

Reader's Digest

JUNE 2023



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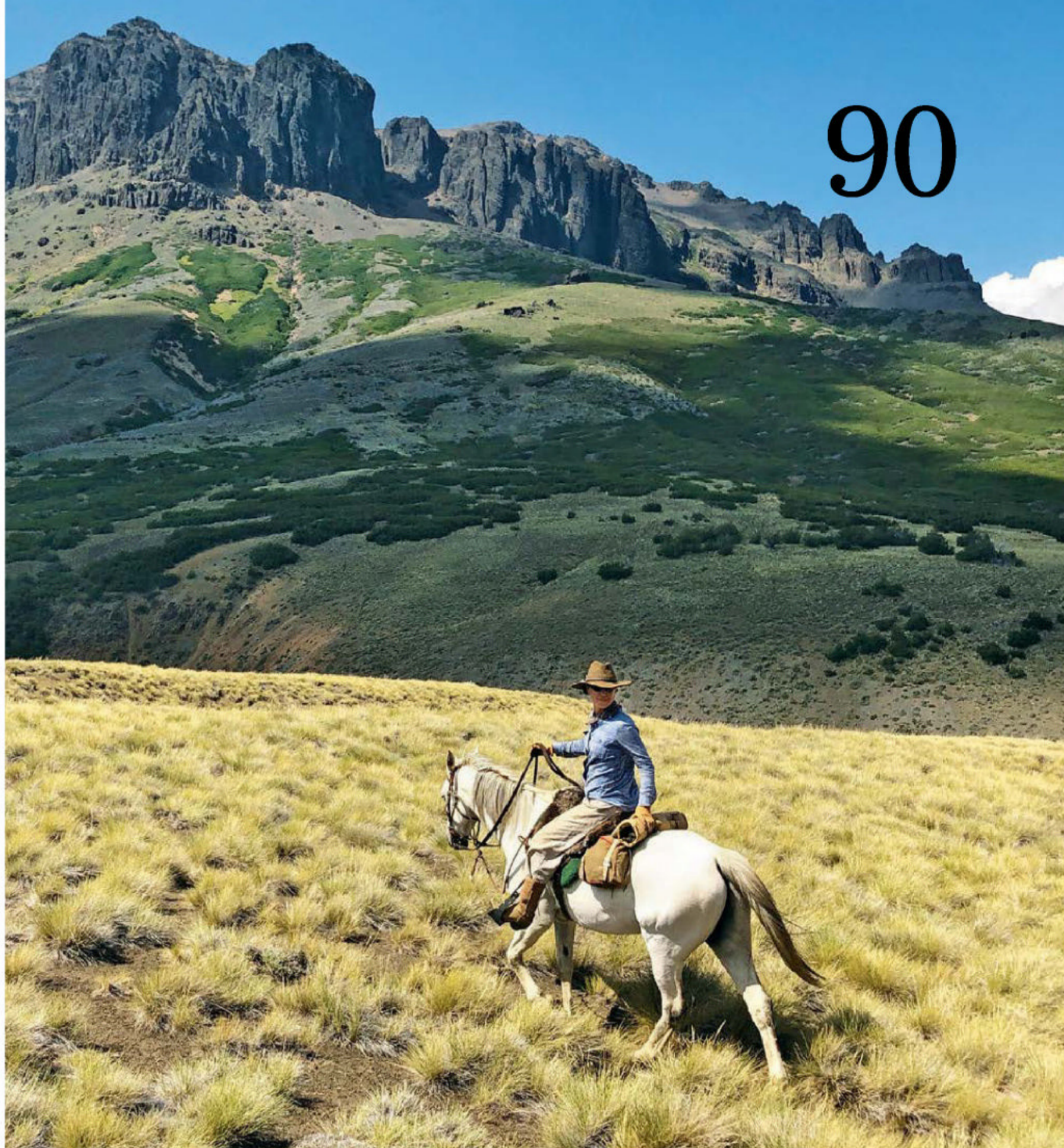
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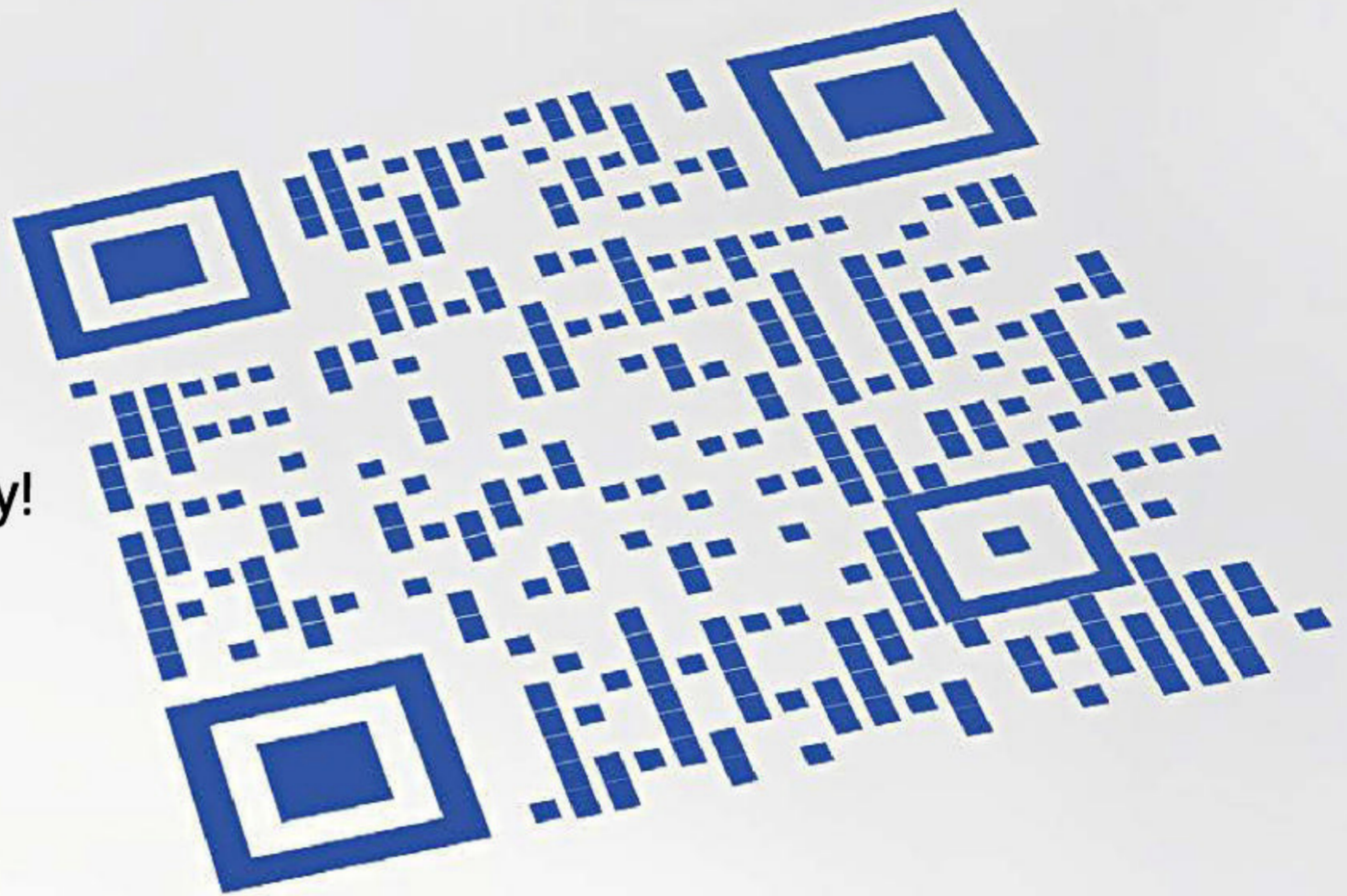
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EDITOR Kai Jabir Friese
GROUP CREATIVE EDITOR Nilanjan Das
GROUP PHOTO EDITOR Bandeeep Singh
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR Ishani Nandi
FEATURES EDITOR Naorem Anuja
EDITORIAL COORDINATOR Jacob K. Eapen
ART DIRECTOR Angshuman De
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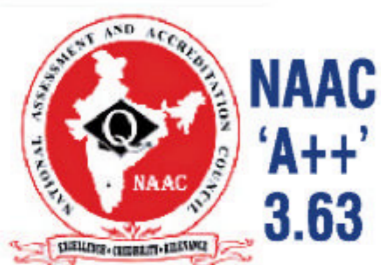
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OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE
April ISSUE



THE SWEET USES OF SOLITUDE

The essay reminded me of Blaise Pascal's quote: "All man's miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone". We wake up every morning to the chaos of news on our devices; we have turned into experts at creating and seeking out noise. But there is one person with whom you should seek solitude and that is you! Solitude allows the mind to stay energetic and fresh—this is the very purpose of meditation, as the sages have taught us. Solitude isn't loneliness. It is a short, yet essential break from our everyday lives. Let us not miss out on that sweetness.

LAXMAN G., *Mysore*

Laxman G gets this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000. —EDs

Wise Animals I have Known

Alan Davoe's story brought back memories of our beloved Kuppamma (meaning 'one from the dust-bin'), the loveable stray dog who would hang around our home. He saved my three-year-old from a possible snakebite by relentlessly barking at a krait trying to slither in through a window. He would resist empty gas cylinders being taken out from the house and prevent waylaid garments from being pilfered. By the end he was part of the family.

K. V. DHARMARAJAN, *Pune*

Personal Glimpses

I ended up reading the heartwarming stories of Jane Goodall and Tony Bennett on the eve of Mother's

Day—a fitting tribute to all mothers. While all children may not achieve the success of Goodall and Bennett, all the mothers share something in common—wanting their children to achieve the best in their lives!

ARVIND ARYA, *Mumbai*

The Night the Stars Fell

I am the same age as Mr Gordon's son, and therefore the story took me back to my own childhood. But the childhood of yore is a distant past. Technology has so overwhelmingly taken over our lives that the pleasure of enjoying the wonders of nature is lost on us. But, it is also true that it is now difficult to look at the starlit sky as the bright city lights have made it redundant! Where are the ponds or rivers, where one could jump in for a swim, or the flora and fauna, amongst which one can lose oneself in the beauty of nature?

We need to revert to sustainability, which, though difficult, is not impossible.

ATUL KUMAR SAXENA,
New Delhi

India's 60,000 Kilo- metre Lifeline

During the 1960–70s, though there were only a few running in Assam, as a child, I often travelled on trains with my parents during vacations.

Frequently, we would take a rail christened by the local population as *Kopling singa rail*, meaning 'coupling breaking rail', because the coupling of the bogies broke down routinely, forcing the train to make unscheduled halts. Passengers would have to wait for hours, for repairs. We would use this time to walk around and explore the place where we were stuck. The train was so famous that an Assamese author even wrote a book on it.

GHANA DUARAH,
Guwahati

Almost every school vacation involved a train journey, either to a relative's or to a new place. I would look forward to those journeys with feverish anticipation, since every train ride promised a new adventure—be it tasting my first cup of lemon tea or a glimpse of a double rainbow for the very first time.

Sitting beside the window, as I watched the countless villages and towns whiz past, I dreamt of becoming a locomotive pilot, hoping I could get to travel long distances by train more frequently. No matter how old I get, I will continue to look back on those journeys I took with fondness, still hoping to catch a glimpse of something yet undiscovered out of the train window.

DIPAYAN DAS, *Durgapur*

Why I Like Japan

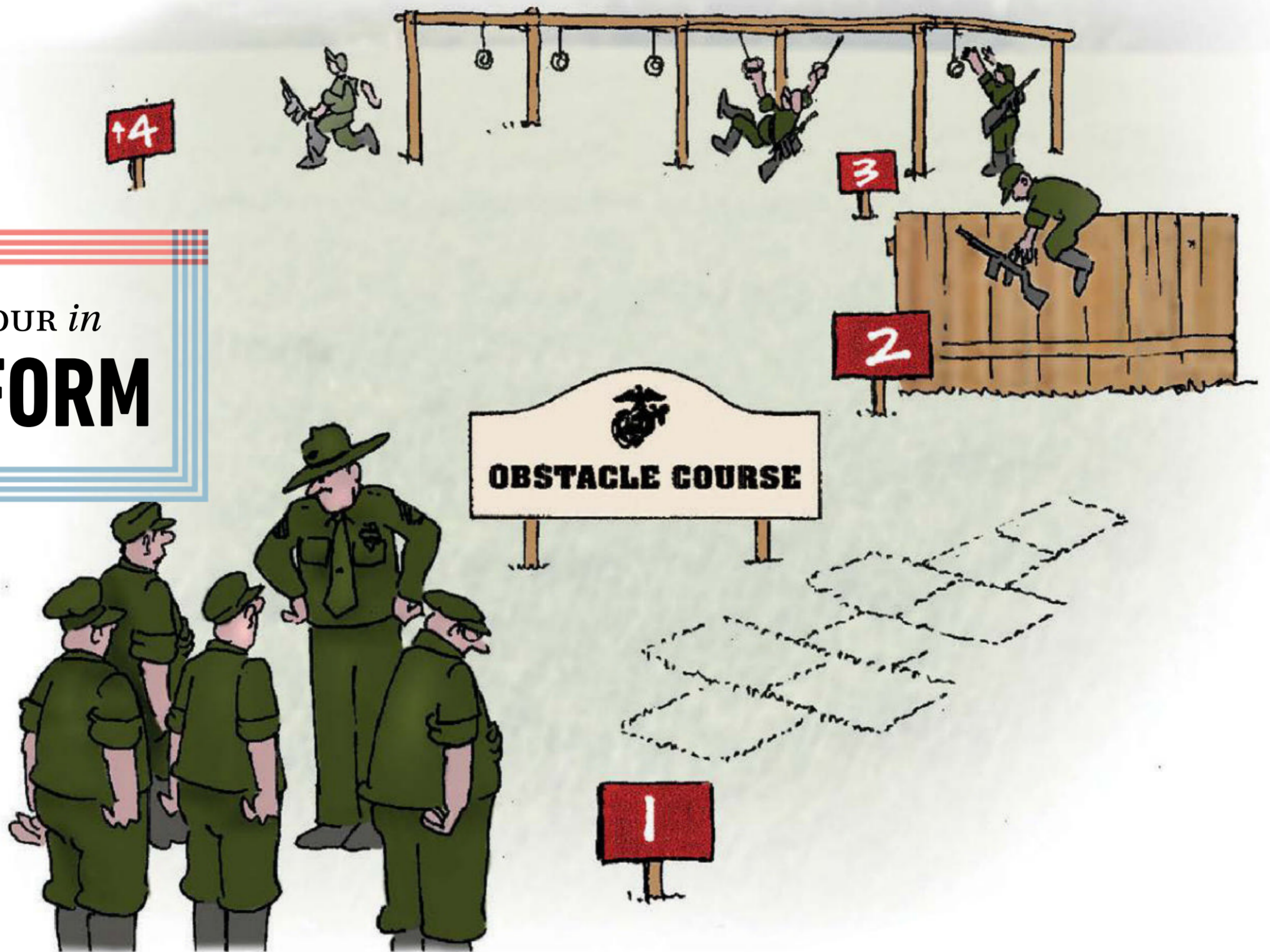
Though I have never been to Japan, I have a minor association with the country and its people. One of my

uncles emigrated to Japan in the 70's. While in India, he was seen as the black sheep of the family—leading an undisciplined life, even ending up bankrupt. He left to start a new life in Japan, where he eventually married a local girl and his life turned 360 degrees. He always insisted that he imbibed the merit of hard work and dedication from his wife, which helped him become a successful trader. For us too, our 'Japanese Uncle' became the epitome of diligence and good values. Though he is no more, he lives on still in those same values I now teach my children.

PARVINDER BHATIA,
Jamshedpur

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HUMOUR *in*
UNIFORM



At a staff briefing in Korea, a pilot told us about a flight he made through a mountain pass during a storm. It was so bad that he was forced to turn back. “Gentlemen,” he said, still shaken, “it’s better to be down here on the ground wishing you were up there than to be up there wishing you were down here.”

The chaplain disagreed: “Maybe in your line of work, Captain, but not mine.”
 —BERNARD JONES

Should you join the Navy fighter pilot training school known as Top Gun, do not quote from the eponymous movie. Former Top Gun instructor Guy ‘Bus’ Snodgrass told *Business Insider* that those ignoring this warning will be fined \$5 by instructors.

We’re an Army family, so it was a surprise when our eight-year-old declared that he wanted to join the Marines when he grew up because “they have

the coolest song.” He then went on to sing his version of it: “From the halls of bazoo-ooka To the shores of naval sea. We’re proud to claim the title Of United States Maureen.”

—T. WOOD, *via United Through Reading*

Reader’s Digest *will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email us at editor.india@rd.com*



Have Chair, Will Travel

FOR 33-YEAR-OLD AMERICAN travel blogger Cory Lee, it used to be easier to explore Antarctica than some of the nearby parks and beaches in his home state of Georgia. Using a wheelchair once meant that rugged hiking trails were off-limits, but that's no longer the case. All-terrain power wheelchairs are now available at state parks in Georgia, as well as in Colorado and Michigan. The wheels and treads on each Action Trackchair allow people with mobility issues to traverse rocky trails, sandy beaches and uneven terrain. They're even powerful enough to make steep uphill climbs. As Lee told CNN, "It'll open up a whole new world for me and for other wheelchair users." **R**



COURTESY OF CURB FREE WITH CORY LEE



EVERYDAY HEROES

Nasrat Khalid wanted to show that disaster aid can be done differently.

Made in Afghanistan

Nasrat Khalid turned his artisan website into a grassroots disaster-relief organization

BY *Diane Peters*

ON A JULY day in 2021, Nasrat Khalid was on the phone to his native Afghanistan when he got some awful news: “This whole city has turned into a refugee camp,” Kabul-based Mohammed Nasir told him.

Nasir is the chief of operations for Khalid’s company, Aseel, which positions itself as the Etsy of Afghanistan. It allows artisans making things like blankets and jewellery to sell their products around the world via its app and website. Artisans may also receive training in handicrafts and business practices.

Khalid, who is based in Washington, D.C., worried constantly about Kabul that summer as US forces withdrew

MOSTAFA BASSIM

from Afghanistan and city after city fell to the Taliban. His Afghan-based team struggled to ship products to buyers, while local artisans saw their incomes dry up. Plus, many of them were fleeing the increasingly dangerous provinces.

Khalid knew he had to help his people. He used some of the company's savings to buy food, and Nasir delivered it to a refugee camp in Kabul. Hungry people attacked the truck, tearing Nasir's clothes in their desperation.

It was clear that they needed to take a more systematic approach. Every aid recipient got an identification number, and Aseel's tech infrastructure tracked every drop-off. "We created a whole new distribution system," says Khalid.

An emergency-response page was added to the company's website, allowing donors to give money or buy emergency packages of food or supplies. They can even select a specific recipient, so that expat Afghans can send money and aid to family members.

Later, Khalid created a GoFundMe-style page on Aseel's website that allows people to run fundraising campaigns for, say, giving food to people in a particular province or funding a vocational program for girls. As of early 2023, Aseel had raised more than US\$7,50,000 [₹6.2 crores] from donors and helped some half a million people, in part through a partnership with the US-based Women for Afghan Women.

Recipients include Fatima, a single mother in Kabul who lives with 12 people in a one-room house. "Aseel's food

packages helped me survive the worst days of my life," she told *Reader's Digest* through a translator.

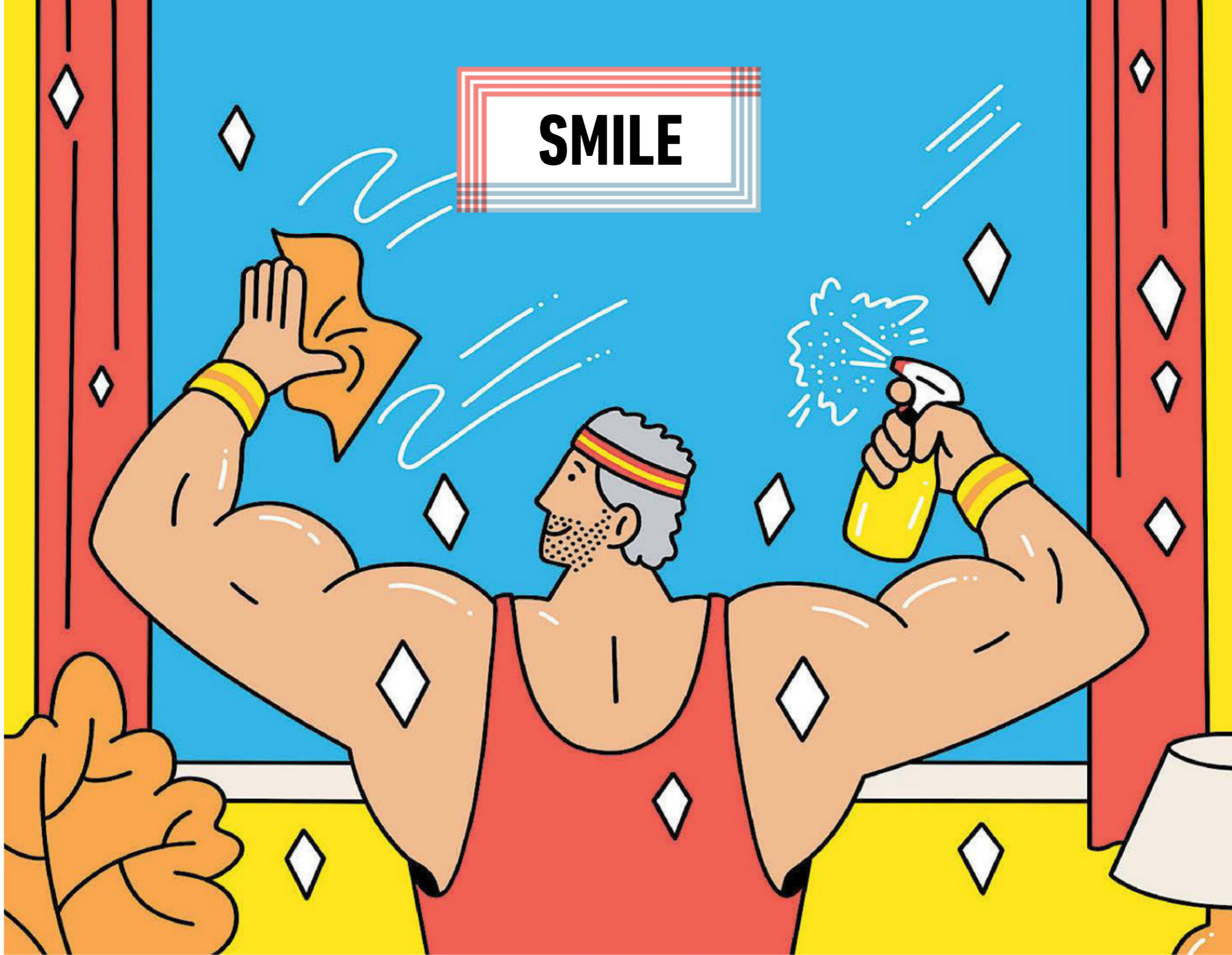
Before she and her sister received Aseel's packages, they had been going without enough food in order to provide for their kids and send them to school. "I remember the first day I received a food package. My kids played music and danced for the whole day." Fatima joined an Aseel apprenticeship program; after she completes it, she will be able to find employment with a local handicraft company.

In November 2022, the Society for International Development gave Khalid a leadership and innovation award. Jason Criss Howk, director of the US advocacy group Global Friends of Afghanistan, lauds what Khalid has done with both the charitable functions of Aseel and its for-profit arm.

"Aseel has become a vital tool to get directed aid to certain places in the country," he says. "They buy and distribute locally, which is sparking the economy." He thinks Khalid could help people in other nations, too, while keeping overhead low—something large aid organizations struggle to do.

Next, Khalid would like to work more in Turkey's Afghan refugee camps, and he has plans for further expansion and collaborations with aid groups.

"When Afghanistan collapsed, initially I felt very powerless," says Khalid. "When my country went through this disaster, Aseel became a lifeline to people in need." **R**



◆ GOOD NEWS ABOUT HOUSEWORK ◆

BY *Richard Glover*

A 2021 STUDY from Singapore found that people who do housework are fitter than those who don't. Tackling 'high intensity' tasks such as cleaning windows helps improve physical health and mental faculties, especially among the elderly.

The mental aspect doesn't surprise me. Attempting to change my duvet cover often leaves me entirely submerged in the thing, my hands holding its corners inside the cover, wondering what to do next. I'm pretty sure the widespread belief in ghosts stems from people becoming permanently entangled in their duvet covers.

Stacking the dishwasher is worse, with a hundred possible solutions to the problem of fitting everything in, only one of which is judged as correct by other household members. Has a dishwasher ever been stacked without someone saying: "Not that way, you've got it all wrong!"?

The bathroom leads to more disputes.

It's my belief that every time you have a shower, the shower has a shower and is therefore self-cleaning. But my wife, Jocasta, believes the shower recess needs to be cleaned separately, a task I achieve by stripping naked and attacking it on my knees with a scrubbing brush, my backside wagging from side to side as I work away at the grime.

Jocasta enjoys the sparkling results but remains uncertain about whether it's worth the flashbacks. Apparently, there are some things that, once seen, cannot be unseen.

As for cleaning windows, it's impossible to achieve a good result. I work hard at it, spraying on the fluid and scrubbing the glass with a crumpled sheet of newsprint. Everything looks spotless until the sun hits the windows the next morning, upon which they resemble a Jackson Pollock painting.

I then wash them again, which only moves the swirls from one place to another. Maybe I'm using the wrong section of the newspaper.

Next in my housework/workout regimen, I sweep up, which creates a pile of dog hair so unfeasibly large that I wonder if there's anything left of the dog. Maybe I could sell his hair for wigs and turn a profit.

The late British writer and eccentric Quentin Crisp famously claimed that if you don't do housework, dirt will stop accumulating after four years. I don't know if this is entirely true. I have memories of student houses in which the type of flooring was uncertain, so com-

plete was the coverage of motorcycle parts, pizza boxes and general filth.

I remember the moment someone moved a pizza box and exclaimed: "Hey, there's a carpet under here!" Nature abhors a vacuum and so did these young men. Was it a coincidence that they were all out of shape? I think not.

The bathroom was worse. Every time I hazarded a visit, I remember optimistically wondering if 'Putrid Black' was just another colour in the range of bathroom fittings.

I hope my housemates eventually realized one of life's great truths: Romantic partners find people who perform their share of the housework more arousing. Jocasta's erogenous zones, I've learned, include the kitchen floor, the bathroom and the lint filter in the clothes dryer.

What other housework can we throw ourselves into and make ourselves fitter at the same time? I have found that organizing the Tupperware drawer is a good start, as it tends to involve a lot of crouching, standing and then crouching again. There's also the moral and intellectual tussle of whether to throw out the lids that have no bottoms and the bottoms that have no lids, or wait to see if missing parts turn up.


And by never having the lawn mower serviced, I have cleverly created a system in which starting it involves two hours of sweat-inducing cord-pulling.

That's the thing about housework. As the Singaporeans discovered, you've got to use your body *and* your brains. **R**

GOOD NEWS

FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY *Patricia Karounos*

A photograph showing children in a school setting. A boy in the foreground is wearing a blue face mask and holding a clear plastic vial with a blue cap. He is looking at the vial with interest. A girl next to him is also looking at the vial. In the background, other children are visible, some wearing masks. The setting appears to be a school laboratory or classroom with a granite countertop.

Children in Campo Grande, Brazil, participate in a school programme to reduce disease.

FIGHTING MOSQUITO-BORNE DISEASES

HEALTH With its densely populated communities, Brazil struggles with outbreaks of mosquito-borne diseases like Zika virus, chikungunya and dengue fever. The World Mosquito Program (WMP) hopes to change that by using the *Wolbachia* method—and it’s enlisting school kids to help.

Wolbachia is a type of harmless bacteria found in up to half of insect species and research has shown it helps reduce disease transmission. The project raises mosquitoes with *Wolbachia* and then releases them into communities, where they mate and produce offspring carrying the bacteria.

In 2022, the WMP’s Brazil chapter

teamed up with 17 public schools in the central-western city of Campo Grande. About 1,600 students were provided with kits to raise an estimated 2.5 million *Wolbachia* mosquitoes over 16 weeks. The children also learnt about proper mosquito safety.

“It isn’t the whole solution,” says Luciano Andrade Moreira, who leads WMP operations in Brazil. “Along with vaccines and insecticides, *Wolbachia* mosquitoes are one more tool.”

The program is showing results elsewhere in the world. For example, a study in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, found a 77 per cent reduction in dengue cases in *Wolbachia*-treated regions.

Community Rallies to Rescue Dolphin Pod

WILDLIFE Linda Grocock was out running errands in Digby, Nova Scotia, last November when she spotted an unusual sight off the coast: 16 Atlantic white-sided dolphins had become beached. Figuring they didn't have a lot of time—dolphins can survive out of water for only about six hours—Grocock quickly got in touch with the Halifax-based Marine Animal Response Society (MARS), as well as some friends who individually contacted the local fisheries department and posted about the dolphins on a community Facebook page.

MARS personnel were too far away to get to the dolphins in time, so they enlisted Digby's volunteer fire department to help coordinate the response. Soon, about 40 locals who had seen the news online arrived on the scene and waded into the mud flats. Then they carefully moved the dolphins to tarps or sleds and gently hauled them back to the water. It wasn't long before each dolphin was safely back in the sea, swimming with its podmates.



ROSS EDMOND/GETTY IMAGES

Bracelet Keeps People With Dementia Safe

INNOVATION Project Lifesaver, founded in the US state of Virginia in 1999, is a non-profit organization that helps find wandering individuals, such as those with dementia or other cognitive conditions. Participants wear frequency-emitting wristbands—a technology often more reliable than GPS.

Earlier this year, the program made its 4,000th rescue, quickly finding a seven-year-old boy with autism who had wandered away from his Indiana home during the winter.

Today, there are more than 1,700 Project Lifesaver-certified agencies in the US and Canada that can locate wanderers in an average of 30 minutes.

Bringing a Nation's Trees Back to Life

ENVIRONMENT Although Iraq was once the world's leading producer of dates, years of war and drought resulted in the destruction of half of the country's roughly 30 million date-palm trees.

Labeeb Kashif Al-Gitta, co-founder of agri-tech company Nakhla, is working to revive the iconic tree. For an annual subscription, Nakhla tends to residents' mature trees, so they can hopefully bear fruit once again.

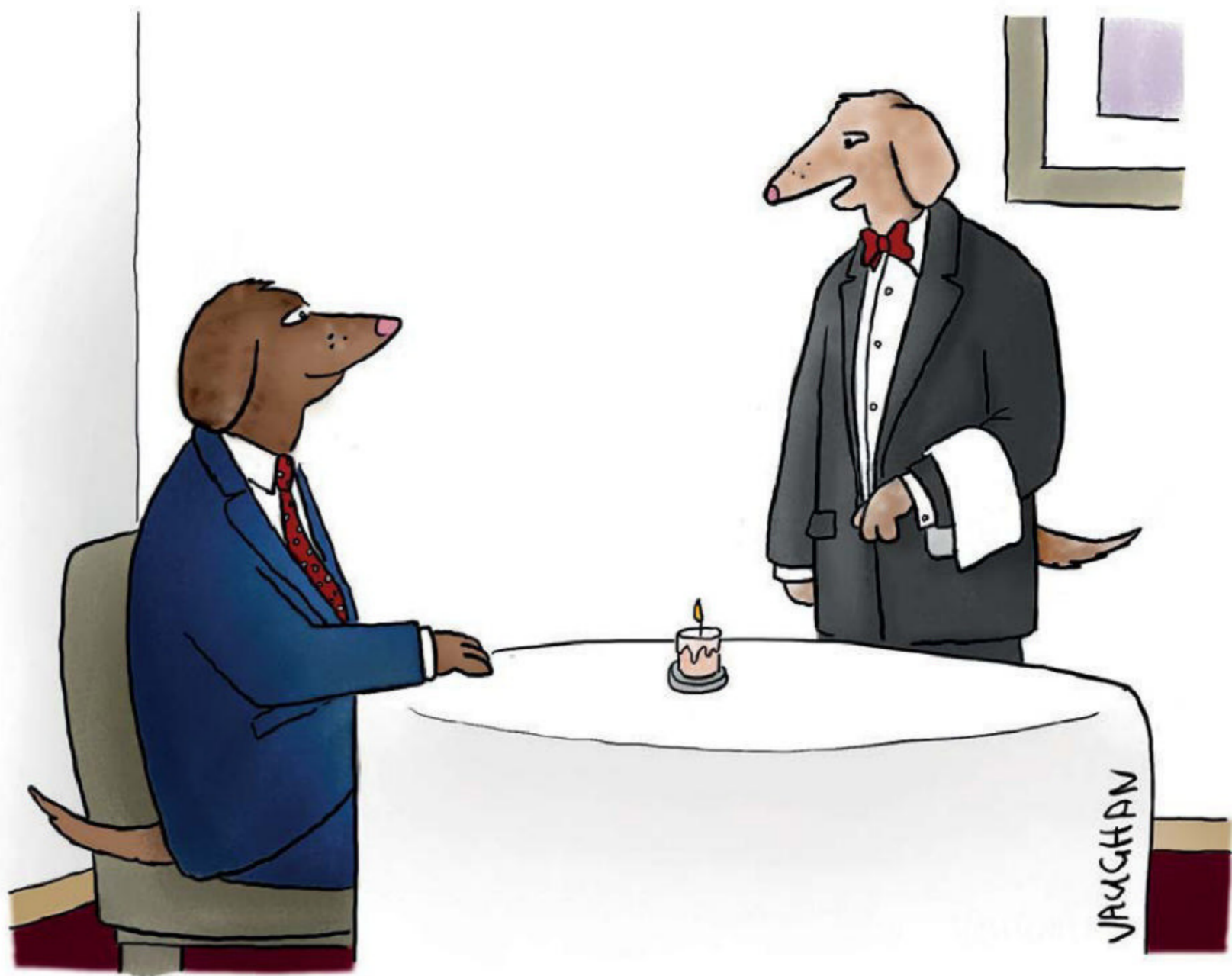
Nakhla launched in 2018, and as of 2022 the company cared for more than 14,000 date palms, with hopes to reach 50,000 by the end of 2023. **R**

ALL
in a Day's
WORK

My wife was teaching our four-year-old the importance of earning money by paying him to perform chores around the house. The first week, when he was finished, she gave him a crisp \$1 bill. The following week, she presented him with another dollar bill, but he pushed it away. “No, thanks,” he said. “I already have one of those.”

—PHILLIP BROWN

For no reason, I just thought of the time a guy I was dating got hired to dog-sit for a well-known filmmaker. My then-BF took me along with him once,



“Toilet or Tap?”

and I was surprised that the apartment was super nice but also relatively normal. Then we found out it was the dog’s apartment.

—[@MELISSAPETRO](#)

“Uhm ... How am I supposed to answer that?” These are actual interview questions meant to stump:

◆ Why is it OK to eat chicken, but not cat?

◆ Have you ever seen a ghost?

◆ Do you think I’m ugly?

◆ If you were starving to death on a desert island, would you eat a human being?

◆ How would you hide a dead body?

—[COBURGBANKS.CO.UK](#)

“I like work. It fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours.”

—JEROME K. JEROME, author, from *Three Men in a Boat*

My 86-year-old father was trudging up the

“Sculpture is something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting.”

—ADOLPH “AD” REINHARDT, painter

stairs carrying rolls of toilet paper to each of the three bathrooms in his house. As I passed him, I heard him mutter, "My first job was delivering papers too."

—TERESA HALL

Scene: Customer walks into our hair salon insisting she has an appointment ...

Me: Sorry, but I can't find your appointment here. Sure it was today?

Customer: Of course! I demand you give me

an appointment now!

Me: I can't find you on the system.

Customer: I booked an appointment a long time ago. Give me an appointment now!

Me: Maybe I can fit you in between two other clients. What were you going to have done?

Customer: I was going to get my eyes checked and get new glasses.

Me: Ma'am, the optician is next door.

Customer: Oh ...

—NOTALWAYSRIGHT.COM

After retiring from UPS as a delivery driver, my friend took a part-time job driving a school bus. When I asked how the new job was going, he replied enthusiastically, "Great! The packages unload themselves."

—GEORGE DENOFRÉ

Reader's Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

DEDICATED TO THE ONE I LOVE

For many writers, plot and dialogue are a cinch compared to writing the dedication and acknowledgments pages. Nevertheless, here are a few gems:

"To my wife Marganit and my children Ella Rose and Daniel Adam, without whom this book would have been completed two years earlier."

—Joseph J. Rotman, *An Introduction to Algebraic Topology*

"My first stepfather used to say that what I didn't know would fill a book. Well, here it is."

—Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life*

"What can I say about a man who knows how I think and still sleeps next to me with the lights off?"

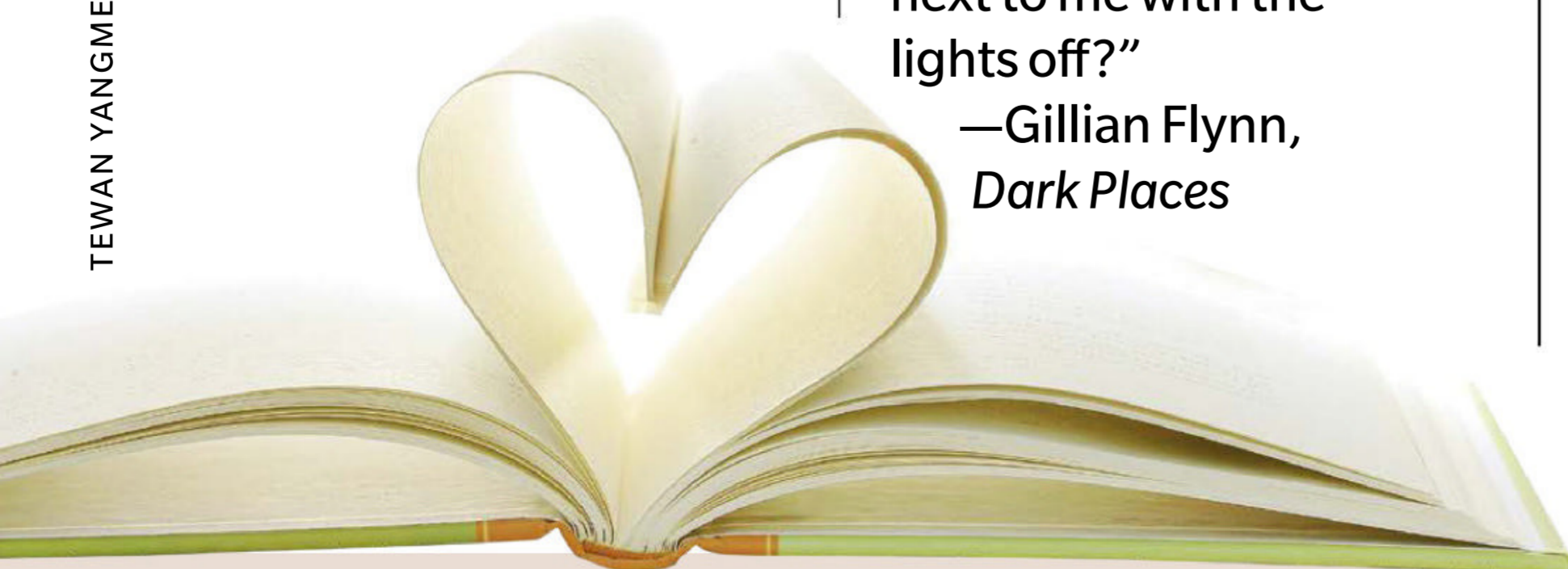
—Gillian Flynn, *Dark Places*

"To Charles Manson (not that one)"

—Norm Macdonald, *Based on a True Story: Not a Memoir*

"This book is dedicated to my father, Joseph Hill Evans, with love. Actually, Dad doesn't read fiction, so if someone doesn't tell him about this, he'll never know."

—Tad Williams, *Otherland, Vol. I*





BREAD
 APPLES
 MILK
 EGGS

~~TO DO~~

- ~~1) GET GROCERIES~~
- ~~2) MOW THE LAWN~~
- ~~3) PLANT FLOWERS~~
- ~~4) CLEAN OUT STORAGE~~
- ~~5) FIX BIKE~~
- ~~6) CALL ACCOUNTANT~~
- ~~7) BUDGET~~



To Do or Not To Do

Why we procrastinate and how to stop

BY *Christina Palassio*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Chelsea Charles*

TRACE MACKAY PUTS the pro in procrastination. As a pre-teen, she entered a speaking competition and only started writing her speech the night before. In veterinary school, she pulled all-nighters to cram for exams. Now 48 years old and living outside of Sauble Beach, Ontario, she works part-time as a vet and part-time as a consultant. But she still procrastinates on everything from her taxes to work projects.

“I’ll do just about anything to procrastinate. I’ll play sudoku on my phone. I’ll strike up a conversation with somebody,” says MacKay. “Especially right now, working from home, I’ll do some laundry, or go in the garden to water or weed, or take longer reading the paper in the morning than I should—all just to delay starting my workday.”

MacKay has developed strategies to beat her procrastination. She sets

early deadlines at work and asks her accountant to book her a personal cut-off a month before taxes are due. But because her procrastination has never gotten her into hot water, MacKay says she's never been forced to address it. So she keeps delaying.

Even if you're not a serial procrastinator, chances are there are many times you've put off a must-do task in favour of doing another, more fun one. In its more harmless forms, procrastinating can lead us to let our homes get messier than we'd like, or delay a much-needed vacation.

In its more pernicious forms, it can keep us from having important conversations with loved ones or delay addressing health issues. And it can take its toll on our self-confidence, health and happiness.

Luckily, there are easy and practical steps we can take to tame the procrastination beast and start living the lives we want to.

RECOGNIZE PROCRASTINATION

The biggest misconception we have about procrastination is that it's a time management problem. If we make more lists or get a time management app, the thinking goes, we'll solve all our problems. But such methods rarely work. That's because procrastination is all about emotional regulation: we procrastinate because we're hard-wired to choose feeling good in the moment

over feeling good in the long term.

"Procrastination is as old as the human condition," says Tim Pynchyl, head of the Procrastination Research Group at Carleton University. "Wanting to feel good now is basically a human need." Unfortunately, delaying the necessary often creates feelings of guilt and shame. The more we procrastinate, the more this cycle becomes entrenched and the worse we actually feel.

Pynchyl suggests taking three steps to get your procrastination habits under control. First, learn how to tell the difference between procrastination and purposeful delay. Whereas procrastination is often irrational (you put off filing your taxes even though it will make you more stressed), purposeful delay tends to be rational (you complete an assignment the night before because the pressure helps you perform). Second, realize that when you're procrastinating, you're acting against your own self-interest. And lastly, learn to forgive yourself for messing up.

IDENTIFY THE FIRST STEP

The next time you're tempted to procrastinate, Pynchyl says to ask yourself: "What's the next action I would take on this task if I were to get started on it now?" Have an important project at work you're not sure how to get started on? Set a meeting with your boss to clarify expectations. Want to finally tackle that home renovation project?

Make a list of the tools and materials you'll need to do the job. Setting a manageable and realistic first step shifts your attention from feelings of uncertainty or fear on to a low-stress, easily achievable action, and it also gives you a sense of agency. "Our research and lived experience show very clearly that once we get started, we're typically able to keep going," says Pychyl. "Getting started is everything."

Dr Piers Steel is a professor of organizational dynamics and human resources at the University of Calgary who began studying procrastination because of his own struggles with it. "These are not exactly difficult lessons to learn," he says. "But we never got cc'd on the instruction manual for our own brains." Steel suggests that framing actions in terms of time can also be helpful: what can you do in the next 10 minutes, or before lunch?

For example, say you want to 'Marie Kondo' your basement, but the thought of tackling your piles of stuff makes you want to slam the door shut and run in the other direction. Instead, try dividing your basement into sections that can be tackled in 30-minute increments. Set a goal to do one per day, and get started on the first one immediately.



USE YOUR POWER HOURS

Give yourself an even better chance of succeeding by setting cues and intentions for yourself, and learning how to

maximize your power hours.

Setting cues and intentions is all about making it as easy as possible to follow through on a task or goal. Say you're struggling to establish an exercise routine in the mornings. Try setting your gym clothes out the night before and putting your shoes by the door. Keep forgetting or putting off doing breast self-exams? Set an intention to do one every time you're in the shower.

Making the most of your power hours, meanwhile, is all about scheduling tasks for the time (or times) of day when you're at your most productive and motivated. Want to train for a 10K run? Assess when you have the most energy to exercise. Need to pull together a family savings plan? Figure out when you and your partner have the most brain space for what could be a stressful conversation.

This approach has worked for MacKay, whose most productive hours tend to be right before lunch. Conversely, she's learnt not to bank on her afternoons: "That's prime napping time," she says, laughing. "I know then I'll think, *Oh, I have so much to do. I should probably go have a nap.*"

Pychyl stresses that conquering your procrastination isn't just about feeling better in the moment—it's about having more agency over your life.

"Time is a non-renewable resource," he says. "We just don't know how much we're going to get of it. We need to stop playing around at the edges and get on with it." **R**

Good Vibes Grow on Trees

*Science shows that our
plants take care of us too*

BY *Lauren David*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *James Steinberg*

RESearch has revealed many benefits to being in the presence of nature, whether that's walking in a forest, having a small garden or keeping a few household plants.

"One study showed that patients at a hospital who had plants in their rooms reported less pain, lower blood pressure, less fatigue and less anxiety than patients without plants in their rooms," says Jenny Seham, PhD, founder and director of AIM (Arts and Integrated Medicine) at Montefiore Health Systems in Bronx, New York. She explains: "Cortisol, the

FROM *THEHEALTHY.COM*

stress hormone, has been shown to lower with plant interaction, lowering fatigue, irritability and blood pressure. Gardening and caring for plants can help turn people away from negative thoughts or emotions.”

Houseplant collections have become a popular social media trend. Jamie Keaton Jones, PhD, a psychotherapist in Washington, D.C., says that for many people, tending to plants has surfaced as a hobby that enables them to experience greater comfort and beauty from the presence of living things sharing their space.

“Plants and exposure to greenery have been found to have multiple mental health benefits, such as lowering stress, decreasing feelings of depression, increasing sociability, restoring focus, improving cognitive performance, improving mood and increasing self-esteem,” says Jones.

Studies have also shown that plants and gardening increase productivity and levels of serotonin, the neurotransmitter responsible for uplifting mood. “Rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future, plant care helps one focus on the present moment and provides a feeling of accomplishment,” says Gayle Weill, a therapist in New York and Connecticut.

Like any new skill or hobby, taking care of houseplants comes with a learning curve. Anyone starting to care for plants should be patient

and allow themselves time to learn the basics, leaving room for a little trial and error.

Here are eight plants that experts recommend for conferring mental health benefits:

SNAKE PLANT

These popular indoor plants have a striking appearance, with dark green sword-shaped leaves that often have mustard yellow or white stripes. “Also known as ‘mother-in-law’s tongue,’ the snake plant is a great first plant,” says Jones. “It is very easy to care for, thrives in spaces with low sunlight, has visual appeal and filters the air.”

SPIDER PLANTS

With light green foliage and plenty of leaves, spider plants are another low-maintenance selection. “They do well with humidity, and actually can handle varying forms of light, but do best with medium light,” says Tyler Keith, a social worker and avid gardener in Wilmington, North Carolina. “Sometimes individuals will put spider plants in their bathrooms to have a warmer, cozier feeling in the space that helps a relaxing bath feel that much more relaxing,” he says.

ALOE VERA

Drought-resistant and easy to grow, “aloe vera is low maintenance—you can just water it monthly—and it produces a healing gel that you can use straight from the leaf,” says Seham.



POTHOS

If you want to go bright green, try pothos, with its chartreuse heart-shaped waxy leaves. Commonly known as money plants, these low-maintenance plants can grow in both a water or soil medium, and do well indoors or outdoors. They grow long vines that can trail or hang from a pot and grow downward, or the vines can climb and be supported with a trellis to grow upward. Jones likes pothos plants because “they are also easy to care for, filter the air and look beautiful cascading down a bookcase or shelf.”

LAVENDER

Well known for its relaxing scent, lavender “has a calming effect, aids in reducing stress, promotes sleep and has anti-inflammatory properties when used as a topical for skin,” Weill says. You can clip and dry the leaves and put them in a bowl or even sprinkle them into your bath.

BASIL

“The experience of growing, picking and using herbs you’ve grown yourself has a positive impact on your mental health, creating positive

sensory experiences as well as a sense of accomplishment,” says Seham. Eating basil has health benefits too, Weill adds. “It has properties that help to relieve stress and anxiety, and eating it can improve mental clarity.”

LEMON BALM

This fragrant green herb is part of the mint family and is simple to cultivate. “Known for its calming properties, it has a light lemony scent and has been used to improve sleep, reduce stress and anxiety, improve appetite, and help with indigestion,” says Seham. Unlike lavender and pothos, lemon balm is safe for pets.

MINT

This hardy herb grows quickly and makes a wonderful addition to drinks. “It’s great to just smell the leaves, without even needing to make a tea, for an immediate soothing effect,” Seham says. In general, mint plants are also highly effective in warding off mosquitos and other insects.

Before you bring home a boatload of botanicals, Jones says it’s not about how many plants you have, but rather how you interact with them. For instance, are the plants in areas where you spend a lot of time? Do you care for them daily? If you have a small space or aren’t sure how much time you’re willing to invest in plant parenting, starting out with a lot of plants could be overwhelming.

“Just one plant can make a difference; it can engage you by its smell or colour that creates a positive mood response with every interaction,” says Seham.

Remember that while indoor gardening can be a boon for your mental well-being and can help with stress and relaxation, it’s not a cure-all.

“Having a plant doesn’t immediately or directly impact mental health processes,” says Keith. But caring for plants can be a useful and enjoyable part of an overall holistic wellness routine. **R**

—WITH INPUTS BY ISHANI NANDI

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HOME

At the Heart of Every Home

*Innovative ideas for
kitchens that enjoy
pride of place*

—
BY Kohelika Kohli

FOOD IS A central aspect of good living. For centuries, mealtimes have brought people together and with every generation our engagement with food evolves. We have gone from cooking on coal or wood, to multiple electrical appliances that enable us to cook in different ways. The last few years in particular has

seen a transformation in our relationship with food: home cooks and budding chefs boomed during the lockdown years, and mindful choices for nutritious eating became a staple in every household.

With more and more people developing a hands-on approach to cooking, kitchens have found a new





COURTESY HACKER

avatar in Indian homes and new-age designs have adapted to allow for this reignited relationship. But it's not enough for our spaces to accommodate the bare essentials. While function is a must, it cannot be the only thing on offer.

Here are some clever features that can turn any modern-day kitchen

into a space that's both practical and a source of pride:

Spaces that Work

Many urban residents accommodate in smaller spaces and therefore kitchens have had to become compact. To maximize the potential of the available area, opt for sliding or folding table

tops that lift up or push out for an extra usable surface. The extension creates leg room turning kitchen islands and counters into dining or work spaces. Even sinks can be fully covered, so when one is not cooking, there is extra room for other activities. Taps and fixtures too can be pushed down into the spaces under the counter and popped back up when required.

Smart Storage

Every homeowner delights in extra storage but it is not enough to install deep cubbies and cabinets wherever possible. Your items need to be accessible too. Try drop-down shelving and cabinet systems—up-high storage built into the ceiling that descend so you can see and access things without a ladder or stool. In some designs shutter-style storage doors move up and down like a garage door to eliminate the need for door-swing space. Corner units are commonplace but instead of crawling all the way in to find items, try rotatable or pull-out shelf systems for easy access.

Cut the Clutter

Today more and more kitchen designs adopt a functional style where appliances are built into the



walls so it merges into the background and leaves counter areas free. Handle-less shutters and drawers that open with the push of a finger not only increase their aesthetic appeal but also makes them easier to stay grease-free.

Think Long-Term

Good kitchens today go beyond accommodating the essentials. A prime example of this is kitchen hardware that you can take apart and put back together even without expert assistance. People move and families expand and so kitchen hardware that can be dismantled and reinstalled in a new home means more value for money. Drawers that can be slipped in and out of its tracks, compartment doors that can be unhinged and removable shelves makes regular cleaning and maintenance a breeze, reducing the chance of common kitchen woes like pests, moisture and mould that reduce their lifespan. **R**

Häcker

kitchen.german Made.

19
YEARS IN INDIA



A PART
OF HISTORY



PUReMission
air protection system



PUResist
water protection system

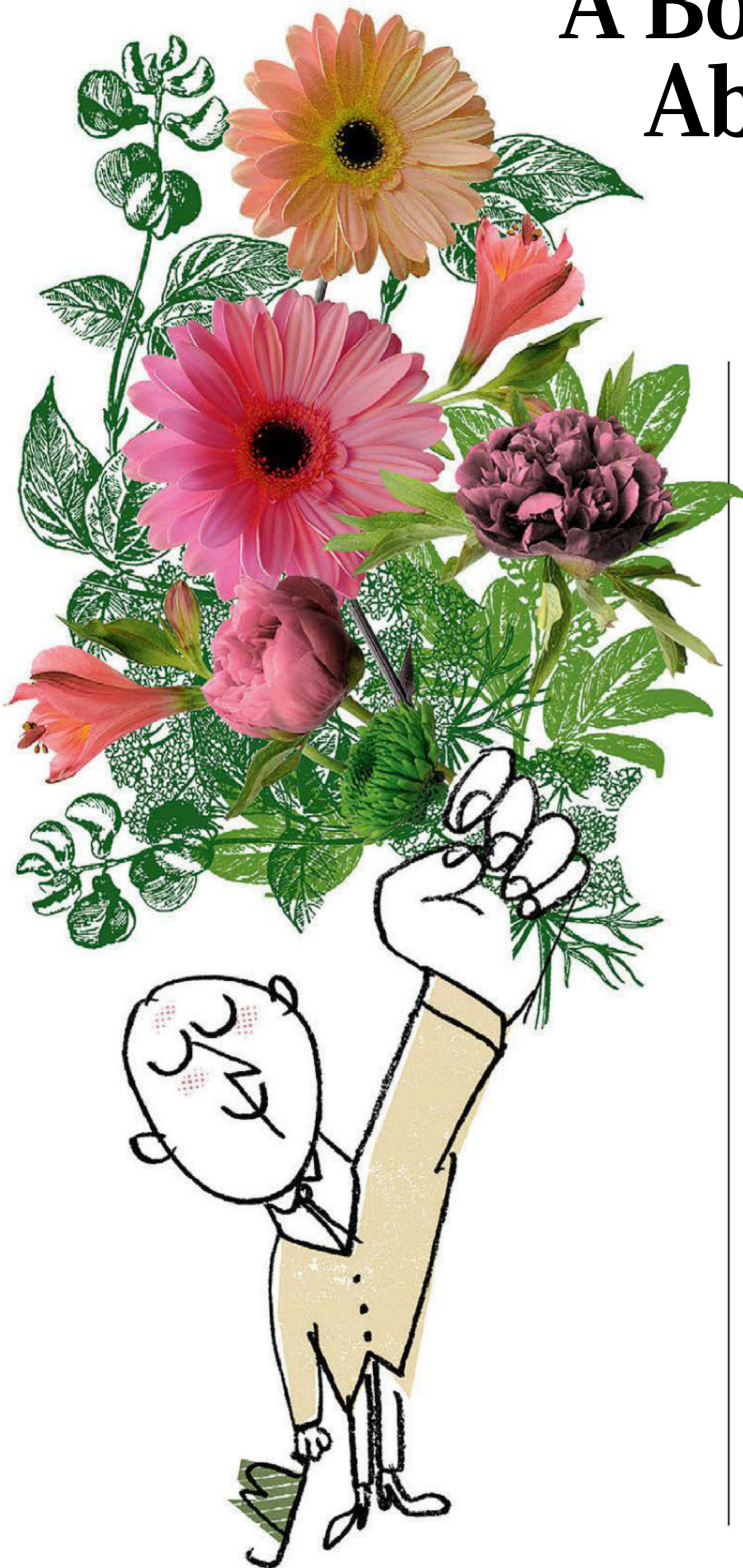


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A Bouquet of Facts About Flowers

BY *Samantha Rideout*



1 ACCORDING TO the ‘language of flowers,’ known as floriography, each month can be symbolized by a flower. June has the rose, symbolizing affection, and the honeysuckle, which represents devotion in love.

The trend of using flowers to express emotions, which popularized the idea that red roses mean love, is credited to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, an 18th-century English poet and the wife of a British ambassador to Turkey. Interest in the concept of floriography grew across Europe and eventually led to a French book, published in 1819, called *Le langage des fleurs* by Charlotte de Latour.

2 THE MESSAGES that flowers were used to convey weren’t always about love and happiness: Marigolds meant contempt, according to some manuals, and yellow roses could mean jealousy. (Florists now market yellow roses as a symbol of friendship.)

3 FLOWERS CAN also have religious significance. For example, the *Lilium longiflorum* (Easter lily) is mentioned in the Bible as a symbol of purity and rebirth and is associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The lotus flower signifies enlightenment for Buddhists because it grows in the mud but remains clean, thanks to its naturally water-repellent leaves.

4 BLOOMS ARE big business: The industry's leading auction company, Royal FloraHolland, sells more than 20 million flowers and plants each day. The Netherlands has dominated exports for decades, but the market is growing in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ecuador and Colombia. There's even a dedicated cargo area for flowers at the international airport in Nairobi, Kenya. The Indian floriculture market size reached ₹231.7 billion in 2022. Altogether, the global flower industry earns more than US\$30 billion.

5 KEEP A bouquet looking healthy for longer by placing it in water with the stems cut at an angle. To keep bacteria at bay, pluck off all leaves below the water line. Do add flower food to your vase; many bouquets come with a packet. They typically contain sugars to supplement the blooms' nutrition, citric acid to reach an optimal pH level and bleach to fight bacteria. To make your own, mix 30 ml of lime juice, 15 ml of sugar and seven ml of bleach into a litre of water.

6 YOU CAN preserve cut flowers by drying them. Simply tie a string around their stems and hang them upside down somewhere dark and dry, like in a cupboard or a closet. You could also press them between the pages of a heavy book or iron them between two sheets of wax paper. Air drying tends to work well for smaller flowers, while pressing is easiest with flat ones. With big, round blooms, burying them in silica gel crystals might get the best results.

7 FLOWERS LOOK and smell lovely because they need to attract the birds and the bees—literally. The creatures carry pollen from stamens (a male flower part) to the eggs in a pistil (a female flower part), allowing seeds to develop. Some flowers have only pistils, some have only stamens and some have both. Does this mean some plants pollinate themselves? Yes!

8 CERTAIN FLOWERS rely on the wind to carry their pollen around, which is unfortunate for people with allergies. Pollens can restrict the human respiratory system and are major outdoor airborne allergens responsible for allergic rhinitis or hay fever, asthma and atopic dermatitis in humans. In India about 20 to 30 per cent of the population suffers from hay fever and about 15 per cent of the population develops asthma as a result of seasonal pollen. Chandigarh was the first Indian city to create a

pollen calender in 2011, which can help the population identify potential allergy triggers and limit their exposure during pollen season.

9 THANKS TO the alluring aroma of flowers, it's no surprise that we've bottled their scents. During the 19th century, perfumes were often derived from the fragrance of a single flower, but as the industry evolved, the scent profiles became more complex, made up of several natural and synthetic chemicals. Chanel No. 5, which Coco Chanel famously insisted should make the wearer "smell like a woman, not a rose," has the concentrated oil of around 12 roses and a 1000 jasmine flowers in every 30-millilitre bottle.

10 ALL OVER the world, there are flower festivals for aficionados to enjoy, from California's lively Rose Parade to Ottawa's beautiful Tulip Festival. Another popular event is the Bloemencorso ('flower parade') Bollenstreek, which takes place in the Netherlands. More than a million people celebrate it each spring. The main event is a 42-km parade of flower-sculpture floats covered in bulb blossoms such as hyacinths, daffodils and, of course, tulips. In India, Bangalore's Lalbagh Flower Show, Chandigarh's Rose Festival and Srinagar's tulip festival draw large crowds, as do the fields of purple-blue Neelakurinji

flowers that bloom on the southern hills once every 12 years.

11 FLOWERS ARE a favourite subject for many artists. Iconic examples include Monet's *Water Lilies*, Andy Warhol's *Flowers*, featuring hibiscus with an almost psychedelic look, and street artist Banksy's *Flower Thrower* on a wall in a small town near Jerusalem. It depicts what looks like a rioter about to throw not a weapon but a bouquet. Not to forget Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, which made headlines when activists threw tomato soup at it to protest against the use of fossil fuels.

12 IN 2012, American astronaut Don Pettit planted a few seeds in plastic bags and grew them in space. As a result, a yellow zucchini blossom and a lopsided, yet cheery, sunflower became the first flowers to bloom on the International Space Station.

13 FLOWERS PLAY a role in many important life moments, and using flowers to honour the dead is not new. In Mount Carmel, Israel, archeologists discovered skeletons dating back some 13,000 years that had been lovingly placed on a bed of blooms. The deceased had been buried on a layer of mud that had preserved impressions of sages and figworts. **R**

—WITH INPUTS BY NAOREM ANUJA

AS KIDS SEE IT



“Much better! I swapped our bowls so they match the shape of our faces.”

My son is arguing with my husband about a math problem. My husband is an engineer. My son is in Grade 4. His confidence is strong.

— [@BUNANDLEGGINGS](#)

I was making my toddler a peanut butter and jam sandwich. She examined the

containers and I asked her which one would be more dangerous if it fell on the tile floor. She said, “The glass one because then we’d have no more jam!”

— ASHLEY ASHFIELD

A woman in the bathroom stall next to me was struggling to convince her toddler to use

the facilities. “You need to go,” I heard her plead. “It’s been two days!” The toddler responded, “But my poop wants to stay home.”

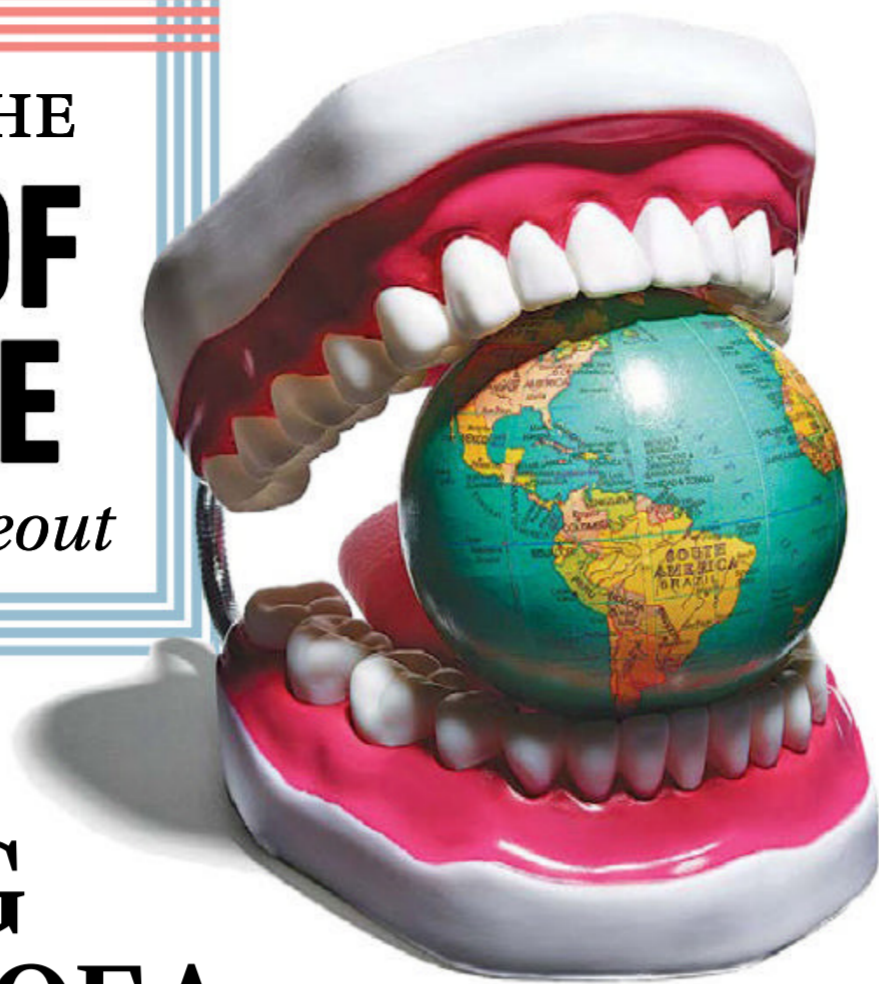
— RITA HICKEY

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NEWS FROM THE

WORLD OF MEDICINE

By Samantha Rideout



REVERSING SLEEP APNOEA

Roughly one billion of the world's adults live with obstructive sleep apnoea. This common disorder contributes to problems ranging from daytime fatigue and irritability, to heart disease. The go-to treatment, a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, controls sleep apnoea by delivering pressurized air through a mask while the person sleeps. However, the machine doesn't address the underlying causes, which are often lifestyle related. Researchers in Spain recruited sleep apnoea patients and helped half of them adopt healthier habits: to eat and sleep better, exercise more, and smoke and drink less. Six months later, that group's sleep apnoea improved more, on average, compared to the people who made no lifestyle changes. More than 60 per cent of patients no longer needed a CPAP machine.

When Breast-Cancer Surgery Is Not Needed

Patients with breast cancer who respond well to chemotherapy may now be able to skip surgery altogether. Improvements made to chemo drugs have rendered them so effective that they can sometimes eradicate the cancer all on their own. For instance, in a Texas-based trial, 31 out of 50 women with early-stage HER2-positive or triple-negative tumours had no signs of cancer after being treated with chemotherapy. So instead of an operating room, these patients proceeded to radiotherapy—and after two years, none of them saw their cancers return. Larger trials will be needed to confirm this course of action, but this small study suggests that skipping surgery is feasible more often than previously thought.



Are You Allergic to Your Phone?

When investigators in Massachusetts and Iowa took a close look at the phones of study volunteers, they uncovered some eye-watering evidence of possible allergens. Researchers found

dog and cat dander, as well as mould and endotoxins, which are powerful inflammatory agents. Their analysis was published in *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*. To prevent your phone from triggering reactions such as wheezing or sneezing, clean it frequently, especially if you have allergies or asthma. Follow manufacturers' instructions and gently wipe the exterior with a household disinfecting wipe or one containing 70 per cent isopropyl alcohol.

A Blood Test for Alzheimer's

When someone has cognitive issues, a doctor might order a PET scan or spinal tap to look for a buildup of a protein called beta-amyloid in the brain, which is one sign of Alzheimer's disease. However, a recent international study published in *Neurology*

confirms that a newer method, measuring the amount of beta-amyloid in the blood, is almost as accurate. It's also faster, less expensive and radiation-free. This test is now available in the US and Europe, but it isn't yet covered by most health plans. That might change, so ask your doctor about it if you or a loved one are discussing options.

To Stave Off Hunger, Eat More Protein

If you're feeling hungry even though you just ate, a lack of protein might be the reason. This source of energy should make up 15 to 25 per cent of the calories we take in, but popular processed foods and convenience fare don't tend to contain much. It's especially important to make protein part of your breakfast. In a recent study from the University of Sydney in Australia, participants who got less than the recommended proportion of their energy from protein in their morning meal went on to eat more food throughout the day. **R**



COVER STORY

How to Live

Life
More

Fully

Happiness experts and palliative-care doctors share their strategies —

BY *Lisa Fields*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Jeff Kulak*



WHEN JOHN HELLIWELL married his wife, Millie, 52 years ago, the two were already incredibly close. “She may have been my best friend then, though it wasn’t something I thought about,” Helliwell says about their courtship, which gave way to a joyful and rewarding partnership that’s still going strong.

Decades into his marriage, Helliwell, a professor emeritus of economics at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, not only started to think about happiness more, but to take a professional interest in the factors that influence our well-being.

In 2017, Helliwell’s research confirmed that marriage increases happiness, and people who think of their spouses as their best friends experience twice as much happiness

as other married people. Because Helliwell considers Millie his closest friend, it follows that their relationship boosted his happiness throughout the past half-century.

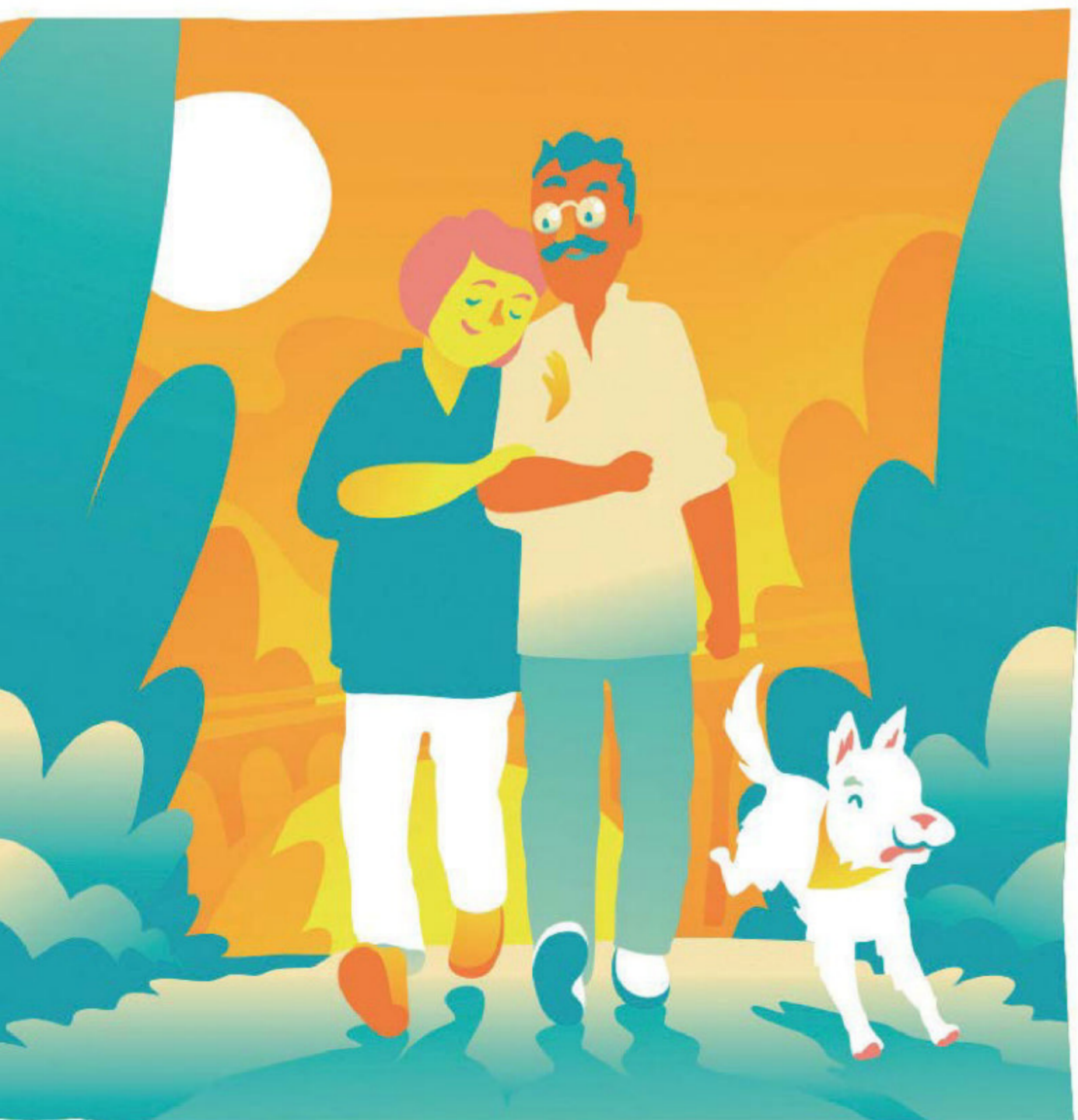
Helliwell isn’t the only academic to glean meaningful lessons from his own findings to live life more fully. Research also shows that happiness isn’t just about a fulfilling marriage.

Reader’s Digest spoke with several happiness experts to see what they’ve applied from their work to lead more satisfying lives. Palliative-care physicians also shared insights they gained through helping patients plan for the future, bolstering important relationships, and appreciating each day—before it’s too late. Here is some of their advice to incorporate into your own life.

Accept That Age is Just a Number

BETWEEN 2002 AND 2017, German researchers asked adults 40 and older to share their chronological age, then describe their perceived age. People who felt younger than their actual ages experienced greater life satisfaction, with fewer negative emotions such as guilt and anger, leading to an overall increase in their sense of well-being. Those who felt older experienced the opposite.

Health-related factors played a role; perceived poor health, chronic illness and physical limitations were associated with feeling older and a



decreased sense of well-being.

“An individual with chronic health problems may feel an increased discrepancy between perceived age and chronological age over time,” says study author André Hajek, professor of interdisciplinary health-care epidemiology at the University of Hamburg. “At the same time, this individual may lower their expectations of longevity, and so they may have problems enjoying their life. This may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading to marked decreases in future health because of bad lifestyle habits.”

Hajek, who is 38, says he identifies with his chronological age because he has two small children and recently became a professor, which is the typical age for such an appointment in Germany. “This could change in the second half of my life, when family obligations with my kids may decrease,” Hajek says.

PEOPLE WHO FELT YOUNGER THAN THEIR ACTUAL AGES EXPERIENCED FAR FEWER NEGATIVE EMOTIONS, SUCH AS GUILT AND ANGER.

“Factors such as general self-efficacy, optimism or, particularly, passion in life—for your job, for example—can very positively affect your perceived age,” he continued. “I try to



live a life with true passion for science, which hopefully will play a role in keeping me young and satisfied.”

Embrace Uncertainty

PALLIATIVE-CARE PHYSICIANS often see patients with life-limiting diagnoses who don't know how much time remains for them. When these people accept uncertainty, then plan for possible scenarios while still living in the present, it helps improve their mental health and overall quality of life, according to a 2016 Scottish study.

Says study author Scott Murray, professor emeritus of the primary palliative care group at the University of Edinburgh: “People often ask, ‘What's the prognosis?’ and what they're saying is ‘How long have I got?’”

But it's actually something deeper: 'What's it going to be like for me?'"

He says that one way for patients to cope with their new reality is to check items off their 'bucket list,' which can help them focus on priorities and pursue achievable goals in the time they have left.

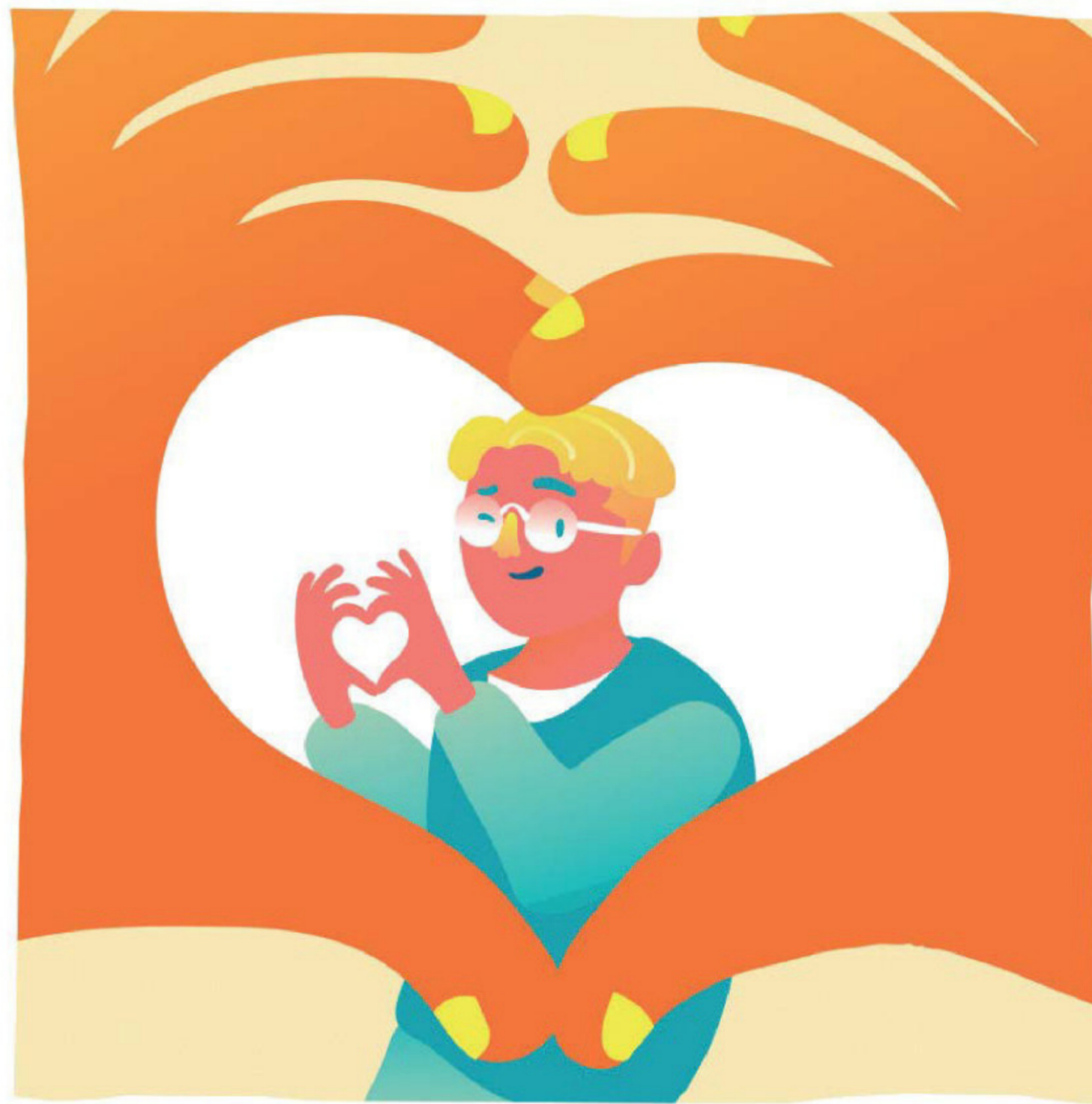
Murray's familiarity with these kinds of conversations helped him when he was diagnosed with lung cancer, seven years ago. "Having faced up to the fact you might die, then been at the final frontier and retreated, you're going to get on living," says Murray.

Although Murray's results ended up being clear-cut and treatment was possible, he faced high levels of stress

FEELINGS OF GRATITUDE LEAD TO A BROADENED LIFE PERSPECTIVE, MORE SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, AND MORE CONNECTEDNESS.

as he awaited that diagnosis. His research has shown that people often feel most anxious at this stage of the process and knowing that provided him some relief.

His research background and familiarity with palliative care and cancer diagnoses helped him approach his situation differently than many people do, which may in turn serve others well. "Over the last 20 years, I've gotten this idea of 'illness trajectory,'"



Murray says. "People don't just die; there is a progressive trajectory of events. And people should ask about that rather than just focus on the word 'prognosis.'"

Express Gratitude

AS PEOPLE AGE, they're more likely to experience health problems, cognitive decline, and the loss of loved ones, possibly compounding feelings of depression and loneliness. But adults, middle-aged and older, who express gratitude are less likely to feel lonely, according to a 2019 Dutch study.

"Feelings of gratitude might lead to a broadened life perspective, more social behaviour, and more connectedness," says study author Jennifer Reijnders, assistant professor of lifespan psychology at

the Open University in Heerlen, the Netherlands.

Reijnders has begun expressing gratitude more in her own life since she began researching its benefits. “Doing that has increased the connectedness and positive emotions I experience with some people and has diminished emotions like feeling alone,” she says.

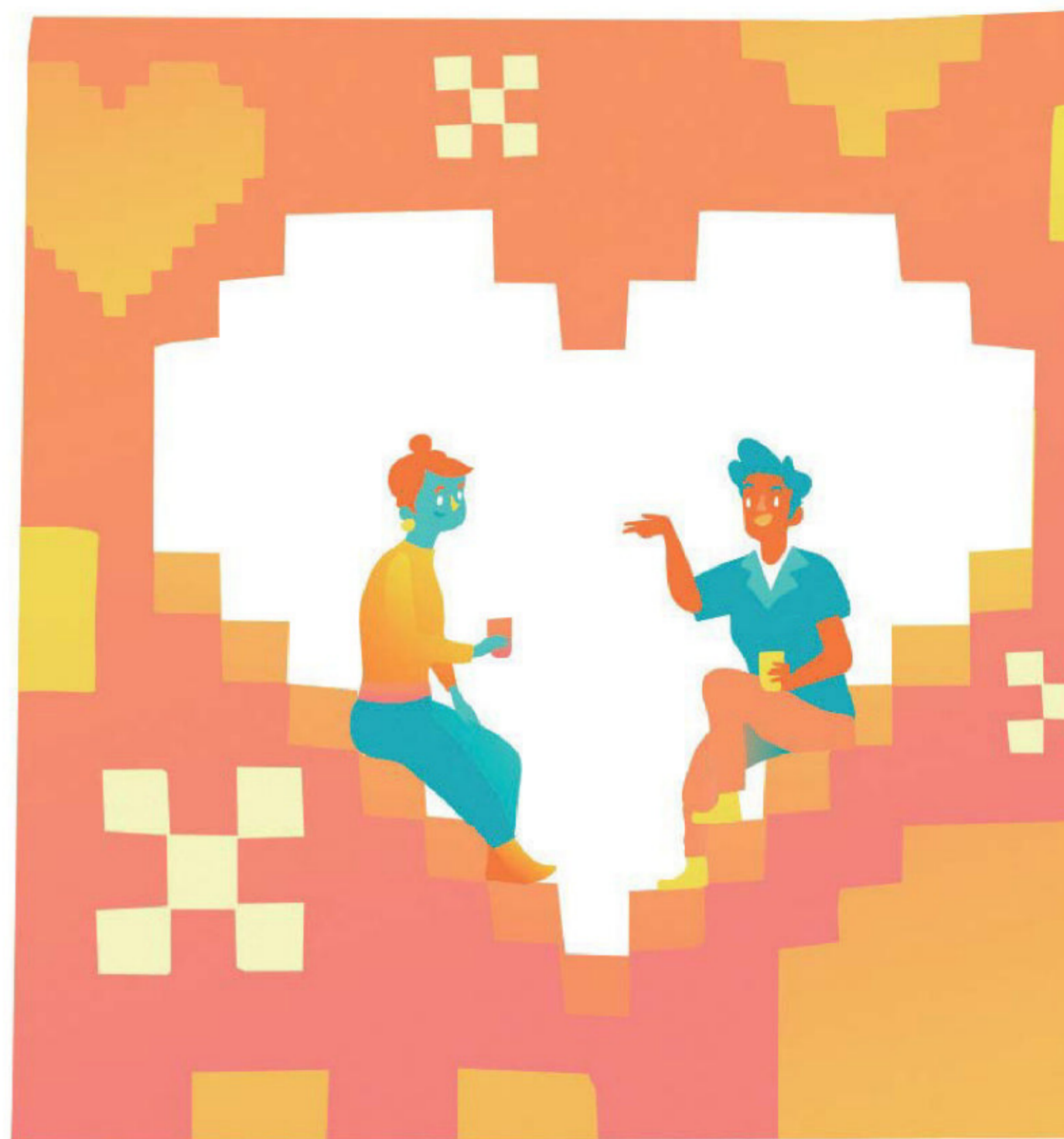
Reijnders first noticed its power after expressing gratitude toward a friend in a birthday card. “She appreciated this very much, got really emotional, and started doing the same in her cards. It really intensified our connection and bonding. I now write this kind of note regularly to people.”

Foster Virtual Connections

If you can't get together with friends because you live far apart, have mobility issues, or are wary of socializing in the wake of the pandemic, going online to maintain important relationships can help you remain close and improve your quality of life.

A 2021 British study found that older adults who used the internet to communicate with people during the pandemic had a higher quality of life and a reduced risk of low mood or depression than older adults who didn't communicate this way.

“Based on our study, it seems the best type of internet-based social contact is via email or video calls,” says study author Simon Evans, a



lecturer in neuroscience at the University of Surrey's school of psychology. “This is a great way to help older adults feel more socially connected and socially included.” (Social media isn't ideal, however, as it may provoke anxiety or feelings of missing out.)

In recent years, Evans has consciously chosen to socialize with close friends through video calls and email, partly because of his findings. “Online communication really helps me feel more in touch with the people who matter to me,” says Evans, who stayed in contact this way both before the pandemic and during it, when seeing each other in person became complicated.

“There's no doubt that connecting online during lockdown periods

allowed me to feel less cut off and more positive during difficult times.”

Document Your Health-care Wishes

In 2009, Germany enacted legislation that strengthened the power of advance directives, which are legal documents that allow people to specify the type of medical care they'd like, or would refuse, if they can't make health-care decisions for themselves.

In the decade following that legislation, these directives grew in popularity and usage: A 2021 German study out of Berlin suggested that the number of people with life-limiting diagno-

FORGIVENESS DOESN'T REQUIRE RECONCILIATION. YOU CAN FORGIVE IN YOUR HEART WITHOUT TELLING THE PERSON.

ses who used advance directives may have almost tripled from 2009 to 2019.

Advance directives help you communicate your wishes to your physicians, and the documents help ease decision-making burdens on relatives. Knowing you'll prevent loved ones from guessing your health-care wishes during a stressful time may positively affect your well-being now, speculates study author Dr Jan Graw, a physician in the department of anesthesiology and intensive care

medicine at Charité-University Medicine Berlin.

Dr Graw's work prompted him to analyze scenarios where people may lose their capacity to make health-care decisions. It also inspired him to think beyond advance directives.

“I would consider speaking with those close to you and discussing your personal beliefs—your attitudes related to life and death—and identifying potential future surrogate decision-makers,” he says. Being prepared for possible stressful situations, he adds, can contribute to well-being.

Forgive Others

OLDER ADULTS WHO are more forgiving are less likely to experience depression, according to research published in 2019, possibly because forgiveness helps them experience greater emotional and physical well-being, as well as improved life satisfaction.

“Later in your life, you tend to look back at things that happened with you: actions that you took, decisions that you made, relationships that have broken, pain that you suffered,” says study author Jessie Dezutter, a senior lecturer in psychology and educational sciences at KU Leuven in Belgium.

“Forgiveness is a really important tool to find a bit of peace of mind so that you can wrap things up in a constructive and positive way and be okay both with specific mistakes or faults that you made or that others made towards you.”

Forgiveness doesn't require reconciliation. You can forgive in your heart without telling the person concerned. This is helpful if someone has died, if the person you're forgiving was abusive, or if a relationship has run its course. Dezutter used this technique with an old friend. "The painful situations became so extreme that I decided forgiveness was necessary but that continuing to invest in the relationship wasn't wise," she says.

"It's not so much forgetting about the relationship as it is taking a more distant position," continues Dezutter. "Accepting that we are all human with our own faults and mistakes can bring a sense of relief. It can also open up new opportunities to engage further in relationships and in friendships."

Tie Up Loose Ends

AS A PALLIATIVE-CARE physician who treated hospice patients for many years, Dr Ira Byock helps people with life-limiting diagnoses find closure through meaningful conversation. And his lessons can be applied to anyone who wants to live a happier life—starting right now.

Imagine, he says, that you were in a car accident and knew you were about to die. What would be the things that you wished you had said to your loved ones while you had the chance? "There are only four things we really need to say to people: 'Please forgive me. I forgive

you. Thank you. And I love you,'" says Dr Byock, the California-based author of *The Four Things That Matter Most*. "So, why wait to say these things?"

For his part, Dr Byock relishes the way he feels after apologizing, forgiving, and sharing gratitude with, or expressing feelings of love toward, the important people in his life.

"When nothing critically important is left unsaid between two people who care about each other, the quality of the relationship changes," Byock says. "You're more aware of the intrinsic value of the relationship, which for me, defines celebration."

THERE ARE ONLY FOUR THINGS WE REALLY NEED TO SAY TO PEOPLE: 'PLEASE FORGIVE ME'. 'I FORGIVE YOU'. 'THANK YOU', AND 'I LOVE YOU'.

Mending and nurturing relationships helps to increase happiness because people value friends and relatives more than possessions. "This is as close to universally true as almost anything I know about human beings: When you really get down to what matters most, it's not things, it's always other people," Byock says.

"The exercise here, as we age, is to keep asking ourselves, 'What really matters most?'"

A 'HAPPINESS JOURNAL' CAN HELP YOU FIND PLEASURE IN LIFE

By Sarah Garone

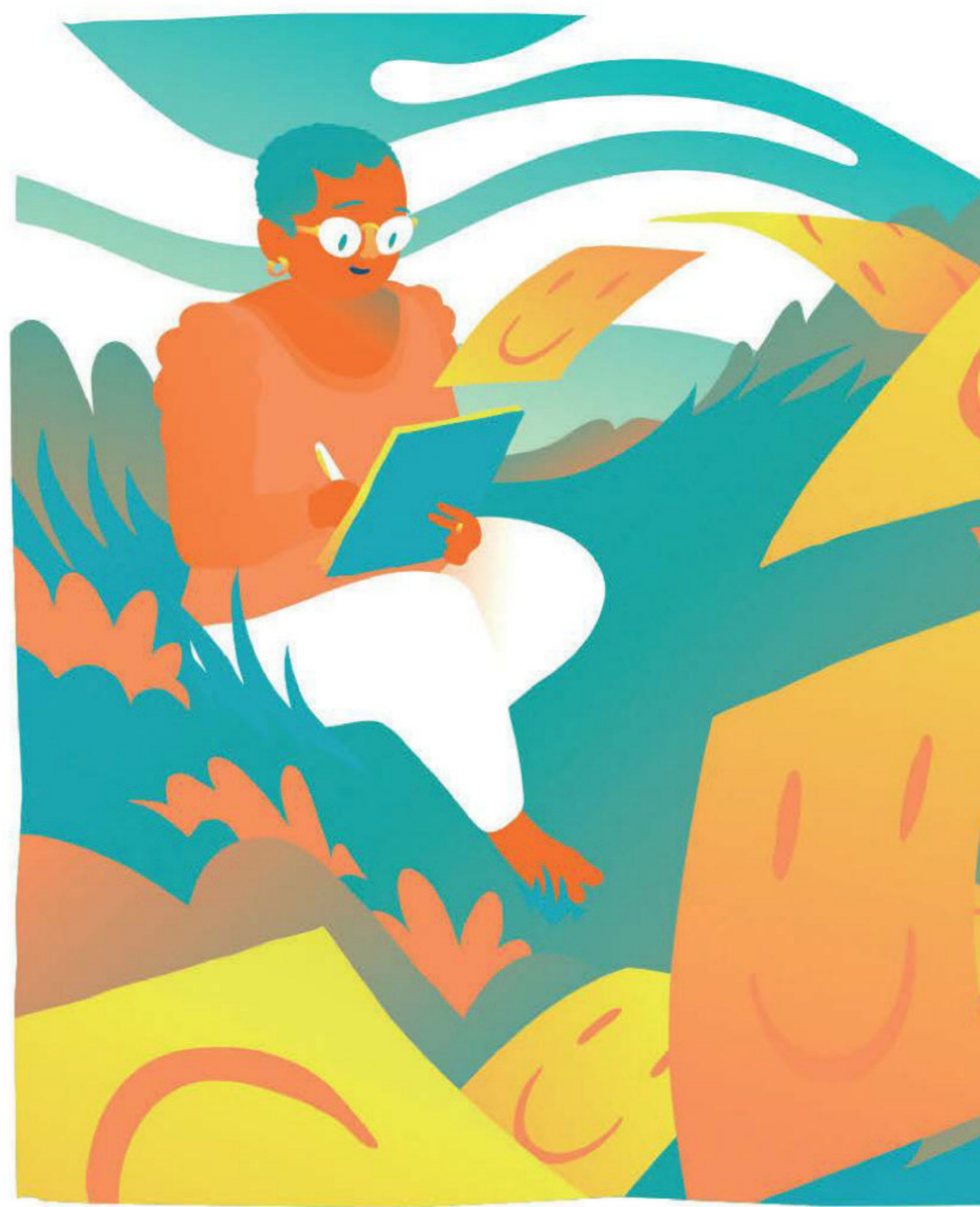
FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

Life under the pandemic cloud had taken its toll on me. Some of my friendships had faded away, leaving me sad. Disappointments—and even outright rage—at the ways my government responded to the pandemic made me resentful.

People around me had noticed these emotional changes. My husband gently asked me if I could complain less, since he bore the brunt of my frustration. I began to see I was turning into a caricature of a joyless, angry person I didn't want to be.

My lack of pleasure really hit me when my family was on a road trip vacation. Normally, I love to travel but on this particular drive, as I looked out my window at the beautiful northern Arizona scenery, I realized I felt nothing. Intellectually, I could see the reasons to feel pleasure, but the feelings themselves weren't there.

After searching the Internet and self-diagnosing a mild case of anhedonia—



the inability or diminished ability to feel pleasure—I stumbled upon a blog post that recommended keeping a “pleasure journal.” I was intrigued. I’ve kept a journal since the age of 10, so jotting a few lines about the things in my day that sparked joy seemed doable.

For several months now, I’ve kept track daily of all things large and small that have brought me delight, satisfaction and enjoyment. I’ve recorded sensory experiences (the smell and taste of my morning coffee), emotional boosts (rekindling an old friendship), funny incidents (my 10-year-old’s hilarious non



sequiturs), and delights that defy categorization, such as the surprise I felt when a lizard darted across my path on a morning walk. Even something as mundane as a hot shower or singing along with the radio make it into my journal.

Journalling in this way has prompted some insights. For one thing, it's been an interesting exercise in affirmation. As a nutritionist and food writer, my adoration of food reassures me I'm on the right track, career-wise. Not a day goes by that I don't find myself recording the glories of a well-built salad or the crunch of roasted cauliflower. Returning to the

roots of why I chose my work is resurfacing a level of pleasure that was buried beneath the day-in, day-out of life.

In fact, I've discovered the endless wellspring that lies in easily accessible activities such as listening to music, enjoying a great novel, or hugging my children. It's a beautiful revelation.

It's also been revealing to discover the things I believe I should enjoy, but don't. One day, when I opened my journal to write about a dinner date with a friend, I realized I hadn't actually taken much pleasure in our interaction. She had vented her problems in a steady stream while I sat by like a smiling, nodding automaton. (Incidentally, that was probably much like my husband felt about me in my many months of complaints.)

Mostly, though, the chief benefit I've noticed from keeping a journal of everyday pleasures is that it keeps enjoyment at the forefront of my thoughts. And when I'm focused on how to take joy from life, I do take more joy from it.

After several months of journalling, I can't say I'm delighting in every moment—or even finding the same happiness as before the pandemic—but keeping track of the things that bring me joy has been far more impactful than I would have guessed. As I've honed my vision for the pleasure in life, it's kept the less pleasant things from stealing my joy. **R**

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST (23 NOVEMBER 2021),
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LIFE'S

Like That

I was working out in the gym when I noticed a man in street clothes, who stood watching me and the others for about 20 minutes before leaving. He came a second day, staying for a half hour. On the third day, I asked him what he was doing.

He smiled and said, "My doctor said I have to go to the gym."

—TOM SWARTZ

I ran into a neighbour walking his dog. It was his first pet, so I made sure to lavish praise on the cute pup. Not knowing the gender, I asked if it was spayed or neutered.

My husband was so excited to finally have a kid who shared his love for baseball, until the bottom of the eighth when she loudly asked, "Is this baseball or football?"

—[@IHIDEFROMMYKIDS](#)



"Today's top story: Nobody did anything about anything that you wanted them to do something about."

"Neither," he replied. "She's a shepherd mix."

—SUZIE LENZINI

At a dude ranch in Texas, the cowboy preparing the horses asked my wife if she wanted a Western or English saddle. "What's the difference?" she asked.

"One has a horn and

one doesn't," he said.

"The one without the horn is fine. I don't expect we'll run into too much traffic."

—GCFL.NET

My five-year-old granddaughter was fascinated as she watched her great-grandmother remove her dentures. So much so, that she just had to ask, "Does your tongue come out too?"

—VIRGINIA CULLEN

My son-in-law was washing his truck when he turned the hose on his

5-year-old. She ran around, laughing and giggling. Unable to control her happiness, she shrieked, "This is so much fun, Dad! How did you come up with it?"

—DINAH RODGERS

When our son went away to college, a friend of his often invited him to dinner at his family's lavish home. One day, I took time out from sorting coupons to write the family a letter thanking them for taking care of

him. Soon after, my son called saying the family wanted to thank me for my kind letter, not to mention the 25-cent coupon for Ragu spaghetti sauce.

—BARBARA PORTER

My uncle was in his 90s when he saw a doctor about his bum leg. After examining him, the doctor said with a shrug, "You know, Mr Whitney, at your age you have to expect things like this."

Uncle Charlie wasn't buying it. "Doc," he

said, "my other leg is the same age, and it don't hurt."

—LINDA PERKINS

I don't say "ohhh big stretch," to my dog. I say "ooooh good stretch," because I want him to know I appreciate his form.

— @COTTONCANDADDY

Reader's Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

HOW NOT TO GET ARRESTED

Check your ego at the door

Police in Rockdale County, Georgia, listed their 10 Most Wanted criminals on social media, and in doing so insulted a man who wondered why he'd been left off the list. "What about me?" he asked in the comments section. Officers replied, "You are correct. You have two warrants. We are on the way." He was

arrested on charges of violating probation.

Be aware of your surroundings

A thief walked into a Walmart in St. Cloud, Florida, and, being a thief, pocketed a few items. He might have gotten away with it had he only turned around to see the 40 uniformed police officers milling about as

part of their annual Shop with a Cop event.

Plot out a foolproof escape route

A woman in Lakewood, Washington, stole her mother's Mini Cooper and drove it till she could go no farther. That's because the route she took happened to be where road crews were laying concrete. The car got stuck and she had to hoof it out, only to be arrested later.

THUMB/GETTY IMAGES



*This therapy is
gaining credibility as
it shows real results*

When Music Is Medicine

BY *Anicka Quin*

THERE'S ONE PATIENT that SarahRose Black still thinks about. Back in 2019, the nursing team in the palliative care unit at Toronto's Princess Margaret Cancer Centre asked if she could reach out to a patient who had been there for about a week. The man was struggling, and unwilling to engage with staff or be part of any activities. "They told me, 'He's short and grumpy with us, and we wonder if you might have an in.'"



Black isn't a doctor or a nurse. Since 2013 she has played an important role for patients as Princess Margaret's on-staff music therapist. On any given day, she might see one person who's anxious about an upcoming procedure, another who's undergoing chemo and in need of a soothing moment. Or, like the man in the palliative care unit, it might be someone who doesn't yet know they need her.

So, on a wintery Wednesday afternoon, Black approached the patient's room and introduced herself. She asked if she could sit, and offered to play some music. In an effort to con-

"He shared with me afterward that he'd been holding in so much and had been unable to talk about anything—but the music showed up at a moment when it felt like a hug."

Anyone who has felt that spark of joy when a favourite song comes on the radio at just the right moment—or wept along with a singer who is expressing heartache—will understand the emotional resonance of music. But now, a growing body of scientific evidence is actually demonstrating that music can be medicine, too.

In a review of 400 research papers looking into the neurochemistry of

A MUSIC-THERAPY SESSION CAN BE AS UNIQUE AS AN INDIVIDUAL PATIENT'S NEEDS ON A GIVEN DAY.

vince him, she said, "If you don't like it, you can tell me to leave," she recalls.

After some gentle urging, the 70-something man, who had lung cancer, told her a few classical composers he liked and then turned away to look out the window. But as she started to play one of his favourites, Bach, on her portable keyboard, a change came over him. He unfolded his arms, turned toward Black and started to cry.

She stopped playing. "Do you want me to continue?" she asked.

"Absolutely," he said through tears.

"It was as if the music went places that nothing else could," recalls Black.

music, Daniel Levitin, a psychologist and neuroscientist at McGill University in Montreal, found that playing and listening to music had clear mental and physical health benefits, including improving our immune systems and reducing stress levels.

One 2007 study from a team of Spanish researchers found that listening to music before surgery had the same effect in reducing preoperative anxiety as taking Valium—an important finding, as anxiety before a major surgery can affect post-operative pain and recovery time. Another Spanish study, conducted in 2018 in the palliative care

unit of Barcelona's Hospital del Mar, found that patients participating in a music-therapy program experienced significant decreases in tiredness, anxiety and breathing difficulties, as well as an increase in feelings of well-being.

Even major health-care institutions are embracing music therapy on a wide scale. In 2019, the National Institutes of Health in the U.S. introduced significant funding—\$20 million—to support research projects in music therapy and neuroscience.

A music-therapy session can be as unique as an individual patient's needs on a given day. With Black, who also sings, that inevitably involves the cart of instruments she travels with ("I'm pretty much a one-woman band," she jokes). Aside from the keyboard, to create rhythms and texture she has other instruments such as a guitar, tambourine, singing bowls and more. She also brings recording equipment and an iPad, to supply song lyrics.

If a patient loves classical music, she'll play it. Maybe it's folk or jazz. She did a Bob Marley tune for a man's assisted-dying process. "One woman spoke no English, but she taught me a Farsi folk song, and we had this wonderful exchange," says Black. "She'd sing a line, I'd sing it back, and we were singing this beautiful song together."



She's gentle in her approach with patients. "I make it very clear that pre-existing musical experience or training isn't required to participate," she says. "If I were to ask, 'What kind of music do you like?' that might be a difficult question to answer. Instead I ask what they want to *feel*, which is an easier question to answer."

If the goal is pain management, Black might match the pace of her playing with the patient's breathing, and then gradually slow the music. This process, called 'entrainment,' can help slow the breath, too, and has a calming effect.

Or a session might be about helping a patient process the emotions stemming from what they are going through. It may even be about connecting with loved ones who are in the room with them. "Sometimes the patient says,



‘I’m having such a profound experience. I have no words,’ she says. “We know from so many wonderful brain studies that music can trigger memories and touch parts of the brain that other mediums cannot.”

ONCE A WEEK, Carol Cameron hops on Zoom from her home in Madison, Wisconsin. She’ll be joined by a dozen or so other participants, all following along as music therapist Jason Armstrong Baker leads them through drumming exercises—sometimes clapping their hands in a distinct rhythm he’s laid out for them, sometimes tapping on their own bodies.

Like everyone taking part in the session, Cameron, 71, has Parkinson’s disease, and this drumming circle—known as Rx 4 Rhythm—is designed to help strengthen her coordination.

“My tremor is on my left side, so learning things with my left hand is difficult,” she says. “But it’s really good to get this regular rhythm going—it gives you a feeling of overcoming a problem.”

Rx 4 Rhythm is just one of the programs offered at the Johns Hopkins Center for Music and Medicine in Baltimore. The research institution is the brainchild of Dr Alexander Pantelyat, a violin player and former member of the Penn Symphony Orchestra in Philadelphia.

Today, he is a neurologist who specializes in movement disorders like Parkinson’s and Huntington’s. The centre provides music therapy and more, Pantelyat explains. They’re taking music into the ‘precision medicine’ realm.

Applying that kind of treatment to movement disorders is relatively new; previously, it was mainly the domain of cancer therapies. “There’s a revolution in oncology and cancer research—more people are being cured, and much of it can be attributed to a very targeted precision treatment that really is individualized for the patients,” he explains. “Just listening to music activates many regions of the brain simultaneously.”

He adds that there is an understanding in the field of music medicine that there can be tailored interventions using music that a person actually likes, that speaks to them culturally, personally, autobiographically.

One study from the Center for Music and Medicine followed a choir composed of Parkinson's patients (called the 'Parkinsonics') to learn how singing might impact the speaking voice of those patients. After 12 weeks, the singers' speaking volumes—which often fade as Parkinson's progresses—grew demonstrably stronger. The Rx 4 Rhythm drumming circle, meanwhile, came out of a 2015 study that showed that Parkinson's patients had improved their ability to walk after six weeks of drumming practice.

The centre's blueprint is to continue

centre's senior music therapist and runs an online support group for people with a broad range of neurological disorders, along with their care partners—those people in patients' lives, usually loved ones, who are supporting them through their illness.

"There can be folks who are experiencing really intensive symptoms, like a decline in their ability to verbally communicate," says Devlin. Music, she notes, can sometimes help such patients find ways to respond again. "I've had the honour of making music with people, and all of a sudden they're

DEVLIN SAYS IT'S A POWERFUL THING TO WITNESS SOMEONE FIND THEMSELVES AGAIN FOR A MOMENT, THANKS TO A SONG.

to fund these musically oriented groups, even after the studies have wrapped up. "Patients in the Parkinsonics told us that they didn't want to stop singing when the study was over," says Pantelyat. The centre now funds a professional choir instructor, a music therapist and a social worker to help the choir members carry on with their classes, which rolled onto Zoom during the pandemic.

And while sessions at the centre do have therapeutic goals—working on coordination, say, or breathing techniques for anxiety management—there's a community-building element to the groups, too. Kerry Devlin is the

coming up with new words. It turns into this beautiful improvisational moment—and a care partner is saying, "I've never seen this happen."

It's a powerful thing, she says, to witness someone find themselves again for a moment, and when a song is the vehicle for that shift.

Much of what Devlin does is designed to help patients feel like more than just cogs in the medical system. "Of course they want to come and receive medications and treatments, but they're also a person," she says. "It's important when we're thinking about holistic care to provide opportunities for patients to actually process

the impact that a diagnosis is having on their lives.”

Music can have a profound effect on helping sick children, too. Ruth Hunston is a music therapist in the “play department” at the Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, England. As the UK’s oldest children’s hospital, it sees more than 69,000 patients a year.

“When children are in the hospital, their worlds get much smaller,” says Hunston, who explains that her program, introduced in 2019, helps give young patients back some sense of

your child there,” she says. “What’s really lovely is when you go in and you start to make music, and the children invite their parents to join. There’s this beautiful interaction between everyone, and sometimes I get to step back and just watch them play—to really laugh and have fun.”

AT THE DR BOB Kemp Hospice in Hamilton, Ont., music therapy has become an integral part of patient care in residential end-of-life settings. “The palliative journey isn’t really about someone dying,” says Doug Mattina, director of the hos-

“THERE’S THIS BEAUTIFUL INTERACTION BETWEEN EVERYONE, AND SOMETIMES I GET TO STEP BACK AND JUST WATCH THEM PLAY.”

control. “They’re having so many things done to them and around them, but this allows them to create something themselves.”

Extended time in pediatric care can also affect a child’s development, says Hunston. In light of that, much of her program is designed to help them progress. “I’ve had lots of infants who have sat up for the first time at the drums, because they’re just so motivated to play,” she says. “Or they start making sounds because I’m singing to them, and they want more.”

The parents also become part of the therapeutic process. “It’s not easy being in a hospital, and it’s not easy to leave

pice’s pediatric unit. “It’s about bringing the most joy. It’s providing the wrap-around care not only for the individual but for those impacted by it.”

Mattina himself experienced the music-therapy program when his father spent his last days at the hospice. “I remember when the music therapist said to him, ‘Bill, what kind of mood are we in today?’ And he said, ‘Today is time to dance,’” says Mattina.

He was so moved by the whole experience that he left a career in the foreign service to work full-time for the hospice. “Even though my father was feeling like crap, and we knew that we had days or hours left, me, my sister, my brother

and my mom would dance around his bed. His favourite song for this was ‘Rasputin,’ and he would request high kicks from us as he clapped along. Sometimes he’d fall asleep as we danced.”

Sara Klinck directs the music-therapy program at the hospice, where, at a patient’s bedside, she might improvise a call-and-response song to help them open up about how they’re feeling that day, or help a resident write a song as a legacy for their family.

“We might also revisit songs that have personal significance for residents and families, as a way to communicate emotion to one another,” she says. “It can feel like a whole choir as visitors and family members join in. For some people, sometimes what’s hard to say is easier to sing.”

It could also mean fulfilling a lifelong goal before a patient passes away, as she did for someone with late-stage ALS. “He had very limited movement in his hands but had always wanted to play guitar,” says Klinck.

She brought in the instrument and laid it on his lap in bed. “He was able to put his hands on the strings and interact with them; often I moved the guitar, as well.” This music experience was something his family felt would be very meaningful to him.

Finding those moments is the skilled therapist’s role, but as SarahRose Black notes, people have been connecting with music for their whole lives—she is just helping them access it again at a time when they need it most.

“We have a heartbeat, so we have a drum inside us; we are wired to be musical people,” she says. She smiles softly as she reflects back on one patient, a man in his late 30s with late-stage brain cancer.

“He said, ‘SarahRose, I have a lot of friends, and they’re great. They show up and they’re helpful, but they don’t really understand what’s going on here,’” she says. “He told me that the music is like a friend who ‘gets it.’” **R**



Animal Speak

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

MAHATMA GANDHI

If animals could speak, the dog would be a blundering outspoken fellow; but the cat would have the rare grace of never saying a word too much.

MARK TWAIN

The greatest gift an animal has to offer is a permanent reminder of who we really are

NICK TROUT

A Life

*A daughter learns
how stories have
shaped her world*

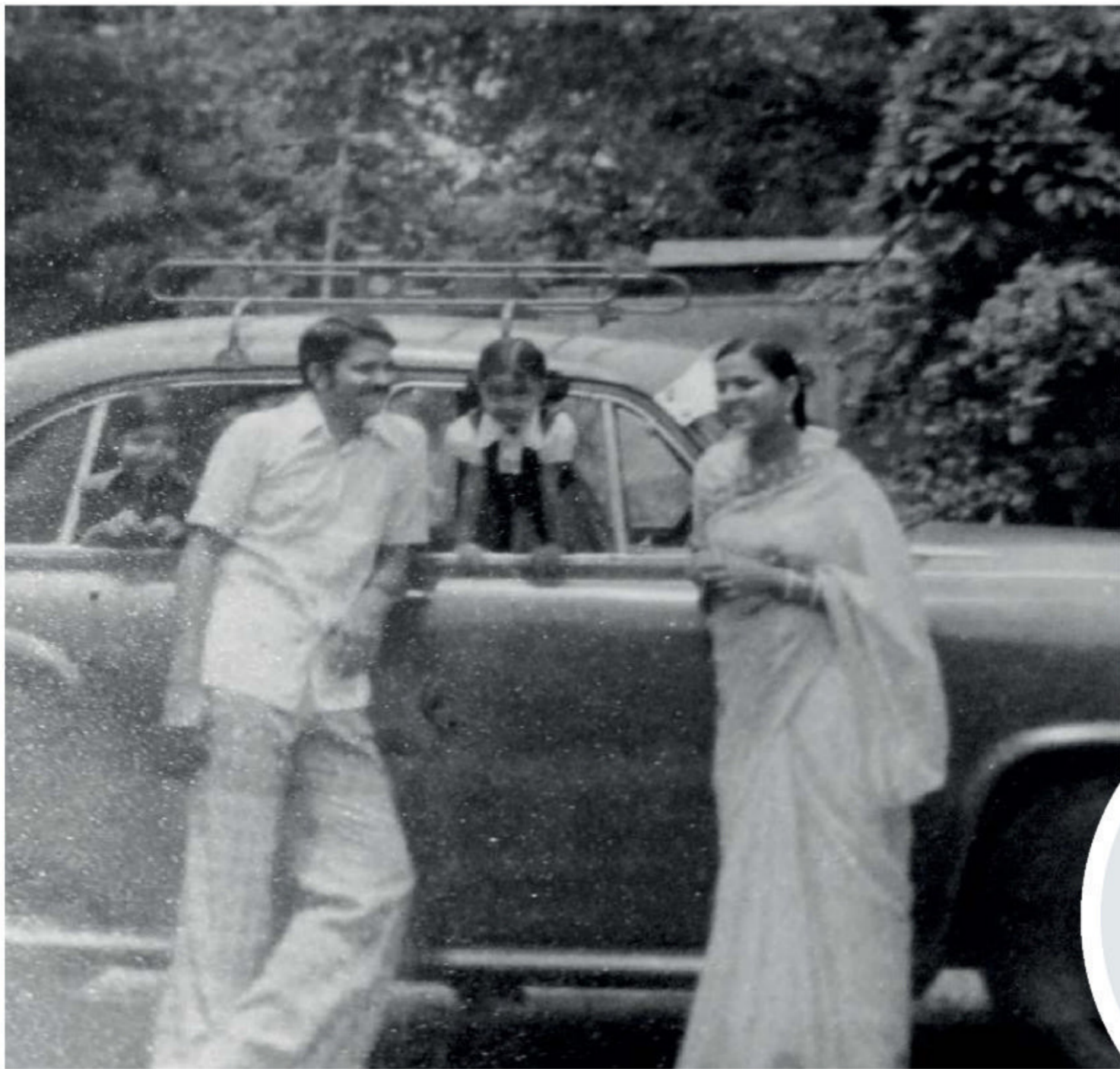
—
BY *Farah Naaz*

in

Books

“I did not always know how to eat an ice cream cone,” said my 78-year-old father to his grandkids who greeted this anecdote with incredulous laughter. The thought of someone not knowing the ‘how-tos’ to anything perhaps seemed ludicrous to them. After all, theirs’ is a hyper-connected world, where a single tap on a phone can crack open every mystery, in bite-sized, easy-to-consume pieces.





(Left) The author as a child, with her family; (Right) The 1973 RD story she finds in her late father's library.

This was in 2020. COVID may have stopped the world in its tracks, but my father, unperturbed, sat in my home regaling my children with stories of his boyhood. As family folklore went, neither he nor our uncle—who emigrated from a small village called Mahdauli in Bihar to the United States—knew how to eat an ice cream cone. Household legend has it that my uncle would routinely leave his wafer cones to languish away in the dustbins of New York's bustling streets, after fastidiously scooping out the ice cream.

This memory came rushing back to me as I sat rearranging my father's books in his library at our ancestral home in Bihar. The shelves are filled with copies of *Amar Chitra Katha*, *Tintin* comics, Ruskin Bond novels, a few Urdu collections, books we won

as prizes in school and numerous copies of *Reader's Digest*.

The books sat bundled together; quite a few with their spines starting to separate from their yellowed, well-thumbed pages. But even in their battered state they held within them the universe of my childhood—a whole way of life preserved. After a lifetime's journey from Bihar to West Bengal, to Madhya Pradesh then Maharashtra, these treasured tomes were finally home. I picked up a *Digest* at random, an edition from 1973, and, flipping through it, stopped. There on the page I had opened up to was an article titled *How to eat an ice cream cone*.

It was as if a movie montage of my father's life came into focus. A strapping young man working on-site as a manager in the mines of Asansol,

PHOTO CREDIT: AUTHOR

cooing into his first-born daughter's ear, his eyes shining—welcoming her into the world. Soon, I am back in my childhood bungalow in Asansol. A home filled with love and laughter, and rows and rows of books. Comforts too, all of which were missing from his own childhood.

As I sit surrounded by reams of paper, filled with stories of all shapes and sizes, I cannot help but marvel at his life. At the journey of a village boy, who didn't have enough to buy shoes, or a bag to go to school, but started a library in his mud-tiled

AS I REVISITED THE MEMORIES OF MY FATHER, I COULDN'T HELP BUT MARVEL AT THE JOURNEY OF HIS LIFE.

house in Jitwarpur, Bihar, at the age of 20. In 1962, India was at war with China, and yet here was this fellow, just out of his teens, writing to various embassies for free English journals. They responded to his requests with donations of pamphlets and books. I wished I had asked him, 'Where did you get the confidence to write to embassies?'

I eagerly scan more pages of the magazine in my hands, and find an underlined word in it: family. It dawned on me just how much my

father sought and learnt from books, how deeply he relied on them to build his life, design its contents, and teach us—his three kids—about the brave new world he wanted us to inherit. As I flip through the rest of the edition (it is one from the year of my birth), two advertisements catch my eye: 'Train her to be a housewife' is Usha sewing machine's war cry; the other says 'The world is her oyster.' I am grateful my parents decided to buy into the latter.

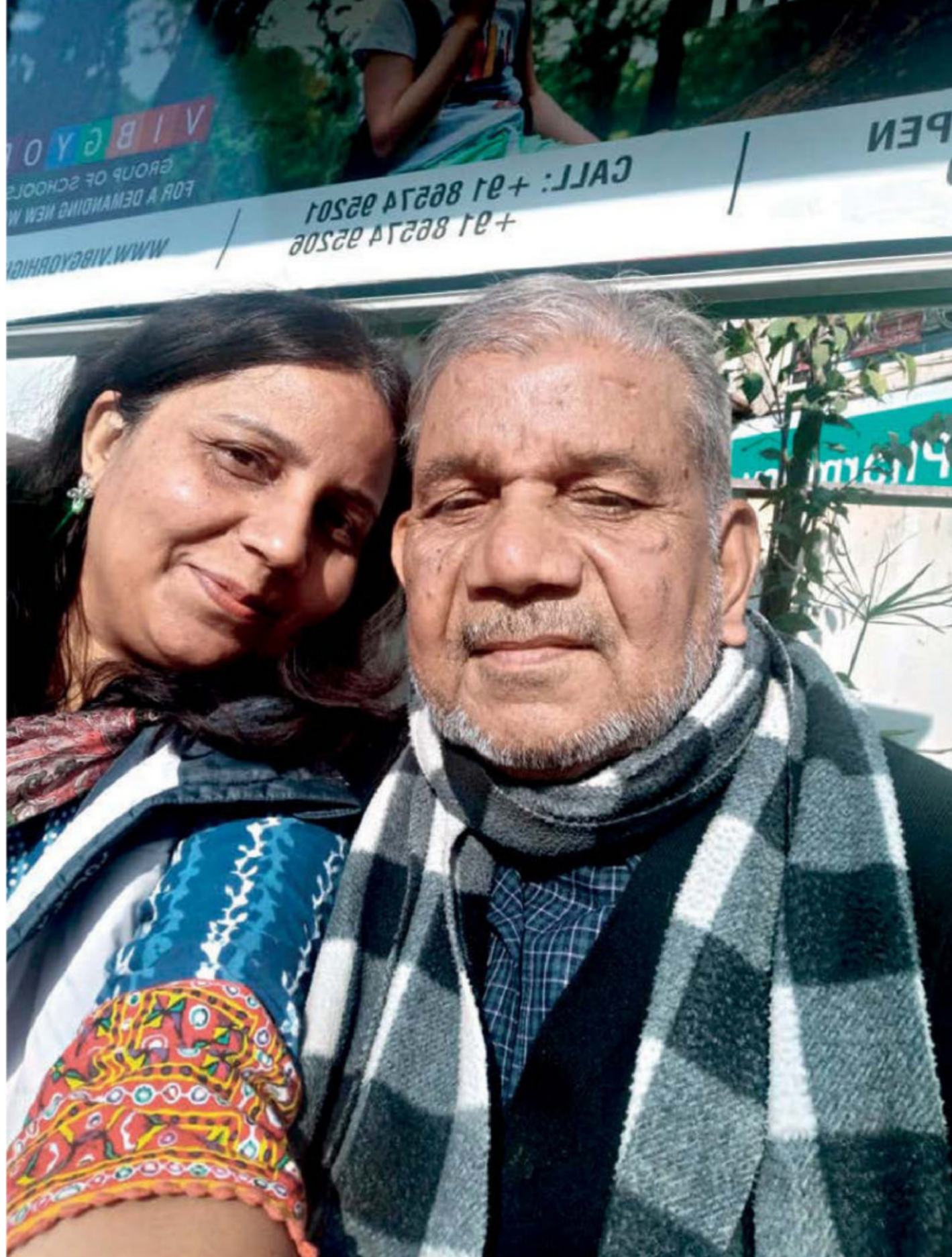
My father passed away in October 2022. As I gently pulled out book after book, I felt the weight of the dreams and lessons these stories had brought into his life—and through his world, seeped into mine. A few that took deepest roots are as follows:

Dream big and never give up These oft-repeated words still ring in my ears. And he led by example. In 1961, my father had passed the prestigious Indian School of Mines exam and he was jubilant—he was going to make something of his life. But little did he know then that he would fail to clear his 12th-standard physics practicals. Life was bitter-sweet that year. But determined as he was, he retook both exams the next year—he didn't even know about compartment exams—and cleared them with distinction. He would tell this story to his grandkids when they were dealing with the stress of competition.

Read voraciously This was his mantra for us. We were encouraged to nurture

a reading habit and cultivate curiosity. Soon, Enid Blyton, Nancy Drew and Agatha Christie's books became our childhood companions. He would routinely gift his grandkids books, hoping that they too would discover the joys of reading, as he had once done.

Even as he grappled with dementia in his last few years, he would religiously read the daily newspapers. His appetite to learn never waned, and he never shied away from asking for information if he did not understand something, especially new technology.



The author, in a selfie with her father.

The value of a hug “I had no one in my family who hugged me except my mother,” he once told me. Growing up my father would envelop us in bear hugs, freely and often, no excuse needed, although his young grandchildren often sought to escape them. The same grandchild, at age 18, hugged him tight when he heard this story.

Plant trees “Farah do you know that the smell of fruit trees attracts butterflies and so do the vibrant colours of flowers?” I could hear his joy over this factoid crackling through the telephone line from Bihar, all the way to Delhi, where I lived. He had planted numerous fruit trees back home. Whenever I asked him why he

took the trouble or who was going to eat the harvest, he would repeat: the birds, the bees and the butterflies. On the day of his funeral, I remember the sight of countless butterflies and birds descending on our garden, as if they knew that it was their friend's final farewell.

I shake myself out of my reverie, carry the books out of his study, and lay them carefully on the *chowki* in our *aangan*. The March sun beams overhead. I spy a copy of Ibn-e-Safi's *Jasoosi Duniya*, and know that I am ready to go on an adventure with Inspector Faridi and Sergeant Hameed. Maybe John Donne had the right idea—that death was an ascension to a better library. Maybe life could be too. **R**

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It Happens
ONLY IN INDIA



“The rot of corruption! They caught me for taking a bribe of two thousand rupees, I had to pay one lakh to clear my name!”

The Sink and The Drain

As so many things do these days, this tale too starts with a pic for the ‘gram.’ Food inspector Rajesh Vishwas was taking a selfie along the beautiful Kherkatta reservoir in Chhattisgarh, when splash went

his phone into the dam’s watery depths. Beleaguered Mr Vishwas couldn’t stand the loss and buoyed both by bureaucratic privilege and the dear misfortune staring him in the face, he took matters into the deep end.

He ordered a diesel pump, ran it for days and drained roughly 41 lakh litres of water out of the reservoir, all to allow retrieval of his phone. Vishwas alleges he had ‘verbal permission’ for the act and that the water he

drained was 'not in an usable condition' anyway, but perhaps, he hadn't quite fathomed the depths of trouble his actions would drag him to. News of this gross violation of power reached the water resource department, and his suspension order was dispatched. The phone however when found turned out to be damaged beyond repair, not unlike Vishwas' professional credibility.

SOURCE: BBC.COM

Run Away

Cross the aisle or hope to die? Well, almost. In Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, a woman sat in all her wedding finery, awaiting her lover of two-and-a-half years to finally make her his bride. After all, it had taken them much negotiation to get the families to agree to their impending nuptials.

So sat the expectant bride-to-be, patiently waiting for her groom, but as the hours ticked by, it dawned upon her that her prince was

uncharacteristically late. Fearing the worst she called him up to inquire what the hold-up was. His response: He was headed to Budaun to pick up his mother. Suspecting a lie, the bride shook herself out of her wedding reverie and immediately swung into action. She launched a most determined man-hunt and managed to nab the runaway groom as he was boarding a bus near Bhimora police station, about 20 km away from Bareilly! A high-charge drama unfolded in the middle of the road before the couple made their way back to the temple and solemnized their wedding in the presence of their families. To the newly-weds then, break a leg!

SOURCE: INTODAY.COM

The Musk Men

Billionaire Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter has been a bumpy ride, but little does he know of the heaps of meninist goodwill the takeover has earned him in these parts. So happy were the

men leading the charge at the Save Indian Family Foundation, Bengaluru, an organization working to alleviate the oppression suffered by the males of our species, that they organized a grand *puja* in gratitude. The reason for the hat tip: reducing censorship on Twitter and allowing men's rights activists to freely express their views on the platform. In the video doing the rounds on the internet, these men were seen chanting 'lord' Musk's name and thanking him for being the 'destroyer of woke-shura'—alluding to the pesky demon of liberal thought.

We too have a little prayer: maybe men will, one day, clue in on the realities of the world and direct their devotion to a worthier cause.

SOURCE: NDTV.COM

—COMPILED BY NAOREM ANUJA

Reader's Digest *will pay for contributions to this column. Post your suggestions with the source to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com*



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE



There was little heroic about Nick Bostic's life. He was troubled. Aimless. Then one night, everything changed

INTO THE FLAMES

BY *Nicholas Hune-Brown*

AT FIRST, IT WAS ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE— A FAINT ORANGE LIGHT

at the edge of his vision as Nick Bostic drove down the streets of Lafayette, Indiana, on a warm night last July. Bostic rolled past the two-storey house before he could process what he was seeing. Then he slammed on the brakes. *Oh my god*, he thought. *That house is on fire.*

It hadn't been Bostic's best night, but it hadn't been his worst either. The 25-year-old—burly and six-foot-three, with a messy beard that often framed a mischievous grin—was still figuring out how to make his way through a life that hadn't always been easy.

Bostic had spent his childhood shuttling back and forth between his mom in Lafayette and his dad in Arkansas, with neither home providing the love and safety he needed.

If you'd asked his friends to describe him as a kid, Bostic says, they'd probably have said "a fool." He got into trouble, acted like an idiot, tried to use humour to make friends but never quite got it right.

As he got older, his troubles became more serious. Bostic began using methamphetamines. He lost friends to suicide. At times, his own life didn't feel worth living. But over the past few years, he had started to turn things around. He'd quit hard drugs. He had a girlfriend, Kara, and was working at a Papa Johns making pizzas. If people around Lafayette had to describe him now, they might say he was a guy with a big heart who maybe didn't know exactly what to do with it.

That night, 11 July 2022, Bostic had had a petty squabble with Kara and he'd stormed out of their apartment, leaving his phone behind so she couldn't contact him. He filled up her car with gas, then smoked some weed in an auto-parts store parking lot; he liked to go there when he needed to be alone. He looked up at the stars and sat in silence for 15 minutes or so. Then he decided to head home. He was on the road back to the apartment just after midnight when he saw the house on fire.

Bostic threw the car into reverse and whipped it into the driveway. Flames were climbing up the front porch, lapping at the home's walls. Hurrying out of the vehicle, he immediately regretted not having his phone. "Hey, help, the house is on fire!" he yelled into the night. A car drove past and Bostic tried to flag it down, to no avail.

He ran around to the back door, sure it would be locked. To his amazement, it swung open. Without pausing for a moment to think about the danger, Bostic ran into the burning building.

IT WAS DATE NIGHT for the Barretts, and in a large family, date night was important.

The Barrett family was a lively bunch. They went to church on Sundays, and the five-bedroom, two-storey house they rented was always full of yelling and laughter, with friends and family coming by for cookouts and sleepovers and volleyball games out back.

That night, four of the six Barrett kids were at home when David, a 39-year-old

assistant principal at Tecumseh Junior High School, and his wife, Tiera, went out to play darts down the street. Seionna, their 18-year-old daughter, was in charge. She was taking care of Kaleia, her one-and-a-half-year-old sister. Shaylee, 13, was in the house with a friend. And Kaylani, the family's six-year-old, was roaming from room to room, looking for someone to fall asleep with.

Kaylani hated sleeping alone. The animated little girl was so curious and trust-

**THE NEXT THING
SEIONNA REMEMBERED
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AN EXPLOSION.**

ing that David was always worried she'd just run off with a stranger. That night she walked into Seionna's bedroom on the ground floor asking if she could climb into bed with her big sister. But Seionna wasn't feeling well, and she had to work in the morning. So she told her sister to go to her own room, that they could sleep together tomorrow.

The next thing Seionna remembered was waking to what sounded like an explosion. Later, officials would find that the fire had started on the porch and then caused a propane tank next to their grill to explode. But in the moment, Seionna only knew that there was smoke in her room. The living room

next door was on fire, and she could feel the flames' heat on her skin. *Is this a dream?* she thought. Then she started to run. *I have to get the kids.*

Seionna sprinted up the stairs, grabbed Kaleia out of her crib and hurried to the next door, where Shaylee and her friend were still sound asleep. "Wake up, wake up!" she yelled.

When she got to Kaylani's room, however, the bed was empty. The six-year-

BOSTIC WENT UPSTAIRS. HE SEARCHED UNDER THE BUNK BED AND INSIDE THE CLOSET. NO KID.

old was nowhere to be found. A horrible realization hit Seionna. Kaylani sometimes liked to sleep in the living room. And the living room was on fire.

THE CURTAINS WERE MELTING. That was just one of the surreal things Nick Bostic noticed as he ran through the hallway of the burning house, peering into rooms that were in flames and searching to see if anyone was home.

With the ground floor seemingly clear, Bostic headed for the staircase. He had just started climbing when he looked up and saw four faces emerge from a room at the top of the stairs and peer down at him, their eyes wide. "Your house is on fire, you need to go!" Bostic yelled.

The girls came pouring down the stairs, Bostic hurrying them along. They all rushed out into the fresh air where they huddled in a circle. "Is there anybody else in there?" Bostic asked.

"There's a baby in there!" Seionna screamed, referring to Kaylani. But neither she nor any of the kids knew where the six-year-old was. Without hesitating, Bostic ran back inside.

By now, the whole side of the house was in flames. The smell was foul and intense, like nothing he'd ever encountered. Black smoke was gathering at the ceiling, then billowing down towards him. The temperature was intense, a whoosh of pure heat that hit him like a physical object.

Bostic went upstairs. Everything looked eerily normal, with no sign there was a fire raging so near. He searched under the bunk bed and in the closet. No kid. He searched the other upstairs bedrooms and listened intently, surprised he couldn't hear a single cry.

Kaylani didn't seem to be on the second floor, so Bostic prepared to head back down. But the smoke was thick now—black and opaque, a curtain of poison that had climbed all the way to the top of the stairs. He lifted his Papa Johns T-shirt, doubling it up and trying to cover his mouth and nose, as he hesitated at the top of the stairs. Then he heard the sound of crying, from the dark smoke below.

Bostic stumbled down the stairs and into the blackness, choking on smoke. He was on a search and rescue mission,





his ears alert as he tried his best to move toward the sound, arm outstretched. Then suddenly Kaylani was in front of him. Bostic quickly lifted the girl into his arms and looked for the door.

But in the smoke and heat, he was all turned around. He stumbled through the burning house, trying to find the exit. *Where is the front door?!* Disoriented, the only things he could see through the haze were the lights leading upstairs, like lanterns in a fog.

Bostic climbed back up. At the top, he tripped and fell. With the fire all around them, he thought: *We're goners.* But he managed to pull himself up, Kaylani still in his arms. Bostic remembered seeing a window on the side of the house where the fire hadn't reached, and that's where he headed.

He made it to the room and immediately tried tearing down the curtains and blinds from the window. Kaylani's ankle became entangled in a curtain cord, so he forced himself to slow down.

Finally he got the curtains and blinds off so that clean air was just one windowpane away. Still holding the little girl, Bostic punched the glass with his right hand. His fist bounced off. For his next punch, he reached back with everything he had. His fist smashed through the window, cutting up his arm as a gust of glorious fresh air filled the room. Then he quickly knocked some shards out of the frame.

As the flames advanced behind them, Bostic and Kaylani looked at the open space. Below, a strip of grass lay

between this house and the next one's wooden fence. The girl peered down. "I don't want to jump out the window," she said. He was thinking the exact same thing.

But they had little choice. The flames were inching ever closer, and the heat was intensifying. Bostic took a few steps backwards. Then, without letting himself think much about what awaited them, he ran forward and threw himself out of the window.

And as he flew headlong through the air, holding Kaylani tightly in one arm,

**HOLDING KAYLANI
TIGHTLY IN ONE ARM,
BOSTIC RAN FORWARD
AND JUMPED OUT OF
THE WINDOW.**

he twisted and contorted his body so as to land on the other shoulder and cushion her fall. Then they hit the ground.

OUTSIDE, MEANWHILE, the firefighters had arrived on the scene. They hurried Seionna and the rest of the kids away from the house—which was now entirely engulfed in flames.

"Six-year-old female and 23-year-old male, possibly inside," a firefighter called out as they rushed to put on their equipment.

Then Bostic came stumbling out from the side of the house, Kaylani in his



Clockwise from top left: A firefighter's body camera showing Bostic and Kaylani; the destroyed house; Kaylani (red bow) and her family; Bostic recovering.



arms. “Take her,” he yelled, the moment captured by the firefighters’ body cameras. He handed over the girl—crying, but miraculously uninjured apart from a cut on her arm—before collapsing on the sidewalk calling for oxygen.

Gasping for air, the house crumbling behind him, there was only one thing on his mind. “Is the baby okay?” he asked. “Please tell me the baby’s okay.”

The minutes, hours and days that followed are a blur for Bostic. He remembers the paramedics pulling the tourniquet tight around the arm he’d cut punching through the window. He remembers being wheeled into the

ambulance, but he doesn’t remember being transferred to the hospital, where he was treated for smoke inhalation and first-degree burns to his ankle, leg and arm.

When Bostic woke up, it was with a tube down his throat and his girlfriend by his side. In bed, he thought about what had happened. He felt like he’d just done what anyone would have done in that situation. But outside the hospital, the story of Nick Bostic was already spreading. He was a hero—the pizza man who had run into a burning building not once, but twice.

A few days later, after Bostic had

been released from the hospital, the Barretts invited him and Kara to dinner at the house where they were staying. David wanted to thank the man who had saved his family in person.

The moment David saw Nick Bostic, he started crying. “He walked up to me with his arms open and held me tightly and thanked me,” says Bostic. “All he could say was thank you, thank you.”

That week they asked Bostic to come to church with them. And then they had him back to dinner, again and again. “I feel like God used him as a tool,” says David. “And I feel like God is using me as a tool to help him as well.”

The Barretts are still pulling their lives together after losing everything they owned. The fire has brought them even closer as a family and closer to their community, which came together to shelter and feed them while they looked for a new home.

Kaylani, who emerged from the fire with nothing more than a minor cut on her arm, has become delirious with a sense of fame and bravado. “She thinks of herself as a hero,” says David. “The first thing she says when she meets someone is: ‘I was in a fire and I jumped out a window.’”

Bostic’s burns have mostly healed, though he finds his eyes have been sensitive to light since the fire. The other changes have been far greater. Bostic and Kara are expecting a child. And as news about his heroism spread, a GoFundMe account for his hospital bills exploded, reaching some \$6,00,000 [₹4.9 crores]—a life-changing amount of money.

Bostic offered the Barrett family some of it to help them get their life back on track, but David was firm. That was Bostic’s money. He should support his child, and use that gift to spend time with his family. Then he introduced the now 26-year-old to a financial advisor.

When Bostic thinks about what happened, it somehow feels like both a near-death experience and a rebirth. Even though he was the one who ran into a burning building, it’s like he was the one who was rescued.

“I feel like a different person. Like I got a second chance,” he says. If in the past he’d sometimes felt like a fool, that wasn’t how he saw himself now. Life hadn’t been easy. He knew the future, too, would be difficult. “But I’m starting to find my purpose,” he says. For the first time, he’s sure he’ll figure it out. **R**

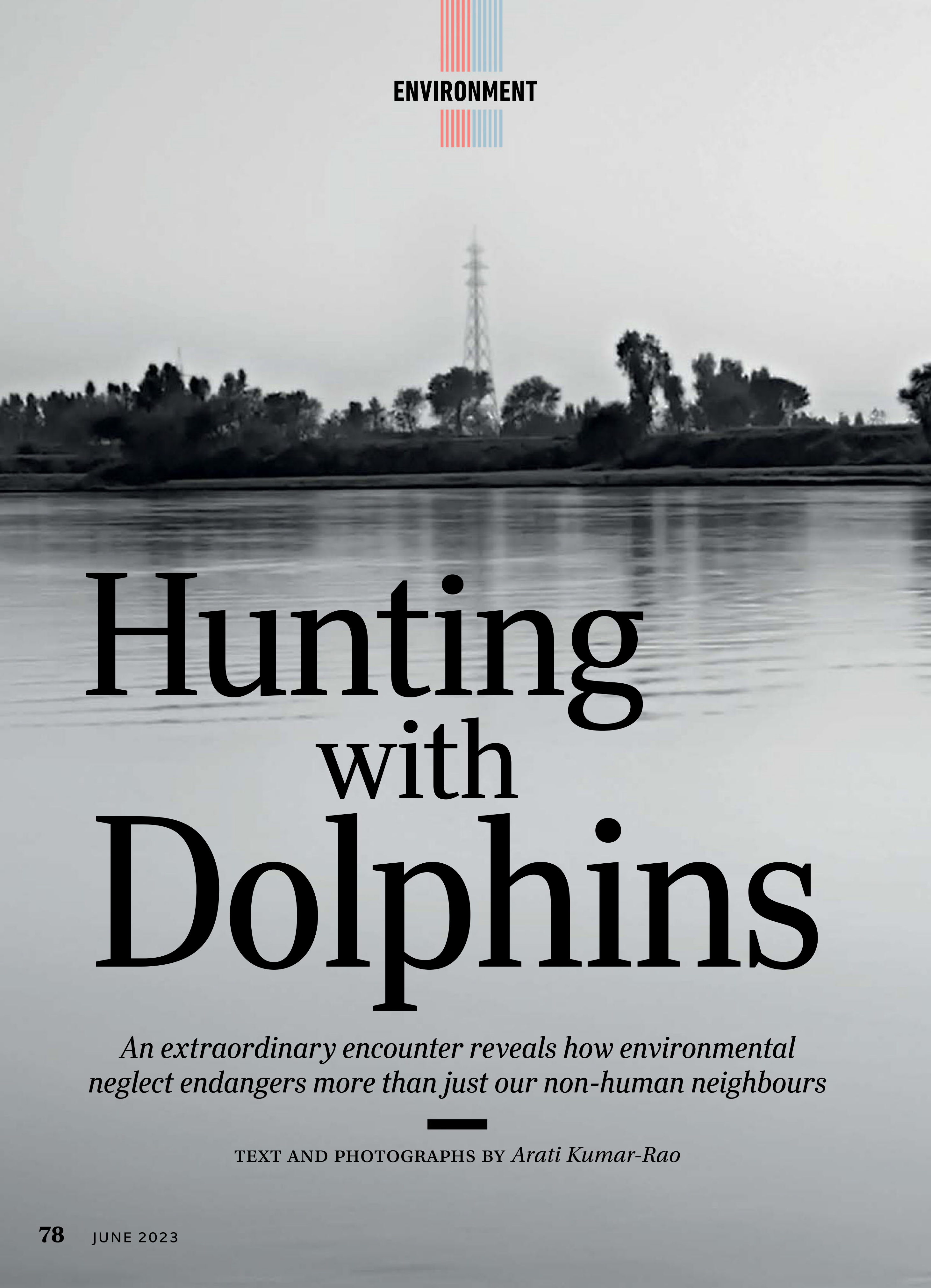
(OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF LAFAYETTE POLICE DEPARTMENT; WXIN FOX59 NEWS; COURTESY OF THE BARRETT FAMILY; DAVE BANGERT



Economy Class

Thrift is that habit of character that prompts one to work for what he gets, to earn what is paid him; to invest a part of his earnings; to spend wisely and well; to save, but not hoard.

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM



Hunting with Dolphins

An extraordinary encounter reveals how environmental neglect endangers more than just our non-human neighbours

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Arati Kumar-Rao*

An endangered Indus
dolphin comes up for air in
the Beas Conservation Area.



It is the final week of February 2017, the last of the dark nights in the hunting season on the Brahmaputra. The sun is down, leaving behind a rose-pink sky that fades to purple, then indigo, which ultimately turns an inky black. We can't see a thing. Not the horizon, nor the moon, the stars, not even a hand held in front of our faces. It is as if the world were doused in Japanese ink.

My friend and I are inching up the massive river with two fishermen, Lekhu and Ranjan, in their long, low-slung dinghy. It is the dry season; the river's shallow course here is braided with sandy shoals.

Lekhu and Ranjan are among the last of their tribe in Assam—handheld harpoon fishermen who fish on the blackest nights of the dry season, when the river runs clear and low. What makes them special is that they fish alongside the Gangetic dolphins.

Now the boat bumps up against something and runs aground. We step onto a silt island—a *chapori*. It is neither land nor water, neither predictable nor permanent. It rises as the silt piles up and submerges as the river current erodes it, carrying the silt away; it gives, it takes back.

These fertile *chaporis* come in varying degrees of robustness, depending on the amount of silt accreted and the vegetation anchoring the outcropping to the bed. Adventurous risk-takers settle on the larger, more robust ones. A *chapori* belongs to no government or

“We will set out at 9 p.m., after dinner,” says Lekhu, the senior of the two fishermen. “It will be cold; wear something warm.”

The men fill a kettle-shaped lamp with kerosene and poke a wick into its spout. With clay collected from the riverbank, they fix the lamp onto the front of the boat, just beneath the prow. A wind starts up as a whisper that soon turns into a howl, raising small waves that lap furiously at the sandbank. The fire goes out; flying sand enters our tents, stinging our faces. High wind means no fishing, Lekhu warns us.

OUT OF THE PITCH BLACK OF THE NIGHT, THERE IS A ‘WHOOOSH’ OFF TO OUR RIGHT. THE FLASHLIGHT BEAM LIGHTS UP THE DORSAL FIN OF A GANGETIC DOLPHIN.

individual; it exists on no map. Google, in fact, tells us we are in the middle of the main stem of the Brahmaputra. The *chapori* we are on will, in all likelihood, disappear in a few months, as the river swells during the next monsoon.

Flashlights clamped in our mouths, we juggle ropes and stakes out of the boat and pitch our tents. The fishermen start a cooking fire, and against its light, our shadows dance on the river. Dinner is rice—lots of it—and potatoes in a tomato curry.

As we eat, the river gurgles softly near us and the wind brings the sound of drumbeats. The world’s largest river island, Majuli, home to Vishnu-worshipping monks, is not far off.

AT 9 P.M., THE WIND is still fierce. We wait. An hour or so later, it relents. Lekhu lights the lamp on the boat. We clamber onboard and push off from the sandbar. Lekhu stands tall at the prow, a six-pronged harpoon in hand, while Ranjan perches aft and navigates with the oar. The two of us crouch between them, in single file. We can see only a small arc in front of the boat by the lamp’s light, which glows orange and burns heavy, leaving a trail of smoke in our wake.

Lekhu’s eyes are fixed on that arc of light as he uses his harpoon to call the dolphins. He teases the water, moving the tip of the instrument in wide curves along the surface. Nothing happens. He spears the harpoon into the river,



Fishers cast a net in the shallow waters of the Brahmaputra in Upper Assam.

making sloshing sounds. Still nothing.

Ranjan guides the boat downstream, zigging from right bank to left and zagging around shoals. Lekhu dunks the harpoon in the water and raises it quickly, causing a soft plop. He agitates the water, sending ripples out wide, but to no avail. The two fishermen exchange comments in hushed voices. I gather that the season is drawing to a close.

Time passes, and then, out of the pitch black of the night, there is a *'whoooooosh'* off to our right. The flashlight beam lights up the dorsal fin of a Gangetic dolphin. As the first one disappears, another arcs out of the water, ghostly white in the glow. A mother and her calf have joined us.

I switch off my light and listen to the swoosh of their breath through the blowholes. They stay with us; Lekhu is alert now for signs of fish fleeing ahead of the dolphins. He harpoons one, then

another. The impaled fish come up squealing and yapping.

The sounds surprise me at first. Catfish, prawns, crabs and river puffers all make sounds, but this is the first time I've heard a fish squeal. It thrashes for a while at the bottom of the boat, fighting for air, and then falls silent.

"Fish are scarce," Lekhu tells us. "When there's plenty, the dolphins get excited. They come close enough to rock the boat and even slap its sides." The dolphins today are just 10 yards ahead of us. I put my camera down. We are bobbing and swaying in this thin, long boat on the mighty Brahmaputra, in total darkness and silence, with a river dolphin mum and calf for company.

A shiver runs down my spine, and I hug myself and smile at the ghostly grey arcs beside us. If meeting an endangered wild creature in its space, with its offspring in tow, far away from

any protected area was not in itself special, we are witnessing a human collaborating with a wild animal—a way of life that is also endangered.

I bowed my head and exhaled long and slow. Fish populations in the Brahmaputra have been dwindling, reports indicate, by as much as 80–85 per cent in some places. Many small species of indigenous fish, neither studied nor named, are likely lost forever. As no baseline study was ever conducted, there is not enough data to quantify this loss. All we have is the oral evidence of fishermen who live on these waters and tell tales of what once was.

Three years earlier in Upper Assam: winter has long vanished, leaving behind only a hint of nip in the fierce pink of the gloaming. The Subansiri river makes its way down from Tibet to join the Brahmaputra, flowing fat and placid across the plains. Orchid-swathed forests with clumps of fern rise black and feathery against a salmon sky. From the far bank, a boatman in a dug-out ferries seven people across using a bamboo pole as an oar.

Trucks wheeze and grumble along raw roads of scree, carrying towering piles of smooth, round rock. The grey dust of their passing obscures small-scale factories pulverizing great quantities of rock into cement for dams, roads, buildings.

The light is fading fast. Professor Lakhi Hazarika, who teaches fish zoology at the local college in Lakhim-

pur, and I have jumped into our car at the urging of the driver in order to return to the town. This is 'elephant hour' and, in an area famous for 'angry rogue elephants at twilight', our driver is scared. The professor, a scientist, has no such apprehensions. As we crest a bridge over a stream, he motions for our driver to halt. Jumping out of the car, he runs down the bank. I follow suit.

We rush across the soft sand, past massive elephant footprints, to an area with a smudge of water. He crouches at its edge and carefully moves a small river rock. Two baleful eyes stare back at us—a snakehead fish, about as long as my index finger, heavy with eggs.

"This is an endangered species," the professor explains. Small indigenous fish like the snakehead find refuge around river rocks and fallen logs, in the nooks and crannies of soft-flowing streams, and in coves. These are prime habitats for the fish—they breed under the rocks and submerged logs, or near the roots of trees along the tiny streams that flow down from the eastern Himalayas. Those streams and rivers are now being mined for rocks and boulders, depriving the fish of their safe spaces. "If you take those 'obstacles' away, you destroy vital fish-breeding habitats."

With the supply of small indigenous fish declining by 85 to 90 per cent over the past decade, fishermen are sliding into poverty. They cannot find enough fish in the river to sell, much less to eat. In the markets of Dibrugarh, 90 per cent of the fish consumed in the

town is trucked in, on beds of ice, from farms in Andhra Pradesh, and this is true for most other cities on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra that was once highly biodiverse. The socio-logical and economic hit the river fisheries are taking is repeating itself all over the subcontinent.

A few months after my trip with Professor Hazarika, I walk through fishing villages along the Teesta in Bangladesh and see scarcity and hunger everywhere. India's barrage upstream impounds vital water, desiccating the lower riparian country in the dry season. It's not difficult to join the dots. No water, no fish. No fish, no money. No money, no food.

ALL ALONG THE BRAHMAPUTRA, wetlands serve as nurseries for fish. Brought in by the floods that spill over the banks and into the wetlands, the fingerlings find space to grow, awaiting the next flood to make their way back into the tributaries and from there into the main stem of the river. The embankments erected to control floods, however, have cut the wetlands off from this main stem, adversely affecting the natural replenishment of fish stocks. With their livelihoods unsettled by the double whammy of upstream mining and disappearing wetlands, fishermen resort to unsustainable fishing methods that in turn accelerate the depletion of fish populations.

Artisanal fishermen like Lekhu and Ranjan are being pushed to the brink. We spend three hours on the river, fishing in the company of two sets of dol-



Supply of indigenous fish has declined by 85 to 90 per cent over the past decade.

phins, but have only two fish to show for it. Returning to our camp well after midnight, we crawl into our tents. The night closes in on us, its silence punctuated only by the tympanic slap of water.

As dawn approaches, the tan-coloured *chapor* reveals itself. It is flat as a pancake; there is no chance for privacy during one's morning ablutions. Lekhu and Ranjan snore rhythmically inside their tent. I drag my drone's Pelican case to the edge of the sandbar, perch on it and scribble notes while the experience is still fresh.

A commotion erupts in the water right in front of me. A million bubbles burst from an eddy. Panicked fish fly into the air. The hump of a dorsal fin and a spray of misty water cue me in—a Gangetic dolphin is on the hunt. I watch, stunned

by the cetacean's speed, grace and power, too rapt to even break out my camera. And then, as suddenly as it had started, the hunt is over, the fish have scattered and the dolphin moves away. The river settles back into its natural rhythms, the currents making soft sounds again as they churn silty waters.

Lekhu starts a fire for the morning tea. He and Ranjan make plans to move camp further upstream in the hope of better fishing. We pack up and load the dinghy. As we row upstream, Lekhu lowers a fishing net into the water. A raucous flock of the endangered greater adjutant stork lifts off into the leaden skies. A melancholic song wafts from downriver; in the distance, we spot a lone fisherman in a boat. Our fishermen guides know him; he is called 'the mad one' for his incessant singing. Lekhu hauls up his net with two fish in it, and we disembark on another *chaponi*. This one is a sizeable strip with a jetty at the far end, and there are signs of human presence.

We gather around yet another cooking fire. The two freshly caught fish are on the menu. "Seven or eight years ago, we'd make about ₹12,000 in a week of hunting," Lekhu says, as he fillets the fish. "Now we hunt all months of the dry season and still don't make that much."

The rivers that feed the Brahmaputra are changing constantly, and there are rumours that the Brahmaputra itself will be turned into a national waterway. The wetlands, already under assault from all kinds of development, will be

further stressed, and the fisherfolk—their lives and livelihoods—will suffer the cumulative impact's worst effect.

Not so long ago, fish markets along the banks of the Brahmaputra bustled with dozens of fish varieties. Now most of these shops are shuttered; the few that remain open sell those ice-box fish brought in from the fish farms of Andhra Pradesh, thousands of kilometers away.

Lekhu and Ranjan know that their special skill, hunting alongside dolphins, has reached its use-by date. They may not return next year. Lekhu has some knowledge of masonry; Ranjan will find some odd job. The dolphin's fate, too, is uncertain.

THREE YEARS PRIOR, in 2014, on a river to the southwest of Dhaka one monsoon day, we had been calling out to every fishing boat we encountered: "Any fish? How many you got?" Usually, the answer was a shake of the head, a moan that floated over the waters: "No fish. There are no fish in the river." But once came this reply: "*Shushuk!*" Dolphin. Caught in a net not cast for it.

This is one way dolphins die—especially the young ones. Either they go to feed on fish trapped in fishing nets or, worse, they swim right into nets strung across the width of a river. The nets weave themselves in and out of the white parabolic curve of the dolphins' sharp, clean teeth, snapping the snouts shut.

Adult dolphins are strong enough to cut through the mesh, but the babies,



A woman uses a *tongi-jaal*, a dip net, to fish in the Ganga–Brahmaputra basin.

like the not-yet-eight-month-old ‘*shushu*’ this fisherman inadvertently caught, can do nothing. Unable to come up to breathe, they thrash wildly in the water, often entangling themselves further. Eventually, they suffocate and perish.

I remember touching the lifeless cetacean. Its skin had felt smooth, almost like the rubber of a scuba diver’s outfit. It was cold too, with white chalk-like gashes on its back and fins—the marks of its fruitless struggle with the net. Its near-blind eyes were like tiny beads. I knew the theory—the silty waters of these rivers meant that they had adapted to the murkiness by relinquishing sight for a keen hearing, using echolocation to navigate. Their eyes could not see anything but, maybe, the direction of light. Even so, I was aston-

ished by the tiny, clouded opening.

The fishermen, though, were going home hungry, their debts deepening with every drawing of an empty net.

Night falls quickly in northeast India. There is no wind to delay us. We set off from the *chapori* for the last hunt of the season. The blackness closes in on us; the only sound is that of Lekhu teasing the waters with his harpoon. Two dolphins materialize ahead of us, then another, followed by a mother and her calf.

They whoosh and arc and dip and sigh. There are no fish for them or us.

Whichever side of the net you are on, there is only loss. **R**

FROM *MARGINLANDS: INDIAN LANDSCAPES ON THE BRINK* BY ARATI KUMAR-RAO (PAN MACMILLAN, 2023).
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WORDS OF LASTING INTEREST

The Memories *Remain*

A revered storyteller reflects on how the power to remember builds, shapes, and even rescues, who we are

BY *Ruskin Bond*

ILLUSTRATION by *Titas Panda*



I was going through a drawer full of old manuscripts and notebooks when a long-pressed maidenhair fern fell out from between the pages of a notebook. It had lost its colour but was undamaged, and it still looked very pretty lying against the white pages. For me, maidenhair is the prettiest of all the ferns—delicate, almost fragile, but held together by a strong dark stem that resembles a maiden's hair; hence its name. You will find it near water, usually on the fringes of a small spring where there is not much sun nor too much shade.

Sometimes I come across it quite by chance, its tender green fronds brightening up a dry hillside. If I go looking for it, it proves elusive. Life's like that. If you want something very badly, it can be hard to get. Turn aside, forget it and it will come to you when you least expect it. This particular fern brought back memories—or rather, one particular memory, of a picnic by a mountain stream. Sushila, whom I loved, was sitting beside me on the grassy bank, holding hands. She took her hand from mine for a moment and plucked the frond of maidenhair from the plant that grew there quite profusely, and gave it to me to preserve.

That was nearly 50 years ago and I haven't seen Sushila again. You could say the stars were not in our favour. But now, holding the pressed fern in my hand, I can feel her hand again and the sweetness of her touch. Not all of us keep such mementos from the past. Or, if we do, we forget about them and their whereabouts. Some things get thrown away. But some—like a pressed fern or leaf or flower—hide themselves

in an old diary or notebook, and turn up unexpectedly to remind you of a precious moment in time.

Six or seven—that's the age at which our essential tastes, even our obsessions, begin to be stamped on us by outward impressions. They never leave us, even when we think we have forgotten them. To my dying day I shall have a special fondness for the cosmos flower because I remember walking through a forest of cosmos—or what seemed like a forest to a small boy. White, purple, magenta, those fresh-faced flowers nodded to me as I played on the lawns of the Jamnagar palace grounds and today, more than 80 years later, whenever I see the cosmos in bloom, I go among them, for they are eternal, even if I am not.

And to this day I like the sound of a cock crowing at dawn, because this was one of the first sounds that impinged on my mind when I was a child. A cock crowing. Harbinger of light, of optimism. "Great day! Great day!" it seems to say.

Little things stay with us, remain with us over the years. The memory of a

broom, the small hand-broom, sweeping the steps of the veranda, takes me back to that distant but vivid childhood, and the thin dark woman who swept the bungalow's rooms. I loved watching her at work. It seemed like a game to me, and sometimes I would take the broom from her and sweep so vigorously that the dust rose and settled on the furniture. "Aunty will be angry," she'd say and take the broom away from me. But she'd let me borrow it from time to time, when my parents weren't around.

The other day, seeing my steps covered with dead leaves, I picked up the small *jharoo*, the broom lying on the veranda, and began clearing away the leaves. A local shopkeeper on his way to the market saw me sweeping away and called out: "Sir, what are you doing? That's not your job. Give the *jharoo* to the sweeper."

Absorbed in my childhood hobby, all I could say was, "Yes, Aunty," while sending up a flurry of dead leaves. He continued on his way, muttering something about the poor old writer having lost his balance at last.

Human beings are blessed with the power to remember. But not all our early impressions are of a pleasant nature. They linger on just the same. Like the frequent quarrels

that took place between my parents, usually in my presence. I hated these quarrels and I was helpless to stop them. Eventually they led to my parents' separation. And all my life I have felt profoundly disturbed if I see or hear a husband and wife quarreling bitterly. I look around to see if a child is present. And then I realize I am that child.

Fortunately the most lasting impressions are the simple, harmonious ones. Why do I still prefer homemade butter to factory-made butter? Because, when I was five or six, I would watch my father beating up a bowl of cream and then spreading a generous amount of creamy

white butter on my toast. Now Beena knows why I am always demanding creamy white butter with my breakfast.

And you will have similar impressions to carry with you all your days. That first day at school, maybe an agonizing parting from your parents. The face of a loved one gone. A pullover knitted by your granny. A favourite toy. A doll, perhaps. A familiar melody. A book of rhymes, tattered and worn. Someone who gave you a flower, a kiss on the forehead. To the end of your days you will carry that kiss with you. And may it protect you from all harm. **R**

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FROM *THE GOLDEN YEARS: THE MANY JOYS OF LIVING A GOOD LONG LIFE* BY RUSKIN BOND (HARPERCOLLINS, 2023).

My unforgettable horseback trip in
Argentina put me on top of the world

A WILD RIDE IN PATAGONIA

BY *Liz Beatty* FROM CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC



**Lulu Waks leads
the all-woman
riding group.**

Some journeys leave a mark. That was the case with my ride into the last vestiges of authentic gaucho culture in northern Patagonia. Though it's been more than two years since my trip, the transformative powers of this experience linger with me even now.

Somewhere past the town of Loncopué in western Argentina, the paved road turns to dirt. Another hour beyond that, the car I'm riding in rattles and heaves over what has devolved into a track. Finally, my vehicle and the one following cross a grassy expanse surrounding the Andean mountain Buta Mallin. This tiny outpost in far northern Patagonia is the end of the road for the drivers, but for their women passengers, it's where the real journey begins.

With dark locks flowing from beneath her hat brim, 26-year-old guide Lara Simon, who hails from Germany, greets us with a broad smile and a sing-songy "Helloooo." In contrast, the piercing gaze of head wrangler Alyssa Young evokes 1970s Clint Eastwood—if Eastwood were a 24-year-old woman with long auburn hair. A veteran horsewoman from California, she is Zen, a bit fierce and completely in charge.

Young's welcome talk is all business: horse care, trail rules, staying hydrated. She then washes in the stream. Despite the scrubbing, it's clear that it will take weeks back in civilization before

her hard-working hands will look clean. Suddenly, my white shirt feels conspicuously laundered.

It's time to mount up. Simon double-checks each cinch (the strap that holds the saddle in place). "We have just enough daylight," says Young, swinging her leg over the sheepskin-covered saddle. The three-hour trail ride is the final leg of a long day that's drawn us five women to this remote trailhead. One more will arrive tomorrow.

We are from four countries—one Brit, one Australian, two Americans and two Canadians (including me)—and range in age from 30 to 60-something. While it seems most of us feel at home in the saddle, our comfort ends there.

Our guides, on the other hand, so clearly belong here, with their worn hats, their veneer of well-earned grime, and their bone-handled knives belted to their hips. They are wholly adapted to these arid, sweeping valleys, free-running horses and springs pouring out of the ground with surprising regularity.

I marvel at Simon as she trots up beside me, a dirty black scarf covering her face against the thick dust kicked up from the horses ahead. She is so loose in the saddle, so at ease in her skin. Experiencing that in-the-bone sense of belonging in such an untamed, rugged landscape is why I'm here.

Wild Women Expeditions, based in Canada, is one of the world's biggest all-women tour companies, serving a market that grew 230 per cent from 2014

to 2020. The average adventure traveler isn't a 28-year-old triathlete, but more likely a 47-year-old single mother or a baby boomer. In short, someone like me. Many crave adventure that may be hard to tackle solo. They're drawn to an ethos of environmental stewardship and personal growth. Some see all-women groups as liberating, for all kinds of reasons.

DOWN THE FINAL RIDGE, the setting sun illuminates our dust trail. We begin hearing hoots and cheers coming from our destination on the valley's far edge. Snaking up to Ranquilco, as the ranch is known, we pass a message carved across the gate: "Enjoy the Creation."

A welcome party emerges from nearby outbuildings, porches and forest paths. Among them are Lulu Waks and Sylvana Manterola. Waks, who is from California, will lead our pack trip. She's fit, 30-something and entirely self-possessed. Diminutive Manterola is the daughter of a local gaucho, or horseman. A bull-strong *gaucha* in her own right, she makes her own knives.

This is our home for the next 36 hours—off the grid and a bit off the wall, a higgledy-piggledy of stone and wooden architecture extending out from the *casa grande*. Each room has a wood-fired water heater and a worthy view.

Since Ranquilco was established in 1978, individualists from around the globe have found their way to this more



Liz Beatty (second from left) with her fellow riders.

than 40,000-hectare ranch—horticulturists, veterinarians, massage therapists, master masons and chefs. All bring their creative vision to the ranch's circle of sustainability.

Drinking glasses, someone realized, could be made from the bottom of empty wine bottles (of which there are many). Horseshoes could be reshaped as hinges or to secure support beams cut in the ranch's own sawmill. Virtually all their food is grown or raised on the property.

And for the most part, it's eaten on a stone terrace with a long harvest table and yet another impossible view. In the distance, high, arid grasslands, valleys, meadows and jagged peaks extend deep into the heart of the Argentine Andes. No roads, no fence lines.

"This place could not exist without so many hard-working, creative hands," says Waks, sipping coffee the next morning and surveying the horizon. Her reverence for the community here is palpable, but what she loves most is riding out into this magnificent vista. Tomorrow, we'll go with her.

ROLO THE MULE STANDS compliantly under the towering poplars shading Ranquilco's main courtyard. Simon, Waks, Manterola and Young are expert packers, balancing the load and securing the cinches. Next, the other mules—Ragnar, Ruby and Roberta—take their loads. Finally, four women guides, six women guests, four mules and 10 horses head off down Ranquilco's treed

lane. The mules and an extra horse walk free. There are hoots and cheers from the men and women staying behind.

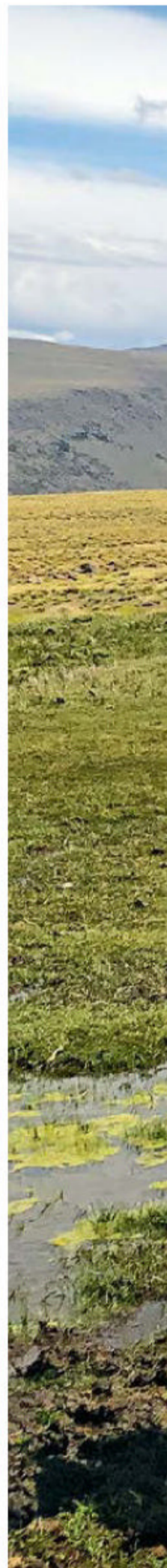
Jen Billock, from Chicago and the only novice rider, is a little nervous about what's ahead—the first major descent. It's a narrow scree and boulder-filled slope dropping about 120 metres. A line snakes down the middle. It doesn't look like a trail. Navigating this is all about trust, letting the hardy native Criollo horses do what they do.

Waks and Young offer Billock calm, spare instructions: "Lean back. Give him his head." That means loosen the reins; let him see where he's going. There's no time for pondering. Billock is near the bottom by the time I reach the top edge. *Way to go, Jen!* I think. Even though I've ridden all my life, I had no idea horses could do what we're doing.

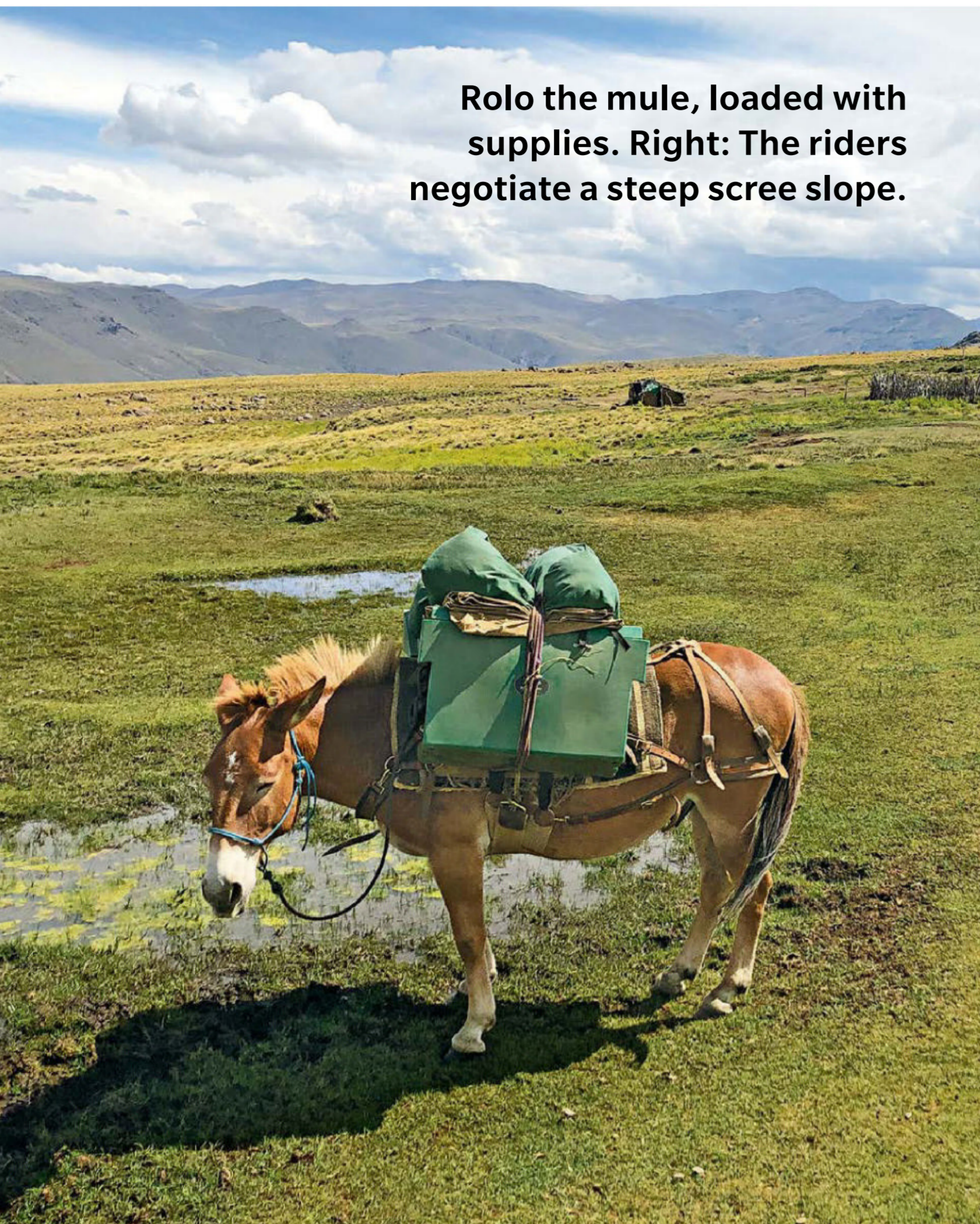
By mid-afternoon, persistent winds blow in cloud cover and eventually thunderheads. Fork lightning strikes with a shuddering bang one valley over. Waks takes her time assessing the situation. "It looks far enough away and is moving in the other direction," she says finally. "Let's keep going."

Later, we muddle through our first evening setting up camp, then peel off hot, dirty riding gear. We lie flat, looking up at clear skies and luxuriating in the sound of the river's flow.

THE NEXT MORNING I find my horse, Angus, where I left him, still tethered. He's such a handsome black gelding,



Rolo the mule, loaded with supplies. Right: The riders negotiate a steep scree slope.



energetic, or ‘forward’ in horse speak. I enjoy his flashy gaits. But the deeper into this landscape we ride, the deeper grows my affection for the mules. Their labour makes all this possible, but also, they are fascinating characters.

“Heads up—Ragnar coming through!” Young bellows from above. I spin Angus around as Ragnar’s wide load blows by down the hill. At the bottom, the mule falls in line near the front. She won’t let anyone pass.

“It’s just what they do sometimes,”

explains Young. “Horses and mules have a clear social hierarchy with horses at the top. But it’s a love-hate thing for mules. They want to be part of the group. But every once in a while, they have to assert themselves with a not-so-gentle reminder, ‘Don’t take me for granted.’”

I wonder if perhaps I was a mule in a previous life.

We follow a canyon trail that opens to a wide plateau. There are peaks to each side and expanses so enormous that the hundreds of angora goats

along the river below seem like bleating white ants.

Waks asks if I want to take the lead. I do. For a moment, my gaze fixed straight on, I pretend I'm all alone in this stunning panorama. It might be my favourite stretch of the ride.

As the valley narrows, a gaucho appears, seemingly out of nowhere. With a magnificent grey stallion

THE DESCENT BEGINS DOWN THE MASSIVE SLOPE. I STRUGGLE TO COPE WITH THE PRECIPITOUS DROP.

and a thick moustache under a flat-brimmed hat, Tono looks straight out of central casting. At first, his warmth and familiarity feel surprising in a landscape we thought we had to ourselves. But then I'm reminded of what someone said back at Ranquilco. This is no wilderness; it's one gigantic neighbourhood.

This meet-up is the Northern Cordillera equivalent of chatting over the back fence. Tono describes a bad fall from his horse. Waks gives him Tylenol. Then he escorts us through a dense thicket and on to where a lightning strike the day before sparked a brush fire. A large swath of charred hillside still smoulders, pretty close to where

we'll camp for the night. Still, he and Waks agree—we're probably safe.

SIMON HANDS ME COFFEE as I pull out tent pegs the next morning. Each day, these rituals get faster, more second nature. Homemade bread is toasting over an open fire—a piece of which I'll soon smother in a caramel spread called *dulce de leche*. Soon we're climbing the valley bowl beyond the vegetation line toward the next pass.

Single file, the descent begins down the massive scree slope to the Desecho Valley floor. My brain struggles to cope with the precipitous drop to my left. Eventually, I look only straight out or up.

At the bottom, we untack the animals and for the first time let them go free. Young insists they will be safe, and happier to tackle what's coming the next day. Soon Angus, Brian, Bandero and the others, mules included, trot gleefully a good kilometer down the valley. I'm shocked that my control issues aren't, well, out of control. Instead, it's liberating to release these wondrous creatures and trust that they will return.

At sunset, we stretch out around the fire. Some of us have washed up in the nearby spring, while others still proudly sport the day's dust. Manterola passes a dried gourd filled with *mate* tea. Each of us takes our turn sipping from the metal straw called a *bombilla*. One by one, we ponder the things in our lives that brought us

to this campfire deep in the Patagonian Andes—10 grateful specks under a dazzling starry sky.

Young rises early to round up the animals, now many kilometers down the valley. From the elevation of our campsite, I watch this show of horsemanship unfold.

When they're back, we break camp quickly, tack up and ride out. Halfway across the meadow, Waks raises her hand. We halt and gather round her.

"Over the next two hours, we will climb to almost 8,000 feet [more than 2,400 metres], the highest point on the trail," she says. "And we'll start turning back toward the *estancia*. It is our tradition to ride this section in silence.

"We want you to absorb this moment and to be fully present for a trail that will command your full attention."

Over the next two hours we pass a massive scree slope and go over the spine of another high pass, then cross a trail that is half the width of Rolo's load. It drops off on one side farther down than I care to imagine. Finally, after one last brutal climb,

we stand on what feels like the top of the universe.

FOUR DAYS LATER, our last, three-hour ride begins early from Ranquilco's courtyard. Dirt covers every inch of my clothes and gear. It will take a week of scrubbing before my hands look anywhere near clean. Jen Billock, who trailed behind tentatively when all this began, has her horse trot up to the lead.

Over the final kilometers, Waks, Young and I ride at the back of the group, savouring this last stretch of trail. Before the final rise, before the grassy expanse surrounding Buta Mallin appears, Waks suggests we three hold back even farther. "How about one final run?" she says with a smile.

"Yip, yip, yeeow!" We push our horses into the lovely three-beat rhythm of a canter. We sit deeply in our sheepskin-covered saddles, shoulders back. Our bodies are loose, at ease in our own skin, just three badass *gauchas* in northern Patagonia. **R**

© 2021, Liz Beatty. From 'A wild ride through northern Patagonia, Argentina,' *Canadian Geographic* (19 February 2021), cangeotravel.ca



To Put It Another Way

People are always asking me, "What does that song mean?"
If I could say it in other words than are in the song,
I would have written another song, wouldn't I?

ELVIS COSTELLO, SINGER-SONGWRITER

LAUGHTER

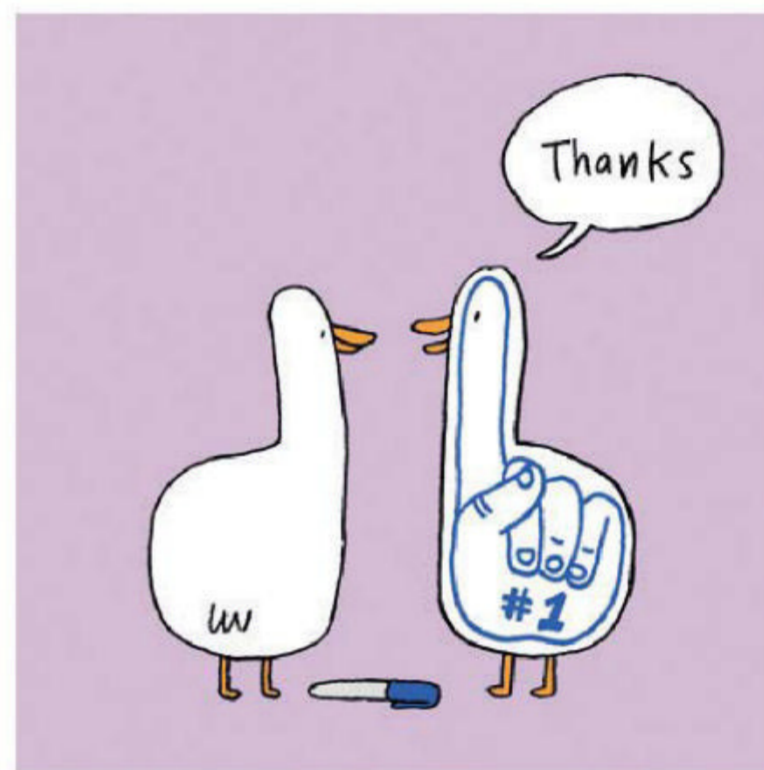
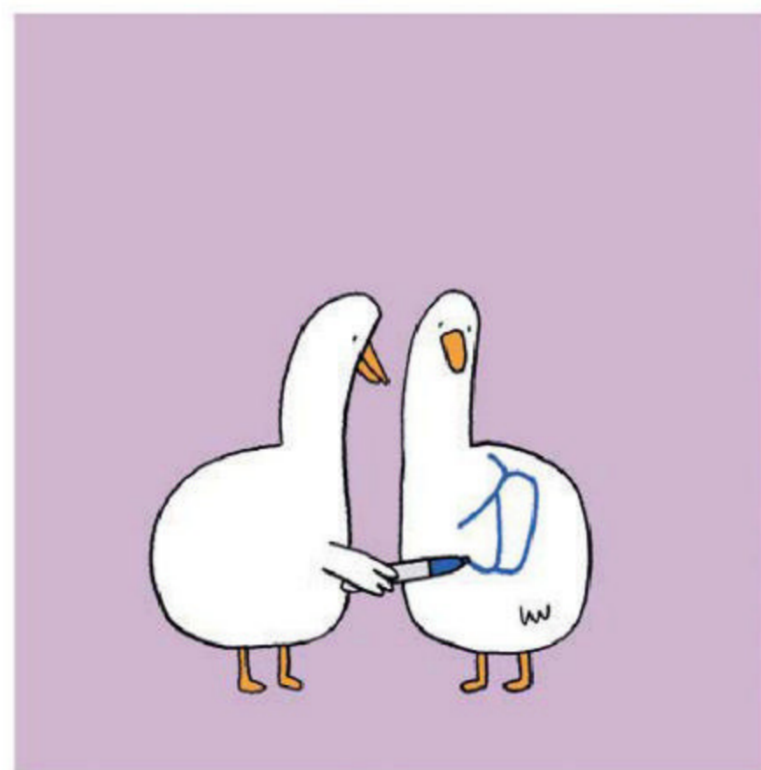
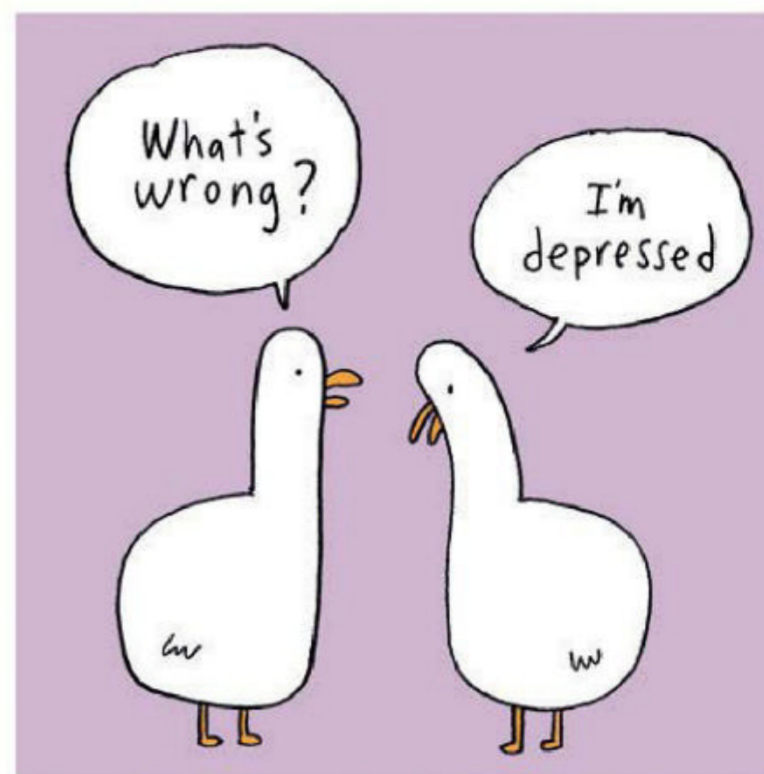
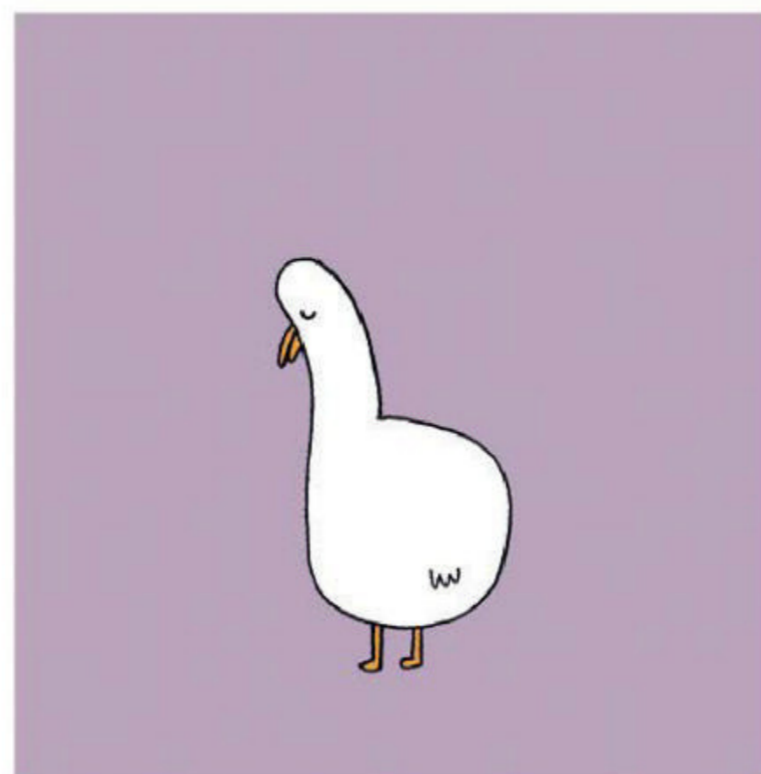
THE BEST *Medicine*

A banker and his friend are fishing when their boat hits a rock and sinks. The banker panics, screaming, “I can’t swim!”

His friend wraps an arm around him and tows him toward the shore. But after 20 minutes, he becomes weary and asks, “Do you think you could float alone?” The banker shouts, “This is no time to ask that!”

—JEFF ACKLES

After his jewellery store was robbed five times in two weeks by the same thief, the police asked the owner if he could give a



description of the robber.

“Yes,” said the owner. “He was dressed a little better each time he robbed the store.”

—DAVIS SINGLETARY

With sales down at KFC, Colonel Sanders calls the pope to ask for a favour.

“Holy Father, I need you

to change the daily prayer from ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ to ‘Give us this day our daily chicken.’ If you do that, I will donate \$10 million to the Vatican.”

The pope replies, “That is the Lord’s Prayer. I can’t change it.”

“How about \$50 million?”

“No.”

“\$100 million?”

“I’ll get back to you.”

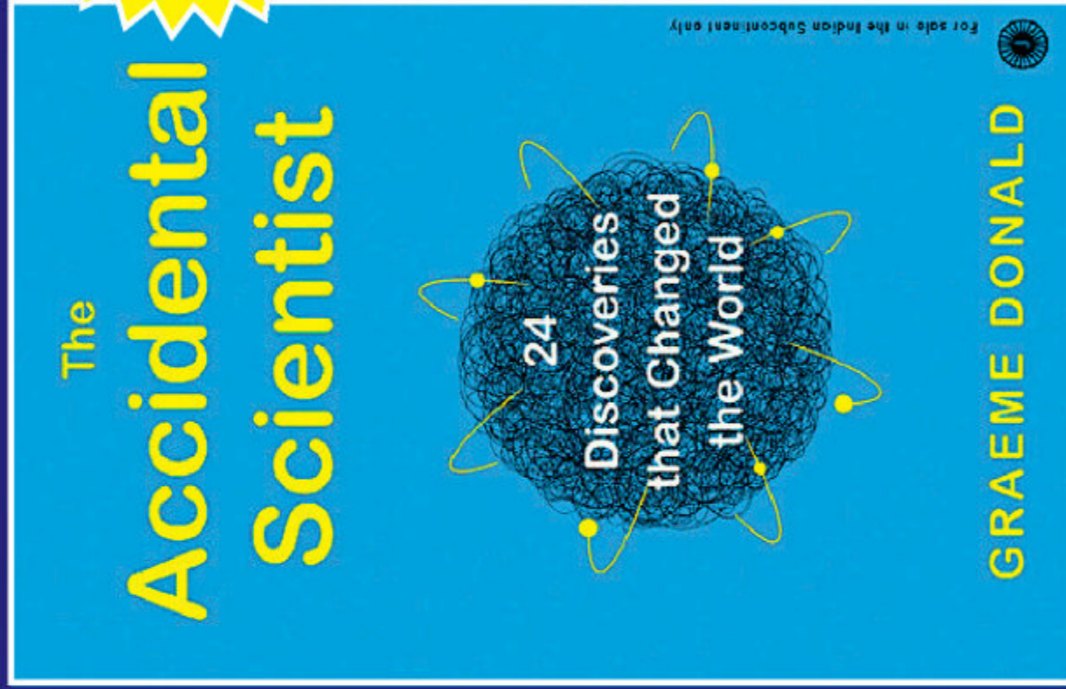
The next day, the pope calls together his bishops. “I have good news and bad news,” he says.

Hello. All of the actors from *Friends* are now older than the youngest Golden Girl was in the show’s first season. Have a nice day.

—@ELIMCCANN



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CHANGED THE
WORLD



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“The good news is that KFC is donating \$100 million to the Vatican. The bad news is, we have to give up the Wonder Bread account.”

—PLANET PROCTOR NEWSLETTER

The Merriam-Webster dictionary produces a word of the day, and the folks at Fark helpfully show us how to use it in a sentence:

M-W word of the day: gainsay

Helpful Fark: “I’m going to eat way too much over the holidays and gainsay 3 to 5 kilos.”

M-W word: abandon

Helpful Fark: “Paul McCartney and Wings’ biggest hit was abandon the run.”

M-W word: countenance

Helpful Fark: “We were curious how many insects were in the colony, so we spent the whole day countenance.”

When asked by the *New York Times Book Review* which writer he’d invite to a dinner party, John Cleese answered,

“Mark Twain... because he said, ‘Wagner’s music is much better than it sounds,’ which I think is the greatest joke ever made.”

My kid asked if he should leave something for the tooth fairy, so I need everyone to back me up that the traditional offering is a bottle of wine

—[@DELOISIVETE](#)

Two mafia hit-men are walking in the woods at night. One turns to the other and says, “It’s really dark in here. I’m scared.” “You’re scared?” says the other mobster. “I have to walk out of here alone.”

—ROBERT LOVE

Reader’s Digest *will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com*

SARTORIAL SPLENDOUR

If it’s true that clothes make the man, then artist Helga Stentzel proves they also make the animal.



—[@HELGA.STENTZEL](#)

Films

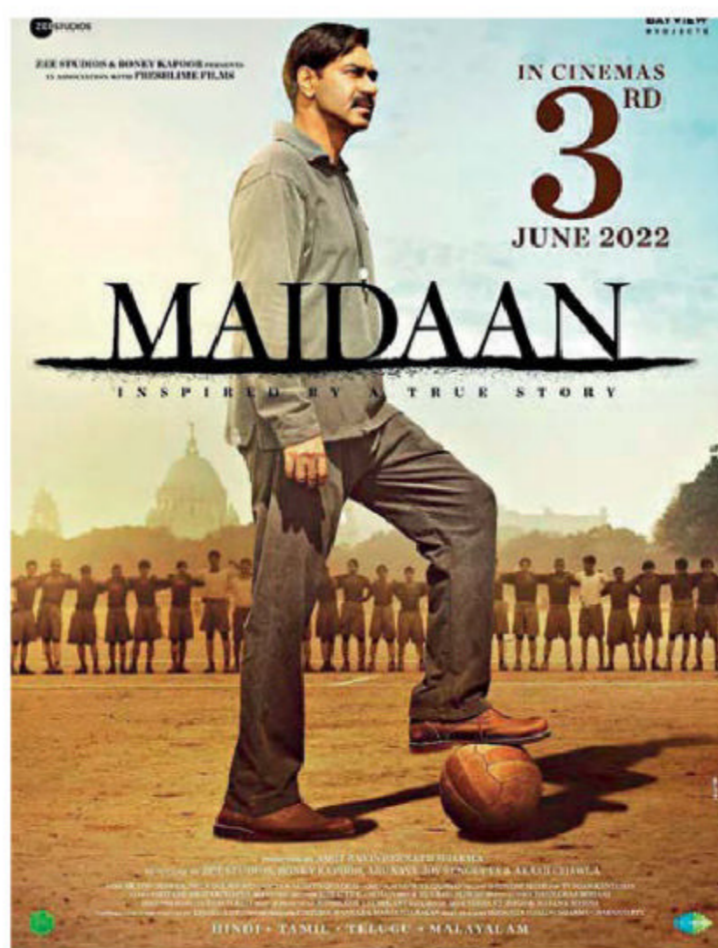
ENGLISH Veteran actor Harrison Ford reprises his role as daredevil, adventure-junkie and archaeologist Indiana Jones in **INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY**. In this fifth segment of the beloved series of films, Indy is on the verge of retirement and feeling out of place in a world far from the one he remembers. When his goddaughter (played by Phoebe Waller-Bridge of *Fleabag* fame) shows up determined to retrieve a legendary dial that can change the course of history, Indy must pick up his whip once more to keep the treasure from falling into the wrong hands, namely those of Jürgen Voller—played by Mads Mikkelsen—a former Nazi working for NASA.



A still from *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*

The film is set to be out in theatres on 29 June.

HINDI Filmmakers could hardly go wrong fronting a film that has two of India's biggest fixes—sports and drama. The popularity



Ajay Devgn as Syed Abdul Rahim in *Maidaan*

of movies like *Lagaan*, *Chak De! India*, and *83* certainly proves the rule and director Amit Ravindernath Sharma's (the man behind *Badhai Ho*) is set to follow suit on 23 June with the release of **MAIDAAN**. Scored by A. R. Rahman and starring Ajay Devgn essaying the role of Syed Abdul Rahim (known as the architect of modern Indian football) and National Award winner Keerthy Suresh (making her Hindi film debut) this movie is about the golden era of Indian football, from 1952 to 1962.

A remake of the 2011 French film *Sleepless Night*, **BLOODY DADDY** revolves around an NCB officer (Shahid Kapoor) and his quest to save his son from a drug lord. After his team busts down a narcotics scam, the drug lord abducts the NCB officer's son. He demands the officer retrieve a bag of cocaine from his headquarters



Poster for the film *Bloody Daddy*

in exchange for his son. With no other option left, the officer decides to do as he is asked, only to find that things are more complicated than he expected. A high-octane thriller that appears to parallel the adrenaline rush of the *John Wick* franchise, *Bloody Daddy* will be available for viewing on JioCinema from 9 June.

#WATCHLIST: ON OUR RADAR

THE DAYS This eight-episode series depicts the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident that occurred



Koji Yakusho in the web series *The Days*

in 2011 over a period of seven days. Made from the three perspectives of the government, corporate organizations, and those who put their lives on the line, the show tries to uncover what really happened on that day and in that place. The series is on Netflix from 1 June.

School Of Lies is a thriller-suspense series starring Nimrat Kaur, Varin Roopani, Vir Pachisia and Aryan Singh Ahlawat. Based on true events, it tells



Poster for *School of Lies*

the story of a young boy who disappears from a boarding school. The plot thickens when a slew of grim details about the school and the boy's family come to light during the investigation. On Disney+ Hotstar from 2 June.

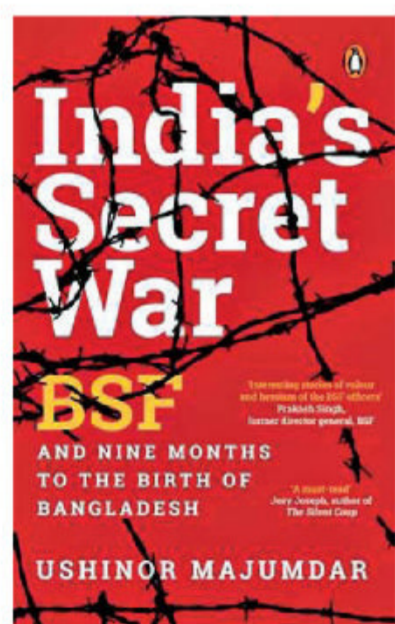
Books

***A Lost People's Archive: A Novel* by Rimli Sengupta, Aleph**

Based on the tales and records found in her grandmother's notebook, author Rimli Sengupta's latest book weaves the story of two neighbours, Shishu and Noni, who meet as children and develop a deep friendship strengthened by their shared love of stories and poetry. Soon however their paths diverge under the dark shadow of circumstance—Noni is married off at 16,



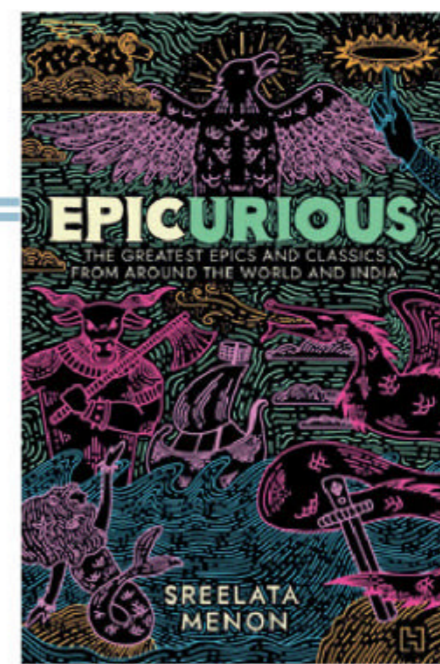
while Shishu becomes a revolutionary—and cataclysmic events—Partition, a refugee exodus, communism as well as political and social unrest in Bengal. Told through an artful fusion of imagination with history, both personal and national, Sengupta brings alive the story of Bangals—the displaced East Bengalis—and the narrative of their fractured land and lives.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...

***India's Secret War: BSF And Nine Months To The Birth Of Bangladesh* by Ushinor Majumdar (Penguin):** Through exhaustive interviews with surviving veterans, Ushinor Majumdar brings his award-winning investigative reportage to

this first comprehensive historical account of the role of the BSF, an elite Indian force, in the Bangladesh liberation war, which changed the course of South Asian history.



Scope Out

***Epicurious* by Sreelata Menon (Hachette):**

Using drama and humour that engages young readers, Menon breathes new life into ancient epics from cultures and countries around the world.

***Varavara Rao: A Life In Poetry* (Vintage):** Edited by N. Venugopal and Meena Kandasamy, this is Varavara Rao's first book of poetry to be published in English.

***Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities* by Wendy Doniger (Speaking Tiger):** Scholar and indologist, Wendy Doniger analyses stories from the *Puranas*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and other texts to explore the role of dreams and illusions in Indian myth and philosophy.

—COMPILED BY ISHANI NANDI

QUOTABLE QUOTES

Nothing in the future exists yet. But anything is possible right now. Including the thing you think you cannot do.

—Laura McKowen, author, in the book *We are the luckiest: the surprising magic of a sober life*

If you aren't humble, whatever empathy you claim is false and probably results from some arrogance or the desire to control. But true empathy is rooted in humility and the understanding that there are many people with as much to contribute in life as you.

—Anand Mahindra, entrepreneur

History repeats, but science reverberates.

—Siddhartha Mukherjee, physician and author



The good part about getting older is you stop trying to prove anything to anyone ... All you are in the pursuit of is collecting experiences—beautiful, fragile little soap bubbles that you store in your heart, and every once in a while, you pull one out and gaze at the delicate pictures it shows you.

—Twinkle Khanna, author

You have to use your voice, even if it shakes. There are times when you will ask for change, and there are times when you'll create it.

—Allyson Felix, sprinter, to graduates of the University of Southern California



FROM LEFT: VIKRAM SHARMA, YASIR IQBAL



STUDIO

***Broken Chola Temple,
Tarangambadi***

by Amit Pasricha

Archival Inks

Printed on Canvas

190 x 64 cm

ON DISPLAY AT the gallery Under the Mango Tree in Berlin until 12 July, this arresting panoramic photograph understandably headlines Amit Pasricha's exhibition, *Earth,*

Water, Air, Life. Managing Hope, which tries to encapsulate more than two decades of the Delhi-based photographer's work across India.

The universal appeal of the image lies in its ability to affect the viewer at multiple levels, and you get to pick the one that pleases you most. At first glance, it's the stunning seascape and the balanced composition that attract the casual gallery goer. The sheer expanse that the eye takes in piecemeal

encourages an intense feeling of *fernweh*—that deep sense of longing for travel to far off places that a beautiful scene in an exotic locale inspires.

But as you delve deeper, a wave of wistfulness washes over, emphasized by the seemingly solitary human figures looking out over the vastness of the Coromandel coast. The scale of the artwork gives you that same sense of being an insignificant speck in the



PHOTOGRAPH BY AMIT PASRICHA; IMAGE COURTESY: GALLERY UNDER THE MANGO TREE, BERLIN

universe, that looking far out into the cosmos gives the astronomer.

It seems to transcend not only space but time too, transporting you to an age when Tamil Nadu was a hub of trade, cultural exchange and conquest and the temple builders perhaps guilty of hubris.

Today, Pasricha's photograph of the crumbling debris of an ancient Chola temple juxtaposed against the remnants of its foundations and

shikhara reminds one of the greatness of the empire that once existed in Tarangambadi and beyond, several centuries ago.

The wind from the stormy skies above seems to whisper tales of their influence on south-eastern Asia and eastern Asia across the Bay of Bengal from where the photographer stood to compose this image.

The Danes built their Fort Dansborg in Tarangambadi (which they

called Tranquebar) but in this composite shot, the focus is on the continuum between the broken Chola empire of yore and the sea as it lives and breathes today.

On purpose, the textured grittiness of his photograph almost brings you the taste of the salt in the air and the sounds of the crashing waves on the age-old temple rocks. It's Pasricha's way of reinforcing one's respect for nature as a monumental force.

And yet, at the same time, he reminds you of its fragility through his frame, as thoughts of rising sea levels and the impact of climate change subtly swirl at the edge of your perception.

As with many of his other panoramic photos, Pasricha achieves a certain timelessness even as he captures a moment in time. **R**

— BY PRIYA PATHIYAN

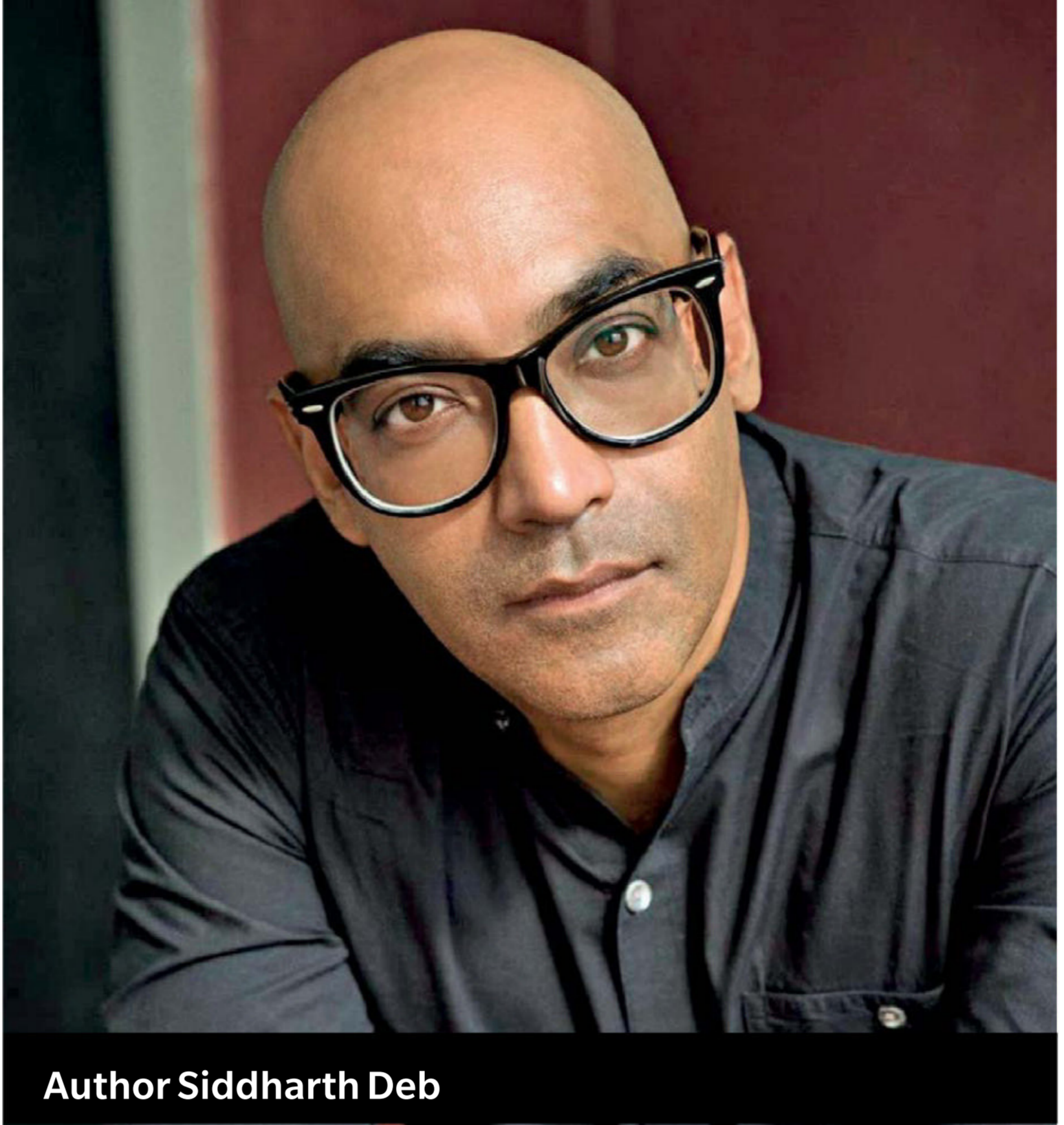
REVIEW

Breaking New Ground

Original, entertaining and epic, Siddharth Deb's first novel in 15 years will not disappoint

BY Aditya Mani Jha

If ambition is considered the primary marker of literary worth, we can safely say this: Siddhartha Deb's third novel *The Light at the End of the World* is one of the most original works of fiction to come out of India these last few years. The four novella-length sections that make up this book are all set in different parts of India at different points in time. Taken in conjunction, they present an unforgettable picture of India perpetually under siege but also perpetually rebelling to free itself, whether the adversaries



Author Siddharth Deb

be white-skinned colonizers in the past or brown-skinned CEO robber-barons in the present.

In the opening section 'City of Brume' (set in the Delhi of the near-future) we meet former journalist Bibi, tasked with finding her ex-colleague Sanjeet because his conspiracy theories are proving to be inconvenient to Bibi's present-day clients, a shadowy mega-corporation called Vimana. In 'Claustropolis: 1984' we meet an assassin hot on the trail of his target, a whistle-blower threatening to expose security vulnerabilities at the

Union Carbide plant in Bhopal. 'Paranoir: 1947' follows a conscientious young veterinary student in 40s Calcutta as his work connects him to the mythical Vimana, the vehicle of the gods—which may yet prevent the looming genocide in the Indian subcontinent. And finally, 'The Line of Faith: 1859' sees a British soldier on a quest to locate a legendary anti-colonial rebel called the White Mughal—whose rebel army isn't what it appears to be.

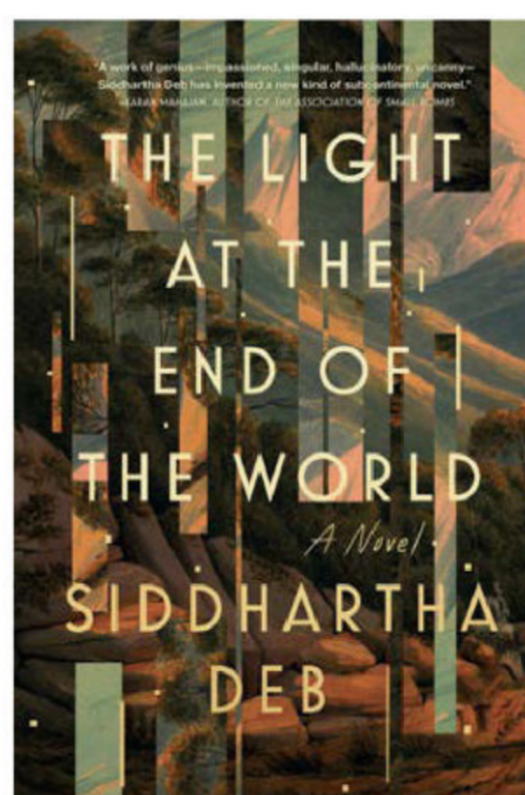
There are common themes across all four sections—quests, out-

PHOTO: NINA SUBIN

laws, majoritarianism, 'manufactured wars' and government conspiracy theories, a la X-Files (the connection with the TV show is even referred to directly by Deb in the first section). But each section has a different voice and a unique narrator with unique motivations and points of view. Deb's voice is strong, assured and malleable, equally effective while dissecting a marriage as it is satirizing governmental overreach or media frenzies.

He is also a bit of a throwback in this era of short, clipped sentences—he is not shy of unleashing serpentine, multi-clause phrasings that engulf several worlds within its coil. Like this 95-word monster that begins by describing the Delhi winter fog and ends with an indictment of India's political and media ecosystems: "The fog is a paintbrush, erasing the marks on an old, much-used canvas, erasing the streets, the cars, the malls, the hotels,

the schools, the slums, the ministry buildings, the police cells, the army bases, the airport, the aircrafts, the malice of the glossy-haired anchor, the banal evil of the mask-like prime minister, erasing the ruins from the 20th century, the ruins from the 16th century, the ruins from the 11th century and the ruins from the third century BCE, erasing a countryside already erased and erasing a nation that has failed by every measure."



I'm not a 100 per cent sure if the 'banal evil' bit is a deliberate nod to Hannah Arendt (whose Eichmann in *Jerusalem: A Report on The Banality of Evil* is one of the more famous books on the Nazis). But I would be inclined to say so, because

Deb's kaleidoscopic novel is extremely good at incorporating academic concepts within its narrative framework. For example, the real-life case of 'The Monkey Man' is a prominent plot device and at one point, Deb offers up the following: "A sociologist at JNU suggested that the New Delhi Monkey Man was a case of the return of the repressed, an eruption of the uncanny, an embodiment of all those marginalized people ... feared by urban, upwardly mobile India."

This is a reference to the real-life Aditya Nigam's essay *Theatre of the Urban: The Strange Case of the Monkeyman*, which Deb summarizes in the paragraph quoted above. *The Light at the End of the World* is full of fun little segues like this, 'deviations' from the centre that are, in fact, not deviations at all. Rather, they're vital, supremely entertaining parts of this puzzle-box of a novel. And the payoff to this puzzle is spectacular, trust me. **R**

BRAIN TEASERS

Fun At The Fair

EASY Mira is taking Adeel, Bobby, Caroline and Didi to the fairgrounds for a fun trip to celebrate the start of summer. Each child has a favourite food and carnival ride. With the clues below, can you figure out what each child's choice of snack and ride is? The choices are: roller coasters, the Ferris wheel, bumper cars, merry-go-round, cotton candy, hot dogs, ice cream and candy apples.



1. The one who likes roller coasters also likes cotton candy.
2. The one who likes the Ferris wheel hates hot dogs and ice cream.
3. Adeel thinks the Ferris wheel is too slow and the roller coaster is too fast.
4. One child likes bumper cars and hot dogs.
5. Bobby can't wait to get to the merry-go-round.
6. Caroline likes to be high above everyone on the Ferris wheel.

Number Maze

MEDIUM In this maze, start at the 5 in the top-left corner and move horizontally or vertically (but never diagonally) to reach the star in the bottom-right corner. At each move, travel in only one direction the same number of squares as the number in the cell you are currently on. Since you are starting on a cell containing 5, your next move is either 5 squares to the right or 5 squares down. The next move will be based on your new cell's number. Can you find the path?

5	5	4	2	3	4
3	3	1	4	1	1
2	3	2	1	2	2
4	4	4	3	4	2
5	1	2	3	4	5
4	5	4	5	2	★

Good Luck

DIFFICULT

- 1 → 1
- 3 → 9
- 5 → 7
- 7 → ?
- 9 → 9
- 11 → 4

Using two simple calculations, each number on the left is transformed to the one on the right. What is the missing number for 7? Hint: If you start with a low number, the second step doesn't do anything much.

		C	
	C		B
	C	A	
A			

Set Free

DIFFICULT Place an A, B or C in each empty cell of this grid. No three consecutive cells in a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line may contain a set of identical letters (such as B-B-B) or a set of three different letters (such as C-A-B). Can you ensure a set-free grid?

Alterations While You Wait

MEDIUM You're in need of a 20 in a hurry, and all you have is a 1. You can change the number you have into a new number in any of the following ways, but it's going to cost you:

- ◆ Add 5: ₹15
- ◆ Divide by 2: ₹3
- ◆ Subtract 4: ₹2
- ◆ Multiply by 3: ₹8
- ◆ Add 7: ₹13
- ◆ Subtract 6: ₹4
- ◆ Multiply by 5: ₹24
- ◆ Subtract 1: ₹5

What's the cheapest way you can get exactly 20?

For answers, turn to PAGE 112

GOOD LUCK BY DARREN RIGBY; SET FREE BY FRASER SIMPSON; ALTERATIONS WHILE YOU WAIT BY DARREN RIGBY



BY *Louis-Luc Beaudoin*

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

To Solve This Puzzle

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

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

SOLUTION

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

BRAIN TEASERS ANSWERS

From pages 110 and 111

Fun At The Fair

Adeel likes hot dogs and bumper cars; Bobby likes ice cream and the merry-go-round; Caroline likes candy apples and the Ferris wheel; Didi likes cotton candy and the roller coaster.

Number Maze

The correct sequence of moves is: down 5, right 4, left 2, up 4, left 1, down 3, up 1, right 4, down 2.

Good Luck

7 → 13. Square the number, then add up the digits in your answer.

Set Free

A	A	C	A
B	C	C	B
A	C	A	A
A	A	C	A

Alterations While You Wait

Add 7 (8, ₹13), multiply by 3 (24, ₹21), subtract 4 (20, ₹23).


WORD POWER

You don't have to play Wordle to do well on this quiz, which features past answers to the popular online game that gives players six guesses to identify a five-letter word. Will you share your success on social media or erase your stats? When you're done, turn the page to find the answers. Ready? Begin!

BY *Rob Lutes*

1. aphid *n.*

('ay-fuhd)

- A** sap-sucking insect
- B** algae-eating fish
- C** flowering shrub

2. egret *n.*

('ee-greht)

- A** bad decision
- B** small cove
- C** white heron

3. smite *v.*

(smyt)

- A** strike sharply
- B** secure with rope
- C** ascend

4. leery *adj.*

('lihr-ree)

- A** intoxicated
- B** wary
- C** poorly made

5. tapir *n.* ('tay-pr)

- A** Velcro-like fastener
- B** nocturnal mammal
- C** ceramic cookware

6. duchy *n.*

('duh-chee)

- A** land of duke or duchess
- B** savoury puff pastry
- C** motorized bicycle

7. tilde *n.*

('tihl-duh)

- A** whirlpool
- B** accent mark in Spanish
- C** tiered fountain

8. axiom *n.*

('ak-see-uhm)

- A** bridge support beam
- B** sub-atomic particle
- C** established truism

9. biome *n.*

('by-ohm)

- A** biogeographic unit
- B** group of stars
- C** couples yoga

10. whelp *n.*

(welp)

- A** scar
- B** puppy
- C** slap

11. abase *v.*

(uh-'bais)

- A** defend
- B** remove
- C** humiliate

12. epoxy *n.*

(i-'pahk-see)

- A** class of adhesive
- B** type of viral disease
- C** period of history

13. grimy *adj.*

('gry-mee)

- A** uninviting
- B** covered with dirt
- C** pained

14. agate *n.*

('a-guht)

- A** arched doorway
- B** sour berry
- C** ornamental stone

15. rebus *n.*

('ree-buhs)

- A** riddle made of pictures
- B** twin
- C** male crow

Your Daily Fix with All the Fixings

You've done the Wordle of the day. Now what? Thankfully, there are spinoffs that can tide you over—or become your new favourite. For more words, try Quordle, which has you guess four five-letter words simultaneously. Art buffs might like Artle, in which you name an artist after seeing up to four of their works. Music lovers, try Heardle to quickly name that tune after hearing as little of it as possible.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. aphid

(A) *sap-sucking insect*

Drought led to an aphid infestation that threatened the potato crop.

2. egret **(C)** *white heron*

From the shore, Lucky watched the egret catch fish in the shallows.

3. smite **(A)** *strike sharply*

The knight drew his sword to smite the beast.

4. leery **(B)** *wary*

I'm leery of my roommate's cat, which always seems ready to pounce.

5. tapir

(B) *nocturnal mammal*

On an evening hike in Colombia, Fiza spotted the tracks of a rare tapir.

6. duchy

(A) *land of duke or duchess*

The Duchy of Cornwall is worth more than \$1 billion.

7. tilde

(B) *accent mark in Spanish*

Avrati lost a point on her exam for missing a tilde on the word *señor*.

8. axiom **(C)**

established truism

The axiom that a large fire can come from a tiny spark proved true when Amit's cigarette caused an inferno.

9. biome

(A) *biogeographic unit*

The tundra biome is home to woodland animals such as caribou.

10. whelp

(B) *puppy*

At the sound of the train, the whelp retreated behind its mother in fear.

11. abase **(C)** *humiliate*

Shahid refused to abase himself, so he quit the demeaning job after one day.

12. epoxy

(A) *class of adhesive*

Epoxy adheres to wood better than glue does.

13. grimy

(B) *covered with dirt*

Smriti struggled to hide her dismay at her boyfriend's grimy apartment.

14. agate

(C) *ornamental stone*

The statuette carved from multicoloured agate sat proudly on the mantel.

15. rebus

(A) *riddle made of pictures*

Sandro made the scavenger hunt trickier by using rebuses for the clues.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: Phew!

10-12: Splendid

13-15: Magnificent

TRIVIA

BY *Beth Shillibeer*

1. What Guinness world record did actor John Cena set in 2022 for his work with the Make-A-Wish Foundation?

2. Bloomberg Philanthropies' Asphalt Art Initiative has awarded 19 European cities grants to do what in 2023?

3. Developed in the late 1930s, what sport is played on horseback, using a stick to capture the ball and score?

4. What chocolate bar has a version infused with sake, giving it an alcohol content of up to 0.8 per cent?

5. Which seabird will fly the equivalent distance of nearly three times to the moon and back over its 30-year lifespan?

6. Trucks playing Beethoven's 'Für Elise' travel through Taiwan gathering what?

7. What does it mean if a docked ship is flying the maritime-signal flag 'Blue Peter'?

8. Which country shares a border with every other South American country except Ecuador and Chile?

9. Mr Potato Head had a body made of what until 1964?

10. What global milestone did the human



race reach on 15 November 2022?

11. In 1894, Luis Coloma rewrote the story of Ratoncito Pérez to comfort eight-year-old King Alfonso XIII of Spain when he lost what?

12. Ancient cultures were known to use what sweet and sticky substance as a food preservative?

13. Museums in Toronto and New York are employing what smart-phone technology to superimpose images on nature and colourize ancient sculptures in many of their exhibits?

14. Cleopatra had her portrait carved into what gemstones?

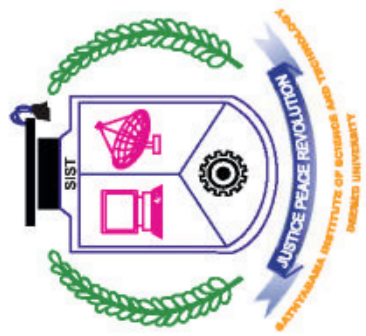
15. Who wrote the "No. 1" book series, about a Botswanan woman who opens an investigative business?

Answers: 1. Most wishes granted (650). 2. Paint public murals. 3. Polocrosse. 4. Kit Kat. 5. Arctic tern. 6. Garbage. 7. Ready to sail, all aboard. 8. Brazil. 9. A real potato. 10. A population of eight billion. 11. A tooth. 12. Honey (its high sugar content kills micro-organisms). 13. Augmented reality. 14. Emeralds. 15. Alexander McCall Smith (No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency).



A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

Lost and Found by Deshi Deng, exclusively for *Reader's Digest*



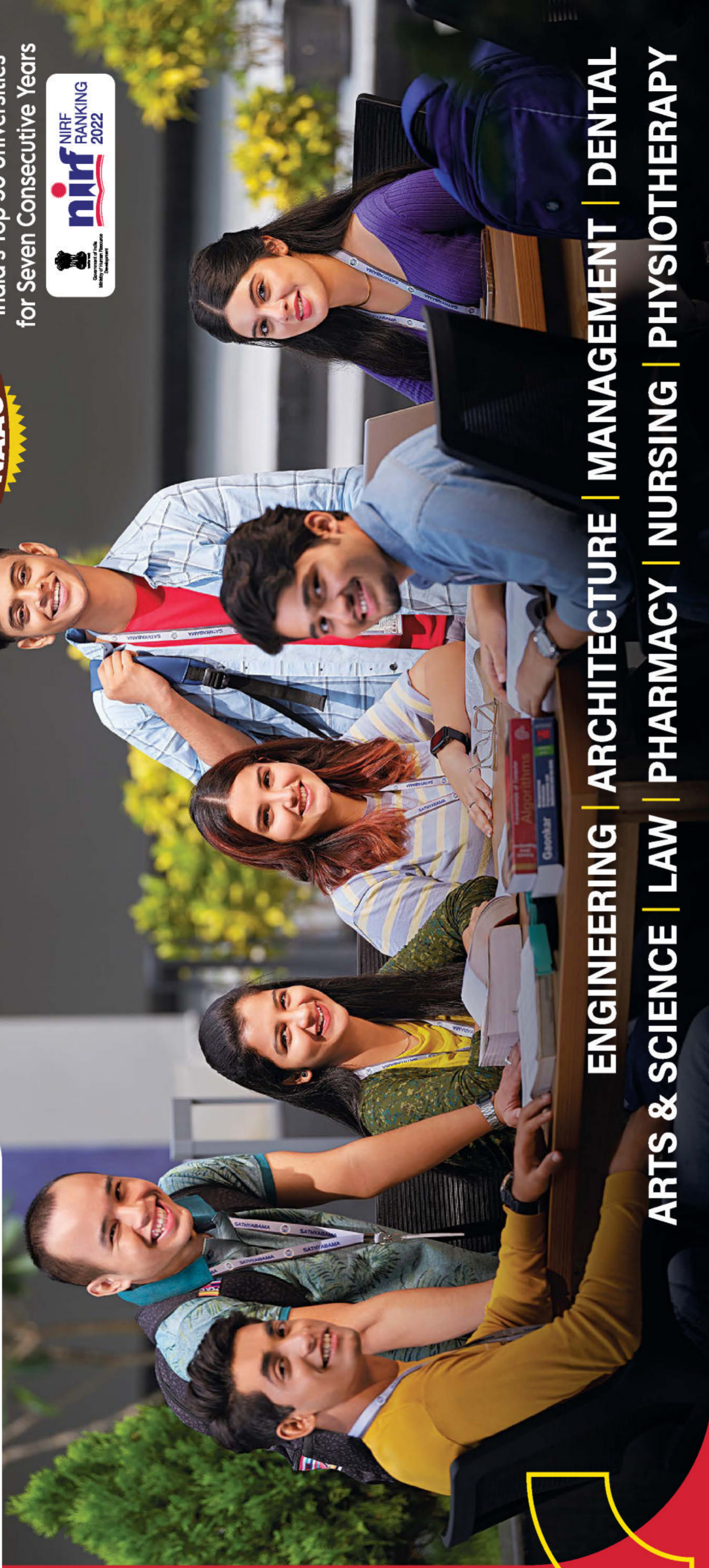
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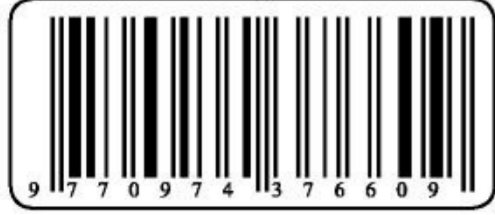
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