

OUR SPECIAL ISSUE!

Reader's Digest

CANADA'S
MOST-READ
MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2020

Easy Gift
Ideas—All
Under \$50

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A Celebration of Togetherness

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MY 77-DAY BATTLE WITH COVID-19

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The Growing Risk of
Winter Melanoma

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Mom Knows Best:
Raising Polar Bear Cubs

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(ILLUSTRATION) BEENA MISTRY; (PHOTO) AARON MCKENZIE FRASER

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Not Home for the Holidays

I need to apologize to my in-laws, the Finneys. This was supposed to be the Christmas we'd get to Cape Breton. We usually don't because December flights are too expensive and the crummy weather means we'll spend more time waiting on the tarmac than in the air, if the plane even manages to depart. But we swore that we'd make the effort this holiday. Our boy, now four, needs to see his nan and papa.

Then 2020 happened and no one wants to sardine with strangers in a metal tube for two hours. Never mind that by visiting my in-laws we could be unwitting



agents of infection—every report of a new outbreak seems to be blamed on a big family gathering.

Which means we'll be missing out again on his nan's fish cakes and butterscotch pie, spotting the Newfoundland ferries in Sydney harbour, the kitchen party after midnight mass and waking up early with all the cousins to open presents. A Zoom call doesn't quite cut it.

This month's cover feature, "Home for the Holidays" (page 26), will be bittersweet for the many Canadians in the same dilemma. It's a collection of stories—some funny, some familiar, all heartfelt—about holiday-time traditions with family and friends.

Each is different, but all share a conviction that, this year especially, there's no place like home.

P.S. You can reach me at mark@rd.ca.

Reader's Digest

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Writer, Toronto

“Fight of His Life”

Hune-Brown is a National Magazine Award-winning writer whose work has been published in *Toronto Life*, *The Walrus*, *Hazlitt* and *The Guardian*. He’s also the senior editor at *The Local*, a magazine focused on long-form stories about health and social issues in Toronto. Read his story about a COVID-19 patient’s incredible fight for survival on page 114.



JARRED BRIGGS
Illustrator, Plaster Rock, N.B.

“Beware Winter Rays”

Briggs’s favourite part about being an illustrator is coming up with clever conceptual drawings—he lives for the aha moment when all the pieces of the puzzle begin to fit together. When he’s not illustrating, Briggs loves reading science-fiction novels, being outdoors and spending time with his three dogs. Take a look at his latest work on page 18.



NICK WONG
Photographer, Toronto

“Hunger Gains”

Wong’s work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *FRAME* and *enRoute*, Air Canada’s in-flight magazine. As an active member of the LGBTQ+ community, Wong has also shot for Pride Toronto, highlights LGBTQ+ subjects in his personal portrait work and volunteers as a team captain in gay dodgeball leagues. Check out his photo of the founder of Feed It Forward on page 10.



MEGAN MURPHY
Writer, Peterborough, Ont.

“Home for the Holidays”

Murphy’s love affair with writing began at a young age with the nightly words “Dear diary.” Also an actor, Murphy co-created a show this year called *The Verandah Society*, in which she and a musician friend travel to people’s homes and share music and stories. Read her humorous tale of a childhood Christmas pageant on page 26.

(MURPHY) GERRI WEATHERBEE

LETTERS

PINS AND NEEDLES

I disagree with the way acupuncture is dismissively presented in “Conquer Your Everyday Aches and Pains” (October 2020). My uncle worked at a church mission in China during the Second World War. Minutes before evacuating, a fellow missionary went into labour. A local midwife used acupuncture; the mother gave birth to twins without pain. Could it be that the acupuncture practised in China is different from what’s available in Canada?

— GORD YOUNG, *Peterborough, Ont.*

BORN A BOOKWORM

Growing up on a farm in New Brunswick, money wasn’t plentiful. But my family did have good food, clean clothes, a warm house and lots of books! Our house was filled with *Reader’s Digest* condensed books and, of course, your magazines. I could wake up in the middle of any given night and find



one or both of my parents reading your publications. I attribute my success in life to being introduced to reading at a young age.

— WENDY MACDOUGAL, *Somerville, N.B.*

WE THE NORTH

I subscribe to your Daily Digest newsletter, which I find enjoyable and informative. At times, however, it seems like *Reader’s Digest* overlooks our country’s territories. Because they are so “out of the way” and have a relatively small and scattered population, I guess it’s easy to forget about them. I hope you acknowledge our northern communities more in the future.

— SUZANNE STARRIE, *Whitehorse*

CONTRIBUTE

Send us your funny jokes and anecdotes, and if we publish one in a print edition of *Reader’s Digest*, we’ll send you \$50. To submit, visit rd.ca/joke.

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*How a Toronto charity feeds thousands
with surplus restaurant food*

Hunger Gains

BY Courtney Shea

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK WONG

JAGGER GORDON WAS standing in line at the grocery store in late March when it hit him: this was only the beginning. The 50-year-old chef and founder of Toronto's Feed It Forward, one of the country's most innovative food bank programs, saw that COVID-19 would have an even bigger impact on communities that depend on his services. "People were fighting over water," he says, "and I just thought, okay, this is going to be bad."

Gordon is like a modern-day Robin Hood, only instead of robbing from the rich, his food bank rescues food that would otherwise be destined for

landfills. He launched Feed It Forward six years ago, hoping to ameliorate hunger by making a dent in the approximately 11 million tons of food that Canadians annually let go to waste. The food he rescues is still edible but may not meet the picture-perfect standards of consumers. Don't even get Gordon started on overly aggressive best-before dates. "This is perfectly good stuff!" he says. "Maybe a pepper has a slight blemish, or it's not breast meat or whatever the desired cut is, but you can still make something that tastes amazing." Operating out of three main kitchens with some 2,200 volunteers, the organization



Jagger Gordon's charity redistributes food that would otherwise be thrown out.


was, until recently, feeding approximately 3,000 people every day. Since COVID, it's closer to 5,000.

Feed It Forward runs a pay-what-you-can restaurant and grocery store stocked entirely with hand-me-downs from Whole Foods (some 400 kilograms every day). Thirty-two Toronto-area restaurants and food supply companies—Sysco, for example—also help out. On 200 acres in Whitby, Ont., Feed It Forward grows produce and hosts grow-your-own-food lessons for individuals and families. If the pandemic hadn't cancelled in-person classes, this fall would have meant resuming Soup Bar, an offshoot program that provides free hot meals to students at Humber College (more than a third of post-secondary students live with food insecurity). People have an idea of what a person who is hungry looks like, says Gordon, but it's so much more prevalent than we realize.

Feed It Forward couldn't exist if the Ontario government hadn't passed 1994's Donation of Food Act, which allows individuals and companies to provide organizations with excess or unused stock without fear of liability. But Gordon says we can still do better. In France, for example, it's illegal

for large supermarkets to throw away food that could otherwise be donated. In 2016, Canada's NDP agriculture critic Ruth Ellen Brosseau introduced a private member's bill to develop a national strategy on food waste, but it was defeated.

Experts predict the number of people who are food insecure to have doubled this year—but Gordon hopes that the spotlight the pandemic has put on food distribution systems and scarcity will lead to meaningful change. In the early days of the lockdown, Gordon heard from staff in the kitchens at Rogers Centre, the CN Tower, the Ontario Food Terminal and hundreds of other businesses—all of them had food to give and knew Gordon was the guy who would know what to do with it.

As the year came to an end, Feed It Forward was stockpiling turkey. In previous years, the organization hosted holiday dinners—community celebrations with live music and, of course, plenty of good food. This year will be different—less gathering and more special deliveries. So maybe Gordon is less like Robin Hood and more like Santa. “There is need out there, and we can meet it,” he says. “That's my mission.” 



Democracy Now

There is always a tug-of-war between policies to achieve equality and policies to achieve excellence. I am certain that Canada can achieve both.

JOHN TURNER

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

Chef Boy-Ar-JEEZ!

It looks so easy when the pros do it. So why do our versions of baked goods come out looking like this?



A typical cup holds about eight ounces of liquid. But if a child spills it, that number increases to eight gallons.

—[@HOMEWITHPEANUT](#)

Having a Hard Time

I told my sister I was going through it and she said, “Well, go around it.”

—[@ITSKTLE](#)

Two weeks after I had photos taken of my baby, I returned to the studio to view the pictures on a colour monitor. The photographer started describing the merits of each photo, but as he went through the set, he rattled off his sales pitch so quickly that I couldn't get a word in.

Finally, after we'd seen all 20 poses, he asked me which ones I was most interested in.

“None,” I replied. “This isn't my child.”

— GCFL.NET

The absolute worst-spelled word in the English language is “queue.” Q was killing it on his own and someone was just like, “Hey, what if he had four useless teammates?”

—[@RANDYPAIN](#)

Send us your original jokes! You could earn \$50 and be featured in the magazine. See page 9 or rd.ca/joke for details.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY TAMIKA WHITE; COURTESY DANIELLE LARKIN; COURTESY HOLLY PUTNAM; COURTESY KAROLINE SMISKOVA; RUTHBLACK/GETTY IMAGES; ISTETIANA/GETTY IMAGES

FACT CHECK

The Truth About Pet Adoption

BY Anna-Kaisa Walker

ILLUSTRATION BY CLAYTON HANMER



1 Adoption is a long-term commitment. Thanks to better health care and diets, the life-span of dogs has doubled in the past four decades to an average of 12 years, while domestic cats now live to about 15 years, compared to nine in 1995.

2 It's not cheap, either. Including high quality food, routine vet visits and pet insurance, it costs a national average of \$42,000 to own a dog for 12 years, and \$35,000 for a cat that lives to 15.

3 When you adopt from a shelter or rescue group, you're not only gaining a beloved friend, you may be saving a life—some shelters have seen increases this year of between 20 and 60 per cent in fostering and adoptions.

4 Adopting from a shelter is often more cost-effective than a “free” kitten or puppy. “Our fees include spay or neuter surgery,

vaccines, deworming, microchipping and six weeks of pet insurance,” says Jennifer Finnegan, support services manager at the Calgary Humane Society.

5 Microchipping is a worthy investment, in case your pet ever gets lost. A tiny chip the size of a grain of rice is implanted under the skin. Shelters and vet clinics scan the chip and access your contact information through the manufacturer’s registry.

6 Pets and allergies can mix, under the right circumstances. “The benefit of having a pet can outweigh the risk of mild symptoms,” says Kitchener, Ont., allergist Dr. Harold Kim. “Allergy shots do work in about 70 per cent of patients, but they are a large time commitment, and there is a risk of reaction.”

7 Don’t take it too personally if a shelter turns you down. “We’ll

take into account an animal’s known history,” says Finnegan. “If they were fearful or aggressive with kids, we’d place them in an adult-only home.”

8 Veterinarians recommend puppy socialization classes starting as early as seven weeks of age—even before vaccinations are complete. The first three months are the crucial window for teaching dogs to accept new people, animals and places.

9 A senior pet—over age seven—can take twice as long to get adopted as a pup or kitten, but might just be the right companion if you enjoy life in the slow lane. “Their personalities are already developed, and they just want to relax with you,” says Finnegan.

10 A large dog may not need as much space as you think—breeds like greyhounds, mastiffs and Great

Danes can be happy in a small apartment as long as they get regular outdoor walks.

11 To help an anxious pet integrate into your family, place them in a small room and keep their first few days at home calm and low key. “Give the animal space to make the choice whether to come to you or not,” Finnegan says.

12 One is the loneliest number, especially for some pets—kittens do best in pairs, while other small critters like guinea pigs, rabbits, rats and mice can get depressed without a buddy.

13 Feelings of regret after adopting a pet—even one that seems perfect—are common. “It’s called adopter’s anxiety and it’s completely normal,” says Finnegan. “It can take up to a few weeks to a few months for everyone to adjust.” 

POINTS TO PONDER



If I didn't have a whole team of therapists throughout my life, I don't think I'd still be here.

–Alanis Morissette

WE'VE BEEN CRYING FOR YEARS, WE'VE BEEN PROTESTING FOR YEARS, WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING FOR YEARS AND OUR VOICES ARE GOING UNHEARD.

–**Quentrel Provo**, WHO FOUNDED STOP THE VIOLENCE, SPREAD THE LOVE, FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF HIS COUSIN

On Friday nights my sister and I would call into our local rez station and request songs for our friends or cousins. It felt like this amazing connector for our community.

–Falen Johnson, NEW HOST OF CBC'S INDIGENOUS PROGRAM UNRESERVED



THERE IS A SMALL MINORITY OF PEOPLE WHO ARE AGAINST MASKS. SOME OF THESE PEOPLE ALSO THINK ELVIS IS ALIVE.

–Quebec premier François Legault



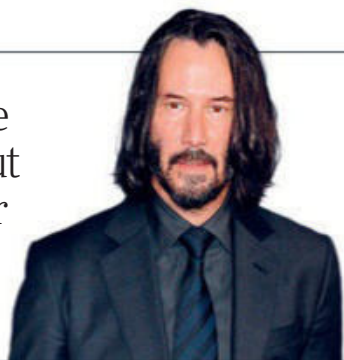
Being on the front line during this offseason has given me a different perspective on this pandemic and the stress it puts on our health-care system. I cannot allow myself to potentially transmit the virus by playing the sport that I love.

–**Super Bowl champion Laurent Duvernay-Tardif**, ON HIS DECISION TO KEEP WORKING AT A LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY INSTEAD OF PLAYING FOOTBALL THIS SEASON

(MORISSETTE) SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/DFREE; (JOHNSON) CBC; (DUVERNAY-TARDIF) LAURENT DUVERNAY-TARDIF/TWITTER

It's a lot harder for me to execute some of the moves the way I would have 20 years ago. But I would never let a stuntman do the work for me. I have to do it myself, even if it's painful.

—Keanu Reeves, ON AGING



**I DIDN'T DRINK,
DIDN'T SMOKE,
DIDN'T DO DRUGS.
THERE WERE NO
BIG NEGATIVES
ASSOCIATED WITH
ME. I NEEDED
A VICE—SO I
STARTED CURSING.**

—Alex Trebek

**IF I COULD CHANGE
SOMETHING ABOUT
MYSELF, I WOULD BE
ABLE TO SING ON KEY—
THAT WOULD MAKE
A DIFFERENCE IN
THE SHOWER.**

—Poet Dennis Lee

When I was cut from the women's Olympic hockey team in 1998, I thought it was because of racism, but how could I prove that? I live with it now, but I'll always be devastated by it.

—Angela James, NWHL BEATRICE AEROS
FORWARD FROM 1992-2000

I wish that the certain politicians had recused themselves, but there's no one we blame.

—Craig Kielburger, DISCUSSING
THE CLOSURE OF WE CHARITY IN CANADA

(REEVES) SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/FEATUREFLASH PHOTO AGENCY;
(TREBEK) SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/MICHAEL MATTES





Beware Winter Rays

Melanoma is a risk—even in the snowy months

BY Vanessa Milne

ILLUSTRATION BY JARRED BRIGGS

THE PREVALENCE OF melanoma has been rapidly rising around the world for nearly a century. In the 1930s, the chance of an American getting melanoma was one in 1,500. Today it's one in 74. In the U.K., melanoma rates have tripled since the 1990s alone.

While some of the increase may be due to better detection, researchers also believe it's because we're spending more time outdoors in the sun, vacationing to warmer climates during the winter and using tanning beds.

That rise is concerning, since melanoma is the most dangerous kind of skin cancer. Non-melanoma types, like basal cell carcinoma, rarely spread to other parts of the body and are often resolved by localized surgery. Melanoma, on the other hand, is far more likely to spread and be deadly. In the U.S., it makes up only one per cent of diagnosed skin cancers but causes the most deaths of them all.

There are a few main risk factors for melanomas, including how much cumulative sun exposure a person

has had in his or her life—and how many sunburns. It's thought to develop when the sun's carcinogenic UV rays damage the cells that make the pigment in your skin. That's why people who have fair skin are at a higher risk of getting it, along with anyone with a family history of skin cancer.

Most of us know to cover up and apply sunscreen on hot, sunny days, but when fall arrives, we tend to drop those habits. Experts warn that's a mistake. Though there's less need for sun protection after summer ends, exposure to UV rays still adds up.

What precautions you should take to defend against melanoma during the cooler months depends on where you are in the world. That's because the further away you are from the equator, the more UV rays weaken in the winter. "In southern England or Canada, the daily dose of UVA on a clear summer day is 6.5 times higher than on a clear winter day," says Professor Brian Diffey of the British Association of Dermatologists. "People in those countries typically receive only about five per cent of their annual UV exposure in the winter months."

But no matter where you are, even during colder, lower risk months, it's a mistake to put your sun-protection habits on ice. "It's important to wear sunscreen when there is a lot of glare from the snow," says Victoria Mar, director of the Victorian Melanoma Service at Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, Australia.

If you're tobogganing, skiing or skating, the ice and snow reflect up to 80 per cent of the sun's rays back at you, increasing your sun risk to summertime levels. And if you're outside during the day for an hour or more doing any activity, you should take precautions: wear a hat and put on sunscreen. "To make it simpler to remember, make sunscreen part of your morning routine before going out," advises Mar.

THE AVERAGE AGE OF A PERSON DIAGNOSED WITH MELANOMA IS

63

Finally, you should monitor your moles. "Early detection of melanoma is vital for successful treatment," says Diffey. If it's caught before it spreads to other parts of the body, the five-year survival rate is 99 per cent. If it's caught late, that can drop to 25 per cent. Warning signs are a mole that's changing size, shape or colour, or one that's asymmetrical—sometimes referred to as "ugly duckling" moles.

If you have concerns, talk to your doctor. And in the meantime, practise healthy sun habits—even when it's cold outside.



NEWS FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**

BY Samantha Rideout



HOW SUGAR FUELS THE HOLIDAY BLUES

This festive time of year is notoriously stressful and can even exacerbate depression. One thing you can do about that is limit sweets—sugar lifts your mood momentarily, but it'll leave you feeling worse in the long term. According to a review from the University of Kansas, that might be because excessive sugar consumption promotes inflammation and messes with the balance of the microorganisms in your gut, which are some of the physiological factors that have been linked to depression. Completely eliminating foods with added sugar isn't a realistic goal, but aim to keep it to less than 25 grams per day.

Cannabis Could Harm the Heart

Now that cannabis is more available than ever, claims abound about its medical effects—good and bad. The truth is, because it was classified as an illicit substance for years, medical scientists don't yet know a whole lot about it. When it comes to your cardiovascular system, the two main active ingredients seem to have opposite effects: CBD lowers blood pressure while THC raises it. But regardless of how much or little THC there is, inhaling marijuana smoke increases carbon monoxide in the blood, according to a recent statement from the American Heart Association. Regular exposure to the substance has been linked to strokes, and more research may reveal additional risks. For now, the AHA doesn't recommend taking cannabis by smoking or vaping it.

Don't Fall for Shoddy Hand Sanitizer

If you've been shopping for hand sanitizers lately, you've likely noticed your options have multiplied. New manufacturers entered the market in response to COVID-19, but not all of them are safe to use. For instance, some contain dangerous substances such as methanol. Government regulators, including Health Canada, have issued alerts about brands to avoid. You should also watch out for products with less than 60 per cent alcohol, which won't kill many germs. The best germ-killing method remains washing your hands with soap and water; hand sanitizer is merely a substitute for when that's not an option, like when you're on the go.



Exercise Already Saving Millions of Lives

We all know that sloth is one of the deadly sins. And indeed, insufficient exercise contributes to around 3.2 million deaths worldwide. On the flip side, though, physical activity prevents an even bigger number of deaths, including 3.9 million that would be considered "premature" (before age 75). Keep that in mind if you prefer positive motivation over the fear of negative consequences. The British, Australian and French researchers who made this calculation argue that we should celebrate what exercise is already accomplishing, as a way to encourage even more people to get moving.

Seniors: Watch Out for These Prescriptions

McGill University researchers recently found that two-thirds of hospitalized Quebec seniors are prescribed potentially inappropriate medications (PIMs) when they're discharged. These are drugs that are likely to cause more harm than good for people over 65, who run a higher risk of falls and other problematic side effects. They include proton pump inhibitors (unless you have stomach bleeding or a peptic ulcer) and benzodiazepines (which could be worth the risks for treating epilepsy or severe anxiety but not insomnia). Ask your doctor to consult the complete list of these medications, which can be found online through the American Geriatrics Society, before filling a prescription.




A Hysterectomy Isn't the Only Solution for Fibroids

They're not normally life-threatening, but uterine fibroids, which typically arise between the ages of 30 and 50, are a source of recurring pain for roughly one in six women. These non-cancerous tumours in the womb can also cause bloating, painful sex, a constant feeling of needing to pee and difficult, heavy periods. For years, hysterectomy (surgically removing the uterus) has been the one-size-fits-all treatment. But with many women choosing to conceive after 30, there's a need for treatments that alleviate the symptoms while preserving the ability to start a family. People who don't plan to carry a child also may not feel that the condition warrants removing their uterus.

British scientists have been comparing two newer womb-sparing alternatives: myomectomy (cutting out the fibroids) and uterine artery embolization (blocking the blood flow to the fibroids). Both treatments proved effective at providing relief, and women were able to give birth afterwards. Compared to the embolization patients, the myomectomy patients had slightly better health-related quality of life at the two-year mark, although they also had a longer initial hospital stay. Your doctor can help you explore the pros and cons of each option in detail.



Another Helping Won't Hurt You

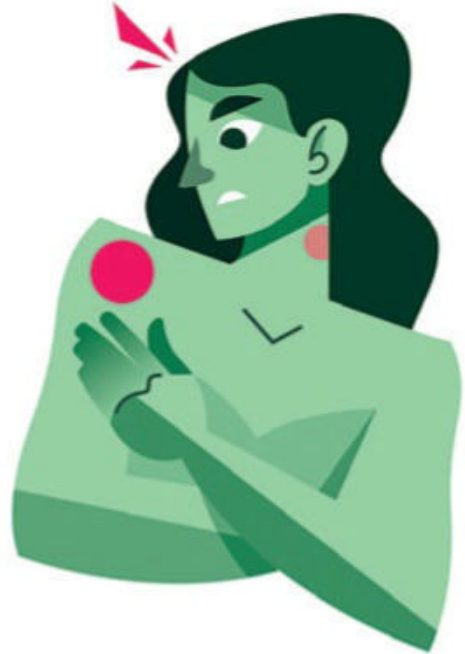
Many of us overeat during the holidays—and immediately dread the impact on our health. But it turns out we may be worrying for nothing. For a study that sounds more fun than most, healthy young men ate as much pizza as they possibly could. On average, they stuffed in about 3,000 calories—far more than most adults need to consume in an entire day. Yet, their blood sugar didn't climb more than it would after a normal meal, and fat levels in the bloodstream were only slightly higher than usual. Frequently eating too much can lead to obesity, diabetes and a host of other health issues, but an occasional overindulgence isn't enough to make people suffer metabolic consequences. 

HEALTH

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?

BY Lisa Bendall

ILLUSTRATION BY VICTOR WONG



THE PATIENT: Vera*, a 56-year-old fitness instructor

THE SYMPTOMS: rash, tiredness and heart palpitations

THE DOCTOR: Dr. Adrian Baranchuk, a cardiologist at the Kingston Health Sciences Centre, Ont.

VERA IS A high-energy fitness instructor in her mid-50s who looks years younger. She enjoys long-distance runs on trails around her hometown of Kingston, Ont. In the summer of 2018, while jogging through a bushy area, she felt a pinch on the

front of her right shoulder. Ticks are a common nuisance in her area, so when she got home she inspected her skin carefully—but there was no sign of the insect.

Over the next few days, Vera felt achy, as though she had a mild flu. She also noticed a spreading red patch around the right side of her neck and shoulder. She drove to the Kingston Health Sciences Centre to get checked out, mentioning the bug bite sensation she'd felt a week earlier. But the skin redness didn't resemble the typical bull's eye rash associated with ticks. The emergency physician thought it was more likely that she had cellulitis, a common

*IDENTIFYING DETAILS HAVE BEEN CHANGED.

skin infection that can be caused by bites or stings from a wide range of insects. Reassured, Vera returned home with some antibiotics.

The redness gradually faded, but Vera didn't feel better. She was light-headed, and began experiencing heart palpitations. At first she toughed it out, even though she was getting too tired to go on her runs. But then she became exhausted just folding laundry. Fifteen days after her first hospital visit, Vera returned to the ER.

An ECG revealed an unexplained, slight heart block. This delay in the heart's electrical signals, which can develop with aging and coronary artery disease, often grows worse over time. Hospital cardiologist Dr. Adrian Baranchuk was called. "Vera impressed me as a person who, before all this, was perfectly fit and healthy," he says. "This came out of nowhere."

Heart block can be caused by other conditions that trigger inflammation, such as sarcoidosis, an autoimmune disease. But if Vera was right about the bug bite, there was a possibility this was connected to her symptoms. Ticks spread the bacteria that develop into Lyme disease; in the early stages, it often causes flu-like symptoms. Left untreated, it can lead to more severe problems like joint pain and weak muscles, even liver inflammation.

In fewer than 10 per cent of Lyme infections, mainly in young men, the bacteria invade the heart, a condition

called Lyme carditis. Baranchuk had treated roughly a dozen cases, all male. And the photo Vera shared of her skin rash wasn't convincing. "This was by no means the classic bull's eye rash," says Baranchuk. The ring-within-a-ring happens because there are two skin reactions: one to the tick's saliva, and one to the spreading Lyme bacteria. Although doctors are trained to look for this pattern, Baranchuk was aware of studies suggesting that at least a quarter of Lyme rashes might vary from this description. He couldn't rule it out.

AT FIRST, VERA TOUGHED IT OUT, BUT THEN SHE BECAME TOO TIRED EVEN TO FOLD HER LAUNDRY.



Untreated heart blocks can deteriorate quickly and lead to cardiac arrest. If Vera did have Lyme carditis, prompt intravenous antibiotics might reverse it. But if it was too late, or if she had some other condition, what she'd need is a pacemaker. This was something Baranchuk hoped to avoid. "A pacemaker is very useful when heart electricity has failed, but then you live the rest of your life as a cardiac patient with a piece of hardware in your body," he says.

Testing for the Lyme bacteria would take time they didn't have. But

Baranchuk had recently co-authored a scoring tool, the Suspicious Index in Lyme Carditis, to help physicians avoid unnecessary pacemakers. Vera had Lyme-like symptoms and had been exposed to an area known to be populated with ticks, but she didn't have the bull's eye rash, wasn't male or under 50, and hadn't seen a tick. That made her low risk for Lyme carditis—except for one other factor. “She was a super articulate individual who was telling me, ‘I felt something like a tick bite, and then had a rash where I'd felt it.’ I gave utmost importance to that.”


Baranchuk decided Vera warranted admission, and she was started on antibiotics while her heart was monitored—postponing a pacemaker.

Even if the Lyme carditis diagnosis was correct, however, it could take up to a week to notice effects, if any, from the antibiotics. In the meantime, Vera's heart block became steadily worse each day. Baranchuk ordered ECGs every few hours. “This patient was on my radar all the time. I contacted the residents at night, asking how she was.” By the fifth day, she'd deteriorated further. “I believed I would need to put in a pacemaker, despite everything,”

Baranchuk recalls. He continued to be astounded at his patient's physical stamina. “If it were me, I'd be lying in bed convinced I'm going to die any second,” he says. “But she's used to endurance and heavy sports. With 30 beats per minute, she was still walking the corridor!”

Finally, on day six, Vera's heart began to show signs of improvement. It was a thrilling moment for both doctor and patient; they'd successfully avoided surgery. Shortly after, the Lyme test came back positive.

In a characteristic show of strength, Vera was now raring to go home. She took a treadmill test as soon as her heart had recovered enough, and passed it. Twelve days after her hospital admission, Vera went home with oral antibiotics. A follow-up six weeks later showed no sign anything had gone wrong.

“We were able to exchange a lifetime as a cardiac patient with three weeks of antibiotics,” says Baranchuk. He's glad he believed Vera, despite so many atypical factors. “It could have been a catastrophe,” he says. “As doctors, we have to remember we're practising in an endemic Lyme region. If I hear ‘tick,’ I open my eyes and start looking.” 



Create Your Own Courage

Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me.

CHERYL STRAYED, *WILD*






COVER STORY



Home for the Holidays

In a year when so many of us are kept apart,
a tribute to the comfort and joy of gathering
with family and friends



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT CARTER



My Year as the Virgin

BY MEGAN MURPHY

MY MOTHER, MARY ANNE, and her friend Elizabeth had agreed to head up the annual children's Christmas pageant at our local Catholic church, St. Anne's in Peterborough, Ont. Their challenge was to transform 20 suburban youngsters from the year 1986 into shepherds, wise men and barn animals from the year 1.

"Why does she get to be Mary?" my older sister Kate whined.

"You had the role last year. Your sister gets to be the Virgin this year," Mom replied. There may have been some spiritual nepotism involved in the casting (Elizabeth's son, Tony, was playing Joseph), but I'd rather believe that our mothers recognized our raw talent.

Our costume budget was somewhat lacking so I wore my own white nightgown with a baby blue pillowcase bobby pinned to my head. Joseph wore a terry cloth robe and a brown bath towel on his head, held firmly in place with a curtain tieback.

There were no lines to memorize. Instead, as the lector read the story of Jesus's birth, Joseph and I knocked on the imaginary door of the inn and looked appropriately downtrodden when the innkeeper shook his head and pointed to a wooden manger downstage centre. Bleating about the

makeshift structure were a handful of children on their hands and knees with woollen sheep ears attached to headbands. Joseph and I calmly sat ourselves on a crisp pile of dry straw, among the livestock, to await the miraculous birth of our child.

I anxiously listened for my cue line, "The time came for her to have her child," and then, with nary a labour pain, I valiantly lifted Baby Jesus from his hiding place behind a straw bale and set him into the empty cradle beside me. Jesus, in this scene, was played by my own Jesmar Newborn Baby. He was a wrinkled, anatomically correct doll I'd begged for Santa to bring me the year before. His real name was Daniel Edward Paul, but on this day, he was honoured to play the part of the Messiah.

MY WRINKLED, ANATOMICALLY CORRECT DOLL PLAYED THE PART OF BABY JESUS.

The play was a success, and although not a usual occurrence during mass, the parishioners broke into thunderous applause—or at least that's how I remember it.

Back at home, my younger sister, Kerry, and I held a post-mortem, and

I imparted wisdom that would be helpful when the time came for her to play the Virgin Mother. Then we changed Daniel back into his fuzzy onesie.

“I didn’t know Jesus had an umbilical cord,” Kerry said.

“Obviously he does,” I responded. “He’s attached to God.”



A Sikh Christmas

BY NAVNEET ALANG

THE CLICHÉ ABOUT living as part of two cultures is that you find a space between them. But sometimes you do the opposite: just lean into one side or the other as circumstance fits.

Perhaps that’s why, after moving to London, U.K., from India, my parents decided to celebrate Christmas. “We thought it would be a way to be part of English culture,” says my dad, “and then it just stuck when we moved to Canada.”

Last year, it was our turn to host my parents’ friends and their families for dinner on Christmas Day. On most visits to my parents’ home, when I head downstairs in the morning, my mom is listening to shabad, Sikh religious music. But on Christmas morning, the house is filled with a rather English mix of choral music or carols, making our Indian kitchen sound more like the inside of a church.

“Oh, are they talking about Jesus again?” inquires my father when he arrives downstairs. As an agnostic, he

isn’t loyal to any particular religion. Nor am I, but something about the history and tradition of listening to carols while prepping Christmas dinner feels right.

At around six, our guests arrive. Sparkling wine, claret and whisky are generously poured into glasses. The house grows warm and cheeks turn flushed. Though we are all either from India or of Indian descent—and thus you might expect a tandoori turkey—my brother and I have decided Christmas is not a time for fusion.

“Should we add some chilies to the stuffing?” asks Dad. “Of course!” replies Mum, who can barely bring herself to eat something if it isn’t blisteringly hot. But my brother and I always veto them. When you’re an immigrant, it can be alienating that what happens inside your home rarely matches depictions on TV or in magazines. One reason I like Christmas is that when everyone else is gathering around a turkey, glass of wine in hand, so are we.

The morning after, when I awake with a fuzzy head, my mom is listening to her usual shabads. And I know what we’ll be eating for dinner: turkey curry.

Sacramental Soufflé

BY KATHERINE ASHENBURG

IT WAS CHRISTMAS EVE, 1973, in Vancouver. I had two daughters, one 22 months and the other five months. Preparing to celebrate, I told Sybil, the



older one, that we would put the baby to bed before dinner and she, Daddy and I would eat in the living room, with the Christmas tree lights ablaze. I can still see her sitting in her pajamas, proud as punch, at a little table in front of the fire.

We ate cheese soufflé from my most sophisticated recipe source—*Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Cookbook*—as well as tomatoes provençale and green beans. The menu was neither traditional nor particularly festive, and I have no memory of how I chose it. In fact, I'm impressed that I managed to make even a halfway-nice dinner with two small children. For Sybil, the highlight of the evening seemed to be that Hannah, the baby, was in bed, and she had her parents to herself.

The next Christmas Eve, I forgot all about the cheese soufflé. Then Sybil, almost three, announced, "Tonight Hannah will go to bed, and I will eat in front of the fire with you and Daddy." I knew that Hannah, at 17 months, was not going to permit that, but before I could speak, Sybil continued, "And we will eat cheese soufflé." I was stunned. How could someone not yet two when she ate the soufflé remember it for a year?

Of course, we obeyed her. We have been obeying her for 47 years. Every Christmas Eve, we eat cheese soufflé, tomatoes provençale and green beans in front of the fire, except when we run out of floor space and then we eat it at the table. Depending on who is hosting

for Christmas, we do this in Vancouver, Toronto or London, U.K.

And Hannah is always invited.

Me and My Chosen Family

BY NAJ S. (AS TOLD TO ZIYA JONES)

IN 2012, I CAME OUT as trans to my close friends. I was 21 years old, had moved to Montreal three years prior and was forging my own identity as an adult. At the same time, my relationship with my family was growing strained—our values and our beliefs about our Muslim faith didn't always align. In 2017, I cut ties with most of my relatives.

Around December I would often miss one of my favourite Ismaili Muslim traditions. Ismailism is a sect of Shia Islam—there are about 80,000 of us in Canada—and every year on December 13, my community would gather in a high school cafeteria close to our mosque to celebrate Salgirah Khushali, the Aga Khan's birthday. After prayers, we put on a big, flamboyant show. People performed Bollywood dances, comedy skits, even lip-synchs to Top 40 songs. In fact, the first time I ever saw someone in drag was when, on this holiday, a girl dressed as a boy for a rendition of TLC's "No Scrubs."

Two years ago, I realized I didn't have to give up this tradition and decided to celebrate with my chosen family—four friends and my girlfriend, all of whom



I met at university. They're not Ismaili, but on December 13, we make a playlist of Bollywood and Christmas songs that we blast while we decorate a tree at my apartment. Then my girlfriend and I pose for a photo shoot—one that includes our terrier mix, Katya, dressed in a Santa hat.

Now that I know I can be both trans and Muslim, I can't wait for COVID-19 to pass so that I can go back to mosque—this time worshipping on the men's side.

The All-Nighter

BY ROBERT LIWANAG

AS MY BROTHER and I removed the Christmas duck from the oven, my mom headed to my parents' bedroom to wake my dad up from a nap. It was 11:30 at night.

"What do your friends say when you tell them we do this?" I asked my older brother. He laughed and answered, "They think I'm joking." I was referring to Noche Buena.

Spanish for "good night," Noche Buena is the Filipino Christmas Eve feast that begins at midnight and lasts far into Christmas morning. Dating back to when the Philippines became a Spanish colony in the 16th century, Filipinos embraced Noche Buena as a way to celebrate—and eat—after returning home from "Simbang gabi," or "night mass." Although my family never attended Christmas Eve masses

in Canada, my parents kept the latter part of the tradition when they moved here 26 years ago.

Every Christmas Eve followed the same pattern: the four of us would spend the day rehashing classic, often embarrassing family memories—like my days as a benchwarmer in a youth basketball league—while watching a *Home Alone* marathon on TV. Unsurprisingly, after a while, it became hard to keep our eyes open.

FOR NOCHE BUENA, OUR FAMILY SITS DOWN FOR A FILIPINO CHRISTMAS DINNER AT MIDNIGHT.



In order to stay awake, we resorted to playing holiday music as loudly as possible. Nevertheless, my brother, mom and I would often catch one another falling asleep in the living room. My dad, meanwhile, would go for a quick snooze as soon as the duck was in the oven at nine o'clock. The rest of us were supposed to keep an eye on the bird.

Half of our feast, including my mom's embutido, a Filipino-style meatloaf, and fruit salad, had already been made in the afternoon. Other dishes, like the peas, carrots and mashed potatoes my brother and I were responsible for, were whipped up closer to midnight.

We spent the final half-hour before Noche Buena popping in and out of the kitchen, hungry and sleepy, asking one another, “Is it midnight yet?” as if we didn’t know the answer.

But the wait was always worth it.

The roast duck, with its crispy skin and rich, succulent meat, was a hit every time. And while most Canadians were asleep, we were up until four in the morning eating, laughing and looking forward to the new year.

Girls’ Club

BY EMILY LANDAU



SOME FOLKS SPEND decades looking for their people, their best friends, the crew that really gets them. I was lucky enough to find mine in Grade 7 at Glenview Senior Public School in north Toronto—eight tween girls turned one brace-faced hive mind.

As we progressed to high school, a couple of girls dropped out and a couple of new ones wormed their way in. By the end of Grade 12, the group had more or less coalesced into its final form, one that’s remained remarkably intact for the past 20-odd years.

Among our many traditions is an annual Christmukkah exchange. This event first took place when we were 12 and newly empowered to shop without our parents at Yorkdale Mall. We set it up on the long, sticky cafeteria tables at our school, choosing names

out of a Tupperware container and swapping modest gifts we’d bought with our babysitting money. In subsequent years we’d make a night of it, watching movies and ordering pizza in parents’ living rooms, eventually segueing into our own shabby student apartments, then into slightly less shabby adult apartments and finally into our first homes.

At the beginning, we gave each other butterfly hair clips and Spice Girls Chupa Chups that we’d purchased at Ardene. Those gave way to gaudy mall jewellery and satsuma lotion gift sets from The Body Shop in our teens, cheerful housewares as we began nesting in our 20s and baby clothes once we started having kids in our 30s.

Once, I received a scented candle in an antique teacup from my friend’s partner, Steve—only to receive a near-identical teacup candle the following year from Sara, who’d missed the previous exchange (apparently, I give off a Victorian grandma vibe). But my favourite gift by far was the one I received two years ago. That time, we’d gathered at Lauren’s house, and Abra—whom I’ve known since birth—commissioned a custom cross-stitch kit that depicted all the members of the group.

Holidays with family can be cozy, but our exchange offered something else: a chance for my friends and me to create our own traditions and play at being grown-ups. We got to plan and fuss and cook for ourselves, setting



up the kinds of ritualized joy that have kept us bonded. And now, so many years later, it's also a time when we get to revert to the goofy, giddy girls we once were.

The Gift of Gratitude

BY SUZANNE WESTOVER
FROM *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

NINE YEARS AGO, on Christmas Eve, I was sitting in a hard-backed chair in the neonatal intensive care unit of the Queensway Carleton in Ottawa, waiting for an ambulance to take my baby away to another hospital.

I kept reminding myself to be grateful.

After two years of infertility, a failed round of IVF, a successful frozen embryo transfer, a bleed at 30 weeks, and an urgent scheduled C-section, I'd finally given birth to a tiny, perfect baby girl the night before.

But after having held her only briefly after birth, she was whisked away to an incubator. The surgeon told us how lucky we were. It turns out that a faulty connection between the umbilical cord and placenta meant our baby wasn't getting the nutrients she needed. And, she added, 50 per cent of undiagnosed cases with this condition do not have happy endings.

As the ambulance team prepped the incubator for the trip, I gazed at my newborn, who looked like a doll inside her glass bubble, the smallest diaper

dwarfing her four-pound frame. Logically, I knew that this was our baby, but I didn't feel remotely like her mother.

Mothers hold their babies, and I was terrified to touch mine. Mothers feed their babies, and I'd seen no sign of my milk. Mothers love their babies from their first mewling cry, but I didn't feel much of anything, other than bone tired.

MY WISH FOR A BABY HAD BEEN GRANTED, BUT ALL I WANTED WAS TO BE ALONE AND CRY.



"Your Christmas miracle," the nurses said. I nodded enthusiastically, feeling guilty for feigning a gratitude I didn't have the strength to muster. For years, I wanted nothing more than to have a baby, to be a mother. My wish was granted, at the holidays no less, but all I wanted to do was be alone and cry.

LOOKING BACK, I wish I could tell my forlorn self a few things to assuage her fears. I would say, "Don't be so hard on yourself. Your hormones are raging. You're scared. You're in pain. You've been through the wringer and spewed out the other side. Give yourself a break and the gratitude will come."

I'd let her know that even scrappy four-pound babies are more resilient

than they look. I'd promise her that her love for her new baby will unfurl over days and weeks, and grow fierce and indomitable.

Lastly, I would tell her, "Whatever you do, do not eat the hospital's chicken pot pie! You've just had abdominal surgery. Have soup."

It was too soon after surgery for me to go in the ambulance with her, so I watched mutely as two paramedics, a neonatal nurse and a respiratory specialist struggled to warm up the travel incubator. I only let myself cry when the kind paramedic turned to me and said, "Don't worry, Mom. We'll take perfect care of your baby." Then they were gone.


After my ill-fated supper, destined to stop me up for days, a kind night nurse sensed my distress and gave me a Christmas gift I'll never forget: "Take an Ativan, and get some rest."

Hallelujah.

Christmas morning roared in with a snowstorm. I was discharged and then spent that week at the children's hospital. There, I marvelled at the kindnesses extended to us. Our daughter had her photo taken with Santa, alongside her very first stuffed bear, a gift from the hospital. She was the recipient of a beautiful quilt, handmade by a good Samaritan. The accompanying card read, "Cherish this time. Your baby will grow up so fast. Love, Barbara."

Barbara, wherever she is, was right.

This Christmas Eve, our daughter turns nine. She's healthy and funny and irascible. She is the light and joy in our lives. Every December, as I wrap presents and gaze at the tree, I think back to the year she was born.

And I don't have to remind myself to be grateful. 

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Hot Takes

Love is a fire. But whether it is going to warm your hearth or burn down your house, you can never tell.

JOAN CRAWFORD

Take a nap in a fireplace and you'll sleep like a log.

ELLEN DEGENERES

Keep a little fire burning; however small, however hidden.

CORMAC MCCARTHY, *THE ROAD*

Life is a flame that is always burning itself out, but it catches fire again every time a child is born.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



"When I received my diagnosis, I felt relief," says Deschamps.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

My difficulties fitting in, my problems at work
and my divorce all made sense when, at 46,
I discovered I was autistic.

BY Wanda Deschamps FROM *BROADVIEW*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL EHRENWORTH

I'm 10 years old, away at my first sleepover camp. The rest of the girls in my cabin are trying to put together a skit for the camp's variety show, and I can see that it isn't going to come together the way they imagine. I have a sixth sense about these things, like I'm on the outside looking in when I'm supposed to be part of something. I want to speak up and tell them how to fix it, but I've learned that being a know-it-all does not make me popular.

There was always something about me that most people considered "different." As a kid, I didn't enjoy sitcoms or skip rope like other girls my age. I wasn't comfortable hugging friends, but I did love listening to discussions about politics. I've always been talkative and inquisitive, which wore out the patience of my friends and sometimes even the adults around me. My Grade 4 report summarized my social deficiencies with "needs improvement." I stuck out, but I gradually learned to be less conspicuous.

It wasn't until I turned 46 that I learned my uniqueness has a name: autism.

That was over three years ago. My diagnosis was like discovering a piece of my brain, picking it up, putting it in place and feeling whole for the first time. This was also like receiving the key to unlock my life and live for the first time—according to my own values, principles, beliefs and choices instead of weighed down by the expectations


and assumptions of others. What I've found out since is that there are a significant number of others like me—individuals who weren't identified as having autism until midlife. And for reasons that are still coming to light, many of them are women.

ALTHOUGH AUTISM has a high profile today, it was only identified in 1943 by the American child psychiatrist Leo Kanner. He'd observed antisocial children who became obsessed with certain objects and reacted poorly to unexpected change. Kanner named this disorder infantile autism. A year later, Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger published a study about children in his clinic who exhibited similar characteristics. His findings were largely overlooked until 1981, when the term Asperger's syndrome came to be applied to higher-functioning individuals. Asperger compared them to "absent-minded professors" who might be socially awkward but intellectually precocious. The line between autism and Asperger's was erased in 2013 when the term autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was introduced, to account for the many degrees and kinds of autistic behaviours.

Today, approximately one in 66 Canadians is diagnosed on the autism spectrum, and those numbers are on the rise, possibly because of improved diagnostic methods and awareness of the condition. A neurodevelopmental

condition that affects brain development, autism can cause communication problems and a lack of awareness of social cues—for many who have it, social interactions must be learned as opposed to intuited.

GIRLS ARE GOING UNDIAGNOSED BECAUSE SCREENING TOOLS ARE BASED ON STUDIES WITH BOYS.



Being autistic means I can appear dispassionate, even though I am empathetic. I am highly loyal, honest, straightforward and direct. I'm driven by intellectual inquiry, and thus more interested in why something happened than how it happened. I am capable of stunning people by reciting credit card numbers from memory, and sometimes speak quickly and with a sense of conviction because I have moved along a conversation in my mind while the other person is still formulating his or her next thought. At work, I have been both highly praised for these attributes and harshly admonished. This wide range of reactions to the same behaviour is a reality for women with undiagnosed autism and one of the reasons why more extensive diagnosis and research into autism in women are necessary.

Autism is diagnosed four to five times more commonly in boys than in girls. Growing research suggests that autistic characteristics in girls and women may go unrecognized by health and education professionals because they present differently than in boys and men in clinical settings, as well as in daily life settings such as school and work. Why are girls and women in particular going unrecognized?

Yani Hamdani, a clinician-scientist at the Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, offers a few possible explanations. One is that autism has historically been perceived as a predominantly male condition, including how it has been represented in popular culture. From Raymond in *Rain Man* to Sheldon Cooper in *The Big Bang Theory*, characters with autistic traits in movies and TV shows have mainly been male. Autism researcher Judith Gould, former director of the Lorna Wing Centre for Autism in Kent, U.K., believes that female autism has been understudied from the outset, noting that Dr. Leo Kanner had only three girls in his group of 11 research participants.

Screening and diagnostic tools may not be as sensitive to autism in girls and women because they have been predominantly developed based on studies with boys. A girl's obsessive reading would not necessarily be seen as an indicator of autism, while a boy's preoccupation with lining up toy cars or trains

might very well serve as a marker. "Girls and women may learn strategies to hide, mask or camouflage their autistic ways of being, doing and socially interacting," Hamdani tells me, "and may be more adept at doing so than boys or men, suggesting that there may be different gender socialization processes at play."

CAMOUFLAGING MY AUTISM AT THE OFFICE LEFT ME FATIGUED, ANGRY AND RESENTFUL.

This reminds me of how I paid particular attention to the most popular girls in my classes at school, adopting their attitudes and ways of communicating as my own. Initially, I was not great at camouflaging; it can only be finessed with frequent practice. So I focused on other strategies to combat my differentness. I was involved in a wide range of activities, from dancing to figure skating to acting to chorus singing, and I kept a to-do list to ensure everything was managed. It was almost as if every minute of the day was planned and structured so that I could focus more on what I was doing and less on how I was doing and even less on how I felt I was doing. Eventually, I learned to feel a sense of belonging. And while social acceptance offered a reprieve

from feeling like I was living on the margins, it also delayed my diagnosis.

I WAS THE YOUNGEST of 10, with parents who were 40 and 51 when I was born (older fathers are more likely to have autistic children). When I was eight, my mother moved to Toronto to pursue a second master's degree while my father stayed home in Antigonish, N.S., and served as the primary parent. This helped instill in me the notion of equal opportunity for women, but it also created a void in my life.

My increasing isolation, stress, anxiety and confusion led me to struggle both academically and socially, leaving a trail of concerned teachers and friends. A call home from a junior high vice-principal worried about my emotional health finally made the situation impossible to ignore. I was floundering at school; my poor math and science marks meant I was failing Grade 9. Dad met with my teachers individually and successfully negotiated a pass. But I only felt self-loathing: I was stupid. No one suspected that the underlying issue was autism.

My grades improved, but throughout high school I still felt a sense of social isolation, and our stressful home situation only exacerbated it. In 1988, the fall after high school graduation, I had a son with my boyfriend, Steven. We knew we couldn't raise him and placed him for adoption, though we've had the good fortune of an open relationship with



Deschamps suspected she was autistic when her sons, Adrien (left) and Rene, received their diagnoses.

him since he was five. We then completed our undergraduate degrees—mine a bachelor of arts with a major in sociology and a minor in history, followed by a year of business college.

In 1994 I found work as a records assistant for a Maritime university's alumni and fundraising programs. Soon after, I married Steven. I was good at my job—it provided an avenue for me to apply my attentiveness to detail. But my overall confidence took a severe hit when only 17 months after the wedding, Steven announced he was leaving me. Our lack of compatibility had

not been obvious to me. I had convinced myself we belonged together because we were together rather than questioning if we were truly happy.

Two months later, I met Ryan. We married in 2000, and two sons followed: Adrien and Rene. Meanwhile, my career in fundraising continued to flourish. Always underlying my success was my undiagnosed autism. To combat my continued struggle to attach words to concepts, I listened attentively to people I considered articulate, then memorized their words, phrases and sentences, and recorded them for

future use. This presented as a commitment to self-improvement, while in reality it was one of my obsessions—my version of lining up toy cars.

New jobs took us to Regina in 2011, and for me it was nothing short of complete upheaval. As I pushed higher at work—as well as further into middle age—camouflaging my autism left me fatigued, angry and resentful.

Our family situation had its own stresses. Adrien read at age three, wrote at age four and had astounding recall, yet he struggled socially beginning in primary school. His teachers noticed immediately that he avoided making eye contact, often preferred to be alone and had interests in topics well beyond his age level. Finally, in 2012, when he was nine, he was diagnosed with autism. Then, the next year, Rene's Grade 1 teacher began to express concerns about his challenges in focusing, processing information and interacting with classmates. Regrettably, because of our stress levels and the fact that Adrien and Rene were very different from each other, autism didn't occur to us. Meanwhile, I was pursuing an MA in Canadian history, ultimately as a full-time student, and entered therapy to address my growing state of anxiety. This was my third time in counselling and the third time I would dig deeper, feel better—and miss the most important component of the picture. Autism never entered the conversation.

In 2015, what seemed like another great opportunity appeared: I was recruited for a new job in Waterloo, Ont. There, I began being complimented and recognized for my work like never before. Given my underlying self-loathing, I didn't know how to deal with it. As I approached my one-year work anniversary, all the symptoms of my undiagnosed condition manifested themselves in my work environment: sensory overload and being baffled by social cues and office politics.

FINALLY, EVERYTHING STARTED TO MAKE SENSE. FOR THE FIRST TIME, I FULLY ENJOYED LIFE.

At home, Rene's symptoms—verbal precociousness, challenges focusing and trouble with interactions at school—were becoming more prevalent. We began the assessment process in early 2017; at the same time, my emotional troubles hit a crisis point, and in May, I had a complete breakdown at work. The day after we received Rene's autism diagnosis, I asked my family physician to refer me for my own evaluation. "I think I have it, too," I explained. My assessment consisted of completing in-person exercises as well as the Adult Autism Spectrum Quotient,


a self-reporting survey comprising 50 statements, such as “I would rather go to a library than a party,” “I am fascinated by numbers” and “I find it difficult to work out people’s intentions.”

When, two months later, I received my official autism diagnosis, I felt relief. Finally, everything started to make sense. I couldn’t get over the positive effect of the diagnosis. For the first time, I fully enjoyed life.

I SOUGHT ACCOMMODATION at work but instead lost my job. Since then I’ve become an entrepreneur. My new firm is called Liberty Co. to signify that confronting the facts brings us freedom. The firm’s goal is to increase the participation level of the neurodiverse population in the workforce. I am also the catalyst behind a collective focused on building gender equity through supporting other women. And I am sharing my story and the stories of others, often under the banner of the Inclusion Revolution—a worldwide movement launched by the inclusivity leader Caroline Casey. Championing gender equity and neurodiversity provides an avenue for me to be an advocate for women with autism, including as a participant in research into autistic

women’s experiences in the workplace.

Hamdani highlights the urgency around early female diagnosis because the burden of late identification can be huge. The psychologist who conducted my assessment described my background as “a complicated picture” because of the number of environmental and social factors involved. Unfortunately, my case is similar to others. By the time some women with autism are diagnosed, their mental health has reached a crisis point, and they are experiencing depression and even suicidality.

Self-awareness is the greatest gift you can give yourself, and knowing my strengths as well as my limitations, both related and unrelated to my autism, has allowed me to build my self-esteem and connect with others. My husband is the main beneficiary of all this positive change—I’ve relaxed and I’m more focused on myself and us. Finally, I am a proud autism mom, modelling for my children how you can be unashamed, unafraid and undeterred as an individual with unique abilities. To honour my newfound freedom, I refer to myself as “Real Wanda.” I like her! 

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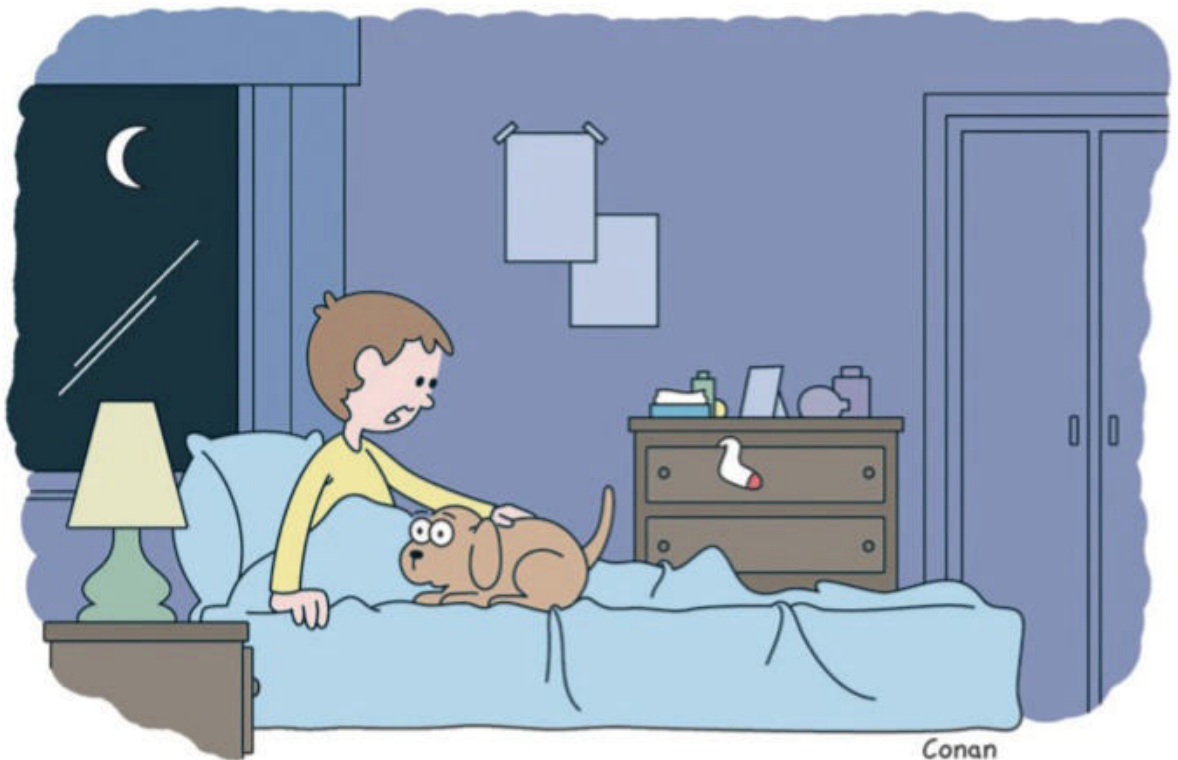


By Definition

Dictionary: Opinion presented as truth in alphabetical order.

JOHN RALSTON SAUL

AS KIDS SEE IT



Conan

“And with you on guard, I won’t have to worry about that monster under my bed.”

One of my nephews just brought me wine and said, “Here’s your Christmas juice.”

— KENDRA ALVEY, *author*

My five-year-old gently rubbed his hands on my back. Interpreting this as a sign of affection, I looked down to give him a smile. Then

I saw him grinning sheepishly as he used my shirt to wipe cookie crumbs off his hands.

— ASHLEY ASHFIELD,
Hampton, N.B.

Last summer, we took our family out for ice cream and my wife noticed that our three-year-old daughter

eventually lost interest in eating her cone.

“Are you done with that,” my wife asked, “or are you going to have a cow if I throw the rest out?”

“It’s okay,” our daughter replied. “The cow can have it!”

— VIC WEINGARTNER,
London, Ont.

My daughter just told me that she checks my location on my phone in order to determine when she's going to start on chores.

—[@TMIKAMOUSE](#)

Me: Go back to bed.

Six-year-old: It's time to get up.

Me: It's still dark outside.

Six-year-old: I'm faster than the sun.

—[@XPLODINGUNICORN](#)

During my son's confirmation, the Archbishop asked him if he wanted to go to heaven. My son replied, "Not yet."
— FILOMENA CIACCIA,
Delta, B.C.

My husband was reading a story to our three-year-old granddaughter, Kate, when her attention began to wane. He tried a new approach: reading a couple of sentences at a time and then pointing at pictures.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A giraffe," Kate answered.

I made the grievous mistake of laughing at my five-year-old's joke, so now I must hear that joke repeatedly until I die.

—[@THECATWHISPRER](#)

This went on for a while but eventually got old, too.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to a zebra.

Exasperated, Kate replied, "Geez, Granddad, don't you know anything?"

— WELLNER GAGNIER,
Delta, B.C.

I love that my six-year-old enjoys watching *Jeopardy*, even if she just announced she wants a Nano Knee replacement.

—[@ERDMANMOLLY](#)

Before the pandemic, our three-year-old grandson, Matthew, went to Disneyland with his parents. Before they left, Matthew's grandpa had asked, "Can I come along in your suitcase?"

When they got to their hotel and opened

their suitcases, Matthew looked into one of them. Confused, he called out, "Grandpa?"

— GAIL RODE,
West Kelowna, B.C.

Me: What the heck am I going to do with my kids today?

My daughters: We're going down to the creek to make a movie about pants that are actually people.

—[@WRITESLOUD](#)

At the stage of quarantine where my four-year-old nephew just complained that I "take him to Dairy Queen too much" and he "wants to try something else."

— SELENA ROSS, *journalist*

Send us your original jokes! You could earn \$50 and be featured in the magazine. See page 9 or rd.ca/joke for details.

How patients built
a simple phone app
that does a better job
than your pancreas

DIABETES D.I.Y.

—
BY Jonathan Garfinkel
FROM *THE WALRUS*

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVE MURRAY



I WAS 12 WHEN my immune system suddenly wiped out the insulin-producing beta cells in my pancreas. The first symptoms arrived when I was in Paris, on a family vacation. I started urinating like crazy, drinking litres of water each day to compensate. My memory of the Champs Élysées is not the beauty of the architecture but the number of public bathrooms I had to duck into along the way.

It was 1986, a different era in diabetes care, and the doctors I eventually saw told me I could still eat whatever I wanted, so long as I injected enough insulin to compensate. I was told that diabetes is manageable, that you can live a good life with it—both mostly correct though not always straightforward. Yet my diagnosis still changed how I saw myself. I contained a flaw, my body now a series of problems that constantly had to be solved.

Diabetes is a tricky disease, both to live with and to understand. It all comes down to the pancreas: in normal circumstances, the organ produces insulin, a hormone that controls blood glucose. Diabetics either can't produce enough insulin (which causes the more manageable Type 2 diabetes) or any at all (Type 1). Because of this, our bodies can't handle the sugar we consume. When blood-glucose levels drop too low or surge too high, it can lead to serious health complications.

Thankfully, new medical and technological advancements have allowed

Type 1 diabetics—myself included—the opportunity to live full, relatively normal lives. Insulin pumps let us forgo regular insulin injections: these small devices run a thin tube through a tiny hole in the abdomen to deliver a programmable stream of medication. Sensors, called continuous glucose monitors (CGMs), can be placed under a diabetic's skin and will send updated blood-glucose levels to users' smartphones every five minutes. Managing Type 1, however, is still a full-time job—one where, if you don't do it just right, you'll feel terrible. Or get sick. Or die.


The magic number for blood glucose is typically 5 millimoles per litre of blood, and consistently hitting it is a challenge, even with the most up-to-date tech. Diabetics still need to consider many factors to determine how much insulin they need to take: what they've eaten (and are going to eat), how much exercise they've done (and will do). Everything from stress to sex can affect blood sugar. The trick for managing it all is to think like a pancreas—a problem, since nobody really understands how a pancreas thinks.

But what if a computer could do all the hard work for you? Enter the artificial pancreas, the holy grail of diabetes management. Currently, a person might use both an insulin pump and a CGM to help manage their diabetes. Unfortunately, these pieces of tech don't talk to each other. The person with diabetes is still the one who's constantly making

decisions, monitoring and taking everything into account. But an artificial pancreas, also known as “the closed loop,” uses a piece of code to connect them, mimicking a real pancreas. Once connected, the loop would work in the background like any other organ.

It sounds like the stuff of science fiction. Officially, it will be at least another few years before people with diabetes can obtain an artificial pancreas. But, unofficially, well, that’s a different story.

ONCE CONNECTED, AN ARTIFICIAL PANCREAS WORKS IN THE BACKGROUND LIKE ANY OTHER ORGAN.



I FIRST MET Kate Farnsworth and Pina Barbieri in November 2017. The mothers are based in the Greater Toronto Area and both have teenage daughters—ages 13 and 15, respectively, at the time—with Type 1 diabetes. Farnsworth tells me about the fear she felt when her then eight-year-old daughter, Sydney, was diagnosed in 2012. She began looking everywhere for information—and hope.

In May 2014, she found a Facebook group called CGM in the Cloud, an international community of over 30,000 members with a do-it-yourself ethos. Through the group, Farnsworth

followed instructions on how to adapt Sydney’s CGM. Suddenly, she was able to pair Sydney’s CGM with a regular smart watch, giving her the ability to check Sydney’s blood-glucose numbers wherever she was. She was even able to set up an alarm to warn her whenever Sydney’s levels were trending too low.

Two years later, she heard about a group of amateur coders from the U.S., most of them Type 1 themselves, who were fiddling around with insulin pumps and CGMs, looking for ways to improve the devices. The amateur coders pooled their discoveries and created an iPhone program called Loop (an Android version, called OpenAPS, was also created around the same time). Loop is not available in the App Store or through any official channels—no doctors will prescribe it. Users need to find the instructions online and build the Loop app themselves. This bit of free code, paired with a hacked-together insulin pump and CGM, is an artificial pancreas. Farnsworth knew that Sydney needed to have it.

I feel uneasy about entrusting my life to homemade software thrown together by some DIY hackers. The technology sounds revolutionary—if it actually works—but it also feels like giving up control. After living with diabetes for 33 years, I have trouble believing that a few lines of code can understand my body better than I can.

“When Sydney started on Loop, my entire role as a parent changed. It went

from me micromanaging her diabetes to the system doing almost everything," Farnsworth says. She no longer needed to wake up in the night worrying about Sydney going low; Loop took care of it. "Every night she goes to bed, I sleep through the night, and she wakes up usually at the same number," she adds. "It's amazing."

"Yeah, she actually gets some sleep," says Barbieri.

Suddenly, an alarm goes off. It's Barbieri's smart watch. Her daughter Laura's blood sugar is 17.3, which is very high. Barbieri texts her: "You okay?"

I'M SKEPTICAL THAT
A FEW LINES OF CODE
WILL UNDERSTAND
MY BODY BETTER
THAN I CAN.



Laura: "Yeah, taking more insulin."
Barbieri: "Good."

This exchange between mother and daughter floors me. I've always felt that there's something intimate in a blood sugar level: shame if you're too high, pride in perfect 5s or 6s, anxiety if you go too low. It's like having a daily report card on how you're living your life. Managing the disease was my responsibility, and I'd tell myself that I needed the privacy. I've never shared my numbers with anyone other than my

doctor. As I listen to Farnsworth and Barbieri, I wonder if I've been thinking about diabetes all wrong.

I SPEND THE NEXT few months reading posts in the Looped Facebook group, which, at the time I joined in January 2018, had about 6,500 members worldwide. Approximately 1,000 of them are already "Looping." Others, like me, are simply curious. Farnsworth explains that since Loop has given her and Sydney so much, she feels compelled to give back to the community: she's the creator of the Looped Facebook group and is one of the two volunteers who run the page, spending hours each week answering questions and offering advice.

The more I learn about Loop, though, the more hesitant I feel. For one thing, Loop requires having an insulin pump that can be hacked and reprogrammed, and these are rare: when medical-device developer Medtronic realized there was a security flaw in its products, it changed its design. This change makes Looping with new pumps impossible, meaning would-be Loopers need to find old, out-of-warranty devices. They also need to order a RileyLink from the United States—a Bluetooth device that lets an iPhone communicate with a pump. After all of that, they need to build the Loop app themselves.

So I'm not quite sure what to say when Barbieri calls to tell me that she and Farnsworth would like to organize

a Loop-building session with me and a few others. Barbieri has an old, Loop-able pump I'm free to use. I can have her daughter's extra RileyLink so long as I replace it. The entire cost of this life-changing artificial pancreas? \$250. Amazed by the generosity of a virtual stranger, I thank her. But when she asks me to commit to a date, I'm evasive.

Days pass, and the dream of the closed loop clings to my imagination. I contact Health Canada's Graham Ladner, scientific evaluator of the Medical Devices Directorate, to ask about the elusive artificial pancreas and whether we'll ever see an approved version on the market. Ladner explains an insulin pump is usually a class III medical device, but once you "close the loop" by having the pump automatically communicate with a CGM, it becomes class IV, meaning more restrictions and more difficulty getting approval. Just like humans, machines can make mistakes, too.

If I've closed the loop and am using an artificial pancreas, my CGM could, for example, erroneously say I have a blood glucose level of 16.5. In truth, I may actually be at 7, but in a closed-loop system, the pump will automatically give me too much insulin. I'll end up with severe low blood sugar and could lose consciousness.

Even in normal use, insulin pumps can be dangerous. According to a November 2018 CBC investigation, more people have died because of

insulin pumps than any other medical device on the market, with Health Canada concluding they may have been a factor in 103 deaths and over 1,900 injuries from 2008 to 2018. Such potential risk only becomes magnified when you leave things to a computer algorithm. "The closing of the loop introduces new patient hazards," Ladner adds, "and we need to be convinced that it's safe."

After I hang up the phone, I head back to the Looped Facebook group. I'm not sure what I'm looking for. Confirmation? A perfect solution? I read a mother's comment about frustrations managing her child's diabetes. Fellow Loopers offer a chorus of support and advice. I choke up, break down and cry. Maybe it's the exhaustion of living with diabetes for three decades. But as I read the various Facebook comments, I'm amazed by the care people take in volunteering their time, feedback and insights. Which is why I decide to do it. Will the Loop be better than what I have? I don't know. But, for the first time, I won't have to do it alone.

IT'S A SATURDAY morning when we all meet to build me my very own Loop. Farnsworth hands me an old purple Medtronic 554 pump. Barbieri passes me a lighter-sized box: the RileyLink. Once connected, these two devices will work alongside my CGM and the Loop code to create my artificial pancreas. We gather at a table. Farnsworth leads


us through all the coding steps. A message appears on my laptop screen: "Please understand this project is highly experimental and not approved for therapy."

By the end of the afternoon, I've built my first app and transferred it onto my phone. We connect finicky wiring to tiny battery packs and flick on our RileyLink switches. When I tap the Loop icon, I see graphs highlighting my glucose trends, active insulin, insulin delivery time and carbohydrate intake. My CGM numbers appear on the top row. To the right, it shows how much insulin the algorithm is adjusting. To the left, a small circle glows green. It means I'm Looping. My artificial pancreas is alive.

In the days that follow, Barbieri and Farnsworth continue to guide our group. At first, I feel overwhelmed and am constantly worried I'm going to forget something. Sometimes the RileyLink craps out and the Bluetooth goes down, and I feel panic in the moments before it reconnects. There's no question that the system isn't perfect. But after my first night's sleep, I wake up to a perfect blood glucose of 5.0. And then it happens the next morning. And the next.

I'VE NOW BEEN on Loop for over two years. I wake every morning to near-perfect blood sugars. The Looped Facebook group has grown exponentially since then, surpassing 23,000 members. In April 2019, the Omnipod, another commercial pump, became Loop compatible. And, in a gesture that shocked many, Medtronic recently announced that it will work with the FDA and competitor Dexcom to let their insulin pumps and CGMs speak to one another via Bluetooth and an app called Tidepool—essentially Loop gone legit.

With so much potential change on the way, I ask Farnsworth what's going to happen when a government-approved artificial pancreas as good as Loop—or better—is finally available. I ask if it will bother her to lose this close community she's helped create. "Honestly," she says, "I would love to be put out of my volunteer job."

I'm not sure how I will feel when that day comes. After all, Loop has changed my relationship with my health and with myself—life is more than just a report card, diabetes more than a mere flaw. 

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Mama Bear



Arctic explorer James Raffan tells the story of a polar bear and her cubs—and their struggle to survive in a changing climate

FROM *ICE WALKER: A POLAR BEAR'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE FRAGILE ARCTIC*

ENVIRONMENT



Nanu, a nine-year-old female polar bear, lives on the Hudson Bay lowlands, south of Churchill, Man. Her den, which she dug out of a stream bank before the ground froze, is nearly two metres in diameter and half a metre higher than the narrow exit tunnel. Air heated by Nanu's body and breath forms a bubble of warmth that rises into the space. While the temperatures outside can be in the minus 20s in January, the well-insulated cave can be brought to just below freezing with nothing more than her presence.

Though she hasn't eaten for six months, she's able to nourish her cubs in utero and still keep her metabolism quiet enough to conserve energy for at least three more months of fasting to come. That's because, in addition to her own considerable insulation—five centimetres of thick, downy underfur combined with a full mantle of long, hollow guard hairs—every bear has a layer of fat just below the skin.

To save energy, Nanu is able to lower her body temperature slightly from its normal 37°C. In her state of suspended animation in the darkened confines of the den, she delivers two blind, deaf, toothless, downy-haired young who are less than one per cent of her size, with no body fat to speak of.

The cubs, Sivu and Kingu, are immersed in the fur of her belly, where the sound of their mother's heart is as present and familiar as it was when they were in utero. Mother's milk, with

32 per cent fat, keeps these tiny, helpless newcomers alive and powers their exponential growth.

By the time they are three weeks old, their fine hair is replaced by a dense undercoat and longer guard hairs. After 25 days, the soles of their little feet start developing hair as well, completing the insulation they need for moving around the den.

Before their eyes open early in the second month, they learn to navigate with other developing senses, often with Nanu's gentle guidance. They start to differentiate the textures, smells, sounds and rhythms in the den. When they are two months old, their ears open and they begin to hear more. By their third month, they are able to raise themselves up on their hind legs.

The cubs double in size monthly—going from two to four pounds in January, from four to nine in February. By March, when they start to explore the inside of the den, they are in the 24- to 26-pound range and increasingly aware of their surroundings.

The constant proximity of the three bears creates a family bond that will see them through to the separation that is at least two years off.

OUTSIDE, THE AIR is dry and supremely cold. The cubs may perceive the presence of a fox roasting small mammals, like lemmings, that eke out a living in the tundra grasslands under the snow. One day, the sound of a helicopter

dropping grid stakes for a mining claim in the area startles the cubs, and they cluster back into Nanu's bosom.

By March, the cubs are getting their lower incisors and canine teeth. In this third and final month in the den, the cubs' hearing is starting to become much more acute. They can now detect a fox walking over the den. And, as they pounce and roll together, they try out different voices and calls.

With all this activity, Nanu must rouse herself from her sleepy state to scrape the frost that builds up on the walls. From time to time, she pokes at the air vent.

After the equinox on March 21, when the sun is visible for 12 hours, the days lengthen quickly. Soon it will be time to get the three of them on their way to the bay, 70 kilometres away. There is nothing but uncertainty ahead for Nanu, as there has been for every emerging mother bear before her.

By March's end, Nanu is fully awake. The cubs, fearless little furballs with claws and teeth, are ready to enter the wider world.

Until recently, the speed of change—in hunting traditions, the seasons, the weather, the local conditions—was such that the bears could mostly adapt. With the dawn of the industrial revolution and the climate change that has accelerated in lockstep with technological progress, change

is now happening much more rapidly than any living plant or animal's ability to respond. Nanu and the cubs are living in circumstances that will challenge their very survival.

THE ADULT BEAR who punches through to the April sunshine has lost 100 pounds from her former ample self. Stiffly, Nanu drags herself out of the den, shakes vigorously and stands fully upright for the first time in five months. She turns to the den, chuffing for the cubs to follow. Working her way uphill for a few dozen metres, she stands on a gravelly ridge looking first one way and then another. Scanning the distance. Sniffing the air. She knows instinctively how vulnerable she and the cubs are.

That first trip out of the den lasts no more than half an hour. Over the next



week, Nanu and the cubs work their way up the ridge, stopping at a place where the wind has scoured the ground, exposing alpine grasses. She grazes on these to reduce her hunger and to reawaken her digestive system.

Forays in these early days build and tone the cubs' muscles for their journey to the ice, which is about to begin. But these walks are also about readying Nanu's own body for the long trek back to the bay.

NANU WALKED A SIMILAR ROUTE WITH HER OWN MOTHER ALMOST EIGHT YEARS AGO TO THE DAY.



Finally, Nanu decides it is time to move. In the 10 days since she opened the den, the scent of the sea has arrived on the wind, particularly from the east. Silhouetted against the strengthening sun, the three bears walk away, the cubs roaming between Nanu's feet, getting sidetracked with smells and other distractions, being called back.

The route they are taking is similar to the one that Nanu first walked with her mother almost eight years ago to the day. It isn't long before they are crossing a pattern of beach ridges, each one a little lower in elevation than the previous one.

The cubs play less now because when they are not walking or nursing, they are sleeping. And when they walk, they feel the sun as it moves from in front to beside and then behind them as the days progress. For Nanu, it is a familiar sensation, like melodies of a long-remembered tune.

Kingu will likely never come back this far inland. As a male, he will den during the harshest months of winter. Sivu, by contrast, will learn to come here by heart, by the look and feel of the place—the ground-hugging spruce on the beach ridges, the faint smell of diesel from the trains running up and down from Le Pas to Churchill, the pungent dens of foxes.

Suddenly Nanu stops with every muscle in her body flexed and ready. The cubs, too, tumble to a stop. Nanu sniffs and utters a high-pitched grunting sound that the cubs have never heard before—at least not at that intensity. Nanu stands and sniffs, first in one direction, then in another and another, finishing with a long stand facing downwind. In the distance, three grey wolves are making their way toward them.

Encouraging the cubs to keep close, she stands resolutely so that the wolves can see her before taking a few vigorous running steps in their direction. She then continues walking toward the wolves, cubs behind her. Undaunted, driven by a mother's combination of fear, caution and courage, Nanu chooses to pose a threat of her own.



Again, she stands, radiating the confidence of size. This time the wolves stop and then lope off in the other direction.

At this point in their lives, the cubs have no real capacity to run. Nanu will never leave them, except to fight on their behalf, so her ability to escape from a threat is compromised as well. The best she can do to protect the cubs is to encourage them to listen and stay close.

DAY SIX, in spitting grey snow, they crest a ridge, and the cubs, riding on their mother's back, sniff the air and sense that something is different. For the first time, Sivu and Kingu notice the odour of muddy ice on the foreshore flats of Hudson Bay. Mixed with the

familiar scents are old oil, which may have washed in from a summer boat at sea, and the acrid plastic flotsam increasingly brought here by the slow rotations of the Hudson Bay gyre.

At the beach, Nanu breaks into a short canter. Stopping suddenly, she flops onto her back and rolls for a long time as the cubs clamber all over her. She gets up and sniffs along a crack in the ice. She disappears momentarily down through the crack and reappears with a tawny snake of bull kelp that she drags up on the ice. The kelp is full of alginates and fibre that will fill her digestive system and ready it for the meal to come. The little ones tire of it quickly and butt their way in for milk instead.

They continue out onto the ice. Nanu stops and sniffs and stands much more often than she did while they were on the land. She and her cubs are entering a dangerous world of male adult bears.

The threat from these males is extreme. If they aren't attacking a trio like this for nutrition in a lean year, then they are after the cubs to kill them, in the hope that this might bring the female back into estrus. As hungry as Nanu is, she has to be ever vigilant.

She works every scent on the breeze, assessing the ice for signs of seal habitation. There are smells everywhere of seals, bears, foxes and the sights and sounds of returning birds.

The voice of a raven and the piercing squawks of a glaucous gull draw Nanu's attention to a place far along a pressure ridge. She finds the remains of a ringed seal baby. It is mostly just furry skin left behind, but she eats that and keeps moving along the crack. Suddenly she stops. She has located an agloo, a seal's breathing hole in the ice.

Nanu nudges Sivu and Kingu a few metres away and does her best to get them to lie still while she moves back to prepare for the kill.


She can hear that there is a young seal inside. With precision and care

that seems to belie the size and strength of her paws, she scrapes away some of the snow covering the thin layer of ice on the inside of the lair.

Kingu is going to sleep, but Sivu is soon back beside her mother. Nanu pushes Sivu to her side and then, in a sitting position, she stiffens. Sivu takes one look at this and settles down quietly as well.

Nanu can hear the quiet mewling of the baby and its movements inside the lair. But that is not the meal she is hoping for. Eventually, she feels the puff of condensed air come up through the air hole, followed by the hollow swoosh of water below and the slip of a wet mother seal crawling up onto the ice.

In one smooth movement, forelegs braced, Nanu rises up and crashes down through the top of the agloo, front feet followed by her head. Then, to Sivu's amazement, she recoils back above the surface of the ice with a seal four times the cub's size.

When it stops moving, Nanu rips through the grey-silver fur and into the rich blubber that she has been craving. In no time, the cubs are dabbling inside the carcass as well. Life on the ice has begun in earnest. 

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Not So Idle Thoughts

It may be those who do most, dream most.

STEPHEN LEACOCK

LAUGHTER
THE BEST MEDICINE

Ladies, if he gives you:

- 12 drummers
- 11 pipers
- 10 lords
- Nine ladies
- Eight maids
- Seven swans
- Six geese
- Five gold rings
- Four calling birds
- Three French hens
- Two turtle doves
- One partridge in a pear tree

He's not your true love. He's wanted in multiple states for kidnapping and unlawful possession of birds.

—[@_ELVISHPRESLEY_](#)

A highway patrolman pulled alongside a speeding car on the highway. Looking at the car, he was astounded to see that the elderly woman behind the wheel was knitting.

The trooper cranked down his window and yelled to the driver, "Pull over!"

"No!" the woman yelled back, "Cardigan!"

—[REDDIT.COM](#)

The dentist just asked me to open up and now I can't stop crying.

—[@MOMJEANSPLEASE](#)

Why would they call it a grapefruit? There already is a grape fruit. It's called a grape. Someone messed up here.

—[@PERFECTSWEETIES](#)

Too Talented

Dolly Parton writing "I Will Always Love You" and "Jolene" in the same day is mind-blowing. It would be like if Da Vinci finished the Mona Lisa, then turned around in the same day and wrote "Jolene."

—[@WENZLERPOWERS](#)

Send us your original jokes! You could earn \$50 and be featured in the magazine. See page 9 or [rd.ca/joke](#) for details.

THE BEST JOKE I EVER TOLD

By Coko Galore

After 30 years in Canada, I finally feel Canadian. I am now passive-aggressive.

Galore is a Toronto-based comedian and the artistic director of the Bad Dog Comedy Theatre. Follow her on Twitter at [@cokogalore](#).





— A P L A N N E R ' S —

Guide T O

Dying

Preparing for the end now can save your loved ones plenty of heartache—and money—later on. These practical tips will help get you started.

BY Emily Landau

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CORNELIA LI

Get Your House in Order

1 PREPARE A WILL

Death is one of those things many of us avoid thinking about until it's absolutely necessary—it's often too sad, too scary, too morbid. A 2018 Angus Reid survey showed that more than half of Canadian adults don't have a signed will or personal directives. When asked why, many respondents said they thought they were too young. But you can save your family extra heartache by planning and budgeting for your end-of-life decisions early. Ian MacDonald, an independent funeral planner in Halifax, believes the purpose of a funeral is to help the living. "You're helping them transition from life with someone they love to life without," he says.

2 FORM AN ADVANCED CARE PLAN

At the same time you're moving forward in life—saving up for your first house or your kids' education—you should be planning for the end of your life. Even in your 30s, it's smart to have an advanced care plan, which outlines what you'll tolerate in terms of medical



care and life support, what should happen to your body, and how you want to be celebrated. An advanced care plan eliminates the guesswork involved in end-of-life decisions and, once someone's gone, allows people to grieve instead of scrambling to make funeral decisions. "If you have life insurance," MacDonald says, "you should probably have end-of-life planning."

3 SAVE FOR YOUR FUNERAL

Like most milestone events, how much a funeral costs depends on how elaborate it is. Even a mid-range funeral can cost as much as a downpayment on a house—and many people don't want to surprise their loved ones with the bill. Prices vary, but Brett Watson, president of the Funeral Services Association of Canada, estimates the average funeral-home package—including embalming, a casket, flowers, music and catering—costs around \$10,000.

PRICE CHECK

It can be cheaper to shop online for urns.

This one, from casketoutlet.ca, costs \$175.



A burial plot and marker might cost another \$7,000, depending on how desirable the real estate is. Many life insurance policies include funeral insurance, while some people instead make their own arrangements with funeral homes, prepaying into a trust.

Whatever you decide, it's useful to do some research and go in with an idea of what you'd like—no matter

how uncomfortable it may seem. "This is an industry that's there for profit," says MacDonald, "and you want to get good value for your money."

Green Your Death

A growing number of Canadians are making their end-of-life plans more environmentally friendly. Direct cremation, for example, skips the embalming process, which often requires toxic chemicals. It costs an average of \$2,500 and can involve scattering the remains or burying them in a biodegradable urn. Alkaline hydrolysis, or flameless cremation, uses water, pressure and sometimes heat to dissolve the remains. Finally, there's direct-to-earth burial, which also dispenses with embalming and involves depositing the remains straight into the plot, either in a shroud or a biodegradable casket.



Hire a Death Doula

Chelsea Peddle is a death doula: one of dozens of professionals in Canada who provide emotional and practical guidance for people near death and for their families. She earned her credentials at Dawson College, in Vancouver, but was originally set on this path at age 15 when her father died of an aggressive brain tumour. The experience had

initially left Peddle with a crushing fear of illness and death. "I know what it's like to feel lost and to not know what benefits and resources are available," she says, "or even how to *be* with someone who's dying."

About half of Peddle's clients today are in palliative care. Many are undergoing treatments, such as chemotherapy, for terminal illnesses. Every one of them is simply trying to wrap their head around the process of dying. She acts as a sounding board, directs them to resources, and helps them cope with the big emotions that come with knowing you're going to die. "Sometimes there's a sense of unfairness," she says, "but a lot of the time there's also this amazing level of acceptance."

Facing death is often harder for the families. One of Peddle's clients, for example, was recently caring for her sick mom in the U.S., living away from her family in Victoria, B.C., and felt guilty and conflicted for wanting the whole thing to be over already. Peddle helped her process those tough feelings and release the shame she was holding. "She had no idea that it was an entirely normal way to



Personalize Your Memorial

Gregory Williams, a tattoo artist, carver, musician and member of the Haida nation based in Skidegate, B.C., has always been fascinated by tattoos. “For me,” he says, “tattooing is understanding our past, living for the present and dreaming of the future.”

Williams’ daughter, Kaiya, was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, an aggressive cancer that targets nerve cells, at age five. Kaiya was smart, spunky and stubborn. She loved art and music and her

home on Haida Gwaii in B.C. She went into remission once but died in 2013, when she was 10. “When she passed, I thought my heart was going to stop,” Williams says.

Like many people, he saw an opportunity to use the art he loves to cope with his grief. Williams got several tattoos in honour of Kaiya, mixing his daughter’s ashes into the ink. One forearm tattoo depicts a raven, which represents his family’s clan and Kaiya’s heritage. He also has a

tattoo of a spirit face on his throat—the placement represents her love of singing and music, and the subject represents her move from the physical to the spiritual realm.

“At times it’s difficult for me to do anything because I feel guilty about why I get to live,” Williams explains. Looking at the tattoos reminds him to live for his family. “They give me the strength that I need to not only move on, but to remember Kaiya for who she was as a person.”

feel,” Peddle says. “She was so relieved that it didn’t make her a horrible person and that she wasn’t alone.”

During the pandemic, Peddle has had to figure out new ways to do her job: she can’t sit by a client’s bedside or visit their homes. Instead, she’s learned to build a level of trust and communication over video sessions. At the same time, she’s noticed more people facing the inevitability of death, creating advanced care plans and

wills. “The veil on death has been pulled back,” she says. “The fact that death can visit anybody, regardless of their age, is more apparent now.”

PRICE CHECK

Most death doulas charge

\$30-\$80

per hour.

Don't Leave Loose Ends



THE ESTATE PLANNER **Willful.co**

Founder Kevin Oulds created Willful, his Toronto startup, in 2017 after his uncle died and left him to deal with a complicated estate. Using Oulds' web service, will creation is as fast, cheap and secure as online banking or grocery shopping: you answer specific questions about your assets, family status and life situations, and then the app generates a legally sound estate plan. The whole process takes about 20 minutes—and all but eliminates the need for stratospherically priced estate lawyers, who may charge between \$200 and \$500 per hour. *From \$99.*



THE DIGITAL LOCKBOX **Everplans.com**

Gone are the days when family members had to ransack boxes and bank accounts to sort out their loved ones' affairs. Instead, Everplans serves as a one-stop shop where meticulous planners can securely store all of their essential documents for their families to access after they die. Financial information, digital passwords, life insurance policies—they all go here and can be accessed by designated executors. *US\$75 per year.*



THE MILLENNIAL **MANUAL**

Joincake.com

The sleek and sunny end-of-life planning service designed by MIT brainiac Suelin Chen is largely targeted at 20- and 30-somethings seeking a head start on their end-of-life planning. Users fill out a profile, dating-site style, selecting how they want to deal with their medical care, legal documents and social media accounts. Cake is also stacked with breezy, approachable resources to educate users about matters like life insurance and power of attorney. *Free.*



THE MESSAGING **SERVICE**

SafeBeyond.com

This site gives users the chance to contact their loved ones from beyond the grave—no Ouija board required. With Safebeyond, clients can create personalized videos, voice messages and letters for their families and friends to be delivered once they're gone, either immediately after their death, on a specific date (say a wedding or birthday), or even a public goodbye to be released on social media. *From US\$4 per month.*



Pick the Right Time

Four years ago, the federal government passed Bill C-14, the landmark legislation that empowered Canadians to seek medical assistance in dying, or MAID. And last year, more than 5,600 people availed themselves of this right. But what does the legislation mean for patients and caregivers? Here's a look at the ins and outs of physician-assisted death.

STEP 1: THE CRITERIA

Not every patient is eligible for MAID. First, patients have to be at least 18 and determined by a physician to be mentally competent. Next, they must have a grievous or irremediable medical condition. "That means they have to be in an advanced state of decline that cannot be reversed, they have to be experiencing unbearable physical or mental suffering and their natural death has to be reasonably foreseeable," says Helen Long, the CEO of Dying With Dignity Canada.

STEP 2: THE ASSESSMENT

Anyone who wants a physician-assisted death is required to make a written request confirming they're mentally competent and not subject to undue influence.

Depending on the region, an official form may be required. The request also requires two witnesses who meet certain criteria—for example, they must not benefit financially from the MAID-requester's death. After the form is completed, you can see a doctor or, in some provinces, a nurse practitioner. You will also need to undergo two assessments with whoever you choose to make sure you meet the criteria.

STEP 3: THE LOCATION

MAID can take place wherever the patient is most comfortable. According to the federal government, 35.2 per cent of MAID patients died in their homes in 2019, while 36.3 per cent died in hospital, 20.6 per cent died in a palliative care facility and 6.9 per cent died in a residential care facility.

STEP 4: THE PROCEDURE

Before going ahead with MAID, you're typically required to wait at least 10 days to ensure it's what you want. Then, if you still decide to complete the procedure, you need to find a doctor who's willing to do it. The medications for MAID are administered intravenously and designed for a peaceful and painless death. Many physicians use a cocktail of midazolam, propofol and rocuronium: the first puts the patient to sleep, the second sends them into a deep coma and the third is a muscle blocker that stops the heart.

STEP 5: THE END

A scheduled death can allow people to say goodbye in the way they want. According to Helen Long, a MAID is often like a celebration of life—except the guest of honour gets to be there. “A friend of my dad had a classic car, and he and his son went for one last drive around the neighbourhood,” she says. “Once a person makes a decision, it's often a very freeing experience for them. It gives them back their control.”

Don't Let a Pandemic Get in the Way of Your Send-Off

There's currently a pandemic prohibition on packed funeral homes, drop-in shivas or any other form of traditional grieving. To give mourners a chance to say goodbye to their loved ones, funeral planners are coming up with creative, comforting and surprisingly moving new memorial services. Here's a sampling:

THE ROBOT

Humanoid robots can clean our bathrooms, serve us sushi and, in the age of COVID, stand in for us at funerals. At places like the Turner and Porter Funeral Home in Toronto and the Saskatoon Funeral Home, remote mourners can use an on-site droid, which is basically a tablet mounted on a scooter, to zip around and chat with





the deceased's loved ones via the tablet's webcam. R2D2 would be proud.

THE ZOOM FUNERAL

These days, the phrase “Zoom funeral” is almost redundant—nearly every memorial service is available via live stream or video conference. When the pandemic hit, former Shopify staffer Effie Anolik saw an opportunity in the Zoom boom. Her startup, PlanAFuneral.com, works directly with families and funeral planners to organize live-streamed and recorded memorial services: she and her staff will create a custom service, deliver invitations, set up slide shows and videos, organize speakers and—best of all—handle all that pesky tech.

THE DRIVE-THROUGH

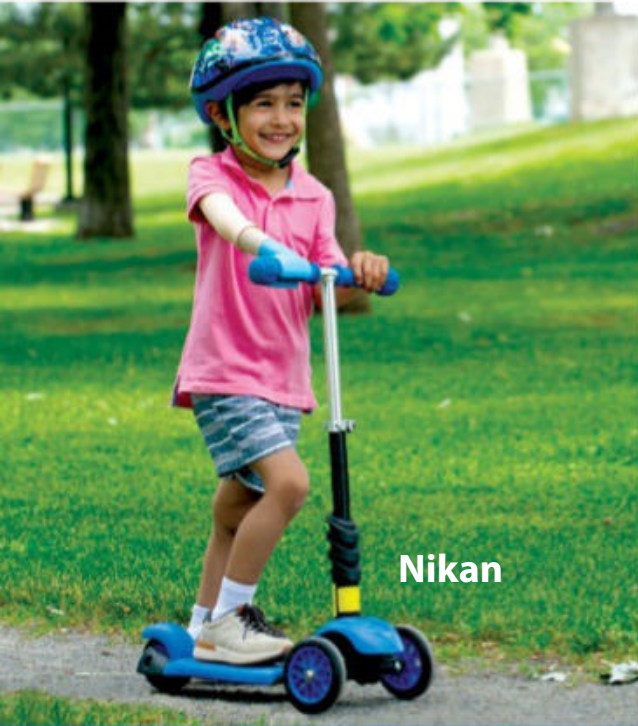
In 2020, we've figured out how to do pretty much anything from the comfort and COVID safety of our cars: visit art events, gawk at zoo animals and, yes, mourn our dead. At Tubman Funeral Home in the village of Kars, near Ottawa, mourners can attend a

drive-in funeral service in the parking lot. The service is broadcast via an FM radio station. Afterward, cars line up and proceed through a multi-step visitation: first stop is signing the condolence book (there's plenty of hand sanitizer on deck); then they roll up to the casket to pay their respects for a minute or so before moving on.

THE PROCESSIONAL

Just because we can't all grieve together in person right now doesn't mean we can't still support neighbours and friends. Back in March, Father Paul Lundrigan, a Catholic priest, was presiding over a funeral in Flatrock, a Newfoundland hamlet with a population of around 1,700. Restrictions at the time meant only immediate family could attend. As they drove to the gravesite, they noticed that there were about 70 cars lined up along the route, flashing their lights in a gesture of shared grief as the hearse passed them by. If we're facing more lockdowns in the near future, a processional is a heartwarming way to show solidarity. **R**

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WORLD WIDE WEIRD

BY Rebecca Philips

Hive Mined

Last February, a wildlife removal crew was called to an unoccupied apartment in Richmond, Virginia, to deal with an eight-foot-long beehive wedged between the first and second floors. Rich Perry, the owner of Virginia Wildlife Management and Control, estimates it would have taken the bees three or four years to build their indoor mansion. This wasn't the largest extraction ever undertaken by the company. "We removed a huge honeybee hive from the side of an 1800s schoolhouse here in Virginia that was around twice the size," says Perry. The hive in the apartment was still slightly active; the team, which spent two and a half hours removing the nest, salvaged about 20 pounds

of usable honey—a sweet reward for a job well done.

Music to Her Ears

Last fall, Dagmar Turner, a violin player in the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra, learned that a brain tumour she'd had treated six years earlier was growing again, close to an area that controls the fine movement of her left hand. She needed surgery, and Professor Keyoumars Ashkan, a brain tumour specialist at King's College Hospital in London, was the person to do it. His plan: rouse Turner during the surgery and ask her to play her violin to ensure they didn't damage any crucial tissue. Turner was awake for about two and a half hours during the successful



operation, during which she played the scales, "Bésame Mucho" and "Summertime."

Public Announcement

When Steffen Schwarz, a part-time farmer from Germany, decided to propose to his fiancée last year, he had his best man program a seed drill to leave empty areas in his cornfield. Once the crops grew around those spaces, the words "Willst du mich heiraten?," or "Will you marry me?," would be written across an area 200 by 100 metres. When the corn grew tall enough, he persuaded his girlfriend to fly a drone over the field. Her reply to the surprise proposal? A big yes. **R**

SAFE IN THE STACKS

How I created a sanctuary for teenagers in my library

BY Angela Jouris Saxe FROM *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHNNY C.Y. LAM



Angela Jouris Saxe at her local branch in Tamworth, Ontario.

When I got my first library card in the mid-1950s, my love for the institution blossomed.

From the age of eight, I was allowed to walk from my house in Mount Royal, Que., across the wooden footbridge over the CN rail line to where the municipal library was housed directly above the police station. Once the librarian gave me my membership card, she suggested that I might enjoy a series of books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder, starting with *Little House in the Big Woods*.

The memory of curling up in an armchair and disappearing into the far-away world of pioneer life is still vivid today. I was from a Greek household, so the details of homesteading in the American West were exotic: chopping down trees to build a house, planting crops, the isolation, it all fascinated me. Time disappeared. No longer restricted to the here and now, I was free to imagine myself as a pioneer girl. I was addicted.

But the municipal library's collection paled in comparison to what was available to us at high school. There, I read novels written by the authors we were studying in class: Charles Dickens and Joseph Conrad, Mark Twain and Emily Brontë.

During the summer months, I was caught up in *Gone With the Wind* and

Anna Karenina or lost in the exciting and strange worlds of Ray Bradbury.


When I studied English literature at university, I thought it best to build my own library. And later, when I taught English at a high school, I continued to collect books. Forty years into my collecting, I realized that all those books had become a part of the house, like wallpaper or wood panelling. Suddenly I saw them as vanity and an insidious aspect of consumerism. Why did I have to keep every book? I held on to a select few and donated the rest. My home library is now filled only with books that have enriched my life and are of interest to my family and friends. I regularly prune my collection. A new book rarely stays with me for long.

Toward the end of my teaching career, I became a teacher-librarian. This position reignited my love and appreciation for how wonderful it is to be surrounded by books. And the school library indulged my passion for books even more.

I had a generous budget, and I searched for books that would interest my teenage audience and hopefully spark a love of reading in them. Fantasy. Science fiction. Horror. Graphic novels. I couldn't keep the *Twilight* series on the shelves—too many kids wanted to borrow them. Biographies of sports heroes were in hot demand. Students raced to the library as soon as it opened (even in our digital era) to take out several books of their favourite manga

series. I suggested *Three Day Road*, *De Niro's Game* and *The Ghost Road* to senior boys for their independent study assignment, and the girls loved *Lullabies for Little Criminals*, *A Complicated Kindness* and *Fall on Your Knees*. I bought books that students asked for and ones that I wanted to read.

THE LIBRARY WHERE I WORKED BECAME AN INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACE, HOME TO EVERYBODY.




I quickly realized that the library wasn't just a place to do research; students came for other reasons, as well. I noticed that some students lined up first thing in the morning, returned at break time and spent the whole lunch hour tucked away in a carrel. These were the loners and the marginalized, the ones who felt safer in the library than in the hallways or in the cafeteria where they could be bullied or harassed.

There was the young man who hid in the stacks reading philosophy books, refusing to sign them out for fear of being ridiculed at home. A young woman, who read every book on human anatomy and diseases, dreamed of being a doctor, but her family was too poor; she would have to find full-time work after graduation. I noticed that

students searched for books on specific topics instead of using computers: sexually transmitted infections, drugs, LGBTQ+ issues, mental-health issues. I realized that computer screens were too visible, so I bought more books on those topics.

I bought sofas and easy chairs. The conference room doubled as an art gallery and a meeting place for students to talk about ideas, play chess, start knitting circles and make posters for their clubs. The library became an inclusive public space, democratic and safe for everyone. The circulation rates for books rose five to 10 per cent every month.

My years as a teacher-librarian—non-judgmental, resourceful and always accommodating—were the most rewarding of my career. Even though I was an authority figure, I wasn't involved with student assessments and evaluations or restricted by the rigid structure of the curriculum. I was free to make the library a comfortable and exciting place to learn.

Whether libraries are located in schools or in communities, I believe they provide students and the public with an opportunity to engage with the past, the present and the future; all that is required is a modicum of curiosity. Libraries are vibrant and fluid places that help us to adjust to the world, and their doors must be kept open to everyone—for free. 

© 2019, ANGELA JOURIS SAXE. FROM "WHY I CREATED A SAFE SPACE FOR TEENS IN MY LIBRARY," *THE GLOBE AND MAIL* (JULY 31, 2019), THEGLOBEANDMAIL.COM

I started playing the trumpet at 42. Why learning new skills as an adult is easier—and more fun—than you think.

OLD SCHOOL



BY Rebecca Philps

ILLUSTRATION BY BEENA MISTRY

LAST FEBRUARY, before the world went into lockdown, I sat in a cramped waiting room with about 10 other people, all under age 12. “I’m dyyying!!” I texted my friend, shaking with silent laughter. “What am I doing here?!”

Here was a music academy, and I was about to take my first trumpet



lesson. Learning to play was something I had talked about for years, for no reason other than I thought it would be fun. But it wasn't until my husband gave me a trumpet for Christmas that I got the final push to give it a try.

I was floundering. In three years I'd had two kids, left a full-time job to freelance, and we'd moved across the country. I wanted something that was invigorating, a little out of left field and, most importantly, just for me.

I've never mastered a musical instrument before and had lived with the quiet shame of being called tone deaf since I was a kid (I'm not, for the record). But there I was at 42, throwing my lot in with a bunch of preteen mini Mozarts. I was simultaneously nervous and thrilled by the idea of starting something new.

It had been years since I'd tried a hobby in which I had no background, no connections, no baseline knowledge. I was curious to see if I could hack it. As it turned out, I could—and with a few simple tips, so can anyone.

EMBRACE DISCOMFORT AND HAVE FUN

As adults, we're reluctant to go outside of our comfort zones. We may fear looking foolish or making mistakes. But there are advantages to being an adult learner. If you've chosen to explore a hobby, it's because you genuinely want to. You're motivated to learn. And you bring a wealth of

experience that you can connect with to help learn new material.

"The wonderful thing about being older is that you have more time and opportunity to try new things," says Dr. Marnin Heisel, a clinical psychologist and professor at Western University whose research focuses on psychological resiliency and well-being among older adults. It's easier to convince yourself to cut loose and have fun. "Some people step back, take a look and say, 'My life isn't as fun or fulfilling or meaningful as it could be. And the main thing stopping me is me.'"

If you're stuck on what to do or where to start, Heisel suggests a simple technique: adult show and tell. It's easy. Imagine you had to present a meaningful or sentimental object to a group of strangers that tells them something about your story or your personality. Consider why you love it. Then ask, what sort of fulfilling pastime can I build around it? You're more likely to dive into a new activity if you already have a positive association with it.

There are physical benefits, of course, to choosing hobbies and activities that get you moving, and physical activity, in turn, has beneficial effects on executive functions and memory. Most crucially, chasing hobbies that offer positive and meaningful experiences makes us happier and could also make us more adaptable to the inevitable changes in life, says Heisel. "When we look ahead to the future," he

adds, “most of us are also concerned with life satisfaction and enjoyment, not just warding off cognitive impairment, as important as that may be.”

GO WITH THE FLOW

Once you find a hobby that you happily look forward to doing, more benefits will come—especially if you tap into “the flow.” That’s the term coined by prominent psychologist and author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to describe when you’re fully immersed in a challenging, absorbing activity—time flies, self-consciousness disappears and the world around you melts away.


Sixty-six year old Rob Doggett recognizes that flow every time he climbs on his Suzuki dual-sport motorcycle. “Being on the road, it’s exhilarating,” he says. “The wind whistles in my helmet, and I’m laser-focused on everything around me. There’s no time for day-dreaming. It tests everything: attention to detail, alertness, mental stamina.”

Doggett, a retired restaurant owner, learned to ride when he was in his mid-50s. He’d always been drawn to motorcycles but wasn’t comfortable taking on the risk of riding until his three children were grown. It’s now part of a collection of activities—golf, curling, umpiring rec-league baseball, handiwork—that he does to stay active in retirement. “The more active I am, the more reason I have to get out of bed in the morning,” says Doggett. “It keeps me young.”

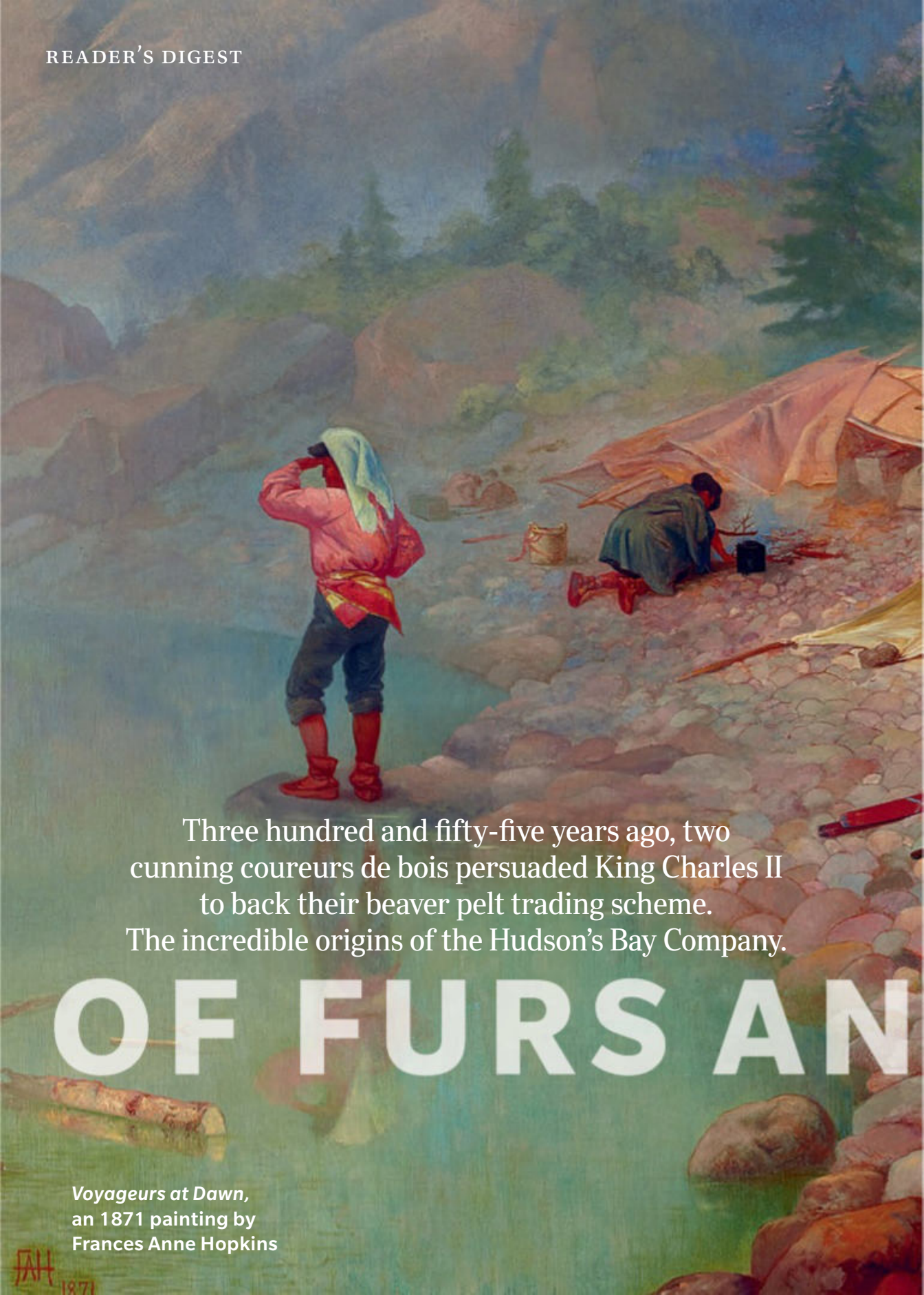
MAKE A CONNECTION, AND DON’T GIVE UP

If new hobbies don’t in and of themselves have a social element, it often doesn’t take much to make them social, says Heisel—and it can help to keep you invested and having fun. If you want to learn to paint, learn to paint with other people. If you want to garden, get to know the horticulturist at your local garden centre. If finding a physical community is too challenging (and these days it can be), go online, find a group, build social connections and try new things, all while staying comfortably close to home.

Here’s how it works for me: I now take trumpet lessons over Zoom, which holds me to playing at least once a week (I’m accountable); my teacher is an impossibly patient and lovely person (I feel supported); when I started in February, I promised my son that I’d learn to play “Happy Birthday” for when he turned three in May (I gave myself a goal and a deadline); and I even participated in an online summer recital (I connected with a new community, under pandemic conditions no less).

I know playing trumpet won’t solve my existential middle-aged-mom crisis, but it’s loud and it’s fun and I like that I can toot-toot my way through a “Happy Birthday” serenade for special people. Plus, I’m investing in future fulfillment, a more balanced life and long-term fine-tuning for my brain, which all feels pretty great. 

READER'S DIGEST

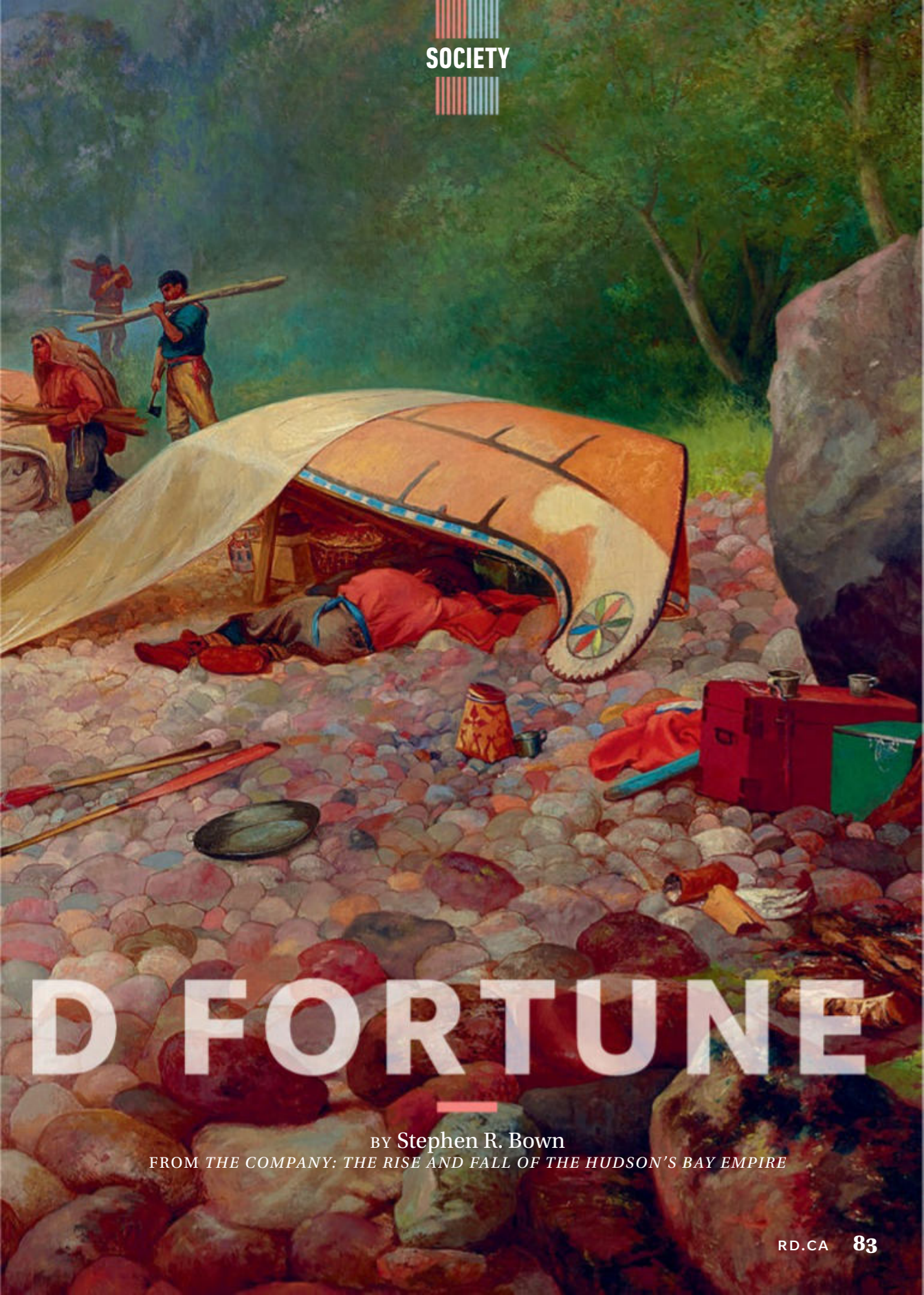


Three hundred and fifty-five years ago, two cunning coureurs de bois persuaded King Charles II to back their beaver pelt trading scheme. The incredible origins of the Hudson's Bay Company.

OF FURS AND

Voyageurs at Dawn,
an 1871 painting by
Frances Anne Hopkins

FAH
1871



D FORTUNE

BY Stephen R. Bown

FROM THE COMPANY: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HUDSON'S BAY EMPIRE

In the summer of 1665, Médard Chouart des Groseilliers and Pierre-Esprit Radisson, two *courcours de bois* from North America, sailed upriver on the Thames toward the sprawling metropolis of London. They had a business proposition to discuss with English financiers, after having been snubbed by authorities in New France and merchants in New England. The two men stood at the railing, sniffed the air, and smelled smoke as the buildings on the outskirts of the city drew near.

Mounds of rotting refuse were heaped outside the city gates, the whole place infested with small black rats—rats that were the hosts of fleas, and fleas that bore the bubonic plague bacterium. Plagues had ravaged the city every generation or so since the 1300s, but 1665 saw the worst outbreak in a century. At its height, in the fall of 1665, the Black Death killed more than 7,000 people each week in London alone.

The stench of death permeated the air, and carts lumped with corpses trundled down detritus-strewn roads. Clutching perfume-doused handkerchiefs to their faces, the duo continued upriver to the city of Oxford, where the royal court had fled to escape the pestilence. The men were taken ashore by Colonel George Cartwright, King Charles's commissioner who had first met them when he was in Boston after the British conquest of New Amsterdam. Cartwright was astonished at the

pair's tales of a great sea that they claimed to have seen with their own eyes. He correctly surmised that the king's financial advisors would want to hear their incredible tale and its promise of riches.

They disembarked and were taken for a series of interviews with prominent members of the royal court, culminating with an audience with King Charles II. Charles was a flamboyant hedonist known as the Merry Monarch because of the gaiety and social liveliness of his court. The son of Charles I, who had been beheaded in 1649 at the conclusion of the English Civil War, the younger Charles had spent 11 years in exile in France and the Dutch Republic while England was bowed under the weight of the dour and repressive Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell. He had returned to become the king of England, Scotland and Ireland only a few years earlier, in 1660.

A man of good humour, fond of celebration, sumptuous furnishings and fine clothing, Charles was a subject of gossip, particularly for his numerous mistresses, seven of whom bore him a total of 12 children. But Charles was also an astute statesman, acknowledged for reviving the Royal Navy, reforming laws and taxes to encourage commerce and overseas trade, and supporting the arts and sciences. The Restoration period was the beginning of an age of unbridled optimism, ripe for new ideas and bold undertakings.

But Charles's dissolute ways were a financial burden. His numerous mistresses and children and the maintenance of Whitehall Palace (then Europe's largest, sprawling over 23 acres of grounds) were a great drain on the nation's purse. Charles saw mercantile opportunities as a means to satisfy his insatiable desire for money to fund his grandiose dreams. The expansion of trade and commerce became national concerns, and the king formulated many of his national policies, including wars, through the lens of commerce.

He was also receptive to a plan that could make him money while damaging the prospects of the French, with whom England was frequently at war, by undercutting their trade from the St. Lawrence. The English knew that the prosperity of the French colonial outposts was based on a highly profitable trade in quality furs. Other members of the English court also perked up at the scheme put forth by the two French travellers, a scheme that promised to shaft the French in the fur trade while making a profit for themselves. The plan was the genesis of one of England's most storied commercial enterprises.

ALTHOUGH PARTNERS in many escapades, Groseilliers and Radisson were very different. They were brothers-in-law, one young and charismatic, the

other grizzled and contemplative; Groseilliers was approximately 20 years older than Radisson. Both had spent the bulk of their lives on the fringes of French colonial settlement along the St. Lawrence.

A ship's captain described Radisson: "Black hair, just touched with grey, hung in a wild profusion about his bare neck and shoulders. He showed a swart complexion, seamed and pitted by frost and exposure in a rigorous climate. A huge scar, wrought by the tomahawk of an Indian, disfigured his left cheek. His whole costume was surmounted by a wide collar of marten's skin; his feet were adorned by buckskin moccasins. In his leather belt was sheathed a long knife."

Groseilliers had first made his way to New France in 1641, when he was around 23. After the Iroquois drove the Huron from their traditional lands by

A painting of the *Nonsuch*, one of the HBC ships, returning to London in 1669.



the early 1650s, Groseilliers set out roaming west toward Lake Superior, searching for them in an effort to re-establish ties to the fur trade.

Radisson was between the ages of 11 and 15 when he arrived in New France in 1651. According to his own sometimes fanciful reminiscences, he was not in the community for more than a few months before he was captured by a roving band of Mohawk while out hunting birds. He was taken captive to their settlement along the Mohawk River in New York, a village of at least a thousand people in dozens of great communal longhouses surrounded by farms. Although the family was headed by a man who boasted 19 European scalps, young Radisson, owing to his facility with their language and his professed desire to learn their ways,

was treated kindly and adopted. He learned to hunt and was trained in warfare before being taken on raiding forays against neighbouring peoples to the west.

But he longed for his former life. One day he was travelling with a hunting party of three Mohawk and a captive Algonquin. The Algonquin captive persuaded him to help kill the three Mohawk while they slept by crushing their skulls. "To tell the truth," he admitted, "I was loathsome to do them mischief that never did me any." Yet he nevertheless "tooke the hattchett and began the execution which was soone done." The two quickly fled the scene of the murder, but after two weeks of travelling north through the woods, they were tracked down and recaptured by the Mohawk. The Algonquin

Pierre-Esprit Radisson (below) and a painting depicting a 1672 public sale of traded furs.



man was quickly killed, and Radisson was saved only because he disavowed any role in the murders.

He again fled in 1653, but this time south along the Hudson River, and then successfully back to New France, where he met with his brother-in-law. Radisson, now in his early 20s and also an experienced traveller, convinced Groseilliers to hire him for an expedition planned for 1659. Radisson had grown accustomed to adventure and its attendant hardships and would never settle down to a conventional life.

Despite political opposition from various people in the administration of New France, Groseilliers secured a vague permit to leave the community and negotiated a profit-sharing agreement. When Governor d'Argenson demanded they take two servants with them, Radisson, suspecting they would hinder his movements and spy on his activities, replied insolently that he would gladly take the governor along, but not his servants, whereupon the governor grew angry and forbade him to leave Montreal.

This was only a minor setback, and the brothers-in-law decided to leave under cover of darkness. When a group of Huron and Odawa offered to allow Radisson and Groseilliers to accompany them on their return journey west, to make a larger group for safety against marauding Iroquois, Radisson and Groseilliers agreed, and they secretly canoed up the Ottawa River and down the

French River to Lake Huron and then west along the south shore of Lake Superior, following the well-travelled route. The two brothers-in-law and their Huron companions ranged far and wide in the Great Lakes region beyond the territory through which Europeans had ventured. The curious duo continued travelling west of the Huron lands along the south shore of Lake Superior and beyond.

THEIR KERNEL OF AN IDEA FOR A TRADE NETWORK WOULD TRANSFORM NORTH AMERICA.



They overwintered southwest of Lake Superior in what is now Minnesota, where they were invited to participate in a great “Feast of the Dead” celebration. Over 1,000 people came together in a great camp where the festivities included smoking ceremonies and ritual gift giving, feasting, drumming, dancing and singing, games and sporting contests. The two men now dug deep into their supplies for goods they had hauled all the way from Montreal and displayed them, both to trade and as gifts, an enticement for future trade. Many had seen these items from the east before, but not the strange people who produced them. Items presented by the Frenchmen included

hatchets, knives, kettles, combs, mirrors, face paint and little bells and brass rings for the children.

From the Cree who had travelled from the northern forests they traded for the glossiest and largest beaver pelts they had ever set eyes upon, and heard tales of great rivers that flowed north to a frozen sea, a “salt sea,” perhaps the very sea that maps showed had been navigated by English mariners a generation earlier. Around campfires in the evenings they heard tales of massive herds of bison on the plains and “the nation of the beefe,” as they called the Sioux farther west.

THEY PADDLED BACK TO THE ST. LAWRENCE LEADING 60 CANOES LOADED WITH A MOUNTAIN OF FURS.

The two travellers learned of the great trade fairs in the Mandan villages along the upper Missouri River. People from thousands of kilometres away, from all directions of the compass, congregated to haggle and barter for goods such as northern furs, pipe-stone, buffalo robes, grease, ochre, obsidian, eagle feathers, porcupine quills, fine leather, pottery, dried corn, wild rice, tobacco, dried herbs, preserved fish, precious stones, decorative

seeds, coloured embroidery—and of course to share news of the land.

Radisson and Groseilliers formed the kernel of an idea that would eventually transform northern North America: they could tap into this well-developed intercontinental trade network that was lacking in certain goods—primarily metal tools, implements and weapons—that even now were not present in large quantities among the mix of goods generally available.

IN EARLY SUMMER the two travellers continued their journey by returning east, this time tracking the northern shore of Lake Superior and then canoeing downstream following rivers through the northern evergreen woodlands, travelling with parties of Ojibwa and then Cree over the established portages, trails and river systems. Groseilliers and Radisson were quickly realizing just how interconnected things were outside the orbit of the fledgling settlements of New France.

Along the shore of James Bay, near the mouth of what is now called the Rupert River, they came upon the rudimentary hut that the English explorer Henry Hudson had constructed in 1610, an “old howse all demolished and battered with bouullets.” If Hudson had been there before, ships could navigate there again. The early English mariners from a generation or two before had been searching for the source of an inlet to a mighty inland


sea or a route through the continent to the nearly mythical South Seas and the Spice Islands. What Groseilliers and Radisson found instead was an El Dorado of rich and thick furs from animals that lived in lands with long, dark winters and deep snows.

When the duo paddled back to the St. Lawrence on August 24, 1660, leading 60 canoes and perhaps 300 Indigenous traders, and loaded with a mountain of furs, they were celebrated as heroes. But Governor d'Argenson, out of jealousy and the intransigence of vested interests, insulted them as mere provincials and seized a good portion of their furs on the grounds that they had been trading without a licence. The adventurers retained barely one-fifth of their earnings, and Groseilliers was even tossed in jail briefly. Having claimed a large sum of their profits, the governor then promptly left for France that fall.

Spurned by their own government and annoyed at the corruption and restrictions on their activities, the two

men set off for Boston—the next best place to seek sponsors for their grand and audacious scheme. That was where they met Colonel George Cartwright, who extended an invitation to cross the Atlantic and present their case to King Charles himself.

They had a plan that was sure to interest the English court: to use ships to exploit the vast beaver preserves surrounding Hudson Bay, bypassing New France altogether and dealing directly with the Cree who dwelt in the heartland of the beaver. Ocean-going ships could easily transport a greater quantity of furs than flotillas of canoes with time-consuming portages.

Perhaps they could even cut off the fur supply to the St. Lawrence, damaging French political and economic interests and making a profit for themselves in the bargain. It was almost too good to be true. 

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Positive Influence

We have to inspire people and give them a sense of hope. We have to bring people along, not ridicule and tear them down.

MASAI UJIRI

If you have wonderful moments, don't second guess them. Just enjoy them.

MARTIN SHORT

Cynicism can often be mistaken for wisdom.

SARAH POLLEY



A Star Is Born

A chance encounter with a waiting room songstress pulled my dad out of his Alzheimer's fog

BY Deborah Stock

FROM *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

ILLUSTRATION BY DOROTHY LEUNG

A FEW YEARS AGO, at a medical laboratory clinic in Waterloo, Ont., an elderly woman sat on the edge of a waiting room chair belting out the Celine Dion tune “My Heart Will Go On.” Other than a slight rhythmic rocking of her torso to the *Titanic* theme song, she was motionless, with her eyes shut and her arms crossed elegantly over her chest. With little effort, she was able to send her sweet, high-pitched voice exploding into every corner of the clinic.

I had fun watching how people reacted. There was a lot of shifting in seats and a couple of stony sideways stares, but mainly they awkwardly averted their eyes and tried to pretend that there was nothing out of the ordinary going on. Business as usual. This sort of thing happens all the time.

I was at the clinic with my father, who was getting a routine blood test, when the woman first arrived. She settled into the seat directly across from my dad. Because she was so tiny, she was forced to perch on the edge of the chair so her feet could touch the floor. The position made it seem as though she was sitting forward to engage in conversation with him. She smiled at him and he smiled back.

I was concerned about how my dad would react to the possible encroachment on his space. He was 77 years old at the time and had been living with Alzheimer's for several years. He came into adulthood in the Swinging '60s, but he was definitely a product of the '50s. He was a brilliant, introverted, card-carrying Catholic military man who was suckled and plumped on guilt, obligation and humility. When he was healthy, he tolerated people's eccentricities dutifully but with a healthy dose of silent reproach. Privacy and personal space were definitely his thing, and he considered it wholly bad mannered to bring undo attention to oneself. Since Alzheimer's has a tendency to play havoc with a

person's patience and erode restraint, Dad had experienced a few challenging encounters in the past. I couldn't help but think that this melodic little woman was playing with fire.

MY DAD DIDN'T SMILE, NOD, OR EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE THE SINGER. IT DIDN'T DETER HER ONE BIT.

HER SINGING BEGAN gently, like a quiet hum. I glanced over at Dad to see his response. His smile was gone, and he was staring right at her. She was staring back. I couldn't read his expression initially, but it seemed to be something like confusion. This wasn't an unusual state for him, and I wondered if he was actually seeing her at all or if he was lost somewhere deep in his mind, not really aware of her presence at that point. Or maybe he was trying to establish whether this was someone he should know.

Dad had never been one to partake comfortably in unnecessary conversation. Traditionally, he would relinquish that task to my mother, who took over the responsibility with her own brand of enthusiastic relish while he sat contentedly on the outskirts as a silent but engaged participant. If we had been more astute, we probably

would have recognized his declining condition earlier. We would have noticed that, on the odd occasions when he was drawn into a conversation, he'd become increasingly reliant on her to finish his thoughts or answer questions directed to him. Without missing a beat, she would fill in all the blanks whenever he paused, and our attention was shifted away from him.

It also took us some time to realize that he had begun to abandon any effort to nod politely or insert an obliging smile in appropriate places. We just thought he was getting a little cranky in his old age.

That's what was happening now: no more smile, no amiable nod, no acknowledgment of any kind. Just a stare. This didn't deter the diminutive songstress one bit, and her singing slowly got louder. By the time she got to the chorus, "Near, far, wherever you are..." it was full-tilt belting. She was in a meditative, eyes-shut, torso-rocking, inner-diva-embracing trance.

Now Dad looked a little stunned.

I tried not to laugh. It wasn't that I didn't appreciate this woman. In fact, I kind of loved her. I wanted to be her friend. But the thought of my tightly wound, somewhat prudish dad being serenaded in a packed medical lab by this itty-bitty Celine Dion was just too delicious. Still, I watched cautiously, waiting for any sign of an impending irritated outburst and was considering my options on how best to intervene.

Instead, he was starting to look entertained. His face softened, and the tension eased in his brow. He no longer looked confused.

PEOPLE WILL TELL you that Alzheimer's is a thief, that it steals your loved ones, slowly, day by day. There is, without a doubt, so much heartbreaking truth in that statement. The loss is painful and unrelenting. But during certain experiences with my dad, things have happened that allowed me to see a side of him that I never knew existed. I will hold onto those quiet moments when, unsolicited and for the first time ever, he held my gaze and told me tender stories about when he was a child or regaled me with tales of his time in the air force, as if he knew that he didn't have much time left to show me who he really was. In a quiet and unexpected way, that's also what happened for me that day in the clinic. Alzheimer's sometimes seemed to be peeling back the onion of my dad's true self, and while I hate that he struggled with this disease, I love the sweet man I've met.

When her song ended and the waiting room became silent, the woman opened her eyes. My dad was still looking directly at her.

"That was beautiful," he said.

And she smiled and said, "Thank you." 

© 2019, DEBORAH STOCK. FROM "THE ODD ENCOUNTER THAT PULLED DAD OUT OF HIS ALZHEIMER'S FOG," THE GLOBE AND MAIL (OCTOBER 22, 2019), THEGLOBEANDMAIL.COM



The Button Box

Bought at auction, a vintage cookie tin reveals a lifetime of memories

BY Karen Grissinger
FROM *COUNTRY WOMAN*

ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA AMADOR

“GOING, GOING, GONE, for \$3 to bidder number 43, the lady in the last row, white hat.” The auctioneer called out my auction number and location. I had just won the bidding for a 1950s cookie tin full of memories at an estate sale outside McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania, near the farm where my husband and I live.

Delighted at my victory, I took the box and gave it a shake. The contents rattled. I pried off the lid and took a peek. Inside were dozens—or maybe even hundreds—of buttons, pins and other items, all glittering in the sunlight. It reminded me of my mom’s button

box. As a girl, I’d always enjoyed digging through it, just as my own daughters enjoyed looking through mine.

I listened to the auctioneer’s patter as more objects were bid on and sold. I bought some lovely embroidered pillowcases and a few other things. Soon my eye caught the movement of a swing on the front porch of the house. A petite





older woman watched the happenings in her yard, her eyes wandering over the crowd, looking for the familiar faces of friends and neighbours.

As I carried my purchases to my car, I stopped to chat with her. We made small talk about the large number of people that had gathered and the prices her things were bringing. She told me she was selling almost all her possessions because she was moving to a nursing home in town.

Her eyes fell to the button box, and when she looked up, they were glistening with tears. I asked whether she minded if I sat with her awhile. She slid over to make room for me next to her on the swing.

I took the lid off the tin, and her gnarled hand lifted a handful of buttons and then slowly dropped them back into the container. Her fist closed around a delicate pearl button, now yellow with age. She smiled as she told me about the birth of her first child and the special pearl-buttoned christening outfit that would be worn by five more babies before time wore the garment thin.

I noticed a large, dark brass military button and asked her about it. "From my first husband's uniform," she said. "It's one of the few things I had to remind me of him when he didn't return home alive."


They had been married seven months before he left to serve his country in the Second World War. "I married his best friend two years later, and

we had a good marriage," she told me. "That's the way it was in those days. Someone always looked out for the widows and children."

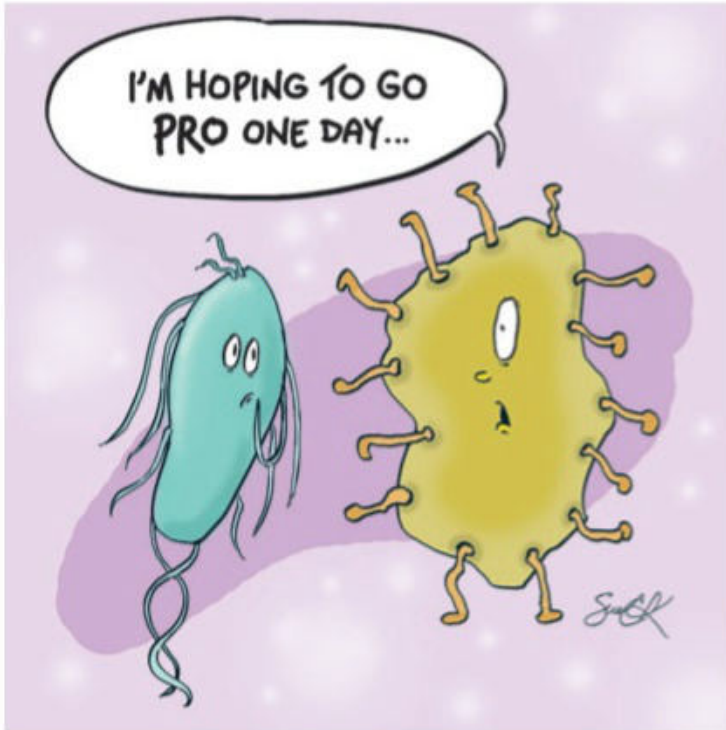
As we sifted through the box together, we found hairpins ranging from black to brown to shades of grey and even white. Each colour noted the passing of time and its effect on her hair. When I pulled a small key from the box, I heard the sharp intake of her breath. It was the key to a music box that played a special love song, she said. She'd lost it years ago. From my hand to hers, I passed the key to her memories.

We found a Sunday school pin holding a bar for perfect attendance in every year except one. She explained, "The year my mother was sick with cancer, I stayed home on Sundays with her so my father could get to church. He never missed a Sunday until he died, 15 years ago."

Garter clips, wooden nickels, snaps and ruby buttons took her further down memory lane. I learned about her wedding, the birth of her children and much more of the life she'd led for 89 years.

After our chat, I set the woman's box of memories down on the swing and slid my hands into hers. I knew we would talk again, when I went to visit her at her new home. And I knew that when I reached my own home, my heart would pull me to my sewing room, where I would rediscover my own lifetime of memories in my own button box. 

DOWN TO BUSINESS



Lorne was an amateurbiotic.

The Truth Hurts

A guy went in for a job interview and sat down with the boss.

The boss asked, “What do you think is your worst quality?”

“I’m probably too honest,” the man said.

“That’s not a bad thing,” said the boss. “I think being honest

is a good quality.”

The man replied, “I don’t care what you think!”

— HUMOURTHATWORKS.COM

One day, an employee received an unusually large paycheck. She decided not to say anything about it. The following week, she

noticed she’d been paid less than usual, and she confronted her boss.

“How come you didn’t say anything when you were over-paid?” her supervisor inquired.

The employee replied, “Well, I can overlook one mistake, but not two in a row!”

— GCFL.NET

In Case of Emergency

There was a safety meeting at work today. The presenter asked me, “What steps would you take in the event of a fire?”

“Big ones” was the wrong answer.

— REDDIT.COM

Poor Sport

I quit my job working for Nike. I just couldn’t do it anymore.

— REDDIT.COM

Are you in need of some professional motivation? Send us a work anecdote, and you could receive \$50. To submit your stories, visit rd.ca/joke.

Forty people gathered at a
hotel high in the Italian Alps.
Then came the earthquake,
the devastating avalanche—
and the race to find survivors.

UNDER THE MOUNTAIN

BY Joshua Hammer FROM *GQ*

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN P. HUGHES



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

HE WAS PINNED in the darkness by the weight of beams and walls, ice and earth. What happened? Where am I?

Lying on his stomach, he surveyed what he could. His left leg had been twisted and thrust forward so that his foot rested near his cheek. He could move his left arm, but his right arm and leg were crushed beneath something enormous. He realized with horror that his chin rested on the knee of a corpse. He tried to still the panic, to recall the moments before everything went dark.

He had been speaking to his wife. They were standing in a doorway. And then, the whistling gust of wind; the sense of tumbling through space; the sounds of coughing, moaning; and the horrifying silence that followed. Had it been an earthquake? He called to his wife but heard no answer.

"Giampaolo? Giampaolo?" a woman cried. She was close, and she was trapped here, too. "Are you alive?"

"I'm alive!" he shouted. "I'm alive."

NESTLED ON THE flanks of Italy's Apennine Mountains, about 160 kilometres northeast of Rome, the Hotel Rigopiano had never been easy to reach. But its isolation only added to its appeal, attracting Italian pop stars and celebrities like George Clooney.

In January 2017, snow began to fall across the Apennines. For days it came down, and the enormous drifts ringing the Rigopiano grew taller by the hour.

From his home in the Rome suburbs, Giampaolo Matrone watched the weather with growing concern. He and his wife, Valentina Cicioni, had planned an overnight getaway to the hotel, but now he wondered whether they should go. Matrone phoned the Rigopiano. Its owner, Roberto Del Rosso, said Matrone simply needed chains on his tires. "Tranquillo," Del Rosso said. "It won't be a problem."

What Del Rosso kept to himself was that things were growing bleak. Food and supplies at his hotel were running low, and with only a single snowplow, officials in town were struggling to keep the road open. But Matrone and Cicioni didn't know that. They decided to make the trip. By the time they neared the resort six hours later, they were battling a total whiteout. When they finally reached the hotel, they were cold and exhausted. They checked into their room and then headed outside to the thermal pool, trying to forget their long day in the car. The wind and the thick, wet snow were unrelenting. Soon they retreated indoors and got dressed for dinner.

The conversation there was troubling. "I'm more scared than you," a waiter confided to them. "I've been stuck here for six days."

AS THE HOTEL guests awoke on Wednesday, January 18, they discovered that their predicament had worsened overnight. The cars in the lot were invisible.



**Hotel Rigopiano
before the avalanche.**

The phone and power lines were down. Cellular coverage, always spotty on the mountain, had gotten worse.

Employees in the kitchen were trying hard to manage what was left of the provisions. For breakfast, they put out a few microwaved croissants, some marmalade and Nutella.

After breakfast, Matrone and Cicioni went to the Jacuzzi. Matrone sank beneath the surface. Suddenly, the hotel began to wobble. The windows rattled, and the water in the tub sloshed over the edges.

An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.7 had struck the mountain. Matrone had had enough. "Let's get out of here," he told his wife, dressing quickly. They headed to the parking lot, where others were excavating their cars. Fifteen minutes after the first earthquake, another tremor hit, this one measuring 5.6.

With a dozen vehicles freed, guests set off down the driveway. But when they reached the main road, the path was blocked by a two-metre-high wall of snow. Matrone climbed out of his car and scaled the drift. There was no road, just a glistening expanse of powder. He turned and yelled down to his wife, "We're trapped!" They made their way back to the resort.

As the light outside faded, the 40 guests and workers searched for distraction. Adriana Vranceanu and her son huddled over a checkerboard in a playroom on the ground floor. She needed aspirin and had sent her husband, Giampiero Parete, to find some in their car. Meanwhile, their daughter shot pool with two other children down the corridor in the billiard hall.

A handful of guests sat in white upholstered armchairs and sofas.

Matrone paced the reception area, anxiously discussing options with his wife. Del Rosso, the owner, was just around the corner, in the hotel's library nook. Half a dozen of his employees milled about in the kitchen.

This was when the snow on the mountain began to slide.

They heard the avalanche before they saw it. As the wall of snow and ice tumbled downward, it compressed the air into a terrible low whistle. The avalanche gathered speed and size, grabbing rocks and trees and anything else in its way as it roared down the mountain.

WHEN THE RESCUERS FINALLY ARRIVED, THERE WAS NO MOVEMENT, NO HUMAN SOUNDS.

With the force of 4,000 fully loaded Mack trucks, the snow slammed into the hotel at 100 kilometres per hour. Walls buckled. The avalanche thundered through the kitchen, killing the workers there. It tore into the alcove where Del Rosso was, then raced across the two rooms where guests sat sipping hot drinks.

The snow—and the weight of everything it had brought down the mountain with it—ripped the hotel from its

foundation, collapsed it into a pile of rubble, and sent debris flying more than 90 metres away. When the tossing and tumbling came to a stop, those caught inside were left buried in the icy heap of rock and ruin. All was now still; everything had gone dark.

FABIO SALZETTA, the resort's caretaker, had been working in the tiny boiler hut about 27 metres from the main building when he noticed an eerie silence. He tried to throw open the door, but it wouldn't budge. The little outbuilding was sealed in snow. So he pried away the window frame and wriggled outside. Standing on an empty snowfield, he gazed at a trail of sheer destruction—it was as if a giant rake had been dragged down the mountain, toppling beech trees, crushing cars, chewing up everything in its path.

Salzetta felt numb. Where was the hotel?

Then he saw the tip of the Rigopiano's roof poking out of a pyramid of ice-topped rubble. The entire building had been bulldozed down the hill.

Salzetta noticed a figure stumbling across the snow: Giampiero Parete. Moments before the avalanche had struck, he'd gone to get aspirin for his wife from their car. Parete appeared disoriented, distraught. "My family is inside the hotel," he wailed.

The two climbed inside Parete's car. Finding a cell signal with Parete's phone seemed to take forever. In fact,



it took two hours before they finally spoke with the chief of the region's alpine rescue team, Antonio Crocetta.

"We're coming," Crocetta promised.

"How long will it take?" asked Parete.

"Five or six hours."

Darkness had set in, and Parete and Salzetta sat afraid inside the car, the motor running, the heat now blasting.

From his base in the hillside village of Penne, Crocetta alerted the military police and mobilized his unit: 14 men trained in rescue operations, including a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a dog handler, a search dog and two veteran alpine guides. Reaching the resort would mean trekking 10 kilometres up the mountain.

When the rescuers finally arrived, eight hours after Parete had talked to Crocetta, there was no movement anywhere—no human sound, just rubble. They did spot two headlights: Salzetta and Parete in the car.

"How many people are in the hotel?" a team member asked.

Northern Italy had seen an unusual amount of snow that January from more than a week's worth of unrelenting storms. A series of four earthquakes sent roughly 132,000 tons of snow hurtling down the mountain at 100 kilometres per hour. The avalanche spun and dragged the Rigopiano 10 metres before burying it.

"About 40," Salzetta replied.

"Can you give us an idea of where they might be?"

Salzetta offered his best guesses. As rescuers wrapped Parete in a thermal blanket and took him down the mountain on a stretcher, other members of the alpine team began probing with tools used to poke through snow to locate bodies. They found the first one after about an hour, buried under one and a half metres of snow. It was Gabriele D'Angelo, one of Salzetta's colleagues. The maître d' of the hotel's restaurant was found buried nearby. Later, Del Rosso's body would be discovered beneath the rubble that crushed him as his hotel disintegrated.



More than 30 hours after the search began, rescuers heard a woman calling for help.

WHILE THE ALPINE team probed for corpses, Giampaolo Matrone lay in a coffin-sized pocket of air beneath nine metres of snow, ice and rubble. He could hear nothing of what was happening at the surface. Shock had set in, and he felt no pain, no hunger, no cold.

He began to fade in and out of consciousness. Surreal imagery drifted through his mind. At one point, he was walking alongside his wife toward the bakery his family operated, taking note of every shop, every street corner, each crack in the pavement.

THE WRECKAGE WAS UNSTABLE. THE RESCUERS OR A TREMOR COULD BRING IT ALL DOWN.

His thoughts were strange and richly detailed. He imagined rescuers swooping in on magic carpets, dressed like Aladdin in *The Arabian Nights*. In another vision, his best friend, a body-builder, materialized on the mountain, lifting tons of concrete and setting Matrone free.

Each time Matrone awoke, he confronted anew the terrible reality: he was buried alive. Despair washed over him. He asked himself, Who is going to save us?

THE NEXT MORNING, Thursday, more rescuers arrived, including a team of firefighters and canine trainer Lorenzo Botti. Looking at the remains of the hotel, Botti made a quick assessment: no chance of survivors.

Police technicians set up an antenna that allowed them to home in on buried cellphones. Wherever there were phones, there would be people—or, more likely, bodies.

Botti turned his attention to the nine-metre mound, buried under snow, that constituted the main structure of the hotel. After studying a crude floor plan drawn by Salzetta, Botti and his men mounted the wreckage, shovelled through four metres of snow, and, when they found the top of the building, began sawing into the roof.

Rescuers carefully lowered themselves through the apertures they'd cut. Lights fastened to their helmets illuminated the twisted debris. The space was so cramped, the rescuers had to crawl on their bellies. For hours they called out for survivors.

Finally, at 11 a.m. on Friday, more than 30 hours after the search began, they heard something astonishing: a woman crying for help.

"Who are you?" one of the rescuers screamed back.

"I am Adriana."

"How many are you?"

"I'm in a room with my son," she said. "My daughter's inside, in the next room."



A month after the disaster, Matrone was still recovering in a Rome hospital.

Adriana Vranceanu—whose husband had gone to fetch her aspirin from their car before the avalanche and then frantically phoned for help—was bleeding from a head wound when firefighters found her and her son squeezed together in a crawl space. They were led to safety.

Finding the survivors electrified the rescuers. The firefighters tunneled

quickly toward the nearby billiard room, cut a small hole in the roof, focused a searchlight, and lowered a video probe. Gathered around a screen, the team saw two small kids emerge from behind a sofa, including Adriana's daughter, drawn by the light from the hole in the roof. Somehow, the entire room appeared intact.

Through a hole in the wall, firefighters found three more children. "Stay calm," a rescuer said. "Get on your bellies. Make like a centipede." Carefully but quickly, the men ushered the children out of the rubble.

Meanwhile, another squad of rescuers picked up a cellphone signal coming from a crawl space. They sawed toward voices crying for help. Soon they found a young couple and a young woman, all of whom they pulled to safety.

"Who else is down here?"

"A Roman guy," one of them said. "Giampaolo Matrone."

IT WAS AFTER midnight now, Saturday, January 21, some 55 hours since the avalanche. The rescue team had been working nonstop for more than two days. The wreckage was frighteningly unstable. As they moved, the rescuers knew that the force of their digging—or another tremor—could bring it all down upon them.

Paolo Di Quinzio and three other rescuers burrowed on, breaking blade

after blade on their circular saws, battling toward a faint cell signal detected deep in the ruins. Suddenly they heard a voice. They silenced their saws and listened. It was Matrone.

He was still fading in and out of consciousness. A vision of his wife, Valentina, hovered over him, an angel of mercy, he thought. She assured him he would be OK.

“Giampaolo, we are here!” Di Quinzio shouted, three metres above where the trapped man lay. “Are you injured? Are you bleeding?”

As the voices and the buzzing of saws grew louder, Matrone became more alert. “Where is my wife?”

“We put her in the car because it’s cold,” Di Quinzio said.


At last, at around six in the morning, Di Quinzio’s saw broke through a final thick layer of insulation. He pointed his light toward the opening and spotted Matrone’s back. Di Quinzio could see how the angled beams had created a cocoon that prevented Matrone from being crushed to death. Those near him had not been so lucky: squeezed in the space with him were the bodies of two women—one supporting his head, one curled

beneath his left leg.

Rescuers raised the concrete beams off Matrone’s limbs with a hydraulic jack. “You are a superhero,” Di Quinzio said as he reached beneath Matrone’s armpits and gently lifted him out of his tomb.

The rescuers placed him on a mattress. Matrone gazed up at a dozen faces silhouetted by the light of their headlamps. A cheer went up in the small crowd: “Bravo!” He was one of 11 people out of 40 to have survived. Soon after, he was airlifted to a hospital in a nearby town.

Gangrene had begun to burrow deep into his right arm. The nerves in his right ankle had practically been destroyed. Had he been pulled out even two hours later, Matrone was told, his arm would certainly have been lost.

Five days after his rescue, Matrone was given the heartrending news that his wife had died. Her body had been found, crushed by debris, near where Matrone had been trapped. The angel who had appeared to him in his fitful dreams had never left his side. 

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Laugh Now, Cry Later

There’s no life without humour. It can make the wonderful moments truly glorious, and the tragic moments bearable.

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT



HEART

House of Cards



In my family, a game of euchre
is the answer to everything

BY Jessica Myshrall FROM *THE WALRUS*





My grandmother loved euchre so much that we dropped a deck of cards into her casket. “Deal us a hand, Beth,” my grandfather said. In spite of our grief, we laughed. She would have laughed, too.

Euchre (pronounced you-ker) runs deep in my family’s history. When I was growing up in New Brunswick, the only people I knew who played were my mother, my grandparents and the friends they had converted.

My grandparents had two homes: the one they built for their retirement in the New Brunswick village in which my grandfather had grown up and the one in Toronto where they raised their children. They divided their time equally between provinces and drove back and forth every other month.

In my grandparents’ home in New Brunswick, the 24-card deck and scoreboard were brought out as soon as the dinner plates were cleared. We played over strawberry shortcake and wine, both homemade. When in Toronto, my grandparents hosted dinner and euchre on Tuesday nights, opening their home to family and friends. I lived with them while attending university, and it was during those Tuesday-night games that my love of euchre flourished.

PLAYING THE GAME is a rite of passage for members of my family. I learned to

play through trial and error. Euchre has variations, but the central rules are simple. Four players split into teams of two. Everyone gets five cards, and once the trump suit has been determined through bidding, each player throws down one card, face up, in turn. The team with the highest-ranking card wins the hand, or “trick.” Points are earned by the team that wins the most tricks. If your team called trump but fails to win the most tricks that round, the other team is deemed to have “euchred” you—and earns double points. The first team to reach 10 points wins the game.

Euchre is fun to play even if you aren’t that great at it. The games don’t drag on forever, either, so you can play for as little or as long as you like. It can be excellent for socializing—or, if you join our group, for friendly trash talk. At times, a gutsy move with no chance of winning will earn you a “Lord hates a coward”—a direct quote from my grandfather’s late cousin, Aunt Elsie.

When my mother was battling breast cancer, my grandmother worried that her chemotherapy treatments would make her too sick for euchre. “Mom, I could be dying, and I’d still be playing,” my mother told her. “Oh, me too,” my grandmother replied.

Years after my mother went into remission, my grandmother maintained the same attitude when she herself was diagnosed with end-stage lung cancer. In the weeks before my grandmother died, my family gauged



Who Invented Euchre?

Although popular throughout Canada and the U.S., its origin is the stuff of legend. One of the game's first rule books, published in the 1860s, recounts a popular theory: two friars, imprisoned for salacious but unknown wrongdoing, invented euchre to pass the time. Another guess is that it "sprang like Venus from the sea" and can be credited to a sailor named Jack. Its true origins are likely in Germany or France, but nobody knows for sure where the first hand was played.

whether she was having a good day based on how many games she could fit in. We slowed the pace of our games as her health declined and played every round knowing it could be her last. She was 84 years old and had smoked for most of her life. We knew we were going to lose her, but we still couldn't envision playing without our matriarch at the end of the table.

EUCHRE NIGHT was suspended after we lost my grandmother. For a long time, my family felt disjointed. Their home in Toronto was eerily quiet in her absence. The Tuesday-night crowd

visited my grandfather regularly, but the card deck and scoreboard remained in the cupboard. Having moved elsewhere by then, I dreaded coming back to the house they shared with me for two years. Walking into the kitchen and not seeing my grandmother at the table was too painful.

It was four months before we played another Tuesday-night game. Every member of the usual group made sure to be there. We took extra care to help set out dinner and wash the dishes, but our actions felt awkward and strained. Then the cards came out, and I took my grandmother's seat—sitting there made me feel close to her. After the first few rounds, we began to ease the tension by imitating her. "Dammit," someone said when a play didn't work out in their favour. Everyone smiled. For the rest of the evening, we brought up our favourite one-liners of hers, like "wouldn't that frost you?"

It has now been more than six years since my grandmother died. Those who attend Tuesday-night games continue to do so in the same way devout Christians attend service. We have played through illnesses, arguments, divorces and death. Euchre has held us together and helped us heal. These days, my boyfriend joins us if he's free. When my mother learned he played euchre, she told me to keep him around. Just like that, the circle grows. **R**

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LAUGH LINES

The most judgmental aquatic animal is probably the seal of disapproval.

—[@WHEELTOD](#)

People freak out because of sharks in the ocean. News flash: That's where they live! If you see them at Chipotle, then we have a problem.

—[@BIGKEFD](#)

I'm jealous of turtles. They can go home whenever they want.

—[@3SUNZZZ](#)

Lobsters would be proud of themselves if they knew how expensive they were.

—[@MEGSDEANGELIS](#)

I've never been more disappointed than when I found out the Miami Dolphins football team was made up entirely of people.

—[@SAMGRITNER](#)

"Hermit crab" describes me twice.

—[@LISAXY424](#)



Shore Things



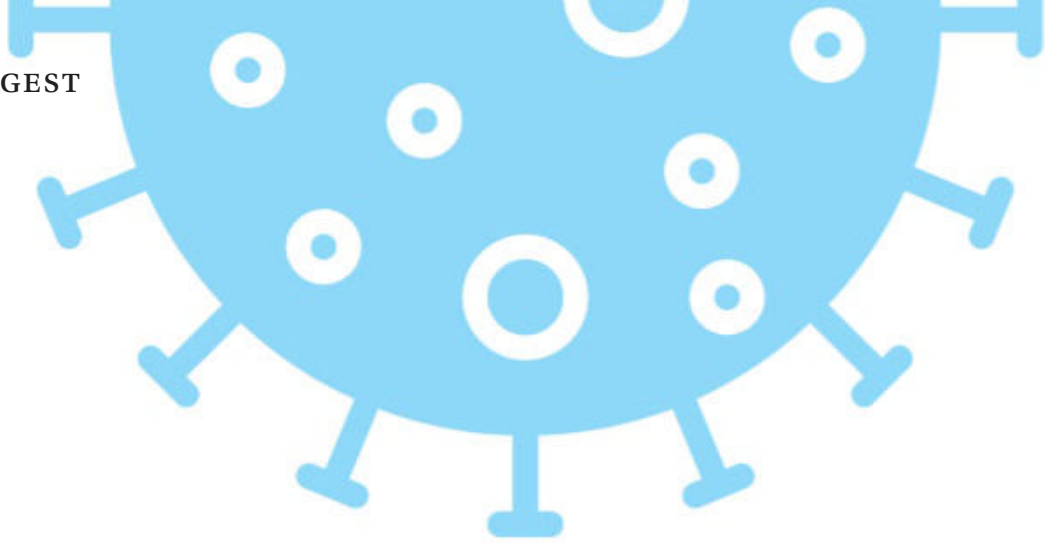
Rick Cameron spent weeks in a coma.

COVID-19 put Rick Cameron in the hospital for 77 days. The story of his amazing battle for survival, the doctor who wouldn't give up—and the Maritime community that rallied around them both.

FIGHT OF HIS LIFE

BY Nicholas Hune-Brown

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AARON MCKENZIE FRASER



Rick Cameron was tired. His body ached, and his breath seemed to catch in his chest—a bout of the flu, he assumed, something he'd picked up from the grandkids who'd been clambering over him the week before.

It was Friday, March 13, and in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, the coronavirus still felt like a distant threat. It was an item on the news, not something that could plausibly find its way to this sleepy maritime town.

At 69 years old, Rick was healthy and strong, a six-foot-two former athlete who had spent decades coaching youth hockey. He'd grown up in a tiny village on the coast and spent 41 years at the Michelin tire plant in Pictou County, working his way up from forklift driver to industrial engineer to business analyst. He'd met his wife, Faye, when he was 17 and she was 15. Rick was blond and outgoing and “pretty hunky,” Faye remembers. On Saturdays, after helping his dad on the lobster boat, he'd pick her up in his

prized Ford Falcon and drive to dance night at the local rink. They married four years later. It was a relationship, their daughter Kelly used to complain, that was so impossibly conflict-free that it had ruined her conception of what a marriage should be.

Kelly, a 40-year-old manager at Money Mart, had never really worried about her dad. He'd always been the one to take care of her and her brother Jeff, helping her through her battles with depression as an adult, bringing his insistently positive attitude to the worst situations. After a house fire a few years ago, she and her 44-year-old husband, Brian, had moved into her parents' three-bedroom Cape Cod-style home in Stellarton. The four of them have lived together ever since.

That weekend, with her dad already self-quarantining in the basement, Kelly stood at the top of the stairs and listened with growing concern as Rick weathered coughing fits that seemed to shake his entire body. On Monday, Rick and Faye drove 40 minutes to the ER in Truro. Masked health-care workers examined him and asked him if he'd been out of the country recently. He told them he'd vacationed in Florida for two weeks in mid-February, but that was nearly a month earlier, well past COVID's two-week incubation period. The hospital said it was only a viral infection and released Rick, telling him to take some Tylenol and get some rest.

RICK GOT WORSE AS THE WEEK WENT ON. THEY WORRIED WHEN HE STRUGGLED TO BREATHE.



As the week went on, however, Rick got worse. By Wednesday, he was so weak he could barely move. By Thursday morning, he struggled to breathe. "I think you better call an ambulance," he told Faye. To reduce the possible spread of the virus, family members weren't allowed in hospitals. As the ambulance was leaving, Faye rushed out to give her husband his phone and say goodbye.

At the hospital in New Glasgow, doctors swabbed him for COVID before transferring him to Truro, where doctors had created a COVID unit in anticipation of a possible epidemic. That evening, doctors called Faye to tell her the news: her husband had tested positive for COVID-19. They weren't sure where he'd caught it—possibly in the community, possibly from someone else who had returned from the States. "What do I do now?" Faye asked. "Pray," said the doctor.

That night, so weak he could barely work the phone, Rick called his wife. "Don't get upset," he said. If she started crying, he knew he'd start too. The doctors had a plan, he assured her. Before he said goodbye, he apologized for putting her through all this. He told her he loved her. When Faye called the next morning, the hospital told her Rick had been intubated and put into a coma late that night.

THE EIGHT-BED ICU at the Colchester East Hants Health Centre in Truro—a town with a population of about 12,000—is not often at the forefront of modern medicine. When Rick Cameron arrived on March 20, however, the hospital became home to the first critically ill COVID patient in the province.

The man in charge of his care was Dr. Kris Srivatsa, a 44-year-old internal medicine specialist with an easy smile and a swoosh of salt-and-pepper hair. Srivatsa had ended up in



Dr. Kris Srivatsa credits Rick's remarkable recovery to his team's hard work.

Truro almost by accident. Born in Mumbai, Srivatsa had relocated to the U.S. to finish his medical training. In 2009, with his visa running out, he'd desperately Googled "job opportunities in Canada" and stumbled upon a posting from a Nova Scotia town he'd never heard of.

Just a few months later he found himself driving deeper and deeper into what felt like uninhabited wilderness, second guessing his decision. But Srivatsa found an unlikely home in the community. He'd met his husband, an artist and gallerist, and they spent their vacations hiking Cape Breton Island. "It felt like a homecoming," he says today. In 2015, he became a citizen.

In late February, as the mysterious new virus made its way across the globe, Srivatsa and his team began anxious preparations—creating a COVID unit, securing personal protective equipment and practising procedures.

The process of intubation—sedating a patient before inserting a nearly foot-long plastic tube down their windpipe—is a routine part of ICU treatment, but it had suddenly become perilous in the COVID era. There is a high risk of aerosolizing a patient's saliva and respiratory secretions from their lungs and airways, sending the virus airborne. Srivatsa had been following the stories of nurses and doctors in Italy becoming infected and dying. He was determined not to see that happen in his hospital.

Rick had been immediately put on oxygen through a nasal cannula, a tube to his nose. But it wasn't enough. He needed more than five litres of oxygen every minute to keep his blood oxygen levels above 90 per cent. His lungs simply weren't drawing in enough air—he had to be intubated.

THE TRUTH WAS, KRIS SRIVATSA DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO TREAT HIS COVID-19 PATIENT. NO ONE DID.



That night, the team in Truro carefully donned their personal protective equipment. Using the buddy system, team members watched each other put on gowns and gloves, N95 masks, face shields and hats until they were sweating beneath their armour. They sedated Rick, putting him into a coma. Then the anaesthetist approached. The key was to do it in one shot—any more attempts and you increase the risk of aerosolization.

The procedure went perfectly on the first try, and the team quickly worked to stabilize Rick. But the truth was, Srivatsa didn't know how to treat his COVID patient. No one did. There is no cure for COVID-19. The most doctors can do is keep a patient alive and wait for the body to fight off the virus.

Srivatsa and his colleagues were learning about the virus in real time alongside the rest of the world.

Srivatsa spent his evenings poring over the latest studies, reading about what had worked in other countries, looking for any clue that might improve the likelihood of Rick's survival. A machine can do the work of breathing for a person for a little while. But at that point, early in the pandemic, the survival rate for people on ventilators was grim: up to 90 per cent of COVID patients on ventilators were reported to have died. (Later studies found that those early reports that Srivatsa had read were misleading, with the mortality rate more likely to be in the 30 to 50 per cent range.)

IN THE DAYS AFTER Rick was diagnosed, Faye, Kelly and Brian each received their own positive COVID tests. The house became a divided sick ward. Faye was in the basement, suffering through her own chest congestion and fever, but thinking only of her husband. Each day was the same: she would wake up, sit in one little corner of the basement, and call the hospital. Then she'd sit and wait until it felt like a reasonable amount of time had passed before calling again.

With her dad unconscious in the ICU, Kelly started a Facebook page to let friends and family members know what was going on. It was a place for her to record their days—a diary she vowed

her dad would read himself once he recovered. It was also a way to try to feel close to him at a time when COVID had forced families like hers apart, with hospitals still closed to visitors.

For Kelly and Faye, not being able to see Rick was the hardest part. For Srivatsa, too, having to share important news over the phone felt cruel and impersonal.

BY WEEK THREE, RICK WAS STILL IN AN INDUCED COMA AND STILL TESTING POSITIVE FOR COVID.



“Do you have access to Skype or some way that I can video call you?” he asked Faye one day. The doctor started a video call on his phone, and for the first time in weeks Faye was able to see her husband. “That was a turning point for me,” she says. She was able to put a face to the voices of all of the nurses and doctors who had been caring for him. And she could finally picture where her husband was—not in some strange void in the ether, but lying in a hospital bed, unconscious and shockingly thin, but still fighting, still her Rick.

After that, the family worked out a system with the nurses. They would do video calls with an iPad. Often a



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nurse would leave a phone on the pillow in Rick's room for hours. Faye would tell him they loved him and say how well he was doing, even if the news that day had been bad. When she ran out of things to say, she would sing—songs by the Righteous Brothers and the Beach Boys, all the old classics she and Rick had listened to a lifetime ago, driving out to the rink in his Ford Falcon.

By week three, however, Rick was still in a medically induced coma, still testing positive for COVID. Srivatsa and his team adjusted his sedation. They tweaked the setting on his ventilator. But Srivatsa was getting worried. Rick's body's response to the illness had caused widespread inflammation. His creatinine levels were up, indicating a kidney problem. In a growing number of cases, those symptoms led to one outcome. "My goodness," Srivatsa thought to himself one day. "After all this, he's not going to make it."

The doctors needed to get Rick's lungs working. One way to do that was to put him in a prone position, turning him onto his stomach for a few hours before turning him back so that the back of the lungs, which had been compressed by the weight of his body, would be able to do their work.

Proning a grown man attached to a series of tubes and lines is a delicate, complex manoeuvre that takes a team of nine. Truro didn't do the procedure in normal times; they sent patients

to the larger hospital with more staff in Halifax. But these weren't normal times. The move also came with serious risks: if something went wrong and Rick was destabilized and went into cardiac arrest, doctors might not be able to turn him back in time to save him.

When doctors told Faye she needed to decide if they should do the procedure, she burst into tears. That day, Faye and Kelly sat at either end of their large living room with Kelly's brother Jeff on the phone, and talked through their decision. Suffering through the worst of her own illness, Kelly would fall asleep, then wake in a panic. Faye decided she couldn't agree to anything that might endanger her husband. But that night, she couldn't sleep. "What if I didn't do the right thing?" she kept thinking. The next morning, she gave doctors the okay.

On April 3, Srivatsa and his team carefully followed the steps they had learned over video from doctors in Halifax. With three nurses on each side of his body, two respiratory therapists attending to the lines and ventilator at his head, and a doctor at his feet, the team turned Rick. Then they waited. Just a few hours later, the improvement was already evident: Rick's oxygen levels were ticking up. He was finally beginning to turn the corner.

WHEN KELLY STARTED documenting her father's battle with COVID, she just wanted to share his progress. But what

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had begun as a family page quickly grew into something much larger. The “papa bear” Kelly wrote about so movingly day after day became the face of an illness that was no longer a distant story. The local news covered Rick’s journey. Kelly’s posts were read by thousands, each message gathering hundreds of comments from people across the province and the continent.

On Easter Sunday, 25 days after Rick was hospitalized and nine days after the medical team first rotated him into a prone position, nurses called Kelly and Faye, excited to share some news: that morning, Rick had opened his eyes. They got Rick on the iPad, and there he was—still with tubes all over him, still so weak and fighting the sedation, but awake.

There were ups and downs, but steadily Rick grew better. Each day doctors put him into a prone position for a few hours. Each day they reduced the amount of oxygen on the ventilator, watching as his lungs became less and less dependent on the machine. The day they removed his tracheostomy tube, the nurses huddled around him. “Say something!” they urged. “Hi,” Rick croaked.

On April 26, 38 days after entering the hospital, Rick tested negative for COVID. A few days later, he was moved to the hospital in New Glasgow to start the long process of recovery. One morning he looked at his hand and felt a wave of terror as he realized he was

too weak to raise it off the bed. He spoke to Faye and Kelly over the iPad, trying to make sense of what had happened to him. “How long have I been in here?” he asked.

Rick had been on life support for 35 days and had lost 45 pounds. But as his mind grew sharper, he became determined to get stronger. When the physical therapist asked him to do three minutes on a stepping machine, the next day he would do six. He became singularly focused on one goal: getting strong enough to get home to his family.

Srivatsa was no longer in charge of Rick’s care, but he couldn’t help but follow his former patient’s progress from a distance. “He felt like a family member,” says Srivatsa. When someone sent him a video of Rick doing physiotherapy, Srivatsa could scarcely believe it. Just three weeks earlier Rick had been comatose and intubated, a team of nine turning him onto his stomach. Now he was walking, shaky but determined, wearing a maroon hoodie emblazoned with the words “FU COVID.”

ON JUNE 3, Kelly’s 40th birthday and 77 days after Rick first entered the hospital, the family was finally able to bring him home. It was a cold and rainy day. When they arrived at the hospital, Rick was clutching a cane and wearing the same shorts in which he had first arrived. “He pretty near ran to the car,” says Faye. Rick hugged his wife. “Happy



Clockwise: Rick's wife, Faye, and daughter, Kelly, started a Facebook group to cheer him on; Rick returns home, wearing a message to COVID-19; happier, pre-pandemic times.




birthday, honey," he whispered to Kelly, and they both burst into tears. As they pulled out of the parking lot, they gave a final wave to the nurses who were waiting by the entrance with tears in their eyes.

After two and a half months, the world outside the hospital walls seemed utterly transformed to Rick. People wore masks on the streets; "social distancing" and "flattening the curve" had become part of the lexicon; stickers marked where to stand at the local grocery store. It was a world in which an undercurrent of anxiety ran through the most basic human interactions. But in that corner of Nova Scotia, the pandemic had also brought people together.

As they turned onto the Camerons' quiet street, Rick saw a strange sight: a woman he didn't know on her front lawn, standing under an umbrella in the pouring rain, waving at him. Before he could make sense of it, the car pulled into the driveway, and he saw 40 people—neighbours and friends and complete strangers—surrounding his house, waving and cheering him on like a conquering hero.

In the weeks and months since he's been home, Rick is still trying to make sense of his experience. Each day he walks around the pond near their house, adding laps, gaining strength. He's only recently been able to make it through Kelly's Facebook posts, fighting back tears as he read the thousands of comments and prayers. It was strange to think about. If you added it up, all the people he'd met in his seven decades in that corner of Nova Scotia—the kids he'd coached, the co-workers he'd had a beer with, the countless hellos and pleasantries he'd shared in his personable way—Rick might have said he knew thousands. But to see all those people supporting him, willing him on, taking his personal survival as a symbol of hope in a dark time, that was almost too much to take in.

"I can't walk up the street without cars stopping to talk," he says. The other day a woman approached him at the local fish and chips place. "I know who you are," she told him. She had been following his story for months. He was the man who'd seen the worst of COVID, nearly died, and walked out the door of the hospital. 



Branch Out

Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree long ago.

WARREN BUFFETT

When trees burn, they leave the smell of heartbreak in the air.

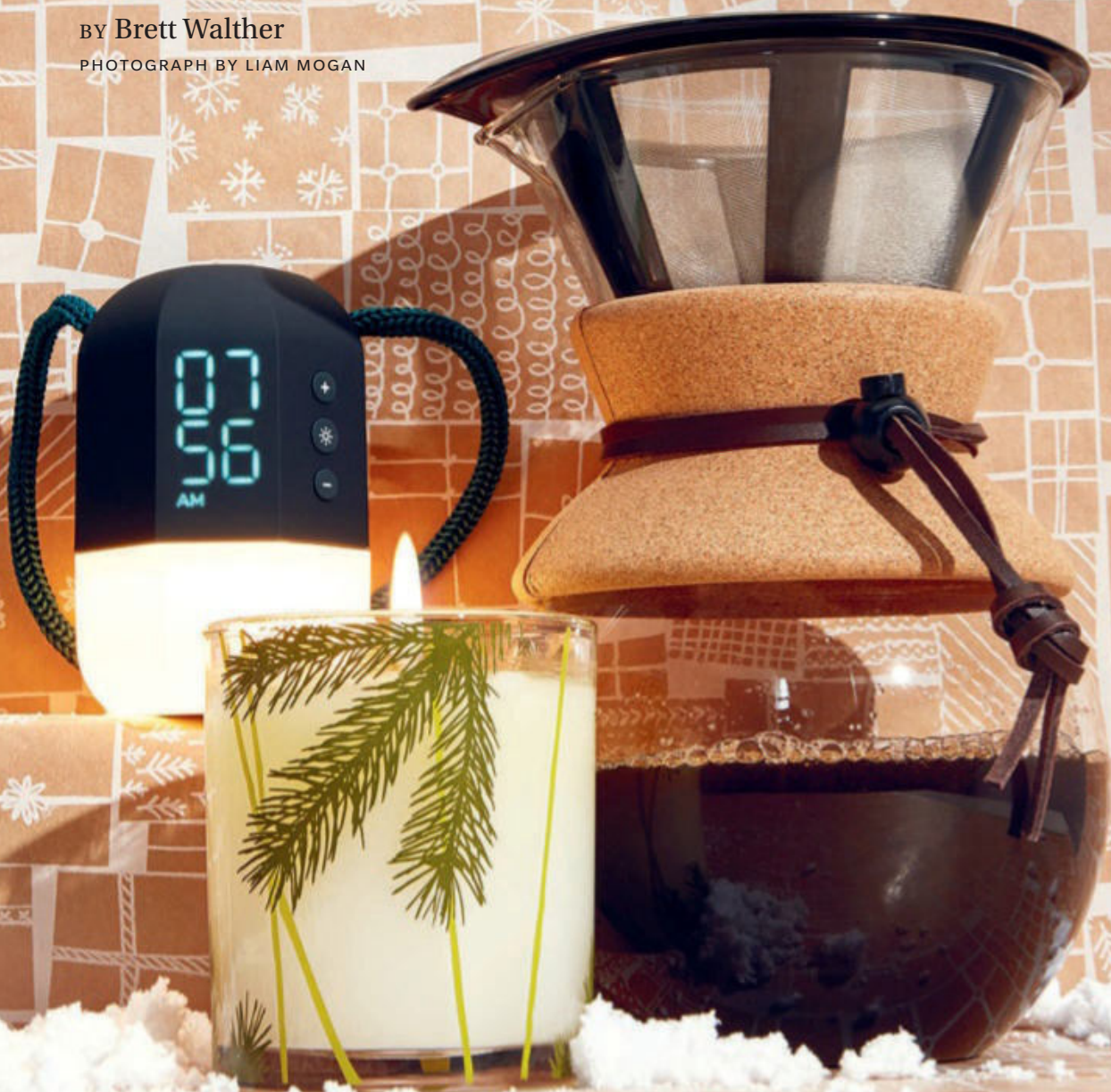
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PHOTOGRAPH BY LIAM MOGAN





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American Sign Language alphabet discs, \$28, treeforttoys.etsy.ca.



Alcohol-free Marvis mouthwash, \$22, thebay.ca.



Teas and honey for soothing common cold symptoms, \$28, davidstea.com.



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Seed spacer garden tool,
\$33, amazon.ca.



Love & Lore toque made from recycled plastic,
\$29, chapters.indigo.ca.



KitchenAid compact food processor,
\$49.99, homedepot.ca.



Tile Pro Bluetooth item tracker,
\$40, [bestbuy.ca](https://www.bestbuy.ca).



Breadsmart bread-making whisk and scraper,
\$20, [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca).



Benchmark flexible screwdriver,
\$49.99, [homehardware.ca](https://www.homehardware.ca).



Cotton-blend jacquard throw,
\$30, [ikea.ca](https://www.ikea.ca).



A pet camera that connects to your mobile device, \$40, [petsmart.ca](https://www.petsmart.ca).

(TILE) LIAM MOGAN



Weleda Skin Food travel moisturizers,
\$20, well.ca.



Hands Full interactive game,
\$40, mastermindtoys.com.



Tasco lightweight binoculars,
\$25, canadiantire.ca.



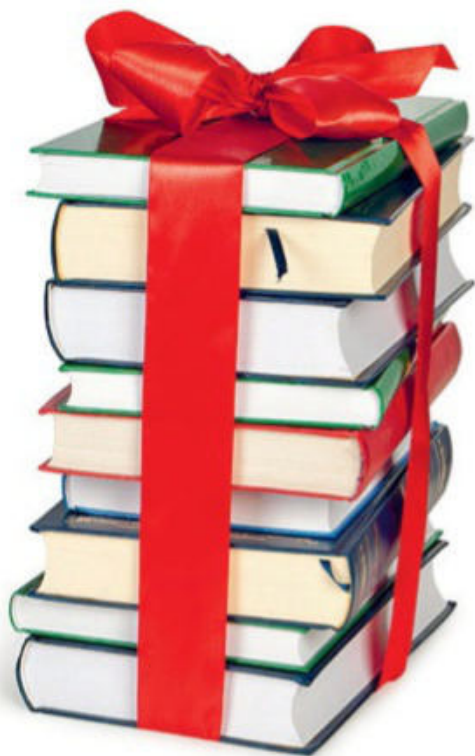
Ryobi Air Grip laser level,
\$40, homedepot.ca.



A non-alcoholic spirit for mocktails,
\$49, cocktailemporium.com.

For more gift ideas, check out RD.CA/GIFTGUIDE

READER'S DIGEST
BOOK CLUB

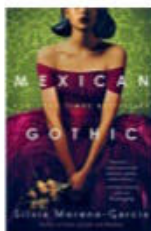


Give a Great Read

Sometimes the best gift is a book. Here are our favourite 2020 titles.

BY Emily Landau

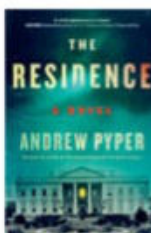
FOR SHIVER SEEKERS



MEXICAN GOTHIC

by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

The Vancouver-based novelist has written fantasies set in the Mayan underworld, vampire noir thrillers and outer-space dystopias. Her latest, a lush Gothic drama, takes place in a ghoulish Mexican mansion where a young debutante comes to rescue her cousin from certain danger. It owes as much to the movie *Get Out* as it does to *Rebecca*. \$36.



THE RESIDENCE

by Andrew Pyper

This brain-busting horror novel is inspired by the true-life tale of Franklin Pierce, the little-remembered 14th president, whose son was killed in a gruesome train accident days before his father's inauguration. The way Pyper tells it, the boy's spirit follows his family to the White House, where his presence exposes the fractures in the Pierces' marriage and America's troubled history. \$25.

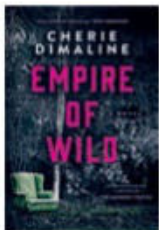


THE SEARCHER

by Tana French

Few writers are as universally adored by mystery connoisseurs as French, known for slow-burn, intricately plotted twisters set in fog-veiled Irish villages. Her new book

is about a gruff detective who retires to a remote cottage in one of those trademark towns. His suitcase is barely unpacked before a young boy recruits him to track down his missing brother. A wool blanket and mug of tea complete the creepy-cozy rural vibe. **\$36.**

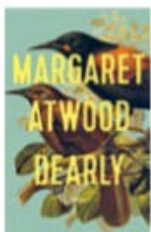


EMPIRE OF WILD

by Cherie Dimaline

Growing up near Penetanguishene, Ont., Dimaline would listen raptly to her grandmother's stories of the *rogarou*, a dapper werewolf-like creature from Métis folklore. And in Dimaline's breakout thriller, the *rogarou* is stalking Georgian Bay forests as a local Métis woman named Joan seeks the truth about her missing husband. It's atmospheric and exhilarating, the kind of book that will keep scare seekers up long past their bedtimes—and make them look twice next time they're in cottage country. **\$21.**

FOR LITERATURE LOVERS



DEARLY

by Margaret Atwood

You'd think, in the months after publishing *The Testaments*, last year's best-selling novel, winning the Booker for it and selling the rights to Hulu, Atwood might take a break. Instead she's released a new poetry collection. It swirls together ideas

about the natural world, obsolescence and death—with a healthy smattering of werewolves, aliens and hungry zombies for some classic Atwoodian weirdness. **\$33.**



PIRANESI

by Susanna Clarke

And you thought your quarantine was bad: the title character of Clarke's new novel lives alone in a house that never ends, where thousands of pillared halls are filled with Greco-Roman statues, where the oceans are in the basement and the clouds are on the upper floors. That's all we'll say about the plot, because the joy of the book is in discovering its wildly inventive world and in untangling the mystery that keeps Piranesi trapped within its walls. **\$36.**



A DEADLY EDUCATION

by Naomi Novik

The vaunted fabulist Naomi Novik's new adult fantasy is set at Scholomance, a spooky school for fledgling magicians. There, a talented young sorceress must figure out how to stop her magic from destroying everyone around her. It's deliciously ghostly, inventive and feminist—the perfect magic-school book for millennials who grew up on *Harry Potter* and seek to fill the wizard-shaped hole in their lives. **\$35.**



WHITE IVY

by Susie Yang

Ivy Lin, a young Chinese-American woman taught the art of petty theft by her grandmother, spins a maelstrom of lies and deception to win the love of a former classmate, a white Boston Brahmin who embodies everything she wants for herself. There are shades of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in this sleek debut thriller, complicated by the spectres of race, sex and the weighty expectations often placed on Asian-American women. **\$26.**

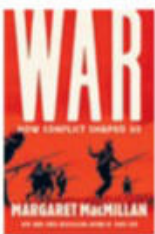
FOR HISTORY BUFFS



MEMORIAL DRIVE

by Natasha Trethewey

This former American poet laureate has written the year's most stunning memoir. In 1985, when she was 19, her stepfather shot her mother in the head in their Atlanta apartment. Trethewey investigates the untold history of her mother's murder and the indelible cycles of racism, toxic masculinity and domestic violence that made her death almost inevitable. **\$30.**



WAR: HOW CONFLICT SHAPED US

by Margaret MacMillan

After publishing several landmark books about the First World War, Canada's unofficial historian-in-chief shifts her

focus to how and why we end up on the battlefield. Drawing on everything from classical history to present-day hostilities, she assesses the elements of human nature that lead us into war, how the rise of nationalism exacerbated our conflicts and the effects of violence on soldiers and civilians. It's the undisputed dad book of the season. **\$35.**



THE EVENING AND THE MORNING

by Ken Follett

Follett's epic historical novels are bigger than cinder blocks—this one clocks in at 928 pages—but once you start reading them, it's impossible to stop. Thirty years after *The Pillars of the Earth*, he's written a prequel set toward the end of the 10th century, as Normans, Britons and Vikings wrestle for control of what will soon become medieval England. It's littered with high-seas adventures, meticulously described battle scenes, malevolent clergy and humble peasants caught in the chaos—in other words, pure historical candy. **\$48.**

FOR KITCHEN INSPIRATION

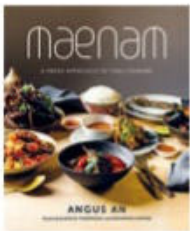


EAT A PEACH

by David Chang and Gabe Ulla

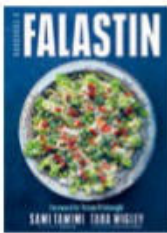
A gustatory renaissance man, Chang created the global Momofuku empire, stars on Netflix's *Ugly Delicious* and has now joined the illustrious league of

big-name chef memoirists. His book ticks the usual boxes, covering his childhood in Virginia and ascent to food stardom, but it's also astonishingly candid, delving deep into the psychological tolls of restaurant work, his experiences with depression and suicidal ideation and the struggles he faced as a Korean-American, both from within and outside his community. **\$37.**



MAENAM: A FRESH APPROACH TO THAI COOKING
by Angus An

It may be some time before we dine again in crowded restaurants. In the meantime, this elegant new cookbook from Angus An, chef of the titular Vancouver restaurant, can offer some approximation of the real thing. His recipes are spicy and fresh, with as much inspiration from the West Coast as East Asia: expect to find such home-cookable dishes as dom gati, a fiery coconut soup with grilled salmon; scallop ceviche cured in Thai nam jim sauce; and Maenam's famous black-pepper Dungeness crab. **\$35.**



FALASTIN: A COOKBOOK
by Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley

Tamimi, best known as Yotam Ottolenghi's executive chef and business partner, grew up in Jerusalem, leaving home at age 17 out of fear that his

father would find out he was gay. His new cookbook, written in collaboration with Ottolenghi-world insider Tara Wigley, is an ode to Palestinian food across the diaspora, featuring gorgeous, earthy tabbouleh and koftas, as well as shawarmas and halvah puddings. Even better than the recipes are the stories of the people Tamimi and Wigley met during their research: a woman in a refugee camp near Bethlehem who teaches cooking lessons, or the operator of the Palestinian Heirloom Seed Library, who preserves foods indigenous to the land. **\$45.**

FOR HEALTH ADVICE



SOAP AND WATER AND COMMON SENSE
by Bonnie Henry

B.C.'s charismatic public health officer has inspired tote bags and T-shirts emblazoned with her face and catchphrase ("Be calm, be kind, be safe"), which makes now a great time to pick up her reissued 2009 book for any pandemic-weary friends who could use some cool-headed reassurance. Originally written in anticipation of an H1N1 resurgence (how quaint!), it offers a pragmatic, approachable tour through the history and science behind the flu, Ebola, travellers' illnesses, STDs and, yes, the coronavirus, which is covered in a newly added introduction. The short version? Wash your hands. **\$19.**



BRAINTEASERS

Pic-a-Pix: Knight

Moderately difficult

Reveal a hidden picture by shading in groups of horizontally or vertically adjacent cells. The numbers represent how many cells are in each of the corresponding row or column's groups. (For example, a "3" next to a row represents three horizontally adjacent shaded cells in that row.) There must be at least one empty cell between each group. The numbers read in the same horizontal or vertical order as the groups they represent. There's only one possible picture; can you shade it in?

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



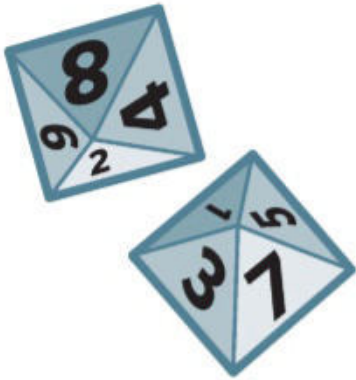
Matching Is So Last Year

Difficult A man has five pairs of pants (black, blue, brown, green and grey), five shirts (blue, green, red, white and yellow) and five hats (black, brown, red, white and yellow). How many different outfits of a hat, shirt and pair of pants can he assemble if an outfit cannot contain two garments of the same colour? (You may assume that if they have the same colour name, they're the same colour.)

(PIC-A-PIX: KNIIGHT) DIANE BAEHR; MORE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS AVAILABLE AT LEARNPICPIX.COM. (MATCHING IS SO LAST YEAR) DARREN RIGBY; (ILLUSTRATION) ISTOCK.COM/HEIN NOUWENS

Fickle Friends

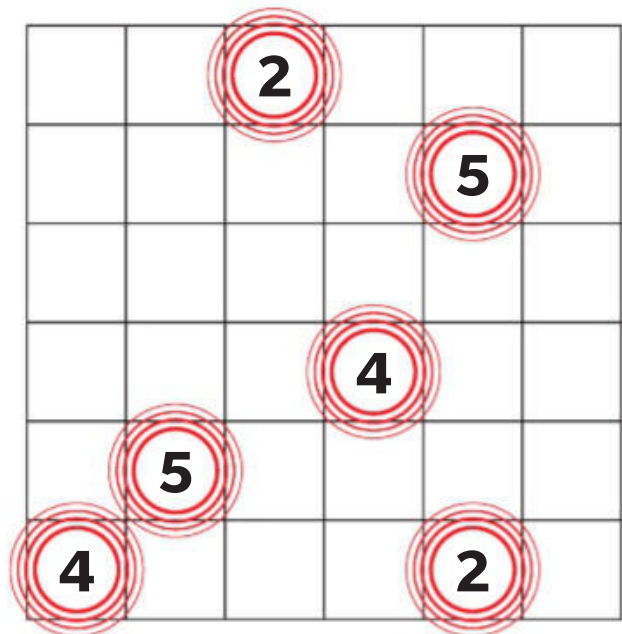
Easy Nisha’s friends want to buy her a gift. Originally, 10 friends were going to chip in equally, but then two of them dropped out. Each of the remaining eight friends had to chip in another \$10 to bring the total back up to the original amount. How much money did they plan to collect?



Doubles or Nothing Moderately difficult

A gambler proposes a game: Pay \$10 and roll two evenly weighted eight-sided dice with the sides labelled 1 through 8. If you get doubles (two numbers the same), you win \$60. The gambler will allow you to set aside one die with any number showing and just roll the other one to get doubles—if you pay \$5 more. If you play, should you set aside the die? Should you play at all?

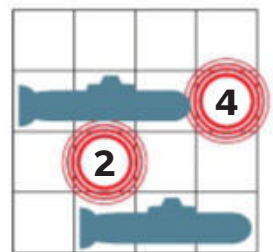
(FICKLE FRIENDS) EMILY GOODMAN; (DOUBLES OR NOTHING) DARREN RIGBY; (SUB HUNT) RODERICK KIMBALL, ENIGAMI.FUN



Sub Hunt

Difficult Four submarines must be located. The grid above is a sonar display. The numbers represent sonar sensors telling the total number of sea squares at any distance directly north, south, east and/or west from the sensor that are occupied by submarines. The subs are each three sea squares long. Can you find all four sneaky submarines?

EXAMPLE



For answers, turn to PAGE 143



BY Samantha Rideout

1. What hot beverage, enjoyed throughout the Western world during the holiday season, goes back at least as far as the ancient Romans?

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

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

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

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

6. Winter is caused when the earth is furthest from the sun. True or false?

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

8. The four letters on a dreidel stand for "Nes gadol haya sham," meaning what?

9. The first time Erno Rubik tried to solve his own invention, the Rubik's Cube, how long did it take him?

10. What holiday do Iranians celebrate on the longest night of the year with pomegranates and watermelons, among other foods?

11. Pantomimes are a British holiday tradition. Which of these celebrities has not acted in one: David Hasselhoff, Kristen Bell or George Takei?

12. Some say they can fly, but can reindeer swim?

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

14. What African-American athlete annoyed the Nazis by setting three world records at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin?



15. According to the Bible, how many wise men brought gifts to the child Jesus?

Answers: 1. Mulled wine. 2. A bicycle. 3. Anthropology. 4. Five days. 5. One-fifth. 6. False. It's caused when your hemisphere is tilted away from the sun. 7. An original copy of the Magna Carta. 8. "A great miracle happened there." 9. Over a month. 10. Yalda. 11. Kristen Bell. 12. Yes. 13. Olive oil. 14. Jesse Owens. 15. The number of wise men isn't specified in the Bible.

WORD POWER

This quiz hides a menagerie of beasts. See if you're eagle-eyed enough to spot the animal embedded in each word, then identify the correct definition.

BY Beth Shillibeer

1. catharsis—

- A:** fluid drainage.
- B:** release of repressed emotion.
- C:** sealing off.

2. bemuse—

- A:** inspire.
- B:** speculate.
- C:** confuse.

3. parhelion—

- A:** bright spots on either side of the sun.
- B:** device to partition wavelengths.
- C:** ring of fire in the sky caused by certain partial solar eclipses.

4. pugnacious—

- A:** argumentative.
- B:** foul-smelling.
- C:** distasteful.

5. swanky—

- A:** graceful.
- B:** fashionably luxurious.
- C:** lacking life skills due to having been pampered.

6. endogenic—

- A:** resulting from genetic modification.
- B:** concerning extinct species.
- C:** formed or occurring beneath the earth's surface.

7. encroach—

- A:** embroider.
- B:** encrust.
- C:** intrude.

8. iterate—

- A:** perform repeatedly.
- B:** explain in detail.
- C:** make a list of items.

9. asperity—

- A:** financial decline.
- B:** harshness.
- C:** sharpness of flavour.

10. nomothetic—

- A:** magnetically repellent.
- B:** adhering to a precise method.
- C:** relating to general scientific laws.

11. toponym—

- A:** place name.
- B:** insignia.
- C:** ornamental capstone.

12. execrable—

- A:** exceptionally talented.
- B:** extremely bad.
- C:** tediously slow.

13. motorcade—

- A:** procession of motor vehicles.
- B:** large parking garage.
- C:** car show.

14. forbearance—

- A:** ancestral lineage.
- B:** restraint and patience.
- C:** weight capacity.

15. epigone—

- A:** mythic story.
- B:** role model.
- C:** inferior imitator.

WORD POWER ANSWERS

1. catharsis—B: release of repressed emotion; as, *Watching A Street Cat Named Bob* served as a *catharsis* for Sonya's grief over the loss of her pet.

2. bemuse—C: confuse; as, The emu has *bemused* biologists as they've searched for advantages that compensate for its inability to fly.

3. parhelion—A: bright spots on either side of the sun; as, At sunset, after a day of lion-watching, the tourists lucked into a stunning *parhelion*.

4. pugnacious—A: argumentative; as, Chenlei's pug was *pugnacious* with other dogs.

5. swanky—B: fashionably luxurious; as, The fundraiser for restoring trumpeter swans in Ontario was a *swanky* affair with a live band.

6. endogenic—C: formed or occurring beneath the

earth's surface; as, The child soothed himself by petting his dog as he watched a show about *endogenic* disasters.

7. encroach—C: intrude; as, Although they often *encroach* on our homes, roaches could help humans by eating trash.

8. iterate—A: perform repeatedly; as, A recent study had rats *iterate* navigational challenges in a small car-like vehicle.

9. asperity—B: harshness; as, Natasha declared her loathing of the "great outdoors" with *asperity* after spotting an asp lying on the path ahead.

10. nomothetic—C: relating to general scientific laws; as, To explore wider principles of insect navigation, scientists have devised *nomothetic* studies of moth migration.

11. toponym—A: place name; as, The Red Pony Stands horse sanctuary bears a *toponym* reflecting the effort to preserve the Lac La Croix Indigenous Pony.

12. execrable—

B: extremely bad; as, Snow-crab fishing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence has had *execrable* effects on endangered right whales.

13. motorcade—A: procession of motor vehicles; as, The small Pacific town's Orca Fest featured a *motorcade* of floats.

14. forbearance—

B: restraint and patience; as, The mother bear displayed an air of *forbearance* when her cubs tried to play-wrestle with her.

15. epigone—C: inferior imitator; as, Picasso the painting pig is sure to inspire many *epigones*.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

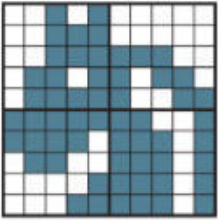
FROM PAGE 144

■	A	O	R	T	A	S	■	H	E	N
A	L	V	E	O	L	I	■	A	X	E
F	L	E	A	P	I	T	■	V	C	R
T	E	R	M	S	■	■	■	S	E	E
S	N	L	■	A	P	P	E	A	L	S
■	■	■	A	V	I	R	O	N	S	■
I	M	P	A	L	E	R	■	H	E	W
R	A	P	T	■	■	■	■	T	R	O
I	F	I	■	P	L	E	A	T	E	D
S	I	N	■	H	A	N	G	A	R	S
H	A	G	■	O	N	D	U	T	Y	■

BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

FROM PAGE 138

Pic-a-Pix: Knight



Matching Is So Last Year

90.

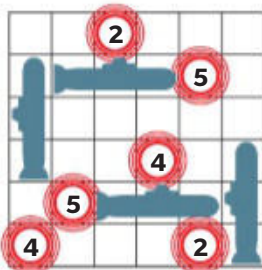
Fickle Friends

\$400.

Doubles or Nothing

Your odds of winning are $\frac{1}{8}$ whether you set aside a die or not, so you should not waste the extra \$5. If you win, you get back only six times your bet. With $\frac{1}{8}$ odds, the prize should be at least eight times your bet for this game to be worth playing.

Sub Hunt



BY Jeff Widderich

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

To Solve This Puzzle

Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that:

- ◆ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;
- ◆ each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

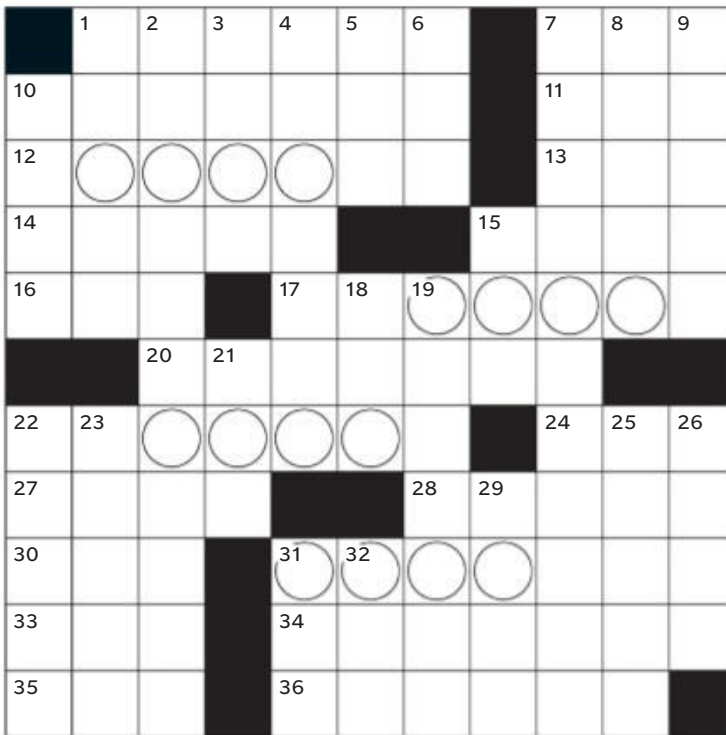
SOLUTION

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



Leap Year

BY Derek Bowman



ACROSS

- 1 Major arteries
- 7 Barnyard bird
- 10 Small air sacs in the lungs
- 11 Chop down
- 12 Rundown establishment
- 13 Passé program-taping device
- 14 Contract conditions
- 15 Start a garden
- 16 NBC sketch show

- 17 Legal actions
- 20 Canoe paddles, to voyageurs
- 22 Vicious nickname for Vlad III who inspired Dracula
- 24 Chop down
- 27 Spellbound
- 28 Store of valuable things
- 30 "___ Had a \$1,000,000"
- 31 Folded, as fabric

- 33 ID for CRA forms
- 34 Bombers' homes
- 35 Fairy-tale figure
- 36 Working, say

DOWN

- 1 Famed CFL quarter-back Damon
- 2 Like shingles on a roof
- 3 Package of paper
- 4 Part of a ship's rig
- 5 Boxing great Muhammad
- 6 Look after kids or pets
- 7 Could still achieve
- 8 Do very well
- 9 Candy usually sold with two flavours in a box
- 10 Matinee times, for short
- 15 Ottawa athlete, familiarly
- 18 Grand ___, Nova Scotia (Acadian site)
- 19 Foretell
- 21 Brewery fixture
- 22 Setter or wolfhound type
- 23 *The Godfather* group
- 25 Not just some
- 26 Gets married
- 29 Italian sauce
- 31 Vietnamese noodle soup
- 32 Jour de ___ (New Year's Day)

For answers, turn to PAGE 142

**THE
FEUD
IS BACK!**



**FAMILY
FEUD
CANADA**

HOSTED BY **GERRY DEE**

**NEW SEASON
MONDAY TO THURSDAY 7:30/8 NT**



Got Joint Pain?



➔ **Get Medicine That Works!**

Warning

This is a powerful product. It uses a five-fold natural pepper extract that blocks pain at the source. Unlike other rub-on pain relievers that only cause skin warming, Lakota works below the skin at the site of the pain. When it is absorbed, it blocks the pain messengers from sending a pain signal, killing the pain. And Lakota lasts way longer. It comes in a no-mess, hands-free roll-on. Get Medicine That Works!