

THE INSPIRATION ISSUE

Reader's Digest

JANUARY 2023



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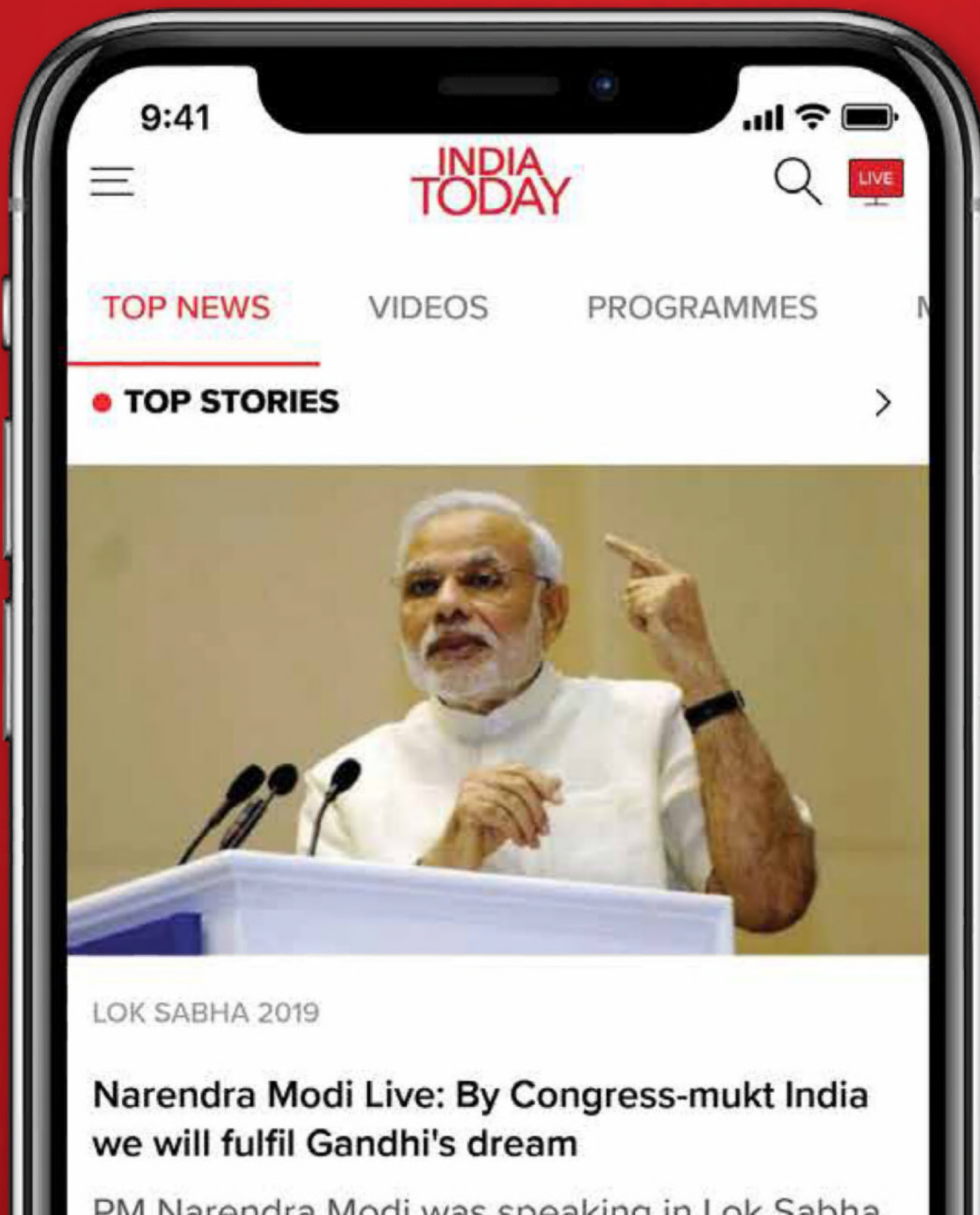
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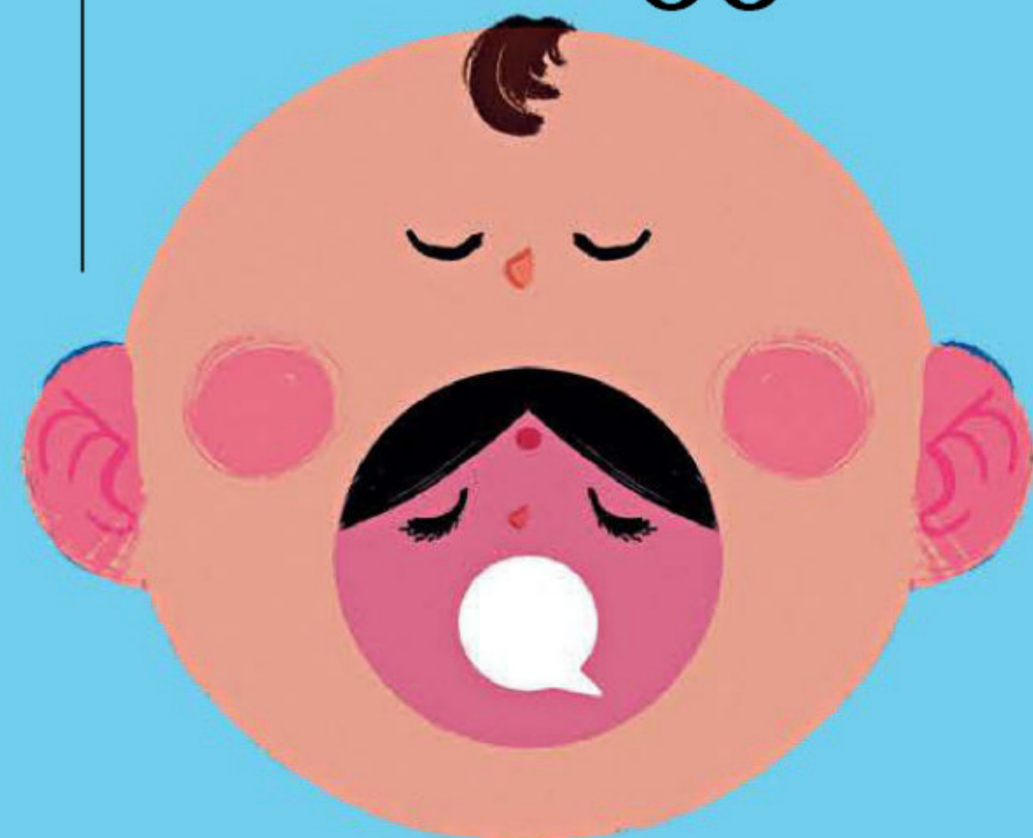
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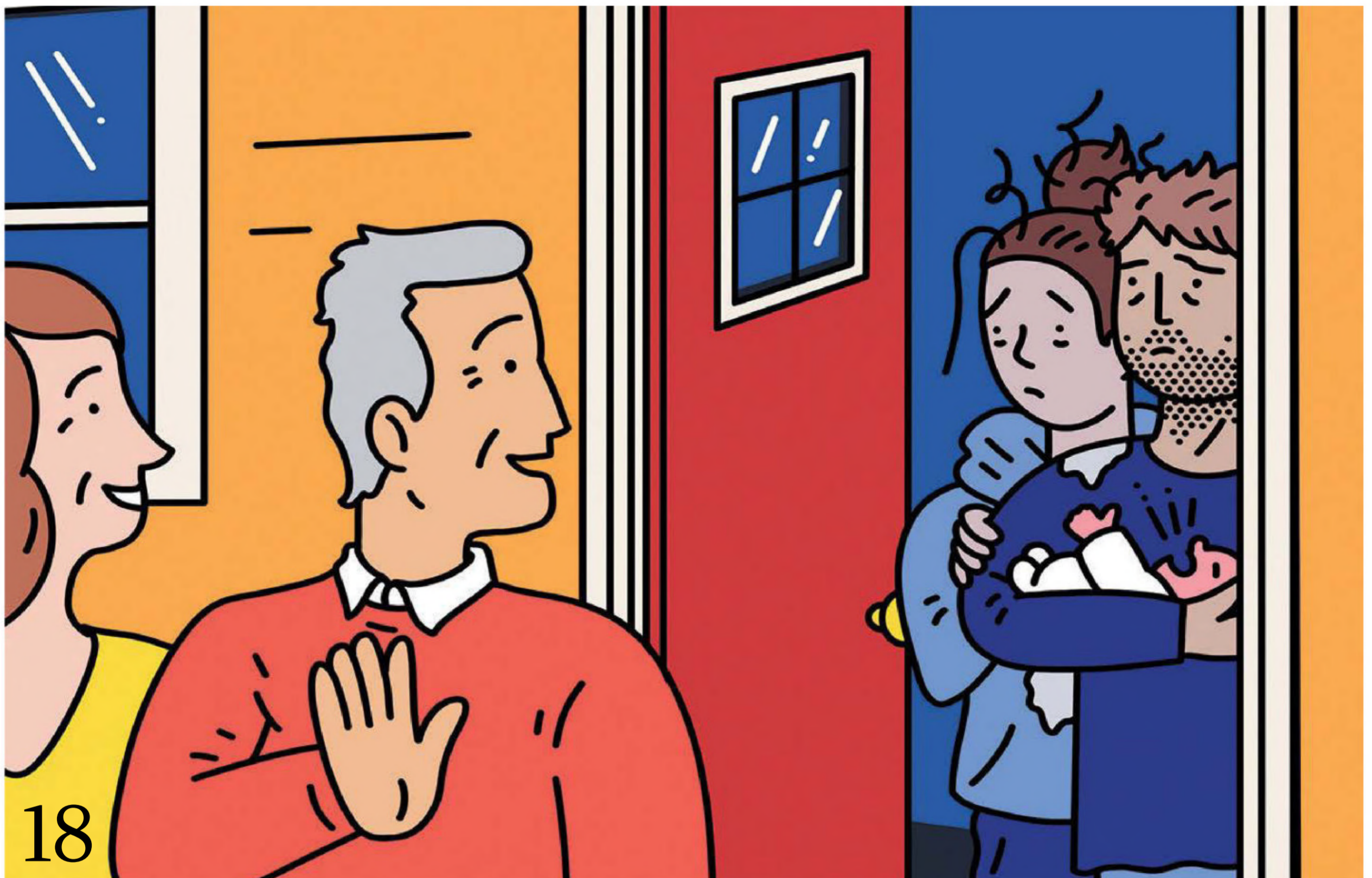
Sky Runner

How pure resilience helped this young man from Morocco scramble his way to victory—in both sport and in life.

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Laughter,
The Best Medicine



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PHOTO: (LEFT) HARDIK CHHABRA; (DOG) SHUTTERSTOCK

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GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Dinesh Bhatia

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EDITOR Kai Jabir Friese

GROUP CREATIVE EDITOR Nilanjan Das

GROUP PHOTO EDITOR Bandeep Singh

SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR Ishani Nandi

FEATURES EDITOR Naorem Anuja

CONSULTING EDITOR Shreevatsa Nevatia

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SALES AND OPERATIONS

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GM, OPERATIONS Vipin Bagga

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GENERAL MANAGERS Jiji K. Abraham (Mumbai)
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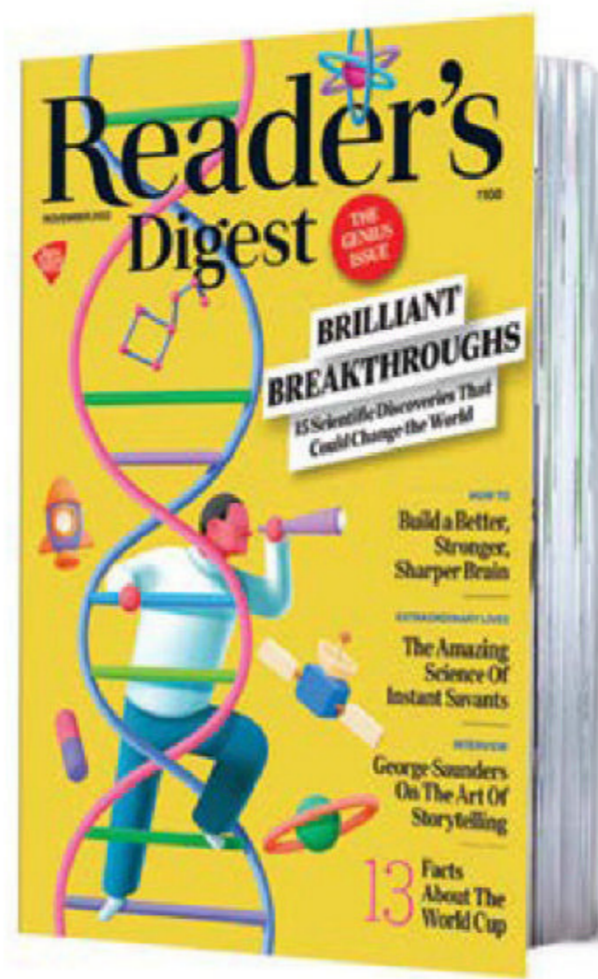
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OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE
November ISSUE



THE MANY LIVES OF DABBA

This story triggered an old memory. My maths teacher would brand students who failed to answer his questions, as 'dabbas'. Looking back, I realized that this rude remark, meant to signify those he considered lacking in grey matter, has ever been turned on its head in Indian homes. My mum, for instance, stored her sewing paraphernalia in a big Britannia biscuit tin, our pencils and pens in an old dry-fruits box. Reusing these containers, otherwise rendered useless, made their existence purposeful, and returned prestige to the word, otherwise used to describe someone slow, empty. This legacy lives on in several flower pots in my garden that were once old oil jars, paint cans and grocery cartons. May there be no end of recycling on earth!

PRAFULL CHANDRA SOCKEY, *Hazaribagh*

Prafull Chandra Sockey gets this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000. —EDs

My mother, too was obsessed with her collection of dabbas. She remembered every single one she ever owned. If I ever gave one to a friend, I made sure that I got it back. Otherwise, that friend was due to end up on my mother's long list of 'culprits', who didn't return her priceless possessions.

PARVINDER BHATIA, *Jamshedpur*

No Child Left Behind

When the pandemic brought life to a standstill, it also induced a compassionate many to shed their

diffidence and rise to the occasion to help those in need. The blossoming of teachers like Hidayatulla Barakatulla Khatik, helping his students adapt to digital learning and the birth of Prafulla Shashikant's V-school and VOPA initiative to provide education to children from low-income households, bear witness to the wholesome other side of the pandemic. The quick spread, acceptance and recognition of such yeomen services rendered should serve as a catalyst for others to emulate them.

FIONA FERNANDO,
Chennai

Build a Better Brain

For the past few years, I cannot fight the feeling that my old age is fast approaching. So, I rarely miss reading about dementia or Alzheimer's. This was the first time I came across an article on how to make our brain strong

by adopting easy, simple measures—eating more greens, taking up old-fashioned games such as cards or chess, and adding in meditation! What a revelation!

P. M. GOPALAN, *Mumbai*

A Day at the Beach

This story was a reminder that life has to be lived to the fullest, as time lost never comes back. The pandemic taught us the important lesson that calamities may strike us anytime so we should always learn to treasure the small joys of life.

P. S. MEHTA, *Jalandhar*

The Double Triple

This piece reminded me that miracles really do happen. Performing an operation is never simple, but a triple transplant is the rarest of medical procedures. The level of planning required, collection of vital organs and, above all, the precise execution—kudos to the surgeons and their entire team. Also, both

patients had the will to face and overcome the pressures of undertaking such a procedure. Even as a reader, the story brought upon anxiety and expectations. Everyone involved came together, fought well to achieve outstanding results.

VASUDEVAN, *Bengaluru*

Brilliant Breakthroughs

The use of animal organs to replace diseased human ones is a very old idea. Early kidney and live transplants were attempted from baboons and chimpanzees as these primates were considered closest to human beings. However, most of these transplants failed and were gradually given up. The interest in pigs as a source of human organs is recent. One reason why scientists have now zoomed in on these otherwise shunned creatures as an organ source is that

in the western world, it is socially more acceptable to breed pigs for this purpose. From a scientific view point, pigs are genetically modifiable to reduce the chances of rejection by the human body. While there are several issues with xenotransplantation, the first successful pig-to-human transplant represents a significant step forward in solving the problem of organ shortage.

PRADEEP KUMAR, *Surat*

Errata

The author of the story *The Truth about the Man in Red* (December 2022) was incorrectly printed as Rebecca Meiser instead of Anne T. Donahue. The error is regretted.

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HUMOUR *in*
UNIFORM

An Air Force guy was driving while an Army guy was driving in the opposite direction. In the middle of the night with no other cars on the road, they hit each other head-on.

The Air Force guy manages to climb out of his car and surveys the damage. He looks at his twisted car and says, "Man, I am really lucky to be alive!" Likewise, the Army guy scrambles out and says to himself, "I can't believe I survived this wreck!"

The Army guy walks over to the Air Force guy and says, "Hey man, I think this is a sign from God that we should put away our petty differences and live as friends instead of arch-rivals."

The Air Force guy thinks for a moment and says, "You know, you're absolutely right!"

Now let's see what else survived this wreck."

He pops open his trunk and finds an unopened bottle of whiskey. He says to the Army guy, "I think this is another sign from God that we should toast to our new-found friendship." The Army guy replies, "You're right!" and starts drinking.

After putting away nearly half the bottle he hands it to the Air

Force guy and says, "Your turn!"

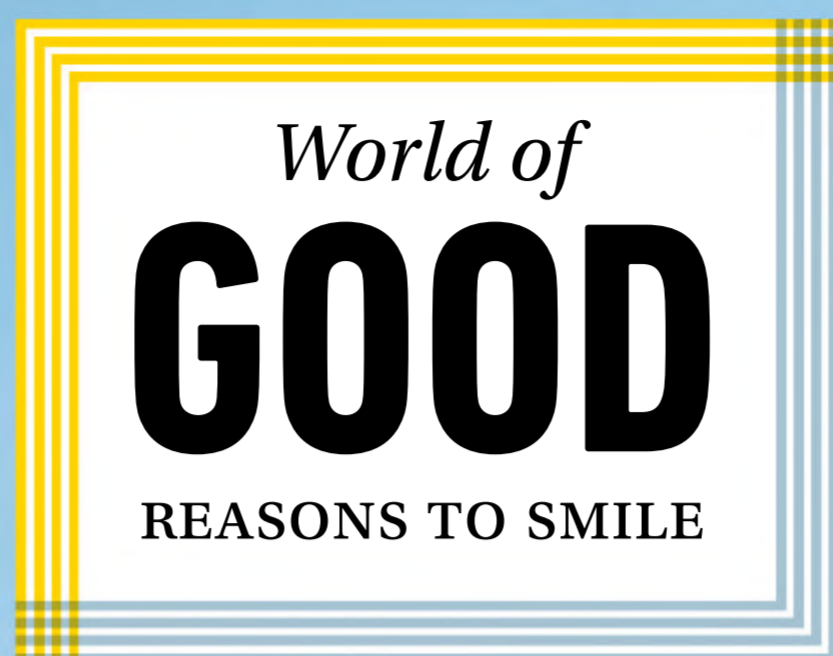
The Air Force guy twists the cap back on and says, "Nah, I think I'll wait for the cops to come."

—REDDIT.COM

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When the remote control fails



Drive-By Poetry

POEMS ARE POPPING up in unexpected places, as on this dusty road in Mosca, Colorado, population 732. The anonymous poet calls his work Roadside Senryu. A senryu is like a haiku but focuses more on human foibles than on nature. So, near Ulysses, New York, you'll see: *Where is my person/I ask forgetting that I/Am standing right here.* The artist has erected 23 signs so far, to "inspire people to strive for the greater good," he told the *Daily Memphian*. Hence, the sentiment behind a sign in Mount Prospect, Illinois: *Foolish to hold back/For love is for giving and/Love is forgiving.* **R**

 A photograph of a blue roadside sign with white text on a rural road. The sign is mounted on two metal posts. The background shows a paved road stretching into the distance, with utility poles and mountains in the far distance under a clear sky.

Change can be challenge
Let this time not be in vain
Keep up the good work

A Few Kind Words

A passerby convinces a distraught woman not to end it all

BY *Andy Simmons*

IT WAS 11 p.m. when Alex Conrad saw the woman on the Main Street Bridge. She was standing by the railing, peering down at the rushing Chippewa River below. At her feet was what appeared to be a backpack.

Maybe she's fishing, Conrad, then 20, thought as he continued driving his Mustang to his home a short distance away. His friend's car had broken down, so Conrad was making a quick pit stop to grab some tools before heading out to help.

Tools in hand, he climbed into his car. Instead of taking a shortcut, though, he opted to head back over the bridge. Something about that woman didn't sit right. Why would

she be fishing this late at night—in May, when it's still cold in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin?

As he crossed the 400-metre-long bridge, Conrad saw the woman standing in the same spot. He pulled a U-turn and parked on a diagonal some 20 feet away with his hazards flashing, blocking one of the four lanes. In case there was trouble, he hoped another driver would take note and help.

He stepped out of his car and got a clearer picture of the scene. The woman was in her 20s, dressed in pants and a heavy coat. What he'd thought was a backpack was in fact rope pooled by her feet. One end was tied to a bridge post. The other, around her neck.

Alex Conrad, on
the bridge where he
saved a stranger's life



"Hey, what's going on?" Conrad called out. He didn't acknowledge the rope because he didn't want to let on that he knew exactly what was going on.

She spoke reticently, but he kept probing, eventually pulling from her that she was going through a particularly rough patch. She was jobless, not doing well in school—in short, life wasn't working out as she'd hoped.

"Not everything goes as planned," agreed Conrad. He started talking about the ups and downs he'd faced in his life. As he talked, he inched closer.

When she mentioned that, on top of everything else, her car had broken down, Conrad chuckled. "Well, that's better than when my friend rolled his car," he said. "Too much power for him." The woman laughed.

"I told a few more jokes about my friends, and the dumb things we've done, just to get her mind off stuff," he says.

Conrad is a quiet guy, not given to gabbing. But for the next hour he found enough topics of conversation to keep the woman engaged and even laughing. She grew comfortable enough to let him get within a few feet of her.

Then a switch seemingly went off.

Without warning, she climbed on to the railing. Conrad reached for her. She teetered. He threw his arms around her, hauling her down off the railing. She grabbed the railing, saying, "I'm not worth it."

"Let go of the railing," Conrad said, his heart pounding, "or I'll have to yank you off, and I don't want to hurt you."

Suddenly, bright lights appeared. It was the police. Someone had reported Conrad's car for being parked on the bridge—just as he'd hoped. The two officers took hold of the woman, then handed Conrad a knife so that he could sever the rope tethering her to the bridge. Soon, more police arrived and the woman was taken to a hospital for observation.

SHE GRABBED THE RAILING, SAYING, "I'M NOT WORTH IT."



Sadly, this was not the first time someone tried to end it all on one of the city's bridges. What was unusual was what Alex Conrad did.

"Usually, at best, we have someone see something odd and call us later," says police Lt. Brian Micolichuk. "It's rare that someone gets personally involved."

One officer was so impressed by Conrad's actions that he suggested he consider a career as a police negotiator. Conrad declined.

"You can't win them all," he says. "And I'd have to live with that for the rest of my life." Instead, he's going out with a perfect record. **R**

AS KIDS SEE IT



“Just when I’m ready to commit to a favourite colour, this happens.”

My son at a bookstore:
“Ma, buy me these.”

Me: “You didn’t use the magic word.”

My son (confused):
“Bippity Boppity Boo?”
—ISHANI KAUL, *via email*

My kid wanted to go to a buffet for her birthday dinner. After a few rounds, they started groaning and saying how full they were.

Me: “You should really stop if you’re that full.”

My kid: “Dad, it’s called an all-you-can-eat buffet. Not an all-you-should-eat buffet.”

—REDDIT.COM

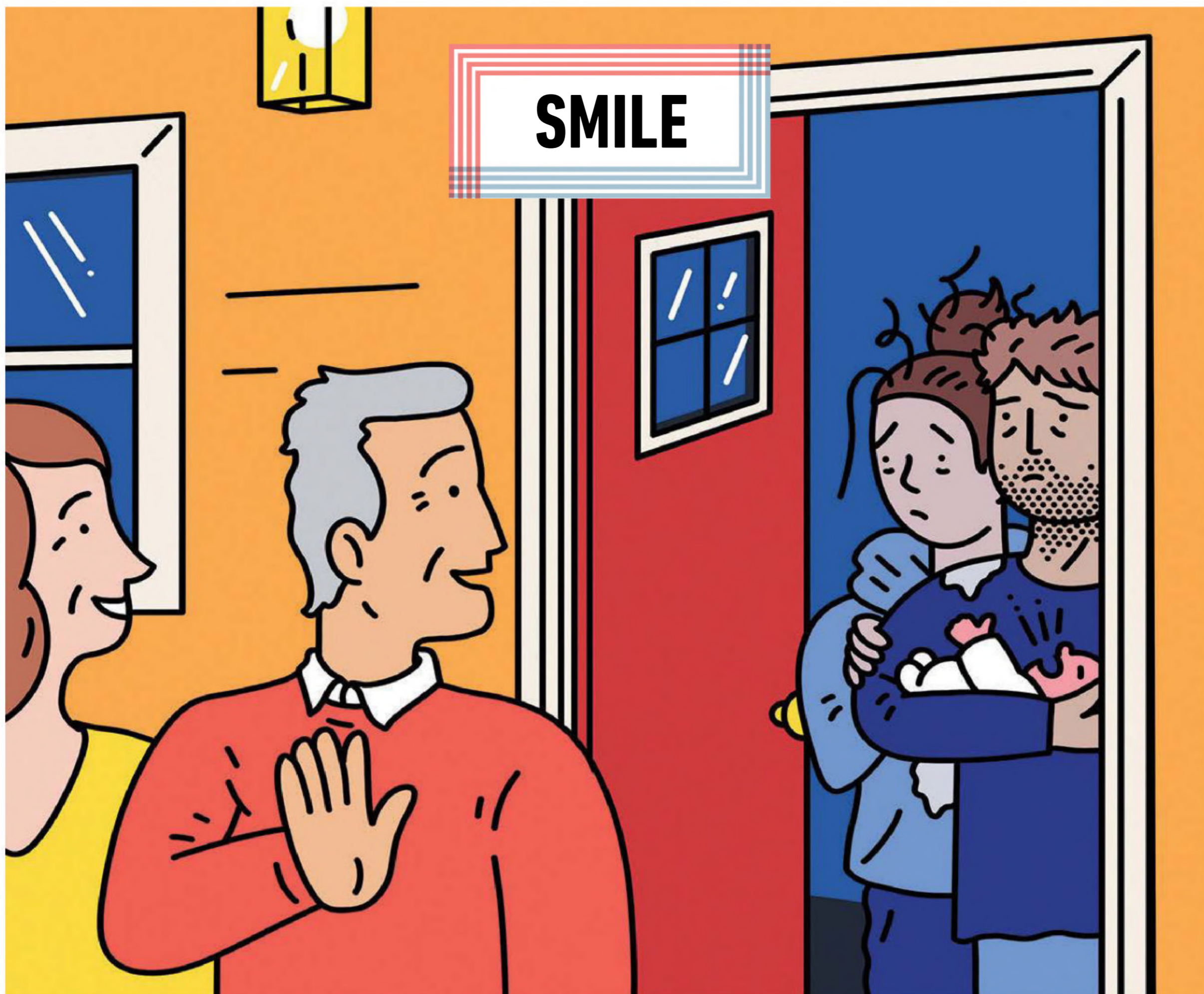
Instead of saying “What are you doing?” my two-year-old goes around asking in a haunting voice, “What have you done?”

—[@BESSBELL](#)

I told the kids to say “love you” to their father on FaceTime. Instead they waved to him and said, “All the best.”

—MERVE EMRE, *writer*

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The Secret of Grandparenting

BY *Richard Glover*

WHEN A GRANDCHILD comes along, especially for the first time, it's important to have the right help. In our case, it's a lovely young couple who seem absolutely perfect when it comes to bringing up our grandson.

The new baby appears to really like them, which certainly takes away the worry for us. As the grandparent, you

can't trust just anybody with such an important job.

Here's the deal: We get the young couple to do most of the difficult work, like feeding the baby, changing nappies and lulling him to sleep. He even lives in their house, so that makes things a lot simpler.

We arrive for the good times, such as when the grandson—who looks

very handsome—is available to lie in our arms, arching his tiny back and glancing up at the world as if to comprehend its wonder, all while gesturing towards us with his starfish hands.

Why, you may ask, would a young couple be willing to do all the hard work, while the grandparents enjoy the good times?

It's a fair question. When we arrive, the young couple has usually been up all night, dark circles under their eyes, a shuffling quality to their gait.

The grandchild, though, is full of beans. We, the grandparents, take turns rocking him, making eyes at him and telling him he is the most gorgeous child in the world. He wriggles in our arms.

An hour or two later, just when things are about to turn fractious, we hand him back to the young couple and disappear down the front steps. "See you in a few days," we'll say. "We're just going to stay with some friends by the seaside. We're expecting to have a ball."

Why does the young couple do it? No other occupation is like this: one party dealing with the tricky things, while someone else waltzes in for the fun. Could these differing work conditions really be considered equitable?

And yet the young couple seems happy enough. The grandchild looks like them both, having Mum's green eyes and Dad's quirky chin. That's a stroke of serendipity that may have helped win them over to the task. The

child also shows signs of his parents' expansive spirits.

But what, in practical terms, does the young couple get in return for their service? Well, firstly, they get access to their own parents' advice. And in such fabulous quantity.

All our advice is 30 years old, so it has really stood the test of time. We tell them exactly how the baby should be lying when in his cot; how he should be fed and the precise brand of bouncy sling they should purchase for him (it's just like the one we purchased three decades ago).

They respond by telling us all this stuff they heard from the hospital about how the baby would die should they follow our advice.

The result: We've decided to let them do it their way! Does that mean we're easygoing? If, as grandparents, we have a fault, this might be it.

Really, their nutty ideas are endless, especially the way they rush to nurse the child every time he so much as squawks. They constantly indulge him. I hope they realize that, in terms of demarcation, this is *our* job.

Then there's the issue of housework. Ever since our grandchild came to live with his parents, their household standards have really fallen. There's un-ironed laundry everywhere and the washing line is full of nappies that have yet to be brought in and folded.

The situation is so dire that I wonder whether I should just hop in and help them. After all, no one wants their grandchild growing up in a pigsty. But, actually, I think it's better for me to focus on the child himself, whispering my life wisdom into his tiny ear. Wisdom such as: "Your parents could tidy up."

I WHISPER LIFE WISDOM INTO THE CHILD'S TINY EAR: "YOUR PARENTS COULD TIDY UP."

There's one area, however, in which I have been providing assistance: the food supply. I bring them all the delicious dishes I have perfected over my many years of cooking. All four of them. The lasagna. The lamb curry. The vegetable tart. And the Spanish

meatballs. These I supply in such quantities that the young couple have lunch and dinner for weeks ahead, both fresh and frozen.

Three weeks in, the male half of the young couple rings me. (I suppose I should mention that he's my son. Sure, it sounds nepotistic, but we decided he and his partner really were best placed to look after our grandchild.)

"Dad," he says, sounding a bit stern. "It's been very kind of you to bring all the food, but I think we can now go it alone."

I'm torn between two theories. Is this a sign that the young parents are coping well, a discovery that should leave me delighted? Or is it a sign that my Spanish meatballs may not be up to scratch?

I don't know about that. What I do know is that we've landed on our feet with this particular young couple. When it comes to raising our grandson, I don't think anyone could do it better. **R**



You Just Blah Blah Blah All Day

Working from home gave some children a glimpse into how their parents make a living. Here's how some of the youngest describe it:

Claire, 5: "She does grown-up homework. She works for cookies."

Parent's occupation: owner of a baking company

Cecilia, 6: "She works for sales. She says 'sales,' and 'they,' and blah blah blah."

Parent's occupation: strategic account director

Cass, 6: "My dad teaches when people should become members in something.

Both of them can't work at the same time—we only have one work closet."

Parent's occupation: associate professor of business economics.

YOUR TRUE STORIES

IN 100 Words

Don't Stop Believing

I used to send articles to a Persian publication in Iran, where I grew up. The editor rejected each one for two years. I decided that the next, if rejected, would be my last. To my surprise, I got a mail from the editor, Maarouf Shifa'an: "Today is my last day in the office before I retire. You've been contributing and, sadly, I've been rejecting your submissions. But I'll be using this one. Keep writing and never lose heart. No editor feels good about rejecting a piece. Every editor values perseverance. All the best. *Khuda hafiz.*"

—Sumit Paul, Pune

Got a true story that can bring out a smile? Send us your anecdotes in 100 words or less to editor. india@rd.com and Reader's Digest will pay for and print the best ones.

The Sweetest Grandson Ever

We recently had dinner at my son and daughter-in-law's home. She had prepared a beautiful pecan pie for dessert, but I do not eat refined sugar in an attempt to lessen inflammation from my rheumatoid arthritis. My young grandson generously set two pecans on my empty plate. "These are for you, Grandma," he said. "Thank you, sweetheart, but these pecans are coated with sugar," I replied. "No, Grandma, there is no sugar on these. I licked it all off."

—SHARON LEWANDOWSKI



He Gave Her a Lift

My mom uses a wheelchair. Our city has buses with wheelchair lifts, but they slow things down and drivers don't like that. They often say, "The lift is broken." One day, Mom was waiting at the bus stop while a man snored on a nearby bench. But when the driver made his lame

excuse, the man on the bench awoke and yelled at the driver for his heartlessness toward this old disabled lady.

Ashamed, the driver 'miraculously' discovered that the lift worked after all. My mom got on the bus, and the guy on the bench went back to sleep.

—Ray Martin

All



How to
quiet your
inner critics

Talk

BY *Christina Palassio*
PHOTOGRAPH BY *Nikki*

IN 2017, A FEW MONTHS after Meredith Davis of Guelph had her third child, her husband went back to work and she found herself alone at home, trying to manage three kids under the age of four. She was 35, and the stress of balancing her older children's needs and caring for her new baby was taking its toll. "I felt like my life imploded," she says. "All I could hear was this loud, glaring voice saying *You're not*



a good mom. You're not cut out for this."

The more stressed she became, the louder her inner critic got, leaving her exhausted and struggling to feel present with her family. She soon contracted pneumonia and shingles—and realized she needed to do something to manage her negative self-talk.

Our interior monologue is influenced by the people in our lives (our parents and caregivers when we're young, our peers, partners and bosses when we're older) and the cultural messages and beliefs that surround us. And it's active! Experts estimate we can talk to ourselves as much as 4,000 words a minute.

Our inner voice can be very helpful, reminding us where we put our keys or to be careful when we're walking on an icy sidewalk. But challenges and stress in our relationships, jobs, financial affairs and the world around us can turn up the volume on our inner critic. This can lead to negative self-talk and, sometimes, self-sabotage—say, convincing ourselves we'll never get that job or that we don't deserve a partner's love. Luckily, there are practical actions you can take to shush your self-critical chatter.

Name Your Triggers

A good first step in managing your inner critic is to notice what sets it off. Davis realized hers gets chatty when it comes to her work. She runs a consulting firm and, sometimes, when she thinks about growing her business, she'll find herself thinking, *Why would anyone want to meet with you?* or, *You're not good*

enough to take on this new project.

In the past, that voice could stop her from pursuing her goals. Now she's learnt to spot her inner critic's favourite topics and regain control. First, she'll acknowledge the challenge she's facing, then she'll interrupt the negative self-talk and show herself some kindness instead. "Sometimes I just put my hand on my heart and acknowledge, *This is hard,*" she says.

Start by keeping a log of your triggers. Ask yourself what the situation was. What did your inner critic say? How did it make you feel? How did you react? After a few weeks, you'll have a list of your triggers and a greater awareness of how you are or aren't managing them. It may feel like a lot of work—and your inner critic may try to talk you out of it!—but there's a lot at stake if you don't act.

Ethan Kross, the author of *Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why It Matters, and How to Harness It*, warns that negative chatter can undermine our ability to think and perform. It can create friction in our relationships, and also has the potential to undermine our physical health. Research shows that negative self-talk can help fuel our stress response, which can lead to sleep disorders and an increased incidence of cardiovascular illness.

Create Some Distance

Once you've named your triggers, it can help to reframe the conversation. To do this, Davis asks herself: *What's a thought that's more positive than this*

one and is also one that I can believe? For example, I'm a terrible mom becomes Maybe I'm not the best mom in the world, but I'm trying.

Kross's research shows that distancing techniques are also effective in breaking the chatter loop. Say you're ruminating on an incident where you were impatient with your parent, and your inner voice is telling you that you're a terrible, uncaring child. Try addressing yourself in the second or third person. So instead of berating yourself with *Why did I lose my cool?* ask *Why did Christina lose her cool?* It can take the oxygen out of the shame and blame and make room for objectivity and curiosity about how to address the issue.

Jane Reichman Van Toch, a Montreal-based executive coach and consultant, has clients who struggle with impostor syndrome behaviours at work. Sometimes, when they tell her they're not good enough for their job, she encourages them to look at their own CV and pretend it belongs to an applicant. Does this person have the skills and experience for the job? The answer, more often than not, is yes.

"We often act on our inner monologue more than on our outer experience," she adds. "If we're not managing our inner voice, then it's going to manage us."

Look Outside Yourself

Professional coaches, partners, friends and family can be important allies in our quest to conquer negative self-talk. Davis relies on her psychologist, her husband and a couple of favourite podcasts to give her the right tools, confidence and motivation. Together they act as sounding boards and remind her of the techniques she can use.

Research also shows that awe can be a powerful circuit breaker against our inner critic. That's because it opens up a world of feeling beyond our own needs and wants. Awe can come in many forms: a beautiful hike in the quiet woods, seeing live music, watching your kids do something they love. It's all about putting yourself in a different frame of mind.

Reichman Van Toch adds that fun and play can work to change the channel, too. For example, when one of her clients' inner critics prevented them from being present and effective at work, she suggested trying an improv class—something that is all about being in the moment with others and not lost in the negative loops of their mind.

Finding strategies to manage negative self-talk will keep you in good stead throughout every stage of life. Luckily, it's never too late to get started. **R**



City Views

The outcome of the city will depend on the race between the automobile and the elevator, and anyone who bets on the elevator is crazy.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, ARCHITECT

Intuitive Eating

Is this approach better than a conventional diet?

BY *Vanessa Milne*

ALTHOUGH MOST DIETS vary according to what foods you can eat, they all follow the same principle of restriction: to lose weight, you need to eat less. Never mind that there's ample evidence that few diets work in the long term.

The now-trendy diet of intuitive eating is, in a sense, an anti-diet: followers base what they eat on how they feel, not on prescribed limits.

How Does It Work?

The concept was first proposed in the mid-1990s by registered dietitians Elyse Resch and Evelyn Tribole, who wrote the book *Intuitive Eating*. The first step is to reject the idea that you need to be on a diet to be healthy. Intuitive eaters work on getting in touch with their hun-



ger levels, practising eating when they're hungry, paying attention to when they're full, and stopping when they're satisfied.

Also, you're encouraged to give yourself 'permission' to eat all foods, to reject the idea of 'good' and 'bad' foods, and to accept your inherent body shape. Finally, you exercise, find better ways than food to soothe your emotions, and gradually shift to more nutritious food choices.

One of the biggest myths around intuitive eating is that nutrition goes out the window. In a traditional diet, caloric restriction and the avoidance of 'bad' foods is usually followed by a binge, where the body's primal drive to make sure it gets enough calories overrides aspirations for nutrition or moderation.

Because intuitive eating allows all foods, people who try it can make small, slow changes toward eating more nutritiously that ultimately are longer lasting.

Will I Lose More Weight?

Short answer: No. There isn't strong research to back up claims that intuitive eating helps shed weight. A 2021 systematic review of the practice published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*

INTUITIVE EATERS GAIN A HEALTHIER ATTITUDE TOWARD FOOD THAN YO-YO DIETERS.

pointed out that the studies were low-quality or found that there were no differences between people who were and weren't intuitive eaters.

However, in the experience of Katie Keller, a registered dietician in Calgary, Canada, intuitive eating can help with overall weight maintenance. In addition, she says, it has health advantages: "Research shows that it can improve blood-sugar levels and repair metabolism," she says. "So rather than having people with yo-yo weight changes, it

allows them to stay at a weight that is easy to maintain."

A study from New Zealand looked at 39 adolescents with Type 1 diabetes and found "a strong association between intuitive eating, in particular the effect of emotion on eating, and glycaemic control." Another study, from Brazil, looked at 179 people who were mostly elderly and found that intuitive eaters had an 89 per cent lower chance of inadequate glycaemic control.

Should I Try It?

Intuitive eaters do gain a healthier attitude toward food, compared to yo-yoing dieters. A study by researchers in the US followed 1,500 intuitive eaters from 2010 to 2018 and found they were less likely to have low self-esteem, be depressed or dislike their bodies. They were also less likely to fast, skip meals or binge eat.

We often decide to diet for emotional reasons: because we believe we will be happier if we're skinnier, for example, or that we will find love or get a better job.

"You dig a little bit deeper, and what people actually want is to feel comfortable and confident and healthy in their own body," Keller says. "They have to be ready to realize that changing how they look on the outside isn't going to change those things on the inside." **R**



When you look at climate change from a human mortality perspective, it will be the equivalent of a coronavirus crisis—every year.

—MARK CARNEY, FORMER GOVERNOR OF THE BANK OF CANADA

ASK AN EXPERT



Does my Baby Know I'm Reading to Her?

We asked certified infant and child sleep specialist, Himani Dalmia, for answers

—
BY *Ishani Nandi*

How exactly does reading benefit kids?

Reading to babies and toddlers is often referred to as a 'keystone habit', that elite category of practices that kick off a positive effect in multiple areas of our lives. Not only does reading lay a solid foundation for the parent-child bond, it also helps a child become smarter, kinder. It stimulates parts of the brain that process language. Just 15 minutes a day (and there is no maximum) of this joyous, fulfilling activity offers magical gifts to our children, from higher cognition and better attention spans to greater creativity and the ability to form deeper relationships.

Books help to foster social and communication skills and develop both emotional empathy (experiencing the reactions of another) and cognitive empathy or theory of mind (adapting to another's viewpoint). Reading together builds their ability to practise 'joint attention', an important milestone where the child shares focus with someone else, and participates in a collective experience.

Finally, stories are powerful therapeutic tools that can help children process events like starting school or the arrival of a new sibling or the death of a loved one. They give children an emotional vocabulary with which to make sense of their big feelings, make them feel 'seen' and validated, and provide an opportunity to talk about these subjects with their parents. Not to mention they are a far more effective alternative to screentime for toddlers!

What's the right age I can start reading aloud to my baby?

It is possible to read books to the youngest of babies, even those in utero. Unborn babies can tune in to the rhythm and cadence of our voices at six months or 24 weeks. Newborns start to understand how words and sentences fit together as language networks, mental pictures and visual connections begin to form in their brains. In fact, early reading by parents is intricately linked to later literacy skills.

UNBORN BABIES CAN TUNE IN TO THE CADENCE OF OUR VOICES AT 24 WEEKS.

—

The sheer volume of words, the breadth of language and the association with pictures transferred through a reading activity can never be replicated as well solely through conversation. Pre-reading skills—like knowing that we read a language like English from left to right, that words on a page have meaning, that they are made up of letters and so on—are learnt through early read-alouds.

How do I choose the right books for children?

It is important to choose books with high-quality visual and literary content. The idea behind reading is not academic or didactic. The idea is to tap

How to choose books for your child:

- Look for high quality children's literature, like modern picture books, with good writing and beautiful artworks. Checking the reputation and background of the publisher, the author and the illustrator can help.
- Check blogs and online communities dedicated to children's books, or visit bookstores with knowledgeable owners or staff, who can curate and recommend titles.
- Avoid books that have an academic purpose like teaching children to read.

That will come in its own time.

Focus on the pleasure that comes from literature and art.

- Be careful with traditional yarns, such as fairy tales, moral stories, mythology, some of which may contain content that can be scary, violent, racist or sexist.
- Follow your child's lead. If they like a particular author or illustrator, source more books by the same person. If they are going through a phase of being fascinated by lions or trucks, source books on those themes.

into the natural human love for stories and to nurture a love for books organically because the act is so joyful and rewarding. Books should not be intended to teach or indoctrinate but to stimulate and inspire, to encourage exploration and enquiry. Picture books spark a child's imagination and stimulate their curiosity. High quality visual art by master illustrators develop a complex and nuanced visual literacy which is fast gaining even greater importance in a media-driven world.

Is bedtime reading sessions more impactful than others?

Sharing books while snuggling before naps or night sleep is a practice that can begin from infancy itself, and creates a habit that lasts a lifetime. Books are a wonderful signal to the child that it's time to unwind. Reading acts as a bridge

between energetic, fast-paced action and slowing down, between the world outside the bedroom and the land of dreams, between outer and inner worlds. It makes the transition to sleep enjoyable, not something to be detested and resisted. It also builds an immovable 'slot' for reading into your daily schedule—a happy time when books represent connection with the parent. So, not only is the reading soothing, the feeling of being soothed conversely makes reading a cherished activity and helps to build a love for books. **R**



HIMANI DALMIA IS THE AUTHOR OF THE CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK, *THAMMI'S GIFT* (HARPERCOLLINS INDIA), AND CO-AUTHOR OF *SLEEPING LIKE A BABY* (PENGUIN INDIA). SHE IS ALSO THE CO-FOUNDER OF 'GENTLE BABY SLEEP INDIA', A PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT GROUP ON INFANT AND TODDLER SLEEP.

QUICKIPEDIA

Going Goblin

BY Naorem Anuja

It was the year of the slow slide back into our chaotic public lives; of a ceaseless pandemic's third year, and also one in which a world war seemed imminent. There was but one word to describe how many of us were doing in 2022: 'goblin mode'.

Voted the Oxford Word of the Year by a public poll of English speakers around the globe—a first in its history—the term 'goblin mode' crystallizes the nearly ubiquitous instinct to choose comfort and coping mechanisms over everything else. According to the publishing house Oxford Languages, the neologism denotes 'a type of behaviour, which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations.' Think dishevelled living spaces, odd outfit combinations, revenge bedtime procrastination, questionable dietary choices and ditching immaculate self-presentation in favour of letting your messy, primal self thrive. The term first popped up in early 2009 on Twitter, but Google Trends traces its rise in



popularity from February, 2022.

In a direct departure from the pretty, hyper-curated cottage-core aesthetic of the early pandemic days, when people young and old showcased wholesome domesticity on social media feeds, hoping to make the best of what we assumed then were only a few weeks of mandatory isolation, Goblin mode captures the vibe shift. Moving from that socially-distanced, Zoom-mediated reality, with unattainable aesthetic standards to the current milieu in which fatigue has truly set in.

But the anarchy of goblin mode is an impermanent way of being. Implicit to the concept is that this is a mode, which will switch on and off. Perhaps, this word of the year was a sign that we all need rest and respite from the sucker punch that the last few years have landed on us. **R**

NEWS FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**



Coffee Can Lead to Impulse Buys

When you're shopping, it's best to be careful of what you sip on. Scientists recently gave away beverages outside stores in France and Spain. They offered regular coffee to 150 shoppers and decaf coffee or water to 150 more. On average, the shoppers who drank caffeine spent 50 per cent more money. They bought a comparable number of utilitarian products (utensils, say) but splurged more on fun items, like scented candles.

Caffeine often creates a state of 'energetic arousal' that enhances the appeal of non-essential goods, the researchers explained. Something to keep in mind if exceeding your budget causes you stress.

How to Prevent Recurring Kidney Stones

If you've had a kidney stone, your chances of reliving that excruciating experience within five years are around 30 per cent. However, the right foods could reduce that risk, says new research from the Mayo Clinic.

By asking first-time kidney-stone patients about their dietary habits and monitoring which of them went on to form more stones, the co-authors concluded that consuming 1,200 milligrams per day of calcium—found in foods such as dairy products and leafy greens—could be helpful for prevention.

They also recommended getting more potassium, which is in many fruits and veggies, including bananas, oranges and mushrooms. Meanwhile, people who haven't had a stone and want to avoid getting one should drink plenty of fluids.

More Long-Covid Symptoms Revealed

For roughly 10 per cent of sufferers, COVID-19 causes symptoms that linger after 12 weeks. To provide the best

care for these patients, it would be useful to know which ailments might be due to something other than long COVID. To help unravel this puzzle, British researchers looked at the medical records of about 4,86,000 people who'd had COVID-19 three months prior and compared them to control subjects who had similar demographic characteristics, lifestyles, and medical histories, except they'd never contracted the virus.

Issues among the people who had been infected included some that had already been associated with long COVID, such as fatigue, shortness of breath and an altered sense of smell. However, the study also revealed lesser-known symptoms, including hair loss, reduced libido and limb swelling. Even though most subjects suffered from only a few of these issues, the study validates the patients who claim that long COVID has a range of possible effects that cannot be entirely explained away by lifestyle habits or other medical conditions. The investigators also identified risk factors for long COVID, which included obesity and being female.

Your Brain on Junk Food

Food that has been significantly transformed from its original state is known as 'ultra-processed'. Examples include chicken nuggets, instant soup and ice cream. In a study published in the *European Journal of Nutrition*,

Australian researchers found that seniors with a habit of eating ultra-processed products performed more poorly on a test of language and executive function.

The Underestimated Value of 'Just Thinking'

Imagine being alone with your thoughts, without distractions. Sound boring? You might like it more than you expect. Researchers at Kyoto University in Japan asked participants to sit and let their mind wander for 20 minutes. Beforehand, the study subjects rated how they thought they would feel about the task. Afterward, they reported how they had actually felt. On average, the activity was more enjoyable and engaging than they'd anticipated. Previous studies suggest this kind of activity can help people enhance their creativity, solve problems and even allow them to find more meaning in life. **R**

By Samantha Rideout



It Happens
ONLY IN INDIA



An Inside Job

It was a day like any other. Sub-Inspector Mahendra Ula from Faridabad, headed out to collect his graft for solving a case of buffalo theft when his day took a turn. He was to meet Shambhu Nath, the man whose buffalo was stolen, in order to collect the remainder

of his ₹6,000 bribe. Instead, he was caught red-handed by vigilance department officers just as he was pocketing his ill-gotten cash. Turns out that Nath, tired of Ula's harassment, had decided enough was enough and contacted the Haryana State Vigilance Bureau for help.

Ula, ever quick on the uptake, broke not a drop of moral sweat upon apprehension and proceeded to swallow the cash, to cover up his crime. A video of Ula surrounded by the officers, with one attempting to pry out the notes, was widely shared online. The department lodged a case

and initiated action against Ula, whose gravy train is now at an end.

SOURCE: INDIATODAY.IN

A 'Ruff' day

Three men broke into Shubham Pratap Singh's Greater Noida home where his two prized, pricey pooches—a Rottweiler and a Dogo Argentino lived. The intruders, Vishal, Lalit and Monty, were acquaintances of Singh's brother, Rahul, who would often help take care of the canine babies. Vishal forcibly tried to take the Dogo Argentino, but failed when Rahul interceded. Their dognapping mission foiled, the group did some quick thinking: grab Rahul instead. Imagine Singh's surprise when he received a call demanding the dog—bought for ₹1.5 lakh—as ransom if he wanted his brother back. Singh duly informed the cops, who swung into action. News reached the suspects and Rahul was let off. The three men are on the run, with police teams working to bring



MASTER OF DISGUISE

A video of a man wearing a crocodile costume, petting a live crocodile went viral, reminding us all that some dreams are best left unrealized.

them to justice. Looks like man's best friend is no longer safe, not just on city streets, but even in our homes.

SOURCE: HINDUSTANTIMES.COM

Three's company

Our next entry is a slice-of-life horror show featuring twin sisters and their legally-wedded husband. Yes, husband is in singular! 36-year-old twins Rinky and Pinky from Solapur happily married Atul Awtade in a wedding ceremony on 2 December, with friends and family as witness. A video of these women—both IT professionals—gleefully trying to garland the groom were shared on various social

media platforms.

According to PTI, the trio had been living together under the same roof since childhood and after their father's demise, Atul has been a source of support to the family. However, marrying the sister-wives means Awtade has committed a non-cognizable offence under Section 494 and has been duly booked. We share your shock and awe, dear reader.

SOURCE: HINDUSTANTIMES.COM

—COMPILED BY NAOREM ANUJA

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



Only Good News —

Start the new year right with our list of heartwarming, awe-inspiring and straight-up happy-making reasons to smile, from around the world

TEXT by Anna-Kaisa Walker, Flannery Dean, Lisa Bendall,
Jason McBride, and Naorem Anuja

1 LIFTING THE LOAD

For the 70 per cent of the world's population without access to electric washing machines, simply keeping up with laundry is a time-consuming task. The burden falls disproportionately to women and girls, many of whom spend 20 hours a week hand-scrubbing clothes, often without electricity or running water. But 31-year-old Navjot Sawhney, an engineer based in London, has come up with an off-grid solution: a portable, lightweight washing machine powered by a hand crank. Sawhney calls it the Diyva, after the woman who inspired the project—his former next-door neighbour in southern India, where he spent a year volunteering after leaving his job as an engineer at high-end vacuum maker Dyson. He returned to the UK to found the Washing Machine Project in 2018. After a few months developing a prototype, he received a grant from Oxfam's Iraq Response Innovation Lab. Since



Navjot Sawhney, founder of The Washing Machine Project

December 2022, nearly 200 Divyas, which resemble a plastic drum, have been distributed impacting almost 22,000 people across six countries. By saving 75 per cent of the time required to wash clothes, he says, women and girls will be freer to pursue education. “The feedback was overwhelmingly positive,” Sawhney says. His goal is to deliver 8,000 machines to 10 countries over the next three years.

2 SMALL COUNTRIES THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Many nations around the world are making the necessary pledges to reduce harmful carbon emissions, with a goal of becoming carbon neutral several years from now. But what's truly impressive are the countries certified by the UN climate secretariat as ‘carbon negative.’ This is a tiny but growing club of forested countries absorbing more carbon than they produce, according to the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Certified so far are Bhutan—the Himalayan kingdom's forests absorb nine million tonnes of carbon each year, while its economy has been purpose-designed to produce just four million tonnes—and Suriname, just north of Brazil. Panama is the third nation to be recognized as carbon-negative.

3 FROM OLD TIRES TO NEW PARKS

In and around more than a dozen Indian cities, brightly coloured

caterpillars, octopi and elephants are appearing in empty lots, much to the joy of local children. Made from old tyres and waste such as scrap metal and discarded ropes, these climbers, jungle gyms and swings are low cost, sustainable play spaces built by Bangalore's Anthill Creations, whose CEO, Pooja Rai, an architect, was inspired to found the company in 2014 after watching children at an orphanage play with broken pipes and flip-flops. Reusing some of the 100 million tyres discarded in India every year also helps reduce air pollution caused by tyre burning. Each tyre is cleaned, inspected and painted before being repurposed. So far Anthill has built 328 playgrounds across India. "Children come up with hundreds of games exploring their creativity, and there is something new every time they play," Rai says.

4 A REFUGE FOR CAPTIVE WHALES
Some of the estimated 60 killer whales kept in captivity at large marine parks and sea aquariums will soon experience the joys of retirement at North America's first wild refuge for captive orcas (and possibly beluga whales). It's scheduled to open its almost 100-acre coastal location in Nova Scotia, Canada, in early 2023. The refuge, which will have underwater nets to allow the whales to swim freely while remaining contained, has a depth of 16 metres and provides the mammals with 150 times more space

than they have known in captivity. After the environmental assessment stage, the site hopes to welcome six to eight whales.

5 HOPE FOR ORGAN RECIPIENTS
For potential organ-transplant recipients, blood type can be the difference between a successful match and more time on the wait list. But in early 2022, researchers working at Toronto's University Health Network published a new study that might ensure better blood-type odds for all transplant patients. The team of scientists used an enzyme to change the blood type from A to O in one of two human lungs (the other lung was kept as a control). Within lab settings, the experiment was a success, marking the first step toward finding a way for donor organs to be given to whichever patient needs them the most, regardless of blood type.

6 CHANCE TO SEE OUTER SPACE
As a child growing up in Nairobi City, Susan Murabana didn't get much encouragement to look to the stars. Outer space wasn't a big part of her school's curriculum. That changed for Murabana in her early 20s, when she encountered her first telescope and spotted Saturn and its icy rings. Says Murabana, now an astronomer, "Seeing something I had only read about in a textbook made me realize how small we really are." In 2014, she bought a telescope with her husband. Inspired by how studying space had opened up





The Travelling Telescope has reached 3,00,000 Kenyans.

Murabana's life, the couple decided to give kids this experience by creating an educational programme called The Travelling Telescope. They criss-cross Kenya bringing astronomy education and a portable planetarium to schools and communities. So far, they've met with 3,00,000 children. Murabana says the telescope is the main attraction wherever they go. "It's a way of reminding people about the universe that sits just above their heads, and that they remain an intrinsic part of," she says. "It's there, but we forget to look up."

7 WIND TURBINES GET NEW LIFE

Wind power is more popular than ever; the Global Wind Energy Council reported a 53 per cent increase in wind-power capacity in 2020 compared to the year before. But this renewable source of energy is not entirely planet-friendly. About 10 to 15 per cent of wind-turbine components, including propeller blades, cannot be recycled

when they're due for replacement. That's why Anmet, a recycling firm in Poland, launched a subsidiary company in 2019 that finds new uses for old propeller blades. AIRchitecture designs unique-looking, weather-resistant furniture, as well as larger products, including car ports and fishing docks. These turbine parts may be past their prime, but they've found an elegant new purpose.

8 A BRIGHT IDEA

Twenty-year-old IIT-student Kaviraj Prithvi was fishing for ideas for a college project, when a visit to one of Bengaluru's schools for visually impaired sparked an idea for a useful innovation. The students and staff there revealed to him that the schools, often sparsely funded, needed cheaper options to print Braille text. Kaviraj got to work and soon developed Tactall, a portable printer the size of a computer mouse, which converts data received from a computer into braille, and prints it on any paper size—unlike regular braille printers that work only on A4-sized sheets—and at 20 times lesser cost. Awarded the Best Social Impact Business Idea at the SmartIDEAthon 2022, Tactall is now in prototype, with plans to launch in the market in April this year.

9 TURNING A COAL MINE INTO A NATIONAL PARK

With many countries abandoning fossil fuels for renewable sources, what

are they to do with the now-toxic landscapes left behind? Norway has one very good idea. It's turning its last Arctic coal mine, located on the Svalbard archipelago between Norway and the North Pole, into a nearly 3,000-square-kilometer park. (The decades-old mine stopped operating in 2019.) Svalbard was already ecologically important: Some 20 million birds nest on the islands in late summer, while about 3,000 polar bears use its sea ice as hunting grounds. Now, the Van Mijenfjorden National Park will unify this wilderness and, over time, return it to a pristine and well-managed state.

10 SAFE HAVEN THROUGH BOOKS Terence Crowster has long helped disadvantaged youth in the crime ridden neighbourhood of Scottsville in Cape Town, South Africa. At various secondary schools, he has helped kids develop valuable skills, and led anti-bullying and leadership programmes. But it's the new libraries he has built out of repurposed shipping containers—with donations and second hand books solicited through Facebook—that have truly transformed the neighbourhood. The first one, which opened in 2017, was dubbed the Hot-Spot Library, a reference to both its location at the border of an area fought over by two rival gangs and its aim to be a helpful resource to youth. Despite its dangerous

location, the library has flourished. In its first year, membership grew to 750 young people. Its shelves are now stocked with more than 2,000 books, and educational programming is offered six days a week. In November 2021, Crowster opened the Zoopark Hot-Spot Library in the adjoining Scottsdale neighbourhood, with future branches and libraries-on-wheels planned. "If this can inspire more people to stand up and do their part, then I have done my job towards changing our community," says Crowster.

11 A POLLUTION SOLUTION Growing up kayaking around the southwest coast of Ireland, 22-year-old Fionn Ferreira saw ocean pollution first-hand, and was shocked by how much plastic littered the shores. So he began learning about the estimated 300 million tonnes of plastic waste we produce every year. The most dangerous form, Ferreira found out, is one you can't see. Microplastics are tiny fragments that end up inside not only marine life, but humans. We ingest five grams of them every week through our food and water, and even more microscopic plastic particles are shed from carpets and synthetic textiles. After noticing that oil-spill residue on the beach attracted plastic particles, Ferreira set out to design a device that used

Fionn Ferreira designed a device that removes microplastics from drinking water.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FIONN FERREIRA

ferrofluid, a type of magnetic liquid, to remove microplastics from drinking water. In 2019, his prototype—which removed 87 per cent of microplastics from a water sample—won him the grand prize at the Google Science Fair. Ferreira has started Green Journey Coalition, a non-profit that uses research and innovation to develop technology for cleaner water to fight plastic pollution. They are currently working on the development of a new MicroPlastic Environmental Cleaning technology known as MPEC, which is currently in the testing phase with Fionn & Co., LLC, and Stress Engineering .

12 TESTING FOR LEAD POISONING IS SAVING CHILDREN

In 2010, hundreds of children were falling fatally ill and others were developing brain damage in the northern Nigerian state of Zamfara. Community members there were mining on a small scale, processing gold deposits tainted with lead and inadvertently contaminating the water and soil. Since then, a joint effort between state departments and international agencies, led by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), has saved lives. More than 8,000 children were tested for lead poisoning, and the vast majority required treatment. Heavily contaminated waste areas were then excavated. Local miners have also been trained in safer practices, such as processing mineral deposits at sites far from their homes. With no child deaths reported in 2021, MSF handed the

programme to the state government in February 2022, lead poisoning is now all but eliminated.

13 SOLAR ENERGY

In happy news that will help dissipate a degree of climate anxiety, India installed a record 10 gigawatt of new solar energy capacity in the first nine months of 2022. With the country set to become the world's most populous this year, its energy needs are set for expansion, this increase in solar capacity is a much-needed push towards decreasing the country's dependence on fossil fuels. 2022 was also the year when India got its first solar-powered village, Modhera in Gujarat. (flip to page 56–57 for more on Modhera)

14 'CORAL GARDENERS' ARE REBUILDING REEFS

Coral reefs support at least a quarter of ocean life; half a billion people rely on the ecosystems for their livelihoods or food. Yet roughly half of the world's coral reefs have died, or are dying, because of such factors as pollution and global warming. A group of divers in French Polynesia has committed itself to restoring reefs. When Titouan Bernicot, 24, was a teenager growing up on the island of Moorea, he realized the ocean life around his home was vanishing. So in 2017, he founded Coral Gardeners. The organization grows pieces of coral in underwater nurseries and moves them to natural ocean reef sites around Moorea when



they're large enough to survive in less protected conditions. Coral Gardeners has replanted more than 30,980 corals and intends to expand globally to reach one million by 2025. This ambitious goal may actually be within reach, thanks to advanced technologies. Live video feeds and sensors at restoration sites help track coral health.

15 A NOVEL IDEA FOR DIVERSITY In July 2020, Sofia Akel, a race equity researcher based in London, decided to launch a fundraiser. Its goal? To get books by authors of colour to people who can't afford them across the UK and Ireland. So far, the Free Books Campaign has sent out more than 1,700 books. Beneficiaries of the campaign include kids and "parents who weren't aware of how many amazing authors of colour there are," Akel says. Two years in, she has no doubt as to the need for the campaign, which is for people of all ages. "Sadly, reading

has become a luxury in today's world. If you're working two jobs to put food on the table, finding the time or the money to sit down and read can be difficult." This is where the campaign steps in: to close the gap so that nobody is denied the opportunity to immerse themselves in a great book. The Free Books Campaign operates on a trust basis. "No one has to prove that they don't have money," says Akel. "Everyone deserves to read books that they love."

— By Marco Marcelline

16 CYCLING MADE EVEN MORE SUSTAINABLE

Cycling is widely known to be beneficial to your health, but Wyld Bikes, in Queensland, Australia, also has a positive impact on people in other ways—and is good for the planet. Each bicycle distributed by Wyld, which stands for What You Love Doing, is handmade in West Africa in partnership with the Ghana Bamboo Bike Initiative (GBBI). Created from sustainably sourced bamboo, the bicycles tread lightly on the planet: For every plant used to make bikes, 10 more are planted, helping to stabilize soil and stop erosion. The GBBI also empowers Ghanaian communities by generating employment for low-income women. Once assembled, some of the bikes are donated to kids in Ghana, providing them with the means to travel to school. Bike parts are shipped to Australia and put together there by unemployed youth involved with Wyld's mentoring programme.

17 DIGITAL DETOX

Aiming to reduce screen addiction, Vadgaon village in Sangli, Maharashtra is running a 3,000-strong community digital detox. Every day the village sounds a siren at seven p.m. signaling all to turn off their screens, till the second siren goes off at 8:30 p.m. when the devices can be switched back on. The decision to switch off TV sets and mobile phones for a few hours was arrived at by the village council on 15 August 2022. The pledge was initially met with stiff resistance and members had to go canvassing door to door to get people on board. But the BBC has reported that the digital fast once adopted has yielded positive results, with families reporting that the restrictions have meant more quality family time.

18 SMART BIRDS CLEAN UP CIGARETTE BUTTS

Christian Günther-Hanssen has long known that birds in the Corvidae family—which includes crows, rooks and jays—are highly intelligent. In 2013, while studying for a test at Sweden's Lund University, he was distracted by the sound of rooks outside and got the idea to train the birds to help clean the community. He built a vending machine that rewards crows for picking up cigarette butts (worldwide, 4.5 trillion cigarettes end up as litter every year.) The birds first learn that they can take a tasty food such as peanuts from the machine,



and then they realize the treats come out only if the birds toss butts into a bin. A pilot project is set to test the machine in a small town in Sweden. The birds will be monitored for illness from handling the toxic butts—but it's more likely they'll benefit, thanks to a diet that's healthier than the discarded food they usually find.

19 RIGHT TO THE CITY

In most places, after-dark hours have rarely belonged to women. Female mobility is continually policed, citing safety as the reason, and the result is as the night grows we see women's presence steadily shrink across public spaces. Women Walk at Midnight is a volunteer group working to reclaim bodily autonomy and city spaces that are taken away from women due to gendered violence. The idea for the initiative came about when Mallika Taneja, a theatre artist, decided to embark on a 24-hour-long walk across Delhi about seven years ago. Fearing potential danger in walking alone, she put out a call on social media asking people to join her. People showed up and that empowering experience evolved into Women Walk at Midnight. Since 2017, the campaign has seen groups of women—numbers can range from four to 30—set out for late-night walks to reinforce the fact that public spaces, whatever the hour, belong to women just as much as they do to men.

20 THE COUNTRY THAT PAYS PEOPLE TO FIX BROKEN ITEMS

Have you ever thrown away a damaged lamp or coffee maker because it was too expensive to repair? In 2020, Vienna, Austria, launched its *Reparaturbon* ('Repair Voucher') programme for just that reason. Citizens paid half the cost of repairs, up to a 100-euro [₹8,600] maximum, on electronics, bikes, furniture and clothes, while the municipal government covered the rest. In April 2022, Austria's federal government offered a similar subsidy for broken electronics, covering half the repair cost up to a maximum of 200 euros [₹17,300]. By the time the programme concludes in 2026, it's estimated that 4,00,000 items will have been fixed instead of scrapped.

21 DISPLACED SYRIANS SHARE THE JOY OF MUSIC

Of the millions of Syrians who have fled their war-torn country over the past 11 years, hundreds of thousands have found a home in Germany. Raed Jazbeh, a bass player, claimed asylum in Berlin in 2013. Although Jazbeh left his homeland behind, he brought his love for music with him—along with a passion for sharing his culture with the world. Jazbeh spent months bringing together other displaced Syrian musicians. Then, in 2015, he founded the Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra. Under Jazbeh's artistic leadership, these talented men and women play classical and contemporary music as

well as traditional Syrian and Arabic pieces. The award-winning group, now with about 75 members, has made appearances in festivals and concert halls across Europe, including the *Klarafestival* in Brussels and the *Centre d'Art et de Culture* outside Paris.

22 LEARNING FROM OUR DIFFERENCES

Ronni Abergel of Copenhagen has always been curious about the lives of other people. In 2000, with his brother and friends, he launched the Human Library, stocking it with 'human books'—volunteers recruited from often-stigmatized backgrounds (for example, they may have been labelled as homeless, ADHD, Muslim, or obese). "I wanted to create a safe space where it was okay to ask other people questions," Abergel says. The first Human Library was held at a music festival, and the concept caught on. More than 85 countries now have human libraries, often in actual libraries. Patrons can browse the catalogue and check out a 'human book' for 30 minutes. "It's a chance to see what it's like to walk in their shoes, and to dispel fear," says Abergel, adding that the organization trains applicants to ensure they'll be open-minded and genuine. In 2020, the Human Library went online for the first time. Weekly virtual sessions are available and are typically fully booked with participants from around the world. Abergel says it takes a special kind of person to

volunteer as a human book, opening themselves up to whatever is asked. But it has rewards, too. “This forum allows them to explain themselves,” says Abergel. “Who doesn’t want to be understood if for most of your life you’ve been misunderstood?”

23 **GIVING A LANGUAGE NEW LIFE**

Miali Coley-Sudlovenick, an Inuk-Jamaican playwright born in Iqaluit, runs Allurvik, a business created in 2021 to preserve Inuit culture. One of Allurvik’s most significant services is its online language lessons, where Coley-Sudlovenick teaches Inuktitut over Zoom. Some of her students are non-Indigenous, but many are Inuk, eager to reclaim a language they might never have known. “So much of our culture is gone,” Coley-Sudlovenick says. “All we’re trying to do is bring those parts of us back to life.”

24 **A NOTEWORTHY GESTURE**

A 2021 survey of some 16,000 undergraduate students in 21 countries found more than half said their mental health had deteriorated because of COVID-19. Iman Al-Areibi, a secondary school teacher in Ontario, Canada, found a way to help her struggling students. She put pen to paper, and mailed each one of her 80 students a handwritten message of support. “Thank you for your hard work and contributions to our class and school community,” one letter read in part. “Thank you for being you!” One student’s mom responded,



The Human Library stocks ‘human books’—volunteers recruited from different backgrounds

“The kindness and encouragement brought tears to my eyes and boosted my daughter’s spirits.”

25 **MR FIX-IT**

Dushyant Dubey, is perhaps better known by his Reddit username St Broseph, and for good reason. In December 2021, he made a post on the Bengaluru subreddit offering help to all who found themselves stuck in any ‘shifty situation.’ And throughout last year he delivered: he has helped file FIRs, write college applications, get the city’s municipal corporation to fix street lights, find accommodation and even helped two sisters escape their abusive home. He is currently developing a website to keep up with the requests as well as working on getting an apartment to serve as a safe house. **R**



THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

IT LIES IN LEARNING OF THE
**DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WE
CAN RISE** AND LIVE ANEW EVEN
AS WE KEEP FALLING

By **RAJ CHENGAPPA**

Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**



IT

may seem odd to be talking of happiness when the world has barely emerged from the immense grief two-plus years of the Covid pandemic inflicted on us. Or seen much strife, including the debilitating war in Ukraine that, if allowed to fester, could end up as the war of the worlds. Or to usher a new year with joy when there are dire predictions of a global recession that could lead to massive job cuts, high inflation and heightened misery.

Yet it is precisely why we should be searching for answers to the secrets of happiness. For, as Mahatma Gandhi put it, “Strength does not come from winning. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.” So it is with the quest for happiness—how do you rise even as you keep falling and live anew? The first of the four noble truths enunciated by the Buddha was accepting that the world was full of suffering. The remaining three go into the causes and the paths to attain moksha, the ultimate liberation from the seemingly endless cycle of birth and death. The question of how best to do that itself becomes the quest.

Since 2012, the UN has engaged an independent agency to bring out a World Happiness Report and rank the happiest countries. To assess a nation’s state of happiness, the global survey relies on three key markers of well-being: the person’s current life evaluation, positive emotions and negative effects. Interestingly, the study found that positive emotions like laughter, enjoyment or learning

something new figure twice more frequently in the answers than negative feelings like worry, sadness and anger. The world, it seems, is learning to cope far better than before.

India, however, inexplicably finds itself among the countries at the bottom of the list in the current edition of the World Happiness Report, figuring below even Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Finland tops the ranking, followed by many other Scandinavian countries, with the combination of material well-being, social cohesion and sense of ownership in government policy giving them a decisive advantage. India, though, can take heart from the fact that its

citizens do not necessarily have to be bound by such narrow definitions of what constitutes contentment. For, the same study has found that in the past decade, the word “happiness” has occurred more frequently than the phrases “gross domes-

tic product” (GDP), “livelihood and income”, the older markers of progress, both of which have seen a declining frequency in usage.

So here we are at the crossroads of a new year, looking at how to navigate the twists and turns that life throws at us and deal with them with an equanimity that redefines the notion of happiness. Not as a national quest to improve the GDP or any personal search for material and physiological comfort but as the art of not just living but

giving and in that sharing finding the elusive state of bliss. This special section features heartwarming stories of exemplars who have forgone their own comforts and found joy in making others

feel happy. These individuals, by their definitions of happiness, give us pause to think on how we look at the ultimate truth of our existence and the paths we can take to achieve or experience it. So, enjoy the read and the ride. ■

THE PATH TO BLISS, AS WISE MEN HAVE SAID, CAN BE FOUND IN THE ART OF NOT JUST LIVING, BUT ALSO OF GIVING



ONE-MAN ARMY—Sushanta Giri, on a boat in one of the many creeks that cut through the Sundarbans

Helping Hand on the Sundarbans

Happiness delivery: Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha helps people in the Sundarbans' remote coastal villages battle grim lives by taking care of their basic needs

By **ROMITA DATTA**

Bit by bit, Sushanta Giri's mother wasted away, as the deadly liver ailment progressed. The family, who live in the remote Baikunthapur village in the Sundarbans in West Bengal, had no means to take her to the nearest subdivisional hospital at Joynagar, 49 km away, for treatment. Giri's eyes well up as he recalls

those nights when his mother suffered acute pain, and how he frantically did the rounds of village quacks for some palliative. Giri's mother passed away the day he wrote the final paper of his school-leaving board

exam. Back from the funeral, the 18-year-old resolved to help improve the living condition of the people who live in these coastal backwaters—the very margins both geographically and socio-economically—so that they could access the basic needs of life.

For thousands of underprivileged villagers in the Sundarbans, life is not just about coping with poverty and the absence of health-care, education and roads and communication, it is also fraught by a constant struggle with nature—cyclones, flash floods, farmland laid waste by saline water from the

**BAIKUNTHAPUR
TARUN SANGHA
FOUNDED: 1983**
The Sundarbans,
West Bengal

HAPPINESS MANTRA

“When I see a young boy who could not afford to go to school become a doctor, lawyer, teacher or working in an MNC, I tear up in utter joy.”

SUSHANTA GIRI, Founder, BTS

sea, and land erosion. Giri embarked on a comprehensive plan of community development and self-sufficiency, so that villagers could send their children to schools and share in the possibilities of a rapidly digitizing world.

The beginning, in 1983, was humble: a primary school run by the local Ekta Youth Club. Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha (BTS) began as a school for the underprivileged forced to discontinue their education due to acute poverty. “We had 25 students to begin with. Our main aim was to give basic education to local children and tie up with good schools for higher education. Education was highly subsidised—a tuition fee of ₹5–7, and a free meal with milk,” says Giri. Today, Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha is a reputed English-medium school till Class 8 with around 100 students. Earlier, teachers gave voluntary services; Giri is now able to pay them a monthly honorarium of ₹2,000 because of aid and donors. BTS also has 500 former students—professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers and nurses—who are doing their bit for their alma mater. “The primary school was a stepping stone for getting the FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) registration in 1996,” he says. But Giri has not stopped there. BTS’s activities in healthcare, community development and employment generation cover 52 villages of

14 gram panchayats in seven blocks of the Sundarbans. The total number of beneficiaries is estimated to be 55,000.

Though the region is a UNESCO-declared world heritage site, 85 per cent of the Sundarbans’ population falls in the BPL category. The rise in the maternal mortality ratio by at least 10 per cent in the coastal areas between 2005 and 2010 led Giri to start a community delivery centre in collaboration with the state’s health and family welfare department under the NRHM. Over the years, it has served 922 rural women in the safe institutional delivery of newborns. It runs a 10-bed maternity clinic and holds medical camps periodically. To villagers with only around an acre of farm land, BTS has imparted professional aid so that their patches are transformed into highly productive areas yielding vegetables and lentils. “Villagers are growing paddy on slightly raised banks of their ponds, breeding fish. They get iron, vitamins and minerals from their own kitchen garden,” adds Giri. BTS has also helped villagers sell their excess organic produce. The integrated farming approach has now increased farm earning three times from the meagre ₹2,500 a month.

“I now earn ₹40,000 a month from farm produce and ₹12,000 a year from fish farming,” says 36-year-old Soumen Samanta of Moipith-Nagenabad. “Even without ponds, BTS has taught us how to grow fish by digging drains around the field. Organic farming has taken off because of BTS—giving us seeds, other inputs and training free of cost.” Rashmoni Kayal of Baikunthapur says, “Now men don’t feel the need of leaving the villages. There’s so much to do that no one sits idle.” Rashmoni and other village women now complement their family income by doing tailoring and zaree work at a nearby Usha Silai School that is run with the BTS. Another BTS team, in collaboration with the Sneha Foundation, supplies low-cost sanitary napkins to students and housewives.

Besides all this, BTS has its own disaster mitigation task force for quick and on-the-spot response to natural calamities that are the bane of the Sundarbans, helping administration in prompt evacuation, rescue and distribution of relief. During the Amphan and Yaas cyclones, they saved many lives. Susanta Giri is a happy man today. His life’s work has changed thousands of lives. ■



Nurturing the Next Generation

Happiness delivery: Born out of the tragic infant deaths in Kota in 2019, Suposhit Maa Abhiyan provides specially curated nutrition kits and regular medical check-ups to underweight expectant mothers and ensures their children get a healthy start in life

By **ROHIT PARIHAR**

As Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla walks through the narrow alleys of a slum in Kota, his parliamentary constituency, to enquire about the health of young mothers and their newborns, his stern facial expression—usually on display while he is chairing the House proceedings—gives way to a benevolent smile. Always up for promoting a public cause, from mobile kitchens to free clothes for the poor, Birla found a new mission when Kota's JK Lone Hospital reported a high incidence of infant deaths in December 2019. "Often, a newborn is weak because of the mother's poor health, which in turn is due to the lack of adequate medical advice during pregnancy," says Birla, whose

wife Amita, a gynaecologist, helped him understand that maternal and infant mortality in India are not always related to poor health infrastructure or doctors' negligence.

Thus was born the Suposhit Maa Abhiyan (or a well-nourished mother campaign) to identify undernourished women, mostly expectant mothers, and provide them with nutrition kits along with regular medical check-ups for a few months after the delivery. Union minister Smriti Irani launched its first phase on February 29, 2020, after Birla involved social workers and doctors to identify the beneficiaries, who were mostly labourers and domestic helps residing in slums. Seeing the



**SUPOSHIT
MAA ABHIYAN
FOUNDED: 2020**

Kota, Rajasthan

positive results among the 1,000 women covered under the scheme, Birla in May 2022 extended the campaign to cover 3,000 women in the second phase. "We often talk of hunger, but malnutrition is a bigger issue affecting our new generation. Our campaign not only helps improve the health of a woman but also her newborn, besides creating awareness about a healthy diet among the whole family," says Birla, while recalling how the Covid-induced lockdown soon after the launch of the first phase reinforced his belief that improving nutrition can go a



FEEDING CHANGE Speaker Om Birla meets beneficiaries of the Suposhit Maa Abhiyan

long way towards building a healthy generation.

The Janani Social Work and Health Sanstha Team is his leading partner in this effort. To identify the beneficiaries, it held camps at 26 places, involving health officials and anganwadi workers. Underweight women can easily be identified through physical examination. Nutritionists then work out the

curated list of food supplements, including molasses, porridge, ghee and a multigrain diet. A monthly kit weighs about 15 kg and costs about Rs 1,000. In cases of severe anaemia, extra supplements are given. The kits are delivered for up to a year, often beginning in the third month of pregnancy. Some private doctors have joined the effort by offering free

consultations at their clinics.

“What I found encouraging is that almost all deliveries have turned out to be normal, with two-thirds of the babies weighing above normal,” says Birla, who wants to bring down his constituency’s maternal and infant mortality rates to the lowest across India.

“But I also want this pilot project to be rigorously evaluated and then implemented all over the country. As the Speaker, I urge other elected representatives to take up similar programmes in their constituencies as well.” It’s definitely an effort worth emulating. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

“Knowing that my efforts are keeping mothers and children healthy makes me extremely happy”

OM BIRLA, Lok Sabha Speaker and founder, Suposhit Maa Abhiyan



Battling the Black Scourge

Happiness delivery: A victim of kala azar (black fever) in her pre-teens, Pinki has taken it upon herself to create awareness about the dreaded disease in her home district, Deoria, in UP

By PRASHANT SRIVASTAVA



BE WARY Pinki (centre) with students at one of her pathshala classes

It's a cold morning at the government school in Deoria district's Banghata block, and a group of 30 students are listening to a girl not much older than themselves. She is 19-year-old Pinki Chauhan, who runs Pinki ki Pathshala, as

part of an awareness programme on kala azar or black fever, a vector-borne disease caused by the protozoan parasite, *Leishmania donovani*, which can be fatal if not treated. A victim of kala azar herself, Pinki has now become

a household name across Uttar Pradesh's Deoria district for the informal classes she takes in government schools to raise awareness about the disease in the region. She not only gives details about the disease, but also engages stu-

HAPPINESS MANTRA

“Staying fit and healthy is essential to be happy. And to stay fit, one must be aware about lurking maladies. Awareness is key for a healthy future”

PINKI CHAUHAN, Kala Azar awareness campaigner

dents through a series of games so that she can effectively drive home her mission and message—“Hansna bhi, jagrook karna bhi (Smile but also be on your guard)”.

Pinki caught the black fever in 2015 when she was just 12. She recovered, but a year later again fell victim to kala azar’s sequential infection—post-kala azar dermal leishmaniasis (PKDL)—in which the parasite invades the skin. It took years to recover fully, a difficult time when she took the decision to do what she could to create awareness about the disease. The chance came in November 2021 when she got involved with the UP government’s community engagement efforts to create awareness against lymphatic filariasis (a painful, disfiguring disease otherwise known as elephantiasis) and dermal leishmaniasis. Since then, she and her pathshala have visited several villages of Deoria.

Says Pinki, “I am a victim myself so I know the pain and the struggles. I realized that few people know what causes kala azar (the disease is spread by sandflies). Nor do they realize how serious it can be. Apart from taking classes at schools, I now cycle around the district in a bid to reach out to at least two dozen peo-

ple every day. I talk about the disease, its warning signs and symptoms and prevention, besides telling people who to contact if they have doubts.” She feels people know about mosquitoes, but not so much about sandflies, which are 50 to 60 times smaller in size. “Staying alert about its breeding places, such as small holes, damp walls and areas like gaushalas (cow shelters) is the only way to save ourselves,” she says.

“I have seen people run from pillar to post for treatment. And that leads to a lot of suffering and wastage of money. The treatment itself is simple if we get in touch with the district health officials and doctors. You don’t need to go to private hospitals either because government hospitals are equipped to cure it,” Pinki adds. She is hoping to become a social worker in the future, adding that half of Purvanchal’s problems would be solved if the health and education infrastructure saw improvement.

According to a World Health Organization (WHO)

report, people of UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal are at risk in India, where cases have been recorded in 54 districts of these states where the disease is endemic. Deoria, Kushinagar, Ballia and Ghazipur districts are the hotspots in UP. India has pledged to eliminate the disease by the end of 2023 although the WHO is hoping to achieve the same result globally only by the end of 2030.

Pinki says she began her campaign against the disease from her own college, the Babban Singh Intermediate College in Ratasiya village of Deoria district. Having got positive feedback, in July, she started visiting schools and local communities. Till date, she has been able to reach out to over 10,000 children across several schools in Deoria. Pinki is now planning visits to schools in other nearby districts. The National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), the central nodal agency for prevention and control of vector-borne diseases, has also officially praised her contribution in spreading awareness against the dreaded kala azar. ■

**PINKI KI
PATHSHALA
RUNNING SINCE:
2022**

Deoria, UP



A Shade Better

Happiness delivery: Forest First has not only helped restore native plant species in the Western Ghats but has also improved the lives of local communities

By **SONALI ACHARJEE**

After 16 years of working at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in Wayanad, Kerala, it was a 2010 visit to a piece of land Meera Chandran's family owned in the district that changed her life. She found that Lantana weed, an invasive species that kills native plants, had taken over the land, thereby upsetting the ecological balance. For three years, Chandran worked tirelessly—manually uprooting the weeds so that they don't grow back—to clear the area and restore native plant species. Around the same time, the endeavour made Chandran want to work on conservation on a larger scale, and thus, the Forest First Samithi was born. After four years of juggling TCS and Forest First, she finally quit her

job and devoted her entire time to conservation.

“Forest First was started with a vision to conserve a large diversity of native tree species, including rare, endangered and threatened flora, by restoring lands that are degraded by exotic invasive species,” says Chandran. Since its inception, Forest First has restored over 300 acres of land in Wayanad and in Kodagu in Karnataka, and with years of fieldwork, the organization has given a new lease of life to around 150 tree species in the Western Ghats.

Allowing native species to thrive does more than restore forests—it helps local wildlife and forest communities as well. The Lantana species, for example, kills plants on which herbivores thrive. Conse-



**FOREST FIRST
SAMITHI
FOUNDED: 2010**
Wayanad, Kerala

quently, as the animals gradually leave the forest, predators often follow suit, which leads to man-animal conflict. A 2020 study conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, says Lantana occupies 154,000 sq. km of forests (44 per cent by area) in India's tiger range. Restoring natural flora would bring wildlife back to the area and provide a safe home for endangered species. Additionally, edible fruits and seeds produced by the trees also help enhance the livelihoods of local communities. “After we remove invasive species, nature rebounds



GREEN SHOOTS Meera Chandran (extreme left) with members of the Forest First Samithi

in just a few weeks of rain,” says Chandran.

The Forest First Samithi also works actively with local tribes who have traditional knowledge of flora and fauna. The NGO hires 20 tribal people for 10 months a year. Support comes from corporates as well as crowdfunding platforms, and the money is passed on to communities who help the

NGO with uprooting weeds and monitoring plants. “We have trained 45 people in restoration, thus supporting livelihoods in the villages around forests. We want to involve more indigenous people who can support our work,” says Meera. She adds that she feels deeply happy when eco-restoration helps improve people’s livelihoods.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

“Happiness is when the saplings we plant become big trees, attracting a larger biodiversity of birds and several pollinators, triggering a cycle of restoration”

MEERA CHANDRAN, Founder, Forest First

In 2017, Forest First started working on restoration of sacred groves that are overrun by harmful weeds, and so far, it has saved nearly 20 acres of area. The group has also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Kerala Forest Department to restore 200 acres of degraded forest land in critical animal habitat areas of Wayanad. Upon the completion of the project, these areas will not only become safe spaces for flora, fauna, wildlife and local communities but also beautiful sites for visitors to enjoy and experience native biodiversity. ■



Sunshine Village

Happiness delivery: Modhera in Gujarat has become a net-renewable energy generator, setting an extraordinary example for sustainable living

By **ROHIT PARIHAR**

A jaysinh Solanki, a 21-year-old mechanical engineer, is hoping to welcome the summer this year with an air conditioner, a 'luxury' that until now hardly anyone in his village could afford. On the terrace of his modest one-storey house—Solanki's is a joint family of 20—in Modhera village in Gujarat's Mehsana district are items that are common for a typical rural household in India: pickles and spices laid out under the sun, a clothesline, an occasional straw mat. Among these, however, are also four shiny solar panels of 1 kW each that the members of the house take turns to clean. Nobody is complaining, though. Installed just about a year ago—with no

hefty down-payment—these solar panels are the reason behind an extra ₹500 Solanki is now able to save every month because of the significant reduction in his monthly electricity bill. He hopes that the money will help with his sisters' education. Others in Modhera have similar stories to share. For some households, in fact, electricity is now entirely free of cost.

There are roughly 1,700 houses in Modhera, and 1,350 of them now have rooftop photovoltaic (RTPV) systems. A year ago, the Gujarat government completed installing RTPV systems in the village under the Suryagram Project. The programme, carried out at a cost of ₹80.66 crore, has



**SURYAGRAM
PROJECT
FOUNDED: 2019-20**
Gujarat

been split between the Centre and the state government. Each house is linked to the central electricity grid, and power expenses for most households have reduced by 40 to 100 per cent.

For about six months now, the village has not imported any power from the grid and has instead been supplying green power. It has become the first village in India to become a net renewable energy generator. According to an official from the Gujarat Power Corporation Ltd, the government agency anchoring the project, about 6,332 kWh of power is generated daily. Modhera consumes about 6,000 kWh per day, and the rest is given to the grid. Solar

GOLDEN HOURS

A woman in Modhera village cleaning a solar panel on her rooftop



NANDAN DAVE

panels are also installed over government buildings, and the popular Sun Temple is now literally powered by solar energy. It also hosts an electric charging facility for motor vehicles, a free service often utilized by tourists. Daytime power is supplied through solar panels, and after sunset, electricity is supplied via the Battery Energy Storage System, the plant for which is situated in Sujjanpura village, about 6 km from Modhera.

Many in Modhera can now

dream of a slightly better quality of life. Most people in the village are small farmers, agricultural labourers or livestock herders. “The average income of each household ranges from ₹8,000 to ₹10,000. About 500 households are educated, and many youth are employed in automobile factories nearby. Their incomes are around ₹15,000 to ₹25,000,” says Jatanben Thakor, the village sarpanch. Even a few hundred extra rupees saved at the end of each month

is a substantial amount for the families. Amratlal Prajapati, for example, a retired clerk from the tourism department, is planning to give a complete makeover to his house, while his wife Savita is hoping to include more vegetables and fruits in the family’s diet. Prajapati hasn’t received an electricity bill in four months now because of the solar panel on his rickety rooftop.

These achievements haven’t gone unnoticed. In October 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Modhera and declared it India’s first village that meets its complete energy needs with solar power. Soon after, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited the place and lauded the efforts: “What is amazing, and we must thank in a very emotional way the people of this village, and also the government of Gujarat and the government of India, is that here there is a reconciliation between humankind and the planet.”

The transformation of Modhera has made the village shine on the global map as a symbol of possibilities, showing the way for not just India’s but the world’s efforts towards sustainable living. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

“Whenever there is a mention of solar power in the world, Modhera will stand out”

— **PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI**
(at Modhera in October 2022)



Mad about Children

Happiness delivery: Founded by Jithin Nedumala when he was just 20, Make a Difference has helped hundreds of orphaned children break free of the cycle of poverty

By SONALI ACHARJEE

MAKE A DIFFERENCE (MAD)
FOUNDED: 2006
Kochi, Kerala



In 2010, when Michelle Obama visited India, she was seen playing hopscotch and dancing to *Rang De Basanti* with a few orphaned children in Mumbai. The children were with the Mumbai chapter of Make a Difference (MAD), one of the largest youth-volunteer networks in India for orphaned children. That one meeting with Obama propelled MAD to nationwide popularity.



ASHISH K VINCENT

For Jithin Nedumala, who founded MAD in 2006 when he was just 20 years old, volunteering with children was a coincidence. After losing a close friend at the age of 19, he began volunteering at an orphanage in Kochi to “escape his own pain”. There, focusing on someone else’s struggles helped him find deeper happiness. “I was able to focus on something larger than myself for the first time,” he adds. However, he soon realized that most children he was working with, owing to their circumstances, might get sucked into the world of crime and violence. “MAD was born because I was angry at society, where instead of providing children with the best care and

simply teaching children English would not help—many of them still went on to get arrested for selling drugs, got into toxic relationships, were suicidal or had mental health issues,” says Nedumala. So, MAD built a holistic programme wherein along with providing for their basic needs, children also receive exposure to build life skills and essential personality traits. Today, the first generation of children that Nedumala taught are all adults; most of them are married and earn ₹20,000 to ₹25,000 a month on average. MAD has also provided them with interest-free funding to build their first home. The cost will be paid back into a kitty that will go to-

HAPPINESS MANTRA

“To experience deeper happiness, invest long-term in helping others”

JITHIN NEDUMALA, Founder, MAD

support they need to break free of the cycle of poverty, we are just keeping them alive till 18 and then washing our hands of them,” says Nedumala.

Today, MAD gives Nedumala the greatest satisfaction. The NGO has worked with around 20,000 volunteers in the past 17 years, building a model that can help children escape inter-generational poverty. “We realized that

wards building homes for the next batch. Nedumala calls it a “cycle of support and happiness”.

For many of MAD’s volunteers, there is a special joy that comes from a decade-long relationship with a child. “I won’t say I have helped thousands of children. I have made a difference to the 10 children I have personally worked with for over a decade now. They are family to me and that relationship continuously makes me happy,” says Nedumala. ■

A FRESH APPROACH Jithin Nedumala with youth volunteers at the MAD centre in Kochi



Colours and Camaraderie

Happiness delivery: The Art Sanctuary treasures young persons with intellectual disabilities, crafting with care artists, photographers, filmmakers and sculptors out of an abundance of natural talent

By **AJAY SUKUMARAN**

On the rooftop terrace of a villa near Bengaluru's tech corridor in Marathahalli, an art class is in progress, where a group of young adults are engrossed in a curious endeavour—to draw and colour using their less-preferred hand. There's a great deal of bonhomie, and every once in a while someone breaks into a whoop, while others concentrate on such things as forming a heart shape. The good cheer communicates itself to the mothers accompanying them. The session is being conducted by The Art Sanctuary (TAS), a platform for 'neurodiverse' youngsters to showcase their creative skills. Neurodiverse is a term used to describe individuals with intellectual disability from conditions such as autism, Down's Syndrome, cerebral palsy or dyslexia. "Just because today we don't understand what cognitive impairment is, it cannot be brushed under the carpet," says Bengaluru-based

Shalini Gupta, who set up TAS in 2019. A business consultant who gave up her career 21 years ago when her daughter Gayatri was born with Down's Syndrome, Gupta says the idea was born out of her own experience of bringing up her child. The charitable trust celebrates the artistic talents of specially-abled young adults, and curates and displays their painting, sculpture, films and photographs. The aim of TAS is to pave the way for the inclusion of talented, and variously challenged, youngsters in the mainstream art world.

But showcasing their work meant these youngsters needed training in a conducive environment to upgrade their skills. Thus, TAS began online workshops. Besides, it has a tie-up with the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in

FOR ART'S SAKE Shalini Gupta (right) with participants at a workshop of The Art Sanctuary in Bengaluru



HAPPINESS MANTRA

“The tears in the eyes of a mom as her son is felicitated ... as a young filmmaker are those of pure joy”

SHALINI GUPTA, Founder, The Art Sanctuary

Pune for a course in short film-making. There’s an arrangement with the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) to host painting or clay modelling workshops. “We displayed art made by these young adults for the first time in a commercial gallery four years back and sold 70 per cent of it,” says Gupta. TAS has held exhibitions in the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi and the NGMA in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. While TAS

works with around 50 youngsters in its workshops, it reaches out to about 1,500 families across India when exhibitions are held via parent support groups in 20 cities.

At the art session, Sania Khimji wears a tiara she recently won at a beauty pageant to commemorate International Disability Month, along with runner-up Dinal Jain, who is also a swimming champ. Then, there’s Sai Shashank Sivaramakrishnan, whose glazed

pottery work occupies pride of place alongside the paintings on display. “I feel he’s at total peace when he is holding wet clay,” says his mother Viji.

“When our children were born, the world told us to expect only tears and therapy... But look at the amount of joy around us,” marvels Gupta. After TAS held its first art exhibition in 2019, there was a marked lift in the mood of some of the young artists, and their dosage of medicines like anti-depressants came down. “They might take four years for a course that you and I would finish in four months. But who is in a rush?” Truly, it’s the joy of learning that counts. ■



Rx

PATIENT NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Prescription:

FLIP THE 'SCRIPT

Before dialling your doctor,
try finding relief with these
simple home remedies
that really work



BY *Lisa Bendall*

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

For Dry, Itchy Skin: Take an Oatmeal Bath



Several studies show the benefits of using this traditional breakfast grain to treat skin symptoms.

One 2020 trial, for instance, found that patients with eczema showed more improvement when their hand creams contained colloidal oatmeal. (Colloidal means the grains are pulverized into dust and mixed thoroughly into the lotion or solution.)

“Oatmeal has anti-itch, anti-inflammatory, soothing properties, and it improves the skin’s direct barrier,” says Sandy Skotnicki, MD, a dermatologist in the department of medicine at the University of Toronto. This is thanks to the grain’s natural antioxidants, proteins and other special compounds. The starch and fibre in oatmeal also help draw moisture to the skin.

You can make your own colloidal oatmeal by breaking down rolled oats with a coffee grinder or blender. Put one cup of the pulverized oats into a tightly woven mesh bag—the tighter the weave, the smaller the cleanup will be afterward—and immerse it in lukewarm-to-warm bathwater. (Don’t use hot water, as that will further irritate the skin.) Just be careful getting into the tub—the bath might get a bit slippery.

And don’t oversoak, as this can also cause skin irritation. “The data

has shown that a quick bath of less than 10 minutes every day can be helpful, followed by application of a moisturizer that helps repair the skin barrier,” says Dr Skotnicki, adding that it’s best to look for a product that says it treats eczema, even if that’s not what you have. “Those are the best, in part because they’re formulated without allergens.”

For Constipation: Drink a Tablespoon of Olive Oil



When you’re feeling stopped up, swallowing a spoonful of extra-virgin olive oil every day can help move things along. That’s been shown in experiments including one on patients with ulcerative colitis, published in 2020 in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Participants had fewer symptoms of constipation with taking extra-virgin olive oil (as opposed to canola oil, which was used for comparison), and blood tests showed that the disease was less active.

“It’s thought that extra-virgin olive oil can help hydrate and soften stools, making them easier to pass,” says Desiree Nielsen, a registered dietitian and author of the book *Good for Your Gut*.

Try taking olive oil in the morning, when your bowels are more active, and on an empty stomach. Nielsen notes that kiwis and prunes, which she

often recommends to clients, are better studied for their laxative effects, but extra-virgin olive oil has added heart-health benefits. It's also tasty, if a little peppery, after it goes down.

When you're shopping, double-check the price to ensure you're not cheated into buying soybean oil flavoured with a bit of olive oil, says Nielsen. "Be wary if you see a litre of extra-virgin olive oil for \$6.99 [₹599] instead of \$12 [₹995] or so." Another indicator is when it was harvested. Look for a harvest date on the bottle; it should be within the past 18 to 24 months.



**For Joint Pain:
Go on a
Brisk Walk**

If you have painful arthritis in your knees, you might be tempted to take it easy. Instead, set a goal of spending an hour a week—that's just nine minutes a day—walking briskly, as if you were trying to catch a train or were late for a meeting. People who do this are 85 per cent less likely to end up with mobility problems from their arthritis, according to 2019 findings by researchers at Northwestern University outside Chicago.

It's unlikely that the physical stress of brisk walking will cause more wear and tear on your knees. Bioengineers at Queen Mary University of London showed that this kind of mechanical pressure on the joints in fact triggers a protective effect in cartilage cells that

wards off inflammation and damage.

**For Hiccups:
Sip with Suction**

Whether it's holding your breath or gulping water, everyone has a go-to trick for stopping hiccups—in-



voluntary spasms of the diaphragm. The problem is, hiccup cures are usually hit or miss, says Ali Seifi, MD,

associate professor and neurosurgeon at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. "The remedies activate the phrenic nerve regulating the diaphragm muscle, or the vagus nerve regulating the epiglottis, which has a scientific basis. But trying these home remedies may not reach that sensitive point at which they can stop the hiccups."

Seifi's solution is a special straw, which he dubbed the HiccAway, that requires approximately five times the suction compared to sipping from a regular straw. "That's the key," he says. "It means higher and more prolonged contraction of the diaphragm muscle, which triggers a longer duration of nerve activation."

That pressure, coupled with swallowing to activate the phrenic and vagus nerves, resets the brain. More than 90 per cent of participants in a 2021 study said the HiccAway stopped their hiccups when they tried it.

For a home remedy that works the

same way, Dr Seifi suggests filling a glass with water and stretching a coffee filter (or a few layers of strong paper towel) over the top. Hold it tightly in place or secure it with a rubber band, then drink the water through the coffee filter. The suction should have the same effect. “I have tried this myself, and it works,” says Dr Seifi.

For Stinky Feet: Soak in Black Tea

Your feet contain about a quarter of a million sweat glands, more per inch than any other part of your body. And it's the combination of sweat plus bacteria that's to blame when your feet start to smell bad.



A black tea soak can address both problems. Tea is high in an antibacterial compound called tannic acid, so it helps kill germs. Tannins are also astringents, which means they tighten pores when they're applied to the skin. “Marathon runners use tea-bag soaks, because if you sweat less, you get fewer blisters,” says Dr Skotnicki.

Tannic acid gels are available from compounding pharmacies, but you can make your own formula at home. Boil a couple of tea bags in about two cups of water for 15 minutes. Dilute it with eight more cups of water, and when it's cool enough, soak your feet for half an hour. Do this daily for a week until you see improvement.

After that, once-a-week maintenance soaks should do the trick.

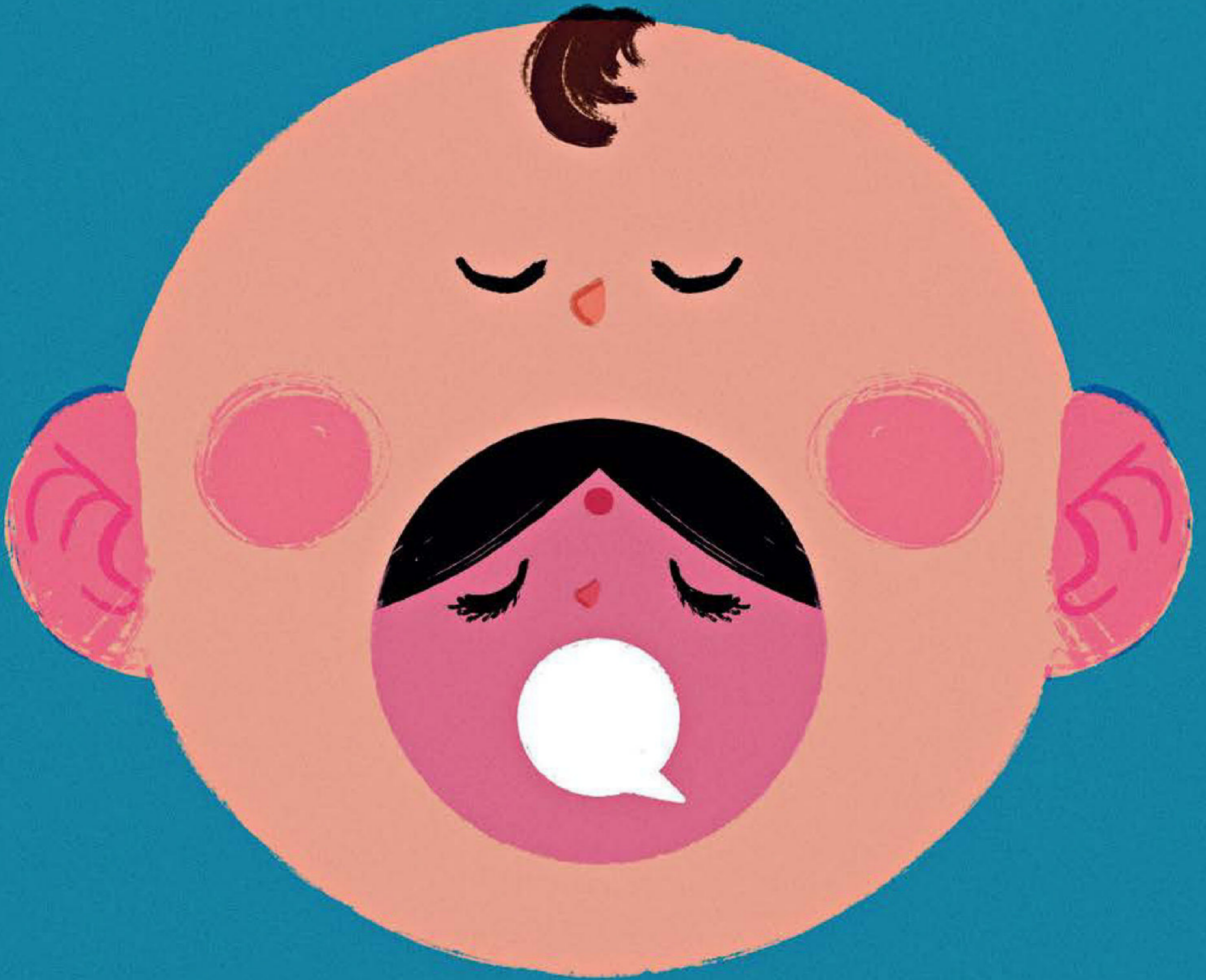
For Sensitive Teeth: Rub with Toothpaste

Brushing regularly with a toothpaste designed for sensitive teeth can ease discomfort because it contains ingredients that coat teeth where the enamel has worn away, dulling sensitivity. Another way to get relief is by rubbing a high-fluoride toothpaste on to irritated teeth and leaving it there—just before bed, for example. The fluoride safeguards enamel, says Yang Gu, an oral pathologist who teaches dentistry at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada.



Another folk remedy is clove oil from cloves. More than 2,000 years ago in China, people chewed cloves to freshen their breath. While using cloves for a toothache is not a new idea, a recent discovery at Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg, in Germany, points to the mechanism behind it. The scientists showed that exposed tooth cells contain TRPC5, a special protein responsible for transmitting sensations of cold to the brain.

Cloves contain a compound called eugenol, which can block TRPC5. Make your own tooth rub by crushing ¼ teaspoon cloves and blending it with ¼ cup olive oil, then rubbing it onto sensitive areas. **R**



Speaking Tongues

Native languages carry within them a vision of the world we inherit. But can one get to the heart of dreams without one?

BY *Blessy Augustine*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Siddhant Jumde*

When I was pregnant, I considered my state only as a ‘condition’—one that made me hungry and uncomfortable. I did everything to prepare for the arrival of my baby, but did not try to imagine what the person growing inside of me would become. I had one fleeting vision, though: Someday I would take her to see the Sistine Chapel and she would be as awestruck as me. I wanted her to be a good traveller. Ruby* is now five and we are yet to make that trip, but she shares my sense of awe.

One day as we were walking back

home from school, she told me about an episode of *The Octonauts*. “They were in the Arctic and saw the Northern Lights. Do you know what that is?” She continued, “I saw it and I felt amazed. I would like to see it for real. Can we go there?”

I had always wanted to see the Northern Lights too but had never shared that with her. *Do you pass on your dreams to your children?* I wondered. But what struck me most was her use of the word ‘amazed’.

At two years old, Ruby babbled expressively but spoke only a few coherent words. I struggled with the

**Name changed to protect privacy*

idea that perhaps she had a learning disability. I brought it up during a visit to the paediatrician, who considered her for a minute and said, "Nothing to worry about. She has intelligent eyes." *What are intelligent eyes?* I wanted to ask. *And what do they have to do with speech?* It was only months later that I realized that paediatricians look for signs of spectrum disorders by studying how toddlers respond to eye contact. I disregarded the 'intelligent eyes' comment and followed more practical advice. I read to Ruby compulsively,

HINDI, FOR ME, IS THE LANGUAGE OF GETTING BY, USED TO BARGAIN WITH SHOPKEEPERS. IT IS TRANSACTIONAL.

named every object in our path, and enunciated carefully. "To-ma-to," I would stress holding the fruit in my hand. Ruby would laugh at how funnily I moved my mouth. I persevered with rhymes and stories. And then one fine day, around the age of three, she began speaking in full sentences, as if she had been speaking all her life.

My parents spoke Malayalam and that, for me, became the language of instruction and conflict. English became a language of discipline taught by teachers who spent money from

their pockets to buy strong wooden rulers that would last a whole academic year's worth of knuckle raps. But it was also the language of easy friendships and—as the only language in which I could read—of stories. I read about the devastating effects of famine in imperial China in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* and the need to find the right word when describing a symptom in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. Around this time, I also taught myself enough Malayalam to be able to read the titles of movies I loved to watch. But to me Malayalam was a peculiar language—heavy, full of tension, masculine, but also full of humour. I realized very early on that the strength of the movies I loved lay in their ability to leave so much unsaid.

When we moved to Canada, Ruby fit in right away, speaking the universal language of *Paw Patrol*, *Peppa Pig* and *Frozen*. Her friends speak Spanish, Arabic and Tamil at home, and so I decided she needed to learn a second language as well. Hindi seemed like a feasible option. But besides the fact that the classes took place on Saturday mornings in a far off location, there was another concern. Whose language was it?

Of course, my husband and I read, write and speak Hindi. But my relationship with it is thin. Hindi, for me, is the language of getting by, used to bargain with auto drivers and shopkeepers. It's the language that bound my Bengali maid to me, even though neither of us knew the correct word for kneading. It

is transactional. A language in which few of us feel at home. Perhaps, I could teach Ruby Malayalam ...

Ruby's friends' parents tell me how important it is for them that their kids learn their vernacular and follow their traditions. I nod, pretending to be a lazy parent. How could I explain how complicated language and tradition become when you are a first-generation immigrant in one place, a second-generation immigrant in another and a curiosity in your 'native land'. But also that some of us belong nowhere on several levels.

Would they look at me with the same incomprehension as my American friend did when I told him that my last name is not a family name but my father's first name, because most Malayali women can only belong to their fathers and their husbands but to neither's family? They do understand



that languages are ties to places and people, an inheritance. But would they understand if I said I didn't really have a mother tongue—just a tongue?

Once Ruby started speaking effortlessly, I redirected my efforts to teaching her to name and differentiate between the many confusing emotions all young kids have. The morning grumpiness versus sadness, anger versus frustration, upset versus hurt. How would I teach her to do that in Malayalam when all I know is the look on the screen that accompanied that emotion but was left unnamed?

The words I do teach her is what, for now, allows her to relate to the world, to know that stars can be amazing, that grumpiness is shaken off but hurt has to be forgiven. I can teach her to be at home in English, even if there is no heritage to pass on. We can both be travellers, and never native.

◆ ◆ ◆

Open Invitation

A man was invited to a wedding. When he reached the hotel, he found two doors. The sign on one said 'Bride Relatives' and the other 'Groom Relatives'. He entered through the Groom door and found another two doors. One had 'Ladies' on it, and the other 'Men'. Entering through the 'Men' door, the man came to a choice of doors called 'People With Gifts' and 'People Without Gifts'. He selected the 'People Without Gifts' door and found himself back outside the hotel.

SOURCE: @MICKEY



PHOTO FEATURE

Art is ... a Matter of Perspective

*A harmless sidewalk or is there more to the story?
These 3D street artists see beyond the asphalt*

BY *Nicole Lewen*



FOTO: © GETTY IMAGES/DUN LAOGHAIRE





▲ **Watch out, a glacial crevasse!**

In 2008, German street artist Edgar Müller brought this dramatic ice age scene to the street at a Festival of World Cultures in Dún Laoghaire, Ireland.

◀ **Who dares** to go into the jaws of the great white shark? This lifelike drawing was a popular photo motif in Fuzhou, China, in 2011. Even more than other types of art, 3D street art relies on audience interaction.

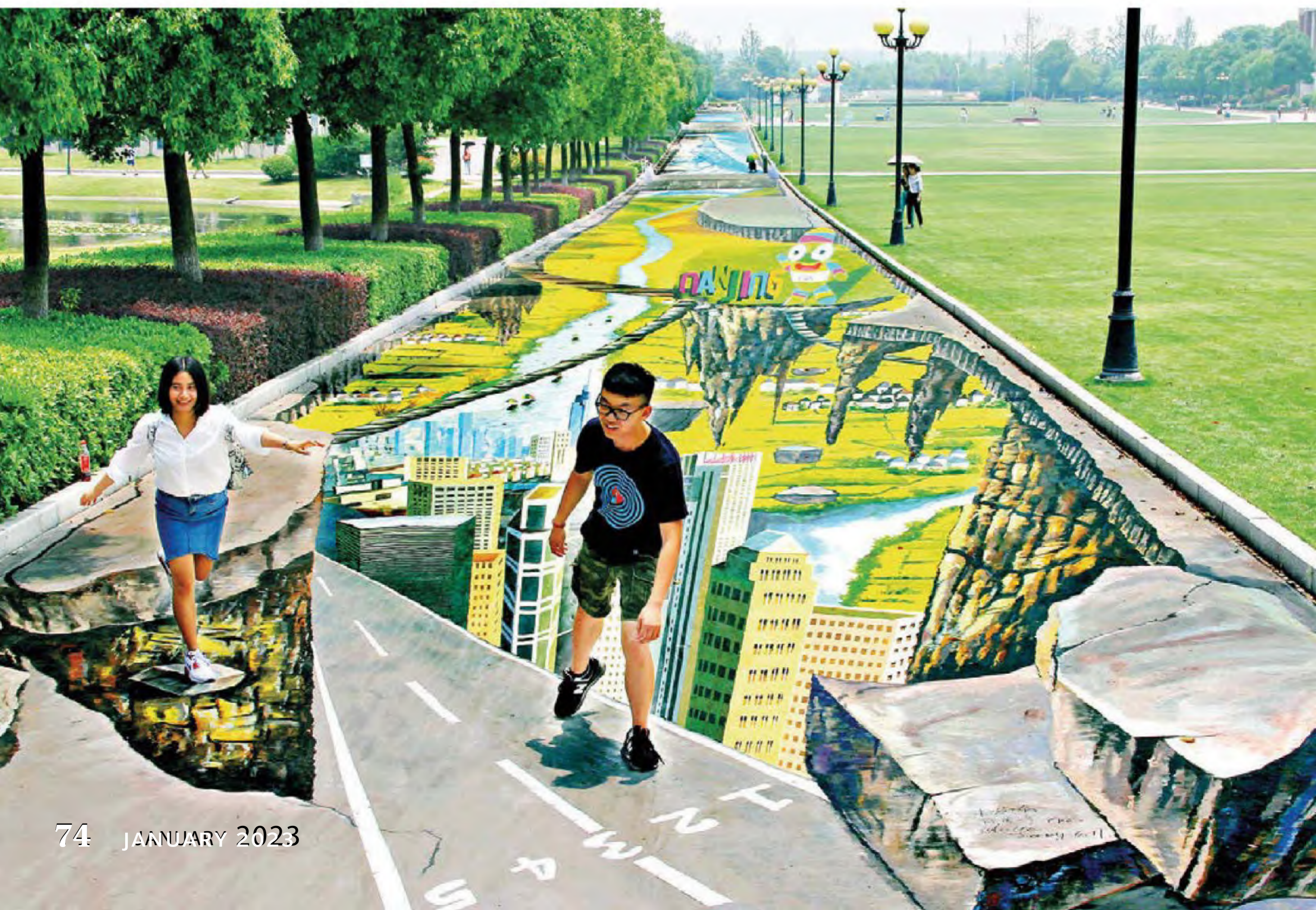
▶ **Sluggo & Co.** have been beautifying the streets of Ann Arbor, USA, since 1987. The bright green creature with the bulging eyes is one of artist's David Zinn's favourite creations.

▼ **Alex Maksiov conjured up** a piece of urban history on this staircase in Istanbul, Turkey, in November 2020. His drawing shows the famous Galata Tower, built as a watchtower in the 14th century.

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) © PICTURE ALLIANCE / REUTERS; © DAVID ZINN; © 2020 ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES;









◀ **Water splash or raindrop?**

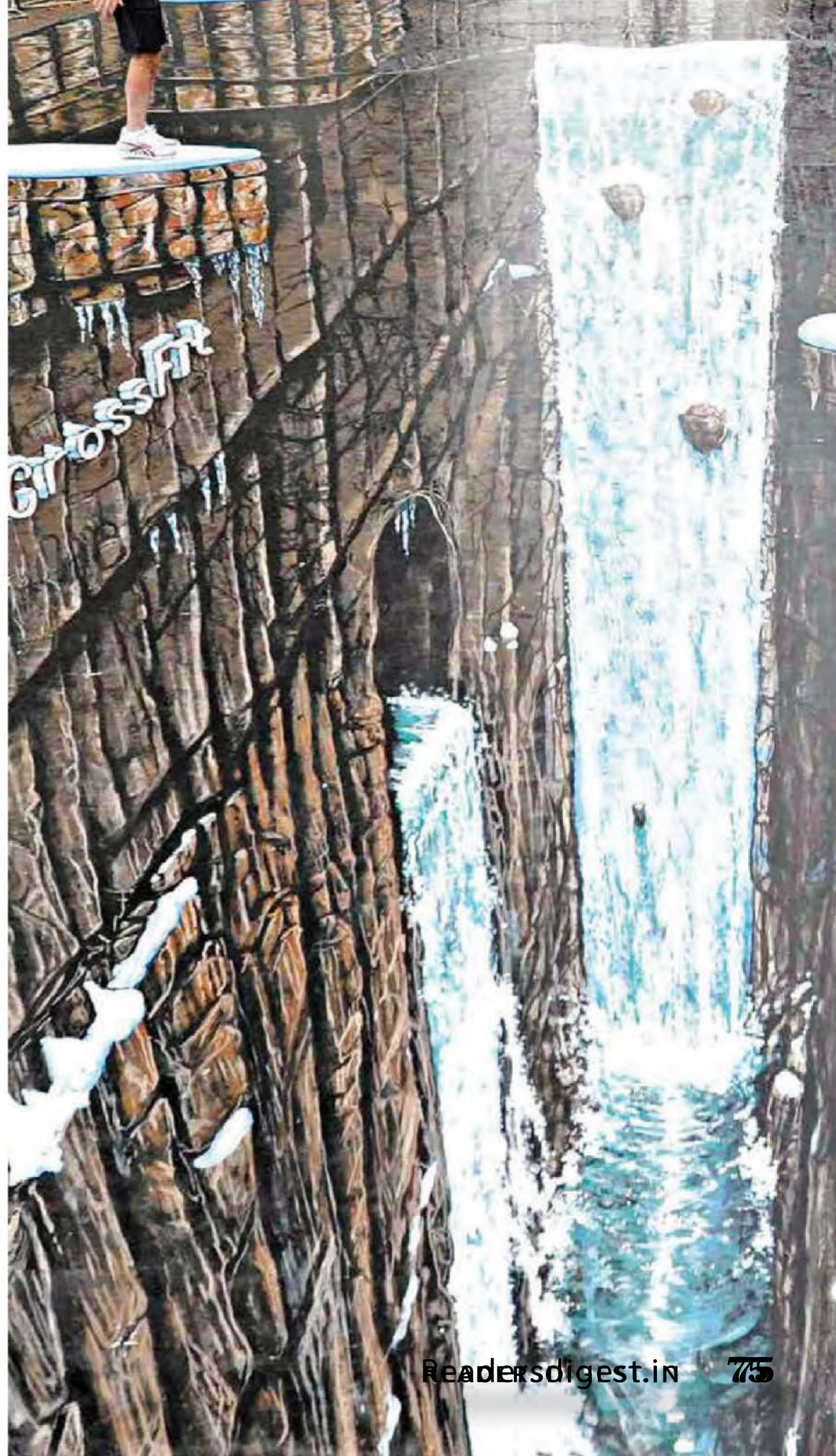
An existential question for the octopus that seems to emerge from a street in Jerusalem, Israel. Maya Koch painted it with chalk at the Street Art Festival in 2012, so whatever his answer, the next downpour washed both octopus and question away.

◀ **It took artist Yang Yongchun**

and his team several weeks to complete these cities and landscapes. In 2014, they were on display at the University of Communication in the Chinese metropolis of Nanjing. When completed, the 7.5-metre-wide artwork stretched over a length of 365 metres and invited students and passers-by to marvel and play.

▶ **The people are real,**

the abyss and waterfalls are fantasy. In 2011 Briton Joe Hill created what was then the world's largest realistic 3D floor painting, covering more than 1,000 square metres amid office towers in London's busy Canary Wharf district. For this photo shoot, actors perched above the "chasm".



PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) © NIRALON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; © PICTURE ALLIANCE / REUTERS; © IMAGINECHINA LIMITED / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



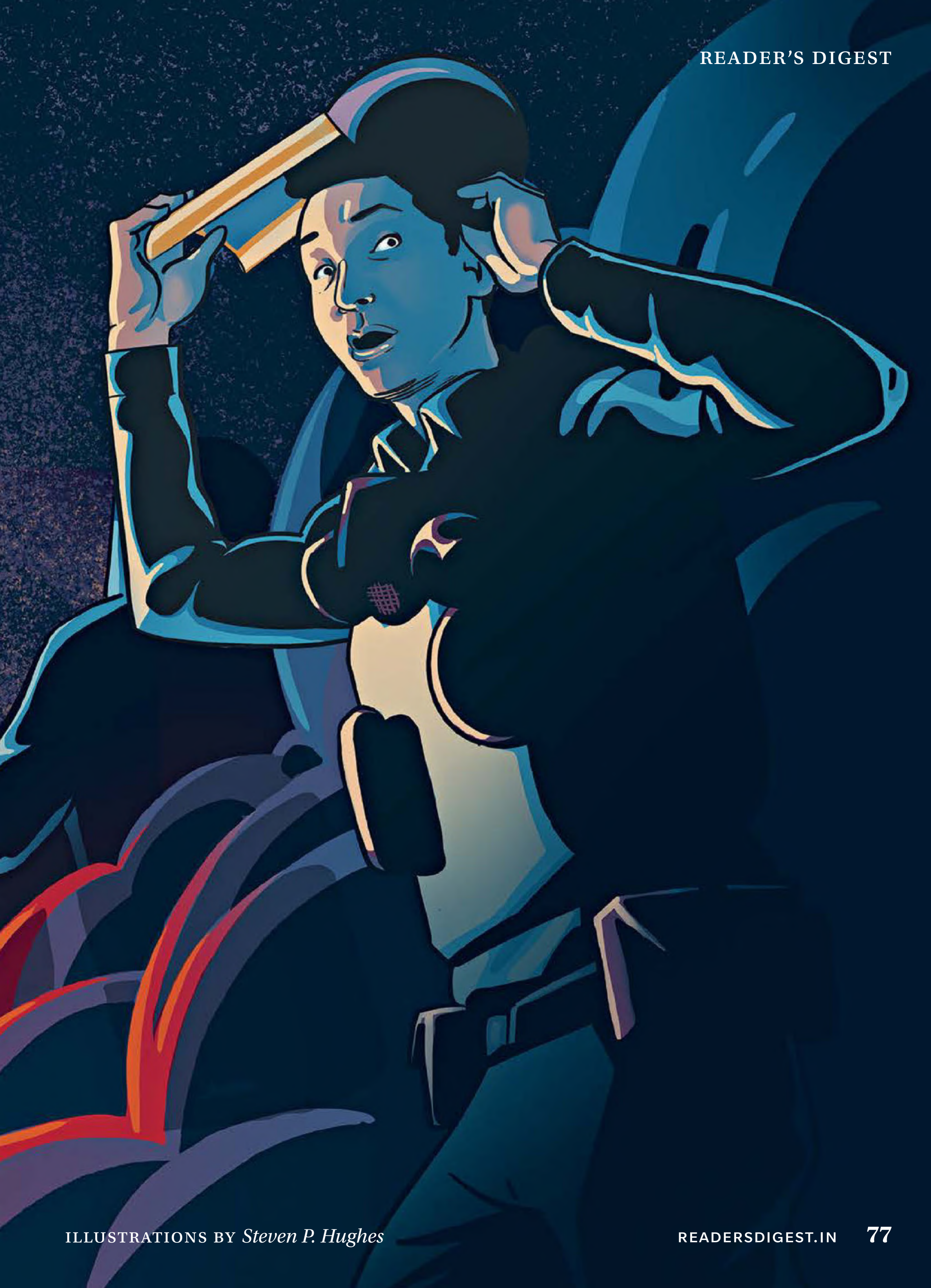
DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

UNDER SIEGE

Two years ago, rioters stormed the US Capitol in a bid to overturn election results after Donald Trump lost. This is the story of the people who protected it

BY Anita Bartholomew

EXCERPTED FROM THE BOOK *SIEGE: AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY*



OFFICER DANIEL HODGES ducked into the relative safety of a hallway just inside the US Capitol Building to collect himself. Since arriving with his unit at 2:01 p.m. that 6 January 2021, he'd been cursed at and punched by angry rioters trying to gain entry. One had even tried to gouge out his right eye. Still, he didn't rest long. Hodges, 32, of the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C., took a deep breath, then answered a call for reinforcements.

He made his way down a corridor. Cries and shouts of combat coming from behind the double doors at the end, which led to the lower west terrace tunnel, guided him to where he was needed. On the other side of the doors, smoke and chemical residue fogged the air, but the full gas mask he'd donned moments earlier protected his lungs and his eyes.

Fellow officers were at the arched opening to the tunnel, through which president-elect Joe Biden would walk on to the lower west terrace in two weeks' time at his inauguration—provided police could hold the Capitol Building against those determined to thwart the transfer of power. Law-enforcement officers there were trying to defend it and the lawmakers inside.

Officers were stacked about five across and six deep, shields up,

somehow holding back the insurgents who had already smashed the glass of the first set of double doors within the tunnel. The immediate goal: Clear the mob from the tunnel and secure those doors, which led into the Capitol.

It wouldn't be easy. The officers were up against thousands of angry rioters. (Some estimates later put the number of rioters at as many as 10,000, while it's thought that, by day's end, roughly 2,000 law enforcement officers answered the call to defend the seat of government.) Though they were attacking the seat of American power, most in the crowd had an abiding love for the nation and the Constitution, even if many had only a vague understanding of what was in that document.

One of them was Danny Rodriguez of California. He had learnt much of what he believed from YouTube personalities who claimed to reveal the hidden 'truths' that traditional media didn't want their audiences to know. He didn't consider himself a QAnon member, but Rodriguez, 38, believed some of the movement's conspiracy theories: Not only was the election stolen, the 'theft' was perpetrated by a cabal of elite paedophiles who trafficked children.

The insurgents doused the officers with bear spray and other chemicals,

**“WE’VE GOT TO HOLD THIS DOOR!”
SHOUTED THE POLICE COMMANDER.**



and battered them with sticks, bats, feet and fists. Hodges and other new arrivals filled gaps in the back of the line. His radio had been lost in the earlier battle, and with radio communications sparse to non-existent anyway, Hodges didn't realize that parts of the mob had gained entry into the Capitol through other doors and windows. As far as the cops guarding the tunnel knew, this was the last line of defence. If the officers failed to hold back the hordes, thousands more would surge through the building. If they made it through, it was anyone's guess what they would do to trapped Vice President Mike Pence and lawmakers.

"We've got to hold this door!" shouted the police commander.

Hodges moved up to the front, adding his shield to those of fellow officers with whom he stood shoulder to shoulder. They fought to control

just a small portion of the tunnel, sometimes mere centimetres. But every bit counted.

Hodges felt sure that if they could just hold the line a little longer, reinforcements would arrive. Some were already trickling in from the FBI and nearby police jurisdictions, but the D.C. National Guard had not yet been authorized.

Hodges held on tightly to his shield, since insurgents had been yanking shields from cops and passing them back to other rioters. A heavysset, bald, 60-ish man who had already stolen at least one shield grabbed for another. A cop at the front line warned him: Release it or be sprayed. The man refused, then collapsed, complaining of asthma, as a stream of chemical gas forced him to loosen his grip.

Some officers pulled the stricken man inside and administered first

aid. The officers moved forward, gaining a bit of ground against the mob. Hodges, now face to face with the insurrectionists, braced himself against a metal door frame halfway down the tunnel entrance to help him hold his position.

Without warning, the momentum shifted. The cops were pushed back, losing the ground they'd just gained. Insurrectionists, at least 50 deep, moved against them as one.

"Heave ho! Heave ho!"

Hodges, still wedged between the door and its metal frame, got caught in this wave and found himself unable to move.

"Heave ho!"

To his left, a rioter took advantage of Hodges's vulnerability and slammed a shield against him. With the weight of all the bodies behind him, pushing from the mouth of the tunnel, he had Hodges trapped between the shield on his left and the door frame to his right. Arms pinned, Hodges cried for help.

Another insurgent, seeing Hodges immobilized, grabbed his gas mask and used it to bash his head against the door, blow after dizzying blow. The trapped officer thought these might be his last moments. He struggled to free his arms as his attacker wordlessly screamed in rage or glee—Hodges couldn't tell which.



The insurgent ripped the mask off his face, and Hodges gulped in a rush of chemical spray.

"Heave ho!"

The mob pressed forward, forcing the air from his lungs.

Someone grabbed the baton from Hodges's immobilized hand and began pummeling him with it—smashing it against his skull, his shoulders, his face. His lip split open. All he could do was scream until another officer was finally able to dislodge him and help him move to the rear.

SGT. AQUILINO GONELL was unable to help Hodges. Only a few feet away, he found himself in hand-to-hand combat with flag-draped rioters wielding bear spray, hammers, rebar, knives and flagpoles thrown like spears.

Gonell, 43, a US Capitol Police sergeant, had fought in Iraq. This was more terrifying than anything he'd encountered there: a medieval battle that pitted a handful of men

and women in uniform against an anarchic mob, surging toward them in waves, fresh fighters on both sides taking up the attack at the mouth of the tunnel as earlier combatants, spent, fell back.

Gonell was realistic about his chances—not good—but for as long as he was able, he was going to keep the mob from crossing the line.

Rioters grabbed an officer near him, attempting to yank him out of the tunnel. Gonell grasped the back

bested his attackers, using his baton to thwart an insurgent who was bent on dragging him into the mob. Finally able to right himself, Gonell fell back in line, his body racked with pain.

With no relief in sight, he fought on.

IF CENTRAL CASTING were to choose someone to play the quintessential Irish beat cop of a bygone era, that person would look very much like Jimmy Albright—red haired, earnest, reassuringly solid. At the other end of

THEIR RADIOS CRACKLED WITH DISTRESS CALLS: “OFFICER DOWN ...”

of his collar and pulled him back to the police line. A moment later, the insurgents almost got another officer.

As Gonell reached out to help him, he stepped on a pile of riot shields slick with pepper spray and bear spray. He slipped, lost his footing, and fell hard. The mob descended, taking advantage of Gonell’s sudden vulnerability. Hostile hands grabbed his leg, tugged his riot shield, dragged him forward by his shoulder strap. His shoulder felt as if it was being wrenched out of its socket.

Gonell fought back with equal ferocity—punching, kicking, clawing. He looked to nearby officers for aid, but they were also under attack. If anyone was going to save him, it would be himself. The blows piled injury on injury, but somehow he

the cop spectrum would be his friend Michael Fanone. Wiry, intense, tattooed from wrists to neck and exuding a daredevil vibe, he’d spent much of his police career undercover, rubbing elbows with criminals. After working together in D.C.’s Metropolitan Police Department for about five years, the two were best buddies.

Distress calls had been coming from the Capitol Police while Fanone was on his way to an undercover drugs operation. Through radio transmissions, he’d learned that officers were calling for volunteers. The undercover operation would have to wait. Fanone turned around and headed for the station, where he met up with Albright.

The two arrived at the Capitol Building at 3:04 p.m., their radios

crackling with distress calls: *“Officer down ... Officer needs assistance.”* Albright noticed a trail of blood on the ground.

They entered the building's south entrance into a corridor lined with massive fluted white pillars that, in better times, evinced dignified serenity. From there, they moved down toward the lower west terrace, from which the most urgent calls for help arose.

Outside a pair of double doors that led to the tunnel, they encountered a

there!” called Fanone.

On the other side of the tunnel, a new chant rose from the mob:

“Pull the cops out. Pull the cops out. Pull the cops out.”

One of those near the front was Danny Rodriguez, a Taser in his hand.

SERGEANT GONELL was having trouble breathing. He'd inhaled and swallowed more chemical spray than seemed possible. Then he heard a voice shout, “Come on, guys, I just got here! Back up if you need a break!”

THEY LOOKED OUT AT THE INSURGENTS AND REALIZED WHAT THEY WERE UP AGAINST.

number of officers who had been at the front line. Their eyes, which had been drenched with tear gas and pepper spray, were little more than swollen red slits.

Those officers passed bottled water to each other and washed as much of the toxic residue from their faces as they could before heading back into the fray. Fanone and Albright fell in line behind them.

A chemical fog wafted around their ankles as they made their way forward across a floor slimed by what other cops, overcome by chemical sprays, had vomited up. Exhausted officers—40 or 50 of them—had been battling for control of this entrance for the better part of an hour.

“We need to get fresh bodies up

He didn't know the voice, but he knew he needed that break if he was going to be any good to anyone ever again. Gonell backed up.

Fanone took his place at the front line. Albright, to his left and inches behind him, held Fanone's vest so they wouldn't be separated.

They looked out at the hordes of insurgents and realized, for the first time, what they were up against. Just one small point was in their favour: Despite the officers' being insanely outnumbered, only so many of the mob could push into the narrow space of the tunnel at any one time.

It didn't make it a fair fight, but it might be winnable if they could shove them back far enough and close the double doors inside the tunnel. If

police managed to gain ground. First a couple of metres, then farther still. Invigorated by their momentum, they kept pushing, all the way to the threshold.

Then one of the cops hollered, “Knife!”

Albright saw it too: black, with a blade 15-centimetres long. He quickly slapped

it out of the rioter’s hand, grabbed it from the ground and passed it back over his shoulder to the officers behind him. In the seconds it took to do that, Fanone was gone.

“I got one!” yelled a voice in the mob.

THEY GOT ONE, Danny Rodriguez saw. They dragged the police officer on his stomach down the steps, away from the tunnel and into the mob.

Rodriguez held his Taser in his hand. Like others in the crowd, he considered himself a loyal ally of the police. But this officer was on the wrong side. Rodriguez reached out with his Taser, pressed it to the cop’s neck, and pulled the trigger. The cop screamed in agony.

IT ALL HAPPENED SO QUICKLY, Fanone couldn’t say who dragged him from the tunnel or how. The single-minded mob came at him from every direction, a mad, raging monster with

they failed to hold the line, the mob wouldn’t just overrun the building, free to attack whomever they encountered—every cop in that tunnel would be trampled.

“Back it up!” Fanone yelled, pushing at the rioters.

An insurgent with a stolen police shield thrust it forward, and countless others added their weight to his in a rush to get deeper inside.

“Heave ho. Heave ho.”

“Come on, push ’em back,” Fanone implored his fellow cops. “Dig in!”

The time was about 3:15 p.m., and chaos reigned. The rioters at the front had tasted blood and wanted more. The battering of fists, feet, flagpoles and other improvised weapons against police flesh had a powerful effect on this contingent of otherwise ordinary people. Some were clearly ready to fight to the death, if it came to that.

But against the odds, the



dozens of limbs. That monster meant to kill him.

Fanone struggled mightily, but too many hands held him. He couldn't escape. One hand hit him with a crutch, another with a baton. A third bludgeoned him with a flagpole.

"Get his gun!"

"Kill him with his gun!"

Hands grasped his radio, stripped away his ammunition belt, tore the badge from his vest. He struggled to escape, powerless against them or the weapons they used to beat his torso, his arms, his legs.

Someone lunged for his gun. Fanone managed to keep it, thinking he could shoot his way out. Bad idea, he realized. He might get a couple of them, but then they'd kill him for sure.

Then came a jolt of electricity to his neck. Someone had used a Taser on him. Waves of liquid lightning charged through his body, lighting up every nerve ending, screeching through his veins, his muscles, his viscera.

He was going to die here. He thought of his four daughters. He would never see them again. What would they do without their dad?

Close to losing consciousness, he had one hope left: If he could reach just a couple of them, appeal to their humanity ...: "I got kids!" he cried out.

JIMMY ALBRIGHT LOOKED DOWN into the mob and saw an insurrectionist dragging Fanone back up toward



him at the tunnel entrance. Albright reached out, grabbed his partner, and pulled him back inside in the corridor, where he cradled the limp, unconscious Fanone. He wasn't sure at first that his friend was even alive.

"Mike, stay in there, buddy. Mike, it's Jimmy. I'm here."

He was alive. Albright could see that now. But he wasn't responding, and he was having trouble breathing. Albright kept talking, kept trying to reach Fanone in those deep recesses of the unconscious that his friend had disappeared into, telling him he needed him to wake up. They had plans. They were going to go duck hunting together—remember?

"C'mon, Mike."

Could Fanone hear him?

Minutes ticked by. Finally, Fanone stirred, coming back to the world of the living.

Weakly, he looked up at Albright. "Did you take that door back?"

AT 4:32 P.M., ACTING Defence Secretary Christopher Miller approved deployment of the D.C. National Guard, and National Guardsmen began arriving at the Capitol around 5:30 p.m.

By 6:30 p.m., law enforcement had cleared the remaining members of the mob from the Capitol and its grounds.

At 3:42 a.m. on 7 January, Vice President Mike Pence, in his capacity as president of the Senate, declared Joe Biden the winner of the 2020 presidential election.

Soon after Michael Fanone was attacked, Jimmy Albright drove him to a hospital emergency room, which was crowded with fellow wounded officers as well as demonstrators. There it was determined that Fanone had suffered a concussion and a heart attack. Officer Daniel Hodges also appeared to have suffered a concussion. They were among the 140 officers injured that

day, some suffering grievous injuries.

Many hours later, at 4 a.m., Sgt. Aquilino Gonell finally arrived home. Longing for the comfort of his wife's touch, he was unable to hug her because his uniform was saturated with chemicals that could harm her—bear spray, tear gas, pepper spray. The residue burnt his skin even after he showered. It was impossible to sleep.

Still, even after all he'd endured, he got up again a couple of hours later and headed back to the Capitol by 8 a.m. His country needed him.

*Editor's note: Since 6 January 2021, more than 900 protesters have been arrested and some 400 have been convicted. At press time, Danny Rodriguez's trial was scheduled for February. He has filed a plea of not guilty. **R***

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So, This is Love ...

My wife likes to keep the mystery in our relationship. For example, I never know what is going to arrive for her from Amazon today.

@WILDCHARGEART

My love language is quietly leaving a meme in your DMs like a cat leaving a dead lizard or bug on your doorstep because it likes you.

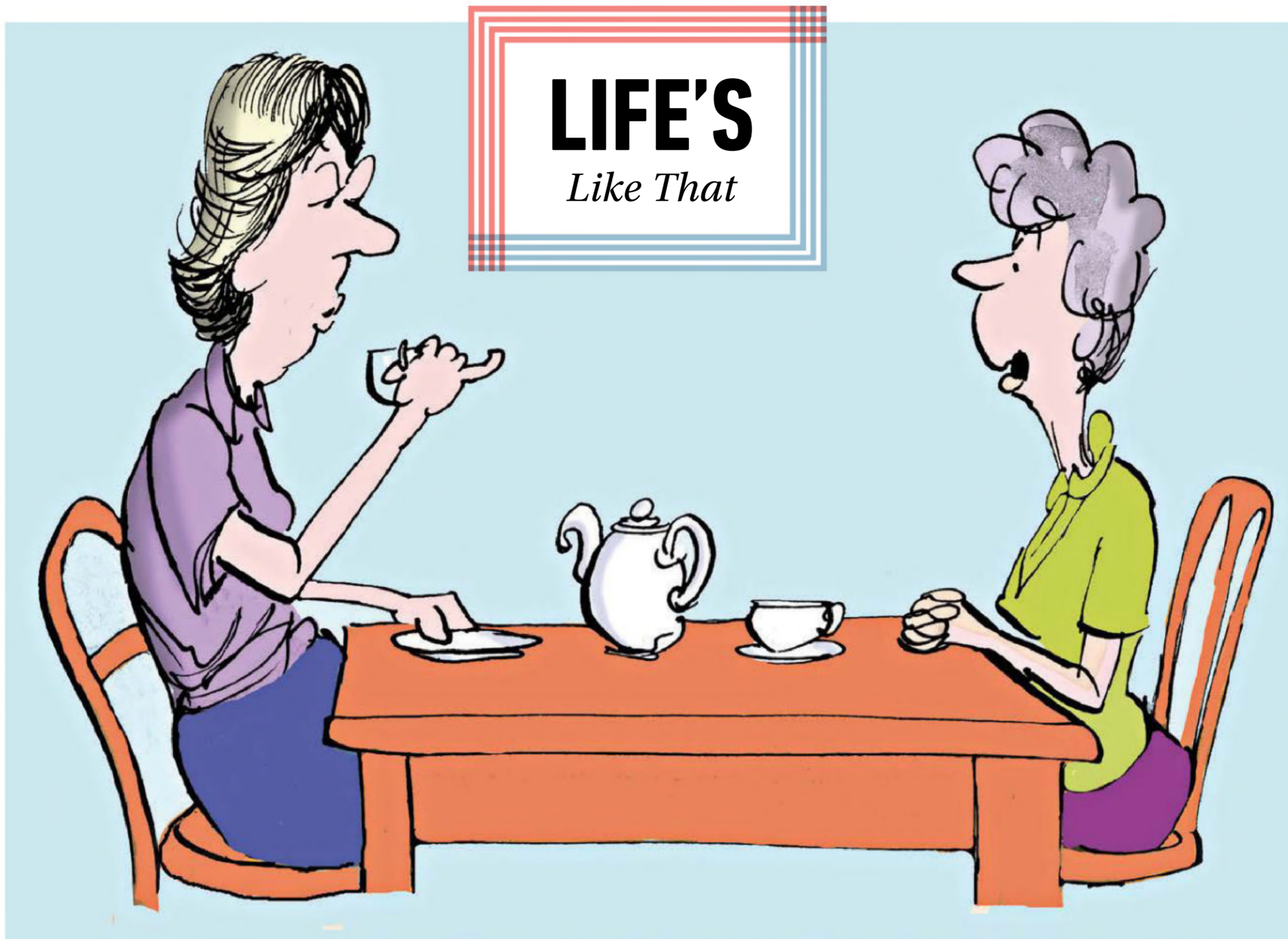
@WILDCHARGEART

Nothing has been nor will ever be more chaotic than the 'it's complicated' relationship status option on Facebook.

@ANNIKAMARRIE

Before I was married I had no idea that I was always right.

@IWEARAONESIE



**“After a few more years of complaining
I think I may change my life”**

The Going’s Tough

I show affection for my pets by holding them against me and whispering I love you repeatedly as they struggle to escape from my arms.

—[@MESARCASTICNVR](#)

How much does a roof cost? Nothing—it’s on the house.

—[@THEPUNNYWORLD](#)

The Longest Day

A man giving a long-winded speech says,

“I’m sorry I talked so long. I left my watch at home.” A voice from the crowd replies, “There’s a calendar behind you.”

GCFL.NET

Somewhere, there is an employee specifically designing the bags of very small screws and hardware that fling their contents across the room when you try to open them. I will one day find

**“Never feel badly about walking away
from losers who drain you for any reason.
It’s self care.”**

—[@TOPHER_CRUX](#)

something with your scent, and release the hounds upon you.

—@FULKERY1

Had to change my work password twice today and I'm rapidly running out of Brendan Fraser movies.

—@MATTONAROOOF

Throws caution into the wind.
Comes back and hits me in the face.

—@ITS_A_BONUS

Murphy's Law

I feel like it's customary to lose a meatball out of your sub when you're wearing your favourite shirt.

—@COSMICDREAMER6

Holy Matrimony

Due to traffic, I didn't show up on time for the start of my wife's art opening and so for the rest of the evening she introduced me as her late husband.

—@CHALZAMORA

Doing the Dirty

Whenever I see a couple doing yard work, I like the one standing by the bags of dirt who looks like they can't quite believe they are outdoors and can't fathom how they've gotten caught up in this terrible thing.

—@ANNIEMUMARY

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

GROWING PAINS

Parenting is HARD!

Be nice to your children's teachers. Especially elementary ones, cuz kids have loose lips and that teacher has all the dirt on you.

—@THECISCOKIDDER

I told my five-year-old to brush her teeth so she doesn't get cavities and she responded with, "So what, they're gonna fall out anyways." I had no comeback to this.

—@BUNANDLEGGINGS

My three-year-old had a meltdown because she was smiling in a pic, but the puppy wasn't. So I get it, parents that drive their entire family into a lake.

—@THECISCOKIDDER

My four-year-old told me to hold her baby as she walked away with her dad. My four-year-old left me in a restaurant alone with a fake

baby in my arms. I should've put the baby down, but I didn't. I just held it like a real baby. Why? I don't know why. Parenthood is wild.

—@BUNANDLEGGINGS

Watching a group of 11 children try to work as a group to solve a puzzle really helps you understand why international diplomacy is so flawed.

—@PINKCAMOTO

The Many Gifts of Chandralekha

Remembering a master of movement, architect of modern Indian dance and a friend to all she met

BY *Suresh Menon*

PHOTOGRAPH BY *Bandeep Singh*

There was an aura about Chandra that lit up everything around her. Chandralekha—dancer and choreographer, activist and designer, poet and painter—had the gift of friendship. She had too the gift of elevating the most ordinary of actions—opening her gate or waving to a friend—into a narrative poem.

It didn't matter what time of day it was, Chandra always looked her best, gentle white hair framing a delicate face, with a red bindi on her forehead and kajal lining her expressive eyes. Her choice of colours spoke of a person who celebrated life and was keen to pass on its joys and excitements to anyone who met her. It was my wife,

the sculptor Dimpy, who introduced me to Chandra and Dasrath, the iconic designer, at their Besant Nagar residence in Chennai which faced the Bay of Bengal. Dimpy's artistic sensibilities were highly refined; mine needed polishing. We were in our 20s then; in my case it was an age when I knew everything. What I didn't fathom, I put down to something lacking in what I was expected to understand. Initially, I didn't get Chandra or her art. I was too full of myself, a journalist, who had travelled the world and was raised in a family where Bharatnatyam was *the* dance form. My sister and some friends trained as dancers when young, so it was difficult to absorb the idea of



someone questioning the very basis of the form. Truthfully, I hadn't given it a lot of thought. Chennai—and Chandra—gave me a second chance. After stints in Delhi and Dubai, I returned to work there. This time, we lived minutes away from Chandra, and we had a young son who then was a fan of the rock-opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Someone had given him a video, and Chandra came with her companion Sadanand for dinner and a viewing.

In the course of conversation she mentioned that she had seen the original. My son, then 13 or so, was in awe. Chandra was no longer just his parents' friend, but his too. Teenagers can be more judgemental and bigger know-alls than adults, and it was fascinating to watch a friendship develop between them. Chandra was in her 70s then. It is a special thing, this ability to speak to different age groups in their language without strain. Chandra connected effortlessly with people, from the vegetable vendor to the great and celebrated; each thought of her as a special friend.

Dimpy and I often sat on the beach with Chandra, munching peanuts while she told us stories of Henri Cartier-Bresson and other friends. After seeing her choreography *Yantra*, Cartier-Bresson had said, "Such wonderful slowness; slowness is the only luxury we have left in the world today."

Chandra's dissatisfaction with Bharatanatyam, a dance form with mythological content led her to give it up for over a decade while her own

thinking on dance and physical expression crystallized. "She understood dance to be not a celebration of the gods but rather a celebration of man and woman—especially woman," wrote *The Guardian* in her obituary. Chandralekha had been a crusader for equality, human rights, women's rights, secularism, pluralism and the environment. She didn't compartmentalize—it was a great synthesis.

"It is all energy," she said, and went about combining movements from yoga and martial arts like Kerala's *kalarippayattu*. The additions, far from accreting to what existed, pared it down in the manner of the late works of artists like Matisse (a Chandra favourite).

From 1985 to 2003, she choreographed 10 works, which re-established her reputation, perhaps raising it beyond what she had achieved as a Bharatanatyam artiste in the same league as Balasaraswati and Rukmini Devi. Modern Indian dance, she showed, could be both modern and Indian and didn't need to look towards the West for inspiration or sustenance. It was at once unique and universal.

At the turn of the century, Dimpy and I visited Chandra at rehearsals. One such, for *Sharira*, I think, saw Tishani Doshi, later acclaimed poet and novelist, practising to the music of the Gundecha brothers. Chandra's instructions were pared down then too. Sadanand wrote that "for her, the dancer was someone who did not merely aestheticize the body, but also



The author, with Chandralekha at his home in Bengaluru, 2004

stimulated the imagination by politicizing it.” The question of women affected Chandra the most: women in all their roles, involving questions of sexuality, sensuality, femininity. Chandra had created the first poster for the Forum Against Oppression of Women. She was a true rebel, to quote what Cyril Connolly had said about George Orwell; many were merely stage rebels. “While men run the world, she runs life,” she wrote of the burden of the woman.

Chandra was remarkably optimistic about the goodness in us. Once five of us piled into our car to the theatre for the movie *Lagaan*. She hadn't been to the cinema in years, and enjoyed it hugely. She was generous in her praise for a dancer. But it was after the movie that she gave us a glimpse into her faith in humanity. The driver had somehow managed to lock the car with all of us outside. I could sense the apprehension rising in me when she said with clarity and conviction: “Don't worry,

this is India, someone will come to our help.” And someone, a stranger, did!

When she needed a break after a surgery, she came to stay with us in Bangalore. She was 76 then, having left home at 17, and said, “You can run away from your family, but you can't run from your genes.” We gathered around the TV to watch the election results. Chandra was wickedly funny, her eyes dancing, her child-like laughter bouncing off the walls. The composer John Cage had once recorded her laughter and played it on a loop at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. It was that precious.

Later, at the airport, she had to take a wheelchair, something that went against her grain. Humour was the counter. After one arrived and she sat in it, she told the airport assistant, “Now get some for the others too.”

The three of us went to Chennai to see her one last time after Sadanand had indicated time might be running out. The cancer was in its final stages, but she was dressed as always, her kajal in place. On her visit home, she had told us how she saw our house as a living being. “How is your house?” she now asked, as if she were enquiring after a friend. Then she asked of my wife, “Show me your recent works.” We embraced, knowing we were saying goodbye for the last time. As I write this, she has been gone for 16 years. Few people lived in the present with Chandra's intensity. Fewer still were so unconcerned about the future. **R**

A Species In the Pink

Despite pressure from development, flamingos are thriving on the shores of one of India's most populous cities, with a little help from its locals

BY Vaishnavi Chandrashekhar



It is not yet 8:00 a.m., and the sun is already fierce on a small rowboat anchored a kilometer from the eastern banks of Thane Creek, an inlet separating the island city of Mumbai from the Indian mainland.

A yellow cloth flutters in the line of mangroves along the shore. Behind the trees, tall buildings shimmer in a haze of pollution; in front of them, thousands of flamingos are gathering, flying in from nearby roosting sites. As the sun ascends, the tidal water ebbs, exposing the mudflats that are the flamingos' feeding grounds.

The army of pink advances.

In a boat, Mrugank Prabhu unpacks his camera, sets up his telescope, and begins his count.

Prabhu is a scientist with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), which is leading an ambitious 10-year-long study to monitor a unique phenomenon. Every winter, thousands of greater and lesser flamingos fly into Mumbai, forming a sea of pink against a backdrop of skyscrapers, bridges and oil refineries along the 26-kilometer-long Thane Creek. The seasonal gathering is a source of wonder in Mumbai, and also a bit of a mystery.

The flamingos only began visiting Mumbai in significant numbers in the

1990s. As the city grew in the 1970s and '80s, so did the volume of untreated sewage flowing into Thane Creek, nurturing the algae that are the flamingos' main food, and turning the area into a feeding ground for the birds. Their numbers have increased in the past two decades, from at least 10,000 in 2007 to an estimated 1,30,000 this year.

The phenomenon illustrates the complexity of urban coastal ecosystems in India, say experts. Sometimes, "human impact results in conditions that seem terrible for nature at a glance, but are actually a gold mine for some species," says Sunjoy Monga, a veteran local naturalist, who has also led a study on Mumbai wildlife. Now, the flamingos are reshaping the ecological mindset of the city too, showing what wildlife can do for conservation even in the most pressured environments.

Flamingos have become a source of pride for locals. In the past few years, citizens have been holding annual flamingo-themed festivals and runs to raise awareness of local wetlands.



Flamingo numbers in Thane Creek have gone from 10,000 in 2007 to an estimated 1,30,000 this year.

In 2018, authorities designated almost 1,700 hectares of the creek as a flamingo sanctuary.

Yet threats to these remarkable birds remain, including a bridge that is under construction across the lower reaches of Thane Creek where the water spills into Mumbai Harbour. The BNHS study—the first of its duration in urban India, paid for by regional planning authorities—aims to keep a check on the impacts of development by monitoring the abundance and biology of the flamingos and the biochemical characteristics of the creek. Now at the halfway mark, the study is unearthing some surprises. Flamingos seem to be adapting to the bridge construction for the moment—they stay 500 metres or so from the site—but the same environmental shifts that helped draw the birds here in the first place are changing the mudflats in ways that could jeopardize their future.

Massive flocks of greater and lesser flamingos are often associated with the saline and alkaline lakes of Kenya and Tanzania. India has the largest

population of lesser flamingos outside the African continent, mostly in the salt deserts of the western state of Gujarat—the species is considered ‘near threatened’ by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. There are few historical records of flamingos in Mumbai; one from 1891 suggests they were an occasional bird of passage.

Today’s flocks are thought to come largely from Gujarat’s breeding grounds, some 600 kilometers away. Six birds tagged with satellite trackers in March of this year migrated to that region after leaving Mumbai. Where else the birds might go will be revealed in the coming years, says Prabhu. In the meantime, thanks to leg-banding efforts by BNHS, scientists do know that some of the same birds come back to Mumbai year after year. It’s as if they have place memory, says Prabhu.

The place, in this case, is bordered by a 400-square-kilometer port and nuclear facility to the west and high-rises and another port to the east. In between, some nature manages to thrive: an estimated 65 species of

migratory birds are found in the Thane Creek mudflats, which stretch for seven square kilometers, and another 100 bird species live in the surrounding mangrove stands.

To estimate flamingo abundance, Prabhu and his team sail out in their boats, using binoculars and telescopes to count birds along one-kilometer transects. At the creek's mouth, which yawns to over several kilometers wide, the team members must row, each in their own boat, closer to shore just as the water is receding and the birds are arriving. This way, they can position themselves in the middle of the action and get a reliable count.

in food that's helped attract flamingos, however. Looking at satellite images of the creek, Prabhu found that mud deposition, which created the vast mudflats that host the flamingos, started increasing dramatically in the 1980s. The deposition was probably due to construction debris and sewage from expanding urban development washing into the creek during the monsoon, he says.

Ironically, the mudflat habitat the flamingos depend on is now potentially threatened by excess mangrove growth, also fuelled by nutrients from the sewage. Because the mangroves cannot expand landward into the city,

IF POLLUTION HAS BEEN GOOD FOR THE FLAMINGOS, IT HAS BEEN LETHAL FOR FISH.

The birds feed relentlessly, stalking across the mudflats, beaks sweeping the ground, taking in the muddy water that will be parsed for food through their unique filtration systems. Greater flamingos feed on a variety of food including mussels, shrimp and cyanobacteria—also known as blue-green algae—but lesser flamingos mainly eat cyanobacteria. Vast quantities of this algae covers the Thane Creek mudflats, more than in other creeks around the state, says Reshma Pitale, a marine biologist who leads the BNHS team responsible for monitoring the water and soil along the creek.

It's not just sewage-driven growth

they are growing into the creek, says Prabhu. Satellite studies show mangroves are shrinking the width of the waterway and potentially encroaching into the mudflats. Mangroves are a vital shield against storm surge and also act as nurseries for fish; felling them was banned in the surrounding state of Maharashtra in 2018 after decades of legal battles to stem their destruction. The ban also means that authorities at the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary must now get permission from the courts to remove new growth.

Coastal habitats are dynamic, influenced by both land and sea, says Pitale. Soils and biodiversity in Thane Creek



BNHS scientists Mrugank Prabhu (left) and Reshma Pitale studying the Mumbai flamingos and their Thane Creek habitat

change upstream to downstream, tide to tide, and season to season. And if pollution has been good for the flamingos, it has been lethal for fish. The diversity of fish in the creek has crashed since the 1980s, from 22 species recorded in the early 1990s to 12 species found in a 2000 survey. The decline is attributed to industrial pollution in earlier decades as well as the increased sewage and debris in more recent ones. Changes in the composition of mud may be changing the organisms on the mudflats, too. In the past two years, Pitale and her team have observed an explosion of alien bivalves on the mudflats. “Will this change the community? Will it outcompete other organisms?” says Pitale. “Anything can happen.”

ON EARTH DAY, APRIL 2022, a small group of upper-middle class residents meet on a trail along a dense patch of



mangroves in Navi Mumbai, the town on the eastern banks at the mouth of Thane Creek. This and nearby mangroves and shallow ponds provide roosting sites for the flamingos when high tide covers the mudflats. The residents, members of Save Navi Mumbai Environment, a citizens' network to protect local mangroves and wetlands, introduce themselves and describe their path to environmental activism. Many of them were first moved by the destruction of greenery in their own backyards; one professional, who brought his young son along, says he got involved after losing a local pond to a development project. Another man says he and his wife traveled to Lake Nakuru in Kenya to see flamingos some years ago, unaware of their presence in his own

city. “What fools we were,” he says.

After the meeting, Sunil and Shruti Agarwal, co-founders of Save Navi Mumbai Environment, take me up to their apartment, one of hundreds in the high-rises bordering the wetlands along the creek. From their 13th-floor balcony, you can see the mangroves that got them involved in environmental activism and, at high tide, the flamingos that brought others to their cause. Soon after the Agarwals moved here in 2013, they challenged the clearance of land for a new housing project and golf course on these wetlands. Neighbours told them they couldn't win—the project was promoted by a subsidiary of the powerful Adani Group. But in 2018, the Bombay High Court stopped the development, giving the couple their first big victory. Since then, they've been fighting against other development projects in nearby wetlands and raising awareness about local biodiversity. They roped in their son and

daughter and their friends to help organize neighbourhood festivals with games and activities for children, as well as an awareness-raising annual marathon called Run for Flamingos. At least 2,000 people participated in the event in 2020.

Authorities at the sanctuary, which is managed by the state forestry department, are also promoting tourism around the flamingos, hoping to educate the public about the birds and their habitat. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a new marine education center and flamingo boat rides attracted some 17,000 visitors annually, including busloads of school students, says Virendra Tiwari, the senior forest officer who oversees the sanctuary. The ambitious management plan for the sanctuary includes increased security to prevent illegal construction, a big museum on the banks of the creek, and more boats for rides—but not so many that they would disturb the birds, says Tiwari. He is hoping that the sanctuary's recent designation as a ‘wetland of importance’ under the international Ramsar Convention will also limit the destruction of ‘satellite wetlands’—the roosting sites that fall outside the 16.8-square-kilometer sanctuary but are identified in the Ramsar designation as part of a 48-square-kilometer buffer zone where ‘wise use’ is advised.

Children in Navi Mumbai participate in a rally for the local wetlands, 2017

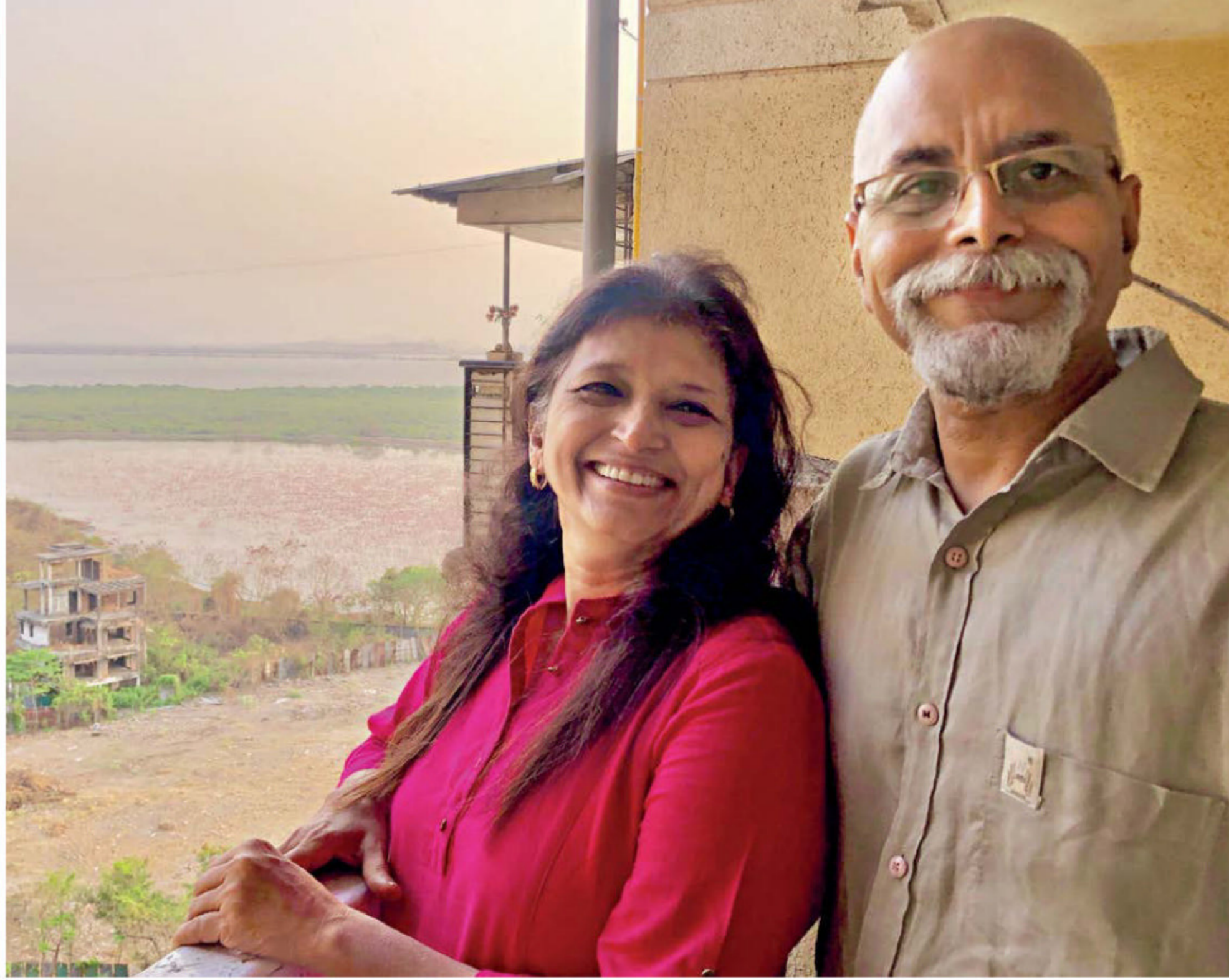


The pandemic suspended many of the sanctuary's activities, yet it increased flamingo fever. In the 2020 lockdown, residents of Navi Mumbai were stuck at home with nothing to do but look out their windows and see thousands of birds roosting at high tide. The flamingos made a particularly spectacular showing that year, arcing across suddenly clear skies, says Shruti. Photos and videos of the flamingos went viral, including on international media.

The flamingo is a useful totem for local ecology—but, as the Agarwals have found, it can also be reduced to an empty symbol. Late last year, the local municipality tagged Navi Mumbai as Flamingo City, putting up statues of the bird on streets and painting murals on walls.

But local agencies haven't put an end to development projects on wetlands. If the government saves the wetlands, says Shruti, "I'll be the first to dress up as a flamingo and stand on the road."

OUT ON THE MUDFLATS with Prabhu, the sun is overhead and the tide is rising. The flamingos are strutting back to the shoreline, slurping up food as



Sunil and Shruti Agarwal, co-founders of Save Navi Mumbai Environment

they go. As the water streams in, so does the detritus of the city—packets of chips, beer bottles, medicine boxes, and the odd flip-flop. Prabhu packs up his scope and brings out the oar, ready to paddle against the strong pre-monsoon currents. His tally for the day: 15,000 flamingos in his transect alone. All around, flamingos are lifting off, stretching out like pink hockey sticks, to fly back to their roosts.

Mumbai's flamingos are an accidental marvel, an inadvertent creation at the fragile intersection of the urban and natural worlds. Can the dynamic wetland habitat, with its competing human and ecological interests, sustain these birds in the years to come? The residents of this metropolis certainly hope so. For now, the flamingos offer a flash of unexpected beauty and hope amid grey skies. **R**

FIRST PUBLISHED IN *HAKAI MAGAZINE*, 6 DECEMBER 2022



Zaid Ait Malek ran the Zegama Marathon in Northern Spain in 2014.

BONUS READ

SKY RUNNER

How pure resilience helped this young man from Morocco scramble his way to victory—in both sport and in life

BY Sorrel Downer



he eyes of the crowd are on Zaid Ait Malek as he takes his place at the starting line. Wild-haired and wiry, he clowns around with fellow competitors, but then, as the race countdown begins, Zaid falls silent, staring straight ahead. “Ten, nine ...”

The 38-year-old mountain runner visualizes how he'll handle the course's challenges, when he will push, when he'll hold back. Zaid touches his fingers together in prayer. *God protect us all and return us safely.*

The way Zaid approaches this run—the Calamorro Skyrace in March 2022—is the way he approaches life. Faith, resilience and joy have helped him navigate the journey from stow-away from Morocco, to sports hero in Spain, to being a husband and father.

But his focus right now is the start of this 27-kilometer run through mountains high above the southern Spanish coast. “Two, one.” When the signal sounds, the ‘sky runners’ pound away and quickly disappear. Some 120 elite runners from across Spain are competing for a trophy and a prize (₹1,05,780 for the winner).

Moving past brush, loose stones underfoot, Zaid is transported back to his childhood, to the Atlas Mountains where he grew up.

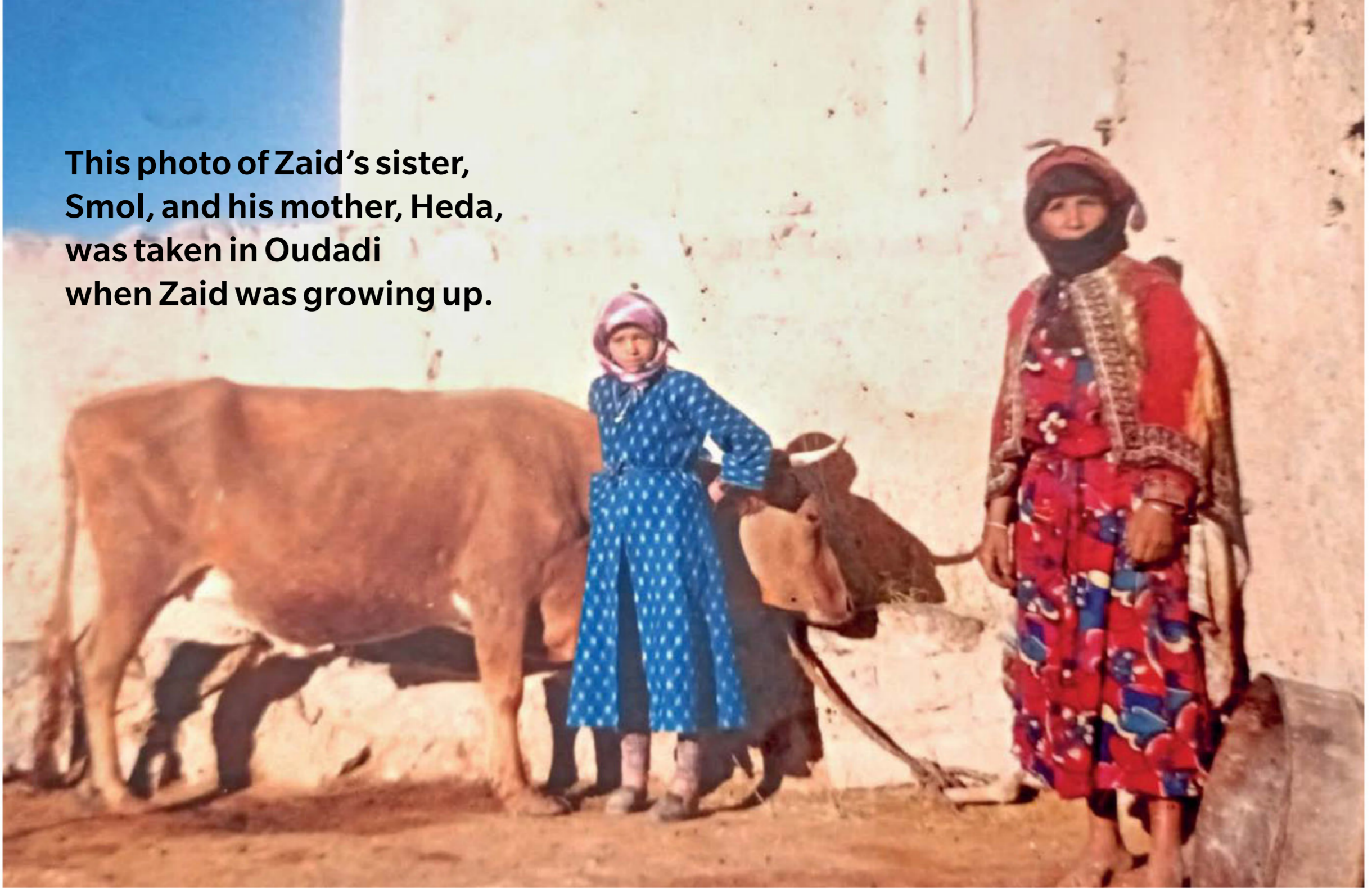
WHILE CITY CHILDREN have parks to play in, Zaid and his nine siblings—he

is third youngest—had steep, sheer mountains. They played with goat kids near the family *jaima*, the tent that nomadic Berbers live in; his mother had woven it from wool. The goats were part of a herd his family cared for and moved with as they sought new grazing areas. Zaid loved watching the sure-footed animals jump from rock to rock, and mimicked their technique until it became instinct. Another favourite game was throwing stones down the mountainside and chasing them as fast as he could.

The family's *jaima* was above Oudadi, an isolated village some 350 kilometres inland from Casablanca and about the same distance northeast of Marrakesh. As Berbers, they lived removed from modern life, with their own ancient culture and language.

Life was hard. Zaid's mother, Heda, often went without food so there was

This photo of Zaid's sister, Smol, and his mother, Heda, was taken in Oudadi when Zaid was growing up.



enough for her children. Hssain, his father, was a thinker, full of ideas and plans to make things better, and he wanted the best for his children.

When Zaid was six, Hssain asked him, “Do you want to go to school?” Zaid wasn’t sure, but when his father bought him a book bag at the market and told him, “study well and strive for better,” he couldn’t refuse. Anyway, he really wanted the bag.

As the first of his siblings to attend school, Zaid found it a shock. He couldn’t read or write and spoke only Berber; he didn’t know Arabic, Morocco’s official language. In the playground, he watched the other children play, but didn’t know how to talk to them or join in.

And living in a house—he was staying with his older brother’s family in Oudadi to be close to the school—was also strange. He missed falling asleep in the *jaima*’s one room as his parents

told him stories, and waking to the sound of bleats and birdsong. He lived for the holidays, when he could run free in the mountains.

But Zaid was adaptable and made friends fast, and he was always top of the class. Hssain burst with pride when he looked at the school reports his son brought home.

Zaid, who had learnt Arabic, went on to college, but knew his father struggled to support him. “I should be earning money, not costing it,” Zaid finally told him, and, against his father’s protests, he left school in his late teens to work alongside his cousin Hassan as a labourer on building sites in Casablanca and the capital, Rabat.

Ambitious and keen to keep learning, Zaid caught the eye of his boss, who trained him as an electrician and gave him the higher-paid jobs. By age twenty, Zaid was earning enough to send money home. Life was good.

But the talk among the rest of the workers, especially Hassan, was that life was better in Europe, where wages were double or triple what they earned in Morocco. When a boy from near Oudadi returned from Spain with a foreign car, Hassan told Zaid, "We'll be working all our lives and never be able to afford a car like that."

For most, the only way to get into Europe was illegally, hidden in a lorry aboard a ferry, making the 30-kilometer voyage across the Strait of Gibraltar. Hassan often spent his days off in the port city of Tangier, watching for opportunities to leave Morocco.

In late December 2006, Zaid was at his parents' *jaima*, preparing for the Muslim festival Eid al-Adha, when Hassan called from Tangier. "I'm going to escape," he said. "Come help me find a way to get to Spain." Zaid said no, telling him, "You're mad!" In the end, though, he made the long journey

the sudden panic came an impulse—he too ducked under the lorry and grabbed hold of the undercarriage.

The cousins clung on as the lorry boarded the ferry. Once the drivers headed to the upper deck, the two dropped down and found a canvas-covered trailer to hide in. Zaid was wearing just a tracksuit and trainers, and they had no water, but as the ferry set sail he felt strangely calm. *I'm here now*, he thought. *This door has opened and I'm going through.*

A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

AT THE SPANISH port of Algeciras, the stowaways cautiously peeked out. They'd arrived at midnight and the driver had left the trailer in the car park and driven away. By 1:30 a.m. the port was silent; the pair left the trailer and headed for the busy coastal motorway, the Autovía del Mediterráneo, where

"YOU'RE GOING TO DIE!" ZAID HISSED AT HIS COUSIN. "COME OUT!"

to Tangier—but only to fetch his cousin home for the family celebrations.

On 30 December, the pair took a late afternoon stroll to the port—"just for a look," Hassan promised—before heading back to Oudadi. But when a lorry, blocked by a taxi, stopped beside them, Hassan quickly disappeared beneath it. "You're going to die!" Zaid hissed. "Come out!" But with

they began walking northeast towards Málaga. It started raining, so they took refuge under a concrete bridge before starting again at daybreak.

Around 9 a.m. a car slowly approached. "Police!" shouted Hassan, and took off down the road. Zaid jumped a fence and hid behind a tree. When he peered out, he saw the police car coming. Hassan, who had



Before his fateful, unplanned departure from Morocco, Zaid worked in Rabat. That's him in the front, with colleagues.

been caught and was in the back of the car—and would shortly be deported—could only watch as his more athletic cousin sprinted off the motorway and out of sight.

Zaid ran until he reached a quiet road. He felt very alone. He was an illegal immigrant, he hadn't eaten in 24 hours, and he had only the wet clothes on his back and a little Moroccan money. He knew nobody, didn't speak Spanish, and had nowhere to go.

But he remembered his father telling him, "You must always follow the open way." He had to trust that his father was right. It was New Year's Eve, the right sort of day for new beginnings.

When he passed a service station, the Arabic-speaking woman working there called him over and offered him

coffee, breakfast, and a bag filled with bread and Coca-Cola. She also gave him the name of friends in Barcelona, so Zaid began to walk in that direction. A couple of hours later, he got a lift from some Moroccans who took him to their house, let him shower, and gave him fresh clothes.

When he told them where he was going, they laughed. "Walking? It's nearly a thousand kilometers. It will take you months!" They were going to visit family in the province of Almería and invited Zaid to join them.

In Almería, Zaid called his mother from a pay phone. "We didn't know where you were," she said, worry in her voice. "You didn't even plan to leave!"

Zaid reassured her he was safe, but added, "Now that I'm here, I'm going to try to make a better life."

Hanging up, Zaid heard someone speaking Berber. The man in the next booth introduced himself as Jilali—and he was from a village near Oudadi. "What a coincidence!" exclaimed Zaid.

Jilali said he worked nearby as a fruit picker; his boss had given him a house to use and was looking for workers. "Come with me," he said. Meeting someone from home felt like fate, and so, after thanking his new friends, Zaid left with Jilali.

Picking tomatoes and watermelons for eight hours a day gave Zaid blistered hands and backache, and the temperatures under plastic, which hit the mid-40s in summer, were tough

to bear. Zaid was now working close to the Tabernas Desert in the sprawl of horticultural hothouses known in Spain as the Sea of Plastic.

As an illegal immigrant Zaid could be deported at any moment. But it was worth it; his boss gave him a contract and paid his taxes and contributions. And after three years Zaid would be eligible for Spanish residency. Then he could look for a better job and visit his family.

Jilali's house was run-down, with no electricity, so Zaid set to work hooking up a power supply, and bought light bulbs and plugs, a television, and the tools and parts to fit a shower. When the boss came for a

brother, in tears, saying, "Our brother Hassan is dead." A bottle of butane had exploded, and Hassan, the second eldest sibling, had died of his injuries.

Then his father came to the phone. Zaid told him, "I'm coming home."

But Hssain said, "Nothing will be gained by that. Your brother won't return and you'll regret it. Stay on the path. Find what you are searching for and accomplish your dreams."

Zaid sat on a crate in the hothouse and cried. Then he shut himself in his room, not working and barely eating for two weeks, just lying on the bed, turning things over and over in his mind. His friends rallied round, persuading him to stay.

"STAY ON THE PATH, AND ACCOMPLISH YOUR DREAMS," HIS FATHER TOLD HIM.

visit, he was amazed. "What has happened!" he said to Zaid. "You've just got here and you've done all this?"

Meanwhile, Zaid's fellow workers, on seeing how fast he ran on the football pitch on his time off, invited him to join the local team. And he began to teach himself Spanish so he'd be ready for any future opportunities. Finally, he felt his life was coming together.

AN UNEXPECTED DETOUR

ONE MORNING IN 2009, two years after his arrival in Spain, Zaid's phone rang as he was picking tomatoes. It was his

It was true, Zaid knew, that with the money he was sending home, his father had managed to buy a half-built house and was working on finishing it. So he decided to try to stay positive. He was homesick, but would push on.

A year later, he received another call from Morocco—his father had passed away from cancer. It was the bitterest of blows: Zaid was tortured knowing how much his father had missed him. He wept, thinking, *He did so much for me and died without me.*

Zaid was just weeks away from getting the papers that would allow him to stay in Spain; finally, three years



This photo was taken when Zaid worked as a tomato-picker soon after arriving in Spain.

after leaving Morocco, he would be able to go see his family. But when he made the application in January 2010, it was denied; he was told he hadn't worked enough days to qualify, yet he knew he had. Zaid confronted his boss and discovered that in order to save money, he hadn't declared the full number of days Zaid had worked.

Zaid was shocked. But as an illegal alien there was nothing he could do. If he wanted a life in Spain, he would have to stay and work an extra year to make up the time. In October, when he heard about temporary work picking olives in the groves of Baena, in the autonomous region of Andalusia in southern Spain, he left, hoping to find a more reliable boss.

With nobody to play football with in his new base, Zaid took up running. One rainy evening, he caught up with

three Spanish runners from the local athletics club, Media Legua Baena. They talked a lot over the 16-kilometer run, Zaid effortlessly keeping pace. He was wearing old trainers and had no fancy running gear, but the club members could see he had talent.

The following day, as Zaid watched people training at the athletics club, a police car drew up. His heart pounded as a uniformed officer lowered his sunglasses. "Remember me?" he said, and to Zaid's relief he saw it was one of the runners. "The club president wants to meet you," said the man.

Media Legua was looking for talented runners to help them win regional road races, but, more importantly, the members were part of a kind and welcoming community.

"If we help you with residency papers and look for work for you," Jesus

Morales, the club president, told Zaid, “would you like to stay with us as a runner for the club?”

“Yes!” Zaid replied.

One of his jobs was assisting Carlos Chamorro, who ran the club's training program for kids. Carlos took in Zaid's huge smile and friendly manner as Jesus introduced him, and liked him immediately. The new assistant's enthusiasm and sense of fun soon made him a hit with the children, too.

The club members made Zaid feel like one of the club's family, helping fix up a house for him and donating the furniture he needed. “We loved him so much and he, us,” recalls Je-

the slopes. Carlos couldn't believe his eyes. *He's like a mountain goat!* he thought. *He has no fear!*

While road races are run on even surfaces, mountain running involves rough trails and steep climbs. Carlos explained there were trail-running and high-altitude competitions for local, regional, national and world titles. Zaid listened, amazed—this was the challenge he'd been searching for! “There's a race here in the Subbéticas next spring,” said Carlos. “We should train and try to get in.”

The race was the 2011 Subbética Trail, a 26-kilometer regional championship that attracted the best runners

THE CLUB MEMBERS MADE ZAID FEEL LIKE HE WAS ONE OF THE FAMILY.

sus. “We shared what we had, and he gave us everything he had to give.”

After some technical training, Zaid—who had been nicknamed “Ferrari” by club members—was soon travelling on the team bus and proudly running for the club in road races across the region.

One Saturday late in 2010, Carlos invited his friend for a training run in the nearby Sierras Subbéticas mountains. Running in this kind of terrain, Zaid was in his element. “This is like being six years old and playing in the Atlas Mountains again,” he told Carlos, laughing as he leapt up the steep and rocky terrain and sprinted down

in Spain. Along with a small group from the club, Carlos and Zaid both qualified. On the day, Zaid, sporting new trainers, lined up with more than 150 competitors—and set off fast. Running behind, Carlos could hear competitors discussing his friend. “He thinks it's a road race!” said one. Going too fast uphill would soon sap any runner's energy.

But Zaid made it up the mountain so quickly that, once on top, he couldn't see anyone following, and started to panic. *I'm lost!* he thought. Just then the race steward, who'd been resting nearby, jumped up, startled. “You're here already?” he gasped.

Zaid at the 2015 Transgrancanaria race.



Zaid pushed on, running incredibly fast on the dangerous downhill portions, too, and won the race. It was a dream come true to cross the line to loud applause—and to share this experience with the people who had helped him so much. He had finished two minutes and 17 seconds ahead of the reigning champion and more than ten minutes ahead of the rest of the field. Leads in these races are usually measured in seconds.

For an unknown beginner to win this prestigious event by such a margin was astonishing. Everyone was asking who he was and where he'd come from. The regional selector said he thought Zaid could qualify for the national championship, the Copa de España. He did—and he beat all competition in 2013 and again in 2014.

Such was his mental and physical

drive that Zaid even won races while fasting for Ramadan—though he would say it was his Muslim faith that gave him strength.

One of Spain's most iconic high-altitude races is the Zegama-Aizkorri Marathon. It's 42 kilometers, with an elevation gain of 2,700 metres. Thousands of runners apply to enter; only 500 qualify. Although Zaid was a newcomer, in 2013 the club persuaded the organizers to give him a chance. When he came fourth, completing the race in less than four hours—only four minutes behind the winner—it was clear to everyone Zaid had the potential to become world champion.

Zaid was rising through the ranks, and, because he was about to shift his focus to running in the more elite races, he and Carlos ran their last race together in 2015. As Carlos approached

the finish line, he saw his friend waiting for him—so they could cross the line together.

REUNITED

WITH THE BAENA club's help, Zaid had finally received his Spanish residency papers. He would need to re-qualify each year, fulfilling a minimum number of days of employment. But it meant that finally, in 2012, he would be able to leave Spain to visit his family.

It was midnight when he arrived home and pushed the door open. Everyone was waiting for him. There was sadness that his father and brother weren't there to greet him, but his mother was bravely determined to make this a joyous homecoming. She stepped forward and embraced him, smiling. "I'm happy to see you return," she told him. Zaid promised he'd come again soon, and often.

Though Zaid's life was now in Spain, his roots were in Morocco, and soon, so was his heart. A young woman named Aicha Ouhou, born in the neighbouring village but raised outside the area, was part of an extended circle of friends who followed Zaid's racing success on Facebook. The two had never met, but in the course of online chats they had developed a special bond.

On Zaid's second visit home, in 2013, he met Aicha for the first time. As soon as he saw her laughing eyes, he knew they would be together—the glances they shared spoke volumes.



Aicha captured Zaid's heart; this photo is from 2014, the year they married.

On subsequent trips a romance blossomed; they married the next year.

Carlos and friends from Baena attended the wedding in Oudadi, and to Zaid, watching as they celebrated with his family, it was as if all the parts of his life—love, running, happiness, and success in two countries—had finally come together.

Then came a major setback. In 2014, the Andalusian Mountaineering Federation (FAM) began what was intended to be a fast-track process of naturalization for Zaid on the basis of his exceptional value to Spanish athletics. But nothing happened.

Over the coming years, nobody knew why Zaid wasn't getting a response from the government on his naturalization application. Then, in 2018, he learned he was about to be deported. Because he was racing so



Zaid ran the 2015 Retezat SkyRace in the mountains of Romania.

much, he had fallen short of the number of days he was required to work in order to retain his residency status. “This is the end of the dream,” he told his friends. “I’m done.”

But his friends were having none of it. As Zaid’s spirits flagged, the international running community stepped in to support him. Spanish runner Javier Ordieres started an online campaign called “Zaid Stays!” (#ZaidSeQueda) to put pressure on the authorities, and it quickly spread across social media. “The moment we heard he needed help,” says Javier, “everyone threw themselves into it 100 per cent.”

On September 29, 2018, Zaid began what was to be his last race before deportation, the 110-kilometer Ultra Pirineu in Bagà, Spain; there were 923 participants. He was exhausted by

stress, but hundreds of people were there to encourage him, holding placards and cheering him on. He ran like the wind and finished second.

As he stood in the finish line area he looked at his phone and saw hundreds of messages of support flooding in, among them offers of legal help.

It was soon discovered that the citizenship application prepared in 2014 was still sitting in the registry in Baena; apparently, a clerk had mistakenly filed it away.

ZAID WAS GRANTED Spanish nationality on 30 November 2018. After 12 years of uncertainty, he was finally safe, finally settled. Signed by Jimbee, a major Spanish sports sponsor, he has a team behind him that believes in him, and the support he needs to pursue his professional career.



Zaid and his family at the Jimbee Volcano UltraMarathon in Cartagena, Spain, in autumn 2022.

In some races, the winner is called ‘Champion of Spain.’ But as a Moroccan citizen, Zaid had up to now been unable to step up to the podium when he won those; that honour went to the Spanish second-placed runners. Ever generous of spirit, Zaid had said he didn’t mind. But, clearly, it wasn’t right. Now, he could take his place on the podium.

And he can compete in international events, like the 244-kilometer Volcano UltraMarathon in Costa Rica—a showcase for mental and physical fortitude—which he won in 2021. His ambition is to become the mountain-running champion of the world.

THE FINISH LINE

IT’S THE 2022 Calamorro Skyrace, where our story began. Zaid reaches the finish with great loping strides and a wide grin, and takes second place. He hugs the winner,

congratulating him, then looks around for Aicha, who is waiting by the barrier with their seven-year-old son, Elhousseine.

Along with their baby girl, Israa, they live in Cartagena, on the Mediterranean coast in the Spanish province of Murcia. But Zaid’s Berber roots are all-important.

“I’m building a house near my mother’s in the Atlas Mountains, and we’ll spend part of the year there,” he says. “It’s a fine place to bring up children, in the middle of nature. And it’s perfect for high altitude training. I’m hoping to make it a centre where runners from all over the world can stay and train.”

Zaid took his father’s advice: He stayed on the path, and, despite the challenges, fulfilled his dreams. Smiling, he offers his secret to success: “Just jump from stone to stone like a goat—and always think positively.” **R**

QUOTABLE QUOTES

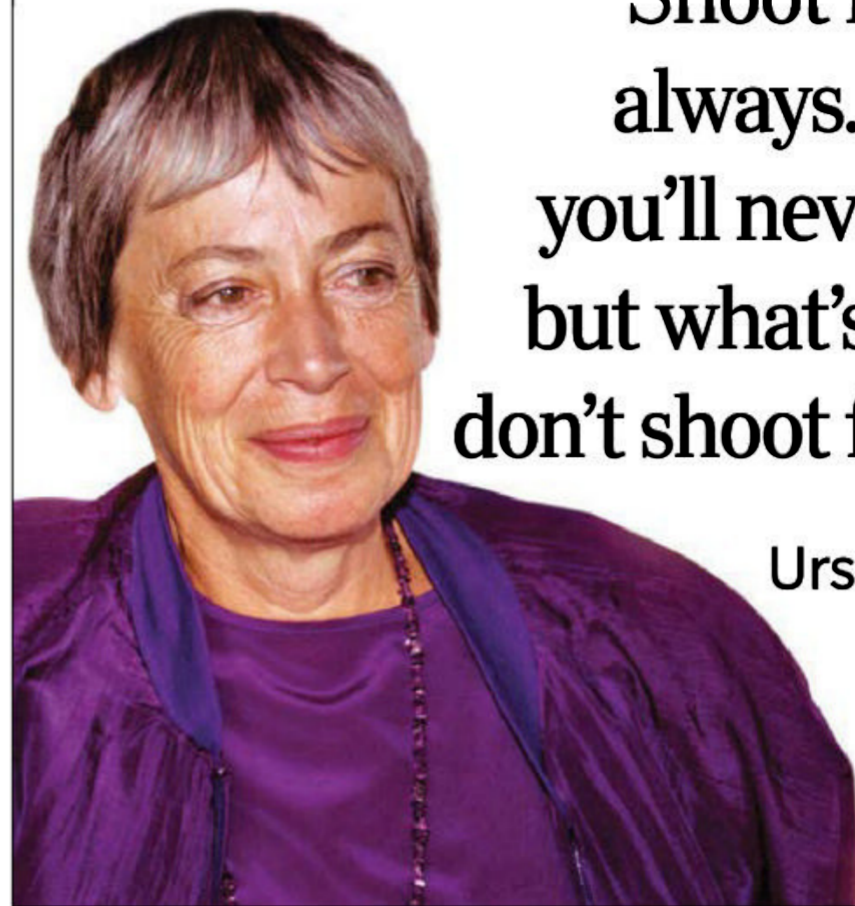
Ladies and gentlemen, let us discover more of that which is impossible and then do it ... Let us demolish the differences that divide us. Let us build a monolith with our diversity. May no one be in the shadows of our glory.

Amitabh Bachchan, in his speech at the inauguration ceremony of the 28th Kolkata International Film Festival



There are many ways of breaking a heart. Stories were full of hearts broken by love, but what really broke a heart was taking away its dream—whatever that dream might be.

Pearl S. Buck. *Author*



Shoot for the top, always. You know you'll never make it, but what's fun if you don't shoot for the top.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *author*

When you raise a god instead of a child, you're bound to be serving him for the rest of your days. Same thing holds when you marry a god.

Gloria Naylor, *author*

It seems to me that we generally do not have a correct measure of our own wisdom.

R. K. Narayan, *author and cartoonist*

An optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves.

William E. Vaughan, *author*

LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*

I'm getting really sick of millennials attitudes lately. Walking around like they rent the place.
—*Reddit.com*

If you come to my house and see a coffee cup upside down on the floor, just be my hero and put the spider outside please.
—*@BROKENHALO06969*

If I could ask God for one thing, it would probably be power equal to or greater than his own.
—*@CALMTOMB*

I've never been to hell, but I once forgot to buy batteries for my 6 year

Eating too much fruitcake is the sin of gluttony. However, eating too much pie is okay, because the sin of pi is zero.
—*@HANSABUMSADAISY*

—*@HANSABUMSADAISY*



"I thought you did a great job with your gender neutral statements ... There will be a second date."

old son's toys on Christmas morning.

—*@CHEERS27402373*

Tried to shop at the plagiarism store, unfortunately they only take credit.

—*@DURTMCHURTT*

My 75-year-old Dad was taking his daily walk through the park when he heard a tiny voice calling to him. "Hey,

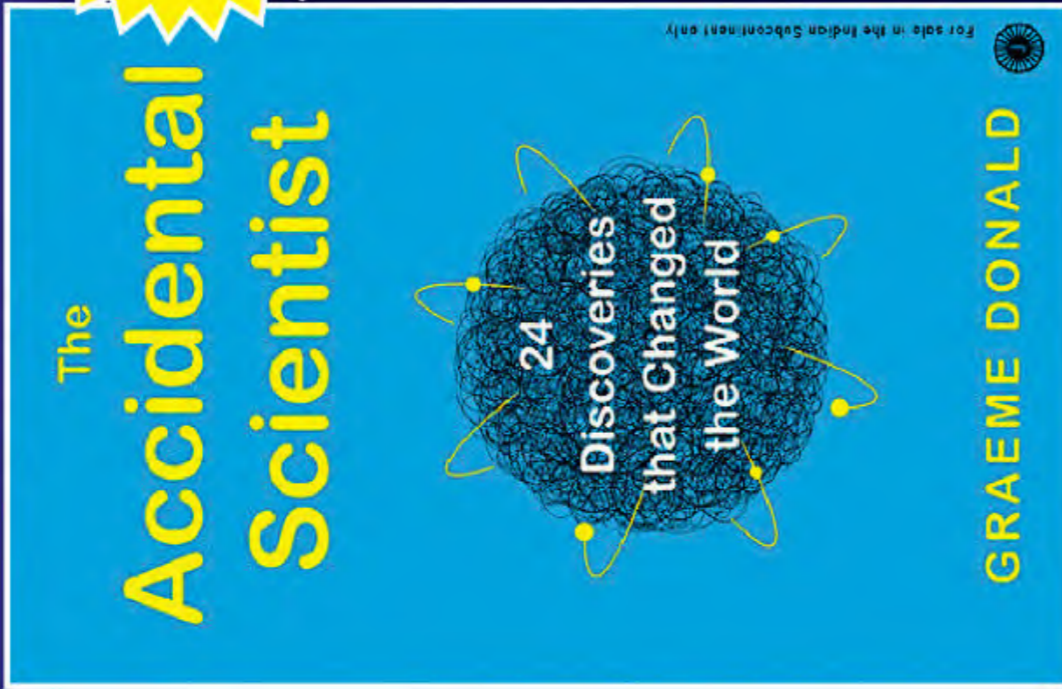
mister! Pssst, mister!" Dad looked all around, and spotted a little frog sitting in the grass looking up at him.

"Hey mister," said the frog. "A wicked witch cast a spell on me, and turned me into an ugly frog. If you'll just kiss me I'll turn back into a beautiful princess and be forever grateful."

Dad reached down, picked up the frog, put it in his pocket, and



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proceeded to walk on. The frog called out to him again, "Hey! Didn't you hear me? I said if you'll kiss me, I'll turn into a beautiful princess and be forever grateful."

Dad replied, "I heard you, but at my age, I'd rather just have a talking frog!" zero.
—GCFL.net

Those are not the screams of an animal caught in a bear trap, they're the bleatings of a dog banished to the back yard and rendering her unable to run assist with the repairman.

—@KIMTOPHER22

A shampoo bottle upside-down in the shower is basically your low-fluid indicator light.

—@GBERGAN

My local weather app tells me conditions are good for breathing but tough for running, which fortunately

blends perfectly with my skillset.

—@HOARSEFACE

Throwing a spear you at your enemy is a bad gamble. If you miss you have no spear now and he's just fine. He's better

than fine; now he has a spear.

—@IAMJACKBOOT

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

UNNECESSARY INVENTIONS

There is a famous saying which states that "necessity is the mother of invention," however the inventions on this list seem far from necessary.

◆ Makeup That is Tattooed on:

You might love that green eyeliner now, but what about when you're fifty?

◆ Coloured Elastics For Braces:

As if the braces didn't make your mouth stand out enough.

◆ Crayons That Smell:

Oh, good, let's give kids another reason to eat them.

◆ Coloured Contact Lenses:

Oh, yeah, purple is such a



natural eye colour.

◆ Fake Eyelashes:

You shouldn't be able to braid your eyelashes.

◆ Heated and/or Padded Toilet Seats:

You are not supposed to spend the day there. Comfort should not be a pressing concern. Get in, do your thing, and get out.

◆ Doggie Sweaters:

Fido is not Mr. Rogers, nor does he want to be Mr. Rogers.

—GCFL.net



Finding Light Amidst Shadows

Author Nilanjana Roy speaks with *Reader's Digest* about writing *Black River*, her latest literary thriller, and facing the darkness of man with compassion and vulnerability

By Shreevatsa Nevatia

In her blurb for *Black River* Sonia Faleiro wrote, "it feels completely true". Her book *The Good Girls* memorably starts with girls suddenly hanging from a tree. Given that yours begins similarly, were you ever tempted to fictionalize fact? Did you keep at bay the horrors or give them room?

When we imagine a writer leaning on the truth, we imagine the incidents that get into the newspapers, or on television. The truth *is* here to some extent, but there's a difference between a book that's based on reality and one that aims for a kind of truthfulness to what's happening in the world. From 2009 to 2013, when I was working on gender for *The New York Times* (NYT), I spent

a lot of time in places that would never make it to the newspapers because these were commonplace murders, where the damage was not violent or egregious enough. But, a family or a survivor was still left completely shattered. Everywhere I went, I was seeing a collective absence. There were these missing girls, who were knocked out of life because of the violence of their times. Munia [from *Black River*] came out of that. I was seeing the lasting agony of these absences. I think I was struck by being both an intruder on very private grief and a witness to how deeply that grief would go, changing people's lives for years afterwards. You don't get over the death of a child. We

PHOTO: CREDIT : HARDIK CHHABRA



BLACK RIVER
NILANJANA S. ROY

BLACK RIVER
NILANJANA S. ROY

THE COLONEL WHO WOULD NOT REPENT
SANKU TRIPATHY

Joseph Anton
A MEMOIR
Salman Rushdie

THE WILDINGS
NILANJANA ROY

GRAHAM GREENE
THE COLLECTOR

Trotter-Nama
ALLAN BEALE

RAJATARANGINI
ADITYA CHAKRAVARTY

keep searching for justice. Yes, there is the justice of the courts, and there is the justice of knowing, or, as one of the characters in the book tries, to get some kind of acknowledgement. The justice has nothing to do with the absence. And the absence was what I was writing into.

Was journalism, and you're reporting for *NYT*, an education in novel-writing?

I think it was before *NYT*; some of it years ago while with the *Business Standard*. But because at *NYT* I was working on gender, I had the great luck of many women trusting me with their stories—when they were in a position to speak. When you're wandering around the little parts of the country, you see, the real challenge is not only in the listening; it's in finding a space where a woman is alone and can be private. And on the rare occasions when that happened—usually in furtive snatches when the men stepped out to do something—many women trusted me with the experience of their lives or set me right. It allowed me to see that when you write, you can't do so about a class of people. The people you're talking to are not just material for your story. However compassionate you are as a reporter, you're going to have to write something and move on. And your skill and integrity as a journalist, I think, depends on how faithfully you can reflect everything that they've gone through in those few sentences of the final copy. Fiction gives

you more room. You're returning to people the right to be full, complex individuals, which is exactly what they are. And that started to happen when I walked into *Black River*. In fact, fictional characters also taught me a great deal. Every now and then, the life of the story chokes off because you don't know enough. And to know enough, you have to be able to stay open to experiences that are very different from the comfort that your world might come from. And then you can see the things that you have in common, and you realize, oh, it's all human, it's fine.

In such a novel, how hard is it to manage darkness, especially the darkness of man?

How do I put it? I have a warm heart, but a very cold eye. I mean the ability to feel with great intensity but at the same time, stand quietly in a corner of the room, and just observe. The darkness is not the only thing around us. In 2016, during one of the key drafts of *Black River*, many things were pulling people apart. People had learnt with great difficulty to live together, but that way of life was being disrupted. A few of my friends who read the draft at the time said, our country is never going to walk down this road. Three years down the road, and it feels like you're just reporting what was already there. The darkness was never easy to write about, but it was clarifying. I am of the generation that saw the 1984 riots, and I was in Delhi after the Babri demolition

in 1992. But in any country, you live against your own timeline; against a timeline of grimness. I didn't want to write only about violence, but violence is part of the map of Delhi. But I can't retreat into cynicism, much as I would like to. You have to allow yourself to be vulnerable, so you write with the same vulnerability as your characters. When you start to feel what they're feeling, it's breaks your heart. But hopefully, if you can translate that to the reader, then you've done your job.

The pandemic made us realize that we are not good to migrants, our fellow citizens. Your book drives that point home too. In the end, is it just a failure of empathy?

People build very high walls and instead of reaching out, they stay behind those high walls. The more I spoke to women, whether it was about homelessness or water crises or health, I saw the determination to succeed. When you come into a city like Delhi as a migrant, you're setting very distant goals for yourself. You're saying: I will be here no matter what, for 10 years. That is what carries people forward—the sense of possibility of being able to move, however slowly, from a precarious existence into one with a little more certainty. But the way we are with migrants, comes from seeing them as outside of yourself. We think of Delhi as a wealthy, powerful city. But, who built it? Migrants. Migrants were the second wave of Delhi citizens after the Parti-

tion refugees. When you see that, then you realize you're writing about people who really own the city in the deepest sense of the word.

Your novel suggests that it is in friendship, not just acceptance that our communal malice dies. Would that inference be anywhere close to true?

I think that's the one time that my authorial personal beliefs intrude deeply into the novel. Think of the way that the entire country got over the wounds of partition, in part because we had the generation that was engaged in the freedom struggle just telling us a simple thing—you can't afford hatred, to be plunged into an permanent internal war, Indian against Indian. And for a while, I think the wounds of Partition went deep enough for people to call on a ceasefire, to start to move towards something else. Friendship is that part of the constitution where it says fraternity. It's there in the founding promises for a reason. Because after the years that it took to win freedom for India, everyone, from Gandhi to Nehru, Sarojini Naidu to Maulana Azad, understood that if they were going to bring this country together, you had to build it, at least on being able to live side by side, and at best with actual friendship.

Tell us about the next book?

I'm staying with noir fiction for a bit. It is an irresistible challenge, and you can say so much else, around the right (or wrong) kind of murder. **R**



(From right) Janelle Monáe, Daniel Craig and Jessica Henwick in a still from *Glass Onion*

REVIEW

A Cut Above the Rest

Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery is a rare big-ticket sequel that hits all the right notes

BY Aditya Mani Jha

Last year, when Lana Wachowski's *The Matrix Resurrections* released, the initial reaction from fans and critics was mixed—the film es-

chewed the franchise's signature blend of eye-popping action, VFX and world-building for a more intimate, character-driven meta-fable. Just over a year later, the critical tide has turned and more people are waking up to the film's worth. Something similar will happen, I feel, with Rian Johnson's *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*, released this month on Netflix.

The sequel to the director's 2019 whodunit *Knives Out*, *Glass Onion* is a dazzling, tonally assured deconstruction of much the same detective tropes it depicted in the

earlier film—the 'closed room mystery,' the red herrings, *deus ex machina* and so on. Because this is a story that takes visible delight in subverting viewer expectations, it stands to reason that some of those viewers may feel hard done by. Over time, however, *Glass Onion* will be recognized as a rare big-ticket sequel that dares to interrogate the original's thematic preoccupations, and does so in style.

Daniel Craig returns as Benoit Blanc, Johnson's American Hercule Poirot, with his "Kentucky-fried foghorn" of

a voice. At the centre of the murder tableaux lies Miles Bron (Edward Norton), the Elon Musk-like vainglorious billionaire who summons the main characters to his private island for a hedonistic weekend—Claire (Kathryn Hahn), the Governor he put in office, Birdie (Kate Hudson), the supermodel-turned-designer whose career he resurrected, Duke the ‘men’s rights’ YouTuber he backed financially (Dave Bautista), and Lionel (Leslie Odom Jr.) the chief scientist for Miles’ company. The surprise appearances of Blanc and Andi (Janelle Monae), the business partner Miles cheated years ago, threaten to sour the parlour game planned for the weekend; solving Miles’ ‘murder’. Of course, when real bodies start to drop, the stakes truly begin to rise.

Within this almost too-simple setup, Johnson’s razor-sharp screenplay extracts scarcely believable mileage: this film is as per-

fect a snapshot of the 2020s as the earlier film was to 2016 or so (the early Trump years). Figures as diverse as Elon Musk, Andrew Tate and Kim Kardashian are skewered expertly, the COVID-induced lockdowns are used intelligently, and just about everything unfolds as though borrowing from yesterday’s headlines. “Nobody wants you to break the system itself,” complains Miles Bron to Blanc in one of the former’s many verbiage-filled rants. But the line might as well have been talking about the film itself, especially with regard to its treatment of the detective story template.

For much of the second half, it’s Janelle Monae’s character who does the heavy lifting (by Blanc’s own admission). The actual ‘whodunit’ denouement is deliberately “stupid” as Blanc puts it. In real life, few murderers are like Wile E. Coyote, devising elaborate systems of levers and pulleys. They are far

more likely to be accidents of panic and opportunity, as Blanc proves in the film’s stunning last half-hour.

Out of the ensemble cast Craig and Monae deserve special praise, as does a rejuvenated Hudson, who’s pitch-perfect as the oblivious rich white woman, the kind of person who thinks a ‘sweatshop’ is where one manufactures sweat-

pants. Norton’s Miles Bron, however, will be the most-talked-about character because of the Elon Musk parallels. Miles is a canny PR operator who has convinced the world he’s a maverick genius. His hubris is matched only by his appetite for bullying and Norton does a fantastic job of communicating all of this with his malleable dialogue delivery.

Glass Onion is a brilliantly written, agreeably cerebral commentary on the whodunit. and one hopes that Craig and Johnson make a few more (Netflix has confirmed at least one) over the next decade or so. **R**

ME & MY SHELF

Founder/editor of the Indian arts review, *The Chakkar*, **Karan Madhok** released his debut novel *A Beautiful Decay* in 2022. His story *Public Record* appeared in the anthology *A Case of Indian Marvels: Dazzling Stories from the Country's Finest New Writers*.



The Stranger BY ALBERT CAMUS,
Vintage international, ₹ 499

When life is meaningless, why keep on living? Camus' *L'Étranger*—translated from French as *The Stranger* or *The Outsider*—is a masterclass of philosophical literature, an eternal bout with the absurd under the hot Algerian afternoon sun, featuring my favourite opening line in all of fiction: “*Aujourd’hui, maman est morte*” (Today, *maman* died).



Nineteen Eighty-Four

BY GEORGE ORWELL,
Grapevine, ₹349

Few books have had the cultural impact of Orwell's bleak, dystopian prediction of the future (one now nearly 40 years past). Orwell created a Britain under harsh totalitarian rule, governed by force, surveillance, and censorship. Even today, his 'predictions' continue

to be as prescient as ever, co-opted (and often misunderstood) by political movements around the world.

Midnight's Children

BY SALMAN RUSHDIE, *RHUK*, ₹499

In a sense, Indian writers of my generation are all children of this novel, the great 'Booker of Bookers.' The story of Saleem Sinai—and of South Asian independence—unlocked a perspective that made absolutely everything seem possible in literature. It's a flight through magic and reality, one world and many worlds, time and space.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy BY DOUGLAS ADAMS,
Pan Macmillan, ₹799

Originally a radio comedy broadcast, this 'trilogy in five parts' brought together sci-fi and humour into a perfect singularity, and boasts of being the only piece of literature capable of providing the answer to life, the universe

and everything. Enjoy the ride to the restaurant at the end of the universe. Just don't forget to bring your towel.

One Hundred Years of Solitude

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ,
Penguin, ₹399

The enchanting saga of the Buendía family in the fictional town of Macondo is one of the most impactful pieces of literature ever written. Márquez's beautiful, recursive tale challenges reality with magic, comments on a universal sense of solitude and plays with the progression of time itself.

Metamorphosis BY FRANZ KAFKA,
Fingerprint! Publishing, ₹150

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." Thus begins this devastating exploration of man's inadequacies and helplessness under the weight of the world, of sons and their fathers, of the horrors of isolation, of being left forever unheard. Few writers have ever metamorphosed the grotesque and the mundane into something so beautiful.

Catch-22 BY JOSEPH HELLER,
Vintage Books, ₹399

Many a true word is spoken in jest, and Heller's 1961 magnum opus—based on a fictional WWII US army air squadron in Italy—is one of the funniest, truest books ever written. A satire of war, capitalism, love, and death, the novel has made me laugh until it makes me hurt.

The Lord of the Rings

BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN, *HarperCollins, ₹1299*

There's hardly anything I can add about this epic story that hasn't been dissected ad infinitum. The three-volume book is one of the most popular texts ever written in English. Every trip to Middle Earth is an invitation to stay there forever. Tolkien created a language, a universe, and crafted a literary fantasy novel that transcends genre.



The Mahabharata

(TRANSLATED BY JOHN D. SMITH), *Penguin, ₹899*

I love *The Mahabharata* in all its forms—and not just because I was named after the mag-

netic anti-hero, Karna. It's a story of a great war, a family feud, gods and men, the shaping of a nation, dharma and the wheel of time itself. It's a story that keeps on giving, and has done so to millions around the world in its various adaptations for millennia. Simply put, the greatest epic ever composed.

The Vegetarian

BY HAN KANG
(TRANSLATED BY DEBORAH SMITH),

Random House, ₹499

A haunting meditation on resistance, selfhood, and the body, Han Kang's three-part novel explores personal agency and sexuality, the desire for the other, and the desire for individuality. Originally in Korean, *The Vegetarian* excels in bewildering the reader—as much as it is sure to delight them. **R**

BRAIN TEASERS

■	○	□	■	□	■
●	●	□	○	●	■
■	□	●	■	□	□
□	●	○	■	●	●
□	●	■	○	□	□
■	○	■	□	●	□
□	■	○	□	○	■

Black-and-White Maze

EASY In this maze, start on the black square in the top-left corner and end on the one in the lower-right corner as you follow these rules:

1. Move from cell to adjacent cell up, down or sideways, but never diagonally.
2. The cell you move to must contain the same shape (square or circle), the same shading (black or white), or both the same shape and the same shading as the one you're currently on. E.G.: If you're on a white circle, you can move to an adjacent cell with a white circle, a black circle or a white square. Can you find the path?

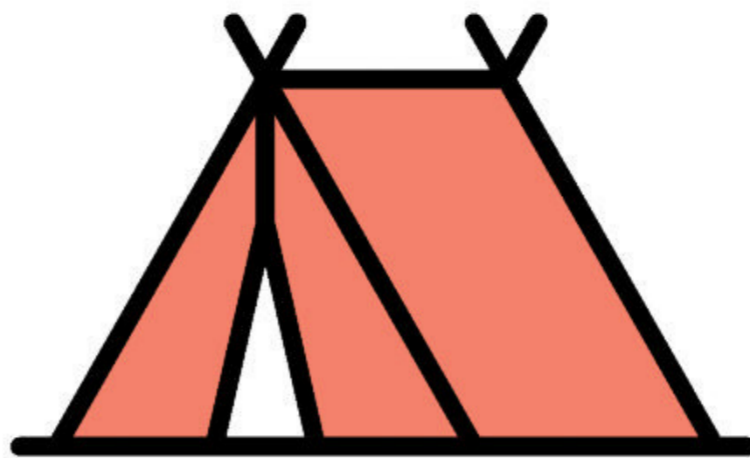
Do the Math

DIFFICULT Use five mathematical symbols (+, -, x, ÷, and √) to complete the equation. Use each symbol only once, and ignore the standard order of operations.

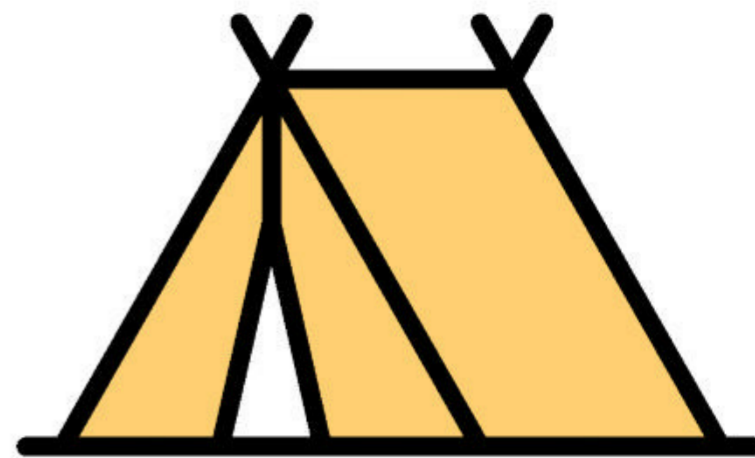
$$? \ 25 \ ? \ 5 \ ? \ 9 \ ? \ 32 \ ? \ 8 = 4$$

Happy Campers

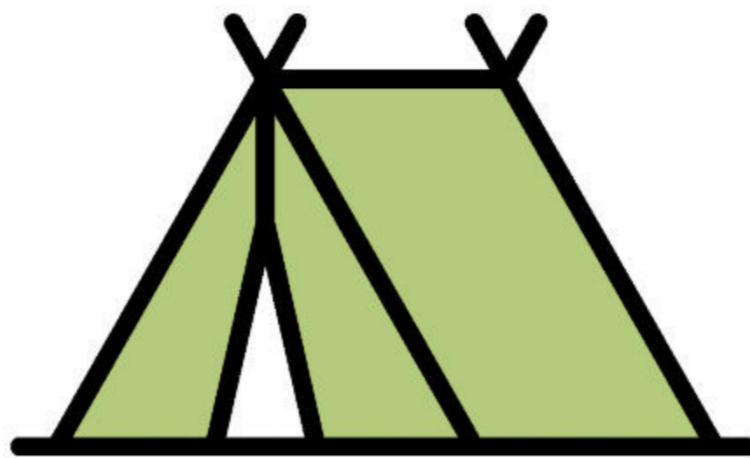
EASY Family camping trips usually involve some sort of practical joke and, this year, the prank is on you. Your family has hidden your sleeping bag in one of four tents. Outside each they put a sign, but only one sign is truthful. Can you determine which sign that is, and which tent your sleeping bag is in?



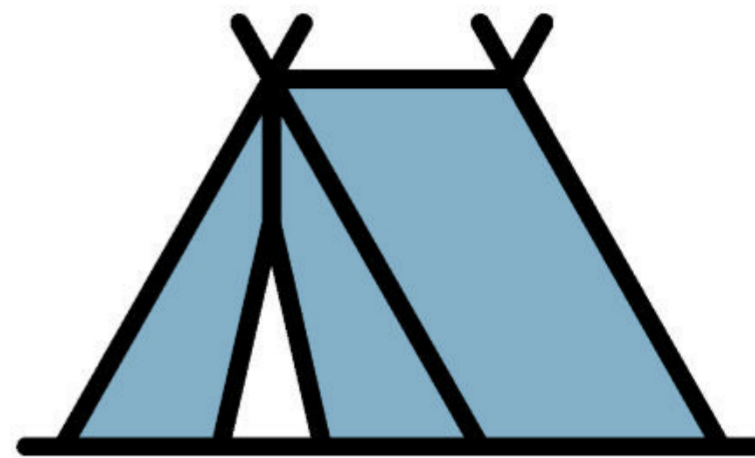
It's not in here.



It's not in the blue tent.



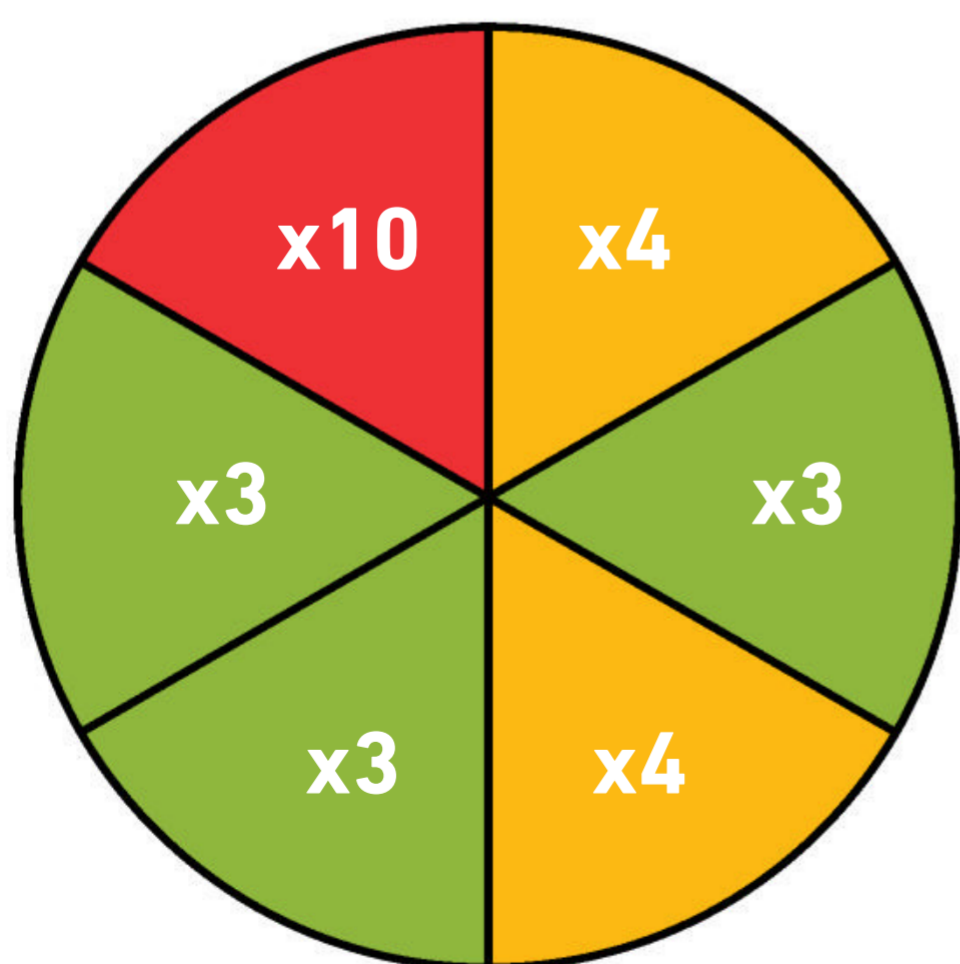
It's in the yellow tent.



It's not in here.

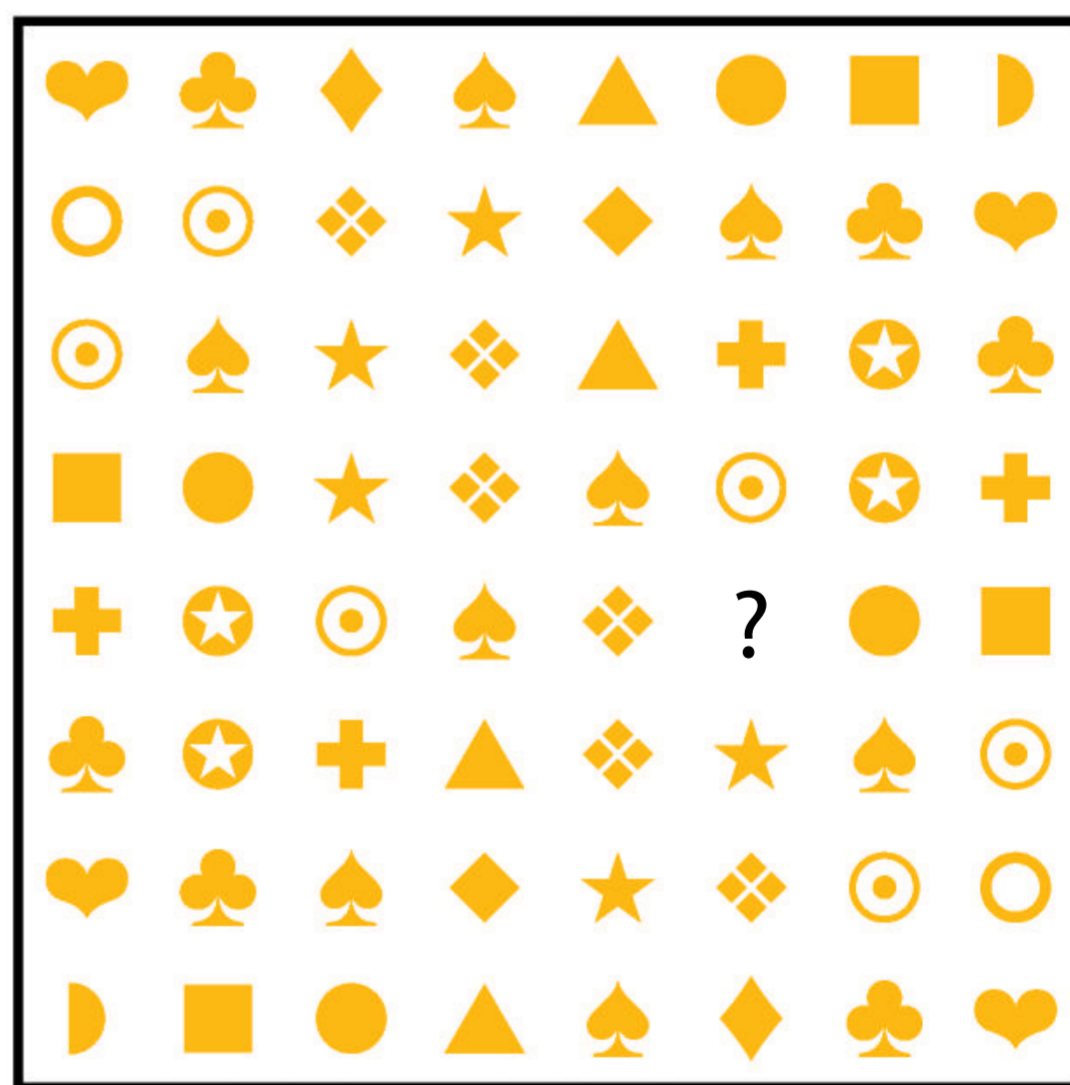
Wheel of Profit

MEDIUM You must bet ₹10 to spin the wheel, and if the wheel spins to the colour you bet on, you win ₹10 multiplied by the number shown. If you always bet on green and your friend always bets on red, who is more likely to have made a bigger profit after six spins?



Symbolism

DIFFICULT Which symbol (A, B, C, or D) is missing from the grid below?



A



B



C



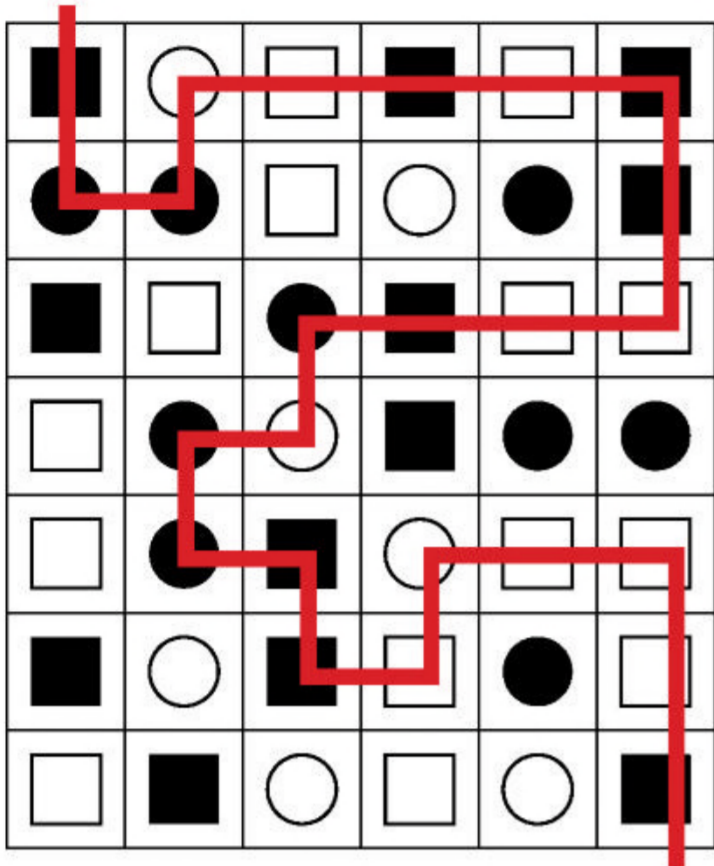
D



For answers, turn to PAGE 128

BRAIN TEASERS ANSWERS

From pages 126 and 127
Black and White Maze



Do the Math

$\sqrt{25 + 5} - 9 \times 32 \div 8 = 4$ or
 $\sqrt{25 - 5} \times 9 + 32 \div 8 = 4$

Happy Campers

The sign outside the red tent is the only one that can be true without creating contradictions, so the blue tent is correct.

Wheel of Profit

Your friend can expect to win once after six spins (for ₹100); you can expect to win three times (₹90).

Symbolism

A. The symbols on the top line are in reverse order on the bottom line; those on the second line down are in reverse order on the second line from the bottom; and so on.



BY Jeff Widderich

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

To Solve This Puzzle

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

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

SOLUTION

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

WORD POWER

This quiz is just what the doctor ordered: a vigorous vocabulary workout related to medicine and health. Will your score be pale and wan, or hale and hearty? Turn the page for the diagnosis.

BY Sarah Chassé

1. robust *adj.*

(roh-'bust)

- A** swollen
- B** strong
- C** fractured

2. prognosis *n.*

(prahg-'no-sis)

- A** course of treatment
- B** yearly checkup
- C** likelihood of recovery

3. salubrious *adj.*

(suh-'loo-bree-uhss)

- A** high in fat
- B** promoting well-being
- C** depressed

4. inoculate *v.*

(ih-'nah-kyuh-layt)

- A** disinfect
- B** operate on
- C** give a vaccine

5. chronic *adj.*

('krah-nik)

- A** ongoing
- B** fatal
- C** mild

6. pyrexia *n.*

(py-'rek-see-uh)

- A** numbness
- B** malnutrition
- C** fever

7. quiescent *adj.*

(kwy-'eh-sent)

- A** nauseated
- B** causing no symptoms
- C** prone to fainting

8. atrium *n.*

('ay-tree-um)

- A** heart chamber
- B** brain stem
- C** windpipe

9. pallor *n.*

('pal-er)

- A** paleness
- B** wheeled cot
- C** bedside manner

10. alleviate *v.*

(uh-'lee-vee-ayt)

- A** apply pressure
- B** make less severe
- C** lift above the heart

11. epidermis *n.*

(eh-puh-'der-mis)

- A** allergy shot
- B** disease outbreak
- C** top skin layer

12. benign *adj.*

(bih-'nine)

- A** sudden
- B** harmless
- C** over the counter

13. convalesce *v.*

(kahn-vuh-'less)

- A** heal gradually
- B** shake violently
- C** become drowsy

14. analgesic *n.*

(an-el-'jee-zik)

- A** decongestant
- B** pain reliever
- C** cough drop

15. panacea *n.*

(pan-uh-'see-uh)

- A** miracle cure
- B** doctors' oath
- C** herbal supplement

Placebo Power

You've likely heard of the placebo effect, in which a "fake" medication makes patients feel better simply because they believe it's real and expect it will help. But did you know that the term *placebo* (rooted in the Latin *plac̄eb̄o*, meaning "I shall please") has a less famous opposite? A *nocebo* (from the Latin *noc̄eb̄o*, "I will harm") is also an inert treatment, but it makes patients feel worse because they're anticipating a negative result.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. robust (B) *strong*
Anuradha may not look robust, but she can bench-press 200 pounds.

2. prognosis (C) *likelihood of recovery*
"With early diagnosis, the prognosis is excellent," Dr. Patel said.

3. salubrious (B) *promoting well-being*
I've resolved to adopt more salubrious habits in the new year.

4. inoculate (C) *give a vaccine*
Per city law, dogs must be inoculated against rabies.

5. chronic (A) *ongoing*
Seth takes a daily pill to manage his chronic arthritis.

6. pyrexia (C) *fever*
In adults, pyrexia is defined as a temperature over 100.4 degrees.

7. quiescent (B) *causing no symptoms*
Luckily, I had a quiescent case of COVID-19.

8. atrium (A) *heart chamber*
A fish's heart has just one atrium, while most other animals' hearts have two.

9. pallor (A) *pale*
Felix's eyes looked glassy, and his skin had a worrisome pallor.

10. alleviate (B) *make less severe*
Have you tried daily yoga to alleviate your back pain?

11. epidermis (C) *top skin layer*
The epidermis helps protect us from heat,

light, injury and infection.

12. benign (B) *harmless*
Is the tumour malignant or benign?

13. convalesce (A) *heal gradually*
After her surgery, Aubrey spent a month convalescing at home.

14. analgesic (B) *pain reliever*
Opioids are powerful analgesics.

15. panacea (A) *miracle cure*
While self-care is important, it's not a panacea for every problem.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: pre-med
10-12: resident
13-15: M.D.

TRIVIA

BY *Samantha Rideout*

1. What condiment was in short supply last year across France, despite being named for a French city?

2. The UK's Norland College is known for training elite providers of what service?

3. How many cells do bacteria have?

4. Volunteers receive anaesthesia when they donate which of the following: blood, bone marrow or plasma?

5. Who recently became the third person to earn a billion dollars by making movies, joining Steven Spielberg and George Lucas?

6. Players in what professional sports league perform such signature cele-

bratory moves as 'Ice in My Veins', 'Night Night' and 'The Silencer'?

7. Which cetaceans recently began attacking small boats, sometimes sinking them?

8. Roughly 255 million years ago, India, Africa and Australia were all touching the land that is now which continent?



9. What Canadian Oscar nominee said, "Bullying puts you in a place where, later, you have so much unlearning to do"?

10. What European city suffered a devastating earthquake in 1755?

11. What is the world's bestselling studio album by a solo female musical artist?

12. What was the ninth-century Japanese Emperor Uda describing when he wrote, "When it lies down, it curls in a circle like a coin"?

13. Zara Rutherford and her brother Mack recently became the youngest woman and the youngest person, respectively, to do what?

14. What tabletop-game franchise of Stranger Things fame will get a new film this year?

15. Billions of the people alive today wouldn't have food to eat if it weren't for ammonia, a fertilizer compound made by extracting which element from the air?

Answers: 1. Dijon mustard. 2. Nannyng. 3. One cell each. 4. Bone marrow. 5. Peter Jackson. 6. The NBA. 7. Orcas. Scientists don't fully understand this behaviour, but it may be a playful 'fad'. 8. Antarctica. 9. Elliot Page. 10. Lisbon. 11. Shania Twain's 'Come on Over'. 12. A cat. 13. Fly solo around the world. 14. Dungeons & Dragons. 15. Nitrogen.



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Acts of Kindness by Chanelle Nibbelink, exclusively for *Reader's Digest*

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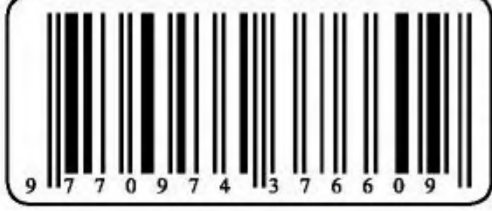


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