

14 JULY 2024

# The Observer Magazine

*'You've got to squeeze as much joy out of life as you can': Danny Dyer takes his moment in the sun*



**Paid to do nothing:  
is it time for universal  
basic income?**  
**How to dress for  
the festival season**  
**Nigel Slater serves  
up a slice of summer**

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# The Observer Magazine



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Illustrator **Nathalie Lees** has been published in the *Economist*, *Time* magazine, *Le Monde* and the *Washington Post*. Her brilliant artwork vividly distils complex themes through simple forms. Here, she brings to life our feature on universal basic income (p12).



After studying English literature at university, **Jenny Knight** went on to work in journalism and the publishing industry. For many early mornings alongside this she coached rowing – a job that inspired the initial idea for her first crime novel, *The Fifth Guest*. In this issue, she writes about team sports and what netball taught her about friendship (p36).

Author **Daisy Buchanan** is the host of the *You're Booked* podcast, where she interviews celebrated writers about how their reading shapes their work. Her new novel, *Pity Party*, is a comedy about a young widow worrying that she's getting grief wrong. Here, she writes about her own struggles with loss, and how she realised, ultimately, it's all about love (p16).



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COVER: DANNY DYER WEARS POLO SHIRT BY ARKET.COM, TROUSERS BY WAXLONDON.COM AND TRAINERS BY ADIDAS.CO.UK; GROOMING BY DANI GUINSBERG USING SHAKEUPCOSMETICS

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# Eva Wiseman

## How much would you pay, honestly, to get back with your ex?



@evawiseman

I got angry yesterday, which is unlike me, a lady of peace and careful breaths. I felt like that guy who kicked in his telly when the Sex Pistols swore and I may have done similar had this not been a work laptop and had I not been a little bit sleepy after lunch. The thing that got me, the thing that threatened to push me over the edge, was an article about the rise of “get your ex back” coaches.

This is the “breakup rehabilitation industry”, where people charge brokenhearted followers, typically clients who have found them on YouTube after Googling “how to get my ex back”, hundreds of dollars for a single coaching session. In addition to these sessions, for an extra \$499 the client can send two further inquiries (at no more than 500 words each), with one coach reporting that business is booming – he’s currently making “multiple six figures”. “My schedule is packed back-to-back all week,” a man called Benny Lichtenwalner told Slate. “Think of the worst breakup you’ve had. Would you try to solve it for the price of a PlayStation? I think if their ex said, ‘Hey, give me a PlayStation and we’ll be back together,’ they’d do it. I can sleep at night just fine. Because I love that I’m helping people.”

It was as I started to morbidly scroll through their videos – videos set typically in these sort of grey voids, transient non-places reminiscent of loneliness itself, or of models designed by architects who went missing mysteriously before the project began – it was as I started to scroll that my anger really kicked in. “Five psychology steps to reattract an ex,” “Seven ways to make your ex think about you 24/7,” the numbers soon made me lightly dissociate and I was back, briefly, in a much younger body vomiting with heartbreak. Like grief, part of us should feel grateful to feel heartbreak so violently, because it is proof of love, but it’s still surrounded by acres of taboos around what it is acceptable to say or feel and our cruel inability to comprehend an ending.

I flashed to the end of the 1990s, crying on a low wall, humiliated. I can feel the physical agony of that heartbreak, I can remember the pleading conversations of night-times, when calls were free after 9pm, and I can remember also one afternoon, terribly hungover with my best friend, watching *Gosford Park* while we quietly wept. Would I have been drawn in by these videos when I was wading through those horrible months, when I was weak and dehydrated from crying and feeling unloved and ugly? Undoubtedly. Would they have led to my ex and I now being happily married and naming sourdough starters in a bungalow in Watford? Who can say?

Some of the advice sounds all right. Like, the coaches agree you should cut off all contact with the ex, concentrate on improving your self-esteem and, then, because you haven’t been hassling them for months on text, when the ex is ready to talk, it’s easier for them to return. That’s good advice, it promotes a kind of clear dignity and encourages you to centre your mental health, but what it doesn’t do, crucially, is get your ex back. I would suggest that the way to cure heartbreak is rarely to try to turn back time, but instead, move forward.

These coaches are, of course, an offshoot of the self-help industry, where a huge amount of money is made by people who diagnose and promise to remedy all manner of human inadequacies, from poverty to low sex drive – it’s an industry that is both a feature and a tool of a relentless economy. But its coaches and products meet their customers at their lowest points, when they are desperate for change. And while these business people can perhaps offer rudimentary tools to help us look at a problem from a different angle, when faced with somebody in serious distress, the only responsible advice they could really give would be for their client to talk to a qualified professional. Much like the children who end up blaming themselves for not working hard enough after being brought up on the fiction that they can be whatever they want to be, so do the adults who return to self help. They’re trying to apply an easy fix to a complicated and unique problem, one most likely caused by an inequitable and brutal little world.

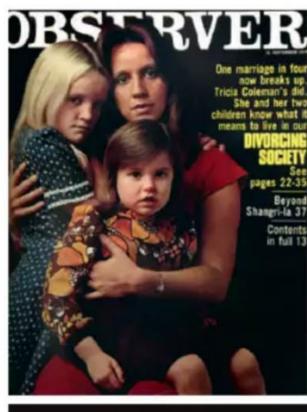
The truth is, you can’t force somebody to love you again. And if it was possible, if you could learn how to manipulate your ex in a way that they returned to a broken relationship, that relationship would be built on sand, not to mention upon the memories of gesticulating YouTube mentors gurning at you from beside your next cookery video. My anger comes from the knowledge of how vulnerable a person is when the heartbreak is fresh, when you would do anything, pay anything to feel safe and loved again, but I understand the self-help impulse here, the desire to feel as though you’re in control. One of the hardest parts of a breakup, in my experience, is coming to terms with the chaos and horrors and unpredictability of love, and then, choosing to start right from the beginning, again and again and again. ■

## One more thing...

I’ve been desperate to find a way for my daughter to listen to music that doesn’t require a screen. I’ve gone for the revolutionary hi-tech of a... **CD player**. It felt mad to buy something I routinely see beside wheelie bins, but it does seem to be the best (only?) way for her to have control over what she listens to, without getting phones involved. Let’s see...

I raced through Teddy Wayne’s new novel, *The Winner*, a pandemic-set story of a working-class law student who decamps to Massachusetts to teach the wealthy tennis. While they learn tennis, he learns about **sex and power** and a series of wonky choices puts his carefully balanced life in peril.

I’m yet to dip into season three of *The Bear*, but bad reviews have me nervous. The *NYT* called it a ‘dangling, wailing beast’, *Variety* said it was ‘aimless’, and *Vulture* declared it ‘trapped’. Instead, I’m just watching an old clip of Sydney crumbling crinkle-cut crisps on top of a gentle omelette, and sighing with pleasure.



## From the archive

A look back at the Observer Magazine’s past

‘When things go wrong, it is now possible for the first time in history for the women in a marriage to say, “I’m off,”’ wrote the *Observer* in 1976. Since the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, divorces were rocketing – 120,000 petitions a year – but was it inevitably an ‘emotional disaster’ or the ‘unacceptable face of individualism?’ And above all: ‘What about the children?’

Individual stories gave a more reassuring picture. Peter had ‘an amicable divorce’ with Elizabeth, including alternate-week custody of their son, Tony. Both had remarried (Elizabeth to Peter’s friend Jonathan) and all four met up regularly to discuss Tony’s welfare. Tony, Peter said, ‘felt the draught during the worst months’, but was thriving. It had been painful, unsurprisingly, but Elizabeth said: ‘We were able to stand back and think, “How can we be sensible?”’

Tricia’s ‘wrong from the start’ marriage collapsed in a perfect storm of debt, infidelity and domestic

violence; alone with two children, it took three years for her to feel ‘more like my old self again’. She was taking a playgroup leader course and unsure she’d marry again: ‘After being your own boss, it’s hard to go back to the “little wife” bit.’

The main article describes the ‘torture inflicted on divorced fathers’ who rarely or never saw their children, but Paul was a carer for his daughter, Sarah. His ex-wife had moved out of their home to share with two separated girlfriends; Paul could manage cooking and ‘most jobs around the house’ and Gingerbread, a sole-parent support group, made his working life possible: Sarah stayed at their playgroup until he left the office. She saw her mother on weekends and knew, ‘If I want Mummy, I can ring her.’ They worked hard not to ‘spoil everything and get embittered’, Paul said; it helped that neither felt their marriage breakdown was the other’s fault. ‘We helped each other grow up.’ *Emma Beddington*

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Interview **HAYLEY MYERS**  
 Photograph **CHRIS FLOYD**

**When my sister** was born I realised the world didn't revolve around me. It was a curious thing: like, well, who is that? I got over it. My mother had three of us in a row. We were like triplets.

**During the Second World War**, my mother, a Dutch native living in Bandung, was incarcerated in three Japanese concentration camps in Indonesia. Helping others kept her going. She had nightmares about it for years afterwards.

**After the war**, she went to Saint-Tropez and met my father, who'd been in the RAF and was recovering from a broken back. Mother came bounding out of the water and didn't realise her knitted swimsuit had slipped underneath her breasts. He thought he'd better make an honest woman of her.

**My father was** a great doctor. At weekends we'd be unpaid auxiliary nurses at his hospital. I grew up around surgery, sluice rooms, blood and guts. His idea was that if you see enough, you won't be worried by it. Very useful for *Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman*.

**I couldn't stand** school meals. Anything bland made of mince or offal was my idea of hell. At home, food was more interesting. Rice, sambal and, of course, a large chunk of Edam or Gouda.

**Languages and I** do well if I put my mind to it. I had a week to hone my French for the role of Marie Antoinette in *La Révolution Française*. And now, *je parle assez bien*.

**Richard Attenborough** told me that the day you believe your own publicity, you're dead. That was important to hear when you're 21, starring in a Bond film and everyone's telling the world you're the best thing since sliced bread. His other advice was "You've been given a fine instrument. Your job is to tune it." In other words, you're photogenic and can act, but you have to do the work.

**At the beginning** of #MeToo, I felt it was appropriate to explain that I'd been put in a situation by a powerful film producer. I said "no" and left, but he threatened that my entire career would be destroyed if I told anyone. My agent knew of his reputation, but didn't protect me. It so damaged me emotionally that I didn't act for a year.

**My first marriage** did not count. We were young. He jokes that on our wedding day we knew we were stuck, but it was too late to give the presents back. We still adore each other. My second husband is one of my closest friends.

**For the sake** of my children, I've remained friends with my third and fourth husbands, and with their significant others, too. I don't love how the marriages ended, but we shared amazing experiences. ■

*Harry Wild* series 1–3 is streaming now on Acorn TV



# This much I know

*Jane Seymour, actor, 73*



'I have a good night's sleep and then attack the day again': Danny Dyer wears a polo shirt by Mr P ([mrporter.com](http://mrporter.com)). Facing page: polo shirt by [arket.com](http://arket.com); trousers by [waxlondon.com](http://waxlondon.com); trainers by [adidas.co.uk](http://adidas.co.uk); and his own watch

# 'Life makes sense now'

He's a working-class actor with royal blood in his veins; he's the tough guy in a pink dressing gown who cries at romcoms; he's the tearaway who's embraced family life... Danny Dyer talks to Eva Wiseman about the 'mad old journey' he's been on



**I**t's a beautiful day in Essex and I'm making myself at home with the Dyers. Theirs is a neat house on a hill, furnished in white and grey with a vast marble kitchen island and a bulldog called Debbie. And, no offence, but my God Debbie is large. The width and girth of a coffee table, she lumbers affectionately across the tiles towards Jo, Dyer's partner of more than 30 years, elegant in white as she mourns a missing T-shirt, and their teenage daughter Sunnie, who sweeps through to grab a bottle of water on her way to college. Artie, who's 10, is at school and their eldest daughter, Dani, is in Germany with her three children, aged three and under, there to support her footballer boyfriend Jarrod Bowen at the Euros. Builders sweat on the patio outside, the sun glints off shelves of awards. And there, in the middle of it all, grinning into a tiny coffee, is Dyer, calling everyone baby.

Dyer, Debbie and I stand in the awards alcove and with his pointing finger he takes me on a swift tour of his career. "I've nicked a few awards over the years I suppose," he smiles. "I did really well, I can't believe that." There are National Television Awards won over his nine years on *EastEnders*, one of which he dedicated, in a choked acceptance speech, to his mentor Harold Pinter and children living in poverty, then there's a framed photo of Pinter and an *Attitude* award he won for being a "straight ally" for his first soap storyline. He's proud of that one. "I remember when they approached me about *EastEnders* and I thought, obviously I'm going to be coming in as a gangster or something like that. Alpha male, working class, anti-gay." Then they said his first storyline would involve his son coming out to him. "They created this character for me who was an alpha male, but who wore a pink dressing gown. Somebody that is very protective, can swing a right hander, but will open up about his feelings." The dog gives me a pointed look, as if to check I can tell he's talking about himself.

**This is set** to be the year of Danny Dyer. As well as his TV comedy debut, in Ryan Sampson's *Mr Bigstuff* on Sky, he's starring in Disney's glossy new adaptation of Jilly Cooper's *Rivals* ("Wait until you see Danny," co-star David Tennant said, "He's brilliant.") and a film about football hooliganism called *Marching Powder*. Today he's wearing a large gold watch that glitters as he sips his coffee – in front of him now on the impossibly tidy kitchen counter are a baby's dummy and white dice, into which I idly read some light symbolism. His family have left the room and he marvels briefly. "Me and Jo have been together since we were 13. Which just doesn't happen, does it, now? It's fascinating to me, still. When I look at her, part of me sees her back then, but then I also look at the pair of us and go, 'Wow, we're grandparents now.' It's been a mad old journey."

They grew up on the same council estate in east London, where, when Dyer was nine years old, his father left them for his other, secret family. Dyer's reaction was rage; he was in constant trouble until his drama teacher enrolled him in a Saturday club where he was spotted by an agent and, at 16, cast in *Prime Suspect*. He and Jo had Dani two years later. "I remember on Twitter someone said, 'The most Danny Dyer thing Danny Dyer's ever done is calling his kid Dani Dyer,'" Dyer says, wrinkling his nose, "And I thought, 'What the fuck does that even mean?'" It's just what you do, he mumbles; you name your kid after yourself. He laughs. When she won *Love Island* in 2018, "All of a sudden, I was the second most famous Danny Dyer in the country."

Why did he roll his eyes at the idea of *EastEnders* casting him as a gangster?

"I think I'm falling into the category where people either respect me as an actor or they think that I play myself. So that's been a running theme throughout my life." He muses for a second. "There's an element of classism in it, because I speak in a cockney accent. But I think my mistake was that I've probably done too many documentaries [like *Danny Dyer's Deadliest Men*, or *I Believe in UFOs*] and revealed too much about myself as a human being. Because as actors our toolbox is us. If you give away all your stuff, then people watch you and go, 'Oh he's just playing himself.' But that's what acting is. We're salespeople. Do you believe it? Do you



'Instilling working-class values in kids being driven around in a Bentley is very difficult': polo shirt by Mr P ([mrporter.com](http://mrporter.com)); trousers by [waxlondon.com](http://waxlondon.com); and deck shoes by [sebago.co.uk](http://sebago.co.uk)

## 'You've got stuff missing within your soul and you try and fill it with drugs or drink, and it doesn't work'

buy it? Do you give a fuck about what I'm talking about? It's not about whether you can do hundreds of accents. In my eyes, it's like, do you believe what I'm saying? Do you care? And so you have to dig within."

On the other hand, it's been these documentaries that have brought him a lot of fans, and fame. "I divide opinion, but I think that's fine. I struggled with it as a younger actor and when social media first came around. But I'm absolutely fine with it now." The struggle, back then, was well documented in the tabloids. There were cheating scandals and drug scandals. One night in 2001 he was on stage in New York, in Pinter's *Celebration*, and he went blank. He was 24 and had stayed up all night smoking crack. Pinter "bollocked" him, but it took a few more years before Dyer took himself to rehab, slowly becoming the meditative family man he is today.

"You've got to try and squeeze as much fucking joy out of life as you possibly can," he goes on. "Because the one

thing I learned when I was going through some crazy times is that your fucking brain is your worst enemy. It questions us all the time and we can't escape it." Every evening he takes 10 minutes to meditate, "and just completely concentrate on my breath, and let all the fucking shit go, then have a good night's sleep and then attack the day again." In rehab he had therapy, where for the first time he started talking about his father. "There's little holes. You've got stuff missing within your soul and you don't know why and you try and fill it with drugs or drink and it doesn't work. And so I learned from going to therapy that I had abandonment issues from men."

After his father left, his beloved grandad died from cancer, "and that sent me off the rails a little bit, but then that was around the time I met Pinter. I wasn't looking for a father figure, but he took me under his wing." When Pinter died in 2008, "I pushed my 'fuck-it button'. It was about destroying relationships before they could fuck

me over. Which is why I sort of went a bit crazy." Therapy helped him understand himself, but, "I think doing *Who Do You Think You Are?* helped me as well." This is the BBC genealogy show that, in 2016, aired its "best episode ever". Dyer had no idea, after they'd investigated his family tree, what they were going to reveal.

"I knew there was an energy," he remembers. "I thought it might have something to do with criminality. I was hoping for some sort of old-school Shakespearean actor, something that would make me go, 'Oh I've got it in my blood.' Then, the way it panned out was fucking ridiculous." Dyer discovered he was a direct descendant of King Edward III; when he was told, sitting in the choir of Westminster Abbey, he looked as though he was going to faint.

The relative he was more excited to discover, though, was Thomas Cromwell, his "15 times great grandfather. He was a working-class kid who rose through the ranks and was really clever and became a medieval righthand man, and he had no right! And so I thought, 'OK, I can see similarities in the sense that he had no right to be where he was either.'" He thinks for a second. "And his downfall obviously was that he became almost too powerful and he didn't fit the mould. He didn't have any aristocrat parents to get him out of trouble. And his last act, his last roll of the dice..." he grins, surprised to find he is, in fact, holding some dice, "which is why I'm sitting here today, is that he got his son to marry Jane Seymour's sister. If he hadn't done that Gregory would have been killed as well." Then they had a child and their child had a child, "and then I'm 15 generations later. He was really famous and out of his depth slightly. So it made me go, 'My life makes sense to me now!'"

**Does he regret** doing the other documentaries? "No, not really, because I needed money to feed my children. I'm just plying my trade as an actor, like a spark would, or a plumber." Twenty years ago he made a film called *The Football Factory*, "which made me very famous, but I didn't get any money for it. So I was stuck in that weird room of being famous, but not having the money to back it up." Then the documentaries came along. "I had no desire to run around the country speaking to hooligans, meeting them under dark tunnels with balaclavas on and all that. I wasn't on something journalistic, but it got me a house. That's the truth."

At the time he was still living on the same council estate where he'd grown up. "I'm very proud of where I'm from. I'm very proud of my roots. And I love the people who inhabit them spaces, but I knew that I needed to get out and try and give my kids a better life." Which again, he doesn't regret, but it does add a layer of confusion to his family life. "Trying to instil working-class values in kids who are being driven around in a fucking Bentley is very difficult, you know?"

He moved to Essex, had more children, and went viral a number of times for his political commentary. (One memorable clip from 2018 saw him opposite Jeremy Corbyn on Good Morning Britain questioning why David Cameron, "that twat" had "disappeared" amid the Brexit chaos. "He's in Nice with his trotters up! He should be held accountable for it!") Yet he says the press still associate him with violence.

"The media have always labelled me 'hard-man Danny Dyer'. I don't know where that's come from. Is it going back to classism and because I swear a lot? Is it that? It always seems to be about trying to bring me down and catch me out. Especially now in a world of cancel culture." In 2010, he was sacked from a ghost-written column in lads mag *Zoo*, for apparently advising a man who couldn't get over his ex-girlfriend to "cut his ex's face, then no one will want her". It had been a line from a film, he said he'd been misquoted, but the backlash was serious and still impacts the way he's seen. "Everything's divisive, you know. We're all being segregated, we've regressed as a human race, I feel. There's no love. Why the fuck are we not looking after each other as human beings? What's going on? It's probably because the elite have been exposed a little bit. And the media are fighting back, making us go, well, you're either this or you're that. You can't be all things."



We're meeting the week before the election, and Dyer's ambivalent about voting. He sighs. "What does worry me, I suppose, is the Tories have fucked it so much that they disappear off the face of the earth, and then Labour get in and there's no one to challenge them. There's just something about Starmer I can't quite buy into. I feel he's trying too hard to be a common person." Watching the debates, he found himself asking, "What the fuck? You are a knight, but you're meant to be part of a working-class party? I just despair at it all and don't really believe a lot of what they say. Let's see what the fuck happens and hopefully it changes for the better. I pray, for everybody's sanity."

He downs his coffee, bitterly. "I don't know, darling, we're so lost. Everybody hates the Tories and quite rightly, but we're not inspired by the Labour party. Who the fuck do we trust? We need more working-class people in politics, it's very simple. Maybe they'll put Angela Rayner in later, when Keir gets found out. I watch her and go, 'I believe you. I believe your soul.' And they're all pretty soulless at the moment, I think." He shrugs.

When Dyer made *How to be a Man*, his most recent documentary, "I felt the idea

of masculinity was being manipulated," he says. I mention Nigel Farage's recent praise of Andrew Tate and his defence of "male culture". Dyer leans back. "Andrew Tate only exists because the media write about how masculinity is toxic. That's how you create a space for Andrew Tate to exist. Some of the stuff he says is very fucking interesting. The problem is, he's such a cock. It's OK to want to be a provider and protector, it's a natural instinct for a man. But if we're going to keep bollocking men for being too masculine and also bollocking them for not opening up about their feelings... You can't have it both ways." He sees how his daughters "think they want a bit of a prick, someone who's unattainable, a bad boy. But actually later on in life, which is what Dani's learned, they want a man who's going to be strong and there for her." He looks like he's welling up when he talks about her partner, West Ham forward Bowen. "What Jarrod did by taking on her son at 18 months old, it says a lot about a man." And to have a West Ham player as a son-in-law? He grins. "That's a real bonus for me as a dad."

**He laughs about** his new era, as a 46-year-old grandfather to three toddlers, pointing now to the dummy on the counter. "Every day is a fucking lesson to me and throwing being a grandad into the mix, it's a fucking amazing feeling." He describes the logistics of babysitting as if it's a football game, gesturing with swift firm movements. "So you've got twins that are one, and all they want to do is kill themselves. So what they do is they wait for that door to open and they make a bolt for it so they can roll down the stairs." He is responsible for making sure they don't die. "But at the same time, you've got the three-year-old

**'I'm a middle-aged man and I enjoy it':** (from top) in *The Football Factory*; with Kellie Bright in *EastEnders*; in *Mr Bigstuff*; and with his wife Jo and daughter Dani

running around smashing shit up and he likes to wind us up by opening the door."

A footballer's career is short, he points out, so while Dani is parenting alone much of the time now, Bowen will be back with his

family for good in a few years. Dyer can relate to the idea of sacrificing your home life for a career. "It's all intense and it's wonderful and then you just wake up one day and it's done, and then you come back to your life." He picks up the dice again. "You commit completely fully, you hold your soul to it, and then it stops, and then you have to come back and sort of just, shrug it off, you know what I mean?"

In his new comedy, *Mr Bigstuff*, Dyer's character arrives to teach his estranged brother how to be a man. "It's like, you need to find that inner cunt inside you. And when I use that word, it's all about intent." What is a perfect man? "I would like to think the perfect man will be able to build you a cupboard, but also like a bit of a gossip. So I can curl up on the sofa and watch *Marley and Me* and cry. But also be able to throw his missus around the bedroom like a caveman."

As he entered his 40s, Dyer realised he was questioning himself less. "I know what I'm about now – you tend to not care so much about what people fucking think about you." Looking in the makeup mirror on a recent job, he says: "I started to notice I was going bald, but I realise that's part of the ageing process. I understand I'm starting to be the shape of an avocado. But that's what a middle-aged body is. And I'm accepting it. I smoke and I drink, I like to enjoy life, and I don't want to become a person who calls potatoes 'carbs'. I don't want white bread to be the enemy. So I'm a middle-aged man and I enjoy it."

He gazes briefly, proudly around his clean white house and Debbie huffs her way towards him, collapsing like a tyre at his feet. "It's weird getting older, because you become aware of how long you've got left. I reckon I've got another half my life to go" – finally, he throws the dice – "and I intend to enjoy it." ■

All episodes of *Mr Bigstuff* are available on Sky and NOW from 17 July



**W**hen Elinor O'Donovan found out she had been randomly selected to participate in a basic income pilot scheme, she couldn't believe her luck. In return for a guaranteed salary of just over €1,400 (£1,200) a month from the Irish government, all the 27-year-old artist had to do was fill out a bi-annual questionnaire about her wellbeing and how she spends her time. "It was like winning the lottery. I was in such disbelief," she says.

The income, which she will receive until September 2025, has enabled her to give up temping and focus instead on her art. "It covers my living expenses, my rent, food and day-to-day stuff."

The concept of a guaranteed basic income might seem novel or neoteric, but it dates back to 1795, when the American founding father Thomas Paine suggested a "national fund" should pay every adult "rich or poor" a "ground rent" of £10 a year until the age of 50. Earth is "the common property of the human race", he argued, so everyone has been collectively dispossessed by "the introduction of the system of landed property" and was entitled to compensation.

Today, as artificial intelligence (AI) learns from the collective intellectual and creative output of humans and

uses this to dispossess workers of their livelihoods, the idea of universal basic income (UBI) as a possible solution is gaining traction. "We are seeing the most disruptive force in history," Tesla founder and X (formerly Twitter) owner Elon Musk said last year, before speculating: "There will come a point where no job is needed – you can have a job if you want one for personal satisfaction – but AI will do everything."

The counter argument is that although AI could replace a range of jobs, it will also create new roles (including oversight of AI decision making – known as "human in the loop"). Yet for many workers, the advance of AI continues to be alarming. In March, after analysing 22,000 tasks in the UK economy, covering every type of job, a model created by the Institute for Public Policy Research predicted that 59% of tasks currently done by humans – particularly women and young people – could be affected by AI in the next three to five years. In the worst-case scenario, this would trigger a "jobs apocalypse" where eight million people lose their jobs in the UK alone.

UBI would provide a vital safety net. "Under capitalism, you need money to survive. It's that simple," says Dr Neil Howard, an international development social protection researcher at the University of Bath. He and his team have helped to develop basic income pilots around the

world and, like Thomas Paine, he believes that a redistribution of the privatised resources of all human beings is inherently just. Howard likens the large language models of AI that rely on the aggregated collection of human knowledge to the enclosure of the commons, which began in the 1600s and privatised most of England's common land. "The common wealth of the world and of humanity, should, by rights, belong to all of us," says Howard. "It has been appropriated by the few – and that leads the many to either have to struggle to survive or simply not effectively do so. So there's justice underpinning the claim of UBI."

Contrary to expectations, he says, "It wouldn't necessarily lead to people doing less work – it would enable them to do better work or to invest their time in more socially useful activities."

This argument is backed up by a 2020 study conducted by researchers at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. It found that unemployed individuals who were previously in receipt of benefits increased their participation in the labour market after they were given a basic income for three years. Rather than opting for insecure work – taking any job they could get – to fulfil the conditions imposed upon them by the benefits system, they were more likely to find and accept a long-term, well-paid job. They also took on more work. >



# Money for nothing?

**Would Universal Basic Income enable people to do more rewarding, socially valuable work? And could this be the answer to the predicted AI 'jobs apocalypse'? Donna Ferguson reports on what could be one of the most profound shifts society has ever known**

*Illustration* NATHALIE LEES



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› “Humans need to do work that feels valuable, psychologically,” says Cleo Goodman, a UBI expert at the thinktank Autonomy. “It’s baked into us. It is complete nonsense to suggest that there’s a faction of society that just wants to sit around on the sofa all day, drinking beer and watching TV. We want to spend a fair amount of our time doing something that makes us proud.” She believes that everyone has the potential to find their “niche” – work they’re good at, that gives their lives meaning and purpose.

For example, she believes that if UBI was available, people would do more creative and charitable work. “The kind of work that, currently, it’s very difficult to make an income from is the kind of work that I think people would move to in droves. And I think that would be positive for society.”

This is particularly true of care work and parenting, says Goodman. “People shouldn’t be punished for making those choices. Socially and economically, that work is valuable. But at the moment, economically, it’s not valued.”

Salaries for work that is essential, but unattractive, would need to rise if a UBI scheme was introduced. “We’d have to recognise the people that are doing the work in the sewers and cleaning the streets, they’re doing incredibly important jobs that we should be grateful for,” says Goodman. “So they should be compensated in a fair way. I think more people would be happy to get their hands dirty if they were being paid fairly.”

While there is currently no basic income scheme available in England, Autonomy is looking to change that. Goodman is fundraising to run a micropilot that would give 15 people in two areas – central Jarrow in South Tyneside and East Finchley in north London – £1,600 a month for two years, to observe the impact on their lives.

The only basic income pilot currently running in the UK is a Welsh government scheme for 600 young care leavers. Each is receiving £1,600 a month (£1,280 after tax), for 18 months, so that researchers can evaluate the scheme’s benefits. An interim report suggests recipients feel “a greater sense of choice and control over the future”.

**In the US, where there** are currently more than 100 UBI pilots being explored or delivered, researchers have seen similar results. One two-year pilot, *In Her Hands*, involving Black women in the state of Georgia, resulted in more women of colour returning to education.

Cheeon Hampton, 47, a disabled grandmother who left school young to have children, was one of them. “When I found the flyer under my door, I was sceptical,” she says from her home in Atlanta where, at one point in her life, she experienced homelessness. “Then I researched it a bit, and thought: ‘Maybe I can get a real career, instead of hopping from job to job.’”

The income she is receiving – \$850 [£673] a month until September – has enabled the former warehouse worker to take an online course and become a security guard, while simultaneously paying off debts. “A weight was lifted off my shoulders,” she says.

Hampton moved out of her subsidised apartment and bought a low-cost home with a mortgage. She is now earning enough to meet all her bills without getting into debt. With a little extra money, she says, you can really do a lot. “It motivated me to go out and do better for myself. It changed my outlook on life.”

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, former mayor Sumbul Siddiqui began a programme providing 2,000 low-income families with a guaranteed tax-free income of \$500 [£395] a month, for 18 months. She is a member of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, a coalition of 150 mayors in the US who are advocating for a nationwide guaranteed income scheme. Her scheme is costing the city \$22m [£17m] but, she says, it was a “very easy” decision to make: “I think we have to do everything we can to provide financial stability and dignity to those who are the most vulnerable in our community.” She adds, “I think it’s important to say: ‘We recognise you could use help and assistance, and we trust you to figure out how best to use this money.’”

An earlier pilot Siddiqui ran in the city resulted in significant improvements in financial health for 130 families,



‘Humans need to do work that feels valuable. It’s baked into us’

along with higher rates of employment, more time and space for parenting and improved educational outcomes for children.

In Cork, Elinor O’Donovan – who began receiving Ireland’s basic income for creative workers in 2022 – can now spend time doing a job that makes her feel fulfilled. “I made my first film last year, which was really huge for me, and I was able to pay other artists to work with me.”

Across the Irish sea, the Scottish government and the mayors of Manchester, Liverpool and London have all publicly expressed enthusiasm for running basic income pilots in their areas. But so far, none have managed to do so.

One of the biggest obstacles they face is that HMRC refuses to exempt participants from income tax, significantly increasing the gross amount that scheme providers must pay to provide each individual with a small but adequate net income. Participants also need to be financially compensated if other benefits are affected as a result of the pilot. That makes pilots in the UK more expensive than in other countries.

“It’s an impasse,” says economist Prof Mike Danson, who has carried out research advocating for a basic income scheme in Scotland. “We know that, privately, some senior civil servants are in favour. But politicians are afraid

‘It was like winning the lottery. I was in such disbelief. It covers my living expenses, my rent, food and day-to-day stuff’: artist and filmmaker Elinor O’Donovan

of making that big step and trusting the population to do the right thing.”

Research on the impact on participants of pilots in places with similar economies to the UK is so overwhelmingly positive that, he suggests, the resistance in government must be “ideological”. “So, until there’s quite a radical change in thinking in Westminster, nothing can change, really, anywhere in the UK.”

But AI may be the impetus for this radical change in thinking, especially if massive job losses do occur. “One view is that basic income has to happen because, to continue, businesses need people to have money. People need an income they can spend on goods and services. So if you’re taking a lot of income out of the economy, with people losing their jobs, then that’s a problem,” says Danson.

It’s not just economists who think a UBI scheme will be necessary in the future. Professor Geoffrey Hinton – a computer scientist generally regarded as “the godfather of AI” – is among those advocating for it. “I was consulted by people in Downing Street and I advised them that UBI was a good idea,” he told the BBC in May. He fears AI will destroy jobs and increase productivity: “It’s going to increase the gap between rich and poor,” he said.

**Darrell West, author of *The Future of Work: AI, Robots and Automation***, says that just as policy innovations were needed in Thomas Paine’s time to help people transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, they are needed today, as we transition to an AI economy. “There’s a risk that AI is going to take a lot of jobs,” he says. “A basic income could help navigate that situation.”

AI’s impact will be far-reaching, he predicts, affecting blue- and white-collar jobs. “It’s not just going to be entry-level people who are affected. And so we need to think about what this means for the economy, what it means for society as a whole. What are people going to do if robots and AI take a lot of the jobs?”

Nell Watson, a futurist who focuses on AI ethics, has a more pessimistic view. She believes we are witnessing the dawn of an age of “AI companies”: corporate environments where very few – if any – humans are employed at all. Instead, at these companies, lots of different AI sub-personalities will work independently on different tasks, occasionally hiring humans for “bits and pieces of work”.

These AI companies have the potential to be “enormously more efficient than human businesses”, driving almost everyone else out of business, “apart from a small selection of traditional old businesses that somehow stick in there because their traditional methods are appreciated”.

Watson speculates that only jobs that require human interaction (like hospital chaplains and care workers) or involve complex physical tasks (like plasterers, plumbers and hairdressers) will need to be done by humans in the future. As a result, she thinks it could be AI companies, not governments, that end up paying people a basic income.

AI companies, meanwhile, will have no salaries to pay. “Because there are no human beings in the loop, the profits and dividends of this company could be given to the needy. This could be a way of generating support income in a way that doesn’t need the state welfare. It’s fully compatible with capitalism. It’s just that the AI is doing it.”

Howard is also optimistic that we will one day see a basic income scheme introduced in the UK: “We have lots of evidence – and people make it very clear – that the universality, the unconditionality, the automaticity of payments give people a sense of dignity. It manifests that they matter and that their experiences as human beings matter enough to be given this solid cash floor,” he says.

“I think we need to be calling for basic income on the basis of a sense of shared morality, because economic insecurity is grim. It’s empirically damaging and it’s based on historical injustices that are translated into present inequalities. So there’s a very strong case for redistributive basic income right now, irrespective of whether or not the machines are coming.” ■

# 'I felt I had no right to grieve'

When the author Daisy Buchanan lost a series of friends, she felt bereft – yet also that her feelings



'Even when we feel that we can claim our grief, it's hard to navigate,' says author Daisy Buchanan

were misplaced. Here, she explores 'disenfranchised grief' – and learns how to let her sorrow in



**W**hen I was 17, a girl in my year died suddenly, in her sleep. Natalie was beautiful and very popular. We weren't friends and we hadn't really spoken to each other much. (I was a self-conscious, self-obsessed teenager and

I assumed I was invisible to most of my classmates.) At the time, her death seemed like a matter for the other popular girls. Because I was self-obsessed, I was worried about being accused of using a tragedy to gain traction and social status. I didn't try to comfort her friends. I didn't understand that we were going through a collective, communal grief. My shock and sadness seemed fraudulent and I believed the best gift I could give anyone was space. Natalie's very best friends were allowed to cry in the corridor and take time off school. If I tried it, I'd be attention-seeking, claiming emotions I had no right to feel.

Now that I'm 39, I regret everything I did and didn't do. I wish I'd put my self-consciousness aside and let empathy lead the way. I could have gone to her friends and asked what they needed. I could have taken the time to get to know their version of Natalie, who probably wasn't a remote goddess to them, but a sweet, funny teenage girl.

It's taken me more than 20 years to understand that grief isn't an emotion we need to earn. During that time I learned about "disenfranchised grief" – a term coined by bereavement expert Kenneth Doka in 1989. He explained that it "refers to a loss that's not openly acknowledged, socially mourned or publicly supported". Even when we feel that we can openly claim our grief, it's heavy and hard to navigate. When we don't think we have a right to our sadness, it's impossible to heal.

It brought two friends to the forefront of my mind – John and Andrea. Their deaths were just over a year apart. They hadn't been my closest friends. There were other people in their lives who had a much greater claim to grief than me. But I thought about them both constantly. I missed them. I felt angry and guilty and ashamed that I hadn't been a better friend. I resented the other friends, whose grief seemed more legitimate than mine – and I hated myself for that. I had to remind myself that my feelings were shaped by love. When I tried to push my grief away, I pushed my happy memories away, too. I wanted the chance to remember the best of my friends, and the times when I'd felt close to them.

**The night I met John** was especially memorable, because we both thought I'd die first.

We went to a screening of a film. At the time, he was the editor-in-chief of a film website, which sounded very grand – later I learned that he was also the staff writer, the entire picture desk staff and occasionally the office cleaner. John

was charming on Twitter – warm, generous, wicked and fun. Over pizza and drinks, I discovered that he was just the same in real life. Imagine a third Mitchell brother, played by Noël Coward. That was John.

As we wobbled in the general direction of Charing Cross, towards home, I asked "What are all those people doing on Nelson's Column?"

John turned towards me. "You've never been up Nelson's Column? *How* long have you lived in London? We must remedy this at once!"

I climbed up on to the plinth as gracefully as I could (not very) and marvelled at seeing London from a slightly higher vantage point than usual. I think John offered me his hand on the way down. I think I said, "Don't worry, I'm fine." I know exactly what happened next. I missed my step.

My memories are blurry, here, because I lost consciousness, but he came to the hospital with me. I can recall giggling as I used a bedpan behind a translucent curtain, while John turned his back and hummed a little tune to help me to preserve my dignity. I can picture the two of us, alone in a little room, watching the sky turn from navy to pink. Dawn was breaking, and I was out of danger. "I really thought you were going to die," he whispered. His face was very pale. I smiled. "But I didn't! And now we have a story! We'll remember this for ever!"

I believed the incident marked the start of an important friendship. We'd be in each other's lives for years to come, dining out on this ridiculous anecdote. But when John died, in hospital, six years later, I found out about his death on Twitter.

If I could go back to the moment when we met and give my past self a single piece of advice, it wouldn't be, "Don't go up Nelson's Column," or even, "Really watch your step on the way down." It would be: "This friendship is precious. Fight for it. Don't take it for granted, and don't

let it ebb away." We'd fallen into an easy, instant intimacy. Soon, we became part of a gang, made up of other Twitter friends who had made the leap into "real life". John had been diagnosed with blood cancer in the summer of 2015. The shock was searing, but galvanising. Shortly after his diagnosis, John had a birthday dinner. "Good to know that cancer will get everyone out in the middle of the week," he joked. "I hope no one is going to leave after two drinks, pleading a morning meeting, *under the circumstances*." We made plans to rally round, and talked about rotas, routines, freezer filling. We made jokes about *Peter's Friends* and said that in 20 years, we'd return to the restaurant and say, "Remember when John *nearly died?*" Champagne all round.

A year later, John was still in and out of hospital, but he seemed to be responding to treatment. I left London and moved to the Kent coast, and my connection with our wider friendship group started to unravel. They seemed much

## When I tried to push my grief away, I pushed away happy memories

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**'If I was more guarded with love, maybe I'd have a more straightforward relationship with grief': Daisy Buchanan on the parallels between our deepest emotions**

> closer to John than I was. I had always found the group difficult to navigate. It was easy for me to convince myself that the other members didn't like me at all. Anxiety and depression descended, periodically. I nursed a secret suspicion that I had always been a non-player character, and the main characters were glad to get rid of me. Now, I'm ashamed that I let those feelings get in the way of a friendship I should have protected.

When I found out that John died, I was barely in touch with any of our mutual friends. How had I let myself lose him? What was the appropriate amount of grief to feel, when you've loved someone very much – but you've barely spoken to them during the last year of their life? My grief felt wrong. It had the wide, shallow bloom of a bruise. I'd loved John, but had I meant anything to him? The emotions that rose in my throat seemed monstrous, so I swallowed them down again. I felt lonely, angry and selfish. This wasn't about me. It couldn't be about me. I'd forfeited the right to my big feelings, by failing to protect the friendship. I was more mad than sad and it scared me. I focused on trying to feel less and making myself as numb as possible. Better to have no feelings, than the wrong feelings.

A year later, in the spring of 2019, my friend Andrea was diagnosed with a rare liver disorder. I knew Andrea through the Jilly Cooper book club, a gang of women who had bonded over a shared love of bonkbusters. Within minutes of Andrea's awful announcement, the rallying round began. I had a spooky sense of déjà vu as we shared visiting schedules, made reading lists, and Monzo'd each other fivers for care packages. Andrea had known some of the other Jillies for ages, but the two of us had never spent any time alone together. After her diagnosis, we started to message each other frequently.

Andrea wanted to make plans. We talked about what would happen when she was out of hospital, when she was better, when summer came, when, when, when. It was peony season and we discussed where to acquire peonies, where to put them, their scent, their colour and how to prolong their lives. When I first met Andrea, I'd have guessed she'd like lilies or orchids. She seemed elegant, delicate and controlled. When we spoke about peonies, it was as though we were speaking about her second self, her moon sign – a craving for the pungent, riotous and intense.

I hadn't learned my lesson. As Andrea's condition improved, I assumed she'd make a stunning recovery, build a brand-new wing of the hospital and be given an OBE for services to grace under pressure. When my friend Kat called me early one sunny morning, I knew, before I slid my finger across the phone screen, that we'd lost her.

As I started to make sense of the situation, the awful old feelings rose up. I had less right to be there than anyone. I hadn't played enough of a role in Andrea's life to grieve her. If I was going to earn my place among my friends, I had to offer comfort and support. But I didn't know what to say, or where to reach. I wondered whether this loss would help me make some sense of losing John and bring me some wisdom and perspective. Instead, it made that grief seem even heavier.

Grief wasn't supposed to feel this way. I waited for a slow, profound heaviness to take root. Instead, I felt wild. Angry, lonely, abandoned. And selfish. I had no right to these feelings. I couldn't tell anyone about them. Emotionally, I was at the very end of the queue.

## Grief wasn't supposed to feel this way. I waited for a heaviness to take root



I couldn't numb myself this time. The dam had burst. I shut myself off and marinated in shame and pity, feeling exactly like a child having a temper tantrum. When I cried, I didn't sob sweetly into a handkerchief, thinking beautiful thoughts about my lost friends. I screamed. Sometimes I'd lie face down on my bed, grunting into a pillow, kicking the mattress as hard as I could. Please, I thought, someone, give me grace and strength, make me useful. Please let me burn through these mad feelings, so I can get to the proper ones.

The screaming helped, a little. Reading helped even more. I read Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and Cariad Lloyd's *You Are Not Alone*, which were deeply comforting. Books saw my "wrong" feelings and held them and absorbed them, without judging me. And then, in the spring of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic began and death and grief were everywhere.

The observations made by creative people struck me. People talked about feeling heartbroken, because their first novel was being published when bookshops were closed, or being unable to perform in the plays they'd been rehearsing for months – and then feeling guilty and ashamed of those feelings, because people were dying. Others talked about struggling to process the death of loved ones when they hadn't been able to spend any time with them at the end. Or about how wrong it felt to go to a funeral on Zoom. A friend's cat died and she struggled to contextualise her

grief. "I don't really know who to talk to, or turn to," she said. "Everyone is suffering and struggling. I'm not sure where my feelings fit in; there doesn't seem to be space for them on the scale."

It was liberating to learn that for most of us, grief isn't just about death – we can grieve relationships, lost opportunities and endings. Everyone seemed to be experiencing disenfranchised grief, struggling to attach heavy, oversized feelings to losses that didn't seem strong enough to bear their weight. We felt isolated – scared to open up about the scale of our emotions. But we were isolated together. A wall fell away. I started to talk about missing John and Andrea. I started to realise that I was allowed to miss them. Grief wasn't proof of the impact I'd had in John's life, or Andrea's – it was proof of the love they'd brought to mine.

In a tribute to her partner and collaborator Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson wrote: "I believe that the purpose of death is the release of love." Love is a lot like grief. It's rarely pure, sweet and easy. It can be heavy and painful. It can rush in like a tide, buoying us up, and knocking us down. It doesn't have a sense of proportion. We don't love in direct correlation to the amount we are loved. If I was more guarded with my love, maybe I'd have a more straightforward relationship with my grief. But I'm lucky in love – it fills my life. I have a lot of feelings for a lot of people and I've learned that there is as much wonder in loving as there is in being loved. Inevitably, this will lead to grief, concentric circles of it lapping my heart. And it will never be dignified or appropriate. It will be vast and wild, the same size as the cast of people who make my life brighter. ■

*Pity Party* by Daisy Buchanan is published by Sphere at £14.99. Buy it for £13.19 from [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com)

# Food & drink

## Nigel Slater



@NigelSlater



### Recipes worth turning the oven on for this summer

Photographs JONATHAN LOVEKIN

I have a soft spot for a savoury tart on a summer's day, whether it is a deep-bellied, crisp-sided tart of quivering custard and asparagus or a more free-form arrangement made with a sheet of puff pastry, pesto and tomatoes. The version I have been making this summer is simple and blessedly straightforward to make. It is something of a hybrid, possessing both a crisp base and a soft, cheesy layer.

The crust is crunchy and light. The filling – topping might be a more accurate description – is one of shredded courgettes and spring onions, laced with melted mozzarella and fragrant with tarragon. It smells of deepest summer.

You could embellish the filling with

a sprinkling of fennel seeds or some thin slices of pancetta. A little finely grated lemon zest would be delightful as would a teaspoon of bottled green peppercorns added for their warm piquancy. This tart is something to bring to the table in its entirety and slice as needed. I should add that it can be cut into small squares and offered with drinks.

The stone-fruit season is upon us. There are some decent apricots around – though, as always, the fruit can disappoint, no matter how tempting its colour. Anything that is not deeply fragrant and juicy is best baked with a dusting of sugar and a trickle of cognac or eau de vie. I took the step of

grilling a batch of apricots this week, filling the hollows left by the stones with mascarpone and the first blackcurrants of the summer (though I could have used frozen). The berries burst and sent their purple juice flowing into the creamy, vanilla-scented filling – a luscious summer treat.

#### **Courgette, mozzarella and spring onion tart**

A large, crisp vegetable tart to eat warm or cool. It is large enough to feed 4 as part of a summer lunch, perhaps with a tomato salad. It is easiest to make if you use ready-rolled puff pastry, trimming it to fit the tin. *Serves 4. Ready in 1 hour*

**puff pastry** 320g  
**courgettes** 400g  
**mozzarella** 320g  
**crème fraîche** 100g  
**tarragon leaves** 2 tbsp, finely chopped  
**spring onions** 3  
**parmesan** 30g, grated

You will need a shallow-sided baking tin approximately 20cm x 30cm.

Preheat the oven to 220C/gas mark 8.

Line the baking tin with baking parchment. Roll the puff pastry out a couple of centimetres larger than the tin, then use it to line the tin, ushering the pastry into the corners and gently up the sides. Place a piece of baking parchment on top of the pastry and cover it with a deep layer of baking beans. Rest the pastry in the fridge for 20 minutes.

Coarsely grate the courgettes, then put them in a colander over a plate or bowl. Sprinkle them lightly with salt, toss them gently so the salt can coat them fairly evenly, then leave them for 40 minutes.

Bake the pastry shell in the preheated oven for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven, lift out the parchment and baking beans, then return to the oven for 5 minutes until the surface is dry to the touch.

Wring out the grated courgettes in the palm of your hand and put them in a mixing bowl. Tear the mozzarella into small pieces and add to the courgettes. Stir the crème fraîche through the mixture with a fork, then stir in the chopped tarragon leaves and a little pepper (no salt).

Finely slice the spring onions, >



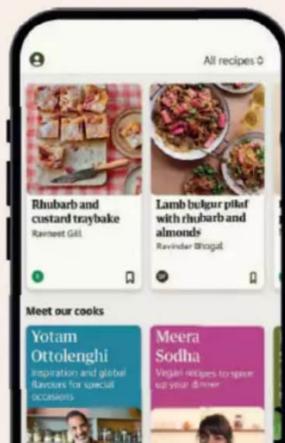
Add some heat:  
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Facing page:  
courgette and  
mozzarella tart

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# Food & drink

## Nigel Slater

### Apricots I come home with that fail to live up to their sunset-hued promise end up in the oven

> discarding the roots and any tough, dark leaves as you go, then stir into the courgette-mozzarella mixture.

Fill the tart case with the mixture, then scatter the grated parmesan over the surface. Bake for 20-25 minutes, until the pastry is crisp and golden.

#### Grilled apricots

When I find a perfectly ripe apricot, I will eat it raw, perhaps with a spoonful of chalk-white ricotta. On most occasions, the apricots I come home with fail to live up to their sunset-hued promise and end up in the oven, where a frosting of sugar and the heat of the oven works wonders.

This recipe, where the fruit is grilled to soften the flesh, then filled with blackcurrants and cream and browned under the heat, is a good use for apricots that, although ripe, don't quite live up to expectations. *Serves 4. Ready in 30 minutes*

apricots 8, ripe  
crème fraîche 200g  
mascarpone 100g  
vanilla extract a few drops  
blackcurrants 150g, fresh or frozen  
icing sugar 2 tbsp

Get an overhead (oven) grill hot. Slice the apricots in half and remove their stones. Place them cut-side up on a grill pan or baking tray. Slide the apricots under the hot grill and leave for about 5-7 minutes, until the fruit is starting to soften.

Put the crème fraîche and mascarpone in a mixing bowl and add a couple of drops of vanilla extract. Stir, but do this only enough to mix the two ingredients together, without over-mixing.

Pull the blackcurrants from their stems. Put 1 heaped tbsp of the crème fraîche mixture into the hollows of the apricots. Scatter the blackcurrants over and dust generously with icing sugar.

Return the apricots to the grill and let the filling melt and start to bubble. The fruit should be soft, but not so soft that it collapses. Lift the fruit on to small dishes, about 4 halves for each person. ■



### Nigel's midweek treat Red fruit fillo pastries

Photograph  
JONATHAN LOVEKIN

#### The recipe

Defrost 6 sheets of fillo. They should measure roughly 25cm x 30cm. Melt 80g of butter in a small pan. Weigh out 125g of caster sugar. Preheat the oven to 200C/gas mark 6 and place a baking sheet on the middle shelf.

Line a second baking sheet with baking parchment. Lay a sheet of fillo on the baking parchment and brush it generously with some of the melted butter. Dust with about 2 generous tbsp of the caster sugar, then place a second sheet of fillo on top, brush with butter and then again dust with caster sugar. Continue until you have used all the pastry, butter and sugar.

Put the baking sheet on the preheated baking sheet and cook for 10-12 minutes until crisp and golden. Remove from the oven, score the pastry into 16 rectangles, but don't separate them. Leave to cool.

Gently whip 250ml of double cream. It should be firm enough to stand in soft peaks. Stir in 100g mascarpone with a few drops of vanilla extract and leave in the fridge to chill.

Remove the stalks and stones from 200g of cherries and toss them with 100g of raspberries. Have ready 8 sprigs of redcurrants (not essential, but nevertheless rather lovely; use extra raspberries instead if you prefer).

Using a sharp knife, separate the pastry into 16 rectangles. Place 8 of the pastry pieces on the work surface, then spread thickly with some of the cream and mascarpone mixture. Spoon the cherries and raspberries over the cream, then place a second piece of pastry on top of each. Finish with a sprig of redcurrants or a few raspberries. *Makes 8. Ready in 1 hour*

● You could substitute other soft fruits as they come into season. Mulberries would be glorious, but blackberries are good, too, as are slices of peach or nectarine.

● You can make the sugar pastry beforehand and store in an airtight container. It will keep for a day or two in a cool place, though not the fridge.

● Assemble the pastries only at the last minute, so the fillo stays crisp. ■

# Food & drink

## Emma Beddington

@belgianwaffling



An immersive tasting menu in Yorkshire boasts some serious cooking chops with much reassuring fun

### Fifty Two

Rudding Park Hotel, Follifoot, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG3 1JH (fiftytworuddingpark.co.uk). Tasting menu £85–£115 Drink pairing £35–£50

I discover the giddy power a restaurant reviewer wields, not over restaurateurs, but over my husband. “We get a free meal!” I tell him, provoking great rejoicing. “It’s an ‘immersive’ experience,” I add; silence. “The chef was on *Great British Menu*, you know, where they serve liver in pencil cases,” I inform

him; there’s a guttural sound. He shouldn’t be so stricken. Watching people cook elaborately is our hobby. There’s nothing unusual in that: fancy food has become entertainment; we’re all sofa sous-chefs after three seasons of *The Bear* and 9 million of *MasterChef*. But our only haute cuisine experience – a po-faced Michelin-starred marathon in an Alpine barn – was traumatic. My husband still talks sorrowfully about the groaning cheese trolley he was too broken-spirited to tackle after 20-plus torturous courses, featuring liquefied tartiflette served in a milk carton and sea urchin meringue.

So onwards, with apprehension, to Harrogate, where *GBM* alumnus Adam Degg’s Fifty Two is hidden somewhere in a labyrinthine country house hotel complex. We blunder round a squat shipping container with no obvious entrance until we reach a glass-fronted, blond-wood suggestion of a restaurant, where we’re handed an aperitif and superior cheesy biscuit and sent to wander the kitchen garden. It’s this garden and its 52 raised beds of organic produce that Degg’s new concept celebrates, and the ravishing mosaics of greenery, thickets of flowering chive and espaliered cascades of currants are spectacular.

The crowd is Harrogate-smart (stealth wealth with a touch of sparkle) and palpably tentative about embarking on a 10-course, £115 “experience” where the only choice is whether you want your drinks pairing (£50) to be alcoholic or not. In a post-*The Menu* world, the spectre of a murderous Ralph Fiennes casts a chill shadow over immersive gastronomy. But once we’re seated at shared tables, expectantly facing Degg and three colleagues, we’re only asked to immerse ourselves in a Sylvanian Family-chic apple blini with cod’s roe and hot pink radish, wearing a nasturtium leaf hat.

That’s reassuring, but the real exhalation comes when one of the chefs delivers what he calls “chips and dip”. It’s ultra-luxe: a floofy cloud of sour cream and dill (*esprit de Pringles*) over a chunky ragout of Jerusalem artichokes, which are also deep-fried as the “chips”. There’s something comfortingly familiar about watching people cook while troughing down crisps. Dark-golden fermented potato brioche rolls,



**A riff on eel, mash and liquor is a standout: a bronze chunk on a silky beurre blanc**



Garden party: (from below) chefs at work; eel, potato, parsley; the dining room; nasturtium gazpacho; harvesting produce; salt-aged lamb; and chocolate and pine caramel

ceremoniously pulled from the oven, destroy our last shreds of reserve; we duel over who gets first dunk in the whipped sunflower seeds, cultured butter and salsa verde. Now we couch potatoes can relax, watching our food take painstaking shape, then demolishing it. There’s too much for a blow-by-blow, but a riff on eel, mash and liquor is a standout: a smoked, bronze chunk on a confit potato in a pond of silky green beurre blanc, topped with thistle-down-thin crispy potato filaments and tongue-tingling powdered vinegar and parsley.

An unpromising-sounding pre-dessert – nuggets of last year’s chewy beetroot in blackberry juice under goat’s milk ice-cream – is bafflingly brilliant: earthy, clean, sweet and tart. You can tell Degg used to be a pastry chef. His dark-crust, brown-butter custard tart dusted with star anise and nutmeg sugar shimmies, threatening collapse, at the slightest spoon nudge; pine

caramel adds resinous complexity. Not everything works. A deep-fried gherkin served with other sour bits and piccalilli is a pickle too far, the batter not crisp enough to offer contrast. Cod with overly sweet magnolia blossom tastes like a work in progress (Degg confirms it's a new dish). The non-alcoholic drinks pairing is admirable, but needs tweaking: as designated driver, if I'd finished the first three large, sweet offerings served I would have been sloshing and hyperglycaemic before pudding. Some of the vegetarian options deliver: a "take on Branston pickle" offers the crunch and sweetness of new season green things. But I get the same amuse bouche twice and while it's nice that the gardener produced an early cauliflower that was slow-roasted just for me, it's seriously under-seasoned. And on a £115 menu, don't charge £6.50 for water; serve tap.

But we visit in week seven after opening and all that is fixable. There's so much more right than wrong: Degg cooks and hosts with charm and generosity. The "signature sharing" lamb is gloriously OTT: there's slow-cooked saddle and a hibachi-charred kebab, and spiced navarin topped with a wild garlic foam and crunchy sweetbreads over smoked rosemary. Plus, a salad. It's tasting menu vibes, Yorkshire portions.

But what Degg has nailed above all is the experience. He's obviously deeply serious about his food (at one point I count three chefs tweezing away), but equally so about atmosphere. You can't be too po-faced when you're toasting meringues with naked flames: this is as far from chilly, ego-driven cooking-as-theatre as you could imagine. The quantity of food and drink (boozers get three excellent cocktails and two wines, regularly topped up) means that by dessert, cheeks are pink, smiles broad and belts slackened. Chairs shuffle together; we're encouraged to choose songs for "dessert island discs", at which point two young women start schooling their 60-something tablemates on Taylor Swift and a mini-Mexican wave breaks out. By the time Degg comes over offering warm, cherry-sugar-dusted madeleines, my neighbour is coaching me so intensely on overcoming my fear of failure, we absent-mindedly grab a handful and smash through them like he's our mate passing round M&Ms (they're infinitely tastier). He seems delighted. Fifty Two is better than fancy food as entertainment: it's honest-to-goodness fun. ■

Jay Rayner returns next week

## Notes on chocolate

In hot weather, a dark bar is more reliable, says Annalisa Barbieri



When I was newly on the path to matrescence, and every day was like a crawl to the peak of an oxygen-deprived mountain, I used to keep a giant bar of Dairy Milk (back then I liked it) in the car. I would sneak out, after first and second breakfast, lunch, dinner, bedtime, and bite chunks out of it, leaving teeth marks of guilty, desperate, pleasure.

Then one day it all melted. There is no despair greater, relatively speaking, than finding an expected treat quite gone.

I learned a few things: never store chocolate in a car; all chocolate melts if it gets too hot; buy high cocoa content chocolate as it's that bit more robust to sneak into a summer picnic basket.

Today's delicious bites go from 67% to 85%. First was Love Cocoa's 85% Colombian

Dark (£5/75g). If this chocolate had a dating profile it would have a great bio: rich, intense, smooth. It's a remarkably easy-to-eat 85%, so you can stay worthy and good while actually enjoying yourself.

The founder of Love Cocoa is James Cadbury, John Cadbury's great, great, great-grandson. John was the founder of the original Cadbury chocolate. And the Dairy Milk I used to love was originally made by Cadbury's in 1905.

Then I went on to Chocolarder's Guadacanal 67% (£7/70g) made from Solomon Island beans. The beans for this are taken from the island to the mainland by the farmer's wading across the river – which has crocodiles in it – with the sacks of beans on their heads. The journey is worth it: this is a lively chocolate bursting with flavour. Quite delicious.



## Wines of the week

Creative white blends from three sublimely skilful wine makers.

By David Williams

@Daveydaibach

**Susana Balbo Signature White Blend Argentina 2022**  
£24, The Great Wine Co

The measure of a talented cook is being able to make something delicious out of any ingredients. That's not quite the case with a winemaker: it's easy to make a terrible wine

out of good grapes, but you can't make a good wine from bad grapes. Still, there is something of the flexible cook's pragmatism to some of my favourites. Certainly, that's part of the story with one of Argentina's best whites. When leading winemaker Susana Balbo wanted to make a Bordeaux-style white blend, she had access to plenty of the two key ingredients: sauvignon blanc and semillon. The third, muscadelle, was more elusive. A cunning substitution of a local grape variety, torrontés, was her answer, and the result is a peach-skin soft, mandarin-tangy, subtly herbal wine.

**Triade Bianco Italy 2022**  
£7.49, down from £9.99 until 30 July, Waitrose

I was immensely impressed by Viña Estampa Inspiración Italian White Blend 2021 (£24.99, carruthersandkent.co.uk), a three-way blend of fiano, greco

and vermentino from the Pacific coastal vineyards of Paredones in Chile's Colchagua Valley. It's a combination that I'm not sure I've ever come across outside the original home of each of those varieties in southern Italy, but it works beautifully here. There's an essential oil intensity and texture, oranges, lemons, fresh white peaches, a salty-fresh finish. Rather more accessibly priced, certainly on the offer price, Waitrose's Triade goes back to the source, with falanghina taking vermentino's place alongside fiano and greco di tufo in a lovely soft, tropical fruity summer white.



**Tesco Finest Côtes du Rhône Villages Blanc France 2023**  
£9, Tesco

France's southern Rhône is another region with a tradition of blending multiple white grapes that winemakers all over the world have used as inspiration. In a wine such as Tesco's smart

own-label bottling from the region, the skill of winemaker Julie Rouffignac is very much akin to the cook making a complex soup, as she harmonises seven grape varieties to create a wine that shimmers with ripe stone fruit. The blend is not quite so symphonic in Montirius Côtes du Rhône Blanc la Muse Papilles 2022 (£18.99, thesourcetable.com). But this trio of grenache blanc, roussanne and clairette from Christine and Eric Saurel's biodynamic vineyard in Vacqueyras, is even more sophisticated and evocative with notes of fleshy red apple and chamomile, subtle almond and nougat and a refreshingly gastronomic salty finish.



# The edit Festival dressing

From retro classics to chic accessories, here are five fabulous ways to blaze a trail through the festival season – come rain or shine



**Harriet Green**  
Observer Magazine editor

'A waterproof jacket is key.' **Jacket** £239, [barbour.com](#) **Sweatshirt** £89, Whistles (johnlewis.com) **Skirt** £215, [rixolondon.com](#) **Bag** £98, free [people.com](#) **Boots** £50, [lechameau.com](#) **Sunglasses** £11.99, [hm.com](#)



**Jo Jones**  
Fashion editor

'A crochet dress is easy to pack.' **Sunglasses** £395, [cutlerandgross.com](#) **Jacket** £45, Polo Ralph Lauren ([depop.com](#)) **Dress** £84.99, [superdry.com](#) **Bag** £35, [Klättermusen](#) ([arket.com](#)) **Scarf** £69, [rockins.co.uk](#) **Boots** £190, [blundstone.co.uk](#)



**Sam Deaman** Fashion assistant  
'Mix pattern and colour.' **Sunglasses** £61.60, [Moschino](#) ([thrift.plus](#)) **T-Shirt** £28, [Takweer](#) ([everpress.com](#)) **Shorts** £265, [endlessjoy.co.uk](#) **Jacket** £40, [Rains](#) ([rokit.co.uk](#)) **Ring** £250, [saintdavis.com](#) **Sandals** £155, [ancient-greek-sandals.com](#) **Bag** £65, [Gramicci x and wander](#) ([gramicci.co.uk](#))



**Bem Shaw**  
Contributing stylist

'Go for designer accessories.' **Sunglasses** £280, [Tom Ford](#) ([libertylondon.com](#)) **Coat** £299, [allsaints.com](#) **Bag** £114 for 4 days' rental, [Prada](#) ([hurrcollective.com](#)) **T-shirt** £32, [beyondretro.com](#) **Shorts** £65, [stories.com](#) **Boots** £79.99, [pullandbear.com](#)



**Helen Seamons**  
Men's fashion editor

'Try vintage outerwear.' **Sunglasses** £185, [vivienne westwood.com](#) **Jacket** £160, [Carhartt](#) ([thrifted.com](#)) **T-shirt** £35, [Adidas](#) ([asos.com](#)) **Shorts** £60, [levis.com](#) **Shoes** £140, [sebago.co.uk](#) **Bracelets** £30 and £55, both [astley clarke.com](#) **Cup** £42, [uk.yeti.com](#)

# Beauty Funmi Fetto

@FunmiFetto



## 10 of the best Hand creams

A few years ago, I was sitting next to a lovely woman at a dinner. She had the most impressively glowy skin. The kind of skin one could only acquire with a serious dedication to care (and I suspect a little bit of cosmetic intervention, too). As we spoke, she gesticulated, lifting her hands close to her face and I had to stop my food from falling out of my mouth. Her hands looked as if they belonged to someone else, someone 200 years older. While that is a bit of an exaggeration, my point is this: we need to pay more attention to the skin on our hands. Hand cream with actives – such as retinol – and SPF protection are particularly progressive as they treat hands with as much care as the skin on your face, and now increasingly, your body. Hand creams tend to be spoken about more in winter, but they should be an all-year-round necessity. On a basic level, a great hand cream will make your hands feel more comfortable, but it also means you won't end up with hands that don't match your face. ■



1. L'Occitane Dry Skin Hand Cream £23, [uk.loccitane.com](http://uk.loccitane.com)
2. Elizabeth Arden Eight Hour Cream Intensive Moisturizing Hand Treatment £28, [elizabetharden.co.uk](http://elizabetharden.co.uk)
3. Aesop Eleos Aromatique Hand Balm £27, [aesop.com](http://aesop.com)
4. Necessaire The Hand Cream £20, [spacenk.com](http://spacenk.com)
5. Super Retinol Hands Anti-Ageing Moisture Cream £12.50, [beautypie.com](http://beautypie.com)

6. Hello Sunday The One For Your Hands SPF30 Hand Cream £10, [cultbeauty.co.uk](http://cultbeauty.co.uk)
7. CeraVe Reparative Hand Cream, £7, [sephora.co.uk](http://sephora.co.uk)
8. Shiseido Ultimate Power Infusing Hand Cream, £27, [johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)
9. This Works Perfect Hands Intense Moisture £20, [thisworks.com](http://thisworks.com)
10. Chanel Le Crème Main, £52, [chanel.com](http://chanel.com)





An unappreciated  
'hodgepodge' of a  
building in Antwerp  
has been opened  
up into a spacious  
and highly  
unusual home

Words **THIJS DEMEULEMEESTER**  
Photographs **JAN VERLINDE**

**Living the**

**high life**

'A house should be a living composition':  
Nils Verkaeren and Eva Wuytjens perch  
on a painted beam in their eclectic home.  
Left: the sitting room and dining area

# 'I've been raving about **ProBio 8+** to everyone I know' says surgeon Nurhan.

28-year-old ears nose and throat surgeon, Nurhan Abbud, first heard about ProBio 8+ from a friend. Nurhan was complaining to her about feeling tired due to her night shifts and often bloated because of her erratic eating patterns.

'To be honest, I was a little sceptical, and wasn't expecting too much, I don't know what I was expecting' recalls Nurhan.

'After about five or six days it kind of all hit me at once, at first I thought it was because the weather was getting better, but I just didn't feel so tired'

'Before I started taking ProBio 8+, because of my interrupted sleep, I often felt sluggish when getting out of bed. As soon as I started taking ProBio, it dawned on me I no longer felt tired in the morning and I also had a lot more energy.

'Sometimes I have back to back night shifts and my eating is all over the place. That makes my stomach not feel great, I'll have a big meal in the evening and then I'll feel really bloated and sometimes quite sick.

'I haven't really had that since taking the ProBio 8+. I've taken out a subscription now, that's how much I like it.'

ProBio 8+ is a scientifically-tested, multi-strain biotic supplement, containing eight carefully selected bacteria, including Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium. This combination has been chosen for their ability to support the gut. It has been tested to ensure the live bacteria not only survive the journey through your gastrointestinal tract but also remain stable without having to be refrigerated.

'The sachets are nice and easy to take, I have mine with some milk in the morning. It's become part of my daily routine. I've been away on holiday recently and took a week's worth away with me, my routine didn't have to be interrupted. I've



'I'm really surprised with how much more energy and how little bloating I now have.'

been raving about ProBio 8+ to everyone I know.

'I'm really surprised with how much more energy and how little bloating I now have. I've also read around the subject. I don't understand why everyone doesn't take it!'

Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, Head of Product Development for

FutureYou Cambridge the company that makes ProBio 8+ says, 'The Probioact® Technology in the product ensures a higher effectiveness when compared with similar products on the market. It helps the strains of friendly bacteria to survive, as well as start thriving once they reach the gut.'

## Try ProBio 8+ for just £7 (usual price £23)

Leading Cambridge company to offer four week trial of scientifically proven gut health support.

FutureYou Cambridge, a nutraceutical company known for its well-researched nutritional supplements, is offering new customers the opportunity to trial its flagship gut health product for 28 days for just £7. The offer is ideal for people suffering from digestive discomfort, from feeling bloated to long-term gastrointestinal issues, but is open to any one.

The company has received many positive customer testimonials via

Trustpilot about ProBio 8+ since its launch such as Anthony, who says: 'It certainly does what it says on the tin. I had bowel problems for over 12 years, tried everything the NHS suggested to no avail, then a friend recommended ProBio8+. That hit the bullseye in one! I'm so happy with the product.' Another happy customer, Joanne says: 'Always had



a bit of a weak stomach. But no more with this. Excellent product. Feel so much better on it - and so does my other half.'

**'Excellent product. Feel so much better on it - and so does my other half.'**

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[FutureYouOffers.co.uk](https://FutureYouOffers.co.uk)

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**F**or Belgian painter Nils Verkaeren, a home of his own wasn't strictly necessary. He could just as easily live as a nomad. "In 2002, I didn't have an official address. I traded two landscape paintings for a Renault Twingo and set off into the wild. I found it quite easy to have nothing. But owning a home also has its charm."

But his partner, Eva Wuytjens, needed a place where she felt at home. At first, somewhere in the countryside was their instinct: a logical decision, given that Eva grew up in the country and Nils creates vibrant landscape paintings, preferably in the open air. But also illogical, given their hunger for urban stimuli. "So we decided to search for a home in Antwerp instead," says Eva. "When we visited this house, right in the city centre, we spontaneously began renovating it in our minds. I understand why many potential buyers backed out: it was a bit of an odd thing. You had to be able to see through the hodgepodge of extensions. The house was divided into numerous small rooms. You had to walk through various dark spaces before reaching the living areas."

"It was also unclear from which period the house precisely dated. The property seller mentioned 1947, but the house looks much older," says Nils. "The old floorboards have 13 different widths. We also discovered the oak beams are identical to those in the 17th-century Rubens House, a stone's throw from here. Perhaps the house was built with leftover materials at the time."

To tackle the renovation, they called in a friend and architect, Maarten Tierens. The project was anything but straightforward. "The renovation took shape like my paintings: as a work in progress," Nils says. "The plans were a ping-pong game between us. We kept tweaking them. Fortunately, Maarten is also a painter: he understood that process all too well. It was mainly the contractors who went crazy."

You wouldn't notice much of that "work in progress" when walking around the house today. Numerous "invisible" interventions have been made, such as updating techniques, insulating, and breaking down unnecessary partitions. But you would swear the house has always looked this way. "It's quite spacious for a couple with a dog," Nils admits. "It sounds decadent, but I consume a lot of space, just like my work. I see our house as a blank canvas: it can evolve in any direction. If we want to turn the living room into a large dining area tomorrow, we can do that perfectly. I'd put a bathtub in front of our open fireplace if I could. Why limit the spaces to the predestined functions? A house should be a living composition."

Nils and Eva didn't buy all-new furniture and artwork for their home. "We already had quite a few heirlooms from my grandparents, who were both antique



New beginnings: multiple walls were taken down to create open spaces, filled with art, plants and cherished vinyl



**'I'd put a bathtub in front of our open fireplace if I could. Why limit the spaces to the predestined functions?'**

dealers," says Nils. The couple combined these with striking contemporary elements, such as the Chill Chair by Zigmund Pront and the yellow Dikarya tube chandelier in the living room, designed by Yves Pauwels for Falluce. "Here and there, we've hung artworks by fellow artists with whom I've exchanged pieces. Many works still need a place. Once you hang something, it immediately feels so definitive."



Even though quite a few of his own landscape paintings are in the house, you can hardly call Nils and Eva's place a studio home because he prefers to work on location, alone, in the open air. "Last summer, I was in the Moroccan desert, with temperatures up to 50C. Those conditions force me to work and see differently. A home studio doesn't challenge me enough in that respect." ■ [nilsverkaeren.com](http://nilsverkaeren.com)

A vibrant landscape photograph of a turquoise lake in a forested valley. In the foreground, a red canoe is docked on a wooden pier. The water is crystal clear, showing the rocky bottom. The background is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# Round the clock

City breaks and stunning scenery, Switzerland has it all

Words SARAH TURNER Photograph SIMON DANNHAUER

Big blue: Caumasee in the Laax region offers everything for adventure sport enthusiasts



## Mountain sports

Laax is the Swiss mountain resort that your teenage kids won't mind heading to, especially if they are into skating. As well as an indoor hall, this summer sees the opening of the new Freestyle Academy Laax with skate bowl, vert ramp and trampolines, plus expert teaching. Riders Hotel is the unofficial heart of Laax and embraces the season in the same party-minded way it approaches the winter months. There are DJs and yoga sessions, rooms come in configurations that suit couples, families and groups of friends who want to bunk in together, and are a pleasing blend of cool concrete, plywood and large windows with dreamy views. It's also classified as one of Switzerland's bike hotels, with a workshop and repair area on site. *B&B doubles from £164; [ridershotel.com](http://ridershotel.com)*

## The city break

Europe's best crossroads city, Basel, is a short tram ride from both Germany and France. Every person who stays in a hotel or guest house here gets free public travel – from the moment you arrive, your reservation counts as your ticket from the airport. Basel isn't just brilliant for transport nerds, it's also an art-filled, leisure-focused haven, especially in the summer months. Locals can swim home after work, or more likely drift thanks to the current of the Rhine, keeping their clothes and belongings dry in a locally made, waterproof Wickelfisch bag. This might be Switzerland, but Basel's art student vibe helps to keep the costs down. The university botanical gardens are free to visit, including the tropical house. Chill at Café Zum Roten Engel at Andreasplatz for *kaffee und kuchen* or at the Fischerstube, home of the locally acclaimed Ueli beer. Basel's upmarket youth hostel on the banks of the Rhine was revamped by the highly hip Buchner Bründler design group and has double rooms with their own en suite. *B&B with en suite from £70pp; [youthhostel.ch](http://youthhostel.ch)*

## Lovely lakes

There are about 1,500 lakes in Switzerland, from the big hitters of Lake Geneva and Lake Constance to smaller idylls. In the Bernese Oberland, Blausee ("Blue lake") lives up to its name. Just 6,400 sq m of pine-framed perfection – its deep turquoise waters are truly impressive. Take a trip on a glass-bottomed boat or enjoy a gentle walk in the surrounding woodlands. Blausee is easy to reach – the 230 bus will deliver you directly to its shores from Adelboden. The Blausee Hotel is the perfect spot in which to base yourself, with pretty >

**Calm reflections:** (from top right) sailing boats moored in the picturesque town of Arbon on the shores of Lake Constance; and the river Rhine flowing past Basel's ancient Munster Cathedral



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views across the lake. There's a spa and food includes fresh trout; the owners will also pack you a picnic, so you can head into the hills to enjoy it. *B&B doubles from £185; [blausee.ch](http://blausee.ch)*

## Groovy Montreux

Even when the Montreux Jazz Festival finishes next week (20 July), the musical heritage continues throughout the year with jazz at Funky Claude's Bar and tours of the Mountain Studios where Queen recorded six albums. Montreux also makes a great base for visiting the Lavaux vineyard terraces by train, heading by cable car to Glacier 3000, as well as exploring Lake Geneva by standup paddleboard. Just beyond Montreux, the Hotel Masson is a three-star charmer, with old-fashioned grace, gardens that look out on to the lake and some of the area's most affordable room rates. *B&B doubles from £220; [hotelmasson.ch](http://hotelmasson.ch)*

## Hiking and biking

A four-hour hike and a million miles from Gstaad's glitz, the hamlet of Abländschen is pretty much just a tiny church surrounded by endless green meadows and small streams, backed by the Gastlosen range. So far, so very *Heidi*. However, the Hotel Zur Sau, despite its trad looks, is quietly radical. Part of a foundation that aims to use tourism to help this area become a sustainable place to live, all of its workers, along with its food, are kept local. There are hiking and



biking trails from the hotel and if you're car-free, an electric post bus, the 185, stops outside the hotel four times a day (twice in either direction). *B&B doubles from £200; [bergdorf-ablaendschen.chu](http://bergdorf-ablaendschen.chu)*

## Sheer style

Back in 1996, the village of Vals in the Surselva region hired architect Peter Zumthor to create a building to encase its thermal waters. His multi-award-winning building, Vals Therme, which uses more than 60,000 slabs

of Vals quartzite alongside water that emerges from deep underground at 30C, has been a place of architecture-student pilgrimage ever since. It's definitely worth a look: you can drop in for a cocktail at their Blue Bar. But to stay, Brücke 49 is a more affordable, chic guesthouse that's owned by designer Ruth Kramer, who has created stylish, spare interiors in soothing grey, softening Vals' local granite with sheepskin and wool. Brücke's warm heart continues with an organic Swiss



**Best of times:** (clockwise from top left) Gandria, a traditional village on Lake Lugano; vineyard terraces in Lavaux, a Unesco World Heritage Site since 2007; crystal clear waters at Blausee, near the village of Kandersteg; and dramatic views of the Gastlosen ridge at Freiburg, popular with hikers

breakfast – and guests have half-price entry to the spa. *B&B doubles from £219; [brucke49.ch](http://brucke49.ch)*

## Italian-Swiss fusion

Switzerland borders five different countries, but Ticino, next to Italy, is the part that the Swiss try to keep to themselves. Mountains lead down to the pastel-coloured villages and towns of Lake Lugano, and the fabled Swiss efficiency comes with an extra dollop of Italian charm. It's no surprise to learn that this is Switzerland's foodiest area; not just vineyards and cheese-making (though they are very good) but edible flowers in the Piano di Magadino national park. Italy's *albergo diffuso* movement – where restored village houses are used as places to stay – has taken root here, too. Corippo, in the village of the same name, offers simple rooms and stellar food. An hourly bus from Tenero station gets you to within a short walk of the village. *B&B doubles from £195; [corippoalbergodiffuso.ch](http://corippoalbergodiffuso.ch)* ■

# Self & wellbeing

Photograph JOONEY WOODWARD

## How returning to competitive sport after 25 years taught me resilience – and the joy of new friends

Words JENNY KNIGHT

When I was 17, my rowing coach announced that taking a day off was unnecessary. That one time of the week that I left school at 4pm and watched *Neighbours* was now gone. I think that's probably why, when I gave up rowing, I stopped doing any exercise at all. I'd had enough. Exercise for me equated to diehard commitment and someone shouting at me all the time. So I did nothing. Which in retrospect was a bad idea, because there were times in my life – getting RSI when I tried to write a book while holding down a full-time job or having a baby and getting swamped by anxiety – when exercise would have helped enormously.

It was when I had come out of the baby years, moved to a new area, but worked from home, that I felt the pull to be part of a team again. But I didn't know how or in what sport – there was no way I was going back to rowing.

There are plenty of "back to..." sessions for various sports – hockey, football, lacrosse – but having never played any of these, I was daunted. Then one day a neighbour knocked looking for a sub for her netball league team. I'd been OK at netball at school, so I said I'd do it. It was during that game I realised all the latent competitiveness that had pushed me at school to become a junior world rowing champion, was still very much there. And when I got rid of it, through sport, it took the pressure off other areas of my life.

A friend of mine went back to lacrosse after her therapist told her competitive sport was excellent for building up emotional resilience (the ability to cope with stressful situations, challenges and adversity). That was exactly why, without consciously knowing it at the time, I took up rowing as a teenager. It was a counterweight to the cliquey, results-focused, all-girls school I went to – where the headmistress berated us for the "sparkling array of Bs and Cs" in our exam results. It was competitive, but in a different way. I discovered that popularity didn't rely on the whims of the clique, but on the ability to work together to shift the boat. By the time I made it to the GB junior squad, that resilience was more important than ever, because the pressure ramped up, there were blood tests to check performance levels, our heart rate monitors were set to beep if we weren't working hard enough, people's blisters went down to the bone and one time I remember being too exhausted to get up off the floor to go home.

**I am naturally competitive.** And while this is good when it comes to sport, it has the downside of building up adrenaline in areas of life where it isn't helpful. It's almost impossible to relax, because I feel that everything could be done better. But as I started playing netball, I realised that each week it pulled the plug on the pockets of stress that had built up in my everyday adult life.

Being an author is a brilliant job, but working in



'Netball is so fast and strategic that there's no time to think of anything other than the game': author Jenny Knight

isolation does get lonely. The main communication with the publisher or agent is around the time of book publication or handing in the first draft. For much of the year it's tumbleweed – just you and your characters who are in essence extensions of yourself or versions of how your own brain would tackle a problem were you, say, a murderer.

Working alone and watching other people's careers via social media can lead the best of us to paranoia. Staring at a screen all day wreaks havoc with the neck and back.

**Friendships on the team differ, we don't know each other's backstories**

And, while coming up with the ideas is great, when you're stuck with a blank piece of paper or pages of revisions willing a solution, it's the ultimate frustration; it's there when you're eating, sleeping, walking to pick up your kid from school, watching TV. There's no escape.

But there is a break now

for me that comes from picking two of my teammates up every Tuesday evening and driving to a netball game. It's half an hour on the court where the only object of interest is the ball. And, as a defence player, stopping the other people from getting it. It sounds ridiculous, but I can go to sleep replaying the feeling of a good interception (but equally lie there wide-awake lamenting a terrible pass or game-losing penalty). We play against people who are much better than us and a few who are much worse. There are girls straight out of uni, top of their squad, who moan about being as old as 25. Women in their 40s and 50s who have to bring their children with them, setting them up on iPads because their partner is out or there's no babysitter – and that weekly game is as important to them, for whatever reason, as it is to me.

This is where friendships differ from the norm. In our league, we don't know each other's backstories. In some of the opposing teams, who I've played against for years, I don't even know the names of the players. But we say hello. We congratulate each other. I know how they run, catch, pass. I know their tricks; I know if they

get angry when marked too closely or happily barge me out the way with the whole force of their body. On my team, we don't have jobs in common or kids the same age, as one might usually with friendships, nor have we met each other's families. But we are bonded by a shared desire to play and to win (which often we don't). We train together. We celebrate our wins or moan about losing or bitch about how we were wronged on court together. And over the years this bunch of strangers have become my friends. The journey there in the car is 10 minutes of life-problem moaning, but on the way home, after the game, everything feels a little bit better.

It made me remember the things I loved about being a rower at 17; that your team were the people you trusted to want something as much as you. You didn't have to even like each other, but you had to respect their talent, their commitment and their effort. The sporting

## It's a small change – an hour a week – but I've built inner strength

friendship is one based on knowing that in the pouring rain, freezing cold, or ferocious, sweating heat, you all show up, because it makes life better. And then you go home to your normal life.

Where the Junior Worlds was my ultimate goal as a teenager, what's so great about my weekly netball game now is that it doesn't

matter. It's competition for competition's sake. It goes round in an endless loop of the same teams and the same players – you can beat a team one week and lose against them the next. You can walk away if someone shouts at you.

This is not the cliché of school sporting types – these adult teams are made up of strong, determined women of varying ages, shapes, sizes and fitness who are there simply to compete in a game they love with people they respect. It's something I thought I would never do again and in the grand scheme of things it's a very small change – less than an hour a week – but it has categorically improved my life, perhaps even built up my inner strength.

OK, so I still cried (in the John Lewis underwear department) when I got an email to say I needed to rewrite the book I had spent a year working on. But that evening I went to play netball. I started the game in a really bad mood – apologies to whoever I was marking – but, as it went on, I actually felt my emotional state change. Netball is so fast and strategic that there's no time to think of anything other than where the ball or your opposing player is. In essence, the game gave my brain a half-hour holiday to focus on something other than the rubbish work news, while behind the scenes processing it and decatastrophising.

On top of that, there was the actual physical release of the exercise, burning through the adrenaline of the shock and dispelling the cortisol from the stress. By the end of the game, I was still gutted, but I had some perspective. I can't say whether I was more resilient than if I hadn't taken up netball. But what I can say is that the game itself, and the act of playing in that team, allowed me to escape the realities of life for enough time that I could calm down and rationalise, so what felt devastating before was less so after. Which I suppose is exactly what emotional resilience means. ■

*The Fifth Guest* by Jenny Knight is published by HQ at £8.99. Buy it for £8.36 from [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com)



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## Séamas O'Reilly

### There's nothing like a local park and a big cake to take the stress out of a child's birthday party

@shockproofbeats



My wife was on the phone to my sister, Maeve. Their tone seemed grave. 'Can you not put cream on it?' she said, conjuring images of my sister covered head to toe with third-degree burns. A more dutiful brother would have inquired after his sister's health, but I was following our two-year-old daughter up some wooden stairs she'd decided to mount while soaking wet and barefoot.

Thirty seconds later, I heard my wife say, 'Just use chocolate,' which caused a half-second of further confusion before I realised they were discussing cake, and their gravity of tone owed to the stresses involved in my son's sixth birthday preparations.

Everything about planning a child's birthday party is stressful. Not babies, they're easy. Just plop them down with a muffin and a candle and they'll be delighted.

Babies are so undiscerning, you could simply walk around until you found another

baby's birthday taking place in your local park, join in and they'd have the best day of their lives with perfect strangers. Even that is likely doing too much. You could just show them a fire engine, a picture of a jellyfish, or a crude drawing of your own face. For all the many horrors of parenting in the early years, your child's utter lack of a meaningful social life is a real bonus.

Our toddler is still in this phase, something for which I thank myself as I stop her fitting a cat's entire head into her mouth. My son, by contrast, is quite particular in his needs. He's never wanted a big party, with dozens of kids, a bouncy castle and an entertainer, because he gets a bit overwhelmed by large groups. Even when we explained that such an arrangement would net him many more presents, he remained steadfast that we keep it small.

This arrangement suits us because we are bad, lazy parents who would rather not be directly in charge of 30 children even for a short

period of time and we feel our children provide enough chaos in our lives already, so avoiding any additional extras is worthwhile.

In the end, we took 10 kids to our local trampoline park. The first hour was spent happily jumping until he and all his friends were covered in the kind of puppy dog sweat that makes a six-year-old look like a coalminer clocking off. The second was spent in a 'party room' on site, whose bare walls and folding tables had all the charm of a Soviet crematorium.

There, I made a little girl cry when I called her out for moving during musical statues, so much so that I lost my nerve and let everyone stay in the game forever. Pin the tail on the dinosaur resulted in every adult leaving the space, unknowingly, with a T-rex tail appended to their arse.

On seeing my sister's beautiful chocolate-topped cake, my daughter tried to headbutt it full force with the candles still lit. It was chaos, after all. But it was beautiful, wonderful chaos.

# Ask Philippa

## My brother's mental illness hovers over my family life



@Philippa\_Perry



### Sunday with...

Katarina Johnson-Thompson on training and telly

**Sunday rest?** It's the only day I get off from training, so it's about looking ahead and making sure my body is fully recovered for the next training cycle. If I'm being a really good athlete, I'll have an ice bath. A lot of people think because you're on a rest day you can't eat as much, but really you should overeat on your rest days.

**What are you scoffing?** I love to go for brunch, because every other morning I'm training and I normally have to eat on the go. On Sundays, I make the effort to have a full English breakfast, or eggs Benedict, or pancakes, either with friends or by myself with a book.

**Sunday activities?** It depends what time of year it is. Maybe there'll be a football match I'll watch in the afternoon. I support Liverpool. The last time I went was for Jürgen Klopp's second-to-last game against Tottenham. I had to go and say bye in my own way.

**Sundays growing up?** I'm from the generation that played out in the streets, so I'd be out with my friends. I used to live opposite my nan and grandad. It was just me and my mum. I haven't got any siblings, so I'd be with my friends playing Pokémon on my Game Boy or playing football.

**Sunday telly?** My boyfriend [British hurdler Andrew Pozzi] lives in Cardiff, but I live in Loughborough, so we'll start a programme together and watch it at the same time. We've been watching *Traitors*. I don't think I'd make a good traitor. I can't lie to save my life.

**Family time?** I live by myself, but try to go back to Liverpool on the weekends to see my mum when I can. I'll be away this month and in August, too. I'm looking forward to my fourth Olympics. It's an honour to be selected. **Rich Pelley**

*British Gas has commissioned a mural in Liverpool dedicated to Katarina Johnson-Thompson for the Paris Olympics*



**The question** I'm writing to you about sibling rivalry. I am not sure what to do about my youngest brother – indeed, whether to do anything. In the past he had a schizophrenic episode and was in hospital for a while and received psychiatric support. He made a good recovery and went to university. Since he graduated, though, he has lived at home with our parents and done very little. He exercises excessively to maintain his fitness and mental health. He says he will volunteer, find work, or apply for further study, but doesn't seem to have done any of this. He doesn't see friends and rarely goes out, unless to exercise. He has no income and so makes no contribution.

I have tried to talk to my parents, but my mother says she is very hopeful he will get there and my father doesn't want to rock the boat. Both are retired and fear he may have another schizophrenic episode, so they try hard not to stress him.

My other siblings share my feelings, but it's the elephant in the room we can't bring up. I've tried to accept it, but I find it hard when I visit them with my children that the situation just seems to continue while I work so hard to provide for my family and to maintain a good social life. I feel my parents are enabling him to lead a half-life where he doesn't need to grow up. I would add, however, that he is lovely to my children, but very defensive around me (as you might expect).

**Philippa's answer** Your situation is delicate and complex, entangled with love, concern and frustration. Your desire to see your brother lead a more fulfilling and independent life is commendable, as is any concern about the impact his situation may be having on your parents. But patience, patience, patience.

It can feel more comfortable, easier and quicker for us to persecute or patronise rather than to empathise and accept. Think about it like this: when you announce you've got a cold and instead of getting sympathy you get advice about vitamin C, echinacea and nasal douches, then you are likely to feel more patronised than comforted. The takeaway point here is, be with someone

where they are, rather than trying to fix them. Try to *feel with* rather than *deal with*. If you are more on the same page as your brother it will be easier for you to have conversations with him about possible action, but not if your frustration is leaking through. When you can talk from a place of love and concern, rather than from sibling rivalry, it will feel easier.

It is interesting that you are feeling this as sibling rivalry. He gets to be coddled and you must be a grownup. You seem set against coddling! So, I'm

### Aim for a loving relationship with him, not one that is directive

a bit puzzled that this is a concern. Or is your envy (because that is what sibling rivalry is) giving you information about what you need in your own life?

Do you need more coddling? Would you like to be more looked-after than you are? Are you being stridently independent when actually you'd like more support and help?

Have you got a belief that it is wrong to be dependent and yet you long to lean on others more? Maybe challenge this belief and luxuriate in leaning on others when you need it. We are not weak when we ask for help – we all need each other. We are here to help and be helped.

Your brother's mental health is fragile, but you cannot "see" mental health like you could a physical disability, so you think: "Why isn't he out there, contributing to society?" But he does contribute. He can relate to children, that is contributing. He is doing stuff to help himself by keeping fit, which will help.

I expect when you are around him, you have resentment and so stiffen up, he senses this and so he is defensive around you. We don't tend to be our best around people who don't accept us how we are. Not feeling good enough around people because of how they treat us doesn't do much for our confidence. See if anything shifts if you soften and put aside your judgment and expectations of what you think he should be doing. Some of us need longer than others to internalise that parental safety and love. Your mum has faith this will happen and by being a safe, loving, accepting person, you could help it happen, too.

Remember he hasn't got your mindset, he has his own. He gets on board with your children by attuning to them – he understands where they are at and meets them there. If you could learn the skill of attunement from him by observing that, it will be easier to imagine how he feels and then you'll get on with him better.

Aim for a loving relationship with him rather than a directive one. I think he may have things to teach you. If you allow his influence, it will increase the likelihood that he'll be more open to yours. ■

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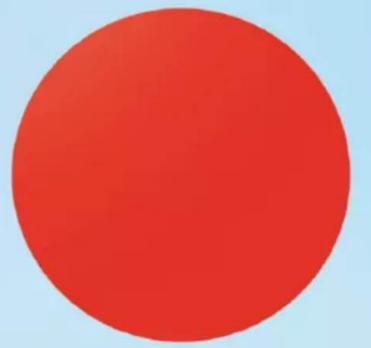


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