

FEBRUARY 2021

Reader's Digest

68
All-New
JOKES!

**IMPROVE
YOUR
Metabolism**
An RD ORIGINAL



**KEEP YOUR
HEART
YOUNG**

From THEHEALTHY.COM

**Is Dentistry
a Science?**

From THEATLANTIC

**Truths & Myths
About Memory**

From PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM

**What Black
History Month
Is Missing**

By [DAWN PORTER](#)

13 Surprising
**KISSING
Facts**
By [EMILY GOODMAN](#)



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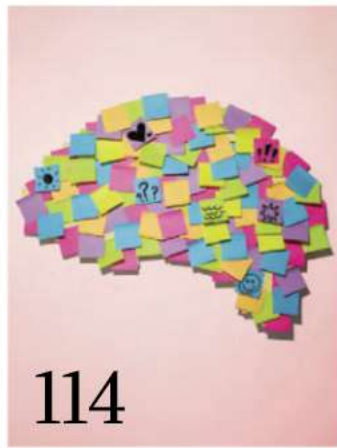
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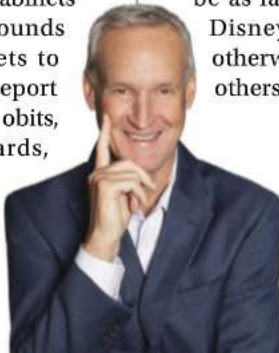
DEAR READER

Oh, Memories!

I MUST HAVE BEEN three or four when I woke one morning remembering a trip I'd taken alone to Disneyland before I was born. It was so real to me that I bawled when my two older brothers laughed at my story. But this *happened*, I cried. Honestly, I had met Mickey Mouse, ridden the Matterhorn, everything, and it was *amazing*.

So began my lifelong tussle with memory. While my dreams invent experiences I can't shake, important life events and old friends reside in a fog of impressions. Even my one pride, recalling the details of every trail I've ever walked, has fallen away. Now, when Susan and I come to a fork in a familiar trail, I just shrug, a once-trusted scout absent his sole gift.

Out of shame, I've compensated spectacularly, building an absurd alternate memory literally as big as a room. It's an attic full of cabinets and boxes holding 500 pounds of clippings, maps, tickets to everything I've attended, report cards (mine and my kids'), obits, work files, Christmas cards, and willy-nilly scrawled thoughts. To what purpose? Good question.



Bruce Kelley,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Write to me at
letters@rd.com.



I don't refer to the material, because how would I find what I was looking for? My kids laugh out loud when I say it's for them. I'll never write one memoir from this mess, much less the dozen its size implies. It's as if I'm a hoarder of evidence that I exist.

"The Truth About Memory" on page 114 may help stop the madness. Memory, it explains, isn't about evidence. It's just an old man telling tales by a fire, prone to nonsense but also entertaining as heck and rich with meanings to savor. Reading it, I felt a weight lift. If a good memory is a brain full of unreliable, deeply felt stories, I have those out the wazoo!

You do, too, I'm sure. Write me about a powerful memory that makes you smile, no matter how foggy or questionably true it is. I bet it won't be as fantastic as my sojourn to Disneyland, but convince me otherwise and we'll publish it so others can smile along with you.

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American Built and Registered Ships



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LETTERS
NOTES ON THE
November ISSUE



The Nicest Places in America

I'm an Army officer serving as a staffer for a member of Congress. I've been privileged to serve domestically and overseas and visit all 50 states. This story reaffirmed my faith in our country. We're so much more united than divided. Thank you, Buchanan, Michigan, for showing us that. I can't wait to visit.

—JEREMY CHRISTOPHER *Washington, DC*

Secrets and Lies That Are Harming Your Life

The section titled "The Recycling Myth" outlining how less than 10 percent of all plastic in the United States has been recycled over the past 40 years was a blow to this fastidious recycler! That said, we must make recycling more efficient for all products—our beautiful earth is at stake!

—MARY SCHELD
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Why We Should Rest on the Sabbath

As the years have gone by, my perspective on the Sabbath has changed. When I was young, it felt as if there were so many things we could not do. Now, as a mother of six, it's a gift—one day a week when I put aside work, laundry, and cooking to rest, worship, and enjoy my family. What a blessing!

—BOBBIE KROESE
Hull, Iowa

The Bank Robber on the Bicycle

The illustration with the bike wheels drawn as coins was a wee bit off. The back wheel is an Eisenhower dollar, which has a 38.1 mm diameter, and the front is a Susan B. Anthony dollar, with a 26.5 mm diameter. That's like having a 36-inch front wheel and a 24-inch wheel in the back. The Eisenhower should be a Sacagawea dollar with an identical diameter to a Susan B. Anthony!

—JAY STEVENSON
New Franklin, Missouri

Your Brain Was Made for Walking

This article made me think of the genius Wright brothers. Both were prodigious walkers and cyclists. When traveling overseas to demonstrate their invention in the French city of Le Mans, Wilbur wrote home about walking the ocean liner's promenade deck—about five to ten miles every day!

—TIM RAPOZA
Dighton, Massachusetts

We Found a Fix

I was amused with your trick to put aluminum foil on surfaces to repel cats. When our daughters left home, our cat expressed her unhappiness by relieving herself on the couch, so I tried foil there. Next morning, wet foil. Then I tried covering it with a plastic tablecloth. Next morning, wet again. Finally, I showed her: I bought a pet gate.

—RACHEL LEVITAN
Baltimore, Maryland

Everyday Heroes

Your "Surfer Dudes to the Rescue" story reminded me of my ten-year-old granddaughter. She was surfing this summer when she heard two people yelling and found a mother and son caught in a riptide. She got them to hang on to her surfboard and paddled them back to shore—just like these surfer dudes.

—SANDRA FOLEY
Mount Pleasant, South Carolina

DOG HEROES

Our son was a kennel master in Afghanistan and told us about a Marine who was lost to a sniper. The Marine's bomb-sniffing Labrador, Eli, covered his body loyally until other Marines finally pulled him off. Eli never worked again, as he constantly searched for the man he'd bonded to. Retraining didn't work, so Eli was retired and sent to live with the Marine's family. At the airport, he jumped into the arms of the fallen man's younger brother.

—D. T. Hartley
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

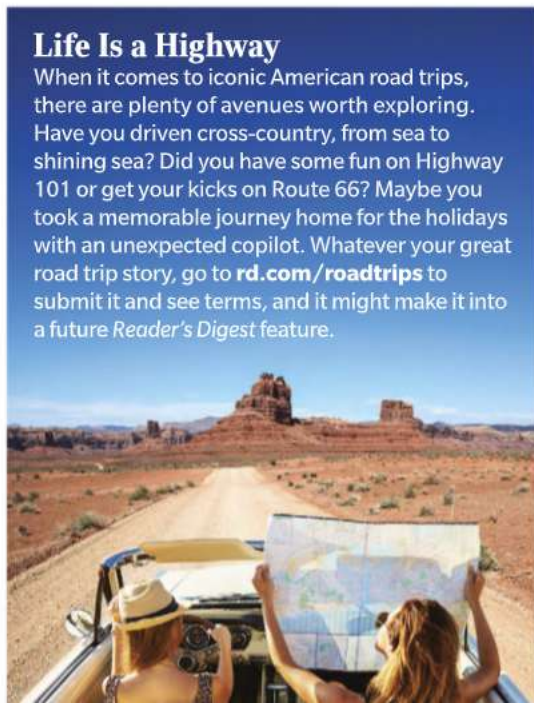
Not every hero dog was returned home after World War II. My family lived on the island of Saipan a few years ago, and running loose all over the island are the descendants of abandoned war dogs. It's very common to see these mild-mannered pups, called boonie dogs, wandering around looking for food at businesses or dodging traffic.

—Rachael Slater
BOONVILLE, INDIANA

Life Is a Highway

When it comes to iconic American road trips, there are plenty of avenues worth exploring. Have you driven cross-country, from sea to shining sea? Did you have some fun on Highway 101 or get your kicks on Route 66? Maybe you took a memorable journey home for the holidays with an unexpected copilot. Whatever your great road trip story, go to rd.com/roadtrips to submit it and see terms, and it might make it into a future *Reader's Digest* feature.

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For adults with type 2 diabetes (T2D), along with diet and exercise, once-daily RYBELSUS® can help lower blood sugar

Wake Up to the Possibilities of Reaching Your A1C Goal



If eligible, you may pay as little as \$10 for a 30-day prescription*

Text® RESULTS to 44535 to learn more about RYBELSUS®



RYBELSUS® is proven to lower blood sugar and A1C

In a 6-month study of people with an average starting A1C of 8%, the majority of people taking RYBELSUS® reached an A1C of less than 7%[†]:

- Nearly 7 out of 10 people on 7 mg of RYBELSUS®
- Nearly 8 out of 10 people on 14 mg of RYBELSUS®
- About 3 out of 10 people on a sugar pill



RYBELSUS® may help you lose some weight

While not for weight loss, in the same 6-month study, people with an average starting weight of 195 pounds lost up to 8 pounds[‡]:

- 5 pounds on 7 mg of RYBELSUS®
- 8 pounds on 14 mg of RYBELSUS®
- 3 pounds on a sugar pill

While many people in medical studies lost weight, some did gain weight.



RYBELSUS® does not increase the risk of major cardiovascular (CV) events such as heart attack, stroke, or death[§]

[†]In a 6-month study looking at A1C with 703 adults with T2D comparing 7 mg RYBELSUS® and 14 mg RYBELSUS® with a sugar pill when both were added to diet and exercise.

[‡]In a cardiovascular safety study, 3183 adults with T2D and a high risk of CV events were treated with either 14 mg RYBELSUS® or a sugar pill in addition to their usual diabetes and CV medications.

What is Rybelsus®?

Rybelsus® (semaglutide) tablets 7 mg or 14 mg is a prescription medicine for adults with type 2 diabetes that along with diet and exercise may improve blood sugar (glucose).

- Rybelsus® is not recommended as the first choice of medicine for treating diabetes
- It is not known if Rybelsus® can be used in people who have had pancreatitis
- Rybelsus® is not for use in people with type 1 diabetes and people with diabetic ketoacidosis
- It is not known if Rybelsus® is safe and effective for use in children under 18 years of age

Important Safety Information

What is the most important information I should know about Rybelsus®?

Rybelsus® may cause serious side effects, including:

- **Possible thyroid tumors, including cancer.** Tell your healthcare provider if you get a lump or swelling in your neck, hoarseness, trouble swallowing, or shortness of breath. These may be symptoms of thyroid cancer. In studies with rodents, Rybelsus® and medicines that work like Rybelsus® caused thyroid tumors, including thyroid cancer. It is not known if Rybelsus® will cause thyroid tumors or a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) in people

Do not use Rybelsus® if:

- you or any of your family have ever had MTC, or if you have an endocrine system condition called Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2)
- you are allergic to semaglutide or any of the ingredients in Rybelsus®

Before using Rybelsus®, tell your healthcare provider if you have any other medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had problems with your pancreas or kidneys
- have a history of vision problems related to your diabetes
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if Rybelsus® will harm your unborn baby. You should stop using Rybelsus® 2 months before you plan to become pregnant. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best way to control your blood sugar if you plan to become pregnant or while you are pregnant
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. Breastfeeding is not recommended during treatment with Rybelsus®

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Rybelsus® may affect the way some medicines work and some medicines may affect the way Rybelsus® works.

What are the possible side effects of Rybelsus®? Rybelsus® may cause serious side effects, including:

- **inflammation of your pancreas (pancreatitis).** Stop using Rybelsus® and call your healthcare provider right away if you have severe pain in your stomach area (abdomen) that will not go away, with or without vomiting. You may feel the pain from your abdomen to your back
- **changes in vision.** Tell your healthcare provider if you have changes in vision during treatment with Rybelsus®
- **low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).** Your risk for getting low blood sugar may be higher if you use Rybelsus® with another medicine that can cause low blood sugar, such as a sulfonylurea or insulin. **Signs and symptoms of low blood sugar may include:** dizziness or lightheadedness, blurred vision, anxiety, irritability or mood changes, sweating, slurred speech, hunger, confusion or drowsiness, shakiness, weakness, headache, fast heartbeat, and feeling jittery
- **kidney problems (kidney failure).** In people who have kidney problems, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting may cause a loss of fluids (dehydration), which may cause kidney problems to get worse. It is important for you to drink fluids to help reduce your chance of dehydration
- **serious allergic reactions.** Stop using Rybelsus® and get medical help right away, if you have any symptoms of a serious allergic reaction including itching, rash, or difficulty breathing

The most common side effects of Rybelsus® may include nausea, stomach (abdominal) pain, diarrhea, decreased appetite, vomiting, and constipation. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are most common when you first start Rybelsus®.

Please see Brief Summary of Prescribing Information on the following pages.

*Commercially insured patients only. Offer valid for up to six 30-day fills. Eligibility and other restrictions apply.

[†]Message and data rates may apply. Check with your mobile service provider. Message frequency will be based on your selections. Text HELP to 44535 for help. Text STOP to 44535 to quit. See Terms and Conditions of Use at RYBELSUS.com.

See cost and savings info at RYBELSUS.com, and ask your healthcare provider about RYBELSUS® today.



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RYBELSUS®
semaglutide tablets 7mg | 14mg

Brief Summary of information about RYBELSUS® (semaglutide) tablets

RYBELSUS®
semaglutide tablets 7mg/14mg

Rx Only

This information is not comprehensive.

- Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist
- Visit www.novo-pi.com/rybelsus.pdf to obtain the FDA-approved product labeling
- Call 1-833-GLP-PILL

Read this Medication Guide before you start using RYBELSUS® and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking to your healthcare provider about your medical condition or your treatment.

What is the most important information I should know about RYBELSUS®?

RYBELSUS® may cause serious side effects, including:

- **Possible thyroid tumors, including cancer.** Tell your healthcare provider if you get a lump or swelling in your neck, hoarseness, trouble swallowing, or shortness of breath. These may be symptoms of thyroid cancer. In studies with rodents, RYBELSUS® and medicines that work like RYBELSUS® caused thyroid tumors, including thyroid cancer. It is not known if RYBELSUS® will cause thyroid tumors or a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) in people.
- Do not use RYBELSUS® if you or any of your family have ever had a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC), or if you have an endocrine system condition called Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2).

What is RYBELSUS®?

RYBELSUS® is a prescription medicine used along with diet and exercise to improve blood sugar (glucose) in adults with type 2 diabetes.

- RYBELSUS® is not recommended as the first choice of medicine for treating diabetes.
- It is not known if RYBELSUS® can be used in people who have had pancreatitis.
- RYBELSUS® is not for use in patients with type 1 diabetes and people with diabetic ketoacidosis.

It is not known if RYBELSUS® is safe and effective for use in children under 18 years of age.

Do not use RYBELSUS® if:

- you or any of your family have ever had a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) or if you have an endocrine system condition called Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2).
- you are allergic to semaglutide or any of the ingredients in RYBELSUS®.

Before using RYBELSUS®, tell your healthcare provider if you have any other medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had problems with your pancreas or kidneys.
- have a history of vision problems related to your diabetes.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if RYBELSUS® will harm your unborn baby. You should stop using RYBELSUS® 2 months before you plan to become pregnant. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best way to control your blood sugar if you plan to become pregnant or while you are pregnant.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. Breastfeeding is not recommended during treatment with RYBELSUS®.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. RYBELSUS® may affect the way some medicines work and some medicines may affect the way RYBELSUS® works.

Before using RYBELSUS®, talk to your healthcare provider about low blood sugar and how to manage it. Tell your healthcare provider if you are taking other medicines to treat diabetes, including insulin or sulfonylureas.

Know the medicines you take. Keep a list of them to show your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.

How should I take RYBELSUS®?

- Take RYBELSUS® exactly as your healthcare provider tells you to.
- Take RYBELSUS® by mouth on an empty stomach when you first wake up.
- Take RYBELSUS® with a sip of water (no more than 4 ounces).
- Do not split, crush or chew. Swallow RYBELSUS® whole.
- After 30 minutes, you can eat, drink, or take other oral medications. RYBELSUS® works best if you eat 30 to 60 minutes after taking RYBELSUS®.
- If you miss a dose of RYBELSUS®, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular schedule.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about how to prevent, recognize and manage low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), high blood sugar (hyperglycemia), and problems you have because of your diabetes.

What are the possible side effects of RYBELSUS®?

RYBELSUS® may cause serious side effects, including:

- See “What is the most important information I should know about RYBELSUS®?”
- **inflammation of your pancreas (pancreatitis).** Stop using RYBELSUS® and call your healthcare provider right away if you have severe pain in your stomach area (abdomen) that will not go away, with or without vomiting. You may feel the pain from your abdomen to your back.
- **changes in vision.** Tell your healthcare provider if you have changes in vision during treatment with RYBELSUS®.
- **low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).** Your risk for getting low blood sugar may be higher if you use RYBELSUS® with another medicine that can cause low blood sugar, such as a sulfonylurea or insulin. **Signs and symptoms of low blood sugar may include:**
 - dizziness or light-headedness
 - blurred vision
 - anxiety, irritability, or mood changes
 - sweating
 - slurred speech
 - hunger
 - confusion or drowsiness
 - shakiness
 - weakness
 - headache
 - fast heartbeat
 - feeling jittery
- **kidney problems (kidney failure).** In people who have kidney problems, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting may cause a loss of fluids (dehydration) which may cause kidney problems to get worse. It is important for you to drink fluids to help reduce your chance of dehydration.
- **serious allergic reactions.** Stop using RYBELSUS® and get medical help right away, if you have any symptoms of a serious allergic reaction including itching, rash, or difficulty breathing.

The most common side effects of RYBELSUS® may include nausea, stomach (abdominal) pain, diarrhea, decreased appetite, vomiting and constipation. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are most common when you first start RYBELSUS®.

Talk to your healthcare provider about any side effect that bothers you or does not go away. These are not all the possible side effects of RYBELSUS®.

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

How should I store RYBELSUS®?

- Store RYBELSUS® at room temperature between 68°F and 77°F (20°C to 25°C).
- Store in a dry place away from moisture.
- Store tablet in the original pack.
- Keep the tablet in the pack until you are ready to take it.
- **Keep RYBELSUS® and all medicines out of the reach of children.**

Revised: 01/2020

Manufactured by: Novo Nordisk A/S, DK-2880 Bagsvaerd, Denmark

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READER CONTEST

Send Us Your Pet Pals!

Man's best friend may be a dog, but she could also be a cat, a horse, or a pig. Our pets form powerful bonds with us—and, adorably, with other animals too. *Reader's Digest* is on the prowl for the most hilarious, touching, and meaningful friendships involving a pet. Submit your story and photos—and videos!—and see terms at rd.com/petpals. We will share the best in many categories of friendship online, in the magazine, and on social media.



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New Look!

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EVERYDAY HEROES

Alarmed by a tragic shooting in his hometown, a New Orleans musician gives hope to kids—for a song

The Trumpet Is His Weapon

BY Emma Taubenfeld

SHAMARR ALLEN WAS dozing at home one evening last July when he was startled awake by a TV news item. There had been a shooting among a group of children in the 7th Ward of New Orleans, only a few miles from Allen's home, and a nine-year-old boy named Devante Bryant had been killed. Allen was horrified and heartbroken. He thought of his own nine-year-old son.

Originally from the city's rough Lower 9th Ward, Allen is one of the most celebrated jazz trumpeters in a city that's teeming with them. His band, Shamarr Allen & the

Underdaws, has released three albums, and he is a fixture on local television and as a street performer. After seeing the tragic news that morning, it didn't take long for Allen to hit on a possible antidote. He had a few spare trumpets lying around. Maybe he could offer them to kids in exchange for their guns.

"What saved me and redirected my path was a trumpet, the music and culture of the city that it connected me with," Allen says. "It showed me that success, connections, and differences can be managed through self-expression."

ARMON DAUPHIN/COURTESY SHAMARR ALLEN



"What saved me and redirected my path was a trumpet," says Allen.

Allen named the program My Trumpet Is My Weapon—after all, it was something of a personal mantra. He met with the New Orleans mayor to figure out how to make children feel safe coming forward with their guns, and the chief of police agreed to dismantle everything Allen collected, no questions asked.

“Just to see that they actually want to give up their guns, that’s the cool part about it,” says Allen, who has collected seven guns so far, a small but symbolically important start.

“I COME FROM WHERE YOU COME FROM, AND I CAN SHOW YOU THE WAY OUT.”

But he doesn’t stop with the swap of gun for instrument. After the exchanges, Allen connects the children with local musicians who give them free virtual trumpet lessons. He also started a GoFundMe page to purchase more instruments to give away. So far, he has collected over \$45,000. More importantly, he has fostered hope for his city and young people looking for a better life.

“I just say, ‘Look, I come from where you come from, and I can show you the way that got me out,’” says Allen. “And music may not be the way for you, but it will at least open your mind to see what’s out there.” **R**

Cavemen (and -women) to the Rescue

BY *Andy Simmons*

MIKE WHITE WASN’T TOO CONCERNED when his five-year-old coonhound, BuzzMan, hadn’t returned following a sanctioned raccoon hunt in Campbellsburg, Indiana, last February. Still, it had been a few hours, so using his cell phone, White followed the pinging from the GPS on the dog’s collar to a narrow cave entrance just large enough for a raccoon and, judging by the fresh dog prints, BuzzMan too. *Now* White was concerned.

Hunt organizer Logan Ray called in two spelunkers for help—Indiana Conservation Officer Neal Brewington and National Cave Rescue Commission coordinator Anmar Mirza. They arrived a few hours later and set about enlarging the entranceway by hand. Then, at 1:30 a.m. that Sunday, ten hours after BuzzMan went missing, the rescuers squeezed through.

The passageway was just three feet high, forcing the two men to slowly belly crawl, the only light coming from headlamps attached to their helmets. They stopped when they hit a tight



BuzzMan the dog is a tenacious hunter. Lucky for him, so were his rescuers.

crawl space about 100 feet in. Mirza, at five foot six and 230 pounds, is a stout man. No way would he fit through that hole. By then, it was 3:30 a.m. The men retreated back to the outside world.

When BuzzMan hadn’t emerged by Sunday afternoon, smaller volunteers who might fit through that narrow gap were called in. At 5:00 p.m., with other volunteers watching and ready to lend a hand, four new cavers, two men and two women, wriggled through the entrance. Foremost on their minds was the fact that this type of cave floods. “If it rains,” Mirza says, “that cave will kill people.” That night’s forecast: rain.

The cavers made their way to the tight space that had stymied Mirza and shimmied their way through. On the other side was a passage with a stream. The four split up, the women crawling and swimming upstream, the men downstream. “In caving, we call it a bathtub,” says Mirza. “Basically,

you’re lying down in water and you’re going to get completely wet.”

After an hour or so, the women reached an impasse and could go no farther. They were cold and wet, and the threat of hypothermia was real. The men faced similar issues. Still, one of them, Kevin Romanak, decided to push a bit farther before calling it quits.

He crawled 30 feet more, and the passage gave way to a large room. He scanned the floor with his headlamp and then up the 15-foot-high walls. And there was BuzzMan, standing on a narrow ledge, nervously staring back at the stranger. Romanak gently attached a leash to his collar, helping him off the ledge. He strapped an extra light on the dog, and, just like that, the coonhound took off toward the entrance 600 feet away, Romanak clinging to the leash.

At 9:30 p.m.—30 hours after being led astray by a raccoon—BuzzMan shot out of the cave, making a beeline for Mike White and slathering him in wet kisses. He was cold and hungry, but otherwise OK. His rescuers brought up the rear, emerging safely.

In total, eight cavers answered the plea to search for BuzzMan. “It’s great to have someone do that on a volunteer basis,” Logan Ray, the hunt’s leader, wrote on Facebook.

Mirza laughs off the praise. After all, going into dark, dank, tight spaces is their hobby. “What we consider fun,” he says, “often gives most people nightmares.” **R**

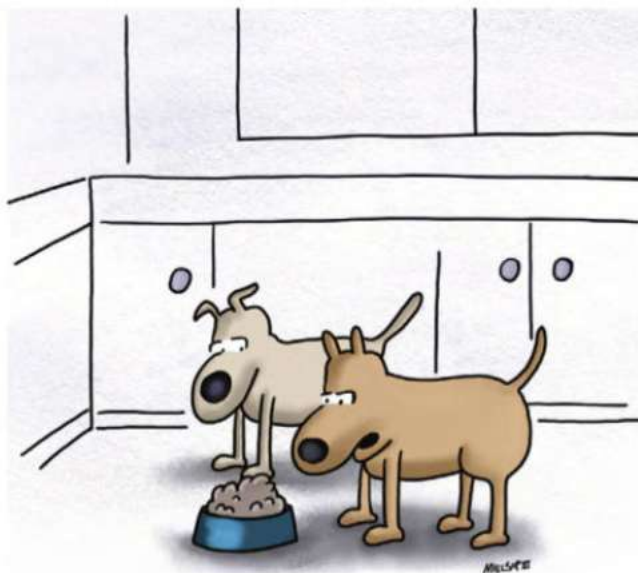
COURTESY LAURA DEMAREST

LIFE
IN THESE
United States

Looking out a diner window, I noticed a woman struggling to parallel park. After a few minutes of watching her inch up, inch back, inch out, and inch in, I went outside to offer my help, which she readily accepted. After I parked her car, a man came over to thank me. "You're welcome," I said. "Are you her husband?"

"No," he replied. "I'm the guy parked behind her."
—MITCHELL PLANTIER
New Boston, New Hampshire

Today, in incredible power moves, the cashier sniffed each of my candles as she rang them up and



"I wish they would stop putting food in my hat."

nodded or shook her head after each one.
—@ANNABROGES

What We Have Here Is a Failure to Communicate

◆ Decades ago, I told a guy that I was studying meteorology.

Him: Cool. So when's the next one coming?

Me: The next thunderstorm?

Him: No, the next meteor.

—@TRACYGARNER

◆ Thinking about the time that I said that I was distantly related to Marie Curie and a guy explained, "It's pronounced Mariah Carey."

—@I_LEAN

◆ A friend used to say she put her foot down on the *exhilarator*. She also would say her homeowner's insurance was paid through the *escarole*.

—@GLENAHARTWELL

LONNIE MILLSAP/THE CARTOON BANK

Why do baby clothes have pockets? Are people really going up to babies and saying, "Hey, can you hold this for a second?"

—@Y2SHAF

Confronting my husband, I demanded, "How come you never tell me I look pretty? Even my sisters tell me I look pretty sometimes."

"Your sisters are absolutely right," he said grandly. "You do look pretty sometimes."

—ALICE FAY
Omro, Wisconsin

I received a call from a telemarketer asking to speak with my husband.

"Unfortunately, that's impossible," I told him. "He's in heaven."

"In that case," he said, "what's the best time to reach him?"

—CAROL WHITE
Ocala, Florida

After she quit smoking, my mother gained 50 pounds in six months. Concerned, she asked her doctor, "Do you think I have an overactive thyroid?"

"No," he said. "You have an overactive fork."

—LORRAINE YOUNG
Sherman, Texas

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

THE NOT-SO-GRAND CANYON

America's national parks are treasures to behold. Or at least most of us think so. Here are one-star Yelp reviews from tourists who beg to differ.

SEQUOIA

"There are bugs and stuff, and they will bite you on your face."

YELLOWSTONE

"It's like a bigger version of Central Park, only with bears."

YOSEMITE

"Trees block views, and too many gray rocks."

THE GRAND CANYON

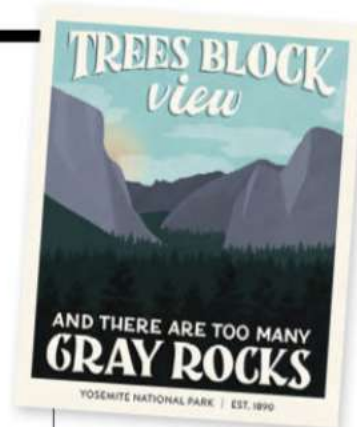
"A hole. A very, very large hole."

ISLE ROYALE

"No cell service and terrible Wi-Fi."

ARCHES

"Narcissistic, selfish people posed right in front of the arch for their personal photo."



DENALI

"The bus stops way too much."

—BACKPACKERS.COM

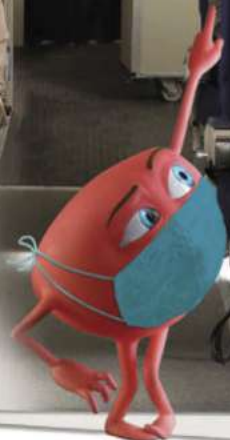
COURTESY AMBER SHARE - INSTAGRAM.COM/SUBPARKS

BOARDING PASS
BOARDING PASS

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

- ! Urgency
- ↻ Frequency
- 💧 Leakage

Take charge of your overactive bladder (OAB) symptoms by talking to your doctor about Myrbetriq today.



BOARDING PASS

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



*Based on 24-month TRx shares for all branded OAB medications, IMS Health National Prescription Audit, March 2018–February 2020. THIS INFORMATION DOES NOT IMPLY SAFETY OR EFFICACY OF ANY PRODUCT; NO COMPARISONS SHOULD BE MADE.



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USE OF MYRBETRIQ (mirabegron)

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

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

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

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Like us on Facebook  and visit Myrbetriq.com



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



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

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

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

What is Myrbetriq (meer-BEH-trick)?

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

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

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

Who should not use Myrbetriq?

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

What should I tell my doctor before taking Myrbetriq?

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

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

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

Tell your doctor if you take:

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

How should I take Myrbetriq?

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

What are the possible side effects of Myrbetriq?

Myrbetriq may cause serious side effects including:

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

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

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

The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include:

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

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

These are not all the possible side effects of Myrbetriq.

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

How should I store Myrbetriq?

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

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

General information about the safe and effective use of Myrbetriq

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

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

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

What are the ingredients in Myrbetriq?

Active ingredient: mirabegron

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

What is overactive bladder?

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

Marketed and Distributed by:

Astellas Pharma US, Inc.

Northbrook, Illinois 60062



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QUOTABLE QUOTES

Next time you are discussing an important issue with someone, ask yourself, Is this a monologue or a dialogue? Personally, I'm only interested in the latter.

—Reese Witherspoon, ACTOR

Cool detachment only gets you so far. Passion gets you a lot further.

—John Legend, MUSICIAN

I can live with a mistake. What I couldn't live with is sloppiness. And there's a difference.

—Dana Canedy, PUBLISHER

You can achieve your dreams at any age. Did you know that Harrison Ford at 30 was a carpenter? Vera Wang didn't design her first dress until she was 40. Even Captain Crunch joined the navy at 50.

—Leslie Jones, COMEDIAN

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

—Cookie Monster, MUPPET

We're always walking with our younger selves. I feel like I'm always answering to her, about whether I'm being as brave as I could be, or as big as I could be, or as ambitious as I could be.

—Greta Gerwig, DIRECTOR

There are years that ask questions and years that answer.

—Zora Neale Hurston, AUTHOR

I am older than fire, and twice as hot.

—Cher, SINGER

POINT TO PONDER

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

—Joaquin Phoenix, ACTOR



YOUR TRUE STORIES

IN 100 Words*

Baby to the Rescue

My grandparents were attending a wedding when they received the call that I was being born. Not wanting to seem rude, they debated whether to stay and eat first or just leave. They chose the latter and were at the hospital to welcome me as the newest member of the family. Later they learned that the whole wedding party got sick—I had saved my grandparents from a terrible case of food poisoning! Twenty-two years later they still love to tell this story.

—Abigail Bessey
LAKE ORION, MICHIGAN

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

First-Class Male

I'm a letter carrier, and I occasionally run into people from my mail route at local establishments. One Sunday, my wife and I were shopping, and, of course, I was not wearing my postal uniform. A young woman who lived on my route approached us in the dairy aisle. She asked me, "Don't I know you from somewhere?" I smiled and said, "Yes, I'm your mailman." With a broad grin, she replied, "Oh, I didn't recognize you with clothes on."

—FRANK MONGIELLO *Lakewood, New Jersey*



He's Lovin' Dad

I had a coworker who loved McDonald's food. No matter the lunch options at our office, he chose McDonald's every time. One day, he brought his young son with him to work. I spoke to the son while his dad was clocking out

to take him to lunch—at McDonald's, of course. "Do you love McDonald's as much as your daddy?" I asked. He thought for a moment and said, "I really love McDonald's, but I think I like my daddy better."

—Lori Williams
BECKLEY, WEST VIRGINIA



Papa Bear's Good-Night

BY David Warren
MIAMISBURG, OHIO

I WAS SURPRISED to learn the sleeping arrangements at the log home we were sharing with my in-laws for the week—specifically that my young daughter had agreed to sleep in a first-floor bedroom by herself.

As we settled in, we discussed the number of deer we had spotted on our way up to the log home.

"I hope we see a bear or two this week!" my wife shouted.

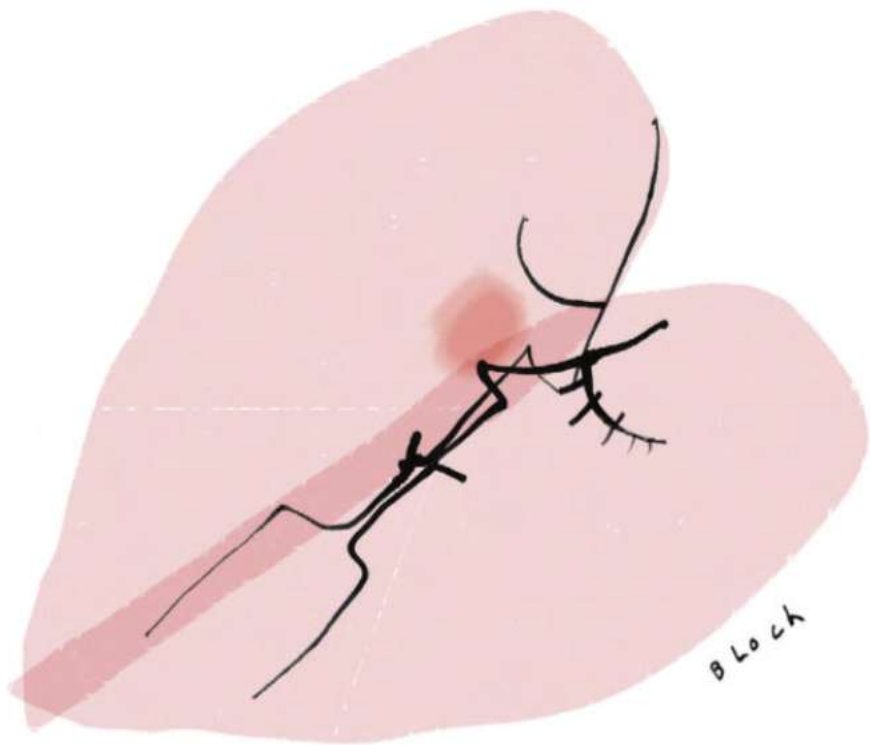
At bedtime, my wife and I retreated to the upstairs loft, and my in-laws headed for a bedroom on the first floor. My wife and I were about to

**Sometimes 100 words just aren't enough!*

doze off when our daughter appeared with a worried look on her face. She said a bear was scratching at her window. I decided it would be best if I slept downstairs and my daughter shared the loft with my wife. On my way down, I passed my father-in-law, asleep in front of the television. I was in bed only a couple of minutes when I heard a tap ... tap on the window. Something was indeed out there, but it wasn't a bear—at least that's what I told myself.

Sometime later, I was awakened by a loud, low-pitched growl. I saw a large figure in the doorway and froze as it inched closer to me. I realized what it was—only after my father-in-law leaned in to give me a kiss. I blurted out in my deepest voice, "It's David." My father-in-law jumped back. We both laughed nervously at the awkward moment, and I explained his granddaughter's bedroom switch. I told him that the only thing scarier than a bear attack was Papa Bear coming in to kiss me good-night. He growled in agreement! **R**

13 THINGS



Pucker Up! Facts About Kissing

BY Emily Goodman

1 IS IT in his kiss? Scientists think so! During a smooch, our senses heighten and we subconsciously pick up on things such as the health and genetic compatibility of our lip-locking partner. A first kiss especially can be a make-or-break moment: 59 percent of men and 66 percent of women say they have ended things after a bad one.

2 KISSING IS neither universal nor unique to humans. In 2015, anthropologists at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, concluded that fewer than half of the 168 cultures they studied engaged in romantic kissing. Meanwhile, apes such as chimpanzees and bonobos have been observed locking lips—bonobos even use tongue.

3 ONE EXPLANATION of how the term “French kiss” came about is that British and U.S. servicemen returning from World War I described—and tried!—a tongue-heavy approach they saw the French using. However, the French language had no formal word to describe the sensual style until a prominent dictionary included the term *galoché* (think sloppy, wet galoshes) in its 2014 edition.

4 ENGLISH HAS numerous ways to describe the mashing of lips, from the fancy

osculation to the slangy *necking* and expressions such as *making out* and *tonsil hockey*. When it comes to spelling out the sound of a kiss, most opt for *mwah*. Germans, however, say *schmatz*, Greeks go for *mats-muts*, and the Japanese use *chu*.

5 A SINGLE kiss involves as many as 30 facial muscles. And while it’s not exactly cardio, kissing can burn calories (two to six per minute, with more passionate sessions burning up to a total of 26). On average, we spend two weeks of our lives smooching, so it could take your entire kissing existence to work off that box of Valentine’s Day chocolates.

6 ... UNLESS you’re Ekkachai and Laksana Tiranarat, who hold the record for the world’s longest kiss. The Thai couple canoodled for 58 hours, 35 minutes, and 58 seconds back in 2013. They aren’t the only

ones who take smooching seriously. Thanks to philematology—the scientific study of kissing—we know that most people tilt their heads to the right as they pucker up.

7 AMERICAN FILMS made between 1930 and 1968 were not to include “excessive kissing,” according to a set of guidelines called the Hays Code. Alfred Hitchcock cleverly got around this in his 1946 film *Notorious* by having Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman kiss repeatedly yet intermittently. Their lips never touched for longer than three seconds at a time.

8 THE FIRST interracial kiss on American television took place in an episode of *Star Trek* in 1968. Producers of the show worried about how some stations would react and wanted to film a second version in which the kiss happened offscreen.

But actors William Shatner and Nichelle Nichols, playing Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Uhura, deliberately flubbed their lines to force them to use the original take.

9 PUBLIC DISPLAYS of affection can get you in trouble in some places. They're illegal in Dubai and frowned upon in China. Even the French outlawed smooching on train platforms to prevent amorous passengers from delaying train departures. Lip laws go back centuries. King Henry VI of England banned all kissing in 1439 to stop the spread of bubonic plague.

10 WHILE MONONUCLEOSIS—aka the kissing disease—is only one of several conditions you can catch from a kiss, in

most cases, swapping spit boosts your immunity. When you smooch someone new, you exchange tens of millions of microbes; long-term partners share a common microbe mix from all their years of lip-smacking. These exchanges help protect us against infections and maybe even allergies.

11 SEALING SOMETHING “with a kiss” became a popular practice during medieval times, when most people were illiterate. Someone who couldn't sign his name on a contract could instead draw an X and then kiss the mark to make it legally binding. That's why the xs in *xoxo* stand for kisses.

12 THE TRADITION of kissing at midnight on New Year's Eve is

rooted in English folklore and the superstition that not doing so portends a loveless year ahead. For good measure, New Year's revelers in Scotland kiss everyone in the room.

13 A DOZEN men and at least three women have claimed to be the most iconic smoochers in history—the nameless sailor and nurse locking lips in Times Square on VJ-Day. Photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt started following the sailor after he noticed him moving about the crowd and kissing anyone wearing a skirt. When the sailor came upon the nurse—whose white dress contrasted nicely with his dark suit—Eisenstaedt snapped the picture but neglected to get their names, creating a mystery for the ages. **R**

The Divine Feline

In ancient times cats were worshipped as gods; they have not forgotten this.

TERRY PRATCHETT, AUTHOR

WE FOUND A FIX
9 TRICKS TO Improve Your Life*



1 Keep Those Paws Out of Your Plants

PETS Protective deterrents by design, pine cones can help defend your houseplants from mischievous feline visitors. If your cat can't help but dig and meddle—or worse—in your ficus, keep a few pine cones in the pot. Cats hate touching them, and they won't ruin the natural look of the greenery.

*From RD.COM and THEHEALTHY.COM

NYNKE VAN HOUTEN/GETTY IMAGES

2

Save on Printing Costs

MONEY Printer ink can become a major business expense in your home office. Depending on the printer, you may be able to refill the cartridge yourself with a bottle of black ink and a small syringe. For most brands, just peel the sticker off the cartridge to reveal five holes; the top three should lead to the ink reservoir.

3

The Magnifying Glass in Your Phone

TECH Trouble reading a menu? On an iPhone, go to Settings > Accessibility > Magnifier. Flip it to on, then when you click the home button three times, the camera will open as a magnifying lens with a zoom function. Android users, turn the feature on in Settings > Accessibility > Vision > Magnification, then open the camera and tap the screen three times.

4

Keep Your Mirrors Fog-Free

HOME Wiping shower fog with your hand will leave your bathroom mirror more streaky-clean than squeaky-clean. Instead, lightly coat the dry mirror with a thin layer of hand soap, then buff it with a cloth. Soap reduces the surface tension of water and inhibits droplet formation, so future showers won't fog up the glass.

6

Mix Up Your Cocktails

FOOD & DRINK Now that your Saturday evenings on the town have been restricted to Club Living Room, you may find that the drink menu has also gotten much more limited. Enter all the booze, beer, wine, mixers, and garnishes you have at home on makemeacocktail.com, and it will generate a list of every possible cocktail you can mix with those ingredients. There are even nonalcoholic recipes for teetotalers who still enjoy a nightcap.

7

Go Dutch when You Get Out of the Car

AUTO Don't fling the door open and potentially clock pedestrians on busy streets or ding doors in parking lots. Using the "Dutch Reach," courtesy of the cycling capital of the world, open the door with your right hand, not your left. The pivot to do so draws your eye from the rear mirror to a more accurate posterior view for a full survey of your surroundings and a safe exit.

8

Expose Sneaky Sugars

HEALTH Many "lite" products make up for their reduced fat (and flavor) with hidden sugars. Enjoying the classic oil-and-vinegar combo can spare you light salad dressings' added sugars and preservatives. And dressing's partner in crime? Ketchup, whose sugar content goes incognito as brown, high fructose corn, and rice syrups. Instead, slather that burger with ketchup's compadre, mustard, which typically doesn't contain any sugar.

9

Snow Removal Made Easy

HOME While heavy, wet flakes are perfect for snowmen, they're back-breaking for those clearing the walkway. Skip the shovel and pack a ball of snow at your stoop, then roll it right down to the curb. It'll stick together and roll up neatly like a carpet, exposing the clear walkway underneath. **[E]**



5

Arrivederci to Sauce Stains

CLEANING Store Bolognese in a plastic container one time and the container never lets you forget it. Dishwasher and microwave heat seal in that orange tint permanently. Before it even gets that far, add dish soap, a paper towel, and warm water to the container, close the lid, and shake for 60 seconds. Your best container will stay crystal clear.



NICHOLAS EVELEIGH/GETTY IMAGES

YINYANG/GETTY IMAGES



"It's amazing to think he started out in the lobby."

ALL
in a Day's
WORK

My wife helps run a food pantry from the basement of a Catholic church. After an appliance store delivered two freezers to the church, it sent a

personalized follow-up e-mail asking for feedback. It began: "Dear Saint ..."

—JOHN TEBBETTS
Gurnee, Illinois

As a high school Latin teacher, I'm used to fielding questions about my subject, which some find arcane and ancient. However, I was surprised when someone

asked, "Do you have any native speakers in your class?"

Sadly, that person was the principal.
—KEITHA ITO
Plantation, Florida

My friend has owned a sewing machine shop for decades. Recently, a customer he hadn't seen in years came in to buy a new machine. Looking around the

Gonna update my CV to say "survived 1,000 Zoom calls that should've been an e-mail" as part of my achievements in 2020.

—[@ALANAH_TORRALBA](#)

small shop a bit befuddled, she asked, "Whatever happened to that young man who used to work here?"

My friend smiled. "I got older."
—JAMES METZ
Honolulu, Hawaii

I'm sorry, but I can't respond to your work e-mail. I've taken my bra off for the night.
—[@LIZHACKETT](#)

I called my local used bookstore to ask when it opens. The owner

said, "Usually it's 11, but I'm in the middle of a lovers' quarrel, so today it's more like 12."
—[@SARATARDIFF](#)

For my Sunday sermon, I purposely buttoned my suit vest incorrectly to illustrate how difficult it is to fix things once you've started off on the wrong foot. So I stood before my congregation, opened my suit coat, and asked, "Does anyone notice anything unusual about me?"

A child shouted, "Yes, your shoes are dirty."
—LEWIS KUJAWSKI
Toledo, Ohio

The first day of college can be disorienting, even for returning students. I was walking in the lobby of one of our main buildings when an upperclassman stopped me. "Excuse me," he said, looking lost. "Is the second floor still upstairs?"
—KAREN LOVE
Chicago, Illinois

ANYTHING FUNNY happen to you at work? It could be worth \$\$\$.
For details, go to page 3 or [RD.COM/SUBMIT](#).

PET PEEVES

A vet in Westminster, Maryland, shares her unique animal adages with passersby.



PAUL NOTH/CARTOONBANK.COM

COURTESY CARROLL COUNTY VETERINARY CLINIC



THE PUTT FOR A CAR Challenge

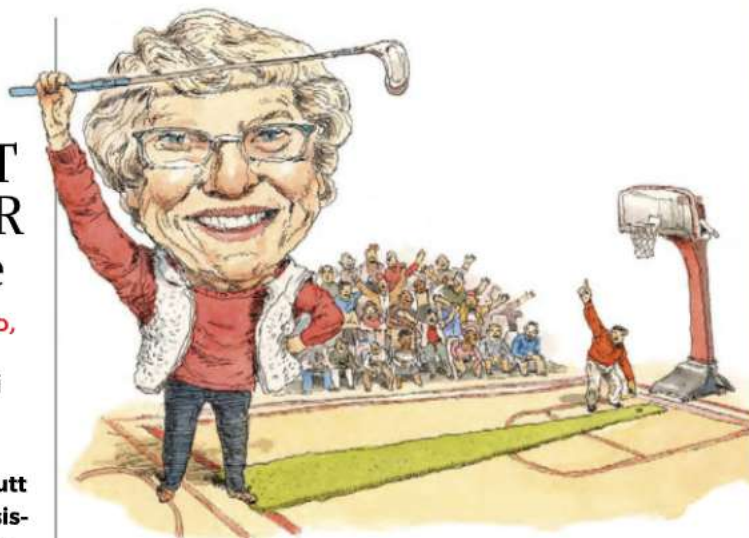
MARY ANN WAKEFIELD,
age 87,
Oxford, Mississippi

You made a 94-foot putt at a University of Mississippi basketball game?

My daughter and her husband are big Ole Miss fans. They take me to the games quite often. At halftime there's this competition—putt the ball into the hole to win a new car. They've done it for three or four years, but no one had ever come close.

You must be a serious golfer.

Actually, I didn't know how to golf until after I retired. My husband taught me. I enjoyed it, but I never won any prizes. My game fell apart when I got close to the green,



but I could hit a long shot pretty good.

No kidding! How were you selected to participate?

I said I wanted to try it, but I guess my son-in-law thought I was kidding. So I thought, I'm going to find out where you sign up for this! And I found it.

And you found the hole!

I couldn't see the hole. I closed my eyes and said, "Lord, it's up to you." That was his putt, not mine. It wasn't until the crowd erupted that I knew it went in.

Did you need a new car?

I had this grand idea to auction the car off to raise money for charity—I have a soft spot for poor children. My daughter convinced me to keep the car and donate money instead. So far, I've donated more than \$20,000 to help feed and clothe children, as well as send them to school. 🇺🇸

Wakefield won a 2020 Nissan Altima in the Cannon Motors Putt for a Car Challenge at a University of Mississippi men's basketball game.

ILLUSTRATION BY John Cuneo

Do you know where your vegetables come from?



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THE
**FOOD
ON YOUR
PLATE**

YOU THOUGHT I was just brewed leaves and nothing more, but pinkies out, folks, and prepare to be impressed. I'm the most consumed drink in the world next to water. I have launched ships and started wars, and I helped birth your country. The culture of sipping me is steeped in tradition from Japan to Afghanistan. And each version—whether it's iced black, hot green, or a chai latte—starts with the same amazing plant.

That's right: All tea—my main varieties being black, green, and oolong—is from the same evergreen shrub, *Camellia sinensis*. (Sorry, but your herbal "teas"—mint, chamomile, raspberry, etc.—are not tea at all.) As a native of the Himalayan foothills, my leaves were most likely originally chewed for a jolt of caffeine. Eventually, people figured out how to brew me.

I'm usually harvested by hand, and only my new shoots are good for brewing. Once picked, I oxidize like a cut apple. Green tea is made by immediately heating fresh-picked leaves to preserve my grassy, vegetal flavor. At my spectrum's other end is black tea, which is left to fully oxidize, making me malty, dark, and about twice as caffeinated as when I'm green. In the middle are oolong teas, which have a range of flavors, having been heat-treated between the green stage and the black.

An even richer source of variety? My famous flavored versions. I am the 1,000-year-old, delightfully fragrant jasmine tea, a palate cleanser in

Chinese restaurants worldwide. I am the black tea blended with the zest of bergamot oranges, which got its name (one theory has it) when a stash of gifts shipped to British earl Charles Grey contained bergamots in close quarters with tea leaves. Yes, that Earl Grey. And I am spiced chai (*chai tea* is redundant; *chai* means "tea" in Hindi), a black tea brewed with cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, and black pepper that is key to the practice of Ayurveda.

After centuries of trade in Asia, I made my European debut early in the 17th century, and it set off a scramble for new trade routes to meet the thirsty demand for me. Cue a burst of colonialism. Cue also the origin story of you Yanks.

You've got your version, but here's mine. After a century during which the Crown wouldn't allow the East India Company to sell directly to the Americas and the massive trader had to ship me through England first, that profitable supply chain was met with trouble: The colonies started sourcing their tea more cheaply from Dutch smugglers.

The Tea Act of 1773 was the English answer. It let the company cut out the middleman in London on the logic that the colonials would return to getting tea the upstanding way—from them. But, perversely, Britain also kept its tax on tea. Now *that* was upsetting. If the king could tax you on me, he could tax you on anything! A boycott began. Tea drinkers in the colonies were shamed and ridiculed. The Boston Tea Party, a culmination of the resistance, took place on December 16, 1773, when 90,000 pounds of me were

CRAIG CUTLER/TRUNK ARCHIVE

I Am Tea ...
**A Symbol
of Health and
Revolution**

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

**1
BOWL
& YOU'RE
& GOOD TILL
LUNCH**

With 2% milk, at least half of adults had a lower desire to eat than before breakfast for 3 1/2 hours.



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10 LAYERS OF WHEAT IN EVERY BITE



MASALA CHAI

In a medium saucepan, boil 2 cups water. Add a crushed 2-inch knob of peeled fresh ginger, 4 crushed green cardamom pods, 2 whole cloves, 1 cinnamon stick, ½ teaspoon fennel seeds, and ¼ teaspoon cracked black peppercorns. Boil for 2 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons loose black tea leaves (about 6 bags black tea) and boil for 1 minute longer. Stir in 2 cups whole milk along with 2 tablespoons sugar (or to taste), then bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a gentle simmer for 2 minutes longer. Fine strain the masala chai and serve hot. Makes four 8-ounce cups.

tossed into the harbor by outraged colonists. The spectacle was followed by the continental congresses, a war for freedom, and the formation of the United States. No wonder you've never become a tea-drinking nation!

Yet you can't really resist me; U.S. sales rise every year, especially of my sweetened and iced black version,

MIZINA/GETTY IMAGES

The Food on Your Plate

though as calls to give up sugar increase, more of you are sipping me unadulterated. And heaps of studies say drinking me straight is great for you. That's largely courtesy of my polyphenols, antioxidants that might lower the risk of some cancers and improve cognition and mood. As with most nutrition research, little is definitive, but we know this: A "cuppa" (or several) per day will lend you the many upsides of caffeine and not hurt a bit.

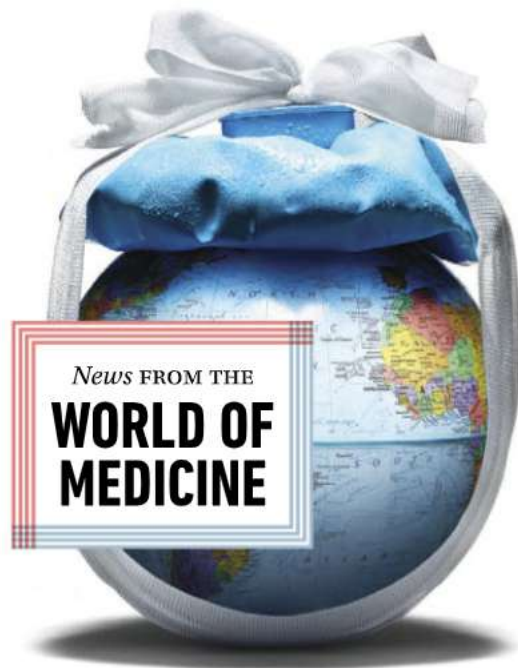
Recent controversies over me are of a lighter variety—and still largely driven by those most opinionated tea drinkers, the Brits. Take the kerfuffle Adele created when a video for the hit song "Hello" featured her making tea by putting hot water in the cup first. "What kind of a MONSTER puts the hot water in before the tea bag?" reads an example of the Internet outrage. Last year, an American TikTokker brewed me in the microwave and added an unsavory blend of milk, powdered lemonade, sugar, cloves, cinnamon, and Tang. The furor was so great that the British ambassador to the United States called on troops from her country's armed forces to brew tea properly on camera to set the record straight.

Apparently the British still can't take a trolling from Americans on the subject of their favorite drink. ☒

Kate Lowenstein is a health journalist and the editor-in-chief at Vice; Daniel Gritzer is the culinary director of the cooking site Serious Eats.

SILENCE YOUR GROWL





News FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**

THE SWEETEST HOME REMEDY FOR COUGHS

It's that time of the year when the flu and the common cold are in full force, often bringing nasty coughs. According to a University of Oxford review, the solution is in your kitchen cupboard: a jar of honey. A spoonful can bring more symptom relief than the usual treatments, such as cough syrup and antibiotics (which are often prescribed even though they're ineffective for viruses). Honey works its magic by coating and soothing the irritated mucous membranes in the throat. Just don't give it to infants under 12 months—it may contain microbes that are harmful to them.

Breaking Chronic Pain's Vicious Cycle

People living with lasting pain often avoid regular exercise. While understandable, that habit can be counterproductive, as physical inactivity can make pain worse. A Pennsylvania State University study of people with osteoarthritis found that subjects avoided activities they were capable of doing and were more sedentary on days when they thought about their pain with a more exaggerated sense of helplessness or hopelessness. A psychologist can coach you in avoiding this pitfall and teach you techniques for continuing to thrive with chronic pain. For instance, learning to recognize discouraging thoughts as simply thoughts rather than assuming they're true can positively influence your habits.

ADAM VOORHES



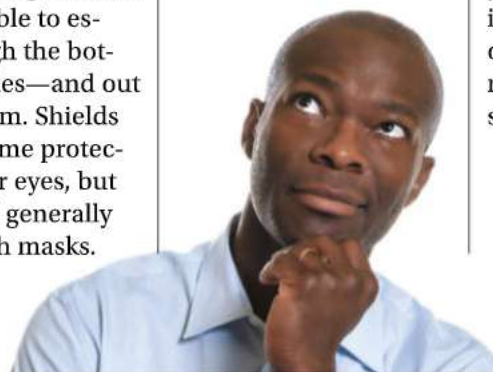
A Face Shield Isn't a Mask Substitute

Although plastic face shields may be more comfortable than surgical or cloth masks, they're less effective at protecting you and others. Florida Atlantic University researchers recently put face shields to the test by mimicking the small droplets that are thought to spread COVID-19. After a simulated cough or sneeze, a face shield blocked the initial forward motion of the droplets, but they were able to escape through the bottom and sides—and out into the room. Shields can offer some protection for your eyes, but they should generally be used with masks.

BYJENG/GETTY IMAGES (FACE SHIELD). DMEPHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES (MAN)

DOCTORS MAY NOT RECOGNIZE SYMPTOMS ON DARKER SKIN

Quality of health care can be compromised by a patient's skin tone—in part because doctors don't see many photos in their medical school textbooks of dermatological symptoms on people of color. This reality makes it trickier for them to get timely and accurate diagnoses for diseases ranging from anemia to melanoma. British medical student Malone Mukwende came up with a partial solution: He compiled a photographic handbook for patients and doctors, available at blackandbrownskin.co.uk.



Acetaminophen Can Dull Your Emotions

A series of recent studies suggests that taking 1,000 milligrams of acetaminophen, a popular go-to for everyday aches and pains, might blunt some of our emotional responses, including those involving empathy, joy, and hurt feelings. Researchers suggest this may be because it reduces activation in brain areas that are thought to be involved not only in pain but also in emotional awareness. Until it leaves your system, the drug can also affect risk perception, which could impact your health and welfare. Take that into account before taking acetaminophen when you'll need to be driving a car, for instance, or making decisions related to COVID-19 social safety.

PROBIOTIC BENEFITS STILL CHASING PROOF

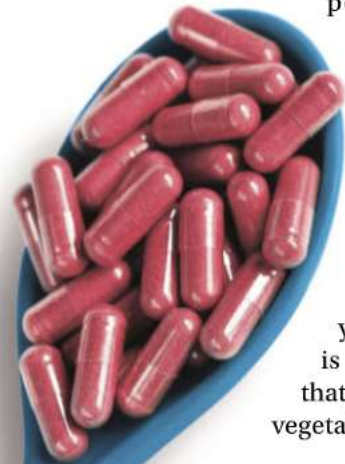
There are thousands of species of bacteria in your intestines that are collectively known as the gut microbiome. Many are beneficial for your digestive health: Among other things, the gut microbiome metabolizes the nutrients in food and protects the intestines against infection.

Scientists still have a lot to learn about which strains and combinations of these bacteria do what, but that doesn't stop companies from claiming that probiotics—foods and supplements containing living bacteria—will improve ailments such as inflammatory bowel disease and irritable bowel syndrome. In most countries, these products aren't sold as drugs, so their makers can assert untested claims.

The American Gastroenterological Association reviewed relevant studies and concluded that certain probiotics may be useful in some cases, such as preventing an intestinal disease called necrotizing enterocolitis in premature babies, reducing the risk in those on antibiotics of catching a *Clostridium difficile* infection, and managing

pouchitis, a complication of ulcerative colitis surgery. Beyond that, there wasn't enough evidence to recommend probiotics for treating other digestive conditions.

A more reliable way to foster the health of your gut microbiome is to eat a high-fiber diet that includes plenty of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains.



Poor Diets Linked to Acne in Adults

A study of more than 24,000 French participants suggests that people are more likely to experience adult acne if they consume a lot of sugary drinks, dairy products, or fatty fare. And yes, pimples can affect grown-ups, especially women, possibly because women are more prone to hormonal imbalances.

Antibiotics Can Lead to Unintended Pregnancies

Taking antibiotics may keep birth control pills from working as they should, according to a British study of unwanted drug side effects. To play it safe, the researchers recommend that women take extra precautions—using condoms, for instance—until they finish their antibiotic prescriptions. **R**

PHOTO_CHAZ/GETTY IMAGES

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HOW TO

Fine-Tune Your Metabolism

Adjusting over time will help you stay thinner—and healthier

BY *Courtenay Smith*



GETTY IMAGES (4), ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA AMADOR

DANIELLE PAYTON'S METABOLISM was a mystery for most of her adult life. When she was 18, she weighed 165 pounds, which made little sense to the five-foot-four-inch high school shot put champ. "I was a very healthy eater—coming from a family of pescatarians and vegetarians—and an athlete, and I couldn't lose a single pound," says Payton.

Just before college, she was diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), which causes imbalances in the hormones that regulate both the reproductive system and metabolism. That solved part of the mystery—women with PCOS are prone to weight gain. But Payton continued to struggle. By the time she turned 24, she weighed 209 pounds and had developed prediabetes. Her search for a solution became more focused and urgent. "I had to find food and exercise that worked for my body," says Payton, who lives in Miami and is cofounder of *kudose.co*, an online fitness and wellness program. For her, that meant giving up processed and fried foods, eating more animal protein, doing short daily bouts of walking (30 minutes) and strength training (5 to 15 minutes), and taking a probiotic supplement. She also takes doctor-prescribed medication for PCOS (metformin/spironolactone), which seems to help keep her weight in check. It took her four years, but Payton ultimately lost about 90 pounds and now is fairly steady at 122. "Mentally, I am tougher because

of this process of standing up for my body and figuring out what worked for me," she says. "No one knows your body like you do, and listening to your body is crucial."

Most of us have heard that a good metabolism is the golden ticket to weight loss, but that seriously underplays metabolism's role in our bodies and in our health. Simply put, metabolism is the energy used by the physical processes that keep us alive. We burn up to 80 percent of daily calories while at rest (referred to as basal, or resting,

KEEPING YOUR BODY RUNNING EFFICIENTLY MIGHT BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

metabolism) by breathing, digesting, maintaining circulation, and more. But while that fact inspires comparisons of your metabolism to a fire-burning furnace, it's really more like a busy city transit system, delivering the right mix of chemicals to the right cells at the right times to extract energy from food and keep the whole machine (i.e., your body) running seamlessly. That's why the first sign of a troubled metabolism may be the faltering of one of these systems manifesting as rising insulin, cholesterol, or triglyceride levels or fat deposits around your waist—all markers of metabolic disorder, which

heralds a higher risk of diabetes, heart disease, or stroke.

But your biggest risk—the “most universal contributor” to metabolic decline according to an article co-written by Nir Barzilai, MD, director of the Institute for Aging at the Albert Einstein School of Medicine—is aging. Aging naturally causes metabolic decline and also makes us more likely to require medications to address issues such as high blood pressure or depression that could slow metabolism. While there’s obviously no fix for aging, you can learn to fine-tune your metabolism as your body changes over time, priming it to deliver the right mix of hormones, much as Payton did. “Find what works for you—then do it consistently,” she says. Here are some of the best small changes in habit that can help you make strides in boosting your metabolism.

Watch the Sunrise

“Simply basking in early morning rays can increase your metabolism naturally,” says Ken Ceder, executive director of the nonprofit Science of Light. That’s because our circadian rhythms, or master body clocks, regulate the hormones crucial to metabolism and hunger control, including insulin, cortisol, and leptin. Our circadian rhythms work best when in sync with the sun, receiving bright light in the morning and diminishing rays toward sundown. To get your daily dose, spend at least 15 minutes every morning outdoors

in sunlight, without sunglasses so the sun reaches your eyes’ photoreceptors. (Don’t stare at the sun; you will get the benefits passively.)

Safeguard Your Sleep

Sleep is the reset button for your metabolism. Prepare your brain for bedtime by dimming the lights a few hours beforehand—turn off bright overheads and turn on bedside lamps equipped with warm or amber-toned bulbs. Also, “if your slumber is constantly interrupted by light snoring, then you are missing out on calorie-burning benefits,” says Bindiya Gandhi, a family medicine doctor in Decatur, Georgia. The fix may be as simple as using a breathing strip on your nose to help open constricted sinuses at night. (Just ask your doctor whether you should be tested for sleep apnea, since snoring is a common sign of the serious disorder.)

Try Intermittent Fasting

If changing your diet is too overwhelming, try a form of fasting. A 2020 review in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* concluded that intermittent fasting regimens can be a promising way to lose weight and improve metabolic health. There are many approaches, such as overnight fasting (don’t eat between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m.) or the 5:2 method (eat about 25 percent of usual calories two days a week). Ask your doctor first. Trying it even once or twice may jump-start other healthy habits.

Track Your Water Intake with Rubber Bands

Try this easy system: In the morning, put five rubber bands on your wrist. Every time you drink 16 ounces of water, take off a band and put it on the bottle. German researchers found that metabolic rate jumped by 30 percent for up to 40 minutes in 14 volunteers after they drank 16 ounces of water. The researchers estimated that over a year, increasing your water consumption by two cups a day could burn an extra five pounds or so. Since much of the increase in metabolic rate is due to the body’s efforts to heat the liquid, make sure the water you’re drinking is icy cold.



JOLEEN ZUBEK, ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA AMADOR

Feed Your Gut

“Healthy gut bacteria optimize your metabolism by helping your body extract nutrients from your diet more effectively,” says Amy Gorin, MS, RDN. A daily serving of probiotic-rich foods such as yogurt, kefir, and unpasteurized sauerkraut might help, though so far studies have been inconclusive on the total benefits. Yogurt has an added advantage—dairy foods may lower the risk of metabolic disorder, according to an analysis in the *British Journal of Nutrition*. Preliminary studies have found that some probiotic strains help with weight loss (*Lactobacillus rhamnosus*) and body fat reduction (*Lactobacillus amylovorus*). “Ask your health-care provider about a probiotic supplement,” recommends Gorin.

Quash Cravings with Protein

A number of well-documented studies show that high-protein diets may help adults lose weight while maintaining lean muscle mass (one of the main drivers of a naturally high calorie burn), according to a 2020 analysis in *Nutrition*. Protein also unleashes a cascade of metabolic signals from the gastrointestinal tract to tell the brain that it’s full. However, long-term high-protein diets can be harmful to the kidneys, so consult your doctor.

Don’t Detox

Severe, long-term calorie restriction doesn’t work, because your metabolism is mainly determined by your

body composition; the more muscle mass you have, the more calories you burn throughout the day. "When you lose weight quickly, your body is breaking down its muscle mass," says Susan Berkman, RD, of the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. "When you resume eating normally, your metabolism is slower than when you started the plan because you have less muscle." Result: You gain fat.

Chill Out—Literally

Cold weather is one of nature's most powerful metabolic boosters, helping increase your levels of brown fat, a type of fat that burns more calories even when you're at rest. "Going outdoors in cold weather can increase your nonexercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT) score, helping you torch calories," says Kristen Koskinen, a registered dietitian nutritionist in Richland, Washington. "The metabolic act of staying warm is an easy way to boost your metabolism without breaking a sweat." Taking a cold shower (or finishing a steamy one with a cool rinse-off) might also give your metabolism a quick boost by forcing your body to shiver—which requires

energy (and calories)—to warm up. But since the long-term effects on weight loss are unclear, you'll have to decide whether the torture is worth it.

Curl Up on the Couch with a Book

Wait—being a couch potato can help your metabolism? If you're totally relaxed, then yes. "Stress increases the level of the hormone cortisol, which can cause metabolic dysfunction if it's constantly elevated," says Dr. Gandhi. The cure is to do something daily that will help you completely de-stress, whether that's watching a movie, taking a long bath, or reading a book.

Sweeten the Deal with Cinnamon

In test tubes, cinnamaldehyde—the compound that gives cinnamon its flavor and smell—spurred human fat cells to burn extra fat. In animals, a regular dose has been shown to help control blood glucose. Human studies are scant, but it can't hurt to slay a sweet craving by stirring a dash into coffee, oatmeal, yogurt, or a smoothie. **R**

With additional reporting from thehealthy.com



You Give Love a Bug's Name

Consumed by the memory of an old flame? Zookeepers at the San Antonio Zoo will name a cockroach after your former beloved and serve it to a bird or lizard, all for the low price of \$5. For \$25, a frozen rat named for your most coldhearted ex will land a date with a snake.

START SOMETHING YOU WON'T WANT TO STOP.



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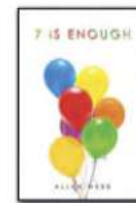
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Three male dogs are walking down the street when they see a beautiful female poodle. They all scramble to reach her first but end up arriving in front

of her at the same time. Aware of her obvious effect on the suitors, she tells them, "The first one who uses the words *liver* and *cheese* together in an

imaginative sentence can go out with me."

"I love liver and cheese!" the golden retriever blurts out.

"Oh, how childish," says the poodle.

The Labrador tries next. "Um. I hate liver and cheese?"

"My, my," says the poodle. "I guess it's hopeless."

She then turns to the last of the three dogs and says, "How about you, little guy?"

The Yorkie, tiny in stature but big in finesse, gives her a smile and a sly wink, turns to the other dogs, and says, "Liver alone—cheese mine!"

—PLANETPROCTOR.COM

A guy tells his friend, "I bought my wife a diamond ring."

"You told me she wanted a car," the friend replies.

"Yeah," says the first guy, "but where would I find a fake car?"

—Submitted by S.L. via rd.com

MARK PARISI/OFFTHEMARK.COM

COURTESY JANELLE SHANE/AIWEIRDNESS.COM

Arguing with your spouse is like trying to read a Terms of Use policy on the Internet. In the end, you give up and go, "I agree."

—HERWAY.NET

Rumor Has It

♦ Is there rehab for gossiping? I don't need it, but I'll tell you who does ...

—JEN STATSKY, comedian

♦ The winning pot of chili at the county fair cook-off was named Gossip. Good to your face, but it talks behind your back!

—Submitted by KATHRYN KITCHEN Vernal, Utah

Two aliens land their ship on a golf course and watch a young man play. First, he hits his ball into high grass and mumbles and curses as he goes to retrieve it. Next, he hits it into a sand trap, shouting and swearing on his way to collect it. Then he hits a perfect shot, and the ball goes

right into the hole.

The first alien turns to the second and says, "Uh-oh—cover your ears. He's going to be really mad now!"

—SWINGBYSWING.COM

At the supermarket, a customer buying a lot of groceries was checking out.

As the clerk lifted the final bag, its bottom gave way, sending the contents crashing to the floor.

"They don't make these bags like they used to," the clerk said to the customer. "That was supposed to happen in your driveway."

—GCFL.NET

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

SWEET NOTHINGS

Artificial intelligence still has much to learn when it comes to matters of the heart. These are some of the supposedly fun, flirty messages one of the most sophisticated text-generating computer programs came up with after being shown examples of the real candy:



EVERYDAY MIRACLES



Lost and Found, an Ocean Away

BY *Emily Goodman*

DOUg FALTER RETURNED home on the evening of February 3, 2018, teary-eyed and exhausted. The 33-year-old professional photographer had just run from one end of Hawaii's Waimea Bay to the other—the length of three football fields—while frantically scanning the water like a starving

seabird in search of a fish. Still not finding what he was looking for after more than an hour, he tried scaling some nearby rocks to get a better view. But by then, night had started to fall.

At home, Falter took his search online. “Was surfing tonight and lost my baby,” he wrote on Facebook. That

“baby” was a ten-and-a-half-foot-long baby blue surfboard that had been custom-made for him. Hours earlier, the crash of a big wave and the powerful swells of the bay had separated Falter from this prized possession.

“I caught the biggest waves of my life on that board,” Falter later said. “That’s why it means so much to me.”

He hoped it would wash ashore in the coming days and that whoever spotted it would have also seen his Facebook post. But instead of pushing Falter’s surfboard to shore, the currents of Waimea Bay swept it out to sea, away from Oahu and from the Hawaiian Islands altogether.

Weeks passed with no sign of the surfboard. Then months. Lyle Carlson, who had customized the board for Falter, told him of another lost surfboard that was found—four years later—after a fisherman hooked it. “That did give me hope,” Falter says, “but by that time I was like, ‘I just have to forget about it.’” He saved for months to buy a new custom surfboard, for \$1,500. “Those boards aren’t cheap,” he says.

But Falter never completely forget about the board, which—six months after and more than 5,000 miles away from where it disappeared—floated by the remote island of Sarangani in the southern Philippines. The local fisherman who found it didn’t have much use for his unusual catch of the day, so he sold the board to Giovanna Branzuela, a 36-year-old elementary school teacher. Branzuela hoped to

learn to surf and one day share the skill with his students, who regularly accompany him on beach cleanups.

“It’s been my dream to ride the big waves here,” Branzuela says. He bought Falter’s surfboard for \$40.

The once-blue board had faded to a pale straw color during its journey, but its distinctive markings were still there: two elephants, one at either end, each framed in a diamond emblem. Underneath the emblems were the words “Lyle Carlson Surfboards, Oahu, Hawaii.”

**“THIS IS THE
COOLEST WAY I
COULD HAVE EVER
LOST \$1,500.”**

“I couldn’t believe it,” Branzuela said on realizing how far the surfboard had traveled. He reached out to Carlson online last July and sent him a photo of the board. Carlson, in turn, reached out to Falter, who then contacted Branzuela directly to ask for more photos. Those extra shots confirmed the board was his. Falter was shocked to learn that his “baby” had drifted across the world’s largest ocean—and survived.

“It was the craziest thing I had ever heard,” Falter says.

He was ecstatic, but not only for himself. “When I heard this guy bought it because he wanted to learn how to surf, I thought, ‘This is the coolest way

I could have ever lost \$1,500.” Seeing interest in the sport grow means a lot to Falter. “I couldn’t imagine a better ending to this story,” he says.

But the story was far from over. Even now, months later, Falter and Branzuela are in contact almost every day. The coronavirus pandemic has delayed their plans to meet in person, but Falter knows his surfboard is in safe hands in the Philippines. “I told him I would take good care of it,” Branzuela says.

In the meantime, Falter wanted to thank Branzuela with some surfing supplies, but the teacher asked for school supplies instead, such as backpacks for his students and materials to help them learn English.

“That fueled me to raise money for the kids,” Falter says. So far, he has collected \$2,500, which he has used to

buy and ship maps, puzzles, classroom posters, textbooks, and workbooks, along with beloved children’s titles like *Charlotte’s Web* and *The BFG* as well as volumes in the Harry Potter series. “I’m just happy for the opportunity to do something good,” Falter says.

As for the surfboard, Falter is delighted that Branzuela is using it, if only for splashing around in shallow waters, since he is a novice. When Branzuela bought the board, he had no idea it was made specifically for a man of his exact size. “It’s pretty wild—we’re the same height,” Falter says of the happy coincidence. When the two men finally do meet for the handoff, Falter plans to make it an even exchange by giving Branzuela a brand-new board. And before he leaves the Philippines, Falter wants to do what Branzuela hoped the board would do: teach him to surf. **R**

YVONNE SANDOVAL/COURTESY COUNTRY WOMAN

Do You Know a Place This Nice?

The international students at the United World Colleges campus in New Mexico were among the scores of people who couldn’t get back home after COVID-19 hit last year. Fortunately, the farmers at the nearby and aptly named Bueno Para Todos (“Good For All”) farm, where some of the students had been helping out, had a plan.

When they learned that their volunteers were stranded, they hired a crew of unemployed construction workers to build a sunny space for the handful of young women from Egypt, Jordan, Cayman Islands, Niger, and Nigeria to live. Says director Yvonne Sandoval, “We are glad that we could open our doors and our land to these beautiful young people. We look forward to when we will be able to open the farm to everyone. In the meantime, we use the time to dig, plant, and grow.” Do you know of a place where acts of kindness bring people together? Visit rd.com/nicest to share your nomination for the Nicest Place in America 2021.



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How to Keep Your **HEART** YOUNG

Exercise and proper diet are a good start. But these cardiologist-approved tips offer surprisingly helpful additions to any routine.

FROM [THEHEALTHY.COM](https://www.thehealthy.com)

EDITED BY *Andrea Au Levitt*

Given our current health crisis, it's easy to forget that COVID-19 is not the leading cause of death in the United States. That distinction belongs to heart disease, which killed more than 650,000 Americans in 2018. Research now shows that COVID-19 itself may harm the heart, by either hindering the flow of oxygen or initiating a potentially damaging immune response. Clearly, it is more important than ever to take control of your cardiovascular health no matter your age: As many as 10 percent of all heart attacks strike people younger than 45. These 34 facts are a perfect place to begin any heart-health education.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Valero Doval

1 Get screened early

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that everyone over age 18 have regular hypertension, or high blood pressure, screenings. In the United States, nearly half of all adults have high blood pressure. And according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), roughly one out of five people with high blood pressure doesn't know it. "Your blood pressure can be high without showing any symptoms—that's why it's known as 'the silent killer,'" says Nieca Goldberg, MD, a cardiologist and the medical director for the Joan H. Tisch Center for Women's Health at New York University's Langone Medical Center. You should also receive a lipoprotein profile, which measures your LDL (bad) cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, and total cholesterol. If left untreated, high blood pressure and high cholesterol can lead to heart disease, an aneurysm, or even a stroke.

2 Manage stress and anxiety

Stress plays a role in 77 percent of all health concerns, including digestive trouble, an inability to lose weight, and heart disease, says Nikki Martinez, PsyD, an adjunct psychology instructor at Southern New Hampshire University. "When you reach an age where your body is going through changes and is not bouncing back as it once did, stress and anxiety can start to become quite significant issues," she explains. "Learning solid coping skills,

stress management, mindfulness, and healthy outlets can truly impact each and every area of your functioning." Stress relief can come in many forms. Try taking a deep breath; giving yourself a mini-massage by massaging the palm of one hand with the thumb of the other; reciting a mantra, such as "I've got this" or "I feel calm"; breathing the scent of lavender, peppermint, or rose; taking a walk; or simply spacing out for a few minutes.

3 Pay attention to your shoes

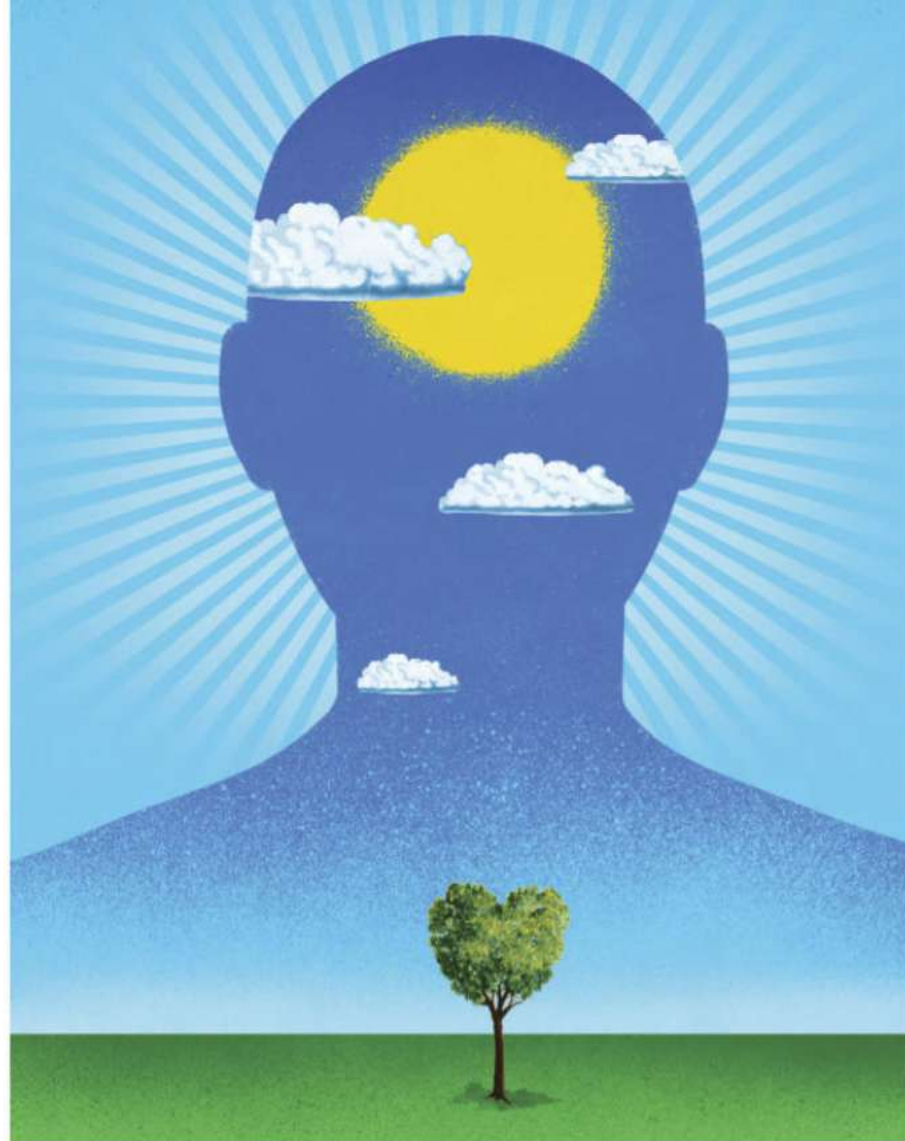
Edema, the buildup of excess fluid in the body's tissues, can be the result of congestive heart failure. When your heart doesn't pump blood as effectively as it should, the blood instead collects and causes swelling, most commonly in the feet and legs. "People may notice their shoes feel tight or their socks make lines on their ankles," says Gregg Fonarow, MD, interim chief of the University of California, Los Angeles, division of cardiology.

4 Watch the cleaning chemicals

Many cleaning products—even some "green" ones—contain chemicals that have been linked to strokes and high blood pressure. When possible, clean your house with items you'd cook with, such as white vinegar, lemon, baking soda, and cornstarch.

5 Toss your plastic containers

Chemicals commonly found in plastic water bottles and food



containers, such as bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates, leach into the contents of these containers. More than 50 medical papers link phthalates to cardiovascular issues. Use glass, ceramic, or stainless steel containers instead. Or look at the recycling code on

the bottom of any plastic container; if it is a 3 or 7, the container may contain BPA or phthalates.

6 Ask about new devices ...

Heart failure, a life-threatening chronic condition in which the

heart is too weak to properly pump the blood and oxygen the body needs, affects 6.2 million adults in the United States, per the CDC. For these patients, there's new hope: In 2019, the Food and Drug Administration approved the Barostim Neo System as a "break-through device" that gives patients who don't benefit from standard treatments an option to reduce their symptoms and improve their quality of life. It's easily inserted under the collarbone.

7 ... and medications that multitask

As an adult, having type 2 diabetes increases your risk of dying from heart disease as much as fourfold, reports the American Heart Association (AHA). If you have been diagnosed with the condition, ask your doctor about diabetes drugs that also have heart-protective properties, including empagliflozin (Jardiance), dulaglutide (Trulicity), and semaglutide (Ozempic). "These reduce the likelihood of a heart attack, a stroke, heart failure, and even kidney disease," says Eduardo Sanchez, MD, chief medical officer for prevention at the AHA.

8 Mind the salt, whatever your blood pressure

"Even for people who don't have high blood pressure, less sodium will significantly blunt the rise in blood pressure that occurs as we age," says Dr. Goldberg. "As an important bonus, it will also reduce the risk of



developing other conditions, like kidney disease, which are also associated with eating too much sodium."

9 Vegetarians, be aware that you are not immune

"There's a lot of hype around plant-based diets, and with good reason. Eating a diet low in animal sources of protein and fat and high in produce has been linked to lower risks of cardiovascular disease," says Erin D. Michos, MD, associate director of preventive cardiology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. "But not all meatless diets are healthy. You can avoid meat and still load up on refined grains, simple starchy carbs, sugary beverages, and dairy—thereby increasing your risk of disease, including heart disease."

10 Ladies, take note if you had a preterm pregnancy ...

Women who undergo spontaneous preterm delivery (before 37 weeks) may have a greater likelihood of heart disease, according to a Dutch study. Moms of preemies had a 38 percent higher risk of coronary artery disease, a 71 percent higher risk of stroke, and more than double the risk of overall heart disease. Researchers say these women may be prone to inflammation, which is linked to preterm delivery and common among heart disease patients.

11 ... or experience lower estrogen levels ...

Estrogen is essential for the maintenance of many of the body's

systems, including reproductive health, bone development, mood management, and heart health. When menopause hits—at age 51, on average—estrogen takes a nosedive. "Those changes result in the development of risk factors for heart disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes," says cardiologist Kavitha Chinnaiyan, MD, director of cardiac imaging research and an associate professor of medicine at Oakland University Beaumont School of Medicine. Research at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, found that women who enter menopause early (before age 46) may have double the risk for a heart attack or stroke, *Woman's Day* reported. "Experts suspect that if you stop ovulating prematurely, this may be a sign of blood vessel disease, and you may need extra screenings," according to the magazine.

12 ... or passed a stress test but still have chest pain

Heart attack symptoms can present differently in women because there's a difference in plaque buildup and blockage patterns between men and women, according to cardiologist C. Noel Bairey Merz, MD, director of the Women's Heart Center at the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute. Whereas men often have plaque buildup in the major arteries around the heart, in women it is the smaller coronary blood vessels that cease to constrict and dilate properly, creating the lack

of blood flow and oxygen to the heart, Dr. Bairey Merz says. Thus, women can have normal angiograms and stress tests even if they have heart disease, leading doctors to dismiss even classic symptoms such as chest pain and shortness of breath. Women may also experience dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting, upper back pressure, or extreme fatigue, all of which can easily be mistaken for other issues.

13 Men: Have a beer
A study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* found that men who drank one beer a day for one month lowered their cholesterol levels, increased their blood levels of heart-healthy antioxidants, and reduced their levels of fibrinogen, a protein that contributes to blood clots. Red wine might be even better; some studies suggest that resveratrol, an antioxidant found in the skin of grapes used to make red wine, can reduce cholesterol and lower blood pressure. That being said, research clearly shows that too much alcohol can lead to heart failure, not to mention liver damage, obesity, and some types of cancer. So whether you choose beer or wine, keep it to just one or two drinks a day.

14 Open the windows in your house ...
The air inside your home might be even more polluted than the



air in the world's dirtiest cities. There are dozens of possible sources, including hair spray, candles, fumes from the nonstick coating on your cookware, or smoke from a woodstove or fireplace. While any of these might be harmless in small amounts, the caustic brew they create when mixed together can turn up inflammation, raise blood pressure, and harden arteries. Open windows and use a fan to circulate the air and reduce indoor pollution levels.

15 ... but keep them closed in the car
This reduces your exposure to airborne pollutants. A Harvard University study found that exposure

reduces something called heart rate variability (HRV), or the ability of your heart to respond to various activities and stresses. Reduced HRV has been associated with increased deaths among heart attack survivors as well as the general population.

16 Take note of daylight saving time ...
When researchers examined three years of Michigan hospital records to track the number of heart attacks that required stent insertions, they found that the frequency of these procedures fluctuated when daylight saving time started and ended. On the Monday after "springing ahead" an hour, there was a 24 percent increase in heart attacks. Since the total heart attack counts for those weeks were not drastically different from other weeks, researchers determined that the time change didn't necessarily make the heart attacks happen but rather made them likely to occur sooner than they otherwise would have. This is probably due to disrupted sleep-wake cycles and increased stress at the start of a new week of work. However, on the Tuesday after "falling back," there were 21 percent fewer daily heart attacks.

17 ... and beware of natural disasters
A hurricane or earthquake in your region affects you not only mentally and emotionally but physically as well. Researchers at Tulane

Medical Center in New Orleans studied the number of patients suffering heart attacks in the years after Hurricane Katrina hit the area in 2005. They found a threefold increase in the ten years after Katrina compared with the numbers in 2003 and 2004. Patients were also more likely to have heart attack risk factors after the hurricane, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, and diabetes.

18 Prioritize sleep
A sound snooze is good for your heart, but as you age, your brain and neurons begin to change and your "sleep architecture" suffers, reports the National Sleep Foundation. That means you're more prone to waking up during the night and less likely to get the deep sleep your heart needs to function properly. Women also have to battle the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause—hot flashes are notorious for wrecking slumber. "Shorter sleep duration and poorer quality of sleep seem to be associated with increased stiffness of the arteries and increased cholesterol plaque, especially in the carotid arteries," says staff cardiologist Christine Jellis, MD, PhD, of the Miller Family Heart, Vascular, and Thoracic Institute at the Cleveland Clinic. A few classic tips for a better night's sleep: Avoid afternoon naps and caffeine within six hours of your bedtime.

Doctors have been touting the link between healthy eating and a healthy heart for decades. These foods and drinks are worth special attention.

19 Yogurt
Yogurts and spreads containing plant sterols (substances similar to good cholesterol) such as Smart Balance and Benecol can reduce blood levels of LDL cholesterol by up to 10 percent, says Kristian Morey, RD, a clinical dietitian at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

20 Coffee
The research and recommendations about coffee

have been all over the place, with some studies suggesting the beverage is harmful to health and others stressing its benefits. According to the American College of Cardiology (ACC), coffee might be helpful in reducing the risk of arrhythmias, heart disease, and stroke. But don't overdo it. Morey cautions, "The current conservative recommendation is three cups of coffee per day."

21 Lean beef
Surprised this is on the list? Don't be. Morey says that beef is loaded with zinc, iron, and B vitamins, all of which help to boost heart health. Stick to lean cuts like flank or skirt steak and 95 percent lean ground beef. Or look for cuts marked "round" or "loin," such as top sirloin, bottom round (great for pot roast), and tenderloin—they have the lowest fat content. Limit your intake to four to six ounces no more than three times a week.

22 Cumin
Time for some curry in a hurry. According to

Morey, this spice has been found to have powerful effects on heart health. A study published in the journal *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* found that overweight or obese women who consumed just half a teaspoon of this spice daily reduced their LDL cholesterol and triglycerides and raised their levels of good HDL cholesterol too.

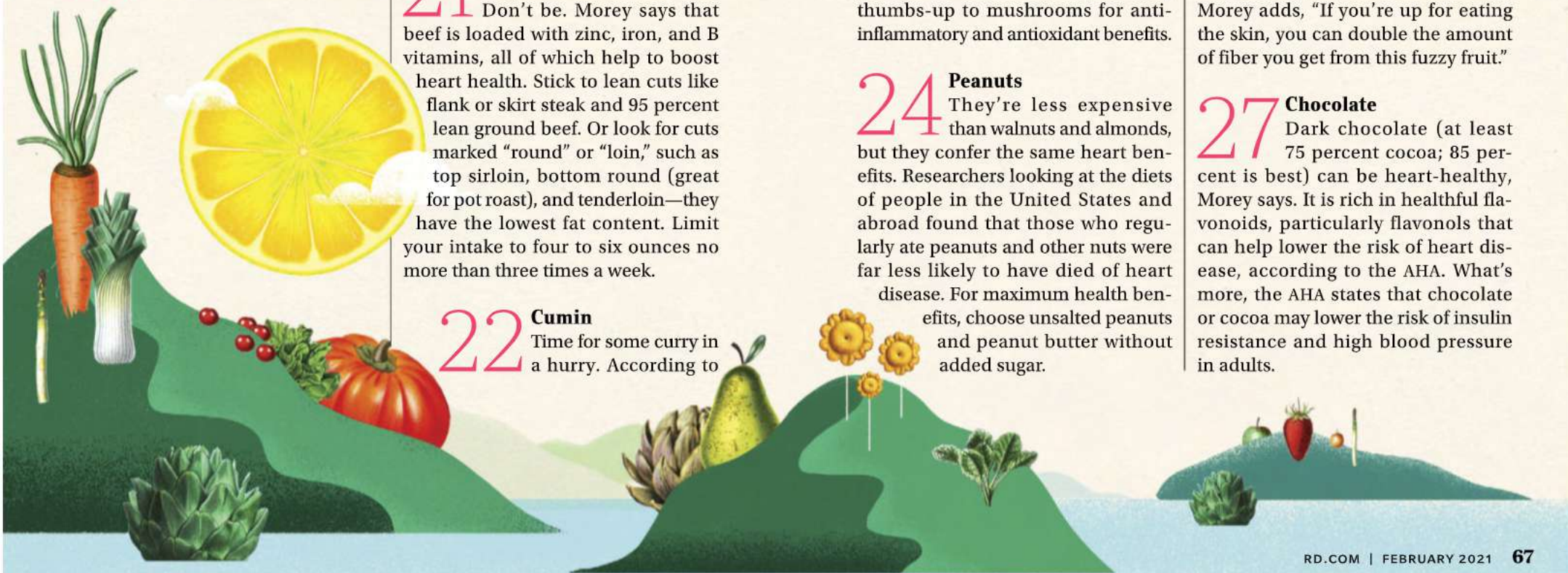
23 Mushrooms
A recent scientific review published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* analyzed how popular foods help your heart. The authors gave a big thumbs-up to mushrooms for anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits.

24 Peanuts
They're less expensive than walnuts and almonds, but they confer the same heart benefits. Researchers looking at the diets of people in the United States and abroad found that those who regularly ate peanuts and other nuts were far less likely to have died of heart disease. For maximum health benefits, choose unsalted peanuts and peanut butter without added sugar.

25 Oranges
Studies suggest that diets high in vitamin C may reduce your risk of stroke, especially if you smoke, and oranges are one of the best sources. Strawberries, brussels sprouts, broccoli, and red bell peppers are also excellent sources.

26 Kiwi
"Eating two to three kiwis a day can help reduce harmful blood triglyceride levels," Morey says. The fruit also helps raise HDL levels. It is rich in vitamins (C and E) and minerals (potassium, magnesium, copper, and phosphorous). Morey adds, "If you're up for eating the skin, you can double the amount of fiber you get from this fuzzy fruit."

27 Chocolate
Dark chocolate (at least 75 percent cocoa; 85 percent is best) can be heart-healthy, Morey says. It is rich in healthful flavonoids, particularly flavonols that can help lower the risk of heart disease, according to the AHA. What's more, the AHA states that chocolate or cocoa may lower the risk of insulin resistance and high blood pressure in adults.



28 Urinate when you feel the urge

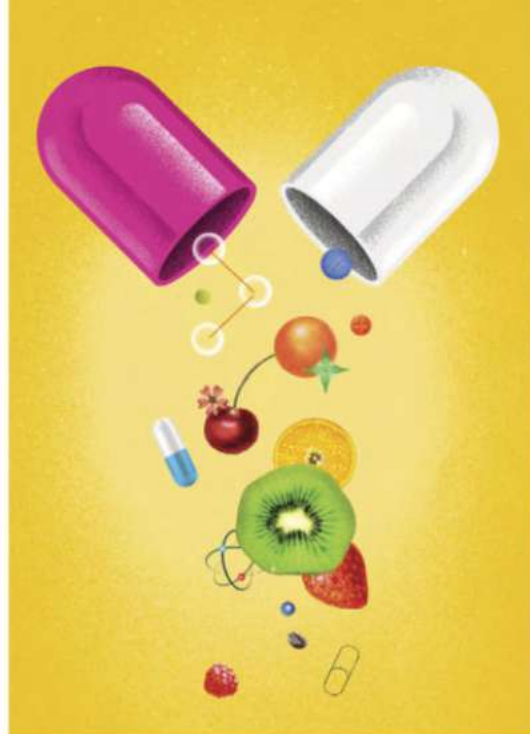
Research at Taiwan University found that a full bladder causes your heart to beat faster and puts added stress on coronary arteries, triggering them to contract, which could lead to a heart attack in people who are vulnerable.

29 Get the right minerals

Potassium and magnesium are among the most important. Potassium helps keep our cells, tissues, and organs' electrical system working properly. Magnesium helps protect against heart attack risks, strengthens muscles and tissues, and lowers blood pressure. If you notice your heart skipping a beat, your doctor may want to test your mineral levels. Calcium supplements may also be necessary, for both men and women, especially as the risk of heart and other diseases begins to climb in our 40s.

30 Limit the weekend binges

Watching what you eat is important, but new research suggests that when you eat might affect your health too. We tend to dine at consistent times during the workweek, but on the weekend, sleeping in, late dinners, and Sunday brunches disrupt our usual meal patterns. The problem: Departing from our typical calorie schedule by as little as 10 percent can



lead to increases in blood pressure, waist size, and body-mass index, according to a new study at Columbia University of 116 women ages 20 to 64. Researchers aren't sure exactly why, but they believe that disruptions to the circadian rhythms of our heart and other organs are to blame.

31 Get some sun

Low levels of vitamin D have been linked to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and even COVID-19, and the risk for many of these tends to increase with advancing age. Sunlight stimulates your body's production of vitamin D; you can also get vitamin D from food and supplements.

32 Enroll in rehab

Cardiac rehabilitation, that is. If you've already had a heart attack, doctors agree that participating in a supervised program of exercise and lifestyle changes is key to reducing your risk of a repeat. "Everyone who's had a heart attack should leave the hospital with cardiac rehabilitation as part of their treatment plan," says Martha Gulati, MD, chief of cardiology at the University of Arizona and editor-in-chief of cardiosmart.org, the patient engagement program of the ACC. "If it doesn't get set up while you're in the hospital, ask your physician how to enroll." Alan Schwartzstein, a family physician in south central Wisconsin and an officer for the American Academy of Family Physicians, adds that patients who live far from a cardiac rehab center might be able to participate virtually. "People can sign up for text messages from the program to receive reminders about daily exercise and dietary changes," he says.

33 Don't let your heart harden

Starting at around age 50, the heart muscle begins to stiffen, making it tougher for it to pump blood

efficiently throughout the body. The medical term for this phenomenon is *diastolic dysfunction*: The muscle isn't able to relax after each beat, increasing wear and tear. For women, hormonal changes can make matters worse. "When estrogen levels decline, women often develop stiffening of the heart muscle," says integrative cardiologist Regina Druz, MD, of the Integrative Cardiology Center of Long Island, New York. Regular exercise and a balanced diet can help. Don't delay consulting your doctor if you have any of the hallmark symptoms: shortness of breath; fatigue; rapid heartbeat; coughing up pink and foamy mucus; or swelling in the legs, ankles, and feet.

34 Be active and be kind

People who spend a lot of time being sedentary are 73 percent more likely to develop metabolic syndrome, a cluster of problems that raise heart disease risk. Meanwhile, a study found that those who spent money on other people had lower blood pressure than those who spent money on themselves. To double your benefits, do something physically active on behalf of someone else: While you're out shoveling snow, clear your neighbor's walkway too. **R**

For more tips and advice, go to the heart solution center at THEHEALTHY.COM/HEART.

I THINK
**BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH**
SHOULD LAST
ALL YEAR

We know about Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr., of course. But our American history lessons skip over so many other African American achievers.

BY Dawn Porter
COLLAGES BY Dakarai Ashby

At its best, Black History Month honors not only the famous (clockwise from top left: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Paul Robeson, Serena Williams, George Washington Carver, and Thurgood Marshall) but everyday Americans as well.



My feelings about Black History Month are complicated. On the one hand, I deeply appreciate the time to intentionally celebrate the brilliant contributions to American culture and history by people who look like me. But while absolutely worthy of celebration, the stories of African American contributions to our society have become repetitive over the years.

Harriet Tubman was so brave. Martin Luther King Jr. was the best orator of all time. George Washington Carver sure was a wiz with peanuts! Year after year, I hear a dutiful recitation of the same familiar facts, and I fear that the result is the mistaken impression that this is the sum total of African Americans' role in our history.

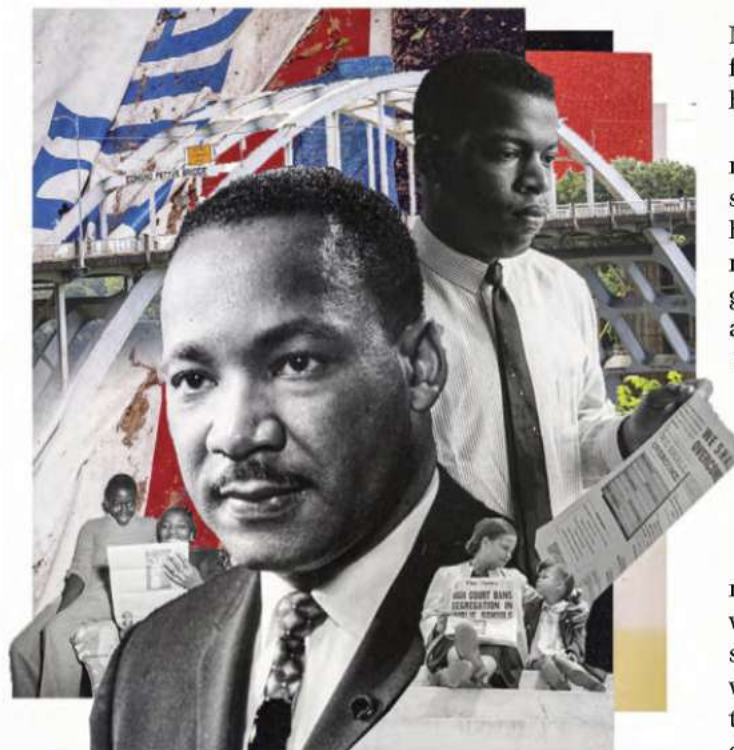
Confining the history of an entire race of people to a 28-day period not only diminishes the significance of their contributions but also allows the greater truth to be erased. When I ask my African American friends about this, I often hear some version of "I'd rather have one month than no months." But is that the only choice?

Black History Month traces its origins back to 1926, when the Association for the Study of African American Life and History designated a week in February, chosen to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and Frederick Douglass

(February 14), as what was then called Negro History Week.

The creation of that week was an important historical marker; its founder, Carter Woodson, an African American historian, intended for Black history to be taught as a part of American history and looked forward to the day when a designated period would no longer be needed. At that time, although it had been a half century since the abolition of slavery, Black people were still strenuously making the argument for their humanity.

There is nothing so motivating as knowing that people who look like you achieved great things. I know this from experience. My grandmother's name before she married was Marian Robeson. She was the daughter of Benjamin Robeson, a minister and civil rights activist. Some will know his more famous brother, Paul Robeson, the scholar, activist, and entertainer



We rightfully speak of civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rep. John Lewis (top), but the full story of Black excellence is much bigger.

remembered for his performance of "Ol' Man River" in *Show Boat*. Their father, my great-great-grandfather William Drew Robeson, was a slave in North Carolina. He escaped to Philadelphia via the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War, he fought with the Union Army. And in 1876, this child of slavery graduated from Lincoln College with a degree in theology and then became a minister.

I wasn't quite as smart as I thought I was, wasn't quite as capable. Reading his words pushed me to think about how the full story of the accomplishments of Black people is so buried that we think of those we do celebrate as exceptional. Learned racism teaches us that there can't possibly be so much Black excellence, that any accomplished Black person must be an outlier.

My great-grandfather was one of his seven children.

Before she died, my grandmother shared with me her father's sermons. In them, my great-grandfather, also a veteran, spoke eloquently about his love for a country that opposed his civil rights efforts.

I first read his moving writings when I was in law school, at a time when I began to let feelings of self-doubt creep into my consciousness. In this hypercompetitive world, I began to think that perhaps

And then I discovered Ida B. Wells. Orphaned as a teenager, she went on to become a journalist, a mother, and an activist. She worked alongside Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and pushed them to include Black women in the cause for suffrage. The story of the women's suffrage movement is absolutely incomplete without understanding the efforts of Wells and her Black compatriots. Full stop.

Reading her words made history so real for me, so painful but also so celebratory. Today, as a documentary filmmaker, I think of her fearless crusade for truth often, and I'm motivated to continue to tell important stories.

My most recent reminder of the power of story was my work directing a film about Rep. John Lewis called

Good Trouble. I spent a year interviewing him and traveling the country with him. Watching hours of footage of a young Lewis strategizing and organizing, watching him deftly work with White and Black activists and politicians, I lived history through his eyes and experiences.

Walking through an airport with the congressman, I was constantly struck by the fact that he could not go more than a few feet without someone asking for a picture or to shake his hand. He always stopped and acknowledged and thanked the person. It was as if he sealed each interaction with an implicit understanding that every person he connected with would become an ambassador, that when they tell the story of John Lewis, it will assure that history lives on, even now, after his passing.

Because of my work and my interests and experiences, I am acutely aware of the need for accurate information in our media and our history books. Don't we need this information all year long?

In 1976, the week that had been set aside to honor Black accomplishments was expanded to a month and called Black History Month. In the preceding 50 years, remarkable battles had been hard fought and won, including

HENNY GARFUNKEL



The author, Dawn Porter, is "a proud descendant of slaves."

ONLY BY TELLING TRUE STORIES DO WE HAVE A CHANCE TO ERADICATE NOT ONLY RACIST BEHAVIOR BUT RACIST THOUGHT.

landmark Supreme Court cases that resulted in the 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* requiring the desegregation of public schools, the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other civil rights laws guaranteeing basic rights of full citizenship to all people, regardless of race.

So now, some 40 years later, it's time for Black history to enter the next phase. African Americans no longer need to argue that we deserve equal rights. With the establishment of the glorious National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC, we no longer need to make the case that our contributions are worthy of noting and celebrating.

But racism and discrimination on the basis of race continue to be a stain on our country. And only by telling true stories do we have a chance to eradicate not only racist behavior but also racist thought. We have to face head-on the untrue idea that only White people contribute substantially to our country's cultural, scientific, legal, and other advances.

To dismantle this false narrative, the first place we should look is the

story we tell about ourselves. I am confident that given the opportunity, a host of scholars would gladly take a pen to outdated history books—break them apart and add the rich context that includes the contributions of not only African Americans but native and Asian people, women, and every other marginalized group. History is not a pie; my having more does not leave you less.

I'm a "plus ... and" person. I think we need Black History Month. I also think we should challenge our educators and ourselves to consistently search out and share stories and facts that expand our understanding of history to include all who play a role in it. Acknowledging that America is a multicultural society and that the accomplishments and contributions of people who are not White are real, substantial, and important is proof that the American ideals so many of us profess to value are real.

I asked my friend, the noted historian and scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., for his thoughts on this, to which he quickly replied, "Every day should be Black History Month!"

Yes, sir. Every day. **R**

A Valentine's Day

LESSON

As a child, I had a humiliating experience on February 14. Now that I'm a teacher, my students celebrate the day with love.

BY *Melanie McCabe*

FROM WASHINGTONPOST.COM

"I'M GOING TO tell you a story," I tell my class of high school seniors.

All eyes look up. Nothing quiets a chatty group of teenagers faster and causes them to put down their phones more effectively than the promise of a story.

"It's a tale about love. And heart-break." I pause for dramatic effect. "And humiliation."

Their eyes widen. I add the clincher. "Mine." Now I have them.

This is a story I've told every February since I started teaching in 1999. Its power lies, I think, in how it changes the way my students see me. Gone temporarily is whatever omnipotence I command as their teacher. Left behind is an 11-year-old girl whose feelings are crushed—and each of them is outraged by the brutality of the one who did the crushing.

"In sixth grade," I begin, "I fell madly in love. His name was David. He was

FOTOGRAZIA/GETTY IMAGES



tall, cute, kind of a bad boy—which I found tantalizing. He had no interest in me at all, but I doodled his name all over my diary. Wrote DT loves MM in giant hearts. You get the idea.”

They get the idea. The girls are laughing—and remembering.

“So it was Valentine’s Day, elementary school style. Construction paper mailboxes. Someone’s mom brought in cupcakes. Our parents bought us those variety-pack valentines to send to everyone in class. Dreadful things with corny sayings like ‘Bee My Honey’ and ‘I Gopher You!’”

All of them are laughing now. “It was party day. I spilled my cards onto my desk, and amid many small envelopes, I saw one enormous one, spangled with glitter. My mind raced: ‘Wow—someone likes me enough to buy me this giant valentine. Who could it be from?’ With trembling hands, I tore open the envelope and drew out a sparkly image of a queen seated on her throne. The heading read, ‘To a Queen of a Valentine.’”

I give the class a meaningful look. “I was swooning with excitement. Slowly, I turned the valentine over, and at the bottom I saw the signature and almost fainted: David. It was all too perfect to be real.

“Then my eyes traveled up to the writing above his signature. In large, uneven letters, he had written me a special message.”

My students lean in, waiting. You could hear a pin drop.



“It read, ‘To the Ugliest Girl in Our Class.’”

There are audible gasps. Mouths drop open. Some look down at their desks, seemingly embarrassed for me.

“What did you do?” asks a brave soul.

“What do you think?” I say. “My eyes filled with tears. My nose was stinging, my cheeks burning. I was devastated—and so afraid that he and his friends were watching me, eager to see how I would react.”

They nod sympathetically.

“Well, it ruined Valentine’s Day for me. It shook what little faith I had in myself for a long time after. But I

survived. And now I refuse to cede this holiday of love to the meanness of one rotten boy. Instead, it’s given me the motivation to undo the malice of David.” I smile. “And that’s why we’re going to have a party. A party that celebrates kindness instead of cruelty.”

Their eyes light up. They are willing to let me take them wherever I am going. I hand out construction paper so they can make mailboxes. “You don’t have to, but you’re welcome to decorate them. I have markers.” A few studiously cool boys refuse to do more than scribble their names, but most students cover theirs with hearts, swirls, and fancy lettering. I can attest

FOTOGRAZIA/GETTY IMAGES

that no one has more fun in school than an 18-year-old given permission to be ten again.

The night before the party, I cut pink paper into hundreds and hundreds of small squares.

“What are we supposed to write?” someone asks when I distribute them. “Do we have to sign our names?” asks another.

“Of course you sign your names,” I say. “You’re not going to write anything you’re ashamed of, right? The objective is to write something positive and sincere to everyone in the class. Even if it’s someone you barely know, there’s always something nice to say. Admire their fashion sense or

**THEIR EYES
LIGHT UP.
“WHAT ARE WE
SUPPOSED TO
WRITE?”**

their skill at basketball. Remind them of something fun you remember about them from grade school.”

Looking on as they compose each message is always a treat. I play a mix CD of oldies and Motown love songs, and the vibe in the room is happy. Feet tap. Sometimes I can’t stop myself from dancing. But the real fun comes when they read what people wrote to

them. Watching a shy kid tentatively open a card and then break into a big grin is worth all of the hassle.

A decade ago, one of my students, Julio, confessed to a girl named Rosa that he'd loved her since third grade. For months after that, they were a hand-holding, starry-eyed pair. But romances are rare, and not what matters to me. There are far better measures of success. Three years ago, a boy named Hal wrote me that I was the only one who had noticed when he was depressed a few months before and how much it had meant to him. Former students have shared with me that they have hung onto their valentines and sometimes read through them when they're feeling low. Parents have e-mailed to tell me that the valentine exchange boosted their child's self-confidence at a time when it was greatly needed. An especially sweet class had an artistic student draw me a valentine of a queen with the caption "To the Prettiest Girl in the Room," and everyone signed it. That one still hangs next to my desk.

After 20 years of teaching, I harbor few hopes that students will retain all of the grammar or vocabulary I taught them. Maybe they will remember a

book or two with some pleasure, or a fun and creative writing assignment. But if all a student recalls of one of my classes are the valentines they received one long-ago February, to me that makes it all worthwhile.

In recent years, the world that we inhabit has grown uglier—more divisive and unkind. Today there are bullies we contend with via social media who are far more powerful and corrosive than the childhood villain I remember so vividly.

Add to that the high-stakes push to achieve, to earn A's, to get into a top college that dominates the lives of my current students, and they are left saddled with a level of stress far greater than anything I experienced decades ago. If, for one day a year, I can help them turn all of that off, if I can create an environment where they are intentionally kind to one another, then I count that as something to be proud of.

And whatever hurt David intended for me all those years ago, it has now been canceled out, many times over. I think he would be startled by his legacy. **R**

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OF HIS OTHER LIFE: SEARCHING FOR MY FATHER,
HIS WIFE, AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS.



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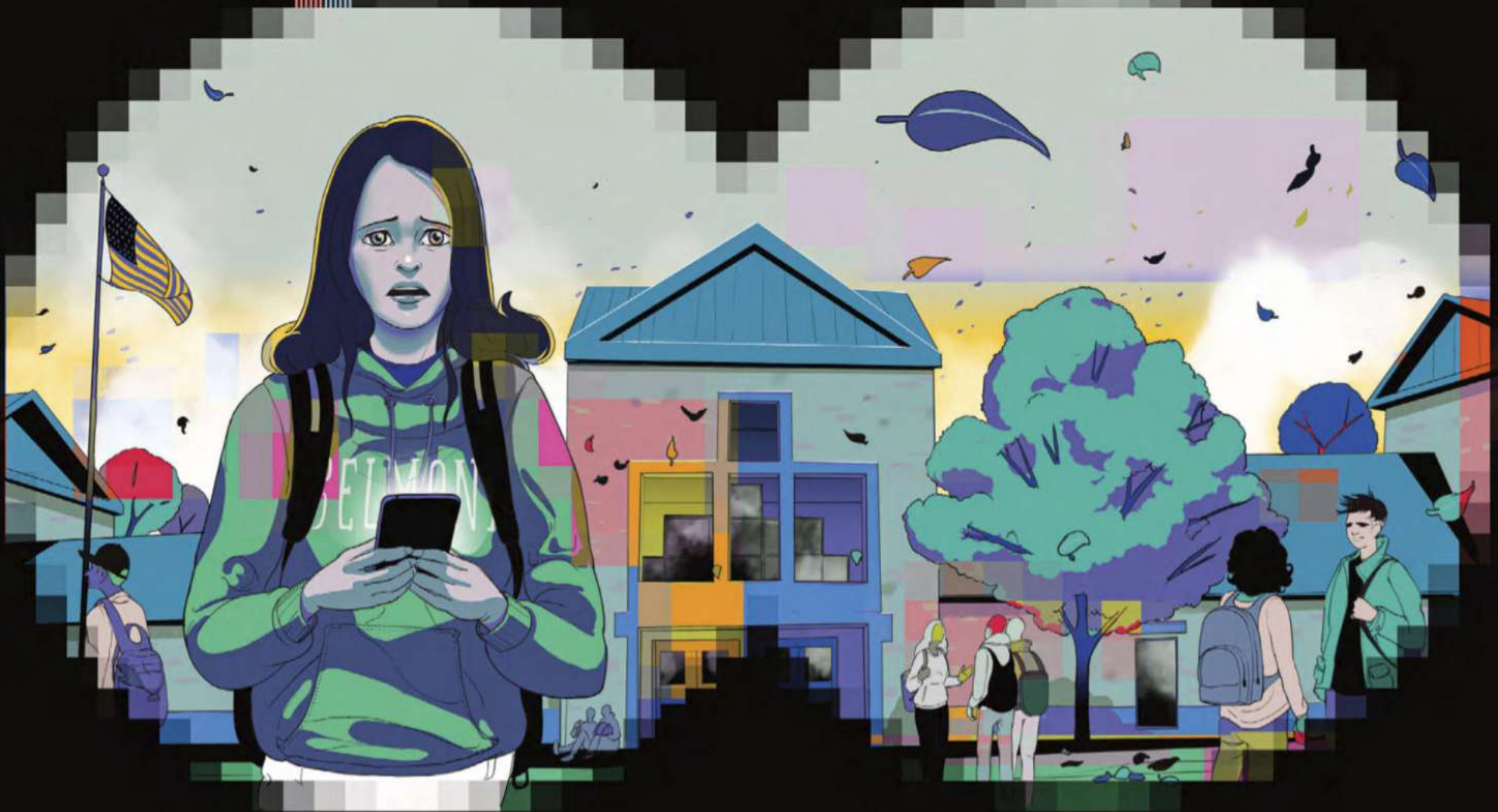
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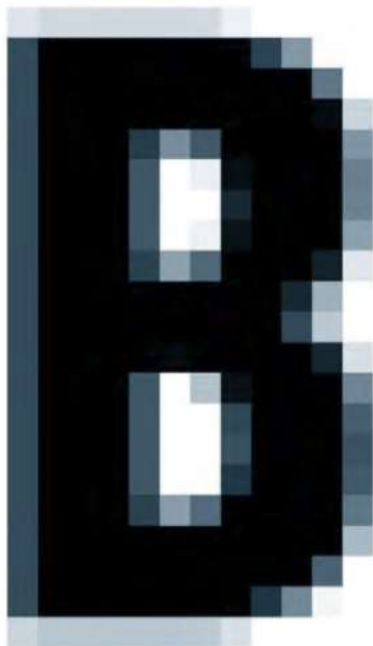
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HOW THEY CAUGHT THEIR STALKER

An elusive hacker humiliated high school girls from a small New Hampshire town. Then they teamed up with a determined detective to set a digital trap.

BY Stephanie Clifford FROM WIRED



BELMONT, NEW HAMPSHIRE (population 7,200) is an old mill town surrounded by lakes and forests. A hardware store and a hair salon are about all Main Street has to offer. At the local police department, a donation box is stuffed with change and dollar bills to support Vito, the department's K-9. "We don't have a lot of people who are rolling in the dough," says Raechel Moulton.

For years, Moulton, 42, was the town's only detective. She grew up about 20 miles away, in Concord. A bold kid, she would stride up to uniformed police officers to ask them about the things on their belts. When she was in fifth grade, an officer came

to her school to run a drug-awareness course. That's when she decided she was going to be a cop.

In high school, Moulton enrolled in a law-and-policing course, during which she was assigned to ride along in a patrol car with a male officer. He told her that women shouldn't become cops. That cemented her ambition. In 2005, she was hired onto the Belmont police force. "This job picks you," she said, sitting straight-spined in the police department, her brown hair pulled back in a tight bun.

Crime in Belmont tends toward opioids, thefts, and burglaries. But before long, Moulton was fielding complaints from parents and counselors at Belmont High School about teens sending nude photos, often to people they were dating.

Channeling the officer who inspired her as a fifth grader, Moulton offered workshops at the high school about safe online behavior. She warned students that a nude photo might get sent around to unintended viewers or uploaded online. The results weren't all she hoped for. "One girl told me, 'What I got from your class is, as long as my head isn't in the picture, it's OK,'" Moulton says.

In the spring of 2012, after Moulton had been promoted to detective, a student walked into the police station and said that someone she hadn't met and knew only as Seth Williams had been texting and hounding her for naked photos. When she wouldn't send any,



The stalker would disappear for a while, but he always came back.

he broke into her cell phone account—she wasn't sure how—and found some nude photos. Then he copied and sent them to her friends. Hoping it would make Seth stop pestering her, the girl gave in and sent him an explicit photo. But he didn't stop.

A few weeks later, another Belmont High girl showed up at the station. A guy was harassing her too. Then more girls came in. Some were ashamed, some were in tears, and some were accompanied by furious parents. Moulton had an epidemic on her hands.

IN 2011, MAY was a 16-year-old midway through her sophomore year at Belmont High when her family moved

to a nearby town and she enrolled in a new school. "I wasn't that popular, I guess you could say," May said.

So when she got a Facebook friend request from someone named Seth Williams, whose profile photo was cute, she accepted it. They exchanged numbers, and he began texting. He said nice things and seemed to want to get to know her. He'd ask about her favorite ice cream flavor and her pets.

When he asked for photos of her body, she hesitated. "I still was like, no guy shows me this attention," she said. "He actually seems like a nice guy. Maybe it'll be OK." May sent him a photo she thought was fun, of her

The dozens of victims had all attended Belmont High.

Send more or else

rear in jeans, plastered with handprints from her freshly painted room.

He wanted more. She sent him a picture with her in underwear, then one of her bare bottom. When he demanded a full nude, she told him, "No. That's where I draw the line."

"No picture, no Facebook," he replied. When May tried logging in to her accounts, she couldn't access them: He'd hacked her Facebook account and her e-mail and changed the passwords. She begged him to return the accounts; he refused. She blocked

him on her phone; he texted from a different number. She changed her number; he still found her. "He always came back," she said. "Always."

One night in the fall of 2012, a text pinged on her phone. It was Seth, again demanding photos. This time, the text included nude photos of other girls. May recognized a friend from her Belmont days. She called the friend, who urged her to talk to her mother and go to Detective Moulton in Belmont.

"I remember taking in a deep breath and going up the stairs. I sat on my mom's bed, and I said, 'Mom, I have something that I need to tell you, and I don't know how,'" May says. The next day, May and her mother went to the Belmont police station.

May met with Moulton, who was spending more and more time on the mystery. Seth had sent nude photos to other girls, too, and with their help, Moulton was able to track down a dozen or so victims and see a commonality: They all

had, at some point, attended Belmont High. She knew some of the girls were really suffering. One began sleeping in the same bed as her mother. Several feared Seth would attack them. One girl cried herself to sleep. Another routinely called her mom at work,

sobbing, terrified about being alone. They battled depression, anxiety, nausea.

Moulton talked to the state's computer-crimes unit and was told that there weren't any known perpetrators who followed Seth's script. She took over one girl's phone to try to elicit information from Seth, suggesting they meet up at a teen hang-out nicknamed the Arches. He didn't seem to recognize the name, and she wondered whether he was a local.

In response to a subpoena, the messaging service TextFree sent information that identified Seth's phone. With that, Moulton was able to subpoena

ONE GIRL CRIED HERSELF TO SLEEP. ANOTHER ROUTINELY CALLED HER MOM AT WORK, SOBBING.

the phone's registration and billing information. The results pointed to Ryan Vallee, a 19-year-old graduate of Belmont High, class of 2012.

Moulton needed more evidence to know it was Vallee for sure. But she told a few of the girls that he was a suspect, hoping it might ease their fears. "They really had a sense of this big huge brute of a person," Moulton said. "When they found out who it was, some of them were like, 'Really?'"

If they could place him at all, classmates remembered Vallee as quiet and

awkward. One girl had sat with him at lunch occasionally. She'd even told him about her online stalker. Vallee offered his help to unmask "Seth." May knew Vallee from the school bus and had made a point of being friendly toward him. What did I do for him to feel that I deserved this? she wondered.

As Moulton tried to gather more information, she was staring down another problem. Even if she could find the proof to arrest Vallee, the most she could charge him with was harassment, a misdemeanor carrying a sentence of less than a year. "For a couple of those girls, it became their lives for a year and a half," she says. "I didn't think the laws of this state were enough for that kind of fear."

So Moulton reached out to the feds.

IN OCTOBER 2013, federal authorities learned that one of the victims was close to suicide and charged Vallee with extortion. But under a tight time frame, they dismissed the case, opting instead to gather more evidence with the goal of arresting him again on stronger charges.

Five months after they took over the case, a new expert came on board: Mona Sedky, a lawyer in the Department of Justice who specialized in computer crimes and corporate hacking. A few years earlier, she had been enlisted to help with a case against a man who had threatened to spread naked images of a young mother online. The man pleaded guilty, but

soon after his sentencing, the victim killed herself. Then Sedky learned that someone in her own extended family had experienced something similar at age 14. "I can't unring that bell for her, but I can help make sure that other women don't have that happen to them," she says.

Since then, Sedky has worked on about a dozen "sextortion" cases. While sextortion isn't a federal crime, prosecutors can charge people with computer fraud and abuse. Most states outlaw nonconsensual sharing

WHEN SETH WAS MAKING FRIENDLY CHATTER WITH THE GIRLS, HE WAS COLLECTING CLUES.

of sexual images, but generally these carry far lighter sentences than the federal laws Sedky relies on.

Matthew O'Neill, a Secret Service agent in New Hampshire, reached out to Sedky for help with the Vallee case. (The Secret Service investigates computer crimes and identity theft.) Sedky jumped in, issuing subpoenas to Amazon, Skype, Pinger, Yahoo, Google, AOL, Facebook, and others. She unearthed the trail all Internet users leave: log-in IP addresses, time and date stamps, and registration information. Investigators then went back further, to the Internet providers, to find subscriber and location information.



Mackenzie was determined not to cower. "I'll fight back," she wrote to her harasser.

with interstate threats, aggravated identity theft, and computer fraud and abuse. The indictment listed ten Jane Doe victims—the women that had been persuaded to come forward.

Vallee was released on bail and ordered not to use the Internet. Though the evidence was strong, Sedky was worried; she knew from experience that putting vulnerable victims on the stand could be enormously distressing, "so there were incentives for us to try to get him to plead guilty to avoid a trial." But Vallee was adamant that it wasn't him—that some other dude did it.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM Belmont High in 2011, Mackenzie moved to North Carolina. Her mother had banned her from social media in high school, so she "went a little crazy," she says. When Seth contacted her, she responded. But then Seth took over several of her accounts and demanded a photo of her breasts.

"I won't send one. I'll fight back," Mackenzie wrote him.

Mackenzie, who says she was a victim of abuse when she was younger, was determined not to cower. She printed out her exchanges with Seth and took them to the police in her town. "The policewoman told me, 'Honestly, we don't really have the technology to be able to deal with something like this, and there's a very

With these details in hand, O'Neill and other agents mapped the locations where Seth had logged in. They all had some plausible link to Vallee: a burrito place near his mother's house, an air-conditioning business belonging to his mother's ex-boyfriend. A random person's Wi-Fi in Gilford, New Hampshire, turned out to belong to his sister's neighbor. These were crucial bits of circumstantial evidence, and investigators needed as many of them as possible.

"In these cyber cases, you have to defeat the SODDI defense," O'Neill says—that is, "Some other dude did it." By studying the exchanges, O'Neill cracked one way that Seth accessed his victims' accounts. When Seth was making friendly chatter with the girls—such as asking May her favorite ice cream flavor and the names of her pets—he was really collecting clues that he then used to answer the security questions on their accounts.

Finally, in 2016, federal prosecutors had enough evidence to charge Vallee



"This job picks you," says Detective Raechel Moulton, who decided in fifth grade to become a police officer.

low probability that anything will come from this," Mackenzie says.

A year later, in 2013, Seth started using a Belmont girl's hacked Facebook page to harass Mackenzie further. Mackenzie messaged the girl, who told her about Detective Moulton. Mackenzie passed along dates and screenshots, adding to the thick case file.

When the trial team called Mackenzie, she told them that Seth had stopped bothering her for a bit but that in recent months he'd contacted her again, using the same hacked Facebook page of the Belmont girl, identified in court papers as M.M.

This information was critical: It meant Vallee was back online, breaking the terms of his bail. If agents could catch him with whatever device he was

using, they would have his browsing and messaging history. With evidence that strong, they could circumvent Vallee's "some other dude" defense.

The government got an order that required Facebook to deliver daily reports of IP addresses and log-in times for the M.M. Facebook page. Meanwhile, O'Neill took over Mackenzie's Facebook account. Copying the instant-messaging patois he'd learned from his teenage daughters, O'Neill posed as Mackenzie on Facebook Messenger. He alternately flirted, challenged, and acted mad at "Seth," who, the Facebook reports showed, accessed the app with a cell phone. The investigators were determined to get it.

On a windy March morning, Secret Service agents in black SUVs pulled up outside Vallee's mother's house and his sister's apartment. They figured Vallee was staying at one of them. O'Neill, acting as Mackenzie, once again used Facebook Messenger to connect with the hacker of M.M.'s Facebook page.

Just after O'Neill signed off, Vallee left his sister's apartment. Secret Service agents followed. When he stopped at a traffic light, the officers jumped out of their SUVs, guns raised. Vallee took off, weaving through traffic. The Secret Service and local police tailed him until he hit a dead end. As he got out of the car, a police officer yelled at him to get on the ground. In the car was a backpack. Inside the backpack was a phone.

Five months later, Vallee pleaded guilty to 31 counts, including aggravated identity theft, computer hacking, and cyberstalking.

ON FEBRUARY 6, 2017, Ryan Vallee sat in the Concord federal courthouse for sentencing. Sedky told the judge about the emotional devastation Vallee had wrought. She called his acts a "remote sexual assault" and argued that Vallee should go to prison for eight years—the higher end of federal sentencing guidelines.

Investigators had identified 23 victims and suspected there were even more. Most declined to speak at the hearing. "I can only guess they were just as ashamed as I was," May says. But she decided to attend, as did Mackenzie and a third victim. Sitting behind Vallee in the courtroom, Mackenzie studied him. He was wearing glasses, his eyes cast down. He looked, she says, "quirky

and small, and someone who I probably wouldn't have been as afraid of if I had actually known who he was." But when she got up to make her statement, she tried to avoid looking his way. It wasn't Ryan Vallee she'd feared, she told the judge, trying not to cry, but Seth, who was "everywhere, all the time."

Judge Paul Barbadoro asked Vallee whether he had anything to say. He shook his head and said, "No."

The judge sentenced Vallee to the eight years in prison that prosecutors had requested.

"It should send a message to other people out there that you can't do this," Assistant U.S. Attorney Arnie Huftalen said. "This is real crime. It really hurts people, and it creates injuries that will last for a lifetime."

Vallee is serving his sentence in federal prison in Massachusetts. **E**

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My Surprising Journey

Life has been all about learning lessons. First, don't fall in love at 13, but if you do, don't have four children by age 23, but if you do, don't marry a man who isn't around to help, but if you do, make sure he doesn't work two jobs, but if he does, try not to be too lonely, but if you are, do not move to rural New York and run a resort/restaurant with four teenagers, but if you do, don't move back to the city and get a lesson in humility as a secretary, but if you do, make sure your knees don't wear out or you will have to retire to Florida like I did with the guy I fell in love with 59 years ago, and if you do, well, it wasn't such a bad life after all.

READER BARBARA NOLLMAN, IN THE READER'S DIGEST BOOK BEST LIFE STORIES

COURTESY DETECTIVE MOULTON

She Finally Said

*A lovesick teenager
gets the girl—
40 years later*

YES!

BY *Emily Goodman*

Georgene
Zimmermann,
née Huber,
in 1965



In 2003, now
Mr. and Mrs.
Zimmermann

ONE



early January day in 1999, 51-year-old Georgene Martin, née Huber, received a delivery of red roses. Her husband had recently passed away, so the flowers didn't seem completely out of the blue. But the name on the note that came with them did. The last place she had seen that name, Jerry Zimmermann, was in her high school yearbook—from 1965.

"Dear Georgene," Jerry's card read, "I was a classmate of yours, though I don't believe you knew who I was. I was painfully shy, and you were the prettiest girl I had ever seen."

It was true that Georgene hardly remembered Jerry. Nearly four decades had passed since their paths first crossed in the hallways of Farnsworth Junior High School in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where she still lived.

"Though I now live in DC, I keep close ties to Sheboygan," Jerry continued. "I return several times a year. And now to the crux of this letter—I will be visiting the weekend of May 15th, and I'm wondering if we could meet for a coffee? I am, however, sensitive to the recent loss of your husband.

If this approach comes too soon, I will understand—and wait another 40 years."

Why not? Georgene thought to herself as she put down the letter. She was certainly curious to see what Jerry looked like after so many years. If nothing else, it would be nice just to chat with him. She wrote back and agreed to meet with him that spring.

In Washington, DC, Jerry anxiously checked his mailbox each day. When Georgene's reply came, he was elated. She finally said yes! Georgene didn't know it, but she had broken Jerry's heart all those years ago.

JERRY'S INTEREST IN Georgene Huber began when he noticed her in the ninth grade. Her sparkling eyes gave

him a euphoric jolt whenever they glanced, albeit fleetingly, at him. Jerry's shyness prevented him from saying a single word to her until their junior year in high school.

A newly minted driver, Jerry was on his way to school one morning when he spotted Georgene walking with a friend. Before he could talk himself out of it, he pulled over and asked the girls whether they wanted a ride. They did.

The friends climbed into the front seat, with Georgene sitting next to Jerry. The beautiful girl he had been pining for was sitting just inches away, and it petrified him. Unable to think of anything to say to break the ice, Jerry didn't even introduce himself. Once at school, his passengers thanked him and went on their way.

Jerry spent all day mulling over his next move. His plan was simple: After school, he would drive around until he saw Georgene walking home. Then, just as he had done that morning, he would offer her a ride. She would accept, sit next to him again, and that would be that, he thought. Happily ever after.

When the last bell rang, Jerry raced to the parking lot and started driving around the school. He soon found Georgene walking with the same girl from that morning. Jerry pulled over and rolled the window down.

"Fancy another ride?" he asked.

Georgene looked at him. "No, we're going to walk."

No? Jerry couldn't believe it. In his mind, the three of them were already good friends. He slowly rolled the window back up and drove away, devastated.

It only got worse. The following year—their senior year—he learned that Georgene was engaged. Jerry didn't dare approach her again.

AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, Jerry found work making deliveries for an electrical and plumbing wholesaler. He enjoyed the job until he was sidelined by a back injury in 1983. Jerry, then 36, was forced to do desk work, which he hated. A divorce and the death of his father added to his misery.

THE GIRL HE WAS PINING FOR WAS JUST INCHES AWAY, AND IT PETRIFIED HIM.

Then one evening, Jerry opened up the *Sheboygan Press* and saw an ad for the University of Wisconsin. "Do you want to improve your life?" it asked. Intrigued, he read on. The ad advised a meeting with one of the college's counselors at the local library. By the end of his meeting, Jerry was signed up for two classes. He wasn't totally convinced more school would help redirect his path, but he really enjoyed his coursework, and he eventually earned a degree in physical geography.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY ZIMMERMANN FAMILY

Jerry soon left Wisconsin for Spokane, Washington, where he worked as a cartographer in the mapping department of the U.S. Geological Survey. He was later promoted to the U.S. Department of Defense's mapping agency in Washington, DC.

Moving to the nation's capital was a big adjustment. Jerry, who had been raised on a farm, was accustomed to seeing grazing animals and wide-open spaces. In DC, he found himself surrounded by politics and traffic. He missed Wisconsin. He called home every week, and he returned at least twice a year, for his birthday in July and again at Christmas.

"Usually one of those times," he says, "I'd drive by Georgene's house, just to get a look." When he would see her out and about, he still couldn't work up the nerve to talk to her. Jerry would look in the local phone book for her name. It was always there—beside her husband's.

Jerry married—and divorced—a second time. Neither of his ex-wives ever knew of his everlasting affection for Georgene, though his friends back home did. On one of his semi-annual visits, in December of 1998, Jerry caught up with his friend Frank Cooper.

"Have you seen Georgene lately?" Frank asked.

"No, not at all," Jerry replied.

"Her husband died."

Georgene's husband had succumbed to a brain tumor after being ill



Jerry and Georgene with their granddaughters, Hannah (left) and Hope

with it for nearly a year. All that time, Georgene had been his caretaker.

Jerry had to go back to Washington, but before leaving town, he stopped at a local florist. While he didn't want to seem insensitive to Georgene's husband's death, he didn't want to waste any more time. Leaving his shyness behind, he wrote a note to send with the roses. Composing the letter was easy. The difficult part, on that cold winter day, was squeezing all his warm feelings for her onto one little card.

WHEN HE GOT back to DC, Jerry was already looking forward to his next trip home in May. Once he learned that Georgene was interested in getting together, he couldn't wait. He called her that night, and the two spoke for more than an hour. He came home as scheduled that spring of 1999 for a brief weekend visit. At 51, he was finally going on his first date with the woman he'd been infatuated with for more than 35 years.

Georgene's beauty hadn't faded a bit. "Her hair was different," Jerry says, "though she was still petite." He was slender himself. The first thing Georgene said to Jerry when she saw him was, "Wow, are you skinny!"


It's perhaps not how Hollywood would have scripted their reunion, but for both Jerry and Georgene, the connection was powerful. While Jerry had longed for Georgene for decades, Georgene had been praying for companionship ever since her husband died. "If you found someone for me," she used to confide in God, "I would love that." The two of them had such a great time on their coffee date that they made plans to see each other again when Jerry came back to Wisconsin for a longer visit in July.

Jerry was home for ten days that summer. He spent every one of them with Georgene. The pair took daily walks, usually in a park not far from Lake Michigan. On their third or fourth outing, they decided to stroll along the western banks of the lake instead. "The waters were blue, the sounds were gold," Jerry says, "and my heart was there—or our hearts, I should say."

It was the perfect setting for Jerry to confess the full extent of his

feelings. "I'm in love with you," he told Georgene. Then he asked her to marry him. "It was totally unexpected," Georgene says, "but I just knew he was the one." She said yes, and Jerry felt triumphant. He now had two yeses to overcome that no from so long ago.

His next trip to Washington was his last. Jerry quit his job with the government and moved back to Wisconsin. Decades earlier, the most beautiful girl in the world married someone else. That winter, the most beautiful girl in the world married him.

Their two dozen wedding guests received a version of Georgene and Jerry's love story, 40 years in the making, that Jerry had written. Last year, he shared that story with *Reader's Digest* with this postscript: "For several years, things were great. Then I developed a limp. Georgene knew what it was, but I needed to hear it from a neurologist: Parkinson's disease. It's now in its advanced stages, but Georgene and I continue to love each other while I battle debilitating symptoms. Moreover, we love the Lord and we're grateful for what we have together because it's perfect for us." Happily ever after indeed. 

Take 183 Years' Worth of Aspirin and ...

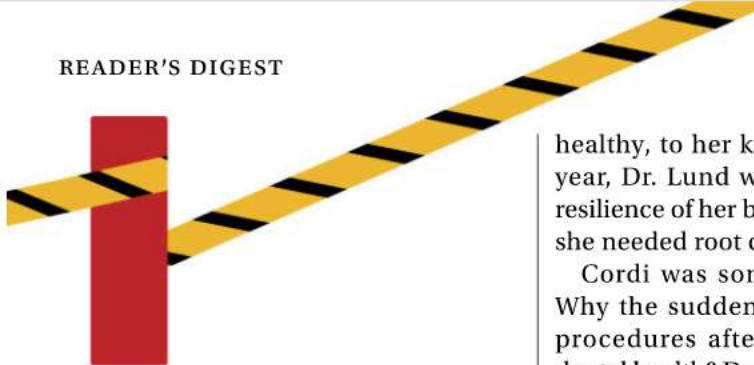
New York City's C.O. Bigelow, founded in 1838, isn't just one of the oldest drugstores in the country; its customers are a who's who of Americana, from Mark Twain to Eleanor Roosevelt to John Belushi.

CAN YOU TRUST YOUR DENTIST?

While most of the professionals who care for our teeth are reputable and honest, dentistry is less science-based and regulated than other fields. Some patients pay the price.

BY *Ferris Jabr*
FROM THE ATLANTIC





IN THE EARLY 2000s, Terry Mitchell's dentist retired. When one of his wisdom teeth began to ache, Mitchell, an electrician in his 50s, started looking for someone new. An acquaintance recommended John Roger Lund, DDS, whose practice was a convenient ten-minute walk from Mitchell's home in San Jose, California.

Dr. Lund extracted the tooth with no complications. Mitchell never had any pain or new complaints, but in the space of seven years, Dr. Lund gave Mitchell nine root canals and just as many crowns. Mitchell's insurance covered only a small portion of each procedure, so he paid about \$50,000 out of pocket. He had no idea that it was unusual to undergo so many root canals. (A typical person might get one or two in a lifetime.) And he trusted Dr. Lund.

Joyce Cordi, a businesswoman in her 50s, learned of Dr. Lund through 1-800-DENTIST. When she visited him for the first time, in 1999, she had never had a cavity. Other than a small dental bridge to fix a rare congenital anomaly (she was born with one tooth trapped inside another and had them extracted), her teeth were perfectly

healthy, to her knowledge. Within a year, Dr. Lund was questioning the resilience of her bridge and telling her she needed root canals and crowns.

Cordi was somewhat perplexed. Why the sudden need for so many procedures after decades of good dental health? Dr. Lund always had an answer ready. The cavity on this tooth was in the wrong position to treat with a typical filling. Her gums were receding, which had resulted in tooth decay. Clearly she had been grinding her teeth. And after all, she was getting older. As a doctor's daughter, Cordi had been raised with an especially respectful view of medical professionals. Dr. Lund was insistent, so she agreed to the procedures. Over the course of a decade, Dr. Lund gave Cordi ten root canals and ten crowns. He also chiseled out her bridge, replacing it with two new ones that left a conspicuous gap in her front teeth. Altogether, the work cost her about \$70,000.

In 2012, Dr. Lund retired. Brendon Zeidler, a young dentist looking to expand his business, bought his practice and assumed responsibility for his patients. As he met more of Dr. Lund's former patients, he noticed a disquieting trend: Many of them had undergone extensive dental work. When Dr. Zeidler told them after routine exams or cleanings that they didn't need any additional procedures, they tended to react with surprise and concern: Was he sure? Had he checked thoroughly? At the same time, Dr. Zeidler was

making only 10 to 25 percent of Dr. Lund's reported earnings each month.

Dr. Zeidler gathered years' worth of records and began to scrutinize them. What he uncovered was appalling.

WHEN YOU'RE IN the dentist's chair, the power imbalance between practitioner and patient becomes palpable. A masked figure looms over your recumbent body, wielding power tools and sharp metal instruments, doing things to your mouth you cannot see, asking you questions you cannot properly answer, presumably judging you all the

While the vast majority of dentists are reputable, caring professionals, the often-uneasy relationship between dentist and patient is complicated by an unfortunate reality: Common dental procedures are not always as safe, effective, or durable as we are meant to believe. As a profession, dentistry has not yet applied the same level of self-scrutiny as medicine or embraced as sweeping an emphasis on scientific evidence.

"We are isolated from the larger health system. So when evidence-based policies are being made,



WHEN A DENTIST DECLARES THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM, WHO HAS THE COURAGE OR EXPERTISE TO DISAGREE?

while. A cavity or receding gum line can suddenly feel like a personal failure. When a dentist declares that there is a problem, that something must be done before it's too late, who has the courage or expertise to disagree? When he points at spectral smudges on an X-ray, how are we to know what's true? In other medical contexts, such as a visit to a general practitioner or a cardiologist, we are fairly accustomed to seeking a second opinion before agreeing to surgery or an expensive regimen of pills with harsh side effects. But in the dentist's office, the impulse is to comply, to get the whole thing over with as quickly as possible.

dentistry is often left out of the equation," says Jane Gillette, a dentist and Republican state legislator in Bozeman, Montana, who works closely with the American Dental Association's Center for Evidence-Based Dentistry. "We're kind of behind the times, but increasingly we are trying to move the needle forward."

Consider the maxim that everyone should visit the dentist twice a year for cleanings. We hear it so often, and from such a young age, that we've internalized it as truth. But this supposed commandment of oral health has no scientific grounding (and it was readily overruled when concern



substantiated by research. A good number of them have never been tested in meticulous clinical trials. And the data that are available are not always reassuring.

The Cochrane organization, an independent health-research firm, has conducted systematic reviews of oral-health studies since 1999. Researchers have analyzed the scientific literature, focusing on the most rigorous and well-designed studies. In some cases, their findings clearly justify certain procedures. For example, dental sealants—liquid plastics painted onto teeth like nail polish—reduce tooth decay in children

and have no known risks. But most of the Cochrane reviews reach one of two disheartening conclusions: Either the available evidence fails to confirm the purported benefits of a given dental intervention or there is simply not enough research to say anything substantive one way or another.

For instance, fluoridation of drinking water seems to help reduce tooth decay in children, but there is insufficient evidence that it does the same for adults. Some data suggest

that regular flossing mitigates gum disease, but there is only “weak, very unreliable” evidence that it combats plaque. As for common but invasive dental procedures: An increasing number of dentists question the tradition of prophylactic removal of wisdom teeth; little medical evidence justifies substituting tooth-colored resins for typical metal amalgams to fill cavities; and what limited data we have don’t clearly indicate whether it’s better to repair a root-canal tooth with a crown or a filling. When Cochrane researchers tried to determine whether faulty metal fillings should be repaired or replaced, they could not find a single study that met their standards.

“The body of evidence for dentistry is disappointing,” says Derek Richards, the director of the Centre for Evidence-Based Dentistry at the University of Dundee, in Scotland. “Dentists tend to want to treat or intervene. They are more akin to surgeons than they are to physicians.”

DR. ZEIDLER SPENT every weekend for nine months examining the charts of hundreds of patients Dr. Lund had treated in the preceding five years. In a giant Excel spreadsheet, he logged every single procedure Dr. Lund had performed so he could carry out some basic statistical analyses.

The numbers spoke for themselves. Year after year, Dr. Lund had conducted invasive, costly, and seemingly

unnecessary procedures on dozens of his patients, some of whom he had been seeing for decades. Mitchell and Cordi were far from alone. Dental crowns were one of Dr. Lund’s most frequent treatments. Crowns typically last 10 to 15 years. Dr. Lund not only gave his patients superfluous crowns, but he also tended to replace them every five years—the minimum interval of time before insurance companies will cover the procedure again. More than 50 of Dr. Lund’s patients also had ludicrously high numbers of root canals: 15, 20, 24. (A typical adult mouth has 32 teeth.)

In addition to performing scores of seemingly unnecessary procedures that could result in chronic pain, medical complications, and further operations, Dr. Lund had apparently billed patients for treatments he had never administered.

Zeidler was alarmed and distressed. “We go into this profession to care for patients,” he says. “That is why we become doctors. To find, I felt, someone was doing the exact opposite of that—it was very hard, very hard to accept that someone was willing to do that.”

He knew what he had to do. He had to confront Dr. Lund and give him the chance to account for the anomalies. Even more daunting, he would have to divulge his discoveries to the patients. He would have to tell them that the man to whom they had entrusted their care for years had apparently deceived them for his own profit.

BECOMING A PRACTICING physician requires four years of medical school followed by a three-to-seven-year residency program, depending on the specialty. Dentists earn a degree in four years and, in most states, can immediately take the national board exams, get a license, and begin treating patients. (Some choose to continue training in a specialty, such as orthodontics or oral and maxillofacial surgery.) When physicians complete their residencies, they typically work for hospitals, universities, or large health-care organizations with substantial oversight, strict ethical codes, and standardized treatment regimens.

By contrast, about 80 percent of the nation's 200,000 active dentists have individual practices, and although they are bound by a code of ethics, they typically don't have the same level of oversight. There are dozens of journals and organizations devoted to evidence-based medicine, but only a handful devoted to evidence-based dentistry.

In the past decade, a small cohort of dentists has worked diligently to promote evidence-based dentistry, hosting workshops, publishing clinical-practice guidelines based on systematic reviews of research, and creating websites that curate useful resources. But its adoption "has been a relatively slow process," as a 2016 commentary in the *Contemporary Clinical Dentistry* journal put it. Part of the problem is funding: Because dentistry is often sidelined from medicine

at large, it simply does not receive as much money from the government and industry to tackle these issues.

Among other problems, dentistry's struggle to embrace scientific inquiry has left dentists with considerable latitude to advise unnecessary procedures—whether intentionally or not. The standard euphemism for this is *overtreatment*. Favored procedures, many of which are elaborate and steeply priced, include root canals, the application of crowns and veneers, deep cleaning, gum grafts, fillings for "microcavities"—incipient lesions that do not require immediate treatment—and superfluous restorations and replacements, such as swapping old metal fillings for modern resin ones. As Mary Otto writes in her book, *Teeth*, "America's dental-care system continues to reward those surgical procedures far more than it does prevention."

Certainly there is a financial incentive. In the United States, the average debt of a dental-school graduate is more than \$200,000. And then there's the expense of finding an office, buying new equipment, and hiring staff to set up a private practice. A dentist's income is entirely dependent on the number and type of procedures he or she performs; a routine cleaning and examination earns a baseline fee of only about \$200.

All that said, the amount of tooth decay in many countries' populations has declined dramatically over the past

four decades, mostly thanks to fluoridated toothpaste. In the 1980s, with fewer genuine problems to treat, some practitioners turned to the newly flourishing industry of cosmetic dentistry, promoting elective procedures such as bleaching, teeth filing and straightening, gum lifts, and veneers. It's easy to see how an unethical dentist, hoping to buoy his income, would be tempted to recommend frequent exams and proactive treatments—a small filling

Collectively, the overzealous dentists singled out 13 different teeth for drilling; each advised one to six fillings.

These results wouldn't have surprised some Americans. In 1997, *Reader's Digest* conducted its own investigation of dentists' practices. Writer William Ecenbarger visited 50 dentists in 28 states and received prescriptions ranging from a single crown to a full-mouth reconstruction, with the price tag starting at



"AMERICA'S DENTAL-CARE SYSTEM CONTINUES TO REWARD SURGICAL PROCEDURES MORE THAN PREVENTION."

here, a new crown there—even when waiting and watching would be better. It's equally easy to imagine how that behavior might escalate.

Studies that explicitly focus on overtreatment in dentistry are rare, but a recent field experiment provides some clues about its pervasiveness. A team of researchers at ETH Zurich, a Swiss university, asked a volunteer patient with three tiny, shallow cavities to visit 180 randomly selected dentists in Zurich. The Swiss Dental Guidelines state that such minor cavities do not require fillings; rather, the dentist should monitor the decay and encourage the patient to brush regularly, which can reverse the damage. Despite this, 50 of the 180 dentists suggested unnecessary treatment.

about \$500 and going up to nearly \$30,000. His conclusion: "Dentistry is a stunningly inexact science." (To read the full story, go to rd.com/dentist.)

DR. ZEIDLER CONFRONTED Dr. Lund about his discoveries in several face-to-face meetings and decided shortly thereafter to take legal action. (Repeated attempts were made to contact Dr. Lund and his lawyer for this story, but neither responded.)

One by one, Dr. Zeidler began to write, call, or sit down with patients, explaining what he had uncovered. They were shocked and angry.

"A lot of them felt, How can I be so stupid? Or, Why didn't I go elsewhere?" Dr. Zeidler says. "But this is not about intellect. It's about betrayal of trust."




A 1997 READER'S DIGEST INVESTIGATION CONCLUDED THAT "DENTISTRY IS A STUNNINGLY INEXACT SCIENCE."

In October 2013, Dr. Zeidler sued Dr. Lund for misrepresenting his practice and breaching their contract. In the lawsuit, Dr. Zeidler and his lawyers argued that Dr. Lund's reported practice income of \$729,000 to \$988,000 a year was "a result of fraudulent billing activity, billing for treatment that was unnecessary, and billing for treatment which was never performed." The suit was settled for a confidential amount. From 2014 to 2017, ten of Dr. Lund's former patients, including Mitchell and Cordi, sued him for a mix of fraud, deceit, battery, financial elder abuse, and dental malpractice. They collectively reached a nearly \$3 million settlement, paid out by Dr. Lund's insurance company. (Dr. Lund did not admit to any wrongdoing.)

Dr. Lund was arrested in May 2016 and released on \$250,000 bail. The Santa Clara County district attorney's office is prosecuting a criminal case against him based on 26 counts of insurance fraud. At his arraignment, he

said he was innocent of all charges; the trial is expected to take place later this year. The Dental Board of California is seeking to revoke or suspend his license, which is currently expired.

Many of Dr. Lund's former patients worry about their future health. One of Mitchell's root canals has already failed: The tooth fractured, and an infection developed. Cordi's new dentist says her X-rays resemble those of someone who had reconstructive facial surgery following a car crash. Because Dr. Lund installed her new dental bridges improperly, one of her teeth is continually damaged by everyday chewing. "It hurts like hell," she says. She has to wear a mouth guard every night.

Worst of all, she says, "He damaged the trust I need to have in the people who take care of me. He damaged my trust in mankind. That's an unforgivable crime." 

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Go Ahead, Bust a Move

A person who is not afraid of looking like a fool gets to do a lot more dancing.

MARGARET RENKL, WRITER

Ask The Expert THE TRUTH ABOUT COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

Straining to hear each day, even when using powerful hearing aids?



DR. ALEJANDRO RIVAS, a cochlear implant surgeon and medical advisor to Cochlear, answers questions about cochlear implants and how they are different from hearing aids.

Now more than ever, communication and connection are important for maintaining relationships with family, friends and community. Whether it happens suddenly or gradually over time, hearing loss can affect you physically and emotionally. Being unable to hear impacts your ability to communicate with your loved ones, talk on the phone, or hear the TV. Being able to hear in different environments will help you stay connected with what matters most. Addressing your hearing loss has the potential to transform your life.

Cochlear implants work differently than hearing aids. Rather than amplifying sound, they use state-of-the-art electronic components and software to help provide access to the sounds you've been missing.

Q How are cochlear implants different than hearing aids?

Hearing aids help many people by making the sounds they hear louder. Unfortunately, as hearing loss progresses, sounds may not only need to be louder, they may need to be clearer. Cochlear implants can help give you that clarity, especially in noisy environments.¹ Be sure to discuss your options with a Hearing Implant Specialist in your area.

Q Is it major surgery?

No, not at all. The procedure is often done on an outpatient basis and typically takes just a couple of hours.

Q Are cochlear implants covered by Medicare?

Yes, Medicare and most private insurance plans routinely cover cochlear implants.*

Q Are cochlear implants a proven solution?

Cochlear hearing implant technology is very reliable.² In fact, it has been around for 40 years and Cochlear has provided more than 600,000 implantable hearing devices.

Call 800 610 4901 or visit www.Cochlear.us/Rdigest to find a Hearing Implant Specialist near you and get a free guide about cochlear implants



* Covered for Medicare beneficiaries who meet CMS criteria for coverage. Contact your insurance provider or hearing implant specialist to determine your eligibility for coverage.

1. The Nucleus Freedom Cochlear Implant System: Adult Post-Market Surveillance Trial Results. 2008 June.
2. Cochlear Nucleus Implant Reliability Report. Volume 18 | December 2019. D1712187. Cochlear Ltd; 2020.
Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always read the instructions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information. Views expressed by hearing health providers are that of the individual.

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YOU CALL THAT A COMPLIMENT?

A LITTLE PRAISE IS
ALWAYS NICE—EXCEPT WHEN
IT IS A TAD TOO HONEST

Did you
used to be
good-looking?

ONE DAY, IF the stars are aligned and you've worked hard to do the right thing, you, too, might be lucky enough to receive a lovely compliment like the one Nancy Phelan, of Baraboo, Wisconsin, got a few years back. "When I was visiting my son, his fiancée, and her children," Nancy wrote to *Reader's Digest*, "I made them a specialty of mine: breakfast pizza. After eating several slices, my eight-year-old future grandson leaned back in his chair and proclaimed, 'This is so good, it makes my tongue dance!'"

Alas, life isn't always so sweet. In fact, we sometimes get treated to a more stinging kind of praise—the backhanded compliment. We asked you for some of the favorite zingers you've heard or endured. It's OK to laugh. We did.

I had joined an aerobics class made up mostly of older women like me. At first, it was difficult to follow all the steps, but after a few weeks I felt that I had a good grasp of the routines. One day, a fellow classmate stopped me to say, "I've been noticing you. You're very coordinated."

I couldn't have been prouder. "Thank you," I said.

"Yes," she continued, "your shirt matches your pants, and your pants match your socks."

—JOYCE THOMASSON
Stuart, Florida

When I was in my 20s, I had a streak of gray hair. One day, a complete stranger noticed and said, "I really like your gray hair. Where did you get it done?"

"Oh, thanks," I said. "It's natural."

She recoiled. "Oh my, what are you going to do about it?"

—DONNA CALVERT
Leopold, Missouri

A student stopped me in the hallway to say that she'd just learned that her mom had had me as a teacher. Then, after looking me up and down, she asked, "Did you used to be good-looking?"

—BOB ISITT
Spokane, Washington

As a wannabe musician, I took advantage of an opportunity to play with a local recorder group. During a break in our first rehearsal, the woman sitting next to me, an accomplished musician, said, "You have a beautiful vibrato!" I was basking in the glow of her praise when she added, "You're not supposed to."

—VICKI MORRISON GOBLE
Bemidji, Minnesota

When I met my brother's new father-in-law, he took my hand and said warmly, "You look just like your brother. He has a big nose too."

—MARIE BALL
Tonawanda, New York

One morning shortly after we got married in our 60s, my husband and I were sitting on the bed putting on our socks and shoes. Out of the blue, he reached over and patted me on the knee, saying, "I am so glad we got married."

He was being romantic, and I appreciated it. "Me, too," I said.

He continued, "Do you have any idea how nice it is to open my dresser drawer and find my underwear and socks all folded nice and neat?"

—K.C. *via rd.com*

After I sang a solo in church, an elderly gentleman offered me his highest compliment.

"I liked your song for two reasons," he said. "You sang it well, and you didn't sing too long."

—ANN ABERNATHY
Colonial Heights, Virginia

Somehow, a friend and I got on the subject of age, which led him to ask how old I was.

"Thirty-seven," I said.

He cocked his head and asked, "Is that all?"

—MARY CARRUTH
Mason, Texas

A client was so impressed with my work, he made a point of calling to tell me that he had named his new puppy after me.

—SHEILA COMPTON
Carmichael, California

In high school, a female classmate told me I'd "make a really handsome guy."

—KIMBERLEY COLEMAN
Danbury, Connecticut

My grandma used to tell me, "There's no conceit in your family. You've got it all."

—DEVON CHRISTENSON
McFarland, Wisconsin

We adopted our daughter from China when she was nine, and we soon discovered that common American phrases and idioms didn't come easily. Case in point, the time she tried to praise me for being outgoing and having lots of friends. With a great big smile she declared, "When I grow up, I want to be a big mouth just like you!"

—AMY REYNOLDS
Springfield, Illinois



Among my all-time favorite movies is *Babe*. For years, whenever I wanted to compliment someone, I'd quote the film's famous line: "That'll do, Pig, that'll do."

Recently, I finally got my husband to watch the movie with me. When that scene came on, he turned to me, stunned. "It's a compliment? All these years I thought you were insulting me!"

—TIGER MILLER
Montague, New Jersey

Our boss at the factory was a grizzled New Yorker with a management philosophy that harked back to the sweatshops of old. A shift without being cussed out multiple times was considered a win. But one day, after I spotted and corrected a problem with one of the machines, he

offered me the highest compliment he could think of.

"Rich," he said, "you're stinking less at this job all the time."
—R.P. *via rd.com*

"Happy birthday! You don't look 60, but I remember when you did!"

—SUSIE BARR
Rhodelia, Kentucky

From a reference letter written by my first boss: "Sarah is very lazy. When given a task she immediately figures out the easiest and quickest way

to complete it. This tends to make her highly efficient."

—S. J. GARNER
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

I gained 50 pounds with my first pregnancy. Two weeks after delivery, I heard someone whisper, "She doesn't look like she just delivered a baby."

—JUDY MORSE
Holtville, California

My then-wife and I were going through a divorce when we sat together to watch a TV show. It was about a New York City transit cop, played by James Brolin, who was rescuing passengers trapped in a flooded subway. To my pleasant surprise, she said, "He's only an actor. You're trained to do that. Scout,

Army, NYPD Rescue ... You could really save them, not him."

It was a sweet moment that ended when she remarked, "Of course, he looks much better doing it."

—ALBERT WEIR
Seaford, Delaware

Years ago, I was giving a presentation at the Pentagon in order to get funding for a project. When I finished, the general I was briefing smiled wryly and said, "You should sell used cars." I don't think he meant it in a good way.

—MICKEY SKAMANGAS
Fredericksburg, Virginia

Back when my daughter was an infant, I was out pushing her in the stroller when a woman stopped us on the street.

"My goodness, what a beautiful baby!" she remarked. "Does she look like her father?"

—PEGGY GREB
Leetsdale, Pennsylvania

After reading a poem I'd labored over, my mother said, "This is good. Really good!"

I was beaming!
Then she felt compelled to ask,




"Are you sure you wrote it?"

—THERESA BAUMBACH
Center Moriches, New York

From an Englishman: "You speak well for an American."

—MIRIAM MARTIN
Dallas, Texas

I was taking my four-year-old grandson out of his car seat when he gazed into my eyes and delivered this bit of wisdom: "Papa, you're old. But at least you're not dead yet." 

—OWEN WILKIE
Brookline Station, Missouri

Past the Hard Part

I don't want to exercise. I want to *have* exercised.

 @AKILAHGREEN

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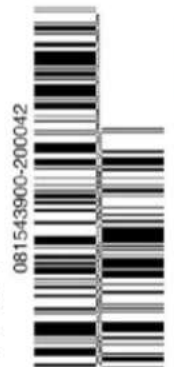
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THE GENIUS SECTION

10 Pages TO SHARPEN
Your Mind



THE TRUTH ABOUT MEMORY

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

BY *Guy P. Harrison*

FROM PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARIA AMADOR

WHAT WOULD YOU be without your memories? How important is your ability to remember the past and to draw on it to inform your next move? I'll answer for you: It's right up there with breathing and eating.

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

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

When asked, "Is confident testimony necessarily accurate testimony?" more than a third of people

(37 percent) strongly or mostly agreed that "the testimony of one confident eyewitness should be enough evidence to convict a defendant of a crime." Not one expert used in the study strongly or mostly agreed with this; 93.8 percent strongly disagreed.

So how does memory work? I prefer to describe it as something like an old man sitting by a campfire somewhere deep in your brain. He means well and wants to help, but he doesn't show you your past like some wizard with a time portal. The best he can do is tell you stories. And like all good storytellers, he edits for impact, efficiency, functionality, and clarity. He tells you what he assumes you need to know.

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

In other words, memory is associative and constructive—there is no consistent, orderly, or rational sense to it. It's not like files on a computer hard drive arranged by subject or placed in chronological order. A memory will be



in our neural jungle. Memories come to us in a way that is similar to how archaeologists and police detectives use bits of information—artifacts and clues—to construct stories about past people and events.

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

tucked away and connected to other memories or concepts in ways that are not necessarily practical or logical. This is why a particular smell or sound may bring up a memory even though it wasn't important in the original experience. It's also the reason we can't always recall in an instant a memory we need, even if it's there somewhere

history you are watching. It's a docu-drama at best. When you remember, your memory tells your brain a story—and much may be lost in transit.

WE DON'T NEED TO REMEMBER EVERY DETAIL ABOUT EVERYTHING.

The human brain is still a mysterious universe in many ways, of course. Fortunately, enough has been revealed to offer us some guidance toward wiser and safer navigations through daily

life. Your memory is best thought of as helpful input. It's packaged information sent to help us cope in the present and plan for the future. It is not meant to provide foolproof transcripts or recordings of what really happened. And while this can complicate our lives, it works just fine most of the time. We don't need to remember every detail about everything. For more than two million years of human existence, we have survived and thrived in large part because our memory worked well enough. Even in our information-soaked, hyperconnected, and fast-changing world, it still does.

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3

Reasons to Celebrate Your Faulty Memory

BY Robert Nash

1. Faulty memories can give self-esteem an artificial leg up. One of my favorite demonstrations

comes from a study of university students asked to remember their high school grades. The researchers had the students' high school transcripts for cross-checking, so there was no reason to lie. Nevertheless, the students were substantially better at remembering their good grades than the bad ones. The A's and B's generally stuck in their memories very well, whereas the D's and F's

tended to be recalled as slightly higher grades. In other words, what we remember fits by and large with reality, but the details can get skewed in ways that make us feel better about ourselves: smarter, kinder, more hardworking.

2. They help us recognize our core values.

For example, studies show that liberals will more readily develop false memories of

fictional events that would embarrass conservative political leaders, whereas conservatives will more readily remember fictional events that would embarrass liberal leaders. Our memory biases benefit us by making us feel better about ourselves and our social groups.

3. They also help us build bonds. We often describe past events for other people depending

on our different social goals. Sometimes we might want to entertain our audience; at other times we might want to accurately inform them. Sometimes we might know our audience has particular beliefs or attitudes, which makes us frame our story differently from what we otherwise might. One line of research has shown that retelling in different ways can actually change our own memory of what really

happened—the memory can morph to fit the way we tell the story, becoming more similar over time to what we think our audiences want to hear. Reshaping our memories might help us feel more connected to people and perhaps help us integrate into groups and avoid conflicts. **R**

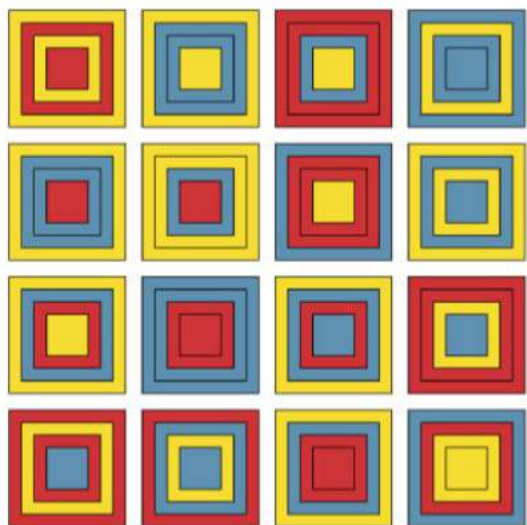
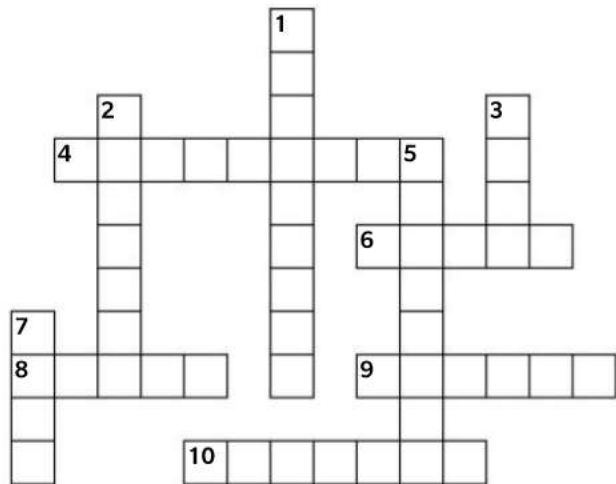
Robert Nash is a professor in the School of Psychology at Aston University in England.

BRAIN GAMES

Quick Crossword

EASY Happy Valentine's Day, *sweetie!* Be a dear and fill the grid with these—the most hated (on the left) and adored (on the right) pet names we give our romantic partners, according to Yahoo.

- | | |
|-----------|---------|
| BABE | DARLING |
| SNOOKUMS | DEAREST |
| MUFFIN | LOVE |
| SUGARLIPS | ANGEL |
| BABYCAKES | HONEY |



Four in a Row

MEDIUM In this bird's-eye view, each of the nested squares represents a stack of four blocks, with smaller ones sitting on top of larger ones. Can you find a line of four blocks in the same row, column, or long diagonal that are all the same color? The line must be straight in three dimensions, meaning it spans blocks sitting at adjacent heights, going from smallest to largest (or vice versa), or at the same height.

Word Ladder

MEDIUM In the "ladder" of words below, one letter changes between consecutive rungs. The red blanks indicate which letter changes as you move from one rung down to the next. Can you fill in the words using the definitions given—and the one letter we placed for you?

LEGEND (SYNONYM OF THE LADDER'S FINAL WORD)

HERB

SINGLE SHEET

T

TOP OF HEAD

TRAIL

SCHOOL SUBJECT

LEGEND (SYNONYM OF THE LADDER'S FIRST WORD)

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

Groundhog Day

DIFFICULT In a curious little town, Prognostication Peyton (the local groundhog) declares if there will be six more weeks of winter. But Peyton doesn't make his judgment based on whether he can see his shadow. He makes his call based on his dream from the previous night.

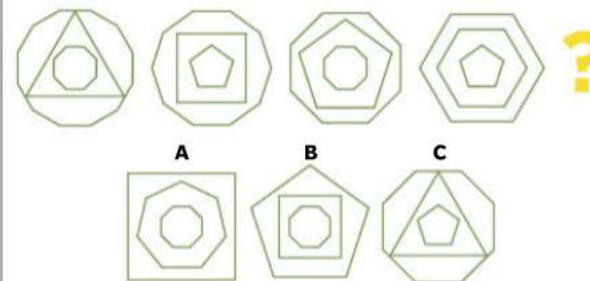


- ♦ If Peyton has a good dream the night before Groundhog Day, there's a 70 percent chance he will declare an earlier start to spring.
- ♦ But if Peyton has a bad dream the night before, there's a 70 percent chance he will declare six more weeks of winter.

Assuming half of his dreams are good and the other half are bad, what's the overall likelihood that Peyton will declare six more weeks of winter?

What's Next?

EASY Logically, which group of shapes (A, B, or C) should come next in the sequence?



For answers, turn to **PAGE 123**.

EMILY GOODMAN (QUICK CROSSWORD); DARREN RIGBY (FOUR IN A ROW)

EMILY GOODMAN (WORD LADDER, GROUNDHOG DAY); MARCEL DANESI (WHAT'S NEXT); MARIA AMADOR (GROUNDHOG)

WORD POWER

We're throwing you a curveball this month with a vocabulary roundup of a circular nature. Can you roll with the roundhouses, or are you out of the loop?

Give this quiz a whirl, and then take a spin to page 122 for answers.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

1. rouleau n.

- (roo-'lo)
A roll of coins.
B mushroom cap.
C crystal ball.

2. ellipse n.

- (ih-'lips)
A crater.
B oval.
C revolution.

3. gyre n.

- ('jy-er)
A spiral motion.
B ring of fire.
C pirouette.

4. rotund adj.

- (roh-'tund)
A curled.
B plump.
C rotating.

5. circuitous adj.

- (ser-'kew-uh-tuss)
A winding.
B surrounded.
C eclipsed.

6. bobbin n.

- ('bah-bin)
A life preserver.
B spare tire.
C spindle for thread.

7. aureole n.

- ('or-ee-ohl)
A pearl.
B seed.
C halo.

8. cupola n.

- ('kyew-puh-luh)
A bald spot.
B espresso mug.
C roof dome.

9. roundelay n.

- ('rown-duh-lay)
A traffic circle.
B song with a refrain.
C barber pole.

10. chapati n.

- (chuh-'pah-tee)
A flatbread.
B eye patch.
C tasseled belt.

11. hora n.

- ('hor-uh)
A clockface.
B circular folk dance.
C burial mound.

12. maelstrom n.

- ('mayl-strum)
A eye of a hurricane.
B water cycle.
C whirlpool.

13. aperture n.

- ('ap-er-chur)
A orbit.
B hole.
C wine cork.

14. ovate adj.

- ('oh-vayt)
A coiled.
B wearing a crown.
C egg-shaped.

15. oculus n.

- ('ah-kyuh-luss)
A gun barrel.
B spinal disk.
C round window.

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A Very Round Number

As a symbol, it can be a circle or an oval, but the word zero comes from the Latin *zephirum* and the Arabic *sifr* ("empty"). For a term that means, well, nothing, it has a lot of synonyms: *cipher* (also from *sifr*), *zilch*, *naught*, and *nil*, to name a few. Some sports have their own terms: 1860s baseball gave us the *goose egg*, and in tennis it's *love*, probably from the idea of playing for nothing but "the love of the game."



Word Power ANSWERS

1. roulette (A) roll of coins.

Anand organizes his spare change into rouleaus, but he always forgets to takes them to the bank.

2. ellipse (B) oval.

I'm drawing your face as a greenish ellipse—no offense.

3. gyre (A) spiral motion.

In a widening gyre, the drone rose over the field.

4. rotund (B) plump.

"Rover is getting a bit rotund—how many treats do you feed him?" the veterinarian asked.

5. circuitous (A) winding.

The hikers followed the circuitous trail through the forest.

6. bobbin (C) spindle

for thread. My great-grandmother's vintage sewing machine is in perfect condition, but it's missing the bobbin.

7. aureole (C) halo.

The sun shone behind Diana, making her blond hair a glowing aureole.

8. cupola (C) roof dome.

A white marble cupola tops the mosque's towering minaret.

9. roundelay (B) song

with a refrain. The singer-songwriter's new album is full of soothing, folk-inspired roundelays.

10. chapati (A) flatbread.

Dad whipped up vegetable curry and fresh-baked chapati for dinner.

11. hora (B) circular folk

dance. If you're attending a wedding in Israel, be ready to do the hora!

12. maelstrom (C) whirlpool.

The small fishing boat was nearly pulled into the powerful maelstrom.

13. aperture (B) hole.

The wily fox slipped into the henhouse through an aperture in the wall.

14. ovate (C) egg-shaped.

Before his fall, Humpty Dumpty had maintained an ovate physique.

15. oculus (C) round

window. The stained glass in the chapel's oculus dates to the 1920s.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: coming 'round

10-12: well-turned

13-15: winner's circle

HANI-NYAONG/GETTY IMAGES

BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

See page 118.

Quick Crossword

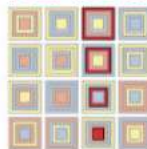
ACROSS

- BABYCAKES
- HONEY
- ANGEL
- MUFFIN
- DEAREST

DOWN

- SUGARLIPS
- DARLING
- LOVE
- SNOOKUMS
- BABE

Four in a Row



Word Ladder

Saga, sage, page, pate, path, math, myth

Groundhog Day

50 percent (half of 30 percent plus half of 70 percent)

MAKE US LAUGH!



Caption Contest

What's your clever description for this picture? Submit your funniest line at RD.COM/CAPTIONCONTEST. Winners will appear in a future Photo Finish (PAGE 124).

What's Next?

A. From left to right, the number of sides on the outer shape decreases by two, the number on

the middle shape increases by one, and the inner shape alternates between an octagon and a pentagon.

BYLLWILL/GETTY IMAGES

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PHOTO FINISH
YOUR *Funniest* CAPTIONS



Winner

“Reverse the ceiling fan!”

—KEN KORTH *Forest City, Iowa*

Runners-Up

“Hey, Dad, have you seen my pet tarantula?”

—WILLIAM KANDELL *Holbrook, New York*

“So this is what they mean by Airbnb.”

—DIANA REDETZKE *Seattle, Washington*

To enter an upcoming caption contest, see the photo on **PAGE 123**.

DARIUS BASHAR/UNSPLASH

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Reader's Digest

DECEMBER 2020/JANUARY 2021

**Music
Grows
YOUR
BRAIN!**

Page 110

'TIS THE SEASON

FAMILY MIRACLES

Real-Life Stories of Hope

**STAY
POSITIVE**
Every Day

A GUIDE TO GRATITUDE

**2020 Holiday
SHOPPING
SECRETS**

By JODY L. ROHLENA

**Heroes in a
Year of Virus**

From THEHEALTHY.COM

**A Cure for
Bellyachers**

An RD ORIGINAL

13 TV
Streaming
Answers
By EMILY GOODMAN



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THE SEASON FOR FAMILY MIRACLES

A mother's eerie premonition. An uncle's unusual joyride. The sweet wait for a dad's holiday treat. If you need a little extra warmth this year, these three wonderful stories will do the job nicely.

TED + CHELSEA CAVANAUGH

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DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

Don't Go into the Volcano

When a honeymoon hike to the rim of a jungle crater ends with a fall, the bride must get her injured husband medical care—by herself.

BY NICHOLAS HUNE-BROWN

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INSPIRATION

Finding the Silver Lining

Many of us have discovered a new appreciation for life's simpler joys. RD readers share theirs.

RD readers share theirs.

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The Double Triple

A triple transplant is among the rarest of medical procedures. In one 48-hour stretch, a team of doctors performed two of them.

BY BRYAN SMITH
FROM CHICAGO

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2020 Holiday Shopping Guide

In this most unusual year, the gift of giving will feel especially good. These tips will help.

BY JODY L. ROHLENA

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FIRST PERSON

Use a Hankie, Dude!

He has used a pocket handkerchief all his life—and was ridiculed for it. Now, this famous author says his habit has found its moment.

BY SCOTT TUROW FROM
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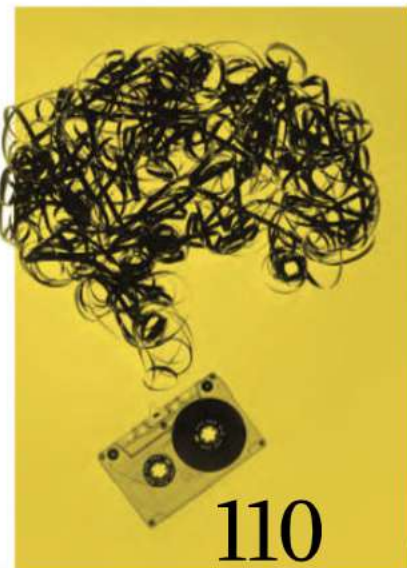
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DEAR READER

Good to Go

“DUDE, DRIVE SAFE,” I said at the door of my son’s tiny old Subaru, which I’d helped him pack to the brim. Neil was moving 1,000 miles away, to Nashville. “You know I love you.”

“Love you, too, Dad,” he replied, looking me in the eye. “I’m good.”

And he was.

When Neil came home in 2019 after a humbling final year in college, Susan and I didn’t much know him. He didn’t know himself either. But we were all willing to connect on an honest level. Susan and I listened better. He got sober and healthy in mind and body. Gradually, we felt like a team.

The quarantine, which struck six months in, only helped us. We got into a day-to-day rhythm and learned how to back each other up. Neil had asked Susan to teach him to cook, and now he got serious, preparing dinners for us that they had imagined together. We talked about the movies we watched, books he was reading. Mornings, he and I would go on hikes and talk about stuff I don’t talk with anyone about.

My droll son is a stickler



for facts. Right now, reading this, he’ll almost certainly drop a hilarious line reminding me it wasn’t perfect.

But dude, it *was* perfect. So many moments, I felt how good his openness made me feel and how it made me more open in return.

My family knows I’m spectacular at sentimentality—I cry like a baby over dumb rom-coms. But gratitude in the moment, not so much. That’s an emotion I feel too late, along with regret at things unsaid, connections dropped.

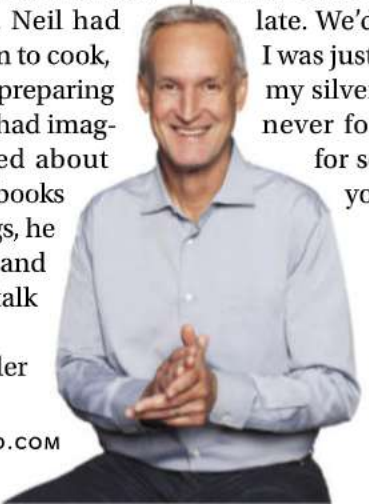
Not in 2020. When he drove away, I teared up a little, but not the way I do when emotions denied flood in too late. We’d said everything we felt.

I was just so happy for him. That’s my silver lining for 2020, and I’ll never forget it. Turn to page 78

for some of yours. And thank you, as always, for reading.

Bruce Kelley,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Write to me at
letters@rd.com.



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LETTERS
NOTES ON THE
October ISSUE



Extraordinary Uses for Ordinary Things

You recommend lining fridge drawers with paper towels to absorb the moisture that causes produce to rot. We call our crisper the rotter because it's where good-intentioned veggies die a forgotten death. An entire roll couldn't save them from impending doom.

—DENISE THIERY *Alexandria, Kentucky*

Letters from the Front

I appreciate Andrew Carroll's collection of wartime letters from soldiers. I have 200 letters from my husband from his tours in Vietnam: exchanges about our romance and upcoming wedding, his experiences in Da Nang and Tan San Nhut, and, later, our new daughter. The letters are our biggest nonliving treasure, and our kids treasure them too and will pass

them down to their own children.

—KATHY STEENSON
Forest Ranch, California

**My School Desk—
in a Bar**

This brought back childhood memories of a similar neighborhood bar on the North Side of Chicago, my father's after-work retreat. All the regulars had telephone codes to alert them to head home for dinner. My father's code was two rings,

hang up, one ring. I still remember the number. God help the person who answered before the code was recognized.

—KATHLEEN SCHNEIDER
Leesburg, Florida

Eat Better for the Planet

At nearly 50, my husband and I are thriving on a plant-based diet with blood work that amazes our doctor. We've seen big improvements in our health, and this story reminds us how much it helps the planet.

—LISA BUCHMEIER
Arnold, Missouri

My Concession Speech

After reading about Andy Simmons's humorous and enterprising endeavor to run for president of his home, I can say I'm glad no public funds were used because there was NO WAY he could've won commander-in-chief of 347 Elm Street and unseated the incumbent,

Mommy. The only winner here was the dog.
—MARYANN DOUGLASS
Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

We Found a Fix

The "De-fat Soups and Stews" fix that recommends filling a ladle with ice and skimming it across the top to collect fat is too much work. You can also dip the corner of a paper towel in the floating liquid fat, which will cling to the paper towel and reject the water-based fluid. I save the paper to use as a fire starter.

—HAROLD PARKS
Minden, Nevada

The Snake's Revenge

This near-fatal encounter with a rattlesnake reminded me of my father's similar method

of dealing with them: using a shovel to cut off the head after it's dead. He spent 40 years in the track department of the Santa Fe railway, covering southwest Kansas, southeast Colorado, and the Oklahoma Panhandle. Too many encounters with rattlers.

—WILLIAM GAMBLE
Urbana, Illinois

Word Power

I truly enjoyed October's Word Power about nearly identical words with different meanings. I recently noticed a gaffe made by a TV journalist who said "The anger in this city is palatable." I didn't believe anger could be pleasant to taste. (She of course meant *palpable*.)

—PAM CAMP
Chico, California

BETTER LATE THAN ... CLEVER?

♦ Just finished reading "Sorry I'm Late" in the October issue. It reminded of the time we lived in New Jersey and I went to head to work and found a black bear near my car. I went back inside to call and let my boss know why I'd be late. His question: "Is it by the driver's side?"

—Linda Deane
GERMANTOWN, TENNESSEE

♦ I was a fifth-grade teacher for years, so I have heard every excuse in the book. One student's homework excuse was "The ladder was in the garage," which is what her dad always said was as good an excuse as any.

—Vicki Kinnison
KEENESBURG, COLORADO

In Search of Unknown Benefactors

A friend in need is a friend indeed, but the kindness of a stranger is twice as nice. Have you ever received a memorable helping hand that made you smile or even cry? Maybe someone paid for your meal at the drive-through or you awakened one snowy morning to find your walkway shoveled. Share your story and see terms at rd.com/kindness, and your Good Samaritan might get a well-earned moment in the spotlight.



RD PHOTO STUDIO

MARNIE GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES

EVERYDAY HEROES

Health issues preoccupied all of us in 2020. Thehealthy.com found people making a memorable difference.

The Caped Crusaders' Tailor

BY *Lauren Diamond*

EVERY SUPERHERO, no matter how small, needs a cape. That was Robyn Rosenberger's motivation when she started sewing superhero capes for kids with cancer, heart defects, and other serious ailments.

It all began when she was making a cape as a birthday present for her nephew. Rosenberger heard of a girl named Brenna who was battling a potentially deadly skin condition called harlequin ichthyosis. Anyone going through what she was going through

had to be tough. "I had an aha moment," Rosenberger says. "Brenna was a superhero! She needed a cape."

So Rosenberger sent her one, and Brenna's mother was delighted. Rosenberger found ten more kids online and sent out ten more capes. Before long, she quit her job at a software company to dedicate herself full-time to tinysuperheroes.com, a website where people can buy handmade capes for brave kids facing illness and disability.



Robyn Rosenberger gives a tiny superhero a much needed lift.

Since 2013, Rosenberger and her small paid staff have sent more than 12,000 handmade capes to kids in all 50 states and 15 other countries. The capes come in pink, blue, purple, or red and can be emblazoned with the child's initials or specialized patches, including a heart, a rocket, or a lightning bolt.

One recipient was eight-month-old Gabe, who was born with a cleft palate and Coffin-Siris syndrome, which causes distinct facial features. Rosenberger sent him a red cape with a bright yellow *G* in the center. It was a hit. Gabe is now a fixture on the company's social media posts. "The TinySuperhero community has been a wonderful connection to have," says Gabe's mom, Kate Glocke. In fact, two years later, "we still bring Gabe's cape with us to every hospital appointment." **R**



Health-Care Heroes

To read more stories from our sister site about people performing extraordinary feats in the world of health, go to THEHEALTHY.COM/HEALTHYHEROES.

Bye-Bye, Medical Debt

BY Amy Marturana Winderl

IN MARCH 2019, when Sara Cook first got a letter in the mail telling her that someone had paid off a chunk of her medical debt, she thought it was fake. "It seemed like one of those e-mails you get that says you have a long-lost uncle and you just inherited two million dollars," Cook says. Cautiously, she called the number listed on the letter. What she learned was that this was not a scam or even a joke. It was 100 percent real.

A remarkable nonprofit called RIP Medical Debt had indeed paid \$5,000 toward her bills. The organization didn't take care of all the debt she'd amassed from several back surgeries, but the former nurse was still awed by the gesture. "I felt really loved and blessed," she says, "knowing that complete strangers just did that out of the goodness of their hearts."

Craig Antico and Jerry Ashton do have good hearts. They're also former collection agents who have seen how runaway health-related debt has destroyed lives. "As a collector, you don't think about forgiving the debt. You collect the debt," Antico says. "I never



A medical issue shouldn't endanger anyone's financial health, say Jerry Ashton (left) and Craig Antico.

thought about all the hardship of the people who couldn't pay. Now I'm trying to find the people who need help."

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a quarter of all adults say they or a household member have had difficulty paying medical bills in the past year—and many of them have health insurance. In the United States, if you don't pay a hospital bill, it will eventually go to a collection agency, which buys the debt at a discount but owns the right to collect the full amount—and we know how unpleasant that process can be.

RIP Medical Debt buys debt directly from collection agencies at a steep discount, usually paying only a few pennies to retire each dollar of debt. Since 2014, the men estimate they've spent only about \$20 million to pay off nearly \$1 billion in personal debts. Antico and Ashton get their money from

individuals and charities that support RIP's mission. The \$5,000 to pay off Sara Cook's bill was donated by a church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Antico says that in 2019, the Christian Assembly Church in Southern California raised \$53,000, which was enough to pay off more than \$5 million in debt owed by thousands of people.

Don't bother contacting RIP for help, however. Antico says they used to let people reach out to them, but it was a disheartening experience because they weren't able to help everyone who applied. Instead, RIP researches potential recipients based on three criteria. First, they look for people who make no more than two and a half times the amount established as the federal poverty level. Then they screen for those whose debt (medical alone or combined with other debt) is equal to 5 percent or more of their gross income. Third, they look to see whether a person is insolvent.

For the people who do qualify, RIP's help is life-altering. "After their letter, I realized that my life really doesn't stink," says Cook, who shares her story with anyone who will listen. "I may never be able to work as a nurse again, but I can sit at the school library and help kids read or serve up food in the soup kitchen. When people do something out of the kindness of their hearts, sometimes they may wonder, Does it really make a difference? I want people to know that this had a positive impact." **R**

TAWATCHAI PRAKOBKIT/GETTY IMAGES (LAPTOP), COURTESY THE HEALTHY (INSET)

KEVIN STURMAN/COURTESY RIP MEDICAL DEBT

Depression Discussions

BY *Kimberly Goad*

ALISON MALMON WAS a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania when she got a call from her mother that would change her life: Her fun, outgoing older brother, Brian, had taken his own life.

When Malmon returned to school after Brian's funeral that spring of 2000, she was still grieving. But when she looked for help on campus, there was no place to turn. Back then, says Malmon, "students weren't encouraged to talk about their mental health. I started reflecting on the fact that there was an immense need to get that conversation going."

She was only 19 and had no experience with mental health issues, but that didn't stop her from launching Open Minds at Penn. Now, 20 years later and with a new name—Active Minds—it is the largest young adult mental health advocacy organization in America, with more than



A family tragedy turned Alison Malmon into a crusader for mental health care.

550 chapters at high schools and colleges. "What I'm most inspired by is that my generation and the generations coming behind me are taking on mental health as a social justice issue," says Malmon. "Our tools are changing not only their campuses, they're changing their families too."

Active Minds' peer-to-peer education techniques are more important than ever. The American College Health Association's 2019 National College Health Assessment found that 45 percent of students reported feeling so depressed in the previous 12 months that it was difficult to function; 66 percent felt overwhelming anxiety; and 13 percent seriously considered suicide.

Malmon's goal has always been to destigmatize mental illness, down to the language we use to talk about it. An example that hits close to home: the word *suicide*. You don't commit a heart attack or cancer, says Malmon. "Suicide is the only death where we use that pejorative word of 'committing,'" she says. "If we take that word out of our vernacular, we can make significant changes in how we think about suicide to the point where people reach out for the help they need as soon as they need it." **R**

EMMA EDICK/COURTESY ACTIVE MINDS

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“Will you stop referring to my failed diet as ‘Donutgate!’”

I used to run into this one guy at the coffee shop who never could remember my name. To prod his memory, I pulled out a dollar and said, “My name is Bill, just like this one-dollar bill.”

“Got it,” he said.

A few days later, our paths again crossed. This time he gave me a big, confident greeting:

“Well, hello, George!”
—BILL CRAFT
Edwardsville, Illinois

My last New Year’s resolution was to lose ten pounds. I missed it by 15 pounds!

—WILLIAM CAVICO
Villa Park, Illinois

A strip club near where my daughter lived shut its doors for a while in

response to COVID-19. A billboard outside announced: “Sorry, we’re clothed!”

—KATHLEEN O’HAGAN
Congress, Arizona

After my wife and I took our seats at a restaurant, the waiter arrived to take our order. First, he let us know that the special of the day was twin lobsters.

Three-year-old and dad start assembling a new toy in living room. Three-year-old emerges and says to me, “Mommy, what’s a nightmare?”

—@THEREALDRATCH (*Rachel Dratch*)

My wife was not impressed. “That’s silly,” she said. “How can you tell they’re twins?”

—KEVIN MCCORMICK
Montclair, New Jersey

Husband: Don’t be angry at me, but I accidentally spilled grease all over the oven.

Me: How about I won’t be angry at you, but you have to clean it.

Husband: I’d rather you be angry at me.

—LINDA GOLDFINGER
Los Angeles, California

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

“You’ll have to wait,” she told me. “We’re

out of tanks and waiting for a delivery.” As she walked away, she muttered, “This wouldn’t happen if patients would just stop using ‘em all up.”

—PHILLIP RADCLIFFE
Largo, Florida

I called to congratulate my parents on their 24th wedding anniversary.

“So, next year’s your 25th,” I said to my stepmom. “Is that silver, or wood, or what?”

“Guts, I think,” she replied.

—LYNETTE COMBS
Norfolk, Virginia

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

OH, CHRISTMAS TREE!

◆ Putting up the Christmas tree this weekend because life with a toddler isn’t dangerous, messy, and terrifying enough already.

—@DadandBuried

◆ How to Decorate a Christmas Tree When You Have Kids:

1. Unpack ornament.
2. Drop so that it shatters into a million pieces.
3. Repeat.

—@Lhlodder

◆ Wow, my kids are decorating the heck out of this small lower left section of our Christmas tree.

—@simoncholland

◆ **ME:** I hate putting up the Christmas tree every year.

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD: So why do you take it down?

—@XplodingUnicorn

(JAMES BREAKWELL)



MURIEL DE SEZE/GETTY IMAGES

QUOTABLE QUOTES

I like it when things are crazy. Something good comes out of exhaustion.

—John Mulaney, COMEDIAN

We have the ability to be the heroes of our families, our communities, and our lives. It's important to remind people of that truth: You have what it takes to make an impact. What is your hero's journey?

—Kerry Washington, ACTOR

My comfort zone is outside of my comfort zone. I like to be a little uncomfortable.

—Billie Eilish, SINGER

The rules, like streets, can only take you to known places.

—Ocean Vuong, WRITER

You've got to try your luck at least once a day, because you could be going around lucky all day and not even know it.

—Jimmy Dean, SINGER



Never stop learning how to learn.

—Billie Jean King, ATHLETE

Be nice to everyone and make your own cup of tea on set.

—Saoirse Ronan, ACTOR

I believe the secret to a long and happy marriage is not just finding someone you can live with for 50 years. It's finding someone you can't live without.

—Frank Caprio, TV JUDGE

POINT TO PONDER

When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.

—John Lewis, POLITICIAN



GETTY IMAGES (7)

**YOUR
TRUE
STORIES**

IN 100 Words

Shopping for a Song

While shopping one day at Publix, I made a pit stop at the women's restroom. Upon entering, I saw a cleaning lady. She was singing to herself as she mopped. I recognized the song ("How Great Is Our God") and couldn't hold back—I joined in! Then we hugged, tears in our eyes. We were so thankful for each other. Now I look—and listen—for her every time I go shopping.

—Dorothy Morse
LAKE PLACID, FLORIDA

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

A Very Merry Un-Birthday

Last December, a young lady ringing up my purchases greeted me with an enthusiastic "Merry Christmas!" I was not offended, but I am a Muslim, and at the time I was wearing a beautiful headscarf in a manner identifying my spiritual convictions. I responded, "Happy birthday!" At first, she was taken aback, but then she nodded and laughed good-naturedly, acknowledging my point. I smiled back at her and said, "Merry Christmas to you."

—MAHASIN SHAMSID-DEEN *Prince George, Virginia*



Right on the Money

When my youngest nephew was seven, he came home confused about whether or not to believe in Santa because some kids at school told him there was no such

thing. When my brother asked my nephew what he thought, his response was, "There has to be a Santa, because you could never afford all this stuff."

—Carol Feeley
MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

ILLUSTRATION BY *Hallie Bateman*

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HOW TO

Quiet the Family Complainer

Talking to a Debbie Downer can stress you out, but with the right tools you can lighten the mood for all

BY Lisa Fields

FOR YEARS, Janice Holly Booth endured her mother's lengthy airing of grievances about her aches and pains. It got so bad that Booth felt her mother's excessive grumbling was ruining the quality of their time together, so she finally spoke up.

"I know you probably don't realize it," Booth told her mother, "but you spend the first 20 to 30 minutes of every conversation complaining." When her mother objected, the two agreed to start keeping a running tally.

"When we'd sit down to talk, I'd bring a notepad," Booth says. "When she'd start off on a tear, she'd see me writing, catch herself, then stop."

Before long, it was clear that Booth's intervention not only helped her mother—it also helped their relationship. "Now her recitation of maladies

takes 60 seconds and we move on," Booth says. "I give her a lot of credit for making that behavioral change."

You may not be as bold as Booth was with her mother, but there are other ways to get a chronic complainer to taper off without starting an argument—a precious skill anytime, but one that is especially useful around family-reunion season. To be effective, it helps to understand why people complain in the first place.

In fact, even the kindest, most considerate people complain—the average person does it between 15 and 30 times a day. And complaining doesn't always have a negative impact. Sometimes a complaint changes an unfavorable situation into a more desirable one. Other times, complaining can deepen our relationships (such

HAND LETTERING BY MARIA AMADOR

as when we confide in someone we trust) or foster new relationships (like when we strike up conversations with people we don't know well by griping about, say, the terrible weather).

The problems start when complaining becomes the default mode. "When we have a need to be heard, we repeat ourselves. We become more emphatic," says Dian Killian, PhD, a New York City-based life coach. This behavior could be hard-wired, since it does seem that those who complain frequently don't realize that they do. Robin Kowalski, a psychology professor at Clemson University in South Carolina and one of the first researchers to study complaining, says the satisfaction for chronic complainers comes from attention. "Even if it's negative attention," she says, "they're OK with that." This is why some Negative Nancies (or Neds) are never satisfied with any suggestion to address the problems that they highlight—resolution isn't their aim.

So, how do you get a chronic complainer to scale back, for the sake of your health and his?

Change the subject. Some complainers will switch gears if you shift the conversation in a direction that interests them. If your neighbor is fussing over the phone company, tell her

about an unexpected call you received from an old friend. If your coworker is bellyaching about your boss, ask whether he met the new employee.

This tactic is especially effective on those who are mindlessly venting, and you can keep using it. "Don't just try it one time," Kowalski says. "Get them off the focus that they're currently on."

Summarize the complaint. If your complainer keeps repeating himself, he may stop if you demonstrate that you're listening. "Ask something like, 'Can I tell you what I've heard so far so you know that I've gotten it?'" Killian says.

Using "I" statements ("I've heard...") rather than "you" statements ("You keep repeating yourself") shows that you're interested rather than trying to shut the person down.

Hard as it may be, avoid saying the word *complaining*. "It has such

negative connotations," Kowalski says. Saying you hear their *dissatisfaction* gets the point across—and it's not nearly as loaded a term.

Challenge the person to act. When a chronic complainer tells you about her latest problem, ask nicely what she's done to improve it. This isn't the usual direction a grievance-laden conversation takes, and it may help to abruptly end a rant.

RATHER THAN TRYING TO SHUT THE PERSON DOWN, SHOW THAT YOU'RE INTERESTED.

"Typically, it's not about a strategy to fix it—they just want to keep talking about it," Kowalski says. "If you break that pattern, it puts them off guard, and people typically stop."

Be honest. When you have things to do, tell the complainer that you must cut the conversation short. You don't need a tangible excuse such as a work deadline to pull this off. You

can simply be honest, even saying you need to move on so the conversation doesn't bring you down—especially if it's someone who's complained to you many times before.

Have a heart-to-heart. When it's someone very close to you—your partner, sibling, or best friend—who stresses you out with a barrage of negativity, it's important to talk about the problem. Otherwise, if you bottle up your feelings and continue listening to repeated complaints, you may grow resentful or start avoiding the person.

Broach the topic gently. Rather than pointing a finger at the other person, focus on the effect it's having on you. "You're still acknowledging the other person's behavior," Kowalski says, "but it's being done in terms of 'I' and 'me' rather than 'you.'"

Confronting a chronic complainer about his habit can be beneficial to both of you. Take Janice Holly Booth's example: After she helped her mother realize how often she complained, Booth got what she wanted—fewer complaints—and her mother got what she wanted—real conversation with her daughter. **R**



And on the Seventh Day ...

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USE OF MYRBETRIQ (meer-BEH-trick)

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

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

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

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

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

What is Myrbetriq (meer-BEH-trick)?

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

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

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

Who should not use Myrbetriq?

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

What should I tell my doctor before taking Myrbetriq?

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

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

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

Tell your doctor if you take:

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

How should I take Myrbetriq?

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

What are the possible side effects of Myrbetriq?

Myrbetriq may cause serious side effects including:

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

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

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

The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include:

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

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

These are not all the possible side effects of Myrbetriq.

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

How should I store Myrbetriq?

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

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

General information about the safe and effective use of Myrbetriq

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

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

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

What are the ingredients in Myrbetriq?

Active ingredient: mirabegron

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

What is overactive bladder?

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

Marketed and Distributed by:

Astellas Pharma US, Inc.
Northbrook, Illinois 60062



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057-2652-PM



A Nationwide UGLY SWEATER CONTEST

**ROXANN
CRUNKLETON-GUNN,**
age 63,
New Castle,
Pennsylvania



**Ugly Christmas sweaters
have long been a fad.**

When did you get into it?
About five years ago, when we started a contest at the school where I work. The kids know to be ready for me when I come through the doors because I will be dressed up!

Don't most people buy premade ugly sweaters?
Don't do that! You have to make it yourself and make it original.

So you knit yours?
No, I buy one at the thrift store and I just keep looking at it until I can see what I want

to put on it. My number one rule is: You have to cover the whole thing. I work with what's on the sweater. This year, mine has a flamingo on it, so I picked up everything flamingo I could find.

How do people react to your sweaters?
They laugh. Everyone in town recognizes me. They call me the Ugly Sweater Lady.

How does your family feel about that?
My kids used to laugh at me too. But when I won the contest, they stopped laughing.

What did you win?
I won \$500. I bought an exercise bike with it.

Isn't wearing these sweaters exercise?
They are quite heavy, too heavy to wear all day! I just put so much stuff on them. But I figure if you want to win, you have to be a little uncomfortable.

Crunkleton-Gunn won the 2019 Live with Kelly and Ryan Holiday Sweater Photo Contest, voted on by viewers of the show.

ILLUSTRATION BY *John Cuneo*

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ALL
in a Day's
WORK

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

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

—LINDA RHODE-RUDIAK
Castro Valley, California

A reddit.com contributor named Simon explained that his extensive educational background came in handy when he worked as a store Santa, especially when faced with a smart-alecky preteen.

"When I asked him what he wanted for Christmas, he flatly



"Give me a scotch and CBD oil."

said, 'Coal,'" recounts Simon. "Being a jovial spirit, I asked, 'Bituminous or anthracite?'"

"Absolutely threw him for a loop."

—RD.COM

We have a team member called Jimmy who has a habit of writing rude, dismissive messages to difficult customers.

If they complain about Jimmy, we apologize and say he's been fired.

Of course, Jimmy is totally made up.

—@WORKI_LEAKS

Before driving to the pharmacy, I called to ask, "Could you tell me what your hours are?"

The young woman who answered the

I think we need to stop calling it "working from home" and start calling it "living at work."

—@H_DEQUINCEY

phone was very obliging. "Well," she said, "today I work nine to one, but tomorrow I work three to six."

—VONDA JEFFRIES
High Point,
North Carolina

These may be some of the more creative justifications for speeding that police officers have encountered.

♦ "I wasn't speeding; I just got a haircut and it makes me look fast."

♦ "I thought the sign I-95 meant the speed limit."

♦ "I have a cold, and when I cough, my foot mashes the pedal."

—POLICEONE.COM

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

The little girl I babysit asked if I have a boyfriend. I said, "Not anymore," and she said, "Boyfriends are a waste of time." Then she turned to her

brother and told him, "You're gonna be a waste of time."

—@ITSMADIMAY

I hated going on job interviews until I realized the perfect answer to the question "What is your biggest weakness?" is "My interview skills."

—INÉS ANAYA,
comedian

WHEN SECRET SANTAS GO ROGUE

♦ Nothing says "I love you" like diamonds. Nothing says "I drew you in a workplace Secret Santa" like Starbucks gift cards.

—@samlymatters

♦ A colleague has just been fired from work and someone else put her hand up and asked how it would affect the Secret Santa.

—@g0_f1sh

♦ I'm sorry, I thought that a Secret Santa's job is to share all the secrets he knows about the person with everyone in the office.

—@Cheeseboy22



♦ To whatever coworker pulls my name in the Secret Santa drawing today, I'm a size 24 pack of frosted Pop-Tarts.

—@dreamthievin

♦ Secret Santa is very disappointing if you're self-employed.

—@davidschneider

VIORIKI/GETTY IMAGES (SANTA HAT), BHOFACK2/GETTY IMAGES (POP-TART)

THE
**FOOD
ON YOUR
PLATE**



I Am Onions ...
**Tearfully
Delicious**

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

IN 1955, A farmer named Vince Kosuga had a villainous idea: He would corner the market on me, the common onion. Kosuga set about buying up all the onions in the country, storing millions of pounds of me in the cavernous, corrugated warehouses he built on his New York farm and around the country. Then he bought up all the onions that were still in the ground, too, in the form of futures. As you might expect, Kosuga took advantage of his monopoly by raising my price. Then he flooded the market with his stockpiled (and by this point, rotting) wares while making bet after bet in the commodities market that the price would drop. By the time Kosuga had made his fortune—\$8.5 million, to be exact—a 50-pound bag of me cost less than the sack I came in.

The Great Onion Corner was a devastating moment for the onion-eating American public, and for onion farmers too. Congress subsequently passed the Onion Futures Act, and to this day, I am the only crop for which it is illegal to buy futures.

Lest you think the OFA is the only bizarre law associated with pungent old me: In Dyersburg, Tennessee, for a time, one was not allowed to enter a movie theater within four hours of eating raw onions, and it was against the law in Lexington, Kentucky, to carry one or more of me in your pocket. Meanwhile, women in Wolf Point, Montana, were thought to be justified in forcing their spouses to eat raw

JACK ANDERSEN/GETTY IMAGES

onions if they were found drinking. Just sitting there in your pantry or in the produce section, I look innocent of all charges. Whether yellow, red, white, or sweet like Walla Walla and Vidalias, I am a simple dirt-growing bulb, with stem and root ends and not a whiff of the stink that might cause you to write harsh laws in my name.

But when you cut into me, the forensic truth reveals itself: I am an allium, a botanical genus that includes garlic, leeks, and chives, all of us built to defend ourselves via noxious, eye-watering fumes. When my cells are crushed or cut, an enzyme called alliinase and another called lachrymatory factor synthase react via a molecule called syn-propanethial-S-oxide. To translate those fancy scientific terms: I fight back.

The more I'm cut, the more vigorously I do so. Finely pureed raw onion will be more noxious than thick slices. Ring cuts will be more pungent than stem-to-root cuts, since pole-to-pole slicing damages fewer of my cells. Even knife selection makes a difference: A dull blade crushes more of my cells than a sharp one, which means more tears on your cutting board.

That combative tendency is what made humans fear me, along with garlic. When God tossed Satan from heaven, Turkish folklore has it, the ground where one foot landed sprouted garlic; the other gave you onions. But for modern humans, with your hankering for pungent flavor and

BARTOSZ LUCZAK/GETTY IMAGES

ONION-TOPPED PUFF PASTRY

Slice a peeled medium yellow onion crosswise into 1/8-inch-thick rounds. Arrange in a single layer, season lightly with salt, brush with olive oil, and microwave on high until onion is very soft and turning golden with some browned spots, about 15 minutes. Repeat with one red onion. In a small bowl, stir 5 ounces fresh goat cheese with 1/4 cup milk until smooth. Season with pepper. Unfold one 14-ounce sheet defrosted puff pastry on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Leaving a 1/2-inch border, spread cheese and carefully top with onion. Bake at 400°F until pastry is puffed and golden and onions are more deeply golden, 20–25 minutes. Sprinkle with fresh thyme and rosemary, drizzle with olive oil, cut into squares, and serve.



willingness to cry to get it, nearly every cuisine has repurposed me from bad omen to bedrock aromatic vegetable. Today I play key roles in stocks, soups, stews, braises, and sauces everywhere. In France, I'm a component, along with carrot and celery, of the ever-present mirepoix; I'm a member of the holy trinity in Cajun and Creole cooking alongside celery and green bell pepper; and I'm pounded, often in the form of shallots, into Thai chile pastes. In Italy, I'm sautéed into the soffritto that adds depth to everything from meatballs to Bolognese sauce; in Spain and much of Latin America they make a similar base but spell it *sofrito*.

The list of my uses in cooking is endless, and these aren't even my starring roles (see: French onion soup, stuffed onions, caramelized onion tarts, and more). To you today, there seems to be only one rule about me: Eat me often, and any which way—pickled or boiled in soups and sauces, dried and pulverized into onion powder, raw on bagels and sandwiches and in all sorts of salads.

If you love raw onion but want less intensity, soak me sliced or diced in cold water, or wash me briefly in

warm running water, or soak me in vinegar to make a quick pickle in 15 to 30 minutes. And of course, cooking tames me, turning me increasingly soft and sweet as my natural sugars caramelize and the Maillard (browning) reaction takes place. Enjoy me grilled, sautéed, slowly sweated, caramelized, and roasted. Or roast me whole in my skins directly on live embers. (I don't have that thick papery exterior until I'm "cured," by the way, which basically means dried.) There is no culinary downside to me! Plus I'm high in vitamin C and antioxidants, especially an anti-inflammatory one called quercetin.

As for avoiding eye irritation, there are tricks that work and tricks that don't. Chilling onions seems to help reduce the enzymatic reactions, as does avoiding the root end, which has higher concentrations than the stem end. Or just get over it—it's all part of my acrid, controversial, entirely lovable package. **R**

Kate Lowenstein is a health journalist and the editor-in-chief at Vice; Daniel Gritzer is the culinary director of the cooking site Serious Eats.

A New Kind of Birding

During the 19th century, the Christmas "Side Hunt" was a shooting competition—whoever shot the most birds won. Then, in 1900, an ornithologist named Frank M. Chapman had an idea. Instead of hunting birds, why not count them? The Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Census continues today.



1 Hair, Hair, Everywhere

PETS So, you've got a shedder whose weekly brushing sessions leave him tidy and well-groomed but you looking like a shag carpet? Cut a pair of pantyhose into pieces just big enough to fit over the brush's head, allowing the bristles to poke fully through the material. Your pup's fur will cling to the pantyhose instead of your shirt. Then simply toss the pantyhose for an easy cleanup.

**From RD.COM and THEHEALTHY.COM*

2

Penny-Test Your Tires

AUTO Figuring out if you really need those new tires the shop recommends can be tricky. Who's a more trustworthy consultant than Honest Abe? Slide a penny upside down into various parts of the tread. If you can see any of Lincoln's head, the tread is too worn and the tires do in fact need to be replaced.



3

Bring Back a Lost Browser Tab

TECH There's something especially maddening about clearing out dozens of open browser tabs and accidentally closing the one you actually need. Control+shift+T will restore the most recent tab you closed, as many times as you need. Mac users should hit command+shift+T.

4

Car Cup Holders Finally Get Help

CLEANING A car's cup holder is perhaps one of the filthiest spots on the planet, and cleaning it is next to impossible. One proactive solution: Put a reusable silicone cupcake liner in there. It will catch all that dirt and can be taken out and tossed in the dishwasher for easy cleanup.

5

Wrap the Gifts and the Tree

DECOR An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of fir. When putting the tree up this season, tuck a tree bag (found at most hardware stores) under the stand and skirt. When it's time to take it down, pull the bag up around the branches and carry it out—and save yourself a clogged vacuum.

6

Know Your Oven's Hot Spots

COOKING An undercooked half-fudgy, half-raw batch of brownies is enough to turn any sweet tooth sour. Find out where your oven runs hot—or cold—by putting a cookie sheet lined with slices of white bread inside for a few minutes at 350°F. Which slices have browned? Next time you'll know just how to place and turn your pans for even cooking.

7

Don't Eat Those Travel Points

TRAVEL Now is the time to redeem your frequent flyer miles—even if you're not ready to fly yet. With travel down drastically because of COVID-19, airlines are much more willing to let you use your points. You can now book almost a year in advance (when the virus will have been tamed, hopefully) and lock in your vacation days. If plans change, you can get your points back without penalty.

8

Wrangle the Tape

HOME Nothing spoils a good gift-wrapping rhythm like repeatedly having to dig your nail into the tape roll to start a new piece. Stick a paper clip at the end of the roll after you tear a piece off. This way, it won't cling back to the roll again and you can easily find the end point next time.

9

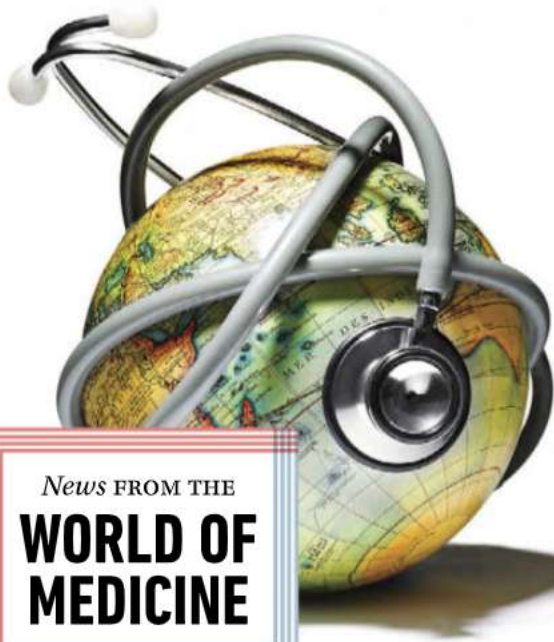
Cut Calories with a Spoonful of This

HEALTH Researchers discovered a rice-cooking method that reduces calories by 10 percent and potentially up to 50 percent for healthier varieties. Just add a teaspoon of coconut oil to the cooking water, then put the cooked rice in the fridge for 12 hours. The coconut oil's fat transforms digestible starch into resistant starch, which we can't digest, so we process fewer calories. Cooling promotes the conversion.



ALLE12/GETTY IMAGES(TIRE), WELZEVOUL/GETTY IMAGES(PENNIES)

FOODCOLLECTION RF/GETTY IMAGES



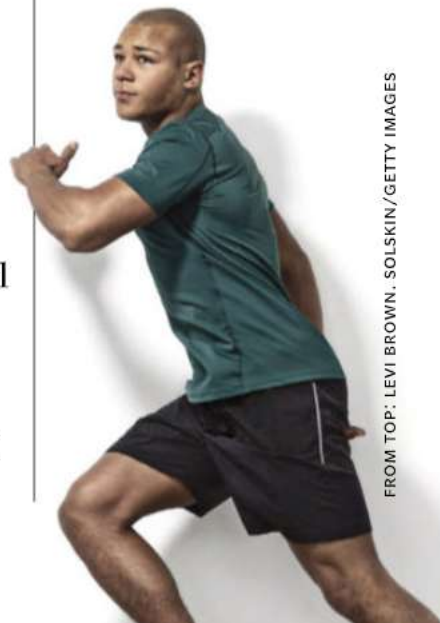
News FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**

WATCH FOR DANGEROUS HAND SANITIZERS

Liquid hand sanitizer quickly became one of the year's must-have health products, but beware: Some of them are actually dangerous. The FDA has warned against those that contain methanol, or wood alcohol, which can be toxic or even deadly if it's ingested. Other sanitizers contain less than 60 percent ethanol or isopropanol (the correct type of rubbing alcohols), which means they are not potent enough to kill many germs. Doctors' advice: Use soap and water whenever you can. It is still the best protection.

EXERCISE EXCUSES AND HEART MEDS

Just because you are taking heart medication doesn't mean you can go easier on other cardiovascular care. A Finnish study that followed more than 40,000 people for 13 years showed that people who started preventive prescriptions for heart issues were more likely to cut back on exercise and gain extra pounds—which might raise the need for higher doses of drugs.



FROM TOP: LEVI BROWN, SOLSKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Mixed Messages on Marijuana's Effects

Now that cannabis is more available than ever, you may have heard claims about its medical effects—good and bad. The truth is, because for years it was classified as an illicit substance, scientists don't yet have much firm advice 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 (AHA). Regular exposure to the substance has been linked to strokes and heart attacks, and more research may reveal additional risks. The AHA doesn't recommend taking cannabis via smoking or vaping.

CLAUDIA TOTIR/GETTY IMAGES



Overeating Is OK (Once in a While)

We all overindulge from time to time, and it's nothing to stress over. For a study that sounds more fun than most, healthy young men ate as much pizza as they could in one sitting—3,000 calories, on average. Their blood sugar didn't climb more than it would after a normal meal, and fat levels were only slightly elevated. Frequent overeating can lead to obesity, diabetes, and other issues, but the odd indulgence likely won't create major metabolic consequences.

BETTER FIBROID HELP

Uterine fibroids are a source of recurring pain for roughly one in six women. These non-cancerous tumors of the womb can also cause bloating, painful sex, a constant feeling of needing to urinate, and difficult, heavy periods. For years, hysterectomy (surgically removing the uterus) has been the standard treatment. But British scientists have been comparing two newer womb-sparing alternatives that allow women to give birth: myomectomy (cutting out the fibroids) and uterine artery embolization (blocking the blood flow to the fibroids). The studies revealed that both provided relief, but compared with the embolization patients, the myomectomy patients had slightly better health-related quality of life at the two-year mark.

SWEETS CAN HURT MENTAL HEALTH

IF YOU'RE PRONE to depression, you might want to say "bah humbug" to sugary holiday desserts. A new study from a team of clinical psychologists at the University of Kansas suggests that added sugars can trigger metabolic, inflammatory, and neurobiological processes tied to depressive illness. Coupled with dwindling light in wintertime and corresponding changes in sleep patterns, high sugar consumption could result in a perfect storm that adversely affects mental health, according to the researchers.

The researchers found that inflammation is the key physiological effect of dietary sugar related to mental health. "A large subset of people with depression have high levels of systemic inflammation," said Stephen Ilardi, a coauthor of the study. "When we think about inflammatory disease, we think about diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis, diseases with a high level of systemic inflammation. We don't normally think about depression in that category, but it is—not for everyone who's depressed, but for about half. We also know that inflammatory hormones can directly push the brain into a severe depression. An inflamed brain is typically a depressed brain. And added sugars have a pro-inflammatory effect on the body and brain."

The problem is worse this time of year. "For many people, reduced sunlight exposure during the winter will throw off circadian rhythms, disrupting healthy sleep and pushing 5 to 10 percent of the population into a full-blown clinical depression," Ilardi says.

Where Seniors Get the Wrong Meds

One answer: in the hospital. Two in three hospitalized seniors are prescribed drugs that should be avoided by older adults, increasing the risk of injury and adverse drug reactions. Improving hospital prescribing practices can reduce the frequency of inappropriate medications and resulting harm, according to a new study led by McGill University researchers.

Get Screened for Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a liver infection that often goes undetected for years, until serious complications such as liver scarring arise. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recently recommended hep C screening for everyone ages 18 to 79, given that medication now exists to provide a safe and quick cure. **R**

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DEPARTMENT OF WIT

Prowling for Dust Bunnies

Long before Marie Kondo, there was Roomba. In this classic from 2003, Mary Roach gives the robot vacuum cleaner a whirl.

BY Mary Roach



ROOMBA 17 COURTESY IROBOT

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED and not wanted a cleaning person. I want very much for someone else to clean our house, as neither I nor my husband, Ed, has shown any aptitude for it, but I'd feel guilty inflicting such distasteful drudgery on another human. No one but me should have to clean up the dental floss heaped like spaghetti near the wastebasket where I toss it each night, never catching on that floss cannot be thrown with a high degree of accuracy.

Imagine my joy upon reading that the iRobot company has invented the Roomba. The website plays a clip of an enlarged CD Walkman scooting across a living room carpet, sucking up detritus. Meanwhile, sentences run across the screen: "I'm having lunch with a friend" ... "I'm planting flowers in the garden." The point is that you can "enjoy life" while your robot cleans up the conspicuous chunks strewn about your living room floor.

Roomba joined our family last week. Right away I changed the name to Reba, to indulge my fantasy of having a real cleaning person, yet still respecting its incredibly dumb-sounding given name. As gadgets go, it's surprisingly simple to use. All you do is tell it the room size. This I calculated in my usual manner, by picturing six-foot guys lying end-to-end along the walls and multiplying accordingly.

I was on my way out the door to enjoy life when I heard a crash. My vacuuming robot had tangled itself up in

the telephone cord and then headed off in the other direction, pulling the phone off the nightstand. "Maybe Reba needs to make a call," said Ed.

I couldn't be annoyed, as I'm the sort of person who gets up to go to the bathroom on airplanes without unplugging my headphones. Only that my head is attached to my neck prevents it from being yanked off onto the floor. Also, it tells you right there in the owner's manual to "pick up objects like clothing, loose papers ... power cords ... just as you would before using a regular vacuum cleaner."

This poses something of a problem in our house. The floor space along the walls and under the furniture in the office are filled with stacks of what I call Ed's desk runoff. My husband does not easily throw things away. Whatever he gets in the mail or empties from his pockets he simply deposits on the nearest horizontal surface.

Once a week, like the neighborhood garbage truck, I throw Ed's discards onto the heaping landfill on his desk. At a certain point, determined by the angle of the slope and the savagery of my throws, the pile will begin to slide. This is Ed's cue to shovel it into a shopping bag, which he then puts on the floor with the intent to go through it later, *later* here meaning *never*.

Picking it all up for Reba would take half an hour, which is more time than I normally spend vacuuming. It's the same situation that has kept me from hiring an assistant. It would take longer

to explain my filing system (“Takeout menus and important contracts go in the orange folder labeled ‘Bees’ ...”) than it would do the chore myself.

The bathroom promised to be less problematic. I put the hamper in the tub and the scale in the sink, where it looked as if it wanted a bath, or maybe had a date with a vacuum cleaner.

Then I went into the bedroom to fetch Reba, who was engaged in a shoving match with one of my Birkenstocks. She had pushed the shoe across the room and under the bed, well into the zone of no-reach.

“Good one,” said Ed, who has always harbored ill will toward comfort footwear for women.

I aimed Reba at the crud-paved crawl space beneath the footed bathtub. I have tried this with Ed and various of my stepdaughters, but it always fails to produce the desired effect.

Reba was not only willing but enthusiastic about the prospect, motoring full bore under the tub and whacking her forehead on the far wall. You just can’t find help like that.

The living room was a similar success. Reba does housework much like

I do, busily cleaning in one spot and then wandering off inexplicably and getting distracted by something else. iRobot calls this an “algorithm-based cleaning pattern,” a term I will use the next time Ed catches me polishing silver while the mop water evaporates in the other room.

REBA WAS ENGAGED IN A SHOVING MATCH WITH ONE OF MY BIRKENSTOCKS.

Halfway across the carpet, Reba emitted undelighted noises. Ed leafed through the troubleshooting guide.

“It’s a Whimper Beep,” he said in the concerned baritone that once announced the Heartbreak of Psoriasis as if it were the Cuban Missile Crisis. Wound around Reba’s brushes was a two-foot strand of dental floss. Apparently even robots have their limits. **R**

This article originally appeared in the March 2003 issue of Reader’s Digest.

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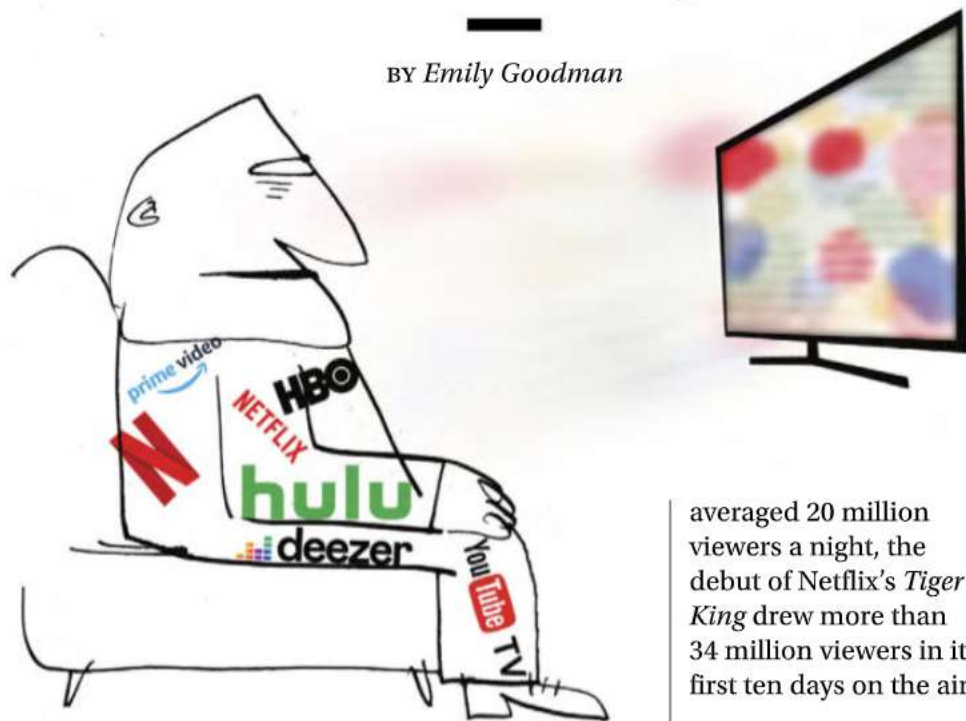
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13 THINGS

The Ultimate TV Guide to Streaming

BY Emily Goodman



1 STREAMING FIRST became popular in 2005, thanks to YouTube. By 2017, more people were watching old episodes of the long-running hit *NCIS*

on Netflix than the newest season on its home network, CBS. This past year, while *Sunday Night Football*, the most-viewed show on network television,

averaged 20 million viewers a night, the debut of Netflix's *Tiger King* drew more than 34 million viewers in its first ten days on the air.

2 NEARLY THREE quarters of American households subscribe to at least one video streaming service. With almost 200 million subscribers worldwide and a billion hours of

content viewed each week, Netflix is by far the biggest paid service. No. 2 is Amazon Prime Video. But for every Goliath, there are a hundred Davids. Many smaller streaming services focus on niche programming, showing nothing but sports, classic movies, or Japanese anime.

3 IN THE early days of streaming, the appeal was the lower cost, and it still is. The average streamer spends \$37 a month (and subscribes to three streaming platforms), while the average cable user pays more than \$200 per month.

4 STILL, STREAMING has become more expensive in recent years. In 2019, Netflix raised the price of its basic service 12.5 percent, to \$8.99 a month. A quarter of its subscribers, who have a history of protesting price increases, said they would cancel their subscriptions. Few did.

5 A MAJOR REASON: Streaming networks have become home to many of the most acclaimed TV series, including recent Emmy winners *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Fleabag*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*. They offer full-length feature films as well, and last year, Netflix received more Oscar nominations than any other media company. In fact, streaming has changed the Oscar competition, at least for this year: Usually only films shown in theaters are considered, but because of the coronavirus, all movies released online in 2020 are eligible for the 2021 Academy Awards.

6 THAT SHIFT is especially good news for Disney, which had to ditch its planned theatrical releases for two of its anticipated blockbusters, *Hamilton* and *Mulan*. Both are now on the company's new streaming service, Disney+. But watching *Mulan* from the comfort

of your own home will cost a hefty \$29.99—on top of the service's monthly fee of \$6.99.

7 CONSIDERING THE money and prestige at stake, it's no wonder that competition for programming is fiercer than the fighting in *Game of Thrones*. NBC paid \$100 million to bring *The Office* to its new streaming service, Peacock, which is the new home for all shows and movies owned by NBCUniversal. WarnerMedia paid \$425 million to get exclusive streaming rights to *Friends* for its HBO Max platform, which is also the only place to find all eight Harry Potter movies.

8 SOME STREAMING services include an option to add live TV, but it drives up the price. A basic monthly Hulu subscription costs \$5.99; with live TV, it jumps to \$54.99. Services such as SlingTV offer cheaper packages with only a core group

of popular channels. If you want to cut cable but are devoted to a particular network, sign up for its streaming service. Almost every network has one. Most are less than \$10 a month.

9 NOT SURE whether a given service is worth the money? Most offer 7- or 30-day free trial periods. (But be careful—they will automatically charge you the day your trial ends.) If you buy a new iPhone, iPad, or Mac computer, you get a free year of AppleTV+. Verizon unlimited plan holders get complimentary access to Disney+. And T-Mobile offers its customers a year of Netflix and Quibi, a newer streaming app with shows designed for viewing on a phone.

10 THERE ARE free streaming services, such as Crackle, Tubi TV, and Xumo. They tend to have fewer titles to choose from—or make you sit through commercials. One exception: Kanopy, which doesn't show ads and offers 30,000 films. You need a membership card from your local public library to sign up.

11 IT'S HARD to find your favorite shows when streaming platforms are rotating content like museum exhibits. But many smart TVs and media players such as Roku will find them for you. There are also free online databases, such as reelgood.com and justwatch.com, that can locate particular titles.

12 TOO MUCH streaming can get you into trouble, however. Nearly half of people who stream shows with their significant other admit to “cheating”—watching episodes ahead of the other person. As many as 60 percent of cheaters say they would cheat more often if they could get away with it.

13 AND THEN there are those who binge-watch, a term Merriam-Webster added in 2017 with the definition “to watch many or all episodes of (a TV series) in rapid succession.” Alejandro Fragoso of New York City holds the Guinness World Record for the longest binge-watching bender: 94 straight hours. **R**

Money to Burn

During filming of *Rush Hour 2*, \$1 billion in prop money was blown up, but some bills survived and ended up in circulation. This sparked change in federal rules on the appearance of prop money. Some bills now state “For Movie Use Only,” and the really convincing fakes can be printed only on one side.

CNN

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LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*



A couple's doorbell rings while they're sleeping. The husband opens the second-floor window but can't see much because of a raging blizzard.

"Who's there?" he yells.

"Could you give me a push?" a voice cries.

"C'mon, man, it's two a.m.!" the husband replies. But his wife

says, "Remember last winter when you got stuck in a snowdrift and a stranger pushed your car out? You should help this man!"

The husband agrees and goes back to the window.

"Are you still there?" he calls down.

"Yes," comes the response. "I really would appreciate a push."

"All right," says the husband. "I can't see much out there. Where are you?"

"On the sled."
—Submitted by

GARY KATZ
Long Grove, Illinois

Young Billy and Willy were walking home from Sunday school, where they had just learned about Noah's

My New Year's resolution is to get in shape. I choose round.

—SARAH MILLICAN, *comedian*

ark. Willy asked, "Do you think Noah did much fishing?"

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

—THEADVOCATE.COM

A lawyer had an operation. He woke up in his hospital room afterward and saw that all the blinds were shut. When he asked the nurse why, she said, "There was a fire across the street,

and we didn't want you to think that the operation had failed!"

—Submitted by
C.H. *via rd.com*

If the person who named walkie-talkies named everything, would ...

- ♦ stamps be lickie-stickers?
- ♦ hippos be floatie-bloaties?
- ♦ pregnancy tests be maybe-babies?

—GCFL.NET

A state trooper pulled alongside a speeding car on the freeway. Glancing at the car, he was astounded to see that the elderly woman behind the wheel was knitting.

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

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

—KNITTINGHELP.COM

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THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER

What do you get someone who has everything? How about a good laugh? These are prank gift boxes—and recipients will surely appreciate that whatever you put inside doesn't match the description on the outside.



VIA PRANKO.COM



DNY59/GETTY IMAGES

COVER STORY



The Season for Family Miracles

A mother's eerie premonition. An uncle's unusual joyride. The sweet wait for a dad's holiday treat. If you need a little extra warmth this year, these three wonderful stories will do the job nicely.



Dad's Mystery Package

My father resembled a fruitcake. One year, he even sent one. It never arrived.

BY David Rompf

ADAPTED FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

A FEW YEARS AGO, my father arranged to send me a mail-order fruitcake at Christmas-time. Although I had a good job and owned an apartment in Manhattan, he feared my cupboards and refrigerator might be bare. I had recently moved from California, where my parents still lived in their suburban bungalow of 50 years, the house I grew up in.

He wanted me to have a particular

brand of fruitcake. Made in Texas, it was famous among fruitcake lovers—or, at least, among people who gave fruitcakes to those who were assumed to love them.

“It reminds me of my mother’s,” he told me in a phone call. “Hers was really moist, with lots of raisins.”

I later figured out that my grandmother’s version, which I never had the chance to taste, was probably a Depression cake, made without milk, sugar, butter, or eggs, scarce commodities when he was a child.

Born in 1932, Dad grew up during the Great Depression in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. On most Christmases, he received two gifts: a pair of homemade socks and a small sack of oranges.

“My mother knitted the socks,” he said. “And those oranges tasted so good.”

Ordering the fruitcake was his way of trying to take care of me from afar, in an era that, in his mind, might at any moment turn economically perilous. Regardless of my middle-aged status, I was still his son.

“It should arrive the first week of December,” he said. “As soon as you get it, let me know what you think.”

I would be going to California for Christmas, as I do every year, and I was looking forward to his gift and to sampling the flavors that transported him to his childhood.

The first week of December passed with no sign of his fruitcake. Delayed



STYLIST: JACQUELINE DRAPER FOR THIS REPRESENTS

PHOTOGRAPH BY Ted + Chelsea Cavanaugh

by holiday mail, I assumed, or a backlog of orders.

I knew there would be plenty to eat in California. In addition to my mother's cookies, fudge, and other treats, my father always gave my sister and me each a large bag of assorted foods he called, rather plainly, the "Food Bag." He produced these from some secret spot only after all the other presents had been opened. One year, I listed the contents of my

* THE FRUITCAKE WAS HIS WAY OF TAKING CARE OF ME FROM AFAR.

Food Bag in a notebook. I suppose I wanted a record for myself, for the day when I might not get a Food Bag for Christmas. That year, my bag contained a can of deluxe mixed nuts, a box of whole-wheat crackers, a Belgian chocolate bar, a stick of hickory-cured turkey sausage, a half-pound sack of California red pistachios, some English breakfast tea, and many other items, including an "Oh Deer Super Dooper Reindeer Pooper Jelly Bean Dispenser" filled with jelly beans.

I was 44 when my father gave me that Food Bag, and he was 72.

The bags had an uncanny but undeniable kinship with fruitcakes, featuring a little of this and that thrown together with intriguing results. They

were so overstuffed that I often had to put most of the food in a box and mail it home. One year I assembled a few of the healthier items—sardines, rye crisps, dried apricots—and on the way to the airport made a special delivery of my own to the donation center of a local church.

FRUITCAKE IS A polarizing concept, a triggering word. People love it or hate it and like to debate whether it's cake at all. In some ways, my father's character resembled a fruitcake: whimsy and a little nuttiness mixed with a sweet foundation.

When we were children and went to the local shopping mall, he liked to spritz on women's perfume—all of them. This was before men's cologne counters were common. Once they were, he would transform himself into a pansexual bouquet of exotic fragrances. On our drives home, my mother would say, "You stink! What did you put on this time?"

While working as a meat cutter in grocery stores, he was called Crazy Charlie by his coworkers and was known for workplace pranks, such as pretending to lock someone in the walk-in meat freezer. But he also gave out instructions to customers who didn't know how to roast lamb or make stuffing. When he came home from late shifts, he left candy bars under our pillows, thinking we might wake up wanting a snack.

My father believed everyone was

always hungry and needed to eat. When we visited him in the hospital during a three-month stay—he was battling a vicious infection after heart surgery—he would ask whether we had eaten and never failed to remind us that the cafeteria would be closing soon.

"At least get a cup of coffee," he'd say. "Don't worry about me."

A fruitcake, in his mind, was a perfect Christmas gift. The culinary jumble of jeweled fruits suggested an extravagance that belied its practicality: Fruitcake can fill your belly and has a long shelf life. In 2017, a fruitcake thought to have been brought on Robert Scott's Antarctica expedition more than 100 years earlier was discovered to be in "excellent condition."

THE DAY BEFORE my flight to California, the fruitcake still had not arrived. When my father called to wish me a safe trip, he said, "Did you receive it?"

"Not yet," I said. "It's probably delayed in the holiday mail."

"Maybe it'll be there today." He fretted deeply about that lost fruitcake.

When I arrived at my parents' house, he said, "Did you get the fruitcake?"

"No, but I'm sure it'll be there when I go home."

As soon as the word left my lips, I realized that *home*, for them, was a kind of triggering word. Because wasn't this home? Wasn't I home now, with my parents greeting me, asking whether I was hungry after the long flight?

In the living room, a Christmas tree

stood above piles of presents in glittery paper, and in the spare bedroom, my father, I knew, had hidden our Food Bags, concealed under large towels.

He remained hopeful the fruitcake would come by New Year's Eve, when I'd be back in Midtown Manhattan, humanity roaring from Times Square.

January, February, and March came and went with no fruitcake. Though my father continued to ask about it, I never once considered lying and telling him yes, the fruitcake had finally arrived and was delicious. Instead I said, "That cake is orbiting earth, and sooner or later it will land."

"That's a good one!" he said.

His sense of humor never wavered, and as time went on he would bring up the perpetual journey of his fruitcake.

"I wonder where it is now," he'd say.

"It's taken a detour to Pluto."

He liked that one too.

"Do you want me to order another, in case it never comes?"

"That's OK, Dad," I said. "I'll wait for this one. It'll taste even better after touring the cosmos."

EARLY LAST DECEMBER, nearly a year after my father died from a failing heart, I got a call from a staffer at the front desk of my apartment building.

"You have a package," he said.

I went downstairs to pick it up. The brown box had a FedEx label with a return address in Texas.

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Celebrating Like a Man

Uncle Ed was a tough guy of few words. But when he took me on a Christmas Eve drive, he gave me the kind of sweet memories that last a lifetime.

—
BY Rick Bragg

FROM SOUTHERN LIVING

I WAITED TOO LATE to thank Uncle Ed for that Christmas Eve, but I guess he and I were never the kind of men who wrote many notes, or read them. Even around Christmas, when a little silliness and frivolity is easier to tolerate, men of a certain time, place, and class are unlikely to have anything to do with a thank-you card. We would just as soon go caroling in a light-up sweater. Southern men like us tend to keep the holiday our way and let others keep it theirs.

Still, some Christmases are kept better than others. Some flash in and out of our memories, like a short in an old string of lights.

For me, it will always be 1969 that blinks back into my mind this time of year. That was when I first read

Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and saw it come to life, in a way, in the mist-shrouded mountains of northeastern Alabama.

I have loved Christmas all my life. As a boy, I loved the grocery store, where frozen turkeys and smoked hams piled up like cannonballs. There was, and is, a beautiful kind of sturdiness to it here, mirroring the people. Trees were real and came from these mountains, usually cedars and hardy pines. Our mistletoe was procured the old-fashioned way, by blasting it out of the trees with a Remington. The ornaments were mostly handmade and almost always crafted from twice-used aluminum foil. The star that crowned a tree in December was probably left over from wrapping a

MARIA AMADOR (SPARKLES)

tomato sandwich the summer before.

This was my Christmas. It was simple, never fancy, but there was in it a wonderful warmth. Uncle Ed's wife, my aunt Juanita, filled the whole house with the smell of her peanut butter cookies. Even the desserts were substantial; no sissy divinity candy would be tolerated here. My mama baked pecan pies that were so dense you asked not for a slice but a slab. Paper plates buckled under the weight. My aunt Joe made corn bread dressing you could eat with a fork, like cake.

But even this sturdy a Christmas was too delicate for Uncle Ed, the hardest-working man I had ever known. He thought there was just something wrong about taking time off in the middle of the week—time you could have spent running a chain saw or on the end of a shovel handle.

And Christmas Eve was a workday like any other. I was ten years old that year, just idling around the house and yard, prowling through the wrapped presents under the tree, trying, with my X-ray eyes, to peer beneath the paper of a gift that looked suspiciously like a G.I. Joe, when he asked me whether I wanted to ride to Gadsden with him to look at a used dump truck.

Any other time, I would have knocked the furniture over getting out to his pickup. Country kids never miss a chance to go to town, to go anywhere. But this was the day before Christmas, just hours before all our kin gathered here for a big feast.

This year it was a deer roast as big as a buffalo—and a present exchange. Someone might bring a guitar or a French harp and even be brave enough to sing. In the meantime, there were cookies and maybe fudge to steal, aunts to irritate, and black-and-white reruns to rewatch on channels 6, 40, and 13. Then at five o'clock, the weatherman would show us precisely where on his radar Santa Claus was in relation to Calhoun County, Alabama. We believed in every bit of it.

WE ATE BURGERS IN THE TRUCK, LISTENED TO THE RADIO, AND SAVORED IT ALL.

I would miss it all if I went with him, maybe the whole Christmas. Once he got started on a job, even if it was just a search for a truck, he would hang with it till it was done. Surely it could wait.

"You want to go or not?" he asked.

I had no spine. "I reckon," I said.

It was one of those winter days in the Deep South that was almost black by afternoon, so thick was the mist. The low-lying clouds were cold gray. It seemed as if the heater in the old GMC would never warm up, and we were halfway to Gadsden before my toes began to thaw. Parts of the city, an industrial town on the Coosa River, would be brightly lit, and shoppers would throng the downtown. Even

Goodyear, even the steel plants, would knock off early on Christmas Eve and join that celebration. But we steered away from the lights and headed into the graveyards of old machines that have been part of such cities since the start of the Industrial Revolution. We found, I was dismayed to see, a few million used dump trucks.

Then, in a Christmas miracle, Uncle Ed gazed down at his Timex and said we had bigger fish to fry. Looking at that truck was just an excuse, a ruse. We went to celebrate Christmas like men.

First, we headed to the day-old bread outlet and filled up the truck with fruitcakes, cinnamon buns, and doughnuts. Next, with powdered sugar on our lips, we turned down Broad Street and idled through the decked-out heart of the city on its most festive day. The storefronts were lit up, glowing, crowded with last-minute shoppers—daddies rolling new bicycles and mamas staggering under big boxes. Santa Claus stood ringing a bell on a corner like it was goin' out of style. I saw him again in the music store, strumming a guitar, and again in what I think was the Western Auto or maybe the Otasco with children on his knee. I asked Uncle Ed which one of them was the real Santy, and he just took a draw on his Winston and told me it was "prob'ly that fust 'un."

Then we turned south toward the Big Chief Drive-In, which had one of the finest hamburgers in northeast

Alabama. We got two cheeseburgers each and a pile of fries that burned my fingers. It was too early for supper and way past dinnertime, but when you're celebrating, you can ignore such as that. We ate in the truck and savored it all, listening to the radio. I don't remember much being said but just hearing the song about the drummer boy and the one about the 12 days. Then he looked at his watch again and said, "The women will be purty riled if we don't git home." But we took our time going back, too, admiring holiday lights, taking the longest way. And before the Christmas Eve celebration had even begun there on Roy Webb Road, we'd celebrated all up and down Gadsden, Alabama, and the north half of Calhoun County. It was as good a Christmas as I would have for a very long time.

I should have told him this when he was alive, but things get awkward the longer you live. So, even though it's too late now, I want to thank him for it, for letting me come along.

"And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well ..."

Some may hear those words of Dickens and think of fine literature. But I see Uncle Ed in the glow of an AM radio, smell french fries and Winstons, and hear the ticking of an old Timex that, in the most beautiful way, didn't mean a thing that day.

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BY RICK BRAGG, SOUTHERNLIVING.COM.



The Woman in the Red Coat

When my mother died, I thought I'd never enjoy Christmas again. Then my father began dating a woman who shared a most surprising link to my holiday traditions.

BY Jessica Pearce Rotondi

CHRISTMAS AT MY house meant fresh pine boughs wrapped around the banister with velvet ribbon, candles in every window, and homemade dinners for 20 cooked by Mom. Mom was the only girl in a house full of four brothers, so when she had a home of her own to decorate and two daughters to dress up, she didn't hold back. Christmas was a monthlong ritual we waited for all year, running errands in our matching red coats. On Christmas Day, we'd open the wreath-covered front door to welcome cousins and aunts and uncles.

Over the years, the dining room table—from my father's own childhood as one of 13 siblings—was adjusted to expand as partners, then spouses, then

kids crowded around the table, Mom holding court over us all.

I always took for granted that someday my own kids would gather at that same table and enjoy the traditions that had been passed down each December. Life had other plans.

Mom found her tumor on my 21st birthday. She was just 53. She died three years later, on October 29, 2009. I was only 23.

Three years after her death, I made my annual pilgrimage north from Brooklyn to my childhood home outside of Boston for Christmas with my dad and sister. We were all putting on brave faces, but I couldn't stand the bare banister or candleless windows. I channeled my inner Mom



The author (second from right) and her stepmother in their red coats

and marched up to the attic to hunt for Christmas ornaments.

From the attic window, the moonlight on the snow outside made the trees look like construction paper cut-outs of themselves. Mom and Dad had built the house on an old Christmas tree farm. "Isn't it wonderful to be surrounded by Christmas all year long?" Mom would joke. Now her words seemed more like a reminder of what we once had. Dad was putting the house on the market come summer.

Up in the attic, I headed toward a box promisingly labeled "Christmas" in Sharpie. Moving aside wooden cranberry strands from Mom's peak New England craft phase, an unusual yellowed envelope caught my eye. The return address on it was a famous publishing house in Boston.

My mother had been an editor before I was born but had given up her

dream of being a writer when she had kids—or so I thought. Inside was a never-published manuscript for a children's book, dated February 10, 1993. I did the math quickly: I would have been seven, my sister four.

The manuscript was titled *The Evil Stepmother (Who Wasn't)*. It's the story of a little girl who loses her mother to cancer. Her father soon remarries, and at Christmas, the girl returns home to find her stepmother crying with an ornament in her hands: a star with a woman's photograph. The stepmother reveals that she lost her mother, too, and always misses her most at Christmas.

I read Mom's book under the bare bulb in the attic, surrounded by her things, and wondered why she had been moved to write it. She was years away from her own diagnosis at the time. Did part of her always know? Did losing her brother, whose dog tags were returned from Vietnam at Christmas-time the year before I was born, inspire it? She wasn't around to ask. There was no stepmother, evil or otherwise, in our lives. I packed the manuscript away, located the ornaments I came for, and forgot about Mom's book in the craziness of the move that summer.

WITHOUT THE HOME that had been the anchor for so many memories, I cut Christmas loose. I began to avoid the ringing bells of the Salvation Army—even, for a while, the color red. Most of all, I avoided holiday music.

I shopped online to ensure a carol couldn't catch me unawares.

That changed in December 2017. Dad told me he was seeing someone. Could he bring her to Christmas?

"Of course," I said, stunned but happy.

We hugged each other shyly when we first met. Soon, she had Dad and me laughing. It was going so well, the three of us went to a nearby Marshalls to pick out gifts. That's when "White Christmas" began to play over the store's speakers. I froze. It was the song Mom sang to me as a child to get me to sleep, the closest sound on earth to her voice. The earrings I was holding in my hands blurred as tears streamed down my face. I was mortified. Dad was mortified. I left the earrings and ran for the safety of the car, hoping Dad's girlfriend didn't notice.

We got home, and I went to my room to pull myself together. There was a knock on the door: Dad's girlfriend.

"Can I come in?"

"Sure."

She told me that Christmas was hard for her too. That she had been a

caregiver for her mother as she slowly slipped away from Alzheimer's.

"Do you see this coat?" she asked, referring to the red swing coat I had complimented earlier. "It was my mom's. Your dad tells me your mother had a red coat too. Maybe we can wear them together sometime?"

She handed me a small package. I unwrapped the tissue paper to reveal the earrings I had been holding at the store. I remembered the long-ago scene from Mom's book and hugged this woman who made my dad happy, who was offering us a second chance at Christmas.

A year later, my sister and I were maids of honor at Dad's wedding. This past December, I hosted my first Christmas in New York. We decorated with ornaments old and new before taking in the city's holiday lights. My stepmother and I walked arm in arm down Broadway in our mothers' robin-red coats, cherished reminders of the stylish women who raised us. **R**

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COURTESY JESSICA PEARCE ROTONDI

The Abominable Snowman

According to Guinness World Records, the "tallest snowperson" in American history was actually a woman. Olympia, completed in February 2008 in Bethel, Maine, was 122 feet one inch tall. Her eyelashes were made of skis, the buttons were truck tires, and her arms were fashioned from 30-foot spruce trees. She was about 11 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty, though she had a much shorter life span.

DON'T GO INTO THE VOLCANO

A dream honeymoon hike to the rim of a jungle crater ends with a terrible fall. Now a young bride must get her severely injured husband medical care—by herself.

BY Nicholas Hune-Brown



Acaimie, with Clay on their wedding day—a preview of her strength



ON A STEAMY morning in July, Clay and Acaimie (pronounced “Ah-CAY-mee”) Chastain arrived at the base of Mount Liamuiga on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, ready for their first climb as husband and wife. They had married just five days earlier back home in Crawfordsville, Indiana, the culmination of a storybook romance. Clay, age 23, and Acaimie, age 25, had met at Purdue University, at a square dance held for Clay’s Christian fraternity and Acaimie’s Christian sorority. Clay—a handsome farmer’s son with a charming, puppy-dog energy—was immediately smitten by Acaimie’s beguiling smile. They’d lasted through college and the tough years after, when Acaimie moved to Illinois for work as a store manager and Clay finished his master’s degree in swine nutrition back at Purdue. They took turns enduring the weekly five-hour drives to see each other, but they were devoted and slightly old-fashioned—they refused to live together in the house

they'd bought together in Indianapolis until after their wedding.

Like any good couple, they had their complementary differences. Acaimie had always been the worrier. "A realist," she says. "A pessimist," Clay replies. She liked order and structure. She wasn't just fastidious about washing her sheets once a week; she did it at the same time every Saturday. Clay, on the other hand, was a perpetual optimist—maddeningly carefree and easygoing, always certain that things would turn out just fine.

SHE HEARD A CRASH, THEN THE SOUND OF SOMETHING BIG ROLLING DOWNHILL.

So it was Clay who wanted to take a day of their Caribbean honeymoon and spend it scaling Mount Liamuiga. The highest point on St. Kitts, Liamuiga is also a dormant volcano that starts in the clouds and plunges down to meet the sea. Called Mount Misery by the British who colonized the island, it is a popular day hike for vacationers looking for adventure.

The couple, dressed in T-shirts and sneakers, arrived for their journey in a rental car expecting to find more information on-site. Instead, they found an empty dirt parking lot with just a small plaque marking the trailhead. They made their way up anyway, the

narrow path taking them through tropical growth so lush you couldn't see the sky. Vervet monkeys chattered in the trees; the air was thick and humid.

It took them nearly three hours to reach the peak, but the view—the view!—made it all worthwhile. The island of St. Kitts stretched before them, the green rain forest carpet cascading down toward the sapphire Caribbean water. They may have been tired and sweaty—Clay's red bandanna was soaked—but they couldn't have been happier as they ate their sandwiches, took a few selfies, and walked around the rim of the volcano completely alone.

That's when Clay saw it: a small trail, semi-hidden beneath plant life, that led into the volcano's crater, a bowl of green with cloud forest giving way to a grassy meadow. A series of screw eyes had been drilled into the rocks, with ropes that led down. For Clay, the sight was unbearably inviting. It felt like a secret entrance to a primeval paradise. Acaimie was less enthusiastic. The trail was steep, and she was afraid of heights, but she gamely followed Clay's lead. After just a few minutes of descent, though, she'd had enough. She told her husband she'd wait on the rocks just off the trail while he went exploring. "Just be quick," she said as she watched him set off on the precipitous path, zigzagging while clutching the rope.

A few minutes later, she heard a



Clay on top of the world, moments before his fall

crash—a noise that sounded like a large branch snapping, followed by the sound of something big rolling downhill. "Clay?" she called. Silence.

Acaimie fought back a flutter of panic. She hadn't heard anyone call out, after all. The sound might have been anything. A few minutes later, she heard something faint that could have been a human voice. She leaned forward, craning her neck. Then she heard it again, and this time she was certain: It was Clay, speaking in an eerily childish tone she hardly recognized, calling for help from deep within the crater.

As she looked over the lip of the volcano, she tried to suppress some of

her worst worries. Her phone wasn't getting a signal, and her cries for help were met with only silence. "Clay!" she shouted as loud as she could. "Clay, are you OK?"

Acaimie gripped the rope and began scrambling down the trail. When the path became too steep, she slid on her butt, her legs and arms getting bruised and scraped in the process. Then, just off the trail, she saw a flash of red. It was Clay's bandanna. And next to it was his cell phone.

She grabbed both and continued down, screaming for Clay all the way.

"Help," he said in that strange voice. "I'm coming! Stay where you are," she said. Finally she spotted his white

PREVIOUS SPREAD: SALLY JANE STEFFY

COURTESY ACAIMIE CHASTAIN

shirt through the trees. She wanted to prepare for what she was going to see, worried that if he were badly injured the sight of him would put her into a state of shock. "Tell me what's wrong," she said as she approached.

"I don't know," he said weakly.

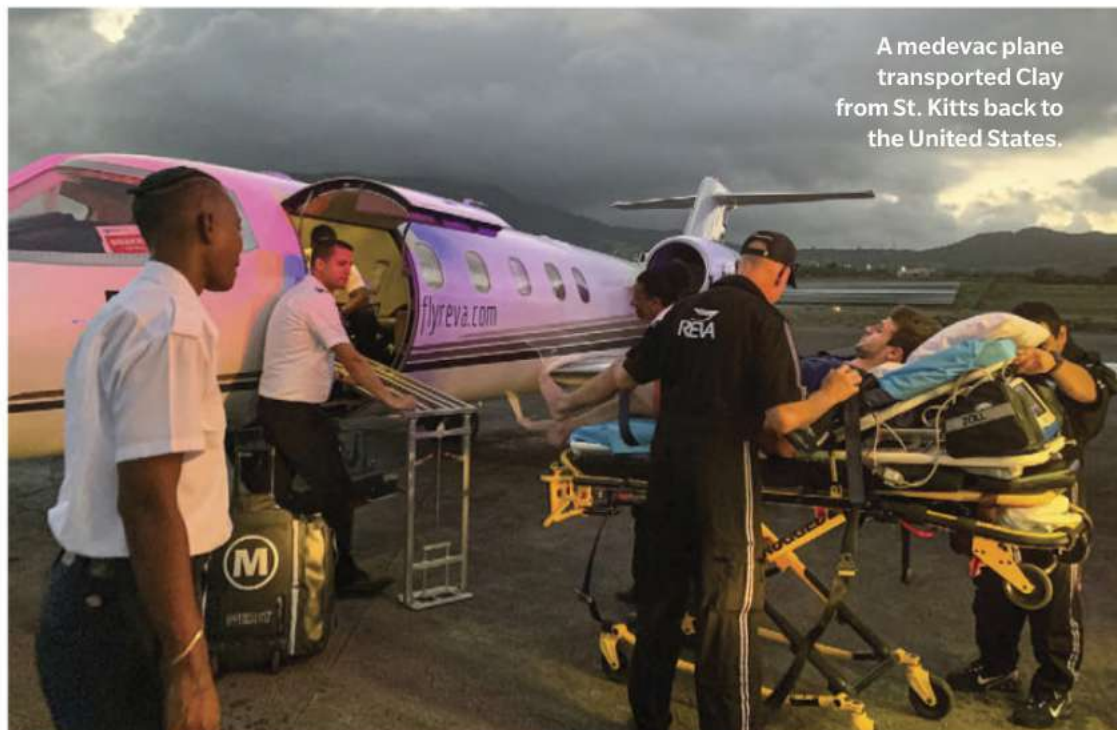
Clay was sitting hunched over with his head in his hands, his back to Acaimie. When she got closer, she could see that he was bleeding from the back of his head, and his neck and shoulders were scraped. Walking around him, she saw that he'd been vomiting. Blood ran down his face.

Perhaps the rope he'd been holding had snapped, or maybe he'd just missed a step, but it was clear he'd fallen a long way. He was badly concussed. "Where are we?" he asked. She explained they were on a hike on St. Kitts. "Why aren't you calling for help?" he asked. Their phones weren't getting cell service, she told him. He seemed to take that in. Then, 30 seconds later: "Where are we?"

Acaimie tried to clear her mind. They were alone in the volcano without cell service. There was only one thing to do: She needed to drag him out somehow.

"Look at me, Clay," she said. He looked through her, his eyes swimming. "We're going to have to climb out of here, and you're going to have to listen to me."

Acaimie hoisted Clay shakily to his feet. He had no balance and couldn't support himself. The two of them



A medevac plane transported Clay from St. Kitts back to the United States.

stumbled forward, and Acaimie put his hands on the rope. She told him to hold tight as she placed Clay in front of her and pushed him from behind. He lurched forward, flailing like a drunk, but he seemed able to control his limbs just well enough to follow Acaimie's directions. When they reached a particularly steep section, she bent down, picked up his feet, put them in good footholds so he wouldn't slip, and pushed again.

Inch by inch, step by step, they climbed. After what couldn't have been more than half an hour but felt like forever, they reached the top. "Help!" Acaimie yelled. She'd hoped

that once they reached the top they'd find a group of hikers, but the trail was empty. There was no choice but to try to make it back to the trailhead alone. It was about 12:30. It had taken them three hours to reach the summit. How long, she wondered, would it take them to reach their car?

PUTTING HER HUSBAND'S arm over her shoulder, Acaimie led him back down the trail. It was almost like a black-diamond ski run—sheer and winding as it cut back and forth through rain forest so thick she could never see more than a few yards ahead. Clay's legs flopped beneath him; at times he

COURTESY ACAIMIE CHASTAIN

almost began running down the hill because of this lack of control and Acaimie had to struggle to make sure he didn't send them crashing into the trees. In particularly steep sections, she sat Clay down, shuffled ahead of him, and had him slide into her arms.

As they made their way, the sun was sinking lower in the sky and Acaimie's mind raced. The path was confusing and indistinct in places, with smaller trails branching off into the wilderness. What if they got lost, she wondered. Would Clay survive the night?

She checked her phone again. Still no signal.

CLAY COLLAPSED AND VOMITED BLOOD. "I WANT TO SLEEP," HE MUMBLED.

After more than two hours, Clay seemed to be getting worse. He was losing what little control he'd had over his body. Every ten minutes or so he'd stop, collapse on the trail, and begin vomiting blood. "I want to sleep," he mumbled now, shutting his eyes. Acaimie urged him to keep moving. "You're doing such a good job. I'm so proud of you," she kept repeating, unsure if any of it was getting through to her husband. Once again she checked her phone. No signal.

It dawned on her that maybe she should leave Clay there and run ahead



Clay, here in a St. Kitts hospital, has recovered from most of his injuries.

sound of another person's voice. She described what had happened—the fall, the vomiting, the blood, the disorientation. The dispatcher, barely audible, asked whether they were able to make it to the trailhead, or did they need a helicopter? Acaimie looked around. With the thick covering, there was no way a helicopter could land anywhere near them. She told him they'd keep trying to make their way down.

But as they moved forward, she became more scared. Clay's condition was continuing to deteriorate. He could hardly use his arms and legs. At one point, Acaimie couldn't support him and gravity took over, sending him flying out of her

and get help. But one look at him and she nixed that idea. She worried that in his state, he might wander off into the wilderness or stumble down the trail and injure himself. She needed him to keep going.

They continued on—Acaimie guiding Clay, Clay barely able to move forward. After hours of painful but exhausting progress, they took a break. She instinctively pulled out her phone to check for a signal. Yes! It was faint, but it might work. She dialed 911 and heard the welcome

arms and rolling down the hill, smashing into a tree. He lay there in a heap. Then he started vomiting blood again.

She dialed 911 once more. "If the paramedics are anywhere near the trail, they need to start heading up now!" she told the dispatcher. When she hung up, she looked down the trail, calling out for help as loudly as she could until her voice grew raspy. Clay was getting cold and clammy. She didn't know whether they could go any farther.

Then she heard something. It was faint and could have been almost

anything. She didn't move a muscle, afraid she might miss it if it came again.

"Hello!" someone called out.

Acaimie leaped up. "We're here!" she yelled as two paramedics came into view. "We're here!"

The paramedics wrapped Clay's arms around their shoulders, and then each took a leg. In this cumbersome manner, they carefully carried Clay down the mountain to the ambulance waiting at the trailhead. Acaimie sat in the front of the ambulance—she was hyperventilating, and her hands eventually became numb from lack of oxygen. She listened in horror as the paramedic in the back yelled to the driver, "He's still vomiting blood; we need to get to the hospital!"


AT THE EMERGENCY ROOM, doctors discovered just how vast Clay's injuries were. They included a bad concussion, a fractured vertebra, a fractured skull, and a spinal fluid leak.

Clay spent a painful week recuperating in a St. Kitts hospital before being medevaced to a hospital in Florida, where doctors placed a shunt in his spinal cord to drain excess fluid. After nine days, he flew home to Indiana for several months of physical

rehab and visits with specialists, including a neurosurgeon and an audiologist. But he was alive. And as his mind slowly cleared and the enormity of what he had endured became apparent, Clay was amazed at what his wife had done for him.

Today, the couple are in their new home in Indianapolis. Nearly a year later, Clay has regained the balance he lost, but he's now deaf in one ear. "It's really not that bad, a minor inconvenience at worst," he says, ever positive.

When Clay and Acaimie think about what happened in St. Kitts, it's with a strange mix of emotions. A honeymoon is supposed to be a chance for connection—an island of time in the midst of a busy life for people to truly get to know each other. But even though their honeymoon had turned into a nightmare, it cemented their relationship. The words "in sickness and in health" were no longer just a quaint refrain said in front of friends. To see one's partner under the most awful conditions imaginable had created a kind of intimacy that was different from what they'd had before.

"We got shell-shocked, but in a good way," says Clay today. "You realize what you have. And you become so thankful." 

COURTESY ACAIMIE CHASTAIN

◆ ◆ ◆
Would You Buy a Watch from This Man?

Some celebrities will endorse just about anything. One gung-ho hawker was Mark Twain. He lent his name to a brand of cigars, whiskey, watches, and flour.



Finding the Silver Lining

This year, many of us have new appreciation for life's simpler joys. RD readers share their discoveries.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Shout*

I think for so many, the silver lining should be a simple message, that happiness is found at home and from within. I'm thankful for all the traveling my spouse and I got to do in our 45 years together. We saw so many countries and met interesting people. But we never knew the contentment we had right here. Dusting off the Scrabble board we'd bought in '75 and taking it out on the back screened-in porch was so enjoyable—with the bonus of seeing and hearing all the birds chirping!

—MARGARET WAGGONER
Milton, Florida

My daughter told me that people in nursing homes and assisted living centers were looking for pen pals to help them combat the loneliness brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. I have always loved to write and receive letters, but a handwritten letter has become a rarity. So I jumped on the opportunity to resurrect this passion of mine. Initially, I sent out three letters to three assisted living facilities in three states. I received one reply from a wonderful man who lives in New Hampshire. So far we have exchanged three letters, and I have made a new friend.

—E.S.
via rd.com

Because of quarantine measures, I no longer run as many errands, and our yearly vacations

were canceled. No more pit-stopping at various stores. The result was a bigger wallet and fewer things. I ended up saving (and still am) so much more money because I'm not spending sporadically, and I'm not buying things that we don't need. If I keep this up, I'll be able to pay off my car in another year, instead of three.

—ANGELA ECKHART
Danielsville, Pennsylvania

As the pandemic started out, our family had the same concerns as anyone, but on Easter Sunday our daughter and son-in-law announced they were expecting a baby in December. This is our first grandchild, and we were elated. The next few months, our thoughts turned toward our little hope for the future. Each day seemed brighter! Fast-forward to July 5, when our son announced that he and his girlfriend had just gotten engaged. More hope for the future! My family has truly been blessed. God is present. God is powerful. God is good. Even in a pandemic.

—K.G.
Branchville, New Jersey

I have rediscovered the love of running outside early in the morning. I had abandoned running outdoors for the convenience and relatively hassle-free experience of running on a machine. Inevitably, the TV was tuned to news channels.

Every day, after auto-running my eight miles, I was left hot, sweaty, and a bit stressed out with all of the negativity. With gyms and fitness centers closed, I was forced to start running outdoors very early in the morning. What a delight! I often witness the sun breaking the horizon, wild turkeys sitting high up in a canyon pass, and, best of all, a soothing, almost meditative state of mindfulness as I immerse myself in nature.

—ROGER ANDERSEN
Roseville, California

My daughter started kindergarten this fall, but this spring I got to work one-on-one with her on her math, reading, writing, science, and social studies. We also built giant forts, played lots of games, solved many puzzles, and did a host of other things we wouldn't do on our normal schedule. I felt truly blessed to have been able to spend the time with her.

—ERIKA CIAVATTONI
Chesterfield, Michigan

Can I be thankful for having more time to play video games?

To me, it's a silver lining.

—N.A.
via rd.com

In the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown, I became so depressed. I missed my activities, family, friends. Turning the television off, I pulled out shoebox upon shoebox

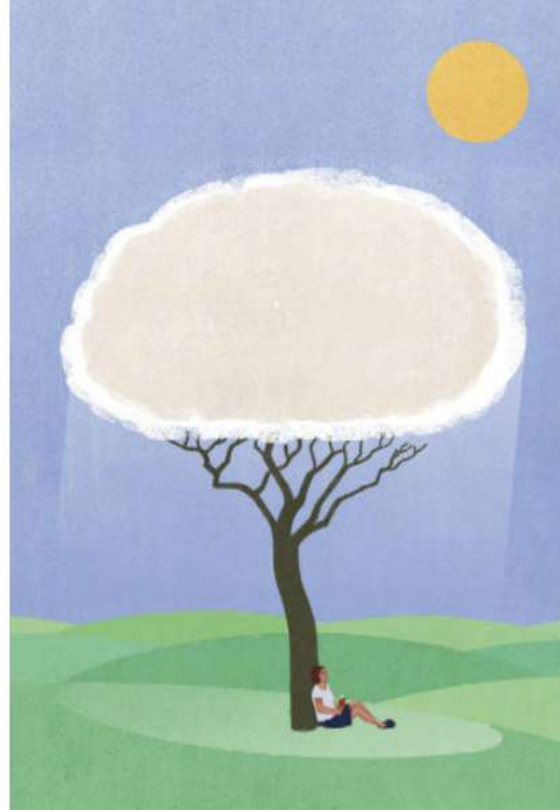
and spent hours organizing photos. I reconnected with family members long gone, laughed over fun memories, revisited places traveled, shed tears at the losses, smiled at the blessings. And I created memory albums for each of my six grandchildren, from their birth to the present. With each photo, I could once again hold them in my arms, bake cookies, rejoice in their accomplishments, and feel the warmth of their hugs and kisses.

—CAROL MURRAY
Lowville, New York

I'm no longer bald, and by the grace of God, I'm still here! In April 2019, I was diagnosed with cancer after a trip to the ER for extreme swelling and pain in my abdomen.

To say I was shocked was an understatement. I was admitted to the hospital and shortly thereafter began chemo treatments for stage 2 diffuse large B-cell lymphoma. My husband immediately stocked up on hand sanitizer, gloves, and toilet paper (you have to drink a lot of fluid when you are trying to flush the chemo from your system). Because of my compromised immune system, I also refrained from hugging and kissing friends and family and spent quite a bit of time alone. I finished treatment last August and have been in remission ever since. Little did I know that I was "in training" for COVID-19!

—DIANA BOSSE
Loveland, Ohio



My husband and I had talked about getting a dog when we retired and this seemed like the right time. We found a cute seven-pound poodle-terrier mix named Coco at the shelter. The rescue representative kept stressing to me that she was a ten-year-old "senior" dog. My response was, "No problem. We're seniors too!" Now I have a happy reason to get out of bed every morning at 6:30, when I take her for a walk. She is full of energy for a senior. She makes us both laugh and has helped us find our smiles.

—ANNE CHANCE
Venice, Florida

The local craft store remained open during lockdown, and I was invited to take kits home to make masks for health-care workers. At first, I hesitated, since I don't own a sewing machine. But that did not stop me. From the middle of April until the middle of July, I made 42 masks, all sewn by hand. What a joy to do my part to support first responders.

—KATHLEEN ZURENKO
Daytona Beach, Florida

My yard has never looked any better than it does now. I spend part of the mornings outside every day!

—SHARON DEVORA
Pipe Creek, Texas

In most neighborhoods in Silicon Valley, everybody is busy, and our court is no exception. In the 20 years we've lived here, we've known our neighbors enough to wave as we drive in and out of our garages or walk the dogs. Everybody was friendly, only very busy with work and school. Then the quarantine began, and a few of us decided to meet each afternoon in the middle of the street for the five o'clock wave. Since then, just about everybody on the court comes out every afternoon for casual conversation. Months later, we are no longer just neighbors but friends. We know about the children and how they are handling the loss

of school. We know the neighbor who likes to bake bread. We know about the daughter who loves horses and the one who belongs to a cheer team. We have watched the baby grow into a toddler. Best of all, we know we can count on each other in time of need. That is a comfort in this difficult time.

—CATHY KORDSMEIER
Los Altos, California

Because I have been at home 24/7, I watched a pair of barn swallows raise their young on my front porch. Although this may not sound like much, I watched the entire process, from the parents selecting a place to build two side-by-side intricate mud nests (where I could easily see them through my front window), to their laying and hatching the eggs, feeding the young babies, raising them to maturity, and very patiently teaching them to fly on the porch (with the aid of the porch light to land on). I then watched them fly around the yard in a larger area every day and return to the nests every night to sleep together—at least for the first week. The mother

and father bird were amazingly attentive parents. These birds have been a highlight of my year.

—WYNNE SMITH
Spartanburg, South Carolina

My husband has been retired a while, and I retired in October 2018. We love each other, but we are quite independent, with our own interests and schedules, so when the lockdowns began, I wasn't sure what to expect. The pandemic has been heartbreaking for those who've lost loved ones or jobs. But our silver lining is that my husband and I have grown closer than ever through this time of isolation. We encourage each other whenever one of us begins feeling discouraged. We stay engaged with family and friends, whether through digital connections or socially distanced encounters. Our love for each other—our appreciation for each other—has continued to grow during this unusual year, and that's something for which I am deeply grateful. 📺

—MINDI MCKENNA
Kansas City, Missouri

A View from the North

Canada and America are closer than friends. We're more like siblings. We have shared parentage, though we took different paths in our later years. We became the stay-at-home type, and you grew to be a little more rebellious.

JUSTIN TRUDEAU, PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA



"This is just a prototype, of course, but I can say that our previous tests on mice were extremely encouraging."

HUMOR in
UNIFORM

LEE LORENZ/CARTOONCOLLECTIONS.COM

Military newbies often find their gullibility preyed upon by pranksters who outrank them. Case in point: While serving on the USS *Turner Joy*, a naive young sailor came rushing into our supply office with an important

requisition order that came straight from his chief. "I need," he said, "a fallopian tube."

The storekeeper, remarkably keeping a straight face, asked, "What size?"

"I don't know."

"Go find out."

—RICHARD E. ASCHE
Port Orchard, Washington

Hot and sweaty after landing the Air Force C-97 on Wake Island, I took one look at that

inviting water and said to my aircraft commander, "That lagoon looks like a great place to go for a swim."

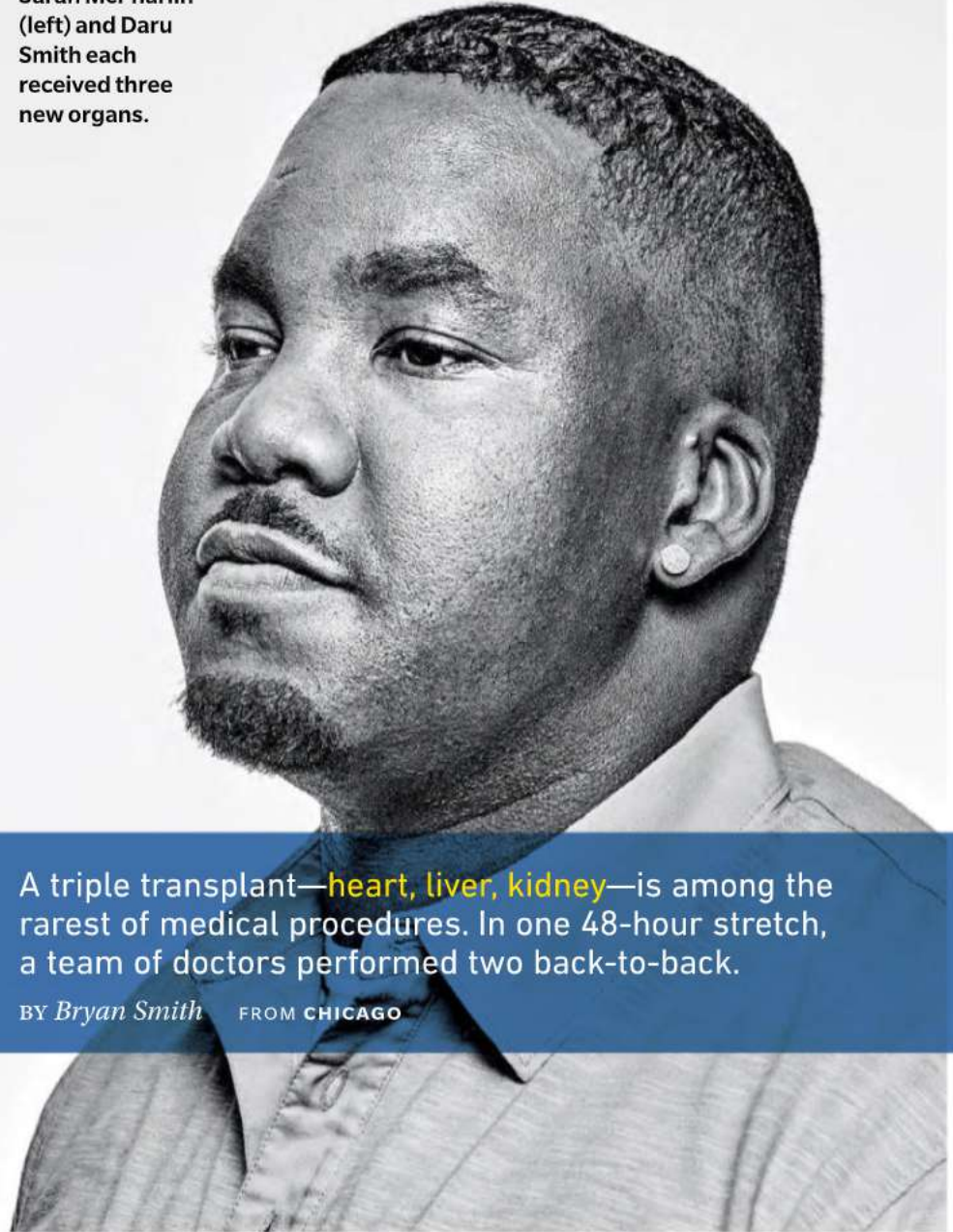
Unimpressed, he answered, "I don't bother the sharks in the lagoon, and they don't bother me in the bar."

—CARL STEVENSON
Bend, Oregon

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



Sarah McPharlin (left) and Daru Smith each received three new organs.



THE Double Triple

A triple transplant—**heart, liver, kidney**—is among the rarest of medical procedures. In one 48-hour stretch, a team of doctors performed two back-to-back.

BY *Bryan Smith* FROM CHICAGO

D

Daru Smith was talking to his doctor and sister one day in December 2018 when he began to die. He saw their forms grow dim, a dark curtain coming down on them and himself in his fluorescent-lit hospital room at University of Chicago Medicine. Then the 29-year-old was above it all, looking into a hole in the ground where a torrent of water was swirling like a giant draining sink.

And then he was in a hallway. At the end of it glowed a white light. He felt at peace. No more heart palpitations, no flutters, no aches. He saw pictures on a wall. Scenes from his life. His son being born. It felt good, the light. Until Daru realized: This is what happens when you die. He turned around and began to run. The light pulled him. I gotta fight, he said to himself.

Daru had been sick. A few weeks earlier, he'd gone to the emergency room with a cold he couldn't shake. But tests showed it was much more than that. Daru was in cardiogenic shock, a condition in which the heart can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs. He also had something

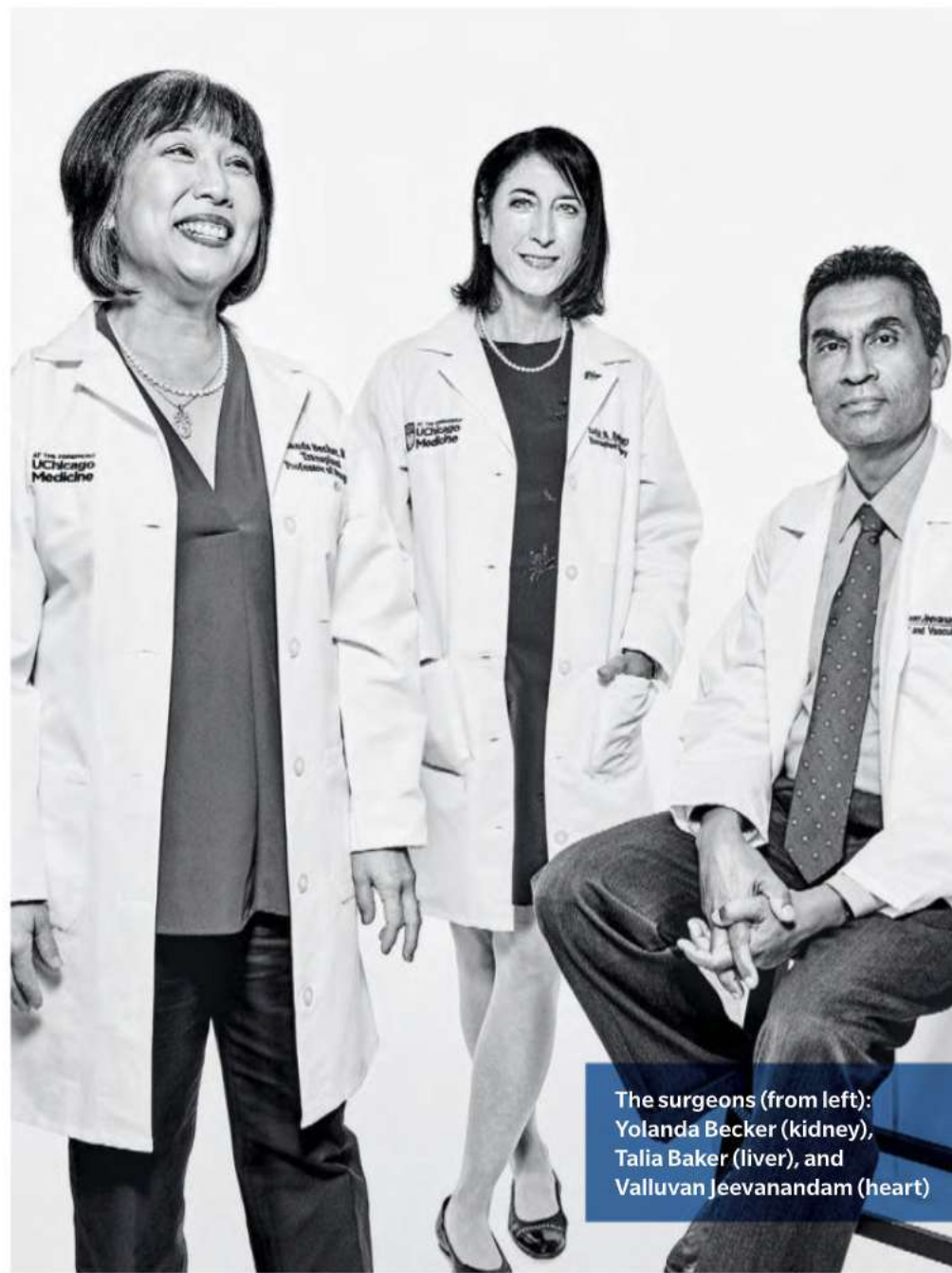
called sarcoidosis, a rare autoimmune disease that can cause the body to overproduce certain cells that all but shut down organs—in Daru's case, the heart, liver, and kidneys.

That meant Daru needed all three vital organs replaced, a procedure so complex and risky that only 15 had been performed in the country at that point. And he would need the rarest of donors, one with three healthy organs compatible with Daru's blood type and strong enough to support his six-foot-one-inch body.

Still unconscious, Daru continued to fight the light. Then his eyes fluttered and opened. "Hey, where'd you go?" Daru's cardiologist, Bryan Smith, said. "Thought we lost you for a second."

SARAH MCPHARLIN SAT in a spare room at UChicago Medicine, waiting to plead for her life. She was there to meet with the center's transplant evaluation team.

As different as Sarah was from Daru—she'd grown up in a tree-lined suburb of Detroit, gone to graduate school, traveled the world; he was



The surgeons (from left):
Yolanda Becker (kidney),
Talia Baker (liver), and
Valluvan Jeevanandam (heart)

raised by a mother who managed a Harold's Chicken Shack in Chicago, where he worked until he found a better-paying job as a truck driver—they were, in more important ways, alike.

Like Daru, Sarah was 29. A rare autoimmune disease—an inflammatory condition called giant cell myocarditis—had attacked her heart. At 12, Sarah had had a heart transplant, but over the years the replacement organ also began to fail. Surgeons had to open her chest five more times to repair ongoing problems. Complications from years of procedures and medications had all but destroyed her liver and kidneys. Her only hope, too, lay in a triple transplant.

But there were some ugly realities that needed to be addressed: The degree of difficulty of a heart transplant doubles with each previous cardiac operation. Sarah's numerous procedures had left her heart buried in scar tissue. This "hostile" chest, as surgeons call it, makes it harder for them to locate the arteries and veins they will need to disconnect and reattach. What's more, she was so physically weak that doctors weren't sure she could survive such a grueling surgery.

And then there's a macabre math that goes into such decisions. A triple transplant means using three organs that could potentially save three other patients. Does it make sense to use them on a single long shot?

Heart specialist Nir Uriel, MD, was

at first skeptical about Sarah's case. She was as pale as the hospital sheets. She had almost no muscle mass. Her chest seemed to have collapsed in on itself, while fluid swelled her arms and abdomen. She could barely speak a sentence without gasping for breath. But when Dr. Uriel asked what she would do post-transplant, the words she could get out moved him.

She'd travel, she said, maybe to Europe, where she had visited as a student in high school. She'd restart her career as an occupational therapist. Beyond that? She loved spending time with her family. They were

Does it make sense to use three organs on a single long shot?

inseparable. Oh, and there would be Michigan State games! How could she forget about her alma mater?

Before the day was out, Sarah had spoken with nearly 30 members of the transplant evaluation team. Afterward, they unanimously voted to move forward, each one seeing what Dr. Uriel saw: someone who, though facing death, radiated life.

For both Sarah McPharlin and Daru Smith, it was now a waiting game. Waiting for organs to become available. Waiting, to put it in blunt terms, for the right person to die.

But at their darkest point, a bright spot flickered: The two patients, just two doors apart in the ICU, met. Over the following weeks, a bond developed. Sarah and Daru could be seen comparing notes as they walked laps around the floor together, challenging each other on how many trips they could make, laughing at what they must look like in their gowns, with tubes and machines trailing behind. Their go-to phrase became "You got this."

AT 3:15 P.M. on Tuesday, December 18, 2018, the pager of Jamie Bucio, lead coordinator of UChicago Medicine's organ procurement team, buzzed with an alert. A potential match for Daru had been declared brain-dead. The young man's heart, liver, and kidneys were intact and strong, and his family had agreed to donate the organs. Bucio and her five-person team had one hour to respond with a preliminary acceptance of the organs—otherwise they would go to the next patient on the waiting list.

Every moment of that hour was crucial. First, Bucio collected information on the organs: What kind of shape were they in? Were they good matches? Then she and her team alerted the surgeons and the attending physician, sending them medical records of the intended recipient. If everyone approved, then and only then would the patient be notified that a transplant was a go—and would be happening in a matter of hours.

After hearing back from all the surgeons, Bucio called the attending physician: "Tell Daru it's time."

"You ready?" Dr. Smith asked Daru as he walked into his room.

"For what?"

"Are you ready?" he repeated, smiling.

Now Daru smiled, too, the realization dawning on him.

"All right, then," said Dr. Smith. "Let's do this."

ON MOST DAYS, the white-tiled hallway just outside of operating room 5 west is deserted, save for the occasional flock of surgeons, nurses, and orderlies. But on this day, December 19, just before 3 p.m.—24 hours after Jamie Bucio got the call—an unusually large contingent of 20 medical staff members milled about. The star of the show was the hospital's head cardiac surgeon, Valluvan Jeevanandam, MD. He'd be performing Daru's heart transplant, the initial procedure upon which the rest of the undertaking rested.

As Dr. Jeevanandam and his team began prepping for the first leg of the marathon surgery, two floors below, Daru was being wheeled away from his ICU room and his family. Meanwhile, three SUVs carrying the two surgical teams—one for the heart and one for the liver and kidney—sped across the city to retrieve the donor organs. Speed is of the essence. A heart needs to be implanted within six hours—and ideally within four hours—of being removed from a donor.

Dr. Jeevanandam made his first cut at 3:07 p.m., timing it to when the doctor at the other hospital began removing the donor's heart. Inserting the rib spreader, a stainless steel retractor used to lay bare the chest cavity, he began to crank slowly. Daru was then hooked up to the heart-lung bypass machine, the major arteries to his heart clamped shut, leaving him without a functioning heart for what would be 102 minutes, and then the removal process began. The donor organ, packed in a Tupperware pickle jar, bathed in a preservation solution, and chilled in a medical box similar to an Igloo cooler, arrived at 5:04 p.m.

Daru's sarcoidosis presented a complication for Dr. Jeevanandam. A healthy person's tissue is like supple leather, which helps it fuse when sewn together. Much of Daru's tissue

Dr. Jeevanandam tried to "tickle" the heart back to life.

was more like cardboard, so the doctor had to be extra careful not to rip it while sewing in the new heart.

That accomplished, Daru was ready to be taken off the bypass machine. In transplant surgery, it's always a tense moment when the aortic clamp is removed. To preserve a heart for transport, doctors fill it with a solution high

in potassium. If all goes well, when the clamp is released, the whoosh of blood into the heart restores normal levels of potassium and other electrolytes, and the heart begins to beat. In Daru's case, the heart didn't beat. Not panicking, Dr. Jeevanandam picked up forceps and gently massaged the heart, trying to "tickle" it back to life. Finally a dot began to hop up from the long, flat green line on the screen across the room. With that, Dr. Jeevanandam stepped back. Four hours after beginning the surgery, his part was done. It was 7:00 p.m.

While Dr. Jeevanandam's assistants affixed drainage tubes and packed the area around the heart with gauze to absorb blood, Talia Baker, MD, the surgeon performing the liver transplant, and her team were already setting up.

There are some 180 steps in performing a liver transplant. But Dr. Baker's main challenge with Daru was the state of his liver. A healthy liver has the spongy consistency of a jellyfish, which makes it pliable. A cirrhotic, or scarred, liver like Daru's is firm, so manipulating it is more difficult, raising the risk of damage to the tissue around the organ when removing it.

With liver transplants, there's also a fear that the absence of oxygen and nutrient-rich blood can damage the newly transplanted organ once the blood flow is restored. That damage can cause the heart and lungs to collapse, resulting in death. In Daru's case, though, the new liver handled



TOP AND BOTTOM: COURTESY OF UCHICAGO MEDICINE. MIDDLE: COURTESY OF SARAH MCPHARLIN

Top: Daru having his post-op vitals checked. Middle: Sarah and her parents. Bottom: Dr. Jeevanandam (left) checks in on Sarah (right).

the blood flow as it was supposed to. At 11:46 p.m.—eight hours and 39 minutes after surgery began—the second portion of his transplant was complete. All that remained: the kidney.

Around that time, Bucio got a page that stunned her: A young woman in another state had been declared brain-dead. She was a potential match for Sarah, and she had three healthy organs. Bucio called Dr. Smith, Sarah's attending physician: "Well, I guess nobody's getting any sleep for the next 48 hours."

No hospital had ever performed two triple transplants within a year, and yet UChicago Medicine was preparing to begin its second in just over a day. Doctors and nurses would be working on little to no sleep. The surgeons would need some 700 instruments for each of the two triple transplants, all of which would have to be cleaned, sterilized, and inspected—no small task since there were also three other transplants happening at the hospital at the time, one of which was a double: kidney and liver. Was it even possible? It had to be. The offer of three matching organs simply could not be turned down.

Bucio had already sprung into action, working out the logistics.



Daru and Sarah seven months after their surgeries: "I feel better than I have in years," says Sarah.

Because Sarah's organs were coming from some distance, UChicago Medicine would need two jets, plus ground transportation to and from both airports.

At 8:18 a.m. on December 20, Daru's triple transplant was completed. After more than 17 hours in surgery, he was moved back to the ICU. Ten hours later, Sarah's triple transplant began.

As Dr. Jeevanandam had anticipated, the heart portion of Sarah's surgery required extra care, taking longer than Daru's. The scar tissue that had built up in her chest from past surgeries made hunting for the arteries and veins seem like an archaeological dig. Just as an archaeologist uses little brushes to carefully clear away dust and debris, Dr. Jeevanandam had to use special instruments to tease apart the tissue to find the arteries underneath. A miscalculation of a single millimeter with the scalpel could cause a nick in the heart itself.

Sarah's liver posed special challenges as well. Because she had been on immunosuppressive drugs for most of her life, her tissues were fragile. Dr. Baker had to work slowly and precisely, taking painstaking care with each incision and suture.

Yolanda Becker, MD, was last up. And as the final surgeon, she had to not only perform the kidney transplant but also make sure the heart and liver were still functioning, which meant keeping a close eye on all of Sarah's vital signs. She also had to

navigate the minefield of drains and chest tubes and pacemaker wires left in place by the previous two surgeons. Dislodge any of the tubes or drains, and she might not notice any internal bleeding. Detach a pacemaker wire, and the heart could develop a dangerous arrhythmia without her knowing.

"I guess nobody's getting any sleep for the next 48 hours."

By the time her surgery was done, at 2:27 p.m. on Friday, December 21, Sarah had been on the table for more than 20 hours. UChicago had accomplished the unthinkable: two triple transplants in less than two days.

JUST DAYS AFTER the surgery, Sarah was amazed by how good she felt. Before the transplant, she had gained 45 pounds of water weight. It was nice to have her normal legs again. She'd also felt out of breath and cold all the time, a result of the poor circulation caused by her failing heart. Now she didn't have to constantly be swaddled in a blanket or coat.

But the two patients' recoveries were not without complications. Two weeks after the transplant, Sarah registered low magnesium levels, requiring weekly infusions of the mineral, which keeps the heartbeat steady and

maintains nerve and muscle functions. She has also struggled with a low white blood cell count, necessitating booster shots. And yet she's more active than ever. She exercises regularly, and last February she participated in Hustle Chicago, a charity stair climb event to the very top of the former John Hancock Building, 94 floors up.

As for Daru, a month after the operation, surgeons placed a stent in one of his bile ducts to open up a blocked passageway. Other than that, he's been working out and "actually seeing results."

Sarah and Daru had intended to meet up after leaving the hospital, but life and eventually the COVID-19 pandemic conspired against them. Instead, Sarah sends Daru banana bread, and they text each other three to four times a week. They also have a regular group chat with two other triple organ recipients, both of whom had their operations after Sarah and Daru.

Daru appreciates the camaraderie. There were days when the pain and the boundaries placed upon him due to his compromised immune system made him wonder whether the triple

transplant was worth it. "No one can relate to what it's like walking around with three new organs," Daru told *Reader's Digest*. But on these calls, you have "people who truly understand you, from your risk factors to your benefits."

A few days after Sarah's discharge, on January 7, 2019, Daru was granted his own release from the hospital he'd called home for eight weeks. As he was wheeled through the ICU toward the elevator, nurses, doctors, and administrative staff clapped and shouted goodbyes.

"You are loved here," the orderly pushing his wheelchair said.

They turned one corner. And then another. And then they stood looking down a final hallway. At the end of it shone what looked like a bright white light. The orderly pushed him forward. And as he did, the source became clear: a set of white double doors illuminated by bright disks of light in the ceiling. The white grew brighter until Daru was on the other side, where he saw a familiar car and his sister standing beside it, smiling, waiting to take him home to his son. **R**

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Happy Michael King Day!

Little Martin Luther King Jr. was called Michael, the name on his birth certificate. Inspired by a trip to Germany in 1934, King's father, Michael Sr., changed his own name to Martin Luther King. Then he changed his five-year-old son's too.

LAUGH LINES

My wife got mad at me for buying the family-size pack of Oreos for just the two of us and I was like, "Are we or are we not a family?"

—**@Average_Dad1**

My little sister discovered we have different dads; now she's trying to say we're just friends ...

—**@ntnasty**

Opening gifts that say "From Mom and Dad" and knowing that Dad is going to be just as surprised as you are.

—**@kellicopter**

Instead of "XOXOXOX" my mom ends every e-mail with "MOMOMOM."

—**@ErinBode**

My uncle only polished the front half of his car because it was the only part he saw when he drove it.

—**@GalgosRGreat**

My grandmother sewed and crocheted until she was into her 90s and her hands just couldn't do it any longer. So don't expect me to be putting this phone down anytime soon.

—**@Darlainky**

It's All Relatives

MJRODAFOTOGRAFIA/GETTY IMAGES

2020 Holiday Shopping Guide

In this most unusual year, the gift of giving will feel especially good. These tips can help make the season merry and bright for everyone.

—
BY Jody L. Rohlena

From what's under the tree to how it got there, many of our holiday shopping traditions look very different this year. A survey of American shoppers by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company found that more than 75 percent of us have altered our shopping habits in 2020—embracing new brands, stores, or ways to save—and most intend to keep them up. Celebrating this season will clearly require unwrapping new strategies. Here are the best we've found.

WISH LIST

This season, hot ticket items don't have to come with high price tags.



What's Different This Year

Hot Ticket Items May Be Extra Hot

Some companies have scaled back their holiday ordering this year to trim inventory, so popular products might sell out fast—in stores and online. (For more tips on this season's hot ticket items, see "What Gifts to Buy & Where to Find Them," starting on page 101.) So if you see a good price for an item on your list, be sure to grab it. And plan to ship gifts at least two weeks before Christmas Eve.

Online Sales Will Start Early

Black Friday in stores has been overtaken in recent years by more and more deals appearing online, not just on Cyber Monday but during all of what's now known as Cyber Week. This year, it may be more like Cyber Season,

**Look for
rock-bottom prices
as some stores
liquidate.**

with online promotions and sales starting right after Halloween. (See "When to Shop," next page.) With concerns about crowds, retailers will likely save a lot of their inventory for online sales.

More Stores Offer Curbside Pickup

Malls are open, though they may be limiting capacity (as are some

individual stores inside). If you'd rather keep your distance from other shoppers but you still want to pick up items locally, order ahead and pick up curbside. Many stores offer this option when you buy online, or you can call in an order and ask whether an employee will run your purchase outside to you. To avoid parking lot chaos, try to pick up your purchases first thing in the morning or later in the evening, when wait times should be shorter.

Outlets Are Online Too

If one of your holiday shopping traditions is a trip to the outlets, you can still experience the thrill of the bargain hunt—from home. Shoppremiumoutlets.com is the virtual version of the country's largest outlet company. In some ways, it's even better than an in-person trip because you can shop by item or category and immediately see what different retailers have in stock, rather than going store to store (even if, for some of us, that's part of the fun). For example, search women's handbags and see offerings from Kate Spade, Michael Kors, Burberry, and more all in one window to easily compare, choose, and buy.

A Few Old Favorites May Not Be Around Much Longer

Among the retail stalwarts that filed for bankruptcy this year: JCPenney, J. Crew, Gordmans, Lord & Taylor, New York and Company, and Tuesday

STYLIST: JACQUELINE DRAPER FOR THIS REPRESENTS



DON'T SWEAT IT

Weights have been in short supply, but you might find them in unexpected places.

Morning. One upside for shoppers is rock-bottom prices as some stores liquidate. The downsides: They might not be around if you need to return something or use a gift card. In other words: Bankruptcy buyers beware.

Customer Service Really Counts

It's a fact of life: Sometimes gifts go back. Do your giftees a favor and buy from retailers with generous return policies, such as Nordstrom, which doesn't impose a time limit for returns; Home Depot and Kohl's, where customers have six months to return items; or fanatics.com and REI, which allow returns for a year. (Most policies have exceptions, so read those closely.) During the holidays, retailers

often extend their usual time limits for returns. Stumped for a gift idea? Zappos.com, the shoe giant known for its above-and-beyond customer service (which includes a 365-day return policy), has an "Ask Us Anything" line with representatives who are ready—and encouraged—to talk to callers about anything, whether they have a question about an order or just want to chat. Now, that's a nice holiday present!

When to Shop

Not on Thanksgiving ...

Many stores that opened their doors on the holiday last year—including Best Buy, Target, and Walmart—have



TAKE CONTROL
Watch sale schedules to save on electronics.

announced that they will be closed this year.

... Or on Black Friday

Not in stores, anyway. Home Depot announced in early September that it was canceling its in-store Black Friday promotions and instead planned to offer deals all through November and December, in stores and online, with exclusive offerings on its app. Other retailers have similar plans to avoid the in-person crush, so watch their websites or download their apps and allow push notifications so that you will receive alerts for “flash”

sales, when hot items are offered at a discount for a limited time. The best way to see all the sale schedules in one place is to visit blackfriday.com and theblackfriday.com.

Small Business Saturday

Held the Saturday after Thanksgiving (November 28 this year), this “shopping holiday” is a good reminder to support your local merchants, who need you more than ever this holiday season. By some estimates, one in every three small businesses is in danger of going under because of the pandemic.

Whenever Stores Restock

If you find that something you want is sold out, nowinstock.net will let you know whether another retailer has it. For Amazon goods, so will camelcamelcamel.com; it will even ping you if the price drops. You can also ask a local merchant to order something specific for you and call you when it comes in—but you may also want to check in with the store every week or so, given how busy it may be this time of year.

At the Last Minute

Forgot something—or somebody—important? Don't panic! This is when same-day delivery can save you. If you're in one of the 260-plus markets served by shipt.com, the personal-shopping service (\$99 per year or \$9.99 per order), you can order items from Target, Costco, CVS, Petco, or your local supermarket for same-day delivery. Walmart+ (\$98/year) promises same-day delivery service in some regions, but it's not available in many smaller towns. Amazon offers same-day delivery, too, but it's also limited to certain cities. Other retailers that offer same-day delivery in certain areas include Ace Hardware, Barnes & Noble, and Best Buy; most require a minimum purchase and may charge a fee. For shoppers in smaller towns, don't forget that some local businesses—and not just supermarkets—will bring your orders right to your door.

What Gifts to Buy & Where to Find Them

Comfy Clothes

In a world where we now have “work sweatpants” and “Zoom sweaters” and maybe even an entire wardrobe of slippers, comfort is king. In April, when clothing sales fell 79 percent overall, sales of sweatpants shot up 80 percent. If you want to help upgrade someone's “workleisure” wardrobe, consider Uniqlo's basic sweatpants, at \$20 (\$29.90 for men) voted best bargain for women by *Real Simple* staffers, who wore and washed 45 different brands. From outdoorsy Lands' End, you can buy fleece for everybody and have it monogrammed for an

Books are always popular gifts, and many Americans are reading more.

extra \$8 per item. Fanatics.com has a huge selection of school and sports-team sweatshirts starting at \$30. For a splurge gift with a bargain price tag, shop lululemon.com's “We Made Too Much” sale section, where you'll find markdowns on its famous women's leggings and lots more—for men too.

Books

They're always popular gifts, and many Americans say they are reading more,

according to a survey from market research firm Statista. Amazon's "Find a Gift" section makes shopping there even easier, but independent booksellers are working hard to keep up, offering curbside pickup and sometimes even free shipping, and they're known for offering booklovers personalized, thoughtful recommendations. Find a store near you at indiebound.org.

Bicycles

Bikes were one of the hottest items of the past year, thanks in part to closed gyms and iffy public transportation around the country. In fact, for months, mass retailers and specialty shops were sold out of all but the priciest specialty rides, so if a two-wheeler (or a three-wheeler!) tops the wish list of someone special in your life,

A handmade gift is always appreciated—even if you aren't handy.

start shopping soon, before supplies dwindle again. If you're not particularly handy, look to buy from a locally owned shop, where you can get a bike that's already assembled rather than a box full of parts.

Workout Gear

Also in short supply this year: hand weights, kettlebells, and other popular

workout items. They may still be hard to find or crazy expensive, so consider giving other health helpers such as exercise bands, jump ropes, or yoga and stretching mats or shopping at less-obvious suppliers, such as overstock.com, T.J. Maxx, supermarkets, or even Home Depot, where we found mats in a variety of bright colors.

American Wines

Many European wines got more expensive last year because of a new 25 percent tariff. If you have a wine lover on your list, it's a good time to buy American. Look for noted regional varietals such as California chardonnays, Colorado Rieslings, and Oregon pinot noirs, as well as wines from vineyards in your area. According to the experts at *Wine Enthusiast*, many bottles from 2010, 2011, and 2012 are at their peak for drinking. You can find plenty of good choices for less than \$25, and you don't necessarily have to go to a wine store to find them. Some Aldi, Costco, and Trader Joe's stores have solid selections—even according to wine snobs! Buy a case (12 bottles) and you can usually save an extra 10 percent. And don't snub bottles with screw caps; these days, plenty of fine wines come without a cork.

Crafty Items

A handmade gift is always appreciated—even if you aren't handy enough to make it yourself. Etsy.com



UNCORK SAVINGS
Tariffs have driven up the prices of imports, so this year try domestic.

dates and sale schedules (see "When to Shop," page 99). Another way to save: Check retailers' online outlet sections, where you can find good deals on open-box items (products that have been returned) and refurbishes (pre-owned items, which are certified by the sellers and often come with a warranty). Check out apple.com/shop/refurbished, amazon.com/outlet, and bestbuy.com/outlet. You'll save even more if you have an old device to trade in. For example, in the fall, Samsung was offering as much as \$400 for certain used Galaxy phones—money you can put toward a new purchase. Apple doesn't generally have sales, but last year you could score a gift card or free wireless earbuds with certain purchases, so watch for bonus deals this year too.

offers its own holiday guides to get you started. Other sources for jewelry, decor, clothing, and more made by artisans around the world are thelittlemarket.com, worldmarket.com, and tenthousandvillages.com.

Games and Gadgets

Hunting down the hottest holiday gifts, such as the Sony PlayStation 5 or the Xbox Series X, often feels like a game in itself. Pay attention to release

Sneakers

When big-name athletes' signature shoes come out, they usually fly off the shelves, making them popular gift items for "sneakerheads." If you're looking for a specific new release, such as the retro Air Jordans due out this holiday season, make sure you don't miss out. Use the shoe release calendar at Dick's Sporting Goods or sign up for notifications on shoe companies' websites. Look for refurbished



KICKS MAKE GOOD GIFTS

Grab sneakers on release day or risk missing out.

classics at Nike's resku.co. Or if you're all about price, see what styles are on sale at sneakadeal.com.

At-Home Events

While concerts, comedy clubs, and other in-person shows are now no-gos, you can still spectate at home. The Moth (themoth.org), the source of many *RD* stories, offers tickets to its storytelling performances for \$10 per household. Online cooking classes from the experts at Sur La Table (surlatable.com) run \$29 per household. A subscription to watch stage performances at broadwayhd.com is \$100 a year—less than the price for a single seat in a theater. And at eventbrite.com, you'll find listings for all sorts of lectures and shows.

And don't forget the popcorn!

The top recommended poppers at toptenreviews.com include the countertop West Bend 82505 Stir Crazy Popcorn Popper (\$25) and the stovetop Great Northern Popcorn Original Popcorn Popper (\$34).

Treats

Speaking of snacks, with traveling on hold for many of us, why not send a care package of regional delicacies—Kansas City ribs, New York bagels, Alaska king salmon—to folks on your gift list? Goldbelly.com, a clearinghouse for dishes from around the country, arranges for shipping directly to the lucky recipient's door. Plan ahead, because holiday delivery dates might be limited. You can also call a favorite restaurant near your relatives to have a meal delivered to them,

or use a food-ordering app such as Seamless or Uber Eats. It's nice to give the family kitchen crew a night off!

Master Classes

It's always a good time to learn something new. You can gift a virtual seat in a class with a top professional in a variety of fields, such as ballet with prima ballerina Misty Copeland, fiction writing with children's novelist R. L. Stine, or scientific thinking with Neil deGrasse Tyson. Find them and other pros at masterclass.com, which charges \$180 per series.


Gifts That Keep on Giving ...

Some companies make donations after you order. For example, for every pair of socks you buy at bombas.com, a pair goes to a homeless shelter. Buy a comforter at thecompanystore.com and a comforter goes to a child in need. Any purchase (of jewelry, pottery, etc.) from uncommongoods.com sends \$1 to a charity partner of your choice. Or do your Amazon shopping through smile.amazon.com, and a portion of the money you spend will go to your chosen cause. Another great source for unique gifts that give back: museum stores, where your purchases help keep visitor-starved museums afloat. A few good ones to try: the Smithsonian Institution (smithsonianstore.com), the National Gallery of Art (shopnga.gov), and Chicago's Field Museum (fieldmuseum.org).

... And Keep Coming

As we're all craving fresh stimulation, this might be the year to spring for a gift that shows up every month or so. You can find subscription boxes filled with food, toys, pet products, makeup, clothing, and more. Some let the recipient hand-select items, while others are full of surprises. Browse at mysubscriptionaddiction.com. Our sister publication *Taste of Home* has a nifty box filled with curated kitchen goodies and recipes; learn more at tasteofhomebox.com/rd1220.

Nostalgia

Of course, you'll make new memories this year, but the old ones are worth celebrating too. You can get your home movies digitized and saved on a thumb drive or DVD or in a Cloud file at legacybox.com (\$60 and up) so you can watch them without hauling out the projector or share them with the rest of the family. Have a wardrobe of beloved T-shirts made into a memory quilt at projectrepat.com (\$75 and up). Or turn your smiling faces into a photo book, calendar, set of note cards, or other photo-memory gift at shutterfly.com, artifactuprising.com, or one of the many photo gift sites (options and prices vary). Watch for special discounts for first-time shoppers, and check groupon.com and livingsocial.com for discount offers. Certainly, however you celebrate, this will be a holiday season to remember! 

Use a Hankie, Dude!

He has used a pocket handkerchief all his life—and was ridiculed for it. Now, this famous author says his habit has found its moment.

—
BY Scott Turow

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

THE TEXT FROM my son said it all: “Dad, there’s an article you were born to write that the world is finally ready for: Bring Back the Handkerchief!”

As my son knows, there’s no “bring back” for me. For me, the handkerchief never left.

My mother raised me with several fixed rules. One was that a gentleman always has a clean handkerchief in his

right rear pocket, a piece of simple cotton, roughly 15 inches square and less than four inches when folded. I was a dutiful son, but I can recall being a ten-year-old on the school playground, feeling the padding directly over my butt and wondering what it was there for. Time would tell.

Every night for most of my life, I have removed from my trousers the items I’m going to need the next day—keys, wallet, and hankie, if it’s still unused.

After 60 years, I am like the princess in “The Princess and the Pea.” My body weight feels wrong if I’m heading out of the house with an empty back pocket.

I am sure this habit has sometimes struck friends and colleagues who’ve noticed it as a little quaint, but in polite company nobody comments on somebody else’s trivial eccentricities. That rule of behavior, of course, did not apply to one’s children in the late 20th century. When my three kids were growing up, they all let me know whenever they could that my hankie was as

A GENTLEMAN ALWAYS HAS A CLEAN HANKIE IN HIS RIGHT REAR POCKET.

ridiculously old-fashioned as a top hat and a walking stick. They had their arguments. If you have to be prepared every day for allergies or a cold, why not tote a little packet of tissues, which saves you from that disgusting business of blowing your nose in the thing and then stuffing it back in your pants?

Point taken—especially in the time of COVID-19. But a cotton handkerchief is a lot more durable than tissue, creates no waste, and has a far wider variety of uses. One reason my kids saw that handkerchief so often is because of the epic number of chocolate mouths, skinned knees, and drippy noses that

hankie wiped. Can you grab the handle of a pot that’s boiling over with a Kleenex? Now that I am a grandfather of five, my hankie again has been getting a workout. When friends become grandfathers for the first time, I often send them a dozen handkerchiefs as a small gift. “Hold on to these,” I say, “you’re going to need them.” In fact, for Father’s Day last year my wife gave me several new handkerchiefs, embroidered with my grandpa name, “Pops.”

Her gift was a tacit admission. From her subsequent comments, I take it that the first time that handkerchief came out, right after we started dating, she thought to herself something like, “Holy smokes, what a geezer!” But by now, neither of us can count the number of times her eyes have welled up at a movie, a tickle won’t leave her throat in the theater, or, as happens, she’s needed to blow her nose and timidly whispered, “Can I borrow your handkerchief?”

Yet not even Mom could have anticipated the hankie’s new role as an Essential Public Health Appliance. All of us have learned how hard it is to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s advice in this coronavirus-plagued era about not touching your face. Here is an answer. Got an itch in your eye or your nose that you just have to scratch? Facing those frequently touched places such as elevator buttons and door handles that seem full of peril? Use your hankie, dude!



Here let me add a sober note on best practices: Touching your face with a coronavirus-infested hankie is not much better than doing so with a dirty hand. The solution is to carry multiple hankies in different pockets. And of course, if you used a handkerchief for virus protection, wash it thoroughly with soap and hot water as soon as you can.

That said, your handkerchief can be even more useful in protecting others from you, especially if you are one of those asymptomatic coronavirus carriers. In April, the CDC recommended wearing masks when we’re out of the house. Guess what can be turned into a DIY mask by folding several times and

applying two rubber bands six inches apart? In a pinch, and if you have no rubber bands, your handkerchief can become a makeshift bandanna that can be pulled over your lower face like a robber entering a bank.

So my son has it right: Bring back the pocket handkerchief. It may actually save a few lives. And it will certainly give me the chance to channel my mother, to lift my chin and look at my adult children through one eye, asking in her good-hearted way, “What do you have to say now, smarty-pants?” **R**

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Looking on the Sunny Side

There’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes.

NORWEGIAN PROVERB

THE GENIUS SECTION

10 Pages TO SHARPEN
Your Mind



DAVID ARKY/TRUNK ARCHIVE

OLDIES BUT FEEL-GOODIES

*Why our brains prefer music from
our youth—call it cerebral comfort food*

BY *Jeremy D. Larson*

FROM [PITCHFORK.COM](https://pitchfork.com)

LISTENING TO NEW music is hard. Not hard compared to going to space or war, but hard compared to listening to music we already know. Especially those of us who have settled into the groove of adult life often don't listen to new music because it's easy to forgo the act of discovery when work, rent, children, and life come into play. Eventually, we bow our heads and cross a threshold where most music becomes something to remember rather than something to experience.

Most people have all the songs they could ever need by the time they turn 30. And thanks to Spotify and Apple Music, we can easily whisk ourselves back to the gates and gables of our youth, when life was simpler. Why leap off a cliff hoping you'll be rescued by your new favorite album on the way down when you can lie supine

on the terra firma of your "Summer Rewind" playlist? Why spend time on something you might not like?

One of my favorite pieces of arts criticism is a 2016 article from *The Onion* titled "Nation Affirms Commitment to Things They Recognize." From music to clothing brands, the joke is self-explanatory: We love the things we know because we know them and therefore we love them.

But there is a physiological explanation in our desire to seek comfort in the familiar. It can help us understand why listening to new music is so hard, and why it can make us feel uneasy, angry, or even riotous.

It has to do with the plasticity of our brains. Our brains change as they recognize new patterns in the world, which is what makes brains, well, useful.

When it comes to hearing music, a network of nerves in the auditory

cortex called the corticofugal network helps catalog the different patterns of music. When a specific sound maps onto a pattern, our brains release a corresponding amount of dopamine, the main chemical source of some of our most intense emotions. This is the essential reason why music triggers such powerful emotional reactions.

Take the chorus of a song by Adele or Bruce Springsteen, many of which have very recognizable chord progressions. The majority of our brains have

THE ACT OF LISTENING TO NEW MUSIC IS HARD ON THE BRAIN, BUT NECESSARY.

memorized these progressions and know exactly what to expect when each comes around. When the corticofugal network registers that Springsteen chorus, our brains release just the right amount of dopamine. Like a needle tracing the grooves of a record, our brains trace these patterns. The more “records” we own, the more patterns we can recall to send out that perfect dopamine hit.

In his book *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, the one-time neuroscience lab worker Jonah Lehrer writes about how the essential joy of music comes in how songs subtly toy with patterns in our brains, spiking the dopamine

more and more without sending it off the charts. This is the entire neuroscientific marketing plan behind pop music. But when we hear something that hasn't already been mapped onto the brain, the corticofugal network goes a bit haywire, and our brains release too much dopamine as a response. When there is no map or pattern to anchor to, music can register as unpleasant or, in layman's terms, bad. “If the dopamine neurons can't correlate their firing with outside events,” Lehrer writes, “the brain is unable to make cogent associations.”

That's what happened one night in Paris in 1913, in what is perhaps the most infamous musical debut in history. The piece that premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées that night was Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, an orchestral ballet inspired by the Russian composer's dream about a young girl dancing herself to death. Drawing from the Slavic and Lithuanian folk music of his homeland, Stravinsky blackened his score with rhythmic and harmonic tension, stretching phrases to their outer limits and never bothering to resolve them. The harmonies were difficult to name and his rhythms impossible to follow.

The *Rite* began with a solo bassoon squeezing out a riff so high in its register that it sounded like a broken English horn. This alien sound was—apparently and unintentionally—so strange that chuckles erupted from the bourgeoisie in the mezzanine



JUANA MARI MOYA/GETTY IMAGES

boxes and rippled through the crowd below. The dissonant opening gave way to the martial assault of the second movement, “The Augurs of Spring,” and the dancers bounded on stage, moving squeamishly and at jagged angles. As recounted in the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, the chuckles turned into jeers, then shouting, and soon the audience was whipped into such a frenzy that their cries drowned out the orchestra.

Many members of the audience could not fathom this new music; their brains—figuratively, but to a certain extent, literally—broke. A brawl ensued, vegetables were thrown, and 40 people were ejected from the theater. It was a fiasco consonant with Stravinsky's full-bore attack on classical music and thus every delicate sense in the room.

Le Figaro called the piece a “laborious and puerile barbarity.”

Laborious and puerile as it may have seemed, did *Rite* really necessitate a riot? Maybe. The way the corticofugal system learns new patterns makes everything we already know far more pleasurable than everything we don't. We experience the strange allure of wanting to go back to that time in high school driving down country roads with the radio on. Plus our brains actually fight against the unfamiliarity of life. “We are built to abhor the uncertainty of newness,” writes Lehrer.

The coda to the famous *Rite of Spring* riot is not often told. After the melee of that evening, the ballet continued running at the theater for many months. Alex Ross wrote in his book *The Rest Is Noise*, “Subsequent performances were packed, and at each one the opposition dwindled. At the second, there was noise only during the latter part of the ballet; at the third, ‘vigorous applause’ and little protest. At a concert performance of *Rite* one year later, ‘unprecedented exaltation’ and a ‘fever of adoration’ swept over the crowd, and admirers mobbed Stravinsky in the street afterward, in a riot of delight.”

The act of listening to new music is hard, but it's necessary. After all, what is unheard could define history—might as well come for the show. **R**

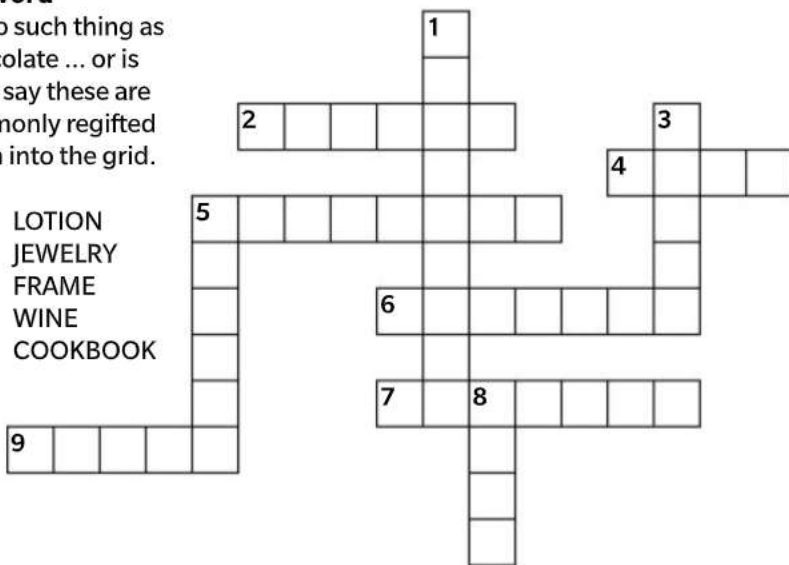
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BRAIN GAMES

Quick Crossword

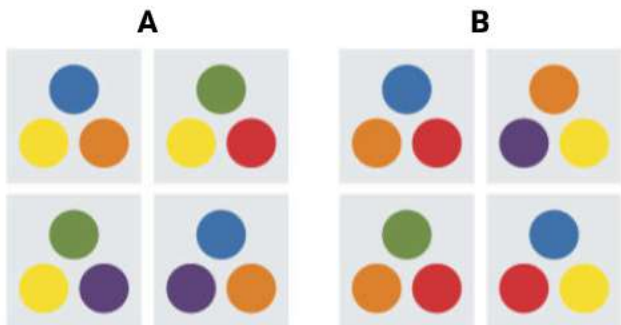
EASY There's no such thing as too much chocolate ... or is there? Experts say these are the most commonly regifted items. Fit them into the grid.

- SOCKS
- SOAP
- CHOCOLATE
- PAJAMAS
- CANDLE
- LOTION
- JEWELRY
- FRAME
- WINE
- COOKBOOK



Sort It Out

DIFFICULT The eight tiles below have been sorted into two groups according to a rule. Part of this rule is that in Group A, the three dots on each tile are arranged clockwise starting with the dot on top, and in Group B, they're arranged counterclockwise.



In which group does this tile belong?



EMILY GOODMAN (QUICK CROSSWORD), DARREN RIGBY (SORT IT OUT)

Here's the Deal

DIFFICULT Four playing cards, one of each suit, lie in a row on a table. They are a three, a four, a five, and a six. Using these clues, can you determine the cards' suits and their order?



- ◆ The cards on either side of the four are black.
- ◆ The club is to the right of the three but not next to it.
- ◆ The spade is to the left of the heart.
- ◆ The middle two cards add up to an even number. Neither of them is a club.

The Fashionable Snowman

MEDIUM Noel is about to put the finishing touches on the snowman he built. He has already placed the buttons and sticks (as shown), but he has a few other decorations as well. They are:

- ◆ A top hat
- ◆ A festive scarf
- ◆ A carrot, for the nose
- ◆ A pipe
- ◆ A vest



Noel might use all of these items, though he will certainly use no fewer than three. How many different combinations are possible?

Fill in the Blanks

MEDIUM How many common English words can you make by adding a letter to each of the blanks below? We found seven. Proper nouns don't count.

D _ I _ Y

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

For answers, turn to PAGE 119.

Statement required by the Act of August 12, 1970, Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code, showing the ownership, management and circulation of READER'S DIGEST, published 10 times a year at 44 South Broadway, Floor 7, White Plains, Westchester County, NY 10601, as filed on September 30, 2020.

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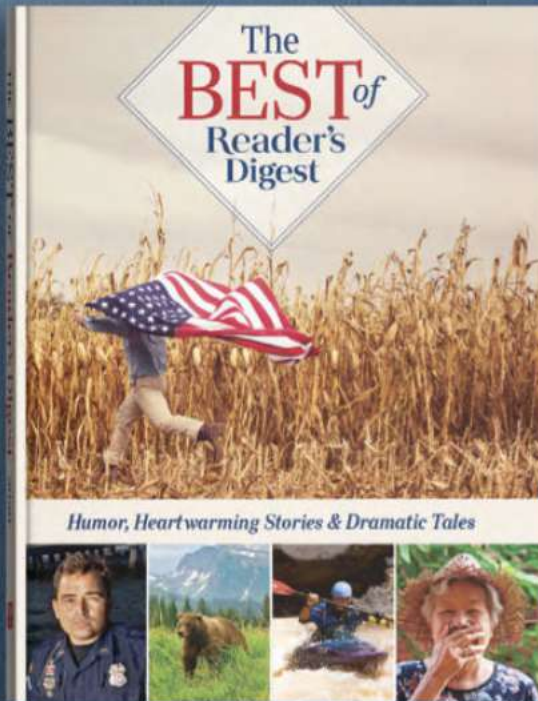
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Jim Woods, VP, Magazine Planning

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WORD POWER

As the holiday season approaches, many of us turn to spiritual matters and end-of-year reflection. This contemplative quiz is full of words that refer to holy, soulful, or meditative practices. After you've pondered, ascend to the next page for answers.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

1. canticle *n.*
(ˈkən-tih-kuhl)
A sacred flame.
B small chapel.
C Biblical song.

2. asana *n.*
(ˈah-suh-nuh)
A sweat lodge.
B yoga pose.
C spiritual guide.

3. halal *adj.*
(huh-ˈlahl)
A in a trance.
B on a pilgrimage.
C fit or lawful.

4. mezuzah *n.*
(muh-ˈzoo-zah)
A scroll hung by a door.
B golden halo.
C organ composition.

5. vespers *n.*
(ˈveh-sperz)
A evening service.
B silent worship.
C winged cherubs.

6. genuflect *v.*
(ˈjen-yoo-flekt)
A donate.
B ponder.
C kneel.

7. lama *n.*
(ˈlah-muh)
A prayer shawl.
B humble offering.
C Buddhist monk.

8. halcyon *adj.*
(ˈhal-see-on)
A awesome.
B peaceful.
C mythical.

9. atone *v.*
(uh-ˈtohn)
A begin fasting.
B bow down to.
C make up for.

10. ashram *n.*
(ˈah-shrum)
A burial mound.
B Nativity scene.
C religious retreat.

11. homily *n.*
(ˈhah-muh-lee)
A sermon.
B hymn.
C parish.

12. thaumaturgist *n.*
(ˈthaw-muh-ter-jist)
A miracle worker.
B congregation head.
C nonbeliever.

13. supplicate *v.*
(ˈsuh-plih-kayt)
A pray.
B obey.
C consume.

14. kinara *n.*
(kih-ˈnah-ruh)
A enlightenment.
B set of seven candles.
C scripture.

15. psyche *n.*
(ˈsy-kee)
A soul.
B guide.
C rite.

That's the Spirit(s)

Most examples of *spirit* are ethereal, such as a person's soul or mood, or even a ghost. But what about that most earthy of spirits—aka alcohol? That meaning may have originated as a term for the vapors produced by distillation; *spiritus* is Latin for "breath." Or it could be linked to the final product of distillation: pure alcohol, the "spirit" of the original liquid.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. canticle (C) *Biblical song.* The choir sang a canticle to begin Sunday's service.

2. asana (B) *yoga pose.* Barbara's favorite asana is downward-facing dog.

3. halal (C) *fit or lawful.* My family is Muslim, so we've always followed a halal diet.

4. mezuzah (A) *scroll hung by a door.* The Rosens bought that pretty mezuzah on a family trip to Israel.

5. vespers (A) *evening service.* If we don't eat dinner soon, we'll be late to Christmas Eve vespers.

6. genuflect (C) *kneel.* After my knee surgery, I couldn't genuflect for a month.

7. lama (C) *Buddhist monk.* In Tibetan, the title *Dalai Lama* means "oceanmonk" because the spiritual head of the religion is said to possess an ocean of compassion.

8. halcyon (B) *peaceful.* I'm an early riser because I adore those halcyon moments that happen just as the sun comes up.

9. atone (C) *make up for.* Ellen broke her mother's camera, and she will be atoning for that for years.

10. ashram (C) *religious retreat.* Though ashrams are usually associated with Hinduism, they've become popular in the United States as sites for other forms of spiritual contemplation.

11. homily (A) *sermon.* Can I just borrow the car without all the usual homilies?

12. thaumaturgist (A) *miracle worker.* That man who "cures" blindness with a touch of his hand says he's a thaumaturgist, but he's really just a huckster.

13. supplicate (A) *pray.* Before his big presentations, Boris would supplicate to the gods of public speaking.

14. kinara (B) *set of seven candles.* The first kinara, used to celebrate Kwanzaa, was created 55 years ago.

15. psyche (A) *soul.* Why do so many politicians seem to have the psyche of a potted plant?

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: acolyte
10–12: sage
13–15: guru

BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

See page 114.

Quick Crossword

ACROSS

2. LOTION
4. SOAP
5. COOKBOOK
6. PAJAMAS
7. JEWELRY
9. FRAME

DOWN

1. CHOCOLATE
3. SOCKS
5. CANDLE
8. WINE

Sort It Out

Group B. The dots on each tile are in alphabetical order by color (Blue, Green, Orange, Purple, Red, Yellow), with Group A going clockwise from the top dot and Group B counterclockwise.

Here's the Deal

Left to right: Three of diamonds, six of spades, four of hearts, five of clubs

The Fashionable Snowman

16

Fill in the Blanks

Daily, dairy, daisy, deify, deity, doily, drily



Caption Contest

What's your clever description for this picture? Submit your funniest line at RD.COM/CAPTIONCONTEST. Winners will appear in a future Photo Finish (PAGE 120).

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TESTIMONIALS

- ▶ **I WILL BUY AGAIN AND AGAIN** *"First pair of shoes in many years that I can wear without adding additional arch or cushion inserts. I am now ordering multiple pairs for myself and my Mom to try."*
- ▶ **EXCELLENT PRODUCT!!!** *"I need arch support and these shoes have it."*
- ▶ **HIGHLY RECOMMEND** *"Bought these for use as everyday wear shoes. The arch support is amazing."*



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PHOTO FINISH
YOUR *Funniest* CAPTIONS



Winner

December 26!

—CARLA MEYER *Panama City, Florida*

Runners-Up

Nick's audition for *Graywatch* went well.

—STEVEN ARRUDA *Locust Grove, Virginia*

The commercialization of Christmas was complete when Speedo signed Santa Claus as their new spokesmodel.

—JENNIFER FALCO *Crystal Lake, Illinois*

To enter an upcoming caption contest, see the photo on PAGE 119.