

# Reader's Digest

DECEMBER 2023

## *The Spirit of Christmas*

4 True-Life  
Stories Of Love  
And Compassion

## *The Art Of Conversation*

How To Tackle  
Tricky Types  
At Christmas

*Leona  
Lewis*

On Music,  
Motherhood  
And Mental  
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Printed by Warners Midlands PLC. Newstrade distribution by Seymour Distribution Limited.

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# A Christmas To Remember

**H**ave you ever experienced a Christmas that lingers in your heart? Perhaps it's the one from your childhood when you finally unwrapped that shiny, coveted toy. Or the year you found yourself celebrating in a foreign land, far from familiar traditions. It might even be the Christmas when you felt the absence of a loved one at the table for the very first time.

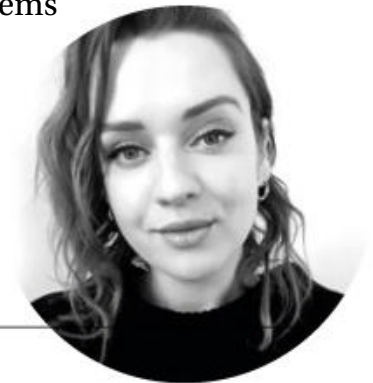
On page 56, we invite you to dive into the cherished memories of four individuals who share their unique and touching Christmas stories, blending moments of joy and nostalgia.

From the heartwarming account of a mother who keeps Christmas on standby year-round to the moving narrative of a healthcare assistant guiding souls on their final journey, and the sweet recollections of a time-honoured neighbourly tradition of candlelit windows—these festive stories are sure to resonate with you.

But they're more than just words on paper; they're an invitation for you to share your own cherished holiday tales with us. We're eager to hear from you, so send your festive stories to [readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk).

With the holiday season upon us, we're sending you our warmest wishes from team Reader's Digest. Your letters, stories, and poems illuminate our pages and enrich every season, and for that, we are truly thankful. Here's to another year of sharing life's incredible stories together.

*Eva* EVA MACKEVIC  
Editor-in-Chief



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*Reader's Digest* is published in 23 editions in 10 languages

# Over To You

LETTERS ON THE *October* ISSUE

We pay **£30** for every published letter

## Young And Brave

What a moving article "Beyond Survival" was, about the lasting impact on young cancer survivors. I read their stories as tears ran down my face. I am in awe of how courageous Ellie, Jessica and Helen were as they shared their lives.

Cancer is a horrible diagnosis to receive at any age, but to be so young and have to cope with it must be very hard for these youngsters and their families and friends. You only get one chance at being young and those crucial years shape the person you become, your relationships and career, your confidence and wellbeing, your ability to pursue dreams.

Cancer turns people's lives upside down. A friend's daughter had leukaemia at a young age, and then in her early twenties had breast cancer. She is just about to undergo a hysterectomy. She is the bravest



person I know with the way she copes with all setbacks she has had—and she is only 30.

In terms of what the future holds for curing all cancers, some experts believe the evolving treatments may, in the future, make that a reality. Others think the ability to control cancer as a chronic disease is more achievable. I do believe, however, that the government should give cancer research limitless funds to help aid their learnings.

ROBERT AITCHISON, *Birkenhead,  
Wirral*

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Include your full name, address, email and daytime phone number. We may edit letters and use them in all print and electronic media





## Will Power

“Get Your Will Sorted This Autumn” in the money column by Andy Webb was just what my husband and I needed to read.

Although we have been married for 36 years and have three grown up children, we are part of the 59 per cent of UK residents who don't have a will. Despite thinking about this legality when our first daughter was born 30 years ago, we still haven't got round to it.

Your advice and information about Free Wills Month and Will Aid was most welcome and helpful and something neither of us were aware of. Having both taken early retirement in the past year, it is certainly a task that we will be sorting in the near future.

MELANIE LODGE, *West Yorkshire*

## Feeling So Alive

I was entertained by your article "Under the Grandfluence: Baddiewinkle". Instagram has millions of active users and many of them over the age of 50. Some of them have created their own accounts, while others collaborate with one or more of their grandchildren. So many seniors like Baddiewinkle are gaining a following and good for them.

I hadn't actually heard of her until now, but I warmed to her immediately! She has a penchant for tie-dye, slogan T-shirts and raver clothes—she is an overnight style icon and she clearly can't be happier about it. I also note she's famous for her rule-breaking, rebellious style which probably makes her a favourite with a younger audience too. I'd wager she's changed a lot of older women's ideas about fashion.

My own grandmother used to wear a lot of beige and white. But then all of a sudden, she moved on. Colour makes her feel so alive and she has no restrictions on what she wears anymore.

HANNAH BYRON,  
*Liverpool*



Editor's note: crossword enthusiasts may have noticed a printing error in our crossword on p92 of the November 2023 issue. We apologise for any confusion this may have caused and have resolved this issue as follows: all entries have been classed as valid whether the word was correct or incorrect, and if anyone still wishes to enter, they can do so online by November 30, 2023. Thank you for your understanding.



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## Unwanted Gifts

by Esther Chilton, *Nottinghamshire*

It is the worst time of year,  
One that fills me with great fear.

It's almost Christmas, you see,  
I know I should be filled with glee

To receive presents and gifts galore,  
But I don't want them, not anymore.

Not out-of-date sweets from Uncle Ken,  
Or twee ornaments yet again.

I don't want toasters or a wok,  
Nor an annoying cuckoo clock.

I've earrings coming out of my ears,  
And smellies just reduce me to tears.

Though there is one thing that would be quite grand,  
And that's money. I'm sure you understand.

## The Forest Walk

by Susanna Lewis, *North Yorkshire*

Walking through the dapple lit forest  
I feel the cool air brushing my cheeks.

As pine scented fir trees lift my quiet soul  
I dream of peace filling my heart.

Birds sing their sweet song of freedom

While leaves unfurl welcoming the stranger.

I am enveloped in this emerald green world

Where love breathes through nature, reborn.

# Memory Lane

*To celebrate the rich legacy of Reader's Digest, we share some of your most cherished, humorous and nostalgic memories of the magazine*

## **Hundreds Of Happy Hours**

I first started reading *Reader's Digest* when I was about ten. My granny ordered it on subscription so there was always a copy to find somewhere in her house. I would enjoy finding interesting articles; some funny, some thought-provoking, others informative and quite revealing!



Many of the articles in *Reader's Digest* made me laugh out loud or other times be amazed by adventurous escapades. Skiers lost in mountains, family experiences from around the world, holidays good and bad. And completing the "Word Power" with some success pleased me greatly.

As a young lady in her early twenties, I decided to sign up myself to have my favourite little magazine delivered each month. Since then, I have enjoyed hundreds of happy hours reading *Reader's Digest* and have passed the magazines onto many delighted recipients. During the COVID-19 lockdown periods a few years ago, *Reader's Digest* was something of a life-saver for some, providing a very enjoyable read with stories, puzzles and jokes to fill their time at home.

Thank you, *Reader's Digest*, for giving so many people so much pleasure through reading!

SUZY HAMILTON, *Hampshire*

Email your *Reader's Digest* memories to [readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk)



**SEE THE WORLD...**  
*turn the page →*

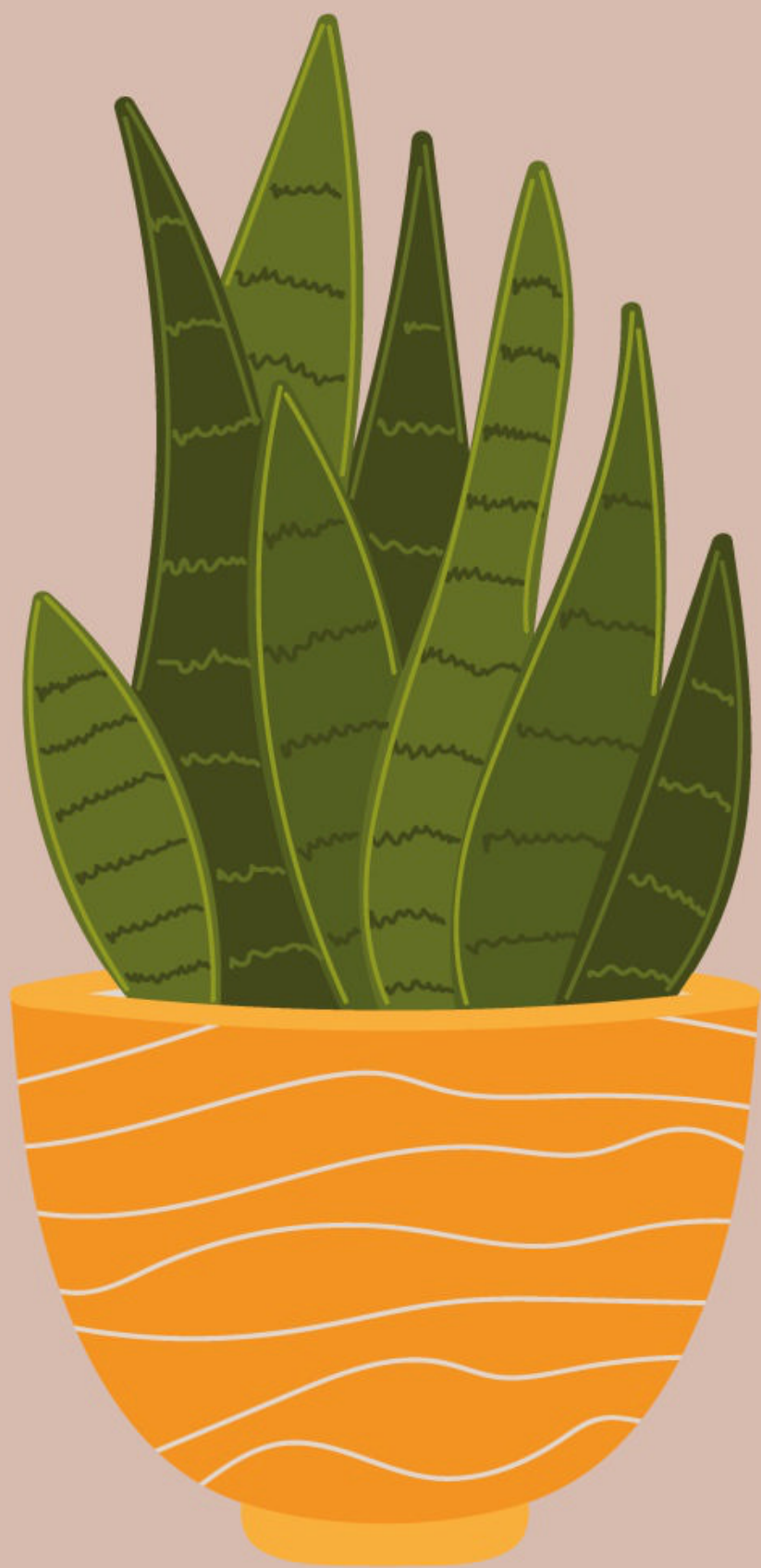






## ...DIFFERENTLY

**A photograph by** the famous photographer Steve McCurry made Sri Lanka's stilt fishermen famous all over the world. Even today, men in sarongs casting their lines from stakes driven into the seabed are among the most popular motifs among tourists. However, many of these "fishermen" have long since stopped fishing for herring, mackerel and sardines. They merely pose for the cameras—for a fee. Tourism is an important industry on this island in the Indian Ocean. The coronavirus pandemic therefore also hit the population hard economically.





# Planting Memories

*Olly Mann battles to keep a family heirloom alive, with some help from his in-laws*



Olly Mann is a presenter for Radio 4, and the podcasts *The Modern Mann*, *The Week Unwrapped* and *Today in History with the Retrospectors*

“IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANT FROM GRANDMA’S FLAT?”. My uncle, texting me, last week.

His mum had passed away the week before; aged 96, in a hospice, completely *compos mentis*, indefatigable as ever. He’d begun the painful yet necessary task of sorting through her belongings. Dividing them into the familiar post-mortem piles: Retain, Sell, Donate.

I required zero thinking time. Yes, I would like her aloe vera plant, please. In the orange pot, you know the one? To the left of the porch. Nothing special to look at.

Here’s why. Sometime around 1975, Grandma received this plant as a gift. It came courtesy of the local butcher in recognition of her loyal custom. A gesture. A knick-knack. It could, I suppose, just as likely have been a calendar, or a fountain pen, or a box of biscuits. But it just happened to be a pleasantish pot plant, which Grandma, who always had green fingers, appreciated and placed in her doorway.

Five years later, my mum married the butcher's son. And had me.

When my father's mother died in 1993, Grandma revealed to me how this particular plant was different to the dozens of others she had in her home. How this one had *history*. It was, she suggested, a living, prospering embodiment of the relationship that existed between the two sides of my family. As, indeed, was I.

In recent years, whenever we've visited Grandma's flat, I've attempted to enthuse my children with this compelling concept. "Look at that!" I'd exclaim, like a Victorian ringmaster. "That was a *gift* your great-grandma bought your other great-grandma! *Before* they were even related! It's older than *me!*" Then my kids would shrug, and ask Grandma for a sweet.

Numerous times, Grandma gave me clippings of this sacred plant, in the hope I might foster my own and continue the legend. Yet, every time, my offshoots died of neglect. Aloe vera is reasonably hardy, but, as I've learned, if you put it above a radiator, it dies. If you under-water it, it dies. If you over-water it, it dies. It doesn't mix well with toddlers, or dogs, or under-heated flooring, or under-counter lighting. It doesn't

stay upright when you transport it in a car. In short, with my woeful horticultural skills, I'm better off with a plastic one from IKEA.

But that didn't used to matter, because I could badger Grandma for another clipping and try again. Now I can't. If I kill this one—Grandma's master plant, the Mann family heirloom—it will be irreplaceable. So, straight after I asked my uncle for this treasure to be bestowed into my custody, I put in place an insurance policy: the plant will go

and live with Ann, my mother-in-law.

In stark contrast to me, my wife's mother is a genius with a greenhouse (indeed, the fact she even has a greenhouse indicates she has a substantially more evolved relationship

with flora and fauna than I do). I've seen her grow marrows the size of volleyballs, and sunflowers as tall as trees. She seems instinctively to know which flowers in her care require a drink, which a mere spritz, and which a veritable swim. In her house, plants *live*.

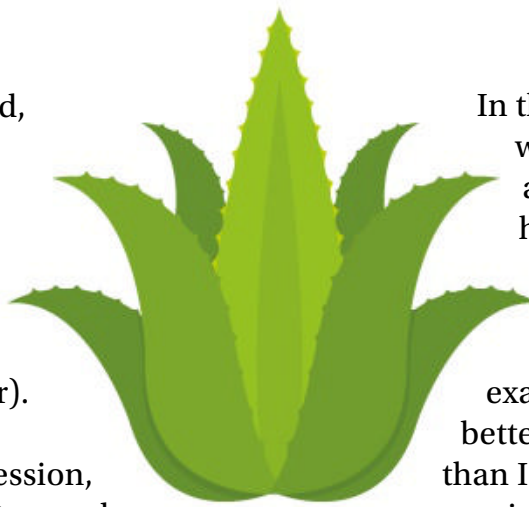
This afternoon, I took delivery of the famous aloe vera. In the four weeks that have elapsed since Grandma left for hospital, the plant has begun to brown and fray at the edges (not because it's

GRANDMA GAVE  
ME CLIPPINGS OF  
THIS SACRED  
PLANT, IN THE  
HOPE I MIGHT  
FOSTER MY OWN

been left unattended, but because those attending to it—my Grandmother's carer, my mum, my uncle—don't know what they're doing, either).

Within hours of it arriving in my possession, I carefully double-strapped it into our car seat, as if it were a newborn baby leaving the maternity ward, and commuted it slowly up the A1. Upon arrival, Ann triaged and treated it for over-watering, transferred into a new pot, and placed it by some French doors "to dry out".

The plan is for Ann to keep hold of the original plant—at least until I can be trusted to look after its progeny. In time, she can teach me how to care for its cuttings properly, and then maybe one day I can confidently settle the mother plant in my own front porch for posterity.



In the meantime, Ann will disperse cuttings and clippings among her own family, as Grandma used to do. My wife's two sisters, for example, are both far better at tending plants than I am, so it is quite conceivable that they, too, will spread cuttings of the plant around their partners' families; that this humble plant might yet spread across my entire extended family. What an amazing outcome, for a gift that my dad's mum gave my mum's mum before I even existed.

There are oodles of potential mementos from a person's life one can keep to remember them by. Photos, recipes, jewellery, crockery, fragrance—all of these can do the trick. And, no doubt, a bit of cash from their will can be jolly nice, too. But I'm content with the aloe vera pot plant from Grandma's front porch. My Family Tree. ■



## Sun Worship

It is thought that when Stonehenge was first built, on the day of the winter solstice the setting sun would sink over the Altar Stone, framed by a trilithon (two upright stones that support a third horizontal stone). This alignment has since been lost, as half of the trilithon has fallen.

SOURCE: ENGLISH-HERITAGE.ORG.UK



# *Leona Lewis*

## On Stardom, Sustainability & Snoop Dogg

By Alice Gawthrop

The British singer-songwriter opens up about motherhood and the magic of performing on stage

**T**ALKING TO ME from sunny Los Angeles, Leona Lewis has come a long way since her *X Factor* days. Back then, she was a hopeful 21-year-old looking for her big break; today, she is a singer-songwriter who has sold 35 million records worldwide, owner of vegan coffee shop Plants and Coffee, and mother of a 14-month-old who was up early this morning.

“Me and my husband are still figuring [parenting] out,” Lewis laughs. “We’re just about getting to a point where we’re like, ‘OK, I think this works.’”

You wouldn’t know from looking at her that Lewis was up early chasing

after an energetic toddler. She is glowing and happy to chat. Currently she is in the midst of preparing for her upcoming Christmas headline UK tour, working on the setlist.

How do you put a setlist together, anyway? Lewis explains that usually, an artist will prioritise songs from whatever album they’ve just had out. In the case of artists with a few albums, they can play around a bit more. This applies to Lewis, who has five studio albums under her belt, including *Spirit* which became the fastest-selling debut album in the UK at the time of its release in 2007, and remains one of the best-selling albums in UK chart history.

It's clear that Lewis' fans are important to her, and they play a big role in shaping the setlist. "I asked on Instagram what songs people wanted to hear," she tells me. "I went through them and thought, *Which of these are my favourites as well?* I find a middle ground."

As for which songs she is most excited to perform, Lewis is keeping mum. She'll go as far as saying that she is doing a lot of songs that she hasn't sung onstage before, but she won't name any names. "People don't know the setlist yet so I can't say too much," she winks. "But I'm really excited that there's going to be a lot of new songs that people haven't heard me sing live before!"

Going on tour is no easy feat, and Lewis admits that she was nervous to begin with. Her Christmas tour will be her first headline tour for a few years, and her first ever as a mother. "It's going to be such a different experience," she says. "Before when I was touring it was just me, but now it's me and the baby. She's going to be there with me a lot, so it got me a bit nervous at the beginning."

It's reassuring to know that even an award-winning global singing sensation gets a little nervous from time to time. Her pre-show rituals for dealing with nerves? Singing through

"Say A Little Prayer" by Aretha Franklin and taking a moment to be thankful. "I like to just remember what I'm doing it all for, how excited I am for everything to come together. It's so amazing when you're performing live and people know a song, and everyone's singing it with you. You just feel so connected to each other."

**Although she lives** in LA now, Lewis speaks warmly of Hackney, the East London borough where she grew up. "I think London will always feel like home," she says. "It's where I was born and raised. Hackney has changed so much, it's so gentrified now, but in some ways it feels the same. My family still live there, so it's always just going to be home to me."

*"I think London will always feel like home, it's where I was born and raised"*

You can still hear her London roots in her friendly accent as she reminisces about her career beginnings. Lewis always knew that being an artist was her goal, and after leaving the BRIT School at the age of 17, she started seriously pursuing it. She went to labels and tried to get deals, but nothing seemed to stick. "At the time, people just weren't about my sound, so it was really difficult," she says.

In 2006, she auditioned for the third series of *The X Factor* with the song "Over the Rainbow",



Alongside Simon Cowell  
appearing on *The X Factor*



immediately impressing the judges—notoriously hard-to-impress Simon Cowell even applauded her performance. She went on to win the competition, and her winner’s single, a cover of Kelly Clarkson’s song “A Moment Like This”, broke a world record after being digitally downloaded more than 50,000 times in less than 30 minutes.

Now, she often finds herself on the other side of the panel, having been a guest judge on shows such as *The X Factor*, *Queen of the Universe* and *I Can See Your Voice*. What’s it like being the judge rather than the contestant on shows?

*“Notoriously hard-to-impress Simon Cowell even applauded her performance”*

“I love being part of a panel because you’re witnessing other people share their gifts,” Lewis says warmly. “It can be really daunting to get up there and express yourself like that. For a lot of people it takes a lot of courage, so I’m always really happy to witness that.

“I think these shows can either help you grow as a person or diminish you as a person. I like to take it as an opportunity to help. Whenever I get time with the people who are coming onto the show to just chat backstage and have a heart-to-heart, I try to give advice that would have helped me when I was doing what they’re doing.”



**Has motherhood changed things** for Lewis? For one thing, she's working on projects that she may never have picked up otherwise. Exhibit A: A collaboration with Snoop Dogg on a YouTube song for kids (yes, you read that right). How did that even come about? She laughs. "I had just had the baby and I was looking on YouTube for songs to stop her crying. Babies love to hear stuff over and over and over, and I was getting to the point of madness!"

By chance, she came across a Snoop Dogg channel for babies. When she played a song, her baby was mesmerised. "I thought, *I wonder if Snoop Dogg would be up for working on something together?* She loved it so much and I just thought it would be lovely to play her one of these songs and be able to say, 'This is Mummy'"

The result is a collaboration on an animated YouTube music video to help raise awareness for children's wellness and celebrate Mental Health Day titled "It's Okay." Lewis voices a puppy called London Lilly who sings about why it's

completely OK to be afraid of the dark.

"I love the message that it's OK to be scared, it's OK to feel these things," Lewis says. "I think when Carmel gets a bit older, she'll be able to understand it. So it's something that will grow with her."

Balancing a career with being a new mother is hard work, Lewis attests. You can't just switch off when you have a baby the way that you might be able to with other things. "I'm lucky to have a really good support network around me," Lewis says. "I've got my husband, I've got his mum, I've got my parents. I'm really lucky to have people that help me so I am able to rest."

### **Alongside her impressive** musical

career, Lewis is also the owner of a vegan coffee shop, Coffee And Plants, in Pasadena.

Her enthusiasm for the coffee shop is contagious: she reveals the drink flavours that they've been working on lately and my mouth waters.

"The weather is lovely in LA, but it has got a bit colder and there's that autumnal feeling now," she says.

"We've just rolled out our new pumpkin





Coffee And  
Plants drinks



drink at the coffee shop. It's called Pumpkin Pie, and it's really good! We use all real pumpkin puree, not flavoured syrup. The best part about the coffee shop is doing all the tasting sessions, although it sometimes gets a bit dangerous—you can go a bit crazy with the pastries!”

Coffee And Plants is a real passion project for the singer-songwriter, being fully plant-based. Lewis has a long history of animal activism, starting with going vegetarian at the age of 12 after going on shopping trips to Oxford Circus with her mum and seeing protesters with animal testing signs. “I was so upset, I said, ‘Mum, I have to help the animals,’” she says. “That became my mission as a kid, and it's fed into every aspect of my life. I was campaigning before anyone even knew who I was.”

Her animal activism only grew alongside her fame: in 2011 she supported a campaign to ban the use of wild animals in circuses in the EU, and in 2013 she released a cruelty-free makeup line with The Body Shop. When it came to opening a coffee shop, making it plant-based was a no-brainer.

“I wanted it to be plant-based because I'm plant-based,” she says.

“I would often go into coffee shops and see milk cartons stacked up high and think, *Oh my gosh, how many cows are being milked for this?* The dairy industry and mass farming—it's so cruel and it harms the environment too, so it's twofold.”

Environmental awareness is also at the heart of Coffee And Plants, with all cups being recyclable and a tree being planted for every 100 cups sold. But ultimately, Lewis

*“I would often go into coffee shops and see milk cartons stacked up high and think, oh my gosh, how many cows are being milked for this?”*

is hoping for a more widespread mindset shift. “We want to be as sustainable as possible. What we really try and get people to do is actually bring in their own flask to refill, or we encourage them to sit in and have a coffee in a cup instead,” she explains. “We want to get rid of cups that you have to throw away altogether. But it's

something that we have to slowly implement, because people's minds have to change about how we use things first. We need a mindset shift where we start to think, *OK, we shouldn't really be using stuff that just goes in the bin.* We have to start using reusable things.” ■

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*Dates for Leona Lewis's Christmas with Love 2023 UK Tour can be found at [leonalewis.com/events](http://leonalewis.com/events)*

# Mark Powell

I R E M E M B E R ...



After four decades of making clothes for the great and the good, stylist and tailor Mark Powell (63) is Soho's last man standing





**I WAS BORN IN KING'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL ON DENMARK HILL.**

My mother was born in East London and my dad was from South London, but I spent a lot of time as a kid in East London with my mum's family, so most people assume I'm an East Ender. I was interested in fashion since I was eight or nine. I didn't question it. It was just something that was naturally a part of me. In the mid-1970s, I was one of the more stylish kids at school. I'd wear beads around my neck with a mohair jumper, drainpipe trousers and winkle pickers.

**THE 1970S IN LONDON WAS A VERY STYLISH TIME WITH A LOT GOING ON.**

When I lived in Romford, aged 13 or 14, I used to travel up to the capital quite a lot. I kept my eyes open. When I was 17, I got into hairdressing and ended up working in a salon on Savile Row in Mayfair. A few doors along from the salon was the legendary tailor, Tommy Nutter. And of course, just around the corner was South Molton Street, which was an exciting fashion centre at the time. So a mixture of all of these things was inspiring me for the future.



(Far left) Mark, aged three, with his mum





(Above) Outside Robot on Floral Street, 1983



### CREATING THE LOOK... AND LANDING IN SOHO

Soon after, I was working in a gentlemen's clothes shop on Conduit Street in Mayfair. It was next to the *James Bond* tailor, Anthony Sinclair. I'd go in and chat to the guys in there. By then I'd started to create my own look, which I wore every day, and people would ask me where I got my clothes from. That was when I realised that tailoring was my future. In 1981, my next move was to the famous Robot shop on King's Road, and stars like Jack Nicholson, when they were in town, would drift in and out. That was normal back then. While there, I started to develop made-to-measure suits. It was then that I had my first

inking about getting my own shop. In the Covent Garden branch of Robot, I met a customer who was able to locate a shop for me. So that's when I arrived in Soho, in 1985, on Archer Street.

**I WAS 24 AND IT WAS AN EXCITING TIME AND GREAT FUN,** but I didn't take it too seriously. The Archer Street premises had been a shabby old sex shop. I took it over. I decided to transform it, lay it out like an old gentlemen's outfitters. I had a barber shop in the back too, which added to the lifestyle aspect of the business.

COURTESY OF DEREK RIDGERS





I had clients like Bryan Ferry and David Bowie. Bowie was a very nice guy. He came into the shop one day and wanted a suit. All the staff from the Italian cafe next door saw Bowie coming in. They got very excited and rushed in and mobbed him. Signing all those autographs was driving him mad! But within two minutes my mates from the sex shop next door came round and cleared them all out because they thought a row had started. Bowie thought it was hilarious. He came back the following Monday in his limo and spent an afternoon with me talking about all things London, music and Ronnie and Reggie [Kray]. And, of course, he bought a suit. Subsequently, I also provided a lot of clothes for his film, *Absolute Beginners* (1986).

**I DIDN'T HAVE A LONG-TERM PLAN.** I was just doing it. I also had my nightclub, Violet's, on Tisbury Court in Soho, which was a big entrepreneurial investment and gaining a lot of attention. But when I lost Violet's, due to Soho politics, I had to start from scratch. I began making suits for my old private clients like Vic Reeves, Bob Mortimer and Jonathan Ross. Ronnie Kray too. Ronnie's measurements were sent to me from Broadmoor [psychiatric hospital] and the suit fitted him perfectly. Then when I moved to a new atelier on D'Arblay Street, I started making clothes for Mick Jagger and George Michael. From there I started doing a lot of work in New York and Japan.

**ONE DAY I MADE A SUIT FOR MICHAEL BALL,** and at that time he was doing his own TV show for the BBC with a different guest every week. The BBC asked me to deliver the suit to the studio. So I did, only to discover that his guest that week—one of my musical heroes—was James Brown. James walked in with a 20-strong entourage—you couldn't have written the script for this—and they all looked amazing. So James sits down for the sound check, and though I'm there for Michael Ball, all I'm actually worried about is meeting my hero. So I walk up to James and say, "James, this is my



Mark, Bradley Wiggins and Paul Smith in 2019

Elvis moment, it's lovely to meet you." And he says to me, "Turn around, turn around! You look terrific!". So I had to do a twirl for James Brown. I shook his hand and that was that.

**MY INSPIRATION COMES FROM A LOT OF THINGS**, ranging from classic MGM musicals where the costumes and tailoring were often amazing. Fred Astaire was an impeccable dresser, as was Gene Kelly in *Singing In The Rain*, Cary Grant too in a film like *North By Northwest*. Miles Davis was also a great style influence on me. And from the British post-war period, my inspiration came from that period's popular culture, from the 1950s to Carnaby Street in the 1960s and all the way up.

**THERE ARE THREE VERY ICONIC SUITS THAT I'VE FOUND USEFUL FOR INSPIRATION.** There's the grey three-piece Anthony Sinclair suit worn by Sean Connery in *Goldfinger* (1964), and the other two were made by the maverick Savile Row tailor, Douglas Hayward, which are Steve McQueen's suit in *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) and the suit worn by Michael Caine in *Get Carter* (1971) of course.

**I'M A STYLIST.** If you look at changes in fashion, trend on trend, it's always in tailoring that the change first occurs. People would go to a tailor and want to create a look. Tailoring is a great way to express individual style. I've been interested in different phases of style, from the 1920s right through to the 1970s.

I have knowledge of different eras and am able to draw on different periods of style to create new looks. But the showbiz world is tricky. Not everyone's a nice guy, even though they make out they are. Although when I met John F Kennedy Jr when he launched his magazine, *George*, I found he was a lovely man. Tragically, he died a couple of weeks after our meeting. George Clooney was featured on the front cover of the launch issue and I made the suit he wears on it.

**I HAVE A SON AND TWO DAUGHTERS AND THEY'RE A GREAT SUPPORT TO ME.** I've been very lucky. They're a real blessing. But I don't give myself to a lot of people. I'm a private person. I take after my mum, I think. She worked in the theatre, in costumes, so I think I've also inherited her theatricality in some ways.

**IN 2010, I WENT BACK TO MY ROOTS AND OPENED A SHOP ON MARSHALL STREET IN SOHO.** I was there for a decade. And now I'm on Newburgh Street. Post-lockdown, business has never been better. I have moments of doubt, like everyone, but I have to be psyched up every day to do what I do.



After four decades of making clothes for stars like Harrison Ford, after exhibiting at Pitti in Florence and staging numerous fashion shows, I now live and work in Soho, although now the area is very different. Nearly all the old businesses have disappeared, so I'm very much the last man standing.

**I'LL NEVER LEAVE SOHO.** I've got too much of a connection to the place. But knowing when to retire is crucial. Do I hang on till the end, or do I retire early and discover that early retirement isn't for me? I enjoy the social side of the business very much. Lots of friends come and visit me on a daily basis. I'll be 63 this coming November and my brain is still on point. Every day there are always challenges. I'm a driven person, positive and upbeat. I have to be. And the secret to a happy life? It's to love and respect yourself, and accept yourself for who you are. ■

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**As told to Jason Holmes**

You can find Mark's store at Mark Powell Bespoke, 10 Newburgh St, London, W1F 7RN. Visit [markpowellbespoke.co.uk](http://markpowellbespoke.co.uk) for more info



# 10 *Nutrition* *Myths*

And what health experts want  
you to know instead



BY *Sophie Egan*  
FROM *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

## MYTH 1: Fresh fruits and vegetables are always healthier than canned, frozen or dried varieties

□ Despite the enduring belief that “fresh is best,” research has found that frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables can be just as nutritious as fresh.

“They can also be a money saver and an easy way to make sure there are always fruits and vegetables available at home,” says Sara Bleich, a professor of public health policy at Harvard University.

One caveat: some canned, frozen and dried varieties contain added sugars, saturated fats and sodium, so be sure to read nutrition labels, especially on prepared foods. Choose the ones that keep those ingredients to a minimum.

## MYTH 2: All fat is bad

□ When studies published in the late 1940s found correlations between high-fat diets and high levels of cholesterol, experts reasoned that if you reduced the amount of total fats in your diet, your risk for heart disease would go down. The assumption was that a low-fat diet could benefit everyone, even though there was no solid evidence that doing so would prevent heart disease, obesity and other health issues.



As a result, says Vijaya Surampudi, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles, Centre for Human Nutrition, many people—and food manufacturers—replaced calories from fat with calories from refined carbohydrates such as white flour and added sugar.

“Instead of this helping us stay slim, rates of overweight and obese people went up significantly,” she says.

In reality, not all fats are bad. While certain types, including trans fats, can increase your risk for heart disease or stroke, healthy fats help reduce your risk. Examples of those include monounsaturated fats (olive oil,

avocados, some nuts and seeds) and polyunsaturated fats (sunflower oil, fish, flaxseed).

Good fats also supply energy, produce important hormones, support cell function and aid in the absorption of some nutrients.

If you see a product labelled “fat-free,” don’t assume it is healthy, Surampudi says. Prioritise products with simple ingredients and no added sugars.

### MYTH 3: “Calories in, calories out” is the most important factor for maintaining weight

It’s true that if you consume more calories than you burn, you will probably gain weight. And if you burn more calories than you consume, you will probably lose weight—at least for the short term.

But research does not suggest that eating more will result in becoming overweight or obese.

“Rather, it’s the *types* of foods we eat that may be the long-term drivers” of those conditions, says Dariush Mozaffarian, a professor of nutrition and medicine at Tufts University in Massachusetts. Ultraprocessed foods—such as refined starchy snacks, cereals, crackers, energy bars, baked goods, sodas and sweets—can lead to weight gain. That’s because they are rapidly

digested and flood the bloodstream with glucose, fructose and amino acids, which the liver converts to fat.

Instead, the best way to maintain a healthy weight is to make the shift from counting calories to prioritising healthy eating overall. Go for quality over quantity.

### MYTH 4: People with type 2 diabetes shouldn’t eat fruit

While fruit juices can raise blood sugar levels because of their high sugar and low fibre content, research has found this isn’t the case with whole fruits. Some studies show that those who consume a serving of whole fruit per day (particularly blueberries, grapes and apples) have a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

And other research suggests that if you already have type 2 diabetes,



eating whole fruits can help control your blood sugar.

It's time to bust the myth, says Linda Shiue, director of culinary medicine and lifestyle medicine at Kaiser Permanente San Francisco. She says that everyone—including those with type 2 diabetes—can really benefit from fruit's health-promoting vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre.



### **MYTH 5:** Plant beverages are healthier than dairy milk

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□ Kathleen Merrigan, professor of sustainable food systems at Arizona State University and a former US deputy secretary of agriculture, disagrees. She says that while the nutrition of plant-based beverages can vary, many have more added ingredients—such as sodium and added sugars, which can contribute to poor health—than cow's milk.

Consider protein: typically, cow's milk has about eight grams of protein per 250 millilitres, whereas almond beverage typically has one or two grams in the same amount. Oat beverage usually has around two or three grams.

### **MYTH 6:** Potatoes are bad for you

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□ Potatoes have been vilified because of their high glycaemic index, which

means they contain rapidly digestible carbohydrates that can spike your blood sugar. However, potatoes can actually be beneficial for health, says Daphene Altema-Johnson, a programme officer of food communities and public health at Johns Hopkins University.

Potatoes are rich in vitamin C, potassium, fibre and other nutrients, especially when consumed with the skin on. They are also inexpensive and available year-round. The healthiest ways to prepare them include baking and boiling.

### **MYTH 7:** Never feed peanut products to young children

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□ For years, experts told new parents that the best way to prevent their children from developing food allergies was to avoid feeding them common allergenic foods, such as

peanuts or eggs, during their first few years of life. But now, allergy experts say it's better to introduce peanut products early on.

If your baby doesn't have severe eczema or a known food allergy, you can start introducing peanut products (such as peanut powders or watered-down peanut butter, but not whole peanuts) when they are four to six months old, around the time your baby is ready for solids.

Start with ten millilitres of smooth peanut butter mixed with water, breast milk or formula two to three times a week, says Ruchi Gupta, director of the Centre for Food Allergy & Asthma Research at Northwestern University in Illinois. "It's also important to feed your baby a diverse diet in their first year to prevent food allergies," Gupta says.



## MYTH 8: The protein in plants is incomplete

“Where do you get your protein?” is the most common question vegetarians are asked,” says Christopher Gardner, a nutrition scientist and professor of medicine at Stanford University in California. “The myth is that plants are completely missing some amino acids,” also known as the building blocks of proteins, he adds. But in reality, all plant-based foods contain all 20 amino acids, including the nine essential ones. The difference is that the proportion isn't as ideal as the proportion of amino acids in animal-based foods.

So to get an adequate mix, you simply need to eat a variety of plant-based foods—such as beans, grains and nuts—through the day, and eat enough total protein.

“It's easier than most people think,” Gardner says.

## MYTH 9: Eating soy can increase breast cancer risk

High doses of plant oestrogens in soy, called isoflavones, have been found to stimulate breast tumour cell growth in animal studies.

“However, this relationship has not been substantiated in human studies,” says Frank B Hu, chair of the department of nutrition at the





reduced heart disease risk, such as high-quality protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals,” Hu says.

**MYTH 10:** The best nutrition advice keeps changing

❑ Not true, says Marion Nestle, a professor emerita of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University. In the 1950s, she explains, the first dietary recommendations for prevention of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and other ailments advised balancing calories and minimising foods high in saturated fat, salt and sugar. That is still the case today.

Yes, science evolves, but the bottom-line guidance remains consistent. As famed author Michael Pollan put it: “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” That advice leaves plenty of room for eating foods you love. ■

Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. So far, the science does not indicate a link between soy and breast cancer risk in humans. Instead, consuming soy-based foods and drinks—including tofu, tempeh, edamame, miso and soy milk—may even have a protective effect toward breast cancer risk and survival.

“Soy foods are also a powerhouse of beneficial nutrients related to

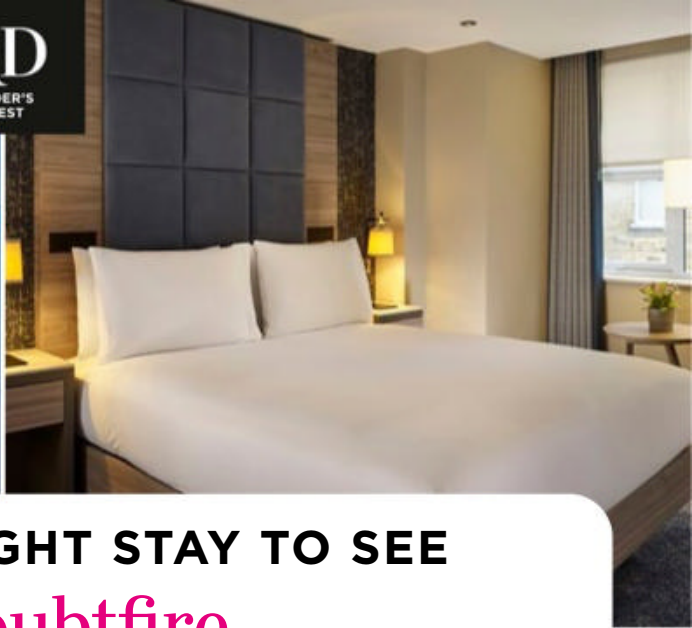
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**Beer Wars**

In 1983, Freddy Heineken, the owner of the eponymous Heineken brewery, was kidnapped and held for ransom for weeks. As awful as it was, Heineken never lost his sense of humour. Legend has it that, after finally being released, he told a friend, “They tortured me. They made me drink Carlsberg.”

FORBES.COM



## WIN AN OVERNIGHT STAY TO SEE Mrs Doubtfire

Mrs Doubtfire is now dazzling and delighting audiences at London's Shaftesbury Theatre!

This 'genuinely funny comedy musical' (Time Out) based on the beloved film is 'a surefire hit!' (The Telegraph, Daily Express). The Telegraph calls it 'a complete joy', The Times says it 'soars from screen to stage', and City AM hails MRS. DOUBTFIRE as 'funny, heart-warming and wildly entertaining!'

Out-of-work actor Daniel will do anything for his kids. After losing custody in a messy divorce, he creates the alter ego of Scottish nanny Euphegenia Doubtfire in a desperate attempt to stay in their lives. As his new character takes on a life of its own, MRS. DOUBTFIRE teaches Daniel more than he bargained for about how to be a father.

**First prize is a pair of theatre tickets and an overnight stay for two people.**

You'll be staying in the four-star DoubleTree by Hilton London – West End just a 7 minute walk from the theatre.

We've got 2 pairs of runner-up tickets to be won also!

Simply Answer the following question:

**Which James Bond actor appeared in the film version of Mrs Doubtfire?**

**A. Pierce Brosnan    B. Roger Moore    C. David Niven**

Simply answer A, B or C on the entry form or enter online. See page 151.

An illustration of a hiker in winter gear, including a red beanie, orange jacket, and tan pants, walking through a snowy mountain landscape. The hiker is carrying a large backpack and using trekking poles. The background features blue mountains, a full moon, and evergreen trees.

# A Mental Workout

*Exercise releases  
“hope molecules”  
into the  
bloodstream*

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BY *Karen Robock*

I'VE JOGGED THROUGH postpartum depression (twice), relied on Pilates classes to help me stretch during stressful times in life and I often go for a walk after a particularly bad day. So it's no surprise to me that there's a link between exercise and mental health. But scientists have now made it official: research has found a direct connection between movement and mood.

Each time you work up a sweat, your body releases feel-good

neurotransmitters, or “happy hormones,” including endorphins, dopamine and endocannabinoids, the latter being responsible for the so-called runner’s high. Now researchers are also pointing to myokines—dubbed “hope molecules”—as an important contributor to the mental health benefits of exercise.

When our muscles contract, chains of amino acids called myokines are released into the bloodstream; they help your muscles and organs communicate. Researchers are looking into the effect of myokines on the brain. They think this communication increases resilience to stress, reduces symptoms of trauma and anxiety and have a direct

effect on depression. A 2021 review published in *Neuropharmacology* showed evidence that myokines boost brain function (eg, improving memory and mood).

“Myokines reduce systemic inflammation, which is especially beneficial for people with drug-resistant depression whose low mood is linked to high inflammation,” explains Dr Jennifer Heisz, an expert in brain health and associate professor in the department of kinesiology at McMaster University in Canada.

There’s also a growing body of research proving that exercise helps build key connections between the networks *within* the brain, too, improving overall cognitive



performance. Studies have shown that physical activity stimulates creativity, sharpens judgement skills and improves mental energy.

It can also help to slow age-related cognitive decline, possibly even stalling the onset of Alzheimer's disease. A new study published in the *Journal for Alzheimer's Disease Reports* found that walking regularly (30 minutes a day four times a week) was enough to measurably improve memory, even in people who have already been diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment.

A recent study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* showed that treatment for depression can be much more effective when physical activity is added to the usual care. Participants found benefits after 12 weeks of exercising for 30 to 60 minutes a day.

"While exercise is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment, physical activity can complement and enhance the effects of the treatment," says lead researcher Ben Singh, a research fellow at the University of South Australia. He says regular exercise in a group setting can boost self-esteem and decrease feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Whether you're cycling, swimming, walking around your neighbourhood or doing yoga, getting sweaty is good for your body and mind. But how much activity is enough to maintain brain health? Experts suggest that you

aim for a minimum of ten to 30 minutes, three to five days each week.

"For reducing depression, research suggests that aerobic exercise is less about intensity and more about duration," says Heisz.

Just ten minutes of light movement, like gentle laps in the pool or walking your dog, are enough to boost your mood, and the effects increase for every ten extra minutes that you move, for up to an hour. Exercising beyond 60 minutes didn't provide extra mental health benefits, according to Singh's study.

## TO GET THE MOST OVERALL BENEFITS, FOCUS ON DOING THE ACTIVITIES YOU LIKE BEST

Strength-training, such as Pilates and lifting weights, does count toward your daily exercise goals (and is essential for strong bones). And research shows that increasing the intensity of resistance workouts by just ten per cent will yield a greater antidepressant effect.

"It is amazing to consider how moving our bodies can heal our minds," says Heisz. To get the biggest overall health boost, the key is to zero in on sports and activities you enjoy, so you'll keep going back to them. ■



*Give The  
Gift Of  
Good Health*

*What presents  
can you give this  
Christmas that  
are scientifically  
proven to benefit  
your physical or  
mental wellbeing?*



Susannah Hickling is  
twice winner of  
the Guild of Health  
Writers Best Consumer  
Magazine Health Feature

## Air purifier

Do you have a loved one who suffers from allergies or eczema? Why not gift them an air cleaner? Research has shown that they can reduce allergy symptoms, remove asthma triggers such as dust, pollen and animal dander, and improve air quality in your home. Some studies have even shown they improve cardiovascular health. Look for purifiers with more than one filter and, especially, a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter.

## Olive oil

A fabulous bottle of extra virgin olive oil not only makes a delicious salad dressing but has amazing health benefits too. It's high in healthy mono-unsaturated fats and antioxidants, giving it anti-inflammatory properties and protective effects against chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer and arthritis.

## Journal

Putting pen to paper to record your thoughts, hopes and fears has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood and even lower blood pressure. It gives you perspective and helps you process your emotions and find solutions to problems. A beautifully bound book makes a lovely as well as a helpful gift.

## Board game

Another great de-stressor—and perfect for the festive season when you're likely to have family around—is a board game. Playing is a convivial activity with huge scope for laughs, which boost feel-good chemicals called endorphins. Regular participation improves cognitive skills and memory, and may help guard against dementia.

## Coffee

Science is waking up and smelling—well—coffee's health advantages. Various studies have pointed to its effect in reducing the risk of skin cancer, depression and stroke in women, and of men dying of prostate cancer. It might also protect the liver, promote heart health and make you less likely to develop dementia.

## Electric toothbrush

One review of 56 studies found a powered toothbrush resulted in a 21 per cent reduction of plaque and an 11 per cent reduction in gingivitis after three months, compared with a manual toothbrush. It's also a fun way for children to look after their dental hygiene.

## Spa day

Who doesn't love to be pampered? While the main benefits are being able to relax, which has a positive effect on your mental wellbeing, a spa might also relieve aches and pains, improve blood pressure and promote more restful sleep.

## Dark chocolate

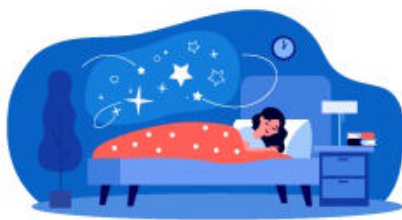
Nothing screams Christmas quite like chocolate, and the good news is that dark chocolate is associated with several health benefits. Small amounts of this sweet treat may lower the risk of heart disease, improve brain function and give your immune system a boost, potentially reducing inflammation.

## Your time

Quality time spent with your nearest and dearest is completely free, but the most precious gift you could give them. If you've been too preoccupied of late, determine to put aside more hours to do fun things together, or if you have time to devote to others outside your immediate circle, consider volunteering with Age UK as a befriender to an elderly person. ■



*For more weekly health tips and stories, sign up to our newsletter at [readersdigest.co.uk](https://www.readersdigest.co.uk)*



# 9 Ways To Stay Warm At Night

Keep toasty in bed this winter and get a better night's sleep

**1 Wear PJs made of natural fibres**  
Wool, cotton or silk nightwear allows your skin to breathe, whereas synthetic fabrics trap moisture, which could end up making you feel chilly.

**2 Wear socks**  
Sexy they are not, but wearing socks causes blood vessels in your feet to dilate, keeping your toes toasty. A small South Korean study found people who wore them when it was cold fell asleep more quickly, slept for longer and had better quality kip all round.

**3 Get warm and wet**  
Having a warm—but not too hot—bath before bed will relax you and raise your core temperature. A hot milky drink will do a similar job, but avoid caffeine from the afternoon onwards, as this could keep you awake.

**4 Layer up your bedding**  
Have several blankets or throws you can add and take off as necessary. Layers trap the air and keep you snug. Consider flannel sheets for winter as they feel warmer.

**5 Avoid a saggy mattress** If you sleep with a partner, make sure you have a firm mattress so you'll not be thrown together in an unsupportive bed.

**6 Use a fleecy underblanket**  
Sleeping on a soft surface keeps you better insulated.

**7 Take a hot-water bottle to bed**  
But always put a cover on it so it doesn't scald you and doesn't feel cold against your skin after a few hours.

**8 Do some light stretching before turning in** This will get your circulation going, help tire you out and, according to a 2016 review of studies, improve sleep quality. But just do a few minutes of meditative movements such as tai chi or yoga so you don't end up energised instead.

**9 Do away with draughts** The ideal sleep temperature for most people is between 16 and 18°C. Install thick curtains if cold air is getting in through windows and use a draught excluder in front of your bedroom door if necessary. ■



# Winter Wellness

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# Debilitated Doctor

*Dr Max reflects on how he views his patients' pain after suffering a kidney stone*



**O**CCASIONALLY, DOCTORS BECOME patients too. While I wouldn't wish ill-health on anyone, it can be an edifying lesson for medical professionals to suddenly be on the other side.

This happened to me a few months ago when I had a kidney stone, which had decided to make its unwelcome presence known in a rather dramatic fashion just as I was going out for dinner with a friend.



Max is a hospital doctor, author and columnist. He currently works full-time in mental health for the NHS. His new book, *The Marvellous Adventure of Being Human*, is out now

The pain came from absolutely nowhere but within minutes I was incapacitated. Fellow sufferers will sympathise, I have no doubt. I was quite taken aback by how astonishingly painful it was.

Of course, being a doctor, I initially refused to believe that anything was wrong. I was haunted by all the embarrassed people I have seen over the course of my career who have come to A&E convinced they are dying only for it to be nothing more than trapped wind. It's hard not to forget their mortified faces as they burp loudly and the pain vanishes and they sheepishly skulk out of the

department. I wasn't going to be humiliated by trapped wind, so instead opted to writhe around screaming for several hours until I had to admit that yes, probably this was something more serious than a stubborn belch.

I was particularly pleased to read afterwards in a medical textbook that renal colic, as the pain is known, is the "most excruciatingly painful event a person can endure...the pain is often described as being worse than childbirth." I took great delight in telling my mum that. It's also rather irritating because it's not as though what came out is going to look after me in my old age, as happens in childbirth.

Given the pain, I had assumed the offending stone was actually a small boulder. I was therefore fairly deflated when it finally came out and it looked more like a piece of aquarium gravel. How could something so small be so painful? While I wouldn't readily repeat the experience, it was certainly interesting to be on the punter side of medicine for once.

The pain had waxed and waned and during the moments when it was less intense, it did strike me how

awful pain is. It's no wonder chronic pain drives people to suicide. While doctors talk about pain and its management, it's hard to put into words quite how draining and debilitating it really is until you've experienced it for yourself. And even then, there's something about the way our brains deal with pain that, once it's over, we quickly forget how much it affects us and how incapacitating it is.

During my time in hospital, various doctors came to speak to me. They were all very nice and polite but one stuck out in my mind. He

was actually the most junior of them all, but something about his manner was incredibly calming and reassuring. It took a while before I put my finger on what it was he was doing that was making me feel so relaxed and

reassured. Whenever he came to my bed to speak to me, he knelt down so he was at my eye level. It seems such a small, simple thing, but it meant that he never loomed over me, as all the other doctors and nurses did. Just that one simple act of kneeling down made all the difference. It's a trick I'm going to start using myself. There's something to be said for getting down to your patient's level. ■

**DOCTORS TALK  
ABOUT PAIN BUT  
IT'S HARD TO  
PUT INTO WORDS  
HOW DRAINING IT  
IS UNTIL YOU'VE  
EXPERIENCED IT  
FOR YOURSELF**

# The Doctor Is In

*Dr Max Pemberton*

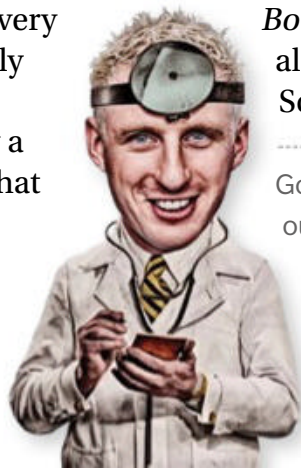
**Q: Dear Max, I am experiencing extreme insomnia. I just can't sleep. My GP prescribed a short course of sleeping pills which helped, but without them I can't sleep. I've tried reducing my caffeine intake, exercising more and changing my diet, but nothing helps.**

**A:** Most people experience problems with sleeping at some time or another in their lives. This is actually quite normal. This sounds more serious though and those with regular insomnia will sympathise with you. It can be really miserable and have a real impact on people's day-to-day functioning as well as their mood, relationships, work and social life.

I'm really sorry you're experiencing this. You've done the sensible thing and gone to your GP. You don't say what type of sleeping pills you were prescribed but while it worked in the short term, it's not really a long term solution. I'm actually very pleased to hear your GP only prescribed a short course. Insomnia can be caused by a lot of things and we know that for a lot of people a short course is all they need—it helps reset the body's sleep

pattern and allows them some respite and reduces the anxiety of going to bed and worrying you're going to stay awake (which becomes a vicious cycle). But we also know that anything more than a short course of sleeping pills can cause more problems than it solves—some are addictive, have hangover grogginess in the morning and don't provide restful, deep sleep.

I think you should return to your GP and ask if they would consider referring you to a local sleep clinic. Sadly, not all areas have ready access to one but I've seen them help people who have battled insomnia for years. You might also want to consider trying the sleep app Sleepio. This was created by a sleep scientist and has a very good evidence base behind it. Some areas provide this app for free. There are also self-help books for people with insomnia that use CBT—a type of therapy that addresses people's thinking and behaviours. *The Sleep Book* by Dr Guy Meadows (who also runs a website called Sleep School) is very good. ■



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# We Need To Take The Pressure Off Christmas

*It might just save your relationship*



Monica Karpinski is a writer and editor focused on women's health, sex, and relationships. She is the founder of women's health media platform The Femic

AS A KID, I remember Christmas morning at my parents' house always being chaotic. Before 20-odd relatives would arrive for lunch, there'd be frenzied cooking, cleaning, and rushing about—will there be enough food? Is so-and-so bringing their partner?

Like many families, mine were doing their best to navigate the expectations that come with the holidays. It's supposed to be a time of joy and happiness; the most wonderful time of the year. Everything needs to be perfect. Everyone needs to get along.

Yet placing this kind of pressure on the festivities often only sets us up to fail. After all, has trying to manufacture happiness ever actually made anyone feel good? And it's in no small part why Christmas is one of the most common times of year for couples to break up.

Ever felt panicked at the thought of bringing a partner home for the holidays? With the ideals around Christmas in the air, you may have looked at them a little more critically. You might have worried about how they'd be received—or asked yourself some tough questions about whether you see them as being part of your family.

As best put by a woman named Kate, who was interviewed in a piece by the website [Stuff.co.nz](http://Stuff.co.nz): "Everything that was in the Christmas movies and

ads only kind of highlighted what was missing in my life.”

Thoughts like these can be a good thing. They can bring pent-up feelings to the surface and, as in Kate’s case, help us realise that our relationship isn’t working. But they can also stir undue pressure and anxiety, creating heightened expectations for what a “good partner” should be.

In 2013, *Time* magazine reported that over the holidays, people believe their partners should demonstrate their love through clear, tangible acts. This could be giving a gift or making the effort to attend your friend’s Christmas party: as long as it’s enough to signal their commitment to your relationship.

And if the festive season is especially symbolic or important to you, you may also hold your partner to particular standards for how you want it to go. But if they missed the memo on gift giving, or just don’t see Christmas as big a deal as you do, is that something to hold against them?

For some, the stress all of this brings is enough to call time on their relationship. A survey of 1,600 users by dating app RedHotPie found that 56 per cent of men and 71 per cent of women would prefer to cut and run than introduce their partner to their families over the holidays.

What if we lifted some of that pressure? Once freed from the strain



of trying to make everything rosy, we might see—and, dare I say, enjoy—our relationship for what it is.

While family gatherings do tend to come with a degree of scrutiny towards you and your life choices, remember that your relationship is the same as any other time of year. Though you will probably need to communicate and check in with each other more than usual.

If there are problems between you, address them. If you have certain expectations or concerns, then share them. And if you do want the relationship to be over, then be honest and end it. It’s not fair to either of you to stick around on a sinking ship just because it’s Christmas.

Sometimes the holidays are less than magical, and that’s OK. Family events can be awkward or just a bit boring, and sometimes there’s an uncle who behaves badly and he spoils lunch for everyone. It happens—we’re all human and families can be complicated. ■

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# Relationship Advice

*Monica Karpinski*

**Q: Recently, a few different men I've matched with on dating apps have told me that they have "no social skills" (or something similar) ahead of us meeting up in person. Part of me thinks they're joking, but another part wonders if they're trying to give themselves a free pass for a future lack of effort towards me. Should I just ditch them?**

**A:** We can't know for sure why people write self-deprecating things when using dating apps. Scientific research shows that talking about ourselves in that way is linked to low self-esteem and negative self-regard, but sometimes, it can be an attempt to come across as down-to-earth.

Because in this case the comment is quite personal—they're belittling who they are rather than their cooking ability, for example—I think we're more in the realm of the former.

How we see ourselves absolutely influences what we put on dating apps. And having to condense yourself into what is essentially an advertisement can dredge up confronting feelings about how you think you'll be received by others.

For example, if someone is more introverted but perhaps a bit insecure

about whether that will be attractive to potential matches, they might try to make a joke about it—like writing that they have "no social skills". Or, they might feel a lack of confidence about what they could bring to a relationship, so set expectations low.

Context is important here, too. If you've suggested they come with you to a friend's event, for example, and they've said the above in a way that's rude and dismissive of the idea, they might just be being disagreeable. And this may give some insight into what sort of partner they'd be.

But in itself, making a self-deprecating comment isn't enough to really show what kind of person someone is. If you've otherwise enjoyed matching with them, you could ask what they mean by the comment to try and gauge where they're coming from. Then, you could make the call whether you want to continue.

Equally, if the exchange has put you off then you aren't obliged to entertain them. It's up to you how much you want to read into it. ■

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Got a question for our resident sex and relationships expert? Email it confidentially to [thelovedoctor@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:thelovedoctor@readersdigest.co.uk)





## WAITING FOR NEW SMILES – *one family's journey*

Rolland and Adeline are proud parents to nine beautiful children. Their youngest two, daughter Lanto, and son, Rindra, were both born with cleft conditions. In Madagascar, many families have never seen a cleft before, so it's a condition often greeted with fear and superstition in some rural communities. However, the news of Lanto and Rindra's cleft wasn't so much of a shock for Rolland and Adeline because Rolland's cousin – a man in his fifties – had lived his entire life with an untreated cleft.

Although seeing a relative with a cleft meant the family weren't fearful of the condition, they knew the negative impact an untreated cleft can have on a person's health, and their life. They wanted a better future for their children.

Rolland heard an advert on the radio about an Operation Smile surgical programme in Antsirabe, Madagascar. Finding out that Rindra and Lanto could have the cleft surgery they needed, for free, was a dream come true for the family. Unlike here in the UK, health services aren't free in many parts of the world, and the costs of treatment – or even travelling to reach medical facilities – are out of reach for most families.

When Rolland and his children arrived at the programme

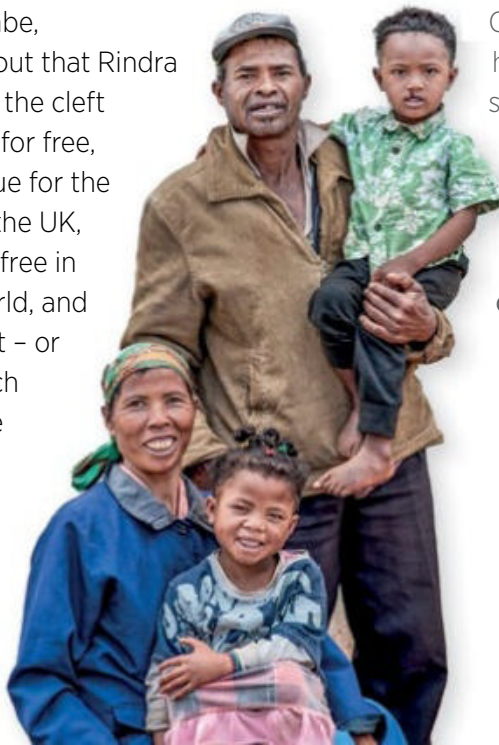
site they were surprised to see so many other families in the same position. After a thorough medical evaluation by medical volunteers, Lanto was found to be fit enough for surgery, and later got the new smile her parents had dreamed of for her. But, for younger brother Rindra, the journey to a new smile would take a little longer.

Rindra was underweight due to problems feeding, and also suffering from a respiratory infection, both common problems for children with cleft conditions. Thankfully, he was referred to Operation Smile's nutrition programme, which will provide ongoing support for the family through workshops, advice and nutrition supplements, until Rindra is strong enough to get a brand-new smile like his big sister.

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### ABOUT OPERATION SMILE

Operation Smile has provided hundreds of thousands of safe surgeries for children with cleft conditions worldwide. For more information about our work or to find out how you can help, visit [www.operationssmile.org.uk/rindra1](http://www.operationssmile.org.uk/rindra1)



# CHRISTMAS Chronicles

Christmas, a time when the world sparkles with lights, goodwill, and the promise of togetherness, means something unique to each of us. For some, it's a time to be selfless and help those in need; for others, it's all about family and connection. In this festive article, we unwrap four unique true-life tales that capture the essence of Christmas



# A Beacon Of Unity

Benjie Goodhart, *Brighton*

Christmas is never so magical as when you're a child. The stockings, the presents, the food, the sweets, the tree, the telly, and the rarity of "Can I stay up a bit later, pleeeeeease" actually being answered in the affirmative. But as a child, I would venture that my Christmases were more magical than most, thanks to a deeply romantic and picturesque tradition.

I grew up in Campden Hill Square, a beautiful Victorian square in London's Notting Hill Gate. On Christmas Eve, when it got dark, every house in the square would turn off its lights and place rows of candles in all the front-facing windows. Over the next few hours, people would come from the surrounding environs to quietly walk around the square, taking in a scene that could have been from the 19th century were it not for the Peugeot 504 sitting outside our house, and the sound of the 88 bus going past the end of our road.

The origins of the tradition have been lost in the mists of time, though it seems to have started in the 1920s. One story is that a Jewish orphanage in the square placed candles in its

windows on Christmas Eve, only to have the windows broken by antisemitic vandals. Thereafter, the other houses all put candles in their windows so the vandals couldn't identify the Jewish house. It is romantic, but apocryphal—one can only hope that it's true.

What was undoubtedly true was that the tradition was taken very seriously by local residents. The only years that the display didn't take place were during the Blackout in the Second World War, and the fire brigade's strike of 1977. And woe betide the household that didn't take part. Even if you were due to be on holiday, it was considered your neighbourly duty to arrange for a surrogate to light your candles.

The whole affair was a cause of great excitement for my sisters and I—not least because my parents threw an enormous party every Christmas Eve. Up to 100 guests would pitch up, walk the square marvelling at the scene, before descending on our house for the ensuing bacchanalia (in truth, this meant a glass of wine and a vol-au-vent, consumed in semi-darkness until the lights could be switched on at about 8.30pm).

There was one year, however, when the Christmas candles caused something of a rift in our otherwise harmonious household. Sometime around 1980 my father, in his role as chairman of the residents' committee, was interviewed about the tradition by the magazine *Harpers & Queen*.



The *Harpers & Queen* picture of Benjie, his dad and sister

## A JEWISH ORPHANAGE PLACED CANDLES IN ITS WINDOWS ON CHRISTMAS EVE, ONLY TO HAVE THE WINDOWS BROKEN BY ANTISEMITIC VANDALS



They also sent a photographer. But, Dad being Dad, whose mind was almost always occupied by lofty, intellectual matters, he'd forgotten to tell my mum (or indeed my oldest sister), and neither of them were present for the photo.

Mum was incandescent. All the more so when the magazine was published, and it became apparent that I had been photographed wearing ripped jeans (this was not a

fashion statement, more a legacy of hours spent playing football in the square gardens). It's fair to say that the Christmas chill wasn't just meteorological that year.

Christmas Eve would always end the same way. We would go to Midnight Mass in the local church (our one religious event of the year, my parents being more of the Humanist

persuasion). Then we'd go

home, be allowed to open one present before bed (it being after midnight) before turning in and dreaming of Father Christmas.

Father Christmas, of course, may have indulged in a few glasses of wine during the party. One year, this led to a bit of a stocking mix-up, with my grandpa delighted to find some children's Punch and Judy toothpaste in his stocking, and me rather bemused to discover a tube of Dentu-Grip.

Today, I live in Brighton, with my wife and our two children. I often think about making the trip up to West London to show them the candles, a tradition that still endures. But I've never been back. Perhaps some things are best left as memories. Christmas is never so magical as when you're a child.



# Sharing Christmas With Strangers

Louise Carleton, *Bedfordshire*

I come from a large multicultural family, spread out across the globe. Despite being found in far-flung corners of the world, we're a tight-knit family that makes an effort to stay close and keep in touch. Christmas has always been a special time for us and a chance for us all to come together, no matter where in the world we might be.

My aunt Samantha, known affectionately by everyone in the family as Mantha, loved Christmas and always went out of her way to make it cosy and magical for everyone around her. Mantha was kind, fun and full of energy so it wasn't hard to get into the Christmas spirit when she was around.

December 2022 was no exception. Mantha drove three hours from her house in Bournemouth to visit everyone two weeks before the 25th and to drop off presents to her friends still in the area. We chatted about our plans, laughed at how organised Mantha was (presents already bought and wrapped and the freezer full ahead of the big day) and kissed goodbye when it was time to leave.

So when on the evening of December 18, just seven days before Christmas Day, Mantha's son called us distraught to tell us Samantha had passed away suddenly at home, none of us could quite believe it. I'd only been messaging her the day before, sharing voice notes like we always liked to do. Mantha had had a blood clot that had unfortunately travelled to her lung and despite the paramedic's best efforts, they were unable to save my beloved, fun, wonderful aunt.

So close to Christmas, none of us felt like celebrating and we decided we'd have a quiet day at home, surrounded by family. That was until my sister-in-law, Vera, told us about some colleagues of hers who'd just arrived in the UK. Vera is Chinese and like her, her colleagues were four young women from mainland China. They'd arrived in the country far away from friends and family unaware they'd have to spend the next two days alone while the rest of the country got together and celebrated.

We knew we couldn't leave them to spend the day by themselves, especially after we heard how eager they were to experience a proper English Christmas. More importantly, we knew that Samantha would have wanted us to throw open our doors and give them a Christmas to remember, so that's exactly what we ended up doing.

At the last minute, we dashed around shops, adding to the trolley

(Right) Welcoming strangers at Christmas made the pain easier to bear; (Below) Louise's beloved aunt Samantha



## WE KNEW THAT SAMANTHA WOULD HAVE WANTED US TO THROW OPEN OUR DOORS



presents for them to open, extra bottles of prosecco and Christmas pudding to make sure there was plenty to go around. When the day finally came, we welcomed them into the house with open arms and tried to put our pain aside so we could give them the full Christmas experience. We opened presents together around the tree, ate a full Christmas dinner (introducing them to pigs in blankets and Yorkshire puddings), played games, pulled crackers, watched *It's a Wonderful Life* and ate Christmas cake.

It didn't ease the pain of Samantha's absence but connecting with strangers and sharing our culture helped us get through the day and turned out to be the very thing we all needed.

The first Christmas without Mantha was difficult but it was also the first time where Christmas took on a deeper, more special meaning.

Around this time of year, it's easy to get sidetracked and focus on the wrong things. We're all guilty of spending too much money and trying to outdo ourselves but the best feeling doesn't come from material things. It comes from being together, putting aside our differences and showing one another love. By opening our doors to strangers who have now become friends, we experienced that love when we needed it most and it made for a Christmas none of us will ever forget.

# Christmas Standby

Jane Malyon, *Essex*

I'm playing "Jingle Bells" on the piano and the bauble-laden tree is sparkling over my shoulder. The smell of roasting turkey fills the house and I can see filled Christmas stockings waiting to be plundered. Ah, cue Noddy Holder: "It's Christmaaaaa..." No. Wait, that's the postman at the door in his shorts, the leaves are on the trees, plus, there's a fan on trying to keep us cool. Oh yes, it's August.

It could, in fact, be any time of year—except for late December! The problem is that our beloved grown sons live far, far away and almost never get home to England. George tours the world with Cirque du Soleil (currently in South Korea). Edward lives in Toronto and his girlfriend has to work around Christmas, so they can't travel either. Oh no—because I absolutely *love* everything about the festive season and live for family fun and togetherness, opening stockings, playing games and watching *Elf*. So we decided collectively on a solution. Whatever time of year it is that they get back home, even if only for one day—it is officially Christmas!

This started five years ago when my husband Roger was dutifully taking

down the tree decorations on the 12th night in January. He stopped to ask: "Am I going to have to hurriedly put this tree up again in a few months' time?" My answer "Probably..." was the start of having a tree up all year round and an ever-renewing assortment of gifts underneath it.

I remember the postman tapping on the window and asking if that was a Christmas tree in our room in May. And, of course, friends were puzzled to see Christmas stockings and presents under the tree all year round. But now, they know: we're on permanent Christmas Standby, you see—ready to jump into Santa action at the drop of a hat.

I'VE MANAGED TO  
DE-CHRISTMAS LATE  
DECEMBER AND FIND I  
CAN GET THE MAGICAL  
FESTIVE FEELINGS  
UNEXPECTEDLY



This year George managed five days in England. He arrived in August with his enchanting Austrian girlfriend who was unsure whether this happened in summer in every British home or just ours. Bless her for wearing her paper cracker hat, joining in on the jokes and trying to make sense of bread sauce. She was confused and delighted in equal measure when she found out





**George and his girlfriend  
opening their presents**



that there was a Christmas stocking for her too. Old-style Ray Conniff music was playing “Little Drummer Boy” while they opened prezzies with oohs and laughter. We had the fire going *with* an air cooling fan on in the room (only briefly!) and it all truly filled my heart to the brim. It will last me through the rest of the year and beyond.

As for that time around December 25 when you're all settling down to turkey and trimmings...well, we're free to try new things and locations. We may/may not have traditions, we may be cooking for others or going to friends', but I've actually managed to de-Christmas late December and find I can get the magical festive feelings unexpectedly in moments like watching a Nativity, hearing carols sung in a shopping centre or just sharing quality time with friends. It's all good. I've swapped two days of December for Christmas 365 days of

the year! Not the true religious meaning of course, but that cosy, glowing feeling of excitement, love and togetherness.

It's potentially even better because there is so much pressure (my brother says the word is “obligation”) around Christmas time: the meal has to be perfect, gifts must delight, certain relatives have to be invited and the house needs to look a certain way. Whereas, when we're rustling up Christmas in summer, we're not stressing

because we're too busy laughing at our own daftness searching for sprouts and parsnips in non-sprout-and-parsnip season. We're pleased at the ability to buy gifts at non-inflated December prices too and there's no queuing at the tills. I might even get more than one Christmas-time if our sons visit separately (we'll simply repeat the process!) so, for us, it's a win-win!

In the meantime, if you run out of sage and onion stuffing any time, you know you can borrow from us because living on Christmas Standby means you always have that to hand. Finding mistletoe in summer might be another matter but other than that, this works pretty well! So if your family squabbles over which relatives to spend Christmas with, just create an extra festive season and you'll find there's time enough to spend Christmas with everyone you love!

# When Love Outshines Darkness

Cherry Rowland, *Essex*

I've been a healthcare assistant with Marie Curie for four years. What led me to join this remarkable organisation was a deeply personal experience. Seven years ago, my father was in the hospital, and I was informed that he was in the end-of-life stage. He had wanted to be at home during his final moments, so I arranged for him to return home. He spent only one more night there, but he wasn't alone. A Marie Curie nurse was by our side. Facing the emotions that come with knowing a loved one is at the end of their life can be overwhelming—the fear, the adrenaline. Having a nurse with us made it easier to cope with these feelings. That's when I made the decision to join Marie Curie.

Working for the charity, I find myself on duty during most Christmases. We operate every single day of the year, including holidays. You might assume that being with families during their last Christmas, knowing it's a difficult time for the person they're caring for, would be a sad experience.



But what may surprise you is that it's not. The families, in my experience, are not sad. They make the most of the time they have left. They remain positive. Everyone knows what's coming; they understand that their loved one is dying, but it's not a time for sorrow; it's a time of togetherness and warmth.

I feel privileged to be there during this time of year because, sometimes, there are many family members present. They gather to celebrate Christmas one last time with their loved one. We can't change the inevitable, but we can make a difference. We provide support through the early stages of grief. And, surprisingly, for some families, death can be a relief because they don't want to see their loved one suffer any longer. They may feel guilty about it, but it's a normal feeling.

I've been there on Christmas Eve when we've lost someone. I remember one particular family—three sisters—and the fourth was in the end-of-life stage. When I arrived, she was unconscious, and I knew she might not make it through the night. But sitting with the sisters, talking about their childhood, reminiscing about past Christmases and sharing photos, it was a special time. They mentioned that their sister had asked for peaches and cream earlier that day, and they made sure she got it. She went to sleep, and we lost her that night.



## YOU MIGHT ASSUME THAT BEING WITH FAMILIES DURING THEIR LAST CHRISTMAS IS A SAD EXPERIENCE, BUT IT'S NOT



The sisters expected it, they thanked me, and it was a comforting experience. I'll always remember the peaches and cream!

I've lost count of the number of stories I've heard, especially during Christmas. Everyone has memories, and it's heartwarming to hear about them, particularly the ones from childhood. It's like any other time of the year when we visit their homes. Families like to talk about various aspects of life; it's therapeutic for them.

Our role is to support families and the individuals who are dying. We do

whatever they need us to do. For instance, one family asked us to play Christmas carols throughout the night. We accommodate such requests. What we do during Christmas is what we do throughout the year—we aim to please families. Christmas is

a typical time for healthcare assistants like us. You might walk into a house with a Christmas tree, and there might be grandchildren around. It's always different.

I've also been with many lonely, isolated individuals during Christmas. They wish to be at home, but they don't have many family members, and the only people they see are the daytime caregivers and us during the night. It's a sad time for them. We do whatever they'd like—sometimes they just want to chat or they're unconscious, in which case we sit with them. It's a very personal experience, and it can be quite sad when you walk into a dark room, not knowing where the patient is because the lights weren't switched on during the day.

There are some heartbreaking situations, but we are there until the end, and we do whatever it takes. We don't stop, even during Christmas. ■

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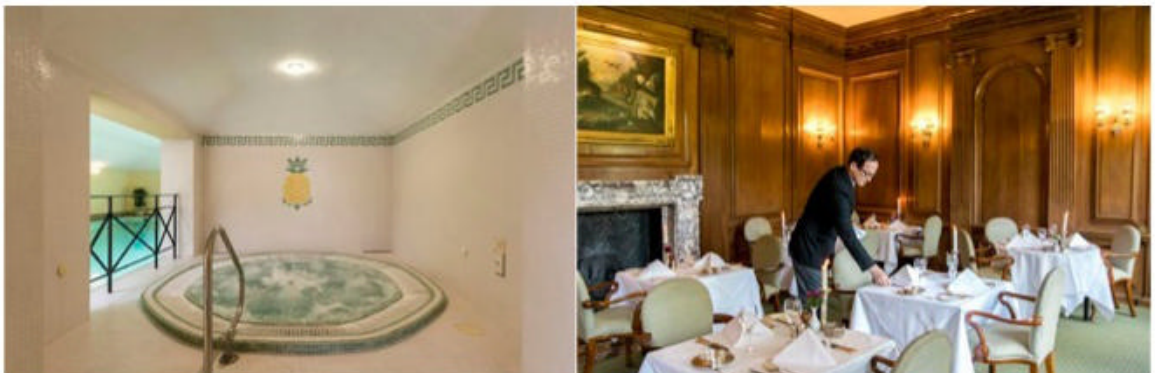
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# My Britain: Edinburgh

BY *Alice Gawthrop*

**C**HRISTMAS IN EDINBURGH is truly lovely. In fact, it's so lovely that Edinburgh tops most lists of "best places to visit for Christmas in the UK", and it's easy to see why. Known for its festivals all year round, the city doesn't take any time off in December, instead coming alive with festive decorations, markets and special events. Stroll through charming wooden stalls and pick out handmade gifts for your family, or warm up with some mulled wine, surrounded by twinkling Christmas lights.

If you're not so fussed about Christmas, you can take in the city's scenic views instead. Climb up the famous Arthur's Seat, an ancient volcano whose peak boasts panoramic views of Edinburgh and beyond. After a bracing walk up and down the hill, reward yourself with Scottish delicacies like haggis or neeps and tatties.

The party continues into the new year with the city's Hogmanay celebrations. Hogmanay is the Scots word for the last day of the old year, and it is often celebrated with firework displays and heartfelt renditions of "Auld Lang Syne" sung in a circle of linked arms. Edinburgh certainly doesn't hold back: its 1996–97 celebrations were recognised by the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest New Year party, with approximately 400,000 attendees. These days, Edinburgh's Hogmanay involves live music, fireworks and a torchlight display.

With the holiday season fast approaching, we speak to locals about what life is like among the magical markets, luminous light displays and sensational street parties. →



**Dani Rae is a director at Unique Assembly, who produce Edinburgh's Christmas, a festival which transforms the city centre with traditional markets, funfair rides and spectacular events**

[edinburgh-christmas.com](http://edinburgh-christmas.com)

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**I CAME TO EDINBURGH** as a student in September 2003 and never left. I did a degree in Drama and Theatre Arts, thinking that I wanted to perhaps be a performer, and then I got hooked on the Edinburgh festivals. I first worked for the Edinburgh International Children's Festival and then the Fringe. More recently I've got involved in Edinburgh Christmas and Hogmanay.

Edinburgh is like a big village really. You can turn the corner and see someone that you know. I grew up in Dumfries and Galloway so I was used to that kind of village feel. I was ready for more when I left, and I remember Edinburgh gave me that village feeling but with so much more to do and see. At Christmas, when you come into the station as a visitor, you look up and immediately see that incredible big wheel, the trees all sparkly, the gorgeous architecture and the castle. We're right in the heart of the city, and it feels like walking into an old-timey, magical kind of Christmas. It has a bit of a Hogwarts feel.

For me, Christmas starts in March. We get going really early so that



everything is ready to go by mid-November. It's been a big head shift for me—I've always been firmly in the "Christmas doesn't start until December" camp. But now it's my whole year!

Festivals are a big part of the city's identity. They started in 1947, and the whole premise was to cheer up postwar Britain. There's around 12 festivals throughout the year in Edinburgh, so it's a really big part of life here. It does feel like the majority of the city wants those festivals to be





there, and we see it in the people coming out to go to the markets, go for an ice skate, go and see Santa, you know.

Edinburgh's Christmas started small and has grown over the years. It's a responsive festival, we try to be reflective of the city. We have a beautiful market where you can come and buy things that are locally produced, as well as things you might not find in Edinburgh normally. We spread that across the city centre alongside a funfair with rides and



dodgems for the younger kids, and a beautiful ice rink. It's a lovely, safe space for people to come and have a bit of fun. Father Christmas is there, of course, but we also have a Festival of Kindness, so as well as receiving a gift you're encouraged to give back to temper that commercial feeling of Christmas. It's not just about buying, it's about giving. We're also partnering with our lovely community. Diwali will be hosted as part of the festival too which will be gorgeous. The whole city just comes alive with light trails and Christmas shows and pantos.

It's hard to pick a favourite spot in Edinburgh. I love the light in Edinburgh, so my favourite place is really anywhere you can sit in that light and see the sky. We've got so many beautiful green spaces in here—the Meadows, Princes Street Gardens. You can sit on a bench or lie in the grass and just look up and feel the light on your face.

**Callum Ross is the director of Cycling Gardeners, a collective of gardeners who combine the potential of electric power tools and cargo bikes**

[cyclinggardeners.co.uk](http://cyclinggardeners.co.uk)

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**I WAS BORN AND BRED IN EDINBURGH.** In my twenties I travelled extensively to Australia, South America and North America, but these were just trips before returning to Edinburgh. Edinburgh is a very competitive place when trying to build a career and many of my friends had to leave in order to pursue theirs. I decided to remain and though this at times proved to be difficult, the life I have built has given me such good rewards and memories, it was more than worth it.

Most of my family and friends live here and it is where 20 years ago I met my wife. I have an active social life that is centred here. Within the area we live, we get immersed in all aspects of its cultural life. A sense of community is



very important to me and Edinburgh gives me this through my friends and family, the people I work with and the clients we do gardening for.

Edinburgh simply explodes with colour and culture during its extended holiday season. It is not just its famous festival in the summer but its Christmas and Hogmanay celebrations which fill the city with tourists from all over the world. In December my business (based at Tollcross, at the edge of the Meadows) lights up its yard and turns into a base for selling Christmas trees. This gives us so much local community interaction and brings cheer to the area at the start of winter.

Along with the tourists, Edinburgh has loads of students who bring energy and diversity to the culture of the city. Although this can be overwhelming at times, if you embrace the good that it brings you can get so much out of the city. It is never a boring place to live with so much going on!

Although Edinburgh is actually quite a small city, it often feels more like a big town with so many small world coincidences always happening. I call it Edinburgh Village Syndrome as it seems that everybody is somehow related to each other by no more than just a few degrees of separation.

The Cycling Gardeners are a part of the local community.



By being totally dependent on bikes for transport we are limited to working within the city centre.

We have made life a bit easier on ourselves by using electric bikes, and we often beat cars in traffic and have no problem finding places to park. Our team are mostly young qualified horticulturalists who enjoy the freedom of working on their own on a bike. We have a great collective team spirit which is very important. Edinburgh's wet weather can be overcome by helping each other out, or by spending time in the many local cafes, catching up and



having a good moan about the rain!

Without doubt my favourite spot in Edinburgh is The

Meadows park. I was born in the hospital overlooking it and grew up in flats surrounding it. Much of my childhood days were spent there playing "out the front" when not in the back gardens. I met my wife there and it is where I take my young son to play. I have the happiest memories of sledging and building snowmen when the snow comes down. I really hope that this winter brings good snow so I can replicate my own childhood with my son!

**Hazel Johnson is the festival director at Hidden Door Festival, a pop-up arts festival in Edinburgh's abandoned and forgotten places**

[hiddendoorarts.org](http://hiddendoorarts.org)

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I'VE LIVED IN EDINBURGH for coming up to 20 years. My mum's family are from the area so I visited a lot as a child. I remember emerging from Waverly Station for the first time and being absolutely awestruck by the hulking form of the castle, and the jutting skyline sweeping down the Royal Mile. That first impression clearly stuck as I ended up returning to study—and staying!

Edinburgh is a city that can show off its assets in any weather—rain or shine, snow or *haar* (fog). During the holiday season it is reasonable to expect a bit of a *dreich* climate, made all the more seasonal by lights from the Christmas market twinkling through the wind in the trees in Princes Street Gardens. And if you don't fancy joining in with the crowds, the Old Town in particular isn't short of a number of excellent hosteleries ready to provide festive cheer! Edinburgh is also a city of beautiful architecture; from medieval twisting turrets to neoclassical delights (not for nothing was the city known as the "Athens of the North"), there is always something new that catches your eye. My advice for any visitor is not to forget to look up—the



roofs and skyline of the city's streets are a treat. I love the culture and vibrant arts scene here—there is always something new and exciting to discover! This time of year is no different, with gigs, exhibitions and events to fill your diary with.

Lots of people refer to Edinburgh as a village, and I've certainly found that often you can't walk anywhere without bumping into a friendly face or three. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, even though Edinburgh is a capital city, it feels



temporarily transforming them into unique sites for visitors to discover new creative talent across a range of art forms. We programme music, visual art, theatre, dance and spoken word, film—and more! One of the greatest privileges of working for Hidden Door is how many wonderful, creative and talented people I get to meet. And one of the greatest perks is the fantastic spaces we get to explore! Most recently, in June 2023, we opened up an amazing and vast empty 20th century office building for a five-day festival. With the help of our volunteers and the local community we built stages,

exhibition spaces, immersive performance spaces, brought in some of Edinburgh's finest street food vendors, and constructed beautiful pop-up bars. One of the reasons Hidden Door is so special is that it is Edinburgh's own independent arts festival—it exists because so many people are giving of their time and skills to pull it all together.

This December we're holding a festive art sale, both online and at the magnificent Hub building at the top of the

Royal Mile. We're bringing together the work of some of Edinburgh's most exciting artists, so you might just find the perfect Christmas present! More information can be found on our website.

like a place where you can make things happen.

Hidden Door is an arts charity run by volunteers, and since 2014 we have held regular multi-arts festivals in unusual or disused spaces and buildings across Edinburgh,

# Luke O'Neill

## If I Ruled The World

Luke O'Neill is a world renowned scientist, author and educator, and professor of biochemistry at Trinity College Dublin

**We would plant more trees** There would be trees everywhere: native trees, trees from your own country planted. Wouldn't it be marvellous? My wife is planting 6000 Irish trees on some land, with a grant from the Irish Forestry people. There's this Japanese term, "forest bathing", which is where you walk through trees and look up. It makes sense, we came from the forest after all.

**Healthcare would be made accessible** We need to keep working to make healthcare accessible to everyone.

What's the point in all of these new discoveries and medicines if people don't have access to them? I feel that my discoveries have a lot more meaning to them if they actually help people. This is especially true with the ageing population. There's a new discovery with Alzheimer's—people need access to that and the world economy needs to be set up in a way that means people all over the world can access healthcare.

### **Everyone would do science up to 18**

Science should be a critical part of a child's education. It's more important than ever. Obviously every other subject is important too, but the world is becoming more and more scientific. One example is vaccines. They save lives. Science allows you to engage in that complexity, to understand how science and medicines can help you. The jobs of the future are tech-based too, so it's really beneficial. Also, science is just fun. My book, which comes out in October, is all about the fun in science. Schools could do with a bit more investment, because science is an experiential thing and you need resources to make sure you can do practical work in class.

### **Better controls on social media**

There's a lot of malignancy online. Who would have thought this marvellous thing called the internet could become malignant? I didn't have this growing up, when I was a

teenager. I would want to stop trolling, to have restrictions on trolling that can hurt young people. I think social media can be undemocratic, people can be attacked for having their views. I had it myself because I was advocating for vaccines in the Irish media. People came at me, but luckily I'm old, I can handle that. If I was young, that could have put me off. Social media can be so damaging. We've evolved to listen to the negative, to be on our guard the whole time and social media feeds that part of us. Actually, it's funny. I was in a lecture once and the lecturer said, "Can you swap phones with the person next to you?" and there was just instant anxiety in the room. Social media and phones can be an addiction, almost.

### **I would regulate Artificial Intelligence**

I don't know how we regulate it; it's just beginning, but it's definitely something that needs our attention. It can be a useful teaching aid. It's not all bad, but I'd set up a commission to see where it could go. I think Oppenheimer himself said, "We need to put controls on this (the atom bomb) before it becomes a disaster." AI is like the atom bomb, something where we really need to consider where it could go. It could be amazing, if there are regulations.

**Presidents should retire at 70** This is a bit tongue in cheek. I think people should be able to work as much as they want, but I feel like, to be president, you have to be so aware of the current times. You don't want to be so removed from the public. If I was 70 though, maybe I'd have a different opinion.

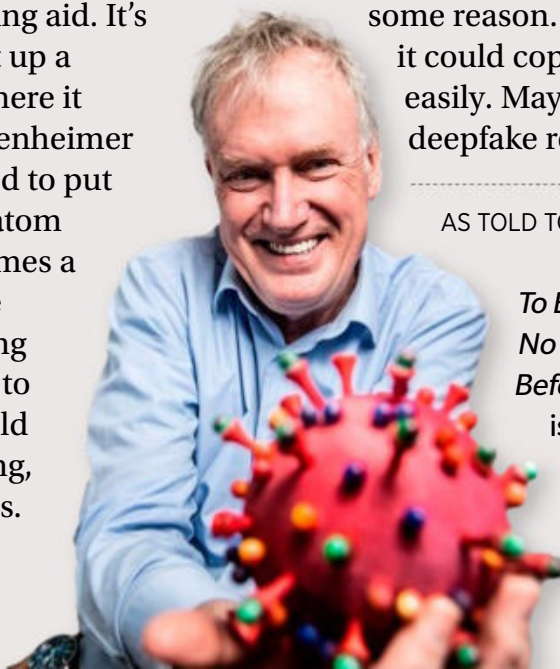
### **I would ban saying the same phrases over and over**

There's this terrible saying that is "Yeah, no." For example, when you say "What do you think of spaghetti Bolognese?" and someone says "Yeah, no" automatically. What does it mean? I've given my editor a huge thanks in my acknowledgements because I used the word "huge" 150 times in the book. As writers we have those little phrases, don't we? Someone actually gave me a poster with all of my phrases on it as a goodbye gift when they left the lab. One of my phrases is "very, very interesting", with "very" twice for some reason. Going back to AI, it could copy me very (very) easily. Maybe it has and I'm a deepfake robot? ■

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AS TOLD TO OWEN SCOTT

*To Boldly Go Where  
No Book Has Gone  
Before* by Luke O'Neill  
is published by  
Viking (out now,  
£22 hardback)



## GOLDSTER'S FREE ONLINE EVENT

### *Increase Energy:*

As the year winds down and darker nights draw in, energy levels can drop and with end-of-year festivities approaching it's important to fuel and maximise vitality. To support you, we've teamed up with **Goldster Nutritionist Claudia le Feuvre** who will guide you through a free online event on Sunday 3rd December, 2pm - 4.30pm, that will make sure you end your year feeling balanced and energetic.

#### CUSTOMER QUOTE:

"I have attended Claudia's classes for the past year and will not miss them. I've learned so much and am so grateful to be able to receive such fantastic advice from such a lovely lady. Thank you, Claudia, and Goldster."

*-Patricia*

Claudia is a Nutritional Therapist & Eating Psychology Coach. She has 16 years of clinical experience helping clients with a wide range of health concerns. Claudia lectures at The British College of Nutrition & Health, and The Nutritional Healing Foundation.



Let's savour nourishing foods that boost our energy levels and help us thrive. By taking care of ourselves, we ensure we have the energy to make the most of this joyful season. There's never been a better time to prioritise health and vitality."

Claudia says, "As we gear up for the end-of-year festivities, looking after our energy is essential for enjoying celebrations to the fullest.

Join Claudia as she hosts Goldster's Free online event, "Increase Energy" with other leading experts in the field of health and wellbeing.



**INCREASE ENERGY EVENT: SUNDAY 3RD DECEMBER, 2PM - 4.30PM**



**2:00pm:** Welcome with **Claudia Le Feuvre**.

**2:15 - 2:45pm:** **Andrew Lane** - Medicine and your energy levels.

**2:45 - 3:15pm:** **Claudia Le Feuvre** - Nourishing foods for health and restoration.

**3:15 - 3:45pm:** **Andy Yau** - Tai Chi for energy and flow.

**3:45 - 4:15pm:** **Celia Garcia** - Spiritual guidance to safeguard your energy.

**4:15 - 4:30pm:** Got questions? The experts have answers in a Q&A session.



**Andrew Lane**

Andrew is the Head of the National Pharmacy Association. He provides a deep understanding of how various pharmaceuticals can impact your overall wellbeing.



**Andy Yau**

Andy, a Tai Chi expert, assists individuals in discovering their unique flow. Through this gentle, poetic movement, he unveils the secrets of physical and mental harmony.



**Celia Garcia**

Celia is a Reiki Master and Energy Teacher who specialises in providing techniques that empower individuals to enhance their energy field, for a sense of balance and positivity.

*GOLDSTER IS A PERSONALISED, ONLINE, EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTH COMMUNITY, OFFERING 450 LIVE AND ON-DEMAND CLASSES MONTHLY FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING*

**goldster.co.uk**

# Under <sup>The</sup> Grandfluences: Grandad Frank

## Owen Scott talks to the fun-loving social media sensation, Grandad Frank



**YOU MIGHT HAVE SEEN** the honorary Grandad-to-the-nation: Grandad Frank. His TikToks made us laugh during lockdown, when he and his granddaughter Kiera could only see each other from across the fence, but the pair didn't stop. Grandad Frank's TikTok account has reached 7 million followers, he's appeared with Kiera on *This Morning* and he's met a famous superfan, Niall Horan, on BBC Radio.

### How did you get started with TikTok?

**Kiera:** It was November 2019. I got Pops to do a little dance and got his permission to post it. It went viral.

**Frank:** I think we were fortunate; we were in there at the beginning. There weren't many grandads on TikTok, so we sort of cornered the market.

### What work did you do before TikTok, throughout your life?

**Frank:** I've done so many things. I

worked on the London Underground and the last job I had was being a school minibus driver. I just loved it.

### Do you have a favourite TikTok that you've made?

**Kiera:** He likes to dress up as Carl from the film *Up*.

**Frank:** We always get a great response from that. I think it's the hair.

**Kiera:** When we started, everyone said he looked like Carl. One Halloween I got him to dress like Carl, which got a great response. For me, it's the ones where he dances. They're so funny.

### How do you feel about all of the celebrity love you've got?

**Kiera:** It still is just a bit of fun, but we've had so many opportunities. We

got responses from Gary Barlow and Ed Sheeran.

**Frank:** We're very fortunate because we live next door to each other. When the pandemic hit and the shutdown happened, we were fortunate because we could still do our TikToks over the wall. That was a great help, I think. Making those TikToks around that time, I think had a lot to do with how big they became. The response is always great. We're still waiting on a phone call from Gary Barlow though!

### Do you have a celebrity you'd love to collaborate with?

**Kiera:** Ours are very different.

**Frank:** Niall Horan. He loves golf, I love golf.

**Kiera:** We spoke to him on a Zoom with Zoe Ball on BBC Radio, which, for my childhood self, was amazing. If he got to meet Harry Styles, that would be absolutely unreal.

**Frank:** Maybe we could get Niall Horan and Harry Styles.

**Kiera:** A One Direction reunion!

### Are you recognised out in public?

**Frank:** I get recognised everywhere. Even if it's at a show, I get recognised in the audience. It blows my mind.

**Kiera:** When we're at home, all of the responses to the TikToks are on a screen but, when people started coming up to Pops, that's when we realised, "Oh people are really paying attention." It's an unexpected feeling.

**Frank:** But always a good feeling.

### How do you feel about the fact you inspire so many people?

**Frank:** It's really nice to hear older people say "we've seen what you do" and then, because of that, get involved with technology. Especially during lockdown.

**Kiera:** We always get comments about him being people's grandad.

That's why, whenever we do videos thanking people who watch, we call them "grandchildren", not fans.

**Frank:** A lot of teenagers have never met their grandparents, but they say they wish they had a grandad like me. That really moves me. It makes me realise how lucky I am to have my family around me.

### What do you think it is that has connected with so many people?

**Kiera:** It's because it's wholesome, family content. It pulls on the heartstrings. It pulls on mine, when I watch the videos. Some of them make me really emotional.

### Would you say social media has improved our lives?

**Frank:** Big question. It has such an impact on everybody.

**Kiera:** I think it's enhanced our lives. It's made the bond between Pops and I even closer. It's given us so many great opportunities.

**Frank:** I have a brother and a son in Australia, as well as a son in Manchester and family in Galway, but we can all connect on Zoom. ■

Why do we feel younger  
than we actually are?

# Young At Heart

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BY *Enrique Alpañés* FROM *EL PAIS*

**HER CHRONOLOGICAL AGE** is 66 but her subjective age is 40. The woman I'll call Ana did not become fully aware of this disconnect until she went for her COVID-19 vaccination a couple of years ago. As she stood in line, surrounded by her contemporaries, she looked around and thought: *Are they really my age?* Later, amused and slightly worried, she discussed it with her friends. Almost all of them said the same thing had happened to them.

According to a 2006 Danish study published in the *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, people over age 40 perceive themselves to be, on average, 20 per cent younger than what their ID indicates. Having a younger subjective age begins at age 25—before then, most people tend to feel *older* than they are.

Why do some of us feel that the number of candles on our birthday cake can't be right? Psychologists and scientists have been studying this phenomenon since the 1970s. Some wonder about the cultural factors that push us to look younger. A 1989 study by the American Psychological Association concluded that subjective



age identities are “a form of defensive denial by which adults can disassociate themselves from the stigma attached to growing old.”

Belén Alfonso (chronological age 35, subjective age 30) agrees. “We internalise negative stereotypes about old age, so we resist identifying ourselves with being an older person,” says the psychologist, who specialises in gender studies. Alfonso explains that these ageist attitudes especially persecute women, who are the target of advertising that associates being active and attractive with being young. “In contrast, old age is associated with being unproductive, ill and dependent,” she says.

Alfonso doesn’t believe that a mature person should be blamed for perceiving themselves, or presenting themselves to others, as younger, but she argues that we need to understand the social context that pushes them to do so. “Having a subjective age of 20 when we are 65, for example, suggests that we see ourselves as energetic, strong, attractive. But why can’t we associate those qualities with being 65?”

Take Madonna. The singer, who is 65, has long been criticised for how she presents herself: a woman confident in herself and her sexuality. Surrounded by people who could be her children, Madonna twerks, smokes cannabis, shows off her vibrators and joins viral trends on TikTok. Judging by the comments on

social media, many people see this as a big problem—they believe that a woman in her sixties should cover herself up and not attract attention.

In a statement posted on Instagram earlier this year, the singer responded to the haters: “Once again I am caught in the glare of the ageism and misogyny that permeate the world we

## THOSE WHO PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AS YOUNGER TEND TO BE HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER

live in. A world that refuses to celebrate women past the age of 45 and feels the need to punish her if she continues to be strong-willed, hardworking and adventurous. I have never apologised for any of the creative choices I have made, nor the way that I look or dress, and I’m not going to start.”

For Belén Alfonso, Madonna “shows us that physical activity, eroticism and trending on social media are not exclusive to a specific age.” But the problem is that in the music industry, pop divas are supposed to be young; mature women often feel pressured into getting cosmetic surgery and using Photoshop to fit into a single mould.

Nor has age constrained Paddy Jones in the UK. Her place was on the

dance floor—and in the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest acrobatic salsa dancer in the world. Well into her eighties, she danced salsa with an agility and fearlessness that many would want for themselves at 40 (“I don’t plead my age, because I don’t feel 80, or act it,” she once said in an interview). Her videos, which are hypnotic, tender and slightly terrifying, have accumulated millions of views.

A dancer as a young woman, Jones gave it up to have a family. But her fame came much later: in 2009, at age 75, she entered the Spanish TV dance competition *Tú sí que vales* (*You Are Worth It*) with “Nico” Espinosa, 40 years her junior—and won.

Her story went viral, and she danced on shows in the UK (she and Espinosa made the finals of *Britain’s Got Talent*), Germany, Chile and Italy. In interviews she encouraged women to throw down their walking stick and go after their dreams in defiance of ageist stereotypes. She has squeezed the juice out of each year, competing until 2021, when she performed on *Spain’s Got Talent*; she and Nico made it through the first round. Now 88 years old, she no longer competes. Subjective age can help improve quality of life, but in the end, real age imposes itself.

Chronological age cannot be modified, “but lifestyle and behaviour can influence subjective age,” says Bruno Arpino, a sociologist at the University of Padua in Italy who

coordinated a European study looking at the quality of life of elderly people. Arpino is 43 and prefers not to say how young he is in subjective years (“I study the subject, so my answer would be biased”). He says there are positives for people who perceive themselves as younger than their real age.

“They tend to be healthier, happier with their lives,” Arpino says, “and they live longer.” But he cautions that it’s not known to what extent these positives are a cause or an effect. “The phenomenon occurs mostly among people who are active for their age,” he points out.

Other factors that lead to us perceiving ourselves as younger are being sociable, cultivating hobbies or having intergenerational relationships.

**ALL THE STUDIES** and theories seem to boil down to a rather simple idea: in adulthood, it’s hard to find our place. At the high-school reunion, we may feel we are the best-preserved of our fellow alumni. That’s OK, but it’s not real; it may be a disappointment to realise you look just as old as everyone else your age.

At the end of the day, seeing yourself as younger can be good for your physical and mental health. So be defiant, like Madonna, or a dancer, like Paddy Jones. Forever young, to the end. ■

© 2023 FROM “LA EDAD SUBJETIVA: EL MISTERIO POR EL QUE UNA PERSONA SE SIENTE MÁS JOVEN DE LO QUE ES” BY ENRIQUE ALPAÑÉS, *EL PAIS* (MARCH 14, 2023) [ELPAIS.COM](http://ELPAIS.COM)







# HOW TO GET ALONG WITH ANYONE

**Master awkward conversations with these nine tricky personality types**

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BY *Rosemary Counter*

**WHILE MAKING POLITE** small talk at a baby shower, my day was quickly ruined. “Ooh, are you expecting?!” asked a family friend, looking me up and down. I sheepishly shook my head, instantly regretting both my party dress and my plate of mini-sandwiches. Then, just when I thought it couldn’t get worse, it did: “Well,” she asked, “why not?”

My mind flooded with reasons and retorts—“just fat, thanks,” deep-rooted doubts about my maternal capabilities, fear of climate change, or perhaps a well-deserved expletive—but, sadly, none materialised. Instead I murmured that I was busy with work and

excused myself to mope for the rest of the afternoon.

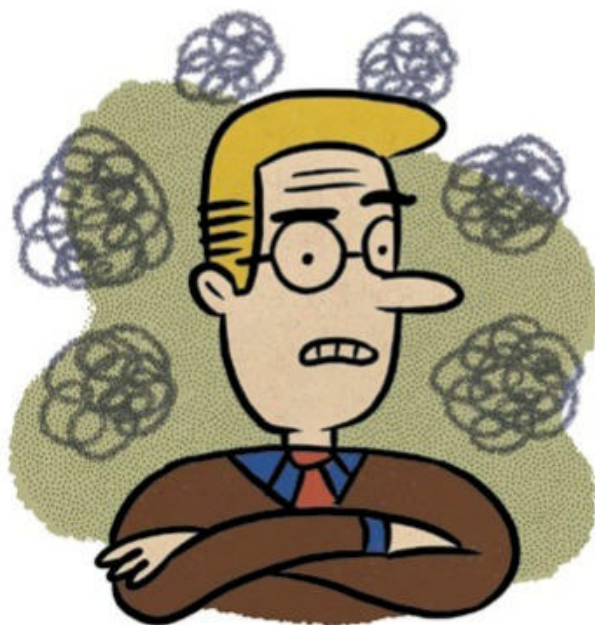
I've since recovered emotionally, but I sometimes wonder: what should I have said to a nosy question from a rude person? And how about all those other challenging personalities we have to talk to, whether we want to or not? So I asked experts about how to deal with the trickiest, tackiest, meanest and most maddening personalities.

## THE COMPLAINER

You know the type: this restaurant's too pricey, the music's too loud, their burger is overdone and they can hardly taste it anyhow because they're coming down with something. People who whine are great fodder for comedians. But in real life, the Complainer isn't so funny.

"This is a person who thinks life is unfair to them," says Jody Carrington, a psychologist and author of *Feeling Seen: Reconnecting in a Disconnected World* in Alberta. Nobody is that bummed out by a burger; they're down about other, bigger things and are taking it out on specific, controllable things, like what's on their plate (not to mention the unfortunate server who delivered it).

How should you deal with this good-mood thief? "If you want to interact better with these people, it starts with empathy," says Carrington (this is true for all tricky personalities, but



especially for a Complainer). Start by removing the small stuff from the equation—maybe let them choose the restaurant—so you can both focus on the big picture. Get them to talk about what's really bothering them and challenge their negativity with questions about what's good, fun and exciting in their lives.

Like the old adage goes, says Carrington: "You've gotta kill 'em with kindness and hope it rubs off."

## THE CONTRARIAN

You say it's a nice day; they say it's too hot. You've read a good book; it was the worst book they've read in a decade. You mention that they contradict everything you say; they say, "No, I don't!"

"A Contrarian is someone who just likes to argue," explains Mónica

Guzmán, Seattle, Washington-based author of *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times*. “Sometimes this is fun, but other times it’s aggressive and unpleasant. The Contrarian can’t always tell the difference.” While you’re arguing the issue at hand, they’re arguing just for the sake of the argument—and so they win every time.

How to better brave this battle? A Contrarian only wants to spar, so you should pick your battles. For anything inconsequential, says Ian Leslie, a London-based argument expert and author of *Conflicted: Why Arguments Are Tearing Us Apart and How They Can Bring Us Together*, “the most disarming way to handle a contrarian is to say you agree with them.”

This doesn’t mean you should lie; try “I agree with you on *that*” about something small and specific, or “I can definitely see your point” if you truly don’t agree on a single thing. Then change the topic.

When you want to stand your ground, you can move the Contrarian beyond their default defence position by becoming a more nuanced opponent. “You can sometimes get them off the

opinion showdown by asking them for their story or experience with a matter,” says Guzmán. Asking “How did you come to believe that?” or “Has that ever happened to you?” can move a conversation away from a competition of opinions and toward a personal perspective. You might learn that you value their opinion after all.

## THE CHATTERBOX

If you can’t ever seem to finish a story or sentence, chances are you’re face-to-face with a Chatterbox. Despite the cute name, they can be a frustrating bunch, explains communication expert Sandy Gerber of Vancouver Island. As the author of *Emotional Magnetism: How to Communicate to Ignite Connection in Your*



*Relationships* puts it: “The Chatterbox is a story stealer. They identify with what you’re saying and then give a story about themselves.”

It can feel like the Chatterbox is constantly trying to one-up you, but it’s not necessarily true. They could be socially anxious, uncomfortable with silence or just extra passionate and excitable. But whatever the reason, they probably don’t even notice they do this, nor the deeper reason why.

“Particularly in kids, Chatterboxes could also be called connection seekers,” says Carrington. “That’s all they’re after, but they’re not giving you the chance to connect back.” And because they’re chatting a mile a minute in this tediously talkative catch-22, you might not notice until you’re irked on the drive home, having realised all your stories were hijacked.

Next time, try the phrase you’d least expect: “Tell me more.” Says Carrington: “Choose a topic and let them exhaust it. Ask them questions, follow up and really listen.”

Once the Chatterbox has run out of things to say, their need to be heard has been met, so now it’s your turn. Jump in with something like, “I love your stories and I have one for you, too.” For once, the floor is yours.

## THE TECH ADDICT

Socially, few things are more annoying than someone repeatedly checking their phone in the middle of your conversation with them. Soon enough, you’re projecting sulky thoughts their way like, *I’m boring you/You’re more concerned with whoever’s on that phone than me/You don’t care about me*, explains Carrington. None of that is necessarily true, but this is: “If someone is engaged in a great conversation, they wouldn’t care about their phone,” she says. Ouch.

Whether you say something or not, remember the Tech-Addict’s annoying habits aren’t about you. “It’s rude, for sure, but sometimes we mistake the behaviour for more than what it is,” says Leslie. “It’s possible



they're just nervous or anxious," he says. It's also possible their partner is stranded with a flat tyre or their child is sick. The point is, you don't know.

So before you hastily rage at the Tech-Addict's blatant rudeness, focus instead on building a better conversation than whatever's going down on their Instagram feed.

You might never be able to achieve this, given the power of today's clickbait, so if you're close enough to a person, Carrington advises you to cheekily ask them: "What's on that thing that's so alluring?". Chances are they'll apologise and sheepishly tuck the phone away (but if the answer is something real, talk about it).

Better yet, avoid the situation in advance by saying something like, "I'm really interested in catching up properly, so how about we leave our phones in the car?". If they indeed have that flat tyre or sick kid, you won't have to assume it's because your stories all suck.

## THE POLITICAL ANTAGONIST

Oh boy. This person's ideology is fundamentally different than yours. They've read the news (and/or the dark web) and they're eager to talk about it.



No family is immune to political differences, though Guzmán, an American, has a complicated case: she's the liberal daughter of Mexican immigrants who voted for Donald Trump twice. And, naturally, they want to discuss differing politics loudly over dessert.

Like the Contrarian, the Political Antagonist loves to argue—but they've got a great big end game of changing your mind. They can't, and won't, change theirs, and neither will you, because you're both passionate about your politics—which is exactly why they've singled you out for a fight. *Sigh.*

Turn that bad thought good, however, by remembering they chose you because they consider you a worthy intellectual opponent and

cannot operate without you. “If they’re your adversary, you’re probably theirs, too,” Guzmán says.

Politics and religion used to be no-go zones of polite conversation, but no longer—and that’s a good thing. “Heat in a conversation is good,” says Guzmán. “It means you’re exposing yourself to different points of view. You’re learning.”

Ian Leslie concurs: “Many couples and families thrive on these discussions, which can sound like arguments. It’s all about having richer, more productive arguments, rather than avoiding them.”

However, he says, bringing personal hostility into it is definitely crossing the line. If you’re nearing that boundary, turn down the dial. If your sparring partner is getting angry or aggressive, try Guzmán’s suggestion to de-escalate: “I’m sorry, I didn’t realise that this mattered so much to you.” You could continue with “tell me more,” if, and only if, a more productive conversation feels possible in that situation.

But if the discussion is just too heated, a distraction is an excellent exit strategy. Try “Time for dessert!” (because we can all agree on dessert).



## THE INAPPROPRIATE JOKESTER

Every family has one, so let’s call him “Uncle Bob”: he’s loud and brash, his opinions haven’t changed since the 1980s, and just as you’re happily passing the potatoes, he decides to drop a totally inappropriate joke.

There are some possible explanations for the Inappropriate Jokester’s regular faux pas. “They could be blind to their prejudices, are trying to be controversial or are intolerant of other points of view,” explains Chuck Wisner, a Massachusetts-based leadership adviser, personal coach and author of *The Art of Conscious Conversations: Transforming How We Talk, Listen, and Interact*. But none of these explanations justify discrimination.

So, should you feign a chuckle to keep the peace or confront Bob for his (racist, sexist, classist, homophobic) “joke”? Naturally, it depends. “If a person who represents that particular group is present, you probably need to intervene because it’s the right thing to do,” says Guzmán. You should say something both for that person’s dignity and to avoid the guilt of being a silent bystander—an act that often hurts the offended person as much as the joke does.

But you don’t have to declare Uncle Bob a despicable racist and insist he change his ways this instant (he won’t). “Saying ‘Uncle Bob, that’s not OK,’” as Guzmán suggests, says everything that everyone’s thinking in few words. Or try Wisner’s phrasing: “That sounds racist to me. I know you don’t mean that.” The jokester is unlikely to respond with “I do, actually, as I’m very racist.”

If the comment is so inflammatory it sparks further conversation, be careful to critique the joke, not the person, and frame your criticism as your own.

Wisner suggests saying: “To me, that joke is offensive. Let me tell you why.” This could be a good chat for later, when Bob is calm and alone, when there’s time for a non-confrontational conversation about what’s really going on.

“There’s something in every bad joke that says, ‘I’m frustrated but I can’t say it,’” says Guzmán. If you can get Bob to let it out, hopefully he’ll do better at the next family gathering.

## THE DRAMA QUEEN

“The Chatterbox on steroids,” in Carrington’s words, the Drama Queen (or King) is someone who similarly dominates the conversation, chatting your ear off about all the wild things you will never believe are happening in the “Worst. Week. Ever!” (the boring details of your week, meanwhile, can’t possibly compare with what’s going on in their life, so don’t even try).

Why are they like this? “This person’s always exaggerating because they want to be the centre of attention,” says Gerber. The more they do this, the more we pull away from the over-the-top emotions of a life in constant crisis.

“We tend to avoid them because keeping up with the drama is an energy sucker,” says Carrington. “But this only means they’ll turn it up. They’ve often exhausted other people in their lives so they come on even stronger.” The Drama Queen desperately wants your attention and she’s also terrified she’ll lose it; she’s putting on a show in hopes you’ll never look away.

But deep down, what the Drama Queen wants to know is that you’d meet her for lunch without the dramatics. Resist the urge to cut her off; instead set boundaries you can both stick to.

“Be really clear in advance about what you’re willing and not willing to do,” says Carrington. Maybe this means you’ll talk about her ex for 20 minutes but no longer. Or maybe it

means you reschedule lunch until “a week when you’re feeling better.”

She might be mad in the moment, but the Drama Queen secretly loves the regular-person treatment that shows you’re sticking around for the real her—no drama required.

## THE FRENEMY

Though all these personalities are difficult, perhaps none is more so than the Frenemy—someone who is equal parts friend and enemy, a subtle and complicated phenomenon. “I call this a see-saw friendship,” says Gerber. “Because of the highs and lows, you never know what you’re going to get.” One day your friend is fun to be with; the next they seem a bit mean—and you have no clue why.

“The Frenemy is passive-aggressive and motivated by their perceived lack of value,” says Gerber. “They’re rolling their eyes at anything that *you* have, or do, that feels like it’s undervaluing *them*.” To feel better about themselves, the Frenemy is desperate to knock you down a little bit at a time.

When dealing with a Frenemy, protect yourself by recognising a negative judgement and not taking it personally. “These people are almost firing arrows at you,” explains Wisner,



“so you can dodge the arrow; let the arrow pierce and hurt or offend you; or catch the arrow and stop it.” Options A and B are easy in the moment, but C is the brave choice if you want things to change. To start a difficult conversation, Wisner suggests saying, “That doesn’t feel sincere to me. Did you mean that?”

That might address a particular jab, but if you actually want to fix and save the friendship in question—and maybe you don’t—you’re going to need to dig deeper.

“These people are competitive on the surface, but underneath they’re insecure and highly distrustful,” says Gerber. To turn a Frenemy into a real friend, you’re going to have to talk about it.

“Tell them what you’re looking for in a friendship and what you’re willing to offer,” she says. “But if they can’t or



won't have that conversation, well, that's your answer."

## THE OVERSHARER

Unsolicited commentary about someone's sex life, their best friend's messy divorce or whatever just happened in the bathroom (yuck) are all clues you've got an Oversharer on your hands. Whether they're telling too much or asking for details you're not comfortable sharing, this all-too-common persona has neither a filter nor boundaries.

Why would anyone in their right mind list their irritable bowel syndrome symptoms over brunch? Because of two specific human qualities.

The first is an unwritten personal boundary that's far, far from yours. "The discomfort you feel comes from a difference of standards about what topics of conversation are OK," says Wisner. "What they consider to be acceptable, need-to-know information is different than what it is for you."

At the same time, the Oversharer is also trying to get closer to you by revealing more things about themselves—and hoping you'll do

the same. "We tend to label these people as nosy, invasive or rude," notes Gerber, "but they really just want to be liked and accepted."

To satisfy the Oversharer, and simultaneously veto the endless commentary, consider sharing something else—still personal but less invasive, ideally—that satisfies their urge to connect. When they really cross the line, say something that indicates your boundary is being crossed. "That's private!" says everything, and you'll never have to bring it up again.

A compliment also works wonders with an Oversharer, adds Gerber, because it refocuses the conversation in their direction while subtly resetting your boundary. For example, I could have given this wise response to my nosy family friend at the baby shower who asked about the state of my uterus: "You made having kids look so easy! How did you do it?" (then nod and smile, nod and smile).

I missed my chance that time. But next time, I'll be ready to face an Oversharer—or any of the challenging people it takes to make a world. ■



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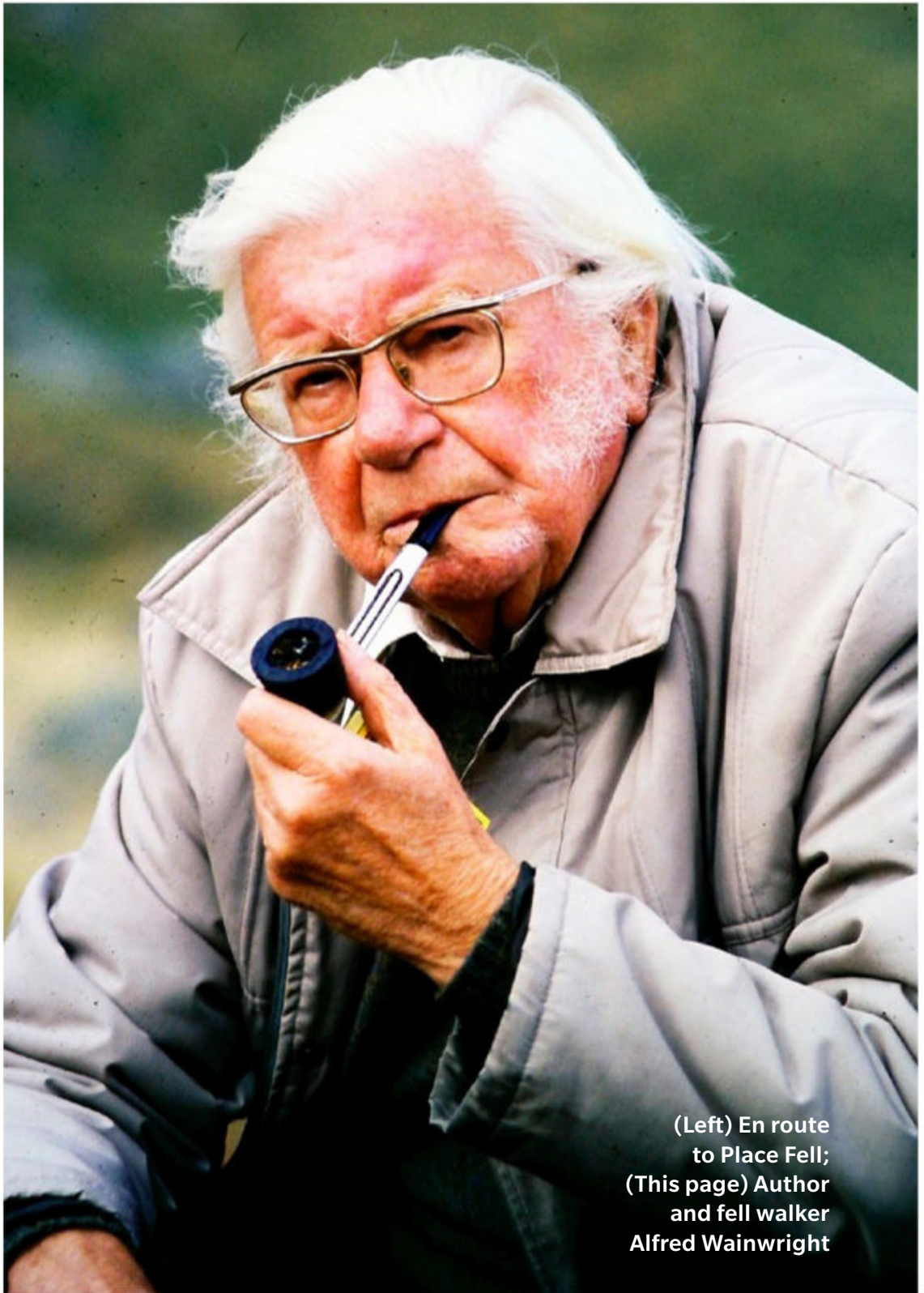
A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue zip-up shirt, olive green shorts, and a backpack, is hiking on a dirt path. He is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a vast, scenic view of the Lake District, with rolling green hills, a winding path, and a lake in the distance under a clear sky.

IN THE  
FOOTSTEPS  
OF WAINWRIGHT

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BY *Richard Webber*

Inspired by Alfred Wainwright's writings, Richard Webber walks up multiple Lake District fells with stunning views



(Left) En route  
to Place Fell;  
(This page) Author  
and fell walker  
Alfred Wainwright

## THE GREY BLANKET HAD LAIN HEAVILY ACROSS THE FELL TOPS ALL MORNING

but as I trudged up the muscle-wrenching track towards the summit of Blencathra, the veil of swirling mist gave way to shafts of sunlight.

By the time I reached the top of one of my favourite Lake District fells, the sky was awash with blue.

A fellow walker huddled against a pile of rocks smiled. “Someone must be looking after you. It’s been a real pea-souper up here but you’ve brought the sun,” he said, munching the remnants of his sandwich.

Lakeland is England’s dampest region and I’ve endured my share of drenchings in this corner of the country, but this time the sun was a frequent companion.

Being able to enjoy some cloud-free fell tops was a huge relief because I was spending only a few days following in the footsteps of the late Alfred Wainwright, a hillwalking legend who knew this part of the world like the back of his hand.

It’s over 70 years since AW—as he was often called—first put pen to paper. This piece of writing—covering his ascent of Dove Crag—marked the beginning of his first *Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells*. Six more guidebooks—all beautifully presented with intricately detailed walking

routes and appealing ink drawings—followed, as well as other books.

His late wife, Betty, once described AW as a “sensitive, shy man who sought anonymity, hiding himself behind a gruff exterior”. He preferred to walk alone and the occasions he enjoyed the most were those when he had the fells to himself.

I must admit, I can appreciate his sentiments because nothing beats walking at one’s own pace, stopping when you want and being alone at a mountain’s summit—and there are enough of those in the Lake District.

Within the seven volumes of his pictorial guides, AW detailed 214 peaks, which became known as Wainwrights, and all but one—Castle Crag—are over 1,000 feet in height.

Interestingly, the Blackburn-born accountant, writer and intrepid walker never intended to publish the guides, he simply wanted a record for his own pleasure. He once wrote: “Drawing brought the mountains to my own fireside...I could wander over them seated in an easy chair, on a bleak winter’s night.”



**TIME CONSTRAINTS MEANT** I only had a small window of opportunity to conquer a few fells, starting with Blencathra, which AW regarded as a “mountain that compels attention, even from those people whose eyes are not habitually lifted to the hills.”

It’s near impossible for anyone to miss the imposing grandeur of this fell rising high above the village of Threlkeld. Walkers are afforded various routes to the exposed summit, including Halls Fell Ridge, which I mastered. It’s direct and, at times, a scramble but brings you to within feet of the summit cairn. Another option is the infamous Sharp Edge, the most challenging and discussed crest of rock in the Lakes, and—in my view—best left to very experienced walkers.

Not wanting to be based in one region for the duration of my Lakeland

## WITHIN SEVEN VOLUMES OF HIS PICTORIAL GUIDES, WAINWRIGHT DETAILED 214 PEAKS

adventure, I opted to stay with The Inn Collection Group, a northern-based company founded in 2013. Among its portfolio are several inns scattered across the Lake District, conveniently located for exploring numerous fells.

For a few days, my base was The Pheasant Inn, close to Keswick and Bassenthwaite Lake. From there, I drove just a little further to reach my next fell: Helvellyn, England’s third highest mountain.



Lake Buttermere

AW—who died in 1991, aged 84—described it as a “friendly giant” and it’s easy to see why; it’s arguably Lakeland’s most conquered fell. A shapely beauty, its jagged arms—Swirral Edge and Striding Edge—embrace Red Tarn, high up on its eastern flank; and it was from this side that I began my walk.

While the quickest and easiest ascent is from the west, the route from the east is more rewarding. But vertigo sufferers take heed: Swirral and Striding aren’t for the fainthearted. But with it being a windless day and good visibility, I chose the latter where a tiny track weaves along the steep, rugged ridge, with a huge drop either side.

After tackling the ridge with extreme caution, I finally reached the summit, where a stone shelter

provides protection when needed from the elements on this rocky terrain. I hauled out my flask and gazed down across the luscious landscape towards gracious Ullswater, the region’s second largest lake, edged by high-rising mountains reflected in its rippled surface.

Before leaving the summit, I joined a small crowd gathered around a memorial stone, marking the place where, in 1926, two brave souls made the first British mountaintop landing in a plane. What an amazing feat!

Just like AW, I enjoy closing my eyes and remembering previous fell-conquering days, such as the warm summer’s afternoon when Place Fell—overlooking Ullswater’s eastern shore—was the sole objective.

My walk began in Patterdale and, eventually, returned to the village via





Innominate Tarn, near  
the summit of Haystacks

an undulating path along the shores of the lake. It was a route truly adored by Alfred Wainwright who rated it the “most beautiful and rewarding walk in Lakeland.”

**WHENEVER I VISIT** the Lake District, there is never any doubt about whether I’ll head west to Buttermere and Crummock Water because it’s my favourite corner and offers glorious mountains to climb, including Haystacks, which has become a magnet for Wainwright fans.

Atop the lumpy fell is Innominate Tarn, some 1,700 feet above sea level. Haystacks was Wainwright’s favourite fell and he spent many hours sitting alongside the tarn. He once remarked: “For a man trying to get a persistent worry out of his mind, the top of Haystacks is a wonderful cure.”

## WAINWRIGHT’S ASHES WERE SCATTERED ON THE SHORELINE OF INNOMINATE TARN ATOP HAYSTACKS

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Such was his love for this particular spot that, in keeping with his wishes, his ashes were scattered on the tarn’s shoreline. In his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Fell Wanderer*, he finished with the words, “And if you, dear reader, should get a bit of grit in your boot as you are crossing Haystacks in the years to come, please treat it with respect. It might be me.”

As I sat, sandwich in hand, contemplating AW’s assessment of this

fell top, I decided it wasn't the grandest around, in my view. But it's definitely an unassuming, tranquil fell squeezed between loftier Fleetwith Pike and High Crag.

It was also one of several fell tops I bagged that day, with my route continuing on to Seat, High Crag, High Stile and Red Pike before dropping down towards Crummock Water—certainly a rewarding, albeit tiring, day on the mountains.

All too soon my time in the Lakes was drawing to a close. As a fitting finale, I decided another lengthy walk

## FROM HIGH RAISE, I WAS ENTRANCED BY THE CRAGGY WESTERN SKYLINE WHERE PEAKS RISE UP FROM VALLEYS

was called for—especially as the weather was still playing ball.

Instead of a circular walk, I chose a linear route and jumped on the bus close to the The Swan, just outside Grasmere, which was my base for the night. Allegedly the oldest coaching inn within the Lake District, this 17th-century hostelry was William Wordsworth's local and where he brought his literary friends.

Alighting the bus at Great Langdale, my walk began with another trudge up a muscle-

wrenching path. This time, the initial target was the crag-ringed corrie filled by 50-foot deep Stickle Tarn, set against the towering heights of Pavey Ark and Harrison Stickle.

This collection of fell tops dominates the skyline for miles with Pavey Ark, in particular, a superior crag offering a multitude of photo opportunities.

Taking a slight detour, I headed for High Raise, regarded by many—although not necessarily AW—as Lakeland's most central mountain. While the writer felt the fell's attractions were limited, he did conclude that High Raise boasted a “magnificent position geographically, many valleys radiating from the wide upper slopes”.

Stretching 2,500 feet into the Cumbrian air, High Raise is the loftiest of the Central Fells. Although its featureless grassy summit certainly wouldn't win a beauty contest, it offers superb views.

Perched up against the marker at the summit, I was entranced by the craggy western skyline where peaks with evocative names like Broad Crag and Great Gable rise up from the valleys beyond.

**A FRUSTRATION OF FELL-WALKING** is that one always wants to spend longer at a particular spot than time allows, and so it was on this occasion. I needed to move on, with Grasmere my ultimate target for the day.

## Stickle Tarn



En route, I dropped down to delightful Easedale Tarn. Sitting in a lofty crater-like spot two miles above the village, it's often a hive of activity. Such was its popularity in the 1930s, that refreshments were, apparently, sold from a stone hut.

At the 69-foot deep tarn, I rested on a shoreside hillock and savoured the view of high ridges encircling the tarn while a buzzard soared on the thermals above. Even on the way down to the honeypot village of Grasmere, I made regular stops, this time to admire the frothy white plumes of water cascading from the mountain tarn.

Finally reaching Grasmere, I noted how quaint the village is, despite the bustle. Most of the crowds, however, seemed to be queueing for the famous gingerbread. If you want to find the shop selling this delicacy—where

customers have included Nicole Kidman and Alan Whicker—just follow your nose.

I strolled along the streets before stopping at a streetside cafe for coffee and cake. While I watched people wander by, I reflected on my days following in Alfred Wainwright's footsteps. Memories of reading his autobiography came flooding back with one very poignant sentence firmly etched in my mind. He wrote: "A walk in Lakeland is a walk in heaven." And I couldn't agree more. ■

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Want to know more?

Visit [wainwright.org.uk](https://wainwright.org.uk)

THANKS TO THE PUBLISHER, FRANCES LINCOLN, FOR ALLOWING US TO QUOTE FROM WAINWRIGHT'S WALKING GUIDES. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO [QUARTO.COM](https://quarto.com)

RICHARD STAYED WITH THE INN COLLECTION, WHICH HAS SEVERAL INNS ACROSS THE LAKE DISTRICT. VISIT [INNCOLLECTIONGROUP.COM](https://inncollectiongroup.com)



*My Great Escape:*

# Viking Voyages

*Our reader Carolyn Ross visits the Viking Museum at Roskilde and explores longships up to 1,000 years old*

I'VE ALWAYS HAD a thing about Vikings, and a trip to Copenhagen which included a visit to the Viking Museum at Roskilde was a treat not to be missed. Although it has to be said that by getting on the wrong train at Copenhagen and paying a short 30-minute visit to Malmo in Sweden, we did almost miss it!

Housed in a modern, purpose-built museum, sections of Viking longships have been painstakingly reassembled and attached to a frame.

With the light coming in from one side of the building only, the elegant silhouetted vessels emanate a sense of otherworldly strength and power. Analysis of one of the longships, now almost 1,000 years old, revealed that it was built of oak in the vicinity of Dublin and would have carried some 65-70 warriors.

Roskilde houses five Viking longships, four traders and one warship, which were discovered sunk in the Roskilde Fjord. For centuries, people knew that there were wrecks



there on the seabed—ships that had been scuttled in the fjord as a defence system to make the approach channels difficult to navigate, but it was assumed the ships were medieval. It wasn't until investigations began in 1957 that they were revealed to be Viking longships, now on display along with weapons, jewellery, coins, belts and buckles, chess pieces, combs and other accessories essential to your average 11th-century Viking warrior.

The museum is also a shipyard, and not content with just displaying the remains of the longships, full-size replicas have been built using similar tools and wood as would



have been used for the originals. The warship replica was sailed to Ireland, under much the same conditions as the Vikings themselves would have experienced. The voyage took six weeks, although the actual sailing time was 12 days—the rest of the time was spent putting in to shore and waiting for the right winds and tides. The shape of the ships was designed for purpose—the sharp prows of the trading vessels were designed

to cut through the small waves of the waters around Scandinavia, while the broader bows of the warships were designed to deal with the big boulder-shaped rollers of the Atlantic.

Having wrung as much Viking minutiae from our museum guide

(he was blond, blue-eyed with a plait, naturally) as possible, we made our way to the museum cafe where we ate a delicious salmon salad with crunchy red and white cabbage and pickled red onions. Then, via the shipyard workshops, we strolled past the longboat replicas on the water and headed back to the station where, I'm happy to say, we caught the right train back to Copenhagen. ■

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# Marlene Dietrich Exhibition

## *Berlin*

HIDDEN  
GEMS

**THE CROWN JEWEL** of the Deutsche Kinemathek (The Museum of German Cinema) in Berlin is the Marlene Dietrich Collection. A short ride on the U-Bahn to Potsdamer Platz will take you to the heart of German cinema history and to the world's biggest collection of the iconic Marlene Dietrich's belongings.

Dietrich's impact on the world of cinema and culture as a whole is indelible. From her androgynous style and uncompromising attitude, she was a feminist role model, a queer icon and a freedom fighter, all while starring in some of the biggest films of her time.

The exhibition takes you through Dietrich's illustrious and, at times, controversial career with its collection of 3,300 textile objects, 16,500 photographs and 45,000 pages of correspondence belonging to Dietrich. Her legendary suits, which paved the way for a more androgynous edge being popularised in women's fashion, are on display alongside her glamorous gowns from her cabaret tours. Film posters from blockbusters such as 1957's *Witness for the Prosecution* and 1930's *The Blue Angel* are on display alongside letters detailing her relationships with high-profile celebrities of her time.

The exhibit has a focus too on Dietrich's work as an opponent to the Nazis, who denounced her as a traitor because of her work with the Allied forces. Her legacy is one of resistance; resistance to Nazism, to forced gender conformity and to patriarchal forces. It's this theme of resistance that makes the exhibition so gripping.

If you're heading to Berlin, make sure you don't miss this gem nestled away in the bustling chaos of Potsdamer Platz.

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By Owen Scott





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Alternative ways to  
make your gift count

# *This Christmas*





**T**HERE ARE SO many reasons why we give presents at Christmas. Many are good, or at least well intentioned. And there's nothing quite like receiving something that's been well thought through and just about perfect.

But sometimes when we buy presents that effort is missing.

It could be that we feel obliged to spend cash, often more than we can afford, for friends, family and colleagues because they're doing the same for us.

Worse, it's out of habit—we've always done it so we keep on doing it (and they do the same in reverse).

Or perhaps we just don't have the time to shop around, so we just grab what we can, when we can, to tick a name off the list before moving on to the next one.

The end result is often the same. The present itself, though appreciated, isn't quite right or even completely wrong for that person. So it doesn't get used, eventually moving into the back of a cupboard, listed on eBay or gifted to someone else next year. And that's if it doesn't just end up in the bin.



Andy Webb is a personal finance journalist and runs the award-winning money blog, *Be Clever With Your Cash*

I think we can all agree this is something we want to avoid. Not only do we want the recipient to be delighted with their present, we also don't want our cash to be wasted—especially when there are so many other things it could go towards right now.

So how do you do this? Well I've got some tips that'll put you on the right path.

## **1. Ask them what they want**

It's such a simple and obvious task, yet we tend to avoid it. Yes, it takes away the element of surprise, but at least everyone knows that the present is going to be used.

It's a good idea to also say what your budget is. It might be uncomfortable, but it stops you feeling pressured into overspending.

If you really don't want to do this then include a gift receipt. This allows the recipient to take the item back to the retailer and exchange it for something they'll be able to use.

## **2. Switch up Secret Santa**

The danger with Secret Santa is you end up buying something for someone in the office who you hardly know—and by the nature of it you can't go and ask what they want!

That really increases the chances of the gift going unused or in the bin. Research by UK Money Bloggers



found that one third of Secret Santa presents tend to be given away afterwards, and a similar number would rather not even take part!

Even when you do this with friends or family (which can be a good money saving idea) the same risks apply.

One smart addition you can apply is to give everyone taking part the opportunity to “give or gift”. When you put your name in the hat, simply add whether you would like a traditional gift, or if you’d prefer for your “Santa” to instead make a charitable donation in your name instead.

There’s more information on how to take part at [ukmoneybloggers.com/giveorgift](https://ukmoneybloggers.com/giveorgift)

### **3. Avoid gift vouchers**

Gift cards are the classic back up present. You don’t have to think

much about them and you are actually giving someone a present.

I think it’s better to strip this back and instead give cash or a cheque (yes they do still exist). Though it seems impersonal, they are effectively the ultimate gift card without any of the risks.

Cash doesn’t expire, it isn’t restricted to just one or only a handful of shops and if a retailer goes bust your money isn’t lost—a much safer option.

And if you’re worried that it feels too impersonal, you can always suggest how it’s spent. Say that the money is to buy a new coat, to go out for a nice meal, or whatever it is you think they’d enjoy but aren’t quite sure what the right present is.

And remember in some cultures, it’s pretty common for money to be given at celebrations.

## 4. Add to their savings

This one is particularly good for very young kids who won't be aware of what presents they've received—or get so many that they'll lose track of who gave what.

In addition to one or two presents, you could then put the remaining cash you had budgeted for the giftee into a savings account.

There are a few options, and it's best to go for the highest rate you can. Just bear in mind that Junior ISAs can't be accessed until the child is 18—and then they can do what they want with it.

You might also struggle to open new accounts if you're not the parent or guardian, so that would involve giving them the money to put aside.

## 5. Give your time

If money is particularly tight but you have a skill that'll be appreciated,

perhaps just offer that as your present instead.

From a promise to babysit once a month through to getting hands-on sorting out their garden, it could be just what the person wants.

And if you want to have something that you can wrap, you could make some vouchers that can be redeemed later in the year.

## 6. Scrap presents altogether

If even all of these ideas are still just perpetuating the giving of presents that really aren't necessary, then it could be time to stop or pause exchanging gifts.

It's worth having a chat with others first—you don't want them to buy you something and receive nothing!

You could even suggest an alternative where you spend some quality time together over Christmas for a festive tippie or a winter walk. That could well mean much more than another pair of socks. ■



### Robin Redbreast

It is believed that the robin became the iconic bird of Christmas in the Victorian era, when postmen were nicknamed robins because of their red waistcoats. Robins began to appear on Christmas cards to represent the postmen who delivered them

SOURCE: NHM.AC.UK

# Get the facts about equity release

From downsizing to specialist retirement mortgage products, there are a handful of solutions available to homeowners over 55 who are looking to take advantage of their home's value. One of the most popular but often misunderstood options is equity release



For more information, please visit:  
[www.readersdigest.co.uk/er2](http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/er2)

Or call direct on 0800 029 1233

The UK's most popular equity release product is called a Lifetime Mortgage. It allows you to borrow a tax-free sum from your home's value, which you can spend on fulfilling your long-held goals like clearing an existing mortgage or improving your home.

At **Reader's Digest Equity Release**, we want to help you feel fully informed about your financial options. Below you can see 4 facts that you may not know about a Lifetime Mortgage.

## 1 100% HOMEOWNERSHIP IS GUARANTEED

With a Lifetime Mortgage, you are borrowing from your home's value, not selling it. This is unlike a home reversion plan, which is another type of equity release that does involve selling all or part of your home.

## 2 YOUR LOVED ONES WON'T INHERIT EQUITY RELEASE DEBT

All Lifetime Mortgages from providers that are members of a trade body called the Equity Release Council come with some guarantees as standard. One of the guarantees is that you will never owe more than the value of your home, no matter what happens to its value in the future.

## 3 ALL PAYMENTS ARE VOLUNTARY

With a Lifetime Mortgage, it's your choice how to make payments. You can consider clearing the interest each month or make payments when you're able to afford to.

You can also stop making payments and allow the interest to increase over time. The full amount, plus any unpaid interest, is then only repaid when the last homeowner dies or enters long-term care. This can usually be achieved with the sale of the home.

## 4 FIXED EARLY REPAYMENT CHARGES

Lifetime Mortgages are designed to last for your lifetime, but we understand that your circumstances can change. All products that we advise on will come with fixed and defined early repayment charges.

With this, you can know exactly how much it will cost to pay the mortgage back in each year following your release and effectively plan for the future.

Releasing equity will reduce the value of your estate and may affect your entitlement to means-tested benefits. It's essential to receive expert advice so that you understand the features and risks. Get in touch with Reader's Digest Equity Release today and learn how we can help you.

Call us on 0800 029 1233 to speak with the friendly Information Team. They can answer your questions, check your eligibility, and book you a no-obligation appointment with your local adviser.

# DIY Pet Toys For Christmas

*Easy-to-make gifts to keep your pet happy and entertained*

**W**ITH THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS, you might be cutting back on spending this Christmas. Here are some DIY pet toy ideas that won't break the bank.

## Dog destruction box

The paw-fect way to keep your dog's brain busy and active this Christmas.

### What you need:

- Empty cardboard box
- Newspaper/old magazine
- Empty egg box
- Tasty bite-sized treats

### Method:

1. Grab an empty box, making sure it's not too small for your dog.
2. Get some newspaper or an old magazine and shred enough paper to fill at least half the box.
3. Scrunch up the remaining paper into rolls and mix it in with the shredded paper to fill the box to the brim.
4. Pop some treats in your empty egg container and bury this in the paper, somewhere in the middle of the box.
5. Scatter some treats inside the rest of the box.
6. Close the box and let your dog into the room to investigate and dig out the treats.



## Cat treat vending machine

What you need:

- Empty cardboard shoe box
- 30 toilet roll inner tubes

### Method:

1. Take the lid off your shoebox.
2. Glue your toilet roll inner tubes into the box on top of one another. Your inner tubes need to have one side facing outwards.
3. Glue your shoebox in the middle of the shoebox lid. The lid will then provide your cat treat vending machine with a base.
4. Wait an hour or so for the glue to dry.
5. Pop a treat into each inner tube for your cat to fish out with their paw.

## Cat wand

A fantastic gift for cats who love to chase.

### What you need:

- Wooden dowel (around 30cm in length)
- Five jingle bells
- Fabric scraps
- Fabric glue
- Bakers twine string
- Scissors

### Method:

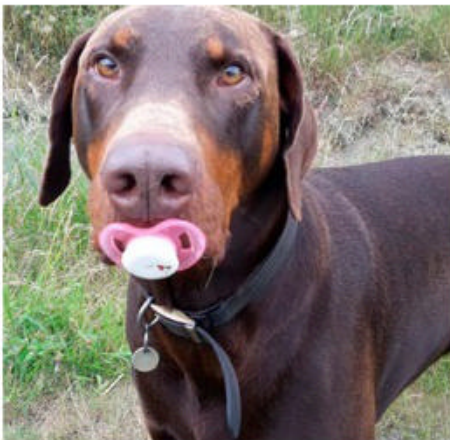
1. Wrap your dowel with twine, leaving around 10-12 inches to dangle free.

2. Secure the twine with fabric glue at the base and the end of the dowel.
3. Place all your jingle bells on the twine that's left at the end of the dowel.
4. Tie fabric scraps to the twine end and it's play time!

For more expert pet advice from Blue Cross, visit [bluecross.org.uk](http://bluecross.org.uk)



## READER'S DIGEST'S PET OF THE MONTH



# Logan

**Age:** Six years

**Breed:** Doberman

**Owner:** Tom Lawson

**Fun Fact:** Logan may be six but he is really still a baby at heart!

Email your pet's picture to [petphotos@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:petphotos@readersdigest.co.uk)



**WIN!** £100 gift voucher to spend at Pet Planet

Enter our monthly Pet of the Month contest at the email above



# Wreath Wonders

Felicity Carter in conversation with Flowerbx about the art of festive wreath-making



**W**HITNEY BROMBERG Hawkings founded the flower delivery service FLOWERBX when she noticed a gap in the market for chic, single variety floral arrangements. Since then, the brand has grown and their autumnal and Christmas wreaths have become a bestseller. Who better then, to offer her wreath-making guide than Whitney—follow her steps to create your very own showstopper of a festive wreath that showcases the magic of Christmas.

## Step 1: Choose the floral ingredients for your wreath

Get started by designing your wreath. This process might begin with a Pinterest board of seasonal wreaths or edits of Instagram saves that inspire your style.

Once you've got an idea of the look you're going for—whether it's traditionally festive or featuring dried autumnal details—you can pick the foliage, flowers and extra embellishments that'll be dressing your wreath. At FLOWERBX, we've got plenty to choose from: fragrant stems like eucalyptus branches, fir and fern, or flowers ready for drying—including our signature XL hydrangeas in deep, seasonal tones.

Finally, decide on a base. For traditional wreaths, I recommend a simple and sturdy wire frame, which you'll then fill with moss and weave your fresh ingredients into. Alternatively, natural wreath bases made from willow, vine or rattan are becoming increasingly popular for wreaths with more whimsical styling.

## Step 2: Add flowers and foliage to your wreath frame

Next, for the fun part—assembling your wreath. There are a few different ways to create a dense and voluminous wreath, but this is my favourite method: first, take a heavy-duty yet flexible floristry wire, and tie



a loop at the top of your wreath. This will act as an easy way to hang your wreath once it's complete, and a good marker of where you started.

Next, choose a selection of stems from your line-up, and cut them to a length of around six to eight inches for a standard sized wreath. Top tip: I like to make sure my stems are slightly varied in height, to create more texture. Form a small bunch with a mixed variety of stems—always thinking about colour palette and tone—and begin to build your wreath. While holding your miniature foliage bunch against your wreath frame in one hand, and your floristry wire reel in the other, tightly wrap around in a circular motion to secure.

Repeat this method all the way around your wreath until the entire surface is covered. You'll arrive back at your original loop, which you can now weave the end of your wire into and tie it tightly in a knot. You can always add extra foliage in once you're finished. Remember, you're looking for that perfect circular shape!

### **Step 3: Finish with extra-special details**

It's time to choose some finishing touches to bring your wreath to life. I like to look to nature for inspiration, with pinecones and dried citrus fruits like lemon and clementine slices.

Not only do these extra details create a unique and seasonal look,

but they're full of fragrance—something I find essential for the festivities! To attach, cut an appropriate length of floristry wire (the kind that's a little thicker) and fasten it securely onto your pinecone or citrus slice. You should be able to pierce this straight into your wreath, bending any sharp ends back into the base for a clean finish.

Another last detail that a wreath isn't quite complete without is a ribbon bow. In my opinion, the bigger the better, and always in rich tones like crimson, forest green or saffron gold. Of course, texture is important too—so opt for luxurious finishes like heavy velvet, sheer organza or silk satin.

### **Step 4: Choose where to display your wreath**

Traditionally used to dress front doors, you can experiment with wreath styling all around your interior. From hanging over a signature fireplace to using yours as a centrepiece for a dinner party, the possibilities are endless.

To secure your wreath to a front door, you can use a nail, a wreath hanger or ribbon inside the door frame. A traditional picture hook and coordinating loop of ribbon work equally well for indoor displays. ■

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For more information, visit [flowerbx.com](https://www.flowerbx.com)



# Christmas Crafts

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## How to make recycled paper tinsel

**T**insel is quite a hot topic when it comes to Christmas decorations. It divides opinion: is it tacky or is it fabulous? The benefit of tinsel on a Christmas tree is that it draws the eye right around it and provides balance and a fuller look, but we can't ignore the ecological impact of decorating the tree with metres of plastic and foil.

But we can make tinsel more environmentally friendly with recycled parcel paper or wrapping paper. We're not going to lie, this does require a little investment of time, but you can snip away as you listen to a podcast or two—and sometimes a mindless task like this can help me unwind.

## Materials

- Parcel/packing paper
- Ruler
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Glue stick

**1** Lay your paper flat on a solid surface. Measure and mark 10cm distances all along the shortest edge of the paper.

**2** Cut along the length of the paper using the marks as a guide. You don't have to worry about being too accurate here, a few wobbles are fine, but try to keep roughly the same distance from the edge of the paper as you cut.



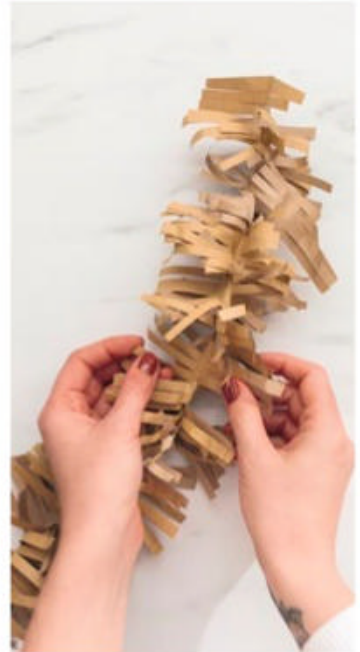
**3** Once you have cut all your paper strips, fold each one in half along the length to give you long, thin strips.

**4** Run the glue stick along the paper at the fold. Line up another strip of paper with the folded edge and press into place. Repeat two more times.

**5** Using scissors, make cuts along the width of the paper around 1cm wide. Cut from the non-folded edges through all the layers at the same time, stopping around 1cm from the folded edge. Cut all the way along the paper until you reach the other end.

**6** Repeat steps 3 to 5 to create several pieces of paper fringing. Use the glue stick to attach the pieces together at the ends until you have the length you need. I like to make several pieces around 2m long to

make them more manageable to decorate with.



**7** To create the classic tinsel look, hold the paper in place at one end and twist the other end. This should fan out the tassels evenly, but you can help to make them look more fluffy by gently shaking them out with your fingers.

**8** Weave the tinsel all around the tree, using the branches to secure the tinsel in place.

## How to make fabric Christmas crackers

Everyone loves the traditional, popping Christmas cracker—the awful jokes, tissue-paper crowns and useless trinkets are an essential part of any good Christmas dinner or party.

But there are times that call for something more special; think a romantic dinner with a piece of jewellery hidden inside. Perhaps you

can replace the cracker joke with an experience voucher or gift card? I love this grown-up take on Christmas crackers. It's a really lovely way to share gifts that might not necessarily go under the tree.

I use my favourite fabric scraps for these, and once the cracker has been opened you can reuse the fabric year after year.

### Materials

- Fabric (30cm x 20cm per cracker)
- Fabric glue or needle and thread (optional)
- Toilet roll tube
- Cracker filling
- Ribbon

1 Cut your fabric into rectangles 30cm x 20cm. If you want neater edges, fold over a 5mm hem and press down. Use fabric glue or sew in place.

2 Place the fillings into the cardboard tube. Wrap the fabric around the tube and tie ribbon around it at both ends of the tube to secure.



EXTRACTED FROM *FESTIVE* BY FRANCESCA STONE (POP PRESS, 2023). PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCESCA STONE

Reader's  
Digest



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## Our 100-word-story competition is your chance to show the world your story-telling talents

There are three categories—one for adults and two for schools: one for children aged 12–18 and one for children under 12. Your stories should be original, unpublished and exactly 100 words—not a single word shorter or longer! Entries are now open. The editorial team will pick a shortlist of three in each category and post them online on February 1, 2024. You can vote for your favourite, and the one with the most votes will scoop the top prize. Voting will close on February 29, 2024 and winners will be published in our May 2024 issue.

Visit [readersdigest.co.uk/inspire/enter-our-100-word-story-competition-2023](https://readersdigest.co.uk/inspire/enter-our-100-word-story-competition-2023) to enter.



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# Dishing Out Joy



*Paola Westbeek  
explains how  
buffets can be the  
answer to the  
stress of holiday  
meal hosting*

Paola Westbeek is a food, wine and travel journalist who has tasted her way through Europe, interviewing chefs, visiting vineyards and reviewing restaurants. Her work has appeared in *FRANCE Magazine* and other publications



**W**E ALL KNOW how potentially daunting holiday entertaining can be. Combine high expectations with a desire for perfectionism, add a dollop of relatives who all seem to have different dietary restrictions, finish with a dash of stressing over which drinks to serve, and you've cooked yourself up a recipe that's everything but jolly. Fear not, however. When in doubt about how to gracefully host a gathering come the month of December, nothing will prove as truly satisfying and stress-free as inviting friends and family over for a casual (yet decidedly festive) buffet.

The great thing about buffets is that the dishes can be prepared well in advance, meaning you won't have to leave your guests to serve the next course, not to mention fret about making an impression with your plating skills. Once you've decided on which dishes to serve, it's all a matter of

arranging them into an attractive tablescape complete with plates, cutlery and napkins.

Let's begin with the canvas—your buffet table, which should be set up away from the wall so that guests can walk around it and have easy access to the food. It's important to remember that the focus should be on the dishes, so keep the decor simple yet elegant and inviting.

are, can pose a risk for guests as they reach over to help themselves. Tea lights in pretty votive holders can be strategically placed between dishes and will add just as much warmth to the set-up. And do not make the mistake of lighting scented candles! Steer away from special holiday varieties with seductive names like "gingerbread men" or "magical winter forest" and let the food's



## FOR DESSERT, A HANDSOME, STORE-BOUGHT YULE LOG AND PERHAPS A BOWL OF PEARS POACHED IN SPICED WINE

Instead of a bulky tablecloth, place a few beautiful cream or white linen runners across the table to create the illusion of space and add lightness to your presentation. Once you've decided on the menu, start by setting the table in a logical order. Arrange a stack of plates on one corner, followed by the serving trays for cold appetisers and salads, chafing dishes for mains and sides that should be kept hot, stands for cakes and desserts, and ending with the cutlery and napkins on the opposite corner. With this all in place, you can move on to the decorative touches.

Candlelight will cast a subtle glow over your spread, but bear in mind that tall candles, graceful as they



tempting aromas permeate the air instead. Another option is to skip the candles and fill mason jars or glass vases of various heights with delicate fairy lights.

When it comes to choosing accessories, at this time of year, nature will be your ultimate source of inspiration. Rather than baubles, fill your table with holly sprigs, pinecones painted in silver and gold, twigs tied with sparkling ribbon, and crystal bowls brimming with sugared cranberries and nuts.

The menu, of course, is the real star of the show and will require the most planning. For a group of ten, you should prepare three appetisers, three mains, two sides and two desserts. Rather than the



usual olives and breadsticks to start, you'll want to include a sumptuous crudité platter filled with crisp vegetables and served with two cold dips (presented on a bed of ice) such as aioli, cocktail sauce, hummus, guacamole or tapenade. Alongside any traditional roasts serving as the *pièce de résistance*, make sure to include a vegetarian or vegan option in the form of a decadent mushroom lasagne, a hearty shepherd's pie with lentils in lieu of meat, or a pumpkin and sage quiche. Root vegetable gratins and traybakes made with seasonal vegetables are excellent hot sides, but remember to also include a mixed green salad with a jar of homemade vinaigrette. For dessert, a handsome, store-bought yule log

and perhaps a bowl of pears poached in spiced wine or baked under a golden crumb topping of pecans, cranberries, cinnamon, butter, brown sugar and oats will certainly please and impress.

Finally, designate a separate station for drinks (including a few non-alcoholic options). Offer a festive cocktail served in a bowl or pitcher, such as a sangria with sliced oranges, cranberries and cinnamon. Wines that pair well with myriad dishes include those made with riesling grapes (for white) and grenache or pinot noir (for red). When in doubt, however, remember that nothing captures the spirit of the season more than the always versatile bottle of champagne. ■



## White Christmas

Despite snow featuring on Christmas cards, advent calendars and festive songs, it's more likely to fall in the UK between January and March than in December

"Technical" white Christmases simply require one snowflake to fall somewhere in the UK (something that has happened the last three years)

The last widespread white Christmas in the UK was in 2010. There was snow on the ground at 83 per cent of observation stations—the highest ever recorded

Other than 2010, there have only been three other years since 1960 with snow on the ground at more than 40 per cent of UK stations—2009, 1995 and 1981

SOURCE: METOFFICE.GOV.UK

## STATE OF THE ART:

# Philip Guston

*Owen Scott talks to Michael Wellen about a powerful new retrospective exhibition at London's Tate Modern*

**PHILIP GUSTON** is one of the most interesting artists of the 20th century, challenging injustices and violence he saw in the world over a 50-year career and undergoing multiple artistic changes.

The Tate Modern is currently holding a landmark exhibition of Guston's work to pay tribute to this boundary-pushing artist. We spoke to Michael Wellen, the International Art Curator at the Tate, about why Guston's art is still important today.

### **Why did the Tate decide to host a Philip Guston retrospective?**

This exhibition was a long time in the making. We have a large collection of Guston's work; we've been collecting his work since the Sixties. The Tate has over 40 works by him in its collection. People are so interested in him, because of the richness and the strangeness of his work.



**Guston's work (Left) *Sleeping*, 1977; (Above) *Sunday Interior*, 1941**

We've partnered with three American institutions who were also

interested in creating a Guston exhibition: the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It was an opportunity to tell Guston's story.

### **What is it about Guston's work that is so enduring?**

I think that we come back to Guston's work because it's beguiling—charming and enchanting, sometimes in a deceptive way.

There are so many great quotations from the artist. He has so many

interesting views on being an artist. He talked about “clarity” and “meaning”. His work is solid, it engages you, but the storytelling doesn’t resolve—it encourages even more questions. That’s such a difficult thing to achieve. He constantly rebelled and I think that interests people so much.

### **Guston is an artist who often changed his style. Why was this?**

I think Guston’s changes have been a point of connection between myself and the other curators. His style isn’t back-and-forth, as is believed; it’s continual transformation.

This quote is the opening of the exhibition: “The only thing one can really learn, the only technique to learn, is the capacity to change.” I return to this quote over and over when working on Guston’s work. His deliberate efforts to change himself and the way he works and get his feelings across in his art is amazing.

### **Could you tell us about Guston’s life?**

The show follows his life, in a linear biographical way. It traces his life alongside the larger themes of his art.

Guston is usually thought of as an American artist, but he was actually born in Canada to Jewish parents escaping persecution in what is present-day Ukraine. His family moved to Los Angeles when he was young, where he eventually became involved in political movements.

Through this, he became a muralist, something he continued in New York in the 1930s. It was here that he changed his name from Philip Goldstein to Philip Guston, in a time of rising antisemitism.

He became a key figure in the New York School of Artists, who focused on abstraction. In the late 1960s, he was making these renowned and complex images that responded to political injustice, such as groups like the Ku Klux Klan. He did this through a cartoon-inspired technique.

### **Do you have a favourite piece by Guston? Why is it your favourite?**

I think my favourite is probably *Sleeping* from 1977. I saw it as a teenager and it became a point of reference for me. It depicts someone in bed, with a blanket pulled up to the eyeballs. There was something relatable in this man not wanting to get up and face the world.

He had artistic nightmares and dreams, focused on what he called “the brutalities of the world”, such as racism. He wanted to hold onto the absurdities and beauty of the world but was focused on those brutalities. That painting holds all of that together. I think there’s a real vulnerability in that painting. ■

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*Visit the Philip Guston exhibition at London’s Tate Modern until February 2024. You can read an extended version of this interview at [readersdigest.co.uk](https://www.readersdigest.co.uk)*

FILM OF THE  
MONTH



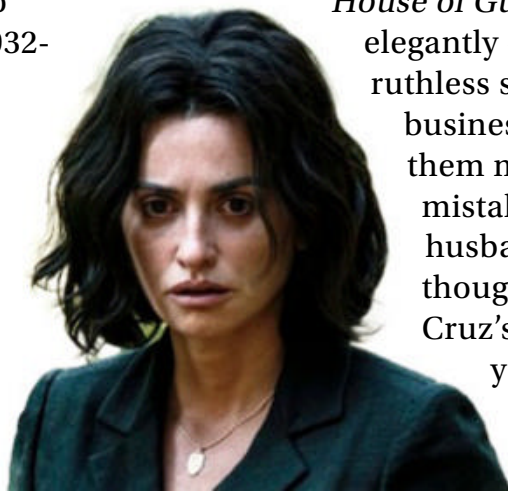
## FERRARI

**FOCUSING ON THREE INTENSE**, life-changing months in the life of Italian motoring pioneer Enzo Ferrari, Michael Mann's biopic is a typically captivating work from the legendary director of *Manhunter* and *Heat*. A film Mann had spent years brewing, it sees a silver-haired Adam Driver play Ferrari, while a combustible Penélope Cruz features as his wife Laura. The year is 1957, with the business he and Laura established a decade earlier in Modena about to implode. As he decides to enter the Mille Miglia, a 932-mile endurance race, his marriage is also heading for the pits, with the discovery that he has a mistress (Shailene Woodley) and a son.

The fiery domestic

scenes between Driver and Cruz are to be savoured, but *Ferrari* really hits top gear during the race scenes. With Patrick Dempsey and Jack O'Connell co-starring as daredevil drivers on the track, Mann ably shows the precarious, life-threatening nature of motorsport and the burning passion that comes with it.

Aside from reprising the questionable Italian accent he deployed in Ridley Scott's *House of Gucci*, Driver elegantly captures Ferrari's ruthless streak as both a businessman ("make them make the mistake") and husband. Ultimately, though, it's Penélope Cruz's Laura who you'll remember.



## ALSO OUT THIS MONTH



★★★★

## THE BOY AND THE HERON

**AFICIONADOS OF STUDIO GHIBLI** and Hayao Miyazaki, the Japanese animation maestro behind such classics as *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, can once again rejoice. A decade on from his last film, *The Wind Rises*, Miyazaki—now 82—returns with what may well be his final film. A story about parental loss, it begins in 1943 during the Second World War bombing of Tokyo as a young boy Mahito loses his mother in a fire. When his father remarries, moving his son to the countryside, the boy encounters a mischievous, mysterious grey heron, which lures

him into a fantasy world with the claim that his mother is still alive.

As the inquisitive Mahito encounters swathes of pelicans, parakeets and even his great uncle in this unique landscape, Miyazaki's film takes a genuinely imaginative flight of fancy in its second half, a journey filled with hope, humour and humanity. Available in the UK to watch in both subtitled Japanese and dubbed English versions, the latter features an impressive voice cast including Christian Bale, Florence Pugh and Robert Pattinson. But really it's the lush animation, especially the Tokyo fires early on, and Miyazaki's give-peace-a-chance message that hit home. A poignant, perfectly-made look at processing grief.

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James Mottram

• TELEVISION

**WHO DESERVES A**

Christmas bonus?

Execs at Netflix  
France, for starters.

The miniseries  
known across the  
Channel as *Tapie*  
and now streaming  
here as *Class Act*

(Netflix) is a cherishably eccentric, rewardingly funny weighing up of a local hero: Bernard Tapie, a Trump of the Left, if such a thing is imaginable. A Duracell-bunny dreamer, Tapie (played here by Laurent Lafitte) fell into business after flopping as a folk musician, enjoyed notable footballing success as Marseille's chairman in the Chris Waddle era, pushed back against Jean-Marie Le Pen's fascism, and wound up behind bars anyway. The lesson of Tapie's life remains debatable—maybe our Gallic cousins just respond to his shrugging, buoying liberty—but the show delights in period detail and tremendous character acting: it's like *The Crown* with the ceremonial



trappings replaced by cheese and sheepskin coats.

Weirdly, Tapie has much in common with Assane Diop (Omar Sy), hero of global hit *Lupin* (Netflix), back for a third

instalment. Both are born

shapeshifters, rarely observed wearing the same hat twice; both know the value of money in today's world; and both seem but a heartbeat away from the one false move that will land them in irons. The show has made no such mistakes in updating Maurice Leblanc's serial about the "Gentleman Burglar" to contemporary Paris, limiting itself to smaller series so as to better channel its creative energies into top-drawer twists and only the finest close shaves (season three may arrive at the ultimate in narrow escapes, involving a coffin). It remains a gift of a show, and one of the modern era's great adaptations: literate yet nimble, and set to run and run.



**Retro Pick:**

***The Complete and Utter History of Britain***

(Britbox/ITVX)

Perhaps 2023's foremost TV rediscovery: Michael Palin and Terry Jones' pre-*Python* sketch show, hitherto mislabelled and thus lost in the ITV archives.

Mike McCahill

# Christmas Music

## The unlikely birth of the Christmas pop song

**ONE ONLY HAS** to note the best-selling physical single of all time—Bing Crosby’s “White Christmas” has shifted over 50 million copies since 1942—to reveal the commercial pull of Christmas songs. It’s strange to think that a pop culture phenomenon so tied to festive consumerism actually emerged during the Great Depression, when there was very little money at all.

The year was 1934, five years into the banking crash that shook the world. Radio DJ Eddie Cantor was searching for a new Christmas tune to play, sensing, in the words of pop historian Ace Collins, “the need for a bright holiday song” to cheer his listeners. Multiple attempts landed on his desk but none stuck, until one publisher named Leo Feist sent in an outlier by songwriter Haven Gillespie.

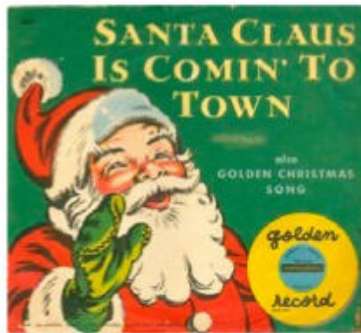
It’s a surprise that Gillespie’s song got written at all. When Feist alerted him to the opportunity, Gillespie initially refused, grief-stricken as he was by recent news of his brother’s death. But on the subway home from Feist’s office, memories of his childhood flooded in, and he began scrawling poetry on an envelope.

Once it was set to music, it was Feist’s turn to doubt Gillespie’s tune—his company deemed it too childish to warrant much commercial potential. Cantor agreed. Popular myth has it that his wife convinced him to give the song a go.

Her intuition was right. Cantor sang “Santa Claus Is Comin’ To Town” in a broadcast from Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade, adding his own embellishments to fit the national mood—lines like “We’ve

gotta dig deep and cover the list/Gotta see that nobody is missed” encouraged acts of charity. The song became an overnight sensation, selling 30,000 records and 100,000 copies of sheet music within 24 hours.

In the 1940s, the record industry accelerated, fuelled by consumer wealth and the new vinyl LP. As songs like “Santa Claus Is Comin’ To Town” endured, artists learned to capitalise on Christmas pop—a homey, at times misty-eyed genre, which continues to bring listeners joy and comfort.

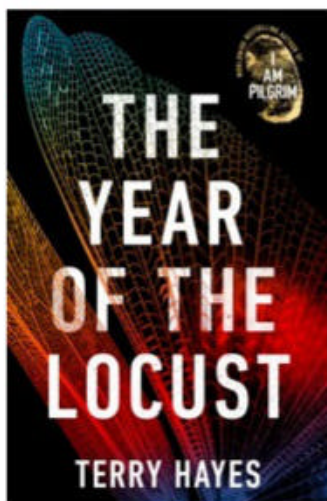



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Becca Inglis

# December Fiction

*An action-packed spy thriller with a twist and the story of one of Hollywood's most notorious couples are Miriam Sallon's top literary picks this month*



***The Year of the Locust***  
by Terry Hayes  
is published by  
Bantam Press  
at £22

IT'S BEEN TEN years since *I Am Pilgrim*, the 912-page action-crammed tome, hit the shelves, and fans still haven't got over it. Some claim it redefined the spy-thriller genre, and *The Guardian* said it "makes moussaka of its rivals". Terry Hayes could easily have retired on the glory, never to write another word. There's even

a film coming out, with rumours that Leonardo DiCaprio will play the lead.

But Hayes clearly wasn't satisfied, and once again he's delivered a whiplashing, wild-ride adventure—this time at a modest 672 pages that take us not just around the world, but into a terrifying future.

He packs a crazy amount in, probably



enough material for three novels. I know it's bad form to give spoilers but I don't think you'll be any the wiser if I tell you we start at a hanging in Iran and end up 24 years in the future in sewage tunnels fighting orcs.

For the most part, this is a classic CIA spy thriller with all the heart-thumping trimmings. Ridley Kane is a Denied Access Area spy, sent on one mission after the next in places basically impossible to enter, to try and prevent a global terrorist spectacular. It's something like *Homeland* on speed, an immaculately (or at least convincingly) researched, classic US-centric tale of goodies and baddies.

## TERRY HAYES COULD EASILY HAVE RETIRED ON THE GLORY, NEVER TO WRITE ANOTHER WORD



But it doesn't stop there. While the main thrust of the plot doesn't change—high-stakes, high tension drama—three quarters of the way through, Hayes strays confidently into the speculative, dabbling with time travel and a dystopian evolution of the human race. So now it's *Homeland* meets *The Last of Us* and then some.

Some might say Hayes should stick to what he does best, or at least pick a lane, but I'd say he's a master at getting your blood racing, and if that means reaching outside his usual crayon box for an orc or two, then more power to him. ■

## NAME THE CHARACTER

**Can you guess the fictional character from these clues**  
(and, of course, the fewer you need the better)?

1. He works as a clerk and is a hardworking family man.
2. He has a miserly boss who he is fearful of but feels sorry for.
3. He has a disabled, sick son.

RECOMMENDED READ:  
**Celebrity Scandal**

*Glamour and wild behaviour are at the heart of Roger Lewis' biography of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton*



**W**HERE OTHER BIOGRAPHERS seek to make the personal public, Roger Lewis seeks to find the personal in the public, or rather in the performative. Moving diligently through each of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's films, he tracks their extravagant and debauched lives, their multitudinous marriages, and their endless vices as they

coincided with the actors' on-screen personas.

Arguably the first modern celebrities, Taylor and Burton's lives are ripe with salacious stories and titillating details, from trashing hotel rooms and drinking three vodka bottles a day, to demanding gifts of expensive jewellery from production studios and regularly buying all the first-class tickets on a flight to avoid the hoi polloi. While their inimitable talents are indisputable, they clearly weren't very nice people. But then it wouldn't be as interesting if they were.

Lewis inserts himself a fair amount, expressing opinions, sometimes controversial, and passing judgement, sometimes severe. It's perhaps more honest for the author to be present, where

a conventional biographer would hide behind supposedly objective facts. Occasionally, he lacks a much-needed modern perspective: Taylor's concerningly young on-screen sexualisation, for example, is explained by her own "innate sexuality", rather than considering the adults surrounding her who encouraged this. This is an ongoing theme: Sybil, Burton's first wife, is charged with having no self-respect because she put up with Burton's philandering, and Burton's affair with a 14-year-old girl ("Burton liked her to keep her school uniform on") is only mildly rebuked, and almost instantly followed by a list of Burton's other affairs at the time.

One could argue, I suppose, that there's no use in holding long-past offences to modern standards, and the book, already 656 pages, would certainly be much lengthier if every morally concerning act were thoroughly examined. And perhaps Lewis' point is that they were treated (and considered themselves) as though beyond judgement.

Ultimately this is not a happy tale, but it's certainly fascinating, if only to consider how much shocking behaviour these two "vagrants" got away with. ■



***Erotic Vagrancy***  
by Roger Lewis is  
published in  
hardback by  
riverrun at £30

## EXCERPT

“\*\*\*\*!” bawled the baritone Richard Burton, in the vestibule of the Hotel Capo Caccia, Sardinia, when on August 11, 1967 he found himself with “thousands of bags all over the place, nine children, six adults...I screamed \*\*\*\* out of drunkenness...To scream \*\*\*\* in the lobby was the only possible way to meet the justice of the day.” Possibly so. There were many similar days to do justice to.

At the Grand Hotel Timeo, for example, in Via Teatro Greco, Taormina, Taylor broke a guitar over Burton's head. Rex Harrison, seeing 14 pieces of luggage piled up at Reception in the Hotel Lancaster, Paris, plus the cages of cats and dogs and turtles, wondered out loud, “Why do the Burtons have to be so filthily ostentatious?” John Gielgud, directing *Hamlet* in Toronto and Boston, early in 1964, said that, “Even when I went out to lunch with [Burton] between rehearsals, there'd be four or five of

the entourage sitting at adjoining tables, preventing people coming up and talking to him.” In Toronto, Burton and Elizabeth Taylor took the Presidential Suite at the Sheraton King Edward Hotel. In Boston they put up at the Copley-Plaza.

When they arrived at Logan Airport, there were 5,000 screeching fans, grabbing at their clothes, snatching at their hair, behaving as if Taylor and Burton were the Beatles. The police lost control. Is any sympathy deserved? Marlene Dietrich, staying at the same hotel as Burton and Taylor, overheard them complaining about the sheer volume of fans besieging the place. “My dear Richard, my dear Elizabeth,” she said, with her Germanic lisp, “if you want to escape the crowds, don’t stay in the same hotel as me.” There is stardom, superstardom, and megastardom. “That sort of celebrity is so very hard to cope with,” said Gielgud.

## TAYLOR BROKE A GUITAR OVER BURTON’S HEAD

“They had to exercise the dogs on the roof. There was a man with a machine gun in the corridor standing outside their room.”

The ructions were similar the following year in Dublin, while the filming of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* went on at Ardmore Studios. John le Carré couldn’t believe it. Taylor was disrupting shooting by turning up in a Rolls-Royce, accompanied by the likes of Yul Brynner and crates of champagne. “The reputedly 17-strong Burton household ...occupied the whole of one floor of Dublin’s grandest hotel,” The Gresham, in O’Connell Street, where the retinue was augmented by “various children by different marriages,” plus nannies and tutors and, said Le Carré, “the fellow who clipped the parrot’s claws.” There is now The Elizabeth Taylor Suite at The Gresham, 130 metres square, containing a four-poster bed seven foot three inches wide. ”



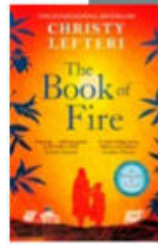
*Answer to*

### NAME THE CHARACTER:

The humble, poor clerk to the mean, greedy Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’s classic *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchit is underpaid but still grateful for what he has, including his initially ill-fated son Tiny Tim and a Christmas meal.

# Books

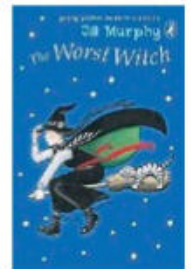
THAT CHANGED MY LIFE



Brought up in London, Christy Lefteri is the child of Cypriot refugees and the author of international bestseller, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*. Her new book, *The Book of Fire*, is published by Manilla Press

## *The Worst Witch* by Jill Murphy

As a child I used to read at bedtime and I remember looking forward to going to bed to read *The Worst Witch*. What a relatable character Mildred Hubble was! Such a flawed, clumsy but brave witch. I loved how she couldn't train her cat Sooty to ride the broom. I guess at such a young age it taught me that we can all have flaws and still be our own brilliant selves. But it also drew me into this other world so completely. It took me away to a place of magic where humans can be turned into snails.



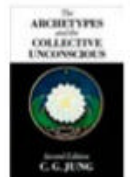
## *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath

I read *The Bell Jar* at university. I'd actually applied to study Law and went to my first lecture and realised I had made a huge

mistake. I walked out, ran to the English department, passing a bunch of students who were reading *The Bell Jar* on the grass outside the library. I cried to the lecturer who years later would be my PhD supervisor. Thank goodness, she let me on the course. *The Bell Jar* became the first book I read on my English Literature BA. Reading about Esther's life, her attempts to grow as a woman, to be true to herself, opened my eyes. The emotion in the book seemed so real and raw, looking at women's role in society, at passion and ambition as well as mental illness.

## *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* by C G Jung

I read this while I was doing a PhD in Creative Writing at Brunel. I wanted to understand Cyprus' fight for independence against British colonial rule from a psychological perspective. I found it rich, beautiful and enchanting. I love the way Jung embraces the depths of human experience, including the "shadow" aspects—the destructive and not so nice parts of ourselves—working towards wholeness. I found Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and archetypes inspirational. It shifted the way I looked at religion, myths, fairytales, films, art and even war, politics and civil conflicts—it's like I had a new lens with which to understand the world.





# Cyber SAFETY

**How to protect  
yourself against  
hackers, according  
to James O'Malley**

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**GENERALLY SPEAKING,** the single most important thing you can do to keep your computer safe is make sure your operating system and apps are up-to-date. That annoying box that nags you to install Windows Updates? Unfortunately, it's good advice. Because though it looks like nothing has changed afterwards, below the surface every update—or "patch"—is fixing bugs and holes that can be exploited by hackers.

The problem is that modern computer systems are so wildly complicated that it is basically impossible for developers to build a completely secure system. However much you test and try, hackers and other people with bad intentions will comb through and look for a bug or a hole they can exploit to rummage around and access your private data.

The good news is that there is fight-back going on. And our operating systems and apps are increasingly wise to some of the most common forms of attack. Here are some of the tricks they're using to keep you safe.

The most simple attack is a **Bruteforce** attack. This is the laborious and time-consuming task of simply going through and trying every single combination of letters and numbers to, for example, guess a password, until you find one that works. And this is why modern systems have built-in protections against this. It's why you can only get

the passcode on your phone wrong three times before it locks up—to stop someone trying to guess and guess until they get lucky.

**Phishing** isn't so much clever technology, but is a psychological trick to persuade you to hand over your details. Most commonly deployed via email or text message, typically you'll get an email that looks like it is from your bank, Royal Mail, or Facebook or whoever. But if you type in your details as requested, instead of logging you in it will send your details to the hackers instead, so they can login and impersonate you. And though it is important to remain wise to these sorts of attacks (as they go after our brains—not our computers), email clients are getting better at spotting them. For example, for many scams, Gmail will display a warning that all may not be as it seems.

A **Man In The Middle** attack is when hackers snoop on your data as it transits between you and the place or person it is intended for. For example, if you browse a website that has **http** and not **https** in the address, and you're on a public wifi, it's conceivable that anyone on the same network could read every word being sent to your phone or computer.

This is why over the last few years, there has been a big move towards websites using “https”—a more secure type of connection that encrypts the data as it moves. So if you see the little padlock symbol in the link bar, you can be more confident that the site is safe.

Messaging apps have been moving over to use more encryption for the same reason. For example, a normal SMS text message is completely unencrypted—but if you send a message by WhatsApp, only you and your friend will ever see the message.

Not even Facebook, the company that owns WhatsApp, will be able to read it.

Finally there is the holy grail for hackers: **Malware**. This is software written to meddle with your computer. If hackers can run their own code on your computer, then they can do, well, whatever they like—from block access to your files until you pay them money (what is known as ransomware), to snoop around and steal any files that look

## MESSAGING APPS HAVE BEEN MOVING OVER TO USE MORE ENCRYPTION



James is a technology writer and journalist. A former editor of tech website Gizmodo UK, James can be found mostly on Twitter posting jokes of variable quality @Psythor

interesting. Or maybe they'll just delete everything to cause chaos.

This used to be a really, really bad problem. For example, in the Windows 95 era, it used to be possible to download an app from anywhere on the web, click on it, and run it on your computer—with no one checking what it does or whether it is legit.

But today, both Windows and Mac are more locked down than they used to be. Though you can still download apps from anywhere, typically both will throw up a scary warning if the operating systems think a file looks suspicious.

Similarly, both will attempt to keep your personal files separated off, and will ask permission if an app wants to delve into them. And due to the way they are designed, your phone (especially if you have an iPhone) is probably even more locked down.

So though the threat of hackers is real and scary, the good news is that the good guys are getting better at fighting them. But that doesn't mean we should be complacent. The best way to keep your data safe is to remain vigilant, and be careful where you click. And, of course, to make sure all of your apps are up-to-date, so they have all of the latest safeguards to keep you safe. ■

# Ask The Tech Expert

James O'Malley

**Q: How can I make my phone battery last longer?**

**A:** Have you noticed how despite massive improvements in your phone's camera, screen and capabilities over the years, the one thing that never seems to get much better is the battery life? This is why speaking to a battery scientist a few years ago, my mind was blown: batteries are getting better at storing energy. The problem is that as technology has improved, we've demanded that our phones do more battery-intensive things.

In fact, when the likes of Apple and Samsung make a new phone, when they're at the engineering stage they literally design their devices around the idea that the battery will last on average, exactly one day.

So even if Apple could make an even more powerful iPhone, with a faster chip or even whizzier camera, it won't unless it can also be confident that on the average day, you'll start the morning fully charged—and will still have a little bit of juice left by bed time.



However, in the real world not every day is an average day. Some days, you need your phone. You need those GPS directions for a long drive—or you want to take lots of photos at that party.

**So how can you stretch that battery to last the distance? Here are four top tips:**

- **Reduce your screen's brightness.** Making your screen light up is one of the most energy intensive things your phone does, so if you can make it a little darker, you'll make significant battery savings over the day.
- **Turn off wifi.** Even if you're not connected to a network, if your wifi is switched on, every few seconds your phone will be sending out a little burst of signal to look for available networks. So if you know you're not going to be using wifi for a while, switch it off in your Settings app.
- **Reduce background processes.** Sometimes when you leave an app, it doesn't stop working in the background—which will eat up battery. On iPhone, in your Settings app go to "General" and then "Background App Refresh", and toggle off anything that isn't

important to you (probably keep it switched on for your emails—but Instagram might be less important). If you have an Android device, most phones will let you slide up and see the apps you have running. Swipe up on any you don't need to close them properly.

- **Stop playing games and watching videos.** Graphically intensive activities like games and videos will quickly drain your battery as your phone's processor will have to work harder to display all of the action. So if you need to preserve your battery on a long train journey, dig that book out of your bag and read that instead.

If you're still finding yourself running low at inopportune moments, it may be a sign that the only real solution is to spend some money. If your phone is getting old, it might be worth getting the battery replaced, as batteries do degrade over time. But another reliable solution is to buy yourself an extra "power brick" battery back-up, so you can charge up on the go. It's another thing to carry around—but it can bring the extra peace of mind that you need on a busy day. ■

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 Email all your tech questions for James to [readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk)

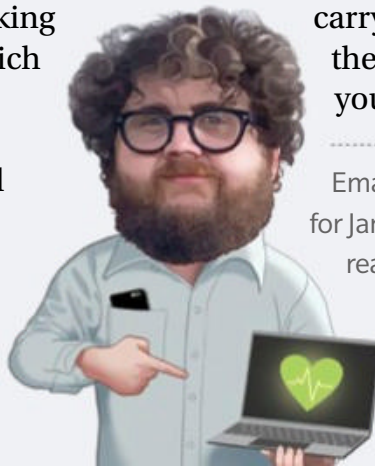


ILLUSTRATION BY  
 Daniel Garcia



# Insurance, Photocopiers and Other Mysteries

BY *Richard Glover*

**THRILLERS AND DETECTIVE SHOWS** are all the rage on television, yet the real mysteries of life go unsolved. It may be time to put a modern-day Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot on these real-world cold cases.

## **Why is hotel plumbing so bad?**

The woman in Room 4 turns on the shower, diverting hot water from the man showering in Room 5. As he furiously turns the taps, the water fluctuates between boiling and freezing. This is a nightmare for the honeymooning couple in Room 6, who now have burns over 20 per cent of their bodies because they were, ahem, not close to the taps when the water went thermo-nuclear. Some hotels manage to provide consistent water temperatures; why can't the rest of them? Any theories, Sherlock?

**Why don't fitting-rooms have flattering lighting?** OK, I understand that fluorescent lights are cheaper, but when your business relies on convincing people to spend £100 on

a garment that costs £2 to make, maybe you could spend just an extra few pennies so customers don't frighten themselves.

**Why have pedestrians lost the will to live?** Sure, jaywalking has been around for years, but people used to cross the road only after waiting for a break in the traffic. Now, pedestrians no longer wait; they just hurl themselves into the fray. And they are *looking at their phones* as they do it. It's like crossing a Formula 1 racetrack with a bag over your head.

**Why does our collection of Tupperware lids not match the bottoms?** And why are so many tops missing? Do they dissolve in the wash? Do children use them as Frisbees? Do aliens steal them? Over to you, Monsieur Poirot.

**Why are we sensitive about some prices but not others?** A pub charges £9 for a glass of chardonnay and £8 for a beer, and still there's a queue at the bar. We know that we might get cheaper life insurance if we shopped around, yet most of us shrug our shoulders and say, "I just don't have the time." Yet if the price of petrol goes up by three pennies a litre, people lose their minds.

**Speaking of insurance, why is it so expensive?** Property crime is down all over. In Europe, the number of burglaries has dropped 42 per cent since 2010. The property-crime rate in Canada fell by more than half between 1990 and 2020. And in Australia,

motor-vehicle theft has declined by 16 per cent since 2016. And yet insurance premiums are as high as ever. Who is pocketing the extra cash? Why does competition, that much-lauded feature of our capitalist system, not push down the price? Miss Marple, can you take on this case?

**Why do parents "parent" so publicly?** We'll take it on faith that you are a good parent. When denying your child access to her iPad, the whole train does not need to hear details of the transgression that led to this ban, all delivered in your "I'm a reasonable person" voice and at a volume sufficient for everyone to consider the facts.

We've all been there. We're on your side. We won't call the authorities, we promise.

**Why are photocopiers so complicated?** The paper is always jammed and the ink always runs out. The solution to these problems is supposed to be simple: follow the onscreen guide—a guide that consists of various flashing arrows going in all directions seemingly at random, much like a diorama of the Battle of Agincourt.

Personally, I wish I had one of those Gestetner duplicating machines that was invented 140 years ago and worked perfectly fine before the photocopier came along in the mid-20th century. But where can I find one? Lieutenant Columbo, maybe you have a theory? ■

# £50 PRIZE QUESTION

## UNCANNY TURN

Rearrange the letters of the phrase below to form a cognate anagram, one which is related or connected in meaning to the original phrase.

The answer can be one or more words.

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ANSWER TO NOVEMBER'S PRIZE QUESTION

## FRIENDS?

**EACH CAN HAVE THE PREFIX PARA- TO FORM A NEW WORD**

**AND THE £50 GOES TO...**

LUCY PESARO, *West London*

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**On Christmas Eve**, I asked my wife if anything was needed from the supermarket, as I was going there for last-minute items.

She said, "Can you get some crackers please?"

"No problem," I said.

When I came back home she asked what crackers I got. I said a box of assorted ones.

She looked at me and said that she did not know what assorted crackers were.

When I showed her the box with cream crackers, digestives, etc, she asked, "How are we supposed to pull them tomorrow?!".

ROSS PURFIT, *Submitted online*

**My friend was at his mother-in-law's funeral** and was getting questions at the wake from his inquisitive eight-year-old grandson.

"So, my great-grandma was Nanny's mum, and she was 97 when she died."

"That's right," my friend replied.

"And Nanny is 72," the grandson continued, carefully, "and you, Grandpa, are 75."

My friend was impressed by his grandson's grasp on age and relationship, but became rather staggered and then amused by his grandson's final remark.

"So, you could be next!"

KEITH LODGE, *Hull*

**While teaching the Christmas story**, as a primary school teacher, I noted that Mary and Joseph flew to Egypt shortly after Jesus was born to escape King Herod.

An enterprising student, who had listened to the Easter story too, added that Pontius was their pilot. I found it difficult to keep my face straight when reading this account.

JOANNE CAMPBELL, *County Antrim*

**My small son asked my husband** and me one day what was meant by the word "soul".

I tried to explain the concept that people have souls but things don't.

I picked up a nearby object.

"This flip flop, for example, doesn't have a soul."

"No," said my husband drily, "but it does have a sole!"

EMILY BULMAN, *Bishop's Stortford*

**Last Christmas, I was waiting for my wife at the tills** of a supermarket



"YOU GUYS ARE REALLY CREEPING ME OUT..."

when I noticed that someone had left behind their broom.

When no one came to claim it, I went outside to search for a couple of women I remembered seeing in the queue while I stood there. I spotted them getting into their car and hurried over.

"By any chance, did you leave your broom inside?" I asked one of the women.

She smiled and replied, "No, I came by car."

STEVE HOLLANDS, *Herts*

**I found my son**, Jamie, aged eight, weighing one of his presents I'd placed under the Christmas tree.

When I enquired why, he told me he was going to ring Argos to see how much a PS5 weighed.

That's hopeful for you...

MICHA BRYN, *Liverpool*

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IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

# Word Power

*One of English's more entertaining features is its bevy of colourful collective nouns. See if you can pick a pack of correct definitions for groups of people, animals and objects from this confusion of clues*

BY ROB LUTES

**1. smack—**

A: hockey players.  
B: jellyfish.  
C: stooges.

**2. business—**

A: birds.  
B: balls.  
C: ferrets.

**3. bank—**

A: clouds.  
B: alligators.  
C: owls.

**4. copse—**

A: trees.  
B: cattle.  
C: flags.

**5. clutch—**

A: wrestlers.  
B: acorns.  
C: eggs.

**6. bed—**

A: kittens.  
B: volcanoes.  
C: mussels.

**7. shrewdness—**

A: poets.  
B: liars.  
C: apes.

**8. pod—**

A: redheads.  
B: whales.  
C: Martians.

**9. coterie—**

A: bicycles.  
B: boutiques.  
C: close friends.

**10. raft—**

A: canes.  
B: comets.  
C: ducks on water.

**11. fleet—**

A: foxes.  
B: ships.  
C: asteroids.

**12. murmuration—**

A: heartbeats.  
B: starlings.  
C: gossips.

**13. archipelago—**

A: records.  
B: islands.  
C: flies.

**14. cabal—**

A: conspirators.  
B: witches.  
C: monks.

**15. hand—**

A: bananas.  
B: sticks.  
C: gloves.

# Answers

**1. smack**—B: group of jellyfish; Jeff spotted a *smack* of bobbing jellyfish and quickly swam away.

**2. business**—C: ferrets; A *business* of ferrets escaped from a cage and tore through the pet shop.

**3. bank**—A: clouds; A *bank* of clouds hung over the shore like a white duvet.

**4. copse**—A: trees; The maple *copse* behind Ilya's house had begun to turn red and yellow.

**5. clutch**—C: eggs; Mo's Rhode Island Red hens reliably produced a good *clutch* every laying season.

**6. bed**—C: mussels; Tara found a mussel *bed* and began digging, thinking of the steamer pot waiting at home.

**7. shrewdness**—C: apes; Upon returning home from her family reunion, Nellie quipped that she could have spent a more civilised weekend with a *shrewdness* of apes.

**8. pod**—B: whales; Oli cried out, first in delight and then in fear, as a *pod* of humpbacks surfaced near his kayak.

**9. coterie**—C: close friends; Ever since college, Safia had maintained the same *coterie*.

**10. raft**—C: ducks on water; Luiza stopped paddling momentarily to watch a *raft* of ducks go by.

**11. fleet**—B: ships; The navy *fleet* conducted combat exercises off the West Coast last week.

**12. murmuration**—B: starlings; A *murmuration* of starlings twisted through the sky like black smoke.

**13. archipelago**—B: islands; Wei's goal was to sail through the Mergui *Archipelago* in Burma to study the plant life.

**14. cabal**—A: conspirators; In *The X-Files*, Mulder and Scully always seem to be up against a *cabal* of government agents.

**15. hand**—A: bananas; Rupert had a habit of lifting each *hand* of bananas at the supermarket to check for bruises underneath.

## VOCABULARY RATINGS

7-10: fair

11-12: good

13-15: excellent



# Reader's Digest Competitions —

Enter today for your  
chance to win!



Photo Finder

You will find this photograph somewhere inside this issue of the Reader's Digest magazine, but can you find it? Once you have, simply write the page number on your entry form, or enter online.

**WIN!**  
**3 X £50**

## Competitions — How to enter

**Enter By Post Or Online** — December 2023  
closing date for entries: 31st December 2023

Online:

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**Complete the entry form and send via post to Reader's Digest Competitions, Warners Group Publications, West Street, Bourne, PE10 9PH**

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Competitions are open to residents of the UK, Eire and BFPOs, aged 18 or over, except Reader's Digest employees and any associated partners or affiliated companies. No purchase necessary. Entries can be made via post or online. There is no cash alternative and prizes are not transferable. Only one entry per person. Winning entries will be chosen at random and winners will be notified by email or post. Winners must agree to publication of their name, age and photo. Your information will only be used in accordance with our privacy policy. Entry implies acceptance of these rules. Full terms can be viewed online at [readersdigest.co.uk/competition-rules](https://readersdigest.co.uk/competition-rules).

Reader's  
Digest

## DECEMBER 2023 ENTRY FORM

Fill in all your answers below:  
(enter as many as you like – one entry per competition per person)

Page 40 **Mrs Doubtfire theatre & hotel**

Page 66 **2-Night stay at Middlethorpe Hall Hotel**

Page 96 **Ragdale Hall Evening Spa**

Page 151 **Photo Finder**

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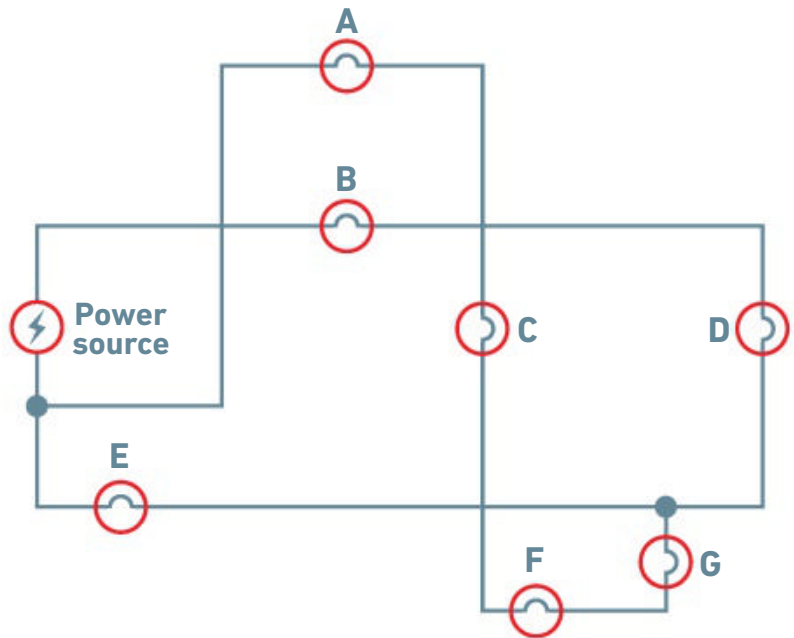
\* I opt-in to be contacted by third party competition promoters about future offers and promotions (\*please tick)

*Brain*  
**GAMES**  
SHARPEN YOUR MIND

**Let There Be Light**

**MEDIUM** Ella has only six bulbs to place in the seven sockets on the Christmas lights on her roof (labelled A to G in the diagram). For a bulb to shine, it needs to be part of an uninterrupted path leading from one end of the power source to the other. An empty socket breaks any path that passes through it.

When there's a dot at the intersection of two wires (•), they are connected. If there's no dot (+), one wire simply passes under the other, without an electrical connection.

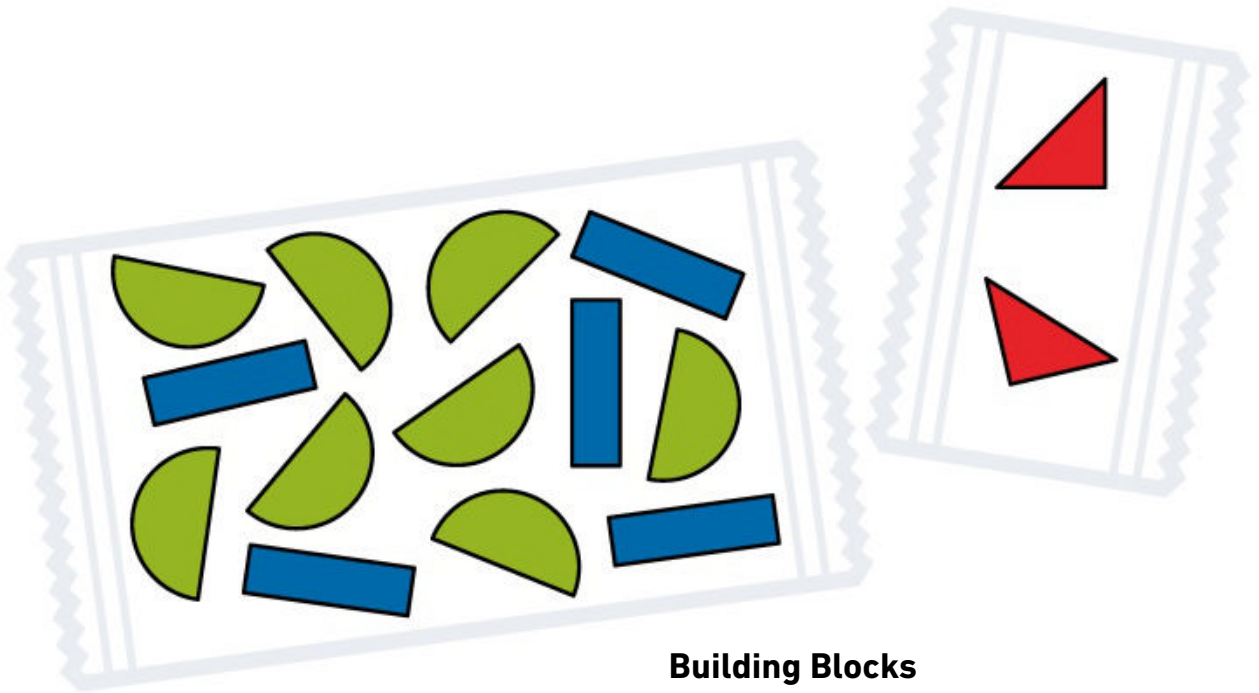


If Ella wants to enjoy the highest possible number of shining bulbs, which socket should she leave empty?

				12
				45
				56
				60
42	54	50	16	

**Times Square**

**MEDIUM** Fill in each cell of the grid with a digit from 1 to 9. Each number outside the grid is the result of multiplying together the digits in its row or column. The number 1 will appear only once in each row and column; other numbers can be repeated and not every digit will be used.



### Building Blocks

**EASY** Lloyd wants to buy some construction blocks for his grandchildren so they can build houses and bikes following the designs to the left. The parts are sold in the packs shown above, and Lloyd doesn't want to have any blocks left over. What is the minimum number of each pack he should buy, and how many houses and bikes will his grandkids be able to make?

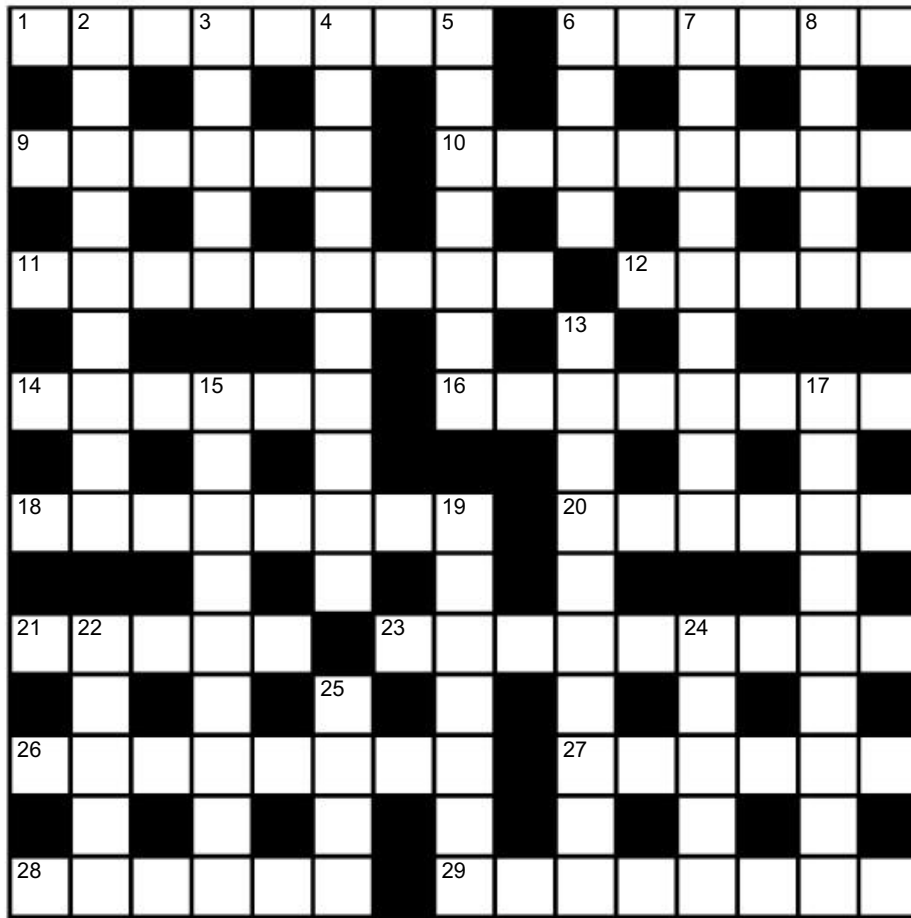


### Final Battle

**DIFFICULT** You're playing a video game in which you defeat each enemy by making a unique sequence of moves, which are numbered 1-6. You've figured out all of them (listed at the right) except the last one. What sequence will beat the final boss?

**VOBAFERNO 2-1-6-5**  
**RABADOOL 1-2-1-4**  
**SCEFFRIT 3-5-6-6**  
**PICADELLOR 3-1-4-5**  
**ZODDAFIZZ ?-?-?-?**

*For answers, turn to PAGE 155*



**CROSSWISE**

Test your general knowledge. Answers on p158

**ACROSS**

- 1 Pulled a face (8)
- 6 Deeply felt (6)
- 9 Business combination (6)
- 10 Rain gently (8)
- 11 Orts (9)
- 12 Hangs around (5)
- 14 Undiluted (6)
- 16 Units of sound intensity (8)
- 18 Weird things (8)
- 20 Charge with a crime (6)
- 21 Expect (5)
- 23 Stopped (6,3)
- 26 Fighting axe (8)
- 27 Scheduled (6)
- 28 Public address (6)
- 29 Rule out in advance (8)

**DOWN**

- 2 Returned to office (2-7)
- 3 Power (5)
- 4 Murderous painter of *The Supper at Emmaus* (10)
- 5 Craved (7)
- 6 Calvary inscription (1,1,1,1)
- 7 Retired (4,2,3)
- 8 Team race (5)
- 13 Providing grounds for a lawsuit (10)
- 15 Bring into being (9)
- 17 Midlands cathedral city (9)
- 19 Conceited and snobbish (5-2)
- 22 Shout with joy (5)
- 24 Whimsically funny (5)
- 25 Sprint (4)



BY *Louis-Luc Beaudoin*

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

**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**

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

**BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS**

FROM PAGE 152

**Let There Be Light**

Socket E, which leaves the other six bulbs lit.

**Times Square**

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

**Building Blocks**

If Lloyd buys three larger packs and 23 packs of the triangles, his grandchildren can make five houses and 12 bikes with no leftover blocks.

**Final Battle**

4-4-1-6

Each enemy's name has a sequence of four letters that includes four of the first six letters of the alphabet, A to F. With A=1, B=2 and so on, these letters represent the correct combination of numbers to beat the boss.

# Laugh!

WIN £30

for the reader's joke we publish!

Go to [readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us](http://readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us)  
or [facebook.com/readersdigestuk](https://facebook.com/readersdigestuk)

**I'm no expert but** would it have been quicker for Noah to escape the flood in a straight line, rather than a huge arc?  
GARETH GEORGE (*groanman2020*)

**Applied for a sandwich-making job,** but they said the roll had been filled.  
DARREN WALSH PUNS (*@DarrenWalshPuns*)

**My housemates are convinced our house is haunted.** I've lived here for 274 years and not noticed anything strange.  
DOC (*@DocAtCDI*)

**My other half came home early** and caught me in bed with an optical illusion. I told her it's not what it looks like.  
OLAF FALAFEL (*@OFalafel*)

**I'm dating a bin lady at the moment.** I can never remember if I'm supposed to take her out on a Monday or on a Wednesday.  
WILLIAM STONE (*@itswilliamstone*)

**Ben Hur once organised a big race** at the Coliseum for a good cause. It was a huge chariot event.  
CRAIG DEELEY (*@craiguito*)

**I've just robbed the local snooker club** in broad daylight. Took a lot of balls.  
GARETH GEORGE (*@groanman2020*)

**I used to be part** of the hula hooping community but I no longer move in those circles.  
WILLIAM STONE (*@itswilliamstone*)



What's a mathematician's favourite Christmas snack? A mince pi

MRS S CLARKSON, *Norfolk*

# ASK A COMEDIAN *Ian Smith*

Known for BBC Radio 4's *The News Quiz*, *The Now Show* and co-hosting the *Northern News* podcast, Ian Smith is taking his stand-up show *Crushing* on tour. **Ian Chaddock** asks him about his funniest experiences...

## What stand-up special or comedy film made you fall in love with comedy?

I think the first stand-up special I watched would have been Peter Kay's *Live at the Top of the Tower* and I was just blown away by someone making a room laugh that much by themselves. The first stand-up show I saw live was Lee Mack (the show he released as his first DVD)—it remains the most I've laughed, or seen an audience laugh, over the course of a full show. I don't think I've wanted to do anything else since.

## What's the weirdest heckle you've ever heard and how did you reply?

One time at the Edinburgh Fringe a woman shouted out, unprompted, "You've got a very rigid posture."

It wasn't said with any real malice, just a genuine observation she couldn't keep to herself. My reply was to make my posture even more rigid, performing my show like a robot, but in all honesty my response was to become heavily self-conscious about the way I stand on stage—

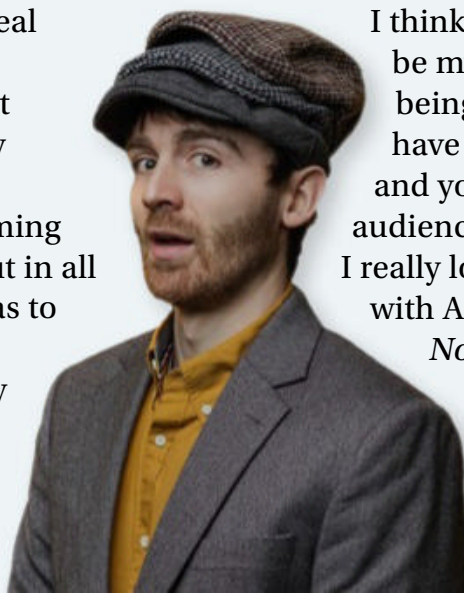
bullied into being less rigid. A rare positive story about bullying.

## What has been your funniest live show experience?

I once blew a candle out on stage, but I blew it out with such ferocity that all the wax blew back up into my face going on my face, in my hair, eyebrows and eyelashes and some of it into my actual eyeballs. I did that within the first five minutes of the gig and had to perform 15 more minutes in one of the most humiliating situations of my career. Not funny for me, but funny for the audience.

## As well as stand-up, you've worked on TV panel shows, radio shows and podcasts. Which format do you find works best for comedy?

I think stand-up will always be my favourite part of being a comedian—you have more creative control and you're holding the audience's attention yourself. I really love the podcast I do with Amy Gledhill—*Northern News*. Sitting in a room and reading about



weird stories from the North is such a joyous way to make a living.

**What’s the funniest thing that’s ever happened to you in your life?**

I went husky sledding when on holiday to Tromso in Norway, by myself. I had to be paired up with a family of three and me and the dad of the family took it in turns to drive. I had a lovely time as he drove and when we swapped over, I went too fast and flipped the sled, crashing him into the snow.

**Your new stand-up show is about trying to deal with stress. Do any of the methods work for you?**

A lot of the things I talk about in the show have not helped me de-stress at all—I had a terrible time in a sensory deprivation floatation tank and someone defecated on the bed I was supposed to be sleeping in when I went to Blackpool. I did, however, have a very fun time smashing up a car with some hammers and then driving over it with a tank in Slovakia with my hairdresser. Quite a lot to take in with that sentence, maybe best to come and see the show to find out what went on there.

*Ian Smith tours the UK with his show **Crushing** throughout January and February*



*What Is Happening?*  
**WHEN A FUNNY PHOTO CAPTURES AN UNEXPECTED MOMENT**  
 Via [boredpanda.com](http://boredpanda.com) and [Outre Bizarre \(@outrebizarre\\_\)](https://twitter.com/outrebizarre_)



**CROSSWORD ANSWERS**

**Across:** 1 Grimaced, 6 Inward, 9 Merger, 10 Sprinkle, 11 Leftovers, 12 Stays, 14 Strong, 16 Decibels, 18 Oddities, 20 Indict, 21 Await, 23 Turned off, 26 Tomahawk, 27 Booked, 28 Speech, 29 Preclude.

**Down:** 2 Re-elected, 3 Might, 4 Caravaggio, 5 Desired, 6 I N R I, 7 Went to bed, 8 Relay, 13 Actionable, 15 Originate, 17 Lichfield, 19 Stuck-up, 22 Whoop, 24 Droll, 25 Dash.



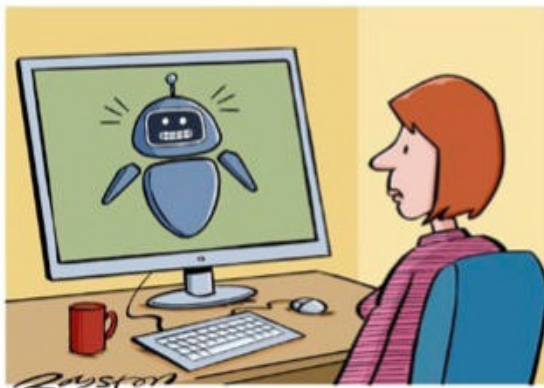
# Beat the Cartoonist!



Think of a witty caption for this cartoon—the three best suggestions, along with the cartoonist's original, will be posted on our website in mid-December. If your entry gets the most votes, you'll win **£50**.

Submit to [captions@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:captions@readersdigest.co.uk) by DECEMBER 7. We'll announce the winner in our February issue.

## OCTOBER WINNER



Our cartoonist's caption, "I'm not a chatbot. I identify as a human", failed to beat our reader Kevin Christian, who won the vote with, "**It's not my software that needs updating, it's your dress sense!**"

Congratulations, Kevin!

## IN THE JANUARY ISSUE



### Sharon Osbourne

The TV personality and author on her life, career and marriage to a heavy metal icon



I REMEMBER:

### James Taylor

Hammond star and former Prisoners member looks back on his childhood, Bach and morality

## THE SCIENCE OF SWEARING

What's behind our relationship with profanities?



## The charity providing sanctuary for rescued donkeys in Egypt

**F**IRST ESTABLISHED IN 2000 to help thousands of working donkeys in Israel and the Palestinian Territories (West Bank), the charity Safe Haven for Donkeys has begun working with an Egyptian partner organisation, the Bridge Foundation (El Gesr), to provide care to the donkeys in the El Saf region of Egypt.

Thousands of donkeys and mules work in the brick kilns in Egypt (of which there are approximately 1,000), carrying 1.4 to 1.6 tonnes of bricks and moving at an intense pace to prevent unfired bricks from cracking in the heat. Due to a lack of expert veterinary care, many of these animals are suffering intense pain from harness wounds, beatings, teeth and hoof issues and parasitic diseases spread by flies.

Now a collaboration between UK charity Safe Haven for Donkeys and Egyptian community development charity the Bridge Foundation is

providing much-needed relief to these animals. The project includes a mobile veterinary clinic which treats common injuries and infections and trains owners on how to best look after their donkeys and mules.

In a press release, Safe Haven for Donkeys CEO Andy Foxcroft said, “Through our work in Israel and the West Bank we came to know of millions of working animals in neighbouring Egypt without critical veterinary care, suffering a host of preventable and treatable painful conditions. Currently no other animal welfare charity provides veterinary interventions in these particular kilns, hence the need for Safe Haven’s expertise on the ground, treating sick and injured animals and providing training for owners and local professionals (vets and farriers). This first year is vital as we hope to make a lasting impact by reducing the unnecessary suffering of working animals, which sadly, is all too common a feature in the brick kilns.”

Safe Haven for Donkeys’ work, which helps an estimated 10,000 animals a year, is made possible by charitable donations that fund the treatment and training that they offer. You can donate to the charity at [safehaven4donkeys.org](https://safehaven4donkeys.org).

**BY ALICE GAWTHROP**



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