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Two Brothers & A Stolen Picasso

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DZEMPC

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"The Next Aircraft Will Crash On Landing"

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WHY BEING A SUPERTASTER

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PAGE 60





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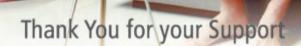




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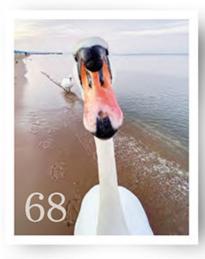
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MARKUS REX



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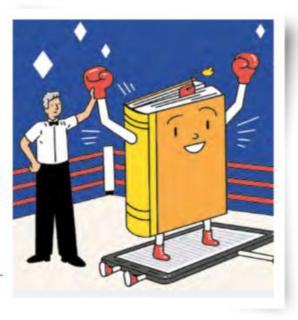




Reader's Comments And Opinions

Old School

I enjoyed reading your article 'The Triumph Of The Book' (Humour, Apr/May) by Richard Glover. I am old school and there is nothing more rewarding than holding a physical book in my hands, especially on long distance journeys when you don't have to worry about your e-reader battery running out! **DAVID WONG**



Art Of Conversation

The article 'How To Get Along With Anyone' (Feb/Mar) was very helpful to an introvert like myself. As a child, I preferred to be on my own and I didn't like to socialise. I preferred reading books and watching movies. I was ignorant when it came to communication. I failed to speak up when I needed to and often spoke at the wrong time. The article provided insights into navigating the art of positive communication.

ADELINE VINCENT

Showing Love

'A Scammer's Target: My Mother' (Bonus Read, Apr/May) brought me to tears when I read it aloud to my mother, who lives alone and rarely tells me when she has a problem. I wish our parents would understand that we want to be there for them.

I really liked how the story ended with the author deciding to move to live closer to her parents.

AIMEN SHAHID

LLUSTRATION: SAM ISLAND/RD LICENSE

Let us know if you are moved - or provoked - by any item in the magazine, share your thoughts. See page 7 for how to join the discussion.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Beyond The Hype

with their weight, the idea of a miracle drug that can support the process of shedding kilos is a prayer answered. Newly released diabetes medicines that also target weight loss – the prescription-only Ozempic and other drugs – have attracted a lot of attention about their efficiency at shedding weight and also the cost and side effects. In 'Is Everyone On Ozempic?' (page 24) we explain how the drugs work, who they were designed for, and what lies ahead in the race to claw back obesity rates.

We then meet the women who are working hard to rid the Everglades National Park in Florida of an infestation of Burmese pythons ('The Snake Charmers', page 78). It's dangerous work, but these colourful volunteers are dedicated to the natural environment they call home.

Also in this issue: we learn some surprising insights about eggs (page 44); and explore the mysteries of the frozen Arctic with some dedicated scientists (page 90).

All these great stories and much more!

Louise

LOUISE WATERSON Editor-in-Chief

Reader's LUXURY JEWELLERY



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Turning The Spotlight On Dementia Issues

Thank you for highlighting dementia in the Feb/Mar issue in the article 'Dementia Breakthroughs Offer New Hope'. At just 50 years old, I find myself in the unenviable position of being caregiver to my 53-year-old husband, who has dementia.

He is the second in his family to be diagnosed with it. I welcome all awareness around dementia. Putting the spotlight on early onset dementia also highlights the loss of income, career and a future together.

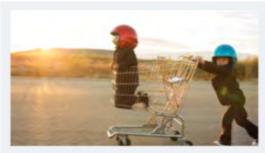
Being a caregiver is a hard and lonely position, especially the daily heartbreak of watching my formerly capable husband reduced to being like a child.

HELEN GREEN

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We asked you to think up a funny caption for this photo.

Mum, you'll never guess what I bought at the supermarket today!

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Mummy said she got my little brother from the supermarket – so I am taking him back!

Toddler-driven innovation.

JERIAH GABRIEL TAY

"Mum, don't wait up, we're going to space-mart!"

ELEORA LOW

Congratulations to this issue's winner,
Dell Mannion.



CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win \$100. To enter, email asiaeditor@readersdigest.com.au or see details on page 7.

Réader's Digest

Vol. 126 No. 732

August/September 2024

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Reader's Digest publishes 6 issues a year.

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Smart Animals Up to \$100

Share antics of unique pets or wildlife in up to 300 words.

My Story \$200

Do you have an inspiring or life-changing tale to tell? Submissions must be true, unpublished, original and 800-1000 words.

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A Graduation

Reward

BY Peihua Zhang

always reminisce about my school days, particularly those during my middle school years near the end of the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-76). In 1975, at age 11, I started at the local middle school, located in a small town in Anhui province. There was a unique aspect to our education – we didn't do written

exams to advance to higher levels of schooling. This trend continued through high school, college and university. In each stage of my education, I progressed without undergoing traditional written assessments.

I vividly recall my first set of textbooks in middle school. They were pristine, adorned with colourful covers, and featured a special delicate print ink.

Our Chinese teacher, a man with a perpetual smile, often regaled us with stories from history, occasionally delving into accounts of murder and intrigue. His delivery was quiet, yet his smile persisted.

In contrast, our English teacher, Director Hu was a considerably younger man who had a serious demeanour. Some students nicknamed him 'Hu Da Zui' (big mouth) due to his prominent family name, Hu [to shout out]. Despite his stern exterior, I found his English lessons captivating. He would stand in front of the blackboard, his 'big mouth' opening wide as he guided us through the English alphabet from A to Z. With enthusiasm, he encouraged us to open our mouths and speak out loud, introducing the class to simple English words like 'father', 'mother', 'worker', 'peasant', and 'revolution'. He also led us in a lively rendition of the alphabet song, and our class became a chorus of joyful voices.

Unfortunately, just a few weeks after the school year started, our English lessons abruptly stopped. In fact, all our lessons ceased. Our

Peihua Zhang moved to Japan in 2002 and obtained a PhD in Japanese Literature in 2012. He is currently teaching and researching at Japan Women's University and lives in Tokyo with his family.

classes transformed into sessions devoted to studying and reciting Chairman Mao's quotations.

We were given a small book featuring a red plastic cover. Its contents lacked the endearing stories we had become accustomed to. Instead, it was filled with numerous short and long paragraphs, all penned by Chairman Mao. Although we struggled to comprehend his messages, we had to complete homework reflecting Chairman Mao's thoughts and sentiments.

Fortunately, our generous class captain allowed us to copy his notes on interpreting Chairman Mao's emotions to complete our assignments. In a class of 50 students, including 14 girls, almost every student submitted homework mirroring the captain's work.

When Director Hu entered the classroom, our captain would command, "Stand up," and we would all rise, echoing the captain's words, which were Chairman Mao's quotations.

Director Hu would then silently read through our homework. We held our breath, watching him scrutinise each book one by one. Eventually, he'd smile - a smile we had never witnessed in his class. It was intense, impressive, sophisticated and beautiful.

He informed us that it was time to leave the campus temporarily,

READER'S DIGEST

for at least one month. He said our new lessons would not be confined to the classroom; that we were to be engaged in a practical study of our thoughts. This meant learning about industry, agriculture and the military.

The agricultural component of the curriculum was further divided into two distinct areas: upland fields and paddy fields. In the upland fields, we had to plant tea in the barren mountains. And so, each morning as the sun emerged from the east, the sports teacher would gather

SOME STUDENTS

OPERATED

TRACTORS WHILE

OTHERS SOWED

TEA SEEDS

us together in the mountain grass with a strong blow of his sharp whistle. Some students operated tractors, some applied fertiliser, while others sowed tea seeds.

All students worked diligently; the female students even took turns cooking with their class mates.

After completing our tasks in the upland fields, we transitioned to the paddy fields. The general sentiment among students was that the upland fields were better than the paddy fields, where we had to take off our shoes and socks and deal with snakes, leeches and mosquitoes. This became a daily challenge. The leeches would cling to our legs and feed on our blood unnoticed. The deep itching sensation only became

apparent after they had had their fill and detached themselves from our legs.

The tea trees and paddy rice flourished under the sun as we delved into our other two areas of learning: industrial production and military affairs. The former involved working in a small plastic factory that produced black chemical fertiliser bags made from broken plastic bags, plastic soles, plastic bottles, waste plastic boxes and plastic boards. Our classroom was transformed into a storage space

> for these plastic items, which were abundant and filthy and emitted a distinct odour. Most of our winter routine involved washing these materials in the frozen river. Breaking the ice to find water in the bitter cold was no

easy task, and I endured chilblains on my hands.

The spring of 1978, when I was 14, ushered in the final year of middle school. As summer approached, I successfully obtained my graduation certificate, accompanied by an unexpected reward - an 8.5 kilogram bag of paddy rice. R

Do you have a tale to tell? We'll pay cash for any original and unpublished story we print. See page 7 for details on how to contribute.



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Three-legged Siblings

PETER BADENHUIZEN

Rescuers told us that Willow and Storm would both need their front right legs amputated at six months of age. The Siberian husky siblings were the only puppies in their litter with a birth defect which forced them to walk on their elbows. and would be better off as threelegged 'tri-paws'. Their breeder had planned to euthanise them - until a rescue organisation stepped in.

We weren't afraid of the challenge and quickly learned Willow and Storm weren't either. Now eight years old, the two dogs have hopped, run

and climbed hundreds of kilometres of hiking trails. They can jump amazingly well - we even had to erect a two-metre fence around our yard to prevent them from clearing it.

Once in a while, one of them will take a spill or faceplant, but they just pop back up and forge ahead. I honestly don't think that they have any idea that they are different from any other dog - just don't ask them to 'shake'.

You could earn cash by telling us about the antics of unique pets or wildlife. Turn to page 7 for details on how to contribute.



King Of The Mountain

FRANCIS ROY HILL

Some years ago, I bought a block of land in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. Before the house was built, I planned where it should be situated.

One day, busily hammering wooden pegs into the ground to mark out the footprint of the house, I didn't notice a kangaroo a short distance from me. He was standing up to his full height next to a flowering Hawthorn bush, as if guarding it. This big boy must have been king of the mountain. He was a warrior, with battle scars on his head and chest to prove it, and ears tattered and torn. He watched as I drove in a few more pegs and grunted before loping off. After

that he became a regular visitor although we both kept our distance.

One night after the house was built, and during bleak belowzero temperatures, I was startled while testing the verandah lights. A kangaroo was keeping warm on my front door mat. Big Joe, as I named the roo, bounded three metres in one hop, landing on the lawn. I opened the front door and he glared at me. "My doormat can be yours anytime," I told him.

After that we developed a strange relationship. He didn't move away when I got close to him, he simply continued to crop my grass. He understood that I wouldn't harm him and in return he didn't damage my property. The rapport between us was one of mutual respect.



Hazards In Your Home

How to combat health risks lurking in your house

BY Susannah Hickling

MOULD

This fungus often appears where there is damp, condensation and a lack of ventilation, such as on windows, walls and behind cupboards. Not only do mouldy walls and grouting look horrible, they're also a threat to health, exacerbating asthma and causing bronchitis and other breathing problems, plus eye,

nose and throat irritation. Leave windows open whenever possible, especially in bathrooms, where an extractor fan will also help. Ideally, dry clothes outdoors. Keep buildings and gutters maintained and tackle leaks promptly.

RATS AND MICE

Rodents carry a host of bacteria and viruses. These include salmonella, the respiratory infection hantavirus (which you can catch by breathing in dust from droppings) and LCMV, a kind of meningitis. They're not common, but who wants to live in a home contaminated with rat or mice droppings or urine anyway? Discourage rodents by keeping surfaces free from food, cleaning regularly and blocking any possible access points. Put down traps as soon as you see signs of activity droppings are a giveaway.

BEDBUGS

A plague of these gross insects caused a frenzy in France last year, thanks to warm weather and more people travelling. These little creatures leave red, itchy lumps when they feed off you in the night. Other tell-tale signs are bugs in the tags, seams or piping of your mattress and brown spots - bedbug droppings - on your bedding. Bedbugs can sometimes be found in clothes, curtains and carpets, too.

Wash anything you can that's

affected on a hot wash, vacuum your bed and the area around it every day, and keep a closed, plastic cover on your mattress for a year.

CARBON MONOXIDE

Fires, wood-burners, gas boilers and cookers can produce invisible, odourless but lethal carbon monoxide if they are faulty, badly installed or poorly maintained. Symptoms to be alert to include headache, feeling sick or weak, chest pain or shortness of breath. If you think you're affected, leave the house and get medical help. Make sure gas appliances are serviced regularly, have chimneys and flues swept and install a carbon monoxide monitor in any room where the gas could be generated.

SHOES INDOORS

Whatever etiquette might dictate, taking outdoor shoes off is a hygienic option when you enter a home. A study by microbiologist Professor Charles Gerba of the University of Arizona found coliform bacteria from faecal material on the outside



of 96 per cent of outdoor shoes examined. One species of coliform, E. coli, can cause stomach bugs and urinary tract infections. Keeping floors clean will also reduce the risk.



WHATEVER ETIQUETTE **MIGHT DICTATE, TAKING OUTDOOR SHOES OFF IS A HYGIENIC OPTION WHEN YOU ENTER A HOME**

SHOWER HEADS

Think catching Legionnaires' disease from your shower sounds farfetched? It's not impossible if it's not used regularly. To keep Legionella bacteria at bay, store hot water at 16°C or higher and allow the shower to run for a few minutes before stepping in if you haven't used it for a while. Descale your shower head every few months to prevent bacteria, viruses and microorganisms.



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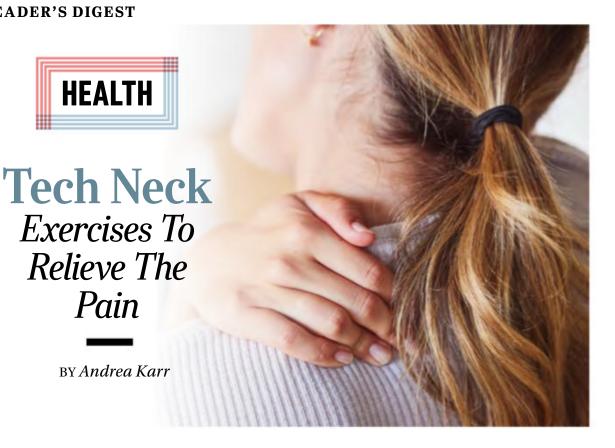
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stare at my phone for five hours a day. At least, that's what an impertinent weekly notification tells me. As a result, I've developed 'tech neck' - head forward, shoulders rounded and back slumped - and it causes pain and stiffness in my back, shoulders and neck. In essence, I have poor posture.

Pain

But I'm not alone. It's caused by looking down at electronic devices too much which causes the muscles in my neck to strain and my shoulders to slump forward. Studies show that between 27-48 per cent of office workers experience neck problems each year.

I saw a physiotherapist who recommended some stretches to help alleviate the tension. For a week, I took a five-minute break, three times each day, to roll my head up and down into a chin tuck, slip onto a mat and into cobra pose (lie on your stomach with your palms on the mat, next to your shoulders, then raise your upper body and look forward) and do a few spinal rotations (sitting cross-legged on the floor, reach for your left knee with your right hand, gently twisting your torso to the left; repeat on the other side). I also made sure my smartphone and computer screen were always positioned at eye level.

I felt immediate relief, but I was told I would need to adjust my screen time habits before I saw any improvement in my posture.











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WORLD OF MEDICINE

START AND END THE DAY RIGHT

It's not just what you eat, but when you eat that matters. That's the conclusion of two studies, one looking at breakfast and the other at bedtime eating.

In the first, published in the Journal of Affective Disorders, scientists studied more than 20,000 adults. Those who ate breakfast regularly - especially if the breakfast didn't include inflammatory foods like red or processed meat and commercial baked goods - had lower rates of depression.

In the second study, Penn State University scientists found that people who regularly ate berries of any kind, but especially blackberries, had fewer nights of short sleep (less than six hours). Add some blueberries to your breakfast or eat blackberries after dinner. And sweet dreams!

BREAST CANCER RED FLAGS

Nearly everyone would consider a breast lump to be a sign of possible cancer, according to a US survey. But most breast cancers don't begin with a noticeable lump. Fewer than half of the respondents knew about the other red flags, which can include nipple changes, loss of feeling in part of the breast, or puckering in the breast when you raise your arms.

Many changes are just the harmless effects of hormonal fluctuations or ageing, and some breast tumours cause no symptoms. When in doubt, get it checked out.

HUMOUR HELPS THE HEART

In a small trial, 26 participants with coronary artery disease - when plaque and inflammation impede the arteries' ability to bring enough blood and oxygen to the heart - were split into two groups. One group watched two comedy TV shows each week, while the other watched documentaries. After 12 weeks, those

who watched comedy saw a ten per cent increase in

> how much oxygen their heart could pump. By releasing endorphins, laughter may reduce inflammation and help muscles in the arteries to relax.













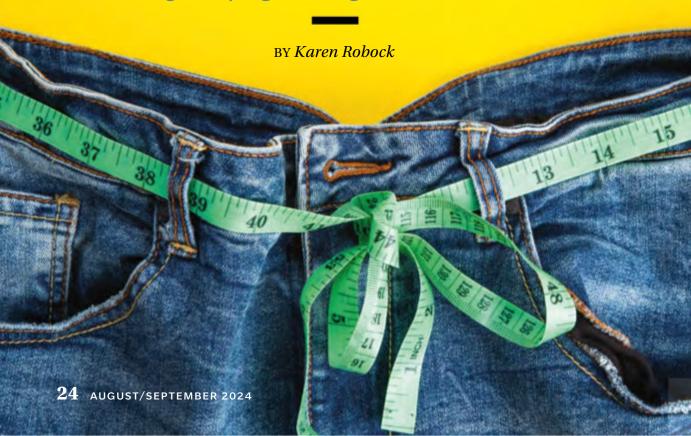








Everything you need to know about the new diabetes drugs shaping the weight-loss revolution



eight is something that I've thought about every single day of my adult life," says Jennifer Blackburn*, a 49-year-old public relations professional.

Following decades of trying different diets and medications - and finding little success - in late 2022 she started taking Ozempic, the diabetes drug that has become synonymous with celebrity weight loss.

"It has been life-changing," she says.

It's been reported that in the US, health-care providers wrote more than nine million prescriptions for Ozempic and similar drugs during the last few months of 2022. Weightloss drug sales are forecast to grow to as much as US\$100 billion by the end of the decade.

No wonder obesity medications are a hot topic. But there's still mass confusion around who should take them, whether the potential side effects are worth it, and whether people who truly need them can access - and afford - the limited supply.

How do the new obesity drugs work?

Ozempic was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2017 for the treatment of type 2 diabetes. Once the manufacturer, Novo Nordisk, tapped into the drug's added benefit of triggering substantial weight loss, it soon had another drug in the works: Wegovy, with a higher

dose of the same active ingredient, semaglutide. This was approved in 2021 for the treatment of obesity. The company also makes an oral form of semaglutide called Rybelsus for type 2 diabetes.

In addition to semaglutide, there is also tirzepatide, which is prescribed as Mounjaro for diabetes and Zepbound for obesity. (Again, the active ingredient is the same, but the drugs are prescribed under different names with slightly different doses.) Another diabetes drug, liraglutide, is marketed as Saxenda for weight loss.

Due to staggered release dates of these medications and fluctuations in their availability, some people without type 2 diabetes (such as Blackburn) have been prescribed the diabetes drugs for the treatment of obesity. The practice of prescribing drugs 'off-label', which means for a use other than the one the medication is approved for, is not uncommon.

Semaglutide and tirzepatide work for people with type 2 diabetes by helping the pancreas produce more insulin when blood sugar is high and by preventing the liver from releasing too much sugar. And they provide a third action, the one that's getting all the attention: as GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide 1) receptor agonists, they mimic the gut hormone that communicates fullness to the brain. This false fullness cue helps patients eat less, which leads to weight loss - as much as 15 to 20 per cent of a patient's body weight. (Tirzepatide has the added benefit of also triggering a hormone from the small intestine, which speaks to the fullness centre of the brain as well.) Other than Rybelsus, which is a daily oral tablet, they are all given as a self-administered injection just under the skin of the thigh, the abdomen, or the back of the upper arm. Saxenda is a daily jab, while the others are taken weekly.

For most people, the doses will need to continue indefinitely. Once someone stops taking the drug, their hunger cues are likely to return to their baseline and the weight comes back. "The first time I see a patient, I tell them this is meant to be a longterm treatment plan," says Dr Nidhi Kansal, an obesity medicine specialist at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago.

Who can these drugs help?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 890 million adults were living with obesity in 2022. Defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher, obesity puts a person at increased risk of a range of health problems, from heart disease to sleep apnoea. (It should be noted that BMI is a screening tool and does not on its own determine a person's fitness or health.)

In obesity, metabolic hormones can be dysregulated, which means that for some people who are trying to do the right things in terms of diet and exercise, their bodies just won't respond the same way.

"That's where medication has been a game-changer," says Dr Kansal.

But since Oprah Winfrey and a slew of other influencers have raved about their slimming successes on these drugs, it seems everybody wants to try them. The overwhelming demand has led to shortages. Throughout 2023, people with type 2 diabetes struggled to access Ozempic. Periodic shortages are expected to continue this year. Novo Nordisk recently announced an earmarked US\$6.5 billion to boost production facilities to bolster its global supply chain.

Those who can access these drugs face a significant financial cost.

In the US, where the State of Obesity 2023 Report found 41.9 per cent of adults have obesity, the stakes are high to find a medicinal treatment for the condition. Despite obesity being such a significant public health issue, the cost is prohibitive to the vast majority of Americans.

"These medications are mindblowingly expensive," says endocrinologist Dr Amy Warriner, director of the University of Alabama at Birmingham weight-loss clinic. A monthly supply of Wegovy or Zepbound will set you back more than US\$1000. Some private insurers won't cover the cost; some place strict restrictions on who is eligible.

Seniors face an added challenge: "Medicare [the US federal health insurance programme for seniors and people living with disabilities] blocks all of these medications," says Dr Fatima Cody Stanford, an obesity medicine physician scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital. She hopes that the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act, a push to lift Medicare's ban in the US on weight-loss drugs will finally be passed, expanding and updating coverage. In the meantime, dozens more obesity drugs in development are certain to increase competition and eventually drive down prices.

Still, there is big money to be made. Earlier this year, Eli Lilly and Co., makers of Mounjaro and Zepbound, launched a telehealth service called LillyDirect, where patients can, in consultation with an online health-care provider, order the drugs directly to their door. "This is very concerning, as we are not sure what patients are actually taking," says Dr Warriner.

Some practitioners worry that people are basically working around seeing in-person doctors who would be unlikely to prescribe to them, or turning to unregulated private telehealth services and weight-loss clinics to get unapproved generic versions of the drugs without a prescription.

How well do they work?

For perspective, it helps to compare these drugs to the alternatives. "Only five to ten per cent of patients seeking treatment for obesity are going to get significant weight loss with diet and lifestyle modifications alone," says Dr Stanford. Bariatric surgery (where a large portion of the stomach is removed) has a high success rate (between 50 per cent and 85 per cent, depending on the type), but not everyone is a candidate, and many patients don't want to go under the knife.

The third option is a class of oral weight-loss drugs. The 'old generation' of obesity medications, such as combination phentermine with topiramate (Qsymia) and bupropion plus naltrexone (Contrave), help most patients lose an average of five per cent of their body weight. These medications are much more affordable than the newer ones, but the results aren't nearly as impressive.

By comparison, studies show that those taking Wegovy shed an average of 15 per cent of their weight. The results for Zepbound are even better, with patients losing 20 per cent or more of their body weight when the drugs are taken in conjunction with exercise and dietary changes.

"These are results we've never seen before," says Dr Daniel Drucker, an endocrinologist at the Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute in Toronto.

But that's if, and only if, the medications work for you. "This is not talked about enough, but I do have patients - about a quarter of them who are minimal to non-responders,"

READER'S DIGEST

says Dr Stanford. "That's why I don't use phrases like miracle drug, because it's only a miracle if it works for you."

What else can they do?

The benefits extend beyond the number on your scale, says Dr Daniela Hurtado Andrade, an endocrinologist at the Mayo Clinic in Florida. The largest semaglutide study to date, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, found that the drug reduces the risk of heart attacks, strokes and cardiovascular death by 20 per cent. The patients in the study were all 45 years and older, overweight or obese, and had cardiovascular disease.

Also, only 3.5 per cent of the patients taking semaglutide progressed to having diabetes, compared to 12 per cent in the placebo group. And a major study published in Hypertension found that people with obesity taking Zepbound experienced a significant drop in blood pressure.

"These medications are life-changing for so many people, allowing significant weight loss, but more importantly, leading to impressive health benefits including medical reversal of diabetes, improved mobility, reduced liver disease due to fatty infiltration and so many more," says Dr Warriner.

Because we already know that GLP-1 drugs reduce inflammation in the heart, kidneys and liver, researchers are hopeful that this effect could be applied to treat inflammatory



diseases of the brain and eventually Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases. Additional research is looking at the potential of these drugs to treat nonmetabolic conditions such as drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

Are they really the answer?

Despite all the benefits, there are some definite downsides. Mental health issues are not listed among Ozempic's possible side effects, but in July 2023 the European Medicines Agency (Europe's equivalent of the FDA) said it was looking into a risk of thoughts of self-harm and suicidal thoughts with the use of Ozempic and similar drugs. Wegovy comes with warnings for depression or thoughts of suicide.

More common side effects include a range of gastrointestinal issues, including nausea, constipation and diarrhoea. As many as 15 per cent of patients experience side effects, says Dr Kansal. Ozempic's list of possible serious side effects includes inflammation of the pancreas, kidney failure, gallbladder problems and thyroid cancer.

In August 2023, Eli Lilly and Co. and Novo Nordisk were sued over claims that their drugs caused gastroparesis, a disorder that makes food move too slowly through the stomach on its way to the small intestine, which can cause severe pain, vomiting and dehydration. In the US, and as of February 2024, over 55 personal injury lawsuits against Ozempic had been combined into a federal litigation that could grow to as many as 10,000 plaintiffs. The companies deny the claims. (At press time, all cases are ongoing.)

And a report published in the Journal of the American Medical Association has established a link between the use of GLP-1 agonists for weight loss and a risk of serious gastrointestinal conditions. Among people taking semaglutide, gastroparesis was seen at a rate of about ten cases per 1000.

With all this in mind, the experts we spoke with say we have sufficient data on the drugs to allow people those who need them for medical use and have been prescribed under the

care of a doctor - to feel confident taking them. But we don't know how the use of the drugs might play out over decades, or what some of the side effects of rapid weight loss will mean in the long run. There are already some concerns about decreases in muscle mass and bone density.

Despite all their potential, what the new obesity drugs can't seem to cure is the stigma of obesity. "It's a myth that obesity is a choice," says Dr Stanford. "The reality is that obesity is a disease." And still, the world judges people with obesity harshly - and people often condemn themselves, too. "They think they are failures, and they think they are cheating if they are using a drug to manage their disease," says Dr Kansal. "We don't think about any other medical diagnosis in this wav."

Jennifer Blackburn has lost 16 kilograms (and kept it off)."I feel happier, more confident, and I guess the word would be empowered," says Blackburn. "It's about so much more than size - it's like the weight has been lifted off my shoulders." R

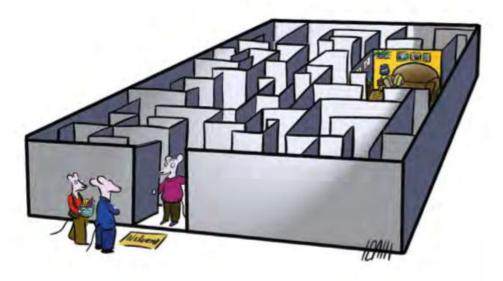


Animal Doctoring

Back in June 2022, scientists observing Sumatran orangutans in Indonesia's Gunung Leuser National Park witnessed an adult male treat a facial wound with chewed leaves of akar kuning, a medicinal plant used by people to treat pain and inflammation. Afterwards, he pressed the chewed plant leaves to cover the open wound like a makeshift bandage. AP

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

Seeing The Funny Side



"Sorry that took so long, I just moved in."

Expanding Our Vocabulary

After a recent visit to the eye doctor who was monitoring her glaucoma and macular degeneration, my mother-in-law shared the doctor's prognosis: "He says I'm suffering from immaculate deception."

LAURENCE REYNOLDS

Sixth Sense

On the morning of my daughter's birthday, I told her, "Now that you're six, there will be things you can do that you couldn't do before."

By that I meant taking on chores and responsibilities. She took it

to mean something else. Leaping off her bed, she ran down the hall yelling, "I'm going to see if I can read!" **KEITH CRAWFORD**

Camera Ready

As I lugged a ladder through the house, I told my husband, "I'm going to get some heavy boxes off that top shelf in our cupboard. Maybe you should come along - they are pretty high up, and I could fall."

My beloved jumped up from his leather recliner and said, "OK, yeah, let me grab my camera."

CARLA KOOTSTRA

GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

Very excited about the arrival of my niece's new baby, I searched for a baby store in my area where I might buy a gift. One shop had closed; another seemed to be online only. Finally, I found an adorable little place, chock-full of little toys and outfits. I was taken immediately by a tiny plush jacket. "Is this for a newborn?" I asked the assistant.

She hesitated. "It depends on the breed," she said.

DEBBIE PLUMER. IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ride Share

My mum downloaded the Uber app and ordered a ride for the first time. She's 66, she'd never done it, and I'm proud of her! I was less proud to learn that in the process she had accidentally signed up to become an Uber driver.

@IOREMMONS





THE GREAT TWEET-OFF: PET-SITTING EDITION

Caring for a pet that's not yours may require a sense of humour.

The dog I'm pet-sitting just yipped pathetically for five minutes because I hadn't gone to bed yet and she was already under the duvet.

Are we married? @HEIDITRON3000

My friend whose dog I am watching has just texted to say there are voghurt iceblocks in the freezer for the dog if he wants them. Yoghurt iceblocks. For the dog. In the freezer. If he wants them.

@HANSMOLLMAN

The dog I'm pet-sitting got hold of a plastic knife and was threatening to eat it. I had to offer her my whole breakfast in exchange for her dropping it. Then I realised I had just literally been held up at knifepoint by a dog over some scrambled eggs.

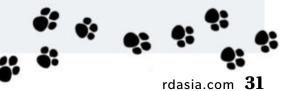
@LEBASSETT

In case this is helpful to other non-pet people who are going to be pet-sitting: it doesn't help to google 'cats'.

@ABOULELAHOSAM

Pet-sitting for my parents. My dad cooked chicken, rice, green beans and sweet potatoes for the dog. They did not leave me any food.

@SAMANTHAMARIE





DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

CHINIIIIIIIIIIII



BY John Dyson

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JONATHAN CARLSON

rdasia.com 33



he jet thundered down the runway, then lifted into the evening sky over Los Angeles. "That's odd," remarked Captain Tim Barnby, noticing that the wheels seemed to take longer than usual to retract. He scanned the instruments for indications of trouble. There were none: all the wheels were up and locked.

With no problems evident, Virgin Atlantic Flight 024, with 98 passengers and a crew of 16, set a course to London's Heathrow Airport. The flight was uneventful, and 11 hours later the red-and-white Airbus 340 began to descend. Thanks to favourable tail winds, touchdown - at 3.05pm on November 5, 1997 would be a little early.

Graham and Janice Jones saw their

daughter, Claire, 23, grin as she came down the aisle, smart in her flight attendant's uniform. She had invited her parents on a trip to California, and they were now returning home. "Dad," Claire said, "the captain wants to know if you'd like to sit in the cockpit for landing."

"I'd love it!" he replied. Minutes later, Jones slid into a jump seat between Captain Barnby, 39, who was talking to air-traffic control on the radio, and Andrew Morley, 32, who was piloting the plane. The third pilot, Craig Mathieson, 28, who had relieved the others during the night, explained the landing sequence to Jones. "When the landing gear is lowered you'll see four green lights on the instrument panel showing the wheels are down and locked," he said.

"The Next Aircraft Will Crash On Landing"

AT 11 KILOMETRES to touchdown, Morley ordered, "Gear down!" There was a clunk as the big doors opened, and a rumble as the wheel struts unfolded into the slipstream. Jones watched three green lights illuminate - and one red. The pilots waited for the red to correct to green. Nothing changed.

"Recycle the gear, please," Morley said. Barnby raised and lowered the wheels. Again, three greens and a red. Now as the plane descended to 750 feet (230 metres) on final approach, alarms dinged like door chimes. Morley immediately pushed the throttles to climb while Barnby raised the wheels. Flight 024 surged into the clouds.

"The boys have a bit of a problem," Mathieson told Jones. "Would you mind going back to your seat?"

"WHAT HAVE I DONE?"

Barnby knew that minor glitches often caused false alarms. He was confident all four sets of wheels were coming down perfectly and that only the warning light was faulty. But with the landing gear out of sight there was no way to be sure.

As Morley flew a circular holding pattern, Mathieson raised a hatch in the floor and wriggled into the tiny avionics compartment. Brightly lit with electronic boxes on metal shelves, it was like the inside of a computer. As he pulled different combinations of circuit breakers, the

pilots raised and lowered the gear. The red light remained on.

Barnby kept his eye on the fuel gauges; already, 25 minutes of circling had burned nearly half the fuel reserve. "Looks like we've got a real problem," he said. "I want to do a flyby." They'd make a low pass by Heathrow's control tower so controllers there could see whether all the wheels were down.

In the forward galley, in-flight supervisor Jacalyn Courtney explained the pilot's plans to the crew. Claire Iones was close to tears as she realised the implications. "I've got my Mum and Dad!" she cried. "What have I done?"

BY NOW THE PASSENGERS were getting jittery. Colin Mitchell kept his nose in his book. A roller-coaster fanatic who worked for a London bank, he'd been surprised on his 40th birthday when his wife, Lesley, gave him tickets to Las Vegas so he could ride one of the world's highest roller coasters. With their three-yearold daughter Hayley, they were now heading home. "Why don't you panic like the rest of us?" Lesley teased.

Claire Jones seemed agitated as she checked the other passengers. "It's going to be fine, don't worry," she told them. But she wouldn't look her mother in the eye; Janice Jones knew the situation was serious.

Barnby now took the controls while the other two pilots began reviewing





emergency checklists. Barnby levelled off at 250 feet, roaring towards the control tower. "You'll enjoy this, Tim. It's your cup of tea," Morley said lightly. He knew that Barnby was an aerobatic pilot in his spare time and had won the British aerobatic championship that summer. An abnormal landing won't be so tough for a man who spends a lot of time flying upside down, Morley mused.

At the last moment Barnby pulled back on the stubby control stick. Climbing steeply, he tipped the plane's belly. "It's bad news," a controller radioed from the tower. "The left gear is not even out of its bay."

"Roger," Barnby replied, his mind racing. Their fuel was getting short. Flight 024 was in trouble.

RISKY MANOEUVRE

Barnby's radio crackled; it was Robin Cox, manager of the Airbus fleet. "Okay, there are a few things you can do," he advised. "You can try bouncing her." Barnby would hit the good wheels hard on the runway and take

off instantly, hoping to jolt the stuck wheels down.

"Not in this aircraft," Barnby replied, noting that fuel was running low. "I need to get her on the ground."

Cox had another idea. "You can pull some G," he suggested.

Barnby pushed the plane into a steep dive, then pulled up sharply while flicking the wings up and down, hoping gravitational force would dislodge the stuck wheels.

As the G-force squeezed passengers into their seats, Colin Mitchell flung out an arm to protect his daughter Hayley. This was a stomach churner at least as good as his birthday surprise, he thought. And scarier.

But the manoeuvre didn't work. Barnby's only hope was to land on the right-side set of wheels, while holding the left wing off the runway to keep it from touching and cartwheeling the plane. No one had ever tried this in a wide-body jet. "You'd better call a mayday," Barnby told Morley.

In the tower, air-traffic watched manager Alan Haines flip up the red

"The Next Aircraft Will Crash On Landing"

cover on his desk and pressed the 'crash' button. Instantly Heathrow Airport swung into crisis mode. Departures were stopped and many incoming flights diverted. Thousands of travellers groaned as 'delayed' flashed up on flight-information screens.

Fire and rescue units sped to positions along a four-kilometre runway. Nearby hospitals were warned to expect a major accident.

Barnby and his crew methodically worked through the crash-landing checklist on their screens, then again from the lists in the plane's handbook. This time they realised they had overlooked something. The small print stated: ensure centre gear is raised.

Barnby and Morley exchanged horrified glances. The wheel strut in the centre of the fuselage, between the wings, was not strengthened for heavy impact, and if they landed with the centre wheel down – as it was – the strut could punch up through the cabin. Shocked by the lapse, Barnby flew a circle while they sorted it out. "Can you spot anything else?" he asked anxiously.

Mathieson scanned the lists. "No, that's it."

All his flying life Barnby had wondered what it would be like to have an accident. Will the plane stay straight as it skids down the runway? Will it break up? He tried to put aside negative thoughts. Just fly the plane, he told himself. Everything will be fine.

WITH MINUTES TO GO, in-flight supervisor Courtney asked passengers to read the safety card and look for the nearest exits. "Able-bodied passengers who are firemen, police, airline staff, pilots, doctors or military," she added, "please make yourselves known."

Flight attendants then chose four passengers to sit near every door. "You have to go down the slide first and get people out of the way at the bottom," Claire told her father.

"I can't leave without you and Mum," Graham replied.

"Dad!" she snapped in a tone he hadn't heard before.

"All right, I'll do it!" he agreed.





READER'S DIGEST

The Mitchells strapped Hayley into her seat. "There's going to be lots of noise, darling," Lesley said, her stomach knotting. "Daddy will undo your seat belt, and then we're going to run as fast as we can." Blue eyes big and round, Hayley gazed trustingly at Lesley.

"BRACE! BRACE! BRACE!"

At 4.19pm the Heathrow tower controller radioed Barnby: "You are cleared to land, runway 27, wind south at 14 knots, emergency services standing by." Rescue units' radios crackled: "All stations. The next aircraft will crash on landing."

Eight kilometres out Barnby picked up the runway lights. Monitoring the instruments, Morley kept up a running commentary: "Descent rate good. Land slightly to the right."

At 200 feet Morley spoke over the public-address system: "Brace! Brace! Brace!"

Protecting their faces with pillows, passengers leaned forward and pressed their hands on their heads.

The Airbus seemed to float out of the sky like a gigantic bird reaching for the ground with a single claw. Barnby held her straight down the runway and pulled up the nose; the longer the Airbus stayed in the air, the more it would slow before it hit.

With a slight thump, the plane's 150-tonne weight kissed down on the wheels of the right main gear. "Cut the outboards," Barnby called.

Mathieson snapped the master switches of engines one and four to minimise the risk of fire.

The left wing lifted, causing the right to drop. The engines under the right wing scraped along the concrete, shooting streams of sparks.

Fire engines sped along behind Flight 024, dodging metal pieces that broke from its undercarriage. The fire crews expected the plane to roll and split apart at any minute.

But Barnby levelled the right wing, and the nose wheel touched down. "Cut two!" he ordered. "Cut three."

The plane swung right, its good wheels coming perilously close to the runway edge. As it started to slow, the left wing dropped, and the engines on the left side scraped concrete. Barnby and Morley gently pressed on the rudder and brake pedals, but the computer was confused because only one set of main wheels was registering. Finally, after 16 seconds, it applied full brakes.

The wheels on the right landing gear locked, and the smoking tyres blew out with loud bangs. Melting as they scored into the concrete, the wheel rims spurted sheets of flame and sparks.

The plane slid along its belly, canting to the left, then finally came to a halt. The emergency personnel all braced for an explosion. None came. Fire engines pulling alongside sprayed foam on the smoking wheels. There was no fire.

"The Next Aircraft Will Crash On Landing"



IN THE CABIN a burst of applause quickly faltered as flight attendants ordered the passengers to evacuate. Colin Mitchell put Hayley on an escape slide and let go. A fireman caught her at the bottom. When Lesley hit the ground seconds later, Hayley reached over to her and

Captain Tim Barnby was back in the air a week after the Flight 024 emergency landing

giggled, "Mummy, can we do it again?"

In less than a minute the cabin was empty. Outside, Claire ran to join her parents. "We made it," they cried, hugging one another.

Later Claire and her mother hugged Barnby and his crew. "You did a terrific job!" Janice said.

Barnby boxed Graham on the shoulder. "It's all your fault," he said, laughing. "Everything was okay until you came into the cockpit!"

A British government

investigation found that as Flight 024 lifted off the runway in Los Angeles, a ten-centimetre metal pin fell out of a brake assembly, allowing one end to droop and jam the left-gear door mechanism. Following the accident, the landing gear was redesigned to prevent future malfunctions.



No Gelato After Midnight

Italian city Milan is once again trying to ban ice cream sales in the streets after midnight to protect the 'tranquillity' of residents. A 2013 attempt failed after a backlash and an 'Occupy Gelato' protest. CNN.COM



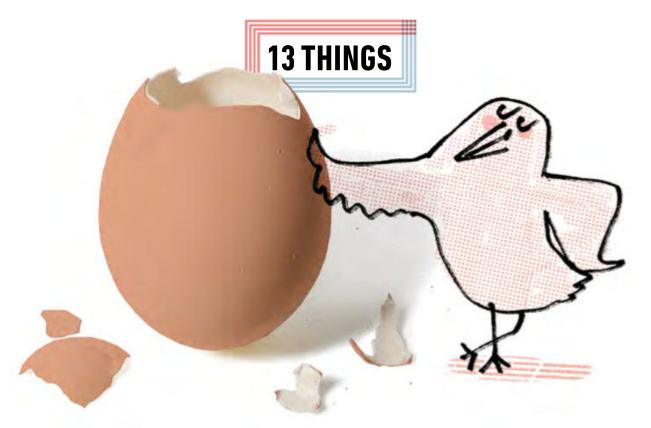


SEE THE WORLD... Turn the page >>





Pole Fishing An image taken in 1995 by renowned photographer Steve McCurry made Sri Lanka's stilt fishermen famous all over the world. Today, men in sarongs casting their lines from stakes driven into the seabed are among the most popular motifs with tourists to the country. However, many of these anglers stopped fishing for herring, mackerel and sardines long ago. They merely pose for the cameras – for a fee. Tourism is an important industry for this island nation. PHOTOS: (OPENER) ALAMY STOCK PHOTO/ ROBERT HARDING; (THIS PAGE) PICTURE-ALLIANCE/ DPA/DPAWEB/M.A.PUSHPA_ KUMARA/BOTH GERMAN RD LICENSE rdasia.com



Egg-ceptional Facts About

BY Courtney Shea

Eggs are perhaps the most vital life force. More than 99 per cent of animal species reproduce via oviparity (egg laying), with mammals being the notable outliers. And even then, there are two striking egg-ceptions: the echidna and the platypus, the only mammals that lay eggs, both found in Australia.

At birth, human ovaries come equipped with a lifetime supply of eggs already intact - between one and two million oocytes (eggs). By puberty, that number shrinks to around 400,000 and continues to decrease with age. With women waiting longer to have children (the average age for first-time

mothers in Australia is 30, New Zealand is 30.6 and in Singapore 31.9), egg freezing is on the rise.

"Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Science has settled this debate once and for all. Chickens are a domesticated version of the red jungle fowl (Gallus gallus), a tropical bird still common in Asia. By selectively breeding the tamest of the birds, humans created a whole new species approximately 8000 years ago. So, the first-ever chicken (Gallus domesticus) came from the egg of its wild ancestor.

White and brown eggs are the most widely available, but chicken eggs come in an array of shades, including cream, pink, blue and even green. That's right: green eggs aren't just the imaginings of Dr Seuss - though in real life, only the shell appears green. The variety is due to genetics, and there's no difference in nutrition or taste.

Decorating eggs is an age-old tradition: archaeologists discovered gold- and silver-decorated eggs in the ancient tombs of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern elites. But the association with Easter began with the Ukrainian practice of *pysansky*. With the yellow yolk representing the sun, decorating eggs was a way to welcome spring and ward off bad crops.

When Christianity spread to Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, the ritual was reimagined, with the eggs symbolising Christ's resurrection.

Fabergé eggs are crafted from gold and adorned with diamonds and semi-precious stones. The Hen Egg, commissioned as an Easter gift by Tsar Alexander III for his wife, was the first in a series of 50 created for the Russian imperial family between 1885 and 1917. Of those, 43 are still accounted for - including the Third Imperial Egg (valued at US\$33 million). It was discovered at an American flea market in 2014. The buyer didn't realise its worth and had planned to sell it for scrap.

Pop culture 'Easter eggs' can be seen in Marvel movies and Taylor Swift music videos. But the practice of hiding hard-to-catch messages and inside jokes started as a way for video-game developers to communicate with players or leave a tag of sorts. But sometimes it happens by accident.

The cast of 1975's The Rocky Horror Picture Show held an Easter egg hunt on set and some of the eggs were so well hidden they weren't found by the crew. However, at least three eggs are visible in the final film.

More recently, a Starbucks coffee cup appeared in a Season 8 episode of Game of Thrones.

'To have egg on one's face' is a figurative expression meant to convey embarrassment, but it has more literal origins. In the vaudeville entertainment era of the early 20th century, a poor theatrical performance was often met with a pelting of rotten vegetables and, yes, raw eggs.

The largest eggs are laid by the ostrich, at 15 centimetres long and 13 centimetres wide. They weigh an average of 1.36 kilograms, but, in 2008, one ostrich laid an egg nearly double that (2.59 kilograms), hitting a new world record. However, the largest eggs to have ever existed are believed to be those of the now-extinct Aepyornis maximus (elephant bird), a flightless species native to Madagascar whose eggs were about 30 centimetres long and 22 centimetres wide. At the other end of the scale, the Bee Hummingbird's eggs measure 12 x 8.5 millimetres, the size of a coffee bean.

An egg is almost certain to shatter if you drop it on the floor, but squeeze it from the ends and it's a different story. The conundrum comes down to architecture: while eggshells are made from fragile calcium carbonate, their three-dimensional arch shape is extremely durable when pressure is applied equally from top to bottom - reportedly withstanding more than 45 kilograms of weight.

Eggs could be considered the original breakfast food in the West. Before the 18th century, only manual labourers, children and the elderly would eat first thing in the morning. But when the Industrial Revolution birthed a new labour class, workers needed sustenance before heading to the factory. Enter eggs (a cheaper alternative to meat) as the obvious solution to early morning hunger pangs.

Eggs are a great source of protein and vitamins A, D and B12. They're also high in cholesterol, which has led to some confusing guidelines when it comes to heart health. In the 1960s and '70s, consumers were warned against eating more than three eggs per week. But current research has debunked this advice, concluding that there's no definitive link between eggs and an increase in blood cholesterol. In fact, an egg a day can be good for you.

Chocolate eggs certainly don't have the same health benefits, but they're still a favourite treat. The first chocolate Easter egg was made in Europe in the late 19th century and was an expensive novelty at the time. It wasn't until the 1950s that they became more widely affordable. Easter has since become the second biggest holiday for chocolate consumption across the R world.









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TRUE CRIME

Can You Help Me Return the

A painting went missing in 1969, then turned up at a museum's doorstep. No one knew how or why — until now

BY Dan Barry

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES



The Picasso fell off the proverbial truck. It vanished from a loading dock at Logan International Airport in Boston and wound up where it didn't belong, in the modest home of one Merrill Rummel, also known as Bill.

n fairness, this forklift operator had no idea that the crate he tossed ■ into the boot of his car contained a Picasso until he opened its casing. In fairness, he didn't care much for it; he preferred realism.

But now things had turned all too real. FBI agents were hot on the trail of a hot Picasso unavailable for public viewing, as it was hidden in Rummel's hallway cupboard. He and his fiancée, Sam, began to panic.

"How do we get rid of it?" she recalls thinking. "We couldn't just give it back. It was a pain in our butt."

Fortunately, Rummel knew a guy. Someone particularly skilled at making problems melt away. A fixer. He dialled the number he knew by heart.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING PICASSO goes a long way back. Back before the far more notorious theft of 13 works of art from Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990. Back, in a sense, to a time before Picasso had even painted the piece.

Back to the 1950s of Waterville, Maine, where the Rummel boys -Bill and his younger brother, Whit, were testing their hometown's forbearance.

If one boy was looting parking meters for his coin collection, the other was pilfering pens from Woolworth's. If one was stealing radios from abandoned cars, the other was racing his car so recklessly that it seemed destined for the wreckers.

But their father, Whitcomb Rummel Sr, always managed to calm the aggravated constabulary with assurances that he would handle it. And he did: when 12-year-old Whit - known in the family as Half-Whit - was caught stealing from Woolworth's, his father banned him from entering any shop for a year.

"Not even into the corner shop for a Coke," the son, now 77, recalls. "This meant my mother had to bring clothes out to the car so I could try on pants because I couldn't go into the shop."

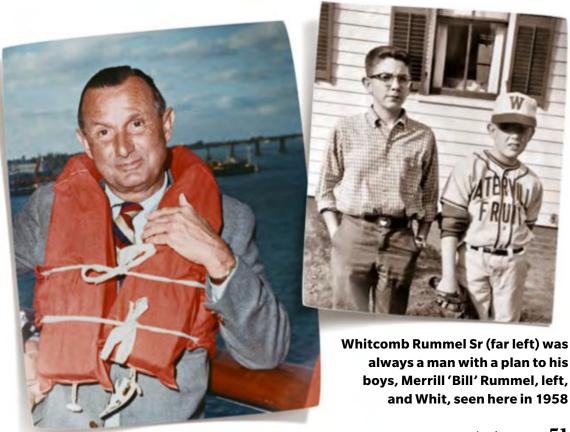
Neither son dared to cross their father. "He was all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing," Whit says.

Rummel the elder never spoke of his own childhood - too painful, perhaps. His mother had died of influenza when he was nine, after which his father sent him away to an affection-averse aunt. "It wasn't until after high school that he reconnected with his father," Whit says.

He attended college, did some

acting, married, served in Africa during World War II, and moved to Waterville, where he bought and spiffed up a local ice cream stand. His frozen treats became a favoured local delight, available at Gustafson's market, the Chicken Coop restaurant, Bea's Candy Kitchen - even Mid State Motors, where a full tank of petrol came with a pint of Rummel's.

The man behind the brand was just as ubiquitous, a chamber of commerce leader and active in local clubs. He donated a scoreboard to the town gymnasium, presented the police with a trained German shepherd, sponsored a semi-pro baseball team and gave away banana splits to



READER'S DIGEST

children for their civic spirit or academic success, or just for being kids.

At home he was a quirky dad, sometimes fun and even zany, but often stern. "He never hugged us," Whit says.

To Waterville's relief, the Rummel boys moved on. Whit went to Uni-

"WORRIED? **ARE YOU KIDDING? WE DIDN'T WANT** TO GO TO PRISON"

versity. Bill served with the Coast Guard, where he fell in love with a bowling-alley bartender whose customers called out "Play it again, Sam" so often that her given name, Evelyn, became a gutter ball.

When his Coast Guard stint ended in 1968, Bill joined Emery Air Freight, then America's largest cargo airline. He worked nights on the company's loading dock at Logan airport, where, in early 1969, a crate arrived from Paris.

Inside, was a Picasso: Portrait of a Woman and a Musketeer.

Pablo Picasso, then in his late 80s, had become intrigued by musketeers as evocative of the old masters. especially Rembrandt, and returned to the theme again and again. "It was the idée fixe of his very late work," said Pepe Karmel, a professor of art history at New York University. "I think he was asking himself: Where does my art stand in relation to the old masters?"

The painting, completed in 1967, was to be forwarded from Boston to a Milwaukee gallery owned by Irving Luntz. His son, Holden Luntz, recalls that his late father bought the piece from Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, a prominent dealer in Paris known for championing Picasso. Since negotiations took place on his father's 40th birthday, he says, Kahnweiler agreed to sell the work for US\$40,000.

"A gesture of generosity," says Holden Luntz, now 70, a photography gallery owner.

But the Picasso never made it to Florida. An anxious Irving Luntz contacted Emery Air Freight to complain, but the cargo company had its own emerging problem, with what came to be known in Boston as the 100-hour storm.

The protracted late-February snowfall paralysed Boston, including the airport, where more than half a metre of snow disrupted passenger flights and cargo deliveries. Large containers littered the tarmac, while boxes and packages clogged the docks.

"Our dock was a mess," Bill Rummel said in a 2007 interview with Ira Glass for a shelved episode of the *This* American Life radio programme.

With outbound crates at the front and inbound crates at the back,



Emery executives demanded a decluttering of the dock. Under pressure, his supervisor pointed to a crate whose label had disintegrated from being left out in the storm, and told him to get rid of it.

It should be noted that, according to Bill, this supervisor was later fired. For stealing.

Bill angled the crate into the boot of his car and later lugged it into his half of a two-storey home in Medford, Massachusetts. He pried it open with a hammer to discover that he was

THE FBI WAS TURNING UP THE HEAT, ISSUING A **BULLETIN TO LAW-ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES**

now in possession of a Picasso.

Its artistry underwhelmed him, he told Glass. "Not a Wyeth [realist painter], put it that way."

Bill called his then-fiancée. "You'll never guess what I've got," Sam Rummel, now 80, recalls him saying. "A Picasso!"

"What are you, drunk?" she asked. She returned to their home to find a big crate leaning against the wall.

"You want to see it?" he asked.

"Hell, no," she said.

The couple hid the crate in the cupboard beneath the stairwell. "We shoved that thing so far back there, and then shoved stuff in front of it," Sam says. "We never talked about it."

But someone was talking about it: Irving Luntz, the Florida gallery owner. After weeks of being Picasso-less, he contacted the FBI, which began snooping around Logan. This unnerved a certain couple in Medford.

"Worried? Are you kidding?" Sam says. "We were young. We didn't want to go to prison."

Unsure of what to do, Bill called his brother, Whit, who was more knowledgeable about art. He had once torn a photograph of a Picasso out of a library book to hang in his bedroom.

In effect, Whit's first question was: have you called the fixer?

Of course. Dad.

The elder Rummel listened to his older son's predicament and then offered two options:

1. They could bury the Picasso in the foundation of a Waterville restaurant under renovation that his father co-owned. (The restaurant's name, The Silent Woman, seemed apropos.) Unearth the painting in 30 years and maybe sell it for a small fortune. Or,

2. Return it.

When Bill asked his father what he thought he should do, the elder Rummel said that this was a life choice he had to make for himself.

"So I said, 'I'll give it back'," the son told Glass. "And he said, 'I'll help you'."

The elder Rummel telephoned Whit

PHOTOS: (LEFT) TRAVIS DOVE/THE NEW YORK TIMES; (RIGHT) WHITCOMB RUMMEL JR. VIA THE NEW YORK TIMES /BOTH RDIE LICENSE

Hey Dad, Can You Help Me Return The Picasso I Stole?



in New Orleans and gave him detailed instructions for a handwritten note that could not be traced. Use high-end stationery. Since you're left-handed, write it out with your right hand. And since you're studying creative writing, make it sound artsy. Then send it by airmail to your brother in Medford.

Meanwhile, the FBI was turning up the heat, issuing a bulletin to lawenforcement agencies throughout the Northeast: 'Picasso stolen from Logan Airport. Be on the lookout.'

Days later, the ice cream king of

Waterville arrived in Medford with his wife, Ann, a new trench coat and a plan. He rubbed the painting's packaging and crate with Vaseline, for reasons that evaded his son. He attached the handwritten note. He donned the trench coat, a brimmed hat and gloves. Go time.

Three years after this escapade, Whitcomb Rummel Sr would die, suddenly, at 63; in his honour, his restaurant would stay closed until the evening ice cream rush. His son Bill would spend the next 18 years with

READER'S DIGEST



Emery, rising to regional manager before retiring to South Carolina and dying, at 71, in 2015.

But on this April Fools' Day, 1969, in Boston, father and son were sharing an unforgettable moment: loading a purloined Picasso into a Chevy Impala.

Bill Rummel, wearing sunglasses and a black watch cap, drove them into Boston and, at his father's direction, parked on Huntington Avenue. His father got out and carried the crate a few car lengths ahead.

The elder Rummel loaded the painting into a taxi, handed the driver a \$20 banknote and told him to deliver the package to the Museum of Fine Arts, just down the avenue. He returned to his son's car and, on the drive back to Medford, tossed the coat, hat and gloves in separate garbage bins.

Newswire services were soon circulating photographs of Perry T. Rathbone, the museum's esteemed director, posing with both the recovered Picasso, worth an estimated US\$75,000, and a mysterious handwritten note, which read: "Please accept this to replace in part some of the paintings removed from museums thruout the country."

It was signed 'Robbin' Hood.'

Luntz, the Florida gallery owner, told a TV station that he was

Hey Dad, Can You Help Me Return The Picasso I Stole?

"absolutely delirious and delighted to get this painting back". And yes, he said, prospective buyers were lining up.

A few days later, on the Emery loading dock at Logan Airport, Bill Rummel's boss called him over and motioned to a certain crate in the middle of the floor, bound for Milwaukee.

"They found it," his boss said. "Oh," he answered.

Whit Rummel, also known as Robbin' Hood, is a filmmaker in North Carolina. He has long thought that his family's Picasso story had the makings of a movie, and kept all the news clippings as proof of a tale that for decades could not be told. But he sensed a potential plot hole: where did the Picasso wind up?

A couple of years ago he hired Monica Boyer, an editor and financial writer, to track it down. She could not find mention of the work in auction-house records or in various Picasso databases, and, of course, the artist had created many musketeer-themed paintings. Still, by drawing on a few clues she found a catalogue for a 1971 exhibition called Picasso in Milwaukee. Among the works on display: *Portrait of a Woman and a Musketeer,* courtesy of Sidney and Dorothy Kohl.

Sidney Kohl, 93, living in Florida, is a member of the family behind the Kohl's department store chain. He is an extremely wealthy developer, investor and art collector; in 2012, eight pieces from the Kohl couple's collection sold at auction for US\$101 million. That sale did not include the Picasso, and the Kohls did not respond to several requests to confirm that the painting – no doubt worth millions of dollars – is still in their private collection.

Wherever it is, this work by one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th century remains as shielded from public view as if it had stayed hidden in the hallway cupboard of a forklift driver. But that working man had at least tried to return it to the world – with some help, of course, from his dad, the ice cream king of Waterville, Maine.

THE NEW YORK TIMES (JUNE 15, 2023), © 2023 BY THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY.



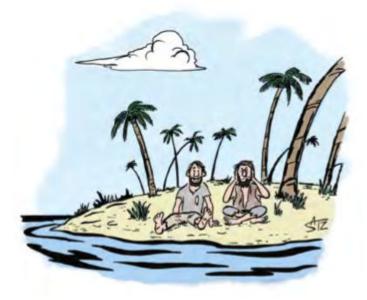
Marathon Effort

A British man who ran 1000 marathons over 43 years has earned a Guinness World Record for his aggregate time: 3363 hours, 4 minutes and 2 seconds. Steve Edwards, 61, ran his first marathon at the age of 18 in 1981.

UPI.COM



The Best Medicine



"Stop me if you've heard this one before."

Down On The Farm

A city slicker is in the country when he sees a field of animals and says to the farmer: "What a strangelooking cow. Why doesn't it have horns?"

"There are several reasons," the farmer replies. "Some cows get their horns late, others have their horns cut off, and still others never grow horns."

"And this cow?" the city slicker asks.

"Well, the reason this cow doesn't have any horns is because it's a horse." LANCASTERFARMING.COM

Vote Of Confidence

A politician running for office visits a small rural town and says to the mayor, "I want to help you. What are vour needs?"

"We have two basic needs," the mayor replies. "First, we have a hospital but no doctor." Hearing this, the politician pulls out his smartphone and after speaking for a little while tells the mayor, "Don't worry, a doctor will be here soon. Now, what's the second problem?"

"We don't have any mobile phone reception."

PLANET PROCTOR NEWSLETTER

And The Band Played On

Names for your middle-aged dad band:

The Who Left This Light On? The Arrhythmics Talking Heads with Subtitles Bloodwork, Sweat & Tears Crosby, Stills, Nash & No Longer Young

> BY WENDI AARONS AND LAURA HOUSE. FROM MCSWEENEYS.NET

It Takes Two

A zoo manager was sending an email requesting new animals. He wrote, "I want to order two mongooses," but that didn't seem right. So he rewrote it: "I would like to order two mongeeses." That looked even weirder. Finally, he started over and wrote, "No zoo should be without a mongoose. I would like to order two."

SUBMITTED BY RUTH SPANGLER

HAUNTED HOUSE

My housemates are convinced our house is haunted. I've lived here for 274 years and not noticed anything strange. @DOCATCDI





SHIVER ME TIMBERS!

September 19 is 'International Talk Like A Pirate' day. So, gather yer mateys for a day of jolly jests.



Q: How do pirates know that they are pirates?

> A: They think, therefore they ARRRR!!!!!

Q: Why does it take pirates so long to learn the alphabet?

A: Because they can spend vears at C.

Q. What did the pirate say when he became an octogenarian? A. Aye matey years old!

> Q: What's a pirate's least favourite veggie? A: Leeks.

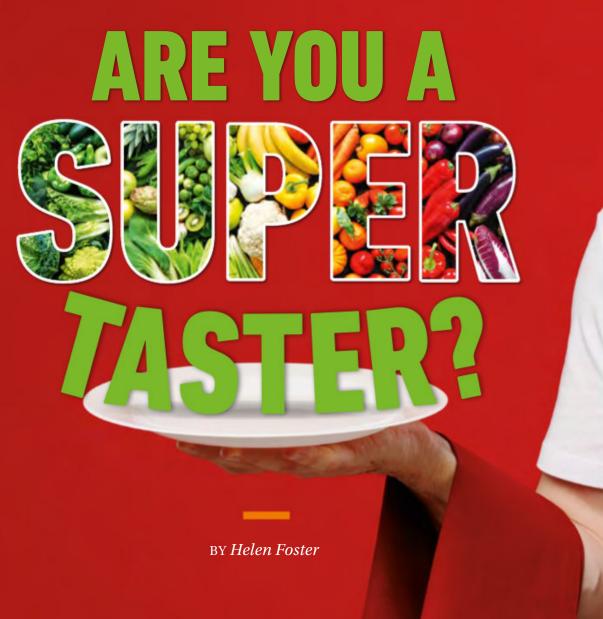
Q: How did the pirate call his mate? A: On his aye phone.

Q: What is a pirate's favourite doll? A: Baaaaaarrrrrrrbie!

SOURCES: RD: LOVETOKNOW.COM



Your sense of taste could affect your weight, your eating habits, and possibly even your risk of COVID-19. By understanding taste sensitivity, you can influence your eating behaviours for the better





Around ten years ago, Kavita Favelle, a food blogger from Wales, was enjoying a beer tasting event when she and the other beer enthusiasts were each given small pieces of paper to put in their mouths. The bite-sized paper contained a sample of a bitter chemical called phenylthiocarbamide and, by needing to spit it out, the 52 year old had revealed herself to be one of the 25 per cent of the population known as supertasters.

"Your taste type is determined by how strongly you perceive this bitter taste," says Andrew Costanzo, lecturer in food and nutrition at Deakin University in Melbourne. "Supertasters find it highly distasteful, normal tasters who make up around

50 per cent of the population don't mind it and the 25 per cent of non-tasters can't taste it at all."

Which of these three groups you fall into can play a role in what you choose to

eat - and how much of it - with knockon effects to health.

Supertasters, like Favelle, tend to avoid foods that they consider taste bitter. On the positive side, this means they are less likely to smoke or drink alcohol. On the negative side, they tend to shun brassica vegetables like kale, cabbage, broccoli and Brussels sprouts that are high in bitter compounds - but also contain

cancer-fighting compounds. Originally this was thought to be why supertasters have around a 40 per cent higher risk of some cancers than non-tasters, "but the issue is more that it's not just bitter foods that super tasters avoid," says Dr Costanzo. "They

have generally less diverse diets possibly because they are more cautious about trying new things."

And this could lower their general level of nutrition and exposure to protec-

tive compounds in fruit, vegetables, herbs, spices - and even coffee. Supertasters also tend to add more salt to their food, as salt disguises bitterness which might also have negative health

Medium or normal tasters tend to have a broader palate because they are neither adverse to bitter-tasting foods, nor do they need to douse their food in sauces to make it palatable.

effects like raising blood pressure.

SUPERTASTERS TEND TO ADD MORE SALT TO THEIR FOOD, AS **SALT DISGUISES BITTERNESS**



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"Y-Oryzanol is a powerful natural anti-oxidant found only in Rice Bran Oil. It improves good cholesterol and is more active than vitamin E in fighting free radicals. Research studies have shown that it helps with anti-aging and reduces the risk of heart diseases.



Lemma by Contractors &







While supertasters avoid certain foods. non-tasters have the opposite issue. They tend to be higher in weight than supertasters, possibly because they need higher quantities of

high fat, high sugar foods to satisfy their flavour needs. They're also more likely to smoke and drink alcohol.

The fact that their taste isn't so sensitive might also have a surprising effect on immunity. A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association discovered that non-tasters were more likely than supertasters to test positive to COVID - and had worse symptoms when they did.

The reason, explains Dr Henry Barham, a US-based ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist at Sinus and Nasal Specialists of Louisiana, is that when the taste receptors activate, the small hairs inside the nose and mucus membranes of the nose and mouth fire up - both of which are part of our defence against infection. Plus, you produce a substance called nitric oxide which inhibits the spike protein on COVID-19. "Because this response in a supertaster is stronger than in a non-taster, it's possible this results in a more effective clearing of the infection microbe and a reduced susceptibility to infection," he says.

Primarily, what determines whether you are a supertaster or a non-taster

WHAT DETERMINES WHETHER YOU ARE **A SUPERTASTER** OR A **NON-TASTER?**

is genetics. According to researchers in the UK and New Zealand, these genes don't just run in families, but they might also correlate to ethnicity - with those with an Asian back-

ground more likely to be supertasters than Caucasians. But, while we can't change our genes, we can trick our tastebuds in ways that make it easier to eat more of the things you should - and less of those we should avoid.

MORE DAIRY

Supertasters tend to add salt to their food to disguise bitterness, "but dairy does the same thing," says Clare Collins. Laureate Professor in nutrition and dietetics at the University of Newcastle. "Serving vegetables with a cheese sauce or a yoghurt-based dip could make them easier to eat."

ADD HERBS AND SPICES

If you can tolerate hotter herbs and spices, Professor Collins says these can also act as a decoy to bitter tastes. "Pepper, chilli, ginger work well - and, adding a mix of garlic and browned onions to vegetables makes everything moreish."

TRY ALTERNATIVES

Favelle says she finds it hard to disguise strong bitter flavours so she looks for alternatives. These include



little gem lettuce instead of radicchio, savoy cabbage instead of kale and also drinking light roast coffees. "I pick milder teas like oolong and find higher quality green teas don't have the same bitter edge."

STIR-FRY INSTEAD

Avoid boiling vegetables. "A lot of taste comes from smell, and the smell of boiled cruciferous vegetables is high in sulphur which can amplify the bitter taste," says Professor Collins. "Stir-frying doesn't release the smell in the same way."

AVOID COLD FOODS

Some people also taste food differently depending on its temperature. In those who do this, bitter tastes are

strongest when food is cold, so avoid raw vegetables.

TRY NEW FOODS

And keep trying the foods you don't like: "Our tastes do change with age, and we can also get used to a taste by exposing ourselves to it," says Dr Costanzo.

EASE OFF FAT AND SUGAR

If you overindulge in high fat or high sugar foods, start reducing how often you consume them. "The feeling of satisfaction you get from a taste changes in relation to how often we interact with a food - the more of it you consume, the more you will need to stay satisfied," says Dr Costanzo. "So, start cutting back - it's hard at first, but you will acclimatise - and eventually even fruit will taste intensely sweet."

EAT SLOWLY

It's a good idea for everyone, but particularly non-tasters. "When you chew food well it passes over your taste buds for longer and you will get more satisfaction from a smaller amount," says Dr Costanzo.

WHITE DINNER PLATES

According to research from the Memorial University of Newfoundland, food tastes sweeter if you serve it on a round white plate - so, non-tasters might need less of it to feel satisfied - and super tasters might find things less bitter served this way.

EAT COLOURED VEGGIES

"There are a lot of vegetables out there that aren't bitter - pumpkin, sweet potato, beetroot, carrots and corn are all good for you," reminds Professor Collins. "Don't quit all vegetables just because you don't like green ones." You can also try roasting vegetables to increase natural sweetness.

No matter where you are at on the

HOW TO TEST YOUR TASTEBUDS

You'll need some blue food colouring, a cotton bud, a piece of cardboard with a 4mm hole, and your phone.

Add the food colouring to the cotton bud and rub it over a small area of your tongue. Now, hold the cardboard over your tongue, with the hole placed over the blue area. Get someone to photograph this.

Inside the hole you will see a mix of blue areas and pink dots – these are the papillae that house your tastebuds. Enlarge the phone image so you can count the dots. If you count fewer than 15 you are a nontaster. If you count more than 35 you're a supertaster. Anything in between is a normal taster.

Obviously don't try this if you are allergic to blue food colouring.

'taster' spectrum, understanding your genetically primed taste preferences can help you expand and retrain your palate, because repeatedly trying a food can increase acceptance.





Forever In Blue Jeans

Scientists have found a sustainable replacement for the popular but toxic indigo used to dye denim. Indican, a compound also derived from indigo-producing plants, could reduce denim's environmental and societal impacts by up to 90 per cent. PHYS.ORG



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For the Comedy Wildlife Photography Award animals show their ...

Humse Of Humour

BY Doris Kochanek



■ Whatever he has discovered on this leaf, this crested macaque seems to find it hard to believe.
Photographer Matti Rauvala took his picture on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi and called it 'Fake News!' for this reason.

▶ This swan got up close and personal with Jaroslaw Kolacz's camera on a beach near Gdansk in Poland. Is he interested in technology, or admiring his reflection in the lens? Possibly he is just begging for fish.

▼ The snowball with eyes

is a ptarmigan (snow grouse) photographed by Jacques Poulard in Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago. In winter, when temperatures can drop to -30°C, it moults into a highly effective white plummage which serves as camouflage.







◀ This otter in Singapore

strikes a ballet pose as he reaches for delicious leaves. The cute quadrupeds usually eat fish, insects and crustaceans. A ballet teacher, to whom photographer Otter Kwek showed this photo, confirmed the animal's dancing talent. For a perfect arabesque, however, it would have to pull in its belly even more.

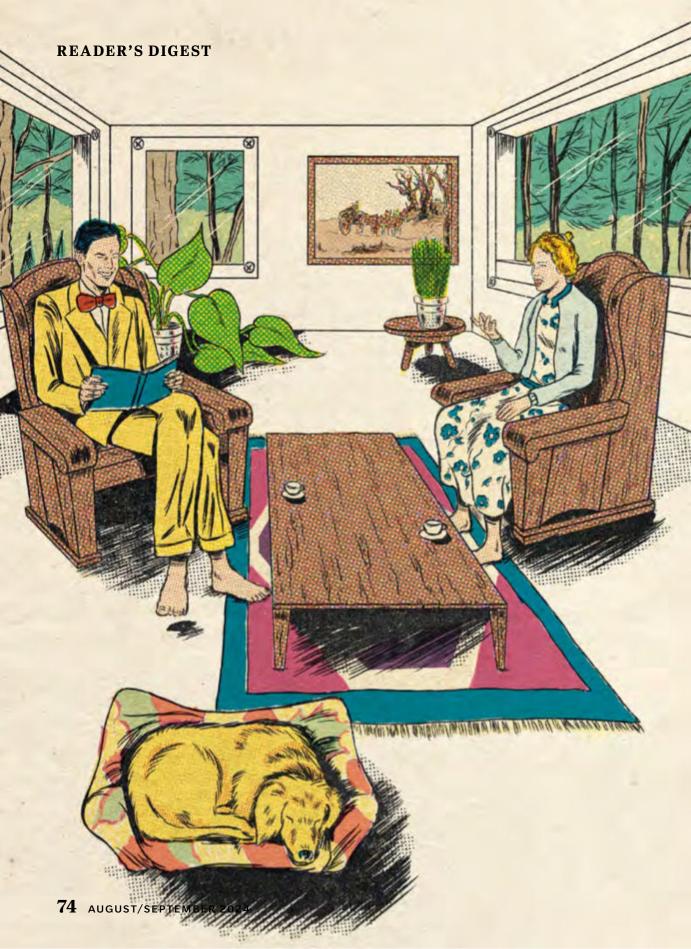
children love to play – and that goes for polar bear cubs, too. Khurram Khan snapped this little king of the Arctic on Barter Island off the north coast of Alaska. The cub was amusing itself with a piece of driftwood until it discovered that you can also lean on it.

◀ The three king penguins

photographed by Dario Podesta on the Falkland Islands seem to be best friends. The king penguin is the world's second-largest penguin, typically weighing 12-14kg. They lay a single egg which they keep on their feet for about 55 days, the entire incubation period. This allows for breeding in much colder terrain than penguin species that lay their eggs on the ground.

ALL IMAGES ARE FINALISTS FOR THE COMEDY WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY AWARD 2023. THE OVERALL WINNER WAS THE 'AIR GUITAR ROO' BY JASON MOORE.







Tiny New Neighbours

A couple were astonished to see who had taken up residence in their letterbox

BY Cathy Free

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

on Powell was pulling the usual assortment of envelopes from the letterbox outside his home in Orchard Lake Village, Michigan, when he noticed something out of the ordinary: a tiny doll couple were sitting on a love seat inside the letterbox. A small sticky note was also tucked inside.

"We've decided to live here," the message read. It was signed from Mary and Shelley.

Powell, 72, says he initially figured that somebody must have left the wooden dolls inside his letterbox back in August 2022 by mistake.

He and his wife, Nancy Powell, had a custom-designed letterbox resembling their contemporary white house installed about four years ago.

"We could understand why dolls would want to move into such a nice mailbox, but we were still perplexed," Don says. "I asked the neighbours whether anybody had left dolls in their mailboxes, and everyone told me no," he says. "So I thought, This must just be a joke, and whoever left them here will come back to get them. I moved them to the back of the mailbox to see what would happen."

A few days passed and nobody retrieved the dolls, he says, noting that he and his wife soon discovered the small couple had acquired an end table, a throw rug and a pillow.

"I also have a sense of humour, so I left a note of my own, saying that what the home really needed was a refrigerator stocked with food," he says.



Don Powell next to his letterbox where a set of dolls mysteriously appeared

The fridge was never delivered. But over the next several months, additional items mysteriously showed up: a four-poster bed, a painting and a wood-burning stove, to name a few.

More than a year later, Mary and Shelley were still living rent-free in the letterbox, to the delight of neighbours who now follow Don's updates on Orchard Lake Village's Nextdoor page. Don first posted about the tiny squatters on August 21, 2022, hoping that might help solve the mystery.

"A homeless couple has taken up residence inside our mailbox. I have included photos of what it all looks like, so you don't think I'm making any of this up," he wrote on Nextdoor. "Some people initially thought that I had planted the dolls myself, but that is definitely not the case," Don says. "All I did was provide a mailbox. Somebody else decided to make it into a home for Mary and Shelley."

Nancy Powell says she can vouch for her husband.

"It was honestly a surprise to us," she says. "Don is the kind of person, though, to play along with it."

The Powells' next-door neighbour, Terry Falahee, says he believes that Don did not move the dolls

into the letterbox himself.

"It's just somebody out there who is having some fun, giving us all a little community humour," Falahee says.

"Whoever is doing this is obviously somebody who is incredibly artistic and clever," he says. "Don has a lot of skill sets, but doing something this detailed with dolls isn't his forte."

After Don and Nancy moved into their home in Orchard Lake Village about five years ago, they decided to pay a local craftsman to design a letterbox resembling their house, with lots of windows on the top and sides to let the light in.

The interior is roomy, measuring 66 centimetres long, 38 centimetres wide and 25 centimetres high. It has solar-powered ceiling lights to illuminate the letterbox at night.

Although a person can be fined for putting items without postage inside somebody else's letterbox, Don says

he could not imagine alerting the authorities and evicting the dolls.

"I asked our postman if there would be a problem delivering our mail with the dolls in there, and he told me no - there was plenty of room," Don says. "He also said he got a kick out of seeing what was going on inside my mailbox."

Every month or two, particularly around holidays, the Powells find something new tucked inside the box for Mary and Shelley.

For Halloween 2022, the doll couple temporarily disappeared and were replaced by two small skeletons, he says, and at Christmastime, a decorated tree was left with





The dolls, named Mary and Shelley, even celebrate Christmas

tiny presents. Don says whoever left the gifts took them back right after Christmas, before he could open the boxes to see if anything was inside.

The doll couple have also acquired a cat, he says.

"It's getting a little crowded, especially because their cousin Shirley has also moved in, along with a service dog named Maggie," Don says.

"The note left in the mailbox said they were all grateful to find a one-storey house because they'd previously lived in a Dutch-style dollhouse," he says. "I'm assuming that place had more stairs."

After packages were left for the holidays, Don says he added a tiny addition of his own outside the letterbox: a miniature letterbox.

"I decided it made sense to give them one, since their tiny letters were getting mixed up with ours and could get lost in the mail," he says.

Don says he now doesn't want to know who is responsible for the letterbox saga because he's hoping it will continue.

"People in the neighbourhood are enjoying it and stop by sometimes to ask questions," he says.

"They want to know what we're charging for rent and who mows the lawn. Some people ask if I've thought about installing an outdoor camera, but personally, I like the mystery of it."

THE WASHINGTON POST (MAY 2, 2023), © 2023 BY THE WASHINGTON POST



THE SNAKE CHARMERS

Invasive pythons are squeezing the life out of Florida's vast Everglades. An unlikely sisterhood is taking them on

BY Craig Pittman from flamingo magazine

For Beth Koehler and Peggy Van Gorder, this is how it works: three days a week they run a dog-grooming salon in St Petersburg, Florida. Then they close up shop and head to the swampy grasslands known as the Everglades for three nights of hunting Burmese pythons – powerful constrictors that squeeze the life out of their prey.



ach night of the hunt, they spend hours slowly rolling ■ along gravel back roads searching for the elusive invasive reptiles. They switch on massive lights atop their Jeep, turning the night as bright as day. The humid air is filled with a subdued chorus of hoots and ribbits.

The younger, more athletic Van Gorder drives, never going more than about ten kilometres per hour, while Koehler, the more focused of the two, stands with her head through the sunroof, looking for any sign of a snake.

The pair achieved some fame in 2019 when they bagged the 500th python to be caught by hunters working for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. They're not doing it for the money, they're doing it to save Florida's wildlife. Although the exact origin of Burmese pythons in the Everglades is not known, it is likely that many were once pets released by owners who found them too difficult to care for.

There's hardly any profit in searching for the slithery invaders. The job pays US\$8.46 an hour plus US\$50 per snake, with another US\$25-per-30-centimetre bonus for snakes longer than 1.2 metres. Some nights the pair comes up empty.

The first Burmese python turned up on the outskirts of Everglades National Park in 1979. It measured 3.6 metres and had been flattened by a car. By the late 1990s, a National Park Service biologist named Ray Snow sounded the alarm about pythons taking over the Everglades. No one took his warnings seriously because he had no proof that pythons were mating in the wild. In 2003, he finally found hatchlings, incontrovertible evidence of breeding - only to be told by those in charge that it was now too late to stop the snakes.

Today, biologists estimate that about 100,000 pythons infest Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve and the marshy public land surrounding them. But they're not staying there. CNN reported that a woman in West Palm Beach found a Burmese python in her washing machine. The problem has got so bad that in 2021, the state's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission banned possession and breeding of Burmese pythons and 15 other non-native species.

"I grew up down here," Koehler, 63, says. "I've seen the changes that have taken place. And now, all you're going to see are rats, alligators and pythons ... That's why we have to get rid of them."

While some hunters kill the snakes with bullets. Koehler and Van Gorder prefer to capture them by hand and stuff them into large sacks. Van Gorder says she relishes the adrenaline rush of wrestling with a big, hissing snake. Once, she was bitten on the hand by a struggling python. The snake's tooth remained lodged in her finger for months. It didn't lessen her enthusiasm for the hunt.

"We want to get our adventure in now," the 57 year old says. "I can sit on a cruise ship when I'm an old lady."

To the public, the face of Florida's python hunters is Dusty Crum, who once caught a python that measured more than five metres long. The thick-bearded Crum stars in the reality-TV series Guardians of the Glades, where he runs through the swamps barefoot, showing little apparent regard for the alligators, feral hogs and venomous native snakes that also occupy the soggy terrain. The truth

VAN GORDER **RELISHES THE** RUSH OF WRESTLING WITH A BIG. HISSING SNAKE

is, though, Florida's licensed python hunters come in all shapes and sizes. Quite a few are female. One of the best is Anne Gorden-Vega.

Gorden-Vega's LinkedIn profile describes her as a teacher at the Ceramic League of Miami and an artist who specialises in hand-carved tiles, sculpture and raku firing. What LinkedIn doesn't mention is that the vivacious 64 year old with long silver hair has caught 236 pythons for the state.

Gorden-Vega grew up hiking around the Everglades, watching the animals. She gave it up when she became a mother, trading in her nature

hikes for nine years as a football coach. Then one day, one of her art students mentioned she was going python hunting with a state contractor. Gorden-Vega talked her way into coming along, and before she knew it, "Monday became ladies' night out," she says. "We'd drive around the swamp laughing our butts off."

She noticed, though, that these expeditions were different from the nature hikes of her youth. She saw no raccoons, foxes or other small mammals. The pythons had eaten them. A 2012 scientific study found that between 2003 and 2011, the areas where pythons had proliferated saw a 99 per cent decrease in raccoon populations, a 98 per cent drop in opossums, a 94 per cent drop in white-tailed deer, and an 87 per cent falloff for bobcats. The number for rabbits and foxes: 100 per cent.

The pythons' effect on the landscape made Gorden-Vega want to do more snake catching. She and one of her art students, a 59-year-old stayat-home mother, filled out applications with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission but figured they had little chance of being selected. Of the 40 snake hunters the commission employs, only ten are women. To their surprise, both women were hired.

"I looked at her and said, 'They're desperate,'" says Gorden-Vega.

When Gorden-Vega goes hunting, sometimes she'll let a friend or a licensed hunter from out of town tag along. Other times, she goes out alone, leaving her husband - a phone

Peggy Van Gorder (left) and Beth Koehler hold up one of the pythons they captured







Left to right: Anne Gorden-Vega scours the roads and levees at night for signs of scales; a Burmese python curls around her leg

company technician - at home as she cruises the levees. She drives a 2017 Chevy Colorado ZR2 with fourwheel drive and bright LED lights on top. The truck has what she calls "99,000 python miles" on the odometer. She burns a lot of fuel patrolling the levees half the night. She fills the silence by listening to audiobooks, mostly "historical fiction, anything about Florida, murder mysteries, weird stuff. It's fun being out in the Everglades and listening to stories about the Everglades."

Gorden-Vega figures her best tool for catching pythons is the element of surprise. The pythons are used to being the apex predator, so when she grabs one by the head, the snake is too stunned to react. That gives her a chance to stuff it into a bag.

If it puts up a struggle, the wrestling match usually takes about 15 minutes, on rare occasions up to an hour. She just lies down on the snake, digs in with her elbows and wears it out. Sometimes the pythons fight back in a very messy way, peeing and pooping on her. "We call that the sweet smell of success," she says. "You smell that way because you got one."

Hunting pythons has taken over my life, Donna Kalil says. As a kid, she collected snakes and lizards. In the 1980s she sold Florida real estate. In 2017, she became the first female python hunter hired by the South Florida Water Management District. She was going to try it for three months. Four years later, the 1.75-metre, 57-kilogram Kalil was one of just a few people permitted to hunt pythons for both the water district and the wildlife commission, meaning she has access to land owned by both agencies.

When hunters working for the wildlife commission catch pythons, they take the snakes to a state laboratory in Davie. Some pythons are killed with a bolt gun and dissected for

examination. Some are injected with a microchip for tracking and turned loose so they will lead the hunters and researchers to other snakes. At least, that's the way it's supposed to work. During the pandemic, the rules changed. The lab was no longer open to visiting hunters. Instead, hunters had to euthanise, weigh and measure their snakes themselves.

Killing the snakes is the hardest aspect of the job for Kalil, who believes in killing animals only if you're going to eat them. The first one she killed was a little one, just 1.4 metres long.

"I cried for a good long time," she says. Even now, "I can't look them in the eyes. And I apologise to them for what I'm about to do to them."

One nearly got the better of her. She was grappling with a 2.3-metre snake when her daughter phoned. Rather than let the call go to voice mail, Kalil tried to answer it. "A silly mistake," she says. With Kalil distracted, the snake wrapped itself around her neck. She couldn't get the leverage to pull it loose, so she staggered back to her truck where friends were packing up their gear. Her friends got the snake off her before she passed out.

Kalil hasn't saved any other hunters, but she has rescued alligators that were losing battles with pythons. She has also caught a python that had already swallowed an alligator.

Kalil has captured more than 500 pythons, including more than one 'mating ball' made up of multiple snakes tangled together during breeding season. The biggest python she's caught by herself was 3.8 metres long. The biggest one she nabbed with assistance measured 4.7 metres.

When she started out as the lone woman working for the water district, no one showed her the ropes, she says. "Their attitude was, 'I learned the hard way, so you should have to learn the hard way, too." Kalil takes the opposite approach, helping new hunters learn the right way to catch pythons. "I don't want to see a bunch of guys coming out here shooting up the Everglades because they think the only good snake is a dead snake."

Amy Siewe abandoned a successful career in real estate in Indiana to become a python hunter. "I have this insane passion for snakes," says Siewe. "I can't explain it."

When she was growing up, her dad would take her to a nearby creek and teach her how to catch frogs and reptiles. She started keeping snakes as pets and even began breeding them.

A video of Siewe, 46, catching water snakes went viral. Soon she got a call from a reality show that was filming a python hunt, asking whether she'd be interested in participating. Her reaction: "Wait, they pay people to hunt snakes in Florida?"

She never got on TV, but the inquiry planted a seed. She travelled to Florida and convinced Kalil to take her out on a hunt. They caught a python that night.

READER'S DIGEST

"I was hooked," Siewe says. She went back to Indiana and told her fiancé they were moving to Florida.

To become a licensed python hunter, Siewe had to show she had experience hunting pythons. She picked up the necessary experience by volunteering to help Kalil catch snakes. Now she ventures out about four times a week. Sometimes she goes on foot, sometimes by car, sometimes by canoe. She and a partner paddle out to islands in the swamp, hop out, grab any snakes they see and load them into the canoe to take back.

"One time we got seven pythons," she says, one of them 4.5 metres long. A snake that size weighs around 65 kilograms. "The canoe was so low in the water we could not have put in another snake."

Recently, the state has tried using dogs and a new type of camera with infrared technology mounted on drones to sniff out the elusive snakes, but with little luck. The problem with the dogs, says Siewe, is that they're at risk of being eaten by alligators. As for drones, they can't spot the pythons if they're hidden beneath the earth.

"They burrow," Siewe says. "A lot of their nests are underground. You can be standing right over a python and



Amy Siewe films her snake encounters for YouTube

not see it." That's why the only way to catch them is the slow, low-tech way: hiring hunters to search for them for hours on end and then grab them by hand and stuff them into a bag.

And that's fine by Gorden-Vega. She can't picture herself ever quitting. Python hunting, she explains, "becomes a part of you. You think, It's warm tonight, I've got to go out. You get an itch."

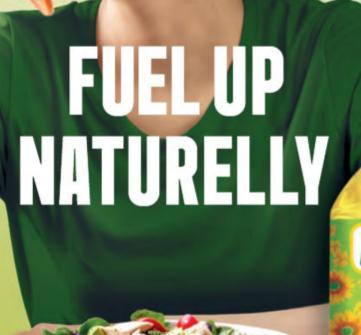
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Living Language

A new word is created every 98 minutes and hundreds of words are added to English dictionaries each year. THE NEW YORK TIMES









ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Humour On The Job



Yet Another Bug

I was doing some research for an article I was writing about how kids can learn about insects. Wondering whom I might interview, I told my husband, "I need to find an entomologist."

He just shook his head. "What's wrong now? You're always going to the doctor for one thing or the other." SUBMITTED BY JULIE ENGELHARDT

In The Service Business

Job interviewer: "Why do you want to work in customer service?"

Me: "I'm really good at apologising for things that aren't my fault."

@NOTETHAMSEMITH

Realised customer service wasn't for me when a lady on the phone told me I didn't know how to do my job and I said "Well, walk me through it" and she hung up. @HEYYITSIANEA

Reply Fail

I finally answered an email I'd been putting off and the person responded right away and now I'm back to square one. @SARAHROSEETTER CARTOON: DAVE BLAZEK. LOOSEPARTSCOMIC.COM/TMBI LICENSE. ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK

All In A Day's Work

Hard Cold Cash

The bar where I worked was in a rough neighbourhood. So, when a new bartender had to close up by herself, she didn't want to leave the cash in the till. But since our boss had forgotten to tell her where to stow it overnight, she placed the money in a bag and stuck it where no thief would find it. Concerned that the morning shift wouldn't find it either, she left this note on the cash register: 'Moneybag is in the ice machine.'

SUBMITTED BY ROBERT WOOD

In Wine, There Is Truth

After my presentation on the wine industry, a man asked, "After you open a bottle of wine and don't drink it all, how long will it stay good?"

I responded honestly: "I don't know. I've never had that problem."

SUBMITTED BY PHIL KIRK

Voice Enabled

Terrifying watershed moment at work. For years, kids have accidentally called teachers 'Mum' or 'Dad'. Today, one of my colleagues got referred to as 'Alexa' @TIMPARAMOUR

Poor Attendance

An Italian court upheld a school's right to fire Cinzia Paolina De Lio, a teacher for 24 years, after it learned that for 20 of those years she simply never showed up for work. De Lio insists that she has documents



proving she had reason for missing work. Unfortunately, she told the newspaper *Repubblica*, she couldn't produce them quite yet, saying, "Right now I'm at the beach."

BACKHANDED COMPLIMENTS

Passive-aggressive flattery on the job:

"It's impressive how you manage to stay so confident."

> "You continue to meet expectations."

"I will give your suggestion all the consideration that it deserves."

"You seem too nice to be a lawyer."

"I'm certain you tried your best."

"I didn't expect you to get the job. Congratulations!"

"I always feel more intelligent after reading your reports."

> "For a beginner, you did a nice job."

SOURCES: REDDIT; THETYPESETCO.COM

QUOTABLE QUOTES

I'm not sure that one can be a good writer without being a good reader. If you're going to build a desk, it's very good to see what other carpenters have done.

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE. NOVELIST



EVERYTHING YOU CAN *LEARN* FROM IS AN **OPPORTUNITY** TO BECOME STRONGER.

DANIEL RICCIARDO. FORMULA 1 RACING DRIVER

It's fairly easy to send an innocent person to prison. It's very difficult to get one out.

JOHN GRISHAM, AUTHOR AND LAWYER

HAVING DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE WORLD FROM **PEOPLE WHO** ARE SO GOOD AT LOOKING AT IT FROM A **PERSPECTIVE** S WHAT GIVES HE RICHNESS IN LIFE.

O-YO MA, CELLIST AND HUMANITARIAN



The more you engage, the more you learn about different ways that people believe and worship, the more you can sit next to anyone and be a neighbour.

IENNIFER GARNER, ACTRESS

Good and bad ideas both come from the same fountain of speculation and experiment.

SHAUN TAN, ARTIST AND AUTHOR

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It is the largest Arctic expedition ever.
In the name of science, the crew of the Polarstern
spends an entire year...

BY Markus Rex

TRAPPED IN THE



20 NATIONS

have joined forces to study the immediate vicinity of the North Pole for a better understanding of the Arctic climate. For the MOSAiC expedition, which is pushing the boundaries of what is possible, the research icebreaker *Polarstern* is trapped in the central Arctic ice as its crew spends a whole year collecting data we so desperately need. They are here because the Arctic is the epicentre of climate change. Nowhere else is our planet warming as rapidly as here. Much of this process we still don't understand. Yet we need reliable scientific foundations for the climate protection decisions that are so urgent.

20.9.2019, DAY 1 The *Polarstern* is moored at the pier in Tromsø, its massive hull illuminated in the falling Norwegian darkness by a light installation for our farewell. The decks to starboard, our shore side, are packed with about 100 scientists, technicians and members of the ship's crew, who are taking the risk of being trapped in the ice for months on the largest Arctic expedition ever.

On shore, friends and family members wave, including my wife, and two sons. We wave, too. Many pairs of eyes seek the gaze of their loved ones one last time. But the mood is too exuberant for tears. And then we're off. The band plays, the gangway is raised, the lines are hauled in, and with a long toot of the ship's horn, the Polarstern starts moving.

23.09.2019, DAY 4 We spend as much time as possible on deck. Observing how we glide through the waves, enjoying the progress, while we still determine the course ourselves. And vet: you can tell that everyone is eagerly awaiting the moment when we hit the ice. That is when the main phase of the expedition begins: the drift through the Arctic. In the evening we open the bar for the first time. The atmosphere is excellent, the expedition members are now really getting to know each other. Later that night, the Arctic greets us with one of the most impressive spectacles it has to offer - the aurora borealis.

25.09.2019, DAY 6 The first ice floes drift by. We discover a polar bear on one of them. He sits there calmly looking curiously up at the ship. As our steel colossus draws near, he gets spooked, jumps into the water and swims away. We reach the ice and Polarstern does what it likes to do best: it bravely makes its way through it. This can be experienced in a particularly impressive way in the sauna, which is located almost at the front of the ship's bow at the

waterline. While you're sweating inside, thick chunks of ice hit the ship with a loud crash seemingly right next to you. The sauna is very popular when sailing through ice.

26.09.2019. DAY 7 We are looking for a special piece of ice. One that will allow us to complete the expedition, that will provide stability. Hour after hour I pore over satellite images. One particular small floe in the vastness of the Arctic catches my attention. It is about 3.5 by 2.5 kilometres and looks mostly dark, as do all ice floes. But it has a core about one by two kilometres embedded in its northern area. Is this our special snowflake? Late at night, I decide to set a course for this particular floe.

04.10.2019, DAY 15 Only a narrow strip of light hangs over the horizon. A large area of ice appears in the glow of the searchlights: our floe. Now everything depends on the skill of Captain Stefan Schwarze. The momentum when breaking into the floe has to be just right.

A tiny bit too much, we shatter it.

A tiny bit too little and we come to a halt in the ice too soon. Gently, Captain Schwarze pushes the steering levers forward. On the bridge we feel the ship rattling and shaking as we break into the floe. A final quick consultation with the captain, we pull the bow slightly to port. Just a little way to go now. Stop!

MOSAIC

(Multidisciplinary drifting **Observatory for the Study** of the Arctic Climate)

- Climate models are based on data and on a detailed understanding of the processes in the climate system. Many models predict that the Arctic will be ice-free in a few decades. Others don't. It is hard to say with certainty what an ice-free Arctic would mean for our climate; Arctic processes are too unknown.
- To collect the urgently needed data on atmosphere, sea ice, ocean, ecosystem, biochemical processes and much more, Polarstern drifted 3400 kilometres through the Arctic ice.
- On board were 442 experts and crew members from 37 nations. Polarstern's journey lasted for a total of 389 days, from 20 September, 2019 to 12 October, 2020.

Like an alien planet, the floe lies around us the next morning. Its core of solid ice, which by now everyone is calling "our fortress", has a high ridge of press ice that separates it from the thinner area on which we find ourselves: the outer wall of our fortress. Branching off from this, a smaller ridge runs directly to the bow of the ship.

READER'S DIGEST

Together with the group leaders I have developed a plan for our research camp. Marcel Nicolaus is leading the ice team. Allison Fong is team leader for the ecosystem, i.e. everything that lives in the Arctic. On our expedition, she'll earn the nickname 'Chainsaw-Alli' because if there's a hole to be sawn in the ice, she wields the chainsaw like no one else. Katarina Abrahamsson represents biogeochemistry. Ying-Chih Fang represents the small ocean team. Matthew Shupe co-chairs the atmospheric team with me.

We follow the Outer Wall on foot. Matt finds a perfect area for Met City, the city of meteorology. He chooses the location of the meteorological mast and the research hut where the instrumentation control computers will be housed. The ocean team picks a place for its Ocean City. Not far away, the remote sensing site with its radars will sit on the thin ice near the Outer Wall.

Near Ocean City, I establish the location for Balloon Town. This is where the tethered balloon will be operated, taking measurements of the atmosphere hundreds of metres above the ice surface. I select a particularly massive area in the fortress where the large and non-mobile hangars in Balloon Town should be safe. A lucky decision: it will turn out that Balloon Town is the safest location and - unlike almost all other areas of our camp - will never be

directly threatened by cracks or new ice ridges.

Marcel Nicolaus, our ice team leader, is looking for a spot for ROV City, the area where the underwater robot will dive beneath the ice. This must be an area unaffected by other works and should be characteristic for the surrounding ice. Marcel chooses a location on the thin ice about 500 metres in front of the ship. For the best science, sometimes you have to take risks.

13.10.2019, DAY 24 A fresh wind whistles through camp, lowering the temperature to -35° Celsius. Breath condenses immediately and settles as ice crystals on beards and eyelashes, caps and scarves. Despite the dropping temperatures, construction is making good progress.

15.10.2019, DAY 26 Around four in the morning, the bridge alerts me: 'the ice has started to move, pushing *Polarstern* forward'. An ice ridge which is about one metre high pushes up in front of the bow and rolls its ice masses towards the cables leading to ROV City. I can't do anything there at the moment. However, the situation in our loading zone right next to the ship is also getting precarious: a lot of equipment is stored there.

The sounds the ice makes are indescribable. Besides loud bangs, crashes and creaks, there are squeaks and whines. A box and some timber are

Trapped In The Ice

already floating in the water. Plus, a rapidly opening crack runs under the row of skidoos parked there for the night. One of the snowmobiles is already partly submerged, with its skids wedged under the floe. Without the snowmobiles, the expedition is lost.

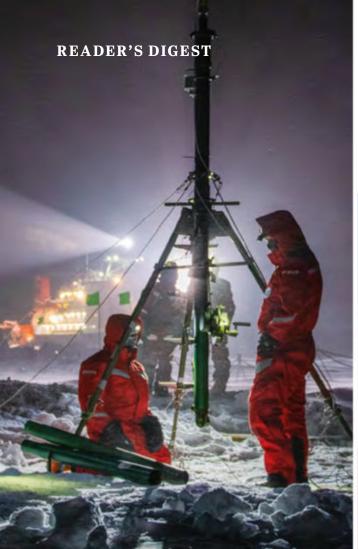
After a quick check of the situation, the cargo officer, a member of our logistics team, and I sprint to the skidoos, launch them and manoeuvre the vehicles out of the danger zone. Then we recover the half-submerged skidoo. With our combined forces, we actually get the snowmobile working again and drive it away as well. Meanwhile, wearing a survival suit, our cargo officer has started to pull boxes and timber out of the water and onto the ice. This was a last minute effort.

29.10.2019, DAY 40 There are fish here. On a highly sensitive sonar we can observe what is going on beneath us: when there was still day and night, the fish dived to a depth of 300 metres during the day and came up to 150 metres at night. They do this to avoid being seen and eaten by predatory animals during the day. But because it is dark now all the time, the animals stay at 150 metres throughout. Yesterday, we let a longline into the water in the hope of identifying a few specimens more precisely.

So today is the big day for the fishermen. The fishing line is reeled in. Nicole Hildebrandt pulls it up hand over hand. Already she thinks she can feel fish down there. Everyone is laughing, no one believes her. But

Expedition leader Markus Rex and two participants on the floe





Clockwise from left: The meteorology mast is 30 metres high; The tethered balloon, Miss Piggy, makes measurements in the atmosphere possible; A polar bear and her cub explore the camp; Worms like this Polyacheta also live in the Arctic







then a head with big eyes appears in the hole in the ice. Then another one. All attempts to persuade our fishermen to make these two magnificent specimens available to the kitchen fail. These animals are for research purposes only.

02.11.2019, DAY 44 For several days we have had no trace of daylight. We set up the large hangar of Balloon Town, home of Miss Piggy, the red tethered balloon that takes atmospheric measurements. To wrap up my day, I walk around Balloon Town by the light of my headlamp. The ice sculptures in the fortress look as if they had been created by an unnamed sculptor. They would surely have a place in any museum, instead they grace the vastness of the pitchblack Arctic. The ship is a small glow in the background - it's our safe and warm home in this fascinating, yet hostile environment.

09.11.2019, DAY 51 Polar bear alert! Today we got into a critical situation for which we have trained so often. A bear snuck around the southwest end of the trip wire and emerged from the darkness without warning at Met City. When the bear guard spotted it, the animal is only about 45 metres away. With nose raised and head moving from side to side, it sucks in the air and continues to approach. This is the behaviour of a bear that wants to find out

what's ahead and whether it's worth attacking potential prey. From this distance, it would be on top of the human in about three seconds.

The guard reacts immediately. At such close range, you have to choose between two bad options: you either fire the signal pistol into the snow between you and the bear - then the flash-bang cartridge detonates under the snow and makes a muffled 'poof'. Or you fire almost directly above your own head - then the cartridge detonates high up in the air. Under no circumstances should you fire in the direction of the bear because the cartridge will detonate behind the animal, it will get scared and run straight towards you.

The guard has decided to fire high. The polar bear looks up in the air, but immediately turns its interest back to the human in front of it, whom it probably didn't identify as the source of the bang. The bear guard fires a second shot - again into the air. The bear does not retreat. This means highest danger to life. The guard follows protocol. In another attempt to drive the animal away, he fires a sharp shot over its head.

This time the bear connects the loud bang of the gun with the human in front of it. Now things get scary and it gallops off into the darkness, jumping over the trip wire, which is supposed to protect us from visitors like bears, without triggering it. It doesn't escape far, but there is

READER'S DIGEST

enough time to evacuate the area. When word comes that everyone is on board, I fall into a chair on the bridge, breathing a sigh of relief.

Using field glasses, our searchlights and the thermal imaging camera, we continue to watch the bear for another half hour. It glows in the thermal image; the action has excited and stressed it. The animal keeps rolling in the snow and sticking its head in, which is less well insulated than its body. It is strange to observe how the polar bear, which is obviously too hot here at -25 degrees air temperature, has to cool down.

10.11.2019, DAY 52 It's Sunday. You can tell because there are eggs in the morning. Something didn't work out with the food takeover, and we've had to ration breakfast eggs to Thursdays and Sundays. Vegetables are also already in short supply. So on many days we now have lunch without cauliflower or broccoli. Everyone always looks forward to the vegetable days and otherwise hopes for fresh supplies when icebreaker *Dranitsyn* resupplies us in mid-December.

11.11.2019, DAY 53 At -26° Celsius, snowfall and dense snow drift. It's a cold day for our coring team, which is taking dozens of ice cores, analysing some in the field and then storing them in the ship's cold rooms for further study in the labs at home. Frozen beyond recognition, team

members come back aboard after seven hours of work. Their eyelashes are heavy with ice, the rest of their faces covered with completely frozen face masks.

16.11.2019, DAY 58 We prepare the ship for an approaching storm. Any equipment not immediately needed is taken off the ice and brought back on board. We move our main power and data line further away from the newly formed press ice ridge and hope it will be safe there.

17.11.2019, DAY 59 The storm is battering the ship. Gusts reach wind force nine.

22.11.2019, DAY 64 The damage to our research camp has destroyed weeks of work. But it would be pointless to dwell on the destruction. Yesterday we already started rebuilding, and everyone is going at it with zeal. Over the past day, Met City has begun emergency measurement operations, with power coming from the generator the team took there. The remote sensing site has been secured, and the shelter there has been detached from the ice and relocated; we have moved some of the expensive instruments to safer ice areas.

A reconnaissance shows us that hardly anything is irrecoverably lost or buried under the tons of ice blocks folded on top of each other.

26.11.2019. DAY 68 In the afternoon we conduct a rescue exercise. All expedition members already completed the appropriate training before departure: how to extinguish a fire on board, how to rescue someone who has fallen through the ice. We've also trained how to free yourself from a helicopter sinking into the sea in the event of a crash, using the emergency breathing apparatus that is to be carried on the chest.

Today we are practising the procedures to be followed in case of an accident on the ice: the interaction between the bridge, where an emergency operation is coordinated, first aid measures on the ice, and the rescue team who transfers the injured person to the *Polarstern* quickly. As a rule of thumb, the first sip is warm, the second cold and the third frozen.

13.12.2019, DAY 85 During the night icebreaker Dranitsyn has reached us. The bunker hose is pulled over, which supplies the Polarstern with fuel. Cargo operations begin as well. Polarstern not only needs fresh food but additional research equipment for the next few months. What is no longer needed in the camp travels back with the icebreaker to make room for the new cargo.

18.12.2019, DAY 90 I temporarily relinquish responsibility on board the ship. Until mid-March I'll take care of the expedition's organ-

AT JUST UNDER -30° CELSIUS AT THE ICE BAR, THE FIRST SIP OF MULLED WINE IS WARM, THE THIRD IS FROZEN

hospital - which is being prepared to care for the casualty. Everything runs smoothly: 35 minutes after the alert, the team member who acted as the injured party is on the operating table.

28.11.2019. DAY 70 My birthday! In the morning, I open packages with the gifts that my family wrapped for me at home. In the evening we celebrate at our ice bar next to the ship. At almost -30° Celsius, we drink the mulled wine very isation from shore. I wonder what the camp will look like when I return and see it in broad daylight for the first time with the sun permanently in the sky?

JANUARY 2020 Soon after my return ashore, I read in the newspapers about a new virus that is spreading in China. Something is happening there, something worrying, but at the same time it is happening far away, like the distant thunder of a storm.

MARCH 2020 The COVID-19 tempest has swelled into an all-consuming storm. Reports of border closures come in almost hourly. Within days, the logistics concept for the expedition falls apart. If we don't find solutions for the restocking of supplies, we will have to abandon the expedition in early summer at the latest - a disaster for the scientific goals. The processes in summer, too, need to be properly mapped to achieve more robust modelling of the Arctic climate system. We get in touch with all our partners and friends. Our Chinese partners immediately explore their options, but can't step in because their ships are too far away. Our Russian colleagues offer help as well. But their two ships are also too far away.

One scenario remains: the German research vessels Maria S. Merian and RV Sonne had to abort their expeditions because of the pandemic and are on their way back to Germany. Quickly, the agencies in question signal their support. Plus: the team currently trapped on the ice agrees that its members will stay on - for more than two months longer than planned.

The two German research vessels aren't icebreakers. But since the exchange is not scheduled until early summer, Polarstern will probably be able to reach the ice edge and meet them, as its drifting position lies ever more to the south as time passes. We plan to have the three ships meet at the ice edge for personnel exchange and resupply. With that, the mission is saved.

01.05.2020, DAY 225 The door closes behind me, I am alone. I have never started an expedition in such an unusual way: with a quarantine of more than two weeks, isolated in a hotel room.

15.05.2020, DAY 239 This morning we undergo our third COV-ID-19 test. In the evening the call comes: once more everyone is negative. What a relief. All the work pays off, we can actually leave on Monday. I'll be sailing on the *Merian*.

04.06.2020. DAY 259 *Polar*stern appears on the horizon. Shortly we will be on board.

09.06.2020, DAY 264 Around noon we reach the ice. For about two hours we sail along its edge, then turn north. The floes become denser and form a closed surface, but are still interspersed with gullies. Whales are swarming in the gullies. One sticks its head out of the water right next to us. It probably wanted to see what this strange structure crossing its habitat looks like from above the water. Whales can be curious sometimes.

14.06.2020, DAY 269 Today we finally have weather fit for flying, and our floe is within reach. First, I

direct the helicopter pilot over the thinner area where *Polarstern* has been anchored since October 2019. At this location, the ice has broken into many small pieces. But the solid core of our floe, the fortress, is stable and without cracks.

The floe delivers what it promised. Namely, the fortress would remain a reliable platform throughout the summer of 2020, where we can relocate parts of our research camp when the thinner ice areas around it break up. Even the all-important sampling sites where we have been taking our ice samples and making measurements since the beginning of the expedition are still connected to and accessible from the fortress. Our time series there will be able to continue seamlessly.

On top of that, the instruments that remained in the research camp and have tirelessly collected important measurement data autonomously while Polarstern was away to be resupplied, are all intact.

24.06.2020, DAY 279 It was midsummer three days ago, and the sun is high above the horizon by Arctic standards, where it makes its circle around us 24 hours a day, burning onto the ice surface. The melt ponds that now dominate the surface of the floe show the various hues of the colour spectrum, from bright turquoise to shimmering greenish pastel blue, and countless colours in between.

No two pools look alike. Above is the yellow of the low sun in the sky, while the ice displays gradations of colour from glistening white to various shades of ochre, beige to light brown.

05.07.2020, DAY 290 Birds are flying above us all the time now, and the round heads of seals appear frequently in areas of open water. The macrofauna in the form of polar bears is well-behaved. Though we get frequent visits, the animals move off briskly without causing major damage or devouring scientists. Our longline now often catches big fish from depths of several hundred metres. The first analyses show that they are healthy and well-fed. The fish nursery lies just below our feet. Countless small fish hide on the under side of the ice. We can spot them in underwater shots and sometimes directly in crevices.

11.07.2020, DAY 296 It is raining. The Arctic in summer is not the frozen landscape of winter, its temperatures are in the freezing range. That is the way it has always been: in winter, the ice expands; in summer, it retreats. This is the eternal heartbeat of the Arctic in time with the seasons. And as long as it freezes enough in winter, the ice in the central Arctic will outlast the melting in summer. But we are disrupting this delicate cycle through global warming - perhaps in the future the

READER'S DIGEST

Arctic will even become ice-free in summer. Then its heart would stop beating.

22.07.2020, DAY 307 We continue to drift south. At some point we will reach the edge of the ice, and then our floe will end its life cycle, breaking apart under the influence of swell and waves. It'll drift out into the open sea, melt there, and return **31.072020. DAY 316** There is nothing to indicate that until yesterday there was a large, stable island of four-metre-thick ice here. We turn on the main engines and steam away.

16.8.2020. DAY 332 It is time to complete the last piece of the puzzle that has been missing from our data: the early freezing phase of the

THE ICE EDGES ARE LIFTING AND SINKING ALONG THE **CRACKS. THERE IS CRUNCHING AND SQUEAKING**

to what it formed from off the coast of Siberia almost two years ago - water of the ocean.

30.07.2020, DAY 315 Yesterday we dismantled the ice camp. This morning we started to bring in the remaining power cables - and not a minute too soon. While we are busy with this task, we start getting reports of cracks from the teams on all areas of our floe. Everywhere the ice edges are lifting and sinking along the cracks. There is crunching and squeaking. Instead of the static ice surface of last year, on which you could often forget that an ocean stretched out below us, we now see the ice rippling to the horizon, following the long waves of the open sea. What has been our home for almost a year is dying noisily.

new ice - the nursery of the ice floes, so to speak. The summer ice melt will soon turn into winter freezing. To capture this, we want to push further north.

19.8.2020, DAY 335 The North Pole. The point where all lines of longitude and all time zones meet, where the compass direction and the time of day lose their meanings. Almost all expedition members have gathered on the bridge, staring at the coordinates of the navigation computer: 89.999, ... 89.9999, ... 89.99999 ... degrees north latitude.

Then the gyrocompass starts spinning freely, and the beeping of the error messages in the navigation system starts as the compass can't report a direction anymore - everywhere is south from here.





Clockwise from top: In the winter, the sun doesn't rise for weeks, not even for the group photo; Samples provide information about the properties of seawater; Maren Zahn gets up at 3.45am to make breakfast. On Thursdays, she also makes cakes for afternoon tea



21.08.2020. DAY 337 We have travelled south on the east side of the pole and crossed 88 degrees north latitude. Now we need to find a floe that will allow us another month of research without breaking up.

When I get to the bridge, the watch officer at the helm of the ship has just given up trying to break through a wide band in the ice and has turned onto a course that will allow him to go around it. Why keep looking? This band of thick ice is a stroke of luck. It gives us stability for the ship, and the surrounding ice areas look perfect for what we are about to study: the soonto-start freezing.

25.08.2020, DAY 341 Camp setup is almost completed in record time, and measurements are already underway at maximum intensity.

02.09.2020, DAY 349 The lower position of the sun is clearly noticeable already. The light grows yellower and warmer, the colours even more intense. These are incredibly beautiful days on the ice. The fact that our floe presents itself so prettily with its mountains, valleys and flat lake landscapes only adds to this. Some team members lovingly call it beautifloe, a word creation combining 'beautiful' and 'floe'.

08.09.2020, DAY 355 Yesterday at noon, another of our intensive measurement cycles began: this time the operation will last for 36 hours non-stop. Most of the instruments in Met City and in the Remote Sensing Site are running all the time anyway. But in Ocean City, team members are now continuously releasing a probe into the water that measures chlorophyll, salinity and temperature and detects where mixing is happening in the water column. In addition, our research balloons from the ship now launch every three hours.

The timing for this intensive measurement phase was not chosen at random: our meteorologist has predicted a change in the weather. Last night, wind and snow had reached their peak - until the cloud cover broke in the early morning hours, revealing a brilliant sun. At the same time, temperatures dropped. This is the long-awaited and all-important 'freeze up', the final transition from summer ice melting to winter freezing.

It could not have gone any better. The measurements through all phases of the annual sea ice cycle are now complete.

20.9.2020, DAY 367 Today we bid the ice farewell. In the morning we finish dismantling the camp and take the last measurements. Around noon we have to stop the work because a polar bear, which has accompanied us at a safe distance for the last few days, is getting too close. But at 3pm its distance allows us all to say

Trapped In The Ice

goodbye to the expedition on our floe. We take one last group photo. Suddenly everyone is throwing snow at each other, laughing and frolicking. Behind the ship two playful seals appear and wave goodbye with their flippers.

When everyone is back on the ship, I am the last to walk up the gangway. We hoist it onto the deck with the crane, set the machine to full speed ahead, and sail south, back to the world beyond the ice.

EPILOGUE We are back on land. Apart from our data, we bring back impressions and memories that will stay with us forever. The past year has changed us, and it will change the science that studies climate change in the Arctic. There are various tipping points in the Earth's

climate system, points that will lead to irreversible changes if we trigger them by warming the planet. Beyond 1.5 degrees of warming lies a minefield of such tipping points, and we have no precise idea where the mines are. But we do know this: the disappearance of summer sea ice in the Arctic is one.

Humanity has already successfully solved global environmental problems through collective action. The ozone layer is on the mend because all countries on Earth have committed to stop producing ozone-depleting substances. This has proven that despite varying conflicts of interest, we are capable of responsible collective action. And if at one stage not all countries go along, then the others must lead the way. R



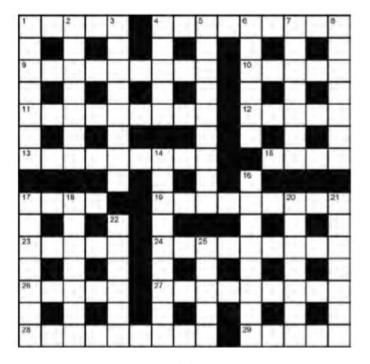
Big Band Theory

It doesn't always follow that big is better, but that didn't stop them in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1872, when the city hosted the World's Peace Jubilee and International Music Festival. Prominent band leader of the day, Patrick S. Gilmore, assembled an orchestra of 848 musicians and a 17,282-voice choir. It's said that he then coaxed famous composer Johann Strauss II into conducting it by offering US\$100,000 and free passage for himself, his wife, two servants and Newfoundland dog. Strauss was assisted by 100 conductors armed with binoculars who, at his signal from a lookout tower, followed his giant illuminated baton to begin the show... They played 'The 'Blue Danube', but in Strauss's words... "There then broke out an unholy row such as I shall never forget."

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Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 110.



ACROSS

- 1 Total (3-2)
- 4 Morning meal (9)
- **9** Framework of hexagonal cells (9)
- 10 Petty officer on a merchant ship (5)
- **11** Fast game on frozen surface (3,6)
- **12** Headed (5)
- **13** Good Will Hunting star (4,5)

- **15** Astound (4)
- 17 Of the current month (4)
- 19 Victories (9)
- **23** Overtly aggressive person (5)
- 24 Perceptive (9)
- 26 Where you are now (5)
- 27 Unable to be heard (9)
- **28** Aping (9)
- **29** A set of biological attributes in humans and animals (5)

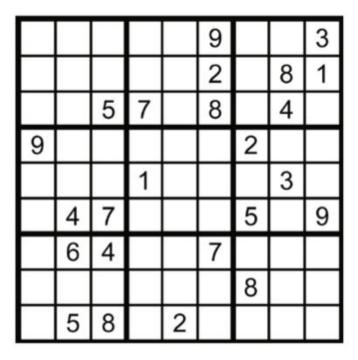
Crossword

Test your general knowledge.

DOWN

- **1** Belief that there is no God (7)
- 2 Not strict (7)
- 3 Cargoes (8)
- 4 Tolerate (5)
- **5** At an early stage (9)
- **6** Skewered meal (6)
- **7** Physical attack (7)
- **8** Switched on (5,2)
- 14 Italian dictator (9)
- 16 Humiliates (8)
- **17** Tel Aviv native, for example (7)
- **18** Feudal Japanese warrior (7)
- **20** Support for an orator (7)
- 21 Artists' models (7)
- **22** Battle of Jericho leader (6)
- 25 Colloquialism (5)





Sudoku

HOW TO PLAY: To win, you have to put a number from 1 to 9 in each outlined section so that:

- Every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numerals (1-9) without repeating any of them;
- Each of the outlined sections has all nine numerals, none repeated.

IF YOU SOLVE IT WITHIN:

15 minutes, you're a true expert

30 minutes, you're no slouch

60 minutes or more, maybe numbers aren't your thing

BRAIN POWER brought to you by PILOT "Write, Erase, Rewrite"





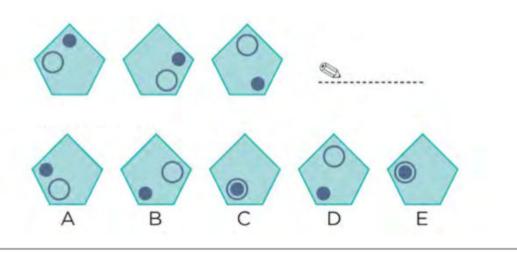
Spot The Difference

There are ten differences. Can you find them?



What Comes Next?

Solve the sequence to see if you are visually minded?

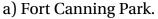


TRIVIA

Test Your General Knowledge

- 1. What ingredient is added to pizza to create 'Hawaiian pizza'? 1 point
- 2. What female Pharaoh, who ruled ancient Egypt for more than 20 years in the 1400s BCE, was famously portrayed as a male in statues and paintings? 2 points
- 3. What Franco-Belgian comic book series has been translated into more than 100 languages, including Turkish, Hebrew and Latin? 1 point
- **4.** What championship sporting event, held on the second Sunday of February every vear, causes about 17 million Americans to skip work the next day? 1 point
- **5.** Other than humans, how many mammal species have chins? 2 points
- **6.** In what southern African nation would you find the Sossusvlei desert, where 2015 action movie *Mad Max: Fury* Road was filmed? 2 points
- **7.** The Lord of the Rings movies are based on a novel by what author? 1 point

- **8.** What plant found in New Zealand, also known as *Raoulia eximia*, might you mistake for a sheep due to its white, woolly appearance? 2 points
- 9. The ancient Chinese ball game cuju is the earliest known version of what modern-day sport? 2 points
- 10. What animal is the famous TV cartoon character Bluey? 1 point
- **11.** Which of the following locations in Singapore is a UNESCO World Heritage Site?



- b) Old Parliament House.
- c) Singapore Botanic Gardens. 1 point
- **12.** As of 2024, how many female presidents has the Philippines had? 1 point
- 13. How many chambers are in the human heart? a) Eight. b) Four. c) Two. 1 point
- **14.** A 5000-year-old pair of what item, commonly worn for a winter activity, was found in Switzerland in 2007? 1 point



15. On what remote volcanic island in Polynesia will you find moai, massive statues of human figures carved by the Rapa Nui people hundreds of years ago? 1 point

16-20 Gold medal

11-15 Silver medal 6-10 Bronze medal 0-5 Wooden spoon Macapagal Arroyo. 13. b) Four. 14. Ice skates. 15. Easter Island. A blue heeler puppy. 11. c) Singapore Botanic Gardens. 12. Two, Corazon Aquino and Gloria diameter of one metre. 9. Soccer. It was played with a leather ball stuffed with feathers. 10. A dog. (NFL) championship. **5.** None. **6.** Namibia. **7.** J. R. R. Tolkien. **8.** Vegetable sheep. It can grow to a ANSWERS: 1. Pineapple. 2. Hatshepsut. 3. Asterix. 4. The Super Bowl, National Football League

PUZZLE ANSWERS

From Page 106

Crossword

¹ A	L	² L	U	³ P		⁴ B	R	⁵ E	Α	⁶ К	F	⁷ A	S	⁸ T
Т		Е		Α		R		М		Е		S		U
θН	0	N	Ε	Υ	С	0	М	В		10 B	0	S	U	N
Е		-1		L		0		R		Α		Α		Е
111	С	E	Н	0	C	K	Е	Υ		¹² B	0	U	N	D
S		N		Α				0		S		L		1
13 M	Α	Т	Т	D	Α	14 M	0	N			15 S	Т	U	N
				s		U		1		16 D				
17	N	18 S	Т			¹⁹ S	U	С	С	Е	s	²⁰ S	Ε	²¹ S
S		Α		²² J		s				G		0		1
²³ R	Α	М	В	0		²⁴ O	В	²⁵ S	Е	R	٧	Α	N	Т
Α		U		S		L		L		Α		Р		Т
26 E	Α	R	Т	Н		27	N	Α	U	D	1	В	L	Ε
L		Α		U		N		N		Е		0		R
28	М	1	Т	Α	Т	- 1	N	G		²⁹ S	Е	х	E	s

Sudoku

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

Spot The Difference

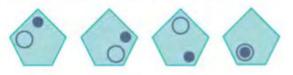


What Comes Next?

Option C

The dot moves one corner clockwise at each stage, while the circle moves two places.







Down On The Farm

It's time to get your hands dirty and grow your vocabulary with these words rooted in the field of agriculture. Weed out the false definitions, then plough on to the next page to harvest the answers.

By Samantha Rideout

1. apiary – A: apple-cider press.

B: place to store crops.

C: collection of beehives.

2. freshen – A: delay ripening.

B: thaw after freezing.

C: begin to lactate.

3. hydroponic – A: grown without soil. B: overwatered.

C: capable of swimming.

4. farrow – A: half a hectare.

B: unenclosed pasture.

C: litter of pigs.

5. haycock – A: mature rooster.

B: seeding machine.

C: cone-shaped hay pile.

6. lime – A: harvest produce.

B: reduce soil's acidity.

C: wilt before sprouting.

7. fallow – A: uncultivated.

B: drained. C: composted.

8. ovine – A: with hooves.

B: egg-producing. C: relating to sheep.

9. viticulture – A: organic farming.

B: cultivation of grapes.

C: growing plants in water.

10. droving – A: irrigating with pipes.

B: practice of walking livestock over long distances.

C: abandoning farmland.

11. dibble – A: sprinkle water lightly.

B: make holes in the ground.

C: grow without pesticides.

12. fodder – A: coarse animal food.

B: nitrogen-rich manure.

C: tractor fuel.

13. yield - A: scarecrow.

B: agricultural output.

C: oversized field mouse.

14. hardy – A: tolerant of cold.

B: hard to grow.

C: having many seeds.

15. flerd – A: group of sheep and

cows. B: compost heap.

C: inedible animal parts.

Answers

- **1. apiary** (C) collection of beehives. The apiary was next to an orchard, giving the bees easy access to flowers.
- **2. freshen** (C) begin to lactate. Daisy freshened quickly after the birth of her calf.
- **3. hydroponic** (A) grown without soil. The hydroponic lettuce absorbed its nutrients from a liquid mixture.
- **4. farrow** (C) litter of pigs. To the delight of the farmer's grandkids, there was a new farrow in the pigpen.
- **5. haycock** (C) cone-shaped hay pile. The field was dotted with haycocks drying in the sun.
- **6. lime** (B) reduce soil's acidity. Iris limed her land by spreading wood ashes on it.
- **7. fallow** (A) uncultivated. Letting land lie fallow can improve its fertility.
- **8. ovine** (C) relating to sheep. The sheep grazing in the backyard was an "ovine lawn mower", Maria joked.
- **9. viticulture** (B) cultivation of grapes. Hoping to make his own wine, Rameez started learning about viticulture.
- **10. droving** (B) the practice of walking livestock over long distances. The farmers are droving their cattle to market.
- **11. dibble** (B) make holes in the ground. Zach dibbled the field, then planted seedlings in each hole.



ANIMAL SOUNDS

Not all farm-animal calls are featured in nursery rhymes. For instance, a cow's moo can be more formally described as a low, and a donkey's hee-haw as a bray. Goats bleat, bulls bellow, and llamas and alpacas hum. Only male turkeys gobble, but both sexes yelp to keep track of each other and putt when they're alarmed. Horses whinny loudly, but they also nicker in quiet, happy tones.

- **12. fodder** (A) coarse animal food. After the harvest, Freya gathered cornstalks to use as winter fodder.
- **13. yield** (B) agricultural output. The yield from the principal crop of coffee fluctuates greatly.
- **14.** hardy (A) tolerant of cold. Cabbages are hardy enough to survive a bit of frost.
- **15. flerd** (A) group of sheep and cows. Taylor let his flock and herd pasture together as a flerd.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

5-9: Fair

10-12: Good

13-15: Word Power Wizard





TAHAN











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