

Reader's

MAY 2024

Digest



₹100



HOW TO GET A GREEN(ER) THUMB

PAGE 36

NATURE

The Curious Benefits of Getting Lost

PAGE 72

HEALTH

Relief for 'Tech Neck'

PAGE 28



BETTER LIVING

7 Days to a Digital Detox

PAGE 18

HEROES

Meet Kitt, the Courageous K-9

PAGE 60

BONUS READ

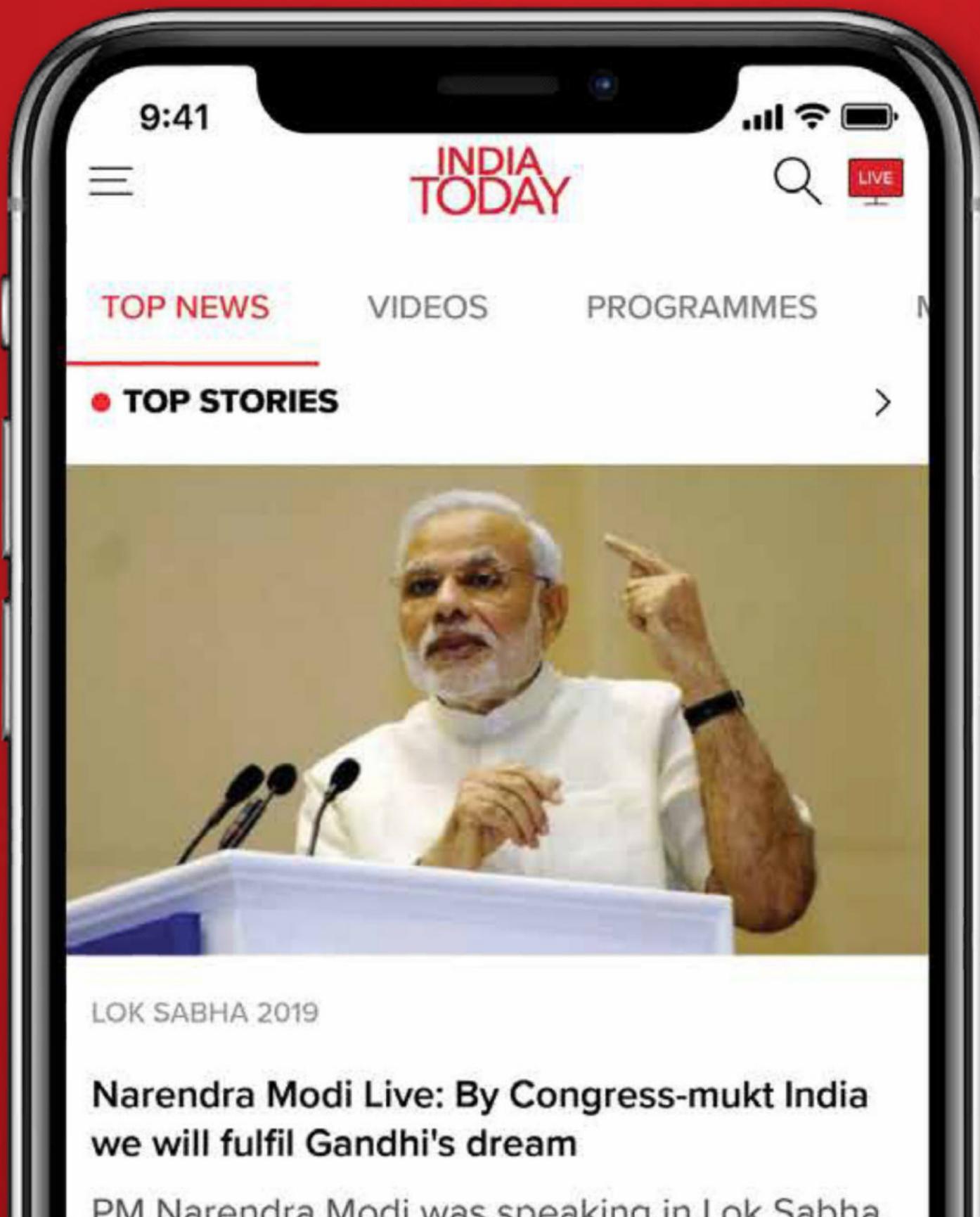
A Mother's Wrongful Conviction

PAGE 86

INDIA
TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

JUST A TAP AWAY



DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

AVAILABLE ON





देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है





Only The Best Of Outside Inside Your Home

Keep the Outside Outside... Forever



Your home is your sanctuary. Shield it from outside noise, dust, pollution and rain*. Switch to Fenesta and let only nature nourish your home and your life.

RANGE OF SOLUTIONS ▶ uPVC | Aluminium | Doors | Façades

Science@work



Fenesta

Better by Design

*T&C Apply.

Servicing 900 Cities | Call: 1800 102 9880 (Toll Free)

74286 91568 | Email: response@fenesta.com | Visit: www.fenesta.com

CONTENTS

Features

36

COVER STORY

HOW TO GET A GREEN(ER) THUMB

From what to plant where to how to water and how often, this quick beginner's guide full of expert advice will have you gardening like a pro.

BY JULIE LANE-GAY

44

HEALTH

My Stutter, Myself

If others don't notice my stutter, can I really call myself a stutterer?

BY ISABEL ARMIENTO

52

PHOTO ESSAY

As Gods Among Us

A photographer explores the gamut of India's ritual performers who embody deities as a unique form of worship.

BY KAI FRIESE

60

HERO PETS

Kitt, the Courageous K-9

An officer needed a partner. His dog needed a purpose. Together, they rescued each other.

BY DAVE WEDGE

72

NATURE

The Upside of Getting Lost

I was in the woods with my family and we'd lost our way. How could this possibly be a good thing?

BY LIANN BOBECHKO

80

TRAVEL

Have Child, Will Travel

Bringing my kid on my round-the-world adventures helped me see her in new and unexpected ways.

BY DIANE SELKIRK

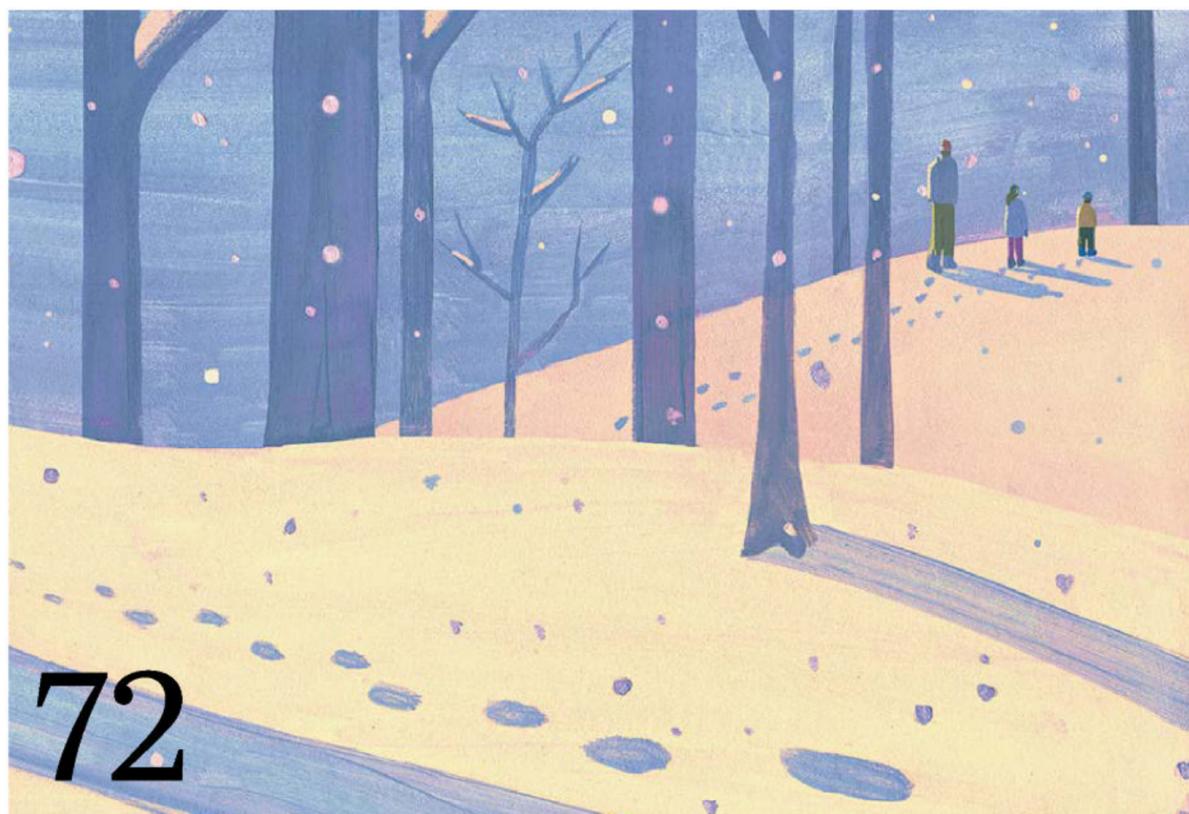
86

BONUS READ

A Mother's Conviction

After all four of Kathleen Folbigg's children died in infancy, a court found her guilty of murder. Twenty years later, science uncovered the truth.

BY SARAH TRELEAVEN



(THIS PAGE) ILLUSTRATION BY HOLLY STAPLETON



12

Departments

8 **Over to You**

A WORLD OF GOOD

11 **Flying High**

EVERYDAY HEROES

12 **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Modification**

BY CLAIRE SIBONNEY

SMILE

14 **Caught on Camera**

BY SAMIT BASU

GOOD NEWS

16 **From Plant Waste to Fabric, A Push to Criminalize Ecocide and More**

BY SAMANTHA RIDEOUT

IT HAPPENS ONLY IN INDIA

84 **To Smell a Rat, Flush and Flee, and the Marriage Mirage**

BY NAOREM ANUJA

QUOTABLE QUOTES

107 **Manmohan Singh, John Lubbock, Renuka Sahane Eeyore and More**

TRUSTED FRIEND

116 **Don't Bug Me by Valéry Goulet**

Better Living

LIFE WELL LIVED

18 **Life, Unplugged**

BY JULIEN BLANC-GRAS

HEALTH

26 **Eye Health Epidemic**

BY REBECCA GAO

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF MEDICINE

30 **Weightlifting for Better Skin, and More**

BY SAMANTHA RIDEOUT

13 THINGS

32 **Fast-Moving Facts About Driving**

BY STEPHANIE GRAY

NOTE TO OUR READERS

You may see pages titled 'An Impact Feature' or 'Focus' in *Reader's Digest*. This is no different from an advertisement and the magazine's editorial staff is not involved in its creation in any way.

PHOTO: SCOTT RADFORD-CHISHOLM, COURTESY OF SHARINE MILNE

PATANJALI®

Kesh Kanti Advance

Tootna mana Hai!



Power of
30
Herbs



for complete nourishment of hair

- Stops hair fall • Promotes growth of new hair
- Repairs damaged hair • Prevents premature graying of hair
- Makes the scalp dandruff free



Humour

29

Humour
in Uniform

35

As Kids See It

70

Life's Like That

98

Laughter,
The Best Medicine

Culturescape

RD RECOMMENDS

102 ***Furiosa: The Mad Max Saga, Salman Rushdie's Knife, and More***

STUDIO

106 ***Leela Mukherjee's Standing Woman***

BY ZEENAT NAGREE

ME AND MY SHELF

108 **Tejaswini Apte-Rahm's Top 10 Favourite Reads**

Brain Games

110 **Brain Teasers**

112 **Sudoku**

113 **Word Power**

115 **Trivia**



PHOTO: MICHELLE NEELING; (CAT) MURIKA/GETTY IMAGES

Your story, letter, joke or anecdote may be used by Trusted Media Brands, Inc. and its licensees worldwide in all print and electronic media, now or hereafter existing, in any language. To the extent that your submissions are incorporated in our publication, you grant us a perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free right to use the same. You warrant that: you are the sole owner of all the rights to the submitted material and have the authority to grant the rights herein without restriction; the material is your original work, and that the material does not infringe or violate any copyright, right of privacy or publicity, or any other right of any third party, or contain any matter that is libelous or otherwise in contravention of the law; to the extent the material shared by you includes any of your personal details, you expressly waive your right to a future claim or injunction. In the event of a claim or liability on account of the above warranties, you will be required to indemnify us. We regret that we cannot acknowledge or return unsolicited pitches or submissions. It may also take some time for your submission to be considered; we'll be in touch if we select your material. Selected items may not be published for six months or more. We reserve the rights to edit and condense your submissions including letters. We may run your item in any section of our magazine, or on www.readersdigest.in, or elsewhere. Not all submissions are compensated, unless specified in the invitation for entries or through express communication by the editorial team. We do not offer kill fees for story commissions that cannot be published in print or on www.readersdigest.in for any reason. Personal information limited to full name and city/town location will be used as part of the credit or by-line of your submission, if published. All other personal contact information is used solely by the editorial team and not shared with any third party. Requests for permission to reprint any material from Reader's Digest should be sent to editor.india@rd.com.

Reader's Digest

A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

CHAIRMAN AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Aroon Purie
VICE CHAIRPERSON AND EXECUTIVE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Kalli Purie
GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Dinesh Bhatia
GROUP EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Raj Chengappa
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Manoj Sharma



VOL. 65 NO. 05
MAY 2024

EDITOR Kai Jabir Friese
GROUP CREATIVE EDITOR Nilanjan Das
GROUP PHOTO EDITOR Bandeep Singh
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR Ishani Nandi
FEATURES EDITOR Naorem Anuja
EDITORIAL COORDINATOR Jacob K. Eapen

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR Angshuman De
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTORS Chandramohan Jyoti,
Praveen Kumar Singh
CHIEF OF PRODUCTION Harish Aggarwal
ASSISTANT MANAGER Narendra Singh

SALES AND OPERATIONS

SENIOR GM, NATIONAL SALES Deepak Bhatt
GENERAL MANAGER, OPERATIONS Vipin Bagga
GENERAL MANAGER (NORTH) Rajeev Gandhi
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER (WEST) Yogesh G. Gautam

IMPACT (ADVERTISING)

SR ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER Suparna Kumar
SR GENERAL MANAGERS Mayur Rastogi (North & East)
Jitendra Lad (West)
GENERAL MANAGER Syed Naveed (Chennai)
CHIEF MANAGER Pushpa Hn (Delhi)

BUSINESS

GROUP CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER Vivek Malhotra
SR GENERAL MANAGER, MARKETING Ajay Mishra
GENERAL MANAGER, ITCMS G. L. Ravik Kumar
DEP. GENERAL MANAGER, MARKETING Kunal Bag
ASST. GENERAL MANAGER, MARKETING Anuj K. Jamdegni

Reader's Digest in India is published by: Living Media India Limited (Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001) under a licence granted by the TMB Inc. (formerly RDA Inc.), proprietor of the *Reader's Digest* trademark.

Published in 43 countries, 22 editions and 10 languages, *Reader's Digest* is the world's largest-selling magazine. It is also India's largest-selling magazine in English.

TRUSTED MEDIA BRANDS, INC. (FORMERLY RDA INC.)

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Bonnie Kintzer
FOUNDERS: DeWitt Wallace, 1889–1981; Lila Acheson Wallace, 1889–1984

HOW TO REACH US

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS/CUSTOMER CARE: Email rdcare@intoday.com Phone/WhatsApp No. +91 8597778778.
Mail Subscriptions Reader's Digest, C-9, Sector 10, Noida, UP—201301, Tel: 0120-2469900. **Toll-free No** 1800 1800 001 (BSNL customers can call toll free on this number). **For bulk subscriptions** 0120-4807100 Ext: 4318, Email: alliances@intoday.com. For change of address, enclose the addressed portion of your magazine wrapper. **ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES: Phones** Mumbai: 022-69193355; Chennai: 044-28478525; Bengaluru: 080-22212448; Delhi: 0120-4807100; Kolkata: 033-22825398, Fax: 022-66063226, **Email** rd4business@intoday.com.
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Email editor.india@rd.com **CORPORATE/EDITORIAL: Address** Reader's Digest, India Today Group, 3rd Floor, Film City 8, Sector 16A, Noida, UP—201301; **Phone:** 0120-4807100. We edit and fact-check letters. Please provide your telephone number and postal address in all cases. **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/ReadersDigest.co.in;
Instagram: @readersdigestindia; **Twitter:** @ReadersDigestIN; **Website:** www.readersdigest.in/

© 2016 Trusted Media Brands, Inc. (*Reader's Digest* editorial material). © 2016 Living Media India Ltd. (Living Media editorial material). All rights reserved throughout the world. Reproduction in any manner, in whole or part, in English or other languages, is prohibited. Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18–35 Milestone, Delhi–Mathura Road, Faridabad–121007, (Haryana). Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001. Editor: Kai Jabir Friese (responsible for selection of news).

OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE
March ISSUE



ME AND MY SHELF: Nandita Haksar

I must thank Ms Haksar for choosing *Winnie the Pooh* as one of her favourite reads. It made me curious about a book that I had merely browsed through while at school. So I downloaded a copy and started reading—and *Winnie the Pooh* was a revelation. While I had merely skimmed through this book 50-plus years ago, I now devoured each word with delight. Each chapter offered wise nuggets delivered via endearing characters, and interactions that display a deep understanding of the natures of ordinary people. Though written to ignite the fascination of young children, the book transgresses time, and is peppered with humour and practical wisdom, valid for all ages.

J. KRISHNAN, *Chennai*

J. Krishnan wins this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000. —EDs

Words to Live By

All along, I have believed that I must be alone in my habit of reading obituaries. So, I was delighted to read about another who shares this interest. Wherever I am in the world, I go through obituaries in newspapers. For instance, during my stint in the US I noticed that the obituary column was next to the opinions page, and I have thought that was done to give importance to the departed souls! The story also reminded of another obituary-related incident: Years ago, while applying for a reporter's post, I was asked to write an 'obituary note' for the written test!

P. M. GOPALAN, *Mumbai*

Women On The Move

Based on five women known for their passion for adventure, the feature reminded me of Premlata Agrawal, the first Indian woman to scale the Seven Summits and the oldest Indian woman to conquer the Mt. Everest.

Her marriage into a Marwari family did not bind her with the conservatism. In fact, her in-laws motivated Agrawal to foray into the exciting world of adventure sports. Everyone nurtures a spirit for adventure. And women are no different.

PARVINDER BHATIA,
Jamshedpur

The twin Malik sisters, Pervin Batliwala, Preeti Maske and Gowri Varanashi prove that neither age nor gender can curtail the passion of someone who has their mind made up. They have defied age, fear and convention. Thank you to these

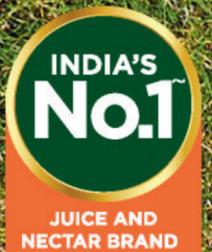




PRESENTING
 NEW 100% JUICE[^] VARIANTS
 POMEGRANATE
 CRANBERRY



100% JUICE[^]
 NO ADDED SUGARS⁺
 NO ADDED PRESERVATIVE
 RICH IN ANTIOXIDANT



DABUR CARES: CALL OR WRITE - 8/3, ASAF ALI ROAD, NEW DELHI - 110002 ✉ E-MAIL: daburcares@dabur.com 🌐 Website: dabur.com 📞 TOLL FREE: 1800-103-1644

Creative visualization. Ready to serve fruit beverage. [^]Equivalent to 100% juice content. (Reconstituted) ~Dabur India Ltd. claim as per NIQ Retail Index data for period MAT Dec'23 for the India market in Juices & Nectars segment. ⁺CONTAINS NATURALLY OCCURRING SUGARS. Réal Fruit Power is a registered trademark of Dabur India Limited.



women for reminding us life should be lived to the fullest.

SRIDEVI SRINIVAS,
Paloncha, Telangana

Bike Bus Crossing

I still remember my birthday where a brand new bicycle was presented to me. What a thrill! I finally had my own two wheels. It soon became an inseparable companion. Cycling to the library, art class or down a slope with a group of friends with the wind blowing against our faces, brought us much joy and a great sense of freedom. It is great to see that biking is back in favour.

PREETI ARANHA,
Mangalore

Be Friends With Your Money (And Manage it Too!)

What's your relationship with money? Maybe your personal finances are like a distant cousin you hardly think about or a stranger you avoid. Or perhaps money feels like an enemy, annoying

you and rarely doing what you want. Treat money like a friend, and you can ensure that you don't outlive your money. My tip: Schedule to check on your finances only when you're feeling calm and level-headed.

SANJAY CHOPRA, *Mohali*

22 Rivers Across 22 States in 22 Months

Forty-eight-year-old Neil Moore decided to navigate through rivers across USA, in a canoe, to learn about his countrymen. The trip revealed that Americans were generous, curious, brave and connected by neighbourly values, a detail seemingly absent in news media during these polarized times. I couldn't help but draw parallels with the two *yatras* undertaken by Rahul Gandhi and his men, though heavy with political undertones. They allowed him to interact with a large cross section of society in this diverse country. Both Moore and Gandhi went on to

fulfill the goal they had set out to accomplish—to learn about what unites the people country, in these politically divided times.

PRAFULL CHANDRA
SOCKEY, *Hazaribagh,
Jharkhand*

The Great Unknown

Bydlowska's story made me think about the complexity of human relationships, of building new bonds, the woes of breakups and coping mechanisms employed by children. Bydlowska has lived through vicissitudes in her life with an iron will. This story bolsters morale for all who have had relationships disintegrate and had to work on building themselves up again. I have recommended this tender story to many.

DR SUDHIIR DESHPANDE,
Ratnagiri, Maharashtra

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



A World of
GOOD

REASONS TO SMILE

Flying High

LAST SEPTEMBER, FIVE MEN jumped out of a hot air balloon 38,139 feet above New Mexico. After free-falling 34,067 feet, they linked arms for roughly five seconds before separating and deploying their parachutes. The men—73-year-old Larry Connor and four Air Force pararescuers—set the record for the highest high-altitude, low-opening formation skydive, meaning they gutted it out longer than anyone else before opening their chutes. The feat raised more than \$1 million for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, which provides educational opportunities for the children of Special Ops Forces lost in the line of duty. Connor, a thrill-seeking millionaire who once flew to the International Space Station, told *People*, “I’ve found the impossible is just somebody’s opinion.” **R**

EVERYDAY HEROES



Sharine Milne at her motorcycle shop.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Modification

A Queensland mechanic customizes bikes so veterans can get riding again

BY *Claire Sibonney*

HOLDING A FLASHLIGHT between her teeth, Sharine ‘Spanner’ Milne adjusts the shock of a Harley Davidson Sportster at the motorcycle repair shop she owns in Townsville, Queensland, in northeastern Australia. Her fingers—long nails painted in flaming orange—work the pocket-sized wrench near the bike’s brakes.

Over the past three years, the 46-year-old mechanic, and owner of R.H.D. Classic Supplies & Services, has made several modifications to this bike, which belongs to a customer named Stewart, a 72-year-old orchid farmer. Stewart’s right leg was amputated so he wears a prosthetic, and he recently broke his

left ankle. To make the motorcycle work for him, Milne adjusted the seat and handlebars to help with his back pain and, most recently, installed an electronic gear shift for him to use while his ankle heals. Giving up riding was never an option for Stewart.

"I'd hate someone telling me I can't ride," says Milne, who knows first-hand what it's like to overcome a 'life injury'—the term she prefers to use instead of 'disability'. Milne was born with bilateral dislocated hips. Doctors told her she wouldn't be able to have children and that by the time she was 40, she would no longer be able to walk without assistance. She proved them wrong on both accounts.

"I didn't let it stop me," says Milne, an Indigenous woman and mother to a grown daughter. Today, not only does she walk, but she also rides motorcycles and has amassed a large collection of bikes over the years.

Twenty-one years ago, as a single mother juggling three jobs in hospitality and hardly seeing her five-year-old daughter, Milne decided to return to school and enrolled in a pre-vocational automotive course. But as a woman aiming to become a motorcycle technician, she faced a lot of doubters. "I got laughed out of five shops," she says.

Eventually Milne landed at R.H.D. Classic, first as a student, then as an apprentice and eventually taking over ownership of the shop in 2012. Kirsty, her former boss's daughter, who is deaf and uses a wheelchair, gave her the

nickname, 'Spanner girl'. One of Milne's first modifications involved setting up a sidecar for Kirsty so she could ride with her dad.

Today Milne runs a thriving business, but the injury-related modifications are her passion. Her projects range from crafting wheelchair-accessible motorcycles to converting her own sidecar into a type of hearse with a flatbed to carry her veteran customers' caskets after they die. "The greatest respect I can pay them is to be able to take them to their final resting place," she says.

By letting people continue to do what they love, Milne has helped them find emotional healing. David McHenry, a 55-year-old retired veteran of the Australian Defence Force with spine, hip and knee injuries from 35 years of service, turned to Milne to help ease the pain of riding for longer stretches.

"Spanner provides a safe space for veterans like me to come to when they are struggling. No judging, just comfortable conversation and some hands-on work to distract us," says McHenry.

Along with his physical injuries, McHenry has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and his psychologist, who recommends riding as 'throttle therapy', can tell if he hasn't been out on his motorcycle enough.

On the open road, Milne too finds a therapeutic rhythm. Some days the ride is her emotional outlet, but it's also a way to connect with others. "On a motorcycle, I don't feel like life's passing me by. I'm part of it." **R**



SMILE

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

BY *Samit Basu*

A FEW DAYS AGO I had a work meeting on videocall. Nothing unusual about that, and, as a person who doesn't enjoy offices at all, I'm glad that post-pandemic work life isn't as dependent on in-person meetings as it used to be.

But as I looked around the digital room, one thing I noticed that brought me great delight was that absolutely no one on the call was making any attempt to look glamorous. No fancy lighting, no special digital background, no carefully curated rooms, no effort to show faces at their best angles. Just a set of people dourly talking work, wholly unconcerned that their faces were visible.

I don't have any nostalgia for the lockdown era—I wish those years had never happened, and I hope they never come back. But one absolute gift that the forced movement of work to online spaces gave us was beautiful new ways for people to make messes at meetings. A whole new genre of human error was added to our vast collection, and that's something to be grateful for.

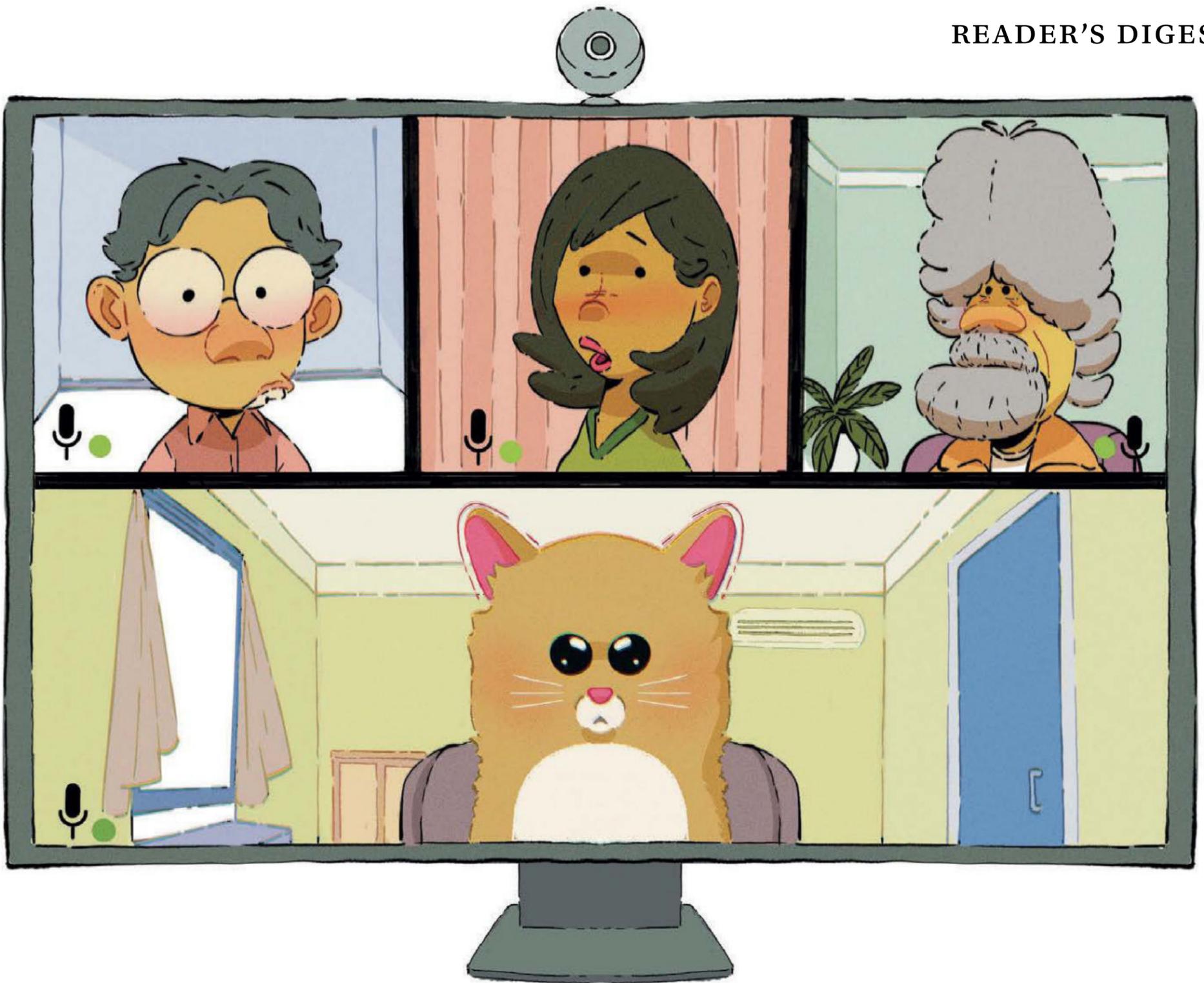
Remember the legend, Robert Kelly—

the man whose BBC interview about South Korea gave the world an unforgettable video where first his daughter and then his toddler in a stroller burst into the room from behind and wandered towards him, followed by his wife entering with a commando-like crawl, on a grim Rambo-like mission to retrieve and remove the tiny invaders.

Remember the legend Rod Ponton, the lawyer who appeared before a judge on a virtual case and was unable to turn off the filter, which presented him before the federal court as a little fluffy white cat? "I'm not a cat," he said, to explain matters.

And so many other heroes, interrupted by pets or kids or noisy relatives, burdened by inappropriate backgrounds or people in the wings, in the wrong room because of a wrong link, or simply rendered immortal by forgetting to mute themselves, or put on clothes. It was a strange time.

In previous eras, this category of beautiful event was confined to collections of bloopers—behind-the-scenes



footage from films, or mistakes made on live TV. But thanks to modern technology, everyone's a broadcaster now, and everyone gets their chance to become a part of history with a popular on-camera mistake. Some even manage to combine these eras—every now and then, footage pops up of someone being interviewed on TV, but their dog or cat has commandeered the computer instead.

So get on a videocall today, and be as chaotic as possible. This is an art form previous generations could not create, and perhaps your quickest route to legendary status.

One day in the future, when aliens reach out to us from their spaceship via

THE ONE GIFT OF MOVING WORK TO ONLINE SPACES? BEAUTIFUL NEW WAYS FOR PEOPLE TO MAKE MESSSES AT MEETINGS.

transgalactic videocall, and a long time is spent in awkward silences, followed by everyone speaking at the same time and then saying “You go ahead,” “No no, you go ahead,” and then falling silent again, maybe yours is the name they will remember. **R**

In Zimbabwe, grandmothers traditionally play a role in promoting health.

GOOD NEWS

FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY *Samantha Rideout*

A GRANDMOTHER'S LISTENING EAR

COMMUNITY Good mental health care is hard to find. A 2022 report from the World Health Organization found that, globally, most health and social systems do not provide the support people need. The situation is even more dire in low-income countries like Zimbabwe.

In 2006, Harare-based psychiatrist Dr Dixon Chibanda began training older women, known as 'grandmothers,' to provide free basic talk therapy, often meeting with their clients on unintimidating park benches they call 'friendship benches.'

"People feel more comfortable opening up with the grandmothers," says Charmaine Chitiyo, programmes man-

ager for Friendship Bench, which books these encounters. "It feels less formal."

Studies back up her observation: A 2016 trial published in *JAMA* showed that in Zimbabwe, the friendship-bench approach was more effective than professional care at alleviating the symptoms of conditions like depression and anxiety. After a series of one-on-one sessions, clients are invited to join an ongoing support group.

Having served roughly 4,00,000 people so far, Friendship Bench is expanding its reach, with branches already in Malawi, Zanzibar and New York City. "Our hope is to have a network of 'grandmothers' all over the globe," says Chitiyo.

From Plant Waste to Fabric

RECYCLING Every year, up to 300 million trees are felled to make fabrics like rayon, made from the cellulose in wood pulp. However, it's not just trees that contain cellulose: most other plants do, too. Knowing this, some companies are using plant-based waste to make rayon.

For instance, a Swedish company called Renewcell is selling a cellulose pulp called Circulose, produced from worn-out jeans and other discarded cotton garments. Fabrics made from this pulp are going into clothing sold by leading global brands like H&M and Levi's.

Other companies are experimenting with producing fabrics from other types of plant-based waste, like fallen leaves and food scraps. All these approaches use far less energy and water than it takes to produce traditional rayon—and no trees need to be cut down, either.

A Push to Criminalize Ecocide

ENVIRONMENT Ever since the Vietnam War, activists have decried 'ecocide'—



Thirteen countries have criminalized ecocide.

TBRADFORD/GETTY IMAGES

knowingly causing widespread or long-term environmental damage that is severe and clearly excessive compared to any social or economic benefits it may bring.

Thirteen countries, most recently France in 2021, have criminalized ecocide or similar offences. Over a dozen others have shown an interest in making ecocide an international crime.

Making ecocide a crime would threaten decision-makers with jail time, a much stronger incentive than fines or legal damages for halting practices such as trawling or taking careless risks that lead to oil spills.

Faster Relief for PPD

MENTAL HEALTH Postpartum depression (PPD) affects an estimated 10 to 15 per cent of mothers. In rare cases, it can become life-threateningly severe. Thankfully, PPD is treatable with existing medications, but the relief takes time. Now, a pill that recently gained approval in the United States promises faster-acting relief.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), a class of common antidepressants, are already prescribed for PPD. But they can take weeks to start taking effect, whereas the new medication, called Zurzuvae (zuranolone), can start helping in as few as three days.

As the first oral medication made specifically for PPD, Zurzuvae represents a new approach that may eventually receive approval outside of the US. **R**

BETTER LIVING

WELLNESS FOR BODY & MIND

Life, Unplugged



Could you get through seven days
without looking at a device?
I tried—here's what happened

BY *Julien Blanc-Gras* FROM *L'OBS*



It's

well-documented: Our screens are cognitive prisons that pulverize our attention span, erode our mental health and spark polarized rage, all while exacerbating our carbon footprint. But can we free ourselves?

I've decided to try to live like it's 1996, and go back to my pre-internet life, with a one-week digital detox—no computers or cellphones. But before the big shut-off, I need to do a little preparation.

The Day Before

First, I need to explain the concept to my friends and family so they're not wondering why I've suddenly fallen off the map. I set up an out-of-office reply: "I won't have access to email until Sunday. If this is an emergency, call my landline at xxxx."

Then I scribble a few useful phone numbers in a notebook—which will be my daily diary. I borrow my eight-year-old son's watch (the last time I wore a watch, it was the 20th century), jot down my week's appointments and map out routes. Next I find my long-abandoned landline phone and plug it in.

My digital detox hasn't even begun and I'm already conscious of the fact that I underestimated my screen dependency. I feel nervous. I had envisioned the challenge as a soothing lull, but now, on the edge of the analog abyss, I'm gripped by dull angst. I type these final words on my Mac, which I'll put in the drawer along with my iPhone. I'll shut the drawer and tape it closed. Once it's sealed, there will be no turning back.

Day 1

The alarm clock goes off. I reach towards the bedside table. My phone isn't there. I feel a void already. I've only been awake a few seconds.

No checking messages before I empty my bladder. No news roundup with breakfast. No weather forecast. I have no choice but to look out the window: It's the early hours of a beautiful day.

I hop on my bike. I'm on my way to lead a writers' workshop for middle-school students at a school I've never been to, so I bring a map of Paris with me, just in case. At the first traffic light, I pat my pocket, checking for my phone. Have I done that at every light these past few years? Possibly.

At the school, I'm aware that these kids, born in the 2000s, don't remember life before the internet—and have only a vague idea that such a time existed. As I chat with them, I'm not thinking about the emails piling up in the phone I don't have. But during breaks, I feel around in my pockets. Very Pavlovian.

Afterwards, I realize I've survived much of the day offline. And all my vitals are stable.

Back at home, I spend an hour reading a novel before hunkering down to write. On paper. I manage to produce more than 10 lines before my inspiration abates slightly, and the digital devil tempts me.

It's moments like this when I would normally reach for my phone and check the news in case something occurred on planet Earth in the last seven minutes.

MY SON IS FLABBERGASTED THAT I WOULD WILLINGLY GIVE UP MY DIGITAL PRIVILEGES.

We all know how it goes. You grab your phone for a very specific reason (to read an article, call your mom, check your bank account), then get caught up in a social media post, a WhatsApp chat (group gift for a friend's birthday!) or a grabby bit of breaking news. When you put your phone down, you wonder why you picked it up in the first place.

But not today. When I can't muster up enough motivation, I have a piece of chocolate. That's what's known as compensating. After my son comes home from school, he asks: "So, Dad, did you manage without a phone?"

"Yep, no problem at all," I lie, just a little.

"But why are you doing this?" he asks. Subject to screen restrictions, he's flabbergasted that an adult would willingly give up their digital privileges.

After dinner, my partner pushes back from the table; she has a series to binge watch. I'm not allowed. "I don't want to hear about your detox," she says. "Go read on the couch."

I fall asleep on the sofa, my book on my chest, with a little less blue light in my body and without a last glance at my emails, just in case. In case of what exactly?

Day 2

Before leaving for school, my son wishes me good luck. I gaze at my taped drawer. What if something terrible happens? What if the school wants to call to say my son broke his arm at recess? What if Putin goes nuclear? What if *The New York Times* wants me to write a story in Japan? There may be a message in my voicemail at this very moment: "Hi, Julien. This is Martin Scorsese. I'd love to make your latest book into a movie. Get back to me as soon as you can."

Perhaps I could give myself permission to check my messages in the middle of the week? For goodness' sake, it's been barely 24 hours and I can hardly take it anymore! Time to get out of the house before it's too late.

I grab the print edition of *Le Monde*, which I haven't done since who knows

when. Ensconced in a café, I leaf through it with delight. Climate change, inflation and coups: The world's tragedies seem much further away when they're laid out on paper. There's less assault on the brain, eyes and nerves.

But I've got to get back to work. The manuscript I'm working on is due in a few weeks.

After a studious day, I decide a well-deserved cocktail is called for, and the stars aligned: I have an invitation to the launch of a magazine I've contributed to.

At lacklustre cocktail parties, a phone is an invaluable ally that confers a sense of composure, of being engrossed in an

urgent matter when you're actually checking football stats. I'm now in envy of others here because I'm empty-handed. Naked. Bereft of something to hide behind.

But I realize I've got a great topic of conversation: my detox. I assumed people would think it was a dumb idea ("Why do that to yourself?"), but instead I get admiration ("Good on you! I couldn't do it."). I'm a hero of Big Tech resistance: the man who hasn't checked his email in nearly 36 hours and who, even after this historic achievement, remains a model of voluntary simplicity.

I go home early. Everyone is already



asleep. The apartment is silent, and I'm not feeling tired, so instead of drifting in cyberspace, I write.

Day 3

From a professional perspective, today is going to be a problem. I have to write a column for a magazine I've been contributing to every month for the past four years. I usually type it in Word on my Mac and send it as an email attachment to my editor.

How did we used to do it? In the early 2000s, I was the editor of a regional newspaper. Local correspondents would bring in handwritten articles. Typists (do they still exist?) entered them into the system for us to edit.

That's what I'll do: hand in my article on paper. The editors will think I'm crazy, especially since they've never seen me. (Yes, these days you can work for a magazine for years without ever meeting any of the editorial staff.)

I quickly get to work and, oh joy, I'm interrupted by a call on the landline. Someone must have read my out-of-office message and made the effort to call. It must be urgent. (Scorsese, probably: "Please call me back, I beg you, Julien.")

No. It's a journalist inviting me to appear on the *Internet Show*. I tell her point-blank that I don't have the internet. "No problem," she replies, once she gets past her bewilderment. They want me to talk about a book I wrote and need me to send her an image of its cover.

But how? My publisher can take care of it. I'll call them. But I don't know the number (who can remember numbers?), and I don't have a phone book handy (remember those?). Does directory assistance still exist?

My attempt to manage my professional life is failing. A quick email exchange and it would have all been taken care of in no time. Regardless of what anyone says, the internet comes in pretty handy sometimes.

Day 4

As soon as I wake up, I reach toward the taped bedside table. Clearly, I still have a long way to go. What is it that drives us to feverishly check our email inboxes? The promise of a reward, the prospect of good news, someone who's thinking of us. We're all well aware that most of what we get is spam, bills and unwanted solicitations, but—and maybe this is heartening for humanity—we can't help but hope.

I go check my mailbox—my real one—then follow up with a trip to the grocery store. I break out in a cold sweat as I come to the realization that I've forgotten my loyalty card. My partner is going to be ticked off at me when I get home: "I sent it to your phone so you'd always have it," she'll say.

Is my detox undermining my relationship? Will this ridiculous challenge shatter so many happy years with a wonderful woman?

If I keep disappointing her, she'll end

up leaving me, I'll have a breakdown, stop bathing and end up homeless. Lurching in my ragged clothes, I'll yell at passersby: "Never forget your phones!" Children will laugh at me, and the cashier at the local shop, eyeing me as I rant, will explain to customers: "It's so sad. He was a travel writer, he was on TV, and then one day he got this dumb idea and it was the beginning of the end."

It would be a shame to ruin my life for

LOSE YOUR FREEDOM, GAIN A HEART EMOJI. IT'S *BRAVE NEW WORLD* WITH NARCISSISTIC GRATIFICATION.

this. What if I took just a peek? Come on! No one will know. It's Thursday, 2 p.m. Three-and-a-half days in. Halfway through, that's not bad. Critical messages are probably waiting for me in that drawer. Scorsese must be getting impatient.

I feel dirty, ashamed and miserable. Yet I open the drawer and power up the phone. Hundreds of emails, notifications and messages pour in, not to mention all the spam. I handle three job-related things, but to be honest, it was nothing that couldn't have waited a few days.

Later, at school pick up, a parent asks me how my detox is going.

"Awesome," I answer without batting an eye. "The first few days are +tough, but then you get into it." I follow that up with platitudes about peace of mind ("WhatsApp groups, so annoying!") and all the time I've gained, eliciting nods of assent.

I hadn't planned on lying. It just came out. It's a rude awakening: I tick all the junkie boxes. I'm addicted, and I'm shouting from the rooftops that I'm clean just after getting a fix.

Day 5

It's a miracle: I left the house without checking my pocket for my phone. It took me five days. I feel lighter. I spot a friend in the street. I wave. She walks by at about arm's length but doesn't see me. Guess what she's got in her hand.

For the past few days, I've been living out of step. Outrageous behaviours jump out at me. It's like everyone's on drugs. We're all out of our minds. These amazing technologies that provide access to universal knowledge haven't had the desired effect on our collective intelligence. (We're living on a virtually free and perpetually available drug whose addictiveness was conceived by the most brilliant engineers of our time. It's a losing battle.)

With school done for the week, my son throws himself on the tablet. Enforcing a zero-screen policy during the week is a daily struggle, and he gets his revenge on Friday evening by immersing himself in Minecraft.

“When do I get a phone?” he asks far too often. As late as possible, honey. I’m in no hurry to watch Silicon Valley hack your brain.

Day 6

I don’t need a phone to go to the park with my son. Elderly people chat on a bench. A man throws his dog a ball. A couple embraces. They’re 20, they’re in love and they radiate happiness. The world around them doesn’t exist.

And I don’t need a phone to read a book. Just turn the pages and let your brain stay in one place for an hour.

I don’t need a phone at dinner with friends, as we reimagine the world. We all see it: Our daily *Black Mirror*, that series about techno-paranoia, reflects a softer version of the great literary dystopias: *1984*, of course, because we’re being watched all the time, everywhere. Big Brother dissects our data, and we’ve all become Big Brother to each other.

Except Orwell never imagined that our servitude would be voluntary, that humanity would rush to consent to being scrutinized in its most intimate recesses—and that we’d even pay for it (there’s no denying the genius of capitalism) in exchange for the promise of the dopamine provided by a “like.” Lose your freedom, gain a heart emoji.

It’s *Brave New World* with narcissistic gratification as a stand-in for soma, the drug that keeps the citizens of the World State peaceful, subdued and compliant.

My son and I lose track of time. I should let my partner know we’ll be late. I ask a friend to lend me his phone.

Day 7

I’m allowed to open the drawer and return to my online life. But I don’t. Not just yet. Before I get back to all the noise, I step outside to listen to the birds chirping. I’m not thrilled to be back in 2023. Life without the internet was happier. But it’s impossible. There’s no rewinding to 1996.

Still, we can make tomorrow’s world a little less bitter. Manage our addictions. Have good digital hygiene. Today, smoking in restaurants and driving without a seatbelt seem inconceivable. Maybe in a decade we’ll be wondering how we ever sat down to dinner without switching to airplane mode.

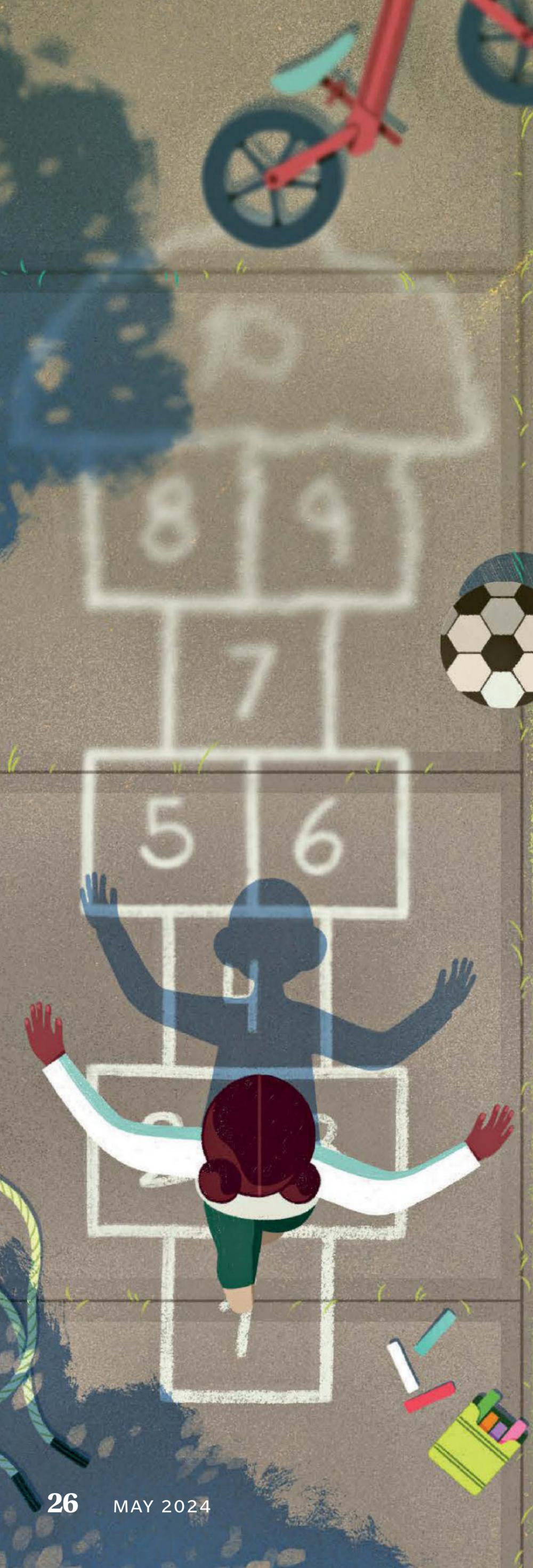
I’m going to consciously, slowly wade back in, with reluctance. To set an example. Because when my son wants to show me his drawing, I don’t want to hear myself say “one sec” as my brain gets hijacked by a device alerting me about Taylor Swift’s new love interest. **R**



A Happy Mess

A two-year-old is kind of like having a blender, but you don’t have a top for it.

JERRY SEINFELD



HEALTH

Eye Health Epidemic

What's behind the sharp increase in short-sightedness?

—
BY *Rebecca Gao*

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly two billion people have myopia, or short-sightedness, and predicts that this figure will likely reach 3.3 billion—about half of the world's population—by 2050. It's clear that our vision is becoming increasingly blurry, but researchers are only now beginning to understand why.

Generally a childhood phenomenon, myopia happens when the eyeball grows too long from front to back, taking on more of an oval shape versus a sphere. Eyes have a 'stop signal'

so that they grow proportionally with the head, explains Gregory Schwartz, an associate professor at the Departments of Ophthalmology and Neuroscience at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University. However, that signal can be interrupted by genetic and environmental factors, which leads to our eyeballs growing a bit too much, making them too big for the optics (the lens and the cornea, which are responsible for focusing your vision).

The mismatch between the eyeballs and the optics leads to far-off objects looking out of focus. Telltale signs you might have myopia also include headaches, as well as eye strain and tiredness when doing certain activities such as driving or playing sports.

While our first instinct is to blame the increased use of screens, experts believe the real reason is not that, exactly, but it's related: namely less time spent outdoors. Natural light is essential for healthy eye development, says Schwartz. A 2017 study published in *JAMA Ophthalmology* found a correlation between increased UVB exposure and a decrease in myopia, particularly in children and young adults.

Exposure to natural light stimulates dopamine, which helps regulate normal growth and development of the eyeball. Indoor lighting doesn't do the trick. Ideally, kids should get at least two hours of natural light a day.

That said, our increased use of screens is a problem. Most screens

are high contrast—like black text on a white page, or light text on a dark background, says Schwartz. It's still a theory, but some scientists think that the contrast of reading a book or looking at a bright screen in a dark room might be overstimulating our retinas, causing more eye growth in children.

A 2018 study in *Scientific Records* analyzed the retinal pathways when looking at black text on white backgrounds compared to natural environments, and concluded that the contrast could stimulate myopia. Close work, like reading and looking closely at screens, has also been shown to cause myopia.

Researchers are working on ways to slow down rising myopia rates. A clinical trial at Ohio State University found that eyedrops with a low dose of atropine can slow myopia in kids. There's also some early evidence that a type of contact lenses called peripheral defocus lenses might stop nearsightedness from worsening.

Most people's vision will stabilize in their teens, but some people develop myopia later in life, typically between ages 20 and 40. Blurry vision isn't the only downside; people with myopia are at a higher risk of developing eye issues as they age, such as glaucoma, early cataracts and macular degeneration.

That's why regular eye examinations



are important. You can also reduce eye strain by making a few simple lifestyle changes, such as ensuring that you are reading or working in good light (soft background light, plus a task light), choosing nonglare screens for your computer or TV and taking frequent breaks.

“When we spend time looking at a screen, our blink rate decreases from the typical 18 times per minute to six to eight times per minute. This results in significant dry eye and irritation,”

says Yuna Rapoport, a board-certified ophthalmologist at Manhattan Eye in New York City.

She recommends following the 20-20-20 rule when using your computer: Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. She also says that dry eyes and irritation can be treated with over-the-counter eye drops, ointments or prescription medications. And, of course, always wear your contacts or eye-glasses as prescribed. **R**



I Tried It ... Exercises to Relieve Tech Neck

BY *Andrea Karr*

I STARE AT MY phone for five hours a day. At least, that’s what an impertinent weekly notification tells me. As a result, I’ve developed ‘tech neck’—head forward, shoulders rounded and back slumped—and it

causes pain in my back, shoulders and neck.

I saw a physical therapist who recommended some stretches to help alleviate the tension. For a week, I took a five-minute break, three times each day, to roll my head up and down into a chin tuck, slip onto a mat and into cobra pose (lie on your stomach with your palms on the mat, next to your shoulders, then raise your upper body and look forward) and do a few spinal rotations (sitting cross-legged on the floor, reach for your left knee with your right hand, gently twisting your torso to the left; repeat on the other side). I also made sure my smartphone and computer screen were always positioned at eye level.

I felt immediate relief, but I was told I would need to adjust my screen time habits before I saw any improvement in my posture. **R**

HUMOUR *in*
UNIFORM

Drill instructors are tough to please. During boot camp at the Great Lakes naval training centre, a DI saw our squad outside the mess hall. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

Our squad leader replied, "Waiting to be called to chow, sir!"

"Well, you're not waiting fast enough. Drop and give me 10 pushups."

—JOHN KEARNS

In his new book, *The Dirty Tricks Department* (St. Martin's Press), John Lisle describes the Coordinator of Information (COI), a spy agency that preceded the Office of Strategic Services and the CIA, as often disrespected. At a party, an admiral called the COI a Tinkertoy outfit. COI leader William Donovan said, "I don't know, Admiral, I think we



"Actually, my belt broke and they're holding up my pants."

could get your secret files and blow up your ammunition dump before midnight." The admiral laughed.

Donovan excused himself and made a phone call. Within an hour, his agents "broke into the admiral's office, cracked his safe, removed secret documents and sped them over to Donovan," Lisle writes. "Next, they snuck into the ammunition dump and planted fake dynamite."

At the end of the party, Donovan handed the shocked admiral the contents of his own safe. He then in-

formed him where to find the 'dynamite.'

After boot camp, I entered a building on base and asked the guard for suite 110. He said it was downstairs. I looked around, but I didn't see stairs or elevators. "Where's down?" I asked. "Where's down?" he repeated. "Son, I bet you had a pretty hard time in boot camp."

—ALAN BRUCE ROWLEY

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



NEWS FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**

By Samantha Rideout

LIFTING WEIGHTS REJUVE- NATES SKIN

Strength-training workouts aren't typically included in skin-care regimes, but maybe they should be, according to a small Japanese trial published in *Scientific Reports*. The authors asked middle-aged sedentary women to start exercising twice a week for 30 minutes. Half of them did an aerobic workout on a stationary bike while the other half lifted weights. By the end of 16 weeks, the researchers recorded improvements to both groups' skin elasticity, but in the weightlifting group, the skin also got measurably thicker. Both elasticity and thickness tend to decrease with age, contributing to sagging and wrinkles.

Why would exercise help to counteract skin ageing? According to the researchers, it's possibly because of its influence on gene expression, hormones and inflammation.

The Price of Precarious Work

Globally, an estimated two billion people are trying to support themselves through 'precarious'

employment, meaning work with low pay, poor job security and few protections for their well-being and workplace rights.

Precarious employment, including part-time, on-call, seasonal or contractual work, can be an ongoing source of high stress, which might be one of the reasons that a Swedish study found that switching into and staying in 'standard' employment lowered the 12-year risk of dying by 30 per cent, compared to staying in a less predictable job situation. Of course, landing a secure job is easier said than done. To create more of these positions, experts recommend strengthening unions and improving labour laws.

Bathtime Alert

Grandma was right: Be sure to wash between your toes, behind your ears and in your belly button. Much like the intestines, the skin is



home to millions of bacteria, most of which are harmless or even beneficial to their human hosts. A diverse microbiome helps keep each strain of bacteria in check, and new research suggests that your bathing habits could help maintain a healthy balance of skin microbes.

In an experiment conducted by university students in Washington, D.C., body regions that tend to get overlooked at bath time had lower biodiversity and thus probably a less healthy microbial ecosystem, compared to other areas such as the forearms and calves. This suggests that certain bacteria—including those with the potential to take over the microbiome and contribute to issues like acne or eczema—may be more affected by washing than others.

Body Temperature: Not One-Size-Fits-All

While 37°C has long been considered the benchmark for a normal, healthy body temperature, mounting research suggests that this number shouldn't be used as a standard. In a new study, published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, researchers analyzed the temperatures of 6,18,306 people and found the average temperature was 36.6°C—but it varied with age, sex, height and weight. Other variables affecting a person's temperature include the time of day (temperatures tend to be coolest in the early morning), menstrual cycles and physical activity. When you're checking for a fever, consider using a more personalized approach based on your own usual range of temperatures.

Comparing Treatments For Hand Arthritis

New research suggests that

the current treatment guidelines for people who have osteoarthritis in their hands may need to be updated.

After analyzing the results of 65 previous trials, Danish researchers concluded that glucocorticoids and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) help with the pain when taken orally.

However, several other treatments that are currently recommended by rheumatological associations, including hyaluronate and glucocorticoid injections that go straight into the affected finger joints, didn't give more relief than placebos overall.

Meanwhile, topical NSAID creams showed promise, but their effectiveness remains uncertain for now. **R**



13 Fast-Moving Facts About Driving

BY *Stephanie Gray*



1 THE INVENTION of the first automobile is most often credited to German engineer Karl Benz (co-founder of Mercedes-Benz), who filed a patent for his three-wheeled, gas-powered Motorwagen in 1886. But it was his wife, Bertha, who made the world's first long-distance drive in an automobile. She took the Motorwagen without his knowledge and

drove it 96 kilometres, from Mannheim to Pforzheim, in about 13 hours.

2 TODAY, roughly 70 per cent of countries drive on the right, with notable exceptions being Australia, India, Japan and the United Kingdom. Ancient Romans are believed to have driven their chariots on the left-hand side of the

road so that they could use their right hands to wield a weapon, but there were no laws enforcing one way or the other. It wasn't until wagon transport increased in the late 1700s that countries began to pick a side. France ordered traffic to keep to the right, while Britain picked the left, and the laws trickled down to their respective territories and colonies.

3 ACCORDING to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, India, 1,68,491 persons were killed in road crashes in 2022—claiming 19 lives per hour. Young adults in the age group of 18–45 years accounted for 66.5 per cent of victims. And two-wheelers constitute the largest group of vehicles involved in road accidents; 44.5 per cent of road accidents in India involve them.

4 THE FIRST automobile fatality in the world was a female naturalist and astronomer Mary Ward in August 1869, in Ireland. She had taken her cousin's homemade automobile for a spin. However, across the world women have a minority share in road deaths, and India's number is among the lowest in the world. For instance in 2021, only 14 per cent of the total road deaths in India were female. Their lower share in road-crash casualties

could be explained by the fact that only six per cent of the driving licence holders in India are female.

5 ELECTRIC vehicles (EVs) are gaining popularity with drivers wanting to save money on fuel and reduce their carbon footprint. In 2022, 10 per cent of all passenger vehicles sold worldwide were EVs, 10 times more than five years earlier. Most EVs can travel 200 to 400 kilometres on a single charge, making them a great option for day-to-day travel. India's EV market has been booming, with EV sales expected to increase by 66 per cent in 2024 .

6 DRINKING any beverage while driving—including water—is illegal in Cyprus, and in Australia, it's against the law to stick your hand out the window, even to wave. In Thailand, it's illegal to drive shirtless, and in most Scandinavian

countries drivers must always have headlights on, even in daylight.

7 CAN YOU ever imagine getting a nearly \$4,00,000 (₹33.3-crore) speeding ticket? That's what happened to a 53-year-old Swedish motorist when he was caught driving his Ferrari Testarossa through a village near St. Gallen, Switzerland, at 137 kilometres per hour—57 kilometres over the speed limit. The steep fine was calculated based on previous infractions and the driver's income, which is standard practice in Switzerland.

8 GERMANY IS one of the few countries in the world that doesn't impose a speed limit on highways. The average speed on the famed Autobahn clocks in at 142 kilometres per hour. Despite this, the Autobahn is said to be one of the safest highway networks in the world.

9 WE'VE BEEN singing in the car for nearly 95 years. The first car radio was introduced in the 1930s, but at the time it was an expensive add-on that worked solely on AM radio waves. The now-standard AM/FM radio wasn't invented until 1953. Since then, our in-vehicle music options have continued to evolve, with the eight-track introduced in the 1960s, cassette players in the '70s, compact disc players in the '80s and the streaming services of today, such as Spotify and Apple Music.

10 IN 1984, Swiss couple Emil and Liliana Schmid climbed into their bright blue Toyota Land Cruiser and began the world's longest road trip, which continues to this day. In 40 years, they've travelled more than 7.41-lakh kilometres across 186 countries. Now in their 80s, the couple is currently on the road in Africa

and hold the Guinness World Record for the longest driven journey.

11 ALASKA'S Dalton Highway is considered one of the world's most dangerous roads. The two-lane gravel road stretches 666 kilometres, with only three gas stations along the way and no cellular service. Drivers often encounter crater-like potholes and turbulent winter weather, including avalanches and snowdrifts. Other high-risk routes include Bolivia's single-lane 'Death Road', which clings to the side of a mountain, and Britain's A537, nicknamed 'the widow-maker' due to its deadly sharp turns.

12 IN CANADA, it's against the law to use any handheld device behind the wheel, including while being stopped at a traffic light. Doing this could earn you a major fine and demerit points,

and possibly even vehicle suspension or prison. Ontario has one exception to this rule: while waiting in a drive-through line.

13 SELF-DRIVING cars, or autonomous vehicles (AVs), aren't a futuristic idea—robot cars are already driving in some US states. But the technology still has major safety issues, with reports of inappropriate hard braking and hundreds of crashes. Last November, General Motors suspended operations of Cruise, its driverless car unit, after California's Department of Motor Vehicles deemed the vehicles a risk to the public. And in December, Tesla recalled more than two million cars equipped with Autopilot, its driver-assistance programme, due to safety concerns. Meanwhile, Google-owned Waymo is still operating in Phoenix and San Francisco. **R**

—WITH INPUTS BY NAOREM ANUJA


 AS KIDS SEE IT


“What? We had left over colours from Holi.”

About a month ago, my four-year-old son and I drove past a group on strike outside their place of work. My son asked what they were doing. Wanting to answer in plain terms, I said, “Ah, they just want more money.”

Two weeks later, we drove by again. The workers were still

picketing, and some had their dogs with them. Seeing this, he said, “What, now the *dogs* want more money?”

—JAXON UNGER

One day a group of grade 1 children had come to the school library where I work. I was telling them the story *The Monkey and the Crocodile*.

At the end of the story I asked the group what the moral of the story might be. One girl replied very sweetly, “We should never eat our friends.”

—JUNI ROY, *Hyderabad*

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



COVER STORY

GET A GREEN(ER) THUMB

BY *Julie Lane-Gay*

WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY *Naorem Anuja*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Emiko Franzen*



Whether you love digging in the dirt, planting seeds and reaping the bounty that bursts forth, or find the whole idea of gardening intimidating, this spring offers the promise of a fresh start. Growing flowers, vegetables, herbs or anything else need not be endlessly fussy or take up your entire Saturday. As an avid gardener, I'm not opposed to a little sweat, but I much prefer working smart and keeping things easy. Here's a quick guide to minimize your effort and maximize your joy.



WHAT IF I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE TO START?

When I moved to my current garden, I got a wonderful blank slate, but the beds looked eerily sparse. To create an immediate feeling of ‘presence,’ I planted some scented-leaf pelargoniums (scented geraniums). These shrubby plants are a good starting point, as they grow quickly in a variety of home gardens without lots of attention, and their fragrant leaves come in a vast range of colours, sizes and shapes. I put them all over the garden that first spring and summer.

Best of all, true to their name, these plants offer exceptional fragrance. Different species carry aromas of lemon, rose, apricot, ginger, chocolate and more. Kate Jayne, co-owner of Sandy Mush Herb Nursery in Leicester, North Carolina, says, “Scented pelargoniums are great planted with vegetables,” says Jayne, “as they are fast growing, deter pests, and attract bees and humming-

birds.” And, she says, their fragrance makes weeding a pleasure.

Still feeling overwhelmed? Dr Ekta Chaudhary, a Mumbai-based plant-scaping expert, who offers professional gardening services through her venture Garden Up, assures that, “No one is born with a green thumb. Put in the time to observe your plants and you will develop an intuition about what makes them tick.” Her top tip is to guard against a common rookie mistake—over- or underwatering plants: Stick a finger into the soil and check if it has moisture. If it does, you can skip watering. Another key element is to observe what sort of plant you have at hand. Plants with fleshy leaves, such as succulents, have adapted to store water so don’t need to be watered daily. Plants that have leaves with a large surface area on the other

hand require frequent watering, as moisture tends to evaporate more quickly from these varieties.

“It is okay to kill a plant or two, during the learning process. The idea is to learn from your mistakes,” Chaudhary adds.

HOW DO I START A GARDEN IF I HAVE LIMITED SPACE?

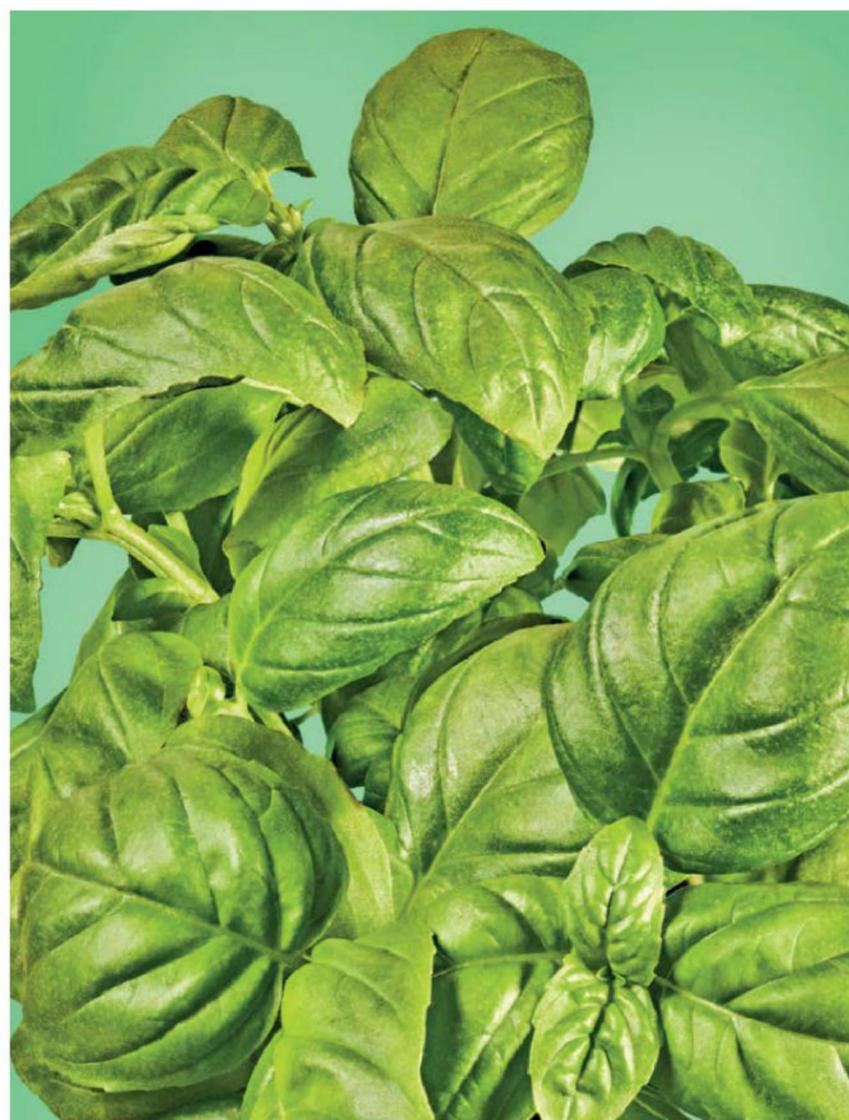
Growing produce or flowers in small spaces can be challenging as both require room and sunlight. The key is to assess what works for your space, says Madhavi Guttikonda, the award-winning content creator behind the 7.2-lakh-subscriber-strong YouTube channel Mad Gardener. “Check how much sunlight you get and plan your spread accordingly,” she says. In India, if your terrace or balcony faces the east or north, your plants will catch the morning sun, ideal for growing plants and vegetables that don't fruit or flower, such as leafy greens. And if your garden space faces south or west, it receives the afternoon sun which is favourable for root vegetables, tomatoes and different varieties of gourd. “Your geographical location and the seasons determine the varieties that may flourish in your garden. The trial-and-error method is how you will find out what works best, so don't be afraid to experiment,” advises Guttikonda

Whether you mix red chard and tulips in a clay pot by the front door, or plant upright leeks next to clumping geraniums in a flower bed, growing vegetables, fruits, flowers and herbs together is a

common strategy. This method is space saving and often beautiful, and it can also enhance the plants. Certain ornamental flowers can distract bad bugs from the edibles while attracting pollinators that increase the output.

Placing blue-flowered rosemary plants near carrots works well because the herb masks the scent of the carrots, making it harder for pests to find them. Plus, the flowers attract bees. Several gardeners I know interplant green onions with their long-flowering pansies to deter mice.

On a walk last summer, I noticed a container that had an orange cherry tomato plant at its centre, surrounded by marigolds and cheery white cosmos. It was a nice pairing visually—but the flowers did double duty, attracting





aphids away from the tomatoes. Alyssum also attracts ladybugs and hoverflies, two insects that eat pesky aphids. It's a win-win.

HOW DO I TACKLE PESTS?

Going organic to control pests and prevent plant diseases is a healthy option, and is easy and cost-effective for a home gardener. Guttikonda swears by the following solutions: Make a paste of ginger, garlic, chilli and onion and soak them in buttermilk. Let it rest for a day or two and use the liquid to get rid of pests. Another easy fix for sap-sucking insects such as aphids is to sprinkle wood-ash over the soil. To prevent rot, use asafoetida and turmeric diluted in water (3 gms in 1 litre).

Chaudhary recommends neem oil as the best solution for all soft- and hard-body insects. "Any gardener with three or more plants should have neem-oil solution at home. These come as ready-

to-use sprays, or dilute pure neem oil in water and spray liberally."

WHAT'S THE EASIEST WAY TO GROW HERBS?

When a friend wanted fresh herbs in her kitchen, I planted some in a 6-by-14-inch plastic container with good drainage holes for her sunniest windowsill. I filled the container with about 4 inches of new potting soil, then mixed in 2 tablespoons of slow-release fertilizer pellets (available in the floral section of most grocery stores). After I loosened the roots of small plants of thyme, rosemary and chives, I planted them together snugly. Oregano, parsley and cilantro work just as well. I added more soil to fill in the spaces and told her to water (ideally with some liquid fertilizer mixed in) every four days, ensuring the water ran out the bottom. I also advised her to move the container outside in summer. She was enamoured with the convenience of fresh herbs, and three years later, her windowsill garden is going strong. (How often you should water depends on what you're growing and where you're growing it. See "Getting Started" on the next page.)

Another easy success for your indoor garden is microgreens. Microgreens are the very young seedlings of vegetables and herbs—even smaller than baby greens. They are tasty in scrambled eggs, salads, smoothies and more, and exceptionally nutritious—they can be more than three times more nutrient rich than their mature leaves. Radish, broccoli,

GETTING STARTED: A GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

What to Plant

Start by assessing your space. (How much sun does it get? Is the soil sandy, or heavy with clay?) Choose plants that suit those conditions. Employees at local nurseries can tell you all you need to know. Take along a small bag of your soil to make it even easier.

I find that if I start by providing plants with the sun or shade they want and the soil they prefer, the plants don't ask a lot of me. You don't need to be a plant whisperer. I read labels. I research plants before I buy them. And I resist planting a cactus in wet soil or a fern in hot sun, no matter how great I think it'll look in that spot.

When to Water

You can buy a moisture meter, but few tools are more accurate than sticking a finger in the soil. Does your finger look glazed with brown soil? Or dusty, as if it's been in sand? If you're getting dust, it's time to water.

The next test is to scoop up a handful of soil and gently squeeze it with your fingertips. You want the soil to show a light imprint of your fingers. But if your handful drips through your fingers, it's too wet. Leave it for a day or two until the roots absorb the excess.

How to Water

Add enough so the flow comes slowly but steadily

out of the drainage holes (and drainage holes are always essential). If the water whooshes through the holes, that means it isn't saturating the soil. Once the draining water is slow and continuous, you have watered enough.

What to Watch for

Underwatered leaves will dry up and drop, usually quite suddenly, whereas overwatered leaves will turn pale. "Remember when plants are growing fast and strong, and making more demands on the root system, they will dry out more frequently," says Douglas Justice, associate director of horticulture and collections at the UBC Botanical Garden in Vancouver.

A Note on Plant Food

You can buy dry slow-release fertilizers and liquid fast-release ones. In containers, using slow-release fertilizer when you plant is adequate; add liquid fertilizer every two to four weeks to make plants thrive. When planting in the ground, using dry slow-release fertilizer once in the spring is ample.



EVGENY SHAPLOV/GETTY IMAGES

cabbage, legumes and leafy greens like spinach, Swiss chard and arugula are all ideal for this healthy method.

To grow microgreens, Amy Pennington, author of *Tiny Space Gardening*, uses a shallow tray or roasting pan. She starts with fresh seed-starting soil mix and puts in just enough so it's flush with the top. Pennington says to scatter the seeds densely across the surface of the mix. Spray the soil (and seeds) with a misting bottle to saturate the surface, then loosely cover the pan with plastic wrap to hold in moisture, let light in and create some warmth. Place on a windowsill or countertop and keep the mix moist. Remove the plastic wrap as soon as the first sprouts appear. Wait until the seedlings reach 1 inch to 2 inches tall and have two sets of leaves.

Pennington uses kitchen scissors to cut seedlings as close to the soil mix as possible, taking just as much as she needs that day. She rinses and dries the greens, then stores any extra between paper towels in the refrigerator. Most gardeners get two or three crops from each microgreens sowing, and then they sow seeds again.

WHAT IF I WANT TO GROW (AND EAT) MY OWN PRODUCE?

'Cut and come again' greens—like lettuce, kale, chard, arugula, spinach, endive and even broccoli—are another low-effort option. I sow (i.e., scatter) seeds, allowing about 3 to 4 seeds per inch of narrow rows, or 8 to 10 seeds per 3 square inches in containers. Four to

five weeks later, I enjoy salads and stir-frys. The cut-and-come-again method is the easiest way to grow greens in the smallest space and the shortest time.

You can sow cut-and-come-again plants with a seed mixture (my preference) or sow a specific green. Begin in early spring, when the large-flowered daffodils are blooming. Generously spread seeds loosely over the top of moist new potting soil. Cover them with a dusting of about a quarter-inch of soil (no deeper) and tamp the soil and seeds down firmly with your hand. Water with a gentle spray and ensure the soil never dries out.

Lindsay Del Carlo, trial garden manager of Renee's Garden seed company in Felton, California, is a fan of mesclun greens mixes—they are quick to germinate, often "coming again" (resprouting leaves) three to four times, and are delicious with a balsamic vinaigrette. For all cut-and-come-again gardening, she recommends you wait until plants are 4 to 6 inches tall before shearing. Cut just as much as you need that day, taking off a patch of young leaves about 1 to 2 inches above the soil level. Lindsay's favorites to grow with this method include Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*) and broccoli rabe, a leafy green.

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE SPACE OR TIME FOR BIG PLANTS?

I love the taste of my own strawberries and zucchini, but allocating the sunny space on our patio to big pots and having to stake sprawling, teetering plants as

the fruits grow heavy are big deterrents. I have become a fan of smaller, or 'dwarf,' versions of fruits and vegetables. Seeds and seedlings of both can often be found at nurseries. Look for varieties with 'patio' or 'gem' in their names—these are common cues for smaller plants.

WHAT IS THE EASIEST WAY TO START COMPOSTING?

Composting has an intimidating reputation, but both Chaudhary and Guttikonda agree that “everyone can, and should, compost.” Guttikonda lists the essentials: “Air circulation and a balance between the green/nitrogen component (from wet kitchen waste) and the brown/carbon component (cardboard paper, cocopeat, dry leaves and twigs).”

To build your compost, take a container and puncture holes in it. Then add a base layer of carbon material, followed by wet waste, and repeat till it is full. The ratio, Guttikonda advises, is two parts of carbon material for every one part of nitrogen waste. She also suggests ensuring that the compost is not running dry. “Add water, if you need to. Without moisture the process won't start,” she says.

“Composting at home goes a long way in decreasing the amount of waste that ends up in city landfills,” says Chaudhary, who suggests adding Bokashi powder to kitchen waste if collecting carbon material proves difficult. “The powder is easily available and its activated microbes balances out the nitrogen and takes care of the foul smell that may accompany your compost,” she says.



MY YARD DOES NOT GET MUCH SUN. CAN I STILL GROW SOMETHING?

If you get inconsistent sun (or fewer than six hours per day), Pennington suggests sowing snap peas. “It’s a cool-season crop so it doesn’t require a ton of sunlight in order to grow, and while the snap peas may not be quite as sweet as if they were in full sun, they will be pretty yummy,” she says. Other plants that tolerate some shade or do well with only morning sun include chard, arugula, leeks and radishes.

Beginning gardeners can revel in easy wins, and master gardeners may enjoy mixing things up. Happy growing! **R**



I was walking to my
 home in Toronto when
 a well-dressed man
 politely stopped me
 to ask for directions.

“Could you tell me which way to Bloor and...” He struggled to get the next word out, a pained look on his face, but I knew better than to finish his sentence for him.

“... Bathurst?” he said after several seconds of straining. When I started to answer, he told me that he didn't actually need to know. He was practising stuttering openly, he explained, hoping to become more confident doing so around strangers.

I lit up with excitement. “Are you doing that because it's National Stuttering Awareness Day?” I asked, always eager to connect with other people who stutter. When the man asked how I knew that, I said that I grew up with a stutter.

He nodded, looking a bit wistful: “And I suppose your stutter has magically disappeared since then?”

His question gave me pause. I under-

stood why he assumed this—when compared to his fairly severe stutter, I sounded fluent, stutter-free. But even as we spoke, my stutter had influenced my speech: For example, I'd misnamed *International* Stuttering Awareness Day as *National* Stuttering Awareness Day to avoid the tricky front vowel sound at the beginning of the word—a sound I continue to struggle with.

And while it's true that my stutter was more noticeable when I was a child, this was partially because I'd since found workarounds for difficult words and sounds, helping me hide the worst of it.

When I answered his question, I opted for the simplest explanation: that I had grown out of my stutter. But was this true?

ACCORDING TO DATA from the Canadian Stuttering Association, four per

cent of Canadian children stutter and only one per cent of people stutter into adulthood—a 75 per cent drop. But are the supposed ex-stutterers completely free of their past disfluencies? Or do their stutters continue to influence their decisions and affect their lives?

Most people who meet me don't notice my stutter, or, if they do, they chalk it up to shyness or insecurity. While most of the time, I don't stutter overtly—thanks in large part to my learnt knack for word substitution and assortment of ready-made circumlocutions—many of my choices are still guided by a deep fear of disfluency.

Stutterers like me, those who can pass as reasonably fluent, are called 'covert' stutterers, meaning that the most prominent features of our stutters aren't the overt ones—the syllable repetition, prolonged sounds and vocal blocks usually associated with stuttering—but the things we do to hide them.

Tiffani Kittilstved, a speech language pathologist and therapist, started stuttering as a child, though no one ever named or diagnosed her condition. She quickly learnt to hide her stutter using a combination of whispering, changing the pitch or tone of her voice and putting on strange accents. "I'd gotten to the point where if someone talked to me, I would cry and just not respond," she says. When people meet Kittilstved, they might not notice her stutter—and yet it has affected her life tremendously.

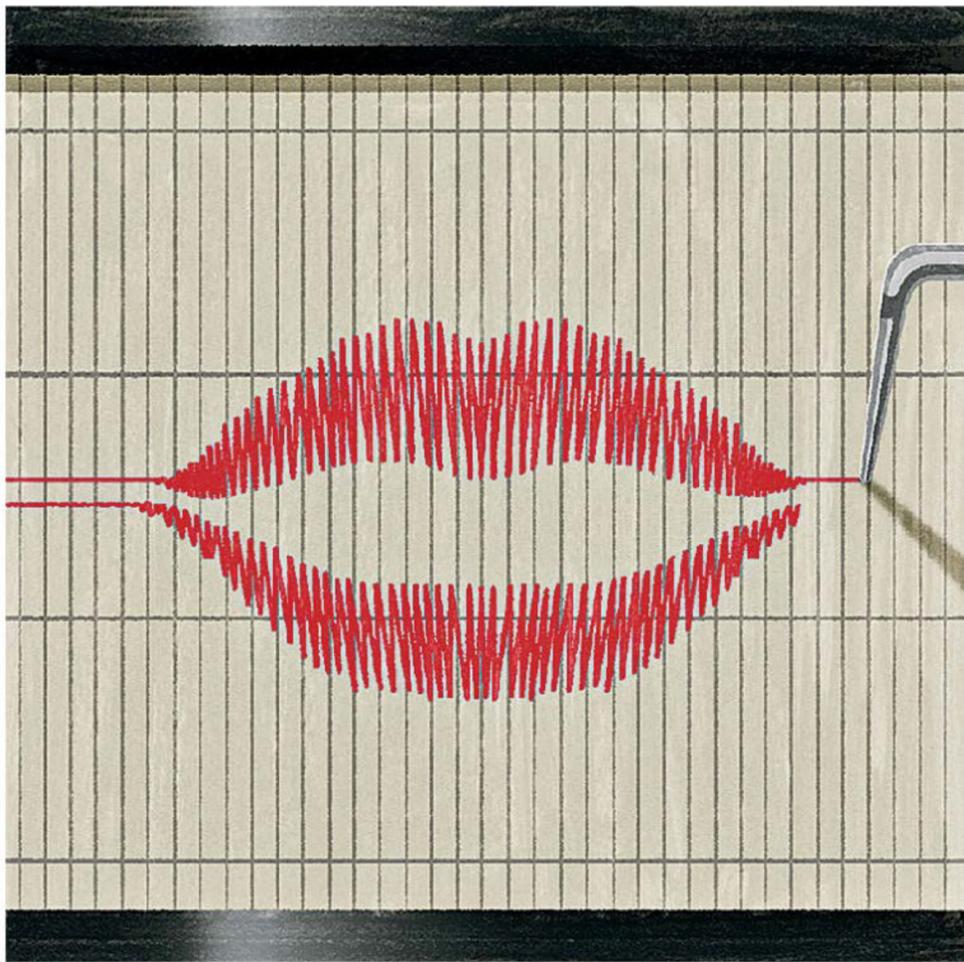
Vocal disfluency can deeply impact a person's decisions. For example, most

stutterers have difficulty saying their names. When asked my name, I always respond with a rushed "My name is Isabel," rather than just "Isabel," a trick that usually works, even if it often sounds clunky and awkward. My worst nightmare is a circle of strangers saying their names one at a time. Despite being a social person, I generally avoid situations where I have to meet many new people at once.

“MOSTLY I JUST DON'T INTRODUCE MYSELF UNLESS IT'S ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE.”

This common experience for stutterers can complicate our social and professional lives. "I can only imagine how many people think I'm an aloof bitch based on how rarely I introduce myself to someone new," says Sophia Stewart, a Brooklyn-based journalist who has written about her covert stutter. "Mostly I just don't introduce myself unless it is absolutely imperative. I try not to think about how many missed opportunities, missed connections and bad first impressions this has resulted in."

All this to say, many people who supposedly outgrew their childhood stutters are still guided by their effects. So, while the severity of my stutter has decreased with age, it has shaped my identity, informing the way that



I speak, interact with others and move around in the world.

A 2020 SURVEY of UK adults by the British Stammering Association found that between two and four per cent of respondents self-identified as stutterers—significantly more than the previously accepted figure of one per cent. Unlike earlier surveys, this one relied on self-reporting, which means many of us hide our stutters.

Being a covert stutterer is a liminal position, teetering between ability and disability. Which makes you wonder: Is a stutter defined by one's experience of speaking, or by the perception of the listener? If others don't notice your stutter, can you really call yourself a stutterer? And if covert stutterers *don't* identify with their disability, how might this affect the way they see them-

selves—as well as whether or not they ever come to accept it?

The social model of disability, which has been accepted by disabled communities worldwide, defines disability by the limitations imposed upon an individual by society, rather than any supposed limitations of the individual. Stuttering, however, has been largely absent from the discourse surrounding disability.

There has been “a glaring omission of speech and vocal impairments from disability scholarship as a whole,” Stewart wrote in an article for *The Baffler*.

Most research on stuttering is clinical, with a focus on the reduction of overt stuttering, rather than on accommodation and acceptance.

But this is beginning to change. Some researchers argue that treatment shouldn't be centred around eliminating a person's stutter, but rather on reducing harmful thoughts and behaviours surrounding it. In a 2022 paper published in the journal *Topics in Language Disorders*, researchers Seth E. Tichenor, Caryn Herring and J. Scott Yaruss proposed a new framework for understanding stuttering that prioritizes the speaker's experience over the listener's, making room for the ways in which covert stutterers' lives are affected by their ways of speaking.

This includes their personal reactions to their stutter, such as shame, fear or anxiety; behavioural reactions,

such as avoiding certain sounds or not making eye contact when speaking; and cognitive reactions, such as ruminating about future events when they expect to stutter. In short, having a stutter is about more than just the sound of one's speech: There are psychological and behavioural factors at play, too.

Nevertheless, from what I've seen, many covert stutterers wouldn't seek

“EVERY DAY I SAT IN HER CLASS IN SWEATY, HEART-POUNGING TERROR THAT I'D BE CALLED ON.”

out this kind of treatment. I never asked for accommodations in school because my stutter wasn't "bad enough," and I didn't want to justify my covert stutter to skeptical teachers.

I regretted the decision every time I had to present a paper aloud, forced to cut out entire sections on the fly because getting the words out was taking twice as long as I'd anticipated. I wish I'd asked for alternate ways of presenting my work: Another student could have read the paper, for example, or I could have pre-recorded my presentation.

For some covert stutterers, this attitude is reinforced by others' reactions. Stewart recalls being shut down when she approached a high school teacher who would randomly call on students to answer questions. "I went to her early

in the semester and told her that I didn't feel comfortable or able to participate this way," she says. Stewart offered to work with the teacher to figure out another way to show her engagement. "She was incredibly dismissive and basically said no. Every day I sat in her classroom in sweaty, heart-pounding terror that I'd be called on."

In university, Stewart was granted the accommodations she requested: Her final grade wasn't affected if she didn't verbally participate in class, and she was given alternatives to oral presentations. However, this came with another set of problems. "There were some who made assumptions off of my disability requests—who quite clearly assumed I was slow or shy," she says.

Indeed, studies have shown that stutterers are perceived as less intelligent, articulate and competent than non-stutterers. This is due to 'disability drift,' a phenomenon Jay Timothy Dolmage explores in his 2014 book *Disability Rhetoric*, whereby people assume that someone with one disability is impacted by other, unrelated disabilities.

Ultimately, whether or not a covert stutterer identifies as disabled is a deeply personal decision. "I consider disability as more of a public identity than a private one," Stewart says. "If someone asked me to describe myself, I don't think I would list 'disabled' as one of my intrinsic attributes."

However, the label has proven useful at times: It has helped Stewart access accommodations and it offers others an

easy way to conceptualize her experience. “When I say stuttering is a disability, it helps people to understand that it’s as constant and out of my control as, say, blindness or deafness,” she says.

Not only does the “disability” label enable stutterers to better access the care they need and to advocate for themselves (having a stutter may

I’VE KEPT MY STUTTER PRIVATE, OUT OF FEAR THAT IT WOULD CHANGE THE WAY OTHERS SEE ME.

qualify you for a disability tax credit in Canada, if it is severe enough), it can also help them find community. Having that connection is crucial for people with disabilities, who report being significantly more socially isolated and lonely than people without disabilities.

WHEN YOU’RE ABLE to pass as fluent, “coming out” as a stutterer can be a fraught decision. In my most recent relationship, for example, I went four years without discussing it with my partner. My stutter feels like a core part of my identity, but I’ve generally kept it private, out of fear that it would change the way others see me.

While Stewart openly identifies as a stutterer now, she hasn’t always. “I have actively hid [my stutter] before, from people I cared about quite a bit,”

she says. When possible, passing as fluent is usually the easiest option for her. “It is much more difficult to be disfluent than it is to be fluent,” she says. “Whenever I choose to pass, it’s for my own comfort, not for anyone else’s.”

Coming out can make covert stutterers vulnerable to discrimination. When Kittilstved chose to major in linguistics, she told the department head about her stutter, as well as her dream of becoming a speech language pathologist.

He told her that she would fail and strongly warned her against continuing—according to him, parents wouldn’t entrust their child’s treatment to someone who stutters. Kittilstved was crushed and changed her major. “That was the first time I really told someone I stutter ... and it had a really negative outcome,” she says.

Kittilstved eventually did become a speech language pathologist, applying for grad school years later at the encouragement of an anthropology professor who noticed her interest in the social impacts of stuttering. Nowadays, she is mostly open about her stutter. “I put it on my dating profile and I bring it up in conversation pretty much immediately,” she says.

She still hides her stutter in some situations. “It’s so easy to be like, ‘All your avoidance behaviours are wrong and bad, let’s just be open and stutter’ ... but that’s not the world we live in,” she says. “I’m a woman, I’m queer, and I stutter and have other disabilities like ADHD, so I don’t always



feel safe to be totally open ... It's so complex being a marginalized person in our society."

Even as the disability justice movement flourishes, 'coming out' remains a complicated choice for people with invisible disabilities.

SINCE CHILDHOOD, I'VE devoured any media representation of stutterers I could find: Bill from *It*, Merry from *American Pastoral*, King George VI from *The King's Speech*. Recently, I've noticed an uptick in stuttering content: essays in mainstream publications, books from major publishers. Not to mention that the United States

elected Joe Biden, a person who stutters, as president.

All of this has helped me to begin reclaiming my stutter and reimagining how it might fit into my identity. In addition to writing about it, I've opened up to my family and some of my friends. As covert stuttering gains recognition, I feel like I have permission to accept that my stutter is part of who I am, whether or not the people around me know it.

Covert stutterers might not see themselves in conventional disability narratives, but recovery

narratives might not quite fit either. "There is no 'recovering' from stuttering," Stewart says. "There's no pill, no surgery, no way to get rid of a stutter ... but there is recovering from the shame and self-hatred that stem from stuttering. So that is the recovery that I'm always focused on."

As for me, I'd say that my stutter has not "magically disappeared," or at least, not exactly. Yes, I've found ways to conceal it, but I'll never outgrow my stutter. But maybe I got something better—I grew alongside it, my identity inextricable from the way that I speak. **R**

@2023, ISABEL ARMIENTO. FROM "GROWING OUT OF IT," THIS (1 AUGUST 2023), THIS.ORG



Umbrella Academy

The way I see it, if you want the rainbow you gotta put up with the rain.

DOLLY PARTON, ARTIST



**Sudukathu Kali
(Graveyard Kali),
Kulasai Dussehra,
Udangudi, Tamil Nadu**

As Gods Among Us

A photographer explores the gamut of India's ritual performers who embody deities as a form of worship

BY *Kai Frieze*

PHOTOGRAPHS by *Charles Fréger*

A demon *asur* nonchalantly twirling a human skull and the blade that took it; the buffalo-headed monster Mahisasur, and his nemesis, the half-man, half-lion Narsimha; a pair of *gopis*, or milkmaids, waving peacock feathers to catch a polyamorous god's eye; the naked and bloodthirsty goddess Kali, with her many arms and garland of skulls—the *dramatis personae* of the Hindu cosmos is famously colourful and many-headed. But the selection of wild incarnations stalking the pages of Charles Fréger's book of

portraits *Aam Aastha* offers a glimpse of a more startling, and perhaps deeper, paganism than the narrowing visual imagination of mainstream Hindu iconography proliferating in India today.

While modern Hindu nationalism fosters a state-sponsored religious aesthetic increasingly focussed on gigantic temples and statues, Charles Fréger's meticulously composed images of the 'little traditions' of religious devotion staged by costumed 'folk' artists from more than 60 local cultures across the country, are both strikingly beautiful and quietly unsettling.



(Left) Uchitta, Theyyam, Madayi village, Kannur, Kerala

Fréger has, it would be fair to say, something of an obsession with ritual costumed performance, or masquerades. He has been working on related themes since at least 2010, in a beguiling series of books including *Wilder Mann*, on mythic, feral characters of European cultures, *Yokainoshima* on traditional festival costumes of rural Japan, and *Cimarron*, on the ritual costumes and characters assumed by descendants of African slaves in the Americas.

Despite the resonance of these earlier projects, Fréger told me that *Aam Aastha* (which translates as ‘common devotions’) was “more ambitious” because it focussed on masquerades and dances linked to religion. “This is what distinguishes it from my other projects right from the start,” he said. “Here, we depict a wide variety of representations, often tribal, of Buddhist and Hindu deities.”

Indeed, many of the traditions documented in *Aam Aastha* involve performers from the bottom of the elaborate social hierarchy that has historically ostracized tribal and low-caste communities. Paradoxically, it is this social dynamic that charges the performances you see on these pages with much of their power. The Theyyam representation of the goddess Uchitta for example, is a performance that combines, divine mediation, individual transformation and



Charkula Nritya, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

the subversion of hierarchy (however temporary) since it is traditionally enacted only by a Dalit man.

Similarly, the Gajan performers of Bengal have a tradition of straying onto the ritually ‘impure’ stage of cremation and burial grounds. It’s rumoured that despite legal prohibitions, they still seek out the ultimate theatrical prop, the Ur-mask: a human skull. Fréger himself was struck by “the economy of means” used to create the costumes and masks he photographed. “In India, more than anywhere else, faces and bodies are often painted ... This is frequently the basis of the mask. The rest may be made of recycled fabric.”



Asur Sonio and Mathar Khuli (Demon Army and Skull), Gajan Kasim Bazar, Murshidabad, West Bengal

Yet, for all the aesthetic diversity and frank exoticism in these 300-odd images, we are also confronted with the shock of something familiar: echoes of the visual projects of both colonialism and modernity. It's hard, at first glance, to ignore the impression that the book is a collection, a compendium, of costumes and performance traditions. I thought imme-

diately of the famous 19th-century volumes *Les Hindous, ou description de leurs moeurs coutumes et cérémonies* (*The Hindus, or Description of their Morals, Customs and Ceremonies*) by the Flemish printmaker-ethnographer Frans Balthazar Solvyns. Indeed, I thought of the entire European tradition of cataloguing colonial subjects as infotainment, whether in encyclopaedic volumes like Solvyns', or the 'human zoos' of Carl Hagenbeck or the dioramas of 'tribal savages' in Victorian-era museums, some of which survive in India to this day.

While it's impossible to un-see the accumulation of colonial imagery that *Aam Aastha* evokes, Fréger negotiates this fraught legacy with a coolly provocative detachment. You can see that there is more than one thing going on in his tableaux. They are staged, for a start, like outdoor studio portraits, with flat lighting and backdrops that alternate between generic landscapes and the cheap brickwork and bright paint of small-town India.

As a result, we find the performers caught in relaxed or extravagant poses, their lines and shapes distinctly fore-



Gopis, Ras Leela,
Tellou village,
Imphal East, Manipur

grounded and decontextualized from the busy realities of actual ritual performance or street theatre. “To be in India is to be part of a very noisy, chaotic world, but my portraits press pause on the frenzy,” Fréger says.

The photographer's remarks reminded me how very different his perspective is from that of an Indian, or urban-cosmopolitan Indian viewer. For someone like me, it's impossible not to confront the simultaneous masquerades of nativism and the white masks of colonialism's cultural legacy. And to me, the figure of a subaltern, folkloric performer always evokes a sense of regret or rebuke that demands an outspoken response.

These are not images I can imagine an Indian photographer attempting, though I can think of at least three prominent contemporary ones who are similarly obsessed with costume and ritual: Gauri Gill, whose *Acts of Appearance* deploys the masks of tribal artists to stage unsettlingly quotidian tableaux; Arko Datto, whose thematic documentary work ‘PPE Fuses the Masks of the Covid pandemic’ with effigies of Bengal's religious festivals; and Pushpamala N. whose *Native Women of South India—Manners and Customs* is an explicitly playful and ironic take on the



Nirsingha (Narasimha), Bhaona, Tetelia village, Guwahati, Assam

exoticization of costumes, performance and portraiture itself.

Fréger's images, though, maintain a reticent distance, a strategy that could be construed as naïve, evasive—or subtle. They are certainly free of any didacticism, and one benefit of this is that they invite the observer to layer the pictures with their own references. I find myself startled by the chilling serenity of the Manipuri *Ras Leela* image for example, given the recent outbreak of a brutal ethnic civil war in that part of India, while the Assamese



Mahishasur, Gajan, Kasim Bazar, Murshidabad, West Bengal

Nirsingha looks to me like a doppelgänger of the American adult cartoon character BoJack Horseman. In the portrait of the doomed buffalo-demon I can't help but smile at the gentle humour of the backdrop, a wall plastered with patties of bovine dung.

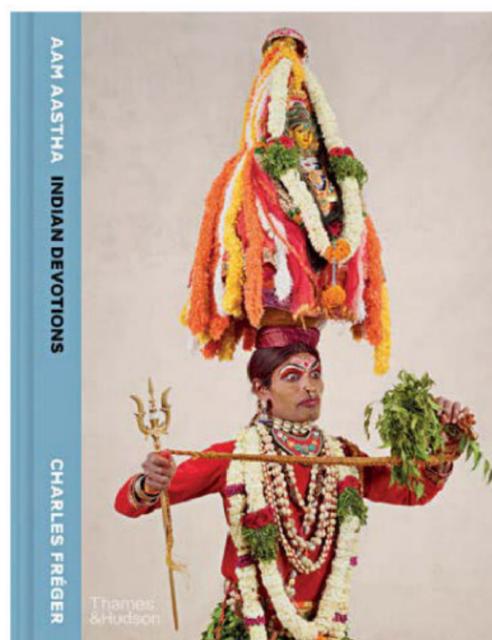
If Fréger avoids polemics and irony, there is clear empathy here, and he is emphatic about his desire to celebrate “ordinary people” trying to express “their desire to do good, to embody the deities as best they can.”

I think he's also more optimistic than

an Indian aesthete is likely to be. The novelist Anuradha Roy, in an introductory essay to the book, expresses the fear that these images document “an ancient system of beliefs and rituals being swept away by a homogenizing combination of forces: religious nationalism, globalization, the mass media.”

But Fréger himself prefers to believe that “there's a strength in these regional rituals that resists this dominant, centralized culture.” He also celebrates the adaptive ingenuity of his ‘devotees’, their use of found materials and the “circulation of forms and imaginary worlds, thanks to everything locals can see

on their cell phones.” For all the aesthetic distance in his photographs, this ‘imaginative circulation’ is a bond that Fréger seeks to share with the fellow bricoleurs on the other side of his own elaborate mask—the camera. **R**



FRENCH PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER CHARLES FRÉGER IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE STUDY OF BODY AND CLOTHING. HIS BOOK *AAM AASTHA: INDIAN DEVOTIONS* (THAMES AND HUDSON, ₹3,300; 324 PAGES) WAS RELEASED IN 2023. A VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN GERMAN IN THE MAGAZINE *GEO*, JANUARY 2024.



Kitt, ready
for duty.

HERO PETS



*Officer Bill Cushing needed
a partner. His dog needed a purpose.
Together, they rescued each other*

BY *Dave Wedge*

FROM BOSTON MAGAZINE



Bill Cushing was exercising in his home gym when he got the call. It was a little before 1 p.m. on 4 June 2021, and the Braintree, Massachusetts, police officer thought he could get a workout in before his shift started.

When Cushing suddenly heard sirens, though, and his phone lit up with the Braintree Police Department number, he knew his day was about to start early.

A domestic violence call had come in, and the department needed Cushing and Kitt, his police dog for the past decade, to help find the suspect. Cushing rushed to put on his uniform. Kitt, an 11-year-old German shepherd-Belgian Malinois mix, snapped to attention. It was time to go to work.

Cushing drove toward the scene on McCusker Drive, listening to the radio chatter and speeding up as he heard the action escalate. The suspect possibly had two firearms, was on foot and had fled into the woods behind a massive apartment complex.

Cushing knew the spot. Those woods had been the site of many police

incidents where he and Kitt had tracked assailants in the past.

By the time Cushing whipped into the parking lot at the edge of the woods, other officers were there. One directed Cushing and Kitt to the last known spot where the fugitive had been seen. Kitt immediately picked up the scent, and they were off, charging into the brush. Kitt tugged forcefully at his leash, almost dragging Cushing into a sprint.

Soon, Kitt leaped towards a large rock, which let Cushing know that behind it, the armed man they were after was hiding and ready to pounce.

TEN YEARS EARLIER, on a warm July day in 2011, Cushing climbed into a van with Mark O'Reilly, the master K-9 trainer from the Massachusetts Department of Correction. They headed



Partners, Cushing and Kitt quickly grew close.

toward a police-dog training centre in Bethany, Connecticut.

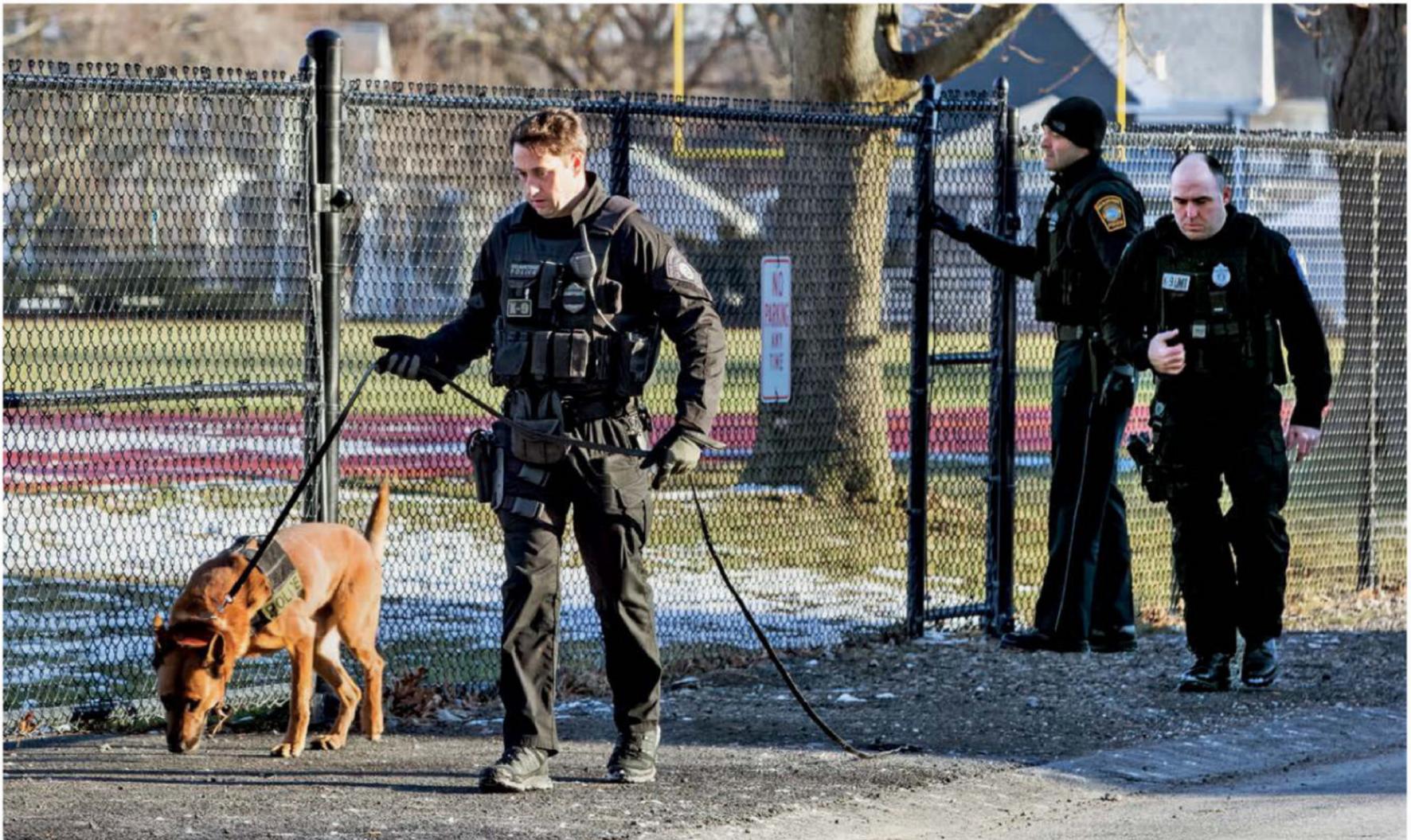
Cushing didn't yet know much about being a K-9 officer. He'd been a beat cop for the past six years. But now, in his early 30s, he wanted more action and to make a greater contribution to keeping his hometown safe. He believed that becoming a K-9 officer was the way to do it.

Not every cop can become a K-9 officer. Candidates need to be hardworking, incredibly fit and, most of all, catch the attention of the police chief. Once

officers are selected, they must undergo hundreds of hours of specialized training before getting to work with a dog. It's an elite circle.

At the training facility, Cushing and O'Reilly emerged from their vehicle to a chorus of dogs barking inside the long white building. One of the facility's trainers came out with a dog for their inspection. His name was Kitt.

Kitt was a mangy-looking mutt with matted hair, big pointy ears that stood straight up, and a funny look in his eye. Cushing didn't like what he saw.



O'Reilly, though, wasn't paying attention to Kitt's looks but to the way he strode out of his kennel as though he belonged. He was just 11 months old and hadn't been trained to track scents. Yet he immediately spotted a five-gallon bucket with some toys in it. He attacked the bucket with a vengeance, toppling it over and thrashing it around.

"We'll take him," O'Reilly said.

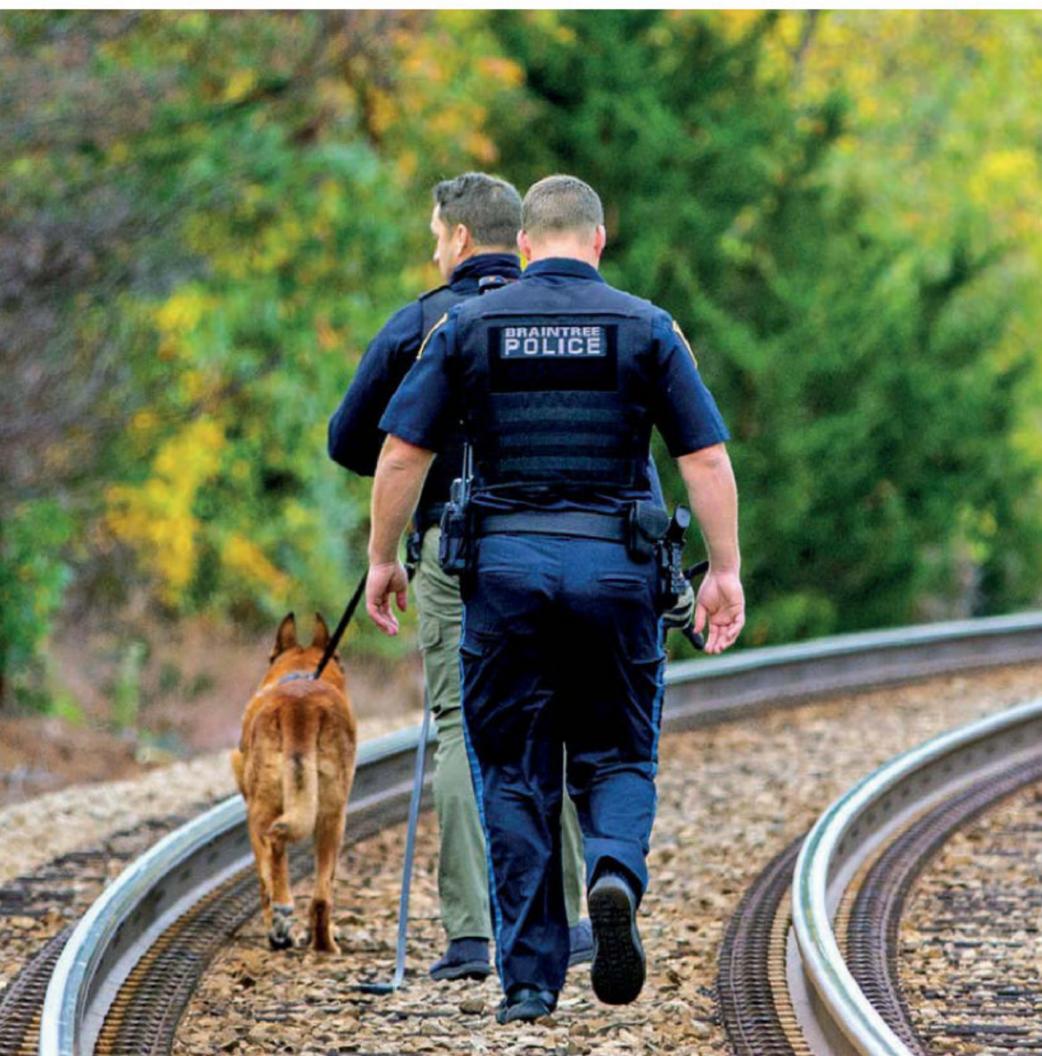
Ah, geez, Cushing thought. Now this funny-looking dog with no tracking experience was coming home with him.

THE NEXT 16 WEEKS served as a boot camp for Cushing and Kitt. Each morning, the pair headed out for intensive eight- to 12-hour training sessions, tracking through vast fields, empty buildings and surrounding forests.

O'Reilly told Cushing that he had to learn to trust his dog, even when Cushing had his doubts.

Still, the most important part of the training took place at home. Cushing learnt that for their partnership to be successful, Kitt needed to believe that Cushing was the only person who would provide him with food and water, and that his own survival depended on Cushing's safety. So for the first few weeks, Cushing fed Kitt only by hand. He would serve him a water bowl, and if Kitt didn't drink, he would remove it. Cushing became everything to Kitt.

It was mutual. Cushing didn't have a wife, girlfriend or children. Kitt was the focus of his profession, his home life and his affection.



About halfway through their training, Cushing and Kitt went to the prison complex for a long, challenging tracking test. A trainer, posing as a suspect—clad in a protective bite suit—hid hundreds of yards away. Kitt picked up his scent and aggressively pursued. When he spotted the trainer, Kitt leaped at him, flying 10 feet through the air and nearly knocking him down to the ground. *Whoa*, Cushing thought. *This dog actually works.*

“Congratulations,” O’Reilly told Cushing. “You are cleared hot,” which meant that Kitt was ready to hit the streets.

Kitt and Cushing’s first assignment was to track a bank robber. Kitt picked up a scent at the bank and led Cushing down the road, where they discovered

Kitt’s nose was unailing when searching for evidence or a suspect.

some cash that the robber had dumped before fleeing in a getaway car. Kitt’s discovery helped other officers pick up the trail and capture the robber.

Many successful assignments followed. Sometimes, when the tracks were long and gruelling, Cushing wondered if Kitt was still on the scent. Then he would hear O’Reilly’s voice in his head: *Trust your dog*. So Cushing did, and Kitt never let him down.

Cushing soon grew to rely on Kitt in other ways too. If Cushing had a personal problem, he’d talk to Kitt about it. If Cushing was having a rough day, Kitt would intuitively rest his head on him. Before Cushing knew it, Kitt wasn’t just his partner; they were best friends.

IN THE EARLY hours of a March day in 2016, Cushing was asleep when his phone rang. It was his lieutenant. A man had allegedly threatened the mother of his two children and was on the loose, drunk and carrying a knife.

“We need you and Kitt to find this guy,” the lieutenant ordered.

Kitt was already up and standing at attention. He seemed to sense that they were going to work. Kitt barked as they drove with sirens screaming and lights flashing toward the neighbourhood where the suspect had last been seen.

When they arrived, Kitt picked up the scent of his target, 44-year-old

Robert Dussourd. Kitt then led Cushing and other officers through several backyards, and onto a street where Kitt stopped and attempted to dive under a parked car. The officers then knew that was where the man they were after was hiding.

Cushing gripped Kitt's leash in his left hand, shining his flashlight under-

“HEY, BUDDY, I DON'T WANT MY DOG TO BITE YOU. JUST COME OUT, GIVE UP.”



neath the vehicle to see the fugitive. The round beam of light passed over Dussourd's face.

“Come out, man,” Cushing said to Dussourd.

Silence.

“Hey, buddy, I don't want my dog to bite you,” Cushing added. “Just come out, give up.”

Kitt sat still, riveted, waiting for Cushing's command to pounce. Then Dussourd poked his head up from under the car and looked directly at him.

Dussourd allegedly said, “I'm going to kill you.”

An instant later, the suspect darted out from under the car, pulled a large kitchen knife out of his pants, and advanced toward Cushing and Kitt.

“Drop the knife!” Cushing recalls yelling. “My dog's gonna bite you!”

Dussourd kept moving toward them, leaving Cushing no choice. He released his grip on the leash. Kitt leaped through the air and sank his teeth into the suspect's right hip. Dussourd wailed and began flailing his knife. Cushing was terrified that he would stab Kitt.

Enraged, Dussourd advanced, stabbing at the air just inches from Cushing.

Cushing sensed it was a shoot-or-be-killed situation, but feared he might strike Kitt while trying to hit the suspect. He fired two quick rounds, and Dussourd fell to the ground, with Kitt still biting him.

Cushing rushed over and grabbed Kitt around the neck to release his bite. Other officers immediately attempted CPR on Dussourd, but it was too late. Dussourd later died at the hospital.

Wanting to make sure that Dussourd hadn't stabbed Kitt, Cushing inspected the dog's body for injuries. When he found none, he bear-hugged Kitt, burying his face in his fur.

“Good boy, Kitt,” he said. “We're good, we're good.”

JUST A MONTH after the shooting, Cushing and Kitt found themselves in the same neighbourhood, tracking another domestic-violence suspect. Cushing

was on high alert. His breathing was heavy, and his heart pounded. When Cushing stepped on a tree branch and it snapped, he drew his weapon. Another officer turned to look at him and asked if Cushing was OK.

Cushing had assured his chief that he was ready to return to work. But now, back in the field, drawing his gun at imaginary bad guys, it was obvious to Cushing that he wasn't OK at all.

Over and over again, he replayed in his head what had happened the night he'd killed Dussourd. He was sure he had done everything right, but he couldn't stop thinking about Dussourd's children, who had lost their father.

Cushing knew he needed help. He



Kitt's other job: big brother.

WILLIAM CUSHING

began going to a therapist. He also consulted Kitt's veterinarian, who said that Cushing's emotions were travelling right down the leash into Kitt. Cushing knew he had to work hard to heal, not just for his own sake but also for Kitt's. After several weeks of therapy, they went back to work and continued to excel.

Then, in 2018, Cushing started dating a woman. She moved in with Cushing and Kitt, and in June 2019, their daughter was born. Cushing worried that Kitt might react poorly to a baby in the house—in their house. After all, Kitt was so protective of Cushing and their territory. But just as Kitt had seemed to feel Cushing's fear and trauma, Kitt seemed to also feel his love.

Kitt played with the baby. She fell asleep resting on him. He wouldn't let anyone other than Cushing and his girlfriend near her.

As for Cushing, he took to parenting like a natural. After all, Kitt had taught him how to care for another being, how to nurture, and how to put someone else's needs before his own.

As parenting became a priority, Cushing began to work less. In 2020, Cushing and his girlfriend welcomed their second daughter, and that meant turning down even more assignments.

Soon after, the call for McCusker Drive came in. On 4 June 2021, Kitt yanked Cushing through thorny woods with two other officers, Richard Seibert and Matthew Donoghue, following. They were chasing 34-year-old



A statue of Kitt stands alert at the police memorial.

Andrew Homen after a woman had called the police, saying he had tried to choke her and put a gun to her head before fleeing.

Cushing could tell by the purpose with which Kitt was pulling him that Homen was hiding somewhere nearby. Suddenly, Kitt stopped and jumped up and down near a 4-foot-tall rock. Kitt was telling him Homen was behind it.

“Show me your hands!” Cushing shouted. “Show me your hands!”

Homen emerged with his gun drawn.

“Drop the gun,” one officer shouted.

Kitt leaped at Homen, aiming to sink his teeth into him so Cushing could make the arrest. Instead, Homen fired three times, and Kitt flew backward, landing on the ground.

Cushing raised his weapon, fired at Homen, and thought he had hit him. Homen doubled over and started backing up, but continued firing at the officers, who fired back at him.

Cushing ran out of bullets. He tried to reload but couldn’t move his left arm. When he looked down, he knew why. It looked like his arm had been partially blown off.

“I’m hit!” he shouted before falling onto the ground, next to Kitt. Seibert unleashed a volley of shots from his rifle at Homen—*pop, pop, pop*.

The woods suddenly went quiet. Homen was mortally wounded, and Cushing was still lying on the ground, his left arm in searing pain. He recalls turning his head to the side to find

himself face to face with Kitt. He stared into his best friend's eyes and watched as the life drained out of them.

Cushing feared he wasn't far behind. He thought of his young daughters. If he died, they wouldn't remember him.

Then Seibert tied a tourniquet around Cushing's arm.

"He shot my dog," Cushing told him.

"He's gone, Bill," Seibert said.

Cushing heard the unmistakable sound of police gear clinking and clanking. Officers placed Cushing onto a stretcher. As they carried him out of the woods and loaded him into an ambulance, Cushing saw an officer crying. The door slammed, sirens blared and the driver sped toward the hospital. Staring at the ceiling, Cushing tried to focus. He thought of his daughters. *I'm still alive*, he told himself. *I'm not going to die*.

ONE WEEK later, after undergoing a handful of reconstructive surgeries, Cushing went home with his left arm in a sling and a full police procession. When they pulled into the driveway, Cushing had to work up the nerve to enter his home. Everything was still there: Kitt's bowl, the bed that still smelled like Kitt, dog hair on the couch. Everything but Kitt himself.

Ten days later, an officer drove Cushing to the Cartwright Funeral Home in Braintree. Staff escorted Cushing into the viewing room, where Kitt's body lay in a coffin draped in an American flag.

Cushing pulled up a chair and sat

down, lowering his head onto Kitt's body, and wept. For one last time, it was just the two of them.

Cushing thanked his partner for everything he had done for him, including taking those first bullets and buying the officers precious extra seconds that had saved Cushing's life. Then he wiped his tears. It was time for Kitt's final send-off.

Dozens of police from across the state watched as six K-9 officers—led by O'Reilly—placed the dog's casket into the back of a hearse. A procession of police vehicles slowly made its way to Gillette Stadium, where O'Reilly and the other pallbearers carried Kitt's casket onto the turf, which was painted with a large, white message that read: "K-9 Kitt, End of Watch, 6-4-21."

As 'Taps' solemnly echoed across the stadium, officers removed the flag from Kitt's casket, folded it into a tight, neat triangle, and presented it to Cushing. Then all the officers lined up and paid their respects to Kitt.

In the months that followed, Cushing began the long process of rehabbing his left arm, unable to do his job without full use of his limb. Instead of pouring his energy into Kitt and police work, he opened a foundation in Kitt's name. It provides K-9 teams with protective gear, including bulletproof vests for dogs, in hopes of saving the life of a canine as brave as Kitt. **R**

FROM BOSTON MAGAZINE (10 AUGUST 2023). © 2023
BOSTON MAGAZINE, BOSTONMAGAZINE.COM.

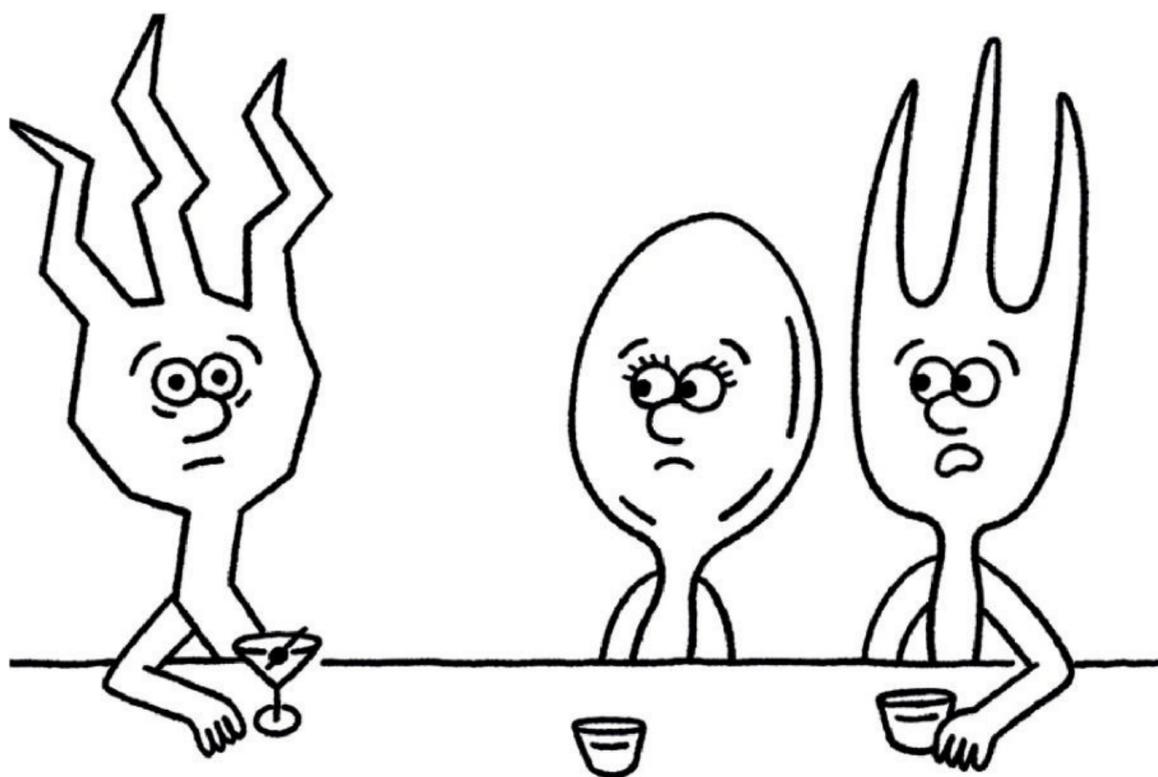
LIFE'S

Like That

We were playing the game Password with friends. I got the word *violin*, and gave my partner—my husband—this ideal clue: “Stradivarius.”

My husband immediately perked up, shouting, “Clouds!”
—GWENDOLYN SHAULYS

Just because my mother likes her new cellphone doesn't mean she knows how it works. While on the phone with her, I noticed that she seemed reluctant to wrap up the call. I felt touched that she didn't want our chat to end. That is, until after numerous exchanged goodbyes, she muttered softly, “I really need to learn how to hang up this phone ...”
—DEBORAH SERGEANT



“He once fell into the garbage disposal and doesn't like to talk about it.”

Three examples of why we need a vacation after our vacation:

◆ There are two types of people—those who get to the airport four hours early and still worry about missing their flight, and those who think the final boarding call is a good time to go grab Starbucks—and they marry each other.

—X@MEDIocreMAMAA

◆ Opened closet in hotel to check for murderers while simultaneously realizing I was unprepared should one be in there.

—X@ANNIEMUMARY

◆ The younger generation will never know

the absolute panic of dropping the Map-Quest directions and the pages getting mixed up while a dad screams, “WHAT EXIT DO I TAKE???”

—X@EMILYKMAY

After my brother-in-law's beloved Seattle Mariners failed to make the playoffs last year, he declared, “When I die, I want the Mariners to be my pallbearers ... so they can let me down one last time.”

—KATHRYN SWORD

While looking at old family photos from our trip to Disney World, my 3-year-old noticed

It's not a good meal until I have to take my shirt off to eat it.

—X@ATSUKOCOMEDY

that he wasn't in any of them. I pointed to his pregnant mother in the photo and said, "You were there, just in Mommy's tummy."

"Daddy," he said, "next time we go to Disney World, don't put me in Mommy's belly."

—CEDRICK LUCES

While taking the road test for my driver's licence, someone cut me off. I held my temper in front of the inspector, who shook his head and said, "You have a lot to learn."

At a red light, the car behind tapped my bumper. I remained calm while the inspector

shook his head. When the light turned, the car behind me sped up and cut me off. That did it. I hit the horn.

The inspector swiveled around to look me in the eye and said, "Now you're getting the hang of it."

—GCFL.NET

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

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER US BY

After 12 years of learning the three R's, high school seniors are putting all that knowledge into creating senior pranks. Here are some of the best, as shared on the 'We Are Teachers' Facebook page:

- ◆ Seniors at my kids' high school hired a mariachi band to follow the principal around all day.
- ◆ The seniors of two Alabama schools reversed places and showed up at the other school. It was midday before the teachers caught on.
- ◆ The relocation of the principal's office—including everything that wasn't nailed down—

out onto a field. Everything was in the same position as in his actual office. They even ran an



electrical cord so that he was able to work outside.

- ◆ They put the assistant principal's car up for sale on *Craigslist*. It said, "Proceeds will benefit the class of ___."
- ◆ While the history teacher was called to the office for a minute, all the seniors went into the room next door and a class of second graders filled the seniors' room.

The

I was in the woods with my family and we'd lost our way.

Upside of

My phone was dead. It was getting dark.

Getting Lost

How could this possibly be a good thing?

BY *Liann Bobechko*

FROM *COTTAGE LIFE*





I know my way around the woods pretty well.

I can walk the path to the lake near our house in the dark without a flashlight—my feet know the way. Around my family's cabin in Ontario, there are more than 100 acres to explore, crossed by deer trails, creeks and valleys. I've been tromping over that land for my whole life, so it was a shock when I got lost last winter.

Late one bright, frigid afternoon in February, my two daughters, ages 9 and 12, my husband, Steve, and I strapped on our snowshoes and headed northwest from the house. While making our way up the long, gradual slope, we stopped to look at the convoluted trails of mice running between trees, to investigate lichen and bracket fungi, and to adjust the kids' snowshoes when they came loose.

As the shadows started to lengthen, we moved farther up, clambering

around fallen trees. Weariness began to outpace enthusiasm. At the top of the ridge, we came to a stand of hemlock, where we discovered a couple of deer beds under the delicate branches. When had the animals last been there? Would a fawn snuggle up on its own in a small spot or beside its mama in a big one? We knew there were wolves around; we'd seen the remains of their deer kill a few weeks earlier.

In the shade of the dense cover, our feet and fingers started to feel cold. We decided to head back, but rather than backtracking, we'd make a loop and trek down the steep side of the hill. I had a general sense that ahead lay the creek that leads to the valley, so we trudged onward, trusting that the stream would funnel us to the road, where the going would be easier.

We made our way down the hillside,

into the glow of dusk, leaping from boulders into the deep, powdery snow, shouting and laughing. We picked up sticks and became Jedi, exploring our way through a strange, frozen planet. As the terrain levelled out in the valley, I felt my first pinprick of doubt. Everything looked flattish, the ground disguised by deep drifts. *Where was the creek? Had we veered off course?*

I pulled out my phone to get my bearings, but it died in my hand. That pinprick of doubt now felt more like panic: *I didn't even bring snacks. Or a flashlight. No one even knows we are out. It's getting dark. We are going to die here in the woods.*

“MOST OF US HAVE boundless confidence that we can figure out where we are,” says Colin Ellard, a professor of psychology at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. He tells me about a park ranger who was lost in the woods but was so sure he knew where he was that he decided his compass was wrong. “So he destroyed it—smashed it on a rock—because he was so frustrated,” says Ellard. “He thought, *I know this way is north*, but the compass was telling him it was this other direction.” Now that ranger always takes two compasses into the bush. It’s comforting to hear that even experienced outdoors people can get disoriented.

Depending on factors including age and genetics, people’s ability to navigate varies considerably, says Giuseppe Iaria, a professor of cognitive neuroscience

specializing in spatial orientation at the University of Calgary. “If you take 100 people, the majority are going to be within a wide, normal range, with some people quickly becoming familiar with their environment and some taking five to 10 times longer,” he says. Only one or two per cent of people have a profound inability to find their way, even in extremely familiar environments, such as their workplace and neighbourhood.

In the 1970s, scientists studied rats to try to understand how the brain navigates. The researchers observed that certain cells in the hippocampus would fire when one of the rats was in certain locations. Over time, more research supported the idea that the brain might form some kind of cognitive map. In the past 50 years, Iaria says, we’ve learned that it’s not just these ‘place cells,’ as they are called, that help form mental maps by recognizing places. Our brains also contain directional cells, which help with orientation by firing when looking one way versus another; border cells that help with spatial recognition, which fire when walking around the boundaries of a space; and grid cells, which fire at regular intervals and generate a grid-like mental map to help with spatial awareness.

All these cells work together to help animals, including us, make sense of where they are. Recent research also points to the existence of time cells, which help us locate our memories not only in space but in time.

“The hippocampus seems to be a

central clearinghouse for understanding where we are in the world," says Ellard. "Ideally placed near the centre of your brain, it receives a huge number of inputs and helps create the story of where you are and how you got there."

So that's where the magic happens. But how does it happen? The strategy we most commonly use in getting around is procedural memory. Akin to muscle memory, it lets us, say, drive to work while listening to the radio. We don't need to think—we're on autopilot. "It's a system for the brain to keep up without using higher cognitive functions and becoming exhausted," says Iaria.



In the snow-covered landscape, everything looked the same.

Assume that in your neighbourhood you have four places you go: your house, the store, the bank and the bus stop. Your brain can easily remember the paths between those points because you've walked them hundreds of times. But what about the places we only go on occasion? That's where the cognitive map comes in. Says Iaria, "It allows us to go from place to place without having too much load on our memory."

The cognitive map allows us to link up locations in our minds to form a spatial understanding of our surroundings.

Because it's dynamic, you can still direct yourself to the target location. In the woods, "the cognitive map is what's going to save your life," Iaria says, not following one trail you've taken for 20 years. When you rely on procedural memory, you can go out in the dark, but as soon as you get off that trail—say there's a tree blocking it, or you followed an interesting set of animal tracks—suddenly you don't know your way back.

A cognitive map is more robust—and made stronger each time you move around in it. But these maps don't always keep us from getting lost, says Ellard. "Often they only have a vague resemblance to reality, the way a subway map is a boiled-down geometric map."

Unfortunately, that was the case for me that afternoon in the woods. I didn't have a procedural memory or a robust cognitive map to rely on—we were in unfamiliar territory.

You'd think it wouldn't be that hard to keep a running tally of where we are by remembering where we've been and how we got there. But whether you're walking in a forest or up a mountainside, or are in a boat in a fog, holding course can be extremely difficult. It relies on a skill that we humans are not very good at, according to Ellard.

Called path integration, it gives animals information about how far they've gone from a starting place by keeping track of and integrating their own motion over time. Ellard says path integration is very difficult, and that once the mental representation of the

path is lost, it's unlikely to be recovered.

So what other tools can we rely on? Paying attention to landmarks that help orient you is another strategy the experts recommend. "It's easier in an urban environment to identify landmarks, such as a Starbucks or 'the beautiful red building,'" says Iaria.

The challenge when you're in the forest or the mountains is to find the equivalent of the beautiful red building. How? The trees may look the same superficially, but once you remark on the details that make one tree, one rock, one bend in the creek different from another, you can use them as landmarks. You must consciously look for these critical details.

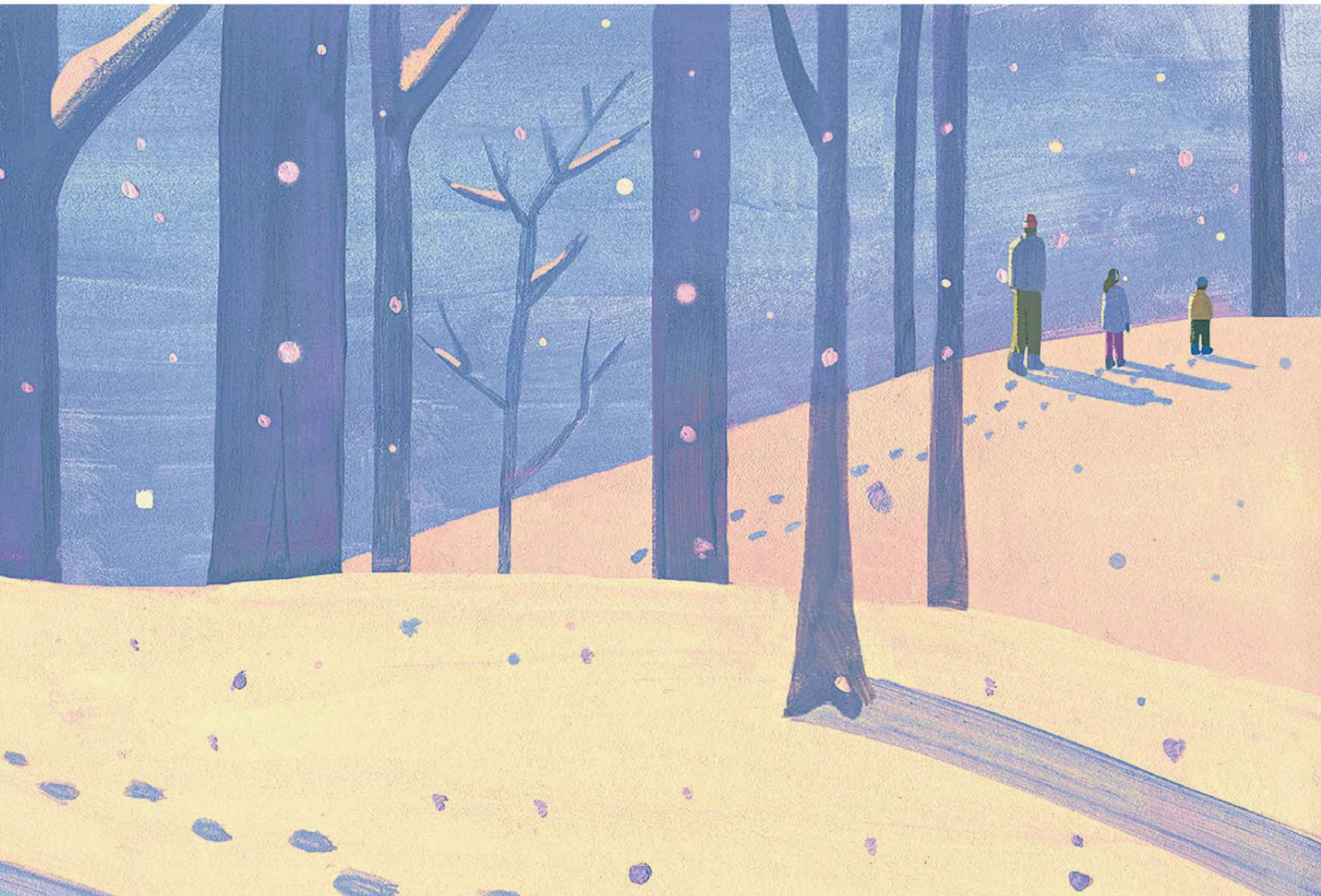
That day, as we went up the hill and away from the house, my cognitive map grew increasingly fuzzy, like crossing onto the part of an old-timey explorer's map labelled "Here be dragons." My family and I were paying attention to the details around us—the fungi, the fallen trees and the mouse trails. But as soon as we decided to head down the hillside rather than turning back the way we came, we left our landmarks behind and had to forge our way across a snow-



covered landscape where everything looked the same.

BY NOW, YOU KNOW I lived to tell the tale. So what was it that got us back on track? If it wasn't the cognitive map, procedural memory, path integration or landmarks, how did we do it?

Fearing we were turned right around, I reflexively looked to my phone's GPS, only to be let down as my phone died. GPS is a useful crutch, one that has often helped me get unlost in the city and along unfamiliar country roads. Before phones got so smart, I



would chart my route on the paper map I kept in my glove compartment and stop along the way to check my progress or ask for help. With the ubiquity of GPS on our phones, are our brains out of practice? Even lazy?

If we rely on GPS, “we are going to lose some of those skills,” Iaria says. The brain is constantly optimizing. That’s useful if you want to pick up a new skill—or learn new directions. Numerous studies have been done on the hippocampus, including famous experiments with London cab drivers who undergo arduous training in way-

finding to prepare for a rigorous test dating back to 1865 known, charmingly, as ‘The Knowledge.’ The research found that learning the city’s layout and its many routes (without using GPS) seems to strengthen the drivers’ brains, changing them physically.

“But the bad news is that the brain does not like to waste resources,” Iaria says. If you’re not using those important skills, the connectivity that supports that behaviour is not there anymore. “It’s use it or lose it,” says Iaria. “If there’s brain function, it’s there for a reason. If there’s no function, it

gets reorganized into something else.”

So if we’re using GPS all the time, we’re not keeping up our navigation skills. Researchers at McGill University in Montreal found that the more people used GPS, the worse their spatial memory became when navigating without it. Furthermore, they found a noticeable decline in the spatial memory of people who used GPS over a three-year period. So if we don’t want to lose our skills, should we stop using GPS altogether?

Navigation is a challenge for many people, especially at a time when we travel far and fast, so there’s no problem with getting help from devices. “I use one myself,” Iaria admits. “I just use it strategically—to keep from being late, or if I don’t need to know where that place is because I won’t be there again.”

On the other hand, there are times when we should practise without that crutch. “If I’m in a new town and have dedicated time to explore, I don’t use GPS,” Iaria says. “I may use a map to get a sense of where things are, but that’s where it’s important to use our cognitive skills.” He suggests strategies such as exploring a small area, learning to discern landmarks as you go and expanding from there. As you explore,

you learn to connect landmarks. In a new place, you can practice building a cognitive map.

That afternoon, after my phone died in the cold, I quietly admitted to Steve that I wasn’t sure where we were. He calmly assured me to stay the course. We kept walking—with me trying not to freak out—and suddenly made out the curve of the road, lit slightly brighter where the tree canopy parted. Everything snapped back into place. My brain made a connection between my current location and a familiar place on my cognitive map. I recognized where I had been, and my paths became aligned, allowing me to find my way without feeling lost. It’s an embarrassing story to tell, especially because we came out to the road almost within sight of the house.

But that embarrassment taught me an important lesson: I will learn to be more like the mice whose trails we saw in the snow. I’ll add my own criss-crossed tracks all over the forest floor, connecting trees and rocks in my mind, and build a map where no dragons can hide. **R**

@2022, LIANN BOBECHKO. FROM OFF THE MAP, COTTAGE LIFE (MAY 2022), COTTAGELIFE.COM.



Sweat the Small Stuff

The next time you’re embarrassed about something you did in the past,
just know that everyone remembers and still thinks about it too.

In fact, we were just talking about it the other night.

X@50FIRSTSTATES



Have Child, Will Travel

Bringing my kid on my
around-the-world
adventures helped me
see her in new and
unexpected ways

BY *Diane Selkirk* FROM
THE TORONTO STAR

THE FIRST TIME MY DAUGHTER, Maia, realized I was leaving on a trip without her, she was alarmed. She was three, and as a new travel writer, I was excited about a solo visit to South Carolina. Seeing photos of where I was going, she didn't hold back her toddler despair. "Why did you even have me if you were just going to leave me behind?" she sobbed.

I tried to tell her that someday she'd understand the lure of travel. But as my husband, Evan, pried her off my leg so I could leave, I wondered if my solo trips would be worth the effort of going without her.

Returning home after a few days away, I felt energized and inspired. The mini jars of hotel jam I brought back were a hit, and Maia was happy to hear about my trip. But this was the age of learning about compromises. As in: "You have to wear a coat, but we'll compromise and you can choose which one." She told me I could keep going on trips for work—but we'd compromise: She'd come with me.

Travelling is something Evan and I hoped Maia would love. She was born on our sailboat, six years into a slow adventure through 12 countries,

From top, clockwise: Maia in Tofino, B.C.; Maia on Meares Island, B.C.; Diane and Maia at sunset in Mexico; the family in 2009 on their boat; young Maia on the Rocky Mountaineer.



Mexico, Panama and Guatemala among them. Wanting her to know her grandparents, we headed back home to Vancouver when she was 14 months old.

OUR GOAL WAS TO SET OUT sailing again when she was seven, an age when she'd be able to remember the voyage, as well as be independent enough for us all to enjoy extended family travel. Until then, the plan was for me to travel on my own and build a writing career while we took Maia on short family trips.

But then, a year after that pivotal trip to South Carolina, an invitation came to experience the Rocky Mountaineer on a parent-child journey through the Rockies. And as terrifying as it seemed to take a preschooler on a luxury train, the trip sounded too good to pass up.

Dressed in her fanciest train-riding clothes, four-year-old Maia watched me take notes about the scenery as we chugged along the Fraser River in B.C. Wanting to prove her worth as an assistant, she began interviewing the Australian couple across the aisle from us. Unable to spell more than a few words, she drew their answers in crayon.

The woman told Maia she'd dreamed about a train ride through the Rocky Mountains ever since she was little, when a Canadian relative sent her a scenic calendar for Christmas. A photo of a mountain with a bighorn sheep in the foreground fuelled a lifelong travel goal.

Determined to help our new Aussie friends spot the exact mountain and sheep (no one had the heart to tell

Maia it had likely moved along), we sat together at lunch. Turning down the kids' meal, Maia requested the salmon. She explained that ever since she was little, she'd dreamed of travelling the world with her parents, and because kids' meals might not always be available, her food motto was "try everything."

I was surprised when Maia ended up being such an easy travel companion. Even though I loved my solo trips (and she still accused me of abandoning her), we found a special rhythm on the road together.

I COULD SEE MYSELF COME INTO FOCUS FOR HER—NOT JUST AS HER MUM BUT AS A FELLOW TRAVELLER.



When she was six, we flew to the Riviera Maya in Mexico. I was impressed by how cheerfully fearless she was when we swam in cenotes—underground chambers of water—or snorkelled along a reef, and bemused by how she cleverly worked out that she could order chocolate cake from room service. But it was on the flight home, when my glued-to-my-hip kid said it was okay that the airline didn't seat us together, that I realized how much travel was shaping her.

Research, including a 2016 study by the Student and Youth Travel Association, says that travel can expand a kid's world, helping them become more empa-

thetic and adaptable while boosting their creativity and imagination. As we set off sailing again on another circumnavigation—this one to almost 30 countries and eight years long—we saw this in action.

In Fiji, nine-year old Maia was captivated by the passionate women chiefs we met and decided she wanted to become a leader. During a trip to Sri Lanka when she was 13, she learnt how the coin flip of your birth country can affect your opportunities in life. By the time we were in the Maldives a few months later, she was more interested in how a democracy can thrive or fail than she was in the beaches.

When we finished up our travels and returned home to Vancouver for her high school education, it shouldn't have come as a surprise to learn that our daughter had other ideas: Maia was thrilled when, after months of interviews, she was awarded a place to finish high school at Waterford Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa in Eswatini. It was my turn to be left behind.

My mother told me I should have expected that a kid raised sailing around the world would develop her own wanderlust. But during that first airport goodbye, I wanted nothing more than to grab her leg and beg her not to abandon me.

Compared to the goofy 17-year-old I'd bid goodbye to, the 21-year-old woman who came home from Eswatini and, later, from university in France, seemed mature and unfamiliar. It was a trip to Tofino, B.C., in April 2023 that helped us reconnect. Travel has always helped

me see Maia more clearly. It's as though by stripping away everything familiar, all that's left is her.

Over a plate of herring roe on hemlock, I saw that her "try everything" motto hadn't changed. As her eyes welled up while watching a heart-wrenching Tla-o-qui-aht dance about the loss of Indigenous identity that was performed during the *naa?uu*, a series of events that included a gorgeous traditional feast, I realized that her compassion had only deepened.

The next day, we travelled by boat to the Big Tree Trail at Wanachus-Hilthuis (Meares Island) Tribal Park. Shaded by the towering spruce, hemlock and cedar, she listened to the guardian—a steward who manages the land according to traditional and contemporary Indigenous law—tell the story of the 'War in the Woods,' a series of Indigenous-led blockades in the 1980s and '90s to stop clearcutting on the nearby Clayoquot Sound, north of Tofino.

Looking up at the monumental old-growth trees and then back to me, Maia recalled some of the tales I'd told her about attending the protests to save the ancient forests when I was her age.

I could see myself come into focus for her—not just as her mum but as a fellow traveller. She grabbed my hand and I waited for her to speak, but we just walked among the trees, absorbing the moment, making another memory. **R**

© 2023, DIANE SELKIRK. FROM TRAVEL HAS HELPED ME SEE MY DAUGHTER MORE CLEARLY, THE TORONTO STAR (13 MAY 2023), THESTAR.COM

It Happens
ONLY IN INDIA

Anyone Smell a Rat?

Law enforcement in Rajganj, Jharkhand, it seems, are being kept on high alert, not just by the usual rag-tag gangs of thieves, robbers, and other miscellaneous criminal minds, but by vermin too! Look, we aren't the ones levelling the charge! Lead officer of Rajganj police station admitted as much when he was asked to present the 19 kilos of marijuana and *bhang* that was seized and stored as evidence in a six-year-old case involving a certain Shambhu Agarwal and his son. When it came time to produce the goods, the evidence had gone inexplicably missing. The long arm of justice reached (and we mean really reached) and came up with the most



“Sir, good news! We found what’s left of the evidence from our drug case.”

elementary of answers: the dope was disappeared by the local rodent population.

While an investigation

into the missing contraband has been ordered, Prasad and son may just have reason to celebrate—the no-show

of evidence tilts the scales heavily in their favour. And who knows? Maybe those rats were just trying to take the edge off their busy lives as underworld informants.

SOURCE: LIVEMINT.COM

Marriage Mirage

It was with great glee that officials in UP's Ballia district proudly announced that 568 couples had tied the knot, under the Chief Minister's Mass Marriage Scheme. However, investigations into the wholesale ceremony revealed that the wedding bells and whistles rang a tad hollow. Turns out, 200 of the 568 couples from the ceremony hadn't really gotten hitched—they had been paid to participate in the matrimonial masquerade. Instead of exchanging heartfelt vows, the couples were playing pretend as part of an elaborate scam to cash in on the government gig. The proof? A video

of brides garlanding themselves during the ceremony has been circulated online. The police have arrested 15 people, including officers from the Social Welfare department, in connection with the alleged scam till now.

As for the couples that stood tall and pledged their genuine commitment to have and to hold amidst this corrupt chaos, our congratulations and break a leg!

SOURCE: INDIATODAY.COM

Flush and Flee

In a case that left authorities flushed with disbelief, more than 62 bathroom fixtures inside Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) railway station—also a UNESCO World Heritage site—were stolen. The missing loot included jet sprays, bottle traps, pillar taps, and bib cocks, all pilfered away between 3 to 6 February. These public restrooms along

with being a hotbed of criminal activity were the Indian Railway's first odourless toilet block, and this plunder forced the authorities to shut it down within a month of its opening, leaving the 5 to 7 lakh passengers who pass through CSMT a day, with little option than to cross their legs and fight off thoughts of babbling brooks.

As for solutions to stop future incidents of the sort, the plan, we hear, is to appoint a private organization to maintain these toilets as part of their corporate social responsibility. As for the culprits responsible, the case has been cracked open by the Mumbai police and three men have been duly arrested.

SOURCE: HINDUSTANTIMES.COM

—BY NAOREM ANUJA

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





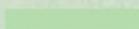
BONUS READ



AFTER ALL FOUR OF KATHLEEN FOLBIGG'S
CHILDREN DIED IN INFANCY, A COURT
FOUND HER GUILTY OF MURDER.

TWENTY YEARS LATER, SCIENCE FINALLY
UNCOVERED THE TRUTH

**A M O T H E R ' S
C O N V I C T I O N**



BY *Sarah Treleaven*

DR CAROLA VINUESA

was in her office at the John Curtin School of Medical Research in Canberra, Australia, one afternoon in August 2018 when she received a call that both changed her life and saved another. As a professor of immunology, Vinuesa immersed herself in the fascinating and complex world of genetics.

The call was from David Wallace, a former student at John Curtin whom she hadn't spoken to in years. He presented Vinuesa with a scenario that was equal parts shocking, intriguing and devastating: An Australian woman named Kathleen Folbigg had been sentenced to decades in prison for murdering her four children, all infants, over a period of 10 years. The case had captivated the nation. Many were abhorred by Folbigg's crimes; others questioned the veracity of her guilt.

Given the paucity of evidence used to convict Folbigg, asked Wallace, could Vinuesa's research shed light on what actually happened to the children?

Over the next five years, Vinuesa and an international team of scientists would dedicate much of their lives to answering this question. Their findings would shake up Australia's judicial system, raise questions about the treatment of mothers accused of killing their children and shine a light on the misuse of scientific evidence.

FOLBIGG, WHO WAS BORN Kathleen Megan Britton in Balmain, an inner-city suburb of Sydney, on 14 June 1967, was haunted by tragedy, instability and alienation from the very beginning. In December 1968, her father, Thomas Britton, stabbed her mother to death during an argument; he served 15 years in prison before being deported to his native England. Young Kathleen was shipped off to live with her mother's sister in western Sydney.

Any hopes that Kathleen would have a warm and safe childhood were soon dashed. The girl's aunt, known in court records as 'Mrs Platt', complained to child-welfare authorities in spring 1970 that Kathleen was aggressive, impolite, unclean and preoccupied with masturbation—and that the strain of caring for her niece was causing her marriage to deteriorate. She no longer wanted the girl. Kathleen was not yet three years old.

Doctors determined that the girl had likely been abused by her father. She was also found to have an unusually low IQ, largely attributed to her withdrawn and restless nature. In September 1970, she was placed into the care of a foster family, Deirdre and Neville Marlborough, who lived in Newcastle, 120 kilometres north of Sydney.

At first she bonded with the family and settled into school. But the legacy of her catastrophic early years took its toll: She was caught shoplifting, left school early and struggled in her relationship with Deirdre. At 17 she

left home and moved in with the family of a friend.

A year later she met a 23-year-old forklift driver named Craig Folbigg at a nightclub in Newcastle. Craig was tall with brown hair, a pronounced nose and an easy smile. Charming and chatty, he seemed like Kathleen's rescuer. Together, they could make the home she had always needed. They married in 1987, when Folbigg was just 20, and rented an apartment in Georgetown, Newcastle. Folbigg found a job as a waitress at an Indian restaurant.

AFTER SARAH'S BIRTH, FOLBIGG BECAME OBSESSED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF LOSING HER.

Craig was one of eight children and wanted a big family himself. Soon the couple was expecting. Thrilled, Folbigg became protective of her unborn child: Craig was forbidden from smoking indoors, and Folbigg improved her diet. When Caleb was born in February 1989, Folbigg told people that she felt complete; after so many years of upheaval, she had a husband, a home and a baby.

But on 20 February 1989, tragedy struck. Folbigg found Caleb, just 19 days old, dead in his crib. An autopsy identified the cause of death as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Folbigg was devastated but not

deterred, and she was soon pregnant again. When Patrick was born in June 1990, he underwent extensive testing, including a sleep study. The results were normal. Still, Folbigg was terrified for Patrick's life.

It turned out that she had reason to be afraid: On 18 October 1990, four-month-old Patrick had what was known as an apparent life-threatening event, typically associated with oxygen deprivation. It resulted in brain damage, visual impairment and seizures for which Patrick was repeatedly hospitalized.

Caring for her disabled baby became the focus of Folbigg's life. Few waking moments were spent without Patrick on her mind or in her arms. By February 1991, he was gone, too. The cause of death was listed as asphyxia due to airway obstruction related to his seizures.

Feeling that she was to blame for deaths of her two children, Folbigg fell into a deep depression. She decided that she and Craig needed to uproot their lives if they were going to beat whatever was plaguing their family. They sold their house and moved to Thornton, just north of Newcastle. Craig got a job selling cars, and Folbigg found work at a baby-product retailer, a job that spoke to her heartbreaking desire for a family.

Sarah was born on 14 October 1992. She, too, underwent numerous tests, which didn't find any problems. Sarah appeared to be developing typically, but Folbigg became obsessed with the

possibility of losing her. The couple started to feel the strain.

One night, when Sarah was 10 months old, Craig saw Folbigg “growl” at Sarah as she tried to get the baby to fall asleep. She passed Sarah to him, telling him to deal with her. The next day, 30 August 1993, Sarah died. The autopsy concluded that the cause of death was SIDS.

What could possibly explain this terrible misfortune? In the wake of Sarah's death, Craig became severely depressed, beyond the reach of his wife's attempts to help. In a bid to change their luck, they bought a home in Cardiff, on the western edge of Newcastle, not far from Craig's family.

TO THE POLICE, THE DEATHS OF THE FOUR FOLBIGG CHILDREN SUGGESTED SOMETHING SINISTER.

The marriage started to crack under the strain. The couple separated repeatedly, but they reunited each time—whether through genuine mutual love or the shared bond of repeated trauma. They moved yet again, this time to the nearby Hunter Valley, and decided to have another baby.

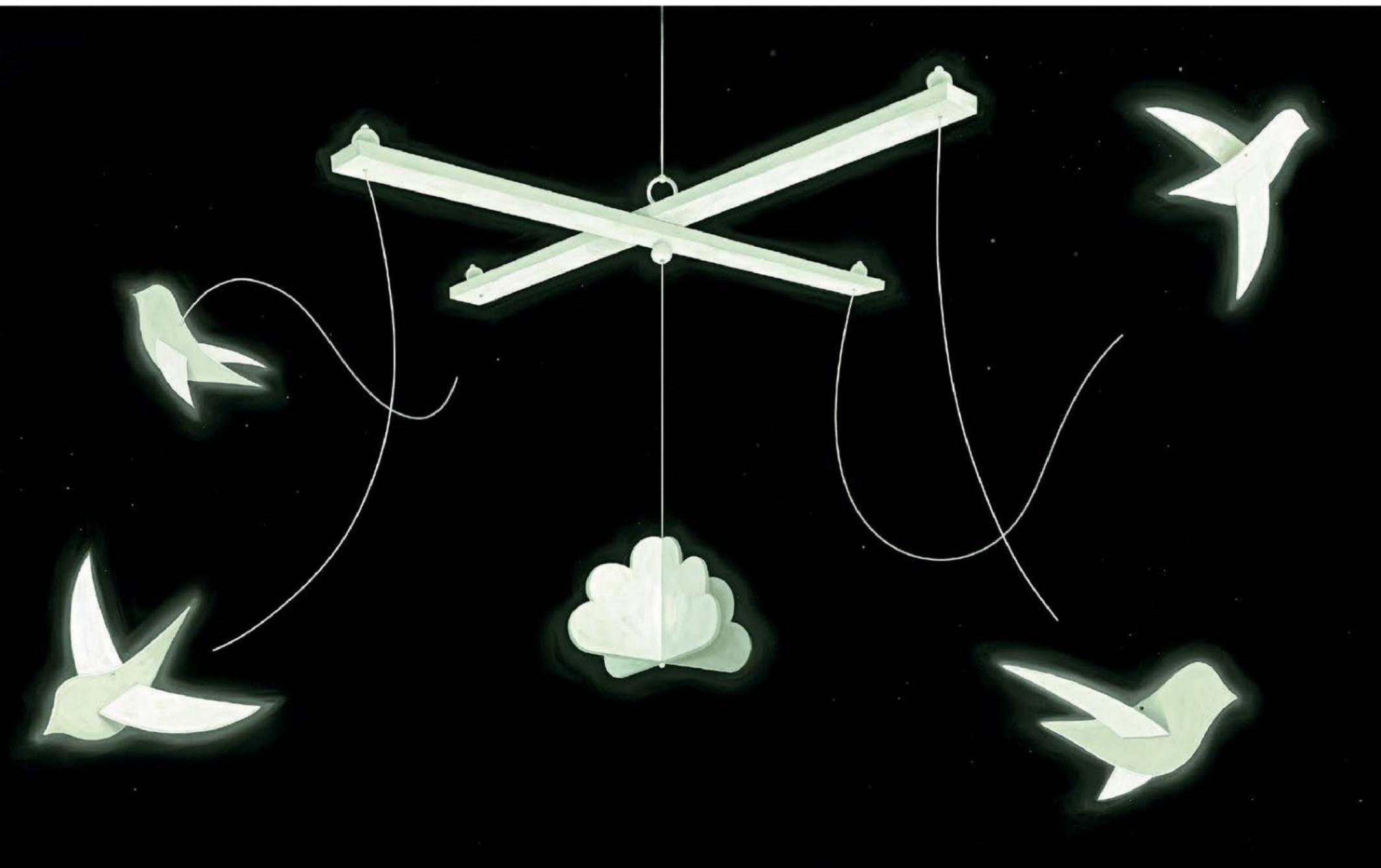
Laura was born on 7 August 1997, almost four years after Sarah's death. She was another healthy baby but was subject to even greater scrutiny,

including a full panel of biochemical, blood and metabolic tests. For 12 months, cardiorespiratory monitoring indicated no problems with Laura's breathing and heart function. As Laura's first birthday approached, Folbigg planned a big party. She finally had a healthy baby, and her anxiety eased. The life she had planned for herself was coming to fruition after three heartbreaking false starts.

But the couple was once again falling apart. Folbigg was a devoted mother, but Craig was concerned about her flashes of anger. One night in late February 1999, he noticed the strain between Folbigg and Laura, then almost 18 months old. “Oh, she's got the sh—s with me,” Folbigg told him. “It's probably over what I did to her last night. I lost it with her.”

At breakfast the next morning, 1 March, Folbigg was struggling to feed cereal to Laura. She then pulled her out of the high chair, put her on the ground and told her to “go to your f—ing father.” When Craig went to work, Laura was watching television.

Later that morning Folbigg called Craig at work and apologized for losing her temper. She then took Laura to visit him during his morning break. Laura fell asleep in the car on the way home, and Folbigg carried her to bed. Laura died later that day. This time, the autopsy was inconclusive, though it did note that Laura had myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart.



ON THE AFTERNOON OF 1 March 1999, shortly after Laura became the fourth Folbigg child to be pronounced dead in 10 years, a police officer met the couple at the hospital. The sudden deaths of the four Folbigg children, all apparently healthy at birth, suggested something sinister to police: It wasn't a one-in-10-million unlucky happenstance. Could Folbigg have killed them?

As the police ramped up their investigation—including a search of the Folbiggs' home—the couple's relationship was once again on the rocks. They separated permanently in June 2000,

still under police suspicion. On 19 April 2001, Folbigg was arrested and charged with four counts of murder. She pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The jury trial began in spring 2003, at the Supreme Court of New South Wales in Sydney. In photographs taken during the trial, Folbigg looked as if she were sleepwalking—her eyelids heavy, her complexion pale.

The prosecution's case laid out a cold take on the children's deaths: Folbigg had asphyxiated each one. The circumstantial evidence seemed overwhelming. Each child was apparently healthy before dying in their own bed,

and Folbigg was both the last person to see each one alive and the one who had found them dead.

But the case wasn't just circumstantial. After the couple had separated for good, Craig discovered his wife's diaries. He later told the jury that what he read "made me want to vomit." Crown lawyers used the diaries to allege that Folbigg tended to "become stressed and lose her temper and control with each of her four children." She was accused of frustration, impatience and even cruelty with her children.

The prosecutors suggested that more than 200 entries indicated that she didn't love and hadn't bonded with any of her children, and that motherhood left her so stressed and resentful that she was pushed to the darkest of acts.

3 June 1990: *This is the day that Patrick Allen David Folbigg was born. I had mixed feelings this day whether or not I was going to cope as a mother or whether I was going to get stressed out like I did last time. I often regret Caleb and Patrick, only because your life changes so much, and maybe I'm not a person that likes change, but we will see.*

9 November 1997: *With Sarah, all I wanted was her to shut up and one day she did.*

28 January 1998: *I feel like the worst mother on this earth, scared that [Laura] will leave me now, like Sarah did. I knew I was short tempered and cruel sometimes to her and she left, with a bit of help. I don't want that to ever happen again. I actually seem to have a bond*

with Laura. It can't happen again. I'm ashamed of myself. I can't tell Craig about it because he'll worry about leaving her with me.

THE PROSECUTORS ARGUED that a grieving mother would not write these things. Even if the science surrounding the children's deaths was inconclusive, the diaries were presented as clear evidence that Folbigg was an unfit mother. How far was the leap from unfit to violent?

Folbigg wasn't the first woman convicted of killing her children under similar circumstances. Many of these cases were influenced by Roy Meadow, a British paediatrician who developed a theory that became known as 'Meadow's Law': One sudden infant death in a family is a tragedy, two deaths are suspicious, and three are murder unless proven otherwise. Charles Smith, a Toronto paediatric pathologist and a go-to prosecution expert in criminal trials of people accused of mistreating their children, used a similar approach. Meadow and Smith had inverted the common-law tradition of presumption of innocence.

Both men have since been discredited, and many of the people they helped convict were later exonerated, but the damage was extraordinary. Sally Clark was a British lawyer convicted of murdering her two infant sons in 1999. A later review found that Meadow had misrepresented statistical evidence at her trial, and a pathologist had withheld evidence that pointed toward

natural death. Clark's release in 2003 prompted a review of hundreds of cases in the UK, and several other mothers had their convictions overturned.

But the assumption of guilt informed similar cases. On 21 May 2003, Folbigg was found guilty of three counts of murder, one count of manslaughter and one count of inflicting grievous bodily harm. The following October she was sentenced to 40 years in prison, with no chance of parole for 30 years, and was incarcerated at Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre in Sydney. She was 35 years old. On appeal, her sentence was reduced to 30 years with no chance of parole for 25 years.

FOLBIGG HADN'T LOST HER COMPASSION OR DECENCY, EVEN AS SHE STRUGGLED WITH HER GRIM REALITY.

TRACY CHAPMAN, a childhood friend who had largely drifted out of Folbigg's life, was galvanized by her arrest. As she followed the trial, Chapman became convinced that Folbigg would be found not guilty. Shortly after the conviction, she reached out to Folbigg. She called the lawyers and read through transcripts, desperately trying to figure out how her friend could be exonerated.

She and Folbigg mostly communicated through long letters, in which Folbigg detailed her day-to-day life in

prison. Most strikingly, Folbigg—whom Chapman describes as an animal lover with a terrific sense of humour—hadn't lost her compassion or decency, even as she struggled with her grim reality. "She's got a strong moral compass," says Chapman. "And I supported her to not allow the system to eat that up."

Other people also started to question Folbigg's guilt. One of the earliest dissenting voices came from Emma Cunliffe, an Australian working on her PhD in law at the University of British Columbia. She approached the Folbigg case through a feminist lens, part of an emerging consensus among some scholars that investigators and prosecutors were prone to discriminatory reasoning against women—particularly with mothers accused of harming or killing children.

As Cunliffe reviewed the trial records, she was disturbed that so many people involved in the case were certain of her guilt even though there was no evidence of homicide. She also found the use of Folbigg's diaries to be both highly prejudicial and misleading.

"The Crown's case was that the unexplained deaths of four children within the same family, coupled with the diary entries and evidence about Kathleen Folbigg's tendency to become frustrated, were sufficient to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Kathleen Folbigg had killed each of her children," Cunliffe wrote in the *Australian Feminist Law Journal* in 2007.

In 2011, an academic journal asked



Carola Vinuesa helped uncover the truth behind the Folbigg case.

Stephen Cordner to review *Murder, Medicine and Motherhood*, Cunliffe's book about the case. Cordner, a forensic pathologist in Melbourne, had been following a similar case from 2007 in the Australian state of Victoria.

Carol Matthey, a 27-year-old mother living in the city of Geelong, was charged with murdering her four children. The crown alleged that each one was deliberately suffocated and that Matthey had "little regard" for her children, using them as pawns in her relationship with her partner. Charges were ultimately dropped due to insufficient evidence.

As Cordner reviewed Cunliffe's findings, he was struck by the similarities to Matthey's case—and the sense that something was deeply off about Folbigg's conviction. He told the University of Newcastle Legal Centre, which had taken on Folbigg's case pro bono, that he wanted to look into the conviction. In his 100-page report, Cordner wrote that the pathology reports offered no evidence to support the conclusion that the children had been murdered.

He also pointed out that the prosecution had used Folbigg's diaries to portray her as a bitter mother who was prone to lashing out uncontrollably, but the children had no physical injuries. Laura's teeth, for example, should have left a mark on the inside of her mouth under the pressure of suffocation. How could a mother act so violently yet kill her children so gently?

As the years passed, more medical and legal experts raised doubts about

Folbigg's conviction. The campaign to exonerate her took a crucial turn in 2018, when Carola Vinuesa entered the picture. David Wallace, the former John Curtin School of Medicine student who had become a commercial litigator, had been following the case with increasing unease about the lack of evidence to support the conviction. He called Vinuesa and asked: Was it possible that whole-genome sequencing, the process of determining an individual's full DNA profile, might shed light on the deaths of the Folbigg children?

COULD IT BE THAT FOLBIGG HAD PASSED A POTENTIALLY DEADLY MUTATION ON TO HER CHILDREN?

Vinuesa agreed to look into it. First she had a colleague visit Folbigg in prison and do a cheek swab. When Vinuesa sequenced Folbigg's DNA, she discovered that she had an extremely rare mutation of the CALM2-G114R gene, associated with cardiac arrhythmias and cardiac death. Had Folbigg passed this potentially deadly mutation on to her children?

To get a fuller picture of the children's genetic history, she wanted to sequence Craig Folbigg's DNA. He refused to provide a sample, maintaining that his now ex-wife was guilty and declining to be part of efforts to free her.

Folbigg's lawyer presented the findings of Cunliffe, Cordner and Vinuesa to Mark Speakman, the attorney general for the state of New South Wales, and in August 2018, he announced an inquiry. The next year, Reginald Blanch, a former chief justice of the District Court, produced a report of more than 500 pages, poring over the details of Folbigg's life and the arguments and evidence presented at her trial. Folbigg's supporters were stunned by its conclusion: "I find no error or procedural irregularity in the trial process that causes me to have a reasonable doubt as to Ms Folbigg's guilt," Blanch wrote.

THE MEDIA NOW PORTRAYED HER INCARCERATION AS A GRIM MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE.

Folbigg, who had been in prison for 16 years at this point, had always maintained her innocence. It was unclear what, if anything, could clear her name. The report "looked like that was slamming the door," says Cordner.

Pressing on, Vinuesa contacted world-renowned geneticist Peter Schwartz at the Auxological Institute in Milan. In a remarkable coincidence, he had recently written about a similar case involving two siblings who carried the same mutation as Kathleen Folbigg had, on one of the other CALM genes. One child had

died, and the other went into cardiac arrest but survived.

Schwartz reached out to colleagues in Denmark. Mette Nyegaard, professor of biomedicine at Aarhus University, and Michael Toft Overgaard, professor of bioscience at Aalborg University, had made a similar discovery seven years earlier: Members of a Swedish family with a history of sudden cardiac deaths carried an extremely rare mutation in another member of the CALM gene group associated with sudden death in childhood. Both cases bolstered the theory that the deaths of the Folbigg children were not necessarily the result of sinister acts.

Vinuesa realized that investigators had concluded that the Folbigg children must have been murdered because the odds of them dying of natural causes were astronomical. But when these deaths are linked with a genetic factor, the picture shifts dramatically. "Then it's a one-in-16 probability, not one in 73 million," Vinuesa says.

She set about gathering the DNA of Caleb, Patrick, Sarah and Laura, drawing from decades-old samples collected either when the children were born or during their autopsies. Her analysis found that the CALM2 mutation had been passed along to Sarah and Laura. Caleb and Patrick, meanwhile, shared another exceedingly rare mutation in a gene known as BSN, which has been linked to lethal epileptic seizures.

As word spread of the growing evidence that all four Folbigg children had

died natural deaths, 90 eminent scientists from around the world, including Nobel Prize winners and the president of the Australian Academy of Science, signed a petition in 2021 demanding a new inquiry into Folbigg's conviction.

Meanwhile, Peter Yates, a former investment banker who served on the boards of some of the country's most important institutions, heard Vinuesa talk about the Folbigg case and was an immediate convert to the cause. He became what he calls "the de facto chairman of Team Folbigg," lobbying politicians and bringing in a public-relations firm to shift the public's perception of Folbigg from serial killer to wrongly incarcerated and grieving mother.

Media coverage reached a fever pitch. Headlines had once called Folbigg "Australia's worst female serial killer"; now her incarceration was portrayed as a grim miscarriage of justice.

In May 2022, following enormous pressure from the public and the scientific community, Governor of New South Wales Margaret Beazley ordered a second inquiry on the advice of NSW Attorney General Michael Daley. Just over a year later, the head of the inquiry, retired judge Thomas Bathurst, concluded that there was reasonable doubt that Folbigg was guilty. The governor signed a full pardon for Folbigg and ordered that she be freed.

On 5 June 2023, Folbigg was released from prison. She was 55 years old and had been incarcerated for 20 years.

She spent her first night of freedom at Chapman's farm in northern New South Wales, eating pizza and drinking Kahlua and Coke. "We didn't actually say very much," says Chapman. "There was a kind of profoundness in the silence." For so many years, the friendship had been dominated by a single, exhausting goal: getting Folbigg out of prison. Now they could finally rest.

IN NOVEMBER 2023, the final report of the second inquiry recommended that Folbigg's convictions be overturned, and the following month the NSW Court of Criminal Appeal formally quashed them.

For many of Folbigg's supporters, her wrongful conviction has raised questions about how many other innocent women might be languishing in prison due to faulty science and mischaracterization of their actions.

"We've got a long way to go," says Cordner, who recently published a new book, *Wrongful Convictions in Australia: Addressing Issues in the Criminal Justice System*. Legal experts have called on the Australian government to appoint an independent body to review wrongful convictions—similar to ones in England and New Zealand.

"I hope that no one else will ever have to suffer what I've suffered," Folbigg, wiping away tears, told the media after her convictions were overturned.

"My children are here with me today, and they will be close to my heart for the rest of my life." **R**

LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*

A long-married couple is dining out at a fine restaurant when the husband orders a Scotch.

“I’ve never had Scotch,” the wife tells the waiter. “Bring me one too.” The waiter returns with two Scotches. The wife takes a swallow and gags. “This is awful! How can you drink this?”

Between sips, her husband says, “And here you thought I was out enjoying myself every night.”

—Submitted by

GARY KATZ

Many sailors agree that the best part of owning a boat is naming it. If you’re looking for

a moniker, here are suggestions from the National Boat Owners Association.

- ★ A Wave from It All
- ★ Sail la Vie
- ★ Seas the Day
- ★ Fishizzle
- ★ Lady Kriller
- ★ Marlin Monroe
- ★ Tuna Colada
- ★ Baits Motel

My biology report titled “Your Intestines: How Digestion Works” was

marked down a grade. Turns out I’d forgotten the colon.

—Submitted by

GLEN YOUNG

This Mother’s Day, let’s celebrate the comical side of motherhood with classic mom gags:

★ You know you’re a mom when you

understand on a deep level why Mama Bear’s porridge was too cold.

★ If I ever go missing, just follow my kids.

They can find me wherever I try to hide.

★ Good moms let you



When someone hands me a flier, it’s kinda like he’s saying, “Here, you throw this away.”

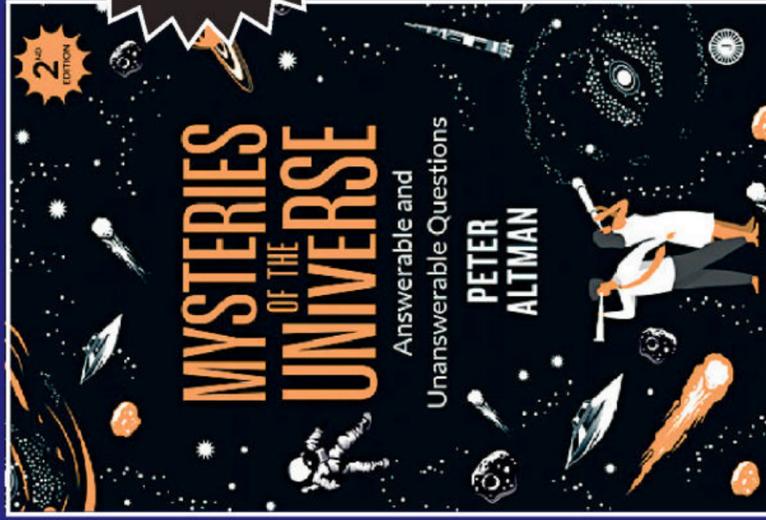
—MITCH HEDBERG, *comedian*

JUST FILL IN YOUR NAME, ADDRESS
AND SIGNATURE. DETACH AND

POST THIS CARD TODAY

(PLEASE WRITE IN CAPITALS)

▼ Detach this card and send to Reader's Digest ▼



GET THIS
BOOK
WORTH ₹ 299
FREE!

Does alien life exist? Is time travel possible? How did the Universe begin and how might it end? Is the future pre-determined. These are just some of the fascinating questions posed in this richly illustrated book.

**RETURN
THIS CARD
TODAY!**

SUBSCRIPTION DATA CARD

Claim a gift worth ₹299 and enjoy the next 12 issues of Reader's Digest for just ₹83 a copy.

if you prefer, you may courier your cheque payment in favour of 'Reader's Digest' with this card.

To Reader's Digest: Yes, please start my 12-month subscription to Reader's Digest at a saving of ₹261 and send my gift.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE
12 MONTHS — ₹1,260
(INCLUDING POSTAGE & HANDLING)

YOUR DISCOUNTED PRICE
12 MONTHS — ₹999
(INCLUDING POSTAGE & HANDLING)

YOUR SUBSCRIPTION SAVING: ₹261 DISCOUNT ON THE FULL PRICE



RDE20054/3

NAME
ADDRESS
City Pin
*Email Tel./Mob SIGN

*This authorizes RD/LMIL to communicate about its products and promotions through mail, phone, printed material, email, etc.

*This authorization is irrespective of my instruction elsewhere to not be contacted or informed over mail, phone, printed material, etc.

OFFER VALID
FOR DELIVERY IN
INDIA ONLY.

▼ Detach this card and send to Reader's Digest ▼

PREFERENTIAL SUBSCRIBER AGREEMENT— OUR WRITTEN COMMITMENT TO YOU

- You will be entitled to a gift subscription at the Preferential Subscriber's rate.
- You will enjoy the assurance that, unless you notify us to the contrary (which you may do at any time), this written agreement confirms your gift subscription will continue without interruption—and, of course, at a Preferential Subscriber's discount.

▼ Detach this card and send to Reader's Digest ▼

Postage
will be
paid by
addressee

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

Permit No.: BR.D (C)-276
ND G.P.O., New Delhi-110 001.

No postage
stamp
necessary
if posted
in India

▼ Detach this card and send to Reader's Digest ▼

To:
**Reader's
Digest**
F 26, First Floor,
Connaught Place.
New Delhi - 110 001.

ONLINE PAYMENT



Scan this QR code
with your smartphone
and simply pay for your
subscription online.
We will dispatch your
gifts immediately.



lick the beaters after making brownies. Great moms turn them off first.

★ My mom superpower is being the only person in the house who can see an empty toilet paper roll.

Three prosperous sons decide to give their elderly mother the best Mother's Day ever. The first said, "I built Mom a mansion."

The second said, "I bought her a new Mercedes!"

"I've got you both beat," said the third son. "Since Mom has trouble reading the Bible because of her eyesight, I sent her a parrot that can recite the entire Bible. It took 20 monks 12 years to teach him."

Soon thereafter, Mom emailed each son: "Bruce," she wrote to the first son, "the house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house."

"Barry," she wrote the second son, "I'm too old to travel, so

I never use the Mercedes."

"Dearest Marc," she wrote to her third son, "you have the good sense to know what your mother likes. That chicken was delicious."

—SERMONCENTRAL.COM

Whatever you do, give 100 per cent. Unless you're donating blood.
—BILL MURRAY, *actor*

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

KITTY LITTER-ATURE

As pet owners know, dogs write in limericks, cats in poetry. Here are examples of feline verse from the book *Oh. It's You: Love Poems by Cats* (Chronicle Books), by Francesco Marciuliano.

And Then ...

One day
A future day
When I am not around
You will sit
You will fret
You will get low
Then you will realize
"Oh God,
I bet they're in the
food pantry
Chewing on the
roast chicken
ramen packs again"
And you will find me
once more

Be Here, Be Present

I don't know
How much time we've had
I'm not sure
How much time is left
I only know
That my head is
presently stuck in
some shopping bag
handles
So if you could get me
out of here that
would be great



RD RECOMMENDS

Compiled by Aditya Mani Jha



FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA

in theatres (23 May)

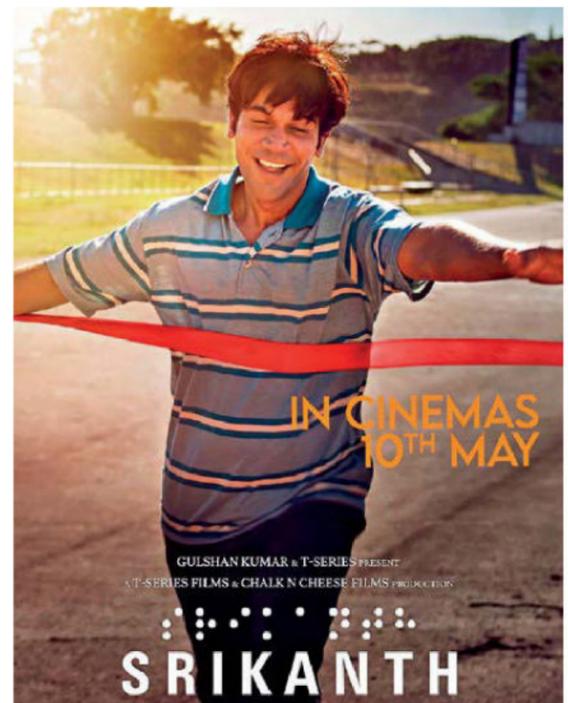
Tireless veteran George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* was indubitably one of the great action films of the 21st century, a breathless, hyper-kinetic post-apocalyptic story with eye-popping set-pieces every ten minutes or so. So large is this film's cultural footprint that a sequel—or in this case, a prequel—was all but inevitable. *Furiosa* sees Anya Taylor-Joy tackling a younger version of Charlize Theron's eponymous badass, one-armed character from the earlier film (among other things, fans will get to know how Furiosa lost her left arm). Set almost 20 years before the events of *Fury Road*, this story begins when the very young Furiosa is snatched from her home by a gang of bikers led by the delightfully named 'Warlord Dementus', played by Chris Hemsworth (Thor in the *Marvel* universe).

PHOTO CREDIT (FURIOSA): ALAMY

SRIKANTH

in theatres (10 May)

Director Tushar Hiranandani, co-director of the hit streaming show *Scam 2003*, returns with a feel-good biopic based on the life and career of Srikanth Bolla—the visually-impaired entrepreneur who founded Bollant Industries, which manufactures eco-friendly products and hires differently-abled workers. Rajkummar Rao, one of the most acclaimed actors of his generation, stars as Bolla, who was denied entrance into IIT-JEE coaching classes but gained admission to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology instead, becoming the first visually-impaired international student there. The always-efficient Jyothika co-stars as Bolla's inspirational teacher. The tagline is rather on the nose (“He's coming to open your eyes”) but the film is looking good in its initial rushes and is definitely well-intentioned.



THE SYMPATHIZER

on JioCinema (from 14 April)

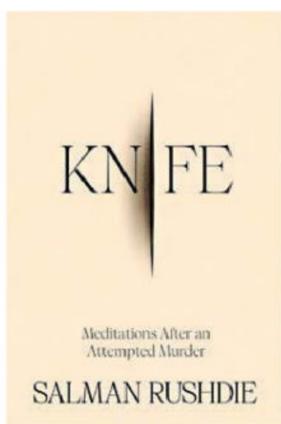
Based on Viet Thanh Nguyen's Pulitzer-winning 2015 novel of the same name, *The Sympathizer* is a black comedy based on colonialism, immigration and the idea of divided loyalties. Hoa Xuande stars as 'The Captain,' a North Vietnam plant in the South Vietnam army. At the end of the Vietnam war, he moves to America and lives among a community of South Vietnam refu-

gees. However, he is still in contact with the remnants of the old, fallen North Vietnam regime and spies on his new neighbours for them. Robert Downey Jr, fresh off his Oscar win for *Oppenheimer*, co-stars in multiple antagonist roles (an inversion of the idea that to American eyes, a lot of South Asians look alike). The series has been co-created by the South Korean director Park Chan-wook, one of the leading lights of world cinema over the last 20-odd years (*Oldboy*, *The Handmaiden*, *Decision to Leave*).

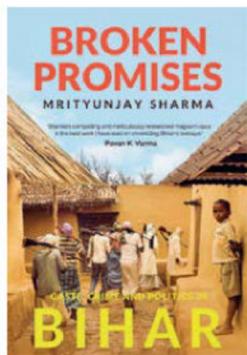


KNIFE by *Salman Rushdie*,
Penguin Random House

On the fateful August morning in 2022, when Salman Rushdie was attacked by a knife-wielding fanatic at a New York event, the world nearly lost one of its most powerful voices. Nearly two years later, Rushdie has released *Knife*, a hard-hitting, poignant book-length essay about the assassination attempt—required reading for anybody interested in the intersection of art



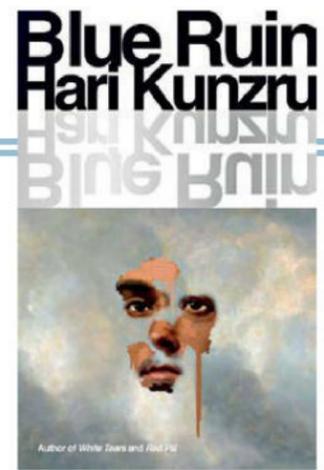
and mortality. As Rushdie writes at one point, “We contain within ourselves both the possibility of murdering an old stranger for almost no reason—the capacity in Shakespeare’s Iago which Coleridge called ‘motiveless Malignity’—and we also contain the antidote to that disease—courage, selflessness, the willingness to risk oneself to help that old stranger lying on the ground.”



Broken Promises: Caste, Crime and Politics in Bihar

by *Mrityunjay Sharma*, Westland

Did you know that early-career Lalu Yadav was an unusually hands-on chief minister in the vein of Anil Kapoor’s CM-for-a-day character from *Nayak*, firing corrupt bureaucrats on the spot? How did Nitish Kumar and Lalu become rivals, then allies, and then rivals again? Why does caste-based politics have such a vice grip upon the state? The well-researched *Broken Promises* offers the answers to these and more. It provides a firm factual grounding for beginners, while also dishing out choice anecdotes and analyses for longtime Bihar-watchers.



Blue Ruin

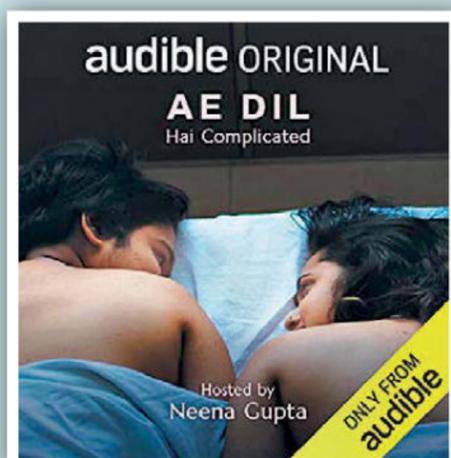
by *Hari Kunzru*,
Simon & Schuster

Kunzru, noted for his brilliant and versatile fiction involving immigration, race and technology, is back with *Blue Ruin*, another wide-ranging novel. Once tipped to be the art world’s Next Big Thing, Jay’s budding career takes a nosedive after his girlfriend Alice leaves him in tragic circumstances. Come 2020, an over-the-hill Jay is struggling with long-Covid complications when he runs into Alice and her now-husband, fellow artist Rob. Alice invites Jay to recover on the couple’s sprawling New York property, setting into motion a series of life-altering incidents for all three of them.



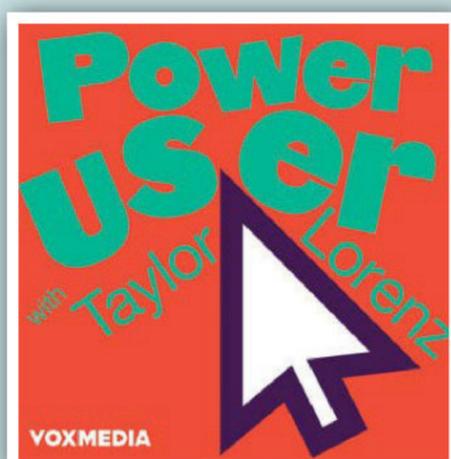
A MUSLIM AND A JEW GO THERE

One of the most interesting new podcasts on the circuit, *A Muslim and a Jew Go There* features Baroness Sayeeda Warsi alongside writer–comedian David Baddiel. Warsi was the co-chairwoman of the Conservative Party between 2010-12, breaking ranks with her party in 2014 over its hawkish stance on the Israel-Gaza conflict. Baddiel wrote a book about progressive Hollywood’s “racist blind spot” re: Jews and Jewishness. He also wrote a 2010 film called *The Infidel*, in which a British Muslim man discovers he was adopted and his birth parents were, in fact, Jewish. As such, it’s difficult to find two people more qualified to debate questions of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. What sets this podcast apart is the scrupulously parliamentary way the duo expresses their disagreements—a rarity in today’s severely polarized times. Fittingly, the podcast is produced by British journalist Jemima Goldsmith’s Instinct Productions: Her father hails from a Jewish family and she was previously married to Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan.



AE DIL HAI COMPLICATED

In Arré Studio’s Audible Original podcast *Ae Dil Hai Complicated*, actor Neena Gupta dons her Oprah hat in a series of thoughtful, confessional romance-centric stories from a wide-ranging list of guests: writer Manish Gaekwad, actor Lisa Ray and so on. The topics covered are similarly eclectic: finding romance past the age of 40, polyamory, discovering unpleasant truths about your parents’ romantic lives. In the first episode, ‘I Am a Tawaif’s Son’, for example, Gaekwad speaks eloquently about his courtesan mother, also the topic of his 2023 book *The Last Courtesan: Writing My Mother’s Memoir* (HarperCollins India).



POWER USER WITH TAYLOR LORENZ

Taylor Lorenz’s journalistic career is built upon demystifying social media platforms, especially for older readers. Vox Media’s new podcast *Power User With Taylor Lorenz* continues that process by tackling the important questions in this context: Why is America determined to ban TikTok? How will AI change your X (Twitter) experience? Listen to *Power User* to find out.



***Standing Woman* by
Leela Mukherjee,
Wood, 50 x 12 x 9 cm,
Undated**

Leela Mukherjee (1916 to 2002)—whose work did not receive much notice in her lifetime outside a close circle of friends and admirers—was recently the subject of a retrospective exhibition organized at Vadehra Art Gallery in New Delhi, with a catalogue published by the foundation managing the estate of her daughter, sculptor Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949 to 2015), that delves further into her oeuvre through essays by friends and scholars.

During Leela Mukherjee's lifetime, it was the art practice of her husband, legendary modernist Benode Behari Mukherjee (1904 to 1980), that took precedence. In the late 1940s, when the couple moved to Nepal because he was appointed curator at the government museum,

Leela Mukherjee trained in sculpting in wood from master craftsman Kulasundar Shilakarmi. This skill would help her make her most dynamic work.

Standing Woman is a powerful example of how contour and movement was central to her execution. Artist Ranbir Kaleka, who lived with Leela Mukherjee in her later years, notes that she was committed to daily observation of ordinary people around her, which she then distilled into her drawings and paintings.

In this sculpture, we seem to have caught a woman emerging mid-conversation, striking a pose with the suppleness of her limbs, perhaps scoffing at what was said and looking away, as if there is something else waiting ahead in the future. Mukherjee's work moves between the abstract and the figurative with a restrained yet deliberate use of mallet and chisel, near impossible to locate in time or place. **R**

— BY ZEENAT NAGREE



QUOTABLE QUOTES

We're concentrating so much on how to bring up our daughters, that we've completely ignored how to bring up our sons.

—Renuka Shahane, *actor*

India is this great experiment of a billion people of such great diverse persuasion, working together, seeking their salvation in the framework of a democracy. I believe it will have some lessons for all the multicultural societies.

—Manmohan Singh,
former Prime Minister of India



I think I'm greedy, but I'm not greedy for money. I'm greedy for an exciting life.

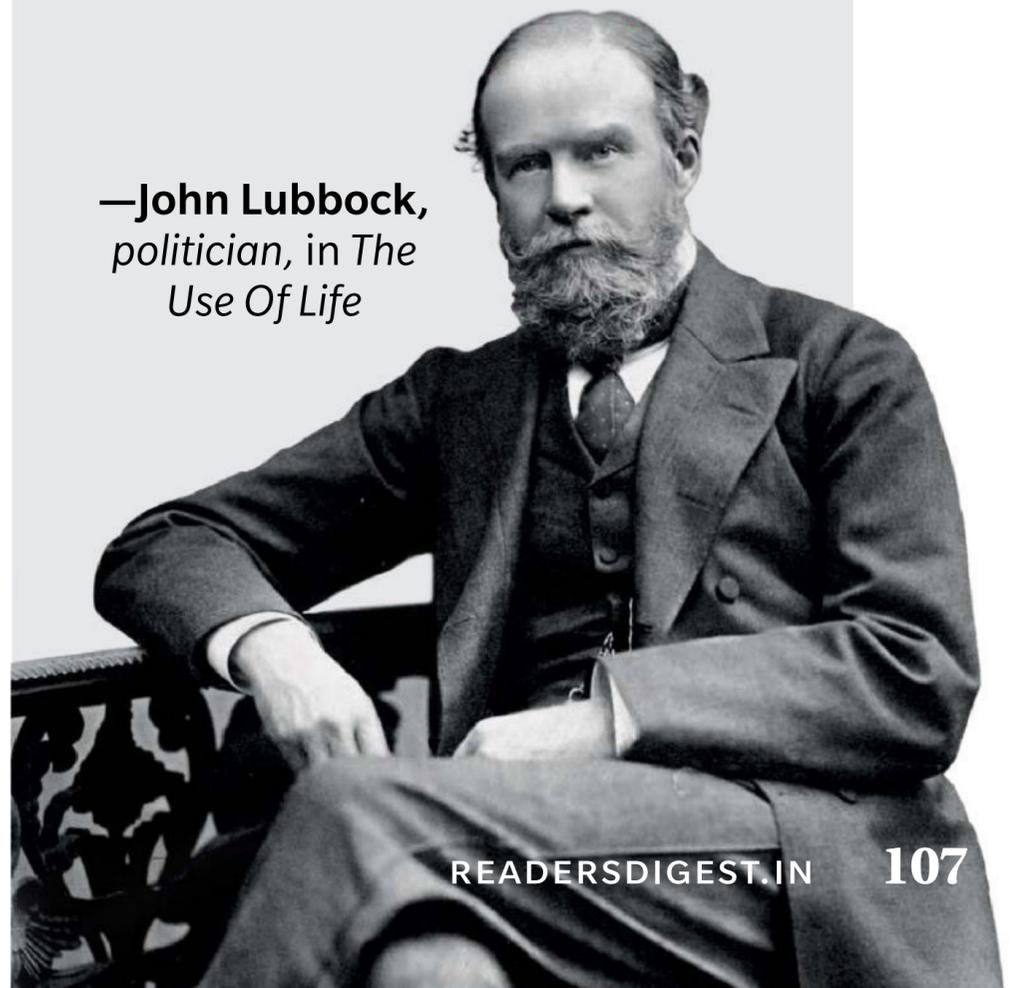
—David Hockney, *painter*

After all, one can't complain. I have my friends. Somebody spoke to me only yesterday.

—Eeyore, in *Winnie the Pooh*

Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.

—John Lubbock,
politician, in The Use Of Life



Caste is such an incredible waste of human capital and human potential.

—Thenmozhi Soundararajanm, *author,*
in The Trauma of Caste

ME & MY SHELF

Tejaswini Apte-Rahm is the author of the award-winning debut novel *The Secret of More*—a rags-to-riches story set against the booming textile industry and the newly-emerging silent-film era of colonial Bombay—and the short-story collection *These Circuses That Sweep Through the Landscape*.



Goodbye Mr Chips BY JAMES HILTON, *Hodder Paperbacks*, ₹465

This slim novella tells the life story of an English boarding school teacher over several decades, including the world wars. Hilton brings to life the grand sweep of history, and the vanishing of eras, without budging from the location of a countryside school.

Jane Eyre BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË, *Fingerprint! Publishing*, ₹489

My comfort read. I go back to it again and again, especially when I am low or agitated. Jane is the quintessential underdog, the heroine who refuses to accept the class and gender roles expected of her, and triumphs through sheer force of personality.

84 Charing Cross Road

BY HELENE HANFF, *Virago*, ₹306

A charming epistolary novel set in the post-WWII years. A writer in New

York writes to an antiquarian bookseller in London to order books by mail. It's a real treat to see his stiff formality melting in the face of her friendliness, while his reticence is clearly something that charms her.

Piranesi BY SUSANNA CLARKE, *Bloomsbury Publishing*, ₹358

I have never come across a stranger novel, or one that pulled me in so rapidly. It is set in a weird landscape of a sea trapped in a building of incredible architecture—endless halls and bizarre statues—with seabirds flying in and out. A lone man lives there writing down what he discovers about the place, and slowly begins to question who he is, and why he is there.

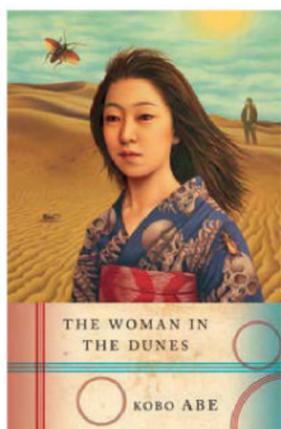
How Not to Write a Novel BY

HOWARD MITTELMARK AND SANDRA

NEWMAN, *Harper Perennial*, ₹458

One of those rare books that makes

me laugh out loud. It goes through classic mistakes made by writers, dealing with plot, character and style. Hilarious commentary accompanies every possible example of bad writing and cliché that most attentive readers (and indeed film-lovers) would have come across at some point.



The Woman in the Dunes BY KOBO ABE, *Vintage Books*, ₹587

A nightmarish descent into a maze of actions and reactions that only yield further entrap-

ment. An amateur naturalist visits a remote seaside village in Japan and falls down one of its vast sand dunes. Held captive by a young woman who lives there, he must spend his days shovelling sand in the hope of eventually climbing out. It's a bizarre, yet eerily realistic, story.

The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals BY DOROTHY WORDSWORTH, *Oxford University Press*, ₹876

Reading these diaries is to fall into the unhurried rhythm of 19th-century life in the English countryside where Dorothy lives with her famous brother. Her daily life is full of the nature around her. The minutiae of a moment are what catch her eye—William and his friend leave for Yorkshire with “cold pork in their pockets”. And: she “carried a basket for mosses” on her walk.

Completely Unexpected Tales

BY ROALD DAHL, ₹590 (*Kindle*)

Dahl's stories inspired me to start writing seriously. His character sketches are ruthless, getting to the dark heart of a person in a few lines. His mastery of suspense is unrivalled. The thing that attracts me hugely to Dahl's work is that he is so obviously enjoying himself. You can almost hear him chuckling as he takes his characters on a ride into darkness.

The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum: Dry Store Room No.1 BY RICHARD FORTEY,

HarperPerennial, ₹613

A peek behind the scenes of the venerable London museum, written with moving passion by a palaeontologist who spent his life there working on trilobites. He presents a feast of a tour through millions of years of pre-history, juxtaposed with the scandals and eccentricities of the humans who studied it.

The Malory Towers series BY ENID BLYTON, *Hodder Children's Books*,

₹1,299, I grew up loving all of Enid Blyton's novels, but liked her boarding school stories the best—especially Malory Towers. The fun and friendship of girls living together, the beautiful coastal setting, the midnight feasts of tinned pineapple and sardines, the common room gossip—it was all a world away from my childhood in 1970s Bombay. **R**

Brain
GAMES
SHARPEN YOUR MIND

The More Things Change

MEDIUM The stepping stones in this maze have three attributes: background pattern (vertical stripes, horizontal stripes, polka dots), suit (spades, clubs, hearts) and suit colour (black, white, red). You may only move from one stone to another if the number of steps to that stone is equal to the number of differences between the stones' designs. (For example, you can move from the horizontal black spade in the upper left to the horizontal white heart at the top because there are two differences between them.)



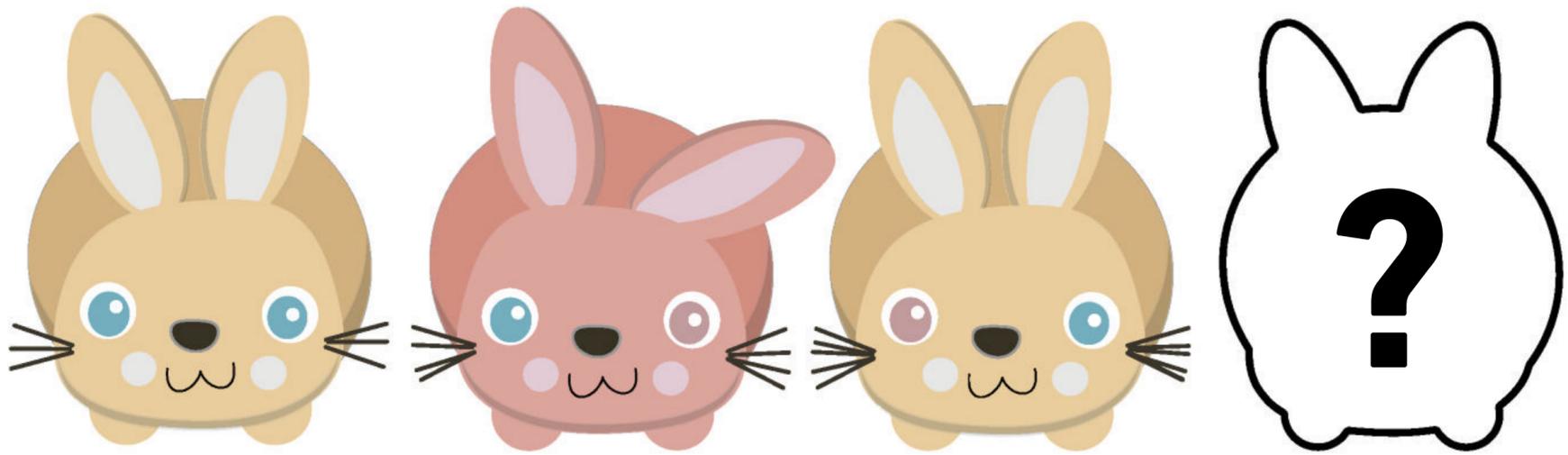
Moving between the stones in straight lines, what is the shortest path from the spade on the left side to the identical one on the right? Hint: It can be done in five moves.

Treasures

DIFFICULT Locate 12 treasures in the empty cells of this grid. The numbers on the outer edges indicate how many treasures there are in each row or column. Each arrow points directly toward one or more of the treasures. An arrow may be immediately next to a treasure it points to, or it may be farther away. Not every treasure will necessarily have an arrow pointing to it.

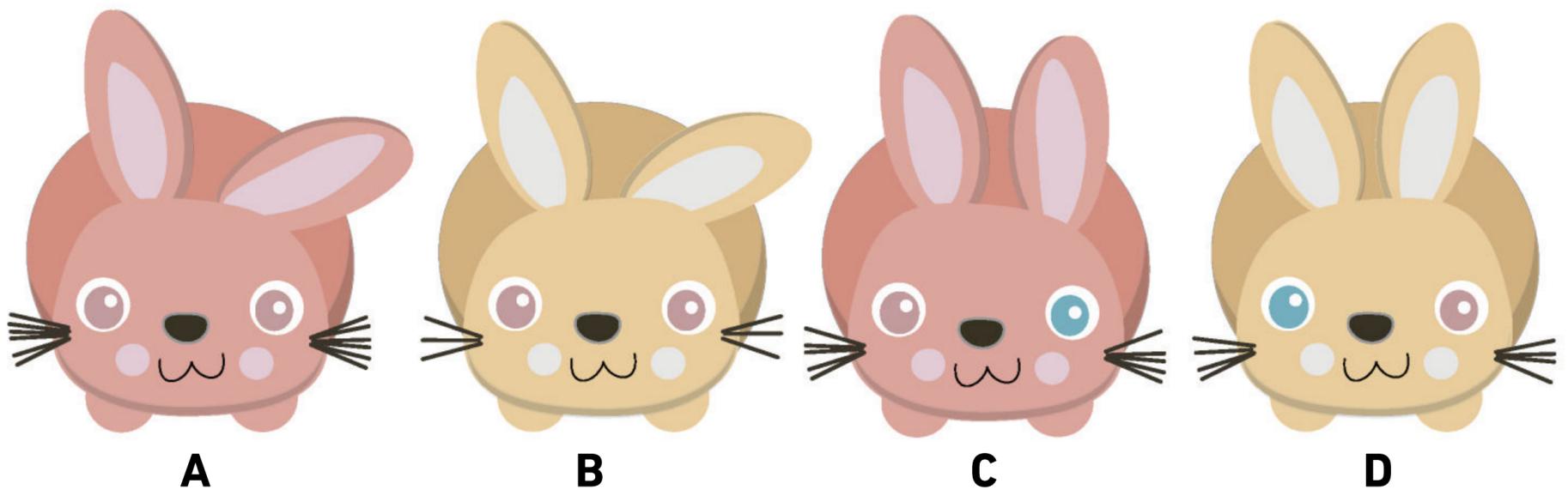
	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	1
2		↘						↙
1								
0								
2			←			→		
1				↗				
2					↖	↘		
2								
2		↗						

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE BY DARREN RIGBY; TREASURES BY FRASER SIMPSON



Hop to It

EASY Which of the rabbits below completes the series and is the final member in this set of siblings?

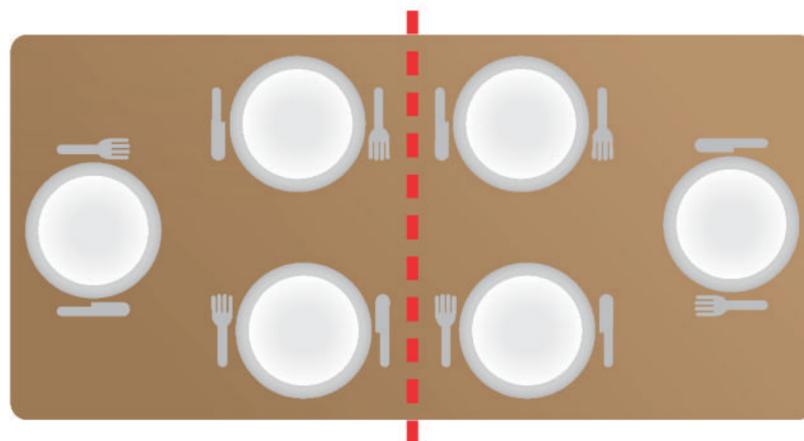


HOP TO IT BY BETH SHILLIBER; FAMILY DINNER BY DARREN RIGBY

Family Dinner

MEDIUM The Singh family has gathered for dinner, and everybody has preferences about where they want to sit. Can you place everyone around the table according to their wishes? The table has two ends, separated by the dotted line.

- ◆ Grandfather Wedant sits at the head of the table.
- ◆ Chetan and Ramya want to sit next to each other, and feel their kids Bodish and Ashmita should sit together too, but not necessarily next to their parents.
- ◆ Ashmita and Tanya don't want to sit on the same end as the creamed spinach, which is on the right side of the table.
- ◆ Chetan wants to sit opposite Bodish.
- ◆ Ramya and Bodish aren't sitting at the same end of the table.



For answers, turn to PAGE 112

SUDOKU

BY *Louis-Luc Beaudoin*

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

To Solve This Puzzle

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

- ♦ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;
- ♦ each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

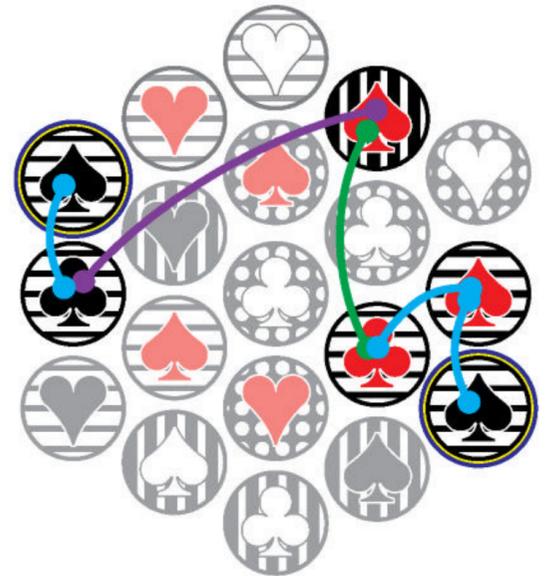
SOLUTION

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

BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

FROM PAGES 110 & 111

The More Things Change



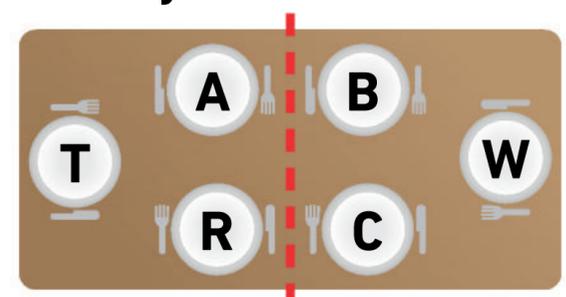
Treasures

	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	1
2		↘			●		↙	●
1	●							
0								
2	●		←			→	●	
1				↗			●	
2		●		●	↖	↘		
2					●		●	
2		↗	●		●			

Hop to It

A. Moving from left to right, each rabbit has one more pair of whiskers than the one before it.

Family Dinner



WORD POWER

The scent of freshly mown grass, the kiss of a warm breeze, the music of birdsong: May is a delight for the senses. We explore all five of them in this *tantalizing* quiz of *touching, melodic* and *fragrant* words.

Why not *see* for yourself? Then find the answers on the next page.

BY *Mary-Liz Shaw*

1. haptic *adj.*

(‘hap-tik)

- A** unfeeling
- B** blind
- C** tactile

2. mien *n.*

(meen)

- A** sound effect
- B** earlobe
- C** appearance

3. redolent *adj.*

(‘reh-duh-luhnt)

- A** soft
- B** aromatic
- C** pressed

4. descry *v.*

(duh-‘skry)

- A** discover
- B** shout
- C** taste

5. noisome *adj.*

(‘noy-suhm)

- A** loud
- B** flat
- C** offensive

6. coruscate *v.*

(‘kor-uh-skayt)

- A** glitter
- B** scratch
- C** perceive

7. tactual *adj.*

(‘tak-choo-uhl)

- A** tasteful
- B** tangible
- C** temperate

8. tincture *n.*

(‘tingk-chr)

- A** pigment
- B** probe
- C** irritant

9. piquant *adj.*

(‘pee-knt)

- A** spicy
- B** textured
- C** deafening

10. osculate *v.*

(‘ah-skyuh-layt)

- A** push
- B** kiss
- C** rotate

11. lucently *adv.*

(‘loo-snt-lee)

- A** silently
- B** radiantly
- C** forcefully

12. sapid *adj.*

(‘sa-puhd)

- A** weak
- B** gaseous
- C** savoury

13. attar *n.*

(‘a-tuhr)

- A** fragrant oil
- B** tooth cavity
- C** tear duct

14. acetous *adj.*

(uh-‘see-tuhs)

- A** stunted
- B** runny
- C** vinegary

15. sonorous *adj.*

(‘sah-nr-uhs)

- A** unsightly
- B** loud
- C** incandescent

The (Real) Sixth Sense

The name of the 1999 thriller is an actual thing, but it's not about seeing dead people. Proprioception, or 'the sixth sense,' helps us track our bodies in space, allowing us, for instance, to walk in one direction while looking in another. People with a genetic mutation that interferes with their sixth sense can't do this, but they also lack sensitivity to certain kinds of pain. Researchers studying this disorder hope to find improved treatments for chronic pain.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. haptic (C) tactile

Some smartphones let users control the frequency of haptic feedback or vibrations.

2. mien (C) appearance

Cory's joyful mien boosted the mood of everyone in the room.

3. redolent (B) aromatic

Whenever Nana starts cooking, the whole house turns into a redolent delight.

4. descry (A) discover

You can tell by the hole in our chicken wire that our hens descried a way out of their coop.

5. noisome (C) offensive

After the chemical fire, we held our noses to block out the noisome gases.

6. coruscate (A) glitter

Cubic zirconia doesn't coruscate in the light the same way diamonds do.

7. tactual (B) tangible

A tactual learner, Bella relies on her sense of touch to help her understand things.

8. tincture (A) pigment

The artist added a tincture of brown ochre to her palette to match the model's hair colour.

9. piquant (A) spicy

Not wanting to insult her future in-laws, Anna finished the peppery stew they served her, even though she found it overly piquant.

10. osculate (B) kiss

The European diplomat warmly osculated his visitor on each cheek as a sign of sincere welcome.

11. lucently (B) radiantly

Those who live near the poles are lucky to get to see the aurora borealis shine lucently in the sky.

12. sapid (C) savoury

The thick, sapid steak made a satisfying meal.

13. attar (A) fragrant oil

Often made from rose petals, attar is a popular essential oil.

14. acetous (C) vinegary

Everyone at the picnic puckered their faces at the acetous flavour of the cucumber salad.

15. sonorous (B) loud

Sgt Stan Surly delivered all his commands in a sonorous voice.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: Unfeeling

10-12: Perceptive

13-15: Keen

TRIVIA

BY *Samantha Rideout*



1. What do psychologists call the phenomenon opposite to déjà vu: when something familiar feels new?

2. What Nordic country is home to Orca, the world's largest facility for capturing carbon dioxide right out of the air, rather than at the source of emissions?

3. As the parents of young kids know all too well, what song became, in 2022, the first YouTube video to hit 10 billion views?

4. What sweet food product inspired the Canadian government to assign nearly 100 terms to describe its flavours and aromas, including 'smoked', 'grassy' and 'sponge toffee'?

5. Velociraptors could fly. True or false?

6. The creation of a search engine called Backrub by two university students in 1998 led directly to the founding of what tech company?

7. What Asian mountain range is sometimes called 'the Third Pole' because it contains the world's third-largest concentration of glaciers, after the Arctic and the Antarctic?

8. What historical figure was given the nickname 'Bloody Mary' by her Protestant opponents?

9. What planet, which we now know does not exist, did some pre-20th-century astronomers believe orbited between Mercury and the sun?

10. Which president—currently still in office—

is the longest-serving European head of state ever?

11. Who was the first scientist to document non-human animals making tools?

12. Cricket may have been invented in England, but which country's men's team tops the International Cricket Council's test team rankings?

13. What entertainment company employs around 300 full-time costume artisans, including wigmakers, shoemakers and milliners?

14. The quote 'Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer' is often misattributed to the Italian philosopher Machiavelli or the Chinese military general Sun Tzu, but who really said it first?

Answers: 1. Jamais vu. 2. Iceland. 3. 'Baby Shark'. 4. Maple syrup. 5. False, despite having feathers observed chimpanzees using sticks to extract termites from holes. 6. Google. 7. The Himalayas. 8. Mary I of England, also known as Mary Tudor. 9. Vulcan. 10. Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, who has been in power since 1994. 11. Jane Goodall, who, in 1960, observed chimpanzees using sticks to extract termites from holes. 12. India. 13. Cirque du Soleil. 14. Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino in the 1974 film *The Godfather: Part II*.



A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

Don't Bug Me by Valéry Goulet, exclusively for *Reader's Digest*

A **TATA** Product

VOLTAS



TWO MILLION. TOO COOL!

Voltas becomes the first-ever brand to sell 2 million ACs in a fiscal year.

We, at Voltas, are proud to announce that we've broken all records and sold over 2 million Air Conditioners in the fiscal year 2024. We can't help but thank every single one of you for your continued trust in us, which has made us **India's most trusted AC brand**. We promise to deliver our best and keep things cool with constant innovation, dedication, and an unwavering commitment to provide top-quality cooling to everyone.

VOLTAS
SMARTAIR™

Voltas 24x7 Customer Service - 1860 599 4555, 9650694555.
For product registration SMS <WTA> to 9289525321
Buy only genuine Voltas stabilizers.

Visit us at www.voltas.com
To locate your nearest store,
log on to: www.Voltas.com/apps/store-locator

Follow us at [f](#) My Voltas [t](#) My Voltas [i](#) My Voltas [in](#) Voltas Limited [v](#) My Voltas

Buy online at: www.voltas.com

Corporate Head Office: Voltas Limited, Voltas House A, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Road, Chinchpokli, Mumbai-400033, Phone: 022-66656666. Also available in all leading Retail Outlets. *Terms & Conditions apply. Voltas Smart Air AC delivers a Super Silent Operation at 28dBA noise level as tested under standard lab conditions. The IOT Technology is powered by Voltas Smart Mobile App which can be operated through Voice Control through smart voice interface devices. Voltas Adjustable mode can deliver cooling at multiple tonnage capacities, as selected by the user on the AC remote, hence optimizing power consumption. Features available in select models only. For more details on E-waste (Management and Handling), Warranty, Product Features and Offers (Valid on Selected Products Only), please visit www.voltas.com.



RANKED **51** Among India's Top 100 Universities for Seven Consecutive Years



ACCREDITED WITH GRADE **A++** NAAC



SATHYABAMA
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
CATEGORY - 1 UNIVERSITY BY UGC



For Details, Contact:

+91 99400 58263 | 99401 68007 | 99400 69538

Toll-Free Number: 1800 425 1770

ENGINEERING | ARCHITECTURE | MANAGEMENT | ARTS & SCIENCE

LAW | DENTAL | PHARMACY | NURSING | PHYSIOTHERAPY

www.sathyabama.ac.in

SathyabamaOfficial

SathyabamaSIST

sathyabama.official

@sathyabamaofficial