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APRIL 2023

Features

ENTERTAINMENT

Exploring Life

Multi-award-winning actor Cate Blanchett on broadening horizons and why she is grateful for her privileges. RÜDIGER STURM

HEALTH

The Surprising Benefits Of Pets

As well as keeping you active, pets are good news for your physical and mental wellbeing. ANNA-KAISA WALKER

The Future Of Medicine

Breakthroughs in medical research - and diseases that may be cured in our lifetime. HELEN FOSTER



Get Clued-In On Crosswords

We fill in the blanks behind this popular form of word play. **EMILY GOODMAN**

HUMOUR

Blinded By The Light

The novelty of sampling shiny bright products. OLLY MANN

ENVIRONMENT

Floating Life

A community living on the water may offer answers for rising sea levels.

SHIRA RUBIN FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

Saving Ukraine's **Sacred Art**

Having eluded ruin and being plundered for centuries, a priceless gilded altarpiece is once again threatened by war.

JOSHUA HAMMER

FROM SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE

CULTURE

Pulling The Strings Of History

The puppeteers of Sicily are determined to preserve their legacy.

ANNA STAROPOLI

FROM ATLAS OBSCURA

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What It's Like To Be In A Coma

Hearing the stories of patients who have woken from comas is helping doctors better understand this strange phenomenon. **LAUREN CAHN**

OUIZ

Museums Of The World

Examine the exhibits as we test you on your knowledge. **DORIS KOCHANEK**

ART OF LIVING

Misguided

Poor advice can make a tough decision even tougher. **CHRISTINA PALASSIO**

Six Places Cheese Lovers Should Visit

Top destinations for foodies who can't get enough of the dairy product.

SAM O'BRIEN

FROM GASTRO OBSCURA

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Splendid Isolation

Mysterious and primal, Iceland is perched on the edge of the North Atlantic. **DOUGLAS KENNEDY**

FROM LE FIGARO



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Reader's Comments And Opinions

An Effective Cure

It was my good luck that the article 'A Day At The Beach' (January) appeared when I needed it. I was under the weather and desperate for some motivation. So, like the doctor advised in the article, I went to a happy place with good memories.

All four 'prescriptions' were short but impactful. The last



prescription, 'Write your worries on the sand', eased my anxiety and shifted the focus to inner happiness and peace. **SANA SHOAIB**

Singing Along All Wrong

'Like a Dino in the Sky' (My Story, February) resonated deeply with me. It's hilarious how creative the mind can be when you don't know the actual lyrics; automatically filling in the empty spaces with words that sound similar to make it more convenient to sing along to.

I am very proud to say that as a fan, I can sing to almost every K-pop song. One day, however, as I was singing, my friend from Korea

caught me singing the wrong lyrics. Apparently, what I was singing had a totally different meaning!

ALARICE TEO

Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

I had to smile all the way through Patricia Pearson's humorous piece 'The Perfect Salon? A Barber Shop' (February). After years of listening to complaints about his barber shop, I finally convinced my husband to make a joint appointment with

Let us know if you are moved - or provoked - by any item in the magazine, share your thoughts. See page 8 for how to join the discussion.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Connecting With Others

GOSSIP, RUMOUR-MONGERING, HEARSAY, call it what you will, it seems that few of us are immune to this very human, some say flawed, activity. But not all gossip is bad – it can be one of the best ways to connect with others. In 'Gossip: Why We Need It' (page 130), we learn why psychologists think gossiping can genuinely be a good thing, and discover their tips on how to keep it civil.

Also featured in this month's issue is an interview with Oscarwinning actor Cate Blanchett (page 24) and an investigation into the diseases and conditions close to big breakthroughs ('The Future Of Medicine', page 36). We also meet the people trying to save Ukraine's centuries-old masterpieces ('Saving Ukraine's Sacred Art', page 70). Oh, and for crossword fans, don't forget to read Clued-In On Crosswords (page 50).

These stories and so much more for your reading pleasure in the April 2023 issue.

Enjoy!

Louise

LOUISE WATERSON Editor-in-Chief



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READER'S DIGEST

> me at my hairdresser. Now we go together. Laura has a home-based salon and knows how he likes his hair and what he likes to chat about. We make an appointment so there's no sitting and waiting to take your turn. And we don't pay an arm and a leg for the privilege. It's all a matter of perspective, isn't it? Different things suit different people. DEB AYERS

Defiance And Compassion

I am always overcome with emotion whenever I hear 'La Marseillaise' sung by Madeleine LeBeau in *Casablanca*. Her defiance permeates every note that was made possible by the courage of one man. Aristides de Sousa Mendes ('Portugal's Schindler,' February) risked his own life to save the lives of many, including that of LeBeau. **MICHAEL WOUTERS**

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LOAN SHARK AHEAD

We asked you to think up a funny caption for this photo.

My car has a new Shark Absorber! MERRAN TOONE

> What a shark-ing sight! JESSICA CHENG HUI MIN

Just out for a quick bite. **CHRIS RAMOS**

I think that red car might be lost. It just keeps circling.

ADAM WILLIAMS

Car pooling! SUKHDEEP SINGH

Congratulations to this month's winner, Merran Toone.



CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win \$100. To enter, email editor@readersdigest.com.au or see details on page 8.



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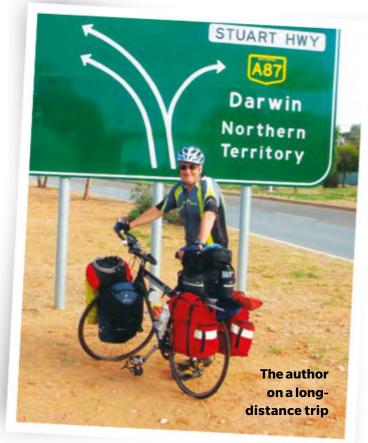
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MY STORY

Cycle Of Life

Pedalling through adventures, adversity and joy

BY Roger McDougall



y long-distance cycling career of 13 years and 35,000 kilometres ended as I approached 75 in 2019. The realisation of this dawned on me slowly during my last ride in the US summer of that same year.

Over the 13 years I cycled across Australia from Sydney to Perth, four times across North America, west to east, the UK from Land's End in the south to John O'Groats in the north, and finally up the east coast of the US, from Key West, Florida, to Bar Harbor, Maine.

Although I am now no longer strong enough to endure the long days and big climbs, day in and day out, I have my memories.

One of the challenges of ageing is

coping with change. Things are never as good as they were when we were young, it seems. With introspection, I can see that things are indeed different but not necessarily better or worse, just different.

Long distance cycling brings pain, anxiety and exhaustion, but these pale into insignificance compared to the joy and exhilaration and satisfaction of climbing huge mountains or seeing spectacular sights for the first time. These memories are indelibly imprinted.

Real joy would come when I was alone, on my bicycle, in some remote and beautiful place. You could say that these same feelings could have been experienced in a car, but I know this not to be true. I had time to observe nature and life, all of which would have been by-passed in a car.

The road ahead always loomed large, as did the mountains, the cold, the mosquitoes and the rain. The road behind is just memories, devoid of pain and anxiety, some soon to be forgotten, others to be cherished and enhanced with the retelling. A 6000-kilometre cross-country ride initially appears daunting but, once done, it is simply done, much like the challenges that life throws.

I experienced moments of exhilaration and joy, long hours of anxiety, even fear and many hours of frustration. Every day held something to which I could look forward to, the planning, setting goals and ride.

I enjoyed meeting and beating the daily schedule I had set for myself. I enjoyed the technical challenges faced by punctures and broken spokes, but admittedly, not at the time. I enjoyed the everchanging vegetation, the people, kind, unkind and indifferent, whom I met along the way. I loved cycling with a strong tailwind pushing me along. I hated battling into a strong headwind. Regardless of the wind,

Roger McDougall is 78 years old and lives in Sydney with his partner Carol. Roger discovered cycling after a long career in the IT industry. He has three children, five grandchildren, four stepchildren and loves animals, in particular Rottweilers.

rain or terrain, no matter how hard or easy the ride, I always enjoyed the achievement of arriving, followed by a hot shower and bed, when I could find a motel. On the other nights, I was happy to camp.

Meeting a diversity of people with different perspectives on life was easy. The cycling gear allowed me to strike up conversations in pubs and cafés and I got to see and experience the very best in people. In 2007, on a lonely section of road across the Nullarbor, in the middle of nowhere, a complete stranger, Pat McGovern, stopped her car alongside me and offered me a 'cuppa'. She pulled out a gas cooker and proceeded to make me a most welcome cup of tea.

Checking out of a motel on my 2014 across-Canada trip, the receptionist became emotional as he learned of my trip - I must have stirred something in him.

On that same trip, a couple, Darlene and Marvin, who had tracked me down through my public blog, offered me accommodation at their home in Portage La Prairie. I spent the night at their place. The support and comfort they offered was a pleasant change from the long hours I had spent alone on the bike.

In 2016, my older brother Bruce accompanied me on my UK trip. We spent 36 days together and became very close during that time.

Across the continents, I saw nature at its best and worst. I saw magical

READER'S DIGEST

places that will live with me forever. The Nullarbor, the spectacular Niagara Falls and the beautiful state of Utah, were the highlights of all my cycling adventures.

As each trip neared its end, I gradually forgot the long hours of riding up mountains, the frostbitten hands while descending at

65 kilometres per hour in the rain and bitter cold, the interminable hills and the nothingness. The pain and frustrations I experienced on every trip quickly receded, to be replaced by only happy memories of the trip.

POSSESSED I had time to reflect on my life and the death of my daughter. Time heals and with the healing comes guilt - guilt for being happy to be alive when she is not, guilt for feeling joy when she cannot. My reflections on her life brought me closer to her.

Cycling taught me to like who I am. I am finally happy with and accepting of my introverted personality. I have more tenacity and courage than I ever envisaged. These trips all required courage; courage which I never knew I possessed.

Many people have asked me why I cycle. I have had plenty of opportunity to reflect on this question. Unfortunately, I still do not know why. Any concerns I may have had regarding my impending demise were always overwhelmed by being fit and feeling alive.

I cannot satisfactorily answer the question of why I committed myself, each time, to two, sometimes three months or more, of hard work, agony and frustration. Possibly it was a last grasp at my youth and

> strength. Maybe it was to satisfy a sense of adventure not satisfied during my youth.

I am not an avid cyclist. I do not love cycling. I do, however, enjoy the sense of adventure and achievement, arriving in remote places, knowing

that I got there, unsupported, through sheer tenacity.

These were the adventures of my life, and I accomplished each one. They are unlike all the other achievements and failures in my life, which seemed to just happen. I could never be sure if they were due to luck or me. They were always a by-product of living. With cycling, the outcome must be planned, and the success or failure cannot be due to luck or circumstance. Succeed or fail, it was up to me and me alone.

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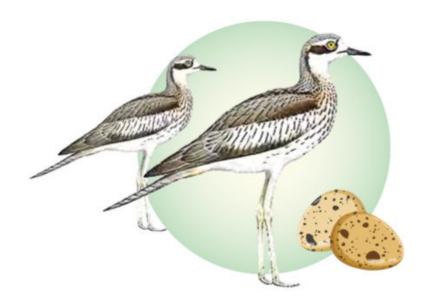
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SMART ANIMALS

Animals are very vocal when they want to communicate with us



Parental Instincts

XINMING WANG

Last year in early summer, I was walking up the hill to my house in suburban Brisbane when I saw two birds, each about 60 centimetres tall, standing in my driveway. They didn't seem to notice me until I was right in front of them and then they immediately scattered into the nearby bushes.

I was quite excited by the idea of two special birds making a nest in my front yard, although I didn't really expect them to as wild birds don't usually nest so close.

A few weeks later, the birds reappeared. I found them crouching

beside a tree off to the side of my driveway. As I approached them, I imagined that they'd run away like they did last time, but instead they stuck out their heads and made a menacing croaking sound that came from deep inside their throats.

I did some research and found that the birds are Burhinus grallarius, or bush-stone curlews. I still didn't know why they were croaking at me until a short time later I made an amazing discovery:

You could earn cash by telling us about the antics of unique pets or wildlife. Turn to page 8 for details on how to contribute.

they had laid two eggs which had hatched into the two small birds which were now racing around.

As I crept towards the birds, careful not to make any sudden movements, they started their croaking again, stretching their necks forwards so they seemed longer and more threatening.

The mother ushered the chicks under her wings and carefully crouched down over them, fluffing out her feathers so her babies were well hidden.

I was watching them in awe when I suddenly tripped and fell to the ground. The curlews took this as a threat and the father raced towards me, spreading his wings to shield the mother and the chicks while making himself appear larger.

I was sorry to have startled them and left quickly.

I am amazed by their bold actions. Their parental instincts kicked in and made them so courageous. It is hard not to be awed by nature.

Cats Don't Like Water

MARK O'BRIEN

We recently looked after my brother's two-year-old grey Persian cat. We don't have any pets of our own and my four-year-old son and six-year-old daughter were delighted.

The cat, Smokey, was a pleasure to mind. She loved the cuddles bestowed enthusiastically upon



her and, other than relying on us to put her meals out, she looked after herself.

The only behaviour we found odd was whenever any of us showered or bathed, Smokey would stand at the bathroom door and cry. Her meowing was clearly one of distress and we couldn't work out why.

When I mentioned this to my brother, he informed us that as a kitten she was sprayed with the hose whenever she went near their veggie patch and she has been traumatised by water ever since.

She must have been trying to warn us of the 'danger' we were in.



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Dogs Or Cats? Taking Sides

What makes you a dog person or a cat person?

By The Editors

s the great cat/dog debate any more than another way of stereotyping ourselves? Recent research suggests not. Studies have found common traits held by cat people and dog people, giving us paws for thought.

CURIOUS CATS In a 2010 study of over 4500 participants, cat people were found to be 11 per cent more open minded - with more

appreciation for art, culture and more progressive ideologies - than the selfconfessed dog people, who received lower scores on openness, tending towards more conventional ideas and traditions, thus being categorised as less curious than cat lovers.

CLEVER CAT? Six hundred students were asked their preference over cats or dogs and subsequently given an intelligence test. Those who preferred cats scored higher on the intelligence test overall. However, according to a poll of over 200,000 people, both cat and dog people were equally likely to hold a four-year university degree.

IT'S THE WAY I TELL 'EM In the same poll, dog lovers were found to be 30 per cent more likely to appreciate physical comedy, such as slapstick and impressions, whereas the feline fans were 21 per cent more likely to enjoy more wordy humour in witticisms, irony and puns.

SPACE ISSUES Psychologist Stanley Coren found in his studies of cat and

dog owners that when asked if they had the space available for a cat or a dog in their home, 68 per cent of cat owners would not accept a dog, while 70 per cent of dog

owners said that they would admit a cat into their household.

This could come down to what we were used to growing up. Of people who had cats in the house as children, almost half owned cats as adults, while only 11 per cent of those who had dogs as pets growing up now owned cats exclusively.

CAT WORSHIP Some research data suggests that feline friends are more inclined to be atheists than their dog-loving counterparts.

But as one dog-lover and professor of psychology told Coren, "You couldn't tell this based on my experience, which is that cat people seem to worship their felines like the ancient Egyptians worshipped their Pharaohs - as gods. We dog lovers just talk to our hounds like people."

MAKING CHOICES Cat owners were found to be lower in dominance scores, suggesting they are less assertive and self-confident than dog owners. They would apparently appear quieter and more timid in social gatherings. Cat owners were

> also found to be more trusting, obliging and straightforward: behavioural traits usually associated with canines.

A general pattern that comes out of

studies is that dog owners are more social and interactive than cat owners. The dog lovers' results also showed them to be slightly more suspicious, perhaps explaining why they would gravitate towards owning a pet more associated with loyalty and trustworthiness. Recent studies found that the reasons for choosing a pet were different for cat and dog enthusiasts, with almost 40 per cent of dog devotees looking for friendship, while 45.6 per cent of cat lovers wanted affection.



The Best Ways To Take A Nap

BY Leslie Finlay

aps don't just feel amazing - they are amazing. A study published in the journal Heart found a link between healthy napping and a lowered risk of heart disease. The American **Psychological Association points** out that naps can improve memory, learning capacity, immune system function and mood. Cognitive neuroscientist Professor Sara Mednick and author of The Power of the Downstate, explains that when you fall asleep, your body moves through stages that each play a role in health:

STAGE 1: the 'dozing off' period; STAGE 2: muscles, heart rate and brain activity slow down; **STAGE 3:** deep, restorative sleep; **STAGE 4:** REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, when brain activity increases and you're most likely to dream.

Ideal napping times are based around this four-stage cycle.

THE 20-MINUTE NAP Between 20 and 30 minutes is a napping sweet spot, says Mednick, as you get enough Stage 2 sleep to switch your body and mind into full relaxation mode, helping boost memory.

THE 60-MINUTE NAP Stage 3 sleep is a time for your body to repair tissue, fortify the immune system and recharge energy stores. But waking up during this phase can make you feel groggy, Mednick says. Most people start to move out of Stage 3 after around 60 minutes, which makes it a good time to set your alarm.

THE 90-MINUTE NAP A complete sleep cycle is about an hour and a half, and napping for a full cycle can have big benefits. But naps longer than 90 minutes can interfere with nighttime sleep and might even impair memory retention, according to a study in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society. Not a regular napper? That's OK. "Everyone needs to rest, but not everyone necessarily needs to nap," says Mednick.



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WORLD OF MEDICINE

THE BALANCE CHALLENGE

Can you stand on one leg for ten seconds? This question could help doctors evaluate the overall health of their middle-aged and older patients, argues a Brazilian-led study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. The subjects who couldn't perform this balancing feat had an 84 per cent higher risk of death during a median follow-up period of seven years, after accounting for basic factors like age and sex.

Besides causing falls, poor balance can also signal underlying medical issues, such as declining eyesight or nerve damage caused by diabetes. Much like grip strength and walking speed, balancing ability doesn't tell the whole story of your health, but it's a useful clue.

DON'T REMOVE SKIN TAGS AND MOLES YOURSELF

Two of the most common types of skin blemishes among adults are dark spots known as moles and the growths known as skin tags. Both are harmless and don't require treatment unless their appearance is an issue.

In some jurisdictions, mole- and skin-tag removal kits are sold for home use. But these products can contain a large amount of salicylic acid and could leave you with permanent scarring. The US FDA recently issued a warning about these kits after receiving reports about consumers who had injured themselves. You're better off visiting a dermatologist, who can safely remove a lesion. Plus, they can perform the all-important screening for skin cancer.

TAILOR VITAMIN C INTAKE TO YOUR WEIGHT

When taking vitamin C, it's best to take your weight into account. Researchers from the New University of Otago in New Zealand recommend

a 60-kilogram person consume 110 milligrams of vitamin C per day through a balanced diet,

while someone weighing
90 kilograms needs
140 milligrams. Eating
foods like oranges
- which contain on
average 70 milligrams of
vitamin C each - can help.



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Exploring

Actor Cate Blanchett on praise, self-criticism and the desire to use her fame for a good cause

BY Rüdiger Sturm

t 53, Cate Blanchett is already an acting legend. The Australian actor is just as impressive in blockbusters such as Lord of the Rings and Thor: Judgment Day as she is in sophisticated dramas such as Babel and her most recent film, Tár. In it, the Academy Award winner plays a power-conscious conductor who becomes entangled in an intrigue.



Blanchett in her multi-award-winning role as German composer-conductor Lydia Tár in Tár

Reader's Digest: You've enjoyed success at the highest level. Does the praise you keep getting ever go to your head?

Cate Blanchett: No, actually I find so much applause a little scary. Also I'm not constantly being cheered. I know, for example, what it's like to perform in front of a very small audience. And with all the praise I receive to my face, I am aware that people are equally tearing their mouths apart about me behind my back. If I were to believe all the nice words, I would have to do the same with the slurs.

Some people are the harshest critics of themselves.

I sometimes think, What a mess I've made. However, that thought also drives me, makes me try to constantly get better. Still, that doesn't mean I drive my fellow filmmakers crazy striving for perfection. Because in filmmaking you don't have much time. You have to think practically and let it go sometimes. In that sense, I prefer the theatre, because there I can continue to perfect my performance every night.

Was that also the case with your current film, Tár?

I feel that way all the time. I console myself with the fact that I can explore human life even more deeply in my next role.

In Tár, your character gets entangled in a sex scandal and jeopardises her entire career. Can it get uncomfortable if you let characters like that get too close?

It's true, a small residue of your characters remains inside you. But I find that rather enriching, because that's how your understanding of the world grows. Every great novel we read, every good conversation and every great role broadens our horizons.

Does that also apply to working with your husband, playwright and director Andrew Upton?



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READER'S DIGEST

The more interesting your partner, the more he enriches you. From our very first conversation, I found Andrew fascinating. That's why I also enjoy working with him immensely.

To what extent have you involved your four children in your work?

The lives of creative people are shaped by the whims of fate. That's why we wanted to keep our children out of it as much as possible. But then we quickly realised how much they enjoyed the theatre. The back-andforth behind the scenes was like a big party for them. I also didn't want to leave my kids alone so often. Every day I was away from them because of my work felt like I was cheating on them. From that point of view, it

CATE BLANCHETT

Cate Blanchett was born May 14, 1969, in Melbourne. After finishing her studies in 1992, she made her international cinema debut in 1997 with Paradise Road. In 1998, her title role in the historical drama Elizabeth earned her the first of eight Academy Award nominations. In 2005, she won Best Supporting Actress in Martin Scorsese's Avigtor. followed by Best Actress in a Leading Role in Woody Allen's Blue Jasmine in 2014. With her husband Andrew Upton, who she married in 1997, she has three sons and a daughter.

is the right thing to do to take them with me as often as possible.

If you dive deep into the world of art, you can lose sight of the hardships of reality.

I don't, if only because I have been an ambassador for the UN Refugee Agency since 2014. I have been to refugee camps in Bangladesh and Jordan, among other places. The people I met there have had a profound impact on my outlook on life. I am even more grateful for my privileges. For example, I met a Rohingya woman from Myanmar with her six-monthold baby. She had given birth to her child in the jungle while fleeing and had done everything she could to keep the little one alive. I had to think about the birth of my first child, and the thought that I would not be able to feed him and that we would be in constant danger of being attacked - it was unbearable. I can't get those images out of my head.

Do such experiences become too much for you?

On the contrary, I would like to expand my activities. Of course, I can feel particularly important in the process, which I even do sometimes, but seriously, I want to bring the stories of these people to the public so that they are not a faceless mass but regain their dignity. Since I have such a platform thanks to my fame, it is my responsibility to use it. R

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Whether they're furry, feathered or scaly, the non-human members of your family help you in more ways than you know especially when it comes to your health

Surprising Benefits Of

BY Anna-Kaisa Walker

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAIME HOGGE

1 THEY KEEP **YOU ACTIVE**

If you have a dog, chances are you're walking it at least 30 minutes a day, and likely more - an activity that goes a long way towards keeping you fit. In fact, a 2017 British study published in the journal BMC Public Health found that, on average, walking a dog added an extra 2700 steps to a person's daily total, about 20 more minutes of physical activity per day than people who don't own dogs. What's more, most of that walking

was done at a 'moderate cadence' - enough to get your heart pumping but still carry on a conversation - the minimum intensity the UK's National Health Service recommends adults get for 2.5 hours a week.

Walking your pooch for that amount of time could even prolong your life. Getting 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week reduces your risk of heart disease by up to 15 per cent, cuts your chances of developing breast, stomach, kidney, and other cancers by up to 20 per cent, and helps prevent and manage type 2 diabetes.

And, as a bonus, more

exercise during the day also seems to set the stage for better nights. According to a survey of 6500 retired London civil servants conducted a decade ago, dog owners were more likely to report having an easier time falling asleep at night than those who didn't own dogs.

2 THEY BOOST YOUR **IMMUNE SYSTEM**

According to the so-called hygiene hypothesis proposed in the late 1980s, growing up indoors in dis-

> infected spaces later causes our bodies to overreact to harmless substances, making us more prone to allergies and asthma. Dogs and cats, with their dirty paws, copious dander and love of licking us, introduce more microbial diversity that frequent our immune systems.

> Of course, pets can bring you into contact with dangerous bacteria. But research shows that children who live with pets from birth have lower rates of allergies and asthma, and the more animals, the greater the protection. Kids with four or more cats or dogs had half the



DOGS' SALIVA CONTAINS **ABOUT 600** DIFFERENT TYPES OF BACTERIA, WHICH THEY **GENEROUSLY** SHARE WITH **THEIR HUMANS. DIVERSIFYING OUR GUT** FI ORA

The Surprising Benefits Of Pets

rate of allergies as nonpet owners.

Even in adulthood, there's new evidence to suggest pets may have a positive effect on our guts - with links to both mental and physical health. Researchers at the University of Arizona are studying whether the sharing of bacteria between dogs and their owners can alter our microbiome - the community of microorganisms inside our bodies - and change our brain chemistry, alleviating major depression.

"We were intrigued by previous research that found that dogs and humans share gut bacteria just by living in the same home, and you get the same amount from your dog as you do from your spouse," says Dieter Steklis, co-director of the Human-Animal Interaction Research Initiative.

3 THEY LOWER YOUR RISK OF A FATAL **HEART ATTACK**

Researchers at the University of Minnesota tracked 4000 people most of them for more than a decade - and found that cat owners had a 30 per cent lower risk of dying of a heart attack.



Given you don't need to take a cat for walks. what accounts for the lower risk? The researchers hypothesised - and most cat owners would agree - that cats' inherently unbothered nature has a calming effect. And research has shown that, like exercise, spending time with a pet lowers stress, an important contributor to heart disease.

In fact, students at Washington State University showed significantly lower levels of

the stress hormone cortisol in their saliva after spending just ten minutes patting a cat or dog. Other studies have shown that human-animal interaction lowers your blood pressure and releases the bonding hormone oxytocin, which reduces anxiety and pain and improves cardiovascular function.

4 THEY HELP YOU **MANAGE A CHRONIC** CONDITION

Along with their needs for feeding, walks, affection and play, animals have expectations of their owners - and that can be a good thing for chronic disease sufferers of all types.

The benefits of animals in health

care were first noted by Florence Nightingale in 1860, when she wrote that a pet tortoise named Jimmy provided great comfort to wounded soldiers in hospital. In the 1960s, child psychologist Boris Levinson observed that a withdrawn, non-verbal child suddenly began communicating when Levinson's dog was in the room. The field of 'pet therapy' was born, and visits from trained therapy animals are now commonplace in hospitals and nursing homes.

But outside of institutional settings, pets can help people on an ongoing basis with the daily management of longterm health conditions. According to University of Michigan research scientist Mary Janevic, this is especially true of chronic pain sufferers looking for non-pharmacological interventions.

In 2019, Janevic led a small study of older adults with arthritis, lower back pain, and other conditions, and found that pets not only helped improve mood, but also compelled their owners to stick to routines that alleviated their pain in the long run.

In addition to that, Janevic points out that pets' greatest superpower against chronic suffering is their talent for drawing attention and focus. "If you're distracted from the pain, you perceive less pain, and therefore you are in less pain," she explains.

Kelly Redmon, a therapist based in the US state of Virginia who suffers from complex regional pain syndrome, says fostering guinea pigs from a local rescue group has helped her cope with what is an often excruciating condition.

"When I care for my animals, I have to stay present even through a flare-up," she says.

Sometimes her pets provide vicarious joy. "When I watch my guinea pigs run around their little playpen through all the tunnels, I can see that it makes them happy, and that makes me happy, too."

REGULAR
DOMESTIC
CATS ARE
KNOWN
TO MAKE
AFFECTIONATE,
QUIRKY
COMPANIONS.
PUREBRED
CATS FAMOUS
FOR THEIR
CUDDLINESS
INCLUDE
RAGDOLLS,

BIRMANS,

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AND SIAMESE

5 THEY REDUCE INFLAMMATION

Inflammation is how your body responds to a perceived injury or infection, and normally it's a good thing – when a cut becomes red and swollen, for example, it's because an army of white blood cells are swarming in to fight off

harmful bacteria. But sometimes your immune system doesn't switch off after the fight is over, and when inflammation becomes chronic, it can silently lay the groundwork for killer diseases, like diabetes, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

In a small preliminary trial, researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison assigned foster dogs to a group of volunteers aged 50 to 80.

After three months, some blood tests showed a drop of up to 30 per cent in markers of inflammation, including IL-6, which has been linked to many inflammatory diseases, including diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, dementia, heart disease and cancer.

"Some of the subjects also reported that they felt an increase in their sense of wellbeing and improved social function," says psychiatrist and study

director Charles Raison.

"We don't know for sure whether there was an association between IL-6 levels and mental health, but it may work as a virtuous cycle - having a dog makes you feel better, which makes inflammation drop, and lower levels of inflammation make you happier."



LABRADOR **RETRIEVERS ARE THE MOST** COMMON **SERVICE DOGS. AS THEY ARE** PATIENT, FRIENDLY, **AND VERY** TRAINABLE, THEY'RE THE IDEAL THERAPY AND **EMOTIONAL** SUPPORT ANIMAL

6 THEY IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

When 40-year-old Sharmeen Abeysinghe left her job as an early childhood educator in 2019, she was suffering from depression and burnout. Her doctor prescribed antidepressants and she began to feel functional again. Then came the pandemic and multiple lockdowns, causing more stress.

Fortunately, Abeysinghe and her husband, who have two children, decided to adopt a ninemonth-old terrier-lab.

"We thought having a dog would give us something to do while we're at home, and she has just

transformed our lives," Abeysinghe says. "I feel so lifted by her joy, energy and unconditional love. I've even told my doctor I don't think I need my medication anymore."

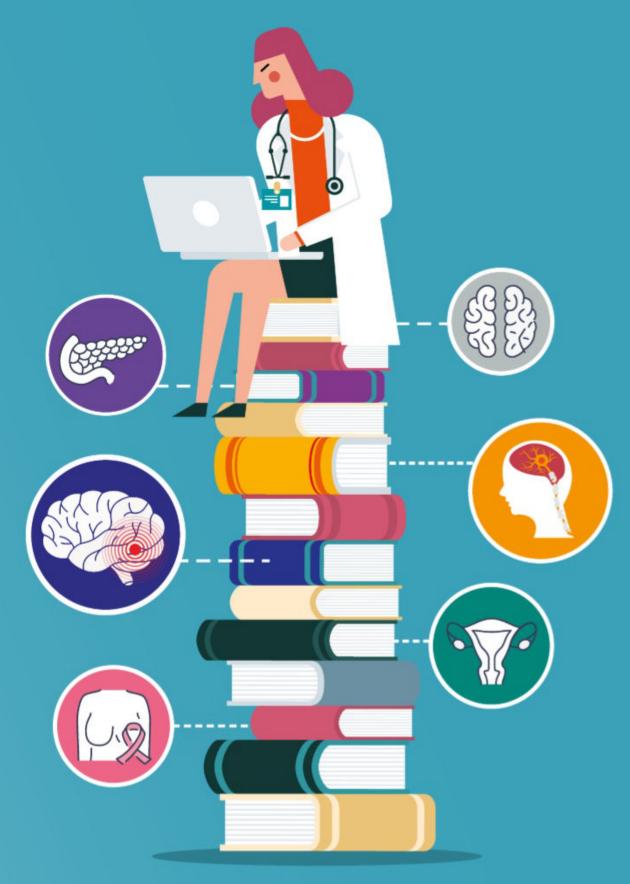
A number of studies have shown that pet ownership is beneficial for people with depression, anxiety, PTSD, schizophrenia and other longterm mental health conditions, while pet owners report that their pets provide unconditional emotional R support.



'I'he Medicine

While medicine can often work marvels, the cure for some diseases, such as motor neurone disease or pancreatic cancer, is proving more elusive. We asked the experts why this might be and reveal some of the exciting new developments that are bringing us closer to treatments

BY Helen Foster





Motor Neurone Disease

Motor neurone disease (MND) is a life-limiting condition that affects the nerves. It can be genetic, but 90 per cent of cases occur sporadically with no known cause - which is one reason it's hard to find a cure. "But we have made some progress recently," says Professor Matthew Kiernan from the Brain and Mind Centre at the University of Sydney.

A recent study at the Brain and Mind Centre has found that changes in a protein called SOD1 that damages cells in the genetic form of the disease, also damages cells in the sporadic form. "So that might take us somewhere," says Professor Kiernan. "We are also currently trialling a new drug made from gold nanoparticles that, so far, has been shown to improve survival by 70 per cent, and are about to start a new trial using lithium. We already know that multidisciplinary treatment means even people in the placebo arm of MND trials are doing better than ever before; combining different medications might only improve this further."

All these developments have led some experts to suggest that a cure for genetic MND could be as little as three years away, and foresee an end to the sporadic form in ten.



Pancreatic Cancer

Pancreatic cancer is the third leading cause of death in Australia. "The main issue is there are few outward symptoms so by the time it's diagnosed it's already spread," says Professor Paul Timpson from Sydney's Garvan Institute of Medical Research. Early diagnosis is therefore an important area of research interest - but so are new ways to attack the tumours, and Professor Timpson and his team recently found a potential new avenue from which to do this.

The Future Of Medicine

Pancreatic cancer is surrounded by a dense fibrotic tissue that causes the blood vessels leading to the tumour to collapse, which makes it harder for drugs like chemotherapy to get to work. The team discovered that a drug called AMP945 softens these fibres, which opens up the blood vessels.

"So, if you give this drug for a couple of days, then provide chemo and repeat that in a metronomic way, you increase the effect that the chemo has on the cells," says Professor Timpson. Changes to the tumour environment also seems to stop it spreading. Right now the team is recruiting for further stages of the trial to confirm the efficacy in humans.



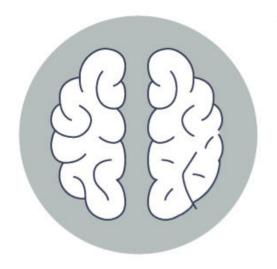
Breast Cancer

We're already ahead of the curve with curing some forms of breast cancer. "Early-stage breast cancer is already curable with surgery and medication like chemotherapy or radiotherapy," says Professor Elgene Lim, medical oncologist at the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, "Advanced breast cancer - where the cancer has either already spread or is inoperable – is still currently incurable, but we do have treatments that prolong lifespan."

WE'RE AHEAD OF THE CURVE WITH CURING

With those, she says, "we've turned a disease which, when I first started medical school, had a prognosis of 18 months, to something that a woman can survive for a very long period of time - and with a good quality of life. too."

Professor Lim says that future advances that turn even aggressive breast cancer into a treatable problem we can live with long-term, like heart disease or diabetes, may mean we don't need a 'cure' per se but, that doesn't stop researchers from trying. A new trial at the Garvan is exploring a drug called seviteronel, which stops breast cancer cells becoming resistant to chemotherapy. Another team at the Garvan has found that collagen around breast cancer plays a role in how quickly it's likely to spread - and this could also create new avenues for treatment or prevention in the future.



Brain Cancer

Glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) is the most aggressive and lethal type of brain tumour with no effective treatment options. Again, it's often diagnosed very late but it also spreads in a way that makes surgical removal very difficult and, most importantly, any drug to treat it must cross what's known as the blood-brain barrier.

"The job of this is to protect the brain, the body's most vital organ, from toxins and pathogens, but that high level of protection also keeps out medication," explains Professor Shudong Wang from the University of South Australia.

Now though, Professor Wang and her team have developed a drug - Auceliciclib - that can cross the blood-brain barrier effectively. Auceliciclib targets a protein called Cyclin-dependent kinase 4 (CDK4), which drives cancer cell

proliferation. By inhibiting CDK4 activity, Auceliciclib blocks tumour growth and spread. "Although progressing rapidly, the drug trials are still in the early stages and results on efficacy are yet to be revealed, but we are very excited about what we've seen so far," says Professor Wang.

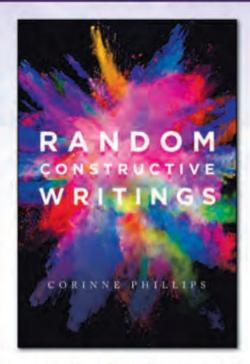


Multiple Sclerosis

Affecting around 26,000 people in Australia, multiple sclerosis, or MS, is a condition where the immune system damages the myelin sheaths that protect the nerves in the brain and spinal cord. Curing MS would involve stopping and reversing this damage.

We're not there yet, but an interesting new trial from US researchers, using stem cells, has helped increase mobility in those with MS. In initial results, the team at Tisch MS Research Centre in New York saw an improvement in upper limb dexterity

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and walking speed in 36 per cent of patients. Much more research is needed but "these findings are unprecedented for the treatment of MS patients," said Dr Saud A. Sadiq, director and chief research scientist at the Tisch in a statement.

"While in the past patients could have experienced loss of mobility and muscle strength each year due to their MS, this treatment has opened the possibility that such life-altering symptoms may not occur at all if the treatment is administered early in their disease progression."



Ovarian Cancer

"We've already dramatically improved survival rates for ovarian cancer," says Jim Nicklin, Professor of Gynaecological Oncology at the University of Queensland. "When a patient comes to me now I can tell her she probably has at least a 50 per cent chance of still being here in five years - a generation ago that was more like a 30-40 per cent chance."

However, he says, there are still challenges in finding a cure. Ovarian cancer is not a single disease entity and the type of cancer in one person is not the same as another. "This means we're unlikely to find one big development that changes everything, but in-

OVARIAN CANCER IS **NOT A SINGLE DISEASE** OF CANCER IN ONE PERSON IS NOT THE SAME AS ANOTHER

stead make lots of small, incremental advances that help us manage it more effectively."

The focus of researchers is also moving strongly into preventing disease. In August 2022, a team at Monash University announced the trial of a new DNA screening programme for 10,000 people aged 18-40, to try and identify those at high genetic risk of conditions, including breast and ovarian cancer. The idea is that by finding people at higher risk before disease presents, they can be offered targeted screening, or use prophylactic measures like surgery, or possibly medications, to avoid disease entirely. R



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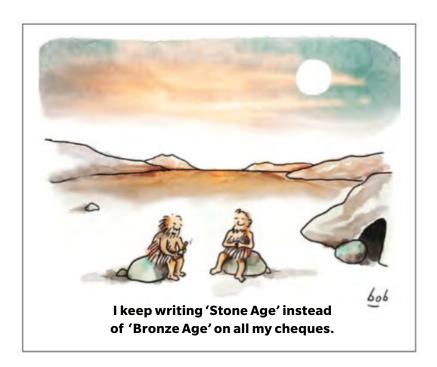
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LIFE'S LIKE THAT

Seeing The Funny Side



Olden Days

The word 'vintage' means different things to different people. To me, at 71, vintage means early 20th century. To my 43-year-old daughter, it's the 1950s. So, when my 13-year-old granddaughter wanted something vintage for a birthday present, I had to ask what she considered vintage.

"Oh, you know," she said, "back when they used to communicate using paper."

SUBMITTED BY SUSAN REYNOLDS

Puss To The Rescue

My neighbour has three cats. One of her cats likes to jump up on her shoulder. Recently, when she went to have a shower and didn't want him in the bathroom with her, she put him outside and locked the door. Unfortunately, while doing so, she knocked the key from the lock, and it slipped out under the door. She was locked in, and she did not have her phone with her, so she was stuck.

She tried to reach the key but failed, so she played a game with

the cat and a stick. Bit by bit, the cat moved the key nearer the door until she could reach it.

So she was rescued by the cat. "Talk about a get-out claws!" she said. SUBMITTED BY IDA LEE

Not That Great

Growing up, we called one set of grandparents Big Mama and Big Daddy. No one thought much of it until the day one of the grandkids told them they were soon to become great-grandparents.

That's when Big Mama put her foot down and told us that, while she had never minded her nickname before, she refused to be called Great Big Mama.

SUBMITTED BY RICHARD HUDSON

Puppy Love

My husband just asked me in the kindest voice if I wanted some water, and I said, "I'd love some." I turned around and he was carrying the dog's water bowl to her. @ADALIMON

MEAT FREE

When my son was young, he became vegetarian for a year. We always thought it was because of his kind heart and love of animals. Now a teenager, he revealed he became a vegetarian to get out of eating the meatloaf they served for lunch at preschool.

IESSICA HOLMES, COMEDIAN



THE GREAT TWEET-OFF: SOUNDS WILD

The folks of Twitter enjoy a bit of good music to tweet by.

If you're a classic rock fan, and an insufferable snob, your favourite band is The Whom.

@CONANOBRIEN

You may be tough, but you're not 'just sat through a Year Four recorder concert' tough.

@MCDADSTUFF

Why does the inside of a cheese grater look like every rap music video from the early 2000s?

@THEROCKLE.COM

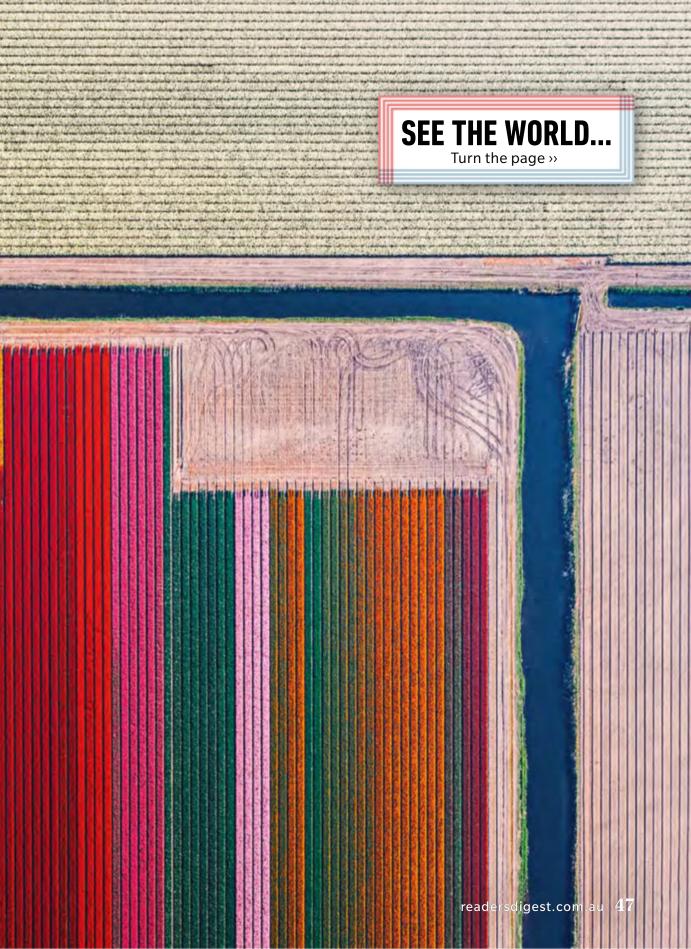
Rage Against the Machine never specified what type of machine they were furious with, but I reckon it was probably the printer.

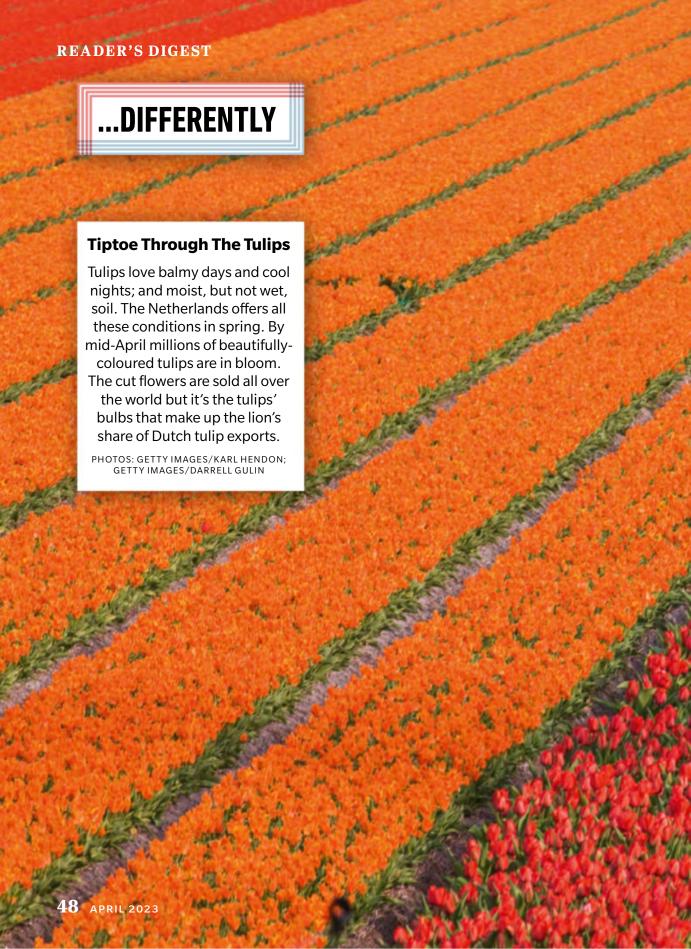
@JOHNMOYNES

"Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me." *Shakes tambourine* "Got any others?" *Shakes tambourine* "Sounds a lot like the last one." @OJEDGE













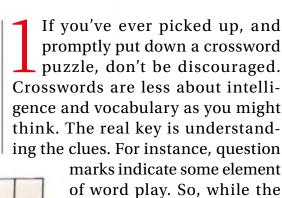
Get Clued-In On Crosswords

BY Emily Goodman

6

66

33



of word play. So, while the answer to, 'Job that involves watching the kids' might be BABYSITTER, with a question mark at the end, it's more likely to be GOAT HERD.

Speaking of kids, they were among the earliest solvers of cross-

words. Primitive versions of the puzzle first appeared in British children's books in the 1800s. In the US, crosswords developed into an adult pastime after Arthur Wynne published his original Word-Cross puzzle in the New York World in December

1913. Weeks later, a typesetting error permanently changed the name to Cross-Word.

Soon almost all daily newspapers were running crosswords, with one notable exception. In 1924, the New York Times described the craze as "a sinful waste in the utterly futile finding of words", and didn't publish a puzzle until 1942. Now, the maker of perhaps the world's most famous crossword has a different outlook, likening the puzzle to 'mental yoga', both challenging and relaxing at the same time.

Cryptic crosswords are particularly popular in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Each clue in a cryptic crossword is a riddle, often relying on anagrams, double meanings and words hidden inside other words. For instance, the clue 'Tours streets and wishes one hadn't' could yield RUES, as the French for 'streets' is also the English for 'regret'.

The point of these puzzles is to revel in their cleverness. Last year, the New York Times delighted devotees with the clue, 'The better of two major sci-fi franchises?' because both STAR WARS and STAR TREK fitted - even in the other direction. With the last letter, for example, the clue 'Let out, in a way' worked with either LEASED or LEAKED.

Much like mysteries, crossword clues can deceive and mislead, which is what makes their solutions so satisfying. Not surprising, then, that they come up in crime novels, notably in Ruth Rendell's One Across, Two Down and in Agatha Christie's The Curtain. Here's a clue Hercule Poirot contends with: 'The chaps between the hills are unkind.' With MEN (for 'chaps') between two TORs (for 'hills'), you get TORMEN-TOR. Quite a workout for those little grey cells!

Whether or not regular crosswording can improve mental acuity and even delay cognitive decline is the subject of much scientific research and debate. One of the more interesting case studies was that of an amnesiac who was able to acquire and recall information about events that happened after his amnesia set in when he learned that information through crossword puzzles.

To become a better solver, learn these words: alee (the side of a ship that is sheltered from the wind), aga (a Turkish officer), eider (a type of duck), eland (an African antelope), epee (a practice sword in fencing), etui (a cosmetics case), and oleo (another word for butter). Otherwise uncommon, these all show up disproportionately often in crosswords due to their unique letter combinations.

The brand name OREO also continually makes its way into crossword grids, so much so that it has been dubbed by some as the puzzle's 'official' cookie. OREO has appeared in the New York Times crossword alone at least 389 times. Perhaps more remarkable: it's been clued nearly 300 different ways, some mundane ('Nabisco cookie'), others head-scratching ('It has 12 flowers on each side').

With many papers that print a daily crossword, the puzzles get harder as the week goes on. Mondays are the easiest (so start there if you're a newbie) and Saturdays are the hardest. Sunday puzzles are typically of midweek difficulty.

Crossword creators have been known to help solvers get hitched. In 2007 and 2008, editors at The Boston Globe and USA Today worked WILLYOUMAR-RYME into their puzzles at the special request of loyal solvers. Even Will

Shortz of the *New York Times*, who generally has a rule against putting proposals in puzzles, made an exception to help a fellow crossword enthusiast pop the question back in 2019.

Famous crossworders include Hollywood stars Kristen Bell, Ellen Burstyn and Daniel Craig, astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson, and cartoonist Gary Trudeau. Former US President Bill Clinton does crosswords - in pen while carrying on conversations. The puzzle has even propelled at least one person to relative fame: Rex Parker (real name Michael Sharp) who posts a daily blog revealing the answers to the New York Times crossword.

Is looking up the answers cheating? Some solvers say so, but when you look things up, you learn, and that's a huge part of crosswords' appeal. As far as teaching tools go, few are more fun. The ruling from the *Times* is one we're inclined to agree with: it's your puzzle. Solve it any way you like.



Feather Boas Lure Wildlife

It appears that we humans are not alone in our fascination with feather boas. Scientists in Tasmania are trialling different lures in bushland to tackle the problem of feral cats, including feather boas. Cameras caught both native animals and cats interacting with the boas. One pademelon even returned four nights in a row to canoodle with the feathers, ABC, NET, AU

THE ENVY OF TOILETING

"I first saw the bidet advertised in the Reader's Digest magazine. We were so intrigued by the product that we spent about 6 months looking around Sydney for a retailer, or even a handicap specialist that would be able to give us a product demonstration, but without any luck.

So I decided to give The Bidet Shop a call and have not regretted it!

I'm a spring chicken compared to my husband, who was incapacitated at the time. The bidet was a great help to him and his situation, preventing the need of a carer - unfortunately my husband is now in a home...

Although, I have just ordered our second bidet for our son. He is currently building a holiday home and has insisted that a bidet be put in, he says, "Mum, we have to get it, the bidet is my inheritance..."

I absolutely love the bidet and all it has done to help ease the suffering of my husband while he was still at home, as well as the continuous aid it has provided as a health care product for me....

...I wouldn't be getting a second one if I didn't like it!"

Mrs Saunders, customer testimonial 2012

For more information or to purchase, contact The BIDET Shop on 1300 138 365.







The Light

Olly Mann finds himself something of an unofficial 'brand ambassador'

esterday I met Liz, a highly intelligent woman in her 50s. She's a school friend of my mate Brett, and she's spent the last 20 years working in brand marketing. As a result, she has a swimming pool. And a designer handbag. And a job title I can't quite bring myself to recall: 'Chief Inspiration Leader' or 'Treasurer of Top Ideas' calculated to put the FUN in 'strategy-led market research'.

"She's very smart," I said to Brett.

"Yes," he replied. "What a shame she's wasted her brain, rather than doing something PROPER."

I smiled at this and indicated agreement - I knew what he meant; it's not like she's curing cancer or engineering electric planes - but then, having thought about it for a second, I found myself responding defensively.

"It's quite a rigorous job she has though, isn't it? I mean, she'll take a product that seems... pedestrian, and think about it so deeply that she'll know exactly why, say,



Pepsi Max is associated with extreme sports, but Pepsi Max Cherry isn't. It seems trivial, but I guess if they sell more products as a result, then more people keep their jobs."

Brett looked at me like I was totally mad. "There are scientists," he said softly, sipping from his smoothie, "dermatologists, with PhDs and CBEs [Commander of the Order of the British Empire] and everything,

THERE'S A PART

OF MY BRAIN

THAT BEHAVES

AS IF IT RUNS

ITS OWN TEST

KITCHEN

working on formulas for make-up."

He virtually spat out the words.

"Cosmetics already exist! The world doesn't need more wrinkle cream! You can't reverse the progress of time! They

could be doing something that benefits everybody, instead of shilling something pointless!"

Again, I reflected for a moment. Brett was correct, of course, that someone with a sharp mind and a state-subsidised further education turning their back on public service, and accepting the most lucrative job offer on the table, is, to some extent, unethical. But, truth be told, I for one enjoy the novelty of trying and buying new products. I like that clever people spend time planning how to tell me about them. I want to be told about them.

Take, for instance, the day that Nestlé launched Kit Kat Chunky

Peanut Butter. Even though I knew exactly how it would taste - 'Kit Kat' equating to wafer and chocolate, 'Chunky' indicating an oblong gobfull, and 'Peanut Butter' promising an umami hit of salty-sugar yumminess - I still felt compelled to pick one up as soon as they hit the shelves. I was not disappointed. In fact, I have seriously considered travelling to Japan to try the 300+ limited edition flavours

> they've released over there.

> Even when I have absolutely no intention of buying the products being thrown at my brain, I still obligingly inhale those newspaper columns in which a

food writer tries out ten supermarket brands of rosé, or compares the rind of blue cheeses, or rates the best brandy butters at Christmas. It somehow matters to me when a supermarket brand tastes better than its more gourmet equivalent.

Scanning back through my Amazon history is to encounter a time capsule of household goods and pop-cultural ephemera (my first purchase, in 1999, was The Best of Texas on CD; my most recent bargain is an anti-microbial copper tongue scraper).

It's also proof of my efforts over the years to try out different items; always seemingly on some unspoken



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quest to uncover the ultimate exemplar of each product category.

It's weird, but there's a part of my brain that behaves as if it runs its own Test Kitchen. Perhaps that's just what happens when you're brought up with consumerism all around

you, and you've lost religion. For instance, I experimented with dozens of tea bag brands before settling upon Welsh Brew, I had a free sample at a food fair, and fell in love with their calming Kenyan Assam blend.

I'm equally evangelistic about **Dual Action Microfibre Sponge** and Scourer pads (so soft, yet so robust!); my Powerbeats Pro wireless earphones (so low-key! So reliable!); Lush's Big shampoo (sea salt flakes! But MOIST!); the Baby Jogger City Mini Stroller (a pram you can steer with one hand!); Mayonnaise de Dijon, by Amora, specially imported

from France; and my phone holder from Typo. I could go on.

Brett, meanwhile, is a Head and Shoulders shampoo kind of guy; he considers it a waste of energy to think about stuff like this. When he goes shopping, he simply selects a

> well-known product he knows works just fine, and if there's an own-brand ripoff on offer for less, he'll buy that one instead, even if it's not as good.

I'm jealous, in a way, of this approach to life. I sympathise

with Brett's prejudices - but I can't deny my interest in shiny bright new things. Would I like, in an ideal world, to turn off, or at least turn down, the part of my brain so flooded with pointless knowledge about peripheral brands? Perhaps.

But Brett should feel a little jealous of me, too. When the apocalypse comes, I'll be the one eating the best baked beans. R



I SYMPATHISE

WITH BRETT'S

PREJUDICES -

BUT I CAN'T DENY

MY INTEREST IN

SHINY BRIGHT

NEW THINGS

Very Hoppy Bunnies

Luxury 'pet boarding' accommodation for cats and dogs when their owners are away may be put in the shade by Bunny Style, a luxury resort for pet rabbits in Hong Kong. Rabbits get to climb a castle made of wood and explore a cotton tunnel. The bunnies are also kept happy with regular exercise, parties, spa treatments and lots of hay. AP

ADVERTORIAL PROMOTION



A LEGACY OF HOPE

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is a comprehensive cancer centre treating both public and private patients. When Professor Chris O'Brien AO was diagnosed with brain cancer, he used his diagnosis to advocate for his vision of bringing together all elements of cancer care in one place.

Today, Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is the leading referral centre in Australia for rare and complex cancers. We offer every type of treatment and service that people with cancer need under one roof. Our clinicians are world-leaders in cancer research, determined to find better ways to treat patients, improve outcomes and deliver uncompromising, patient-centred care.



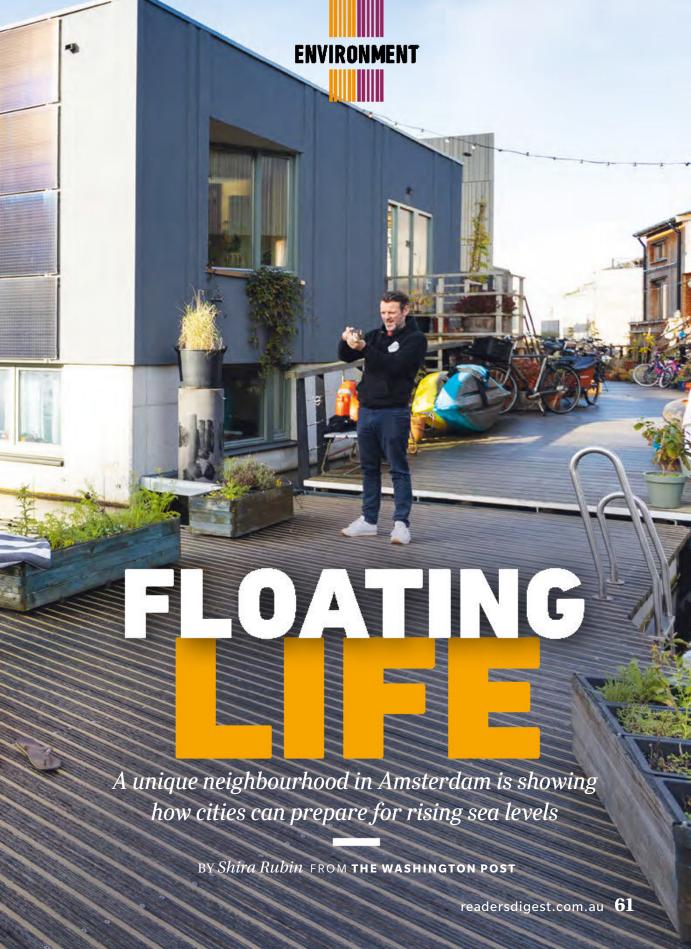
Professor Chris O'Brien AO
3 Jan 1952 - 4 Jun 2009

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is not only Chris' legacy, but the legacy of our community of gift in Will supporters. As a not-for-profit hospital, our model of care relies on our generous supporters, who enable major breakthroughs in world-first cancer research and further advance our standards of specialised and holistic care.

By leaving a gift in your Will to Chris O'Brien Lifehouse, you leave a legacy of hope for people with cancer and their families, both now and into the future.

To find out more about how you can make an impact, please contact Rebecca Scott for a confidential discussion on 02 8514 0988 or Rebecca.Scott@lh.org.au.







arjan de Blok readjusts her body weight as she treads along the jetty linking a floating community on a canal

off the River IJ. Through the whipping winds, she shouts greetings to many of her neighbours.

On the day I visited in autumn 2021, heavy rains and 80 kilometrean-hour winds put Amsterdam, just a short ferry ride away, on alert. But in the northern neighbourhood of Schoonschip, life carried

Marjan de Blok with her family in her floating home

on mostly as usual. De Blok chatted with neighbours while the homes glided up and down their steel foundational poles with the movement of the water below.

"It feels like living at the beach, with the water, the saltiness of the air and the seagulls," she says. "But it also feels special because, initially, we were told that building your own neighbourhood is just impossible."

A long list of European lawmakers, urban planners, entrepreneurs and citizens have visited Schoonschip to see the real-life manifestation of a once science-fiction idea. De Blok,

> a Dutch reality-TV director, has shown them Schoonschip's patchwork of environmentally focused social projects: lush floating gardens beloved by the water birds; a community centre featuring floating architecture diagrams; and nearby onland, a vegetable patch. But the homes' industrial-chic design and their immediate proximity to the city, she says, are what surprise visitors most.

> Schoonschip can serve as a prototype for the more than 600 million people - close to ten per cent of the world's population - who live near the coast and less than ten metres above sea level. As the effects of climate change intensify, sea levels are forecast to rise somewhere between 30 and 240



Schoonschip is setting an example for communities around the world that are coming to grips with rising sea levels

centimetres this century, and storms are expected to increase in frequency and intensity. In the summer of 2021, at least 220 people died in Germany and Belgium from a once-in-400-year rain event. In Zhengzhou, China, 630 millimetres of rain fell in one day, killing nearly 300 people.

By the end of this century, the kind of intense precipitation events that would typically occur two times per century, will happen twice as often, and more extreme events that would occur once every 200 years would become up to four times as frequent, according to a study published last year by a team at the University of Freiburg.

THE NETHERLANDS has long contended with water - nearly a third

of the country is below sea level and close to two-thirds is flood-prone. Since the Middle Ages, Dutch farmer collectives have drained water to make room for agricultural land. The groups evolved into regional water boards that keep the land dry using canals, dikes, dams and sea gates. Water management is such a normal part of Dutch discourse that many citizens are surprised to be asked about it, assuming it is common in every country.

The Dutch have historically lived on water. As international commerce flourished in the 17th century, foreign tradespeople moored their boats to the land to sell their goods. In the 1970s, people started converting boats into homes.

And over the past decade, Dutch water management strategists have sought to embrace, rather than resist, the rising sea levels brought on by climate change, with floating communities emerging in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht.

These homes are relatively lowtech, constructed off-site and weighted by basins filled with recycled, water-resistant concrete, then pulled across the water by tugboats and moored in place. Heavy pieces such as pianos are counterweighted with bricks on the opposite side of the

Eelke Kingma helped design Schoonschip's renewable-energy grid

house, and interior design is carried out in line with the Dutch principle of gezelligheid, or 'cosiness'. Many rooms are outfitted with modular furniture that can be easily disassembled or reassembled to accommodate life changes such as the birth of children.

"It's evident that sea waters will rise, and that many big cities are really close to that water," says Schoonschip resident Sascha Glasl, whose architectural firm, Space & Matter, designed several of the community's homes. "It's amazing that not more of

> this innovation and building on water is being executed."

> DE BLOK, who has no engineering, architecture or hydrological training, says that she never intended to spearhead a movement in floating urban development. In 2009, she had become disenchanted with her life in Amsterdam. She worked all the time, bought things she rarely used, and had little time to see friends.

> On a winter's day, she visited a solar-panelled floating event venue called GeWoonboot as part of a series of documentaries she was shooting on sustainable living. She was stunned by its contemporary feel, its immediacy to the water and the city, and its use of experimental sustainability practices.



Schoonschip residents hang decorative lights among the houses

"Before I visited that boat, I wasn't really conscious that I didn't like the way I was living," she says.

When she asked friends if they had interest in building a floating community, she was unprepared for the deluge of responses. She cut off the list at 120 people.

She scouted waters around Buiksloterham, a 100-hectare, post-industrial area that had been largely abandoned after manufacturers (including Shell and the Fokker airplane factory) left the city for lower-wage countries in the second part of the 20th century. When she learned that the city was planning to develop tens of thousands of housing units in the area, she realised that they could be pioneers there.

When 'Schoonschip' is made into a verb, 'to do Schoonschip', it means 'to cleanse'. Looking to make a different kind of community, De Blok had all residents sign a manifesto committing them to constructing, insulating and finishing their homes with eco-friendly materials such as straw, burlap and bamboo.

They also informally signed up for eating together, swimming together and conducting their lives largely in common view of one another, with curtains only rarely drawn. They use a vibrant WhatsApp group to request almost any service or borrow items from neighbours, including bikes and cars.

The neighbourhood feels like an extended block party mostly

because many of the residents are actually De Blok's friends, or friends of friends, including colleagues from the TV and entertainment industry. Most of them joined the project in their 20s and 30s, when they had no kids and ample time to invest in building a community. Twelve years later, those young couples have young families.

During the summer months, their

children jump out of their bedroom windows directly into the water below. On clear winter nights, the neighbourhood gleams with soft lighting and buzzes with the hum of chattering residents on their top-floor porches.

To realise Schoonschip's sustainability goals, De Blok drew on the residents themselves. Siti Boelen, a Dutch television producer, mediated between the Schoonschip representative committee and the local municipality. Glasl, the architect, helped design the jetty that connects the houses to each other and to the land.

Eelke Kingma, a resident and renewable tech expert, joined a community task force that co-designed the neighbourhood's smart grid system. Residents collect energy from more than 500 solar panels - placed on roughly a third of the community's roofs - and from 30 efficient heat pumps that draw from the water below. They then store it in enormous batteries below the homes and sell any surplus to each other, as well as to the national grid.

OVER THE PAST DECADE, the floating-house movement has been gaining momentum in the Netherlands. The Dutch government is amending legislation to redefine floating homes

> as 'immovable homes' rather than 'boats' to simplify the process of obtaining permits.

Amsterdam and Rotterdam are reporting a sharp uptick in requests for permits to build on

the water. The trend is coinciding with a national water awareness campaign for an era in which climate change is already a fact of life. The people behind Schoonschip and other floating neighbourhoods, office buildings and

In 2013, the architectural firm Waterstudio, which designed several of the houses in Schoonschip, sent a floating, internet-connected converted cargo container, called 'City App', to the Korail Bosti slum of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Children attended remote classes in it during the day, and adults used it to develop business projects at night.

event spaces across the Netherlands

are increasingly being consulted for

projects across the world.

"LIVING ON WATER DOES SOMETHING TO YOU,"

SAYS DE BLOK. "THERE'S SOME **MAGIC TO IT"**

In 2019, the vessel was relocated to a slum near Alexandria, Egypt, where it remains stationed. "We want to upgrade cities near the water," says Koen Olthuis, a Waterstudio architect. "Now we're at a tipping point where it's actually happening. We're getting requests from all over the world."

After two decades of planning, his firm, along with Dutch Docklands, which specialises in floating developments, will oversee construction on a 200-hectare lagoon off Malé, the capital of the Maldives. The city sits less than one metre above sea level, making it vulnerable to even the slightest rise.

The small, simply designed complex will house 20,000 people. Pumps will draw energy from deep-sea water and the homes' artificial coral-clad hulls will encourage marine life.

Dutch and international projects are showing that "we can cope with the challenges of sea-level rises," Olthuis says.

Back in Schoonschip, De Blok hopes that one day everyone will be able to live in communities built in harmony with the natural environment.

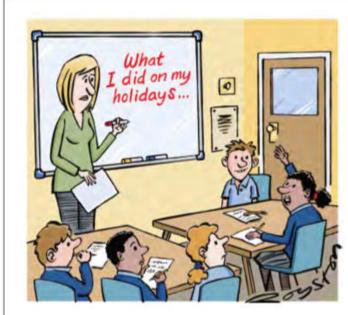
"Living on water does something to you, being aware that under your house everything is moving," she says.

"There's some magic to it."

THE WASHINGTON POST (DECEMBER 17, 2021). © 2021 BY THE WASHINGTON POST



The Best Medicine



"Can't I just send you the link to my Instagram, Miss?"

Making A Home

"By my age, my parents had a house and a family, and to be fair to me, so do I – but it is the same house and it is the same family."

HANNAH FAIRWEATHER

Flying High

A plane encounters turbulence and starts rocking from side to side. The flight crew quickly wheels out the drinks cart for the jittery passengers.

"Would you like a drink?" the flight attendant asks a businesswoman.

"Yes," she replies.
"I'll have whatever the pilot's having."

ajokeaday.com

Banking It

A man walked into a bank in the city centre and asked for a loan for \$4000.

"Well, before we lend you the money we are going to need some kind of security," the bank teller said.

"No problem," the man responded. "Here

are the keys to my car. It's a black Porsche parked in the back of the bank's parking lot."

A few weeks later the man returned to pay off his loan. While he was paying it, along with the interest of \$20, the manager came over.

"Sir, we are very happy to have your business," said the manager. "But if you don't mind me asking, after you left we looked into you and found out that you are a millionaire. Why would you need to borrow \$4000?

"Well, it's quite simple," the man responded. "Where else can I park my car for three straight weeks in the city centre for \$20?"

greatcleaniokes.com

Travel With Kids

People with babies: "I don't see why people stop travelling when they have kids. You can just strap the baby in and go hiking. Grab a stroller, fly to Europe, it's really all in your mindset!"

Those people a year later with a toddler: "It only took us 23 minutes to get down the stairs this morning."

LUCY HUBER, WRITER

Full Plate

What's the difference between an all-you-can-eat restaurant and your grandmother's cooking? At an allyou-can-eat place, you get to decide when you're full. mytowntutors.com







SAFETY MEASURES

Passwords are like underwear. Don't share them, hide them under your keyboard or hang them from your monitor. Above all, change them frequently.

GCFL.NFT

BRANCHING OUT

Tree jokes to leaf you laughing



- ❖ A woodchopper walks into an enchanted forest and tries to cut down a talking tree. "You can't cut me down." the tree exclaims, "I'm a talking tree!" The woodchopper responds, "You may be a talking tree, but you will dialogue."
 - **❖** Why did the pine tree get in trouble? Because it was being knotty.
 - **❖** What kind of tree can fit into your hand? A palm tree.
- **❖** What is every single tree's least favourite month? SepTIMMMBERRR!
 - How do trees access the internet? They log on.

Sources: Upjoke.com; thoughtcatalog.com





A 300-year-old masterpiece has withstood religious persecution and world wars.
Can it survive Russia's brutal assault?

BY Joshua Hammer

FROM **SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE**



arrived in Lviv on a cold, clear morning in March, four weeks after the Russian invasion. A jewel of cobblestone alleys, Hapsburg-era palaces and squares, and churches dating to the Middle Ages, western Ukraine's largest city possessed a veneer of calm. But as I strolled in Rynok Square, an air-raid siren shattered the hubbub of street musicians and café-goers, sending many pedestrians scurrying into shelters. On this day no attack came.

The Andrey Sheptytsky National Museum in Lviv had been closed

since the first day of the war. By a side entrance of the opulent former villa, I met Ihor Kozhan, its director. A short, burly man in his late 60s with a kindly visage, Kozhan led me

through the museum's deserted atrium and into an exhibition hall that had been stripped bare. "This room was filled with religious icons," he told me, pointing out rows of white display cabinets containing nothing but brass mounts.

On February 24 last year, Kozhan awakened to the news of the Russian invasion. "Western countries had been claiming that troops were massing, but our government insisted that nothing was going to happen," he told me as we strolled through one

empty gallery after another. "We had no plan." Blindsided, Kozhan told his wife and daughter to stay safe, then he steeled himself and went to work.

His first decision, a difficult one, was to close the museum. Then Kozhan and his employees met to formulate a strategy to protect its 1800 objects on display - Ukrainian modern art, illuminated manuscripts, and sacred icons spanning 800 years. Kozhan was particularly concerned about the pride of the collection, regarded by many scholars as the greatest example of Baroque-era religious art in Central Europe: the

> Bohorodchany Iconostasis.

For more than two centuries the enormous, elaborate wooden altarpiece had been caught up in the region's inva-

sions, conflicts and shifting borders. Over the years it had been hastily disassembled and transported to safety, claimed as a spoil of war, tossed aside, and left to rot. It had finally settled into a gallery of its own at the Sheptytsky National

Now it was threatened once again.

Museum nine years earlier.

EVEN IN A GENRE known for its dazzling opulence, the Bohorodchany Iconostasis stands by itself. Created between 1698 and 1705 by the monk and painter Yov Kondzelevych and at



After Russia invaded, the race was on to protect the Bohorodchany Iconostasis

least 20 artisans, the iconostasis is a 13-metre-high, 11-metre-wide wall of gilded icons and other religious scenes set in ornate wooden frames and crowned by a huge gold depiction of the Crucifixion.

The naturalism of Kondzelevych's images, with their vibrant colours and the individualised facial expressions of the figures, marked a dramatic departure from the formalised Byzantine art that had shaped Ukrainian iconography through the 17th century. The masterpiece helped forge a distinct Ukrainian identity, separate from that of Russia, its giant neighbour to the east.

For Kozhan, the realistic depictions of human beings, so different from the 'very still, very stiff' style of Russian sacred art, is captured by the nickname bestowed on Kondzelevych by art historians: 'The Ukrainian Raphael'.

The artist was born in Zhovkva, a centre of painting and wood carving located 30 kilometres north of Lviv, in 1667. At 19 he entered a nearby monastery. Not much is known about his life, but he is thought to have fallen under the tutelage of the great Baroque icon painter Ivan Rutkovych, who kept a studio in Zhovkva. Rutkovych's masterpiece, the Zhovkva Iconostasis, also hung in the National Museum until early last year.

In 1698, Kondzelevych received a commission from the Manyava

Orthodox Monastery, the dominant hermitage in what was then Polish Galicia, to create the Bohorodchany Iconostasis. Kondzelevych assembled carpenters, joiners, goldsmiths and other artisans, and established a workshop at the retreat in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. They remained there for seven years.

The Bohorodchany Iconostasis hung originally at the Manyava Monastery, but in 1782, a decade after Austria-Hungary annexed the region, the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II ordered the monasteries throughout the empire to shut down and appropriated their land. Three years later, the community of Bohorodchany, 25 kilometres to the north, bought the giant altarpiece. It was moved to the town's Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity.

The iconostasis was still hanging in Bohorodchany when, in August 1914, weeks after the start of the First World War, the army of Czar Nicholas II launched a massive assault on Galicia, setting off a panicked exodus. The Hapsburg Army made three futile counteroffensives against the Russians in the Carpathian Mountains. The casualties on both sides numbered over a million men.

Amid the chaos and violence, Austro-Hungarian troops risked their lives to save the obscure religious icon. Riding into Bohorodchany one night, perilously close to the front lines, "the soldiers

began to dismantle the iconostasis and pack it - to the joyful surprise of the residents," wrote one witness. The soldiers, assisted by locals, loaded the parts onto trucks and transported them to a museum in Vienna.

After its defeat in the First World War, Austria-Hungary surrendered the iconostasis to Poland, and it hung in the Royal Castle in Warsaw. In 1924, Andrey Sheptytsky (after whom the National Museum in Lviv is named), a leader of Lviv's Greek Catholic Church and a Ukrainian nationalist, bought the iconostasis for the equivalent of US\$4000. He displayed parts of it in a museum dedicated to Ukrainian iconography that he had founded on Lviv's Drahomanov Street.

Still, the artwork's trials weren't over. In 1939, the Soviet Union occupied the region and held it until the Nazis invaded two years later. In 1944, the Soviets seized control of the region again, merging parts of Galicia with present-day eastern Ukraine, greatly expanding the size of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Joseph Stalin's commissars shut down churches, destroyed icons, and dismantled the Bohorodchany Iconostasis. They hung one of its 50 panels in a folklore museum and warehoused the rest in Lviv's shuttered 14th-century Armenian Cathedral, which was allowed to slowly fall apart. And there it remained until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Saving Ukraine's Sacred Art

UKRAINE gained its independence in 1991, but its national identity is still evolving. The Ukrainian-speaking region once known as Galicia, in the west, developed a culture that was distinct from the rest of the country, which was ruled by Imperial Russia from the 18th to the early 20th century. Ukraine's suffering under Stalin, the country's experiment with democracy, and Vladimir Putin's violent meddling have all strengthened a sense of national solidarity.

Another thing that binds east and west is art, especially now, with Ukrainians determined to protect

KOZHAN FILLED THE

MUSEUM WITH

ARTWORKS THAT HAD

BEEN MOULDERING

IN STORAGE

their cultural legacy from destruction by Russian troops. Liliya Onyshchenko-Shvets, the director of Lviv's cultural heritage office, initiated an online data bank that allows

museum directors across Ukraine to report war damage and identify their needs. "We have 2000 wooden churches, many on the UNESCO heritage list," she told me. All are considered highly vulnerable.

Kozhan's own life story reflects his devotion to Ukrainian culture. He was born in Lviv in 1953, the son of Ukrainian nationalists. At Ivano Franko University in Lviv, he associated with fellow activists who revered the poet, writer and artist Taras Shevchenko, who agitated for Ukrainian independence in the 1840s.

In 1973 the KGB ordered Kozhan's expulsion from the university, along with seven faculty members and 19 other students. He served in the Soviet Army, then earned his degree elsewhere in Ukraine and went to work for the National Museum. which was dedicated to displays of Soviet folklore and arts and crafts.

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. The incoming local Ukrainian government designated the Hapsburg-era villa, then housing the city's Lenin Museum, as the new home of the Andrey Sheptytsky National Mu-

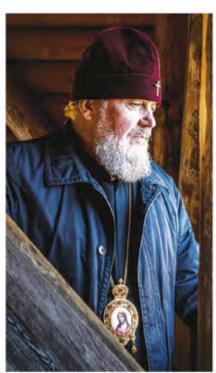
> seum, and named Kozhan director.

> "I got a phone call from the city council," he recalled. "They said, 'Liquidate the Lenin Museum'." On our way down to his office.

he pointed out the window to a dingy courtyard where a bust of Lenin still lay discarded.

Kozhan filled the halls with Ukrainian artworks that had been mouldering in storage. But it wasn't until 1997 that restorers began to prepare all 50 panels of the Bohorodchany Iconostasis for public viewing. "It was serious work," Taras Otkovych, director of the restoration team, told me.

Neglected for decades, the paintings were covered with grime. Old





Bishop loasaf Vasylkyv hopes the Bohorodchany Iconostasis will eventually be returned to its original home, the Manyava Monastery in the Carpathian Mountains

varnish needed to be stripped away; misguided restorers a century earlier had painted over many icons. Otkovych's team conducted chemical analyses, X-rayed the paintings to determine the look of the original layers, and used cotton swabs and gentle emulsion cleaners to remove dirt and old varnish. In 2013, the entire Bohorodchany Iconostasis was put on display for the first time in a century.

In March last year, Kozhan supervised the dismantling of the iconostasis for the seventh time in its history. Twelve museum workers toiled for four days, removing the ingenious wooden joints that had locked the icons to their frames, then carefully separating the giant panels into dozens of parts. Kozhan held up several

of the crude-but-effective locking mechanisms. "Every piece was linked," he told me.

Kozhan agreed to let me visit the secret storage place of the iconostasis on the condition that I revealed no details that could give it away. The next day, an aide in Lviv led me to a basement. There, I set eyes on hundreds of icons and other treasures. Parts of the Bohorodchany Iconostasis were stacked together without wrapping. Kozhan was confident that they'd be well protected, though he'd reached out to colleagues in Poland to make contingency plans.

"Putin's idea of this war is to destroy Ukrainian nationality, and our task at the museum is to preserve it," he told me.

Saving Ukraine's Sacred Art

THE MANYAVA MONASTERY, where the astonishing artwork was created, lies in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, 175 kilometres south of Lviv. The hermitage is a stone-walled compound overlooking a riverine gorge and pine-covered hills. As I walked through the gate, I took in the peacock-blue-and-golden onion domes rising from churches, a bell tower, and a four-storey library.

In the nave of a wooden church, topped by three pyramidal tiled roofs, stood a replica of the Bohorodchany Iconostasis, created after the monastery reopened in 1998 following its closure of more than 200 years.

Even without having seen the original, except in pieces, I could easily discern that this iconostasis was an inexpert knockoff: the depictions of Jesus, Mary and the saints were less realistic, and the tableau lacked depth and richness of colour.

"The artists studied the original and tried to copy it," said Ioasaf Stasiuk, Manyava's 23-year-old deputy bishop, a cherubic-looking man wearing a brown robe, his hair pulled back into a ponytail.

During shelling in World War I the original wooden church burned

down. Ioasaf Vasylkyv, 67, the monastery's bishop, led me down the main path through the monastery, pointing out fragments of the original structures: the base of the outer wall, the bell-tower archway, the bottom floor of the library tower.

With donations and God's support, he said, he had put Manyava back together. The monastery has reclaimed its place as one of the holiest Eastern Orthodox sites in the region, drawing thousands of pilgrims a year.

Vasylkyv had two wishes, he said. The first was for the return to the monastery of the original Bohorodchany Iconostasis, a prospect that seemed unlikely. Kozhan has said as much. "The general principle is that what goes into the museum doesn't come out," he told me earlier.

But the bishop's second wish seemed more attainable, if far from certain: a Ukrainian victory in this latest catastrophic war. "I hope you have good health," he said, escorting me out through the front gate. "And may the Russian president and the Russian Army never enter here."

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Train Stretches For 1.9 Kilometres

A Swiss railway company has claimed the record for the longest passenger train after it ran a train comprising 100 carriages through the spectacular Swiss Alps. AP



THE STRIN

Sicily's puppeteers are finding novel ways to keep their art form alive

BY Anna Staropoli

FROM ATLAS OBSCURA



Deep in the historic heart of the Sicilian capital of Palermo, a dragon stirs. A drumbeat thuds through the darkened room as the creature takes flight. The dragon lurches towards our armour-clad hero, Orlando, but it is no match for a knight. Orlando's sword slices through the beast and its body falls to the ground. Its bloodied head dangles by a string above the stage. A burst of funhouse music from a barrel organ closes out the scene.

Here at the Antonio Pasqualino International Puppet Museum, housed in a grand building that was once home to the 18th-century Hotel de France, slaying dragons is a family affair. Salvatore Bumbello stages daily live shows at the museum's theatre, often with the help of his ten-year-old daughter Martina and her older brothers Luciano and Francesco. During the dragon show, Martina cranked the handle of the barrel organ while her brothers worked backstage.

The productions follow traditional storylines from the Renaissance period and earlier, in particular the

tales of Orlando and Rinaldo, two legendary knights, or paladins, of Charlemagne's court. The pair take on dragons, demons and other foes – staple fare for this distinctive style of Sicilian puppetry, which began in the early 19th century.

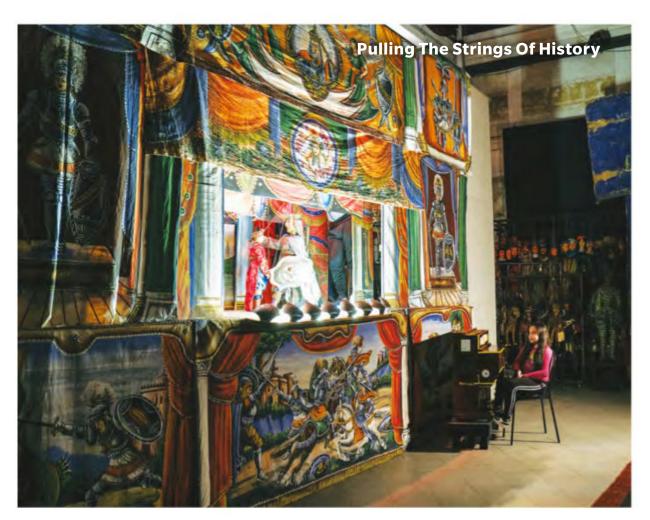
Weathering war and economic turmoil, the *Opera dei Pupi* has been performed without interruption for more than 200 years. COVID-19 threatened that run, forcing Palermo's puppeteers to tweak the very elements that set their tradition apart – or risk losing it altogether.

Palermo had dozens of puppet theatres before 1950, when interest

> in the art form began to decline. Today, there are only four left, each using handmade marionettes that stand nearly a metre tall and weigh nine kilograms.

> Puppetry inspired by regional tales crops up across cultures, from ancient India's





(Above) Martina Bumbello plays the barrel organ during a performance at the Antonio Pasqualino Museum; (opposite) three of the museum's thousands of marionettes

Ramayana and Mahabharata to Japan's Tale of the Heike. But, says Jo Ann Cavallo, chair of the Italian Department at Columbia University in New York and who studied Opera dei Pupi extensively in her research on Renaissance literature, "Only Sicilian Opera dei Pupi stages epic stories with intricately structured and painted wooden puppets, in elaborate metal armour, and with swords and shields made to withstand heavy fighting." Cavallo says Sicilian puppet theatres are often family-run:

Salvatore Bumbello learned the art from his late father, beginning when he was Martina's age. Today, he designs and creates the elaborate puppets for his shows as well as for other puppeteers. Some of his marionettes can be found in the museum's extensive collection - with thousands of Opera dei Pupi puppets, it's the largest of its kind in the world.

IN ADDITION to the Sicilian marionettes, the museum houses rare water puppets from Vietnam and



Luciano and Francesco Bumbello help their father during a performance

enormous, human-sized puppets designed for a show written by Italian fairytale author Italo Calvino. Too large to be operated using strings, the puppets had to be strapped to the backs of puppeteers. They were retired after a single performance and now occupy an entire room in the museum, serving, perhaps, as a warning of the risks of abandoning deeply established conventions, something Palermo's puppeteers have long avoided.

"We have not changed anything," Bumbello says when asked to compare his productions with those of his father. Even the special effects he uses - such as pull-apart puppets that can be dismembered or beheaded, including the doomed dragon in

his current production - have existed for centuries.

Since the start of the pandemic, however, change was unavoidable for Palermo's puppeteers. The theatres closed temporarily in March 2020, which Bumbello says jeopardised their status, recognised by UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list, as the only uninterrupted puppetry tradition of its kind.

"The pandemic devastated the world of puppetry," he says. "We could not act out our stories and consequently could not have an audience."

Rather than shut down completely, the museum took to the internet, allowing viewers to live-stream

Pulling The Strings Of History

performances until in-person shows returned in October 2021. Streaming shows helped keep the tradition going - but for some of the Palermo's puppeteers, evolution of their art form has been ongoing for years. Third-generation puparo Vincenzo Argento, who runs Teatro Famiglia Argento with his son Nicolò, started experimenting with new approaches to Opera dei Pupi to keep his business alive long before the pandemic hit.

Hunched over a desk in his workshop, Argento chisels fragments of metal that will form the helmet of a puppet destined for sale in his shop beside feathered, puppet-shaped wine corks and other items intended to appeal to

tourists. Setting aside traditional stories, he and Nicolò have written original scripts and added more daring special effects to their shows. "[Other puppeteers] don't always accept these changes," Argento says, his eyes intent on his handiwork. "When we began, it was much simpler."

TODAY'S OPERA DEI PUPI shows often depict knights fighting their way through one battle after another and emerging victorious before the curtain falls. As local audiences shrank in the second half of the 20th century and were replaced largely by tourists

without knowledge of the Italian language or the stories the productions were based on, the shows became more action-heavy and disconnected from their literary inspiration.

Some see the challenges created by the pandemic as an opportunity for Opera dei Pupi puppeteers to experiment with technology and update traditional themes. Expanding to online performances has also allowed Sicilian puppeteers to try out new, more modern stories and to

> stage plays that haven't been performed in decades. The Antonio Pasqualino Museum has taken this new digital direction even further by incorporating augmented reality into its puppetry, creating an interactive component

for virtual visitors.

"THE ART

WAS HANDED

DOWN TO ME.

I'LL HAND IT

DOWN TO MY

CHILDREN"

Back at the museum, Martina cranks the barrel organ as the show comes to an end. Before the curtain closes, three final characters make an appearance. Bumbello, Luciano, and Francesco crouch down, visible at last in front of the wooden set, and wave at their audience.

"The art was handed down to me, and I will hand it down to my children, as they will do with theirs," says Salvatore Bumbello. "This way, tradition will not be lost." R

ATLAS OBSCURA (DECEMBER 10, 2021), © 2021 BY ATLAS OBSCURA

READER'S DIGEST 1/41/11/11/11/1 84 APRIL 2023



What It's Like To Be In A

The twilight zone between life and death is a mystery that doctors hope to solve

BY Lauren Cahn

hen T. Renee Garner was 32 weeks pregnant with her son, she was rushed to the hospital with extremely high blood pressure, her foetus in distress. Intravenous medication lowered her blood pressure and her baby was delivered safely before being taken to the neonatal intensive care unit. But when Garner went to visit him there the next day, she still wasn't well, and she

began experiencing leg cramping so severe it left her weeping in the hospital. Then everything went black for three days.

Doctors determined that Garner's coma was the result of a severe electrolyte imbalance - her sodium had dropped precipitously - caused by the IV medication she'd received. Garner says that while she was in the coma, she heard a siren and then the words "it died", which she took to mean that she had died. "It" was

actually a battery on a monitor that had died. She also recounts having horrible dreams. "I can't remember them, but I know they tormented me," she says. "Every dream I had during my coma was a nightmare."

Zaida Khaze was 19 when she was travelling in a car that was hit by a

drunk driver. Her head injury was so severe that she lost the ability to walk, speak and swallow, and she lapsed into a coma that lasted ten days. When she started to fully awaken in the rehab hospital to

which she had been transferred, she remembered none of it: not the accident nor the aftermath. The only thing she did remember was having her entire family gathered around her. But, in fact, they were never all there at the same time.

What an individual patient will experience during a coma remains a mystery to doctors. Even the medical definition is vague. The Mayo Clinic in the US calls it "a state of prolonged unconsciousness that can be caused by a variety of problems." Technically, someone in a coma is unresponsive to light, sound, touch and verbal communication, but that doesn't necessarily mean the patient isn't aware, says Dr J. Javier Provencio, professor in neurology and director of the Nerancy Neuroscience Intensive Care Unit at the University of Virginia.

Dr Provencio has had patients tell him they remember when doctors and nurses came into the room and pinched their big toe so hard it hurt, though they didn't respond at the time and were completely unconscious.

> The pinch is a way for doctors to see whether people in a coma will respond to the pain.

> "Some remember nothing; some remember a great deal of feelings but noth-

ing specific. Some people hallucinate that people came to visit them who never actually did," he says.

On the other hand, there are people like Jennifer Beaver. In June 2017, she was riding in a golf cart with her husband and two friends. When she turned to talk to one of them, she slipped and fell off the moving cart, landing on her head. She suffered a massive brain bleed and was rushed to hospital, and then put in a medically induced coma for a week to allow her brain to heal. The doctors told Beaver's husband that she was unlikely to survive and that if she did, she might be severely disabled.

And yet when doctors gradually brought her out of the coma, Beaver not only was relatively healthy but also could recall pieces of discussions

What It's Like To Be In A Coma

she'd overheard. "I remember friends and family in the room, and one friend who flew in from Los Angeles to see me," she says.

"Later on, I texted the friend and asked her if she had been in the room because I was certain I'd heard her voice, although I couldn't recall seeing

her." The friend had, in fact, been there.

Even with brain imaging and other tests, doctors can never be certain whether a specific patient will emerge from a coma or how they will recover. But hearing the stories of

patients who have come out of their comas and recovered helps doctors learn more about this strange phenomenon. One of the most important lessons: the human brain is a lot more resilient than they once thought.

"For a long time we were vastly underestimating the brain's potential for recovery," says Dr Stephan A. Mayer, a specialist in neurocritical care and emergency neurology at

Westchester Medical Center Health Network in New York. Many patients whose doctors thought had no hope of them waking have come out of their comas. "After about ten years of doing this I realised I knew less about prognosis than ever," says Dr Mayer.

> Becoming clearer about the best treatments for coma patients - and about how to better predict recovery prospects - are thriving areas of study. Dr Provencio is one of the founders of the Curing Coma Cam-

paign, a group of neurocritical care specialists from all over the world who are developing coma treatment strategies. The campaign website (curingcoma.org) provides information for patients, families and healthcare providers.

"We're looking for people who have been affected by coma to help us learn about their experiences before, during, and after," says Dr Provencio.

THE HUMAN **BRAIN IS A** LOT MORE RESILIENT THAN **DOCTORS ONCE THOUGHT**



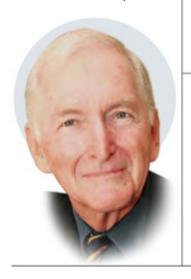
Corn Field Tribute

Lionel Messi has been immortalised in Argentina in tributes ranging from tattoos to murals after leading the national team to win the soccer World Cup. Now his face can be seen from the heavens too – on a specially planted corn field in central Cordoba. The ripened corn will create a huge visual image of Messi's bearded visage. REUTERS

QUOTABLE QUOTES

I take a fact, put a top hat on it, a silk shirt and bow tie and striped trousers and a tailcoat and a pair of tap shoes and I do a Fred Astaire with a fact. But I don't ruin the fact... I'm just giving it life.

BRYCE COURTENAY. WRITER





I'd advise people that if you want to go into business, you have to have the passion and not just because you want to make money.

ARA MINA. ACTRESS AND CAKE SHOP OWNER

It's the job of scientists to explore black holes in the universe, but the job of a poet is to explore black holes in the psyche.

SANDRA CISNEROS.

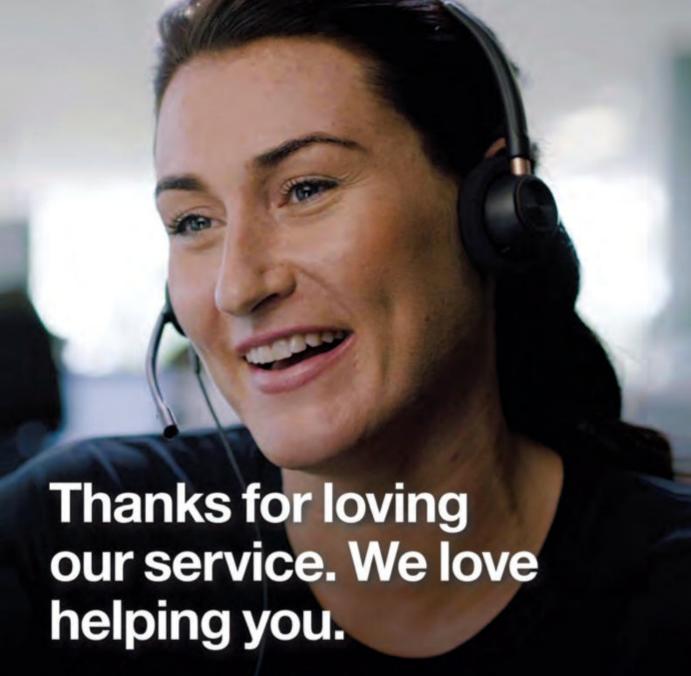
POFT

I'M THE WORST COOK. **BUTI'M A REALLY** GOOD HOST.

PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS, **ACTRESS**



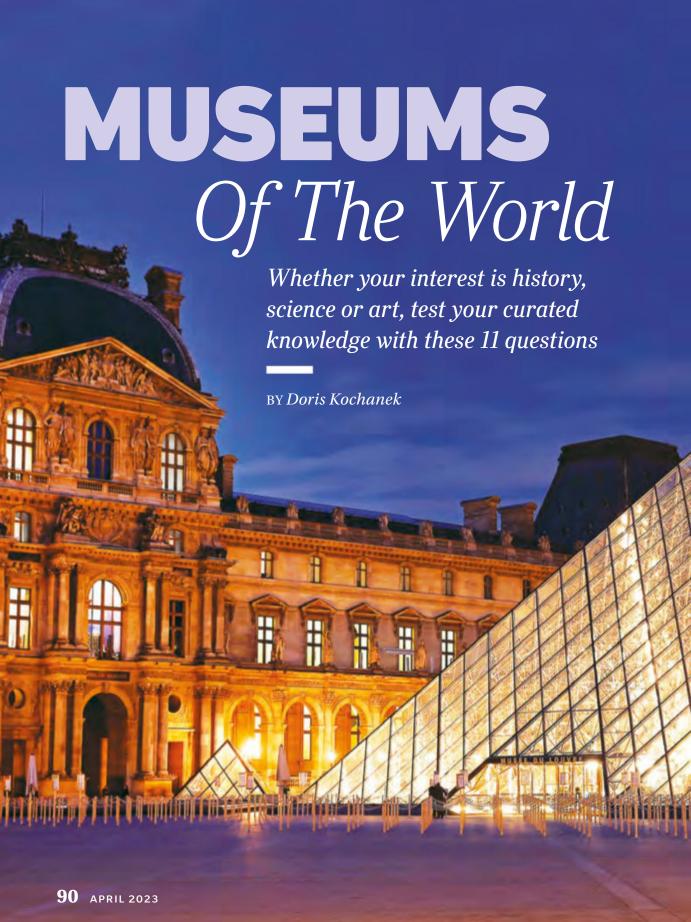
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST



We won gold in the home and contents category at the Reader's Digest Quality Service Awards. But when you love what you do, these things happen.











= QUESTIONS =

The Louvre in Paris used to be the residence of the French monarchy. Its rooms alone are worth a visit. In 1989, five glass pyramids designed by Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei were added. One of them is upside down, its top reaching into the ground. What is hidden beneath it in the movie *The Da Vinci* Code, starring Tom Hanks?

- **a**) the original tablets of the Ten Commandments
- **b)** Mary Magdalene's sarcophagus
- c) the crown of thorns said to be worn by Jesus Christ
- **d**) the holy grail

The Dulwich Picture Gallery in London has experienced burglaries on several occasions. Between 1966 and 1983, the same painting was stolen four times. What nickname did the work earn as a result?

- a) Picasso for all
- **b)** Takeaway Rembrandt
- **c)** Pocket Titian
- d) Runaway Rembrandt

Not every museum is dedicated to art, culture, history or science and technology. Some are also about food. What is the focus of a museum in the Czech city of Pilsen?

- a) sausages
- **b**) dumplings
- c) pancakes
- d) beer

The crowd pullers of some museums have come into their possession under questionable circumstances. In many cases, the countries of the exhibit's origin demand their return. For example, there is a bitter dispute over the Parthenon Sculptures which can be seen in the British Museum. They used to be exhibited there under the name of the man who brought the treasures from Athens to London. What was his name?

Singapore's Haw Par Villa provides a very special museum for visitors



- a) Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin
- b) Ferdinand Rothschild
- c) Hans Sloane
- d) Archibald Spencer

The more than a thousand sculptures at Haw Par Villa in Singapore teach visitors about Buddhist traditions and beliefs. Admission to the park is free. However, if you want to see the main attraction, you have to pay. What are visitors only allowed to marvel at after buying a ticket?

- a) the flying horse
- b) the golden Buddha
- c) the 'Ten Courts of Hell'
- d) a roaring tiger

The Vatican Museums in Rome date back to 1506, when Pope Julius II acquired a sculpture that he made accessible to the public

a short time later. Today it is a must-see for every visitor. Which sculpture is it?

- a) David by Michelangelo
- **b)** Venus of Willendorf
- c) Laocoön and His Sons
- d) a bronze pinecone

The Palace Museum in Beijing – as well as similarly named museums in Hong Kong and Taipei – display art treasures from a collection of Chinese emperors. Where should visitors go to see the Jadeite Cabbage and the Meat-Shaped Stone, two exhibits that are as famous as they are unusual?

- a) Beijing
- **b**) Hong Kong
- **c**) Shanghai
- **d**) Taipei

Big cities like to decorate themselves with museums. When it comes to new buildings, they also like to employ famous architects. Which building complex was designed by the Canadian-American star architect Frank Gehry?

- a) the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- **b**) the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
- c) the Riverside Museum, Glasgow, Scotland
- d) the Tate Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall

The Treasure Chamber in Liechtenstein owns not only gold and jewels, but also lunar rocks. Why did the US government donate this treasure to the small principality?

- a) A local company was involved in the space programme
- **b)** Buzz Aldrin, the second man on the moon, was born there
- c) Ex-US President Nixon used it to solicit money for NASA
- **d)** As a general thank you



A very successful movie starring Ben Stiller set in a museum of natural history was based on a children's book

for supporting the Apollo programme

In which movie does Ben Stiller fight with exhibits that come to life and make mischief after dark?

- **a**) The Mummy
- **b**) Ghostbusters
- c) Zoolander
- **d)** Night at the Museum

Many museums reside in buildings that were previously used for other purposes. What did the building of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Cape Town serve as?

- a) a prison
- **b**) a grain silo
- c) a cathedral
- d) a court

>> Turn to page 94 for quiz answers

ANSWERS: MUSEUMS OF THE WORLD QUIZ

- **b)** In the film, Mary Magdalene's sarcophagus is hidden under the Louvre.
- **b**) Fortunately, the gallery got back the portrait of *Jacob de Gheyn III* painted by Rembrandt after each theft.
- **d**) A brewery museum provides information on the history of the art of brewing beer, the beginnings of which date back thousands of years and which reached a peak in Pilsen. In 1842, Joseph Groll, a brewmaster who moved there from Bavaria, created Pilsner lager.
- **a)** Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin, had the Parthenon Sculptures shipped to London from Athens during 1801 to 1805. Greece was then under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The British Museum argues that Lord Elgin had the permission of the Turkish administration. Greece argues that Lord Elgin far exceeded his authority and demands the return of the ancient art treasures.
- **c**) The 'Ten Courts of Hell' show visitors very graphically what torments await them in the afterlife if they are guilty of certain offences.
- 6) The statue of *Laocoön and His Sons* was the first work of art in

- the papal collection to be officially exhibited. The ancient sculpture of a Trojan priest being attacked by snakes was probably created in the first century in Rhodes.
- 7 d) The Jadeite Cabbage and the Meat-Shaped Stone are on display in Taipei. Both exhibits look deceptively similar to food. There are even two small insects sitting on the leaves of the vegetable.
- **b**) Frank Gehry designed the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain. Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers designed the Centre Pompidou, Paris. The Riverside Museum in Glasgow was designed by Zaha Hadid, and the Tate Gallery in Cornwall was designed by Eldred Evans and David Shalev.
- **a**) A Liechtenstein-based company was at the time a leader in vacuum technology as well as the manufacturer of thin protective layers that supplied important components for the Apollo programme.
- 10 d) In Night at the Museum, the character played by Ben Stiller is a night watchman at New York's American Museum of Natural History.
- **b**) A grain silo was converted for the museum.



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ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Humour On The Job



Memorable Title

To ensure that a new business contact would remember his name, my father introduced himself by using a mnemonic device: "My name is Ron Reader – Reader, like in Reader's Digest."

It worked, as evidenced by the fact that later that day, his new acquaintance introduced Dad to an associate by saying, "Jim, meet Ron Digest."

SUBMITTED BY PAM HERTNER

Overly Honest LinkedIn Confessions

- "I have managed to keep up a sales job for the last ten years without completely losing my soul."
- "Would prefer job with no real responsibility."
- "I don't believe in spamming people. Unless you do, in which case I'm totally fine with that."
- "Able to sit in my chair for extended periods of time without numbness or fatigue."

• "Quite possibly the only person on LinkedIn who isn't a 'resultsorientated team player with excellent interpersonal skills'."

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Reality Bites

ME AT 14: Can't wait to travel the whole world once I'm earning my own money.

ME NOW: Mustn't forget that
Tupperware at work – it's my
only one. @itsbombardier

Above And Beyond

The phone rang in our office, and my colleague quickly picked it up. After a few seconds I heard her say, "Sorry, there's no one here by that name."

Not wanting to simply hang up, she politely, but not so helpfully, asked, "May I take a message?"

SUBMITTED BY JOHN BOUCHARD

Order Needs A-Dressing

Our rookie restaurant waiter handed the cook a slip with the customer's order. Next to salad, he'd written the letter 'A'.

Now, we often abbreviate salad dressings, like F for French or R for ranch. But neither the cook nor I could figure out what A was.

So I asked.

"A?" said the new guy, incredulously.

"A is for AH-talian."

SUBMITTED BY HOPE VANDER HEIDE

YOU DO WHAT?

Strange job titles are becoming more common as companies look to make their job adverts and brands stand out in the marketplace.

Dream Alchemist

(ACCOUNT MANAGER)

King/Queen of Rigour

(ACCOUNT DIRECTOR WITHIN A PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY)

Mother Repairer

(SOMEONE TO REPAIR A METAL PHONOGRAPH RECORD MATRICE)

Chief Troublemaker

(DISRUPTER CEO)

Digital Prophet

(SEEK OUT NEW DIGITAL BUSINESS)

Galactic Travel Agent

(WORKING FOR VIRGIN GALACTIC TO HELP SPACE TRAVELLERS)

Fashion Evangelist

(ONLINE FASHION EDITOR)

Word Wizard

(WRITER)

Happiness Hero

(CUSTOMER SERVICE OPERATIVE)

Digital Overlord

(WEBSITE MANAGER)

Resumecoach.com



ART OF LIVING

How To Spot Bad Advice

By Christina Palassio ILLUSTRATION BY JEANNIE PHAN

agonising over a financial decision. I had three options, and having spent considerable time researching them, felt reasonably informed, but I was still not fully confident in which to choose. So when I later saw a financially savvy acquaintance at a party, I decided to ask for her advice.

As the conversation deepened, however, I felt my stomach tighten in frustration. While I'm sure my friend wanted to help, her advice

was immediately off the mark. She didn't ask me questions or consider how my goals might differ from hers. She simply told me what she would do, and I quickly found myself tuning out her monologue. The exchange left me feeling discouraged.

When we ask someone for advice, we look for a range of responses: a thoughtful and objective perspective, information to fill a knowledge gap, guidance from someone we trust. Done well, the exchange can benefit both parties, adding nuance to each person's thinking and strengthening their bonds. Bad advice, on the other hand, can harm relationships and make a tough decision even tougher.



The worst advice-givers can invite second-guessing, undermine your values and lead you astray. Even the most well-intentioned bad guidance can leave us feeling exasperated and confused.

CONSIDER YOUR NEEDS

To help head off bad advice, be clear on your needs. Are you asking someone to help you think through options you might take to resolve a problem? Are you asking someone to provide

advice as your friend or as an objective observer? Do you want help with something that's closer to instruction or coaching - like how to plant a spring garden or ensure you get the next big promotion at work? Communicating both your problem and your expectations will help your advice-giver

approach your questions thoughtfully and with a goal of their own in mind.

Next, make sure you're intentional about whom you ask, and consider if you need a range of opinions or one well-informed perspective. Don't be afraid to get creative with who you ask, and don't assume you know everyone's expertise. When you receive the advice, listen to your body. Are you tensing up or resisting? It could be a sign that the advice that's coming your way isn't right for you - or it could mean someone is challenging your own biases and assumptions. Take the time to check in with yourself on which it is.

ARE THEY ENGAGED?

David Eddie was an advice columnist for nearly two decades. In that time, he learned that good advice-givers ask questions that help them better understand where you're coming from and what your goals are. They don't assume they know the answer

> - or that you have the time, resources or ability to approach the challenge in the same way they would. "You want someone who's going to drill down into the problem with you and take the time to understand the shape of it," he says.

> It can take time to formulate smart, em-

pathetic questions - and a chat at a party, for example, may not be the best setting for true consideration.

DO THEY UNDERSTAND YOUR VALUES?

When it comes to human relationships, things can get murky. Our different backgrounds, beliefs and philosophies mean there often aren't one-size-fits-all solutions. When advice-givers assume that what's best for them is also what's best for you, or

NEW RELEASE FROM SID HARTA

Genocide Under the Red Sun

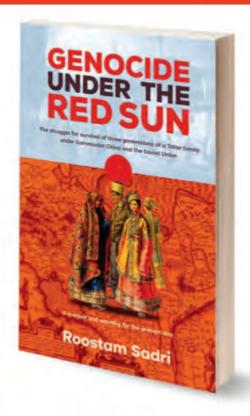
Roostam Sadri Sid Harta Publishers

ISBN: 978-1-922958-08-2

Available from your local bookstore, BOOKTOPIA, eBook and online stores.

This book has been written about the struggles for survival of three generations of a Tatar family who lived through the most turbulent periods of Russian, as well as Chinese, history.

Tatars were subjected to assimilation policies by both the Tsarist and the Soviet regimes, causing them to resist such policies for many generations. The most turbulent periods of the 20th century have been briefly depicted in this book as the background of the struggle for survival by the family, who eventually succeeded not only to survive the genocidal policies of the communist regimes of Russia as well as China, but to also come to Australia to live prosperous and happy lives.



"The grey ashes of the cruelty of mankind to the so-called lesser beings in many societies has blown over me since reading *Genocide Under the Red Sun*. Thank you Roostam for your history of your family and the Tatar peoples. I highly recommend this book."

Judith Flitcroft, author of
 Walk Back in Time

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that their advice should always guide you to what's most socially or culturally acceptable, problems can arise.

Sahaj Kaur Kohli knows this firsthand. When she was 30, she founded Brown Girl Therapy, an Instagram mental health community for children of immigrants that now has over 200,000 followers. But when Kohli decided to study further to become a clinical mental health counsellor, she was advised to delete her social media accounts and try to remove information about herself from the internet. The advice-giver felt it might interfere with her new career as a counsellor. But Kohli disagreed.

"It felt like a rejection of what I wanted to do with my life," she says. Whereas her advice-giver saw her social media presence as a career blocker, Kohli saw no reason to hide her lived experience.

While Kohli ultimately ignored the advice, she wishes she'd asked herself if the other party understood her values before fretting over their advice.

Personally motivated advice is usually pretty easy to spot. A parent may encourage a certain university path because they believe it brings more

prestige or financial independence. A friend may advise their secret crush to leave their current partner. It's harder when people don't recognise their own underlying biases.

TRUST YOURSELF

That's why Eddie often gathers a range of perspectives. He calls his group of advice-givers 'The Panel', and it's made up of his wife, mother and some friends and colleagues. Their advice helps him see different sides of sticky issues – pushing him to consider different outcomes.

But in the end, he's the one who makes the decision. "I believe in the saying, 'Seek the advice of many, but follow your own counsel'," he says. Kohli subscribes to the same approach for herself and her clients. One of the biggest lessons she's learned as a mental health professional, she says, is that everyone is an expert on their own life.

She sees her role as asking questions to help a person get the perspective they need to make a choice – even if those around them may disagree with it.

Now that's good advice.





Quite A Number

A 'lucky' number plate with just the letter 'R' was sold at auction in Hong Kong for a staggering US\$3.1 million (A\$4.4 million). 'R' is associated with racing cars and is also a lucky character in Chinese fortune telling. DAILY STAR





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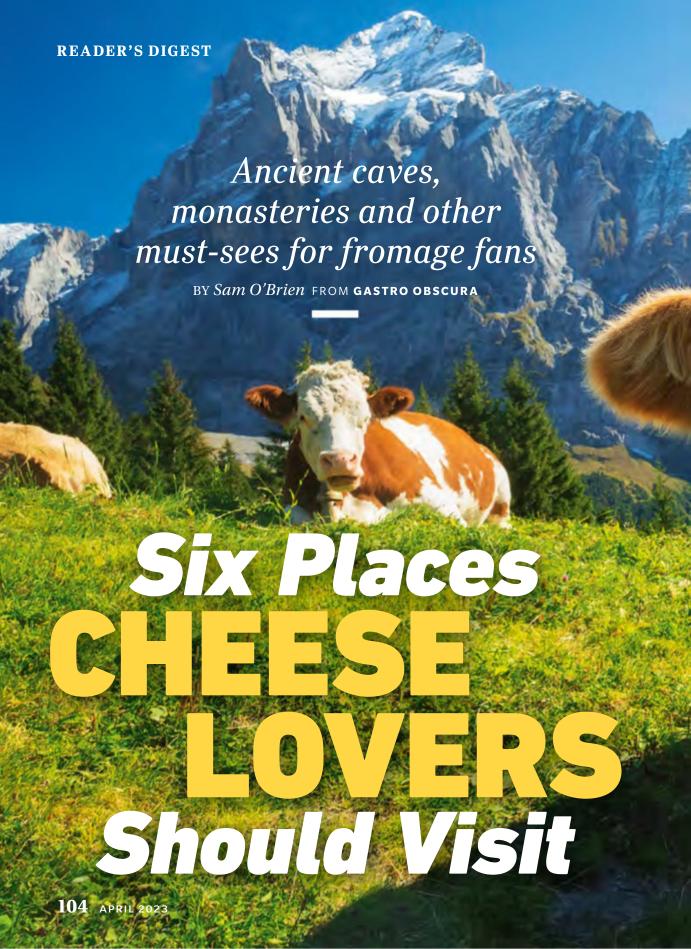
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here's something about cheese that elicits a kind of passion and loyalty unrivalled in the culinary world. That might be why people are willing to traverse mountains, wander through caves, even the most-mighty

and milk even the most-mighty beasts, all in the pursuit of a delicious dairy product.

Beyond the storied, classic purveyors of Brie and burrata, however, there's a vast network of adventurous cheesemakers and aficionados. Here are six places where fans can fulfil their love for *fromage*.

But few know that the cheese is meticulously aged in the Kaltbach Cave, a tunnel-like sandstone formation inside Santenberg mountain with climatic conditions that are just right for ripening cheese. The cool subterranean labyrinth, said to be 22 million years old, is the natural incubator for up to 120,000 wheels of cheese, mostly Gruyère and Emmental.

Stacked shelves stretching more

blue company logo and Swiss cross.

Stacked shelves stretching more than one-and-a-half kilometres hold the cheese at a temperature of 12.5°C year-round, and the cool waters of the stream (*Kaltbach* means 'cold stream') that runs through the cave keep humidity levels at around 96 per cent. The cave's unique climate and the interaction between the sandstone's

KALTBACH, SWITZERLAND Kaltbach Cave

In the undulating green sprawl of an Alpine valley not far from Lucerne, where clouds swim against snow-capped mountains and placid cows graze on verdant meadows, a cave formed from a prehistoric seabed carries a glorious culinary secret. Many shoppers browsing cheese aisles in supermarkets around the world will recognise the little wedges of Emmi Kaltbach Le Gruyère, with their distinctive black labels featuring a

Kaltbach Cave provides ideal conditions for ripening cheese

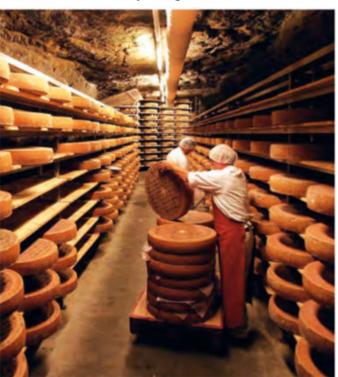


PHOTO: REUTERS/MICHAEL BUHOLZER/ALAMY IMAGES



What Mother Nature provides, our master blenders perfect.



READER'S DIGEST

mineral deposits and the cheese create a distinctive flavour and aroma, and give the rinds their signature dark brown colour.

Like artists working on their masterpiece, cave masters turn, wash and brush the wheels with a brine solution every seven to ten days. The cheeses stay in the cave for up to nine months, diligently monitored until they reach just the right aromatic and textural maturity. The art of caring for and gauging the maturity of cheese is a skill transferred down through generations of cave masters at Kaltbach, with no written record of the training.

The cave was discovered in 1953; in need of storage space, local cheese-makers began keeping their cheese there. In 1993, Emmi acquired the cave and has been crafting, storing and ageing their finest cheeses in it since.

BJURHOLM, SWEDEN The Elk House (Älgens Hus)

Moose milk is sold commercially in both Russia and Sweden, but one small farm with a herd of 11 moose, The Elk House (moose are also known as elk in some communities) is the only place in the world that produces moose cheese. The proprietors of the farm are famous enough for their moose-based dairy products that they now have an upscale restaurant, gift shop and museum for visitors, who can meet the domesticated moose.

TILLAMOOK, USA Tillamook County Creamery Association

In the northwest state of Oregon, cheese cubes hang from the ceiling in this creamery's recently renovated visitors centre, which also features such memorabilia as a 1927 butter churner and a stamp used to authenticate packaged blocks as genuine Tillamook cheese. Most impressive is the view of the factory floor, where blocks of cheese as big as milk crates roll down a conveyor belt and are boxed, then transported to a warehouse where they are aged from 60 days to ten years. You can also get a behindthe-scenes glimpse of the production and packaging process; each day, the creamery processes 800,000 kilograms of milk and churns out at least 85,000 kilograms of cheese. It is both a marvel of cheese engineering and a slice of the past.

Cheddar cheese has a long history in Tillamook County. A local cheddar won the grand prize at the 1904 St Louis World's Fair. In 1909, several creameries in the area formed the Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA) to act as a quality control organisation for the cheddar made throughout the county. A cheddar recipe first developed in the 19th century is still used, and the spirit of excellence has not waned. In July last year the TCCA took home four golds, one silver and two bronzes at the International Cheese and Dairy Awards.

"An honest and heartfelt story of discovery"

-Anna Weaving, Artist & Musician



Even before Zoe was born, she was in trouble. She was a magnet for perils, and life was far from ordinary.

She attracted the good, and the bad, including Jim- her childhood sweetheart who swept her off her feet and into wedded bliss. Zoe was carefree and happy.

Until a visit to a clairvoyant revealed a deep dark secret that sent Zoe searching for answers that would turn her perfect life upside down...

Unravelled is the debut novel based on a true story by Sydney author, Zoe Fanning.

Available soon from all good bookstores, and as an e-book from:









France's Tamié Abbey specialises in soft cheese made from raw cow's milk

PLANCHERINE, FRANCE Tamié Abbey Tamié Abbey sits in serene surroundings in the Bauges mountain range in France's Savoie department. Founded in the 12th century, it is today home to around 25 Trappist monks who run a small dairy and cheesemaking operation that produces Abbaye de Tamié, a soft cheese made from raw cow's milk.

As of 2021, the monastery processed around 3500 litres of milk per day, making about 420 kilograms of Abbaye de Tamié cheese, which is pressed and moulded into wheels. It's then immersed in a brine bath for two to three hours before being moved to the abbey's cellars, where it is turned every other day and aged for four weeks.

Not wanting to waste anything

Six Places Cheese Lovers Should Visit



during the cheesemaking process, the monks at Tamié Abbey came up with an innovative use for their by-products. In 2003, they built an anaerobic digestion plant, and are able to use excess whey and wash-water to produce bio-gas. This is used to power the abbey's hot-water system. The success of this initiative has inspired similar systems in France, most notably the 'cheese-based' power plant in nearby Albertville, which supplies enough electricity to meet the annual needs of more than 300 local homes.

Abbaye de Tamié cheese is often compared to Reblochon, but is slightly thicker. Both cheeses are made using raw milk, enhancing its *terroir* – or the characteristic taste and flavour imparted to the cheese by the environment in which it is made. This helps give Abbaye de Tamié its nutty, fruity and distinctively earthy flavour.

Abbey of Regina Laudis
The Abbey of Regina Laudis, appropriately located in the town of Bethlehem in the northeastern state of Connecticut, is home to Benedictine nuns with a taste for life's finer cheeses. Mother Noella, who earned the nickname the 'Cheese Nun' after appearing in a 2002 documentary of

the same name, spearheaded the abbey's foray into the artisanal market. A local farmer gave the abbey its first cow in the 1970s and the nuns began creating their specialty: the raw milk, uncooked, fungal-ripened Bethlehem Cheese, which is similar to France's Saint-Nectaire cheese. They learned their technique from a third-generation French cheesemaker.

Mother Noella was even able to use Bethlehem Cheese as the basis for her graduate research, earning

A nun holds a fungal-ripened cheese from the Abbey of Regina Laudis



PHOTO: ROBERT FALCETTI

READER'S DIGEST

her a doctorate in microbiology from the University of Connecticut. A Fulbright scholarship later brought her to France, where she ventured into the country's cheese caves to study fungus. She used her research to determine how fungus affects the odour and taste of different cheeses as they mature.

When she first began creating cheese at the abbey, there was only one other artisanal cheesemaker in Connecticut. Though the industry has since boomed in the US, the Abbey of Regina Laudis remains one of a small number of dairies that are licensed to produce and sell raw milk products. The nuns still make Bethlehem Cheese at the abbey, as well

as other varieties like ricotta, mozzarella and cheddar. Most of the cheese is consumed by residents of the abbey and guests, but it is sometimes sold in the abbey's gift shop along with other homemade treats like bread, honey and jams.

ZEITZ, GERMANY
Cheese Mite Memorial
In the tiny eastern German village of Würchwitz stands a memorial in honour of a microscopic local hero: the cheese mite. For without



Cheesemakers Helmet Pöschel (left) and Christian Schmelzer with their monument to the cheese mite

this mite, locals could not produce their famous specialty cheese, Milbenkäse.

Milbenkäse has been produced in the Saxony-Anhalt region since the Middle Ages, but the traditional method was almost lost in the mid-1900s when the East German government outlawed the production and sale of mite-infested products. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany, local science teacher Helmut Pöschel, using techniques passed down by his

Six Places Cheese Lovers Should Visit

mother and grandmother, managed to preserve the tradition. Today, Milbenkäse is produced only in the small village of Würchwitz.

Milbenkäse is made by flavouring a soft, white, and unaged cheese called quark with caraway, dried elderflowers, and salt. The cheese is shaped into balls, wheels, or cylinders, which are then dried and left in a wooden box containing rye flour and cheese mites (Tyrophagus casei).

This is when the magic happens. For at least three months, the cheese mites secrete enzymes over the cheese, causing it to turn yellow and then a darker reddish-brown as it ripens. Some cheesemakers let the process continue for up to one year, by which time the cheese has turned

black. Well done, cheese mites. When the cheese is ready to eat, the mites are not removed; instead they are eaten along with the cheese. There are other cheeses, such as Mimolette from France, that use mites to create a pitted rind, but Milbenkäse is unique in using them throughout the cheesemaking process.

It's no wonder that local cheesemakers in Würchwitz decided to honour the hard-working cheese mites with a memorial. It's not the prettiest of things, but it is a fitting tribute to both the mites and the cheese they help produce. R

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Shocking Events

South Korean social media and internet sites were abuzz with messages late last year from people who said they saw a soaring object and mysterious lights which appeared to be a UFO. To quash rumours that triggered the public scare, the country's military confirmed it had test-fired a rocket. In a statement, the Defence Ministry said it didn't notify the general public of the launch in advance because it involved sensitive military security issues. The launch is part of the country's efforts to build a space-based surveillance capability.

Meanwhile, closer to the ground, a woman from Hobart in Tasmania was left shocked when she mistook a real live Tasmanian devil hiding under her couch for her dog's plush toy. Her husband came to the rescue and ushered the furry carnivorous marsupial out of the house with a broom. HUFFPOST.COM

BONUS READ

Splendid Solation



t was 5am over an airport called Keflavík. It was dark. It was wet. There was an edgy wind that made my flight's touchdown from Boston one of those Hail Mary moments where even a non-believer like myself asks for divine intervention.

None was needed. The Icelandair pilots negotiated this fleeting existential crisis with aplomb – as if such epic, crazed crosswinds were the usual welcome home.

An hour later, still in the dark and relieved that I had resisted alcohol during the last three hours of the flight – owing to Iceland's low tolerance for booze in your system when driving – I was behind the wheel of a rented car, negotiating the 50 kilometres into Reykjavík. I couldn't help

but think that arriving in pre-dawn blackness, with the rain sheeting down like something out of Nordic film noir, was the perfect start to my August 2021 journey into geographic isolation.

Travel is always freighted with expectations. Coming to this distant outpost of human habitation – a one-time Danish dependency whose nearest landmass was that cartological tabula rasa called Greenland – I didn't know what I would find in this

vast, underpopulated (376,000 inhabitants) subarctic island nation, whose global position and its co-habiting arrangement with the European Union made it the balcony of Europe.

What I didn't expect to encounter, as I approached the fringes of its capital, was a traffic jam, one of those vast automotive blockages that stretched to the edge of vision. Having sped along at 90 kilometres per



Author Douglas Kennedy is an American writer and novelist; he has sold more than 15 million books worldwide



Reykjavík: in Iceland, twilight is a drawn-out dying of the light

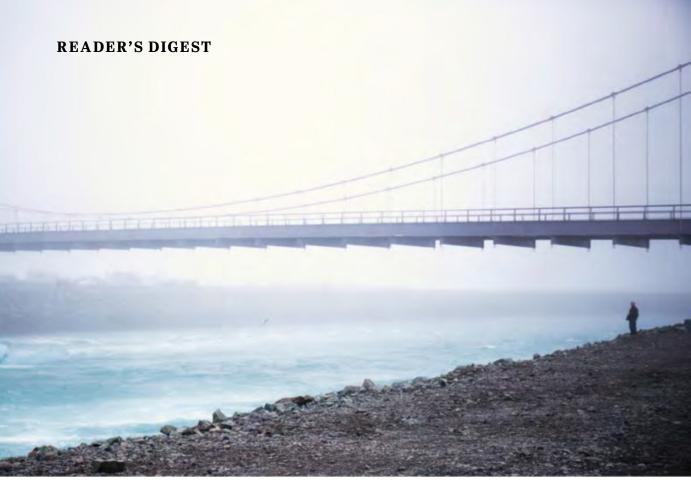
hour on the dual carriageway from the airport, I suddenly found myself in Reykjavík's morning rush hour. Absolute gridlock. A long, slow slog towards the city centre. It took almost an hour to travel the last ten kilometres to my hotel.

What did I see as I crept along to my destination? All the totemic signs of global monoculture. The usual fast-food outlets. The usual shopping centres. Office blocks with neon signs informing you that here were far-flung outlets of international finance and banking. Suburban houses. Tower blocks in rather pristine condition; possibly the Reykjavík variations of low-income housing.

And, in the midst of this modernist, concrete sprawl, a coagulation of cars. Is there any better metaphor for the pitilessness of modern life than a traffic jam? Arriving in such an inaccessible place and finding myself stuck in the usual Monday morning nonsense, while passing the usual chicken and hamburger emporiums and big box stores, I couldn't help but think, is nowhere in the world free of the ferociously neutralising hand of the consumerist multi-national?

EVENTUALLY I REACHED MY HOTEL.

I found a parking spot right outside its door. "You are lucky," the woman behind the desk said.



The sky here was a moody, ever-changing cycle of grey irritability

"Parking in central Reykjavík is impossible."

I still had some hours before my room was ready. The receptionist directed me to The Sandholt right down the street. "The best place for breakfast in Reykjavík," she said. "But you will have to queue."

She was right: the queue lasted 30 minutes. It was worth the wait. The café was Scandinavian minimalist chic. The coffee was sublime. They had their own bakery with dangerously good bread and pastries.

The rain had subsided outside, but a boreal wind was blowing. Though winter was still some months off, I could already feel it knocking on the door, informing all comers: "This is Iceland ... you can't keep me away for long." I drank my coffee and observed the couples at the other tables. All in their 30s and early 40s, many with children, with their edgy eyewear, designer prams and a sense of discreet, non-ostentatious professional class money behind them.

I didn't see anybody wearing a suit or carrying anything that hinted at serious office work. In fact, I rarely saw formal business clothes on anyone in Reykjavík. Maybe I wasn't looking in the right places – law offices, government buildings, banks.

For all of the Icelandic capital's suburban sprawl, its centre was compact and possessing a primary-colours charm. Small back streets with small wooden houses. Upmarket boutiques selling Icelandic designers, outdoor gear, handicrafts and Swiss watches. Subdued prosperity. A sense of urban serenity and order and quietude, as one would expect from a country that, until 2008, prided itself on its social democracy and communal calm.

But 2008 was the year when Ice-

IN 2008,

BANKRUPTCY FOR

THE ENTIRE

NATION LOOKED

LIKE A REAL

POSSIBILITY

land lost its isolated innocence; when it witnessed the default of all three of its major privately-owned commercial banks, following their difficulties in refinancing shortterm debt. It triggered a run on its

deposits in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Relative to the size of its economy, Iceland experienced what was claimed to be the largest systemic banking collapse in economic history. There was a moment when bankruptcy for the entire nation looked like a serious possibility.

Where there had been stability and a formidable social safety net, there was now massive insecurity as Iceland suddenly found itself in fiscal freefall, courtesy of the sort of cowboy financial speculation that

once seemed improbable in such a model of rectitude and communality.

There were protests, many of which turned angry. The prime minister's car was pelted by eggs. Many citizens lost their entire financial foundation. A centre-left government came into power, and the former prime minister was put on trial and found guilty of one charge of failing to hold emergency meetings in the lead-up to the crisis. In a very Icelandic move, he didn't go to prison.

Fiscal stability was restored. Pru-

dence and pragfore. But the shadered this on my first

matism came back to the communal ow of this near disaster, the sense of anger and shame, is still there below the country's calm surface. I discov-

night in Iceland, when I met a middle-aged university lecturer whom I'll call Gunnar in a Reykjavík bar. After sharing war stories about our respective divorces (as one does over booze late at night), he mentioned that he lost a significant part of his savings in the 2008 debacle.

"What can I say?" he asked, motioning for the waiter to pour us two more local Flóki whiskies.

"I lost so much by trusting the speculators. And like so many of us here I am still dealing with its terrible

READER'S DIGEST

after-effects. But life is about surmounting difficulties, isn't it? Still, I feel we were all seduced by the craziness of gamblers whom we mistakenly believed could line our pockets. We forgot our essential values as a country ... and we paid a price."

I mentioned the shock of all the fastfood and big-box detritus on the outskirts of Reykjavík. And the traffic jam. "Oh, I get it," Gunnar said. "You come here with the usual false impressions of us being socialist Vikings, detached from the modern world."

I smiled and said: "Don't we all

think in picture post-cards?"

To which Gunnar replied: "The thing about Iceland is, 30 kilometres outside of Reykjavík the modern world vanishes."

Actually, it was

about 20 kilometres out of Reykjavík that I found myself becoming detached from contemporary realities. I was driving along a two-lane road, traversing a landscape that reminded me of the west of Ireland in its austere verdancy and its craggy grandeur. Though it was late summer, the temperature outside was around nine degrees Celsius and the sky was a moody, ever-changing cycle of grey irritability.

For almost an hour I passed only one or two signs of human

habitation: the occasional house, a rural shop.

Radio transmission quickly faded away. The wonders of 4G signals also faded in and out, meaning that any streamed music came and went: I had chosen Sibelius for the first part of this journey – his Finnish melancholia so suited the bleak terrain. There was something intriguingly distorted about the dark rhapsodic soundscape of his Fifth Symphony – with its endless struggle between darkness and light – blasting for a time, then vanishing as my little

rented Toyota Yaris struggled up a hill, providing me with a sweeping vista of epic sullenness.

I passed just one petrol station during my first hours on the road. The laconic guy at the car rental

agency near the airport had asked me about my itinerary and gave me a curt warning: "Even if you think you've got enough petrol to get to the next town, always fill up whenever you see a petrol station. Because, truth be told, you won't see many of them outside of towns. And as you will discover, towns tend to be far apart here."

I glanced at the gauge on my dashboard and saw that I had enough petrol to cover the 400 kilometres I was driving today. I still decided to





Strokkur Geyser sends hot water blasting 20 metres skywards from the ground

fill up. The petrol station was a onepump affair with a tiny store. A real middle-of-nowhere place. An old man came out. He nodded gruffly then waited for my instructions.

"Fill it up please," I said.

He did as requested. When the petrol pump stopped, he looked at me with world-weary incredulousness.

"Your tank was almost full."

"I was just being prudent," I said.

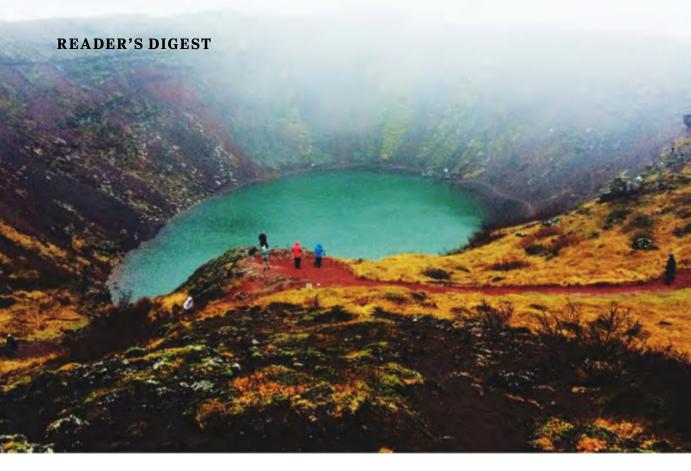
"No, you were being paranoid."

A GEYSER: a blast of hot water that thermally explodes from the ground. An aquatic eruption that has the potential to seriously scald anyone

standing close by. In Strokkur, everyone was standing close by with their phones at the ready, awaiting the explosion.

I tend to dodge tourist spots, but in Iceland certain natural phenomena made me put aside my determination to avoid insidious tour-bus groups with their selfie sticks. It would have been foolish to miss the chance to see water blast upwards from terra firma. Personally, I was more intrigued by the burbling brooks near the central geyser - the black earth and the low grey afternoon brought to mind Bela Lugosi's Dracula from 1931.

But all the bus people stood around



Staring into the Kerid Crater gives one an idea of why Norse myths are so primal

a large muddy mound. The flatulent, subterraneous noises gave the impression that it was having gastric problems or a bad case of Tourette's syndrome. And then, with one loud *whoosh*, it burst into ecstasy, sending water 20 metres into the air. People immediately scattered.

I couldn't help but think of one of the most quoted lines about sex from Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls: "He felt the Earth move." In this instance that was the actual case. A fellow American standing near me, in a reference to the famous US geyser Old Faithful [a geothermal feature in Yellowstone National Park that erupts every 44 minutes to two hours], asked his wife: "Do you think that happens every hour on the hour?"

To which the woman – large, formidable, and clearly carrying decades of grievances – hissed in reply: "It's Mother Nature, you idiot."

A CRATER IN THE EARTH – 3000 years old, 170 metres wide, 55 metres deep. A seismic gash, probably caused by a collapsed volcano. I walked its upper ridge, staring down into its vertiginous cavern. I found myself thinking: One of the many reasons we are drawn to extreme natural phenomena that plunge into the earth – grottos, caves, the Grand

Canyon - is bound up in the human preoccupation of the netherworld being beneath us. The earth from which mankind emerged and to which we are all destined to return.

A vast gash in the Earth is also a geophysical metaphor for the subterranean hell to which the damned are doomed - and where those who embrace its shadows are fated to be enveloped by its darker recesses. Orpheus follows Eurydice into the underworld and loses the love he so craves because he reneges on Hades's command not to turn back and look at her.

In caverns nothing good can transpire, which is why we are drawn to them. Staring down into this canyon known as the Kerid Crater - I began to understand why

Norse sagas and myths are so damn primal.

The sun doesn't go down with a dark vengeance in Iceland. Twilight is a drawn-out dying of the light. When night finally falls, the narrow roads in the hinterland (that is, everywhere outside of Reykjavík) become even more lonely and truly eerie.

I found myself in a modernist hotel in a tiny nowhere town of Vik. I sidestepped reindeer on the menu. I ate Arctic fish and drank overpriced Argentinian white wine and got to

talking with the waitress, an émigré from Poland. How did she find her way from Kraków to this back of the back of beyond, a town with a supermarket, a petrol station, this hotel, several low-lying modernist blocks and little more?

Graznya (not her actual name) told me that she was an artist: that she needed to run away from the populist realities and general erosion of civil liberties in Poland; that Iceland, with its cooperative agreement with the European Union, gave her residency and employment without

bureaucratic hurdles: that she loved the remoteness and visceral rush of its frequently hard landscape; that she knew where to "find myself in places so remote, so raw, that I truly believe I am

not part of the shit of modern life."

She went on: "Yes, I live in a tiny village. But I can be an artist here and make enough here to maintain a good life. I do this job a few hours a week and spend the rest of my time painting and heading out into the wild. And I am far, far away from the madness of Poland."

I wanted to know more: did her family or someone else in her life cause her to flee Poland, to live so far off the grid? And what kind of temperament was required to live

READER'S DIGEST

in such isolation with all its cultural limitations? As if reading my mind, she said: "I know what you're thinking: She came to Iceland to flee her past. And now, having ended up at the end of the world, will she fall off its edge? But one of the many good things about this country is that as isolated as we all are up here, there is a sense that there are enough people looking out for you to ensure you don't tumble into the abyss. Not that I am planning to do that!"

She went off to bring a couple at the adjoining table their main courses.

Intriguingly, that sense of a quiet-but-present social safety net in Iceland was confirmed by many other outsiders I met during my travels – Dutch, Bulgarians, Swiss, and two more Poles. Living here is

underscored by the communal knowledge that regardless of its epic visual loneliness, you were never alone.

A BLACK BEACH. At the end of a narrow peninsula overshadowed by a hill with a Matterhorn-like build. There was nothing in this southeast corner of Iceland except a little café and a very simple hotel for those wanting to hike in this ultra-remote place. And a couple of locals drinking beer in the early afternoon. I ordered a hot chocolate. The owner – a

woman in her 50s, the very embodiment of the Icelandic Earth-Mother type – told me: "If you want to go to the black beach the road is private. So I have to charge you."

The fee was the equivalent of ten euros (A\$15). I paid it.

"Why the charge for the road?" I asked. Madame Earth Mother rolled her eyes and said, "Capitalism."

The gate – the sort that keeps livestock and wild animals from wandering – opened with the smart card the woman handed me. I was amused by this bit of modern technological

gate-keeping in the absolute middle of nowhere.

The road beyond was semi-paved and dead-ended some kilometres away at a NATO post – a Cold War relic that was undoubtedly still being

used as a monitoring station at this complex geopolitical time. (Iceland, by the way, is the only NATO member without any sort of standing army or military force.) I did a U-turn when I reached its lightly barbed-wire confines and bumped back along the road until, at the far side, I suddenly

I parked and walked towards the round formations. My walking boots began to make scrunching sounds. I bent down and felt the earth beneath

saw what looked like a series of dark

hummocky mounds of earth.



Akureyri is the only city at the top of Iceland; its population is less than 18,000

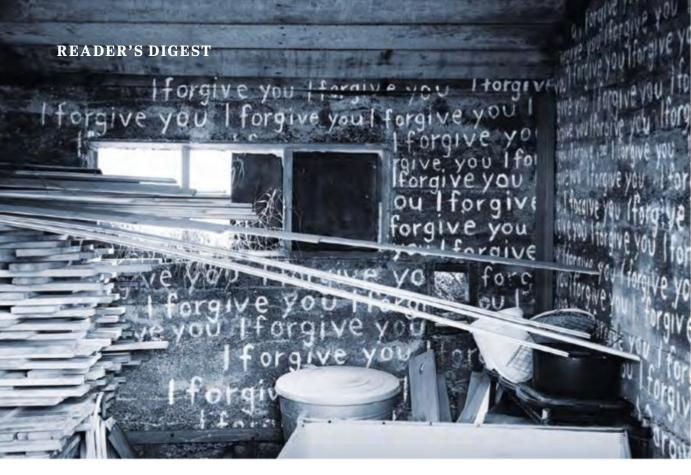
me. It was granulated. It cascaded through my fingers. It was sand. Black sand. Probably volcanic in geologic origin. And those hummocky structures were, in fact, sand dunes.

As I walked further from the unpaved road, as I headed towards the choppy, Arctic waters of the North Atlantic, the black sand defined a horizon that ended at a black sea.

This was a first for me. Though my peripatetic life has taken me to many back-of-beyond places, I'd never felt so disconnected from the noise and detritus of the modern world as I did right now. Black sand and a black sea, capped by a sky of deep greyness. A geographic tabula rasa.

The only city at the top of Iceland is called Akureyri. 'City' is a bit of a misnomer; Akureyri has a population of less than 18,000, which still makes it one of country's biggest population centres. It has chic shops and a modern cultural centre where Icelandic pop artists and a Reykjavík production of Madame Butterfly were due some weeks after I left. I even found a halal café and an émigré community from the Middle East. How on Earth did they make their way to Akureyri? Every life is indeed a novel.

In a rather stylish boutique I heard a truly ethereal young woman speak fluent Icelandic, then switch into American-inflected English. A native of Los Angeles, she had "met a boy", as she ironically put it, who grew up in Akureyri and wanted to return home. Jump cut to several years



In the deserted barn, someone had written the same three words over and over

later and here she was, the mother of two young children, living in the far north of Iceland and running her own emporium of Icelandic style.

"Coming here must have been quite the adjustment," I said.

"Do I miss the blue skies of LA? And the beaches? Sure. But there's snow here seven months a year, and I've come to love that. Just as I am happy to be away from all the political extremism and craziness that is America today."

The next night, sitting in a shabby bar in a shabby hotel in a shabby seaside town on the country's west coast - one of the few depressing places I'd been in my travels here - the manager poured me a vodka and told me that in the morning I should walk to the back of the hotel and find a deserted barn, inside which someone had written three words over and over. He wouldn't tell me the words or explain how or why they were scrawled there. He wanted me to see it and draw my own conclusion.

I drank too much vodka with the manager, a burly fellow in his 60s who'd fled the Reykjavík finance world after the crash and was happily running this dive hotel.

"This is the best place in Iceland!" he proclaimed sometime after vodka number four. "This is the best place in the world!"



READER'S DIGEST

The vodka was playing games with my critical faculties, so I simply told him that I was happy that he was happy here at the end of the world. Then I found my way up to my room and passed out.

When I woke hungover a few hours later, I threw on my clothes and headed out into the morning. I crossed to the barn. A tumbledown structure, completely dark inside. Clicking on

the torch in my phone, I found myself immediately blindsided.

Scrawled everywhere in white handwriting were indeed three words: I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you.

Was this some strange piece of per-

formance art? A post-modernist practical joke? Or an actual declaration of forgiveness for some inflicted pain? And what possessed somebody to execute many hundred perfectly penned 'I forgive you's' in this nowhere barn in this nowhere town?

It was a wonderful riddle. Then again Iceland likes its mysteries, its

enigmas – which, like its potently hypnotic terrain, play games with your sensibility and remind you of your own insignificance in the larger metaphysical scheme of things.

In a world so stratified and wracked by ever-escalating extremism, Iceland serves as a quiet, important reminder that socially responsible democracy can re-emerge from the extremity of fiscal imprudence

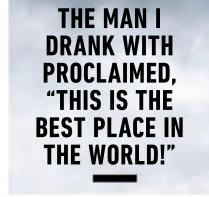
and that shared communal values are still considered an important civic underpinning to quotidian life.

And yet, even way up here on a windblown corner of Iceland's west coast, someone had taken the time to proclaim,

over and over again, mercy in the wake of evident agony. I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you.

Crazed compassion and pardon in a forgotten barn. And the ultimate Iceland enigma.

LE FIGARO (DECEMBER 30, 2021), © 2021 BY LE FIGARO MAGAZINE





Snagging A Snack

Hungry Germans craving a sausage in the dead of night are increasingly turning to vending machines for their bratwurst and bockwurst. The machines are booming outside German cities where shops are less likely to stay open for long hours. INDEPENDENT.CO.UK







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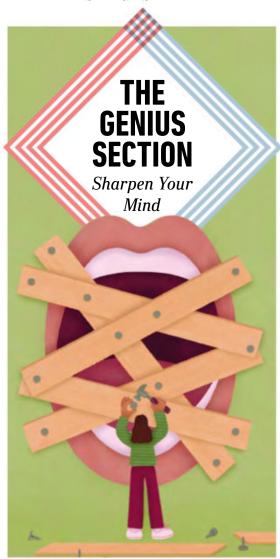


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GOSSIP Why We Need It

Not all gossip is bad. Here's how to quash the mean-spirited kind

BY Katherine Ashenburg

hen I was in primary school, the teachers insisted, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything." Alice Roosevelt Longworth, a famous socialite and gossip, took the opposite view. She kept a pillow on her sofa, needlepointed with her still-popular motto, "If you can't say something good about someone, sit right here by me."

People who study gossip define it as any talk about people who are not present. It can be positive, neutral or negative, but it's the mean-spirited variety - Alice Longworth's favourite - that has traditionally inspired disapproval. For many of us, hearing and telling scandalous stories counts as a guilty pleasure.

And yet, gossip is by no means a black and white affair. We have a natural need for human connection. and gossip feeds that for good and ill. There is even evidence that negative gossip can have merit, as it reinforces social norms. Much depends on the motivation of the gossiper: are they aiming to warn people about a bad actor or enjoying the malicious pleasure of spreading a harmful story? It all comes down to learning how to curb the mean variety while benefiting from the useful.

Why We Gossip

The reasons why people indulge in gossip or shun it are as individual as we are. In 20 years of friendship, I

have never heard Lyndsay Green, a sociologist and author of You Could Live A Long Time: Are You Ready?, dish the dirt on anyone. When I asked her why she never gossips, she traced her behaviour back to her school days and her own sense of security.

"People telling hurtful secrets seem vulnerable," she says. "They use gossip like a chip in gambling:

'I'm going to throw this in and I hope you will like me more'." It's a tactic that might work to gain connection in the short-term, Green surmises, but even as a kid she doubted that it built true friendship.

Still, it's a tempting habit - and many people can attest there's something undeniably seductive about being the bearer of scandalous news. For better or worse, a feeling of superiority can accompany having a juicy - and exclusive - piece of news to share. Dishing the dirt can feel fun and it can also bring us together, tightening social bonds. The trick is learning the benign from the bad.

Some Gossip Is Good

Despite its longstanding bad name, the past few decades have seen a surprising appreciation of gossip. Psychologists, sociologists and experts in organisational behaviour write that even snarkier gossip can be a powerful aid in bonding and social education.

Criticising those who have transgressed social norms, for example, encourages good conduct and serves as a deterrent to bad behaviour.

Scholars also hypothesise that the informational value of gossip was important for our ancestors: the people who knew what was going on in the next cave were more likely to survive than more isolated individuals.

> While it's not a lifeand-death matter today, gossip's informational function remains useful. Your colleagues' speculation about the company's change in leadership or focus can keep employees in the

loop. The same goes for potential developments in your communities and neighbourhoods.

Studies have also shown that gossip can alleviate loneliness, serve as a safety valve for frustration and stimulate the part of our brains that helps us deal with complicated relationships. It even calms down our bodies when it's used to help others, says Matthew Feinberg, a professor of organisational behaviour at the Rotman School of Management in Canada.

In one study, his subjects observed people cheating at a game. When they simply watched, their heart rates sped up. But when they were able to warn others, their heart rates returned to normal.

Motive Matters

Is your gossip empathetic, compassionate or appreciative? Or is it something intended to wound or, as Green recognised, to increase your status? John Fraser, a journalist and author, relishes and values gossip. Fraser's gossiping ticks some familiar boxes: he uses it to bond with people, to inform, to humiliate those he thinks deserve scorn, and to celebrate 'the human circus'. "Only in very rare circumstances do I believe in secrets," he says. He likes 'sharing stuff', which includes other peoples' secrets as well as his own.

While Lisa Schmidt, a coach and consultant, believes secrets should be respected, she agrees with Fraser on a key point: "Informational gossip greases the skids of the world."

If permission is given, sharing sensitive information may even provide opportunity for compassion. Say you learn that two friends are getting a divorce. Passing on the information may spare your friends the emotional exhaustion of telling everyone themselves. The listener may also respond by reaching out in kindness to one or both members of the couple to assure them of support.

Break The Habit

Delicious as it can be to share gossip, the malicious kind can – and often should – leave a bad taste in your mouth. Pay attention to your conversation. How much of it is sneering, or embroidering a discreditable story to make it even more shameful? Are you knowingly passing on information that is incomplete or incorrect?

When someone approaches her for coaching, Schmidt asks them, "Who do you want to be in the world?" As they work together, she keeps tugging them back to that ideal self. If she notices a client disparaging other people, she'll hold a mirror to the behaviour and say, "This is the language you're using. Does that align with the person of integrity you say you want to be?"

Also try to analyse yourself as a listener. As Schmidt tells her clients, "What you permit, you promote."

When people regularly come to you with sniping gossip and you allow it, you're creating a culture that feeds on meanness. You may simply say that you don't want to engage in that kind of talk. But even a more subtle response works.

I had a friend who, whenever I bad-mouthed someone, reminded me what was good about that person or about the difficulties in their life. Without ever commenting directly, she taught me that my gossiping was not going to be reciprocated. So I stopped.

Schmidt acknowledges that we won't always get it right. But if we keep pulling ourselves back to the person we want to be, it will get easier to chat about people in ways that are still fun, but never mean.

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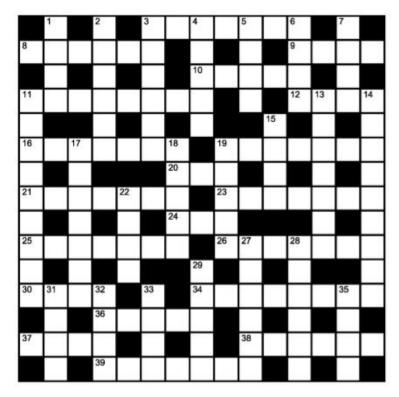
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Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 140.



ACROSS

- **3** Ringed (7)
- 8 ----- Goldberg, actress (6)
- 9 Highway (4)
- **10** Lax (5)
- 11 Last (8)
- **12** Heavy blow (4)
- **16** Predicted (7)
- **19** Spark off (7)
- 20 Belonging to us (3)
- **21** Another name for Satan (7)
- **23** Its capital is Montevideo (7)

- **24** Involuntary muscular contraction (3)
- 25 Up-to-date (2,5)
- **26** Covered (7)
- **30** Young lady (4)
- **34** Instruction for 'don't panic' (4,4)
- **36** Northern Irish Tyrone county town (5)
- 37 Forbidden action (2-2)
- 38 Vortices (6)
- **39** Learned the ropes (7)

Crossword

Test your general knowledge.

DOWN

- 1 North Wales seaside resort (4)
- 2 Incentive (6)
- **3** Shrill chirping insect (6)
- 4 Canons (5)
- **5** Landlocked SE Asian nation (4)
- 6 Sketched (4)
- **7** Father (4)
- 11 Spreading out (9)
- **13** Top brass (4-3)
- 14 Death for a cause (9)
- **15** Stead (4)
- 17 Earthquake scale (7)
- **18** Value (5)
- **19** Armistice (5)
- **22** Smoke duct (4)
- 27 Approached (6)
- **28** Agree (6)
- **29** Grey (5)
- **31** "Prince ---", Borodin opera (4)
- **32** Spoils (4)
- 33 Individual facts (4)
- 35 Sediment (4)



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

Sudoku

HOW TO PLAY: To win, put a number from 1 to 9 in each outlined section so that:

- Every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numerals (1-9) without repeating any of them;
- Each of the outlined sections has all nine numerals, none repeated.

IF YOU SOLVE IT WITHIN:

- 15 minutes, you're a true expert
- **30** minutes, you're no slouch
- **60** minutes or more, maybe numbers aren't your thing

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READER'S DIGEST





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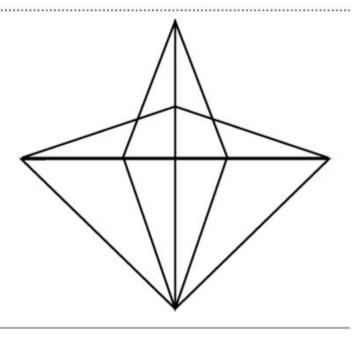




Triangle Wrangle

How many triangles appear in this diagram?





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Test Your General Knowledge

- **1.** Why were the plant species *Lamprocapnos spectabilis* and *Hoya kerrii* especially popular in February? *1 point*
- **2.** What was built in Austria in 2020 to be the tallest of its kind? *2 points*
- **3.** The first ever YouTube video, posted in 2005, featured what animals at the San Diego Zoo? *1 point*
- **4.** When stores in Japan play the song *Hotaru no Hikari*, known elsewhere as *Auld Lang Syne*, what does it signify? *I point*
- **5.** Due to wartime metal shortages, Academy Award winners from 1943 to 1945 were given temporary Oscars made of what? *1 point*
- **6.** Sweet *frittelle* and *galani* are pastries traditionally eaten during what festival in Venice? **2** *points*
- **7.** What kind of nut can spontaneously combust, making it a dangerous cargo to transport on ships? **2** points

- **8.** If you were at Point Nemo in the Pacific Ocean, where would you find your nearest human neighbours? *2 points*
- **9.** How many time zones does New Zealand have during the summer? *1 point*
- **10.** The arduous 1200-kilometre Finnmarksløpet, held every year in Norway, is Europe's longest distance race in what sport? *1 point*
- **11.** In what ocean did the RMS *Titanic,* at the time the largest and most luxurious ship in the world, sink in April 1912? *I point*
 - 12. Adolescent mammals share what feature that causes them to fall asleep and wake up later than adult populations? *1 point*
 - **13.** Eris, Makemake and Haumea are what kinds of objects in our solar system? *1 point*
 - **14.** What language has the most letters in its alphabet? *2 points*

15. The toquilla straw hat, known as the Panama hat, is made using a weaving technique from which country? 1 point

16-20 Gold medal 11-15 Silver medal 6-10 Bronze medal 0-5 Wooden spoon

Answers: 1. They have heart-shaped flowers or leaves. 2. A snowman. 3. Elephants. 4. Closing time. 5. Painted plaster. 6. Carnival. 7. Pistachio. 8. At the International Space Station. 9. Three. New Zealand, Chatham Islands and Tokelau. 10. Dog sledding. 11. North Atlantic Ocean. 12. Temporary circadian-cycle changes in the brain. 13. Dwarf planets. 14. Khmer (Cambodian), with 74 letters. 15. Ecuador.



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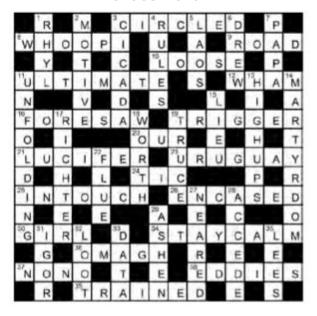
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PUZZLE ANSWERS

From Page 134

Crossword



Sudoku

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

Spot The Difference

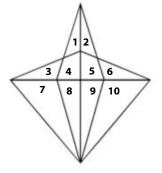


Triangle Wrangle

How many triangles appear in this diagram?

Answer: 24.

Triangles are formed by the following segments: 1,2,3,6,7,8,9,10,1+4,2+5,3+4,5+6,7+8,8+9,9+10,1+4+8,2+5+9,7+8+9,8+9+10,1+2+4+5,3+4+5+6,7+8+9+10,3+4+7+8,5+6+9+10.



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Show Your True Colours

Roll out the red carpet and prepare to be tickled pink: these vocabulary words are all related to colour. Will you win the blue ribbon or wave the white flag? Head over the rainbow to the next page for the answers.

By Sarah Chassé

- **1.** sanguine A: canary yellow. B: blood red. C: lime green.
- **2.** blanch A: become pale. B: feel blue, C: black out.
- **3. ombré** A: tie-dyed. B: bronze-plated. C: graduated in tone.
- **4.** alabaster A: white mineral. B: copper coin. C: violet-shaded gemstone.
- **5.** variegated A: striped. B: camouflaged. C: multicoloured.
- **6.** brindled A: tanned. B: having dark streaks or spots. C: rose-tinted.
- **7.** cerulean A: sky blue. B: royal purple. C: pink lavender.

- 8. monochromatic A: colourcoded. B: silvery. C: having one hue.
- **9. imbue** A: fade over time. B: glow red. C: to tinge or dye deeply.
- **10. sepia** A: brown. B: peach. C: lavender.
- **11.** hoary A: inky. B: off-colour. C: grey with age.
- **12. verdure** A: greenery. B: undertone. C: painter's palette.
- **13.** flaxen A: pastel. B: pale yellow. C: bleached.
- **14. celadon** A: navy blue. B: burnt orange. C: light green.
- **15. tinge** A: whitewash. B: slight tint. C: rust.

Answers

- **1. sanguine** (B) blood red. Smoke from bushfires can give the sun a sanguine hue, even thousands of kilometres away.
- **2. blanch** (A) become pale. Joe blanched with fear when he saw the snake.
- **3. ombré** (C) graduated in tone. Should I get ombré highlights in my hair or dye it all one colour?
- **4. alabaster** (A) white mineral. The museum has a large collection of statues carved from alabaster, a soft stone similar to marble.
- **5. variegated** (C) multicoloured. Margo's variegated outfit raised eyebrows at her grandfather's funeral.
- **6. brindle** (B) having dark streaks or spots. We adopted two puppies: Tiger is brindle and Pepsi is black.
- **7. cerulean** (A) sky blue. Known for its cerulean waters and whitesand beaches, the island is a top tourist destination.
- **8. monochromatic** (C) having one hue. The artist's early work was gloomy and monochromatic, but her later canvases are bright and colourful.

- **9. imbue** (C) to tinge or dye deeply. The setting sun imbued the sky with streaks of fuchsia.
- **10. sepia** (A) brown. Rebecca uses a sepia Instagram filter to give her photos a nostalgic and warm look.
- **11. hoary** (C) grey with age. "I wasn't always this hoary and wrinkled, you know!" Grandpa joked.
- **12. verdure** (A) greenery. The cottage is nestled in the valley, surrounded by the verdure of the forest.
- **13. flaxen** (B) pale yellow. Letting out a soft whinny, the stallion shook his flaxen mane.
- **14. celadon** (C) light green. Dr Porter's office is decorated in soothing shades of celadon and teal.
- **15. tinge** (B) slight tint. The flower's petals are usually white with a lilac tinge at the edges.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

5-8: Fair **9–12:** Good

13-15: Word Power Wizard

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Cosy cover comes off so it's easy to wash





Lovely, Persian-Style Rug – A traditional design you can afford!

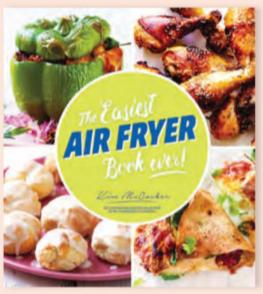
Enhance your home with the beauty of a traditional, Persian-style design without paying a sky-high price. Tough and hard-wearing yet wonderfully soft to the touch, this rug is made from easy-clean polyester backed with PVC dots to help keep it securely in place on a hard floor. A versatile 230 x 160 cm, it's perfect for the lounge, dining room or hall, or for bringing colour and warmth to a bedroom.

Traditional Style Rug
• TRDIR \$119 or
\$29.75 x 4 mths



Only \$2 Postage! - Quote code RM234S when ordering





▼The Easiest Air Fryer Book Ever

Create restaurant quality meals by 'frying' using minimal oil and very hot air. Just about everything can be made in an air fryer that you would bake in an oven or fry on a stove top. Includes over

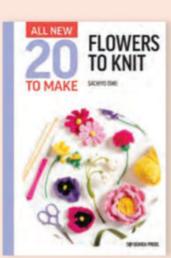
75 delicious recipes that can be created in 10 to 20 minutes and require little preparation. 144 pages.

• 67778 \$22.95

20 To Make Flowers To Knit ▶

For a bright splash of colour all year round, look no further than this collection of beautiful knitted blooms, brought to you by best-selling author Sachiyo Ishii. Includes the iconic English rose, an intricate peony, colourful freesia, distinctive Scotch thistle and more.

64 pages hardcover. • 69440 \$17.95



Air Fryer & Rotisserie - delicious, crispy, low-fat meals

Now you can enjoy restaurant-style rotisserie chicken and your other favourite foods cooked to crispy perfection with little or no added fat or oil. This 1600W all-in-one digital air fryer is incredibly easy to use. Simply



Includes mesh basket, tongs, rotisserie fork. wire rack & drip tray



360° Convection

Belle-Fleur Serviettes - 8 sets of lovely floral designs



These pretty paper serviettes are decorated with floral designs in contrasting styles that are also cleverly complementary. From bold irises to a bowl of roses, garden lavender to sprigs of dainty pink blooms, they capture the essence and variety of summer. Each of the 8 sets contain 20 paper serviettes measuring 33 x 33 cm and featuring one of the designs. All are 3 ply and printed with safe, water-based inks to capture the subtlety of their colours. Props not included.

Belle-Fleur Serviettes • BELLES \$22.95 8 sets of 20 Serviettes

Slide And Film Viewer

- enjoy your memories

Here's an easy way to relive happy memories, or decide which of vour 35mm negatives and 2 x 2" slides or negatives you'd like to digitise. This neat 15.5H x 8W x 16D cm viewer has an 8 x 8 cm glass lens, 3X magnification and bright, even lighting for sharp, clear images. Powered by 4 x AA batteries (not included), or with the USB cable supplied and your own adapter, it could

Slide And Film Viewer

bring hours of enjoyment.

 SFVW \$59 or \$29.50 x 2 mths

Relive your happy family memories

Simply insert slides, film or negatives to view

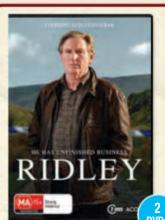
View photos, family portraits, or birthday snaps in an instant!

MAGNIFICATION

Offer ends 30/4/23

YELLOWSTONE

Only \$2 Postage! - Quote code RM234S when ordering



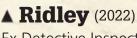
Yellowstone

- Seasons 1-4 (2018-2021) ▶

This brilliant series follows the Dutton family, led by John Dutton (Kevin **Costner**), who controls the largest ranch in the U.S. that is under constant attack. 17 DVDs. 34 hrs. SUBTITLES

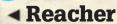
MYELT \$109 or \$27.25 x 4 mths

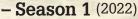




Ex Detective Inspector Alex Ridley is enlisted as a police consultant on a complex and compelling murder case with a dark and unexpected twist. 2 DVDs, 391 mins.

MRIDLE \$34.95





Retired Military Police Officer Jack Reacher was arrested for a murder he did not commit and finds himself in the middle of a deadly conspiracy. 3 DVDs, 368 mins.

SUBTITLES

MREACH \$39.95 or \$19.98 x 2 mths





Pink

You'll love the feel of these super-soft plush mats under your feet. They're also very absorbent to help keep your floor safely dry. Made from microfibre with a slip-resistant backing, both feature the same delightful rose design. Supplied as a set of two, the 80 x 50 cm bath mat and 50 x 50 cm pedestal mat will add a lovely decorative touch to any bathroom. The set is available in pink or sage.

> **Rose Petal Bath Mats** RPBMS \$44.95 each Set



Ceramic Vase with Faux Roses - an incredible display!



If your taste leans towards the traditional, you're sure to love this gorgeous antique-style vase filled with an abundance of lifelike roses. In teal-coloured ceramic with a flower and bird design, the vase is finished with gleaming gold coloured handles and base. The cream plastic roses are captured at every stage from when the buds first unfurl, set off by equally realistic greenery. At 26 cm tall and 27 cm wide, this will make a magnificent centrepiece. *Props not included*.

Ceramic Pot Of Artificial Roses • CPOTR \$59 or \$29.50 x 2 mths

Only \$2 Postage! - Quote code RM234S when ordering

Postag Offer ends 30/4/23

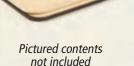
Puzzle Case

Jigsaw Puzzle Organiser Set 🔻

This fabulous accessory set for puzzle enthusiasts includes everything you need to make your puzzling projects easier. With a puzzle case, roll up mat and six stackable sorting trays each measuring 20 x 20 cm, you can have two puzzles on the go at once, then store them both away until you are ready to work on them again. The puzzle trays are indispensable for sorting your pieces by colour. Includes a 1500-piece portable puzzle case with non-slip felt lining and a 90 x 65 cm working area, plus side panels for sorting puzzle pieces. Gridded roll-up felt puzzle mat measures 105 x 78 cm, ideal for puzzles up to 2000 pieces.

• 61780 \$129 or \$32.25 x 4 months

> Sorting Trays



Gridded Puzzle Mat



Set Of 2 Copper Braceletsfamed for natural benefits!

For generations people have worn copper bracelets in their belief that they had natural benefits. Beautifully crafted from different shades of jewellers' copper. The Serpent design is woven from strands of red, yellow and white while the Wave features red and yellow. Both are 167 mm long, slip easily on to your wrist, and they even have a small 80 gauss magnet at each end for added effect. *Note: Not suitable*





Polo Neck Ponchocosy and easy to wear

Ponchos are both fashionable and practical – the ideal choice for cooler weather. This one is particularly cosy, knitted in soft, light and warm acrylic with a snug polo neck. With its bold black and red check on a camel-coloured background, it's also the height of style, and fringing adds a stylish finishing touch. You can easily pop it on and off and, measuring a generous 120 x 120 cm, it will comfortably fit most sizes.

Polo Neck Poncho • POLOS \$29.95



Our team are the heart and soul of our business.
Thanks for helping recognise the amazing work they do every day.



