# BTH ANNUAL WINNER! BEAGED BEAGED S Digest



THE SPY in Your Car

From THE NEW YORK TIMES

Scared of ... Sunflowers? And Other Unusual Fears Byrd READERS

"Give Me the Baby!" EVERYDAY HEROES

> 13 Things About STARGAZING By IOE RAO

"My Pet Warthog TRIED TO KILL ME"

From TEXAS MONTHLY



# EXCLUSIVE PLAN FOR 55 & UP 2 UNLIMITED \$300 MO/LINE

Save 45% compared to Verizon Welcome and AT&T Starter plans. Plus, get one of the latest 5G phones **free** when you add a line. All on America's largest and fastest 5G network.

Free Phones: With 24 mo. bill credits. For well-qualified customers; plus tax & \$35 connection charge per device.

# **F** Mobile

Limited-time offers subject to change. During congestion, customers on this plan may notice speeds lower than other customers and further reduction if using >500B/ mo, due to data prioritization. Video typically streams in SD quality. Tethering at max 3G speeds. Unlimited on our US network; see details for roaming & international usage. Unlimited talk & text features for direct communications between 2 people; others may cost extra. Limited-time offers; subject to change. Credit approval and deposit may be required. Monthly Regulatory Programs (RPF) & Telco Recovery Fee (TRF) totaling \$3.49 per voice line (\$0.50 for RPF & \$2.99 for TRF) applies; taxes/fees approx. 10–33% of UBL. Without AutoPay, \$5 merc/inlew(mo; debit to tank account required. May not be reflected on 1st bill. 45% Plan Saving svs. ATR and Verizom Plans; Plan benefits vary; competitor plans may include international data. AT&T and Verizom Pdevice Tell (\$2.99,99 - moto g stylus 5G 3rd Gen). Bill credits end if you pay off device early. Tax on pre-credit price due at sale. Limited-time offer; subject to change. Qualifying credit and service required. If you have cancelled lines in past 90 days, you may need to reactivate them first. Up to \$300 via bill credits; line with promo must be active and in good standing to receive credits; allow 2 bill cycles. Max 12 discounted devices/account. May not be combinable with some offers or discounts. Coverage not available in some area. **Fastest Based on analysis** by Dokka<sup>6</sup> of Speedtest Intelligence<sup>6</sup> data of national Speed Score results incorporating 5G download and upload speeds for O1–022024. Network Management Service may be slowed, suspended, terminated, or restricted for misuge, which may result in higher speeds for dat aused on device. See T-Mobile.com/Openinternet for details. See Terms and Conditions (including arbitration provision) at www.T-Mobile.com for additional information. T-Mobile, the Tlogo, Magenta and the magenta color are registered trademarks of Deutsche Telekom AG. @ 2024 T-Mobile

# **Reader's Digest**

A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

# Features

# **46** COVER STORY THE NICEST PLACES IN AMERICA\*

Our eighth annual search finds places where people are kind, differences are celebrated and neighbors work together to make their communities better.

BY DEREK BURNETT, CAROLINE FANNING, BILL HANGLEY JR., WENDY WILSON AND JOCELYN ABRAMS

### 68 NATIONAL INTEREST

**The Spy in Your Car\*** Modern cars are computers on wheels. And

like computers, they can be hacked, even by abusive partners.

BY KASHMIR HILL FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

# 76

# Shots! Shots! Shots! For Everybody!\*

Are you up to date on your vaccines? Our handy guide will let you know. BY BETH WEINHOUSE FROM THEHEALTHY.COM

### 80 drama in real life

His Best Friend Was a 250-Pound Warthog...\* One day it decided to kill him.

BY PETER HOLLEY FROM TEXAS MONTHLY

# 90 TRUE STORIES

**Terrified of Turtles\*** And other "scary stuff" that might surprise you. By *READER'S DIGEST READERS* 

# 94 who knew?

The First Photobomber ... struck in 1853! And other "new" fads that are actually ancient history. BY JACOPO DELLA QUERCIA

# 46

ом | остовеr 2024 **|** 

# Departments

### 4 Dear Reader

#### WORLD OF GOOD

7 The Scarf Bombers

#### **EVERYDAY HEROES**

8 "Give Me the Baby!"\* BY DEREK BURNETT

### GLAD TO HEAR IT

11 Mail Bonding, The Little Hero and More

#### **BEST PET PALS**

12 Alfie and Fred

#### FOOD PASSPORT

17 Get It Twisted BY EMILY TYRA

#### 13 THINGS

20 Look Up! Facts About Stargazing\* BY IOE RAO

#### DEPARTMENT OF WIT

26 Allow Me to Mansplain ... BY ANDY SIMMONS

#### THE RD LIST

101 Trivial Pursuit with LeVar Burton, Night Magic and More

#### **QUOTABLE QUOTES**

104 Kevin Costner, Cady Coleman, RuPaul and More

#### POINT TO PONDER

105 James Patterson

### WHERE, OH WHERE?

112 Spectral Sculptures

# The Healthy

33 Prevent the Pain of Shingles BY BETH WEINHOUSE

35 I Tried It ... Bone Broth

# 35



40 News from the World of Medicine BY BETH WEINHOUSE

# Brain Games

106 Candy Conundrum, Ghost Patrol and More

109 Word Power

# Humor

Life in These United States	14
Humor in Uniform	23
All in a Day's Work	
Laughter, the Best Medicine	44

Send letters to letters@rd.com or LETTERS, READER'S DIGEST, PO BOX 6100, HARLAN IA 51593-1600. Include your full name, address, email and daytime phone number. We may edit letters and use them in all print and electronic media. To submit humor items, visit rd.com/submit, or write to us at JOKES, 1610 N. 2nd St. Ste 102, Milwaukee WI 53212-3906. We'll pay you \$25 for any joke or gag and \$100 for any true funny story published in a print edition humor department of *Reader's Digest* unless we specify otherwise in writing. Please include your full name, address, email and daytime phone number in your entry. We may edit your submission if it is selected. We regret that we cannot acknowledge or return unsolicited work. **Requests for permis**sion to reprint any material from *Reader's Digest* should be sent to *permission@(tmbi.com.* Get help with questions on subscriptions, renewals, gifts, address changes, payments, account information and other inquiries at *rd.com/help*, or write to us at *customecore@rd.com* or READER'S DIGEST.PO BOX 6095. HARLAN IA 51593-1595.

Audien Hearing

Available at

Walmart 23

# It's time to hear again.

Hearing Aids Delivered To Your Door In 3-5 Days, Ready To Use Out Of The Box.



"The Audien Atom is truly life changing!"



Starting at \$189/pair

Audien Hearing

No doctor or hearing test needed\*

VISIT: AudienHearing.com OR

CALL: 1-800-501-3609



# **Nice Going!**

A s I HOPE you will not be surprised to learn, *Reader's Digest* is put together by a bunch of very nice folks. It's something of a job requirement, in fact. The magazine's founder, DeWitt Wallace, used to roam the halls of the headquarters on summer Friday afternoons and tell everyone to quit working and go enjoy the day. Oh, and the headquarters were located in the nicest-sounding place you could conjure: Pleasantville, New York.

So it's absolutely fitting that one of our biggest projects of the year is our Nicest Places in America contest. For eight years now, we have asked all of you nice folks to tell us about the nice places where you live, work, play, volunteer, or hail from. This year we selected six, with Provo, Utah, and its support of struggling teens, taking the top honors. Read all about it on page 46. We hope you'll be inspired to do something to make flowers bloom where you are, so to speak.

And if you missed out on nominating your favorite nice place this year, don't worry. We'll do it all again next year!



The Nicest Place in America 2024

Share your Nicest Place by scanning the QR code below, and we'll put it in the running for our 2025 contest.

Some of the judges—nice people, all!—who helped us select this year's winners will be familiar, especially Al Roker of the *Today* show. See our full roster on page 67. The leader of this massive project is editor Caroline Fanning, who will kindly but quickly set you straight if you malign her home state of New Jersey.

Of course, we've got lots of variety in this issue too. Meet an irrepressible mansplainer, on page 26; a beloved meteorologist and stargazer, on page 20; a bunch of brave readers who share their surprising secret fears, on page 90; and a killer pet warthog (!), on page 80.



*Jody L. Rohlena,* CONTENT DIRECTOR

Write to me at letters@rd.com.



# Cruise the Canadian Maritimes & ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

On this amazing 15-night cruise, explore picturesque waterfront towns and admire the stunning natural landscapes that stretch out before you. In the comfort of your private balcony, bask in the beauty of the Thousand Islands region, adorned with stately mansions, fairytale castles, and historic lighthouses.



Explore Well™

Call for a **FREE** Cruise Guide

888-610-7094

PearlSeasCruises.com

# **DO FOOD EXPIRATION DATES REALLY MATTER?**



We spoil the myths around product "Use By" dates to help you save more time, money & food!

Tired of losing money on overdue fridge and pantry items? We're here to help! Check out this informative article from our sister brand, Taste of Home, that uncovers the truth about expiration dates and what they really mean. You'll learn if your "overdue" items are really ready to toss or not exactly a total loss...yet!



Scan the QR Code Now for All the Eye-Opening Details!

**READER'S DIGEST** 



# The Scarf Bombers

EN YEARS AGO, when college students in Ottawa, Canada, tied scarves to fences and around the necks of statues, with notes to homeless people to help themselves, they had no idea they were launching a movement. But today, "scarf bombing" is definitely a thing. Knitters across the United States are turning wool and fleece into scarves, hats and gloves, then leaving them in places where the needy congregate, like bus shelters. In Jacksonville, Florida, a note reads: "I am not lost! If you're stuck in the cold, take this gift to keep warm." The scarves warm body and soul, Suzanne Volpe, a bomber from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, told the *Washington Post*. The gifts, she says, tell homeless people that "somebody cares."

When a man threatened to throw his child off a bridge, Christine Dawn King stepped in.



# "Give Me the Baby!"

A commuter takes an unexpected detour to stop a distraught parent

#### ву Derek Burnett

A NOTHER STICKY LATE-JULY Thursday in Philadelphia, and 52-year-old Christine Dawn King was hurrying to her job as a caregiver to the elderly. Or trying to. The traffic on Interstate 95 was thick—no surprise for this stretch of highway. She pulled into the exit lane, which was moving at a crawl.

That's when she spotted a man and woman standing beside a stopped vehicle and engaged in some kind of altercation. King watched as the woman repeatedly attempted to block the man as he headed toward the guardrail, which overlooked a 40-foot drop onto a concrete parking lot. The man kept pushing the woman aside and shifting some object from his right arm to his left. Having reached the guardrail, he dangled the object out over the precipice. *Oh my God*, King realized. *That's a baby!* The woman, in tears and physically outmatched, struggled to pull the man back from the edge.

King hit the brakes, flung open her door and ran at the man along the shoulder of the debris-strewn highway. "Give me the baby!" she cried. "Don't do this!"

Again he moved toward the concrete guardrail, but now King and the woman both blocked him as they reached for the 18-month-old girl.

"Get off my baby!" the man

screamed. When King made another lunge for the child, he looked her dead in the eyes. "I've got a gun," he said, "and I will shoot you."

She didn't see a gun, but she believed him. Her body began to shake. "OK," she said, stepping backward.

# MANY PEOPLE WERE FILMING, BUT NO ONE GOT OUT OF THEIR VEHICLE TO HELP.

King looked over at the lines of vehicles. Traffic had stopped now. *Isn't anybody going to help me?* she thought. The highway was a sea of watching eyes. Many people were filming, even livestreaming, on their phones. But no one got out of their vehicle. It was up to King, a mother of five, to stop this tragedy. The man had not yet done the unthinkable, but one wrong word or movement could push him toward a final appalling act ... or he might commit that act if left to his own devices.

King inched closer and pleaded, "Just give me the baby."

The man staggered back up against the guardrail. Again and again, King grasped for the girl but could not free her.

Then the sound of sirens—the police had arrived. The child's mother abruptly stepped toward the officers. "I have a gun!" she called out. "It's his gun!" She had sneaked it out of his pocket during their struggle.

The cops swarmed in, weapons drawn. "They're going to shoot you," King warned the man. "Give me the baby."

Still he refused. Now the officers were on him, grabbing and tugging at his arm. This was the moment when all would be resolved—either he would throw his little girl over the wall in a final act of desperate defiance, or someone would get their hands on the child first. In the chaos, King worked her way through the scrum of bodies, plucked free the terrified toddler and carried her to her mother, leaving the police to subdue the man.

The child was unharmed. Through sobs, her mother delivered the gist of what had transpired: a breakup, an attempted fresh start, a new apartment. Then the man had found them and forced them into the car. How they had ended up on the bridge wasn't quite clear.

But they were safe now. The man would later plead guilty to aggravated assault, making terroristic threats and endangering the welfare of a child, and would be sentenced to up to 23 months of incarceration, with mental-health supervision.

Many have wondered why King would risk her life for strangers. She wonders why no one else helped.

"I don't have to know her," she says, referring to the mother. "There was a baby involved."



### **Mail Bonding**

In the post office in Grand Prairie, Texas. Alvin Gauthier discovered some letters dated 1942 to 1945 and addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lamb in Jacksonville, Arkansas. A stamp read: "U.S. Army Postal Service." A Marine vet who'd served in Iraq. Gauthier knew the importance of mail to soldiers and their families. He was determined to see the lost letters delivered. With help from KARK-TV in Little Rock, he tracked down the last surviving member of the Lamb family, JoAnn Smith, whose older brother Marion wrote the letters while serving in World War II. On his day off, Gauthier drove five hours to Jacksonville to hand the letters to a tearful Smith. "It's a connection to my family," she told KARK. "Sometimes," Gauthier said, "you just go the extra mile ... or 379 miles."

### **The Little Hero**

Wayne and Lindy Baker were driving to Dickson, Oklahoma, in April when the tornado they were hoping to outrun sent their truck off the road and into a tree. The Bakers each suffered a broken back and neck, and Lindy's lung was punctured. Their son Branson, 9, was unhurt. Climbing out of the backseat, he said, "Mom, Dad, please don't die—I'll be back," reports CBS News. Dodging downed power lines, Branson ran a mile in the dark to a family friend's home, then brought the friend back to the truck. First responders freed the Bakers and took them to a hospital. Lindy's sister described the young hero this way: "Branson is small, but he is so mighty."

# A Side of Kindness

For five years, Nixta Taqueria served up genuine Mexican fare in East Austin, Texas, while hosting a "free fridge" for the needy so they could enjoy fresh and nutritious meals without charge. Then an electrical issue shuttered the restaurant. The initial cost to fix it was \$80,000. But their neighbors stepped in. "Y'all fed us when we were frozen," commented a contributor on their GoFundMe page. "You feed the community with the fridge. It's the least that we could do when ya'll do so much." In two days, they had raised over \$89,000. Responding to the outpouring of kindness, the owners wrote: "Help is there-and asking for it isn't anything to be ashamed of."

#### **READER'S DIGEST World of Good**



# Alfie and Fred

DOUBT YOU HAVE next-door neighbors as fun as mine. Alpacas Alfie and Fred regularly join us on the patio when we go outside for dinner and to lounge in the evening. They are the remaining two from a herd of 40—our neighbors couldn't bear to let them go when it was time to sell.

Come summer heat or winter chill, the quirky duo always wants to know what we're up to. Usually, they just want to socialize and munch grass and leaves, but once in a while they'll start roughhousing, and that's always a show. They wrap their necks around one another like giraffes and make sounds straight from a *Jurassic Park* film until they wear themselves out.

Fred is especially interested in our Maltese pup, Brighton. Letting her out is a surefire way to lure Fred over. When he sees the dog, he'll emit weird sounds as if he's trying to call her over. Unfortunately, Brighton doesn't quite share his neighbor's interest. She used to run up to the fence to bark and act tough, to which the alpacas would simply tilt their heads, as if to say, *What? We're just trying to be neighborly!* 

-Nominated by CATHY MOSTOWY



# FOR THE LIFE HE WAS BORN TO LIVE



NUTRITION

Your Pet, Our Passion.

TRUE INSTINCT

HIGH PROTEIN

PURINA

RURINA

TRUE INSTINC



DAY 7

STRONG MUSCLES



### **READER'S DIGEST World of Good**



It was my turn to work the indoor concession stand at the ice rink while our son's youth hockey team played outdoors. When a player from another team came inside to buy a snack, I asked what the score was.

"Four to three," he said.

"Oh, yeah?" I said. "Who's ahead?"

As he exited, he shouted back, "Four!" —DAVID FLEMMING Hermantown, MN

**The doctor** was reviewing some results from a routine blood test during my checkup, then he



"I just couldn't bring myself to shoot him."

took my blood pressure. "Were you in a hurry this morning?" he asked. Contemplating the worst, I replied, "No, as a matter of fact, I sat quietly in the waiting room, very relaxed and reading. Why? Is my blood pressure off the scales?"

Autocorrect turned "Think of others for a change" into "Think of otters for a change," and I agree that's a better solution.

-X@RYGDANCE

"No," replied the doctor. "Your undershirt is on inside out."

.

Never mind Prince Charming, where are these forest animals that clean? —X@CALIDAYSAY

# ENSURE® FOR STRENGTH AND ENERGY AND COMPLETE, BALANCED NUTRITION®



### 25 VITAMINS & MINERALS AND NUTRIENTS TO SUPPORT HEALTH OF:

#### IMMUNE SYSTEM

With protein, vitamins A & D, zinc, and antioxidants vitamins C & E and selenium

# DIGESTIVE

Comfort fiber blend with a prebiotic to support digestive health and growth of good bacteria

### MUSCLES

Blend of 30 grams of high-quality protein to feed muscles up to 7 hours

BONES Excellent source of vitamin D and calcium to support bone health HEART Excellent source of plant-based omega-3 ALA<sup>†</sup> to support heart health BRAIN Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and folate to support brain health



### AVAILABLE IN 3 DELICIOUS FLAVORS:

Vanilla, Milk Chocolate, and Strawberry





#### Use as part of a healthy diet.

\* Vitamins C & E and selenium.

<sup>†</sup> 450mg plant-based omega-3 fatty acid ALA (30% of 1.6g DV). © 2024 Abbott 202418028/April 2024 LITHO IN USA



### **READER'S DIGEST World of Good**

story, but they keep repeating themselves.
From the moment she said, "Holy pepperoni!" I realized I was too old to be reading this book.

✦ How this @#\$%^ could find three boyfriends and I can't even find one is crazy to me.

 I wish I was illiterate.
 How can books be published by people who don't know what a comma is?

When I dropped off my car at a St. Louis repair shop, the mechanic held out his hand. Bemused by this young man blatantly flirting, I jokingly placed my hand in his and did a fake swoon. He smiled sympathetically and said, "I need the keys." —SUE PENZEL Cape Girardeau, MO

An older man I knew practically lived in his recliner. He loved that chair so much he named it "my vinyl resting place." —GEORGE DENOFRE Chassell, MI While my wife held our son, I placed the hamburger I was eating on the seat of his baby stroller. Some guy walked by, peered down and said, "Looks just like the father," and went on.

**After standing** in line at the car rental for what seemed like eons, I was told by the clerk that I would be given a free upgrade because of my wait.

Later, when I told my husband why we got a free upgrade, he seemed confused, asking, "How do they know how much you weigh?" —DEBORAH SNYDER Frederick, MD I loved the commercials during the last Super Bowl, especially the one that recalled my youth. At one point, I texted my sons, "VW Beetles and Neil Diamond! Be still, my beating heart!"

My oldest brought me down to earth, replying, "The hearts of most of the people who loved those two have probably already been stilled." —DAVID ROBISON

Ashburn, GA

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



## WHERE'D YOU GET THE COSTUME?

Had the audacity to deviate from my usual black clothing and wear a gray knitted tunic and just got asked how the Crusades went. —X@EM\_E\_DEE



# **Get It Twisted**

The loops of this popular snack tell a warm, winding tale

ву Emily Tyra

**The TALE OF the pretzel's enduring popularity crisscrosses a medieval monk** with a modern mall mogul, with a lot of twists and turns in between. Our story begins around 610 C.E., when a monk in northern Italy braided ropes of bread dough to resemble crossed arms in prayer. He baked the treats until golden and gave them as rewards to his students at the monastery.

That iconic knot shape became popular with bakers in Europe during the

Middle Ages, and Germans especially took to the art of pretzel twisting. Starting as early as the 12th century, German bakers hung pretzel-shaped signs above their doorways "as a symbol that you could find fresh-baked breads inside," says *Saveur* writer Ben Crair, adding, "Pretzels were once so special that medieval painters would dab a few on the table of the Last Supper."

Germans brought a passion for pretzels to the New World, especially to Pennsylvania Dutch country, which is a misnomer for Pennsylvania *Deutsch*. The state produces roughly 80% of the pretzels sold in the United States today. The country's first commercial pretzel bakery opened in 1861 in

# PENNSYLVANIA PRODUCES ROUGHLY 80% OF THE PRETZELS SOLD IN THE U.S.

Lititz, outside Lancaster. Its founder, German-born Julius Sturgis, claimed to create the first hard pretzels—made crisp so they could be stored for long periods without going stale. Sturgis's descendants still make hard pretzels at their factory in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Hard or soft, pretzels pair perfectly with a cold beer. So our next act takes us to Oktoberfest in Milwaukee, where Germanic traditions live large in the city's beer gardens. At South Shore Terrace overlooking Lake Michigan, you can savor Bavarian *laugenbrezel* ("lye pretzels") made by the Milwaukee Pretzel Co. Co-owners Matt and Katie Wessel fell in love with this style of soft pretzel while living in Munich. Legend has it that years ago, a Munich baker accidentally dipped his pretzels into a lye cleaning solution and discovered that it gave them a crispy, chestnut brown crust and an unmistakable tang. (Not to worry: Lye is safe to use in small amounts in cooking.)

This twisting tale isn't complete without an homage to "Auntie" Anne Beiler, who started selling hand-rolled soft pretzels in 1988 at a Pennsylvania farmers market to help fund her husband's dream of providing free family counseling services for their community. Auntie Anne's is now the largest hand-rolled soft pretzel franchise in the world, with over 1,700 locations.

Now for a cameo from actor Adam "Shappy" Shapiro. The Philly native became pretzel vendor to the stars during the pandemic, when he perfected a Philly-style soft pretzel and offered it from his Los Angeles driveway to friends. His pretzel pop-up became a Hollywood hit—and a bona fide business. Shappy pretzels were given out at the 2023 Academy Awards, and Kristen Bell, Ryan Seacrest and Tyra Banks all professed their love. Feeling starstruck? Shappy ships.

There is no twist ending here. Just an abiding admiration for a doughy delicacy with Old World traditions, all wrapped up in a bow.



**READER'S DIGEST** 



ву Joe Rao

JUST HOW many stars can we see with the naked eye? The Yale Bright Star Catalog provides the answer: 9,095. Except we can't see all of them at once because at least half would fall below the horizon. Daylight and haze also limit us. So in fact, the number of stars we can see at night at any given time is around 2,000.

THE LARGEST star visible with the naked eye is Mu Cephei, a strikingly red star in the constellation Cepheus (the King). If our sun was the size of a softball, Mu, in comparison, would be 437 feet across. The brightest star in the sky is Sirius, or the Dog Star, in the constellation Canis Major. Orbiting it is a white dwarf star known as Pup. Though about the size of Earth, Pup is far denser. On our planet, a teaspoon of its material would weigh 5 tons.

THE FARTHEST celestial object visible without a telescope is the Andromeda galaxy, 15 quintillion miles away. On a clear night, it appears as a faint elongated patch. When its light began traveling earthward. mastodons and saber-toothed tigers roamed North America. An estimated 1 trillion stars make up Andromeda, more than twice the number in our own Milky Way galaxy.

CONTRARY TO popular belief, Galileo did not invent the telescope. The genius behind it was spectacle-maker Hans Lippershey, who applied for the patent in 1608. Telescopes were initially pointed not at the sky, but at the seas—to spy on ships. Galileo first turned a telescope toward the heavens in 1609.

THE IDEA OF constellations goes back tens of thousands of years, as people have always seen outlines of people and animals in the night sky and made up stories about them. But in the 17th century. **Johannes Hevelius** introduced seven that are still among the 88 we recognize in the sky today, including Lacerta (the Lizard) and Vulpecula (the Fox). Hevelius had no love for telescopes, however. His star atlas Firmamentum, published in 1690, features a cartoon of a cherub holding a card with "The naked eve is best" written in Latin.

THE LIGHT that emits from the star Spica in the constellation Virgo takes 250 years to reach Earth and become visible to us. In 2026, we might consider branding Spica as "America's star," since the light we'll see from it began its earthward journey around the time the Founding Fathers declared our country's independence.

CAMERA LENSES have improved a lot since the first photograph of a star was taken at Harvard College Observatory in 1850. To shoot stars with your phone's camera, use the night mode (available on newer Androids and iPhones). which lets you record exposures of several seconds or more. A tripod and a Bluetooth shutter trigger further improve your results.

LOTS OF locales across the United States have dark. starry skies ideal for stargazing. Flagstaff, Arizona, has some of the nation's starriest skies, as does Big Bend National Park in Texas. **Cherry Springs State** Park in Pennsylvania is highly regarded as an oasis for starry skies in the Northeast, which otherwise has a lot of nighttime light coming

from nearby cities. In the Midwest, Beverly Shores, Indiana, though close to urban areas, offers unexpectedly dark skies, as Lake Michigan's massive footprint to the north keeps the sky near the lakefront dark.

ASTRONOMY IS the oldest of the sciences, making it the oldest scientific hobby. As a teenager in Ohio in the early 1900s, Leslie Peltier became fascinated with stars. Today, he is fondly remembered as the world's greatest amateur astronomer. He died in 1980, having discovered a dozen comets and submitted more than 100.000 observations of stars to the American Association of Variable Star Observers during his lifetime.

ANOTHER AMERICAN astronomer, Garrett Serviss, once wrote, "Stargazing is a great medicine of the soul." But there's a big problem affecting stargazers across the world: light pollution, caused by excessive or misdirected outdoor lighting. The spread of light pollution over the past half-century is a major reason why approximately 90% of Americans have never seen the Milky Way, and 80% struggle to see stars near their homes.

TO HELP reduce extra nighttime lighting in your own neighborhood, consider joining Dark Sky International. The organization aims to protect communitiesof people and wildlifefrom unnatural and irresponsible outdoor lighting. Its website (darksky.org) provides information about local laws regarding what is known as "light trespass." For example, if you have a neighbor whose bright lights shine onto your property, you can take legal steps to have those lights shut off or properly shielded.

WE ALL KNOW birds fly south for the winter. But how do they find their way? A 1967 study conducted at Cornell University under the artificial skies of a planetarium suggests that the indigo bunting. a songbird common throughout the eastern United States and Canada. obtains directional information from star patterns such as the Big Dipper to guide its annual migration.

SEEING A comet is a rare treat. but there's a chance one may come our way this month. The comet. called Tsuchinshan-ATLAS, will pass 36 million miles from the sun in late September; two weeks later, it will come within 44 million miles of Earth. Comets are notoriously unpredictable, but this one might be bright enough to see, so look low in the sky one to three hours after sunset during the third week of October.

### Art of Living



On our first day of basic training at Fort Campbell in Kentucky, we were in line as the senior drill sergeant barked orders. He told us that when our number was called. we were to answer with our full name, grab our duffel bag and double-time it outside. "And remember," he added snidely, "your name is not 'HERE!'" And then he began: "Number one!"

Hearing his number, a terrified trainee quickly grabbed his bag, yelled, "Not here!" and took off. —R. FRED ZUKER Longview, TX

Know your military slang! Dittybopper: A soldier marching out of step.



"Headquarters says their menu options may have changed."

Flight suit insert: An Air Force pilot. Gofasters: Sneakers. –omnimilitaryloans.com

With my wife, Phyllis, at my side, I stood proudly in the commander's conference room for my promotion ceremony. Following a brief but meaningful speech, the commander pinned my new, shiny double-silver bars on my shoulder. I was officially a lieutenant of the United States Navy! As other attendees congratulated me, I felt like I was floating 10 feet in the air. Then Phyllis, who knows how to keep me grounded, whispered, "You know that when we're done here, you have to go home and clean up the dog poop in the backyard." —GENE HALL Lost City, WV

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



# LIVING WITH DIABETES? ON MEDICARE?

# Turn small steps into big wins.

The FreeStyle Libre 3 Plus sensor continuously tracks your glucose, so you can see the impact of your activity on your glucose levels in real time\*. And over time help lower your A1c<sup>†1‡2</sup>.

Covered by Medicare for more people managing diabetes with insulin<sup>§3</sup>.

This is progress.

Talk to your doctor or call 1-844-330-5535 to learn more

ReeStyle Libro 3

1127



See references, disclaimers and link to Important Safety Information on the next page.





For illustrative purposes only. Not actual patient data. Medicare and other payor criteria may apply. The FreeStyle Libre 3 system includes the FreeStyle Libre 3 Plus and FreeStyle Libre 3 sensors, FreeStyle Libre 3 app, and the FreeStyle Libre 3 reader.

\*A 60-minute warm-up is required when applying the sensor.

+Study was performed with the outside US version of the FreeStyle Libre 2 system. Data is applicable to FreeStyle Libre 3 system, as feature sets are similar.

\$\$ Study was performed with the outside US version of the FreeStyle Libre 14 day system. Data is applicable to FreeStyle Libre 3 system, as feature sets are similar as FreeStyle Libre 14 day system, excluding alarms. \$Patients must meet Medicare eligibility coverage criteria.

#### **References:**

 Leelarathna, Lalantha, et al. "Intermittently Scanned Continuous Glucose Monitoring for Type 1 Diabetes." New England Journal of Medicine 387, no. 16 (2022): 1477-1487. https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmoa2205650.

 Evans, Mark, Zoë Welsh, and Alexander Seibold. "Reductions in HbA1c with Flash Glucose Monitoring Are Sustained for Up to 24 Months: a Meta-analysis of 75 Real-World Observational Studies." *Diabetes Therapy* 13, no. 6 (2022): 1175-1185. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13300-022-01253-9.

 Local Coverage Determination (LCD) L33822, Glucose Monitors, https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/view/lcd. aspx?LCDId=33822.

Product for prescription only, for Important Safety Information please visit https://www.freestyle.abbott/us-en/safety-information.html

The sensor housing, FreeStyle, Libre, and related brand marks are marks of Abbott. Other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

© 2024 Abbott. ADC-94515 v1.0

# Get All of Our **BEST Jokes** in **One Hilarious Collection!**

**ADVERTISEMENT** 

ALL-NEW Laughter the Best Medicine 2024 is packed with our favorite jokes, gags and more from 100+ years of *Reader's Digest*. Poking fun at the facts and foibles of everyday experiences, it proves life is often funnier than fiction!

700+ Jokes, Stories, Riddles, Columns & Cartoons

**10** Side-Splitting Chapters

Good, Clean Family-Friendly Humor!



Order your copy today! SAVE 67% + FREE SHIPPING at: rd.com/24G1





# Allow Me to Mansplain ...

If there's one thing we Americans know, it's this: We're a nation of know-it-alls

### BY Andy Simmons

HERE'S A FINE line between educating someone on a subject and being an overbearing bore. I trampled that line a long time ago.

Just the other day, my wife and I were discussing how painful childbirth is. Scratch that. *I* was discussing how painful childbirth is; the person who actually gave birth to a child was rolling her eyes.

"I [that would be me] would have to say the pain is akin to the sensation of having your insides ripped apart by two gerbils fighting over a lettuce leaf. That, or watching an 8-year-old trying to tell a joke. But even those examples don't capture the agony."

Jennifer rolled her eyes in the direction of the TV remote and picked it up. "The thing I can best compare it to is the time ..."

She turned on Netflix, found *Shōgun* and fast-forwarded to a samurai fight scene.

" ... my brand-new sneakers chafed my corns ..."

She raised the volume to 62.

"Yes, that's the closest comparison I can make to childbirth ..."

To 77.

"You see ... YOU SEE, CHILD-BIRTH—MUCH LIKE CHAFED CORNS ..."

She hit mute.

"... IS VERY PAIN ... ful."

"I have a suggestion," she said, in a voice that led me to believe this was no mere suggestion, but an order to be carried out immediately.



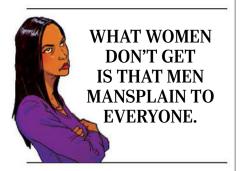
"Why don't you write an article about mansplaining?"

"Did you know that *mansplaining* is a portmanteau of *man* and *explaining* and describes the act in which a man provides a condescending explanation of something to a woman who already understands it?"

"Yes."

"Well, did you know this? Women such as yourself don't much care for mansplaining."

I had no idea the volume on our TV could reach 147.



Mansplaining is not new. It's been around since the first caveman told the first cavewoman how to braise a saber-toothed tiger. She responded with a polite nod, then proceeded to cook the beast the way Mama Neanderthal had taught her.

Women, of course, don't like mansplaining because the little dears think they're being condescended to. What women don't get is that men mansplain to everyone, including each other. Go to any bar in the United States and you'll find some guy off in the corner drunksplaining to other patrons, bartenders and his Budweiser about politics ("They're all idiots! *Hic!*"), computers ("You gotta unplug it for 30 seconds ... *hic!* ... then plug it back in!"), the weather ("I'm tellin' ya, it's a dry heat!!! *Hic! Hic!*").

But it's a mistake to think that only men partake. We are a nation of 'splainers. Today, 'splaining knows no gender, has no political affiliation, and is a fan of every sport. TikTok, Instagram and dining room tables are awash with opinions and theories facts and tact be damned.

My wife has joined a native plants page on Facebook. One of the regular posters is constantly 'splaining to the fold about the perils bees face in the modern world. Mind you, this is a fold that knows well the perils bees face. It's one reason many of them joined the page to begin with. But that doesn't stop the beesplainer.

**My wife:** My backyard is shady. Will a spicebush grow there?

**Beesplainer:** Bees face colony collapse disorder due to human encroachment, pesticides and volatile weather conditions.

**MW:** Yes, but the spicebush I bought ... will it grow in shade?

**BS:** Oh, how nice that you've found the time to plant a spicebush. I'm sure the bees would love to plant spicebushes, but, you see, they have more pressing matters on their minds, like FACING EXTINCTION!!!!!! **MW:** So is that a yes or no on shade for the spicebush?

'Splaining also has no age. No one is more earnest than the teensplainer. Their fertile brains soak up information they've heard from some 12-year-old TikTokker, then their little gray cells get to work filtering out any good news. The teensplainer who lives in my house recently hit me with this factoid: "Did you know life isn't fair?"

Huh ... not fair, you say? *Life*? How did that news slip past me?!

I've been 'splained to so often you'd think I'd be the most knowledgeable person on earth. But apparently, I need more 'splaining. Here are a few of the 'splanations I've been on the receiving end of:

"Here's a joke: What did 0 say to 8? 'Nice belt!' You see, it's funny because ... "

I get it.

"Although Let It Be was the last album the Beatles released, Abbey Road was the last album they recorded ..."

Yes, I was the one driving when we listened to that podcast.

"You're doing it wrong."

I figured that out when the bookshelf collapsed on my foot.

• "The problems in the Middle East can all be solved if only ..."

So you're the one who's been hiding the peace plan!

• "It is true that 76 trombones led the big parade. However, it would

behoove you to remember that 110 cornets were close at hand."

Thanks, I played third glockenspiel in my school's fourth-grade production of The Music Man.

!!!!!

'Splaining has become big business, with some 'splainers awarding themselves the title "influencer" so you can now be bored by a professional. Even a seasoned nonprofit 'splainer such as I can bridle at being lectured. But if I am to be lectured, here are a few topics I wish someone would 'splain to me:

• Why the word for fear of long words is *hippopotomonstrosesquipp-edaliophobia*.

Why film, TV and book critics use the word *delicious* even though they're not talking about food.

Why doctors insist on being called Doctor away from the office, yet, at parties, refuse to look down your throat when you tell them you're not feeling well.

► Why dog owners wrap kerchiefs around their pets' necks. Does a dog see itself in the mirror and think, Blue paisley is exactly the accent my black and beige spots need to really pop!?

Why some people pronounce *often* as "off-ten."

These are just some of the things that need 'splaining, and fast. I could go on and on and on and on and on. But I suspect you already know that.

#### **READER'S DIGEST**



**My brother-in-law** overheard some teachers talking about AI. They were marveling about this new technology that would impact the lives and financial wellbeing of thousands.

My brother-in-law wasn't having it. When there was a lull in the conversation, he let them know that AI was not new technology. "Farmers," he informed them, "have been using artificial insemination for years." —ROB THOMAS Davenport, IA

**For lunch** one day, my colleague's young



"Basically, I come in at 9 a.m., set the time machine for 5 p.m. and head home."

daughter asked for "that thing that's orange in the middle and black on the outside."

My friend, confused, asked, "Is it a new kind of Oreo that comes out around Halloween?"

"No," her son said. "She means your grilled cheese sandwiches." —MERRY PRUITT Bexley, OH **"We sound like** a really bad tribute band for the first three or four run-throughs on these things."

—ALEX LIFESON, guitarist for the rock band Rush, describing to Rolling Stone what it's like jamming with former bandmate Geddy Lee

The theme of the school administrator's workshop was "trusting employees to empower them." The speakers exhorted each of us to trust our staff and teachers, thereby allowing them

There's someone on our team that behaves horribly to me. So whenever I have to type his name, I've taken to using a slightly smaller font size than for everyone else's.

-X@SUPERBREEZE\_BEX

### Art of Living

to better develop as professionals.

Nice sentiment, but I questioned their devotion to it when, during a visit to the men's room, I noticed small padlocks installed on the toilet paper roll dispensers. —RICARDO SORIA Fort Walton Beach, FL

**Roaming** the supermarket aisles in search of peanuts but coming up empty, I spotted an employee stocking shelves and asked, "Where do you hide the nuts?"

Looking around the store at colleagues and customers alike, she grumbled, "We don't hide them. They're all over the place." —YEFIM M. BRODD *Kirkland, WA* 

My teacher education program didn't prepare me for being bullied by 10-year-olds for having a knockoff Stanley tumbler. ─X@KATIEDEAL99 **Spotted in** *Coffee News*: While getting my hair cut, I asked the barber, "When would be the best time to bring my 2-year-old for his first haircut?"

The barber answered, "When he's 4." —JERRY ESPOSITO Boynton Beach, FL

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

# **CLASS DISMISSED!**

Teachers took to Reddit to describe the moment they realized their students might have to repeat a few years:

At the university where I teach, I handed out an exam. Six hands went up instantly. I pointed to one of them and the student asked, "What does 'surname' mean?" I paused, then calmly explained, "It's your last name." And with that, the other five hands went down.

 I mentioned bringing my lunch to work and a kid put up his hand to ask where I worked. He asked this in class.
 Where I teach him. GOOGLE MEI GOOGLE MEI

I have a poster on my wall with a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln that states, "Don't believe everything you read on the internet." A student said, "Wait, did they have internet back then?"

 Me: I'm thinking of a fruit that is yellow and very sour!
 Student: Chickenpox!

Headache, Fever, Sore Throat, Minor Aches & Pains

En The

VICKS

VICKS

VapoCOOL

**SEVERE COLD & FLU** 

+ CONGESTION

Chest Congestion, Thins & Loosens Mucus

Nasal Congestion, Sinus Pressure

# THE VAPORIZING,

DAYTIME, COUGHING, ACHING, STUFFY HEAD, SORE THROAT, CONGESTED CHEST, FEVER, POWER THROUGH YOUR DAY, MEDICINE.

READ EACH LABEL. USE AS DIRECTED. KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN.

Sinus Pressure





You don't have to suffer, as long as you take two important steps

ву Beth Weinhouse

**T** F YOU'VE HAD shingles, or you know someone who has, then you know what a painful condition it can be. It's also surprisingly common: One in three people will develop shingles (medical name: herpes zoster) in their lifetime, adding up to an estimated 1 million cases in the United States each year. Fortunately, there are very effective ways to prevent getting shingles, and effective ways to treat it if you are unlucky enough to get it.

### What It Is

Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV)—the same virus that causes chickenpox. When you're exposed for the first time, you develop chickenpox. But when you recover, the virus doesn't leave your body. It lies dormant in nerves that emerge from the spinal cord and causes no problems until something reactivates it. Then you get shingles. Things that make reactivation more likely: getting older, being immunocompromised, feeling generally run down or dealing with a lot of stress.

"It's almost like the body's way of kicking you when you're already down," says Esther Freeman, MD, director of Global Health Dermatology at Massachusetts General Hospital.

While shingles is usually associated with a rash, most people develop skin sensitivity—tingling, itching, or a burning, shooting pain—in a specific area of their body first. Then, one to five days later, small red spots appear, which turn into fluid-filled blisters.

In the early stages, people may mistake the rash for something else. "People think it's poison ivy or an allergic contact dermatitis caused by something they touched," says Dr. Freeman.

While the rash can appear anywhere on the body and may look like a random red patch or cluster of blisters, it actually follows a distinct pattern. "What's unique about shingles is that the rash will appear only on one side and on one part of the body in what we call a dermatome," says Dr. Freeman. She explains that the rash follows the line of the nerve where the virus lay dormant. That's why the rash often looks like a stripe winding around the torso. The face is another common location.

Other symptoms can include fever, headache, fatigue or upset stomach. It generally takes three to five weeks for symptoms to disappear completely.

### How to Treat It

It's important to see a doctor, preferably a dermatologist, as quickly as possible after you experience symptoms.

"Doctors can prescribe antiviral medications, which are effective if started within 48 to 72 hours," says Sonya Kenkare, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in Chicago. The medication can reduce and shorten symptoms, and also lessen the chance of complications. Pain medications can help manage the discomfort.

Home treatments include petroleum jelly and dressings over the area. "You want to keep the blisters covered, because open blisters are most contagious," says Dr. Kenkare. "Keep the area well covered until the lesions are crusted over."

The period of being contagious can last as long as 7 to 10 days, and people with shingles blisters should avoid direct contact with other people, especially pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems. Interestingly, you can't get shingles by being in contact with someone who has it. But you can get chickenpox if you've never had it and never had the chickenpox vaccine.

#### How to Prevent It

While shingles isn't life-threatening, it can be extremely painful. And one of the most common complications, called postherpetic neuralgia (PHN), can make that pain last long after the rash has healed. "It can be similar to the pain associated with acute shingles, but it can last for months or even years," says Dr. Freeman. About 1 in 5 people who get shingles develop PHN.

"In a younger person the risk of the complication might be 10%, but in an older person it can be as high as 30%," she adds. Another complication, though less common, is lasting eye damage or vision loss from blisters on the face.

The newest herpes zoster vaccine,

called Shingrix, has been available since 2017. It's recommended for everyone age 50 and older, plus people who are immunocompromised.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the vaccine is more than 90% effective at preventing shingles and PHN in adults age 50 and over with healthy immune systems. And for those who do get shingles after getting the vaccine, the disease will be much milder than if they hadn't, with a much lower chance of developing complications like PHN. In fact, the new vaccine is so much more effective than the previous one (which has been discontinued) that the CDC recommends that people who received the previous vaccine now get revaccinated with Shingrix. (For more about this and other vaccines, see page 76.)

# Bone Broth

#### As a nutritionist, I find a good bone broth so nourish-

ing, especially in the afternoon as a pick-me-up. Last winter, it was a constant after my toddlers brought home a bug that turned into cold after cold at our house. I recommend bone broth to my clients who are struggling with excess weight, gut symptoms, low energy, depression, immu-

nity and more. The ingredients gelatin, glycine and glutamine can support digestive health. Proline and hyaluronic acid promote collagen production, which helps with skin elasticity and hydration. When I drank bone broth every day for a week, I was less bloated and I didn't crave an afternoon snack. I also noticed that I was less thirsty after working out. Some brands of store-bought bone broth can be high in sodium, so I make my own by boiling beef or poultry bones together with water, apple cider vinegar, garlic, onion, a few carrots and celery stalks, plus herbs, salt, pepper and gingerroot. —Katie Bressack ADVERTISEMENT

A Journey From a Rare Diagnosis to a Promising Treatment

Teri, a Florida native, lived an active life. She filled her days with yard work, walking her dogs on the beach, and visiting her grandchildren. However, at 60, her busy routine finally caught up with her, and she found herself needing a hip replacement.

Teri's procedure required a blood transfusion and monitoring of her iron levels. In a twist of fate, the results shed light on a different issue: low hemoglobin levels. Referred to a hematologist, she underwent a bone marrow biopsy revealing an often-misdiagnosed disease called **myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS).** 

MDS is a group of closely related blood disorders in which the bone marrow does not produce enough healthy red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets.<sup>1</sup> Untreated, MDS worsens and can result in symptoms like anemia, caused by low red blood cell counts, vulnerability to infection from low white blood cell counts, or risk of heavy bleeding or bruising due to low platelet counts. As MDS progresses, there is also a risk that it may transform into acute myeloid leukemia (AML), an aggressive form of blood cancer, making early detection and treatment crucial.<sup>2</sup>

Given this risk, MDS patients are regularly monitored. As the disease progresses, red blood cell transfusions may be necessary. Patients who require blood transfusions can spend as much as two hours in the clinic, as often as every other week, for years.<sup>2</sup>

There are types of drug therapies called ESAs (erythropoietinstimulating agents) that can increase the body's natural production and release of blood cells, helping to reduce the frequency of transfusions.<sup>3</sup> However, these therapies do not necessarily eliminate the need for transfusions completely, with many patients continuing to rely on them to combat anemia.<sup>4</sup>

Teri cycled through treatments, including blood transfusions, but over time, efforts became ineffective. The energy Teri had taken for granted was fading. A member of her care team recommended a treatment called *Reblozyl*.

Reblozyl is a prescription medicine for injection and is used to treat anemia (low red blood cells) in adults with very low- to intermediate-risk MDS who may require regular red blood cell (RBC) transfusions. Reblozvl is not indicated for use as a substitute for transfusions in patients who require immediate correction of their anemia. The most common side effects for patients receiving Reblozyl are diarrhea, fatique, high blood pressure, swelling of the hands, legs and feet, nausea and trouble breathing. Please see the following page for additional Important Safety Information.

"I had never known anyone who had bone marrow cancer. My only worry was leaving my family." While on *Reblozyl*, Teri's dosing regimen was every three weeks and she no longer needed timeconsuming and burdensome blood transfusions. She had more time to accomplish more of her everyday tasks, and she had more time in general, an advantage she didn't know was missing. **"It's all about time. Time is precious."** Individual results may vary; *Reblozyl* may not work for everyone.

Reblozyl is a treatment option for certain individuals with anemia due to MDS. It can be considered as a first-step treatment for some patients, though it was initially approved as an alternative second-line treatment for patients with ring sideroblasts (MDS-RS) following an ESA.<sup>5</sup> With treatment options like Reblozyl available earlier, people living with MDS may have a better chance to reduce the frequency of transfusion and improve their anemia. It's important to talk to your doctor about treatment options, including Reblozyl, its safety, and if it's right for you.

Reflecting on her experience, Teri wishes her story gives others hope. "Take every day as a gift," she urges, "have full faith in treatment options and providers and know that your focus is to keep moving forward."

#### For more information, visit WWW.REBLOZYL.COM



#### What is REBLOZYL® (luspatercept-aamt)?

REBLOZYL is a prescription medicine used to treat anemia (low red blood cells) in adults with:

- beta thalassemia who need regular red blood cell (RBC) transfusions.
- myelodysplastic syndromes who may need regular RBC transfusions and have never received an erythropoiesisstimulating agent (ESA).
- myelodysplastic syndromes with ring sideroblasts (MDS-RS) or myelodysplastic/myeloproliferative neoplasms with ring sideroblasts and thrombocytosis (MDS/MPN-RS-T) who need 2 or more RBC units over 8 weeks and have not responded well to an erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA).

REBLOZYL is not for use as a substitute for RBC transfusions in people who need immediate treatment for anemia. It is not known if REBLOZYL is safe or effective in children.

#### Before receiving REBLOZYL, tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had blood clots
- take hormone replacement therapy or birth control pills (oral contraceptives)
- · have had your spleen removed
- smoke
- have or have had high blood pressure (hypertension)
- have a history of extramedullary hematopoietic (EMH) masses
- have or have had enlarged spleen or liver
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. REBLOZYL may harm your unborn baby. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you become pregnant or think you may be pregnant during treatment with REBLOZYL.

### For females who are able to become pregnant:

- Your healthcare provider should do a pregnancy test before you start treatment with REBLOZYL.
- You should use effective birth control (contraception) during treatment with REBLOZYL and for at least 3 months after the last dose.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if REBLOZYL passes into your breast milk.
  - Do not breastfeed during treatment with REBLOZYL and for 3 months after the last dose. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby during this time.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

What are the possible side effects of REBLOZYL?

### REBLOZYL may cause serious side effects, including:

- Blood clots. Blood clots in the arteries, veins, brain, and lungs have happened in people with beta thalassemia during treatment with REBLOZYL. The risk of blood clots may be higher in people who have had their spleen removed or who take hormone replacement therapy or birth control (oral contraceptives). Call your healthcare provider or get medical help right away if you have any of these symptoms:
  - chest pain
  - trouble breathing or shortness of breath
  - · pain in your leg, with or without swelling
  - a cold or pale arm or leg
  - sudden numbness or weakness that are both short-term or continue to happen over a long period of time, especially on one side of the body

- severe headache or confusion
- sudden problems with vision, speech, or balance (such as trouble speaking, difficulty walking, or dizziness)
- High blood pressure. REBLOZYL may cause an increase in your blood pressure. Your healthcare provider will check your blood pressure before you receive your REBLOZYL dose. Your healthcare provider may prescribe you medicine to treat high blood pressure or increase the dose of medicine you already take to treat high blood pressure, if you develop high blood pressure during treatment with REBLOZYL.
- Extramedullary Hematopoietic (EMH) Masses. EMH masses have happened in people with beta thalassemia during treatment with REBLOZYL. You may have a higher risk for developing EMH masses if you have a history of EMH masses, have had your spleen removed, have or have had enlarged spleen or liver, or have low hemoglobin levels. Your healthcare provider will monitor you before you start and during treatment with REBLOZYL. Call your healthcare provider or get medical help right away if you get any of these symptoms:
  - · severe pain in the back
  - numbness or weakness or loss of voluntary movement in feet, legs, hands or arms
  - loss of bowel and bladder control

### The most common side effects of REBLOZYL include:

- tiredness
- headache
- back, joint, muscle or bone pain
- joint pain
- dizziness
- nausea
- diarrhea
- cough

- stomach (abdominal) pain
- trouble breathing
- swelling of your hands, legs, or feet
- high blood pressure
- allergic reactions

REBLOZYL may cause fertility problems in females. This could affect your ability to become pregnant. Talk to your healthcare provider if this is a concern for you.

These are not all of the possible side effects of REBLOZYL. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You are encouraged to report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088 or www.fda.gov/medwatch.

#### Please see US Full Prescribing Information and Patient Information, for REBLOZYL:

packageinserts.bms.com/pi/pi\_ reblozyl.pdf

#### References

- Zeidan AM, Shallis RM, Wang R, Davidoff A, Ma X. Epidemiology of myelodysplastic syndromes: Why characterizing the beast is a prerequisite to taming it. Blood Reviews. 2019;34:1-15. doi:10.1016/j.blre.2018.09.001.
- What Causes Myelodysplastic Syndromes? (n.d.). American Cancer Society. https://www.cancer.org/cancer/ types/myelodysplastic-syndrome/causesrisks-prevention/what-causes.html.
- Platzbecker U, Kubasch AS, Homer-Bouthiette C, Prebet T. Current challenges & unmet medical needs in myelodysplastic syndromes. Leukemia. 2021;35(8):2182–2198. doi:10.1038/ s41375-021-01265-7.
- Meunier M, Park S. Lower-risk myelodysplastic syndromes: Current treatment options for anemia. EJHaem. 2022, https://doi.org/10.1002/jha2.523.
- Reblozyl U.S. Prescribing Information. Available at: https://packageinserts.bms. com/pi/pi\_reblozyl.pdf. Accessed May 2024.

News FROM THE

WORLD OF

### MEDICINE BY Beth Weinhouse DOES YOUR DOCTOR'S GENDER

**MATTER?** 

Researchers at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) analyzed Medicare data from more than 750,000 people over age 65, all hospitalized for urgent medical conditions. They found that patients with female physicians had a lower chance of dying in the hospital or of being readmitted. The finding was true for men and women, though the difference was much more pronounced for the women. While the study didn't determine why a doctor's gender matters, a UCLA rep says, "Female doctors may communicate better with their female patients, making it likelier that these patients provide important information leading to better diagnoses and treatment."

#### True-Crime Anxiety

Podcasts, books and videos recounting real-life crime stories are popular, with about half of Americans admitting to a fondness for the genre. The stories are often gruesome, and a new survey finds that it's often difficult for fans to forget the gory details. The survey, by the company Secure Data Recovery, finds that nearly half of truecrime fans say that the stories increase their anxiety, and 61% say they make them more suspicious of other people. One positive effect, though, is that 78% of truecrime fans say that consuming these stories has made them more aware of their surroundings. And 1 in 3 report that they have added to their home security. So maybe that heightened vigilance will lead to fewer real-life crime stories in the future!





## NERVIVE NERVE RELIEF

REDUCES OCCASIONAL NERVE DISCOMFORT IN AS LITTLE AS

7 DAYS

Nerves can change as you age, which may cause occasional feelings of nerve discomfort such as stabbing, burning, tingling, and numbness.

"THESE STATEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN EVALUATED BY THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION. THIS PRODUCT IS NOT INTENDED TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT, CURE, OR PREVENT ANY DISEASE.

With continued daily use, 1800mg ALA in Nervive Nerve Relief reduces occasional nerve discomfortdue to aging. 1Nicholas Hall's global CHC database, DB6, 2021 value sales at MSP

#### A Less Invasive Prostate Cancer Detector

A new urine test developed at the University of Michigan Rogel Cancer Center may help many men avoid unnecessary prostate biopsies. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men after skin cancer. and screening is done with a blood test that detects an antigen associated with the cancer. But elevated levels can also indicate benign conditions such as inflammation or an enlarged prostate. So if the blood test is positive, men usually need

a biopsy to determine whether or not they have cancer. The new urine test, called MyProstateScore2.0 (MPS2), screens for 18 genes that can indicate whether aggressive cancer is present. If the test is negative, men can often avoid biopsy and further treatment.

# The Best Time to Exercise

A new study finds that working out in the evening may be best for the heart. Researchers from the University of Sydney in Australia looked at data from almost 30,000 adults who were either overweight or had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. After eight years, on average, all the participants who exercised had lower rates of cardiovascular disease and death than those who didn't exercise. But those who worked out in the evening had the lowest rates of all. No need to panic if evening exercise isn't for you. Previous studies have found that morning exercise is good for heart health, better sleep, boosting brain power and losing weight. The important thing is to exercise. no matter what time of day you prefer.

#### How Often Should You Weigh Yourself?

Researchers from the University of Florida and the University of Virginia set out to find how often people should weigh themselves for the best chance of losing weight. The study tracked 74 adults who were overweight or obese for three months as they followed a

weight loss plan, and then for nine months afterward as they attempted to maintain the loss. The researchers found that the people who monitored their weight, diet and activity for at least three days a week were most likely to keep the weight off, and those who did the same for five days or more each week were most likely to keep losing. On the other hand, tracking for only one to two days per week was associated with significant weight gain.



# HELPS MANAGE BLOOD SUGAR<sup>\*</sup>

Glucerna<sup>®</sup> has a sweet taste that fits smoothly into your day.





high-glycemic carbohydrates.



Doctor-recommended brand for people with diabetes



Scan and sign up for up to \$80 in benefits'

### collective savings of offers throughout duration of program.

Use as part of a diabetes management plan. \* Designed to help minimize the blood sugar spike from consuming Glucerna compared to

<sup>†</sup> Offers may vary. Valuation based on maximum

©2024 Abbott 202314641/April 2024 LITHO IN USA

Glucerna



#### READER'S DIGEST



A man with a woman strapped onto his back walks into a costume party. The host eyes him quizzically and asks, "What are you dressed up as?"

"A snail," the man replies, in a French accent.

The host is thoroughly confused. "If you're a snail, why do you have a woman strapped to your back?"

"Her? That's Michèle." *—ifunny.co* 

#### An intellectual is a

person who hears the name Swift and thinks of the 18th-century Irish satirist. — Submitted by MONTY GILMER Rosedale, VA



Father Murphy walks into a pub in Donegal and says to the first man he meets, "Do you want to go to heaven?"

The man says, "I do, Father."

The priest says, "Then stand over there against the wall."

The priest asks a second man, "Do you want to go to heaven?"

"Certainly, Father" is the man's reply. "Then stand over there against the wall." Father Murphy walks

#### Who called it rolling over in the grave instead of a plot twist? —X@RIOTGRLERIN

up to a third man and asks, "Do you want to go to heaven?"

"No, I don't, Father," replies the man.

The priest is aghast. "You mean that when you die you don't want to go to heaven?"

"Oh, when I *die*, yes. I thought you were getting a group together to go right now." —FAITHWRITERS.COM

#### The Healthy

metal is metallic, but not so for iron, which is ironic.

I was gonna tell a time-traveling joke, but you guys didn't like it.
"DO NOT TOUCH" must be one of the most terrifying things to read in Braille.
I think the Discovery Channel should be on a different channel every day.

**Mrs. Jones** accompanied her husband to his annual checkup. Afterward, the doctor pulled her aside. "I'm very concerned about your husband's mental condition," he said. "He told me that every time he gets up to go to the bathroom at night, God turns on the light for him. And when he's finished, God turns off the light."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Jones. "He's going in the refrigerator again." —Submitted by BUDDY DOWD Hampstead, NC

l know a frog who thought he was 100% German. He was wrong. He's a tad Pole. —Submitted by JIM BETHKE Minneapolis, MN

**Two dog owners** are arguing about whose dog is smarter.

"My dog is so smart," says the first owner, "that every morning he runs to Starbucks, grabs a mocha latte grande and a muffin, tips the barista and brings it home for me." "I know," says the

second owner. "How do you know?" "My dog told me."

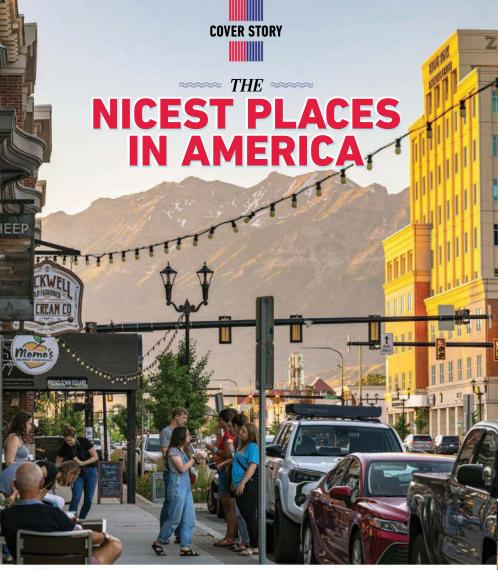
-PAINTSQUARE.COM

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

#### HEY, FUNNY FACE!

Artist Tom Curtis brings his child's drawings to life.





Mount Timpanogos rises over downtown Provo (above). Facing page, clockwise from top left: Provo City Center Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Beehive Freeze Honey Slush at the Provo Farmers Market; *The Children of Peace* sculpture at the courthouse in Provo; picnickers in Pioneer Park; dinosaur fossil at the Brigham Young University Museum of Paleontology; rafting in Provo Canyon.















# PROVO, UTAH

#### ву Derek Burnett

N 2020, WHEN SARA "Seung" Blanco Parra was 12, she and her family left their home in Colombia and wound up in Provo, Utah. It couldn't have been more obvious that they were outsiders. They were immigrants, spoke little English, and practiced Catholicism in a city whose population mostly belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). And yet Blanco Parra, now 16, says she's never felt more safe or welcome.

"In Colombia," she says, "I hardly knew my neighbors. Here, I know I could ask anyone for help, and they would give it to me." During their first few months in Provo when the family had no car, Blanco Parra remembers a motorist pulling over as she was walking to a restaurant with her mother. He gave them a lift, paid for their meal and then hurried off.

This was Provo.

It was the living embodiment of Mormon culture—conservative while curious and open to the world, entrepreneurial while charity-minded, abstemious while fun-loving, ambitious while family-oriented. The city frequently made it onto lists for great places to live, to work, to raise a family, and to play in the outdoors. When one local family was entertaining friends

### Opposite: Utah Lake State Park, with the state's largest freshwater lake

from out of town, the guests looked around and commented, "This place feels like Mayberry."

**THERE ARE PLENTY** of reasons that this beautiful city of 113,000 likeminded neighbors could've been named the Nicest Place in America. But Provo also struggled with a dark secret. Starting in the late 1990s, young people had begun killing themselves at an alarming rate. What sets the community apart is the blueprint it built to fight this deadly epidemic.

In 1999, a 14-year-old boy walked into Provo High School, the city's second-



largest school, and handed his watch to his best friend.

"I'm not going to need this after tomorrow," he said. During the school day, he shared his plans with six other friends, then went home and killed himself. He wasn't the first.

In the early 2000s, sociologists identified a "suicide belt" stretching across the Intermountain West from New Mexico to Montana. Suicide rates within the belt were about twice the national average, and Provo wasn't immune. Between 1998 and 2003, the Provo City School District averaged one or two suicides per year. Over a three-year period, its largest school, Timpview High School, suffered four deaths among its population of 2,100 students.

Why was this happening? Could the conformism and strictures of the Mormon church, with its moral prohibitions, be suffocating for young people? Conversely, could life for nonmembers in Provo be challenging? But the cases didn't neatly align with the first theory, and research suggests that religion can be protective against suicide.

It was when Greg Hudnall, the associate superintendent with the Provo City School District, actually sat down with young people who had attempted suicide that things came into focus. He consistently heard them describe a sense of isolation, of anonymity.

Sara "Seung" Blanco Parra, a junior at Timpview High School and proud Hope Squad member "Do you have any idea what it's like," one girl said to him after her suicide attempt, "to attend a middle school with 1,200 students, share a locker, play on the volleyball team, and not once in three weeks hear your name mentioned?"

Somehow, in this city famous for its niceness, too many kids were feeling as if they didn't matter. Whatever was driving that, the solution began to appear clear: Make sure the kids knew they did matter. But how?

When Hudnall, now 66, began exploring youth-focused prevention programs at other school districts, he learned that many administrators handpicked their most popular students to be trained on what to do if a classmate appeared suicidal. In 2004, Hudnall, along with the school system's prevention officer, Cathy Bledsoe, took a slightly different tack: Rather than identifying the popular kids themselves, they asked every student at Timpview to name three classmates not kids who were popular, but those they would turn to if they were in crisis. Out of 2,100 students, 40 names rose to the top. They came from all over the student body-athletes, nerds, drama kids, cowboys, gay, straight, LDS, non-LDSbut they shared a set of traits. They were known among their classmates to be good listeners, caring people, empaths.

When Hudnall and Bledsoe, now 72, rounded them up to talk about suicide prevention, the kids gave themselves a name: the Hope Squad.

Working with local mental health

experts, including Brigham Young University academics, Hudnall trained the Hope Squad members to recognize suicide warning signs, taught them what questions to ask, and empowered them to guide their struggling classmates toward counselors and social workers. The Hope Squad wore special T-shirts to school, hosted a Hope Day and Hope Week, and met regularly for training and fellowship.

Things turned around so abruptly it was startling. The year after the first Hope Squad was formed—after that devastating string of four suicides in three years—not a single Timpview student took their own life. Nor during the second year, nor the third, nor the fourth ... nor, as of this year, the 20th. The program has been so successful that it was adopted in all 19 of the district's schools, then approved by the Utah legislature as a recipient of funding for any school in the state wishing to start a Hope Squad.

**NESTLED BETWEEN THE** majestic Wasatch Range of the Rocky Mountains and the high-altitude Utah Lake, Provo is a place of natural beauty. It was settled in the 1840s when, under the leadership of their prophet Brigham Young, pioneers belonging to the LDS Church trekked across the Great Plains. They settled Salt Lake City, then Provo, turning an inhospitable desert valley into a lush oasis. Their emblem, the beehive, symbolized their industriousness and unity.

They planted orchards, built wool and



steel mills, and established Brigham Young University (BYU), which is home to some 35,000 students. Today, the city is quite diverse, with Spanish-speaking wards, Pacific Islander wards and Korean wards. In recent decades, Provo has given rise to health-care, finance and tech companies, and its prosperous, enterprising culture is the perfect extension of its bustling-beehive past. It enjoys affordable housing, an enviably low crime rate and a high rate of community volunteerism.

"We know our neighbor. We're kind. We look out for each other," says the city's mayor, Michelle Kaufusi. "Provo people are sensitive to what's going on in the community."

On any given Saturday, some 250 volunteers show up, ready to work, in a Hope Sybrowsky, president of Timpview's Hope Squad, followed her three older sisters into membership.

\*

preselected neighborhood. They will rip out damaged trees, pour concrete for driveways, "anything we can do to help the neighbors," says Kaufusi, 57. The Provo native, who grew up as one of seven kids in a single-parent household, started this MyHometown initiative to help the city that helped raise her.

Residents of Provo are also notoriously outdoorsy, hiking Provo Canyon, fishing Utah Lake, skiing at Sundance. The city boasts a center for the arts, four science museums, a picturesque public library, several theaters, a state-of-theart rec center, ice cream shops that outnumber bars some 15 to 1, and an LDS meetinghouse on nearly every corner.

While life in an LDS town can have its challenges for nonmembers, there's surprisingly little conflict. As Trenton Brown, a 32-year-old non-LDS transplant from upstate New York, puts it, "You never feel judged. It really is a great place to live."

**HUDNALL RETIRED** from the school district and now operates Hope Squad as a nonprofit in Utah. In 2017, he began licensing the program to schools around the country. There are Hope Squads in 2,000 elementary, middle and high schools, a few colleges, a few corporations and even some senior centers. To date, the program has resulted in 12,000 referrals to mental

#### **READER'S DIGEST** Cover Story

health services and more than 2,500 hospitalizations.

Blanco Parra is now a Hope Squad member, as were all six of Kaufusi's kids. Blanco Parra recently became friends with a girl in the nearby town of Spanish Fork. In early 2024, she noticed that her new friend's text messages contained an alarming litany of daily pressures, conflicts with parents, expressions of hopelessness. She kept thanking Blanco Parra for being her friend and left three or four tearful audio messages.

Although the girl lived in another school district, Blanco Parra contacted a Timpview counselor and together they connected her friend with a school social worker, who helped her through the crisis.

"She was a little angry that I did that," says Blanco Parra. "But at the same time, she was glad."

Such dramatic cases are relatively rare. Hope Squads would not be nearly so successful if members only stepped in to help after their peers were already in crisis. Instead, a Hope Squad is about the crucial yet less glamorous work of deep prevention, of making all their classmates feel seen so that they never begin thinking about taking their own lives.

Hope Sybrowsky, 16, the aptly named president of Timpview's Hope Squad, describes the bulk of the work as "going

Momi Tu'ua, a former counselor at Timpview, returned two years ago to serve as the school's principal. to school every day and looking around. You might see someone happy and bubbly one day and then the next day they're sort of quieter. So I will just go up to them and say, 'Hey, are you doing OK? Because it looks like you're feeling a little down.'"

Some Hope Squads will sit together and memorize names and faces of everybody in their school. Having someone drop a casual, "Hey, Megan!" in the hallway can feel like a gift. Not all Hope Squad members are naturally extroverted, but belonging to the organization gives them license to act on their benevolent instincts.

School counselor Rachelle Carter, 54, who is the adviser to Timpview's current Hope Squad, marvels at how uninhibited the group's members can be.

"I can't tell you how many times I



have seen them go up and just sit with someone that was all by themselves," she says. "Just sit there and eat lunch with them or just talk to them. They're the type of kids who are not afraid to do that. They want to just watch out for people."

To be clear, Hope Squad members aren't expected to be counselors. Rather, they're taught to be sensitive to the struggles of their peers and to bring in adult help when they see red flags, as was the case with Blanco Parra and her Spanish Fork friend. Momi Tu'ua, 57, Timpview's current principal, estimates that in her school alone, there have been about 100 referrals made by Hope Squad members over the years.

"About a third of them were cases where we had to intervene at a much deeper level," she says. "I shudder to think what would have happened in those 30 or so cases without the Hope Squad."

**ADAM MCMURRAY**, 18, is a former Hope Squad member and a freshman at BYU who plans to establish the university's first Hope Squad.

During high school, he says, "it can feel like all your peers are finding their place—the football team, math club. A few students just don't seem to quite fit in anywhere. Everyone in Hope Squad was on the lookout for those people. It trained us to have those eyes to see those other students."

Acknowledging the worth of the people around you, McMurray says, "is



School counselor Rachelle Carter, having seen the program's positive results, asked to be its adviser.

something I think everyone in the world could do a little bit better on."

Of course, Provo is not perfect. Ensuring that everyone feels included is an ongoing challenge, says Hudnall: "You really have to work at it. It's not one and done." But he's confident his city will continue to put in the effort. Provo's key asset, Hudnall believes, is "stalwart, kind, supportive people, who really care about connection."

Kaufusi has a message for every person who calls Provo home: "We want them to know that we need them. We need them in our families, we need them in our communities, in our schools, in our friend groups. They are loved and needed."

Manuel Vera has repaired more than 700 bikes—and given them all away.



ву Caroline Fanning

**T FIRST, MANUEL VERA** just wanted to do something productive for his neighbors during the COVID-19 lockdown. Maybe he could help them get outside by tuning up bikes in need of a little TLC, he thought. So he posted to an online group in his Silver Spring, Maryland, neighborhood, offering to fix people's bikes for free. All he asked was to be reimbursed for any new parts.

"Then I started thinking about all the bikes that people have at home that never get used," says Vera, 74, who is retired from the local power company.

Soon he was asking neighbors to donate any bikes collecting dust in their garages and basements after kids had outgrown them or adults had upgraded to new models. Then, in his tidy little backyard shed, he'd get to work.

Vera's workspace is nearly as tricked out as his bikes. The green gardening shed, its inner walls lined with tools, holds a workbench and repair stand, and even has AC and Wi-Fi. You'll know Vera is at work when classic rock or folk music floats out its open doors.

Space is tight, so Vera prefers to work alone—though not for lack of volunteers. Kabul's fall in 2021 saw an influx of refugees to Silver Spring, a Washington, D.C., suburb of about 80,000. It's home to families, young professionals, retirees like Vera, and a large community of immigrants and refugees raring to make Montgomery County home.

Vera tunes up the donated bikes and hauls them to parks, food banks, apartment complexes and churches. He camps out with his Free Bikes sign and waits for people to wander over. Then he pairs people up with the perfect new ride and watches them pedal away happy. His first giveaway saw six bikes go in under 30 minutes.

"People ask a few questions like 'Are they really free?'" says Vera. "The

This family received three bikes, including one with a long handle attached to push a toddler learning to ride, from Vera. answer is 'Yes. If you like this bike, it's yours.'"

Now neighbors know him as the Bike Dude, and they keep him busy with a steady supply of bikes, helmets and locks to redistribute. The local farmers market collected 36 bikes at its first attempt. Vera is constantly tagged in Facebook Buy Nothing group posts when locals seek to either acquire or offload sets of wheels.

In addition to the adults and kids he meets at his Free Bikes events, eager customers come from local resettlement agencies and other nonprofits. The groups provide Vera with the height, gender and age of a rider, and he delivers a fitting bicycle to



#### READER'S DIGEST Cover Story

their door. He's happy to make the trip.

"People found themselves running from home, coming to the United States with nothing but the clothes on their backs," says Vera, who emigrated from Peru with his family when he was 14. "Many of them are professionals who suddenly found themselves on the receiving end of charity."

Manizha Azizi, 47, whose family fled to the United States when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan during the Cold War, works with Vera on behalf of the resettlement assistance group Homes Not Borders.



"A lot of times, people want to donate or offer their services, but you still have to do the footwork," says Azizi. "With Manuel, I just give him the information and he takes it from there."

Vera recalls one instance in which an Afghan man needed a way to get to his new job as a night security guard. Vera outfitted him with not only a bike and helmet, but also lights, a pump and a reflective vest.

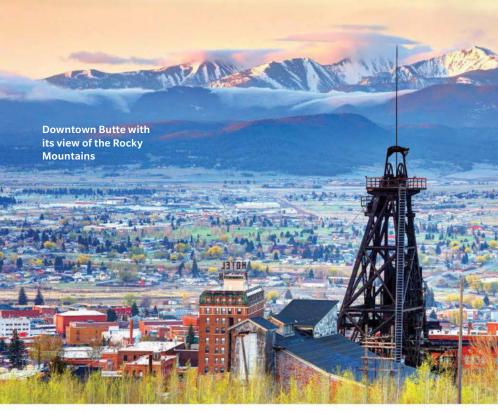
Ibrahim Alashe's new bike cuts his travel time to the grocery store in half, sure. But since the 21-year-old Syrian refugee had said he primarily wanted a

> bike to exercise, Vera made sure his was a sports bike that he could use for cardio too. The model retails for up to \$800.

> "When I was looking for bicycles, it was very expensive, so when he does this for people it makes them so happy," says Alashe. "It was one of my dreams to get a bicycle, and he helped me lose weight. So it's very, very good."

> So far, more than 700 Silver Springers like him have new wheels to take them anywhere their feet can pedal, thanks to the bighearted Bike Dude.

Manuel Vera (right) refurbished a used sports bike for Ibrahim Alashe.





**O SEE THE BEST OF BUTTE,** Montana, all Joyce O'Bill has to do is look out her front window at the gleaming white Virgin Mary on the mountain.

"I look out every morning and say hi," she says.

Perched high on a ridge outside of town, the massive statue known as Our Lady of the Rockies (or just Our Lady to locals) can be seen from almost everywhere in this famously hardworking city. Bob O'Bill built it as a tribute to his wife while she battled cancer. While Joyce was hard at work beating the disease, her husband's modest vision of a 5-foot front-yard statue was blossoming into a 90-foot mountaintop memorial to both family and motherhood.

"Bob said, 'I'm not religious, but I've got a lot of faith,'" says Joyce. "I tell everybody that it doesn't have so much to do with me, or religion. It's for all mothers."

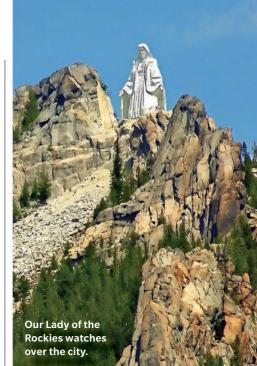
Joyce ended up outliving Bob: He passed away in 2016, and she's still going strong at 90. So strong, in fact, that she drives twice weekly to the Butte Emergency Food Bank to give back to the community that has given so much to her.

"I started 31 years ago, and kept going and going. I'm the old one there," she says. "When we started, it was only four of us. Now we have 60 or 70 volunteers."

It's people like her who inspire Lorraine Hamry most. A retired banker and Butte native, Hamry started volunteering at the Butte Emergency Food Bank a decade ago and is now its director.

"I've absolutely fallen in love with it. I had no idea how much Butte gives back," says Hamry. "People in Butte are so proud. They think everybody should know where Butte is. It's not 'Butte, Montana,' it's 'Butte, America.'"

Founded in 1864 and once the largest city in the West, Butte has always been a rugged place. Joyce



O'Bill still remembers when the local high school got its first turf field.

"The kids played on rocks and dirt for years," she says. "When they finally put in grass for the football field, we thought we were big time."

Now home to 35,000, Butte is most famous for its biggest scar: the milelong crater on the east side of town known as the Berkeley Pit, or just "the pit," a former open-pit copper mine almost 1,800 feet deep. The city was once among the world's most important copper mining regions. Workers created a tight-knit community that took care of its own.

"Everybody knew everybody," recalls Hamry, 61. "People say they're 'Butte tough'—that's because everyone here is surviving."

Today, as mining gives way to tourism, Butte's blue-collar workers have been joined by artists, professionals and entrepreneurs like Demetrius Fassas, a Kentucky transplant who moved in 2015.

"People who come here tend to want to create something for themselves, to start things," says Fassas. "These people are hardy. They know how to do stuff. They're survivors."

Fassas, 34, came to Montana to ski, then stayed to build a career in service. In between, he has helped launch community gardens and two sober-living communities. He now runs the Covellite Theatre, named for the region's signature copper-rich mineral. The Covellite hosts concerts, potluck suppers, open mics and fundraisers.

Curiously, Fassas has found that the less he asks for, the more he gets.

"We've had donation events that do better than ticketed events. If you don't put a price tag on it, people actually give more," he says.

A few blocks away at the Hungry Hill Center for Art, Education and Outreach, Butte native Mike Kujawa has found the same generosity. An art teacher at Butte's high school, Kujawa wanted to support the food bank's youth programs. So he and his students made simple bowls to fill with soup and sell at a fundraiser. Patrons would pay \$20 for their meal and the bowl it came in. At the time, Kujawa, 57, had no idea how much support his Empty Bowls Project would generate.

"That first year, we made 650 bowls, and we were overwhelmed. We had just one soup line and so many people," Kujawa recalls. "This year, we made 1,700 bowls and could only sell 1,300 tickets because that's all the fire marshal would allow in the building."

The support reflects a deep Butte tradition, Kujawa says.

"It goes back to the mines—there was no insurance. When somebody died in the mine or got injured, everybody got together to help the family," he explains.

It's that same Butte spirit that made the Our Lady of the Rockies statue possible.

When Bob O'Bill shared his modest plans with friends in 1979, they started thinking bigger. A supporter donated land. The mining company lent equipment. It took Bob and his friends five years to build the road to the ridgetop and pour the concrete base. The 51-ton statue was completed in 1985, its seven steel sections flown in by Nevada Air National Guard helicopters as locals cheered from below.

"So many good guys," Joyce O'Bill recalls. "They'd all work their jobs all day, and then go up there at night and work some more. Then they'd come down all hungry and dirty and sit in the front room and giggle." A shrine at the site includes 15,000 memorial tiles for mothers and grandmothers. One tile honors the great-grandmother of Butte native Shannon Hopewell.

"The view is spectacular—you can see the Berkeley Pit, the city, everything," says Hopewell.

Our Lady of the Rockies isn't Butte's only statue of note. Outside the town archives, where Hopewell works, stands a bronze-and-stone memorial to a true Butte survivor the famously standoffish stray dog known as the Auditor, who spent 17 years living alone at the Berkeley Pit.

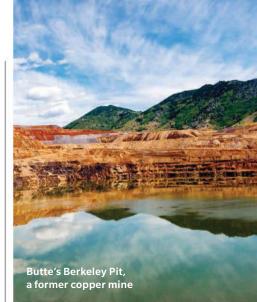
"The number of people who stop by to pat his head is amazing," says Hopewell.

Miners named the dog the Auditor because he'd show up when least expected. He wouldn't let anyone near him, but miners left him food and built him a doghouse, where he would eventually pass away peacefully.

The story captivated Hopewell, 32, who recently published a children's book about him called *The Richest Dog on Earth*.

"We don't really know where he came from, but the miners took care of him," Hopewell says. "There's a resilience to the people of Butte. Even if you're alone, you can still find a friend."

The city isn't perfect, says Fassas: "Nine months of winter is tough."



But Butte has held on to its history and builds its future.

Visitors can see the World Mining Museum, hit the Montana Folk Festival and eat at the nation's oldest Chinese restaurant, the Pekin Noodle Parlor, founded in 1911. There's a film festival, the country's most difficult 100-mile mountain bike race, and a two-day Fourth of July party (Butte's title as Montana's "festival city" is certainly earned). And the spectacular landscape around the city offers hiking, biking, hunting, fishing and any winter sport you can think up.

The longer you stay, claims Kujawa, the harder it is to leave.

"You will see a rough edge," he says, "but they're the friendliest people around. What else is there to say?"



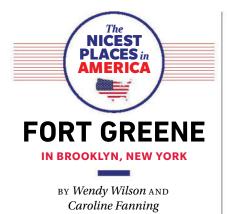
вч Jocelyn Abrams

**N 2003, THREE CHURCHES** brought a mobile dental clinic to Cashiers, North Carolina, a tiny vacation town with just 752 year-round residents. When the clinic moved on, hundreds of hopefuls were left in line.

Church volunteers who saw the good that accessible dental care could do raised funds to buy office space. Dental practices donated chairs and equipment; a dentist and a hygienist donated their time; and the Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic was open. The pool of volunteers grows every year: In 2023, more than 20 professionals helped some 700 people with overdue fillings, extractions and dentures.

"You don't need to walk around feeling bad about yourself, because they can change your life for the better," says Elizabeth Hooper, who skipped her school reunion because she couldn't afford to fix her teeth. "I got the smile—I'm going to show it off!"





**AST YEAR, EMILY ANADU** answered a call from New York City's Parks and Recreation Department.

"Emily, I'm mad at you," the man on the other end of the line told her.

Anadu, 45, and thousands of other Brooklynites had just convened in Fort Greene Park for The Lay Out, an annual gathering the Sunday before Juneteenth. People come together to eat, buy clothes and crafts, and just bond with one another.

"Oh no," Anadu replied, "did we do something wrong?"

"No," he said. "You didn't leave anything for us to do." Attendees and organizers had returned the park in better condition than it was given.

Decades ago, Fort Greene, a section of Brooklyn just off the Manhattan Bridge, was largely populated by first-time-homeowning Black families living on tree-lined streets where the sky's view inspired limitless possibilities. It was a place where folks knew their butcher's name. Kids played outside till dusk. You saw the same people every day.

The neighborhood became a mecca for art and culture, championed by filmmaker and hometown hero Spike Lee, who set his first movies there. In the 1840s, Walt Whitman helped found Fort Greene Park, the neighborhood's beating heart, and almost a century later, Richard Wright wrote parts of *Native Son* in the 30-acre green space.

"It was more family oriented, and you felt that family love. Every parent had permission to check someone's child," says Carlos Jones, 56, CEO and co-founder of Switching Lifestylez, a group of volunteers in Fort Greene who help de-escalate conflict among youth. On any given day, members might walk kids home from school, step in if they see trouble brewing or just lend an ear.

"Now, it's totally different, but we are bringing that vibe back," he says.

Things have changed, as anyone would expect. Skyrocketing housing costs and stark economic disparity between longtime residents and newer, wealthier residents have forced lifelong Fort Greeners out of certain parts of the neighborhood, if not out entirely. Amid it all, one thing remains firm: an intrinsic sense of both camaraderie and mutual support.

It's that sense of belonging that The Lay Out aims to protect. The idea was

born in a group chat during 2020's Black Lives Matter marches—Anadu and friends just wanted to create a safe space in the park, which is beloved to Fort Greeners. Anadu knows it so well she can follow its pathways while reading a book. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, she picked up trash alongside maintenance crews on her daily walks.

"I'm desperately trying to hold on to the history of this neighborhood, trying to make sure that Black people always have a presence," says Anadu.

The Lay Out is more than a celebration in the park. Its organizers have created an entire ecosystem, with a network of more than 500 Black-owned businesses and cooking classes whose ticket proceeds keep community fridges stocked with delicious food, free for the taking, to name a few ongoing efforts. But Anadu stresses how important simply gathering in Fort Greene Park, a space that felt increasingly encroached upon, can be for residents to bask in the joy of shared connection.

"It was about reclaiming space, reclaiming each other, and this idea that peace is a form of resistance," she says.

The neighborhood is a master class in preserving the mores of old while making just enough room for what's new, dynamic and curative.

"I want people to see we aren't like every other community," says Jones. "Fort Greene is a wonderful place with a vibe like no other." Hurricane Idalia devastated the town in 2023.

### HORSESHOE BEACH, FLORIDA

The NICEST

**PLACES** in

вч Derek Burnett

HEN CATEGORY 3 HUR-RICANE IDALIA, complete with 125-mph winds, came pounding across the Gulf of Mexico in August 2023, Horseshoe Beach, Florida, took a direct hit.

An idyllic enclave of some 200 permanent residents in the state's sparsely populated Big Bend region, the town prides itself on its old-fashioned vibe, neighborly spirit and resistance to commercialization.

"They paved the roads back about 15 years ago," says Mayor Jeff Williams, "and a lot of people in town raised Cain about it." Horseshoe Beach had no cell service or internet access until 2014.

Now, one of Florida's final frontiers faced an existential threat. Idalia's storm surge damaged or destroyed every building that wasn't constructed on pilings. Forty homes were washed away completely. Devastated residents returned to town later the same day, shell-shocked and numb. Then they started cleaning up the mess.

A community disaster called for a community response. People who owned second homes in Horseshoe Beach handed the keys to their now-homeless neighbors to stay as long as they needed. Residents brought in their heavy equipment and chain saws to open the roadways and plow away debris, clearing neighbors' property without a thought of payment. When contractors from inland showed up passing around business cards, Williams says, the locals "just about run them out of town. Because everybody's friends and families were doing it for nothing."

Hours after the storm moved on, 25-year-old Lacey Coe, nearly 6 months pregnant and with three little ones under 5, realized that all these neighbors helping neighbors were going to need to eat. So she drove 40 miles to the nearest superstore, loaded up on groceries, returned to her undamaged home and, as she puts it, "put on my big-girl britches and started cooking."

The next day, she did the same thing. And the next. And the next.

The area beneath her elevated house, where she'd set up a deluxe grill donated by a neighbor, became a gathering place for whoever was hungry, three meals a day, drawing between 40 and 100 people per meal. She served pork chops, grilled chicken, seafood boils, salmon, ribs, rice and gravy, green beans, potatoes, salads and more. She worked from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. and never charged a dime.

"She became the captain of the ship," says resident Bill Ordner, 59, who had never spoken with Coe before the storm but grew close to her family



helped neighbors.

when he made it his business to help her however he could: prepping meals, cleaning up, carrying ice. One day, he recalls, she accidentally laid a hot frying pan on her thigh. "She put some burn gel on it and went right back to cooking," he says.

To Coe, she was just in keeping with her Horseshoe Beach upbringing. In this town, she says, "when you find out somebody don't have what they need, you go do it, you get it, and you make sure they have it."

Eventually, someone put out a donation jar, and Coe manned the grill for three months. Then she had her baby and started back up again.

Horseshoe Beach's future is uncertain. Modern building codes require homes to be elevated, which can double construction costs. Many are putting up pole barns and parking their RVs on the concrete slabs where their houses once sat. Some will likely sell their properties to out-of-towners who have the means to build fancy homes and might not share the community's long-held values.

Mayor Williams agrees that the actions of Coe and her neighbors align perfectly with the enduring spirit of Horseshoe Beach.

"Someone has a problem with their shrimp boat, the next day you see 12 or 14 neighbors out there helping him pull the engine so he can get back to work," he says. "Horseshoe Beach will be back as good or better than we were. But we don't want to change."



### **Our Finalists**

For the past eight years, our readers have nominated thousands of towns, cities, libraries, parks and even a shed as some of the Nicest Places in America. Take a journey around the country to see this year's winners, starred on the map above. Read more and visit our previous Nicest Places at **rd.com/nicest**, where we are already collecting nominations for 2025.

- ★ Provo, Utah
- ★ Manuel's Bike Shed in Silver Spring, Maryland
- ★ Butte, Montana
- ★ Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic in Cashiers, North Carolina
- ★ Fort Greene, Brooklyn, New York
- ★ Horseshoe Beach, Florida

#### **OUR PAST WINNERS**

- Gallatin, Tennessee, 2017
- Yassin's Falafel House in Knoxville, Tennessee, 2018
- Columbiana, Ohio, 2019
- Buchanan, Michigan, 2020
- The Quality Inn in Kodak, Tennessee, 2021
- Coulterville, California, 2022
- Buffalo, New York, 2023

### The Road to the Nicest Places

It takes a village to put together the Nicest Places in America, and ours is filled with some of the Nicest People. For our eighth annual contest, we started as we always do by asking you, our readers, to be our scouts around the country and send us your nominations for the nicest places you know. Our editorial team vets each place carefully, whittling down the list with the help of our panel of judges, who know a thing or two about niceness themselves. Congratulations to each of the 2024 Nicest Places in America. Keep showing us all how it's done!

#### MEET OUR JUDGES



MITCH ALBOM Philanthropist, broadcaster and bestselling author of *Tuesdays* with Morrie, The Little Liar and more



CRAIG ELSTON Owner of C&C Cutz barbershop in Buffalo, New York, 2023's Nicest Place in America



MÓNICA GUZMÁN Senior Fellow at Braver Angels, a nonprofit working to depolarize America, and author of I Never Thought of It That Way



BONNIE KINTZER Chief Executive Officer of Trusted Media Brands



STEVEN PETROW Journalist who writes about civil discourse and author of many books, including The Joy You Make



AL ROKER Weatherman and anchor on NBC's *Today* show



MODERN CARS ARE COMPUTERS ON WHEELS. AND LIKE COMPUTERS, THEY CAN BE HACKED, EVEN BY ABUSIVE PARTNERS.

# THE SPY IN

BY Kashmir Hill from the new york times

*LSEEK* 

TRACKY

SETUP



## AFTER ALMOST 10 YEARS OF MARRIAGE, CHRISTINE DOWDALL WANTED OUT.

Her husband was no longer the charming man she had fallen in love with. He had become narcissistic, abusive and unfaithful, she says. After one of their fights turned violent in September 2022, Dowdall fled their home in Covington, Louisiana, driving her Mercedes-Benz C300 sedan to her daughter's house near Shreveport, five hours away. She filed a domestic abuse report with the police two days later.

Her husband, a Drug Enforcement Administration agent, didn't want to let her go. He called her repeatedly, first pleading with her to return, and then threatening her. She stopped responding to him, even though he texted and called her hundreds of times.

Dowdall, a 59-year-old real estate agent, started occasionally seeing a

strange new message on the display in her Mercedes, about a location-based service called mbrace. The second time it happened, she took a photograph and searched for the name online.

"I realized, *Oh my God, that's him tracking me*," Dowdall says.

Mbrace was part of "Mercedes me connect"—a suite of connected services for the car, accessible via a smartphone app. Dowdall had only ever used the Mercedes me connect app to make auto loan payments. She hadn't realized that the service could also be used to track the car's location. One night when she visited a friend's home, her husband sent the man a message with a thumbs-up emoji. A nearby camera captured his car driving in the area, according to the detective who worked on her case.

Dowdall called Mercedes-Benz customer service repeatedly to try to remove her husband's digital access to the car. but the loan and title were in his name, a decision the couple had made because he had a better credit score than hers. Even though she was making the payments, had a restraining order against her husband and had been granted sole use of the car during the divorce proceedings, Mercedes-Benz representatives told her that her husband was the customer so he would be able to keep his access. There was, she learned, no button she could press to take away the app's connection to the vehicle.

"This is not the first time that I've

heard something like this," one of the representatives told Dowdall.

A spokeswoman for Mercedes-Benz said the company did not comment on "individual customer matters."

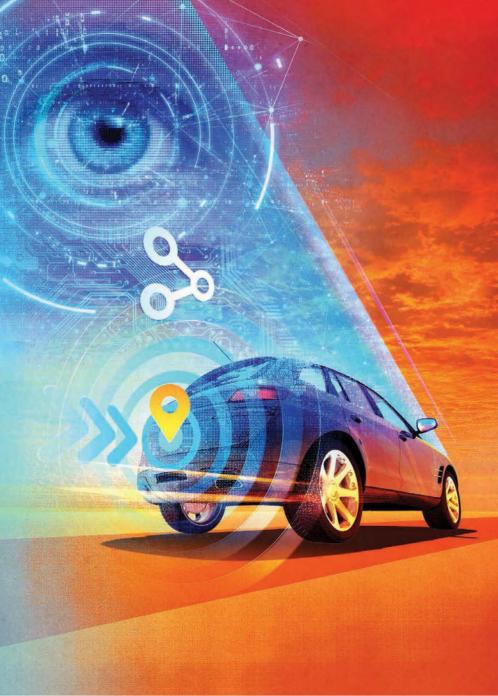
A car, to its driver, can feel like a sanctuary. A place to sing favorite songs off-key, to cry, to vent or to drive somewhere no one knows you're going. But in truth, there are few places in our lives less private.

MODERN CARS have been called "smartphones with wheels" because they are internet connected and have myriad methods of data collection, from cameras and seat weight sensors to records of how hard you brake and corner. Most drivers don't realize how much information their cars are collecting and who has access to it, says Jen Caltrider, a privacy researcher at Mozilla, the company that developed the Firefox browser. She reviewed the privacy policies of more than 25 car brands and found surprising disclosures, such as Nissan saying it might collect information about "sexual activity."

"People think their car is private," Caltrider says. "With a computer, you know where the camera is and you can put tape over it. Once you've bought a car and you find it is bad at privacy, what are you supposed to do?"

Privacy advocates are concerned by how car companies are using and sharing consumers' data—with insurance companies, for example—as well as by





drivers' inability to turn off the data collection.

For car owners, the upside of this data-palooza has come in the form of smartphone apps that allow them to check a car's location when, say, they forget where it is parked; to lock and unlock the vehicle remotely; and to turn it on or off. Some apps can even remotely set the car's climate controls, honk the horn or turn on the lights. After setting up the app, the car's owner can grant access to a limited number of other drivers.

Domestic violence experts say that these convenience features are being weaponized in abusive relationships, and that carmakers have not been willing to assist victims. This is particularly complicated when the victim is a co-owner of the car or is not named on the title.

Detective Kelly Downey of the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office, who investigated Dowdall's husband for stalking, reached out to Mercedes-Benz more than a dozen times to no avail. Mercedes-Benz also failed to respond to a search warrant, Downey says. By obtaining records of the husband's internet activity, she found evidence that he was using the Mercedes me connect app.

This was not the first time the detective had been down this road. She had previously dealt with another case of harassment via a connected car app—a woman whose husband would turn on her Lexus while it sat in the garage in the middle of the night. In that case, too, Downey was unable to get the car company to turn off the husband's access. The victim ended up selling her car.

Unable to get help from Mercedes-Benz, Dowdall took her car to an independent mechanic and paid \$400 to disable the remote tracking. This also disabled the car's navigation system and its SOS button, a tool to get help in an emergency.



### "TECHNOLOGY MAY BE OUR GODSEND, BUT IT'S ALSO VERY SCARY."

"I didn't care. I just didn't want him to know where I was," says Dowdall, whose husband died by suicide last November. "Car manufacturers should give the ability to turn this tracking off."

Downey agrees. "Automobile manufacturers have to create a way for us to stop it," she says. "Technology may be our godsend, but it's also very scary because it could hurt you."

Eva Galperin, an expert on techenabled domestic abuse at the digital rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation, says she has seen another case of an abuser using a car app to track a victim's movements. The victim didn't



realize it because she wasn't the one who set it up.

"As far as I know, there are not any guides for how to lock your partner out of your car after you break up," Galperin says.

Controlling partners have tracked their victims' cars in the past using GPS devices and Apple AirTags, Galperin says, but connected car apps offer new opportunities for harassment.

A San Francisco man used his remote access to the Tesla Model X vehicle he co-owned with his wife to harass her after they separated, according to a lawsuit she filed anonymously in San Francisco Superior Court in 2020.

According to a legal complaint against her husband and Tesla, the car's lights and horns were activated in a parking garage. On hot days, she would arrive at her car and discover the heat was running so that it was uncomfortably hot, while on cold days, she would find that the air conditioner had been activated from afar. Her husband, she said in court documents, used the Tesla's location-finding feature to identify her new residence, which she had hoped to keep secret from him.

The woman, who obtained a restraining order against her husband, contacted Tesla numerous times to get her husband's access to the car revoked, but was not successful.

In legal filings, Tesla denied responsibility for the harassment, questioned whether it had occurred based on the husband's denials, and raised questions about the woman's reliability. Some of what she claimed her husband had done, such as turning on songs with disturbing lyrics while she was driving, could not be done via the Tesla app.

"Virtually every major automobile manufacturer offers a mobile app with similar functions for their customers," Tesla's lawyers wrote. "It is illogical and impractical to expect Tesla to monitor every vehicle owner's mobile app for misuse."

A judge dismissed Tesla from the case, stating that it would be "onerous" to expect car manufacturers to determine which claims of app abuse were legitimate.

Katie Ray-Jones, the chief executive of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, says abusive partners use a wide variety of internet-connected devices, including smart home products, to track and harass their victims. Technology that keeps tabs on a person's movements is of particular concern to domestic violence shelters, she says, because they "try to keep the shelter location confidential."

As a preventive measure, Ray-Jones encourages people in relationships to have equal access to technologies used to control their homes and belongings. "If there's an app that is controlling your automobile, you both need to have access to that," she says.

Adam Dodge, a former family law attorney turned digital safety trainer, calls car app stalking "a blind spot for victims and automakers."

"Most victims I've talked to are wholly unaware that the car they rely on is app-connected in the first place," he says. "They can't address threats they don't know are there."

As a possible solution to the problem, he and other domestic violence experts point to the Safe Connections Act, a recent federal law that allows victims of domestic abuse to easily sever their phone from accounts shared with their abusers. A similar law should extend to cars, Dodge says, allowing people with protective orders from a court to easily cut off an abuser's digital access to their car.

"Having access to a car for a victim is a lifeline," he says. "No victim should have to make the choice between being stalked by the car or having no car. But that's the crossroads many of them find themselves at."

THE NEW YORK TIMES (DEC. 31, 2023), COPYRIGHT © 2023 BY THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY.

#### **Squad Goals**

What do Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush have in common—apart from the obvious? They were all cheerleaders in high school or college.

RD.COM





## SHOTS! SHOTS! SHOTS! SHOTS! FOR EVERYBODY! Are you up to date on your vaccines?

Are you up to date on your vaccines: Our handy guide will let you know.

#### BY Beth Weinhouse from thehealthy.com

HAT WAS THE most important medical discovery of all time? Was it antibiotics, which gave doctors a way to fight deadly infections? What about medical imaging such as X-rays and CT scans, which allow doctors to look inside the human body to diagnose and treat a variety of conditions? Both of these innovations, of course, have saved many lives. But there's one that leaves them in the dust. According to the World Health Organization, vaccines have saved more human lives-154 million. including 101 million infants, in the last 50 years alone-than any other medical invention in history.

The first successful human vaccine was the smallpox vaccine, developed in 1796. Smallpox used to kill millions of people each year, and the vaccine has saved many millions of lives. We no longer need a smallpox vaccine because that disease was successfully eradicated, thanks to the vaccine. So far, smallpox is the only infectious human disease we've succeeded in making disappear completely. There are still plenty of viruses and bacteria circulating that are a threat to our health, but fortunately we have vaccines that can protect against many of them.

This fall, as you think about getting a

flu vaccine (do it!), also think about whether there are other vaccines that you should consider getting to keep yourself healthy. Many people follow the recommended vaccine schedule through childhood, but then stop keeping up with boosters and new vaccines once they're adults.

The list at right includes vaccines that are recommended for most adults (age 19 and older) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as many other reputable medical organizations. You might need vaccines earlier or more often than the regular schedule if you have conditions that affect immunity (such as HIV infection) or if you take immunosuppressant drugs (after an organ transplant, cancer or illnesses such as vasculitis, for example).

Or you might need other vaccines in addition to those listed, depending on risk factors such as your age, overall health, immune status, lifestyle and even travel plans (for instance, typhoid vaccine is not typically given to people living in the United States, but for those traveling to a country where typhoid is common, the vaccine can provide protection). On the flip side, if you were born before a certain year, you likely have developed immunity to certain diseases and can skip those shots.

Take a look at the list to see if you've fallen behind on any recommended vaccines. And check with your healthcare provider for specific recommendations tailored to your health needs.

#### WHAT VACCINES YOU NEED AND WHEN

#### INFLUENZA (flu)

• Who Should Get It: Everyone

• How Often: Every year

**Notes:** The flu vaccine changes every year as scientists try to anticipate which strains of the flu virus will be most prevalent. A special high-dose vaccine for people age 65 and older helps their immune systems respond more vigorously.

#### COVID-19

- Who Should Get It: Everyone
- How Often: It depends

**Notes:** Everyone should have the newest version of the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna vaccine, which both came out in fall 2023. Some people, such as adults over age 65 and immunocompromised individuals, may need additional doses. New versions of the vaccine may be released as the virus continues to mutate. Ask your doctor or look for public health announcements to keep current.

VARICELLA (chickenpox and shingles) • Who Should Get It: People born in 1980 or later, plus older individuals who have additional risk factors and were not previously vaccinated and have never had chickenpox.

 How Often: Once. The vaccine requires two doses given four to eight weeks apart.



TDAP (tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis)
Who Should Get It: Everyone
How Often: Every 10 years
Notes: If you step on a nail or get another wound and aren't sure when you had your last booster, get another one. Women should get a booster shot with each pregnancy.

MMR (measles-mumps-rubella)

 Who Should Get It: People born in 1957 or later who have not been fully immunized.

 How Often: One or two doses provide lifelong immunity. Most people are fully immunized in childhood.

HPV (human papillomavirus)

 Who Should Get It: Adults through age 26 (or, if not vaccinated by age 27, then before age 46 in consultation with your doctor). • How Often: Two or three doses, depending on age and health factors. Notes: Young people between ages 9 and 14 receive two doses; adults receive three.

#### ZOSTER (shingles)

 Who Should Get It: Adults age 50 and over, plus younger adults with immunocompromising conditions.

 How Often: Once. The vaccine (Shingrix) requires two doses given two to six months apart.

PNEUMOCOCCAL (pneumonia)

Who Should Get It: Adults over age 65, plus younger people with additional risk factors, such as diabetes, lymphoma, cigarette smoking and more.

• How Often: One dose of PCV20 vaccine, or one dose of PCV15 vaccine followed by a dose of PPSV23.



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

## HIS BEST FREND WAS FREND WAS 50-POUND 50-POUND WARTHOG ...

BY Peter Holley FROM TEXAS MONTHLY

RD.COM 81

# *He'd come close to dying on multiple occasions,*

including a few months before his first birthday, when doctors discovered a golf ball-sized tumor growing inside his skull. Austin Riley would go on to spend much of his childhood in and out of hospitals, enduring high-risk brain surgeries and grueling recoveries. Then, in his mid-20s, he was nearly killed by a cerebral hemorrhage that arrived one night, unleashing the worst pain he'd ever felt. He emerged from that experience reborn, feeling lucky to be alive and convinced that he had been spared by God.

So as he sat in a pool of his own blood on a beautiful October evening in 2022, Austin, then 31, couldn't help but acknowledge the morbid absurdity of his current predicament. He'd spent decades conquering brain maladies only to be killed while doing mundane chores on his family's ranch in Texas Hill Country.

"After all I'd been through," he says, "I just couldn't believe that this was how it was going to end."

As Austin slumped against a fence in an isolated part of the 130-acre property and his mangled body began to shut down, his mind went into overdrive. He thought about his girlfriend, Kennedy Buckley, whom he'd never get a chance to marry, and the children he'd never have. He thought about how much he loved his three sisters and his parents and how badly he wished he could thank them for the life they'd provided. He thought about the land stretched out before him, a rustic valley accentuated by crimson and amber foliage that seemed to glitter in the evening light, and realized it had never seemed more beautiful than it did in that moment.

Mostly he thought about the creature that had just used its razor-sharp 7-inch tusks to gore him at least 15 times. The attack had shredded his lower body and filled his boots with blood, and left gaping holes in his torso and neck. Had any other animal been responsible, Austin would've considered it a random attack.

But this was a pet he'd trusted more than any other: his lovable, nearly 5-year-old warthog, Waylon. It wasn't just an ambush, as far as Austin was concerned. It was a murderous act of betrayal, one that shattered everything he thought he knew about the deep bond between man and pig.

"For years, that animal trusted me



every day, and I trusted him," Austin says. "I put blood, sweat and tears into his life, and he decided to kill me."

AUSTIN, WHO SPENDS most days on his own, working with his hands, seems like a throwback to another era. Ruggedly handsome, with a five o'clock shadow and a head full of unkempt brown hair, he has a confident strut and refers to himself as "farm-boy strong."

When it comes to animals, he reveals a softer side. In his polite Texas twang, he talks lovingly about caring for an antelope or a warthog as matter-offactly as most people speak about feeding a dog or a cat. He has a wide circle of human friends but an even wider circle of relationships with animals, many of whom he's given human names, such as Elmer and Susan.

"People are so mean to each other for no reason, but animals, they've always felt peaceful to me," he says as he fixes a fence on the edge of the ranch, keeping one eye on an anxious herd of African antelopes called kudu. "And unlike people, they almost always give back what you put into them."

Animals have been a part of Austin's life for as long as he can remember. Austin's father, Shane Riley, has a career in oil and gas, but his passion has been for his ranch, which he stocks with unusual animals from faraway places. After Austin was born, Shane turned his hobby into a business, breeding and selling exotic animals, typically to buyers in Texas.

Because his medical history meant he faced an increased risk of seizure, Austin needed regular supervision growing up. He wasn't allowed to play contact sports and had to be careful roughhousing at the swimming pool each summer or attending sleepovers at friends' homes. He faced limitations his peers didn't, but he did have access to something that other children lacked: exotic animals. In addition to three dogs, Austin had a pet ostrich, a white-tailed deer and a fallow deer.

"He was never inside and didn't like

to play video games," Gail Riley, Austin's mother, recalls. "He wanted to be outside with the animals, hanging out, playing hide-and-seek, learning how to feed and care for them. Austin loved the animals and the animals always seemed to love him."

But there was one animal that Austin poured more of himself into than any other: Waylon. Their bond formed on a cold December night in 2017, seconds after the tiny warthog took its first breath. The piglet's mother had died in labor, but Austin immediately assumed her place, cradling the hamster-sized infant in one hand and a bottle of milk in the other. He moved the animal into



his parents' home, creating a makeshift nursery out of a plastic container, hay and baby blankets. Eventually, as the weather outside warmed, Austin built a small wooden house beside his parents' home, where the pig was able to spend his days gaining strength and

#### *"I'D TAKE HIM TO THE DRIVE-THRU AT WHATABURGER. HE'D SIT IN THE FRONT SEAT, HAPPY AS CAN BE."*

playing with the family's bulldog. Austin decided to name the rambunctious warthog as an homage to another unruly figure, outlaw country legend Waylon Jennings.

Always eager for his owner's company, Waylon enjoyed falling asleep on Austin's chest after feedings. He loved red apples, rough belly scratches and tender massages on his hardened, bony snout. Before long, the pig and the brawny farm boy were inseparable.

"I just kinda became his parent—his dad, really," Austin says. "Early on, I'd take him with me through the drivethru at Whataburger, and he'd sit in the front seat, happy as can be."

Waylon soon grew to be "250 pounds of pure protein," as Austin likes to say more than an average-size NFL linebacker. By then, Austin had moved him to a large pen a few hundred yards away from the family home. On particularly beautiful days, Austin liked to lie on the ground in the enclosure, listening to sports radio and watching the clouds pass by. Inevitably, Waylon would lie down beside him, gingerly resting his enormous, wart-covered head on Austin's thigh. They could remain that way for hours at a time.

Pigs, as any experienced livestock handler will tell you, are usually the most intelligent animals on a ranch, and Waylon was no exception. He could follow basic commands and knew his name. When Austin wasn't paying attention, Waylon enjoyed digging his snout into his owner's back pocket and grabbing hold of a pair of pliers that Austin always carried with him. Instead of giving the tool back, Waylon would run to the other side of the pen and play keep-away for as long as Austin would chase after him.

"He loved being a little pain in the butt," Austin recalls. "But in the end, we had an understanding, and he never showed one sign of aggression."

**ON THE RUTHLESS** African savanna, warthogs exist in an almost perpetual state of danger. Their wariness and quick trigger have helped turn them into formidable opponents for some of the world's most fearsome predators. Adult warthogs can reach speeds of more than 30 mph. Even when caught by a lion or leopard, the pigs can be hard to kill because they fight back with knifelike lower tusks, which protrude from muscular jaws like blades on a scythed chariot.

#### READER'S DIGEST

Nearly 9,000 miles away, on ranches in Texas, they're becoming more popular as pets and as hunting targets. They are prized by hunters for their delectable meat and the challenge involved in acquiring it. For those who keep them, meanwhile, warthogs are low-maintenance exotic pets. Despite their menacing appearance and deadly hardware, they don't usually display aggression toward humans.

Experts say a reputation for docility can be the very quality that makes a particular animal dangerous. Wild-pig behavior isn't easy to predict, says Tina Cloutier Barbour, associate vice president of animal care and welfare at the Dallas Zoo, Unlike domestic animals. which have been bred to remain docile. wild animals are capable of dramatic shifts in behavior, even when they appear tame. At the Dallas Zoo, personnel never encounter the adult beasts unguarded but instead practice "protective contact." a form of interaction that ensures there is always a physical barrier, such as wire mesh, between human and animal.

"Warthogs aren't predators, so they don't necessarily seek out fights, but if they do feel threatened, they'll use their speed and their agility and their tusks to defend themselves quite spectacularly," Cloutier Barbour says.

Low to the ground and deft, the animal is capable of thrashing its head back and forth at a rate that can be hard for the human eye to register. Adding to the terror, a warthog goring isn't a clean



A cozy moment years earlier. But on the day of the attack, Austin says, Waylon "almost looked like he was possessed."

form of penetrative trauma. The tusks' hooked shape ensures that they cause even more damage coming out than they do going in.

Asked what she'd tell someone planning to add a warthog to a private collection, Cloutier Barbour offers a simple piece of advice: "Don't do it."

AFTER PARTICULARLY BRUTAL days at the ranch, whether he's laboring through freezing weather or has spent hours corralling an unruly animal, Austin likes to sum up his struggle with a single expression: "Things got Western," a rhetorical tribute to the rugged cowboy culture that so many rural Texans still embrace.

The most "Western" five minutes in his life began without much warning. Waylon had appeared to be his typical friendly self that October day at his dinnertime. He greeted Austin at the front gate, happily accepted some back scratches, and trotted beside him as the two walked to a nearby feeding trough. About 20 minutes after he'd arrived, Austin had just finished feeding Daisy, a potbellied pig he's owned since she was a piglet, in an adjacent pen. He reentered the warthog enclosure and was walking toward his all-terrain vehicle, parked at the gate.

Suddenly his right leg crumpled behind him, and he found himself tumbling forward, landing some 15 feet away. As Austin gathered his bearings, Waylon's bulky, gray head emerged from a swirling cloud of dust near his feet. Before Austin could stand up and run, Waylon thrust his face between the rancher's lower legs and began violently swinging his tusks back and forth. One tusk stabbed Austin twice in the right calf and the other once in the left calf. His right leg was gashed from the knee to the upper thigh, an injury so wide that Austin was later able to put his hand inside it. He remembers the sensation of cool air hitting warm muscle and the realization that blood was pouring out of his jeans and filling his boots.

Austin knew his parents were almost certainly eating dinner indoors a quarter-mile away, and nearby ranchers were likely too far away to hear his cries. He screamed anyway.

For a split second, Austin thought the incident might come to an abrupt end,

that Waylon had merely decided to deliver a forceful message—"This is my pen and I'm the man around here now!"—in the only way he knew. But a momentary glimpse of the warthog's narrowed, rage-filled eyes dispelled that notion. As Austin attempted to scoot backward, he realized that Waylon wasn't stopping. The warthog was barreling forward, attempting to pin his owner to the ground.

"He was in murder mode," Austin says.

Before Austin could fight back, Waylon hooked his owner four more times in the upper left leg and genitals. Several more stab wounds to his upper right leg followed in rapid succession.

Reflexively, Austin attempted to gouge out the warthog's eyes, but he was blocked by bony facial armor. Austin grabbed Waylon's tusks instead,

#### AUSTIN'S SURVIVAL DEPENDED ON REENTERING THE PEN WITH THE BEAST TO RETRIEVE HIS PHONE.

slicing open his wrist. After three more gashes in his abdomen, Austin attempted to put Waylon in a headlock. But the animal jerked upward, plunging his tusk into Austin's voice box, leaving a hole the size of a quarter in his neck. The blow knocked him onto his back, leaving his entire body exposed to the rampaging boar.



Somehow, when he needed it most, Austin caught a break. Lying on his back and bleeding out, he may have looked dead to Waylon. The warthog relented, momentarily. Pumped full of adrenaline, Austin staggered to his feet and clambered halfway up an 8-foot fence using a foothold. It would take five tries to swing his body over the top.

Once outside the pen, Austin made a disheartening discovery: His phone had fallen out of his back pocket during the attack. Afraid he'd lose consciousness soon, and with no other way to summon help, Austin realized his survival depended upon his reentering the pen with the beast and crossing 20 feet of blood-soaked dirt to retrieve his phone and call for help, all without Waylon noticing. Austin's rehab was tough. He says, "I'm not the kind of person who gives up."

Once Waylon had trotted a little way in the other direction, Austin seized his opportunity. After climbing down the fence, he dragged himself over to his phone and then stumbled to a nearby gate. Steadying his legs and trying not to panic, he struggled to open two latches as Waylon circled back around and started charging. Slipping past with seconds to spare, Austin collapsed on the ground as the warthog lunged at him from the other side of the fence, threatening to break through.

Austin knew his survival was far from assured. His service rarely worked near the back of Waylon's pen, but on this day he found a single bar of coverage. When his dad picked up the phone, Austin told him he was "bleeding out." Shane knew his son wasn't being dramatic. Austin—who preferred to wrap a paper towel and some electrical tape around a wound and then go about his business—was not one to fuss over injuries. Shane told him to sit tight.

Before Austin hung up the phone, he told his parents how much he loved them. They'd always been there for him, he said, and his rapidly approaching demise wasn't their fault.

A minute later, he could hear his mother's screams from inside the family home a quarter-mile away, followed by the screech of his father's Suburban peeling out of the driveway.

#### Drama in Real Life READER'S DIGEST

By the time he made it to the pen, Shane felt as if he'd walked into a gruesome crime scene. His first instinct was to push the tissue back inside Austin's body, as if trying to put his son back together.

"It was horrible," Shane says. "I just knew I needed to get him to the hospital as soon as possible."

As Shane got him into his SUV, Austin was beginning to lose feeling in his hands and feet, a sign that his body was going into shock. Emergency responders had instructed the Rileys to wait for their arrival, but Shane felt there wasn't enough time. He raced toward a rendezvous point, where Gail had driven on her own. Paramedics informed the Rileys that they wouldn't be able to ride in the ambulance with their son. His condition was too serious. Shane and Gail told Austin they loved him and urged him to keep fighting.

Shane knew Austin had already cheated death multiple times in his young life. He prayed to God, asking for another miracle.

"Austin is special," he says. "And everyone who knows Austin knows how tough he is."

By the time Austin reached University Hospital in San Antonio, 30 minutes away, he'd lost nearly half his blood. Even more shocking was that Waylon's tusks had come within millimeters of severing multiple arteries. It would take doctors 11 surgeries to repair the damage to Austin's body. Though the official count stands at 15, no one is entirely sure of exactly how many times Waylon gored his owner. Some wounds were just too messy for them to be certain.

**TWO YEARS AFTER** the attack, and after Austin's parents asked an exotic-animal broker to put Waylon down, Austin has no idea what caused his favorite animal to turn on him. They'd both been in the pen earlier that day, and nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

Extensive therapy has helped Austin work through traumatic memories and flashbacks. Gradually, his feelings of shock and betrayal are being replaced by acceptance and understanding. As Austin showed me sweet pictures of him giving the warthog nuzzles and belly scratches, I asked if he thinks Waylon regretted attacking him before he was killed. He went silent for a few seconds before responding.

"I don't think it was Waylon who attacked me," he says. "I was attacked by a warthog."

TEXAS MONTHLY (MAY 2024), COPYRIGHT  $\circledast$  2024 BY TEXAS MONTHLY, LLC.

They Paved Paradise ... On average, 20% of all land in city centers is devoted to parking.

ATLAS OBSCURA

## Terrified of Turtles

**YOUR TRUE STORIES** 

And other "scary stuff" that might surprise you

BY Reader's Digest Readers

#### **Shell-Shocked**

As a kid, I heard stories of snapping turtles who ate my grandmother's pet ducks. One day, I was in a rowboat with my aunt, occasionally dipping my hand into the lake. Suddenly, there was a huge snapping turtle inches away from my hand. I've been scared of them ever since. Then, in my 20s, some friends convinced me to join them in jumping into a lake from a bridge. On the way down, all I could think of was snapping turtles swarming me when I landed. I flailed my arms and legs midair in a futile attempt to stop myself, totally muffing the jump and doing a painful belly flop into the water.

-JENNIFER THORNE Auburn, AL

#### **Mixed Signals**

I told my wife how I hated driving under traffic lights on windy days. I'd once visited a factory that manufactures them and learned how huge and heavy they are. She told me I was nuts and that traffic lights never fall. Fast-forward to me driving home one rainy, windy night. I pulled up to an intersection and, lo and behold, the traffic light was lying in the middle of the road, smashed to smithereens. So my paranoia isn't without merit. It even has a name: *fanariphobia*. But I like to call it *trafficlightis*.

—JOHN MEEKER York, PA

#### **Oh, Bother**

I loved reading *Winnie-the-Pooh* books growing up. But I was terrified of his friend Eeyore. I'd make my mom hide my Eeyore stuffed animal at night so it wouldn't scare me. I wouldn't stop reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*, but I turned the pages very slowly so I could prepare for the potential appearance of Eeyore.

-ZAK VALDES Freehold, NJ





#### **Flower Cower**

My irrational fear? Sunflowers. This is largely because I accidentally wandered into a huge patch of them on my aunt's farm when I was a kid and I couldn't find my way out. This was shortly after watching *The Day of the Triffids*, an old horror movie about killer plants that come to life. The leaves clung to me, and it felt as if they were trying to hold on to me and wouldn't let go. I do love munching on sunflower seeds, though—I'm eating them instead of them eating me. —CAROL LINN Grove, OK

#### **Mind Firmly on Matter, Please**

I find the feeling of my feet dangling over open air totally unsettling. Being on a swing, ski lift, carnival ride or similar are all no-gos. However, I can walk around an airplane at 36,000 feet with no issue.

-LOIS SHAFFER Blythe, CA

#### Fear the Underwriter

I will not drive behind a semitruck hauling a double-height trailer of stacked cars out of fear that the chains will break and the cars will come rolling down the ramp into me. If I can't get by it, I'll slow down so other drivers pass and get between us. Anyone who doesn't share my fear, I have to assume, has better car insurance.

-HAZEL BOWMAN Prescott, AZ

#### **Robbed Blind and Breathless**

I worked in a bank for a decade. I also have horrible allergies. I was always

#### Your True Stories READER'S DIGEST

afraid that one day bandits would try to rob the bank, herding tied-up employees into the vault and duct-taping our mouths. Of course, it would be allergy season and I would be unable to breathe through my congested nose. Fortunately, in all my tenure, all the bank was ever robbed of were pens.

-JANE TEDDER Lawrence, KS

#### A Tough Pill to Swallow

I carry a stainless steel water bottle everywhere, but I refuse to drink from it while driving, no matter how thirsty I am. I'm afraid I'll drive over a bump or pothole while sipping and knock my teeth out. Once, I had a headache and pulled over on the highway to swallow ibuprofen. I told my boyfriend, who was following me in his truck, that I'd stopped to clear something from my eye because I was embarrassed by the truth.

-LESLIE LAZARRE Helena, AL

#### That'll Make a Heart Skip a Beat

My whole life, I've been horribly afraid of suffocating. When I was a baby, my mother had to buy all button and snap clothes because I had a tantrum if she tried to pull a shirt over my head. As an adult, I once crawled out of an MRI machine because I was so panicked. Hard to tell who was more freaked out by that: me or the MRI technicians. —DEBORAH BREDA Mechanicville, NY

#### **Shaken to Your Core**

I have a horrible fear that an earthquake will strike when I'm at my most vulnerable: while I have a Q-tip in my ear. The things that living in Southern California will do to you.

-ELIZABETH BOOLEN Burbank, CA

#### A Feeling You Can't Overlook

I love nature and scenery, especially when enjoyed from observation decks, bridges and overlooks. But every time I sightsee, I imagine that the observation deck's foundation will crumble, the bridge will collapse or the overlook's underpinning will slide into the ravine below. Don't you just love the outdoors? —PATRICK MCLAUGHLIN Charlotte, NC

#### PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES

Oh, the joys of public transportation! What's your most memorable surprise experienced in transit? Editor Jody Rohlena was once mortified to be scolded by a Washington, D.C., bus driver after missing a No Eating sign, but then wound up chatting with him for the rest of the ride. On another trip, her husband and son met the NBA's Antetokounmpo brothers during an airport layover. Maybe you rode the subway with an unforgettable character or struck up a friendship with your train conductor. To share your travel tale, please see terms at **rd.com/publictransit**. It might appear in a future *Reader's Digest*.



## THE FIRST PHOTOBOMBER ...

struck in 1853! And other "new" fads that are actually ancient history.

ву Jacopo della Quercia

It's no secret that almost every fad eventually loses its appeal. (We're looking at you, post-lockdown mullet!) However, some trends seem to have always been around because, well, they have always been around, at least as far as we can remember—and then some.

#### Photobombing

In case you haven't noticed, people have been taking a lot more pictures since the invention of the smartphone. As a result, countless individuals go out of their way to make chance encounters as memorable as possible—for themselves. The word *photobombing*, meaning popping up in a photo uninvited, first appeared online in 2008 and was enshrined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary in 2015.

The oldest known example of this odd behavior took place in the early 1850s, when a woman named Sally sat alongside a Mrs. Reed for a photographic portrait by Mary Dillwyn. We know these details because they were written on the picture, which we still have in the National Library of Wales. The ladies are dressed fashionably: high collars, dark dresses, and shawls and bonnets that look as if they once belonged to Whistler's mother. What we don't know is why the smug young girl with the grinning face in the top-left corner peering around a screen decided to upstage their portrait.

#### Reboots

Stop us if this sounds familiar: "Hollywood frequently digs up old plots, remaking successful movies of the past ... and inevitably watering them down. This sterile rehashing and stealing of stories ... is significant." If you think that comes from an angry critic reviewing the latest iteration of *Planet of the Apes*, think again. Social critic Trent Hutter wrote that complaint in the 1950s.

Reboots and remakes are nothing new. If your oldest relatives told you their favorite movie was *The Wizard of Oz*, you'd probably think they were talking about the 1939 classic starring Judy Garland. But if they corrected you by saying, "No, the silent movie!" then they were probably talking about *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, released in 1910. This forgotten relic is not only the oldest known motion picture based on L. Frank Baum's *Oz* books, which had just been published a few years earlier, it was the first film in an entire series.

Quite a few other classic movies were based on older films. Alfred Hitchcock even remade one of his own films, the 1934 thriller *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. His 1956 version kept the name but was filmed in color and had a whole new script that included songs for its female lead, Doris Day.

These originals and their remakes were all considered great successes.



But not everyone is a fan of reimagining masterpieces, including John Huston, who directed a few classics himself (*Maltese Falcon*, anyone?) He's been quoted as suggesting, "Why don't we remake some of our bad pictures ... and make them good?"

#### ► Gag Gifts

Pet rocks, bobbleheads and other novelties are mainstays at souvenir shops around the world. But some of the sillier gifts you'll find while out of town are older than almost every country on the planet.

If you were visiting Rome in A.D. 70, a funny trinket you could take as a keepsake was a stylus, an ancient pencil-like writing instrument. According to the Museum of London Archaeology, one such stylus in its possession bears this inscription along its sides: "I have come from the City. I bring you a welcome gift with a sharp point that you may remember me. I ask, if fortune allowed, that I might be able [to give] as generously as the way is long [and] as my purse is empty."

In other words, "I went to Rome, and all I got you was this stupid pencil."

As for exchanging gag gifts, the ancient Romans did that as well, especially during Saturnalia, a holiday in December (think a Roman Christmas). One such gift was the "air pillow," a precursor to the whoopee cushion. It was, according to the ancient Roman biographer Lampridius, a favorite of an adolescent emperor named Elagabalus. "Some of his humbler friends he would seat on air-pillows instead of on cushions," Lampridius wrote, "and let out the air while they were dining, so that often the diners were suddenly found under the table." It seems he pulled one prank too many; Elagabalus was assassinated shortly after, at the ripe old age of 18.

#### Fan Fiction

If you ever wrote or imagined an original story that featured your favorite fictional characters, congratulations! You have contributed to the world of fan fiction, a literary genre where amateur writers craft new stories with famous—and frequently copyrightprotected—characters.

We must emphasize "copyrightprotected" since fan fiction occasionally becomes the stuff of lawsuits. However, all the lawyers on the planet can't stop fans of *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars* from freely sharing their own original tales across the internet. Some of these writers even strike it rich: E.L. James's bestselling *Fifty Shades* trilogy began as online stories following the lovers from Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series on their ... well, let's just say on their new adventures.

While this may sound like a byproduct of the internet, fan fiction is actual among the oldest forms of literature. Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Roman epic that tells the tale of the Trojan horse and the fall of Troy, features characters and storylines lifted straight from the Greek poet Homer eight centuries earlier.

More recently, Old Friends and New

Fancies: An Imaginary Sequel to the Novels of Jane Austen appeared (unauthorized!) in bookstores in 1914. Twenty years earlier, J.M. Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, wrote an imaginative article for *The St. James's Gazette* in which Dr. Watson was suspected of Sherlock Holmes's death in the short story "The Adventure of the Final Problem." And in 1614, someone writing under the pseudonym Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda had the guts to publish a sequel to *Don Quixote* before Miguel de Cervantes even finished his second volume.

Maybe that's why George R.R. Martin is in no rush to finish the last two installments of his seven-book series *A Song of Ice and Fire.* Someone else may write it for him.

#### Selfies

While we can't say for certain whether any western pioneers angered a bison while posing near one for a photo, the "selfie" is just a few years older than the camera, which was invented in 1825 by Nicéphore Niépce of France.

According to the Library of Congress, the oldest photographic self-portrait in existence was taken in Philadelphia sometime around Halloween in 1839. The man in the picture was an interesting character: Robert Cornelius, a photographer and inventor who made a fortune designing lamps that burned lard instead of whale oil. As if being rich, intelligent, artistic and a friend to whales was not enough, the guy was also pretty easy on the eyes. Described as "broodingly handsome with his collar upturned and his hair disheveled" on the Timeless blog from the Library of Congress, Robert Cornelius's historic selfie is a swipe-right keeper.

#### Influencers

It seems it's never been easier for someone to amass a worldwide following. Take Emma Chamberlain.

Emma who? You may not know her, but more than 9 million girls and young women were glued to her every utterance on YouTube concerning fashion and society in general. She became so popular that Louis Vuitton hired her as a brand ambassador.

"Hold my telescope," says astrophysicist, author and proud nerd Neil deGrasse Tyson, who has a stratospheric 20 million-plus social media followers. These are two very different examples of people using their personalities to affect how others dress, shop, speak and think. Social influencers might sound like a 21st-century phenomenon, but they've been around far longer than anything online.

Cleopatra, for example, caused quite a stir in 46 B.C. when she first visited Rome. According to biographer Stacy Schiff in *Cleopatra: A Life*, her very presence "set off a brief vogue for an elaborate hairstyle," the melon coiffure, her signature bun.

Centuries later, in the mid-1800s, Amelia Bloomer's "bloomers" became a feminist fashion statement. Even though she did not originate the dressessentially, a skirt worn over loose trousers—Bloomer's writing on the subject in the women's newspaper the *Lily* set off a sexist firestorm. Soon, early feminists like Elizabeth Smith Miller and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were ditching the fashionable (but uncomfortable) dresses of the day, and men throughout the United States were outraged. Women, meanwhile, sent Bloomer hundreds of letters "making inquiries about the dress and asking for patterns—showing how ready and anxious women were to throw off the burden of long, heavy skirts," Bloomer wrote.

During the Civil War, Union general Ambrose Burnside became an unexpected style icon. If it were not for him, we would still be calling sideburns "side whiskers." That's because his sideburns joined together to form a mustache. Only his chin was clean-shaven. His military skills, however, got zero likes after he suffered disastrous defeats at Fredericksburg and Petersburg. But, oh, those sideburns!

#### 3D Movies

If you took your kids to see *Minions 2* in IMAX 3D and walked away thinking it was a groundbreaking experience, you're wrong. Hollywood has been making 3D movies since Bette Davis was a teenager.

Back in 1922, a little-known film titled *The Power of Love* premiered and caused quite a stir. Here's the plot: Because of financial troubles, Don Almeda promises his daughter, Maria,

## DO I LOOK LIKE I TAKE VENMO?



to Don Alvarez. But Maria doesn't love Don Alvarez. She loves ... oh, never mind. The plot isn't what made this film revolutionary. It was the first to offer audiences 3D visuals by showing the entire film through anaglyphs: nearly identical overlapping images shown in different colors. The process tricked the brain when people viewed films like *The Power of Love* through 3D glasses with a red-tinted lens and a blue-tinted lens.

In addition to eye-popping visuals, *The Power of Love* enabled audiences to view one of two different endings to its main story. Since the film was two versions in different colors—one playing on top of the other—covering or closing one eye at a crucial moment allowed viewers to experience whichever conclusion to the film they wished.

#### LOLcats

If you've ever viewed or shared an image of a cat accompanied by a funny caption, you have no reason to be ashamed. You just enjoyed a LOLcat, which originated in the early 1870s when British photographer Harry Pointer began taking pictures of his cats. The first were pretty standard, but Pointer eventually realized that his photos would be more interesting if he staged scenes starring his cats performing human activities, such as hosting tea parties, reading the newspaper and holding question time with the "Prime Minister Lord Pawmerston."

Soon Pointer added captions to his pictures—often as tame as the cats that said things like "Happy New Year" or "Happy returns." In short, LOLcats



have been around for about as long as humans have been rendered powerless by feline cuteness.

#### Text Speak

OMG! Did you know people have been using expressions like *OMG* for over a century? And for the same reasons we do today. Texting lingo, aka SMS (short message service), has saved people time and money across countless conversations since the invention of the telegraph.

Abbreviations became more frequent in correspondence once people realized how long it took to tap out words like *abbreviations* and *correspondence* in Morse code. To make it easier on people's fingers, in 1879 journalist Walter P. Phillips published a book of shorthand terms for telegraph operators. Among his suggestions were *POTUS* and *SCOTUS* for the President and Supreme Court of the United States, respectively. While *administratrix* might sound less like a kinky office manager when shortened to *ADX*, *AWKWD* remains just as awkward.

The military joined in the fun a few decades later with the result that American soldiers have been going AWOL since World War I, and orders to arrest the absentees have been sent ASAP since the Korean conflict.

As for *OMG*, its earliest usage was in a letter a British admiral sent to Winston Churchill in 1917. The admiral kindly explained that "O.M.G." stood for "Oh! My God!" We doubt he was addressing Churchill. The RD

READ, WATCH, LISTEN

### FILM Super/Man Directed by

Ian Bonhôte and Peter Ettedgui CHRISTOPHER REEVE IS FOREVER the definitive Superman, but this inspiring documentary demonstrates why he was as much of a superhero off-screen as he was on. The Juilliard graduate catapulted to stardom by playing the strapping Man of Steel in four *Superman* films beginning in the late 1970s. In 1995, when a horseback riding accident left him paralyzed from the neck down, the actor persevered by continuing to work, raising money for spinal injury research and helping others until his death in 2004. Members of his lovely blended family share intimate home videos and poignant anecdotes of growing up with Reeve, while friends like Jeff Daniels and Glenn Close discuss his richly lived private side. The stories about Reeve and Robin Williams, who were as close as brothers, evoke laughs and bittersweet tears. Superman flew, but Reeve soared. (In theaters Sept. 21) —Mara Reinstein



## Trivial Pursuit Hosted by LeVar Burton

**Fan favorite LeVar Burton** takes his turn in the trivia-show spotlight as he gamely hosts the new TV version of *Trivial Pursuit*. Three players move around a giant board—just like the one you're used to seeing on your coffee table—answering questions in hopes of winning colored wedges in the six categories from the classic version of the home game: Arts & Literature, Entertainment, Geography, History, Science & Nature and Sports & Leisure. The first player to reach the board's center earns a chance to race the clock and take home the \$20,000 prize pot. (For a full game night experience, tune in an hour early to catch *Scrabble* hosted by another '90s to '00s TV favorite, Raven-Symoné.) (*Airing Mondays at 9 p.m. ET on The CW*) —*Caroline Fanning* 

#### The RD List READER'S DIGEST



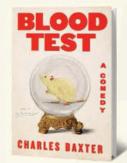
### Nobody Wants This

*Starring* Kristen Bell and Adam Brody

A new comedy that's sure to inspire laughs and teach something about love, cutting us up in more ways than one? Yes, we do want this! Noah (Adam Brody) is a young, brassbound rabbi on the cusp of proposing to his "perfect," familyapproved girlfriend, Rebecca (Emily Arlook). Then a chance collision with Joanne (Kristen Bell), an outspoken agnostic who co-hosts a hit podcast about the joys of life alone, rocks both their worlds. The O.C. heartthrob Brody brings the rom and The Good Place funnywoman Bell brings the com. (Streaming on Netflix Sept. 26) – CF

#### Blood Test: A Comedy By Charles Baxter

Brock Hobson, a cliche of wholesomeness as a midwestern dad, insurance salesman and Sunday school teacher, finds himself facing a life-altering revelation. Follow our sympathetic protagonist's journey-equal parts humorous (Baxter calls it a comedy for good reason) and poignantas Hobson grapples with the results of an unusual medical test: one that indicates he's predisposed to murder. Surrounded by richly developed supporting characters (his girlfriend with cancer, capricious teenage kids, and impulsive ex-wife with her macho boyfriend), Hobson tests whether our fate really is in our own hands. -Adrienne Farr





#### Night Magic By Leigh Ann Henion

Henion, a nature and travel writer, skips the exotic locales to find wonder in the nighttime world of her own North Carolina backvard, inspiring readers to look outside too. Her observations are rich with insights about nocturnal fauna (finding a salamander in a creek indicates clean water: the pollutant-sensitive creatures breathe through their skin) and flora too. The chapter on foxfire, the alow from bioluminescent fungi once scraped from forest floors to fill lanterns. shines brightest. Viewers of Night on Earth, the wildlife documentary series showcasing characteristic nature-show fare in an uncharacteristic nocturnal light (or lack thereof), this one is for you. -CF

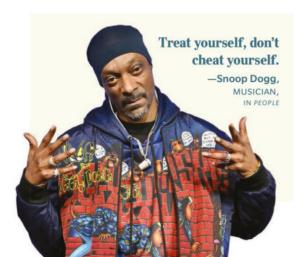
QUOTABLE QUOTES

My background is hunting and fishing. I've sat around campfires with my father and watched older men talk. I got to know who the real storytellers were.

-Kevin Costner, ACTOR, IN DEADLINE

Part of growing up is realizing that you haven't been walking a straight road to where you are now, that it's been a labyrinth the whole time.

> -Moshe Kasher, COMEDIAN, IN THE BOOK SUBCULTURE VULTURE



Courage is not the absence of fear; it's acting in the face of fear. In the same way, grit and determination, for me, are not the absence of selfdoubt and insecurity. They're acting in the face of self-doubt and insecurity. —Cady Coleman,

ASTRONAUT, IN THE BOOK



No matter how poor I'd been, I had never felt as impoverished as the rich people I knew who had no imagination.

—RuPaul, ENTERTAINER, IN THE BOOK THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN MEANINGS

#### **READER'S DIGEST**



**POINT TO PONDER** 

IN AMERICA WE URGE EVERYONE over the age of 18 to vote, but only 15% of voters read books. Only 15% of us perform the life-affirming, sanity-bolstering, empathy-forming act of spending time inside somebody else's brain.

Fortunately—in spite of cellphones, in spite of video games, in spite of online gambling, in spite of the current storm of shortsighted politics the habit of reading books is not yet on the brink of extinction.

Not yet.

Today's booksellers and librarians are not the sitcom stereotypes who give judgy looks when someone brings the latest bestseller to the counter, or who will *shush* an overenthusiastic teen to churchy quiet from 60 yards away.

Today's booksellers and librarians are extraordinarily good at understanding and motivating. Armed with empathy, wit and professional training, they take the confused, the fearful, the frustrated, and help them become more keen-eyed, sharp-eared and justiceattuned. What they do is crucial for this country, especially right now. They understand in their hearts and souls that *in the beginning was the word*.

Day after day after day, they find the right book for the right person, and in so doing, they help save people's—and our collective—lives. And maybe our sanity.

#### James Patterson, AUTHOR,

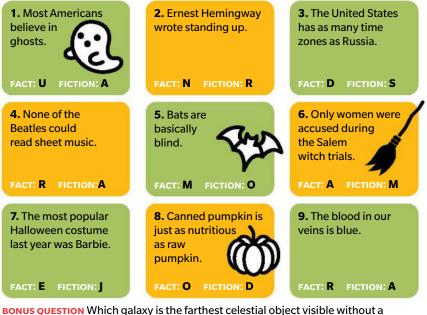
IN THE SECRET LIVES OF BOOKSELLERS AND LIBRARIANS: TRUE STORIES OF THE MAGIC OF READING

#### READER'S DIGEST

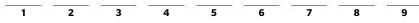


#### **Fact or Fiction?**

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



telescope? (Need help? Turn to "13 Things" on page 20.)



Answers: 1. Fiction; between 20% do, but not a majority. 2. Fact: as did Virginia Woolf, Lewis Carroll and Charles Dickens. 3. Fact, 1 appiece. 4. Fact. 5. Fiction; despite the expression, bats see quite well. 6. Fiction; some men were too. 7. Fact, according to Google trends data. 8. Fiction; the canned stuff is more nutritious because it's more concentrated 9. Fiction; it may appear that way from our skin's surface, but it's really red. Bonus Question: Antomeda.

#### Brain Games



#### **Candy Conundrum**

EASY All the bags of Reese's Pieces and regular M&M's candies in Katie's Halloween haul ripped opened, so the individual candy pieces are loose in her bag. Reese's Pieces come in three colors: yellow, orange and brown. Regular M&M's also come in these colors, plus three more: red, green and blue. If Katie picks a piece of candy at random, what's the chance she can tell—before tasting it—which kind of candy she has? Assume equal pieces of candy per bag and an equal distribution of colors in each.



#### Number Logic

MEDIUM The numbers inside these shapes all follow the same pattern. Can you determine the missing number?



#### Sum-Thing Special

6

10

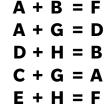
**DIFFICULT** Each letter from A through H has one of the eight values listed below, and no two letters have the same value. Can you determine which number goes with each letter to make the equations true?

16

19

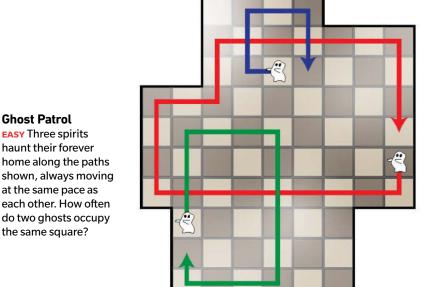
26

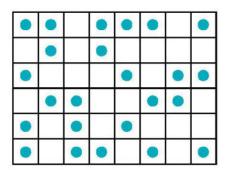
29

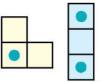


З

#### READER'S DIGEST







#### **Tricky Tiling**

MEDIUM The grid to the left was tiled using only the two tile shapes shown above, with rotations permitted. The tiles' dots are all indicated in the grid. Using these, can you figure out the configuration of the tiles?

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

For answers, turn to PAGE 111.

#### **Brain Games**

## WORD POWER

Look alive, vocab fans! We've corralled 15 vigorous verbs for you to puzzle over. This part of speech is a powerhouse, the engine of any sentence, driving the action. Ready to dive in? Navigate the quiz below, then zoom to the next page to examine the answers.

ву Sarah Chassé

1. lob v. (lahb) A scribble B chop c throw

2. inveigle v. (in-'vay-gl) A convince with flattery B negotiate C tangle up

3. canvass v. ('kan-vuhs) A lengthen B survey C crisscross

4. foment v. ('foh-ment) A turn sour B stir up c snarl 5. hew v. (hyoo) A conform B inform C deform

6. undulate v. ('uhn-juh-layt) A sell short B overshadow c move in waves

7. garner v. ('gahr-nr) A correct B beautify C earn

8. gambol v. ('gam-bl) A make a deal B skip happily c sand smooth

#### 9. quaver v.

('kway-vr) A tremble B stall

c debate

#### 10. futz v.

- (fuhts) A stumble over
- B stink up
- c fool around

#### 11. opine v.

- (oh-'pyn)
- A relieve pain
- B imprison
- c express an opinion

#### 12. mewl v.

- (myool)
- A droop
- B whimper
- c crush
- **13. expedite** v. ('ek-spuh-dyt) A speed up B glorify C transport

#### 14. defenestrate v. (dee-'feh-nuh-strayt) A clear of trees B toss out a window C protect from invaders

**15. revel** v. ('reh-vl) A drive back B take pleasure c bewitch

#### Lie and Lay for Laymen

If you confuse the verbs *lie* and *lay*, you're not alone; it's among the most common errors in English. Even the greats get it wrong—Bob Dylan's song "Lay, Lady, Lay" should be "Lie, Lady, Lie." *Lie* means "to recline," and *lay* means "to put down." So you could say: "I'm tired. I need to lie down, right after I lay down my *Reader's Digest*."



Word Power ANSWERS

**1. lob (c)** throw The shortstop lobs the ball to the second baseman for an easy out.

#### 2. inveigle

(A) convince with flattery Anna inveigled her way into the exclusive nightclub by flirting with the bouncer.

**3. canvass (B)** survey City officials will canvass residents about the proposed bike lanes.

**4. foment** (B) stir up "Do you dare to foment an uprising against me?" the queen roared.

**5. hew** (A) conform My brother has never hewed to social norms he's a fortuneteller who lives in a yurt.

#### 6. undulate

(c) move in waves The golden stalks of wheat undulated in the breeze.

**7. garner (c)** earn Though the indie film garnered praise from critics, it flopped at the box office.

8. gambol (B) skip happily The cute baby goats gamboled across the meadow, bleating loudly.

**9. quaver** (A) *tremble* Petra's voice quavered with nerves as she testified in court.

**10. futz (c)** fool around Will you please stop futzing with your phone during dinner?

**11. opine (c)** express an opinion Fans of James Bond films often opine about who played 007 best.

**12. mewl (B)** whimper My cat mewls pitifully the second his food bowl is empty!

**13. expedite** (A) speed up "Please take your seats to expedite our departure," said the flight attendant.

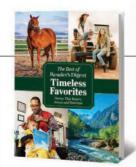
#### 14. defenestrate

(B) toss out a window After starting a brawl in the saloon, the rowdy cowboys were defenestrated into the street.

**15. revel (B)** take pleasure The newlyweds reveled in the magic of their first dance.

Vocabulary Ratings 9 & BELOW: Saunter 10-12: Sprint 13-15: Soar

#### **Brain Games**



#### SPECIAL OFFER

## Stories That Stay with Us

We pack each issue of RD with stories of lasting interest, but some have endured in our memories for longer than others. Take, for instance, the brown spaniel who helps comfort other rescue dogs, or the man who fought for 29 years to prove his innocence. These inspirational tales and more of our most captivating content are inside The Best of Reader's Digest Timeless Favorites. The book is yours for just \$10. (We'll spot vou the shipping.) Order a copy at rd.com/2308C.

### ANSWERS

WHERE, OH WHERE? (page 112) A. Beatty, Nevada

BRAIN GAMES (pages 107-108)

#### **Candy Conundrum**

25%. Because all three Reese's Pieces colors are also represented in the M&M's, the only way to be certain which candy she has is if it's one of the three colors unique to the M&M's. These represent half of the M&M's, which is half of the candy, and half of a half is a quarter.

#### **Number Logic**

56. Multiply the number of sides in each shape by the number that is one less than that number.

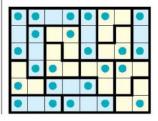
#### Sum-Thing Special

A = 10; B = 19; C= 4; D = 16; E = 26; F = 29; G = 6; H = 3.

#### **Ghost Patrol**

They never do. Each time the ghosts advance, they move to a square of the opposite color, so two ghosts could only meet if they start on the same color square.

#### Tricky Tiling



Reader's Digest (ISSN 0034-0375) (USPS 865-820), (CPM Agreement# 40031457), Vol. 204, No. 1201, October 2024. © 2024. Published monthly, except bimonthly in March/April, July/ August, and December/January (subject to change without notice), by Trusted Media Brands, Inc., 1610 N. 2nd St., Suite 102, Milwaukee, WI 53212-3906. Periodicals postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Reader's Digest, PO Box 6095, Harlan, Iowa 51593-1595. Send undeliverable Canadian addresses to ca.postal.affairs@rd.com. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction, in any manner, is prohibited. Reader's Digest and The Digest are registered trademarks of Trusted Media Brands, Inc. Marca Registrada. Printed in U.S.A. SUBSCRIBERS: You may cancel your subscription at any time and receive a refund for copies not previously addressed. Your subscription will expire with the issue identified above your name on the address label. If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. A special Reader's Digest Large Print with selected articles from Reader's Digest is published by Trusted Media Brands, Inc. For details, write: Reader's Digest Large Print. PO Box 6097, Harlan, Iowa 51593-1597. CONSUMER INFORMATION: Reader's Digest may share information about you with third parties for the purpose of offering products and services that may interest you. If you would rather not receive such offers via postal mail, please write to Reader's Digest Customer Mailing List, PO Box 3123, Harlan, Iowa 51593-0189. You can also visit www. tmbi.com/preference-center to manage your preferences and opt out of receiving such offers via e-mail. Please see our Privacy Policy at www.tmbi.com/privacy-policy.

#### **READER'S DIGEST**

## WHERE, OH WHERE

**FEAR NOT:** These ghoulish fiberglass figures, collectively called Last Supper and cast in a pose similar to the one in Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the same name, mean you no harm. Their sculptor didn't think they'd last two years in the desert, but they have hovered just outside the Gold Rush-era ghost town of Rhyolite since 1984. Where are they? (*Answer on* PAGE 111.)

## Beatty, Nevada Tule Valley, Utah

#### C Amargosa, California Arcosanti, Arizona

TUMN SKY PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ADVERTISEMENT

#### CONNECTIONS: Your link to values and insights each month

#### LET YOUR GARDEN GROW

#### **SKECHERS**



Fall fashion is blossoming. Step into BOBS<sup>®</sup> from Skechers<sup>®</sup> – cute kicks with cushioned Skechers Memory Foam<sup>™</sup> insoles. For every BOBS purchase, a donation is made to support shelter pets.

#### Skechers.com

#### IT'S TIME TO HEAR AGAIN



Try the world's #1 selling OTC hearing aid brand trusted by over 500,000 happy customers.

Learn more:

AudienHearing.com

#### MAY WE BORROW YOUR BRAIN?



Answer quick polls, share ideas and help our editors with article topics. Join Trusted Media Brands Inner Circle community and have the chance to win prizes just for participating.

Go to TMBInnercircle.com to see if you qualify.

#### ONE APP. ENDLESS PAW-SIBILITIES

MY PURINA APP



With the free myPurina app you can earn points, bond with your pet, receive tailwagging rewards and more! Download from the App Store or Google Play.

Purina.com/MyPurina-App

## SKECHERS HANDS FREE Slip-ins



Introducing new Skechers Hands Free Slip-ins', Putting on your shoes has never been easier. No bending over. No pulling them on. JUST STEP IN AND GO.

Exclusive Heel Pillow<sup>™</sup> holds your foot securely in place!

> NEVER HAVE TO TOUCH YOUR SHOES AGAIN







No Bending Over.

HOWIE

No Touching Shoes.



skechers.com