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# Reader's Digest

SEPTEMBER 2020

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**THE KINDNESS  
OF STRANGERS**  
Life-altering Encounters  
of Rare Generosity

**7 Numbers For A  
Healthy Heart**

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**DRAMA IN REAL LIFE**

**The Arrow  
That Saved My  
Life—Twice**

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**The Pill-Free  
Way To  
Boost Your  
Brain**

**INTERVIEW**

**In Conversation  
With Vidya Balan**

INDIA  
TODAY

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## A Doctor's Duty in Today's World

Dr Professor Reddy's article should serve as an eye-opener for all doctors. Unlike in the past, when doctors spent ample time dispensing holistic patient treatment and care, increasingly doctors have become more focused on generating revenue. This has resulted in them adopting a 'hear-not, see-not, care-not' attitude. With this type of health care becoming the norm, hapless patients don't know whom to turn to. Maybe it is too much to ask for an ideal doctor in today's fast-paced world, someone with clinical acumen and compassion, but Dr Reddy's article serves as a timely reminder that there are still exceptionally competent, caring and courteous doctors around us, doing justice to this noble profession.

—PARTHASARATHY MANDADI, *Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh*

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

### **Night Without End**

While a new political order seems to have been established in our country, in which mass violence is legitimized, it is heartening to know that despite the acri-

mony and hatred being fanned by vested interests, humanity still prevails over prejudice. It is my earnest hope that we do not fall prey to fiery speeches, drowning us into senseless

hostility. Thank you, Sanskriti Rajkhowa, for sharing your experience. RAVI CHARLES, *Trichy, Tamil Nadu*

### *Night Without End*

reminded me of a similar incident, when, in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination, riots broke out. My wife and I were caught unawares when a mob of rioters stopped our bus, near Panipat, and refused to let it travel further. It was at the brave intervention of a few sensible young men, who persuaded the goons, that the bus was able to proceed to Delhi.

DR ASHWANI KUMAR MALHOTRA, *Ludhiana*

### **Tracking the Tiger Butcher**

The article by Terrence McCoy is a thrilling account of illicit animal trade. It is really disheartening to learn that the tiger population is dwindling not on account of natural causes but because of illegal trade in these

animals. As in other businesses, here too, the forces of demand ensure supply, pushing the greedy to end the lives of these magnificent beasts.

VASUDEVAN, *Bengaluru*

### **The Woman Who Won a Pot of Gold**

Indu Balachandran's story is not only inspiring, but serves as a lesson in perseverance: Grab every opportunity, don't worry about getting lucky. Like Indu, I love words and relate to the 'middle-class' aspiration of winning consumer contests. I remember how happy I felt when my jokes were published by *Reader's Digest* for the first time. But, I gave up when I was not 'lucky' subsequently. Indu's story reminds us that our own 'never give up' attitude plays a larger role in life than luck or fate.

DEVIKA, *Lucknow*

### **There's Always Room for Kindness**

It is because of people like Koduri Bala Lingam,

Vikas Kumar Jaiswal and Saisri Akondi, that it still rains in the world. Their selfless service to the victims of the lockdown is exemplary and must have earned them several blessings. I made my two children read the story as well, hoping that they imbibe the lesson—give your best to the world and it will come back to you.

SHALINI GERALD,  
*Chennai*

The yeomen service rendered by the three Good Samaritans during the lockdown made for a very interesting read and touched our hearts. There can be no second opinion that the common thread running through them is compassion. If it wasn't for their generous hearts, rising for those in distress would not have been possible. May their tribe increase!

FIONA WALTAIR, *Chennai*

### **Rules of the Job Game: Learn and Upskill**

Most of us have had to suppress our inner

calling to pick vocations which are traditionally viewed as more economically stable. The current pandemic and its trying effects on the job market may be the push that many of us needed to venture into exploring new skills and old hobbies.

This is also the time to devote ourselves to our families, whom we often neglect (or don't spend enough time with). Family can be a great source of strength in bringing about a better 'you' in these testing times—play board games, chat, touch base with long-lost relatives and friends. There are numerous things one can do apart from building a career; focus on your inner self—get your emotional quotient in place!

GAURAV NIRVIKAR  
SRIVASTAVA, *Noida*

Write in at [editor.india@rd.com](mailto:editor.india@rd.com). The best letters discuss RD articles, offer criticism, share ideas. Do include your phone number and postal address.

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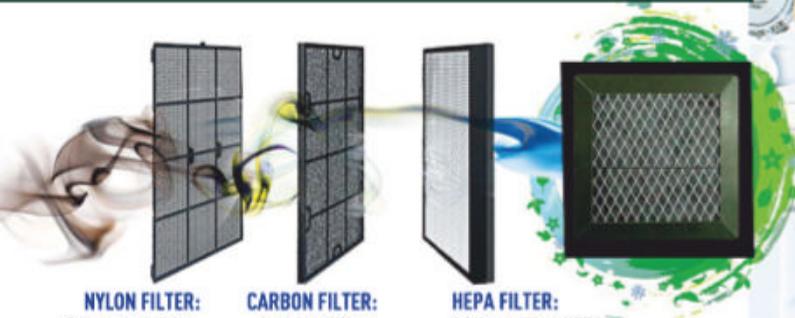
With growing air pollution & increase in the risk of health hazards, it is important to use something which keeps you and your loved ones healthy & your kitchen pollution free. Faber's 3 in 1 Hood with Aerostation technology keeps you sweat free, lets you breathe pure and makes you love your kitchen.

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# The Answer is Not in a Bottle

*There are more effective and cheaper ways to give your brain a boost*

BY Jane E. Brody

ADAPTED FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

**A**TENTION ALL consumers seeking to protect brain health: You can save hundreds a year by ignoring the unproven claims for anti-dementia supplements, and instead focusing on a lifestyle long linked to better mental and physical well-being.

How many of these purported brain boosters have you already tried: ginkgo biloba, coenzyme Q10, huperzine A, caprylic acid and coconut oil, coral calcium, among others? The Alzheimer's Association says that, with the possible exception of omega-3 fatty acids, all that were properly tested thus far were found wanting.

It's very appealing to think you can maintain your cognitive powers by



swallowing a few pills a day. But you'd only be fooling yourself and wasting precious money.

"No known dietary supplement prevents cognitive decline or dementia," Dr Joanna Hellmuth stated emphatically in *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)*, in January 2019.

Dr Hellmuth, a neurologist at the University of California, San Francisco, Memory and Aging Center, reminds consumers that supplement manufacturers do not have to test their products for effectiveness or safety. Most are promoted by testimonials that appeal to people worried about developing dementia.

"It's a confusing landscape," Dr Hellmuth said in an interview. "Lots of patients and families see bold claims in newspaper ads, on the Internet and on late-night TV that various supplements can improve memory."

Such a memory statement is legal in the US under the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, as long as the product is not claimed to prevent, treat or cure dementia or Alzheimer's disease. But too often, people assume incorrectly that anything said to support memory would ward off dementia.

Some companies try to sneak illegal claims past government watchdogs. Eventually they're likely to get caught, but not always before unsuspecting consumers waste hard-earned dollars on useless, possibly hazardous and

often costly supplements.

In February last year, the Food and Drug Administration issued 12 warning letters and five advisory letters to companies the agency said were illegally marketing more than 58 dietary supplements that claim to prevent, treat or cure Alzheimer's disease or other serious conditions.

## **IT'S NICE TO THINK YOU CAN KEEP COGNITIVE POWERS WITH A FEW PILLS. BUT YOU'D ONLY BE FOOLING YOURSELF AND WASTING MONEY.**

Of course, supplements are only one arm of the memory-enhancing industry. There are also myriad videos, games, puzzles and programs currently being marketed.

Some of these products may be helpful up to a point. Researchers at the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona, reported in *JAMA Neurology* that older people who engage in mentally stimulating activities like games, crafts and computer use have a lower risk of developing mild cognitive impairment, often a precursor to dementia.

The researchers, led by Dr Yonas E. Geda, a psychiatrist and behavioural neurologist at Mayo, followed nearly 2,000 cognitively normal people 70 years or older for an average of four years. After adjusting the results

for sex, age and education level, they found that computer use decreased the participants' risk of cognitive impairment by 30 per cent, engaging in crafts decreased it by 28 per cent and playing games decreased it by 22 per cent.

Dr Geda said that those who performed such activities at least once or twice a week experienced less cognitive decline than those who did the same activities at most only three times a month.

Also helpful is if players participate with other people—social engagement has repeatedly been shown to benefit health and longevity.

## SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT HAS REPEATEDLY BEEN SHOWN TO BENEFIT HEALTH AND LONGEVITY.

For the most part, playing so-called brain-training games can make you better at the games themselves, but the benefits don't necessarily translate into improved performance in other activities.

What really works to support brain health as you age? Start with the foods that can help to keep your heart healthy: A Mediterranean-style diet replete with fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, fish, low-fat dairy and olive oil. In a major

study, seniors who adopted such a diet and limited their salt intake had a 35 per cent lower risk for cognitive decline as they aged, and strict adherence to the diet cut the risk by more than 50 per cent.

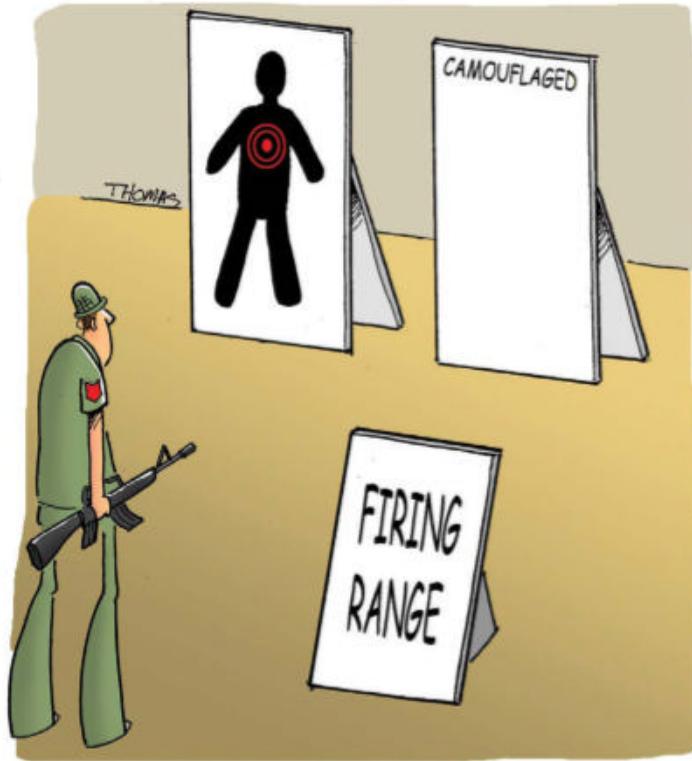
At the same time, avoid or strictly limit foods that can have negative effects on the brain, like red and especially processed meats, cheese, butter, fried foods, pastries, sugars and refined carbohydrates like white rice and white bread. This diet would also reduce the risk of high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes, both of which can foster cognitive decline or dementia.

In a Chinese study of 17,700 older adults free of dementia, those who consumed at least three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruits a day were significantly less likely to develop dementia over the next six years.

An earlier Chinese study of 15,589 people, aged 65 and older, found that those who participated in daily aerobic and mind-body exercises were significantly less likely to develop dementia than those who did only stretching and toning exercises. And a 2019 Swedish study that followed 800 midlife women for 44 years found that engaging in physical activity reduced the risk of dementia by 56 per cent.

Finally, don't skimp on sleep, which gives the brain a chance to form new memories. Researchers suggest seven to eight hours a night. **R**

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HUMOUR *in*  
**UNIFORM**

**An Army buddy** and some other raw recruits were waiting to be sent on detail. As the officer in charge (OIC) read off their names, each soldier jumped up and left the room for their new station, except for a guy named Jones. The OIC called out,

“Jones ... Jones ...”  
but no one answered.

After he’d called all the names, there was still one soldier left.

“Are you Jones?”  
the OIC asked.

“Yes,” the soldier replied, happy to be recognized. “But everyone calls me Bubba.”

—RICK SAGE

**We were drilling** with rifles for the first time when our master sergeant caught one of the

cadets chewing gum.

“Cadet!” he shouted. “I want you to run to the end of the field and throw your gum over the fence!”

We were all slightly bemused when he came back still chewing gum but with no rifle.

—GUNAR GRUBAUMS

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

CARTOON BY BILL THOMAS

DEPARTMENT OF WIT



# Are You Too Boring for Therapy?

*Six tips for spicing up the relationship*

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BY *Cassie Barradas*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Steven Twigg*

**W**ORRIED THAT YOUR dull problems and weak-sauce neuroses are putting your therapist to sleep? Spent yet another tedious session talking about your mother? *Again?*

Don't fear: Therapy is about self-improvement. Yes, your counsellor is in this field because she wants to make a positive difference in the lives of others, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't

make her day positively different. This helpful guide can help you spice up your sessions—and self-actualize in ways neither of you have expected!

### **SHARE YOUR INTERESTS**

She may know nearly everything about your relationships with your family and friends. But, does she know about your relationship to the hit 1990s television series *Friends*? While it's true that your therapist pursued her career path to help others navigate life's toughest circumstances, it's also true that an hour spent determining whether you're a Ross or a Phoebe is a valuable psychological exploration that says a lot about both of your capabilities.

### **DRESS FOR THE OCCASION**

Your therapist may have a master's degree in psychology, but you can still wow her with your mastery of fashion. A nine-foot velvet cape makes a powerful statement without you having to use any words at all.

### **ADD SOME MYSTERY**

Even the most professional relationship needs the element of surprise. Yes, it's been wonderful having your therapist help you unpack your emotions every Thursday afternoon. But mixing things up with a Monday session will have her saying, "Did your schedule change?"

You can eagerly reply, "No, it did not. I just thought this would make things more interesting for you," to which she will doubtless respond, "I'm happy to

schedule appointments during all available work hours." Exhilarating!

### **INCORPORATE SURPRISES**

Saying "thank you for helping me to see my worth" is so boring, and your kind, professional therapist deserves more. Try instead, "I bought a duck farm, but I'm not sure what to name all the ducks." I assure you, she has never heard this line before, and that's a much better thank you.

### **CHANGE YOUR MAKE-UP ROUTINE**

It's really amazing how your therapist has helped you make boundaries for yourself. You can reflect that by literally drawing a line on one side of your face with a thick black Sharpie and not ever acknowledging it. She probably gets pretty tired of seeing all her other clients' faces without lines drawn on them. This is sure to leave a mark on your face—but also in her heart.

### **GO ON ADVENTURES TOGETHER**

So many of your appointments involve talking about the same locations: work, home, your innermost self. While it might be wildly inappropriate to literally travel with your therapist, a bit of emotional sightseeing could be just what you need to keep things fresh. Use mixed metaphors to let her know that 'This early bird has bigger fish to fry'. The biggest adventure of all will be figuring out what you even meant by that! **R**



(Left) Robin S. Pukhram; (right) Inside the hostel built for the children

**GOOD NEWS**  
FOR A  
*Better Planet*

## A TEACHERS' DAY SPECIAL

### No Mountain Too High

There's a special reason Robin S. Pukhram, principal of St Stephen English School, and his colleagues, from Churachandpur, Manipur, travel 120 kms through hilly forests to reach remote villages in the state's interiors—parent-teacher meetings! Many of the students attending St Stephen live in these hard-to-reach spots. Reaching the school for a meeting requires expensive, private means of conveyance, so the school staff saves them the trouble and cost by making the trip themselves. Pukhram has been conducting these meetings



Retired science teacher  
P. K. Vinod Kumar

PICTURE COURTESY: (LEFT) THE BETTER INDIA; (RIGHT) YOUTUBE

in around 25 villages over the course of one week, since 2018. Having taken charge of the school's administration in 2016, he has since built a hostel for underprivileged children as well, offering them low-cost accommodation. His extraordinary efforts have led to a huge uptick in the student population—from 50 in 2015 to more than 545 pupils today.

## Tablets for the Needy

Online classes have been gaining momentum, but the inability to afford devices that can access learning platforms threatens to leave children from needy families behind. P. K. Vinod Kumar, 55, a retired science teacher from Kozhikode, decided to help and offered up his pension money to buy 18 digital tablets for underprivileged kids to continue learning. Generosity is not new to Kumar—during his tenure at Kodal Government U. P. School, he provided school supplies and study material to students from poor families, and set up an annual cash prize for the school's best-performing student. "Growing up in a middle-class family, I have reached where I am in life with the help of a lot of people; now it's time for me to pay it back," Kumar is quoted as saying.

## Classes through COVID

When his village was declared a COVID-19 containment zone in



A still from Kifayat Hussain's lesson video

May this year, Kifayat Hussain, a maths teacher at Lamdon Model Senior Secondary School in Leh, worried that he might be exposing his students to the infection. He got himself tested despite being asymptomatic and his results came back positive. Stuck in an isolation centre at Leh's Maha Bodhi hospital, he wondered how his pupils would manage in his absence. So, he used his time during treatment and quarantine to begin online classes for 9th and 10th grade students via videoconferencing platforms and pre-recorded videos uploaded on his YouTube channel. The hospital, school and Leh administration offered great support to help him conduct his daily hour-long classes over Zoom successfully. "Teaching is not just my job, but my passion. When I take classes, I feel refreshed. I feel like I am fulfilling my purpose in life. I couldn't let the virus take [that]," he says in a report by *Outlook*. **R**

—COMPILED BY ISHANI NANDI

*It Happens*  
**ONLY IN INDIA**



**Wife:** "Just wanted to let you know that you have to help me with cooking and doing the dishes while you are 'working from home'"

**Show me the money**

Self-styled godman Nithyananda—whose lurid preoccupations have earned him a blue corner notice from Interpol—has been a busy man while on the run. While allegedly hiding somewhere in South America, the guru graced the world with an appearance on You-

Tube on the "auspicious Ganesh Chaturthi day" to make a deeply material announcement—the launch of the Reserve Bank of Kailasa, and the official currency of his 'Hindu Nation' Kailasa, the Kailashian dollar. The fugitive also announced that his country signed a Memorandum of Understanding with

another nation to host his bank. His divinity is questionable, but no one can accuse him of underutilizing his borrowed freedom.

Source: youtube.com

**Till death do us part**

Karnataka industrialist, Srinivas Murthy, put his undying love for his wife, Madhavi, on

display for the world to see—quite literally. The bereaved husband installed a lifelike silicone statue of his deceased wife to grace his (should we say their?) new home. The guests at the house-warming were stunned to see Madhavi, resplendent in a pink saree, playing lady of the house, sitting on a sofa, smiling genially. Murthy missed his wife terribly and couldn't bear moving into the new home that she had so lovingly designed but hadn't been able to see built. While the loss of a partner is tragic, this mechanism for processing grief is one for the books.

Source: *ndtv.com*

### **Fight, or else flight**

Finding Mr Perfect may be easier than living with one, or that's what this woman from Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, claimed. Complaining that her husband of 18 months never picked a fight, and assiduously helped her with household chores, she sought divorce in the Sharia court. She



**Srinivas Murthy, with his beloved wife's statue**

was sick of a life where her husband was suffocating her with “too much” love. The court refused her divorce plea. What were the husband's thoughts? He doesn't think he has done anything wrong. He was, after all, just trying to be the perfect husband.

Source: *indiatoday.in*

### **S-L-O-W**

The Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, had to wait a whole year before taking possession of an aerospace horizontal autoclave. Wonder why? Because the 74-wheeler travelling from Nashik, Maharashtra, carrying it moved only five kms

per day. The typical travel time for this distance—1,700 kms—for a truck is a maximum of seven days, but this behemoth had several proverbial mountains to climb: pot-holes to be repaired, overgrown branches pruned, electric poles removed, traffic cleared to make way for it. We're on the fence—marvel at the inefficiency or laud the patience of those helming the operation?

Source: *hindustantimes.com* 

—COMPILED BY NAOREM ANUJA

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

## POINTS TO PONDER

I believe that open criticism of any institution is necessary in a democracy ... higher principles must trump routine obligations ... saving the constitutional order must come before personal and professional niceties ...

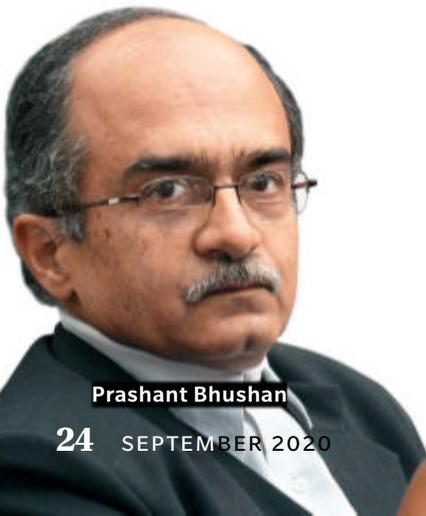
Prashant Bhushan, *lawyer*

**... Going high does not mean putting on a smile and saying nice things when confronted by ... cruelty. Going high means taking the harder path ... standing fierce against hatred while remembering that we are one nation ... we've got to find a way to live together and work together across our differences.**

Michelle Obama, *former first lady of USA*

No matter what your first language, you should treasure it all your life. If it happens not to be standard English, and if it shows itself when you write standard English, the result is usually delightful, like a very pretty girl with one eye that is green and one that is blue.

Kurt Vonnegut, *author*



Prashant Bhushan



Michelle Obama



Kurt Vonnegut

So why would 'outstanding' youngsters be interested in [teaching as a] career choice? Linked to this is the oft-repeated idea of 'passion' amongst teachers, as if passion alone will see teachers through and improve the quality of education.

Disha Nawani, *academic*

**Will the deepening of the decolonisation project in higher education necessarily ensure the liberal values of academic freedom, lack of governmental intervention in the academic and administrative matters of universities? The experience, so far, is bitter.**

Maidul Islam, *political scientist*

The problem isn't just gender-based violence, it's also the violence of gender itself. How do we get people to recognize that we are worth more? ... That we are worth more than being reduced to our bodies ... to language—that our worth is so enormous that we don't have the laws, policies, states or ways of being that will actually do justice to that?

Alok Vaid-Menon, *writer and performance artist*

FROM LEFT: TISS.EDU, CSSCAL.ACADEMIA.EDU, ALOK VAID MENON'S FACEBOOK



Disha Nawani

Maidul Islam

Alok Vaid-Menon

**BETTER LIVING**

# Say Goodbye to Procrastinating

*If you've made a resolution to stop stalling on to-dos, read this—now*

—  
BY *Lisa Fields*



**LOOKING AT HIS** pile of unpaid bills always makes Giuseppe Del Giudice feel uneasy. More often than not, Del Giudice leaves his paperwork undone and sweeps the floor or watches TV instead, waiting until the last moment to write the monthly checks. Sometimes he incurs late fees because of his habit of putting things off, but in many ways the emotional toll is worse. "The longer the bills go unpaid," says Del Giudice, 58, "the more my anxiety soars."

Everyone procrastinates. "It's part of the human condition," says procrastination researcher Tim Pynchyl, a psychology professor at Carleton University, Canada. "One of the ways we cope is avoidance, and that's what procrastination comes down to: We want to feel good now. The way to do that is avoid the task."

You can procrastinate on nearly anything, even enjoyable tasks such as planning a vacation. "Some people procrastinate cleaning. Some people procrastinate by cleaning," says Piers Steel, a management professor at the University of Calgary, Canada.

"One that almost everyone procrastinates on is their wills," says Steel. "Seventy to 80 per cent of people, when they pass away, have no will or an out-of-date or incomplete will. It leads to terrible situations." But death isn't actually the ultimate avoidance trigger. Research has shown that the top tasks people delay are cleaning, advancing their careers, taking care of their health

and planning their finances.

At the end of the day—or month!—most people get their tasks done on time, but around 20 per cent are chronic procrastinators at home and at work.

One big factor for them is fear of failure, of not living up to expectations. Kelli Saginak, a 57-year-old functional health coach from Wisconsin, procrastinated about looking for a new job for years. That inability to take action only confirmed her belief that she would never do any better. "It's totally fear of judgement," says Saginak. "If I don't take the risk, decide or commit, I don't have to face the judgment. Yet it's simply me judging myself."

Some people embrace procrastination, believing that they thrive under pressure. But researchers have debunked that notion. "I did an experiment several years ago, putting procrastinators under restrictions of time," says Joseph Ferrari, a psychology professor at DePaul University, USA. "They did worse than non-procrastinators, but they thought they did better. They made more errors. They took longer."

Whatever the motivation (or lack thereof), procrastination is usually not going to be good for you. Delaying a diet or exercise programme may increase your risk of heart disease. Not having seen the doctor when your illness was easier to treat may shorten your life. Just thinking about what you haven't done may cause discomfort.

“Procrastinators experience higher levels of stress, both from leaving things to the last minute and from their own negative and self-critical feelings about their procrastination,” says Fuschia Sirois, a psychology lecturer at the University of Sheffield, England. “Some of the research has shown that this stress increases their vulnerability for catching colds and experiencing digestion issues, insomnia, migraines and muscle tension.”

One of the most commonly procrastinated activities: going to bed. The excuses are usually the same: ‘I deserve to unwind’ or ‘I want to rescue the day by doing some of the things I didn’t get done earlier.’

But bedtime procrastination can lead to sleep deprivation, which in turn can bring about obesity, heart disease and

many other health issues.

There’s one bit of good news: People tend to procrastinate less as they age. “As you grow older, the illusion of our immortality does get stripped away,” Steel says. “It becomes clearer: How many summers do we have left? 10? 15? They’re really finite. What are you going to do with each of those summers?”

For those of us in need of motivation, the best advice might be to think small.

“We used to believe behaviours follow attitude, but if you can prime the pump with a little bit of progress, that motivates you,” Pychyl says. So if you have been procrastinating on starting an exercise routine, just put on your walking shoes. If you’ve been putting off a work project, reread your boss’s notes about it.

Next, try sending yourself signals to prompt action. For instance, you might put your lights on a timed dimmer switch to encourage a consistent bedtime. Joel Anderson, a philosophy researcher-lecturer at Utrecht University, Netherlands, crafted an experiment around this concept, and it worked on most of his subjects. “They formed an intention—‘When the lights start to dim, I’ll start going to bed,’” Anderson says.

Finally, reward yourself for each step you take toward your goal. After you’ve gone to the gym, take a relaxing bath. After you’ve paid the bills, watch your favourite TV show. (But don’t try to convince yourself it will work the other way around!) **R**

## THERE’S ONE BIT OF GOOD NEWS: PEOPLE TEND TO PROCRASTINATE LESS AS THEY AGE.



FOOD

# Green Box of Goodness

*The magical health benefits of green tea*

BY Mohini Mehrotra

One of the most popular beverages worldwide, green tea is immensely sought after for its powerhouse properties. Here's why green tea should earn pride of place on your health-and-beauty shelf.

**Sip on wellness:** Green tea naturally contains the highest amounts of flavonoids, phytonutrients that help improve heart health. Research points to its multiple health benefits, such as its anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antiviral properties and cholesterol-lowering effects.

**Soothe your nerves:** Studies show that one cup of this antioxidant-rich brew can help calm the nerves, reduce anxiety and improve alertness. This is



due to the presence of the amino acid L-theanine, which has a therapeutic effect on the mind and body.

**Drop kilos:** Rich in caffeine and catechin, a type of antioxidant, green tea is known to rev up our metabolism and aid weight loss. Various studies also suggest that green tea helps cultivate good bacteria in the gut. Drinking it on a regular basis offers health benefits that significantly lower the risk of obesity in the long run.

**Turn back time:** Green tea's anti-ageing properties are great for skin. Here's a DIY recipe for how you can use it for your at-home beauty regimen: **Cleanser:** Empty out a used green tea bag and mix the loose leaves with a tablespoon of face cleanser or wash. Apply on your face and neck and leave on for about 10–15 minutes. Gently scrub and then rinse to remove.

**Toner:** Steep a few green tea bags and lemon juice in hot water. Add a few drops of tea-tree essential oil once the infusion cools. Store it in a spray bottle and spritz on your face once or twice a day for skin that looks instantly refreshed. A single batch should last around three days. **R**

# 13 THINGS

## Get a Healthy Home

BY Jody L. Rohlena



**M**OST OF us have spent more time at home recently than we ever imagined possible. Maybe you took the opportunity to clean, or maybe you plan to do it ... tomorrow. These tips can help make your domicile better for your body and your mind.

**1** Think about keeping your home clean the minute you walk in—literally. Take off your shoes at your door. A University of Arizona study found that the average shoe harbours nearly 4,21,000 different bacteria, including *Escherichia coli* and *Streptococcal* bacteria.

Pesticides, tar, lead, mould and cleaning chemicals can also get tracked into your home via your shoes. Leave a pair of slippers by the front door.

**2** Natural cleaners are great, and they can also be surprising. Can't find bleach? Try vodka! High-alcohol vodka (at least 120 proof) makes an excellent disinfectant. So if you have some vodka you're not planning to drink, mix it with an equal amount of water, put it in a spray bottle and use it to freshen your sheets and smelly gym clothes.

**3** Even if you think you've disinfected everything, you might have overlooked some germ magnets. One notorious offender: toothbrush holders, which need rinsing with soap and water daily. Another culprit: kitchen sponges, which are so unsanitary, they've been banned from restaurant kitchens.

**4** Portable ultraviolet (UV) lights are a highly touted germ-killer. Hospitals use powerful UVC light to disinfect rooms, as it can kill viruses (possibly even the new coronavirus). But beware: Not all home disinfecting systems use UVC, and some UV lights can quickly burn your skin.

**5** If the walls in your home feel as if they're closing in, maybe it's time to freshen them up with a new coat of paint. Studies have shown that colour can influence your mood. Researchers at the University of British Columbia found that blue boosts creativity, while red increases attention to detail.

**6** Another mood booster: Work near a window. In a small study, volunteers worked from noon to 8 p.m. in a room lit primarily by daylight or one lit primarily by artificial light. By the

end of the second day, those who had worked in the sunlit room were less sleepy and performed better on cognitive performance tests.

**7** Don't forget to clean the air in your home too. The gold standard is a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter, which are efficient though rather pricey. The US Department of Energy requires that they remove 99.97 per cent of pollutants and particles in the air. Portable HEPA filters can clean a single room or the entire house.

**8** There are cheaper ways to clean the air—start by cracking a window. Indoor air can have two to five times more pollutants than outdoor air. Cleaning products can produce irritating, even hazardous, chemicals. But if you suffer from seasonal allergies, be mindful of the trade-offs.

**9** Himalayan salt lamps are pretty, but there is no proof that they purify the air by emitting negative ions, as some of these products claim. That said, you can get mood-boosting negative ions via fresh air at the beach, in the mountains or after a rainstorm.

**10** Speaking of salt: It's a surprisingly good cleaning agent. Sprinkle some table salt and baking soda on your grimy stove top and wipe with a wet cloth. Use a teaspoonful with some water or a little oil to clean a cast-iron pan. For extra help with copper, slather on a layer of

ketchup before the salt, then scrub and rinse.

**11** Many viruses don't spread as well in moist air as they do in the cold, dry months. One easy solution for the winter: using a humidifier. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention advises against cool-mist humidifiers, which can harbour bacteria if they aren't cleaned regularly.

Old-fashioned steam humidifiers are best. But too much humidity can worsen respiratory problems and encourage the growth of dust mites, mildew as well as mould. The ideal humidity level, especially for sleeping, is 40 to 60 per cent.

**12** Even 'good' municipal water contains small amounts of lead and chlorine. Consider a filter, one that attaches to your kitchen faucet or is inserted in a pitcher, rather than resorting to bottled water. In a test of 10 bestselling bottled waters, Environmental Working Group researchers found mixtures of eight contaminants, including bacteria, fertilizers and industrial chemicals.

**13** Here's a cleaning tip from the experts at *Family Handyman*: Change the filters in your air-conditioning unit or furnace to get a jump on allergy season. **R**



### To Your Health!

The ultimate summer drink, the gin and tonic, first became popular in 19th-century India—as a malaria cure. Quinine, a bitter herb that prevents the disease, was part of the carbonated tonic water patented in 1858, and British colonists soon concocted the G&T as a way to take their daily medicine. Winston Churchill himself once said, “The gin and tonic drink has saved more Englishmen’s lives and minds, than all the doctors in the Empire.”

# LAUGH LINES

**The most judgemental aquatic animal is probably the seal of disapproval.**

—[@WheelTod](#)

**People freak out** because of sharks in the ocean. News flash: That's where they live! If you see them at Chipotle, then we have a problem.

—[@bigkefd](#)

**I'm jealous** of turtles. They can go home whenever they want.

—[@3sunzzz](#)

**Lobsters would** be proud of themselves if they knew how expensive they were.

—[@MegsDeAngelis](#)

## Shore Things

**I've never been** more disappointed than when I found out the Miami Dolphins football team was made up entirely of people.

—[@SamGrittner](#)

**'Hermit crab'** describes me twice.

—[@lisaxy424](#)



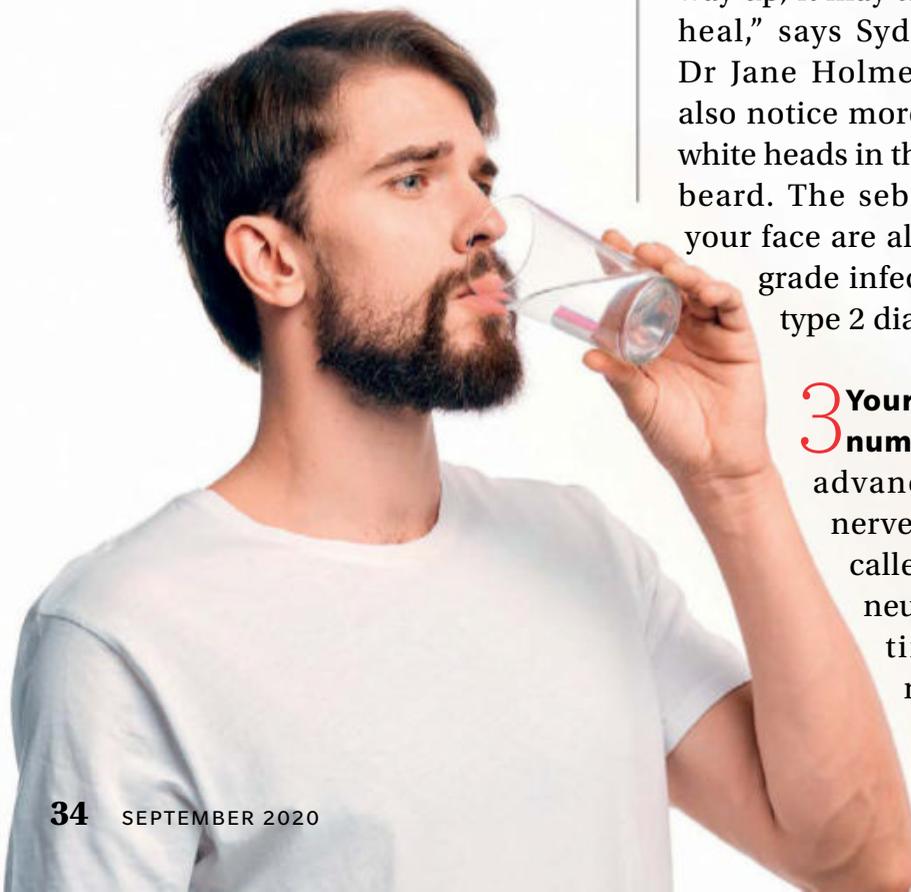
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## HEALTH

*Warning signs men should not ignore*

# 7 Diabetes Symptoms Every Man Must Know

BY *Jessica Migala*  
AND *Kathy Buchanan*



**1 You're so thirsty** Excessive thirst is common with type 2 diabetes—in fact, you may feel that no amount of water can quench your thirst. That's due to rising blood glucose levels: excess sugar builds up in your bloodstream forcing your kidneys to work harder to filter and absorb it; if they can't keep up, they ramp up urine production. You'll pass urine more, which can potentially lead to dehydration, so you'll want to drink more. If you notice that you're running to the bathroom all day or are excessively thirsty (or dealing with a dry mouth), talk to your doctor.

**2 Shaving nicks don't heal quickly** A tiny cut may seem to linger forever. "When your sugars are on their way up, it may take longer for a cut to heal," says Sydney endocrinologist Dr Jane Holmes-Walker. "You may also notice more shaving bumps and white heads in the hair follicles in your beard. The sebaceous oil glands in your face are also vulnerable to low-grade infections when you have type 2 diabetes."

**3 Your hands and feet are numb and tingly** A more advanced complication is nerve damage, a condition called peripheral diabetic neuropathy. You may feel tingling or pins and needles in your feet, pain or numbness.

You may also get a sensation that, for some, feels like walking on cotton wool or on stones, for others. Holmes-Walker says that it presents in a 'stocking-glove' pattern. "It happens first where your socks go on, and it may occur in your fingertips much later," she says.

## ONE IN FOUR PEOPLE WITH TYPE 2 DIABETES EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION WHILE ONE IN SIX CAN EXPERIENCE ANXIETY

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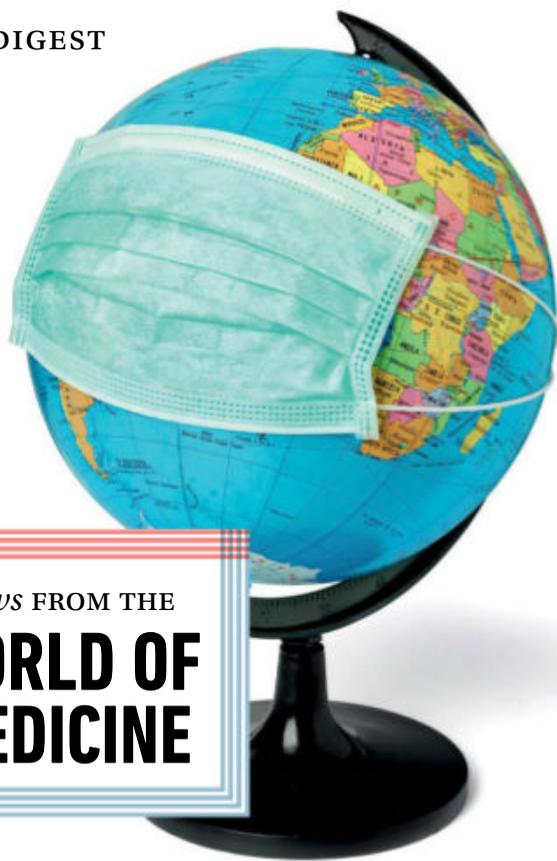
**4 The tip of your penis is red and swollen** Among the many warning signs of type 2 diabetes are erectile dysfunction and a condition called balanitis. "This is most commonly due to an excess of candida, a normal resident on the skin which increases with high blood glucose levels," says Holmes-Walker. If you experience swelling of the foreskin and tip of the penis, any pain or discharge, see your doctor. They will instruct you on the best way to keep the area clean and may recommend an antifungal or antibiotic cream depending on the source of the problem.

**5 Your mood is low** Of all the problems triggered by diabetes, mood disorders are notorious. One

study found that one in four people with type 2 diabetes experience depression and one in six experience anxiety. Blood glucose balance is important for maintaining a stable mood. In a 2016 US study, diabetes was associated with increased odds of depression in older men. The longer the person had been diagnosed with diabetes, the more likely they were to suffer from depression.

**6 You're seeing 'floaters'** Although diabetes can damage eyes, it's usually not until diabetes is more advanced that you start experiencing symptoms. Over time, high blood glucose damages blood vessels in the retina, causing them to bleed and leading to diabetic retinopathy. You may notice black floating spots dotting your field of vision, and you may also have blurred vision. It's important to have a dilated eye exam as diabetes is a leading cause of preventable blindness.

**7 Your gums are bleeding** Holmes-Walker says people with diabetes are three times more likely to develop periodontitis—an infection that damages gums and can lead to tooth loss—than those without diabetes. Red, swollen and bleeding gums are common signs of the condition. It's important to see a dentist to get this under control, since the infection also works the other way—gum problems can increase blood glucose and lead to diabetes. **R**



News FROM THE  
**WORLD OF  
MEDICINE**

## **DISTASTE FOR VEGGIES MIGHT BE GENETIC**

Do you (or your kids) really, truly hate broccoli? Good news: It's not your fault. Researchers have found that as many as 25 per cent of people carry a gene that makes cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cabbage, brussels sprouts and others) taste bitter. Unsurprisingly, these people generally eat fewer veggies. (They also tend to dislike coffee and dark chocolate.) If this sounds like you, don't give up on produce altogether and miss out on the health benefits. Instead, try sweeter veggies such as carrots and beets, which aren't affected by the gene.

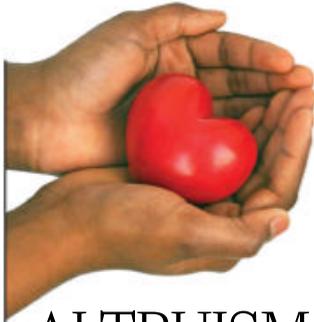
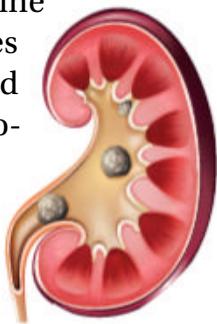
## **Counting Steps and Beating Lung Cancer**

In a recent study, 50 lung cancer patients wore step counters to measure their activity. Those who had been the least active had the worst outcomes once chemoradiation began: 50 per cent of them required hospitalization during treatment, and 55 per cent died within 18 months. Only 9 per cent of those who were more active needed to be hospitalized and fewer than 25 per cent passed away. Earlier, the same researchers found that patients often walk less during treatment, "an indicator that [they were] at high risk for hospitalization within the next few days," said the study's lead author. "If someone's step counts decrease dramatically—say, from 5,000 to 2,000 steps a day—that could be critical in identifying who needs extra care."

## Possible New Treatment for Kidney Stones

Researchers have identified an approach they believe will help patients with kidney stones pass them faster and with less pain. In a lab dish, they exposed cells from human ureters (the tubes that connect the kidneys to the bladder) to 18 different drugs and found two that were most effective in relaxing the cells: nifedipine, currently used to treat high blood pressure, and a rho kinase inhibitor, currently used to treat glaucoma. In animal tests, injecting these two medications together nearly eliminated painful ureteral contractions.

Next, the researchers hope to test the treatment in humans to determine what doses are needed to help stones pass faster.



## ALTRUISM FIGHTS PAIN

Helping others makes you feel better about yourself—and it can also help you feel better physically. A series of experiments found that people giving blood to earthquake victims said the needle hurt less than those getting blood tests did; volunteers who helped migrant children experienced less discomfort when their hands were immersed in cold water than those who hadn't volunteered; and cancer patients who cleaned up for others reported less pain than those who cleaned their own spaces. Researchers theorize that altruism tempers negative experiences by giving you a sense of control and meaning.

## Statins May Help Prevent Glaucoma

Many patients who are prescribed statins to lower their cholesterol don't continue with them because of misconceptions about their risks and a failure to appreciate the potential benefits—even those beyond cardiovascular care. For instance, a study with more than 1,30,000 participants showed that for each 20 mg/dL increase in total cholesterol, glaucoma risk increased by seven per cent, possibly due to impaired blood flow to the optic nerve. But people who lowered their cholesterol levels by using statins for five years or longer had a 21 per cent lower risk of developing glaucoma. By itself, glaucoma protection isn't sufficient reason to take statins, but knowing they might spare you from eye problems could help motivate you to stay the course. **R**



# Common Pet Blunders

*Why you should never  
choose a pet based on  
appearance and more*

BY Dr Katrina Warren

**M**OST PET OWNERS do their best to provide excellent care for their four-legged friends. But even the most well-intentioned of owners can make mistakes. Veterinarian Dr Katrina Warren shares her advice about some of the mistakes pet owners can make and aspects to be careful about.

## **1** Buying a pet online

Buying a pet online is risky because you will have absolutely no idea about the conditions the pet was raised in or its health. You should aim to see the puppy or kitten in the place it was born, preferably while they are still with their mother.



When pets become bored they are more likely to create their own fun.

Ensure the premises are clean and the puppies or kittens are friendly and well-cared-for. Consider adopting a pet from a welfare shelter as an alternative. You should always be prepared to wait and travel to find the right pet.

## **2** Choosing the wrong pet for your lifestyle

You should never choose a dog or cat based on appearance, or because you saw that breed in a movie. Be realistic about how much time and space you have, how much exercise you can provide, the amount of money you're prepared to spend on care and grooming and how much

time the pet will be alone each day. The energy level of the pet is important—some owners want a dog to take out jogging, while others want a lapdog to watch TV with. Take time to find the right pet for your lifestyle.

### 3 Not keeping cats indoors

We all want to keep our pets safe and healthy. It's a fact that keeping cats indoors increases their lifespan by reducing the potential incidence of fighting with other animals as well as possible car accidents. Most cats will live very contentedly indoors if they have plenty to do.

Consider enriching the home environment with a climbing tree, scratching post, toys, cat grass and access to a view.

### 4 Boredom

All pets need an environment that allows them to express their natural behaviour. When pets become bored they are more likely to create their own fun, often resulting in destructive behaviour such as chewing, digging, barking, clawing furniture, etc. It's important that pets receive adequate exercise and mental stimulation.

Offering safe chew toys and food-dispensing toys gives dogs an outlet for chewing behaviour and can help alleviate stress. Give your pet as much companionship as you can and take your dog on outings whenever possible.

## OTHER COMMON MISTAKES

- ◆ Don't give cats cow's milk, they can't digest lactose and may get diarrhoea.
- ◆ Don't allow multiple cats to use the same litter box as they do not like to share.
- ◆ Don't forget annual vet and dental checks. They're important for good health.



### 5 Allowing your pet to become overweight

Just like the human population, there is a high level of obesity among our pets. And just like overweight people, there are serious health implications. Obese pets are prone to cardiac disease, respiratory problems and diabetes. Monitor your pet's weight and be sure to reduce calorie intake or increase exercise if necessary. **R**

---

*Dr Katrina Warren is an established and trusted animal expert. Her long-standing role as a presenter on the hit TV show Harry's Practice has made her a household name in Australia.*



# *The Kindness of Strangers*

*RD readers share their experiences of random acts of benevolence and decency from the most unexpected saviours*

COMPILED BY *Naorem Anuja and Ishani Nandi*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Raj Verma*





## BADRI

In May of 2019, my parents and I were in Goa on holiday. At around one in the afternoon, we stopped at a dhaba for lunch. A young boy, around 11 or 12 years old, came up to take our order. I asked him his name and, in a soft voice, he replied “Badri”. I thought ruefully about how this sweet, innocent little kid had to shoulder responsibilities when he should be out learning at school, climbing trees and playing with marbles.

We were served our food shortly. As we were eating, a large man with a long beard entered the dhaba. He was clearly drunk, unsteady

on his feet and slurring his words. Badri went up to do his job—slowly, unsure of himself. The man pulled the boy towards him roughly and rattled off his food order in loud, incomprehensible words. Hesitant, Badri took the order and scurried into the kitchen. A few minutes later, the man began to get impatient and grumbled aggressively. Badri emerged hurriedly, laden with plates, and started serving the man, but in his nervous rush, he let slip a glass of water, which crashed to the floor, spilling on to the irate customer.

Furious, the man bolted up from his seat, and raised his hand to strike the boy. A terrified Badri cowered in tears



before him. I knew somebody should intervene but felt uncertain and even afraid of the inebriated man's streak of violence. The other diners were, by then, watching the scene unfold. The other staff seemed unconcerned—the cashier looked on vacantly; the cook never emerged from indoors.

Just as the lurch was about to strike, a neatly dressed middle-aged man from an adjoining table got up and placed himself between Badri and his attacker. A tussle ensued—the drunk even took out a knife—but the tall, well-built saviour pinned him down to the floor until he calmed down.

***The other diners simply watched; the staff were unconcerned. Just as the drunk was about to strike, one man stepped in between the boy and his attacker.***

Turning his attention to Badri next, the man held him till his terrified sobs died down. He ordered a cup of tea and some biscuits for the boy, talking to him in a soothing tone till he felt better. I learnt two things from the actions of this stranger that day: The first—making a real difference often means getting your own hands dirty, and doing things yourself. The other was to never hesitate when it was time to step up and do the right thing.

*Avanish Soman, Pune*

## THE FEAST

'Mother Serious. Start Immediately,' said the express telegram, throwing our entire house into pandemonium. My mother began wailing, while my father began delivering quickfire instructions to my two brothers and me to pack for the six-and-a-half-hour journey to our village in Rajoli, Andhra Pradesh.

At 12, 11 and nine years old, we boys were too young to sense the mood, and rejoiced at the unexpected holiday. After a long bus ride to Kurnool, and another to Sunkesula, we had to cross the river Tungabhadra to reach our destination. During summers, we would cross the river by foot, but on this day the river was full and there were no dinghies to ferry us across.

Clearly we were stranded, unable to move forward or go back home. The only structure in the vicinity was an old inspection bungalow—a large single-storeyed government building—a prominent landmark in an otherwise isolated area. Its doors were locked. My brothers and I remained oblivious to our predicament—we played in the garden in front of the bungalow, until hunger and fatigue overtook us.

By dusk, our father was a worried man, with little clue about our next move. As the day grew darker, we spotted a lone man walking towards us. His name was Raju and he was the bungalow watchman. As Father narrated our plight, he let us into the building without asking



questions and asked us if we had had anything to eat all day. The three of us shook our heads glumly. Raju then set off to the riverbank with a towel, where we watched in fascination as he caught a couple of fish using it as a net, made a fire and started cleaning and cooking the catch. He added salt, a pinch of turmeric, chilli powder and tamarind to the stew, and prepared jowar rotis as it simmered.

It was a meagre meal by most standards, with minimal, precious seasoning, but Raju's kindness and selfless generosity made it a feast I've never forgotten in the 50 odd years that have passed since that day. In that sparse, dimly lit room, we felt like kings.

*John Methuselah, Secunderabad,  
Telangana*

## THE VIGIL

Last year, when I was in the 11th grade, my friend, Rameesa, and I were chosen to make a presentation at a school fair. The day before the event, we were asked to make some changes, which took a few extra after-school hours to complete. With home at least 30 kilometres away by bus, I called my parents from a teacher's phone to let them know I'd be later than usual. Then, I boarded a direct bus to my neighbourhood and settled in for the long ride back.

At some point, I dozed off and by the time I awoke and looked around,



I found myself in an unfamiliar area. It was 7:00 p.m and getting dark. I had missed my stop by a long shot and rushed out at the next one in a panic, unsure of what to do next.

The place where I landed was desolate except for a few workers milling around. There was a slum not far away but no shops from where I could call home. As I tried to figure out a way out of my predicament, I suddenly got the feeling that I was being watched. I looked around and saw a woman holding a child in her arms looking at me. Her appearance—short, thin and dishevelled, her sari muddy and ragged—did nothing to reassure me. I convinced myself, through wild assumptions, that anyone who looked as she did could only pose a danger to

me. My mind willed my body to run, but I couldn't move.

The woman walked over and asked me questions in a dialect I couldn't understand. Then, she held out her hand—in it was an old, damaged mobile phone, held together with a rubber band, but functional.

It dawned on me that this was my chance. Still wary, I grabbed the phone with shaking hands and called my father to come pick me up. With nothing else to do but wait, I stood as still as possible, neither speaking nor making eye contact with the woman, who continued to hover right next to me until he arrived 20 minutes later. Once sure I was safe, she smiled and walked away, refusing the money my father tried to offer. I learnt that day to never again judge a person by their appearance but by the kindness they show to others.

*Nahala Nasrin, Thrissur, Kerala*

## SOAP

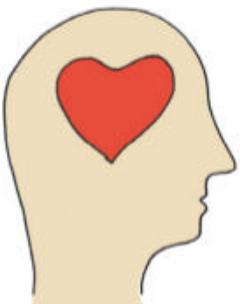
John Ruskin once said, "A little thought and a little kindness are often worth more than a great deal of money." This quote quite aptly sums up a beautiful moment I witnessed recently. I was on my way home after a busy day, and

because my phone had died, I happened to be people-watching instead of scrolling through my feed while waiting at the bus stop near the Thane railway station.

An old man selling unbranded soaps was sitting on the crowded pavement across the road with his wares spread out on a blue tarp. He looked poor and frail and I was moved by his condition—perhaps he was the only one supporting his family? But I soon shook off the sadness—*There's nothing I can really do for him. It's up to the authorities to ensure that such senior citizens do not have to work like this*, I thought.

A few passers-by bought soaps from him while others only made idle conversation. Just then, a lady walked up to the vendor and bought every bar of soap he was carrying. She paid him the full amount and walked away. Delighted that he had sold all his goods, the vendor's eyes sparkled and he smiled ear to ear. He walked to the nearby ration shop, bought food for the day and left, as happy as a clam.

The woman, on the other hand, crossed the road, placed the bag full of soap on the street and then joined the queue to board the bus, which had just



***The thin, dishevelled woman scared me. But then she held out her hand—in it was an old, damaged, yet functional, mobile phone.***

pulled up. The curious incident baffled me.

The woman happened to get on the same bus as I did and took the seat next to mine. I couldn't help but ask her about the strange act.

"Hello, if you don't mind, can I ask you a question?" I said.

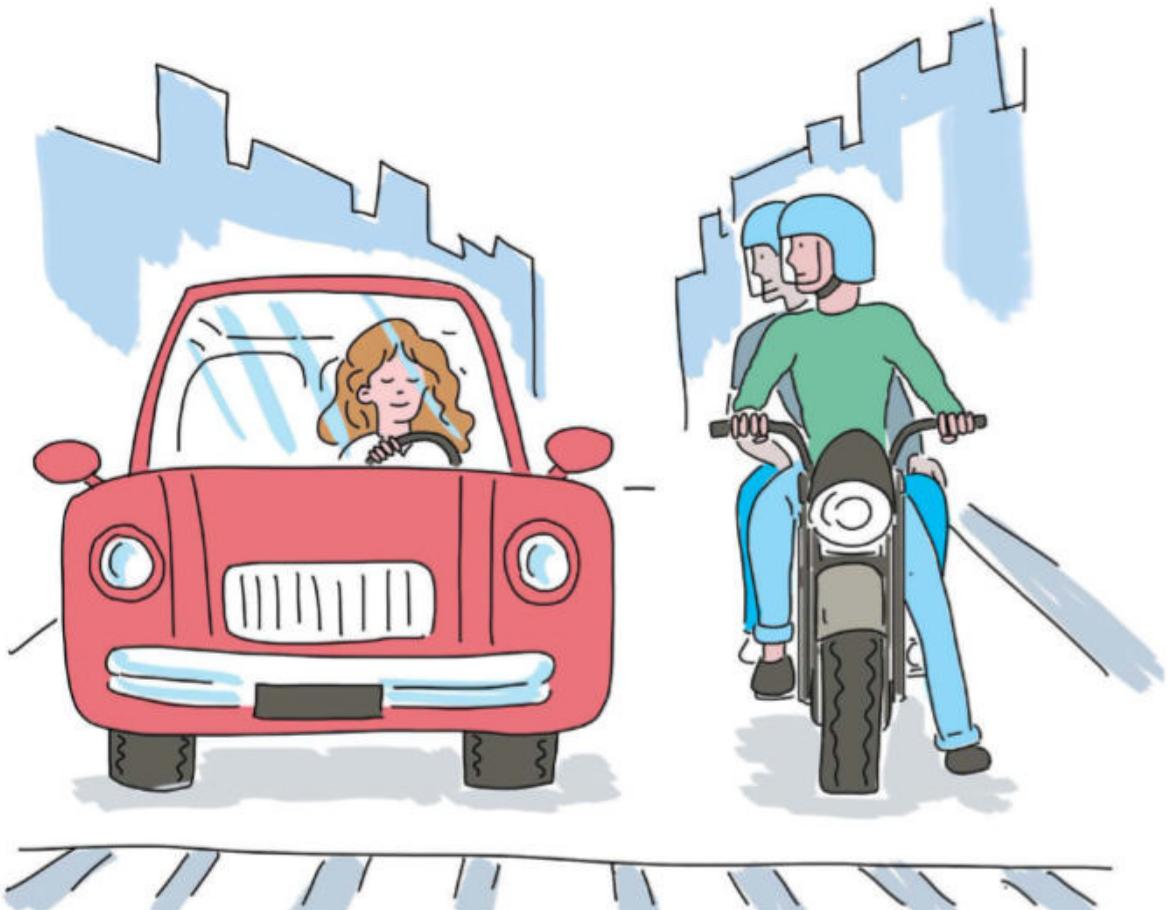
She looked at me and nodded.

"Why did you leave all the soap bars near the bus stop?"

"Oh, I walk this road every day and noticed this man many times. I felt bad at his plight and offered him some

money but he refused. He said he couldn't accept money for nothing in return. He wanted to earn it through hard work and not pity. So I bought all his soap bars to help him in a way that preserves his dignity. I left them on the road so he can sell them again, but I know he wouldn't do that. He's a very honest man. He was happy and content with whatever he earned for the day." I reached home feeling a lightness and hope that humanity is not lost after all.

*Kenisha Birwadkar, Thane*



## THE CHASE

*They're following me!* I thought to myself with a chill, as I watched the two young men on motorbikes slow down next to me as I drove, peering at me through their helmets. *Ignore them. They'll go away eventually,* I decided, and turned my attention back to the road. As a 27-year-old woman living in a big city, such encounters were not new, but I was unusually distracted by a strange melancholy that day—morose thoughts about relationships and loneliness kept me preoccupied. I had only just realized that whenever I stopped at a signal, the two bikers would also pause alongside, staring intently.

*I got home and saw that the men had followed me till my doorstep. "Are you okay?" they asked.*

This continued through three successive traffic signals, leaving no room for doubt. Petrified, I drove as fast as I could to stay ahead of them, but they kept steady pace—I couldn't shake them off despite the busy evening traffic. I finally reached home and heaved a sigh of relief until I realized that they had chased me all the way to my doorstep. Even scarier, they were now off the bike and at the gates, trying to talk to me.

Feeling safer on familiar ground, my fury erupted and I strode over to tell them off. "Please don't get us wrong", one of them said, his tone low and concerned. "We saw you weeping inside your car and wanted to make sure you were okay. Do you need help of any kind?"

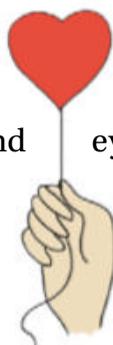
I realized in an instant what must have happened. The men had seen me breaking down in my car and followed me out of concern. Mortified at being caught in such a vulnerable moment, I thanked them curtly and asked them to leave.

I never saw them again—didn't even ask for their names. My emotions got the better of me at the time, but even today, more than 10 years later, I am struck by their selfless concern for a stranger, and remember them with the gratitude and admiration they deserve.

*Beulah Evelyn Lazarus, Chennai*

## LOST AND FOUND

The morning my 12<sup>th</sup>-grade results were declared, I was euphoric—I had aced the exam. It was the first piece of good news my family had received in a long while. My father had a terrible accident two months earlier and was in the hospital ever since. My mother was there too, as his caretaker. I rushed over to give them the good news. Maybe my elated mood was contagious—a pretty, bright-eyed, middle-aged lady I had never met before smiled at me in the



elevator, and I returned the friendly gesture gleefully.

My performance earned me a place at one of the city's top colleges. Despite money constraints brought on by steep medical bills, my mother managed to scrounge together the necessary fees. On admission day, I carefully filled the form, counted the fee amount thrice, packed my bag and set off on my bike.

Once I reached the college my heart sank when I realized that my bag had somehow fallen off along the way. I searched frantically but to no avail. With no identification in it, there was little hope of ever getting the money back.

Distraught, I cursed my carelessness. I rode to the hospital to tell my parents, but once there, I couldn't muster the courage to go in. I stood in the corridor, gazing listlessly when I felt someone touch my shoulder. It was the woman from the elevator.

"Is there anything I can help you with, dear?" she asked. The concern in her voice broke the dam. Tears streaming, I told her everything. She listened intently, then said, "Don't worry. Come."

She led me to a room in the physiotherapy department and reached for her bag lying on a chair, and handed me some money. "Take this and submit your fees," she said. I hesitated, but she smiled, and placed the money in my hands. "Your education is important. I am spending the money for a good purpose," she

said. I stood there rooted to the spot, overwhelmed by the unexpected grace.

"Please give me your address, I will return it later," I said, finally finding my voice.

"No need. Take care of your father and stay strong," she said, patting my shoulder gently. She introduced me to her 15-year-old son, who was in a wheelchair and attending physiotherapy sessions at the hospital.

I returned to that wing many times since then, in hopes of meeting them again, but somehow, I never did.

*Shalini Bhardwaj, Pathankot, Punjab*



## BROTHER

As desperate parents of a daughter born with cerebral palsy, we were quick to try any suggestion that we were led to believe could help her condition.

On this particular day, we had travelled to a village off the Meerut-Bijnor road for treatment and underestimated how long the trip would take. Between multiple delays and a quick meal, we had barely made any progress when the car began to wobble—we had a flat. I got the spare wheel out but realized that was punctured as well.

So, there we were—a family of three—stranded. Fortunately, there were a couple of eateries nearby where I sought help. I came across a middle-aged Muslim man clad in simple kurta-pyjamas and a skullcap passing by and explained my situation to him. He said he knew of a repair centre close by, and gently added, “Ask your family to wait at the shops here. The roads are not safe.”

My anxiety worsened, but we had no choice. He noticed that our 12-year-old

daughter couldn’t walk, and called a woman from a dhaba to help. Sensing my trepidation at leaving them alone, he quickly volunteered, “I can go and get the puncture fixed.” I tried to pay him for the expense but he only said, “*Baad main ho jayega, sahab,*” (We’ll figure it out later). Waiting for what felt like hours, I wondered if he would ever return. *What if it was all a ruse?* The woman who helped earlier assured us, “Don’t worry. They’ll be back soon.” But her words were of little comfort.

Two hours later, with midnight approaching, we finally heard the sound of a bike. “The shop is actually 15 kms away. We didn’t tell you, because that would have increased your worry,” said our saviour. He then proceeded to put the wheel in place. I took out a 500-rupee note to pay him for his pains, but he refused. “Thank you, *bhaijaan* (brother),” was all I could muster, with a catch in my throat. Choked with gratitude at the kindness he had shown us, I didn’t even remember to ask his name.

Vijai Pant, Uttarakhand 



### Ready, Aim, Misfire!

Whoever named them missiles wasn’t very optimistic.

 @FRO\_VO

### The Low-Water Mark

When I was a tour guide at Niagara Falls,  
the most common question was

“What time do they turn the water off?”

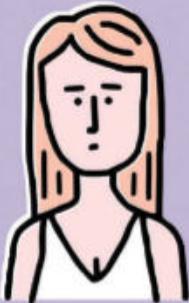
 @CHRISDOBMEIER

# LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*

## Stephen King Spoilers

Carrie



The girl is normal. Wait, I mean **EVIL!**

The Shining



The place is normal. Wait, I mean **EVIL!**

Cujo



The dog is normal. Wait, I mean **EVIL!**

see also: the car, the fan, the clown

© John Atkinson, Wrong Hands • [wronghands1.com](http://wronghands1.com)

**A man was driving** on the highway when all of a sudden he had to swerve to avoid a box falling off the truck that was in front of him. Seconds later, a police officer pulled him over for reckless driving. As the officer was writing

the ticket, the driver noticed the box he'd avoided had been full of nails and tacks.

"I had to swerve or I'd have run over those and blown my tires!" he protested.

"OK," replied the officer, ripping up the

ticket, "but I'm still bringing you in."

"What for?!"

"Tacks evasion."

—[thealternativeaccountant.com](http://thealternativeaccountant.com)

**Not to brag**, but my son's friend said "Your dad looks hot" when I was cleaning the pool.



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New Delhi-110 001.

**Interesting fact: A shark will only attack you if you're wet.**

—SEAN LOCK, *comedian*

She followed with  
“Is that heatstroke?”  
but still.

—[@THEBOYDP](#)

**Could a ...**

... librarian be called  
a bookkeeper?

... referee be a game  
warden?

... dairyman be a  
cowboy?

... cabinetmaker be  
the president?

—*Submitted by J. LEE*

**A Hollywood producer**

calls his friend, another  
Hollywood producer,  
on the phone.

“Hey, how are you  
doing?” he asks. “Well!”  
responds the friend. “I  
just sold a screenplay  
for \$2,00,000. I also  
wrote a novel and got a  
\$50,000 advance from  
the publisher. I have a  
new TV series airing  
next week, and every-  
one says it's going to be  
a hit. I'm doing great!

How are you?”

“OK,” says the first  
producer. “I'll call back  
when you're alone.”

—JIM PIETSCH *in*  
*The New York City Cab*  
*Driver's Joke Book*

**Two guys** stole a  
calendar. They got  
six months each.

—*Submitted by*  
ALEX DEL BENE

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

**GROWN-UP MERIT BADGES**

Kids earn patches for doing good deeds—why  
shouldn't adults? The company Winks for Days has  
created merit badges so you can reward yourself—and  
show off to the neighbours!—all those big-boy  
and -girl accomplishments. *I used a coupon! I ate a  
vegetable! I stopped after watching only one episode  
of that addictive TV show!* These are a few of our  
tongue-in-cheek favourites:



JOLEEN ZUBEK, MERIT BADGES COURTESY WINKS FOR DAYS



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# 7 HEART NUMBERS You Should KNOW

*These measurements offer important clues to health risks you may face*



BY *Stephen Perrine*  
FROM AARP THE MAGAZINE

**D**EBBY SCHRECENGAST knows she should have seen the warning signs. When she looks back at 2014, the year she suffered a stroke, Schrecengast, 57, sees a “stubborn old donkey” in denial about her health. “I had let my blood pressure go uncontrolled, and I remained overweight for so long,” she says.

Schrecengast, who lives in LaFayetteville, New York, joined a programme that eased her into an exercise routine. She took nutrition classes, dropped 13 kilos and no longer needs blood pressure medication.

It’s easy to measure how much weight you’ve lost or how much faster you can jog. It’s harder to calculate whether your heart is getting healthier. But if you keep an eye on these numbers with your doctor, you can tell whether your ticker is getting stronger or weaker as time goes by.

## Cholesterol

The body produces two main types of cholesterol: LDL, the ‘bad’ cholesterol, and HDL, the ‘good’ type. Measured together, along with 20 per cent of your triglyceride score, they add up to your total cholesterol level. An ideal score is 200 or less; between 200 and 239 is borderline high. Go over 240 and you have high cholesterol.

In most cases your physician will be focused on

tamping down your LDL, which can clog up arteries—including those that feed your heart and brain. The good cholesterol can help eliminate the bad, but only to a degree.

You know the diet drill: Limit red meat and full-fat dairy foods, and eat more whole grains and produce. Just one meatless day a week will help; next week, see if you can make it two. And get more exercise. Exercise appears to enhance your muscles’ ability to use blood lipids for energy. Studies suggest that the ideal workout plan consists of 30 minutes of exercise, five days a week, combining moderate aerobic activity and moderate- to high-intensity resistance training.

## Blood pressure

When blood pressure runs consistently high, it strains the heart and arteries. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is often called the silent killer because it usually lacks obvious symptoms. When left uncontrolled, it is a major risk factor for heart attack, stroke, heart failure and kidney disease. Blood pressure is defined as high if the top number is 130 or above, or the bottom number is 80 or higher.

## CHOLESTEROL

An ideal score is

**200**

(or less)

**200-239**

is borderline high

**over 240**

is high cholesterol

You're familiar with the link between sodium and blood pressure, and why it's important to cut down on salt. What you might not know is that much of it comes from food prepared outside the home—ordered in a restaurant or bought in a package.

Cooking with simple, healthy ingredients is the biggest dietary step you can take toward lowering your blood pressure and improving your heart health. While you're at it, look for sources of potassium, a mineral found in many fruits and vegetables, especially sweet potatoes, bananas, spinach and avocados. Increasing your potassium can help to lower your sodium level.

### Resting heart rate

A lower resting heart rate is associated with a lower risk of death. That's because a lower rate is usually a sign of greater cardiovascular fitness. Athletes, for example, are more likely to have a low resting heart rate because they're in better physical shape. (Certain medications, including beta-blockers used to control blood pressure, can also lower heart rate.)

A good time to check your resting

## BLOOD PRESSURE

is high if the top number is

**130**

or above

or the bottom number is

**80**

or higher

heart rate is first thing in the morning, before getting out of bed. Take your pulse for 15 seconds and multiply by four. Check it regularly; if you notice that the rate is trending upwards, you may need to boost how much you're exercising. A rise in resting heart rate over a 10-year period was associated with an increased risk of death, according to a study of more than 29,000 participants that was published in *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)*.

For most people, a resting heart rate between 60 and 100 beats per minute is considered normal, but stress, hormones and medication can affect your rate. Although taking a brisk walk, swim or bike ride raises your heart rate temporarily, these activities make the heart more efficient over time. They may also help you lose weight, which can reduce your risk.

### Blood glucose level

Your blood sugar level can fluctuate depending on the time of day, what you eat and when you eat. That's why a fasting blood glucose test is the most commonly used way to take a reading. You want to see a number less than 100.

The body's inability to regulate

## RESTING HEART RATE

Normal is between

**60–100**

beats per minute

blood glucose is the primary component of diabetes. As the digestive system breaks down food into sugar, insulin—a hormone made by the pancreas—helps transport blood glucose into your cells. Diabetes develops when there is too much sugar in the blood because the body either fails to make enough insulin or because the body's cells become resistant to it. A diet that is low in sugar, trans fats and saturated fats, but has plenty of protein, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and 'good' (monounsaturated or polyunsaturated) fats is the best dietary prescription for keeping blood sugar in check.

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## BLOOD GLUCOSE LEVEL

Fasting blood glucose test is the most commonly used way to take a reading. You want to see a number

less than  
**100**

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### Body mass index

Body mass index, or BMI, is a screening tool used to determine whether someone is a healthy weight. It's a ratio of weight to height that, when too high, can classify someone as overweight or obese. The higher the BMI, the greater the risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, certain cancers and other chronic illnesses. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute offers an online calculator to estimate your BMI. Generally, a BMI score between

18.5 and 24.9 indicates normal weight. Someone with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight; a score of 30 or higher is considered obese, a major risk factor for heart disease.

## BODY MASS INDEX

Generally, a BMI score between **18.5–24.9** indicates normal weight

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But BMI does not always accurately reflect a person's body composition. People with very muscular builds may have a high BMI but little body fat. On the other end of the spectrum, BMI may underestimate body fat in older individuals who have lost a lot of muscle mass. If your BMI is too high, set realistic short- and long-term goals for dropping the excess kilos through healthy eating and exercise. Shedding as little as 5 per cent of your body weight can result in significant changes to your health.

### Waist circumference

Some experts consider waist circumference a better way to measure body fat than relying on BMI alone,

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## WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE

Men should aim for **less than 40 in (102 cm)** while women should shoot for **less than 35 in (89 cm)**

and people who carry fat around their abdomen, instead of on the hips or elsewhere, are at greater risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. To measure your natural waist, grab a tape measure and stand without pushing out or sucking in your belly. Wrap the tape measure around your torso just above your hip bones. Exhale, then measure. In general, men should aim for a waist circumference of less than 40 inches (102 cm), while women should shoot for less than 35 inches (89 cm).

Studies have found that mixing brief bouts of fast walking, running or biking with longer stretches of slower-paced exercise is more effective at burning abdominal fat than steady-state exercise alone.

**VO2 max**

This measurement can give you a unique perspective on your aerobic fitness. The higher the number,

the healthier your overall cardiovascular system.

VO2 max is typically measured by having the subject run on a treadmill to the point of exhaustion. But researchers have developed a calculator (*worldfitnesslevel.org*) that allows you to plug in numbers such as your waist circumference and resting heart rate to determine your VO2 max at home. It will tell you both your VO2 max score and your ‘fitness age’, giving you an idea of whether you’re as young as you feel.

Any kind of cardiovascular exercise—running, biking, even weight training—done at a high enough intensity will help to improve your VO2 max score. 

FROM AARP *the Magazine*, FEBRUARY/MARCH 2019

**VO2 MAX**  
 The higher the number, the healthier your overall cardiovascular system



**What an Ugly Baby!**

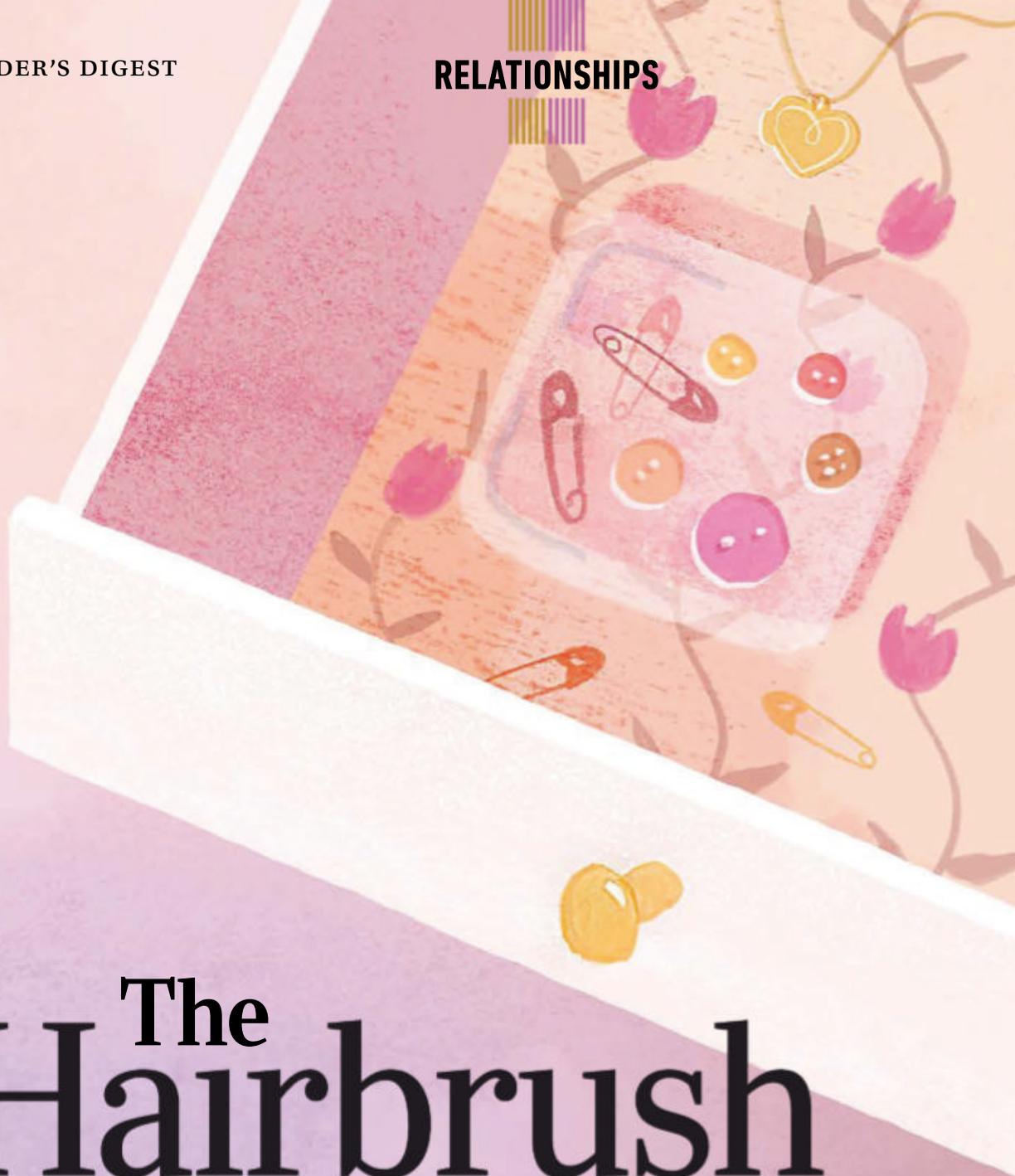
In many cultures, people believe that you can protect a baby from evil spirits by not complimenting him or her, lest the fates get jealous. So in Thailand, you might hear an adult coo something like “Fatty” or “Pig.” In Bulgaria, adults pretend to spit and insult the baby by saying things like “May the chickens poop on you.”

JOYCE EISENBERG AND ELLEN SCOLNIC, IN *STUFF EVERY GRANDMOTHER SHOULD KNOW*

**The Luckiest Town Around**

Were the 31 oil-refinery employees who shared a \$46 million lottery jackpot this year destined to win? Maybe. After all, they work in a Canadian town called Come By Chance.

CNN.COM



# The Hairbrush

*My Mum had wanted Dad to find new love.  
I was the one having trouble with it*

BY *Lisanne van Sadelhoff*

FROM THE BOOK *JE BENT JONG AND JE ROUWT WAT*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Meredith Sadler*



IT HAD BEEN MY MOM, Paola, who pushed my dad to find a new lover. She had just turned 56 and had been sick with metastasized colon cancer for six months.

“Ton?” she had asked her love of 40 years.

“Yes, dear.”

“Don’t stay alone too long, after I’m gone.”

“But you won’t be gone for a long time.”

“But I will, one day, and then you need to get on a dating site. Lisanne will help you. Go find a nice woman, okay? But promise me one thing. Don’t go slutting around because that’s terrible for the children and for those women.”

Search, find and love. Dad locked this advice away in the back of his mind and it didn’t resurface until over a year after my mother died. That first year had been pitch black, for all of us—I didn’t know what pitch black meant before that year.

In a practical sense, Dad managed. He had always been able to fry his own eggs. He went back to work, walked the dog, picked up his tennis lessons and every week he placed fresh purple tulips next to a photo of his wife—red lipstick, huge smile, blue, blue eyes, glass of wine.

After that first year, things brightened up a bit. “Is it me, or is it a bit sunnier?” Dad had asked one day. It wasn’t climate change, or even the weather. It was him, and a new stage of mourning. I had felt it myself, the transition from pitch black to grey.

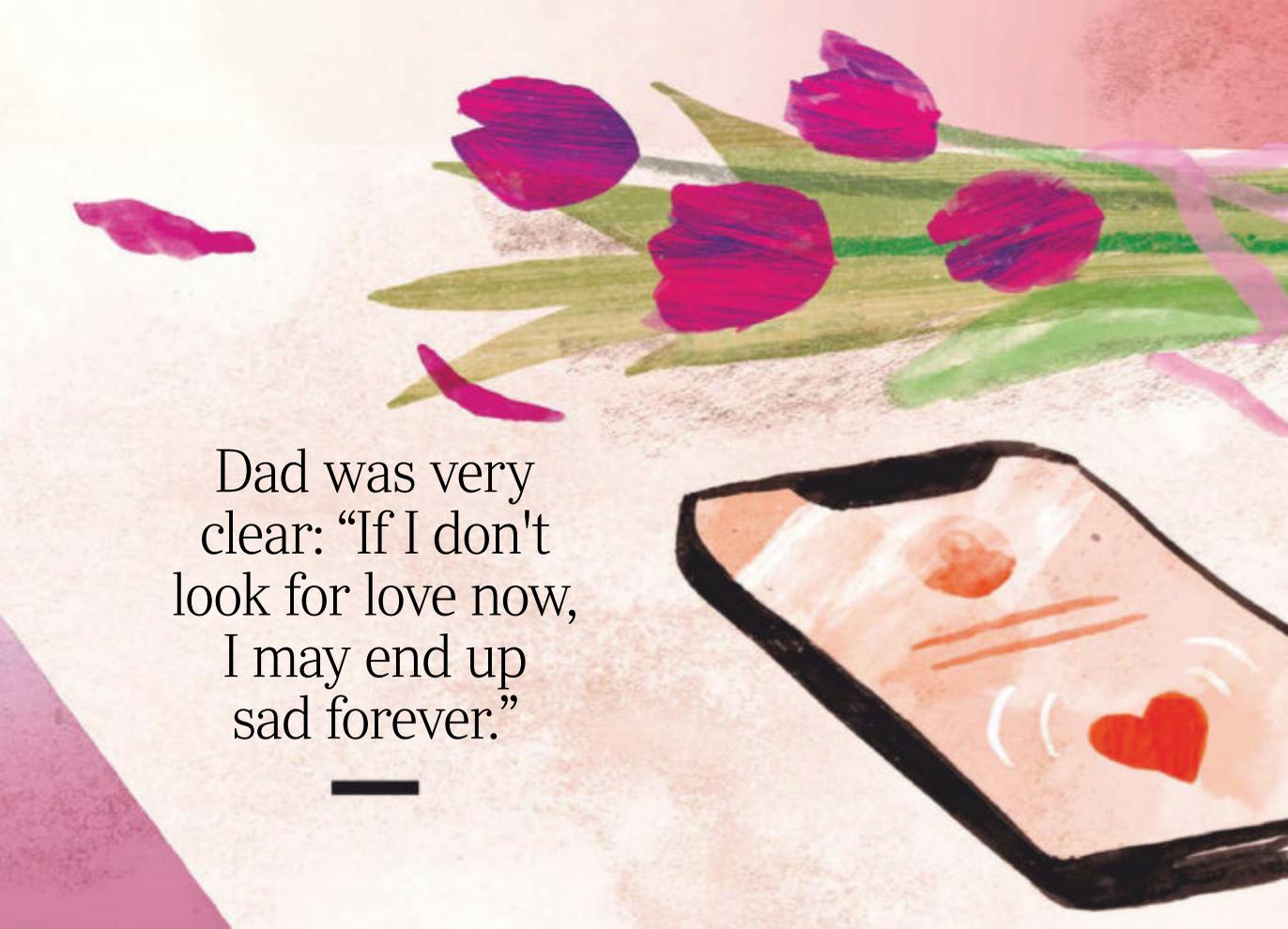
Even then, he wanted it. New love. He wasn’t so much ready for it as eager to find out if he could still love. And he really didn’t want to spend the rest of his life by himself. My brother and I had left home years ago, for study, work, love. Dad was alone—day in, day out. At night, before he went to bed, he switched on the television so as not to hear the silence.

“If I don’t do it now, I may never,” he told us. He had spoken to fellow widowers who had remained single forever. And it wasn’t even that bad. But, they were sad and alone. For it is a painful fact that not all the people who say ‘I’ll stop by soon’ after the funeral actually come by.

We got it, we cheered him on, quietly convinced that he wouldn’t.

But he did.

Dad was very clear: “If I don’t

An illustration at the top of the page features several purple tulips with green leaves and a few scattered petals on a light, textured background. In the bottom right corner, a black smartphone is shown, displaying a red heart icon on its screen.

Dad was very clear: “If I don't look for love now, I may end up sad forever.”

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look for love now, I may end up sad forever.”

So, we signed him up on a dating site as a remedy for eternal heartache. Dad may kill me for writing this, but he thought it necessary to lie, and take three years off his age. And the photo he pasted into his profile was one in which he had cut my mother out. If you looked closely, you could see a couple of her strands of wild blonde hair near his face. It made me laugh, because I knew my mom would have.

**H**IS FIRST DATES were futile, even hilarious at times. At one point Dad texted my brother and me

to ask if it was “very rude to leave after the appetizer.” That’s when I taught him the first rule of dating: Never have dinner on a first date. Drinks are safer.

And then Moniek came along, and it was the appetizer, the entree and even dessert. She was sweet, caring, blonde (like Mum), a teacher (like Mum), loved purple (like Mum), dressed cool (like Mum) and Dad seemed happy with her (as he had been with Mum).

I told him I was happy for him, because I felt that I should. Friends and relatives said “Gee, isn’t that nice for your dad?” But I wasn’t at all sure about how nice I thought it was. I wasn’t sure if I could handle seeing

I told Dad how I felt.  
“Do you want me to  
ask Moniek not to  
stay over this often?”  
*Yes, please*, I thought.  
“No, of course not.”  
I said.



another woman by his side. I wasn't even used to the emptiness my mom had left there.

As Dad fell in love with Moniek, my antipathy grew. For weeks I postponed the moment that I would have to meet her. Dad pushed me to come, more than once. He wanted to share his happiness with us and wanted to know what we thought of her.

“It matters how you feel,” he told me. I understood. I had always needed my dad's approval for my boyfriends.

So, my brother and I gave in. I wanted to ask Dad not to be clingy with her, but didn't. I didn't want to begrudge him his happiness.

They did cling to one another as I would have with a new boyfriend. But I was young and Dad was 62 (or 59 as his online profile had said).

Moniek was sweet, she had brought us presents, she was interested, but she wasn't Mom.

It was difficult. But there was a bright side. Since Mom died I had spent one day with my father, every weekend. And now Moniek was there. And I wasn't, which was fine. I had full weekends again.

But having her in our house was the thing that bugged me the most. In our house. In my parents' bed—the bed that I had been born in 30 years ago. The bed where my brother and I had escaped the spiders in our rooms or the monsters in our heads.

That bed was now dad's and Moniek's, and I shunned the bedroom as if it was infected. What had once been the most secure place in the house was no longer mine.

I told Dad how I felt. “I understand,” he said. “Do you want me to ask Moniek not to stay over this often?”

Yes, *please*, I thought.

“No, of course not,” I said.

I COULD SHUN THE bedroom, but other places were impossible to avoid. Like the bathroom. I was terrified of going in there, but it was impossible not to.

The first time I went into the bathroom since Moniek started spending her weekends with Dad, I found her jar of day cream on the blue stone shelf over the sink.

It made me furious. Really furious.

That was where my mother’s day cream should be! And only hers. What was she thinking? That she could take over? And where were my mother’s things? Did she throw them away?

My stomach turned, my breath stopped, my lips were glued together. I yanked open the top drawer of the dresser where my mother had always kept her hairbrush, her hairbands— where they had been, untouched, until now.

I looked down.

There they were. Not one brush, but two. Moniek’s and Mum’s. Like sisters, side by side.

*My dad and Moniek are still together, and we see each other regularly. It is still uneasy at times, but we talk about it. There is room for our grief over Paola, and there is room for Moniek’s love for my father. *

FROM THE BOOK *JE BENT JONG AND JE ROUWT WAT*  
BY LISANNE VAN SADELHOFF. © 2020 LISANNE VAN  
SADELHOFF, DAS MAG UITGEVERS, DASMAG.NL.  
ADAPTATION BY THE AUTHOR.



## Raise The Woof

If dogs can hear sounds that are too high-pitched to be perceived by humans, how do we know they’re not talking about us all the time in high-pitched voices?

 @SANNEWMAN

## Moo-ving Up

Just got a job as senior director at Old McDonald’s Farm ... I’m the CIEIO.

DEEFPRIEDTWIX ON [reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com)

## What A Hoot

Barn owls must have been stoked when the barn was invented.

 @SHUTUPMIKEGINN



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

# The Arrow That Saved My Life—Twice

*After a freak backyard accident  
almost kills her, a Texas woman is taken  
on a miraculous medical journey*

BY *Donna Barbour*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Marcos Chin*



**EDITOR'S NOTE**

*After we published *The Boy with the Spike in his Head* about a 10-year-old boy who survived a harrowing head injury caused by a skewer, we received a letter from Donna Barbour. Barbour had her own story to tell, and she assured us it was every bit as frightening—and perhaps even more miraculous. She may be right.*

It was a warm April evening, and I had returned home from work about an hour earlier. As I often did after a long day, I went straight to my backyard and did some work in my flower garden before deciding to light the grill to make dinner for my husband and myself. I had only just walked a few steps on the patio when I suddenly felt a horrifying blow to the right side of my neck. It felt as though someone had hit me with a baseball bat. I knew that no one was in the yard with me, so no one could have hit me. Totally confused, I reached up and, to my shock and horror, realized that I had been shot—with an arrow.

I grabbed the arrow with a death grip where it had pierced my neck and ran inside, screaming my husband's name. Ed was in the back of the house talking to our daughter, Keila, on the phone. He dropped the phone and ran to me. Ed grabbed me by the shoulders to stop me from running and told me to lie down on the couch. Then he went to call 911. I lay there and prayed. I didn't know if there was any way that I could survive.

The next hour or so was a crazy, jumbled mix of events. The arrow had come from a young man practicing with a compound bow, used for hunting, in his backyard. Luckily, he



Barbour after surviving the accident (right), and the scan showing the arrow penetrating her neck

was using a practice arrow, which is smooth and rounded; a broadhead arrow for hunting would have killed me. He lived across the alley and was shooting to the north. The arrow had ricocheted and turned back to the south. It went over two, possibly three, fences, through the shrubs and an oak tree, between two large hanging baskets and into my neck as I walked

**I DIDN'T KNOW IF THERE WAS ANY WAY THAT I COULD SURVIVE.**

across the patio. A shot from a compound bow can travel up to 200 miles per hour, or 300 feet per second.

We had EMTs who were simply wonderful that evening. As they entered the house and sat down beside me, they were perfectly calm and totally focused. They called for help

from the paramedics and for a medical helicopter from Amarillo, Texas, which is about 105 kms away and the closest city with a trauma centre.

As the helicopter lifted off to take me to Amarillo, I felt complete peace. I had seen the large number of people outside my house, and I knew that the Lord was being bombarded with prayers on my behalf. I felt certain that everything would be fine.

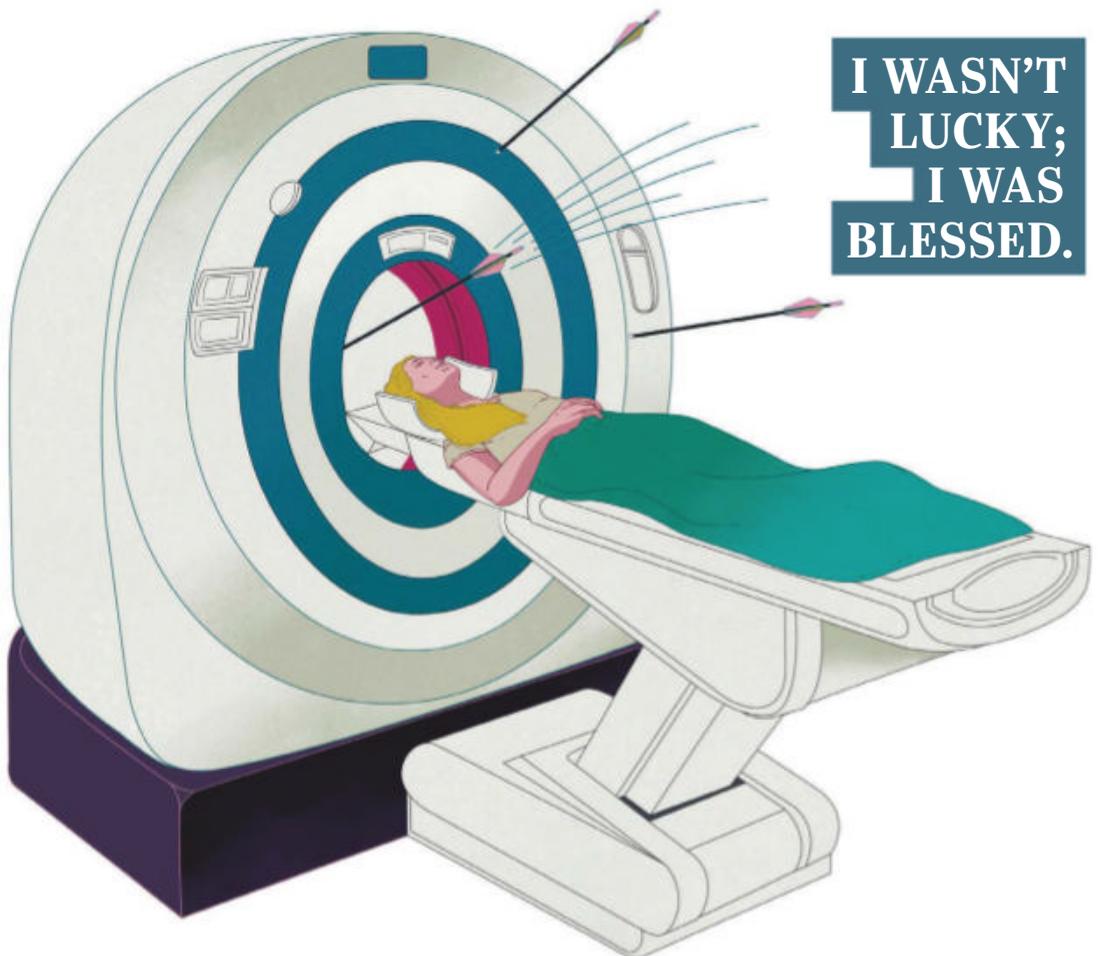
At the hospital, family and friends were gathering. I tried hard to reassure them. I kept telling them I was OK, but the looks on their faces told me that they weren't buying it. It was a difficult job since I had an arrow sticking out of my neck!

Soon, they took me back for a CT scan to determine the location of the

arrow on the inside. The doctors and nurses began telling me how lucky I was. The arrow had gone between the carotid artery and the jugular vein. That space between the two is a quarter of an inch or less. The diameter of the arrow is larger than the space it went through. It actually pushed the artery to the side—without nicking it. There was no bleeding at all. Although I didn't realize at the time how truly incredible this was, I began arguing with them that I wasn't "lucky"; I was "blessed"! This is an argument I have continued to wage ever since.

As I was being taken back to surgery to remove the arrow, my family entered a waiting room full of people—in fact, there were two waiting rooms full! Someone told my son, Kyle, that there was a post on the site *texasbowhunter.com* asking for prayers for me. It turns out a friend had called her son, who is a bowhunter, and told him about the accident, and he had posted the prayer request on that website.

The morning after my two-hour surgery, with my family all gathered in my room, a couple of the doctors came by to see me. After they left,



the surgeon came in. He checked the wound and talked to us about what he had done. Then he told us something that rocked our world again.

He said that the CT scan had revealed that I had a brain tumour. I remember going a bit numb but thinking, *God works in mysterious ways!* The surgeon said they were almost certain the tumour was benign, but it was located in a very difficult place. I was stunned, of course, but I felt like it was God's plan for me to find it.

A few days later, I went in for a second opinion from another neurosurgeon. He said that it was a difficult surgery but that it had to be done. The tumour was about to cross the mid-line of my brain, which would have resulted in a massive stroke.

The brain surgery was successful, and in less than a week I was back home. I was discouraged and feeling horrible. I had lost a lot of blood from a bacterial infection, *Clostridium difficile*, and was extremely anaemic and weak. I was beginning to have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing the swoosh and then the thunk of the arrow. Thankfully, that didn't last too long.

All my adventures had taken a toll, and I needed a time of healing and rest. All was uneventful for a couple of years. I continued to tell people that I was not lucky; I was blessed. I had an MRI each year to make sure that the tumour was not growing back. But, in 2015, after I had my MRI, the doctor's

office called and told me that I needed to come back in to see them.

The doctor explained that there was still no sign of a tumour, but they had found a brain aneurysm. Normally, aneurysms aren't discovered until they rupture, and that is almost always too late. Again, I was facing uncertainty and dreading brain surgery. I simply do not know how people go through times like these without the Lord, and the peace that comes from knowing God is in control.

In the weeks before the surgery, I felt at peace with whatever the outcome would be. We went to Dallas for the procedure. They found it was a very fragile and difficult aneurysm, covered with blisters and on the verge of rupturing, but the doctor successfully clipped it.

Had it not been for that arrow, I would have died from a brain tumour, a stroke or an aneurysm! And honestly, the arrow should have killed me. But it didn't.

For weeks and weeks, everyone gathered around me when I went to the grocery store or the post office. People would stop and hug me and even cry, saying how happy they were that this had happened. It strengthened everyone's faith.

Coincidences? Luck? I think not. The gentleman who wrote the last comment on the prayer-request thread on *texasbowhunter.com* summed it up in just two words. He simply wrote, "Amazing grace." **R**



“... and then we’ll clear the blockage by inserting a tiny balloon.”

ALL  
in a Day’s  
**WORK**

**Sadly, female** airline pilots are still relatively rare. As a result, I’m often mistaken for a flight attendant, a

ticket agent or even a snack-bar employee. One day, I was brushing my teeth in the restroom before a flight when a woman walked in. “My sister would be so proud of you!” she declared.

I figured her sister must also be in the airline business, so I smiled and asked why.

The woman responded, “She’s a dentist.”

—gcfj.net

**I’ve spent** a good chunk of time working in kitchens, so I still reflexively say ‘behind’ and ‘coming around’ as I manoeuvre past people. Which, actually, is not such a bad way to avoid collisions. Less good is the time I

CARTOON BY *Tyson Cole*

During a job interview at the 99 Cents store, my son was asked, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" My son's reply: "At the Dollar Store." He got the job.

—A.K. via rd.com

let slip a 'coming with a knife' while grocery shopping. That took some explaining.

—GIN-AND-ESCH-  
TONIC on tumblr.com

**One of my wife's** third graders was wearing a Fitbit watch, which prompted my wife to ask, "Are you tracking your steps?"

"No," said the little girl. "I wear this for Mommy so she can show Daddy when he gets home."

—JAMES AVERY

**Customers** often know what they want, but they can't always express it. Take these clients' requests to graphic designers, for example:

◆ "I want my logo to be in a colour

no one has ever seen before."

◆ "I am looking for a simple but complex site."

◆ "If I give you a black-and-white copy, could you

xerox it in colour?"

◆ "I want someone to build me a site like Facebook, except I want the main colour to be red."

—clientsfromhell.net

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

## THINKING WAY OUTSIDE THE BOX

Some businesses use oddball interview questions to see how a job candidate might work through an unexpected problem. The job website *glassdoor.com* collected these questions posed by large companies. How would you answer them?

- ◆ How many cows are in Canada?
- ◆ If you were shrunk to the size of a pencil and put in a blender, how would you get out?
- ◆ How many ridges are there around a quarter?
- ◆ Spell 'diverticulitis'.
- ◆ How would you move Mount Fuji?
- ◆ Would you rather fight one horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?
- ◆ What do you think of garden gnomes?
- ◆ Are your parents disappointed with your career aspirations?





INTERVIEW



# The Woman Who Studies Women

*Reader's Digest meets Vidya Balan,  
award-winning actor, producer,  
inveterate observer and author of her  
own unique life story*

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BY *Anna M. M. Vetticad*



**“Every character I’ve ever played has answered questions for me; some I didn’t even know existed.”**

**VIDYA BALAN** was shooting in the jungles of Madhya Pradesh for Amit V. Masurkar's *Sherni* when the coronavirus outbreak put a stop to work. The critically acclaimed actor has spent much of the pandemic promoting the release of her new film, *Shakuntala Devi*, a biopic of the globally feted mathematical genius. In this candid interview, Balan speaks to *Reader's Digest* about life, the lockdown and lessons she has learnt from her films.

**Your last three Hindi films—*Tumhari Sulu*, *Mission Mangal* and *Shakuntala Devi*—are about professionally successful women. Is this a conscious decision?**

It is not. Maybe it's a subconscious decision. (Laughs) Cinema mirrors reality. Previously, cinema portrayed our lives as revolving around the people in our lives—especially men—from whom we derived our identities. Now we derive our identities from our own beings, our dreams and ambitions. Our struggles define us—and that's getting reflected on screen. It's high time, you know.

Look at all that women are accomplishing. That's why *Tumhari Sulu* is as important as *Mission Mangal* and *Shakuntala Devi*. *Sulu* wasn't sending a rocket into space, she may not have been as brilliant as *Shakuntala Devi*, but I like how cinema reflects all kinds of realities. *Sulu* was an average Indian woman who aspired to be something beyond a homemaker and chose an unusual profession. She was doing the balancing act most working women have to pull off—juggling family and career, pursuing your dreams after your



**NOW WOMEN DERIVE IDENTITY FROM THEIR AMBITIONS AND STRUGGLES, WHICH IS REFLECTED ON SCREEN. IT'S HIGH TIME.**

kids have grown up. Our country has its *Shakuntala Devis*, Tara Shindes and Sulochanas.

**In recent years, some politicians have openly mocked higher education. Your colleagues tend to believe college**

**education is irrelevant for an acting career. Shakuntala Devi herself had no formal education. That said, few Hindi film stars are as educated as you. Keeping all this in mind, do you think a college education is important?**

College education should not be missed. Lessons learnt inside the classroom can probably be learnt elsewhere, but what you learn outside class is invaluable. Whether in school or college, it's about working with others, enjoying those days of no pressure, no responsibility, adhering to rules and sometimes flouting them, preparing for examinations. I wanted to quit studies after the 12<sup>th</sup> standard, because after *Hum Paanch*, I got many TV offers. But my parents were like, 'No way—you should at least have a basic graduation [degree]'. I was angry with them for that. I remember not wanting to talk to them for some days. But today, I am grateful they insisted because college prepares you for life after college. There's no right or wrong, but I'd say college [life] is priceless.

**How have your film roles educated you?**

Every character I've played has answered questions for me, some that I didn't even know existed. For example, I always wondered if my mother's life would have been different if she was

working, because she is enthusiastic, she participates in everything, she learns dance and music even today, she has the most active social life, and I know she's always looked up to women who had jobs and studied a lot. *Tumhari Sulu* happened at a time when I was wondering about my mother.

Every role I've taken up has been a response to my current state of mind—and in answering questions, it has healed or freed some part of me. I now realize that my mother made a choice. She lost her mother at the age of five, so

**Balan as Sulochana, aka Sulu, an ambitious housewife turned radio jockey in the 2017 film *Tumhari Sulu***



she wanted to be ever present for us—today, I respect that. *Tumhari Sulu* made me realize you can't measure everyone by the same yardstick. At one point, we thought motherhood was the key to fulfillment for women. To me, for a while, it was that only women with full-fledged careers, or at least jobs, have fulfilling lives—and it was important to earn your own money. But I realize that as long as choice is involved, whatever you choose is right.

**But choice is also a factor of social conditioning and pressure.**

Yes, but it's also about personality. My mother told me, "I'm not sure I would have been okay with stepping out every day." She's a homebody. So yes, it's social conditioning, but we must also take personality into account. Who knows? Maybe my mother would have chosen a profession like Sulu; maybe she would have liked to dance or sing; maybe she didn't even know she could explore those options.

**Choice is a loaded term in this context, especially since society largely does not give men the same choice to pick home over profession.**

I may sound politically incorrect or rude when I say this, but I don't care about men because women have been deprived of any kind of choice forever. Choice has always been a male privilege. If men do not accord themselves that choice because they feel society will judge them

in a different way, that is for them to figure out.

**But unless men see housework as a choice, the home will always be viewed as the woman's primary responsibility.**

True, the invisibility of housework will probably change if more men become comfortable with staying at home and taking care of the household.

**In 1977, Shakuntala Devi wrote a book on homosexuality. Media reports say her interest in the subject arose because her ex-husband was gay.**

**[Spoiler alert] The film says she lied about him. Whether or not that's true, a book on homosexuality in 1977 is path-breaking. It feels like the film brushed that under the carpet.**

Oh, it's unfortunate you feel that way. What happened is, when she [Devi] wrote the book she apparently kept getting asked: 'What gives you the authority to write on homosexuality?' She was an extremely impulsive woman who would say things off the cuff, so apparently she got fed up, and there must have been some anger since there was a divorce, which I guess is human. So I think she just said: "That's because my ex-husband is gay." He was not. But she said this to get people off her back and it gave credence to her work, so she stuck to the story. The beauty is that, irrespective, she wrote literally the first book on homosexuality in India—which is great!



Balan, as a young Shakuntala Devi, in a still from the movie

**But the fact that she wrote this path-breaking book back then is overshadowed in the film by the position it takes that she lied. Would you disagree?**

I'm too close to the film to disagree. That's the thing with film-making, right? Sometimes, you know the backstories, so you assume it will be understood. It's unfortunate it didn't come out better. Many people did get it, but I also know some who said it could have been further elaborated on. I stand by the choices we made.

**How have you coped with the pandemic and the lockdown?**

It was fairly simple and fuss-free—Siddharth (my husband) and I were home. For the first time, we spent so

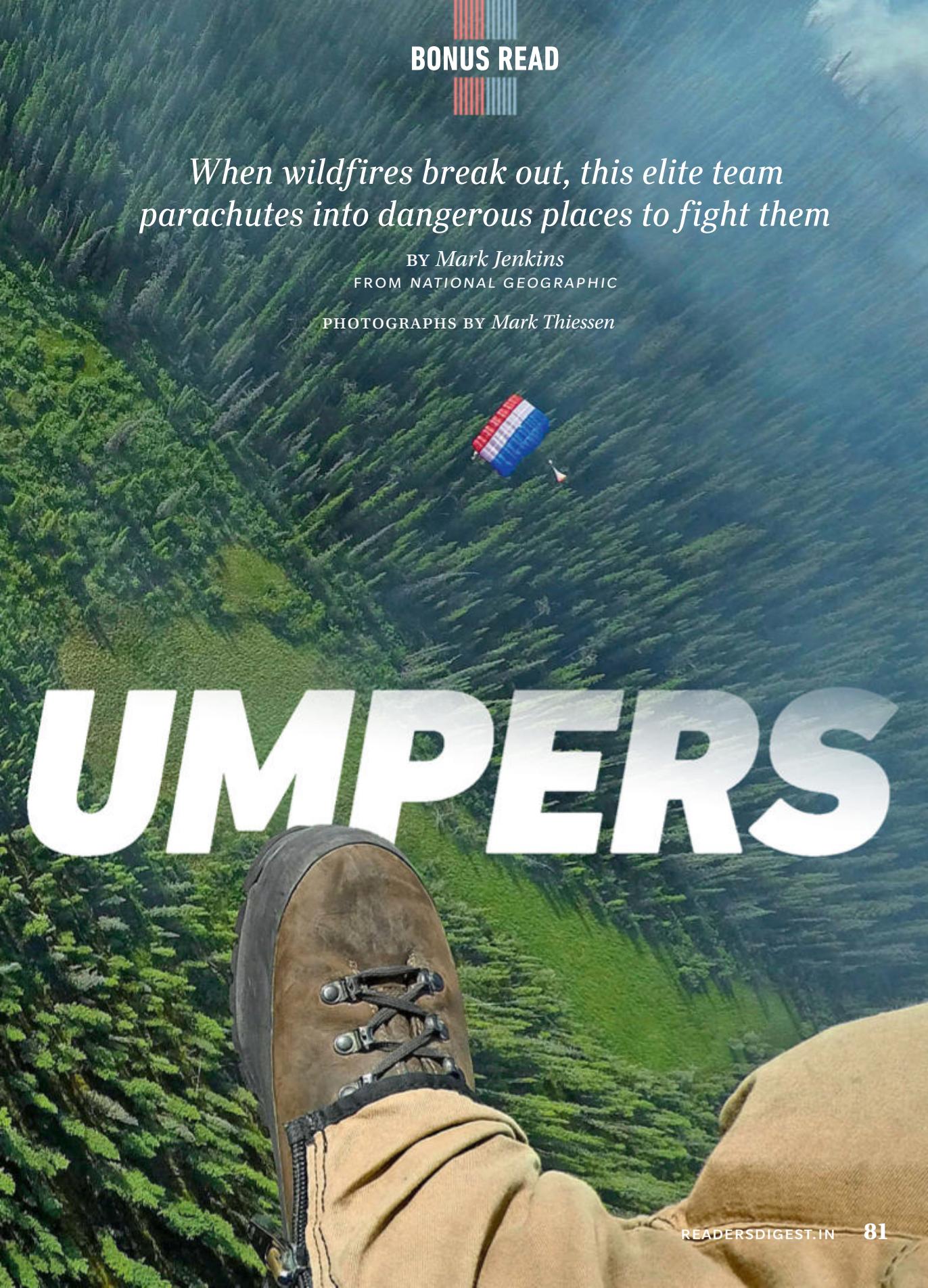
much time together. We shared the load at home. Thankfully, we had someone to cook for us because neither of us do. I tried making a few things just to give her a break sometimes, and that was quite a discovery, but I didn't do anything fancy. I didn't bake banana cake, I didn't start playing an instrument and I haven't read all the books I wanted to read.

But I do feel an overpowering sense of gratitude for the life I have. From the beginning of the pandemic, when I saw people stranded, trying to go home, when I saw homeless and hungry people, many separated from their families and then the sanitation workers, health-care workers and police putting themselves at risk—I have really felt so grateful. **R**

READER'S DIGEST

# THE SMOKEJ

A smokejumper drops towards a landing site near a smouldering boreal forest in Alaska.



BONUS READ

*When wildfires break out, this elite team  
parachutes into dangerous places to fight them*

BY *Mark Jenkins*  
FROM NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Mark Thiessen*

# UMPERS

The sun is still high in the Alaskan summer sky when the call comes in at 9:47 p.m. Sirens wail, and eight smokejumpers race to the suit-up racks. Already in logger's boots, dark green pants and bright yellow shirts, each man practically leaps into his Kevlar jumpsuit.

"First load to the box!" a voice blares over the intercom. Itchy, Bloemker, O'Brien, Dibert, Swisher, Koby, Swan, Karp and Cramer are the men at the top of the jump list. All evening they've mostly been hanging around the operations desk at their base at Fort Wainwright, cracking jokes and razzing each other, anxiously and excitedly waiting for their turn to leap out of a plane to fight a backcountry forest fire.

Now they have exactly two minutes to suit up and be on the plane. It's a much-practised routine: Their hands fly nimbly around, strapping on kneepads and shin guards, zipping into jumpsuits and buckling into heavy nylon harnesses. The jumpsuits are pre-packed with gear—a cargo pocket on one pant leg is stuffed with a solar panel and raincoat. The pocket on the other leg holds energy bars and a 150-foot rope, plus a rappel device in case of a treetop landing. An oversized butt pouch contains a tent and a sack for the parachute.

Other smokejumpers quickly surround them, helping the men put on their main parachutes and reserve

chutes. Then each man grabs his jump helmet—fitted with a cage-like mask to protect his face during a descent through branches—and his personal gear bag, which holds a litre of water, leather gloves, hard hat, flares for lighting backfires, knife, compass, radio and special aluminium sack that serves as a last-resort fire shelter.

Two minutes after the siren, they are waddling on to the tarmac, each laden with nearly 45 kilos of equipment and supplies. They appear awkwardly overstuffed, but every man carries a carefully curated, time-tested kit of the essential items a smokejumper needs to fight and survive a fire in some of the world's most remote and rugged forests.

The twin turbines of a Dornier 228 cargo plane roar to life as the bulging khaki figures totter single file up through the side door and into the plane's belly, which is packed with pallets of fire-fighting equipment that will be dropped with them. The plane lifts off, and the dispatcher radios the coordinates of the fire. Time en route: one hour 28 minutes.

Photographed by team member



**A wing-mounted camera shows firefighters jumping from a height of about 3,000 feet.**

Mike McMillan, one of the crew aims for a landing near the tail of the fire—where it started close to a group of cottages. The billowing smoke column signals a rapidly spreading ‘gobbler,’ a wildfire that’s “off to the races,” McMillan says.

It’s too loud for talk, so the men sit silently, each alone with his thoughts behind his face mask. They don’t know where they’re going or how long they’ll be gone. They don’t know how big the fire is or how dangerous the winds will be. They know only that they’re going into battle with one of nature’s most savage and unpredictable forces.

When the spotter, Bill Cramer, raises his hand to wordlessly call for

a “pin check,” each man executes a final multipoint equipment check of his jump partner.

They are flying above the Arctic Circle on the southern edge of the Brooks Range when they spot a plume of smoke rising from the dark forest, the result of a lightning strike. Cramer opens the jump door and leans out into the slipstream for an assessment: “Fire number 320, 15 acres, 70 per cent active, burning black spruce with caribou lichen understory, 11 structures on north and west shores of Iniakuk Lake, 2.4 kms west.”

The pilot circles at 1,500 feet. Cramer identifies the jump site and drops three paper streamers. Three bright stripes—yellow,



**Smokejumpers use beaters—strips of hard rubber on flexible shafts—to pound burning moss and tussock grass down into the moss, which is damp from melted permafrost.**

blue and orange—unfurl in the sky, allowing him to assess wind speed and direction.

“Get in the door,” Cramer shouts. The first man on the jump list, Jeff McPhetridge, 49, known as Itchy, dangles his feet out of the plane. “Get ready!” Cramer shouts, and a moment later slaps him on the shoulder. McPhetridge hurls himself from the plane. Three smokejumpers follow. On the second pass, the remaining four men fall into the sky. Their red, white and blue chutes circle over the flaming forest like tiny moths riding the drafts above a campfire, each man manoeuvring his wing in the wind. One by one, the smokejumpers fly towards the smoke.

The eight men descending from the sky can trace their professional lineage to a lightning bolt that hit a tree just east of Yellowstone National Park in August of 1937. The strike ignited a small fire that began crawling its way through the forest and eventually grew into the infamous Blackwater Fire, killing 15 firefighters and consuming 1,700 acres. A US Forest Service investigation concluded that the only way to avoid such tragedies was for firefighters to attack backcountry fires when they are still small.

In the 1930s, the Forest Service began testing the viability of parachuting small teams into remote areas, and on 12 July 1940, the first smokejumpers were deployed on to

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the Marten Creek Fire in Idaho's Nez Perce National Forest. Over the next several decades, the Forest Service created seven smokejumper bases, and the Bureau of Land Management established two, including the one in Alaska. Today, roughly 450 active smokejumpers are dispatched to wildland fires from these bases.

"Those early years proved that getting men on a fire when it was the size of your living room, rather than thousands of acres, saved money, forests, lives and private property," says Chuck Sheley, a retired jumper and

apply each year, roughly 10 are selected for rookie training. The most competitive applicants have five to 10 years of wildland firefighting experience and can do 60 sit-ups, 35 push-ups, 10 pull-ups, run 2.5 kms in nine minutes and 30 seconds (or 5 kms in less than 22 minutes and 30 seconds), and carry a 50-kilo pack for 5 kms in less than 55 minutes. Each smokejumper must pass a version of this test annually to keep his or her job. (Currently all 64 Alaska smokejumpers are men, though over the years there have been seven women.)

***"WE ONLY CHOOSE PEOPLE WHO CAN PERFORM UNDER STRESS AND CAN ACCEPT LIFE-OR-DEATH CHALLENGES."***

vice president of the National Smokejumper Association. "The same principle still applies today."

Over time, debate has arisen over the need for smokejumpers in most parts of the United States as development has spread into previously remote areas. Now 90 per cent of fires start within 800 mts of a road, and most can be accessed by vehicles. But in the massive Alaskan interior the vast majority of the land is accessible only by aircraft. Many remote fires are allowed to burn, but when a fire threatens lives and property, smokejumpers remain the front-line troops.

Alaska smokejumper training is among the most demanding in the world. Of the up to 200 people who

"We only choose people who can perform under stress," says Robert Yeager, a former rookie trainer. "People who can control their nerves, their anxiety and their adrenaline; people who are willing to accept life-or-death challenges."

Those accepted to the five-week training course already know how to fight fires, but they have to learn advanced parachute skills—how to quickly and accurately calibrate and account for numerous variables that constantly change: the wind, the terrain, the state of the parachute, the landing zone. Rookies make at least 20 practice jumps, which are filmed and critiqued. Forty per cent of the trainees don't make the cut.

But those who pass become members of an elite fraternity that includes Willi Unsoeld, one of the first Americans to summit Mount Everest; Stuart Roosa, the Apollo 14 command module pilot; Ken Sisler, an intelligence officer killed in Vietnam who was awarded the Medal of Honor; and Deanne Shulman, who in 1981 became the first woman to join.

The smokejumpers land less than 150 feet from the blaze now labelled Fire 320, tumbling on to their hips to absorb the impact. Within minutes they have packed their parachutes. The pallets with firefighting equipment—chainsaws, shovels, beaters, Pulaskis

strips on the ends—but it has been a dry summer, and the caribou moss is a 15-cm bed of prime tinder. They knock it down, but the flames pop right back up.

“It wasn’t going to go out without water,” McPhetridge says. The men run to a nearby creek and fill up four 20-litre bladders using their hard hats. Evan Karp, 36, a hulk of a jumper with a thick, untamed beard, sets up a pump and begins laying hose as the rest of the men race back to the fire.

McPhetridge gives no commands or orders. “Everybody knew exactly what to do,” he says later. “That’s the beauty of the unit.”

## ***THE MEN POUND THE FIRE DOWN WITH BEATERS, BUT THE FLAMES POP RIGHT BACK UP.***

(combination axe-adze tools)—are dropping into the landing zone. The men barely have time to open the boxes before the wind shifts.

“Suddenly the wind was coming out of the south, rather than the north,” McPhetridge, the designated incident commander, tells me later. “We were concerned the fire might flank us.”

The men don’t have time to gather the cargo chutes. Instead they go straight to the fire. Flames are shooting up spruce trees and igniting the brittle caribou moss. Smoke is pouring through the forest. The men begin pounding the edge of the fire with their beaters—poles with thick rubber

While one jumper operates the water pump, filling and refilling the bladders, four men attack the left flank and three attack the right flank. The men move along the edge of the fire, pounding the flames, spraying water, choking on smoke.

The jumpers dig trenches, cut trees and empty and refill the bladders non-stop. By 3 a.m., after several hours of back-breaking work, they’ve completed the fire perimeter. With blackened hands and faces, the men crawl into their sleeping bags for a few hours of sleep. They’re back on the fire line at 7 a.m. Some use chainsaws to cut



**In another Alaska fire, incident commander Ty Humphrey communicates with a pilot while crew members free a parachute from a tree where equipment was dropped.**

down green trees to expand the fire line around the smouldering black edge of the blaze; others are digging with their Pulaskis.

The initial attack is over, and McPhetridge walks the perimeter of the fire. It's only 33 acres, tiny compared with the huge fires that make headlines in the lower 48 states. But left unchecked, it could have burned perhaps tens of thousands of acres. He calls the fire dispatcher with an update and is told headquarters is pulling his team out. A crew of firefighters drawn from local Alaska native communities

will be helicoptered in for the final mop-up duty. They will go over every square yard of the 'black', digging and dousing, making sure the fire is completely out.

Just before 9 p.m. the day after they parachuted in, the eight smokejumpers are helicoptered 80 kms to Bettles, a tiny village deep in the Alaskan interior. Mission accomplished.

Or so they think.

Two bad things happen after the smokejumpers are pulled off of Fire 320. First, the equipment for the Alaska native crew is delayed



**A Fire Boss plane dumps water to help the crew fighting Fire 320. This plane can scoop up and drop 3,000 litres of water from a nearby lake every few minutes.**

in Fairbanks, so they never make it to the fire scene to do the mop-up. Second, winds sweep down from the north and breathe new life on the embers. The fire starts to blow up, and the afternoon after leaving the area, the smokejumpers helicopter back in. By the time they're on the ground in mid-afternoon, the fire has spread across 150 acres, and they call in reinforcements. Another load of eight smokejumpers drops in, and together the 16 men begin to cut a line along the reborn fire's left flank, using the Iniakuk River to hold the right flank.

But because of the dry conditions and abundance of the brittle caribou

moss, the blaze can't be beaten into submission. Without lots of water, it won't go out. The smokejumpers call in the Fire Bosses—crop dusting-style planes equipped to carry 3,000 litres—to bomb the flames. They zoom in low and release their loads of water, then circle back to Iniakuk Lake, glide over its turquoise surface at 130 kph, scoop up another 3,000 litres and return to drop it on the fire.

Still, the flames persist. The fire is now burning so hot that it reignites right after a drenching. Fanned by the winds, it gains momentum, flowing like molten lava into green timber. Bigger scooper planes are called in,

CL-415s, which can release 6,000 litres at a time, along with a helicopter with a huge water bucket hanging from a long line. While multiple aircraft fly successive water-bombing missions, the men on the ground race to cut a defensible fire line north through the forest—chainsawing trees, mowing down the underbrush, pounding out flames. By 10 p.m., seven hours after jumping in for the second time, they have tied the north end of the left flank into the curving Iniakuk River.

Around midnight the smokejumpers withdraw to a campsite near the fire. Their faces are blackened with ash, their eyes raw, their bodies battered.

was a log I hadn't seen, in a bad spot," says Bloemker, 45, who's spent two decades as a smokejumper. "I came in too fast. My toe caught on a tussock of beargrass. Smashed my shoulder and blew out my labrum. Had to hike to where a helicopter could land, maybe a couple of kilometres."

The men nod silently; most have already heard this tale. The stories serve as more than just entertainment—they're a way for smokejumpers to teach each other. The real-world lessons of fighting unpredictable fires in remote wilderness are too numerous to fit into a couple years of training. Freakish wind changes, embers

## ***STORIES SERVE AS MORE THAN ENTERTAINMENT—THEY'RE A WAY FOR SMOKEJUMPERS TO TEACH EACH OTHER.***

Each man wearily cooks his dinner over the campfire. They have ready-to-eat military meals as well as cans of chilli, tins of sardines and loads of energy bars. But the speciality is Spam (tinned ham), slow-fried with fresh onions and peppers over scarlet coals.

The men swat mosquitoes and squint into the fire. Their clothes are caked with salt from sweat, but someone is always willing to tell a story. Like the time David Bloemker dislocated his shoulder. The season had ended in Alaska, and he was down in Montana parachuting on a fire in Kootenai National Forest.

"Then the wind just died and there

of old fires that survive winter only to ignite in spring, parachute malfunctions, backup-parachute malfunctions, chainsaw mishaps, colleagues who never made it home from their last deployment—these and hundreds more are gleaned over long careers and passed on by exhausted firefighters around campfires such as this one.

Bloemker stands up, dumps the remains of his tin cup into the fire and adjusts the .44-calibre Smith & Wesson on his belt. The revolver prompts another story.

"We were deep in the interior near Bear Lake, funny enough. We'd heard there was a habituated bear in the

area, breaking into cabins. When we got off the fire and back to camp, we could tell a bear had messed with our gear. The next day the bear came back and tore into one of our tents. We started up a chainsaw and scared it away. That evening the bear came back again, but this time we couldn't scare him away. He started getting aggressive, stalking some of the guys through the trees. He made a false charge. Then he made a second false charge. On the third aggressive move I braced myself in the notch of a tree and shot him between the eyes."

they're getting close to anchoring the left flank to the river, winds sweep the fire south along the unprotected opposite bank, then shift to blow embers west back across the river, planting a new 'spot fire' behind the men, one that threatens to surround them.

The smokejumpers must remain hyper-vigilant to such changes, McPhetridge says. "You can't control the winds. You can get killed."

The spot fire rapidly spreads in all directions. Most of the men shift southwards in an attempt to circle the spot. Two men with chainsaws are

## ***BEHIND THE MEN, SHIFTING WINDS START A NEW FIRE—ONE THAT THREATENS TO SURROUND THEM.***

The story is a reminder that fire isn't the only adversary in the backcountry. But by this time some of the grimy men are fast asleep.

The smokejumpers are back on Fire 320 at 7 a.m., but during the night the winds have shifted again. The fire has exploded to 600 acres. The flames are now throwing embers hundreds of feet into the air and across the river. It is quickly decided that the far side of the river is indefensible, so the men start cutting a line south to tie up the left flank. They toil for hours, breathing smoke, spitting ash, sweating through their filthy clothes.

But 'Big Ernie', the smokejumpers' name for the fickle god of forest fires, has a twisted sense of humour. Just as

cutting everything in sight along the edge of the flames. Some of the crew are dragging the unburnt trunks into the green areas to deprive the fire of additional fuel. Others are pounding the flames along the black with beaters. The Fire Bosses roar overhead every four minutes, dropping water. The men step back but still get drenched.

After hours of frantic work, the northern and western edges of the new spot fire are almost under control, but the flames are now howling southwards on a northern wind. The 16 smokejumpers just can't get ahead of the fire. Their only option is to pull out before it cuts off their escape route.

The next day the fire will grow to 1,500 acres. The smokejumpers



A smokejumper returns from a fire.

are forced to move from offence to defence. One of the veteran jumpers laments his crew being pulled off the fire before it was completely extinguished. “We’d caught it at 33 acres,” he says. Smokejumpers ruefully call this ‘catch and release’. Their only goal now is to protect the few cabins and a lodge on Iniakuk Lake. Using Zodiac watercraft, they shuttle fire hoses, water pumps, and sprinklers to each structure on the lake. The pumps are set in the lake and the sprinklers set to protect the roofs of the cabins.

Jeff Poor owns the cabin closest to the fire. The scraggly old trapper, who was once from the US east coast but “went as far away as I could possibly get,” and built his cabin in

1976. “More’n happy to see these smokejumpers!” says Poor, who sells his pelts—wolf, marten, lynx—to Russian buyers. “Always happy to have the help.”

Pat Gaedeke, who with her husband built the lodge at the end of the lake in 1974, is the one who initially called in the fire. She is beside herself with joy. “I can’t believe all the resources they’re using to help us,” she says.

Eventually, after dozens of sprinklers and thousands of feet of hose are deployed, each structure is protected inside a half-circle of plumbing that can thoroughly soak the property and prevent it from burning.

The smokejumpers are back at their camp by 10 p.m. Exhausted, they sprawl around the campfire. Cans of peaches are passed around, and the men pull out the slippery halves with their blackened fingers. A chunk of cheese is making the rounds; each man lops off a portion with his knife. “Hey, you guys remember when ...” and someone starts a story.

The eight smokejumpers on the initial attack ended up spending 16 days on the Iniakuk Lake fire before being relieved. The fire burned more than 36,000 acres, but all the structures in the area were saved. “The fire burned all summer and was still burning when we left in September,” says Pat Gaedeke. “Mother Nature finally put it out when it began to snow.” **R**

FROM NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC (MAY 2019), COPYRIGHT ©2019 BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

# LIFE'S

*Like That*

**I loved the dress** that I bought at a flea market. It fit perfectly, and the skirt was a swirl of intricate pleats. I wore it confidently to an evening party and glowed when a woman exclaimed, “Oh, how stunning!” Yes, I was grinning from ear to ear, until she added cheerfully, “Hang on to it, honey. Pleats will come back someday.”

—MARY LOU WICKHAM

**Southerners** are born storytellers. So when *Garden & Gun* asked its readers to spin a typical southern tale using just five words, here’s what they got:

- ◆ “Somebody done ate the biscuits.”
- ◆ “Fry it, then try it.”



- ◆ “Found THIS in the dishwasher!”
- ◆ “BBQ sauce arguments ended friendships.”
- ◆ “After, we called him Stump.”
- ◆ “Collards spun in the washer.”

**I tried** having my mother’s phone disconnected, but the customer-service rep told me that since the account was in my dad’s name, he’d have to be the one to put in the request. The fact

**My four-year-old just asked why she can’t eat tacos every day, and honestly, I think I’d have an easier time explaining where babies come from.**

—[@SARABELLAB123](https://twitter.com/SARABELLAB123)

that he'd been dead for 40 years didn't sway her. Then a solution hit me: "If I stop paying the bill, you can turn off the service, right?"

"Well, yes," she said reluctantly. "But, that would ruin his credit."

—JEANNIE GIBBS

**"I make mistakes;** I'll be the second to admit it."

—JEAN KERR, *author*

**Since the** coronavirus outbreak, my 47-year-old son has been washing his hands religiously. In fact, he said, "I've been washing my hands so much, I found the answers to an old eighth-grade math quiz."

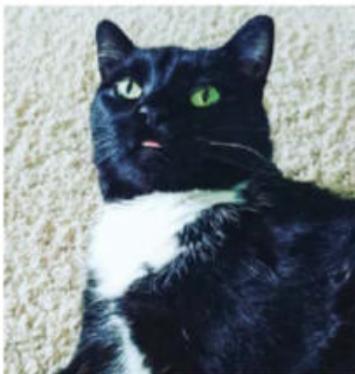
—SUSAN FREEMAN

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

## SIT ... STAY ... DRAW ...

To raise funds, the staff at the Wisconsin Humane Society put their lack of artistic talent to good use: For \$15, they would draw anyone's pets. They raised \$12,000 in one day, thanks in part to these timeless works.





## CULTURESCAPE

BOOKS, ARTS AND *Entertainment*

# Bitten by the Acting Bug

Having made her mark in the world of fashion, designer Masaba Gupta breaks new ground with a self-titled online series

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BY *Suhani Singh*

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
*Bandeep Singh*

“ **In *Masaba Masaba*, you play yourself as a person and as a character. What was that like?**

That was actually the hardest bit. The brief was that we are toeing the line between fiction and fact. If I'm too much myself, it wouldn't be dramatic enough, and too much drama means I have to step back.

### How monumental an influence is your mother [Neena Gupta] in your life?

I think we are all conditioned to behave and act like our parents. We consciously try to pick up their positive traits, and when we are old enough we understand which ones we shouldn't. I am at that stage today where I have learnt a lot from her mistakes. I deal with things differently because my understanding of the world is different from hers. I think the choices I have made are probably different, and even the ones in the future will be.

### Did people expect you to follow in her footsteps and be an actor?

Nobody saw me as somebody who could potentially act. In fact, people told me not to follow in her footsteps. I immersed myself in sports. I was playing professional tennis and everybody was like 'You'd be a sportsman like your father.' The perception is that somebody who is dark-skinned and looks half-Indian and half-something-else can't become an actor. You hear it even today. I think I wanted to prove to people that it doesn't matter what you look like, but how well you do the job.

### The show deals with the pressures a designer faces to deliver creatively. How did you tackle this during the COVID-19 lockdown?

People think creative people are wired 24x7. The corporatization of fashion has led to this being more rampant. Some guy in a suit will come in and say

"You guys need to do six collections." Designers can't keep creating just to meet a sales target. The resulting burnout happens very often.

For the first two months of the lockdown, I was very stressed because things were topsy-turvy. But I never believed for a second that I need to work on a new collection or use my time to get inspired. Inspiration is something that comes to you when you are not looking for it.

I think you have to be okay with the idea of saying I choose not to do anything. I decided not to design till the end of the year, instead of putting more pressure on the design team and myself. We make do with what we have.

### After Masaba, have you been bitten by the acting bug?

Somebody asked me "Have you tasted blood?" And I said, "Yes, I have." Once you enjoy being on set and in front of the camera, I don't think it ever stops. More than anything in this pandemic, I was dying to do a shoot. I shot a commercial recently and felt alive.

### Are you good at spotting a Masaba fake? How does it make you feel?

Yes, I am. Half the prints are not even designed by me but they are tagged as a Masaba print. I feel good. Designer Sabyasachi once said that you can tell the strength of a brand by the power of its copy market. That line never left me. 



The cast of *Atkan Chatkan*

## RD RECOMMENDS

# Films

**ENGLISH:** As the 2020 US Presidential election draws near, ***ALL IN: THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY*** promises to be a timely watch. The documentary,

streaming on Amazon Prime Video on 18 September, takes on the insidious reality of voter suppression in USA. It aims to provide a well-rounded perspective on an issue that most people fail to consider a threat to democracy.

**HINDI:** A. R. Rahman dons the role of a presenter in ***ATKAN CHATKAN***, coming to ZEE5 on 5 September. The film features Rahman's protégé pianist, Lydian Nadhaswaram, in the lead role of Guddu, a tea-delivery boy with a passion for creating new rhythms, who decides to start a band with three other impoverished children. As they enter the biggest competition in the city, the question remains whether they'll be able to rise above their lives on the streets to hit the big time.

**Activist Stacey Abrams in *All In: The Fight for Democracy***



**LONDON CONFIDENTIAL**, a spy thriller set in the pandemic era, starring Mouni Roy and Purab Kohli, will stream on ZEE5 on 18 September. In it, RAW agents in London, who are trying to find out how exactly the pandemic spread, also have to deal with a traitor in their midst responsible for a series of killings.

**MALAYALAM:** In **C U SOON**, a software engineer from Kerala comes to the help of his cousin whose fiancée goes missing after leaving behind a suicidal video message. This film, coming to Amazon Prime Video on 1 September, is directed by Mahesh Narayan and stars Fahadh Faasil, Roshan Mathew and Darshana Rajendran.

(Left to right:) Purab Kohli, Mouni Roy and Kulraj Randhawa in *London Confidential*



**#WATCHLIST:  
ON OUR RADAR**

**The Boys season 2:** An irreverent, often violent, take on the topic of superheroes, *The Boys* explores what

happens when such beings abuse their abilities. Things take a more intense turn in this season, as the out-cast group struggles against the villainous superheroes. The new season streams on

Amazon Prime Video from 4 September.

**Utopia:** Gillian Flynn's adaptation of the British TV show will stream from 25 September on Amazon Prime Video. A few college friends bond over a fictional comic book called *Utopia*, trying to unravel the messages in its pages. However, they soon realize the dangers mentioned in the book are coming to life in the real world.



A still from *Utopia*

A still from *Space Force*

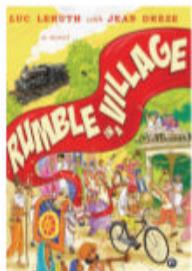
# Books

## **Rage** by Bob Woodward, Simon & Schuster India

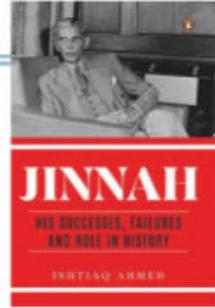
Bestselling author Bob Woodward offers a behind-the-scenes look at the tumultuous tenure of Donald Trump as the US President in his latest book, *Rage*. The book, scheduled for a 15 September release, promises to be a relevant read, more so due to the upcoming US elections this year. In it, Woodward takes stock of Trump's decisions in the face of a pandemic, civilian and racial unrest and a failing economy on the brink of disaster. He also reveals how many of these decisions were influenced by the instincts Trump



harboured during his White House tenure. Woodward goes on to critically examine Trump's national security decisions and policies, showing Trump as an intensely volatile person. Woodward's book promises to be an authoritative, definitive text.



**YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...** *Rumble in the Village* by Luc Leruth with Jean Drèze (Aleph Book Company): In this novel, set in a fictional settlement in northern India, Anil Singh, a London banker, takes up his murdered uncle's inheritance in Palampur. Singh has to navigate through a colourful cast of characters, who are more than just suspects, to save a wrongly accused girl.



## Scope Out

### ***Jinnah: His Successes, Failures and Role in History* (Penguin India):**

Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed subjects Jinnah's career and political choices to intense scrutiny.

### ***India's China Challenge* (HarperCollins Publishers India):**

Journalist Ananth Krishnan examines the future of Indo-Chinese relations and how China's internal politics can influence this bond.

### ***Pandemic* (HarperCollins Publishers India):**

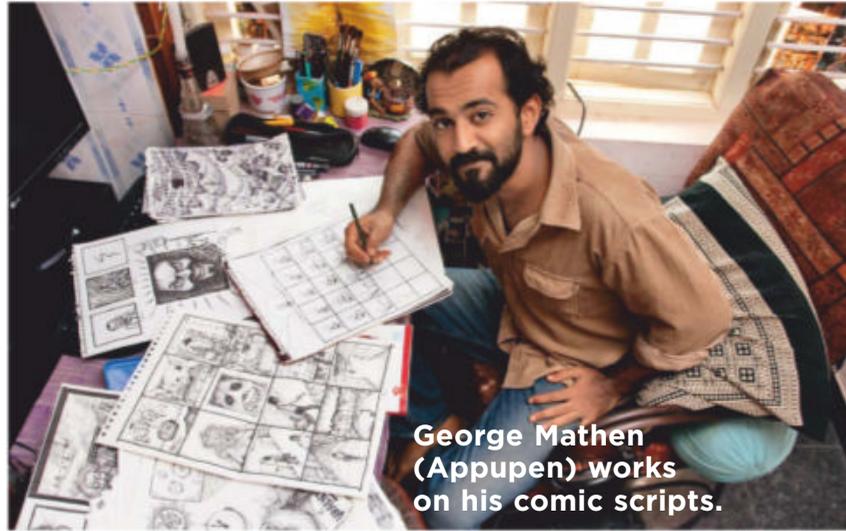
Science journalist Sonia Shah analyzes pandemics, past and present, and the lessons we urgently need to learn in order to deal with them.

# Graphic Storytellers

George Mathen aka Appupen

Satire is central to the works of Bengaluru-based artist George Mathen, better known as Appupen. An active player in the indie-comics circuit from the late 2000s onwards, Mathen is known for his fearless stance on issues ranging from corporate greed to corruption in politics.

Mathen is the creator of the fantasy world, Halahala, which was first introduced in his 2009 graphic novel, *Moonward*. Strange, ancient creatures and a vividly dystopian



George Mathen (Appupen) works on his comic scripts.

landscape pervade Halahala, which acts as the backdrop against which gods and men carry out their schemes in their bid for power and control. The stories

set in this universe use minimum words and are all interconnected.

For bold expression and left-of-centre creative content, Appupen is the one to watch.

## THROWBACK

**Milestones in publishing, science and television**

♦ **On The Road is published:** American author Jack Kerouac's iconic novel, *On The Road*, is published on 5 September 1957.

♦ **Alexander Fleming discovers the world's first antibiotic:** Alexander Fleming accidentally discovers penicillin on 28 September 1928, thereby ushering in the age of antibiotics.

♦ **The premiere of *The Flintstones*:** One of the world's all-time beloved animated shows, *The Flintstones*, airs on television for the first time in the US on 30 September 1960.

## REVIEW

# Above and Beyond

With magnificent aerial views of the country, *India from Above* can take your breath away

BY Shreevatsa Nevatia

THE LONAR LAKE in Maharashtra is a thing of wonder. Formed when an asteroid collided with Earth, the lake is said to be more than 50,000 years old. *India from Above*, a two-part National Geographic documentary series, now streaming on Disney+ Hotstar, approaches Lonar Lake from the sky. Seeing the edges of the crater, it is easy to imagine that hurling asteroid and the devastation of its impact. Similar views of the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean are awe-inspiring, but the series awakens you to the histories of our geography and culture, first.



Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, as seen in *India From Above*

More than a set of pretty pictures, *India from Above* is also an education. In Madhya Pradesh, the series tells the story of how Bhed-ghat's fossil cliffs took their magnificent shape; in Cherrapunji, how man shaped nature to build weatherproof root bridges; how Agariya tribesman hunt for salt in the Rann of Kutch.

The panoramas make it hard to tear your eyes away, but the documentary humanizes its vistas with a deft touch. One sees Ladakh through the eyes of Shabbir Hussain, an ultramarathon runner. Rather than chase Gir's lions, the series

focuses on the late Bharatdas Darshandas, the lone voter in an altogether forested area. The human tumult of the Kumbh Mela is later juxtaposed with the solitude of Bhanwar Ram Meghwal, who quietly feeds the demoiselle cranes that migrate to Rajasthan's Khichan village every September.

Narrated by actor Dev Patel, the series is made memorable by the specificity it brings to its staggering bird's-eye view and cinematography. It is so seductive, it makes you forget climate change, even while documenting the severity of monsoon. **R**



***The World as  
Burnt Fruit***  
by Rina Banerjee

Fans, feathers, cowrie shells, resin, alligator skull, globe, glass vials, light bulbs, gourds, steel wire and Japanese mosquito nets, 2009

IT'S DIFFICULT to make sense of Rina Banerjee's works solely by what they are called. Many have long, wordy titles as is the case with this installation piece called *The world as burnt fruit—When empires feuded for populations and plantations, buried in colonial and ancient currency a Gharial appeared from an inky melon—hot with blossom sprang forth to swallow the world not yet whole as burnt fruit.* The work uses many materials for what Banerjee calls the “maximum experience.” The artwork hides a



dark message beneath its surface—the resin-made skeleton, jutting from the orb lined with cowrie shells, is that of a gharial; the lump it holds in its mouth represents the world. An attentive viewer may spot the link with Indian

mythology—the association of the gharial with Ganga. It also draws attention to the endangered nature of this species in India and Myanmar—brought about by the damaging effects of imperialism. **R**

— BY SAPTAK CHOUDHURY

## ME & MY SHELF

Author-journalist, film-maker and founder of the Draco Books publishing company, **Janaki Lenin** specializes in writing about wildlife and conservation practices in India. She is the author of *My Husband and Other Animals*, *A King Cobra's Summer* and her latest, *Every Creature Has A Story*.



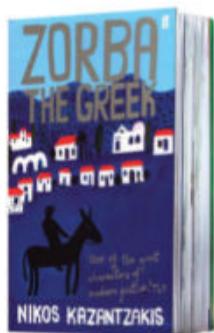
### **The Cairo Trilogy**

**BY NAGUIB MAHFOUZ**, *Everyman's Library*, ₹2,699 The sprawling saga of three generations of an Egyptian family living through the colonial period could have easily been set in India. It can be read as following in the grand old tradition of epic storytelling, of deception, oppression and conflict of breathtaking proportions. Or it could be read as a metaphor for the political turmoil destabilizing Egypt, then and now.

### **Zorba The Greek**

**BY NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS**, *Faber*, ₹599

I identified with the author-narrator as he comes under the influence of Zorba, a larger-than-life



character who ruminates about the big questions in life—war, religion, morality. It's the great Greek tragedy given a modern twist.

### **Vernon God Little**

**BY D. B. C. PIERRE**, *Faber*, ₹500 The death penalty, paedophilia, school shootings and a corrupt justice system in the US make for a dark tale. But Pierre serves it with liberal lashings of satire delivered in a Texan drawl.

### **Barkskins**

**BY ANNIE PROULX**, *Scribner*, ₹1,895 Partly an ecological saga, this book doesn't get overpowering on the environmental message. Each situation is so extraordinarily detailed in lyrical prose that the images erupt with colour and smell.

## The English Patient

BY MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *Everyman*, ₹599

When I first read it, I became obsessed with this haunting love story set against the devastation of war in the bleak deserts of North Africa and in the ruins of a hospital in Italy. The mysterious patient who can't recall who he is, and the many flashbacks could have become a confusing mess in the hands of a lesser writer. But Ondaatje offers little scraps of the tale at a time and reels the reader into this masterfully told story.

## My Brilliant Friend

BY ELENA FERRANTE, *Europa* ₹999

Despite my initial assumption that I'd find the much-hyped book wanting, I was captivated by the stream-of-consciousness style narration of the stories of two teenaged Italian girls, who struggle with poverty, education and jealousy of each other.



## Woodsmoke and Leafcups

BY MADHU RAMNATH, *Harper Litmus*, ₹399

Neither romantic nor sentimental, this charming memoir of the author's time living in Bastar portrays the Durwa community—foibles and all—with affection and sympathy. Offering an insightful glimpse into the lives of these forest people, who contend with the self-important lower-level officials of the state government machinery, as

Book prices are subject to change.

well as armed insurgents, this made me chuckle, grimace and root for the indigenous jungle-dwellers.

## Ghachar Ghochar

BY VIVEK SHANBHAG, *translated by Srinath Perur, HarperCollins*, ₹299

In this deceptively simple novella of a middle-class family, originally written in Kannada, not only is every character fully formed but the conflict between them emerges in just a few brief sentences. I was astonished by the author's ability to pack so much in so few words.

## Circe

BY MADELINE MILLER, *Bloomsbury*, ₹499

I expected only a retelling of a famous story—the adventures of the mortal hero Odysseus—from the perspective of a minor player. But the surprise in this extraordinary tale is a delightfully feminist goddess, who more than holds her own against the charisma of the popular hero and the patriarchal Greek gods of Mount Olympus.

## Eyrie

BY TIM WINTON, *Picador*, ₹899

Winton's prose is spare and gritty, matching the setting of this novel. A former hot-shot environmental activist, awash with self-pity and drugs, a woman from his past with problems far more dire and her silent and withdrawn grandson are each memorable characters.



—COMPILED BY ISHANI NANDI



# THE GENIUS SECTION

*12 Pages TO SHARPEN  
Your Mind*

# SCAMMED

*Even the most savvy among us can be duped.  
I learnt that harsh lesson myself when an urgent  
and heartfelt plea arrived in my inbox*

---

BY *Bruce Grierson*  
FROM *THEWALRUS.CA*

**T**HE EMAIL POPPED up on my screen at 6:45 a.m. on 24 December last year. I'd already been awake for hours, working to deadline.

It was from someone I know quite well: the minister of my Unitarian church. "I need a favour from you," it read. "Email me as soon as you get my message."

"Ahoy, Ron," I replied.

A friend was in the hospital battling cancer, he said, and he'd just learnt she was scheduled for surgery that night. Could I possibly pick up some iTunes gift cards?

"She needs the cards to download her favourite music and videos to boost her confidence on her next phase of surgery." He'd do it himself, but he was tied up, he explained. "I will surely reimburse you as soon as I can."

"OK," I emailed back.

"Thank you so much, Bruce," my correspondent replied. Then he got down to business. I was to buy \$300 (around ₹22,000) of iTunes credit. (*That's quite a lot of music*, I thought.) "I need you to scratch the silver lining at the back of each card to reveal the redemption code, then take a snapshot and send them directly to Sharon's email." He gave the address. "God bless."

God bless? We're Unitarians. Optimistic agnostics at best. The G-word doesn't come up much. Totally weird sign-off there. I assumed Ron's mind was still on the dire circumstances of his friend Sharon.

"I can pick up the cards around noon and engineer this by tonight," I replied.

That would be too late, he replied. "Can you please send them to her by noon so she could be able to use them before her surgery?" This was awkward timing. But hey, what was my slight inconvenience against this woman's cancer fight—on Christmas Eve, no less?

I drove to the grocery store and purchased four gift cards. The clerk activated them at the register. At 9:30, I emailed pictures with the following message: "Dear Sharon:

## **IT WAS AWKWARD, BUT WHAT WAS MY SLIGHT INCONVENIENCE AGAINST THIS WOMAN'S CANCER FIGHT?**

The codes on the cards below will buy you music via iTunes. Everybody is pulling for you."

A busy Christmas Eve day then unfolded. I forgot all about this until around 4:30 p.m., when I checked my email. A follow-up message was in my inbox. "Sharon just emailed me now saying she got the cards. I want to really appreciate you for that. I'm sure it's going to go a long way in her fight over cancer." But now there was a new development. Apparently, word of the gift cards had made its way around the cancer ward. Other patients were

asking Ron for the same thing. "Could you please get me additional \$500 worth of iTunes gift cards right away?"

What? The personal friend was one thing, but random strangers on the ward? Anyway, it might be too late. I called Ron.

"Hey, Bruce. What's up?"

"Are we too late to help those other patients?" I asked.

Silence. Then: "Um, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Those other patients on the ward who now also want music," I said.

## WE THINK VICTIMS ARE OLDER FOLK. IN FACT, MILLENNIALS ARE SCAMMED MORE.



"Bruce." A long beat. "It's a scam. Somebody has been impersonating me. I put out a warning on Facebook."

"I didn't ... see that."

**How is it that** I was played so easily? The answer is simple: Our brains are susceptible to well-crafted fiction, and the best scams are just that, says Vera Tobin, a cognitive scientist at Case Western Reserve University, USA. The sympathies and attention of the victim are expertly manipulated by a narrative sleight of hand. The stakes start small. In my case, the initial contact was modest and believable. There were the shoe-shuffling apologies, the

thanks in advance. From there, the story unfolded. Next thing I knew, I was putting on my jacket. Scammers exploit thinking errors in the same way storytellers do. We are "cognitive misers," says University of Toronto, Canada, psychologist Keith Stanovich, taking mental shortcuts and jumping to conclusions wherever possible.

Scammers take advantage of other cognitive errors, too, such as consistency bias, which says people tend to act in accordance with who they believe themselves to be. When I received the first email, it spoke to my sense that I'm a nice guy, and here was an opportunity to prove it. "You were on a goodwill mission," said the cop who dutifully took down my report. "And that kind of put blinders on you."

Then there's anchoring, a term psychologists use to describe the act of relying too heavily on one piece of information. "It's hard for people to set aside something they already know," says Tobin. "And that constrains our ability to reason." The scammer had fixed in my mind the image of a cancer ward, and to make matters worse, I could see Sharon in my mind because I have been there—I was at my father's bedside when he died of cancer.

All these factors together may incline scam victims to overlook what should be glaring red flags. My minister didn't use my name in the first email. Then again, maybe he was in a hurry? (The scammer didn't use my



name because he didn't have it. Until, with my response, I gave it to him.) And the grammatical errors from a person I knew to be fastidious with language? I chalked it up to stress. Basically, I read those emails through a filter that cleaned up the language and imputed only good motives.

There's a widespread perception that scam victims are predominantly older folk. Actually, millennials are scammed more than any other group, according to Federal Trade Commission data. But they lose less money than seniors because they have less. The stereotype that the lonely are sitting ducks is true. Lonely people are more likely to let scammers get their foot in the door; they open unsolicited mail and stay on the line with those bogus tax agents.

I'm not lonely or a millennial. But I was randomly chosen from a pool that is viewed as promising for

scammers: a minister's congregation. There's evidence that con artists disproportionately target religious groups—although it's less clear whether people of faith are actually more susceptible to such scams. And sure enough, I learned that no one else in my congregation had been fooled. This scammer was lucky to have found me. I'm gullible, as my wife likes to remind me: "Remember the time you almost bought a car with a lien on it?"

There are other character traits we scam victims demonstrably share. We are decisive. OK, impulsive. 'Naive' or 'trusting' could also apply, although social scientists prefer the descriptor 'unsuspicious.' And we are 'risk-takers'—physically, financially and emotionally—says psychologist Stephen Lea of the University of Exeter in England.

You'd think ignorance would be a precondition of getting bilked. But sometimes the problem isn't knowing too little but too much. One of Bernie Madoff's victims was a psychiatrist named Stephen Greenspan, who lost about a third of his retirement savings to Madoff's Ponzi scheme. Just two days before he learned he'd been hoodwinked, Greenspan had published a big authoritative tome called *Annals of Gullibility: Why We Get Duped and How to Avoid It*.

Overconfidence, it turns out, can produce a kind of unwarranted swagger, an almost comically obtuse misreading of events. I had actually been in the middle of editing some articles on how to avoid scams when the first email arrived. This should have made me able to smell a ruse at 50 paces. But here's the thing: While I had a solid general knowledge, I'd never encountered this particular scam. There was no Nigerian prince. It didn't even involve money directly. Why would crooks want music? The answer: They don't. The reason scammers ask for iTunes gift cards is simple: The codes are hard to trace. And once they have them, they can resell them.

**"I'm afraid there's nothing** we can do," said the agent from Visa's fraud department after hearing my story.

"Why not?"

"Because it's not fraud," he said. "When we dispute a charge, our claim is against the merchant. But the merchant didn't do anything wrong here. You willingly purchased those gift certificates."

Wait, what? I didn't willingly purchase them. Or did I? What distinguishes fraud from all other crimes is that it demands cooperation from the victim, notes Lea. Card magician Wesley James puts a finer point on it: "The dupe is always to some extent complicit."

But what could possibly be the payoff in getting robbed? Maybe the answer is not so different from why we go to magic shows. It's weirdly pleasurable to suspend our disbelief and then have the rug pulled out from under us. "That 'aha' moment," says Tobin, "is something humans like a lot."

The tension and release, after being expertly led into jeopardy, is something I've probably been missing on the flat sea of midlife. And of course, for a writer, drama is its own kind of payoff. What did I get out of the whole ordeal? I got a 'moment'—a frisson of aliveness, a memory to distinguish this day from all others forever. And, not least, a story. **R**

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## Can You Believe It?

Sweden's famous Icehotel has a smoke detector.

The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous asked for whiskey on his deathbed.  
(The nurse refused.)

'Father of Traffic Safety' William Eno invented the stop sign, speed limit,  
traffic circle and one-way street—but never learnt to drive.

## AS KIDS SEE IT



“Mother, I think I’m good enough to exhibit on the living room walls now.”

### Welcome to parenting. Your choices are:

A) Listen to your toddler scream and cry for 10 minutes because you opened their fruit snack.  
B) Listen to your toddler scream and cry for 10 minutes because they don’t know how to open their fruit snack.

— [@MOMTRIBEVIBE](#)

**My seven-year-old** grandson, Avyukth, burnt his finger while helping his mother and

showed me the scar over video call. I told him to be careful next time and asked him what lesson he learnt from the incident. “Don’t help mom in the kitchen,” he said.

— S. VIJAYARAGHAVAN,  
*Coimbatore*

**My cousin’s** three-year-old grandson, James, loved playing doctor with his stethoscope. One day, my cousin said to him, “James, come and check Grandma’s heart!”

He replied, “Not today! I don’t work on Fridays.”

— WENDY HAUSER

**Dad:** Cameron, you put your boots on the wrong feet.

**Three-year-old Cameron:** No, these are definitely my feet.

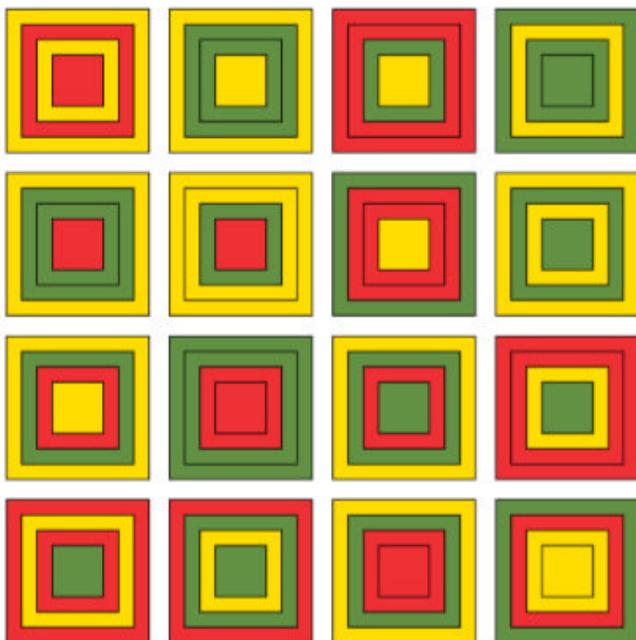
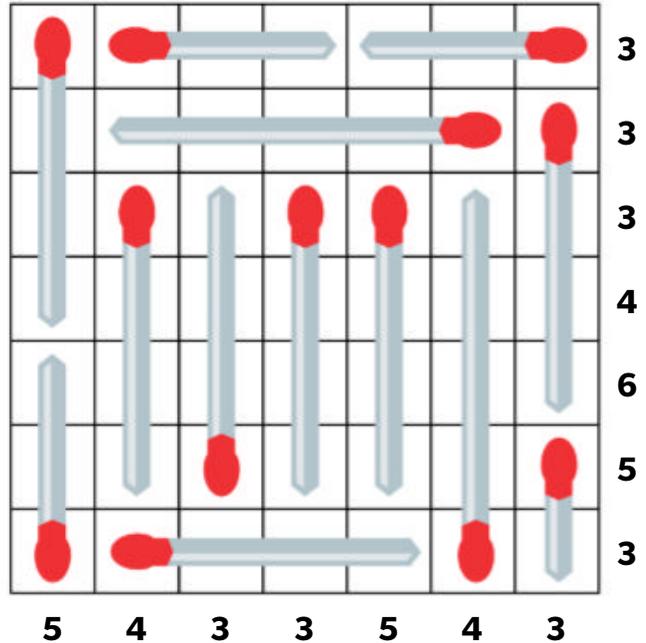
— PETER BELYEA

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

# BRAINTEASERS

## Match Play

**Moderately difficult** This grid contains matches of different sizes, any of which may be completely unburnt, partially burnt or completely burnt. Matches burn from the head (the red end) to the tail without skipping segments. The numbers outside the grid indicate the number of burnt segments in the corresponding row or column. Can you shade in the burnt segments to 'match' the numbers?



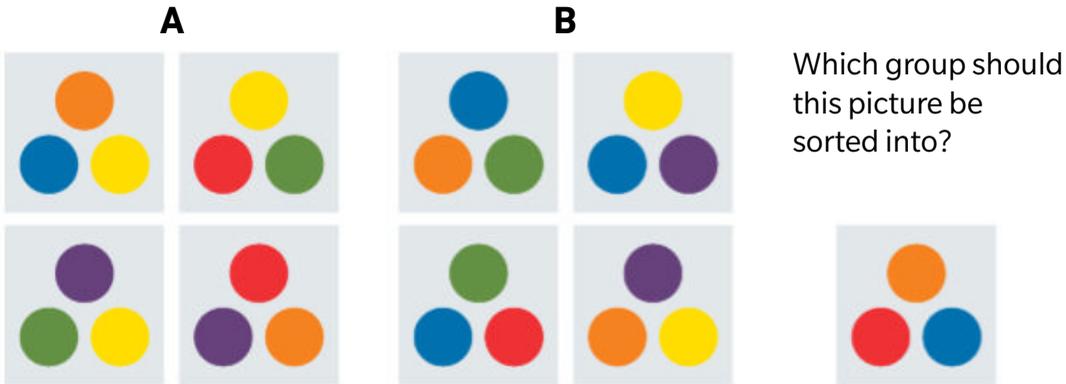
## Four in a Row

**Easy** In this bird's-eye view, each of the nested squares represents a stack of four blocks, with smaller ones sitting on top of larger ones. Can you find a line of four blocks in a row that are the same colour? You can search in three dimensions, meaning that not all four blocks are necessarily sitting at the same height; they could instead be forming a diagonal line by spanning adjacent heights on the same row, column or long diagonal.

(MATCH PLAY) FRASER SIMPSON; (FOUR IN A ROW) DARREN RIGBY

**Sort It Out**

**Difficult** The eight pictures below have been sorted into two groups according to a rule. Part of this rule is that in group A's pictures, the dots are arranged clockwise, whereas in group B, they're arranged anticlockwise.



Which group should this picture be sorted into?

(SORT IT OUT) DARREN RIGBY; (CRISS-CROSS MATH AND MATHELOGICAL) FRASER SIMPSON

	+		-		=5
×		-		÷	
	+		÷		=2
÷		-		÷	
	-		-		=6
=2		=1		=1	

**Criss-Cross Math**

**Moderately difficult** Place the digits from 1 to 9 into the nine empty cells so that each of the three rows and three columns form correct equations. Use all nine digits without repeating any of them. All calculations involve only positive whole numbers and should be performed from left to right or top to bottom, ignoring the mathematical order of operations (PEMDAS).

**Mathellogical**

**Difficult** Each letter in the table stands for one of the whole numbers from 1 through 9. No two of them represent the same number. With the help of the clues, can you figure out which letter stands for what?

**Clues:**

1.  $F \times J =$  The two-digit number HJ
2.  $G \times E =$  The two-digit number DE
3.  $A \times A = D$
4.  $B + E = C$

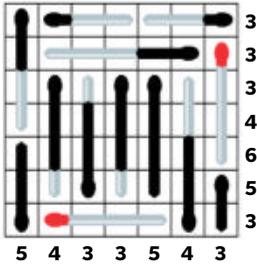
<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>J</b>

For answers, turn to PAGE 112

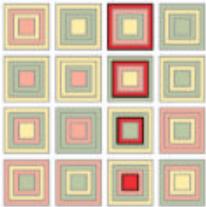
# BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

FROM PAGES 110 & 111

## Match Play



## Four in a Row



## Sort It Out

Group A, where the dots follow the order of the colours of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet) in a clockwise direction.

## Criss-Cross Math

6	+	7	-	8	=	5
x	-		÷			
3	+	5	÷	4	=	2
÷	-		÷			
9	-	1	-	2	=	6
=2	=1	=1				

## Mathological

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J
2	1	9	4	8	7	6	3	5



BY *Jeff Widderich*

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

## To Solve This Puzzle

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

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

## SOLUTION

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



## WORD POWER

**This month**, we visit the likes of nuns, protons, sprouts and soup spoons— words made exclusively from the second half of the alphabet, letters ‘n’ to ‘z’. If they make you feel topsy-turvy, turn to page 114 for answers.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

**1. stuporous** *adj.*

('stee-puh-russ)

- A** hunched over.
- B** leaking.
- C** impaired.

**2. wry** *adj.* (ry)

- A** ironically humorous.
- B** disrespectful.
- C** made with flour.

**3. purport** *v.*

(per-'port)

- A** transfer.
- B** commit a crime.
- C** claim.

**4. tryst** *n.*

(trist)

- A** final audition.
- B** natural disaster.
- C** lovers' meeting.

**5. wonton** *n.*

('wawn-tawn)

- A** wild abandon.
- B** Chinese dumpling.
- C** great quantity.

**6. spoor** *n.*

(spoor)

- A** animal tracks.
- B** rude rejection.
- C** plant cell.

**7. yurt** *n.*

(yert)

- A** custard dish.
- B** buffoon.
- C** circular tent.

**8. usurp** *v.*

(yoo-'serp)

- A** puree.
- B** flip over.
- C** seize.

**9. sop** *n.*

(sawp)

- A** thick syrup.
- B** bribe.
- C** wetland.

**10. tosspot** *n.*

('toss-pawt)

- A** tantrum.
- B** windstorm.
- C** drunkard.

**11. punt** *n.*

(punt)

- A** linebacker.
- B** flat-bottomed boat.
- C** smallest of a litter.

**12. tortuous** *adj.*

('tor-choo-us)

- A** clumpy.
- B** winding.
- C** painful.

**13. onyx** *n.*

('aw-nicks)

- A** antelope.
- B** gemstone.
- C** primrose.

**14. tyro** *n.*

('ty-roh)

- A** rookie.
- B** felt hat.
- C** whirlwind.

**15. ouzo** *n.*

('oo-zoh)

- A** firearm.
- B** Greek liqueur.
- C** slow drip.

## W, X, Y and Z ... and &

The letter 'z' wasn't always last. Up into the 1800s, the alphabet ended with the symbol '&', called an ampersand. It meant *and* then, too—like 'a' and 'i', it was both a character and a word. No one knows for sure when '&' was booted from the alphabet, but it didn't make the cut when the *Now I know my ABCs* ditty was copyrighted in 1835.



### Word Power ANSWERS

#### 1. stuporous (C)

*impaired.* I can't take medicine for my hay fever—just one pill leaves me sleepy and stuporous.

**2. wry (A)** *ironically humorous.* Mr Rana's students loved his wry sense of humour and unusual lesson plans.

**3. purport (C)** *claim.* Janardhan purports to be a bad singer, but he always brings down the house at karaoke.

**4. tryst (C)** *lovers' meeting.* Chayan and Lali planned a midnight tryst in the garden.

**5. wonton (B)** *Chinese dumpling.* I see you've left all the broth and eaten just the wontons.

**6. spoor (A)** *animal tracks.* The park ranger followed the fox's spoor back to the den.

**7. yurt (C)** *circular tent.* Gauri teaches meditation workshops in her backyard yurt.

**8. usurp (C)** *seize.* "I left for one minute—and that guy usurped my seat!" exclaimed Shyam angrily.

**9. sop (B)** *bribe.* If you give the doorman a few bucks as a sop, he'll let you in.

**10. tosspot (C)** *drunkard.* I spent a lot of my 20s in bars, but I wasn't exactly a tosspot.

**11. punt (B)** *flat-bottomed boat.* The travellers steered their punt down the Thames.

**12. tortuous (B)** *winding.* The trail is tortuous and steep, but the reward is a spectacular view from the summit.

**13. onyx (B)** *gemstone.* Hari gave Isha a black onyx ring for her birthday.

**14. tyro (A)** *rookie.* I'm a tyro when it comes to social media; can you explain again what 'tweet' means?

**15. ouzo (B)** *Greek liqueur.* "I'd like to propose a toast!" said Nitin, lifting his glass of ouzo.

### Vocabulary Ratings

**9 & BELOW:** so-so

**10-12:** rosy

**13-15:** wow

**QUIZ**

BY *Paul Paquet*



1. Arancini is an Italian delicacy. Its name means 'little orange' but it's actually made mostly of what?
2. Among land animals, what species has the largest eyes?
3. Humphrey Bogart won his only Oscar for which motion picture?
4. Which Disney princess had two stepsisters, Anastasia and Drizella?
5. What historic figure was assassinated near the Miljacka River in 1914?
6. Which country, other than Switzerland, uses the Swiss franc?
7. Which is the southernmost country in the European Union with no Mediterranean coastline?

8. Which member of boxing's 'Fabulous Four' was the only one who defeated each of the other three at least once?
9. What comedy became the first film directed by a woman to gross over \$100 million at the box office?
10. Who is currently known as FLOTUS?
11. Which of Sri Lanka's official languages also has official status in Singapore as well as parts of India?

12. Which Toni Morrison novel is about a character with the unusual name Milkman Dead III?
13. In 1901, Guglielmo Marconi received the first transatlantic wireless signal from atop Signal Hill in which city?
14. So far, which continent has hosted the Olympics the most times?
15. Short for Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, the acronym BAT refers to the dominant tech companies in which country?

**Answers:** 1. Rice. 2. The ostrich (*Struthio camelus*). 3. The African Queen. 4. Cinderella. 5. Franz Ferdinand. 6. Liechtenstein. 7. Portugal. 8. Sugar Ray Leonard. 9. *Big* (1988). 10. Melania Trump. (FLOTUS stands for 'first lady of the United States'). 11. Tamil. 12. Song of Solomon. 13. St. John's, Newfoundland. 14. Europe. 15. China.

ISTOCK.COM/PEPIFOTO

## QUOTABLE QUOTES

That's the toughest thing about this virus.  
It's like we don't know who to blame.

Vir Das, *comic*

**I do so love my newspapers. They neither shriek nor  
shout ... Such well-mannered behaviour!**

Apurva Purohit, *businesswoman*

Nepotism is the lowest and least imaginative form of corruption.

Daniel Alarcón, *author*



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