

Reader's digest

FEBRUARY 2015

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**If I Ruled the World:
Shami Chakrabarti**

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EDITOR'S LETTER



IF YOU HAVE A LAPTOP and internet access, it's quite likely that you've logged onto YouTube today—probably within the last couple of hours.

Whether it's film trailers, DIY tips or music videos, this modest little website dominates the modern world in a way few could have predicted. As it marks its tenth anniversary, we discuss some of the ways it's changed our lives on p30.

Those of you who prefer traditional viewing to YouTube may have enjoyed actor Kris Marshall in BBC1's *Death in Paradise*, one of the TV highlights of 2015. He talks about filming in the Caribbean, his rebellious schooldays and many other things on p22. And be sure to check out our feature on young carers on p70—the dedication and maturity of these kids should be an inspiration to us all.

Finally, with Valentine's Day nearly upon us, we suggest some romantic ideas on p62 as alternatives to red roses or trips to Paris. An affectionate smooch from all at *Reader's Digest*!

Tom Browne

theeditor@readersdigest.co.uk

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Love Is In The Air?

Love it or loathe it, Valentine's Day is upon us. We're filling the website with a host of articles celebrating the best and the worst of the most romantic day of the year. Find out why kisses are represented by an X, learn how to craft the perfect love letter, and find out which songs are regularly misinterpreted as love songs. And we're sure you'll all want to know how sex can save your life...

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ANIMALS IN LOVE



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LETTERS ON THE DECEMBER ISSUE

twice a day. Given our 24/7 lifestyles and the constant stimuli in our environments, we rarely take enough time for ourselves. We're so used to being bombarded by noise—TV, music or traffic—and there's often an emphasis on “doing” rather than just “being”.

Speaking personally, I like to watch the birds feeding on my bird table or to walk by the sea with my Golden Retriever—it has a lovely calming effect. If everyone just stopped and relaxed once in a while, maybe we wouldn't get so stressed by the simple things.

JOANNA REILLY, *Lancashire*

I had to smile when John Cleese said everyone should have three cats. My wife and I had two, and they gave us lots of fun, affection and happy companionship. Sam was a sloppy type, white with black markings, and the other was a neat little tabby called Sally who kept Sam in order with an

occasional tap from her paw if he stepped out of line.

They were with us for over 20 years. Sam was the first to go, and we were sure that Sally grieved for him because a week or so later she passed away in her sleep...in Sam's basket under the stairs.

ALAN ANDREWS, *Devon*

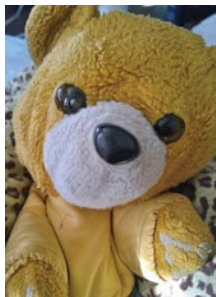


SPANISH ADVENTURES

Reading “My Great Escape: A Road Trip en España” in the Travel section brought back many happy memories. In the mid-1990s, I taught English in Pamplona in northern Spain, and at weekends and on national holidays I’d go sightseeing.

One of the trips was cycling the 560-mile route from Roncesvalles in the east to Santiago de Compostela in the west. Following 14 days of cycling, the sight of the city’s cathedral as I descended from the top of the hill into Santiago was quite spectacular. It was also a relief as my bike—given to me by a Pamplonan bank for opening a new current account with them—was on its last legs, with one flat tyre and defective brakes!

DEBBIE JONES, Cardiff



BEARING MY SOUL

I loved the Paddington Bear special and wanted to share the story of my own travelling bear. Sean

Bear has travelled with me on many journeys over the years, including

to Devon, Scotland and Yorkshire, and also abroad to Paris, Norway and Spain. Now aged 21, he lives with me in Greater London after we both moved from the Midlands a few years ago. He’s very much loved and will still sneak into my bag for the occasional adventure!

WENDY ANN JEFFRIES, London

IT’S SHOW TIME

Thank you for your Money feature “West-End Tickets on the Cheap”. I recently got made redundant and money is tight, but with our 25th wedding anniversary coming up, I really wanted to treat my wife to a night out in London. Tickets aren’t always affordable, but thanks to your clever suggestions I should find a show that’s less expensive.

GEOFF HOLLANDS, Hertfordshire

GOLDEN SLUMBERS

I hadn’t heard of sleep apnoea until I read “Who’s Stealing Your Good Night’s Sleep”, and it seemed familiar to something I’ve been suffering from for years. It’s tough to identify it on my own since most of the symptoms occur when I’m asleep, but I’m going to ask my husband to observe my sleep habits and go to my doctor with the results.

SIMONE ROBBENS, Flintshire

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24.10.2009
A05/50

In Ewigkeit-Liebe
Gora, Celin & Bernhard
20.07.2011

Heik
6.10.20
ABUS
72

Elen
& Dirk
ABUS
72/40





...Differently

Couples from all over the world affix padlocks to bridges to symbolise their everlasting love for each other. At the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne, Germany, there are more than 40,000 of these iron tokens of love. But watch out: in some cities you aren't allowed to hang them up. Whoever wants to eternalise his love on the Rialto Bridge in Venice should be prepared to pay up to €3,000—that's how much the fine can be.

FOTOS: © DENNIS GROMBKOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES



James Brown takes to the air for an exhilarating ride at the hands of a very polite torturer

The Great Theme Park In The Sky



James, founder of Loaded magazine, now edits Sabotage Times—an online magazine with the motto: “We can’t concentrate, why should you?”

MY FRIEND TREVOR CALLED ON TUESDAY and said, “I’m going formation flying on Friday in Northampton. Do you want to come?” I didn’t even think about what it would be like—I just knew this wasn’t the sort of question you get asked every week. I said yes.

Three days later and I’m ready and willing to fly with a team of former Red Arrows called The Blades. The small Art Deco airport at Sywell is coated in fine rain, and until some blue sky cracks through the dark cloud and dries the day out, we’ll be confined to the meeting room.

We’re shown the weather forecast for possible flying, and the cheery team leader Mark explains weather fronts and what’s supposed to be happening. For the first time ever, I realise how much further the weather goes than “Do I need my coat?” The good news is that, in about 90 minutes, we can fly. We climb into our black flying suits and sunglasses, so we now look like very stylish mechanics.

THERE ARE FOUR STAGES AHEAD OF US: “looking out onto the field at the four small planes as they bump across the grass”, “flying”, “landing”, and finally “seeing the others do it”.



We'll be flying smart little red planes called Extra RA-300s, which are "low-wing, high performance aircraft designed for the most aerobatic manoeuvres". I'll be at the front and my pilot Andy will be just behind me. We're so close that I'll obscure his vision when we're on the ground, so

he'll zigzag across the field to get to the runway.

At this point, as we bump across the field looking at the other planes zigzagging ahead of us, I'm thinking about the very clear but terrifying parachute information we've been given. I've fallen out of a plane once

at altitude before—deliberately—and I don't really fancy doing it again, especially in an emergency.

Thankfully we're in good hands: the pilots have impeccable credentials in Harriers and Hawks, on active service in Afghanistan and the Cold War, and leading and flying in the Red Arrows. Hearing all this, I know I can trust them and I never once feel scared of the actual flying.

THEN WE'RE OFF. The nose lifts, rain-lines race across the cockpit and pool in my lap, and Andy is asking me how I feel. I feel utterly exhilarated, and before you can say "Broadsword calling Danny Boy" there's a burst of inter-pilot chatter and we move into formation. A bloke I was chatting to ten minutes ago over a cup of tea is now 15 feet away waving at me in mid-air. Pilot Andy proceeds to ask me very courteously if I'd like to do all sorts of amazing manoeuvres—he's like the world's most polite torturer.

"Are you ready for a thumbscrew now, James?"

"Yes."

"Shall we try the rack?"

"Yes."

"Molten gold down the throat?"

I'd have said yes to pretty much anything he suggested. Ground down into my seat by the G-force, I don't want to miss anything, despite going through the experience of twisting and turning at high speed through the sky. Imagine a roller coaster times ten, but without the rumble

of the tracks.

Once we've done a massive loop in formation and watched the earth, then the sky, then the earth, then the sky again—all tumbling over each other—we proceed into barrel rolls and all manner of gyroscopic manoeuvres. For 15 minutes I experience the most amazing twists and turns. I try to laugh in exhilaration,

but somehow nothing will come out of my mouth, no matter how big my grin.

I find myself thinking about my recently deceased father-in-law Alan Baker, who used to stunt-fly on his own for fun. I think about the freedom of the sky and the control needed to enjoy it. Some people claim that being in their car is the only time they get to be alone, but up there in the sky—darting through the clouds—must have been a totally unique joy.

After flying like this, I can tell you

**I try to laugh
in exhilaration,
but somehow
nothing will
come out of
my mouth,
no matter how
big my grin**

that land is totally overrated. When I climb out, it feels like the earth has had a row with my insides. I stroll back to the flight buildings trying to look nonchalant while my stomach is staggering. A lady on a day off from her job as a Virgin air stewardess helps me on my way, but walking on terra firma just feels wrong.

Shortly afterwards, two of us are

at a local railway station getting used to solid ground—slumped on the platform and falling at the feet of Archbishop Nausea—when we notice the other passengers looking up at two tiny specks tearing the hell out of the atmosphere. I turn to a stranger who's gawping at our mates still up there and say, "We've just done that." ■



BUDDING AUTHORS, TAKE A BOW!

This thoughtful tale was one of thousands submitted to last year's 100-Word-Story Competition. We'll be featuring a commended story each month. Look out for the winners of this month's prize in our May issue.

UNTITLED

On the drive here, I had felt pleased—the countless hours spent scouring eBay were finally going to pay off. I closed my eyes and saw the photos I'd memorised. I opened them to find myself parked a few yards behind a large white van. No intricate detailing, just bold lettering announcing "Harford Asset Repossession". I spotted the woman. Her swollen eyes betraying her otherwise reticent expression. I wondered how she had felt when she had first worn that wedding dress. I wondered what she'd expected from married life. I turned the keys in the ignition and drove away.

Zeba Ghory, Bristol



Zeba says: *"I've always been curious about the history of second-hand objects that I see advertised for sale, particularly pieces that obviously once had a sentimental value to someone—I'm sure each one has an interesting story behind it, which is what I wanted to explore in my story. Although I've done a bit of writing in the past, this is my first attempt at fiction—but definitely not the last!"*

Zeba will receive a cheque for £50.

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Films

Movie
of the
Month

BY TOM BROWNE
AND LAURA DEAN-OSGOOD

■ **BIOPIC:** *SELMA* You would expect a film about Martin Luther King to centre around the March on Washington and the iconic “I Have a Dream” speech, but this absorbing biopic instead focuses on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches in Alabama, which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. This key battle of the Civil Rights Movement—marking its 50th anniversary this year—is an ideal vehicle for exploring the complex character of Dr King, who remains an inspiration amid personal turmoil and appalling racial violence. David Oyelowo as King, but the film is worth seeing for the supporting cast alone, especially Tom Wilkinson as President Johnson and Tim Roth as Governor George Wallace.

David Oyelowo as
Martin Luther King

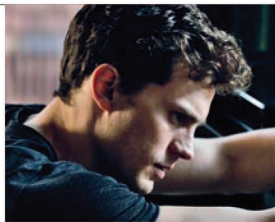


■ **DRAMA:** *LOVE IS STRANGE* Ben and George are a same-sex couple living in Manhattan, whose lives are turned upside down when George, a Catholic School music teacher, is forced out of his job after they decide to marry. It's a simple story, but the performances from John Lithgow and Alfred Molina (not to mention a fantastic supporting turn from Marisa Tomei) transform it into a touching and compelling film.



■ **ROMANCE:**

FIFTY SHADES OF GREY The erotic romance trilogy, which began life as a self-published ebook, has enjoyed phenomenal success—clocking up over 100 million sales worldwide. The much-hyped film adaptation, directed by artist Sam Taylor-Wood, arrives in cinemas on Valentine's Day, starring *The Fall's* Jamie Dornan as the billionaire Christian Grey, who embarks on a sadomasochistic tryst with a young journalist. Probably not first-date material.





Shaun basks in the glow of his first feature film

■ **ANIMATED: SHAUN THE SHEEP**

Having found fame in the *Wallace and Gromit* films, Shaun the Sheep has featured in his own TV show and now a feature-length stop-motion movie. We follow Shaun and his flock as they head into The Big City to save their farmer. Combining humour, adventure and mischief, Aardman Animations deliver yet another production that should tickle audiences of any age.

■ **COMEDY: THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC**

MARIGOLD HOTEL Some interesting new guests are arriving at the hotel in this follow-up to the 2011 hit about a group of friends who retire to India. Like the first film, this boasts a cast of national treasures, including Bill Nighy and Judi Dench, and promises to be another charming comedy set against a stunning Indian backdrop.



DVD of the month

■ **MY OLD LADY**

An American inherits a Parisian property, only to find a stubborn tenant living there.



On Your Radar Kirsty Simon, student

WATCHING: The 100

(Channel 4) A bunch of juvenile adolescents dropped in a post-nuclear war—you've got to see it to believe it.



ONLINE: Twitter

I joined Twitter with the aim of keeping the creative juices flowing—I've only tweeted twice so far!

READING: The Chronicles of

Narnia by C S Lewis You can't beat a classic, and I'm going back to my childhood with this one.

LISTENING: Old Harry's

Game (YouTube) A great old radio comedy about the Devil, a scientist and a despicable human called Thomas.

Fancy appearing in this section? Send your current cultural favourites, along with short descriptions, to readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk

Music

BY MANDI GOODIER

Album
of the
Month

***O Shudder* by Dutch Uncles**

On this, their fourth album, British band Dutch Uncles deliver a solid collection of tunes that deserves wider recognition. Starting as it means to go on with opener "Babymaking", *O Shudder* is a rich baroque combination of art-pop, intelligent arrangement, 1980s-style anything-goes post-punk and classical influence (Stravinsky in particular).

There isn't a single note out of place and the shudder of the album is a seductive one, which slowly slips down the spine to the melody of the piano, intricate bass and androgynous vocals. Also, try to catch the band live should you get the opportunity—if only to witness the loose hips of frontman Duncan Wallis.

Key tracks: "In n Out", "Tidal Weight", "Decided Knowledge"

Like this? You may also like: Scritti Politti, Talking Heads, Kavinsky



Overlooked Record from the Past

***Romantic Times* by Lewis**

The cover depicts 1980s extravagance, but the album is deeper and darker than the sheen of its packaging would suggest. Featuring minimal arrangements and a bittersweet vocal delivery, *Romantic Times* is a captivating tribute to love from an unhinged soul.

More than an overlooked album, this is a lost talent. So elusive a man is Lewis that he's never been properly tracked down. Nothing is known about him beyond two albums made in such short runs that they were lost completely until recently. Record label Lost and Found did what they do best and reissued them last year. ■



On Our Radar

**Wildlife
Photographer
of the Year**, On
all month at Nature
in Art, Gloucester.

**Russian Maslenitsa
in London, Feb 15**
The Russian Sun
Festival celebrates
the end of winter.

**Chinese New Year,
Feb 19** Welcome in
the year of the Sheep.

Actor **Kris Marshall**, 41, is best known for his roles in *My Family*, *Love Actually* and the BT Retail adverts. He can currently be seen in BBC1's *Death in Paradise*

Kris Marshall

"I Remember"

...GOING FOR A SPIN IN OUR OLDSMOBILE, AGED THREE. I climbed into this enormous car, released the handbrake and it rolled down our drive in Ontario towards the road. Luckily my dad ran after me and stopped the car in time. That said, I'm not sure if I remember this or whether it's something I was told about later. The same goes for most of my early memories. I think I once saw a bear in our garden, for instance, but I may have dreamed it.

...FEELING VERY IMPRESSED WHEN DAD CAME HOME. He was with the RAF in Canada, and when I



was about four we moved to Corsham, Wiltshire, with Dad flying Hercules planes out of RAF Lyneham. He'd be away for weeks on end—he flew all over the world, including taking troops to the Falklands—and when

he returned there would be this big, imposing figure in a uniform and hat filling the doorway.

He was a navigator, though he eventually became a squadron leader, so before a mission he'd spread an orange-and-white map on the dining-room table to plot his routes. Then he'd plot them on a second map and stick it on my wall, so I'd know where he'd be.



Kris at Niagara Falls, aged three, with (from right) his gran, mum and sister

It was great to have this vision of him flying around. I still love a good map.

...SOME COMPLICATED PACKED LUNCHES. All the other kids at my primary school got sandwiches, Hula Hoops and an apple, but my mum Janet, a housewife, used to give me these ornate meals. You never knew what you'd get from one day to the next—bean salad, pâté in a little jar, soup, offal. Once there was a slice of Baked Alaska in there; I've no idea how she managed to keep it cold. I'd often think, *For God's sake, just give me a sandwich like everyone else!* But I now

realise how amazing those meals were and there was a very imaginative side to Mum that she wanted to express.

I think I get my creativity from both my parents. Dad has always done a lot of amateur dramatics and used to have a Hinge and Bracket-style act with another guy in the RAF that they took around air bases. He also plays the organ—we had one at home—and the saxophone.

...EMPTY CHAIRS IN THE CLASSROOM. Dad transferred to RAF Brize Norton when I was seven, so we moved to the nearby north-Wiltshire village of



*Exploring Wiltshire
by bicycle, aged six*

“House shoes (not trainers).” Mum decided to put me in a pair of Jesus Creepers, so I turned up wearing home-made burgundy trousers, socks and Biblical footwear, and everyone else was wearing trainers. It took me three years to live that down.

At first, boarding school was tough. I was bullied by older kids—we all were. But the bullies didn’t bother me for long because I learned how to hold my own with humour...and fists. Having to establish myself in a competitive environment stood me in good stead, helping me deal with rejection in my

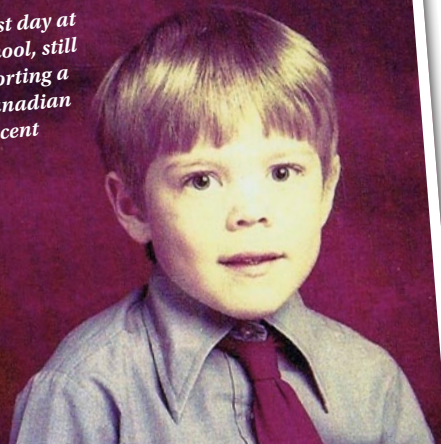
Hankerton. My new school only had about 90 pupils and was very rural. When we started term in September, there would always be a few children missing because they were helping with the harvest. Now, parents are fined for taking their kids on holiday during term time, but it was the early 1980s and Hankerton was still a gentle, farming-focused place. I was a very happy big fish in a small pond

...A RUDE AWAKENING, WEARING DODGY SANDALS. I went to board at Wells Cathedral School after primary school. It had around 1,000 pupils, was steeped in tradition and very daunting. On my first day, there was this list of items I had to bring with me, including

early career, for instance.

...GETTING EXPELLED. I don’t regret going to boarding school, but it didn’t end brilliantly. I did very well in my GCSEs, but then decided to rage

*First day at
school, still
sporting a
Canadian
accent*



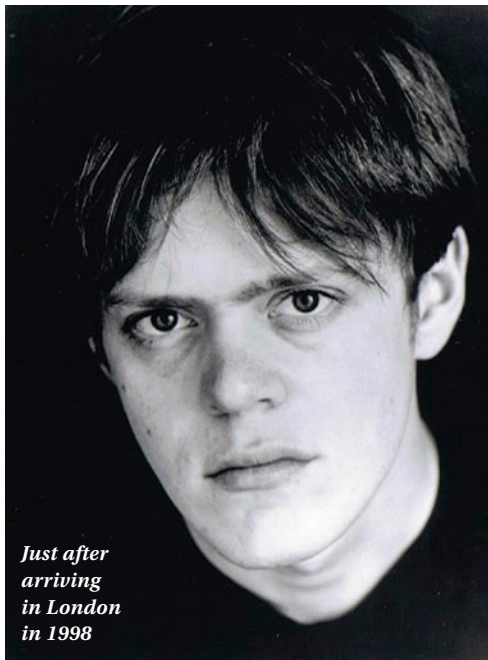
against the public-school machine. This coincided with me getting into drama, and we did some amazing productions at Wells. I became a bit affected and took on this rebel-without-a-Porsche attitude.

I asked if I could go to an open day at St Mary's College, Twickenham, then stay the night with friends at Goldsmiths College before meeting up with my classmates for a schools' economics conference in London the next day. My teachers said that was fine, but assumed I'd be going on the train, rather than the moped I'd brought in against school rules. I rode all the way from Somerset to London on it, was initiated into the ways of the infamous Goldsmiths student union, and turned up for the conference next day not feeling great and still wearing my leathers instead of my uniform.

My maths teacher ordered me to take the bus back to school, but I jumped on the moped, broke down in Ascot and arrived back at Wells several hours later. From then on, it was a real push-shove thing between me and the teachers. I behaved like an idiot. I was frequently grounded at weekends, but would climb out of my bedroom window and sneak off to the pub. Eventually, I was asked to leave, six weeks before my A levels.

...HAVING A BOOZY TIME IN REP.

When I was 18, I went to Redroofs Theatre School in Maidenhead. After the esoteric plays at Wells, coming to



*Just after
arriving
in London
in 1998*

a place where everyone was singing *Les Misérables* didn't sit well with me. But I went on to the Colin McIntyre Production Repertory Theatre, and we'd tour murder-mystery plays round big 1,500-seat theatres.

It was great fun, with plenty of alcohol. Within six months I was playing the lead role in the Ira Levin play *Deathtrap*, and I must have done some 30 other plays in two years—a great learning experience. But it paid Equity minimum and there were people who'd been there for 20 years. I realised I had to leave for London if my career was going to happen.

*Hitting the big time in My Family with
(from left) Gabriel Thomson, Daniela Denby-
Ashe, Robert Lindsay and Zoë Wanamaker*



...A BIG BREAK IN A PUB. For a few years after, until my late 20s, I struggled a bit, making ends meet by delivering tax reminders and working in factories. Then I was in a production of [First World War drama] *Journey's End* in a pub in Chelsea. The theatrical entrepreneur Daniel Crawford decided to take it to his King's Head Theatre in Islington and replaced all of the cast, apart from me. The play was then a huge hit and I went on to the National Theatre, got a good agent and, within a year, had done three small films.

...NOT REALLY WANTING TO DO MY FAMILY. It was 2000 and I'd been doing these interesting little movies,

including the lead in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* (strange title, I know). I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a sitcom actor. But I went for it and my character Nick got bigger and bigger. The show was a massive success, pulling in 11 million viewers.

Part of the reason it did so well, was that it was the first British sitcom with an American style of writing. We'd rehearse on the Pinewood set and down the corridor there was a team of writers, working away from 10am to 2am. If you had a problem with a line, you'd just run down and tell them, and they'd gradually adapt the part to take in your ideas and strengths as an actor.

...BRINGING BT TO LA. I made some 40 British Telecom ads between 2005 and 2011 [Kris played the bumbling family man Adam] and they were usually shot in places such as Wimbledon or Battersea. But when it was time to do one of the later ones, I was in the US filming the comedy series *Traffic Light*. So the advertisers flew the whole production team out to LA and put them up in the Chateau Marmont hotel. I'll never forget the look on the crew's faces when I saw them amid this unexpected luxury! We filmed the ad, where I'm rummaging through a suburban UK garage, in an LA lock up.

...HAVING DINNER WITH THE DON. I got to work with Al Pacino in the 2004 film *The Merchant of Venice*. I was Gratiano, a terrible anti-Semitic character, while Al was playing Shylock. On my first day of rehearsal, I was supposed to get right up in his face and call him horrid names. But this was Al Pacino! I was far too nervous and respectful, and ended up just mumbling at him. He chewed me up, or rather his character did, and I went away with my tail between

my legs. So I came back and gave it full force and everyone was like, "Easy!"

But Al is such a gracious man, with a lot of time for younger actors. Every evening, we'd all go out for a meal with him. To an Italian restaurant. Like we were having dinner with Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*!

“
On my first day of rehearsal, I was supposed to get right up in Al Pacino's face and call him horrid names

...ALMOST GETTING KIDNAPPED BY AFRICAN SOLDIERS. I was filming a movie called *Oka!* deep in the Congolese jungle. Corruption was endemic around there and the local soldiers would make up

some legal reason to take away our producer one day, our make-up artist the next, and demand \$1,000 before they'd give them back. They came for me once, but I'd gone swimming in a

Filming *Oka!*
in the Congo



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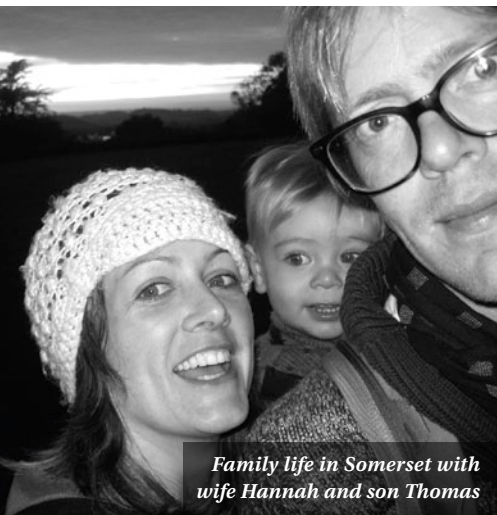
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Family life in Somerset with wife Hannah and son Thomas

river. They'd also turn up on our set drunk, put grenades on the table and roll them around for fun. Crazy.

...THE FEELING OF PANIC WHEN MY SON THOMAS WAS BORN IN SEPTEMBER 2012. When I first held him, he was two minutes old and

screaming in my face. I thought, *Oh my God, what the hell am I going to do?* All the messing about and irresponsibility I'd thrown at my life was suddenly at an end and this tiny, precious little person was all encompassing.

...FILMING ON THE BEACH IN GUADELOUPE FOR *DEATH IN PARADISE* IS A NIGHTMARE. Well, at least for the crew. They have to lug heavy cameras, lights and other equipment over sand and it's hot, hard work. But the directors and actors love it. One director took to putting his chair in the sea, with the warm water lapping at his feet, and shouting his orders from there through a Cecil B DeMille-style loud hailer. The crew got fed up with him in the end and smeared lipstick over the mouthpiece. ■
As told to Simon Hemelryk

Kris appears as DI Humphrey Goodman in *Death in Paradise*, currently on BBC1 every Thursday at 9pm.



A BRIEF ENCOUNTER

Could you describe your worst date in five words? Here are just a few of the thousands of experiences shared on Twitter:

"I don't think it's contagious" @tr1byron
 "Your card has been declined" @EmilyZDavis
 His sweater caught on fire @horanfvc
 I swallowed her glass eye @EndhooS
 "You're just like my mum" @carolduncan
 Too dry, too many seeds @NickEvershed





REC HOW YOU TUBE CHANGED THE WORLD



BY SIMON HEMELRYK

Whether it's music videos, lectures, ice buckets or just funny cats, this online phenomenon is increasingly ruling our lives

AN UNASSUMING YOUNG MAN stands in front of some elephants at San Diego Zoo. "Um, the whole thing about these guys is they have really, really, really long trunks..." he rambles self-consciously into the camera. "And that's pretty much all there is to say."

It's hard to believe that when this banal clip was uploaded to a new website called YouTube on April 23, 2005, it would launch a world-changing phenomenon.

The young man was YouTube co-founder Jawed Karim, who along with co-founders Chad Hurley and Steve Chen, saw a hole in the internet for a service that allowed people to share personal videos easily. It caught on spectacularly and within a year was showing 25 million videos a day. Ten years on, more than one billion users visit the site every month, watching six billion hours of video, with 100 hours of film uploaded to the site every minute.

The billions of videos now on the site, uploaded by everyone from bedroom geeks to multinational corporations, range from cute cats to presidential addresses—with almost everything in between. And, from its mumbling beginnings, YouTube has fundamentally changed much of how we work, rest and play.

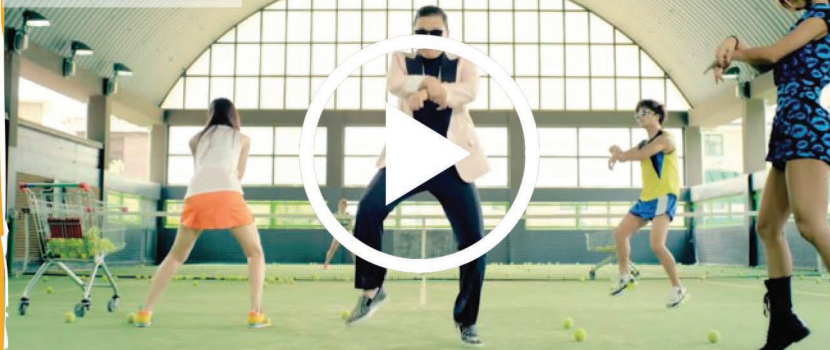
Showbusiness

YouTube has allowed numerous amateur music reviewers, animators, movie makers, teenage lifestyle advisers and others to make films that get seen by a wide audience.

“TV and film used to just be pushed out to a passive audience,” says Don Tapscott, author of seminal best-seller *The Digital Economy*. “Now everyone can become involved in the creation of culture.”

But YouTube has also created a lucrative alternative entertainment industry. It's now far more watched than any TV network, and its Partners Programme gives video creators a share of the more than £3 billion advertising revenue earned by the website each year, according to how many views they've had. Thousands now make a living through everything

Gangnam Style" by Psy
Views: over two billion



from amateur relationship advice to comedy shorts. US slapstick duo Smoosh made up to £3 million last year, for instance, while Swedish video-games reviewer PewDiePie earned around £5 million, with 3.69 billion views (and counting).

Where once they had to work as TV runners, slog around the club circuit or go to drama school, people break into the traditional media and entertainment industries through YouTube too—Justin Bieber being the most famous example. Impressionist Terry Mynott, star of Channel 4's *Very Important People* and *The Mimic*, was a roadie for functions bands when he started putting films of his impersonations of everyone from Captain Kirk to Ian McKellen on MySpace, then YouTube. They got up to 300,000 views, were Tweeted by the likes of Derren Brown, secured Terry an agent and a TV career.

"YouTube is like The Cavern Club," he says, "It takes us back to a time where young acts could perform locally and be discovered. Except it's now so local, it can be their bedroom.

We all know a clip we've found with, say, some man playing a beautiful cello somewhere obscure."

It used to be up to TV executives, pluggers, and professional reviewers as to who would get enough exposure to become a star. But, says industry

analyst John Blossom, author of *Content Nation*. "On YouTube, the public does the work of making things hot, though views, 'tribute' cover versions of songs and remixes." Korean singer Psy's "Gangnam Style", for instance, went to No.1 in 30 countries, thanks largely to becoming a YouTube cult—with two billion views and counting. YouTube plays now even count towards Billboard Hot 100 chart positions in the US.

Politics

YouTube has provided a great platform for the "little man" to expose government

wrongdoing and mobilise political change—particularly in countries where free speech is limited.

Syrian rebels have used it to spread awareness of their uprising against President Assad. Russian



**"YouTube is like
The Cavern Club.
It takes us back
to when acts
could perform
locally and
be discovered"**

punk band Pussy Riot screened their February 2012 protest against Putin in a Moscow church through YouTube. And footage of the first January 2011 demonstrations in Tahrir Square, Cairo, were on the site, galvanising support for the removal of Hosni Mubarak, well before the mainstream media cottoned on.

"YouTube is making it much harder to be a dictator," says Don Tapscott. "It's also harder to be a racist, say, or homophobe."

Many indiscretions, from drunk women insulting black passengers on trains to US presidential hopeful Mitt Romney saying that half the US population don't take responsibility for themselves, have been filmed on mobiles, put on YouTube and brought embarrassment, political damage or even criminal charges for their perpetrators.

Of course, YouTube gives wide exposure to controversial or less savoury political views, too, such as extremist propaganda, or Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif making the case, direct to a

Western audience in November 2013, for his country to be allowed nuclear power.

But YouTube has almost certainly been more of a force for good than ill, helping, for instance, charities and pressure groups highlight African farming projects that need help

or last summer's Ice Bucket Challenge. With famous names such as Steven Gerrard, George W Bush and up to 2.4 million members of the public filming themselves being doused in cold water in exchange for donations, more than £70 million was raised for the US's Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Association and other charities.

Shrinking The World

From videos of domestic life on Pitcairn Island to up-to-the minute diaries from climbers stuck on

K2, YouTube shows us far more of the planet than documentaries and magazine supplements ever could.

"I was going on a motorbike holiday to Nepal, so I typed that in and instantly saw someone riding their Royal Enfield on the local



YouTube has almost certainly been a force for good. The Ice Bucket Challenge has raised more than £70 million for charity

roads," says Terry Mynott. "I got a feel for what to expect, despite being thousands of miles away."

The more we see of different places and cultures, as filmed by the locals themselves, the less remote and alien they become, often challenging our assumptions. Footage of the poor-but-contented residents of a close-knit Arctic hamlet might make us rethink what's important in life, for instance. But the change can be potentially even more profound.

"I met a 14-year-old goat herder in Kenya, who had a solar mobile device that allowed her to post and watch videos on YouTube," says Don Tapscott. "She didn't have water, or electrical power, she was pregnant, married to some guy who bought her for 180 goats, but she was also part of a global media experience. Imagine the kind of cognitive dissonance that something like YouTube brings to her. Imagine the disruption."



Education

It used to be that if you didn't know how to tile a wall or operate a computer programme, you'd either have to go to evening class, buy a manual or pay for professional help. Not any more. YouTube has thousands of free tutorials uploaded by helpful amateurs and companies promoting their products that show

you how to do almost anything. It also provides a platform for more highbrow learning. The TED talks, for instance, are lectures on everything from tribes in the Amazon to fractal mathematics, by the sort of experts you'd normally only hear at top business conferences or university

lectures. The not-for-profit Khan Academy, meanwhile, combines online learning aids and puzzles with micro lectures on subjects including maths, economics, healthcare and astronomy. With the help of YouTube, it has delivered 400 million lessons to schools everywhere from rich British suburbs to poor Indian villages.

Scientists have even shared their new discoveries on YouTube, perhaps in the hope that others can develop them further. Carnegie Mellon University PhD student Johnny Chung Lee received several million plays of a video he posted in 2008 showing how a Nintendo Wii controller could transform a normal TV screen into a virtual-reality display.

Changing Our Minds

"YouTube is improving our memories," says Don Tapscott. "It's a visual record of a huge amount of what's happening or has happened in the world, and it's available to everybody."

You can now have a strong memory of a family party you didn't even attend thanks to YouTube footage, for instance. You can revisit obscure regional news stories you'd long forgotten about. You can watch old footage of a favourite country lane, now buried under a motorway, or watch long-dead writers or entertainers. YouTube has given us a far deeper, clearer sense of the past than we'd get from just being told about it, laboriously thumbing

through history books or watching TV documentaries.

Indeed, says Tapscott, "It has the potential to build on these new shared memories and perceptions to create some kind of collective intelligence or even consciousness."

The World Of Business

YouTube has profoundly changed marketing, says John Blossom.

"It's almost essential for a company or product to have a compelling YouTube presence. Markets are conversations and YouTube is often now where the conversation begins."

The website is an excellent vehicle for ads, but its comments sections also give firms instant feedback about how a product is being perceived, and they may change their marketing accordingly. Some even put "teaser" videos of new products

on YouTube before they are launched and use the public reaction to determine strategy.

But YouTube is also undermining companies' ability to determine how their products are perceived. Video bloggers, who review everything from supercars to restaurants, now



"YouTube has the potential to build on shared memories to create some kind of collective intelligence"



hold a huge amount of power, with many having millions of viewers. They have about 97 per cent of all beauty-related video views, for instance, compared to the big brands' three per cent, so firms have to woo them with free gifts, advertise next to their videos and sometimes take drastic PR action to counteract their criticism. A 2009 upload by Canadian musician Dave Carroll criticising United Airlines for breaking his guitar may have helped wipe £115 million of the company's share value, and prompted the firm to change its customer-service policy.

Meanwhile, smaller and start-up firms can take on the big boys more effectively through affordable, niche YouTube advertising. They can also make cheap, effective sales pitches to huge numbers of potential investors

and big corporations they wouldn't otherwise get near.

Reporting The News

A 2012 study by US think tank, the Pew Research Centre, found that YouTube has become the worldwide platform for viewing news. The most searched term on the website was news-related in five of the 15 months analysed.

However, 39 per cent of the most-watched videos came from members of the public, rather than news organisations, revealing how YouTube has made citizen video journalism a powerful force. Amateur recordings have been the first, most revealing or often only footage to emerge from several major events, including the Japanese tsunami, Saddam Hussein's execution and last year's anti-police riots in Ferguson, Missouri. Indeed,

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- We do not use your contact details for anything other than processing your requests
- 50,000 households have saved £8,500,000 switching energy with iChoosr

Gladys, left, from Elloughton switched with iChoosr making an annual saving of £274. She says, "I am delighted with the scheme, I have told my friends to switch too...it really is to your advantage." Her friend Kath, pictured on the right, switched after Gladys recommended collective switching.

HOW DOES IT WORK FOR READER'S DIGEST READERS?

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STEP 3 Personal offer:

we let you know what the best tariff for you is from the auction and, based on the details you submitted, how much you can save.

STEP 4 Acceptance

period: you decide if you want to make the saving by taking up the offer. There is no obligation.



an anonymous video of the shooting of Iranian protestor Neda Agha-Soltan in 2009 won the George Polk journalism award.

It is YouTube and its users that frequently set the news agenda now, says John Blossom—determining the latest, most important event in the world that most people want to see footage of—rather than editors or TV producers. “Major media outlets must follow in YouTube’s footsteps to gain some portion of people’s attention as events unfold,” he says.

Building Communities

Though often derided as another excuse for young men to isolate themselves in their bedrooms, YouTube has created thousands of new communities.

Video-game players are a good example, says Graham Jones, author of online consumer

behaviour study Click.ology. Fans of a particular game will produce films showing their hints and tricks, others will leave comments saying why they love the game, perhaps, or post their own videos in response, and so people all over the world will start bonding over a shared interest. The same can happen with everything from fishing videos, to tapestry to footage of obscure 1980s British indie groups.

Of course, as detailed in comedian Adam Buxton’s recent Sky Atlantic series *Bug*, the comments underneath YouTube videos often do the opposite of building new relationships, being nasty, sarcastic or threatening. But, says Graham Jones, research has found that far more people leave positive comments online than unpleasant ones, so one could argue that YouTube helps bring people together by showing that, “Most of us are actually nice.” ■



WHEN ROMANCE GOES WRONG

In an attempt to woo and surprise his girlfriend, a Dutch man decided to hire a crane so he could rise to her bedroom window and propose to his love from up high. Before he could start his serenade, however, the crane crashed down into the roof of his next-door neighbour’s house. To make things worse, in an attempt to right the crane, it crashed back down into the roof. Following the evacuation of six apartments and the immediate area, she still said yes. Certainly a story for the grandchildren.

AS SEEN AT MIRROR.CO.UK

For those
branded by
psoriasis,
breakthrough
drugs bring
new hope

More Than Skin Deep

BY ANITA BARTHOLOMEW,
WITH ADDITIONAL
REPORTING BY PAVEL
BARTOSEK, LIDIJA PETEK
AND ILKKA VIRTANEN

WHEN KURT JÄNTTI WAS JUST 13 YEARS OLD, he suffered several consecutive bouts of tonsillitis. Soon after, a mysterious patchwork of itching, burning red spots sprouted on the young Finnish teen's scalp, knees and elbows, eventually spreading all over his body. Although his doctor didn't recognise it, what Jäntti had was psoriasis. The moisturiser prescribed did nothing to hide the snowy debris left behind as dead cells sloughed off his skin. Young Jäntti, active in school sports, was mortified. What would his teammates think if they saw the white flakes piled up near his locker whenever he changed?

As years went by, Kurt struggled to hide his symptoms from friends, co-workers and employers. "Many times I've extended my hand to shake and the other person has pulled his hand away," says Kurt, now 57 and a retired machinery engineer. While psoriasis is never contagious, it isn't easy explaining that when someone is cringing at the sight of the fiery red rash.

Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory immune disorder that affects about one per cent of the EU-28 population, with an estimated 3.7 million Europeans suffering from plaque psoriasis. In adults, it most often begins with large, flat red patches topped by silvery scales of dead skin; in younger people, the affected areas may be clusters of smaller, tear-shaped spots. In a small percentage of sufferers, it appears as blisters filled with non-infectious pus.



But whatever outward form it takes, it's the same disease, says Dr Carle Paul, chairman of the Dermatology Department, Paul Sabatier University, France.

The National Psoriasis Foundation estimates that ten per cent of us have the combination of genes that makes us susceptible. Yet, without something to trigger the condition, most of us will never get it.

SO WHAT BRINGS ON PSORIASIS?

"An exaggerated immune response to a danger signal," says Dr Paul. That "danger signal" can be an actual threat, such as an infection, injury or surgery, but often it's a reaction to stress

or a medication, or even the weather—psoriasis's incidence increases as you move further from the equator. The immune system reacts as if the body's own skin cells are invading organisms and it fights back by causing new skin cells to grow out of control. These immature cells pile on top of one another, causing the redness, itching, burning and scaling of psoriasis.

The condition most often makes its first appearance either between the ages of 15 and 35 or after the age of

50, says Dr Paul. When it appears in younger people, there's often a "family history of psoriasis", he says. And Kurt Jäntti indeed has cousins with the same diagnosis. But when the first flare comes later in life, factors such as being overweight or obese, having hypertension or being a smoker are more likely to be involved.

At one time, psoriasis could seem like a life sentence. About 30 years ago, soon after gall-bladder surgery, now 68-year-old Marjeta Lavri of Ljubljana, Slovenia, discovered a pus-filled blister on the sole of her foot. Her dermatologist diagnosed it as pustular psoriasis and prescribed the

retinoid drug Tigason. Concerned about its possible side effects

—Tigason has been connected to liver toxicity and hair loss—Marjeta at first declined the medication.

Six months later, however, the disease took a terrible turn. "My body was littered with pustules," says Marjeta. Now she was willing to try Tigason, but it didn't work. She was hospitalised for months and staff had to drain the blisters daily. "I had my arms and legs in bandages all the time."

For the next 20 years, doctors prescribed every



**Psoriasis
is in me,
it's a part of
me, but it's
not me**

KURT JÄNTTI, Finland

treatment available: methotrexate, originally developed as a chemotherapy agent; cyclosporine, an immunosuppressant drug; even radiation. The only treatment that helped was a topical corticosteroid, but not enough for her to lead a normal life. When she first became ill, she was an administrator responsible for sales at a foreign trading company. But the once active, always neat woman was forced to remain still for days. She had to take medical leaves and in later years was forced to take early retirement and go onto a disability pension. She was hospitalised numerous times.

"For more than 20 years, I had to wear gloves constantly and my legs were bandaged. I could only wear sports slippers. I was essentially bound to the bed and the couch," Marjeta remembers.

The situation is often very different for those suffering their first flares of psoriasis today, says Professor Matthias Augustin of the University Centre Clinics of Hamburg-Eppendorf, and chair of The Expert European Working Group for Healthcare in Psoriasis. "There's a high chance that they can get help."

Modern drugs for severe psoriasis also pose fewer risks than older ones, so doctors can start patients on the drug that has the best chance of treatment success. And with the right treatment, says Professor Augustin, in many patients, "the severity score can be nearly reduced to zero".

Biologic drugs (so named because they're made from living cells) are designed to mimic our own disease-fighting antibodies by targeting proteins or cells responsible for immune system over-reactions. In many people, the medication clears the visible



DIFFERENT FORMS, SAME DISEASE

A person can be afflicted with more than one type of psoriasis, occasionally at the same time

Plaque: most common. Red, flat patches covered with a silvery-white scale of dead skin cells.

Guttate: often starts in late childhood and teens. More diffuse, smaller patches; often brought on by a strep infection.

Inverse: shiny red patches in skin folds.

Pustular: blisters of non-infectious pus.

Erythrodermic: a rare, highly inflammatory form that can cover most of the body. In some cases, can be fatal.

Psoriatic arthritis: About 20 per cent of those with psoriasis develop arthritis.

signs of the disease completely or almost completely.

This was the case for Marjeta. About eight years ago, she was prescribed the biologic medicine infliximab. And that, at long last, got her pustular psoriasis under control. She's living proof that finding the right treatment can change everything. She's again enjoying the kinds of activities she had to give up decades before, including biking and yoga practice. "I've got my life back," she says.

But too many long-term psoriasis sufferers don't know that more effective drugs may have become available since their initial diagnosis, says Dr Alexa Boer Kimball, MPH professor of dermatology at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital. She suggests that anyone who hasn't checked recently with a doctor should do so now. There might be a treatment that works where others have failed.

WHILE GETTING THE RIGHT TREATMENT is critical, for many with psoriasis, lifestyle can be equally important. Petra Kliková of Prague, the Czech Republic, had her first flare of psoriasis in

1992 when she was just six years old. She recalls how, in elementary school, "Some kids were squeamish about me. They gave me strange looks, recoiled from me."

Embarrassed though she was, Petra rose above it and, thanks to the ointments her doctor prescribed, her psoriasis faded and her confidence soared. Entering high school as a lithe, pretty, clear-skinned teen, she was ready to pursue her dream: fashion modelling. She signed with Rhea Model Management in Prague and for the next two years juggled high school with the thrills and glamour of the catwalk.

Then, when she was 16, it all went bad again. Petra's psoriasis came back with a vengeance. Itchy red splotches covered so much of her body that she had to be hospitalised. And her modelling career was effectively over.

Stress—even so-called good stress, such as the type that comes with a high-powered career—is a well-known trigger for psoriasis. A Korean study published in May 2013 found that stress can also hamper the effectiveness of psoriasis treatments. And it can lead to a vicious circle:



**Biologic
medicine
has brought
my psoriasis
under control.
I've got my
life back**

MARJETA LAVRI, Slovenia

stress exacerbates the rash, which exacerbates the stress, and so on.

PETRA, NOW 28, FOUND A NEW CAREER, managing a beauty centre in Prague, and says she has a better understanding now of how to keep her condition under control. “If I sleep well, take care of myself, go to my doctor and apply ointments, my skin always gets better. And maybe my work helps, and the people around me. They are much more interested in what I do than what my skin looks like.”

Psoriasis can have links with other

illnesses. Kurt Jäntti complained to his doctor in 2013 about what seemed mild chest pains, and learned that he'd had a heart attack. Worse, tests showed it wasn't his first. Surgeons cleared the plaque from a clogged artery using a catheter—a procedure called angioplasty. But Kurt suffered a stroke while in hospital and doctors decided the more aggressive coronary bypass surgery was warranted.

Despite an active healthy lifestyle, Kurt also has diabetes, a “co-morbidity” that, along with heart disease, high blood pressure and other immune



MEASURING SEVERITY AND TREATMENT

Doctors determine psoriasis's intensity using the Psoriasis Area and Severity Index (PASI). For each area afflicted, your doctor will measure the degree of redness, thickness and scaling of psoriasis lesions, and how much of the skin's surface is affected.

■ Psoriasis is considered mild if there are just a few patches, covering less than three per cent of your body; moderate if it covers three to ten per cent; and severe if it affects more than ten per cent.

■ For mild psoriasis that doesn't interfere with daily life, “We start patients on topical treatment,” says Dr Paul of Paul Sabatier University, often a combination of vitamin D derivatives and corticosteroids.

■ For moderate to severe psoriasis, light therapy—phototherapy—administered by a doctor can be just as effective as the widely used methotrexate, according to a US study published in 2012. Phototherapy's side effects are typically limited to temporary skin irritation and sunburn.

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disorders, is more common among people with psoriasis than the general population. It's not clear why.

But some research provides "hints", says Professor Augustin, that effectively treating psoriasis may help keep you healthy in other ways.

Those hints actually come from studies on rheumatoid arthritis. When treated with some of the same biologic drugs as are used for psoriasis, patients had "lower risk for diabetes, heart

attacks and many other co-morbidities", says Professor Augustin.

KURT JÄNTTI HAS RECOVERED and now takes daily walks to stay fit with his dog Heppu. And he's learned to overcome the embarrassment he'd always felt about his psoriasis. "It's in me, it's a part of me, but it's not me."

Not everyone with psoriasis gets complete or permanent relief from the biologic medicines currently available.



BEYOND MEDICATION

Here are some other ways you can improve your quality of life:

- **Learn, and if possible avoid, your triggers** to help keep flares to a minimum.
- **Stay active.** A Portuguese study last year reported that physical activity might both lower the risk of flares and lessen their severity.
- **A daily lukewarm bath with Epsom salts,** Dead Sea salts or colloidal oatmeal, followed by a heavy moisturiser, can help soothe psoriasis patches.
- **Get out in the sun—but don't overdo it.** Psoriasis is often at its worst in winter when the skin is deprived of sun exposure. In 2011, a small Norwegian study reported positive changes in lesions after a day at the beach.
- **Avoid alcohol and tobacco.** A June 2013 Hungarian study found that over-imbibing can both worsen psoriasis and interfere with treatments. A separate study found the same to be true of tobacco.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** As body mass increases, so does the severity of psoriasis, says a new US analysis of previous research, published in April last year.

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And biologics may lessen good immune system effects, the ones that fight disease, while blocking immune system over-reactions. So scientists have been developing new biologic drugs that more precisely target over-the-top immune responses without dramatically dampening the protective ones.

Right now, several next-generation biologics are in various stages of testing. Preliminary evidence suggests that two in particular—ixekizumab and

brodalumab—may also reduce psoriasis symptoms for a greater percentage of psoriasis sufferers than currently available drugs. Early clinical trials in the US also suggest that brodalumab is potentially a very effective treatment against psoriatic arthritis.

With so many options today and more and better treatments coming in the near future, for virtually all those who suffer from psoriasis, the message is clear: there's hope. ■



HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL BADDIE

Have you ever found yourself rolling your eyes at a movie villain, thinking, *How could you be so stupid?* Film buff Peter Anspach has devised a list of how he'd run things if he were in charge:

My ventilation ducts will be too small to crawl through.

I will never utter the sentence, "But before I kill you, there's just one thing I want to know."

When I've captured my adversary and he says, "Look, before you kill me, will you at least tell me what this is all about?" I'll say, "No," and shoot him. No, on second thoughts, I'll shoot him then say, "No."

One of my advisers will be an average five-year-old child. Any flaws in my plan that he's able to spot will be corrected before implementation.

All naive, busty tavern wenches in my realm will be replaced with surly, world-weary waitresses who will provide no unexpected reinforcement and/or romantic subplot for the hero or his sidekick.

If one of my dungeon guards begins expressing concern over the conditions in the beautiful princess' cell, I will immediately transfer him to a less people-oriented position.

If I'm eating dinner with the hero, put poison in his goblet, then have to leave the table for any reason, I will order new drinks for both of us instead of trying to decide whether or not to switch with him.

AS SEEN AS EVILOVERLORD.COM

Cancer prevention – what you can do

BY BARBARA LANTIN

ANYBODY CAN BE FORGIVEN FOR THINKING THERE IS NOTHING POSITIVE TO BE SAID ABOUT CANCER, a disease that kills one in four in the UK. But research shows that over 40% of cancer cases are preventable.

A study published by the British Journal of Cancer revealed that around 43% of cancer cases seen in the UK in 2010 were caused by lifestyle and environmental factors. Thousands of people could avoid becoming ill if they made behavioural changes such as stopping smoking, improving diet, losing weight, reducing alcohol intake and protecting their skin from sun damage. Surprisingly, just 5% of all cancers are caused by an inherited faulty gene.

The biggest step anybody can take is to stop smoking. The earlier you quit, the greater the impact. Tobacco is estimated to cause nearly a fifth of all cancer cases in the UK, including more than eight out of ten cases of lung cancer.

Research suggests an unhealthy diet causes one in ten cases of cancer. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables (at least

five portions a day) and fibre (found in wholegrain pasta, bread, breakfast cereals, rice, pulses and fruit and veg). Cut down on red meat, salt and fat (especially saturated fat).

Drinking sensibly will also lower your cancer risk. Alcohol causes around 12,500 cases of cancer a year in this country, affecting at least seven different parts of the body including the breast, bowel and liver.

The more alcohol you consume, the higher your risk, and not just for heavy drinkers. A pint of premium lager or a large glass of wine every day can increase your chances of cancer. If you stick to the guideline amounts – one standard drink a day for women and two for men (a 175ml glass of wine or a pint of beer or cider) – your risk is smaller.

Try to stay a healthy weight. Research has shown that many tumour types are more common in people who are overweight or obese, including cancer of the womb, pancreas and kidney. This is probably because fat tissues in the body produce hormones and growth factors that can interfere with the way your cells work.



The sun brings health benefits, but too much exposure can lead to skin cancer, especially if you are fair skinned, have lots of moles or freckles, have had skin cancer yourself or have a family history. Cancer Research UK advises people to avoid deliberate sunbathing and to spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm, wear a T-shirt, hat and sunglasses and to use a sunscreen of at least SPF 15.

Finally, take advantage of NHS screening programmes. Some can pick up changes in the body which – if left untreated – could lead to cancer. The NHS runs national screening for breast, cervical and bowel

cancer. Nobody can guarantee you good health, but following these tips will help you cut your chances of serious illness.

Reader's Digest has teamed up with AXA PPP healthcare to bring readers a Cancer CashCover plan. If you are diagnosed with cancer for the first time, you receive a cash lump sum of up to £60,000 to help support you and your family. It also gives 24/7 telephone support from dedicated cancer nurses and access to licensed cancer drugs if they are not available to you on the NHS.

To find out what is and isn't covered and to get a quote call AXA PPP healthcare on 0800 5870 842 or visit axappp.co.uk/readers

Boost Your Happy Hormones

BY SUSANNAH HICKLING



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

IT'S FEBRUARY AND THE WEATHER'S RUBBISH, so you could be forgiven for being at a low ebb, even if you don't have full-blown Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as "winter depression". But, happily, there are natural ways of boosting the hormones that make us feel better about life.

DOSE UP ON DOPAMINE This neurotransmitter drives your brain's reward system. If your boss praises you, you'll get a dopamine hit—and feel great as a result. Boost it by setting realistic goals, such as tidying your desk or sticking to an exercise schedule—and achieving them. Dopamine also drives pleasure-seeking behaviour, so indulge in fun (but healthy) activities. One fabulous way to get a feel-good fix is to listen to music you love, according to a 2011 study in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

SEEK OUT SEROTONIN This mood-boosting neurotransmitter was made famous by SSRI (selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitor) antidepressants, which increase serotonin levels in the brain. Do it naturally by exercising daily—that's one reason a brisk walk does wonders for your mood. Carbohydrates also increase this happiness hormone, which partly explains why we crave sweet, starchy foods when we're feeling low. For the most positive mood boost with the least negative impact, choose healthy, high-fibre carbs such as dense wholegrain bread.



OPT FOR OXYTOCIN Known as the “love hormone” and “bonding hormone”, oxytocin has been linked to life-satisfaction levels by researchers studying its effect on women. In fact, it may play a greater role in women’s

happiness than men’s. Spending time with loved ones and being kind to others stimulates oxytocin. A cuddle with your partner, kids or pet should do the trick. Stress, on the other hand, blocks its release, so try to control it.

QUACK QUESTION

Q Can you fall in love without chemistry?

A Yes. We can all think of relationships (sometimes our own!) that were highly charged at the beginning and then fizzled out. But research has shown it’s possible to fall for someone even if you don’t feel any obvious attraction to start with. Psychologist Robert Epstein studied “Western society” love matches and compared

them to arranged marriages. He found that feelings of love and affection in love matches fade by as much as half in the first 18 months, but the love in arranged marriages can grow and eventually surpass relationships in which people chose their partner. So leave your chemistry in the lab this Valentine’s Day and don’t give up on someone just because the sparks aren’t there on the first date!

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From Nature. For Health.

Curing A Cough

1 DRINK PLENTY OF WATER. This may help loosen all that mucus you get at the end of a cold. It will also help keep mucus membranes moist and stop you having a scratchy throat.

2 ADD HONEY TO YOUR DRINK. Sip hot honey and lemon, or have honey in your tea. It seems this sticky stuff coats the throat and soothes irritation—temporarily at least.

3 INHALE MENTHOL. There's some evidence that menthol can help. It may act as an anaesthetic, switching off your coughing reflex. Try leaning over a bowl of hot water that contains menthol, putting a towel over your head and taking some deep breaths.

4 TAKE A LONG SHOWER. A hot steamy shower can loosen the secretions that cause you to hack.

5 DITCH THE CIGS. Nearly all smokers eventually develop a smoker's cough, plus smokers have more colds and coughs than those who aren't hooked on tobacco.

6 EAT CHOCOLATE. Hooray, this is the one we wanted to hear! A US study found it eased cough symptoms.



MEN'S HEALTH

THE TAKEAWAY TRAP

If you want to lose weight, try tackling your fast-food habits.

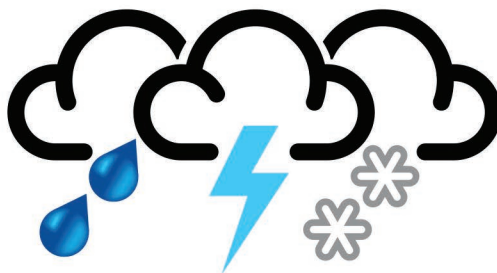
Skip the cheese. Craving a burger? Get a plain one without the cheese. That will save you around 50kcal.

Say no to sauces. The "special" sauce is usually just dressed-up mayonnaise, overflowing with fat and calories. Mustard, however, has few calories and lots of flavour.

Order a child's meal. A small burger, small fries and an orange juice is a surprisingly filling meal, and has very many fewer calories.

Switch to water. A large cola has 210kcal. A bottle of water? Zero. Making this one change might save you the same number of calories as the meal you're about to eat.

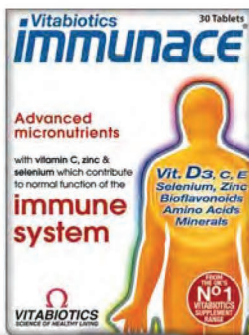
Fill up on fruit. Eat an apple, banana or a fat-free yogurt an hour before you go for a takeaway. That way, you won't arrive starving and be tempted to overeat.



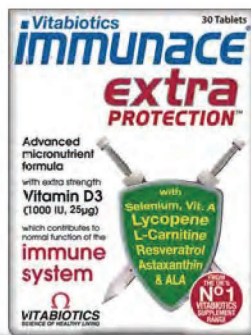
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Forearmed

Modern technology means we have punier arm muscles than ever before. Here's how to add strength without needing to go near any weights:

Scrub the floor on your hands and knees. You'll clean your floors better than the mop and strengthen your arms at the same time.

Make your own pizza dough. The forward and backward of the rolling pin will give you a great arm and shoulder workout. The result will be tastier than a purchased pizza too.

Swap the mixer for a wooden spoon. Anyone who's ever creamed butter and sugar by hand when making a cake will remember what hard work it is. Make sure you use both hands to work your arms evenly.

Use cast-iron cookware and store it a cupboard below oven height. That way, you need to lift the heavy pot onto the hob each time you need it, building more muscle with every meal.

Dig the garden. Using that garden fork will strengthen your hands, wrists, forearms, upper arms and shoulders.

Pour water from a large jug. The weight of a large jug will do wonders for your arms (four litres of water weighs more than 3.5kg).

Curl your jug five times—by bending your elbow and bringing your hand to your shoulder—before pouring.

Do desk pushes. Place your palms against the top of your desk with your elbows bent. Then press into the desk with all your might. Hold for a count of five, release, then repeat until you feel the burn. ■



ARE YOU A "HANGRY" BIRD?

"Hangry—what's that?" I hear you ask. Simple: it's when you get angry because you're hungry, and it officially exists, according to US researchers. An Ohio State University study published recently found low levels of blood sugar can make married people angrier and more likely to have a go at their spouses. The boffins who conducted the study believe that glucose provides our brains with energy, so we'll have the necessary self-control to deal with our aggressive impulses. So make sure you have snacks to hand!

Why Seeing Isn't Always Believing

BY MAX PEMBERTON

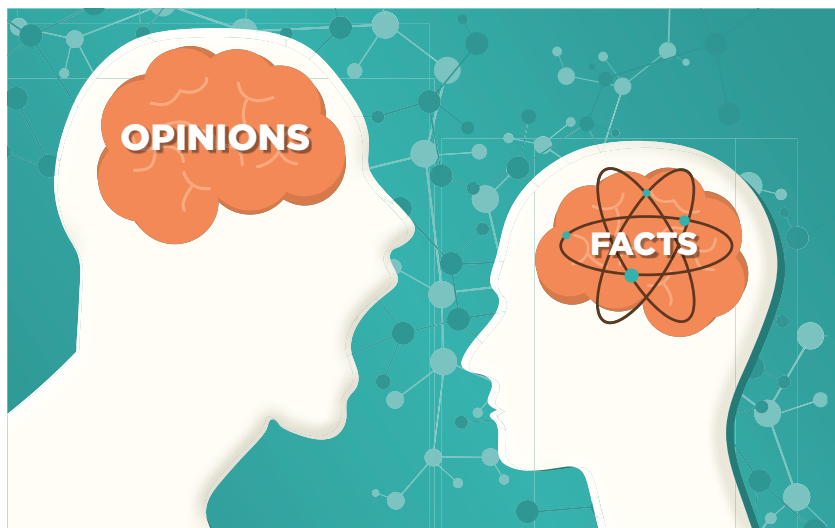


Max is a hospital doctor and author. He's also the resident doctor on ITV's This Morning

ONE OF THE THINGS ABOUT THE HUMAN MIND is that it looks for patterns and meaning in things. It's programmed to see patterns even when they may not be there. This is understandable from an evolutionary perspective—to make sense and navigate our way through the world, we have to be looking for patterns that allow us to predict outcomes safely. It helps make the world less random. But sometimes it can lead us to the wrong conclusion.

One of the great advances of mankind was the development of scientific enquiry. It presents a framework by which we test hypotheses objectively and apply statistic methodology to the results, to ensure that what we observed wasn't the result of chance or coincidence. But sometimes it's hard to hold on to this—it's easy to revert to believing something because of a single experience.

WHEN I WAS A MEDICAL STUDENT, I did a GP attachment with an elderly GP who was about to retire. He was fascinating because he had the kind of knowledge and experience that can't be learned in a lecture or from a textbook. He told me how a few years earlier he'd been holding a vaccination clinic. Although the link between the MMR vaccine and autism has since been categorically disproved, the idea that this vaccine can be dangerous still persists in some people's minds.



Many parents worry that, despite the evidence of the immense benefit vaccination brings, it's still risky. The GP had done his best to reassure his patients, and slowly more and more parents were coming to have their children immunised.

One mother asked lots of questions about the safety of vaccination and, after the GP had allayed her fears, she agreed for her son to receive the jab. He was about to administer the vaccine when suddenly the child had a seizure. It didn't last long, but the child didn't receive the vaccine and was sent to hospital.

However, the GP explained, if he *had* vaccinated the child a minute earlier, the child would have had the seizure after the vaccine and the

mother would have been convinced for ever more that the vaccine had caused the seizure. She would have told every other parent about her experience and it would have caused great worry. Even if he'd tried to explain that there was no evidence the jab caused seizures and it was a coincidence, no one would have believed him. In fact, he said, he'd have probably thought the vaccine caused the seizure too.

With just a few seconds' difference, he and a whole community would have falsely abandoned the science for what they thought they'd seen with their own eyes. It was a valuable lesson in making sure that we all trust in the science, not simply what we think is true.

MEDICAL MYTHS—BUSTED!

Green Mucus Means You Need Antibiotics



WHERE DID THE MYTH COME FROM?

This is one of those myths that's so common and pervasive, even many doctors believe it's true. Research has shown that when a patient reports having clear mucus, only one per cent will diagnose a sinus infection and about ten per cent will prescribe antibiotics. However, when patients report that the mucus is green, over a third will diagnose a sinus infection and two thirds will give an antibiotic.

In fact, repeated scientific studies have shown that the colour of the mucus has no relevance to the severity of the infection or whether antibiotics are indicated.

WHAT'S THE TRUTH?

Green or yellow mucus is a sign that your body's immune system is at work. But this doesn't mean that it's necessarily a bacterial infection—the only type of infection for which antibiotics are useful. Studies have shown that people who report green mucus and are given antibiotics don't get better any quicker than those who don't take antibiotics.

SO, THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Regardless of the colour of mucus, there's no evidence that antibiotics are going to help. In fact, the over-use of antibiotics is creating "super-bugs" such as MRSA that can pose a real health risk, especially to sick or vulnerable people in hospital. ■

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A Luxury Spa Break

CAREYS MANOR, HAMPSHIRE

Recharge your batteries in beautiful surroundings at this spa hotel in the middle of the New Forest. The cosy country-house reception has a large roaring fire and sweeping staircase, and you can shake off your cares with a laid-back itinerary of pursuits.



Guests have free roam of the infinity pool, jacuzzi and sauna, which look out onto the grounds, or can book into the SenSpa for some serious, dedicated you-time. Go through the discreetly positioned door to the candlelit spa area and relax in the warm pool, which features below-water loungers with controllable jacuzzi jets and fountains

to blast away the cobwebs. The rainforest showers, meanwhile, simulate the smells and sounds of a tropical storm, or you can simply recline on a sculpted chair in perfect temperatures.

The hotel also has two restaurants, so you can enjoy a hearty meal and get ready to do it all again tomorrow.

■ Visit careysmanor.com for details



A Stargazing Evening

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK, SOMERSET

Light-polluted skies and our busy lives mean we sometimes forget to look up at the night sky and ponder our place in the universe. As the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe, Exmoor National Park enjoys a distinguished quantity of starry nights. Visitors can hire telescopes from the park centres, download sky maps and guides from the website, and take part in events.

The Yarn Market hotel runs a week-end stargazing course this month, led by an acclaimed astronomer, along with bed, breakfast and dinner.

■ Visit exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk for details

A Pottery Course

NETHER HALL, SUFFOLK

Take a couple of days or a whole week to learn a new skill with your loved one and get utterly absorbed in creating some of your own masterpieces. Residential pottery courses are taught by established potter Deborah Baynes at her countryside home and studio, which boasts inspiring views of the River Orwell.

After a hearty breakfast, and under Deborah's expert instruction, you can tap into your inner potter and learn to mould, throw, slip and glaze before breaking for lunch with your fellow students. It's a fun activity to share with



your other half, and also a great way to make like-minded friends.

■ Visit potterycourses.net for details



A Wine-Tasting Trip In The Countryside

DENBIES, SURREY

What better way to get to know each other than over a glass of deep red or sparkling rosé, while learning all about the wine-making and tasting process? Set in the beautiful North Downs in leafy Surrey, Denbies is a vast vineyard that offers many choices for a romantic trip or getaway.

This month, for instance, you can try a group cheese- and wine-making lesson, tour the winery or explore the atmospheric cellars, while working your way through some delicious drinks. From March onwards, guests can take part in grape-picking classes and walking tours that take in the



panoramic view points within the vineyard, or take the Denbies train through the grounds with a glass of sparkling Cuvée in your hands.

If you need a good snooze after all that wine and walking, cuddle up for a night at the cosy onsite B&B.

■ Visit denbies.co.uk for details

A Remote Seaside Sojourn

THE SHINGLE HOUSE, KENT

Dungeness on the Kent coast is one of the largest expanses of shingle in Europe, and is officially Britain's only desert. This fascinating landscape, dotted with small dwellings and two lighthouses, is also home to the beautiful Shingle House, which is available for short stays all year round. It was designed by architects Nord, who re-developed the buildings with the area's colours and textures in mind.

"A lot of the ideas have originated

from the experience of Dungeness," says architect Alan Pert. "It's very different throughout the seasons and that's one of the things that's fascinating about it. Many of the elements of the landscape have found their way into the internal spaces."

Guests can truly get away from it all here and enjoy the breathtaking and ever-changing scenery of the vast beach, which is a nature reserve and home to an incredible array of fauna.

■ Visit living-architecture.co.uk for details



A Stay In A Private Castle

HELEN'S TOWER, COUNTY DOWN

Built in 1848, Helen's Tower has been immortalised in lyrical poems by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning, and a few nights' stay in this private castle will make you fall in love with it too.

As romantic locations go, it's hard to beat. A spiral staircase leads to an octagonal room with an open fire, while the views from the top stretch as far as the shores of Scotland. The tower is also an ideal base for exploring the woodland of the Clondeboy Estate and the surrounding area.

■ Visit irishlandmark.com for details



A Canal Cruise

WARWICKSHIRE

View the British countryside from a whole new perspective by spending a few days on the canal. Once you're

behind the wheel of your private boat, the Warwickshire Ring route chugs through beautiful Leamington Spa and past Warwick Castle, and you can moor and explore at your leisure.

"Cruising the canals is a great way to experience total relaxation while trying something new," says Leighton Jones of Black Prince, whose popular breaks are taken by couples "simply looking to get away from it all".

Narrowboats are available from two to ten berth, so are ideal for couples and groups of friends, and a full orientation is provided.

■ Visit black-prince.com for details

Do you have a romantic hideaway you'd like to share? Tell us about it by emailing readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk

Young Carers *in focus*

Thousands of youngsters across the country are supporting family members living with illness, disability, mental-health problems or substance abuse. We hear three stories of courage, hope and inspiration

BY AMANDA RILEY-JONES



“WE’VE BEEN CARING FOR MUM ALL OUR LIVES”

Emma, 16, and Matthew, 15, live with their parents Denise and Andrew, both 51, in Cheshire.

“I’ve been a carer all my life,” says Emma. “I was injecting Mum with insulin when I was three. The first phone number I learned was 999.”

“I’ve been helping Mum since I was three as well,” adds Matthew.

Mother Denise, a former teacher and hotel manager, has had hard-to-control Type 1 “brittle” diabetes since she was 13. And she has reduced primary warning signs that she’s

going into a hypo, where the blood glucose drops too low. “When I have a bad hypo, I can no longer speak, think or do anything,” she explains. “Too little or too much sugar could kill me. I live on a seesaw.”

Husband Andrew works shifts as a process chemical operator, knowing that Denise is in safe hands with the children. They have learned to spot when their mum is falling into a hypo. “She goes pale and starts shaking, and her eyebrows change shape!” says Emma, to general laughter.

“We make her sit down and give her a drink of milk with sugar and a straw, because Mum sometimes finds it hard to swallow,” she continues.



© PREVIOUS IMAGE: IMAGE SOURCE PLUS/ALAMY

If Denise is too weak, they rub jam or glucose gel into her gums. "She does get argumentative!" says Emma.

"You fight having sugar because you know it could kill you," adds Denise. "It's very difficult for the kids."

The teenagers regularly take pin-pricks of blood to check Denise's blood glucose level and can change her insulin pump if necessary. This is a delicate procedure that involves putting a canula into her stomach.

Three years ago, Denise had a stroke and she also suffers from multiple cluster migraines that exacerbate the stroke symptoms. "Everything she does slows down," Emma explains. "Her speech goes, one side of her face drops and she can't move."

Denise adds, "It's so frightening—sometimes I'm afraid I've had another stroke. Emma will massage my hands while Matthew checks my blood. They stay with me until I 'come back', which can take an hour. Emma is so gentle and caring with me. She tells me she worries every day that they will come home from school and find me dead."

Emma, who has a part-time waitressing job, adds, "Matthew and I text Mum through the day. I can come back from sixth-form college

to check on her and my grandparents live round the corner. When Mum isn't well, I cook, do the ironing and change the bins. I like housework! I don't think of myself as different to anyone else—it's just how my life has always been. And Matthew helps loads too."

"I do Hoovering and washing, set and clear the table, and do some cooking," Matthew says. "I pick

up two bags of food on the way from school on my bike. I keep my phone on me so Mum can contact me. I try not to worry, but I do."

Matthew, who has an array of Scout awards, has also started up a YouTube channel called Wacky Wizard, so he can record his thoughts and speak to other young carers.

"We're a really strong, positive family and have lots of laughs together," says Denise. "Emma and Matthew are extremely close but also want to kill each other at points! I've just had three months of not being well and the children have been doing everything for me."

"I feel very lucky to have them. I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for the help I get at home. Emma and Matthew are going to be exceptional adults. I'm so excited to see what they make of their lives."



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"I SPEND MY ENTIRE TIME PUTTING A BRAVE FACE ON"

Meg, 17, lives in Warwickshire and cares for her mother Annabelle*, 46, 11-year-old sister Holly* and brother Max*, who's eight.

"I care for my Mum who has bipolar disorder, my 11-year-old sister who has ADHD, and my eight-year-old brother who has learning difficulties.

I get up around half six, see how Mum is and take it from there. If she needs a lot of help, I make packed

lunches for the children, walk them to school and then go on to sixth-form college. I text and call through the day to check Mum is OK.

After college I collect the kids, do my homework, help the kids with their homework, make dinner, do the laundry, get the kids to bed with a story between 8pm–9pm, sort out clothes and school bags for tomorrow, then check on Mum and see if she's taken her meds. If there's time left, I'll watch some trashy TV, play video games or do more homework before going to bed about 11pm.

Mum was diagnosed as bipolar before I was born. When she and Dad separated, I was eight, my older sister was 11 and my little sister was two. Mum didn't want to get out of bed and would say, 'I don't want to be a Mum any more.' I thought it was me making her cry every morning. It was terrifying.

Me and my older sister cooked, cleaned and did the washing. When I was nine, Mum had my brother Max. Having two younger siblings was difficult. I broke down when I was 14 and Dad, who lives in a neighbouring town, apologised for not realising that we kids would have to look after Mum. Now I see him once a fortnight. He helps me financially and gives me lifts with the food shopping.

My older sister left home at 18, so I've been looking after Mum and the kids on my own. Mum has good and bad days. When I was younger,

it was six bad days to one good. Now it's around three bad days a week—thanks to professional help, sorting out her medication and Mum's hard work in counselling. On a good day, I can live a relatively normal life. On days when I can't leave her, college are very supportive. Mum can get angry and frustrated with herself, and takes it out on other people. I have to stay patient and calm.

I also care for my sister who has ADHD. Holly gets really excitable and crazy. I calm her down and let her know when it's appropriate and to what level. I've got her into a set routine and offer her choices if she has a meltdown: 'If you have a tantrum you can walk to school yourself. Or you can calm down and I'll take you.'

And my brother Max is two years behind his academic year. I worked out that he was fighting at school because he was frustrated. I got trained in 'catch up numeracy and literacy' and do four 15-minute sessions with him every week. We've worked with the school and set him weekly targets.

The stress can get to me when I'm on my own at night or when I'm at college and know what I've got to go home to. The other week, I started crying in college and did nothing all

day. I spend my time putting a brave face on. It's stressful at exam time—I keep thinking, *Am I compromising my future for my family?*

I'd like to move away to uni, but can I put the responsibility I've had on my shoulders since I was eight onto my little sister? What gives me the right? Hopefully my Mum will be able to look after my brother and sister. My older sister lives ten-minutes away, so she can look after the kids if Mum needs help.

Some days, Mum starts crying and says, 'I can't live without you. You can't ever leave.' My boyfriend helps keeps me on track when Mum's on a downer and saying hurtful things. He reminds me, 'You know it's not true, she loves you.'

I go to a group at The Warwickshire Young

Carer Project Charity and have one-to-one support from a project worker who's a young carer herself. I know I've missed out on the carefreeness other people of my age have, but I've gained in more areas than I've lost. I'm as mature as friends who are ten years older.

Don't get me wrong, it's difficult and sometimes I wonder how I'm going to get through it. But this is my life and I just get on with it. I wouldn't change my situation for the world."

“I’VE GAINED
IN MORE
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"I'VE HAD TO GROW UP MUCH FASTER"

Robert, 15, lives in Surrey with parents Amelia* and David*, 55 and 59, and his 12-year-old brother Ashley*.

Robert's architect father David was diagnosed with Huntington's disease six years ago.

"This damages some of the nerve cells in the brain and affects my dad's memory, decision-making and personality," says Robert. "There's no cure and it will get worse. Mum had

to take charge of everything, and I've been helping Dad for about the last four years. He became very flat and lifeless. He talks less and spends a lot of time watching TV. I try to get him talking about architecture and doing things away from the TV. When I ask him how they build by rivers and things like that, he smiles and livens up."

Robert's mother Amelia explains, "When Robert gets David animated, it's like a flashback to normal life and brings back happy memories. Robert also takes his dad on the train to London with him to events at the Royal Institution for Science or the Magic Circle and acts as a memory aid—reminding his dad about personal care, his mobile phone, railcard and so on."

She continues, "Robert has also taken on the role of a parent to his younger brother who struggles with anxiety." Whether it's reminding him to brush his teeth or explaining boundaries, Robert supports and guides Ashley.

"Ashley can get angry and throw things around, and I help Mum sort out the conflict," explains Robert.

"When Robert sees me struggling, he steps in to help reinforce what I'm asking Ashley to do," Amelia adds. "He can be very good at calming Ashley down, by quietly giving him attention and bringing humour into the situation to make him laugh. They have a special connection."

Robert's cool head helps his brother feel more secure. "Ashley worries quite a lot and gets into a state. I explain how situations aren't as bad as he thinks. It's almost like Dad has stopped being part of Ashley's growing up and now he looks up to me."

Now he's older, Robert takes his father and brother walking on the North Downs near their home, and can hold the fort for an hour or so when Amelia goes to meetings at school or with the Huntington's Disease Association.

Robert plans to take A levels and study engineering at university. But although he loves ice-skating

four times a week and attends activity days and support sessions at Surrey Young Carers, he admits, "It can be a bit lonely. Although they try, my friends don't really understand. I have to worry about things adults have to think about. I've had to grow up much faster than other people my age and I do worry about the future."

Amelia adds, "Robert is a rock for me. He takes on the responsibility graciously and has a wisdom beyond his years." ■

Hidden: England's Invisible Young Carers, an exhibition of carers' portraits, is at the Oxo Gallery, London from February 11-22



CARERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

■ Twenty per cent more young people are caring for family members than in 2001. There are 166,363 young carers in England alone. The Children's Society's "Hidden from View" report shows that the official figure is just the tip if the iceberg, as many remain hidden.

■ The Children's Society is conducting research and particularly wants to speak to young carers in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol who are from a black, Asian or minority ethnic group. They will use their findings to campaign to improve the lives of thousands of young carers who may not be getting the services and support they need.

■ The Young Carers in Focus Programme is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and is in partnership with Rethink Mental Illness, YMCA, Fatherhood Institute and DigitalMe. It helps carers bring about positive change for themselves and their families. Visit makewav.es/ycif to read what they have to say.

Shami Chakrabarti is director of human-rights group Liberty and has spoken widely about the important role human rights play in democratic societies

If I Ruled the World

Shami Chakrabarti

We'd learn to love other people's children. It's easy to love your own—we think they're little angels most of the time—but the key to the kingdom is loving other children as your own. In legal terms we call that non-discrimination, but in human speak it's called empathy, and that's the most important quality for humanity in this lovely ideal world I'm ruling.

No one would be punished without trial. This is a pretty fundamental human right that's been extensively breached, particularly in the years since 9/11. We need to treat people fairly and allow them to answer the accusations put to them. It's so important because, on a pragmatic level, the sense of injustice that punishment without trial breeds is counter-productive to hearts, minds and community cohesion.

I'd encourage internationalist values. My parents came to Britain from India in the 1950s, so I'm a natural internationalist. We live in a shrinking interconnected



ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES SMITH

world because of the internet, migration and the ease of travel, yet it's bizarre to me that nationalism is on the increase. Maybe we should all take time to live somewhere else and experience different cultures, take another child into our families or experience what it's like to be a refugee. Then we'd understand what it's like to have to fit in and we'd be more sympathetic to all the different ways people live their lives.

Every legislature would have 50 per cent women in the seats of power.

Gender injustice is probably the greatest injustice on the planet and it's terrifying that we've not made greater progress. An end to this inequality would make our daughters feel better about what they can achieve and would result in improved education and healthcare for women across the world.

I'd abolish unemployment and spread work and play more fairly.

Many people spend vast proportions of their life working in a way that may not be the most productive or fulfilling. A healthy workplace is one where, if someone has to leave early because their child is ill, it isn't the end of the world. And a great colleague is someone who helps with a crisis even when it's their day off. I love my work, but I also recognise the importance of taking time to reflect and do other things.

Soft-boiled eggs would always be perfectly soft for toast soldiers and served with Marmite on the side.

It's bliss and my favourite thing. Soft-boiled eggs are symbolic for me because my mother made them to perfection, whereas I don't always get them right. The Marmite is a little twist on the side. Delicious!

Human rights wouldn't be used as a justification for war without equal protection given to those affected by it.

I'm not a pacifist and can imagine circumstances when it's necessary to take up arms, but we need to take responsibility for military intervention and be prepared to take in and protect the refugees whose lives have been shattered by our actions abroad.

Self-deprecating humour would be given greater respect.

Humour is a wonderful quality, but not when it's used at other people's expense. Self-deprecating humour makes us warm to each other. Recently my son started shaving. I felt a little emotional, it being something of a rite of passage, and offered to buy him lots of products. He said, "It's OK, I'm 12 years old—I don't think I'll be shaving very often to begin with," and he laughed at himself. If he hangs onto that modesty and humour then he'll be just fine in life. ■

As told to Caroline Hutton

Shami's book *On Liberty* is out now.

As the family
slept, little did
they suspect
their lives were
in imminent
danger from a
silent killer

The longest night of our lives

BY JOHN HOOPER

THE MOMENT SHE WOKE, Ildikó Tóth knew something was wrong. As a special treat, she had let the younger of her two sons, nine-year-old Levente, sleep in the bed that she shared with her husband Gábor. Levente was there, clinging tightly to her neck. But where



was Gábor? She'd left him watching TV. Yet there was no sound coming from the living room next door.

Ildikó found Gábor on the sofa, complaining of a headache. Like the good nurse she is, Ildikó fetched aspirin while he got undressed and left it on the bedside table, then went to the bathroom. It was around four in the morning.

"As I'm coming back, I start to feel weightless," she remembers. "I don't know how it is to be drunk, but something like that. Then, when I lie down in bed, I have an odd sensation in my

There were stories going around of their breaking into houses, even when people were inside asleep."

That was to become the least of Ildikó's problems. For what she and her family were about to confront on a bitterly cold January night wasn't a thief skulking outside their home. It was a killer lurking within.

THE TÓTHS LIVE IN HUNGARY, in a village called Karancsalja, close to the mountains that form the border with Slovakia. Together, Gábor and Ildikó run a healthcare company.

“

"My heart was racing, then Levente screamed and I realised something really serious was going on"

ears. It's as if sand is being shaken. It's not unpleasant—like when you're on the beach and the wind is blowing.

"But then I realised my mouth was numb. I asked my husband to open the window to let in some fresh air. He did. And then Levente woke up and screamed that he had a stomach ache and fell back on the pillow.

"My heart was racing. I felt weak. I asked Gábor to go to the boys' room and open the window in there too. But then Levente screamed again and I realised something really serious was going on. I knew we should open all the doors and windows. But there was a gang in the area burgling homes.

The temperature in Karancsalja can drop to minus 20 degrees in winter. It was the weekend, and earlier that day the family had decided to take advantage of the snow. They set off with their big iron sled up a steep hill behind their house.

Gábor had inherited the house from his father, and seven years earlier the family had refurbished the home extensively. They put in a new gas water heater in a spare room on the lower floor. To make sure the house stayed warm on freezing winter nights, they replaced all the doors and windows and laid insulation under the roof. In between the kitchen-diner and the



sitting room on the upper floor, they installed a huge stove clad in green ceramic tiles that resembles a tower of one of the medieval castles dotted around that part of Hungary.

After dinner, the family played with the toys the boys had been given for Christmas, including a Lego set. But there was an argument when Ildikó said it was time for bed.

"I don't care," she said as she stomped out. "You all do whatever you want." Levente took her at her word. Though he had a bed of his own, what he wanted to do that night, he said, was to sleep with his parents again. Ildikó gave in.

Levente and his older brother and parents, in the bedroom where he nearly died

"It was cold and after all that sledding I was tired. I went to sleep almost immediately," she says.

GÁBOR FELL ASLEEP ON THE SOFA after their eldest son, 15-year-old Bence, went to bed. He woke some time after midnight with a headache, and it never left him as he drifted in and out of sleep until he was roused by his wife.

"When Ildikó asked me to open the window in the boys' room, I walked in and tripped over the Lego bucket in the

dark,” he says. “The next thing I knew, I was on my knees. Suddenly I realised I couldn’t get up. My heart was beating abnormally fast. My mind was clear, but I was frightened.”

“Help me. I can’t get up,” said Gábor to his sleepy son. “Open the window.”

With Bence’s help, Gábor half-crawled, half-staggered to the end of the room.

“Thankfully, the window is set low in the wall and I was able to raise myself up enough to gulp in some fresh air. It only took a minute or two for me to feel better.”

With Bence thinking his father might

hallucinating,” says Ildikó. “I can’t find the doorknob. It isn’t where it should be. I’m clawing at the wall. Finally, I managed to open the door.”

And then she collapsed.

LIKE GÁBOR, ILDIKÓ WAS BEING POISONED by carbon monoxide (CO). Colourless and odourless, CO killed more than 140,000 people in Europe between 1980 and 2008; it kills more people every year than Aids or skin cancer, according to the 2012 WHO Europe Region report on carbon monoxide mortality rates.

It usually only makes the headlines

“**Suddenly I realised that I couldn’t get up. My mind was clear, but I was frightened**”

have been at the pálinka, the plum brandy that’s Hungary’s national liquor, Gábor turned around slowly and made his way towards the entrance to the bedroom. What he saw stopped him in his tracks: “Ildikó was lying on the floor of the kitchen.”

Ildikó had decided, burglars or not, to open the doors of the house.

“Somehow, I put on a robe and opened the front door. I should have taken in some fresh air, but I wanted to get to the back door as soon as I could to create a draught.”

There’s a blind on the back door.

“I pull it up. And then I realise I’m

when carbon monoxide fumes, most often from car exhausts, are used for suicide. But more than half of all deaths from CO poisoning are accidental, with 60 per cent of all CO-related deaths occurring in the home. Since it’s hard to distinguish CO poisoning from other causes of death, it’s suspected that official statistics underestimate the true number.

WHEN ILDIKÓ CAME ROUND, Gábor and Bence were standing over her, calling to her. For the next ten to 15 minutes, she lay on the floor, unable to move and only partly conscious, as her

husband and her eldest son waited for the cold, fresh air flowing through the house to have the same effect on her as it had had on Gábor.

For Ildikó, it was pure torture. "I'm exhausted and want to sleep. But I know I have to get back to the bedroom because my boy is lying unconscious there," she says, weeping at the memory. "You can't imagine how much I want to go and help my son."

"All she kept saying was, 'Levente, 'Levente,'" says Gábor. "So I went to the bedroom and he seemed all right."

Gábor, an undemonstrative man who weighs every word as he speaks, had other things on his mind. Suspecting there might be a link with the heater on the lower floor, he sent Bence down to turn it off.

One look inside the spare room, and the boy realised his father was right.

"It was as if there was fog in there," Bence says. "I took a deep breath before entering, turned off the heater and then I didn't breathe again until I left the room by a door at the back that leads into the garden." Bence told his father what he'd seen and done.

GÁBOR HELPED HIS WIFE BACK TO BED, thinking, *Now, the air has cleared, the problem is solved.*

But the most dangerous moment of all was yet to come.

"In bed, I felt my heart rate go up and I was having difficulty breathing. Ildikó had the same symptoms."

Gábor got out of bed and phoned his



An invisible killer engulfed the Tóth's family home in Karancsalja, Hungary

mother who lives in another detached house less than 50 yards away.

"I asked her to open the door so we could get in."

Gábor was going to carry his younger son, who seemed to be sleeping. In fact, as his mother suspected, Levente was unconscious.

His first memory after falling back into the bed in a dead faint was "being carried in my father's arms and feeling dizzy and nauseous".

The front door opens on to a tiled



CARBON MONOXIDE: THE SILENT KILLER

Carbon monoxide (CO) is the most commonly encountered poison in our indoor environment. It's produced by incomplete combustion of carbon-containing fuels such as propane, natural gas, petrol, coal or wood. Breathing in CO reduces the blood's ability to carry oxygen, so the body is gradually starved of the element it needs to keep functioning.

Common causes of accidental carbon-monoxide poisoning include faulty heating systems, gas appliances, open fires, wood-burning stoves and vehicles left running in enclosed spaces.

HOW TO GUARD AGAINST CO POISONING:

- Install CO detectors.
- Make sure all rooms are well ventilated.
- Ensure appliances are high quality, installed correctly and regularly serviced.
- Don't use petrol- or diesel-powered engines or charcoal grills indoors.
- Don't use a gas oven to heat indoor spaces.

area at the top of a flight of 14 steep steps down to ground level. Gábor set his son down on his feet there.

"Levente seemed all right. He was standing up and supporting himself by holding on to the railings. But just as I let go of him I lost consciousness and fell forward onto my forehead on the stone tiles."

When he came round moments later, Gábor faced a terrible dilemma. Should he leave his son who might collapse and fall down the stairs? Or abandon his wife whom he had left behind amid the fumes that were threatening to kill them all?

"I could hear Gábor outside, speaking in a desperate voice to Levente," says Ildikó. "I realised something else had happened."

Impelled by willpower, Ildikó pulled herself to her feet and staggered out of the house. Gingerly, the couple descended the stairs with their sons and reached Gábor's mother's house next door. Somehow, Ildikó managed to remain conscious.

"I knew I might have to resuscitate Levente. But once I saw he was OK, my strength gave out. I fainted again. Gábor and his mother helped me to bed in her house. I had a raging headache and I felt sick. The last thing I remember was it getting light outside."

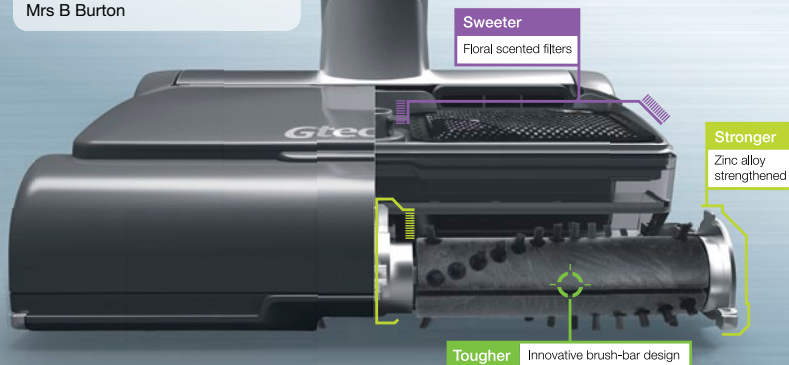
FOR ALMOST A YEAR AFTERWARDS, Ildikó's co-ordination was impaired. "I couldn't pour tea, for example," she says. "And I didn't feel confident about

**"WHAT AN AMAZING PRODUCT...
A REVELATION IN VACUUMING**
*I have 2 dogs and when I used
the AirRam K9 for the first time I
was amazed by just how much hair
it lifted from the carpets, which
our previous cleaner had failed to
remove... a godsend."*
Mrs B Burton

Gtech
AirRAM



High performance cordless pet vacuum



Introducing the new Gtech AirRam K9 – our best ever vacuum

We all dearly love our four legged friends, but cleaning up after them makes vacuuming even more of a chore. Stubborn hair embedded in the carpet, the brush bar choked up... not to mention the smell.

The cordless AirRam K9 is the 4x4 upgrade of the original AirRam, complete with extra tough features. Designed not only for great cleaning performance, but to withstand the extra strain pet hair can place on a vacuum cleaner – clogging the mechanism and making it wear out faster.

Tougher

AirRam K9 is specially designed to lift embedded hair from carpet fibres, but minimise the amount of hair that gets wrapped around the brush-bar, so less cleaning for you.

Stronger

The K9 is strengthened by zinc alloy components, to resist the wear and tear caused by the toughest cleaning environments.

Sweeter

And, it features refillable floral scented filters to leave your room smelling clean and fresh.

All the great features of the original AirRam

Added to that are all the great features that have made the Gtech AirRam so popular: Mains powered upright vacuum performance[†]; Lightweight (3.8kg); 40 minutes run-time[†]; 4-hour charge-time; 'one button' simplicity and easy one-click assembly.

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Without the weight or cord holding you back, you can glide from carpet to hard-floor without stopping, unplugging or changing any settings.

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Limited 2-year manufacturer's warranty. [†]Runtimes quoted may vary depending on floor surfaces cleaned. [†]Performance comparisons based on independent tests to IEC 60312-1 ed 1.1 sec 5.1. and 5.3 when compared to mains powered upright vacuums (Source: GfK, UK Top 20, 2013). ^ΔFree UK delivery. Full details on our website.
Grey Technology Ltd. 1/a Gtech, Cupola Court, Speechley, Worcestershire, WR5 1RL

taking blood samples from patients at work because I couldn't be sure of hitting the vein."

Levente suffered for a long time from short-term memory loss. His teachers reported that he was unable to remember things he'd said earlier.

The family called in an expert who said the house was over-insulated and told them always to keep a window open. The Tóths got rid of their water heater, and dismantled the long metal chimney that was meant to carry the

fumes up to the roof. It's still outside, lying on the ground against the wall at the back.

Ildikó remains haunted by the irrational feelings she first had as she lay in a hallucinatory stupor on the kitchen floor, powerless to help her son.

"I still have a sense of guilt—that I was somehow not a good mother."

And Gábor? He asks himself a single, chilling question: "What might have happened if I had remained asleep on the sofa?" ■



A NEW VOCABULARY FOR THE MODERN WORLD

Surely it's about time we gave the facets of everyday working life a bit of meaning (as seen at the voiceofreason.co.uk):

Blamestorming

Sitting around in a group, discussing why a deadline was missed or a project failed and who was responsible.

Seagull manager

A manager who flies in, makes a lot of noise, c**ps on everything, and then leaves.

Salmon day

The experience of spending an entire day swimming upstream, only to get screwed and die in the end.

SITCOMs

Single Income, Two Children, Oppressive Mortgage.
When one partner stops working to stay home with the kids.

Stress puppy

A person who seems to thrive on being stressed-out and whiney.

Percussive maintenance

The fine art of whacking the c**p out of an electronic device to get it to work again.

Ohnosecond

That minuscule fraction of time in which you realise you've just made a big mistake.

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BY CATHERINE COLE

My Great Escape: Florida To Panama

Norma Henty from Chelmsford gets busy with her bucket list in Central America



Catherine has danced in Rio, been microlighting in South Africa and hiked the mountains of Oman

Tell us about your favourite holiday (send a photo too) and if we include it on this page we'll pay you £50. Go to readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us

THERE COMES A TIME WHEN YOU REALISE you need to start ticking things off your bucket list. During a visit to my family in South Florida, we decided to take a cruise from Fort Lauderdale to the Panama Canal—a destination on our list.

Our first port of call on our boat, called the *Coral Princess*, was Aruba, a small island in the Dutch Antilles and a popular tourist destination as it's outside the hurricane belt. It's a lovely place with beautiful beaches. We docked in the capital Oranjestad, where there's still Dutch colonial influence in the architecture along the waterfront.

Our next stop was Cartagena in Columbia. This Unesco World Heritage site is a fascinating city, with Spanish colonial architecture. It has impressive fortified walls, built in the 17th century to fend off pirates, while overlooking the city is the impressive fortress Castillo San Felipe De Barajas.

As dawn broke the next day, our ship was approaching the Panama Canal, a 50-mile waterway linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It was fascinating to see the ships lining up to be guided through the locks.

Then it was onto the rainforests of Costa Rica before our

last port of call, Grand Cayman, where we ticked off another bucket-list item—swimming with dolphins. It was a wonderful experience with these gentle creatures, and my kiss with one of them was something I won't forget for a long time!

Equally thrilling was a 35-minute boat ride to a sandbar, where we got off the boat to see stingrays swimming around. They're large and can weigh up to 60 pounds, but they aren't aggressive. We felt the silky softness of their underbelly as we held one—another special experience.

Two days later we were reunited with my family, and we continued our holiday in South Florida, with another destination ticked off our list...

■ CRUISE CONTROL

Princess Cruises offers a ten-day round trip from Fort Lauderdale, with stops in Aruba, Cartagena, the Panama Canal, Costa Rica and Jamaica, starting from £919pp for an Interior Stateroom (princess.com; 0843 374 4444).



You'd be forgiven for thinking that Mauritius is yet another Indian Ocean island with beautiful sweeps of beach and upscale resorts. It has both in spades, but there's far more to its 1,270 square miles. It's well-known for watersports, thanks to the ring of coral reef that surrounds the island, and has a good breeze for kite- and windsurfing. If that sounds too high-octane, the mountainous interior makes a great place for hikes—and the vast view out across Mauritius' pristine coastline when you get to the top makes it all worthwhile.

■ SURF'S UP

Wildwind Adventures offers a seven-day watersports trip to Mauritius from £1,520pp, including return flights from Gatwick with BA, transfers, accommodation and sailing and windsurfing instruction for six days (mauritius.wildwind-adventures.co.uk; 0844 499 2898).

Things To Do This Month



VENICE IN TWO MINUTES

■ **DO: Carnival** The Venice Carnival is the highlight of the social calendar, and for almost a fortnight this month the city allows visitors to don masks and attend the famous ball. Can't get a ticket? There are plenty of parades, performances and fireworks to enjoy in the squares (carnevale.venezia.it).

■ STAY: NH Collection Palazzo

Barocchi Near the Grand Canal and the Rialto Bridge, this boutique hotel has all the right credentials: it's built on a former theatre, there's a "bar del doge" and a private dock to arrive in style. Rooms from around £176pn (nh-hotels.com; +39 041 296 0650).

■ **DRINK: Harry's Bar** The home of the sparkling bellini, this bar has also served the likes of Orson Welles and Ernest Hemingway. Right on the St Mark's Square waterfront, it's a classic Venice experience (harrysbarvenezia.com; +39 041 528 5777).

SHORT VS LONG HAUL TRIPS

SHORT: Barcelona

Its wide boulevards and squares make Barcelona the ideal city to explore. Check out bustling Las Ramblas and Gaudi's unfinished Sagrada Familia. Return flights start from £33pp with Ryanair (ryanair.com; 0871 246 000).



LONG: Buenos Aires The Argentinian capital is famous for steak, wine and its love of tango, but there's plenty of architecture to discover—the pink Casa Rosada is particularly lovely, and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes is full of significant Argentine art. Return flights start from around £900 with BA (ba.com; 0844 493 0787). ■



TRAVEL APP OF THE MONTH

Weswap This is a social currency exchange service, which means that you swap currencies with other users at a low market rate, and it handily loads onto a pre-paid MasterCard. There's a low 1% fee, which means you'll spend more on currency and less on commission (weswap.com).

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TRAVEL & ADVENTURE

Lovely, Liveable Bratislava

BY LISA FITTERMAN

Slovakia's ancient capital is a secret
to be treasured—a city like Vienna,
but without the high prices

The main square in the Old Town, an area of cobblestoned streets full of cafes and pubs



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SEMPER AVGSTVS
AVGARIE REX AVSTRIAE
ARCHIDVX AVSTRIA
MEMOR
ACCEPTARVM GRATIARVM
INTELLIGENS
MVLTIPLICEM OBIGATIONEM
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ET SINEM VIVACQVETATE
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WE'RE STANDING ON THE BANKS OF DANUBE, the blue river of Strauss and the storied trade in amber. On this sunny and unseasonably warm March afternoon, the water looks cold as it wends its way through Bratislava, the tiny capital of Slovakia. People lounge on benches, their faces turned towards the cloudless sky. Others walk arm in arm or jog while pushing baby carriages.

"It's said that Slovakia has everything except the sea," says my tour guide L'ubomíra Hornáková. "Bratislava has the atmosphere of a city on the Mediterranean, only our Mediterranean is the Danube."

Welcome to the city that's usually an afterthought to nearby Vienna; tiny, concentrated and nestled against the southern slope of the ancient Lower Carpathian mountain range. When I told friends I was coming here, they were dismissive. "It's a day trip at best," they said. Or, simply, "Never been there and not interested."

It's their loss. Staying over several days, I'm delighted to discover that, rather than an afterthought, Bratislava is more like a secret to be treasured. In the south-west corner of Slovakia, it's only four miles to the Austrian border, nine miles to Hungary, a crossroads that's neither west nor east and a survivor of everything from feudal rule and internecine battles to an unhappy forced marriage

with the Czech Republic and 40 years of Communism.

Easily walkable, it's a lesson in history and the ability to move forward. There are biking and walking trails carved through parks shaded by old growth trees. Landmarks include a turreted castle and an ugly, futuristic concrete-and-steel bridge with a

spaceship-shaped restaurant and viewing deck perched atop the lone pylon that's called UFO—of course.

L'ubomíra and I start at the bank of the river that hugs Staré Mesto, or the Old Town. Behind us are cobblestoned streets choc-a-bloc with cafes and pubs. We turn to the right and skirt the town

to climb up the steep hill to Bratislava Castle, a structure that resembles a table turned upside down. A version of it has stood here for centuries, unblinking and solid.

We enter the grounds through the arched Sigismund Gate, built in the 15th century and named for a ruler

“
**I'm delighted
to discover that,
rather than an
afterthought,
Bratislava is like
a secret to be
treasured**

An iteration of Bratislava Castle has stood above the city since the eighth century



of Luxembourg. As we pass onto the castle's ramparts, I'm struck by the view of the river. If only brick, stone and mortar could tell tales!

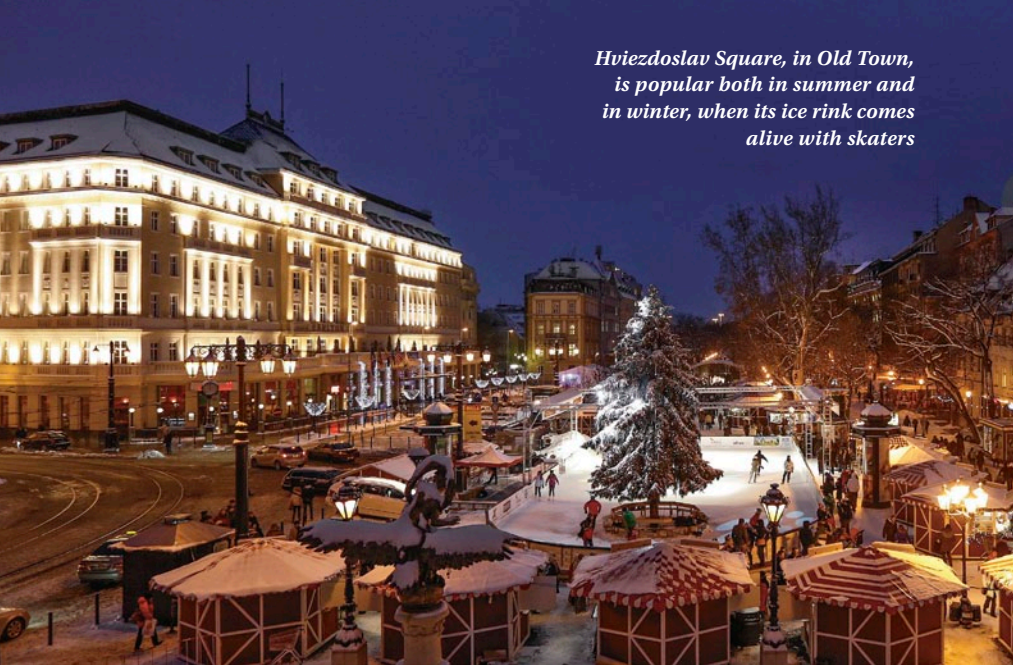
The castle had its beginnings in the eighth century as a rudimentary Slavic structure. Gradually, it was expanded into the centrepiece of the Royal Kingdom of Hungary, a near-impenetrable fortress that protected the town from attacks from Bohemia and Germany, including a two-month siege in 1052; according to tradition, the siege ended when a Hungarian soldier named Zothmund swam out to the enemy ships and drilled holes in them.

Little of the old fortifications remain. In the 18th century, Empress Maria Theresa had them torn down as the city grew to become the largest town in the Hungarian empire and a centre for high society and culture. New palaces and mansions were built during

her reign and the population tripled. Mozart travelled here to give a concert, as did Haydn and Beethoven.

As if watching an old reel of film unspool before me, I imagine the Empress descending the castle's grand staircase during one of her visits from Vienna, stern and theatrical, a flask of her red wine in hand. A precursor to feminists, she gave birth to 16 children but chafed that her multiple pregnancies prevented her from leading her army into battle herself. Schooled in drawing, painting, music and dancing, she proved a natural politician and negotiator when she ascended the throne in 1740, able to delegate and make fast decisions as other European powers sought to overthrow her because she was a woman in a man's role.

"Rumour has it that wine was like a



Hviezdoslav Square, in Old Town, is popular both in summer and in winter, when its ice rink comes alive with skaters

medicine for the Empress,” L’ubomíra tells me as we stroll the castle’s battlements. “People say she had so many children because this red wine made her never say no. I think this would be so. I can’t really imagine becoming pregnant so many times without it, no?”

No, indeed.

We leave the castle, carefully making our way down the other side of the grassy hill towards the medieval St Michael’s Gate, the only one remaining into Staré Mesto. With a green, onion-shaped roof it’s unmistakable, a marker for tourists. Climbing up the 110 steps of

the gate’s adjoining tower, part of the original fortifications that guarded the town, we reach an empty observation platform, from which we can

see the whole of Staré Mesto spread before us: terracotta-coloured roofs and pastel stucco buildings lining the grey cobblestone streets where cars aren’t allowed.

Below us is medieval St Martin’s Cathedral, which has not one, not two, but six more saints connected to it: George, Florian, Elisabeth, Kath-

arina, Nikolas and Adalbert, all of whose names are engraved on the altar. Apparently residents of Bratislava

“Before the revolution, everything closed down by 10pm. People kept their heads down”



believe in keeping all their bases covered. They are also very superstitious, or so L'ubomíra tells me.

"When we see a chimney sweep all covered in soot and carrying brushes, we have to touch a button on our shirt or coat to bring us good luck," she says.

"There's also a statue here in Staré Mesto—a worker climbing out of a manhole. We believe you'll get pregnant if you rub his nose."

As we stroll, L'ubomíra speaks of growing up behind the Iron Curtain, the need to conform and the oppressive greyness; of dissidents diving into the river in a desperate bid for freedom, mistakenly believing that Austria was just on the other side. "They would climb out, only to discover they were still in Slovakia," she says.

Most historical buildings in Bratislava survived the Second World War unscathed but during the Communist era little care was taken to preserve them. The Old Town, especially, suffered. Historic houses were shuttered. Walls and foundations were left to crumble. And in order to construct that concrete-and-steel bridge, popularly known as the "New Bridge," most of the ancient Jewish quarter, including the city's main synagogue, was razed.

"It was the kind of place where no one cared about buildings falling down—or if you did, you said nothing," L'ubomíra says. "Before the Velvet Revolution in 1989, everything closed down here by 10pm. People kept their heads down."

There are still reminders throughout the city of that time: the square apartment blocks with small windows and scarred walls, the now-closed Hotel Kiev that was considered a triumph of Soviet architecture when Bratislava hosted the World Figure Skating Championships in 1973 and, of course, the "New Bridge".

In the years since the Iron Curtain lifted, there's been a renaissance and massive building, including Eurovea, a shopping centre on the Danube at the edge of the city centre with a dramatic glass atrium. But nowhere do you see the past and present come together more clearly than in Staré Mesto, where courtyards have been reopened

to the public, this time with little boutiques, cafes and boxes of flowers.

An oversized papier-mâché doll in a sombrero sits above the entrance to Bratislava's first-ever Mexican restaurant. A pub that was once a library is packed with both locals and rowdy British male tourists who have come here for a stag do and the cheap, delicious beer. I hear a babble of languages in a popular cafe, including Slovak, English, French and German. While settling down with a glass of what a dour waiter with a walrus

moustache called "good red Slovakian wine", I meet an Amazon executive from Washington State in the US who's spent the weekend with friends from Belgium and Scotland.

"The city is affordable, the beer is great and we've just been partying a lot," he says.

In the main square, I flinch as I look at instruments of medieval torture in the Museum of Town History and Feudal Justice in the basement of the old city hall. Then I go upstairs to see displays that trace the history of the



IF YOU GO

Where to stay

The Mercure Bratislava Centrum Hotel is within walking distance of Horský Park. Prices are reasonable. Closer to the Danube is Marrol's Boutique Hotel. It has well-appointed rooms and even a two-bedroom suite with two bathrooms—great for those travelling with children. Prices vary.

Where to eat

Sladovňa House of Beer, Ventúrska 267/5, 811 01 Bratislava (+421 917 211 111). Try the sausage.

Prašná Bašta, Zámocnícka 399/11- Old Town (+421 254 434 957). Order the pork and beef tenderloin in a potato-courgette pancake.

Where to drink

Grand Cru Wine Gallery, Zámocnícka 8, Bratislava, Slovakia (+421 908 656 259).

Be sure to do

A city Segway tour (bratislavasightseeing.com).

city from its beginnings circa 200BC as a settlement atop the hill the castle sits on, through to the Roman period and the Austro-Hungarian Empire that spanned more than 300 years.

Outside city hall, a notice announces a demonstration the next day against the Russian incursion into Ukraine. A statue of a grinning Napoleonic soldier insouciantly leaning on the back of a bench sports a blue scarf around its neck; L'ubomíra tells me it's a sign of an impending presidential election in which the eventual winner is a self-made philanthropist who's not affiliated with a formal party.

In fact, on this day, blue scarves are

wrapped round the necks of every statue in the Old Town, from Hans Christian Andersen to Schöne Náci, the grandson of a clown who decided his own role in life in the mid-20th century was to bring happiness to the people of Bratislava. When he wasn't moonlighting as a cleaner, you could find him dressed in a velvet morning coat, walking through the streets of the Old Town, doffing his top hat and greeting the ladies with flowers and the comment, "I kiss your hand."

Today, I imagine he would add: "And don't forget to vote!"

A few days later, I'm running along the banks of the Danube, retracing the path I took with L'ubomíra Hornáková. It's even warmer today and the



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NA-AR-RDI-AR-ZZZ-ZZ

scent of cherry blossoms and magnolias wafts through the air. I come up to the New Bridge and remember she'd said that on a clear day you can see, if not for ever, then for 60 miles around. I decide to check it out and locate the lift in the east pillar. Walking out, my breath catches for the vista is like an abstract painting. Spring colours bleed into each other, with perspective and light askew—the green and brown of pastures, the pink and green of trees in early bloom, the grey streak of motorway and the blue ribbon of

water that unfurls into the distance. A little boy keeps running from one side to the other with his arms spread wide as if he's flying, then peeking over the edge.

I understand. There's so much to see and do here, so much to taste and try. Cycle or take a tour of Staré Mesto on a Segway. Sip some local, very good wine. Steep yourself in centuries of war and peace, palaces and rebellions. Whatever you choose to do, you'll encounter a capital city that's coming into its own—again. ■



A CUT ABOVE THE REST

Do you have a penchant for parmigiano? Do you find the name Merlot rather nice? If yes, chances are you're a little bit posh. Here are some of the key signs to look out for:

You own at least one pair of red trousers.

You say "bath" as though it has two rs in it.

You've never been inside a pound shop.

You have a posh set of cutlery, but you don't know what you're saving it for.

Instead of saying something is "very nice", you say it's "rather nice".

You say "gosh" two or three times a day.

You've considered calling one of your children Merlot.

Your dog has its own hairdresser.

You thought Jeremy Kyle was a comedy character.

You know six people with double-barrelled surnames.

AS SEEN AT STUDENTBEANS.COM

The new equity release plan to suit the modern day

BY READER'S DIGEST EQUITY RELEASE SERVICE

Forget all you know about equity release. This article will talk you through the government regulated equity release plan called the Flexible Lifetime Mortgage.

DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE 55 & OVER, it is partly responsible for equity release sales rocketing by 36% since 2013.

You own your property, are asset-rich and want to access to this wealth in a flexible, safe way without having to sell your property and move.

With this flexible plan, you can take as little as £10,000 tax-free and leave more funds in reserve for when you need it. Your property remains your own; you have just borrowed against it.

If you want to pay some of the money back into your property, you can do so with optional repayments of up to 10% per year of the amount you borrowed.

If you don't want to pay any back, you don't have to. Like any other borrowing, an interest rate is charged and any interest you choose not to pay is simply added to the total and paid when you or your heirs eventually sell the property. You can transfer the plan to another property if you wish to do so.

Things to watch out for are state benefits. If you are in receipt of these, having money in the bank may affect them so we will look at this with you before proceeding. Also, by taking money out of your property, there will be less left later when you want to leave some money in your will.

Try to find a balance between what you want now and what you want to leave.

The interest rate starts at 5.61% and this is fixed for life so you can be sure of what you are being charged. Those who remember mortgage rates in the mid-teens know the value of fixed rate.



A few steps are all that's required to move forward:

1. Imagine what you might use the extra money for
2. Find out how much you are able to take with this plan
3. If the amounts match then you can investigate further

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This is a lifetime mortgage. To understand the features and risks ask for a personalised illustration.

The service, provided by Retiredom, is without obligation and only charges a typical fee of 1.6% should you go ahead and complete a plan.

Shape Up Your Financial Relationship

Making time to talk with your loved one about money could save heartache further down the line

BY NICK HILL



Nick Hill is a money expert at the Money Advice Service. Visit moneyadvice.service.org.uk for details



❧ WINTER OFTEN BRINGS ABOUT POLAR CHANGES IN THE NATION'S LOVE LIFE. Christmas to Valentine's is full of proposals, while January blues lead to break-ups. Talking about money can help keep your relationship—and your finances—in good health for the rest of the year and beyond.

Whether you're a new couple or have been together for years, it's important to work at your money relationship. And like most things involving a loved one, communication is key. That said, money is likely to be one of the trickiest subjects for you to talk about, yet avoiding it can cause all sorts of financial problems and relationship stresses.

DON'T HAVE A ONE-SIDED MONEY RELATIONSHIP

It's common for one person to look after bills or expenditure more than the other, but information and understanding by both partners is really important. Make sure you both have access to the shared bills and accounts so you know what's coming in and going out. Many couples also value the privacy of their own account, so try to respect that— unless you think it could affect your wider family finances.

MAKE TIME TO TALK ABOUT MONEY

This can be hard, so try breaking the task down and put a date in the diary to review one bill. You may even find you can save money on that one bill, which will help motivate you to do the



next one. Avoid doing it when you're tired, and definitely don't bring it up when you're angry. The more relaxed you are the better.

FIND THE MIDDLE GROUND

Compromise is important. You might be a spender while your partner is a saver, so try to be sympathetic to how they think about money. Write a list of things you'd both really like to buy, so you can work out how to save and budget for these items.

Steering clear of the subject to avoid an argument might lead to big financial problems down the road. So work together to have a conversation without resorting to a fight.

SET SOME JOINT FINANCIAL GOALS

If you both know what you're planning for, how you'll do it and when you need to do it by—whether that's to clear a debt or save for a holiday—you've a better chance of getting there without causing stress.

IF YOU STILL CAN'T TALK ABOUT MONEY WITHOUT ARGUING...

Sometimes you need some outsider help. That could be someone to give independent advice, or perhaps you need a person to help mediate the conversation. If that's too formal, other options could be asking family or friends who are good with money how they manage it.

Divorce Doesn't Need To Be Costly

If you're going through a divorce, ensuring you can cope financially will be one of your key concerns. Here are three things you should act on straight away.

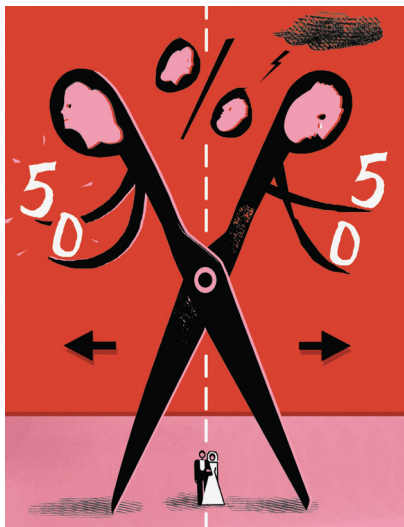
1. YOU MIGHT NOT NEED A SOLICITOR

If you can part on good terms, you don't necessarily need a solicitor to process your divorce. If you wish, you can arrange everything on your own or by using an online service. If you need more help you can seek advice from a solicitor and do the paperwork yourself. Alternatively, an impartial third party could mediate to help you come to an agreement.

2. PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR MONEY

If things aren't going well, take some steps to protect yourself financially.

Contact the Land Registry and your mortgage lender to ensure your home can't be sold without you knowing. Or see if you need to adjust your tenancy. Talk to your bank to discuss your options on joint accounts, credit cards or loans, and think about any income or outgoings—you may want to move them to a personal account.



Your credit rating will be tied to your partner if you were both named on anything, so you need to get a “notice of disassociation” with the credit agencies. Also think about pensions, wills and any death-in-service policies you have, and change the names of beneficiaries on these.

3. START BUDGETING

The earlier you look at your new situation the better—even if it's a big step emotionally. Cut back if you need to and consider if you can switch any bills to cheaper deals. If you're living on your own immediately after the break up you can claim a 25% council tax reduction, and you may even be entitled to benefits.

Further advice is available at moneyadvice.service.org

Can Marriage Protect Your Partner?

Whatever your view on marriage or civil partnerships, many question whether it can bring about any financial advantages that will protect their partner when one of you dies. Though there are some substantial benefits if you do tie the knot, in many cases it doesn't actually make a difference whether you do or don't.

BEING MARRIED OR HAVING A CIVIL PARTNERSHIP MEANS...

You can give your spouse or civil partner anything you own without getting charged inheritance tax.

If you don't have a will, your partner will automatically inherit all or most of your estate. This includes any mortgage-free property.

If you're not married, you need to make sure you name the person in a will. If your husband, wife or civil partner dies, you may be able to use their NI contribution record to help you get a better state pension.

AND IF YOU HAVEN'T MADE THINGS LEGAL...

If you have a joint current or savings account, it will transfer over to the surviving partner—married or not—but may be subject to tax.

Any couple can split their assets between them to take advantage of different rates of income tax. So if one partner pays tax at the 40% rate and the other 20%, it might be better for savings to be in the second partner's name.

With personal pensions, rules on marriage vary from pension to pension, so it's good to check your policy. It's best to make sure you're prepared for all eventualities. ■

SPEND LESS AND GET MORE AT VALENTINE'S

Going all out to avoid breaking hearts this Valentine's could end up breaking the bank. Follow these money-saving tips:

1. Set a spending limit with your partner so neither of you go over the top.
2. Cook a special meal at home to avoid paying premium prices to eat out.
3. Don't leave gifts and flowers to the last minute.
4. A DIY card that you put real effort and thought into can say a lot more than a mass-produced shop-bought one.



Easy-to-prepare meals and accompanying drinks

Spanish Chicken Stew

BY RACHEL
WALKER



*Rachel is a food
writer and blogs
at thefoodieat.org*

LONG FEBRUARY EVENINGS ARE A GOOD TIME to indulge in a little culinary travel—something that whisks you away to warmer climes. Perhaps it's the smell of cooking scampi that evokes memories of summer holidays, or the tang of feta and olives in a Greek salad. Or maybe fish and chips with a pint of bitter transports you to that pub garden in Cornwall.

Whatever memory you're calling on, commitment is key. If it was a San Miguel kind of trip, then stock up the fridge, turn up the volume on your holiday soundtrack, draw the curtains and tuck into this delicious stew. It will provide a temporary Spanish respite from the British chill.

Serves 4

- 2tbsp olive oil
- 4 chicken thighs
- 150g chorizo, diced
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1tsp smoked paprika
- 400g ready-to-eat chickpeas, rinsed
- 200ml chicken stock
- 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

- 1tbsp tomato paste
- Optional: spinach or pitted olives

1. Preheat the oven to 180C
2. Heat the oil in a casserole pan, and cook the chicken thighs (in batches, if needed), until they turn golden all over. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon, put on a plate and set to one side.
3. Cook the chorizo in the same pan.



When it starts to release oil, add the onions. Then, when they start to soften, add the garlic. Stir until it's cooked and finally add the paprika to the pan—cooking just for 10–15 seconds so that the kitchen is filled with aromas, but not enough for the paprika to catch and burn.

4. Add the chickpeas, stock, tinned tomatoes and tomato paste. Return the chicken to the pan. Put on the lid and cook at 180C for 35 minutes. Check that the chicken is cooked through. If you're including spinach or pitted olives, add them to the pan now, until wilted or heated through.
4. Serve with crusty bread.

Ideal drink for the dish

■ **Noster Nobilis**,

Asda, £6.98

■ **Sainsbury's**

Taste the Difference

Priorat, £10

The Spanish wine region of Priorat is known for powerful, high-alcohol reds, which are slowly becoming more available and affordable.



Churros and Chocolate

Makes approximately 30

- ½ tsp salt
- 200g strong white flour
- ¼ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 260ml water at around 70C
- 400ml sunflower, for frying
- A thermometer and a piping bag

For the dipping sauce

- 100g dark (70%) chocolate, chopped
- 120ml double cream

1. Whisk the salt, bicarbonate of soda and flour in a bowl. Add the water and whisk quite vigorously so there are no lumps.
2. Leave to sit in the bowl while you prepare the oil.
3. Heat the oil in a small saucepan and bring the temperature to 180C (use the thermometer).
4. Spoon the dough into a piping bag (use a star nozzle if you want ridges). Twist the piping bag and hold with one hand. Gently squeeze out the dough to a 5cm piece and snip with scissors into the oil, frying in small batches.
5. Fry for a couple of minutes and then turn over with tongs and cook until golden brown. Drain on paper

**Pudding
of the
Month**



towels and keep the churros in a warm oven.

6. There's no strict shape for churros. Snipping them into the hot oil in lines is the easiest way to get started. Once you get the hang of it, you can try piping them into other shapes, such as the horseshoes shown above.
7. For the dipping sauce, place the chopped chocolate into a heat-proof bowl. Bring the double cream to a simmer in a saucepan, then pour over the chocolate. Let it sit for one minute to let the chocolate melt, then stir to combine. Serve the churros immediately, accompanied by the sauce.

Delightful Dunking

CHEF MILL TAYLOR, whose family live in Andalusia, remembers churros dunked in chocolate in her new book

Party-Perfect Treats: "It was a weekend treat for us as kids," she says. "Now I'll happily order them on my own and sneak a dunk into my café con leche."

Although tastes might vary, dunking is universal. Novelist Marcel Proust found that eating a piece of tea-soaked cake gave him an "exquisite pleasure" that evoked a happy childhood memory. For others, a "Proustian moment" might be stirred by a digestive biscuit plunged into a mug of weak tea, or a Hovis soldier dunked into a cup of tomato soup. In the US, it's more likely to be an Oreo cookie dipped in a glass of milk, while in India it might be a cake rusk soaked in warm masala chai. ■

Party-Perfect Bites is available for just £11.99 until the end of February. Call 01256 302 699 and quote GLR L4L



BOOK



The Cookbook Book, £22.75. Beautiful anthology of cookbooks from the past century.

BARGAIN



Tickets are free for **Rye Bay Scallop Week**, February 21–March 1. Visit scallop.org.uk

BLOW-OUT



AGA CITY60, £4,995. At just 60cm wide, this two-door Aga is perfect for smaller homes.



CREATE A SPANISH CHEESEBOARD

If you're having two cheeses, then go for a hard and a soft—for instance, a Manchego and a Canarejal Cremoso. If you're having three, then add a blue cheese, such as a Cabrales or a Valdeon Blue. The key to an authentic Spanish cheeseboard is in the garnishes. Honey, walnuts and figs are all welcome additions.

BY ALISON
CORK



Home and interiors expert Alison Cork runs luxury furniture and accessories brands alison athome.com and homeware clearance site oneregentplace.co.uk

Sleeping Beauty

Alison answers your questions on transforming your bedroom into a paradise

Q I'm looking to overhaul my bedroom entirely, but don't know where to begin. Do I find a wall colour first, or should I choose accessories I love and go from there?

A Our bedrooms are like private sanctuaries, and there's nothing better than coming home after a long day to a gorgeous and comfortable paradise.

The most important thing is to have a plan. I would begin with finding a colour scheme—whether it's earthy tones, neutral creams or dark shades, figure out what you love and settle on a few variations of that.

Next, I would recommend looking at the walls. Do you want wallpaper, a feature wall or one plain colour? Once this is established, it's time to bring furnishings and fun decorations into the mix.

Gardeners' Diary

You may feel like staying inside, but now's the perfect time to take care of some crucial jobs.

- Wrap insulation such as garden fleece around plants, pots and taps to protect them from frost.
- Cover your vegetable and fruit crops with netting to stop hungry birds.
- Help prepare the soil for spring by digging over existing beds and borders.



© GARY K SMITH/ALAMY



Q My bedroom is very small and my current furniture is rather bulky. What pieces would you recommend to give the appearance of space?

A There are a number of options you can go for to utilise space and create a beautiful look. Glass furniture is one trend that's really catching on. Whether you go for a glass side table or desk, it's sure to create the right illusion.

When it comes to your bed, it can be hard to downsize in order to make room for drawers. Thankfully you can purchase bed frames with in-built storage space underneath. This allows you plenty of room for clothes and shoes, without having to sacrifice a comfortable night's sleep. Finally, choosing a neutral-toned colour scheme for your walls adds instant space. Pick one shade you like and play with the same tones throughout your room.

ROMANTIC GESTURES

Transform your boudoir with lush pieces and elegant touches in the vein of your dream Valentine's Day hotel room.

Wonderwall

Beautiful wallpaper can be found in many stunning hotels. With a nod to past trends, the right wallpaper can add a classic appearance to any room. If you're hesitant to make a full commitment, opt for a feature wall. *Northern Rose, £20 per roll, grahambrown.com*



Making light touches

Soft lighting is both romantic and practical. Introduce small reading lights and lamps to your bedside or dressing table. *Ceramic Table Lamp, £100, houseoffraser.co.uk*

Sumptuous seating

Occasional chairs can instantly elevate a room's appearance—especially when the colour offsets the look of your bedding. A relatively plain duvet invites a frivolous pop of colour, like the *Kubrick Wing Back Chair, £349, made.com*



Get The Look: Boutique Hotel Chic

Create a luxurious look in your bedroom or guest room with greys uplifted with yellow and silver touches



1



2



3

4



5



1. Individual Rare Breed Sheepskin, from £50, thefabulousfleececompany.co.uk

2. Terrace Bedside Table, £259, westelm.co.uk

3. Fermoie cushions, from £70, fermoie.com

4. Blake Headboard, £495, sweetpeaandwillow.com

5. Selkirk Lamp by The Libra Company, £303, artisanti.com 

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£20
ON YOUR
FIRST ORDER**



COTSWOLD CLASSICS

Prepare your home for the year ahead and invest in real solid wood furniture from The Cotswold Company. The pictured Langley Pine king bedroom set features a number of elegant and superbly crafted furnishings ideal for any home. From the three drawer pine bedside cabinet to the four drawer chest, there are plenty of options to create your dream look.

■ **Save £20 on your first order of £200 or more. To browse the range and to order, visit cotswoldcompany.com or call 033 00402104 and use code BEDROOM1 before February 27.**

A STYLISH ADDITION FOR ANY BEDROOM

Warm mahogany, a traditional silhouette and beautiful scroll detailing combine to make Anderson Bradshaw's sleigh bed a timeless piece. The good news is that this stunning bed comes at a very surprising price – just £555 for a king-size, with super-king, double and single sizes also available. Readers benefit from an exclusive 15 per cent discount, reducing the king to only £472. You can also choose from three wood finishes: light, medium or rich mahogany.

■ **Call 01420 562 645 or visit andersonbradshaw.co.uk and quote RD0215 before February 28 to claim your offer. Beds are made to order in 12 weeks with a limited number available immediately from stock.**



Shake Up Your Drinks Cabinet

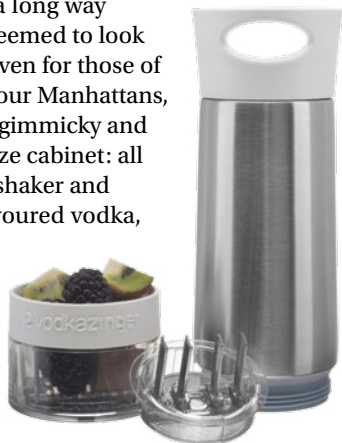
BY OLLY MANN



Ollly is a technology expert, LBC presenter and Answer Me This! podcaster

VODKA ZINGER, £24.99

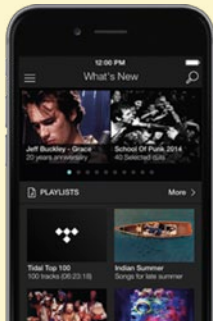
Cocktails have certainly come a long way since my youth, when they all seemed to look and taste like Toilet Duck. But even for those of us who know our Mojitos from our Manhattans, bartending gadgets can seem a gimmicky and unwelcome addition to the booze cabinet: all you really require, after all, is a shaker and some ice. Making your own flavoured vodka, however, has got to be worth a punt. Add fresh ingredients to the bottom chamber, add vodka to the top, and hey presto—coriander vodka! Or perhaps melon, if you must be so predictable.



ANDROID APP OF THE MONTH: TIDAL

£20 A MONTH

Until now, if you wanted music in high-fidelity, you had to buy the CD. That's because music was sold in a pre-broadband era, compressed MP3



format. With fewer size restrictions nowadays, Tidal have stepped in with a streaming jukebox, proffering 25 million tracks, all in 1411kbps hi-fidelity. You'll need decent speakers to hear the difference, though.

APPLE IMAC WITH 5K RETINA DISPLAY FROM £1,999

At first glance, this new iMac looks much like last year's model, but that's the genius of it: Apple have somehow managed to double the resolution of the screen, yet encase it within the same gorgeous aluminium shell as last year, which is only 5mm thick. *And* it now runs on 30% less power. The drawback, as ever, is the price, but let's not compare Apples with, er, oranges: though it's expensive, it's still more affordable than buying a cheaper PC and a separate 5K monitor.



MOTHER, £249.99

For years we've been told so-called "smart" appliances are the future—fridges that tell you when you're out of milk, that sort of thing—but in truth nobody wants to throw out their perfectly serviceable "dumb" appliances without good cause. Mother allows you to convert existing household objects into smart appliances by attaching one of four sensors to them and tracking the activity via a central hub. For example, discover whether your kids have used their toothbrush today, or how many times the cat has used the litter tray. What you do with that information isn't entirely clear.



APPLE APP OF THE MONTH

EUAN'S GUIDE, FREE

Founded by Londoner Euan MacDonald, who has motor neurone disease and uses a wheelchair, this city-guide app allows you to search for venues and, based on user reviews, deduce just how good its disabled access is. For example, see if there are steps from the car park, if induction loops are installed for deaf visitors, or even if the disabled loos are regularly cleaned. ■



BY GEORGINA
YATES



Georgina is a fashion and beauty editor for numerous travel titles and a blogger at cargocollective.com/withgeorgia

Family Values

FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE of looking after three young children and maintaining a liveable income, parents Susan and Paul Johnson started up St Kitts Herbery, a scent-led cosmetics company whose products put to use the healing properties of herbs and essential oils. It began humbly on the kitchen table, with products such as potpourri, soaps and herb pillows being sold from the living room.



"It was a challenge at times, but it gave us the chance to spend time together while also giving the children great experience," says Susan.

After their first big break,

Winter Blues

Electric blues were featured throughout many designers' A/W collections. Here's how to incorporate this winter's blues into your wardrobe.

1. East's felted wool swing jacket will add a pop of eye-catching colour to wintery ensembles (£89; east.co.uk).
2. Include bright blue into your daytime look with this patterned dress (£59; boden.co.uk).
3. Sweep a line of blue along your lids for a bold look (£4.79; barrym.com).





orders came in from major establishments and the family had to move off the kitchen table and into a studio. A decade on, the kids have key roles in the business.

"The best bit about being able to provide work for our children is that they've had the opportunity to discover their strengths while helping St Kitts Herbery grow and succeed," says Susan.

The family still do everything themselves, from mixing to labelling. Slow and steady has won the race so far, and I expect to see St Kitts as a nationally recognised brand soon.

■ Visit stkittsherbery.co.uk for details



FRESH FACED

With the end of the cold season nigh, it's time for a spring cleanse.

Exfoliate

Use an exfoliating wash to scrub away built-up layers of dead skin cells. I love **St Ives Apricot Invigorating Scrub** (£3.99; superdrug.com). The exfoliating beads are tough without being too scratchy.



Replenish

This moisture-boosting serum that's gentle on freshly exfoliated skin.

Kiehl's' Hydro-Plumping Re-Texturizing Serum Concentrate (£40;

kiehls.co.uk), from the brand's Dermatologist Solutions range, is both light in texture and wonderfully refreshing too.

Protect

In winter we wear thicker clothing, so why not use more resilient skincare products?

The Eight Hour Cream Moisturiser for Face

(£30; boots.com) keeps skin hydrated without feeling too heavy.



Irresistibly Charming

OPERATING FROM A SMALL WORKSHOP in south London, Alex Monroe began his jewellery-making business in 1986. His work has since become one of the most desired in the capital. Monroe's inspiration is taken from the British countryside. His intricate sketches of flora, fauna and wildlife are skillfully transformed into detailed pieces of jewellery.

Perhaps his most famous item is his bumblebee necklace, a lifelike model of a bee with its wings spread, which has been spotted adorning the necks of Sienna Miller and



Emma Watson. I love the typically British and whimsical nature of his designs—a perfect gift for a special occasion. ■

■ Visit alexmonroe.com for details



A FRAGRANT VALENTINE'S

Fragrance house Maison Francis Kurkdjian Paris gathers roses from around the world to create an exclusive Valentine's scent that's whimsical and utterly feminine.

À La Rose (£145; franciskurkdjian.com) magically encapsulates what this flower symbolises, making it a different (but equally lovely) kind of bouquet to give to a special someone this year.





Clarence 3 seater sofa
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A skillfully told insight into family life and a weird and wonderful tale of embarking on an adventure

February Fiction

BY JAMES
WALTON



James writes and presents the BBC Radio 4 literary quiz The Write Stuff

A Spool of Blue Thread

by Anne Tyler (Chatto, £18.99; ebook, £9.99)

As we mark 50 years since Anne Tyler's first novel was published in Britain, we can expect plenty of articles about the woman both Roddy Doyle and Nick Hornby have called "the greatest novelist writing in English".

Even Tyler's biggest fans, mind you, can't claim that her range is wide. Her novels are invariably set in her home town of Baltimore and are invariably about family life. Yet not only do they make an overwhelming case for Tyler's belief that families are what most define us, they also trace the minutiae of each family's life. More sceptical readers, meanwhile, have suggested that some of the minutiae can be a little *too* minute.

It's a debate unlikely to be settled by *A Spool of Blue Thread*. Once again, Tyler unpicks the relationships within a Baltimore family with enormous skill, evident affection and moments of spikiness ("like most families, they imagined they were special"). The detail, though, can occasionally feel



NAME THE AUTHOR

(Answer on p128)

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

1. He named the main character in one of his most famous books

after his granddaughter, who later became famous too.

2. He himself was named after a Norwegian explorer.

3. He was, appropriately, an expert in the history of chocolate.

excessive, especially on the kind of logistics that may well dominate real life, but aren't necessarily much fun to read about.



We Are Pirates
by Daniel Handler
(Bloomsbury, £16.99;
ebook, £14.99)

Daniel Handler is better known as Lemony Snicket, whose *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

became a huge children's hit, with its mix of black comedy, compassion for the underdog and gothic violence—all done in a winningly deadpan style. Here, he brings the same blend to fiction for grown-ups.

Gwen is 14 and living in San Francisco where, in the customary teenage way, she's yearning to escape from a life over which she has little control. Then again, she's not the only one. Her dad Phil is up to his eyes in financial anxieties. There's also Errol, an old man living in a local residential home as senility closes in and whose tales of the sea inspire Gwen to gather a pirate crew and set sail...

What follows is certainly a weird mish-mash of the realistic and the fantastical, the comic and the tragic—but it's by no means a casual one. After you finish the book, you realise how carefully it's been put together, and how successfully it achieves its aim of reminding us of the sheer (and inescapable) oddness of modern life.

PAPERBACKS

■ **A Pleasure and a Calling** by Phil Hogan (Black Swan, £7.99).

Funny but creepy thriller about a small-town estate agent who takes full advantage of having so many people's house keys...

■ **You Made Me Late Again!** by Pam Ayres (Ebury, £7.99).

Latest collection from the much-loved poet.

■ **A Perfect Heritage** by Penny Vincenzi (Headline Review, £7.99). Another thumping read from the queen of the blockbuster.

■ **The Mighty Dead: Why Homer Matters** by Adam Nicolson (William Collins, £9.99).

Brilliant account of how *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were written—and of their 4,000-year influence.

■ **Coming Up Trumps** by Jean Trumpton (Pan, £7.99).

From Bletchley Park to a New York advertising agency during

the "Mad Men" era, and from being a minister under Mrs Thatcher to the oldest ever guest on *Have I Got News For You?*, Baroness Trumpington looks back entertainingly on a remarkable life.



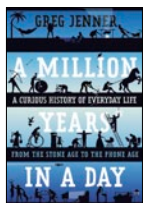
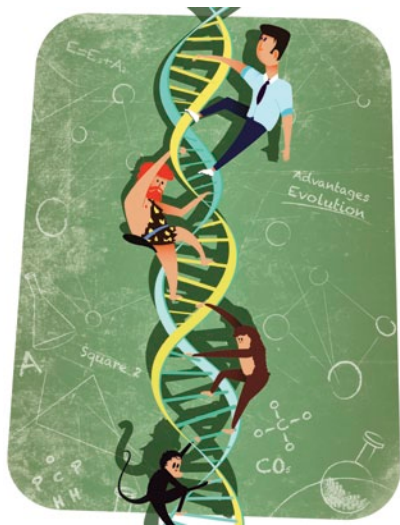
RD'S RECOMMENDED READ

Understand yourself a little better with this fascinating and funny look at the evolution of everyday behaviours

The Making of Modern Man

THE IDEA BEHIND GREG JENNER'S NEW BOOK is so good that you might find daily life feels far more interesting than it did before you read it. He goes through the events of a typical modern Saturday, and shows at every stage how much we owe the things we take for granted to millennia of human history.

The book begins with waking up at 9.30am (Jenner, you sense, may not have children) and a brief account of how we came to measure time the way we do. In Ancient Egypt, for example, hours varied in length according to the seasons. Then it's off to the toilet for a rather hair-raising reminder of what a communal activity



A Million Years in a Day: A Curious History of Everyday Life from the Stone Age to the Phone Age by Greg Jenner is published by

Weidenfeld & Nicolson at £14.99; ebook, £7.99. A special price of £12.99 is available to readers: simply call 01903 828 503 and quote PB116.

the Romans made of the business, chatting away as they sat side by side on long benches. Breakfast time includes the information that three meals a day is a comparatively modern habit, which began only in the 18th century when artificial light made for later bedtimes.

And so the book goes on: through newspapers, communications with friends (the world now contains more SIM cards than people), the largely unchanged importance of alcohol,

and plenty more besides. And all the time it mixes its breezy style with an impressive depth of knowledge that Jenner has also put to use as historical consultant to the all-conquering *Horrible Histories* TV series. But we join him here, for this slightly edited extract, in the shower...

“ Having washed our hair, and bellowed the lyrics to “I Will Survive”, we reach for the fruit-scented body gel. This, on the face of it, is a very modern way to wash. Since the Bronze Age, most people had scrubbed themselves with little more than water and herbs, or soap made of ashes and animal fats, and the Romans and Greeks preferred to oil themselves. The hard soap cake made from olive oil was a medieval Islamic invention, entering Europe through Moorish Spain, which is how it became known as Castile soap.

Yet this remained a luxury item until the industrialisation of the 19th century. At London's Great Exhibition in 1851 soaps abounded, some even gently perfumed, an enticing novelty at the time. Some contained chemicals like arsenic to whiten the skin, but the medal-winning Pears Soap was much less abrasive, and is still the oldest continuously marketed brand in history, having been founded in 1789 by a hairdresser called Andrew Pears.

The Great Exhibition attests to an already-simmering rivalry between

RD EXCLUSIVE: GREG JENNER'S FAVOURITE HISTORY BOOKS



***Rubicon* by Tom Holland (2003)**

This account of Julius Caesar and the downfall of

Rome's Republic is a masterpiece of dynamic history writing.

***The Face of Battle* by John Keegan (1976)** An absolute classic! Keegan explores the terror and courage of ordinary soldiers in some of history's most famous battles.

***At Home: A Short History of Private Life* by Bill Bryson (2010)** This domestic history is wonderfully intimate, but with a grand scope. Such balance was a big inspiration for my own book.

***Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* by Simon Schama (1989)** My mother is French, and reading *Citizens* as a teenager was a very sobering experience.

***Pompeii: the Life of a Roman Town* by Mary Beard (2008)** Professor Beard doesn't just enthuse about what we know of Pompeii, but also interrogates the evidence to reveal what we don't. Her blend of scepticism and accessibility is unrivalled.

producers, but in 1898 a high-quality soap made from a combination of palm and olive oil was introduced. Its name was Palmolive, and it sold like hot cakes (or is that soap cakes?),

pressure in marketing. Yet Odorono's sales soared and many other adverts began flogging miracle cures to anxious women—but none with catchphrases as marvellously



Smearing our skin in sweet-smelling plant extracts is exactly how chimpanzees mask their bodily odour

kick-starting a ferocious soap war, as everyone realised there was a goldmine to be plundered from the Victorian obsession with cleanliness.

The companies also looked to expand their product-range, and deodorants appeared in the 1880s. But these worked in a very simplistic way by trying to shut the pores with wax, and the real breakthrough came in 1907 when a surgeon invented a deodorant based on aluminium chloride. Having dubbed it Odorono (as in 'odour, oh no!'), he allowed his daughter to market the product exclusively to ladies. Her masterstroke was to deploy advertising focused on the dread of public embarrassment.

It was a brutal campaign, one of the earliest deployments of paranoia

monstrous as Odorono's 1926 slogan: 'The ugly half-moon stain under her arms means a woman just doesn't belong.'

As the 20th century progressed, one obvious repercussion of the epic battles for customer loyalty was the naming of the TV 'soap opera' in honour of the dominance of soap adverts during these popular shows. A more subtle result was a dramatic shift in human behaviour towards not just cleanliness, but artificial sensory identity. Whereas once we smelled of sweat and dirt, our hands now give off a waft of lavender and our hair smells of jojoba and coconut, to the point that it's easy to forget what we naturally smell like beneath the creams, moisturisers, deodorants and shampoos.

The irony is that washing in water and then smearing our skin in sweet-smelling fruits and plant extracts is exactly how wild chimpanzees mask their bodily odour. Millions of years may have passed, but it seems we're still animals at heart.



AND THE NAME OF THE AUTHOR IS...

Roald Dahl, uncle of model Sophie, and author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Books

THAT CHANGED MY LIFE



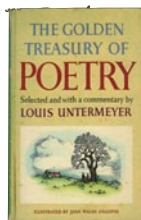
Allie Esiri is the “poetry powerhouse” behind the romantic anthology *The Love Book*, also available as an app with readings by actors such as Helena Bonham Carter, Damian Lewis and Emma Watson

The Golden Treasury of Poetry

SELECTED BY

LOUIS UTERMAYER

I wasn't a great reader of novels as a child, but I loved this anthology of poems. I may not have understood all of them—it's only recently that poetry has been written specifically for children—but I enjoyed how they touched on grown-up subjects, such as death or war, in an emotional and powerful way. This book is one of the reasons why I compile poetry anthologies myself.



Frost in May

BY ANTONIA WHITE

This was the first Virago Modern Classic and it led me to all the great women writers that Virago published. A novel based on White's time in a Catholic boarding school in 1908, the story gripped me like no other. Here



was a whole new, sometimes scary, world where the protagonist Nanda discovers literature—just like me. At school my friends all passed this book around. There was a sense we were discovering ourselves as women (it helped that the BBC version starred a young Daniel Day-Lewis).

No One Writes to the Colonel

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

As White led me to great women writers, so Márquez led me to the Latin American writers. This novella, about a poor colonel and his wife living under martial law in Colombia, was the first course book I read at university, where I studied French and Spanish. I also loved Carlos Fuentes and Borges—Fuentes came to Cambridge to give some lectures during my time there, which was more exciting to me than if the Rolling Stones had turned up. ■
As told to Caroline Hutton



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I ORDERED A FOOT-LONG ROLL

from a sandwich bar in town for myself and my friends. There were four of us, so we decided one long roll would be cheaper than buying four individual ones.

I asked the assistant, "Would you cut it into four, please?"

"I can't do that," he replied.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I've already cut it in half," he said.

CATHERINE HISCOX, Hertfordshire

OUR CLOSE FRIEND, an expecting single mum, came to live with myself and my husband so she could save some money for rent and bills while she was pregnant.

Just two months afterwards, I also fell pregnant. When Christmas came, our neighbours organised a party for couples in the area. My friend and I were ballooning by that time, and when my husband read the invitation his face was brick red.

At the end it said, "P.S. Please bring only one wife."

CHRISTINE MANEJERO, Stockton-on-Tees



"Shooting arrows is old hat. The future is hacking into dating websites"

MY NEWLY-RETIRED HUSBAND

was watching as I went about my daily routine. I hoovered, cleaned, ironed and sorted the laundry, and after making us both a cup of coffee, I sat down. Hubby looked at me thoughtfully. Was he finally realising he could help, I wondered?

My hopes were dashed when he said, "Isn't it wonderful how you always manage to find ways to keep yourself so busy?"

LUCY GRACE, West Yorkshire

MY BROTHER HAD JUST MOVED HOUSE and I went over to check out his new pad. As I pulled up, I saw my nephews were playing in the street with their new friends.

"Hi kids," I called. "Is your dad in?"

"Yeah, he's around somewhere," they shouted back.

The front door was open, so I marched in and flopped onto the sofa. I picked up the TV remote and channel-hopped for the footy results.

After a minute or two, a woman came through from the hallway, looked me up and down, and said, "All right," and nodded, before going into the kitchen.

She walked back past me a minute later and went upstairs before coming back downstairs with a chap.

"All right," I said.

"All right," they both replied, and disappeared into the kitchen.

I heard them whispering before coming back into the lounge.

"Do you know where my brother is?" I asked. "I'm Roger."

"Do you mean Alan?" the woman said. "He lives next door."

ROGER SCOTT, *Isle of Wight*

I CAN NO LONGER CARRY OUT any maintenance around the home now that I'm in my 80th year, so recently I've paid a local handyman to do small jobs such as mending leaking taps, changing light bulbs and so on.

The other day I found I needed his

services again, so I wrote him a note asking him to call over and walked round to his home to put it through his letter box.

Stuck on his front door was a scruffy piece of paper with a note written on it: "Please knock, bell not working!"

BARRY COPPOCK, *Kent*

I WAS LEAVING MY LOCAL SPORTS CENTRE one evening when I noticed a miniature whiskey bottle on a chair. The receptionist informed me that the lost-property clerk wasn't on duty, then continued working away on her computer.

Concerned, I left a message on the noticeboard with my contact details, and took the bottle with me. The following evening, an anxious caller asked if I'd drunk any of the contents.

"Why are you so concerned?" I said.

"It's my urine specimen," he replied.

JILL COHEN, *Leeds*

MY FRIENDS WERE TALKING ABOUT THEIR RECENT TRIP to Amsterdam when the famous "red-light district" was mentioned. One of their refreshingly naive teenage sons asked what this was.

"Well, you know, son—ladies of ill repute," said the boy's dad.

"Pardon?" was the reply.

"The brothels, son," his dad explained to him.

"Oh, is that where they make the soup?" the young lad enquired.

JANET CUNNINGHAM, *London*

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NEW
UPDATED
VERSION

Discover which hearing aid best fits your hearing needs, by comparing 237 of the latest hearing aids. Written in plain straightforward English, this 24 page guide explains all you need to know about digital hearing aids.

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- ✓ Signs of hearing loss
- ✓ Types of hearing loss
- ✓ Choosing your hearing aids
- ✓ Advanced digital hearing aids
- ✓ Premium digital hearing aids
- ✓ The hearing test - what's involved
- ✓ Tips for better communication
- ✓ When two hearing aids are better than one

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DIGITAL HEARING AID ADVICE CENTRE



IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

Word Power

A wave of our wand and presto! We conjure a page of magical words and phrases. Step right up and test your vocabulary—then transport yourself to the next page, where we reveal the answers.

BY EMILY COX & HENRY RATHVON

1. levitate ('le-vih-tayt)

v—A: float in defiance of gravity.

B: weave spells. C: disappear.

2. clairvoyant (klayr-'voy-ent)

adj—A: in a trance. B: ghostly.

C: seeing beyond ordinary perception.

3. planchette (plan-'shet)

n—A: sorcerer's cloak. B: Ouija-

board pointer. C: mischievous fairy.

4. mojo ('moh-jo)

n—A: book of secrets. B: magical

spell. C: mantra.

5. voilà (vwah-'lah)

interj—A: "Begone!" B: "There it is!"

C: "Open!"

6. whammy ('wa-mee)

n—A: trapdoor. B: illusion. C: hex or curse.

7. soothsaying ('sooth-say-ing)

n—A: prophecy. B: recitation of chants. C: revelation of a trick.

8. mesmerised ('mez-meh-riydz)

adj—A: sawed in half. B: hypnotised.

C: turned to pixie dust.

9. telekinetic (te-leh-kih-'neh-tik)

adj—A: predicting the future.

B: calling on ghosts. C: using mind over matter.

10. augur ('ah-ger)

v—A: serve as an omen. B: bend a

spoon without touching it. C: chant in a monotone.

11. shaman ('shah-men)

n—A: fake psychic. B: healer using magic. C: genie in a bottle.

12. occult (uh-'khult)

adj—A: sinister. B: miraculous.

C: secret.

13. invoke (in-'vohk)

v—A: transform. B: use ventriloquism.

C: summon up, as spirits.

14. sibyl ('si-buhl)

n—A: séance. B: fortune-teller.

C: black cat.

15. pentagram ('pen-ta-gram)

n—A: elixir. B: five-pointed star.

C: enchanted staff.

Answers

1. levitate—[A] float in defiance of gravity. “Michael attributed his apparent ability to *levitate* to supernatural powers.”

2. clairvoyant—[C] seeing beyond ordinary perception. “As a bookie, I find being *clairvoyant* really helps me predict the races.”

3. planchette—[B] Ouija-board pointer. “My *planchette* just spelled out, ‘You’re too gullible.’”

4. mojo—[B] magical spell. “I’ve got my *mojo* working, but I still can’t charm Angelina.”

5. voilà—[B] There it is! “As he threw back the curtain, Houdini cried, ‘*Voilà!*’”

6. whammy—[C] hex or curse. “After the gypsy placed a *whammy* on Tom, he fell into the duck pond three times.”

7. soothsaying—[A] prophecy. “If Joe is so good at *soothsaying*, why does he always lose when playing poker?”

8. mesmerised—[B] hypnotised. “Since meeting Jenny, Jonathan

has been stumbling around as though *mesmerised*.”

9. telekinetic—[C] using mind over matter. “Chloe employs her *telekinetic* powers to make the bin empty itself.”

10. augur—[A] serve as an omen. “A flat tyre on the first day surely *augurs* ill for our holiday.”

11. shaman—[B] healer using magic. “The local *shaman* recited a few incantations to heal my broken nose.”

12. occult—[C] secret. “I was poring over an *occult* black-magic text.”

13. invoke—[C] summon up, as spirits. “While studying ancient Rome, I tried to *invoke* the ghost of Caesar to appear before me.”

14. sibyl—[B] fortune-teller. “My apprehension grew as the *sibyl* looked into her crystal ball and winced.”

15. pentagram—[B] five-pointed star. “David said his spells don’t work unless he traces a *pentagram* with his wand.”

WORD OF THE DAY*

MIASMA: a heavy vapour or fog.

Alternative suggestions:

“A beautiful lady with smelly armpits.”

“The continued existence of my father’s wife.”

“A breathing problem that affects Yorkshire people—‘I can’t walk up the stairs cos of miasma.’”

VOCABULARY RATINGS

9 & below: Obtuse

10–12: Well-rounded

13–15: Full circle

JANUARY SALE NOW ON



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BrainTeasers

Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 139.

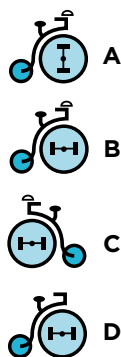
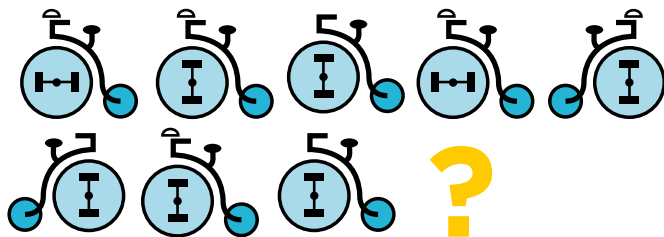
NUMBER SEARCH

The number 13579 appears just once in this word-search-style grid and occurs in a straight line, running either backward or forward in either a horizontal, vertical or diagonal direction. Can you locate it?

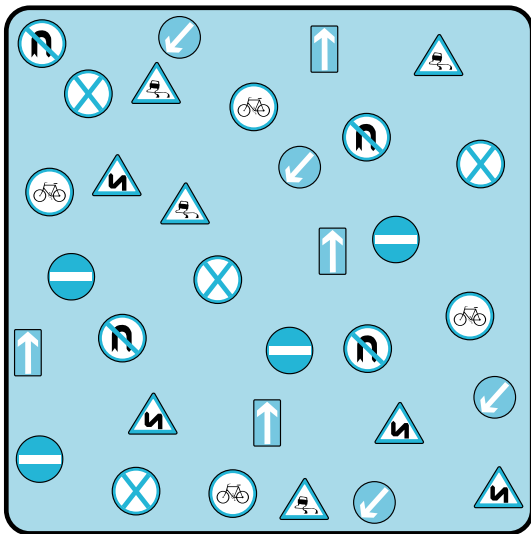
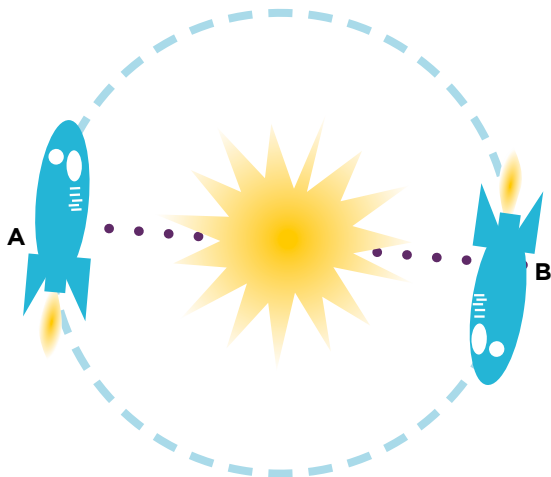
1	3	5	9	7	9	3	1	7	5	3	1
3	9	5	3	1	5	7	9	3	1	5	9
5	1	7	1	1	1	3	5	9	7	1	7
3	5	1	3	5	9	7	1	5	9	3	5
9	7	5	3	9	7	1	3	9	3	5	1
1	9	3	5	7	9	1	5	3	7	9	3
9	3	7	9	5	1	3	9	1	3	7	5
5	5	9	5	3	7	5	1	9	1	5	9
7	9	5	7	1	3	9	7	5	9	1	7
9	7	3	1	7	9	5	3	1	5	7	9
9	7	1	1	3	5	1	1	3	7	9	1
9	7	5	9	7	9	5	3	1	9	5	9

BICYCLES

Which of the four boxed figures completes the set?



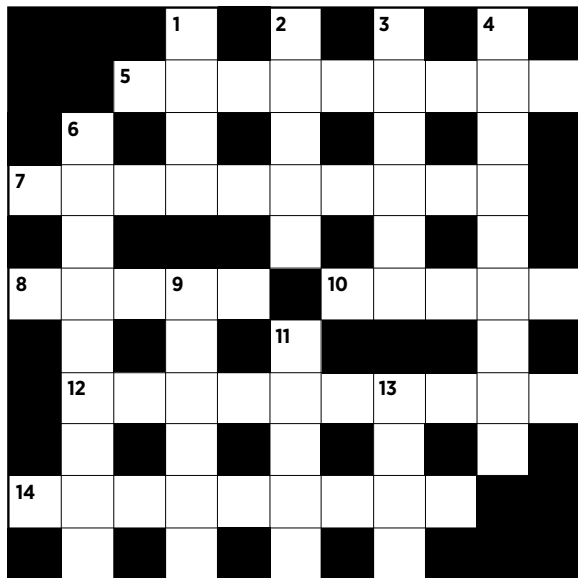
These two rockets are on a collision course in the same orbit around the sun. Rocket A is taking 15 months to orbit the sun, while Rocket B makes an orbit every 12 months. How long do the scientists have to reprogramme the rockets before they crash?



Can you divide this picture by drawing three straight lines to produce four sections, each containing eight different traffic signs?

CONCISE CROSSWORD

Fill in the missing word or words in each sentence to solve the clues to this crossword



DOWN

- 1 He gave an _____ performance in that film (4)
- 2 The _____ in the crown (5)
- 3 Fiona is having a _____ party for all her friends (6)
- 4 Drew _____ is my favourite actress (9)
- 6 Beware—a compass needle doesn't point to _____ (4,5)
- 9 You really know your _____! (6)
- 11 I always cry when _____'s mother dies in the Disney film (5)

- 13 Electrical resistance is measured in _____ (4)

ACROSS

- 5 Edam cheese is _____ in shape (9)
- 7 Please take my suit to the _____ (3,7)
- 8 _____ is famous for his fables (5)
- 10 That's why the lady is a _____ (5)
- 12 I've never used a _____ because the occult scares me (5,5)
- 14 The naughty boys threw a smelly _____ over the fence (5,4)

- ACROSS:**
- 5 Spherical
 - 7 Dry cleaner
 - 8 Aesop
 - 10 Tramp
 - 12 Ouija board
 - 14 Stink bomb
- DOWN:**
- 1 Epic
 - 2 Jewel
 - 3 Dinner
 - 4 Barrymore
 - 6 True north
 - 9 Onions
 - 11 Bam!
 - 13 Ohms

ANSWERS

BrainTeasers: *Answers*

NUMBER SEARCH

1	3	5	9	7	9	3	1	7	5	3	1
3	9	5	3	1	5	7	9	3	1	5	9
5	1	7	1	1	1	3	5	9	7	1	7
3	5	1	3	5	9	7	1	5	9	3	5
9	7	5	3	9	7	1	3	9	3	5	1
1	9	3	5	7	9	1	5	3	7	9	3
9	3	7	9	5	1	3	9	1	3	7	5
5	9	5	3	7	5	1	9	1	5	9	1
7	9	5	7	1	3	9	7	5	9	1	7
9	7	3	1	7	9	5	3	1	5	7	9
9	7	1	1	3	5	1	1	3	7	9	1
9	7	5	9	7	9	5	3	1	9	5	9

BICYCLES

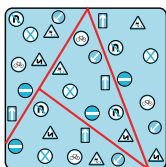
B. Each line contains two bikes facing left and one facing right. Each line contains two bells. Each line contains two vertical pedals. The missing picture must be a bike facing right, with horizontal pedals and a bell.



IN ORBIT

30 months. Rocket A travels $360 \div 15 = 24$ degrees around the circle every month. Rocket B travels $360 \div 12 = 30$ degrees around the circle every month. Hence, B gains on A by $30 - 24 = 6$ degrees every month. There are 180 degrees separating them at the beginning, so it will take $180 \div 6 = 30$ months (or 2.5 years) before they crash.

READING THE SIGNS



£50 PRIZE QUESTION

Answer published in the
March issue

Which of the boxed symbols completes the set?



A

B

C

D



The first correct answer we pick on February 5 wins £50!* Email excerpts@readersdigest.co.uk

ANSWER TO JANUARY'S PRIZE QUESTION

45. Add the number of dots on the front and side faces of each die, then multiply the answer by the number of dots on the top face.

AND THE £50 GOES TO...

Tony Clark, Hampshire

Laugh!

Win £50 for every reader's joke we publish! Go to readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us or facebook.com/readersdigestuk

HOW MANY MYSTERY WRITERS

does it take to change a light bulb?

Two. One to screw the bulb almost all the way in, and another to provide a surprising twist at the end.

TRACY DAVIDSON, *Warwickshire*

I KNOW THERE ARE PEOPLE who do not love their fellow man, and I hate people like that!

MUSICIAN TOM LEHRER

MY WIFE TOLD ME, "Sex is better on holiday."

That wasn't a very nice postcard to receive.

COMEDIAN JOE BOR

HAVING JUST MOVED INTO HIS NEW OFFICE in Whitehall, newly promoted Lieutenant Commander Rodney Grant was sitting at his desk when Leading Seaman Jones knocked on his door.

Particularly aware of his new position, the commander quickly picked up the phone, told Jones to enter, then said into the phone, "Yes, Admiral, I'll be seeing him

this afternoon and I'll pass along your message. In the meantime, thank you for your good wishes, sir."

Feeling as though he had sufficiently impressed young Jones, he asked, "What do you want?"

"Nothing important, sir," Jones replied, "I'm just here to connect up your new telephone."

GUY-SPORTS.COM

MY IMAGINARY FRIEND IS STAYING OVER TONIGHT, so I've made up a bed for him.

AS SEEN ONLINE

HONESTY MAY BE THE BEST POLICY but it's important to remember that, by elimination, dishonesty is the second-best policy.

COMEDIAN GEORGE CARLIN

A CHILD ASKED HIS FATHER, "How were people born?"

His dad said, "Adam and Eve made babies, then their babies became adults and made babies, and so on."

The child then went to his mother, asked her the same question and

she told him, "We were monkeys, then we evolved to become like we are now."

The child ran back to his father and said, "You lied to me!"

His father replied, "No, your mum was just talking about her side of the family."

LAUGHFACTORY.COM

MY NEIGHBOUR IS IN THE GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS.

He's had 44 concussions. He lives very close to me. A stone's throw away, in fact.

COMEDIAN STEWART FRANCIS

AT A NUDIST COLONY FOR INTELLECTUALS, two old men are sitting on the porch. One turns to the other and says "I say old boy, have you read Marx?"

The other says, "Yes, it's these stupid wicker chairs."

RYAN ROSWELL, *Norfolk*

I THINK IT'S WRONG that only one company makes the game Monopoly.

COMEDIAN STEVEN WRIGHT

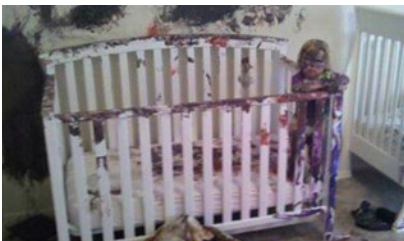
RAQUEL PICKED UP THE PHONE.

"Hi Sarah. Listen, I only have a minute," she said. "I'm about to get picked up for a blind date—can you call me in a half hour just in case it's going badly? Yes? OK, great!"

Raquel checked herself out one more time in the mirror and headed outside to wait for the guy. Sure enough, 20 minutes into the date,

PINT-SIZED PROBLEMS

You look away for *five seconds* and they've redecorated the place...
(from buzzfeed.com)



Raquel was discreetly checking her watch. After ten more long minutes her phone finally buzzed.

Raquel listened for a few seconds, grimly pursed her lips, and turned to her date, "I feel awful, but my grandmother is terribly sick and I must go home now."

"No problem!" said her date with a big grin. "In a few more minutes my dog was going to get run over!"

GREATCLEANJOKES.COM

DID YOU KNOW THAT TOWELS are the number one cause of dry skin?

SEEN ON THE INTERNET

THREE GUYS STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND find a magic lantern containing a genie, who grants them each one wish.

The first guy wishes he was off

the island and back home. The second guy wishes the same. The third guy says, "I'm lonely. I wish my friends were back here."

BLUEDONUT.COM

MY PAPER MANUFACTURING BUSINESS has folded seven times.

I'm pretty sure it can't happen again.

SEEN ON THE INTERNET

A LAWYER DIES AND GOES TO HEAVEN. "There must be some mistake," the lawyer argues. "I'm too young to die. I'm only 55."

"Fifty five?" says Saint Peter. "No, according to our calculations, you're 82."

"How do you get to that figure?" the lawyer asks.

"We added up your time sheets," answers St Peter.

BLUEDONUT.COM



TOP SURVIVAL TIPS

Twitter feed @TwopTwips gives some handy hints on getting through life:

Quickly learn how to tie a double hitch sheepshank knot by placing your headphones briefly into your pocket.

Meet women in your area by turning off your computer and walking out the door into the street.

Just before you go to sleep, quietly slip on a clown mask just in case your partner wakes in the night with hiccups.

Dog walker: avoid being mugged by putting all your valuables in a small, black plastic bag.

Beat the Cartoonist!



Think of a witty caption for this cartoon—the three best suggestions, along with the cartoonist's original, will be posted on our website in mid-February. If your entry gets the most votes, you'll win **£100 and a framed copy of the cartoon**, with your caption. Submit to captions@readersdigest.co.uk or online at readersdigest.co.uk/caption by February 13.

We'll announce the winner in our April issue.



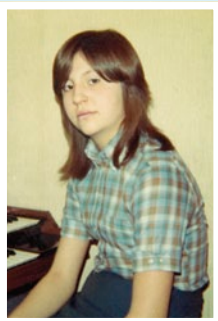
December's Winner

Cartoonist Steve Way's caption, "**Cool hipster beard, Santa!**" was a favourite in the office, but it's

the public vote that counts—and this time it was overwhelming. Reader Malcolm Brownless romped home with "**So you're the little boy who wanted a real-life Barbie doll.**" Smuttiness always wins out!

SCOREBOARD: READERS 28 CARTOONISTS 9

IN THE MARCH ISSUE



Jazz, My Dad And Me

Lynne Wallis describes how rediscovering the music of her youth helped her to establish an even closer bond with her father

Plus

- Drama: Escape to Europe
- Common Causes of Fatigue
- Sole Survivors of Plane Crashes Tell Their Stories

60-Second Stand-Up

We caught up with multi-talented comedian **Richard Herring**

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE OF YOUR OWN JOKES?

"To be or not to be. That is the first and only question on the University of Bee Keeping's entrance exam."

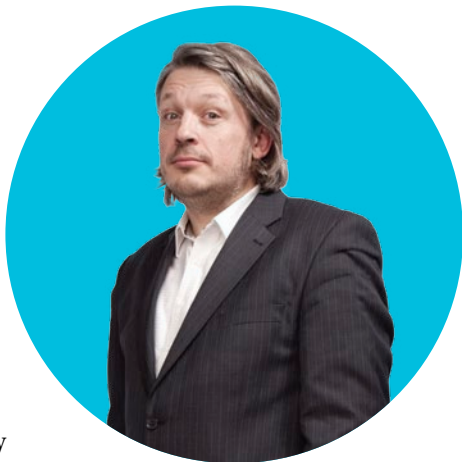
I like creating a world around a joke—and the idea that this university would not only exist, but their entry exam would be that easy...

IF YOU COULD BE A FLY ON THE WALL, WHOSE WOULD IT BE?

I'd like to be a fly on a wall of Amy Pond's character from *Doctor Who*. But if I was a fly, I wouldn't have any interest in her, would I? I'd be more interested in going on some poo or having sex with other flies.

IF YOU COULD HAVE A SUPER-POWER, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

It would be nice to travel anywhere through time, even within your own lifetime, like Sam Beckett in *Quantum Leap*. It would be nice to go back and spend one more day with those people who you enjoyed being with. So, travelling in time...but as a fly. Then I'd go and look at fly history... I don't even know if flies really understand the concept of time. You have to think very carefully when someone offers you a superpower.



WHO'S YOUR COMEDY INSPIRATION?

My granddad was the first person to teach me about jokes and make me laugh. And as a kid I was excited by the stuff Rik Mayall was doing around the time of *The Young Ones*. When he used to come on in his stand-up, he'd be able to get rolling, continuous laughter by just standing there saying, "What? What's so funny?" He was amazing. When he died, I realised how much he meant to me. ■

Richard is touring with *Lord of the Dance Settee* until June. For details and tickets, visit richardherring.com

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that's always true to you.



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**nice'n
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*Based on IRI Retail hair colour volume and value sales, July to date ©2015 P&G

Christina Hendricks is wearing Nice'n Easy 6R Natural Light Auburn

clairol.co.uk