fih-duhl-hed)

- A edible fern.
- B large crab.
- C violinist.

To play an interactive version of Word Power on your iPad, download the Reader's Digest app.

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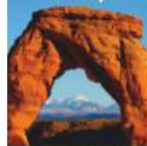
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Scenery



Recreation



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Half-Time Notes

Three different prefixes can signal a half: There's *semi-* (as in *semicircle*), *hemi-* (*hemisphere*), and *demi-* (*demi-god*). As it happens, all three prefixes occur in music—and in one case, in the same word. A *hemidemisiquaver* is a 64th note, or a half of a half of a half of an eighth note, which is called a quaver. The shorter the note, the longer the name!



Word Power ANSWERS

1. affable (A) easygoing. Guillelmo 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?" Mom joked.

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

4. calcified (A) hardened. Mary's 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 actually at the vet.

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

9. kalimba (B) thumb piano. My niece taught herself to play Mozart sonatas on the kalimba.

10. blackball (A) exclude socially. E.J. 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 misshapen scarves.

12. jackal (A) wild dog. What is the mayor's office going to do about the pack of jackals on the loose in our town?

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. fiddlehead (A) edible fern. We're serving salmon on a bed of sautéed fiddleheads for lunch.

Vocabulary Ratings

- 9 & BELOW:** blah
10–12: mild
13–15: ideal

C SQUARED STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES

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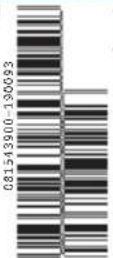
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BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

See page 120.

Quick Crossword

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 5. MYRTLE | 1. PISMO |
| 7. LANIKAI | 2. MIAMI |
| 8. CRANE | 3. BRIGHTON |
| 9. OCRACOKE | 4. ORANGE |
| 10. CHIMNEY | 6. KALALOCH |

Summer Camp

Abigail likes to zip-line,
Oliver likes to kayak,
Rosa likes to rock climb,
and Blake likes to cook.

Full Circle

4321. Moving right, the last digit in the circle becomes the first digit in the next. The other three digits stay in the same order.

Shorthanded

Third:  Fourth: 

Each hand has all four suits. The number on the fourth card in each hand is the sum of the numbers on the first and third cards, and the number on the second card is the sum of the numbers on the first and fourth cards.

Double Trouble

1. Dutch clutch 2. Macho nacho 3. Nonchalant restaurant 4. Acquiescent adolescent 5. Improvisation organization

MAKE US LAUGH!



Caption Contest

What's your clever description for this picture? Submit your funniest line at RD.COM/CAPTIONCONTEST. Winners will appear in a future Photo Finish (PAGE 128).

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PHOTO FINISH

YOUR *Funniest* CAPTIONS



Winner

"Yes, dear, we'll visit your mother as soon as I finish cutting the grass."

—RON HANEY *Milton-Freewater, Oregon*

Runners-Up

"After you're done mowing the lawn, you can get the toothbrush and sweep the driveway."

—SUSAN GRANNELL *Dunedin, Florida*

First day of basic training at barber college.

—BARRY CAULFIELD *Little Silver, New Jersey*

To enter an upcoming caption contest, see the photo on PAGE 126.



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Reader's Digest

MAY 2020

**FEEL
Happier
TODAY!**

By LISA FIELDS



HOW THE INTERNET SPIES ON YOU

p. 54

They Cured Their Own DISEASES

From CNN.COM

Why Teens Can't Stop Vaping

From THE NEW YORK TIMES

RE-ROUTE Your Brain

By DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

The Best Mother's Day Gift Ever

RD HUMOR

5 REASONS to Love Butter

By KATE LOWENSTEIN
& DANIEL GRITZER

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HOW THE INTERNET IS SPYING ON YOU

You might be surprised to learn who—or what—is keeping tabs on your every move.

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A med student battles a deadly disorder with his own research.

BY RYAN PRIOR
FROM CNN.COM

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Mother's Day Gifts They Will Never Forget

These two unusual moms demand something, um, special.

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Why Teens Can't Stop Vaping

Almost overnight, millions of young people started smoking a trendy e-cigarette. It's time for the damage to be undone.

BY JULIE CRESWELL AND SHEILA KAPLAN ADAPTED FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

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"I Didn't Know How Long I'd Survive"

With his leg caught in a gigantic corn conveyor, one farmer did the unthinkable.

BY CARSON VAUGHAN

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A Kentucky Derby tell-all, from those who ran it!

BY JOHN KENNEY
FROM THE NEW YORKER

SUNSET BOULEVARD / GETTY IMAGES (NORTH BY NORTHWEST), BOB BERG / GETTY IMAGES (FITNESS TRACKERS);



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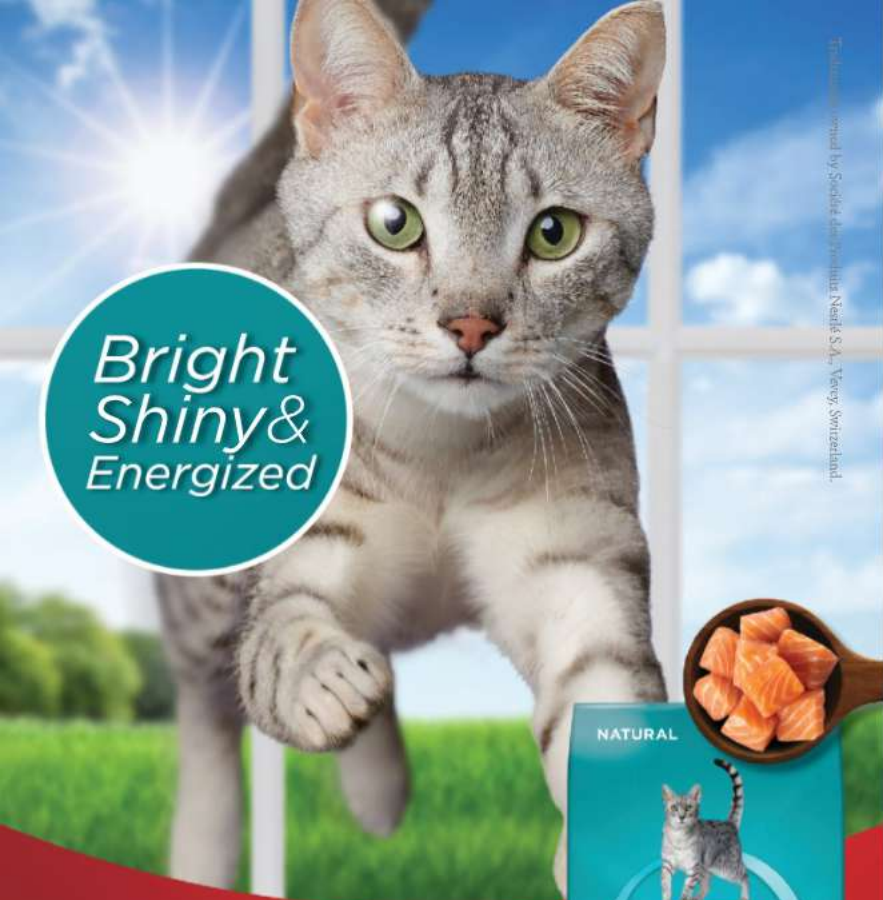


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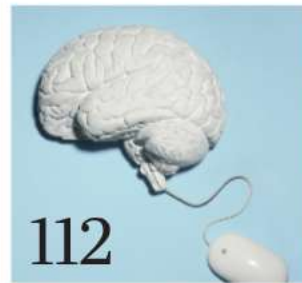
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DEAR READER

Hacks of Terror

A FEW YEARS AGO, when hackers stole my identity and filed a fake tax return in my name, it felt spooky. Someone had my name, Social Security number, employer's name, and more, all to be used at their whim.

Yet that invasion seems harmless compared with the "business model of surveillance" that has taken control of our homes and lives.

Bruce Schneier, who coined that term, is a respected cybersecurity expert who hates sloppy, worst-case thinking that exaggerates risk. But lately he has been sounding the alarm, describing how our phones, cars, TVs, refrigerators, thermostats, CCTVs, and even light bulbs are becoming a single vulnerable system of computers—and, yes, they are all now computers—connected via the Internet. From there, Schneier explains, it's frighteningly easy for terrorist groups, totalitarian states, and depraved individuals to weaponize that connectivity.

The picture he paints isn't a Roger Moore-era Bond movie. It's our

inevitable future, in which bad actors who are good hackers create chaos in all sorts of ways. They remotely crash our cars. They sabotage our implanted medical devices. They hijack our cities by disabling millions of light bulbs or jacking up our thermostats until we pay ransom.

We've already seen how these backdoor takedowns can occur. Target had its data stolen by way of its HVAC provider. A casino got hacked via its Internet-controlled fish tank. In 2017, the Chinese military stole financial data from about 143 million Americans by hacking Equifax, though nothing much came of it. Today, that same hack could be catastrophic. With only a laptop and credit card, the bad guys could access the exploding market for data to learn every hidden quirk of those 143 million people. (Amazon, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, et al. freely rent out what they know about us.) Then they'd be armed to inflame division between us.

Our cover story reports protections that we should all follow. Write me how you deal with this mess. This pressing topic and our coverage of it has only just begun.

Bruce Kelley,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Write to me at
letters@rd.com.



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Wildlife

Scenery

Recreation

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FROM TOP: VIAFRAME/GETTY IMAGES; MATTHEW COHEN

LETTERS
NOTES ON THE
March ISSUE



Find the Doctor You Trust

I have worked in medical clinics and wanted to add a final tip: Be respectful and helpful to your provider and the office staff. They went into practice to help people. They are overworked and as frustrated as you are with the current health-care system.

—DIANE OSBORN, RN *San Tan Valley, Arizona*

My family doctor employs people to type notes for him while he confers with patients. I find this a wonderful way for my doctor to spend more time with me, and I have his undivided attention. I would encourage other physicians to employ this technique.

—CAROL HARDING
Mobile, Alabama

Faithful Friends

What a magnificent story! Two young

people who were able to become friends despite their different backgrounds. The world could follow their example and secure peace.

—CAROLE GLENN
Suquamish, Washington

I Am Pork

Many people, including me, are walking around thanks to a heart valve that came from a pig. The porcine valve is silent and no special blood thinner is needed,

compared with a metal heart valve. No problem with tissue rejection either. Mine has lasted nearly eight years, and I am looking forward to many more.

—MIKE MARKOVITCH
Marina, California

My Fast-Food Love Affair

How Tommy Tomlinson's words touched me: "Aloneness has become my natural state. That's not who I want to be, but it's who I am." I think this is how many of us feel and react after suffering trauma. I will be picking up his book to hear the rest of his story. Congratulations, Tommy, on finding the strength you needed.

—LISA HOWEN
Chattanooga, Tennessee

My own fast-food love affair began after I got pregnant. Forget pickles and ice cream—my craving was for Big Macs! Thanks to a McDonald's less than two miles away and an eager-to-please

husband, I figure I enjoyed somewhere between 150 and 200 Big Macs during that nine-month period. I told everyone my baby was going to be born with sesame-seed buns! He wasn't, and to this day, at age 36, he doesn't like Big Macs.

—ANNE HYLTON
Greensboro, North Carolina

He Trots the Air

I started reading about Roany, and by the time I got to the second

page I had gone through a box of tissues. I never got to have a horse, but I would haunt the stables at our county fairgrounds, volunteering to do anything that would allow me to be near the horses. Bless Roany's beautiful soul. He was lucky to have Pam Houston to care for him, but she was lucky too. (On my second box of tissues now.)

—EILENE SCHULTZ
Springfield, Oregon

Brain Games

I was surprised when my solution to the Math with Matches puzzle didn't match yours. My solution was $7 + 2 = 9$, which I reached by moving only two matches, turning the 3 into a 2 and the 5 into a 9. Either way, the fun of solving your Brain Games is matchless in my book!

—PAT EBERVEIN
Chicago, Illinois



Share the Love blew past its fundraising goal this year.

That's What We Call Nice!

"PLEASE FIND A CHECK for \$55,000 to fulfill the Molalla High School 2020 Share the Love goal." If that school's name sounds familiar, perhaps it's because Molalla High was featured in last year's "Nicest Places in America" cover story. It turns out that the anonymous person who wrote that big check read the story too. "In December I was at a doctor's appointment, and in the waiting room was a *Reader's Digest*," the donor explained in his (or her) letter to the school. "I was excited to read about Molalla High School, researched Share the Love, and decided to attend the opening assembly. Wow, I was so moved."

No kidding. When we started Nicest Places four years ago, we hoped that the stories of people coming together would touch readers, but we never dreamed that someone would literally pay it forward like this. As we open nominations for this year's search, please visit rd.com/nicest to tell us the story of a place you know where people are making good things happen.

DAVID FREGOSO

EVERYDAY HEROES

*A couple turns their loss into a celebration
for kids who need everything*

The Party of Their Lives

BY *Andy Simmons*

SKID ROW. THE very phrase conjures images of drunks passed out in gutters, lowlifes lying in wait, addicts in darkened alleys. It's the definition of a place where dreams go to die. In Los Angeles's infamous Skid Row, the scene can be even bleaker. There are hundreds of children living there—on the streets or in shelters—at any given time. But amid all the poverty and desperation, one couple is determined to use their own experience with loss to foster a sense of hope.

In 2012, Mary Davis, who works at

an enrichment center for young children, and her husband, Ari Kadin, who is in property management, were expecting their first child when Davis miscarried. They were devastated. But the couple, who were volunteering with adults in a Skid Row homeless shelter, refused to let their heartbreak break them.

"In 2013, our child would have been one year old," says Davis, 38. "And we kept seeing these kids at the shelter, and I said to my husband, 'We couldn't throw a birthday party for our child, so let's do it for these kids.'"



The kids get new presents—nothing used. "They deserve the best," Mary Davis says.

They took over a room in the Union Rescue Mission and filled it with streamers, gifts, a cake—all the makings of a great party. Or so they thought. “I forgot the music!” Davis says, laughing. It didn’t matter. Many of the 15 kids who showed up had never had a single birthday party before, and they were so excited to have one now that they made their own music—singing and clapping and, of course, laughing.

Since then, the couple have thrown a bash each and every month. They

MANY OF THE KIDS HAD NEVER HAD A BIRTHDAY PARTY BEFORE.

routinely attract 250 kids and their parents—they’ve had to take over more rooms in the shelter *and* the rooftop. An hour before each party, volunteers arrive to set up the decorations and activities: face painting, balloon artists, a DJ, cake, and pizza. There are small presents for the kids celebrating their birthdays that month, but Davis makes sure there are more than enough to go around.

“I remember a mom came with her two kids,” Davis says. “It was their first night at the shelter, and her child had a birthday. We had an extra gift for her—pink headphones. The little

girl was so excited. She was jumping up and down. And her sister was so excited. And I’m so excited. And her mom ... she’s crying. ‘You have no idea what we’ve been through for the last 24 hours,’ she told me. ‘Yesterday was her birthday. I had nothing to give her. We went through so much trauma, and today we’re here in a shelter. I never imagined we would ever need to be in a shelter. I didn’t know what to expect. But I really didn’t expect a birthday party for my child!’ I had to walk away and wipe away some tears.”

Doing her best to normalize these kids’ lives is both heartwarming and bittersweet, Davis says.

“We’re on this rooftop. It’s this beautiful view. The sky is gorgeous. You’re above everything. But if you look down, you see homeless person after homeless person on the street, and it reminds you that these kids don’t get to leave this area after the party.”

It may be why, after throwing 88 parties, she still cries after each one. “I want to bring all these kids home, but we have a very small apartment,” she jokes.

Davis suffered a second miscarriage before finally having a child—she and Kadin have two now, ages two and four. But she credits the kids in the shelter with helping her hold on to hope. “We didn’t realize how much joy they were going to bring us,” she told CBS News. “And that was so healing for me.” **R**

“I Got Him!”

BY *Andy Simmons*

IT WAS THE homecoming parade in Rockwall, Texas, and cheerleader Tyra Winters, outfitted in her uniform, was riding atop one of the school’s floats. As it slowly made its way down the boulevard, the 17-year-old enthusiastically waved at the crowd, all the while soaking in the music, laughter, and applause.

All of a sudden, a horrific scream pierced the joyous cacophony. Looking down, Winters saw a two-year-old on the sidewalk gasping for air, his frantic mother pleading for help. The boy, Clarke Hornback, had been sucking on a piece of candy when it slid down the back of his mouth, lodging in his throat and blocking his windpipe.

“I see a little bright red face and his mom’s begging, ‘Someone help me, someone help me,’” Winters told KTVT.

“There was no coughing; there was no breathing,” Clarke’s mother, Nicole Hornback, later told news station NBCDFW. “He was just gasping for air.” No one seemed to know how to help.

Except for Winters. A senior with dreams of becoming a pediatric surgeon, she had learned the Heimlich maneuver and CPR. Knowing that the



Midparade, Tyra Winters reacted fast.

clock was ticking, she leaped off the moving float and ran to the child.

By the time she got to Clarke, his face had turned purple. “I got him!” she yelled to Nicole as she grabbed the boy from her. “I tilted him and gave a good three back thrusts,” she told the local CBS station.

Soon, the boy coughed up the piece of candy, gasped, and began breathing again. Without another word, Winters handed Clarke back to his mother and sprinted back to her float before it could leave her behind.

It all happened so fast, Nicole never had time to thank the teen. She didn’t need to, says Winters. “I knew what she was feeling. I saw her tears. I saw her face.”

A good thing, because Winters’ heroic actions left Nicole speechless. “I don’t really have any words,” she says. “The words that you would say to anyone who does something for you is ‘thank you.’ But that doesn’t seem good enough.” **R**

COURTESY STEVEN OFFIELD



"I see my kids' laundry."

in her two cents.

"I can see why it would be dangerous to drink and drive," she said. "The straw could go up your nose."

—MARLENE L. BANWART
West Bend, Iowa

It always irked my single mother that her grocery store didn't carry eggs in packages of six—just by the dozen. Then one day,

session, going on about this, that, and the other. When she finally paused to come up for air, she had one question: "Who am I talking to?"

—CHRISTINE HOHMAN
Port Townsend, Washington

A few of us were discussing the perils of drinking and driving when my five-year-old granddaughter threw



My husband and his sister are notorious yakkers. They can hold court on any subject. One day, he called her. All he had to say was "Hi," and that launched her into a marathon

My favorite thing about watching a new movie with my five-year-old is probably watching it 17 times a day for the next three months.

—@THEBABYLADY7

her wish came true. She walked into the grocery and found fresh eggs in cartons of six.

"I was so excited," she told us later, "that I bought two!"

—THOMAS HASSMANN
Andover, Minnesota

Suffering from an unsightly scaly rash, my friend Denise made an appointment with a dermatologist who happened to be very attractive.

After a full examination, the doctor cocked his head and asked,

"Denise, did you get your hair done?"

"Why, yes. Thank you for noticing," said Denise, flattered.

"I thought so," the doctor replied. "Because your scalp looks red and irritated."

—SANDY HAGGLUND
Aurora, Minnesota

GOT A FUNNY STORY about friends or family? It could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, go to RD.COM/SUBMIT.

GEE, THANKS, MOM

On this Mother's Day, let's remember Mom for all the lovely things she has said to us over the years—not the rotten ones, like these:

♦ If I ever voiced disapproval of a photo of myself, my mother always had a ready reply: "Want a better picture? Get a better face."

—Maria Zagorski
WAUKESHA, WISCONSIN

♦ **ME:** Mom, you're invading my personal space.
MOM: Well, you came out of my personal space. That makes us even.

—@WVandertie

♦ "I'm leaving for the weekend, so I hid \$100 in your room for food. Clean your room and you will find it."

—WATTYPAD.COM

♦ On my wedding day, my mom told my bride, "No refunds, no exchanges on sale items."

—Glen Zeider
SIMI VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

♦ "Be nice to your brother. You might need one of his kidneys one day."

—@cocogur186

♦ I told my mom I expected a boyfriend and a new car for my birthday. She said, "A Ken doll and a Hot Wheels. Got it."

—@jordanmei



RYAN MCIVAY/GETTY IMAGES (PHOTO), MAE LANDER (DOODLE)

LIFE WELL LIVED

My Dad and I, Rebuilt

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

BY Colleen Oakley

ILLUSTRATIONS BY Agata Nowicka



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

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

When I moved out on my own, I called him at least once a week, usually when something broke in my apartment and I needed to know how to fix it: the toilet; the air-conditioning; the wall, once, when I threw a shoe at a terrifying spider.

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

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

I loved my dad, of course, but I

wondered at times if maybe he had already shared everything I needed to know. Maybe I'd heard all his stories. Maybe, after knowing a man for 40 years, there's nothing left to say.

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

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

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

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

The heavy mallet he was swinging paused in midair. "I spent a summer in college building them on the Jersey Shore."

"You did?" I thought I knew everything about my dad—all his random

jobs. I knew about the apple orchard, the summer at the horseradish manufacturing plant that burned his hands raw, and even the diner line-cook position, where he learned how to make the best omelet in the Western hemisphere. But I never knew this.

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

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



A few weeks later, after my family and I moved back into our renovated house, I called my parents. Dad answered. "Hi, sweets," he said. "Here's Mom."

"Wait, Dad," I said. "How are you?" We ended up talking about the consulting gig he was working on, a new battery he'd bought for his sailboat, a refi my husband and I were

looking into to bundle our home-renovation loan. Nothing life-changing, nothing earth-shattering. To anyone else, it would sound like a normal conversation between a dad and his daughter.

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



Great Con Job!

During my interview today, I poured some water into a cup and it overflowed a bit.

"Nervous?" asked the interviewer.

I simply replied, "No, I just always give 110 percent."

@DOUBLETEXTS



WHOA.
Is your cell phone bill just as out of control? Then this is your wake-up call.

NEW TRACFONE WIRELESS GIVES YOU COMPLETE CONTROL WITH UNLIMITED CARRYOVER* DATA:



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QUOTABLE QUOTES

Happiness is an egg-salad sandwich with salt, pepper, and mayo in exactly the right proportion.

—Eugene Levy, ACTOR

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

—Taylor Hill, MODEL

I say I'm a realist and my mom says, "No, you just have anxiety."

—Jessica Chastain, ACTOR

God knows how to make people like you. Sometimes they don't even know why. They can't put their finger on it. There's just something about you. That's God smiling down on you.

—Joel Osteen, PASTOR

Age is not the enemy. Stagnation is the enemy. Complacency is the enemy. Stasis is the enemy.

—Twyla Tharp, DANCER



FROM LEFT: BRANDON WILLIAMS, STEVE GRANITZ, CINDY ORD, ANDREW H. WALKER (ALL GETTY IMAGES)

Growing up with an outhouse is a humbling experience. It's like bungee jumping—I'm glad I did it, but I don't want to do it again.

—Trevor Noah, TV HOST

I hired my ex-husband to work for me—just because we didn't work out as husband and wife didn't mean our relationship couldn't continue.

—Joy Mangano, INVENTOR

Thought is an idea in transit.

—Pythagoras, MATHEMATICIAN

POINT TO PONDER

It's human nature—we become what we see. We become clones of each other. Break free from that and say, "I'm deciding to be my own individual self, and it looks nothing like what anyone else is doing." There's something so powerful about being unique.

—Alicia Keys, MUSICIAN



FROM LEFT: SLAVEN VILASIC, GABRIEL OLSEN, UNIVERSALIMAGESGROUP (ALL GETTY IMAGES)

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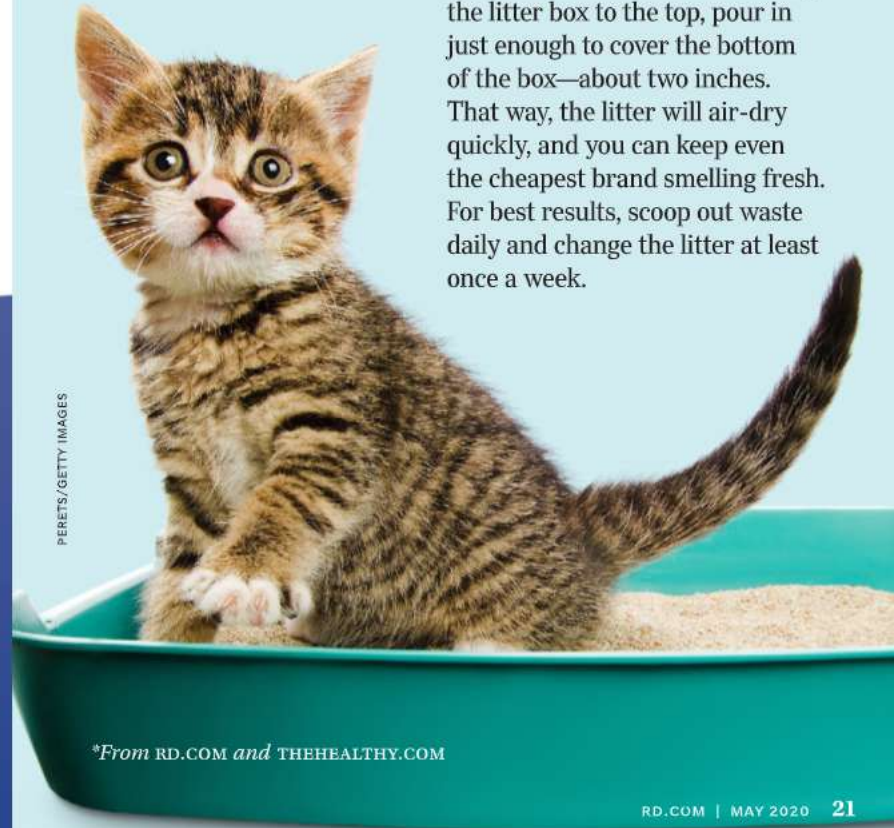
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WE FOUND A FIX

9 TRICKS TO Improve Your Life*

1 Prevent Cat Litter Odor

PETS It may seem counterintuitive, but cat litter smells better when you use less of it. Instead of filling the litter box to the top, pour in just enough to cover the bottom of the box—about two inches. That way, the litter will air-dry quickly, and you can keep even the cheapest brand smelling fresh. For best results, scoop out waste daily and change the litter at least once a week.



PERETS/GETTY IMAGES

*From RD.COM and THEHEALTHY.COM

2

Beat the Crowds

SHOPPING Look up where you want to shop today on Google Maps, and it will display a bar graph of the busiest times for that store. You can also look at other days of the week to see how traffic patterns change. Google gathers data from specific stores, so you can compare how busy the various Targets or Walmarts in your area are on any given day.

3

Put Extra Vino to Good Use

FOOD Freeze leftover wine in ice-cube trays (eight cubes = one cup) to add flavor to future sauces, stews, and more. White and sparkling work best in creamy or clear soups (think chowder or simple vegetable), while red wine goes well with tomato- or beef-based varieties such as chili. Add about one ice cube per portion.



4

Shut Down Stress

HEALTH If you're feeling overwhelmed, step outside—or open a window. Researchers say getting more oxygen to the brain is a quick and effective stress reliever. "Taking in a deep breath of fresh air can immediately shift your neurochemistry," says Deborah Serani, PsyD, a psychology professor at Adelphi University and the author of *Living with Depression*. The American Psychological Association recommends the fresh air approach too.

5

Don't Overfill Your Tank

AUTO A few more drops of gasoline can't hurt, right? Not so fast—the automatic shutoff valve is there for a reason. Gasoline needs room to expand, so topping off can cause pressure to build up in your fuel tank and lead to a dangerous leak. Better to just stop when the pump does.

*** SUBIROS, FABRICE***/GETTY IMAGES

6

Spend Less on Hotel Rooms

TRAVEL Weekend bookers tend to luck out when it comes to snagging the best rate. Prices are lowest on Fridays and Saturdays, according to the most recent data from travel site kayak.com. Absolutely avoid booking on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, when prices are highest.

7

Don't Crank the AC

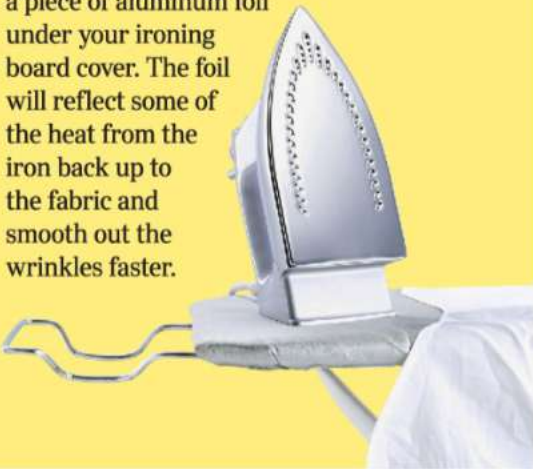
MONEY When you get home on a hot day, do you drop the air-conditioning way down so you can cool the place off quickly? The thing is, your AC can work only so fast. Setting it at 60°F instead of your usual 75°F will just waste energy when you let the air conditioner keep cranking chilly air after the room has reached your ideal setting. You'll save on energy costs by keeping it set to your preferred temperature.

MICHAEL HAEGELE/GETTY IMAGES

8

Speed Through Ironing

HOME The hotter your clothes, the faster you'll blast away the wrinkles (as long as you don't overdo it!). One good trick: Put a piece of aluminum foil under your ironing board cover. The foil will reflect some of the heat from the iron back up to the fabric and smooth out the wrinkles faster.



9

Make Better Small Talk

ETIQUETTE Casual conversation should be playful, "like a tennis game, not a job interview," says Jeanne Martinet, author of *The Art of Mingling*. So what do you do when you're stuck? Turn things into a game. Ask the other person to tell you a few details about his company, and then try to guess where he works. Games allow you to show more personality and your partner to get "into the spirit," according to Martinet. **✎**

ALL
in a Day's
WORK

Teachers shared with reddit.com the most questionable questions they'd ever been asked:

- ◆ "How old was the average 18-year-old in 1942?"
- ◆ "What are those pyramid-shaped things in Egypt called?"
- ◆ "If the patient has a brain hemorrhage, can we tie a tourniquet around the neck to stop it?"

Cashier: I think I know you from somewhere.

Customer: I have a big following on Instagram.

Cashier: Don't you work at the car wash on Third?

Customer: Yes. It could also be from there.

—[@REALOVERHEARDLA](#)



"Before you tell me about your diet, I should warn you, I follow you on Facebook."

I've never wanted to be the kind of successful that requires getting to an airport before 7 a.m.

—[@TRESSIEMCPHD](#)

Marriage vows should be rewritten as "to have and to hold and to listen to stories about your workplace drama until death do us part."

—[@COPYMAMA](#)

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

CORRECTION: "In yesterday's jazz albums column, we incorrectly referred to Don Rendell as a 'terrorist' when it clearly should have been 'tenorist.'"

ADVERTISEMENT: "One of the greatest gifts

you'll ever give your family may be your funeral."

HEADLINES:

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

As a brain wave technician, I often ask postoperative patients to smile to make sure their facial nerves are intact. It always struck me as odd to be asking this question right after brain surgery, so a colleague suggested I ask patients to show me their teeth. Armed with this new phrase, I said to my next patient, "Mr. Smith, show me your teeth."

He shook his head. "The nurse has them."
—EMILY MURPHY
Kingwood, Texas

ANYTHING FUNNY happen to you at work? It could be worth \$\$\$.
For details, go to [RD.COM/SUBMIT](#).

PAGADESIGN/GETTY IMAGES

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

—ABIGAIL GEORGE *Clywd, Wales*

WHAT'S THE 411 ON THESE 911 CALLS?

Not all emergency calls to the police are real emergencies.

- ◆ An Oregonian came home, heard rustling sounds from inside a bathroom, and could see a shadowy figure moving about underneath the closed door. The resident called police. They arrived, drew their guns, and ordered the prowler to come out with hands up. Receiving no response, they burst into the bathroom, where, according to a deputy, "We encountered a very thorough vacuuming job being done by a Roomba robotic vacuum cleaner."

—SNEWSONLINE.COM

- ◆ Peanut allergies are nothing to sneeze at, and one mother whose son is highly allergic wasn't taking any chances. She called 911 after opening



an Amazon package at home that was filled with peanuts—packing peanuts.

—PEOPLE.COM

- ◆ Escape rooms are a popular craze where participants solve puzzles and clues to free themselves from a locked room. Many people find them fun, but not one burglar in Vancouver, Washington. He broke into an escape room after hours and became trapped. He eventually figured out how to leave. He called 911.

—RAVEMOBILESAFETY.COM

The first and only overactive bladder (OAB) treatment in its class.

BOARDING PASS
BOARDING PASS

**IS YOUR
BLADDER
ALWAYS
TAKING YOU
ON A TRIP
OF ITS OWN?**

- ! Urgency
- 🕒 Frequency
- 💧 Leakage



In clinical trials, those taking Myrbetriq made fewer trips to the bathroom and had fewer leaks than those not taking Myrbetriq. Your results may vary.

**TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR
OAB SYMPTOMS BY TALKING
TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT
MYRBETRIQ TODAY.**

USE OF MYRBETRIQ (meer-BEH-trick)

Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) is a prescription medicine for adults used to treat overactive bladder (OAB) with symptoms of urgency, frequency and leakage.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Myrbetriq is not for everyone. Do not take Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any ingredients in Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

Myrbetriq may cause allergic reactions that may be serious. If you experience swelling of the face, lips, throat and tongue, with or without difficulty breathing, stop taking Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take including medications for overactive bladder or other medicines such as thioridazine (Mellaril™ and Mellaril-S™), flecainide (Tambocor®), propafenone (Rythmol®), digoxin (Lanoxin®) or solifenacin succinate (VESicare®). Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Before taking Myrbetriq, tell your doctor if you have liver or kidney problems. The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include

increased blood pressure, common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis), dry mouth, flu symptoms, urinary tract infection, back pain, dizziness, joint pain, headache, constipation, sinus irritation, and inflammation of the bladder (cystitis).

For further information, please talk to your healthcare professional and see Brief Summary of Prescribing Information for Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) on the following pages.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.



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and visit Myrbetriq.com



Myrbetriq®
(mirabegron)
extended-release tablets
25 mg, 50 mg



Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) extended-release tablets 25 mg, 50 mg

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

Read the Patient Information that comes with Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This summary does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment.

What is Myrbetriq (meer-BEH-trick)?

Myrbetriq is a prescription medication for adults used to treat the following symptoms due to a condition called overactive bladder:

- Urge urinary incontinence: a strong need to urinate with leaking or wetting accidents
- Urgency: a strong need to urinate right away
- Frequency: urinating often

It is not known if Myrbetriq is safe and effective in children.

Who should not use Myrbetriq?

Do not take Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any of the ingredients in Myrbetriq. See the end of this summary for a complete list of ingredients in Myrbetriq.

What should I tell my doctor before taking Myrbetriq?

Before you take Myrbetriq, tell your doctor about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have liver problems or kidney problems
- have very high uncontrolled blood pressure
- have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if Myrbetriq will harm your unborn baby. Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Myrbetriq passes into your breast milk. Talk to your doctor about the best way to feed your baby if you take Myrbetriq.

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Tell your doctor if you take:

- thioridazine (Mellaril™ or Mellaril-S™)
- flecainide (Tambocor®)
- propafenone (Rythmol®)
- digoxin (Lanoxin®)
- solifenacin succinate (VESIcar®)

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- Do not chew, break, or crush the tablet.
- You can take Myrbetriq with or without food.
- If you miss a dose of Myrbetriq, begin taking Myrbetriq again the next day. Do not take 2 doses of Myrbetriq the same day.
- If you take too much Myrbetriq, call your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.

What are the possible side effects of Myrbetriq?

Myrbetriq may cause serious side effects including:

- **increased blood pressure.** Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq.
- **inability to empty your bladder (urinary retention).** Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder if you have bladder outlet obstruction or if you are taking

other medicines to treat overactive bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you are unable to empty your bladder.

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• dry mouth	• headache
• flu symptoms	• constipation
• urinary tract infection	• sinus (sinus irritation)
• back pain	• inflammation of the bladder (cystitis)

Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away or if you have swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat, hives, skin rash or itching while taking Myrbetriq.

These are not all the possible side effects of Myrbetriq.

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How should I store Myrbetriq?

- Store Myrbetriq between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C). Keep the bottle closed.
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Keep Myrbetriq and all medicines out of the reach of children.

General information about the safe and effective use of Myrbetriq

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You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about Myrbetriq that is written for health professionals.

For more information, visit www.Myrbetriq.com or call (800) 727-7003.

What are the ingredients in Myrbetriq?

Active ingredient: mirabegron

Inactive ingredients: polyethylene oxide, polyethylene glycol, hydroxypropyl cellulose, butylated hydroxytoluene, magnesium stearate, hypromellose, yellow ferric oxide and red ferric oxide (25 mg Myrbetriq tablet only).

What is overactive bladder?

Overactive bladder occurs when you cannot control your bladder contractions. When these muscle contractions happen too often or cannot be controlled, you can get symptoms of overactive bladder, which are urinary frequency, urinary urgency, and urinary incontinence (leakage).

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Northbrook, Illinois 60062



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Revised: April 2018
206813-MRVS-BRFS
057-2652-PM



Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) extended-release tablets 25 mg, 50 mg

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

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YOUR TRUE STORIES

IN 100 Words

OK, Boys Are Allowed

I had been trying to prepare my seven-year-old daughter for a new baby in a few months, but she kept insisting, "No boys in our house!" When the big day arrived, my daughter came into the hospital room. I told her, "The baby is a boy. What are we going to do?" She placed both hands on her hips and, without missing a beat, said, "I guess we'll have to love the little thing!"

—Karen Dugger
WEST PLAINS, MISSOURI

TO READ MORE *true stories* or submit one, go to RD.COM/STORIES. If we publish yours in the print magazine, it could be worth \$100.

The Wild Bunch

While at a motel in North Dakota, I went to breakfast and sat by a gentleman who was on the phone. I overheard him say that he had "lost time yesterday" because his "passengers got cranky," so he "stopped at a truck stop and hosed them down with cold water." Then I noticed a school bus in front of the motel that hadn't been there the day before. When the gentleman ended his call, I asked him if that was his bus. "No," he replied. "I'm in the back with a semi load of pigs."

—DAVID FLEMMING *Hermantown, Minnesota*



Lost and Found

My wife and I like to take walks down the quiet roads in our small town. One day, we noticed a key on the road and hung it on a fence where a deflated birthday balloon had settled. We hoped that eventually someone would spot their missing key. A week later, we realized our shed key was

missing. We searched and searched, but it was nowhere. Then a light bulb went on. Luckily, the remnants of that colorful balloon helped us spot it. We took it home for a test. Sure enough, we had lost and found our own key!

—Ron Edgington
SNOWFLAKE, ARIZONA
COURTESY COUNTRY

HOW TO

Feel Happier Today

A popular Yale University course, now available for free online, is chock-full of valuable life lessons

BY Lisa Fields



WHEN I LEARNED that the most popular course in the history of Yale University—a psychology class designed to teach students how to become happier—was available online to anyone who wanted to take it, I decided I had to see what it was all about. After all, I've been writing about happiness for years, offering techniques and advice from researchers who found that this idea or that habit can boost well-being. I was curious to see what Yale professor Laurie Santos was recommending, but I assumed I'd already be familiar with many of the concepts. So I invited my boyfriend, Ian, to take the course with me. I wanted to see how someone who hadn't heard it all before reacted.

Santos's online course consists of 19 hours of video lectures and is supposed to take ten weeks to complete, but Ian and I spent three months soaking up what she had to offer. We learned that the things we tend to think will make us happier—bigger paychecks, nicer homes, trimmer bodies—don't actually add joy to our lives. But practices such as exercising more, socializing, getting enough sleep, and prioritizing free time over making money do.

"These constant practices are really what's required to boost your happiness," Santos told me after Ian and I completed her course. "It's like a tire that you put air into. Occasionally it leaks, and you have to put more air into it. It's not a one-time thing where

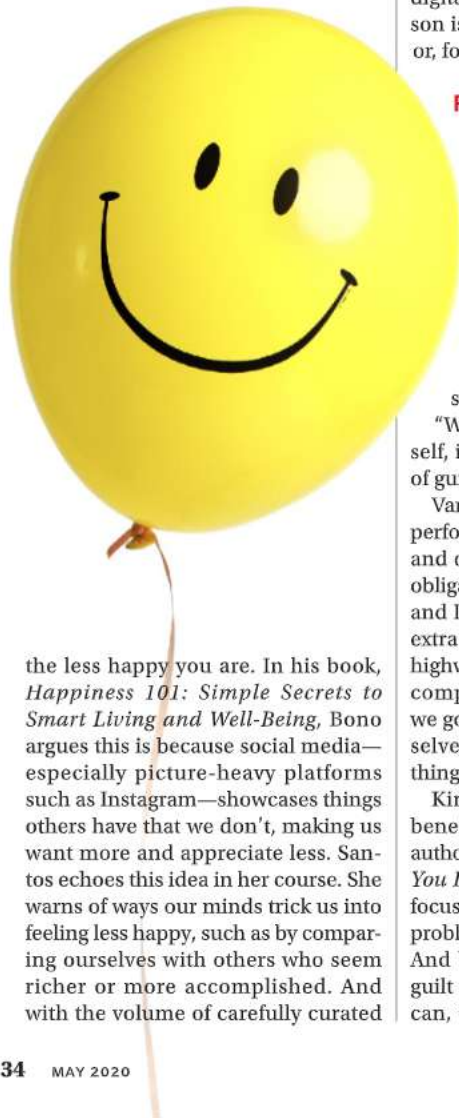
you learn it and you're good. You actually have to put the work in."

Although part of the course focuses on the desire to get good grades and land the perfect job, we realized that these lessons aren't helpful just for college students; Ian and I are both middle-aged, with six children between us, and most of what Santos said was relevant to us. "What the science suggests is that these tips apply cross-culturally, across ages, and no matter what job you have," Santos says. After taking the course, I'm convinced that anyone who adopts and practices the strategies that Santos suggests can truly become happier. Here are our favorite takeaways.

Increase social connections.

Reconnecting with a friend can boost happiness, but so can a meaningful encounter with a stranger. "One of the most complex things we can engage with is another person's mind," says Juliana Schroeder, an assistant professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and one of the researchers cited in the course. Ian loves chatting with waiters, and I noticed him doing it even more after we learned about the benefits of such interactions. He beams afterward.

Tim Bono, who teaches his own course on happiness at Washington University in St. Louis, offers this caveat: Facebook friends don't count. In fact, many studies have found that the more you use social media,



digital personas online, the comparison is far less likely to be favorable—or, for that matter, true.

Perform acts of kindness.

Volunteering to help someone or buying a coffee for the person behind you in line can make you happier than doing self-indulgent things such as getting a massage or a pedicure. “You just feel good about yourself as a person,” says Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California, Riverside, another of Santos’s sources. “Whereas if you’re treating yourself, it might actually lead to feelings of guilt afterward.”

Varying your approach is key. If you perform the same act of kindness over and over, it may begin to feel like an obligation or a monotonous chore. Ian and I held doors open for people, let extra cars merge in front of us on the highway, and helped colleagues solve computer problems. The reactions we got made us feel better about ourselves, and they didn’t cost us anything, unlike an indulgent massage.

Kindness brings other happiness benefits, too, says Raj Raghunathan, author of *If You’re So Smart, Why Aren’t You Happy?* Helping others takes the focus away from our own worries and problems, which can boost happiness. And because it doesn’t result in the guilt that more self-serving behaviors can, being generous won’t increase

the less happy you are. In his book, *Happiness 101: Simple Secrets to Smart Living and Well-Being*, Bono argues this is because social media—especially picture-heavy platforms such as Instagram—showcases things others have that we don’t, making us want more and appreciate less. Santos echoes this idea in her course. She warns of ways our minds trick us into feeling less happy, such as by comparing ourselves with others who seem richer or more accomplished. And with the volume of carefully curated

levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Perhaps surprisingly, kindness improves overall physical health. Unsurprisingly, healthier people tend to be happier.

Burn some calories.

Exercise causes hormonal changes in the body that make you feel good and help interrupt negative thoughts. According to research cited in Santos’s course, clinically depressed people who exercised regularly improved just as much as those who took antidepressants. And after ten months, the exercisers were less likely to relapse.

“IT’S NOT AS IF YOU LEARN IT AND YOU’RE GOOD. YOU HAVE TO PUT THE WORK IN.”

“Getting out of a depression is not exactly the same as happiness,” says Dr. K. Ranga Krishnan, a professor of psychiatry at Rush Medical College in Chicago. “But anecdotally, most people who exercise will tell you they feel better.” Anyone who has ever experienced a runner’s high will surely agree.

Get enough shut-eye.

Just as shortchanging your sleep can make you grumpy, making time for sleep can boost your mood. “A lot of people know that sleep is good,” says

Adam Krause, a psychology fellow and doctoral candidate at UC Berkeley, “but some are forced to sacrifice sleep because they have other things taking up their time.” In fact, Ian and I tried to get more sleep during the course, but our busy lifestyles made it difficult.

TO CONCLUDE THE course, Ian and I each had to commit to a happiness-promoting activity for four weeks. Ian decided to exercise more, and I decided to get more sleep. The first week, Ian went to the gym four times. During his initial visit, he texted me a treadmill photo because he was so excited to be there. That same week, I set an alarm to signal myself to get ready for bed. After a few days, I was so well-rested that I woke up earlier than usual to spend quality time with my teenage daughter while she got ready for school, and I was much more productive during the day.

The remainder of our four-week challenge didn’t go as flawlessly, but when we kept up with our goals, we felt happier. And we walked away from the experience with a desire to follow through on our commitments. Ian bought a treadmill. And I still have an alarm that rings when it’s bedtime.

The idea that you can make incremental gains in happiness is “one of the reasons folks are so intrigued by the course,” Santos says. “You can work on it. In fact, you should.”

With Emily Goodman

13 THINGS

A Crash Course in Commencement Speeches

BY Emily Goodman

1 WHY IS it called a “commencement” speech? The historical answer is that students in medieval times entered universities as apprentices and left able to “commence” their professions. The word *commencement* isn’t the only relic from graduation ceremonies of yore. We’ve also kept the caps, the gowns, and, yes, the speeches.

2 THE EARLIEST commencement speakers were graduating students who delivered their speeches in Latin. At Princeton University, the senior chosen to give the salutatory address still does it in

Latin. The graduates receive special copies of the speech with instructions—in English—on when to laugh, in the hope that the rest of the audience will be impressed with the students’ Latin “fluency.”

3 WHILE A commencement speech is meant to be significant to the graduates, sometimes it actually makes history. In 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall gave an address at Harvard University’s graduation that outlined a program to help European nations devastated by World War II. We know it today as the Marshall Plan.

4 PROMINENT SPEAKERS come at a premium. Matthew McConaughey raked in \$135,000 for the address he gave at the University of Houston in 2015. Katie Couric banked \$110,000 at the University of Oklahoma in 2006. For a

ten-minute speech, that comes to more than \$600,000 per hour.

5 THAT SAID, only 30 percent of universities pay their speakers. The rest rely on alumni or famous friends who will do it for free. Some forgo a paycheck in exchange for an honorary degree, but certain schools, such as Cornell University, don’t award any—the board of trustees thinks they cheapen a hard-earned education.

6 MANY COLLEGES extend invitations to coveted speakers a year or more in advance, but securing a speaker early doesn’t make a school immune to a last-minute scramble. Just a month before its 2015 ceremony, Temple University announced that ESPN anchor Kevin Negandhi would give the commencement address in place of the school’s original pick—Bill Cosby.

7 YOU DON’T have to be human to give a graduation speech. Kermit the Frog gave the commencement address at Southampton College in 1996 and received an honorary doctorate in “Amphibious Letters” from the school. In 2012 at the University of Vermont, Tom Kenny and Bill Fagerbakke delivered their speech as a dialogue between their better-known characters, SpongeBob SquarePants and Patrick Star.

8 ONE OF the most celebrated commencement speakers of late was billionaire investor Robert F. Smith, who gave the address at Morehouse College last year. Smith offered more than just words of encouragement. He pledged to pay off the student debt of all 396 graduates. Months later, Smith announced he would also foot the bill for the federal student loans their parents had taken out.



ILLUSTRATION BY Serge Bloch

9 ANOTHER FAMOUS benediction benefactor was Eugene Lang, who promised the 1981 sixth-grade class at his old elementary school in Harlem that he would pay their college tuition as long as they graduated from high school. More than half of those 61 kids pursued higher education. Since then, Lang's national "I Have a Dream" Foundation has helped 18,000 disadvantaged students go to college.


10 WHEN EIGHTH-grader Gwen Lynch graduated from her one-room schoolhouse on Cuttyhunk Island in Massachusetts last year, she was the only student in her class. She still got a big-time commencement speaker—actor

Jenny Slate, who lived nearby. Slate later said of Lynch, "She goes to school by herself and still has more friends than I had as a teenager."

11 IN HER 2017 speech at Langley High School in Virginia, actor Lauren Graham recalled that her own graduation from the same school felt like "an empty victory." In fact, the folder she received that day *was* empty. Graham didn't receive her diploma until she paid her library fines (she never returned *Robinson Crusoe*).

12 EVEN IF you miss the ceremony, you can still enjoy a good graduation speech.

NPR created an archive of more than 350 addresses, called "The Best Commencement Speeches Ever." But you'll have to read some of them, as NPR—get this—doesn't have all the audio files.

13 SO WHAT was the best commencement speech ever? There's a lot of support for Steve Jobs's address at Stanford University in 2005. Months after receiving a cancer diagnosis, Jobs told the graduates, "Remembering I'll be dead soon helps me make the big choices in life, because almost everything—expectation, pride, fear of embarrassment or failure—falls away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important." 



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HUMOR *in*
UNIFORM

During a combat medical training class, the topic was blast injuries. At one point, our very intimidating instructor pointed at me and said, "There's been a jeep explosion. What would you do if you came upon an injured man with a

steering wheel embedded in his chest?"

Nervous and unsure, I blurted out, "Drive him to the hospital?"

For some reason, the rest of the room found this hilarious.

—GREG WHITE
*Buckhannon,
West Virginia*

It was our first day on the rifle range at Lackland Air Force Base. I felt confident as I aimed and squeezed the trigger of my

carbine for my first shot. "Good news and bad news," my instructor said. "The good news: You got a bull's-eye." Before my head could swell too much, he added, "But it was in somebody else's target."

—GENE NEWMAN
Parsippany, New Jersey

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GUSTAVO RODRIGUEZ

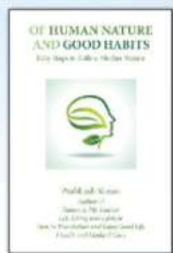
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THE FOOD ON YOUR PLATE

I Am Butter ... **Silky Smooth and Ready for Any Stage**

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

SOME FOODS WERE never meant to be liked. The lima beans of the world, the licorices, the powdered coffee creamers, those black-bean-lentil cakes that call themselves burgers, all born into sad-sackery. Me, though, I am a superstar, a talented actor with celebrity charisma. I'm the one people gravitate to at the dinner party. The smooth one who inspires superlative idioms—*like butter, baby!*—and gets featured in dramatically lit portraits on *Time* magazine.

So how come I'm slogging it out with those other fats just to stay relevant?

This just isn't right! When you've needed something silky and spreadable to moisten your bread, I've been there. When you've hankered for satiny sauces, I've melted myself right into them. As my old friend Julia Child put it: With enough of me, anything is good! And yet you've forsaken me. In my heyday, nearly a century ago, each of you Americans ate 20 pounds of me per year. Now you're down to six!

Take that *Time* cover from a few years back. That was actually a good moment for me. It was captioned "Eat Butter," which I obviously loved. (Great photo, too; did I mention the photo?) I had survived the low-fat craze of the '80s and '90s, had endured falsey-face margarine's half century in the sun, celebrating when she finally got locked away in health jail. Butter was back, the article said. But as soon as it hit

newsstands, Harvard University nutritionists and other wonks were so eager to tear me down again. They recommended “moderation” and reassured that that sanctimonious chump extra virgin olive oil was healthier than me.

I'm telling you, you gotta audition me again. I'm from the cream skimmed off milk. Does it get any better than that? Cream contains tiny fat globules that float around ignoring one another. Yet when you shake, beat, or churn them enough, amazing things start to happen. First you incorporate air, whisking up whipped cream; churn longer and the fat globules start colliding and sticking together until blobs of golden dairy fat are floating in watery milk—buttermilk. Drain it, wash the milk fat with water, give it a knead or two, add some salt (or don't), and bada bing, bada boom: me!

Among cooking fats, my genius dominates for a reason—I alone am an emulsion of fat, water, and milk solids. Being so emulsified (80 percent fat in the United States and 82 percent in Europe) might sound like meaningless hokum to you, but this is wildly important in the kitchen. Every other fat you cook with (my “friends” olive oil, canola oil, chicken fat, yada yada) is pretty much just fat. But if you've dipped lobster in melted butter, you know I contain multitudes: I'm the white foam on top (sugar and proteins), the cloudy liquid at the bottom (water), and the clear yellow stuff in between (clarified butterfat, or ghee).



PERFECT BEURRE BLANC

For an essential topping to fish, blanched vegetables such as asparagus or carrots, or roast chicken or duck, combine 6 tablespoons dry white wine, 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar, and 1 very finely minced large shallot in a small saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Lower heat to a gentle simmer and cook until liquid is reduced to about 2 tablespoons. Cut 1 stick cold unsalted butter into 1-tablespoon pieces. Reduce heat to lowest setting and add 1 tablespoon butter. Whisk constantly until almost melted, then add another piece of butter. Make sure heat remains low, briefly removing saucepan from heat if necessary, so that butter pieces just barely melt. Continue whisking in butter one piece at a time until all of it is incorporated and a silky, creamy sauce has formed. Season with salt and white pepper and serve immediately.

It's the way I shape-shift among these parts that makes me so good. I'm solid and firm when cold, so you can layer me into puff pastry or piecrust dough without making a squishy mess; when baked, I melt, leaving behind countless tender and flaky layers. I can be softened at room temperature just enough to be creamed with sugar, trapping air that forms bubbles for the lightest cookie dough.

By melting me very carefully to maintain my emulsified state, chefs made me the foundation of sunny hollandaise and herbal béarnaise and just about every other classic sauce with body but no greasiness. I've always known when to act subtly. My ghee, unlike my easy-to-scorch milk solids, has a high smoke point and is very frying-friendly, so I'm *the* cooking fat in India and much of Southeast Asia, where I also play a significant role in religious rituals, including funerals.

In Europe, I first was peasant fare, as the rich were well-larded with poultry and pork fat. But then medieval Catholics OK'd me for meatless Lent, so I got a toehold in the upper-class diet and took France by storm. I even costarred in the Protestant Reformation—one

of Martin Luther's many gripes was a butter fee levied by the Pope.

But then came the sad bits. Emperor Napoléon III ran low on butter for his troops and put out a call for someone to approximate my sublime flavor and texture. Some dingus flavored milk with beef tallow (ew), and a long line of poor imitations followed. Later, scientists altered vegetable oils to hydrogenate them, making them spreadable like I (naturally) am. Yes, margarine pushed itself onstage. Butter rationing during World War II helped, too, especially when the government allowed producers to add yellow coloring to its unappetizing pale gray shades.

Read the headlines today about how I again outsell margarine and you'd think I'd made a comeback, but my saturated fat continues to be a controversial indulgence in the face of healthier options like the monounsaturated fats in ho-hum olive oil. But live a little, would ya? I'm butter, baby! **B**

Kate Lowenstein is a health editor currently at Vice; Daniel Grützer is the culinary director of the cooking site Serious Eats.



Meat Loaf Again?!

As much as we complain about leftovers, humans have been stuck with them since practically forever. In fact, in a cave in Israel, scientists recently found dried deer marrow that's believed to be the oldest cache of stored food. It has been there for as many as 400,000 years. (You think it's still good?)



Mackinac Island's STONE SKIPPING TOURNAMENT

MAXWELL STEINER, age 28,
Las Vegas, Nevada

What do people say when you say you're a champion rock skipper?

They don't believe it at all. I was actually at a wedding this past weekend and I was talking to somebody, and he was just blown away. It's a great conversation starter, that's for sure.

Because you're a grown man who gets worked up about skipping rocks!

It gets pretty intense, to be honest. People do take it seriously. I like to have more fun.

Do you bring your own rocks, or does the com- petition supply them?

I actually bring a case full of them, about 50,



so I can practice a little bit before. I like bigger stones, about the size of the palm of my hand. It's got to have a little bit of weight to it. I'm not too picky about it, as long as it's flat.

What's your record?

In 2013, I had a 65-skip toss on the Allegheny River. It was a world record.

How can the judge even count that many skips?

It does happen pretty quick. In the

tournament itself, there are about five judges and they're all getting a number. Then they come to a consensus.

So what's your secret?

I always tell people to try the "Grip It and Rip It" method. Just throw it as hard as you can and put a little spin on it. **R**

Mackinac Island, Michigan, has hosted its stone-skipping contest for the past 51 years.

ILLUSTRATION BY John Cuneo

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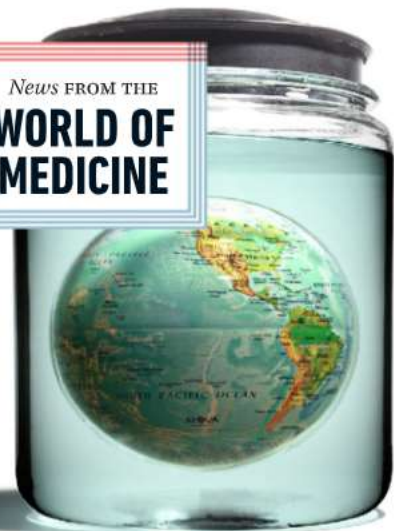
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CHOLESTEROL AND ALZHEIMER'S

In a study of more than 2,000 people, researchers found that those with high LDL (bad) cholesterol levels were more likely than those with lower levels to have early-onset Alzheimer's. Past research has shown a similar link between high LDL cholesterol and late-onset Alzheimer's, possibly because the APOE E4 gene (the largest known genetic risk factor for Alzheimer's) raises cholesterol levels. More research is needed to determine whether high levels of LDL cholesterol actually cause Alzheimer's and whether reducing cholesterol levels can help prevent it.

Inhalers May Not Help Mild Asthma

According to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the low-dose steroid inhalers recommended to patients with mild asthma don't prevent attacks. The drugs do reduce type 2 inflammation, which was believed to be prevalent among asthma patients. But of the nearly 300 people in the study, only 27 percent had type 2 inflammation. And 66 percent of the remaining patients had the same number of urgent care visits and episodes of breathing trouble when they took a placebo as when they used the steroid inhaler.

While the inhalers are generally safe, they can increase the risk for bone loss, cataracts, and glaucoma. If you have been using steroid inhalers, talk to your doctor before stopping.

NICK FERRARI

Take a Deep Breath in the Waiting Room

It's not unusual to feel uneasy about a medical appointment, but that anxiety can have a potentially dangerous side effect. A negative mood tends to make you pay less attention, especially to unpleasant topics. For a recent study, nearly 1,450 subjects learned about the flu, cancer, HIV, herpes, and gonorrhea. Those who did a relaxation exercise beforehand absorbed more of their doctor's information. Some easy remedies for nerves: Take deep breaths or listen to calming music in the waiting room. You can also bring a friend or family member to take notes for you.

FROM TOP: POH KIM YEOH/GETTY IMAGES; NECHAEV-KON/GETTY IMAGES



SMOOTHIES DELIVER THE GOODS IN SPINACH

Lutein, an antioxidant that may help prevent macular degeneration (the most common cause of irreversible vision loss in seniors), is common in leafy greens, but the way you prepare your veggies will affect their health benefits. To see how much of this nutrient was absorbable in various dishes, a Swedish team boiled, steamed, and fried baby spinach, all of which degraded much of its lutein. The best method, even better than eating it raw, was to liquefy the spinach in a smoothie made with milk or yogurt.

Risks of Using Bug Spray

In a study of more than 2,100 men and women, those with higher levels of 3-phenoxybenzoic acid in their urine were 50 percent more likely to die from heart disease than those with lower levels. Their risk of dying from cancer and other causes also increased. This chemical is associated with exposure to pyrethroids, found in many insect repellents, pet sprays, and anti-lice shampoos, as well as pesticides. While the study doesn't prove causation, you may want to avoid pyrethroid-based products, if possible. Look out for allethrin, resmethrin, permethrin, and other common names of pyrethroids in the ingredients list.



PROTECTING GRANDCHILDREN FROM MEDICATIONS

MOST GRANDPARENTS DON'T give much thought to the risks their medications may pose to their grandkids, suggests the U.S. National Poll on Healthy Aging. More than four fifths of grandparents said that when children were visiting their homes, their pills remained in the same place as usual, often in a cupboard or on a countertop. What's more, many seniors transfer their meds from the original child-safety bottles to easier-to-open containers.

"And when they travel to see grandchildren, 72 percent reported keeping their medications in their bag or purse," says Preeti Malani, MD, the poll's director. Only a small minority put them in a secure spot such as a locked cabinet.

Medications are a leading cause of childhood poisoning worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Young kids often ingest them because children tend to put things in their mouths. For older kids, easy access raises the chances of their abusing painkillers and other drugs for recreational purposes.


What to do if your grandchild takes your medication? "The first step can be to call a poison-control center," says Dr. Malani. "Their staff can help with initial decision making, including whether the child needs to be taken to the nearest emergency department."



Pap Smear Options

A new urine test was as accurate as Pap smears for detecting the high-risk HPV virus, a major risk factor for cervical cancer. Larger trials are needed before the test is approved, but it could eventually increase the number of women being screened for the life-threatening disease.

Antidepressants Reduce Diabetes Deaths

People with diabetes are two to three times more likely to have depression than people without diabetes, according to the CDC, and in up to 75 percent of those cases, their depression is undiagnosed and untreated. In a 13-year study, researchers followed 53,412 patients diagnosed with both conditions and found that taking antidepressants reduced the death rate by 35 percent. 

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EVERYDAY MIRACLES

Guardian Angel

BY *Jill Bernick*
FROM **COUNTRY**

TWENTY YEARS AGO, I became involved in pet therapy work with our golden retriever, J.J. After J.J. passed away, we got another golden retriever puppy, whom we named J.J.'s Angel. As she matured and went through obedience training, we realized that she, too, would be a good therapy dog.

Angel is ten now and works every week. She visits two hospitals, a day care for the elderly, and our library's PAWS for Reading program. At the library, six to ten dogs lie on the floor, and the kids pick a book to read to a dog. After they finish, they get a trading card with the dog's picture and history. Angel has also helped out at a children's special-needs camp. She is so popular that everywhere we go people recognize her, especially the kids she has worked with.

We have seen some very special things through our pet therapy work. I brought Angel to our local hospital to visit a woman who was completely

paralyzed on her right side from a stroke. We spent time with her every week. One day, my husband, Jack, got Angel up into a chair next to the woman's bed. He asked her if she wanted to give Angel a treat. She nodded, and Jack carefully placed the treat in her right hand. Angel gently took the treat. Then the woman raised her right hand and started petting Angel. Her friend was in the room and said, "She hasn't been able to move that hand since she had her stroke!"

After that, every time we saw the woman, she lifted her left hand. We'd tell her she had to use her right hand, and she would.

Somehow it seems appropriate that when Angel visits the hospital, she also performs tricks for the patients with her paws. The best one is when she crouches on the floor, bows her head, and crosses her paws. She stays very still and doesn't move until Jack says "Amen" and claps his hands. We taught her how to say a prayer! **R**

COURTESY JILL BERNICK



SMART
SPEAKERS

Page 58



COVER STORY

H O W T H E

INTERNET IS SPYING ON YOU

FROM THE WASHINGTON
POST, WIRECUTTER,
THE NEW YORK TIMES,
THE VERGE, BUZZFEED
NEWS, USA TODAY,
AND BLOOMBERG
BUSINESSWEEK

YOU KNOW MARKETERS FOLLOW YOU ALL
AROUND THE INTERNET, BUT YOU MIGHT BE
SURPRISED TO LEARN WHO—OR WHAT—ELSE
IS KEEPING TABS ON YOUR EVERY MOVE

YOU ARE

BEING **STALKED** EVERYWHERE YOU GO. IN YOUR CAR. ON YOUR MORNING WALK. EVEN IN YOUR OWN HOME—BY YOUR OWN TV.

In our hyperconnected world, where your phone is always with you, information is being collected—and shared—every nanosecond.

“So what?” you say. “I have nothing to hide.” Don’t be so sure. As privacy expert Bennett Cyphers told a reporter for the *New York Times’s* Privacy Project, “The only people I’ve heard say ‘Who cares?’ are people who don’t understand the scope of the problem.”

The problem is that while corporations and data brokers are hoovering up all the information they can get their sticky mitts on, there are no laws governing what they can do with that information—or whom they can sell it to. That includes things you thought were private, such as health and financial data, as well as your

beliefs and daily habits. Someone knowing that you ordered three extra-large pizzas with the works for dinner last Friday night may seem harmless enough, but there’s a deeper principle at play. As cyber expert Bruce Schneier puts it, privacy is not just about freedom from embarrassment. “Privacy is an inherent human right, and a requirement for maintaining the human condition with dignity and respect,” he says.

Yet we do little to block the spies. We click “I Agree” without reading the user agreements. We say we’ll do one of those privacy checkups one day, but we never quite get around to it.

And that means your personal



TELEVISIONS

information could be used against you in the future in ways you can’t imagine today. So what do you have to worry about, and what can you do to protect yourself? Read on—and take notes.

AT HOME TELEVISIONS

BY *Geoffrey A. Fowler*
FROM **THE WASHINGTON POST**

Wrapped in a Snuggie, I like to binge on reruns of *The Golden Girls* all by myself. Except I’m not really alone.

Once every few minutes, my TV beams out a report about what’s on my screen to Samsung, the company that made it. Chances are, your TV is watching you too.

Ever wonder why TVs are getting so cheap? Manufacturing efficiency plays a role. But it’s also because TVs have joined the ranks of websites, apps, and credit cards in the lucrative business of sharing your information. Americans spend an average of three and a half hours in front of a TV each day, according to eMarketer. Your TV records may not contain sensitive financial

OPENS SPREAD; BETTMAN/GETTY IMAGES (PSYCHO);
MILINDRI/GETTY IMAGES (TV)

JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES (THE BIRDS);
MILINDRI/GETTY IMAGES (TV)

data, but that history is a window to your interests, joys, and embarrassments. And marketers are grabbing it because, legally speaking, we gave our permission when we set up our Internet-connected smart TVs.

The TV makers sell this information to data brokers, who in turn sell it to advertisers and media companies, who are now able to link up what you watch with what you do on your phone, tablet, and laptop—even with what you buy in stores. Marketers can then re-target ads you see on TV to your computer and phone. They can measure how many people bought their product after seeing their ad.

I ran an experiment on my own Samsung TV as well as new models from Samsung, TCL Roku TV, Vizio, and LG. I set up each as most people do: by tapping “OK” with the remote to each on-screen prompt. Then, using special software from Princeton University, I watched how each model transmitted data. What I found: Some TVs record and send out everything that crosses the pixels on your screen. It’s not always “you” they’re after, but your behaviors help create aggregated statistical models of people who act or watch TV the way you do. Still, you might find it unnerving. When I set up my TV, I didn’t realize I could say no to any of this. You can change your settings after the fact, if you’re prepared to hunt around in out-of-the-way menus, such as “Terms and Policies.” But it may be worth the hunt.

SMART SPEAKERS

BY *Grant Clouser*

ADAPTED FROM **THEWIRECUTTER.COM**

Alexa is always eavesdropping. (So are Siri, Google Assistant, and any other virtual assistant you invite into your home.) This is and isn’t as creepy as it sounds. Although it’s true that the device can hear everything you say within range of its microphones, it is listening for its wake word before it starts recording. Once it hears that—“Alexa” is the default, but there are other options—everything in the following few seconds is perceived to be a command or a request and is sent to (and stored on) servers in the cloud, where the correct response is triggered. Think of a smart speaker like a dog: It’s always listening, but it understands only “cookie,” “walk,” or “Buddy.” Everything else goes right over its head.

Every time Alexa hears a command, Amazon—its parent company—has just learned something about you. (Same with Apple and Google, if you use their speakers.) Maybe the company learned only that you like to listen to the Police, or that you like fart jokes, or that you turn your lights off at 11 p.m. every night. If you were to say “Alexa, where should I bury the body?” you’re not going to have the police showing up at your door. (I know because I’ve tried it.)

Alexa does make mistakes. Sometimes this can be funny, such as when Alexa hears its wake word in a

TV show. Other times it’s more serious, including an instance in 2018 when Alexa mistakenly sent an entire private conversation to a random person’s Echo device. Occasionally there are even humans listening to your request for weather reports or trying to figure out what you meant when you added “mangosteens” to your shopping list. Sound intrusive? You likely already agreed to it in the app’s terms of use when you installed the device.

What bits of privacy are you willing to sacrifice for the convenience provided by a smart speaker? If you trust that Amazon’s intentions are no more nefarious than getting a better idea of what you want to buy on Prime Day, then you have your answer. If you worry about your private information falling into the hands of the wrong people, then you have another answer.

OUT IN THE WORLD

CARS

BY *Bill Hanvey*

ADAPTED FROM **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

Today’s cars are equipped with “telematics,” monitoring technology that constantly sends vehicle performance and maintenance data—and much more—to the manufacturer via a wireless transmitter. Cars not only know how much we weigh, but also track how much weight we gain. Connect a phone to a car, and it knows whom we call and text.

But who owns and, ultimately, controls the data? Drivers usually sign away their rights in a small-print clause buried in the purchase or lease agreement. What carmakers are doing with the collected information isn’t



JOHN KOBAL FOUNDATION/GETTY IMAGES (DEAD RECKONING), COURTESY TESLA (DASHBOARD SCREEN)

CARS

clear. We know they use it to improve car performance and safety, and we know they have the ability to sell it to third parties. And unfortunately, there is no opt-out feature.

Carmakers use data to alert us when something needs to be repaired or when our vehicles need service. What they don't tell us is that by controlling our data, they can limit where we get that repair or service done. And they are more likely to share our data exclusively with their branded dealerships than with independent repair shops.

Imagine visiting a medical specialist and learning he or she can't access the medical history your doctor maintains. It's easy to imagine carmakers charging fees to independent repair shops that need your data to service your vehicle, leading to higher repair prices.

Because of the data's estimated value—as high as \$750 billion by 2030—carmakers have no incentive to release their control. Policy makers, however, have the opportunity to give drivers control. This will let car owners maintain what they've had for a century: the right to decide who fixes their car.

FITNESS TRACKERS

BY *Curtis Franklin*
FROM **THEVERGE.COM**

With all the data these devices collect—steps taken, hours slept, and more—how can you be sure your privacy won't go flying out the window? Health privacy laws were designed to

keep sensitive information private, but they don't apply to these trackers.

While your heart rate probably wouldn't mean a lot to someone who managed to see it, a wearable that tracks your running routes could provide information of great interest to stalkers or attackers. The menstrual cycle tracking offered on some devices could allow for a significant breach of very private information.

All too often, apps and devices collect far more data than necessary. If possible, you should let them collect and store only the data required to give you the feedback you want. For example, if you want to count your steps and heartbeat but have no real interest in your sleeping habits, then turn the sleep tracker off. If you want pace, cadence, and speed information, it's unlikely that any of that will come from your phone's microphone, so if an app asks for access, just say no.

SCHOOLS

BY *Caroline Haskins*
FROM **BUZZFEEDNEWS.COM**

For high school students, participating in school life means producing a digital trail—homework assignments, essays, e-mails, pictures, creative writing, chats with classmates. For many, it is all monitored by the student-surveillance service Gaggle.

Using artificial intelligence and human content moderators paid about \$10 an hour, Gaggle polices schools



FITNESS TRACKERS

for suspicious or harmful content. The goal is to help prevent gun violence and suicides. It plugs into two of the biggest software suites, Google's G Suite and Microsoft 365, and tracks everything. This includes notifications from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts linked to school e-mail addresses. Gaggle claims to have saved hundreds of lives during the 2018-19 school year.

But in the process, Gaggle is subjecting young lives to relentless inspection and charging schools upward of \$60,000 per year. It's not at all clear whether Gaggle is as effective as it claims, or that its relentless surveillance is without long-term consequences for the students it promises to protect. And there's really no way

to stop it. Gaggle "recommends" that schools get permission from parents and students. But, a spokesperson says, "If a student opts out of Gaggle, then they would not be able to use the school-provided technology."

EVERYWHERE FACEBOOK

BY *Jefferson Graham*
FROM **USA TODAY**

My editor, Michelle, was at a birthday party for her son's friend when another mom mentioned a company she liked, Joymode. Minutes later, an ad for Joymode appeared on Michelle's Facebook news feed. You may already know that every time you like a post, leave a

SUNSET BOULEVARD/GETTY IMAGES (NORTH BY NORTHWEST), BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES (FITNESS TRACKERS)

comment, or tag a friend, that gives Facebook even more ammunition to serve up targeted ads. But is Facebook listening to our conversations too?

"We don't look at your messages; we don't listen in on your microphone. Doing so would be super problematic for a lot of reasons," said Adam Mosseri, CEO of Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, in a CBS interview.

The truth is, Facebook tracks us in ways we don't even realize and is so good at it that we think it's monitoring our conversations. Instead, it uses sophisticated demographic and location data to serve up ads. If you use Facebook to sign into other websites, that gives them even more data about you. So that's one easy habit to stop right away.

GOOGLE

BY *Max Chafkin*

FROM **BLOOMBERG BUSINESSWEEK**

Gmail has been more important to me than any product I've ever owned. It's where my wife and I first started flirting and where, 14 years and two kids later, we send jokes and Gchat-length love notes. It was the center of my professional life for years. It contains the contact information of pretty much everyone I've ever known, plus a decade and a half of credit card bills, tax returns, embarrassing pictures, bad jokes, and apologies for those jokes.

But stories about tech companies' violations of privacy got me thinking

about a scenario that once seemed unimaginable: life without Gmail. Google, after all, has been repeatedly accused of improperly collecting user data. Last year, it paid \$13 million to settle a class action lawsuit about its Street View program's scooping up personal information from people's home Wi-Fi networks. (It denied any wrongdoing.) And yet, I was still giving it the entirety of my inbox.

This spring I started telling friends, family, and coworkers to send e-mail to a new address, hosted by my own personal server. For searches, I started using DuckDuckGo, a Google competitor that doesn't collect user data. I realized I'd been self-censoring my e-mails for years, keeping certain thoughts out of even personal correspondence due to a fear that they might wind up in a hack, or a lawsuit, or some advertiser's data dump. The experience of having my data sitting only in a little box on my desk was weirdly thrilling.

ONLINE RETAILERS

BY *Kashmir Hill*

ADAPTED FROM **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

We all have secret "consumer scores," hidden ratings that determine how long we wait on hold when calling a business, whether we can return items at a store, and what type of service we receive. A low score sends you to the back of the queue; a high score gets you elite treatment. Little is known about these scores. Most people have



BETTMAN/GETTY IMAGES (REAR WINDOW), REBECCA SIMPSON STEELE (GOOGLE)

no inkling they even exist, and companies are mum about how they come up with them, or that they exist at all.

A watchdog group called the Consumer Education Foundation wants the Federal Trade Commission to investigate secret surveillance scores "generated by a shadowy group of privacy-busting firms that operate in the dark recesses of the American marketplace." The report named 11 firms that rate shoppers, potential renters, and prospective employees.

I got my file from one of these firms; others gave the runaround. The company that cooperated, called Sift, says its "proprietary scoring system tracks consumer behavior with hundreds of companies." My report was shocking: More than 400 pages long, it contained

all the messages I'd ever sent to hosts on Airbnb; years of Yelp delivery orders; a log of every time I'd opened the Coinbase app on my iPhone.

Sift knew that I'd ordered chicken tikka masala on a Saturday night in April three years ago. It knew about a nightmare Thanksgiving I had in California's wine country, as captured in my messages to the Airbnb host of a rental called "Cloud 9."

The companies gathering the data say they find it valuable for rooting out fraud and increasing the revenue they can collect from big spenders. But the process is far from transparent.

You can't necessarily stop companies from gathering information, but if you're curious about what's in your Sift file, you can request it by



e-mailing privacy@sift.com. Just be aware that after this article was published in the *New York Times*, the company was overrun with requests, so it might not get to yours quickly.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

You can't prevent all Internet spying, and you may not want to—for example, when you start tapping a web address into your phone's browser and it automatically fills in the rest, or when a shopping site saves what's in your cart. But you can minimize some unwanted spying by taking these steps.

If you're worried about your personal information getting lifted ...

Don't hand over your name, address, phone number, or e-mail address unless the recipient really needs it. If pressed, you can always make something up. Opt for a paper receipt or no receipt rather than getting one via text or e-mail, which requires sharing your information and exposes you to possible data breaches, such as those at Hobby Lobby and Target.

If you want companies to stop trying to sell you things ...

Stop ads from tracking you by opting out of information collecting. The website simpleoptout.com is a good

place to start. Add your phone numbers to the National Do Not Call Registry at 888-382-1222 or donotcall.gov.

If you prefer that your Internet searches stay private ...

Browse with Firefox. Its privacy controls are stronger than other big-name browsers. Or use DuckDuckGo, an alternate service you can easily set as your default search partner at duckduckgo.com.

If you're worried about your phone acting as a tracker ...

Turn off Location Services for all apps except maps and others that expressly need to know where you are. You can do this in Settings, under Privacy and Location.

If you're worried about in-home devices listening to or watching you ...

Hunt around in the device's menu or mobile app for privacy settings so you can opt out. Mute smart speakers when you're not using them.

If you're worried about your car knowing too much about you ...

Unfortunately, you can't opt out of your car's built-in computers collecting data. But you can minimize how often you pair your smartphone

with your vehicle's infotainment system.

If you're worried about being tagged in photos on social media ...

Tell friends you don't want to be tagged, and opt out of being automatically tagged in other people's Facebook photos by going to Settings, then Face Recognition. (Instagram doesn't use facial recognition.)

If you're worried about tech giants tracking everything you do ...

Sign out once in a while. For example, make sure you're logged out of Gmail before you watch YouTube; otherwise Google will know your viewing habits. And don't use Facebook to sign in to other websites.

If you're worried that the government isn't doing enough to protect your privacy ...

Europe has a law that gives people the right to know who shares their personal information and the ability to opt out. A new California law is this country's first step in that direction. So if you've noticed a link lately that says "Don't sell my personal information" or something similar, that's why. (The law affects all Americans.) A national proposal, the Consumer Online Privacy Rights Act (COPRA), is in the Senate, awaiting review. **R**

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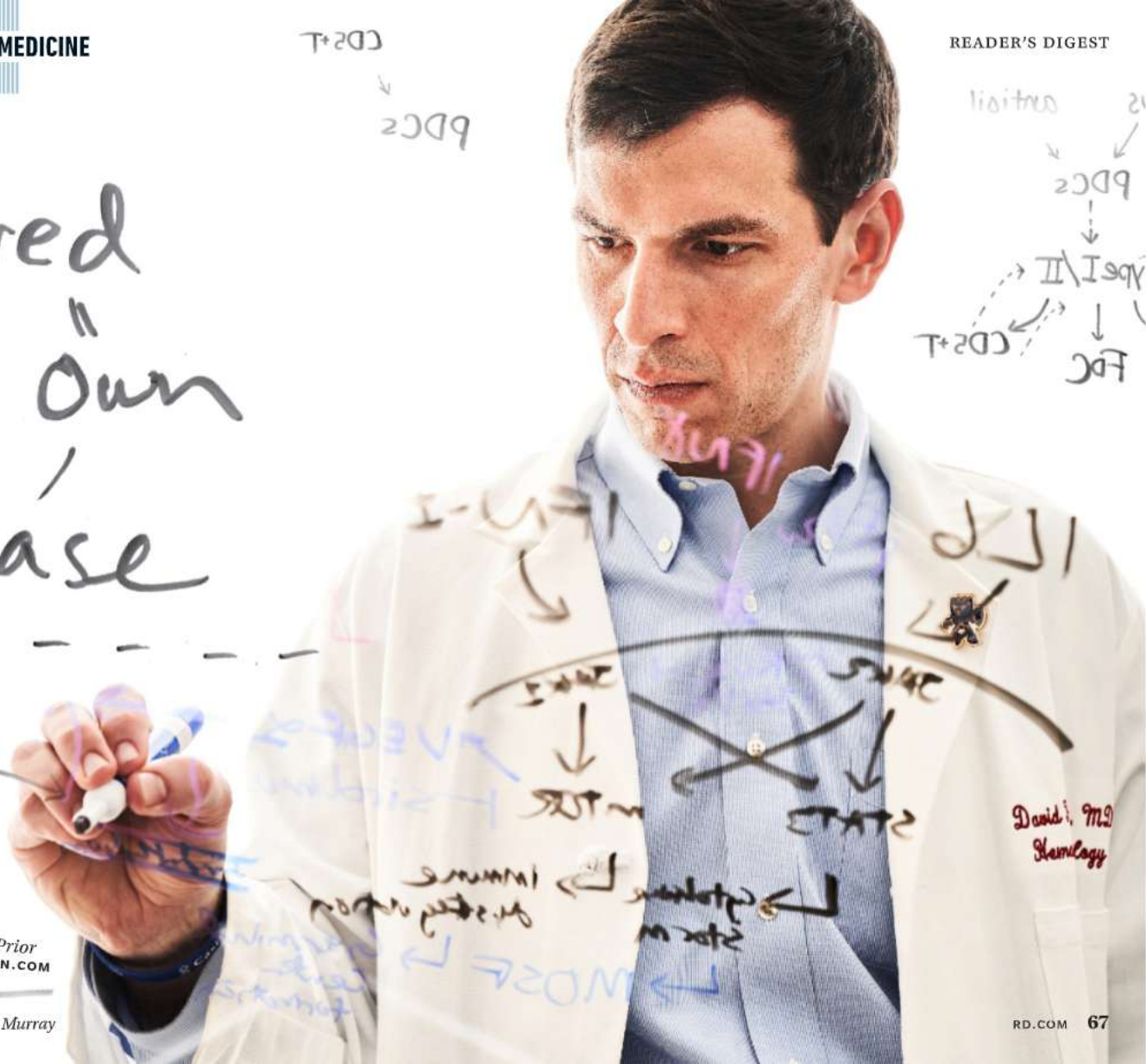
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He Cured His Own Disease

A medical student battling a deadly disorder finally got a lifeline—from his own research.
Plus: Two more stories of innovative men who worked miracles.

BY Ryan Prior
 FROM CNN.COM

PHOTOGRAPH BY Peter Murray



It was just



after Christmas 2013, and David Fajgenbaum was hovering a hair above death.

He lay in a hospital bed at the University of Arkansas, his blood platelet count so low that even a slight bump to his body could trigger a lethal brain bleed. A doctor told him to write his living will on a piece of paper.

David was rushed to a CT scan. Tears streamed down his face and fell on his hospital gown. He thought about the first patient who'd died under his care in medical school and how her brain had bled in a similar way from a stroke.

He didn't believe he'd survive the scan. But he did.

David was battling Castleman disease, a rare autoimmune disorder involving immune cells attacking vital organs. It wasn't the first time a relapse had threatened his life. Massive "shock and awe" chemotherapy regimens had helped him narrowly escape death during four previous attacks, but each new assault on his body weakened him.

David Fajgenbaum's football body fell victim to organ failure associated with Castleman disease (right).

"You learn a lot by almost dying," he says.

He learned enough to surprise his doctors by coming up with a way to treat his disease. Six years later, he's in remission, he and his wife have a baby girl, and he's devoting his medical career to saving other patients like him.

As a boy in Raleigh, North Carolina, David spent Saturdays watching the North Carolina State Wolfpack football team with his dad, the team's doctor.

At age seven, he was obsessed with becoming a Division I athlete. In middle school, he would wake up at 5 a.m. to go running. The walls of his bedroom were covered with football play charts.

He achieved his dream, making the Georgetown University football team as a quarterback. But in 2004, during his sophomore year, his mother died of a brain tumor.

His obsessive focus deepened, helping him learn to appreciate life's precious moments and understand that bad things happen to good people. "I know people far more worthy of miracles than I am who haven't gotten them," he says. David founded a support group for grieving college



OPENING SPREAD AND STORY: HAND LETTERING BY MARIA AMADOR. THIS PAGE: COURTESY PEYTON WILLIAMS/ACCPHOTOS.COM

COURTESY DAVID FAJGENBAUM

students at Georgetown called Students of AMF—an acronym for Ailing Mothers and Fathers, as well as his mother's initials. (*Reader's Digest* wrote about his group in May 2008.)

David went on to earn a master's degree at the University of Oxford, where he learned how to conduct scientific research so that he could fight the disease that took his mom. That relentless focus and scientific rigor would one day save his life.

David entered medical school at the University of Pennsylvania to become a doctor like his father—specifically, an oncologist, in tribute to his late mother.

In 2010, during his third year, he got very sick and was hospitalized for five months. Something was attacking his liver, kidneys, and other organs and shutting them down.

The diagnosis was idiopathic multicentric Castleman disease. First described in 1954, Castleman presents partly like an autoimmune condition and partly like cancer. It's about as rare as ALS; there are around 7,000 new cases each year in the United States.

The disease causes certain immune-signaling molecules, called cytokines, to go into overdrive. It's as if they're calling in fighter jets for all-out attacks on home territory.

In his hospital bed, David felt nauseated and weak. His organs were failing, and he noticed curious red spots on his skin. He asked each new doctor who came in his room what the

“blood moles” meant. But his doctors, focused on saving his life, weren't interested in them.

“They went out of their way to say they didn't matter,” David says. But the med student turned patient would prove he was on to something.

“Patients pick up on things no one else sees,” he says.

Castleman disease struck David four more times over the next three years, with hospitalizations that ranged from weeks to months. He stayed alive only through intense chemotherapy “carpet bombing” campaigns. During one relapse at a Duke University hospital, his

“I don't think I would have felt comfortable trying the treatment on another patient; there were too many unknowns. Who knew what problems could arise when you shut down a volatile immune system like mine.”

DAVID FAJGENBAUM, IN HIS BOOK *CHASING MY CURE*



family called in a priest to give him his last rites.

After all the setbacks, all the organ failure, all the chemo, David worried that his body would simply break. Yet



David Fajgenbaum with his wife and daughter (left), and in his office

COURTESY RACHEL UTAIN-EVANS/RACHELUTAINEVANS.COM (LEFT); PETER MURRAY (RIGHT)

despite it all, he managed to graduate from medical school. He also founded the Castleman Disease Collaborative Network (CDCN), a global initiative devoted to fighting Castleman disease.

Through the CDCN, he began bringing the world's top Castleman disease researchers together for meetings in the same room. His group worked with doctors and researchers as well as patients to prioritize the studies that needed to be done soonest.

Rather than hoping for the right researchers to apply for grants, they recruited the best researchers to investigate Castleman.

David also prioritized clinical trials that repurposed drugs the FDA had already approved as safe rather than starting from scratch with new compounds.

Meanwhile, he never knew whether the next recurrence would finally kill him. Staving off relapses meant flying to North Carolina every three weeks to receive chemotherapy treatments.

Even so, he proposed to his college sweetheart, handing her a letter written by his niece that said, in part, “I'm a really good flower girl.”

“The disease wasn't a hindrance to me,” says his now-wife, Caitlin Fajgenbaum. “I just wanted to be together.”

But in late 2013, Castleman struck again, landing David in that Arkansas hospital. It marked his closest brush with death yet.

Before he and Caitlin could send out their save-the-date postcards, David set out to try to save his own life.

After examining his medical charts, he zeroed in on an idea that—more than 60 years after Castleman disease

was discovered—researchers hadn't yet explored.

A protein called vascular endothelial growth factor, or VEGF, was spiking at ten times its normal level. David had learned in medical school that VEGF controls blood vessel growth,

“I was marrying the girl of my dreams, a woman who had recently been packing my body with ice like I was a coho salmon at Whole Foods. Here she was saying ‘In sickness and in health, until death do us part,’ and I didn’t have to guess that she really meant it.”

DAVID FAJGENBAUM, IN HIS BOOK **CHASING MY CURE**

•••

and he hypothesized that the blood moles that had shown up with every Castleman relapse were a direct result of that protein spike, which signals the immune system to take action.

He also knew that there was an immunosuppressant called sirolimus that was approved by the FDA to help fight the immune system when it activated against kidney transplants.

After consulting with a National Institutes of Health expert, David asked

his doctor to prescribe the drug. He picked it up in February 2014 at a pharmacy less than a mile from his home. “A drug that could potentially save my life was hiding in plain sight,” he says.

So far, it's working. David has been in remission from Castleman for more than six years. He's not the muscular football player he once was, but he's close to full strength. He is now an assistant medical professor at the University of Pennsylvania, running a research lab and enrolling patients in a clinical trial for the drug that has given him his life back.

In 2018, he and Caitlin became parents when their daughter, Amelia, was born. “She's such a little miracle,” Caitlin says. “We're so lucky to have her.”

David hopes his story offers lessons far beyond medicine about what people can do when they're backed against a wall.

And he feels his suffering means something when he looks in the eyes of his patients with Castleman disease. One girl, named Katie, was diagnosed at age two and endured 14 hospitalizations.

Then her doctor prescribed David's drug after the family reached out to the CDCN. Katie hasn't been hospitalized since and just finished kindergarten. She has even learned how to ride a bike.

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He Fixed His Own Heart

by Sorrel Downer



DAVE IMMIS

WHEN TAL Golesworthy (above) was told he needed lifesaving heart surgery in 1993, he said no.

Golesworthy has Marfan syndrome, a genetic condition affecting the

strength and elasticity of connective body tissues, including blood vessels. Back in 1993, when he was living in Cheltenham, in the west of England, his doctor told him that a major artery in his heart, the aorta, was so enlarged that it would inevitably rupture unless he underwent major surgery.

“They talked through the surgical options,” says Golesworthy, “and I was not interested. The operation really didn't look attractive.” What he particularly didn't like was having to be on blood thinners after the operation, something that would prevent blood clots but presented its own risks:

“I was riding motorbikes then, and skiing, so my whole lifestyle would have been affected.”

By 2000, however, his condition had worsened. Realizing something had to be done, Golesworthy put his years of experience as a

research-and-development engineer with the United Kingdom's National Coal Board to good use. He decided he would fix himself.

"Learning new stuff and developing new ideas, that was my job," Golesworthy says. A bulging aorta, he reckoned, was much like a bulging hydraulic hose—it needed external support. And wrapping something around the outside of the aorta would require a less invasive operation. So Golesworthy subjected himself to 30 hours in an MRI scanner; used 3D printing to create a physical replica of the faulty part of his heart (the aortic root); and then used soft, porous textile mesh to make a sleeve to fit around it.

"Luckily, I'd done a lot of work with technical textiles, looking at filters for flue gases in coal-fire processes," he says.

Sheer determination coupled with an original yet practical solution won him the support of two leading cardiothoracic surgeons and helped him raise the money to develop his idea. In May 2004, at the age of 47, he became the guinea pig for his own invention, the ExoVasc Personalised External Aortic Root Support (PEARS). The operation was a success. It has since been used by surgeons in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium, Czech Republic, New Zealand, Australia, and the Netherlands. "When you're as motivated as I was," Golesworthy told mosaic.com, "you make things happen."

He Created an Eye-Saving App

BY Marc Peyser

LIKE ALMOST EVERY SET of new parents, Bryan and Elizabeth Shaw started snapping pictures of their son, Noah, practically from the moment he was born. When he was about three months old, Elizabeth noticed something odd when she took his picture. The flash on their digital camera created the typical red dot in the center of Noah's left eye, but the right eye had a white spot at the center, almost as if the flash was being reflected back at the camera by something. When Elizabeth mentioned the strange phenomenon to their pediatrician, she shined a light into Noah's

eye, saw the same white reflection, and immediately sent the family to an ophthalmologist. A white reflection instead of a red one is a telltale sign of retinal cancer, and that is exactly what Noah had. He endured months of chemotherapy and radiation, but doctors ultimately could not save his eye.

Retinoblastoma, the scientific name of Noah's tumor, is treatable if caught early. Bryan Shaw couldn't help but wonder whether there were signs he'd missed. He went back over every baby picture of Noah he could find—thousands of them—and discovered the first white spot in a photo taken when Noah was 12 days old. As time



The telltale white spot in Noah's right eye (left); Elizabeth and Bryan Shaw with Noah (far right) and his siblings

went on, it appeared more frequently. "By the time he was four months old, it was showing up in 25 percent of the pictures taken of him per month," Bryan, a chemistry professor at Baylor University in Texas, told *People*.

It was too late for Noah's eye, but Bryan was determined to put his hard-won insights to good use. He created a database that charted the cancer's appearance in every photo. He also collected photos and compiled the data from eight other children with retinoblastoma. Armed with that data, he began to work with colleagues in Baylor's computer science department to develop a smartphone app that can scan the photos in the user's camera roll to search for white eye and can be used as a kind of ophthalmoscope. Called White Eye Detector, it is now available for free on Google Play and in Apple's App Store. "I just kept telling myself, I really need to do this," Bryan told *People*. "This disease is tough to detect. Not only could this software save vision, but it can save lives." **R**

COURTESY BRYAN SHAW (LEFT); MARIAN EVANS (RIGHT)



MOTHER'S DAY
GIFTS
THEY WILL
NEVER
FORGET



*For many moms, a card
or some flowers are perfect.
These two unusual women
demand something, um, special.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY John Hendrix

Mama, This Story Is for You

BY Helene Melyan
FROM THE OREGONIAN

HERE IS A country—I read about it once—where the local custom is that if you go to a house and praise some small possession, the owners feel obliged to offer it to you as a gift. I don't remember the name of the country; the only other place I know of with such a custom is my mother's apartment.

Knowing Mama, I have always been careful with my compliments, but that doesn't stop her. Mama senses admiration far more subtle than what's spoken. If she catches me staring at anything small enough to put in a grocery sack, she hands it to me as I leave. It would do no good to protest. "I was merely staring at that photograph of Mount Hood because I have one exactly like it in my living room." Mama would only nod and say, "Of course. You were thinking how nice it would be to have a set. If a mother doesn't understand, who does?"

Sometimes, while visiting Mama and trying not to say anything complimentary, I reflect on what might have been had she ended up in, say, the White House. "Here you are, Mr. Prime Minister, that nice picture of George Washington you were admiring so

much, from the Blue Room. No, take it. You like it. What do I need it for?"

Being with Mama is like watching an Alfred Hitchcock movie: I never know what's going to happen next. For instance, I have lasting memories of childhood walks with her. Mama noticed everything. We had to stop to admire a nice house, a nice tree, a nice flower. Mama regarded the people we saw (those who didn't look like her relatives) as portraits in a museum—no matter if people stared back. "She was pretty once, but has seen tragedy," Mama would whisper, or, "Such a handsome man, but conceited to the core." Her sharpest epithet was "Minky," reserved for the type of woman Mama thought would wear a mink to the supermarket.

As far back as I can remember, Mama was telling people they were in the wrong line of work and suggesting alternative careers. If the landlord fixed the sink, she told him he should have been a plumber. If he couldn't fix it, Mama would wait until the plumber came and then tell him he should have been a landlord. And if either one of them told her a joke, Mama would have to know why



PREVIOUS SPREAD: MARIA AMADOR (BANNER AND FLOWERS), THIS SPREAD: MARIA AMADOR (BANNER)

he hadn't gone into show business.

My turn came when I grew up and became a housewife. "You missed your calling," Mama sighs, examining the doodles on my phone book. "You should have been an artist." Later, I tell her how I returned rancid fish to the supermarket and demanded a refund, and she amends this to lawyer. I know it's horsefeathers, but I like it.

"You missed *your* calling," I tell Mama. "You should have been a vocational counselor."

"I know," she sighs. "But that's life. Maybe now that it's spring ..."

According to Mama, there is no problem that will not be a little bit solved by the coming of spring. I grew up believing that there was only one

correct way to end a discussion of things unpleasant or troublesome: nod at the calendar, pat somebody on the back if possible, and sigh, "Maybe in the spring ..."

I could understand how certain problems—sinus conditions, chapped lips, sticking windows—would respond to the change of seasons. But I never tried to unravel the spring magic that Mama vowed would help me understand fractions or long division.

I was not the only target of Mama's philosophy. At one time or another, Mama had several dozen people in the neighborhood waiting for spring to relieve them of indigestion, mice, domestic difficulties, and trouble with the horizontal hold on their television sets.

Sometimes, sitting in school during history (which Mama promised me I'd find less boring in the spring), I would daydream my mother into other places and other times. Once I saw her patting Napoléon on the back, after he got the news from the Russian front. ("Maybe in spring ...") She was beside George Washington at Valley Forge, brushing snow off his epaulets. ("In spring, maybe, you'll win the revolution.") She was looking over Thomas Edison's shoulder, comforting him in his early failures. ("Don't worry; maybe in the spring you'll try something new.")

EXPENSIVE GIFTS, WHICH MAMA DEFINES AS COSTING OVER \$1.98, ARE OUT.

I have been worrying for weeks now about what to give my mother for Mother's Day. For most people, this is a modest problem, solved by the purchase of a bathrobe or a box of candy. For me, however, Mother's Day represents an annual challenge to do the impossible—find a gift that will make neither Mama nor me feel terrible.

Expensive gifts—which Mama defines as costing over \$1.98—are out, because they make Mama feel terrible. ("This is awful," she says, examining an apron. "I feel just terrible. You shouldn't have spent the money on me.") Inexpensive presents—under

\$1.98—please Mama, but they make me feel terrible.

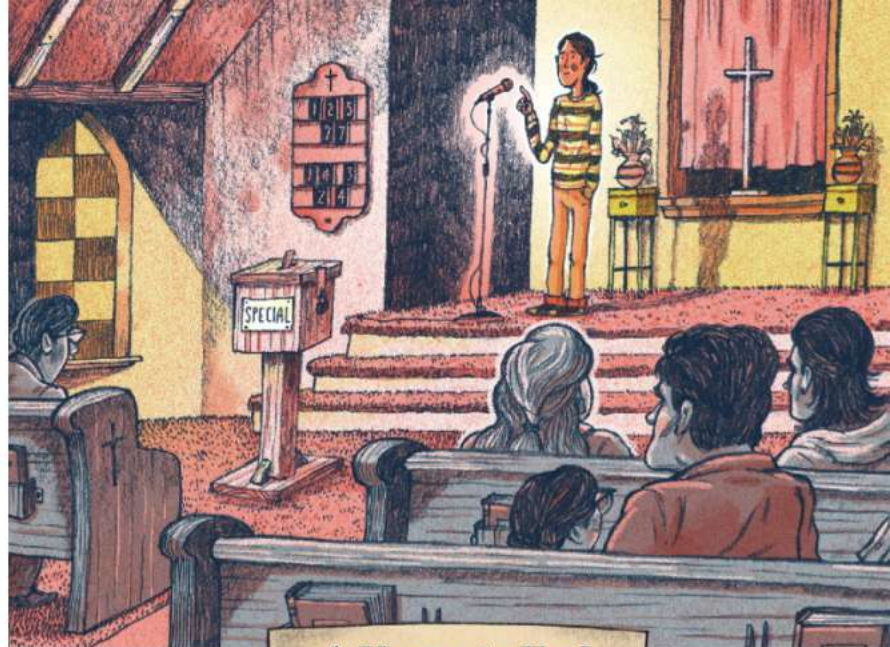
There is always the danger that a gift given to Mama will bounce swiftly back to the giver. If I buy her something wearable, she perceives in an instant that it could be let in here, let out there, and it would fit me perfectly. If I give her a plant, she cuts off the top for me to take home and root in a glass of water. If I give her something edible, she wants me to stay for lunch and eat it.

Papa, a sensible man, long ago stopped trying to shop for Mama. Instead, on Mother's Day, her birthday, and other appropriate occasions, he composes a short epic poem in which he tells of their meeting, courtship, and subsequent marriage. After nearly 30 years of poems, Papa sometimes worries that the edge of his poetic inspiration has dulled, but Mama doesn't complain. She comes into the room while he is struggling over a gift poem and says, "It doesn't have to rhyme as long as it's from the heart."

This year, finally, I think I, too, have found a painless gift for Mama. I am going to give her a magazine article, unrhymed but from the heart, in which I wish her "Happy Mother's Day" and tell her there's nothing Papa or I could ever buy, find, or make her that would be half good enough anyway.

This story originally appeared in the May 1977 issue of Reader's Digest.

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A Hymn to End All Hymns

BY Alistair Bane
FROM THE MOTH

I'M FROM THE Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, but I've lived in Denver for quite a few years. I have a friend that also lives in Denver who is originally from Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation. We got talking about how homesick we were, and he suggested that we go spend a couple of weeks with his grandma.

In the car for the 12-hour drive, we talked about everything we missed:

dry bread and powwows and stomp dances and hearing our people speak our own languages. By the time we got to Oklahoma, I was so happy to be home. We were maybe three or four miles from his grandma's house when he said there were a couple of things maybe he should tell me about.

The first was that his grandmother might not be particularly fond of Shawnee people. This was because of

MARIA AMADOR (BANNER)



a thing that had happened between our tribes in the late 1800s. That might seem like a long time ago to some people, but she remembered.

The second thing was that she could be a little bit persistent about inviting people to go to church with her on Sunday. Right away I knew what he meant. In modern-day Oklahoma, Native people have an eclectic array of spiritual beliefs. Some follow our traditional ways; others have joined various congregations. I grew up with an Irish Catholic mother and a Shawnee father, and so I was very open to all kinds of different spiritual beliefs. But as I grew up, it was our traditional ways that had spoken to my heart.

However, when I went back home I'd still get a lot of invitations to go to

church. Although I really appreciated it, I usually politely declined because there was always an undercurrent of hoping that I might be converted, and I really don't like to disappoint people.

I promised my friend that I could be diplomatic with his grandmother if she was persistent with her invitations, and I even thought that maybe I could win her over to liking Shawnee people.

When we got inside, he introduced us. I addressed her as Miss Myrtle to show extra respect. She was a strong-looking 75-year-old with roller-set hair. Her greeting was polite but not particularly warm. But over the next week I took her to Tulsa to run errands, I fixed her chicken coop, and I used all my best manners, and by that Friday I was winning her over. At dinner that night

she said to me, "You know, Alistair, it's been nice having you here. Now, you know this Sunday is Mother's Day. Of course, at my age I never know if this could be my last Mother's Day. There's just one thing I want. I would like you to be my special guest at church on Sunday." Then she said, "Of course, I know you are into your traditional ways. So if you don't feel comfortable going it's OK, as long as you know this could be my last Mother's Day."

When the invitation is put like that, there is really only one thing I could say, which was, "I'd love to be your special guest on Mother's Day."

We got to the church. It was a one-room country church. There were about 50 to 60 people, mostly elders from Miss Myrtle's tribe. The services started, and they weren't that different from the ones that I remembered my mom taking me to when I was young, until they got to one part. People could walk up the center aisle and put some money into this little wooden collection box, and that bought them the privilege of inviting somebody from the congregation up to sing a "Special." A Special, it turned out, is a solo hymn. A few people walked up, donated their money, selected their guests, their guests all sang beautifully, and everyone was happy. And then Miss Myrtle started up the aisle.

She was kind of elderly, so it felt like it took her a long time to reach the front. When she did, she carefully folded her money, put it into the box,

scanned the congregation, found me, and said, "My grandson brought a friend with him from Denver. His name is Alistair, and he is from the Eastern Shawnee Tribe. But he is a very nice person. Alistair, I would like you to come up here and sing us a Special."

I immediately began making shy "no" gestures and grinning, kind of the way my dog does when he's eaten another sofa cushion. But there was an old man behind me patting me on the back, saying, "Go on up there and sing, son. I can tell by looking at you that you are a singer."

"THERE IS JUST ONE THING I WANT," MISS MYRTLE SAID. "BE MY GUEST AT CHURCH."

That was the moment that I realized how true the old adage is that looks can be deceiving.

But my friend had grabbed me by the arm and was guiding me over his knees in the narrow pew. He said, "Grandma's going to be so happy."

And the next thing I knew, I was out in the center aisle, and it almost felt like there was some invisible force propelling me toward the front of the church. It could have been God. And I was hoping that, if it was God, when I reached the microphone, God would choose that moment to work a super-big miracle and make it so that I could

sing—and that I knew any hymns at all.

I reached the microphone. I waited. It didn't seem like any big miracles were imminent, but I told myself it was going to be OK. I did have some stage and singing experience. It was back in the '90s, when I lived in San Francisco and I was in a Goth band called the Flesh Orchids.

And then I thought back to when I was real young and my mom had sent me to Catholic school. It was the '70s, and there had been this hippie nun who would come out with a guitar at

I HOPED GOD WOULD WORK A BIG MIRACLE AND MAKE IT SO THAT I COULD SING.

recess and sing hymns on the playground. She always sang "Michael Row Your Boat Ashore." And I was like, ooh, ooh—I did know a hymn! I turned to the organist, who was waiting patiently, and I said, "'Michael Row Your Boat Ashore,' please, ma'am."

The music started, and about the place where it felt like there should be some words, I started to sing. "Michael, row your boat ashore, alleluia. Michael, row your boat ashore ..." It was about the time I reached the second *alleluia* that I realized that was in fact the only line I remembered.

But Shawnees have never been quitters. So I decided there can be

different versions of the same song. There could be extended dance remixes, where vocals are looped repetitively. And so I thought I'd sing the line four times, give it a little bit of a rest, sing it four more. And so on for a total of 16 times, which seemed long enough to be a real song.

About halfway through I closed my eyes, because sometimes it's better not to see your audience. And while I stood there singing, I had plenty of time for existential questions, like: Who is Michael? Why does God want him to row his boat ashore? And then, finally, I hit that line for the 16th time and I stopped. The organist, who was not quite sure what was happening, continued to play, but when she realized it was finally over, she stopped in kind of an abrupt way, and then there was silence, and in that silence I walked back down the aisle. I started to climb back over my friend's knees. As I did, our eyes met and he just said, "Dude."

I sat back down. Miss Myrtle was on the other side of me. She wasn't making eye contact. And her posture seemed somewhat rigid. But once I was settled in my seat, she leaned toward me slightly and said quietly, "I don't believe I've ever met someone that didn't know at least one hymn." There wasn't a whole lot I could say about that, so I was just like, "Happy Mother's Day."

AS TOLD LIVE AT THE MOTH IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS (APRIL 5, 2019). COPYRIGHT © 2019 BY THE MOTH, THEMOTH.ORG.

READER STORIES

Mother's Day Memories from the RD Inner Circle

One year, we bought our mother a really cool new iron for Mother's Day. It was still in the box on her birthday a month and a half later, so we rewrapped it and gave it to her again. It was still in the box on Mother's Day the following year, so we rewrapped it again. Then my mother threw the box out so we wouldn't give it to her on her next birthday.

—Amy Gottlieb
SUFFERN, NEW YORK

One Mother's Day, I received a sign from my son that read, "I'm sorry I haven't moved out yet." It made me laugh!

—Sharon Stewart
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

I made a cake one year for my mother and decorated it very prettily, then packed it up for the hour-long drive to her house. The only problem was we had moved to a desert region and it was a very hot day, even with the air-conditioning on in the car. By the time we got to my parents' house, the top layer of cake had slipped halfway off and all the frosting had kind of melted together. It tasted good, but we had a good laugh at the condition of my masterpiece.

—Laurie Sanchez
KINGMAN, ARIZONA

When I was very young, I really thought my mom would like an old bracelet I found in

the trash. (It was lying on top!) I took it, cleaned it up, and gave it to her. Later in life, I found out that she was the one that had thrown it away!

—Phyllis Haines
FORSYTH, GEORGIA

When I was young, I gave my mother a bottle of perfume. The bottle was very pretty, but the perfume stank really bad. My mom used it anyway.

—Debbie Mefferd
SCANDINAVIA,
WISCONSIN

I gave Mom a mug that said, "No matter how hard life gets, at least you don't have ugly children."

—Stephanie Newman
LEESVILLE, SOUTH
CAROLINA

▶ To join the Inner Circle, go to tmbinnercircle.com.



JUUL

HOOKS A NEW GENERATION

WARNING:

In a blink, millions of young people started smoking a trendy e-cigarette and became addicted to a powerful drug. It's time for the damage to be undone.

BY *Julie Creswell* AND *Sheila Kaplan*

ADAPTED FROM **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

COURTESY, STANFORD RESEARCH INTO THE IMPACT OF TOBACCO ADVERTISING / TOBACCO.STANFORD.EDU





the summer

of 2015, a newfangled vaping product came on the market. The Juul device looked unlike any other electronic cigarette and delivered a far more powerful punch—5 percent nicotine, the equivalent of a pack of cigarettes, while other e-cigarettes had only 1 or 2 percent. Another big draw: It came in fun flavors such as mango and mint.

Juul's initial marketing campaign, called Vaporized, introduced the product with glitzy parties, ads, and social media posts featuring young women in midriff-baring tops holding the sleek metal device. Pop-up "Juul Bars" at concerts offered free

samples. A bright billboard display loomed over Times Square. The company hired consultants to identify social media influencers to promote Juul with hashtags like #juul and #vaporized on posts that showed images of themselves or other young people doing tricks with the device.

Bailey Legacki was one of the high school students drawn in by the campaign. She began using Juul as a 15-year-old in South Florida during the 2015–16 school year. "It was everywhere," she recalls. "Everyone had one." Legacki says she was influenced by her friends but also by the ubiquitous ads and posts on Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.



MELISSA GOLDEN/REUX (4); LUCAS CLARYSSE/UTMSI; SHUTTERSTOCK (5); JEFFREY MATHIAS/TOP GEAR; KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES (6); KILIC/GETTY IMAGES (7); THE NEW YORK TIMES/REUX (BOTTOM)

Juul e-cigarettes hooked smokers with fun flavors and a powerful nicotine punch.

"They were young people, and it looked like they were having fun," she explains. "Or it would just be the device that was shown, but not really explaining anything about it, just, 'Try this.'"

She says she did not realize there was nicotine in the pods, the cartridges that contain the flavored





Smoking buddies Adam Bowen (left) and James Monsees created Juul while in graduate school.

liquid you “smoke” with Juul’s battery-operated pipe. In the early days, Juul’s packaging mentioned nicotine only in tiny type in the ingredients list and did not contain the warning labels it does now.

“If I knew it had nicotine at all, I wouldn’t have done it,” Legacki says. “Now I’m so reliant on something

JASON HENRY/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX (TOP); JEENAH MOON/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX (BOTTOM)

5 million⁺

YOUTHS VAPE, PER THE CDC AND THE FDA.

I had no intention of doing. I knew what cigarettes do. This Juul was new, and nobody knew what the Juul did.” She plans to sue Juul.

From 2017 to 2019, when Juul’s growth became astronomical, the percentage of high schoolers who vaped more than doubled in the United States, according to research at Johns Hopkins University. The 2018 National Youth Tobacco Survey funded by the FDA and CDC found that flavored e-cigarettes were one major reason why, and studies show that kids whose first exposure to nicotine was a flavored e-cigarette were more likely to become hooked on any form of smoking than those whose first exposure was a tobacco cigarette. More than five million young Americans—one in four high school students and one in ten middle schoolers—now vape, the agencies said in a joint report last summer.

A sampling of high school students’ tweets from Juul’s first 18 months of sales showed that “juuling” quickly became a fad:

“petition to make our school mascot a juul”

“horizon highschool, where every1 is juuling in the bathroom”

“HAPPY 16TH BIRTHDAY, LEXI T!!! I hope ur day is filled with juuling & just having the best day ever!”

What the tweets didn’t capture: Nicotine is a highly addictive drug that

JUUL’S REMARKABLE RISE CAME AFTER IT BEGAN TARGETING YOUNGER CONSUMERS.

impedes the developing brain, and many teens have struggled to quit.

THE STORY OF Juul began more than a decade ago when two smokers, James Monsees and Adam Bowen, became friends over cigarette breaks as graduate students in design at Stanford University. During those chats, they came up with an idea for their thesis, a design for an e-cigarette that would give smokers the nicotine they craved but

without the cancer-causing substances that come from burning tobacco. They called it Ploom, and in 2007, they started a company by the same name.

Monsees and Bowen's first product, the Ploom Model One Vaporizer, was shaped like an oversize pen. After a couple of years, it became clear that the device wasn't catching on. The biggest complaint? Not enough nicotine.

Kurt Sonderegger, who was Ploom's head of marketing, would tape two of the devices together to try to get a satisfying hit, he says, but "I still needed to go out and smoke a cigarette."

In early 2015, after selling the Ploom brand to a Japanese cigarette company, the company took on a new name, Pax Labs. Pax quickly discovered a way to substantially increase the nicotine levels in a new product, named Juul.

Scott Dunlap, the chief marketing officer at the time, saw the immense promise. "When I first tried the Juul prototype, the nicotine hit was immediate, within seconds. No e-cig had ever come close to this," he says. "The design was also unique—the shape, the glowing light, the crackling sound, the thick vapor. It was a multisensory experience."

In addition to smokers looking for the nicotine high without the cancer risk, the company had been eyeing another potential market: younger people who were occasional smokers and might be drawn to a luxe, smartly designed tech product that they could take out with them on a Saturday night.

And it worked: Juul's remarkable rise and domination of the e-cigarette business came after it began targeting younger consumers, a group with historically low smoking rates, in a furious effort to reward investors and capture market share before the government tightened regulations on vaping.

But even as vaping soared among nonsmokers and Juul became a high school craze, the company's executives stood firm in their assertion that Juul's mission has always been to give adult smokers a safer alternative to cigarettes, which play a role in the deaths of 480,000 people in the United States each year.

THE COMPANY REFUSED TO SIGN A PLEDGE NOT TO MARKET TO TEENS.

"We never wanted any non-nicotine user and certainly nobody underage to ever use Juul products," Monsees testified at a congressional hearing last July.

But according to interviews with former executives, employees, and investors, along with reviews of legal filings and social media archives, the company was never just about helping adult smokers. In 2015, just before the product's debut, Ari Atkins, an engineer who had worked on the team developing the Juul, told *theverge.com*,



Juul cocreator James Monsees testified before Congress last year.

"We don't think a lot about addiction here because we're not trying to design a cessation product at all."

As recently as 2017, with mounting evidence that high school students were flocking to its devices and flavored nicotine pods, the company, which became Juul Labs after splitting from Pax, refused to sign a pledge not to market to teenagers as part of a lawsuit settlement. A nonprofit in California, the Center for Environmental Health, had tested e-cigarettes and nicotine liquids made by Juul and more than a dozen other companies and found levels of formaldehyde, a carcinogen created when e-cigarettes containing certain chemicals are heated, that exceeded the California limit. The organization had sued the manufacturers to force them to lower formaldehyde levels and to add a warning label noting the presence of a cancer-causing ingredient.

But in settling the cases, the environmental group saw an opportunity

to do more. "We wanted to go beyond just the cancer warning," its lawyer, Mark Todzo, says. "At the time, there were reports coming out about the teen vaping rates that were just starting to be reported on."

Todzo says the group added a provision to the settlement requiring the e-cigarette companies to agree not to market to youths. Documents show that it was signed by other companies but not by Juul. Instead, the company opted to pay an additional penalty, based on its sales for 2015—just \$2,500.

It wasn't until the summer of 2018, when the FDA required it to do so, that the company put a nicotine warning label on its packaging. Juul finally signed the pledge in late 2019.

Now the company is facing an ever-growing pile of lawsuits from parents, school districts, counties, and states. In addition to the FDA, the Federal Trade Commission, the U.S. attorney's office in Northern California, and more than three dozen states are investigating the company.

Juul is still waiting for federal health officials to completely clear its devices and nicotine pods from the mysterious vaping-related illness that emerged

SUSAN WALSH/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK

last summer, making more than 2,800 people seriously ill and killing 68 others to date. The CDC said that the likely culprit is vaping liquids containing vitamin E acetate and THC (the chief psychoactive chemical in marijuana), which Juul does not sell. But it cautioned that health investigators had not exonerated nicotine products.

Meanwhile, the FDA must decide whether Juul products are appropriate for the protection of public health. The agency has undertaken a regulatory review, weighing the number of people likely to become addicted to nicotine via Juul against the number who might use it to quit smoking combustible cigarettes, and assessing the products' safety.

REGULATORS WERE NO LONGER BUYING THAT JUUL HAD A VIRTUOUS MISSION.

It likely won't help Juul's case that it is now partly owned by Altria, maker of Marlboro cigarettes. In December 2018, the tobacco giant announced it would pay \$12.8 billion in cash for a 35 percent stake in Juul. Under the terms of the deal, Altria said it would use its vast distribution channels to sell Juul products.

Some Juul employees were unsettled by the fact that they were now in business with Big Tobacco. And FDA regulators? They were irate, no longer

buying that Juul had a virtuous health mission. According to two former FDA commissioners—David Kessler, who served in the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations, and Scott Gottlieb, who ran the agency for President Donald Trump for a time—the agency is likely to make it very challenging for Juul to obtain the necessary clearance to stay on the market.

Even in the face of mounting investigations, Juul Labs has insisted that it never marketed or knowingly sold its trendy e-cigarettes and flavored nicotine pods to teenagers.

Still, the company has taken steps to keep its products away from underage smokers, including stopping sales of most of its flavors; halting all broadcast, print, and digital advertising; and offering \$100 million in incentives for retailers to adopt a new electronic age-verification system intended to curb illegal sales to minors. Late last year, Juul announced that it would discontinue its mint flavor, which a new study showed had become its most popular among teens.

But many kids, now hooked, have simply moved on to another type of e-cigarette, single-use vape pens such as Puff Bar and blu. Just like Juul, they are illegal for minors, but young smokers manage to get ahold of them anyway.

When asked what happens if she doesn't vape, one teen told the *New York Times*, "I get all shaky."

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NICOTINE IS AN OLD RD FOE

By 1952, Americans were smoking approximately 3.94 trillion cigarettes annually, or 2,500 for every man, woman, and child. It's a shocking number today—2.5 times what adults burn through now—but it shocked a few people in the smoke-filled 1950s too.

One of the most affected was DeWitt Wallace, cofounder of *Reader's Digest*. Wallace was himself a two-pack-a-day smoker, but he had long worried about the media's luring people into unhealthy behaviors. He refused to run advertisements that profited from vices.

"I don't want to feel that we are taking an active part in introducing millions of people to smoking and drinking," said Wallace.

He also used the

magazine as a kind of antitobacco bullhorn. Way back in 1944, *RD* published "Are You a Man or a Smokestack?" by a writer who'd quit smoking and wanted to share his secrets. In 1952, the magazine ran "Cancer by the Carton," a reprint from the *Christian Herald*. "What gives grave concern to public-health leaders," the story said, "is that the increase in lung cancer mortality shows a suspicious parallel to the enormous increase in cigarette consumption."

The famous surgeon general's report that first warned about the dangers of smoking wouldn't appear until 1964, but "Cancer by the Carton" made an enormous impact. This single story, published in the most-read magazine in the world, is

widely credited with slowing smoking rates—and, ironically, giving rise to filtered cigarettes as a potentially "safe" alternative.

Still, *RD* never gave up the fight, especially when it came to protecting young people. A 1963 story, "... And Slow Death," was a particularly searing indictment of teen smoking and the tobacco industry—and of magazines that helped "harvest a larger crop of victims" by taking cigarette ads. The next year, the American Cancer Society awarded the magazine its annual citation for distinguished service. Also that year: The surgeon general himself, Luther Terry, quit smoking. The antismoking campaign was thick in the air, and *Reader's Digest* led the way. **RD**



JOLEEN ZUBEK



DANNY SHANAHAN/EVERYONE'S A CRITIC/COURTESY PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

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

"What are you?" asks the cat.

"I'm a gnome. I steal food from humans, I kill their plants, and I raise a ruckus at night to drive them crazy.

I just love mischief! And what, may I ask, creature are you?"

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

—NEV/BLOGGYCAT.COM

A Christian guy named Bill saw an ad online for a Christian horse,

so he went to check it out. The horse's owner said, "It's easy to ride him. Just say 'Praise the Lord!' to make him go and 'Amen!' to make him stop." Bill got on the horse and said, "Praise the Lord!" Sure enough, the

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst—
for they are sticking to their diets.**

—FOODREFERENCE.COM

horse started to walk. "Praise the Lord!" he said again, and the horse began to trot. "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" he yelled, and the horse broke into a gallop. Bill was enjoying his ride so much that he almost didn't notice the cliff he and the horse were about to go over. Bill shouted "AMEN!" at the top of his lungs, and the horse stopped right at the edge of the cliff. Relieved, Bill said, "Phew! Praise the Lord!"

—Submitted by z.s.
via rd.com

Consider this ...

... Mac and cheese implies the existence of PC and cheese.

—@GLAMOUREPTILE

... Baby Yoda implies the existence of a

Sporty Yoda, Scary Yoda, Ginger Yoda, and Posh Yoda.

—@HIREMEIMFUNNY

A North Korean judge leaves the courtroom, laughing hysterically.

"What's so funny?" asks his friend outside.

"Oh, I just heard the funniest political joke," replies the judge.

"Tell me!"
"I can't—I just gave someone life in prison for it!"

—THECOUNTYJUDGE
on reddit.com

I called the tinnitus hotline, but it just kept ringing ...

—Submitted by E.M.
via rd.com

GOT A FUNNY JOKE?
It could be worth \$\$\$.
For details, go to
RD.COM/SUBMIT.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED



The book I ordered from IKEA arrived.

—@DitzMcGee

JOLEEN ZUBEK

“I Didn’t Know How Long I’d Survive”

With his leg caught in the sharp, whirling teeth of a gigantic corn conveyor and no one around to hear his screams, this farmer grabbed his pocketknife and did the unthinkable

BY *Carson Vaughan*
PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Geoff Johnson*



The morning of Good Friday started like any other for Kurt Kaser, a third-generation farmer in northeast Nebraska. The 63-year-old, taciturn and as lean as a fence post, woke around 5:30, his wife, Lori Kaser, by his side. He lit a cigarette, pulled on his muck boots, stuck an old pocketknife in a front pocket, and headed outside to start his day.

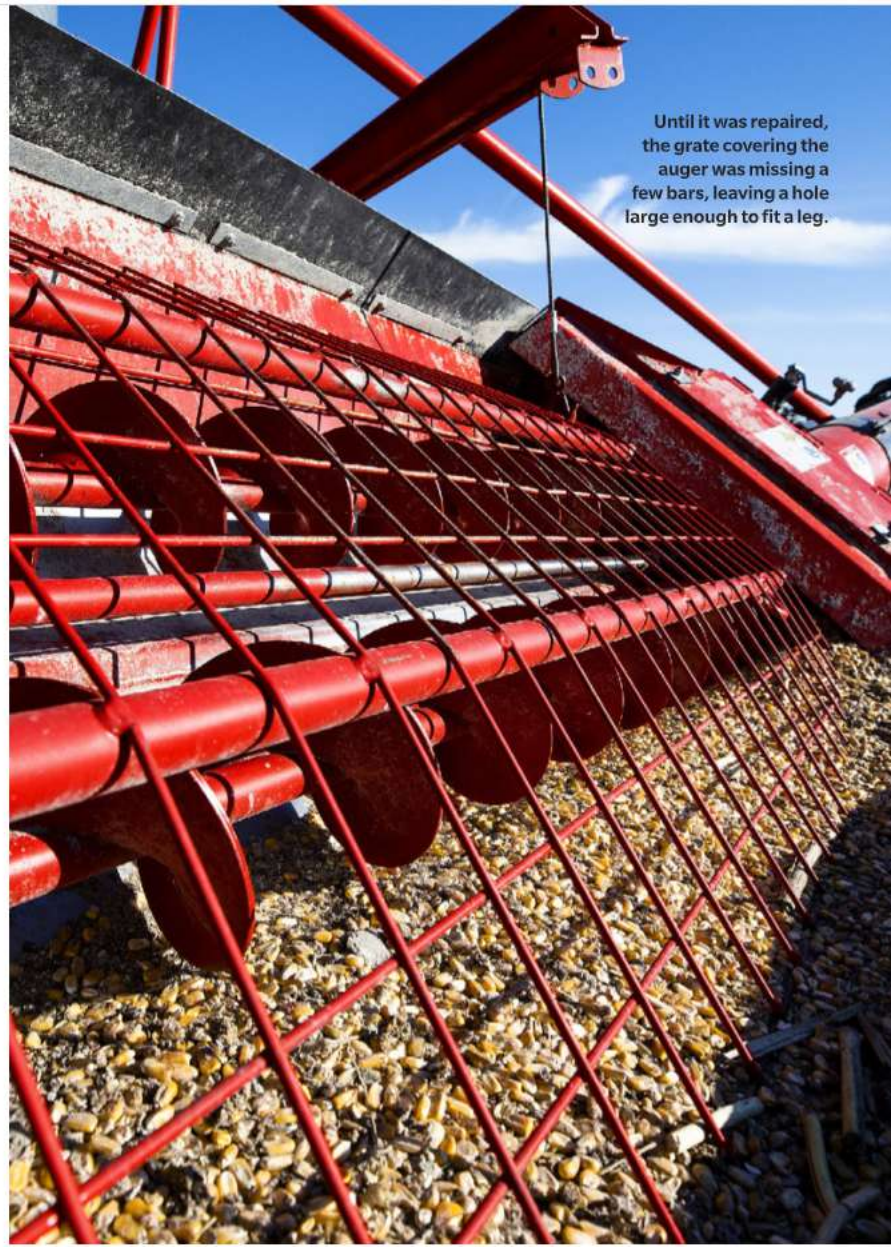
With 3,000 hogs and roughly 1,500 acres of corn and soybeans, not to mention a small trucking business, Kurt's to-do list never really shrank so much as recycled itself, though he understood all too well the dangers of rushing on the job. In sixth grade, he'd jumped down from his father's tractor only to land with one foot inside the corn picker. Though he didn't break any bones, the teeth mauled his foot and ankle so badly he spent the next three months in and out of a hospital bed, the surgeons finally grafting skin from the top of his leg to the bottom before it could fully repair.

"Everybody gets in a hurry and we just don't think," he says. "I got lucky on that one."

On this Friday morning in 2019, he sent a few of his hired hands out to load some corn, then hopped in a grain truck himself to do the same. It was a beautiful day for a drive, Kurt remembers. Crisp and clear and, if the meteorologists were to be trusted, headed for the upper 60s by late afternoon. No rain, thank God—the Midwest and Great Plains had just endured historic flooding that destroyed

a billion dollars' worth of crops. And only the slightest northwest breeze in Thurston County. He'd lived there, just a few miles outside of small-town Pender (population 1,100), his entire life—long enough to know the fickleness of spring and appreciate a calm and sunny morning when he caught one. Long enough to marry Lori and raise a son and two daughters. Long enough to stumble and stand again, to crutch on booze and finally cut loose, to feel his community supporting him when he needed it the most.

The goal that Good Friday was simple enough: transfer the corn he'd just picked up from a soggy field ten miles south to the silo on his homestead, quiet now that he'd dispatched his help and Lori had left for Sioux City, Iowa, nearly an hour away. He parked his truck alongside the tractor next to the silo and tilted his truck's long, corn-filled bed using the hydraulic hoist. Connected to the tractor was a large bin called a hopper, which Kurt wheeled beneath the truck bed to catch the corn when he opened the gate. Inside the hopper, covered by a protective grate, was a giant iron



Until it was repaired, the grate covering the auger was missing a few bars, leaving a hole large enough to fit a leg.



After his leg was caught in the auger, Kurt used a basic pocketknife, similar to this one, to saw away at his leg and free himself.



Kurt was moving dry corn up this chute into a silo when the accident occurred.

corkscrew, about 30 feet long, called an auger. Its job was to rotate, slowly and constantly, to convey the corn up a long yellow chute and dump it into the top of the gleaming chrome silo. With everything now in place, Kurt turned the auger on.

Despite all that prep work, something went slightly off-kilter, as often happens in the life of a farmer. In this case, the corn released too quickly, causing a torrent of kernels to pile up over the sides of the hopper and atop the protective grate, concealing the auger's rotating blades. Kurt stepped onto the corn-filled hopper to lower the truck's gate and stem the flow. In his haste, he forgot that the grate had a rather large hole in it, one he'd cut himself months

earlier when the ground was frozen solid and he couldn't fit the auger beneath the grain bin. He remembered it only when his foot sank into the corn through that very hole—and into the whirring auger funnel. It snagged his foot and wrenched him forward, shredding his jeans, then his ankle. He fell backward onto the gravel path. The blades, still churning, slowly pulled him into the hopper, all the while tearing flesh from bone.

"When the corn quit running out of the truck," he says, "my clothes were still grabbing on the auger and jerking my leg as I was trying to pull it out." He could plainly see his tibia over the hopper's red casing, at least six inches of bone exposed beneath his knee. He could see his own severed foot

bobbing like a rag doll up the hopper toward the silo's opening, tethers of denim still connected.

But the machine wouldn't release what was left of his leg. He couldn't reach the controls to shut down the auger. He needed to call for help. He knew his cell phone was on him—surely his cell was on him. He patted his pockets, his chest, his thighs. He came up empty. (Half of the phone would later be found in the silo, another victim of the auger.) He could scream for help, but the auger would drown out his cries, and anyway, there was no one around to hear them. How long he could stay conscious he didn't know.

"I was holding that one bone in my leg that was all bare and stuff—there

wasn't no meat or nothing on it—but [the auger] was jerking on that and I was getting wore out," Kurt says. "I just didn't know how long I'd survive."

That was when he remembered the cheap black-handled pocketknife in his jeans, one of the countless promotional items he and every other

He fell backward onto the gravel path. The blades, still churning, slowly pulled him into the hopper.

farmer receive from seed-corn dealers and equipment manufacturers. He unfolded the small blade, just three or four inches long. There were no second thoughts, not with the ravenous auger still drawing him in and the hole in the grate big enough to pull at least a few inches more of him inside. A knee. A thigh.

With his left hand, he gripped the bone below his knee. With his right, he began to saw away at muscle, tendons, tissue—the blood painting his fingers red. He could feel the ping, the snap, the sudden release of his nerves with every cut. The handle became slicker and slicker, until he lost his grip and watched the knife slip from his hand. He miraculously caught it in his left.

"I would have been clean out of luck," he says.

Regripping the knife, he continued

the horrific act of amputating his own leg. Was each stroke of the knife agony? He honestly doesn't recall. Maybe it was shock. But one thing and one thing only ran through his mind: "Survival," he explains. "Wanted to get the hell out of there."

When the muscles were cut through and the last tendon severed, Kurt swung his leg—what remained of it—away from the machine and dropped his knife to the dirt.

Now on autopilot, he crawled to the tractor, way up into the cab, and shut down the auger. Then he crawled to his idling truck and shut it off too. No need to waste the diesel, he surely would have been thinking, had he been thinking at all. After maneuvering himself down off the truck, he dug his elbows into the gravel and slowly began pulling himself toward the garage, toward the phone in the office, a long, silent crawl over roughly 70 yards. Several times along the way he slowed down, stopped, thought maybe he'd just rest a minute. Then he thought again. To stop, to pass out, meant death. So he kept clawing his way toward the garage, one foot and a few breaths short, the longest 70 yards of his life.

Finally inside, Kurt crawled to the desk and hoisted himself up just enough to grab the receiver. He collapsed back onto the floor and immediately called not 911 but his 31-year-old son, Adam Kaser, who'd spent about half his life volunteering

Kurt's lesson learned: "Use your head? Don't do stupid stuff?" he says.





According to CNBC, farming is the seventh-deadliest profession in America, with 257 fatalities in 2018. Around a hundred workers are injured every day.

with the Pender Fire and Rescue Department. Kurt didn't waste his words.

"I need an ambulance now," he said. "I lost my foot."

In the midst of buying tractor parts from the local John Deere dealership, in the midst of a routine day, Adam was certain he'd misheard, especially when his father mentioned the "auger" and "hopper."

"Get me an ambulance now," his father repeated, and the line dropped cold.

Adam darted away from the checkout. He jumped in his pickup, stomped the pedal to the floor, and raced around four miles west to the farm, calling 911 on the way. Hands

strangling the wheel, he feared the worst: that his father would bleed out before he arrived.

Less than five minutes later, he pulled off Highway 16 at the farm and ran directly for the hopper, but his father wasn't there and the auger was silent—the truck and the tractor too. The picture didn't reconcile. No blood. No painful cries. No droning auger. He then noticed the open door to the garage, and inside, his father splayed out on the floor in a dusty shirt and baseball cap, legs hidden by the office wall, smoking perhaps the last cigarette of his life.

"How bad is it?" Adam asked.

Kurt looked up from the floor,

smoke trailing from his lips. "I messed up big-time," he said.

Strangely, there was virtually no blood. (His doctor would later guess this was due to Kurt's decades of heavy smoking.) Nevertheless, his foot

Kurt slowly dragged himself toward the phone in the office. To stop, to pass out, meant death.

was missing and his leg was horribly mangled, dusted with dirt and debris, the bones protruding beyond his calf muscle. Though he'd already called 911 from the road, Adam now called the chief of his rescue squad, told the squad to "kick it into overdrive," that his father had severed his foot and would likely need an air ambulance. Adam then snapped into "firefighter mode," as he calls it. He started asking his father questions, keeping him lucid until the roughly 12-person team arrived a few minutes later.

The rescue squad carefully loaded Kurt onto a stretcher and into the ambulance, then raced back to Pender Community Hospital. Kurt doesn't remember much of the ride, but he does

recall the helicopter flight to Bryan Medical Center in Lincoln and all that sodden, muddy farmland below.

After two surgeries, a week at Bryan Medical, and two more at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, Kurt returned to the farm, the stump of his left leg wrapped in a clean elastic bandage just below the knee. For a while, he was stuck inside with a pair of crutches and a walker and too many get-well-soon cards to read in one sitting, just another one of the hundred or so agricultural workers who sustain a lost-work-time injury every day.

"It's frustrating. But," Kurt says, "it's just the nature of a farmer. Don't think. Gets in a hurry. Gets tired. Whatever."

Four months after the accident, Kurt received his prosthetic leg, and soon the farmer was back to doing what he loves. Strong-willed, as his family has always known him to be, he helped with the harvest last fall, even ran that same leg-chewing auger as he unloaded corn into grain bins.

"When we went down to the hospital to see him, first thing out of his mouth was 'Why are you guys not working?'" farmhand Tyler Hilkemann told KCAU in Sioux City. "Ever since he got his leg, you can't stop him. One of these days we might steal it from him." **■**

Rest in Peas

I heard the inventor of autocorrect died. I didn't even know he was I'll.

ALABAMAMAYAN ON REDDIT.COM

*A Kentucky Derby tell-all,
from those who ran it!*

STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES' MOUTHS

BY John Kenney
FROM THE NEW YORKER

THE SHOCK in the crowd at Churchill Downs was palpable: Maximum Security, the apparent winner of the Kentucky Derby, had just been disqualified for bumping two horses. Did he purposely veer out of his lane? Was he spooked? For the first time, the disgraced colt, along with ultimate winner Country House and the other noble contenders, explains what really happened last May in the most notorious Kentucky Derby ever!





Maximum Security ▶ At first, I wasn't sure where we were going. I remember being in a small, like, shed, with gates. But the gates were locked. I remember a very loud bell and the gates opened really fast and everyone was running. So I ran. I assumed it was a fire alarm.

Country House ▶ When the bell rang, I wet myself. It was so loud. The gates flew open and I screamed. Everyone was running like mad. On my back was a tiny man dressed like a bumblebee. He had a stick and he was hitting my butt. Which was weird.

War of Will ▶ There was a party. It was crowded. It was very hard to meet anyone, since we were all in little rooms and then we were running, like, crazy fast. I don't know why we were running or whose idea it was to run. I also didn't know where we were going. Also, my name is Greg, not War of Will.

Code of Honor ▶ At first, it seemed like we were running toward something. It

was straight for a while, and then we turned. And I kind of expected there to be something there. Like a barn. Or a pond. Or a Roy Rogers. But it just kind of kept going exactly the same. And then there was another turn. Same thing. And then another turn. At first, I thought it was kind of funny. By the third turn, though, I was like, This is ridiculous.

Gray Magician ▶ I had no idea what was going on. I just remember a lot of women in ridiculous hats.

Country House ▶ There was a horse that was in front. He looked really familiar. I think his name is Duane. But I wasn't sure. They were calling him Maximum Security. I guess he works in security. But I was trying to catch him, because I think he knows my friend Bob. I'm like, "Hey! Hey! Do you know Bob?" But he didn't slow down. He seemed super eager to be in the lead. To this day, I don't know if he knows my friend Bob. His loss, because Bob is hilarious.

Gray Magician ▶ I was looking around trying to figure out where we were going. I assumed it was a surprise party. I don't know why I thought that. Maybe because of the hats.

Long Range Toddy ▶ The irony for me is that I don't love running. I think walking at a brisk pace can give you the same kind of cardio with much less stress on your body.

Country House ▶ It was very crowded and muddy, and I'm thinking, If we have to run around this circle again, I'm going to slap myself.

War of Will ▶ You know how when you're running for a while your mind wanders? Well, this is kind of embarrassing, but I had just heard this joke the day before, and I decide to tell it to this one horse in front of me. I say, "Hey! Hey!" And he says, "What?" But, like, kind of annoyed. And I go, "Why the long face?" Now, I think it's hilarious, but he says, "Seriously?" And that's when he put his butt in my face.

Maximum Security ▶ I may have put my butt in his face. But it wasn't intentional. I was trying to get away from him, like at a party when you're like, "Oh, I see someone I know."

Country House ▶ When I heard him say, "Why the long face?" I thought, He can't have just said that. But I looked at him and he's like, "What?"


And I said, "You know that's the oldest joke in the world, right?" And I think honestly he had no idea.

War of Will ▶ That's what made me laugh. And then I stumbled because it was so funny. And then everyone slowed down. I assumed it had something to do with my joke, and I felt really bad. I'm on the insecure side, and I have a hard time meeting new people—and all of a sudden they're running away from me.

Long Range Toddy ▶ I was incredibly tired. And really dirty. Everyone was around Duane. I don't know why. And then I just felt sad, like, what's the point of it all? Why are we here? Why run around and around in circles? I just wanted to go home.

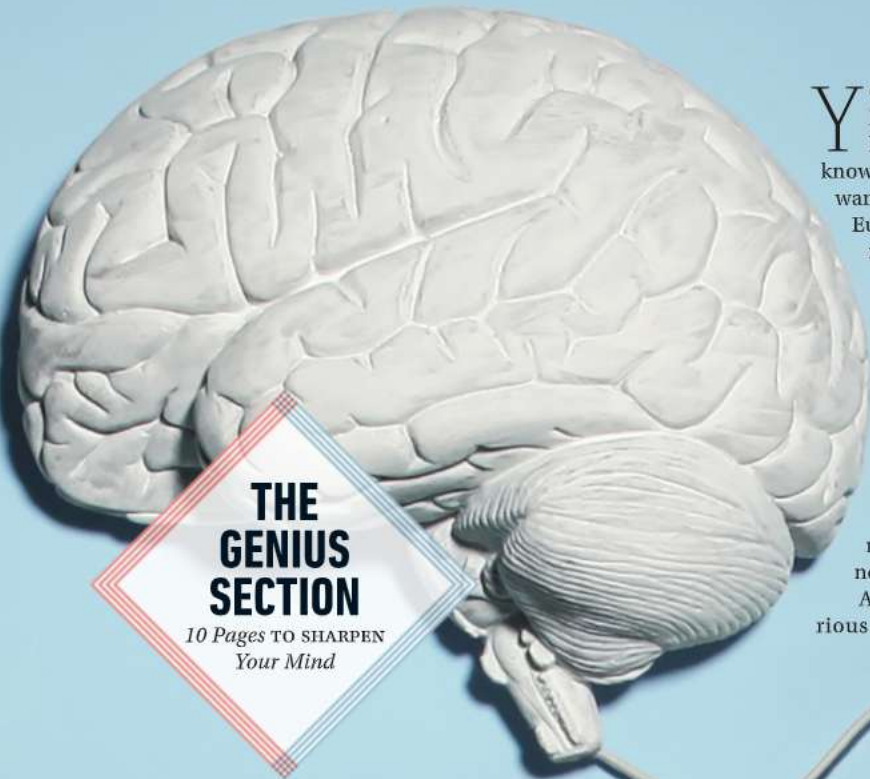
Country House ▶ Then some people came over and put a huge bush on me, with flowers, and they were smiling like, "Isn't this great?" It was incredibly strange.

War of Will ▶ I was thinking of telling the joke again but had second thoughts. I'm really glad I didn't.

Gray Magician ▶ Would I do it again? I'd walk it, if that were an option. I don't know why they were in such a rush. But then, I finished last. And I'm OK with that. 

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THE GENIUS SECTION

10 Pages TO SHARPEN
Your Mind

SURFING *for* BRAINPOWER

How to avoid being clickbaited by your own brain

BY Daniel T. Willingham

ADAPTED FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

YOU CAN LEARN anything on the Internet, so why do I so often learn things I don't want to know? When I'm surfing the Web, I want to be drawn in by articles on Europe's political history or the nature of quasars, but I end up reading trivia such as a menu from Alcatraz prison. Why am I not curious about the things I want to be curious about?

Curiosity feels as if it's outside your control, and trying to direct it sounds as ill conceived as forcing yourself to find a joke funny. But if you understand what prompts curiosity, you may be able to channel it a little better.

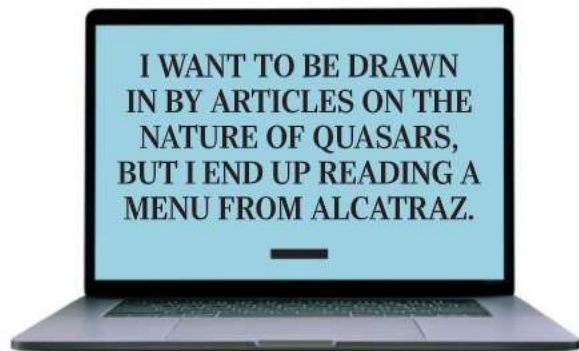
Across evolutionary time, curious animals were more likely to

survive because they learned about their environments; a forager that occasionally skipped a reliable feeding ground to explore might find an even better place to eat.

Humans, too, will forgo a known payoff to investigate the unknown. In one experiment, subjects were asked to choose one of four photos, each carrying some chance of paying a cash prize. Photos repeated, so subjects learned to pick the best-paying, but when a novel photo popped up, they chose it more often than the odds dictated they should. This preference for novelty is, of course, the reason manufacturers periodically tweak product packaging and advertising.

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

What's more, curiosity doesn't just ensure new opportunities for learning; it enhances learning itself. In a recent experiment, subjects read trivia questions and rated how curious each made them feel. Later, they saw the questions again, each



followed by a photograph of a face, and judged whether that person looked as if he or she would know the answer. In a surprise final memory test for the faces, subjects better remembered those appearing after trivia questions that made them curious. Curiosity causes a brain state that amplifies learning.

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

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

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

Note that your brain calculates what you might learn in the short term—your long-term interests aren't a factor. That's why a cardiac surgeon who is passionate about her job will nevertheless find a conference presentation on the subject boring if her brain decides that the talk won't add to her knowledge. Conversely, when her friend persuades her to watch a documentary on type fonts, her brain may calculate that this will be a rich source of information—and she finds herself fascinated.

It's that disconnect between long- and short-term interests that makes frothy Internet articles so frustrating. The feeling of curiosity promised you'd learn something and, admittedly, you did—now you know French citizens' favorite macaron flavor—but

you're disappointed because your new knowledge doesn't contribute to your long-term interests. You've been clickbaited by your own brain.

If following curiosity results in disappointment, maybe it shouldn't be allowed to take the lead. Why not just search for topics you truly want to learn about? That sounds logical, but a search for "quasars" will yield thousands of hits and no way of knowing which offers the just-right match to your current knowledge that will maintain your curiosity. You'll probably end up like the surgeon at the boring conference talk.

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

Many websites that snare your time feature scores of stories on the front

page, banking that one will strike each reader's sweet spot of knowledge. So visit websites that use the same strategy but offer richer content: for example, JSTOR Daily, Arts & Letters Daily, and ScienceDaily.

And pay more attention to bylines. Curiosity arises from the right balance of the familiar and the novel. Naturally, writers vary in what they assume their audience already knows and wants to know; when you find an author who tends to have your number, stick with her.

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

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Deep Thoughts from the Readers of Reddit.com

Alexander Graham Bell's first telephone was absolutely useless until he made his second one.

GREENCAPTAIN

When I was a kid, my parents taught me to not believe everything I saw on TV. Now I have to teach them to not believe everything they see on Facebook.

SNICKSOUND

Humans are really bad at recharging; it takes them about 8 hours to charge for 16 hours of use.

TALLERKEN

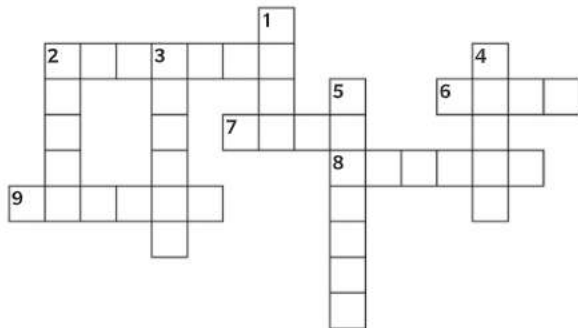
TAWATCHAI PRAKOBKIT/GETTY IMAGES

BRAIN GAMES

Quick Crossword

EASY May the fourth is Star Wars Day. Place these words (each of which appears in a *Star Wars* film title) in the grid. May the force be with you!

- HOPE
- EMPIRE
- RETURN
- JEDI
- PHANTOM
- ATTACK
- REVENGE
- SITH
- ROGUE
- FORCE



May Flowers

MEDIUM Emma is playing in a field where there are bees buzzing around some flowers. She notices that if one bee lands on each flower, one bee doesn't get a flower. She also notices that if two bees land on each flower, one flower doesn't get any bees. How many flowers and bees are there?



ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA AMADOR

Give Me Five

DIFFICULT If all five grids share a common feature, what's the missing number?

2	3	4
1	5	6
6	2	1

7	0	7
5	3	2
4	1	1

8	2	1
8	3	0
4	3	1

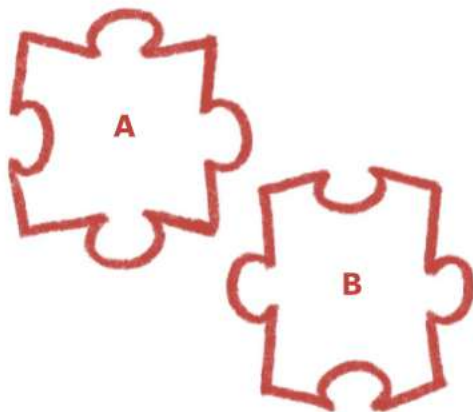
3	3	4
5	2	3
7	1	2

5	2	2
1	?	3
5	3	4

MARCEL DANESI (GIVE ME FIVE), DARREN RIGBY (JIGSAW SHUFFLER), PUZZLEPEDIA (OPPOSITE DAY), ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA AMADOR

Jigsaw Shuffler

MEDIUM Assuming all the tabs and slots on jigsaw pieces A and B are compatible with each other, how many different ways can you put these two pieces together?



Opposite Day

EASY In each of the following pairs of words, switch one letter from the first word with one letter from the second word to form pairs of opposites. The switched letters can come from anywhere in either word.

- LOFT / SOUND
- COAL / WORM
- FAN / REAR
- HEAT / FEED
- FLESH / STARE

For more Brain Games, go to RD.COM/CROSSWORDS.

For answers, turn to PAGE 122.

WORD POWER

At first glance, this month's words might not seem like birds of a feather. But each has an animal name (or two!) nested inside, the way *menagerie* contains *nag*. So make a bee-line to the quiz, try to spot the critters, then vamoose to page 120 for all the answers.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

1. dogma *n.*
(ˈdɒg-muh)
A false belief.
B perseverance.
C established opinion.

2. cataract *n.*
(ˈkæt-uh-rakt)
A waterfall.
B tomb.
C eyeshade.

3. toponym *n.*
(ˈtəh-puh-nim)
A misprint.
B place-name.
C opposite.

4. escrow *n.*
(ˈeh-skroh)
A money held in trust.
B gross exaggeration.
C eviction notice.

5. forbear *v.*
(fɔr-ˈbair)
A hold back.
B go before.
C carry off.

6. simoleon *n.*
(suh-ˈmoh-lee-un)
A look-alike.
B dollar.
C coincidence.

7. execrable *adj.*
(ˈek-sih-kruh-bull)
A discarded.
B immortal.
C horrible.

8. camellia *n.*
(kuh-ˈmeel-yuh)
A flowering shrub.
B horned lizard.
C love song.

9. unorthodox *adj.*
(un-ˈor-thuh-doks)
A not conventional.
B Eastern.
C beneath the surface.

10. welkin *n.*
(ˈwel-kin)
A fleece vest.
B sky.
C accordion.

11. epigram *n.*
(ˈeh-puh-gram)
A long farewell.
B witty saying.
C ghostly presence.

12. malevolent *adj.*
(muh-ˈleh-vuh-lent)
A masculine.
B spiteful.
C good-hearted.

13. papeterie *n.*
(ˈpap-uh-tree)
A poetic meter.
B letter jumble.
C fancy stationery.

14. demur *v.*
(dih-ˈmer)
A shy away from.
B take exception.
C strongly imply.

15. clamor *v.*
(ˈklam-er)
A shine brightly.
B demand loudly.
C leave speechless.

To play an interactive version of Word Power on your iPad, download the Reader's Digest app.

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The Canine Islands

You might think the Canary Islands were named for canaries—all, the yellow finches are indigenous to the Spanish archipelago. But “Canary” here actually refers to another animal: the dog. In Spanish, the islands are called *Islas Canarias*, derived from the Latin word for dog, a moniker bestowed by ancient explorers who reported seeing large canines there. The native songbirds were named, in essence, after dogs!



Word Power ANSWERS

1. **dogma** (c)

established opinion. Galileo's ideas challenged the religious and scientific dogmas of the time.

2. **cataract** (A) *waterfall.*

“Canoeing over that cataract would be very unwise,” warned the park ranger.

3. **toponym** (B)

place-name. “Half the toponyms on this map are unpronounceable,” Florence grumbled.

4. **escrow** (A)

money held in trust. “I’m afraid there’s not enough in escrow to cover the taxes,” said the lawyer.

5. **forbear** (A) *hold back.*

If you’re offering my favorite cookies, how can I forbear?

6. **simoleon** (B) *dollar.*

Reuben was down to his last simoleon when Lady Luck arrived.

7. **execrable** (C)

horrible. We had execrable weather last week: five rainy days in a row!

8. **camellia** (A)

flowering shrub. Many people don’t realize that tea is made from camellia leaves.

9. **unorthodox** (A)

not conventional. Kari’s unorthodox approach to investing paid off when she retired early.

10. **welkin** (B) *sky.*

A faint rainbow stretched across the welkin.

11. **epigram** (B)

witty saying. The poet Dorothy Parker was known for her biting epigrams.

12. **malevolent** (B)

spiteful. Cinderella wondered why her stepsisters looked so malevolent.

13. **papeterie** (C)

fancy stationery. Soniya sent her wedding guests handwritten thank-you notes on beautiful papeterie.

14. **demur** (B)

take exception. You say there’s no chance of winning this game—well, I demur!

15. **clamor** (B)

demand loudly. The protesters clamored for the jailed activist to be released immediately.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: moderate

10–12: swanky

13–15: shrewd

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BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

See page 116.

Quick Crossword

ACROSS

- 2. REVENGE
- 6. HOPE
- 7. SITH
- 8. ATTACK
- 9. RETURN

DOWN

- 1. JEDI
- 2. ROGUE
- 3. EMPIRE
- 4. FORCE
- 5. PHANTOM

May Flowers

FOUR BEES AND THREE FLOWERS

Give Me Five

5. (The numbers in each grid add up to 30.)

Jigsaw Shuffler

EIGHT

Opposite Day

**LOST / FOUND
COOL / WARM
FAR / NEAR
HEAD / FEET
FRESH / STALE**

MAKE US LAUGH!



Caption Contest

What's your clever description for this picture? Submit your funniest line at RD.COM/CAPTIONCONTEST. Winners will appear in a future Photo Finish (PAGE 124).

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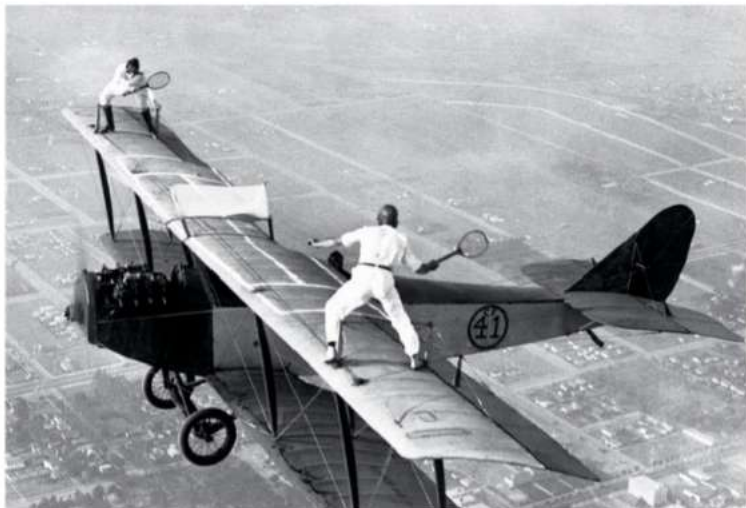
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PHOTO FINISH

YOUR *Funniest* CAPTIONS



Winner

"Whaddaya mean? It was out by a mile!"

—ROBERT PARFITT *Connellsville, Pennsylvania*

Runners-Up

The second Olympic sport canceled, after javelin catching.

—TED HAYES *Cookeville, Tennessee*

"Hey, where'd the ball boy go?"

—BILL WALKER *Mount Shasta, California*

To enter an upcoming caption contest, see the photo on PAGE 122.

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