

SEPTEMBER 2022

Reader's Digest

The
GENIUS
Issue!

BUILD YOUR
**WORD
POWER**

FUN FACTS,
QUIZZES & MORE

The Great
**9/11 BOAT
RESCUE**

From *NEW YORK MAGAZINE*

A Marriage
Proposal Miracle

From *THE WASHINGTON POST*

Learn a New Language
AT ANY AGE

By *EMILY GOODMAN*

Reclaiming My
Southern Accent

From *JEZEBEL.COM*

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Reader's Digest

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DEAR READER

More than Words

ON A LIST of life goals that I have so far failed to complete, learning a foreign language is somewhere near the top. I always wanted to be fluent in a second language. But aside from memorizing a few useful phrases in high school Spanish and taking a Japanese course in college, I have yet to master a foreign language.

My wife, Melissa Gorski, has all the talent in this department. She can learn a language in a weekend—at least enough to get around a foreign city. She's handy with Spanish and French. She once taught herself Japanese using an off-brand CD box set before a trip to Tokyo. Then she did it again with Italian. These days, we know our roles when traveling: She does all the talking, and I nod and eat gelato.

That hasn't dampened my passion for languages and words. I love their history and meaning, the way they change and evolve over time,



My wife, Melissa, guiding us in Italy. Not pictured: Me eating gelato.

and the different sounds and rhythms of each language.

So I was right at home here in our Word Power issue. I loved exploring weird word origins (page 54) and learning about your favorite words (page 74), such as *cwm*, which is now my secret Scrabble move.

Maybe it's not too late for me. As our own Senior Editor Emily Goodman points out on page 26, new research shows it isn't as tough to learn a foreign language when we get older as researchers previously thought. There's hope for me yet.

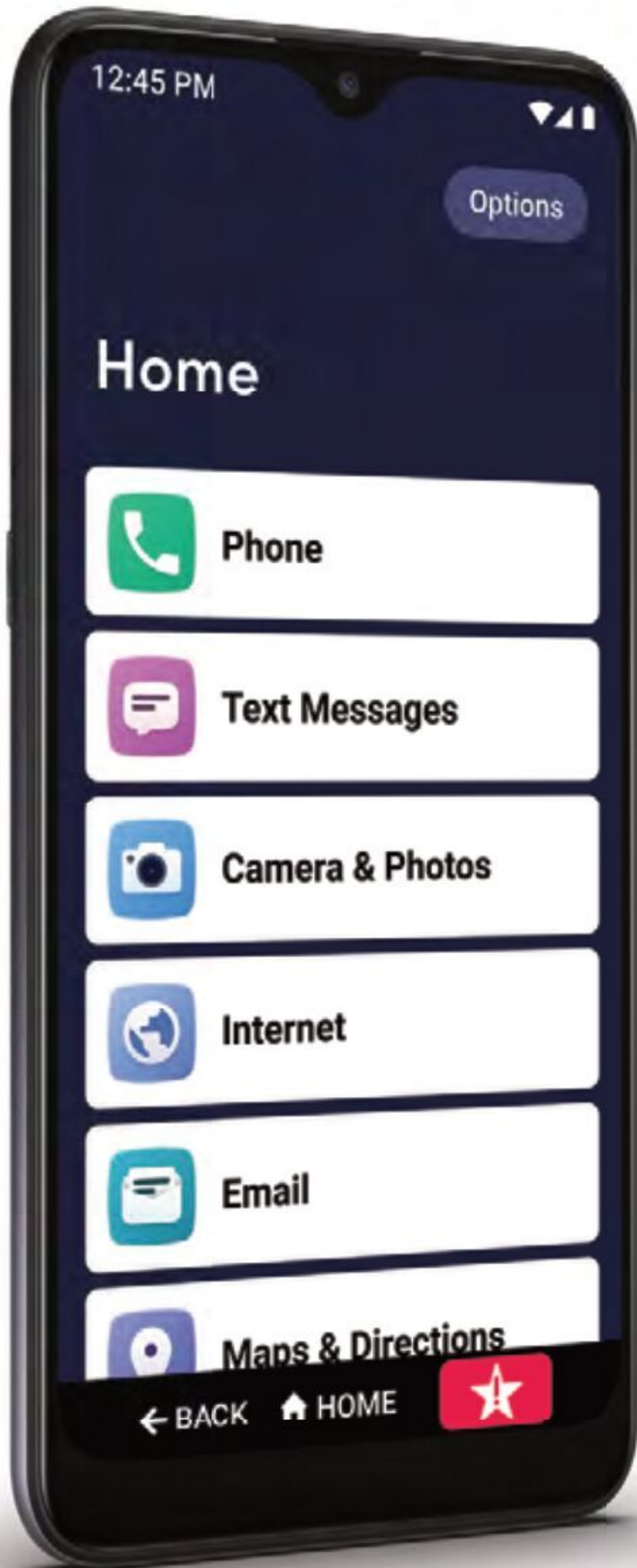
If this page is in French next month, you'll know I finally did it. **R**

Jason Buhrmester,
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER

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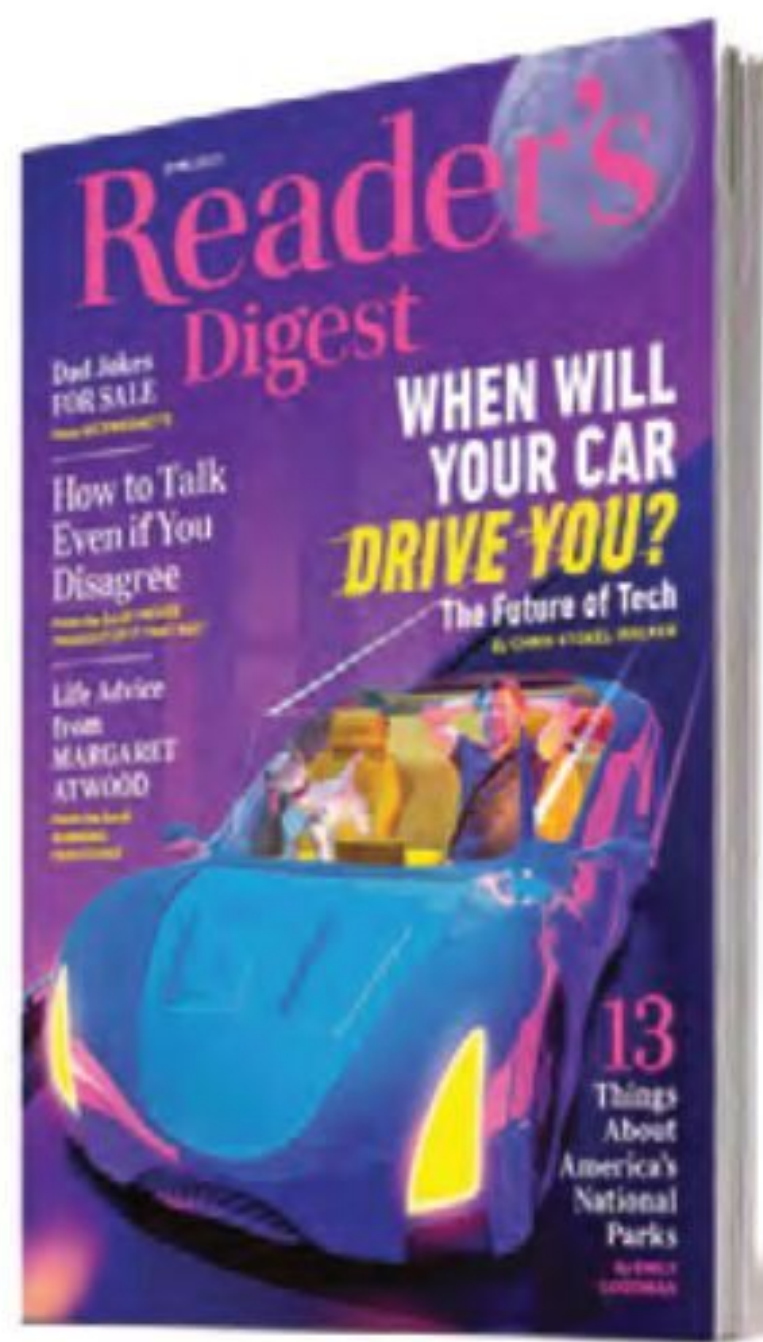
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LETTERS

NOTES ON
Past Issues



“I Never Thought of It That Way”

My four siblings and I are a microcosm of the country, representing liberals, conservatives, atheists, and Christians—just like the family described as having a blowout on Thanksgiving (*June*). Our mother’s solution to our arguing is that we’re not allowed to talk about politics or religion or play Trivial Pursuit. That rule has kept the peace for 25 years.

—SUZANNE HUTCHINSON *Ozawkie, Kansas*

For Sale: My Catalog of Dad Jokes

I both laughed and cried at Gary Rudoren’s story about having no use for his dad joke collection now that his son has outgrown them (*June*). I saved mine, too, when my kids got too old. It was a great decision because I now have three grandkids who are young enough to laugh hysterically at my now “Opa jokes.”

—MARK KOHLBRENNER
Rome, New York

Everyday Heroes

It’s so refreshing that dads in Shreveport, Louisiana, banded together to help curb fighting at the local high school just by showing up and being good influences (*June*). Students must feel safer and also as if they have adults to mentor and listen to them. I’d love to see something like this in every high school in my own state.

—JUANITA LIVINGSTON
Akron, Ohio

13 Things

You did a good job explaining the many benefits of Airbnb and Vrbo (*July/August*), but there are some downsides too. My daughter lives in a vacation town where every house is instantly snapped up by someone who turns it into a vacation rental, which causes a severe shortage of affordable long-term rentals. She sometimes has to block off half of her restaurant—not because of a lack of customers but because of a lack of staff, since nobody can find affordable housing nearby.

—TOM HOCKETT
Colfax, Washington

Flip the 'Script

I enjoyed your story about home remedies (*June*), and I have another cure for an ailment you described. A few years ago, my entire class was silent for a lesson—except me. I couldn’t stop hiccuping! My teacher gave me a spoonful of peanut butter, and my

hiccups were gone. Now I understand why it worked (hard swallows activate the nerve that regulates your diaphragm).

—KATE ULRICH
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Reader

I completely agree with your editor's letter about how much support Ukraine deserves (*June*). Palestine is experiencing a similar crisis but doesn't get nearly the coverage. Being born an American is a privilege, and we should use it to help others as much as possible.

—SAFIYA BLEVINS
Knoxville, Tennessee

Advice to the Young

How I related to Margaret Atwood's writing about her urge to dole out advice (*June*). I often feel compelled to offer helpful information, too, but have also felt the tug on my sleeve to stop. The most likely recipients of such sagacity are my very patient grandkids. They

know I do it out of love!

—CAROL BEALL
Mount Airy, Maryland

We Found a Fix

I love that in your "Cool Off a Hot Car" fix you chose a Tesla Model 3 image to demonstrate that flapping the door

open and closed will get rid of hot air (*June*). That vehicle has a feature that allows the driver to turn the air conditioning on remotely via a smart-phone app.

—PHIL STILLMAN
Newcastle, California

THE "ORBISCULATE" CHALLENGE

We published "Warning: This Fruit May Orbisculate" (*December/January*) about a family's quest to register their dad's made-up word in the dictionary. Later, we printed a letter from Sue Mollineaux of Torrington, Connecticut, who wrote that her senior community chose it for its word-in-a-word game. Within an hour, the residents found 223 words with four or more letters within "orbisculate." She challenged others to try their luck, and lots of you did.

◆ I accepted Sue's challenge and found 278 words. Not bad for an old broad!

—Sue Starn
PATASKALA, OHIO

◆ We took more than one hour, but we are only two people. We counted 306 words, and we keep finding more.

—Ken and Hazel Kirschenmann
HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA

◆ I love word games and sat down for an hour to make my list. I stopped when I got to 400 but probably could've kept going!

—D.B.
PITTSBURGH,
PENNSYLVANIA



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The Iowa Wave

TUNE IN TO a University of Iowa football game at the end of the first quarter and you'll see players, coaches, and fans (Hawkeyes and their opponents!) united in one goal: to cheer on the patients at the Stead Family Children's Hospital. All 69,250 people in attendance turn and wave in the direction of the hospital, where kids, their families, and staffers gather at the big windows overlooking Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City. "It's one of the reasons I go to the game," says junior Olivia Hasselmann. Her friend, senior Rubye Ney, agrees. "It kind of forces you to stop and think about things more important than football." **R**



MATTHEW HOLST/GETTY IMAGES

EVERYDAY HEROES

The Movie Gets a New Ending

A producer discovers that the bad guy in his real-life crime drama is innocent

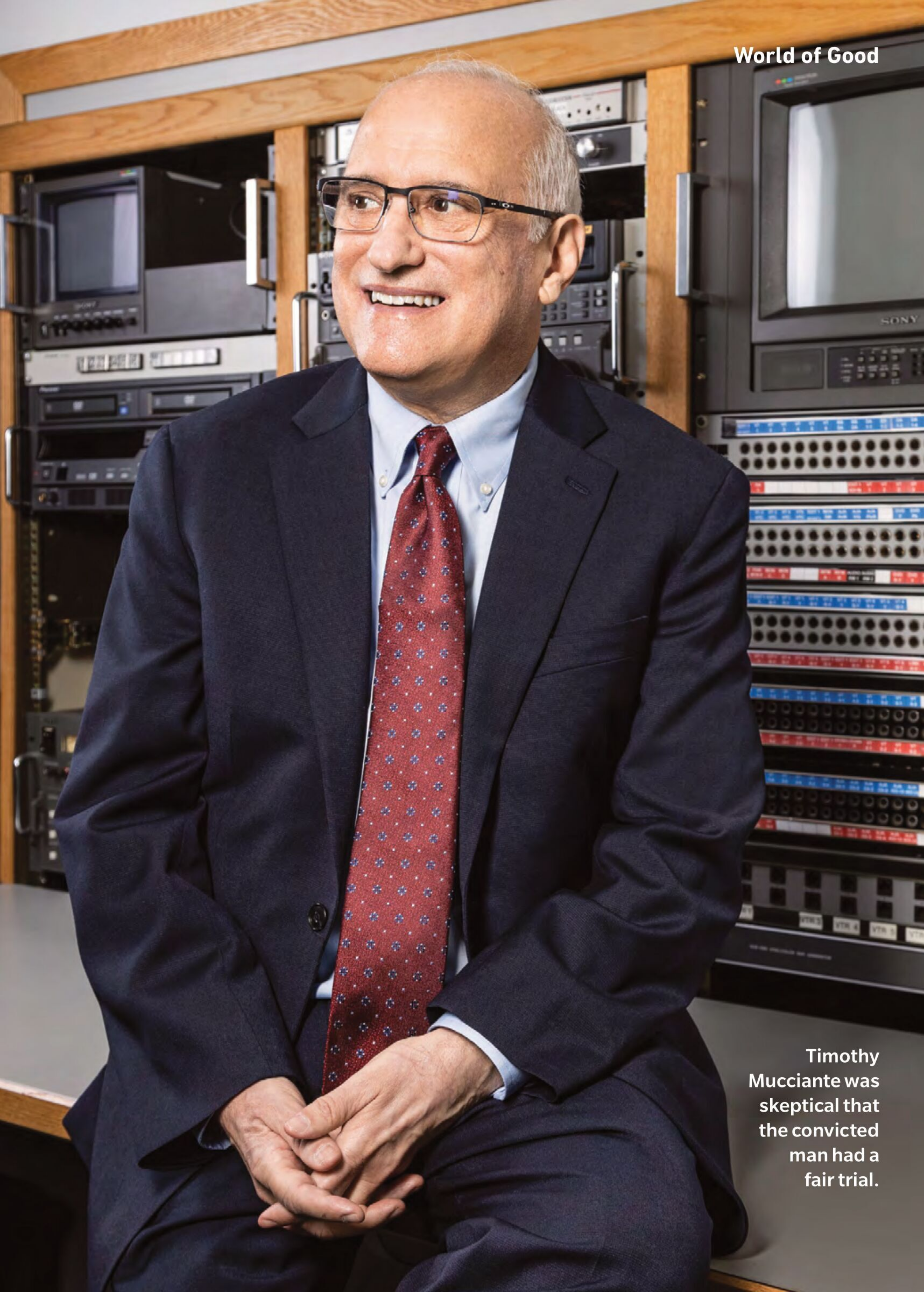
BY *Adrienne Farr*

TIMOTHY MUCCIANTE WAS an executive producer working on a film called *Lucky* when something in the script struck him as odd. The film was based on the 1999 memoir of the same title by Alice Sebold, author of *The Lovely Bones*. It recounts her sexual assault in 1981 while a freshman at Syracuse University.

It was late at night when Sebold was walking alone back to her dorm. As she entered a tunnel, a man brandishing a knife grabbed her, threw her to the ground, and raped her. The book's title came from a police officer who

said a girl had once been murdered in that tunnel. By comparison, the officer told Sebold, she'd been "lucky."

In October of that year, Sebold said a man on a Syracuse street called out, "Hey girl, don't I know you from somewhere?" Sebold mistakenly assumed that the man, Anthony Broadwater, then 20 and a Marine, was speaking to her. She became alarmed. Broadwater looked vaguely like her attacker—both were Black, and around the same size and age. Sebold called the cops, and Broadwater was arrested. Although he steadfastly proclaimed his innocence, he was convicted of eight felony counts, including first-degree rape.



Timothy Mucciante was skeptical that the convicted man had a fair trial.

He would spend 16 years in prison. Released in 1998, he had to register as a sex offender.

The crime was brutal. But was Broadwater guilty? After comparing the script to news accounts of the trial, Mucciante wasn't sure. During a police lineup, Sebold initially picked out a different man before eventually changing her mind. Not only that, Sebold later said she and the men stood only feet apart. "I knew that is not how lineups work," says Mucciante, who was no stranger to them. He was

"SOMETHING WAS VERY WRONG WITH THE VICTIM'S STORY."



in a lineup in the 1980s when he was arrested and ultimately served time for investment fraud. Victims and suspects are never that close. Was she lying? Confused? Who knows, but convinced "something was very wrong with this story," Mucciante pulled the \$5 million he put up to finance *Lucky*.

It was not a decision he made lightly. Mucciante, who had been a lawyer and journalist, had just formed his own film company a year earlier. *Lucky* was to be his big break. Using his own money, Mucciante hired a private investigator and contacted two lawyers who found numerous discrepancies in the case: A partial

fingerprint on the pocketknife used in the rape could not be linked to Broadwater; distinguishing features like a scar on Broadwater's face and his chipped tooth were never mentioned and did not appear in the police sketch; and Broadwater passed two polygraph tests. And then there was the police crime lab analyst who testified that hair found at the scene had characteristics that were consistent with Broadwater's—but the hair comparison method he used was deemed unreliable in later cases, leading to several defendants being set free.

Convinced they had enough to acquit Broadwater, the team brought their findings before a judge. On November 22, 2021, Anthony Broadwater, then 61, sat in the courtroom, his salt-and-pepper hair in cornrows, awaiting the judge's ruling. When he heard it, he let out a gasp and wept. He'd been exonerated. His name would no longer be tainted by the words "sex offender."

Sebold regrets her mistake, saying she struggles with the role she played in sending "an innocent man to jail."

Mucciante was almost as happy as Broadwater. "Watching Anthony get his life back is the biggest benefit," he says. As for his film career, Mucciante is producing a documentary about the case, called *Unlucky*. In it, Broadwater, overcome by all that Mucciante and the others did for him, struggles to find the right words. "This is amazing," he says. "It's just like, you can't fathom it, man." **R**

Bear Trap

BY *Andy Simmons*

IT WAS THE day before Thanksgiving and Kaleb Benham was pattering around outside his home in Northern California. His 90-pound pit bull, Buddy, was romping around nearby, doing what dogs do: getting into trouble. Only this time, Buddy was getting into a whole lot of trouble.

The unmistakable sound that no one wants to hear alone in the woods caught Benham's attention. It was the deep, guttural, otherworldly roar of a black bear. Benham wheeled around to see the beast, which Benham figures weighed around 350 pounds, some 100 feet away. In an instant, the bear latched on to Buddy's head and started dragging him away.

Benham, a lean, fit 24-year-old, took off after them. "Honestly," he told CBS13 in Sacramento, "the only thing I could think of was 'save my baby.'" Sprinting, he lowered his shoulder and plowed into the bear. But it only tightened its grip on Buddy. Benham grabbed the bear by the throat. Nothing. He tried prying open its mouth, but the jaw was locked tight. Benham resorted to street fighting—pummeling the bear over and over around its snout and eye. It worked. The bear dropped the dog and ran off into the woods.

Buddy was in bad shape. His face



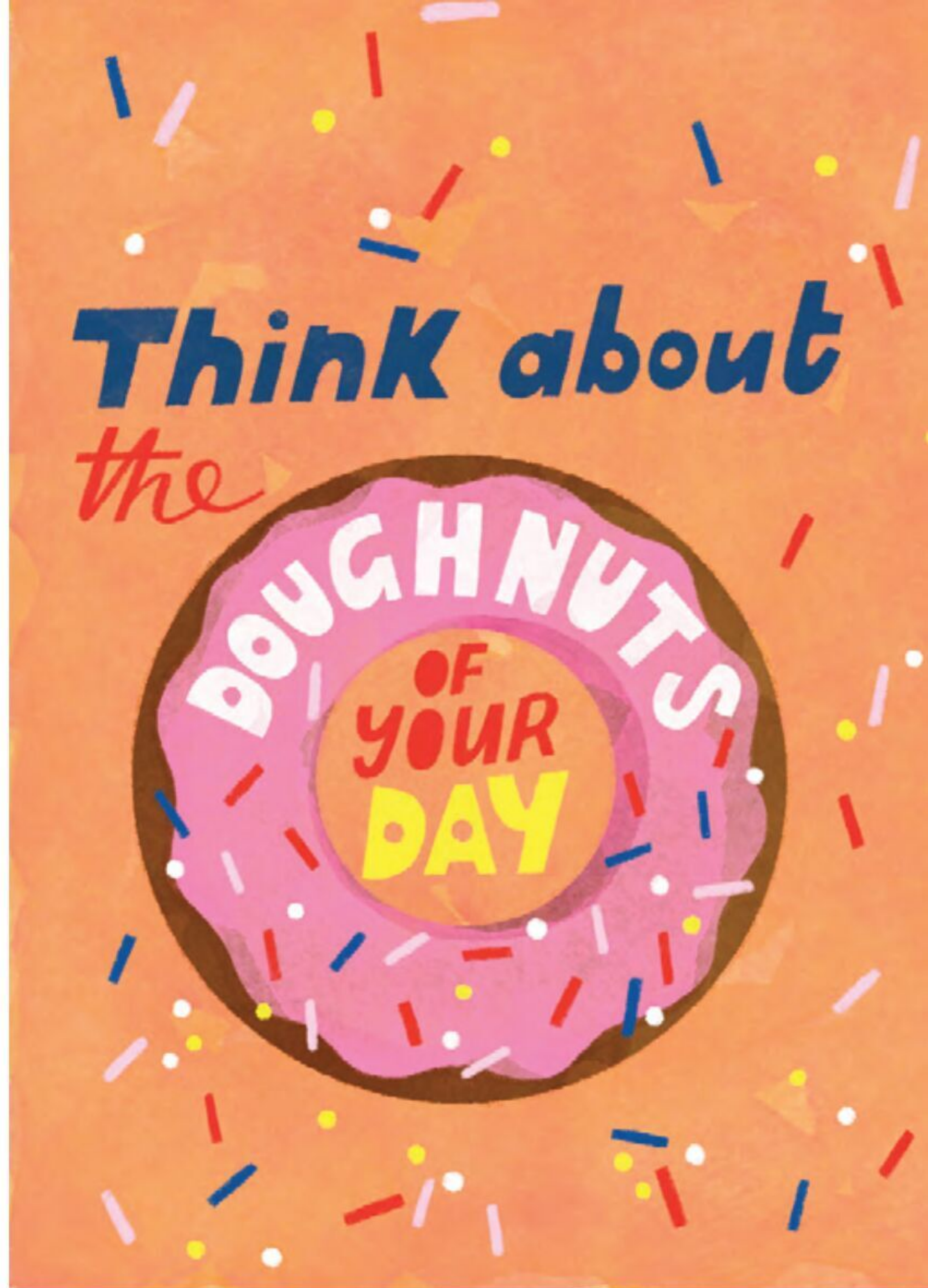
Kaleb Benham and a fully healed Buddy

was bloodied and ripped up. His ears were dangling. He had a bite mark clear through his lip and one that barely missed an eye.

"My first thought was that I was going to lose him," Benham said. He scooped up Buddy, put him into his car, and sped off to a nearby veterinarian.

Buddy's surgery took nearly four hours. Benham watched the procedure through a window. "I just stood there," he said, watching as Buddy's ears were stapled back on and skin flaps were stitched, and tubes were inserted into his head to drain fluid.

This was the second time Benham had rescued Buddy, says CBS13. The first was from a shelter a few years ago. "If it was your kid, what would you do?" he asked. Nodding toward Buddy, he added, "That's my kid." **R**



LIFE WELL LIVED

Life Advice from a Five-Year-Old

Stressed? Overwhelmed? Maybe doughnuts, dinosaurs, and Dolly Parton can help.

BY *Tara Parker-Pope*

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

WHEN GWENYTH TODEBUSH told her five-year-old son, Clark, that she was feeling anxious about a meeting, he knew he could help.

“Mama, I am nervous all the time,” he said. “I know what to do.”

What followed was a stream of uplifting advice through a five-year-old’s filter. Gwenyth posted their exchange on Twitter, and it went viral.

“Everybody is kind of coping with one kind of stress or another in a pandemic,” says Gwenyth, who lives in northern Michigan. “I think it rang true with people. I said on Twitter that he’s the only life coach I know that gets paid in goldfish crackers.”

Here is Clark’s advice, followed by brief explanations from his mother:

“You gotta say your affirmations in your mouth and your heart.”

“Another mom on Twitter talked about saying affirmations with their kid before school. We tried it. Sometimes I tell him, ‘Say it like you mean it.’ I guess he translated that.”

“You say, ‘I am brave of this meeting! I am loved! I smell good!’”

“He knows you can be ‘scared of’ something, so he talks about being ‘brave of’ things. I love the grammatical construction. I’ve never corrected it because I like it better.



I don't know where the 'I smell good' came up, but I like it. I'm going to use it a lot."

"You gotta walk big. You gotta mean it. Like Dolly on a dinosaur. Because you got it."

"He really loves Dolly Parton's 'Coat of Many Colors.' When kids are making fun of her in school, she still went in and was brave and talks to those kids. I don't know where the dinosaur thing came from."

"Never put a skunk on a bus."

"I don't know what it has to do with being nervous."

"Think about the doughnuts of your day!"

"We used to go to this little record shop. There was a room in the back and a whole section of records for a dollar. I would take him down there with a dollar bill, and he came back with a Burl Ives record from the '50s. There's a song on there called 'The Donut

Song.' It goes, 'Watch the doughnut, not the hole.' After we listened to that song a lot, that became our thing. Every night at bed he tells me about the doughnuts of his day."

"Even if you cry a little, you can think about potato chips!"

"When he's upset, sometimes I tell him to think about things he's looking forward to. Potato chips are high on his list."

"Even if it's a yucky day, you can get a hug."

"There have been so many times when there's nothing I can do. I tell him, 'Even if it's a bad day, when you get home, I'll hug you.'"

Clark didn't have other kids around during the pandemic, Gwenyth says, so she's been working with him to make the transition to school easier. Affirmations helped, though she didn't realize how much until Clark offered his own versions of them. **R**

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Oscar the Rooster

NEPTUNE, NEW JERSEY

WE WERE ALL confused when a rooster showed up in our suburban senior community, considering there are no farms nearby. The colorful bird strutted from porch to porch for corn and other goodies from generous neighbors, and then roosted in trees at night.

One neighbor, Richard, became especially close with the rooster, named Oscar by the neighbors. Richard has lingering PTSD from military service, and spending time outside with Oscar noticeably improved his outlook.

Then disaster struck: Richard was hospitalized, and while he was away, the township took Oscar. When Richard returned, he was crushed to find his friend gone. He went to the animal shelter to spring him, but there was a hefty fee for Oscar's release.

Two days later, I heard a familiar cock-a-doodle-doo. Oscar had reappeared! We're not sure how our jailbird was sprung, but we suspect a neighbor bailed him out.

Every time I hear Oscar crow, I'm grateful that Richard's life is a bit more livable thanks to Oscar's company. **R**

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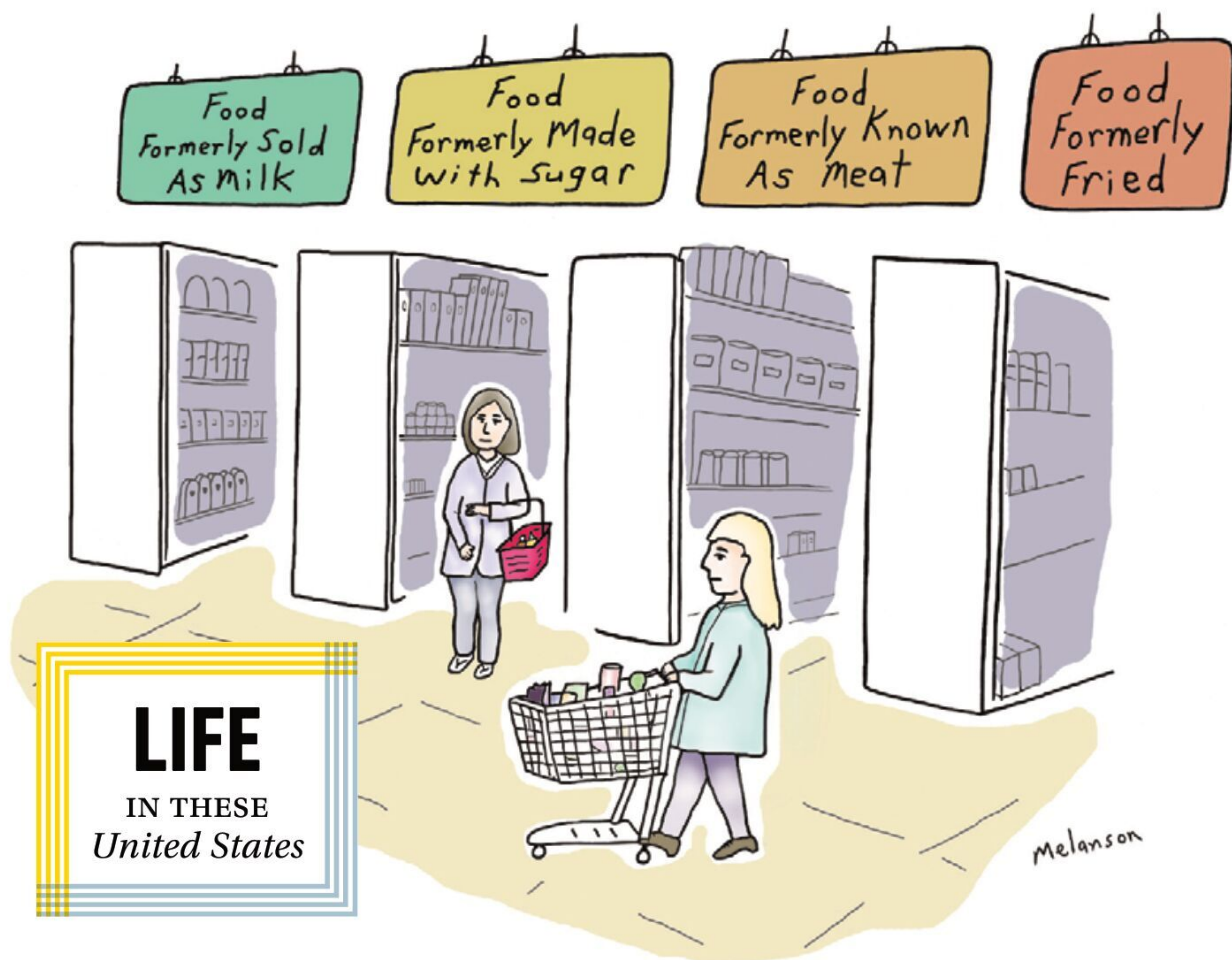
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Whenever my three-year-old grandson comes to visit, we inevitably play Army. I'm the lowly private and he's the general barking out orders. "Soldier, do this! Soldier, do that!" One day, while we were playing, he needed to use the bathroom. A few minutes later, the door opened and there he stood, his pants around his ankles,

shouting, "Soldier! I can't get my pants up!"
—KATHY DEVER
Park City, Illinois

The guy in front of me in the grocery store checkout line was buying just three things: a case of beer, a carton of cigarettes, and a gallon of milk. The total came to \$75. He stood there for a moment in disbelief before asking the

cashier, "How much was that milk?"
—BRYAN ISELT
Lexington, Texas

Forget about endless school concerts. The worst part of the school year is the morning drop-off:
♦ **Commute to school:** 3 minutes
Wait in the drop-off line: 3-4 business days.
—[@MOMSENSE_ENSUES](#)
♦ My husband is

helping me relax by taking the kids to school this morning. We went over the drop-off procedure 37 times and he just left without one of the kids.

—@MARYFAIRYBOBRRY

◆ **Me at school drop-off:** Have a good day.

Six-year-old: You can't make me!

—@XPLODINGUNICORN

I've been running for more than half of my life, and I admit, it's possible that I've slowed down a step

I've never meditated. The closest I've come to thinking about nothing for 30 minutes is the time my husband talked about his fantasy football league.

—@MOMMAJESSIEC

or two. Recently, I was grinding up a steep hill when I passed a 77-year-old neighbor in his driveway. "Nice day for a walk," he said.

—BILL DEANE

Cooperstown, New York

I'm supposed to give my wife an injection today but she's worried

cuz she's seen my many struggles with Capri Sun straws.

—@DADDYGOFISH

YOUR FUNNY STORY about family and friends could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, go to page 2 or RD.COM/SUBMIT.

AH, THE JOYS OF PARENTHOOD

My six-year-old, to her crying brother: It's OK to be sad. Sometimes we need to let our feelings out. Just let yourself be sad.

Me: Oh darling, that's so lovely. Well done. Why is he crying anyway?

My six-year-old: I hit him.

—@ELSPELLS13

I walked in on my three-year-old pumping all

of our hand soap into the bathroom sink, all while chanting "wasting soap, wasting soap" to himself.

—@NULLSTATEOFMIND

Six: So, you'll never get taller?

Me: Nope, I can't grow taller.

Six: Only fatter, right?

—@HOMEWITHPEANUT

Me: Yes, you were in my belly.

My three-year-old, with tears in her eyes: Why ... why did you eat me?

—@GOINGBYRENEE

You may be tough, but you're not "just sat through a 4th grade recorder concert" tough.

—@MCDADSTUFF



EVERYDAY MIRACLES



A Gem of a Proposal

BY *Cathy Free*

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

CHRISTIAN LIDEN WAS in eighth grade when he hatched a grandiose plan to create a personalized engagement ring for his future fiancée. Never mind that he didn't have a girlfriend. If a natural diamond could take billions of years to form, he figured he could be patient.

Liden decided that he would not pick out a ring in a jeweler's case like most other people. Instead, he would go into the wild to find his own materials: the diamond, the gold, the accompanying gemstones. Everything.

"I've always been a rock hound, so, to me, this is the perfect way to get an engagement ring," said Liden, who lives in Poulsbo, Washington, near Seattle. "Actually, it's the only way. I couldn't imagine not making it myself."

Last year, Liden decided that it was finally time to put his plan into action. He and his girlfriend, Desirae Klokkevold, had been together for more than five years.

"I knew that I wanted to marry her, and I also wanted to surprise her," says

Liden, who works for his family's excavating business.

So, in May 2021, Liden told Klokkevold that he and Josh Tucker, his best friend since sixth grade, were heading out on a camping trip to Yellowstone.

He and Tucker made their way instead to Crater of Diamonds State Park in Murfreesboro, Arkansas, which is set on an eroded volcanic crater. The park is one of the few places in the world where the public is welcome to search for real diamonds—and keep what they find.

About 33,000 diamonds have been found at Crater of Diamonds since it opened in 1972. Most are fairly small. Only 1 in 10,000 park visitors is lucky enough to find a diamond that weighs a carat or more.

Liden knew that the odds of finding anything spectacular were minuscule. Still, he was up for the challenge.

He had started panning for gold around his home state years earlier and now had enough to make the ring band. On the way to Crater of Diamonds, Liden and Tucker had stopped in Helena, Montana, to mine for sapphires. There they found a couple of small beauties to add to the diamond they hoped to score.

In Arkansas, the pair paid \$10 each to get into the park and got to work. They spent almost three days sifting through the volcanic dirt.

On the third morning, Liden suddenly spotted something reflecting light in the gravel on his sifting screen:

a shiny pebble a bit larger than a pea. “I was so excited that I started shaking, and I called Josh over to take a look,” he says.

Tucker let out a whoop when he saw the stone. “It was oily and shiny, and we both just knew it was a diamond,” he says. “We freaked out a little bit—we couldn't believe it.”

WHEN HE RETURNED, HE CONFESSED TO HIS GIRLFRIEND.



The two quickly took the find to the park office, where it was confirmed that Liden had found a 2.2-carat triangular yellow diamond.

Similarly sized diamonds go for \$2,500 to \$20,000 per carat, depending on color, cut, and clarity. But the value wasn't what was important to Liden.

“To me, it was priceless,” he says. “I'd found Desirae's diamond.”

When he returned to Poulsbo, Liden confessed to his girlfriend that he hadn't been in Yellowstone.

“Then I pulled out the diamond and got on my knee,” he says. “I told Desirae that I'd like to design a ring for her if she'd marry me.”

She was stunned. “I knew that he was going to propose someday,” Klokkevold says, “but I certainly didn't expect this.” She said yes. **R**

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We Found a

FIX

HELP, HACKS,
& HOW TO

1 COOKING
Preserve Your Herbs
Once you have a nice dinner on the table, it's difficult to predict when you'll be up to such gourmet cooking again. But don't let those handfuls of chopped rosemary, oregano, thyme, and dill go to waste. Freeze leftover herbs in olive oil in an ice cube tray, then while warming a pan for your next *pièce de résistance*, toss in a cube or two to melt. The herb-olive oil mixture will leave the pan both lubricated and seasoned.

SOURCE: RD.COM



2 **MONEY** Turn Gift Cards into Savings

No matter how badly you want something, it's hard not to dip into the money you keep setting aside. To make sure those funds stay untouched, buy and save gift cards until you have the amount you need. Want a new laptop? Throw down on Apple gift cards. Need a new dishwasher? Put your extra cash into Home Depot gift cards. This way, you can't dip into your shiny-new-object fund. You may be motivated to save even faster if the cards have expiration dates.

SOURCE: LIFEHACKER.COM

3 **TRAVEL** Plan "Green" Plane Trips

Want to be kind to the earth while seeing every corner of it? Search on Google Flights and use the "Any emissions" filter to see how many kilograms of carbon dioxide are emitted by each available flight based on flight plan, aircraft, and number of seats in each class. You can even filter by "Low emissions only" to see the greenest flights available.

SOURCE: APNEWS.COM

4 **HOME** Magnetize a Screwdriver

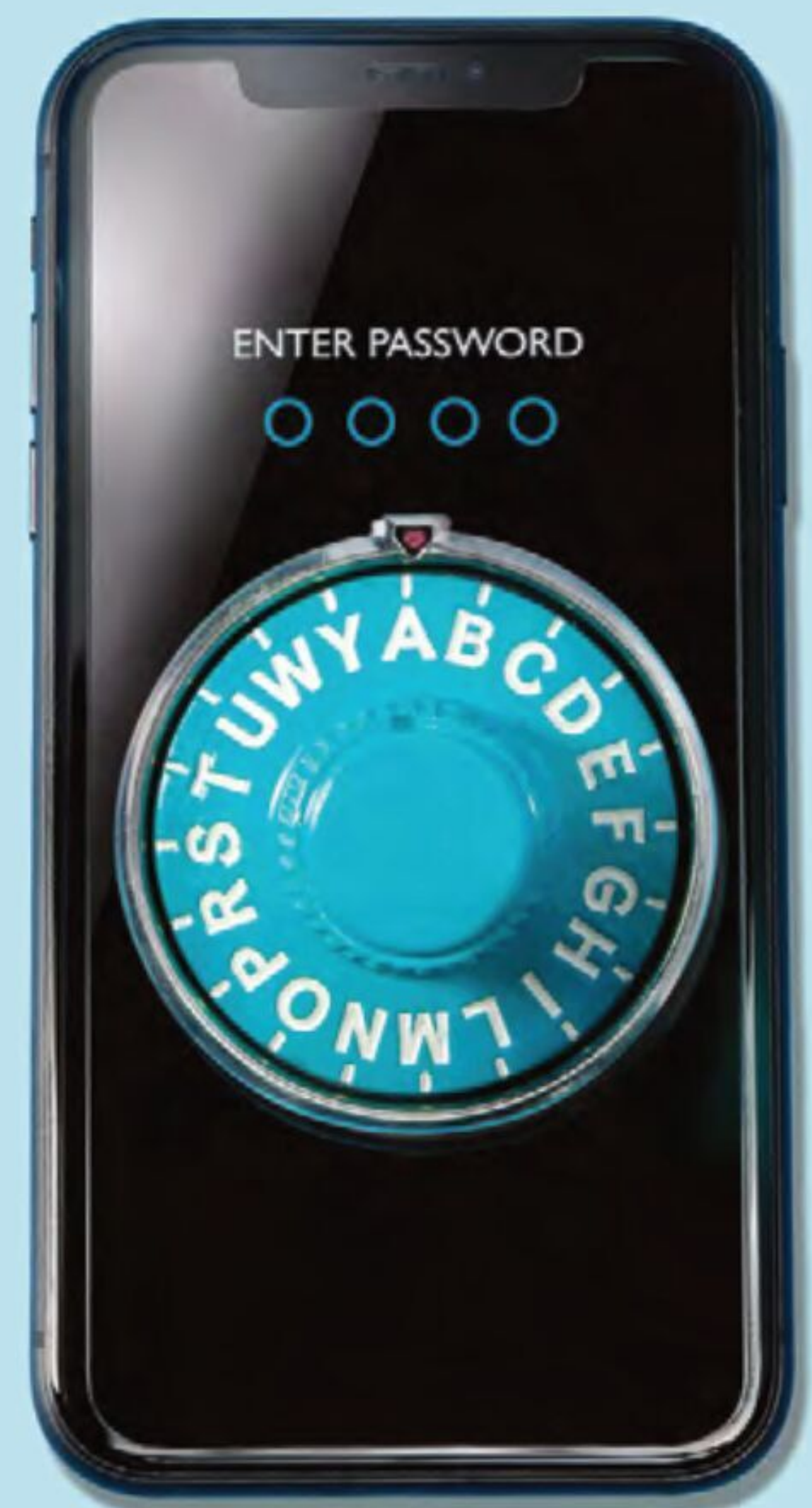
The next time you go to war with an IKEA table, place a small magnet on the metal part of your screwdriver. Screws will automatically attach to the tip of the screwdriver so you won't have to hold each screw in place with one hand while you twist the screwdriver handle with the other. It'll make a complicated project much easier.

SOURCE: FAMILYHANDYMAN.COM

5 **TECH** Scramble Your Passwords, Not Your Brain

The best passwords are so good, so unguessable, that everyone (sometimes even you, apparently) gets locked out. Instead of using something obvious (no pet names!) or going through the hassle of password recovery, try this trick that cyber security experts recommend: Choose a short phrase, lyric, or quote that you'll remember. Then, swap in numbers and symbols that resemble the letters. For example, rewrite "No place like home" as "n0-Pl@ce_L1k3-ho^3." It'll still be memorable but a lot more secure. For even further security, refrain from making that lyric or quote your Facebook status. **R**

SOURCE: RD.COM





TMB STUDIO



HOW TO

Learn a Language as an Adult

Contrary to conventional thinking, it isn't too late

BY *Emily Goodman*

FOR MORE THAN two years, Dulcie Shoener of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has done daily German lessons on her smartphone. To some, that might sound like self-imposed homework, but Shoener, a language lover and the copy chief for *Reader's Digest* and other publications, doesn't see it that way.

"I enjoy it so much," she says. "It's a delight to be able to read a short story in German."

To be able to read, write, or carry on a conversation in another language is a feat few Americans attempt, let alone achieve. Just 7 percent of our university students study a language other than English, and less than 1 percent of American adults are proficient in a foreign language they studied in school.

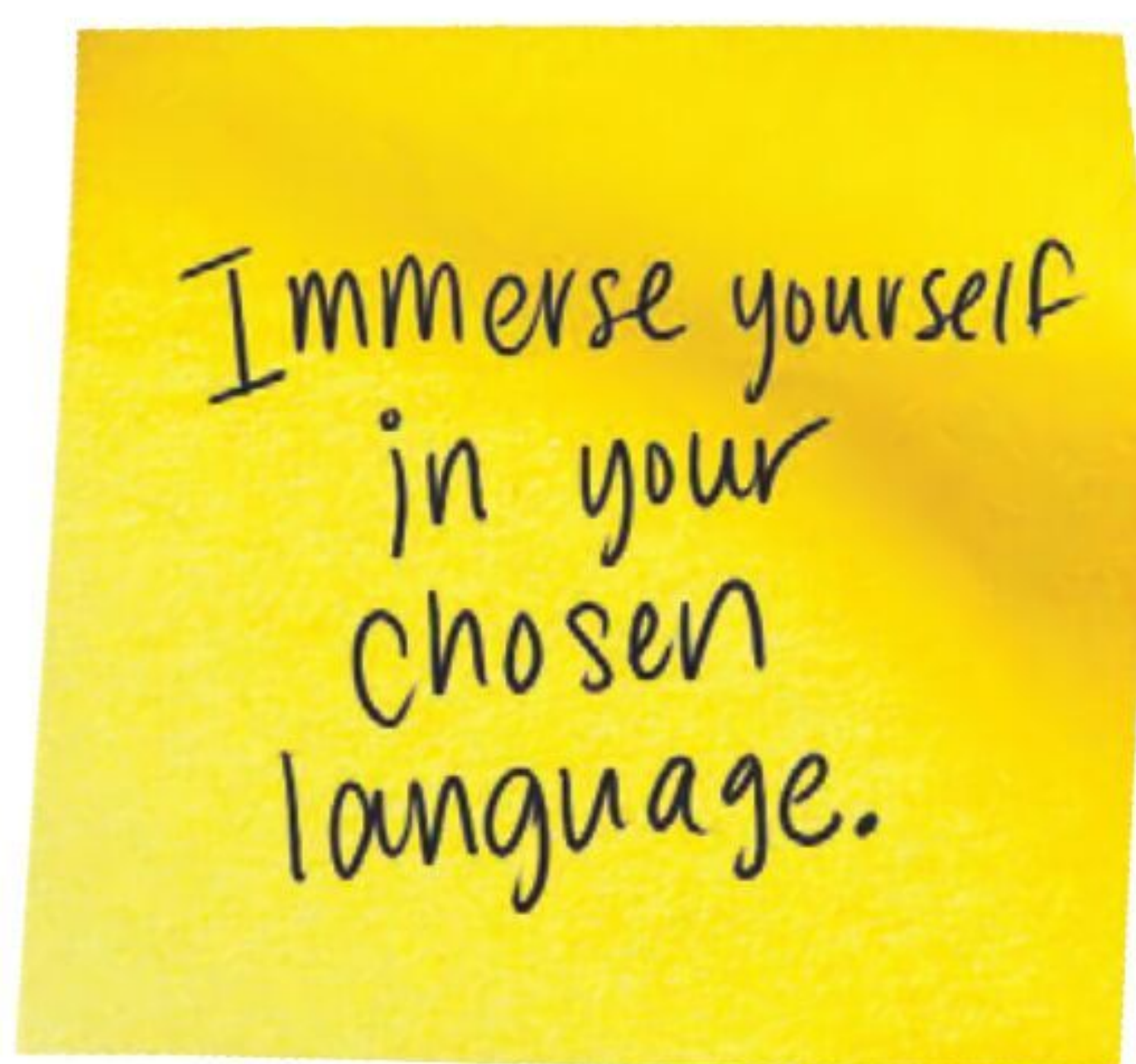
Of her college German, Shoener says, "I remembered very little."

Yet the rewards for those who do learn a second (or third, or fourth...) language are profound: increased travel opportunities, of course, but also improved memory, focus, and ability to multitask. Bilingual brains are better shielded against cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's disease. And, according to a poll conducted by the language app Babel, knowing multiple languages can make you seem more attractive.

So, why aren't more of us multilingual—or trying to be? There are dozens of decent answers to that question, but one common retort doesn't have much merit at all: the idea that adults, especially older ones,

just can't learn languages as easily as children can.

Linguists have long debated how old is too old to acquire a language, but newer research is refuting the idea wholesale. "There is no magical point at which it becomes impossible to learn a new language," says Alison Gabriele, PhD, of the University of Kansas, who led a study published last



year showing that adult learners—even as beginners—could process sentence structures in new languages much like native speakers. Separate research at Cambridge University recently found that language instruction affects adults and children the same way.

While it's true that children tend to pick up new languages quickly and easily, this has more to do with how they learn than how old they are when they do. Kids absorb and infer lots of information about language simply by listening: to family, friends, teachers, and the media around them. It happens without much thought or effort on their part and, when they do put in effort, it's because they want to

understand the story, joke, or game that's going on. By contrast, adults tend to learn in rigid academic settings where they have little say in what they study and where the stakes are also higher. What Shoener can recall from her German classes is the pressure to maintain her grade point average. "I was horrified of making mistakes," she says. "Now I'm not afraid, and I know I'm doing better than I did in college."

If you dream of being bilingual, your age does not disqualify you. Make the process more fun—and, by extension, more successful—with these tips:

Find your motivation.

Wish you had paid more attention in high school Spanish? Consider why you didn't. Perhaps all you wanted out of the class was a good grade, or to fulfill a graduation requirement. Linguists call these incentives "extrinsic motivators," but the most successful language students are "intrinsically" motivated, sincerely invested in their own learning. So pick a language you are excited to use, whether on a grand vacation in Spain or on your couch watching Spanish soap operas.

Pick your tools.

It might take some trial and error, but you'll figure out which resources work best for you. Mobile apps such as Duolingo and Babbel gamify your learning, so if you could easily spend

hours playing on your phone, you'll likely find these similarly addictive. Others such as Rosetta Stone and Pimsleur are less gimmicky but more rigorously researched. Consider a conversation-based class on Italki or Idlewild. And don't neglect books. McGraw Hill and Barron's offer excellent textbooks, grammar guides, and workbooks with answer keys to let you see how you're doing. But you may enjoy children's stories more, with their simple vocabulary and easy-to-understand narratives.

Dive in.

Immerse yourself in your chosen language as much as you can. Watch movies or listen to songs, even if they are just on in the background. Periodically look around you and see how many things you can name in the language you're studying. Or, better yet, label items around your home with those words. You'll have no choice but to see them and, in very little time, learn them.

Get social.

Practicing with other people helps solidify what you've already learned and makes you more aware of which ideas you're able to express. These need not be native speakers you chat with, though various websites and apps such as languageexchange.com, HelloTalk, and TalkAbroad can connect you with some, either free or for a small fee.

Don't sweat your mistakes.

Kids get it wrong all the time. They'll say, for instance, that they "goed" to school and played with other "childs." But inherent in these errors is an understanding of the general rules: We use "-ed" as a suffix to put an action in the past, we add "-s" to make things plural, and so on. Although kids often misapply these rules, they pick up on the patterns and use them in novel situations. This is what successful language learners do. Sometimes you'll miss the mark as you unknowingly stumble on an irregular verb or an exception to the rule. But more often you'll be right. And even when you do falter, those who are fluent should still be able to understand what you mean.

Try less.

It seems counterintuitive, but you're more receptive to pick up on language patterns when you aren't hyper-focused on learning them. So rather than stare intently at a vocabulary list, glance over the words while you listen to instrumental music. Or enjoy a glass of wine ahead of conversation practice. As research at the University of Liverpool has shown, our ability to speak a second language improves after a bit of alcohol. Or turn on subtitles in the language you're learning even as you watch TV in English. But don't devote your full attention to them—just enjoy the show and absorb what you can. The less you stress, the more you'll be able to learn. **R**

HUMOR *in*
UNIFORM

I asked a new trainee when he needed to hand in his paperwork.

Trainee: The training manager said any time after a thousand.

Me: A thousand? A thousand what? A thousand clicks? A thousand minutes?

Trainee: That's all her message said. See? (shows me the message, which does indeed say "After 1000.")

Me: OK, that's ten-hundred, as in, 10 a.m.

—NOTALWAYSRIGHT.COM

I was in the chow line staring at a measly, lonely potato on my plate. "Is that all I get?" I asked the cook.

Taking pity, he asked, "Would you like two?"

"Yes, please."



"No, my memo isn't encrypted. The spell-check broke."

"Sure thing." He reached over with his spatula and cut my potato in half. "There, now you have two."

—KENNETH FRAGMIN
*Mount Clare,
West Virginia*

Military personnel are an optimistic bunch. During an ROTC class on defensive positioning, someone asked our instructor, "What do we do

if we're surrounded?"

"Son," the instructor said, "never think of yourself as being 'surrounded.' Look at it as being in a target-rich environment."

—EDWARD ROUSE
*Mechanicsburg,
Pennsylvania*

YOUR FUNNY MILITARY story could be worth \$\$\$**.** For details, go to P. 2 or **RD.COM/SUBMIT.**

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Bubble Tea Blows Up

BY *Sarah Jinee Park*

WHEN BUBBLE TEA was first introduced to the United States about 30 years ago, you could get it only in mom-and-pop shops in big-city Chinatown and Koreatown. Now it's popping up in cafés around the country; Baskin-Robbins even offered a version this spring and summer.

Classic bubble tea is black tea brewed with milk and sugar, then poured over ice and tapioca pearls (also known as balls or boba; bubble tea is often called boba), and served with an oversized straw so you can slurp up a pearl or two with each sip. Made from tapioca starch extracted from cassava root, these marble-sized pearls traditionally are boiled and caramelized in brown sugar syrup, giving them their dark color and sweet flavor. (Just take care not to swallow the pearls whole; they're meant to be chewed and savored.)

On most bubble tea menus, you'll find an array of options for the tea itself, including green, matcha, jasmine, chai, and even fruity herbal varieties. Some favorites in Asia are lychee, white peach, and taro, which has a nutty vanilla flavor. You can then top your tea with flavored jellies, fruit, ice cream, custard, and mochi (a sweet Japanese rice cake) to make it even more indulgent.

Several Taiwanese teahouses claim to be the birthplace of bubble tea, though Chun Shui Tang in Taichung has perhaps the most perpetuated origin story: Its owner started serving chilled tea in the early 1980s after seeing coffee served cold in Japan. A few years later, a staffer poured tapioca balls straight into her cup, and the fantastic fusion was born. Whether or not this was truly the case, bubble tea has a relatively short history despite the fact that drinking milky tea and eating starchy desserts are both long-standing Southeast Asian traditions.

Some shops use a machine to seal the cup with cellophane so it's easy to tote around without spilling. But the process doesn't have to be so high-tech: You can even make bubble tea at home. In fact, you likely already have all of the ingredients—minus the tapioca pearls, which you can make yourself, though it's far easier to buy them online or from an Asian grocery store. While you're there, also pick up some fat straws. Slurp and enjoy! **R**

HOW TO MAKE IT

Start with 1 cup tapioca pearls (enough for two to four servings of bubble tea). Boil 3 cups of water, cook pearls until they float, then keep them on the heat for about a minute more. Rinse pearls in cool water, drain, and put them in a jar with some simple syrup. Next, brew the tea, letting it steep a little longer than if you planned to drink it plain. Sweeten to taste, and chill. Place pearls in a tall glass, fill two-thirds of the way with tea, then top with your favorite milk. Stir with a straw and sip.



13 THINGS

A Celebration of 100th Birthdays

BY *Emily Goodman*



1 THIS LITTLE magazine just celebrated a big birthday: Our February issue marked a century of circulation. We want to fete our fellow centenarians, such as the Newbery Medal, which honors outstanding children's literature. The first winner: *The Story of Mankind* by Hendrik Willem Van Loon.

2 IF YOU happen to drive a Jaguar with Belle Tires and insure your car with State Farm, then your road trips are sponsored by 100-year-old companies. The United Services Automobile Association, or USAA, which serves

RUTHBLACK/GETTY IMAGES (CAKE), ARTISS/GETTY IMAGES (CANDLES)

those in the military community, was also founded in 1922. The original members were 25 Army officers who all insured one another's vehicles.

3 A CENTURY ago, the New York City radio station WEAJ aired the first-ever radio commercial, a whopping 15-minute-long real estate ad for available properties in Queens. Later that year, the BBC was formed, and the popularity of this new medium of radio helped usher the word "broadcast" into the dictionary.

4 OTHER WORDS that got official entries in 1922 include "by-pass" (as in the road), "sidecar" (as in the cocktail), "tracksuit," and "polyester." "Eye shadow" was also added that year, even though it's been worn since the time of ancient Egypt. (Egypt also formally gained its independence in 1922.)

5 THE BLENDER was born 100 years ago. Its inventor: Stephen Poplawski, a Polish immigrant to Racine, Wisconsin (also the home of Horlicks Malted Milk). Poplawski's blender helped make the modern milkshake possible. And, in fact, the first shake made with ice cream came together at a Chicago Walgreens in the summer of 1922.

6 AMERICA'S FIRST chocolate-covered ice cream bar, the Eskimo Pie (renamed Edy's Pie in 2021), was patented in 1922. Creator Christian Kent Nelson partnered with chocolatier Russell Stover on the treat, then the pair sold the manufacturing rights to a few ice cream companies in Iowa. They were an instant hit, as the first 250,000 bars sold out within 24 hours.

7 GUMMY BEARS are also a century-old sweet. They were invented in Germany

(where *Gummibär* translates to "rubber bear") by Hans Riegel for his candy company, Haribo. To celebrate, the confectionery giant is offering special edition bags all year with blue raspberry-flavored party hats as well as single-flavor bags—a longtime fan request.

8 THE FIRST example of skywriting in the United States happened in May 1922, when Royal Air Force Capt. Cyril Turner wrote "Hello USA" over New York City. The following day he took to the skies again to write "Call Vanderbilt 7200," referencing the hotel where he was staying. Over the next few hours, the hotel received 47,000 calls.

9 WATERSKIING WAS invented 100 years ago by a daring Minnesota teenager named Ralph Samuelson, who held on to a clothesline while his brother Ben towed him behind a boat in Lake

Pepin. Samuelson then spent years developing his own waterskiing equipment but never patented any of it, so he likely never saw any money for it.

10 ROSE BOWL Stadium in Pasadena, California, opened in late 1922 and has hosted the New Year's Day tradition every year since with only two exceptions: first in 1942, due to fears of another Japanese attack following Pearl Harbor, and again in 2021, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Centre Court at Wimbledon opened for matches in June 1922.

11 PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S soccer also has 100 years of history in the United

States, sparked by a British ban on the sport. The English Football Association declared soccer "utterly unladylike" in 1921, so in 1922, one of the United Kingdom's best women's teams came to play in America—against men. Although the athletes finished their nine-game series in the States with three wins, three losses, and three draws, they left with something of a trophy: a soccer ball signed by President Warren G. Harding.

12 THE LINCOLN Memorial celebrated its centennial in May. After all this time, several false notions about the monument persist. Some say, for instance, there's a face on the back of Lincoln's

head. (This is merely a fanciful interpretation of his hair.) Others claim there is typo in his Second Inaugural Address on the north wall of the memorial. While an engraver did initially carve a wrong letter, the mistake was corrected almost immediately.

13 A FEW beloved characters turn 100 this year: Smitty, the office boy from the eponymous comic strip that ran for 50 years in hundreds of newspapers; Walt Disney's Julius the Cat; and the kids' classic the Velveteen Rabbit. The little plush bunny who came to life reminds us that in order to be real, you must first be loved. And for 100 years, our readers have made us at *RD* feel very *real*. **R**



Are You as Good as Your Word?

In a survey of nearly 2,000 Americans, 58 percent of respondents admitted that they've used a word to try to sound smarter—despite not knowing what it meant.

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ALL
in a Day's
WORK

School administrators frown upon bus drivers' letting our students off before 8:15 a.m. But one day, at a little after 8, it began to rain, and a concerned driver announced over her radio, "I'm letting my kids off now so they go into school dry."

A fellow driver agreed. "Good idea. They smell even worse when they're wet."

—JOHN PICKERL
Wheaton, Illinois

I opened an envelope from one of our customers regarding an accidental life insurance policy on her spouse. The request



"Do you have any true-crime podcasts?"

was simple and to the point. Handwritten boldly across the invoice in red ink, it read: "Please cancel this policy. My husband is dead, and it was *no* accident."

—KATHLEEN
JOHNSON SIMMONS
Omaha, Nebraska

Vacation's over, back to work!

◆ After taking a week of vacation, I like to slowly ease back into my workload. This process typically takes 51 weeks.

— @RODLACROIX
◆ I wrote up a to-do list of things for when

We have plumbers working in our house. I just heard one of them say "Lefty loosey, righty tighty." I know we're in good hands.

— @ROLLININTHESEAT

I'm back from vacation. It was so long I gasped and wrote "Write to-do list" at the top so I could cross one thing off.

—@KARENCHEEE

◆ Listen to me. If you haven't returned from vacation yet, *do not return. Stay there. wherever you are. Keep that OOO up.* It's too late for me, but save yourselves!

—@THEFEROCITY

Text message exchange between reporter Doug Wolfe of WAND TV in Decatur, Illinois, and a local viewer:

Viewer: Can you please tell me if the interstate is safe to drive?

Wolfe: IDOT is asking everyone to stay off the interstate unless absolutely necessary.

Viewer: Why call me an idiot? I was asking because a friend is taking that road to work.

Wolfe: IDOT stands for Illinois Department of Transportation.

—@WANDTVDOUG

BACK TO WORK				
B	I	N	G	O
Ask for the WiFi password	Think (NOT say) "I thought you'd be tall"	Find a desiccated spider in desk	Realize that real life has no mute button	"I didn't recognize you with a mask on."
Google your office building's address	"How do I call IT again?"	Buy "fancy" leggings or sweat-pants	"Is this food/drink/medicine still good?"	Pretend to text to avoid hallway small talk
RIP, potted plant	Office crush no longer attractive		Eat stale celebratory doughnuts	Introvert realizes they like people after all
"It feels as if we never left."	Reunite with favorite printer, which then jams	Zoom meeting in your cube	Wow, that coworker chews loudly	"Did you get COVID? I got COVID."
Wonder if bottled water expires	Enter wrong restroom	2020 hand sanitizer has evaporated	Temporary nostalgia for commute	Extrovert realizes they like being alone

ADAPTED FROM NPR

While volunteering in a hospital during college, I was tasked with feeding an elderly patient who didn't have the strength to do it himself. When his tray arrived, I picked up the utensils and asked, "Would you like me to use a spoon or a fork?"

He replied, "That depends on your aim."

—SANDY SPEER

Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania

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[§]Milk Chocolate with Caffeine and Café Mocha flavors have 100mg of caffeine, as much as an 8-oz cup of coffee.

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Beyond Burnout

*What to do when
(or ideally, before) stress
reaches epic proportions*

—
BY *Leslie Finlay*

AMERICA IS SERIOUSLY stressed out. According to The American Institute of Stress, even before the pandemic 94 percent of workers said that they regularly felt stressed. And more recently, the American Psychological Association reported that the country's collective stress had reached alarming levels. We all get busy sometimes, but feeling constantly and chronically swamped, worried, and overwhelmed can lead to burnout, which can have serious consequences.

Think of burnout as stress taken to another level. “Typically, burnout is defined as an extreme state of psychological strain,” says YoungAh Park, an associate professor at the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois. It’s a response to facing prolonged, chronic stressors that go beyond your ability or available resources to overcome.

Because so many of us frequently feel stressed, it can be hard to recognize when the line has been crossed. True burnout is different from feeling overextended. Michael Leiter, a professor of psychology at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, explains, “Burnout combines three key dimensions: overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism, and a sense of discouragement, inadequacy, or low accomplishment.”

Feeling exhausted when you begin working is a red flag. “This is a sign

that demands are building faster than you can recover from them,” he says. That fatigue evolves into feelings such as pessimism and withdrawal, “becoming grumpy and cynical about work you used to love—especially feeling that way toward people you’re supposed to care about.”

That’s the end stage of burnout, but it takes a while to get there. “At first, we might find ourselves experiencing hyperactivity, trying to manage our stressors by frantically working to reduce them, and juggling more and more simultaneously,” says Emily Balcetis, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at New York University. Unfortunately, this desperation can contribute to making mistakes, losing concentration, or even starting to feel emotionally unhinged—all of which pave the way for more chronic issues to develop.

I TRIED IT...

Sleep Apps for Insomnia



As someone living with fibromyalgia and psoriatic arthritis, I often struggle to fall asleep. Nighttime stretches and white noise machines rarely helped, so I decided to try some sleep apps. The one that worked best was Aura. It offers bedtime stories, soothing sounds, meditations, insights from psychologists, even hypnosis—not just for sleep but for well-being all day long. It also has personalized

suggestions based on information I shared, such as how long it takes me to drift off. By the end of the weeklong free trial, I was falling asleep peacefully, which made the \$60 annual fee seem worth the investment. —*Jennifer Huizen*



Living at a burnout level of sustained stress can lead to serious health consequences, including problematic sleep patterns, digestion woes, and even a greater risk for depression, heart problems, diabetes, and weight gain, according to Balcetis. Perhaps most frightening, a study published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* found that people who experience chronic burnout have up to a 35 percent greater risk of early mortality.

Before the stress in your life ramps up to that level, know that experts say there are proactive steps you can take to prevent burnout:

Look for meaning at work

We can tolerate stress longer if we believe we're doing something purposeful and worthwhile. Balcetis says we're

more likely to experience chronic, burnout-inducing stress when something seems out of our control, against our will, or totally meaningless. Try to identify ways in which even the smallest of your daily tasks contributes to the lives of others. "Take stock of what's on your plate," Balcetis says. "If you can, cut or outsource one or two of those things that don't personally give you meaning."

Look for meaning outside of work

If you're struggling to make your work meaningful, prioritizing life outside of work might be especially beneficial. Research published in *BMC Medicine* shows that people more likely to experience a greater sense of engagement when on the job are those with a hobby—the ultimate burnout buffer.

Try to separate work and home/outside life

“With boundaries blurring between work and nonwork these days, research has suggested that there are some tactics individuals can use,” Park says. She suggests turning off work e-mail notifications on your phone, using separate e-mail accounts for work and personal life, and setting up boundaries—physical and temporal—between work and personal life, especially if you work from home.

Don't neglect yourself

“Neglecting your diet or eating fast foods or comfort foods can become a way of dealing with stress, but it will rob your body and brain of nutrients necessary to facilitate energy and regulate moods,” says Benjamin Maxson, AMFT, a family therapist in Orange County, California. Physical activity is essential to shaking out stress hormones too. “Many individuals are less active when under stress in order to rest,” Maxson says. But movement is the most natural evolutionary response to our body's stress. While you don't have to run away from a mountain lion these days, even light movement helps “complete” the stress cycle, flushing stress hormones out of the bloodstream.

Recognize when it has become too much

Talk to your supervisors when you feel your job should be more manageable,

rewarding, and under your control. “It's very common for superiors to continue to increase tasks over time,” Maxson says, adding that if we don't communicate our needs or limitations, they may be overlooked. If you don't expect things will improve, consider changing jobs or even careers.

For nurse Wendy Reynolds, director of a hospital intensive care unit in Pennsylvania, stress had always been part of the job. Then the pandemic hit, and the stress ramped up to a whole new level. “I wasn't sleeping, always had a headache, and was always anxious and worried about everything,” she says. “I knew I needed to leave.”

She realized the ICU had become too much for her, and the stress and long hours weren't fair to her family, either. She solved her burnout problem by transitioning into a health-care administration role where she can manage her work-life balance while still having a career that aligns with her passion for clinical health care.

“I love my new job,” she says. “I actually see my family now, and I can use my clinical skills to help leaders at other hospitals improve workflows for their staff, so it's very rewarding.”

If you do feel burned out, therapy can help you process work-related stress and learn coping strategies, and it can teach you to communicate with your employer and set healthy boundaries. Maxson says cognitive behavioral therapy is especially effective for dealing with workplace burnout. **R**

Forget Those Crazy Skin-Care Trends

BY *Leslie Finlay*



IN CONTRAST TO some of the rejuvenating skin-care trends out there—*vampire facials?* *bee venom serums?*—dermatologists consider tretinoin the gold standard for keeping skin smooth and glowing.

Tretinoin is a vitamin A derivative called a retinoid. It was originally studied in the 1960s to treat keratotic disorders—conditions that cause the skin to become thick and painful. Researchers recognized that tretinoin also worked to fight acne and started prescribing it in the 1970s. By the 1980s, people were using it to treat fine lines, wrinkles, and sun damage. Tretinoin is still available only by

prescription, in topical creams and gels sold under brand names such as Retin-A, Renova, and Avita.

Brooke Jackson, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in Durham, North Carolina, says tretinoin works as an exfoliant, irritating skin to speed up natural cell turnover. “As your skin cells turn over faster, the dull, dry, damaged skin will be replaced with brand-new skin cells,” she says.

“Tretinoin can also regulate the genes involved in collagen production,” says Tanya Kormeili, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in Santa Monica, California. Collagen is essential for skin firmness and elasticity, but we produce less of it as we age. Tretinoin can enter skin cells and switch on the genes responsible for collagen production.

Retinol, a less potent retinoid found in many over-the-counter antiaging creams and serums, is available without a prescription. But retinol doesn’t have the same powerful effect on the skin that tretinoin does. “Retinol is less effective at turning on the [collagen] genes,” says Dr. Kormeili.

Dermatologists say that most people can start using tretinoin for skin rejuvenation long before wrinkles appear. However, it’s not recommended for pregnant women and those with ultra-sensitive skin, and it takes several months of regular use before you’ll see results. **R**

News FROM THE
**WORLD OF
 MEDICINE**
 BY *Mark Witten*



MIND OVER MIGRAINE

A German study of migraine sufferers found that weekly sessions of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy reduced the frequency of their headaches by 40 percent. This may be due to the therapy's psychological benefits—decreased stress, anxiety, rumination, and catastrophizing—which remove potential migraine triggers.

Why It's OK to Forget Sometimes

Forgetting things can be frustrating or even worrying, but it might actually be good for our brains. Based on pre-clinical trials, researchers at Trinity College Dublin and the University of Toronto propose that forgetting is something the brain does to prune clutter. On the flip side, their research suggests that buried memories could be brought back, even in people with amnesia. If further study supports these findings, more serious memory loss could be treated. Also, a new German study shows that cognitive processing speed generally begins to change after age 60. In the study, older participants took longer to settle on decisions, but mainly because they were more careful to avoid making mistakes—which is, of course, a smart thing if you want to make better choices.

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Another Reason to Take Vitamin D Supplements

A study at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Massachusetts found that taking 2,000 IU of vitamin D3 every day for two years lowered the risk of developing autoimmune diseases by more than 20 percent. Physicians may soon recommend a daily dose for people in their 50s.

Good News About HIV Prevention

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved an injectable drug, called Apretude, that could help prevent the 1.5 million HIV cases contracted globally each year. The shot, given every eight weeks, is 70 percent more effective in lowering HIV risk than Truvada, the pill commonly used now.

OLIVE OIL COULD ADD YEARS TO YOUR LIFE

A Mediterranean diet is known to be heart-healthy, and a new Harvard study found that consuming just a small amount of olive oil every day lowers your risk of dying from a variety of ailments. Researchers followed 90,000 Americans for 28 years and found those who consumed a half tablespoon of olive oil daily had a lower risk of death from cancer (by 17 percent), respiratory disease (by 18 percent), heart disease (by 19 percent), and neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia (by 29 percent). Whether taken straight from the bottle or used in cooking, olive oil has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that contribute to overall health, as does replacing other artery-clogging fats. **R**

Implant Helps Patients Walk Again

A small Swiss study has accomplished the incredible: After electrical stimulation of the spinal cord, three men paralyzed from the waist down following a motorcycle accident were able to stand, walk, swim, and cycle again. The patients had a device surgically implanted that sends electrical stimulation into the spinal cord. Within days, each participant could take as many as 300 steps using a walker for support—and even farther with practice. If similar, large-scale trials underway in the United States and Europe are successful, the device could be permanently implanted into paralyzed patients, who would use their smartphones to adjust the level of stimulation needed for various activities.



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Nick's mother stops for a moment as her son reads the Bible to their cat. "Isn't that sweet?" she says. But an hour later, she hears a terrible racket. Running out the door, she finds Nick trying to dunk the cat in a bucket of water.

"Nick, what are you doing?"

"I'm baptizing Muffin," he says.

"But cats don't

like to be in water."

"Well, then he shouldn't have joined my church."

—BLUERIDGENOW.COM

For the exercise-averse, good news! Researchers say that a mere three seconds of resistance training a day could boost our biceps by 12 percent. Meanwhile, *The Week* asked its readers

to name a workout regimen that requires the absolute minimum level of effort.

- ◆ "CrossSit"
- ◆ "AutoPilates"
- ◆ "Chairmaster"
- ◆ "Gluteus Minimus"
- ◆ "Diddly Squats"
- ◆ "Chillates"
- ◆ "Zzzzzumba"

A telephone rang.

"Hello! Is your phone number 444-444-4444?"

“Yes, it is,” came the reply.

“Great! Could you call 911 for me? I superglued my finger to the phone.”

—REDDIT.COM

Revenge is a dish best served anytime. ♦ I know it sounds mean, but when I’m mad at my wife and want to lash out, I open a bottle of some condiment when there’s already one open.

—@THEBOYDP

♦ Instead of telling my husband I’m annoyed with him, I’m just gonna put strawberries in a salad.

—@LIZHACKETT

♦ My wife ate the last doughnut this morning, so I went in her car and readjusted the driver’s seat and mirrors.

—@RUNOLDMAN

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

I was playing chess with my friend and he said, “Let’s make this interesting.” So we stopped playing chess.

—CHESS.COM



UP-LYFTING

Facebook user Eric Alper shared this list he found in his Lyft driver’s car:

Welcome to Cameron’s car!!! To ensure the best ride possible for you, I have prepared a menu of the various types of rides I offer. Just choose one, sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride. :)

1. The Awkward Ride –

You ignore this menu completely, then we will sit in silence for the remainder of the ride.

2. The Funny Ride – I tell you jokes or entertaining stories from my life.

3. The Silent Ride –

4. The Creepy Ride – I don’t say anything but I keep staring at you in the rearview mirror.

5. The Karaoke Ride –

We rock out to hits from the ’80s, early 2000s, or literally whatever you want.

6. The Bubbles Ride –

We blow bubbles the whole time.

7. The Small Talk Ride –

We talk about how crazy the weather’s been lately and I ask if you caught the game last night.

8. The Therapy Ride –

You tell me your problems, and I listen.

9. The Drunk Ride –

You throw up in my car.

10. The Cliché Ride –

You ask me how long I’ve been driving for Lyft.

—UPWORTHY.COM (APRIL 21, 2022),
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WHERE, OH WHERE?

SAY HELLO TO Mama Mimi. This gentle giant, the brainchild of Danish artist Thomas Dambo, took up residence here in Rendezvous Park last year. She's made of recycled and renewable materials that were sourced locally and assembled by the artist and a team of workers on-site. Her mane, for instance, is driftwood, and she wears a necklace of rope and stones. Mimi is the 80th in a family of troll sculptures Dambo has installed all over the world. Where is she? (*Answer on PAGE 111.*)

- A** Bernheim Forest, Kentucky
- B** Aullwood Audubon, Ohio
- C** Jackson Hole, Wyoming
- D** Breckenridge, Colorado





COURTESY THOMAS DAMBO

SO THAT'S WHY WE SAY

T H A T

Fun facts about the language
that's been confounding speakers
for centuries: English

BY *Brandon Spektor*
ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Richard Borge*



“If the English language made any sense, *lackadaisical* would have something to do with a shortage of flowers.”

—*Doug Larson, journalist*

AS ANYONE WHO'S sat through English 101 can tell you, our national language is baffling. And yet, somehow, the average American has managed to learn 42,000 words. Granted, many are of the *a*, *the*, and *but* variety. Still, few of us know how the words we utter were derived or what they really mean. What follows is a hodgepodge (there's a good word!) of fun facts about the language that gave us Shakespeare, Hemingway, Angelou, and those dolts on Twitter.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD

Did you know that the word *muscle* comes from the Latin *musculus*, which means “little mouse”? Apparently, the ancient Romans thought that the movement of a muscle, especially a flexed bicep, looked as if a mouse were running under the skin. Now there's a fun visual. And that's not even the weirdest example of a word with odd, ancient origins creeping—like mice under our skin—into modern English. Here are a few of our favorites.

QUARANTINE ▶ The first quarantine was in Venice, Italy, while bubonic plague was ravaging the mainland. To help curb the spread of infection, visiting ships had to spend 40 days at anchor before entering the city. (Worst. Cruise. Ever!!!) The word *quarantine* comes from the Italian phrase *quaranta giorni*: literally, “40 days.”

GALAXY ▶ Thousands of years ago, ancient Greek stargazers looked up at the sky and saw a white river of light arcing overhead. Their reaction? “I could really go for some cookies right now.” The Greeks named that broad band of stars *galaxías*—which stems from the word *gála*, meaning “milk.” To this day, we call our galaxy the Milky Way.

AMBULANCE ▶ The word originates from French military field hospitals of the 18th century. This type of mobile medical center could be easily broken down and moved from place to place, earning it the name *hôpital ambulant*—literally, “walking hospital.” Eventually, the name was shortened to just *ambulance*. Thankfully, today's walking hospitals come with wheels.

CANDIDATE ▶ In ancient Rome, the color of someone's toga could indicate that person's social status. Politicians wore gleaming white robes, probably whitened with powdered chalk, to show the purity of their intentions. This white toga was called *toga candida*, from the Latin *candidare* (to whiten). From there, we get the English words *candidate* (one seeking office) and *candid* (truthful), two words rarely uttered in the same sentence.

IDIOT ▶ What's the opposite of a candidate? An idiot, or *idiōtēs* in Greek. Coming from the word *idios*, meaning "private," an idiot was anyone who didn't hold public office. That later came to mean "common man" and, much later, "ignorant person," which is how it's used today. (What did the ancient Greeks call a foolish person? *Moros*, which is the basis for the modern *moron*.)

PUNCH ▶ The original recipe for fruit punch, as it was mixed in the 1600s, called for five ingredients: sugar, spice, lemon, water, and booze. It's said that the name of the

drink comes from the Hindi word *panch*, meaning five. (Watch out for that fifth ingredient; it packs a punch.)

BARBARIAN ▶ The ancient Greeks loved their language more than ouzo and looked down on those who spoke a "lesser" tongue. To Greek ears, anyone prattling on in another language sounded as if they were saying *bar-bar*, the ancient equivalent of *blah-blah*. This bar-bar babbling led to the word *bárbaros*, meaning "foreign and uncouth." *Barbarian* came to us from there.



DISASTER ▶ From time immemorial, astrologers have been hunting for divine messages in the stars. Coming from the Latin *dis*, meaning “asunder” and *astrum*, meaning “star,” a disaster means that the stars are against you and that ill fortune is close at hand. Just ask the dinosaurs, who were annihilated by an asteroid (from the Greek word *asteroeidēs*, meaning “starlike”).

MAGAZINE ▶ Coming from the Arabic word *makhzan*, meaning “storehouse,” the term *magazine* was originally used in the 1600s to describe books. Why? Because books were storehouses of knowledge. Eventually, the word came to describe printed periodicals, like the little storehouse of knowledge you’re holding right now.

WHY DON'T WE SAY THAT?

English has no shortage of idioms that might sound batty to foreign ears. (It was raining cats and dogs? Really? How many umbrellas did you go through?) But North America hardly has a monopoly on colorful turns of phrase. Here are a few foreign imports we should consider adopting, pronto.

▶ Ever think of the perfect witty comeback a moment too late for anyone to hear it? In France, you’ve got the *esprit de l’escalier*—“wit of the staircase” (because by the time the idea comes to you, you’ve already left the party).

▶ When someone is daydreaming in Spain, they are *pensando en la inmortalidad del cangrejo*—literally, “pondering the immortality of the crab.”

▶ Similarly, when someone’s mind wanders in Poland, they are said to be “thinking about blue almonds” (*myśleć o niebieskich migdałach*).

▶ If you find yourself in a pickle in Sweden, you aren’t caught with your pants down, you’re *sitta med skägget i brevlådan*—“sitting with your beard in the mailbox.”

▶ In English, a rare occurrence happens once in a blue moon. In Italian, it happens *ogni morte di Papa*—on “every death of a Pope.”

▶ Traveling in Israel? If you ask for directions to a town located in the middle of nowhere, you might get this less-than-helpful response: *Sof ha’olam, smolah*. (“At the end of the world, turn left.”)

▶ Uh-oh, did Grandpa forget the point of another story? In English, he’s lost the plot; in Mandarin Chinese, he’s “adding legs to a snake” (*huà shé tiān zú*).

▶ Had enough of this international inanity? Then buzz off! Or, as they say in Farsi, *Gooreto gom kon!*—“Go lose your grave!”

SO THAT'S WHY WE CALL THAT THAT

In 1997, two smarty-pants, needing a name for their new data-index website, came up with “googol,” which is the number one followed by a hundred zeroes. Perfect! But as they typed *Googol* into a domain-name search engine, they committed a critical typo. And the mistake stuck. Don't believe us? Google it. Meanwhile, here are the stories behind other brand names.

Triscuit ▶

ELECTRICITY BISCUITS

Triscuit is short for “electricity biscuit,” because the first ones were proudly produced with hydroelectric power.

Adidas ▶ ADI DASSLER

Adidas is an abbreviation of “Adi Dassler,” one of two feuding Dassler brothers from Germany who founded rival shoe empires after World War II (Adi's brother Rudi founded Puma).

Häagen-Dazs ▶ ??????

Häagen-Dazs is short for ... absolutely nothing. Reuben Mattus, who moved to Brooklyn from Poland, created the ice cream company in 1959. A Jew, he wanted to give his company a Danish-sounding name in tribute to Denmark's reputation for saving Jews during World War II and settled on this nonsense phrase.

Nike ▶ VICTORY

Nike was named for the Greek goddess of victory. Allegedly, the shoe company's famous “swoosh” logo represents the fleet-footed goddess's wings.

Lego ▶ PLAY WELL

Lego is a contraction of the Danish phrase *leg godt*, meaning “play well.”



WORDS WE GOTTA BRING BACK. NO, REALLY, NOW!

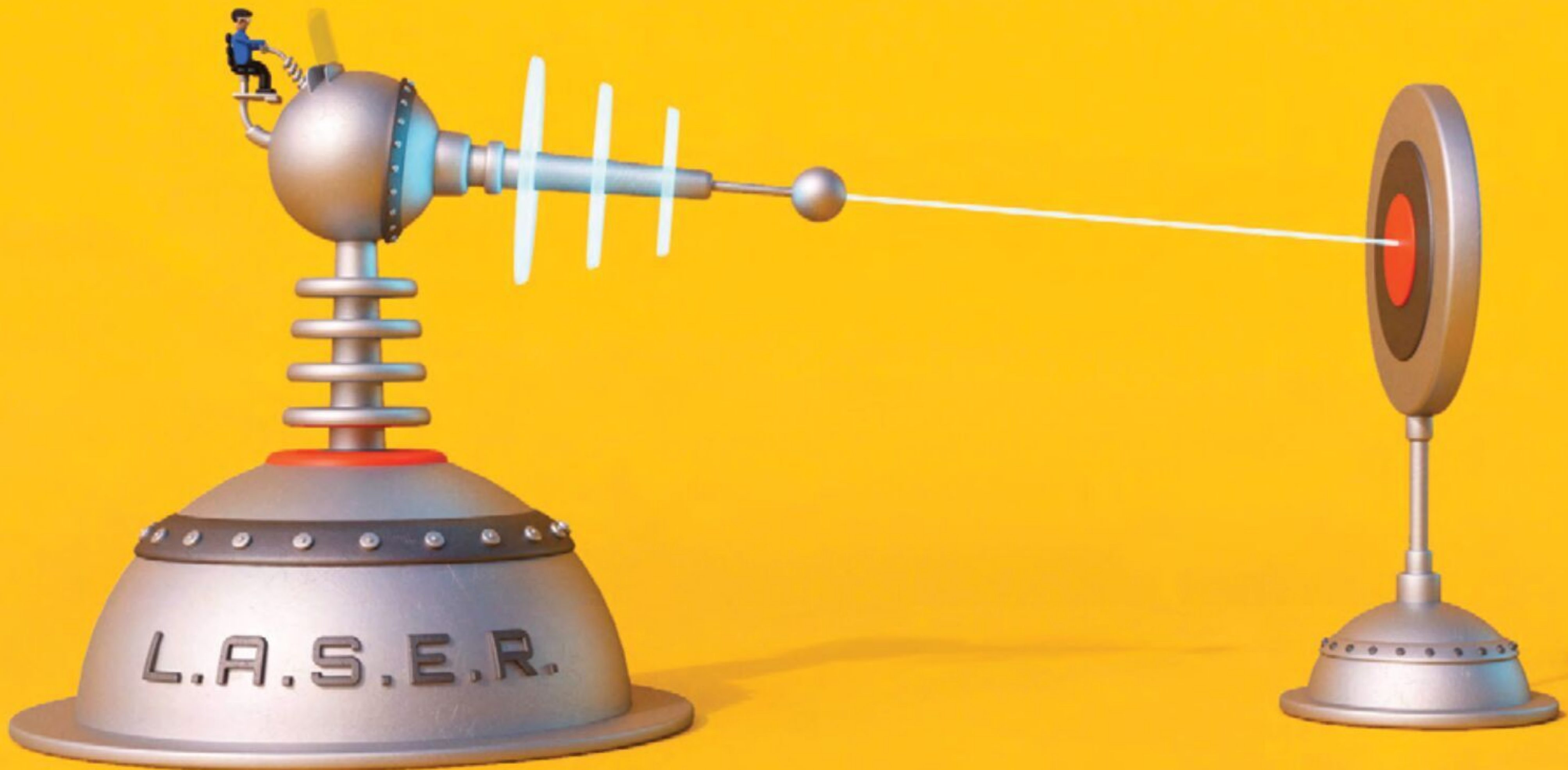
Language is full of twists and turns—or, as our silver-tongued ancestors might say, it's full of crinkum-crankum. Words that were once common become obsolete, or downright ridiculous, just a few generations later. Take these 19th-century slang words that we desperately need to bring back. Can you figure out what they mean in the story below?

The day after my bachelor party, I woke up with the worst **katzenjammer** of my life. My head felt full of **slumgullion**, and **collywobbles** battered my gut. I looked around the room, utterly **bumfuzzled**. The whole apartment was **cattywampus**, with **gubbins** of chips and pizza crusts strewn across the floor. Light shone **slantindicular** through the window. What time was it, anyway? When I looked at the wall clock, it was moving **widdershins**! I closed my eyes to shut out all the **flummadiddle**—then I realized: I don't own a wall clock! Had I been **hornswoggled**, or did I somehow stumble into the wrong house?? I rose shakily to my feet and **absquatulated** as fast as I could. I've never felt so **crapulous** in my life!



KEY:

- ▶ **katzenjammer:** a hangover
- ▶ **slumgullion:** meat stew
- ▶ **collywobbles:** abdominal pains
- ▶ **bumfuzzled:** confused
- ▶ **cattywampus:** askew
- ▶ **gubbins:** scraps
- ▶ **slantindicular:** oblique; a portmanteau of “slanted” and “perpendicular.”
- ▶ **widdershins:** counterclockwise
- ▶ **flummadiddle:** something nonsensical or worthless
- ▶ **hornswoggle:** to trick or deceive
- ▶ **absquatulate:** depart suddenly
- ▶ **crapulous:** sick from excessive drinking



AHIPS! (ACRONYMS HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT)

From a casual LOL (Laugh Out Loud) to your bank card PIN (Personal Identification Number), acronyms infuse our lives now more than ever. Sometimes, you might not even realize you're using one. For example:

- ▶ Did you know that **laser** is the lazy way of saying **L**ight **A**mplification by the **S**timulated **E**mission of **R**adiation?
- ▶ **Taser** might shock you even more. That's the **T**om **A.** **S**wift **E**lectric **R**ifle, named after a 1911 young adult adventure novel that was much beloved by NASA researcher Jack Cover, who invented the Taser in 1974.
- ▶ **Scuba** diving? Hope your **S**elf-**C**ontained **U**nderwater **B**reathing **A**pparatus is working.
- ▶ Lube a greasy wheel with **WD-40**—that's **W**ater **D**isplacement, **40**th formula—a name straight out of the lab book of the chemist who invented the stuff in 1953, after 39 failed attempts.
- ▶ Shop at **IKEA**? Thank founder **I**ngvar **K**amprad, who grew up on the farm of **E**lmtaryd near **A**gunnaryd, a town in Sweden.
- ▶ When in Sweden, listen to plenty of **ABBA**. The famous pop quartet was named after its members: **A**gnetha, **B**jörn, **B**enny, and **A**nni-Frid.



YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE, SO LET ME TRANSLATE

George Bernard Shaw reportedly quipped that Britain and America are two great nations divided by a common language. We'd take it one step further and say that America is made of 50 great states divided by a common language. Don't believe us? See if you can figure out what the following regional slang words mean.

1) going outside (Alaska)

- A. To leave the state
- B. To skinny-dip in winter
- C. To relieve oneself, the way a bear in the woods does

2) whoopensocker (Wisconsin)

- A. A football riot (common during games against Minnesota)
- B. Something extraordinary or large; a whopper
- C. Regional sport that involves throwing cheese through a hoop

3) Arkansas toothpick (Arkansas)

- A. Slang for tobacco
- B. A branch from a fallen pine tree
- C. A single-edged hunting dagger, also called a bowie knife

4) potato drop (Idaho)

- A. Heavy rain

- B. New Year's Eve festivities
- C. When the price of a potato falls below the price of gold

5) Yooper (Michigan)

- A. Anyone from the state's Upper Peninsula
- B. A youth pastor (derogatory)
- C. Slang for "yep"

6) holler (West Virginia)

- A. A remote backcountry area
- B. A prizewinning pig
- C. Grits laced with growth hormones (eaten chiefly by prizewinning pigs)

7) mom'n'em (New Orleans)

- A. Any bite-sized candy
- B. A contraction of "mom and them," meaning "family"
- C. When a mom uses a homonym

8) yinz (Pittsburgh)

- A. Slang for "y'all"
- B. Old steel coins that are still accepted as currency
- C. Breath mints

9) baggin' up (Delaware)

- A. To move to Maryland
- B. To stand in the Delaware River with bags over one's shoes
- C. To laugh, or crack up

Answers: 1-A; 2-B; 3-C; 4-B; 5-A; 6-A; 7-B; 8-A; 9-C

THE POWER OF A SINGLE WORD

One needn't be a blabbermouth to get a point across. When a Macedonian general threatened to attack Sparta in the fourth century BC, he warned the Spartan generals, "You are advised to submit without further delay, for if I bring my army on your land, I will destroy your farms, slay your people, and raze your city." The Spartans replied with one word: "If."

Whoa! The Macedonians suddenly remembered they had to wash their hair that day and never attacked.

Similarly, in 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, German troops surrounded Americans at Bastogne and ordered them to surrender or face being wiped out. Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe sent back this pithy reply: "Nuts!" And, no, he wasn't requesting snacks for his troops. Today, we'd use something a little spicier and almost as short, but the point got across and the Americans eventually fought their way out.

Another benefit of brevity? It saves you on telegram fees. French author Victor Hugo understood this in 1862 when asking his publishers how sales of his new book, *Les Misérables*, were going. Too low on francs to send a lengthy message, he instead telegraphed a single question mark. Having sold all 7,000 copies of the book's first printing in less than 24 hours,

Hugo's publishers responded in kind—with a single exclamation point.

Sometimes even masters of brevity need to employ a second word to make their point. Take America's 30th president, Calvin Coolidge—a man so tight-lipped that his friends nicknamed him Silent Cal. A popular story told by his wife, Grace, recalls Cal sitting next to a young woman at a Capitol Hill dinner party. The woman turned to Cal and said, "I made a bet today that I could get more than two words out of you."

His reply? "You lose."

WE CAN'T STRESS THIS ENOUGH

Take a moment to admire this sentence: "She told him that she loved him." It's a simple, straightforward profession of adoration. Or is it? It doesn't take much to change its meaning. Just place the word *only* anywhere in the sentence. Similarly, the sentence "I didn't say she stole my money" is uncomplicated, until you realize it has seven meanings depending on which word is emphasized.



A TRIP TO THE WORD BUFFET

Synesthesia is a fancy name for experiencing one of our senses through another of our senses. For example, someone might hear the word *chair* and see the color green. James Wannerton, on the other hand, tastes words. As he told the BBC, “The word *college* tastes like sausage. *Karen* tastes like yogurt. *Yogurt* tastes, foully, of hair spray. *Most* tastes like crisp, cold toast with hardly any butter on it.” Scientists aren’t sure what causes synesthesia, though the genomes of synesthetes (those who have it) seem different from typical genomes. The result for Wannerton is that reading and writing can be an adventure, what with his taste buds in overdrive with every sentence. But sometimes, it’s not so bad. “I get tremendous joy,” he says, “out of writing the blandest e-mail.”

NOW, THAT’S BETTER!

This gem, which we found on guidetogrammar.org, has been attributed to both Mark Twain and to a letter written to the journal *The Economist*. It’s called

“A plan for the improvement of the English language,” and it just may resolve many of the issues we have regarding our fickle language.

In Year 1 that useless letter *c* would be dropped to be replaced either by *k* or *s*, and likewise *x* would no longer be part of the alphabet. The only case in which *c* would be retained would be the *ch* formation, which will be dealt with later. Year 2 might reform *w* spelling, so that *which* and *one* would take the same consonant, while Year 3 might well abolish *y*, replacing it with *i*, and Year 4 might fix the *g/j* anomaly once and for all.

Generally, then, the improvement would continue year by year with Year 5 doing away with useless double consonants, and Years 6 to 12 or so modifying vowels and the remaining voiced and unvoiced consonants.

By Year 15 or so, it would finally be possible to make use of the redundant letters *c*, *y*, and *x*—by now just a memory in the minds of old dodgers—to replace *ch*, *sh*, and *th* respectively.

Finally, when, after some 20 years of orthographic reform, we would have a logical, coherent spelling in our new world. **R**




Whatever Moves You

I met my step goal by stirring extra cheese into my fettuccine Alfredo.

@TORITHEMOM





THE GENIUS ISSUE



What I'm Currently Reading

*Classics? Self-help
books? Not for this
Reader's Digest editor.*

BY *Andy Simmons*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Gonçalo Viana*



Andy's *Speeding Ticket* is a riveting crime drama about "reckless driving," a "bald tire," and "a left-rear light" out. The sad ending finds our protagonist \$300 poorer. But that's just skimming the surface of this complex and deep work, written by an Officer Kinney.

In fact, what's not said is just as compelling as the written word on the page. In its essence, *Andy's Speeding Ticket* is a timeless tale of a father being driven out of his mind by the endless repetition of a Taylor Swift CD all the way from Rochester to New York City. But as our central character presses down on the pedal in a vain attempt to get home faster and regain whatever sanity he might have lost along the way, his odyssey takes an unexpected detour. Suddenly he is pulled over by the only state trooper within 50 miles, a particularly sadistic man who let escape that idiot in the Camaro—the one who was weaving in and out of traffic and pushing the speedometer into triple-digit territory while flipping Andy the bird when he beeped—just to get our hero.

NOTABLE QUOTE: "If you wish to contest this ticket ..."

The wonder of science is that even during our bleakest days, it holds hope. Whereas the layman sees a world awash in problems, scientists see solutions. Thus it is

with the upbeat promise held out by *Colgate Advanced Whitening*. Stain removal, plaqueless teeth, a tartar-free life—who wouldn't be enthused by what the future holds? While the language is often obtuse ("sorbitol, sodium lauryl sulfate, propylene glycol, carrageenan" ... huh?) much of the tube is written in no-nonsense, simple, bullet-pointed prose:

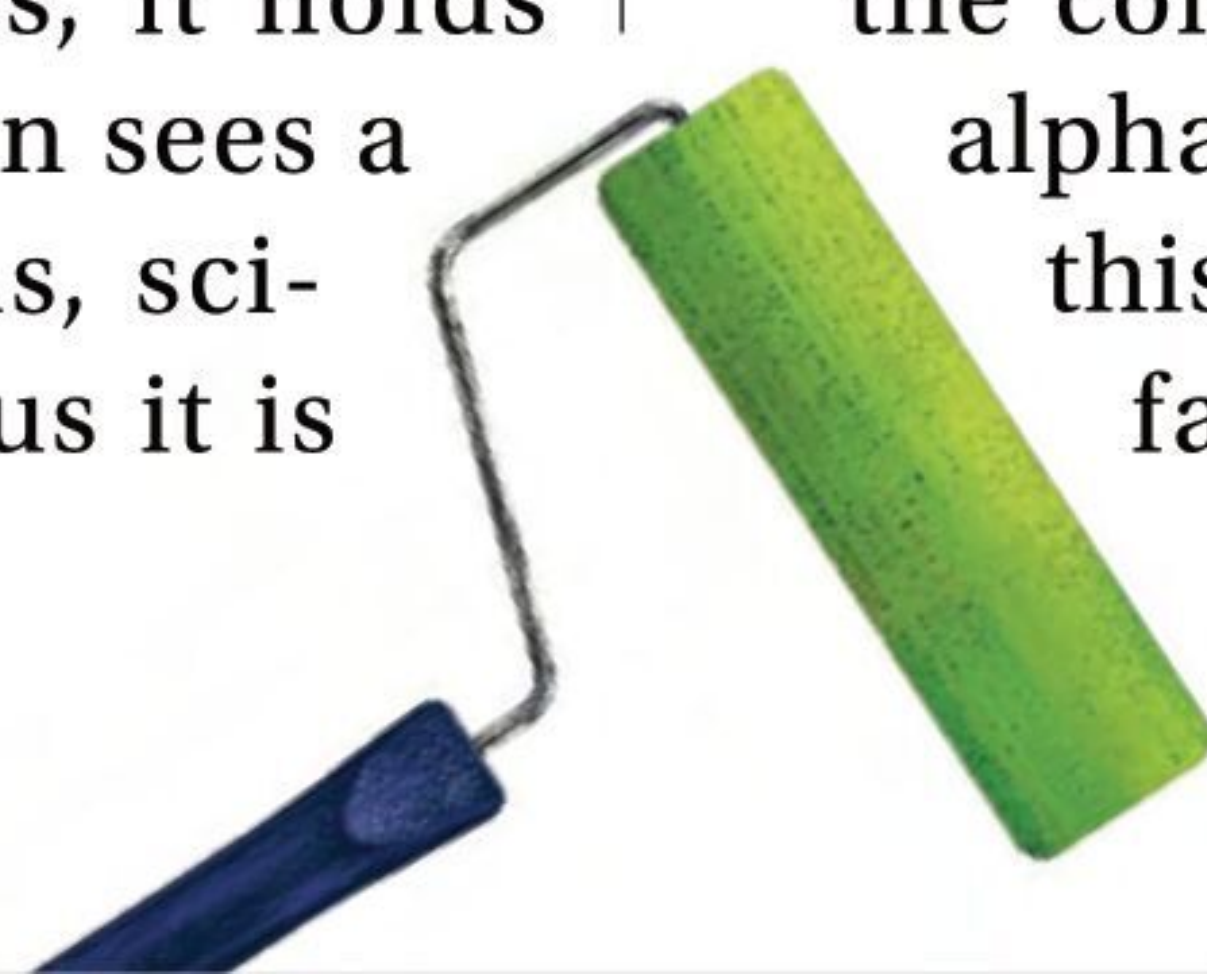
- Help prevent cavities
- Help prevent gingivitis
- Help prevent plaque buildup
- And also ... Fight bad breath

Andy was particularly taken by the phrase "And also." After all, there is more to life than preventing cavities, gingivitis, and plaque buildup. As the writer suggests, nice breath is good too.

NOTABLE QUOTE: "Brush teeth thoroughly, preferably after each meal."

My Divorce Papers is a dull recitation of grievances, grand and small, real and imagined. Much of the ground covered here has been hashed over in previous projects by the author, Andy's wife, such as her first work, *Why Can't You Ever Support Me When I Argue with My Sister!?*

The result is a confusing jumble that veers from fact to fiction. In this volume, the villain snaps at her each time she reorders his books by the color of the spine instead of alphabetically by theme. While this sounds petty on the surface, it lacks context and





instead on trips to the international aisle of his local ShopRite.

NOTABLE QUOTE:

“One inch equals 25 miles.”

Today’s contentious political landscape and spate of global conflicts beg the question: Is a harmonious world out of the question? It is not, according to the *Buddha Delight Chinese Takeout Menu*. Given a special place in the

history, such as the thousands of times Andy begged, “Please stop reordering my books!”

And claims that he “leered at that waitress” do not account for the fact that Andy has astigmatism, which causes him to squint—which she knows very well, since she drove him to the eye doctor!

NOTABLE QUOTE: “I want the house and the good car.”

The Alps, Machu Picchu, Yellowstone—they’re all here in *The World Atlas*, a fascinating exploration of the wonderful, exhilarating places on Earth that Andy will never travel to. This work of fantasy crosses state and national boundaries, oceans, and mountains, whetting Andy’s appetite for fun and adventure—which, of course, he will not experience, settling

menu’s hierarchy, under the heading Chef’s Specialty, is Happy Family. This dish boldly holds out the promise that even ancient enemies such as beef, chicken, shrimp, and pork not only can live together in a brown sauce, but they can thrive. Should you mistake *Buddha Delight Chinese Takeout Menu* for some Pollyannaish tome, you’d be mistaken. The ire of the militaristic General Tso’s bean curd is on full display. A red pepper icon stamps it as hot and potentially volatile, and one is left to wonder if the general has designs on other parts of the menu—say, the noodles. That’s certainly a mystery, but not as much of a conundrum as why Andy must have a minimum order of \$15 to get free delivery.

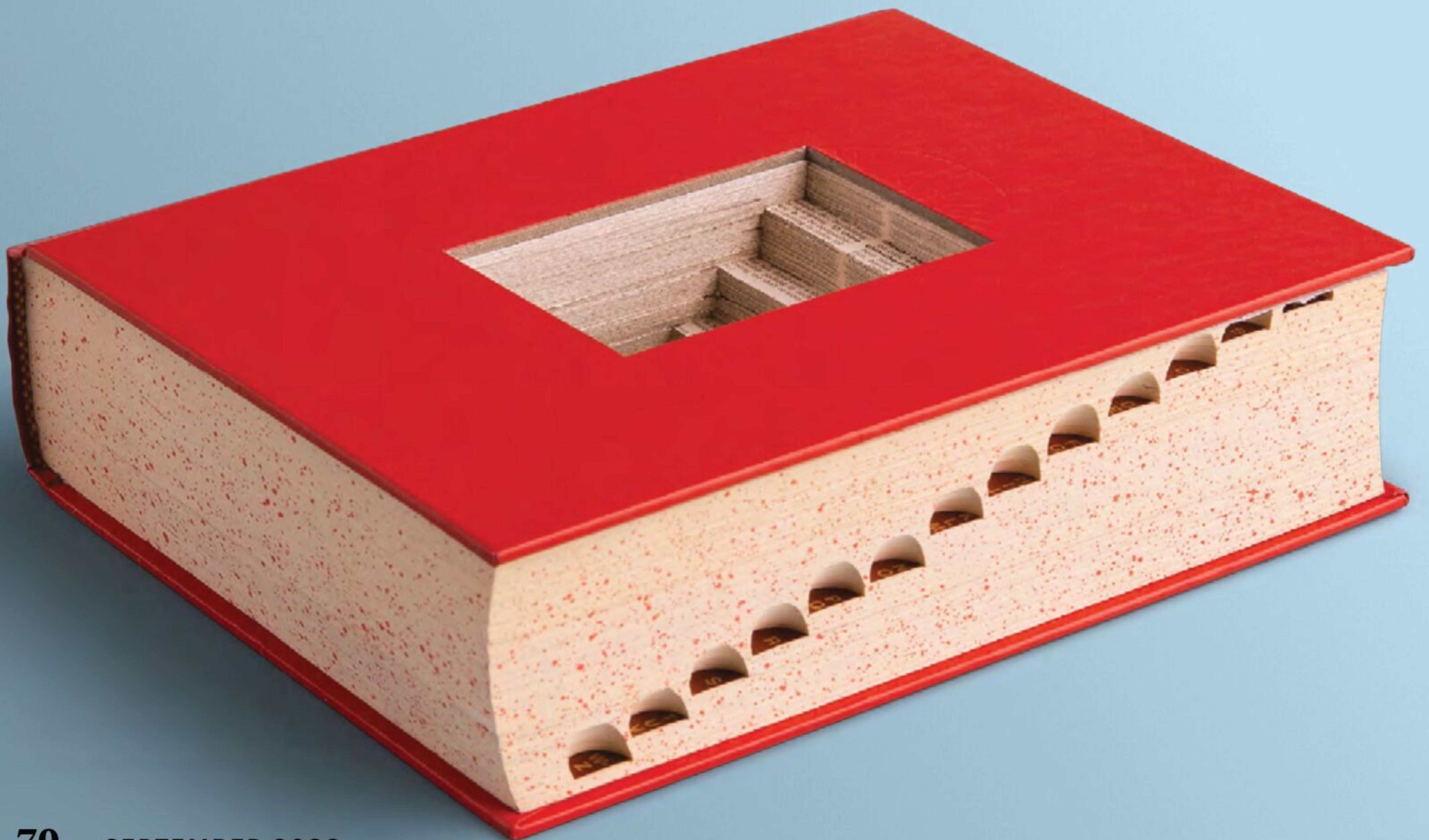
NOTABLE QUOTE: “Comes with white rice.” **R**

THE GENIUS ISSUE

The
**ENDURING
DELIGHT**
of the
DICTIONARY

*Every unknown word is
a solvable mystery*

BY *Rachel del Valle*
FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES



I can't remember how old I was when I learned the words *denotation* (the definition of a word) and *connotation* (the suggestion of a word). But I do remember feeling a little betrayed by the idea that there was a whole layer of language that couldn't quite be conveyed through a dictionary. Like most young people, I enjoyed learning but thought of it as something I would eventually be done with. At some age, I assumed, I would need to know everything. Understanding the nuances of language seemed like an obstacle to that goal.

It wasn't until after I graduated from college, and subsequently realized that there's no such thing as all-encompassing knowledge, that I was able to read for pleasure. A sense of curiosity, rather than desperate completism, steered me. I started to see dictionaries, inexact as they are, as field guides to the life of language. Looking up words encountered in the wild felt less like a failing than an admission that there are lots of things I don't know and an opportunity to discover just how many.

I prize my 1954 copy of *Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition*, which I picked up on the street near my apartment in Brooklyn a few years ago. Its 3,000 pages (India paper, with a marbled fore edge) are punctuated by a thumb index. I keep it open, solitary on a tabletop, the way dictionaries are usually found in libraries. I often consult it during evening games of Scrabble or mid-day magazine reading. I mostly read novels at night, in bed, so when I come across unfamiliar words, I dog-ear

the bottom of the page, then look up words in spurts. When I start encountering these words—newly resplendent to my pattern-seeking mind, in articles, podcasts, other books, and even the occasional conversation—the linguistic universe seems to shrink to the size of a small town.

Dictionaries heighten my senses: They direct my attention outward, into a conversation with language. They make me wonder what other things I'm blind to because I haven't taught myself to notice them yet. Recently spotted specimens include *orrery*, "a mechanical model, usually clockwork, devised to represent the motions of the moon and Earth (and sometimes also other planets) around the sun." The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) also tells me that the word comes from the fourth Earl of Orrery, for whom a copy of the first machine was made, around 1700. Useful? Obviously not. Satisfying? Deeply.

Wikipedia and Google answer questions with more questions, opening up pages of information you never

asked for. But a dictionary builds on common knowledge, using simple words to explain more complex ones. Using one feels as if I'm prying open an oyster rather than falling down a rabbit hole. Unknown words become solvable mysteries. Why leave them up to guesswork? Why not consult a dictionary and feel the instant gratification of pairing context with a definition?

Dictionaries reward you for paying attention, both to the things you consume and to your own curiosity. They are a portal into the kind of irrational, childish urge to just *know* things, which I had before learning became a duty instead of a game.

There are, of course, many different dictionaries. The way they've proliferated over time is a reminder of just how futile it is to approach language as something that can be fully understood and contained. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755, defined a paltry 40,000 words. The original *OED*, proposed by the Philological Society of London in 1857 and completed more than 70 years later, contained over 400,000 entries.

The Merriam-Webster universe is a direct descendant of Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828. Compiled by Webster alone over the course of more than 20 years, it contained 70,000 words, nearly a fifth of which had never been defined before.

Webster, who corresponded with the likes of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, saw lexicography as an act of patriotism. He believed that establishing American standards of spelling and definition was necessary to solidify the young nation's cultural identity as separate from that of England.

Perhaps because of Webster's enthusiasm for rules, dictionaries have long had an unfair reputation as arbiters of language, as tools used to limit rather than expand your range of expression. But dictionaries don't create language—people do. Take *dilettante*. The superficial connotation of the word is a modern invention. Noah Webster's aforementioned *American Dictionary* defines it as "one who delights in promoting science or the fine arts." The *OED* cites its connection to the Latin verb *delectare*, meaning "to delight or please." To be a dilettante once meant that love and curiosity drove your interest in a given discipline.

For me, dictionaries are a portal into that kind of uncalculated knowledge-seeking. They remind me that, when it comes to learning, indulging your curiosity is just as important as paying attention. After all, isn't curiosity really just another form of attention? Following your curiosity instead of swatting it away is one of the best ways I know to feel connected to more than what's right in front of you. **R**

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Using a dictionary feels as if I'm prying open an oyster rather than falling down a rabbit hole.





*We asked readers and they shared theirs,
whether in the dictionary or made up*



BY *Reader's Digest* Readers

Copacetic

adj. (ko-puh-'seh-tik)

Everything is A-OK. My father always said it, and when I was a kid I thought he made it up. It always reminds me of him and makes me smile.

—M.F. *via rd.com*

Momniscient

adj. (mahm-'ni-shuhnt)

I have three kids. I always knew when they were up to something, no matter how covert—just a little tickle in the back of my brain.

—CINDY POCH

Stillwater, Minnesota

Maffick

v. ('ma-fik)

To celebrate with boisterous rejoicing and hilarious behavior. I learned it while watching *Jeopardy!*. It turns out I had been mafficking my whole life and didn't even know it.

—MARY VENIS

Brooklyn, New York

Tympanomastoidectomy

n. (tim-puh-no-ma-stoi-'dek-tuh-mee)

A surgical procedure to treat a damaged eardrum that can involve rebuilding bones in the middle ear. More importantly, this word means my wife of 44 years can hear me! She can also hear her grandkids sing, nature at its best, and those old movies we love to watch again.

—CHUCK HOEY

Wills Point, Texas

Recombobulate

v. (rih-kuhm-'bah-b(y)uh-layt)

To reorient. I encountered it after going through security at Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport. The airport has a big sign hanging over some chairs: "Recombobulation Area."

—CLYDE HAGGARD

Fort Worth, Texas

Cwm

n. (koom)

It's a word with Welsh etymology that describes the steep-sided hollow at the head of a valley or mountainside. I love it because it has no vowels and is a great move during Scrabble and other word games.

—ROBERTA JOHNSON

Arlington Heights, Illinois

Refulgent

adj. (rih-'ful-juhnt)

Shining brightly. My late husband was delighted that this word's meaning was so far from the look and sound of it. His fun was contagious, and it became my favorite word too.

—JEAN LEHMAN

Rancho Santa Margarita, California

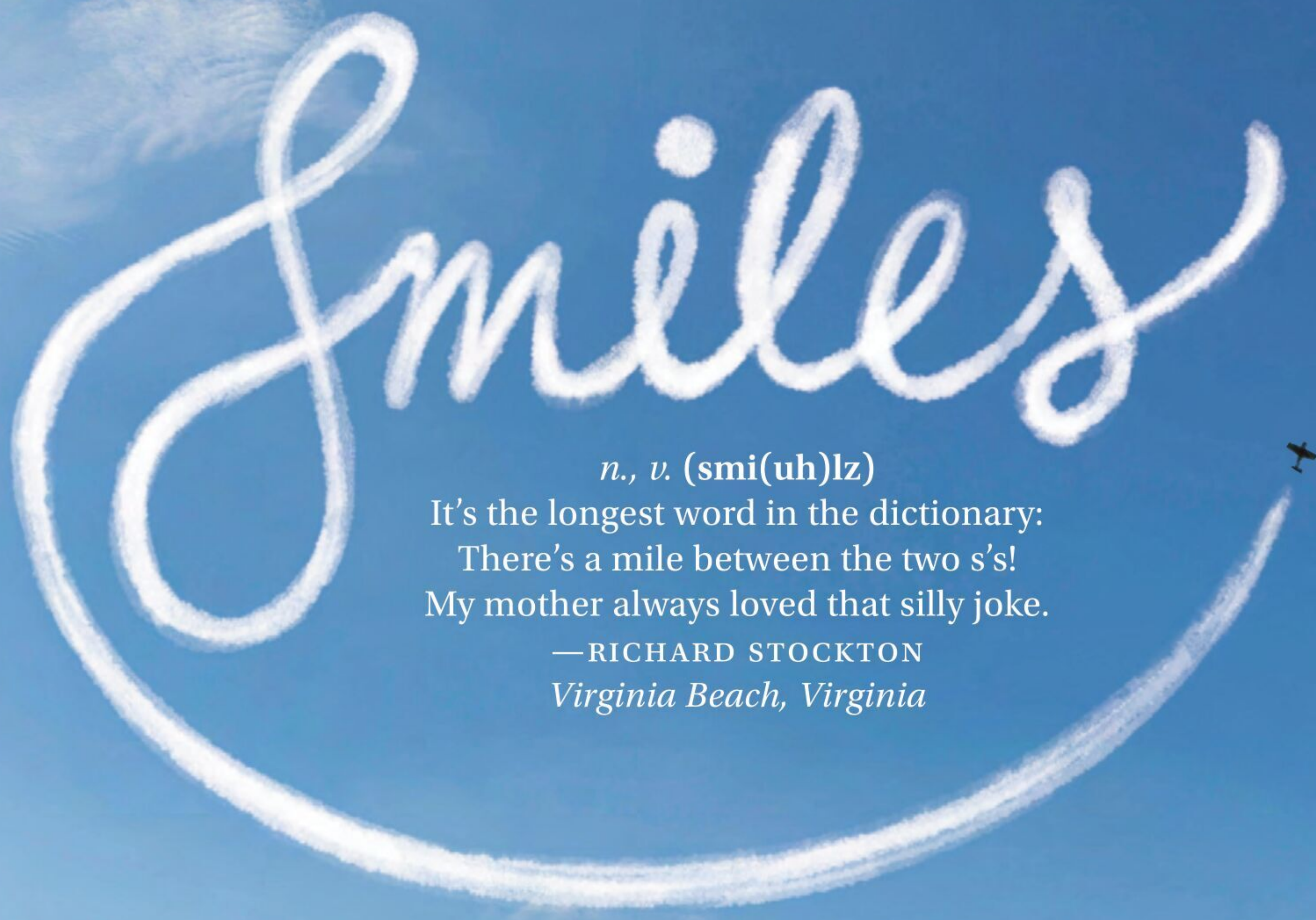
Appendectomy

n. (a-puhn-'dek-tuh-mee)

The removal of an app from any electronic device. As a physician, I find the double meaning especially amusing.

—ROBERT BELLINOFF

El Dorado Hills, California



n., v. (smi(uh)lz)

It's the longest word in the dictionary:
There's a mile between the two s's!
My mother always loved that silly joke.

—RICHARD STOCKTON
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Yessay

n. ('yeh-say)

A piece of writing that one can't help but be excited to create. I made it up to get my students excited about writing in our middle school language arts classroom. Another teacher made me a sweatshirt with "YESsay" stitched into it. We want to get it into the dictionary. Anything to get the kids to smile when they write.

—JAIME WELLER
Farmington, New York

Y'all

pro. (yol)

I'm a high school teacher with a slight southern accent. One day, I asked what the disturbance in the back of the classroom was. It turned out our new foreign exchange student was flipping all through his Chinese dictionary for "y'all." Of course it wasn't there. I thought I'd lost my accent, but apparently it still comes through!

—SUSAN MAASBERG
Williamsburg, Michigan

Paraprosdokian

n. (pair-uh-prahz-'dok-ih-uhn)

A figure of speech in which the latter part of the sentence is unexpected and causes you to reinterpret the first part, usually for humorous or dramatic effect. E.g., “If I agreed with you, we’d both be wrong” or “War doesn’t determine who is right, only who is left.”

—RICHARD JACOBS

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Jawn

n. (juh-'awh-n)

This is a Philadelphia catchall for just about anything. It can refer to pretty much any person, place, or thing. For example, “Pass me that jawn,” or “He’s a good jawn.”

—ANNA NOLASCO

Glendora, New Jersey

Lonesick

adj. ('lon(t)-sik)

Lonesome and homesick. It conveys way more than either of its parents.

—HEIDI KEIFER

Abington, Pennsylvania

Delmarvelous

adj. (del-'mahrv-(uh-)luhs)

The Delmarva Peninsula runs along the Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia coasts. Locals often declare “What a Delmarvelous Day!” to celebrate living along this beautiful shore.

—PAT PETERSEN

Delmar, Maryland

Cahoots

n. (kuh-'hootz)

Colluding or conspiring together. There used to be a bar with that name near my job. I thought it just meant a gathering place: “Where are you?” “We’re in Cahoots!”

—DEBRA SOVICH

Baden, Pennsylvania

Imagination

n. (ih-ma-juh-'nay-shuhn)

Whenever it comes up in conversation, no matter the context, there’s always potential for great things to happen.

—GENE PERRY

Dubuque, Iowa 

GOT A GREAT STORY TO SHARE?

We’re always looking for your true stories, and this time we’re looking ahead to the new year. What’s a resolution you made (whether at the stroke of midnight on December 31 or anytime) that really stuck? What did you resolve to do—or stop doing—and how did your resolution change your life? Likewise, what vow did you make that didn’t quite take? Because funny stories of failure are just as worthy of sharing as sincere stories of success! Please share your stories of good intentions, regardless of the outcome, and see terms, at rd.com/resolution.





THE PLACEBO CURE

WHY DOCTORS ARE PRESCRIBING
SUGAR PILLS INSTEAD OF THE REAL THING



BY *Lia Grainger*
PHOTOGRAPHS BY *K. Synold*

MICHAEL WHARRAD HELD the envelope in his hands, certain of what the paper inside would tell him. A decade earlier, he'd been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. For a year, the former investment banker had participated in a drug trial at London's National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery. Researchers were testing whether a medication approved to treat Type 2 diabetes could also treat Parkinson's symptoms. Every day, Wharrad had received a dose of either the drug or a placebo, but he never knew which.

THE BRAIN-BODY RESPONSE CONTROLS THE PLACEBO EFFECT.



During the trial, Wharrad thrived. His joints ached less, and he could get up from a chair more easily and take walks around the block. He also noticed that his memory seemed stronger. Friends and family commented on his obvious improvement. "My wife and I were convinced I was taking the drug," he says.

But at his end-of-trial meeting with one of the researchers—who also didn't know whether or not Wharrad, then 72, had been on the drug—he was delivered a surprise. When he

opened the envelope to find out what he'd been taking, he saw the word "placebo."

"I was speechless," he says. "I had been feeling so much better."

A PLACEBO CAN be a sugar pill, a saline injection, or a glass of colored water—inert treatments that shouldn't produce a physiological response. But they often do. Wharrad's case is not unusual. In fact, placebos are increasingly proving to be more powerful than active drugs in trials—and they may just be the key to reducing our dependence on medications.

The so-called placebo effect happens when the brain convinces the body that a fake treatment is authentic, which stimulates relief. The medical community has long been aware of this phenomenon, but in the past 50 years, neurologists began examining the molecular mechanisms and pathways at play when a mock treatment creates real healing. To a large extent, it's still a mystery. But scientists have confirmed that simply perceiving that you're being treated affects the part of our brain that processes symptoms.

Because the body-brain response that controls the placebo effect is neurological, placebos work best for conditions controlled by the neurological system, such as pain, irritable bowel syndrome, depression, and Parkinson's disease. They can't change things like a viral infection, and they won't lower your cholesterol, shrink



a tumor, or reduce a cold's duration.

When placebos do work, expectations play a significant role: If you think a pill can cure you, it's more likely to do so. In a *Lancet* review of placebo studies, researchers described a case where post-surgery patients were given morphine for pain. For some, the medication was delivered secretly with a hidden pump, while others received it from a physician who explained that it would make them feel better. The patients expecting the drug and its positive effects experienced a far greater reduction in pain than those who were unaware they had received it.

Placebos can also work as a result

of “pharmacological conditioning”—when clinicians teach a patient how to respond to a placebo by first administering an active treatment. According to Luana Colloca, MD, a professor at the University of Maryland's department of anesthesiology, this can result in the strongest placebo effect. Studying this phenomenon across a range of conditions, Dr. Colloca has observed that placebos use the same neurological pathway of the brain as the medications did.

“The placebo response is like a pharmacological memory,” she says, explaining that it's similar to a trauma response, where the brain reacts to a traumatic event and then is later



significantly better than a placebo in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial (in this type of trial, neither the researchers nor the participants know who is receiving what). Over the past two decades, scientists and drug companies have noticed that placebos are helping patients so much that some drugs can no longer outperform them—not because the drugs are less effective, but because the mind’s power over the body seems to be growing. In fact, a 2021 Danish meta-analysis of 180 drug trials showed that, in total, more than

triggered to replicate that same response. This specificity means that placebos for depression activate serotonin, and those replacing painkillers reduce activity in the brain centers responsible for pain while activating the opioid systems, or pleasure centers. In other words, your brain is tricked into generating a drug response.

PLACEBOS ARE SO powerful that they’re affecting the chances that a medication will be approved for use. To prove that a drug works, scientists must show that it performs

half of the treatment effect could be attributed to a placebo.

This increase is not well understood, according to Lene Vase, PhD, a professor of neuroscience and psychology at Aarhus University in Denmark, but it’s presenting a problem for drug companies. “Some drugs that were approved in the past would not beat a placebo today,” she says.

Currently, this phenomenon seems to be strongest in the United States. Testing results for the drug luma-teperone provide a typical example. In 2019, pharmaceutical company

Intra-Cellular Therapies was on the verge of a major development for the treatment of bipolar depression; it had performed well in earlier trial phases, and the company's scientists were expecting success. Yet in the American arm of the trial, patients who received the drug and those who received the placebo both experienced significant improvement. When Intra-Cellular released its findings showing the drug had failed to consistently outperform a placebo in part of its trial, its stock dropped 22 percent—although the drug was later approved by the FDA due to success in other countries.

Jeffrey Mogil, PhD, who studies pain at McGill University in Montreal, published a paper in 2015 showing that the placebo effect had increased, especially in the United States. He posits that, because American trials are often more expensive and hosted in nice clinics, the patient is conditioned to believe the medication must work.

Neuroscientist Alexander Tuttle, PhD, a coauthor of the McGill study, hypothesizes that advertising also plays a part: People who view ads depicting patients helped by pharmaceuticals could also be more likely to believe the pill they take in a trial will heal them. (The United States is the only country besides New Zealand that allows pharmaceutical companies to advertise prescription medication directly to consumers.)

Placebo research is now its own area

of study, and experts say we should harness the strategies that generate the most powerful placebo effects in drug trials and incorporate them into clinical treatments. It may sound unlikely, but in some cases, placebos work even if you know you're taking one.

The effectiveness of “open-label placebos”—sometimes also called “pure” placebos—has been shown in numerous studies. In one published in the journal *PLoS One*, a team of researchers gave patients with irritable bowel

“THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PLACEBO TREATMENT IS HONESTY, NOT TRICKS.”



syndrome inactive pills labeled “placebo.” Those patients experienced a 60 percent improvement in their condition, while those receiving no treatment improved only 35 percent.

“The key ingredient to successful treatment with a placebo is honesty, not tricks,” asserts Ted Kaptchuk, PhD, director of Harvard University's Program in Placebo Studies and Therapeutic Encounter, who led the study.

Already, without telling patients, some doctors prescribe an active treatment—a vitamin or an antibiotic, for example—that they know will likely not treat the ailment but may generate a placebo effect. In fact, a 2018 international review of studies from

13 countries found that up to 89 percent of physicians reported using placebo treatments at least once a month. Doctors surveyed said they did this to treat nonspecific complaints or to satisfy patients' demands that something be prescribed. The hope, then, is that open-label placebos could replace this ethically murky practice.

AFTER JUST A WEEK, MOST OF MACK'S JAW PAIN HAD DISAPPEARED.



"Use of open-label placebos would reduce the amount of medication we use for common conditions," adds Kaptchuk.

Although knowingly taking a faux treatment won't be for everyone—Wharrad, for instance, isn't convinced that he would have experienced the improvements in his Parkinson's symptoms had he been aware he was taking a placebo—one 2016 American study published in *BMJ Open* found that up to 85 percent of the 853 respondents felt it was acceptable for doctors to treat with open-label placebos in various scenarios.

In 2017, more than two dozen international placebo researchers gathered in the Netherlands to begin developing official recommendations around the use of open-label placebos, some of which were published last year. They include informing patients about placebo effects and fostering warm, trusting, and empathetic patient-doctor relationships.

This potential transformation in medicine has already changed the lives of some patients. Troy Mack, a 57-year-old Baltimore resident, had been suffering for two decades from intense pain in his face, neck, and jaw from temporomandibular (TMD) joint disorder. When researchers at the University of Maryland, including Colloca, announced a study of an experimental TMD treatment, Mack was told that, based on his medical history, he could be a good placebo responder.

That prediction turned out to be correct. After just a week of knowingly taking a placebo, most of Mack's jaw pain had disappeared. His face felt more relaxed, and the joint no longer cracked when he yawned. He was finally experiencing relief.

"If I could get a long-term prescription for this, I would take it," he says. **R**



A Question for Marie Kondo

If you rob a Container Store, does that count as organized crime?

@EMILY_MURNANE

CONNECTIONS:

Your link to values and insights each month



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Elvis

Starring Austin Butler as Elvis and Tom Hanks as Elvis's enigmatic manager, Colonel Tom Parker, ELVIS delves into the complex dynamic between the two - from Presley's rise to fame

to his unprecedented stardom - against the backdrop of the evolving cultural landscape and loss of innocence in America. #ElvisMovie

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THERE'S A DETECTIVE IN ALL OF US.

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DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

THE GREAT 9/11 MARITIME RESCUE





**We've read about so many heroes
of that fateful day, yet somehow
this mission—the largest of its kind
in history—remains largely unknown**

BY *Garrett M. Graff*
FROM NEW YORK MAGAZINE



O

N A BRIGHT-BLUE morning 21 years ago, Coast Guard Lt. Michael Day was at his office on Staten Island, looking out over lower Manhattan. He was

a relatively junior officer whose job involved the safety and navigation oversight of the New York waterways. He also dealt with all the odd questions that tend to crop up in the congested rivers and harbor of one of the largest

cities in the world, like queries related to charity swims and the Macy's Fourth of July fireworks. He had negotiated with the Mets when their new stadium lights blinded mariners, and he'd had to tell David Letterman that, no, he could not launch watermelons across the Hudson River toward New Jersey.

It hardly seemed a job destined for history. So, soon after 8:46 a.m., when he heard that a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers, Day had the same thought that so many Americans did: What an odd

PREVIOUS SPREAD: CHAN IRWIN



More than 200 private boats became the sole means of escape for half a million frightened people.

accident. Likely a small plane—maybe a helicopter. He watched CNN for a few moments, then went back to his desk and kept working. Every so often, he'd glance over his shoulder at the plume of smoke visible out the window, but he wasn't alarmed. He'd worked in the Twin Towers in his previous job with the Port Authority, and everyone knew how robust they were—the legend was that they could withstand a Boeing 707 crashing into them. Whatever had happened, it was not a job for the Coast Guard.

Then the second plane hit. And the chaos began.

Over the hours ahead, Day and his colleagues at the Sandy Hook Pilots Association—the specially licensed sailors who help larger vessels safely get in and out of the harbor—would help orchestrate the largest maritime evacuation in world history, larger even than the famous British rescue at Dunkirk.

With no plan and little direction, they would cobble together a makeshift civilian armada of fishing vessels, pleasure yachts, tugboats, and passenger ferries that would evacuate an estimated 500,000 people from the tip of lower Manhattan—desperate, worried, dust-enveloped people trapped by the closure of the island's bridges and tunnels. Today, the maritime rescue and evacuation of lower Manhattan remains one of the least-known dramas of that day—perhaps the greatest mostly unknown story of 9/11.

In that first hour, the morning kept turning from bad to worse. The collapse of the South Tower and the ensuing cloud of debris rendered the Coast Guard's harbor radar blind. Reports began to come in of panicked crowds piling up along Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan.

Day decided to head there himself. He met up with a Sandy Hook pilot at a nearby dock, and with the crew of the Pilots Association's main station boat, the 184-foot *New York*,

they steamed toward lower Manhattan. The scene looked almost biblical as they drew closer, with gray smoke hanging over the Hudson. This, Day recalls thinking, is Pearl Harbor.

“You could see everyone on the piers,” Day told a Coast Guard historian in 2002. “It was wall-to-wall people.”

By the time the *New York* arrived at Battery Park, some boats were already beginning to ferry people away. It was clear to Day and the Sandy Hook pilots, as they nosed around the southern edge of Manhattan, that the scale of the ad hoc effort was being dwarfed

**“I BROKE MORE RULES
THAT DAY THAN I’VE
ENFORCED IN MY COAST
GUARD CAREER.”**



by the swarms of evacuees. Some people ended up in the water, jumping for safety in fear of further collapses, or falling in amid the confusion.

At midmorning, they called for help—lots of help. As Day told me, “We decided to make the call on the radio: ‘All available boats, this is the United States Coast Guard aboard the pilot boat *New York*. Anyone available to help with the evacuation of lower Manhattan, report to Governors Island.’” The Coast Guard’s Vessel Traffic Service for New York—the equivalent of the harbor’s air traffic controllers—put out a similar call.

New York’s mariners answered, and within 15 to 20 minutes the horizon began to fill with boats of all shapes, sizes, and functions.

The flotilla that day included upward of 130 boats: harbor launches, fishing vessels, sightseeing ships, and dinner-cruise boats, as well as 33 ferries and 50 tugboats, plus numerous fire department, police department, and Coast Guard rescue boats. An NYPD marine officer, Keith Duval, had even commandeered a pleasure yacht from the nearby North Cove Marina. “Rich people always leave the keys in the boat,” Duval told a fellow officer. Sure enough, after finding the keys, Duval and his colleagues made ten trips to New Jersey and back over the course of the day.

For hours, Day and the Sandy Hook pilots played traffic cop, ushering boats in and out of the area. The harbor was so crowded with vessels that Day and the pilots switched to communicating with the other boats by hand signals—the radio channels were too overloaded for the finesse needed to navigate safely. Waves of boats came in empty, loaded up, and moved back out.

At one point, someone suggested emptying North Cove Marina of the rest of the fancy yachts docked there. Day gulped and gave the go-ahead, watching as tugboats pulled out one multimillion-dollar vessel after another. Oh boy, I hope I’m doing the right thing, he thought.

Shocked Coast Guard crew members watched as the towers fell.



“I broke more rules that day than probably I’ve enforced in my whole Coast Guard career,” Day said later. “We authorized a lot of regulations to be broken.”

A Staten Island ferry, for example, which normally handles 5,200 passengers, left on one trip carrying more than 6,000. Day was amazed at how naturally people reacted to authority—any authority.

At one point, a diesel barge pulled up at the seawall to begin refueling the fire trucks that were tirelessly throwing water on the still-burning blazes at ground zero. A city official tried to protest that the barge needed a permit. Day intervened, making it up as he went along, announcing, “This is a Coast Guard operation and I’m telling you that it’s authorized right now.”

The official accepted the explanation and left.

The volunteer crews began to hang banners from their bows with their intended destinations—Brooklyn, Staten Island, New Jersey—but mostly they found people eager to leave to wherever. “All I wanted to do was get off that island,” said a teacher at a high school that was located in the shadow of the towers.

The line of evacuees stretched for blocks, with some people waiting more than three hours for a ride. Every boat seemed to pull away overcrowded. “It was like being the last lifeboat on the *Titanic*,” ferry captain Rick Thornton recounted later to writer Jessica DuLong, whose book *Dust to Deliverance* is one of the few accounts of the boatlift.

Ferries transported stranded civilians from Manhattan across the Hudson River to New Jersey.



Many of the evacuating boats carried away injured victims. Day and other officials tried to coordinate where ambulances were waiting in New Jersey, Staten Island, and elsewhere. “We were getting calls from cell phones,” he said. “I remember someone on Ellis Island saying, ‘We’ve got 40-odd ambulances lined up—bring them over here.’ And then hearing someone else, ‘We’ve got ambulances over here in Brooklyn. Bring them here.’”

When boats pulled away from lower Manhattan, evacuees got their first glimpse of the changed skyline behind them—and that’s when they understood the enormity of the attacks. Frank Razzano, who that morning had been staying in the Marriott hotel nestled between the Twin Towers, recalled

how he hadn’t even understood that the buildings had completely fallen.

“As we were going across the river, I was looking back at the city, expecting to see the World Trade Center—expecting to see a tower with the top off. They weren’t there,” he said later. “I said to the guy driving the boat, ‘Where’s the World Trade Center?’ He said, ‘Buddy, they’re gone.’ I said, ‘Look, I was there when the tops of the buildings came down, but where’s the rest of the buildings?’ He said, ‘Buddy, it wasn’t the tops of the buildings. They collapsed down to the foundations.’”

As lower Manhattan gradually emptied boat by boat, the mission of the boatlift shifted. Instead of taking civilians out, by around 4:30 p.m. the flotilla began to bring rescuers and

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supplies in from New Jersey. “We started getting calls that supplies were coming into Jersey and all the bridges were shut down into Manhattan,” Day said. “They said, ‘Hey, can we get someone to pick up some supplies?’ I asked if anyone would mind going over to Colgate in New Jersey and picking up some supplies, and I was inundated. ‘Sure, I’ll do it.’ ‘I’ll do it.’ ‘I’ll do it.’ Great. It wasn’t my intent—it just kind of happened.”

As the hours passed and the needs grew, the supplies multiplied—bottled water, acetylene for steel cutting, oxygen, wrenches, meals. At one point, Day saw a request from New York City officials for 20,000 body bags.

This Herculean effort went largely unnoticed by the media at the time. And yet, the boatlift stands out as one of the most illustrative threads of the day. First, it is an example of an event that, on any other day, would rank as among the most dramatic in American history. But like the air traffic controllers who urgently landed 4,500 planes nationwide, or Vice President Dick Cheney’s mustering the U.S. government’s response from the bunker underneath the White House, the maritime evacuation of lower Manhattan was initially unnoticed in the midst of the enormous calamity of the attacks.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the boatlift is the largest-scale example of what is the ultimately hopeful legacy of 9/11—that in reaction to

the worst evil humankind can offer, Americans of all stripes that morning came together to help.

“There was a common purpose,” Day said. “It was very clear what the purpose was—what we were trying to accomplish—we were trying to get people out of there.”

AMERICANS CAME TOGETHER THAT MORNING FOR A COMMON PURPOSE.



Late that evening, Lieutenant Day and the Sandy Hook pilots walked into lower Manhattan for the first time. The devastation awed him. “There are papers coming down—there’s always like snow, from the white ash, whenever a breeze would come up,” he said. He paused, considering the buildings that he’d once worked in. “Unrecognizable.”

But most of all, in the dark of that night near ground zero, with the power off and fires burning all around, he remembers the chirping emergency distress signals from scores of firefighters buried in the rubble. In a day where his efforts had helped rescue the equivalent population of a midsize city, the sound that haunts him is that of all the people who weren’t saved. **R**

NEW YORK MAGAZINE (SEPTEMBER 11, 2021),
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My Southern Accent, Lost and Found

For years, I denied this part of myself, until I realized what I was missing

BY *Becca Andrews*

FROM JEZEBEL.COM

BEFORE I THOUGHT I needed to shed my Southernness, I was proud of my heritage. As a child, I dreamed of raising Black Angus cattle the way my Uncle Ted did, scratching out a big vegetable bed, making a home on an acre or two of grass for barefoot children to run across until their soles itched. There was no sound I loved more than my grandmother's accent: thick, sweet, warm, unencumbered. When the phone rang, she answered with a throaty "mmmyehhlo?" My own voice reflected my family's past and present—part northern Mississippi, part Tennessee delta, all southern.

As my childhood receded, I began to realize that outside of our region, southerners were often dismissed as uncultured and uneducated, ignorant and narrow-minded. I was ready to leave behind my

tiny town in West Tennessee and start a new life in some far-off metropolis.

In that awkward space between teenager and adult, my accent was a symbol of everything I thought I hated about my life in the rural South. My conflation of vowels connoted ignorance. My elongation of final consonants gave away a rough-around-the-edges nature that I feared would disqualify me from being a lauded magazine writer.

My voice screamed out my class status. I thought I would have to talk less country. So I killed a piece of myself. I am ashamed of it, but I am more ashamed that I tried to kill that part of someone else.

“Girl, don’t you forget where you come from.”

I met Emily in college at Middle Tennessee State University, a school known for its affordability and its proximity to Nashville. She was determined to work for the student newspaper, which is where I spent most of my waking hours, and she decided we should be friends, and so we were. She, unlike me, embraced her roots. She was—and still is—always good for a tube of lipstick or a *Steel Magnolias* reference or a vat of homemade mac ’n’ cheese. Early in our friendship, her mother asked where I was from,

assuming it was somewhere up north; I beamed with pride at the mistake.

Emily is two years younger. I knew she cared about my opinion, and her admiration soothed my simmering insecurities. I advised her to be more like me, and exorcise her signature Manchester, Tennessee, accent. It was advice that I lobbed at her throughout our college years, sometimes earnestly, more often by poking fun at her doubled-down vowel sounds. It was a bit—it was our bit, I insisted to myself, taking that pained look on her face as part of the shtick. It was not fun for her, and deep down, I knew it.

During my senior year, I took it upon myself to “help” Emily prepare for a broadcast she had to deliver for a class. I would be the Henry Higgins to her Eliza Doolittle. In a photo I took that night, she’s frozen in time, her brow furrowed, literally clutching the string of pearls around her neck. Her lips are pursed, concentrating on pronunciation.

“I,” I say, firmly.

“Ahye,” Emily responds, helplessly. She tries to bite off the extra syllable, but it lingers, a thready pull of thick caramel. Exasperated, she tosses aside her glasses.

“Like,” I say.

“Lahyke.”

It went on like this for an hour. I told myself I was helping her achieve her dream of working for NPR. Now, I see that it was more about justifying what I had done to myself.

My grandmother Carolyn used to tell me, “Girl, don’t you forget where you come from.” Memories are corrupted by time and emotion, but this one remained etched in my mind with uncomfortable clarity. She studied me with her clear blue eyes while she let her appeal hang in the air, sometimes wrapping her gnarled, arthritic fingers around my hands.

My grandmother is the foundation for what I understand a Southern Woman to be. She said exactly what she meant, always at a slow, deliberate cadence. She was born and raised in the half-pony town of Pontotoc, Mississippi, the daughter of sharecroppers, known to me in family lore as Big Mama and Big Daddy. She survived the Depression, but for the rest of her adult life, she seemed haunted by the memories of what it was like to

be poor. After she married my granddaddy, David, a boy from 20 minutes away in Houlka, they settled in Tupelo to have their own family.

His parents fancied themselves city folks and did not approve of their son’s marriage to a country girl, but she never told me this. I learned of it after she died, and now I wonder if that’s the origin of her command: Don’t forget.

I tell you all of this because lineage is important in southern families—it forms the base of our identities, and it is the context for the stories we tell ourselves and each other through time. Now that I am grown, now that I have left the South, it is important to me too.

The process of eliminating my accent began in high school with *Gilmore Girls*. I carefully studied the speech patterns of Emily, Lorelai, Rory, and Paris, trying to memorize the quips and the pop culture references. After each episode, I’d stand before a mirror, practicing the characters’ spitfire cadence in an effort to speak like a “normal” white upper-middle-class girl. Eventually, I was successful at breaking down my tongue and rebuilding it.

It wasn’t just my voice that needed to be recorded over. The summer before I left for college, I lost weight and swapped my ratty pop-punk band T-shirts and worn jeans





for the cheap fast-fashion at Forever 21. I lightened the eyeliner, wore twee jewelry that turned my skin green, pierced my nose, and went to a beauty school to get a better haircut on a budget. And every time I spoke up in class or extended a fake-confident hand toward someone more cosmopolitan, I did it with the clearest enunciation I could muster. If I was asked where I was from, I would say “near Memphis” or make a derisive jab at my country background. Over the years, my career started to fall into place—I moved up to be editor-in-chief of the student paper, and I got an internship with the *Tennessean*. I credited it to the hard work of draining all the blood from my former self and filling her instead with tasteless, benign water.

There was reason to why I did it. In the classrooms of my youth, there was a sense that to succeed it was important to speak with perfect grammar and without too much country

inflection. No “y’alls,” no “ain’ts.” Our teachers were reacting to a very real judgment that came from a “professional” ideal. This was before Dolly Parton was anointed to sainthood.

In mainstream popular culture, white southerners of a lower class were reduced to hicks, to the delight of elite tastemakers. *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Forrest Gump*, *Duck Dynasty*. When I visited the University of California, Berkeley, to decide whether to go to graduate school there, I let slip that I was from a small town in the South, and a girl asked me if anyone wears shoes there. I forced a laugh, but embarrassment soured my stomach.

Five months after I tried to mold Emily into Eliza, I moved to the Bay Area and declared myself done with the South. “You did have a two-tears-in-a-bucket attitude,” Emily recalled later, a bemused expression on her face. I told her that it took me too long to realize that she was right to hold

on to her southern identity. I told her I was sorry. When we talk, I cannot imagine anything that fits her more perfectly than the sound of her voice as it has always been.

These days, I feel like a radio operated by someone clumsily twisting the knob this way, then that, searching for a clear signal between what I sound like and the girl I used to be. Slower, fuller vowels roll off my tongue when encouraged by an extra glass of whiskey, some great indignation, the sound of another's drawl. But if my old self escapes from my lips in my new life, those syllables flatten back out minutes later. The quick, unconscious retreat to the safety of the unaccent makes me feel as though I'm a fraud—a girl who refused to heed her grandmother's warning and forgot where she comes from.

My dad has said you can feel the call to home deep in your bones. I know exactly what he means. Once, every step I walked from the train station to the office seemed victorious to me. But I gradually began to realize that I no longer wanted to pretend. I became a kind of homesick that led me to play old *Friday Night Lights* episodes while folding laundry or put on the Highwomen record and dance around, singing with all the twang I've got left. On visits to West Tennessee, I would spend hours behind the wheel of my parents' car, pushing my luck on the country roads where I learned to drive, staring at the cotton packed up

and waiting in the fields. I swallowed pangs of sadness for having missed the days just before harvest when endless rows of fragile, browning stems balance their fluffy burdens, waiting to be relieved by gigantic cotton pickers. When I lived in Crockett County, I belligerently declared often and loudly that I would soon be gone, that I would never look back. Then, it became impossible to stop looking back.

***My dad has said
you can feel the
call to home deep
in your bones.***

In Sarah Broom's memoir, *The Yellow House*, she writes about her home, a New Orleans that is unseen by the tourists who mill about the French Quarter. She describes her homecoming, her hopes "to close the distance between the me of now and the me of then." I read that line on a bus that carried me across concrete bridges and toward ambitious structures of iron and glass, and yearned for similar catharsis. I started to hope that I could reclaim and resurrect a part of myself.

So, I decided to move back. I'm still searching for what it means to be southern, but now I'm doing it with all the "y'alls" and the "reckons" I withheld for so long. **R**

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A League of Their Own

Starring Abbi Jacobson

ABBI JACOBSON TAKES A SWING at reimagining the beloved 1992 classic. In the opening scene, Jacobson's character, Carson Shaw, rounds a corner and hits the dirt—but she's not headed home. She barely makes a train to join the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. The eight-episode series has more room

to investigate the bats and barriers broken by the women to make the big leagues in World War II-era Illinois. Ace pitcher Maxine Chapman (Chanté Adams), for one, has to work twice as hard and be three times as good as her white counterparts, for even a chance at a chance. But her skill and love of the game might sway the right people to go to bat for her. Jacobson's *Broad City* chops shine through: The show is best when she and fellow Rockford Peach Greta Gill (D'Arcy Carden) banter. (Streaming August 12 on Amazon Prime Video) —*Caroline Fanning*

COURTESY AMAZON STUDIOS, PHOTOGRAPHER: ANNE MARIE FOX. NOUN PROJECT (TV ICON)



Vengeance

Starring, and written and directed by B.J. Novak

B.J. Novak messes with Texas in this comedy-drama about city slicker Ben heading west for the funeral of a former fling. Her brother Ty (Boyd Holbrook) insists it was murder, based on ... nada. Under the guise of helping to find the culprits, Ben podcasts Ty's quest for baseless vengeance. He describes "a new American reality where people invent conspiracy theories because the truth is too hard to accept." But it goes up in flames when Ben's Prius inexplicably blows up. The tension (and hilarity) set up by the culture clash (he thinks the family is a bunch of yokels; they think he's a yellow-bellied Yankee) softens. Ty is sincerely concerned: "What if you were driving a real car? With gas and stuff!" Issa Rae plays Ben's podcast producer, and Ashton Kutcher plays a smooth-as-glass local. *(In theaters July 29)* —Mara Reinstein



Radio Play Revival

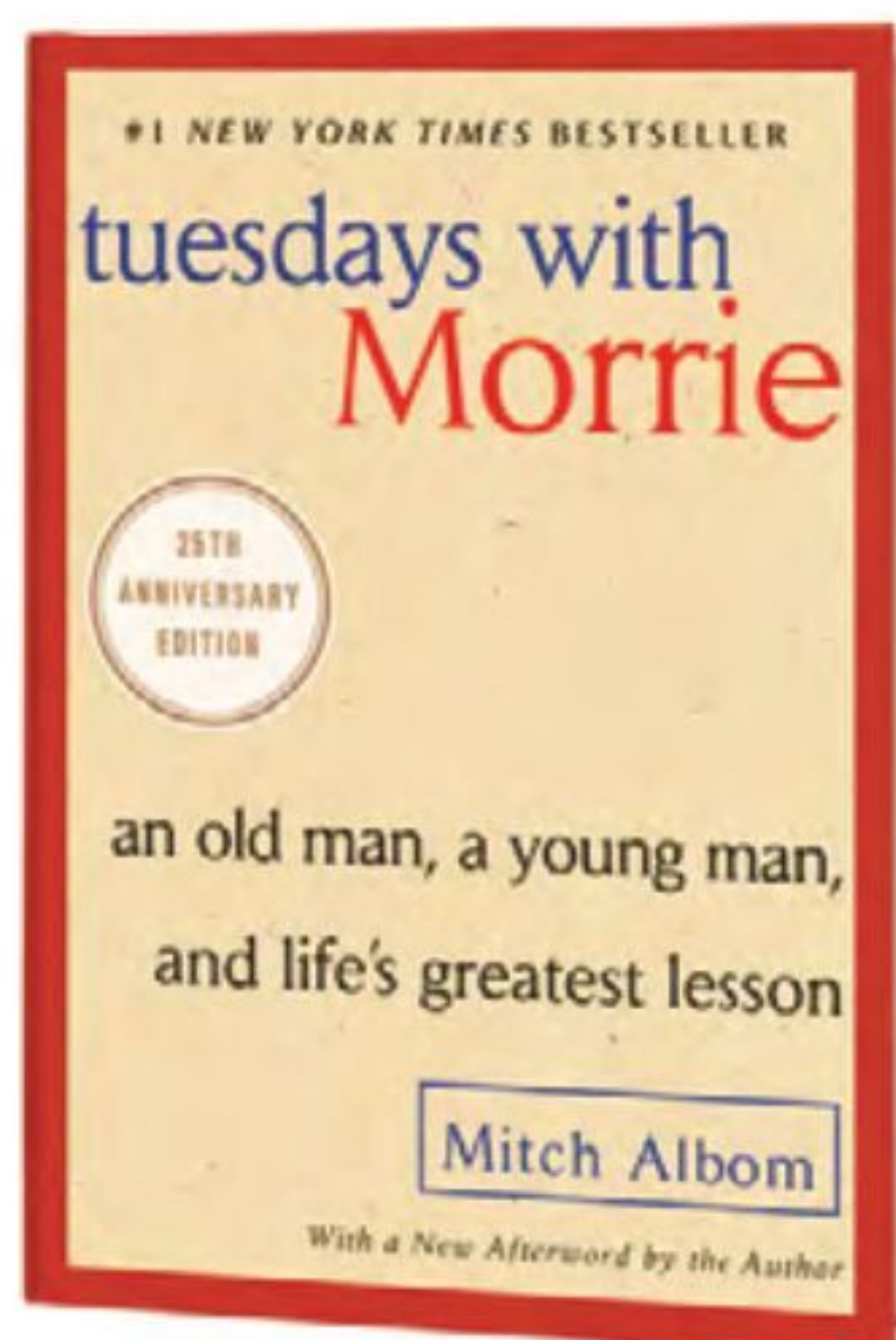
From Broadway
Podcast Network

The AirPods are alive with the sound of Zenith radios.

Radio Play Revival features great American actors from the big screen and Broadway performing great American works of literature. Think Samuel L. Jackson, Michelle Williams, and Harriet Harris doing O. Henry, Edith Wharton, Ambrose Bierce, and more. It's all of the golden age of radio plays without the terror of *The War of the Worlds* 1938 radio scare. —CF



NOUN PROJECT (PODCAST AND BOOK ICONS). T_KIMURA/GETTY IMAGES (BOOK SHAPES, 2). COURTESY PANTHEON BOOKS (PARADISE FALLS). COURTESY CROWN (TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE)



Tuesdays with Morrie: 25th Anniversary Edition

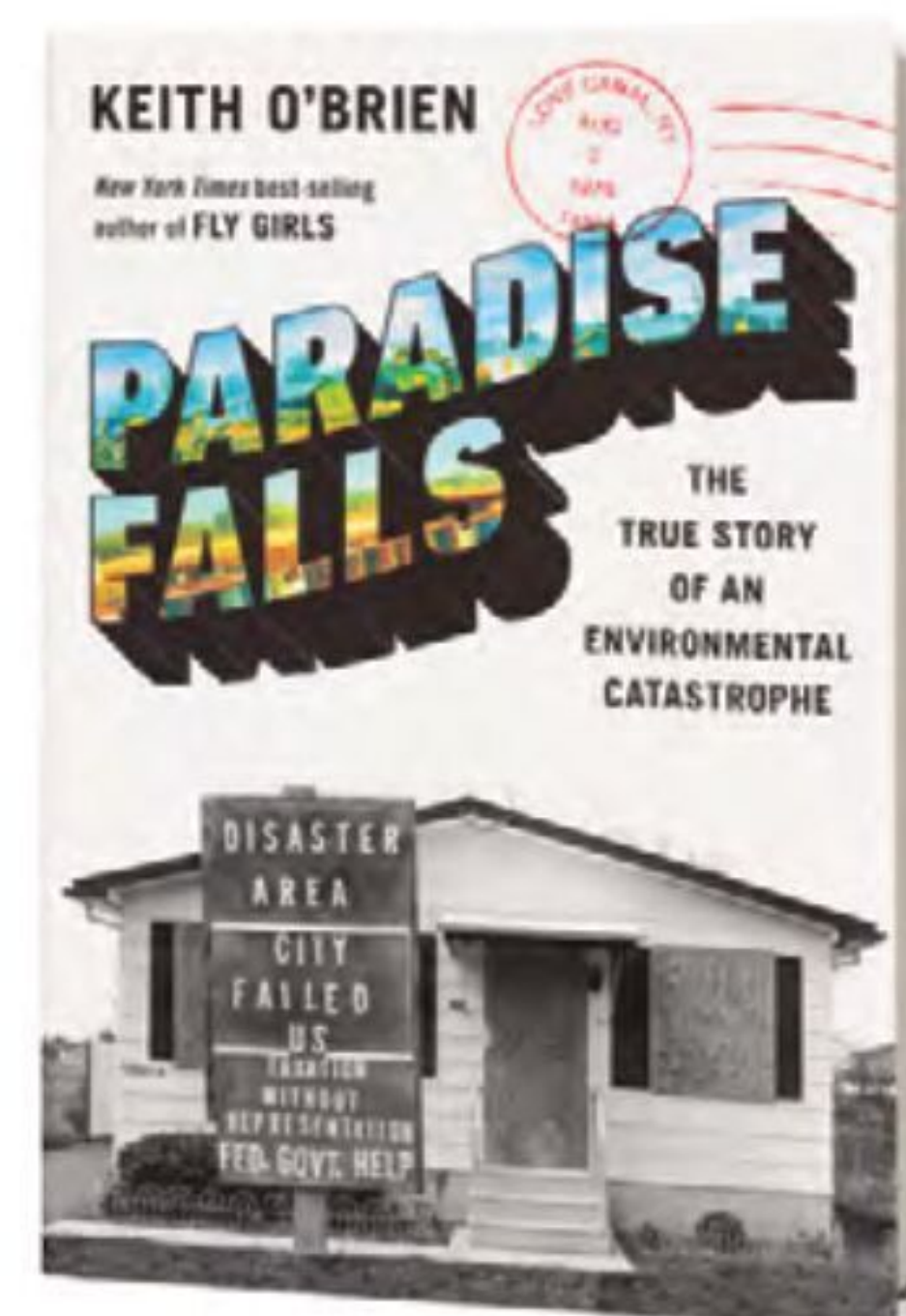
By Mitch Albom

Originally published in 1997, Mitch Albom's account of time spent with mentor Morrie Schwartz was at one time the best-selling memoir in the world. It nearly wasn't published at all. Albom wrote it to help with Schwartz's medical bills, and when a book deal seemed impossible, his agent suggested Albom pen a letter about why he felt so moved to write about his Tuesday visits. For the first time, in this special 25th anniversary edition we can read the letter that inspired publishers to share this story with the world. —CF

Paradise Falls

By Keith O'Brien

There was something in the water in Love Canal. And the ground. And the air. In the 1940s, Hooker Chemical buried toxic waste in the canal and sold the land for \$1—and residents suffered its effects. O'Brien chronicles the notorious case of environmental disaster and bureaucratic negligence, and the actions of citizens who took things into their own hands when officials refused to act. Mothers toted kids along as they petitioned. A nun crashed a meeting to confront executives. A scientist risked her career to whistle-blow. It's an almost unbelievably histrionic history. —CF



QUOTABLE QUOTES

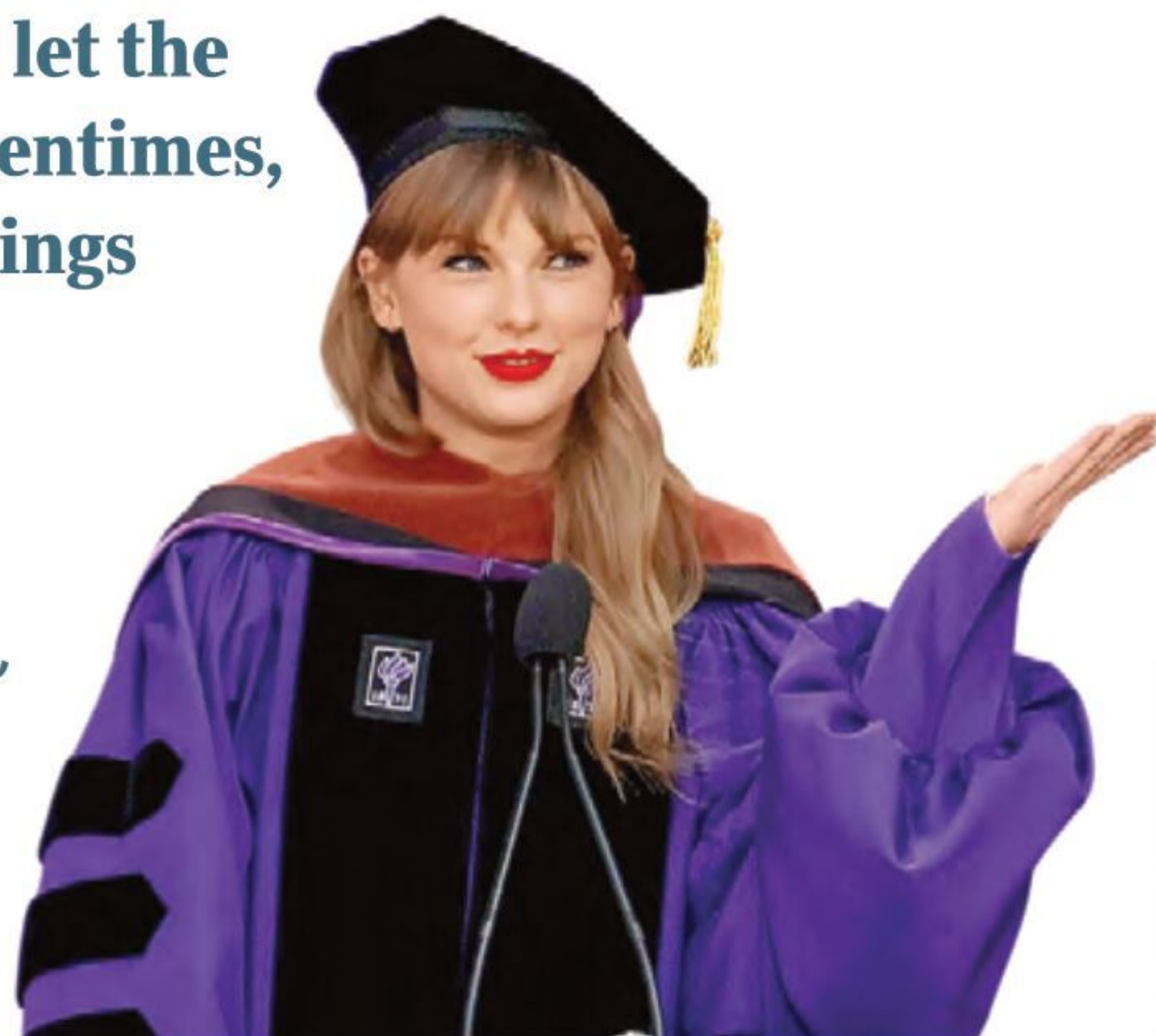
Spend 30 minutes a day doing something to help you become the person you secretly would love to be, to do the job you would secretly love to do. There are people who are doing it, and it was impossible for them at one time too.

—**Tomi Adeyemi**, NOVELIST, IN *TEEN VOGUE*



Decide what is yours to hold and let the rest go. Oftentimes, the good things in your life are lighter anyway.

—**Taylor Swift**, MUSICIAN, TO GRADUATES OF NEW YORK UNIVERSITY



My secrets to a happy marriage: Listen to each other, touch feet in bed even if you're mad, and never, ever ski together.

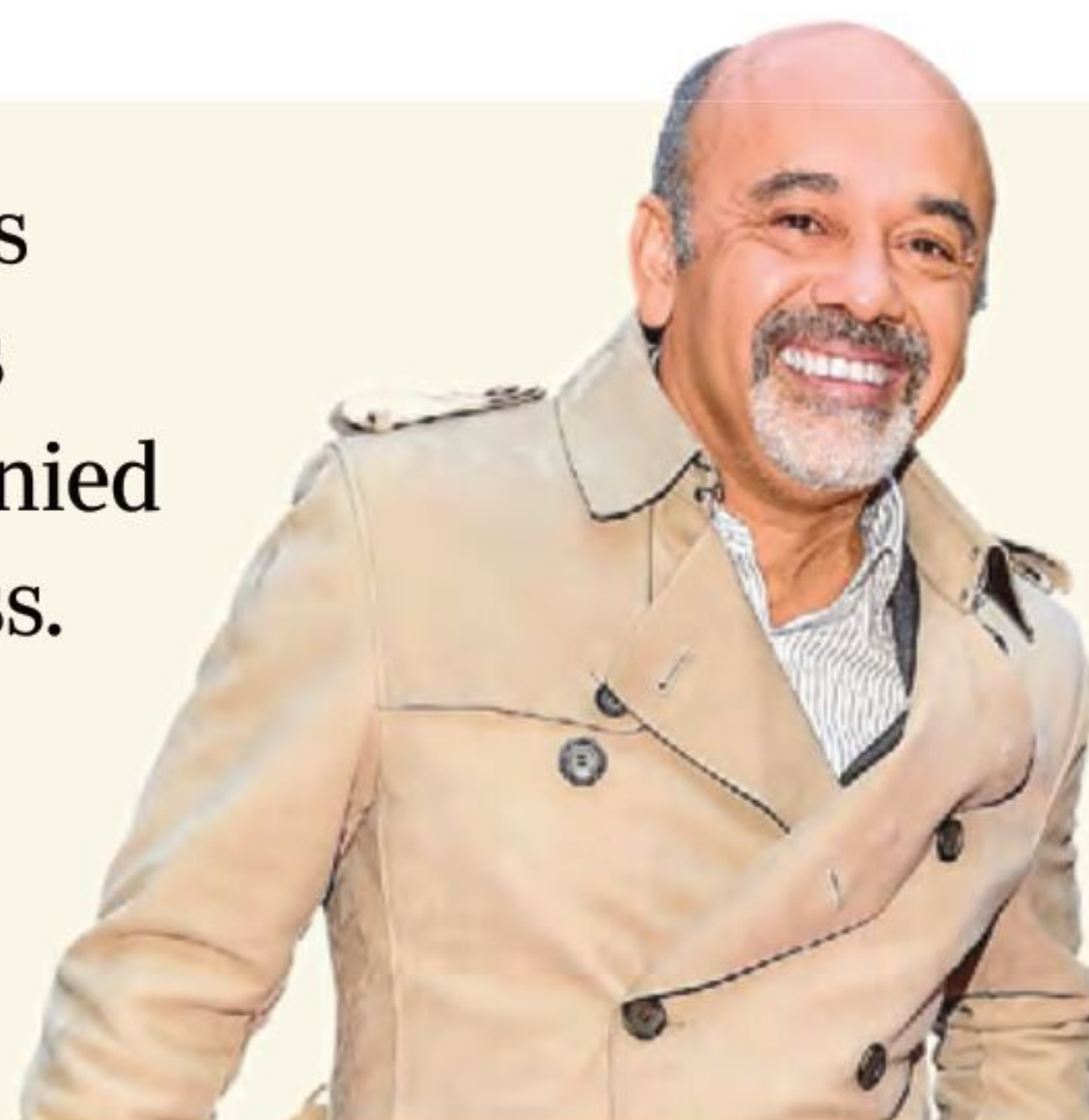
—**Ree Drummond**, FOOD PERSONALITY, ON INSTAGRAM

I can outeat any workout.

—**Angela Bassett**, ACTOR, IN *INSTYLE*

Intelligence is nothing if it's not accompanied with kindness.

—**Christian Louboutin**, DESIGNER, IN *VANITY FAIR*



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— Don W., Sherman, TX

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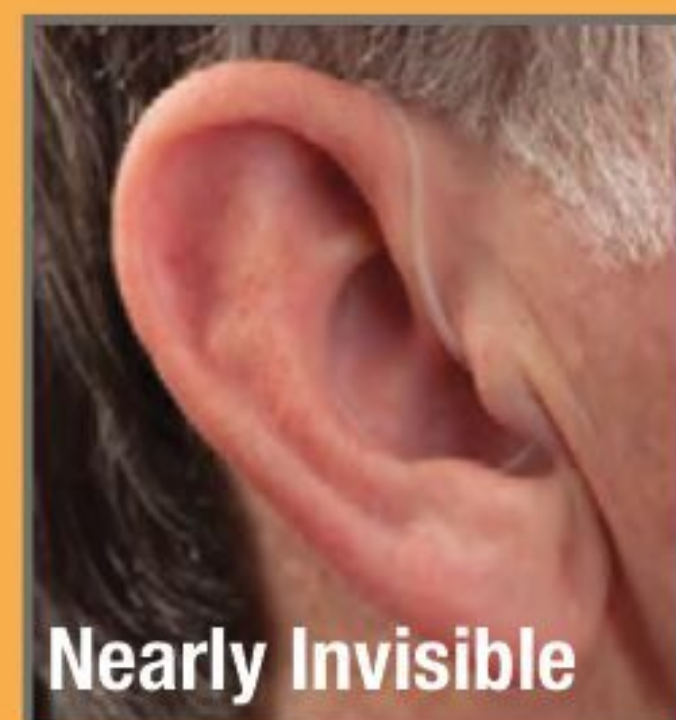
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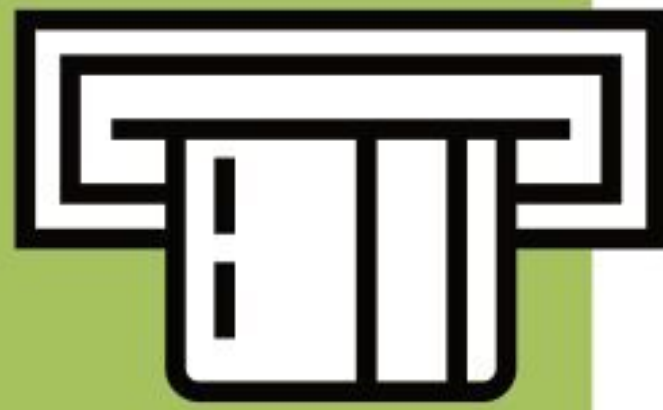


Brain
GAMES
SHARPEN YOUR MIND

Fact or Fiction?

MEDIUM Determine whether each statement is fact or fiction. To reveal the solution to the bonus question at the bottom, write the letters indicated by your responses in the corresponding numbered blanks. Turn the page upside down for the answers.

1. You can find ATMs in Antarctica.



FACT: **B** FICTION: **F**

2. Coco Chanel is responsible for the no-white-after-Labor-Day rule.

FACT: **A** FICTION: **R**

3. Sherlock Holmes first says "Elementary, my dear Watson" in *A Study in Scarlet*.

FACT: **C** FICTION: **O**

4. Brad Pitt injured his Achilles tendon while playing Achilles in the film *Troy*.

FACT: **A** FICTION: **S**

5. We are all either introverts or extroverts.



FACT: **I** FICTION: **D**

6. Baseball umpires used to sit in rocking chairs.



FACT: **C** FICTION: **M**

7. Leaves change color in the fall because their trees get less water.



FACT: **I** FICTION: **A**

8. Abraham Lincoln was a licensed bartender.

FACT: **S** FICTION: **L**

9. Samsung tests the durability of its phones using a robot that sits on them.

FACT: **T** FICTION: **E**

BONUS QUESTION Which word, related to communication technology, was added to the dictionary in 1922? (Need help? Turn to 13 Things on page 34.)

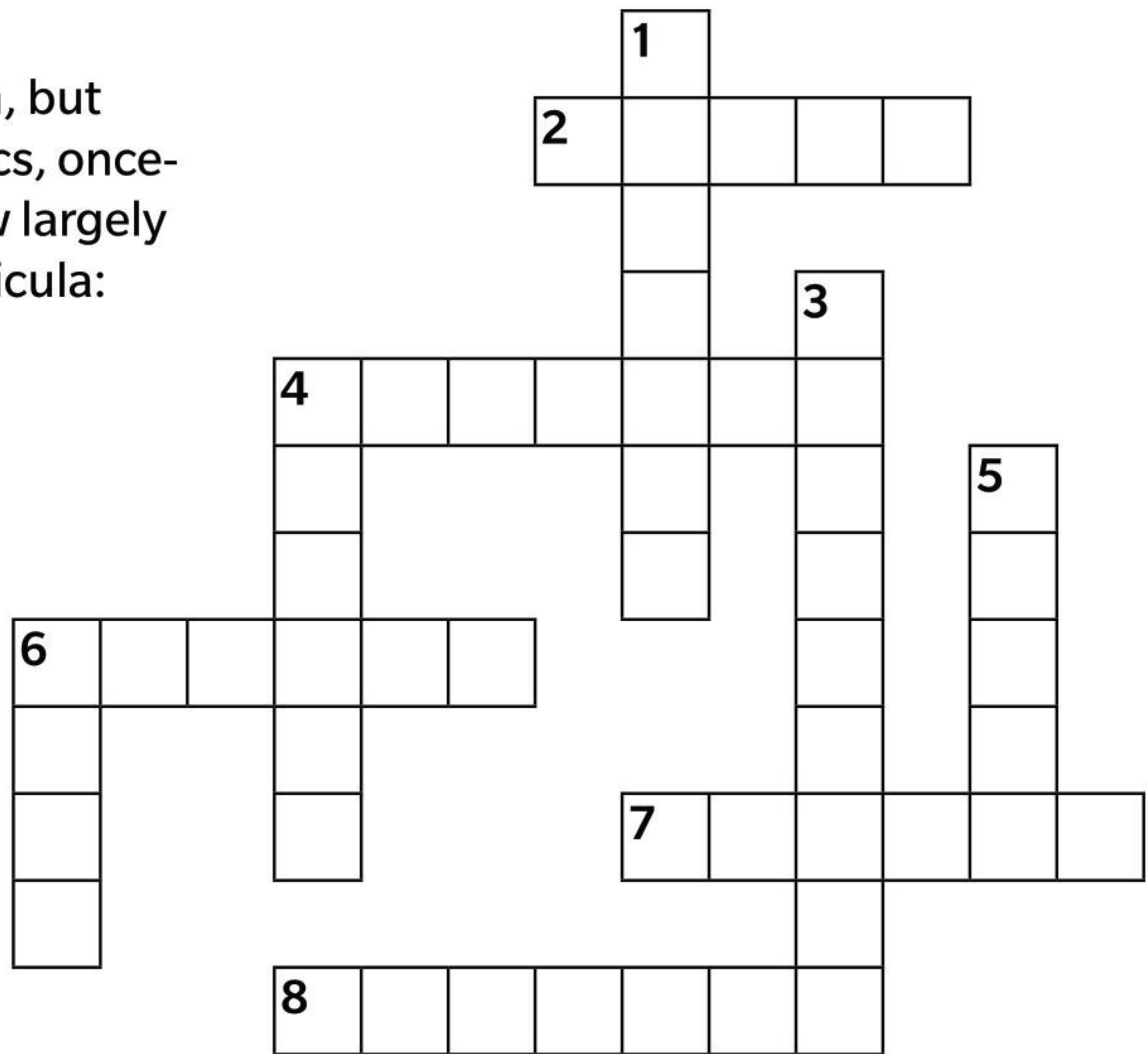
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Answers: 1. Fact. 2. Fiction; Chanel wore white year-round. The custom originated with midcentury American elites. 3. Fiction; he never says it in the works of Arthur Conan Doyle. 4. Fact; art imitates life. 5. Fiction; there is an in-between personality type called "ambivert." 6. Fact. 7. Fiction; it's because the leaves are producing less chlorophyll. 8. Fact. 9. Fact. **Bonus Question:** Broadcast.

Quick Crossword

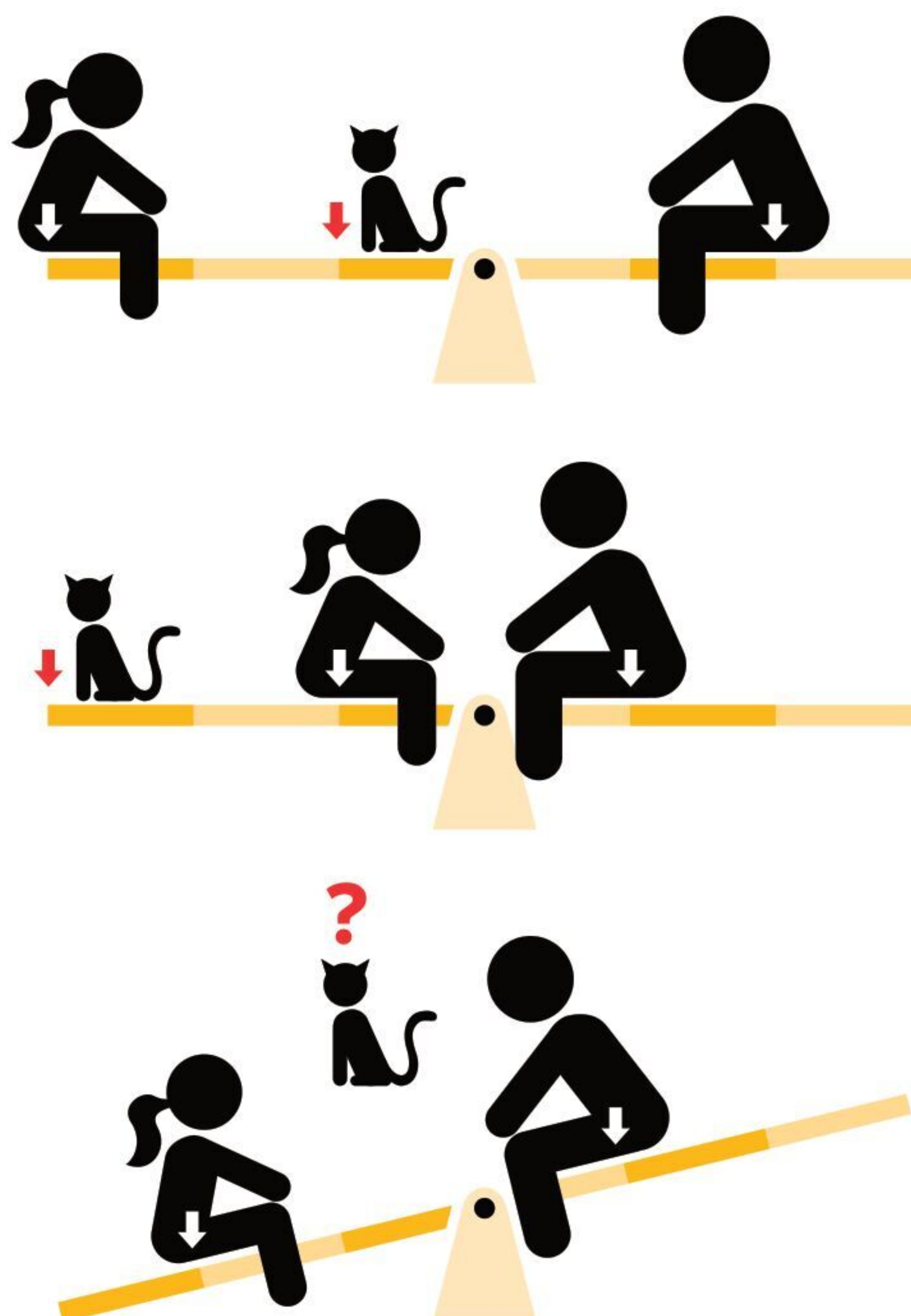
EASY It's back-to-school season, but not for these subjects and topics, once-standard offerings that are now largely absent from public school curricula:

- CIVICS
- SEWING
- LOGIC
- TYPING
- GEOGRAPHY
- SHOP
- LATIN
- LIBRARY
- COOKING
- CURSIVE



Seesaw

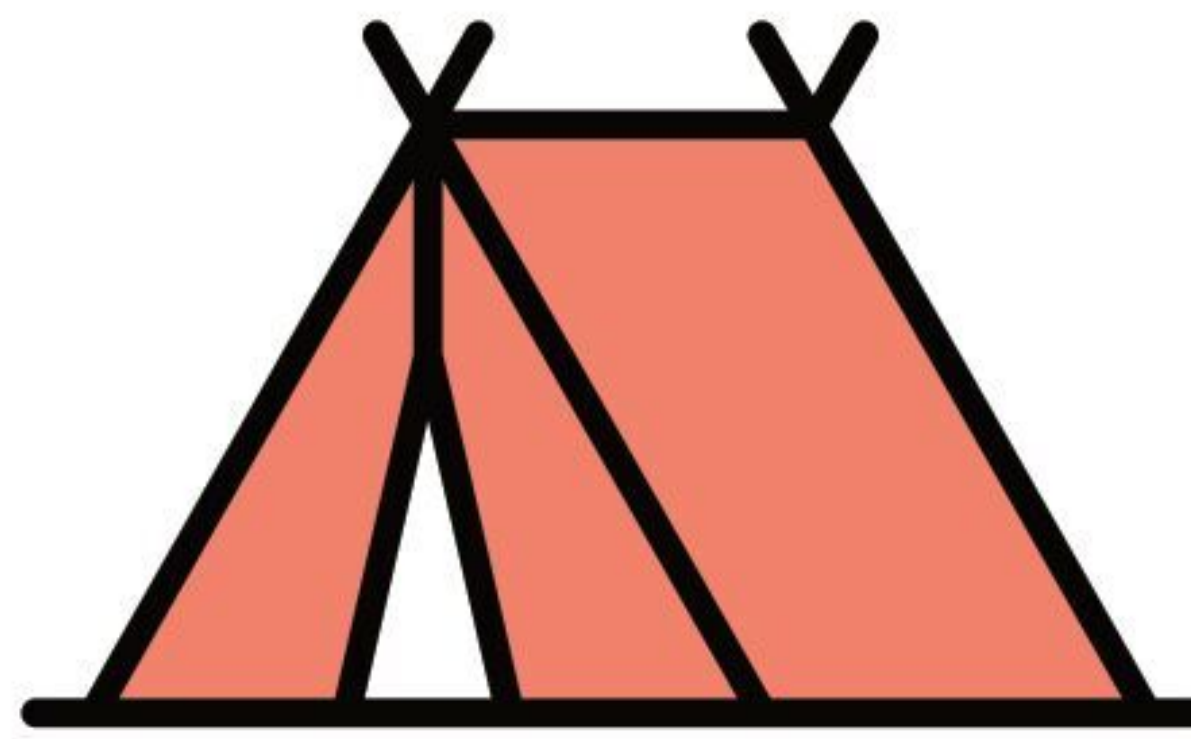
MEDIUM Aaron and his little sister, Alex, are on a seesaw. In the first two pictures, they are balanced because the amount of force they're applying to each side (with some help from their five-pound cat, Ginger) is the same. Assuming each colored section of the seesaw has the same length, where should the cat sit in the final picture to balance it?



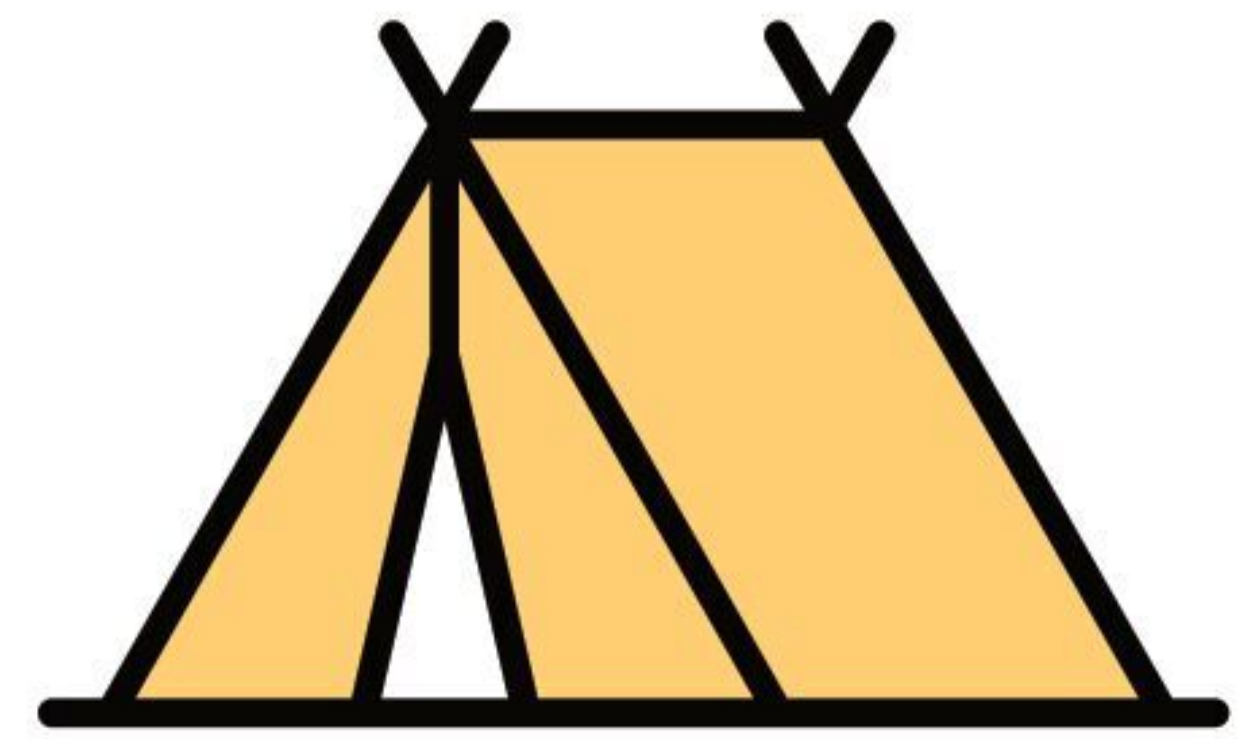
EMILY GOODMAN (QUICK CROSSWORD). SEESAW (DARREN RIGBY)

Happy Campers

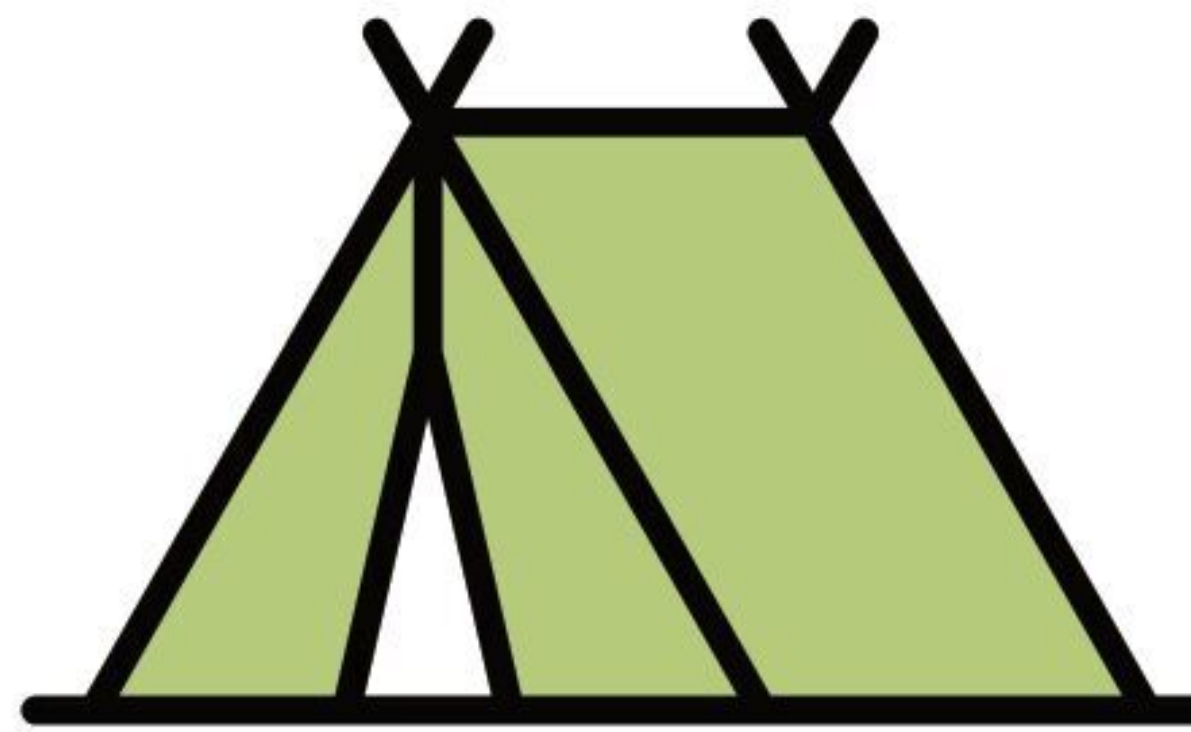
EASY Your annual family camping trip usually involves some sort of practical joke and, this year, the prank is on you. Your family has hidden your sleeping bag in one of four tents. Outside each they put a sign, but only one sign is truthful. Can you determine which sign that is, and which tent your sleeping bag is in?



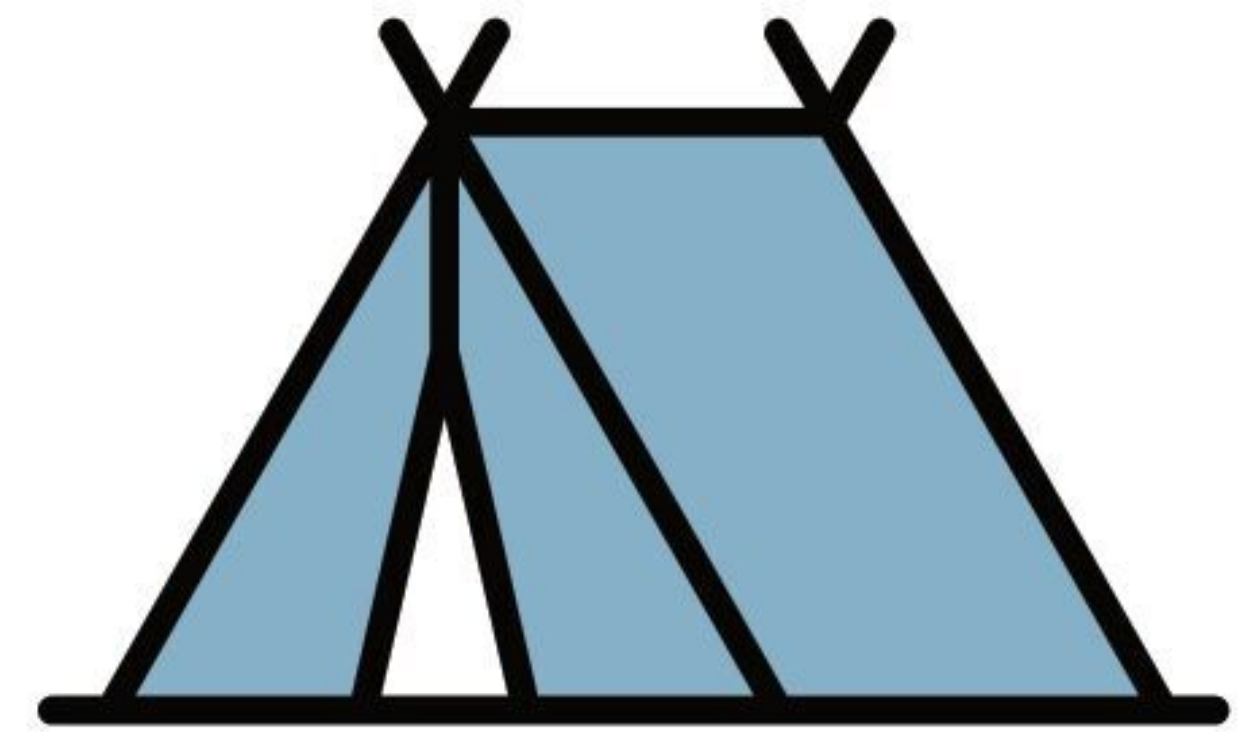
It's not in here.



It's not in the blue tent.



It's in the yellow tent.



It's not in here.

Decoder

DIFFICULT The numbers at the end of each row or column result from adding up the numbers represented by the symbols in that row or column. Knowing this, determine the value of each symbol.

!	■	★	◆	20
■	★	◆	!	20
■	!	◆	■	18
◆	■	★	★	23
★	★	!	★	17
23	18	32	25	

Animal Kingdom

MEDIUM All four of the animal species listed below are made up. Aside from being imaginary, they share one other trait in common. What is it?

CHANTER GEESE
 APRIL EMU
 SUBMERSIBLE SLUG
 COPAY TIGER

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

For answers, turn to PAGE 111.


WORD POWER

Ahoy, mateys! In honor of International Talk Like a Pirate Day, a silly but real holiday celebrated every September 19, these words include three *r*'s (as in "Arrr," the utterance that in 1995 inspired two friends to invent the day). Once you find your sea legs, follow the current to the next page for the answers.

BY Sarah Chassé

1. recurrent *adj.*
(rih-'kur-ent)

- A trendy
- B worthless
- C on-and-off

2. proprietor *n.*
(pruh-'pry-uh-ter)

- A owner
- B offspring
- C headmaster

3. derriere *n.*
(dair-ee-'air)

- A small pistol
- B backside
- C second home

4. corroborate *v.*
(kuh-'rah-buh-rayt)

- A band together
- B support with evidence
- C steal from

5. terrarium *n.*
(tuh-'rair-ee-um)

- A solid ground
- B haunted house
- C glass enclosure

6. arbitrary *adj.*
(-'ar-buh-trair-ee)

- A based on whim
- B contested
- C lined with trees

7. barnstormer *n.*
(-'barn-stor-mer)

- A red-tailed hawk
- B armored tank
- C traveling performer

8. orrery *n.*
(-'or-er-ee)

- A chicken coop
- B solar system model
- C fuel gauge

9. arrears *n.*

- (uh-'reerz)
- A window blinds
 - B unpaid debts
 - C suspicions

10. preternatural *adj.*
(pre-ter-'na-chuh-ruhl)

- A exceptional
- B active at night
- C historical

11. gerrymander *v.*
(-'jair-ee-man-der)

- A build for emergency use
- B joke around
- C finagle voting districts

12. arrowroot *n.*
(-'air-oh-root)

- A poisonous snake
- B trailhead
- C starchy plant

13. farrier *n.*
(-'fair-ee-er)

- A one who shoes horses
- B amateur boxer
- C translator

14. retrograde *adj.*
(-'reh-truh-graid)

- A reversed
- B immature
- C metallic

15. precursor *n.*
(-'pree-ker-ser)

- A requirement
- B ban
- C forerunner

Pirate Parlance in Pop Culture

Did buccaneers of yore really growl “Shiver me timbers”? Possibly. But actor Robert Newton’s swashbuckling performance as Long John Silver in 1950’s *Treasure Island* is responsible for most of our ideas about pirate-speak. He used the dialect of southwestern England, an area with a long maritime history, where “arr” means yes.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. recurrent

(C) *on-and-off*

Javier’s doctor prescribed a new medication for his recurrent migraines.

2. proprietor (A) owner

Are you the proprietor of this fine establishment?

3. derriere (B) backside

The last time I went roller-skating, I tripped and fell on my derriere!

4. corroborate

(B) *support with evidence*

The detectives reviewed security footage to corroborate the victim’s story.

5. terrarium

(C) *glass enclosure*

Our pet turtle, Humphrey, lives in a terrarium.

6. arbitrary

(A) *based on whim*

Good judges don’t make arbitrary decisions; they follow the letter of the law.

7. barnstormer

(C) *traveling performer*

Jorge began acting as a barnstormer, starring in shows across the country.

8. orrery

(B) *solar system model*

The bronze orrery on Ed’s desk belonged to his father, a noted astronomer.

9. arrears

(B) *unpaid debts*

Overwhelmed by her arrears, Hannah filed for bankruptcy.

10. preternatural

(A) *exceptional*

The young quarterback has a preternatural ability to find his receiver.

11. gerrymander

(C) *finagle voting districts*

The city council denies trying to gerrymander key downtown districts

to sway the election results.

12. arrowroot

(C) *starchy plant*

Powdered arrowroot can thicken sauces and stews.

13. farrier

(A) *one who shoes horses*

After a brief stint as a jockey, Derek worked as a farrier at a dude ranch.

14. retrograde

(A) *reversed*

Mercury retrograde, a period when the tiny planet’s orbit appears to change direction, is often considered unlucky.

15. precursor

(C) *forerunner*

Ragtime music was a precursor to jazz.

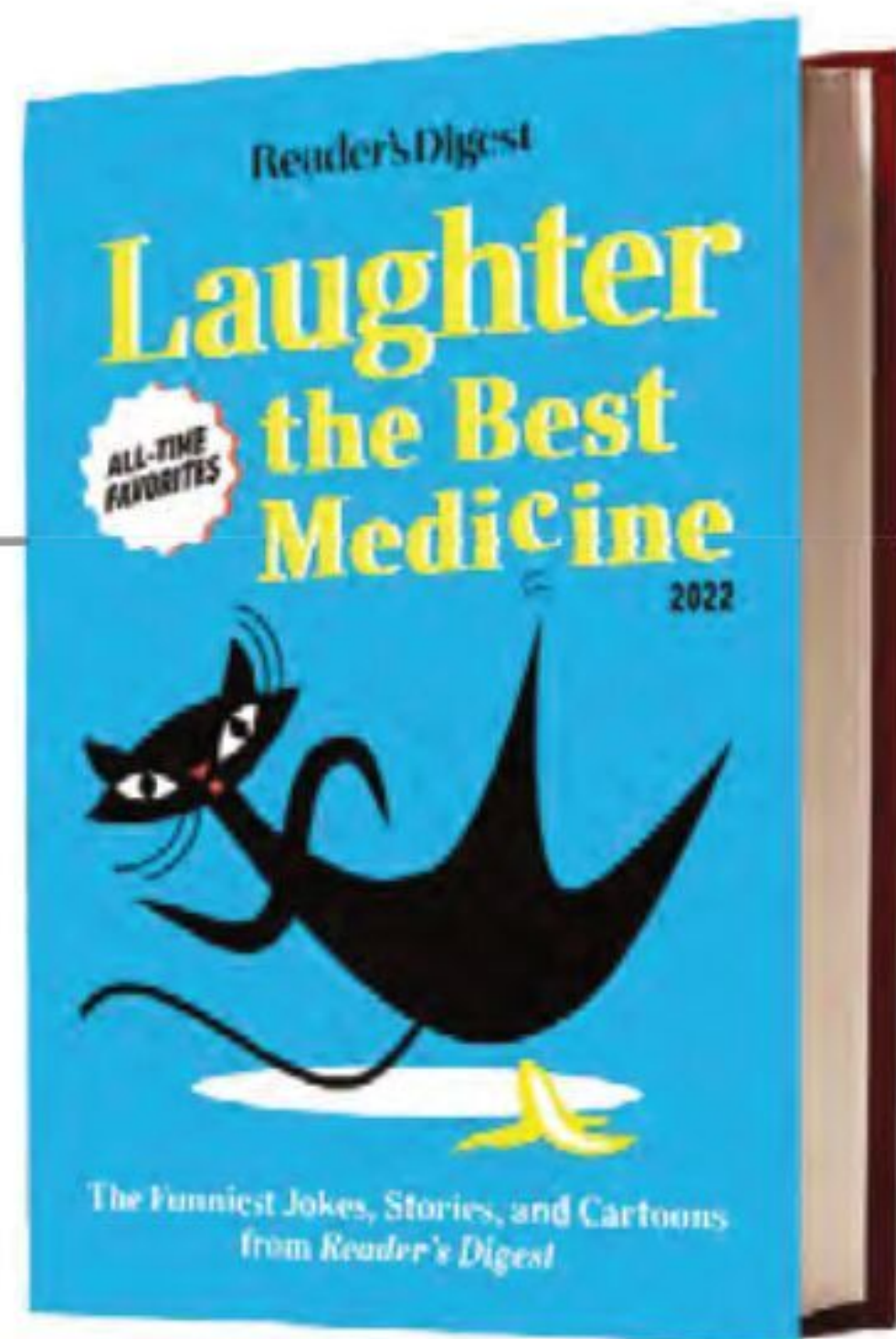
Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW:

underprepared

10–12: extraordinary

13–15: ultrarare



SPECIAL OFFER

Good, Clean, Family-Friendly Humor

You've heard that an apple a day can keep the doctor away, but we like to think that a chuckle every day can do the same. That's why we're writing you a prescription for *Laughter, the Best Medicine 2022*, an all-new collection of our all-time funniest jokes, quotes, quips, stories, cartoons, and columns. Our editors mined 100 years of archives and packed more than 450 of these gems into this compilation, which can be yours for just \$10. (We'll spot you the shipping.) Order at rd.com/RDSEP.

JOLEEN ZUBEK (BOOK)

ANSWERS

WHERE, OH WHERE?

(page 52)

C. Jackson Hole, Wyoming. (The three other choices are also home to Dambo's troll sculptures.)

BRAIN GAMES

(pages 107-108)

Quick Crossword

ACROSS

2. LOGIC
4. CURSIVE
6. SEWING
7. TYPING
8. LIBRARY

DOWN

1. COOKING
3. GEOGRAPHY
4. CIVICS
5. LATIN
6. SHOP

Seesaw

Ginger the cat should sit

two lengths away from the pivot on Aaron's side.

Happy Campers

The sign outside the red tent is the only one that can be true without creating contradictions, so your sleeping bag is in the blue tent.

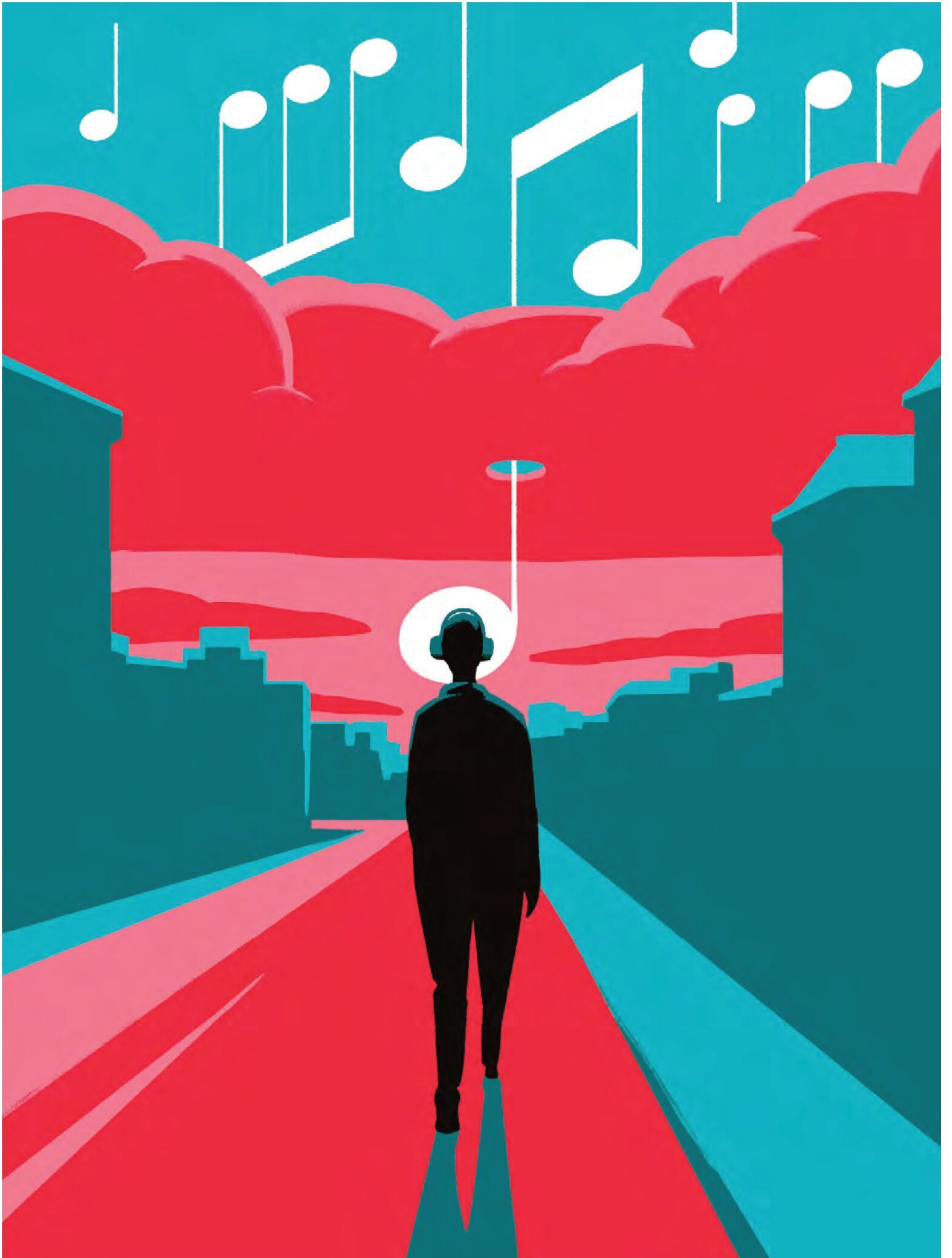
Decoder



Animal Kingdom

They are anagrams of countries and their capitals. (Athens, Greece; Lima, Peru; Brussels, Belgium; Cairo, Egypt)

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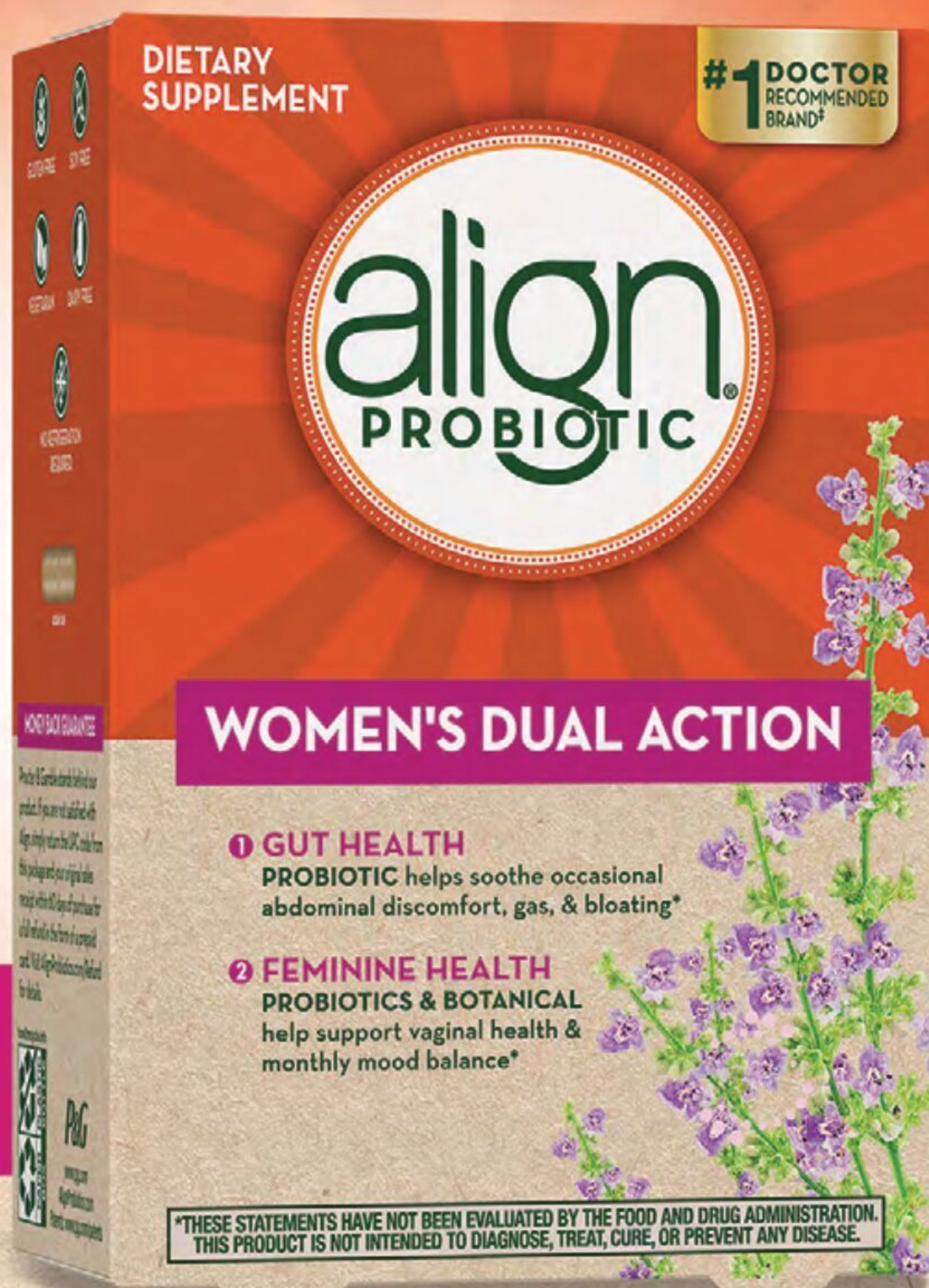
A TRUSTED FRIEND IN A COMPLICATED WORLD

Walking with Mozart by Christoph Niemann, exclusively for *Reader's Digest*

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