Reader's Digest

MARCH 2024

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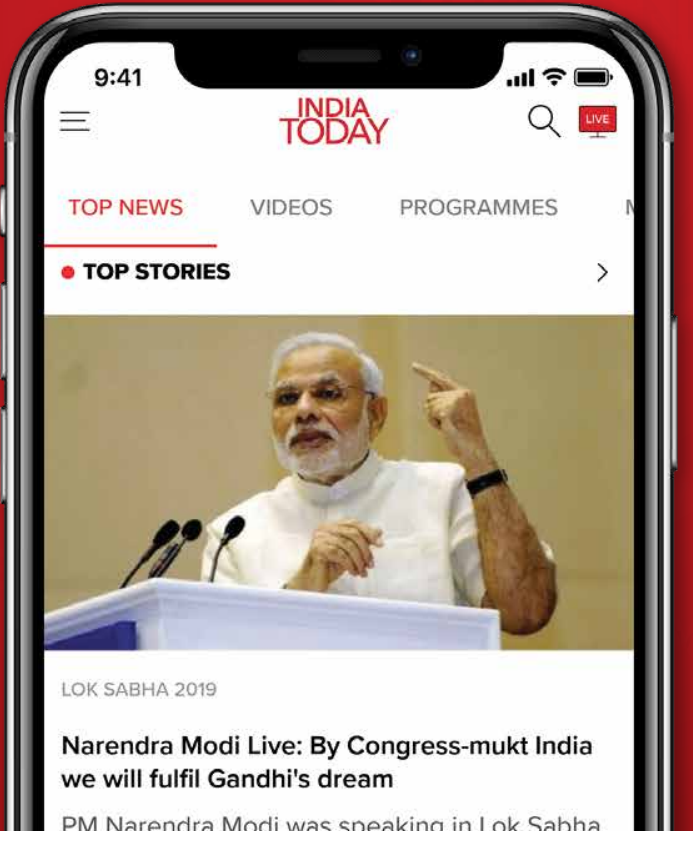


Record-holding 'Everest Twins' Tashi and Nungshi Malik

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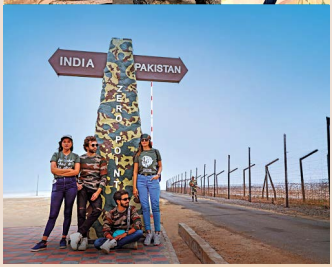
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GROUP PHOTO EDITOR Bandeep Singh

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OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE *January* ISSUE



GETTING OLD IS A FULL-TIME JOB

I turned 60 last year and it came with lots of unsolicited privileges—retirement, transition to the 'senior-citizen club' and earning the sobriquet 'uncle' even from those who addressed me as 'sir' or 'Mr' until a few days ago! Also, like the author, I now visit the neighbourhood chemist shop far more often than the liquor store. Even during overseas travels, I now look for skin toners, anti-ageing creams and other such magic potions rather than scotch or vodka! As another senior friend summed up the experience of being in our 60s: "Mind says go-go, body says no-no"!

ARVIND ARYA, *Mumbai*

Arvin Arya wins this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000. *—EDs*

The Cure Not Taken

Globally, cervical cancer is the fourth most widely reported cancer, accounting for 10 per cent of all cancers affecting women. Stepping up and experimenting with more proactive and diligent screening strategies at the primary- and secondary-levels of healthcare in in the country, is a vital public-health need of our times. It stands to reason that regular and robust cervical-cancer screening at the grass-roots-level accompanied by universal vaccination under the national immunization programme, especially in rural India, is a surefire way to realize a cervical-cancer-free nation. Only then will India have a fighting chance to expedite and realize the targets set by the World Health Organization for elimination of cervical cancer by 2030.

PRADEEP KUMAR, *Surat*

Just Add Poles

I am going to try this as soon as I can find a sports-goods store that stocks skiing poles. I am 83 and have been regularly walking since 1985. I keep a log, that ensures that I don't miss my walks. For the last few years, the health app on my phone has helped me keep a record of the distance I cover every day. A shortage of parks and decent, safe roads in Gurugram is a challenge to walking with tall poles but I will certainly give it a try.

KRISHAN KALRA, *Gurugram*

Lives in the Balance

Thanks to the summary, I was prepared for the story's graveness. But what I wasn't prepared for was the fit of crying



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that followed once I finished the read. The two incidents described by the author–neurosurgeon were thrilling, like a brilliant drama unfolding in front of your eyes. But, it was the second story that wedged a knife right through my heart. It highlighted how human beings have opportunities to learn from our choices even in the most unfortunate of situations. The mother's immeasurable grief while caring for her sick baby, yet loving it with every ounce of energy left in her, incites humility in the reader. I will carry the doctor's experiences forever with me.
MUGDHA LELE, *Pune*

On Becoming a Flâneur

During my early days, as a bachelor in Pune, I would go wandering aimlessly into the gullies of the city, chasing the thrill of discovering more than what meets the eye. When in Agra, I didn't drive up to the Taj but walked around and suddenly found the dazzling marble monument come into sight. When you take the time to get lost in a city, whichever one it may be, the joy is unparalleled!
DR N. GOPALAKRISHNAN, *Coimbatore*

Braving the Depths

With sacks tied around their saris and well-used goggles as their only equipment, the seaweed collectors of India's south-east coast have been diving in the Gulf of Mannar for decades, passing skills from mother to daughter. Climatic odds and marine pollution make it harder for these divers to make a living from their trade. For now, though, the women celebrate the financial independence the seaweed brings them. Although the dangerous habitat and unpredictable tides always pose a threat to their lives, it brings satisfactory wages to their homes.
SANJAY CHOPRA, *Mohali*

A group of middle-aged women who embark on this dangerous occupation from a tender age of 10, is a humbling realization as to what many people go through to earn a living. They make this perilious exercise sound simple: diving in their sarees, blouses and *chappals*, using homemade cloth bandages around their fingers to avoid sharp rocks amidst the seaweed. Here we see nature and humanity at odds with each other over access to this bounty below the sea. We have these young-at-heart women to thank for procuring seaweed, both a delicacy and a healthy addition to diets. Certainly a profession not for the faint-hearted.
PREETI ARANHA, *Mangalore*

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

A World of
GOOD
REASONS TO SMILE

Bike Bus Crossing

WITH THEIR HELMETS and Super Mario backpacks securely strapped on, the elementary school students—led by some parents and teachers—whiz down the streets of Brooklyn, New York, as taxis, vans and trucks make way. Commuting to school on two wheels used to be a thing, but not so much these days. The Bike Bus, a safe-streets movement gaining traction across the United States and abroad, aims to reverse that trend. Biking in a group is a social, safe way for kids to get exercise—and it's a lot more fun than riding a yellow bus. "My legs are a little tired," fifth grader Cai Ciaccia told the *New York Times,* "but I feel relaxed." R



SCOTT HEINS/BERGEN BIKE BUS



COURTESY OF ESTEFANÍA REBELLÓN

A School for the Displaced

Estefanía Rebellón is helping provide an education to children living in migrant camps

BY *Diane Peters*

IN A MIGRANT camp in Tijuana, Mexico, packed with hundreds of people, a three-year-old girl wandered alone toward the exit. She was steps from a busy road and a crowded market.

Estefanía Rebellón seemed to be the only person who noticed her. The actor, producer and writer had just made the two-and-a-half-hour drive from Los Angeles with a group of friends to drop off food, clothing and hygiene kits to a relief organization.

It was December 2018, a time when the United States–Mexico border was seeing a surge of migrants from Central America escaping violence and poverty. Rebellón could not believe what

she saw: families lacking even the most basic supplies. The children, sometimes shoeless and often dirty, clearly had no place to go.

Rebellón dashed over to the child and took her hand. "Where are you going? Where are your parents?" she asked. Eventually, she and her friends found the girl's panicked father, who had stepped away to line up for food.

Back at home, Rebellón could think of nothing else. "We have to do something," she told her partner, Kyle Thomas Schmidt. A school—a safe place for the children to gather and learn—seemed much-needed. So, Rebellón and Schmidt recruited volunteer teachers via social media, and using a thousand dollars from their savings, set up a makeshift school at the Tijuana border. Classes were held in two large tents.

In five years, that pilot programme has grown into the non-profit Yes We Can World Foundation, which operates three classrooms in converted school buses and two brick-and-mortar schools in Tijuana, plus another in Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city directly across the border from El Paso, Texas.

Funded by donations and grants, the foundation's trained (and now paid) teachers have provided a bilingual education to more than 3,000 kids from ages three to 15. The schools follow an official curriculum from Mexico's education ministry, which began accrediting the foundation in 2021. As well, Yes We Can offers special courses, including one that helps kids understand more about human migration.

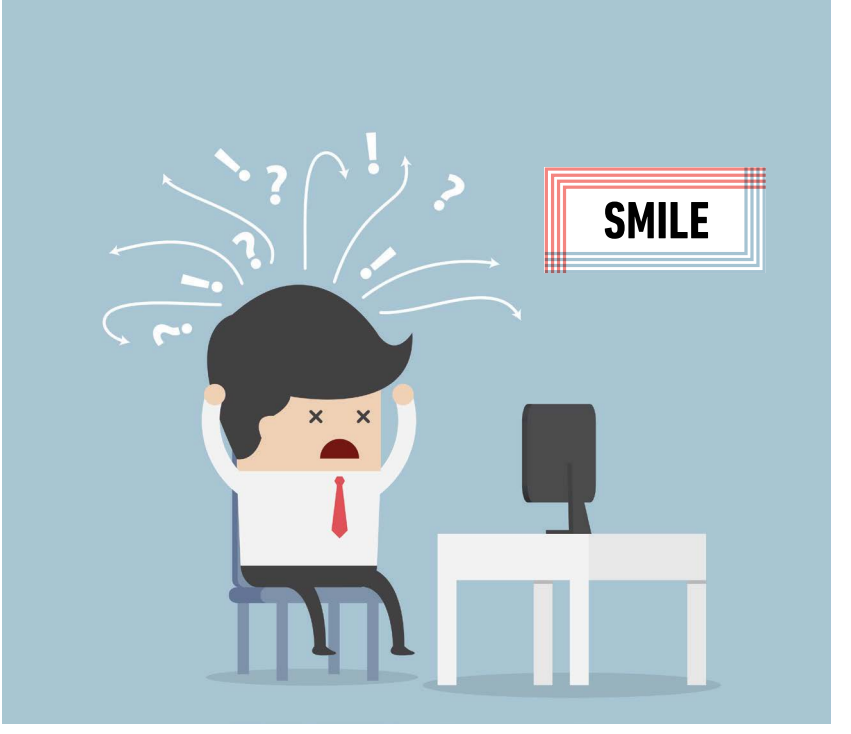
"What started as a temporary solution has become permanent," Rebellón says of the need for education at migrant camps. The process of seeking asylum in the US or Mexico can be long and complicated—most families live at the border for three to five months.

Rebellón has received numerous honours for her work, including Outstanding American by Choice, awarded to her in 2022 by US Citizenship and Immigration Services. She's helping kids who remind her of herself, decades ago. Rebellón was 10 when her family fled their home in Cali, Colombia. Her father, a lawyer and university professor, was getting threatening letters from a powerful guerrilla group. The family of five travelled to Miami, Florida, on a tourist visa and successfully claimed asylum. "It's been a full-circle experience," she says.

The programme's success is easy to see, says Josh Phelps, former director of operations for World Central Kitchen, which has provided meals to some Yes We Can schools. "The kids really enjoy it. There are huge smiles on their faces."

More than 6.6 million people live in refugee camps around the world, according to the UN Refugee Agency. Rebellón says she'd like to expand the foundation's reach and support migrant children globally.

"She is a powerhouse," says Phelps of Rebellón, "and I think one of the most important people doing work at the border right now." R



BYTE-SIZE BLUES

BY *Samit Basu*

IT SEEMS LIKE you can't read the news nowadays without hearing about some new technology that could fundamentally change the lives of people—ideally other people. I don't know about you, but despite being fairly tech-friendly my initial reaction is usually one of alarm. And not for big-picture reasons, but for fairly personal ones. Since the dawn of the digital age, one of my permanent concerns about the ever-increasing role of technology in daily life has been the enthusiastic participation of my mother on every possible cutting-edge platform.

This is not a complaint—I am glad that at 85 she is well ahead of her generation in terms of adapting to the 2020s. I am proud every time she forwards me QR codes, demands OTPs for a bizarre array of transactions, and stays ahead of cybercriminals. After much counselling, I have even managed to persuade her to limit her presence on social media and not do online surveillance and policing (specifically, language monitoring and fashion commentary) of her many great-nephews

ILLUSTRATION *Shutterstock*

and great-nieces. I've applauded all her many successful attempts to evolve and adapt to a world that has absolutely no consideration for seniors, where huge tech shifts and behaviour shifts are casually imposed on people, and new kinds of risks and dangers, from actual crimes and scams to physical and mental health challenges, come with all these shifts that seniors are especially vulnerable to.

One thing that's been a constant through all of this is my mother's deep and unshakeable conviction that all technology has a personal problem with her. That there is a sinister and vast conspiracy that makes all modern-day hardware and software malfunction in her presence—making all her files disappear, all her passwords mysteriously transform, all her devices run out of battery. I am usually the person called upon to troubleshoot in these situations, and my feeble attempts at intervention—often over the phone, from another city—not only usually fail, but also lead her to suspect, sometimes, that I am part of this conspiracy against her. That because I started using computers in my teens, and mobile phones in my 20s, I am a magically gifted tech-whisperer, who understands the inner workings of circuitry and signals, the sort of person who could play a hacker in the movies. Except I am now middle-aged myself, and absolutely not a tech-savant by any stretch of the imagination.

The worst part is that I completely understand how she feels, because I often feel this way myself. I think that for every person, no matter how much they intend to keep up with tech change, eventually you hit a wall after which nothing makes sense. I can blame this on my own age, but it's not just that. Even genuinely young people, who were born texting, who probably think every flat surface is a touchscreen

YOUNG PEOPLE JUST KNOW WHAT WE DON'T—THAT TECH IS NOT SINISTER, BUT STUPID

and would probably talk in emojis if they could, are actually not cyber-geniuses. They just know what we don't—that tech is not sinister, but stupid. That flailing at solving problems and then learning by trial and error are part of the basic process, and that situations where the machines aren't listening to us aren't our fault. The key difference is that the young are very confident when they deal with tech—but isn't irrational confidence a key feature of youth in the first place?

So what I do now to deal wiith my mother's tech woes is encourage her to fake confidence. Because in so many dimensions of 2020s life, that's really what you need to deal with life. R



GOOD NEWS
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY *Patricia Karounos*

Flash Forest uses drones to replant forests after wildfires.

REVIVING FORESTS AFTER WILDFIRES

ENVIRONMENT As a biology student at the University of Victoria, Bryce Jones took a summer job planting trees in B.C. and Alberta. Now an entrepreneur, he's found a faster way to get the job done. In 2019, Jones co-founded the Toronto-based Flash Forest, which uses drones to help replant forests after wildfires.

The tech is more needed than ever, as climate change's longer summers and rising temperatures dry forests out. Canada's 2023 wildfire season was the most destructive on record. As of September, there were more than 6,000 recorded fires—a 21 per cent increase from the average over the last 10 years.

Staff on the ground equip the drones with the start-up's proprietary seed pods, containing locally-sourced tree seed, minerals, nutrients and helpful bacteria and fungi. From the air, the pods are ejected over burned-out sites, so they can plant a biodiverse range of trees in target areas, including in remote spots.

The start-up has already planted 1.5 million trees and aims to hit 5.5 million by mid-2024—and 1 billion worldwide by 2030. (The company plans to expand into the United States this spring.)

People often feel that there is little they can do to fight climate change, Jones says, "but you have more power than you think. We need to take this into our own hands."

COURTESY OF FLASH FOREST

Iraq Eliminates Trachoma

HEALTH Trachoma is no longer endemic in Iraq as of mid-2023, thanks to a national programme, established in 2012, that used screenings at clinics and schools to reduce transmission of the disease.

Trachoma is a contagious bacterial infection, most common in young children. Complications from repeat infections, which often occur in crowded households, can cause irreversible blindness. It's the top cause of preventable blindness around the world, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the WHO, 1.9 million people globally have a visual impairment due to trachoma. It remains a public health problem in 42 countries.

Iraq is the 18th country to end trachoma endemicity; others include China, Morocco and Mexico.

From Waste To Art

RECYCLING Reducing waste requires some creativity. Just ask Kenya-based non-profit Ocean Sole, which is turning discarded flip-flops into colourful art.

The non-profit employs dozens of people to collect flip-flops left along the country's beaches and waterways. Then local artisans turn them into playful sculptures (think penguins, pineapples and giraffes), some of which are available for sale on the non-profit's website.

The group also provides meals, education and healthcare to its employees and their families. Meanwhile, 10 to 15 per cent of Ocean Sole's revenue goes into national education programs, conservation efforts and beach cleanups.



BRAVO1954/GETTY IMAGES

Climate Change Enters British Sign Language

ACCESSIBILITY Researchers at the University of Edinburgh have added 200 new signs related to climate change and the environment to British Sign Language (BSL), including 'greenhouse gases', 'smog' and 'carbon footprint'. The new terms are part of a larger project to build a BSL glossary for academic subjects like math and science. The glossary now has nearly 3,000 terms, most of which are new.

Before these signs were published in the glossary (which is available for free online) in mid-2023, BSL users had to spell out these terms letter by letter. Audrey Cameron, project coordinator, told the BBC that the goal is to empower deaf people to fully participate in conversations about climate change. And since BSL is a visual language, the signs also give communicators a deeper understanding of the concepts being conveyed, something that's particularly useful for children. R



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Words to Live By

What I've learnt from reading obituaries

BY *Mary McGreevy*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Gary Hovland*

We Americans are voracious consumers of advice, seeking wisdom wherever we can find it: podcasts, books, TED Talks, life coaches, influencers, religion, therapy, Dear Abby, barbers, bartenders, Uber drivers—the list goes on. I'd like to add my personal source for guidance: obituaries.

It turns out, the dead know a thing or two about living. I've been an avid obit reader for decades for the same reason that artist Maira Kalman says she reads them every morning: "Maybe it is a way of trying to figure out, before the day begins, what is important."

Recently, I've begun using my TikTok account, called Tips from Dead People, to share some life lessons I've learned from obituaries. Here are a few favourites:

Success is measured in kindness.

Maureen Brennan-Weaver of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was accomplished by any standard measure, as a doctor, mother, volunteer. But her obituary comes to life with the tiny details: *"Maureen was 6'0" and loved strays of all species. Could outthink any opponent. Was riotously funny and pathologically generous."* That last part is the key to knowing her. *"If you mentioned a thing you liked, she'd get you 11 when she found them at a great price. When a nephew wished for a plastic microscope, she found him a real one (at a great price) and painstakingly prepared hundreds of slides for his study."*

Turns out that qualities like generosity are actually the things that endure, not the job titles or the purchases.

Overcoming obstacles isn't just for superheroes.

If you think that a catastrophe in your life will define you forever, worry not. I've read obituaries of lives that featured disaster, heartache, addiction, estrangement, breakups and all manner of reckless choices. And guess what? In almost every case, there was another chapter, sometimes many more chapters. Renewals, rebirths, remarriages, relocations—it ain't over till it's over.

Take Jerry Tubb of Nichols Hills, Oklahoma, who in 1955 and 1956 spent six months in the hospital, losing the use of his legs to polio as a teenager, just months before the vaccine became available. His extraordinarily positive obituary reads: "*You would have thought Jerry would have become needy, pessimistic and maybe even jealous of others over the seven decades his body continued to fail him again and again and again, leaving him both paralyzed and without feeling below his chest in the last years of his life. But he never did. Jerry kept getting up, day after day—and he kept treating each moment of life as a gift.*"

Tubb's story includes law school, an epic love story and so much more. The moral of the story: You may think that you're defined by catastrophic moments, but don't ever

count yourself out—or anyone else for that matter.

When in doubt, laugh.

Renay Corren of El Paso, Texas, died at the age of 84, a crushing blow to her family. But as the obituary written by her loving son shows, this is a woman who will be remembered for living life to the fullest, consequences be damned: *"The bawdy, fertile, redheaded matriarch of a sprawling Jewish-Mexican-Redneck American family has kicked it. Hers was an itinerant, much-lived life: a Yankee Florida liberal Jewish tough gal who bowled 'em in Japan, rolled 'em in North Carolina and was a singularly unique parent. There will be much mourning in the many glamorous locales she went bankrupt in: McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Renay's birthplace and where she first fell in love with ham and atheism; Fayetteville and Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, where Renay's dreams, credit rating and marriage are all buried. There will be a very disrespectful and totally nondenominational memorial on 10 May 2022, most likely at a bowling alley in Fayetteville. The family requests absolutely zero privacy or propriety. Bye, Mommy. We loved you to bits."*



Not to be outdone is Edna Dubuc of Nashua, New Hampshire. By the end of her life, she suffered from dementia. But in her obituary, Dubuc's family preferred to highlight the joy she found in life: "*She was the bingo queen. She never met a candy she couldn't store in her bra for later. She had great teeth until they got lost. She'd flirt with everyone. She laughed so much she often peed her pants. We'll miss her stories and her sporadic use of French. One thing we know for sure is that wherever she is, there's country music playing and she's dancing.*"

In the end, people will be remembered not by the disease, but by how much joy they contributed to the world.

Be honest, even when it hurts.

There comes a point in life and in death when we need to be brutally honest about the hard stuff. Take Cody James Holland of Heuvelton, New York. His mom wrote his obituary and led off with a truth bomb like no other: "*Cody James left us on 8 August 2020, as a result of injuries sustained from being a dumb a**. He drank, drove and didn't wear his seat belt! Please, don't be a dumb a**!*"

The obit generated some controversy, but his mom said she'd do it again to save someone else. Don't misunderstand: Holland was well loved and rel-

ished his life. *"He loved his family and friends, along with trucks, his motorcycle, his dog, his guns, hunting, fishing, steak, chew, beer, hats on sideways, Sour Patch Kids, Swedish Fish and Shania Twain."* But a tribute to him without the hard stuff wouldn't be a real tribute.

You don't need to whitewash a person's life to pay tribute to them. We all contain paradoxes and complications, and not only is there nothing wrong with that, it's what makes us beautiful.

Try something new.

As a perfectionist, I find that this tip is the hardest, and maybe the most important, for me to implement. Can you imagine realizing at the end of your life that you didn't try something, simply because you thought you might fail?

Suffering from a fear of failure did not apply to Ida Keeling of Harlem, New York. According to her obituary, Keeling was 67 and depressed over the sudden loss of her husband and her two sons, when, at the urging of her daughter, she entered a 5K with only a day's notice. *"She was all-in and said early into the race that she felt like she was running up and out of a hole, like someone had watered a plant that had not been watered in a long time."* The spark was lit and she went on to run for three more decades (she died at age 106).

Don't feel like breaking a sweat? Then be like Ricardo Torres of Wayzata, Minnesota. His obit says, *"In recent years he discovered a passion for gardening. He approached it with little planning but lots of enthusiasm, especially when it came to killing weeds. Many a neighbour witnessed Rich using a flamethrower to torch the unwanted plants in his yard. The cigar in his mouth was a nice touch."*



Now come on! That's a guy you'd want as your neighbour.

READING SO MANY obituaries has of course inspired me to think about what my own might say.

"Punctual to a fault"?

"Mediocre dancer but expertly sarcastic"?

"Her perfect meal was a peanut butter and bacon sandwich"?

Any of these things, as 'little' as they are, say more about me than a list of jobs or the money I've made. That's because the little things in life—the things that seem inconsequential but add depth and whimsy and joy to our days—they are what make it so worth being alive. R



HEALTH

A Mental Workout

Exercise releases 'hope molecules' into the bloodstream

BY *Karen Robock*

I'VE JOGGED THROUGH postpartum depression (twice), relied on Pilates classes to help me stretch during stressful times and I often go for a walk after a bad day. So it's no surprise to me that there's a link between exercise and mental health. But scientists have now made it official: Research has found a direct connection between movement and mood.

Each time you work up a sweat, your body releases feel-good neuro-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Kate Traynor*

transmitters, or 'happy hormones', including endorphins, dopamine and endocannabinoids, the latter being responsible for the so-called runner's high. Now researchers are also pointing to myokines—dubbed 'hope molecules'—as an important contributor to the mental health benefits of exercise.

When our muscles contract, chains of amino acids called myokines are released into the bloodstream; they help your muscles and organs communicate. Researchers are looking into the effect of myokines on the brain. They think this communication increases resilience to stress, reduces symptoms of trauma and anxiety and have a direct effect on depression. A 2021 review published in *Neuropharmacology* showed evidence that myokines boost brain function (e.g., improving memory and mood).

"Myokines reduce systemic inflammation, which is especially beneficial for people with drug-resistant depression whose low mood links to high inflammation," explains Dr Jennifer Heisz, an expert in brain health and associate professor in the department of kinesiology at McMaster University in Canada.

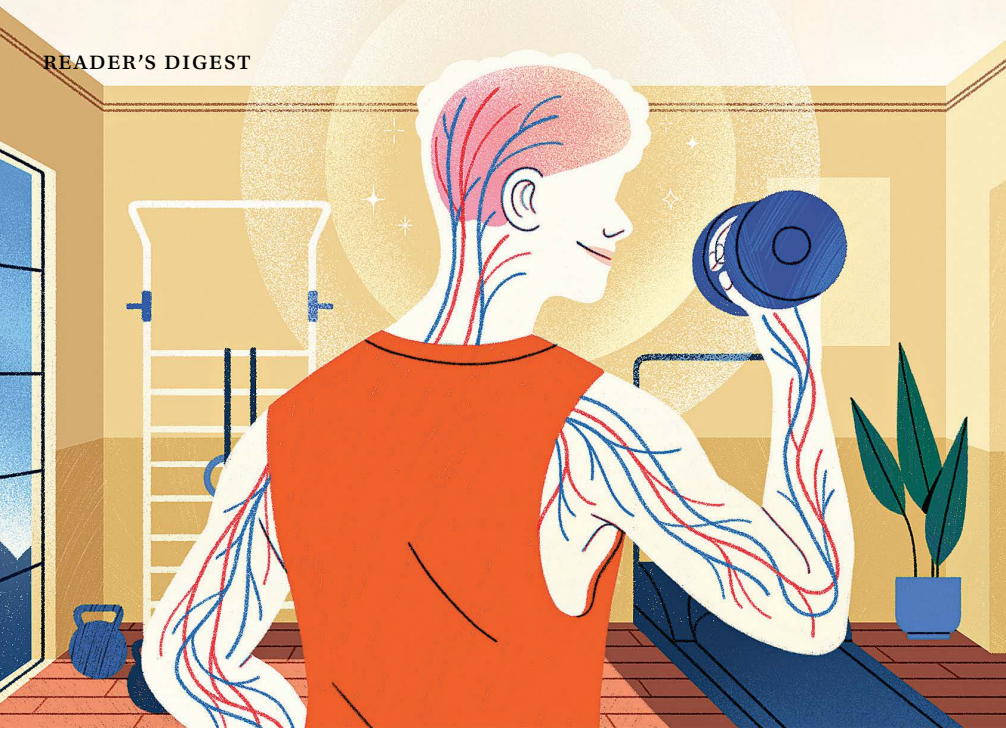
There's also a growing body of research proving that exercise helps build key connections between the networks *within* the brain, too, improving overall cognitive performance. Studies have shown that physical activity stimulates creativity, sharpens judgment skills and improves mental energy.

It can also help slow age-related cognitive decline, possibly even stalling the onset of Alzheimer's disease. A new study published in the *Journal for Alzheimer's Disease Reports* found that walking regularly (30 minutes a day four times a week) was enough to measurably improve memory, even in people who have already been diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment.

A recent study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* showed that treatment for depression can be much more effective when physical activity is added to the usual care. Participants found benefits after 12 weeks of exercising for 30 to 60 minutes a day.

EXERCISE IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT, BUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAN COMPLEMENT AND ENHANCE ITS EFFECTS.

"While exercise is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment, physical activity can complement and enhance the effects of the treatment," says lead researcher Ben Singh, a research fellow at the University of South Australia. He says regular exercise in a group setting can boost self-esteem and decrease feelings of isolation and loneliness.



Whether you're cycling, swimming, walking around your neighbourhood or doing yoga, getting sweaty is good for your body and mind. But how much activity is enough to maintain brain health? Experts suggest that you aim for a minimum of 10 to 30 minutes, three to five days each week.

"For reducing depression, research suggests that aerobic exercise is less about intensity and more about duration," says Heisz.

Just 10 minutes of light movement, like gentle laps in the pool or walking your dog, are enough to boost your mood, and the effects increase for every 10 extra minutes that you move, for up to an hour. Exercising beyond 60 minutes didn't provide extra mental health benefits, according to Singh's study.

Strength-training, such as Pilates and lifting weights, does count toward your daily exercise goals (and is essential for strong bones). And research shows that increasing the intensity of resistance workouts by just 10 per cent will yield a greater anti-depressant effect.

"It is amazing to consider how moving our bodies can heal our minds," says Heisz. To get the biggest overall health boost, the key is to zero in on sports and activities you enjoy, so you'll keep going back to them. R

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NEWS FROM THE

WORLD OF MEDICINE

By Samantha Rideout



A NEW TREATMENT FOR HEART DISEASE

Since the 1950s, medical scientists have understood that high cholesterol can contribute to coronary artery disease (CAD) by clogging the arteries with plaque. More recently, researchers have learnt that chronic inflammation in the arteries can play a role in restricting blood flow, too.

Now, two large multinational clinical trials have shown that colchicine, a drug that's already used to treat other inflammatory conditions, such as gout, is also useful for preventing heart attack, stroke and cardiovascular death in people with CAD. When added to standard treatments such as statins, it reduced the risk of these complications by as much as 31 per cent. The FDA recently approved low-dose colchicine for this purpose, making it the first medication that tackles cardiovascular disease by specifically targeting inflammation.

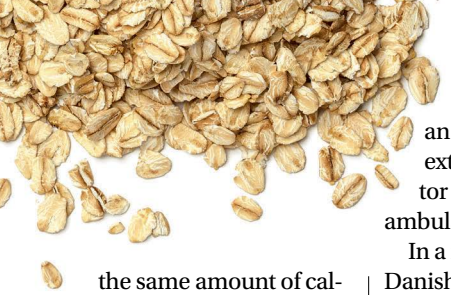
A Few Steps Go a Long Way

The more you walk each day, the greater the health benefits. If there is an upper limit to this general rule, it hasn't been determined yet—but the *minimum* number of steps needed to start making a difference might be lower than previously thought. A Polish- and American-led review of 17 previous studies found that as few as 2,500 steps per day could reduce, by 16 per cent or more, the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease compared to walking less. When it comes to prolonging lives, the senior researcher said in a press release, even modest lifestyle changes can be surprisingly powerful.

Sharing Food With Gut Microbes

When it comes to gaining, losing or maintaining body weight, not all calories are equal, suggests an experiment published in *Nature Communications*. It involved a small group of young adults who tried two very different diets for 22 days each. Both diets involved eating

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM VOORHES; PROP STYLIST: ROBIN FINLAY



the same amount of calories, but one was rich in fibre while the other was full of processed foods, such as white bread and sugary snacks.

On average, participants absorbed 116 fewer calories per day while on the high-fibre diet—without feeling hungrier. How? The upper gastrointestinal tract absorbs highly processed foods quickly, whereas whole foods take longer to digest and often manage to get through to the colon. This is where most of our gut microbiota are, so healthier foods provide calories to the microbes to feed on, rather than being absorbed by the body.

Defibrillators Save Lives

If you witness someone suffering a cardiac arrest in public, it's always worth trying to find an automated external defibrillator (AED), even if an ambulance isn't far off.

In a recent analysis of Danish data, defibrillation improved cardiac-arrest victims' chances of survival. (If paramedics were on the scene in less than two minutes, it made no significant difference.)

Many public spaces, such as community centres, fitness facilities and airports, are legally required to have public access to AEDs. But they aren't mandatory in all workplaces and buildings. In those cases, a large group of neighbours or co-workers might split the cost (starting from ₹50,000 going up to ₹2 lakh) to purchase one.



You Can't Reverse Sleep Deprivation

With help from people who volunteered to stay up overnight, scientists from the University of Pittsburgh and Michigan State University have tested two popular ways of compensating for sleep deprivation: caffeine and napping.

By comparing performance on cognitive tests by subjects who slept and those who stayed up all night, the investigators saw that sleeplessness had taken a toll on their ability to stay focused on a task and to follow a complex set of directions. Consuming the equivalent of two coffees' worth of caffeine improved the former but not the latter. Taking a 30- or 60-minute snooze didn't fully restore their brain function, either. In the end, these strategies might help you feel better and get through the day, but neither of them will have you performing at your best. R

(OATS) VAASEENAA/GETTY IMAGES; (MAN) RENPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

FOOD

A Fondue Swisstory

Switzerland's gift to the world is a pot of melted goodness

BY *Leila El Shennawy*

PICTURE THIS: HUDDLED with a group of friends and family members, you gather around a warm, bubbling pot of cheese fondue. You dip a chunk of crusty bread into the creamy mixture, swirling your fork to prepare your morsel to be devoured. Is your mouth watering yet?

Fondue comes from the French word *fondre*, meaning 'to melt'. Cheese fondue is made with melted Gruyère, a firm, nutty cow's-milk cheese with a pungent aroma that originates in a medieval town of the same name. The cheese melts by simmering in a pot with garlic and dry white wine, for a hearty flavour. A traditional fondue might also use a half-and-half mix of Gruyère and another cheese, like Vacherin Fribourgeois, Appenzeller or raclette. Bread is traditional for dipping, but veggies like baby potatoes and broccoli, steak bites and pear slices are also common.

The dish is traditionally eaten 'family-style' out of an earthenware pot called a *caquelon*. (Modern stainless-steel, cast-iron or ceramic versions are also available.) The pots tend to be wide and shallow to evenly distribute heat.

The earliest written recipe for the dish appears in a cookbook published in 1699 in Zurich, Switzerland. But at that time, 'fondue' referred to a different dish, similar to a cheesy egg soufflé. It wasn't until the late 19th century that the fondue we know and love emerged.

Today, cheese fondue is the ultimate Swiss dish. But until the 1930s, it was only found in parts of Switzerland.

According to Dominik Flammer, author of *Swiss Cheese: Origins, Traditional Cheese Varieties and New Creations,* it was the efforts of a cheese cartel that brought fondue to broader popularity. A post-war export slump led producers to form the Swiss Cheese Union, which limited competition and campaigned globally for Swiss cheeses. Of thousands of cheeses, the cartel supported a mere seven. You

PHOTOGRAPH BY *K. Synold*



guessed it: Gruyère was one of them.

The union was disbanded in the late '90s. But by then, cheese fondue's reputation as the country's national dish had long been established. It also became a popular wintertime treat in North America: By the early 1970s, fondue was all the rage among young baby boomers.

So whether you find yourself in the Swiss Alps or you want to make your at-home experience feel authentic, here are some do's and don'ts:

1. Don't double dip.

2. Stir clockwise or in a figure-eight pattern, never counter-clockwise. Swiss superstition tells us it's the only way to keep the cheese from curdling.

3. Don't scrape or tap on the pot; it's bad manners. Swirl your fork to catch flyaway strings of cheese.

4. The Swiss believe you shouldn't drink anything other than white wine, kirsch (cherry brandy) or tea alongside fondue because anything else will cause the cheese to congeal in the stomach into a fatty ball known as a 'cheese baby'. (A small study in 2010 found that black tea did aid in the digestion of cheese fondue, but alcohol slowed down digestion considerably.)

5. Never lose your chunk in the pot. In Switzerland, whoever commits this faux pas will be half-jokingly handed a punishment such as buying a round of drinks, doing the dishes or taking a shot of kirsch.

Toss your cheese of choice, wine and garlic into a pot and you'll be well on your way to throwing the fondue dinner party of your dreams. R



TMB STUDIO

HUMOUR *in*

UNIFORM

I was stationed at Fort Wainwright near Fairbanks, Alaska, when two buddies and I were given passes for the weekend. We got a ride into town with a man in civvies and asked him where a trio of young guys could find some action in Fairbanks. Looking disappointed, the driver admonished, "I happen to be the base chaplain."

"Then let me put it this way," said one of my friends. "Can you suggest some places we should avoid?"

—KEITH MILLER

My young granddaughters were looking at old photos of me in the Army, including one in Thailand where I had a boa constrictor wrapped around my shoulders. I expected them to "ooh" and "aah" over the snake and tell me, "How brave you were, Grandpa.'" Instead, my youngest exclaimed, "Grandpa, you used to have hair!"

—ROBERT UFFORD



"When a man sends 10,000 troops to attack you, it means he has a crush on you."

Our friend's son was stationed on an Air Force base in northern Maine. When he came home to relatively balmy Pennsylvania, I asked about the weather in Maine.

"Maine," he explained, "has four seasons: early winter, midwinter, late winter and next winter.

—JOHN KEARNS

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CARTOON BY *Sofia Warren/CartoonStock.com*

WOMEN ON THE MOVE



Meet five women who found joy, power and purpose through a passion for adventure and the great outdoors

BY *Chaitali Patel*



Sisters Tashi and Nungshi Malik (leading the queue) representing India at the 2021 100% Women Peak Challenge in Switzerland.



The Malik twins gain much from each other during tough climbs. "When I feel like giving up, Tashi helps me move on," says Nungshi (left).

NO MOUNTAIN TOO HIGH

Tashi & Nungshi Malik, 32

Mountaineers

Widely known as the 'Everest Twins', 32-year-old Tashi and Nungshi Malik have an impressive climbing record having summited all seven of the world's major mountain peaks and reached both the North and South Poles. The feats make the sisters the first Indians to have completed the coveted 'Explorers Grand Slam'.

The Malik sisters' climbing journey began in 2009 when their father enrolled them in a mountaineering course at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarakhand.

"At 19, our first expedition was to climb Mount Rudugaira at 19,000 ft. It took incredibly hard work and hours to make it to the top. But for the first time we realized what we were capable of achieving. Holding the tricolour in one hand, an ice-axe in the other, looking at the vast expanse around us—at that moment, we felt we could climb any mountain anywhere," Nungshi recalls.

Born to a Jat father and Gorkha mother, the Malik twins were aware of the societal challenges girls have to face but luckily, they had the unwavering support of their parents. What proved to be far tougher was getting funding for their expeditions. Adventure activities are hardly a spectator sport and so they garner few eyeballs and fewer sponsors. To bankroll expeditions, their parents put in all their savings, including taking a loan against their mother's gold jewellery.

PHOTO CREDIT: (PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS PAGE) NICOLE SCHAFER PHOTO & FILM

While Mt Everest was one of the toughest of all their ventures, their biggest feat till date is successfully climbing Mt McKinley through extreme weather conditions: a long and severe snowstorm that saw other climbers turn back. "That one week was hell and our biggest worry was that we would have to abort our attempt. That would have had a huge impact on our future funding options and credibility," says Nungshi. The twins waited it out and took a gamble to push ahead despite the weather, which eventually cleared. "If Everest had put us in the list of good climbers, successfully summiting McKinley established us as tough, professional climbers," adds Tashi.

For the twins, sharing the same passion for climbing and having each other for support is a massive advantage in their climbing journey. "On a mountain it's very important to have someone you can count on. At times when I feel like giving up, Tashi helps me move on," says Nungshi.

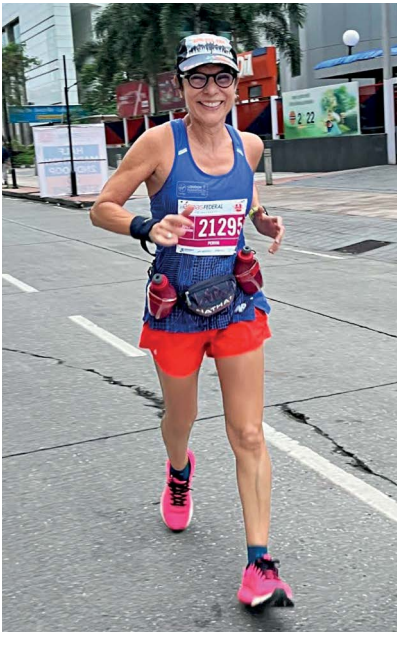
Having achieved so much at such a young age, they set up the Nungshi Tashi Foundation in 2015 to give back to society: to develop mountaineering as a sport and empower women and girls to pursue a life of adventure.

Climbing mountains and overcoming several physical and mental challenges along the way have offered big lessons. "We have always viewed our relationship with the mountains with a deep sense of humility, and for us, making our way up to the summit is synonymous with setting out on an inner journey. It has helped us see the bigger picture and a sense of how fragile and precious life can be," says Nungshi.

IRON LADY
Pervin Batliwala, 69

Marathon Runner

At 50, when a lot of people tend to step away from active sports, Mumbai-based Pervin Batliwala shifted gears and started running. Today, at 69, Batliwala has completed all the six



Pervin Batliwala at the Ageas Federal Life Insurance Mumbai Marathon in 2022.

PHOTO CREDIT: HANDOUT

major marathons across the world, has several podium finishes to her name, and completed the Ironman 70.3 Goa swim–bike–run challenge—touted to be one of the toughest one-day sporting events in the world—with her triathlon partners Zarir Baliwalla and Ariez Kharas.

For someone who couldn't fathom why her husband Kushru Batliwala would wake up in the wee hours of the morning and go for a run, Batliwala has become a runner for life. The transformation was not one that was planned but it just happened. As an executive with Hindustan Unilever Ltd, Batliwala would join other employees for a run at the Maidan with coach Savio D'Souza, as part of the company's initiative to improve employee well being. On one such run D'Souza asked her to join him to run on the road. "That day I started running on the road and I've never looked back since," she says.

In 2006, Batliwala completed the half marathon of the Tata Mumbai Marathon, but it was a struggle and one that opened her eyes to what she had to work on. "I had started too fast and wasn't hydrating properly. I was also excited and overconfident. Although I finished the race I had learnt my lesson," she recalls.

With several marathons under her belt since that first race, Batliwala mixes running with swimming and training to build strength and stamina. Before big events like the 88-km Comrades Marathon in South Africa and 72-km Khardung La Challenge in Ladakh, she also monitors her diet. What's remained constant through it all is her never say die attitude. "However tired I am, I talk to myself and push myself to get to the finish line," she says. She's a vivacious personality who's always talking, joking and making noise while running, and other people, who may be a decade or two younger than her enjoy running with her.

Over the years Batliwala has marked an increase in the number of women in her age group who have started running. "There was a time when I always used to end up on the podium, but now I have a lot of competition. I like that as it makes me work harder," she says.

An inspiration to both young and old, she's a firm believer that age is just a number and doesn't have to dictate what one can do. A quote that she lives by goes: 'We do not stop exercising because we grow old, we grow old because we stop exercising.'

GOING PLACES

Preeti Maske, 47,

Long-Distance Cyclist

When Preeti Maske took up cycling at the age of 40, she had no idea a new hobby would turn into a passion, and then a profession with five Guinness World Records. A surprise first-place victory in a five-km fun run at her children's school was what



"I don't mind passing through places and not having time to see them properly—the journey itself is so special," says Preeti Maske.

PHOTO COURTESY: PREETI MASKE

first fuelled Maske's adventurous side.

In school, Maske played national-level hockey and basketball at a state level, but after marriage and motherhood, sports were firmly in her past—or so she thought. Blighted by health issues and grappling with a lack of purpose, the podium finish at her children's school reignited her competitive spirit. "Many women in their 40s feel like their dreams have been crushed," says the mother of two. "Maybe I felt this more keenly and it showed."

It was a cycling expedition from Kashmir to Kanyakumari—down the length of the country—that made Maske take up cycling seriously. She kept improving and training, but being one of the few women in the group came with its own challenges.

"Keeping up with male riders was tough," she says. "I was slower, but when I caught up with them, whenever they said, 'let's go', I would say, 'let's go'— even though they had been resting for a while. I saw many women who were slower, took longer breaks, and male riders would be reluctant to have them join the group the next time." Among her cycling peers, Maske is known never to complain—even pushing herself after a fall or an accident.

Maske's first attempt at setting a world record was to cycle the 6,000-km-long Golden Quadrilateral spanning north, east, south and west India. She overcame pandemic-related delays and challenges and finished, but her ride didn't qualify. The loss only spurred her on to attempt and achieve records one after the other. Maske set her first Guinness world record in 2022, cycling

from Manali to Leh, in 55 hours and seven minutes. Her latest cycling milestone took her from Bhutan to India through Nepal, a journey of 1,803 km in 10 days, 18 hours and 40 minutes—completely unsupported.

People of all ages, write to tell her that she's their inspiration. One of her friends who didn't know how to ride a bicycle rented one, learnt, completed a 100-km ride, and dedicated the ride to her. Maske leverages her popularity to spread awareness and dispel misconceptions about organ donation.

As for what's next, Maske has her eyes set on cycling from India to Singapore via Myanmar. Picking up on this relentless desire to challenge herself, her daughter gave her the moniker 'the extreme lady'. Maske's plans make it clear she's hell-bent on proving her daughter right.

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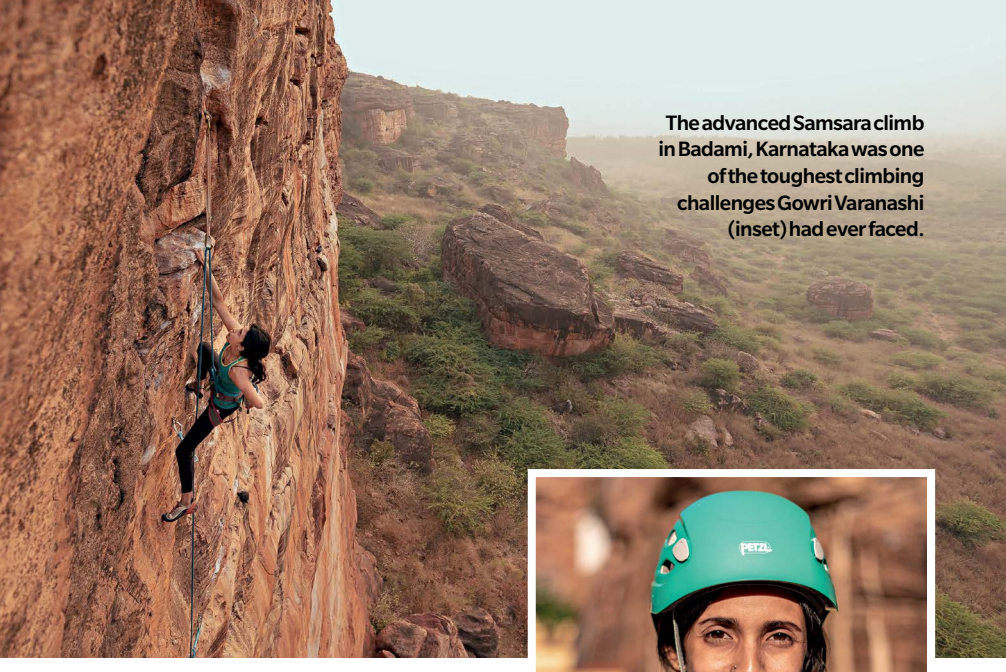
RISE TO THE TOP
Gowri Varanashi, 33,
Rock Climber

For 33-year-old Gowri Varanashi based in Bengaluru, climbing isn't just about scaling new heights; it's an exercise in mindfulness. Hanging off a cliff face, as you decide on your next move, there's little time for distraction or other thoughts. "For me, climbing feels like self care, where I'm focused on myself. Your mind becomes so present in that moment, that you're not worried about anything else. All your worries disappear," she says.

As an environmental studies and biology student in the US, Varanashi worked as a guide with an eco-tourism company during the holidays, taking groups into the Peruvian Amazon. On one such trip a friend who had tagged along noticed the ease with which Varanashi scampered up tall Strangler Fig trees and suggested that she try her hand at climbing. After her first climb in an indoor rock-climbing gym Varanashi was hooked.

Although initially it was a hobby, she says, "It slowly took over my life and everything now revolves around it." An avid sports climber, Varanashi doesn't aim to set records but climbs for the love of it. "For me it's a form of nature connection—you're going outdoors and you're using your entire body, hands and feet to climb up this rock."

In the US, Varanashi participated in a number of events and festivals, many exclusively for women. Back in India, sometimes she would be the only woman in a group going climbing. While her family have always been very supportive of the sport, she realized that this may not be the same for others. Besides familial expectations and cultural norms, she believes that it's also a mindset that needs to be overcome. "I started realizing that maybe it's harder to approach climbing as a sport because as women we tell ourselves a lot of stories that are driven by



The advanced Samsara climb in Badami, Karnataka was one of the toughest climbing challenges Gowri Varanashi (inset) had ever faced.



society: that women aren't strong enough, that outdoor sports aren't for women, and so on. We tend to internalize these ideas and often don't try new things," she says. This was the genesis of CLAW or Climb Like A Woman, an all women led climbing non-profit organization, that she runs with four fellow climbers. CLAW's first event held in 2018 was a big success and the feedback from the participants validated Varanashi's beliefs that climbing helps women break mental barriers and instill self confidence.

"After the first event we realized how important this is as we had so many women giving us powerful feedback. A couple of them said that it was liberating to come together and wear whatever we want, not care about getting tanned or getting scratches. We could just be!" she says.

A growing membership base and roster of climbing events through the year, point to the increasing interest in climbing and Varanashi leads from the front. "Climbing is a powerful way of showing society that women can do anything they put their minds to and that they have equal rights to the outdoors," she says. R

PHOTO: KIRAN KALLUR; (INSET) GAYATRI JUVEKAR

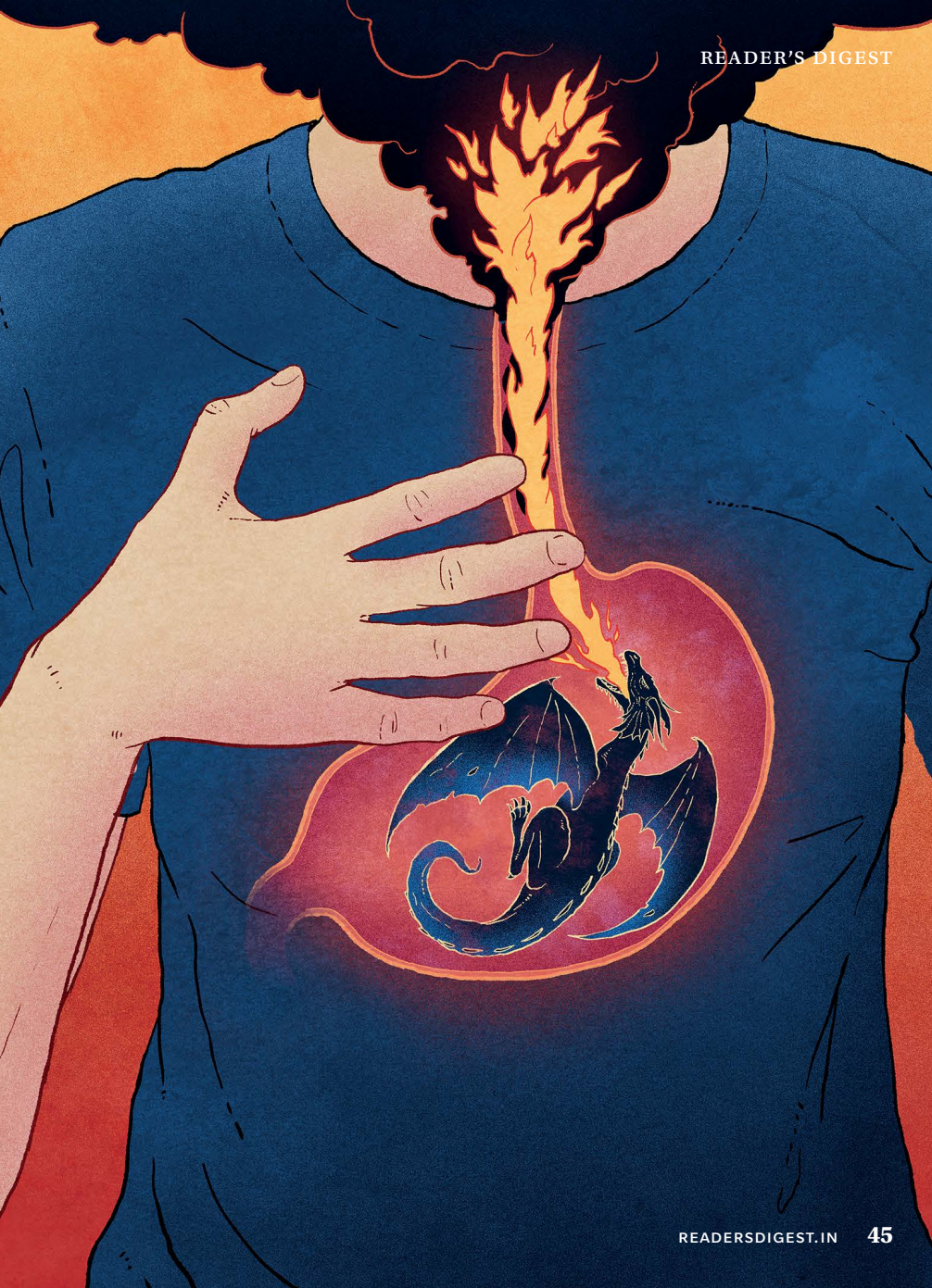
Conquer Your Heartburn

A variety of new treatments could finally mean relief from acid reflux

BY *Lisa Fields*



ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Antoine Doré*



In 2019, after enduring three years of headaches and frequent bouts of heartburn,

Murali Bharadwaj of London learnt what sparked his discomfort: gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD), a chronic condition caused by stomach acid repeatedly rising into his esophagus. Whenever Bharadwaj drank beer or ate late in the evening, he experienced symptoms.

"The acid reflux meant I couldn't focus on the present moment, in meetings, playing sports or having social drinks with my friends," says the now 41-year-old. "My thoughts always went to the burning sensation in my throat."

He began taking medication called proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) to lower the acidity in his stomach. It helped, but only a little. In 2021, his doctor suggested a procedure to strengthen his lower oesophageal sphincter, the valve between the stomach and esophagus. Bharadwaj was skeptical, but when he learnt that transoral incisionless fundoplication (TIF) didn't involve invasive surgery—it's performed endoscopically through the mouth and oesophagus—he decided to try it.

In TIF, a small portion of the upper stomach is folded over the bottom of the oesophagus and stapled in place. After the procedure, Bharadwaj says his quality of life improved, and he no longer needed to take PPIs as often.

"I used to take them once per day, minimum, sometimes twice," he says. "Since the procedure, it's been just three times per week. I get acid reflux sometimes, but it's way more manageable—less frequent and less intense."

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX disease (also known as chronic acid reflux) affects up to 25 per cent of Europeans, around 12 per cent of Australians and 23 per cent of people in South America, according to a 2018 American study. A 2011 population-based study reported an 18.5 per cent GERD prevalence in certain regions of India. When stomach acid repeatedly enters the oesophagus, it can change the delicate tissue, which over time can lead to bleeding or ulcers. Complications may include narrowing of the passage due to repeated

healing and scar formation, which can make swallowing difficult, or Barrett's oesophagus—permanent changes in the lower oesophagus lining that, in very rare cases, can lead to cancer.

Many people experience occasional acid reflux, perhaps after overindulging in alcohol or certain foods. The vast majority of people will never see a doctor about it, says Dr Arjan Bredenoord, gastroenterologist at University Medical Centers Amsterdam. And that's okay, because "bothersome symptoms can be managed with lifestyle adjustments or over-the-counter antacids," he says.

But GERD is different. It happens when people experience heartburn, regurgitation, chronic cough, hoarseness or chest pain three or more times a week. People with GERD often also have a hiatal hernia—when part of the upper stomach pokes through the diaphragm muscle in the chest, making it easier for stomach contents to enter the oesophagus.

"The symptoms of GERD are typically heartburn and regurgitation," says Dr Edoardo Savarino, assistant professor of gastroenterology at the University of Padua in Italy. "So when you have these two symptoms, it's likely that you have reflux disease."

Doctors may diagnose GERD after performing an upper endoscopy to examine the oesophagus. If it looks normal, other tests may be offered, including catheter-based pH-impedance monitoring or a wireless pH test. Proper diagnosis is nec-



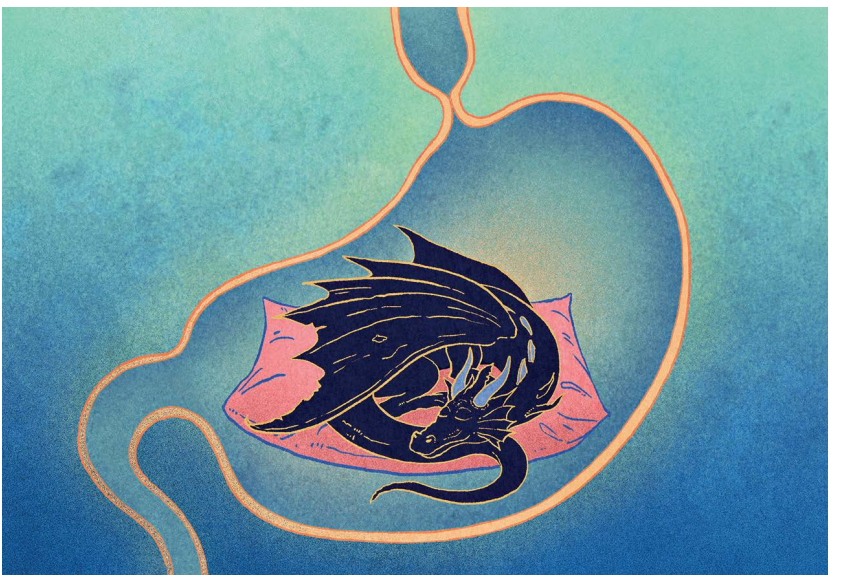
essary because if it isn't GERD, treatments for GERD won't help (for example, if the problem is actually dyspepsia, commonly known as indigestion; an ulcer; or gastroparesis, when the stomach empties into the small intestine too slowly).

Ten per cent of GERD sufferers will develop Barrett's oesophagus. "With Barrett's, you need to get an endoscopy every two or three years to see if there are any changes, because you can treat it early," says Dr Rami Sweis, a gastroenterologist with University College Hospital in London who advises the nonprofit Guts UK. If any pre-cancer or cancer is detected, he says, treatment can be provided through the endoscope.

When doctors diagnose GERD, they usually prescribe PPIs, medication that suppresses acid production within the stomach. H2 blockers, another type of acid suppressor, are prescribed less often because they are less effective.

"In reflux, gastric acid comes up into the oesophagus and causes symptoms or lesions," says Dr. Jan Tack, gastrointestinal (GI) disorders researcher at KU Leuven in Belgium. "So controlling acid makes a big difference for the majority of patients, and apparently does not have a negative effect on the digestive process."

Doctors also recommend lifestyle changes to discourage stomach acid from entering the oesophagus. They include refraining from eating between two and four hours before bedtime,



sleeping with your head elevated (wedge pillows are specially designed to relieve GERD; they go underneath your regular pillow), avoiding tight-fitting clothing and losing weight.

"In perhaps 75 per cent of patients with reflux, treatment with lifestyle changes plus medication are absolutely successful," says Dr Sebastian Schoppmann, head of the upper GI department at Medical University of Vienna.

Some GERD patients seek other kinds of treatment because medication doesn't improve their symptoms well enough, as with Bharadwaj, or it has unwanted side effects.

The good news is that the number of GERD treatments has grown in recent years. "The reason there are more and more treatment choices is that no one thing is perfect for everyone," says Dr Paul Goldsmith, an upper GI surgeon at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust in the UK.

Here are some of those options.

➤ Fundoplication

Fundoplication is the most common treatment to strengthen the valve between the esophagus and stomach. It is performed laparoscopically, meaning that open surgery (when one large incision is made) can usually be avoided. The surgeon makes several small incisions in the abdomen and inserts the tools and a camera. The hiatal hernia is corrected by returning the upper stomach to its place below the diaphragm. Next, the uppermost portion of the stomach is wrapped around the valve, which strengthens the its ability to stay closed—reducing the risk of stomach acid rising into the esophagus.

In the past, surgeons mostly performed a 360-degree stomach wrap, but that was often too tight; as a result food didn't move down the esophagus as easily, and some patients had difficulty belching or vomiting. Some also had trouble swallowing food. Today, surgeons can perform one of several partial wraps, such as a 270 or 180 degrees, which improve GERD symptoms without causing more discomfort.

Dr Radu Tutuian, chief of gastroenterology at Civic Hospital Solothurn in Switzerland, recalls treating a Swiss man in his 60s with heartburn, regurgitation and a chronic cough. After he underwent fundoplication, most of his GERD symptoms faded, although he had trouble swallowing and was not able to eat full meals during recovery.

"For a couple of weeks he was very uncomfortable," Tutuian says. "But he said, 'I don't want to go back to how I was before, to my reflux and the cough.' He felt better and no longer needed to take PPIs. So his goals were met."

➤ Transoral incisionless fundoplication (TIF)

Appropriate for people with small hiatal hernias, this is a version of fundoplication that surgeons perform endoscopically, placing a camera and tools through the mouth and esophagus to

the upper stomach. A barrier is created at the lower esophageal sphincter by folding a portion of the upper stomach over itself and stapling it in place.

Tack was involved in a study of the treatment that was published in 2015 in the journal *Alimentary Pharmacology and Therapeutics*. He says 59 per cent of the patients who had TIF did not experience GERD symptoms for six months afterwards (the end point of the study) and were able to stop taking PPI medication.

➤ Stretta

For this endoscopic procedure, surgeons insert a camera and catheter via the mouth and oesophagus to deliver radiofrequency energy to the oesophageal wall near the stomach opening.

"The idea is that, over time, it strengthens the sphincter muscle," Tack says. "There is evidence, based on measurements of pressure in the sphincter, that it has an anti-reflux effect. However, it is not a huge effect and does not match the efficacy of fundoplication."

➤ LINX Device

A band of magnetic titanium beads is placed around the lower oesophageal sphincter during this laparoscopic procedure. The magnetic force among the beads helps to tighten the valve, discouraging stomach acid from entering the oesophagus. When you eat, the force of swallowing moves the beads apart, and food passes easily from esophagus to stomach.

Whereas most other GERD procedures are irreversible, the LINX device can later be removed if needed. And a hiatal hernia can be repaired during the procedure. Years ago, there were problems with the device, as the beads migrated from where they were implanted. But newer versions of the device fit better and are lighter, so that risk is substantially reduced.

➤ RefluxStop

During this laparoscopic procedure, which is done under general anaesthetic, surgeons repair a hiatal hernia, then place a spherical device the size of a ping-pong ball into the upper stomach—the area that may contribute to the reflux—to bulk it up. The procedure is reversible.

"It restores our anatomy to the way it was before we were suffering from reflux," Goldsmith says.

RefluxStop is the newest GERD treatment, and researchers have only two to three years' worth of safety data. It may appeal to people who worry that tightening the lower oesophageal sphincter could cause swallowing difficulties.

THE BENEFITS OF GERD therapies don't necessarily last forever. "This is soft tissue that moves," Sweis says—for example, when you swallow. So, the new structure might change over time.

After five or 10 years, some patients need to go back to PPIs if their symptoms return. "Therapy for your GERD



FOODS THAT TRIGGER REFLUX

For many people, certain foods or drinks cause reflux, especially acidic and fried foods, caffeine, carbonated beverages and alcohol. Common 'trigger foods' are pizza, sausages, cheese, tomatoes, bacon, citrus fruits, chocolate, peppermint and anything containing chilli peppers or black pepper. Avoiding your triggers may minimize symptoms.

How much you eat, and when, may also impact your symptoms, according to Dr Radu Tutuian of the Civic Hospital Solothurn in Switzerland. Having smaller meals and not eating late in the evening may ease symptoms.

does not necessarily guarantee that you're going to have 30 years of proton-pump-inhibitor-free life," says Dr Ian Gralnek, chief of gastroenterology at Emek Medical Center in Afula, Israel, and president of the European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy.

Within a few years, European doctors may be able to prescribe potassium-competitive acid blockers (P-CABs) to treat GERD. The medication, which has been approved in Japan and Korea, is more effective than PPIs at neutralizing stomach acid. "The suppression of the gastric acidity is longer," Savarino says. "With PPIs, you have to take them one hour before a meal. But with P-CABs, you can take them even if you have just eaten."

Another possible therapy may alleviate symptoms in a novel way. "Some researchers are looking at strengthening oesophageal lining, which would make it less sensitive," Tack says. "This is an avenue of further research." R

In The Praise of Peace

Wherever humanity has made that hardest of all starts and lifted itself out of mere brutality is a sacred spot.

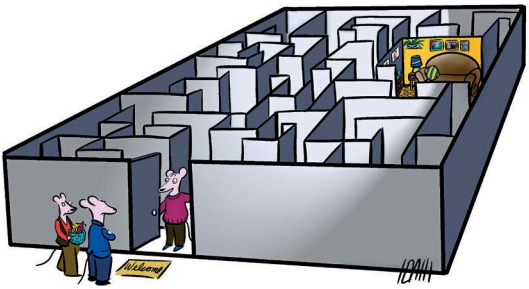
WILLA CATHER, WRITER

There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people.

HOWARD ZINN, HISTORIAN AND PLAYWRIGHT

MARIUSFM77/GETTY IMAGES (LEMONS), ROSEMARY CALVERT/GETTY IMAGES (CHOCOLATE), BARCIN/GETTY IMAGES (PEPPERS), NANTONOV/GETTY IMAGES (PIZZA), CHRIS CLOR/GETTY IMAGES (DRINK),

LIFE'S *Like That*



"Sorry that took so long. I just moved in."

On the morning of my daughter's birthday, I told her, "Now that you're six, there will be things you can do that you couldn't do before." By that I meant taking on chores and responsibilities. She took it to mean something else.

Leaping off her bed, she ran down the hall yelling, "I'm going to see if I can read!"
—KEITH CRAWFORD

I was 11 when, as part of a church trip, I went to an amusement park for the first time. As I nervously climbed into my seat on the roller coaster next to the parish priest, he said, "Don't be scared, it's only a ride."

Well, a few seconds into the ride, and after some tortuous twists and turns, every four-letter word I'd ever heard came spewing out of my mouth. Thankfully, the ride eventually ended. As the priest stood up, he smiled and said, "See you in confession tomorrow."
—JOHN MURRAY JR.

As I lugged a ladder through the house, I told my husband, "I'm going to get some heavy boxes off that top shelf in our closet. Maybe you should come along—they are pretty high up, and I could fall."

My beloved jumped up from his recliner and said, "OK, yeah, let me grab my camera."
—CARLA KOOTSTRA

My mom downloaded Uber and ordered a ride for the first time. She's 66, she'd never done it, and I'm proud of her! I was less proud to learn that in the process she accidentally signed up to become an Uber driver.
—𝕏@JOREMMONS

I see what percentage you guys leave your phones on, how the hell are you gonna expect electric cars to get you anywhere.
—𝕏@TASHANEEDSHELP

Here's how I knew I was getting old:
✦ Having to scroll and scroll to find my birth year when completing an online form.

CARTOON BY *Mark Heath*

At bedtime, I ceremoniously move the claw clip from my hair to the bag of chips, signifying the end of the day.
—𝕏@COFFEEANDVINYL1

✦ The '90s weren't actually 10 years ago.
✦ My Hotmail account is older than most of my co-workers.
✦ When people say "30 years ago" and they mean the 1990s, not the 1960s.
✦ Hearing songs that were popular when I was in high school playing in the supermarket.
✦ My daughter turning 40.
—REDDIT.COM

When my friend's father filled out his personal information form at the pharmacy, he listed himself as "bisexual."

"You're not bisexual," his wife reminded him.

He shrugged and said, "I thought bisexual meant that I believed in a two-person relationship."
—MICHELLE ANDERSON

Very excited about the arrival of my niece's new baby, I was searching for a baby store in Brooklyn where I might buy a gift. One shop had closed; another seemed to be online only. Finally, I found an adorable little place, chock-full of little toys and outfits. I was taken immediately by a tiny plush jacket.

"Is this for a newborn?" I asked the clerk.

She hesitated. "It depends on the breed," she said.
—DEBBIE PLUMER, IN THE *New York Times*

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

EXPANDING OUR VOCABULARY

I never realized how often I served leftovers to my family until my teenage son began claiming that my culinary specialty is "deja food."
—SUSAN MAGAW

After a recent visit to the eye doctor who was monitoring her glaucoma and macular degeneration, my mother-in-law shared the doctor's prognosis:



"He says I'm suffering from immaculate deception."
—LAURENCE REYNOLDS

My son refers to my closet as my "clothes pantry." I mean, he's not wrong.
—ANNA SMITH

PAOLOMARTINEZPHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

BE FRIENDS WITH YOUR MONEY

(AND MANAGE IT TOO!)

This successful Internet entrepreneur, content creator and bestselling author shares his tips for anyone trying to kickstart their investment journey

BY *Ankur Warikoo*

FOR 10 YEARS, I took a below-market salary. Instead, I opted for equity in my start-up. Intentionally, I paid myself last. Gambled on equity, but ignored savings. Convinced it would give me much higher returns. When things didn't turn out as expected, I was cash-strapped. When I needed money the most, I found myself with the least.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIDDHANT JUMDE

PHOTOGRAPH BY *Rajwant Rawat*



Saving isn't sexy

We should save. We get it. Yet, we don't. Because saving isn't sexy. Or fun. The future seems so far off .

"Retirement? I haven't even started earning properly yet! *And* we're not making enough money ... *And* we'll miss out on life ..." Our friends are putting up reels of sundowners in Goa. Why should *we* save?

So, we postpone. We'll start tomorrow. Next year. Just not today.

But We *should* save.

Because. Life. Is. Crazy.

Almost like a Bollywood movie. One moment, we're happily dancing around a tree. Next moment, we're hit with medical emergencies, job losses, an unexpected death in the family.

Also ...

Because. We. Have. Dreams.

That house, that car, that fancy vacation. Plus our retirement. Our money today has to pay for our desires tomorrow.

Savings give you the power to walk away from a job you hate. The power to handle a medical emergency without depleting your reserves. The power to move into your own place. The power to live life on your terms. You don't have to give up what you love.

How do I start saving?

Unless you know *why* you're saving, you don't know *how much* to save.

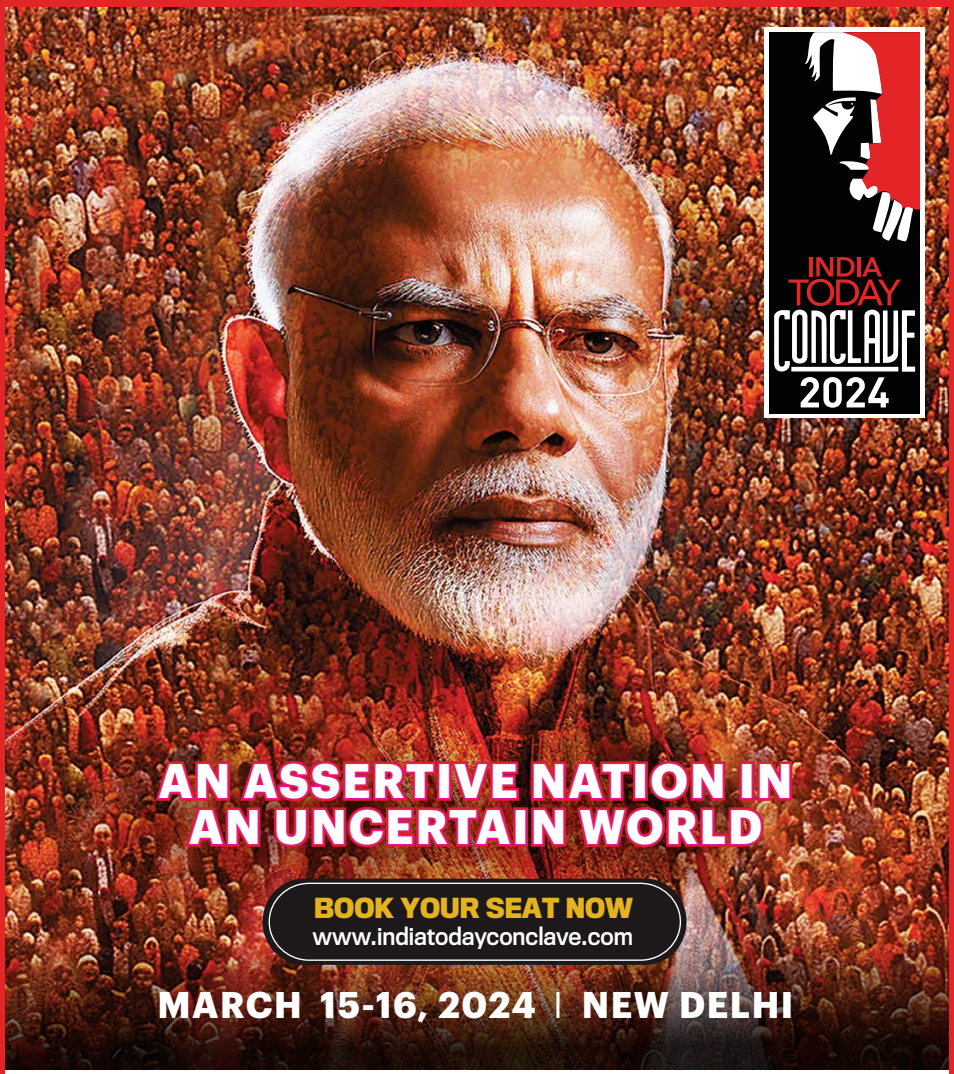
If you're just 'saving', it's a random number. If you don't hit it, you don't care. So, whatever you earn will always be little. Whatever you spend, you'll always feel guilty. Whatever you

Ask Ankur

How did you develop a healthy relationship with money?

For the longest time, I hated money. Because I thought it was the reason my parents fought, why we struggled and had unhappy days. So I grew up hating it, never acknowledging its importance, thinking I am above it. Because of that, I disrespected money, which is where things break down. When you disrespect money and what it can do for you, you start an ugly relationship with it. That's what happened with me too, until the age of 39 when I saw what the absence of money could lead to. I am a changed person now!





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save and invest, you'll never know if it's enough. But if you're 'saving for a vacation' or 'saving for a house', the goal gives you purpose. It sharpens your decisions.

List your goals. When do you want to achieve them?

- Long-term goals: Typically more than 10 years. Example: A down payment on a house.
- Medium-term goals: Typically goals you want to achieve in three to 10 years. Example: Higher education.
- Short-term goals: Less than three years. Example: a holiday.

Figure out how much each goal will cost you.

- Quote an approximate current price for each goal. The price won't stay the same forever, though. Because, inflation.
- Calculate the 'future price' of your goal, based on the time frame you've set. Assume an annual inflation rate of approximately six per cent.

Build the saving mindset.

Your target should be to save *at least* 20 per cent of your salary. Remember the 50:30:20 budget rule: Spend 50 per cent of your salary on essential spends. 30 per cent on your desires. 20 per cent on your savings (and investments).

Don't just save. Invest.

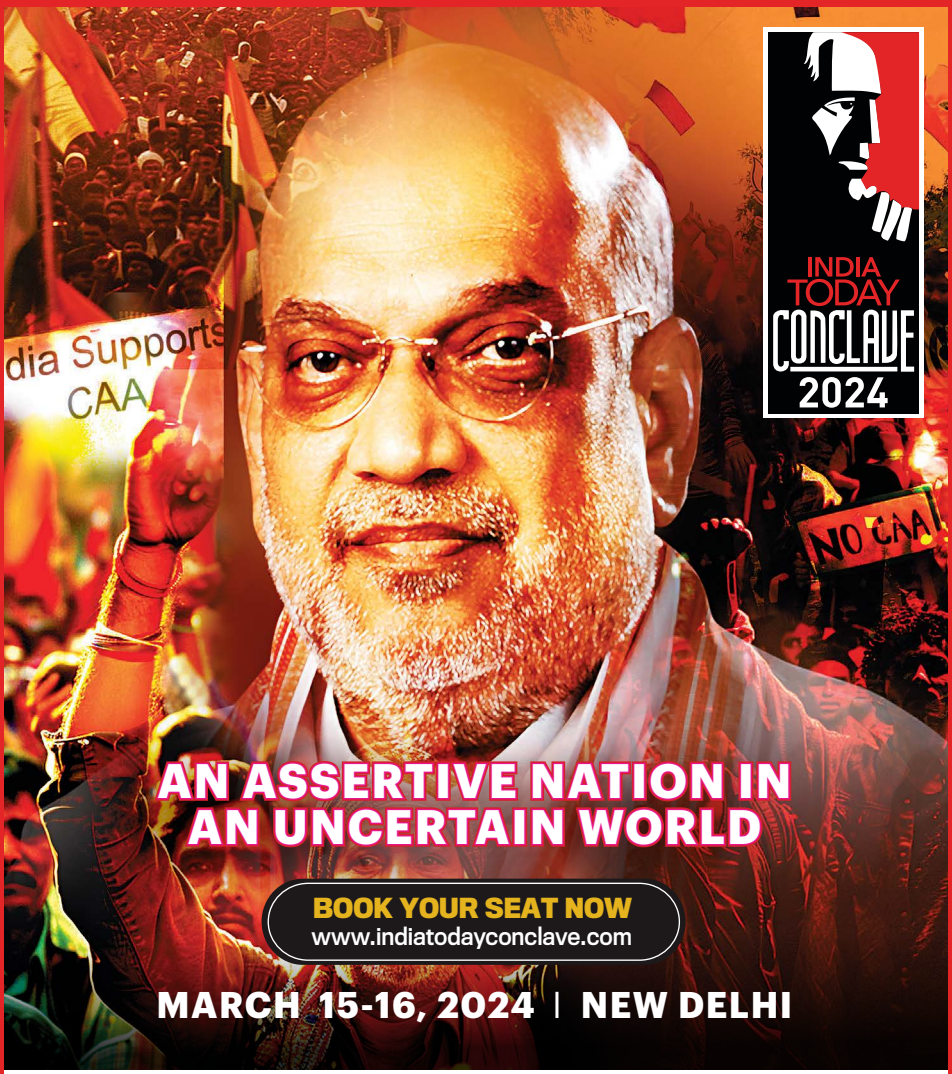
We save to invest. Not to let the money rot in a bank account. These

Ask Ankur

How does one break out of the negative cycle between feeling intense financial anxiety or feeling guilt about becoming money-minded?

By finding a balance—which budgeting allows one to do. We often think money is about extremes. It is either spending all of it or not saving anything. Or saving all of it and not enjoying life. The truth is, money can manage everything. Because money doesn't have colour. It is the same—whether you're paying rent, buying a phone, or investing in a mutual fund.





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investments will generate returns to cover short/medium/long-term goals.

Where to invest is just as important as how much to save. That doesn't always mean investing where you get the maximum returns. It means understanding how different investments work for different goals. Mix and match to hit your goals.

10 Tips to Help You Save More

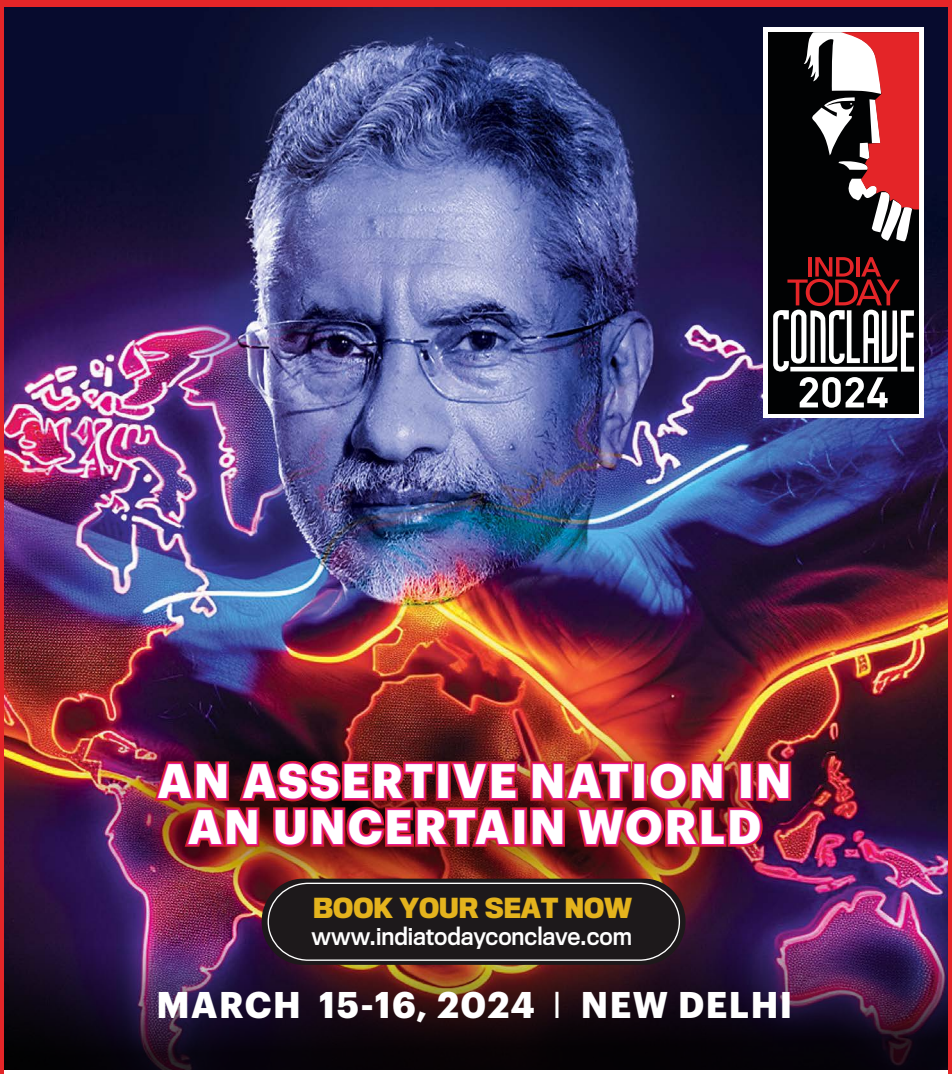
- Automate your savings. If we have money in the bank, we tend to spend it. It's not always easy to do the right thing. So, make the right thing easy!
- Sign up for as much EPF deduction as you can, so it never reaches you. Do monthly SIPs. Open a separate investment account. As soon as your

Ask Ankur

What is the biggest mistake you have made with money?
Investing my money according to my echo chamber (startups, in my case). Until 2019 ALL of my money was invested ONLY in startups—leading me to be rich on paper, but not with actual money.

Drawing from your experiences, what lessons can you share about how to establish consistent habits and building good financial discipline?
Three ways: Protect yourself first by getting health and life insurance; Budget your monthly income to spend wisely; Invest 20 per cent of your monthly income, mostly in mutual fund SIPs. Bonus tip: Be patient!





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Ask Ankur

How can one begin to build an understanding of money so that we can feel confident about money and managing it?

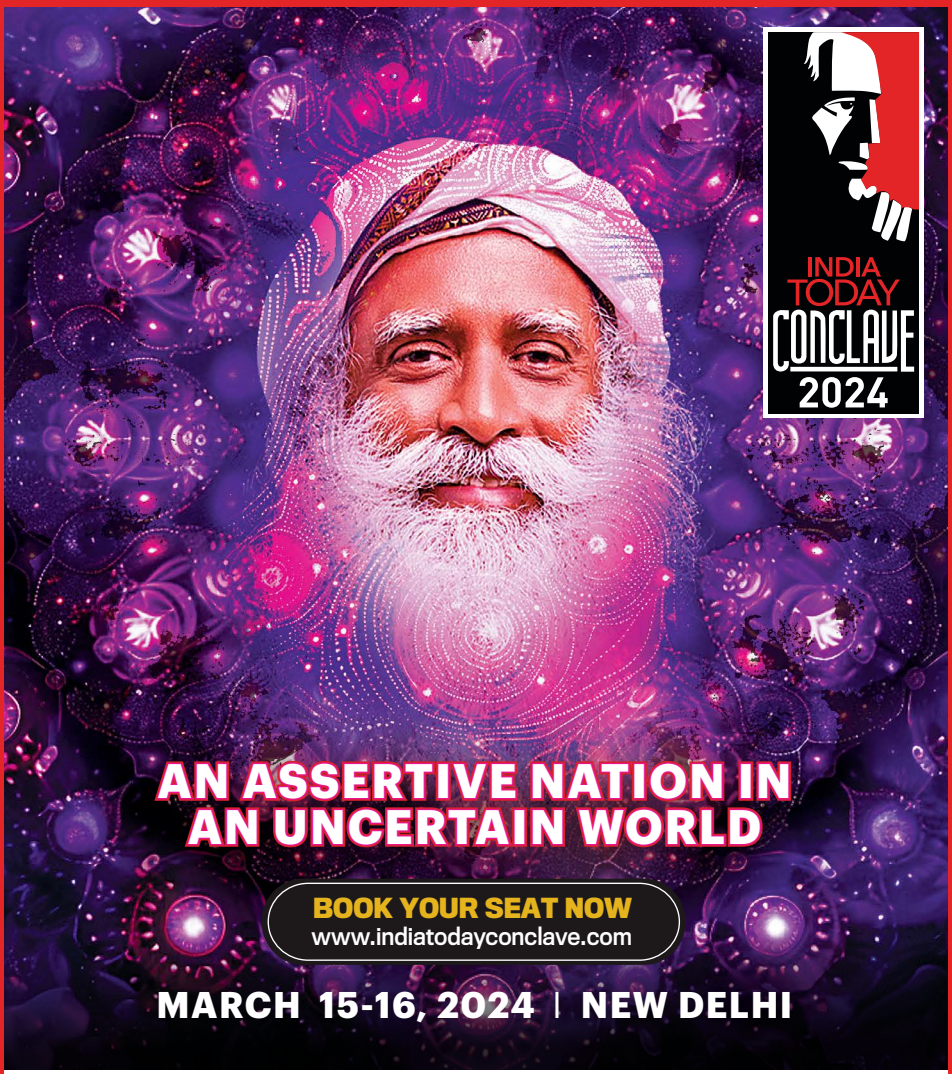
The best way? Start small and warm yourself up to how it feels. It's like any new first-time experience. None of us are born with any of the skills we have today—we learnt all of them. The more we did it, the more comfortable we got. Never invested? Start small. Set aside a percentage of your salary to another bank account. Don't even invest that—just keep it aside. See how that makes you feel. Give it a few months. Then make that first investment. Wait. Then think of what to do with the returns. Just start!



salary hits, sweep your investment amount to that account.

- 30-day rule: If you really want to buy something big, wait for 30 days. Chances are you'll decide you don't need it. Chances are you'll decide you don't need it.
- Try a fortnightly money 'fast'. Once a week or fortnight, don't spend on anything. Anything. Spoiler: This will require some advance preparation. Take food from home. Carpool.
- Choose debit/UPI over credit cards. Debit/UPI is money you actually have. Credit cards give you the illusion of money that you may not actually have. If you don't have it, you can't spend it. The best part? It's free (a lot of places still levy a surcharge on credit cards)!
- Make shopping lists and stick to them Do this even if you're buying online.
- Rent if you're not a frequent user. Today, the mantra is 'reduce, reuse'.
- Use deals and discount sites as much as you can. There's no shame in it.
- Pay off your loans faster. Early repayment saves on interest. For example: Pay one extra EMI/year (13 instead of 12). Increase that EMI by 10 per cent every year. A 25-year loan reduces to 10 years. And you save 60 per cent on your interest amount!
- Buy life insurance when you're young. You pay a lower premium and get longer coverage.

EXCERPTED FROM *MAKE EPIC MONEY* BY ANKUR WARIKOO, WITH PERMISSION FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE INDIA. ANKUR HAS LENT HIS VOICE TO THE AUDIOBOOK, WHICH IS NOW STREAMING ON AUDIBLE AND IS ACCESSIBLE FOR LISTENERS ON THE GO.



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QUOTABLE QUOTES

This is the real danger of the single narrative. ... That in order to, somewhat, justify affirmative action or reservations, we need to look downtrodden. Only then will society agree to acknowledge the ... systemic injustice.

—**Yashica Dutt,** *writer and journalist*

Without love, without music, without harmony, we are nothing.

—**Zakir Hussain,** *musician, after winning the 2023 Grammy for Best Contemporary Instrumental Album*



PHOTO: XXX; ALAMY

And if happiness visits you again, do not remember its previous betrayal. Enter into the happiness, and burst!

—**Mahmoud Darwish,** *poet*



It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?

—**Virginia Woolf,** *author, in* A Room of One's Own

Soak up the views. Take in the bad weather and the good weather. You are not the storm.

—**Matt Haig,** *author and journalist on depression*



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A couple, fleeing the shelling in Ukraine, are captured by Russian troops. It's up to their frantic son—living 2,400 km away—to get them free.

NIGHTMARE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Owen Freeman*



ALLEY —

BY *Reuben F. Johnson*
FROM ***ROLLING STONE***

WHEN RUSSIAN SOLDIERS opened fire on our car, I thought we were dead. It was 4 March 2022, eight days into the invasion of Ukraine. My wife and I had hurriedly packed all our valuables that could fit in one suitcase and a couple of carry-ons.

We hired a driver, thinking we could make it to the train station in Irpin, a village outside of Kyiv that we had fled to after the war began. Nearly as soon as we pulled away from the rural farmhouse where we were staying, we ran into Russian armoured vehicles.

"Go back, go back!" my wife screamed. The driver frantically tried to reverse. It was too late. Russian infantrymen began spraying our Toyota Camry with automatic weapons fire and chasing after us. As I ducked behind the driver's seat, I could hear the glass shattering into a million pieces as the bullets struck the windows.

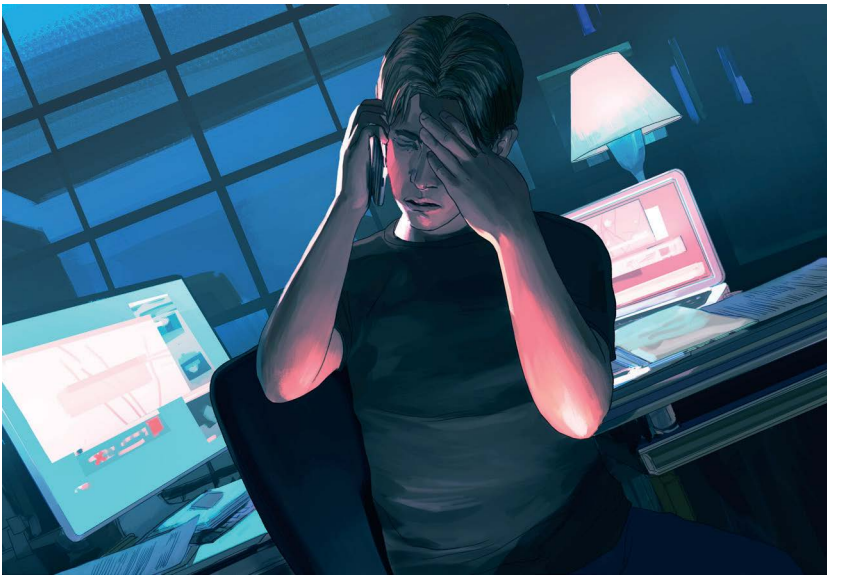
Somehow we managed to jump out of the moving car, hop over a fence and take cover behind a bright blue port-a-potty. Our bullet-riddled Camry careened down an incline and smashed into a fence. It was a complete wreck.

"Come out from behind there!" yelled a Russian soldier. We stepped out from our hiding place, hands raised, explaining we were unarmed civilians on our way to a train station. The Russian soldiers approached and pointed rifles in our faces.

THE STORY OF our capture started with a miscalculation. "There will not be a war." I heard that phrase over and over in Kyiv. My wife, Iryna Samsonenko, and I had been living in Ukraine for 21 years. I worked as a military affairs and Russian political analyst, and as a consultant to the aerospace industry. Putin threatening Ukraine was a movie we had seen many times, and I assumed the saber rattling was just that and nothing more.

Then the missile strikes began. Around four in the morning the air-raid sirens sounded, and we sought shelter in the underground garage across the street from where we lived in Kyiv.

When the shelling stopped later that



day, we returned home. A few hours later, the bombardment began anew. We did not know what to do. Getting in our car and driving west—away from the Russians—was impossible. The roads were clogged with traffic for miles, and there was not a drop of gas to be had anywhere from Kyiv to the Polish border. Anyone left in the city was now trapped there.

Adding to the sense of helplessness was the odour of exploded ordnance permeating the air. This was not just a campaign against Ukraine's armed forces; this was a war to terrorize the civilian population.

After spending two nights in air-raid shelters, we decided to evacuate. We had friends about an hour outside the city, and they kindly agreed to let us stay in their guesthouse.

Within two days of arriving, the fighting in and around nearby Gostomel Airport had shut down all utilities. The artillery and mortar duels between Ukrainian and Russian forces destroyed the water and power lines. Reaching their house was not so difficult, but now going back to Kyiv was impossible—every bridge between us and the city had been blown up to stall the Russian advance. In our attempt to reach safety, we had become trapped. There was no exit from this place, as the entire area was now ringed with Russian troops and armour.

During this time, our son, Antonio Brasileiro Johnson, 18, was at his

boarding school in Cambridge, England, monitoring the war 24/7. He spent long nights speaking with people in Ukraine, in some cases helping them find air-raid shelters and ways to get out of battle zones, but he had only limited contact with us. No electricity except for about three hours a day from a gas generator meant smartphones were almost impossible to recharge. So Wednesday, 2 March, was the last time we were able to talk to Antonio.

The next day, I had expended most of the battery remaining on my MacBook Pro to compose an article on the war. At one point I had to stop working and all of us—Iryna and I, our friends and their children, housekeeper and nanny—had to take shelter in their root cellar while several Russian armoured vehicles were stopped on the road outside the house. The Russians appeared to be lost in the maze of country roads.

They eventually moved on, but it was clearly no longer safe to stay here. So we made a break back to Kyiv—and fell into the hands of the Russian army.

WE WATCHED IN horror as the Russians looted our car—our belongings violently ransacked and everything of value smashed or stolen. Iryna had a hard drive full of nothing but family pictures, and photos and videos of our son playing piano. It was among the many items stolen. A lifetime of memories gone in an instant.

I noticed blood running down Iryna's face. Flying fragments of glass from the shattered windows had lacerated her left cheek, and there were small grains of glass in her eye. Fortunately a Russian combat medic was on the scene and treated her before the condition could become worse.

All our computers and other hard drives were taken. All the work, every article I had ever written, every document I had ever saved, every photograph I had ever taken were all gone.

But the big bonanza for these war criminals was yet to come. As they tore into my computer bag, they found the portfolio where I was keeping the money we had saved for my son's education. "Foreign currency!" exclaimed one gleefully. This to them was the best payday they were ever going to see.

HE PUT A GRENADE IN MY COAT POCKET AND THREATENED TO PULL THE PIN.



The soldiers next began rifling through a pile of research materials I was using for some writing I was doing on the history of missile systems. Though none of the documents was classified, these dimwits were convinced that they had stumbled across some top-level intelligence operative. The same soldier was so overjoyed at

TULPAHN/GETTY IMAGES

the prospect of stealing all our money that he put a grenade in the pocket of my coat and threatened to pull the pin if I did not tell him which secret agency I must be working for.

Once they had finished stealing everything we owned, we were sent into a dark basement in a nearby building where numerous civilians were being held. Why these people had been detained was unclear, but I would be shocked if any of them were still alive today. Groups of people who were held in this area ended up in mass graves.

A RUSSIAN SOLDIER STOLE A GOLD RING I HAD PLANNED TO GIVE TO MY SON.



Next we were packed into an armoured vehicle. Two Ukrainian civilians with their hands tied behind their backs were thrown in on top of our legs. We travelled this way for an hour and a half. While in transit, one of the Russian soldiers stole a gold ring that I had owned for 25 years. I had planned to give it to Antonio once he graduated from college.

At some point we stopped in the middle of a forest. The two Ukrainians thrown in on top of us were tossed out onto the freezing cold mud.

I never saw what happened to them, but I fear the worst.

Iryna and I were told to stand, not sit, in one place, with temperatures dropping precipitously. *Were we going to be taken into the woods and shot?* We stood this way for two hours, face to face, keeping our hands warm by holding on to each other. Some soldiers took pity on us and gave us half-full cups of hot tea.

Finally, after some questioning about my papers, the soldiers left us in a van overnight with a box of the Russian equivalent of C rations and some water. The driver came in periodically to run the engine for 10 minutes or so to warm up the interior and then shut it down again. We tried to sleep, but without knowing what the next day would bring, sleep was not possible.

The next morning, we were driven down roads strewn with burnt-out military and civilian vehicles. The back half of rockets protruded out of the ground—unexploded duds—and signs of explosions and devastation were everywhere. It was a journey through the landscape of hell.

Then we saw our destination: Gostomel Airport. The runways were cratered and no longer serviceable, and the Russian army was using Gostomel as a command post of sorts. We were blindfolded and taken to an underground bunker, and when the blindfolds were removed, we were in a small room with a wooden desk, three cheap chairs and nothing else.

THP CREATIVE/GETTY IMAGES



The floor was filthy; the air cold, wet. There was no clock to tell the time and no calendar to know the date. Iryna began keeping track of the days Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*–style, by making six vertical lines and then a seventh horizontal line at an angle on the wall. How long we would be in this place was impossible to determine. No one told us why we were there or under what auspices we were held.

OUR ESCORTS LEFT US BLINDFOLDED AND EXPOSED TO SHELLING.



No one in the outside world knew where we were, or if we were still alive. All we knew was that each morning when the radios and phones in the room across the corridor began ringing, it was the beginning of another day of war.

BACK IN CAMBRIDGE, Antonio knew something was wrong. It was now Sunday, and he had not heard from us since Wednesday. He finally managed to get a call through to our friends whose place we had been staying at, and they told him the horrifying news, which they'd learnt from the driver we had hired.

My son went straight to work trying to save us. Even at age 18, he knew how US government bureaucracy worked. His first call was to the American Embassy in London. Trying not to panic, he explained that he needed to come to the embassy to speak to someone about his parents. "Make an appointment," he was told.

His next step was to call a friend of ours, retired US Air Force Maj. Gen. John Schoeppner Jr. He is a fighter pilot's fighter pilot who flew 154 combat missions over Vietnam and was the commander of Edwards Air Force Base.

When Antonio relayed the situation, Schoeppner's general's stars began flashing. He picked up the phone and called the American Embassy in London in what I was told was "an exercise in focussing their attention."

His intervention worked. Within minutes, Antonio received a call back from someone farther up the food chain in the London embassy, who then relayed him to the American Embassy in Moscow. The State Department then put our situation in the hands of some very focussed people.

In the meantime, Schoeppner was on the phone to those he knew in the Pentagon, raising an equal level of attention with people there.

After these initial interactions, Antonio was in contact with people from almost every government entity in the US, United Kingdom and Ukraine that you could think of. In Kyiv they were beginning to put together a rescue plan that would involve Ukrainian special-ops troops storming the airport.

But we knew none of this.

TO SAY IRYNA and I were in an information vacuum is being generous. All we knew was that there would be no quick end to this war.

We were held in a windowless underground room guarded by a soldier with an AK-47 cradled on his lap all hours of the day. There was no possible escape—not even MacGyver could have found a way out.

We slept on a flimsy wafer-thin mattress large enough for only one person, and we had only a single blanket against the clammy cold of early March. My folded-up overcoat served as our pillow.

Sanitary conditions were nonexistent. I had to urinate into an empty plastic water bottle. Defecating was done into a bucket in the corner of the room that thankfully had a lid to suppress the foul smell. We were provided Russian army C rations but did not consume much. Living in this modern-day dungeon caused considerable stress. I suffer from hypertension and could tell that my blood pressure was dangerously high.

Our captors did everything they could to hide what was going on in the other sections of the bunker, but we could hear everything. The room next to ours was a medical triage unit. The sounds of the maimed and dying still haunt me. Russian soldiers screaming from their wounds. Others



OLEG7799/GETTY IMAGES



Reuben (centre) with Iryna and Antonio in more carefree days before the war.

babbling incoherently, slipping in and out of consciousness as the morphine could only partially kill their pain.

Then there was the sound of a big, wide roll of packing tape being dispensed and wound around something. We knew what this sound was: Tape is used to bind the ankles of dead soldiers inside body bags.

Every day we were under bombardment. The Ukrainian forces were never far away, and by conducting 'shoot and scoot' harassment attacks against the airport, they made it impossible for the Russians to repair the runways. The building shook from the proximity of the sustained blasts. Even in the middle of the night, an artillery or mortar duel was not uncommon. We began to worry when the bombardments were accompanied by the sound of small-arms fire, signs the fighting was almost on top of us.

EIGHT DAYS AFTER we were captured, Antonio was contacted by a Ukrainian-émigré colleague I knew in Kyiv. She had been a translator and an analyst for high-level US military officials interacting with Ukraine, and she had her own connections to the Pentagon. We still had no idea that any of this was taking place, but there were ultimately several people working on our release.

VIKTOR KOVALEVSKY

One was Charlie Mount, who runs a catamaran charter-cruise service in Florida. He met with one of his friends, who phoned someone. He never told Charlie who it was, but when he put the phone down, he said, "Something is in motion. Don't ask me what, but things are happening."

Two days later, two soldiers appeared in our room and told us we were leaving. We were again blindfolded, then brought to the surface for the first time in 10 days. Supposedly we were going to be taken from the airport to another location, but when we were halfway between the bunker and the truck to transport us, the airport was hit with a mortar attack. Our escorts scampered for cover and left us out in the open, blindfolded, exposed to furious shelling. How we managed to avoid being hit I do not know, but when the firing subsided, our escorts shoved us into a truck.

We were taken to a nearby village and put into a small building being used by the Russians as a command post. Inside, they stuck us in a shower room with the showerheads removed, almost like in the movies about Nazi death camps during World War II. We were fed a small hot meal—the first one in two weeks—and then told we had to sleep sitting up on cold metal chairs.

The next morning, 15 March, we were driven toward the north. The road was littered with cars shot to pieces. There were burnt-out military vehicles, endless signs of explosions and the tracks of heavy vehicles that had chewed up the road.

Several hours later, we were dropped in the middle of nowhere. Our driver gave us back our passports and said, "Back the way you came is Ukraine, and that way is Belarus." Pointing toward Belarus, he said, "You should start walking." We could see nothing but empty fields and forests off in the distance. It was 5 p.m. and less than two hours from nightfall, so we started walking.

We finally reached a Belarus border checkpoint and explained that we were refugees. They let us cross after a series of questions from their immigration, customs and security personnel. Then came the greatest moment of our lives. A Red Cross worker had a tablet, and we were able to call Antonio on Telegram, an instant messaging app, and tell him we were alive. I was never so happy to hear my son's voice.

The next day we boarded a night train that took us to the Polish border at Brest. Several hours later, we were in Warsaw. First Iryna, and then I, some days later, flew to the US. The following month, Antonio flew from London to join us. We were reunited.

"Welcome home, Papa," he said as I hugged him, my body shaking with emotion. "I will always be here waiting for you." R

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An unlikely friendship helped my son grapple with divorce, death and ...

The Great Unknown

BY *Jowita Bydlowska*

ILLUSTRATION BY NIKKI ERNST

THE APARTMENT MY SON, Hugo, and I moved into after my divorce was nice, but the feeling we had was of holding on to a raft in angry waters. We were now about a 30-minute drive from Hugo's dad's new Toronto home. During the first week eight-year-old Hugo stayed with me there, he responded to the change in his life by trashing his room before finally letting tears come and allowing me to hug him.

At that time, he also developed a new fear—the fear of death. "I can't sleep. I am thinking about death," he would say when I would catch him with his eyes wide open, in the darkness of his bedroom, his little body tightly surrounded by a cordon of stuffed toys.

Hugo had always considered himself an atheist, ever since his dad had told him at age four that God, like Santa, wasn't real—and that when we die, we turn to dust. For Hugo, it had been just something to say to make adults laugh and confuse his innocent buddies in kindergarten.

But now that he was growing up, he was grasping the concept of time, that he was slowly but surely moving toward the big unknown. I think his fear of death also came about because nothing seemed certain anymore: Our little family was no longer a unit, and our lives were divided into split-custody homes. When the nights got too hard for Hugo, we'd fall asleep holding on to each other like two monkeys, and all the unknowns stayed away for one more night.

That same year, I'd started going to a new addictions group that met twice a week. The group was a safe place where no hard topic was off the table. The best conversations would often happen after our meetings were over; my favourite person to talk to was Denis, an 80-year-old contrarian and cancer survivor who was considered by everyone else in the group to be a grump.

At the end of each meeting, we were supposed to stand up and hold hands. I would do this even though it made me uncomfortable—I disliked the forced intimacy—but Denis refused. Like a broken link in a circle, he stood with his hands folded, and it was this little rebellion that made me trust him.

He was one of the first people I confided in about my divorce. His pragmatic response and lack of sentimentality—"It sucks now, but it will get better"—helped me gain perspective on my grief. I knew that Denis had gone through hardships, his recent cancer being one, and yet he had a healthy, no-nonsense attitude that inspired me.

I was not the only person taken with Denis—my son became an instant fan when they met at a celebration of my one year of sobriety. As we socialized while balancing our slices of cake on flimsy Styrofoam plates, Hugo was polite and charming, but he felt the adults were talking down to him and he was squirming to leave. That is, until Denis introduced himself, shaking his hand and asking Hugo what he thought about the "bad cake."

HUGO WAS POLITE AND CHARMING, BUT FELT THAT ADULTS WERE TALKING DOWN TO HIM.

Hugo said he thought the cake was fine and then pressed Denis about why he didn't hold hands at the end of the meetings, a detail I'd shared with Hugo.

(PREVIOUS PAGE, TORN PAPER) ISTOCK.COM/PETEKARICI

"I'm not in kindergarten," Denis said, and my son chuckled. Then they talked about being atheists, because Denis remembered from my stories about my precocious kid that this was something they had in common. He told Hugo that he'd never met an eight-year-old atheist before.

FROM THAT TIME ON, MY SON AND DENIS WOULD ASK FOR UPDATES ABOUT EACH OTHER.

"I've never met an 80-year-old atheist before," Hugo deadpanned, and Denis erupted in laughter.

From that time on, the two would ask for updates about each other ("Denis got a new camera to take his bird-watching to the next level"; "Hugo has finished all the *Harry Potters*."). The updates included, eventually, a devastating one when Denis's cancer came back.

I explained to Hugo that his octogenarian buddy was staying at the hospital now, and said I was going to visit.

"Is he going to die?" Hugo asked.

"Yes," I told him.

"Soon?"

"Sooner rather than later. Before the summer is over," I answered. I spoke gently but firmly, feeling my throat clenching a little as I held back tears.

Maybe I was harsh, but I had a vague notion of wanting to teach my son about death, of showing him that death, like friendship (or love that ends in a divorce), was part of life. I hoped that, by nurturing a relationship between Denis and Hugo, I could normalize this terrifying thing for my kid, who still worried about his own end.

Hugo's big brown eyes searched my face, his forehead scrunching as he said quietly, "Okay. Can I visit him?"

And so he did. On our way to the hospital, Hugo insisted on getting a gift. What do you get a grumpy old man whose only request was, at its most extravagant, a coffee? A sparkly stuffed dragon, of course—the perfect gift, we joked, for someone with such a sparkly demeanour.

Denis was amused and proudly displayed the dragon next to a stuffed elf someone else had given to him, also as a joke. He let Hugo have his hospital pudding. We went into the common room and played a card game, with Hugo writing down scores on a sheet of paper. He's always loved numbers and charts and strategy.

"We should play chess," Denis said. "Do you play chess?"

"No, but you can teach me," Hugo allowed.

Denis pretended to be appalled, "If I have to," he said. "What kind of person doesn't play chess?"

I set up visits with Denis every Sun-

day, always bringing my son with me. We ate snacks while they played chess, and we talked about Denis's wild adventures as a farm labourer before he became a lawyer in his 50s, "just to see what that was like." Denis never talked about his cancer, but Hugo had said more than once that maybe the doctors had made a mistake. He thought Denis seemed totally fine.

Except he wasn't. He'd long walked with a cane, but that gave way to a walker, which then became a wheelchair. Eventually, Denis was moved to a palliative care facility.

AS DENIS'S HEALTH DETERIORATED, WE STUCK TO HIS ROOM, WHERE HE AND HUGO PLAYED CHESS.

Hugo's only comment on the new location, which he called the "dying hospital," was that it didn't seem like anyone was dying in it. Compared to the previous hospital, which was surrounded by the concrete of downtown and filled with fragile people in hospital gowns, this place was bright and clean and not depressing at all. From Denis's windows, we could view a sprawling hill of trees and bushes, and grounds dotted with fountains.

Once, feeling particularly sparkly, Denis convinced us to head out for tacos at a cheap street-food joint a 10-minute walk away. That took us half an hour; he allowed Hugo to push him all the way there. It wasn't an easy task, as the wheelchair kept getting jammed in the tram rails.

But Denis felt proud to treat us, and my kid put on a show of pretending to dine as if in a fine restaurant, bending his plastic utensils in ridiculous ways as he tried to cut up the tacos.

As Denis's health deteriorated, we didn't talk about his illness or the fact that he was going to die soon or what it all meant. But eventually we had to deal with the issue of our last visit—the one when saying goodbye would mean saying goodbye for good.

Hugo and I were scheduled to go to Europe for the rest of the summer. We brought him some coffee and then went up onto the rooftop terrace, where it was so windy that the chess pieces kept falling over.

Afterwards, Hugo pushed Denis down the long, bright hallways, sometimes running, and making one wild turn that caused Denis to huff loudly. Hugo kept forgetting that his friend was so fragile, and Denis didn't have the heart to reprimand him.

We dropped him off in his room, and it was the first and the last time we hugged, stiffly—Denis's disdain for physical contact taking a back-seat to this sweet, awkward moment.

LIKE ALL PARENTS, I TRY TO DISPEL MYTHS AND MONSTERS, TO MAKE DEATH LESS SCARY.

And then we left. Hugo cried on the way home.

A month later, a relative of Denis's called me while Hugo and I were on the Adriatic coast, the shimmering sea visible from the windows of our villa as I took the call. Denis had only days, maybe hours, left, they told us. He could no longer speak. After hanging up, Hugo and I decided we would record a voice mail for him. "What should I say?" Hugo wondered.

"What do you want to say?"

"I don't know. Have a nice trip?" he said and laughed uneasily.

After we'd left a clunky message, he added, "But he's an atheist, so he's not even going anywhere."

Two years later, in January 2020, Hugo's beloved grandmother passed away, and he accepted her death stoically, quipping that he had had training in death with Denis.

I don't know if my son's sleepless nights went away because of those Sunday visits, but we did settle into our new life, despite all the uncertainty. Hugo no longer obsesses over death, although he has admitted that he's still scared of the big unknown—but who isn't?

And I'm not sure if he's an atheist anymore, either. While replacing his phone this past Christmas, I found a couple of messages sent to his grandmother's number, one reading: "Where are you?"

When I asked him about it, he said, "I was sad and I missed her. It was comforting."

Like all parents, I try to soften blows and dispel myths and monsters, and I know that with Denis, I was trying to make death less scary, give it a human face or, even more straightforwardly, help him make friends with it.

I don't know if Hugo texting his grandmother is a sign of a spell being broken. But I know that he understands now that people live on after they're gone, and recognizing that is one way to make peace with the great unknown. R

A Good Life

You are the sum total of everything you've ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot—it's all there. Everything influences each of us, and because of that I try to make sure that my experiences are positive.

MAYA ANGELOU, POET AND ACTIVIST

EVENT

Awarding Excellence

A look back at the 2023 Trusted Brand Award presentation ceremony hosted by Reader's Digest *India last month.*

BY *Naorem Anuja*

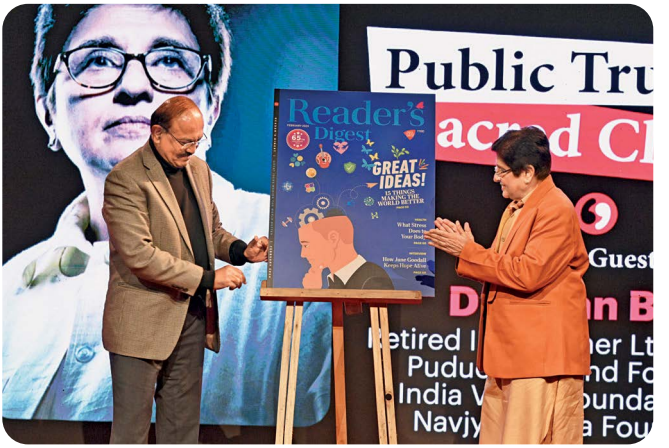
THE 25TH EDITION of the Reader's Digest Trusted Brand awards was held on 3 February 2024, and showcased excellence across various industries, recognizing brands that have consistently earned the trust and loyalty of consumers. The event served as a platform to celebrate companies that have demonstrated exceptional performance and integrity in their respective fields.

Since its inception in 1923, the *Reader's Digest* magazine has proudly served as a trusted companion, a source of reliable information, and a curator of stories that matter to millions of readers worldwide. This century-long history of trust—hard-earned and well-kept—underlines the brand's commitment to providing accurate, unbiased information that readers can depend on.

In keeping with this vital role, *Reader's Digest* India launched the annual Trusted Brands consumer survey to identify companies that have consistently fulfilled their promises to satisfy consumer needs and deliver quality products and services.

The awards ceremony highlighted the significance of trust in consumer relationships and emphasized the importance of reliability, quality, and transparency in building strong brand reputations. Winners were selected based on extensive surveys conducted among consumers, reflecting authentic customer feedback and experiences.

The ceremony began with Mr Raj Chengappa, Group Editorial Director (publishing), Editor, *India Today* magazine welcoming the winners and the three speakers—Dilip Cherian, communications consultant and policy advisor, Ankur Warikoo, internet entrepreneur and chief guest Dr Kiran Bedi, retired IPS, former lieutenant-governor,



Raj Chengappa (left), with Dr Kiran Bedi unveiling the 65th anniversary issue of *Reader's Digest* India



Ankur Warikoo fields questions from the audience during the 25th edition of the RD Trusted Brand Awards.

"Public trust is a sacred charge of leaders," says Dr Kiran Bedi during her keynote address.



Puducherry and author—to the event.

In the first session of the event, Why Trust Matters More Today than Ever Before for Brands, Dilip Cherian spoke about how in a hyperconnected world, where one is constantly bombarded by products and hashtags, brands often mistakenly channel their focus on getting their image right, and though that is vital, that alone doesn't ensure consumer loyalty. He emphasized that getting the product to live up to the hype is essential to craft a success story. Creating a good product that delivers on its promises, is still the only way to ensure that the consumer comes back.

Our speaker for the second session on the Role of Trust in One's Brand-Building Journey was entrepreneur,



Raj Chengappa (left), with Ramon Magsaysay winner, Dr Kiran Bedi during the Q&A session.



"Trust requires the luxury of time. It also needs the commitment of investment, and the rebuilding of the product in which trust has failed", says 'Image Guru' Dilip Cherian.



Winners of the Trusted Brand 2023 awards pose for a group photo with Dr Kiran Bedi and Raj Chengappa

author and content creator Ankur Warikoo. Creating content on personal finance, career, relationships and personal growth, Warikoo has over 10 million followers across platforms. Speaking on how to be an authentic brand, Warikoo underlined the importance of being consistent, and how constancy in one's conduct, or in the consumer's experience of the brand, is the singular way to build a lasting brand that enjoys the currency of trust.

This session was followed by the unveiling of the 65th anniversay of the Indian edition of *Readers Digest* by Dr Kiran Bedi. After the unveiling, the indomitable Dr Bedi took to the stage to talk about public trust and how it is a vital commodity if leaders and public persons were to successfully affect real and effective change. She emphasized that public trust was a privilege that leaders must earn by their conduct, and by empowering people who choose them. She reiterated that trust was both a sentiment and a process; once lost, it can be impossible to win back.

Dr Bedi's address was followed by a lively Q&A session moderated by Mr Chengappa and the award distribution to representatives from the winning brands. The afternoon ended with a delightful lunch enjoyed by the guests, audience and winners. R

Visit www.readersdigest.in/tb-winner for the complete list of winners and for the full coverage of the event.

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Manoj Sharma
Signature of Publisher

Date: 1st March, 2024

It Happens

ONLY IN INDIA



"I have opted for low-risk, after the India assignment fiasco ."

CARTOON BY SIDDHANYT JUMDE

Pigeon Peril

We have a feathered espionage to report. A pigeon, caught by the RCF (Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers) police in Chembur, was found with a message in what was suspected to be 'Chinese' inscribed on its wings, and with two rings—one copper, one aluminum—on his leg. The cops were immediately alarmed. Suspecting foul play at work, the bird was sent to the Bai Sakarbai Dinshaw Petit Hospital for Animals, for medical tests as part of the investigation. The rings were sent for forensic examination to rule out the possibility of them being foreign tech spying on Indian territory. That was 8 months ago. But while the investigation found nothing incriminating, the police had clearly forgotten to clear Private P's good name and sign its release orders. The law-abiding hospital staff couldn't let him go without explicit orders to do so either and spent much time

wringing their hands in wait. Luckily PETA swept in to the bird's rescue and made the necessary and urgent interventions to send the exonerated spy back to the sky. Look we can get behind a robust guarding of the nation's secrets, but best to change strategy when a pigeon makes one eat crow.

SOURCE: *CNN.COM, HINDUSTANTIMES.COM*

Mad about monikers

What's in a name? If you ask IFS officer Pravin L. Agrawal, we bet he would groan: a lot! Poor man, posted as the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife & Ecotourism), had erred and named a lion and lioness sent to Bengal Safari Park in Siliguri from Tripura's Sepahijala Zoological Park on 12 February. Still don't see the problem? Well, he had named the lion Akbar and his roommate lioness Sita. Fresh hell broke loose, as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) went to the Jalpaiguri circuit bench of the Calcutta High Court, demanding that the names of the pair be changed. Why? Hurt religious sentiments. The court agreed and has asked the West Bengal Zoo Authority to consider renaming the couple. And Agrawal has been suspended from his job. Can we take the lord's name over this row, or will that be in vain?

SOURCE: *THEHINDU.COM*

Mind the Gap

If we are being honest, this next news flash had us feeling almost punitive. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has spent the last 6 years building the Gokhale Bridge, which connects Andheri West to Andheri East. The bridge after being in all degrees of abeyance, was due to open February, bringing the hapless commuter some measure of relief. But, in the mad, mad matters of urban public infrastructure, it turns out that the newly minted flyover is misaligned with the also recently constructed C.D. Barfiwala 'Y' Bridge. There now lies a two-metre height difference between the two bridges that were supposed to connect! To contextualize the gaffe, this gap disrupts seamless travel, sparks widespread criticism of the Corporation's foresight and concerns about how much time and taxpayer money it's going to take to fix this significant engineering challenge. Looks like in Mumbai, the East is East, and West is West, and the twain shall take more time to meet.

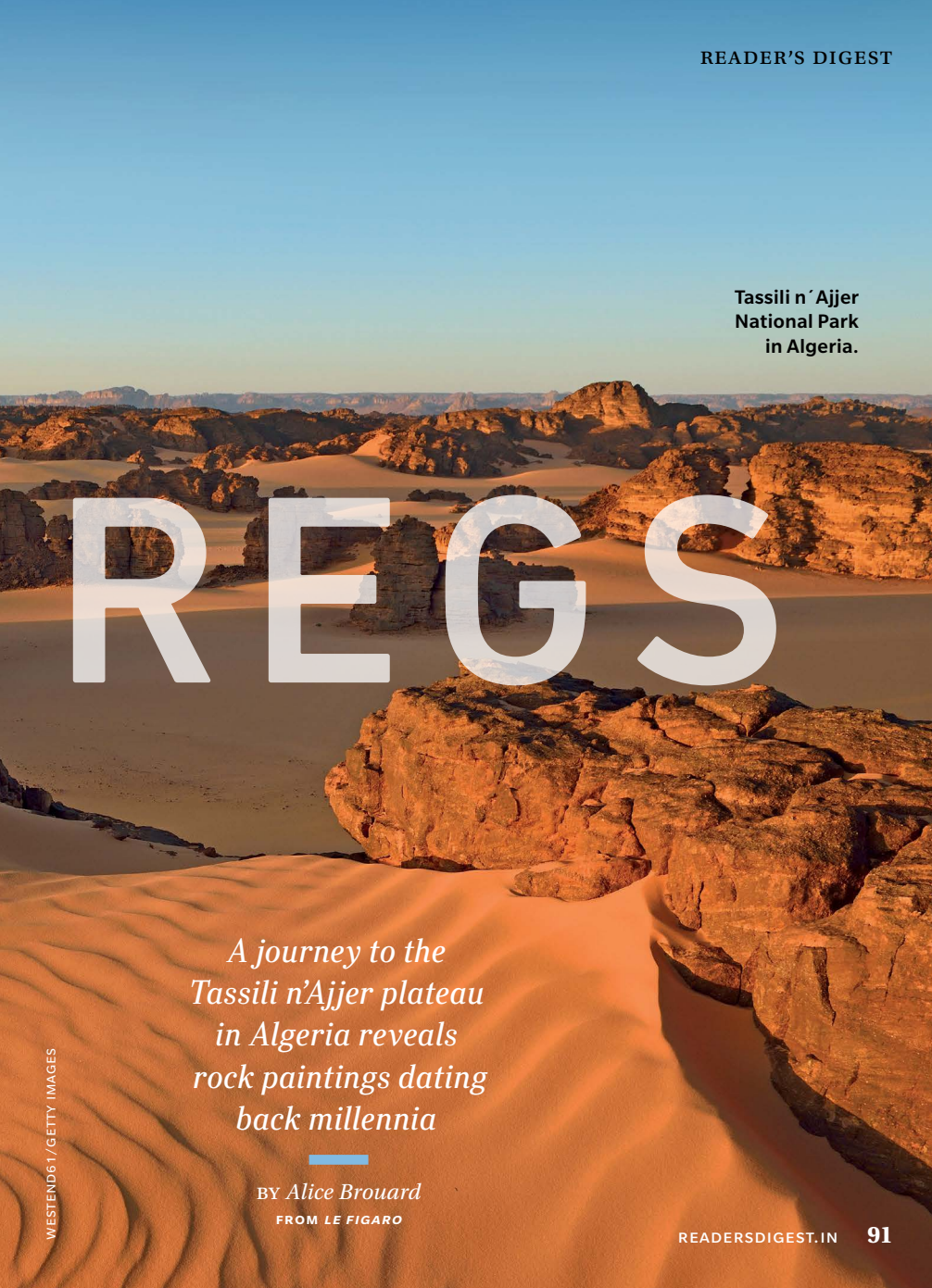
SOURCE: *INTODAY.COM*

—COMPILED BY NAOREM ANUJA

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

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE TUA





Tassili n´Ajjer National Park in Algeria.

REGS

A journey to the Tassili n'Ajjer plateau in Algeria reveals rock paintings dating back millennia

BY *Alice Brouard*
FROM *LE FIGARO*

WESTEND61/GETTY IMAGES

Wrapped in a superb, green-blue cotton *takakat* and a white *tagelmust* around his head, our Tuareg guide's fiery coal eyes are riveted on the horizon. Agaoued Mechar leans on a stick, his chest bent by years of work on this inhospitable land. And what a land! "It's beautiful. It's good!" he says.



Agaoued encourages us to take photos, happy that foreign tourists are once again allowed to visit the Tassili n'Ajjer plateau in southeastern Algeria. From 2008 to 2019, Algeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended that tourists avoid the area because of a high risk of terrorist activity.

We are standing at the foot of the plateau. An ocean of rocks and sand, it seems to have fallen from the moon: dried wadis, gaping canyons, excavated cliffs and blocks of reddish sandstone burned, crumbled, eroded.At an altitude of 2,000 metres and covering 72,000 square kilometers, the vast area sits on Algeria's borders with Libya and Niger. In this rugged environment, Neolithic peoples painted images of their daily lives, beliefs and myths on walls, crevices and cavities.

Agaoued, 79, knows the plateau down to its smallest folds and can easily find these treasures. Born and raised here, he followed in the footsteps of his father, who guided French explorer Henri Lhote in 1950s expeditions to inventory and reproduce the Tassili n'Ajjer rock paintings.

At the time, few foreigners dared to venture into this remote region. Copies of the paintings made by Lhote and his team, traced on sandstone and then painted with gouache on



paper, were exhibited at the Louvre in Paris, bringing world renown to the Tassilian wall art. But the methods employed by Lhote and his team also caused controversy: Moistening the walls to eliminate millennia of dust buildup damaged the original works.

IT IS TIME to leave our camp and head to the base of the plateau. The sun is already burning. The caravan includes a cook named Ibrahim, friends Saayh and Abdelkrim and seven heavily loaded donkeys.

For a strong walker, it takes about four hours to climb onto the plateau—via a hill of scree called Akba Tafelelet (1,784 metres) and three successive projections; less experienced trekkers could take six hours. High table-like mountains formed by ancient geological forces are topped by cones and mounds streaked by the wind.

As we proceed, step by step, ruinous towers emerge from monstrous

Opposite: An arch rock formation at Tamezguida in Tassili n'Ajjer National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Above: A hard-working donkey.

HOMOCOSMICOS/GETTY IMAGES (ARCH). OMAR DAKHANE/GETTY IMAGES (DONKEY)

rubble-covered slopes. Cliffs that look like they were cut with a knife are hollowed out at the bottom, offering shelter under the rock. Small passages weave between the enormous masses; skinny columns rise high and gorges bring shade.

"Are you okay?" Agaoued asks the group. There's a lot to acclimatize to: the intense light, the heat, the dryness, the nakedness of the landscape. And even just the idea of infiltrating this land, of taking in what might have been intended by the painters and

FROZEN STORIES, GHOSTLY ELEMENTS, STRANGE AND FANCIFUL FORMS ARE INTERTWINED.

engravers of the one of the most significant collections of prehistoric art in the world—an open-air museum of 15,000 works.

As the Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra warns, "The desert, a nature not upset, not devastated by man, strips us and, at the same time, reconstitutes us, dresses our soul and purifies our spirit. Let yourself be carried by the beauty, the wonder, the moment. Ignore time, opt for the maybe, the all or nothing."

WHO ARE THE Tuaregs, these Indigenous nomads, descendants of the Berber people who, in the seventh century, tried to oppose the Arab conquest of Byzantine North Africa, before migrating to the Sahara? What are these civilizations from the depths of time? Why—using a few lines and various flat tints or dots in ochre, yellow, green, purple and white—did they leave images of oxen, elephants, sheep, giraffes, human hunters and gatherers and even half-human, half-animal figures? How did these artists forge their talents? What can we learn from their drawings about climate change, animal migration and the way the peoples of northern Africa lived at the time?

Ethnologists and historians generally agree upon the chronology of the region's major art periods, grouped by similar artistic characteristics. The Bubaline Period (from 12,000 B.C.) featured large wild fauna, including a now-extinct giant buffalo. Next came the Round Head Period, which some believe was around 9,500 B.C. This was the first time human-like figures were featured in the art, with large, round, featureless heads and formless bodies. During the Bovidian Period (around 7,200 B.C.), the emphasis on cattle demonstrated that they were among the most important pieces of property at that time. The Caballine Period (around four or five thousand years later) saw the appearance of horses and the Garamante peoples, an ancient civilization, shown as chariot drivers and builders. Lastly, the Cameline Period (which lasted about



EGMONT STRIGL/GETTY IMAGES

Hikers make their way across a canyon in Tassili n'Ajjer.

a thousand years beginning around 50 B.C.) gave us the dromedaries.

Thousands of frozen stories, ghostly elements, strange and fanciful forms are intertwined. It's really not necessary to try to solve the mysteries; better instead to just appreciate the indescribable, the wonderful.

In the middle of a valley surrounded by sharp peaks, we finally reach the camp where we will spend the night. A fire is lit, a carpet unrolled, and the donkeys devour twigs. Before long, Saayh and Abdelkrim take them to a watering hole, then tether them. "Tea?" suggests Agaoued, readjusting his *tagelmust* to protect himself from the sun and wind.

Slowly the sky turns pink, and the sun sets the rocks on fire as we unfurl our sleeping bags. The breeze brushes, caresses, refreshes and invites us to get in tune with this wild world. Enveloped by silence, we eat a vegetable stew under a night sky sparkling with stars.

AT DAWN, AGAOUED and Ibrahim light a fire, prepare tea and toast bread. There is no sign we've had canine visitors, though we did hear some piercing barks in the night. Saayh and Abdelkrim collect wood, gather the donkeys and load the packs.

We head out. Our path takes many

forms: a strip of sand, a stone slab, a pile of pebbles, a road, a staircase, a mule track.

In the distance, a cypress tree with a huge trunk and twisted limbs that we are told is more than 2,000 years old bears witness to a time when large herbivores (elephants, giraffes, antelopes, hippos), wild cats (cheetahs, panthers) and humans lived here, when animals enjoyed forests, grassy valleys, lakes and rivers. On the way, Agaoued looks for tracks of the Barbary sheep, denizens of the area. "They're not here," he almost apologizes. "The sun is shining too much."

One of thousands of cave paintings in the Tassili n'Ajjer mountains.

As we move eastward the valley of In Attinen rolls out kilometers of sandstone arches. At one point we pass three beds of stone where a shepherd family was laid to rest; Agaoued pauses to honour them. As we continue, the impression of petrified cities and a dead planet prevails.

Finally, we reach the lost 'city' of Sefar, a cave complex that houses nearly 15,000 paintings. They show men guiding herds of oxen, hunters chasing antelopes, women dancing, women with babies on their backs. Two large frescoes—the *Great God* and *The Black Lady*—evoke mythical heroes and the mysteries of life.

Agaoued sings as we move through the area. Against an azure sky,



darkness starting to descend, two crows watch our advance towards the place we'll camp for the night. "Welcome to the 10,000-star hotel," says Ibrahim when we arrive. After our evening meal, the Milky Way propels us into infinite dreams.

The next day brings us to a canyon that's at least as impressive as the US Grand Canyon. Dotted with cypress, oleander, date palms and other acacias, it offers a beautiful overview of the succession of climates—humid, Mediterranean and desert. It brings to mind once more the words of Yasmina Khadra, who says that the desert offers "the incredible chance to see the day rise, the evening set, to enjoy each moment, to reach humility ... to love the world."

At camp that evening, Agaoued, Ibrahim, Saayh and Abdelkrim serve *taguella*, a semolina flatbread cooked under the embers, along with hot tea and dried dates. Their smartphones play Tuareg music.



The Tuareg are descendents of the Berber people.

"Tonight, we must get to sleep quickly," our guide says, laughing. That's because tomorrow, the journey to the Djanet oasis will be long. We'll be going back down to earth, leaving the Tassili n'Ajjer plateau.

"It is beautiful. It is good!" says Agaoued. Sublime even. R

© 2022, *LE FIGARO MAGAZINE*. FROM *VOYAGE EN ALGÉRIE DANS LES PAS DES TOUAREGS, GARDIENS DE LA PRÉHISTOIRE* BY ALICE BROUARD, *LE FIGARO MAGAZINE* (27 JANUARY 2023). LEFIGARO.FR

Each For Its Own

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.

ALICE WALKER, NOVELIST

THE HISTORY COLLECTION/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. DMITRY PICHUGIN/SHUTTERSTOCK (MAN)

ALL *in a Day's* WORK

I was doing research for an article I was writing about how kids can learn about insects. Wondering who I might interview, I told my husband, "I need to find an entomologist."

He just shook his head. "What's wrong now? You're always going to the doctor for one thing or the other."

—JULIE ENGELHARDT

Passive-aggressive flattery on the job, as shared on *Reddit*:

★ "It's impressive how you manage to stay so confident."

★ "You continue to meet expectations."

★ "I will give your suggestion all the consideration that it deserves."

★ "I'm certain you tried your best."

Traveling in Costa Rica, we noticed that people often sold water, fruit, meals and souvenirs from their front yards.

One hot day, my husband and I saw a house with tables and chairs set up on the lawn, and we decided to stop for a beer.

We sat down and, when the man came out from his house, we ordered two beers. He gave us a strange look, but went back inside and came out with two beers.

"How much for the beers?" I asked. "I don't sell beer," he said. "I sell tables and chairs."

——JOSIE EVERETT



"We're here to deliver Jessica's out-of-office message. You leave her alone."

BRENDAN LOPER/THE NEW YORKER COLLECTION/THE CARTOON BANK

Terrifying watershed moment at work. For years, kids have accidentally called teachers Mom or Dad. Today, one of my colleagues got referred to as Alexa.

—𝕏@TIMPARAMOUR

The bar where I worked was in a rough neighbourhood. So, when a new bartender had to close alone, she understandably didn't want to leave the cash in the till. But since our boss had neglected to tell her where to stow it overnight, she placed the money in a bag and stuck it where no thief would find it.

Concerned that the morning shift wouldn't find it either, she left this note on the cash register: "Moneybag is in the ice machine."
—ROBERT WOOD

It happened to me: I finally answered an email I'd been putting off and the person responded right away and now I'm back to square one.
—𝕏@SARAHROSEETTER

I was sitting in on a Zoom meeting when I received a message from the host: "While I appreciate you staying muted, we can see exactly what you're thinking based on your facial expressions. I'm going to ask you to turn off your video as well. Thank you."
—𝕏@LAURAANNSTL

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

TAKING A LAZY DAY

An estimated 7,45,000 deaths worldwide are attributed to work-related stress. These people have no need to worry.

★ Last June, a man stormed into a gas station in Tulsa, Oklahoma, demanding all the money or he'd shoot up the joint. The clerk readily handed over the loot. He then closed shop and left. Which makes sense, according to *WAFB* in Baton Rouge, since he'd hired the man to rob the gas station. Turns out he was tired and wanted to go home early.

★ *Three Figures*, a painting on display in a Russian museum in 2022, featured three forms with blank faces. A bored museum guard knew how to bide his time. Using a ballpoint pen, he drew eyes on two of the figures. It was, says *CNET*, his first—and last—day on the job.

★ An Italian court upheld a school's right to fire Cinzia Paolina De Lio, a teacher for 24 years, after it was learned that for 20 of those years she simply never showed up for work. De Lio insists that she has documents proving she had reason for missing work. Unfortunately, she told the newspaper *La Repubblica*, she couldn't produce them quite yet, saying, "Right now I'm at the beach."



CMANNPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES



At the ripe age of 65, we decided to run away and get married

ELOPEMENT SPRINGS ETERNAL



BY *Melodie Campbell*
FROM *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

I COULD START this story with the day Mike got down on one knee at the dinner table to propose marriage and then, thanks to his arthritis, couldn't get up without help.

Or the day he said, "We're going to piss off some people, whatever we do. Why not elope?"

But really, we go further back—47 years, in fact. Mike and I got to know each other in our first year studying commerce at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He was a cool guy, and we both loved sailing and playing

ILUSTRATION BY *Sarah Farquhar*

tennis. But I was engaged to someone else, so we stayed friends.

Life moved on.

My beloved husband Dave had died of cancer a year before the pandemic. Mike's marriage had recently ended in divorce. During the bitter loneliness that came with living alone through the lockdowns, he found me on Facebook and we started talking. Long story short, he arrived at my house in Burlington with flowers and an overnight satchel, and we spent the rest of lockdown together, catching up on 40 years.

AFTERWARDS, MIKE TOOK ME TO TIM HORTONS AND TOLD ME I COULD HAVE "ANYTHING I WANTED."



A little over a year after he first showed up on my doorstep, Mike proposed. And then we had some decisions to make.

Public gatherings at the time were limited to just 10 people. Our adult kids and their families added up to more than that, not to mention our best friends and our siblings. How could we choose which ones to include in the wedding?

That is when Mike suggested a wacky idea: We should elope.

Who elopes at 65? I thought. *Isn't that a thing done by people much younger than we are?*

"Think of all the people we can shock," Mike said, with a wicked grin. "The tackier the better," I said, warming to the idea.

He found a log cabin chapel in Ontario's Niagara Region that does drive-through weddings. "Perfect!" I said.

We contacted the chapel. The wonderful people who run it gave us the following warning: Don't tell anyone in advance you are eloping. If you do, some will show up to surprise you. They'll take photos and post them on social media, and people who weren't told ahead will be upset that you didn't include them.

That sounded like good advice, so we kept mum, giggling like school kids about how we were planning to run away and get married in secret.

The day came and it was absolutely delightful—the opposite of tacky. The chapel owners knew I was a mystery author and asked if they could use our wedding photo, along with my biography, on their website for promotion. Sure, I said. No problem. Nobody I knew would ever think to look at a small chapel's website.

After the ceremony, Mike took me to Tim Hortons for our wedding meal and told me I could have "anything I wanted." The whole day cost us in the ballpark of $400.

As we ate, we joked that it would be funny to not tell anyone about the wedding until someone asked if we were ever going to get married, maybe years



The couple on their wedding day.

from now. We would say, "Actually, we eloped three years ago!"

We went home and kept ourselves nicely busy in the way of newlyweds. So we didn't realize right away that all hell had broken loose.

In the days that followed, people started congratulating Mike on Facebook: 20 people, then 40, then 80. I was shocked to see that my mystery author blog was overwhelmed with comments about the wedding. We started hyperventilating: We hadn't even told our kids, and here it was all over Facebook!

We soon discovered that a photo of Mike and me at the chapel holding our marriage certificate was being seen around the world. And the photo was accompanied by my biography, and lists of books I've published and awards I've received, leaving no doubt of my identity. *How could everyone be seeing this?*

Such innocence. I completely forgot how everything is linked online. Things that go on websites are often shared on social media. We shouldn't have been so surprised. But really, who truly understands the baffling empire that is Facebook?

Oh, we had to laugh—the best laid plans and all that.

With the cat out of the bag, we quickly texted our kids. My two girls sighed and said, "What will mom do next?" and something to the effect of, "Thank God Mike is around to look after her because, honestly, someone has to."

I thought that was a pretty good reaction. Mike laughed.

Others weren't as cheerful initially. We learnt that, indeed, a lot of friends and relatives want to be told in advance that you are going to do something as significant as get married. Mike explained that the whole point of eloping is you don't tell anyone in advance. They've forgiven us by now.

That's where I think the age issue comes in: If you are young and elope, people cheer you on as romantics. When you are 65 and elope, people think you've gone nuts.

But when you want to be with someone and you don't have many decades left and the world is under lockdown, you don't need the expensive dress, the wedding gifts, the fancy reception. Love is precious enough.

Making a happy commitment only needs two people, no matter how old they are. R

COURTESY OF ELOPE NIAGARA, WWW.ELOPENIAGARA.COM





22 RIVERS across 22 STATES in 22 MONTHS

A lone canoeist crosses America in search of what binds us together

BY *Derek Burnett*

Neal Moore is descending New York State's Mohawk River by canoe, approaching the end of a journey that began 22 months and more than 11,200 km ago. His paddle has plied 21 bodies of water so far on his way across the continent. Downstream always means easier paddling, yet dangers abound—wedge up against a log or rock, and the current will flip him and sink his earthly goods. All those upstream slogs were worse, of course. His eyes would scan the river for the calm seams of flat water, the points of land that subdued the stream and made the way less difficult. Lest he surrender hard-earned progress, he would dig and dig long past the burning of his shoulders in mid-morning and on into the long and stifling—or freezing and windblown—afternoon.

"Twenty-two rivers, 22 states, 22 months of journeying" has been his declared objective. "Stringing together rivers" and the people along them to see what still connects us as Americans in divided times.

At evening, sunset often beams upon a chosen spit of sand—the river showing him where to camp. He likes islands for their safety from animals but also from people. An hour before nightfall he unloads his gear, pitches his tent, fixes some supper, maybe cracks a beer. And then he dines in perfect solitude seated upon an overturned plastic bucket, watching the timeless mystery of day becoming night. Music of coyotes, crickets, frogs. The silent coming of fireflies from out across the water, piling into the willows above his head. He turns in early, marvelling at the strength in his 49-year-old limbs, which increases by the day. He'll will himself awake one hour before dawn, and in concert with the first hopeful rays of morning he will push off into the stream, leaving nothing behind but the notch in the coarse sand where his canoe has passed the sacred night.

WHEN MOORE WAS a 13-year-old growing up in Los Angeles, his older brother, Tom, whom he adored, crashed his Mustang and died from his injuries. Devastated, Moore passed his teenage years in a spiraling funk—drugs, attempted suicide—made worse when his beloved mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and began a slow decline. His father was a fifth-generation Mormon whose pioneering ancestor had led a company of

OPENING SPREAD: JOHN NOLTNER. BANKRX/GETTY IMAGES (PAPER BACKGROUND). TMB STUDIO/K. SYNOLD (WATER DROPLETS)

handcart-toting emigrants across the prairie to Utah. Now, with her health dwindling and her son hopelessly adrift, his mother stated her dying wish: for Moore to serve a two-year mission to spread the gospel, as is traditional for devout Mormons between high school and college.

Moore was anything but devout. But his mother wanted him to do something transformative. To do something pure. If she died while he was away, he was not to come home for the funeral. Surprising even himself, he went. His assignment was South Africa, 1991 to 1993. During his first month in the field, he got the phone call he'd been dreading—his mother had passed. Honouring her request, he stayed on.

The mission changed his life. In South Africa he learnt to live outside his dark thoughts. To serve wholeheartedly. To walk freely among strangers and learn their stories. To shake hands African-style, thumb upward. To smile and mean it.

"When you push yourself out of your comfort zone," he concluded, "this is when extraordinary things can happen. This is when you learn and grow."

Over the next decades he lived as an expatriate, teaching English in Taiwan, selling antiques in South Africa, adventuring in Egypt, then heading into Ethiopia's broiling heat. And back for a visit to his homeland in 2009 for a paddle down the length of the Mississippi River to see how the middle of America was faring during the Great Recession—this despite having never previously spent more than an afternoon in a canoe.

"THIS IS WHEN YOU LEARN AND GROW."



Moore kept a journal detailing everywhere he went and everyone he met.

BIRNEY IMES. MARIA AMADOR (HAND-LETTERING)

Cancer had taken his mother, and in 2012 it tried to take him too. He needed surgery, which left him unable to walk. Over the course of months, he crawled and then stood and then took a few shuffling paces and then got to where he could once again trek for miles.

From overseas, after the 2016 election, he watched division and rancor infect his beloved country. He needed to rediscover America, to see what still held it together. His 50th birthday was approaching. Cancer would be back for him, he knew it. He'd love to plan an absolute banger of an excursion. Without a wife or children who'd miss him, he had the luxury of time. And he knew exactly how to use it—he'd traverse the continent by canoe.

The open canoe would not only honour the continent's first inhabitants, it would put as little as possible between himself and the world. Rather than following the path of Lewis and Clark, he would reverse it and keep going, Pacific to Atlantic. The trip would need some kind of flourish at the end, and he knew just the thing—a victory lap around the Statue of Liberty, symbol of the American people, who were what this trip was about.

ON 9 FEBRUARY 2020, Moore sets out from Astoria, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River. He packs a tent, a sleeping bag, jugs of water, and a bucket of freeze-dried meals, then points his bright red 16-foot Old Town canoe upstream. He starts pulling—1,735 uphill



NORMAN MILLER

Moore makes his way through the Gates of the Mountains near Helena, Montana.

km to the Continental Divide in Montana (rivers: Columbia, Snake, St. Joe, Clark Fork). Portage over the divide. Then the eight-month, 5,800-km downhill run to New Orleans (rivers: Missouri, Mississippi). Final leg, 4,650 km and almost a year, east along the waters of the Gulf, then up through Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky, up to Lake Erie, across New York to Albany, then down to the Big Apple (rivers and waterways: Gulf of Mexico, Mobile, Tombigbee, Tenn-Tom, Tennessee, Ohio, Kentucky, Kanawha, Allegheny, Chadakoin, Lake Erie, Erie Canal, Seneca, Oneida, Mohawk, Hudson).

Dodging barges and container ships. Startling grizzlies. Bumped hard by a bull shark. Escorted by dolphins. Curious alligators. Twice capsized. Days and days too windy to paddle. Sleet. Downpours. Floods. Spectacular, breathtaking scenery. And every day, that involuntary laugh of the free man revelling in his element.

The pandemic hits, things shut down, plans change, but Moore pushes on. He dines with the homeless and with mayors and with multimillionaires. Strangers shelter him for the night, buy him meals, show him the town, explain their histories. An Umatilla Indian in Oregon acknowledges with approval that he's "going the wrong way," west to east, reversing manifest destiny. In the Columbia River Gorge, a Klickitat chief shares his enduring love of the Columbia River and its salmon. Recreational fishermen insist on giving him all their food and beer. At dinner after a treacherous lake crossing in Montana, a rawboned cattle auctioneer tells him that he and his family were watching,





Taking it easy near Syracuse, New York; making friends on the Missouri River

NEAL MOORE (2)



Gale Boocks gifts Moore a paddle owned by a legendary canoeist.

ready to boat to the rescue. He attends concerts, pokes around museums, visits old friends, makes new ones. He goes out of his way to meet America.

In Bismarck, North Dakota, a farmer-turned-entrepreneur convinces him to get a tattoo. He chooses a memorial tattoo in honour of his brother, Tom, and listens to the life story of the artist, 42-year-old Lance Steven Paulk II, who has spent more of his life inside penitentiaries than out, who has been a prison gladiator, who has done solitary next to Charles Manson. That night when Moore opens his journal, he sees that it is 13 July—Tom's birthday.

The beauty of a river is that it bears you along through seeming wilderness until it opens suddenly upon a town. This balance between nature and civilization appeals to the artist in Moore, who is at least as interested in people as he is in the land. At river towns as old as the country itself, he hauls his craft ashore. He's often swarmed by curious locals: Where

HE CHOOSES A MEMORIAL TATTOO, ONE IN HONOR OF HIS BROTHER, TOM.

did he say he'd come from? And he's going all the way to where?

In St. Joseph, Missouri, he is hailed by an extended family partying along

RICHARD SAYER

the river. He cautiously comes ashore and within minutes has become part of the group—they thrust a glass of moonshine into one of his hands and a grilled brat into another. Half an hour later, moonshine still in hand, he finds himself careening over the edge of the Missouri's banks in a dune buggy, a giant grin on his face.

In Oil City, Pennsylvania, an 82-year-old former pastor named Gale Boocks greets him on the banks of the Allegheny. Boocks had known Verlen Kruger, considered by many to be the greatest canoeist in history, and owns a paddle that had belonged to the legend. Boocks has read about Moore in the paper, and has come out looking for him so he could bequeath the paddle. Stunned, Moore accepts the gift on the understanding that he will merely be its temporary custodian until someday passing it on to another enthusiast.

It isn't all rosy. At a bar in Montana, Moore slips up and reveals his politics, something he'd promised himself he wouldn't do. The crowd turns on him and calls him—him, Neal Moore, descendant of pioneers, pilgrim on a voyage of love of his country—an enemy of the United States. The next morning the family that has been hosting him shows him the door.

But that is the only real stain on the trip. Any other time he expects danger or hatred, he finds their opposites. He tries to avoid places that attract meth addicts, so at a campsite up on the Snake that looks a little sketchy, he is apprehensive when approached by a fellow camper. But despite missing an eye and being what society deems 'homeless', the man, Brian Bensen, turns out to be anything but a threat. Over the years he has equipped himself with a pretty sweet outfit for surviving on the margins of society—a 7-by-12-foot trailer with



NEAL MOORE

A new friend, Downtown Tat, in Memphis on election night 2020

solar-powered air conditioning and TV—and is eager to share whatever he can with anyone who needs it.

"Push comes to shove, I can feed myself," he tells Moore. "Feed as many weary travellers as I can."

Another night in Idaho, camped behind a church, Moore hears two men outside his tent raving in a drug-addled fury. They menacingly approach his flimsy shelter, commanding him to reveal himself. Shaking, he laces up his running shoes and readies his bear spray and Buck knife. Eventually they leave him alone. Then, strangely, in the morning one of the men returns—and invites him to coffee. Moore sits and hears the man's story of hardship and addiction, and they part friends.

In Memphis, on the day of the 2020 election, the political tension is palpable. Private security details patrol the streets. Moore takes a seat at BB King's Blues Club on Beale Street to see how things will go. He hears a commotion—not trouble, but laughter. Outside, a man is running with a flag in his hand, on which is printed "BE KOOL MEMPHIS." He is posing for pictures with tourists, lightening the mood. Moore gets up from his lunch to introduce himself to the man, who calls himself Downtown Tat.

"What's the flag about?" Moore asks.

"It's not just Memphis," Tat says. "It's the whole country. We just have to be cool. Be cool, baby!"

Americans, Moore decides, still don't know how to reconcile their



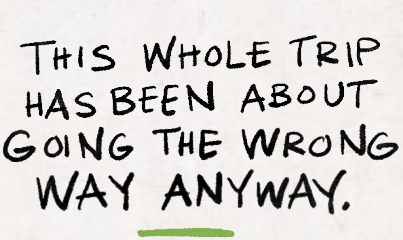
JAMES R PEIPERT

After paddling 12,000 km, Moore arrives in his final destination: New York City.

politics, but they're quite capable of ignoring them. And when they do, the vast majority are happy to help, to share, to swap stories, and to form intense—however brief—connections. Whatever you might see on the news, Moore learns that out in America the people are still generous and curious, brave and resilient, still connected by the neighbourly values he recalls from his youth.

Because of the pandemic, the authorities closed down navigation of part of the Erie Canal, so Moore paddles its first half (Buffalo to Syracuse), then walks the remaining 274 km to Waterford and the Hudson River. (If you think a long-haul canoeist on a river is a curiosity, try one wheeling his loaded boat along the road.) The second December of his expedition is coming on, and he wants to make it to Manhattan before the lower Hudson's notorious winter winds and choppy waves. He is right on schedule.

On 14 December 2021, shortly after his 50th birthday, Moore makes his final approach to New York City. The press comes out to observe the eccentric in his moment of triumph, and a contingent of kayakers and canoeists put in to join his victory lap around Lady Liberty. But near the George Washington Bridge, the winds come up so strong that he ends up with his bow pointed north, and he can't safely turn it south again. Hell, he



thinks, this whole trip has been about going the wrong way anyway. So he paddles stern-first the rest of the way.

Hard to believe it is coming to an end. Tears well up, and not from the wind. Immense above his puny craft looms Liberty Enlightening the World, and crowding the harbor are bobbing boats filled with friends and journalists and gawkers marveling at the magnitude of his accomplishment: 12,000 km. Twenty-two rivers, 22 states, 22 months, just as he'd said he would do.

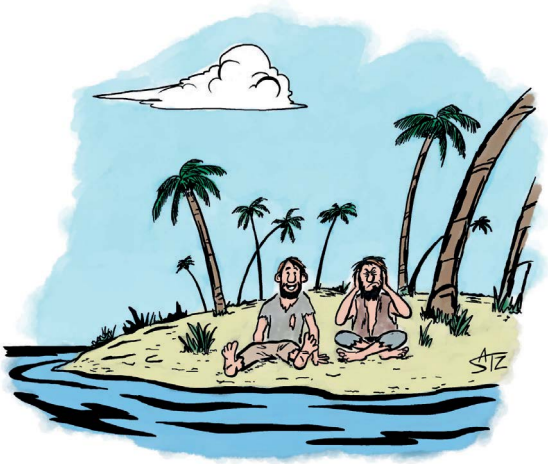
His mother would be proud—he had done something transformative, something "pure." But it's over now, and he wishes he could just keep paddling. R

Old Friends + Bookends

Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one.

OSCAR WILDE

LAUGHTER
THE BEST *Medicine*



"Stop me if you've heard this one before."

A born and bred New Yorker is in the country when he sees a field of animals and says to the farmer, "What a strange-looking cow. Why doesn't it have horns?"

"There are several reasons," the farmer replies. "Some cows get their horns late, others have their horns cut off, and still others never grow horns."

"And this cow?" the city man asks.

"Well, the reason this cow doesn't have any horns is because it's a horse."

—LANCASTERFARMING.COM

Back in my day, I went to the store with only $1 and came back with two bags of chips, one carton of milk and three boxes of chocolate. Now they have cameras.
—*Submitted by* MATT GLOVER

Names for your middle-aged dad band:
★ The Who Left This Light On?
★ Cialis in Chains
★ The Arrhythmics
★ Talking Heads with Subtitles
★ Bloodwork, Sweat & Tears
★ REO Stationwagon
★ Crosby, Stills, Nash & No Longer Young
★ Boyz II Balding Men
★ The Guess Who Just Saved 10 per cent with Their AARP Discount
—*By* WENDI AARONS AND LAURA HOUSE, *from mcsweeneys.net*

A zoo manager was sending an email requesting new animals. He wrote, "I want to order two mongooses," but that didn't seem right. So he rewrote it: "I would like to order two mongeeses." That looked even weirder. Finally, he started over and wrote, "No zoo

Actually, the real monster is the person who goes out of their way to correct you that Frankenstein was the doctor's name.
—𝕏@ROASTMALONE_

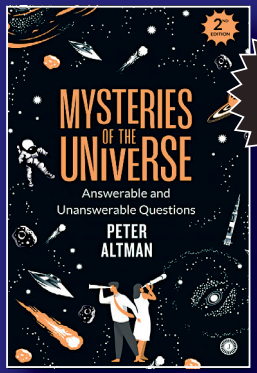
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should be without a mongoose. I would like to order two."
—Submitted by
RUTH SPANGLER

That Reminds Me of a Joke!
The news item ...
Nebraska police received a call from a concerned driver. "I'm on Highway 77 going north, and somebody's on the wrong side of the road. He almost ran me off the road." Police, says Fox 8 News, located the wrong-way driver and pulled him over. As you might have guessed, it was the man who'd phoned it in.
... and the joke:
Mom calls Grandpa while he's driving and says, "Watch out, there's a car going the wrong way on the interstate." Grandpa says, 'It's not just one—there's hundreds of them!"

My class essay on internal organs was too short, so I added an appendix.
—Submitted by
GLEN YOUNG

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

SMILE, YOU'RE ON CAMERA!

From the 2023 Comedy Wildlife Photography Awards: Animals acting up.

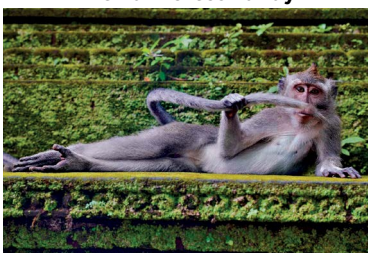
Air Guitar Roo



Monday Blahs



The Rainforest Dandy



That Wasn't Here Yesterday



KANGAROO: © JASON MOORE. OWL: © JOHN BLUMENKAMP. MONKEY: © DELPHINE CASIMIR. BIRD: © WENDY KAVENEY/COMEDY WILDLIFE 2023 (4)

RD RECOMMENDS

Compiled by Aditya Mani Jha



DUNE: PART 2

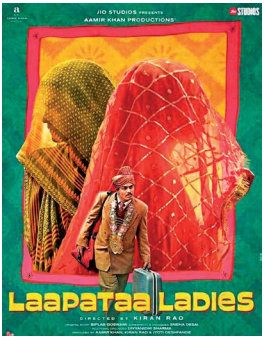
in theatres (1 March)

The much-awaited sequel to Denis Villeneuve's *Dune*, based on Frank Herbert's iconic science-fiction novel series of the same name, stars Timothée Chalamet, Zendaya and Christopher Walken. The first novel in the series has been adapted across two parts, of which this film is the second. The narrative follows Paul (Chalamet), a young man of the noble house of Atreides, stuck in a high-stakes war over the desert planet of Arrakis—a prime target across the galaxy because it contains 'spice', a psychotropic substance used to bestow enhanced awareness, strength and vitality upon users. *Dune,* the novel, is considered a landmark work of science fiction because of its depiction of how ecological and political concerns are necessarily intertwined. The 'spice' story arc and the scarcity of water on Arrakis were both intended as a metaphor for oil and the large-scale battles fought across history to control oil fields.

PHOTO CREDIT (DUNE PART 2 AND 3 BODY PROBLEM): IMDB

LAAPATA LADIES

in theatres (1 March)



Kiran Rao, director of the hauntingly beautiful *Dhobi Ghat* (2011) returns with her first film in over a decade. *Laapata Ladies* is based on a delicious premise—two sets of newlyweds are travelling by train during the nighttime. Visibility isn't great, and the following morning, one of the grooms (played by Sparsh Shrivastava from Netflix's *Jamtara*) realizes that the brides—both of whom were resolutely *ghoonghat*-clad—have been inadvertently swapped. Needless to say, comedic hijinks ensue, especially when an eccentric cop (Ravi Kishan) discovers the mishap. Fans of Rituparno Ghosh will remember the late Bengali filmmaker's masterful *Noukadubi* (2011), another tale of newlyweds, ill-fated travel and mistaken identity. *Laapata Ladies*, though, is a much funnier movie, even when it's talking about deadly serious themes.

SERIES



3 BODY PROBLEM

on Netflix (21 March)

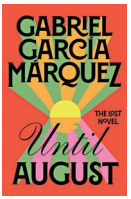
Game of Thrones showrunners Benioff and Weiss form 2/3 of the creators' team (the third being Alexander Woo) that developed *3 Body Problem*, based on Liu Cixin's bestselling and critically acclaimed science-fiction novel *The Three-Body Problem* (2008). The story follows Ye Wenjie (Rosalind Chow), an astrophysicist whose father was killed by the notorious Red Guards paramilitary force during China's Cultural Revolution (1966–76) helmed by Mao Zedong. Years later, as a scientist working for the military, she makes a decision aboard a secret radar base that has the potential to affect humanity's future in the present day (i.e. the late 2000s, when the novel was published). One of the most acclaimed science-fiction novels of the 21st century, this, so the expectations are high from Benioff and Weiss.

BOOKS

UNTIL AUGUST

by Gabriel García Márquez, translated by Anne McLean, Knopf

The Nobel-winning Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) was one of the most beloved and widely-read authors of literary fiction in the world. Some of his universally acclaimed novels include *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, all originally written in Spanish. His style inspired others like Salman Rushdie to use magic realism in their own works. Last year, it was announced that a new 'lost novel'—titled *Until August*—has been discovered among Márquez's papers. The novel is told through the thoughts and recollections of its protagonist Ana Magdalena Bach, who is married for over 20 years and is unable to abstain from taking on a new lover every August, when she visits the island where her mother's grave rests.

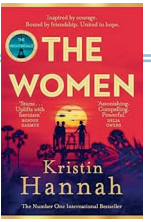




Baal-O-Par: Collected Poems

by Gulzar, Translated by Rakhshanda Jalil, HarperCollins

Short on the heels of receiving the 2023 Jnanpith award, Gulzar, one of India's most famous and recognizable poet has just released *Baal-O-Par*, a collection of the six published volumes of Gulzar's poetry over the last 40-odd years. This bilingual collector's edition places these poems adjacent to their English renditions, by the veteran translator Rakshanda Jalil. Astronomical metaphors, a sprinkle of surrealism and a certain old-school magician's flourish—these are the signature elements of a Gulzar *nazm*. This is a volume you'll be dipping into for years to come.



The Women

by Kristin Hannah, Macmillan

Bestselling novelist Kristin Hannah's latest, *The Women*, is a period drama set during the Vietnam War. The protagonist Frances 'Frankie' McGrath, riding the wave of 1960s nationalism, joins the Army Nurses Corp, inspired by her brother who's a soldier. She comes of age during an era marked by brutality, cynical politics and a generation coming to terms with the fallibility of America. The blood and gore of war is toned down, but the depiction is a far cry from the chest-thumping patriotism of Hollywood. A fast-paced work of fiction, ideal for fans of Jodi Picoult or Kate Quinn.



PODCASTS

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

One of India's oldest and best-known podcasts, *The Seen and the Unseen* is where veteran journalist Amit Varma conducts his detailed, long-form interviews with guests from art, academia, literature, culture and beyond. The last six months alone saw fascinating personalities like actor Danish Husain, foreign correspondent Seema Sirohi, poet, translator and curator Ranjit Hoskote, technology/telecom law expert Rahul Matthan, Ethereum founder Vitalik Buteren et al on the show. Varma relies on traditional journalistic strengths in his interviews—thorough preparation, a good counter, and addressing the public's commonly-held misconceptions about a subject.



INTO THE TARDIS

Big Finish Productions has been producing audio adventures set in the universe of Doctor Who since the late '90s. These thrilling audio stories starred David Tennant as the Doctor and Catherine Tate as his companion Donna Noble—possibly the most popular main cast members in the modern era of *Doctor Who*. And now, Big Finish is launching *Into the Tardis* on all major podcasting platforms starting 16 March. This will be a curation of the best Big Finish audio-stories, like the first episode *Death and the Queen*, originally recorded in 2016 with Tennant and Tate's voices, with the script by James Goss.

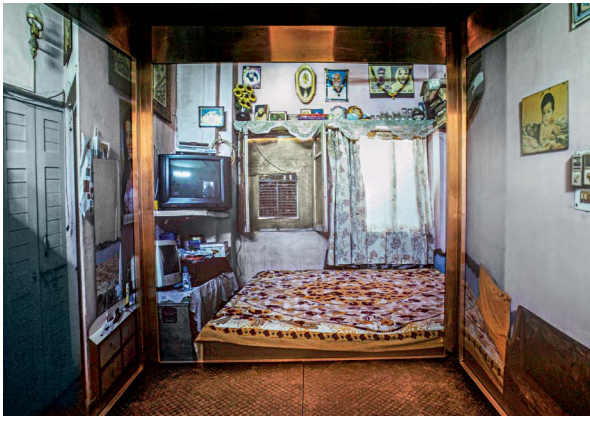
COMEDY



KISI KO BATANA MAT

Anubhav Singh Bassi has made a name for himself in the Indian stand-up circuit over the last few years with his earthy, mischievous brand of comedy as evidenced by the Amazon Prime Video stand-up special *Bas Kar Bassi*. Bassi's material tends to focus on issues like the ennui of nine to five jobs, the difficulties small-town boys have in adjusting to the rhythms of the big city, and of course, the perennial Delhi–Mumbai debates on social media. His facility with language and his willingness to make himself the butt of the joke mark him as a talent for the future. Bassi is touring Delhi (24 and 25 March), Mumbai (3 and 29 March), Bangalore (30 and 31 March) along with several other cities.





STUDIO

***Elevator from the Subcontinent*, by Gigi Scaria, 2011**
Elevator cabin with three backlit projections, automatic door system with microcontroller, 9.3 minute video.

To experience the world inside Gigi Scaria's video installation, *Elevator from the Subcontinent*, you must press a button as you would while waiting to go up or down in a building. Doors open to reveal video projections on three sides.

Scaria, who first showed the work at the Venice Biennale in 2011 and most recently at the India Art Fair in February, had the elevator manufactured by a company in Delhi, where he is based. He altered the metal frame to be able to project images of a city and the various caste-class hierarchies it engenders. Once viewers step inside the elevator, the doors close behind them, and the video moves in a way that creates the impression of ascending and descending. The experience can be dizzying and lasts around 10 minutes. With this work, Scaria, whose practice has centred on the various pressures that urbanism places on the human body and psyche, has created a metaphor of the financial struggles of living in an urban area and the resulting aspiration for mobility. Inside, we see comfortable middle-class homes and other spaces with entire lives packed in one room, all devoid of people. The video ends with an image of the city as seen from above—infusing hope that it may yet make space for one and all. R

— BY ZEENAT NAGREE

PHOTO: COURTESY OF GIGI SCARIA

AS KIDS SEE IT



"I had a great sleep, mom—I feel totally rebooted."

I took my 8-year-old son to watch the local talent perform the memorable parts of Shakespeare's many plays. After watching the actors intently for an hour, he nudged me and whispered, "Which one is Shakespeare?"
—ASHLEY ASHFIELD

I was baking muffins recently with my 14-year-old son. The last ingredient was a cup of pecans. I didn't have any, so I decided to add walnuts instead. My son said, "Why are you adding walnuts? Aren't pecans a type of bird?"
—COTY

When my dinosaur-geek son was four years old, I overheard him telling his friend, "Did you know dinosaurs walked this earth millions and millions of years ago? It was so long back that even my mother was only a little girl!"
—SUMANA SENGUPTA, *Mumbai*

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

CARTOON BY *Susan Camilleri Konar*

ME & MY SHELF

Human-rights lawyer, activist and teacher, **Nandita Haksar** is the author of 25 books. Her latest, *Shooting the Sun: Why Manipur Was Engulfed by Violence and the Government Remained Silent*, looks at the complex identity politics surrounding the ethnic clashes that broke out in Manipur in 2023.



PHOTO: CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



Through the Looking Glass

BY LEWIS CARROLL, *Fingerprint!, ₹109*

This children's book is the most quoted by judges and jurists, especially Humpty Dumpty's famous statement: "... it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." It is even called 'Humpty Dumpty Jurisprudence'. This book is a delightful reading in so many ways, but for me it is the unfailing antidote when I am feeling depressed with the way the criminal-justice system works; or does not.

The Trial

BY FRANZ KAFKA, *Penguin Modern Classics, ₹272*

This novel tells the story of a man arrested and prosecuted by a remote, inaccessible authority, with the nature of his crime revealed neither to him nor to the reader. Published in 1925, Kafka wrote this novel from 1914 to 1915. The story continues to resonate in an age of UAPA-like laws.

Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets

BY SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH, *Random House, ₹968*

This book captures in the minutest details of what it meant to live in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). Writes Alexievich, "I'm piecing together the history of 'domestic', 'interior' socialism. As it existed in a person's soul ... I've been always been drawn to this miniature expanse: one person, individual. It's where everything really happens."

Winnie-the-Pooh

BY A. A. MILNE, *True Sign Publishing, ₹125*

The apparently simple story about Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends—Piglet, Owl, Tigger, Kanga, Roo and

the ever-depressed Eeyore—have endured as the unforgettable creations of A. A. Milne and Ernest Shephard. And as Pooh says: "I think we dream so we don't have to be apart for so long. If we're in each other's dreams, we can be together all the time."



China in 10 Words: Essays

BY YU HUA, TRANSLATED BY ALLAN H. BARR, *Anchor, ₹809*

Yu Hua calls this book fiction but in fact it is memoir, self-scrutiny and cultural analysis of China. In the introduction, he writes, "When ... I write of China's pain, I am registering my pain too, because China's pain is mine." In 10 simple chapters entitled 'People', 'Leader', 'Reading', 'Writing', 'Lu Xun', 'Revolution', 'Disparity', 'Grassroots', 'Bamboozle' and 'Copycat' he explores the tensions, contradictions and suffering of the people.

The Vagina Monologues

BY EVE ENSELER, *Virago, ₹465*

This book says all the things every woman has felt and not dared articulate. It is a wonderful, witty, wise and painful celebration of women's sexuality and so much more.

Call Me American: A Memoir

BY ABDI NORIFTIN, *Vintage Books, ₹377*

This is an extraordinary story of a refugee who made it to America. This book captures the simplicity and beauty of the lives of Somalian people before they were caught up in a bitter civil war.

No Friend but the Mountains: The True Story of an Illegally Imprisoned Refugee

BY BEHROUZ BOOCHANI, *Picador, ₹461*

Written from Australia's notorious prison on Manus island with a hidden mobile phone, this book has the force of poetry, of the hard-hitting reality of refugees trying to escape persecution in their country, and of the utter callousness of the rich countries.

Frankenstein in Baghdad

BY AHMED SAADWI, *PanMacmillan, ₹599*

Winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, this novel captures the hybrid war in Iraq with dark humour and dissection in a manner only an Iraqi experiencing the horrors of the war can do.

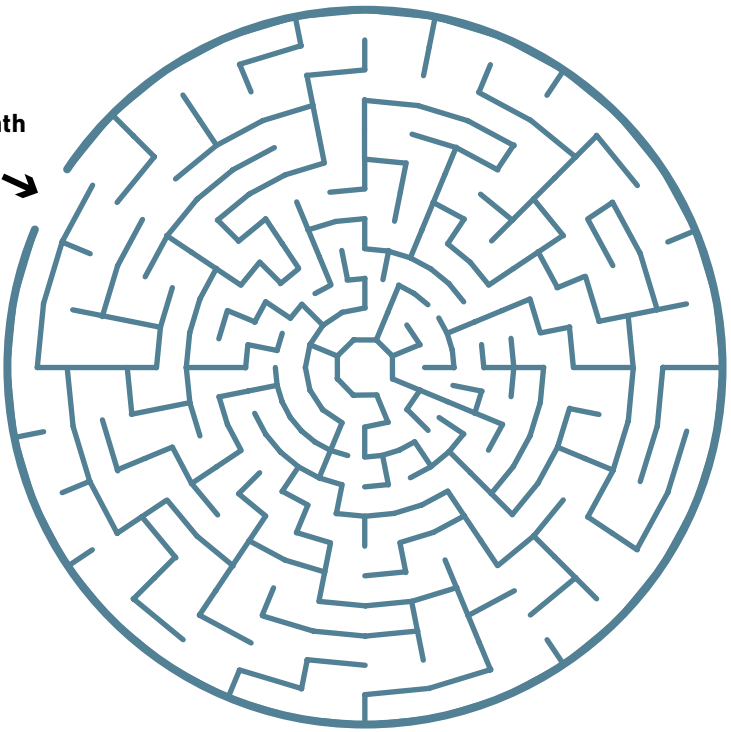
The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse

EDITED BY ALAN BOLD, *Penguin*

I almost stopped reading poetry after I became a lawyer, but this book has been my constant companion. Within it are old socialist poems which call out the vulgarity and insensitivity of the rich and give hope for a better future. These poets were a part of my growing up years: Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda, Nâzim Hikmet, and so many more. I quote their lines in my writings, and often go back to them to keep hope alive. R

Brain
GAMES
SHARPEN YOUR MIND

Labyrinth
EASY



Big Subtraction
DIFFICULT You have a number starting with a 1 followed by many 0s—but you don't know how many. When 276 is subtracted from the number, the sum of the digits in the result is 373. How many digits are in the original number?

LABYRINTH BY LOUIS-LUC BEAUDOIN; BIG SUBTRACTION BY FRASER SIMPSON

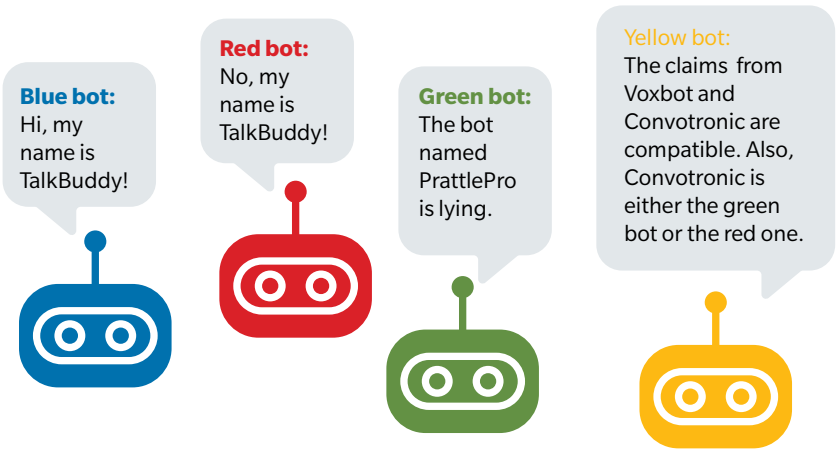
All to Pieces

MEDIUM Shown here are a triangle made of smaller triangles, three to a side, and a square, made of smaller squares, three to a side. If you were to make the same two shapes, but 10 to a side, which one would be made of more individual pieces?



Unreliable AI

MEDIUM Only one of four fictional chatbots—TalkBuddy, PrattlePro, Voxbot and Convotronic—is telling the truth. Each name belongs to one of the bots pictured below and one only. What is each one called?



For answers, turn to **PAGE 128**

ALL TO PIECES BY DARREN RIGBY; UNRELIABLE AI BY SAMANTHA RIDEOUT

SUDOKU

BY *Louis-Luc Beaudoin*

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

To Solve This Puzzle

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

✦ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;

✦ each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

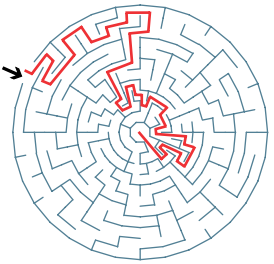
SOLUTION

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

BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

FROM PAGES 126 & 127

Labyrinth



Big Subtraction

Subtracting 276 from 1000 ... 000 gives 999 ... 999724, where all the missing digits are nines. If N is the number of nines, then 9N + 7 + 2 + 4 = 373. That simplifies to 9N = 360. Dividing both sides by 9 gives N = 40. There are 40 nines followed by 7, 2, and 4, so the original number had 43 zeros and started with a 1, a total of 44 digits.

All to Pieces

Both have 100 pieces.

Unreliable AI

Blue: Convotronic. Red: Voxbot. Green: TalkBuddy. Yellow: PrattlePro. TalkBuddy is telling the truth.

WORD POWER

Bingo! In honour of Scrabble inventor Alfred Mosher Butts birthday—13 April, we've gathered some doozies. Each of these words nets at least 20 points (scores in parentheses) and is seven letters long, meaning you'd also earn 50 points for using all your letters—a bingo in Scrabble lingo.

BY *Mary-Liz Shaw*

1. chintzy (24) *adj.*
('chint-see)
A cheap
B tasty
C cute

2. quashed (20) *v.*
(kwahsht)
A planted
B suppressed
C sliced

3. jonquil (23) *n.*
('jahng-kwl)
A narcissus flower
B sailing skiff
C lively party

4. macaque (20) *n.*
(muh-'kak)
A flowering shrub
B ornament
C monkey

5. vexedly (21) *adv.*
('vek-suhd-lee)
A with fear
B with irritation
C with ignorance

6. kumquat (22) *n.*
('kuhm-kwaht)
A type of bee
B leg exercise
C small citrus fruit

7. quaffed (23) *v.*
(kwahft)
A drank freely
B sprinted
C slept soundly

8. hypoxic (24) *adj.*
(high-'pahk-sik)
A full of energy
B flame-retardant
C oxygen-deficient

9. jumbuck (24) *n.*
('juhm-buhk)
A keepsake
B sheep
C urn

10. klezmer (22) *n.*
('klehz-muhr)
A Peruvian blown glass
B Turkish stew
C Jewish folk music

11. blowzed (22) *adj.*
(blaowzd)
A bloated
B disheveled
C tired

12. mazedly (22) *adv.*
('may-zed-lee)
A with confusion
B with wonder
C with hope

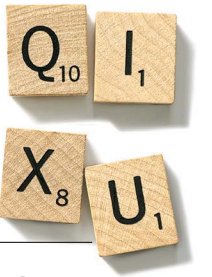
13. squiffy (25) *adj.*
('skwi-fee)
A excited
B drunk
C soft

14. quetzal (25) *n.*
(ket-'sahl)
A seed pod
B cutting tool
C colourful bird

15. bezique (27) *n.*
(buh-'zeek)
A card game
B embroidery
C dance move

Two for the Win

Scrabble pros memorize words containing high-scoring letters J, Q, X and Z. But an easier way to win at home, experts say, is to play high-scoring two-letter words, such as *qi*, from Chinese philosophy, and *xu*, the monetary unit of Vietnam. Acceptable twosomes include slang such as *za* (for pizza), Greek letters *pi*, *nu* and *xi* and interjections such as *hm*, *mm* and *sh*.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. chintzy (A) *cheap*
Badal's chintzy bedding, curtains and pillows made his room feel like a cheap motel.

2. quashed
(B) *suppressed*
The appeals panel quashed the conviction.

3. jonquil
(A) *narcissus flower*
Unlike yellow daffodils, jonquils have more than one flower per stem.

4. macaque
(C) *monkey*
Some 200 Barbary macaques live on the Mediterranean peninsula of Gibraltar.

5. vexedly
(B) *with irritation*
Still angry at her brother, Eva vexedly tossed her toys into the box.

6. kumquat
(C) *small citrus fruit*
A kumquat is about the size of an olive, with a sweet rind and tart flesh.

7. quaffed
(A) *drank freely*
The pubgoers quaffed their drinks like desert plants in a downpour.

8. hypoxic
(C) *oxygen-deficient*
Fertilizer in runoff causes streams to be hypoxic, unable to sustain life.

9. jumbuck (B) *sheep*
The Australian song 'Waltzing Matilda' tells of a wanderer who captures a stray jumbuck.

10. klezmer
(C) *Jewish folk music*
Klezmer grew out of a traditional Eastern European folk sound.

11. blowzed
(B) *disheveled*
Bhavik flopped on the couch, blowzed and exhausted from his hike.

12. mazedly
(A) *with confusion*
The young child moved mazedly among the store's clothing racks in search of his mother.

13. squiffy (B) *drunk*
Jiya's grandma gets squiffy after drinking a single glass of wine.

14. quetzal (C) *colourful bird*
The vibrantly feathered quetzal is the national bird of Guatemala.

15. bezique (A) *card game*
Bezique is a trick-taking game for two, played with a deck of 64 cards.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: Squishy
10-12: Quicker
13-15: Jackpot

DANIELLE SAYER

TRIVIA

BY *Beth Shillibeer*



1. What musician's fans danced so much at a July 2023 concert in Seattle that they caused seismic activity equivalent to a 2.3-magnitude earthquake?

2. In 1938, Hungarian-Argentine journalist László Bíró patented the first commercially successful version of what invention?

3. What fictional character attended the trial of the King of Hearts and was quite erratic during the month of March?

4. What species is Friar Bigotón, also known as Friar Moustache, an adopted member of the St. Francis Monastery, Bolivia?

5. In 2022, Malta began offering what public service for free to reduce car use?

6. Only three nations have landed on the moon: the United States, Russia and China. True or false?

7. What sometimes dreaded spring weed, which is actually full of vitamins A, B, C and D, is used to make tea, wine and coffee?

8. The extraction of massive amounts of what underground resource altered the earth's rotational axis by 78 centimetres between 1993 and 2010?

9. What was unique about the panel of speakers at the United Nations AI for Good 2023 Global Summit?

10. What ancient civilization made concrete so durable that scientists today study it to improve modern cement?

11. Which of the following is not among the so-called "dirty dozen" foods deemed by the Environmental Working Group in 2023 to be laden with the most pesticides: blueberries, strawberries, carrots or spinach?

12. Which of these animals caused the most deaths in Australian hospitals between 2000 and 2013, according to a 2016 University of Melbourne study: crocodiles, snakes, horses or kangaroos?

13. In 2023, Canada joined 43 other countries in banning animal testing in the production of what products?

14. What practice, initially an energy conservation measure during World War I, has been abolished in dozens of nations, including India and China?

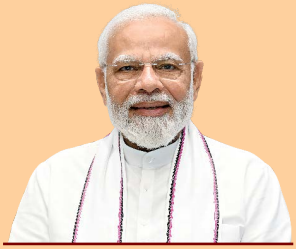
Answers: 1. Taylor Swift. **2.** The ballpoint pen. **3.** The March Hare from Alice in Wonderland. **4.** A dog. **5.** Public transport. **6.** False. In 2023, India became the fourth country to land on the moon, and the first to land in its south polar region. **7.** Dandelion. **8.** Ground water. **9.** They were robots. **10.** Rome. **11.** Carrots. **12.** Horses. **13.** Cosmetics. **14.** Changing the clocks twice a year.

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A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

Born on a Sketchbook by Siddhi Vartak, exclusively for *Reader's Digest*



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Prime Minister



Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh



Dharmendra Singh Lodhi
Minister of State
(Independent Charge) Culture, Tourism, Religious Trusts and Endowments

नवगति, नवलय, ताल छन्दनव

50 वाँ स्वर्ण जयंती वर्ष

खजुराहो नृत्य समारोह

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Pranati, Hunar
Samashti
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