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THE GENIUS ISSUE

Reader's

Digest

SEPTEMBER 2020

**BUILD
A STRONGER
BRAIN**

By SARI HARRAR

Outsmart
**INTERNET
SCAMS**

From **THE WALRUS**

“I Sleep &
Feel Better
with CBD”

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A Love Letter to
My Mail Carrier

From **TWITTER**

You *Can* Bake
Anything

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14 **BIG FACTS**
Left Out
of History

By **JACOPO DELLA QUERCIA**



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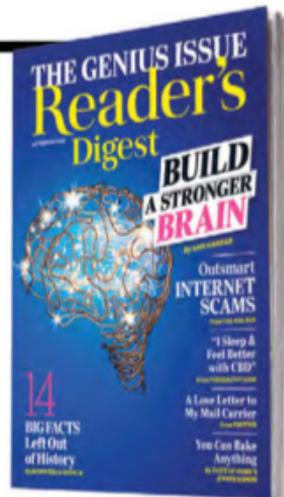
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DEAR READER

History Calls

IN JUNE, a 15-year-old named Alanna Stevenson woke up in East Palo Alto, California, ready to act.

Most people on earth still don't have the right to assemble and speak freely. But in America, Alanna can—without even telling her parents. She posted a flyer on Instagram announcing a march to protest the death of George Floyd. Six hundred people surged into Farrell Park at the time posted on her flyer. Community elders spoke on needed changes. Then Alanna (shown above) and the crowd set off for a mile walk up University Avenue. Many didn't know that a high school student was the force behind the day.

East Palo Alto is the city of 30,000 where I went to high school. In the heart of now-wealthy Silicon Valley, it has had to handle harsh policing, the drug trade, poverty, a foreclosure crisis. Largely Black when I attended school there, the city is largely Latino now.

A lot has changed, but one thing hasn't. "Someone reminded me of East Palo Alto history," says Alanna's mom, Shawneece, coming



around to her daughter's plan. "In East Palo Alto, we value kids' voices."

A few years before I enrolled, Black students at Ravenswood High protested inequities at their segregated school. That's how a White kid like me ended up there, in a racially mixed student body. East Palo Alto kids—and their parents—never were afraid to lead. They successfully campaigned for a police force of their own when county sheriffs ran roughshod. They got a toxic-waste plant shut down.

Now that history has found Alanna. "I felt like God was telling me, 'Use your voice and use the attitude and power you have to protest for what things are right,'" she says. Police officers knelt with her to say Black lives matter. Their chief offered Alanna support. I do too.



Bruce Kelley,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Write to me at
letters@rd.com.

FROM TOP: MAGALI GAUTHIER/EMBARCADERO MEDIA. MATTHEW COHEN

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LETTERS
NOTES ON THE
June ISSUE



Find Your Happy Place

At a time when “being patriotic” can have a variety of definitions—as well as reactions—it is lovely to be reminded of what we really do best in this country: take care of one another. And for that, I am proud to be an American. Thank you for giving us a place where we can share that feeling.

—MARGARET MCKINLEY *San Diego, California*

Dear Reader

After reading the story of your friend’s lost—and found—wallet, I want to share that the quickest way to locate the owner of a lost wallet containing a credit card is to call the number on the back of the card. The company will call the owner and give them your contact information. The owner will probably call you immediately.

—KEN HILDERBRAND
Newport, Oregon

I Was Scammed by My Best Friend

There is so much wrong with our justice system that Johnathan Walton was forced to work so hard and spend two years of his life trying to get his “friend” Mair Smyth convicted of conning him out of \$92,000, which is obviously a crime. Talk about injustice!

—SHERRIE FACCHINE
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

My Thank-You Year

Like Gina Hamadey, I’ve committed to sending thank-you notes for a year—in my case, one per week. It seemed daunting to come up with 52 people to thank. But with COVID-19, I’ve found plenty of recipients: my mailman, restaurants, my grocery store, friends, and family. No e-mails, just pen to paper—something tangible to reach people during this time of isolation. I encourage more people to make 2020 their thank-you year!

—MISTY K. HAM
Cumming, Georgia

On Dad’s Trail, Forever

I’ve been riding motorcycles since my teens. My son and I did a ten-day dirt bike tour of Cambodia, the challenging adventure of a lifetime for both of us. If given a choice between spending my last days in a rest home or “dying with my boots on” doing something I love,

like the author's biker dad, the choice is easy!

—LARRY HARDING
*Hendersonville,
North Carolina*

How to Find Peace Anytime, Anyplace

I have thought meditation might be useful and have tried it.

However, when I read the author's description of his "mental chatter" during a typical session, I thought, How could I possibly take anyone who doesn't like fedoras seriously?

—J. GREGORY BUSHONG
*Weaverville,
North Carolina*

I Won!

Reading about the International Cherry Pit Spitting Championship took me back to the time my parents

brought my best friend and me to the local cherry orchards. That evening, Sheryl spent the night and we lay in my bed eating cherries and spitting the pits into the ceiling light fixture. To this day, when there are cherries on the table, we have our own private laugh.

—LINDA DAVIDSON
Oceanside, California

A Little Life Saved, A Big Friend Made

The hero of this story is the Central Connecticut State University football coach who encourages his players to join the national bone marrow registry. Without that incentive, this miracle never would have happened.

—EILEEN SMITH
Temple, Texas

IT WAS THE BEST OF PLACES, IT WAS THE WORST OF PLACES

◆ My county is rated a bit below average when it comes to amenities, and I wondered what the author would think of it. A few paragraphs later, I read he's from where I live: Oneonta, New York. I bet he thinks it's pretty terrific—like I do.

—Nancy Sikes
ONEONTA, NEW YORK

◆ I was so entranced by the author's account of Red Lake County, Minnesota, that I read the story twice. It painted such a wonderful picture of classic small-town America that I wanted to hop on a plane and experience for myself all Red Lake Falls has to offer.

—Susan Madar
DEVON, PENNSYLVANIA

Looking for a Silver Lining

If you've ever wished 2020 had a fast-forward button, you're certainly not alone. But despite the challenges, many of us have discovered unexpected reasons to be grateful this year. Did you find a new skill—or a new friend? Did you learn something wonderful about yourself—or about a neighbor or even a stranger? Go to rd.com/silver to tell us the best thing to come out of your year (and see terms), and we might publish your story.


 EVERYDAY HEROES

Miracle Tattoos

Using ink and needle, this artist helps injured and scarred patients feel whole again

BY *Cara Anthony*

FROM KAISER HEALTH NEWS

THE FIRST FINGERNAIL tattoos started off as a joke.

Mark Bertram, 46, lost the tips of two fingers at work in 2018 when his hand became trapped in a fan belt. “It’s life-changing but it’s not life-ending,” he says. “Doing work is harder now. Everything is just a little different.”

After two surgeries and occupational therapy, Bertram decided to make light of his condition by asking Eric Catalano, an auto-finance manager turned tattoo artist, to create fingernail tattoos. The idea made everyone in the studio laugh—until they saw the final result. “The mood changed,” Catalano recalls from his Eternal Ink Tattoo Studio in Hecker, Illinois. “Everything turned from funny to wow.”

When Catalano posted a photo of the tattoos, a pair of fingernails that looked so real no one could believe their eyes, he had no idea the image would eventually be viewed by millions of people around the world.

The viral photo pushed Catalano, 40, further into the world of paramedical tattooing. Now people with life-altering scars come from as far away as Ireland to visit his shop. They enter Eternal Ink looking for the artistic healing they saw online. Using flesh-toned inks and a needle, Catalano transforms his clients’ view of themselves.

Leslie Pollan, 32, a dog breeder in Oxford, Mississippi, was bitten on the face by a puppy in 2014. She underwent countless surgeries to correct a scar on her lip.

“Plastic surgery gave me no hope,”



Eric Catalano fills in the blanks left empty by surgery or accidents.

she says. “So I looked for other options.” She ultimately traveled six hours for a session with Catalano. He camouflaged Pollan’s lip scar, giving her back a piece of her confidence. “You don’t understand until you’ve been through it,” Pollan says. “It made me have a different outlook on life.”

Using tattoos to blend in rather than stand out is a relatively new field, but it is growing, thanks in part to interest in cosmetic and plastic surgery. In fact, Americans spent more than \$16.5 billion on cosmetic procedures in 2018. After tummy tucks, breast augmentations, and other procedures, some patients want to cover the scars that are a product of such operations.

Though he is now known for his talent with intricate fingernails, Catalano uses the techniques he picked up years ago while helping breast cancer survivors who wanted tattoos of areolas—the darker areas around the nipples—after having mastectomies.



Mark Bertram’s fingers, before and after

Those tattoos are among the most common paramedical requests. His grandmother had breast cancer, and her battle with the disease is one reason Catalano is so dedicated to helping those with the diagnosis.

“Cancer took away a part of my body I can never get back,” says Sarah Penberthy, a breast cancer survivor who came from Festus, Missouri, to receive areola tattoos. “I felt like I wasn’t even human.” Penberthy, 40, says she was grateful for her life but felt incomplete until Catalano stepped in. He tattooed nipples and a creative design of a ship’s anchor on her chest, with the words I REFUSE TO SINK.

Catalano, who inks traditional tattoos out of the studio he established more than ten years ago, performs up to eight reconstructive tattoos each “Wellness Wednesday,” drawing in nail beds on finger amputees, mocking up belly buttons after tummy tucks, and more. While he charges \$100 per regular tattoo, he doesn’t charge for paramedical tattoos: A GoFundMe page established last year brought in more than \$16,000, allowing Catalano to donate his work.

“Financially, it doesn’t make sense,” Catalano says. “But every time I see that emotion from my customers, I’m 100 percent sure this is something that I can’t stop doing.” **R**

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COURTESY KAISER HEALTH NEWS

Saving a Life Online

BY *Andy Simmons*

WE THINK OF kids playing video games as being in a sort of solitary confinement, sequestered in their darkened bedrooms. In truth, they are usually communicating with other gamers, via audio or text, about the action on the screen. And sometimes the chatter veers from the world of fantasy to real life.

That's what happened to 14-year-old Reilly Howard from East Hampton, Connecticut, last October. While playing *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, he noticed that an online friend, a 13-year-old from Florida, was not his normal effusive self. Reilly's hunch was confirmed when the friend messaged him, "Yo, we need to talk." Reilly immediately called him.

"He starts to open up about what's going on in his life: 'I have nothing to live for; I'm going to kill myself,'" Reilly told nbconnecticut.com. "He couldn't even talk, he was crying so much." Unable to verbally convey his anguish, his friend typed out, "Tonight is going to be the night."

Suicide is a lot to throw at a high school kid, but Reilly, a sophomore at the time, resolved to stay on the line



Gamer Reilly Howard and his mother, Sheila Reilly, prevented a friend's suicide.

for as long as he was needed. "I knew he didn't want to be alone, and I didn't want him to go," he told WFSB. "He's my friend. I didn't want him to die."

For two hours, Reilly said everything he could think of to persuade his friend to embrace life. "I just kept reassuring him, 'You've got a lot to live for,'" says Reilly. "I said, 'I'll see you tomorrow. I'm going to be playing with you tomorrow. You promise, nothing is going to happen tonight.'"

About that time, Reilly's parents came home from dinner. He filled them in, and they contacted Florida police, who tracked down the boy.

The troubled teen is doing well now, thanks to a good friend—one he'd never met in person—who was willing to put down the keyboard and lend an ear. Says Reilly's mother, Sheila Reilly, "You just have to show up and talk to people. And listen." **R**

QUOTABLE QUOTES

All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt.

—Charles M. Schulz, CARTOONIST

I have never considered compassion a finite resource.

—Roxane Gay, WRITER

I strive to be a skeptic, in the best sense of that word: I question everything, and yet I'm open to anything.

—Amy Tan, AUTHOR

I'm just doing the same thing everyone else is right now—the best I can. My AA is a huge part of that. Sometimes, it's just about talking.

—Sugar Ray Leonard, BOXER

There are more people moving us forward than there are sowing division. I surround myself with people who have faith.

—Maria Shriver, JOURNALIST



In the military, you see so many examples of self-sacrifice and moral courage. In life, you don't get that many opportunities to be sure of your friends.

—Adam Driver, ACTOR

**When I stand in a blessing, my first question is
“How can I be used?”**

—Niecy Nash, COMEDIAN

If you're pretty, you're pretty, but the only way to be beautiful is to be loving. Otherwise, it's just “Congratulations about your face.”

—John Mayer, MUSICIAN

**Be the hardest-working person you know.
If you're not, someone else will be.**

—Ian Brennan, SCREENWRITER

POINT TO PONDER

The answers to American problems are found by living up to American ideals—to the fundamental truth that all human beings are created equal and endowed by God with certain rights.

—George W. Bush, FORMER PRESIDENT

GETTY IMAGES (7)

DRIVER

BUSH

NASH

LIFE
IN THESE
United States

My teenage son and I were discussing dating and relationships. To impress upon him that I had valuable experience to share, I commented, "You know, I've been around the barn a few times."

"Yeah, Mom," he said, unimpressed, "but always on the same horse."

—NANCY WEST
Jefferson City, Missouri

Times I've seen my husband cry:

1. Our wedding.
2. The birth of our children.
3. The time I mowed the grass too short.

—[@MOMMAJESSIEC](#)

I walked into our living room and found our expensive decorative sofa



"Got anything else? I gave up carbs."

pillow in shreds. I asked my teenage daughter whether she knew which of our three dogs was responsible.

"It was Cotton," she said.

"How do you know?"

"I watched him."

—TONY BUNKER
Sautee Nacoochee, Georgia

Sad after the funeral of a friend, my wife and I ducked into a Chinese

restaurant for a little Szechuan pick-me-up. The feel-good session ended abruptly when I read the fortune in my cookie: "You will soon be reunited with a good friend."

—STANLEY HEERBOTH
League City, Texas

Sometimes I worry that my nine-year-old is too sweet for this world, but recently she looked at my face and said,

Why don't toasters have a window so you can see how toasted your bread is?

—[@JONATHANHIMPLE](#)

"I didn't know you could be old and get a pimple," so it turns out she'll be fine.

—JESSICA VALENTI,
writer

Daughter (via text):

Mom, where are you??

Mom: Leaving Walmart. Halfway home. Why, sweetie?

Daughter: You brought me to Walmart with you ...

Mom: OH, DARN! Be there in a bit!

—SPOTLIGHTSTORIES.CO

My aunt was in the hospital for hip-replacement surgery and not happy about having to wear the hospital garb she'd

GOT A FUNNY STORY about friends or family? It could be worth \$\$\$.

For details, go to [RD.COM/SUBMIT](#).

been given. So when she was wheeled into surgery, my mother ran out and bought her a nice robe to wear instead. Rather than being thankful, my aunt was appalled.

"You left the hospital while I was in surgery?"

she asked. "What would you have done if I had died?"

"I'd have returned the robe," answered Mom.

—SUE TIMMONS
Ashland, Ohio

It really doesn't feel like September till Macy's puts their Christmas decorations up.

—[@MRGEORGE](#)
WALLACE

DEAR GOD ...

Sometimes kids have such big questions that not just anyone can answer them. Boredpanda.com collected a few such queries from third graders.

◆ **DEAR GOD:** How come you didn't invent any new animals lately? We still have just all the old ones.

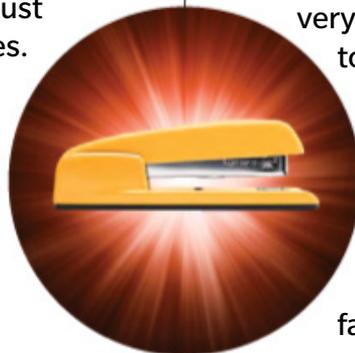
◆ **DEAR GOD:** Is Reverend Coe a friend of yours, or do you just know him through business?

◆ **DEAR GOD:** Who draws the lines around the countries?

◆ **DEAR GOD:** How did you know you were God?

◆ **DEAR GOD:** I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family, and I can never do it.

◆ **DEAR GOD:** I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.



HOW TO

Bake Absolutely Anything

If I could overcome my first run-in with yeast—and the lopsided result—anyone can

BY *Jeanne Sidner*



ADAM VOORHES/GALLERY STOCK

MY INTRODUCTION TO baking started with the home-kitchen classic that cracks open the oven door for so many—Nestlé Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookies. It was the 1970s, and most of the moms in our largely Catholic neighborhood outside of Milwaukee were busy raising big families. For the girls in my house, that meant our mother made sure we knew our way around the kitchen. At the flour-dusted table, Mom taught eight-year-old me how to make the cookies perfectly chewy with a crispy exterior. (The big secret: Always chill your dough.)

We crafted them by the dozen, measuring ingredients from yellow Tupperware containers and mixing everything in my mom's aqua Butterprint Pyrex bowl, part of a set she'd received as a wedding gift in 1963. Friends who grew up in "fresh fruit is dessert" households could not get enough when they visited. And if they happened to come over when the cookie jar was empty, they were not shy about sharing their disappointment.

So from a young age, I was crystal clear on the power of a baked-to-perfection cookie to make people happy. Baking cookies—then brownies, cakes, and pies—became my hobby and a tasty form of social currency. First I used my skills with butter and sugar to impress a series of teenage boyfriends. In time, the fresh goodies were left on doorsteps to welcome new neighbors and set out in

the break room for coworkers. Baking was my superpower.

A few years ago, I became content director for *Taste of Home*, the RD sister magazine that celebrates the treasured recipes of home cooks. I'd never been more excited for a new job, but privately I worried that my baking chops wouldn't measure up. Why? I had a secret as dark as an oven with a burned-out light bulb: While I had baked sweets my whole life, I'd never made a yeast bread from scratch.

Mom couldn't help me with this one. For her, store-bought frozen dough was her go-to when she needed "from scratch" bread. I understand why: Bread dough provides so many opportunities to fail. Cookies are forgiving. You can be a little off in your measurements, and, trust me, those cookies still disappear from the office break room. Not the case with yeast breads. Most recipes recommend weighing ingredients carefully, down to the gram.

Then there's the yeast. Yeast is fussy, the Goldilocks of ingredients. Mix it in water too cool and it won't activate; too hot, and it dies. Yes, yeast is a living, one-celled member of the fungus family. Because it is alive, I could, of course, kill it—and unfortunately rather easily.

And don't forget that other potential failure point: the kneading. Too little kneading and the bread will be flat. But don't overdo it! Knead it too much, and the loaf will be tough and chewy.



I HADN'T KILLED IT. IT WAS JUST— SLEEPING. NOW A PUFFY DOUGH FILLED THE BOWL.

Still, this was no time for excuses. I was a baker, now one with *Taste of Home* attached to my name. I may have been intimidated by bread, but it was time. I wanted in.

Getting started, I found Instagram to be a friend. A basic no-knead bread was the one I was seeing online overlaid with dreamy filters. People described it as easy, and to be honest, the thought of removing even one intimidating variable—kneading—was enough to get me to buy five pounds of bread flour and dive in.

I gathered everything I'd need (“be prepared” is the first rule of any baking), including my mom’s trusty Pyrex.

It had seen me through my first days as a baker, so I was counting on it to work its magic. I had an easy *Taste of Home* recipe all set on my iPad. I mixed the flour, salt, and yeast and made sure the water temperature was just right—100 to 115 degrees—before pouring it in.

And then it happened—or didn’t happen. I followed the instructions to the letter, but my dough didn’t rise. Somehow, impossibly, it looked smaller. Sludgy, gooey, wet with a few bubbles. Sad.

The Pyrex bowl didn’t save me, so I had to figure out how to do it myself. Frantically googling “bread dough didn’t rise” yielded a likely answer—the room was too cold. (This is what happens when you live in Wisconsin!) But I found some solutions too. I put the disappointing dough in the oven with the light on, a trick that provides just a bit of gentle heat, to let it try again.

Three hours later, after I’d resisted the urge to keep checking on it like a nervous mom with a newborn, a puffy dough filled the bowl. I hadn’t killed it; it was just ... sleeping. A quick fold, a second rise, and then my bread went into my Dutch oven and off to bake.

Thirty minutes later, I took it out. Sure, it was slightly misshapen, but in my eyes, it was golden-brown, crusty perfection, right down to the yeasty-sweet hit of steam coming from its top.

Naturally, the first thing I did was grab my phone and hop on Instagram,

TIPS FROM MY TRIAL AND ERROR

1. Read the whole recipe before you start.

We've all gotten half-way through a recipe only to find we don't have any buttermilk. Plus, a quick read can help you prepare for what's ahead, particularly if there are any techniques with which you're not familiar.

2. Use butter at the right temperature.

Most cake and cookie recipes call for softened butter, which is the right consistency for creaming with sugar. Biscuit and pie pastry recipes call for ice-cold butter in order to create the flakiest layers. If your butter isn't the correct temperature,

your bakes won't mix up the way they should.

3. Weigh all your ingredients.

When it comes to baking, it's always preferable to measure your ingredients by weight rather than volume. This ensures you get exactly the right proportions. It may not be critical for something simple like a pan of blondies, but it's important with fussier baked items, such as macarons.

4. Chill cookie dough.

We know how tempting it is to get your cookies in the oven the second you're done mixing up your dough. However, chilling the dough can help develop flavors and prevent cookies from spreading too much. Do not skip this step!

5. Coat mix-ins with flour.

When a recipe calls for add-ins (dried fruits,

chocolate chips, and/or nuts), you'll often see instructions to toss them in a bit of flour before adding to the batter. You might think that's a waste—after all, there's flour in the batter. But coating these heavy mix-ins helps prevent them from sinking to the bottom of the pan. The extra step gives you even distribution and a prettier result.

6. Cool cakes completely before frosting.

Always let your cakes, cupcakes, and cookies cool completely before frosting them. If they are too warm, the frosting will slide right off the top of your cake or melt and soak in. Cooling racks speed up the process. If you don't have one, take the cover off your ironing board and use the board as a cooling rack.



positioning my beautiful bread just so in a shining stream of daylight on a wooden cutting board. No one needed to know it was my first yeast bread ever—or how close it came to getting scraped into the garbage can. The online reactions started almost immediately—heart emojis and comments like “This looks DELISH!” from my friends. They couldn’t taste it, but virtual sharing yields its own rewards.

Finally I cut into that lovely brown crust and doled out slices to my husband and kids. Those slices led to seconds, then thirds, each piece slathered with softened butter and a little sprinkle of kosher salt. I made my family perhaps happier with slices of warm, buttered homemade bread than I had with all the sweets combined. They

were used to the cookies and brownies; this was something totally new and equally delicious. Soon enough, I was left with a butter-smearred knife, a few lonely crumbs on the cutting board, and, of course, my post on Instagram as the only evidence of its existence.

At last, I was a bread baker—despite yeast’s best attempts to intimidate me on this first try. No more feeling inferior or afraid. Now I make bread and homemade pizza crust regularly. Yeast and I have such a good relationship that I’m done buying the little packs—I buy it in large enough quantities to fill its own Tupperware container. And I have enough confidence to start thinking (and stressing!) about my next difficult baking challenge: homemade croissants. **R**



Top Nine Squeaky-Clean Ways to Get Angry

9. “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.”
8. “Whoa whoa whoa.”
7. “Hold your horses.”
6. “Jeez Louise.”
5. “For heaven’s sake.”
4. “If I had a nickel for every time ...”
3. “Well, now, wait a minute.”
2. “For Pete’s sake.”
1. “Listen here, pal.”

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YOUR TRUE STORIES

IN 100 Words

Birds of a Feather

I have been in the construction business for many years. When I was a foreman on a job site, two members of my crew who always rode together were often late for work. I gave them their last warning. A few days later, one of them came in late and said to me, "Boss, I'm sorry, but my parakeet died last night, and I had to bury him." Being an animal lover, I excused his lateness. A couple of minutes later, his buddy came straggling in. His excuse? "I was one of the pallbearers."

—James Ryan

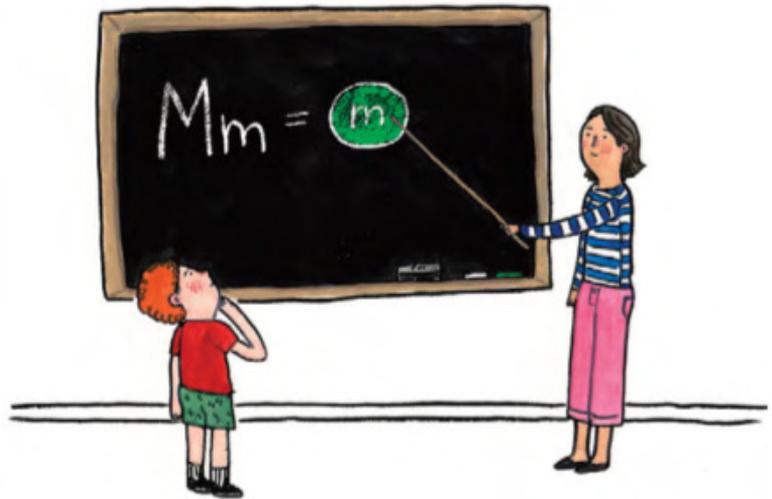
DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA

TO READ MORE true stories or submit one, go to RD.COM/STORIES. If we publish yours in the print magazine, it could be worth \$100.

History in Translation

The road ahead curves under a thick canopy of trees. I'm in Germany. It's 2004. As I drive around the bend, two dozen Confederate soldiers walk out of the brush. I look in my rearview mirror. Yes, those are Confederate soldiers, carrying muskets. I roll my window down and yell, "Was machst du da, Kumpel?" ("What are you doing, pal?") They yell back, "Gettysburg!" It turns out, reenacting the American Civil War is a thing in Germany.

—THOMAS BROWN *Clermont, Georgia*



Learning Is Sweet

As a first-grade reading teacher, I had to test students at the beginning of the school year to determine their reading levels. Part of the assessment was having them read a sheet with upper- and lowercase letters

randomly ordered. One of the students I was testing came to a lowercase m. He looked and looked at it. Finally, he turned to me and said, "I have seen that letter on M&M's, but I don't know what it's called."

—Heidi Bailey

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“Will You Be My Grandparents?”

Bill and Arlene were the most amazing neighbors ever. I've got a certificate on my wall to prove it.

BY *Katelynn Martinez*

IT WAS JUST the three of us—my parents and me. My dad is a truck driver, and when I was little, he was gone most of the time, delivering barbed wire and other livestock supplies around the Midwest. So my mom was almost like a single mother.

We lived in a small house in Brighton, Colorado, in a neighborhood of 1970s ranch houses. We had red shag carpeting and wood paneling and faux brick in the finished part of the basement, and a big yard with plenty of room for our five dogs and two cats to run around.

We moved there on my third birthday. My first memory is our neighbor Arlene handing me strawberries from her garden through a hole in the

chain-link fence. She and her husband, Bill, lived next door.

Arlene spent a lot of time working in the garden, and I was always talking to her from our yard. I was a chatterbox. I think what drew me to Arlene and Bill is that they never got tired of listening to me gab. I also think Arlene saw a lot of herself in me—we were both lonely, anxious kids—and that may be why she always took the time to listen to me. Bill too. It was a wonderful connection.

There weren't any kids my age in the neighborhood, so I mostly played in the yard with the dogs. I had a lot of imaginary friends—a whole family, actually, with a husband, in-laws, children, a best friend ... no joke. Weird kid.

COURTESY KATELYNN MARTINEZ (6)



1997



2008



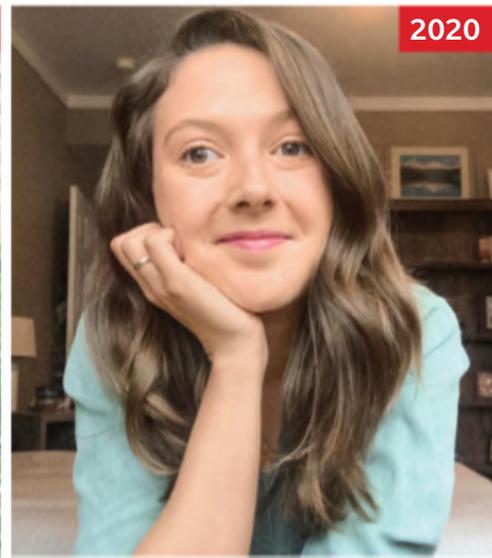
2018



1996



1996



2020

One day, my parents asked Bill and Arlene whether they'd watch me while they went out on a date. This worked well for everyone, so it became a somewhat monthly occurrence. Arlene and Bill didn't have kids. They had a spare room in their house, which became "my" room. I had a cabinet and boxes of toys and books in that room.



EVERY CHILD DESERVES ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECIPROCATED LOVE.

Arlene and I would do crafts together. We were always putting tiny sequins on things. Bill taught me how to ride a bike and later how to drive the lawn tractor and eventually a car (stick and automatic). He was always fixing something in his garage and always smelled like oil. I would wander over to chatter at him, and he would always stop and listen to me, just like Arlene did.

When I was about five, I had an idea. My parents were watching TV when I spit it out: "What if I adopted Bill and Arlene as my grandparents?"

My parents said I could go over and ask them tomorrow. The next day, I knocked on Bill and Arlene's door, sat down in their living room, and said, "Will you guys be my grandparents?" They started crying and enthusiastically accepted. Soon after, they printed out an adoption certificate, and it hung on their living room wall from then on.

I remember being surprised that they took my offer so seriously—not because I wasn't serious but because I was just a kid. They could have laughed it off. Thinking of that moment still brings tears to my eyes. There is something truly magnificent about a child offering up her love and adults being so ecstatic to accept it. Every child in this world deserves enthusiastically reciprocated love.

From the day I adopted them, I called Bill and Arlene Grandpa and Grandma. Pretty soon, my parents were calling them Mom and Dad. Even our animals loved Bill and Arlene and would often sneak out of our yard to go visit them. Arlene always kept treats in her pockets for them.

In the winter, Bill would attach a snowplow to the front of the lawn tractor and we would plow the block and all the neighbors' driveways together. One of my first times on the tractor, I plowed down our chain-link fence,

COURTESY KATELYNN MARTINEZ

and Bill just chuckled in his laid-back way. We eventually replaced it with a nice, tall wooden “privacy” fence. My dad and Bill installed it together. They cut a small gate in the top of one section so we could open it and still chat. They also added a window at the bottom for the dogs.

Over the years, Bill and Arlene Howe supported me in all my dreams. They encouraged me to apply for college, even though I didn’t have the money to go. And when I got accepted to Colorado State University, they presented me with a fund. They told me they’d been putting away money since the day I adopted them.

It took me five years, but I graduated with a degree in forest management, and now I work as a forest health technician for the Colorado State Forest Service.

Since I’ve become an adult, I’ve learned more about my grandparents. They both grew up poor. Bill’s mother died when he was eight, and he and his siblings—there were

eight of them—went to live with relatives. Arlene had some health problems and struggled with alcoholism when she was young. Their lives weren’t as perfect as they appeared to be through the fence. But the two of them always seemed genuinely happy in each other’s company. Bill told me that once on a trip in their RV he listened to Arlene talk about raising honeybees for 200 miles and he never tired of the sound of her voice.

Arlene passed away in 2013, two days before our adoption anniversary. Bill gave her eulogy. At the end, he said, “Arlene leaves behind her husband, Bill. And the greatest joy of her life, her granddaughter, Katie.”

After the funeral, Bill gave me the ring he’d gifted to Arlene on their 25th wedding anniversary. It’s a simple gold band that I wear on my ring finger as a reminder of the kind of love I wish to put into this world. **R**

ADAPTED FROM A STORY ON HUMANSOFNEWYORK.COM (MARCH 2020), COPYRIGHT © 2020 BY KATELYNN MARTINEZ.



A Bird’s-Eye View

During the coronavirus shutdown in Missouri, museum officials saddened by their empty galleries and zookeepers worried about their bored animals hit upon an ingenious solution: letting some of the tamer, more inquisitive animals out to look at the art. That’s how three penguins from the Kansas City Zoo found themselves perusing the galleries of the nearby Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in May. One development that surprised all the humans involved: Penguins prefer Caravaggio to Monet.

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USE OF MYRBETRIQ (meer-BEH-trick)

Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) is a prescription medicine for adults used to treat overactive bladder (OAB) with symptoms of urgency, frequency and leakage.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Myrbetriq is not for everyone. Do not take Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any ingredients in Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream.



IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

Myrbetriq may cause allergic reactions that may be serious. If you experience swelling of the face, lips, throat or tongue, with or without difficulty breathing, stop taking Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take including medications for overactive bladder or other medicines such as thioridazine (Mellaril™ and Mellaril-ST™), flecainide (Tambocor®), propafenone (Rythmol®), digoxin (Lanoxin®) or solifenacin succinate (VESIcare®). Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Before taking Myrbetriq, tell your doctor if you have liver or kidney problems. The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include

increased blood pressure, common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis), dry mouth, flu symptoms, urinary tract infection, back pain, dizziness, joint pain, headache, constipation, sinus irritation, and inflammation of the bladder (cystitis).

For further information, please talk to your healthcare professional and see Brief Summary of Prescribing Information for Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) on the following pages.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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Myrbetriq®
(mirabegron)
extended-release tablets
25 mg, 50 mg



Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) extended-release tablets 25 mg, 50 mg

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

Read the Patient Information that comes with Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This summary does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment.

What is Myrbetriq (meer-BEH-trick)?

Myrbetriq is a prescription medication for adults used to treat the following symptoms due to a condition called overactive bladder:

- Urge urinary incontinence: a strong need to urinate with leaking or wetting accidents
- Urgency: a strong need to urinate right away
- Frequency: urinating often

It is not known if Myrbetriq is safe and effective in children.

Who should not use Myrbetriq?

Do not take Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any of the ingredients in Myrbetriq. See the end of this summary for a complete list of ingredients in Myrbetriq.

What should I tell my doctor before taking Myrbetriq?

Before you take Myrbetriq, tell your doctor about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have liver problems or kidney problems
- have very high uncontrolled blood pressure
- have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if Myrbetriq will harm your unborn baby. Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Myrbetriq passes into your breast milk. Talk to your doctor about the best way to feed your baby if you take Myrbetriq.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Tell your doctor if you take:

- thioridazine (Mellaril™ or Mellaril-S™)
- flecainide (Tambocor®)
- propafenone (Rythmol®)
- digoxin (Lanoxin®)
- solifenacin succinate (VESicare®)

How should I take Myrbetriq?

- Take Myrbetriq exactly as your doctor tells you to take it.
- You should take 1 Myrbetriq tablet 1 time a day.
- You should take Myrbetriq with water and swallow the tablet whole.
- Do not chew, break, or crush the tablet.
- You can take Myrbetriq with or without food.
- If you miss a dose of Myrbetriq, begin taking Myrbetriq again the next day. Do not take 2 doses of Myrbetriq the same day.
- If you take too much Myrbetriq, call your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.

What are the possible side effects of Myrbetriq?

Myrbetriq may cause serious side effects including:

- **increased blood pressure.** Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq.
- **inability to empty your bladder (urinary retention).** Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder if you have bladder outlet obstruction or if you are taking

other medicines to treat overactive bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you are unable to empty your bladder.

- **angioedema.** Myrbetriq may cause an allergic reaction with swelling of the lips, face, tongue, throat with or without difficulty breathing. Stop using Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include:

• increased blood pressure	• dizziness
• common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis)	• joint pain
• dry mouth	• headache
• flu symptoms	• constipation
• urinary tract infection	• sinus (sinus irritation)
• back pain	• inflammation of the bladder (cystitis)

Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away or if you have swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat, hives, skin rash or itching while taking Myrbetriq.

These are not all the possible side effects of Myrbetriq.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

How should I store Myrbetriq?

- Store Myrbetriq between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C). Keep the bottle closed.
- Safely throw away medicine that is out of date or no longer needed.

Keep Myrbetriq and all medicines out of the reach of children.

General information about the safe and effective use of Myrbetriq

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in the Patient Information leaflet. Do not use Myrbetriq for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give Myrbetriq to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about Myrbetriq that is written for health professionals.

For more information, visit www.Myrbetriq.com or call (800) 727-7003.

What are the ingredients in Myrbetriq?

Active ingredient: mirabegron

Inactive ingredients: polyethylene oxide, polyethylene glycol, hydroxypropyl cellulose, butylated hydroxytoluene, magnesium stearate, hypromellose, yellow ferric oxide and red ferric oxide (25 mg Myrbetriq tablet only).

What is overactive bladder?

Overactive bladder occurs when you cannot control your bladder contractions. When these muscle contractions happen too often or cannot be controlled, you can get symptoms of overactive bladder, which are urinary frequency, urinary urgency, and urinary incontinence (leakage).

Marketed and Distributed by:

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Northbrook, Illinois 60062



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057-2652-PM

13 THINGS

Surprising Facts About the U.S. Army

BY *Emily Goodman*



1 CONGRESS OFFICIALLY established the Army in September 1789, but since the Continental Army was formed in 1775, the U.S. Army is technically older than the country it serves. Today, the Army has nearly half a million active-duty troops and another 200,000 in reserve, which makes it the second-biggest employer in the United States (after Walmart).

2 ALL ARMY recruits must pass the Basic Training Physical Fitness Test to complete boot camp, but to join the Army Rangers you must also run five miles in under 40 minutes, hike 16 miles—while toting an extra 65 pounds—in less than five hours and 20 minutes, and swim 15 meters in full Ranger gear. The swim isn't timed, however—this isn't the Navy.

3 WEST POINT cadets receive a class ranking based on their academic and athletic performance. George Custer, class of 1861, graduated last in his year. Rankings don't always determine military success or failure. Robert E. Lee graduated second in his class. By contrast, Dwight D. Eisenhower was 61st.

4 PRIOR TO 1933, members of the 45th Infantry Division wore a Native American symbol of good luck as a nod to

the many Native Americans who served in that division. Now commonly referred to as a swastika, the original insignia was abandoned as the Nazi Party rose to power. Today, members wear a different Native American symbol: a thunderbird.

5 THERE HAVE been only five five-star generals. The rank didn't exist until 1944 and was retired in 1981, when the last living one, Omar Bradley, died. Two presidents held the title: Eisenhower and George Washington, who was promoted posthumously. The other two were Douglas MacArthur and George C. Marshall.

6 MARSHALL HAD a sweet spot for his soldiers. On behalf of Eisenhower, he sent a telegram in 1943 from Allied headquarters in North Africa to the Coca-Cola Company, requesting the soft drink for the troops.

Within months, 148 Coke representatives filled the ranks with the official title of technical observer, though they were nicknamed Coca-Cola Colonels. They wore fatigues and were paid as commissioned officers, but they had one responsibility: getting Cokes to American GIs.

7 THE GREEN BERET wasn't part of the Special Forces uniform until 1961, after President John F. Kennedy visited Fort Bragg in North Carolina and noticed an officer wearing one. Kennedy thought that members of this elite team needed something to distinguish them from other soldiers and made the green covering their official headgear. At Kennedy's funeral, Command Sergeant Major Francis Ruddy placed his beret on the president's grave, a tradition that Green Berets visiting Arlington National Cemetery continue today.

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READER'S DIGEST

8 KENNEDY'S DEATH also affected the 1963 Army-Navy football game. The nation was officially in mourning for 30 days, and a game would have been deemed disrespectful. But the president himself had been scheduled to attend, and the Kennedy family personally requested that it go on. (JFK's beloved Navy won.)

9 THE FIRST woman to serve in the Army, Deborah Sampson, posed as a man in order to enlist in 1781. She sustained multiple injuries in battle but often treated them herself to avoid detection—including removing a pistol ball from her own thigh. When her identity was finally revealed after she'd been hospitalized and lost consciousness, General Henry Knox authorized her honorable discharge. After

Sampson's death, Congress granted her husband a widow's pension.

10 OVER THE years, the Army has adopted many official songs, including one written by John Philip Sousa, "The Field Artillery Song." The Army held a contest in 1948 to replace it, but no winner was selected. In 1952, they tried again, this time asking the music industry to submit songs. The winner, "The Army's Always There," lasted only four years. Many people thought it sounded too much like "I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts."

11 THE ARMY encourages some dissonance, at least at the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. Students there are trained in "groupthink mitigation"—playing devil's advocate—to improve military planning

13 Things

and decision-making processes. Graduates of the program are called Red Teamers.

12 GERMANY IS home to eight U.S. Army bases (more than any single U.S. state), including the largest overseas garrison in the world, USAG Bavaria. State-side, Virginia has the most bases, including the home of the oldest active-duty infantry unit in the Army. Fort Bragg is the country's largest Army base.

13 THERE ARE hundreds of dogs in the Army, and they are all noncommissioned officers. The Army also still uses horses, which last saw combat in 2001, during the invasion of Afghanistan. More recently, the Army has been using equine-assisted therapy to help returning soldiers and their families reconnect post-deployment. **R**

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Thanks to extensive training and unconditional devotion, service dogs are able to help military veterans suffering from PTSD in ways that other therapies cannot. That's why Dog Chow is continuing our Service Dog Salute program to help support the lives and training of more service dogs — so that all of America's veterans in need can find canine heroes of their own.



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AND HIS SERVICE DOG, **KATIE**



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“You have an incredible ability to cut through the noise and get to the truth. We need you to stop that.”

ALL
in a Day's
WORK

During a summer-camp sing-along around the campfire, I grabbed my guitar and accompanied the kids. After five

or six songs, I asked, “OK, what should we sing next?”

One ten-year-old requested, “A cappella.”
—GEORGE HEROUX
Springfield, Illinois

A woman came to our funeral home asking for help finding a family member’s burial site. It took me a few

minutes to look up the information and even longer to walk to and locate the actual plot.

The woman, now tired and winded, scolded, “You know, this would be a whole lot easier if you just put them in alphabetical order.”

—SANDY MOFFETT
Bakersfield, California

I was browsing in the men’s department at Neiman Marcus when a knitted black designer blazer caught my eye.

Although the tag said it was on sale, it still cost more than I cared to spend.

Tempting fate, I tried it on. Just then, a saleswoman appeared.

“It fits you perfectly,” she said.

“Yes,” I said, “but I really don’t need it.”

Without missing a beat, she replied, “We don’t sell things that people need.”

—JOE CAPUTO
in the New York Times

CLIENT: There are four dots above the word *sensitivities* in this design. What are they doing there?

ME: Those are the dots on the *i*'s.

—CLIENTSFROMHELL.NET

Customers can take advantage of a generous return policy at REI, the camping-gear company. How generous? Here are return claims/excuses that employees

have had to deal with:

- ◆ “I dried these boots by the fire, and the soles melted.”
- ◆ “I bought a different car, and this roof rack doesn’t fit it.”

- ◆ “A bear slashed my tent.”
- ◆ “EMTs cut my jacket.”
- ◆ “These river sandals aren’t sexy enough.”

—ADVENTURE-JOURNAL.COM

ANYTHING FUNNY happen to you at work? It could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, go to RD.COM/SUBMIT.

THE MEETING WILL COME TO DISORDER!

◆ I’m in a work-from-home meeting, and my Google Home just answered a question someone on the video call asked.

—[@missalwaywrite](https://twitter.com/missalwaywrite)
(ASHLEY CASPERITE)

◆ Not muting your mic is the new reply all.

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

◆ Names to use when logging in to Zoom meetings: Corrine Tean, Noah Openstoor, Liam Alohn, Maya Snacksergon, Lotta Freatime
—[bigdealmle](https://www.reddit.com/user/bigdealmle) ON REDDIT.COM

◆ There’s awkward, and then there’s “the Zoom meeting is over and you and one other person can’t figure out how to leave the meeting” awkward.

—[@SnarkyMommy78](https://twitter.com/SnarkyMommy78)



The original Zoom meeting

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

◆ My husband’s working from home and just shouted from the living room, “I’m going into a video meeting ...” So I jokingly shouted back, “I guess I should put a shirt on?” And then he finished his sentence: “... and they can hear you.”

—[@ScrewyDecimal](https://twitter.com/ScrewyDecimal) (RITA MEADE)

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WE FOUND A FIX

9 TRICKS TO
*Improve Your Life**

1 Test Your Kitty's IQ

PETS A study from animal behaviorist **Ádám Miklósi** found that some cats can override their natural instincts and follow their master's direction when searching for food. Put one opaque cup to your left and one to your right, leaving a treat under only one. Point to the cup you want your cat to go to, randomly alternating between the one with the treat and the one without. Give her a treat only when she goes to the one you point to. If she follows you instead of her nose seven out of ten times, your tabby has aced the test.



THORSTEN NILSON/GETTY IMAGES (CAT), SUNSTOCK/GETTY IMAGES (CUPS)

*From RD.COM and THEHEALTHY.COM

2

Make Your Own Jar Gripper

HOME An old tennis ball can become the perfect tool to use on stubborn twist-off bottle caps or sticky jar lids. The rubber inside can grip tops large and small, while the soft exterior eases the strain on your hand. To make one, use a utility knife or a box cutter to cut the ball in half.

3

Get Rid of Sweaty Feet

HEALTH Unless you want to win a stinky-sneaker contest (see page 46 for a girl who actually did!), sweaty feet aren't great for your shoes or your tootsies. A swipe of antiperspirant across the toe knuckles and soles of your feet can help keep odor and moisture at bay. If you use a stick or roll-on, keep a separate one for your feet to avoid any bacterial transfer to your underarms.

4

Zap Your Veggies

COOKING While not as epicurean as roasting or sautéing, microwaving your vegetables might be the best option for your health. Veggies retain more nutrients when they are exposed to less heat and water. As with stove-top steaming, microwaving them preserves more vitamin C and cancer-fighting glucosinolate than other methods.

5

Set Your Phone for Deeper Sleep

TECH The blue light emitted by your smart devices is the same kind that comes from the sun, so staring at your screens suppresses melatonin production and inhibits sleep. To reduce blue light exposure without minimizing screen time, go to Settings on your Apple device, then Display & Brightness, and turn on Night Shift. For Androids, look for Night Light or Blue Light Filter.



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6

Beware the Wet Thumb

AUTO If you top off your tires at a service station, check to see whether there's any moisture coming from the air pump. Simply depress the pin inside the inflator valve with your thumb. If your thumb gets wet, advise the station manager that the tanks need to be drained and go to a different station. Moisture trapped inside a tire can cause pressure variations and corrode rims.

7

Unclog Your Showerhead

CLEANING To remove hard-water buildup, pour white distilled vinegar into a plastic bag and tie it around the shower arm so the head is completely submerged. Leave it overnight, and the showerhead will spray like new in the morning. For brass, gold, or nickel fixtures, soak for only 30 minutes to avoid ruining the finish.

8

Buy Some Time, at Zero Percent

MONEY From unemployment to unexpected expenses, periods of financial insecurity can hit most anyone. If you have good credit and need to temporarily improve your cash flow, consider getting a card with a zero percent introductory annual percentage rate (APR). Many credit cards have interest-free periods of a year or longer. You'll have to make the minimum monthly payments, but it can spread out the impact and "flatten the curve" of your expenses.

9

Prevent a Dull Razor

GROOMING Oxidation can dull your blades, but mineral oil will stop the process and keep them sharper longer. After shaving, soak your razor for a few minutes in a shallow dish of mineral oil, then use rubbing alcohol to clean the blades.



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The ROTTEN SNEAKER CONTEST

SENNECA SLOCOMBE,
age 17,
Eagle River, Alaska



How did your shoes get so stinky?

My neighbor was cleaning out his fishing boat, and a bucket of year-old shrimp bait spilled onto my sneakers. I had worn them—without socks—for years, and they were falling apart, so I thought it would be fun to enter them in the contest.

Please don't say that you wore them after that.

I never wore them to school after that, but I did wear them hiking and fishing. My mom didn't let me keep them in the house after the shrimp-bait incident, so I kept them in our shed.

Your poor mother.

She is very supportive. My brother won this contest a few years ago.

What brave souls judge this?

Dr. Rachel Herz is a scientist of smell, and the other judge is a certified sniffer from NASA. Dr. Herz said my shoes had the trifecta of terrible stink: fish odor, dog poop (my dog had gotten to them), and bird poop.

They sound positively toxic. How did you get them through airport security to get to the competition?

We FedExed them.

In a smell-proof box?

I just used a garbage bag. Multiple layers of plastic.

Are you now famous at school?

A lot of the teachers like to tease me about it, especially my gym teachers. They're like, "Clean your sneakers! We don't want to have another national-level stink at our school." **R**

The Odor-Eaters Rotten Sneaker Contest was last held in March 2019. Slocombe's shoes are on display at Ripley's Believe It or Not! Times Square.



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THE
**FOOD
ON YOUR
PLATE**

IF YOU'VE NEVER seen a harvest machine shake my tree, sending almond fruits spraying into the sky like an explosion of glinting confetti, I recommend googling it for a small thrill. Then, next time you encounter a farmer who calls his wares "ammonds," you'll understand the joke when he tells it. (They always tell the joke: "They're almonds in the tree and ammonds on the ground because we've shaken the *l* out of them.")

In California, not everyone appreciates a good almond joke. In the past several years, almond growers in the water-starved Golden State have caught flak for contributing to low river levels and endangering fish, among other things. In my defense, I am far from the only water-hungry crop, and it's you humans who have turned me and my milks and butters into a health fetish, incentivizing farmers to harvest more of me every year. And, by the way, you admire me for more than my produce. Anyone who has watched a grove of me bloom into stunning pale pink during early spring can plainly see why I've been a symbol of light and vitality throughout history. In Greek mythology, the nymph goddess Nana became pregnant when an almond fell out of a tree and into her lap. In Judaism, the menorah that God decreed to Moses was to have almond blossoms on each of its branches.

Up close, an almond tree looks as if it's loaded with immature peaches—green, fuzzy, ovoid. That's because,

I Am Almonds ...

The Health Nut (Only Not)

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

though you call me a nut, botanically I am the seed of a fleshy fruit. While my exterior never gets as fleshy as a peach's, I am otherwise unmistakably peachlike—it is my closest cousin. Farmers let my fruit dry on the tree till it splits, exposing the pit within. It has the same pocked appearance as a peach pit. And just like a peach pit, if you crack it open, you'll see a seed inside. That's me.

As interest in plant-based eating has soared, you've especially availed yourselves of sweet almonds (the most common kind), which you consume raw and roasted, whole with my skins, slivered and sliced, crushed into meal and flour, or as rich, luxurious butter. You appreciate my milk, too—and lest you dismiss that as a craze of the 2000s, it actually dates back to at least the 13th century, when it was sipped and used as an ingredient in cooking in medieval Europe and the Middle East. I like to recall that sweet, nutty simmered concoction of yore; my current liquid iteration is processed, pasteurized, and adulterated with emulsifiers and stabilizers to the point that any almondy flavor is faint.

Why, then, have you made almond milk so popular that it constitutes two thirds of the nondairy-milk market? Google me again and one reason comes up over and over and over: You've learned how exceptionally good I am for you. People who consume me aplenty seem to have an



GLORIOUS WHITE GAZPACHO

In a blender or food processor, combine 1 cup blanched almonds with 2 cloves garlic and add just enough cold water to cover. Blend or process until a smooth puree forms, adding more cold water as necessary. Add about 2 cups cubed, crustless rustic white bread or country loaf and process until very smooth, adding more cold water as needed to create the consistency of heavy cream. Season with salt. Blend in 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and 1 to 2 teaspoons sherry vinegar, to taste. Refrigerate until very well chilled, at least 2 hours. Serve cold, garnishing each bowl with halved green grapes, crushed toasted almonds, and a drizzle of olive oil.

easier time with weight maintenance and a lower risk of Alzheimer's and some cancers—credit my high fiber, healthy fats, and mother lode of vitamin E. If you were to compare me with the walnut, a health-haloed peer of mine, you'd find that I'm higher in fiber and protein and lower in fat (though if I'm honest, walnuts would

What do you want
FOR BREAKFAST?

Something
DELICIOUS

Something
HIGH IN FIBER

Kellogg's
**Raisin
Bran**



have plenty to say about their superior omega-3s and mineral content).

You may be instinctively smart to prefer me not too almondy, lest I harm you. To understand why, let's return to peaches. If you ate a peach seed, you would notice right away that it is intensely bitter—and tastes like a swig from a bottle of almond extract. Turns out my far-lesser-grown sibling, the bitter almond, has the same effect for the same reason: It, too, is overloaded with the chemical amygdalin, part of my chemical defense system to discourage animals from eating my seed. (If my seed gets chewed up, I can't germinate and sprout a tree). But amygdalin breaks down into two molecules that are like Jekyll and Hyde to you: benzaldehyde, which carries that superstrong almond flavor, and hydrocyanic acid—which causes cyanide poisoning! One study found that 50 bitter almonds could kill an adult; just a few can kill a child. Hence the human preference for sweet almonds, which are bred to have much lower levels of amygdalin, the almondy-ness safely muted.

Manufacturers can deactivate hydrocyanic acid via a heating process. That's what they do to bitter almonds to create the almond extract used in baking all around the world and to give real marzipan its trademark punch. Same with the peach and apricot seeds that are used to make persipan, a cheaper version of marzipan. Oh, and here's a fun one: Pistachio ice cream is most often flavored not with pistachios at all but rather with almond extract. The green dye and mixed-in pistachio nuts are there to maintain the illusion.

But I stand in for much more than just pistachios. After all, I represent life and rebirth. Just peruse the almond-shaped halo around the bodies of important religious figures in medieval Christian art. It's not there by accident; in Italian that halo is called the *mandorla*, which is the word for—say it with me now—almond. With the *l. R*

Kate Lowenstein is a health journalist and the editor-in-chief at Vice; Daniel Gritzer is the culinary director of the cooking site Serious Eats.



No Wonder She Had All the Answers

When Emma Boettcher, the giant killer who finally stopped James Holzhauer's 32-match winning streak on *Jeopardy!* in 2019, was in graduate school, she wrote a thesis called "Predicting the Difficulty of Trivia Questions Using Text Features." The trivia questions she analyzed? The ones that appeared on a TV quiz show named *Jeopardy!*



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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 percent 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 percent of them required hospitalization during treatment, and 55 percent died within 18 months. Only 9 percent of those who were more active needed to be hospitalized, and fewer than 25 percent 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."

CLAIRE BENOIST

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 130,000 participants showed that for each 20 mg/dL increase in total cholesterol, glaucoma risk increased by 7 percent, 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 percent 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.

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READER'S DIGEST

Alcohol-Use Disorders Going Untreated

Medications to treat alcohol dependence are safe, effective, and inexpensive, but they are being prescribed to only a small minority of patients. While the stigma surrounding mental disorders has diminished in recent decades, doctors and patients often still don't talk honestly about drinking habits.

Predicting Chance of Coma Recovery

Researchers have discovered a new use for the EEG, a widely available technology: It could help predict how likely it is that a brain-injured patient will wake from a coma. An EEG detected brain activity in 16 of 104 unconscious patients. A year later, 7 of the 16 had recovered enough to function on their own for a short time.



NICOTINE AND LIQUOR ARE WORSE THAN CAFFEINE FOR SLEEP

IF YOU'VE EVER struggled to fall or stay asleep, you've heard all the standard sleep-hygiene advice: Stick to the same sleep and wake times, establish a bedtime routine, create a relaxing sleep environment, and avoid caffeine in the afternoon.

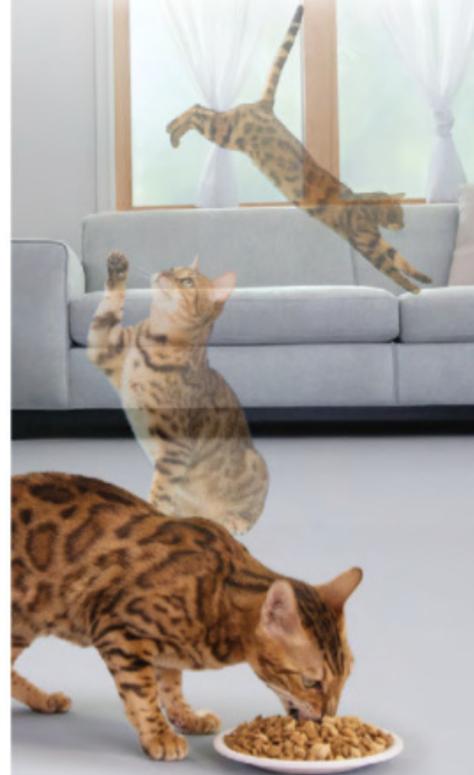
Turns out that last bit might not be as much of a problem as other evening habits. In a study of 785 African American adults with no history of sleep issues, 45 percent reported drinking coffee, tea, or soda within four hours of bedtime at least once in the course of a week. (African Americans have been underrepresented in sleep studies but are more likely to experience sleep problems and associated health issues.) Data from wristwatch sensors showed that the caffeine had no significant effect on how well or how long they slept.

However, drinking alcohol or using nicotine before bed reduced participants' sleep efficiency, meaning that the percentage of time they spent in bed actually sleeping was lower. With nicotine use, people also woke up more often in the middle of the night, perhaps because they were experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

Subjects who reported symptoms of insomnia during the study were more likely to have used nicotine before bed, which made their insomnia worse, robbing them of more than 40 minutes of sleep. Nicotine use before bed was also associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety, while alcohol and caffeine use were linked to chronic stress. **R**

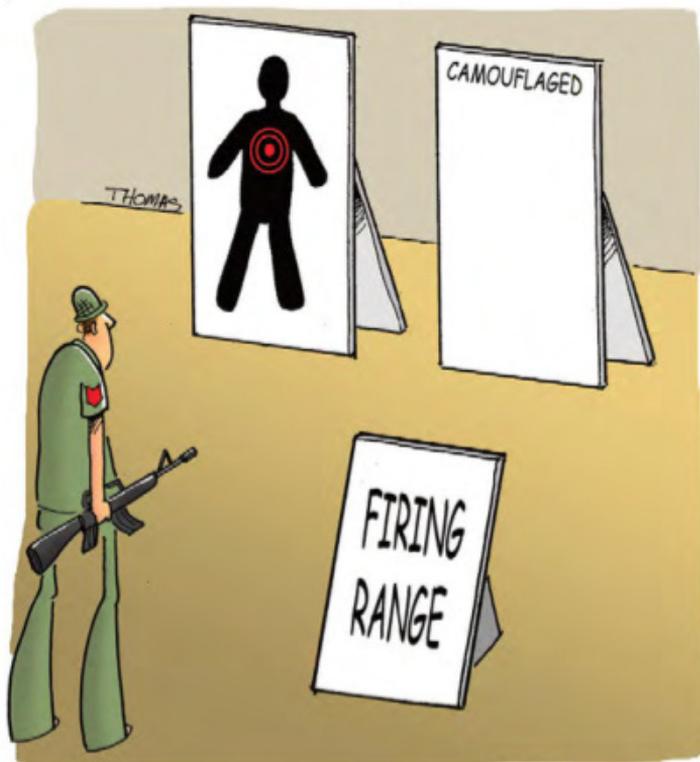
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SEE THE CAT
SHE WAS
BORN TO BE



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can make.



HUMOR *in*
UNIFORM

An Army buddy and some other raw recruits were waiting to be sent on detail. As the officer in charge 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
Royal Oak, Michigan

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

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
Zionsville, Indiana

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INDEPENDENT PHARMACIES

HOW TO BUILD A Better Brain

New research has found that boosting your memory and staying sharp don't require cutting-edge technology or supplements. The real solution: Stick to the basics.

BY *Sari Harrar*





Wendy Suzuki was a highly respected brain researcher with her own lab and a string of published studies when a high-energy gym class and a quiet cup of tea changed her neurons—and her life.

“I just wanted stronger muscles, but after six months of aerobic exercise, I noticed that difficult mental jobs were easier. I could keep lots of little details in my mind,” recalls Suzuki, 55, a professor at New York University’s Center for Neural Science. “It transformed my research. Exercise and the brain is a major focus of my work now. And I exercise almost every day.”

But that was only the beginning. While on vacation in Bali around that time, Suzuki met a monk staying at the same inn. He was a tea master, and he shared his morning meditation: “Simply brewing a cup of tea in silence and sipping it, without thinking about the million things you have to do today.” Suzuki, who had never been a serious

meditator, felt invigorated. Now, she says, “I start every day with a meditation as I steep and sip my tea.”

The encounter led to a 2019 study titled “Brief, Daily Meditation Enhances Attention, Memory, Mood, and Emotional Regulation.” The participants, who were not experienced meditators, benefited from just 13 minutes a day of gentle breathing and relaxation for eight weeks.

If Suzuki had looked into her own brain after establishing her new routines—and, as a neuroscientist, she is the rare person who could do such a thing—she’d have witnessed some amazing things: new brain cells sprouting new connections, new blood vessels feeding more oxygen and fuel to her neurons, and more brain tissue in areas involved with learning, memory, and decision making. Both exercise and meditation, it turns out, can trigger chemical reactions that pave the way for a



**EAT YOUR
FRUITS AND
VEGGIES**

Participants in a 2019 study who ate more vegetables and fruits boosted their scores on thinking and memory tests.

rejuvenation explosion. Even more astounding, this renaissance—called neuroplasticity—was once thought to happen only in children's brains.

But research now shows that the brain can do these tricks at any age. Benefits include improved memory and thinking skills, more creativity, and a reduced risk of dementia. Or, as Suzuki enthusiastically says, "You can grow a bigger, happier brain."

Lately, an avalanche of new studies is pointing out exactly how to harness neuroplasticity. Advanced brain-imaging techniques (among other lab tools) are allowing researchers to get a peek at how everything from sleep

“ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF THE THINGS PEOPLE DO EVERY DAY ARE TOXIC.”



to food to physical activity affects your little gray cells.

One insight worth mentioning right here: Brain plasticity works both ways. "About 50 percent of the things people do every day that affect their brain are toxic," notes cognitive neuroscientist Sandra Bond Chapman, PhD, founder and chief director of the Center for BrainHealth at the University of Texas at Dallas. "They skimp on sleep. They multitask. They aren't active."

Besides changing those bad habits, what can you do to grow your own

new brain cells? Hint: Brain scientists don't recommend spending a lot of money on brain-training programs or nutritional supplements. Nor do they advocate trying science-fictional stuff such as do-it-yourself electrical stimulation. (See page 68 for more on that.)

Fresh from the front lines of brain science, here are simple things you can do to build a better brain.

Yes to Green Leafy Veggies, No to "Nootropics"

In 2015, researchers from Australia's Deakin University published one of the first studies measuring food's physical effect on the left hippocampus, a seahorse-shaped brain region crucial for memory, learning, and decision making. It is also one of the first areas to shrink in people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Two hundred fifty-five people filled out diet surveys and then underwent magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans that measured their brains. Four years later, they returned for another scan.

The study found that the left hippocampus was heftier in the healthy eaters than in the unhealthy ones, regardless of age, sex, weight, exercise habits, or general health. The average difference was 203 square millimeters, nearly one third of a square inch. Sounds small, but that's room for a lot of extra brain cells—and strong new evidence that eating the right foods and skipping the wrong stuff could



MOVE MORE

Women who stayed fit into their 80s delayed the development of dementia by nine years.

help protect against declines in thinking and memory that lead to dementia.

Brain-friendly fare associated with a bigger hippocampus included fresh fruits and vegetables, salads, and grilled fish. The brain-shrinking diet was heavy on burgers, fries, and soft drinks, as well as sausage, potato chips, and red meat.

Healthy eating doesn't just prevent brain decline. It boosts scores on thinking and memory tests, according to a study published in March 2019 that tracked 2,621 American women and men for 30 years. "Plant-based diets have antioxidant

and anti-inflammatory effects that may protect against cognitive decline and dementia," says lead researcher Claire McEvoy, RD, of the Centre for Public Health at Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland.

Even a little healthy food goes a long way. According to a 2018 Rush University study that tracked 960 people for 4.7 years, participants who ate just 1.3 extra servings of green leafy vegetables a day—that's 1.3 cups of salad or a smidge more than half a cup of cooked spinach, kale, or collards—demonstrated cognitive abilities similar to those of people 11 years younger. And a January 2020 study in the

journal *Neurology* showed that getting just 15.3 milligrams a day of plant compounds called flavonols—the amount in a small green salad plus one cup of cooked veggies and a half cup of berries—was associated with a 48 percent lower risk of Alzheimer's-like dementia.

"That's not a lot on a day-to-day basis," says lead study author Thomas M. Holland, MD, a Rush University researcher. If you eat "a big salad every other day, throw in some carrots or broccoli at dinner, and snack on some strawberries, then you've got it."

How are these power foods working

with your brain cells? Animal and test-tube experiments suggest that compounds in healthy diets—such as B vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids, and beneficial polyphenols found in plant foods—help new cells make copies of DNA when they divide and multiply. Meanwhile, high-fat, high-sugar processed foods—from packaged meals to chips and candy—harm brain cells by boosting inflammation and leaving brain tissue vulnerable to damage by rogue oxygen molecules called free radicals. This may interfere with brain plasticity, making processed foods an especially potent threat for the developing brains of kids and teens.

“PLANT-BASED DIETS PROTECT AGAINST COGNITIVE DECLINE AND DEMENTIA.”

While food emerges as an important brain protector, experts say brain supplements (sometimes called nootropics) aren't all that effective. These pills and capsules may contain vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and amino acids in addition to herbs, caffeine, green tea extract, mushroom powder, jellyfish protein, or other ingredients. But studies show that they don't activate brain cells in a significantly positive way. “Let the buyer beware,” says David Hogan, MD, a specialist in geriatric medicine

at the University of Calgary. Dr. Hogan authored a 2015 review of brain supplements in the *Canadian Geriatrics Journal* that found no convincing evidence of benefits.

In fact, at least one ingredient in some of these supplements could harm your health. A study of nootropics in the November 2019 *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that the unapproved drug piracetam was found in four out of five brands tested, at levels that could cause side effects such as insomnia and depression.

Exercise: Moves That Reprogram the Brain

Most of the time, your brain is the boss of your muscles—directing how you hit a ball, play the piano, or open a cereal box. But when it comes to growing new brain cells, more and more research shows that when you exercise, your muscles (along with your liver and body fat) take charge. When you're active, they send chemical signals telling your brain, “Hey, it's time to grow!” Recent research suggests physical activity has multiple brain benefits, encouraging the birth and growth of new brain cells and the extension of blood vessels that supply oxygen and blood sugar to brain cells.

In a 2016 National Institute on Aging study, people who ran on a treadmill for 45 minutes three days a week boosted their levels of brain-derived



SLEEP WELL

A good night's sleep doubled volunteers' ability to remember words they'd learned the day before.

neurotrophic factor, a chemical that acts like fertilizer for new brain cells. After four months of workouts, their scores improved on a memory test.

Without exercise, Suzuki says, "little baby neurons don't get bigger and make thousands of new connections to other brain cells. With exercise, you get fully functioning adult brain cells." Studies suggest that in younger adults, this can add to the overall number of cells in the hippocampus. And once age-related brain changes begin,

starting in our 30s, exercise helps keep brain cells alive longer and replaces old cells with new ones. It's a good deal. "There's evidence these new brain cells are very active," she says. "They're excitable, like teenagers. They get involved in more memory circuits than older cells do. You get more connections."

At any age, you might notice over time that you feel more alert and have an easier time remembering things after you start a new exercise routine.

Sticking with it could reduce your risk for dementia. “Women who were fit at midlife and stayed fit into their 80s delayed the development of dementia by nine years in one exciting study,” Suzuki says. “That’s huge.”

Again, a little goes a long way. If you’re inactive, a stroll around the block may be all it takes to encourage neuroplasticity, she says. And every bit counts. In a 2019 Boston University study of 2,354 adults in their 40s through 60s, sedentary people who boosted their daily walking by 7,500 steps or more had bigger brains than those who didn’t exercise—equivalent to 1.4 to 2.2 fewer years of brain aging. The more light activity study participants logged, such as doing housework, shopping, gardening, or walking the dog, the greater the overall size of their brains.

Sleep: The Nighttime Brain Cleanup

In 2019, Boston University researchers put caps with attached wires on 13 people, sent them to sleep for the night inside a functional MRI machine, and then tracked the electrical activity that naturally ripples across the gray matter. It was like shooting a film of the brain’s secret life, and it was a great show. The researchers found that as brain waves slowed during deep sleep, blood levels dropped in some areas, allowing more of the cerebrospinal fluid that normally surrounds and cushions the brain to pulse in and then recede like an outgoing tide. The watery ballet may increase communication in the slumbering brain. It also might wash away toxins—by-products left over from a long day of thinking—thought to interfere with memory.

The results suggest new ways sleep restores our little gray cells. Long familiar to bleary-eyed new parents, college

ZAPPING YOUR BRAIN

What about hacking your brain with an at-home electrical brain-stimulation kit? Officially known as transcranial direct-current stimulation (tDCS), mind-zapping with low-power currents has been

shown to have positive effects on memory, creativity, and attention in recent studies. Now a fan base of the curious is growing for do-it-yourself tDCS. You can buy a kit complete with wires, stick-on sponges

(you soak them in salt water so they carry the current to your skull), and a small plug-in or battery-powered electrical source for as little as \$99.

A reddit.com forum for tDCS has more than

students pulling all-nighters, and the sleep scientists who study them, sleep deprivation messes with mental focus, stifles creativity, interferes with recall, and slows reaction times by as much as 50 percent. The effects are immediate—in a University of South Florida study of 130 middle-aged women and men, missing out on just 16 minutes of sleep reduced their concentration the next day. (Sleep changes have also been linked to the development of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, but it is less clear which comes first.) In contrast, a good night’s sleep doubled volunteers’ ability to remember words they’d learned the day before, according to a 2015 study from the United Kingdom’s University of Exeter.

Brain scientist Michael Scullin, the director of the Sleep Neuroscience & Cognition Laboratory at Baylor University, believes so passionately in the value of a good night’s sleep that he bribed undergraduates with

extra points if they got eight hours’ sleep a night during exam week. “I didn’t expect it, but they also scored about four points higher—before adding the extra credit—on their

A STROLL MAY BE ALL IT TAKES TO ENCOURAGE NEUROPLASTICITY.

finals in my class,” he reports. “That’s enough to go from a B+ to an A. Even I was surprised by the power of sleep!”

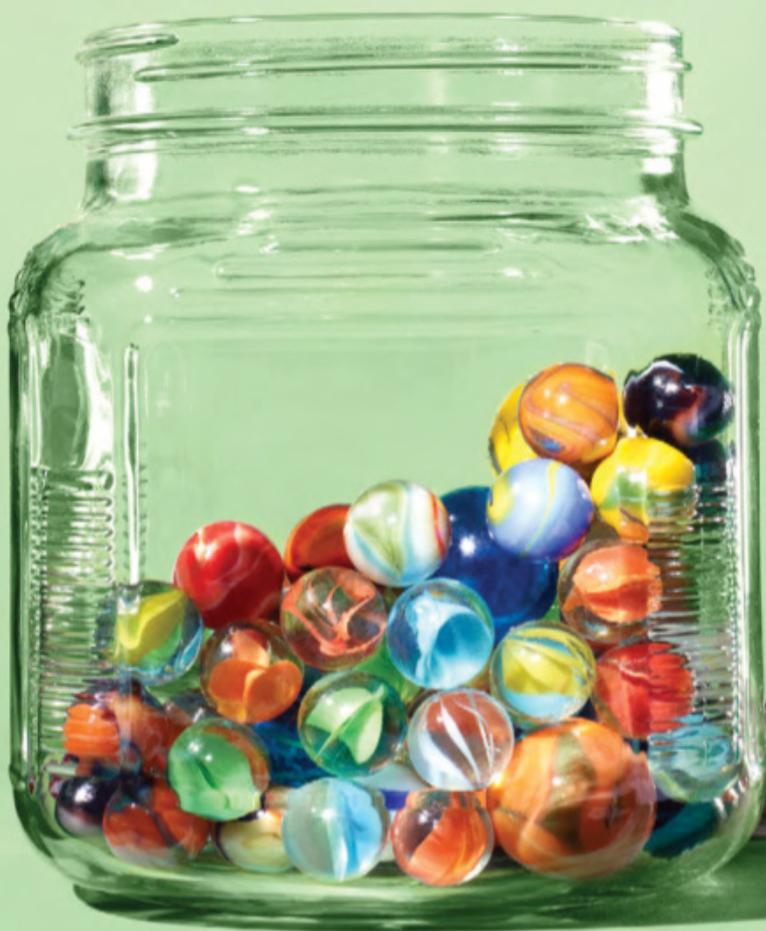
To ensure that you get enough sleep (eight hours is the magic number for most people), “try to stick with a regular sleep schedule,” Scullin suggests. “Prime your body clock by getting natural light exposure in the morning and by relaxing at night. And if your bed partner tells you that you snore loudly, tell your doctor. Obstructive

13,000 subscribers, who report mixed results. But tDCS home units are not FDA-approved for brain stimulation. A 2019 review in the journal *Neuron* found little scientific evidence to

back up most devices’ claims. And a group of neuroscientists who study electrical brain stimulation warned in a 2016 letter in *Annals of Neurology* that zapping your brain on your own could have harmful

effects that no one has yet studied.

Besides, why take a chance on an unproven brain boost when science has found so many easier, safer, and cheaper ones that do the trick?



PLAY GAMES

Playing old-fashioned games such as cards and chess was linked to sharper thinking, on par with a 1.4-point-higher IQ.

sleep apnea can raise risk for brain threats like high blood pressure.”

You may be surprised by the wide range of brain-powered benefits you reap from getting enough sleep. “Every aspect of brain health is related to sleep quality and quantity,” Scullin says. “We

“WOULD WE BE MORE CIVIL AS A SOCIETY IF WE GOT ENOUGH SLEEP?”

even found in a recent study that people were less likely to forgive each other when they got six hours of sleep than when they got seven and a half or eight hours. When I see all of the impulsive, aggressive, negative messages people send to one another, especially on social media, I have to wonder if lack of sleep isn't part of the reason. Would we be more civil, more willing to listen as a society, if we got enough sleep?”

Challenge Your Brain, the Smart Way

Human intelligence comes in two varieties. There's dependable, reliable “crystallized intelligence,” which draws on the knowledge you've learned. Then there's creative “fluid intelligence,” a jazzy superpower that calls on abstract reasoning, working memory, mental focus, and other cerebral talents to find out-of-the-box solutions.

So imagine the excitement in 2008 when University of Michigan scientists announced that brain-training games could boost fluid intelligence. Since then, the brain-training industry has grown into a \$1.9 billion behemoth that promises to tune up your thinking, enhance memory, and even stall declines that lead to dementia.

But brain training may work for only some people. In a 2020 study, Wayne State University neuroscientists measured fluid intelligence gains in 424 people ages 18 to 44 who performed various combinations of brain training, mindfulness training, and aerobic exercise for 16 weeks. Two hundred eighty-two also had brain scans. A majority (74 percent) improved their fluid thinking a little, while 9 percent got worse. Just 17 percent (including people from the groups that got brain training) improved significantly. In this group, some brain areas involved in fluid intelligence—including the hippocampus and the larger anterior cingulate cortex—were bigger than average (though a few were actually smaller).

Without getting a brain scan, how do you know if you're one of the 17 percent who might benefit a lot from brain games, along with exercise and mindfulness? Your attitude might be a clue. If you already love playing brain games, they will probably help.

“You have to increase levels of the feel-good brain chemical dopamine in order to generate brain-cell growth,”

explains neuroscientist William Shankle, MD, medical director of the Pickup Family Neurosciences Institute of the Hoag Hospital Network in Newport Beach, California. “Don’t do things you don’t like because they’re supposed to boost brainpower. Pick something you love. Keep learning about it and doing it. It takes passion to get benefits. Over time, people who keep their minds active have slower declines in memory and thinking. They build cognitive reserve, which

“PICK SOMETHING YOU LOVE. IT TAKES PASSION TO GET BENEFITS.”

helps the brain find work-arounds even when there are physical signs of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia.”

So do what you like. A study of 1,091 older adults found that playing old-fashioned games such as cards, bingo, and chess several times a week was linked to sharper thinking and memory skills—on par with a 1.4-point-higher IQ. In a Mayo Clinic study, people who kept up with arts and crafts such as sewing, woodworking, and painting were 45 to 73 percent less likely to develop mild cognitive impairment over four years.

Focus counts too. “Chronic multitasking and constantly switching your attention from one thing to another

disrupts the memory-formation system in your hippocampus,” Chapman explains. “Allow yourself to focus on just one thing and go deep. This can change brain structure and brain function for the better.”

Calm Down

While you’re at it, try meditation. It may give the brain a helping hand by calming stress circuits that link up areas involved with memory and thinking, Suzuki explains. In a 2013 study from the University of California, Santa Barbara, college students who learned to meditate had better mental focus and got higher scores on graduate-school exams than nonmeditators.

Yoga also encourages brain plasticity, according to a 2019 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign review of 11 brain-imaging studies. People who practiced hatha yoga tended to have a larger hippocampus, amygdala (the area of the brain involved in coping with emotions), and prefrontal cortex (involved with planning and making decisions). Yoga’s brain-changing power may come from its mix of exercise with deep stress reduction, the researchers note.

“You can sit still, breathe, and reap brain-plasticity benefits,” Suzuki says. If you’re new to meditation or yoga, start small. “You don’t have to meditate for an hour. Even ten minutes can be too long at first. Start with one minute. Find a style of meditation you enjoy.” **R**

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LAUGH LINES

Deodorant? No, I've never needed to buy any. People just give it to me, complete strangers sometimes.

—[@SaintEd61](#)

The fact that Head & Shoulders doesn't have a bodywash called Knees & Toes disappoints me.

—[@TheRealSassy1](#)

Dry shampoo is the equivalent of unicorn blood for hair—it'll keep it alive, but it'll be a half life, a cursed life.

—[@elliepeek](#)

I'm sick of men's 3-in-1 bodywash-shampoo-conditioner. Throw toothpaste in there.

—[@ComradTwitty](#)

Coming Clean

Dove chocolate tastes so much better than their soap.

—[@RevSvenTV](#)

My twins hate to brush their teeth. So I just convinced them that it's fun to brush someone else's teeth. Problem solved.

—[@hunz74](#)



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Thank You, Mr. Postman

*The appreciation delivered by an
11-year-old girl is returned to
sender—from grateful postal service
employees nationwide*

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Hugh Weber*
FROM TWITTER



Many Americans have felt isolated and afraid this year, and the Weber family of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is no different. But 11-year-old Emerson Weber had a hobby that turned into a remarkable antidote. Em writes letters—lots of letters. One day last spring, she even wrote to her mail carrier. “I wanted to thank you for taking my letters and delivering them,” she said. “You are very important to me.”

In no time at all, Em’s simple thank-you was shared around the United States Postal Service (USPS). Many of the workers who read her thank-you note wrote her one back.

Her father, Hugh Weber, a managing director at a design company, was so moved by the response that he took to Twitter in May, mid-quarantine, to share his appreciation for the outpouring of love and the marvelous girl at the center of it.

Emerson, my 11-year-old, is on a bit of a wild ride with the USPS and our local mail carrier, Doug. And I think there’s a deeper message to it all. First,

the backstory. Em has a serious letter-writing habit. She maintains active correspondence with over a dozen of her favorite people. And if you’ve been the lucky recipient of one of Em’s hand-decorated letters and envelopes, then you have a pretty good idea of the joy they bring.

A letter from Emerson is likely to include some art, a joke or two, a mention of her younger brother, confessions of her love for Taylor Swift, and enough questions to guarantee a response. So when she decided to thank our mail carrier for the service he provides us, she left nothing out. In went Taylor Swift, in went the little brother, in went the jokes: Why do you never see elephants hiding in trees? Because they’re really good at it.

Em wrote, “I’m Emerson. You may know me as the person that lives here that writes a lot of letters & decorated the envelopes. Well, I wanted to thank you for taking my letters and delivering them. You are very important to me. I make people happy with my letters, but you do too.”

She continued, “The reason you are very important in my life is because I don’t have a phone, so how else am I supposed to stay in touch with my friends? You make it possible!”

She put it in the box and smiled when he took it, and that was enough.



THESE LETTERS ARE FILLED WITH AN OVERWHELMING SENSE OF KINDNESS.

The next week, we got a letter addressed to “Mr. and Mrs. Weber.” It seems that Sara had shared Em’s note as a “Token of Thanks” in the internal USPS newsletter for the western United States, and there were postal folks that wanted to thank her.

Today, we saw Doug getting out of the truck with two BOXES of letters from around the country. We

Doug the mail carrier had never met Em before the boxes of letters came.

The next day, a package arrived with some stamps and two letters. Doug had shared Em’s letter with his supervisor, Sara, and they both wanted to share how touched they were.

Sara said that as an essential worker, Doug might not be able to maintain regular correspondence, but she sure could. Em started writing that very afternoon.

This is when things get interesting.

snapped a quick photo through the door as he and Emerson met for the first time. It was a beautiful moment of silent reciprocity.

These letters are so deeply human. They are filled with family, pets, hobbies, community, and an overwhelming sense of kindness.

Because Em was fully vulnerable in her note, they were too. Em shared jokes, so they shared jokes. Em shared her brother, so every gift that was sent came in duplicate. Em shared Taylor Swift, and it turns out that the

USPS is filled with lots of undercover “Swifties.”

One maintenance manager from Minnesota wanted to inspire her to start collecting stamps, so he sent along two stamps of his own from the bulletin board in his office to start her collection.

They sent stamps to be used as well. Stamps for her to write back. Stamps for her to write to others. Stamps, stamps, stamps (218, by Em’s count).

Emerson takes her time, writing and illustrating each letter by hand.



But there was something more in these letters. People felt seen—some for the first time in a long time.

“I work alone in a small rural post office ...”

“My kids all live far away ...”

“Not a lot of people think about how hard we work ...”

One wrote, “I can’t tell you how much it means to read your letter ...”

Another, “I have a son in Kuwait and if you have a second to send him a letter, he would love it.”

IT’S EASY TO GIVE OTHERS THE ONE THING THEY NEED—HUMAN CONNECTION.

And another, “I know you can’t write back to all of us, but maybe I can drop you a line from time to time?”

With dozens of new pen pals, Em did what she does best.

She wrote the dad.

She wrote his son.

She assured the secret Swifties not to be embarrassed, because her dad likes TSwift too.

She acknowledged that there WERE a lot of letters, but that she had time. She sees them all.

I’m not sharing this because I’m a proud dad. I’m sharing it because it is relatively easy, if we take the time, to give others the one thing they need to be well—human connection.

Twitter Shared the Love Too



Thanks for making me start my Monday with a good happy cry.

—[@TeknoDiva](#) (PATRICE)

This tweet is the best tweet I've read in a long time. The power of caring. Congrats on raising a kind child, Hugh. No higher accomplishment.

—[@adrianvedder](#)

Tell Em to keep sending those letters! I'd personally take a handwritten mailed note over a text or e-mail any day.

—[@Nicole5Wheeler](#)

Please tell Em I do pen-palling and have made it my mission to write to



"You have an innate sense of empathy," the singer Taylor Swift wrote to Emerson in a note.

everyone in my address book several times over. People LOVE mail.

—[@librarywoman201](#) (AMY W.)

I have a friend who says we all just want to be seen, known, and loved. Em does this boldly.

I want to be bold and brave like Em. We've all been in a moment of physical isolation that is amplifying a real epidemic of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. I've been feeling it personally.

While in quarantine, I've responded to hundreds of DMs [direct messages] from people who are feeling this disconnect. I heard from college students to senior executives who are stressed, worried, and/or afraid.

I have incredible family and friends, but the truth is that I needed more.

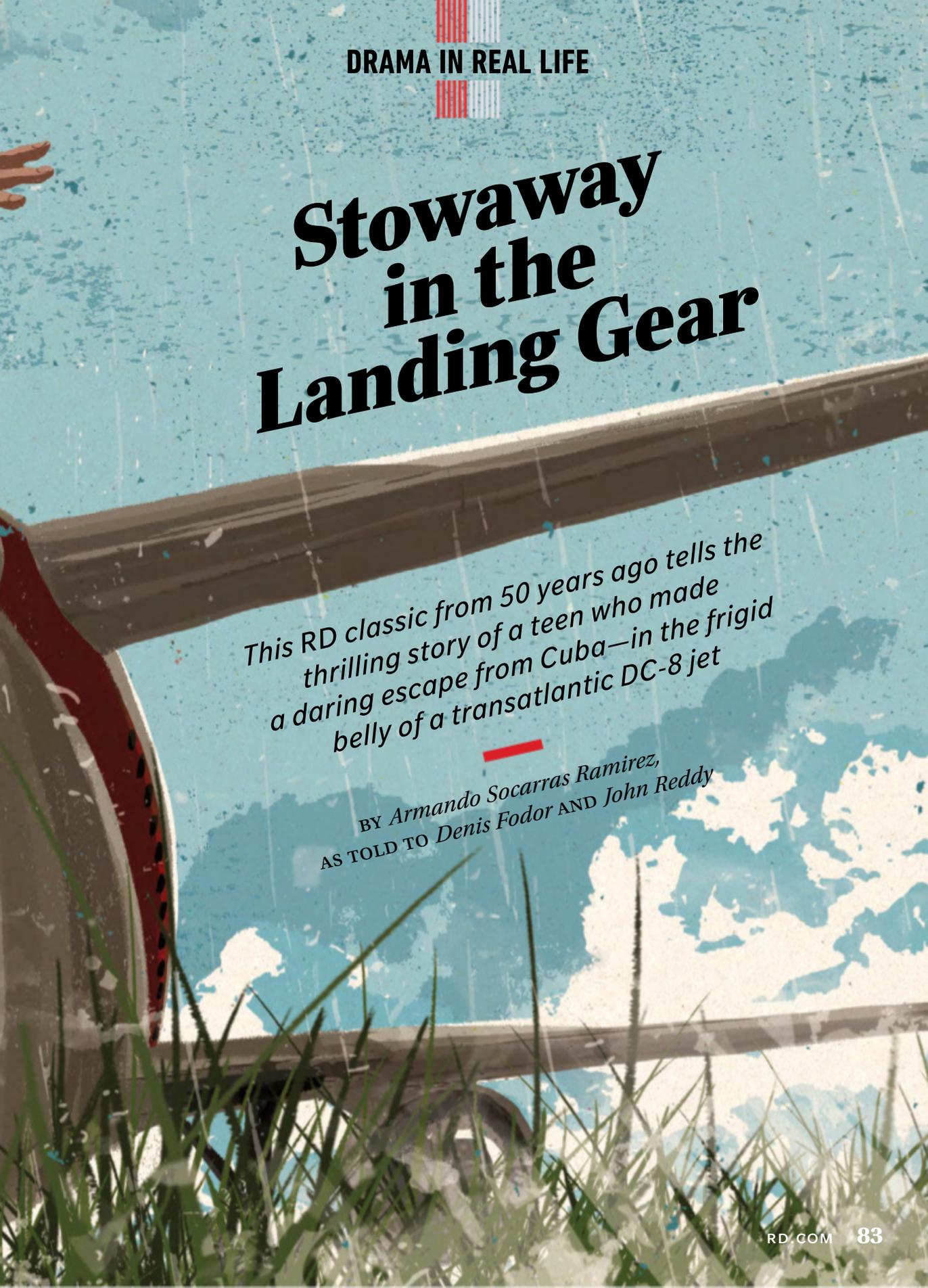
And sending texts via an app has been the small step I needed. Em's lesson to me was simple: It's the small things that matter most.

Send a letter. Make a call. Practice self-care. Take a step of boldness. For yourself or for others. And thank your mail carrier. They are working extremely hard to keep us all connected.

And, if you've gotten this far, just know that you can start the same waves of goodness with the people that you count on, respect, and love. Just tell them that you miss them, love them, or just see them. **R**

ADAPTED FROM TWITTER (MAY 2020), COPYRIGHT © 2020 BY HUGH WEBER, @HUGHWEBER.





DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

Stowaway in the Landing Gear

This RD classic from 50 years ago tells the thrilling story of a teen who made a daring escape from Cuba—in the frigid belly of a transatlantic DC-8 jet

BY Armando Socarras Ramirez,
AS TOLD TO Denis Fodor AND John Reddy



The jet engines

of the Iberia Airlines DC-8 thundered in an earsplitting crescendo as the big plane taxied toward where we huddled in the tall grass just off the end

of the runway at Havana's José Martí Airport. For months, my friend Jorge Pérez Blanco and I had been planning to stow away in a wheel well on this

flight, No. 904, Iberia's weekly nonstop run from Havana to Madrid. Now, in the late afternoon of June 3, 1969, our moment had come.

We realized that we were pretty young to be taking such a big gamble; I was 17, Jorge 16. But we were both determined to escape from Cuba, and our plans had been made carefully. We knew that departing airliners taxied to the end of the 11,500-foot runway, stopped momentarily after turning around, and then roared at full throttle down the runway to take off. We wore rubber-soled shoes to aid us in crawling up the wheels and carried ropes to secure ourselves inside the wheel well. We had also stuffed cotton in our ears as protection against the shriek of the four jet engines. Now we lay sweating with fear as the massive craft swung into its about-face, the jet blast flattening the grass all around us. "Let's run!" I shouted to Jorge.

We dashed onto the runway and sprinted toward the left-hand wheels of the momentarily stationary plane. As Jorge began to scramble up the 42-inch-high tires, I saw there was not room for us both in the single well. "I'll try the other side!" I shouted. I climbed quickly onto the right wheels, grabbed a strut, and, twisting and wriggling, pulled myself into the semidark well. The plane began rolling immediately, and I grabbed some machinery to keep from falling out. The roar of the engines nearly deafened me.

As we became airborne, the huge

double wheels, scorching hot from takeoff, began folding into the compartment. I tried to flatten myself against the overhead as they came closer and closer; then, in desperation, I pushed at them with my feet. But they pressed powerfully upward, squeezing me against the roof of the well. Just when I felt that I would be crushed, the wheels locked in place and the bay doors beneath them closed, plunging me into darkness. So there I was, my five-foot-four, 140-pound frame literally wedged in amid a spaghetti-like

THE DOORS DROPPED OPEN. I HELD ON FOR DEAR LIFE, SWINGING OVER THE ABYSS.

maze of conduits and machinery. I could not move enough to tie myself to anything.

Then, before I had time to catch my breath, the bay doors suddenly dropped open again and the wheels stretched out into their landing position. I held on for dear life, swinging over the abyss, wondering whether I had been spotted, whether even now the plane was turning back to hand me over to Castro's police.

By the time the wheels began retracting again, I had seen a bit of extra space among all the machinery where I could safely squeeze. Now I knew there was room for me, even

though I could scarcely breathe. After a few minutes, I touched one of the tires and found that it had cooled off. I swallowed some aspirin tablets against the head-splitting noise and began to wish that I had worn something warmer than my light sport shirt and green fatigues.

Up in the cockpit of the DC-8, Captain Valentin Vara del Rey, 44, had settled into the routine of the overnight flight, which would last eight hours and 20

I LAY IN FREEZING DARKNESS MORE THAN FIVE MILES ABOVE THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.

minutes. Takeoff had been normal, with the aircraft and its 147 passengers, plus a crew of ten, lifting off at 170 mph. But right after liftoff, something unusual had happened. A light on the instrument panel had remained on, indicating improper retraction of the landing gear.

"Are you having difficulty?" the control tower asked.

"Yes," replied Vara del Rey. "There is an indication that the right wheel hasn't closed properly. I'll repeat the procedure."

The captain lowered the landing gear, then raised it again. This time, the red light blinked out.

Dismissing the incident as a minor

malfunction, the captain turned his attention to climbing to assigned cruising altitude. On leveling out, he observed that the temperature outside was 41 degrees below zero.

SHIVERING UNCONTROLLABLY FROM the bitter cold, I wondered if Jorge had made it into the other wheel well, and I began thinking about what had brought me to this desperate situation. I thought about my parents and my girlfriend, María Esther, and wondered what they would think when they learned what I had done.

My father is a plumber, and I have four brothers and a sister. We are poor, like most Cubans. Our house in Havana has just one large room. Food was scarce and strictly rationed. About the only fun I had was playing baseball and walking with María Esther along the seawall. When I turned 16, the government shipped me off to vocational school in Betancourt, a sugarcane village in Matanzas Province. There, I was supposed to learn welding, but classes were often interrupted to send us off to plant cane.

Young as I was, I was tired of living in a state that controlled everyone's life. I dreamed of freedom. I wanted to become an artist and live in the United States, where I had an uncle. I knew that thousands of Cubans had gotten to America and done well there. As the time approached when I would be drafted, I thought more and more of trying to get away. But how? I knew



airport to reconnoiter. Once, a DC-8 took off and flew directly over us; the wheels were still down, and we could see into the well compartments. “There’s enough room in there for me,” I remember saying.

These were my thoughts as I lay in the freezing darkness more than five miles above the Atlantic Ocean. By now we had been in the air about an hour, and I was getting light-headed. Was it really only a few hours earlier that I had bicycled through the rain with Jorge and hidden in the grass?

that two planeloads of people were allowed to leave Havana for Miami each day, but there was a waiting list of 800,000 for these flights. Also, if you signed up to leave, the government looked at you as a *gusano*—a worm—and life became even less bearable.

My hopes seemed futile. Then I met Jorge at a Havana baseball game. We got to talking. I found out that Jorge, like me, was disillusioned with Cuba. “The system takes away your freedom—forever,” he complained.

Jorge told me about the weekly flight to Madrid. Twice we went to the

Was Jorge safe? My parents? María Esther? I drifted into unconsciousness.

The sun rose over the Atlantic like a great golden globe, its rays glinting off the silver-and-red fuselage of Iberia’s DC-8 as it crossed the European coast high over Portugal. With the end of the 5,563-mile flight in sight, Captain Vara del Rey began his descent toward Madrid’s Barajas Airport. Arrival would be at 8 a.m. local time, he told his passengers over the intercom, and the weather in Madrid was sunny and pleasant.



Shortly after passing over Toledo, Vara del Rey let down his landing gear. As always, the maneuver was accompanied by a buffeting as the wheels hit the slipstream and a 200 mph turbulence swirled through the wheel wells. Now the plane went into its final approach; now, a spurt of flame and smoke from the tires as the DC-8 touched down at about 140 mph. It was a perfect landing—no bumps. After a brief postflight check, Vara del Rey walked down the ramp steps and stood by the nose of the plane waiting for a car to pick him up, along with his crew.

Nearby, there was a sudden, soft plop as the frozen body of Armando Socarras Ramirez fell to the concrete apron beneath the plane. José Rocha Lorenzana, a security guard, was the first to reach the crumpled figure. “When I touched his clothes, they

Socarras Ramirez in 1969, in his hospital bed in Madrid

were frozen as stiff as wood,” Rocha Lorenzana said. “All he did was make a strange sound, a kind of moan.”

“I couldn’t believe it at first,” Vara del Rey said. “But then I went over to see him. He had ice over his nose and mouth. And his color ...” As he watched the unconscious boy being bundled into a truck, the captain kept exclaiming to himself, “Impossible! Impossible!”

THE FIRST THING I remember after losing consciousness was hitting the ground at the Madrid airport. Then I blacked out again and woke up later at the Gran Hospital de la Beneficencia in downtown Madrid, more dead than

alive. When they took my temperature, it was so low that it did not even register on the thermometer. “Am I in Spain?” was my first question. And then, “Where’s Jorge?” (Jorge is believed to have been knocked down by the jet blast while trying to climb into the other wheel well, and to have been put in prison in Cuba.)

Doctors said later that my condition was comparable to that of a patient undergoing “deep freeze” surgery—a delicate process performed only under carefully controlled conditions. Dr. José María Pajares, who cared for me, called my survival a medical miracle, and, in truth, I feel lucky to be alive. (Editor’s note: Experts cited at the time of Socarras Ramirez’s flight estimated that at an altitude of 29,000 feet and a temperature of 41 degrees below zero—the approximate conditions in the wheel bed that day—a person would be expected to live only a few minutes. An engineer said the chances of not being crushed by the retracting double wheels were “one in a million.”)

A few days after my escape, I was up and around the hospital, playing cards with my police guard and

reading stacks of letters from all over the world. I especially liked one from a girl in California. “You are a hero,” she wrote, “but not very wise.”

My uncle, who lives in New Jersey, telephoned and invited me to come live with him. The International Rescue Committee arranged my passage and has continued to help me.

I am fine now. I live with my uncle and go to school to learn English. I still hope to study to be an artist. I want to be a good citizen and contribute something to this country, for I love it here. You can smell freedom in the air.

I often think of my friend Jorge. We both knew the risk we were taking and that we might be killed in our attempt to escape Cuba. But it seemed worth the chance. Even knowing the risks, I would try to escape again if I had to. **R**

Armando Socarras Ramirez is now 69 and lives in Virginia. He retired from the transportation industry. He and his wife have four children and 12 grandchildren.

THIS STORY originally appeared in the January 1970 issue of Reader’s Digest.

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BEST OF AMERICA

THE
SMARTEST
DOG
IN AMERICA IS ...



RD's editor-in-chief was convinced that his beloved Sadie was the most brilliant canine in the land. Readers may have persuaded him otherwise.

BY *Bruce Kelley*



SKIPPY

MISTY

ABBY

NESTLÉ

SADIE

COLBY

In my February “Dear Reader” column, I issued a challenge: “If your dog is as smart as our Sadie, I’ll grant you a year’s subscription.” I didn’t expect much from this tongue-in-cheek wager, but 400 replies later, I see I badly underestimated the situation. After all, these are your DOGS I was woofing about. And your stories of sly, wry, silly companions were so poignant and funny that we decided to publish a kennel of them. One reader did earn the free *RD* because of her pooch’s teaching feats, but let’s be clear: Sadie is still co-champ.



THE WINNER!
Colby Taught a Toddler to Walk

I was sitting in the living room, keeping an eye on my one-year-old daughter, Rachel, who was crawling around. Colby, a retired guide dog, was lying nearby, kind of half-asleep. Rachel crawled over and pushed herself up so that she was leaning on his back. She started rocking back and forth, and then Colby very slowly got up. I thought that he was tired of Rachel and was leaving. But as he got up, Rachel stood with him, holding on to his back. Colby stood there for a bit and then slowly started walking. Rachel took a few steps with him and then plopped on her bottom. Colby sank to the floor. In a bit, Rachel started leaning on his back again. Again, he rose and started walking. Rachel took a few steps, wobbled, and sank to the floor. This scenario was repeated over and over. At first, I couldn’t figure it out. Finally I did. Colby was teaching Rachel to walk!

—**Robyn Sierchio***
 LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



Nestlé Gets Bright Ideas

My eight-month-old Havanese puppy, Nestlé, sleeps in a wire crate right next to my bed, and next to her is a three-way touch lamp. I turn it on at five when I get up to let her out. One morning, she started being restless at 4:15. I told her to go back to sleep. She wouldn’t. Then I heard her pawing at the lamp. At 4:30, she turned it on. I finally got up and put her out, and she had to potty! I thought it was a fluke.

Two days later, at 4:35 a.m., she did it again. This time, she tapped the lamp three times to get it to the brightest setting. Her Royal Highness wants up! A few weeks later, at 4:24 a.m., the light went on again. She’s done this multiple times when she needs to go out. So now the dog controls what time I get up.

—**Liz Moore**
 POST FALLS, IDAHO



Macy Conjures Imaginary Visitors

We had two dogs: Tonka, the sweetest rottweiler in the history of

ALL DOG PHOTOS COURTESY THEIR HUMANS. ADDITIONAL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

the world, and Macy, the gentlest pit bull. But we had only one Kong chew toy, and Tonka liked to sleep with it between his front paws. If Macy wanted to play with the Kong, Tonka would waken, lift his eyebrow, and warn Macy to leave the toy alone.

The one thing that united these rivals was the appearance of anyone outside the window. Both would jump to their feet, run to the window, and bark. One day, Macy developed a strategy. She jumped up, started barking, and ran to the window. Of course, Tonka followed. As Tonka searched for the “intruder,” Macy circled back, grabbed the Kong between her smirking lips, and trotted to her corner. Her little game worked for years.

—David Maupin

MIDLOTHIAN, VIRGINIA



Texas Joined the Final Journey

My wife raised Texas from a six-week-old pup into a tall, playful 90-pound boxer who never left her side. He was truly a gentle giant. He faithfully slept at the foot of our bed for nine years, covered with her pink bathrobe.

Then my wife got sick with ALS. When she went into hospice, she continually asked to see Tex, so one day I borrowed a service-dog blanket and took him to see her. We rode



the elevator up to her floor, and when the door opened, he bounded to her room. How he knew which room, I don't know. When I got there, Tex was on the foot of the hospital bed, his large paw already in my wife's hand.

Back at home that night, Tex was restless and would not sleep in his bed, so he slept on the floor near me. The next morning, I found he had passed away. My beautiful wife of 46 years passed away the next day. I have the ashes of both, and this summer I spread them together in a small stream in Wyoming, high in the Rocky Mountains, where they both loved to travel and play together.

—Jim Sherrard

PLANO, TEXAS

Griffin knows how to whisper. —Peggy Melvin CHATHAM, NEW JERSEY



Skippy Knows Who Is Deaf

Almost as soon as our Welsh corgi, Skippy, came to live with us, she sensed that my children and I cannot hear. When someone comes to the door, she jumps up, runs to make sure a guest is there, and then runs to nudge, nudge, nudge me until I follow her to the door. Same with my children. But with my husband, who has perfect hearing, Skippy doesn't nudge—she barks at him! And if Skippy needs us to wake up at night, she rises on her hind legs and nudges me or my children awake, but with my husband, she goes to his side of the bed and barks. Pretty smart dog, huh?

—Becky Meyers

CEDARVILLE, MICHIGAN



Abby Runs the Family's Recycling

Our Australian shepherd comes running when she hears the crinkle of an empty water bottle, the sound of a cereal box being flattened, or, her favorite, a plastic lid or dish ready to go out. Why? She's a master recycler! She constantly patrols our house for recyclables to grab and take to our garage recycling bin. And if she wants a treat? She brings me an empty cardboard box.

—Diane Schroeder

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA



Birdie Is the No. 1 Treadmill Master (Also No. 2)

We live in Colorado, where walking the dogs outside is not always a viable option, so running on a treadmill is a wonderful trick to teach the pooches. I was thrilled by my puppy's ability to learn so quickly and with so much enthusiasm. What I did not appreciate until much later was how well I had trained her to remain on the treadmill until I gave a release command.

It was Christmas. The family had gathered from hundreds of miles away. The grandchildren were excited

Peyton knows when it's Saturday. When I come home from errands, he runs to his bed. He doesn't do that any other day. —Linda Bradlyn SYLMAR, CALIFORNIA



to open the gifts, and the adults were ready to eat. But first I had to show off the new pup's treadmill trick. I knew Birdie would impress them by the way she followed my commands: Go to the treadmill room, get positioned just right, wait for the machine to turn on, and, most important, proceed to walk until instructed otherwise. Birdie did not falter. She remained on that treadmill even after she gave a warning bark. Birdie tells us she must use the bathroom by barking once. But my husband and I were confident that we could keep showing off our pup's athletic ability and did not heed her.

She barked several more times. Then it happened. First Birdie went number one, and in large part it went unnoticed for a moment. Then Birdie went number two, which could not go unnoticed. Birdie runs, not walks, on the treadmill at 5.6 miles per hour. When number two hits a treadmill at 5.6 miles per hour, it is shot off the back of the treadmill like buckshot and onto everything in its path.

The grandchildren were in awe, the adults disgusted, my husband and I mortified. The dog, however, was pleasantly enjoying herself, since now she was up for a long run. I quickly excused her and went to cleaning up the mess that I believe I caused by teaching the puppy to remain on the treadmill no matter what. I must say that Christmas 2012 is still talked about—but not always with a smile.

—Tammy Fehringer

PEETZ, COLORADO



Shadow Outsmarted Trainers

We had to put our Belgian sheepdog Shadow to sleep yesterday. He was hands down the worst dog I have ever had—not so much a superdog as a superb dog. For the first two years of his life, we worked relentlessly to train him to do the basic things. He balked at all of it. When made to lie down, he would roll

Where most dogs are taught to shake hands, Diesel learned this move with the cue “Show me the money.” —Lorissa Juntti ISHPEMING, MICHIGAN

on his back and cry out as if he were being beaten. If pushed too hard, he would bite—never to draw blood, but enough to let you know who was in charge.

Frustrated, we sent him to a professional trainer, who took him into his home to work with him one-on-one. After the agreed-upon two weeks of training, the handler called and sheepishly asked for another two weeks with Shadow, free of charge, as he had been unable to make any progress. In another two weeks, we got the same phone call. So, after six weeks, the dog trainer returned our dog with apologies, stating that this was the first dog that he'd ever deemed untrainable. Shadow appeared quite pleased with himself.

For all of his 13 years, Shadow



bested us, allowing us the privilege of living in his home. On his last day, my daughter commented, “Mom, I know he doesn’t feel good because he is not growling at me when I kiss his face.” That was him. Shadow was a genius. How else could he have compelled us to love the worst dog in the world?

—Julie Campbell

MINERAL WELLS, TEXAS



Misty Mourns for Dad

When my husband, Jack, was sick and in and out of hospitals and rehab centers, every time I came home, Misty would sit at the gate and wait to see whether he came out of the car. After he died, she would still sit at the gate waiting for him to come in. I knew that I needed to find a way of giving Misty closure. So about a week after his funeral, I took her to the cemetery with me. As we walked up to his grave, I said to her, “Misty, this is where Dad is now,” not sure what to expect. She started sniffing the broken ground, crying; then she walked to me and leaned against my leg. I knelt down, and we both cried. And from that point on, she never waited at the gate for him again.

—Loretta Riker

TAYLORSVILLE, KENTUCKY



Molly Fetches the Heart Medicine

When I was sick and very weak upstairs with the flu, my husband, Rey, was working on the lowest

floor of our split-level. All of a sudden, my heart rate started to speed up. Oh my—I'd forgotten to take the medicine that helps regulate my heartbeat for three days! That can be fatal; was I going to die? I yelled for Rey, but he couldn't hear. Then our toy fox terrier, Molly, ran into the room. I could barely tell her to get Daddy. I tried again, and finally she ran out of the room and down the stairs, and I heard her barking frantically. Rey rushed upstairs and got my medicine. I believe that Molly saved my life that day.

—Valerie Magpoc

BRUNSWICK, OHIO



Loki Nursed a Cancer Patient

I was in my 30s when I was diagnosed with a rare gastrointestinal cancer. I was quite sick after surgery and chemotherapy and having a hard time with fatigue, depression, and anxiety. My Siberian husky rescue, Loki, would gently poke me from my nest on the couch when he wanted some exercise. Often, I didn't want to go. But the exercise, the fresh air, feeling needed when I had been the needy one for so long—it all helped. Loki got me moving and got me stronger when my own willpower wasn't enough. And when the tears and frustration came, he'd curl up on my lap—yes, a 65-pound



lapdog!—and look into my eyes, and somehow I knew tomorrow would be a better day.

—Christine Barczak

LAKE VIEW, NEW YORK



Kymo Can Do Anything

Here are three things to know about our superhero dog, Kemosabe (Kymo for short), whose name means “trusted scout” or “faithful friend”:

1. Once, a burglar was trying to break into our garage when Kymo showed up. It wasn't the fact that there was a huge dog barking in a deep, powerful voice that made him leave his pry bar and other assorted tools. It was the snapping teeth, which

Brandy knows more than 200 words in English—and 50 in Spanish.

—Magdalena Jacobo SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA

sounded like a 600-pound alligator.

2. A neighbor stopped by to share some leftover chicken salad. My sister and I were home from college and did not remember where the bowls were. After we repeated the word *bowl* a couple of times, Kymo dropped her dog bowl on the neighbor's toe, looking back and forth between the chicken salad and her bowl.

3. One morning, my mom made pancakes that weren't so good, which my dad and I alluded to. Her response? She gave them to the normally ravenous Kymo, who daintily took them to the door, went out in the backyard, and buried them.

—Jim Storey

KENOSHA, WISCONSIN



**Roxie Finds Missing
Lawn Tools**

One day, I was using the string trimmer in the backyard when

it suddenly stopped working correctly. Upon examination, I noticed that the screw-on “bump” knob on the bottom that holds the string assembly in place had come off. As I was about to begin my methodical grid search of the backyard, Roxie, our red Queensland heeler, trotted over to one of the many bushes to get her tennis ball. As she came prancing over to me to play fetch, I told her I couldn't, that I had to find the part. With that, she dropped her ball between my feet and looked up at me. As I was about to tell her again that I couldn't play, I noticed her “ball” was the knob to my string trimmer. And her look was one of “Is this what you were wanting?” Needless to say, the string trimmer was put down for a few minutes while we played fetch with her tennis ball.

—Keith Whyte

CHESTERFIELD, VIRGINIA





Jack Anticipates Seizures

Our dog Jack runs to our dog Buddy when one of Buddy's seizures is about to happen, then sits next to him, looking outward, to protect Buddy until it passes and he can walk. Jack was not trained for this.

—Virginia Matheny

LYNN HAVEN, FLORIDA



Binky Treats Migraines

I get migraines, and Binky knows when they are bad. No matter where she is or whatever the noise around us, Binky comes bounding straight toward me, on a mission to assuage the pain and depression that comes with the migraines. She licks my face fast and hard, trying her best to lick all my pain away. If I am lying down, I'd better be prepared—because she will jump on my chest and face me down like a hunk of meat, taking on the challenge of licking me into being well again.

—Elaine Perkins

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



McKenzie Is a Fantastic Actor

McKenzie grew up at a farmhouse. Initially, the fence around the property was old and had several large gaps, so I reinforced the bottom with chicken wire and thought all was well. McKenzie would spend his days

frolicking in the large yard while Connie and I were at work and McKenna was at school.

One day, while on a job in the area, I stopped home to visit. As I pulled up to the driveway, I saw McKenzie outside of the fence playing in the daisies, dancing and nosing at a large butterfly hovering just out of his reach. I watched McKenzie enjoying himself until, suddenly, he realized he wasn't alone. He took one look at me and hightailed it to a hole under the fence, wriggling back into the yard. He ran around to the rear of the house, the place where he was usually asleep when we came home. As I stood and watched, McKenzie then proceeded to come around the corner of the house, stretching as if he had just woken up. Then, continuing his act, he looked at me as if he had just noticed I was home and excitedly came up to the fence, where he sat in his "proud boy" stance, as if he had been good all day and was glad to see me! I laughed as I opened the gate, and then I stood and gave him a frown. With my hands on my hips, I asked the little faker where the hole was. To my surprise, he lowered his ears and dejectedly walked over to the spot in the fence he had earlier wriggled through and sat down, looking at me. I laughed so hard I cried. **R**

—John Miatech

JACKSON, MICHIGAN

Gus reads *Reader's Digest*. —Jennifer Goodwin TOMS RIVER, NEW JERSEY



FACTS LEFT OUT OF HISTORY

*Sometimes the most interesting
information gets lost on the
cutting-room floor of time*

BY *Jacopo della Quercia*

1 ROSA PARKS WAS NOT THE FIRST WOMAN TO DEFY RACIST BUS LAWS

In 1955, a young woman in Montgomery, Alabama, caused a stir when she refused to give her bus seat to a White passenger. She was the first person arrested for protesting Montgomery's racist busing rule, and her defiance eventually became the subject of international attention. That woman was named Claudette Colvin. Actually, she was just a girl—15 years old.

Of course, it is Rosa Parks (left) who

went down in history for defying the Jim Crow laws in the same way later that year. (For the record, it's a popular misconception that both women were arrested for sitting in "Whites only" sections.) Colvin knew Parks from an NAACP youth group, and she also knew that Parks was the better person to be a figurehead in their city's growing protest movement. Parks had done prior work with the NAACP, and "the organization didn't want a teenager in the role," Colvin explains.

After decades of obscurity, Colvin eventually received the praise she deserved for her unsung heroism in Montgomery. Although she may not hold as prominent a place as Parks in textbooks, she has no regrets over her protest. "I feel very, very proud of what I did," she says.

2 CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS THOUGHT THE EARTH WAS SHAPED LIKE A PEAR

Yes, Columbus believed the world was round—as did sailors and mathematicians going back to ancient Greece. However, he did not think the earth was a perfect sphere, and that was likely because of a very famous poem.

According to the logbook for his third voyage to the Americas, Columbus suspected the world was in "the form of a pear," and that its highest peak had the Biblical Garden of Eden on its summit. This is precisely how the earth was described by Dante Alighieri in his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, the most influential work of Italian literature in history. Dante placed the Garden of Eden atop an impossibly high mountain surrounded by an ocean, which Columbus incorrectly determined to be in present-day Venezuela.

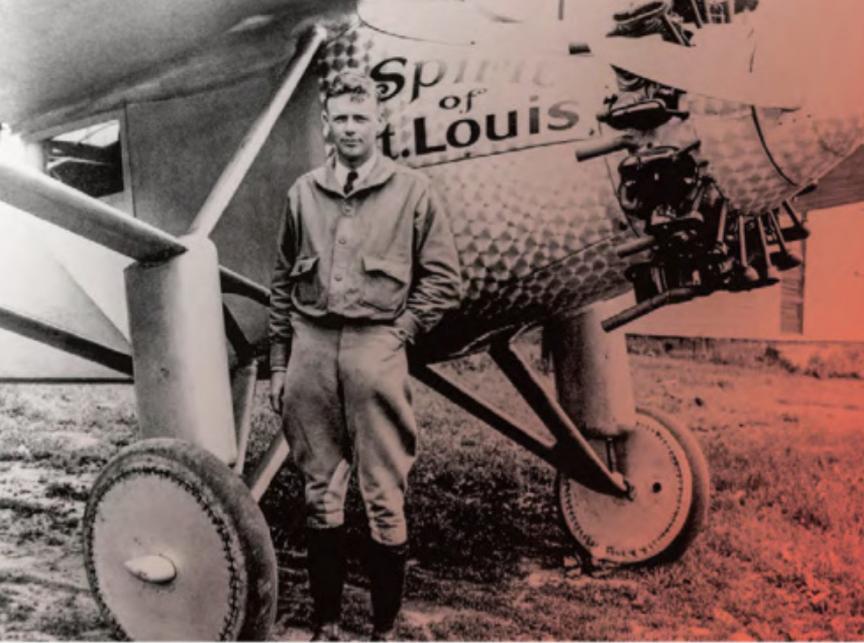
3 A GIRL'S FAKED TESTIMONY HELPED PUSH THE UNITED STATES INTO THE GULF WAR

In 1990, a representative for the Kuwaiti-sponsored Citizens for a Free



Kuwait hired New York public relations firm Hill + Knowlton to help persuade the American government to join in a war against Iraq. After a few months and \$12 million in research money, the group found a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl named Nayirah (above) to deliver horrifying testimony to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus about hospitals being looted and premature babies being left to die. Amnesty International corroborated Nayirah's testimony, which quickly became a talking point for U.S. senators and President George H. W. Bush during the buildup to the Gulf War.

In 1992, after the Americans had crushed the Iraqis in a mere 42 days of combat, an op-ed in the *New York Times* revealed that Nayirah was actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States. Her entire testimony was dismissed as false, and Hill + Knowlton's role in the PR move was made public.



5 ... AND CHARLES LINDBERGH WAS NOT THE FIRST TO FLY ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Lindbergh (left) became an international hero when he flew nonstop from Long Island to Paris in 1927. It was the first time anyone had attempted such a feat—if you overlook John Alcock and Arthur Whit-

ten Brown, two British pilots who flew from Newfoundland to Ireland in 1919.

So while Lindbergh deserves credit for completing the world's first solo trip, Alcock and Brown were the first to fly across the ocean—along the way surviving what sounds like an action movie: rain, a snowstorm, fog, and ice. At one point, they nearly spiraled into the sea. “We had a terrible journey,” Alcock said. After more than 16 hours battling the elements, the pilots landed in a bog in Ireland. A few days later, King George V knighted them.

6 LANDING A MAN ON THE MOON WASN'T ALL THAT POPULAR

The moon landing may be fondly remembered as one of the greatest achievements in human history, particularly by those who witnessed it on live television. However, opinion polls taken in the 1960s and '70s found that everyday Americans were far from universally enamored of the space race. Shortly after the Apollo 11 mission

4 ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL DID NOT INVENT THE TELEPHONE ...

In 1860, a Florentine immigrant in New York named Antonio Meucci demonstrated a remarkable invention he called a teletrofono. Sadly, Meucci could not find a sponsor for his product, and after several mishaps, he could not afford the fee for even a temporary patent. Enter Alexander Graham Bell, who just so happened to share a laboratory with Meucci. Bell didn't get a patent for “his” telephone until 1876, 16 years after Meucci had unveiled his prototype. Bell soon struck a deal with Western Union to sell his device. Meucci sued Bell for fraud, and the case was nearing the Supreme Court when Meucci died, in 1889. It took until 2002 for the Italian inventor to be vindicated. That was when the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution declaring that “his work in the invention of the telephone should be acknowledged.”

was completed, in July 1969, only 53 percent of Americans believed that the moon landing was worth the tax dollars invested. (According to *Forbes*, the Apollo program cost about \$25 billion, or about \$150 billion adjusted for inflation.) Ten years later, another poll found that only 41 percent of Americans felt the benefits of the space program ultimately outweighed its costs.

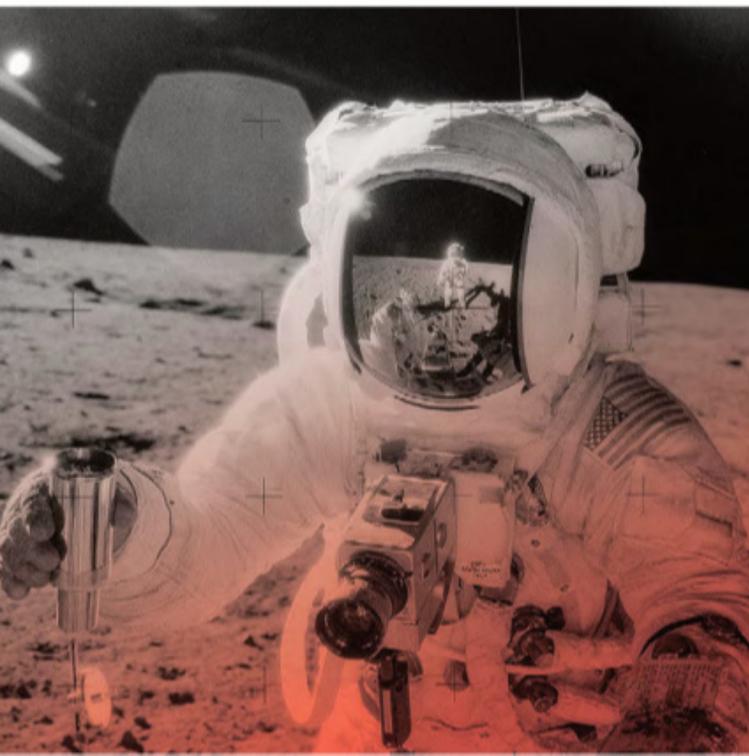
7 MANY FUTURE CELEBRITIES FOUGHT IN **WORLD WAR II**

Bea Arthur (below right) joined the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve in 1943, before heading to Broadway and *Maude*. Future New York Yankee Yogi Berra saw action at Omaha and Utah Beaches on D-Day. Comedian Mel Brooks fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Jimmy Stewart was promoted from private to colonel and eventually became a brigadier general in the U.S.

Air Force. Clark Gable flew five combat missions in a B-17. Suave actor David Niven was already well-known when he took a break from acting to become a commando in the British Army. Peter Sellers was in the Royal Air Force before graduating to *The Pink Panther*. Audrey Hepburn was a teenage volunteer in the Dutch Resistance. Lee Marvin served as a Marine and was wounded at the Battle of Saipan. Tony Curtis witnessed Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945. And Julia Child had a top secret post in the Office of Strategic Services. She even assisted researchers trying to develop a shark repellent that would keep sailors from becoming an underwater meal.

8 THE **FOURTH OF JULY** SHOULD BE ON **JULY 2—OR AUGUST 2**

On July 3, 1776, John Adams sent his wife exciting news: The Second



Continental Congress had approved a resolution for American independence. It was such a historic moment that Adams wrote, “The second day of July, 1776 ... will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival,” complete with “pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other.”

The adoption of what we call the Lee Resolution on July 2, 1776, marked the moment the 13 colonies were effectively independent from Great Britain. After a short wait while the Declaration of Independence was written on parchment by Timothy Matlack, a Pennsylvania clerk renowned for his good handwriting, John Hancock and his colleagues signed it on August 2, 1776—a full month after John Adams inaccurately predicted July 2 would be as celebrated as the Fourth of July is today.

So what’s July 4 got to recommend it? It was actually the day that the Continental Congress finally agreed on and approved the famous language in the declaration. In other words, the Fourth of July is really a celebration of unity.

9 THE WAR OF THE WORLDS PANIC WAS MORE LIKE A SKIRMISH

On October 31, 1938, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story headlined “Radio Listeners in Panic ... Many Flee Homes to Escape ‘Gas Raid from Mars.’” The culprit: 23-year-old

Orson Welles, who several hours earlier had read a radio adaptation of H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* with his fellow actors.

Was there panic in the streets? No. According to a national survey conducted the evening of the broadcast, only 2 percent of participants had listened to Welles’s *War of the Worlds* production. The other 98 percent likely had no idea what he was up to and learned about it later. While some of that 2 percent might have thought the country had been invaded, they were probably few in number and more afraid of a war with Germany than with martians. However, the idea of a science-fiction broadcast causing panic was a trick or treat too delicious for newspapers to resist that Halloween.

10 SOME WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE LEADERS WANTED ONLY WHITE WOMEN TO VOTE

This year marks the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote, but the victory wasn’t as sweet as we’d like to think. Some of those at the forefront of the suffrage movement, fearful that questions of race would make their battle more difficult, wanted to advocate for White women alone. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, arguably the leading voice for women’s rights along with Susan B. Anthony, occasionally delved into what biographer Lori Ginzberg describes as “ugly racist rhetoric” that prioritized “educated, virtuous White women” over

Black men and women. Sojourner Truth, the former slave who was also a leading voice for women's rights, ultimately broke with Stanton over her refusal to agree that women of every color deserved the right to vote. Even after the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, poll taxes and other obstacles barred African American women (and men) from voting throughout the South. It was not until the passage of the 24th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that millions of African Americans finally were able to exercise the voting rights previously denied to them.

11 THE FOUNDING FATHERS EMBRACED ISLAM

George Washington invited Muslims to work at his home. John Adams praised Muhammad as one of history's greatest "inquirers after truth," alongside Socrates and Confucius. Thomas Jefferson taught himself Arabic using a Koran and even hosted an iftar dinner at the White House during Ramadan.

Why was there such openness to Islam in the early United States? One reason: Morocco's Sultan Muhammad III was the first head of state to formally recognize the 13 colonies' independence from Great Britain, in



December 1777. Following the Revolutionary War, Jefferson, Adams, and the sultan signed the U.S.-Morocco Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1786. After more than 230 years of conflicts and crises, it remains the longest unbroken treaty in U.S. history.

12 JOE MCCARTHY ALMOST CHICKENED OUT ON GIVING THE SPEECH THAT MADE HIM INFAMOUS

The 1950 Lincoln Day Dinner in Wheeling, West Virginia, was where little-known Sen. Joseph McCarthy (above) lobbed one of the most meteoric political bombshells of the 20th century. "I have here in my hand a list of 205," McCarthy told the assembled Republican power brokers, "a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

State Department.” It was a brazen lie, delivered by McCarthy with the supreme confidence that would turn his name into an ism and crush the careers of hundreds of Americans. Yet as Larry Tye writes in his new book *Demagogue*, McCarthy wasn’t nearly as gutsy as he appeared. The senator had a second speech in his pocket that day, a snoozer about national housing policy, which was his real pet cause. But the red-baiting barn burner seemed more likely to grab the limelight, so why not? And when it put him on the front page of newspapers, there was no turning back.

13 ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS ONE MACHO GUY

We remember Lincoln for being tall and gangly, cerebral and “honest.” But before he entered the White House, he was a real he-man. He was a skilled wrestler in his youth who would occasionally referee other fights—including cockfights. When he was challenged to a duel in 1842, Lincoln requested broadswords so he could intimidate his notably shorter opponent with his reach. His foe agreed to a truce after Abe sliced a tree branch above the man’s head.

Lincoln was fearless in political battle too. When a fight broke out at a campaign event, he reportedly picked up one offender “by the neck and the seat of his trousers, and ... threw him 12 feet away.”

14 ELEANOR ROOSEVELT WAS A TARGET OF THE FBI

We think of Roosevelt as a beloved first lady who helped lift the nation’s spirits through the Great Depression and World War II, an ardent defender of human rights, and a delegate to the United Nations. So why did the FBI spy on her for 40 years, compiling a file of more than 3,200 pages?

Despite her reputation today as a transformative first lady, Roosevelt’s power earned her all sorts of enemies, not least the political opponents of FDR. J. Edgar Hoover, the almost omnipotent director of the FBI, was especially troubled by Mrs. Roosevelt’s embrace of liberal causes and civil rights activists, many of whom he suspected were Communists.

The public didn’t find out about the extraordinary record that the FBI kept on the first lady until 1982. To this day, 12 pages of the file are classified. **R**



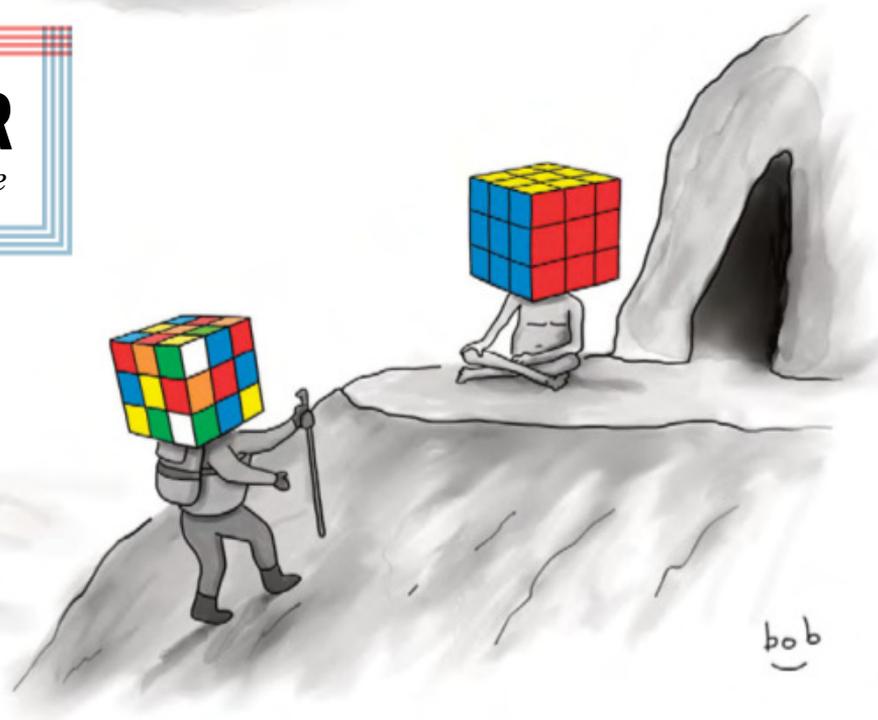
A Big Fish in a Small Pond

The mayor from *Jaws* is still the mayor in *Jaws 2*.
It is so important to vote in your local elections.

 @ADAMGOODELL

LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*



A kindergarten teacher was telling her students about different kinds of animals.

“Whales are the largest,” she said, “but they cannot swallow people, because their throats are too small.”

“But in the Bible, it says that Jonah was swallowed by a whale,” said a little girl.

“You can’t always believe what you read,” the teacher replied.

“Well, when I go to heaven,” said the little girl, “I’ll ask Jonah.”

“And what if Jonah didn’t go to heaven?”

“Then you can ask him.”

—Submitted by
BETTY ALEXANDER
Fort Worth, Texas

What does a dyslexic, agnostic insomniac do at night? *He stays up wondering if there really is a dog.*

—BUSINESSINSIDER.COM

I was in a job interview today. The interviewer handed me his laptop and said, “I want you to try to sell this to me.” So I put it under my arm, walked out of the building, and went home. Eventually he called and demanded,

It’s such poor planning that *ninja* doesn’t have at least one silent letter.

—@UNFITZ

“Bring it back here right now!” I said, “Three hundred bucks and it’s yours.”

—BLOG.ZOOMINFO.COM

Market Fresh

◆ Did you hear how they caught the great produce bandit? *He stopped to take a leek.*

—Submitted by

ANDREW MCCAMMON
Chicago, Illinois

◆ A vegan said to me, “People who sell meat are gross!” I said, “People who sell fruit and veg are grocer.”

—ADELE CLIFF,
comedian

A pigeon was anxiously pacing up and down the street when he saw his friend hop up on the curb.

“Where have you been?” he asked. “I’ve been waiting here for hours.”

“Sorry I’m late,” his friend replied. “It was just such a nice day, I thought I’d walk.”

—THAYERBIRDING.COM

DIY MASTERPIECES

The Getty Museum in Los Angeles challenged people to re-create famous works of art with things lying around their homes. Here are two of our favorites.



—SADANDUSELESS.COM

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NG186, JAN VAN EYCK (ACTIVE 1422; DIED 1441), THE ARNOLFINI PORTRAIT 1434, COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON. COURTESY COVID CLASSICS. COURTESY PAUL DIMATTIA, RD PHOTO STUDIO. 670, JOHANNES VERMEER, GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING 1665, COURTESY MAURITSHUIS, THE HAGUE

Looking for something to tickle kids ages 6 to 106? Check out our Fun Jokes for Funny Kids series, available at shop.rd.com/funjokes and wherever books are sold.



THE PROMISE OF
CBD

*After only a few years on the market,
CBD is being hailed as a new miracle cure-all.
Does it work? How?
Four people share their experiences.*

BY *Shelley Levitt, Charlotte Hilton Andersen,
Anne Harding, AND Selene Yeager*

FROM THEHEALTHY.COM

LAURIE
MAXSON, 65

Home: Colorado Springs, Colorado

Occupation: Retired school administrator

Condition: Rheumatoid arthritis



About four years ago, Laurie Maxson began to find it challenging to complete simple tasks in the morning. “I started experiencing a lot of pain in my hands and feet and difficulty moving my fingers,” says Maxson, a retired school administrator from Colorado Springs, Colorado. “I couldn’t even grip a toothbrush or a hairbrush.”

Her doctor gave her a physical and ordered blood tests. Soon Maxson received a diagnosis. “My numbers indicated that I had a moderate to severe case of rheumatoid arthritis,” she says.

An autoimmune disorder, rheumatoid arthritis causes painful inflammation of the lining of the joints. It can often take sufferers multiple tries to find the right treatment. Maxson started a series of medications but couldn’t tolerate the side effects, which included extreme fatigue, nausea, and itching. She finally found relief with monthly infusions of a biologic medication that blocks inflammation-causing substances.

Then she decided to set her sights higher. “I was good,” she says. “But I wanted to be even better.” She changed

her diet, cutting back on sugar, eating more plant-based foods and less red meat, and choosing organic fruits and vegetables at the market. Through websites and blogs where patients shared their arthritis experiences, Maxson also found several people who had been helped by using CBD.

CBD (short for cannabidiol) is a compound extracted from hemp plants, a type of cannabis. Yes, this is the same plant as marijuana, but unlike tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the compound that makes pot psychoactive, CBD won’t make you high and isn’t addictive.

In 2018, Congress passed a bill that defined cannabis as hemp and not marijuana as long as the plant contains no more than 0.3 percent THC. This effectively made hemp-based products such as CBD legal.

Because cannabis remains classified by the federal government as a controlled substance, though, research on the benefits of CBD is just getting started. Scientists do know, however, that CBD is a powerful anti-inflammatory. A 2017 animal study published in the journal *Pain* concluded that CBD could decrease joint inflammation and protect the nerves.

Maxson decided to try a CBD tincture (a liquid extract she holds under her tongue until it is absorbed into the bloodstream) made from hemp plants grown locally. Today, after a year of taking CBD daily, Maxson says, “I just feel like everything is working a little

bit better and a little bit quicker. It's like oiling up a machine." Though she has had to give up the intense circuit-training workouts she followed before her diagnosis, she's back to exercising again, taking Pilates classes several times a week and walking regularly. "I realize that I have a chronic disease that affects my autoimmune system," Maxson says, "and I'm trying to do everything I can to live the best life I can. CBD is a key piece of that."

LAURA DOBRATZ, 32

Home: Minneapolis, Minnesota

Occupation: Paraprofessional at a middle school

Conditions: Insomnia and anxiety

Lying awake every night staring at the ceiling and counting sheep doesn't even begin to describe the agony of chronic insomnia. "I would have trouble sleeping pretty much every single night—for years," says Laura Dobratz. "This meant I was always exhausted during the day and never felt well rested, which took a toll on every aspect of my life."

Dobratz's insomnia began when her anxiety spiked during an extra-stressful holiday season. It quickly turned into a vicious circle of worrying, which made her unable to relax enough to sleep. This led to more anxiety because she wasn't sleeping.

Eventually, Dobratz sought out a psychiatrist. The doctor prescribed sleeping pills that helped her stay asleep, but she still had a tough time turning off the anxious part of her brain and falling asleep. So her psychiatrist recommended she try CBD.

CBD works in part by mimicking and augmenting the effects of our own natural cannabinoids, called endocannabinoids, which act on cells throughout the central nervous system and are believed to help

“I had trouble sleeping every single night—for years.”



maintain our internal equilibrium. “The brain is loaded with cannabinoid receptors that enhance brain function and dial down stress and inflammation,” explains Mary Clifton, a New York City-based internal medicine doctor, a coauthor of *The Grass Is Greener: Medical Marijuana, THC & CBD Oil*, and an advisory board member for ZoneIn CBD. CBD interacts with those and other receptors to calm your mind.

Plus, CBD can help some people relieve anxiety, physical pain, and other issues that often contribute to insomnia. In a 2019 study, 80 percent of subjects reported significantly less anxiety and 67 percent showed improved sleep scores after taking CBD.

There are hundreds of different brands of CBD, and they are not all created equally. CBD is considered a supplement and is therefore unregulated. “Anyone can get in the business, and there are a lot of so-called CBD products with little or no actual cannabidiol in them,” warns McKenzie Mann, a researcher and product development manager for Blue Forest Farms, which grows high-CBD hemp and sells CBD products.

In addition to CBD and THC, cannabis plants contain hundreds of other compounds that may have medicinal effects. Among them are terpenes, aromatic molecules that promote relaxation, and cannabiniol (CBN), which some people believe has a powerful sleep-promoting effect.

“Full-spectrum” products contain all the compounds, including CBD, THC, CBN, terpenes, and others. “This is always my first recommendation—it has the ‘entourage effect.’ All the compounds in the plant work best together,” says Mann. If you live in a place where marijuana is not legal, opt for a broad-spectrum product, in which just the THC has been removed. While “pure CBD” (also called CBD isolates) might sound like what you want, these products have had all other compounds removed and are generally less effective than full- or broad-spectrum products.

Dobratz opted for a broad-spectrum oil taken under the tongue. She has found that it has no lingering effects in the morning, unlike some sleeping medications. “It costs \$100 a bottle, but it’s worth it because it works so well for me,” she says. “It helps me not worry continuously when I’m trying to go to sleep. I’m so glad my psychiatrist recommended it; otherwise I probably wouldn’t have tried it.”

JOSH KINCAID, 43

Home: Seattle, Washington

Occupation: Health and wellness coordinator for an economic development agency

Conditions: Chronic neck and back pain, migraines, anxiety

Josh Kincaid registered for a charity race up the 98-flight Seattle Space Needle, but he worried that he might not be able to make it. He had suffered an injury on the job more than 20 years earlier and had experienced severe neck and back pain ever since. But he applied a transdermal CBD patch to the base of his neck and was able to complete the race without a problem.

“I don’t think I could have done the stair climb without CBD,” Kincaid says. “After taking CBD, I no longer have to take opioids or muscle relaxants for chronic pain, nor the medication to stop the eight hours of nausea I used to get from migraines.”

Kincaid first tried CBD after he left a stressful job as a financial analyst to start a cannabis café, inspired by a high school friend who had begun to use medical marijuana to treat his multiple sclerosis (MS). The café served a coffee infused with CBD and THC, and Kincaid realized that it not only helped ease his own physical pain but also helped him overcome the extreme anxiety that used to prevent him from any public speaking. Today he hosts a podcast about the business of cannabis and hemp.

Kincaid also credits CBD with helping him deal with cravings when he changed his diet. Unlike THC, which is well known to cause hunger by activating certain cannabinoid receptors, CBD may trigger a molecular response that blocks these receptors



“After taking CBD, I no longer have to take opioids or muscle relaxants.”

and reduces appetite. A 2012 study found that rats given CBD ate significantly less when offered food.

CBD can be used in a wide array of different forms, from gummies to creams to tinctures taken under the tongue. “It took me years to figure out the best delivery methods,” Kincaid says. “I use a topical cream for neck pain at night. While on the go or for immediate relief, I use a vape pen because the effect is incredibly quick. At

home, I use a tincture. And 24 hours prior to a big event, I take 100 to 150 milligrams throughout the day and 20 to 60 milligrams the morning of.

“People are coming to me because I look so healthy now,” Kincaid marvels. “My wife takes CBD when her ulcerative colitis flares up. My mom asks about CBD. I even gave my dog CBD when she had cancer—you could literally feel the heat dissipate from her tumor and see the wrinkles on her forehead relax after each dose.”

Kincaid stresses that it's important to find a trusted brand, since some products may be ineffective or even harmful. Also, CBD may interact with other medications, so talk to your doctor first and proceed with caution. Start with just a few milligrams and increase gradually if needed.

STEPHANIE JOHNSON, 47

Home: Dallas, Texas

Occupation: Associate content director at a marketing, branding, and advertising agency

Condition: Neuropathic pain following treatment for triple-negative breast cancer

Stephanie Johnson was diagnosed with advanced triple-negative breast cancer when she was 38. “I was given a 23 percent chance of living to see five years, and now I’m at

more than eight years,” says Johnson. “I got to see my boys become men.” Her sons, teens at the time, are now 22 and 25.

After her diagnosis, Johnson endured a year of treatment that included four months of chemotherapy and three surgeries. But while the



“I could feel the pain calming down and everything subsiding.”

chemo drug Taxol helped eliminate her cancer, it left Johnson with painful nerve damage in her hands and feet. Johnson likens the sensation to being stabbed with a multitude of tiny ice picks. “It’s prickly and almost an electrical shock feeling,” she says. “The feet will swell and get sore too.”

Her condition, peripheral neuropathy, can also result from poorly controlled diabetes, autoimmune diseases, vitamin deficiencies, viral infections, and many other factors. For about 18 months, Johnson tried treating her tingling hands and feet with over-the-counter pain relievers and topical treatments. But she couldn’t find relief—plus, she worried about potential side effects, such as organ damage.

“I finally was like, you know what, I’ll try this CBD stuff,” she says. Johnson had become familiar with CBD through her job at a marketing agency in Dallas, where she researched and wrote content for clients, including CBD product makers, hemp farmers,

and medical marijuana firms. In a 2019 study of 29 patients with peripheral neuropathy published in the journal *Current Pharmaceutical Biotechnology*, researchers found oil containing 250 milligrams of CBD per three ounces significantly reduced intense sharp pain and cold and itchy sensations compared with a placebo.

Johnson felt the effects of CBD right away. “I remember the first time I tried a topical on my feet,” she says. “I could feel the pain calming down and everything subsiding, and I looked at my husband and said, ‘I feel good! This is great!’” She tried an array of CBD products before settling on a cream she uses when the pain flares up, plus an oil to ease achy legs at bedtime.

When the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders kicked in, she began to experiment with making her own CBD oil infusions and gummy candies, as a fun project to counteract the stress of temporarily being the sole breadwinner in her household. **R**



Money Laundering

Have you ever accidentally run a dollar bill through the wash and been amazed that it survived? You can thank the Bureau of Engraving and Printing’s durability lab, where scientists soak bills in chemicals, crumple them up, and throw them into a washing machine with detergent and a set of towels, all to make sure they can survive the indignities of countless cash transactions. Says chemist Joe Piekarski about being surrounded by all that cash, “It helps to think of it as Monopoly money.”

WASHINGTONIAN



THE GENIUS SECTION

*11 Pages TO SHARPEN
Your Mind*

SCAMMED

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

BY *Bruce Grierson*
FROM **THEWALRUS.CA**

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

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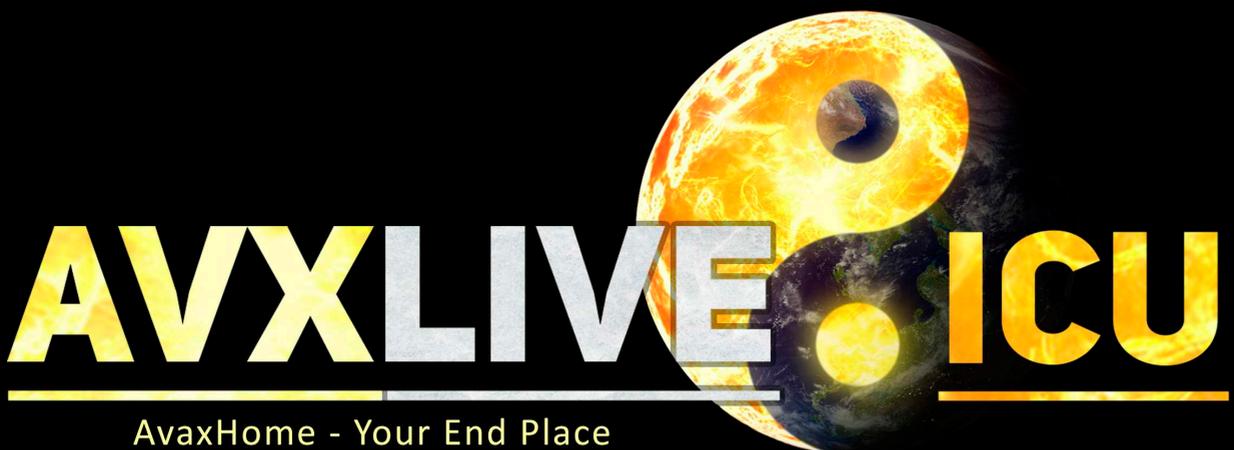
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THE E-MAIL POPPED up on my screen at 6:45 a.m. on December 24 last year. I'd already been awake for hours, working to deadline.

It was from someone I know quite well: the minister of my Unitarian church. "I need a favor from you," it read. "E-mail 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 learned she was scheduled for surgery that night. Could I possibly pick up some iTunes gift cards?

"She needs the cards to download her favorite 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 e-mailed back.

"Thank you so much, Bruce," my correspondent replied. Then he got down to business. I was to buy \$300 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 e-mail." 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 e-mailed pictures with the following message: "Dear Sharon: The codes on

"YOU WERE ON A GOODWILL MISSION, AND THAT PUT BLINDERS ON YOU."

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 e-mail. A follow-up message was in my inbox. "Sharon just e-mailed 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. 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 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 e-mail, 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 e-mail. 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 e-mails 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 IRS 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 e-mail 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 learned to drive.

LIVE LIFE WITHOUT PAIN

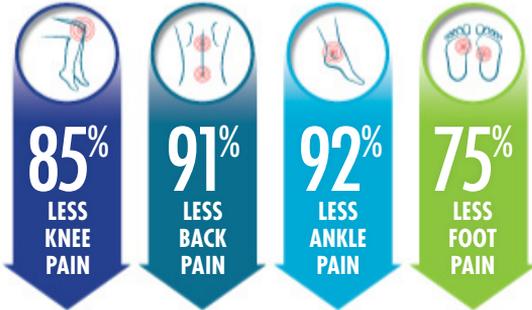
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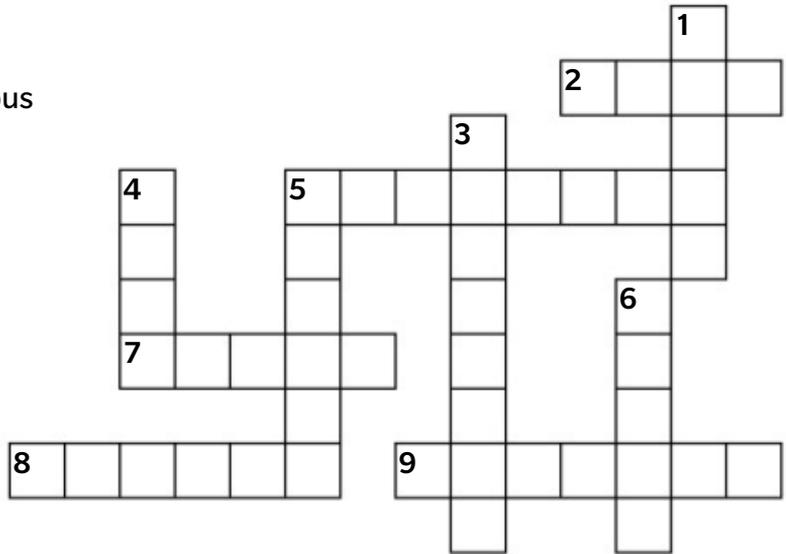
VersoShock[®] U.S Patent #US8,555,526 B2. This product has not been evaluated by the FDA. Not intended to treat, cure or prevent any disease. \$30 off applies to orders of \$100 or more for a limited time. Cannot be combined with other offers. 9% CA sales tax applies to orders in California. Shoes must be returned within 30 days in like-new condition for full refund or exchange. Credit card authorization required. See website for complete details.

BRAIN GAMES

Quick Crossword

EASY It's Labor Day, so get to work! Fit these industrious terms in the grid—and put your back into it.

- LABOR
- WORK
- GRIND
- TOIL
- EFFORT
- TRAVAIL
- OUTPUT
- SWEAT
- EXERTION
- DRUDGERY



True Blue

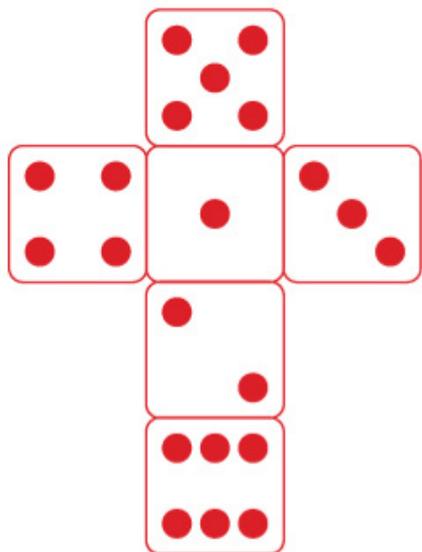
DIFFICULT Daniel, Emily, Marciano, and Christina are all wearing solid-colored shirts. The colors of their four shirts are red, yellow, green, and blue. Only the person wearing blue tells the truth, while the other three lie. They make the following statements:

- Daniel:** "Marciano is wearing red."
- Emily:** "Daniel is not wearing yellow."
- Marciano:** "Emily is wearing blue."
- Christina:** "I'm going to wear blue tomorrow."

Can you determine each person's shirt color, and whether we can expect to see Christina in blue tomorrow?

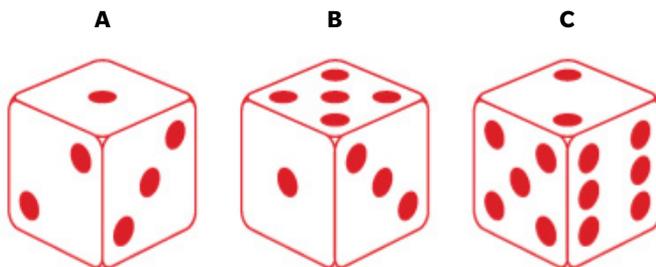


FRASER SIMPSON (TRUE BLUE). THE NOUN PROJECT (SHIRTS)



Odd Die Out

EASY Here's a flat template that can be folded into a cube. Which of the views below does not represent the resulting cube?



In a State

MEDIUM All the letters in *Ohio* appear—albeit in a different order—in both *North Carolina* and *South Carolina* (but not in *Washington*, which has only one *o*). Can you figure out the state whose letters appear in a total of three state names?

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

Alien Math

MEDIUM A visiting professor from a distant galaxy tells you that on her planet, half of 10 is 6. If the same proportion holds true, what would she say is one sixth of 30?



For answers, turn to **PAGE 130**.



WORD POWER

All rise! This month, we're taking you to court. The law has a language all its own, as you'll witness in our quiz, and your score is contingent on your knowledge of legal lingo. After you've made your case, turn to page 128 for the verdict.

BY *Sarah Chassé*

1. bailiff *n.*

('bay-lif)

- A law clerk.
- B court officer.
- C local sheriff.

2. indict *v.*

(in-'dite)

- A prove guilt.
- B hold in contempt.
- C charge with a crime.

3. exculpate *v.*

('ek-skull-payt)

- A banish from a country.
- B settle quickly.
- C clear of blame.

4. affidavit *n.*

(af-uh-'day-vit)

- A written declaration.
- B first offense.
- C star witness.

5. perjury *n.*

('per-juh-ree)

- A failing to appear.
- B lying under oath.
- C skipping jury duty.

6. sequester *v.*

(sih-'kweh-ster)

- A cross-examine.
- B approach the bench.
- C isolate.

7. remand *v.*

(ree-'mand)

- A return to custody.
- B pay a small fine.
- C overrule an objection.

8. docket *n.*

('dah-ket)

- A witness stand.
- B list of court cases.
- C ceremonial gavel.

9. appeal *n.*

(uh-'peel)

- A higher court's review.
- B plea deal.
- C damages awarded.

10. deposition *n.*

(deh-puh-'zih-shun)

- A parole hearing.
- B testimony.
- C lawyer's brief.

11. negligent *adj.*

('neh-glih-jent)

- A careless.
- B honorable.
- C jailed.

12. writ *n.*

(rit)

- A stenographer.
- B formal document.
- C judge's collar.

13. punitive *adj.*

('pew-nuh-tiv)

- A involving money.
- B in the Constitution.
- C related to punishment.

14. lenient *adj.*

('lee-nee-unt)

- A merciful.
- B biased.
- C bankrupt.

15. presume *v.*

(prih-'zoom)

- A return from a recess.
- B believe without proof.
- C give evidence.

To play an interactive version of Word Power on your iPad, download the Reader's Digest app.

Should you be included in the Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water notification database?

If you lived or worked at U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in 1987 or before, the U.S. Marine Corps wants to hear from you.

The Marine Corps is committed to finding and encouraging all service members, their families, and civilian employees who lived or worked at Camp Lejeune in 1987 or before to be included in the Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water notification database. A Federal public health agency, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), is studying whether past exposure to chemicals in the drinking water at Camp Lejeune may have caused adverse health effects.



To register, check your registration status, or if you have any additional questions or concerns, please visit www.marines.mil/clwater or call toll free at 877-261-9782 Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

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The Long Arm of Latin

Because ancient Roman law is the bedrock of Western legal systems, today's attorneys know a lot of Latin: for example, *mens rea* (criminal intent, or literally "guilty mind"), *bona fide* ("in good faith"), and *in re* ("in the matter of"). Many everyday legal terms are also rooted in the dead language. *Alibi* is Latin for "in another place," and *exonerate* is descended from *exonerare* ("to unburden").

Word Power ANSWERS

1. bailiff (B) *court officer.*

The bailiff escorted the accused man into the courtroom.

2. indict (C) *charge*

with a crime. Citing the overwhelming evidence, the grand jury indicted the mobster on three counts of tax fraud.

3. exculpate (C) *clear of blame.* I'm not trying to exculpate myself—I admit that I snuck a cookie!

4. affidavit (A) *written declaration.* Anthony submitted a sworn affidavit to support his claims.

5. perjury (B) *lying under oath.* "Ladies and gentlemen, this woman has committed perjury—you can't believe anything she says," the prosecutor began.

6. sequester (C) *isolate.*

Jurors were sequestered for months during the high-profile trial.

7. remand (A) *return to custody.* The defendant has been remanded to prison until her sentencing.

8. docket (B) *list of court cases.* "What's on the Supreme Court's docket this morning?" asked the reporter.

9. appeal (A) *higher court's review.* After losing the case, the defense team decided not to seek an appeal.

10. deposition (B) *testimony.* In his deposition, Colonel Mustard claimed that Professor Plum committed the murder.

11. negligent (A) *careless.* The negligent driver caused a three-car pileup.

12. writ (B) *formal document.* A search warrant is a type of writ.

13. punitive (C) *related to punishment.* "Our teachers use positive reinforcement instead of punitive measures," explained the principal.

14. lenient (A) *merciful.* Colleen hoped the judge would be lenient about her many parking tickets.

15. presume (B) *believe without proof.* In the American legal system, people are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: scofflaw

10–12: barrister

13–15: chief justice

SCIATICA BACK PAIN?

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BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

See page 124.

Quick Crossword

ACROSS

- 2. WORK
- 5. EXERTION
- 7. LABOR
- 8. OUTPUT
- 9. TRAVAIL

DOWN

- 1. GRIND
- 3. DRUDGERY
- 4. TOIL
- 5. EFFORT
- 6. SWEAT

True Blue

Daniel is wearing yellow, Emily is in red, Marciano is in green, and Christina is in blue. Christina will wear a blue shirt again tomorrow.

Odd Die Out

C

In a State

The letters in *Utah* appear in *South Carolina*, *South Dakota*, and *Massachusetts*.

Alien Math

6

MAKE
US
LAUGH!



Caption Contest

What's your clever description for this picture? Submit your funniest line at RD.COM/CAPTIONCONTEST. Winners will appear in a future Photo Finish (PAGE 132).

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PHOTO FINISH

YOUR *Funniest* CAPTIONS



Winner

“And last week you wanted to be a Great Dane.”

—LORI BAILEY *New Concord, Ohio*

Runners-Up

“I told you the vet was giving me the wrong shots.”

—JAMES RUSH *Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin*

“You are kidding me, right? You have two left feet.”

—PAULETTE WALKER *Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*

To enter an upcoming caption contest, see the photo on PAGE 130.

**“Made you look.
And yes, I’m wearing Always Discreet.”**



Always Discreet Boutique Underwear. Fits close. Keeps you dry, too.