

**DO YOU KISS YOUR DOG? And Other Iffy Health Habits** 

**By ROSEMARY COUNTER** 

# 'MB STUDIO. KEVIN RECHIN (CHIHUAHUA)

# Reader's Digest

A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

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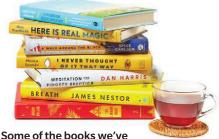


# I Need a New Hobby

Y JOB COMES with an unusual occupational hazard: endless reading! Good thing I can't imagine reading too much. Throughout my career as an editor, I've been required to read a lot for my job: articles we might want to reprint, writers' essays, books for potential excerpt. There's really no end to all the prospects. So what happens when you make your hobby—in my case, reading—a job requirement?

For me, fortunately, it hasn't ruined

my enjoyment of my favorite activity. I only read nonfiction for work, so novels are always a good escape. I love to talk (and swap) books with friends, including all of you who have joined our RD Book Club. (Haven't signed up yet? Learn how at *RD.com/bookclub*.) But I do have to balance things out, which is why I have perhaps a strange fondness for chopping vegetables—something to do with my hands after a long day at the computer. I love



Some of the books we've excerpted in recent years all worth a read!

using whatever random ingredients jump out at me. If it's Monday night, you can probably find me at Zumba. If it's September, I hope you can find me at the beach. (Called "locals summer" at the Jersey Shore, it's the best month, with all the temperate weather and none of the high-season crowds.) But I could use a new day-to-day hobby, or a few. What do you like to do in your free time?

Hobbies are the theme of this year's Genius issue, always a favorite of mine. Learn why hobbies are good to have, on page 52. Get some new clues about the Rubik's Cube, on page 26. Find out how 1 + 1 = more than 2, or sometimes less, on page 32. And enrich your word power with a brew of words associated with coffeehouses, on page 109.

It all adds up to a fun read for your end-of-summer wind-down. I hope you enjoy reading *RD* as one of your favorite hobbies all year round!

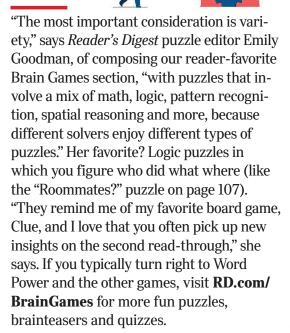
Jody L. Rohlena,
CONTENT DIRECTOR

Write to me at letters@rd.com.

creating new dishes



#### How We Build a Brain Game



As an avid (but often struggling) gardener, I enjoyed the helpful hints in "Get a Green(er) Thumb" (May 2024). Other novice horticulturists like myself might also try hydroponic systems, which grow plants in a nutrientrich, water-based solution rather than in soil. For years, these small indoor systems have produced steady supplies of romaine and red oakleaf lettuce as well as herbs like basil, dill and parsley, on my counter with minimal effort. The systems even supply their own "sun."

—RAMONA DECKER Lincoln, AL





#### Another way to connect with RD ...

... is on Flipboard, an app and website that's a brilliant mix of Pinterest and Apple News. Instead of pinning recipes and decor inspo, you can flip to curated packages of the best of RD jokes, amazing animal stories, road-trip guides and more. Scan to get started!

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# **Not So Puzzling**

s the manager of Utah's Springville Senior Center, Tori Eaton's goal was to get seniors out of their homes and engaging with others. Since jigsaw puzzles were a popular draw, she decided to up their game by purchasing one of the largest puzzles ever made: a 60,000-piece map titled "What a Wonderful World." It took 50 seniors—laughing, chatting and working together—more than four months to complete, but in January they unveiled the result: an 8-by-29-foot creation spread atop 16 tables. "Loneliness is a terrible thing for older people," Eaton told the *Washington Post*. "Getting together to work for a couple of hours on a puzzle can make a huge difference in their day."



# Pier Pressure

A brutal storm rips a floating beachside store from its moorings, sending it and its occupants out to sea

By Eric Raskin

T was around 6:30 on a June morning in 2023, and a Facebook post caught Boyd Jordan's eye. Shell Isle Mercantile, a floating store that sold beachgoing fare—sunglasses, inflatables, food, umbrellas—had been ripped from its moorings on Shell Island, just off Florida's northern Gulf Coast, by a storm the night before and had floated 3 miles across the bay to Panama City.

Jordan, a boat repairman by trade, called his buddy Chris Bourque, the store's owner, and offered to help corral the pink one-room shack and tow it back. Jordan borrowed a friend's motorboat, while Bourque manned a less muscular pontoon boat.

The skies were clear with a light

breeze when Jordan, his friend Tamara Chagnon, and Chris Bourque and his wife, Sarah Bourque, reached the shop—still atop its floating dock—and dropped an anchor to stabilize it. Minutes later, their phones began beeping. An unexpected thunderstorm was moving in. They dropped a second anchor just as an "insane storm cloud," says Jordan, appeared. It was mid-morning, but behind the cloud, the sky was dark as midnight. The wind went from 10 mph to about 50 mph inside of two minutes. A full-frontal storm was upon them.

The anchors proved useless in 85 mph wind gusts and 6-foot waves. Shell Isle Mercantile was on the move again. The women went inside the



store seeking shelter. The two men remained on their respective boats, trying to hold the floating shack steady with lines and more anchors.

Then came one sudden, destructive gust, and the shop flipped onto its side with the women inside. The heavy contents of the store—including deep freezers, cash registers and a 100-quart cooler of canned drinks—crashed dangerously across the capsized vessel, and the only way out was a sliding glass door that had been jammed stuck in the tumult.

#### THE STORE WAS FILLING WITH WATER AND HAD REACHED THE WOMEN'S WAISTS.

Chris Bourque climbed onto the underside of the roof that had partially torn off and yelled to his wife and friend inside, "I don't know how to get you out!"

With winds whipping, rain pouring down and waves peaking, Jordan leaped off the motorboat into the water a few yards from the ravaged store. "He didn't even think," Chris recalls. "He just reacted."

Jordan climbed up and pulled on the double-paned sliding door. It wouldn't budge. The inside of the store was filling with water and had reached the women's waists. They seemed to be in a state of shock, says Jordan. "I'll never forget seeing their faces through the glass. It was the blankest stare."

Jordan spotted a loose two-by-four that was attached to the dock by a few screws. He gave it a hard pull and ripped it off. "Get back!" he yelled to the women.

He swung his wooden cudgel at the door, shattering the outer pane. Still one pane to go. The store was bobbing up and down in the waves, making it hard to maintain balance. *The clock is ticking*, he thought, as the water level inside rose. Jordan steadied himself, wound up and hit the door again. This time, the glass cracked but didn't shatter. But between the rough waters and the reverb off the sliding door, Jordan was bounced backward into the water. His buddy took over. Picking up the two-by-four, Chris smashed the remaining pane.

The pals reached in and pulled the women carefully through the door frame. With the fierce wind blowing inland, it wasn't too hard to swim back to the beach before the shop eventually sank. Jordan, worried about the borrowed motorboat, hitched a ride with some fishermen to retrieve it. He then did a sweep around the marina asking other boaters if they needed help.

It was the sort of selfless gesture Chris has come to expect from his friend. "I like to say he let me take that final swing," says Chris, "so he wouldn't just be the sole hero."



#### The Organ Trail

Although she suffered from liver failure, Julia Harlin forbade any of her adult children from donating a piece of their healthy liver to her. She didn't want them to endure the procedure. But as Harlin grew sicker waiting for a donor, her daughter Eileen got tested behind her mother's back. She was a match! The operation in 2022 was a success. Then last year, Julia's kidneys began to fail, a result of her previous liver disease. She was low on the donor list because of her age, and things looked bleak. But Eileen came through again, becoming only the 14th person in the United States to donate a portion of her liver and a kidney to the same recipient on different dates. An awed Julia told the Washington Post, Eileen "doesn't even like having her blood drawn, and yet she stepped up."

#### **Pedal to the Metal**

Nails, screws and other metal debris on streets are a hazardous, costly menace. They can shred tires on cars, bikes and even wheelchairs. After the tires on both his car and his motorcycle were damaged in Atlanta, Alex Benigno made it his mission to clean up the streets. Benigno rides his bicycle around town towing a small trailer, resembling a mini street sweeper, that uses magnets to pick up metal waste from the ground. On most days, Benigno bikes about 10 miles and collects around 6 pounds of debris, which he often donates to a local scrap artist. "I can't really find anybody that says what I'm doing is a terrible thing," he told WABE in Atlanta, "unless, you know, they own a tire shop."

#### **Driving Mr. Bill**

Bill Moczulewski is legally blind, which means he can't drive. So to get to his job as a janitor on the overnight shift at a Walmart in Cabot, Arkansas, he walks 5 miles each way. All that changed a couple of years ago when Christy Conrad saw him walking and gave him a lift. After hearing his story, she offered to drive him to and from work whenever she could. For those days she couldn't drive him, she started a Facebook group called Mr. Bill's Village, where about 1,500 people have signed up to chauffeur him. A grateful Moczulewski told CBS News, "There's a lot of good people in this world, all over the place, you know." IR



# Ollie the Dental Assistant

ST. PAUL. MN

Y HUSBAND, JERRY, had an appointment at the dentist's office where I work. He showed up with our 4-year-old English goldendoodle, Ollie. The dentist didn't mind; her dog often chills at the desk.

Jerry is usually anxious at the dentist, and while he was lying in the chair, Ollie jumped right in his lap and fell asleep. Ollie was totally unbothered by the drills and lights, a feeling he seemed to transmit to my husband.

I wondered if Ollie would have the

same effect on others. The dentist agreed to let me bring him in to see if he could soothe our nervous clients.

It worked. As soon as we recline the chair, Ollie happily settles between the patient's legs. During appointments, clients pet his head and play with his ears. Most say it's like wearing a warm weighted blanket. Some people who usually need nitrous oxide to relax find that Ollie does the trick.

I bring him into the office three days a month to support patients who request him. But judging by the way he runs to the door when I'm leaving for work, he thinks he should get to come every day. 

—Nominated by APRIL KLINE



"They keep asking me, 'Who's a good boy?' How should I know?"

My husband and I asked our 4-year-old grandson to describe his grandpa. "Bold," he answered. I praised him for such a kind compliment.

Then he held his bangs back at his hairline and asked, "Am I getting bold?" —AMY O'NEILL Dayton, OH Why do my fully charged AirPods deplete at different rates? Do I listen harder out of one ear?

—X@CATHUNTERESPN

I had made lefse, a Norwegian potato pancake, and thought I'd bring some over to Assisi Heights, a retirement home and convent for Catholic sisters where I volunteer. I texted the activities director using voice recognition, which kept spelling the word *love* every time I typed *lefse*.

This is the text I sent: "Hi, I was making love this morning and thought it would be fun to make it up at Assisi Heights with the sisters. I think many of them grew up making it, maybe not? Anyway, I didn't know if you were involved in that type of thing, or if I

I can tell how rich you are by how hard it is to find your kitchen garbage.

**−X**@KATIEDEAL99

should contact someone else."

—CHERYL BAERTLEIN

—CHERYL BAERTLEII Mazeppa, MN

Everyone on my son's high school football team has the same equipment bag. So after he brought home the wrong bag for a second time, I suggested he tie something around the handles to distinguish his bag from the others.

Rolling his eyes, he said, "Mom, the bags have our numbers printed right on them."
—JULIE RUEGEMER
Orono, MN

I often took walks along New York City's East River on early summer mornings. Every day, I'd see the same older man sitting on the same bench, gazing wistfully out onto the water. One morning, I decided to talk to him. "Hello," I said. "I don't mean to bother you, but I see you here every day."

"Is that right?" he said.
"I was curious why
you sit on this same
bench?"

He turned away with a deep sigh. "My wife and I used to sit on this bench together for 51 years."

"Oh," I said, feeling badly. "I'm sorry."

"And for some bizarre reason she likes to sit over there now," he said, gesturing toward a woman 20 feet to the left of us.

—SAMUEL WILLINGER in the New York Times

My sister-in-law has two daughters, one from a previous marriage and one with my brother. One day, she took the girls, ages 3 and 1, to a church banquet. There, a woman stopped the two girls and asked the older one, "Is that your half sister?"

Her reply: "Oh, no, she's all there. She's just little."

—CHERI EMPFIELD Kingston, TN

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

# SOPHOMORIC FRESHMAN

Chip Leighton, host of the TikTok series The Leighton Show, asked parents to share head-scratching questions their college freshmen asked them after leaving home. These kids may need more than four years.



- "What's Grandma's actual name?"
- "Can I use the bathroom on a plane?"
- "How often is annual?"
- "Do we live above or below sea level?"
- "How do I know when water is boiling?"
- "Pork chops are part of a chicken, right?"
- "Which one makes noise, lightning or thunder?"
- "Do we have a billing address?"
- "Do I have Medicare?"
- "What time is noon?"



GENIUS!

# That Kind of Time

A dressing-room encounter made me get real about aging

BY Anne Lamott

Sort of.
My husband and I were recently in Egypt, where the temperature reached 113 degrees, a bit warm for my tiny princess self. *Medic, medic!*We left Egypt one day before the war broke out in Israel and Gaza. Back home, my dearest friends struggled with health stuff, with family craziness, with damaged children both young and grown.

The game of life is hard, and a lot of us are playing hurt.

I ache for the world but naturally I'm mostly watching the "me" movie, where balance and strength are beginning to ebb and, on the surface, things are descending into grandma pudding. (One morning 10 years ago, my young grandchild asked, "Nana, can I take a shower with you, if I promise not to laugh?" I repeat: 10 gravity-dragging years ago.)



What can we do as the creaking elevators of age slowly descend? The main solution is to not google new symptoms late at night. But I also try to get outside every day, ideally with friends. Old friends—even thoughts of them—are my ballast; all that love and loyalty, those delicious memories, the gossip.

When I can no longer walk, I will sit outside with them, gaze into their faces and look up. That is the perennial instruction: Look up! Looking up gives us freedom and causes the shadows to slip right down our backs.

Recently I was walking along the cliffs above the Pacific with one of these old friends, named Neshama. We go back 50 years. She is 84, short and sturdy with fuzzy hair like mine. Every so often, she bent down somewhat tentatively and picked up small items that she'd then tuck into a cloth pouch that dangled from her belt.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm picking up microlitter: bottle caps and bits of wrappers. I try to help where I can."

I reminded her of an old story along these lines, of a sparrow and a horse. A great warhorse comes upon a sparrow lying on its back with its feet in the air, eyes squinched tightly shut with effort. The horse asks it what it's doing.

"I'm trying to help hold back the darkness."

The horse roars with laughter. "That is so pathetic. What do you weigh, about an ounce?"

And the sparrow replies, "One does what one can."

This is what older age means: We do what we can. We pick up smaller things and move more tentatively. We've unwillingly become characters from the movie *Cocoon*.

Especially Neshama. Boy, is she old. We walked slowly past the reef below, foamy waves lapping at the shore with the indigo ocean beyond. So much has happened in our 50 years together; we have ridden the rapids. Her husband's early death, her grown son's and, just last month, her sister's; my father's death, my mother's and a lifelong best friend's. This last is when my friendship with Neshama deepened, during the two years when Pammy was dying, when it truly felt as if the sky were falling.

Pammy and I went shopping a few weeks before she died. I needed a new dress for a concert with a new boyfriend. At the time, she was in a wheelchair and a wig. I came out of the dressing room wearing a short dress, tighter than normal, and asked if it made me look big in the hips.

She looked me in the eyes, calmly. "Annie," she said, "you don't have that kind of time."

That sentence shocked me into getting real about how I was spending my life. We know by a certain age the great palace lies of the culture—if you buy or do or achieve this or that, you will be happy and rich. Nope. Love and service make us rich. My



mom did this with her closest friends when I was growing up, taking modest bouquets and baked goods to comrades in decline. Some were sunk into cranky dementia, alcoholism and random disorders—one with a piercing laugh that, to borrow from P.G. Wodehouse, could open an oyster at 60 paces. But my mom showed up for her. She taught me that service

makes me happy. So I try to do that every day, and to get outside.

The reef below was sculptural, a bas-relief. Neshama pointed out how the surf got lacy after it hit the reef and rolled onto the sand. "A little like my brain," I said. She nodded in agreement, poked herself in the chest: Same.

We passed thousands of trees and crazy patches of overgrowth, and then a stretch of eucalyptus, somehow both towering and delicate. You can't help but look up. The trees are tall and straight, exquisitely spaced, with funny Dr. Seuss tufts of leaves at the top,

redolent of mint, earth and turpentine. I tell you, whoever is in charge of these sorts of things really nailed eucalyptuses.

Neshama wanted to take the shortcut to the lake. We didn't used to. There were eucalyptus pods underfoot, wet from dew, and we trod carefully. She bent tentatively to pick up some of her bits of litter and started to slip, but I caught her and we laughed. We are so physically vulnerable in older age. We have caught each other a lot, have come through some periods of darkness and unsurvivable

#### WE CAN TAKE IT, AS LONG AS WE LAUGH GENTLY AT OURSELVES AS WE FALL APART.

losses, but friendship makes it all a rowing machine for the soul. We can take it, as long as we feel and give love, and laugh gently at ourselves as we fall apart.

We saw some rabbits, and small lizards the exact color of the earth.

And then we came around a curve of dense forest and reached the lake, dark near the shore beneath jutting tree branches, then emerald.

She had come planning to swim,

which I hadn't as the water is too cold for me, and she took off all her clothes, right there and then. "Do you feel shy?" I asked as she walked to the bank.

"Nope. This here is what I done got. This is what me being alive looks like now."

She scooched her butt over a tree trunk, like the world's most graceful Komodo dragon, lifting one leg over and then the other, and then slipped into the water.

"Don't you go drown now, because I am not getting into that freezing cold water," I called to her, although we both knew I would. Then she dipped down to her shoulders and swam a few breaststrokes forward, as if gliding into the arms of a sweater of cold water. She paddled slowly out from underneath the dark porte cochere of trees at the shore, turned over onto her back and floated awhile with her face turned up to the sky.

THE WASHINGTON POST (DEC. 20, 2023), COPYRIGHT © 2023 BY THE WASHINGTON POST.



#### **Polar Opposites**

The title of the 1970s movie *The China Syndrome* refers to the idea that if you dug a tunnel through the earth (ignoring the molten lava core), you'd end up in China. But, for most of us, the exact opposite part of the globe is water, not land. Only a little bit of China would overlap with the southern part of South America. The good people of Argentina seem to have taken this into account when naming the city of Formosa, which is at the opposite end of Taiwan, the island off the Chinese coast formerly known as ... Formosa.

ATLAS OBSCURA





The soulful stew synonymous with Louisiana is delicious anywhere you eat it

вч Emily Tyra

RGUABLY THE MOST classic New Orleans dish, gumbo is the chicken, sausage and/or seafood stew steeped in regional pride and family nostalgia. It's also a complex intersection of three cultures: West African, Native American and European. The word *gumbo* comes from the West African *ki ngombo*, which means "okra," a classic gumbo ingredient that lends a comforting texture and deep, grassy notes. Choctaw Indians introduced filé powder (ground sassafras



leaves), originally used to add body to the broth, now favored as a condiment at the table. The French contribution is roux—a mixture of browned fat and flour that thickens and flavors the dish.

Gumbo starts with a roux, which is cooked slowly (sometimes for more than an hour) and gives the dish a lovely nutty flavor. Also into the pot go Louisiana's "holy trinity" of celery, onion and green bell pepper, plus garlic, parsley, thyme, bay leaves, cayenne pepper, stock, and meats ranging from chicken to andouille sausage to shrimp and other seafood.

#### "A REALLY GREAT GUMBO TAKES THE BETTER PART OF A DAY TO MAKE."

But vegetarians need not miss out: There's a greens-laden version called gumbo z'herbes, which late New Orleans chef Leah Chase and her family made famous at legendary restaurant Dooky Chase. As *Southern Living* reported, "Every year on the Thursday before Easter, she used to cook up to 100 gallons of her gumbo z'herbes, made with nine different types of greens. All of New Orleans, no matter their religion or skin color, would flock to her gumbo pot en masse."

In the Creole and Cajun cuisines of Louisiana, steaming bowls of gumbo are just as at home on holiday tables as in the school cafeteria. As *Bon Appétit* writer and New Orleans native Megan Braden-Perry says, "Pretty much every chef's gumbo exemplar is the one they ate growing up." For her, it's "my mama's gumbo and the gumbo Ms. Fields made in the cafeteria at McDonogh 39 elementary school," where lunch ladies ladled out cups of comfort to go alongside grilled cheese sandwiches.

There is one wild card with gumbo: tomato. It's "an element that often causes a debate," says Kysha Harris, author of The Spruce Eats' recipe for Authentic Louisiana Creole Gumbo Like Nannie Used to Make. Harris and her nannie are in favor.

Either way, "Gumbo is a project," says Lisa Cericola, deputy editor of *Southern Living*. "You can't rush it. A really great gumbo takes the better part of a day to make, from prepping the ingredients, to making a roux, to simmering everything low and slow."

Traditionally, gumbo is served over an island of rice in the middle of the bowl. But you could replace the rice with potato salad, says the Baton Rouge *Advocate*. In what the paper calls an unscientific survey of Louisiana residents, 37% said they like both rice and potato salad with gumbo, and 12% chose just potato salad in theirs.

Whichever way you go, finish your bowl with paper-thin scallions and filé powder if you please. Add a few shakes of hot sauce and you're ready to plunge into the beguiling depths of this dish.





ву Todd Coopee

THIS YEAR marks the 50th anniversary of the Rubik's Cube. More than 450 million have been sold since its invention in 1974, making it one of the bestselling toys in history, ahead of even the Slinky. The Rubik's Cube was named Toy of the Year in 1980 and

was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame in 2014.

THE "RUBIK" in Rubik's Cube is Hungarian professor of architecture Erno Rubik, who first created his twisty mechanical puzzle to teach his students concepts of

three-dimensional movement. Rubik spent about a month trying to unscramble his first prototype, which, at the time, he wasn't sure could even be solved. He called it the Magic Cube. After it became popular around campus, Rubik decided to pursue a patent.

DESPITE THE overwhelming success of the cube, Rubik continued his career in academia. In 1983 he founded Rubik Studio, where he designed other mechanical puzzles and furniture. In 2009, 35 years after creating his cube, he released another geometric puzzle—spherical this time—called the Rubik's 360.

THE FIRST Rubik's Cubes retailed for İ \$1.99. Today, you can buy one for about \$10. But one very special cube is worth a lot more: \$2.5 million. The Masterpiece Cube, designed by Diamond Cutters International. was created in 1995 and is made of gold. diamonds and other precious stones such as rubies, emeralds and sapphires—and yes, you can still solve it.

AFTER THE cube was released in the United States, books on how to solve it soon followed. In

1981, You Can Do the Cube, written by 13-year-old Patrick Bossert, sold more than 750,000 copies in short order, making him the youngest author to hit the New York Times bestseller list.

A STANDARD Rubik's Cube measures 21/4 inches on each side, but Pennsylvania manufacturer Super Impulse sells one that is a scant 34 inch. on each side, the size of a single die. On the other end of the spectrum. Dubai's Knowledge Park is home to the world's largest version, measuring nearly 10 feet on each side and weighing more than 660 pounds.

THERE ARE more than 43 quintillion possible configurations of the classic 3x3 cube—that's a 43 with 18 zeros after it! So you may be surprised that any Rubik's Cube can be solved in 20 moves or fewer. This computation is the result of

mathematical research into what's sometimes called God's number—the minimum number of turns required to solve a particular puzzle. A bank of computers at Google took a total of 35 years of dedicated service to compute the answer of 20.

FOR SOME, simply solving the Rubik's Cube isn't enough. "Speedcubers" race to solve it as quickly as possible. More than 200,000 people have participated in competitions sanctioned by the World Cubing Association, the governing body that establishes rules and maintains official records. Solvers at these events race under a variety of constraints, such as using only one hand or even being blindfolded.

THE FIRST cubing world champion-ship was hosted in Rubik's native Budapest in 1982. The fastest solving time then was 22.95 seconds, held by

#### READER'S DIGEST Art of Living

Vietnamese American Minh Thai. But since then, the record has been broken many times, most recently in 2023 by Max Park, who solved it in just 3.13 seconds! Park is featured in the 2020 Netflix documentary *The Speed Cubers*.

YOU'VE HEARD of tennis elbow and swimmer's ear, but how about "Rubik's wrist"? Hours of obsessively solving the Rubik's Cube leaves some solvers with related injuries. "Cubist's thumb," a separate ailment, is a form of tendinitis. In the 1980s. Cube-a-holics Anonymous support groups popped up to help manic cubers curb their addiction.

QUITE THE pop culture icon, the Rubik's Cube has made many cameos in films and TV shows including Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse and The Big Bang Theory. It's also part of the permanent collection at New York's Museum of Modern Art and has been the subject of numerous exhibitions. One example, Beyond Rubik's Cube, a traveling exhibit that premiered on the toy's 40th anniversary in 2014, traveled internationally for seven years.

ANYONE CAN try the cube— even those with visual impairments. Customized stickers are available to swap in more easily

distinguishable colors from the standard palette of red, yellow, blue, orange, green and white. And some special versions even feature raised symbols, allowing blind solvers to give it a go.

Now 80 years old, Erno Rubik remains as passionate about his cube as ever, not only as a recreational puzzle but also as an educational tool. A program called You Can Do the Cube brought Rubik's Cubes into U.S. classrooms in 2008 and cemented their status as a STEM toy. The next installment, Rubik's Academy, plans to use the cube to teach concepts such as spatial reasoning and perseverance.



#### Lots More Fish in the Sea

More than 100,000 salmon spilled off a truck transporting them from one hatchery to another in Elgin, Oregon, last April. However, luck was on their side: As the truck overturned and their giant tank burst open, almost all the salmon rode the wave of water right into Lookingglass Creek, a waterway that connects with the hatchery they were traveling to.

GOOD NEWS NETWORK

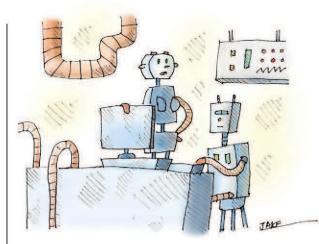


I was trying a new hair stylist. Once I sat down, I launched into how I wanted my hair cut: "Leave the top long. Don't trim the back too short. Keep ..."

"Oh, be quiet," the stylist said, playfully tapping me on the top of my head with her comb. "There are only two or three haircuts out there, and you're getting one of them."

—EARLDEAN BROWNING Brooksville, FL.

**5yo:** What's Romeo and Juliet? **Me:** Well, it's a story about two people who fell in love, and ... [*Two parents, both English professors, one a* 



"The password is 9473ixp8j2?73#af2 it's my mother's maiden name."

Shakespearean, give a long, age-inappropriate synopsis]

**5yo:** Wow.

Me: Yeah. It's sad.

**5yo:** Yeah. I can't believe they FELL in LAVA!

**−X**@s\_insley\_h

Some 40 years after the film hit theaters, Harrison Ford still can't escape the theme song from *Indiana Jones*. As he told *Variety*, he's mentioned to John Williams, the song's composer, that his music "follows me everywhere I go—literally. When I had my last colonoscopy, they were playing it on the operating room speakers."

**As I placed** groceries into the bag, a customer asked, "Will it all fit?"

"Yes," I replied. "It's a little heavy and a little awkward, but it'll all fit."

She sighed, "Story of my life ... a little heavy and a little awkward."

—BRENDA ROTH Indianapolis, IN

My classmate said he's going into consulting because he likes giving his opinion, but he doesn't like doing anything.

**−X**@JENNSUN

**People took** to Reddit to share stories about the times a co-worker made them feel old:

- ◆ "Had an intern refer to the '90s as 'the late 1900s.'"
- ◆ "They were complaining how awkward it is to meet women on Tinder. I asked if they ever had to call a girl at home and her dad answered the phone. They were horrified."
- ◆ "Getting a blank stare after saying we'd meet 'Same bat-time, same bat-channel."
- ◆ "Left a note for a new hire to call IT and he couldn't read cursive.
  He asked me what

language I wrote the note in."

"When I couldn't decipher what my young co-workers were saying. I had to look it up."

Overheard at a store: Customer: Can I ask a stupid question? Woman: Better than anyone I know. —SHARON NERY Mansfield, MA

One 8-year-old loved the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) in Baltimore so much she sat on the floor and refused to leave, declaring, "I am going to live here." Her grandparents reasoned, "Where are you going to sleep? What will you eat?" She had answers for all. The museum store has snacks, she could bathe in our sinks and there's a water fountain in the basement.

—REBECCA HOFFBERGER, founder of AVAM (from Footnotes from the Most Fascinating Museums, by Bob Eckstein, Chronicle Books)

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

# WHAT EXACTLY ARE THEY SELLING?

Can you guess what these business signs and ads are trying to say?

Because we can't.

- → A sign outside a store: "Closed due to personal circumcisions. Apologies for any inconvenience caused."
- → For sale on Facebook: "Antique mid evil chair"
- → A sign on a store door: "Temporarily closed. Sorry for the incontinence."
- Online ad: "I have a monogamy solid wood dresser nice condition ..."

- Sign on a store window: "Due to sanitary reasons, we will not and cannot accept any money that comes out of bras."
- → Seen outside a dental office: "We do our business in your mouth."









# 1 + 1 = MORE (or LESS)

A math whiz encourages you to play with your numbers

BY Eugenia Cheng
FROM THE BOOK IS MATH REAL?

The does one plus one equal two?

One possible answer is "It just does!" That is really a variation on "Because I said so!"—an answer that has been frustrating children for generations.

It is quite right to feel frustrated by that idea. Math can seem like a world of rules you just have to follow, which makes it seem rigid and boring. Whereas my love of math is somewhat driven by my love of breaking rules, or at least pushing against them. Both of those impulses play an important role in advancing human understanding, and in particular mathematical understanding.

So rather than think about why one

plus one is two, let's go a little further and question whether it's even true all the time.

Sometimes, one plus one can equal more than two. If you have enough cash on you to buy one cup of coffee, and your friend has enough to buy one, then together you still might have enough to buy three. Because if you have 1.5 or even 1.9 times the money needed for a cup of coffee, that still only gets you one cup on your own.

One plus one can also equal more than two because of reproduction: Say you put one rabbit and another rabbit together. You might well end up with a lot of rabbits.

Or sometimes it's because the things you're adding together are



more complicated: If one pair of tennis players gets together with another pair for an afternoon of tennis, there ends up being more than two pairs of tennis players because they could play each other in all sorts of different combinations. If the first pair are called A and B, and the second pair are called C and D, then we have the following pairs in total: AB, AC, AD, BC, BD, CD. So one pair of tennis players plus another pair makes six pairs.

Sometimes, one plus one is just one, like if you put a pile of sand on top of another pile of sand, then you just get one pile of sand. Or, as an art student of mine pointed out, if you mix one color with one color, you get

one color. Or, as I saw in an amusing meme, if you put a lasagna on top of another lasagna, it's still just one lasagna (a taller one).

Now, you might think that these aren't really situations in which one plus one equals something else, because they aren't really addition, or

because those aren't really numbers. You're welcome to think that, but that's not what math does.

Math instead says: Let's work out the context in which one plus one really does equal two, and contexts in which it doesn't. And in doing so, we'll understand something about the world more deeply than we did before.

Math isn't really about getting the right answer; it's about building good justifications. This gets implemented in schools as children needing to learn different "strategies" for doing the same thing, and I often hear parents complaining how pointless this is because if they can do something one way, why do they need to know all these other ways?

But having different ways to think about something constitutes a deeper understanding of that thing, and it gives you more ways to check that what you're doing is secure.

Imagine we were designing a jungle gym for children. We'd want to test it in every possible way to make sure it's safe. We wouldn't test it by just playing on it in sensible ways: We'd want to jump on it, swing from it, bash into it, fall from it, and try to pull it out of the ground, rather than simply trusting that we built it well. The solidity of math comes from not wanting to trust things, but wanting to jump and swing and know that our framework will hold up. One of the reasons the framework is so strong is precisely because we question it so deeply.

I hope that we will start seeing mathematics as a place to pose questions and explore answers, rather than a place where the answers are fixed and we're supposed to know them. And I hope we will place more emphasis on those who are curious, and who follow their curiosity on a journey that may be slow and without a clear destination, a quiet walk through the countryside rather than a race to the finish.

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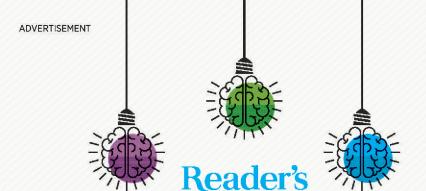


#### **A Grand Tour of Grandmas**

What do Americans call their grandmothers? Grandma is the most common nickname nationwide. Nana is the next most popular, with a big presence in New England and the Midwest, followed by a three-way tie between Grammy, Granny and Gran. Although formal, Grandmother is popular in Hawaii, Idaho,

Vermont and Virginia. It tied with Mamaw and Abuela (Spanish for "grandmother"), which is tops in Arizona, California, Florida and Texas.

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As a former combat. medic in Vietnam, I was invited to address the annual VFW Memorial Day celebration in Grants Pass, Oregon. My wife and our daughters, ages 3 and 7. were in the audience. Unfortunately, our 3-year-old grew impatient waiting for the Air National Guard flyover that would begin the program. After a while, she asked, "Mommy, when does the war start?" -IOHN BLANCHARD Merlin. OR

**We'd just finished** dinner at my son's house when a guest, an Army major, announced that he'd do the dishes.

"Don't bother," my daughter-in-law said.



"I never considered the bright side of digging latrines."

"I haven't even emptied the clean dishes from the dishwasher."

"I'll unload them," insisted the major.

"But you won't know where anything goes."

"If I can't figure out where something goes, I'll put it where it should go."

—BRAD FARRAR
Fort Worth, TX

"Does anyone here know how to drive a jeep?" shouted our drill instructor. We had just arrived for boot camp at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and were standing in line ready for KP duty. Six volunteers, eager to get out of peeling potatoes, stepped forward.

"Good!" said our DI.
"If you know how to
drive a jeep you won't
have any trouble pushing a mop across the
mess hall floors."

—RJ CHELLI Westfield, MA

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



KELBY VAUGHN MILGRIM

A DEDICATED STEM EDUCATOR
INSPIRING FUTURE GENERATIONS

By Anne-Marie Pritchett

Photography by Sydney Cisco HMU by Melissa Evans Wardrobe by Luxe & City At Blok Studio

The America's Favorite Teacher competition saw many hopeful educators vying for \$25,000, a trip to Hawaii, and a professional photo shoot, all to raise awareness for Teach For America. At the final bell, Kelby Milgrim emerged victorious.

Mr. Milgrim, or Sir, to his students. is the STEM director at Phoenix Christian Preparatory School and helped establish the Phoenix chapter of the Southwest National Robotic Challenge, By exposing students to diverse experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, he prepares them for future challenges and opportunities. Kelby also teaches robotics. honors physics, and forensics. Prior to 2016, Kelby spent 21 years teaching science in the Alhambra Elementary School District.



#### A THIRST FOR SCIENCE

An alumnus of Phoenix Christian Preparatory School, Kelby graduated in 1988 and met his wife, Melody, there. Now, he shapes the school's scientific educational vision. "I was raised in an environment that encouraged creativity and innovation. I loved science as a kid and had a thirst for understanding the world around me. I found inspiration in my dad's ability to solve problems through critical thinking and ingenuity," Kelby said. Influential teachers like Mrs. Blake, Ms. Runyon, and Ms. Mullens played pivotal roles in his development.

"Given the unique composition of each class and the constant 'discovery' of subjects due to technological advancements, each year brings new opportunities to adapt my teaching methods and content," he said. "Teaching isn't merely about delivering information; it involves comprehending the world around us and posing questions to reveal the reasons behind and solutions to the world's problems and challenges."

#### GUIDED BY FAITH

Kelby is 100% committed to his students and acknowledges his God and Savior, Jesus Christ, for His guidance and support. "His strength and wisdom have helped me navigate the daily challenges of battling cancer, and He



continues to teach me to surrender my own abilities and trust in Him," he said. "Being a teacher is incredibly meaningful, allowing me to influence countless lives. Over nearly three decades in teaching, I've realized that when someone gives you their time, they are giving you the most precious gift they could offer. Time is invaluable and must be treated with the utmost respect and care," Kelby added.

Outside of teaching, he enjoys collecting sports cards and Star Wars memorabilia, writing science fiction novels, and spending time with his family, especially his new granddaughter. Despite life's challenges, including dyslexia and cancer, Kelby perseveres with hope and determination.

@Kelbymilgrim | FB: kelby.milgrim LinkedIn: kelby-milgrim



Colossal's America's Favorite Teacher is an annual online competition honoring the educators who shape the futures of our children. During the 2024 competition, Colossal raised over \$2.7 million to benefit Teach For America in support of its mission to find, develop, and support equity-oriented leaders so they can transform education and expand opportunities for students. TFA consists of a network of nearly 70,000 leaders who started in the classroom and remain in lifelong pursuit of the vision that one day, all children will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

#### POWERED BY

#### COLOSSAL

Colossal is a nationally registered professional fundraiser who inspires people to advocate for themselves and those in need. Colossal's America's Favorite Teacher competition serves as a fundraising campaign for DTCare. a U.S. 501(c)(3) public charity organization.



#### FINALISTS =







# AND THE GOLD STARS GO TO ...



#### **Shelly Starline**

Mrs. Starline teaches middle school language arts in Cincinnati. She is an empathetic educator passionate about the transformative power of literacy. Shelly brings the fun into the classroom by incorporating new activities, unusual facts, and interesting current events to foster creativity and critical thinking. She is grateful for the support of her family, especially her children and husband, Jeremy.



#### **Erica Boyce**

Coach, Beyoncé, Ms. B, or Mom, as her students call her at Bronx Theater High School and YABC, is a special education generalist from Brooklyn. "Teaching is less of a passion and more of my purpose," she said. Erica is also the proud coach of the school's tennis team. Realizing sports' impact on teens, she offers free tennis lessons to kids and welcomes support.

Donations: gofund.me/2b13cde5

Lesson requests: coachboyce01@gmail.com

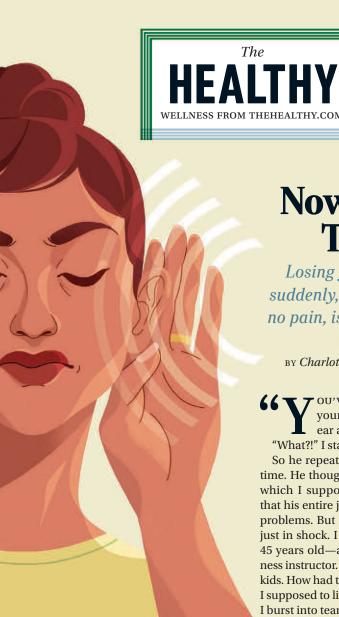
FB: Star Fish | @Glamdolljuicy



#### **Jasmine Williams**

Ms. Jasmine is a lively teacher in Chicago's West Loop area. Her passion for early childhood development is evident as she brings excitement into the classroom through song, dance, and art. Jasmine loves her family and would like to give a shoutout to her mother Angela Williams and sister Charlene Rhinehart for always encouraging her to pursue her dreams and for speaking positive words over her.

@learning with Jas



# Now Hear This

Losing your hearing suddenly, even if there is no pain, is always urgent

By Charlotte Hilton Andersen

66 Y OU'VE LOST ABOUT 60% of your hearing in your right ear and it's permanent."

"What?!" I stared at the audiologist. So he repeated himself, louder this time. He thought I couldn't hear him, which I suppose makes sense given that his entire job is assessing hearing problems. But I had heard him. I was just in shock. I was relatively young—45 years old—and healthy. I am a fitness instructor. A wife, and mom of five kids. How had this happened? How am I supposed to live my life with one ear? I burst into tears.

#### Losing my hearing overnight

Right before Thanksgiving 2023, I got what I thought was a minor head cold. No fever, no pain, no cough—just some congestion and stuffiness that made my right ear feel as if it was underwater. I told people it was probably just a sinus thing as I instructed them to "talk to my good ear." I figured it would resolve on its own eventually.

It didn't. One month went by, then two, and I still couldn't hear well, but because of holiday busyness I didn't get it checked out. It wasn't until the end of January, when I went to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor for an unrelated issue, that I thought to mention it. As soon as I did, the doc looked at me in alarm and told me to make an appointment for a hearing test the next day.

His reaction isn't surprising, says Courtney Voelker, a board-certified neurotologist (an ENT doctor who specializes in hearing) at Pacific Neuroscience Institute in Santa Monica, California. "With any type of sudden hearing loss, time is of the essence—and it's a pretty short time frame," she says. "Ideally you should be seen within a few days to a week. When caught early, it's very treatable. After that, your chances of being treated successfully diminish quickly."

I had waited three months. It was too late.

After a course of high-dose steroids and much testing, including an MRI to rule out a brain tumor, I was diagnosed with idiopathic sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSHL). That's medical speak for "I suddenly lost my hearing for no apparent reason." Within weeks I was the proud owner of a shiny new hearing aid, and my life had changed forever.

#### What is sudden hearing loss?

Sudden hearing loss is defined as a change in hearing that affects three frequencies or more and happens in 72 hours or less, says Nicole Raia, senior clinical audiologist at University Hospital in Newark, New Jersey. The symptoms can be subtle: In addition to the hearing loss, people may experience tinnitus (ringing in the ear), severe vertigo or a feeling of stuffiness in the ear, but it's not uncommon to have no other symptoms or very minor ones, she says. She adds that it's more common than not to have no pain.

We may never know exactly what caused my hearing loss, but the most likely cause was a viral infection in my inner ear that damaged my cochlea, the part of the ear responsible for translating sound vibrations from the environment into information for the brain.

There are other causes for sudden hearing loss, which is divided into two types: conductive and sensorineural. Conductive hearing loss comes from wax or other obstructions in the ear canal, a ruptured eardrum ("Don't stick Q-tips in your ears!" Dr. Voelker cautions) or a middle ear infection. These causes are often simple to diagnose and treat, and the hearing loss is rarely permanent, Dr. Voelker says.

#### READER'S DIGEST The Healthy

On the other hand, sensorineural hearing loss is usually caused by a viral infection in the inner ear. Less often, it's caused by a bacterial infection or a benign tumor on the auditory nerve. These are treatable if you catch them early, she says.

#### What if you suddenly can't hear?

See a doctor immediately. Dr. Raia recommends starting with your general practitioner or urgent care, as they can rule out or treat things like ear wax. If you're still having hearing issues, ask for an urgent referral to an ENT for a medical check and an audiologist for a hearing assessment. If you do have SSHL, it's important to get a hearing aid—and wear it.

"Hearing loss is the No. 1 contributor to cognitive decline, which is reversible with a hearing aid or cochlear implant," Dr. Voelker says.

This condition is more common than most people realize, affecting 1 to 6 in every 5,000 people, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. Yet very few people have heard of it or know the warning signs.

"Not even all doctors recognize the seriousness of sudden hearing loss," says Dr. Voelker, "so you may have to advocate for yourself and insist on being seen quickly."

"It can feel minor, but it isn't," says Dr. Raia. "I always tell people, 'If you lost your vision suddenly, would you ignore it? No! So treat your hearing as



important as your vision—it's just as important a sense."

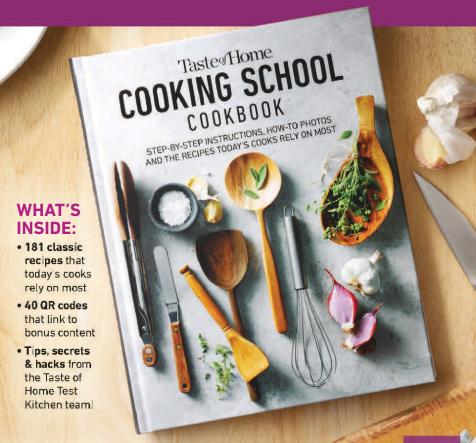
#### The gift of hearing

A month after being diagnosed, I was fitted with my new hearing aid. I was nervous, but the second the audiologist turned it on, it was absolutely magical. I hadn't realized how much I was missing with my compromised hearing until the moment it was given back to me. I burst into tears again—but this time, happy tears. This isn't what I would have chosen, but I'm so grateful for all the medical professionals and technology that gave me back my hearing.

Oh, and my hearing aid also functions like an AirPod—only better! Not only can I stream music, make phone calls and dictate texts on it, the quality is better than a regular earbud and way more comfortable. (Plus sometimes I get mistaken for a Secret Service agent!)

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A Chinese study published in the journal Stroke found that the level of artificial light where people live could increase their risk of stroke. The study followed almost 30,000 adults, none of whom had been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. After six years, people who lived with the highest level of outdoor artificial nighttime light had a 43% increased risk of developing cerebrovascular disease such as stroke. The increase is most likely because of the light's effect on sleep. The researchers say that about 80% of the world's population now lives in a light-polluted environment. "Ideally it's better to sleep with no lights," says Raj Dasgupta, a fellow of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

#### 10,000 Steps?

What is the ideal number of steps to take each day for optimum health? While several recent studies came up with differing results, all show benefits of moving:

**♦** Fewer than 10.000: In one study, published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, scientists analyzed data from a dozen studies involving more than 110,000 people. They found that while taking more steps is generally better, walking about 7,000 steps a day can help protect the heart, and walking 8,000 steps decreases the risk of premature death from all causes.

And University of Buffalo researchers (along with scientists from other universities) followed nearly 6,000 American women in their 60s through 90s. The women who averaged just 3,600 steps a day, moving at an average pace, reduced their risk of heart failure by 26%.

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#### ♦ More than 10,000:

If it's weight you're most concerned about, you'll have to go farther, especially if you are genetically at risk of obesity. Vanderbilt University researchers found that, in a trial involving more than 3,000 adults, those who walked at least 11,000 steps a day best maintained their weight.

#### Waking Up to Go-Go

According to a study published in *Neurourology and Urodynamics*, people who spend five or more hours a day watching TV and/or videos are significantly more likely to develop nocturia, the medical term for the need to

urinate frequently at night. The condition. which affects some 50 million people in the United States, can disrupt sleep and lead to a greater risk of high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease. While the exact connection isn't known, the researchers suggest that long periods of screen-watching may increase the chance of developing type 2 diabetes, a risk factor for nocturia, Also, drinking while you watch means more fluids in the body to excrete later.

#### **Hug It Out**

You know how good a hug feels. Or a great massage. But a quick pat on the back might

be just as beneficial for your health. The body reacts to touch by releasing the feel-good hormone oxytocin. A recent Dutch study found that the more often people are touched, the greater the positive effect on their mental and physical health. This means that frequent quick hugs could have even more impact on well-being than an hourlong massage. The scientists also found that nonhuman touch, such as from a weighted blanket (pets weren't included in the study), improved physical well-being, but not so much mental health concerns such as anxiety or depression.

#### **Best Fruits for BP**

Eating apples and bananas may help people with high blood pressure lower their risk of death. For a study published in *Frontiers in Nutrition*, researchers analyzed data collected over many years from people with high blood pressure and found that those who ate apples or bananas three to six times per week had a 40% reduced risk of death from all causes. The researchers aren't sure why, though they noted that bananas are high in potassium, which has been shown to help lower blood pressure. Interestingly, pears, grapes and pineapples didn't provide the same benefits.

## **CONNECTIONS:**

Your link to values and insights each month

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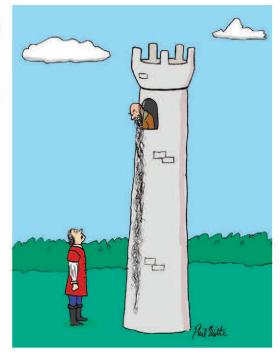
# LAUGHTER THE BEST Medicine

A customer in an Italian restaurant is so pleased with his meal that he insists on telling the chef personally. The owner proudly leads him into the kitchen.

"Your pizza is superb," the customer tells the chef. "I just spent a month in Italy, and yours is better than any I ever had over there."

"Naturally," the chef says. "Over there, they use domestic cheese. Ours is imported!"

Where were bobbleheads created? In the land of nod. — Submitted by RODNEY JURGENSEN Yankton. SD



"Is Rapunzel home?"

On a caving expedition, a man falls into a hole. His partner calls to him, "Are you hurt?" He yells back, "No!" "How could you fall down that hole and not be hurt?"

"Because I'm still falliiiiiiiiiing!" — Submitted by GARY KATZ Long Grove, IL

A man walks into a bar with a chicken potpie on his head. The bartender asks, "Why are you wearing a chicken potpie on your head?"

The man replies, "It's

Fun fact: If Celine Dion sang only the vowels in her name, it would be the lyrics to "Old MacDonald Had a Farm."

**X**@WHINGEWINE

an old family tradition. We always wear chicken potpies on our heads on Tuesday."

"Today's Wednesday."
"Oh dear," says the
man. "I must look like
a real fool."

-WRESTLINGCLASSICS.COM

**The doorbell** ringing at 2 a.m. wakes a couple from a sound sleep. The husband runs downstairs, throws

open the door and finds a guy standing in the pouring rain.

"I need a push," the guy says.

The husband slams the door and storms back to bed.

"Who was that?" asks his wife.

"Some guy wanting a push," he says.

"Honey, he's in trouble. Help the man." Feeling bad, the husband goes downstairs, opens the front door and shouts, "Hey, pal, where are you?"

The guy shouts back, "On the swing."
—Submitted by
JEFF COOK
Perry, MI

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

#### THIS SUBJECT IS A JOKE!

College students are heading back to class. We honor them with these classless gags about their majors:

Classics: My poor knowledge of Greek mythology has always been my Achilles' elbow.

History: No one should have been surprised by the rise of the USSR after World War II. There were red flags everywhere.

Chemistry: I was reading a book on helium. I couldn't put it down.

English: A cliche walks into a bar—fresh as a daisy, cute as a button and sharp as a tack. Not

wishing to see her, a synonym walks into a tavern.

Religion: Too bad that Islam, Christianity and Judaism have been fighting each other for centuries. Hindus, on the other hand, never had any beef.

Applied Mathematics: A statistician drowned crossing a river. Strange, since it was only 3 feet deep on average. Meteorology: Swedish astronomer Anders Celsius died in 1744 at age 42. His rival, Fahrenheit, insisted he was 108.

Physics: Why didn't Isaac Newton dodge the apple? He didn't understand the gravity of the situation.

Latin: A Roman walks into a bar, holds up two fingers and says, "Five beers, please!"









# How Hobbies



# Help Us

Far from a waste of time, pastimes are good for body, brain and spirit

BY Charlotte Hilton Andersen

# Standing on a stage, belting out a ballad at a local Chinese festival,

is a core memory for Kien Vuu. When he was just 6 years old, he was the youngest member of his family band—and one of its star singers. While he was too young to understand the words he was singing—from "Part of the Game," a 1970s song about heartbreak by Hong Kong pop group The Wynners—he did understand how much he loved performing music, especially with his family.

Vuu did not grow up to become a professional singer. Instead, he chose medical school and became Kien Vuu, MD, a longevity doctor and assistant professor of health sciences at UCLA. Yet he never lost his love for singing, so he makes time regularly for karaoke sessions with his own children.

"Singing with people has always been one of my favorite hobbies. In fact, I can still remember all the words to that old song," he says. "Karaoke is one of those things that just lights me up and brings me joy."

Such things are vital, and we do mean in a medical sense. Just ask Dr. Vuu: "In my work as a doctor and researcher, I've become convinced that having hobbies is an essential part of living and aging well," he says.

Sanam Hafeez, PsyD, a neuropsychologist at New York's Columbia University, agrees. "I feel very strongly about the importance of having hobbies," she says. Hers include practicing Pilates and learning Italian. "The benefits are immense, both physically and cognitively."

Dr. Vuu easily rattles off the benefits he gets from singing: In addition to boosting his mood, he says, singing helps him bond with his family and feel connected to his Chinese heritage, improves his memory and mental health, lowers his stress and even gives him a bit of cardio.

"I'm a very active performer when I sing! It definitely gets my heart rate up ... and probably embarrasses my kids," he says, laughing.

For a small investment, that's a lot of return. And the best news is that all these great mental and physical health benefits can come from any activity that "lights you up," as Dr. Vuu puts it.

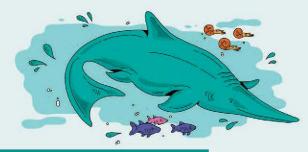
The positive health outcomes of hobbies are available to everyone, says Scott Kaiser, MD, the director of geriatric cognitive health at the Pacific Brain Health Center at the Pacific Neuroscience Institute in Santa Monica, California. Dr. Kaiser's passion project is traveling, but whether you prefer hiking, sudoku, dancing, watercolor painting or playing piano, know that your hobbies are not only making you happier, they're also making you healthier.

#### **Benefits for Your Body**

A pervasive and harmful myth is that engaging in hobbies is self-indulgent or even a waste of time. Nothing could be further from the truth, Dr. Kaiser says. The benefits you reap will depend on your hobby—taking up jogging, for instance, will benefit your cardiovascular health more than, say, crossword puzzles, while those may improve your cognitive health. The point is that nearly all hobbies can provide measurable positive health benefits.

"Doing an enjoyable hobby releases endorphins, the feel-good chemicals in the brain, while lowering cortisol, the so-called stress hormone," Dr. Vuu says. "This then lowers blood pressure, reduces systemic inflammation, improves sleep, boosts the immune system, improves cardiac health and increases energy—which in turn can kick off a whole positive cycle of healthier behaviors."





#### **SPARE-TIME SURPRISES**

Hobbyists doing their thing—just for fun!—made these important discoveries.

#### Uranus

Prior to 1781, astronomers had mistaken the planet for a star. Then musician and composer William Herschel—who looked up at the night sky through a telescope of his own design—realized it was a planet.

#### Conus josephinae

Spanish shell collector Emilio Rolán identified a previously unknown species of snail in 1980 and chose to name it after his wife, Josefina.

#### Viking treasure

In 2014, metal detectorist Derek McLennan dug up the greatest hoard of Viking artifacts ever found in the U.K. He discovered the items, including silver jewelry, crystals and an ornate cross and cup, in the same Scottish field where he had unearthed 300 medieval coins just a year prior.



## The Velvet Underground's missing debut

Canadian record collector Warren Hill paid only 75 cents in 2002 for an unassuming album with a handwritten label. After listening to his yard-sale find, he took it to an expert and found out he had the only known copy of the influential rock band's unreleased first album.



#### A new shape

After retiring, David Smith, a former printing technician in Fast Yorkshire. England, had more time to "mess about with shapes." as he describes his hobby. Last year, he inadvertently answered a decades-old geometry problem. He discovered a shape he called the hat (because it resembles a fedora) that can cover an infinite flat surface without ever repeating the same pattern.

#### A giant sea monster

In 2020, 11-year-old fossil hunter Ruby Reynolds found bone fragments at a beach near her home in west England. Further digging—online and in the mud—confirmed the fossils were from an ichthyosaur: the largest known ocean reptile, from the time of the dinosaurs.

The science backs this up. A 2021 meta-analysis of multiple studies found strong evidence that engaging in leisure activities can improve health by protecting against coronary heart disease, cognitive decline and dementia, as well as age-related physical decline including chronic pain, frailty and disability. The report, published in the journal *Lancet Psychiatry*, found that for people who were suffering from a chronic illness, doing a hobby helped them manage their symptoms and even slowed the progression of their illness.

But another of the researchers' findings is perhaps the most compelling: the strong relationship between doing leisure activities and increased longevity. A different study conducted last year quantified the impact, finding that older adults have a 19% lower risk of mortality when they engage in regular leisure activities.

#### **Benefits for Your Brain**

In addition to providing protection against dementia, hobbies improve our neuroplasticity: the ability of the brain's neural networks to change, adapt and make new connections. Dr. Hafeez explains that hobbies take advantage of this flexibility and help your brain create new connections, which can help you in areas beyond just that particular skill. This may be the reason why people who play a musical instrument often do better in math.

"One of the coolest things I've learned is that regularly doing things



you find enjoyable causes biochemical changes in the brain, and we can measure these in the lab," Dr. Vuu says.

"With the brain," adds Dr. Hafeez, "it's a 'use it or lose it' type of situation, especially as we get older. So you always want to be exercising it to keep it strong, and hobbies are a really fun way to do that."

#### **Benefits for Your Spirit**

In many ways, hobbies make us happier. People who made a conscious effort each day to spend time doing hobbies (no matter what they were) showed an average boost of 8% in wellbeing and a 10% drop in stress and anxiety, according to a 2023 study published in the *Journal of Personality*. Similarly, folks who reported having at least one hobby were found to have fewer depressive symptoms and higher levels of happiness, health and life satisfaction, according to a 2023 study published in *Nature Medicine*.

"On a fundamental level, humans need meaning, something that gives them a sense of purpose. And being able to do what you're passionate about really contributes to that," Dr. Hafeez says. "Engaging in hobbies lowers your risk of depression and boosts your self-esteem."

And perhaps the most underestimated benefit of hobbies is their impact on our social well-being. "Humans have always thrived within a community; we need that," Dr. Kaiser says. "When we don't get it, all aspects of our health can suffer." Indeed, chronic loneliness is worse for your health than smoking 15 cigarettes per day, according to a 2020 analysis published by the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*.

Hobbies are a perfect way to find that sense of community, make new friends and catch up with old ones. Many hobbies are done in a group—think choirs, knitting circles and recreational sports teams. And even when you're not actively doing the hobby, it can still provide opportunities to be social, by

taking classes to improve your skills, say, or participating in online chat groups.

#### How Hobbies Lower Stress

The brain operates in different states, measured in five main categories of brain waves: alpha, beta, gamma, theta and delta. Most of the time, our brains are in a default "work" state, characterized by beta and gamma brain waves. This is when we're using our brains to solve problems and focus on tasks, which requires us to stay in an alert, active state. This is an essential role, for sure, but not one you want to stay in for too long, as it raises cortisol levels in the body, increasing feelings of stress and anxiety, Dr. Vuu explains.

"Stress, and the effects it has on the body, is one of the main drivers of chronic disease and depression today," he says. "Chronic stress fries your nervous system and increases inflammation, which then causes a cascade of negative effects, both mentally and physically."

How, exactly, does that work? High stress and systemic inflammation impact every system in the body, increasing the risk of almost every type of major disease. A 2015 study published in *Future Science OA* found that stress caused physiological changes in the brain and the cardiovascular, immune and musculoskeletal systems. This, in turn, increased the risk of everything from mood disorders to autoimmune diseases and dementia.



#### READER'S DIGEST Cover Story

In all, hobbies are a powerful antidote to stress, causing a cascade of positive changes. "Doing a hobby you enjoy puts your brain into a 'flow' state, characterized by alpha and theta waves, which cause you to feel relaxed, less stressed and less anxious," Dr. Vuu says. These brain states are characterized by feelings of deep relaxation, passive focus, creativity, intuition and daydreaming.

# What Is (and Isn't) a Hobby—and How to Pick One

Perhaps you already have a passion and just need permission to do that thing a little more often. (Permission granted!) But maybe you haven't found a hobby you really love doing yet, or



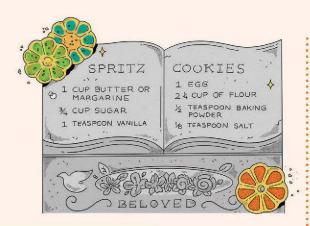
you'd like to add another activity to your roster. And while a hobby is anything you do in your leisure time that brings you joy or pleasure—and a lot of activities fit the bill—not all hobbies are created equal when it comes to health and happiness.

To choose how you spend your time, ask yourself how you feel when you finish doing a particular activity. Many people, for example, will cite scrolling through social media or binge-watching Netflix shows as a hobby, but the reality is that they feel numb or even worse after doing it. These kinds of mindless activities give more of a short-term high and can leave you feeling emptier and more exhausted afterward.

"I call it popcorn brain, where you go from site to app to site looking for something new because our brains crave novelty," Dr. Hafeez says. "But this is detrimental to your cognitive health in the long run and can very easily become addictive. You're not really learning anything new; you're just temporarily distracting yourself."

The other downside of these types of electronic hobbies, including video and mobile games, says Dr. Kaiser, is that they require you to be sedentary, which increases your risk of many health issues. "You need to be aware of that and strive for balance," says Dr. Vuu.

So how do you choose a hobby? "I look at it through the lens of the seven pillars of health: sleep, nutrition, movement, emotional mastery, thoughts/mindset, relationships and purpose,"



#### **MY WEIRD HOBBY**

## Gravestone recipe baking

While interning at the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C., Rosie Grant noticed how often people shared a favorite recipe as their last words. A former librarian living in Los Angeles, Grant, 35, puts her research skills to use by tracking down these gravestones. "I travel to them, and I try to bring their recipe, and have a bite and think about the person," she says. It's hard to pick a favorite, she says, but she's made Naomi Odessa Miller-Dawson's Spritz Cookies, from Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York, the most.

#### Vexillology

Simon loseph became interested in vexillology aka flag collecting—as a student at the University of Notre Dame when a theology professor explained how the flags of the patron saints of England (St. George's red cross on white). Scotland (St. Andrew's white diagonal cross on blue) and Ireland (St. Patrick's red diagonal cross on white) combine to make the iconic Union Jack. Simon, 37. hosted over 120 fellow fans last fall for the North American Vexillogical Association's 57th Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, with a special flag: a blue Liberty Bell atop 13 red and white stripes arranged in a V shape for vexillology.

#### **Digging holes**

"It's just relaxing," Charlie Mone, 22, a physics and mathematics graduate in St. Andrews, Scotland, savs of his hobby, born of boredom at the beach. Mone and friends started digging without purpose but managed to strike gold: a community of people at their university eager to dig with them. Now. Mone bikes to the beach with shovels to share. It's about process rather than result: All holes are filled at the end.

#### **Collecting elements**

As a boy, James Marshall was wowed by the element collection at Chicago's Field Museum. Now 84, the University of North Texas professor emeritus of chemistry has amassed the world's largest collection: every element on the periodic table up to uranium. including shiny lead crystals, a globe of neon gas and a tiny ampule of bromine, using stand-ins for the temperamental compounds (like a radium watch in place of quick-to-decay radium).



Dr. Vuu says. "We need all of those for a healthy lifestyle."

Creating an "ensemble effect"—doing a hobby that engages you in multiple domains of health and well-being—will compound the positive effects, Dr. Kaiser adds. Fortunately, most hobbies check multiple boxes.

What hobbies are right for you will vary greatly based on your personality, interests, abilities and resources, but most of us have a gut instinct of our likes and dislikes. A good way to choose a hobby is by considering which areas of your life you'd like to improve right now. For instance, if you'd like to add more movement to your life, improve your memory and build friendships, you might enjoy a group exercise hobby

like Zumba, paddleboard yoga, "star tour" night hikes or an Ultimate Frisbee league. Or, if you're interested in improving your mood and finding a sense of purpose, look into a philanthropic hobby like helping immigrants learn English, starting a community garden or knitting baby hats for NICU patients. Your options are limited only by your imagination.

Is there a right number of hobbies to have? Again, the answer is individual, Dr. Hafeez says. Some people thrive focusing all their energies on the one thing they are super passionate about, while others enjoy a variety of activities. Regardless, it's a good idea to challenge yourself to try something new every once in a while, as the novelty is good

for stimulating new connections in your brain—and with other people.

## How to Get the Most Out of Your Time

Hobbies are fun, so why is it so hard to find the motivation to do them? With our busy lives, it can be challenging to find the time and energy. But it's worth it! Our experts offer these tips for making the most of your hobbies:

- \* SCHEDULE TIME ON YOUR CALENDAR, just as you would for an appointment. Prioritize your chosen activities by setting a recurring weekly or monthly event.
- \* FIND A FRIEND OR A GROUP to do things with. You'll be much more motivated to go if you know that others are expecting you.
- \* ADAPT TO WHAT YOU HAVE AVAILABLE.

  Don't have all the supplies you need for your art project? It's better to improvise than to cancel.
- **\* GO OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE** and push yourself to take your hobby to the next level or try something new to keep it fresh.
- CHECK OUT FREE CLASSES or free trials before you commit to an activity or program you have to pay for.

The trick to enjoying any hobby is to adopt a "no-fail" attitude, Dr. Hafeez says. If you're trying something new, remind yourself that everyone is bad at something the first time they try it, so focus on having fun. For established hobbies, remind yourself that any time spent doing your hobby is beneficial, even if it doesn't result in an amazing work of art or aria. And even if everything goes sideways, at least you'll have a good story to tell.

Making the time to do something enjoyable on a regular basis will have a great impact on your life. "I'm a bit of a workaholic," Dr. Kaiser confesses, "but one thing I really love is travel. When taking a trip, I increase my curiosity, learn new things and try new foods. I feel excited and have something to look forward to. I spend time with people I love. I feel challenged and enjoy the adventure. I get to learn about other cultures and connect with a wide variety of people. And I build so many great memories, the kind that last a lifetime."

Now it's your turn: Whether you decide to revive an old hobby or start up a whole new one, go find the thing that lights you up and do more of it. Doctor's orders!



#### You Make Your Own Luck

Many cruise lines hold ceremonies in which a bottle of champagne is smashed against the hull of a new ship. If the bottle fails to break, the vessel will—according to superstition—have bad luck. These days, cruise lines use mechanical devices to ensure that the bottle breaks.

NEW YORK TIMES





These clever critters are some smart C-O-O-K-I-E-S

BY Reader's Digest Readers

#### No Birdbrains Here

I should've known our cockatiel, Sara Lee, was special when we introduced her to our new baby and the bird immediately began speaking in a gentle baby voice rather than her usual booming squawks. In the coming days, Sara Lee would squawk every day in the late afternoon. I checked the door and found no one. Then, five minutes later, I'd hear my daughter stir. After several days of this, whenever Sara Lee squawked, I went to check the baby instead of the door. Sure enough, our bird was letting me know that the baby was beginning to wake up from her nap. I loved getting to be there as my daughter woke up each afternoon. Sara Lee was the best babysitter a mom could ask for.

-SUSAN HEITSCH Palatine, IL

#### **Sticking to the Schedule**

Every day at 5 p.m., my Sheltie, Penny, stands in front of my recliner and lets me know it's time for dinner. Not her dinner—mine. She won't even glance at her food until she sees I've eaten mine. Then, at 9 p.m., she gets in my bed and waits for me to come settle down. Once I do, she heads off to her bed in the living room.

—IANIS ENDSLEY *Eatonville*, *WA* 

#### **Purring Inspection**

We call our Siamese cat, Monty, the Inspector. That's because he doesn't let anything—from a package to your purse-through the door without a proper search. Last summer, I cleaned a bathtub that almost never gets used, then went upstairs. Monty was soon pawing at my elbow. I figured he wanted food, so I followed him downstairs, but was surprised when he turned into the living room instead of the kitchen. There was water everywhere! Apparently, the tub's pipes had cracked from lack of use. Monty came up to get me, then led me down two flights of stairs to show me the problem.

—сатну вкоокs Huntington Beach, CA



#### A Measure of Intelligence

I bought a load of 150-foot-long rubber tire strips to build a padded fence for my horses. The strips were extremely heavy and needed to be cut into 50-foot sections. I set a marker in the grass and began laying out the strips so I would know where to cut. My Great Dane, Banner, joined me, grabbing the ends of the strips and dropping them right at the marker as he saw me do. He worked the entire day with me, just as well as a human helper could have.

-DOROTHY LEE Hiram, OH

#### When Opportunity Knocks

Our 27 hens spend the day foraging in the yard, then return to the warmth and shelter of the henhouse at night. One night, a hen named Pullet must have roamed farther afield than usual and missed reentry to the coop. Finding herself locked out on a brisk night, she did what any bright young hen would do: knock. My wife heard someone at our front door and was surprised to find Pullet flapping her wing against the door, waiting to be collected.

—JERROLD KUYPER Salem Lakes, WI

#### **Self-Cleaning Crew**

One day, we were out of the house for much longer than expected, and our very smart Chihuahua, Pixie, had an accident on the floor. When we got home, we found her next to the puddle looking very guilty—with a sponge at her feet and the cabinet door under the sink open. I always wondered: If we had come back even later, would she have tried to mop it up herself too?



#### **Buddy System**

One of our calves came down with pinkeye and was temporarily blinded, so it relied on the rest of the cow herd to lead it around. One day, when the herd was returning to the barn, one of the other calves suddenly stopped and ran back the way it had come. Five minutes later, it reappeared with the blind fellow following close by its side. It was the sweetest—and sharpest—thing I'd ever seen from these big beasts.

—TRUDY OLSEN Tarrs, PA

#### Waiting for the Shoe to Drop

Our dog Chase—aptly named—runs after our cats when they're left alone, so we put him in his kennel when we leave the house. One day, I noticed that Chase was waiting by the kennel as I got ready for work. But on weekends, when I

was getting ready to go out and feed the horses, he'd wait by the door. It seemed he knew what day it was—but how? In time, I realized it was my footwear. Shoes mean I'm going to work and he's going in his kennel. Boots mean we're going to the barn. I switched my footwear a few times to test him and confirmed I was right.

-RANDE BLANCHARD Elmwood, WI

#### A Lightbulb Moment

Our cat Charlie wants attention when he wants it. When he feels ignored, he walks to the nearest light switch, looks back at us several times (one last chance to change our minds) and flips the switch. Having successfully forced us to get up to turn the lights back on or off, he offers a meow that seems to say, *Are you paying attention now?* 

-REBECCA SMITH Pittsboro, NC

#### **After the Beep**

My husband found Lester as a kitten. Lester loves my husband so much. He follows him everywhere and watches intently no matter how dull the task. For years, my husband's alarm went off at 5 a.m., and Lester was right there to make sure he got up for work. Eventually, my husband retired, but Lester did not—he still jumped on the nightstand at 5 a.m. every day, meowing until my husband got up. One day, by accident (so we thought), Lester pressed the button on our answering machine that announced the time and day. He did it day after day at exactly 5 a.m. until we replaced the machine.

-CAROL ROESEMANN Levittown, NY

#### **Her Best Trick Yet**

When she was a puppy, we trained our Doberman pinscher to tap the basement door when she needed to go out. One day years later, she tapped the door, but when I opened it, she ran back upstairs. I returned to the kitchen to find she'd just needed a few unsupervised seconds to scarf my lunch. Imagine my surprise when weeks later, just as she had regained my trust, she pulled the same stunt. Now, I put my plate in the microwave (which we call the safe zone) if she taps the door during mealtime.

—IANE WOLDRING Hamilton, MI

#### **NOW THAT'S A FIRST DATE!**

Sitting in on a 150-piece orchestra session at Abbey Road Studios, the Beatles' longtime recording home (George and Amal Clooney). Getting into a fender bender with the Secret Service (Henry and Jenna Bush Hager). First dates can be all kinds of unforgettable. What's the most memorable first date—good or bad—you've ever been on? See terms and share your story at rd.com/firstdate. It might appear in a future issue of Reader's Digest.



# What's Ailing Our Doctors?

Today's physicians are burned out and battered by spreadsheets. We patients suffer too.



ву Derek Burnett

HEN VIKTORIA KOSKENOJA was in college, she sat in the hospital at the bedside of her mother, who lay dying of leukemia, and studied for her medical school entrance exams. She was determined to one day speak the language of the doctors who swooped in and out of the room discussing the case. Later, in medical school and then in residency, Koskenoja found herself drawn to emergency medicine, with its unpredictability, its tapestry of characters, and its imperative to establish immediate trust with the constant stream of brand-new patients coming through the door. She had found her calling.



Her first position out of residency was her dream job, working in a Level 2 trauma center at a hospital in rural Michigan, where she'd grown up. And at first it truly was a dream. "Small community, really great group of physicians, really great group of nurses," she recalls. "It just felt like we had everything that keeps the hospital running."

But the facility had just been bought out by a private equity firm, and Dr. Koskenoja watched in real time as things began to change. "Cuts were made everywhere in every possible way," she says. Cuts that seemed harmful to patients, the very people they were there to help.

Doctors and nurses were let go or had their hours drastically reduced. "I'd walk into a room," Dr. Koskenoja recalls, "and see a patient with a blood pressure of 60/40," which is dangerously low. Before the buyout, "the nurses would have been all over that," she says. "But I would have to find a nurse, if I could, and try to get them to start fluids, or start them myself."

When her ER pediatric patients needed to be admitted to the hospital, Dr. Koskenoja would request a bed upstairs, only to be routinely denied by administrators. Confused, she asked a pediatrician what was going on. Pediatric admissions don't pay well, her colleague said, explaining that the hospital could bill the insurance company more for adults who have been admitted.

As a result, the children would often

remain in the ER for up to four days at a time, she says. The same thing happened with elderly patients, many with dementia, who stayed even longer while awaiting a spot in a long-term care facility. It was, she says, an untenable situation.

"We didn't have a system designed for taking care of someone for monthlong stays in an emergency department where it's just supposed to be for a few hours," Dr. Koskenoja says.

She describes sleepless nights agonizing over the responsibility of trying to care for patients in what struck her as impossible conditions. Children and the elderly stuck in the ER risked missing treatments because the drastically cut nursing staff was now so overstretched.

The hospital denies ever basing patient admission decisions on cost or reimbursement, and says its staffing models fall well within industry standards. Any issues, the spokesperson told *Reader's Digest*, must be viewed in light of the broad challenges facing the health-care industry.

Dr. Koskenoja and her medical colleagues pushed back but, she says, they were largely ignored. Demoralized and ashamed, she and many others quit.

"I still get emotional when I think about it," she says. "Most of us went into medicine because we love taking good care of people. When you're set up by a system to not be able to do that just so some MBA can have a bigger bonus, it makes you sick."

#### A Prescription for Burnout

America's doctors are in crisis. Six in 10 physicians say they're burned out, with burnout rates for some specialties, such as primary care, reaching 70%. When polled by the American Medical Association, 40% of doctors said they were considering leaving their practices in the next two years. Another study, conducted by health-care industry publisher Elsevier, revealed concerns about mental health and burnout: 63% of med students in the United States reported that they had no intention of practicing clinical medicine after graduation and will instead work as lab researchers or academics. This is despite a predicted shortage of 124,000 physicians over the next 10 years.

Perhaps most concerning, suicide rates among doctors are alarmingly high. Male doctors are nearly one and a half times more likely to commit suicide than the general population, while female doctors are more than twice as likely to take their own lives.

"Doctors are fewer and they're more stressed," says patient advocate David Sherer, MD, the author of *Hospital Survival Guide*. "And when you get that combination, you're going to have more medical errors. You're going to have more mistakes made. I mean, it's just not a good time to be a patient in the United States."

You may recall a time when you enjoyed a closer relationship with your doctors. They took their time, got to



know you, answered the phone, stuck around. Today, many factors have made those things appear increasingly quaint.

Thanks to ever-more-powerful insurance companies, doctors spend precious hours jumping through hoops to obtain prior authorizations from insurers so they can order tests, procedures or medications. During an exam, their gaze is often more focused on a computer screen than the patient because a 2009 law requires that all medical charts be kept electronically.

Far from making things more efficient, says Rebekah Bernard, MD, author of the book *Patients at Risk*, the way the law was rolled out "just really felt slapped together." So, paradoxically, "the paperwork workload went crazy." And because of corporate takeovers in the medical field and their mandates to grow profits, doctors are spending less time with patients in order to squeeze in more appointments. The result is that the average primary care doctor now spends two hours on paperwork for every hour spent with patients.

The time crunch on doctors has gotten so bad that even physicians often can't get each other's attention to make referrals. "Five years ago," says Dr. Sherer, "I used to be able to pick up a phone and within a few minutes, the doctor would be on the phone with me. Now, it's phone jail. You can't do it."

While the drivers of dissatisfaction among doctors are many, the growing influence of corporations has done more to change the practice of medicine than anything else. Today, about three-quarters of U.S. physicians work for hospitals, health systems and other corporate entities (up from about 25% a decade before), often clashing with administrators over a host of issues that boil down to profits versus patient well-being. Money, many doctors say, has now so infected health care that doctors are losing control over decisions that impact care, to the detriment of patients.

The result for physicians, says Dr. Koskenoja, is known as "moral injury," the psychological trauma of being forced to act in ways that violate one's ethics. It is, she says, likely a major source of doctor burnout.

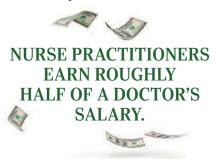
#### "Just Sign the Chart"

Sharon Ortega\*, a pediatric emergency medicine doctor, worked happily for more than a decade at a communitybased hospital in a midwestern city. But when the facility was acquired by a large corporation, executives began pressuring the physician group that employed Dr. Ortega to make severe staffing cuts. At the same time, despite a lack of demand for higher-level services, the company upgraded its ER to a Level 1 trauma center—a headscratching decision that made sense to Dr. Ortega only when viewed through a purely financial lens. "When you have that additional trauma status," she explains, "you can bill at a higher level, even if you're not using all those resources." Great for the corporation's

**72** SEPTEMBER 2024 \*Not her real name

bottom line, terrible for the finances of the patients' families.

"It was shortchanging the kids in the community," Dr. Ortega says. After her group pushed back, the hospital's new owners put out a request for proposals to contract with another group. The final straw for Dr. Ortega was when her group conceded to furlough its pediatricians who had worked at the hospital for more than a decade, replacing them with nurse practitioners, or NPs.



These nurses receive from 18 months to four years of training to perform more advanced health-care functions than registered nurses, or RNs. To become certified, NPs must complete at least 500 supervised clinical hours. That's significant, but far from the required 12,000 to 16,000 clinical hours, four years of medical school and three to seven years of residency before a physician is able to practice unsupervised.

While NPs were initially conceived of as assistants to doctors, practicing only under supervision, recent years have seen a push toward more autonomous practice. But in some states, doctors are often expected to sign off on NPs' work despite having not examined the patients. That's exactly what Dr. Ortega saw happening at her facility—pediatricians being replaced by NPs, and the remaining few doctors being pressured to certify their work sight unseen.

To be sure, NPs play an important role, especially in parts of the country where there is a shortage of doctors. And Dr. Ortega, whose parents are both nurses, has deep respect for the profession. "I'm not opposed to a collaborative type of practice with nurse practitioners," she says. But she chafes at "being told, 'Oh, you just need to sign the chart. It doesn't matter if you have time to see the patient.' No. If I'm signing the charts and my name is legally tied to a patient, then I want to be able to see them."

If the corporation plays its cards right, it still can charge patients just as much as if they'd seen a physician. "A nurse practitioner who sees a patient alone is reimbursed 85% of Medicare fees," says Mitchell Louis Judge Li, MD, a board-certified emergency physician and the founder of an advocacy organization dedicated to taking the profession of medicine back from corporate interests. But if a physician signs off, he says, "they can charge 100%."

Making NPs even more attractive: They earn roughly half a doctor's salary, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The prospect of signing charts without seeing patients represented a legal liability to Dr. Ortega, but she was also concerned about patient safety and the ethical considerations. So she quit—without ever signing a chart for a patient she hadn't seen. She now runs a private practice.

#### **How Did We Get Here?**

More than half of U.S. hospitals today are structured as corporations—and others have been called nonprofit in name only—mostly with nonmedical executives calling the shots. And 56% belong to chains of three or more facilities. Health-care entities make attractive investment targets for companies, seeing as how an aging population and surging health-care costs provide a stable and substantial source of revenue.

Given the prevalence of the corporate-owned model, it can be surprising to learn that, in most states, only doctors who have sworn the Hippocratic oath can make decisions affecting care. That would seemingly rule out large conglomerates run by those without medical degrees. But these norms have become eroded. Exploiting legal loopholes, corporations have overwhelmingly reshaped the health-care landscape, says Dr. Li. A provision of 2010's Affordable Care Act effectively banned physicians from owning hospitals, out of concern that doctors might have a conflict of interest, while waving through a new breed of corporate overseers.

Before, hospital administrators were traditionally motivated by community



ties rather than the profit-driven demands of distant corporate owners, whose imperatives can result in the erosion of the medical decision-making power of independent physician groups.

Sometimes, corporations come in to a situation and shake things up for the better. Struggling health-care firms may seek out private-equity buyers because they need an injection of cash to keep the lights on or to introduce innovations and new technology. And sometimes, greater size makes for more bargaining power when it comes to pharmaceutical pricing and negotiations with insurance companies.

But of late, as health-care giants have become behemoths by consuming smaller competitors, the Federal Trade Commission has begun to express concern that such growth can breed anticompetitive behavior. Some conglomerates have "vertically integrated" patient care, with pharmacies, pharmacy benefit managers, insurance and related services all under one roof. Consider, for example, Optum, a subsidiary of the massive health insurance concern UnitedHealth Group. Optum operates health-care delivery, labs, pharmacy services and a bank offering health savings accounts-and is now the largest employer of physicians in the country. Or CVS, which delivers health care via its Minute Clinics, owns a pharmacy benefits manager, owns Aetna Insurance and recently acquired an in-home patient evaluation company called Signify. (Neither UnitedHealth Group nor CVS is run by physicians.)

Such corporate models can maximize profits—one company with its own doctors in its own clinics prescribing medications for patients on its own insurance, at prices negotiated with its own pharmacy benefit manager, to be picked up in its own pharmacies. Another key benefit: A company could now charge Medicare more for some procedures by using directly employed physicians rather than those working for independent, physician-owned groups.

Proponents of the corporate model say they're making health care more convenient and efficient while safeguarding safety. Responding to a Senate committee inquiry, a spokesperson for Envision, a private equity-backed physician staffing group, wrote, "Our number-one priority is always the wellbeing of our clinicians and the patients they serve."

And the American Hospital Association says that in rural areas, where many independent hospitals have closed, "mergers and acquisitions have played a critical role in preserving access to care."

That may well be, but a study by Harvard doctors, published in December 2023 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, found that when private equity companies buy out hospitals, the rate of harm to patients rises sharply, with falls increasing by 27% and dangerous infections by 38%—likely the result of "reductions in staffing after acquisition," according to Zirui Song, MD, a co-author of the paper.

Another study by researchers at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government looked at the narrow question of how colonoscopy patients fared when hospitals integrated physician groups instead of working with independent doctors. The corporations imposed measures such as scaling back expensive anesthesiologists and increasing the number of patients treated per day. Maybe unsurprisingly, the number of post-procedure complications such as gastrointestinal bleeding increased significantly.

After being acquired by a for-profit company, Mission Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, has become a poster child for the perils of the corporatization



of health care. "Mission Hospital used to be where everyone would go if they wanted good care," former psychiatric and cardiac nurse Nancy Jaquins told NBC News. But after the acquisition, the facility began attracting the wrong kind of attention. In a scathing report, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared the health and safety of Mission's patients as being in "immediate jeopardy." Investigators cited a string of deficiencies in care, including the case of a 78-year-old woman who showed up at the ER with a leg fracture, abnormal heart rhythm and low oxygen, and was found dead in the hallway after languishing for four hours. A spokesperson for Mission's

corporate owner, HCA Healthcare, points out that the state has recommended that the "immediate jeopardy" status be lifted, and says the facility's quality of care is confirmed by various ratings organizations despite "national challenges, like staffing shortages, that are affecting hospitals across the country."

#### **Taking Medicine Back**

A movement is building among physicians to regain control of their profession. Dr. Li founded an organization called Take Medicine Back, whose goal is to reinstate the historical prohibition against the corporate practice of medicine. The fight is playing out in various

ways and on numerous fronts across the country, supported by political allies on both sides of the aisle.

In her state, Dr. Ortega successfully pushed for legislation requiring all emergency departments to keep a physician on staff at all times. She was motivated after reading about a 19-year-old college athlete named Alexus Ochoa-Dockins, who visited an ER where no doctor was on duty and who later died from a misdiagnosed pulmonary embolism. Other states are considering similar legislation.

In Arizona, at the state House level, physician-turned-politician Amish Shah, MD, successfully sponsored bills addressing the hassle of prior authorization and corporate retaliation against whistleblowers, both of which became law. As a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, he has his sights set on similar accomplishments in Washington.

Late last year, Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) opened a Senate Budget Committee investigation into the private equity ownership of hospitals. A similar inquiry was launched this past April by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

And in Oregon this March, a bill that

would have closed the loopholes allowing corporate control over health care in the state died in the Senate Rules Committee after resoundingly passing in the House. The bill's sponsor says he will reintroduce it next year. If passed, it may serve as model legislation for other states.

The goal of all these actions is to reduce the influence of the profit motive so that more health-care settings operate the way they used to. It's a proven model, as evidenced by the success of the non-corporatized facilities and physician-owned practices that still exist. "There are places where you can practice and still feel like you're able to deliver great care," says Dr. Shah.

Dr. Viktoria Koskenoja, whose story ends happily, is living proof. Unlike many of her colleagues who have left the field, she found work in a county hospital that she loves. "It's run by the community," she says. "So the people running it, it's their neighbors that they're taking care of. It's not people making decisions in some fancy business suite states away who don't really care."

She agrees with Dr. Shah that good jobs for doctors still exist. "But," she says, "a lot of us are worried that those jobs are going to get fewer and fewer."



#### That'll Show Them!

A British man changed his name to Tom Pppppppppprice to make it harder for telemarketers to pronounce.

MENTAL FLOSS





# Fathers of the Bride

A young woman finds a unique way to honor the many men who helped her survive her childhood

By Sarah Chassé

afternoon in Chelan, Washington, a beaming young woman named Ivy Jacobsen stood ready to walk down the aisle toward her husband-to-be.

Her blond hair was in a loose bun, and her long white gown was simple and sleek, with just a hint of a ruffle at the back. Waiting for Ivy at the altar was the love of her life, Tristen Jurgensen, who was 28 years old like Ivy and a sheriff's deputy, wearing a blue-gray suit and tearing up with emotion at the sight of his bride.

More than 300 guests had gathered for the wedding ceremony, held in a backyard venue framed by rocky mountains and tall pine trees. From the green grass under Ivy's feet to the blue sky overhead dotted with wisps of white clouds, the day was picture perfect.

For Ivy, this happy moment was hard

won. She'd endured an almost unimaginably difficult childhood, having been abused by her father from a young age. At times, she wondered if she would always live in fear. She worried about her mom and her little brother and sister. She worried about her future. But she survived, thanks, in no small part, to a large support group.

"There are a lot of people who have helped me get to where I am now," she says. In particular, she credits some special men who were always there for her, who stepped in as role models, friends and surrogate family. "I wanted to find a way to honor them."

So she asked the men—all 15 of them—to give her away at her wedding. They traveled from near and far, and they had met Ivy at various points in her life. But they have two important things in common: They love her

dearly, and she considers most to be father figures.

Standing along both sides of the aisle at Ivy and Tristen's ceremony were these men, all dressed in khaki pants and crisp white shirts. There was her funny high school English teacher and golf coach, who had let her eat lunch in his empty classroom when she needed time to herself. There were six former basketball coaches, spanning her career in the sport, from learning to dribble in fourth grade to playing guard on the high school varsity team. There were relatives: her younger brother, future brother-in-law and maternal uncle, as well as other uncles in name onlyfamily friends whom she considers kin. And there were her mentors, including a police officer who helped inspire her to escape the horrors at home.

Every few steps she took toward the altar, a new pair of fatherly figures were on either side of her, taking her hands as she smiled at them tearfully.

When the officiant asked, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" a chorus of deep voices answered: "We do."

IVY WAS IN SIXTH GRADE when her father began molesting her while her mother was at work. He was also violent toward her mom and younger siblings.

"We were in a constant state of fear," Ivy recalls. Some parts of her life seemed normal—she excelled at sports, and she had friends. But behind the scenes, Ivy's father controlled everything. He

blocked her access to the internet and cellphones, and he limited the people she was allowed to talk to. He even dictated what clothes she could wear, banning anything too "girly" or tight. So she wore athletic wear. If she had to dress up for a school event, he would go shopping with her.

But most of all, he warned her never to trust anyone, especially in law enforcement. Scared and isolated, Ivy kept the abuse hidden from everyone; her father said that "bad things would happen to Dad" if she told.

Despite those warnings, Ivy managed to forge a meaningful connection with a police officer who worked at her middle school, Officer White\* of the Marysville Police Department. Ivy met White, a school resource officer, when she worked in the main office as a student assistant. White's office was next door, and they would often chat about sports, school, whatever. One holiday season, the two engaged in a competition to see who could hang the most decorations around school. It was a bit of fun in a childhood devoid of it.

All those interactions began to add up for Ivy. Here was an adult she could trust. But if Ivy's father found out she was friends with a cop, she'd be punished. So she never let White in on her secret.

The abuse continued until 2011, when Ivy was a sophomore. Her best friend, realizing something was wrong, asked point-blank what was going on.

"I didn't know how to respond. I was



scared," Ivy says. She was especially nervous because her friend's dad was a police officer. What might happen if she told? But life at home was unbearable. She confided in her friend, who told her own parents.

The next day, a detective came to talk to Ivy at school. "This detective asked, 'What's happening? You need to tell us what's happening.' And at that point I'm thinking, I've been told never to trust the police," she says.

But all she could think was, Am I going to keep living like this? Will I ever stop living in fear? "I knew that the detective was with Marysville Police, where Officer White worked. And I'd always felt very safe with Officer White," she explains.

With that connection in mind, she made the decision to reveal everything. "I didn't know when my next opportunity would be."

Soon after, Ivy's father was arrested by her friend, Officer White.

LIFE IMPROVED AFTER THAT, but Ivy still had a long journey toward healing. And that's when the men in her life stepped up. Money was tight in the wake of the arrest and her parents' eventual divorce, but one of her uncles was there to pitch in. He showed up at her basketball games, paid participation fees for Ivy's sporting events and bought her dresses for senior homecoming dance and prom. And when Ivy and her family didn't feel safe in their home after her father was released on bail, the same uncle gave them a safe place to stay.

While still in high school, Ivy testified against her father in court. After that trial resulted in a hung jury, she faced him from the witness stand in a second trial, with the same result. After she testified in a third trial, in the summer of

2013, her abuser was finally convicted and sentenced to almost 16 years in prison. Throughout all three court cases, her coaches showed up in the courtroom, offering moral support. Having to recount the worst experiences of her life was excruciating, but looking out day after day and seeing a coach flash a reassuring smile or a quick nod made her feel less alone.

"They heard everything," Ivy says of the men and their regular presence in court. "I don't know how they did it, but their presence got me through."

And then there was a network of "uncles" who, after being kept away by Ivy's abuser, all reached out to Ivy and her siblings following his arrest and reentered their lives. There was her father's former best friend, now living in Arizona, and her mom's first husband and his two brothers.

"It might sound kind of messy, but it's been amazing," Ivy says. "Our adopted uncles like to take us snowboarding or grab a beer with us and hang out. It just feels natural. They've just never given up on us."

After her abuser was convicted, Ivy began to feel free in a way she never had before: She got her driver's license and a cellphone, and relished just "being a normal kid," as she puts it. She ditched the baggy boys jeans and T-shirts in favor of form-fitting jeans and colorful blouses. She wore makeup for the first time and played with various hairstyles. In short, she blossomed into a typical teenage girl.

Intent on helping other silent victims of abuse, she began sharing her story. The first time was as a speaker at her graduation from Lake Stevens High School in the spring of 2014 in front of a crowd of 6,000 people. School administrators had selected her to speak based on her academic and athletic achievements. But her speech quickly became personal.

"There was this girl," she began. "She was manipulated at a young age. She could only wear certain things to school and could only talk to particular people. She was socially and culturally inept. Also, behind the scenes, her father had started to rape her when she was in the sixth grade. She did not know that what he was doing was wrong. Last summer, July 15, her father was finally put into prison. Where is this girl now?"

Her voice, strong and steady up to this point, quickened as she revealed, "She is standing before all of you. I am that girl." When her speech ended, the audience members rose as one, clapping and cheering their classmate.

Encouraged by her reception, Ivy volunteered as a spokesperson for Dawson Place Child Advocacy Center, a nonprofit that had provided her with free counseling and legal services. They also supplied comfort during uncomfortable times at the courthouse. During breaks, she would find Dawson Place staff members with therapy dogs waiting for her in the hallway. She'd cuddle with the dogs, as if they were living, breathing, licking security blankets.

After high school, Ivy kept in touch with Officer White and began dreaming about a career in law enforcement for herself. While working as a personal trainer at a gym, she befriended a juvenile corrections officer named James,\*\* who encouraged her aspirations. "He said I would be a great first responder," says Ivy. That, and Officer White's prodding, "helped push me in that direction." Soon, Ivy entered the police academy.

As a result of all this support, Ivy is living a life she could never have expected back in middle school. Today she works for the East Wenatchee Police Department as a school resource officer—just like Officer White, who is now retired. She spends her days at Eastmont High making sure school is safe and that the students always have an ear to bend.

"I hear about the breakups or the bullying," she says. "Sometimes kiddos say, 'I need to talk to you about something. Can you pull me out of class, but make it for something else so that kids don't know that I'm coming to talk to you?' It's all about relationship building, so that they know that we're always there." The same way that Officer White and so many others were there for her.

BECAUSE HER offender was released from prison early, Ivy does not want to identify most of her wedding escorts by name, for their privacy and safety. But on Ivy and Tristen's big day, Officer White and James stood proudly among the 15 men lining the aisle ready to give

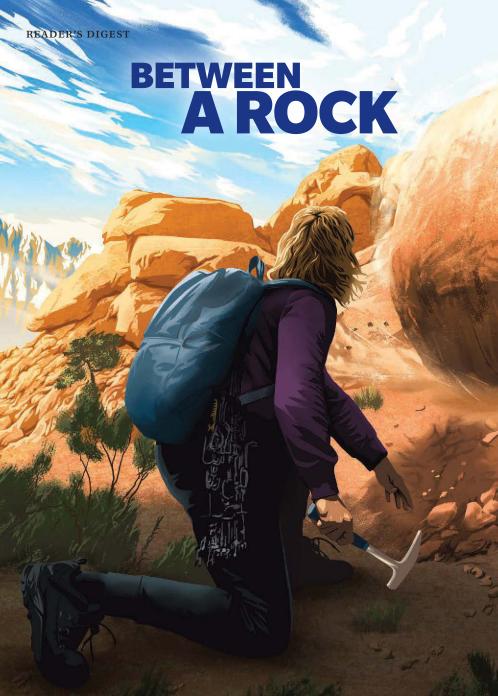


Ivy and Tristen, after exchanging vows during their "different" wedding

her away, as a soft love song, "You Are the Reason" by Calum Scott, played. A look at the lyrics may give a clue why she chose that song: "If I could turn back the clock/I'd make sure the light defeated the dark/I'd spend every hour of every day/Keeping you safe."

Through the love and support of these men, as well as watching many of them raise their own daughters over the years, Ivy has gotten a taste of what having a caring dad looks like. Of what "safe" looks like. "It's been like relearning what's normal, since my upbringing was not normal," she says.

Ivy knows her walk down the aisle was unique, and that was by design. "I'm OK with having our wedding be different," she says. "I wanted to show Tristen that this is how much support I've had, and this is how much support we'll continue to have together."



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

# AND ARD PLACE

Pinned by a giant boulder, a hiker had two choices: panic or gut it out. He did both.

ву Nick Hune-Brown

# MOUNTAINS

rose dusty and jagged into a perfect blue sky as Kevin DePaolo and Josh Nelson set off across the desert range.

That corner of eastern California was DePaolo's favorite part of the country. which was saying something, because the 26-year-old had visited nearly every inch of the United States. Wiry and strong, with blond shoulder-length hair and an earnest way of speaking, the New York-born DePaolo had spent his time since college in search of adventure, impatient for life experiences. For the last few years he'd been a nomad, living out of a tricked-out van he'd christened Vanessa, while doing odd jobs and remote data analyst work from the road. He'd been up to Alaska and down to Florida, and crisscrossed the states in between. But something about that part of California, where you could find both outdoor thrills and a little solitude amid the ancient mountains, had always seemed special to him.

Part of the draw was the friends he'd made there, especially Josh Nelson. The two had met a few years earlier in a coffee shop in the town of Bishop. The

men had bonded instantly. In DePaolo, Nelson saw a kindred spirit, someone who wanted "every ounce of adventure he could get." And in the 38-year-old Nelson, DePaolo found an older brother figure—someone who taught him everything from rock climbing skills to where to find deposits of crystals out in the mountains.

That morning last December, DePaolo was back in Bishop. He'd found a perfect spot to go rock hounding—searching for crystals and minerals—and now he wanted to show Nelson his discovery.

Nelson was feeling under the weather, just getting over a cold, so DePaolo shouldered most of the load—shovels, pickaxes—as they walked through sandy gullies and scrambled over boulders. After about an hour and a half, they arrived at a rocky hillside spot. It was just as DePaolo had said—a deposit of "cool rocks" buried just in front of a pair of enormous boulders.

For almost two hours the friends happily dug in the sand side by side, pulling out rocks of all shapes and sizes. At around 3 p.m., Nelson stepped

aside to rest and enjoy the perfect 65-degree temperature while DePaolo continued to kneel, working away with a small scraper, in the large hole they had dug in the sand. The boulder closest to him was slightly uphill, but it had a look of permanence to it, as if it hadn't budged in millennia and wouldn't move any time soon. But here he was wrong. Whatever equilibrium the enormous stone had found over the years was slowly being shifted, grain of sand by grain of sand, as DePaolo scraped away beneath it.

DePaolo sat up for a moment and turned away as he caught his breath. That's when he heard Nelson yell, "Look out, Kevo!"

DePaolo turned back. And in that instant, the boulder lurched toward him, and rolled, crashing into him like a semitruck and crushing his legs into the sand.

**WITH DEPAOLO NOW** pinned to the ground up to his thighs, Nelson ran to grab the pickax and wedged it between the rock and the ground to keep it from rolling any farther, as DePaolo bellowed in agony. The pain was extraordinary. It seemed to short-circuit his brain, the world becoming strange and dreamlike, while his body went into shock, adrenaline pumping through his veins.

Am I really gonna die like this? he wondered. He turned to Nelson and saw on his friend's face a look of fear that made him lose whatever composure he had left.

"You gotta get this thing off of me, man!" he velled.

"I'm trying, I'm trying!" said Nelson. The boulder was massive, had to be between 6,000 and 10,000 pounds, and Nelson strained against it. He gave three enormous heaves, and on the final push he was able to rock the boulder ever so slightly. It was enough that DePaolo could feel his left leg—numb and limp—was almost free, only held

# HE SQUEEZED NELSON'S HAND AND BIT IT, THE ACT OF SOMEONE IN DESPERATE PAIN.

in place by the material of his pants. He grabbed the scraper and began tearing through his pants before pulling his leg out from under the boulder.

With one leg freed, he could angle his body out of the path of the boulder in case it came tumbling any farther. But his right leg was completely, irrevocably trapped. And his left leg had been blown open, the skin torn from the back of his thigh to his groin, with exposed muscles and arteries gleaming nauseatingly in the sun.

As a veteran climber, Nelson had been in a few emergency situations before, but he'd never experienced anything like this. He could see that his friend's exposed femoral artery was damaged and oozing blood. He was  $terrified\ that\ De Paolo\ would\ bleed\ out.$ 

Nelson double-wrapped the leg with a T-shirt and his sweater, and applied pressure. He then tried his cellphone. Miraculously, despite being in the middle of nowhere, he got a signal. He called 911 and told a dispatcher where they were. The dispatcher stayed on speakerphone with them, urging DePaolo to stay calm.

Nelson started digging beneath the boulder, hoping to shift it enough to free his friend. But DePaolo felt the boulder shift above him, bearing down on his leg even harder. The dispatcher yelled at them not to dig any further. There was no escaping. The only thing to do was stay put and hope that a rescue team could reach them.

DePaolo kept asking his friend, "Am I going to die?"

Nelson shook his head. "You're not going to die, man." He couldn't tell if he was convincing or not. He didn't fully know if he believed it himself. But he knew that staying calm was the only way his friend was going to make it out alive.

**CPL. VICTOR LAWSON** of the Inyo County Sheriff's Office was supposed to be enjoying a day off. But when you're the search and rescue coordinator in a part of the country where hikers and mountain climbers often get into trouble, days off are never guaranteed. Lawson, a longtime climber, leads a crew of highly skilled volunteers, many of them "dirtbag" climbers, who spend



every possible waking moment in the mountains, and who want to put their experience and abilities to good use.

When he got the call from dispatch, he jumped on the computer to find DePaolo's whereabouts, using his mapping software. The two hikers were miles from the nearest road, too far for his team to carry DePaulo. He would need to be hoisted out in a helicopter.

The Inyo County Sheriff's Office doesn't have its own aircraft, but over the years has developed relationships with a number of nearby organizations that do. Lawson's first call was to Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, but as bad luck would have it, they were repairing their helicopter that day. The next call was to the California Highway Patrol and its inland division air operations, but, unusually, they weren't available either.

Lawson put out a call for the rescue team to meet at the Posse Hut—the garage filled with gear where his team planned their missions. As he drove there, he racked his brain. It was now 3:15 p.m., but in the dead of winter it wouldn't be light for long. Who was nearby who could bring a helicopter out into the mountains and had the capability to hoist a person out in the dark? Any kind of intense rescue mission would take hours, and Nelson and DePaolo were miles off track, in steep, rocky terrain that was difficult to reach. And the dispatcher on the phone had made it clear: DePaolo needed help soon or he would die.

**ON THE SIDE** of the mountain, the hours passed slowly. The boulder hadn't just crushed DePaolo, it had knocked over almost all the water they'd been carrying. That left them with just about 1 cup of water, which the two men rationed carefully as the hours passed.

DePaolo was wavering between moments of calm and moments of absolute panic. The two men would sit in silence for minutes at a time, DePaolo listening to the sound of the wind and trying to work himself into a Zen-like state, before the reality of the situation would force its way in and he'd scream out again.

Occasionally Nelson would walk a few steps away to confer with the dispatcher on the phone, but whenever he was out of sight DePaolo would yell for his friend to return. At one point he asked for Nelson's hand. He squeezed it as hard as he could, then bit it—the crazed act of someone in desperate pain.

At around 4:30 p.m., as the sun was setting, the pair heard the distant whir of a helicopter. It came closer, and soon they could see its lights swooping over them. DePaolo's heart leaped. *They're going to save me*, he thought.

The helicopter was from the central division of the California Highway Patrol, which had called Lawson, saying they were available. They flew a reconnaissance flight over the area, sighted the two men, then headed to the trailhead where they would pick up

some of the rescuers, who were still driving toward the mountain.

But the two men didn't know any of that when the aircraft circled and then flew off again, leaving them alone and, once again, in the silence. It felt to DePaolo as though his chance to be rescued had disappeared over the hills.

NIGHT COMES FAST in that part of the country in December, and temperatures swing wildly in the desert. As the sun went down, temperatures plunged to near freezing. DePaolo began to shiver, every spasm sending an excruciating current of pain through his body. Nelson gathered all the clothing he'd brought in his backpack, rain gear and sweaters, and piled them onto his friend. Then he collected wood and built a small fire, keeping it stoked while the two of them waited under the black, starless sky.

DePaolo focused on the glow of the fire, keeping his mind on that little patch of light amid the infinite darkness. At one point, DePaolo asked Nelson to call his mom. If he was going to die, he wanted to speak to her one last time. Nelson refused. "You're not dying on my watch," he said.

At about 8 p.m., five hours into their ordeal, DePaolo looked up to the hills and saw, glowing in the distance, the beams of headlamps from the search and rescue team, descending to meet them.

The first pair of rescuers had come by foot, driving to the closest spot they

could find and then hiking in. With their enormous packs and heavy tools, making their way over the steep terrain in the darkness was treacherous. Each hill they crested presented them with a new predicament: Try to navigate huge boulder fields, or trudge through loose sand?

Moments later, the next pair of rescuers, the ones who had rendez-voused with the helicopter, showed up. The pilot could only find a landing spot about a mile away from the site, so they arrived from the oppo-

site direction, facing similar difficult hiking conditions.

Finally seeing his rescuers face to face allowed DePaolo to relax, if just a bit. The team took stock of the situation. An EMT took DePaolo's vitals, attaching a pulse oximeter to his finger. Despite the incredible damage to his legs, he was stable. Nelson's rudimentary first aid had done its job.

Meanwhile, the other rescuers were working with purpose. One of the men positioned a Hi-Lift jack, a tool used to lift off-road vehicles, under the boulder. Others drilled into the rock, pounding a bolt into the stone with a rock hammer and attaching a carabiner, which they then attached to a rope-and-pulley





system tethered to a large boulder slightly down the hill.

In careful coordination, with two other men holding DePaolo under his armpits, the rescuers used the pulley and the jack to inch the rock off his leg. DePaolo could feel the pressure lessening. He watched in wonder and terror as the boulder rose upward, thinking that one wrong move and he would be crushed. The rescuers tugged him by his armpits, trying to free him, but his ankle was still caught.

"Is your foot free?" they asked. "No, no!" yelled DePaolo. Finally, on the third heave—after he'd been trapped for five and a half hours—they managed to pull his leg out from under the boulder.

The rescuers transferred DePaolo to a light stretcher called a litter, and he lay there, still in agony. He realized that he hadn't thought beyond this moment. He had imagined that once he was out from under the boulder, everything would be fine. But that was not the case.

The rescuers patched him up and tried to keep him as comfortable as possible. Then they delivered more bad news: It was too dangerous to take him off the mountain in the dark. They were staying put for the night.

Back at the Posse Hut, Victor Lawson had not given up on getting DePaolo off the mountain that night. The best bet was by helicopter, but the helicopter crew that had transported the rescuers didn't have the training for a nighttime rescue at a high altitude, nor did anyone else he contacted. But he'd put in a call to the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. And they in turn had called the Naval Air Station Leemore, about 100 miles away. The copter crew there was willing to try the dangerous maneuver.

#### "I'M GONNA STRAP YOU TO ME AND WE'RE GOING TO GO STRAIGHT UP IN THE AIR."

Just after midnight, DePaolo once again heard the sound of helicopter blades whirring. The aircraft hovered above them, the force of its rotors spraying DePaolo with small rocks and debris. Then, like something out of a movie, a Navy medic descended on a rope from the sky.

"I'm gonna strap you to me and we're going to go straight up in the air," he yelled over the roar. Just like that, the medic clipped DePaolo's litter to his harness and the two men were rising, DePaolo lying on his back and swinging unsteadily as they rose 10, 20, 30, 40 feet in the air.

Before he could freak out, rescuers aboard the helicopter hauled him in. And then he was off, the aircraft veering over the mountains toward the hospital in Fresno. There, doctors presented him with a good news/bad news scenario. First the bad: He'd broken his pelvis in two places. He had a lot of dead tissue in his leg from where the boulder had struck him, and that tissue needed to be removed. And he had so badly damaged his femoral artery that it would need emergency surgery. The good news: They were hopeful he'd recover.

after several Hours of surgery—plus nine follow-up procedures over the months to remove dead tissue, change the wound vacuum-assisted closure and add skin grafts—and months of rehab, DePaolo was healing, and his doctors expected a complete recovery. With the road ahead looking brighter, he looked back upon that day not with anxiety, but, incongruously, with a profound gratitude. He thought about his friend Josh Nelson. They spoke on the phone just about every day in the aftermath of the accident.

"I told him I love him, that I'm so thankful for him," says DePaolo. He thought of the search and rescue team, who were inspiring in their skill and toughness. He thought about the helicopter pilot, the doctors and nurses, all these people who had used their abilities and knowledge and care to save him when he couldn't save himself.

It wasn't just that he was grateful to them—he wanted to emulate them. Throughout his early 20s, as he traveled the country in search of adventure, he'd also been searching for something else.





Kevin DePaolo celebrated Christmas 2023 recovering in the hospital.

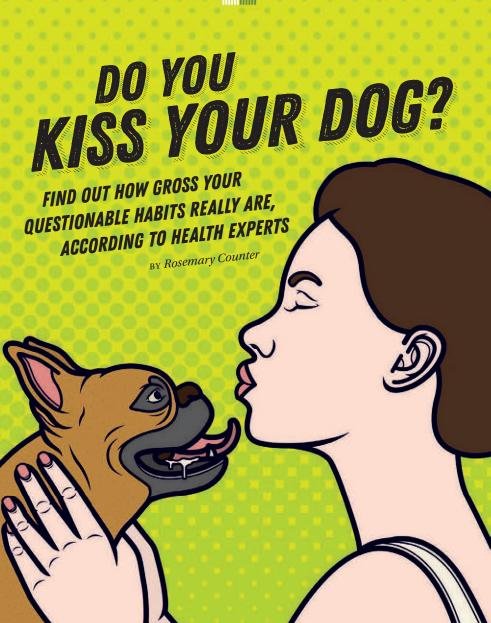
"I've been looking for a kind of purpose in my life," he says. Now he knew he wanted to give back, like them. Maybe as a firefighter? An EMT? He wasn't sure, exactly, but the path forward seemed clearer than it ever had. Before any of that, though, he needed to heal physically and spiritually. And to do that, he knew he needed to get back into nature.

One day in late March, just three months after the accident that nearly killed him, DePaolo found himself out in the California wilderness once again. The trail he'd chosen was at Millerton

Lake near Fresno, where he'd been recovering and going to physical therapy. It was an easy 3-mile loop up Pincushion Mountain, not much more than a hill, really, by his old standards. As he walked, though, his heart pounded and his lungs ached. He could feel every individual muscle in both damaged legs straining.

At one point, halfway through, he had a sudden fear: *Have I made a commitment my body can't actually handle?* Then he took another step. Then another. He would go slow, but he would keep going.





I admit it, when it comes to food, I have some eeew-inducing practices, like skimming mold off old cheddar and feeding the rest to my unsuspecting family. We're still alive, so how bad can it be? Because our gross human habits fall somewhere along the spectrum from mildly cringeworthy to full-on repulsive, I reached out to experts to find out where some common behaviors land on the gross-o-meter.

#### **EATING OLD FOOD**

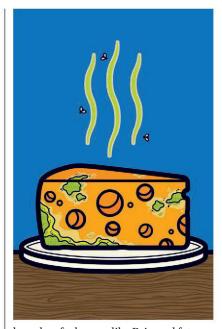
► The stamped expiration date—and its confusing cousins "use by" and "best before"—should be but one tool in your *hmm-should-I-eat-this?* toolbox.

"With the exception of infant formula, food labels aren't standardized or regulated," says nutritionist Marie Spiker, an assistant professor at the University of Washington. "Few are related to biology or food safety—just peak freshness." And so, she says, it's totally fine and safe to eat foods that are not at their exact peak.

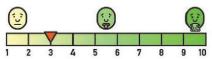
Handling, packaging, refrigeration and storage all affect any food's farmto-plate timeline, so your best tools are your eyes and nose.

"Most of the time, this is intuitive," says Spiker. "If it looks good and smells good, it's probably good." Not sure? Consider this: "Spores spread through soft, porous surfaces. So in general, hard foods are more difficult to permeate and therefore safer to eat," she says. Don't trust your sense of smell or sight? Check out the FDA's website, where food safety guidelines are available.

So you probably should toss the whole package if you spot mold on



bread, soft cheeses like Brie and feta, or soft produce such as strawberries. But it's not too gross to slice off the funky stuff and save the rest of potatoes, cured meat like salami, or hard cheeses like my beloved cheddar.





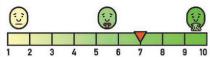
#### **BORROWING A TOOTHBRUSH**

► Most of us would never use a stranger's toothbrush, for two good reasons: 1) We have no idea what illness or germs that person harbors; 2) It's disgusting. But that's surely not the same as borrowing your partner's in a pinch, right? After all, we swap kisses. Welllll ...

"Your mouth is not a sterile place, and it's full of bacteria unique to you," says Matthew Messina, DDS, clinic director at Ohio State Upper Arlington Dentistry in Columbus. "The whole reason we brush and floss is to collect and remove live bacteria." Often, it's from spots that lips don't touch.

A cold, the flu or even herpes can be easily passed along on a toothbrush, especially if you have gingivitis or bloody gums. Using your partner's toothbrush means you're transferring their germs into your mouth, which can disrupt your own mouth's delicate bacteria balance.

Of course, if you've lived with someone long enough, chances are that "your family group already shares some bacterial commonality," says Messina. But it's best to play it safe. If you find yourself on vacation without a toothbrush, just gargle with mouthwash or water. And he adds, when you're traveling, remember: "Unless you're on safari, toothbrushes are readily available. Just call the front desk."



#### KISSING YOUR DOG

▶ Pet owners are shameless when it comes to showering their fur babies with affection. A recent survey revealed that 61% of dog owners admit to kissing their dogs on the mouth. All this despite the possibility of zoonotic (animal-to-human) diseases, including

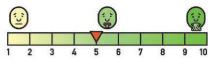
pasteurella, which can result in skin inflammation and joint infections; salmonella (stomach cramps, fever) and E. coli (diarrhea, bloodstream infections). That said, the risk of Spot passing you a parasite or anything else is very low ... except when it isn't.

"If you're young, old, pregnant or immunocompromised, if you have bad

acne or psoriasis or an easily infected open wound, I'd avoid being licked on the face," advises veterinarian Scott Weese, chief of infection control at Ontario Veterinary College.

Even the healthy should pick their pecks wisely. Keep this in mind before planting a wet one on your dog: Everything they've licked—everything!—may

end up inside you. That said, "There's a cost-benefit analysis to be made," says Weese. "For lots of people, kissing is a part of bonding with their pet. If that's you and the risk is worth it, that's fine."



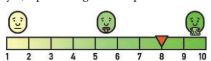
## SIPPING FROM UNWASHED WATER BOTTLES



▶ It's highly likely that buried in a gym bag or forgotten in the car trunk is a reusable water bottle that's been rinsed, rarely and barely, but never properly scrubbed. So what, it's just water, right? Wrong! It's a bunch of other things now too. The inside of your bottle is like a dirty aquarium. It's "covered in biofilms, clusters of viable microorganisms growing from your mouth's backwashed flora," explains Peter C. Iwen, professor at the University of Nebraska's department of

pathology, microbiology and immunology. A small consolation: "Your own flora doesn't necessarily hurt you."

What can hurt you, however, is any foreign bacteria-maybe you use a dirty barbell, wipe sweat off your lips, then take a drink—that can sneak into the bottle and multiply. A water bottle sitting a few hours in a warm car makes a nice petri dish for bacteria to thrive, and in "just water," there are plenty of nutrients from your backwashed saliva for slimy biofilm to feast upon. A simple wash doesn't clean this out. That's because your bottle has a ton of microscopic crevices for bacteria to hide and grow into mold, which can cause diarrhea, vomiting or allergy symptoms. Porous plastic bottles are the most hospitable to bacteria, so opt for glass or stainless steel instead. But whatever you're drinking from, try to wash it every few days with dish soap or, better yet, 1 part vinegar and 3 parts water.



#### SKIPPING THE SOAP

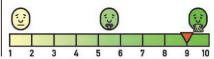
▶ Most of us tend to be fastidious when washing our hands in a public washroom. But at home? Why bother with all that scrubbing? After all, the germs in your bathroom likely belong to you anyway. And you're right, to a point.

"Your immune system is trained to recognize your own microbes and get rid of the rest," says Shannon Manning, associate professor of microbiology and molecular genetics at Michigan State University. But consider that a flushed toilet, when left open, expels invisible particles into the air at more than 6 feet per second. Just assume you're going to get covered in some of that spray.

"If you pick up a pathogen (an organism causing disease) on your hands and then, say, bite your nails or eat a sandwich, you can ingest the pathogen," says Manning. And should that happen and you get sick, "Even microbes you already harbor can balloon if your immune system is busy fighting something else." Hence the necessity of a good wash, preferably with antimicrobial soap. A



simple splash of water is not only insufficient, but might be worse than not washing at all, says Manning, since foreign germs are more likely to stick to wet hands.



#### TINKLING IN THE SHOWER

▶ Relief for secret shower tinklers: Peeing while you're in there is actually pretty natural.

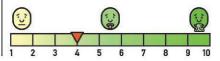
"Warm, running water from the shower stimulates the bladder to want to contract," says Lori Lerner, associate professor and chief of urology at Boston University's Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine. A sudden spasm can force urine from the bladder, and luckily there's no need to fight the inevitable. "In most cases, urine is sterile. It's just electrolytes from your own body and it's going right down the drain," Dr. Lerner says.

But what if you're swimming in a

public pool? OK, yes, other people's pee is a pretty gagworthy thought, though, again, not quite as bad as it sounds.

"Urine in a pool is very, very diluted with tons of chlorine for this exact reason," says Dr. Lerner. Human bodies are leaky, and while technically any bodily fluid could contain disease-causing bacteria, if the risk of pool pee were anything but minuscule, you'd read

about thousands upon thousands of infections daily. Far worse than the chemical-treated pool, adds Dr. Lerner, is a lake filled with fish waste and bacteria. But thanks to nice scenery and nature's good PR, nobody really frets about that.



#### PIMPLE POPPING

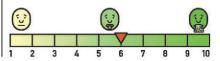


▶ Are you hooked on popping zits? Come on, we're all friends here. After all, whether you're doing it out of boredom or vanity, or for the dopamine hit (gross but true; your brain rewards this bad habit with a flood of happy hormones), you're not alone. The proof: the TV show *Dr. Pimple Popper* and endless TikTok videos.

But before your face ends up resembling an exploded minefield, Idahobased, board-certified dermatologist Dustin Portela wants you to remember this: A popped pimple is basically an open wound where bacteria can sneak

in and cause a highly contagious skin infection, like impetigo, or a yeast-based fungus, like candida. Dr. Portela has seen popped pimples snowball into painful infected abysses requiring antibiotics and surgical drainage.

But good news: The likelihood of this is low. So if you can't keep your fingers off your face, Dr. Portela suggests you scrub up like a surgeon. It takes two to five minutes to carefully scrub the hands and forearms with an antimicrobial soap, according to the National Institute for Health. Even then, Dr. Portela warns, "infections still happen." That's why he suggests you don a pair of latex gloves, and, as soon as you're done, apply a medicated pimple patch to help the picked-at lesion heal more quickly and to keep you from digging at it some more. Because the more you pick, the more likely you'll scar.



#### 5 Expert Tips for Choosing Incontinence Underwear

By Judith Miller

Living with bladder leaks can be challenging, but finding the right incontinence underwear can make a big difference in your comfort and confidence. Here are 5 tips that our experts always look for when shopping for better bladder protection:

- 1. Absorbency: If you tend to have higher absorbency needs, look for "overnight" underwear, whether you plan to use them day or night.

  Because Market's Overnight
  Underwear holds up to 6 cups of liquid, the equivalent of nearly 2 bottles of wine.
- 2. Leak guards: Leak guards are additional pieces of absorbent material that surround the leg cuffs to prevent unwanted leaks. Always look for products with reinforced leak guards.
- 3. Skin-friendly materials: Some incontinence underwear can cause irritation and discomfort, especially for those with sensitive skin. Look for latex-free underwear made from soft, breathable materials. Because Market's pads and underwear are latex-free and sensitive skin-friendly.
- 4. Fit and comfort: Over 50% of leaks are due to incorrect fit. Look for underwear with a snug, but not too tight fit. Top brands will offer underwear with a range of sizes and fits to ensure maximum comfort.

  Because Market offers sizes S to XXL.
- 5. Price: Incontinence underwear can be expensive, so consider the price per piece when shopping for the right product. Some brands will even offer a free pack to try.





## My Penguin Friend

Starring Jean Reno

AN IRRESISTIBLE AND ALTOGETHER adorable true tale about a most unlikely bond. Lonely Brazilian fisherman João Pereira de Souza (Jean Reno) is grappling with tragedy when he spots an oil-drenched penguin in the surf. He rescues the Antarctican, providing baths, shelter, food and a name: Dindim. His wife (Adriana Barraza) doesn't quite understand all the TLC ("Everything is for the penguin!"), but Dindim reignites

de Souza's sense of purpose. The relationship has a touching effect on Dindim too—the plucky bird returns to the ocean for winters but uses his unbelievable GPS abilities to travel 5,000 miles back to his makeshift family every year. In demonstrating how a loving home is universal, it's no surprise that this adventure has riveted the world and earned the bigscreen treatment along the way. (In theaters Aug. 16) —Mara Reinstein



# The Supremes at Earl's All-You-Can-Eat

Starring Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor, Sanaa Lathan and Uzo Aduba

No, we're not referring to the Motown legends. But this drama—which follows three best pals who meet and eat at the titular restaurant—hits plenty of big notes. Our girl group, nicknamed The Supremes, have been inseparable since childhood. As adults, they support each other through ups, downs and arounds. Odette (Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor) learns her hot flashes are cancer symptoms; Clarice (Uzo Aduba) can't decide if she should leave her charming cad of a husband (Russell Hornsby); and Barbara Jean (Sanaa Lathan) turns to alcohol to cope with loss. They dish hard truths and hold court in their favorite booth at Earl's. The film, based on Edward Kelsey Moore's 2013 novel, poignantly depicts the power of meaningful friendship. (Streaming Aug. 23 on Hulu)—MR

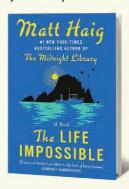


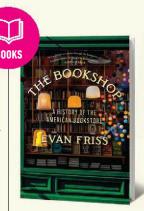
**Pachinko** Starring Youn Yuh-jung

A gripping family epic spanning four generations and half the globe-from colonized 1920s Korea to booming 1980s Japan and New York—returns. Sunia (Youn Yuh-iung). a Korean mother in Japan during WWII, must contend with hard decisions like leaving home and the wealthy Korean man she thought she loved for somewhere with scarcely better treatment, Color-coded subtitles identify languages spoken: English, Korean and Japanese. (Season 2 premieres Aug. 23 on Apple TV+) —Connie Lee

#### The Life **Impossible** By Matt Haig

Literary hitmaker Matt Haig (The Midnight Library) hits the mark once more with The Life Impossible. A letter from a former student prompts retired math teacher Grace Winters to recount the seemingly innocuous act of kindness she extended to a music teacher decades earlier. The good deed nearly forgotten evolves into something unforgettable when Winters is bequeathed a house in Ibiza. As she books a one-way ticket to learn more about her old co-worker's life and death, readers learn more about the baggage Winters tows and can't seem to unpack. —Jenni Latchford





### The Bookshop

**Bv Evan Friss** 

The Bookshop begins as so many things in U.S. history do: with Benjamin Franklin, Each chapter in Evan Friss's account is set in a legendary bookshop, from Franklin's Philadelphia printing house to New York City's iconic Strand to the towering ceilings of Barnes & Noble stores and everywhere in between and beyond. More than glance back at "a history of the American bookstore," as the book's subtitle touts. Friss optimistically turns a page to bookshops' future. Chapters are chronological, but peruse as you would in person: Browse first and see what piques your interest most. —Caroline Fannina



To want something with sufficient fervor is to want it beyond the possibility of ever getting enough.

—Becca Rothfeld, WRITER, IN THE BOOK
ALL THINGS ARE TOO SMALL

We didn't want
to be a bunch of
tough guys. We
would rather have
bigger hearts than
bigger muscles.

—Billie Joe
Armstrong,
MUSICIAN,
IN ESQUIRE

To lead well, you have to care.

—Ava DuVernay,
FILMMAKER,
IN THE GUARDIAN



I don't view each birthday as a lost year of youth, but as a new stage of opportunity.

—Lyn Slater,
FASHION ICON,
IN THE BOOK HOW TO
BE OLD: LESSONS IN
LIVING BOLDLY FROM
THE ACCIDENTAL ICON



#### **POINT TO PONDER**

admired—by aiming right at their strengths. Before, I would run away from their strengths. If a guy had a strong forehand, I would try to hit to his backhand. But now ... I would try to go after his forehand. I tried to beat baseliners from the baseline. I tried to beat the attackers by attacking. I tried to beat the net rushers from the net.

I took a chance by doing that. So why did I do it? To amplify my game and expand my options. You need a whole arsenal of strengths, so if one of them breaks down, you've got something left.

When your game is clicking like that, winning is easy—relatively. Then there are days when you just feel broken. Your back hurts, your knee hurts. Maybe you're a little sick, or scared. But you still find a way to win. And those are the victories we can be most proud of. Because they prove that you can win not just when you are at your best, but especially when you aren't.

Roger Federer, TENNIS CHAMP, TO GRADUATES OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE





#### Fact or Fiction?

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

**1.** The bestselling novel of all time is *The Da Vinci Code*.

FACT: W FICTION: F

2. The harvest moon always occurs in September.

FACT: A FICTION: L

3. A group of parrots is a "pandemonium."

FACT: O FICTION: N

4. The male
U.S. Open champ
wins more prize
money than the
female champ.
FACT: D FICTION:W



**5.** Duct tape shouldn't be used to seal ducts.

FACT: S FICTION: E

6. On average, people get 120 emails each day.



FACT: T FICTION: R

7. More hit songs have the word September in the title than any other month.

FACT: A FICTION: I

**8.** Kansas is the flattest state.

FACT: N FICTION: T

**9.** The White House wasn't always called that.

FACT: E FICTION: G

**BONUS QUESTION** Which type of mindset do hobbies put us in—which in turn helps us feel more relaxed? (Need help? Turn to "How Hobbies Help Us" on page 52.)

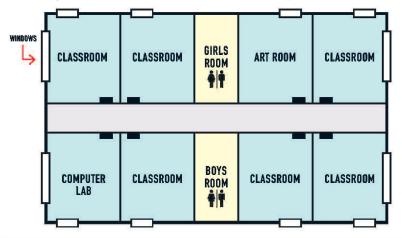
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Answers: 1. Fiction; Don Quixote has sold the most—more than 500 million copies. 2. Fiction; it can occur in October. 3. Fiction; they each win \$3 million. 5. Fact, ironically, 6. Fact, 7. Fact. 8. Fiction; Florida is. (Kanasa ian't even in the top five for flattest states.) 9. Fact; if was known as the Executive Mansion and the President's Palace until 1901, when Teddy Roosevelt had "The White House" engraved on his stationery. Bonus Question: Flow state.

#### Roommates?

**EASY** It's the start of a new school year, and best friends Abigail and Bella are hoping to be in the same homeroom. From the following diagram and clues, determine whether or not they will be.

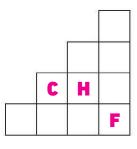
- ♦ Bella's homeroom has windows facing outside on more than one wall.
- ♦ Abigail's homeroom is on the same side of the hallway as the boys bathroom.
- ♦ Neither girl's homeroom is in, across from, or next to a specialized room.



#### **Follow Suit**

**DIFFICULT** Looking at the sequence below, what should the next three symbols be?





#### A-J Fit-In

MEDIUM Insert the letters A to J, one per square, so that no two consecutive letters in alphabetical order are in squares that touch in any way, even at a corner. Three letters have been placed to get you started. Can you complete it?

#### **Spymaster**

MEDIUM Deduce a secret number made of four different digits, 1 through 9. The chart shows three guesses at the number, and a score for each guess using marbles. Any digit that appears in the secret number in the same position as in the guess is scored with a purple marble, and any digit that appears in the secret number in a different position than in the guess is scored with a white marble. Any digit that is not in the secret number does not get a marble. It's up to you to determine which digits are indicated by the marbles. What's the secret number?

1	9	6	3	00
3	5	1	4	000
8	5	6	2	
7	8	3	4	00

#### **Alien Arithmetic**

EASY A spaceship lands in your backyard, and out walk some little green men. One approaches you and explains that his people will conquer your planet—unless you can prove that Earth is home to intelligent life by solving this math problem:

"Our observations," he says, "show that here, half of 12 is 6. But on our planet, it's 8. If the same proportion holds true, what is half of 36?"

What's the answer that saves planet Earth?



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

For answers, turn to PAGE 111.



Pumpkin spice is in the air. To celebrate the arrival of Starbucks' ubiquitous pumpkin spice latte, we're serving up some coffeehouse vocab, on the grounds that even non-java drinkers will get a buzz. So grab your cup and let the answers percolate before turning the page.

#### By Sarah Chassé

#### 1. affogato n.

(ah-foh-'gah-toh)

- A vanilla syrup
- **B** soy cappuccino
- c espresso over ice cream

#### **2. caddy** *n*.

('ka-dee)

- A tea chest
- **B** copper kettle
- c sugar bowl

#### 3. vivify v.

('vi-vuh-fy)

- A pep up
- **B** dust with cinnamon
- c brew in cold water

#### 4. kaffeeklatsch n.

('kaw-fee-klach)

- A German cafe
- **B** informal gathering
- **c** wooden stirrer

#### 5. artisanal adj.

- (ar-'ti-zuh-nuhl)
- A made traditionally
- **B** certified organic
- c fair-trade

#### 6. demitasse n.

('de-mee-tahs)

- A French press
- **B** finger sandwich
- c tiny mug

#### 7. a la carte adj.

- (ah luh 'kart)
- A with milk
  B to-go
- c priced separately

#### **8. boba** n.

('boh-buh)

- A spicy hot chocolate
- B bubble tea
- c fruit infusion

#### 9. biscotto n.

(bi-'skah-toh)

- A junior barista
- **B** outdoor seating area
- c crisp cookie

#### 10. percolate v.

('per-kuh-layt)

- A trickle
- **B** grind
- c caffeinate

#### 11. schmear n.

(shmeer)

- A afternoon slump
- **B** spreadable layer
- c used grounds

#### 12. matcha n.

('mah-chuh)

- A triangular tea bag
- **B** powdered green tea
- c chai latte

#### 13. frappé adj.

(fra-'pay)

- A flavored
- B frothy
- **c** frozen

#### **14. quaker** *n*.

('kway-kr)

- A industrial oven
- **B** decaf drinker
- c defective coffee bean

#### **15. crema** n.

('kre-muh)

- A brown foam
- **B** caramel drizzle
- c hazelnut creamer

#### Call Me Starbuck(s)

In 1971, an English teacher, a history teacher and a writer decided to open a coffee shop in Seattle. But what to call it? They wanted the name to be a nod to early traders transporting beans by boat. One co-founder suggested Pequod, after the ship in Herman Melville's Moby-Dick. When that didn't appeal, the group researched old mining camps in the region, hitting on one called Starbo near Mount Rainier. That brought to mind Starbuck, the Peaquod's first mate. They tacked on an s, and a coffee legend was born.



#### Word Power ANSWERS

#### 1. affogato

(c) espresso over ice cream On her first day in Rome, Heather ordered an after-lunch affogato.

**2. caddy** (A) tea chest Tea was once considered so valuable that it was kept in locked caddies.

**3. vivify** (A) pep up Vivified by two cups of black coffee, Cal was ready to face the day.

#### 4. kaffeeklatsch

(B) informal gathering My gregarious grandma enjoys nothing more than a kaffeeklatsch with friends.

#### 5. artisanal

(A) made traditionally "Our artisanal cheeses

use milk from local farms," the waiter said.

**6. demitasse (c)** tiny mug The word demitasse comes from French, meaning "half-cup."

#### 7. a la carte

(c) priced separately The bakery offers pastries a la carte or in sampler boxes.

8. boba (B) bubble tea An iced drink from Taiwan, boba blends tea with milk, fruit syrup and chewy tapioca balls.

#### 9. biscotto

(c) crisp cookie Why have just one biscotto when you can have three biscotti?

**10. percolate (A)** trickle Rumors about the merger began to percolate through the office.

#### 11. schmear

(B) spreadable layer I enjoy a bagel with a schmear of cream cheese.

#### 12. matcha

(B) powdered green tea Beverages made with matcha have an earthy, grassy taste.

**13. frappé (c)** frozen It's so hot out—let's go to the cafe for a rosé frappé!

#### 14. quaker

(c) defective coffee bean Quakers remain pale even after roasting.

**15. crema (A)** brown foam A well-made espresso has a creamy, bubbly layer of crema on top.

#### **Vocabulary Ratings**

9 & BELOW: Half caff 10-12: Regular 13-15: Double shot



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### **ANSWERS**

#### WHERE, OH WHERE?

(page 112) C. High Point, North Carolina

#### **BRAIN GAMES**

(pages 107-108)

#### Roommates?

The girls are indeed in the same homeroom, in the classroom at the bottom right corner.

#### **Follow Suit**





The first four symbols establish the order of suits: club, diamond, heart, spade. We move through that order sequentially until we loop back around to the club. Then we continue, skipping over one suit at a time, until we again return to the club. We go

through it again, this time skipping over two suits at a time, until we get back to the club. Then we skip over three suits at a time, resulting in back-to-back clubs. We should now skip over four at a time, so the next symbols are diamond, heart, spade.

#### A-J Fit-In

		G
	J	В
C	Н	D
E	A	F

### Spymaster 1432

#### **Alien Arithmetic**

24. What the aliens are calling "half" is what we'd call "two-thirds."

Reader's Digest (ISSN 0034-0375) (USPS 865-820), (CPM Agreement# 40031457), Vol. 204, No. 1200, September 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.

#### WHERE, OH WHERE

**STANDING 36 FEET TALL** and adorned with giant socks, the World's Largest Chest of Drawers honors this area's furniture and hosiery industries. It has undergone a few refinishings since its original 1926 installation, and its current owner is the local university. Where is it? (*Answer on PAGE 111.*)

- A Gardner, Massachusetts
- B Lancaster, Pennsylvania
- G High Point, North Carolina
- D Danbury, Connecticut

