Reader's Digest

FEBRUARY 2024

65TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

INDIA TODAY GROUP

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What Stress Does to Your Body

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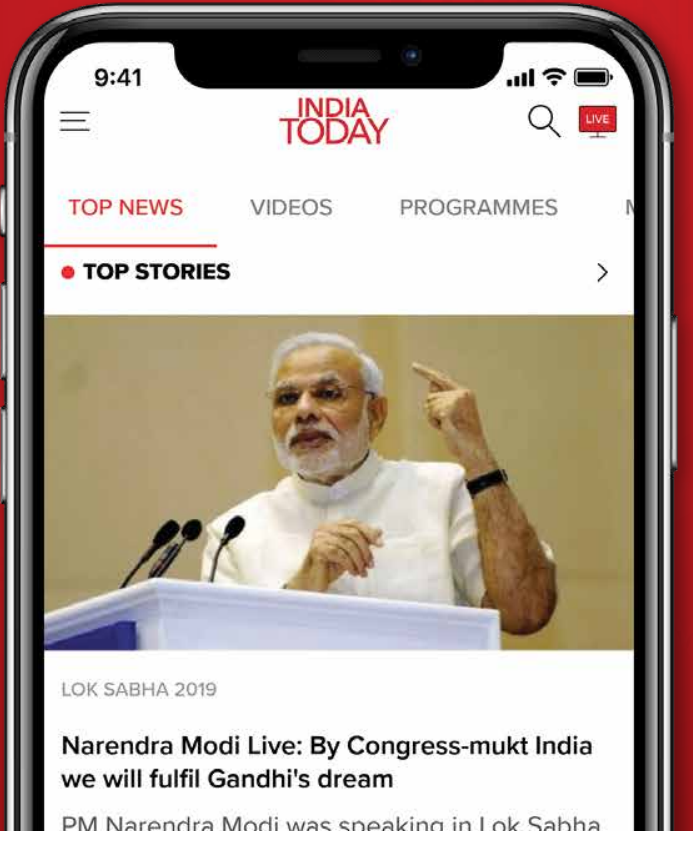
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INDIA TODAY

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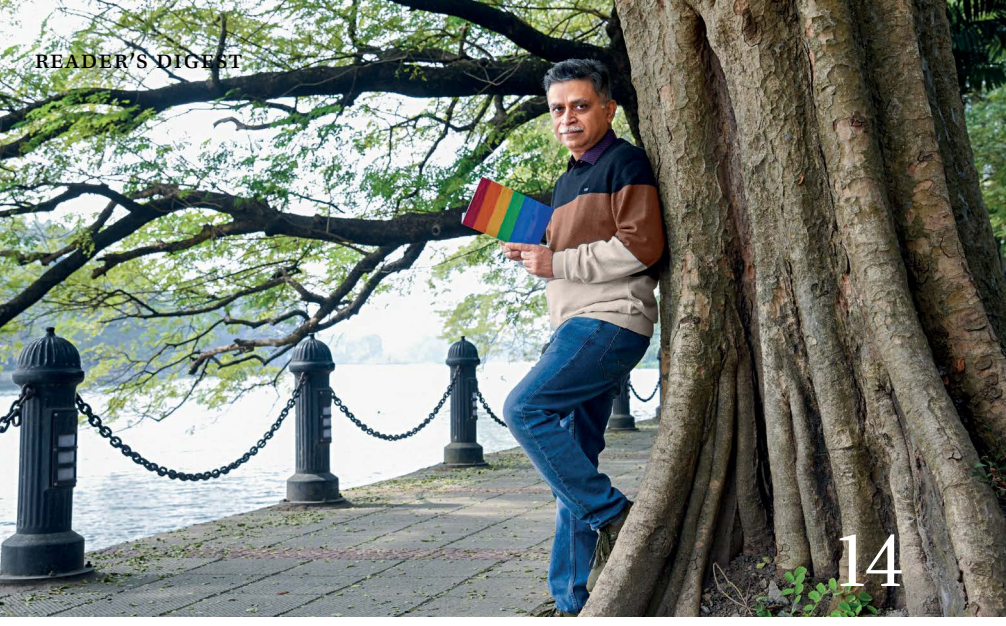
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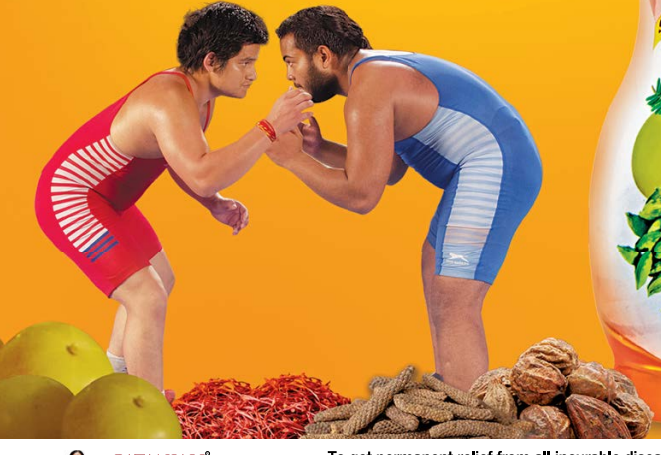




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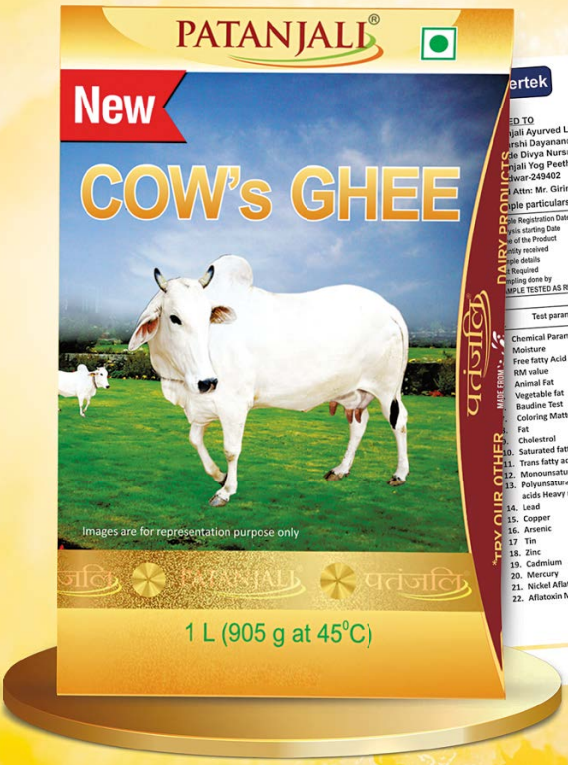
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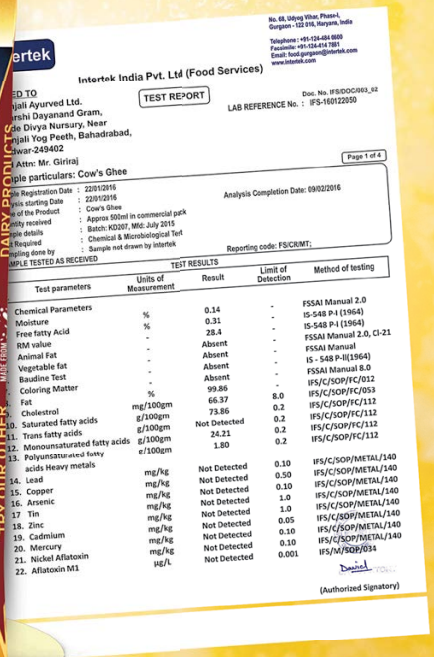
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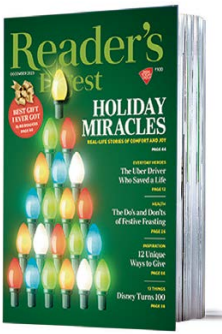

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LAB REFERENCE No. : IFS-160122050
Doc. No. IFS/DOC/003_02
Page 1 of 4
Analysis Completion Date: 09/02/2016
Reporting code: FS/CR/MT;
TEST RESULTS

Test parameters	Units of Measurement	Result	Limit of Detection	Method of testing
Chemical Parameters				
Moisture	%	0.14	-	FSSAI Manual 2.0
Free fatty Acid	%	0.31	-	IS-548 P-I (1964)
RM value	-	28.4	-	IS-548 P-I (1964)
Animal Fat	-	Absent	-	FSSAI Manual 2.0, CI-21
Vegetable fat	-	Absent	-	FSSAI Manual
Baudine Test	-	Absent	-	IS - 548 P-II(1964)
Coloring Matter	-	Absent	-	FSSAI Manual 8.0
Fat	%	99.86	8.0	IFS/C/SOP/FC/012
Cholestrol	mg/100gm	66.37	0.2	IFS/C/SOP/FC/053
Saturated fatty acids	g/100gm	73.86	0.2	IFS/C/SOP/FC/112
Trans fatty acids	g/100gm	Not Detected	0.2	IFS/C/SOP/FC/112
Monounsaturated fatty acids	g/100gm	24.21	0.2	IFS/C/SOP/FC/112
Polyunsaturated fatty acids	g/100gm	1.80	0.2	IFS/C/SOP/FC/112
Heavy metals				
Lead	mg/kg	Not Detected	0.10	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Copper	mg/kg	Not Detected	0.50	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Arsenic	mg/kg	Not Detected	0.10	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Tin	mg/kg	Not Detected	1.0	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Zinc	mg/kg	Not Detected	1.0	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Cadmium	mg/kg	Not Detected	0.05	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Mercury	mg/kg	Not Detected	0.10	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Nickel Aflatoxin	mg/kg	Not Detected	0.10	IFS/C/SOP/METAL/140
Aflatoxin M1	µg/L	Not Detected	0.001	IFS/M/SOP/034

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OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE *December* ISSUE



HOLIDAY MAGIC

A reminder of the awe-inspiring diversity that defines this secular country, Christmas has become a widely celebrated festival across India, even among non-Christians. One of the most noticeable effects of Christmas is the festive atmosphere that engulfs the country during this time. It has become a time for exchanging gifts and spreading joy and love among family and friends. The commercialization of Christmas has also made it a very popular holiday, with decked-up malls offering discounts and sales. From bustling markets adorned with colourful decorations to streets lit up with dazzling lights, during Christmas season there is an undeniable sense of excitement and joy in the air. This festive spirit can be seen across all cities and towns, as people from all faiths, and all walks of life come together to celebrate this holiday.

SANJAY CHOPRA, *Mohali*

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

I lost my Dad a couple of years ago. The last few days before his passing were tough for him. But through it all, he continued to worry about me—his rich, strong voice still resonates: "Don't come to the hospital, you'll catch the bug". My father was a judge and his job took us to different places. My wide circle of friends, still remember him and continue to tease me about his constant worrying over me. My cousins remind me of the pillows stacked next to me when I slept or the chair kept near my bed when I was little. I had to undergo a few tests last year. The doctors were quite concerned after the ultrasound report and ordered further tests. The morning I was wheeled out for my tests, I said a prayer asking my father for his help. It was a miracle—my reports were perfect.

PREETI ARANHA, *Mangalore*

The Best Gift I Ever Received

Last year when I superannuated from my organization on reaching 60, I got gifted the usual mix of pens, shirts, ties, cuff links, an odd vase or two. However, a junior colleague gifted me a well-bound, neatly wrapped book. When I opened it, I found a compilation of a few of my blogs—I had been writing one for the past several years. Very often I'd get frustrated at the tepid response and have thought of

discontinuing it. But this warm gesture gave me hope and encouraged me to continue writing. Now, when my first book has finally been published I can't help but thank my ex-colleague.
ARVIND ARYA, *Mumbai*

The Age of Kindness
The essay took me back to my youthful days spent at Neyveli, a small coal township in Tamil Nadu, where my Dad started his career in the 1950's. Our street had residents from all corners of India, but we lived together like one large family. Whenever there was the rare power failure, all the families would gather at the road junction and mill around, talking to each other. Our days were filled with exchanging food, often celebrating some festival or another. Loneliness and depression were terms few had heard of in Neyveli, unlike now when we have thousands of friends on social media but none to share our joys or sorrows whole-heartedly.
PREETHA RENGASWAMY, *Mylapore*

Preparing for Takeoff
After I finished reading the article, I made a checklist of the things Dr Marmoreo lists in the story. To my dismay I could not tick a single box! I sat recollecting 15 or 16 long trips I have taken, which involved 20 hours or more of travel! I realized how I had gotten lucky each time. I could only thank my stars!
P.M. GOPALAN, *Mumbai*

A Human History in Rust
The examples of reuse of telephone booths and discarded aircraft are very useful. Similar reuse can be done for old freight containers, thousands of which around the world become unserviceable every year. The rule of 'Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle' is followed by most middle class households in our country. Traditionally clothes and shoes used by an elder sibling are passed on to the younger ones; and later the same are used as rags for cleaning floors. In Chandigarh, Neki Ram, a government employee, has created a beautiful garden entirely from scrap materials. An enterprising restaurateur on the Delhi-Meerut highway has used a refurbished old aircraft as the premium section of his eatery. Rejected freight containers are regularly used for people to live in.

In a world struggling with the issue of eco-friendly sustainable consumption, tackling waste is essential to finding feasible action that can help fight the climate crisis.
KRISHAN KALRA, *Gurugram*

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.*

HUMOUR *in*

UNIFORM



My son was stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina when he texted, telling me to expect a call in 10 minutes. My curiosity was piqued. Was everything OK? As promised, 10 minutes later the phone rang.

"Vince, what's up?" I said.

"Can you hear me?" he shouted.

"Yes. Why?"

"I just jumped out of a plane and wanted to see if I'd get reception on the way down!"

—CARLA HOUSEHOLDER

A fellow Air Force cadet entered the chow hall without doffing his cap—a big no-no—and our drill instructor let him know it. The cadet was ordered to throw the cap to the ground and stomp on it, hollering, "Bad hat! Bad hat!"

—KENNY SMITH

During the Cold War, I served as a radio operator in West Berlin. Our third-floor barracks windows overlooked the Berlin Wall and an East German guard tower. Peering into the tower, I noticed that the guards were playing poker. So I picked up five cards and held them up to the window. Seconds later, they held up five cards. We each grabbed our binoculars and played a hand.

For one moment, we weren't adversaries—just guys playing cards.

—GREG WILT

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A World of
GOOD
REASONS TO SMILE

Looking for Love



WEARING A PINK feather boa and daisy-adorned sunglasses, Rosalie, a 7-year-old terrier and pit bull mix, was ready for her close-up. With photographer Kelsey Dubinsky behind the lens, St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center in Madison, New Jersey, was confident Rosalie's sweet, funny personality would shine through.

Older dogs tend to take longer to be adopted, and the glam photo shoot was part of an awareness campaign that aimed to match some of the center's long-term residents with the perfect human. Nearly all of the dogs who took part were adopted, says Diane Ashton, director of communications at St. Hubert's—though Rosalie is still available, if you're looking. "These lovable dogs just need a little extra help to find their forever homes." R

DUBINSKY PHOTOS

Over the Rainbow

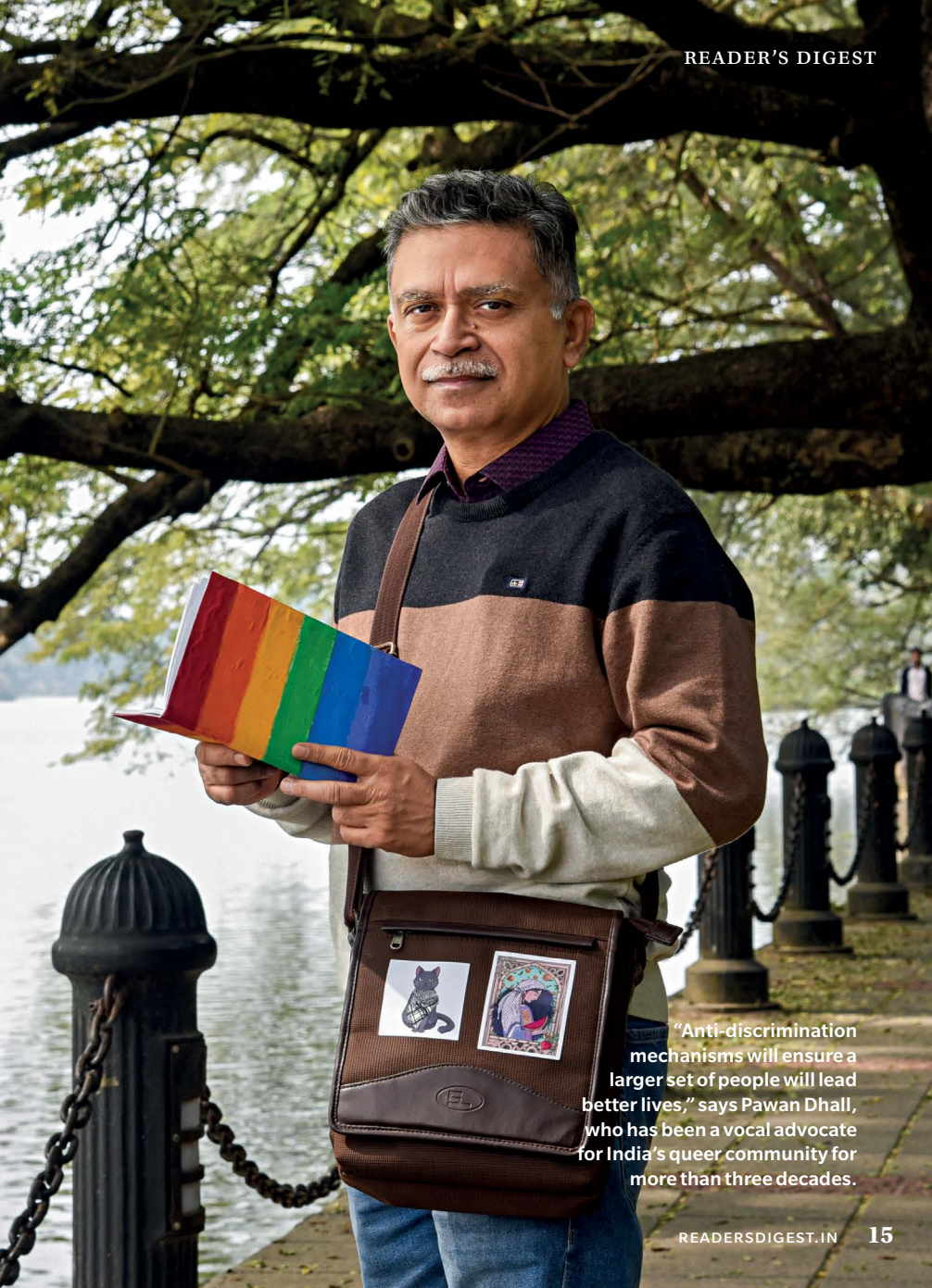
RD speaks to queer-rights activist Pawan Dhall, one of the most prominent names at the head of the rainbow wave in India since the 1990s

BY *Priya Pathiyan*

WHEN PAWAN DHALL first discovered Shakuntala Devi's pathbreaking book *The World of Homosexuals* in his home library, it "opened up a new world to me," he says. Written in 1977, the book was based on research and interviews and Devi's own experience of being married to a gay man. In it, she urged for complete acceptance of homosexuals by society.

While many gay men profess feelings of guilt, depression, and a sense of 'why me?' when they come to their sexual awakening, Dhall wasn't prey to such emotions. "My grounding at home was a solid one. There was a certain importance given to individuality," he says. This was in the '80s and the subject

PHOTOGRAPH BY *Debajyoti Chakraborty*



"Anti-discrimination mechanisms will ensure a larger set of people will lead better lives," says Pawan Dhall, who has been a vocal advocate for India's queer community for more than three decades.

of non-traditional gender relationships was just starting to enter mainstream media.

Based in Kolkata, Dhall is a LGBTQIA+ activist, author and founding member of Varta Trust, a gender and sexuality non-profit. Before that, he worked as the Country Director (Programmes and Development) at the NGO SAATHII (Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India) for a little more than 12 years. Through his books, papers, and talks, he has continually been an advocate for inclusiveness that goes beyond rhetoric.

"By the time I was 17, I knew I was gay. And I had found enough literature to understand that I was not alone, that there was a movement happening in different parts of the world."

Later, quotes from a social worker in Delhi and a psychiatrist in Mumbai in a *Sunday Mid-Day* article, which encouraged readers to write in via a postbox number, proved to be another major turning point in Dhall's life. Over several months in 1985, he wrote to them, asking questions, clarifying doubts, and slowly understanding what it meant to be queer.

It was during this time, when his brother was going to be married, that young Dhall came out to his parents, primarily because he was worried that he would be forced to marry at some point. While they were concerned about whether he was paying attention to studies, and even pondered if this was 'just a phase', they were supportive. They assured him that he would never be forced to live his life with anyone he didn't want to.

Around this time, the journalist Ashok Row Kavi became the first person in India to openly speak about being homosexual—he gave a coming out interview to *Savvy* in 1986—launched *Bombay Dost*, India's first LGBTQIA+ magazine and started the Humsafar Trust support group for the LGBTQIA+ community.

"WE WERE A SUB-CULTURE, INVISIBLE TO THE PUBLIC ... BUT SOMETHING PROPELLED US TO NOT SIT IN SILENCE," SAYS PAWAN DHALL.

After graduating, Dhall took up his first job as a journalist at the *Business Standard*. During the same time, in 1992, Dhall was appointed on the board of *Bombay Dost*. "It was a volunteer position, but anytime there was something to do with Kolkata, the query was directed to me. By the middle of 1993, we were moving towards creating a support group in Kolkata."

"I started networking seriously. It was clear to me that I also wanted to do community mobilization," he says, explaining the genesis of the Counsel Club. Started in August 1993, Counsel Club invited letters via a post-box number and discreetly conducted one-on-one advice sessions

in Kolkata's parks and cafes. It was risky—they faced harassment from the police, who did not hesitate to persecute, demanding bribes or sexual favours.

"We were a sub-culture, invisible to the public. People were discriminated against in their homes, and the stories that came out created a fear psychosis. But something propelled us to not sit in silence," he recalls.

The Counsel Club helped thousands of members of the queer community, initially mainly gay men, but it soon became a support group for all sexual minorities. The initial concerns were how to explore one's sexual leanings without getting caught, as marriage to the opposite sex was inevitable. But that attitude slowly started to change.

In 1998, controversy around the movie *Fire* lit a spark. Dhall and a small group of individuals did the first pride walk in Kolkata in July 1999—the first one ever in Southeast Asia. They also met with representatives of the Human Rights Commission to explain that queer rights were a human-rights issue.

By 2000, the membership of the Club had grown so much that it started having fortnightly meetings instead of one a month. "Events such as the pride walk, the availability of resource books, the *Fire* controversy, were all breaking the silence around homosexuality. After a feature in *Anandabazar Patrika* we were flooded with thousands of letters. We were no longer hiding," Dhall recounts.

Dhall's work which allowed thousands a safe space of their own, continues to archive and fight the erasure the community faces still. The Varta Trust's queer archival research, digitization and preservation work, Dhall believes, is vital to mark how far the queer rights movement has travelled and evolved. "It is important to preserve these stories of how the community negotiated their often lonely lives, the denial of our rights and the massive human cost discrimination exacts". This evidence base, he emphasizes, is essential to good advocacy.

Anti-discrimination is the need of the hour, he believes. "Of course, people should have the right to marry whoever they like, but how will marriage equality help when a couple cannot even be assured of living together safely and accessing the benefits heterosexual couples enjoy?" Dhall questions. The fight to scrap section 377 is only a small part of the larger picture, asserts Dhall. "Establishing anti-discrimination mechanisms through public-interest litigations and sensitization will ensure a larger set of people lead better lives."

"It's not as if cases of violence, blackmail and suicide have stopped. But yes, things are a shade better overall. There is visibility now, the police are aware and even getting educated on the movement. One way of gauging acceptance, perhaps, would be to look at the places where Pride Walks happen now and I think the number has crossed 40—cities like Dehradun, Imphal, Guwahati, Bhubaneshwar, and several in the south and west. It's quite a rainbow wave," he smiles. R



"SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED"

BY *Richard Glover*

FLAT-PACK FURNITURE was once a small segment of the market. Those who were up for a challenge could visit IKEA and test their wits against the evil geniuses who wrote their instruction manuals. It all worked out, provided you were attentive to every tiny detail and had the patience of a saint.

These days, though, nearly everything you buy has "some assembly required." When you order a chair, a bed or a barbecue, you get a bag of tiny parts and an instruction leaflet that needs a magnifying glass to decode. If I bought a new car, I'm sure I would be given 1,043 pieces, a wrench and an oxy-acetylene welding set.

Recently my wife, Jocasta, ordered two outdoor lounge chairs so we could enjoy some time together in the sun. When they arrived, she suggested that I assemble them. The instruction pamphlet had a picture of a tiny, straight-shouldered man and a clock indicating that the job would take 45 minutes.

They could have entered the pam-

ILLUSTRATION BY *Sam Island*

phlet in the Booker Prize for Fiction. A more accurate ideogram would have been a clock spinning to infinity and a bent-double fellow whose spirit was broken. I started work on the chairs at noon and finished, ironically, just as the sun was going down.

There were endless possibilities for error. Which was the chair's left leg and which was the right? The tiny arrows indicated that you must get this correct or much misery would ensue. Yet there was no way of telling.

Worse, the mesh fabric on which you would hopefully lie had to be stretched across the frame under high tension. This was achieved with a series of bolts that had to be turned with an Allen key whose movement was restricted by the crossbeams of the frame.

And so I laboured, making a series of quarter turns, grunting with effort, the bolts moving with reluctance as the fabric slowly tightened. My only point of gratitude: the possibility that at least one chair might emerge; after this, I would definitely need to lie down.

Since when did companies palm off so much of their basic work on to their customers? It's not only furniture. Airlines now require you to print your own boarding pass, affix your own luggage labels and heave your own bags onto the conveyor. They are three steps away from "Sir, could you please turn left upon boarding the plane? You've been chosen to fly the aircraft today."

At restaurants, the 'deconstructed' meal is the big thing. Why make a cheesecake when you can serve up two strawberries, a dollop of cream cheese and a crumbled-up biscuit and call it 'trend-setting'? Soon they'll give you a cleaver and a pot, then point you to the chicken coop out back. "Enjoy!"

I FINALLY COMPLETE PUTTING THE LOUNGE CHAIRS TOGETHER, WITH ONE SCREW LEFT OVER.

And at the supermarket these days, you're encouraged to use the self-serve checkout. Oh, and if you could stack a few shelves before you go, it would be most appreciated.

Social media companies represent the high point of this trend. Why employ anyone to create content when you can invite the customers to entertain each other? And if there's disinformation, defamation or cruelty, you can say it has nothing to do with you—you just sell the ads that surround the field of battle.

Back in the gathering dusk, I finally complete my task, with one screw left over. I gingerly lower my bulk onto one of the chairs. Miraculously, it holds.

As Jocasta settles into the other one I offer her a celebratory beer, which, amazingly, the brewery has actually made; all I have to do is pour it into a glass. I wonder if they know how outdated their business model is. R



GOOD NEWS
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY *Patricia Karounos*

Francisco Núñez plants a tree at a restoration site in the Yaque del Norte watershed, Dominican Republic.

RESTORING CARIBBEAN WATERSHEDS

WATER After decades of deforestation, the Dominican Republic's watersheds are under strain. These areas drain into the rivers and lakes that provide water to more than 60 per cent of the country. Along with a lack of water-storage infrastructure and low rainfall, this has led to drought.

Santo Domingo–based Francisco Núñez has made it his mission to restore these watersheds. He is leading reforestation efforts through the Nature Conservancy, an international non-profit, as the director of their Central Caribbean Program. How do trees help? They support the retention of water in the ground, which then gets filtered into the watersheds.

The group hires local farmers and cattle ranchers to plant trees. As of mid-2023, Núñez estimates that over 3,000 hectares had been reforested. (The goal is to plant 10,000 hectares over the next 10 to 15 years.) The project also teaches the farmers about sustainable practices that reduce tree-clearing.

After an especially severe drought in April 2023, the Dominican Republic's government signed an agreement with the World Bank to curb deforestation. Núñez says he hopes to see similar agreements worldwide. "It's time to restore and give nature what we have taken from it."

COURTESY OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Paris Olympics Go Green

ENVIRONMENT More than 1.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide were emitted as a result of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics—and had spectators been allowed to attend, there would have been another 1,29,000 tonnes due to air travel. In an effort to reduce this carbon footprint, organizers of the Paris 2024 Olympics are aiming to put on the greenest Games yet.

According to *Euro News,* some 11,000 seats for different venues will be made from plastic waste gathered from recycling bins, as well as through collection campaigns held in schools in Paris. The Games will also use biofuel instead of oil to light stadiums, event furniture will be recycled and donated, and vegetarian meal options will be provided.

Photography By Refugee Kids

SOCIAL JUSTICE Originally from a town on the Syrian border with Turkey, photographer Serbest Salih told *Buzzfeed News* that he left for Turkey after an ISIS attack. Once there, he knew he wanted to help those who, like him, had been forced to flee their homes.

Working with Sirkhane Social Circus School, Salih created Sirkhane Darkroom to give refugee and local children all over Turkey a chance to express themselves through photography.

Despite their circumstances, Salih says the kids often choose to photograph moments of joy in their lives, such as playing games with friends. Some of the images were published in a book, *I Saw the Air Fly,* in 2021. Most recently, the non-profit raised more than $30,000 [₹24,93,522] to purchase new cameras and other equipment.



TETRA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Helpful Vending Machines

INNOVATION Japanese government officials are hoping future efforts to keep people safe during natural disasters will be easier, thanks to the installation of vending machines that will dispense free food and drinks during a major typhoon or earthquake. Two such machines have been installed near designated evacuation shelters in Ako, a city on Japan's western coast that seismologists predict may experience a powerful earthquake in the future.

Built by the Tokyo-based Earth Corporation, the machines—which are fully functional—each contain around 300 drinks and 150 food items and supplements. Their contents will automatically become free under a heavy rain warning or evacuation order, or during a strong earthquake. Considering Japan is located in the world's most seismically active region, the goal is to install more of them across the country. R

THE POWER OF 26 LETTERS

My son's split-second decision may have changed a stranger's life

BY *Susan Baker*
FROM *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

On my son Andrew's 15th birthday, I whisked him to a shoe store near our home in Toronto to get a pair of sandals. We knew the exact style and size he wanted, and arrived right when the store opened. Andrew is non-speaking autistic and prefers shopping when it's not busy.

"Size 41 of those black slip-on sandals, please," I told the clerks.

Andrew slipped his feet into the shoes with no protest or head banging (signs of distress we have seen in the past). A perfect fit. We boxed them up, paid and thanked the clerks.

"It's Andrew's birthday today. Fifteen! Got our new shoes and now we're off to celebrate with family," I said.

"Happy birthday!" they said. "Have fun!"

What comes next only happens when you act on intuition, when the voice inside says to stop and do things differently. Instead of having Andrew point to the 'thank you' symbol on his picture chart, I hold up his letter board.

For 10 years, Andrew has used a picture chart to communicate. The images represent important and common words: people, places, food, greetings and activities.

ILLUSTRATION BY *Chelsea O'Byrne*


Closed
TELL JASON...
A B C D E F
G H I J K L
M N O P Q R
S T U V W X
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8



BRIANNA ROYE

Years ago, we discovered that Andrew could communicate more than just his basic needs via a letter board: an alphabet grid with letters he can point to and spell out words, statements, thoughts. It's a simple but profound tool affixed to the back of his picture chart.

Using the letter board requires significant time and effort for Andrew, but it gives him an opportunity to share far more of who he is than he can convey through pictures and basic words. So instead of dashing out, I hold up the letter board and ask Andrew how he'd like to respond.

The store clerks are quiet, watching. Andrew points to each letter, one by one: "Thank you." I smile and turn to leave.

One of the clerks, a man about my age, speaks up: "Um, can I ask you … what is that? How does he … what are you using there? Because I have a brother-in-law … and he doesn't talk."

"Oh! This is an alphabet board that Andrew uses to communicate," I reply. "We've practised it for years. It's

quite incredible, as we just didn't know Andrew was so 'in there.' We didn't even know this tool existed—it's relatively uncommon. It's changed everything for us, for our family, for Andrew."

This is what happens when we invite others into our humanness, and we allow them to share theirs.

"Let me give you my contact info, as well as the website of the spelling-to-communicate organization," I continue.

I ask the clerk about his brother-in-law. He tells us that Jason is 30 and doesn't speak, but he can do a lot for himself. Still, no one really knows him. Maybe there's more, the clerk wonders.

"Amazing!" I say. "We've met people—haven't we, Andrew?—who started using this method when they were 50 or 5 or 15! Andrew, what do you think?"

Andrew starts pointing to letters: "Tell Jason ..."

I choke up. Sometimes I forget how powerful the letter board is. How powerful Andrew is.

"Tell Jason he will change everyone's opinion of him in 26 letters."

We are all moved, inspired, thrilled.

"Wow," the clerk says. "Thank you."

Andrew smiles.

"It really does change everything," I say.

And we leave.

I am floating, and Andrew is singing, as he does.

This is how it happens, how we impact another person's life in a split second: by vulnerably leading with our own.

Maybe Jason and the store clerk are reading this. I hope their whole family's life is changed because Andrew showed up on his 15th birthday to buy a pair of shoes.

Update: After Susan Baker posted this story on Love, Life & Autism, *her Facebook blog, she received numerous inquiries from people about getting started with a letter board for a loved one. Later, she returned to the shoe store and learnt that Jason now has a letter board.* R

© 2023, SUSAN BAKER. FROM *MY SON'S SPLIT-SECOND DECISION MAY HAVE CHANGED ANOTHER PERSON'S LIFE*, FROM *THE GLOBE AND MAIL* (24 JULY 2023), *THEGLOBEANDMAIL.COM*.

Looking Inwards

If you want to be successful ... you need to be bad, then you need to be good. When you're good, you need to fail. Then when you fail, you're going to figure it out.

NIKOLA JOKIC, BASKETBALL PLAYER

No good disliking ourselves—gives the world an excuse to do the same.

KENNETH BRANAGH, FILMMAKER



HEALTH

When the World Spins

Vertigo is surprisingly common. Here's how to handle it

BY *Karen Robock*

ONE MORNING LAST winter, Lynn Smith was doing a series of gentle stretches on a mat in her living room, trying to loosen up a stiff lower back. When the 56-year-old sat up, she felt a bit strange. "I started to feel dizzy in a way I had not felt before," she says. Then, when she got into bed that night, she felt as if the room was spinning around her. She went to her doctor, who put a name to her experiences: vertigo.

While it's often described as a sensation of motion, vertigo is more complex

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Kate Traynor*

than a dizzy spell. People can experience ringing in the ears, loss of balance, double vision and trouble swallowing, depending on what's causing the vertigo. Episodes can last anywhere from a few minutes to a few days.

Although it can affect people of all ages, vertigo is most common in midlife and beyond and is more prevalent in women, though experts don't fwully understand why, says Terry Fife, a neurologist at the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, who specializes in balance disorders.

It's important to understand that vertigo is not a disease in itself. It's a symptom. There are many reasons why someone may have vertigo, but it generally falls into one of two types: peripheral vertigo and central vertigo.

With peripheral vertigo, the most common cause is benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, or BPPV. It develops when canaliths (tiny crystal-like calcium particles) that naturally occur inside the ear become loose and move deeper into the inner-ear canals. As they roll around, they can disrupt the transmission of information to the brain about balance. That's why the sensation that the room is spinning can strike when someone leans back to look up into a high kitchen cupboard, bends over to tie a shoe—or, as Smith discovered, folds over in a yoga pose. Less common causes are a head injury or Ménière's disease, a rare inner-ear condition.

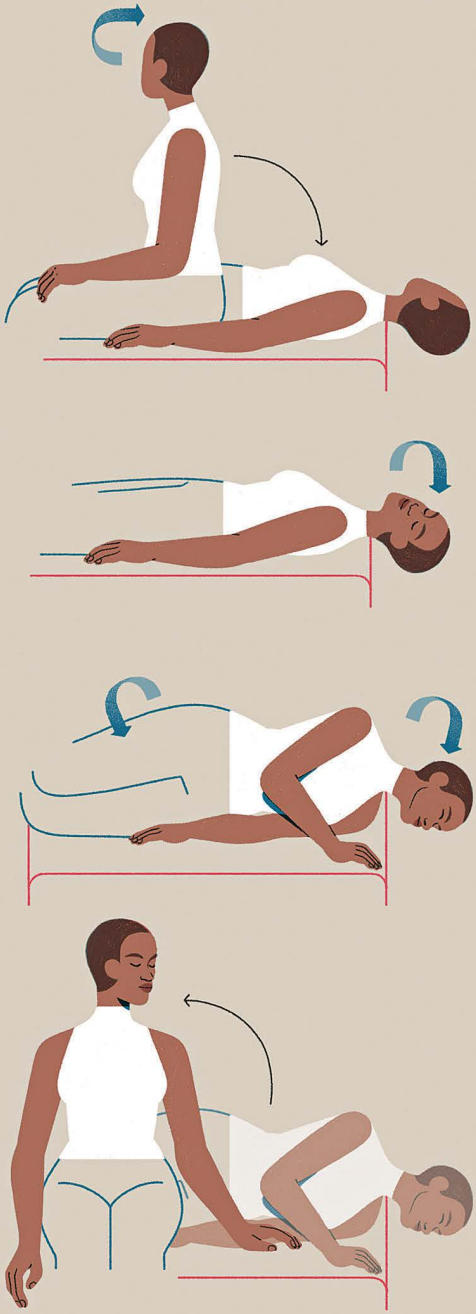
Central vertigo is less common and occurs in people who are experiencing a problem with the central nervous system, such as vestibular migraines (a type of migraine defined by extreme dizziness) or stroke.

A primary care physician may refer a patient to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist, or suggest a neurologist or a cardiologist. "That's why getting the diagnosis right is especially important," says Dr Fife.

BPPV will often resolve itself in a few weeks or months, but rather than waiting, patients can try at-home exercises to wiggle the ear crystals back into position. The Epley manoeuver, which worked for Smith, is the most well-known. (See page 28.) According to a 2023 study published in the journal *Medicine*, it improved symptoms of vertigo in 98 per cent of patients. It can also be done preventively, as Smith's neurologist recommended. An over-the-counter drug, meclizine, which is commonly used for motion sickness, can help quell symptoms when they strike.

Smith's neurologist also recommended she avoid alcohol, sugar and caffeine, as they could potentially trigger episodes of vertigo. Stress and inadequate sleep are other possible triggers.

"Feeling the room spin was terrifying," says Smith. As she shared her experience with others, she was surprised at how many said they too had experienced vertigo. "This is not some obscure medical condition," she says. "It's more common than you think." R



At-Home Treatment

For the most common cause of vertigo, BPPV, your doctor may suggest the Epley manoeuver. Perform each step in order, holding each position for 30 to 60 seconds.

1. Sit on your bed. Turn your head 45 degrees toward the affected ear. (If you get dizzy when you roll your head to the right, it's likely your right ear.)

2. Keeping your head turned, lie back so your head hangs off the bed.

3. Slowly turn your head 90 degrees toward the other side.

4. Roll onto your side in the direction you're looking, then turn your head so you're looking down.

5. Sit upright, keeping your head turned.

TIP: If you can, have someone with you for support as you will likely experience vertigo.

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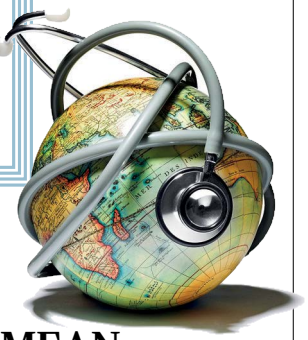
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NEWS FROM THE

WORLD OF MEDICINE

By Samantha Rideout



A CURE FOR 'MEAN WORLD SYNDROME'

Although news stories about disturbing events can be worth your attention, good news benefits your mental health, concludes a British experiment. More than 300 participants read stories about cruelty or violence, which, not surprisingly dampened their moods. Those who went on to read lighthearted anecdotes (e.g., a mouthy parrot) felt better, but those who read stories about acts of kindness reported a greater belief in the overall goodness of humanity. These results suggest that even if you're exposed to a daily barrage of bad news, hearing about the kindness of others makes you happier and protects you against what some researchers call mean world syndrome, an anxious outlook caused by an overestimation of the world's dangers.

Common Vaccines Bring Extra Bonus

Staying up to date with your immunizations reduces your chances of developing Alzheimer's disease, suggests a study of people over 65 led by the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Specifically, the vaccines for tetanus and diphtheria (adults should get a booster every 10 years), shingles (recommended for people over age 50) and pneumococcal disease (recommended for seniors over 65) lowered the relative risk of Alzheimer's by as much as 30 per cent. A couple of years ago, the same team found a similar risk reduction with the flu shot. Exercising the immune system with vaccines can help it respond appropriately to the toxic proteins that contribute to Alzheimer's as they build up in the brain. In addition, some preventable infections, such as shingles, can cause harmful brain inflammation.

LEVI BROWN

Type 2 Diabetes Breakthrough

People with type 2 diabetes will likely soon have the option of taking their insulin injections only once a week. That's because a new, longer-lasting treatment called insulin icodec has performed well in late-stage trials, and its developer has applied for approval from regulators around the world. The trials showed that this form of insulin lowers blood-sugar levels at least as effectively as daily options do. That said, the participants taking insulin icodec had a slightly higher rate of episodes of excessively low blood sugar, a risk that each patient, along with their doctor, will need to weigh against the convenience of fewer shots.

Prevent RSV This Winter

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is an infection that surges each winter—or, in tropical climates, each wet season. Most people have had it before, but they might not realize it because RSV usually causes only mild symptoms similar to the common cold. But it sometimes leads to serious breathing difficulties, particularly for elderly people and babies. Fortunately, scientists are now developing treatments to help prevent RSV in those most vulnerable groups. Two that are approved for use in the United States are an injectable drug called Beyfortus (nirsevimab-alip) for infants, and a new vaccine, Arexvy, that is suitable for some people over 60. Both treatments should protect people through at least one RSV season.

Losing Sleep over Insomnia

Sleeping medications aren't always effective long term, and they come with serious risks, such as memory problems and addiction. But we know that changes to thoughts and behaviours can help with insomnia just as much as meds can—if not more. One of these tweaks is to stop watching the clock when you're hoping to nod off. Recent research led by a team at Indiana University found evidence that monitoring the time makes people feel more frustrated, which exacerbates their insomnia and ultimately makes them more likely to turn to pills. R



JORG GREUEL/GETTY IMAGES

FOOD

The Soul of Morocco

Tagine offers a taste of North Africa as layered as the region's history

BY *Lucy Wildman*

Couscous might be Morocco's most famous-food export, but it's a mere side dish when served with the sweet, spicy, slow-cooked and delicious stew known as tagine. This staple of North African restaurant menus around the world "captures the aroma and essence of so many traditional Moroccan flavours," says Ghillie Basan, author of several books about Moroccan cuisine.

The first written reference to a tagine-like dish appears in the famous collection of ninth century Arab folk tales *One Thousand and One Nights*. Its roots are in the Berber-inhabited regions of North Africa; the Berber word for "shallow earthen pot" is *tazin*.

Today, tagine refers to the vessel *and* the mouth-watering meal cooked in it. Whether the central ingredient is meat, fish or vegetables, tagine's base is commonly made in a shallow-lipped dish with lots of onions, pulses such as chickpeas and lentils, spices like ginger, cinnamon, saffron and paprika and fiery harissa paste.

The heavy conical lid condenses the steam as the food cooks, making for a very tender stew. Sweet ingredients like fruit and honey are added near the end of the cooking process.

The trick to tagine, according to Claudia Roden, author of *Arabesque: A Taste of Morocco, Turkey and Lebanon*, is a balance of sweet and salty. "Dishes with sugar and honey must have enough salt and pepper to mitigate that sweetness," she says. Just before serving, toppings such as olives, preserved lemons, nuts, fresh mint and sometimes boiled eggs are added. Traditionally scooped up with a flatbread called *khobz*, tagines are now usually served with a fluffy mound of couscous.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *K. Synold*



Tagines represent the rich layers of Moroccan history. Its spices came from the Middle East during waves of Arab invasions in the seventh century. And when the Moors were expelled from Spain in 1492, many returned to Morocco, bringing their reliance on Spain's olives, olive oil and paprika.

Today, the busy *souks* (marketplaces) of Moroccan cities like Fez and Marrakech are lined with stalls piled high with an array of tagines. And on Place Mohammed V in the port city of Safi, Morocco's pottery capital, stands the world's largest tagine pot. Made in 1999 for a meal cooked by 200 women involving 12 tonnes of sardines, the vessel measures a staggering 6.3 metres wide and 5.5 metres high. (Just imagine the size of the pot for the accompanying couscous!)

But anyone can enjoy a scaled-down version at home. There are cast-iron tagines, but earthenware is traditional; purists like the unglazed versions, as the porous clay soaks up all the spices and flavours. (Avoid cooking with colourfully decorated clay vessels; they may not stand up to heat.)

Aromatic and evocative of exotic lands, a warming tagine is a perfect dish to serve family and friends on a winter evening. R



AS KIDS SEE IT



"Look—I only get an hour of screen time a day, so enough with the chitter-chatter."

While grocery shopping with my grandkids, we decided to split the shopping list. The children went to the produce department, and I headed for the meat department. Suddenly my granddaughter yelled, "Grandma, they don't have any pot here!" Then it hit me. "That's short for potatoes!" I yelled back. I write the whole word now.
—JANET MORRISON

We have a place on a lake and often take our grandchildren there in the summer to give their parents a break. Once, our grandson was visiting and asked if we could drive to the swimming pool. I said, "We can swim right here in the lake." He replied, "But the fish pee in there."
—CONNIE CHRUSCH

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*

WHAT A GREAT IDEA!

Ingenious innovations that are making the world a better place

BY *Patricia Pearson*



ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Kathleen Fu*



From medical solutions to planet-saving ideas, big thinkers around the world are coming up with ways to make a positive impact. Here are a few of our favourites.

A Wildfire Early Warning System

Every year, forest fires take a huge toll all over the world. In 2021, the United States alone spent more than US$4 billion fighting wildfires. Better ways to spot and douse the flames before they roar out of control are needed, and that is where Berlin-based start-up Dryad Networks has stepped in.

The company has developed a small solar-powered sensor that can be mounted on trees. This "electronic nose" can detect the hydrogen, carbon monoxide and other compounds that are released when a fire starts smouldering, alerting officials via wireless signal before smoke is even visible above the trees.

In a recent test run in Germany, the sensor picked up a (deliberately lit) fire within 14 minutes. It also provides exact GPS coordinates so firefighters can rush to the scene. Forest regions from California to the Italian island of Sardinia are now trying out these inexpensive sensors, and Dryad aims to deploy 120 million of them by 2030, potentially saving a projected four million hectares from burning.

A Brain Implant That Overcomes Paralysis

Stunning advances in neurotechnology are bringing real hope to people with spinal injuries. One man has been able to walk again simply by thinking about it, thanks to a digital brain-spine interface, created by Swiss researchers, that boosts neural signals damaged by the injury.

Gert-Jan Oskam, a 40-year-old from the Netherlands, has required a wheelchair since he was paralyzed in a cycling accident 12 years ago. But electronic implants in his brain now allow him to transmit his silent intentions to a receptor implanted in his spine. The implant then amplifies and sends signals to his legs and feet through his nerve cells.

"I feel like a toddler learning to walk again," Oskam told BBC News.

The mechanism is still in the experimental stage, but experts say the research is very encouraging.

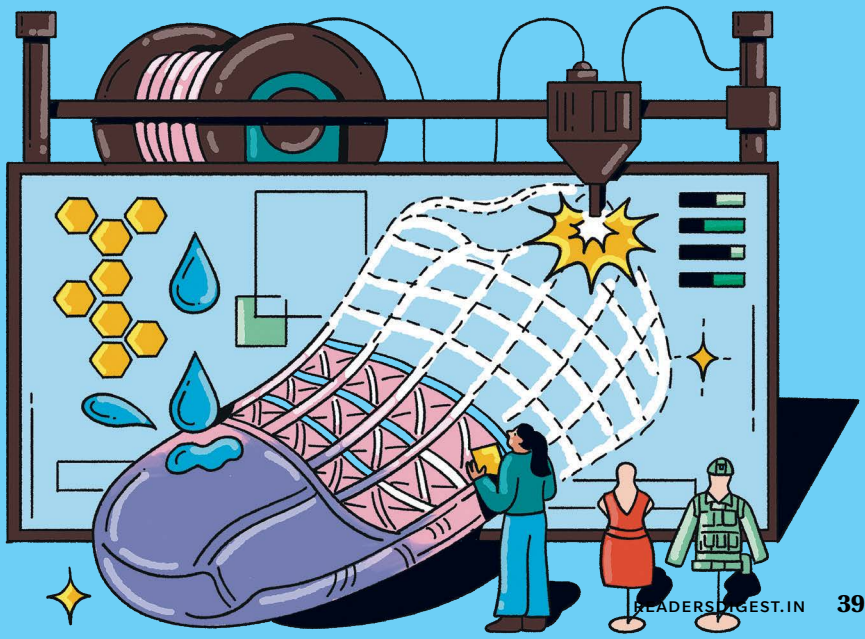
4D-Printed Clothes and Other Mind-Bogglers

When it comes to what we wear, the stuff of fantasy is getting closer to reality, thanks to 4D printing. This new technology programs "smart" materials that, when printed in 3D, change shape and colour in response to external stimuli such as water, heat or light.

Picture a sponge or a memory-foam mattress that contracts and expands. These "smart" materials work similarly, but the programming makes it more intentional: 4D clothing can be triggered to lengthen, fold, flatten, bend or change colour. The U.S. military, for instance, has been testing uniforms that take on a camouflage pattern, depending on the soldier's surroundings.

In other applications, scientists have created wearable gripping aids for people with limited use of their fingers, cardiovascular stents that expand and contract with your heartbeat and soft-tissue implants designed to release microdoses of medication.

Want to toss those baffling IKEA instructions out in favour of self-assembling furniture? 4D printing can also create a flat board that will curl up into a chair when you add heat.



MEET THE INVENTOR

An AI-Powered Diagnostic Tool

WHEN STANFORD University student Ellen Xu, now 18, was a five-year-old in San Diego, California, she vividly recalls her parents rushing her little sister to the hospital. Three-year-old Kate had fallen acutely ill; she had a fever, reddened eyes, a rash and some swelling in her hands and tongue.

At first, the puzzled doctors thought she had influenza, but when her condition didn't improve, the Xus returned to the emergency room, where a doctor by chance had prior experience with an acute inflammatory reaction in the blood vessels known as Kawasaki disease. Though rare, it's the leading cause of acquired heart disease in babies and young children, and its cause and triggers remain somewhat mysterious.

The doctor knew how to treat it: He ordered a dose of intravenous immunoglobulin, and eventually Kate shook off the illness without suffering damage to her heart.



Xu remembers being curious about her sister's dramatic condition and was amazed that the grown-ups couldn't answer her questions about why it was so hard to detect. "In my mind, it was this mystery," she says. "It was a puzzle I wanted to solve."

A decade later, wanting to enter a high school science fair, she had an idea: "What if we had a doctor in our pocket?" So she created just that: Using AI, Xu designed an algorithm that uses visual data to diagnose Kawasaki disease based on five physical symptoms.

The technology works the same way as apps that can identify birds and plants with photos you've taken on your cellphone. Worried parents can upload a photo that they have taken of their child, and the technology will scan the image for symptoms of Kawasaki disease, which often have a strong visual element, such as a rash or a swollen tongue.

Xu's invention has been implemented as a web app on the Kawasaki Disease Foundation's website.

"The technology could also be developed for recognizing auto-immune and rheumatological diseases," she says. "It means a lot to me. I want to use AI to help people live happier and healthier lives."

Xu says that her sister Kate, now in her third year of high school with dreams of becoming an environmental engineer, is thriving.

COURTESY OF ELLEN XU



The research, conducted by the MIT Self-Assembly Lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is in its early days, but its potential impact on health and industry is boundless.

Elevated Urban Farming

Short on fresh produce this winter? No need to wait for those imports from South America. Just run down to the office for a head of lettuce.

No, seriously, in a growing number of downtowns, you can do just that: As more people opt to work from home, leaving office space vacant, some of the empty buildings—many of which are flooded with natural light—are being converted into indoor vertical farms.

Companies like Agriplay in Calgary and Area 2 Farms in Washington, D.C., are solving two problems at once: renting underused real estate and supplying fresh local food without relying on global supply chains.

In addition, Agriplay deploys a soilless precision-sprinkler technique that mists the plants from the roots, and sensor-equipped LED lights that send data to an AI-enabled system that adapts to specific growing conditions. The result is up to 90 percent less energy consumption than traditional vertical-farming operations.

With that kind of tech innovation, office buildings can be modified into vegetable-growing powerhouses. Chicago-based Farm Zero is in the pro-

cess of leasing over 279,000 square metres of office space, with plans to produce 27 million kilograms of vegetables annually, sheltered from agricultural stresses like drought and floods. Way to grow!

Ways to Break Free From Abuse

People who are trapped with an abusive partner now have potentially lifesaving new ways to send an S.O.S.

Police in South Korea have adopted a campaign called "Knock Knock," which allows victims to discreetly report abuse by dialing 112 and tapping any number twice. This triggers the system to send a link to the phone via text. When the user clicks on it, police can pinpoint the victim's location using the phone's GPS and even watch a live stream of what's happening through the phone's camera.



Meanwhile, a Polish high-school student is using the cover of online shopping to fight abuse. In 2021, Krystyna Paszko launched a fake online cosmetics shop and got the word out to her social media contacts that it's actually a lifeline for victims.

When someone visits the Chamomiles and Pansies Facebook page to buy a product, such as a cream, they are actually connected with a psychologist. If someone "places an order" using their address, it prompts a home visit from authorities, similar to what would happen if the victim had called the police for help. The initiative helped as many as 350 people in the first year.

Rewilding Big Cities

A little green space goes a long way, and Madrid, Spain, one of Europe's largest cities, is leading the way with urban rewilding.

It took nearly a decade of construction to complete, but the city's Madrid Río Project moved sections of the multilane M-30 freeway to underground tunnels, allowing people to picnic where cars once whizzed by. The desperately polluted Manzanares river has been cleaned up, to the point that otters are being seen there for the first time in years. The city has planted trees, widened waterways, and built meadows and beaches.

After the project's completion in 2015, a study found big reductions in noise and air pollution; the researchers estimated a reduction of more than 30,000 metric tonnes of CO_2. One woman who lives along the river, Carmen Muñoz, told a reporter for *Politico* that she "no longer wakes to the noise of honking cars, but rather to the sound of birds singing in the trees."

The city isn't done yet: Next, it plans to encircle itself with a forest by planting roughly 1.5 million trees, mostly saplings. "We will be constructing what is, in effect, a 75-kilometre-long metropolitan forest," Madrid city councillor Mariano Fuentes said in an interview with *Geographical* magazine.

MEET THE INVENTOR

Mushrooms for the Win

WHEN RECENT science graduates David Brown and Natasha Jean met in Fredericton, New Brunswick, the two became friends with a shared love of fitness and healthy eating. As chemists, they were aware of how bad for our bodies the preservatives in supermarket foods can be. Calcium propionate, for instance, prevents bread from going moudly by killing bacteria and yeast. But it has also been linked to an elevated risk of diabetes and obesity.

After reading a study about the capacity of mushroom fibre to preserve foods' shelf life by acting as an antimicrobial agent, the two friends were intrigued. With a goal of developing a chemical-free preservative, they bought mushroom stems from farmers who would otherwise throw them out.

Seven years later, in 2023, their company, Chinova Bioworks, has released mushroom-fibre extract that when added to foods, such as dairy products, increases shelf life with a taste that's undetectable.

The company has even been testing the preservative with wineries in California and New Zealand. "It would replace the added sulfites that wine makers rely on right now for a long shelf life," says Brown. Grapes naturally produce sulfite, so the extra is an overload that some people can't tolerate.

It's a win-win-win: for the climate (by reducing food-waste emissions), for our health and for the mushroom farmers who can sell their waste. "We're trying to make an affordable product that companies will use," says Brown. "We hope to make the food industry more sustainable."



COURTESY OF CHINOVA BIOWORK

A Health Monitor for Earth

Conventional satellites orbiting the earth capture data within a limited range, which proves inadequate for advanced applications. Enter Bengaluru-based, space-data start-up Pixxel, founded by Awais Ahmed and Kshitij Khandelwal. With its constellation of high-resolution hyperspectral satellites—it has three in orbit and six more planned for launch—which can cover parts of the globe that are invisible to typical satellites in orbit today. Using hyperspectral imaging, which is a remote-sensing technology where a spectrometer collects images at different wavelengths, Pixxel's satellites can identify areas on a satellite map using distinct colours in real-time and detect a wide spectrum of patterns, all at increased speeds. These satellites can help map and monitor forest cover; measure deforestation and monitor phenomena such as invisible gas leaks, underground oil leaks, emissions, crop and soil health, and much more. The valuable satellite imagery thus generated can be mined for insights, and used for various purposes, including risk management, crop insurance and agricultural applications.

MEET THE INVENTOR

Capturing the Clean Water of Fog

WHEN INDUSTRIAL ENGINEER Abel Cruz was a boy, his weekly chore was to scramble down a ravine in the foothills of the Peruvian Andes to fetch the family's water from a spring. "It was downhill from the house, far away and steep," he says. Cruz began dreaming up better ways to collect water, noticing that subtropical plants, for instance, capture rain and mist with their wide leaves. Eventually, he struck upon the idea of a fog net.

Each vertical net is 20 square metres of synthetic resin mesh, where microdroplets of water condense and dribble down into collection tanks. One net can collect 200 to 400 litres per day. Locals can also fetch it in buckets for small-scale farming.

Working in Lima with support from the Creating Water Foundation, Cruz has installed more than 3,600 nets on hillsides around the city to capture fog drifting in from the Pacific Ocean. With a population of more than nine million, Lima frequently has serious water shortages due to its arid climate.

"The planet has less and less fresh water," Cruz points out, because "the glaciers that are natural reservoirs are disappearing. So we must find a way to accumulate and save water for times of drought."



COURTESY OF ABEL CRUZ

Paint That Cools

The northern hemisphere experienced the warmest summer on record last year. One man has a cool solution: Xiulin Ruan, a professor of mechanical engineering at Purdue University in Indiana, has come up with a special formula that boosts the reflective power of white paint, reducing the temperature of the roof's surface by up to 13 degrees C at midday.

Ruan's paint—containing high concentrations of light-reflecting barium sulfate—could reduce air-conditioning needs by up to 40 per cent. While typical white paint will help keep things cool by reflecting 80 to 90 per cent of sunlight, this formulation reflects 98 per cent. Ruan expects the paint to be commercially available this year.

Infection-Detecting Stitches

Dasia Taylor was just 17 when, in 2021, she put her inventive mind to solving a very common medical complication: infections after surgery. Globally, it happens in around one in 10 patients, according to the World Health Organization, and can be a real hazard in caesarian sections. Taylor, working with her chemistry teacher in Iowa City, Iowa, designed sutures that change colour when infections develop.

How does it work? Skin is naturally acidic, with a pH value of five or so. If infection develops, pH levels go up. Taylor discovered that some vegetables change colour depending on their acid content; beets, it turns out, go from bright red to dark purple at a pH of nine. So she dyed her suture threads with beet juice; the thread goes from red to purple when a wound is infected. That means a patient can be treated quickly with antibiotics, treating the infection before it becomes serious. After winning several awards, Taylor is currently seeking to patent her product.

A Trash-Catcher for Oceans

There are as many as 171 trillion pieces of plastic floating around in our oceans. What can be done to stop this outward flow of trash, most of which comes from rivers polluted by communities located alongside them?

German industrial designer Mauritz Schulz has designed 'TrashBoom', a kind of floating barrier, not unlike a swimming-lane marker, that stretches the width of a given river and acts as a net, blocking discarded bottles and bags before they can drift out to sea.

So far, the simple device is primarily in use in Indonesia and India—where it has stopped more than 9,00,000 kilograms of garbage from entering the ocean since April 2021. The instructions for making the inexpensive TrashBoom are available online, and other organizations are now applying this open-source technique. Sungai Watch in Bali, for example, is deploying booms, while a company called Pangea Movement, also based in Bali, has organized river clean-ups in 11 countries so far, and

hopes to tackle 100 of the world's most polluted rivers.

An Addiction-Preventing Pill Dispenser

Opioid addiction is one of the greatest public-health crises of our times. It often starts with a prescription for medication to ease pain and it can escalate quickly.

As a student at New York University, Artin Perse watched his uncle get hooked on opioids as he recovered from injuries he suffered in a car accident. It inspired Perse to do something to help prevent addiction, so he designed a device that dispenses pills to match what your doctor prescribed.

In between electronically timed releases, the bottle cannot be opened. (It is meant for people in early stages of managing pain, rather than addicts.) Perse went on to found a company called Levl that uses the same design to help people with psychiatric medications. The dispenser is still in the trial phase, but Perse hopes to make it available within a year.

MEET THE INVENTOR

Sustainable Household Waste Disposal

FIFTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD biochemist Dr C. N. Manoj from Kerala was shocked to find that households are the biggest bulk waste generators. "Compared to industries that manage waste in a controlled manner, per governmental rules, even a small family or a community of 100 people can generate tonnes of waste every day, which is disposed off without any control", he told *The Better India*. In a bid to develop a scientific and sustainable solution to waste disposal, the scientist quit his job, developed a natural composting inoculum called Composorb, and in 2021, set up Pelican Kenterra. Made from natural materials such as cocopeat, hay, dry leaves, etc., Composorb sandwiches waste between moisture-absorbing spongy matrices, taking care of the problem of leaching liquid and obnoxious gases which occurs during conventional aerobic composting process. The waste then disintegrates into uniform particles along with the matrix into healthy nutrient-rich organic planting media.

Manoj's subscription-based waste-management solution has now been adopted by over 15,000 homes and commercial establishments in Kerala and Bengaluru, with the team handling over 10,000 kg of waste every day. The company has also partnered with the Kochi Metro, which is using the soilless compost product to fill road medians for flowers and trees. R



COURTESY OF DR C N MANOJ

QUOTABLE QUOTES

Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us, or we find it not.

—**Ralph Waldo Emerson,** *philosopher*

We flatter ourselves by thinking this compulsion to please others an attractive trait: ... we play roles doomed to failure before they are begun, each defeat generating fresh despair ... To free us from the expectations of others, to give us back to ourselves ... there lies the great singular power of self-respect.

—**Joan Didion,** *writer*



PHOTO: ALAMY; M. ZHAZO



It feels like a stone the size of a mountain has been lifted from my chest, and I can breathe again. This is what justice feels like.

—**Bilkis Bano,** *on the Supreme Court judgement quashing the early release granted to the 11 convicts by the Gujarat government*

Entire multi-generational families will be obliterated and yet more Palestinian children will become WCNSF—Wounded Child No Surviving Family—the terrible new acronym borne out of Israel's genocidal assault.

—**Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh,** *barrister, in the genocide case brought to the International Court of Justice by South Africa against Israel*

And, in the end
The love you take
is equal to the love you make.

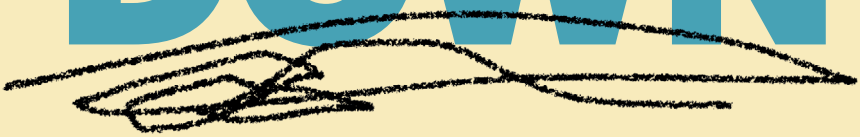
—**Paul McCartney,** *musician*

My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side.

—**Abraham Lincoln,**
16th president of the United States



SIMMER DOWN



Eight compelling reasons your body wants you to dial back the stress in your life

BY *Rosemary Counter*

MY JAW HURTS. BIG DEAL, RIGHT? Right…at least at first: It starts with a looming deadline or a tiff with my spouse, but tension leads to jaw clenching and then pain. Soon chewing hurts, so my blood sugar drops and my head starts to ache. I cancel plans to exercise or see a friend, and my mood goes south fast. A good night's sleep is impossible. I toss and turn and clench my jaw some more, then start it all again tomorrow.

Even the tiniest seed of stress can quickly snowball into debilitating symptoms. Not anxious or irritable or depressed (though it can do that too). I mean physically ill in the whole body—

from dead stem cells causing prematurely grey hairs down to reduced blood flow in your toes (seriously: "foot tingling" is common before and after a panic attack).

If you need a reason to take a breath, here are eight ways stress could be taking a toll on your body right now.

YOUR BRAIN: Firstly, let's define stress. "Stress is a state of worry caused by an external trigger," says Krystal Lewis, a Maryland-based clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health. It can be short-term and acute (like speeding out the door to get to work on time) or long-term and chronic (like a busy career).

"WHATEVER IS HAPPENING TO YOU EMOTIONALLY, THE GUT KNOWS IT AND FEELS IT."



Ideally, your stress is acute and you bounce back as soon as it stops. In reality, if you're like three-quarters of Americans who report that stress has negatively affected their lives, your stress is likely chronic.

Either way, your brain's amygdala jumps into high alert, causing the hypothalamus to release a chemical rush of cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, that might have helped you outrun a sabre-toothed tiger. It's less helpful today, when you're having the same tiger-sized response to being late.

"Whatever it is, because you're in a situation you can't control or manage, your brain is releasing a flood of hormones to help you deal," says Lewis. These hormones can destroy neurons, particularly newly formed ones, leading to brain atrophy, shrinkage or damage to the prefrontal cortex—an area of the brain that's essential for cognitive function, focus and memory-making.

YOUR HEAD, JAW AND SHOULDERS: The first place you might actually *feel* stress settle in is what experts call the "tension triangle." "When you're stressed and your body is in active fight-or-flight mode, your muscles tense up to prepare to protect you," says Lewis.

Stay too long in that state—like holding yourself in a plank at the gym—and soon you'll feel muscle fatigue and strain. Unconscious clenching of the jaw can lead to or exacerbate teeth grinding, temporomandibular joint (or TMJ) disorder or an awful-sounding "globus sensation" that makes it difficult and uncomfortable to swallow.

And have you noticed an unfortunately timed Friday night headache after a hard week? That's because as your stress hormones from the week plummet, blood vessels dilate (a.k.a. "vasodilation," long associated with migraines) and you're now in headachetown.

YOUR GUT: Stress feels "gut-wrenching" or "stomach-churning" because the brain and gut are so intrinsically linked that scientists have a name for it: the mind-gut connection. It refers to the millions of neurons trading messages along the vagus nerve (a thick cable running from brain to gut).

"Whatever is happening to you emotionally, the gut knows it and feels it," says Dr Emeran Mayer, a gastroenterologist and author of *The Mind-Gut Connection.* "The gut is the habitat of microbes, and anything that changes the habitat affects the microbes, which have to adapt." Throwing them out of balance can wreak havoc on things like your digestion and immunity.

In addition, stress can cause changes in secretions of fluid, the time it takes for food to move through you, and intestinal permeability, called leakiness, where potentially toxic molecules from undigested food seep through the intestinal lining into the body and bloodstream. The body reacts to the misplaced molecules as it does all foreign invaders, explains Dr Mayer, via low-grade immune system inflammation.

Meanwhile, stress increases acid production in, and slows the emptying of, the stomach, leading to acid reflux (heartburn) or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). And any gastro pain you do have will actually hurt *more*: "When you're stressed, all your sensory nerves go up in sensitivity," says Dr Mayer.

YOUR HEART: When it comes to the heart, short-term stress hogs all the attention. The very romantic-sounding "broken heart sydrome" (a.k.a. stress cardiomyopathy) can happen when a person is under acute stress, be it emotional (as in grief or fear) or physical (such as a high fever or a seizure).

In some of these cases, a sudden release of hormones such as adrenaline may narrow the small arteries in the heart, decreasing blood flow to the organ temporarily. "You might have palpitations, hyperventilate or even faint if you're not getting enough oxygen," says Patrice Lindsay, a director at Canada's Heart and Stroke Foundation.

The effects of short-term stress are immediate and palpable, sure, but



there's a reason that stealthier chronic stress is dubbed "the silent killer." "Stress wreaks all kinds of havoc on your heart," says Lindsay. Among them, increased heart rate, arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat) and excessive vasoconstriction—when blood vessels constrict, the opposite of vasodilation and the cause of those aforementioned tingly toes.

The largest effect, however, is this: Living in a stressed state all the time raises your blood pressure—the top risk factor for heart disease and stroke. One in four adults worldwide has hypertension, which stiffens and damages arteries, decreases blood and oxygen flow, and increases the risk of blood clots.

YOUR LUNGS: Cursed with seemingly endless colds every winter? A possible cause is unchecked stress levels sapping your body's resources. "Spiked cortisol dampens your immune system so it's less powerful in the fight against the bugs that cause cold and flu," says physiologist Laura Ginesi, fellow at the United Kingdom's International Stress Management Association.

Among many complex interactions between stress and the immune system is this double whammy: Stress reduces lymphocytes, your army of white blood cells often called "natural killers," forcing those you *do* have to work harder amidst any chronic inflammation that's already draining the immune system.

YOUR SKIN: If you've ever blushed with embarrassment or broken into a sweat during an exam, you know that the epidermis, your body's biggest organ, reacts to stress-induced cortisol almost instantly.

"Short-term stress, like feeling anxious before a presentation, can cause temporary problems like flushing, itching and sweating," says Dr Alia Ahmed,

"YOU CAN COUNTERACT ALL OF THIS WITH SIMPLE TRICKS TO LOWER YOUR STRESS."



a U.K.-based psychodermatologist who specializes in the interaction of mind and skin. Cortisol also drives sebum (oil) production, which is why you might break out the night before your wedding. All those will pass, thankfully, but not so the long-term effects.

"Stress drives inflammation, which is implicated in aggravating existing conditions like eczema, psoriasis and rosacea," says Dr Ahmed. Even people with crystal-clear complexions, however, can suffer from dry, scaly and itchy skin when they are stressed. As cortisol levels increase, collagen levels decrease, causing lines, wrinkles, pigmentation, signs of premature aging and dull skin.

Furthermore, stressed-out people

sleep less, eat worse and are often dehydrated—all factors that take a toll on your skin.

YOUR REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM: Ever charge through your front door after an awful day eager for romance? Probably literally never. "Imagine holding a fist all day, and then at 8 p.m., unclenching to grab a fork," says Dr Uchenna Ossai, an Austin, Texas-based physical therapist and sex educator. "Your hand won't feel good, and the same is true of your body."

Chronically high cortisol levels have demonstrable effects on sex hormones. For women, the hypothalamus, which normally tells the pituitary gland to produce menstruation-causing estrogen and progesterone, is instead too busy managing cortisol. This can cause irregular or missed periods, decreased ovulation and reduced fertility.

For men, chronically high stress levels inhibit testosterone production, which can cause lowered sperm count, erectile dysfunction and impotence.

YOUR MUSCLES AND JOINTS: Sore backs are common during stress, of course, but arms, legs, hands and feet may also feel the burden. How so, scientifically?

"Inflammation brings blood to the area to clear up any damage or debris," says Ginesi. When your brain senses pain, whether because you've sliced your thumb or keep clenching your jaw, it works to repair the damage. "Stress makes neutrophils—white blood cells that are part of the inflammatory response—more active in order to heal tissue." As with that bleeding thumb, this can trigger nerve impulses that may lead to physical discomfort. "Inflammation causes redness, soreness, swelling and pain," Ginesi says.

Chronic inflammation can feel like joint stiffness, tendonitis, or aches and pains. Left untreated, it can lead to irreversible scarring (fibrosis), DNA damage and, because it affects the way cells grow and divide, mutations that cause tumours or cancer.

That stress can kill is a terrifying thought, admittedly, unless you turn it upside down: "You can counteract all of this with some simple tricks to lower your experience of stress," says Ginesi.

For me, that's yoga classes, meditating for 10 minutes in the morning and a monthly massage. For you, it could be something even easier: Studies prove that just closing your eyes and breathing deeply can help reduce and regulate your cortisol level—wherever you are, right now and for free. R

Seize the Moment

Begin doing what you want to do now. We are not living in eternity. We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand ... Let us use it before it is too late.

MARIE BEYNON RAY, AUTHOR

LIFE'S *Like That*

Every dog can be trained, or so we've heard. My wife and I tested that theory by enrolling our seemingly untrainable Australian shepherd, Austin, in obedience school alongside six other dogs. The final session ended with four skill contests with prizes awarded. Austin struggled in 'school,' so we didn't expect him to win anything. Surprise! My wife returned home proudly showing off the four second-place ribbons Austin had won.

"What? How? But ..." I sputtered.

She cut me off: "Only two dogs showed up."
—ROGER ANDERSEN

The nurse giving me a pre-colonoscopy che-ckup advised, "You will be given anaesthesia, so for the rest of the day do not drive, drink alcohol or sign any legal documents." After a brief pause, she added, "and you should probably stay off social media, dating apps and Amazon."
—SANDRA SQUIRE

My 10-year-old son recently asked, "If I hit myself and it hurts, am I strong or weak?"

Out of karate class and into philosophy for him!
—J.C.

When a friend passed away, I texted his family: "I'm praying God will comfort you and Fred." Soon after, I received their reply: "Thank you, but Fred and I are not ready yet."

I wasn't sure what they meant until I reread the text I'd sent. Autocorrect had changed it to: "I'm praying God will come for you and Fred."
—TRISHA ORCHID

While we drove to the park, my young nephew said, "I have a big canker sore in my mouth."

My concerned 3-year-old son asked, "Is that a type of dinosaur?"
—CLAIRE STANICH-SMITH



"So many TikToks I'll never see ..."

CARTOON BY *Vaughan Tomlinson*

89 per cent of the time when my husband tells me I look great what he really means is, "We needed to leave five minutes ago."

—𝕏@LOVENLUNCHMEAT

That's Entertainment!

✦ A 2-hour movie takes 3.5 hours to watch because my wife and I constantly pause it to figure out what other movies the actors were in.
–𝕏@DANREGAN_COMEDY

✦ I wish I had the determination of my wife, who's still flipping through radio stations as we pull into our driveway.
—𝕏@DADDYGOFISH

✦ I've been watching HGTV with my wife for the past two hours, and just once—just ONCE—I'd like to see a couple looking for a home who hates entertaining.
–𝕏@JOHNJOKEWRITER

My grandfather was frugal to the end. As he lay dying, surrounded by his children, he warned, "If you kids spend more than $500 for a casket, I'll kick the lid off."

"Dad," my father said in a reassuring tone, "for $500, you don't get a lid."

—VALERIE PRANCEVIC

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

WHAT WERE THEIR PARENTS THINKING?

Coming up with a good name for your baby isn't easy. Still! Some people took to Reddit to share the more outlandish names they've encountered.

✦ "I knew triplets named Cinnamon, Rosemary and Paprika. People called them the Spice Girls."

✦ "I do contract-based IT work. Recently, I worked with an office manager named Moronica."

✦ "My partner is a midwife. She once looked after a couple who were intending to call their daughter Urethra. They didn't know what it meant, they just liked how it sounds."

✦ "My wife worked in a bank and had a regular customer named Dextrose. Always wondered if he had siblings named Sucrose and Fructose."

✦ "Lice. Pronounced lih-say."

✦ "KVIIITLYN. Pronounced Kaitlyn."

✦ "I once met a woman who named her sons Doral and Viceroy. I asked her, 'Like the cigarettes?' She said, 'Yes, those were my daddy's favourite smokes.'"



BENLIN/GETTY IMAGES



DEAR READERS ...

































65TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL











To commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Indian edition of **Reader's Digest**, *editors of this legacy publication share their stories of what it was like at the helm of one of the world's most widely read magazines from 1954, until today*























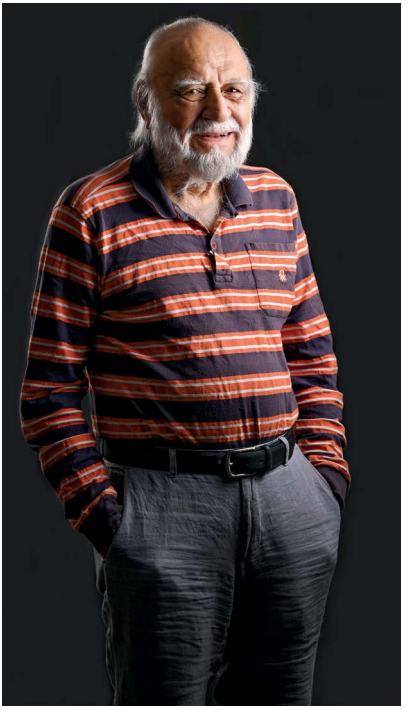




In 1969, when I was 29 years old and had spent five years as an Assistant Editor of the Times of India, I applied to become the first Editor of the Indian *Reader's Digest* (*IRD*)—and was selected from many candidates. After my selection, I had to spend a year in London with the British *Reader's Digest* (*BRD*), getting to know how the *Digest* was brought out. My job was to 'Indianize' the *IRD*, just as many editions all over the world were already localizing their contents to an extent, with articles and jokes originating from that country itself.

During that training period with *BRD*, what struck me most was how *RD* ensured that everything they published was absolutely accurate. Even the jokes sent by readers were carefully checked for their originality. For that, there was a separate research department, which spared no effort or expense to ensure accuracy. Which is why a common refrain to end an argument in those days was, "But I saw it in the *Reader's Digest*." *RD* had great credibility, and was trusted by its readers—essential for a successful publication. The other unique nature of *RD* was the supremacy of the Editor. He or she did not report to the management, only to the International Editor (a Frenchman, Alain de Lyrot, at my time). That was how the *Digest* founder, Dewitt Wallace, an Editor himself, wanted it.

My first major challenge as the *IRD* editor came when censorship was imposed in 1975 during Indira Gandhi's infamous Emergency rule. Every month, I had to appear before the Chief Censor,



and show him what we were going to publish that month, for him to check that there was nothing that the government could object to. It was a humiliating experience for anybody who believed in freedom of speech and expression.

The US edition carried an article by Claire Sterling, extremely critical of Indira Gandhi's suppression of democratic rights under the Emergency. This was brought to the Indian Government's attention by the Indian Ambassador in Washington. I had to assure

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Mandar Deodhar*

the censor that *IRD* would not be carrying it, otherwise we would have surely had to close down!

As Editor, I always had the discretion not to carry in *IRD* any articles from the parent US edition which I felt would not go down well with our readers. Hence, during the Vietnam war I kept out anti-communist pieces. However, a bigger challenge loomed with Janata Party rule, following the Emergency, and the defeat of the Congress Party. Industries Minister, George Fernandes, a socialist known for his anti-US stance, decreed that all American companies were required to have a majority Indian shareholding. Rather than comply, IBM and Coca Cola, among the prominent American companies, decided to exit India.

IRD was similarly placed at the time, with 100 per cent American shareholding. Pleasantville (where *US RD* was located) reached out to me. "What should we do?" it asked. Either we have to agree on at least 51 per cent Indian share-holding, or we must shut down *IRD*, I replied. Eventually, it was mutually agreed by the Indian government and Pleasantville that *IRD* would have 100 per cent Indian share-holding, but Pleasantville would retain complete editorial control.

I also listed five leading Indian companies which would be interested in buying *IRD*'s share-holding. Which is the best? asked Pleasantville. The Tatas, I replied. Negotiate with them, came the directive.

I knew Nani Palkhivala, famed lawyer and a Director of Tata Sons, personally, and went to see him in his Marine Drive apartment. Startled by the offer, he said he needed to talk to "Jeh" (JRD Tata, the head of Tatas) first. Come and see me in two days time, he said. When I went to see him, he simply said, yes, we would like to be associated with *IRD*. That is how Tatas got to own *IRD*. (Later, Ratan Tata decided to exit from all non-core areas and the India Today Group bought over *IRD*).

During my editorship, we also launched a Hindi edition, *Sarvottam*, to add to the many languages in which the *Digest* was published. In fact, no other magazine in the world had so many translated editions, or such a large circulation, as *RD*. Sadly, *Sarvottam* lasted only a few years, being financially unviable.

When I decided in 1980 to leave *IRD* to join a major daily paper, *The Indian Express*, my International and US Editors tried to dissuade me, but when they realized I was set upon returning to mainstream journalism, they made an extraordinary, touching gesture by inviting me to Pleasantville. The farewell parties left me with fond memories of my 11 years with the *Digest*—my longest stint with a publication in my journalistic career. I had been privileged to work for a great and uniquely professional magazine, the likes of which the world will never see again.

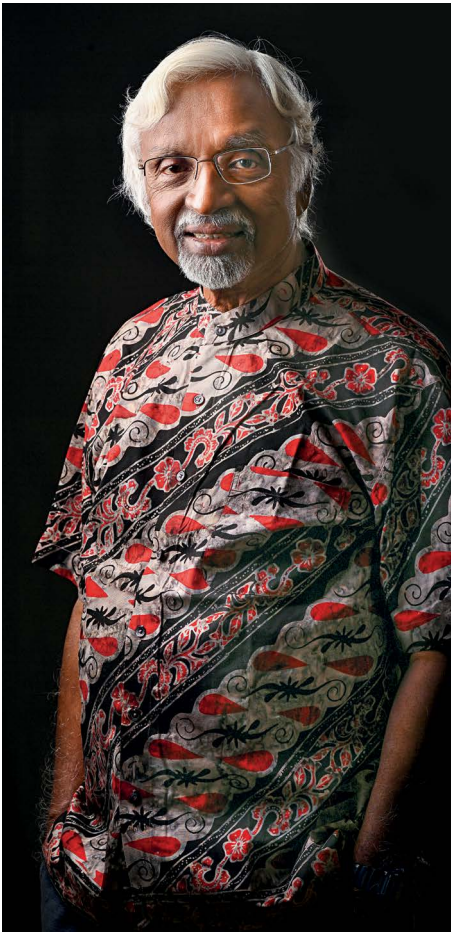
—By Rahul Singh, Editor, RD India, 1969 to 1982

When I joined *Readers Digest* as a deputy editor in December 1974, the magazine was very tightly controlled by the British edition. They needed to oversee everything. After a few years, the US team took over supervising our content. It took several more years for them to relax and we began producing more and more stories about India that Indians cared about. We proved we knew what we were doing. Even so, I found that there were still some lessons I had yet to learn.

For example, I once saw an article on Amitabh Bachchan that appeared in *Bombay Magazine*, now defunct, and wanted to condense and run it because Bachchan at that time was a top star in India. After we carried it, I found, to my great surprise, a lot of people criticizing the piece. All kinds of readers sent letters and I got a lot of negative feedback. I was puzzled as to why. So I asked around.

The general consensus? "We don't dislike the article," people I asked said. "We love Amitabh Bachchan, but we don't want Amitabh Bachchan in *Reader's Digest*! *RD* is a place where people who do worthwhile things should be featured. Bachchan is just a very handsome film star. Who cares?" It was quite a lesson in understanding what *Reader's Digest* stood for among Indians.

Another interesting lesson was in how *RD* approached a story about a problem. Most publications, at least at that time, used to write in great detail about an issue, how difficult it was to solve, and so on. At *RD* though, we looked at it differently: "Hey, of course it's a big problem. It's a monumental problem. But let's see if someone has done something to ameliorate it, even a little bit." That's how approached our



story of mass cheating at Meerut University (MU). The papers wrote really colourful stories about the kind of cheating occurring there. It caused an uproar in Delhi, in the education ministry, the UGC and even the UP government. That year, the exams were cancelled.

But no one, not a single publication, except for *RD*, talked about Professor K. C. Gupta, who had devised the plan to visit Delhi and bring up the issue to newspaper editors. He formed citizen's committees and created a buzz around what was happening in Meerut. The attention he brought to the issue escalated the entire affair and forced authorities to take it seriously. This was an ordinary professor of political science at MU who showed such daring—in fact, some students tried to kill him! So *RD* was unique in that it chose to explore the human element that lies behind sensational events, the positive spin amidst intractable problems—because people need information, yes, but they also need hope.

The *Digest* formula is a very old but solid one that still works: a magazine that inspires, educates and entertains people, full of stories that celebrate the best in us and remind us that we are all in it together. These are universal values that are not going to change very much. And readers seem to agree.

One reader in particular stands out in my mind: For the magazine's 50th anniversary, we brought out a compilation of the best articles and went to President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam to release the book. At the launch he told us that *RD* was, by and large, his favourite. Not only did he say it was his favourite magazine, but he talked about the articles he'd read and been influenced by at length. That was really lovely.

—By Ashok Mahadevan, Editor,
RD *India, 1982 to 2006*
(As told to Ishani Nandi)

Don't worry," said Ashok. "You'll be a hot-shot *Digest* writer one day!" Editor Ashok Mahadevan had sensed it. It was 1983, months into my joining *Reader's Digest*. Unlike at the giant publishing house where I'd spent six years, my story drafts were regularly changed or rewritten. "That's how the *Digest* refines everything," Ashok explained, "Producing local content isn't easy." Among my earliest non-writing assignments was updating *RD*'s Style Book, with periodic changes as English evolved in India—many US usages, for instance, were adopted. 'Doughnut' became donut; 'mom' remained so, as Indians increasingly forgot 'mum.' This task continued till I retired.

In the enormous *Digest* world, we were a 'small edition' although our 1980s circulation averaged a tidy 2,25,000. So, all our articles had to be approved by editors in Pleasantville, then *RD*'s legendary US headquarters. Large editions—like the British or German—approved their own articles.



Even so, in dealing with us, Pleasantville editors were encouraging. If they telexed us back with queries, they also praised our story ideas or anecdotes. "Highlight the positive" remains our editorial policy set in the 1920s. Pleasantville filtered to *RD* editorials across the world.

My first stories were 'adaptations'—a *Digest* practice that redid foreign stories using Indian anecdotes and expert opinions. An early, tough adaptation from me was *Wanted: Better Fire Protection for Our Skyscrapers*. In 1986, *RD* ran my first original. A young woman was robbed at gunpoint on a Bombay train but she bravely helped the police nab the culprit. That year, I also spent a week in Ahmednagar district to write about Anna Hazare, who had transformed his impoverished village.

Such stories are the heart of the *Digest*, Pleasantville said. They reveal the power of the individual winning against the odds. By my fifth original story—a profile of ornithologist Sálim Ali in 1988—Ashok came my room smiling: "Mohan, you've grown with every article." When I joined *RD*, I was just married. By then, I was a father. Ashok's line sounded almost as thrilling as the news of our baby girl. I stayed with *RD* till 2015, after I was 64 and a granddad.

Soon after our May 2000 article on seatbelts, Indian authorities decreed that motorists buckle up. Our local content had grown. By now, we'd also passed the long trial and no longer needed Pleasantville approval. In fact, I had to regulate the number of Indian stories because *RD*'s uniqueness was about presenting articles of lasting interest from across the world. By the time I was named editor in late-2005, our circulation had crossed 5,50,000 copies—beating some large editions abroad. I, who'd once frowned when *RD India* was called a small edition, witnessed the change. Our numbers kept growing, reaching over 6,00,000 by 2009. Back in Pleasantville, on one of my visits there, editors and managers were talking proudly about India and the big, growing Indian edition.

—By Mohan Sivanand, Editor, RD India, 2006 to 2015

The whole world has grown up on *Reader's Digest*, but not me. When I became editor of *RD*, I never had a teary moment thinking how proud it would make my parents if they had been around. Tenacious leftists, they considered the magazine a capitalist rag. I would sometimes read *RD* jokes at a neighbour's home and one day, when at the dinner table, I mentioned that I liked the *Digest*, my parents looked at me sternly and moved on. So what was I doing in *Reader's Digest*? I wasn't being a rebel. I had been the editor of *Prevention*, a digest-size health magazine published by the India Today Group for almost a decade. When the hunt for a new *RD* editor was launched, a top executive in our office decided that I was most suited to edit the bigger small magazine. My own small frame may also have been a powerful influence.

I was put through a series of interviews and a grammar and vocabulary test, which I found mildly shocking, but managed not to fail. As a reward I was sent to Mumbai for six months to move the editorial team to our Noida headquarters. Mohan, the outgoing editor and veteran with the magazine, proceeded to show me the *RD* way of life.

Managing the talent situation was painful though. We were compelled to let old *RD* hands go, as they were not prepared to move to Delhi. I had to find a new team, while bringing the magazine out of Mumbai and eventually moved it to Noida in January 2016. This transition was anything but smooth—it was like being caught in mid-air turbulence—bumpy as hell. And while my seniors were supportive, I drew strength from an unlikely source—the magazine with a heart that I had started editing.

The near-death experiences, Medical Miracles, Dramas-in-Real-Life were oddly comforting. Then there was Kindness of Strangers, Everyday Heroes and amazing stories of transformation. *RD* turned out to be an unlikely, but trusted, friend. I was no longer guilty about taking on this job and betraying my parents.

At first readers were ambivalent about the changes in *RD*. But as we



(THIS PAGE) PHOTOGRAPH BY *Upahar Biswas*

went along, they started warming up to the new ideas. It Happens Only in India became instantly popular, with reader submissions flooding our inboxes. In My Opinion was made more regular, bringing in a current flavour. Columns like If I Ruled the World, My First Job, The Future Of ... lent our *RD* a more contemporary voice. Alongside we gave a fresh design identity to the magazine too. Two annual specials—Extraordinary Indians and the Classic Issue grew out of our lively editorial meetings. We introduced the Trusted Hospitals following the format of Trusted Brands. In 2020, the last of my five years as editor, the issue on the Best Foods from India's States turned into an event showcasing them.

With my young team, *RD* was ready for a new generation of readers and we made sure we revamped our digital play. Everyone had to work extremely hard, but we were excited to serve the readers of one of the world's most admired media brands.

Almost a year or so from when I came in, we started to earn reader approval, although occasionally there would be angry letters accusing us of being "too liberal". One day when a reader turned up at the office asking for me, I was positive I would be rebuked for a similar offence. The marketing chaps were immediately dispatched to handle the situation, but turned out that the gentleman had come to offer his congratulations in person. I went into my job as *RD*'s first woman editor walking on eggshells, but by the time I was ready to move on I was truly grateful that I could become part of *Reader's Digest's* glorious journey.

A very happy 65th, *RD*

—By Sanghamitra Chakraborty, Editor, RD India, 2015 to 2020

I came to *RD* in the uncanny homebound uncertainty of the pandemic lockdown in 2020. So you can understand why it's not among my most cherished memories. But *RD* does have a place in my memory and our family's lore, that goes back well beyond this. My father was German, but his English was very good—fluent enough to romance my mother. And the legend is, he learned it from *Reader's Digest*.

He went on to be a newspaperman—a foreign correspondent for various German *Zeitungen* in India. This makes me wonder, sometimes, why I ended up (or started, for that matter) in magazines. I've never had a job at a paper but I have worked for 10 magazines. And *RD* may well be the last of them.

Growing up, I knew that newspapers were perishable, the stuff of the unkempt rush of mornings, and then destined for *kabaadiwalas* or even to be chopped up for my father's clipping files. But magazines were consumed in the leisure of afternoons or the more glamorous evening. And they were kept much longer. Sometimes forever.



Perhaps I'm a *kabaadiwala* myself, but my bookshelves and filing cabinets still hold a menagerie of inherited periodicals including the Khilafat-ist *Genuine Islam* from 1930s Singapore, the German film magazine *Illustrierter Film Kurier* also from the '30s, several American *National Geographics* and one number of the Hitler Youth's *Wille und Macht* from the 1940s … and a bound volume of four issues of the Indian *Reader's Digest* from 1954—*RD*'s inaugural year in India. I don't need to check the year because I know they include a Brylcreem ad featuring 'Tensing' Norgay whose fame had recently 'peaked'. (Had I been Brylcreem's copywriter I would have used 'Because it's hair!')

It's only from the '70s that I can first remember reading magazines though. And flipping through the filing cabinet of my mind I'm a little startled at what my unconscious has chosen to retain from *RD*: There's *My Family is Dying* (1970), cruelly bylined 'Good Housekeeping', about a poorly glazed Mexican souvenir that poisons a Californian doctor's orange juice, (this also sparked a ceramic pogrom in our house); the tragic melodrama of *Richie* (1975), a cautionary tale of a family destroyed by a son's drug addiction.

On a somewhat lighter note I can remember finding unintended subversive delight in the story of American missionaries preaching the gospel to cannibals in New Guinea, and realizing, to their horror, that the giggling congregation thought Judas was the hero. That story, *Peace Child*, (1974) had a more conventionally redemptive ending, I have subsequently learned. And finally, watching the recent, *The Society of Snow* on Netflix, I soon realized that I knew this Drama in Real Life from the condensed version of Piers Paul Read's *Alive* (1974), the story of a plane crash, survival and yes, more cannibalism. I know, I know, it's a sensational, somewhat gruesome, (also inadvertently 'digestive') selection. Perhaps there's a lesson there for some future editor.

—By Kai Jabir Friese, Editor, RD India, 2020 till present

SPEARED BY A MARLIN!

A fishing trip turned to terror for three friends when the huge fish leapt directly toward them

BY *Diane Godley*





QUENTIN PECK KEPT a keen eye on the forecast in the days leading up to his fishing trip. He was concerned that the weather would turn bad. But as the time drew closer, he could see that conditions would be ideal for the short break with his brother, Nathan, and their friend Andy Sprott.

On Tuesday morning, 21 May 2019, Quentin packed his car with a wetsuit, fins, mask, spearguns, and everything else he needed for the trip to the north coast of New South Wales, Australia. The 46-year-old pulled out of the driveway of his Sydney home mid-morning. After picking up Andy, 46, and his gear, the pair drove north for three-and-a-half hours to Nathan's home in the coastal town of Old Bar. When they arrived, the three experienced recreational spearfishermen prepared Nathan's boat with childlike enthusiasm. They wanted the boat to be ready for an early start in the morning.

The sun was just peeking over the horizon when the trio piled into Nathan's Ford Ranger truck the next day. With his five-metre inflatable powerboat in tow, they drove another three-and-a-half hours north to Wooli. When they arrived at 10 a.m., they headed straight to the town's boat ramp.

BY THIS TIME the sun was high in the clear blue sky, gently warming the trio as they pulled on their wetsuits and launched the boat into the calm, sparkling ocean waters. They couldn't have asked for better diving conditions.

With excitement mounting, 48-year-old Nathan started the boat's engine. Standing shoulder to shoulder at the helm, the men raced out to sea, enjoying the wind and water spray as it brushed against their faces.

The first stop was about 40 minutes north of the boat ramp, in the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve, an area where the south-bound East Australian Current, carrying both tropical and subtropical waters, overlaps with a cold current flowing north. The result is a mix of warm-water and cold-water marine life, including 90 species of corals, more than 280 species of fish, humpback and southern right whales, marine turtles, and great white sharks.

The waters of the Solitary Islands are also home to larger predator species such as kingfish, Spanish mackerel, and tunas, which the men were hoping to catch. There were sharks, too, but Quentin knew that they were more interested in fish than in the humans who catch them.

Quentin and Andy went into the water first, leaving Nathan behind to watch out for vessels that might get

ILLUSTRATION BY *Marcelo Baez*

too close to the divers, and to collect any fish they speared before sharks could take them.

The water was warm and the sun penetrated the ocean's surface, lighting up the depths below. But there was one problem: The large fish were nowhere to be seen. So, after a short time, Quentin and Andy hauled themselves back on board and the trio headed further out to sea. They were now about 20 kilometres off shore.

THE MARLIN'S RAZOR-SHARP BILL TORE THROUGH NATHAN'S UPPER BODY.

The mood was upbeat as they looked at the big, blue expanse of the Pacific Ocean. They travelled at a steady 40 kilometres per hour. The waters around them were calm.

Then, without warning, a huge black marlin jumped out of the water directly in front of the small boat. At any other time, it would have been a magnificent sight to behold, but the men didn't have time to be awestruck—the 100-kilogram fish was flying straight at them.

IN A SPLIT SECOND, the trio's jocular mood had turned to terror.

With the fish's long spear-shaped snout pointing straight at him, all Nathan had time to do was lift his arm to protect his head. It wasn't enough. The spiny, razor-sharp bill tore into his into his armpit before exiting at the back of his shoulder. The impact slammed him to the deck of the boat.

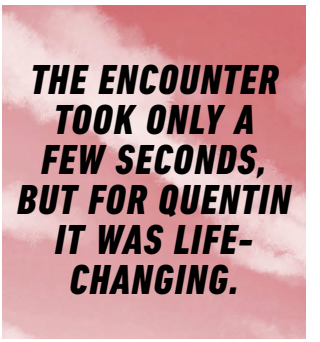
Quentin fared even worse. As he ducked and twisted to get out of the way, the powerful marlin hit his right arm with its open lower jaw, tearing his flesh and ripping apart the tendons. The force of its scaly wet body sent Quentin hurtling to the back of the boat. He landed in front of the speargun rack, which stopped him from catapulting off the boat. And with that, the fish splashed back into the water—without landing in the boat.

In shock and gasping for breath, Quentin lay in a foetal position between the motor well and the gun rack. Everything hurt and he wasn't able to breathe for what felt like an eternity. By ducking when he did, he had avoided the fish hitting him in the head, but the rest of him had felt the full impact of its huge body. Three of his ribs were broken.

Nathan had also been knocked to the deck. When he regained his senses, he saw his younger brother lying at the back of the boat, his face ghost white and blood splattered everywhere. He could see that Quentin's right arm was broken and had a large gash.

Andy, who wasn't injured, took control of the boat and headed for shore. Meanwhile, Nathan grabbed his mobile phone, called emergency services, and relayed the bizarre events to an initially sceptical paramedic. The paramedic told Nathan to apply steady pressure to Quentin's arm with a towel if the bleeding became worse. An ambulance would be waiting at the boat ramp to take over when they arrived.

It was not quite midday. Since they headed out from the shore a couple of hours earlier, the wind had picked up. Andy tried to go as fast as he could, but the waves pounded the boat and Nathan cried out in pain from being banged around. To make the trip smoother, Andy steered across the swell, rather than into it, zigzagging back to shore in what was an excruciating 30-minute trip.



WHEN THE MEN reached the boat ramp, they were relieved to see two emergency services officers waiting for them. They were soon followed by an ambulance and rescue helicopter. Quentin was put on a stretcher and medicated for his pain while his brother's shoulder was stitched up. Then Quentin said goodbye to his fishing buddies and was airlifted to the nearby Coffs Harbour Base Hospital.

Doctors at the regional hospital quickly realised that they were not equipped to deal with Quentin's injuries. The decision was made to transport him to Sydney for microsurgery to reconnect the severed tendons in his arm. Less than 36 hours after leaving Sydney for his fishing adventure, Quentin was heading back there in a medivac ambulance plane. Equipped like an ER treatment room, the plane also carried two nurses and all the medical gear they might need during the 90-minute flight.

QUENTIN underwent two surgeries: one immediately, and another six months later. The tendons and muscles had been severely lacerated from the elbow to the wrist, and during the first procedure, surgeons cut the tendons from the elbow to prevent infection. They then repaired the broken radius bone in his arm with a plate and stitched him up. Just before Christmas 2019, when the bone had healed, he had the second operation to reattach the tendons.

THE ONE-IN-A-MILLION encounter with a marlin took only a few seconds, but for Quentin it was



Nathan Peck (left) and his younger brother Quentin on an earlier spearfishing trip.

life-changing. He lost 60 per cent of the movement in his wrist, half of his right arm's muscle mass, and much of its strength. But neither his damaged arm nor the freak accident has stopped him, Nathan, and Andy from going spearfishing together again. "It hasn't put us off," he laughs.

Black marlins, which frequent the waters around the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve, are not known to be aggressive. However, juvenile black marlins do 'free jump' when chasing smaller fish that swim near the surface. Fortunately, fully grown fish weighing 500 kilograms or more are less likely to launch themselves out of the water.

Before the terrible encounter, Quentin always hoped to see marlin jumping while fishing. Now, he hopes never to see one that close again. R

The Good Fight

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it—always.

MAHATAMA GANDHI, PHILOSOPHER

Our faith changes us. I know it's changed me. It renews in us a sense of possibility ... Every once in a while, we might get something right, we might do some good.

BARACK OBAMA, FORMER US PRESIDENT

PHOTO COURTESY OF QUENTIN PECK

It Happens

ONLY IN INDIA

All for Love

Angrez Singh from Fazilka, Punjab, was a young man whose heart had been pierced by Cupid's dart. A picture of devotion, our guess is he didn't bat an eyelid before committing a felony for the singular object of his affections, a certain Miss Paramjit Kaur.

Seething with love, Singh donned a salwar suit, red bangles, a *bindi*, finished his look with lipstick, and off he went disguised as his lady love, to take the exam for the multi-purpose health workers exam at the Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Kotkapura, in lieu of her! So complete was his commitment to Kaur, that he even forged Aadhar and voter cards to supplement the identity fraud. But the biometric devices installed at the exam centre caught him out. Appropriate legal consequences are set to follow in this case, as the law, unlike the young man's love, isn't blind.

SOURCE: *DECCANHERALD.COM*



"I didn't know the price of the ticket covered meals on the tarmac."

CARTOON BY *Siddhant Jumde*

Mother of All Scams

As far as the best traditions of scams go, the minds behind the 'All India Pregnant Job Agency' are admittedly fertile. Operating from Bihar's Nawada, the agency put out calls on Facebook seeking men to impregnate "unfortunate" women for a handsome fee. The ad encouraged men to come forth and register, then choose a woman of their preference, pay a registration fee, and a refundable security deposit depending on the perceived attractiveness of the woman. A successful pregnancy would invite rewards of ₹13 lakh, a lucrative proposition few could resist.

Eighteen members of the gang have been arrested, yet the main brains of the operation, Munna Kumar is still on the run. Hopefully, the men seeking to service these immaculate conceptions have learnt that some things are, and will continue to be too good to be true.

SOURE: *TIMESOFINDIA.COM*

Risky Ride

The capital's dense fog this winter pushed a truck driver and his handyman to pull extreme *jugaad* moves in order to navigate their way through it.

In video that went viral on several social media platforms, the handyman can be seen dressed to beat the winter extremities yet standing up on the front panel of the truck in this chill, supporting himself by the use of the lower grilles and the wiper surface to beat the haze. Looks like those who traverse Indian roads are just as dense as the thick fog that plagues them.

SOURCE: *FREEPRESSJOURNAL.IN*

Jump Start

Eighty-year-old Darshan Singh Brar had been pronounced dead. His bereaved family was taking the family patriarch back home to Karnal for his last rites—the wood had been ordered, the tent put up and the food readied for the mourners. Till, the ambulance carrying Brar, traversing bumpy roads, went over yet another pothole and lo behold Brar's grandson observed a movement in his hand. Sensing a faint heartbeat, the grandson got the driver to rush them to the nearest hospital. Turns out Brar, contrary to the earlier declaration of death, was indeed alive. Despite the terrible medical negligence on display, cheers to always sighting the proverbial silver linings in all of life's bumpy ways.

SOURCE: *TIMESOFINDIA.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*

Love is Winter

Fairytale marriages do not exist. But is a lifelong commitment to show up for each other still possible?

BY *Selma Carvalho*

If I think of marriage, I think of winter, a heavy northern winter, snow-blinded windows, hard frosts, dead leaves, skies so sullen, the grey bleeds into rooftops and trees. This seems contradictory, love is the coming of spring, bringing us its red-rosed promise of newness and hope, but to me it is winter's cold breath, its muffled sounds, its calm silences, its prolonged incarceration, the endurance of living things hidden underground.

This is the image my mind retains, because three months after we tie the knot, my husband and I arrive in Minnesota, in deep winter. Not a soul stirs in the pale light of lamp posts outside sparse and solitary houses buried in snow. Within the barren walls of our unfurnished apartment, within its cold and damp rooms, I discover I really don't know my husband. I am living with a stranger. Our year-long courtship has revealed only an illusion. Now that illusion is unravelling. Here in the small galley kitchen where I learn to cook, in the water-stained bathtub where I bathe, in the living room where I watch



American news on the one thing we can afford to buy, a television set, I discover my husband is going to let me down, horribly and repeatedly, that I am going to spend many nights crying, and hating the man sleeping next to me. What is this stifling lifelong contract I have signed up to? Who devised this hobbling institution into which I have committed myself?

Winter gives way to spring, rivers thaw, buds bloom, we argue, we make up, we cry, we laugh, we infuriate each other, we make love, we throw away burnt meals, we eat takeout, we read poetry, we watch movies.

When at last spring turns to summer warming our backs with its lemony light, we travel long distances in our polluting, second-hand Toyota car, we stay in bed & breakfast inns, we go to artists' studios and buy cheap paintings,we dine at all-you-can-eat buffets and swear never to go back, we get to know each other. The scales from my eyes fall away. Before me is no longer the cardboard cut-out of my young, blurry dreams—the tall, handsome man who is going to rescue me, who is going to have deep and meaningful conversations about Darwinian evolution, who is going to dance like Travolta and quip like Mark Twain.

No, before me is a man, flawed and incomplete, a man who is going to destroy every rainbow-coloured dream I have ever dreamt about my future and build it up again in new ways. That autumn, the first leaves begin to wilt, the days grow shorter and the nights colder, we watch in horror the twin towers sinking into rubble, America turning into a wounded nation, mourning its loss, mustering all its collective strength to heal. We live through this history, we feel something shifting profoundly, and we are in some inextricable waybound together in the immensity of the moment.

That was nearly 24 years ago. Since then, we have lived through our own history, we have mourned our own losses, we have celebrated our own triumphs, we have moved several houses and continents, raised a child and a cat, built a life. What I've discovered is that before me stands a man willing to commit to marriage, a man who is a wonderful father, a hardworking man building our home one brick at a time, a kind man, an honest man. There he is always in that tiny pause when life holds its breath.

MARRIAGE ISN'T UTOPIA. IT IS RIDDLED WITH INADEQUACY, BUT IT IS STILL A PLACE OF SANCTUARY.

And now it is my daughter's turn to venture into the deep and complex world of relationships. She is living in a lost age. Her generation is endlessly preening, modifying, distorting,

dissipating, becoming a parody of womanhood to gain attention in the vastness of social media.

The 'sexual revolution' has been great for men, but not so great for women. It has not empowered women, it has not liberated us to lead more fulfilling lives. It has pressurized women into promiscuity, pushed them into single-parenthood, made sex increasingly transactional and pornography readily available.



The author, Selma Carvalho

In this age of endless Tinder-choice, to insist on commitment is seen as being needy, to turn down sexual activity that leaves women uncomfortable is to risk being labelled a prude. Men are still extraordinarily privileged when it comes to biology and economics. They can afford to treat sex as an all-you-can-eat buffet, but there is enough evidence to prove such attitudes greatly undermine the well-being of women.

For women to thrive we need intimacy, stability, we need security, we need partners to take responsibility for their children, we need family. Marriage is not an utopia, it is riddled with pain, uncertainty, jealousy, inadequacy, but it is still a place of sanctuary, a place for us to discover our grace, generosity and resilience. Within the comfort of commitment our worst lives become liveable, our worst selves become redeemable.

To my daughter, I say this, "Go, young woman, may the world treat you kindly and may you discover winter in all its splendour and glory." R

Selma Carvalho is the author of *Notes on a Marriage*. **She lives in London.**

A Full Life

Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back. Those who wish to sing always find a song. At the touch of a lover, everyone becomes a poet.

PLATO, PHILOSOPHER

Keeping Hope Alive

BY *Emma Gilchrist*
FROM *THE NARWHAL*

Jane Goodall isn't slowing down in her mission to raise awareness about the planet's shrinking biodiversity

WHEN WORLD-RENOWNED naturalist Jane Goodall visited Victoria, Canada, in 2022, she had an air of serenity. The octogenarian began to walk onstage in front of a sold-out crowd, leaning on an assistant's shoulder and using a cane. But then she abruptly hopped across the stage, lithe as can be—no cane necessary. "That was poor 88-year-old Jane Goodall," she quipped from the mic.


patagonia

The world's best-known naturalist, now 89, isn't slowing down for anyone or anything. When I caught up with her via Zoom a few months after her visit to Victoria, she was in Los Angeles, the latest stop in her relentless schedule to spread the message she learnt from observing chimpanzees in their natural habitat decades ago.

Even in a sprawling metropolis like L.A., she tries to find little pockets of nature. "If I go to a hotel and there's one tree, I will sometimes move my bed around so I can just be there and see the tree," she said. "A little bird comes on the palm tree outside the window. I like it."

That message—that we are part of the animal kingdom and that we all have a part to play in saving our planet—is arguably more important now than ever.

You've said that hope is a survival skill that enables us to keep going in the face of adversity. Lately it has become almost fashionable to be cynical, to throw up our hands and say "It's all hopeless." Why do you think so many people seem to be giving up hope these days?

If you just look around the world, you can't help but lose hope. I mean, you have feelings of helplessness and hopelessness if you look at what's happening politically, socially, environmentally. You've got the war in Ukraine, there's major loss of biodiversity, we're still losing forests, and we've got industrial agriculture poisoning the land. The picture globally is grim. You can't look around and not feel sort of despairing.

So when people tell me they've lost hope, I say, "Stop looking all around the world. Just think about where you are or some project you really care about and roll up your sleeves and do something about that."

Throughout all the things that have happened in your life, have you personally ever lost hope?

I don't know if it was losing hope, but I have felt desperate because things had gone so wrong. Like when four of my students were kidnapped [from Goodall's Gombe Stream Reserve research station in Tanzania in 1975], and all the funding melted away from Gombe. It looked as though it would have to be closed. I knew that that could not be, so I had to go around with my hat in my hand. At the same time, I was looking for a new executive director for the Jane Goodall Institute in the US. It just seemed hopeless.

That was a pretty bad time and we managed to steer through. I don't think I've ever lost hope. I've had my back against the wall, but that makes me determined to fight. *(Editor's note: The students were eventually released and the Gombe station remains open.)*

Can you stay hopeful by turning that sense of anger or desperation around?

Yes, into action. Because being angry and depressed isn't helping anything. One of course feels angry,

(PREVIOUS PAGE) BRIT KWASNEY



A young Jane Goodall at work at the Gombe research station in Tanzania.

JGI/HUGO VAN LAWICK

but you can channel that into making a difference.

Looking back on your life, do you have any regrets?
Not really. I mean, I've made mistakes, but we all make mistakes. I've tried to learn from them. I suppose, in a way, I wish my first marriage had lasted, but it couldn't. That was a shame for my son, particularly. But that's life. It just wasn't working, and so it had to end.

Apart from that, I don't think I've had major regrets. I mean, I've done things that were silly and had to go back and redo them.

How have you witnessed biodiversity change during your lifetime?
Massively. I just need to think of the house I grew up in [in Bournemouth, England]. My sister and I own it—she lives there with her family, and I go back between trips. I'd say 50 per cent of the birds I knew around that area as a child have gone, due mostly to herbicides and pesticides and the proliferation of roads and traffic. And there are no hedgehogs around there anymore.

When I was a child, if you opened the windows at night and the light was on, your room filled with bugs of all sorts. Now I get excited if one moth comes in. The insects have just disappeared. That, of course, is another reason why we've lost birds. So just in that one place, I've seen the loss of biodiversity.

What kind of commitments should world leaders be making to address these problems?
I wish they would do more than make





Goodall has studied chimpanzees for more than 60 years.

pledges. And that somehow we could find a way of having them actually do what they say they're going to do. So many of the COPs [international conferences held by the United Nations] have made all these wonderful pledges. If you go back to the Paris Agreement [on climate change in 2015], I don't think any country has lived up to what they promised in the way of emissions. So I don't know. I mean, one always hopes.

I think the main thing that goes on at these COPs is the networking. They bring together groups that are passionate about the same area of conservation. It's collaboration that we need if we're going to reverse climate change and loss of biodiversity. Those two go together because climate change is definitely affecting the loss of biodiversity.

Do you ever want to slow down a bit and do less? What is keeping you going at this point?

Lots of people said to me that it must have been lovely during the height of Covid to be at home and to stop travelling. But I've never ever been so exhausted in my entire life because I

(LEFT) CHASE PICKERING; (RIGHT) APIC/GETTY IMAGES

was doing up to four Zoom calls a day, all around the world. My voice never recovered, it got so overused. It was virtual conferences, virtual lectures, virtual panels, then it was messages. It was stuff for the different Jane Goodall Institutes—27 of them.

It was non-stop. I didn't have one day off. During the pandemic, the number of hits I got on social media went up dramatically, from about a million at the beginning to about one billion now.

So it was decided, well, Jane should travel less and do more Zooms and social media, that kind of thing. So what happens? Now I'm doing the travelling and the Zooms as well.

But you could slow down. Why do you keep doing all of these things?

I think I came to this world with a reason. I have a mission to keep hope alive and to encourage people to take action now. Not just moan and groan, not just talk about what should be done, but actually roll up their sleeves and get to work.

I want to help people understand that every day we live, we make some kind of difference, and we can choose what kind of difference we make. If enough people are making ethical choices in how they live, then that's going to move us toward a much better world.

Where do you recommend that people start?

I feel one of the major problems we're facing vis-a-vis climate change and loss of biodiversity is industrial agriculture, and particularly the farming of animals. Billions and billions of animals around the world are in factory farms, and they all need to be fed.

Huge areas of land are cleared to grow the food to feed them, and a lot of fossil fuel is used to move the food, to get the grain to the animals, to get the meat to the table.

These animals also produce methane, which is a very, very virulent greenhouse gas. All these things are contributing to climate change.

[I recommend] moving towards a vegan diet, if possible. Otherwise, please be vegetarian. When you learn how the laying hens are treated, when you learn how the milk cows are treated, you don't want to eat those eggs or drink that milk. So I just stopped.

How long have you been vegan?

I won't say I'm 100 per cent vegan. I was during the pandemic because I was at home and I could choose the food I ate. But when you're traveling all the time, you cannot be completely vegan unless you take food with you.

I went vegetarian when I read Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* [published in 1975], and I am vegan as much as I can be now.

What does a perfectly happy day look like for you?

A happy day for me is if I can be out in nature somewhere. R



PHOTO: COURTESY RILEY ELLIOTT

Dr Elliott's Very Polite PREDAT



ORS

New Zealand shark scientist Dr Riley Elliott is happiest when diving below the waves observing sharks, or lobbying for better understanding about the ocean's most maligned occupants

BY *Diane Godley*

News helicopters flew low over Drs Riley Elliott and Ocean Ramsey in an effort to film the crazy rescue the pair were attempting in the waters just south of Perth, Western Australia. It was April 2014 and the two marine biologists were frantically swimming alongside a dying shark in an effort to revive it.

What made the dramatic rescue even more unusual was the fact that it was taking place during a shark cull.

There had been seven lethal great white shark attacks over the previous three years off Western Australian beaches. The public wanted something done and permission had been given for a three-month shark-cull trial targeting sharks longer than three metres.

The larger animals were to be hooked using massive hooks on baited drumlines then killed, while smaller sharks were to be released 'alive'. According to The Guardian at the time, drumlines captured 172 sharks, 50 were larger than three metres and shot. None were great whites. Some 20 sharks were found dead on the baited hooks—14 of them under three metres—before crews could reach them, while another 90 were released 'alive'.

Drs Elliott and Ramsey had found one of the released sharks suffocating on the ocean floor. The 2.4 metre tiger shark was also bleeding from hook wounds. The pair of conservationists swam the shark to the surface, one either side of it, and continued to swim with it for an hour and a half trying to revive the animal.

Both marine biologists knew that the released sharks didn't stand much of a chance of survival after sitting on a hook for up to 12 hours. Exhausted and traumatized, once released the animals simply sank to the bottom of the ocean floor. "We realized the negligence of this, as well as the entire shark cull, and wanted to do something to stop it," says Dr Elliott.

Like many marine species, sharks need to keep moving through the water to allow them to breathe, explains Dr Elliott. If they don't, they suffocate. When game fishermen release a catch, they hold it in the current to let the water flow over its gills. They don't just let it go because it doesn't have the energy to swim.

"So, we took a baby tiger shark off the bottom and we swam with it, one of us on either side." During the resuscitation effort, a shark-cull fisheries vessel travelled alongside the pair, yelling through a loudspeaker that what they were doing was against the law. But the scientists were not intimidated: they had already consulted



Drs Riley Elliott and Ocean Ramsey spent over an hour swimming alongside this tiger shark in an effort to revive it

PHOTO: COURTESY RILEY ELLIOTT

with lawyers before they ventured into the water. What this crazy act of saving a shark did, however, was attract worldwide media interest.

GROWING UP SURFING in Raglan and the Coromandel Peninsula, on New Zealand's north island, Dr Riley Elliott was drawn to the ocean from an early age. Initially studying dolphins, the marine scientist completed an honours degree in Zoology and a masters in Marine Science at the University of Otago. But it was an incident during a dive in the South Island's Fiordland region to study the local dolphin community that changed the focus of his research.

Through his mask he could see something 40 metres below rushing up towards him—it was a shark. Back then, his knowledge of sharks was limited to what he'd learnt from watching the movie *Jaws*. He totally freaked out.

"I ejected my buoyancy control device and shot to the surface," he recalls. Bracing for an attack, he opened his eyes to see a benign 30-centimetre school shark—considered harmless to humans due to its small size and preference for small prey.

"I felt so ashamed—I was a budding marine biologist and I didn't have the slightest idea what a shark was."

He took that shame back to the university before later heading to South



Dr Elliott has free-dived with every shark species

Africa to study great white sharks. After spending time with the world's largest predatory fish, he found them to be cautious, calculating and vulnerable.

By his own admission, his fears quickly turned to fascination.

Since then, Dr Elliott has free dived with sharks of every species without a cage—including great whites, tiger sharks, bull sharks and mako sharks—and his knowledge and understanding of the species has grown. By understanding the science, humans and sharks can find a way to coexist or even evolve to a stage where we can overcome our adverse reaction to sharks, he says.

"We should fear sharks. But I hope we can react to that fear rationally. Sharks have been around longer than dinosaurs and trees. They are incredibly important to our marine ecosystems, yet their populations have declined by 70 per cent in the past 50 years, and a lot of that is down to fear and misinformation."

AT THE TURN OF the century, shark fins for shark fin soup and traditional cures were increasingly in demand, particularly in China and its territories. As shark fins are one of the most expensive seafood products, a largely unregulated shark-fin industry became widespread and seriously threatens shark populations worldwide.

Shark finning entails sharks being caught, fins sliced off at sea, and the body dumped back in the ocean. Unable to swim effectively without their fins, they sink to the bottom where they die from suffocation or are eaten by predators.

To his horror, Dr Elliott discovered that New Zealand was one of the top five countries in the world to allow

PHOTO: COURTESY RILEY ELLIOTT

shark finning, "and it was going on because it was not in the public eye." He decided to do something about that.

In 2010, Dr Elliott started the first in-depth study of blue sharks in the South Pacific, which revealed it was the most-finned of all shark species. Lacking government funding for his shark research, Dr Elliott turned to crowd-funding to raise $2,00,000 for the satellite tagging system he needed for the field research. People who contributed funds could name a tag that identified a particular shark and were able to follow that shark's tag via a website.

His research found that the blue shark migrated from New Zealand to the equator and back and this journey made it vulnerable to long-line fishing. Schools of blue shark were running the gauntlet of millions of long-line hooks and if captured, their fins were sliced off and their bodies thrown back into the sea to die.

"Many of the sharks we tagged would simply disappear," says Dr Elliott. "They were being caught and finned for shark fin soup. It was devastating."

His research emotionally engaged the public and resulted in 88,000 signatories to support the ban of shark finning in New Zealand. Since 2014, when the ban on shark finning in New Zealand waters became law, an estimated 1,50,000 sharks a year have been saved from slaughter.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER, and communicating science through modern media is how Dr Elliott engages with the public to make change, such as the ban on shark finning in New Zealand and elsewhere, and to stop the 2014 shark culling programme in Western Australia. "We know scientifically from Hawaii [where shark culling took place between 1959 and 1976] that it doesn't reduce the risk to people. All it does is needlessly kill sharks as well as hundreds of other species whose home is the ocean," says Dr Elliott.

"AT THE END OF THE DAY, SHARKS ARE PROBABLY THE MOST POLITE PREDATOR ON EARTH"

"If we are going to understand sharks, we need to learn where their habitats are, where they behave in certain ways. From that we can make informed decisions. Sharks survive by catching what they eat. At the end of the day, they are probably the most polite predator on Earth."

According to the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), each year around ten people die from shark attacks—globally. To put this in perspective, upwards of 150 people die every year from falling coconuts.

Every summer, millions of us 'flap' around in the ocean above sharks' heads, yet there are only around

10 people fatally killed by sharks a year, says Dr Elliott. "It is the least statistical risk in the natural world. Because of Jaws, we inflate it well beyond drowning or car crashes and other everyday risks." In fact, according to AIMS, more people are killed each year by elephants, crocodiles, bees and wars, than by sharks.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, we would often spend school holidays at an unpatrolled beach and were told if we saw a single fin to get out of the water, but if there were many fins not to worry, because they would be dolphins. I was curious to find out whether this was a myth when I interviewed Dr Elliott, especially after a young jet skier jumped into the Swan River, Perth, in February this year to swim among dolphins and was fatally attacked by a shark.

"At the end of the day, dolphins are predators much like sharks," he tells me. "They often eat the same prey. So just because there are dolphins doesn't mean there won't be sharks."

The Perth attack was what Dr Elliott describes as a 'bad dog scenario'. In murky water, bull sharks hunt blind, using electroreceptors and vibration. The combination of murky water, feeding activity, and then a flash of flesh, led the shark to react. "To avoid a shark attack, we must not interrupt foraging predators in feeding mode," says Dr Elliott. "In these kinds of conditions, you are basically setting yourself up for an adverse interaction."

WHEN DRS ELLIOTT AND RAMSEY finally let go of the baby tiger shark after swimming with it for an hour and a half, it dramatically sank to the bottom like a stone. The pair's disappointment was palpable. But when its fin touched the sand it gave a little kick and woke up, before giving another kick and swimming off unaided. Their efforts had paid off.

"TO AVOID A SHARK ATTACK, WE MUST NOT INTERRUPT FORAGING PREDATORS IN FEEDING MODE

"All around the world, the public saw an innocent baby animal being rescued,"says Dr Elliott. Although the aim of the shark cull was to rid the beaches of large great whites, it resulted in over 100 small tiger sharks being killed. No tiger shark attacks had been recorded in the area. "It was a ridiculous political knee-jerk reaction." The Western Australian government of the day eventually backed down from its plan to string drumlines along 70 Perth and south coast beaches.

Today, SMART (Shark Management Alert in Real Time) drumlines – which consist of an anchor, two buoys and a satellite-linked GPS communications



Dr Elliott diving with a blue shark, once the world's most finned shark species

unit attached to a baited hook—are set every morning off many Australian beaches, approximately 500 metres from the shore and collected at the end of each day. The use of drumlines is currently the subject of debate with their effectiveness being researched.

According to the Western Australian government website *Sharksmart.com.au*, "The scientific non-lethal SMART drumline trial was designed as a catch, tag, relocate and release programme of target species, unlike the lethal 2014 trial that was designed to kill target shark species caught on the line."

However, according to Dr Elliott, who today is an independent researcher as well as a presenter and producer of *Shark Week* on Discovery Channel—the world's longest running TV series—the SMART drumlines only draw sharks into the coastline that would otherwise just swim by. R

Editor's Note:

Dr Elliott uses Shark Week *to help fund his scientific research and assist the media in educating the public about conserving the natural world.*

Elliott also runs The Great White app, a shark tracking app that lets divers explore sharks tagged by the Sustainable Oceans Society (SOS), a not-for-profit founded by Elliott and marine biology university friends. All proceeds from shark-related work is reinvested in SOS.

PHOTO: COURTESY RILEY ELLIOTT



HEART & SEOUL

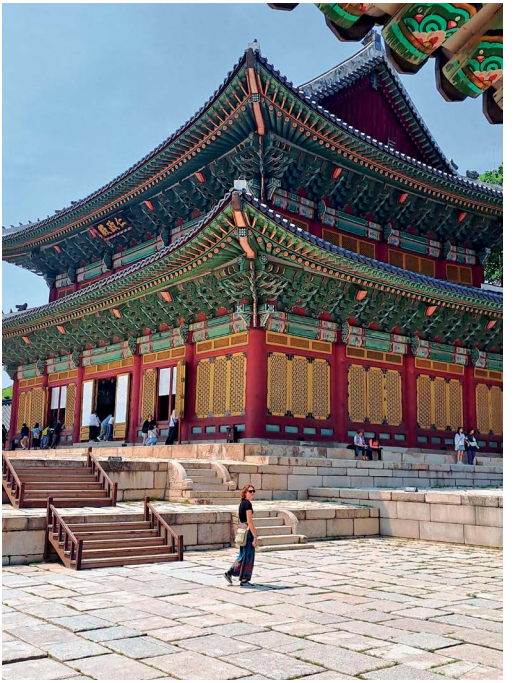


This bustling metropolis will woo you with its melting pot of futuristic architecture, ancient culture and natural beauty

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Diane Godley*

Two weeks in Seoul, South Korea's bustling capital, is just not enough time to explore all it has to offer. With ancient temples, palaces and fortress walls rubbing shoulders with sparkling contemporary architecture, exquisite mountain landscapes, parks and forests, plus pumping nightlife and outdoor markets galore, Seoul really has something for everyone.

Founded as the capital of the unified Korean peninsula in 1394, Seoul sits in a basin and is surrounded by four low mountains, which provided a natural defence to the fledgling kingdom. To reinforce this defence, several years into the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) construction started on a wall along the mountain ridges. Much of the fortifications remain today (some have been rebuilt) and are a magnet for tourists.



UNESCO World Heritage listed Changdeokgung, said to be the most beautiful of the five palaces

On our first day in Seoul, we decided to do something cultural and headed to Gwanghwamun Square and Gyeongbokgung—the largest of the five remaining *gung* or palaces in Seoul—where the history of the Joseon Dynasty began. We were going to take a bus from our hotel in the central district of Myeongdong, but there was such a vibrant atmosphere when we stepped onto the street, we decided to walk. Sejong-daero, the main thoroughfare that passes City Hall and leads to Gwanghwamun Square, was festooned with colourful lanterns—and being a Sunday, the mood was positively festive. We discovered later that many streets and temples across the country are decked out with the lanterns and other decorations during April and May to celebrate Buddha's birthday.

From Gwanghwamun Square—a public space that boasts statues of King Sejong (creator of Hangeul, the Korean alphabet) and Admiral Yi Sunshin—the palace and Blue House (which, up until last year served as the official residence of the president) can be clearly seen, with Bugaksan mountain making a striking backdrop.

Entry into each of the palaces is a tiny 3000 won or around ₹186, but if you hire a *hanbok*, traditional Korean clothing, you can get in for free. To our delight, lots of people, locals and tourists alike, embrace the idea of dressing up so we felt like we were on the set of a Netflix period K-drama. Security guards at Gyeongbokgung also dress in colourful historical costumes, as do tour guides who give free tours in several languages. Looking towards the north from inside the palace grounds, Bugaksan and Inwangsan, the two

highest northern mountains, loom close by. Turn 180 degrees and the view is of a sparkling cityscape with Namsan (south mountain) and Seoul Tower in the background.

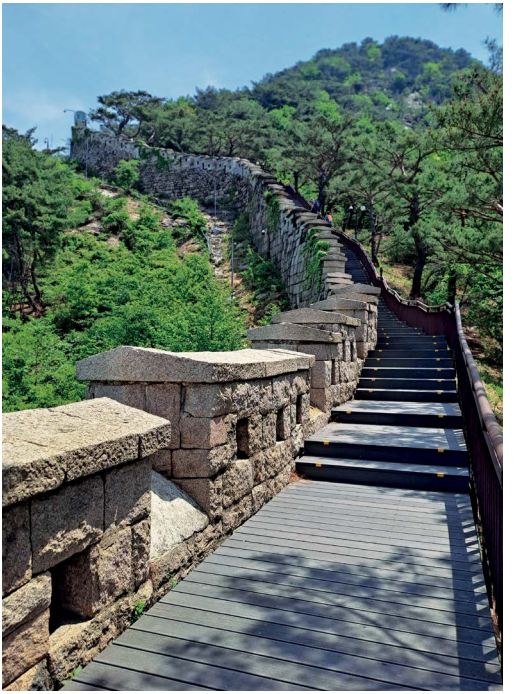
During my stay, I visited two other palaces, the UNESCO World Heritage listed Changdeokgung and Deoksugung, located across from City Hall. Built in 1405 as a secondary royal residence to the main palace, Changdeokgung is the best-preserved palace of the Joseon Dynasty and is where royalty spent the most time. To the rear of the palace is a secret garden dotted with pavilions for contemplating and writing poetry, a library for learning, ponds for fishing, as well as royal residences. Entry to the secret garden is separate from the palace and needs to be booked online as only a limited number of people are admitted each day.

If you don't have time to visit all the palaces, make sure the changing of the guards in front of Deoksugung's main gate is on your to-do list. Performed every day at 11 a.m., the colourful display takes about 20 minutes. From there, stroll along the stonewall walkway the runs alongside the palace. Selected as one of the 100 most beautiful roads in Korea, it is also a popular location for Korean dramas.

On the bus ride back to our hotel, we missed our stop. But we didn't have any misgivings because we stumbled upon Myeongdong market—streets upon streets heaving with people selling street food, such as *tteokbokki* (rice cakes in a spicy sauce), chicken skewers, dumplings, corn dogs and *hotteok* (Korean pancakes). On every corner people were selling hundreds of types of socks for between ₹83 and ₹166—make sure you bring home a pair or ten—as well as souvenirs. At night, fairy lights thread through the laneways and

Visitors to Gyeongbokgung dressed in *hanbok*, traditional Korean clothing





The ascent up Seoul's highest mountain, Bugaksan, takes you along the fortress wall

it is even busier than during the day. Dozens of outdoor markets are found around the capital, but Myeongdong is a good place to start for a taste of Seoul.

The next day we embraced the great outdoors and walked along the fortress wall that snakes up Bugaksan. Rising steeply to a 342-metre summit, it is the highest of Seoul's four guardian peaks and has a difficulty rating of medium—I'm guessing seasoned mountain climbers provided this rating. Bugaksan is part of a military reserve, therefore it is completely off limits after sunset and photography is limited to a few designated spots. You may think them paranoid, but in 1968, North Korean agents attempted to assassinate the then president sparking a gun fight on the mountain. A tree that was hit by several bullet holes is one of the trail's exhibits.

Several paths can be taken from the summit to descend the mountain, and I think we took the steepest (just happy we were going down and not up like some of the flustered people we passed). At the foot of the mountain we were close to Bukchon Hanok Village. Situated between the two main palaces, it is packed with some 900 traditional Korean houses (*hanok*) that were originally lived in by the royal family and aristocrats but today are the residences of your average Seoulite. Retaining much of the appearance of the old city, it is a tourist magnet.

A holiday in Seoul wouldn't be complete without the surreal trip to the DMZ (DeMilitarised Zone between North and South Korea). These can be booked online around three months before you intend to visit. Dozens of buses travel to the DMZ every day. Our

bus with Korridor Tours left Seoul at 7 a.m. in the morning and reached our first destination around 8.30 a.m.—yes, Seoul really is that close to the border, less than 40 kilometres in fact.

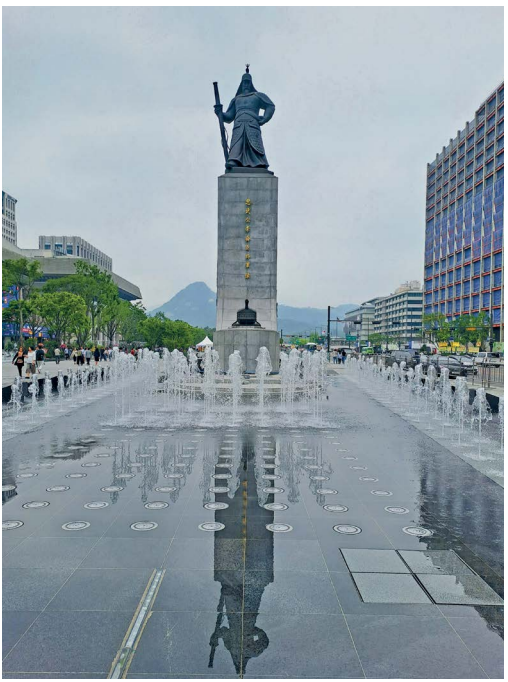
The highlights of the DMZ were the third tunnel and the Observatory Deck. The third tunnel is one of four dug across the border by North Koreans trying to infiltrate the South. As part of the DMZ experience, tourists get to walk through the third tunnel that the South discovered (hence the name) until you reach a wall, which indicates you've reached North Korea. Claustrophobic people may want to think twice about doing this though, as we had to stoop for a good section of the tunnel and hard hats were provided to protect against knocks to the head.

Our guide delighted in regaling the story about how the North Koreans spent all their time and energy digging the tunnel for nefarious purposes only for the South to reap financial rewards by using it as a tourist destination.

The Observatory Deck was another bizarre experience. From atop the tower, binoculars are lined up so voyeuristic tourists can get a glimpse of North Koreans going about their daily lives. Through the binoculars I could see people working in a rice field, and others walking and cycling around a village. It was all a bit surreal; they seemed so near, yet totally out of reach.

The trip back to Seoul took us west along the border with North Korea before turning south. Separated by the Han River, we looked through the barbed wire fencing to an agricultural setting, which contrasted starkly with the industrialized and high density living south of the border. R

The great naval commander Admiral Yi Sunshin (1545-1598) watching over Gwanghwamun Square



LAUGHTER
THE BEST *Medicine*



"Well, this is me."

A politician running for office visits a small rural town and says to the mayor, "I want to help you. What are your needs?"

"We have two basic needs," the mayor replies. "First, we have a hospital but no doctor."

Hearing this, the politician pulls out his phone, and after speaking for a while tells the mayor, "Don't worry, a doctor will be there soon. Now, what's the second problem?"

"We don't have cellphone reception."

—*PLANET PROCTOR* NEWSLETTER

I am at the point in life where I clean my house to the music I used to get drunk to.
— Submitted by
YVETTE GHORMLEY

My Funny Valentine
For Valentine's Day I bought my girlfriend beads for an abacus.

The best technique to sell burglar alarms: Stop by when nobody's home, and leave a brochure on the kitchen table.
—Submitted by GARY KATZ

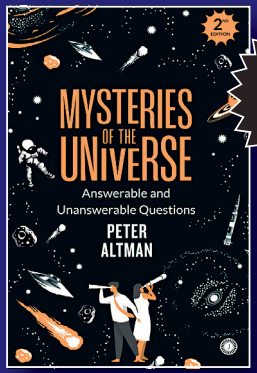
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It's the little things that count.

Why did the skeletons break up on Valentine's Day? Their hearts weren't in it.

My Valentine's Day so far has been going like a fairy tale. Grimm.

Why is bread like the sun? It rises in the yeast and sets in the waist.
— Submitted by
ALICE H. MURRAY

A German shepherd, a Doberman and a cat die and go to heaven. They are greeted by God, who asks each of them what they believe in. The German shepherd goes first. "Discipline, training and loyalty to my master," he says.

"Good," says God. "You may sit on my right. Now, Doberman, what do you believe in?"

The Doberman answers, "Love, care and protecting my master."

"Excellent," says God. "You may sit on my left. Now, cat, it's your turn. What do you believe in?"

The cat replies, "I believe you're sitting in my seat."
— Submitted by
MERRY PRUITT

I will judge you by how much dust is on your ceiling fan.
—𝕏@NOTTODAYERIC

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*

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT!

The annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest celebrates purposefully awful writing. Here's the best of the worst:

The man squinted his eyes as the blistering cold winds battered his rugged face, his eyes darting about, desperately hoping, daring to dream that amidst the frozen wasteland, he would find the last Klondike bar that he had hidden in his freezer.
—OLIVER MAUSER

Having attended Oktoberfest, taken in the beautiful foliage of New England, gone apple-picking, roamed through a corn maze and visited a pumpkin patch, one thing was certain—Humpty Dumpty had a great Fall.
—MARK MEICHES



Officer Meyer Briggs burst into the bedroom and saw professor Rorschach standing over the body of his mother, bloody knife in hand. "I swear it's not what it looks like!" Rorschach exclaimed.
—JUSTIN C. MCCARTHY

She was just like Greta, who'd poisoned her family, burned down my house, bombed six countries and used a gun on anyone she wanted: short.
—FREDERICK ANKOWSKI

DAVE KING/GETTY IMAGES (HUMPTY DUMPTY). BGFOTO/GETTY IMAGES (LEAVES)

RD RECOMMENDS

Compiled by Aditya Mani Jha



ARGYLLE

in theatres (2 February)

Director Matthew Vaughn's *Argylle* looks every bit like the '90s summer blockbuster movie it has been styled after. Bryce Dallas Howard stars as Elly Conway, a mousy spy novelist who seldom travels and is content to churn out her espionage thrillers while staying at home with her pampered cat Alfie. However, when a spy named Aidan (Sam Rockwell) inserts himself into her hitherto uneventful life, and the enigmatic Argylle (Henry Cavill) looms large, Conway has to figure out how her real life has begun to resemble her own far-fetched plots. There was a strong rumour that pop star Taylor Swift was involved in the writing of the film, but Howard has since clarified that while Swift's "unapologetic dorkiness" was an inspiration, the singer wasn't a part of the production. The central trio apart, the film boasts of a star-studded support cast as well: Samuel L. Jackson, Bryan Cranston, John Cena, Dua Lipa and so on.

BHAKSHAK

on Netflix (9 February)



Red Chillies Entertainment's next project is *Bhakshak*, a Netflix film starring Bhumi Pednekar as a journalist who uncovers evidence of large-scale sexual abuse at a girls' shelter. The film also stars Sanjay Mishra, Sai Tamhankar and Aditya Srivastava. The story is based on a real-life case from Muzaffarpur, Bihar, first reported on in May 2018 by Mumbai's Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). In their social audit of shelter homes across Bihar, TISS found that Muzaffarpur's Balika Grih, run by an NGO called Sewa Sankalp Evam Vikas Samiti, had turned a blind eye to reports of sexual assault that had been coming in for several years. The incident and the reportage around it led to widespread criticism of Nitish Kumar's government in Bihar.

SERIES



POACHER *on Amazon Prime Video (23 February)*

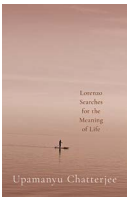
Richie Mehta, who created the hit series *Delhi Crime* for Netflix, returns with a new original series based on multiple poaching-related incidents in Kerala and on the outskirts of Delhi. Starring Malayalam film regulars Roshan Mathew and Nimisha Sajayan alongside the talented character actor Dibyendu Bhattacharya (who played Chunni from Anurag Kashyap's *Dev D*), the show will feature dialogues in Malayalam, English and Hindi. The story features the delicate relationship between forest officers, good Samaritans and NGO workers as they work together to battle organized poaching rings run by unscrupulous, politically connected individuals. Interestingly, *Poacher* is the first-ever TV series produced by QC Entertainment, the Academy Award-winning production company behind Jordan Peele's *Get Out*.

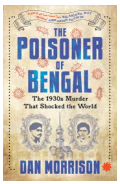
PHOTO CREDIT: (TOP) UNIVERSAL PICTURES, WIKIPEDIA,

BOOKS

LORENZO SEARCHES FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE *by Upamanyu Chatterjee, Speaking Tiger*

One of India's pre-eminent English-language novelists returns with, perhaps, his most unconventional, meditative novel yet. Based on the true story of his wife's Italian colleague, *Lorenzo ...* follows its protagonist through a wide-ranging journey of spiritual discovery following a horrific car accident. At little over 20 years of age, Lorenzo decides to give up his 'regular' life to become a Benedictine monk, and eventually moves to Khulna, Bangladesh to work at a newly-founded 'ashram'. But can one 'renounce' that which one has never experienced? Is it really renunciation if one lacks even an abstract idea of the things being given up? Chatterjee's novel asks us these questions gently, while maintaining its inimitable protagonist's sense of theological enquiry.

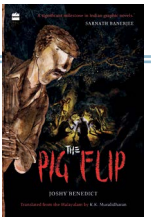




The Poisoner of Bengal

by Dan Morrison, Juggernaut

In 1930s Bengal, Amarendra Pandey, the young heir of a well-known zamindar family is killed after being pricked by a mysterious assassin. Soon, his elder half-brother Benoyendra, the incumbent *raja* of Pakur, comes under suspicion, unfurling a web of intrigue, duplicity and debauchery. Morrison's well-researched story has colourful characters—scheming royals, slippery lawyers—and, like so many good true-crime books, feels like a practical demonstration of the 'Rashomon Effect'. Along the way, Morrison delivers a revelatory picture of 1930s India, a land and a people at the cusp of self-determination.



The Pig Flip

by Joshy Benedict, Translated by K. K. Muralidharan

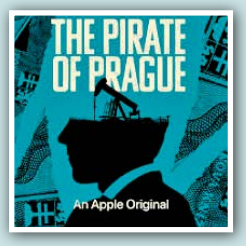
One of the most impressive and visually distinctive graphic novels to come out of India in recent times, *The Pig Flip* tells a straightforward story with a great deal of style: living in a village on the Western Ghats in Kerala, Babycha, a card-game addict, lands himself in debt shortly after getting married. His new wife and brother-in-law take extreme intervention measures, leading to a crisis-of-faith for Babycha. The artwork is stunning—Benedict's familiarity with cinematic techniques pays rich dividends in the most psychologically complex scenes.

PODCASTS



THE REST IS ENTERTAINMENT

A pop culture podcast lives and dies on the strength of its presenters—if you're not invested in their conversational style, no number of good scripts will make you tune in. *The Rest is Entertainment* is absurdly blessed in this context, for here you'll get a roundup of recent books, movies, TV shows and so on by Marina Hyde and Richard Osman. Hyde's column at *The Guardian* is widely appreciated for its clear-eyed insights on culture and politics. Beloved crime-fiction author, Osman, meanwhile, is the veteran presenter of a string of popular game shows in the UK (including *BBC*'s *Pointless*, perhaps the single greatest trivia show of all time).



THE PIRATE OF PRAGUE

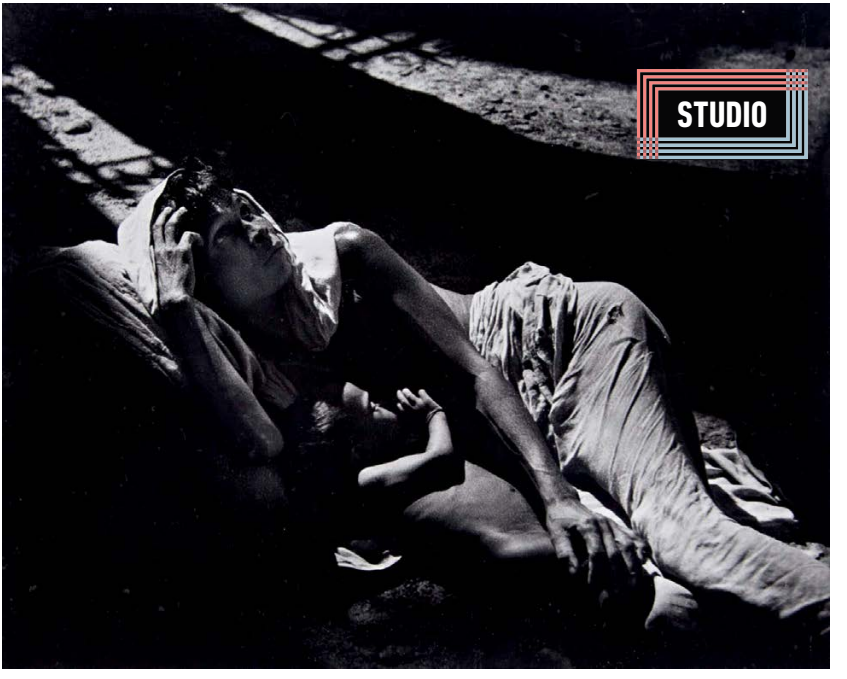
Host Joe Nocera and investigative journalist Peter Elkind tell the remarkable story of Viktor Kožený, a conman and former financial whiz kid from late '90s Czechoslovakia, who convinced some of his wealthiest compatriots that they should invest in an oil company. Of course, the oil company was fake but thanks to Kožený's charm and his seemingly endless talent for making things up on the spot, the richest Czech men in the world kept investing in a Ponzi scheme for years. A highly entertaining story, told in a fast-paced format across nine episodes. Think *Catch Me If You Can*, set in '90s Central Europe.



HER KAJAL WON'T SMUDGE

Hosted by Shana, (a Pakistani-American lawyer with a PhD in economics) *Her Kajal Won't Smudge* is an interview podcast, featuring an array of South Asian women (mostly Indian or Pakistani) who talk about their lived experiences with the patriarchy. Guests on the show cover several realms—there's the comedian Radhika Vaz, illustrator Priyanka Paul, Bharatnatyam dancer Sheema Kermani (from the music video for Coke Studio's 'Pasoori') and so on. Each of these women brings something distinctive and thought-provoking to light and it's fascinating to see the diverse narratives converge upon classic second-wave feminist themes, such as gender roles and workplace equality.

PHOTO CREDIT: (TOP) SPOTIFY, APPLE TV



***Mother and Child on a Street in Calcutta, 1943, by* Sunil Janah**

This haunting image, with its play of light and darkness, of an attenuated woman suckling her shrivelled child on a Kolkata pavement is one among the huge body of photographs Sunil Janah (1918 to 2012) had taken to document the 1943 Bengal famine that took a toll of three million. As with his friend, Chittaprosad, the artist who also recorded the famine with his words and drawings, Janah's photographs were published by People's War, the Communist Party of India (CPI) journal, and drew public attention to the carnage, which the British government was trying to sweep under the carpet.

P. C. Joshi, then general secretary of the CPI, had persuaded Janah, who had no formal training in photography, to leave Presidency College and go further afield to record the devastation caused by the famine in Bengal and Odisha. He took realistic but sensitive photographs of the mass exodus to Kolkata from villages, where food was beyond the reach of the poor and the peasantry, thanks to the callousness of the colonial government and the greed of hoarders. Succour being elusive, the photos generated some relief for the victims, but the dance of death continued. R

— BY SOUMITRA DAS

©SUNIL JANAH, COURTESY OF ARJUN JANAH, *SUNILJANAH.ORG*

Paint

1,00,000 BC
The oldest-known paint-making is in South Africa. The archeological evidence includes charcoal as pigment and bone marrow as binder.

40,000 BC
Pigments used for cave paintings in France are made from ground charcoal and ochre.

3000 BC
Inhabitants of Orkney, Scotland, paint interior stone walls in yellow, red, and orange, using ochre and hematite pigments mixed with fat, milk or eggs.

300 BC
The Roman writer Pliny the Elder describes the use of white lead in paint. (Only in the past century has lead-based paint, which is toxic, been widely banned.)

650 AD
Buddhist monks in Afghanistan are the first to use oil paints: they decorate stone walls with pigmented walnut and poppy seed oils.

1500s
Mughal painters in India use a yellow paint made from the urine of cattle fed on mango leaves.

1600s
Europeans use a rich brown paint made of ground Egyptian mummies. 'Mummy brown' remained in use for centuries.

1704
A German alchemist invents iron-based 'Prussian Blue'. Artists love it (Van Gogh used it in 1889 for Starry Night).

1934
A German company produces the first acrylic resin that can be used as a paint base. Water soluble and fast drying, it's a new favourite among artists.





TEXT SOURCES: BURNAWAY.ORG; BRITANNICA.COM; BBC.COM; WIKIPEDIA.ORG. PHOTO: ©GETTY IMAGES

ME & MY SHELF

Radhika Iyengar is an award-winning journalist based in Mumbai, who writes on arts and culture, marginalized communities, history and gender. Her debut work of non-fiction is *Fire on the Ganges: Life Among the Dead in Banaras*, which has been shortlisted for KLF Non-fiction Book Award.



PHOTO COURTESY: CHANDNI GAJRIA

The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer

BY SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE, *Scribner,* ₹506

The protagonist of this Pulitzer Prize winning book is a life-threatening illness that colonizes our bodies in the most violent way: cancer. Mukherjee's sharp writing, grounded in painstaking research, makes this an important contribution to medical journalism, and to our lives. I am in awe of this book because it makes this inscrutable illness slightly more understandable.

Joothan: An Untouchable's Life

BY OM PRAKASH VALMIKI (TRANSLATED BY ARUN PRABHA MUKHERJEE), *Columbia University Press,* ₹1,273

Joothan provides an unsettling portrait of what it was like growing up as a Dalit in the '50s and '60s. Valmiki belonged to the Chuhra community, whose traditional occupation included sweeping the village and disposing animal carcasses. In one of the scenes in the book, Valmiki shares how his family cleaned cow sheds owned by oppressor castes and in lieu of payment, they were given leftover food or '*joothan*'.

Yellowface

BY R. F. KUANG, *The Borough Press,* ₹494

June, a struggling author steals an unpublished manuscript written by a celebrated young author/quasi-friend, who dies in a bizarre accident. At its core, *Yellowface* is about literary theft but it also examines themes of racism, privilege and the shape-shifting persona of social media.

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity

BY KATHERINE BOO, *Penguin,* ₹298

The book follows the lives of three families living in a Mumbai slum. The book shaped my understanding of how nonfiction reportage and novelistic storytelling can be tightly braided to create a compelling piece of writing.

Half of a Yellow Sun

BY CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE, *Harper Perennial,* ₹382 Adichie's vivid prose and painstaking attention to detail are enviable. Set against the tumultuous backdrop of the Biafran war in Nigeria, the book is a fierce lesson on how grotesque and dehumanizing war can be. Disconcertingly, the book is relevant now more than ever.

Em and the Big Hoom

BY JERRY PINTO, *Aleph,* ₹315
This book was published at a time when conversations around mental health were almost non-existent in India. At the heart of this novel is the flamboyant, beedi-smoking Imelda Mendes, or 'Em'. Written with gripping honesty, the beauty lies in Pinto's craft as he poignantly describes how Em's family, grapple with her bipolar disorder.

Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition of India through Material Memory BY AANCHAL MALHOTRA, *HarperCollins,* ₹580

This book creates crucial awareness about the Partition of 1947—a haunting 'separation' that brought about a seismic shift—the reverberations of which continue to this day. Through objects and belongings carried by families across the border, Malhotra skillfully uses the material memory to stitch together oral narratives to map a history of a generation.

The Good Girls: An Ordinary Killing

BY SONIA FALEIRO, *Bloomsbury* ₹418
With a sharp eye and rigorous reporting, Faleiro investigates the murder of two young Dalit girls, who were found dead, hanging from a tree in Uttar Pradesh. A true crime thriller, this book gripped me from the get go, detailing a critical account of women's agency—and by extension, their safety—in India, through the lens of misogyny, 'morality' and patriarchal violence.

The Kite Runner

BY KHALID HOSSEINI, *Bloomsbury* ₹375
Set in Afghanistan, the book highlights the relationship between economically and socially privileged 12-year-old Amir, and Hassan, who is poor and belongs to an ethnic minority. There is a heart-breaking sense of how the privileged 'violate' the non-privileged. It's a story of political upheavals, close relationships, betrayal, guilt and redemption, told deftly by a master storyteller.

The English Patient BY MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *Vintage International,* ₹639

What drew me in immediately was Ondaatje's poetic writing and rich imagery. Set towards the end of World War II, the book weaves thematic threads of love, identity, nationality, displacement, loss and grief. The idea for the book, Ondaatje revealed many years later, came to him first as a conversation a nurse and a burned patient have one night. R

Book prices are subject to change.

Brain
GAMES
SHARPEN YOUR MIND

Pic-A-Pix: Antlered

MEDIUM Reveal a hidden picture by shading in groups of horizontally or vertically adjacent cells. The numbers represent how many shaded cells are in each of the corresponding row's or column's groups. (For example, a '3' next to a row represents three horizontally adjacent shaded cells in that row.) There must be at least one empty cell between each group. The numbers read in the same horizontal or vertical order as the groups they represent. There is only one possible picture; can you shade it in?

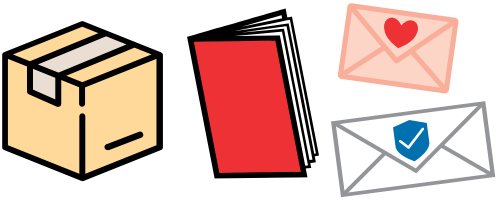
			1	2	1	1	1	3		2	2	1
			3	4	4	3	3	3	10	6	5	4
1	1	1										
		10										
		3										
		6										
	5	2										
		9										
	3	5										
		5										
		4										
		4										

Cumulative Review

DIFFICULT What is the next digit in this series?

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

PIC-A-PIX: ANTLERED BY DIANE BAHER; CUMULATIVE REVIEW BY DARREN RIGBY



All Sorted

EASY The mail for four postal carriers—Mary, Jiri, Sanjay and Teresa—has been mixed up. Using the following clues, can you put each piece of mail (parcel, magazine, Valentine's Day card, registered letter) on the correct delivery route and identify who delivers it?

- The Valentine's Day card was meant for Sanjay's route downtown.
- No magazines were going to route 2 or 4.
- The registered letter was for route 4
- The parcel was for Jiri's route, 2.
- Teresa has never worked route 1 or 2.
- Mary loves the trees and gardens along her route, 3.

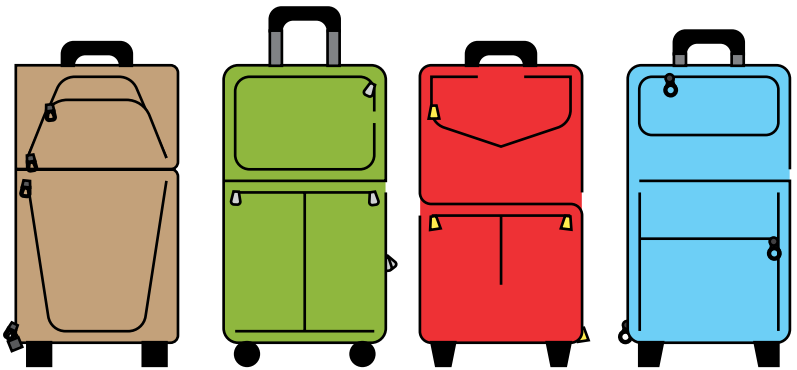
Set Free

MEDIUM Place an A, B or C in each empty cell of this grid. No three consecutive cells in a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line may contain a set of identical letters (such as B-B-B) or a set of three different letters (such as C-A-B).

		C	
	C		B
	C	A	
A			

Going Places

EASY These four pieces of checked luggage have lost their tags. Can you figure out which airport each bag should to go? The airport codes are SVT, GOH, BAU and ECI.



For answers, turn to PAGE 112

ALL SORTED BY BETH SHILLIBEER; SET FREE BY FRASER SIMPSON; GOING PLACES BY DARREN RIGBY

SUDOKU

BY *Louis-Luc Beaudoin*

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

To Solve This Puzzle
Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that:

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

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

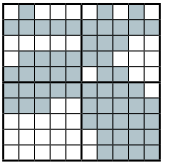
SOLUTION

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

BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

FROM PAGES 110 & 111

Pic-A-Pix: Antlered



Cumulative Review

4. The numbers form a continuous addition sequence: 2 + 5 = 7; + 6 = 13; + 4 = 17; + 9 = 26; + 8 = 34.

All Sorted

Sanjay has the Valentine's card on route 1, Jiri has the parcel on route 2, Mary has the magazine on route 3, and Teresa has the registered letter on route 4.

Set Free

A	A	C	A
B	C	C	B
A	C	A	A
A	A	C	A

Going Places

The bags' designs are made up of the letters in the codes for their destinations: tan, BAU; green, ECI; red, SVT; blue, GOH.

WORD POWER

On Valentine's Day, look out for Cupid's arrow, that piercing dart of passion. Besides the sting of love, sharpness comes in other forms, such as in these pointed words. Hone your rapier wit and shoot for the stars—or take a stab in the dark. And if your target eludes you, turn the page for the answers.

BY *Mary-Liz Shaw*

1. kukri n.
(ʻkook-ree)
A: sharp-billed bird
B: short sword
C: musical semitone

2. whet v.
(wet)
A: hone
B: splice
C: cut

3. echidna n.
(uh-ʻkid-nuh)
A: two-pronged fork
B: hairpin turn
C: hedgehog-like mammal

4. carnassial n.
(kahr-ʻnass-ee-uhl)
A: carnivore's tooth
B: sour taste
C: rose's thorn

5. awl n.
(awl)
A: piercing tool
B: barbed weapon
C: bone spur

6. acuity n.
(uh-ʻkyoo-uh-tee)
A: steep incline
B: keen perception
C: sudden illness

7. toxophilite n.
(tok-ʻsaw-fuh-light)
A: expert archer
B: clawed parasite
C: stinging snake

8. pique v.
(peek)
A: bite
B: provoke
C: snag

9. piton n.
(ʻpee-ton)
A: briar bush
B: mountain climber's peg
C: gazelle antler

10. riposte n.
(ruh-ʻpohst)
A: fencer's helmet
B: clever retort
C: acidic dessert

11. trenchant adj.
(ʻtren-chnt)
A: penetrating
B: savvy
C: tangy

12. durian n.
(ʻdur-ee-uhn)
A: three-horned insect
B: torture device
C: a prickly fruit

13. quarrel n.
(ʻkwuh-ruhl)
A: narwhal ivory
B: pointed hat
C: crossbow bolt

14. aculeate adj.
(uh-ʻkyoo-lee-uht)
A: startling
B: pronounced
C: having a stinger

15. cholla n.
(ʻchoi-yah)
A: spiked shoe
B: nose piercing
C: cactus species

Love Is a Battlefield



Why is Cupid depicted as an archer? For at least 5,000 years, archers have been both admired and feared, an ideal symbol of the duality of love. In war, they were agile fighters. England went into the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 with 6,000 men to France's 20,000, but 5,000 of the English were archers. Their underdog victory is immortalized in the "we happy few" speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V.*

Word Power ANSWERS

1. kukri (B) *short sword*
The curve-bladed kukri, pride of Gurkha soldiers, is the national weapon of Nepal.

2. whet (A) *hone*
High-grit sharpening stones are great for whetting carving knives.

3. echidna (C) *hedgehog-like mammal*
The Australian short-beaked echidna is also known as the spiny anteater.

4. carnassial (A) *carnivore's tooth*
When a cat bites, its carnassials can puncture the skin.

5. awl (A) *piercing tool*
The apprentice leather-worker poked holes in the belt with a curved awl.

6. acuity (B) *keen perception*
Not to brag, but my son's test results show he has high mental acuity!

7. toxophilite (A) *expert archer*
Nadia meets her fellow toxophilites on weekends for target practice.

8. pique (B) *provoke*
We would have gotten through airport security much faster had our bags not piqued the interest of the CISF agents.

9. piton (B) *mountain climber's peg*
Mountaineers hammer pitons into rock to help stabilize their cables.

10. riposte (B) *clever retort*
Deena shot down the insult with a riposte that had everyone laughing.

11. trenchant (A) *penetrating*
My lawyer's trenchant argument swayed the jury.

12. durian (C) *a prickly fruit*
Durian has a strong odour and an odd flavor, like a mix of caramel and onion.

13. quarrel (C) *crossbow bolt*
Shreya used quarrels of lightweight design in crossbow tournaments.

14. aculeate (C) *having a stinger*
Aculeate velvet ants are called cow killers for their powerful sting.

15. cholla (C) *cactus species*
Cactus wrens like to build their nests in clusters of cholla shrubs.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: Keen
10-12: Incisive
13-15: Sharp as a tack

NAZARII/GETTY IMAGES

TRIVIA

BY *Samantha Rideout*



1. What Hollywood actress's name is inspired by the word *tendai*, meaning 'to give thanks' in the Zimbabwean language Shona?

2. What innovative medical procedure, first performed in 1967 in South Africa, interested the public so much that news coverage turned patients and their surgeons into celebrities?

3. In a 2023 study, German scientists observed the brainwaves of sleeping pigeons and concluded that they might be dreaming about what?

4. Celebrated British choreographer Sir Matthew Bourne's contemporary version of which classic narrative ballet is best known for casting men in traditionally female roles?

5. What is the smallest prime number and the only one that is even?

6. In which country can you visit Hobbiton, a fictional town that was built for the filming of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy?

7. It is uniquely human to feel the urge to yawn when you see somebody else yawning. True or false?

8. Four women were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2023: Kate Bush, Sheryl Crow, Missy Elliott and who else?

9. What tree's cones are jokingly known as 'widowmakers' because they can weigh up to five kilograms before they fall off?

10. What board game, promoted as "the game that ties you up in knots," became popular after it was featured on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson in 1966?

11. Which horror novel was inspired by author Stephen King's encounter with a Saint Bernard that "didn't like his face," according to its owner?

12. Although other languages have various ways of spelling the same sound, what is the only modern language that uses the letter ñ?

13. What Roman ruler is said to have been fond of using the expression "quicker than you can cook asparagus" to express haste?

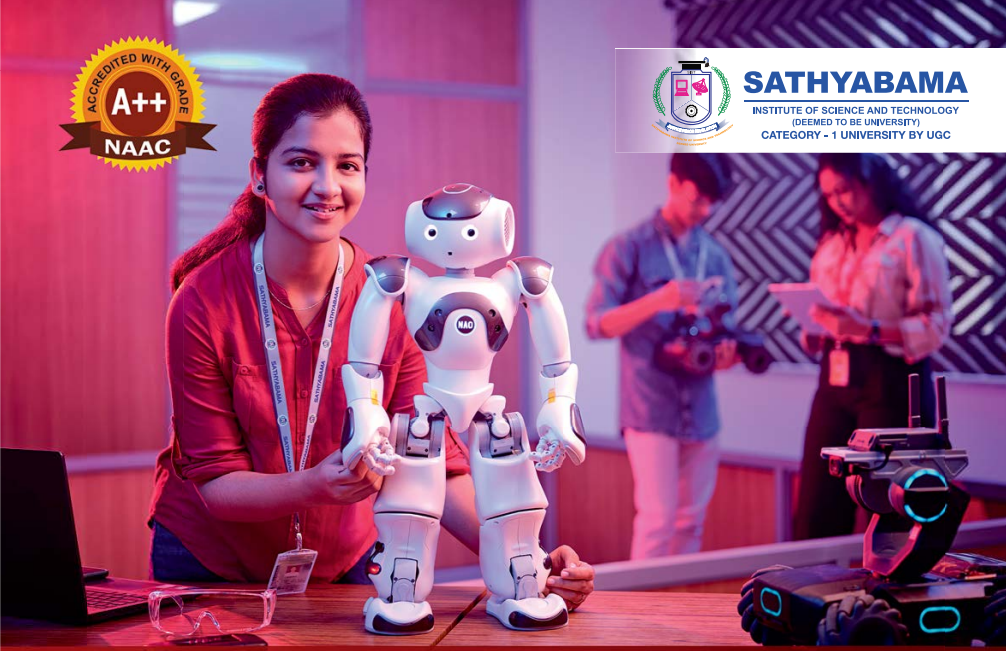
14. What ancient civilization left us the oldest known depictions of people juggling balls?

Answers: 1. Zendaya. **2.** The heart transplant. **3.** Flying. **4.** Swan Lake. **5.** Two. **6.** New Zealand. **7.** False. Yawning is also contagious for other mammals, including chimps, wolves and pigs. **8.** Chaka Khan. **9.** The Coulter pine (Pinus coulteri). **10.** Twister. **11.** *Cujo*. **12.** Spanish. **13.** Caesar Augustus. **14.** Ancient Egypt.

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