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Reader's Digest

APRIL 2023

STEVEN SPIELBERG

HOW I CAUGHT
MY MOTHER'S
AFFAIR ON
CAMERA

Secrets Of SICILY

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Contents

APRIL 2023

Features

- 14 IT'S A MANN'S WORLD**
Olly Mann lets Amazon help him with storytelling for his son

ENTERTAINMENT

- 18 INTERVIEW: STEVEN SPIELBERG**
The cinema maestro talks about his childhood, favourite movies and *The Fabelmans*

- 26 "I REMEMBER": PAUL BRADY**
The Irish music legend on becoming a songwriter

HEALTH

- 34 SEEING DOUBLE: DISEASE IN MULTIPLE TWINS**
When one of quadruplet brothers gets cancer, what's the risk for the others?

- 42 TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS**
Don't forget handy these tips if you're travelling when older

- 60 COLD-WATER CURE**
The health benefits of exposure to cold-water swimming



- 76 INSPIRE MY STARTER DOG**
How adopting a dog changed the life of a woman in her sixties

- 88 EVOLUTION OF THE GARDEN**
From Tudor arbours and Victorian plant hunters to the drought-resistant gardens of the future

- 97 INDEPENDENT LIVING**
Growing older doesn't mean you have to lose your independence

- 102 TRAVEL TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE**
Anna Walker on exploring Sicily's mountains by foot

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Contents

APRIL 2023

In every issue

- 5 Editor's Letter
- 6 Over to You
- 10 See the World Differently

HEALTH

- 50 Advice: Susannah Hickling
- 54 Column: Dr Max Pemberton
- 58 Memory: Jonathan Hancock

DATING & RELATIONSHIPS

- 62 Column: Monica Karpinski

INSPIRE

- 66 My Britain: Snowdonia
- 74 If I Ruled the World:
Suzi Ruffell

TRAVEL & ADVENTURE

- 110 My Great Escape
- 112 Hidden Gems: Geneva

MONEY

- 116 Column: Andy Webb

PETS

- 122 Why rabbits are
complicated pets

HOME & GARDEN

- 124 April gardening tips



p122



p66

FOOD & DRINK

- 128 Why eggs deserve better

ENTERTAINMENT

- 134 April's Cultural Highlights

BOOKS

- 138 April Fiction: James Walton's
Recommended Reads
- 143 Books That Changed
My Life: Lore Segal

TECHNOLOGY

- 144 Column: James O'Malley

FUN & GAMES

- 146 You Couldn't Make It Up
- 149 Word Power
- 152 Brain Teasers
- 156 Laugh!
- 159 Beat the Cartoonist
- 160 Good News

Reader's Digest

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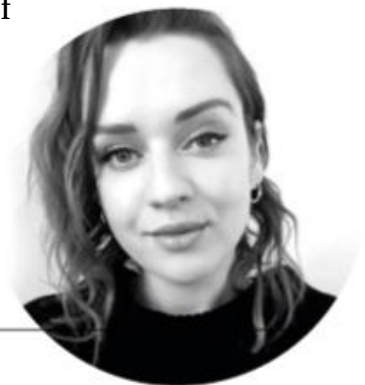
Through The Lens

As a Film Studies graduate, I've been exposed to many films that moved me and shaped my worldview in one way or another. But they all pale in comparison to the emotional impact that *Schindler's List* had on me. Steven Spielberg's 1993 masterpiece about a German industrialist who saved more than a thousand Jewish refugees from the Holocaust, it ensured that the atrocities of the Second World War would remain a matter of public consciousness. It's the only film that makes me well up at the very thought of it.

Cinema has the incredible ability to transport and immerse us in different worlds, and Spielberg is one of the artform's greatest masters. *Schindler's List* put the Holocaust back into the conversation; *Indiana Jones* inspired multiple generations of archaeologists and *Jaws*... well, *Jaws* just made sure that a lot of people would never set foot on a beach again. He defined and revolutionised the film industry, and we are incredibly proud and excited to have him on the cover of this month's issue. On p18, the King of Entertainment opens up about his childhood, favourite movies, and his latest work, *The Fabelmans*.

Eva

EVA MACKEVIC
Editor-in-Chief



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Over To You

LETTERS ON THE *February* ISSUE

We pay **£50** for Letter of the Month and **£30** for all others

LETTER OF THE MONTH

BEING YOURSELF

I was so glad I read “Blending Into the Crowd”. Social masking? I feel like I’ve done this all my adult life.

“Fake it ‘til you make it”—the concept that if you act more confident than you feel, it will become a self-fulfilling prophesy—has been widely proposed as a way to boost self-confidence. But I’ve always hated pretending to be more sociable than I really am. It’s taken a huge effort on my part to be a part of the crowd. I don’t fit in, but not conforming shouldn’t be viewed as a negative thing—yet it actually is, unless my quirks benefit mainstream society.

Feeling left out meant I tried

desperately to change the very essence of myself to avoid the fallouts of being different. But thankfully, your article made me feel a whole lot better about myself. I’d much rather be the quiet one in the corner who doesn’t say much, because that is who I am, like it or not.

JOSIE AINSLEY, *Merseyside*



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Pay It Forward

“Small Acts Of Kindness” really made me think outside the box. Dr Max is right, “it takes nothing to be nice”.

I was in New Zealand in January visiting my son and grandson. I only had a small amount of cash on me as we stopped for a drink and cake, but the establishment wouldn't take cards. As I counted out my coins and realised I needed \$2 more to pay for the cake, two boys waiting on bikes behind me observed this scene and one boy spoke up, “I can pay the extra amount.” It shocked me that a boy who didn't even know me could be so kind. I declined his offer and just had the drink but I thanked him profusely.

I “paid this forward” when I arrived in the UK. This expression for describing the beneficiary of a good deed repaying the kindness to others instead of the original benefactor (although the concept may be old) may have been coined by Lily Hardy Hammond in her 1916 book, *In the Garden of Delight*. At the chemist's, a young lady didn't have enough cash to pay for a hair band that her daughter was keen to have, so I paid the bill for her. It was only £2.99 but it made me feel good about myself and I hope it also made this mum and daughter's day!

With tiny gestures, we can give people a reason to keep on living. I intend to do this much more in the future.

JONI COOPER, *Devon*

Dark Side of Tech

I read “The Future of Tech” with enthusiasm to learn more. Technology has changed major sectors over the past 20 years, including media, climate action and healthcare.

Your article's insight into how emerging tech leaders have influenced and responded to these changes was interesting to say the least. Self-driving cars, robots taking over people's jobs, NFTs, the metaverse, space travel—I don't know what my grandparents would think of the world I am living in today as technologies become increasingly complicated and interconnected.

Cars, aeroplanes, medical devices, financial transactions and electricity systems all rely on more computer software than ever before, making them seem both harder to understand and, in some cases, harder to control. What I fear, however, is that in the near-future, major technological developments will give rise to new unprecedented risks. Nuclear technology, developments in synthetic biology, geoengineering and artificial intelligence—to name just a few of the threats of catastrophe on a global scale. Sadly, advancing technology has its dark side too.

SHONA LLOYD, *Clwyd*

Party Bag Debate

I had to laugh at Olly Mann's article "The Party Bags Are Over", as it brought back a recent memory of me trying to organise a birthday party for my nephew to celebrate his seventh birthday.



When we last had a birthday at the same soft play a few years back for another child, party bags were included in the booking—so the package was a two-hour slot with invitations, play, food and party bags, to which our own cake was added. Not this time though, as the party bags and goodies were extra, thus making the whole birthday party experience unaffordable, especially as another nephew had his birthday two weeks apart and wanted a separate party.

As to which side of the party bag debate I'm on, I think it's a lovely idea to give kids a small "thank you for coming" gift. But the little thank you fillers for the bags are really not worth the money and only add to the expense of the already expensive birthday party. I'm also thinking here of the poor parents who have to listen to the whistles and pick up (literally) the broken pieces of said fillers.

Having said that, the last time my nephew went to a birthday party he didn't get a party bag to take away. His reaction was, "It's not fair". I rest my case.

ZAHIDA RAMZAN, *Fife*

Let's All Listen More



I had to smile at some of Tracy-Ann's Oberman's "If I Ruled the World". Some were comical, but some made a lot of sense, especially concerning debate.

She's right in saying we live in a world where social media has made the understanding of history, politics and truth itself incredibly binary. I prefer facts, nuance and intellectual debate. One of us, or perhaps neither of us, may be right. Death to nobody. It's only when you cause all this stubbornness that there's aggression towards one another. We already have the ability to interact peacefully, we need to work with it.

Audi alteram partem is a Latin phrase meaning "listen to the other side" or "let the other side be heard as well". It is the principle that no person should be judged without a fair hearing in which each party is given the opportunity to respond to the evidence against them.

We all need to listen more. What a different world it would be if everyone did.

BETHANY WEBB, *Clwyd*



POETRY CORNER

ROBERT'S LOVE

He moves slowly now; time exacts its price.
The privilege of life must have a cost;
Ageing yet not aged, though youth be lost.

She walks behind him yet more slowly still.
He turns towards her with loving concern,
Reassured she is there at every turn.

He can make her laugh and keeps her safe.
Still her protector, lover and friend;
the Constancy on which she can always
depend.

He would not lose her for he loves her still.
Is his love known by the one that he chose?
It is unsaid. But she knows. Oh she knows!

BARBARA GODWIN



Because

Because you're losing patience
On life's roller coaster ride,
And everything's confusing
Now your pleasures are denied,
Because you feel forsaken
By the causes you defend,
And life will not awaken
Since the passing of a friend—
Your world is not about to end.

Because your heart was broken
By some turbulent affair,
And dreams are but a token
Of a love in disrepair,
Because nobody listens
To the messages you send,
And all in life that glistens
Is around some other bend—
Your world is not about to end.

Because you only travel
Through the cosmos of the mind,
And life will not unravel
As the fleeting years unwind,
Because it seems forever
Since you truly set the trend,
And time has failed to sever
What you cannot comprehend—
Your world is not about to end.

IAIAN WILLIAM WADE, *Yorkshire*

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the title of the poem. We'll pay £30 for every published piece



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SEE THE WORLD...
turn the page →



...DIFFERENTLY

Tulips love balmy days and cool nights and moist, but not wet, soil. The Netherlands offers both in spring. By mid-April, millions and millions of beautifully-coloured tulips are in bloom. The cut flowers are sold all over the world, but it's the tulip's bulbs that make up the lion's share of Dutch tulip exports.





The Digital Dad

When Olly Mann tires of the bedtime story, he finds an unexpected ally in AI



Olly Mann presents *Four Thought* for BBC Radio 4, and the podcasts *The Modern Mann*, *The Week Unwrapped* and *The Retrospectors*

LOOK, IT'S A wonderful thing to read your children bedtime stories. It fosters imagination, introduces the pleasures of reading, strengthens the bond between parent and child, yadda yadda yadda.

But... when's the right time to stop? Before they sprout underarm hair, I'd wager. Certainly before they get to the Honeymoon Suite. But, when?

I was mulling this over recently, having realised that what used to be a relatively rapid event at the end of each day's childcare (speed-read *Tiddler*, kiss goodnight, then hit the G&T) was fast eating into my evenings. Sometimes I wasn't hitting the bottle until 8pm!

My son Harvey, now seven, has progressed beyond Donaldson and Blyton and likes a proper "chapter book", but isn't ready for something that potentially might entertain us both, like Dickens or Kipling (we tried *The Jungle Book*, and he was literally kicking me in

the face from boredom. Sometimes you've just got to pick your battles).

We've done all of Dahl, and he's very anti-*Harry Potter* for some reason (I think he secretly finds witchcraft scary), so all that's left is the dross from the dreaded "Ages five-eight" section: adventure stories with neon jackets that are clearly designed for kids to read to themselves, but he's not proficient enough for that, so I was reading them to him. And they're

Regular *Reader's Digest* readers will recall that I've been on something of a journey with Amazon's smart speakers. Back in 2015, as gadget columnist for this magazine, I smuggled a first-gen Amazon Echo back in a suitcase from the US, and concluded: "An appealing concept. But knowing it's listening in to your every conversation, all in the name of convenience, is mildly terrifying."

I'VE BEEN ON SOMETHING OF A JOURNEY WITH AMAZON'S SMART SPEAKERS

really, really boring.

These tedious tales—or at least, the ones designed to appeal to boys—are all about dinosaurs and aliens and bottoms and bogies, and basically make no sense. When as an adult you read them aloud, they're almost impossible to follow, because there's endless plot but zero character development: everything happens and nothing happens, all at once. There are laboured jokes and derivative drawings and lots of "what if?" scenarios which don't get fully explored, because on every page someone has to do something silly with some underpants.

But then we got Harvey an Alexa speaker for Christmas, and a solution presented itself: could I outsource our nightly bedtime story to Artificial Intelligence?

However, slowly, voice-activated technology has crept into my life. And, seemingly, everyone else's: John Lewis started selling Alexa devices; radio stations began to acknowledge them ("ask Alexa to play..."); even my 96-year-old grandma got one. They became so enmeshed within our lives that a few years ago I sincerely used this column as a platform to plead with Jeff Bezos to develop a product that could filter out children's voices—just to prevent Harvey from hijacking our Echo in the kitchen whenever I was trying to hear *The Today Programme* (last year, he requested "Wellerman (Sea Shanty)" by Nathan Evans so many times that, according to Spotify, it was "my" most listened-to track of 2022).

I've got five of these speakers now, and Harvey has grown up a full native of the "internet of things". So, when Christmas came along, it made sense to get him an Alexa of his very own: a fifth gen Echo Dot Kids.

And wow, Amazon really know what they're doing. For children, it's approachable and cool: glowing orange buttons, a picture of a fire-breathing dragon woven into the design, and a year's free subscription to Amazon Kids. For parents, it pacifies as it satisfies: we can set limits on Harvey's usage (it turns itself off at 8pm), block out bad language (it won't play "explicit" songs), and keep an eye on the content he's consuming. Plus we got a 56 per cent discount for ordering it on Black Friday!

But I thought Harvey would just use it as a clock and music player. The audiobook function didn't occur to me. So I was floored when, within half an hour of getting his hands on the gadget, he'd worked

out that "Alexa, tell me a story" was a worthwhile command.

You see, unlike Daddy, Alexa doesn't tire of plodding through samey stories, can be paused at will, and delivers fart jokes. Alexa isn't irritable, tired, or craving an alcohol hit. Is it any surprise Harvey prefers her to me? At first, I took it personally ("I'm his father! *And* I'm an audio professional! Does he have any *idea* how much I charge for narrative voiceover?"), but realised both he and I were happier.

The first few months were intense—Harvey polishing off no less than 20 consecutive *Horrid Henrys*—but his routine has settled down now, and he even actually asks me to read to him once or twice per week. But, most other nights, he prefers the company of his digital Dad. And I'm fine with that. Frankly, it's hard to object to him having so much "screen time" on a device with no screen.

Now, Alexa, can you get my kids to brush their teeth? ■



International Haiku Poetry Day

"Haiku" is a form of Japanese poetry that is non-rhyming and usually consists of three lines and a syllable pattern of 5-7-5. Haiku Day is on April 17 so give it a go

Usually elements of nature or moments of beauty or individual experiences are captured in haiku poems, used with sensory language

source: nationaldaycalendar.com

Steven Spielberg

How I Caught My Mother's Affair On Camera

By Jonathan Dean

The cinema maestro was only 16 when his life changed after he filmed his mother flirting with his father's best friend.

Six decades on, *The Fabelmans* director gets personal

WHEN STEVEN SPIELBERG was 16 he found out that his mother was having an affair. He was on a camping trip with his three younger sisters, his father Arnold, his mother Leah and Bernie, Arnold's best friend. As passionate about film-making as a teenager as he is now, Spielberg recorded everything on his Super 8. His camera caught a flirtatious moment between Leah and Bernie. It was the moment that changed his life.

"What was strange," he recalls, "was I saw everything with my naked eye, but only believed it when

I saw a frame around it later, on my editing machine."

Spielberg's mother would soon marry Bernie while Arnold, remarkably, took the blame for the divorce to protect Leah's standing with her children—a noble act that led to many years of estrangement from his son. It's a theme recurrent in so many Spielberg movies.

"I realised the power of cinema young," he says. "That early film I made changed my relationship with my parents, especially my mother. That was how I found out about her affair. After that I no longer looked at her as a parent. I saw her as a human with all the vulnerabilities



Jaws (1975):
Director Steven
Spielberg poses
with the
model shark



“JAWS MADE ME SEE WHAT A MOVIE COULD DO TO AN AUDIENCE”

I saw in myself. I wish I could have had another ten years looking at my mum as my mum, but that secret brought us together. I was as close to my mother as I've been to anyone.”

Spielberg is at home in Los Angeles. Spectacles, grey cardigan, blue checked shirt—he is calm and simmering with stories. At 76 he is one of the grandfathers of modern cinema, along with his old friends Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, with whom he has knocked about since his twenties. I look around the room. A monochrome

vase, a wooden table stacked with books. Very little gives away how Hollywood this man is until he pops out a fat cigar—at ten in the morning. Pick your five favourites by him (for me? *Jaws*, *ET*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *AI*, *Minority Report*) and you could name a different five tomorrow.

Now, for his 33rd film, he has made *The Fabelmans*. Nominated for seven Oscars, it is about his childhood. Why *The Fabelmans*? He says all his films are like an Aesop's fable with a moral, and what joy it is to watch his formative years unspool. The names are changed, but it's all

ET The Extra-Terrestrial
(1982): Spielberg with his
lovable, homesick alien



true. The young Spielberg in the film is called Sammy. Like Sammy, Spielberg shot a war film with mates. He cajoled his sisters into experimental horror at home—“I was a *Grimm’s Fairy Tale* of a brother.”

“My mother used to say, ‘When are you going to tell our story? I provided so much material!’” Spielberg smiles. Did he always think he would make an autobiographical film? “It was never part of a plan because I’ve never had a career plan. But I have always ached to talk about things publicly I had only spoken about privately, so when I had nothing else to do in COVID, it was a good time to collect memories. Also I had just lost my mother.”

Leah died in 2017, Arnold in 2020. They divorced in 1966, shattering their son. The past remains raw. The director says his father would be hesitant about making these stories public, but then the pain was mostly his. Spielberg remains in awe of his father’s “sacrifice” and is clearly moved as he tells me that his sisters said *The Fabelmans* “honours” their parents. “The most nervous screening I’ve had,” he says when describing showing the film to Annie, Susie and Nancy.

It is interesting, I say, that when Scorsese made *Silence*, a meditative epic on death, he said there was “no doubt” he made it because he was 76. But Spielberg, at the



same vintage, is not looking to the end of life, but back to the start. Why? He smiles. “Because every morning I wake up it’s the first act of something,” he says. “I’ve never looked at any phase of my life as a third act.”

So Spielbergian. The optimism and sugarcoating of what we struggle to face. Critics, over his career, have accused him of oversentimentality, especially his endings, but throughout his various imperial phases the director—whose films have made a combined \$16 billion—has been hiding his demons, mostly about the divorce, in plain sight. *ET*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *War of the Worlds*, *Catch Me if You Can*, *Empire of the Sun*—all feature

children from broken homes. Even *Saving Private Ryan* is about the reuniting of a family.

“It’s all through my work,” he says. “I couldn’t be wearing a larger sign. I don’t think there’s a film I’ve made that doesn’t confront complicated issues of identity.” Does he think people missed such messages? “I frankly never thought they cared much about my life because they cared more about the stories.

“I don’t think they cared that *ET* is about three kids whose father is no longer at home,” he continues. “That began as my divorce story, then morphed into what it is: a visitor who puts a broken family back together. Then, on *Close Encounters*, when the boy catches his dad crying, so

screams, 'Cry baby'? That happened when I was ten and saw my father crying. But viewers were more interested in the mothership."

Popping Spielberg on the therapist's couch, I ask whether making movies was a way for him to assert control over fictional family lives in a way that he did not have as a child. "Making movies gives you the false sense of security and a delusion of grandeur you have control," he says. "But none of us have any control whatsoever."

Spielberg's favourite film is David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia*. He saw it when he was a teenager and

who never saw it, but that will never happen." He seems almost sad about that impossibility.

Lean's film was more than just a spectacle for Spielberg. He talks about the scene most personal to him, when Lawrence gets to the canal and the British officer screams: "Who are you?". It has stuck with him through every film he's made.

"The film cuts to the big close-up of Lawrence," Spielberg enthuses, "listening to the question he's been asking about himself, but failing to know the answer to. That's what we do when we make movies. Sometimes we just stand on the other side of the canal, screaming

"I DON'T THINK PEOPLE CARE THAT *ET* IS ABOUT THREE KIDS WHOSE FATHER IS NO LONGER HOME"

almost gave up. He simply thought he could never make a film as good. "I still haven't!". There must, though, have been a time when he thought maybe, just maybe, he was good enough? "It was probably after *Jaws*," he says of his 1975 shark blockbuster. "It made me see what a movie could do to an audience."

Still, *Lawrence of Arabia* stays with him. He rewatches it every year. Which of his own would he suggest people see annually? "Oh gosh, I could never answer that," he says. "Sometimes, though, I wish I could see *ET* through the eyes of someone

across it, 'Who am I?'. All art is that. Every movie I've directed has posed the question, 'Who am I?'."

For a direct answer, we now have *The Fabelmans*, which Spielberg co-wrote with Tony Kushner after being spurred on by his wife, Kate Capshaw. In the film you learn that Spielberg's mother once brought home an errant monkey. You see that the first film he shot involved crashing a train set. You also learn that young Steven was bullied at high school. It was mostly antisemitic, but he was an odd kid filming everything. That stuck out in the

1960s, although he never lacked in confidence. Weekends were spent with peers, messing about on his short films.

“I wasn’t popular,” he admits. “But even kids who didn’t like me loved making movies. The camera popularised me in school. Without it I wouldn’t have stood a chance.”

Now, though, film is very different. Not just in the making of it, with an iPhone to hand for the next Spielberg to shoot with, but, also, how audiences enjoy movies. Nobody makes films like Spielberg anymore—especially not for children. Nowadays films aimed at teenagers are a sugar rush of lights,

something...” I tell him that my children, aged eight and five, enjoyed *Close Encounters* and *ET* and he is delighted. A third generation of fans snared. “That makes me really happy.”

We end where we started—on the power of cinema. Other than showing *The Fabelmans* to his sisters, the film that Spielberg was most nervous about screening was *Schindler’s List*. He made it for Holocaust victims and says he needed the support and “edification” of Jews who made it through. That is his most important film, but he is more worried than ever by

“SHOWING *THE FABELMANS* TO MY SISTERS WAS THE MOST NERVOUS SCREENING I’VE HAD”

CGI and action. Spielberg trusted that they had attention spans—nothing really happens in the first 45 minutes of *Jurassic Park*. Now Hollywood thinks otherwise.

“Kids today do have the attention, if they give it a chance,” Spielberg says. He knows that cinema has more competition than before. “What kids today don’t have as much as the kids of my generation is the patience. For idle, quiet, contemplative time away from any kind of activity. That is what’s lacking—patience. But if you can compel someone to watch

antisemitism. The end—in which survivors visit the grave of Schindler, the German who saved them—was tagged on late, after the director feared people would not believe the story he had told.

“Holocaust denial was on the rise again—that was the entire reason I made the movie in 1993,” he says. “That ending was a way to verify that everything in the movie was true.” He sighs. “I have never made a movie that so directly confronted a message I thought the world needed to hear. It had a vital message that is more important today than it even was



The Fabelmans, based on Spielberg's young discovery of a love for film

in 1993, because antisemitism is so much worse today than it was when I made the film.”

He also made *Schindler's List* as a tribute to his parents and the family's Judaism, which he had shied from when it made him a teenage punchbag. That film, like all he does, was looking to answer, “Who am I?”. Now, *The Fabelmans* is the director's most “Who am I?” film yet. It ends with a great scene in which an irascible John Ford barks career advice at Spielberg in the 1960s.

The director laughs. He enjoys that memory. And there are plenty more

where that came from. One aside is about not liking *The Shining* when he first saw it and how annoyed that made Stanley Kubrick. What a life. What advice would he give budding film-makers now?

“Tell stories that interest you,” he insists, without a pause. “Don't tell stories you think will be interesting to others. But the most important thing is moving on to the next one,” he says, restlessly. “There is nothing more important than moving on.” ■

Jonathan Dean / *The Sunday Times* / The Interview People



BEN NICHOLSON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Paul Brady (75) is an Irish music legend whose 50-year career has seen him cross paths with everyone from Bob Dylan to Tina Turner. Paul's new memoir *Crazy Dreams* is out now

I REMEMBER...
Paul Brady



MY EARLIEST MEMORY WAS THE SONG “NOW IS THE HOUR”, which was a big hit for Vera Lynn shortly after the war. Bing Crosby recorded that in the Fifties, and that might have been the version that I heard, because a lot of big singers at the time recorded the song. According to my father, it's the first tune they heard me la-la-ing to when I was 18 months old.

MY MUM AND DAD WERE BOTH PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS. My father was trained in the Republic of Ireland's system and my mother was trained in the north. My father was a Sligo man and my mother was born in County Tyrone. When they got married, they wanted both to work, so they had to find a town on the border of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. That's why we

settled in the town of Strabane. My mother taught in the north of Ireland, in a school three miles south of the town, and my father used to cycle across the bridge every morning to his school in Lyford in the Republic of Ireland. It was kind of a dual existence. You were living with two different cultures really, socially, artistically, and politically. It was a good experience to have both. I think people who live along the border do benefit from two different views of the world.

I WAS SENT TO PIANO LESSONS WHEN I WAS ABOUT FIVE OR SIX.

Usually at the piano lessons, you learn how to play the scales and read a bit of simple music. But I very quickly realised that it wasn't the music I wanted to play. The music I wanted to play was what I was



Paul's First
Communion

hearing on the radio in the house—Radio Luxembourg was the big pop station. I started to try and play the tunes I heard on the radio myself. I kind of taught myself by ear how to play the piano.

MY MOTHER WAS THE ELDEST OF NINE CHILDREN and they were spread out all over counties Tyrone and Fermanagh, so we would go visit them several times a year. We would all call in to my Uncle Bernard in Irvinestown, and he played the fiddle. I wasn't much educated in Irish traditional folk music at the time. I was still more or less listening to pop radio. But I always loved being in his company, when he would take out the fiddle and play a few tunes. It made me feel I was part of a bigger tradition that I hadn't realised until I heard him play.

I DIDN'T PLAY IN A FORMAL SITUATION UNTIL I CAME TO DUBLIN IN THE MID-SIXTIES TO GO TO COLLEGE. It was the time of the big British blues boom, where you had Spencer Davis' band, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck in the Yardbirds—all that was really coming on to the air. I went to a rhythm and blues concert, and I was immediately struck by the knowledge that that's all I wanted to do—to be a musician. I thought I'd be a teacher like my parents, and maybe play music for fun in the summer holidays. But when I got to Dublin, I knew that I didn't want to continue studying. I just wanted to join a band.

THE JOHNSTONS STARTED OFF IN THE LATE SIXTIES IN IRELAND and in 1969, we moved to London. That was the height of folk revival in the



UK, where you had bands like The Young Tradition, Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span, or folk artists like Billy Connolly, before he became a professional comedian. The Johnstons had quite a profile on British radio. We did loads and loads of sessions for daily programmes like Jimmy Young, Terry Wogan, even John Peel. But then we decided we'd try and break America, so we moved to New York around 1970. Things started to go pear shaped in America for The Johnstons. It was the first big energy crisis and the vinyl that records were made from at the time was in very short supply, because it needed a fossil fuel to be made. Record companies started dropping acts and not signing new acts. We found ourselves stuck in America

trying to get a record deal. That eventually led to the breakup of the group The Johnstons.

ONE OF THE LEGENDARY IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSICIANS, WILLIE CLANCY, died [in 1973], and his funeral became a mecca for every traditional musician in the country. His civil funeral took place in a village in the southwest of Ireland, in County Clare, in the village called Miltown Malbay. It was one of these situations where you met hundreds of people we hadn't seen in a long while. It was a very moving occasion. Right after, we were all in a pub playing music. This lady, Mary Elliot came into the room with a friend of hers from Dublin. They were music fans, and Mary had just delivered her

Paul with Andy
Irvine, 1977;
(Left) The
Johnstons, 1967



thesis for her master's degree that afternoon, so she was well ready to rock. I fancied her straightaway, and we got together that evening and spent some lovely time together. In the space of a week, I'd fallen in love with her. I found myself then having to go back to America, to The Johnstons, and there followed a nine-month period where we were separated. We wrote to each other all the time. Eventually, I left the band and came back to Ireland, and we were still in love. We got married in 1975, and we're still together.

ONE DAY, I WAS DRIVING HOME, AND I HEARD THIS SONG ON THE RADIO. It was Gerry Rafferty, a song called "Baker Street". This was the first time I'd ever heard the song. I

knew Gerry Rafferty because he was in a folk group with Billy Connolly and Tom Harvey called The Humblebums. "Baker Street" was a huge leap forward stylistically, lyrically, and in every other way, and it was like a eureka moment for me. At that point, I decided to say farewell to traditional folk music and see if I could become a songwriter. I made a record in 1981 called *Hard Station*. That surprised a lot of people, because I was known as a traditional folk artist. People go, "Where did this come out of?" To be honest, I don't know myself. It came out of a part of me that I'd never really explored before.

AROUND 1982, I GOT MY FIRST COVER BY THE AMERICAN BAND



SANTANA. They recorded one of the songs off *Hard Station*. Shortly after that, other artists started getting interested in the songs I was writing. My manager, Ed Bicknell, was friendly with an Australian manager, Roger Davies. Tina Turner at that stage, was at a low ebb in her career. She had had a long slide down the pole of success throughout the Seventies. Roger believed in her very strongly and decided he wanted to bring her back for a revival. Ed Bicknell also managed Dire Straits, so Roger was asking Ed if any of his artists had songs that could suit Tina. He had one great song that Mark Knopfler had written called “Private Dancer”, and he had another song which I had just written called “Steel Claw”. Tina loved them both. That

was how I got Tina Turner to record “Steel Claw”.

I WAS IN DUBLIN MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS, when I got a call from my agent to say that Bob Dylan was coming on a big European tour. He was playing Wembley Stadium, and he wanted to meet me. So I flew over to London and met Bob backstage and went into his mobile dressing room. He asked, how did I play the song “The Lakes of Pontchartrain”? I use quite a lot of unorthodox guitar tunings, which a lot of folk artists at the time were doing, so I asked him if I could borrow his guitar and if he'd mind if I retuned it? He said, “Go ahead,” so I did that. And he said, “Well, show me how to do it.” I ended up taking his



fingers and said, “Well, you put them like that on the neck of the guitar, and then you do this here.” The last thing I expected that morning was to be moving Bob Dylan's fingers around his guitar. It was a thrill.

I HAVE TWO KIDS: a daughter, Sarah, who was born in 1977, and my son, Colm, was born in 1979. He lives in New Zealand with his family and Sarah lives in Epsom. We have five grandchildren. New Zealand's a long way away, I have to confess. We couldn't go there from 2020, because New Zealand was one of the hardest countries to get into. We went out on January 4 this year and came back on February 7, and that was the first time we'd seen them in a long time. The older I get, the more I think that

family really is where it's at. I've had success and I'm comfortable, but to me, the main thing is family. It's hard to not have any of your family living in Ireland. But that's the way it is, and we're not the only ones in that boat. Ireland has always been a country that people have emigrated from. I remember what it must have been like over 100 years ago. It was called the American wake, because when people left Ireland for America in the late 19th century, you never saw them again. It was like a death. We're much more fortunate these days that they have lots of ways to communicate. We're not complaining too much. ■

As told to Becca Inglis

Crazy Dreams, published by Merrion Press, is out now (£19.99)



SEEING DOUBLE!

DISEASE IN MULTIPLE TWINS

When one sibling of quadruplet brothers is diagnosed with cancer, what's the risk for the others?



BY Jamie Valentino



AS CHILDREN, MY QUADRUPLET BROTHERS AND I HAD A KNACK FOR GETTING COLLECTIVELY SICK WHENEVER ONE PERSON WOULD FALL ILL. GERMS TRAVELLED AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT BECAUSE WHENEVER THE WORDS LEFT SOMEONE'S MOUTH, THE REST WOULD IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY WITH THE SAME SYMPTOMS. WHO KNEW EXHAUSTION OR HEADACHES WERE SO CONTAGIOUS?

Of course, the possibility of getting to skip school might have had something to do with it. But, since the inception of my memory, I've felt bonded to my brothers—our existences aligned, and I felt deserving of every item or experience they had. Growing up, we were like four cells crowding around the same nucleus, known as Mum.

But happenstance and adulthood cemented our individuality. I always had a tingling about our innate differences, but I fully stepped into them when I came out as gay. Years later, when one of my brothers was diagnosed with testicular cancer, he was also forced to grapple with the different trajectories of our genetics—respective humanities.

"Does that mean I should get tested?" was regrettably my knee-jerk reaction. But I suppose it was easier than facing my real fear of what that meant for him. Thankfully, my brother caught it early and had surgery to replace the problematic testicle with a prosthetic. He was recently deemed cancer-free for the second year in a row.

However, I still wondered if being a multiple increases your risk of cancer if one of the others gets diagnosed. After all, if a family history of cancer is said to increase your risk, wouldn't your twin's health be the closest reflection of your heritability?

DR LORELEO MUCCI, Professor of Epidemiology at Harvard TH Chan



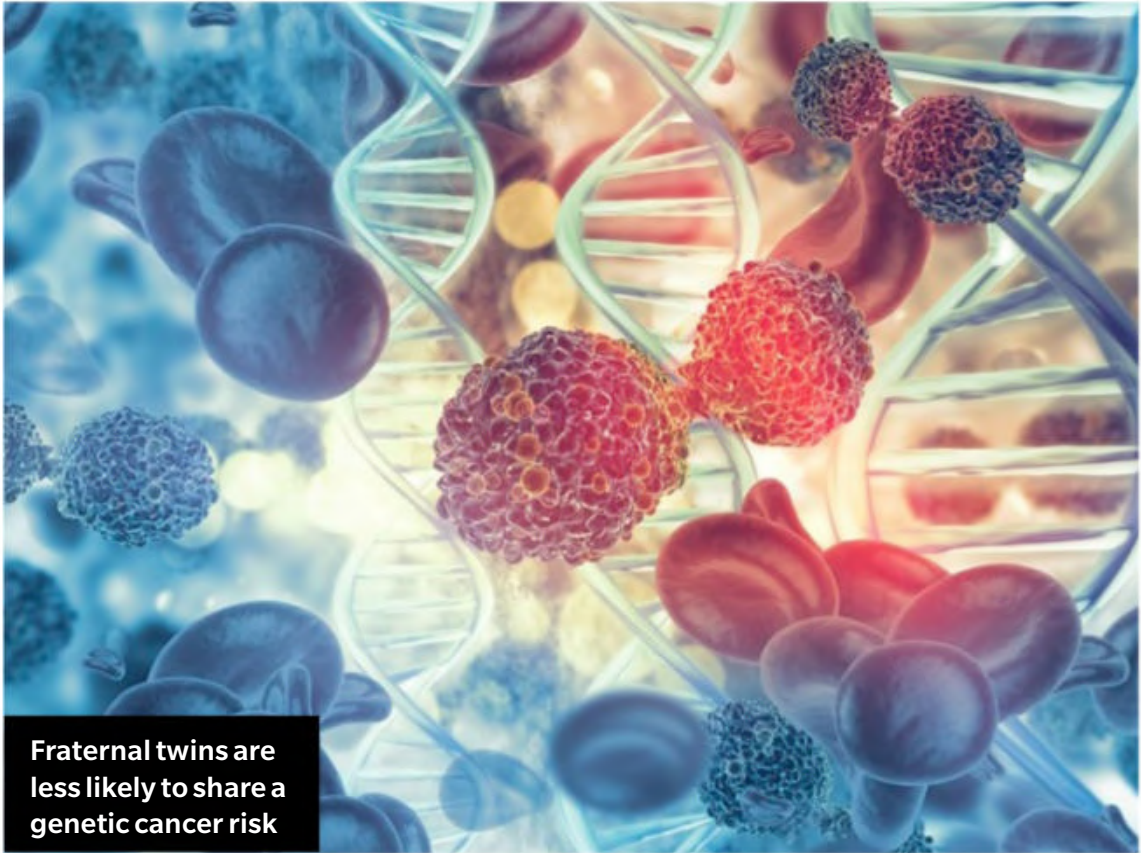
Jamie (first from right) with his quadruplet brothers, and younger brother (second from right)

School of Public Health, says my brothers and I share no more genetic similarities than regular siblings. Fraternal twins, triplets and quads share an average of 50 per cent of their inherited genomes, unlike their identical counterparts, which share 100 per cent. "The familial risk is higher in identical twins than fraternal twins, meaning that if their twin developed cancer, their own risk of cancer would be higher if they were identical," says Dr Mucci.

She was the first author of the Nordic Twin Study of Cancer publication in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and

THE FAMILIAL RISK OF CANCER IS HIGHER IN IDENTICAL TWINS THAN IT IS IN FRATERNAL TWINS

one of the original members of the cohorts executive committee. The study collected data on cancer occurrence among 80,309 identical and 123,382 fraternal twins over 30 years within the population-based registers of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.



Fraternal twins are less likely to share a genetic cancer risk

"The study of cancer occurrence in twins is critical in estimating the relative contribution of genetic and environmental factors to cancer development," says Dr Mucci. "It also provides important information about the familial risk of cancer, which may help in targeted prevention, screening and early detection."

The risk varied by cancer type, but for most, there were significant familial risks, and the study found the estimated cumulative risks were five per cent higher in dizygotic (not identical) and 14 per cent higher in monozygotic (identical). Although it measured all cancer types, specific

cancers such as testicular and skin cancers showed substantial excess risk, particularly among identical twins.

Regarding how far apart cancer occurrence happened when both twins got it, Dr Mucci says that for most types of cancers, the age difference was about eight to nine years. For prostate cancer, however, the age difference was much smaller, falling at about four years for identical and six years for fraternal twins.

DR MICHAEL MURRAY, a geneticist at the Yale Cancer Centre, says that with a triplet birth and higher multiple

births, you can have all identical, all fraternal, or both identical and fraternal, so the risk varies.

He says there are two different categories of genetic cancer risk. "There's what we call monogenic (or single gene) genetic risk, which means that one out of your 20,000 genes can be broken in a way that predisposes you to genetic risk for cancer. The example that many people are familiar with are the BRCA genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2). If one of these are broken, it predisposes someone with that to cancer, but it doesn't cause cancer."

The BRCA-related gene risks include breast, ovarian, prostate and pancreatic cancer. Dr Murray explains that if two siblings are fraternal twins or born at different times, and one of their parents carries a broken gene, then there's a 50 per cent chance that each one would inherit that broken gene from the parent. So they may both get the broken gene, or both miss the broken gene, or one gets it, and one doesn't. In contrast, identical twins either both get it or both miss it.

"When you have these elevated single gene risks which only occur in one to two per cent of the population," Dr Murray says, "then the cancer occurs in 75 to 85 per cent of individuals over a lifetime. Still, never a 100 per cent disease occurrence."

The other genetic cancer risk Dr Murray references is called a polygenic risk score or PRS, which

every person has that arises from a combination of changes in different genes. This new kind of analysis looks at the hundreds, or thousands of gene changes that each increase the risk for a certain cancer a little bit and combines them into scores that may be high, average or low.

"It's worth stepping back for a second and thinking about the risk for cancer in general," says Dr Murray. "It is a combination of environmental and

BRCA-RELATED GENE RISKS INCLUDE BREAST, OVARIAN, PROSTATE AND PANCREATIC CANCER

genetic factors. And so twins and larger birth groups share a lot of the same genetics and a lot of the same early environment, at least until they grow up and move away from each other."

For example, my history of smoking cigarettes (until recently quitting) might put me at a higher risk for lung cancer than the rest of my brothers, who were wise enough never to start. But Dr Murray emphasises you can have a risk for cancer and never get it. There are events at the molecular level as a cancer develops, and a person may have a predisposition, but the follow-on events never happen, so



they don't get cancer. In other words, twins may have increased risk when one gets diagnosed, but it doesn't mean there is a reason for the other to panic. What's important during this challenging moment is to be there for the sibling diagnosed and be emotionally available for them to express themselves. A family member's diagnosis will undoubtedly scare you, but your sibling should feel supported without the burden of carrying anyone else's emotional baggage.

Don't assume you know what they are feeling or project your own fears. You don't need to have the "right" answer—or any for that matter—but just let them know you're there.

YOUR SIBLING SHOULD FEEL SUPPORTED WITHOUT CARRYING ANYONE ELSE'S BAGGAGE

My brother was fortunate that his situation was relatively easy, as far as cancer goes. His real worry manifested the night before the surgery regarding whether future romantic partners would be able to tell he has a prosthetic. As his only gay brother with field experience (testicular cancer is more common than you think), I was happy to let

him know it's hardly noticeable. His testicles would still be as gorgeous as testicles could possibly be!

THE REALITY OF THE MATTER is that cancer will probably affect most of us if we're lucky enough to live a long and fruitful life.

"Across the entire population, age is the number one risk factor for cancer, period," says Dr Murray. "If we all live long enough, we'll probably all have to face cancer of some sort. And that's because the body's machinery for fixing mistakes in the DNA as we get older seems to break down over time."

Luckily, with regards to the common cancers, he says there are

strategies for prevention and screening, which can be enhanced for those with elevated risk.

If you're worried about your risk, both experts suggest that your doctor will always be the best professional to consult. Asking your parents or grandparents about your family's history regarding cancer will also be useful information for your doctor. After you have the facts, you can always count on friends, family or local resource groups for support.

I'm lucky to have three other individuals to share experiences with and learn from their own journeys—the good, the bad and everything in-between in the spectrum of life. ■



A Brief History Of The Selfie

In 1433 Jan Van Eyck paints a self-portrait, "Portrait of a Man in a Red Turban"

In 1839 French inventor Robert Cornelius takes the first selfie using daguerreotypy

In 1865, French photographer Gaspard-Felix Tournachon created a revolving selfie by photographing himself a dozen times as he slowly rotated in a swivel chair

In 1900, the invention of the Kodak Brownie Camera made it easy and cheap for people to photograph anything and everything

In 1966 Buzz Aldrin takes the first selfie in outer space

In 2003, the first front-facing phone cameras were introduced

In 2013, "selfie" entered the official lexicon

source: medium.com



ROAM IF YOU
WANT TO—BUT
DON'T FORGET
THESE ITEMS
IF YOU'RE OVER
60 OR HAVE
MEDICAL ISSUES

PREPARING FOR TAKEOFF

BY *Dr Jean Marmoreo*
FROM CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC



“Is there a doctor aboard?”

No physician wants to hear these words while flying, but this time I was already primed by the frantic sounds of a female passenger in distress. We were over the North Atlantic, and my husband and I were on our way back to North America after a European holiday. The cabin was darkened for the inflight films when pleas of “Wake up! Oh, help!” rang out.

I was out of my seat, fast. The flight attendant and I arrived together to see a frightened elderly woman clutching the hand of her husband, who wasn’t responding to her. His head was back, mouth open. He may have been asleep, except that he couldn’t be roused.

I did a quick examination: irregular but steady pulse, colour good, no evident pain, breathing regularly without effort. I sat on the arm of the seat across the aisle, still monitoring his pulse, and asked the woman about her husband. At 80, he had a clean medical history and took no medications. The couple had travelled to Scotland to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, and they were on their way home. It had been a good holiday, she explained, but tiring.

Suddenly her husband opened his eyes, looked at me, smiled and said, “Hello. What’s happened?”

“Well, you lost consciousness for a few minutes,” I said. “Your heartbeat isn’t quite right, and that may have caused this.”

Soon after, looking down on the expanse of snow over Greenland from the cockpit, I reported to the pilot that there was no other plausible explanation for the man’s episode.

“We can put the plane down in 20 minutes in Gander,” he told me, “or carry on for two hours and land in Toronto. What do you want me to do, doc?”

“Put it down,” I said. It wasn’t worth taking any chances, and the safest thing was to get him hospital care quickly.

Three weeks later, I received a lovely thank you note from this kind gentleman, who will hopefully remain in good health for years to come.

I DON’T KNOW FOR CERTAIN what caused the man’s troubles that day on the plane. Maybe he overexerted himself in Scotland; maybe he didn’t rest enough; maybe he was dehydrated. The truth is, travel for seniors can be

daunting and stressful, and there's enormous potential for medical complications, especially for people with pre-existing health issues. But it can also be very exciting and fulfilling.

Being 80 myself, I love to travel and want to continue for as long as I can. My husband and I recently took walking trips in the Shetland and Orkney islands in northern Scotland and finished in the wind-blown Faroes, east of Iceland. We loved the ancient history and the warm and lively local hosts. Spending time in other parts of the world with people from other cultures adds interest and value to my life.

Though COVID-19 is likely to be part of our lives for the foreseeable future, people are travelling again, and the key to things going smoothly—beyond getting travel insurance—is preparation. Here are steps you can take to enjoy your vacation with minimal stress.

CREATE A PORTABLE MEDICAL HISTORY

Thanks to mobile phones and tablets, it's easy to bring your medical history—consultations, test results, imaging reports—with you on your travels. You can take advantage of the numerous available phone apps and digital tools that allow you to access your health records. That means you will have this vital information with you no matter where you are in

the world. Even with these details on your mobile device, however, you should still create a written record of your medical history. Include any surgeries you've had and the medications you take (by name, dosage and the time of day you normally take them).

Put the information in your wallet along with your boarding pass, vaccination record and credit cards. Knowing it's there is very reassuring. Why? Phones can fail or run out of power. If something goes wrong during your travels and you can't speak for yourself, your medical summary will provide caregivers with the information they need.

And if you end up receiving medical care while travelling, make sure you get print-outs of all the tests you were given so you can show them to your



doctors back home. They will be a key component of your follow-up care and will help you avoid retaking tests.

SHARE YOUR TRAVEL ITINERARY

Send your itinerary to close family or friends, and be sure to include addresses and phone numbers for each destination. This allows your loved ones to keep in touch if you do experience medical problems while you're away.

And if you, the traveller, are leaving elderly parents at home, make sure that whoever is caring for them can reach you if there is a health crisis. Many of my patients in their sixties are longing to go on a trip, but worry about leaving behind a parent for whom they are a caregiver. I never discourage someone from

travelling, unless the parent has a sudden critical illness.

What if a loved one passes away at home while you're travelling? Frankly, unless you belong to a religion that requires a quick burial, I believe there is no need for you to race home. This advice assumes that funeral arrangements have already been made for your loved ones, which is simply smart planning. The pandemic has taught us that in the absence of a bedside vigil, it's the celebration of life that matters.

STAY COMFORTABLE WHILE FLYING

Flights are physically demanding. The combination of being sedentary and enduring high cabin pressure at altitude can take a toll on our bodies.

In addition to donning masks as a precaution against airborne illnesses like Covid-19, my husband and I wear knee-high compression socks on lengthy flights. They reduce or even prevent uncomfortable foot swelling caused by sitting for hours crammed into a small seat. We also never take off our footwear while flying. We know that if we do, we'll be struggling to stuff our swollen feet back into our shoes or boots at the end of the flight.

Compression socks support your legs' veins and allow better blood flow. This helps prevent swelling and the pooling of blood in the veins, reducing your risk of deep-vein



thrombosis, when clots form that can cause a pulmonary embolism.

It's also very important to get up and walk the aisle during the flight. I recommend taking a stroll every two to three hours. Even if you have to crawl over fellow passengers and risk blocking the food trolley in the aisle, it's worth it for your health's sake.

BRING ALONG THE BASICS

Pack a reusable water bottle. Parents today send their kids off to school with water bottles, but rarely do we see elders carrying them—and they definitely should.

If you're part of a tour group, some excursions at your destination may offer fixed lunch times and rest periods, but many travellers find themselves out all day, often inadequately fuelled and watered.

Be sure to drink regularly throughout the day—staying hydrated can reduce headaches and body aches, which helps you stay focused and, crucially, reduces your chances of falling. I like collapsible lightweight bottles because they're easy to tuck into small bags; one that holds 750 millilitres of water is enough for a day's outing but won't make you desperate for the toilet. Aim to drink around two litres per day in total.

When you do head out for the day, don't carry too much. It's well known that the "asymmetrical loading" of



shoulder bags stresses the neck and upper body. A simple, small backpack, squarely set on both shoulders, will make all your outings a lot more comfortable.

Put only the necessities into your daypack: water, medications, your medical-history document, sun cream, hat, credit card and cash. Depending on the weather, you may want to add a sweater, raincoat or compact umbrella. And wearing a mask, especially in crowded places, just makes sense.

DON'T BE SHY ABOUT BRINGING A CANE OR WALKING FRAME

My patients who travel tell me they struggle navigating the cobblestone

paths, steep roads and narrow stairs they encounter at some destinations. Vacations often include visits to museums, gardens and ancient sites, and that can add up to a lot of walking—often more than six miles, or over 12,000 steps, a day. It can take a toll on tricky knees, stiff hips or a sore back.

Many tourist attractions that cater to older travellers offer canes for walking tours and poles for hikes. Some may even provide straps for your ankles and braces for your knees, but it's better to have your own equipment that you've already tried. Consider packing a knee guard (a neoprene sleeve with the kneecap area exposed) or a soft ankle brace. It could be invaluable, as mild pressure on a joint can reduce swelling.

Recently, some friends of mine took their 90-year-old parents on a trip to France. They had to bring along two walking frames and a folding wheelchair, all packed in the aeroplane's cabin. These items allow trips with elderly travellers to be enjoyed, or—sometimes—even to happen in the first place.

Consider borrowing a wheelchair from the airline for use when in transit. They're not only for the eldest, frailest people—anyone who might have difficulty carrying bags through the airport and standing in lengthy customs and immigration lines will appreciate them.

To avoid over-exerting your body before you even reach your destination, it's perfectly okay to ask your GP for a letter requesting the use of a wheelchair for transiting through airports (though airlines wouldn't typically require a doctor's note). Some airports even provide large golf carts in lieu of wheelchairs. Ask your airline in advance about the options for your journey.

DON'T FORGET OTHER ESSENTIALS

You've got your passport, reading glasses, sunglasses, money, contact details, medical information, itinerary, phone, power adapters and small bottles of your preferred toiletries. Other all-important basics are sun cream with an SPF of 50 or higher and



a hat to protect your scalp, ears and the back of your neck (areas that never seem to get enough sun cream).

Don't forget antibacterial wipes; we're all now accustomed to hand sanitiser, and the wipes are handy for cleaning surfaces around you, in planes and on buses, for example. And if you want to be *really* prepared, add an antihistamine to your luggage.

Always pack prescription medications in your carry-on bag, not your checked luggage; replacing them could be difficult if your bags are lost or delayed. And if you are travelling with prescription opiates for chronic pain, bring a letter from your GP that declares exactly what you're carrying with you.

Likewise, if you have diabetes, put your glucometer (to measure your blood sugar) in your carry-on bag. If you are on blood thinners, don't forget to bring your INR testing kit (which monitors the risk of blood clotting).

Anyone planning to hike in North America or Europe should pack tweezers for removing ticks; you don't want to get Lyme disease. It's a serious illness that can dramatically affect the quality of your life. If you're going to be in the woods or in tall grass, wear a

long-sleeved shirt and trousers tucked into your socks. Later, as you get ready for bed, make sure to check your entire body for any ticks.

THE WORLD IS WAITING

Don't forget that no matter where you go, you can often rely on the kindness of strangers. I am forever impressed at the trips my elderly patients undertake, and they tell me that part of their confidence comes from knowing that, if they need help, they can ask for it from locals. People are generally good.

I've just returned from an extended stay in Yellowknife, in Canada's north. When it started snowing heavily, I reached out to locals for advice on how to navigate the pavements and roads in the darkness. I was rewarded with assistance, stories and the kind of essential homegrown savvy you would never find in guidebooks.

I find that travel is good medicine for my soul, and it may be good for yours, too. With the world opening up again, don't shy away from seeing the world. Embrace it.

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The Fountain Of Youth

**"The secret to staying young is to live honestly,
eat slowly and lie about your age"**

LUCILLE BALL

7 Ways Your Body Is Telling You You're Stressed

As well as obvious mental signs, such as anxiety or insomnia, tension can bring on surprising physical symptoms



Susannah Hickling is twice winner of the Guild of Health Writers Best Consumer Magazine Health Feature



1. Spots

When you're stressed your brain releases the hormones adrenaline and cortisol, sending blood rushing to your heart, other vital organs and muscles to help you deal with the situation. But long-term stress can trigger other issues—such as acne. Stress doesn't cause acne so much as aggravate it if you suffer already. Touching your face when you're worried might be one reason you get a breakout.

2. Cold sores

Again, cold sores aren't caused by stress but by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). But when you're under pressure, they're more likely to pop up—and make you feel even worse about yourself. Dab on acyclovir, an antiviral cold sore cream which can be bought at a pharmacy, as soon as you feel that tell-tale tingling or itching.

3. Mouth ulcers

Sores in your mouth and swollen gums are other unpleasant side effects of stress and anxiety, but if they persist more than a couple of weeks see a dentist to rule out any other issues.

4. Chronic pain

Chronic pain causes stress and depression, but prolonged stress can also provoke or worsen chronic pain. It's a vicious circle—the more pain you're in, the more stressed you become and the worse the pain gets. Tackling the stress can help ease the pain. Some recommended strategies are finding distractions, including seeing friends, and going to bed and getting up at the same time every night. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can be effective for both stress and chronic pain.



5. Wrinkles

When you're under mental strain you're more likely to grind your teeth. Long-term teeth grinding (bruxism) wears them down. None of us wants to look older, but unfortunately shorter teeth can shorten your face and cause stress lines around the mouth. Another factor in wrinkle formation might be

frowning. Meanwhile, high levels of cortisol can deplete the collagen and elastin which help give your skin its elasticity.

6. Infections

Studies have shown psychological stress can weaken the immune system over time. You become more prone to coughs, colds and other bugs. One study of 116 elderly Hong Kong Chinese people found those in psychological distress had a weakened immune response to the flu vaccine. Bolster your immunity by eating a healthy diet and exercising. Physical activity is also a great way of relieving stress.

7. Bad hair

We're not just talking about the overall condition of your barnet here; extreme stress can actually cause some hair loss and turn your hair grey. Hair colour comes from melanin, a pigment produced by cells called melanocytes. Stress can cause the stem cells that create melanocytes to disappear, making you go grey more quickly. But the news isn't all bad—a small study from Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York found that in some cases, once stress was lifted, normal hair colour returned. ■

How often should you change your sheets and other textiles you use around the house?

Wash Day

Bed linen—once a week. We spend 50 or more hours in bed a week, meaning we sweat in it, shed dead skin in it and offload germs in it. These include: flu viruses; fungi, such as thrush; and bacteria, such as staphylococcus aureus which can cause skin infections. If you have allergies or asthma, wash bedding every two to three days, since dust mites quickly move in to feed off dead skin and can cause allergic reactions. If you're ill, it's a good idea to change your sheets, pillowcases and duvet covers every day. On the other hand, if you don't sleep in your own bed that much, every two weeks is probably fine.

Towels—every two to three days. Even though you think you're squeaky clean after coming out of the shower, you'll still have some germs on your body. These bugs will get onto your towel as you rub yourself dry. Dirty towels can spread athlete's foot and warts. Acne sufferers and those who use a towel to wipe off sweat rather than bath water should wash it after every use. Always hang



your towel up and let it dry thoroughly after using it.

Tea towels—every three to four days. If you're using them to dry dishes or wipe clean hands, replacing tea towels every three to four days is often enough, but if you use them to clean up food spills, make sure you put it in the laundry basket straight away.

Dishcloths—every day. It's especially important to change them if they're used to wipe kitchen surfaces or spills. Kitchen cloths are a major source of cross-contamination.

Pillows and duvets—every three to six months. If your pillows are washable, pop them in the machine at least twice a year to prevent a build-up of germs, odours and—ugh—dust mites. Many of us forget all about our duvets, but they're a breeding ground for dust mites and bacteria too. ■

For more weekly health tips and stories, sign up to our newsletter at [readersdigest.co.uk](https://www.readersdigest.co.uk)

Ask The Expert: Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Dr Sean Preston is consultant gastroenterologist at the Royal London Hospital, Barts Health and founding partner of London Digestive Health at The Princess Grace Hospital, London

How did you come to specialise in gastroenterology?

I wanted to be a gastroenterologist since medical school. You work with people of all ages and see some over many years. It's lovely to have that continuity and a great honour to be allowed into people's very intimate stories. You can make a huge difference, which is often described by patients as life changing.

What is irritable bowel syndrome?

IBS is a common functional bowel disease—the organ is structurally as it should be but not working properly. It is either constipation or diarrhoea predominant, or more rarely the mixed type. You have abdominal pain and discomfort, and bloating in addition to some change in the frequency or consistency of your stool. We need to eliminate other diseases, such as

cancer, inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's or ulcerative colitis), or coeliac disease.



What causes IBS?

There is no one single cause, but we see it commonly after an episode of gastroenteritis. There is often a psychosocial element—IBS often comes with depression, anxiety or fibromyalgia.

What can people do to prevent it?

Focus on gut health—drink 1.5 litres of water a day and have a diversity of plants in your diet, including fermented foods like kimchi. Exercise is tremendous for the gut. Try to avoid stress and unnecessary antibiotics.

When should they seek help?

We should all talk about our symptoms with relatives and friends and check our stools for blood. If you have symptoms, go to your GP. If there is bleeding, weight loss, vomiting or you get up at night to open your bowels, we need to consider more serious diagnoses. Once those are ruled out, and the cause explained, many people feel better already. There are many treatments for IBS, depending on the cause and type. ■

Visit hcahealthcare.co.uk/finder/specialists/dr_sean_preston
or call 0800 652 1102



On The Wards

Dr Max reflects on the disrespect shown to older patients by some staff

“I’VE COME TO see Professor Mason,” I explained to the nurse. She looked at me blankly and then rummaged in her uniform pocket and produced a piece of paper. “Oh, you mean Mary” she said, looking down the list of patients. *No*, I thought, *I mean Professor Mason*, but I let this pass. The nurse showed me

to her bed. “Here you go, dear, there’s a visitor for you,” she said loudly to Professor Mason, who was sitting up in bed wearing a dressing gown. She thanked the nurse and I sat down at the bed.

I have known Professor Mason since I was a medical student. She is an internationally renowned neurologist with a formidable intellect and considerable standing both as an academic and as a clinician. She is the author of countless research papers as well as one of the core text books used by medical students and trainee doctors. She’s also just broken her hip, which is why I was visiting her in hospital.

Despite knowing her as a personal friend, I have such respect for her that in company I still refer to her as Professor Mason. Perhaps this is an old-fashioned notion, but it would

be unthinkable to casually refer to her by her first name, let alone call her “dear”, as the nurses saw fit to. But, with her enquiring mind, Professor Mason had seized upon her admission to see what being a patient was really like. As a result, while the staff knew she was a professor, she had decided not to tell the ward that she was a medical doctor because she wanted to experience what it was like for everyday patients.

The contrast to how she is treated by nurses when running her clinic compared to how she was treated by them as a patient on a ward was startling. I sat there in horror as I heard the nursing staff repeatedly refer to her as either “dear”, or, even worse, reduced to a piece of anatomy by calling her “the broken hip”. At best it was patronising, and at worst, dehumanising.

But there was more. Not only was she rarely offered adequate fluids, she was repeatedly left calling out for assistance to use the toilet. After she was sick, no one cleaned her for an hour and for three days she went without a shower because they did not have the staff to assist her. So shall we demonise the nursing profession?

From my experience on the ward, there are large swathes of nurses who do a fantastic job and without whom the wards would fall apart. Polls have found that many leave work at the end of each day feeling distressed because they had not been able to

treat patients with the respect they deserved. Increasing paperwork has led to nurses being able to spend less time doing actual nursing and the workload has increasingly fallen to unqualified, poorly trained support staff who lack an understanding of the nuances of communication.

Overlaying this is the culture of “assumed intimacy”, which mistakes being caring for being over-familiar. There are times when it might be appropriate to call a patient “dear” or “love” or by their first name, but the widespread adoption of these is indicative of the disrespect towards older people that is endemic in our society. No one would call Professor Mason “dear” or by her first name if she had been in a professional setting, but as soon as she becomes an older woman with a broken hip, it’s fine.

Word soon got out among the junior doctors who she was. On my last visit before she was discharged, one of the surgical house officers came with a text book she had written: “Would you mind signing it please?” he said. “Certainly”, she replied, smiling. “Good luck with the exams”, she wrote and signed it Professor Mason. ■



Max is a hospital doctor, author and columnist. He currently works full time in mental health for the NHS. His new book, *The Marvellous Adventure of Being Human*, is out now

The Doctor Is In

Dr Max Pemberton

Q: Dear Dr Max, I hope you can advise me. I have pain in my left breast and sometimes it spreads to my armpit too. Painkillers don't help much. I don't have a lump so I'm not sure if I should go to the doctor or not. Do you know what it could be?

- Tasha

A: Dear Tasha, breast pain is one of those problems that affects lots of women at some point in their life.

When I was a junior doctor I worked in breast surgery and would see lots of women in clinic with this. Many were worried about cancer, and the first thing to say is that breast pain on its own is unlikely to be a symptom of cancer. However, it is really important that you do go to your GP to get this investigated if the pain hasn't got better. I know that all the recent coverage of difficulties getting appointments with GPs and delays with waiting lists means lots of people can feel a bit wary of "bothering" doctors, but please, do not let these reports put you off.

You don't mention your age, but in most patients with breast pain it is linked to their periods.

It typically begins a few weeks before the period, may get worse and then will improve after the period. The pain is often described as being a dull ache or dragging feeling and affects both breasts.

There are other causes of breast pain though. Mastitis (a swelling of the breast often caused by an infection) or an abscess. Sprains to the back or neck can sometimes manifest as breast pain. Pregnancy and other hormonal changes such as menopause can also be underlying causes, as can some medications.

The NHS guidance on breast pain says that if regular painkillers aren't helping, you have family history of breast cancer or you might be pregnant, then you should see your GP. Anyone with lumps, rashes, swelling, discharge or changes to the skin over the breast (described as looking like orange peel) should see their doctor. In your case, given that you say painkillers haven't helped, it does need to be checked out. ■



Got a health question for our resident doctor? Email it confidentially to askdrmax@readersdigest.co.uk

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VITABIOTICS



Forget What They Taught You At School!

You might need some new lessons in learning, says our memory expert, Jonathan Hancock

IVIVIDLY REMEMBER the first time a teacher told me how to learn.

Not *what* to learn. Plenty of teachers had done that over the years. No: this was about how to do it—in a fun, fast and effective way.

One Friday afternoon, our history teacher showed us a way to learn lists of key words and ideas—using images and stories. We were blown away. In just a few minutes, he proved how easy it was to take charge of the memory process. He sparked an interest in the art and science of learning that still inspires me today.

What a pity I didn't meet him until I was 15! Even more depressing is that many students are never shown how to learn. In fact, they often end up with some very unhelpful ideas about memory.

So, in case you weren't one of the lucky ones, here are four important things to know about how learning really works (whatever you heard at school!).

1. Learning isn't an event: it's a process. It's no good just being there for a lesson. You have to be engaged, use learning skills, and know which

ones work best for you. Start with these tips and tricks every month!

2. Reading isn't great for recall. Has that become your main strategy?

Unfortunately, just reading something—rather than actively memorising it—may do more harm than good. It tells your brain that it doesn't need to store anything, since the details are all on a page or screen.

3. Don't check your memory too soon. There's not much point in testing yourself straightaway. That's

just short-term memory, and it quickly fades. Instead, wait until it's a bit more challenging to remember what you've watched, read or been told. Recapping it then will leave a much stronger trace in your brain.

4. Learners don't need to be loners.

Did you get many chances to teach or test others at school, or to learn collaboratively? If not, what a shame! These things have all been shown to play a big part in remembering well. Learn in company when you can.

Above all, don't be held back by any memory myths you picked up at school. Take steps like these to start remembering more—and be a "class act" in all your learning from here! ■

Just Cycle And fold away

There's no excuse not to get on your bike this Spring. Get your indoor cycling fix and feel the benefits.

Great for general cardio fitness, exercise bikes can be a brilliant way of training at home. However, choosing the right bike is incredibly important, which is something that Roger Black and his team recognised when creating the Roger Black Folding Exercise Bike.

"Best Present EVER are the words from my 77-year old father who received his Roger Black fitness bike for his birthday. He said it is so simple and easy to use, with no complicated gadgets. The seat is VERY comfortable, so using it everyday is a pleasure. It folds away neatly so it can be stored behind a door if need be"
Anna, Farnham



Roger Black is offering a 10% discount on the full www.rogerblackfitness.com range of home fitness equipment for all Reader's Digest readers. Please use discount code **DIGEST10 at checkout.**

Standard T&Cs apply.



SUBMERGING YOUR BODY into icy depths may not sound appealing, but for devotees of cold-water therapy, the benefits greatly outweigh any short-term discomfort.

Participants claim the practice—which involves plunging into or swimming in water no warmer than 15 degrees Celsius (roughly ten degrees colder than the average pool)—leaves them invigorated and clear-headed, and even alleviates pain.

Cold-water therapy has become more mainstream in recent years, in part due to the influence of Wim Hof, a Dutch extreme athlete who developed his own method of cold therapy coupled with conscious-breathing techniques, but it's not a new trend. In fact, cold water has been used to promote health for more than 2,000 years: ancient Greeks used water therapy to relieve fatigue and treat fever.

In Scandinavian countries, a traditional sauna session is sometimes followed by a cold plunge. Alternating between hot and cold temperatures increases blood flow in the skin and boosts circulation. High-performance athletes also use ice baths or cold showers to help mitigate the delayed-onset muscle soreness that follows intense exercise. And recent research suggests impressive benefits for mental health and stress management.

“Getting into cold water creates stress on the body,” says Dr Mark



Cold-Water Cure

A chilly practice has some promising health benefits

BY *Melissa Greer*

Harper, an anesthesiologist based in the UK and Norway and the author of 2022's *Chill: The Cold Water Swim Cure*. "The body reacts like it would to any stress: adrenalin and noradrenalin are released, your blood pressure and heart rate increase and your breath quickens."

Unlike the detrimental effects of chronic stress, however, this type of wilful and controlled stress can be beneficial, according to a 2019 US study published in *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*.

EASE INTO IT WITH SHORT EXPOSURE TIMES—JUST LONG ENOUGH TO GET PAST THE SHOCK

Apparently, combining physiological stressors, such as cold-water therapy, with focused meditation can train the brain to deal with the stress. Each time a person conquers the cold and emerges feeling invigorated, it reinforces the expectation of a positive outcome. The researchers believe that these brain changes extend beyond cold tolerance and could be applied in everyday life.

Positivity also played a part in UK research published in a 2020 issue of *Lifestyle Medicine*. The small study followed 61 people as they took a weekly cold-water swimming course

over ten weeks. At the end of the study, participants reported greater improvements in mood and well-being than the control group on shore.

Cold exposure increases "feel-good" hormones, such as serotonin and dopamine, says Harper, one of the study's authors. Swimming is also good exercise and often a social activity, which helps to offset anxiety and allows the body to feel both pleasure and motivation.

Harper has been cold-water swimming for nearly two decades and compares the stress of cold-water therapy to that of intense exercise. "Done safely, it's a pretty effective way to train the body," he says. "But if you've got a heart condition, you have to be careful."

If open water isn't your thing, consider cold showers. A 2016 Dutch study published in the journal *PLOS One* found them to positively impact immunity: subjects who took a daily cold shower were 29 per cent less likely to take time off work for illness.

For those wanting to try cold-water swimming in a lake or ocean, ease into it with short exposure times—just long enough for your body to get past the initial shock. Never start by plunging your entire body in at once, and always swim with a friend. Gradually increase the time you spend in cold water to three or four minutes, at least once a week. "That's all you need to get the benefits," explains Harper. ■



What's The “Man-Child” Phenomenon?

IT SOUNDS LIKE a scene from a Nineties sitcom: a man’s wife charges into their bedroom, furious that he’s not ready for an event they’re due at. He’s had an hour to get changed; in that time she’s got herself and each of their three children into their glad rags!

Exasperated, she reaches over and starts dressing him herself. Oh, wait—that is an actual scene from the 1996-2005 TV show *Everybody Loves Raymond*.

The term for men like this is “man

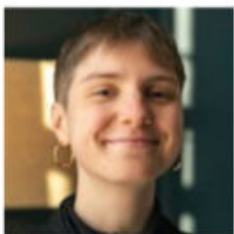
child”. They’re completely dependent on their partner (who is, almost always, a woman) to do everyday jobs they’re perfectly capable of: cleaning, cooking, putting on a suit within an hour.

Unfortunately, recent scientific research shows that men-children aren’t just the stuff of sitcoms. Not only do they exist, but they’re putting their significant others off sex.

Real-life men-children might not be as blatantly useless as those on the silver screen, but, researchers from Canada and Australia found last year, they do expect their female partners to take on the lion’s share of domestic and caregiving labour.

Men were also reliant on them for completing basic life tasks, like doing laundry, in the same way that an actual child would be.

We don’t expect kids to understand the value of this work because, well, they’re kids. But when another adult in the household follows suit, that relationship can shift from being a partnership into



Monica Karpinski is a writer and editor focused on women’s health, sex, and relationships. She is the founder of women’s health media platform *The Femic*

more of a carer/
dependent dynamic.

For the women in the study, this blurred the roles of “partner” and “mother”—which dampened their desire for sex.

This makes total sense: mothering is a form of caregiving that’s decidedly non-sexual in nature. When thrust into this “mother-wife” role, women not only reported feeling desexualised but that this made them see their partners in a non-sexual way.

I know I’d fancy someone less, and also feel less desirable in myself, if I had a partner who expected me to sort a household’s massive to-do list on my own, all the time. And yet, this is a reality for plenty of women.

The study authors chalk this up to our society’s fixation on heteronormativity—the belief that being straight is the norm. This comes with an implicit assumption that men and women will adopt “complementary” roles: women as mother and carer, while men provide and protect.

Women are still very much shouldering these expectations. In the study, which surveyed over 1,000 women who were with men, participants in one group spent



Kinkeeping is the expectation that women will facilitate the needs of family

around 70 per cent more time on household labour than their partners.

Worse still, much of that work is probably invisible to those benefitting from it. After all, a lot of the mental energy expended in running a household—making sure everyone’s eaten, remembering kids’ doctors appointments—is behind the scenes.

The word for this sort of labour is “kinkeeping”. It’s the expectation that women will facilitate the needs of others in their family, and it’ll keep being pushed onto us as long as we’re saddled with the baggage of being everyone’s caretaker.

When your partner doesn’t treat you as their equal, it hurts. It keeps you from being supported and valued for who you are.

It’s also bad news for your libido. Desire starts in the brain, and people who are satisfied in their relationship, and who feel seen and heard by their partner, are more likely to fancy getting frisky with them, note the study authors.

A great sex life stems from healthy relationships. And this research helps give a name to the barriers that keep women from being seen as their whole, sexy selves within theirs. ■

Relationship Advice

Monica Karpinski

Q: I've just started dating someone new and recently went to his house for the first time. He is 61, I'm 58. His house was absolutely filthy! Dishes everywhere, food left out, everything. I didn't say anything but this will be a dealbreaker for me if this is how he wants to live. Should I bring it up or move on?
- *Maria*

A: How someone keeps their personal space is their choice, but when you're in a relationship there comes a point where their habits become a part of your life, too. So, you are within your rights to bring it up, especially if their space doesn't meet basic hygiene standards—and from your question, this sounds like it's what you're dealing with.

But if your gripe is more of a moral judgement based on your personal criteria for how clean a home should be, hold fire. You aren't entitled to tell someone you don't live with how they should arrange their space, so I'd suggest reflecting on why this is bothering you so much before you decide to have the chat.

You've mentioned that this issue could be a dealbreaker for you.

Bringing it up may then be the only way you can resolve your concerns—so this is probably best if you want to give things between you a chance.

During the talk, try not to be too critical. If they get defensive then the conversation likely won't go anywhere useful. Bear in mind as well that there may be a deeper reason behind the mess, such as mental health struggles or coping with a personal tragedy.

Instead, talk about your concerns and how being in their space makes you feel. This helps to frame the discussion as a problem you want to solve because you want it to work between you.

For example: "The stacks of dirty dishes are putting me on edge, and it makes me not want to come over. Can we work out a solution?"

Give them a chance to respond, understanding that it can take time for people to change and that all relationships take compromise. It's up to you how much you're willing to give—and put up with. ■

Got a question for our resident sex and relationships expert? Email it confidentially to thelovedoctor@readersdigest.co.uk

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.
So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."
I Corinthians 13:12-13 (ESV)

KAREN HUMENIUK

THE CHALMERS TRILOGY



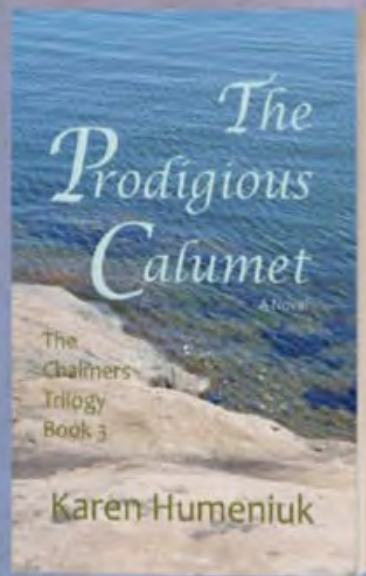
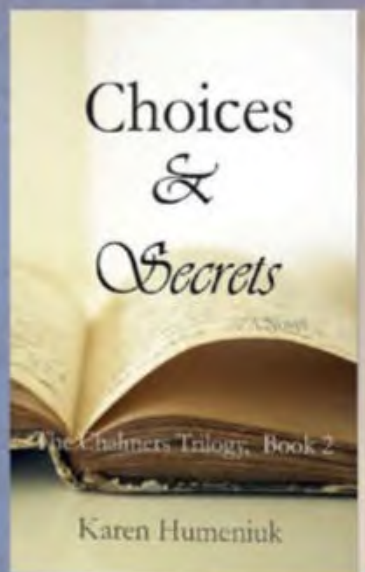
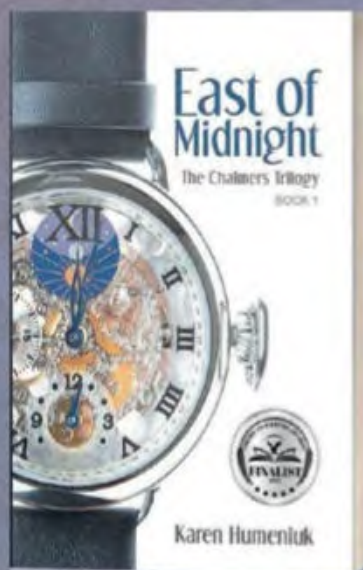
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explored the challenges that come when we seek to 'give up of' childish ways.'

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through two very different sets of circumstances, proves that the outward manifestation of spiritual growth is determined not by us but by those who know us best.



visit us at www.thechalmers trilogy.com

My Britain: **SNOWDONIA**

Snowdonia, or Eryri in Welsh, became Wales' first national park in 1951. It's not hard to see why—with rugged mountains, crashing waterfalls and waterlogged peatlands, it has it all.

Time in Snowdonia is easily whiled away exploring its peaks and valleys. Its crown jewel is Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales and the highest point in the UK outside of the Scottish Highlands. The mountain has a sense of myth and magic to it: its Welsh name, Yr Wyddfa, is rooted in the legend of the giant Rhita, defeated and buried on the mountain by Arthur himself.

Equally as unforgettable as the scenery are Snowdonia's friendly and welcoming residents. We spoke to some locals about life in this beautiful area, where breathtaking nature abounds and the Welsh language lives vividly on.



INSPIRE

Snowdon, the
highest mountain
in Wales



Mike Morris, 32, is the operations manager at Go Below, a company which offers underground adventures in abandoned mines

go-below.co.uk

I'VE LIVED IN SNOWDONIA all my life! I've never wanted to leave because I have everything I need right on my doorstep. I love the cycling mainly, mountain and road. Snowdonia has a very chilled out way of life. We all love living here and feel really lucky to inhabit such an incredibly beautiful part of the world.

Go Below offers a truly unique authentic underground adventure, exploring abandoned slate mines in

an exciting way and reaching places previously unseen for decades. Trips are led by super-experienced, highly qualified (not to mention charismatic) guides. We give customers the trip of a lifetime—a one-off experience that they'll never forget for the rest of their lives.

It's hard to pick just one favourite spot in Snowdonia, there are so many! I'd have to go with Conwy Mountain though, I love it up there.



Tilly Reynolds, 22, is the director of operations for the Love to Eat Group. She tells us about Bodnant Welsh Food, a farm shop and restaurant in Tal-y-Cafn

bodnant-welshfood.co.uk

I HAVE LIVED in Snowdonia all my life. I think growing up you really take for granted living in this area. It's only when you get old enough to leave that, one day, you go for a walk on the beach after work and kind of say to yourself, "Why would I ever leave this place?"

I think it's a given that the landscape makes this place special but the people really make it memorable. I love the sheer willingness of everyone to work together—Snowdonia means being geographically miles apart but everyone's spirits being close. It's a place that truly does take everyone's

breath away, and to be a part of that is really special.

I think as a young person in Snowdonia you have this tremendous sense of pressure that you owe it to your surroundings to make sure the world sees Snowdonia for what it is. I am immensely proud to be contributing to this with my work, and being able to show off the best of Wales is something I don't take for granted.

Bodnant is like no other place; the very best of the region is literally all under one roof. Being able to support local suppliers and farmers as well as educating customers on the importance of shopping local—the farm-to-fork way—is something that you wouldn't get in another job.

My favourite spot is the beach at Conwy Morfa. Being here and watching the sunrise while walking my dogs is a feeling that can't be put into words! Highly recommended.





Andrew (JohnJo) Jones is a demonstrating quarryman at the National Slate Museum Llanberis, a museum dedicated to preserving Snowdonia's rich slating legacy

museum.wales/slate

I'VE LIVED IN Snowdonia all my life, as have all my family before me. My father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather were all quarrymen from this area.

There's nowhere like home. Snowdonia is such a unique area with so many different people and places. It's always surprising! I love the mountains mostly. I'm a big walker—I'll easily walk about ten miles on a weekend walk. I love taking photos of the mountains too, as they look so different at various times of day.

We're very fortunate here in Snowdonia to live in such a beautiful place, and there's a lot of culture here too. The Welsh language is very strong here, and it's great to be able to live and work using the language. We're quite a resilient bunch—especially the quarrymen who have worked these mountains over the years.

I really enjoy working at the museum as I meet so many different people every day. I give daily demonstrations of the slate splitting craft and I enjoy passing

my knowledge on to visitors and telling them all about the history of the area, the industry in general and of my own family. People like to hear about family connections and learn that we've been doing this for many generations.

The museum is at the heart of the community and you can feel the presence of old industry, but also we're excited about the future and all that it brings. Becoming a World Heritage Site in 2021 was very exciting as it showed how important the slate industry has been historically but that the story is relevant to the future.

My favourite spot in Snowdonia is Dinorwig Slate Quarry. When I walk around the quarry I get the feeling of my ancestors walking around with me. Quite by chance I found my grandfather's signature in a stone lintel the other day. I've walked up there numerous times and came across it by chance. It's so beautiful and atmospheric!



Gary Stevenson, 52, and Adrian Stevenson, 56, are the owners of Y Groser Harlech, an independent grocery store in the historic town of Harlech

ygroserharlech.cymru

WE HAVE LIVED in the Snowdonia National Park on a permanent basis for just over five years now. We feel alive here. The air is so clear, crisp and pure—we've learned to breathe all over again while taking in the landscapes, which are spectacular. Exploring is a passion of ours, and there are so many walks and climbs that you'll never become bored.

We feel privileged to be a part of the Snowdonia community. We're part of a patchwork of people who have either long-standing Welsh heritage or who have settled here from other countries. There is a unique mix of past and present, and we are all here for the same reason—love of Snowdonia and all that this

beautiful region has to offer to everyone living here.

Y Groser Harlech is a food, wine and spirits emporium situated on Harlech's high street, and based in Cambrian House. We promote local; offering the community a distinctive destination grocery store that sells exceptional food coupled with good old-fashioned service. We're also really proud to be creating jobs for local people. Harlech is a prime location for tourism and a great place to showcase the fantastic Welsh food and drink products on offer.

Our shop is a central hub to the town, and is well supported by the local community. We deliver a traditional service, built from trust, conventional values and fairness. It's a culture which has been embraced by our staff and our customers.

Our favourite area of Snowdonia is the coastline. It is skirted by the most amazing sandy beaches, with sand dunes as high and rugged as the mountains that can be seen beyond. The sunrises and sunsets from the western coastline are spectacular. ■





If I Ruled The World

Suzi Ruffell



Suzi Ruffell is a Brighton-based comedian and podcaster who has had five sell-out runs at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival

Being a billionaire wouldn't exist. I don't think anyone needs that much money. In a world where so many children go to school hungry every single day, there shouldn't be people so wealthy that they are going to space for a laugh. When you think that someone like Elon Musk could potentially make a massive dent in world poverty, it is insane that he is like, "I'm going to be a space man" instead. It drives me mad that these people are put on pedestals for telling young people that having money is the most important thing. Less emphasis on money would be good.

The NHS would be properly funded.

We can use a lot of the money we've taken off of the billionaires to fund the NHS. It was an NHS doctor who spotted my grandmother's cancer—I got an extra 26 years with her just because the doctor sent her for extra tests. I'm proud to be a patron of a children's charity called Spread A Smile—they do incredible work in hospitals around the country. I don't think we should live in a world where a nurse has to go to a food bank after her shift—they spend their whole day caring for others, and they should be paid properly.

Changes would be made in the school syllabus. There are lots of things I learned about at school that have never come up in adulthood—like Pythagoras' theorem. It's still important to learn the basics—such as maths and science—but there are

so many obvious things that we don't learn about how to exist as an adult—how to fill in a pension form, pay taxes or what VAT is. We should also learn gender studies, the feminist movement, suffragettes, LGBT studies and more so everyone in the class can learn about the journeys that different groups have been on—different civil rights movements.

An emphasis would be put back on local community. Everyone should volunteer for two hours a week, whether it's at your local food bank, gardening at a local park, or reading at school to help kids. It is not about getting financially reimbursed or doing something you love; it's about the people who live on the roads near you, who go to the local schools, use local food banks, hospitals and care homes. It's about putting time into people and your local environment.

In order to vote you have to do research. This includes reading newspapers that come from opposing arguments, talking about politics productively, and a willingness to listen to other people's concerns. I'm lucky enough to do gigs for refugee charities. These refugees probably didn't want to leave their home—they had no choice. If we could have the capacity to listen to others, respect them and give them time, we would be voting with less of a knee-jerk fear reaction and more with compassion.

More support would be available for parents going back to work. This means free childcare for people who need it and a better culture of understanding from workplaces that having children is a good thing. I'm lucky because I'm freelance and my wife has a proper job, and I felt really privileged with the flexibility that allowed us both to spend time and bond with our little girl. Making the workforce more appreciative and understanding of parents would be a great thing.

People would be encouraged to have more fun. I think so much emphasis is put on work, career, money and children as an adult that we forget to have fun. Having a child definitely helps because I began looking for fun in things, just like she does constantly. I recently treated myself to a nice pair of roller skates and it gives me unbridled joy that is just marvellous. Before my wife and I pick up our girl from the nursery, we go out for an hour and it is so joyful. I think encouraging people to be silly, have fun and throw themselves into their hobbies is something we should do more. ■

AS TOLD TO IAN CHADDOCK

Suzi Ruffell is touring the UK with her new stand-up show *Snappy* from March to June. Her two podcasts are *Out with Suzi Ruffell* and *Like Minded Friends*—with Tom Allen



MY STARTER DOG

Adopting a dog in
my sixties was
never part of the
plan. But Casey
changed everything



BY *Rona Maynard*

FROM THE BOOK
STARTER DOG: A VIRTUAL INTRODUCTION



When my husband talked me into rescuing a dog a few years ago, I worried about the downside: fur all over everything, arguments over walk duty. The time for a dog was decades ago, when we had a son at home to play fetch. At 65, we should be planning our next trip overseas, but Paul had always wanted a dog. For love of my husband, I said yes. But I doubted I could love any dog, much less the only flat-friendly dog on offer, a ragged-eared mutt.

He had a great story, I'd grant him that. Born unwanted in Ohio, taught to sit and stay in a prison where incarcerated people train pups for adoption, then sent to a shelter where he waited for a home until he was spirited away to Toronto by a band of volunteers dedicated to saving dogs from death.

We named him Casey. The first thing he did after galloping into our home was drench a chair with pee. He sniffed every corner and finally came to rest with his warm muzzle on my thigh.

ON CASEY'S FIRST MORNING I briefly forgot we had a dog. I padded out of bed, fuzzy with sleep, to find another creature sprawled on the sofa. This had happened a good many times before, but in the past that creature was my husband, sleeping in the very spot where I meant to lounge with my second cup of coffee and the obituaries section of the *New York Times*. Paul sleeps best anywhere but the bed, and the TV tends to get him nodding in the small hours. The presence of a dog—our dog—was a marvel. Oh, yes. It's you.

Casey seemed to have expanded since the three of us had curled up with *Grey's Anatomy*, two to watch and one to snore. In his languor, he pretty much filled the space, limbs every which way. His torn ear pointed straight up; the other flopped off the sofa. I perched on the ribbon of space he'd left me and stroked his flank. Up went all four paws, his way of wishing me good morning. And a fine morning it was, with Casey in it.

My ideal morning involved leisurely online perambulations in my dressing gown. At least it had until this day. But Casey needed his morning walk, which fell to me as the resident morning person. I couldn't be late, or he'd have an accident.

Everything we knew about Casey we'd learned from his foster mum, Liz, who handed him over to us. She said I should take him out right after breakfast. Liz had a fenced garden; all

she had to do was open the door. Then she could hang out in her pyjamas if she chose. Maybe make some muffins, do a crossword, call her mother. But Paul and I lived on the eighth floor of a downtown Toronto block of flats. For me, Casey's morning routine required lipstick, eyebrow pencil and presentable attire.

I'd laid everything out the night before—jeans and sweater for me, poop bags and liver treats for Casey. His crimson lead hung on the coat stand. I remembered Paul's first attempt at walking Casey, the circular stagger outside Liz's house. I was in for a challenge with this bruiser. Whoever trained him knew something Paul and I didn't.

In my days working in publishing, I used to pull creative people into line. No, you can't leave work when we're in crisis mode, summer hours be damned. You want to misspell a headline "because it looks better that way?" Go back to school.

After all the humans I'd tamed, how hard could it be to walk a dog? People did it while texting, hauling shopping and easing strollers over snowy kerbs. The bolder ones did it on skateboards and bikes, and my neighbourhood's fastest walker, a shepherd mix in an orange vest, scurried alongside a man on a scooter. Clearly, anyone could walk a dog—you didn't even have to be ambulatory.

This morning, we'd barely set out when a call rang out from behind,

followed by a burst of laughter: "Who's walking who?" Good question. We couldn't seem to find our rhythm. Every few paces, a standoff ensued. My will against Casey's nose.

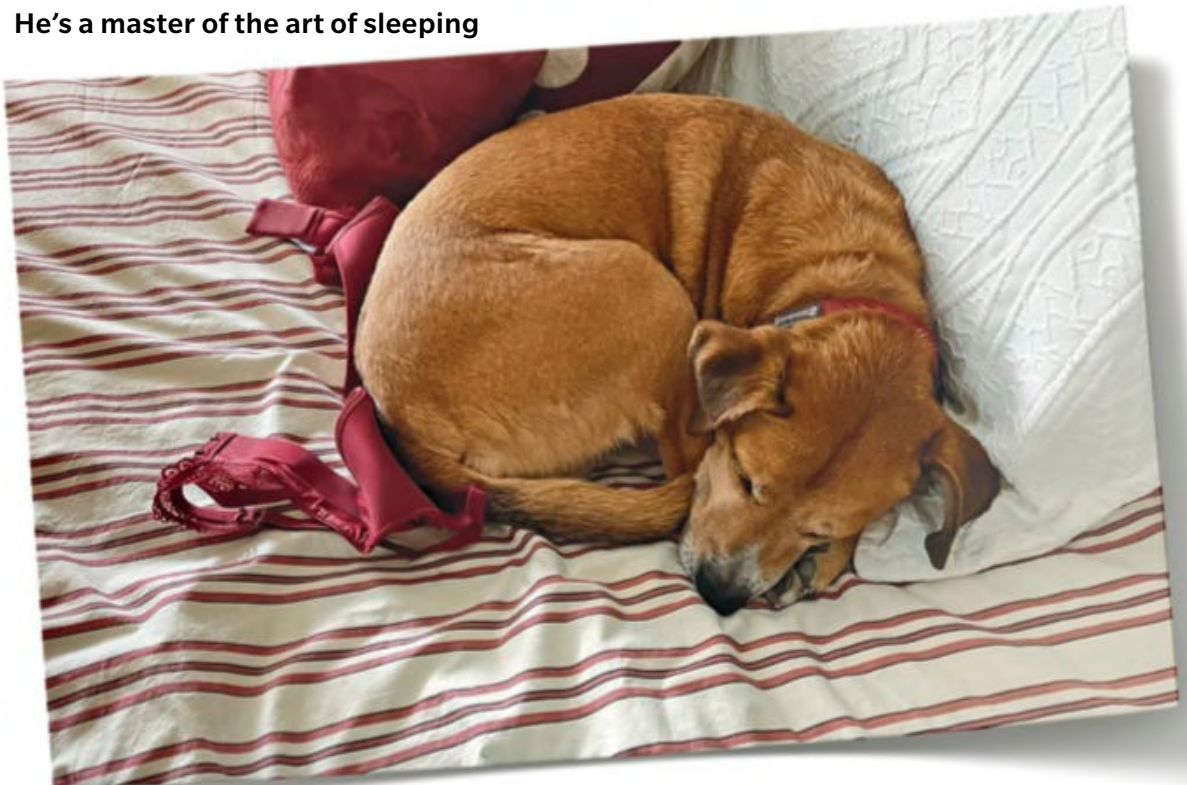
That nose. Low to the ground, sweeping the air, pulling us forward on a full-tilt quest for anything that smelled edible. Down in one running bite went the soggy pizza crust, the piece of chicken in the gritty remains of its batter. Casey dragged me where the nose commanded, shoulders pumping. The exquisite precision of his nose recalled a hummingbird skimming a flower, yet the prize it sought might be a crushed pigeon or vomit from someone's drunken spree.

When not engaged in the quest for food, the nose evaluated spots for a

wee. Casey zipped across the pavement like a daredevil driver cutting through a queue of traffic, and came to a lurching stop at the hydrant summoning his nose. There he checked the accretion of canine pee that proclaimed to the neighbourhood dogs, *I was here!* He took his sweet time while a yellow rivulet spilled over the pavement and into the street. No matter how lavish the spray, he always had pee in reserve for marking.

I thought I knew what it meant to walk my neighbourhood. Check out the films playing at the local cinema. Take note of a shoe sale, a new wood-oven pizzeria. Eavesdrop on conversations. All the while setting a pace, getting my exercise while my mind floated free. Walking was my

He's a master of the art of sleeping



gateway to an inner world in which I chose where to direct my attention.

Not with Casey. I veered between meandering, waiting and a fair approximation of a drunken shuffle, both hands gripping the supposedly hands-free lead that looped around my waist (the dog walker's equivalent of training wheels). Paul and I had a plan for Casey's walking, an hour a day from each of us. Why had I worried about Paul holding up his end, when I was the one trying to stay on my feet?

Pedestrians swerved to avoid us; hazards loomed on every street. Casey tried to chase cars that looked wrong for some reason (just when I thought it was only orange taxis that set him off, he'd charge a black minivan).

And that was the easy part. Squirrels sent him into warrior mode, with head-turning ululations and leaps that nearly knocked me to the ground. Before Casey, squirrels reminded me adorably of Beatrix Potter's Nutkin. Now they seemed more like battle-hardened ruffians on *Game of Thrones*, a tribe of them always ready to burst from the nearest sapling.

While flying at a squirrel I hadn't seen in time, Casey ran smack into a couple of pedestrians. The woman flashed a tolerant smile; the man scowled at me over his shoulder. At the rate we were going, someone might get hurt. Come to think of it, my shoulder was hurting already. I'd heard of strength training for golf and skiing, but dog walking?

I checked my watch. Five more minutes and we'd finish the hour. We. The word for Casey and me on the sofa, gazing into each other's eyes.

Out on the street there wasn't any we. Intellect against instinct, that's what there was, intellect the loser. We couldn't make it home fast enough.

Just as I let my guard down, Casey had a set-to in the foyer with a neighbour's Lab, Betsy, infamous for roving the halls at night. Her owner looked us both up and down, lip curled. "Rescue dog?" To lighten the mood, I mentioned Casey had spent his puppyhood in prison. "You're brave," he said, pulling Betsy away from my jailbird.

The lift seemed to crawl to the eighth floor. Casey ran to Paul's arms for vigorous rubbing and the question that cannot be asked less than twice, with escalating volume: "Who's a good boy? Who's a good boy?"

WE HAD A GOOD BOY, alright, but it soon became clear that we'd both have to up our walking game.

Paul got into trouble at St James Park, beloved for its gazebo and landscaped gardens, when Casey had a noisy meltdown over a squirrel. An older man shook his finger at Paul. "That dog of yours is a nuisance. Don't you realise some of us come here for a little peace and quiet?" He pointed to a wisp of a dog perched on its owner's lap like a stuffed toy on a satin pillow. "That's how a dog should behave. And

until your dog gets the message, I suggest you keep him out of this park.”

The night after Casey was exiled from the park, he lay on what we already called “Casey’s sofa,” twitching as he snored. I ran my fingers along the cleft in his skull, where his ginger fur darkened to rust. I’d never know for sure what Casey dreamed, but I figured a squirrel was involved. Go, Casey, go. Run the varmint down.

A dog trainer, Laurie, soon paid us a house call. She looked younger than our daughter would be if we’d gotten around to having one, but dog people on the internet said she knew her stuff. I’d told her to expect a squirrel-crazed, rubbish-chomping rescue mutt, billed as a Lab/pug mix, although who could say for sure?

Laurie was sure. “He’s all hound.” With that pointy snout, he couldn’t be anything else. And this explained a lot about our would-be squirrel assassin. Like every hound who ever chased prey, Casey was designed for the task, with a nose that ranks among the wonders of the animal kingdom. His “squirrel attacks,” as we called them, expressed his greatest gift. Some dogs were born to bark at strangers; ours was born to hunt rodents. I think we had the better deal.

Laurie put Casey through a few paces. He sat, stayed, lay down as he had been taught in prison—and as he’d do for us if we learned to speak his language. “You lucked out with this guy,” Laurie said. “He wants to please.”

He could have fooled me, but Laurie was the pro.

The three of us took Casey to a free-and-easy park where no one would get fussed about some noise. The idea was for Laurie to watch Casey do his worst, and as we neared the first squirrel-inhabited tree he rose—no, soared—to the occasion with his full repertoire of sound effects while I, the clueless human at the end of the lead, stood and bleated, “Casey, stop!”

I half-hoped Laurie would exclaim at his antics. If Casey had to raise hell, let him be the loudest, most epically acrobatic hellraiser she had yet seen. How many squirrel-chasing dogs do back flips, then jump up to try again? For him the lead did not exist, nor did

I TOLD THE DOG TRAINER TO EXPECT A SQUIRREL-CRAZED, RUBBISH-CHOMPING RESCUE MUTT

failure. Every squirrel was a promise of victory. Casey was my Don Quixote charging at windmills, my pratfalling Buster Keaton.

Laurie watched the show with her hands in the pockets of her hoodie; she’d seen every move before. “Like I said, all hound. You want his attention on you, not the squirrel. That’s going to be your challenge. Let’s get to work.”



The unlikeliness of our comfort together magnifies the joy of it

The Lauries of this world don't really train dogs. They teach perplexed humans to stop doing what doesn't work and acquire more constructive habits. Laurie reminded me a little of Annette, our couples' counsellor back in the striving years. Whatever long-forgotten muddle we were in, she'd seen it all before.

How hard we'd worked with Annette in her basement office with the pine-panelled walls. How thoroughly we'd prepped for every session. If she'd given marks, we'd have aced her course. "You're remarkably well-matched," she told us, peering through

the enormous glasses women wore in the days of shoulder pads. "It's a miracle that you found each other." Her version of Laurie's "You lucked out."

With Annette, Paul and I tuned into the sometimes mystifying but basically well-intentioned people we were at heart. We were about to begin the corresponding process with a dog, who had never forgotten a birthday, stormed out in a huff or blamed either of us for a thing. Compared to making a marriage, training a dog should be easy.

I wasn't getting through to Casey, Laurie said. My entreaties were meaningless noise, a sound soup of his name and half-hearted orders. Nature gave Casey a mission:

slaughtering creatures who, in his mind, had no right to exist. To interrupt him, I'd have to make noise.

I had three options: whistling, shouting or a hand clap. I never learned to whistle, and clapping is no good with gloves on. That left shouting. As squirrel after squirrel romped by, I tried to summon a respectable shout: "Casey! Casey!" How could it be that the name I loved to murmur was so hard to shout with conviction?

Paul shook his head (in our class of two he was the star). Shouting had always come easily to him—too easily for my liking, but with dogs it served a

purpose. "More authority," he said. "More volume."

The authority part I could nail. At 65 I'd earned the right to be a feisty old dame. I demanded refunds with aplomb (and got them). I told wait staff not to call me "dear" and shambling 20-somethings to make room for me on the pavement. I complained and corrected with ease.

But nobody loves a woman who shouts. In my childhood home it was well understood that only my father had the right to shout—and he could erupt without warning. Sober, he quoted Yeats to my sister and me at bedtime. When we modelled new outfits, he would bow to us and ask, like a gentleman from an old movie, "May I have your telephone number (telephone: an old-fashioned word, even circa 1960)?"

But when he was drunk or hungover, the smallest thing could get him going, like the double boiler for his oatmeal. "What's become of the blasted thing? Is this any way to organise the kitchen cabinets?" The rest of us would wake to a percussion band of clatter. And I'd know in the pit of my stomach that the day ahead was going to be a stinker.

Fear had a sound: shouting. What I feared was not so much my father's anger as my own. Because he was a man—the man of the house, in the language of those times—he got to blow off steam. Because I was a girl, I didn't. I should keep my head down, stay out of Daddy's way, do my best to

placate this overgrown baby in the guise of a man.

Now I had Laurie's permission to shout. More than that, I had orders. For Casey's sake, I would learn to let it rip.

AFTER OUR FIRST SESSION with Laurie, I walked Casey with her voice in my head. I practised shouting, "Hey!" when Casey jumped into predator mode. The ground didn't split and swallow me up. I sounded loud and proud. Better yet, Casey started to get it—not every time, but often enough, especially if I followed "Hey! Ca-a-a-sey!" with a sharp tug on the lead. Then the treat, then a neck rub. "Good boy," I would say, as Laurie had taught me.

I was asking a lot of Casey. In the presence of a squirrel, he was anger incarnate. His eyes blazed; his hackles rose. I thought hackles were only an idiom until I saw the band of rage down Casey's back, where his fur is darker and coarser. When they stiffen, he looks bigger, more threatening, as nature intended. He was an officer of the laws of nature, determined to wipe lesser creatures from the earth. One squirrel affronted him; a bobble-headed flock undid him.

Anger consumed him quickly but vanished with the squirrel. Casey's anger had an urgent purity. Unlike any human I'd known, he didn't hold grudges. He wouldn't ruminate on what he could have done to that squirrel if not for me, the spoilsport clutching the lead.

Casey and I walked together as a biped and a quadruped, an older woman and a young dog, a second-guesser and a creature of impulse. One who cleaned up, one who drooled on the floor. One who compared recipes for roasted Brussels sprouts, one who had to be restrained from licking vomit.

It was our differences that held my attention, rather than the shared pleasure of the outing. Casey had his world, I had mine, and therefore I didn't think of him and me as "us." But before long I found myself speaking of the places I shared with Casey—our places, mine and his. The mural where I posed him for a shot, the park where we made friends with a juggler practising his moves.

I was beginning to understand who we would be to each other. We were Us now, and it was enough. The unlikeliness of our comfort together magnified the joy of it. As long as squirrels roamed the streets and parks of Toronto, there would be passing bursts of anger that didn't change a thing. What we had, as a woman and a dog, underscored the miracle of any two fallible beings, committed to opposing points of view, planting the stake in the ground that is Us.

Paul will be Paul, Rona will be Rona. In the beginning came a you, a me. One who slept late, and one who equated purpose with rising early. One who left the marriage when our son, Ben, was a toddler, saying, "I never loved you" (me, exhausted by my

young marriage and younger child), and one who said, "It's not over. Let's try again." One who knew what things should be, and one who didn't get it (actually, that would be both of us). From differences and disappointments, we created Us. And as Us, we brought Casey home.

Us-ness, once you've found it, can accommodate a fair bit of tension. Some days I couldn't stop Casey from charging at squirrels number one to 17, but he calmed down by squirrel 99. With a multitude of squirrels about, we always had another chance. I arrived at a grudging respect for the squirrels, who would stare Casey down with what looked like amusement.

Squirrel by squirrel, day by day, we started to find our groove. We sometimes walked without incident, Casey's tags clinking in time with my steps and his lead vibrating gently in my hand, now that I'd learned not to grip it. He knew every variation on our route. If I didn't pick his favourite, he would tug, as if to ask, "You're sure about this?" I was sure. A slight disagreement on the route was no big deal for a simpatico pair like us.

WE WERE RIPPING THROUGH our value pack of poop bags. Casey was remarkably productive, often filling several bags in a single walk. I didn't mind, though. Scooping gave me a chance to do one thing right every day. And the humble task literally grounded me. It forced me to tend the cracked

and mottled pavement, the sodden leaves at the edge of a walking trail. It was a bondage I shared with all dog folk who care enough to do the right thing. The woman bending from her wheelchair with practised caution, the older walker favouring a bad knee. The young parents exclaiming, as their toddler scooped for the family dachshund, "That's it! Good girl!"

When I started walking Casey it was early spring, when receding snow exposed a winter's worth of blackened excrement in every park. It clumped at the rims of hedges and dotted the pavements, a desiccated record of human can't-be-botheredness. Some people hate dogs for indiscriminate jumping, others for disturbing the peace with their barking. What unites them all is their loathing of poop.

I'd just disposed of Casey's first of the day when someone approached us with an open Clive Cussler novel in his hand and headphones blasting cacophony into his ears. As he passed, he shouted over his shoulder, "I hope it's not your dog who just left his business on the pavement! It's a pox on the city!" The last time I'd heard the word "pox" used in the Shakespearean sense, I was trying to ace an English course. Full points to Mr Multitask for literary flair, but his logic stung. He didn't turn his head when I called, "Not us!"

Us. Any scorn directed at Casey is really directed at me. When you get down to basics, I was scooping

because I loved him. I hoped my fellow humans would look benevolently on him, or at least not disdain him. Every time I bent for Casey, I proved that Yeats was right: "Love has pitched his mansion in/ The place of excrement."

I no longer missed walking with Paul. Walking with a dog had distinct advantages. If Casey took any notice of my mood after a rough night's sleep, he showed no interest in what this meant for him or when I might snap out of it. He still sauntered beside me, ears sliding back to catch a rustle in the grass no human could detect.

I didn't have to earn the good cheer enveloping us. Its engine was Casey's zest for the minutiae of his day—the stained wall that must be peed upon

I WAS BEGINNING
TO UNDERSTAND
WHO WE WOULD BE
TO EACH OTHER:
WE WERE "US" NOW

because no other wall compares, the post office clerk who must be greeted for a biscuit from her tin behind the counter. On Casey's map of pleasures, I was like the earth and the sky, reassuringly present but not the focus.

As Laurie had taught me, I crossed the street to dodge cats, darting toddlers, unpredictable puppies—anything that might flip Casey's anger

Paul and I agreed that we would each walk Casey for one hour a day



switch. He took exception to dogs off-lead (they made him feel insecure), dogs with enormous furry heads (not dogs, as far as he could tell) and a good many large black dogs (who knows why?). Meanwhile other dogs took exception to him for similarly unfathomable reasons. When I couldn't remove Casey, I'd distract him by throwing a handful of treats about.

I knew we'd met a milestone when Casey had a full-throttle squirrel attack close to where we'd first walked with Laurie. Loud, proud and fast, I executed my three-step routine: the shout, the tug, the "Good boy." Someone waved, a professional dog walker whose three charges were all sniffing the same patch of grass. "Nice

work!" she called. How long had it been since being asked, "Who's walking who?"

One day I had a brainwave: Us-ness might serve a practical purpose. Casey has the enviable canine gift for sleeping anywhere, from the back seat of the car to a friend's garden. I have the human gift for rolling worries around in my brain when all I crave is sleep.

In the middle of a restless night, I went looking for a soporific book and found Casey passed out on the sofa. He didn't stir when I sat down beside him to stroke the soft fur on his neck. He exhaled, sinking deeper into his rest. He sounded almost human, but then every human sigh is mammalian. Hey, Casey. Take me with you.

He'd left me just enough room to curl up and make his firm, warm chest my pillow. Unlike all other pillows in my life, Casey's chest expands with his breath. His fur smells pungently of himself. No matter what he's kicked up on our rambles or where he's pushed his snout, he smells exactly as he does.

My headful of niggles rose and fell with Casey's breath like a boat on a calm sea. I didn't yet know I was taking liberties: a human head is a not-inconsiderable burden for the chest of a dog, and dogs hate to be confined. But Casey was too far gone to throw me off straight away. He supported me for about five breaths, reminding me how deep and slow a breath can be.

I'll never paint like Matisse or write a poem like Emily Dickinson, but Casey let me believe that I could sleep like him, my personal master of the art.

For the sleep of my dreams, I'd gone to extraordinary lengths. Bought a king-sized mattress that adapts to my weight and body temperature. Followed a regimen of pre-bedtime baths and stretches. Taken heavy-duty sleeping pills. Consulted a sleep psychiatrist to help me kick the pill habit and learn about "efficient sleep."

On a night of broken sleep not long after Casey joined us, I found him dead to the world on the couch. What he knew about sleep no human could teach me. Falling asleep, like falling in love, is about letting go of expectations, loosening your grip on control. I learned this watching Casey.

Sprawled or curled nose to tail, eyes shut or half open, he got the average dog's 12 to 14 hours a day. All I asked was seven. With help from my canine coach, I had become a new sleeper.

I returned to the bedroom, where the sheets had cooled while I had been with Casey. My side of the bed looked like the shipwreck of my night so far—a tangle of sheets, eyeshades and layers of clothing added, then subtracted. Paul's side lay untouched while he slept in his armchair.

I positioned myself on the neck-cradling pillow I need to take with me everywhere. The white-noise machine whirred. I replayed the moment Casey and I had just shared—his fur against my cheek, his breath lifting me—until I slipped into a dream of Us. ■

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Welcome, Spring?

**"Snow in April is abominable,"
said Anne. "Like a slap in the face when you
expected a kiss"**

L M MONTGOMERY IN *ANNE OF INGLESIDE*

INSPIRE

From Tudor rose-covered arbours and Victorian plant hunters to the drought-resistant gardens of the future, we dive into the fascinating evolution of horticulture

BY *Caroline Roberts*



GARDENS THROUGH TIME

The knot
garden at
the Museum
of the Home

One of the perennial delights of spring is watching a garden burst into life. But in admiring their beauty, we often forget that each plant has its own story to tell. The gardens we enjoy today are the product of centuries of scientific discoveries and intrepid journeys, with a fair bit of wheeling and dealing thrown in too.

Details of the earliest British gardens are sketchy, save for the formal planting of Roman villas, the kitchen gardens of monasteries, and the castle courtyards of the Middle Ages. From the 16th century, it's easier to pick up the threads of the garden's evolution, and the Museum of the Home has woven them into its Gardens Through Time exhibition, created in the ground of former almshouses in Hoxton, East London.

The journey begins in the museum's Tudor knot garden, its low hedging of cotton lavender and germander planted in symmetrical patterns, inspired by the intricate

embroidery and carvings popular at the time. Other common features of Tudor gardens were rose-covered arbours, providing shade and a private space, and the chamomile seat, where you could relax on a cushion of the springy herb and run your fingers through the tendrils, releasing its delicate scent. "It probably helped with courting as people would have been a bit smelly in those days," says head gardener, Heather Stevens.

Coincidentally, Hoxton was the setting of one of history's most significant horticultural developments. In the summer of



1716, local nurseryman Thomas Fairchild carefully dusted pollen from a sweet William onto the stigma of a carnation with a feather. The result of his experiment, "Fairchild's mule", was the first artificially-produced hybrid plant to be recorded. But only God was permitted to tamper with nature and, greatly troubled by his creation, he claimed it happened by accident. It wasn't until a century later that hybridisation became acceptable practice, and today most plants are a result of the process. Fairchild eased his guilt by leaving money to fund an annual sermon on the "wonderful works of God in the natural world", to be preached at his local church, St Leonard's in Shoreditch. The

"Vegetable Sermon" is still delivered to this day.

MOST EARLY TOWN GARDENS were functional spaces in which to grow food, medicinal plants and herbs, and do the laundry, explains Heather. But from Georgian times they took on a more ornamental character as well as being status symbols. "Plants were expensive and people often only had one of the most prized species, which would be planted with a lot of space around it so it could be admired."

Foreign plant species were sought after and travellers had been bringing them back from abroad since late Tudor times. But by the beginning of the 19th century,



Clockwise from top left:
David Douglas,
a Wardian case,
Gertrude Jekyll
and Thomas Fairchild



we were entering the era of the professional plant hunter. Wealthy garden enthusiasts craved more exotic species—camelias from China, rhododendrons from the Himalayas, begonias from Brazil—and botanists were paid to undertake hazardous collecting missions to the far corners of the globe.

One of the most successful was David Douglas who, sponsored by the Horticultural Society of London, travelled to North America and Hawaii and introduced over 240 species, including the Douglas fir. His journals tell of the hardships he endured—snow blindness, being caught in a whirlpool for an hour after his canoe capsized, groping through thick forests, and falling down ravines. He finally ran out of luck at the age of only 35, when he fell into a pit trap and was quickly gored to death by its occupant, an enraged bull.

These adventurers must have been heartbroken when around 90 per cent of the specimens they had collected died during the long journey home. But a solution was around the corner. In 1829, a London medical doctor and keen botanist, Nathaniel Ward, placed a moth pupa in a sealed glass bottle and was waiting to watch it hatch when he noticed meadow grass and a fern sprouting from the soil inside. It led to his invention of the Wardian case, a sealed glass container in which

plant hunters could transport tender young plants across the world, protected from the elements and watered by condensation.

“Victorians suddenly had this incredible variety of plants to play with, and commercial nurseries were busy hybridising them so they were hardier for everyday use,” says garden historian Advolly Richmond. “The middle classes began to move to the suburbs of towns and cities and, when it came to new money, the hallmark of a gentleman was having a showy garden.”

But increasing commercial opportunities meant more plant hunters and more exploitation of other countries' natural resources,

BOTANISTS WERE PAID TO EMBARK ON HAZARDOUS PLANT- COLLECTING MISSIONS ALL OVER THE GLOBE

she adds. “It was about money and competing financial interests. These dedicated plant hunters were a law unto themselves. They were often loners, misfits and quite ruthless, and there are some appalling stories in their journals. They'd find an exquisite orchid, fill baskets and baskets and then destroy the habitat so their competitors, who were



The roof garden at the Museum of the Home

IN THE FUTURE, GARDENS WILL NEED TO BE DESIGNED WITH PLANTS THAT NEED MUCH LESS WATER

hot on their trail, couldn't get their share." Cultivars of rare, exotic plants went straight to the auction house, sometimes fetching more than 1,000 guineas.

A FEATURE OF MANY Victorian gardens was tightly packed "carpet bedding", resembling the brightly-coloured floral carpets popular in the home. But towards the end of

the period there emerged a trend for a more natural or "wild" garden, partly influenced by the rustic and romantic ideals of the arts and crafts movement. It was also during this time that notable female horticulturists, such as Vita Sackville West and Gertrude Jekyll, made their mark. "Jekyll's later influences came from little roadside cottages with wisteria growing above the door and all these self-seeding plants like foxgloves, hollyhocks and sweet peas. We still love those cottage gardens with their romantic and slightly chaotic feel," says Advolly.

Now, with so many plant varieties at the local garden centre, we're spoilt for choice when it comes to our green spaces. But the final garden at the Museum of the Home

is a reminder that we won't always have that luxury. Rather than reflecting the past, it's a garden designed for the uncertainties of the future: a green roof packed with succulents and Mediterranean-style plants that need little water and thrive in sparse soil.



"Green roofs help keep buildings cool, absorb rainfall, and provide a wildlife habitat where there would otherwise be bare concrete," says its designer, green infrastructure specialist Dusty Gedge. He estimates that there are now around 2.5 million square

metres of green roof, mainly in large cities, across the UK. "It's about climate change adaptation for the urban environment as well as access to green space for city dwellers. We can't be irrigating all the time so we need planting that thrives in dry spells and that also benefits biodiversity."

And in the future, gardens on the ground will need to be designed to use much less water too. "They can still be full of beautiful plants, just not lots of roses or privets and expanses of lawn that we normally associate with the traditional English garden. Now, what each of us does in our individual gardens is part of the story of climate change adaptation. We all have that responsibility." ■



The Wisdom Of Elvis

"Some people tap their feet, some people snap their fingers, and some people sway back and forth. I just sort of do them all together, I guess" (1956)

"Man, I was tame compared to what they do now. Are you kidding? I didn't do anything but just jiggle" (1972)

"A live concert to me is exciting because of all the electricity that is generated in the crowd and on stage. It's my favourite part of the business" (1973)

"'Til we meet again, may God bless you. Adios" (1977)

source: graceland.com

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SPECIAL
FEATURE

A GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT LIVING:

Just because you're getting older doesn't mean you need to lose your independence

Growing older. It happens to all of us. And, it seems, more of us too. Census 2021 results revealed that there are more people than ever before in older age groups, with over 11 million people (18.6 per cent of the total UK population) being aged 65 or older.

And, while there are many benefits to happily seeing in our later years (wisdom, grandkids, more free time, less inhibitions, a free bus pass), the most important thing for many people is to retain their independence for as long as they're able to.

Sometimes though, we might just need a helping hand to live the lifestyle we'd like, which is why we've taken a look at the best ideas, tips and products to help you stay independent, for longer.



Reader's
Digest



Set a plan in place

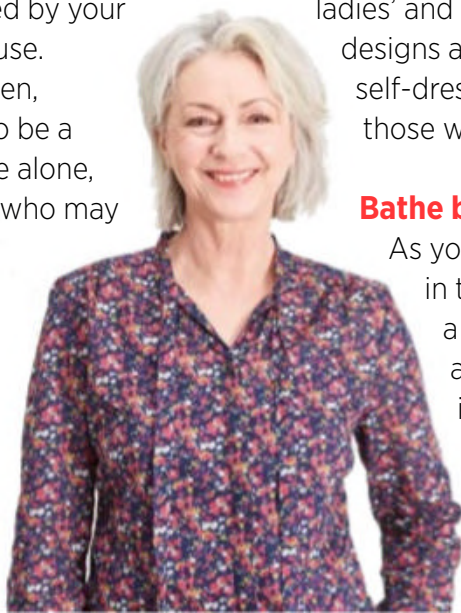
Planning ahead can be a little tricky, as you never know when you might need some assistance living at home. However, there are steps that you can take to ensure that your future is full of freedom. Consider the practicalities of living at home and make a list of the different rooms you might need to make adjustments to. For example, getting up and down stairs, climbing into the bath or sleeping on a high bed can be affected by your mobility around the house. If you have a large garden, managing that may also be a consideration. If you live alone, think about the people who may be able to assist you in the future; if you're a couple, consider each other's needs should one of you need more help due to illness or health problems.

Dress smarter

Considering your clothing may sound a little silly, but arthritic fingers and little buttons, stiff zips and fiddly laces can often mean that getting dressed becomes a more difficult task. So, next time you're shopping, think elastic waistbands, pull on jumpers, front fastening bras and cardigans that feature poppers. You can still stay stylish too—companies such as The Able Label offer a lovely range of ladies' and men's clothes with adapted designs and hidden “extras” to make self-dressing really easy, even for those who may find it more difficult.

Bathe beautiful

As you get older, a relaxing soak in the bath can become less of a treat and more of a chore as bathrooms can become increasingly difficult to navigate, with slippery flooring, low toilets, and





baths that can be difficult to step in and out of. Luckily, there are products that can be fitted easily and quickly that can help bathtime become relaxing again. Specifically designed walk-in showers with low thresholds or walk-in baths for easy bathing access (which can look the same as an “ordinary” bath) can help take the stress away. If you don’t want to replace your existing suite, then consider a bath lift—one option, the Aquatec Orca from Nationwide Mobility, doesn’t even need installation and can simply be used as and when required.

Personal safety

It’s not just your home you need to consider when thinking about independent living. It’s also you. Despite putting measures in place to negate any problems at home, taking a tumble can happen. Investing in a personal alarm can therefore not only make you feel safer, but can additionally give your family and

friends peace of mind. They can also be potentially lifesaving, allowing you to call for assistance quickly if you have an accident or fall at home.

There are lots of types of alarms to choose from, all with slightly different ways of keeping you safe, but they’re all fairly simple to use. Choose from a more basic option which lets out a loud noise to alert people nearby that you need help, or stay connected 24/7 to emergency response centres who can come out to you at the press of a button. If you’re worried about a fall specifically, there are also alarms that are triggered automatically if the in-built motion sensor detects any unexpected downward motion.

Sit and stair

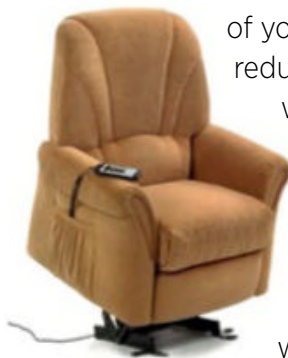
Going upstairs may feel like a small thing but it’s a big part of keeping your independence, so it may be that you need to make certain upgrades or alterations to this area of your home. For example,



making sure stairways have secure handrails can be an easy fix to make sure bedrooms and bathrooms are still accessible. If, eventually, stairs do become more of a challenge, stairlifts or home lifts can be installed, regardless of whether your stairs are straight or curved or the size of your home. With some companies, such as Age UK's "Handicare", you can also rent equipment rather than buying outright. Use them and you'll also be supporting their charitable work—as well as staying safe on your stairs.

Recline, relax

Sitting down, reading, watching TV, chatting—there are many good hours whiled away in a chair. Ensuring that you have the right neck, back and posture support is therefore really important, which is why considering a recliner may



be a good option—especially if you find it difficult getting in and out of the chair itself. Treat yourself and invest in a made-to-measure luxury riser recliner chair from Willowbrook. You can be in and out of your chair at the touch of a button, reducing strain on your legs, hips and wrists, keeping you more mobile for longer. For even more choice, the Recliner Factory also offers a great range of comfortable, stylish chairs too—and they'll even help take your old chair away as well, if that's needed.

Household hazards

Bending down, stretching up, stepping over things. Getting older means that on occasion, bodies don't always work quite as we'd like them to. Checking you can easily access things in the home safely—or organising them so you can—is therefore really important. Placing everyday items on shelves or surfaces that are easy to

reach (no stools please), and moving most-worn clothing from low drawers to waist level can make everyday things a little easier. Additionally, check rugs and flooring for trip hazards, and pop down some anti-slip matting if needed.

Eat well

Kitchens are often seen as the heart of the home, and with a few checks and measures, it's easy to make sure it stays that way. Moving heavy pots, pans, chopping boards and dishes can be difficult for frailer arms, so opt for plastic bowls and boards if you can to alleviate some of the weight. Bending down to the oven can also be a problem, so consider other options such as an airfryer, or a

microwave that offers settings such as grilling and baking too. There are also some great gadgets to help open tins, unscrew bottle tops, and even help with tin can ring pulls, should you need. Try kitchen store Lakeland for a range of good options of gadgets.

And, if making regular meals becomes a little difficult, then delivery services such as Wiltshire Farm Foods, Parsley Box and OakHouse Foods all serve up delicious full meals (including starter, mains, desserts and other treats) right to your door. Easy to cook and easy to enjoy! ■

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Traversing the peaks and towns of the Madonie
mountains on the picturesque Italian island

WALKING IN SICILY'S MOUNTAINS

BY *Anna Walker*

**The wonderful view
of Etna and Gangi,
as seen from
Petralia Soprana**



IN THE BACK of the jeep driving us to the village of Gangi, I have a problem. A typical British tourist, I'd thought I'd be able to get by on our walking tour of Sicily with just slithers of Italian: *grazie, per favore, più vino*.

Failing that, I think, yawning and stretching flight-tired limbs, my partner—fluent in Italian—can make up for my shortcomings. But as he attempts to launch into easy banter with our driver, it's clear the Sicilian language is a beast all its own.

"Is the dialect in Gangi closer to Spanish than Italian?" We're met with a wry chuckle.

"More like Arabic".

As it turns out, my thin grasp of the language won't matter. Sicilian warmth is unimpeded by a lack of common tongue—the hospitality on this trip is some of the sincerest I've ever encountered.

As we drive through fields of flushed orange groves and squat olive trees, towns begin to emerge on the mountainside. A distant summit looms into view and our driver nods reverently. "There is the king of Sicily." We won't see Etna again until the final stop in our trip, which will take in the hilltop medieval towns and leafy forestry of the Madonie Natural Park, in the northern half of the island.

We're visiting through slow travel tour operator Inntravel, who have provided a dossier of maps and advice

to guide us. In the age of Google Maps, there's something refreshing—and a little terrifying—about hitting the road analogue style.

OUR FIRST DESTINATION, Gangi, has a population of just over 6,000. We're staying at Villa Rainò, a handsome family-run agriturismo where the welcome is warm and the food relentless. We're served course after hearty course, realising in dismay, seven dishes in, that we will need to walk this off in the morning.

DAY ONE OF HIKING HAS SPECTACULAR VIEWS ACROSS ROLLING PEAKS

Day one of hiking begins with spectacular views across rolling peaks. We're aiming for the medieval town of Geraci Siculo and the weather is perfect. We're kept company by stout, shiny dung beetles toiling hard under the glare of the sun.

Part way through the day we happen upon a pasture of horses. Their owner pats their shiny coats, calling to his children who have gathered, shyly, to watch us. Hiking isn't a popular pastime in Sicily, so we make for curious figures with our sticks and backpacks. He invites us to pet some of his prized steeds. He's rearing them for dressage and knows

An old castle in Geraci Siculo



of Inntravel, nodding his approval at our maps.

As we stride on, cow bells tinkle on the wind like distant church bells. They wander everywhere on this part of the island, unmanned and drowsy, nonplussed as we nervously sidestep their hulking frames.

As we reach Geraci Siculo—which dates back to 550BC, when Greeks first settled in the Madonie—a storm begins whipping the trees. We dash through the town’s labyrinthine lanes, past ornate churches, and shuttered shopfronts, to dinner.

We’re dining at Vulture, a modern restaurant with a tasting menu thoroughly unexpected in this ancient-looking town. We have the place to ourselves and as the rain drums down, we replenish walk-weary stomachs with oven-fresh focaccia, sparkling beer, and the

region’s speciality—pork with apple.

Drowsy and content, we pull the shutters closed in our hotel, Notti O’Tunn. We’re told that our room has spectacular views, but we wouldn’t know. The outside world is now entirely encased in a cottony sheet of fog and rain.

WE WAKE TO bad news. The storm has called off our hike and the mist is now so thick we can barely see ten feet in front of us. Thankfully, Inntravel’s detailed notes help us to plot an alternative. We skip the hike and taxi directly to Petralia Sottana. Its quaint rooftops peek through scattered storm clouds as we approach—at 1,147m above sea level, this is the second highest village in Sicily.

A drizzly day spent exploring the village offers a welcome change of



Petralia Sottana
and a stag



WHEN WE TURN THE CORNER, THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF DEER IN EVERY DIRECTION

pace. Steep winding roads lead to the orange roof of the cathedral, Maria Santissima Assunta. It's hard on the calves, but locals scurry about like the incline is nothing. We're frequently lapped by Sicilians in their seventies, eighties, who could seemingly scale the city's sharp streets in their sleep.

For dinner that night at our hotel, Albergo Il Castello, we're served pesto pizza, orange pumpkin pasta and pistachio cheesecake. The restaurant's staff pack us chunky calzones for lunch the next day.

Full, but not sleepy enough to retire, we duck into a bar. The football is on, Roma is winning, and we sip generous pours of limoncello. A group of animated boys chant in Sicilian—"He who arrived last will pay for all!"

Gay couples, migrant workers, and locals young and old mingle. For a town of just 2,700 people, it's surprisingly diverse. We shuffle off into a crisp evening. The rain has stopped, and the mist has cleared.

THE MOST DEMANDING hike of the trip takes us from Petralia Sottana to Castelbuono. For nine hours in the heart of Madonie Natural

Park, we don't encounter another soul. Surrounded by holly trees, we scramble up and down peaks, hearing nothing but the trickling of streams and the distant snuffling of wild boar.

Three hours in, stark against the sky, we see the outline of a fallow stag. When we turn the corner, we're astonished to find he isn't alone. There are hundreds of deer, in every direction. They sit grazing on berries or throw their heads back, throaty bellows echoing across the valley. Fawns with white spots dart across our path, and in the distance territorial stags lock antlers and rattle down the rockface.

For hours we walk among them. Just once we lose our path, retracing our steps until we spot the familiar paint marker on a tree trunk—Inntravel's regular "you're going the right way" symbol, and breathe a sigh of relief.

Over dinner that night at Agriturismo Bergi—a charming farm and hotel in the town of Castelbuono—we're both quiet.

Tomorrow, we put away the maps and compass, and return to the world of screens. It's been a challenge, relying on nothing but manual navigation to traverse the mountains of Sicily, but in disconnecting, we've reconnected with something forgotten—the wide-eyed wonder of nature and the warmth of human connection. Some things transcend language. ■

SELF-GUIDED TRIP

Inntravel (inntravel.co.uk, 01653 617000) offers The Mountains of Sicily self-guided walking break from £925pp based on two sharing, including seven nights' B&B accommodation, seven dinners, three picnic lunches, luggage transfers between hotels, and walking route notes and maps. Available April 15, 2023—June 30, 2023 and August 22, 2023—October 31, 2023. Flights (to Catania or Palermo) and airport transfers are extra



Prize Crossword

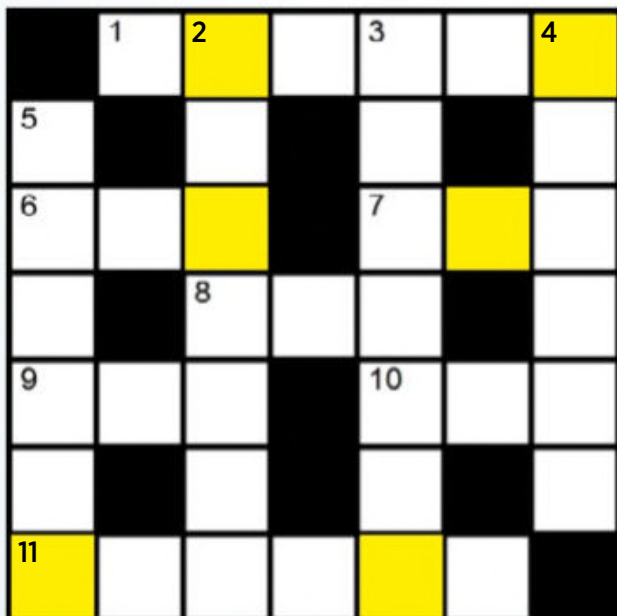
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The utterly divine www.scrumptiousbylucy.com have given us 2 x £100 vouchers to spend on their delicious brownies! Scrumptious By Lucy offer around twenty flavours, including gluten free and vegan varieties. You can pick a chocolate focused brownie like the Signature Chocolate Brownie which offers all the chocolatey brownie goodness that you desire! Or pick out a brownie with a flavouring like Chocolate Orange or Salted Caramel! Scrumptious! The perfect gift!

Complete the crossword and the letters in the yellow squares can be sorted to reveal a word that describes a chocolate flavour for your brownies. Write this word on the entry form. See page 151.



COMPLETE THE CROSSWORD FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN!



ACROSS

- 1 Cup holder (6)
- 6 Finish first (3)
- 7 Encountered (3)
- 8 Be in debt (3)
- 9 Polar (3)
- 10 Prosecute (3)
- 11 Bible distributor (6)

DOWN

- 2 Irritated (7)
- 3 Wakes up (5,2)
- 4 Decayed (6)
- 5 Having (6)

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A. 12 B. 2 C. 3

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My Great Escape:

Discovering Undiscovered Donegal

Our reader Katrina Robinson returns to Ireland, the site of childhood family holidays, determined to discover something new...

EVERY SUMMER AS a child I tagged along with my parents on the annual family holiday from our home in the West Midlands to their birthplace in Ireland.

I enjoyed it, but naturally once I left home I rebelled. Package tours and long-distance flights became my idea of a holiday. Ironically, I then went and fell for an Englishman who also came of Irish stock, and we both felt the urge to renew our acquaintance with Ireland.

It was important to us to discover something different from our childhood visits. So that's how we came to drive along the winding, tapering St John's Point peninsula in Donegal, part of Ireland's Wild



Atlantic Way, to visit a unique fragment of 20th-century history: the “Donegal Corridor”.

When you drive to the point where the land runs out, you see giant white stones embedded in green turf spelling out “EIRE” and “70”, while the Atlantic wind roars across the headland and the ice-white rollers smash into the rocks below. The



during the war, the Battle of the Atlantic was being fought close to Irish shores, and these LOPs, staffed by local volunteers known as “Coastwatchers”, passed on information on maritime activity and weather fronts to London, which helped predict a safe date for the D-Day landings.

At St John’s Point we were standing right underneath the Donegal Corridor, a strip of airspace in which Ireland ensured safe passage to RAF and Allied planes from bases in the UK-governed North of Ireland, thereby saving crews an extra 200 miles and two hours’ flying time during the Battle of the North Atlantic. The stone markings acted as reference points to aircrews.

Standing on this rugged strip of land surrounded by the wild and windy ocean brought home to us the conditions in which the Coastwatchers and Allied crews cooperated in a shared history.

I think we fulfilled our aim of discovering something new, but we also soaked up all Donegal has to offer: empty golden beaches, mysterious ancient stone circles, folk music and weavers’ crafts, and tasty food, drink and *craic* in warm pubs. We had fallen in love with Ireland all over again. ■



meaning behind the stones? They date back to the Second World War when St John’s Point was number 70 in a total of 83 Look Out Points (LOPs), observation stations set up and maintained by Ireland all around its coast.

Therein lies a bit of curious UK-Ireland history. Although Ireland was officially neutral

Tell us about your favourite holiday (send a photo too) and if we print it, we’ll pay £50. Email excerpts@readersdigest.co.uk

POINTE DE LA JONCTION

Geneva

GENEVA TOURISTS TEND to stick to its lakeside, admiring the eye-catching Jet d'Eau fountain and a church-speckled Old Town spread about far below the snow-crested Alps.

Venture inland, however, and the Peace City's prim, Parisian-style streets give way to something altogether less expected. Having exited Lake Geneva, the Rhône river flows westwards for just a mile before another major waterway, the Arve, joins from its left at a place called Le Pointe de la Jonction.

What makes this confluence so memorable is its colouration. The gushing Arve is usually a mucky grey-green and the serene Rhône typically turquoise; for 50 metres, aided by an underwater partition, the two run in stark pantone parallels. It's a surprising and arresting sight.

The quarter behind Le Pointe is itself called Jonction. Walk along its Rhône-shadowing Sentier des Saules footpath in summer and you'll pass a pop-up bar, occasional live music, deckchairs and young things sharing a barbecue; visit in the morning if you'd rather more quietude.

Beyond a former bus depot—this whole area is expected to become a park at some point—the land tapers down to a small round platform that juts out into the water. Cameras at the ready!

For a wholly loftier perspective, briefly follow the Arve upstream before crossing a footbridge and climbing northwest through the Bois de la Bâtie, an attractive nature park. Turn right to descend onto the pale, train-carrying Viaduc de la Jonction, whose adjacent footpath offers fine aerial views of the confluence with Lake Geneva sprawled out beyond. ■

By Richard Mellor

An aerial photograph of a wide river with a large, lush green island in the center. The island is densely packed with trees, some showing early autumn colors. The water is a deep blue on the left and a lighter turquoise on the right. In the background, a city with various buildings and a prominent red brick chimney is visible, set against a backdrop of blue mountains under a clear sky. A dark grey circle in the top right corner contains the text 'HIDDEN GEMS' in white.

HIDDEN
GEMS



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**With dinner on one evening at 3 AA Rosette Blas Restaurant
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Originally a windmill built in 1806, Twr y Felin is, along with the cathedral, the only high-rise structure in St Davids. Purposely positioned on the peninsula to harvest the ever-blowing winds, it lasted as a working windmill for 100 years, before the sails fell off just one too many times. Reinvention saved it then, as it has time and again.

Becoming a hotel gave the building a new life, and it has remained mostly so ever since. Then it was a temperance hotel, today it is Wales' first contemporary art hotel, filled with over 250 specially commissioned artworks and sculptures by 20 Welsh, British and international artists.

Designed to challenge the traditional, inside you'll discover a contemporary space, accented with bespoke handcrafted furniture, linen wallpaper, and velveteen sofas. On a clear day, the islands of Skomer, Grassholm and Ramsey, pierce the horizon of St Brides Bay, whilst the Preseli Hills offer a mountainous backdrop to the mostly marine landscape. At Twr y Felin, the contemporary and traditional meet in the middle. The interior is modern, luxurious and easy, whilst the welcome is typically Welsh, warm and enveloping, our best tradition!

To book email stay@twryfelinhotel.com | or call 01437 725 555

What was the Twr y Felin hotel originally?

- A. A windmill**
- B. A lighthouse**
- C. A fort**

Simply answer A, B or C on the entry form or enter online. See page 151.

www.twryfelinhotel.com

*Terms and Conditions: The prize is based on two guests sharing a double or twin Oriel Spacious room and includes breakfast each day, a three course dinner for two on one evening of your stay, parking and WiFi. The prize is valid, Sunday to Thursday ONLY, between October 15th 2023 and March 31st 2024, excluding School and Bank Holiday and Valentines. Subject to change and availability at the time of booking. As hypo-allergenic properties, we are unable to accept pets.

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BROADBAND
BILLS**

WHEN YOU GET YOUR broadband bill this spring, you'll probably find it's almost 14% higher than last month. That's a staggering amount extra to pay, but these tips will hopefully mean you will pay less, and not more, for your internet access.

This larger increase than normal is because December's inflation (which many providers use, plus another 3% or 4%) was a massive 10.5%. But even without this, there's a good chance you've sleep-walked into paying more than you initially did when you signed up.

Often welcome deals are for a short period, perhaps just six months, before increasing for the rest of your contract. They can even go up again once you're outside of that initial 18 or 24-month period. Of course, previous yearly increases will have had an impact too.

So how do you cut your bill? Well, first you need to check your contract situation. For those out of contract, you've got the power to switch to a different provider at a lower price without paying an early exit penalty.



Andy Webb is a personal finance journalist and runs the award-winning money blog, *Be Clever With Your Cash*

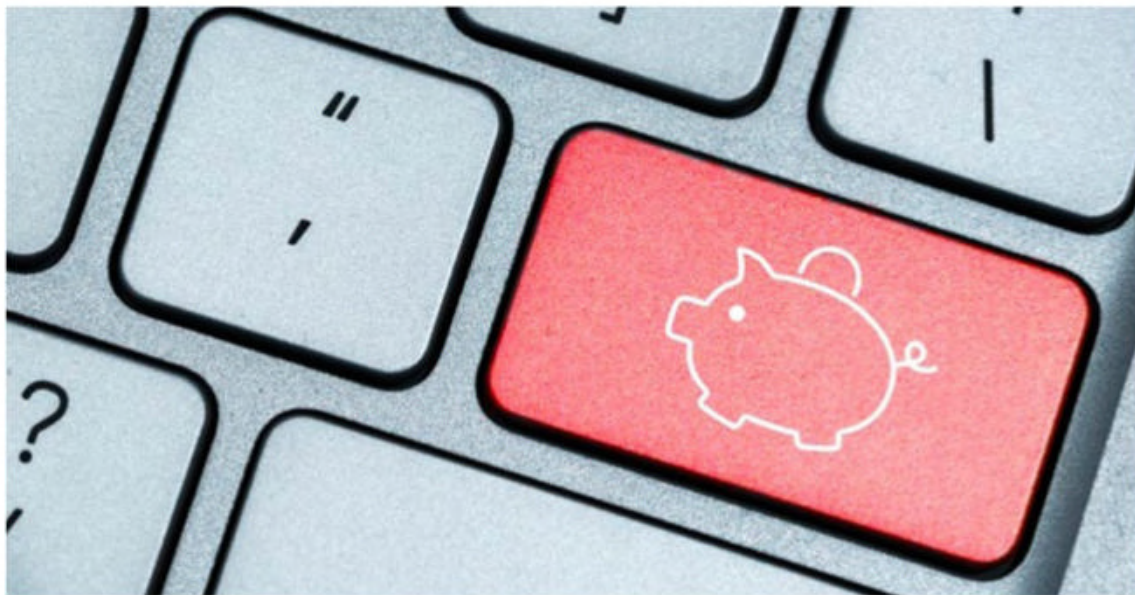
Before looking at your options you'll first want to check what you pay now and what you get for it. This will be on your bill. Speed is the main driver for the cost of internet access, so it's worth seeing if you actually need your current level.

If you're mainly browsing and sending emails, you might be OK with the basic 10Mbps, and if you do some streaming on top, you'll be fine with speeds of around 35 to 36Mbps. For busier homes, you'll want 60Mbps, while lots of smart devices might require the top speeds.

It's likely you'll have both broadband and a landline, and the latter might come with extra call packages. Do you need these? Ditch them if you don't. Do you even need the line itself? If not, you can look for broadband-only services, though these can sometimes cost you more.

Next you'll need to see what's out there, and you can use a comparison site to see a range of providers and tariffs. Look out for extra deals, such as credit on your first bill or a free gift card. Cashback sites are also worth checking out for any additional discounts.

The biggest names tend to be the most expensive. If you've not heard of smaller but cheaper providers then it's worth doing some quick research to find out customer service ratings. Sometimes it's better to pay a little more if good service is important to you.



You can simply choose one of these options and create a new contract. You won't have to give notice to your existing supplier—it'll all be done by the new firm, unless you move to a cable provider such as Virgin Media where you'll need to talk to them too.

It's unlikely you'll even need an engineer to come to your home, unless you need a new fibre or cable line installed. Instead, you'll get a new router in the post that you can set up. On the day of the switchover, you might find there are a couple of hours when you lose access, and you'll need to connect all your devices again with the new ID and password. But I think the admin is well worth it for the savings.

Alternatively, either to see if you can get a better deal or because switching could cause issues (perhaps your email address is tied

to your current provider), you can try haggling.

Broadband firms are among those most likely to give you discounts if you threaten to leave, so it's well worth a go. Call them up and say you want to give notice. This will get you to the cancellation or retentions department—the people who usually have access to the biggest savings.

Be polite and tell them you're going to quit as you've found a better deal elsewhere (use the research from comparison sites as your baseline price). Don't take their first offer, and don't be tempted into upgrades or extras instead of a discount.

If they can match what you've found elsewhere, or at least get pretty close, it can often be easier to stick with them rather than switch away, though don't forget to factor in any extra cashback or savings you've found for joining another provider.

It can get more complicated if you're also bundling in pay TV or mobile phones with your internet, but the same steps will work here too—as long as you're out of contract.

For those with a broadband tariff still under contract, there's less you can do. Most will have to wait until you're not locked in. But in some circumstances it's worth trying a few different things.

You could see if any extras you have aren't tied to the initial contract—though these tend to be with non-broadband services. Still, it's worth a look and you might be able to remove things like additional TV channels or call packages without starting a new contract.

Technical or service issues can be another reason to request a discount, or even the ability to leave penalty-free. You'll often need to give them the opportunity to fix the issue first, which can take some time.

And if you receive certain benefits such as Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Care Leaver's Support, you will be eligible for a social tariff at some of the providers (though it varies by the provider which benefits are required).

These deals usually cost between £15 and £20 a month and you should be able to sign up for one of these even if you're in contract. If your supplier doesn't offer a social tariff, then most will let you leave penalty-free so you can access the deal. ■



The World's Craziest Easter Traditions

On Easter Monday, the residents of Haux, France crack more than 4,500 eggs into a gigantic pan to create a massive Easter omelette that serves over 1,000 people

Chocolate isn't much use in the steamy jungles of Papua New Guinea, so Easter trees at the front of churches are decorated with sticks of tobacco and cigarettes instead

In the Philippines some devout Catholics have taken to the practice of self-crucifixion and self-flagellation on Easter. Their thinking is that it helps purify them and cleanse them of the sins of the world

Easter is known around the world for multi-coloured, decorated eggs. But in Greece you will find only red eggs. Red is the colour of life, you see, as well as a representation of the blood of Christ

source: wanderlust.co.uk



Looking for trustworthy financial advice?

Reader's Digest Equity
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consider all of your options

If you are keen to get your finances in order but not sure where to start or who to trust, it can be helpful to get advice from a fully qualified professional.

There are multiple ways to take control of your budgets, and while it is always important to do your own research first, a professional can really help you to make sense of things.

Equity release is one of the options that you may be considering, as it grows in popularity among homeowners aged 55 and over who are looking to unlock some of their property wealth. These products have changed considerably over the years, and there might be features available that you haven't heard about before.

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When you get in touch with Reader's Digest Equity Release, you'll speak to the friendly Information Team first. The UK-based team are experts in checking whether you and your property might be eligible to release equity. They can also answer your initial questions and give you an estimate of the amount you could release.

Then, if you're ready, they will partner you with an adviser in your local area. Your adviser can visit you in the comfort of your home, or speak with you over the phone if you'd prefer. They will talk through your goals and financial situation before presenting you with a recommendation.

Your adviser will explain the pros and cons of equity release, as well as other options that may be suitable. This includes making you aware that taking from the value of your home now will reduce the value of your estate in the future and could affect your entitlement to means-tested benefits.

How to book an appointment

To arrange your initial, no-obligation meeting with a **Reader's Digest Equity Release adviser**, get in touch with the Information Team today by **calling 0800 029 1233**. They will find your local adviser and book an appointment at a time that is convenient for you.

(Not Just) Easter Bunnies

Rabbits are a popular pet at this time of year. But they're actually complicated animals, so here are some things to consider before you get a bunny

RABBITS ARE A popular symbol of Easter and there's usually an increase in owning rabbits at this time. It's important to think carefully before deciding if they are right for you—they are complex animals with specific needs and not as easy or cheap to own as once thought. However, with the right care they are incredibly rewarding and interesting pets, explains Claire Stallard, behaviour lead at pet charity Blue Cross. Here are things to consider.

Housing

Rabbits need a lot of space! They are active animals that need to be able to hop, jump, run and explore. Blue Cross advises that a pair of rabbits have 24-hour access to a space that is no less than three metres by two metres by one metre high. Converted sheds or children's playhouses are often just as cost-effective as the traditional hutch. As rabbits



are most active at dusk, dawn and at times during the night, exercise areas should be permanently attached so they have freedom to come and go.

Companionship

A single bunny is a lonely bunny. Rabbits are social creatures and need the company of their own kind. Keep at least two together and you'll never look back—watching rabbits interact with each other is a joy. The best combination is a neutered male and neutered female, but neutered same-sex siblings can work too. Introducing rabbits should be done slowly with a lot of care as, although they are social, they are also territorial.

Neutering

Rabbits can reproduce from four months, so it's important to get them neutered—talk to your vet about this. It prevents accidental litters and health problems, but also



means that rabbits can live successfully with other rabbits. Even same sex pairs should be neutered—this will help prevent serious fighting.

All paws on the floor

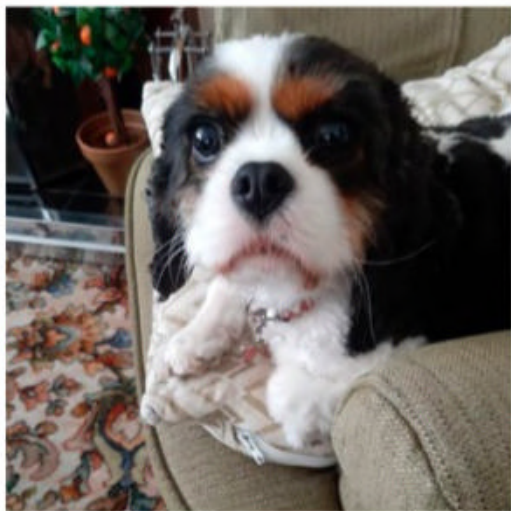
Unfortunately, rabbits are still thought of as an “easy” introduction to owning a pet and are often bought for small children. They don’t enjoy being picked up and cuddled and they are easily frightened. Of course, children can enjoy learning about rabbits and interacting with them. But rabbits, being prey animals, like to keep all four feet firmly on the ground and prefer to hop onto a lap to get a tasty treat rather than be picked up and carried around.

The right food

Rabbits have a complex digestive system and teeth that grow continuously—they need constant access to grass (not freshly cut) of good quality to keep them healthy. They only need a small amount of concentrated food a day (about an egg cup twice a day for the average rabbit) and a few healthy greens. Avoid muesli food. “Sugary” vegetables and fruits (carrots and apples) should only be fed very occasionally, if at all. Consider adopting rabbits from a rescue shelter, as there are many who are looking for homes and often already have bonded pairs. ■

For help visit bluecross.org.uk

READER'S DIGEST'S PET OF THE MONTH



Email your pet's picture to petphotos@readersdigest.co.uk

Nina

Age: Six years

Breed: Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

Owner: Arlene McAllister

Fun Fact: I love my walks in the wonderful local park, watching the swans by the river and snoozing in the afternoon. I have no interest in my toys but I love my owners to bits.



Gardening In April

Award-winning author Liz Zorab on growing your own vegetables and what to look out for in April

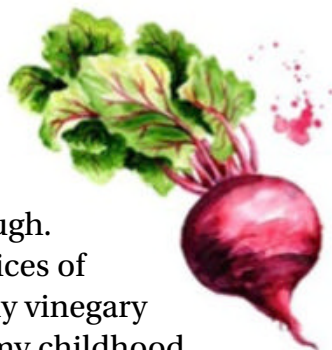
APRIL FEELS LIKE a hopeful month. Daffodils, tulips and other spring bulbs burst open offering splashes of colour across the garden. Blossoms on trees open and once again the focus of our eyes moves from beneath our feet to above head height.

In mid-spring the weather fluctuates between windy, wet, stormy days and dry, clear days that are followed by a frosty night. It's a month of activity in the greenhouse, polytunnel or on the kitchen windowsill as I sow annual vegetables and flowers for the season ahead.

I also think of it as a restless, frustrating month, as the weather is not usually kind enough to direct sow into the soil or to plant out many seedlings in the open ground. If you grow under cover, there is a daily ritual of checking temperatures and deciding whether you need to open and close doors and windows to keep the temperatures from becoming so high that they cook the young plants, or so low that they get frost burn. During April and May, I feel gardening becomes an artform of delicately balanced judgement and action.

Beetroot

I cannot sing the praises of the humble beetroot enough. The purple slices of eye-wateringly vinegary vegetable of my childhood memories have been replaced by sweet, earthy flavours in a variety of colours that please the eye as much as the palette.



Beetroot is traditionally a summer harvest; a few years ago I started sowing beetroot seeds in early autumn. They will sit in the ground throughout the winter and provide an early harvest of small beets in spring. Before the small beetroot are ready to harvest, the new growth of leaves can be used as a hot vegetable. Wilted in a pan with butter, ground black pepper and a light touch of garlic, they are delicious. Beet seeds sown under cover in late winter and early spring can provide baby leaves for salads. I sow beetroot at regular intervals throughout the year from March to October (and even in November in a mild autumn). For a leaf crop, I sow

direct into a raised bed or the ground. For beetroots, I multi-sow in modules early in the year and then direct multi-sow once the soil has warmed sufficiently for the seeds to germinate readily. Multi-sowing is easy, it simply requires you to sow two or more seeds into an area together. For beetroot, I usually sow three or four seeds together.

I used to associate beetroot with the summer months, salads and pickles, but a few years ago I discovered the joy of slow-cooked beetroot, either roasted with a variety of vegetables or slow-fried over a low temperature, which gives the beet the texture of a good steak. Well not exactly, but not a bad second option.

Chard

I would grow rainbow chard in the garden even if we didn't eat it. The bright stems provide a splash of colour even on the dullest of days. The leaves have a soft sheen which contrasts with the stems. There are white, yellow, red, pink and orange versions with green leaves and also a deepest burgund-red stem with dark green and deep burgundy leaves. Chard is hardy, dramatic and a useful plant in the vegetable garden.

Unlike spinach, chard can be harvested even after it starts going to seed. The remarkable twisted stems



appear in the second year as the plant races to produce flowers and seeds. As long as there is space for them in the garden, I leave them to grow into huge striking plants because they provide much sought after fresh green leaves at this time of year. I find large chard leaves unpalatable; they taste too strong, too iron-y. The young leaves, however, are delicious in a salad, omelette or stir fry. I happily remove the medium to large leaves, chop the stems into segments and roast them with lots of garlic in a tray of mixed vegetables. Cooked this way, they taste earthy, but as a contrast to the other vegetables, they make a nice change. The seeds can be collected or the plant can be left to scatter its seeds.

Alternatively, the plants can be added to the compost bin, and once the compost is used on your growing beds, you may find chard seedlings popping up all over the garden. I like this haphazard growth pattern, the young seedlings appearing here and there. But if you prefer your vegetables to grow in neat and tidy rows, remove the chard plant before it sets seed. ■

Extracted from *The Seasoned Gardener*, published on April 17 by Permanent Publications, £20. For further information visit Youtube @LizZorab





Prize Wordsearch

Can you find all these words relating to Easter in our wordsearch grid? One of them cannot be found and will be your prize answer. Words can run in straight lines in any direction, cross them off as you find them, and the missing word you have remaining is the winning word – simply write this word on the entry form or enter online. See page 151.

The deliciously wonderful www.delimann.co.uk have given us **2** of their **NEW Champagne Afternoon Tea Delights** in a wicker hamper worth over £100 each to give away!

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- ANGEL
- APRIL
- BELLS
- BIBLE
- BONNETS
- BUNNY
- CHOCOLATE
- CROSS
- EASTER
- EGG
- FAITH
- GIFT
- GOD
- HOLY
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Terms: Closing date 17th April 2023. Winner will be selected at random. Prize of Focal headphone will be sent by post within 1 month and gift card for Vialma sent by email.



Why Eggs Deserve Better

*With the right
care and
attention, eggs
can make a
delicious meal*

EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING to say on the subject of eggs. MFK Fisher is the best: “Probably one of the most private things in the world is an egg until it is broken.” The egg industry drones that eggs are incredible and edible. The French philosopher Diderot noted that all the world’s theologies could be toppled by one.

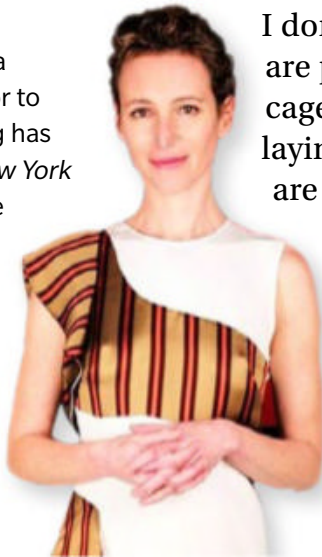
I am going to be as practical as I can be because most people know how to “make eggs.” But “making eggs” sounds dull and habitual, and too much like “making do,” and we and eggs deserve better.

I have three things to say.

First, an egg is not an egg is not an egg. I don’t know what to call the things that are produced by hens crowded into dirty cages, their beaks snipped, tricked into laying constantly. Whatever they are, they are only edible in the sense that we can cram anything down if we need to; their secrets merit airing, but not eating.

Eggs should be laid by chickens that have as much of a say in it as

Tamar Adler is a contributing editor to *Vogue*. Her writing has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New Yorker*.com, and other publications



any of us about our egg laying does. Their yolks should, depending on the time of year, range from buttercup yellow to marigold. They should come from as nearby as possible. We don't all live near cattle farms, but most of us live surprisingly close to someone raising chickens for eggs. If you find lively eggs from local chickens, buy them. They will be a good deal more than edible.

we need to know about divinity. It hinges not on the question of how the egg began, but how the egg will end. A good egg, cooked deliberately, gives us a glimpse of the greater forces at play.

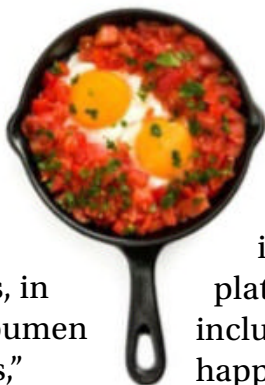
Third is the stance of a man I met in eastern Africa. He was a reedy, white-blond Berliner named Gregor. Gregor had spent five years driving trucks up and down the

MEALS STILL QUALIFY AS MEALS IF THEY ARE EGGLESS. BUT AN EGG CAN TURN ANYTHING INTO A MEAL

Second, a good egg is only worth it if you know all it's good for. Whether or not they ever take off, eggs possess in them some of the mystical energy of flight. A cookbook from the 1930s lists, in a catalogue of eggs' uses: "albumen water [egg whites] for invalids," "for exhaustion," "emergency dressing for a burn," and "antidote to poisoning." I haven't used them to treat poisoning, but if the need arose I would.

Good eggs are worth it, as long as your stance, egg in hand, isn't automatic. As long as you stop before cracking it and think: "I am going to softly scramble this egg," or "a bowl of yesterday's rice would be delicious topped with this one."

Here Diderot stumbles. A gently but sincerely cooked egg tells us all



coast from Mombasa to Cape Town. He had seen a lot of backcountry meals over that time, and whenever he was served one, he reacted in one of two ways. If the plate of food he was handed included an egg, he would look happy and eat. If it didn't, he'd look mournfully up at whoever had delivered it and ask, always as though for the first time: "What about egg?"

For my taste, meals still qualify as meals if they are eggless. But an egg can turn anything into a meal and is never so pleased as when it is allowed to.

When we make eggs, we usually fry or scramble them. "Frying" and "scrambling" imply too much aggression. I soft-fry and I soft-scramble. Fried eggs should be

cooked at a gentle sizzle, which keeps their whites from toughening, and scrambling should just be a series of persistent nudges.

Fried eggs do a good job on spaghetti. There is a slightly harrowing Tuscan pasta sauce called carbonara for which raw eggs are beaten with Parmesan and then tossed with hot noodles. It isn't difficult, but there is always the looming chance that the eggs will start scrambling before they are convinced to become sauce. Frying an egg sunny-side up and putting it on top of olive-oiled and cheesed pasta takes the guesswork out of it and allows you to experience the combination.

Fry eggs for pasta as I learned to in Spain. Cook them slowly in a half inch of just warm olive oil, constantly spooning the oil over the top of the eggs, to lightly poach each part of them in oil.

Scrambled eggs make a delicious sandwich. I first tried a scrambled egg sandwich in Laos, where a big mound of softly scrambled eggs with strange little mushrooms was stuffed inside a warm, soft roll. It was perfectly creamy and the mushrooms were earthy and just barely browned, and it was a revelation. I make a similar one with wild mushrooms or simply with good butter and fresh herbs. ■

Excerpt from
*An Everlasting Meal—
Cooking with
Economy and
Grace* by
Tamar Adler
(published
by Swift Press)
hbk £14.99



Historic April Fools' Pranks

On an episode of *Panorama* in 1957, Richard Dimbleby anchored a piece showing Switzerland's "exceptionally heavy spaghetti crop" harvested from trees

In 1976, astronomer Patrick Moore appeared on BBC Radio 2 and announced that at 9:47am, we would feel the "Jovian-Plutonian gravitational effect"

The Guardian published a travel guide to the islands of San Seriffe in 1977. The two islands, Upper Caisse and Lower Caisse, formed the shape of a semicolon

source: bbc.co.uk, nationalgeographic.com



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contact number

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You must own the rights to the photograph you submit for entry. You must be able to supply a high-resolution copy of the photograph suitable for print publication. Competition is open to residents of the UK, Eire and BFPOs, aged 18 or over, except Reader's Digest employees and any associated partners or affiliated companies. No purchase necessary. Entries can be made via email. Closing date for entries is 12/05/2023. There is no cash alternative and prizes are not transferable. Multiple entries will be accepted. The judge's decision is final and winners will be notified by email or post. Winners must agree to publication of their winning photograph, along with their name. We may use entries in all print and electronic media. Contributions become world copyright of Vivat Direct Ltd (t/a Reader's Digest). Your information will only be used in accordance with our privacy policy. Entry implies acceptance of these rules. Full terms can be viewed online at [readersdigest.co.uk/competition-rules](https://www.readersdigest.co.uk/competition-rules)

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FILM OF THE
MONTH



ONE FINE MORNING

A SUBLIME FRENCH drama about life, death and all the messy bits in between, *One Fine Morning* stars Léa Seydoux in one of her most mature roles to date. She may have captured James Bond's heart in the recent 007 movies, but here she moves away from Hollywood fantasy to something more real. She plays Sandra, a single mother living in a Paris apartment with her young daughter. Much of her time is taken up with her ailing father (Pascal Gregory), a former philosopher who has been afflicted with the cruellest of diseases: Benson's syndrome, a rare degenerative illness that causes damage at the back of the brain and gradually erodes memory and sight.

Director Mia Hansen-Løve based the story on her own father's condition, but there's no mawkish sentiment or self-pity here. As Sandra anguishes over the decline of her parent, she also finds love with an old friend, Clément (Melvil Poupaud), a perfect expression of how life can serve up pain and joy at the same time. A wonderful showcase for Seydoux's myriad talents, the actress is also framed in an unfussy, naturalistic manner, to the point where it feels like you're eavesdropping on personal, sometimes painful conversations. A high-wire act of a movie, both heartbreaking and life-affirming, it'll leave you elated.

By James Mottram

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH

★★★★

GOD'S CREATURES



A REMOTE FISHING village on the wild and windswept Irish coast forms the perfect backdrop for this tense family drama. The story centres on Aileen (Emily Watson), whose son Brian (Paul Mescal) has returned home after several years away. There are few bounds to her motherly love: she steals the resources he needs to revive the abandoned family oyster farm, and things take a darker turn when an allegation is made against him and she lies for him in court.

The village's tight-knit community is haunted by acts of violence that ripple through the generations. Few are shown onscreen, a conscious choice by directors Saela Davis and Anna Rose Holmer, and one that offers an insight into Aileen's willingness to lie for her son. She sees the version of Brian that he presents her with, and

she cannot fathom what he might be capable of outside of her line of sight.

In its slower moments, mesmerising performances from Emily Watson and Paul Mescal keep the story afloat. Aisling Franciosi also shines, bringing both sensitivity and strength to the role of Sarah, Aileen's coworker and Brian's accuser. A haunting score by award-winning composers Danny Bensi and Saunder Jurriaans heightens the tension throughout.

The setting evokes a sense of a claustrophobic community held captive by dangerous tides, where the stakes of holding someone you love to account feel so much higher. Ultimately, *God's Creatures* asks, when the person who means the most to you returns home after years apart, what can you turn a blind eye to?

By Alice Gawthrop

• TELEVISION

AT THIS POINT, retelling the history of Indian cinema is as tricky as committing the *Ramayana* to memory: too many moving parts, too many sprawling sidebars to keep in mind. The four-hour *The Romantics* (Netflix) smartly narrows its focus to modern Bollywood and to Yash Raj, the studio that has provided the industry's creative backbone through the rapid changes of recent decades. Produced by Yash Raj itself, this is transparently authorised history, flirting coyly with those issues of dynasticism and nepotism that have dogged the Hindi mainstream. But director Smriti Mundhra has access to the right faces and names and some extraordinary clips, vibrant with colour, loaded with melody, high on emotion. We're greeting movie royalty, whether you choose to bow or blow raspberries—consider it Bollywood's equivalent of *The Crown*.



Aptly produced by Vice Studios, *Cinema Marte Dum Tak*—or *Cinema 'Til I Die*—(Prime Video) is another tale entirely. Over six episodes, this arresting counterhistory circles back to four semi-retired filmmakers—J Neelam, Dilip Gulati, Vinod Talwar and Kishan Shah—who spent their 1990s heyday cranking out B-movies: cheap but potent screen filler titles like *Jungle Beauty* and *Saint Becomes Satan*, heavy on the cleavage and rubbery monster masks. These clips are no less eyepopping, but it's not all fun and games. Fearsome leading lady Sapna Sappu laments how her talents were wasted on substandard material; there are myriad battles with the authorities and censors. Yet, as its hardy veterans gleefully seize a second moment in the sun, it's hard not to regard them as Indian cinema's real romantics, returning out of love, and for very little money.

by Mike McCahill



Retro Pick:

***My Next Guest... with Shah Rukh Khan* (Netflix)**

From 2019, David Letterman's hour-long chat with the affable Khan, newly recrowned the King of Bollywood after the vast success of January's *Pathaan*

ROCK AGAINST RACISM

ON APRIL 30, 1978, 100,000 music fans marched on London's Victoria Park. This was Rock Against Racism, a grassroots movement that for two years had been using live music to campaign against rising fascism.

When Rock Against Racism threw its first 1976 gig in East London's Princess Alice pub, the Sikh teenager Gurdip Singh Chagger had just been murdered. "One down, a million to go," was the reaction of the National Front chairman, John Kingsley Read, to the stabbing. That same year, David Bowie had named Hitler "one of the first rock stars" to *Playboy*.

It was Eric Clapton's infamous outburst at the Birmingham Odeon—where he cited Enoch Powell's chilling "Rivers of Blood" speech (Clapton later admitted feeling ashamed and repeatedly apologised for his remarks)—that spurred the rock community to action. "Come on Eric... Own up. Half your music

is Black. You're rock music's biggest colonist," read an open letter published to magazines like *NME* and *Melody Maker*, which called on anti-racist rockers to assemble.

The result was the historic concert in Victoria Park. Joining the march through London's East End were not just punks but trade unionists and members of the Asian and Black communities. Musicians like The Clash, Steel Pulse and Jimmy Pursey showed that punk and reggae were united in multicultural activism, though the sound was famously awful—the organisers expected 10,000 to show up, and the PA was woefully ill-equipped.

Not that that seems to have mattered to those who attended. Much more than a concert, Rock Against Racism showed how powerful and unifying music could be against intolerance and violence.

By Becca Inglis



April Fiction

America's violent racial history forms the background to this compelling crime thriller

Small Mercies

by **Dennis Lehane**

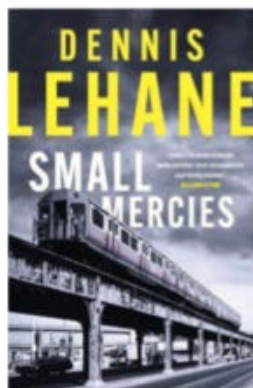
Abacus, £20

FOR MOST OF US, violent racial conflict in 20th-century America probably conjures up images of the Deep South. Yet as

Dennis Lehane's new novel makes horrifyingly clear, the problem was far more widespread than that.

Small Mercies is set in working-class Irish Boston in 1974: the year the city finally decided to desegregate the education system by busing some white kids to traditionally all-Black schools and vice versa.

In theory, this might sound like a progressive move. But for the community that Lehane writes about so immersively (he grew up in it



himself), it's a tyrannical imposition by middle-class liberals whose own children won't suddenly be plunged into an environment where they're unlikely to receive a warm welcome. There's also the fact that the Irish regard Black people with a level of hostility which Lehane never remotely plays down.

The book begins with main character Mary Pat Fennessey agreeing to help to publicise an anti-busing rally. The single mother of a teenage daughter, Mary Pat is fully aware of how constricted life is in this part of town, where Irish mobsters rule. The trouble is that she can't see any way out of it. Things then take a turn for the substantially worse when her daughter disappears at the same time as a young Black man is found murdered nearby.



James Walton is a book reviewer and broadcaster, and has written and presented 17 series of the BBC Radio 4 literary quiz *The Write Stuff*

So are the two events linked? And if they are, what can a 42-year-old woman do about it? The answer, it transpires, is quite a lot and not enough.

Lehane is now well established as one of America's finest crime writers, who superbly blends uncompromising social history with uncompromising tales of what people driven to the limit will do. But perhaps best of all is his creation of character. As ever, *Small Mercies* is densely populated with a wide-ranging collection of unforgettable people—none more so than Mary Pat, whose often alarming behaviour somehow doesn't stop us rooting for her.

Oh yes, and Lehane's classic tough-guy prose is still in great shape too. One baddie, for example, dies when he “drops to the ground, his body nothing but a bag for non-functioning organs, his soul already halfway to hell”. ■

Name the character

Can you guess the fictional character from these clues (and, of course, the fewer you need the better)?

1. Early in the first novel where he appears, he lights his “seventieth cigarette of the day”.
2. His creator's only children's book was *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.
3. He's been played on screen by Timothy Dalton and Pierce Brosnan.

Answer on p142

Paperbacks

In Perfect Harmony: Singalong Pop in '70s Britain by Will

Hodgkinson (Nine Eight Books, £12.99). Affectionate and even quite serious look at the supposedly naff songs that brought joy to people while the critics sniffed.

Shrines of Gaiety by Kate

Atkinson (Penguin, £9.99). The seedy world of 1920s London clubland is the setting for the latest novel from an author who never lets you down.

Portable Magic by Emma Smith

(Penguin, £10.99). Centuries-spanning, highly informative love letter to books—not so much the words inside them as the objects themselves.

One Day I Shall Astonish the World by Nina Stibbe

(Penguin, £9.99). The joys and perils of female friendship explored in a lovely novel that moves from the Nineties to COVID-19.

Beryl by Jeremy Wilson

(Pursuit Books, £9.99). Award-winning biography of Beryl Burton, who dominated cycling for 25 years while working full-time on a Yorkshire farm and raising a family.

RECOMMENDED READ:

Bird's Eye View

This month, we find out how the history of the world was shaped by ten of its avian inhabitants

DID YOU KNOW that pigeon post was part of India's communications system until 2006? Or that cormorant droppings, imported from Peru as fertiliser, made one William Gibbs the richest non-nobleman in 19th-century Britain? Or, more alarmingly, that if human babies were fattened at the same rate as commercially farmed turkeys, by the age of 18 weeks they'd weigh 107 stone?

Stephen Moss's wonderful new book is crammed with startling information like this. Each of the ten chapters centres on one bird—neatly chosen for its effect on human history—but they branch out from there. One, for instance, is on the snowy egret, which was at the heart of a trade even more lucrative than cormorant droppings: the fashion for feathers on women's hats. Between 1870 and 1920, this caused the death of as many as 10 billion birds (not all egrets). On a happier note, it led directly to the founding of the RSPB.



Along the way, Moss busts some strangely persistent myths. Whatever later naturalists have claimed—even, I'm afraid, Sir David Attenborough—the theory of evolution was not inspired by the young Darwin's observations of finches' beaks in the Galapagos Islands (nor, in fact, by anything else he saw there). Despite all those supposed drawings and models of the dodo, we know more about the biology of the Tyrannosaurus Rex than about the world's most famous extinct creature.

The human impact on birds ever since is, as you might expect, a melancholy sub-theme of the

book. But here, from 1932, is a less melancholy example. We join the action in Western Australia where the Australian army has launched a major military campaign...

“By 8 November, almost a week after the campaign had begun, the troops had fired 2,500 rounds of ammunition, with very little success. As the realisation dawned that they had grossly misjudged their adversaries, orders were given to withdraw. A rueful Major Meredith compared them to another legendary cohort of warriors: ‘They are like Zulus whom even dum-dum bullets could not stop.’ The only consolation was that, as his official report noted, the soldiers had not suffered any casualties themselves. Which was hardly surprising, given that the enemy was not human, but Australia’s largest bird: the emu.

This campaign marked the opening salvo of what would become known as ‘the Great Emu War’. It

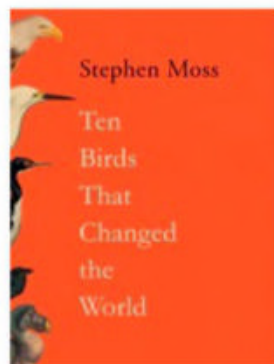
had come about for what seemed a very good reason. Emus had always wandered into this area of Western Australia from the Outback, in search of food and water. But now that the land was being farmed, they’d become a major problem. The issue came to a head as a result of the Great Depression, which reduced wheat prices, leading to major financial hardship for the farmers. That was when, in a classic case of bad timing, more than 20,000 emus arrived on the scene.

Emus are one of the tallest and heaviest birds in the world, which meant they were serious adversaries. They didn’t just eat the crops, but trampled them too, and also knocked holes in fences, allowing rabbits to enter.

Something clearly had to be done. A delegation of former soldiers went to lobby the Minister of Defence, Sir George Pearce, with the suggestion that machine guns be used to kill and disperse the emu flocks. He agreed straight away. Assuming the troops would be triumphant, Pearce arranged for a cameraman from Fox Movietone to record the event for the cinema newsreels. The resulting short film is a classic example of the power of propaganda over an inconvenient truth.

The film opens with jaunty music and the caption ‘WESTERN AUSTRALIA MAKES WAR ON EMUS—Army machine guns are

Ten Birds That Changed the World by Stephen Moss is published by Guardian Faber at £16.99



called in to help farmers repel mobs of marauding birds.' The newsreader then delivers a jokey commentary referring to 'our lads' and 'the enemy watching events through their periscopes'—the emus' long necks. He concludes with this optimistic—and as it turned out, totally false—statement: 'It seems the tables are turned, and there'll be no more damage done here for many a day to come.'

Less than a week later, with the emus continuing to devastate the crops, there was a second attempt at a cull. Again, the numbers killed were pitiful. By then the debacle was being debated in parliament. When one parliamentarian was asked if an official medal should be issued to the soldiers involved, he responded that if medals were to be given out, they should go to the emus, as they had 'won every round so far'. To this day, the Great Emu War remains the only example in history of an army being defeated by a bird." ”

Answer to Name the Character:

James Bond, who first appeared in *Casino Royale* (1953): a book the 43-year-old Ian Fleming wrote, he once said, to take his mind off "the agony" of getting married after life as a bachelor



Stephen Moss's Favourite Bird Books

The Shell Bird Book by **James Fisher**. Written in 1966 by the Attenborough of his day, this is a treasure trove of information about the history, science and culture of Britain's birds (now out of print but widely available second-hand).

H Is for Hawk by **Helen Macdonald**. A book about birds—the central character is a goshawk—but also a meditation on Macdonald's grief at the sudden death of her father. A deserved bestseller.

Singing Like Larks by **Andrew Millham**. A fascinating celebration of the many links between Britain's birds and folk songs from an exciting new writer.

Birdscapes by **Jeremy Mynott**. Scholarly yet readable, this answers a deceptively complex question: why do we feel such a deep connection with birds?

Red 67 by **Kit Jewitt** and **Into the Red** by **Kit Jewitt and Mike Toms**. Two beautiful books highlighting the species on the "Red List" of Britain's most vulnerable birds, with writing and artwork from dozens of passionate people.

Books

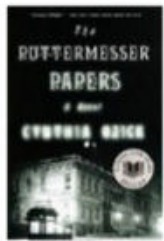
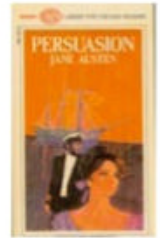
THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

US novelist Lore Segal is known for her novels *Other People's Houses* and *Shakespeare's Kitchen*, a finalist for the 2008 Pulitzer Prize. Her new short story collection *Ladies' Lunch* is out now, published by Sort Of Books, £8.99



Persuasion by Jane Austen

Who is the wit who joked that we wouldn't like to think Jane Austen disapproved of us? In the painfully tender novel *Persuasion*, Anne Eliot is the lovely daughter of a foolish baronet who hasn't the decency to live within his means. Their home must be rented out and Ann goes to stay with her younger sister Mary. Here she is thrown into the company of the splendid Captain Wentworth whose offer of marriage Ann, eight years earlier, was persuaded to turn down. He has not forgiven her. Ann is forced to watch the man she has not stopped loving attach himself to this and that pretty woman.



The Puttermesser Papers by Cynthia Ozick

The novel opens with young Puttermesser studying the sacred Hebrew letters. My particular pleasure in this

book is Ozick's audacious, witty play on the Golem legend. The Golem was the creation of embattled Eastern European Jewry. In pious imitation of God breathing humanity into a handful of dust, they created a daemon for their protection. Puttermesser takes some dirt from a flower pot and shapes the Golem which will make her mayor of New York. During her administration, the city is free of all hate and crime, for a while. The reader who has a strong heart and stomach can stick with Puttermesser to her sad and brutal end.

David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

Dickens showed me what to do with my life. I was 12 when my mother read me *David*



Copperfield; how David's young mother dies and leaves him in the brutal step-father's care; how Peggotty comforts the little boy through the door; the magnificent Steerforth and the sweet girl he debauches. And my favourite character, the young lawyer who responds to the slings and arrows of fortune with cheerful goodness. That's what I wanted to do: fill the page with physical presences whom we remember as we remember the people we have personally known.



Foldable Screens Bending The Rules Of Phone Design

"Remember when phones used to flip?" asks James O'Malley, as foldable screens make a return

I REMEMBER IN THE early Noughties, the phone I most coveted wasn't a Nokia 3310—even though it was a near-indestructible brick, on which you could play *Snake*. What I wanted was a Motorola RAZR.

What made it cool wasn't just that it was "razor" thin (hence the name), but that it was a flip phone. It kept your keypad and screen safe, it was more portable—and it meant you could answer calls with a big, theatrical flick of the wrist, as if to say to the world, "Look at me and all of the important business I am doing".

However, before I could get my hands on one, flip phones quickly fell out of fashion as phones became almost unfathomably smarter. It turns

out a flipping mechanism is a bad idea when what you really want is to maximise the size of the screen, so you can fill it with apps and all of the other modern functions we expect from our phones.

But all of this could be about to change. And two decades on, we could be currently living through the rebirth of the flip phone. Why? Because we can make phones that don't just flip—but fold.

Open sesame

Thanks to screen technologies pioneered over the last few years, it's now possible to make a phone that looks like the phones most of us have

in our pockets—but which have a screen that can bend and flex, without breaking. This means we can once again have our phones take on the classic clam-shell design, but have them fold out so we can watch widescreen videos, send long messages or do whatever else.

This breakthrough has already seen the first few devices come to market, in the form of the Samsung Galaxy Z Flip and an all new version of the Motorola RAZR. Both of them fold closed and can pretty much fit in the palm of your hand.

There are other devices too, like the larger Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 4, which is like a normal-sized phone that folds out into a small tablet. But all of them are only possible due to two key breakthroughs.

First, there was the invention of OLED displays—normally, a screen needs to have a light behind it that shines through to light up the screen, but with OLED, each individual pixel is its own light source and generates a tiny amount of light itself. Screens no longer need anything behind them.

And secondly, phone manufacturers have figured out a way to print the OLED display not on glass, but on plastic polymers, which makes them flexible enough to bend.

You break it, you bought it

So is it time for us to rush out and buy a cool new phone with a foldable screen?

I must admit I'm still a little sceptical. For a start, there's wear and tear: a physical hinge mechanism adds a toll to moving parts of a phone. Each time you open and close it, you're stressing it slightly. Similarly, the screens on folding phones are almost by definition slightly more delicate, as they have to fold.

And then there's the question of

the software: is anyone designing apps to make sure they work on foldable screens? This is particularly tricky for devices like the Galaxy Z Fold, which when opened up has a different shaped screen to most others. Will apps take advantage of the space?

But perhaps the biggest drawback at the moment is the elephant in the room: if you want a new, high-performance folding phone, you'll have to part with almost a grand—both the Galaxy Z Flip 3 and the new RAZR are currently £949. And the Galaxy Z Fold 4 starts at £1,549.

Should I place an order for the RAZR folding phone I always dreamed of? For the time being I'm going to flip-flop and say “maybe, but not quite yet.” ■

TWO DECADES ON, WE COULD BE CURRENTLY LIVING THROUGH THE REBIRTH OF THE FLIP PHONE

£50 PRIZE QUESTION

SANDWICH

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Many years ago, I worked in a timber yard. You can imagine we had some interesting little furry visitors. No one could leave any food on the premises, especially overnight, as in the morning we would find our furry guests had been busy.

One day our timber yard was adopted by a stray cat. Soon our furry problem dissipated. Every day, one of my workmates came in with a tin of cat food. Our stray soon took a shine to him.

Christmas was coming up, and the timber yard would be closed for a week. We were worried about the cat and how it would get fed. But my workmate had the answer. He would take it home with him.

A cardboard box was found and, after a bit of a struggle, the cat was put inside. It was then that we noticed they had not put any air holes in for the cat to breathe, so some were punched into the lid—unfortunately with the cat still in the

box. A hiss from inside told us it was still alive.

After the holidays, we all returned, but the workmate who took the cat came in not only without the cat, but he also had a black eye.

“Where’s the cat?” we all asked.

“As soon as I opened the box, it ran off!” he said.

“Did it give you the black eye?” we asked.

“Don’t be silly. This was from the wife. I forgot she is allergic to cats.”

NORMAN STRONG, *Hertfordshire*

My wife and I were discussing how we should get a new carpet, when my eight-year-old son walked into the room and said, “Please, Mum, please, Dad, can we get a new pet for the car?”

DARRON BARNES, *Hampshire*

My husband saw a dog running backwards and forwards by our gate. “That’s the neighbour’s Beauceron—escaped yet again,” he grumbled.

He went outside and wrestled with the collarless dog, before bundling it into our car and taking it back to its home up the road. He came back ten minutes later, full of pride about his good deed for the day, and explained that our neighbours weren’t home, so he’d left the dog in a secure part of the garden for them.

Later that day, there was a knock on our door. Our neighbours came to



“BILLSEYE”

tell us that they had found an unknown dog enclosed in their garden, while their own dog was safely inside the house!

LEAH ROTTIER, *Epenede, France*

Our youngest son has recently started his first job after leaving school and seemed to enjoy the work and get on well with his workmates. However, at the end of his third week he came home in an unusually miserable mood, having been told that he would be required to work on the Bank Holiday Monday, but would get a day off in lieu.

“But I don’t want to go to Looe,” he complained. “Why should I have to spend my day off going all the way to Cornwall? It’s not fair.”

He was much happier once we explained things.

VALERIE CROSSLEY, *Sussex*

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IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

Word Power

We put language to serious use every day, but words can also be fun. This month, lighten up and see how well you know the sillier-sounding side of English

BY CRYSTAL BELIVEAU

1. damp squib—

A: an event that's a disappointment.

B: stormy weather.

C: creature from the ocean depths.

2. hootenanny—

A: sweet bread roll.

B: temporary shelter.

C: celebration.

3. canoodle—

A: covering over a bed.

B: kiss and cuddle.

C: gentle gallop.

4. brass monkeys—

A: handheld weapon.

B: appearing of value but actually worthless.

C: very cold.

5. panjandrum—

A: powerful, self-important person.

B: Korean spice.

C: instrumental piece with tuba.

6. kerfuffle—

A: two-masted sailing boat.

B: commotion.

C: seasoned sausage.

7. kibosh—

A: in good working order.

B: hoisting bucket used in mines.

C: stop something.

8. yawp—

A: talk coarsely.

B: deviate from course.

C: fungous growth.

9. rigmarole—

A: game played with stick and rubber ring.

B: an overly complicated process.

C: long, loose garment.

10. woebegone—

A: appearing attractive.

B: shrivelled with age.

C: sorrowful.

11. gumption—

A: showing initiative.

B: fungal infection.

C: hearty and broth-based soup.

12. hemidemi-semiquaver—

A: worm-like marine creature.

B: typeface.

C: $\frac{1}{64}$ of a whole note.**13. bumf—**

A: useless printed material.

B: gathering of dust.

C: seabird.

14. gobsmacked—

A: consumed hurriedly.

B: collided face-first into a wall.

C: utterly astonished.

15. gonzo—

A: bizarre, far-out.

B: hooked-nosed.

C: loud and emphatic.

Answers

1. **damp squib**—[A] an event that's a disappointment; Andy went to the cinema but the film was terrible so the evening was a *damp squib*.
2. **hootenanny**—[C] celebration; For his birthday, my dad's folk musician friends set up a *hootenanny* in our garden.
3. **canoodle**—[B] kiss and cuddle; In some businesses, employees who *canoodle* can be sacked.
4. **brass monkeys**—[C] very cold; Jane's friend wanted her to go to the pub but she decided not to because it was *brass monkeys* outside.
5. **panjandrum**—[A] powerful, self-important person; Know-it-all Maria has become the *panjandrum* of our social committee.
6. **kerfuffle**—[B] commotion; The debate over the podcast *Serial* started quite a *kerfuffle* at our family dinner.
7. **kibosh**—[C] stop something; Failing the exams put the *kibosh* on her dreams of being a lawyer.
8. **yawp**—[A] talk coarsely; "Don't *yawp* like that," Panesh whispered to his friend. "My kids are in the living room."
9. **rigmarole**—[B] an overly complicated process; To reset my password, I had to answer a dozen questions. What a *rigmarole*!
10. **woebegone**—[C] sorrowful; Jamie is shipping out tomorrow. I'm *woebegone* at the thought of not seeing him for the next six months.
11. **gumption**—[A] showing initiative; Carla showed *gumption* by writing directly to the company manager and telling him why she deserved to get the job.
12. **hemidemisemi-quaver**—[C] $\frac{1}{64}$ of a whole note; The conductor was frustrated by how I was pausing a *hemidemisemi-quaver* at the beginning of each bar.
13. **bumf**—[A] useless printed material; Alex was frustrated that all the post that came through his door was just *bumf* like takeaway advertisements and promotions.
14. **gobsmacked**—[C] utterly astonished; The waiter's aggressive reaction when I told him the chicken breast was undercooked left me *gobsmacked*.
15. **gonzo**—[A] bizarre, far-out; Andy's definitely got talent, but his writing style is just far too *gonzo* for my taste.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

7-10: fair

11-12: good

13-15: excellent

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APRIL 2023 ENTRY FORM

Reader's Digest

Fill in all your answers below:
(enter as many as you like – one entry per competition per person)

Page 108 **Prize Crossword – Brownies**

Page 109 **2-Night stay at Lyme Regis Dorset House**

Page 114 **2-Night stay at Twr y Felin Hotel**

Page 126 **Prize Wordsearch – Delimann Hamper**

Page 133 **£350 Theatre Tokens**

Page 151 **Photo Finder**

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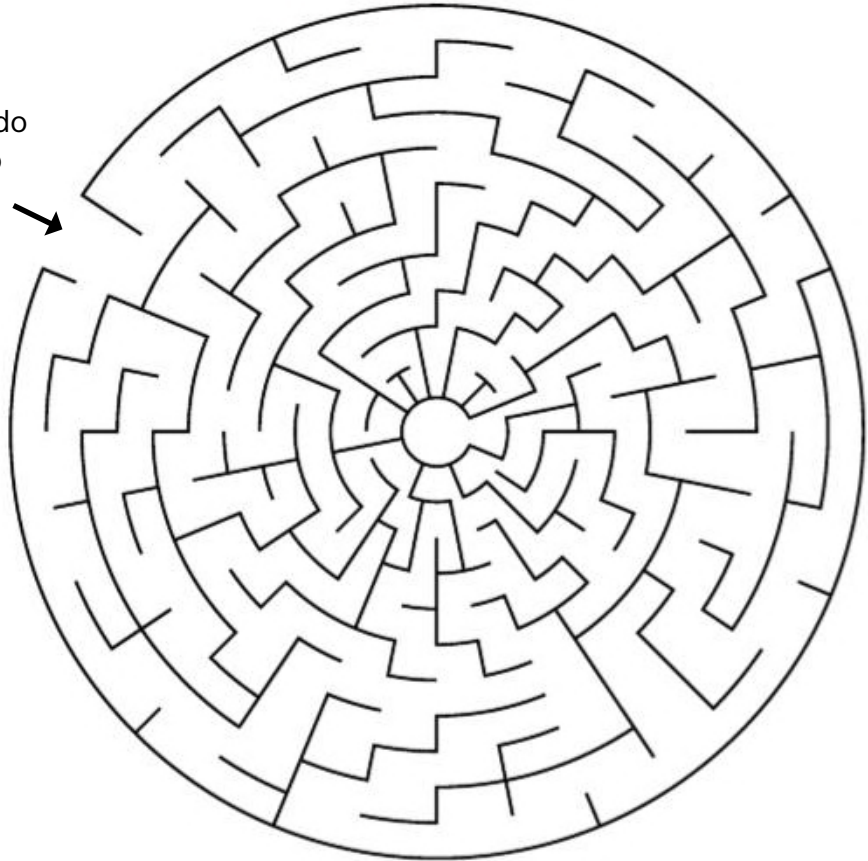
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BRAINTEASERS

Labyrinth

Easy Which path do you have to take to get to the centre of the labyrinth?



Student Scramble

Easy Sumi, Ada, Christa and Bruno are new students at the school and their schedules have got mixed up. They remember some details of their first class, but not all and they're running late. Can you help by listing each student's class and room number?

1. The big windows in Room 201 make it perfect for art class.
2. Biology and history are large classes, so they are never held in smaller spaces like Room 110.
3. Ada remembers that her maths classroom number is higher than 106 but is not on the second floor.
4. Sumi doesn't remember her subject, but definitely remembers it's held in Room 115.
5. Christa can't stand the smell of paint.
6. Bruno already knows Room 106 is not the right one, because the biology teacher is there.

Pic-A-Pix: Peeking

Medium Shade in groups of cells in the grid below to reveal a picture. The numbers to the left of each row and at the top of each column tell you how many cells in that row or column to shade in, and multiple numbers indicate multiple sets (for example, "3" means there will be three adjacent shaded cells, while "4 2" indicates a group of four followed by a group of two). The numbers read in the same horizontal or vertical order as the groups appear, and there must be at least one empty cell between each group.

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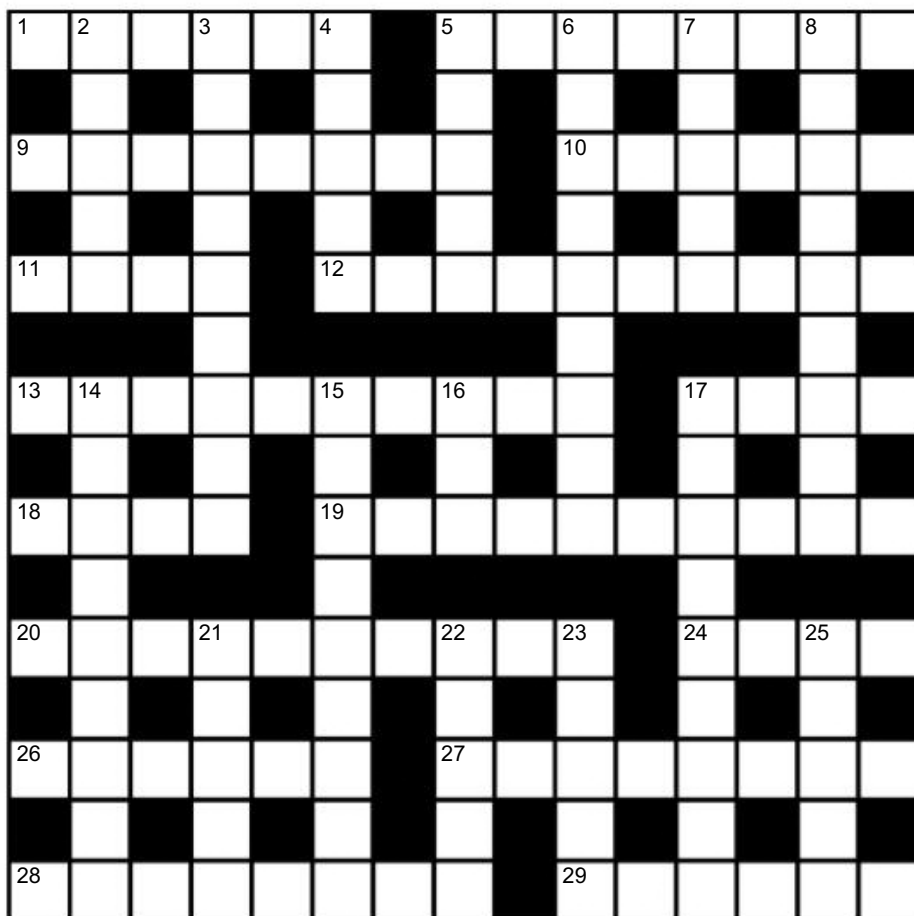
Rabbit Run, Redux

Easy In a one-kilometre race, the tortoise moved at a steady one-metre-per-minute the whole way. The hare woke up late; started 26 minutes after the tortoise; moved at 12 metres per minute for 120 metres; called a cab and waited five minutes for it to arrive; was driven at 30 km/h to a point 180 metres from the finish line; took one minute to pay the driver; then resumed moving at his previous speed to the finish line. Who won the race?

Gimme Five

Difficult A pentomino is a tile made of five squares joined edge to edge. Divide this grid into five pentominoes, each containing the five letters A, B, C, D and E. The regions will not all have the same shape.

A	C	A	E	B
C	B	D	A	C
A	D	E	D	B
B	A	B	E	C
E	D	E	C	D



CROSSWISE

Test your general knowledge. Answers on p158

ACROSS

- 1 Disreputable (6)
- 5 Fraught with danger (8)
- 9 Like most lunch breaks (4-4)
- 10 Longtime Zimbabwean leader (6)
- 11 Sticky snares (4)
- 12 Sparsely distributed amount (10)
- 13 She saw deserts ranged below (10)
- 17 Imperial field measure (4)
- 18 In the proper manner (4)
- 19 Group who stick it to the ball (6,4)
- 20 Grandstanders (10)
- 24 Eliot's were practical (4)
- 26 Landing places (6)
- 27 Develops and utilises (8)
- 28 Character sketches (8)
- 29 Raised the roof (6)

DOWN

- 2 Residence (5)
- 3 Sheers off (5,4)
- 4 Often bought with emulsion (5)
- 5 Communicator before texts and smartphones (5)
- 6 Recall past experiences (9)
- 7 Within the rules (5)
- 8 Inner city, perhaps (5,4)
- 14 Like Gabriel, for example (9)
- 15 Dry run (9)
- 16 And so on (3)
- 17 Scholar to sort out where to learn to paint (3,6)
- 21 Bluff (5)
- 22 Bakers? (5)
- 23 Mawkish (5)
- 25 Right of ownership (5)

BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

FROM PAGE 153

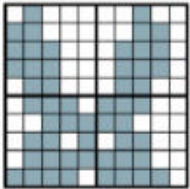
Labyrinth



Student Scramble

Sumi has history in Room 115;
Ada has maths in Room 110;
Christa has biology in Room 106;
and Bruno has art in Room 201.

Pic-A-Pix: Peeking



Rabbit Run, Redux

The hare finished first, in 58.4 minutes—but was disqualified for taking a cab.

Gimme Five

A	C	A	E	B
C	B	D	A	C
A	D	E	D	B
B	A	B	E	C
E	D	E	C	D



BY *Jeff Widderich*

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

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

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

Laugh!

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or facebook.com/readersdigestuk

I once tried to run a dating agency for chickens, because I was struggling to make hens meet.

PAUL BEILBY, *Lincolnshire*

A baker always put too much flour in his bread. He was a gluten for punishment.

JAMES COOPER, *Devon*

When it's very stormy and pouring with rain, owls are not very keen to go romancing. All they do is sit in the trees looking dejected, calling "too wet to woo, too wet to woo".

RICK WILLIAMS, *Denbighshire*

Two cowboys stagger out of a zoo with their clothes in shreds. One turns to the other and says, "That lion dancing sure ain't as restful as they made out!"

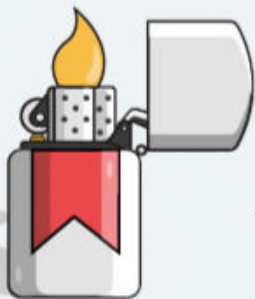
RYAN GEORGE, *Wrexham*

How do teddy bears watch movies?
On Disney Plush!

ISLA BENNETT, *Belfast*

Two police officers were passing the opera house when they spotted someone breaking in and arrested him. Back at the police station, they were asked how they had been in the position to make the arrest. They explained that they happened to be in the aria.

HAROLD GOUGH



What's the difference between a hippo and a Zippo? One's really heavy, the other's a little lighter.

NATASHA RUSSELL-CARR, *Yorkshire*

The Punning Man

Once proclaimed one of the “50 funniest people on Twitter”, Sean Leahy shares some of his favourite puns with us

My wife and I are constantly arguing over just how much laundry can fit in the tumble dryer. Just the other day she said, “There’s room for one more thing in there”, so I told her to put a sock in it.

Once I had finished my degree at university, I had huge aspirations to go to the Olympics, so I spent my gap year javelin.

I didn’t particularly enjoy the Chubby Checker movie, but there was a great twist at the end.

If your least favourite part of a song is the chorus, don’t worry; it could be verse.

Scientists declared they’ve discovered a small comet made entirely of vegetables. If there was some way to add mince it would be a little meteor.

How do woolly mammoths like their hotdogs? With mastodon.



Whenever I hear someone talking about “the war on drugs” I think, *Could it really be the best way to fight a war?*

I’ve decided to become a ventriloquist. I’ve got all the gear.

I don’t start my new job as a human cannonball until next month, but I’m already worried about getting fired.

Breaking news: the tooth fairy has been arrested for incisor trading.

LAUGH

I've poured every penny I have into my limousine business, but I've still got nothing to chauffeur it.

I'm really pleased with my vegetable patch. It's been six weeks since I smoked a carrot.

My wife said she wants me to make her a candle-lit dinner, but it'll take ages to cook a lasagne like that.

There have been an awful lot of famous boats throughout history, but Noah's was the archetype.

Why do they call it the study of craft beer and not "Pale-ale-ontology"?

I used a carpark last week when I went shopping, and when I came back a bunch of druids had set it on fire and were holding hands around it, chanting. It turns out it was a pagan display.

My wife is angry at me again because I dropped the baby. But it's not my fault... he just needs to lose the attitude and he'll be back in the team.

Follow Sean on Twitter at @thepunningman

Why I'm Single



Twitter users share their funny reasons for why they think they're single

@etes_97: ... Sometimes I slip up and pronounce the "L" in "salmon".

@KyleDice23: ... I have to narrate when I tie my shoes or else I can't do it.

@BuddyChampagne: ... My stomach is the mozzarella stick capital of the world.

@whitedaisies07: ... I don't like when I hear people breathing around me.

@MarkWithAnM: ... I asked my cats why I'm single and then I realised it's probably because I asked my cats why I'm single.

@DJTheOldMan: ... I sleep with socks on my hands because I get very cold at night.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Across: 1 Ragtag, 5 Perilous, 9 Hour-long, 10 Mugabe, 11 Webs, 12 Sprinkling, 13 Stewardess, 17 Acre, 18 Duly, 19 Hockey team, 20 Spectators, 24 Cats, 26 Strips, 27 Exploits, 28 Profiles, 29 Yelled.

Down: 2 Abode, 3 Turns away, 4 Gloss, 5 Pager, 6 Reminisce, 7 Legal, 8 Urban area, 14 Trumpeter, 15 Rehearsal, 16 Etc, 17 Art school, 21 Cliff, 22 Ovens, 23 Soppo, 25 Title.

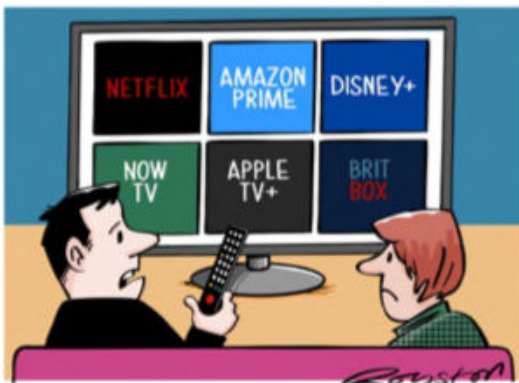
Beat the Cartoonist!



Think of a witty caption for this cartoon—the three best suggestions, along with the cartoonist's original, will be posted on our website in mid-APRIL. If your entry gets the most votes, you'll win **£50**.

Submit to captions@readersdigest.co.uk by APRIL 7. We'll announce the winner in our May issue.

FEBRUARY WINNER



Our cartoonist's caption, "There's nothing on", failed to beat our reader Kevin Brazier, who won the vote with, "**We've spent so much on subscriptions, we can't afford batteries for the remote!**"

Congratulations, Kevin!

IN THE MAY ISSUE



King Charles III

Celebrating the coronation of His Majesty the King, and the start of a new era for the monarchy



I Remember: Justin Webb

One of the most recognisable voices on BBC Radio looks back



VERBIER FESTIVAL

A celebration of music in the Swiss Alps

**GOOD
NEWS**FROM AROUND
THE WORLD

World's Oldest Dated Rune Stone Found In Norway

WHAT'S THE OLDEST artefact you've ever stumbled across? Perhaps an old coin in your garden, or a vintage film camera in your local charity shop. Archaeologists in Norway have discovered something a little older—the world's oldest dated rune stone, with inscriptions from up to 2,000 years ago.

In late 2021, researchers from the University of Oslo's Museum of Cultural History were investigating a burial ground in eastern Norway. In doing so, they came across the

“Svingerud Stone,” named for the site at which it was found. The stone features runic inscriptions believed to have been carved into it between one and 250 AD.

Runologist Kristel Zilmer, professor of Written Culture and Iconography at the museum, told *CNN*, “Me and my colleagues at the Museum of Cultural History are very excited about this sensational find that makes us rewrite some chapters in the history of runic writing. It provides the first clear evidence of the occurrence of rune-stones in Scandinavia in the first centuries AD, thanks to the possibilities we have had in this case to carry out radiocarbon dating of the grave in which the stone lay.”

Runic inscriptions are inscriptions made in one of the various runic alphabets. The majority are found in Scandinavian countries, with Norway being second only to Sweden in terms of the number of runic inscriptions found. The majority of rune stones are from the Viking Age (793–1066 AD), with a handful dating back to around 550 AD.

This new discovery in Norway is the only rune stone found by archaeologists that dates back to before 300 AD, making it an extremely significant discovery. It means that the tradition of rune stones may be much older than we originally thought!

BY ALICE GAWTHROP



Lifeboats

'I'LL BE THERE TO HELP PROTECT LIFEBOAT VOLUNTEERS AT SEA. WILL YOU?'

Chris Huxley – proudly leaving a gift in his Will to the RNLI



'It was horrendous. For 2 days and 2 nights we were at the mercy of the sea. I was with four friends, sailing from England to France. We were all seasick. Seasick and frightened.

'We never forgot the relief we felt when the brave Newhaven lifeboat crew came to the rescue. It all happened 50 years ago – and the lifeboat volunteers are still on a mission to save every one today.

By leaving a gift in my Will, I'm helping to ensure they'll be there tomorrow, with the kit and training they need to save lives and come home safely.

'I'll be there, right beside the crew when lives are on the line. And you can be there too.'

6 in 10 lifeboat launches are only possible thanks to gifts in Wills. RNLI volunteers rely on people like you and Chris to keep them safe. When we receive your gift, your name will be added to the side of a lifeboat, so you'll be by their side on every launch.

Three easy ways to request your free RNLI Gifts in Wills Guide:

- 1. Return** the attached form below
- 2. Visit** RNLI.org/Digest
- 3. Call** 0300 300 0062

Photos: RNLI/Nigel Millard, Lynda Huxley



To receive a free, no-obligation Gifts in Wills Guide, fill in the form below and send to: **'Freepost RNLI WILLS'** (no stamp or other address details required)

Title: _____ Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Keep in touch

Your support saves lives, and we look forward to keeping in touch with you by post and phone, sharing our news, activities and appeals.

Would you like to receive our emails and text messages too?

- Yes, I'm happy to hear from you by email**
- Yes, I'm happy to hear from you by text**

Even if you have received our communications in the past, we'll make sure we honour the preferences you express here.

If you would rather not hear from us, or would like to change how we contact you, please get in touch. Just visit RNLI.org/preferences or call 0300 300 9918.

Privacy Notice: We will always store your personal details securely, and they will only be used by the RNLI, RNLI Shop and RNLI College. Your data may also be used for analysis purposes, to help us provide the best service possible. We will only allow your information to be used by suppliers working on our behalf and we'll only share it if required to do so by law. For full details see our Privacy Policy at RNLI.org/PrivacyPolicy or contact our Supporter Experience Team on 0300 300 9918.

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