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# Reader's digest

JANUARY 2017

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## Alan Davies: “We’re Ruining Our Culture”

PAGE 22

## How To Conquer 32 Miles In A Triathlon

PAGE 98

## Can Meditation Slow Ageing?

PAGE 38



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## EDITOR'S LETTER



**IT'S A NEW YEAR**, and with that comes the inevitable resolutions to create better versions of ourselves. For some, it's a physical thing—as we learn in “Tears and Triumph” on p98, which is about the ordinary folk who take part in Olympic-level triathlons.

For others, a new calendar year brings a desire for renewed mental vigour. Happily, it seems scientists are well on their way to uncovering the secret of sustained youth. Turn to “Can Meditation Slow Ageing?” on p38 to learn how these developments may affect you.

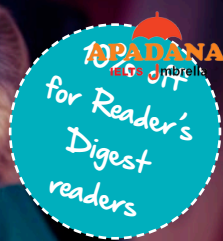
After all this self-improving, we'll need a good sit down—and we have something to keep you entertained during quiet moments too: actor Alan Davies chats about his life and career on p22; Adil Ray rules the world on p82; and on p86 there's the nail-biting story of a man who survived being lost in the Arctic.

As your new editor, my own resolution is to continue creating a magazine to inform and inspire you.

Fiona Hicks

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# Reader's digest

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## Something old, something new...

2016 may have earned itself a reputation as a year of doom and gloom, but here at *Reader's Digest* towers, we're trying to stay positive. To celebrate the New Year, we're looking back on the unsung heroes of the past 12 months. These pioneers are bound to inspire you. Visit [readersdigest.co.uk/unsung-heroes](http://readersdigest.co.uk/unsung-heroes) to hear their stories.

## Beat the festive finance hangover

For many, December is the most expensive month of the year. Even with the best intentions, it can be easy to overspend.

So how can you get your finances back on track and start 2017 with a clean financial slate? Our money expert is on hand with all the advice you'll need for a stress-free start to the year. Head to [readersdigest.co.uk/finance-hangover](http://readersdigest.co.uk/finance-hangover) ►



## FURLESS FASHION

Feeling the chill? You're not alone. These animals are toasty thanks to some keen knitting needles.



See the full gallery at [readersdigest.co.uk/animal-knitwear](http://readersdigest.co.uk/animal-knitwear)



# Over to You

LETTERS ON THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

**We pay £50 for Letter of the Month and £30 for all others**

## ★ LETTER OF THE MONTH...

Max Pemberton's article "Doing A Dance For The NHS" really made me think. Although the NHS has many problems, it's a truly great British institution.

I've had experience with both sides of it. I used to work full-time as a nurse on a cardiac ward. The staff did all they could for their patients, frequently working past their scheduled hours without receiving extra payment. Unfortunately I was retired due to ill health, and now see the NHS from the patient's point of view. I receive excellent treatment from both the medical and nursing staff.

People are wont to complain, but I feel our hospitals do an excellent job with the funds they receive. I only hope that future generations are able to benefit from such a valuable service.

**GERALDINE MILLER, North Yorkshire**



## MAKING SENSE

As far as I'm concerned, Jo Malone should rule the world. I agreed with every one of her suggestions in "If I Ruled the World", especially about children being taught from a young age about entrepreneurship.

We're not graduating the doers, makers and cutting-edge thinkers the

world needs. Some public and private schools are modernising—helping students work in groups to solve problems, learn online and integrate science with the arts—but most institutions don't teach what should be the centrepiece of a contemporary education. That is, entrepreneurship and the capacity



not only to start a company, but to think creatively and ambitiously.

**KYMBERLEY YESSEN, *Cambridgeshire***

I was intrigued to read in “If I Ruled the World” that Jo Malone can smell colours. I’ve always experienced written numbers as sounds, so can sing my credit-card number (which also helps me to remember it)!

Mixing of the senses—called synaesthesia—affects around two per cent of the population, and is thought to be linked to enhanced sensory perception. I wonder if there are other readers with similar experiences and whether, like Jo Malone, this had affected their career choice?

**C J CUTRESS, *London***

## ESSENTIAL READING

I was delighted to see the article “This Is The Most Fun I’ve Ever Had” about Sandi Toksvig. I love *QI* and some while ago completed a survey on whom would be the most appropriate replacement for Stephen Fry. My first choice was Ms Toksvig.

She’s clearly a very intelligent person and her enquiring mind and sense of humour are clear throughout the article. It was particularly interesting to read about her more serious side—she talked so much common sense about

the advantages of coalitions and how politicians use others’ ideas, I think it should be compulsory reading for all MPs! Thank you for the fascinating piece.

**PENELOPE ELLS, *Hertfordshire***

## RUNNING TO HEALTH

I enjoyed reading “Who’s Looking After You?” and it was reassuring to be told that exercise in later years is a good choice. Both my husband and I, now in our fifties, maintain quite a strenuous exercise regime—and hope to continue this for many years to come.

Exercising as a couple has the huge benefit of companionship and encouragement when motivation is low. My husband, who’s 54, started running three years ago and has now run two marathons. I also run quite regularly, but gym classes and yoga are proving to be my best options at the age of 52.

We’ve both lost weight, lowered our blood pressure and reduced some of our prescribed medications; we feel younger and stronger both physically and mentally. Other than a couple of minor running injuries, it’s been plain sailing, and we’re looking forward to another two or three decades of feeling fit, healthy and motivated.

**SUE WATT, *Fife***

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Why creating your very own autobiography is a wonderful and valuable experience

**WITH THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY INCREASING EVERY YEAR**, you might expect that there would be plenty of opportunity for younger people to tap into the knowledge that their older relatives have.

However, recent YouGov research has found that just 35 per cent of Brits know a lot about their grandparents, while 56 per cent know very little and 8 per cent know absolutely nothing.

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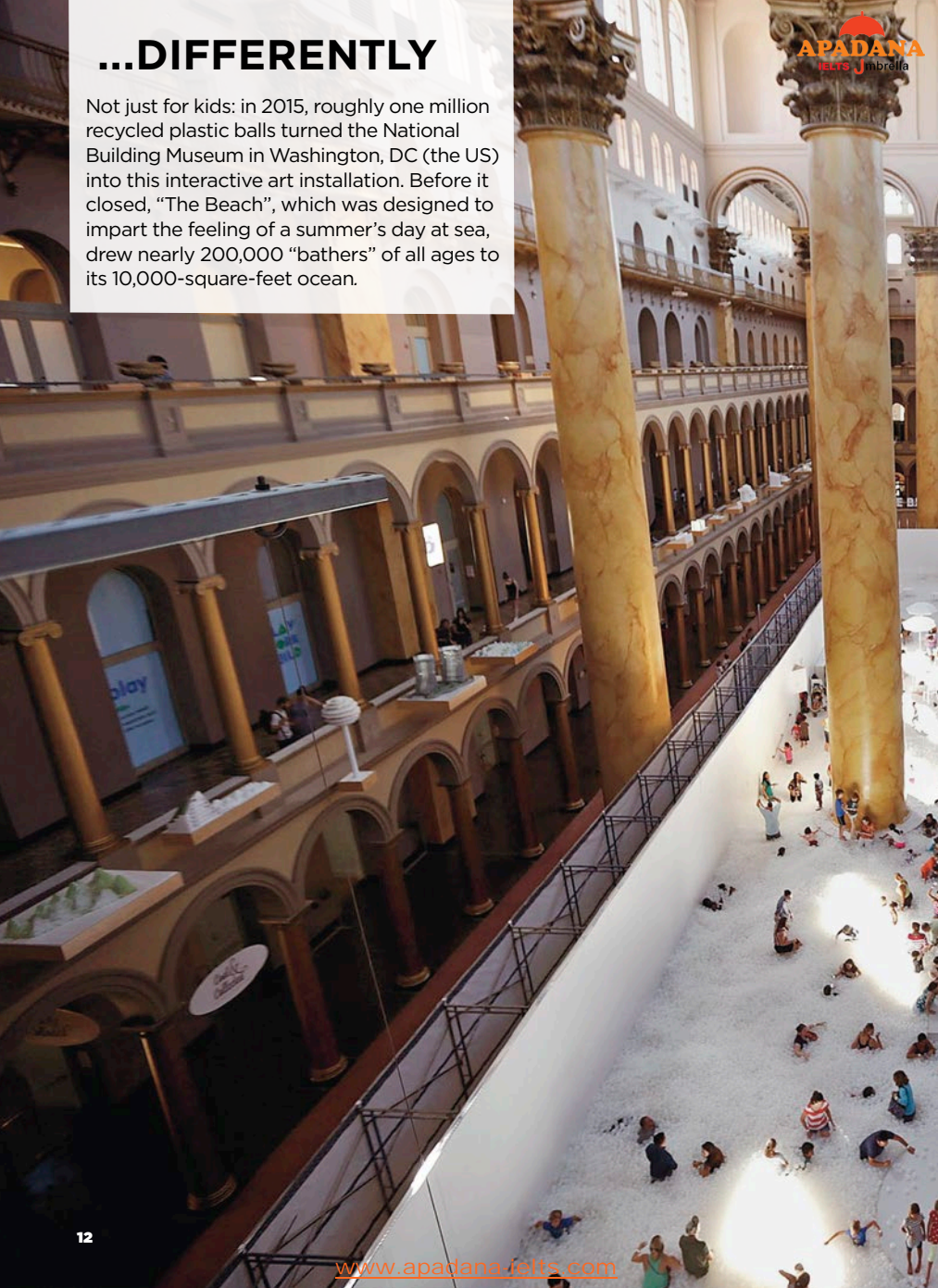
# SEE THE WORLD

Turn the page ➡➡



# ...DIFFERENTLY

Not just for kids: in 2015, roughly one million recycled plastic balls turned the National Building Museum in Washington, DC (the US) into this interactive art installation. Before it closed, "The Beach", which was designed to impart the feeling of a summer's day at sea, drew nearly 200,000 "bathers" of all ages to its 10,000-square-foot ocean.





He may be a cat man to the core, but **Olly Mann** has his doubts about adopting a new feline friend

# In Need Of Purr-suasion



**Olly Mann** is host of *The Male Room on Radio 4*, and presents many podcasts including *The Modern Mann* and *Answer Me This!*

🌀 **MY WIFE WANTS TO RESCUE A CAT.** I've always been suspicious of this terminology. Surely for it to count as a "rescue", you have to jump into a burning building, dive into a muddy lagoon, or salvage a struggling kitten from the train tracks seconds before the moment of impact?

Driving down the road to the RSPCA and handing over a hundred quid for a second-hand moggy whose every movement has been logged for weeks doesn't feel like much of a rescue. But I realise people like to feel good about themselves, so let's leave language to one side.

**I'M NOT KEEN.** Which feels a strange thing to say, because if you were to visit my home, you'd realise that I'm generally very keen on cats. On my desk, for example, is a cat calendar. It's one of those page-a-day jobs, so is, in effect, a box full of 365 colour photos of various different felines. Tearing off each page, thereby revealing a new cat to enjoy for the day, is a highlight of my mornings.

Above said desk, looking down on me as I type, is a Marc Tetro portrait of a British Shorthair lolloping about on a computer keyboard. On the wall behind me hangs a giant canvas print of our cat, Coco, sprawled on my bed, showing off a pink diamanté collar that spells out her name.

We love Coco. Nothing is too good for her. We buy top-of-the-range cat food; the stuff you only get at the vets—even





ILLUSTRATION BY LEONA BETH

though she seems just as content eating spleen and mouse anus (as long as it's fresh). When I'm cooking fish for dinner, one-third is put aside for Coco. When we go on holiday, Coco attends one of those ridiculous

catteries that bills itself as a "cat hotel", as if she's actually going to make use of the split-level cage, "spacious chalet" and "themed play area", rather than curl up in a basin for a fortnight and get fat.

So in the abstract, my answer to the question, “Would you like to get another cat?”, would be yes. Yes, I would like another sofa companion to stroke as I watch *Dragon’s Den* at one in the morning. Yes, I would like another bundle of fluff against my feet on a cold winter’s night. Yes, I would like to make doubly sure the rats don’t return to the garage. All of the above: yes, yes, yes.

But, as a responsible pet-owner, I feel we must consider what Coco might say about the matter, if she were granted a voice. Because cats are essentially solitary creatures. Sure, if they come as a pair—if they’re siblings and have never been apart—then they may enjoy each other’s company, a bit.

But if they’ve spent years alone and are used to getting all the territory, and food, and cuddles, and then are forced to cohabit with another feline, then at best, surely, they’re going to tolerate each other. Most likely, they’re going to hate each other—and cats are basically psychopaths, so who knows how deep that hatred will go?

I don’t want to put Coco through that. She’s already had to live three

out of her 13 years in a second-floor flat with no access to the outside world. She’s already had to suffer the indignity of being put on “diet” food because she let herself go a bit (we got a new sofa that year; she had to put in the hours to make it her own).

More recently, she’s had to adjust to the arrival of my son, which

means no more sleeping upstairs (too close to baby’s nursery for comfort), and no more relaxing in her basket without a dribbling, screaming menace approaching her at speed to tear chunks out of her coat because he thinks it’s funny. She’s had to put up with all this. She would choose to be left alone.

“  
**They’re going to hate each other—and cats are basically psychopaths, so who knows how deep that hatred will go?**

#### I HOPE ALL THIS

“responsible pet owner” business doesn’t make me sound pious. It’s just that I used to be a highly irresponsible pet owner, so I’ve noted the change in myself.

In my early twenties, my flatmate and I thought it would be fun to get a tropical fish bowl. We filled it up with about 20 tetras, some little frogs and sharks, some living coral, some neon decorations and a heated filter. We then shoved a load of fish food in, and promptly went away for the weekend.



When we came back, they were *all* dead. I cling to my instinct that tiny little fish don't have the same comprehension of their own mortality as a cat, but killing dozens at once has haunted me for years.

I tried to put those poor fish to the back of my mind yesterday, when we went to the rescue kennels. (I'd made my feelings clear, but my wife wanted

to "take a look.") Inevitably, we fell in love. Bobby is his name, and he's white with ginger socks. He purred at us through the glass. He's in isolation at the moment, while they run medical tests on him, but in a few days' time we can go back and get him, if we want. First-come, first-served.

Someone rescue me, pronto. ■



### ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

*Between celebrity deaths and political upheavals, 2016 earned a reputation as a bit of a bad year. But it's not all doom and gloom! Here are some of the best things to come out of the previous 12 months.*

**Thanks to money raised by the ice-bucket challenge, scientists have discovered the gene responsible for motor neurone disease—taking us closer than ever before to finding an effective treatment.**

The numbers of tigers and manatees in the world are growing, while pandas are no longer considered endangered.

**Leonardo DiCaprio finally won an Oscar for his performance in *The Revenant*.**

The Treasury got a new cat named Gladstone. He wears a tiny bow tie and has been known to sit in the red suitcase.

**India reached their target of planting 50 million trees. The 80 different species are now growing along roads, railways and other public spaces.**

Andy Murray won Wimbledon for the second time, and became the first British man to attain the world-number-one ranking.

**British astronaut Tim Peake completed his International Space Station mission and was reunited with his family after six months in space.**

Underdogs Leicester City surprised the nation by storming to Premier League victory in a true football fairytale. Experts called it the most improbable win in the history of the sport.

SOURCE: REDDIT.COM

# Upgrading The Smartphone By Adding Simplicity

**SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGY IS EVOLVING** every day, with an ever-increasing range of functions and uses becoming available from your handset.

For one manufacturer though, alongside all of the research and development into technical improvements, their most important evolution has been the addition of simplicity.

Doro, the world leader in easy-to-use mobile phones, is working hard to make smartphone technology accessible to all—regardless of age or ability.

The Doro Liberto® 820 Mini is undoubtedly a powerful smartphone, with all the functionality of the many competitors on the market, but



because of the simple and highly visual instructions, smartphone beginners particularly will be able to do more, faster.

Large icons clearly identify where to find each function, from making a call, to sending a message or accessing the internet, the 820 Mini has a simple logic. It also has loud and clear sound, and is hearing aid compatible.

In addition, for each of the main functions, there are step-by-step guides built into the phone to help the new user get familiar with the technology at their own pace.



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# Films

Movie  
of the  
Month

BY FARHANA GANI

■ **MUSICAL: *LA LA LAND*** Rising star Damien Chazelle caused a stir with his Oscar-winning *Whiplash*. His latest film is a lovingly extravagant song-and-dance homage to the golden age of the Hollywood musical.

Aspiring LA actress Mia (Emma Stone) meets purist jazz pianist Sebastian (Ryan Gosling), and their bittersweet romance—as they pursue dreams of success in the “city of stars”—plays out against an unforgettable soundtrack (you’ll be whistling the theme tune long after the final credits roll). With stunning performances from Gosling and especially Stone, immaculate direction and fabulous set designs, Chazelle is surely destined for more Oscar magic.



Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling dazzle in *La La Land*

■ **DRAMA: *MANCHESTER BY THE SEA***

This astonishing family drama is an unsentimental story of a bereft man. Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck) leads a solitary life as a janitor. After his brother dies suddenly, Lee returns to his Cape Cod hometown to learn that he’s now the legal guardian of his teenage nephew. Flashbacks reveal the truth about Lee’s early life as he makes funeral arrangements and comes to terms with what lies ahead.



■ **BIOPIC: *JACKIE***

The enigmatic First Lady wipes the blood from her face as she looks at her reflection in a mirror. Minutes earlier she cradled her husband’s smashed skull in her lap. With poise, despair and memories, the grieving widow and mother will now make funeral arrangements and consider her future.

Natalie Portman gives her deepest performance yet as Jacqueline Kennedy in her final days at the White House, capturing her manner and speech impeccably.





*Felicity Jones and  
Lewis MacDougall in  
A Monster Calls*

■ **FAMILY: A MONSTER CALLS** Liam Neeson, Sigourney Weaver and Felicity Jones headline in this deeply moving and cleverly animated drama about a young boy struggling to cope with his mother's terminal illness. One night the imposing tree he can see from his bedroom window turns into a giant monster (Neeson) who consoles the boy by telling him stories to help him come to terms with his anger, grief and guilt.

#### ■ **DRAMA: 20TH CENTURY WOMEN**

Family and identity are the central themes in this riveting 1970s-set film starring Annette Bening in one of her finest performances yet. Sixty-year-old Dorothea is a single mother bringing up her teenage son in a large ramshackle house in California. She has free-spirited lodgers who become surrogate parents to her "kid", but her desire to provide him with stability doesn't go to plan.



## On Your Radar Malcolm Walker, retired

**WATCHING: Penn and Teller: Fool Us in Vegas (Channel 5)** Amazing magic tricks—but even more amazing is how they suss them out.



**ONLINE: Confucius Quotes**

He died in 479BC, but his quotes remain relevant today e.g. "Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

**READING: The Road to Little Dribbling by Bill Bryson** Laugh-out-loud funny with unashamed observations of us Brits.

**LISTENING: If I Can Dream by Elvis and The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** A superb digital re-mix of Elvis classics.

**Fancy appearing in this section? Send your current cultural favourites, along with short descriptions, to [readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk)**

## DVD of the month

### ■ THE YOUNG POPE\*



Jude Law is in fine form as the first American pope in this critically acclaimed ten-part drama. Eye-opening storylines and dark humour dominate as the Vatican is shaken to its core. Diane Keaton co-stars as Sister Mary, his staunch ally.

## Music

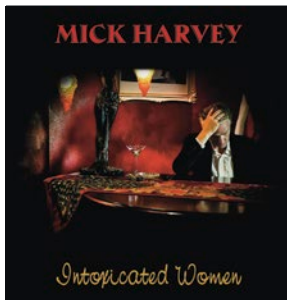
BY EVA MACKEVIC

Album  
of the  
Month

### *Intoxicated Women* by Mick Harvey

A hint of Nouvelle Vague, a sprinkling of Bad Seeds, and a robust chanson core—these are the things that make *Intoxicated Women*. In a labour of love that began in 1995, Mick Harvey translated the songs of Serge Gainsbourg into English and recorded the French icon's rare duets from the 1960s. The result is an eclectic selection of nostalgia gems, adorned with Harvey's whisky-like vocals and sweetened by his charming guest chanteuses, including the dulcet tones of Jess Ribeiro. The collection is a mixture of light-hearted mischief and weary knowingness, punctuated with Gainsbourg's familiar, goose bump-inducing arrangements. **Key tracks:** "Prévert's Song", "The Eyes to Cry", "God Smokes Havanas"

**Like this? You may also like:** Tom Waits, Anita Lane, Rowland S Howard



## On Our Radar

### Belfast Out To Lunch Arts

#### Festival, January

**6-29.** What better way to banish winter blues than with a programme of music and art events? Visit [cqaf.com](http://cqaf.com) for details.

### Bristol Potato Day and Seed Fair,

#### January 15.

With free talks and a dazzling array of plants, this event will delight both seasoned gardeners and novices alike. Visit [potato-days.net](http://potato-days.net) for details.

### Burn's Night in Edinburgh,

#### January 25.

Indulge in some traditional haggis to celebrate the life of the Scottish poet. Visit [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com) for details.



# *“We’re Making A Mess Of Our Own Culture”*

Having graced the stage and small screen for more than two decades, Alan Davies has seen a fair few changes—both professionally and personally

**BY FIONA HICKS**



*Alan on stage at the  
Latitude Festival in 2015*

## ON MAY 10, 1997, THE FIRST-EVER EPISODE OF *JONATHAN CREEK* AIRED.

The titular character was a quirky, young, single man with a penchant for solving mysteries. By the end of the series—a modest five episodes—it had accrued eight million viewers.

Fast-forward two decades and the character is still quirky, though slightly less young and no longer single. He continues to delight audiences, most recently in a 90-minute Christmas special.

Such longevity is coveted and increasingly rare in the fast-paced television industry—and a huge part of it is down to the show's leading man, Alan Davies. Speaking about it, however, he's typically self-deprecating.

"It only comes round every so often," he says, referring to *Jonathan Creek*'s sporadic specials, "so people don't really get sick of it. And a lot of care is taken with the script so that episodes bear repeated viewing and stand the test of time. They're not dependent on any television

gimmicks or anything that's going to look dated in years to come."

The character of Creek, of course, is key. "People like him because he's a hero but he's not all about fisticuffs and car chases. He's got a sense of humour and he's quite cerebral, so he's a little different in that respect. He's also got his own style and his own look," Alan adds, warming to his

topic. "Even his clothes don't really go out of date. You watch an episode of *Seinfeld* now and—as much as I love it—in the 1990s they wore such weird clothes. It's quite off-putting."

By 1997, Essex-born Alan had already enjoyed years on stage as a stand-up comedian.

Finding himself a regular on national television, however, swiftly catapulted him into a different league.

"I don't think I really realised the significance of what was happening. We won the BAFTA award for the Best Drama Series in the first year,

even though we'd come out of the comedy department at the BBC. I went along and picked up the prizes, and it didn't occur to me that I'd never be in a show that won a BAFTA ever again," he laughs.

Awards aside, he's now a regular in many highly regarded shows, not least *QI* and Channel 4's *Damned*. Audiences have got to know him as

“  
***I went along and picked up the prizes—it didn't occur to me that I'd never be in a show that won a BAFTA again***”



*Alan was just 29  
when he first played  
Jonathan Creek*

himself, but Creek remains a huge part of his life. Indeed, in many ways life has mirrored art, as both Alan and his investigative alter-ego have grown from young bachelors to married men.

“When I started I was 29 years old and I was about to embark on several years of psychotherapy for a traumatised childhood,” he says. “I

was doing stand-up and radio, going to the end of a festival and never going to bed, and doing all the things that you do when you’re a young comedian. And now I do all the things you do as a married man with three children. My life is completely different. If I tried to lead the life I was living then, I’d make a fool of myself and have to go home.”





*With actress Sarah Alexander, who plays Jonathan Creek's wife*

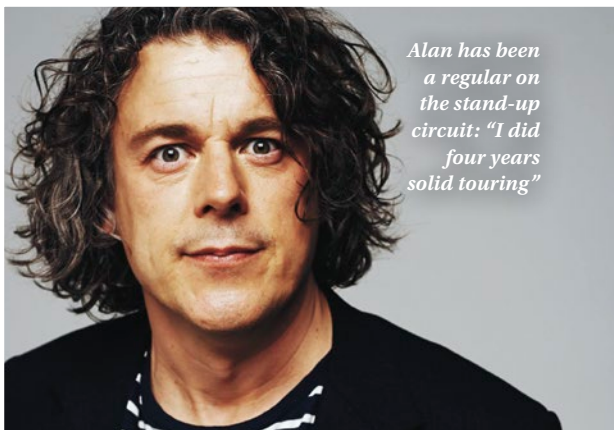
Alan has spoken openly about his difficult upbringing. His mother had leukaemia and passed away when he was six years old, leaving his father to raise three children alone. The psychotherapy Alan mentions was undertaken at the advice of his friend and fellow comedian, Jo Brand, and has had a remarkable impact on his life and happiness. Having dealt with some of his demons, he was in a good place when he met his future wife Kate, a writer, in 2005. They married two years later.

Becoming a father has made Alan reflect on his own childhood. "It's sad,

but I did have a moment when I realised that my daughter had reached the age I was when my mum passed away. I was able to calculate, knowing when my mum had died, that I was six years, five months and 16 days old—and I knew the day my daughter was six years, five months and 16 days old. I looked at her and listened to her and all the things she was interested in—all her ideas, her attitudes, what she wanted to eat for tea, what book she wanted to

read and what shoes she wanted to wear—and I thought, *Oh my goodness, I had all of that.*

"I just thought of myself as a sort of faceless child. But a six-year-old



*Alan has been a regular on the stand-up circuit: "I did four years solid touring"*

is a fully living, functioning person in the world. They have got a lot to say and a lot going on. That gave me pause for thought."

**ALAN'S PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES** aren't the only thing that's moved on in the past 20 decades. So, too, has the television industry.

"It's changed almost beyond recognition," confirms Alan.

"Budgets have been slashed, viewing figures have plummeted and people are spending a lot of time on YouTube and social media when they could be reading books and watching good programmes. I find it a little bit depressing. People are absorbing a lot more content for free and 90 per cent of it is absolute garbage."

As viewers of *QI* will know, when Alan begins a rant, it escalates with full, glorious, humorous force. "I get people sending me messages saying, 'Would you like to look at my blog?' I read four words of it and I know it's going to be sh\*t. People are consuming garbage on a massive, industrial scale.

"We must stop! Everyone writing boring blogs, stop writing them. Everyone posting terrible comedy videos on YouTube, stop posting

them. Everyone just stop posting hideous garbage on the internet!"

He's not finished yet. "For goodness' sake, we're making a mess of our own culture. We used to have good-quality books, good-quality music, good-quality television and good-quality cinema only. And now we have rubbish across the board. Reality television? Rubbish. Soap operas? All rubbish. Even the news

programmes now are quite often rubbish. Yes, they make the news rubbish!"

He takes a breath. "I'm proud that the shows I principally do—*Jonathan Creek*, *QI* and *Damned*—are made with the old-school principle of really trying to make something good."

The millions of eager viewers must agree. As for Alan, in addition to being a part of timeless programmes, his priorities are quite clear. "My concern really is that I can spend as much time as possible with the kids without being too tired and grumpy," he laughs.

Not too dissimilar to Jonathan Creek, then. And with that, Alan is off on the school run. ■

“  
**People are  
absorbing a lot  
more content for  
free and 90 per  
cent of it is  
garbage. I find  
it a little bit  
depressing**  
”

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Mark Williams, 57, is best-known for his charming turn as Arthur Weasley in the *Harry Potter* films. Now he's returning to the small screen for BBC One's *Father Brown*

# Mark Williams

## "I Remember"

### ...OUR HOUSE ALWAYS BEING FULL OF BOOKS AND MUSIC.

My dad was an architect and surveyor. He met mum at art college—she was a talented artist but ended up becoming a librarian. I have vivid memories of the records we had, such as The Rolling Stones' *Between the Buttons*. The disc was warped, so the needle would go up and down as it spun round, which always amused me for some reason.

**...INDUSTRIAL HISTORY WAS ALL AROUND US.** We lived in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, just 13 miles from Birmingham. My grandad

worked at the Austin factory and my maternal grandfather worked at the Cadbury's one.

Every other garage had a lathe and when I was 15, I worked as an electrician's mate. Everybody mended their own cars, and Bromsgrove was a rail centre. Industry was the lifeblood of the region.

### ...WINNING A HISTORY PRIZE

**AGED 13** and requesting a copy of R A Buchanan's *Industrial Archaeology*. *Alea iacta est* [the die is cast], as Julius Caesar said when he crossed the Rubicon. My love of the subject has never dimmed. A dozen



**Mark at the Warner Bros Harry Potter Studio Tour in 2015; (right) as a toddler**

years or so ago I got to make three documentaries on industrial history for the BBC: *Mark Williams on the Rails*; *Industrial Revelations* and *More Industrial Revelations*. Somebody once called me the “new-age Fred Dibnah”. Presenting them wasn’t daunting because my enthusiasm for the subject carried me through.

I don’t think we could do



*Mark was born in Bromsgrove, then a centre of industry; (right) he's never lost his love of the theatre*



it now—clambering around and poking stuff. Even in ten years, fear of litigation and health-and-safety issues have grown.

**...BECOMING INTERESTED IN ACTING AT SCHOOL.** I was in a school play called *The Reluctant Ogre*. I played the jester. Mum made my costume and I remember being on stage and thinking, *Great! I can do this!* That was it really.

**...ACTING FOR THE OXFORD UNION DRAMATIC SOCIETY (OUDS).** I read English Language and Literature at Brasenose College,

Oxford, and although I never belonged to OUDS, I was in one of their touring parties. We did *Candide*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, in which I played Pandarus, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which I was Petruchio. We did that in the open air at Worcester, where we all jumped in the lake. I didn't get what they call "an actor's third" [in his degree], but I must have been perilously close to it.

**...WORKING AS AN ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATOR OF CATTLE.** That was a job I did when I came back from university. It wasn't much fun, to be honest, going into stalls with livestock buyers to face outraged bulls.

**...MY FIRST ACTING JOBS AFTER TURNING PROFESSIONAL.** When I left Oxford I joined a fringe-theatre company called The Fools, though



**Today I live with what I call a bolt-on family; that is, my wife, one biological child and a half-share in two others**

I didn't get my equity card until I joined the Mikron Theatre Company in 1983. We toured by narrow boat, and I worked for them for three years, writing, acting and directing. I also worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company, playing Touchstone in *As You Like It* alongside Sophie Thompson and Gillian Bevan.

I've never lost my love of the stage. A couple of years ago I played the title role in Moliere's comedy *Tartuffe* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Michael Billington said I brought the house down which, contrary to what you might think, is a massive compliment.

**...ENJOYING WORKING IN ADVERTISING.** This was in the late 1980s, and included a famous commercial that had the line, "We want to be together," for Prudential pensions, and also one for Mr Kipling.

It was the first time I got to spend as much time as was needed on scenes and takes. It taught me a lot about timing, discipline and movement, and an awful lot about continuity. That's

something a lot of actors aren't great on when they're younger, but it's very much part of the job. Understanding it teaches you about economy of movement in the right way. That doesn't mean not doing anything, but how to make acting a dance rather than a series of abrupt movements.

**...FIRST REALISING HOW MUCH I LIKED SUSSEX.** I was sitting in the gardens of The Jolly Sportsman pub, which is in the countryside between Lewes and Brighton, looking at the South Downs, and I thought to myself, *I could live here*. Today I live near Lewes with what I call a bolt-on family; that is, my wife, one biological child and a half-share in two others.

**...BEING INFLUENCED BY FEMALE CHARACTER ACTORS.** The thing about some of the older female actors such as Dandy Nichols, Hylda Baker, Irene Handl and Beryl Reid is that they're always telling the truth. You never catch them acting. Watch Dandy Nichols' timing in *Till Death Us Do Part*. It's a masterpiece.

**...GETTING VERY DEPRESSED ABOUT MY ACTING CAREER IN MY MID-THIRTIES.** I was in London working as a carpenter and I thought, *Oh God, it's just not going to happen*. I've done so many part-time jobs. I've been a furniture remover and I've worked in a nursery growing dahlias. I describe acting as not so much a



career as a series of jobs stitched together by hope and fear.

**...BEING ON THE SET OF 101 DALMATIANS WITH GLENN CLOSE.**

One of the funniest times was when Glenn, Hugh Laurie, John Shrapnel and I were trapped in the back of a van while shooting. All the cameras were set up, meaning we couldn't get out between takes. We spent the whole afternoon cracking jokes and telling stories.

Glenn and I still talk. She's great. She's from the theatre and is what we call a trooper. She, along with Jennifer Saunders, has got one the funniest laughs. It should be bottled.

**...GETTING THE PART OF ARTHUR WEASLEY IN HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS.**

I had read one of the books and rang my agent to see if anybody was doing the audiobooks. Unfortunately Stephen Fry had that covered, but I became increasingly interested in Arthur Weasley. I knew if I played him I'd have to make him a jolly-hockey-sticks type. I'd done *101 Dalmatians* and *The Borrowers* by then, so was already considered an accomplished character actor in America. In fact, I was better known there than here.



**Mark in character as Kenneth from The Fast Show; (right) filming the BBC One adaptation of G K Chesterton's Father Brown**

I went to a casting meeting with director Chris Columbus. After a while, Chris turned to the assembled company and said, "Well, I think he looks as if he's old enough to play Julie Walters' husband," and they all nodded. I thought: *Bloody hell, I think I've got this!* Julie Walters and I are both from the West Midlands, so making those films was a great deal of fun.





**We weren't filming—but no one would give the rest of us an acting job because we were still involved with Harry Potter**

**...BUMPING INTO STEPHEN FRY IN SOHO.** For the first couple of *Harry Potter* films, I dyed my hair ginger, and when I met Stephen in the street, he just stared at me and asked, “Is that for professional or sexual reasons?” That’s how you

know he really is a wit, and that it’s not scripted.

**...HAVING A REALLY DIFFICULT TIME** when Daniel Radcliffe went off the New York to do the play *Equus*. We weren’t filming but no one would give the rest of us an acting job because we were still involved with *Harry Potter*. It was a very tricky time for all of us.

**...DOING THE KEN AND KENNETH SKETCHES** with Paul Whitehouse in *The Fast Show*. Although I’d previously worked with both Alexei Sayle and Angus Deayton, I’d never

done stand-up, and was employed on *The Fast Show* as an actor rather than as a comedian.

In that sense, there wasn’t a huge amount of pressure on me, but those scenes were very tightly scripted. People would write loads of stuff, but we’d only end up filming about 25 per cent.

Ken and Kenneth, the two “Ooh! Suit you sir!” tailors, were Paul’s idea, but my contribution was that I’d play my half of the double act as similarly to Paul’s as possible. This was very unusual as, normally, double acts rely on using contrast.



**...RECEIVING A CALL FROM MY AGENT TELLING ME I'D BEEN OFFERED THE TITLE ROLE** in the BBC period drama *Father Brown*. I was filming in Northern Ireland at the time, playing the butler Beach in *Blandings* and for a moment I was lost for words.

I was familiar with the character of Father Brown, because I'd read a lot of the G K Chesterton stories, and knew exactly what I wanted to do with the part. I like the way he's interested and interesting. He bases everything on the premise that nothing is irrelevant, which is quite a good idea for a detective.

**...FILMING ONE EPISODE IN 36-DEGREE TEMPERATURES.**

There was the film crew in singlets and sun hats, while I'm wearing a cassock, hat, heavy trousers and boots. I just have to zen out of it. It's not just me—the girls are sometimes wearing wool twin-sets. But the thing about the series is that the Fifties costumes and cars are fantastic, and the sense of period in the Cotswolds, where we film, is very strong. ▀

**As told to Jack Watkins**

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**A new series of *Father Brown*, starring Mark Williams, starts on BBC One on January 2, 2017.**

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# Can Meditation Slow Ageing?

Is there real science in the spiritualism of meditation? Meet a Nobel Prize-winner who thinks so

BY JO MARCHANT



**M**EDITATION MAY SEEM a world away from biomedical research, with its close focus on molecular processes and repeatable results. Yet at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), a Nobel Prize-winning biochemist is engaged in studies hinting that meditation could slow ageing and lengthen life.

Elizabeth Blackburn has always been fascinated by how life works. She was drawn to biochemistry, she says, because it offered a precise understanding of life “in the form of deep knowledge of the smallest possible subunit of a process”.

Working with biologist Joe Gall at Yale in the 1970s, Blackburn discovered a protective cap on the chromosomes of a single-celled freshwater creature. The caps, dubbed telomeres, were also found on human chromosomes. They shield our chromosomes when our cells divide, but they wear down each time.

In the 1980s, working with graduate student Carol Greider at the University of California, Blackburn discovered an enzyme called telomerase that rebuilds our telomeres. Even with this enzyme, our telomeres dwindle over time. When they get too short, our cells start to malfunction and lose their ability to divide—a key process in ageing. This work won Blackburn the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

In 2000, Blackburn was visited by Elissa Epel, a postdoctoral student from UCSF’s psychiatry department who had a radical proposal.

“I was interested in the idea that if we look deep within cells we might be able to measure the wear and tear of stress,” says Epel, now director of the Ageing, Metabolism and Emotion Centre at UCSF. After reading about Blackburn’s work, she wondered if telomeres might fit the bill.

Epel asked Blackburn for help with a study of mothers caring for chronically ill children. Epel’s plan was to ask the women how stressed they felt, then look for a relationship between their state of mind and their telomeres. Collaborators at the University of Utah would measure telomere length, while Blackburn’s team would in turn measure telomerase levels.

**UNTIL THIS POINT**, Blackburn’s research had involved precisely controlled lab experiments. Epel’s work, however, focused on real lives. “It was another world as far as I was concerned,” says Blackburn.

At first, she doubted it would be possible to see any meaningful connection between stress and telomeres. Genes were seen as the determining factor of telomere length, and the idea that it would be possible to measure psychological impact was controversial. As a mother, however, Blackburn was drawn to studying

these women. “You can’t help but empathise,” she says.

**INITIALLY THEY** collected blood samples from 58 women divided into two groups—stressed mothers and a control group. The results were undeniable. The more stressed the mothers were, the shorter their telomeres and the lower their levels of telomerase.

The most frazzled women had telomeres that resulted in an extra decade of ageing compared to the least stressed, while their telomerase levels were halved. It was the first indication that feeling stressed doesn’t just damage our health—it ages us.

When the paper was published in December 2004, it sparked widespread press coverage. Robert Sapolsky, a stress researcher at Stanford University, described the collaboration as “a leap across a vast interdisciplinary canyon”.

Many telomere researchers were wary at first. “This was a risky idea back then, and in some eyes unlikely,” explains Epel. “Everyone is born with very different telomere lengths and to think that we can measure something psychological or behavioural, not genetic, and

have that predict the length of our telomeres? This is really not where this field was ten years ago.”

The paper triggered an explosion of further research. Perceived stress has since been linked to shorter telomeres in healthy women as well as in Alzheimer’s caregivers, victims

of domestic abuse and early-life trauma, as well as people who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression.

“There’s no question that environment has some consequence on telomere length,” says Mary Armanios, a geneticist at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore.

Laboratory studies show that cortisol (the stress hormone)

reduces the activity of telomerase, while oxidative stress and inflammation—the physiological fallout of psychological stress—appear to erode telomeres directly. Many age-related health conditions, such as osteoarthritis, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, Alzheimer’s and strokes, have all been linked to short telomeres.

**THE BIG QUESTION** for researchers now is whether telomeres are simply a harmless marker of age-related



damage (much like grey hair) or themselves play a role in age-related health problems. People with genetic mutations affecting the enzyme telomerase, who have much shorter telomeres than normal, suffer from accelerated-ageing syndromes and their organs progressively fail. But Armanios questions whether the reductions in telomere length caused by stress are relevant for health, especially as telomere lengths are so variable in the first place.


Blackburn, however, says she's increasingly convinced that the effects of stress do matter. Several studies have shown that telomeres predict our future health. One showed that elderly men whose telomeres shortened over two-and-a-half years were three times as likely to die from cardiovascular disease in the subsequent nine years as those whose telomeres stayed the same length or got longer.

Blackburn is collaborating with healthcare giant Kaiser Permanente to measure the telomeres of 100,000 people. The hope is that combining telomere length with data from the volunteers' genomes and medical records will reveal additional links between telomere length and disease,


as well as more genetic mutations that affect telomere length.

Blackburn says the data shows that as the population ages, average telomere length goes down, but at age 75–80, the curve swings back up as people with shorter telomeres die off—proof that those with longer

telomeres actually do live longer.



## CONDITIONS FROM DIABETES TO OBESITY AND STROKES HAVE ALL BEEN LINKED TO SHORT TELOMERES



**“TEN YEARS AGO**, if you'd told me that I'd be seriously thinking about meditation, I'd have said one of us is loco,” Blackburn told *The New York Times* in 2007. Yet that is where her work has brought her. Since her initial study with Epel, the pair have collaborated with teams around the

world, many focusing on ways to protect telomeres from stress. Trials suggest that exercise, healthy eating and emotional support all help, but meditation is the most effective.

In one project, Blackburn and her colleagues sent participants to meditate at the Shambhala mountain retreat in Colorado. Those who completed a three-month course had 30 per cent higher levels of telomerase than a similar group on a waiting list.

A pilot study of dementia caregivers found that those who tried a chanting



meditation 12 minutes a day for eight weeks, had significantly higher telomerase activity than a control group who listened to simple relaxing music.

Theories differ as to why meditation might boost telomeres and telomerase, but the most likely reason is that it reduces stress. The practice involves slow, regular breathing, which relaxes us physically by calming the fight-or-flight response. It probably has a psychological stress-busting effect too, as we learn to appreciate the present instead of worrying about the past or the future.

#### IN GENERAL,

Blackburn's strictly methodical approach has earned her admiration, even with those concerned about the health claims made by alternative medicine.

Others aren't quite so impressed. Surgical oncologist David Gorski, an alternative-medicine critic, is concerned that the preliminary results of these studies may have been oversold. "Nobel Prize winners aren't infallible," he says.

Blackburn attributes this skepticism to unfamiliarity with meditation. "We're always trying to

say, 'Look, it's a preliminary—a pilot.' But people see headlines and panic."

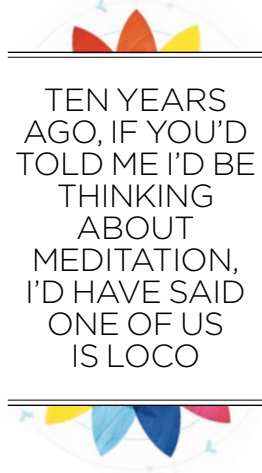
Sara Lazar, a Harvard neuroscientist who studies how meditation changes brain structure, adds, "When meditation first came to the West in the 1960s it was tied to the drug and hippie culture. People think it's just a bunch of crystals."

But the tide is finally turning. Now some researchers are developing non-religious practices such as mindfulness-based stress relief and cognitive therapy. They've reported a wide range of benefits such as lowering high blood pressure and even relieving depression.

Traditions from Buddhism to Taoism

believe that presence of mind promotes health and longevity; Blackburn and her colleagues now suggest that the ancient wisdom might be right. This is supported by one study of 239 healthy women, which found that those whose minds wandered less had significantly longer telomeres than those whose thoughts ran wild.

Blackburn's view is that meditation is a fair topic to study, as long as scientifically robust methods are used. She even tried it out herself



and has found that short bursts effectively help her to sharpen her mind and even avoid distraction.

**ONE DAY**, information from telomeres may help doctors decide when to prescribe particular drugs. For example, telomerase activity predicts who'll respond well to treatment for major depression, while telomere length influences the effects of statins.

Blackburn is more interested in how telomeres might encourage people to change their lifestyle to reduce their risk of disease.

Conventional medical tests tell us about our risk of certain conditions—high cholesterol warns of heart disease, for example, while high blood sugar predicts diabetes. Telomere length, by contrast, gives an overall reading of our biological age.

Blackburn believes that putting a concrete number on our health in this way could provide an incentive

to take action and change both our behaviour and attitudes.

Ultimately, she and Epel want governments to start paying attention to telomeres. A growing body of work shows that the stress from social adversity is a major force eroding these protective caps.

People who didn't finish secondary school or are in abusive relationships have shorter telomeres, while studies have also shown links to low socio-economic status, shift work, rough neighbourhoods and environmental pollution. Children are particularly at risk: being abused or experiencing adversity early on leaves people with shorter telomeres for the rest of their lives. "It's now a consistent story that the ageing machinery is shaped at the earliest stages of life," Epel insists.

"If we ignore that and we just keep trying to put plasters on later, we're never going to get at prevention and we're only going to fail at cure." ■

MOSAIC SCIENCE MAGAZINE (JULY 1, 2014). © 2014 BY JO MARCHANT. WWW.MOSAICSCIENCE.COM



## FIVE-WORD SEDUCTIONS

Could you impress a date with just five words? Twitter gave it a shot:

**"Knows 'there', 'they're' and 'their'."**

"I did *all* the dishes."

**"I have the wi-fi password."**

"The last slice is yours."

**"Here. Have my Netflix password."**

SOURCE: TWITTER.COM

# 4 Really Good Reasons To Get Fit

BY SUSANNAH HICKLING



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

☞ **LOOKING TO GET MORE EXERCISE** in 2017 or simply trying to motivate yourself to be active when the weather's bad? Whether it's walking briskly to the shops or cycling 20 miles, the benefits of getting physical are indisputable.

## Exercise to...

**SLEEP LIKE A BABY** Research suggests that working out helps us fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer—though scientists aren't exactly sure why this is.

It could be because exercise raises our temperature and the subsequent post-workout drop promotes sleep. Alternatively it could cause a shift in our internal clock, or simply reduce anxiety, allowing us to drift off worry-free.

**MOVE WELL** A third of people over 65 will experience a fall every year, which is why it's so important to improve your balance, mobility and joint health. French researchers discovered that women aged 75–85 who stuck with a two-year exercise programme cut their risk of being injured in a fall by around 20 per cent.

Take a few minutes every morning to move your joints through their full range of motion with wrist, ankle, knee and shoulder circles. Practices such as yoga and tai chi are great for promoting balance and flexibility.



**THINK MORE CLEARLY** Increasingly, experts are connecting exercise and alertness. In 2014, Stanford University researchers studied 176 college students and found that walking boosted their creative output by 60 per cent.

Meanwhile, a recent study in the journal *Neurology* revealed that adults who regularly engaged in moderate-to-intense exercise showed a slower rate of cognitive decline. In fact, sedentary seniors' brains were shown to be ten years older than their active counterparts.

**DE-STRESS** Physical exercise is one of the best things you can do to manage stress. In 2014, University of Michigan researchers found that nature walks reduced depression and lowered perceived stress levels.

The positive effects may come from the feel-good endorphins and other anti-stress hormones that are released when you get moving. Some studies have indicated that exercise can be as effective as drugs and cognitive behavioural therapy for treating depression.

## HOW TO AVOID TECH NECK

Did you know we spend up to four hours a day looking at our smartphones? Looking down by 30 degrees can put the equivalent of a 50lb load on your neck, causing head, neck and arm pain and accelerated wear and tear on the upper spine. Physiotherapist Steven Berkman from Boost Physio gives this advice:

- Hold your phone close to eye-level.
- Keep your shoulder blades down and relaxed.
- Tuck your chin in.
- Use voice recognition.
- Use a headset for phone calls.





# Men's Health: Unhealthy Habits Men Should Kick

## Bad habit: Avoiding the GP

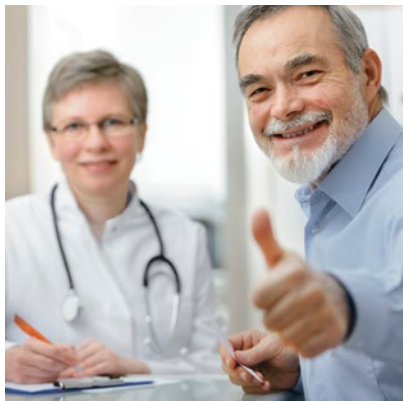
**Good tactic:** According to the Men's Health Forum, men are less likely than women to go to their doctor if something's wrong. They're also more likely to be diagnosed with serious diseases such as cancer at a later stage. They die earlier too. Don't be an ostrich—make it your New Year's resolution to arrange an appointment at the first sign of a problem.

## Bad habit: Skipping breakfast

**Good tactic:** There's a link between skipping breakfast and heart attacks, research has found. Find some mouth-watering recipes for healthy breakfasts, get up a bit earlier and make the first meal of the day your guilty pleasure. Scrambled eggs with basil? Pancakes with fruit? Delicious!

## Bad habit: Ignoring your testicles

**Good tactic:** Cancers that are found early are the easiest to treat, so make it a new habit to check your balls for lumps or swellings once a month.



Do it after a bath or shower, when the skin is more relaxed. See your GP straightaway if there's a change.

## Bad habit: Bottling things up

**Good tactic:** Men often don't like talking about their emotions, but male depression is very common and men are more likely to commit suicide or resort to alcohol than women. Aim to have a good friend you can confide in and if you still feel sad or hopeless after a few weeks, seek help from your doctor.

## Bad habit: Binge drinking

**Good tactic:** Heavy drinking sessions, even occasional ones, can affect your long-term health and make you pile on the pounds. Resolve to drink below the safe limit of no more than 14 units a week, designate alcohol-free days and never save up all your units for a weekly binge.

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# Wacky Ways To Survive At Work

- 1 Work in short bursts.** Get up for five minutes every hour to walk around and stretch. This helps the quality of your work and by the end of your day, you'll have fitted in 30 minutes of stress-reducing exercise.
- 2 Read a poem out loud twice a day.** The cadence and words will soothe your soul. Not into poetry? Listen to your favourite songs instead.
- 3 Do a funny drawing.** Seriously. When everything's falling apart, grab

a pencil and spend five minutes sketching the chaos, or even a caricature of the office villain.

Using another part of your brain will give you a much-needed break.

- 4 Eat three Brazil nuts.** They're a good source of selenium—a mineral that may help to prevent depression.
- 5 Blow through one nostril.** Hold one nostril closed and blow out through the other. This is a yoga movement believed to reduce stress.
- 6 Walk and talk slower.** This tricks your body into thinking that things are calmer than they actually are.



## ARE YOU A WORKAHOLIC?

**Sharon Lobel, professor of management at Seattle University in the US, divides workaholics into two categories:** Happy Workaholics, who value work more than other parts of life and love spending most of their time in the office, and Unhappy Workaholics, who wish they had more time for family, friends and hobbies, but don't because they work too many hours.

So what to do if you

find yourself working too hard and feeling resentful? "Everyone needs to ask themselves what matters in their lives," says Professor Lobel. "Which values are the most important? Achievement, wealth, health, relationships? Then you need to look at your life. Do you devote time and energy towards what you most value? If the answer is yes, great. If the answer is no, it's time to implement some change." ■



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## THE NUTRITION CONNECTION

# How To Ease Your Digestion

BY FIONA HICKS



*Fiona studies Naturopathic Nutrition at the College of Naturopathic Medicine*

☞ AFTER A SEASON OF INDULGENCE, many of us feel uncomfortably bloated. Yet achieving smooth digestion is easier than you think.

**TAKE FIVE DEEP BREATHS BEFORE EATING.** Have you ever noticed you lose your appetite when you're stressed? A pioneering study conducted more than 60 years ago found that intestinal contractions increase when a person is feeling hostile, and decrease when a person is feeling helpless. Cultivate a relaxed, happy state of mind and your digestion is more likely to be easy and even.

## BEST IN SEASON: CAULIFLOWER

**Why eat it?** Cauliflower is part of the brassica family of vegetables, which contain compounds called glucosinolates. These are known to have potent detoxification and anti-cancer properties.

**How to cook it?** Toss florets in coconut oil and roast at 200C for 20–25 minutes. You can also grate and stir fry cauliflower for a lighter alternative to rice.





**GO FOR GREEN.** Not only are green vegetables chock-full of nutrients, they also contain lots of fibre and water—both of which are essential for problem-free digestion.

**CONSIDER A PROBIOTIC.** Probiotic supplements can help repopulate your gut with “good” bacteria, which aid proper digestion. In one randomised trial, supplementation of a probiotic was found to significantly reduce flatulence after just four weeks.

**SWAP FIZZY FOR FLAT.** Fizzy drinks create a lot of pressure in cans and bottles, and your insides are no different: the carbonic acid fills your stomach with air, leaving you with the desire to belch. If you’re turning to

soda pop for the flavour, try popping freshly cut fruit or mint leaves in your water instead.

**SIP GINGER TEA AFTER A MEAL.**

Ginger has a long tradition of soothing sore stomachs. In one placebo-controlled trial, participants who received supplements with ginger and artichoke extract enjoyed a significant reduction in epigastric pain and bloating. You don’t need to pop pills, though—a slice of ginger in warm water is enough to have an effect.

**GET MOVING!** It’s best to avoid strenuous exercise after a big meal, but a gentle activity can encourage gastrointestinal motility, thus helping your food to move along. ■

# Problems & Pronunciation

BY MAX  
PEMBERTON



*Max is a hospital doctor, author and newspaper columnist*

☞ I THINK I'M HEARING THINGS. "Sorry, what did you just say?" I ask disbelievably, rubbing my eyes and groping around in the darkness for my watch. It's 3am.

"You come and see him, no?" comes the voice of the Portuguese nurse at the other end of the telephone.

I swing my legs over the edge of the bed and try to focus. "Sorry, you're going to have to repeat what the problem is—I didn't quite understand you. I thought you said that the patient was nuts," I say, trying to keep calm.

"Yes, that right doctor. The patient," she pauses, rather incongruously, before adding, "is nuts."

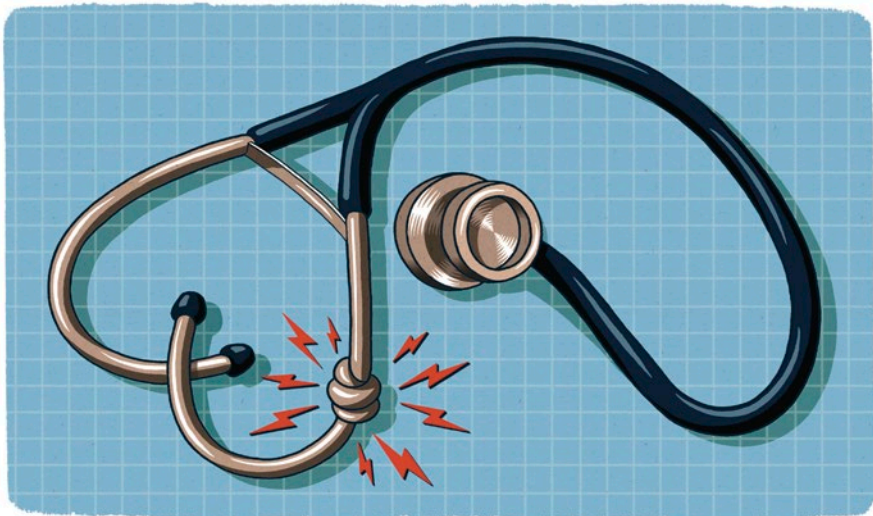
You see, I wasn't hearing things. Can it really be true that a nurse has just woken me up to tell me that a patient in a psychiatric hospital is nuts?

I KNOW FROM PAST EXPERIENCE that, ultimately, it'll be less painful if I just get up and find out for myself what all this is about. I drag myself up to the front door of the ward and am met by the beaming face of the nurse.

"You doctor, no?" she asks. "He want you to speak with him," she says, just as John himself appears.

He looks at the floor, muttering to himself. "Doctor, have you come to see me?" he asks.

I explain that I have, and that I'm not exactly sure what the problem is. He seems lost for words. He's still muttering to himself and I'm not sure I'm going to get any sense out of him.



After a brief hesitation, he points at his groin. “They hurt,” he says.

It’s a welcome moment of clarity. “Oh,” I say, turning to the nurse, “you mean his testicles.”

She looks at me triumphantly: “Yes, he’s nuts.”

“Yes, yes, *his* nuts,” I say, determined, despite it being the early hours of the morning, that she takes this opportunity to improve her pronunciation—and ignoring the fact that technically we should be calling them testicles.

I try to find out how long John has had this problem. He continues to stare at the floor, muttering. I’m tempted to tell him to take some paracetamol and wait till the ward doctor arrives in the morning. But it occurs to me that if this man were on a medical ward, I’d do a full history

and examination—and just because he’s mentally ill doesn’t mean he doesn’t deserve the same treatment.

“LET’S HAVE A LOOK, THEN,” I say. I realise that despite being mentally unwell, he’s experiencing a feeling everyone can empathise with: he’s embarrassed. It’s easy to forget that just because someone is locked up in a psychiatric hospital, they can still have the same feelings and emotions as the rest of us.

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” I say. He finally plucks up the courage to show me the problem. It’s nothing serious—just an infected follicle—so I prescribe antibiotics and go to leave the ward.

The nurse, still beaming, lets me out. As I walk out of the door, I swear she calls after me, “Good nut.”

## MEDICAL MYTHS—BUSTED!

# Cracking Your Knuckles Gives You Arthritis

**WHERE DID THE MYTH COME FROM?**

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who crack their knuckles, and everyone else who finds it revolting.

For those who fall in the former category, the idea is that it “loosens” up the finger joints in some way so the fingers are more flexible. But cracking your knuckles does nothing for improving dexterity.

The notion that it gives you arthritis likely comes from two things: the first is a logical (if incorrect) idea that the

noise must be doing some damage and, secondly, that those with arthritis can sometimes have clicks (known as “crepitus”) in the joints.

**WHAT’S THE TRUTH?**

While people who have arthritis might often have creaking joints, actually making the joints crack doesn’t cause arthritis to form in the first place.

Put simply, there’s no evidence that cracking knuckles actually does any harm to the joints. The sound is caused by bubbles of gas that have formed in the joint being “popped”.

**SO NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?**

Cracking your knuckles isn’t entirely risk-free. There’s evidence that it can cause injury to the tendons—the thick material that connects muscles to the bones—as applying pressure to the joint can cause these to tear.

The biggest risk if you crack your knuckles, though, is that people around you are going to wince and try to avoid your company. ■



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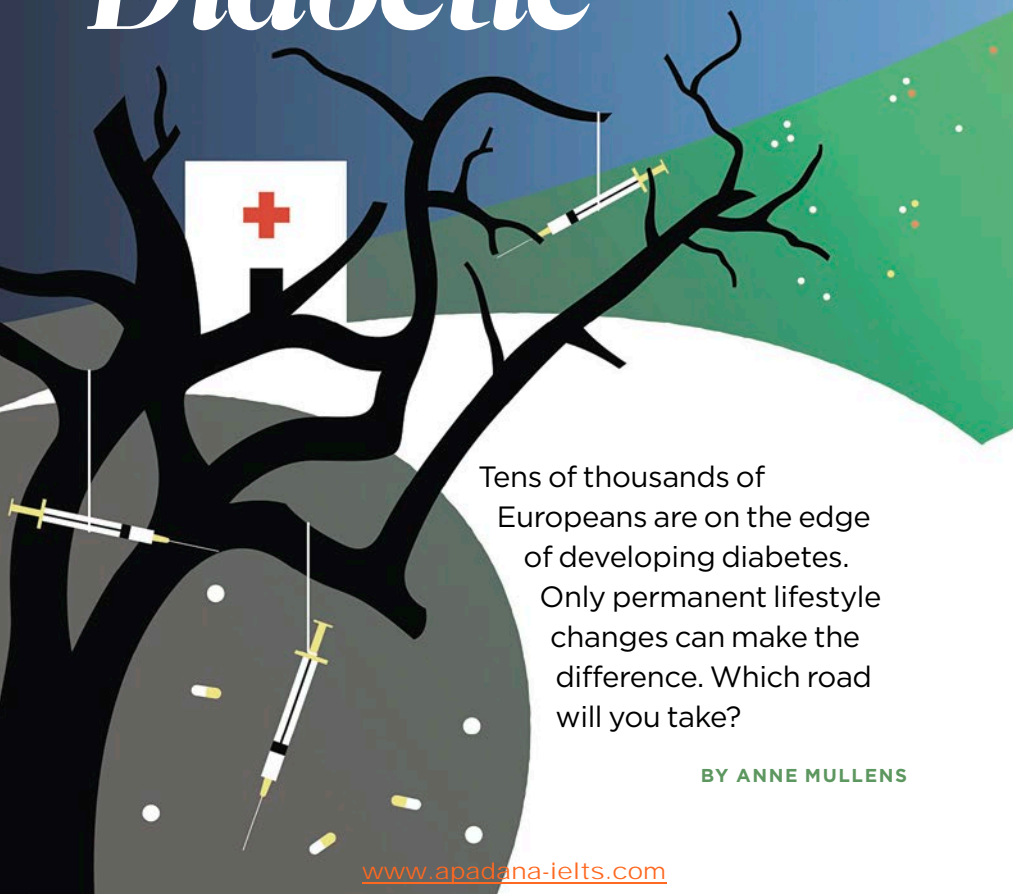
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# How to Avoid Becoming Diabetic



Tens of thousands of Europeans are on the edge of developing diabetes. Only permanent lifestyle changes can make the difference. Which road will you take?

BY ANNE MULLENS



“**YOUR BLOOD SUGAR IS TOO HIGH.** You have pre-diabetes.” When Gail Tudor heard her doctor say that in July 2014, the 54-year-old wedding videographer was shocked. How could she? She had a normal body mass index of 24

and she followed the NHS recommended diet low in fat and high in fruits, vegetables and healthy grains. Plus Gail, a mother of two who lives in Wales, was very active—skating, walking, kayaking and more.

Since she already did those things, her doctor said, it was unlikely Gail could reverse her path to Type 2 (T2) diabetes. She was offered a treatment plan including drugs, and was told that it was likely she’d need them for the rest of her life.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Gail says. She determined to learn what else she could do to prevent diabetes from developing—without drugs.

**RETIRED ENGINEER** Frank Linnhoff, 69, who lives near Bordeaux, France, knew his obesity and his family history put him at high risk of T2 diabetes. His father had died aged 70 from kidney failure caused by the disease and his brother had a leg amputated at 45 because of it. Diagnosed with pre-diabetes years earlier, Linnhoff had tried to follow his doctor’s advice on diet and exercise, but still his weight climbed.

In January 2015, he was feeling so poorly he went for a blood test. The results showed his fasting blood glucose was sky-high. He knew if he went to the doctor he’d be diagnosed with diabetes. “I was so shocked that I was up all night, searching the internet for answers,” he says. “My father and brother had failed to control their diabetes; I couldn’t have the same fate.” He

was determined to pull himself back from the precipice.

In August 2015, at age 57, I too was told by my doctor that my fasting blood sugar was in the pre-diabetes range. Like Gail I wasn’t overweight. My BMI was a healthy 23.7. I exercised three times a week and walked 10,000 steps every day. Moreover, as a health writer for more than 25 years, I’d been following all the recommended dietary guidelines for decades. What more could I do?

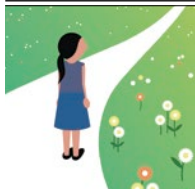
I began searching the medical literature for the most up-to-date facts and views.

Pre-diabetes, I learned, is a warning flag of health troubles down the road for tens of thousands of men and women in Europe this year who’ll be told that they have it. An estimated one in three UK adults already do, and the International

Diabetes Foundation estimates that in Europe, around five per cent of adults aged 20–79 are already living with impaired glucose tolerance and are at increased risk of developing diabetes. Pre-diabetes increases the risk up to ten times for developing eventual T2 diabetes with its dire rates of heart disease, stroke, blindness, nerve damage and limb amputations. What's more, damage

massive health problem, not only for the individuals facing its many consequences, but for the health systems burdened by the growing numbers of patients.

Worldwide, rates of the disease have almost quadrupled since 1980. In the last decade alone, T2 diabetes rates in the UK have increased 65 per cent and according to Diabetes UK's 2016 report, if the current trends



## A FAMILY HISTORY AND BEING OVERWEIGHT MAKE YOU MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO PRE-DIABETES

to the body's tissues and blood vessels can start well before full-blown T2 diabetes occurs.

Often causing or accompanied by hyperglycemia, pre-diabetes is linked to a problem with the body's insulin, a hormone that moves sugar out of the blood and into cells for energy use or storage as fat. When pre-diabetes occurs, higher and higher amounts are being churned out that no longer work as effectively—a process called insulin resistance. As a result, too much sugar is left circulating in the blood, which leads to higher blood-sugar levels as well as the higher risk of Type 2 diabetes.

Soaring rates of T2 diabetes are a

persist, by 2034 a staggering third of Britons will be obese, while T2 diabetes will develop in ten per cent of the population.

The good news is pre-diabetes is reversible with lifestyle changes. The choice is yours. In fact, Gail Tudor, Frank Linnhoff and I have all eliminated our pre-diabetes since our diagnoses and greatly improved our health. So have thousands of others.

If you or a loved one has been told you have pre-diabetes, here's what you need to know.

### 1. Who's at risk?

Being overweight or obese, inactive or from a family with a history of T2 diabetes makes you more likely to



get a pre-diabetes diagnosis. Women like Gail, who have had gestational diabetes (a type that affects women during pregnancy) are at much higher risk of developing pre-diabetes or T2 diabetes. So are women who have given birth to a baby weighing over nine pounds—as I did some 23 years ago.

I also had a related condition that up to 20 per cent of European women may have: a genetic, hormonal condition called Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), which causes lowered fertility, potential weight gain and other symptoms. A key feature of PCOS, just like diabetes, is insulin resistance.

“Insulin’s action is the key,” notes Dr Jason Fung, a Canadian nephrologist, the majority of whose kidney failure patients have T2 diabetes. Dr Fung has recently written the international bestseller *The Obesity Code*, in which he describes how insulin, insulin resistance and the stress hormone cortisol are the key hormonal triggers to T2 diabetes and obesity.

## 2. How is pre-diabetes diagnosed?

Since pre-diabetes generally has no symptoms, it’s detected through a blood-screening test, generally in one of three ways: 1) a blood sample called a Fasting Plasma Glucose, drawn in the morning before you’ve eaten anything, shows blood sugar

between 5.6–6.9 mmol; 2) a blood sample after drinking 75g of a sweet drink (called a Glucose Tolerance Test) shows blood sugar two hours later between 7.8–11.0 mmol; or 3) a test called a Hemoglobin A1c (a single blood test that reflects a three-month average of your blood-glucose levels) averages between 5.7 and 6.4 per cent. Higher rates on all these tests mean full-blown T2 diabetes.

## 3. Lose weight, but how?

It’s been known for years that losing five to ten per cent of your body weight can reverse pre-diabetes for a time. But as we all know, most diets are hard to maintain and weight is eventually regained (sometimes more than was lost). With this usually comes the return of poor blood-sugar results.

But here’s the new, somewhat controversial approach: thousands of people like Gail Tudor, Frank Linnhoff and me have lost weight and reversed diabetes risk factors by cutting sugar and refined or starchy carbohydrates (bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, cereals, biscuits and cakes) out of our diets and upping the proportion of healthy fat.

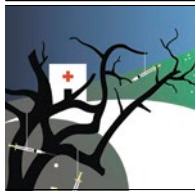
All carbohydrates get turned into sugars by digestion in our body. That sugar then triggers the release of insulin. So reducing or eliminating most carbs to under 100g a day lowers the amount of sugar in the blood—and thereby the need for

insulin to respond to it, notes Dr Fung. Doing so helps re-sensitise us to insulin. “Diabetes and pre-diabetes should really be called carbohydrate intolerance,” says Dr Aseem Malhotra, a cardiologist, advisor to the National Obesity Forum and a founding member of the UK “Action on Sugar” campaign to remove or reduce added sugars in all of our diets.

Low-carb diets have been around for years, but adding healthy fat is

A study published in June last year in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* journal found that a high-fat Mediterranean diet did not lead to weight gain. In fact, men and women in the higher-fat group lost *more* weight and inches from their waist than the low-fat group.

Gail Tudor started the low-carb/high-fat (LCHF) approach in July 2014; by May 2015 she’d lost more than 14lbs—mostly within the first three months, even though weight



## THE LATEST DIETARY ADVICE TO COMBAT DIABETES: LOW-CARB, HIGH-FAT MEDITERRANEAN DIET

the new twist. Fats from dairy, nuts, fish and eggs (including the yolk) are healthy, whereas overconsumption of vegetable oils and trans fats can lead to chronic disease. A growing body of evidence shows our 30-year message to avoid fat has been misguided. In fact, fat instead is satiating, good for the heart and brain, and—compared to other food groups—has the least impact on insulin release.

Swedish diabetes researcher Dr Fredrik Nystrom agrees. His advice? “Carbohydrate restriction in combination with the high-fat Mediterranean diet.”

loss was not her intention. Her blood sugar had returned to healthy ranges, bringing her pre-diabetes under control. Frank Linnhoff, who started LCHF in January 2015, has lost more than 20lbs and his blood sugar is now normal—and so is his blood pressure. I started the diet in autumn 2015 and after seven months had lost ten pounds and had my blood glucose return to normal. Better yet, the food is delicious and satisfying.

Does it work for everyone? No long-term studies have yet been published and most countries’ diabetes associations are opting to take a wait-and-see approach.

But a groundswell of vocal medical experts and scientific researchers, as well as tens of thousands of individuals who have tried it, now endorse the LCHF approach as safe and effective. Some of the growing evidence includes:

In January 2015, 26 international medical experts advocated carbohydrate restriction as the first approach to managing pre-diabetes and T2 diabetes in an article published in the journal *Nutrition*.

In May last year, the diabetes

dietdoctor.com. In 2010 his book *Low Carb High Fat Food Revolution* became a Swedish bestseller and was translated into eight languages. In 2011 he started the English dietdoctor.com site.

Gail, Frank and I were all helped in our transformations by the website. Frank, along with the LCHF diet, is now cycling, dancing, enjoying life and celebrating his return to good health. "I felt so bad in January 2015. I never thought that just a year later I'd feel so wonderful."



## WHAT ELSE YOU SHOULD DO: SLEEP WELL, AVOID STRESS AND EXERCISE REGULARLY

forum diabetes.co.uk announced that as part of a study where 120,000 people had signed up for its ten-week LCHF programme, the majority reported improved blood glucose and weight loss on the diet.

For almost a decade, Swedish GP Dr Andreas Eenfeldt has been counselling his pre-diabetes, T2 diabetes and obese patients to switch to a low-carb, high-fat diet. "In weeks and months they got better, their diabetes reversed and they could get off drugs," said Dr Eenfeldt, who in 2007 started a non-commercial Swedish website

### 4. What else can you do?

Regular exercise, boosting sleep quality and reducing stress have all been shown to help improve blood-glucose control, experts say.

■ **EXERCISE.** Our muscles act like a sponge to sop up glucose in the blood. The more we move them, the more they soak up.

It doesn't have to be training for marathon. Gail, who uses a home blood-glucose monitor, has noticed that all she needs to do is walk around her house or up and down her stairs to bring her blood-sugar levels down a few points. Most

experts recommend 30 minutes of low-stress movement each day—try to fit in a brisk walk if you're unable to keep your body moving with other activities.

■ **IMPROVE SLEEP QUALITY.** In recent years the link between poor sleep quality, insomnia and sleep deprivation have all emerged as risk factors for both weight gain and increased risk of diabetes. Getting seven to eight hours of good-quality sleep reduces the risk. Some tips for a better sleep include not having TV, mobile phones and laptops in the room, keeping pets off the bed, minimising alcohol before bedtime, keeping the room cool, wearing ear plugs and having a relaxing regular sleep routine.

■ **STRESS REDUCTION.** Stress increases the body's hormone cortisol (as does insufficient sleep), which in turn can raise blood-sugar levels. Chronic stress may increase insulin resistance, which leads to abdominal weight gain and increase the risk for pre-diabetes and T2

diabetes. "Reducing stress is vitally important," notes Dr Fung. Some tips to reduce chronic stress include meditation, yoga, massage and relaxing exercise.

**I WAS FORTUNATE.** As a health writer I immediately understood the dangers of a pre-diabetes diagnosis. Over the last year, since my wake-up call, I've focused on making all these lifestyle changes, restricting carbs and sugar in my diet, lifting weights, walking everywhere and getting a good night's sleep.

I've lost a total of 13lbs to date, and I've kept them off. I bought a blood-glucose monitor and check my blood sugar regularly. I'm now always in the healthy range. Believe it or not, I actually feel lucky that I got that pre-diabetes scare: it's helped me improve my health and avoid T2 diabetes.

As Dr Andreas Eenfeldt says, "We really need to spread this knowledge so that more people can benefit from it—and act accordingly to improve their health." ■



## SAY THAT AGAIN

In a thread on Reddit, users discussed the best (or worst?) baby names they'd ever heard. Here are some gems:

**"Mhavryck.** Pronounced Maverick."

**"Jarica.** Parents couldn't decide between Jessica and Erica."

**"Danger.** I work in childcare—I could do this all day."


SOURCE: HUFFINGTONPOST.CO.UK

INSPIRE





The Swedish home-furnishings giant  
has been quietly planting its blue-and-yellow  
flags in places you'd never expect



# HOW IKEA TOOK OVER THE WORLD

BY BETH KOWITT

**IT TOOK SOME TIME** to figure out just the right shopping complex, off just the right highway interchange and at just the right distance from Seoul, to accommodate a 635,000-square-foot store. It took more time to solve certain mysteries, such as how to showcase kitchens that incorporate kimchi refrigerators—a uniquely Korean appliance—and even more time to untangle nuances of the market, such as the South Korean’s preference for metal chopsticks.

“Sea of Japan” rather than the “East Sea”, as South Koreans prefer.

But the Koreans seem, for the most part, to have forgiven the Swedes. The Gwangmyeong store, which is the company’s largest in the world by shopping area, quickly became one of Ikea’s top-performing outlets.

**IKEA IS A GENIUS** at selling Ikea—flat packing, transporting, and reassembling its quirky Swedish styling all across the planet. The furniture-and-furnishings brand is



## THE IKEA MODEL IS BASED ON VOLUME, WHICH HELPS IT SECURE A LOW PRICE FROM SUPPLIERS

It took about six years for Ikea to unveil its inaugural store in South Korea, from the initial scouting trip to the opening in December 2014.

The lag was quintessentially Ikea. “The more global, the more complex it gets,” says Mikael Palmquist, the regional manager of retail for Asia Pacific. “It’s essential for us to get these things right or we’ll never be taken seriously.”

Even with careful planning, Ikea managed to get a few things wrong. It misjudged the number of parking spaces needed, and a map for sale upset some customers: the body of water east of Korea was labeled the

in more countries than Walmart, Carrefour and Toys R Us. China, where Ikea has eight of its ten biggest stores, is the company’s fastest-growing market. An outlet in Morocco opened in March last year, and there are hints that Brazil may not be far off. Meanwhile, in India, Ikea plans to invest about £1.6 billion over a decade to open ten stores.

Getting it right in markets such as China and India, where Ikea is well-positioned to capitalise on a growing middle class, is a key factor in its goal of hitting £40 billion in sales by 2020. That’s up from £23 billion in 2014. Today, the Ikea Group has 318 stores,



*(Top) Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad shows the first Ögla cafe chairs in 1961; the chair collection grew quickly, comprising many different styles by the early 1970s*

not including the brand's some four dozen franchised locations; it's aiming for around 500 by 2020.

The Ikea model is based on volume—producing a lot of the same stuff over and over, which helps it secure a low price from suppliers and in turn charge a low price to customers. One Billy bookcase, a classic Ikea product, is sold every ten seconds.

For the company, this isn't just a business model, apparently. It's a mission: helping "the many people"

and those with "thin wallets". "We're guided by a vision to create a better everyday life for the many people," says Ikea Group CEO Peter Agnelfjäll. "That's what steers us, motivates us—that's our role. We feel almost obliged to grow."

**RESEARCH IS AT** the heart of Ikea's expansion. "The more far away we go from our culture, the more we need to understand, learn, and adapt," says Mikael Ydholm, who heads research. Rather than focus on



*(Top) Opening day of the Ikea flagship store in Stockholm in 1965; opening day of the first Ikea store in Gwangmyeong, Korea, in December 2014*

differences between cultures, it's his job to figure out where they intersect.

For example, Ikea carried out a study of 8,292 people in eight cities, examining morning routines. People are the fastest out the door in Shanghai (56 minutes) and the slowest in Mumbai (2 hours, 24 minutes). New Yorkers and Stockholmers are most likely to work in their bathrooms (16 per cent).

The problem with surveys is that

people lie. Ydholm puts it more delicately: "Sometimes we're not aware about how we behave," he says, "and therefore we can say things that maybe aren't reality. Or it could be that we consciously or unconsciously express something because we want to stand out as a better person."

Ikea researchers get around this by taking a first-hand look themselves. Recently they placed

cameras in homes in Stockholm, Milan, New York and Shenzhen, China, to better understand how people use their sofas. What did they learn? “They do all kinds of things except sitting and watching TV,” Ydholm says. In Shenzhen, most of the subjects sat on the floor using the sofas as a backrest. “I can tell you we certainly haven’t designed our sofas according to people sitting on the floor,” says Ydholm.

The aim of gaining all this cultural

reflecting local customers and customs. For every room set-up, there’s an Ikea employee tracking any element that needs to be switched—making sure that glass products produced in mainland China don’t show up in Taiwan’s catalogue, or removing Persian rugs from the Israeli version.

Ikea hasn’t always got these local nuances right. The company came under fire for photoshopping women out of its catalogue in Saudi



## THE COMPANY PUT CAMERAS IN PEOPLE’S HOMES TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY USE THEIR SOFAS



knowledge is not to adapt products for each market. Instead, Ikea has become awfully good at showing how the same product can mesh with different habitats.

Witness the full-size sample rooms that Ikea sets up in stores. The rooms play an essential, if secret, role—showing consumers how to fit Ikea pieces into their lives. Displays in Sendai, Japan and Amsterdam could feature the same beds and cabinets. But the Japanese style may feature tatami mats, and the Dutch room will have slanted ceilings, reflecting the local architecture.

Ikea’s catalogues also come in 32 languages and 67 versions, each

Arabia and for removing a lesbian couple from its magazine in Russia. “We’ve made mistakes,” acknowledges Kajsa Orvarson, communications officer at Ikea Communications, the home of the catalogue, “but we’re becoming more and more aware of how to improve and to share our values.”

**IN THE FURNITURE WORLD** there’s an oft-cited statistic that we have our sofas longer than our cars and change our dining room tables as frequently as our spouses. Furniture can be its own kind of ball and chain. It’s passed down from generation to generation, or it’s so expensive that



people feel it's forever. From the start Ikea shook up that paradigm.

It kept its prices down with an obsessive focus on costs. Ikea might skip an extra coating of lacquer on the underside of a table that people never see. It has also pushed tasks that were once done by traditional retailers onto the customer. Flat-packed furniture made it easier for customers to take purchases with them, cutting out the expense of stocking and delivery. (Ikea figured

more goods to fit into shipping containers. Wasted space means wasted money and isn't good for the environment. "I hate air," says Dickner.

But he admits that sometimes Ikea does put too much burden on customers. To ensure it doesn't take three hours to put together a tiny inexpensive item, the instruction-manual team is called on to give input. New employees who aren't yet accustomed to the ways of the



## PRODUCTS THAT TAKE TOO LONG TO PUT TOGETHER ARE CALLED 'HUSBAND KILLERS'



out flat-packing in 1956, when a designer took the legs off a Lövet table to get it in his trunk.)

Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of Ikea's goods are made in Europe, 33 per cent in Asia, and the rest in North America. Some 12,000 products comprise what Ikea calls the range, but in reality it's more like 50,000 because of variations in elements such as plugs for different countries. To pack it all up, the company uses more than a billion square feet of cardboard every year. "I'm not proud of it," says Allan Dickner, deputy manager of packaging. "We try to minimise it."

The magic of flat-packing allows

Allen wrench are brought in to do assembly tests. Products that take too long to put together are called "husband killers", Dickner says.

**IN RECENT YEARS** Ikea has been killing far fewer husbands. The company has accomplished this modest feat in large part through improving its product design.

Design manager Marcus Engman's team come up with 2,000 new products every year. Products in development go through rapid prototyping in the pattern shop to provide a sense of what they'll look like in the flesh—or at least in plastic.

One of the oddest things Henrik

Holmberg, who manages the department, has ever worked on was a lamp made from the same material as egg cartons. "I thought that was crazy," he says, "but we proved the technique was possible."

If air is the enemy in shipping, it's the ally in design. "The more air in our products, the better," says Engman, who started working at Ikea when he was a teenager, pushing trolleys. In the design centre, Engman points out a table under development that consists of two trays cobbled together. Its hollow centre means the use of fewer materials. Its legs even attach without screws—part of a general move at Ikea to simplify assembly.

Ikea's designers look well beyond the furniture industry for expertise when it comes to trimming production costs. They've commissioned a shopping-cart manufacturer, for instance, to mass-produce a new table, and a bucket maker to punch out a chair.

So, too, design inspiration comes from everywhere. Engman points out a folding table that he saw in bars and restaurants throughout China. "It costs near to nothing," he says.

"It's the smartest table. It has the construction of an ironing board."

He's also excited these days about acacia wood, which Ikea sources primarily from Southeast Asia. Normally used in outdoor furniture, acacia has the properties of teak but the price of pine.

Walking through the design centre is a bit like seeing into the future. Some of the designers are already working on products for 2019. There's an electric bike on the horizon in some markets, as well as products that, Engman says, will encourage social interaction and play.

Socialising through devices such as smartphones is eroding togetherness, he says, and that togetherness is an essential part of home life—and therefore vital to Ikea.

Indeed, electronic technology is one area where Engman says Ikea won't go. "We weren't any good there," he says. A venture into televisions was one of the company's great failures. "We're world champions in making mistakes," adds Engman. "But we're really good at correcting them." ■

FORTUNE (MARCH 15, 2015). COPYRIGHT © 2015 BY TIME INC., FORTUNE.COM

## DID YOU KNOW?

A bolt of lightning contains enough energy to toast 160,000 pieces of bread.

SOURCE: MIRROR.CO.UK

# 100 Word STORY



Time is running out to take part in our annual short-story competition, so get your entries in! Here are two more tales to inspire you

## Terms & Conditions

- There are three categories—one for adults and two categories for schools: one for children aged 12–18 and one for children under 12.
- In the adult category, the winner will receive **£2,000** and two runners-up will each receive **£200**.
- In the 12–18s category, the winner will receive a **Samsung Galaxy Tab S2** (9.7" Tablet, 32 GB) and a **Samsung Gear S2 Smartwatch**, plus **£150** for their school. Two runners-up will each receive **£100**.
- In the under-12s category, the winner will receive a **Samsung Galaxy Tab S2** (9.7" Tablet, 32 GB), plus **£100** for their school. Two runners-up will each receive **£75**.
- Your stories should be original, unpublished and exactly 100 words long. Please submit them online at **[readersdigest.co.uk/100-word-story-competition](http://readersdigest.co.uk/100-word-story-competition)** by **5pm on February 20**.
- The editorial team will then pick a shortlist of three in each category and post them online on **February 27**. You can vote for your favourite, and the one with the most votes wins the top prize. Voting will close at **5pm on March 20** and the winning entries will be published in our June issue.
- The entry forms are on our website, along with details of the prizes.

## Cecelia Ahern The Speech



ADAM WAS AWARE OF HOW NERVOUS HE SOUNDED, and of how his heart had lost its usual rhythm.

"Susan." He swallowed. "I love

you. I've loved you since the moment we met. I know you're getting married in two hours and I know it's bad timing."

He smiled, sadly.

"Understatement of the year. But I just had to tell you—I love you so much, and I always will."

His face was hopeful, sincere, showed love and heartbreak, all at the same time. Then he looked away from the mirror. One of these days he'd tell her.

Not today.

■ This story was first published in *Reader's Digest* October 2011 issue

## Gregory Heath Words



STROKE ISN'T THE RIGHT WORD; it's too benign. Someone has a stroke of luck, someone strokes a dog.

So the doctor must have got it wrong. But it's all explained as I'm taken in to see you, with your bald head lolling and your teeth out, crying like a baby on soaking sheets.

I say "stroke" and a word has changed forever. But then they never were my strong point,

words; I remember how you laughed when my toothache became nostalgia.

You never taught me your trick of always knowing the right thing to say. Even at times like this.

■ This story was submitted to last year's 100-Word-Story Competition



**Rules:** Please ensure that submissions are original, not previously published and 100 words long (not including the title). Don't forget to include your full name, address, email and daytime phone number when filling in the form. We may use entries in all print and electronic media. Contributions become world copyright of *Reader's Digest*.

Entry is open only to residents of the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Republic of Ireland. It is not open to employees of Vivat Direct Ltd (t/a *Reader's Digest*), its subsidiary companies and all others associated with this competition, their immediate families and relatives living in an employee's household. The judges' decision is final.

# Charity Shops

With curated collections and designer labels, why not snap up a bargain (or several) at these stylish stores?

BY FIONA HICKS



**Best  
of  
British**

## Sue Ryder

### BURFORD

Lying at the gateway of the Cotswolds, Burford is a honey-coloured smorgasbord of traditional tearooms, ancient pubs and quaint shops that gently slope down to the Windrush River. It's a great spot for a weekend getaway—and what better way to top off a trip than by buying a few souvenirs?

The Sue Ryder shop, at the heart of the High Street, is renowned for its fine stock and friendly service. Here you'll find antique bric-a-brac, along with fashionable apparel from designers such as Yves St Laurent, Prada and Ralph Lauren.

Says manager Diana Trinder, "We get the most interesting things donated by the local community. Recently we received some Fulham pottery and several albums of John Player cards." Time to start a new collection, perhaps.

■ Visit [sueyder.org](http://sueyder.org) for details



*Mary Portas has partnered with Save the Children to create 19 stylish shops*



## Mary's Living & Giving Shop

### EDINBURGH

Queen of retail Mary Portas set up the first of her charitable boutiques in 2009. Since then, this trendy extension of Save the Children has expanded to an impressive 18 outlets in London, and one—which is arguably the best—in Edinburgh.

Located in fashionable Raeburn Place, the retro-styled shop counts

© SUE RYDER



high-end delis, swish jewellers and smart coffee shops as its neighbours. The upmarket environs not only ensure a steady stream of discerning customers, but also a regular supply of luxury goods. As well as some modish furniture, there are rails and rails of clothes organised by colour, and they've even been known to stock such treasures as Missoni suits. If you're just looking for a little



something, they always have a selection of beautiful scarves to fend off that chilly Edinburgh wind.

■ Visit [savethechildren.org.uk](http://savethechildren.org.uk) for details



## Oxfam

### HENLEY-ON-THAMES

This Oxfordshire town is famous for its annual regatta, which takes place in July, but it's certainly worth a visit at any time of the year. The pretty streets are filled with every type of shop—there's even one dedicated to teddies—and this branch of Oxfam certainly holds its own among the exclusive offerings.

Positioned in the bustling market place, it stocks a broad range of vintage, new and “gently used” goods, including men's, women's and children's clothes, handbags, jewellery, shoes and an assortment of homeware. They also have an especially good selection of hats which, considering the town is prime location of the summer social season, isn't all that surprising. It is, however, unexpectedly enticing. Go in for a simple t-shirt and you may well find you walk away with a feathered fascinator...

■ Visit [oxfamhenley.co.uk](http://oxfamhenley.co.uk) for details



## British Red Cross

### SHREWSBURY

“This is a little gem of a shop,” says the British Red Cross's director of retail, Paul Thompson. “There's a huge range of clothes and the old vintage cigar cabinet holds a priceless item or two.”

Everything in the shop oozes classic style, from the specially designed clothes tags to the premises' beautiful wooden beams. Of course, lovely ceilings aside, the reason the customers flock here is for the chance of finding something special. And it's highly likely: labels such as Vivienne Westwood, Nicole

*The British Red Cross shop in Shrewbury has the feel of a designer boutique*



Farhi and Smythson are often sitting pretty. What's more, the sale of just one dress (at a paltry £12.99) will enable the British Red Cross to provide four jerry cans of drinking water to East Africa—so there's every reason to spend without guilt.

■ Visit [redcross.org.uk](http://redcross.org.uk) for details

## Barnado's

### CHESHIRE

A mere 15 miles from Manchester, the village of Alderney Edge is a favourite with sporty types keen to buy a beautiful property. You may wonder what relevance this has to charity shops. It's very simple: designer clothes.

"It's not uncommon for celebrities to pop in and donate high-end clothing and accessories," confirms shop assistant Susan Kemp. "A couple of months ago Freddie Flintoff came into the shop to kindly donate a signed cricket shirt. It's not your typical charity shop!"

In fact, it's likely you'll find more high-end pieces than you can carry. Max Mara skirts, Armani tops and Valentino jackets have all been snapped up—none costing more than £30. A good tip is to ask what they have in the back, as they often stock more than they can display on the shop floor.

■ Visit [barnardos.org.uk](http://barnardos.org.uk) for details







as a consequence, we do get some great donations,” says Caroline. “We love our job.”

In fact, from the handwritten labels to the display outfits to the fairy lights adorning the bookshelves—not to mention the resident pooch, Fletch—everything convenes to make you feel as though you’ve been invited into someone’s lovingly appointed home.

Of course, Fletch is a

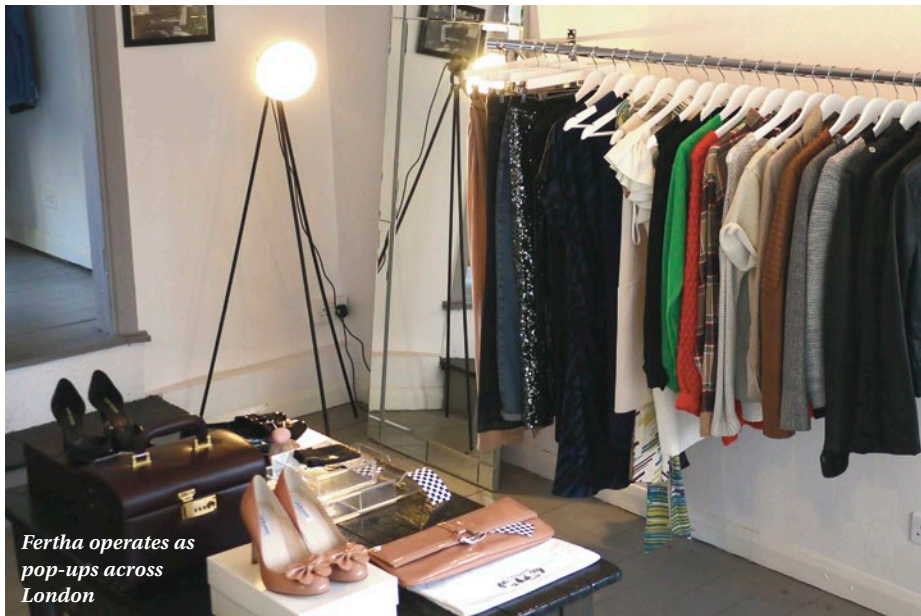


## RSPCA MANCHESTER

For manager Richard Hartley and his deputy Caroline Taylor, this shop in Manchester’s Northern Quarter is a passion project. Self-confessedly “charity-shop mad”, their enthusiasm and eye for detail can be found not only in the way they arrange garments in colour categories, but conveniently next to matching accessories too. “We have a really nice window display and

reminder that the sale of every trinket here goes to a worthy cause. If you’re dithering over a new pair of shoes, consider that this branch of the RSPCA alone needs £300,000 every year to continue rescuing abandoned animals.

■ Visit [manchesterandsalfordrspca.org.uk](http://manchesterandsalfordrspca.org.uk) for details



*Fertha operates as pop-ups across London*

## Fertha

### LONDON/ONLINE

This understated boutique, which occasionally operates as a “pop-up” in various London locations, has grand designs. “The core of Fertha is turning mass-production shopping on its fashionista head,” says founder Jade Alice Galston. “We want to change the life cycle of clothes and the way people think about second-hand shopping forever.”

It may all look shiny and new, but all of the pop-up’s offerings are sourced from donations. This not only offers charities another revenue stream (Fertha’s profits support several), but also enhances the ethical

impact—not to mention decreasing the environmental one—of our relentless pursuit of style.

The pop-up designs are sleek, serene and more minimalist chic than bursting-at-the-seams abundance. The way everything is laid out, from the perfectly pressed clothes to the 1920s-esque champagne glasses, makes you feel as if you’re surrounded by luxury. If you can’t make it to the capital, fear not—they also have an online shop.


■ Visit [fertha.com](http://fertha.com) for details

Are you a regular at a brilliant charity shop? Email [readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk) and let us know!

Adil Ray is the creator and star of the BBC sitcom *Citizen Khan*. He was recently awarded an OBE for services to broadcasting for his body of work bringing more diversity to our screens.

# If I Ruled the World

## Adil Ray

 **Families would watch more comedy together.** There's something very special about sitting down and sharing a laugh. Everyone can forget their worries for a short while and bond over something silly. When I was a kid we'd be allowed to eat fish and chips on our laps on a Friday night and watch some comedy—I loved those times.

**It would be compulsory for men to wash their hands in public loos.** For us hand-washers, a trip to a public loo can be rather difficult. I don't want to touch the door handle to get out after I've seen someone just do their business and leave.

**We'd swap towns for a month each year.** If you lived in rural Cornwall, you'd go somewhere like Oldham town centre. If you lived in Bradford, you might see what it's like in the Welsh Valleys. It would open our minds to how other people live and give us a



ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES SMITH

different perspective on culture and community. I live in Birmingham but have a hankering to live in the Cotswolds—this way I could see if it suited me before I decided to do anything too radical.

**I'd insist everyone tries chicken curry cooked on the bone.** That's a proper authentic curry the way my mum makes it. I know the vegetarians have probably stopped reading by now, but cooking meat on the bone gives the curry a fantastic flavour and adds more nutrients. Plus you can eat it with your hands and get grubby. It's the way forward.

**Politicians would have to undergo lie-detector tests.** We're going through this post-truth era of politics where it doesn't matter what politicians believe. They've become generic personalities who feed us sound bites without telling us what they really stand for. Even if you disagreed with the likes of Thatcher, Hattersley or Hurd, at least you knew where they stood.

**I'd remind people that social media isn't real life.** When *Citizen Khan* was first shown we got abuse from people who said it was disrespectful. Post-Brexit, I get bothered by those who think it's OK to rant about someone from an immigrant background. I remind myself that social media allows people to hide

behind a mask and that there's a whole other world out there that's real and empathetic.

**I'd do away with trendy beards.** How can they be hip if so many men have them? I'd like to see all those guys with their new beards in Birmingham Central Mosque on a Friday afternoon for congregational prayers—why not go the whole way?

**Tabloid journalists would show their articles to their children or grandparents before publishing them.** If they've written a story about someone's personal life, then let's see if they feel comfortable about reading it out loud to people they care about. It would make journalists think about what they do more ethically before causing trouble in someone else's life.

**We'd laugh at ourselves and stop being offended by others.** If you can laugh at your own foibles then no one can laugh at you because you've taken ownership of your own weaknesses. That's a powerful tool to carry in life. We shouldn't be offended by people who say ridiculous things because it's a waste of our energy and really, who cares? ■

**As told to Caroline Hutton**

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*Citizen Khan's Guide to Britain* is out now, published by Sphere.

# Does Your Will Really Protect Your Loved Ones?

That wish to pass something on to our loved ones is one of the most basic, human and natural instincts

A will is an important legal document—possibly the most important legal document. But does your Will really meet your needs? A standard “Mirror” or “Joint” Will does keep things nice and simple, but they also fail to protect what you’ve spent a lifetime building. They often create a situation where the survivor of a couple is left owning everything, and has everything to lose in their later years if they need to move into a care home or if they remarry, for example.

## What if you include a Trust in your Will?

Including a Trust in your Will, such as a Property Trust, could help protect what you’ve worked hard for as an inheritance for your loved ones. A Property Trust is often suitable for co-owners of a property—husband and wife or

unmarried couples perhaps. When one of the couple passes away, their share of the home passes into a Trust for the benefit of their loved ones. The Trust ensures their spouse/partner has the ability to live in the home rent-free for the rest of their life, and even sell and move if appropriate. But if the survivor required care, the Trust protects the half a house from those care fees. If the survivor was to remarry, the Trust protects the



***Including a Trust in your Will, such as a Property Trust, could help protect what you’ve worked hard for as an inheritance for your loved ones***





half a house from passing to a new husband or wife.

Because the half a house is in Trust, it can't be used to fund care fees, and can't pass sideways to a new husband or wife. It's protected for the next generation.


There are other types of Trusts and it's important you take advice as to which type best suits your circumstances. Through *Reader's Digest Legal*, you can benefit from a free home visit to receive that advice in the comfort and privacy of your own home.

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A stylized illustration of an Arctic landscape. In the background, there are jagged, snow-capped mountains under a pale yellow sky. The middle ground is a vast, flat expanse of white snow or ice. The foreground shows a blue, wavy line representing water or a path, with several small, white, circular shapes that look like ice floes or bubbles.

In the distance, a wolf howled and Brian howled back.  
Then he made his decision: if he was ever going to see  
his family again, he'd have to start walking

# LOST *in the* ARCTIC

BY NICHOLAS HUNE-BROWN

**O**N BRIAN KOONOO'S FIFTH DAY ALONE in the wilderness, the snow stopped and the sun warmed the Arctic air. Brian ventured out of his canvas tent, huddling into his parka and adjusting his sealskin pants. He looked out at the snowdrifts, which stretched toward the horizon in every direction.

It was May 17, 2015, and Brian, then 36, had been out of communication range since the 13th. People were almost certainly searching for him, he reasoned, but what were the chances they could find him and his broken snowmobile, alone in a bleak, snowy expanse just above the Arctic Circle?

Brian climbed the hill next to his makeshift camp and scanned his hand-held radio, hoping to catch a signal. He built a fire, using cooking oil and what little debris and rubbish he could accumulate, but it burned hot and clean, producing a smokeless flame. He looked back to see that the snow had already covered his tracks. Any search planes would have a hard time spotting him—a tiny blob of colour in a sea of white snow.

For the first time since losing contact, Brian felt an overwhelming sense of despair. He thought about his family—the wife and five daughters who would be worrying about him back home in Pond Inlet, Nunavut in northern Canada. He began to cry.

In the distance, a wolf howled and Brian howled back. Then he made his decision: if he was ever going to see his family again, he'd just have to start walking.

**THE TRIP HAD BEGUN** as a hunting expedition. Pond Inlet is a hamlet of nearly 1,500 people at the northern tip of Baffin Island—a collection of corrugated metal houses out on the floe edge, where the sea ice melts into the open ocean. In recent years, the caribou hunt had been restricted to give the dwindling herd time to recuperate, but on the mainland the animals were still plentiful.

Brian's plan was ambitious: he'd travel over 300 miles across the tundra by snowmobile, dragging a five-metre sled laden with supplies. Two hundred and eighty miles south of Pond Inlet, he'd meet up with friends, spend a few days hunting and then, if he was lucky, bring the much-needed game home.

On May 10, Brian left his family, travelled 20 hours southeast across snow and sea ice, took a short nap and kept going until he reached Igloolik, nearly 250 miles to the south, on May 12. He spent the night with his childhood pal Perry Atagootak and resumed his trek the next day, passing through Hall Beach.

As a Parks Canada employee who'd been hunting since he was three, Brian was a highly experienced



outdoorsman. After leaving Hall Beach, however, his bad luck began. The plan had been to travel to a series of cabins in the wilderness—simple structures the locals used. He would use his SSB radio, powerful enough to reach over long distances, to determine exactly where his hunting companions were.

Now, as he stopped at the first cabin, he realised that the sack containing that device and his sleeping bag had fallen off the sled during the bumpy ride—lost somewhere in the snow. Brian had no way of communicating except through a hand-held radio with a signal so weak it barely extended beyond eyesight. He spent the night there, then decided the best option was to try to get to Repulse Bay, a day's journey away.

Further south, the flat terrain turned into hills and valleys, with rocks and drifts that threatened to swallow the snowmobile. That afternoon, the vehicle died, felled by a transmission issue. Realising he was stranded, Brian knew that the best course of action was to stay put and wait to be rescued. He set up his tent and hunkered down, keeping the Coleman stove burning to try to stay warm without a sleeping bag.

**WHEN BRIAN SET OFF**, his wife Samantha didn't know exactly when she'd hear from him again. On a hunting trip in the north,

communication is usually unreliable, and plans can be quick to change.

Samantha, 34, is doing a degree in early childhood education while raising five daughters, aged between three and 13. She was confident her husband could handle himself. But on Friday, May 15, Perry Atagootak wrote a Facebook post wondering if anyone had seen his friend.

When Samantha read the note, her stomach dropped. "I called his mum and told her, 'I'm worried about



IN THIS UNFORGIVING,  
UNDERPOPULATED  
PART OF CANADA,  
A SIMPLE MISTAKE  
CAN MEAN DISASTER

Brian,' " she says. Brian's mother contacted his Parks Canada colleague, who then notified the nearby search-and-rescue teams.

Over the next four days, while Brian braved the freezing cold alone, search-and-rescue teams assembled across the Canadian north. In this sparsely populated part of the country with its unforgiving environment, a simple mistake can lead to disaster.

Case in point: back in November 2011, the mayor of Kimmirut, on Baffin Island, went caribou hunting one morning and disappeared into the wilderness. His body wasn't



discovered until the summer thaw the following year.

Three snowmobiles had set off from Pond Inlet but they were initially thwarted by blowing snow. Searchers left from Hall Beach and Repulse Bay, all volunteers using their own snowmobiles to scour the trail for any sign of the missing hunter. That Saturday, the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Trenton, Ontario, got involved, sending a Twin Otter and a C-130 Hercules to fly between Repulse Bay and Igloolik, searching for Brian.

At home, Samantha felt like she was



BRIAN WALKED  
ALL DAY AND WELL  
INTO THE NIGHT,  
UNTIL HE COULD  
WALK NO FURTHER

losing her mind. Should she jump on a plane to try to find her husband? What should she tell the girls? She lay in their bed, trying not to look at the spot where Brian should have been.

**ON MAY 17, BRIAN** decided to take advantage of the clear skies to make his move. He had brought a GPS system, but it needed to be plugged into the snowmobile to work. With a jerry-rigged connection to his radio,

the unit flashed to life. He was still 40 miles away from Repulse Bay, the closest hamlet. It would be a tough walk over hilly terrain, but by this point he had no other choice.

Brian boiled water and filled his Thermos. He gathered the stove and tent into his tarp, but soon realised that dragging the weighty bundle would be impossible. He made the decision to fill his knapsack with essentials: his remaining ham and bread, emergency candles, plastic bags, a hunting knife, radio, GPS and ammunition. He wrapped the knapsack in the tarp and cinched it with a rope. He checked his coordinates and fixed his eye on the horizon. Then he picked up his rifle and started walking.

Brian maintained a steady pace, tracking the wind direction and keeping the dunes aligned so as not to veer off course. He moved through the half-a-metre deep snow, trying not to sweat or become too exhausted, taking sips of hot water from his Thermos as he travelled.

In mid-May, the sun doesn't set above the Arctic Circle. Warmer weather would soon melt the snow, but for now, temperatures remained below freezing. Brian walked well into the night, making his way about 15 miles until he couldn't walk anymore. On the bank of a creek bed, he found a snowdrift against a rock. With his knife, he carved out a snow cave—an emergency shelter his father had



taught him to build. He sliced enough room for his body and covered the hole with his tarp. He crawled in, ate and fell asleep.

**WHEN HE WOKE UP** a few hours later, Brian felt energised and ready to walk. But the next stretch was harder, the terrain hillier. He began playing the mind games you indulge in when you're alone and desperate. *Keep climbing, he'd tell himself, and you'll see a hunting cabin just over the ridge.* Then he'd make it to the top only to see another hill.

Midway through that day, Brian spotted planes in the distance. At first he assumed they were heading to one of the northern communities.

When they returned, however, he realised that they were looking for him. Brian waved his gun, hoping they'd notice the glint of the metal. As they approached, he turned on his radio, fruitlessly trying to catch their frequency as they winged past.

That night the snow was barely deep enough for him to build a shelter. Brian cut a few blocks of snow from a drift and stacked them, then stretched his tarp between a rock and the improvised wall. He lit an emergency candle and filled his Thermos cup with snow, holding it above the flame until he could drink. Shivering, he pulled his arms inside his coat, buried his face in the soft lining and fell asleep.

**THE NEXT MORNING, BRIAN** was still shivering—his breath had created condensation inside his parka overnight. It was an ugly day, with blowing snow that reduced visibility to a few metres around him, and 40mph winds that cut through him like a blade. For the first time, he began to panic. His core body temperature was falling, and hypothermia was setting in. He knew if he didn't move quickly, he'd die.

Brian hurriedly tossed his supplies into his knapsack. As he pulled the zipper shut, it broke, so he abandoned the bag. He stuffed his knife, GPS and radio into his pockets, filled a zip-lock bag with snow and stuffed it into his parka to melt for drinking water. He grabbed his rifle, wrapped the tarp around his shoulders and started walking again.

Three days into his voyage on foot, with little food, sleep or water, Brian was suffering. He would walk just 50 yards before collapsing, lying still until he summoned the energy to trudge forward again. At one point, the wind caught the tarp, ripping it from his hands. He chased after the scrap of plastic, but it was out of reach. Weak and exhausted, he watched it sail away. With little water, he was becoming dangerously dehydrated. One leg began to cramp up, and Brian silently prayed for strength, limping as best he could until he regained mobility. Then the other leg cramped.



Weary, he collapsed again. This time he didn't rise. *This is how it feels to give up*, he thought, gazing at the snow swirling across the sky. His legs were at rest. He let his mind drift.

Lying there, Brian dreamed of his family. At home in Pond Inlet, their life was simple—watching films and hunting seal. In his mind, he heard his daughter, Alina, a rambunctious toddler who was constantly laughing. “Ataata,” she said, Inuktitut for father. Suddenly, he was jarred awake.

A nearby ptarmigan kept calling, an irritating cluck that seemed to grow louder and louder. Brian sat up. *I want to see my wife. I want to my kids grow up*, he thought, rising to his feet. *I'll start walking.*

Brian trudged on. At times the hills were so steep he needed to use his knife to cut footholds into them. About five miles from Repulse Bay, he spotted radio towers—the first sign of a community. He staggered forward until he glimpsed a cabin at

the top of the hill. With the last of his energy, he climbed up and broke in.

Inside, Brian turned on a stove and immediately heated some snow, gulping down the warm water. He found a package of vegetable soup mix and ate that. He removed his boots for the first time in a week and saw his feet—pale as snow, curled and wrinkled. Then he found a blanket, hunkered down on the couch and slept solidly for 12 hours.

**THE WALK INTO TOWN** the next day, May 20, was easy, and Brain arrived at 5.30am to find everyone still asleep. He felt suddenly shy. He didn't know anyone in Repulse Bay, and he was sure he looked like a crazy person.

Brian saw a taxi pull out from a house, a sure sign that its inhabitants would be awake. He approached the home and opened the door. A woman was dozing on the couch.

Brian awkwardly explained what he'd been through. He didn't get far before he broke down. The woman stared. "You're the guy we were looking for," she said. Her husband had been part of the rescue operation, trying to find the man who had just stumbled through her door.

**TODAY, SAFE AT HOME,** Brian still gets emotional recounting the welcome he received. "Everyone was very happy everywhere I went," he says. He recalls the feast in the school gym, the way the hamlet's elders came to meet him—the man who'd survived in the wild, the man who'd refused to give up.

Back in Pond Inlet, he had another homecoming. At the edge of town, where the sea ice meets the shore, Brian held his wife and kids in his arms and broke down. The throng cried and clapped and cheered as he finally took his last steps home. ■



## TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF

How are your resolutions faring? Some are doing better than others:

**"My 'don't make love to Victoria's Secret models' resolution is going great so far."**

"My New Year's resolution is to spend less time interacting with people and more time on my phone. Doing pretty well so far..."

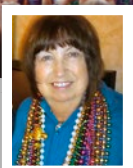
**"Forgot to make resolutions? Just write out everything you did last night and at the beginning add the word 'stop'."**

SOURCE: HITFIX.COM

BY CATHY ADAMS

# My Great Escape: Party In Style

**Maggie Cobbett** from Yorkshire  
celebrated Mardi Gras in New Orleans



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

*I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS MARDI GRAS CELEBRATION, and last year I finally made it with my husband Bruce and son David.*

We landed in a sunny New Orleans that was awash with the traditional carnival colours: purple for justice, green for faith and gold for power.

The streets near the Prince Conti Hotel, where we were staying, were crowded with revellers. *Laissez les bons temps rouler* [let the good times roll] was on everyone's minds.

The parades, each organised by a different "krewé", happened all over town. Elaborate floats were interspersed with bands, and the routes were lined with thousands upon thousands of spectators.

We also made time to explore other aspects of the city. A walking tour took us to Jackson Square by the Mississippi River, the Louis Armstrong Park and the famous St Louis No. 1 cemetery.

Among the tombs is a large pyramid belonging to actor Nicolas Cage (although he's still very much alive) and to Marie Laveau, a 19th-century voodoo queen. We also enjoyed

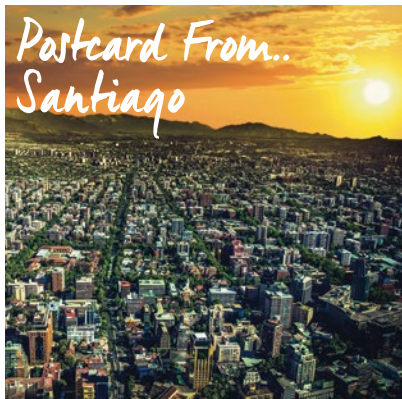


free music in Woldenberg Park and took the ferry to the historic Algiers with its pretty clapboard houses.

New Orleans is famous for its Creole and Cajun cuisine. Unique to the city are the beignets—square doughnuts—at the Café du Monde. We washed those down with cocktails at Pat O'Brien's bar on Bourbon Street. I recommend the Hurricane, which combines dark rum with passion fruit: it's the best drink in the city.

#### ■ THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PARTY

British Airways flies to New Orleans from around £800pp return (0344 493 0787, ba.com). Rooms at the Prince Conti Hotel start from around £110 per night (+1 888 626 4319, princecontihotel.com).



**CHILE IS THE LEAST ACCESSIBLE SOUTH AMERICAN NATION**, but that's about to change as British Airways launches direct flights to the capital Santiago. Colonial architecture, traditional markets and views of the Andes are now just a 14-hour flight away. Tour operator Last Frontiers runs a three-day trip to bohemian neighbourhood Lastarria. You'll visit the iconic fish market, Mercado Central, and dine at one of Latin America's best restaurants.

#### ■ REACH THE UNREACHABLE

Last Frontiers offers a three-day trip from £1,295pp, which includes return flights, accommodation and a cookery class (01296 653000, lastfrontiers.com).

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# Things To Do This Month



## CHRISTCHURCH IN TWO MINUTES

### ■ SEE: THE CARDBOARD

**CATHEDRAL** Next month marks six years since the Christchurch earthquake, which damaged Christchurch Cathedral. A beautiful cardboard version was erected in its place. Designed by architect Shigeru Ban, the colourful structure can seat 700 people ([newzealand.com](http://newzealand.com)).

### ■ EAT: ROOTS RESTAURANT

Clean-eating is a way of life in New Zealand, which is the philosophy of Roots Restaurant. Expect far-flung ingredients such as wild venison, oyster and even blossoms ([rootsrestaurant.co.nz](http://rootsrestaurant.co.nz)).

■ **STAY: HOTEL MONTREAL** One of the few luxury boutique properties in town, Hotel Montreal is contemporary and laid-back. Rooms from around £310 per night (+64 3 943 8547, [hotelmontreal.co.nz](http://hotelmontreal.co.nz)).

## SHORT/LONG HAUL: FITNESS RESORTS

### SHORT: Healthouse Las Dunas, Spain

This luxury retreat is just what tired bodies need. The two-night "Healthy Weekend" package, from around £540pp, includes full-board accommodation, spa treatments and medical assessments. Flights not included (+34 951 082 090, [healthouse-naturhouse.com](http://healthouse-naturhouse.com)).



**LONG: Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa, Maldives** Enjoy unlimited spa access on a beautiful beachfront. Seven-day detox packages start from £555pp (+960 6501515, [hideawaybeachmaldives.com](http://hideawaybeachmaldives.com)). ■



## TRAVEL APP OF THE MONTH

**Detour, Free, iOS, Android.** Prepare to throw out your guidebook. This smart app uses your GPS to offer clever insider tips that are sure to impress even the locals.



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*Lucy Fry spent a  
year immersing  
herself in the  
world of triathlon*

Record numbers are signing up to triathlons for the ultimate physical challenge—but what's the personal impact of this high-intensity sport?

# & Tears Triumph

BY LUCY FRY

I'm running through deep, dank mud while the wind blows hard against my face. Blighted by Northumbrian rain, lifting each foot takes supreme physical effort. My lungs are creaking while my mind flip-flops against the possibility of stopping. *Is anything really meant to hurt this much?* I think. My thighs ache from a 25-mile cycle and before that a mile-long swim, mostly spent trying to keep afloat amid the thrashing competitive limbs. Now I face a six-mile run.

Nobody does triathlon because it's easy. Nor do they do it because it's straightforward—or cheap for that matter. So why, exactly, do they do it?



First, a bit of history: the race comes in different lengths, anything from a sprint (half-mile swim, 12-mile ride, three-mile run) to an Olympic (one-mile swim, 25-mile ride, six-mile run), Half Ironman (one-mile swim, 56-mile ride, 13-mile run) and Ironman (two-mile swim, 100-mile ride and 25-mile run).

The first-ever triathlon was an Ironman, held in California in 1974, and the first British triathlon took place near Reading in 1983. By 2000 it had become an Olympic sport, announcing itself across the globe.

It's not just for the professionals either. According to official participation figures from British Triathlon, the number of people taking part between 2009 and 2014 increased by 75,600, taking the total recorded race starts in Great Britain up to nearly 200,000. There's also been a 63 per cent increase in events held across the country between 2012 and 2016, taking the average weekly number up to 24.

It was exactly this surge in popularity that caught my eye a couple of years ago when—as a runner, gym bunny and all-round fitness fanatic—I became intrigued by this young, dynamic sport. It

seemed that everywhere I looked, friends, family and acquaintances were talking about triathlon; a new hobby that was healthy and social to boot.

At that stage I still couldn't think of anything worse than floating about in a wetsuit that stank of seaweed, yet there was something in the groundswell of enthusiasm for multidisciplinary sporting events that I wanted to understand.

I decided to jump right in, spending a year immersed in the world of triathlon with the intention of writing a book about my experiences.

“  
MODERATION  
IS A DIRTY  
WORD,  
LOOKED UPON  
BY MANY  
DEVOTEES  
WITH  
CONTEMPT

**I QUICKLY LEARNED**  
that triathlon is a lifestyle and an attitude as much as a sport, offering the opportunity to set fitness and health goals as well as recapturing lost self-esteem.

So many of the triathletes I met had heartfelt reasons for getting involved in the sport. Forty-something Katharine Peters, a part-time district nurse and mother of five who did her first super-sprint triathlon in Tockington, north Bristol, says, “For me it wasn't about being a triathlete, more about proving something to myself and having a focus. I lost two-and-a-half



stone during the training process and in the race showed myself that I wasn't useless any more. I could do something just for me."

For Suzanne, in her thirties, triathlon began with a New Year's resolution to do an Ironman just seven months later. She'd run a marathon once before but knew little of triathlon and had done virtually no open-water swimming or cycling. Yet after endless gruelling hours of training (usually twice a day) juggled around her demanding corporate job, Suzanne made it to the starting line in Bolton. Weather conditions

*The first Olympic triathlon race took place in Sydney in 2000*

couldn't have been worse, with the preceding day's storms leaving the course a total washout. It was the

toughest 15 hours, 32 minutes and 15 seconds imaginable, but Suzanne finished her first Ironman that day. Since then, she's gone on to do many more, as well as other endurance events, including a swim across the Strait of Gibraltar.

Triathlon transformed Suzanne's life for the better: "It's changed what I think I'm capable of, where I go on holiday, what I eat, what I look like, who I hang out with and how I spend my time. So basically everything!"



*Rob Popper has made difficult sacrifices for the obsessional sport*

**FOR ME**, the first six months were intense. First, there was the pain. Multiple training sessions a week left me hungry and tired, not to mention time-poor. As I quickly learned, this isn't necessarily a bad thing because for triathletes (and many other fitness-obsessed types I've met along the way) pain isn't a failing. In fact, being able to take yourself into what's known as "the hurt locker" is often considered a sign of strength.

Among the most dedicated triathletes, pushing through physical and mental limits merits respect, while fatigue offers bragging rights. Injuries are commonplace and often treated as a mere nuisance. Moderation remains a dirty word, looked upon by many with confusion and even contempt.

It's hard to remain clear-headed in such a fervid, success-orientated

culture. Many triathletes, particularly those involved in the longer distances, suffer from disordered relationships to food, body image and exercise.

Fifty-one-year-old Rob Popper, a triathlon coach and sports masseuse who discovered triathlon back in 2001, admits, "Throughout my long relationship with triathlon, both as an athlete and a coach, there have been lots of ups and downs. I experienced passion for the work I was doing, improvement in my personal performance, greater understanding about how the amazing human body works and the chance to motivate some brilliant people.

"Simultaneously I've had less time with my kids, my wife, my friends. Actually, less time for me, too. Periods where friends had to sit me down and ask me if I was developing an eating disorder. Separation and

eventual divorce from my wife. Launching a very expensive business that went sour and wiped me out financially. Suffice to say I've definitely sacrificed important aspects of my life to make room for this obsessional sport."

**WHEN IT'S NOT GOING WELL,** the world of triathlon is a dark place. Professional triathlete Jodie Swallow has blogged about the pressure to reach the ideal "performance weight", as well as the bulimia and depression she suffered from during her earlier years in the sport. I came across similar stories about triathlon instigating or exacerbating existing mental-health issues.

"The world of triathlon engulfed me as it engulfed many," says former competitive triathlete, Olivia. "I always suffered from bulimia but when triathlon came along it exaggerated my tendencies tenfold. I saw women who were struggling and tried to believe that I wasn't like them. I saw men who were obsessed with their physique and their stamina.

"Training wasn't just a way of life—it determined life. When one race was done you'd book another one to keep up the momentum. Guilt, anxiety and pressure, all self-inflicted, were daily emotions. A missed training session would bring on a desire to train harder, push harder, work harder and, of course, eat less."

The financial costs are hardly insignificant either. The average entry to an Olympic-distance triathlon is around £40–£80 and Ironman entries are £300–£500. Then there's the kit. You'll need a tri-suit (base layer), wetsuit, bike (alongside optional go-faster extras such as cleated cycling shoes), helmet, sports clothes, swimming costume, hat and goggles, plus some running shoes. Most people also need coaching as well as a bespoke training schedule. Despite borrowing a racing bike from someone for the duration, my kit costs alone added up to over £600.

*British triathletes Alistair and Jonny Brownlee compete in Stockholm in 2014*







*Lucy Fry spares a moment to smile at her dad, who's come to support her*

There were also overnight stays in Blenheim and Newcastle before their respective triathlons (around £350), money spent on petrol, flights and train tickets (£700) and the warm-weather training camp in Lanzarote (around £800 in total). My original plans to race around a *château* in France had to be ditched as the ferry and accommodation alone would have come to £400. Since the logistics of triathlon are tricky without anybody to help carry kit and proffer support, I needed a wingman, which meant that cost would be doubled (£800).

And yet, despite being poorer, both financially and temporally, there's something undeniably electrifying about it. I trained for months for that Olympic-distance triathlon, spending mornings, evenings and weekends doing laps in the pool and around the

park, sacrificing lie-ins, nights out and almost all my relaxation time—all of it culminating in two hours and 55 minutes of ceaseless endeavour.

**I PROMISE MYSELF I'LL FINISH,** swallowing energy gels and water while remembering to breathe. Finally, I cross the line, hands held high, before collapsing in an exhausted heap enveloped by a sweet, ephemeral kind of ecstasy.

It's not just endorphins but also an intense and longed-for sense of satisfaction, the kind that comes from tackling three sports in one (not to mention the ludicrous costume changes in between, known as "transitions") and surviving to tell the sweaty tale. All around me people celebrate—some grinning, some in tears—because they've achieved something unforgettable.



Deeper still, there's the sense of purpose that triathlon offers. Running, swimming and cycling give a respite from existential angst—as the gruelling training schedules leave little room for contemplation of the bigger life questions—as well as opportunity for personal growth.

Ali Hendry-Ballard, 47, first dipped her toe in triathlon during a difficult period in her life. “I really needed something positive to focus on while going through some major life changes,” she says.

“Though I'd never been interested in sport, I started jogging short distances and soon caught the bug. I started doing half marathons and very quickly found myself training for a triathlon. I love mixing the disciplines; there's something that appeals to all sides of my personality. I've never felt so in tune with my body, or felt so aware of both its strengths and its limitations.”

For me too, triathlon has resulted

in an increased awareness of what is and isn't possible, physically, mentally, emotionally and even spiritually. Combating the fear of being dragged under by other swimmers during an open-water start, learning to take a wetsuit off at speed and trusting that I can handle whatever comes my way during the course of any race—all these things have helped me to become a stronger, braver person.

There's a paradox here for me too. Triathlon takes from its devotees every bit as much as it gives and yet, somehow, you end up giving even more than it requires. It's a greedy pastime and it attracts obsessive, determined types. Yet it's also a social, fun-filled hobby that can offer fresh chances to travel, experience and dream. ■

**Lucy Fry's *Run, Ride, Sink or Swim: A Rookie's Guide to Triathlon* is out now, published by Faber & Faber.**



## FACTS SO MIND-BLOWING, THEY SOUND LIKE LIES

These truths are guaranteed to make your jaw drop:

**When the last mammoth died, the Great Pyramid was already 1,000 years old.**

Pluto's entire surface area would fit within Russia with room to spare.

**There are more ways to shuffle a deck of cards than there are atoms on Earth.**

It rains diamonds on Saturn and Jupiter.

**There are more fake flamingoes in the world than real ones.**

SOURCE: BUZZFEED.COM

# Protect Your Cash Online

The January sales are a second Christmas for scammers—here's how to stay safe

BY ANDY WEBB



*Andy Webb is a money expert at the Money Advice Service. Visit [moneyadvice.service.org.uk](http://moneyadvice.service.org.uk) for details*



THE DAYS OF SALES STARTING ON JANUARY 1 ARE LONG GONE. So is the idea of queuing up on Boxing Day, for most people at least. Now the real sales start on Christmas Eve—and they happen online.

The benefits of doing our shopping online are numerous, especially during the sales. For a start you get to avoid the crush as people hurry to get the best bargains.

You also don't have to leave home, which is particularly convenient if you're less able to get on a bus or train into town, or just don't fancy facing the winter weather.

Your purchases also have greater protection, as you can return most of them up to 14 days after delivery. On the high street there's no law saying a shop has to offer a refund.

All good so far. But there are also greater opportunities for you to lose your money. These are easily avoidable if you follow a few simple rules.

## Go straight to the website or use search engines

Fraudsters will sometimes send out emails with dodgy weblinks. Though the email may look authentic, there are often telltale signs that it's a fake, including the address from which the email is sent.

If something doesn't look right, don't click on the links. Instead, go direct to the website by typing in the address or using a search engine.



### Check the shop is secure

You may be sent an offer that seems fantastic, but it's worth doing a little research if you don't recognise the name of the retailer. Ask friends or family if they've used the website in the past.

Other checks include looking for a closed padlock symbol in the address bar or bottom corner of your internet-browser window. Also check for the letters *HTTPS* at the start of the website address. This is different to the common *HTTP*, with the *S* standing for secure.

You can also use services such as PayPal, which act as an intermediary between you and the retailer, so your payment details don't go directly to the website.

### Pay with a credit card

If you're spending more than £100, paying by credit card gives you an added protection.

The Consumer Credit Act says the credit card company is equally liable for these purchases, so you might be able to get your money back from them if something goes wrong.

### Don't store your details

Though you might be the only people using your computer, it's good practice to not autosave passwords or credit card details.

This way there's little chance someone else could log onto your account and purchase something using your details without you knowing about it.

# Will A Water Meter Save You Money?

If you don't have a water meter you'll be paying a fixed monthly price. This doesn't change if you use a lot or a little water.

A water meter, on the other hand, will change what you pay depending on your use. But it could mean you pay more if you're a heavy water user.

So how do you know if a meter is right for you? Most water rates are calculated based on the size of the property. Therefore, if there are more bedrooms than people living in your house, there's a good chance you'll save—but it's important to check the figures first.

You can do this by contacting your water supplier to find out if they think you'll save. There's also a calculator at [cwater.org.uk/watermetercalculator](http://cwater.org.uk/watermetercalculator).

It's free to get a meter fitted in England and Wales. It costs around £300 to get one installed in Scotland. Those of you in Northern Ireland don't need to worry as there are no water charges.

If you decide to go ahead, you'll need to have your property surveyed to check whether installation is possible. Your water company should



then install your new meter within three months.

Sometimes it's not possible to install a meter. If that happens you can ask for an "assessed charge", which is based on the average meter bills and could be cheaper.

It's worth knowing that you can only switch back within the first 12 months, so if you think your living situation could change after that, you might decide it's better to wait.

# One Year On...

Last January I shared my financial New Year's resolutions with you. As with any promise people make to themselves, the words are only as good as your actions. So have I followed through with my plans?

In truth, I could have done better, but I've stuck to three of the five goals and they've kept my day-to-day finances on track.

## 2016 SUCCESSES

I planned to keep saving even though I didn't have a big project to aim for, and I've done just that. I focused on putting money aside for mini-goals.

Keeping track of spending was easy. My top tip is to always ask for a receipt if you pay with contactless.

My other success was to manage less of the household finances. This might seem like an odd goal, but sharing the responsibilities with my wife meant she gained greater control and confidence in our budget.

I'm happy with these habits and shall aim to continue with them this year.

## TWO FOR 2017

The two resolutions I'm yet to tackle should be easy to action, and I might even have completed them before you read this. If not, they'll be right at the top of the list for 2017.

First, I plan to create a will that ensures everything would go where I want it to.

At my stage in life it should be quite a simple thing to set up, and I can adjust it as circumstances change in the future.

A little more complicated—but more pressing—is to get a firm fix on pensions. I've numerous pots but no clear idea whether or not I've saved enough so far or if I'm facing a shortfall.

If you're setting your own financial goals for the New Year, try to be realistic in what you want to achieve and why. Here's to a prudent and prosperous 2017! ■





# Essential Protection For Your Home

Whether you live in a house, bungalow, flat or rented property, we all love and treasure our homes—so protecting your property with a comprehensive home insurance policy should be a priority. But what should you consider when purchasing your next home insurance policy? Here are some key points

## VALUE YOUR VALUABLES

We all take possessions away from the home, including items such as jewellery, mobile phones, tablets and handbags. When buying home insurance, always discuss this. A policy that provides overseas cover means you can often save money on your travel policy—since you don't need to insure these items twice.

## WATCH OUT FOR WATER

If there's damage to your property caused by an escape of water, you may incur additional costs in

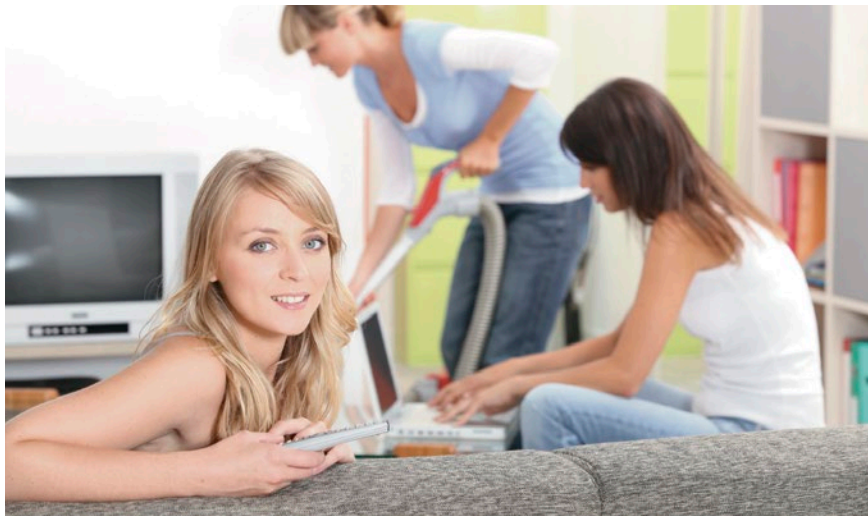
removing and replacing any other part of the building while accessing the source of the leak. Trace and access cover is important as it could save you a substantial amount of money should your property develop a leak. Also, look out for frozen pipes when a cold spell arrives.

## ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

One in four home insurance policies don't include accidental damage cover. Accidental damage cover is recommended as even the most careful person could

\*Based on sample data of 801 clients taking out new buildings and contents cover in 2016. Contents sum insured for a minimum of £50,000. Excludes Insurance Premium Tax and additional products purchased at the same time. Subject to terms and conditions.

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accidentally knock their television when decorating or even while vacuuming the carpet.

It may surprise you to learn comprehensive home insurance—which includes all the important levels of cover as standard—may not cost as much as you might think.

Leading insurance broker Higos Insurance Services recently revealed that on average their new clients paid less than £215\* for buildings and contents insurance in 2016. In fact, 66 per cent of their clients have paid less than £240 for their new home insurance policy this year.

*Reader's Digest Insurance Services provide a range of home insurance policies from leading insurers such as Aviva, Ageas, Axa, Allianz and Legal & General.*

**To discuss your home insurance and to  
obtain a competitive quotation, call us today on**

**020 8069 3102**

Easy-to-prepare meals and accompanying drinks

# Celeriac Soup With Sage Butter

BY RACHEL  
WALKER



*Rachel Walker  
is a food writer for  
numerous national  
publications. Visit  
[rachel-walker.co.uk](http://rachel-walker.co.uk)  
for more details*

CELERICAC SOUP HAS SUCH A RICH FLAVOUR and silky texture, it tastes a million miles away from any of your usual post-Christmas diet dishes. Instead, it's a healthy meal without a hint of deprivation.

If you're feeling particularly pious, then it's delicious on its own. Personally I think that any bowl of soup tastes best with a hunk of bread and any nubbins leftover from the cheeseboard. Celeriac pairs particularly well with Stilton. Add a bit of chutney, and I struggle to think of a more perfect lunch.

## Serves 6

- 20g butter
- 2 onions, roughly diced
- 750g celeriac, peeled and roughly diced
- 1.5L vegetable stock
- 2 cooking apples, peeled, cored and sliced
- 1-2tbsp crème fraîche
- Salt and pepper, to season
- 40g butter
- 2-3 sprigs of sage leaves, picked

1. Melt the butter in a pan or casserole dish.
2. Sweat the onions and add the chunks of celeriac. Cook until the onions are soft and the celeriac is starting to take on a golden-caramel colour.
3. Pour the vegetable stock into the pan and cook at a rapid



simmer for 10 minutes, until the celeriac is soft enough that a knife pokes through the chunks without any resistance. Add the sliced apples and cook for 2 more minutes.

4. Blend. Stir in the crème fraîche, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

5. Melt the butter in a pan until foaming and then add the sage leaves. Let the butter bubble away on a low-medium heat, swirling it in the pan until it turns a golden brown—but absolutely no darker. The sage leaves should have started to become nice and crisp.

6. Divide the soup between 6 bowls. Garnish with the crispy sage leaves and drizzle a teaspoon of sage butter round each garnish. Serve straight away, ideally accompanied with a hunk of bread and crumbly Stilton.

## TIP...

Why not try experimenting with the garnish? Instead of using sage butter, more carnivorous cooks might try bacon lardons, or even crumbled black pudding. Roasted nuts will also add some crunch and a lovely flavour.

# Hot Toddy

My mother swears by lemon, honey and a slug of rum to cure ills, while my in-laws prescribe a whisky toddy. In the middle of flu season, a late-night nip occasionally takes on a truly medicinal quality.

There's a long tradition of the curative cocktail, dating back to ancient Egypt and China when alcohol was used to treat anything from a snake bite to intestinal worms. Spirits have formed the base of apothecaries' concoctions throughout medical history and many popular brands (such as Bénédictine and Chartreuse) started life as medicinal elixirs mixed by monks.

It's still best to turn to aspirin before absinthe when struck down by a lurgy, but that doesn't mean that there's no truth to home remedies. "The alcohol dilates blood vessels a little bit, making it easier for your mucus membranes to deal with the



infection," explains Dr William Schaffner, chair of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Centre. Combine the decongestant powers of whisky or rum with the heat of a "toddy", which helps unblock blocked noses, and it starts to make sense.

To make, simply mix together one shot of your chosen spirit with a shot of water, 2tsp of honey and 2tsp of lemon, and heat gently.

Moderation is the key to self-prescribing from the drinks cabinet—and check with your GP if you're on medication—but I'm sure I'm not alone in finding more charm in a weak whisky toddy than a pack of pills.

## CURATIVE DRINKS

- **The King's Ginger (41%),**  
£22/500ml, Waitrose
- **Dom Bénédictine (40%),**  
£17/500ml, Morrisons
- **Taste the Difference**  
**Armagnac (40%),**  
£22/500ml, Sainsbury's





Pudding  
of the  
Month



## Pears Poached In Mulled Wine

Another handy recipe for using up Christmas leftovers—in this case, mulled wine spices and that lingering bottle of red.

- 6 pears, stalks attached, peeled
  - 1 bottle of red wine
  - 150g sugar
  - 2tbsp shop-bought mulled wine spices.
- Alternatively, use a
- home blend of orange peel, a cinnamon stick, 2 cloves and 2 star anise
- To serve: whipped cream or mascarpone

1. Pour the wine, sugar and spice into a small pan.
2. Submerge the pears and simmer for 35–40 minutes, until tender.
3. Lift the pears out of the pan and rapidly simmer the poaching liquid until it starts to turn syrupy.
4. Serve each pear with 1–2tbsp of the thickened poaching liquid and a dollop of whipped cream or mascarpone. ■

BOOK



***Salt is Essential*, Kyle Books, £17.** Shaun Hill's tome is witty, informative and filled with classic recipes.

BARGAIN



**3.3L casserole dish, Sainsbury's, £35.** Sturdy and made for some serious soup-making.

BLOW OUT



**Touchscreen soup maker, Lakeland, £124.99.** It chops, blends, sautés, cooks and simmers, all in one jug.

BY LYNDA  
CLARK


*Lynda Clark is a homes, property and interiors expert, and editor of First Time Buyer magazine*

## Alpine Style

ON WINTER DAYS, when it's cold and dark outside, there's nothing quite like creating your own rustic retreat inspired by a traditional alpine ski lodge. It's the perfect cosy space to enjoy an afternoon cup of tea, read, sew or watch television.

Set the mood with faux-fur cushions, a rug, natural wooden accessories and sumptuous leather furniture. Tea lights and lanterns add a warm, twinkly glow to the room—perfect to cuddle up in. Rich, warm tones work well with textured layers, while pretty berry tones complete the picture with an injection of colour.

**Marston hanging mirror, £45; Katie Alice Highland fling stoneware teapot with knitted cosy, £25; mug with knitted jacket, £10; faux-leather stool, £35.**

■ All available from J D Williams ([jdwilliams.co.uk](http://jdwilliams.co.uk))

## Get The Look

Snuggle up with these lovely accessories.

- **Churnie vase, £45,**  
[loaf.com](http://loaf.com)
- **Faux-fur cushion, £28,**  
[debenhams.com](http://debenhams.com)
- **Hand-blown glass lantern, £28,**  
[next.co.uk](http://next.co.uk)
- **President leather armchair, £950,**  
[alexanderandpearl.co.uk](http://alexanderandpearl.co.uk)





## HIGHLAND FLING

Tartan never goes out of fashion—and this season it's more popular than ever



This chair is upholstered in traditional Argyll Skye tartan fabric, £379.99 ([argos.co.uk](http://argos.co.uk))



Add a touch of Scotland with a tartan table lamp, £240 ([alexanderandpearl.co.uk](http://alexanderandpearl.co.uk))



This merino lambswool cushion features natty fringing, £44.95 ([annabeljames.co.uk](http://annabeljames.co.uk))



## FEATHERED FRIENDS

As winter makes their food sources scarce, it's important to leave something out for the birds at this time of year. This delightful bird table and feeder from Mia Fleur (£22.50, [miafleur.com](http://miafleur.com)) would make a lovely gift for a bird-watching friend—or yourself. Featuring pretty metal scrollwork with two birds perched either side of the bowl, plus a hook to hang a lantern on, it will make an attractive feature and encourage birds into the garden too. ■

# Add A Little Luxury To Your Bathing With Premier Care

**AS THE NIGHTS DRAW IN** and the weather turns wintry, there's nothing quite like a long warm soak in the bath. However, a bath isn't something all of us can enjoy due to space requirements or mobility issues with getting in and out.

Proven to help with many long-term health conditions, bathing can bring relief to a range of ailments, from soothing away the stresses and strains of a busy day to gently easing aches and even chronic pain.

Today there are many different ways you can personalise your bathroom so you can not only be comfortable, safe and reassured—but also enjoy a little added luxury when having a bath.

With the help of Premier Care, the UK's No. 1 mobility bathing specialist, here's how you can add some optional extras to a super-safe walk-in bath.

## **Hydrovescent System—gentle spa massage to relieve aches and pains**

A hydrovescent system gives a wonderful spa feel to any bathroom, where gentle jets of air circulate around the sides and bottom of the bath. As well as relaxing muscles,

relieving inflammation and helping to improve circulation, the jets can also relieve symptoms associated with arthritis, migraines and stress.

## **Chromotherapy—natural light treatment to promote emotional well-being**

Chromotherapy is an ancient natural light treatment used to help promote emotional and spiritual well-being through colour. By incorporating different colours or lights to your bath you can influence your mood and emotions, which is perfect for reducing anxiety, stress, fatigue, cramps and other associated conditions.

## **StayWarm—heated seat and back rest**

For added comfort you can relax on a pre-heated seat where the underside and back of the bath seat is warmed, keeping you cosy and comfortable for the whole time you're in the bath.

Whether you want to alleviate aches and pains, lighten your mood or opt for a pre-heated seat, Premier Care can help create a luxurious environment of calm and relaxation for your bathing.



“MY BATHROOM NOW  
HAS THE ‘WOW’  
FACTOR”

MR D HOYLAND, WARWICKSHIRE

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in Bathing

To find out more talk to Premier Care in Bathing today.  
**FREEPHONE: 0800 988 4232** and quote ref P61011K.  
Or visit [readersdigest.co.uk/premierbathrooms](http://readersdigest.co.uk/premierbathrooms)



Tech has changed the way we read, how we work and even our personal style...

# New-Age Cool

BY OLLY MANN



*Ollly is a technology expert, radio presenter and podcaster*

## MASTER AND DYNAMIC MH40 OVER-EAR HEADPHONES, £399

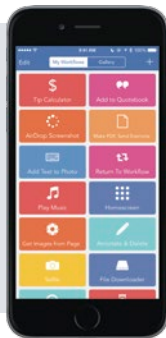
Remember when 50-quid headphones were considered suitable for daily use, and iTunes was promoted with dancing silhouettes, all wearing the earphones that came free with the iPod? No longer. As our phones and tablets evolve into generic black rectangles, headphones have become a favourite way to express style and attitude.

New York's Master and Dynamic are targeting a sophisticated clientele: the MH40's brown leather frame recalls louche 1970s lounge furniture, while the silver metal rim is reminiscent of high-end hi-fi stacks from a decade later. They're comfortable, sound great and—with replaceable parts—are built to last.



## APPLE APP OF THE MONTH: WORKFLOW, £2.29

This allows you to create shortcuts ("workflows") for your most common sequences of iPhone commands, so you can



perform them with one tap. For instance, you can put a widget on your homepage that will draft an email to your most regular contact. The set-up is fiddly but, once installed, the widgets save a lot of time.

### KANO COMPUTER KIT, £124

Much was made of Raspberry Pi, the credit card-sized computer designed to teach kids computer science. But coding computers isn't something you quickly pick up on a Sunday afternoon—it requires a lot of time and dedication, something parents typically don't have.

That's where Kano come in: their colourful, step-by-step kits are fun for adults and children to assemble together. In a Lego-style process, you can put together your own Raspberry Pi-powered computer, which can plug into your television in just a few hours.

Hopefully, it'll inspire your child to combat the next stage themselves, programming classic games such as Snake and Pong.



### ALCOSENSE EXCEL, £99.99

Drink-driving has been illegal for decades, and has more recently become taboo. But “the morning after” is a grey area: like many, I've foolishly driven out for a fry-up on New Year's Day, unsure if I'm technically still under the influence.

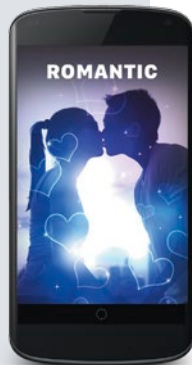
This battery-powered gadget offers peace of mind: just slide up the cover, breathe into the detachable tube and it gives you an instant, accurate reading. If you're over the limit, it displays a clear “Do Not Drive” icon.

Disappointingly, a glovebox-friendly travel case isn't included, but that's my only gripe: this is 100 quid well spent.



### ANDROID APP OF THE MONTH: HOOKED, £2.29 PER WEEK

This is a mad idea, but it works: a collection of episodic novels, delivered in message-length chunks of conversation. Tense thrillers and ghost stories are written entirely in the style of text-message chats between two or more people, revealing themselves line-by-line as the reader presses “next”. The compelling stories are a great way to get teens into reading, and an innovative use of the platform. ■



BY GEORGINA  
YATES


*Georgina is a fashion and beauty editor for numerous travel titles and a blogger at [withgeorgia.co.uk](http://withgeorgia.co.uk)*

## New Roots

BRING LUSTRE AND FULLNESS BACK to your locks with the three-step Invati system from **Aveda**. The shampoo, conditioner and scalp treatment work together to encourage growth, improve thickness and prevent your hair from splitting.

First massage the shampoo into your scalp. A small amount goes a long way as it gently exfoliates, unclogging pores and removing product residue. Once you've rinsed out the shampoo, work the conditioner into the lengths of the hair. This helps to repair the ends, where it's often the most broken and brittle. After towel-drying, spray the scalp revitaliser close to the roots and massage in before blow-drying and styling.

■ **Three-step Invati system, £92, Aveda ([aveda.co.uk](http://aveda.co.uk))**



## HANDIWORK

■ For those who suffer from dry, cracked paws during the winter, **Green People's** Helping Hand (£11.50, [greenpeople.co.uk](http://greenpeople.co.uk)) is a lifesaver. It's organic and safe to use on sensitive skin, with ingredients such as beeswax and lavender to ensure your hands remain smooth.



## TWINKLE IN YOUR EYE

■ **Urban Decay** has done it again with their Moondust eye shadow collection (£14, [urbandecay.co.uk](http://urbandecay.co.uk)). Comprising 16 shades, each colour is highly pigmented and comes out bold and shimmery on the skin—a great way to add a little extra sparkle.



## VELVET TOUCH

**For Her**



■ Pair a velvet jacket with jeans or a plain dress for a look that's understated yet glamorous (£85, [marksandspencer.com](http://marksandspencer.com)).

■ No fabric is more comforting against your skin than velvet, which means it's perfect for scarves (£49, [east.co.uk](http://east.co.uk)).



■ It's a material that's both elegant and warm. Here's it's used to its full potential as a pretty party frock (£85, [whitestuff.com](http://whitestuff.com)).

**For Him**



■ Nothing says opulence like a statement velvet jacket (£450, [simoncarter.net](http://simoncarter.net)).

■ Why not finish off your evening wear with a velvet touch? This sleek bow tie should do the trick (£14, [marksandspencer.com](http://marksandspencer.com)).



■ Pair some velvet loafers with a suit—and dark silk socks—as an attention-grabbing alternative to leather dress shoes (£95, [dunelondon.com](http://dunelondon.com)). ■

Three stand-out reads from an intriguing new trend in publishing

# January Fiction

BY JAMES  
WALTON



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

AS REGULAR READERS MAY HAVE NOTICED (I hope), I usually try and mix up the kind of novels reviewed in each issue. These days, though, there's no getting round the fact that January is Psychological Thriller Month.

Ever since *The Girl on the Train* began its path to world domination in January 2015, Britain's publishers—clearly a superstitious lot—have decided that any books intended to follow suit need to come out at the start of the year. And in a crowded field, three in particular are being tipped for success in 2017...

Of the three, *The Girl Before* (Quercus, £12.99) sticks to the usual pattern most closely. For one thing, it's got the word "girl" in the title (the publishers' consensus being that the psychological thriller revival began with Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*). For another, there are two alternating narrators telling their stories at different times.

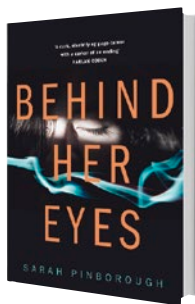
In the sections headed "Then", Emma moves into an ultra-minimalist London house where the rent is unexpectedly low, but where the architect insists that his tenants obey a strict set of rules to avoid clutter. She then falls for the architect himself. In the "Now" parts, Jane, recovering from the trauma of a stillborn child, moves into the same house, falls for the same man—and discovers that a girl called Emma died there mysteriously a few years ago.





**J P Delaney** is apparently the *nom de plume* of an already-successful author, which may explain why the book is written with such assurance, constantly cranking up the suspense, while also depicting Jane's grief with complete conviction.

The result is a thoroughly satisfying read, even if the big twist—neat though it is—may leave experienced thriller readers with their socks not entirely blown off.



Still, if it's guaranteed sock-blowing you're after, look no further than **Sarah Pinborough's** *Behind Her Eyes* (HarperCollins, £14.99). Again, the story is told by two female narrators: this time, Adele,

whose husband is drifting away from her, and Louise—the woman he's drifting towards.

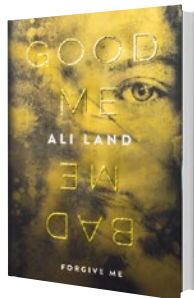
Again, the suspense is built with impressive cunning, as Adele tantalisingly reveals herself to be up to something very sinister indeed. But then comes...well, one of the most astonishing twists I can ever remember. And I certainly don't say that lightly.

It's an ending that seems likely to be one of the literary talking points of the month—and well beyond. And yet, for my money, once my socks

were back in place, it also felt a bit of a cheat. (You'll never guess it, so I can say that it appears to come from another genre altogether.)

And so to the best book of the lot: **Good Me, Bad Me** (Michael Joseph, £12.99) by **Ali Land**. The surprisingly sole narrator is 15-year-old Milly, who's just shopped her mother to the police for serial child abuse and murder. (Her mum also made Milly "help" with the abuse, although one of the novel's many qualities is that we only get chilling hints of exactly what went on.) Now she's with a foster family, where the psychologist father is preparing her to give evidence in the forthcoming trial.

Milly's endlessly conflicted feelings about her mother are captured with utter precision: "The person I want to run from is also the person I want to run to." But she's far too vivid a character for the novel ever to feel merely like a careful case study. Instead, as her relationships with the girls at her new school deteriorate, you're filled with both huge sympathy for such a damaged soul—and increasing terror about what she might do.



## RD'S RECOMMENDED READ

A fascinating new book offers a first-person account of growing up in one of the world's most famous families

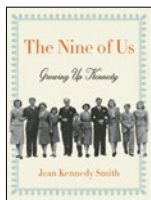
# A Legendary Childhood

### ONE OF THE FAMILY RULES

when Jean Kennedy Smith grew up was, "No whining in this house". It's a rule she obviously took to heart, because, despite the tragedies that befell many of her eight siblings, this is an unashamedly warm-hearted and grateful celebration of her early life.

Now 88, Jean (the US ambassador to Ireland during the Good Friday Agreement) is the last surviving child of Joe and Rose Kennedy. Looking back, she does mention such things as the death of her oldest brother Joe Jr in the Second World War and the later assassinations of Jack and Bobby—but never dwells on them.

Meanwhile, anybody new to the



***The Nine of Us: Growing Up Kennedy*** by Jean Kennedy Smith is published by HarperCollins at £20.

Kennedys would have no idea from the book that, for example, her dad was an epic womaniser, a habit he passed on to his sons; or that any other family member had ever been touched by scandal.

Yet what *The Nine of Us* lacks in objectivity, it more than makes up for in other ways. For a start, there's obvious value in having such an intimate account of the Kennedy story as the Kennedys saw it: people from an Irish-emigrant background who defied anti-Catholic prejudice to become perhaps the most celebrated family in America.

Jean also gives us plenty of jaw-dropping details about how they did it. Mother Rose would appear at breakfast each morning with the major news stories of the day pinned to her dress so that her children could discuss them. Dad Joe's favourite game at dinner—served promptly at 7.15pm—was, "If you were president, what would you do?"

Above all, Jean provides a sharp and touching reminder that these legendary figures were once ordinary children. The book is full of her touchingly everyday memories (and photos to match) of the siblings she clearly adored.

Here, however, are a couple of equally intimate later passages—the first beginning the evening before brother Jack became president...

“On the night of the election, we still had no idea if Jack or Richard Nixon would win, the numbers were too close.

Our family had dinner together, and eventually we went to bed, with everyone nervous.

At dawn, we awoke to have our fears allayed. Jack had won. There was much excitement. An official photographer took a picture of all of us standing before the fireplace. Jackie [Jack's wife] borrowed my coat to go down the driveway with Jack to speak with the press. Meantime, relieved and needing to move about, the rest of us started a touch football

## NINE OF THEM

■ **Joe Jr (1915–1944).** Joe Sr's first hope for a Kennedy president. Killed in a plane explosion while in the US Navy.

■ **John "Jack" (1917–1963).** US President, assassinated in Dallas.

■ **Rosemary (1918–2005).** Born with some learning difficulties. After a lobotomy in 1941, she spent the rest of her life in a mental institution.

■ **Kathleen "Kick" (1920–1948).** Married the Marquess of Hartington in 1944. He was killed by a sniper in Belgium four months later, and she died in a plane crash while with her married lover.

■ **Eunice (1921–2009).** International advocate for the disabled—and for a while, Arnold Schwarzenegger's mother-in-law.

■ **Patricia "Pat" (1924–2006).** Worked in film, and had an unhappy marriage to the Rat Pack actor Peter Lawford.

■ **Robert "Bobby" (1925–1968).** Assassinated while campaigning for the US presidency.

■ **Jean (1928– ).** Ambassador and now author.

■ **Edward "Ted" (1932–2009).** Fourth longest-serving senator in US history.

game on the lawn. When Jackie and Jack came back, he joined in.

After a while we heard Dad shout from the porch, as was his routine, "Lunch is ready!"

idea of filling her shoes was daunting to say the least. I searched the stores and finally decided upon a lovely light blue gown with a lace collar. But what to do for the tiara that Jackie always



## ***Jack turned to me and said, 'Doesn't he know I'm President of the United States?'***

We broke into little groups and began walking up toward the house. Jack and I paired up and were walking a little bit behind the others.

Ever punctual, Dad went inside only to come back a few seconds later.

"Hurry up now, everybody's ready and inside waiting for you two!"

Jack turned to me with a mock seriousness and said, "Doesn't he know I'm president of the United States?"

He had such a grin on his face that we both burst out laughing."

\*\*\*

And three years later...

"One day, Jack called me on the telephone. The president of Ireland, Sean Lemass, was coming for a state dinner. The First Lady, my dear friend Jackie, was in Europe visiting her sister. Jack asked if I would serve as the hostess for the event. Would I ever!

I excitedly began to prepare. I looked at photos of my elegant sister-in-law at other state dinners, to determine what to wear. Jackie was the essence of grace and style. The

placed so delicately in her hair? I did not have such a thing. So I searched my jewelry box and found a rhinestone bracelet and tucked it into my hair, perched precariously above my forehead, secured with two bobby pins. This would have to do the job.

I arrived at the White House and was escorted to the top of the stairs, where Jack waited. "You look great," he said, taking my arm. I smiled back, making sure to keep my head perfectly straight so the bracelet wouldn't go crashing to the floor.

We turned and stood to face the crowd below. Mr and Mrs Lemass looked up at us from the base of the stairs. The guard announced, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States."

We slowly began to descend. When we reached the bottom, on the last step, Jack paused and smiled at me.

"It's a long way from Bronxville," he said.

I turned my head up to him, very carefully, and replied, "It sure is."



# Books

THAT CHANGED MY LIFE



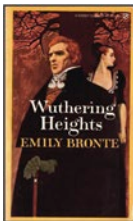
Lynda La Plante is the BAFTA award-winning writer of *Prime Suspect* and the best-selling author of more than 40 books. Her new novel *Hidden Killers* is out now, published by Simon and Schuster.

## Wuthering Heights

BY EMILY BRONTË

One night as a child, I crept along the cold, dark corridor to go to the loo when I heard a voice calling, "Let me in—let me in!" along with a dreadful tapping on a window coming from my grandmother's room. The wind started to howl and, terrified, I burst in and said, "Help me! Where's the ghost?"

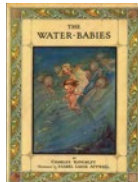
Granny looked up and said, "Don't be silly, I'm listening to a story on the radio called *Wuthering Heights*." I realised then how effectively you could take a story from a book and transfer it to a different medium.



## The Water-Babies

BY CHARLES KINGSLEY

This classic Victorian fairy tale captured my imagination as a child. It made me consider



the unfairness of life—why is one child cushioned in comfort and another forced to climb through the filth of a chimney? I particularly loved all the questions Tom asks on his adventures, many of them related to social injustice. All my life I've asked questions too.

## The Faerie Queene

BY EDMUND SPENSER

I used to have problems reading—I was told I had "word blindness", which nowadays is called dyslexia. My mother gave me a soft, leather-bound copy of Spenser's poem and said, "If you can learn some of this then you'll be able to read anything." I rose to the challenge. I learned huge swathes of it off by heart and was so proud of myself for memorising something that difficult. It was proof that I could learn words just as well as anyone. ■



As told to Caroline Hutton



# You Couldn't Make It Up

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**MY BROTHER** lives in America and has just got a job with a very big fairground company out there. I was telling my neighbour this and mentioned that he'd even got a company car.

My neighbour looked at me strangely and commented, "I hardly think a dodgem is classed as a company car."

STEPHANIE THOMAS, *Clwyd*

**WHILE ON HOLIDAY** in Scotland, I noticed a touristy joke bottle for sale with the words "Real Scottish Mist" printed on it. When I looked at it and turned it upside down, it read: "Made in China".

STUART COLLINSON, *Edinburgh*

**SHORTLY AFTER** our morning assembly, a reception-class pupil arrived at my office door. Earnest and excited, he announced at the top of his voice, "My grandma is dead."

To which I replied, "I'm very sorry, John, I shall telephone your mother."

At which point he turned on his heel and was gone. Within a matter of



*"Go on, go...you know me,  
I always end up on my feet!"*

seconds he was back. Now even more earnest and excited he announced, at the top of his voice, "It's alright, Sir, she knows."

DON O'TOOLE, *Lancashire*

**MY MOTHER** ordered a cake from a local bakery with a message on top for someone who was retiring—but it went terribly wrong. When the cake was delivered to the party, the words on it read: "Best Wishes Colin And Underneath That Write We Will Miss

CARTOON: PETER A. KING

You." The bakery hadn't even spelled the word *underneath* properly!

**DANIELLE TRUBY**, *Hertfordshire*

**MY YOUNG NEPHEW** overheard me say I was getting married and was going to change my name to my fiancé's.

He looked at me for a moment and remarked, "I don't think Richard will suit you, Auntie Rachelle."

**RACHELLE HARDING**, *Cambridgeshire*

**THE FAMILY** were at my in-laws and, as we sat down to lunch, my daughter asked for a glass of water. Her grandmother reminded her, "You have to say the P-word."

Her little brother helped her out, saying, "Please." And she got her glass of water.

My son then said, "Now you've got to say the F-word." There was a deadly hush as we all exchanged rather embarrassed looks.

"Fank you!" he finished.

**ABIGAIL GEORGE**, *Wrexham*

**MY GRANDSON** Jesse (five) and granddaughter Kennedy (four) stayed the night at my house. The following morning I was putting vitamin-C cream on my face.

Kennedy was watching me and wanted to know what it was. I knew she'd want to try it, so I said, "It's a cream to stop wrinkles."

Dead serious, she replied, "It's not working."

**SHARON HART**, *by email*

**AFTER DOWNSIZING** and moving to the countryside, we invited our friends for lunch to see the place. As we were eating I said, "I've had a coil fitted".

I just couldn't understand why they were all laughing. Of course I meant to say "a cowl fitted", as we had birds nesting in the chimney. They were laughing because we're all in our late seventies!

**ELIZABETH WATKINSON**, *Yorkshire*

**AS PART OF** the training to become a barrister, you're required to dine in London at the Inns of Court for a set number of times before you qualify. On these occasions you're also required to wear a gown, which is provided for you and left hanging up in the cloakroom.

My mother, who was training to become a barrister, was running late one day for dining—not helped by the fact that it was also Memorial Sunday and parts of London were closed off. She rushed in by the skin of her teeth, grabbed a gown and sat down in the nick of time.

After some time had elapsed, thinking she'd managed to get away with arriving late, she was tapped on the shoulder by one of the attendants. He whispered in her ear that the gown she'd grabbed in her haste was in fact another gentleman's raincoat—and he would now like to wear it as he was leaving. My mother was mortified!

**DEBORAH BARHAM**, *East Sussex*

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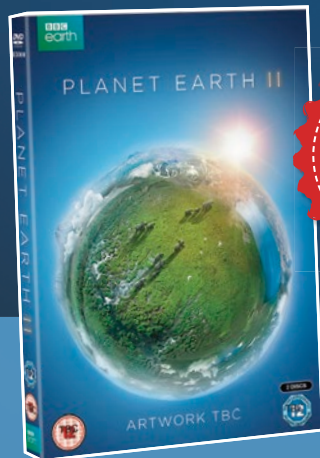
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IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

# Word Power

*The words in this month's quiz come from the book  
Favorite Words of Famous People by Lewis Burke Frumkes.  
Turn the page for answers—and to see which notable names  
picked these terms for top billing.*

BY EMILY COX & HENRY RATHVON

**1. plangent** *adj*—A: flexible. B: very loud. C: carefully detailed.

**2. ruckus** *n*—A: backpack. B: melee. C: dry gully.

**3. vermilion** *n*—A: ten-figure number. B: moth larva. C: bright red.

**4. chthonic** *adj*—A: frozen solid. B: of the underworld. C: having sharp claws.

**5. gormless** *adj*—A: non-flowering. B: lacking firm shape. C: stupid.

**6. interstitial** *adj*—A: beyond our solar system. B: in the spaces between. C: joined by stitches.

**7. unilateral** *adj*—A: one-sided. B: in alliance with. C: flat.

**8. palimpsest** *n*—A: spotted pony. B: leg brace. C: written-over document.

**9. beguiling** *adj*—A: twisted together. B: complementary. C: cleverly deceptive.

**10. lambent** *adj*—A: easily dissolved or dispersed. B: highly submissive. C: luminous.

**11. incarnadine** *adj*—A: flesh-coloured. B: reborn. C: not digestible.

**12. phosphorescent** *adj*—A: of ocean depths. B: glittering. C: soapy.

**13. ramshackle** *adj*—A: barnlike. B: rickety-looking. C: falsely imprisoned or detained.

**14. pixilated** *adj*—A: mentally unbalanced. B: elfin or gamine. C: grainy or blurry.

**15. qua** *prep*—A: in the capacity of. B: starting from. C: in the immediate neighborhood of.

## Answers

**1. plangent**—[B] very loud. My nephew blasts *plangent*, sad music in his room (director Wes Craven).

**2. ruckus**—[B] melee. There was quite a *ruckus* when the fire alarm went off (Penn Jillette of Penn & Teller).

**3. vermilion**—[C] bright red. The theatre had eye-catching *vermilion* walls (writer A S Byatt).

**4. chthonic**—[B] of the underworld. I love the story of Orpheus's *chthonic* journey (Margaret Atwood).

**5. gormless**—[C] stupid. The writer dismissed his critics as *gormless* twits (author Barbara Taylor Bradford).

**6. interstitial**—[B] in the spaces between. The film's action sequences were thrilling; I found the *interstitial* scenes rather dull (Al Gore).

**7. unilateral**—[A] one-sided. The volleyball squad had a *unilateral* advantage in height (editor Helen Gurley Brown).

**8. palimpsest**—[C] written-over document. My address book is a *palimpsest*—I keep erasing names and adding new ones (Joyce Carol Oates).

**9. beguiling**—[C] cleverly deceptive. Those *beguiling* ads persuaded me to buy a phone I didn't really need (playwright Wendy Wasserstein).

**10. lambent**—[C] luminous. Sofia loved hiking by the *lambent* moonlight (activist Andrea Dworkin).

**11. incarnadine**—[A] flesh-coloured. Mia chose a pretty *incarnadine* dress for the wedding (Arthur C Clarke).

**12. phosphorescent**—[B] glittering. The *phosphorescent* firefly flew right into the jar (John Updike).

**13. ramshackle**—[B] rickety-looking. Jack carefully stepped onto the *ramshackle* bridge (Ray Bradbury).

**14. pixilated**—[A] mentally unbalanced. We're worried by Dad's *pixilated* behavior (Mark Hamill).

**15. qua**—[A] in the capacity of. Forget the painter's political views—can we enjoy her art *qua* art? (Dave Barry).

### WORD OF THE DAY\*

#### VELLICHOR:

the strange wistfulness of used bookshops.

#### Alternative suggestions:

"Velvety smooth alcoholic drink."

"To be absolutely certain about something."

"What a German puts on his feet when he's going to do an outside job."

### VOCABULARY RATINGS

**9 & below:** almost famous

**10-12:** famous

**13-15:** infamous





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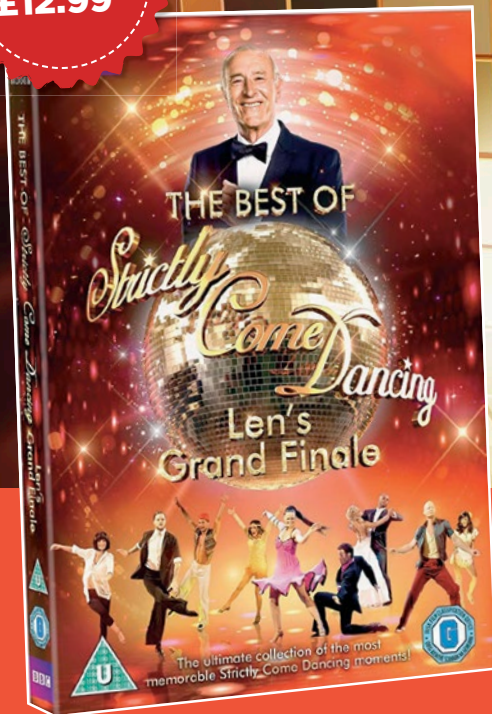
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# BrainTeasers

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

## X MARKS THE SPOT

Identify which of the numbers in the grid below is X if:

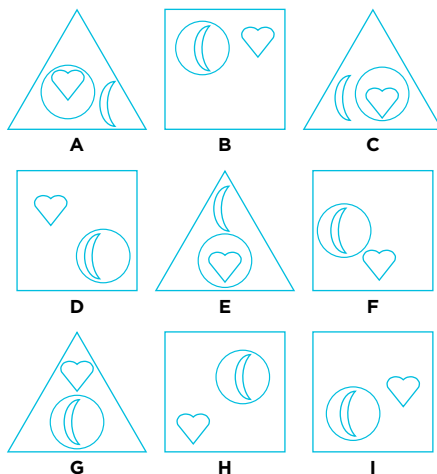
- Three cells away from X is a number that's three times X.
- Two cells away from X is a number that's twice X.
- Three cells away from X is a number that's equal to X plus four.
- Three cells away from X is a number that's equal to five times X plus two.

The distance between cells can be counted horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

2	8	10	13	5
11	3	23	6	7
16	21	20	19	30
18	25	27	28	29
1	9	4	14	17

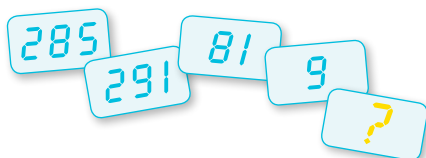
## ODD ONE OUT

Which figure doesn't belong in the set?



## GOT YOUR NUMBER

What number belongs on the blank card?

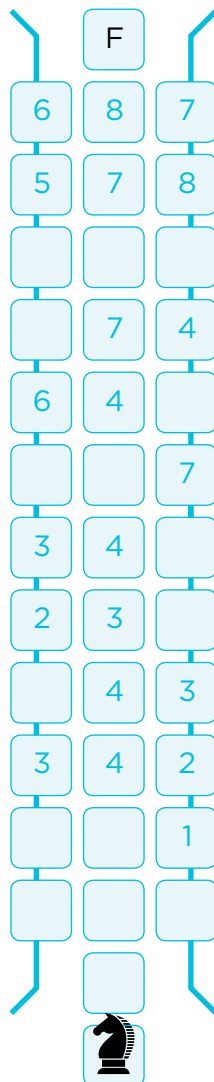
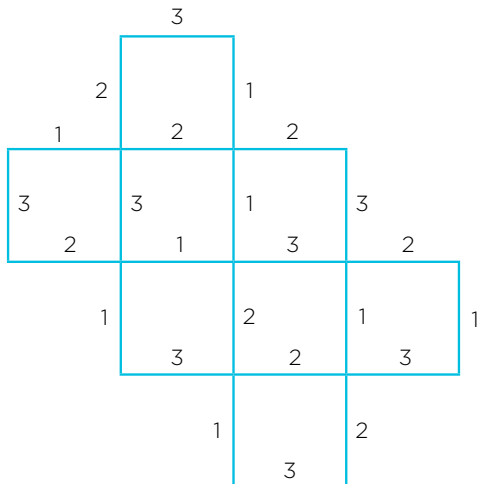


## BRIDGE COLLAPSE

Sir Kaspahad, knight of Chesssylvania, rides up to the bridge in the diagram. He starts on the lowermost square and moves as a chess knight does: jumping two squares in any row or column and one to the side. After his first move, the parts of the bridge marked “1” fall away; then, after his second move, the “2” parts fall and so on. How can he safely cross the bridge to the square marked “F”?

## 1-2-3 GO AGAIN

Find a way to draw a continuous loop that follows each line segment once and only once. You must trace segments in numerical order; that is, “1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3...” As you move along, every corner and every intersection you pass is the beginning of a new segment. It’s OK for one part of your solution to meet or cross another at the intersections.



# CROSSWISE

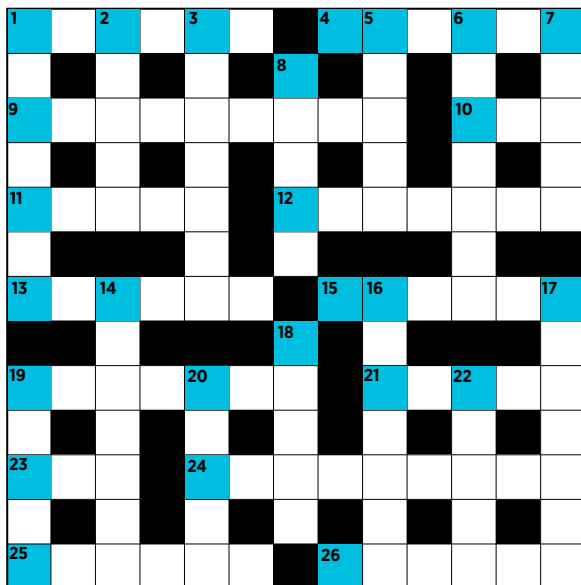
Test your general knowledge

## ACROSS

- 1 Portable rain-shield (6)
- 4 Funny TV show based on everyday life (6)
- 9 Present formally (9)
- 10 Move your head in agreement (3)
- 11 Hint of colour (5)
- 12 Loathsome (7)
- 13 Strong, vigorous (6)
- 15 Snow White's companions (6)
- 19 Graph, chart (7)
- 21 On a ship (2,3)
- 23 Make an enquiry (3)
- 24 Take a nap (2,2,5)
- 25 The Mad \_\_\_, *Alice in Wonderland* tea-party host (6)
- 26 Bram \_\_\_, author of *Dracula* (6)

## DOWN

- 1 Sore bubble on the foot (7)
- 2 Frequently (5)
- 3 Female of a pride (7)
- 5 Unfit, bungling (5)
- 6 Pine or fir (7)
- 7 Demonstrate clothes (5)
- 8 Easy (job) (5)
- 14 Shelf support (7)
- 16 Thingummy (7)



- 17 Run away (7)
- 18 Will \_\_\_, *I, Robot* actor (5)
- 19 Sudden \_\_\_, extra time in sport (5)
- 20 Scoundrel, rascal (5)
- 22 Dust particle (5)

**ANSWERS**

**Across:**

1 Brolly 4 Sitcom 9 Introduce  
10 Nod 11 Tinge 12 Hateful 13 Robust  
15 Dwarfs 19 Diagram 21 At Sea 23 Ask  
24 Go To Sleep 25 Hatter 26 Stoker

**Down:**

1 Blister 2 Often 3 Lioness  
5 Inept 6 Confier 7 Model 8 Cushy  
14 Bracket 16 Whatsit 17 Scaper  
Smith 19 Death 20 Rogue 22 Speck

## Brainteasers: Answers

### X MARKS THE SPOT

3.

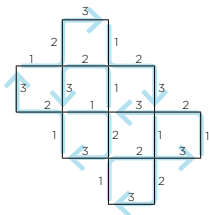
### ODD ONE OUT

G. In a triangle, the heart lies inside the circle and the crescent lies outside of it. In a square, the reverse occurs.

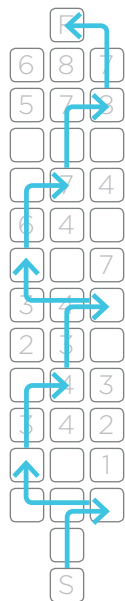
### GOT YOUR NUMBER

3. The number on each card is half of the number on the previous card when read upside down. (291 is half of 582, 81 is half of 162 and so on.)

### 1-2-3 GO AGAIN



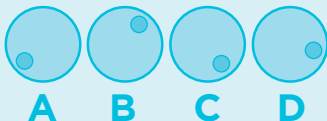
### BRIDGE COLLAPSE



## £50 PRIZE QUESTION

### Answer published in the February issue

In this sequence, which of the lettered alternatives should replace the question mark?



The first correct answer we pick on January 4 wins £50!\* Email **excerpts** @**readersdigest.co.uk**

## ANSWER TO DECEMBER'S PRIZE QUESTION

### Betty should pay Jon £3:

£3 is paid for every dot on the concealed underside of the die.

### AND THE £50 GOES TO...

Peter Paine, Suffolk

\* Entry is open only to residents of the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Republic of Ireland aged 18 or over. It is not open to employees of Vivat Direct Limited (t/a *Reader's Digest*), its subsidiary companies and all other persons associated with the competition.



# Laugh!

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**A WIFE ARRIVES HOME LATE** at night from a business trip and quietly opens the door to her bedroom. But she notices four legs instead of two peeking out from under the duvet.

Seized by a fit of rage, she reaches into the cupboard for the cricket bat and starts hitting the bed until the screaming stops.

Still in shock, she lurches to the kitchen to have a drink. As she enters, she sees her husband there, reading a magazine.

"Oh welcome home, love," he says. "Your parents came for a visit, so I let them have our bedroom. I hope you said hello." **GRAHAME JONES, London**

**NEVER DATE** a tennis player. Love means nothing to them.

**COMEDIAN MATT WINNING**

**TEACHER:** "If I gave you two cats and another two cats and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Seven."

Teacher: "No, listen carefully...if I gave you two cats, and another two

cats and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Seven."

Teacher: "Let me put it to you differently. If I gave you two apples, and another two apples and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Six."

Teacher: "Good. Now if I gave you two cats, and another two cats and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Seven!"

Teacher: "Johnny, where the heck do you get seven from?"

Johnny: "Because I've already got a flaming cat!" **SEEN AT LAUGHFACTORY.COM**

**A DOCTOR** tells a rich old man that he's going to die if he doesn't get a new heart soon. The old man tells the doctor to search the world for the best heart available—money is no object.

A few days later the doctor calls the old man and says he's found three hearts but they're all expensive. The old man reminds the doctor that he's filthy rich and

implores him to tell him about the donors they came from.

"Well, the first one belonged to a 22-year-old marathon runner; never smoked, ate only the most healthy food, was in peak condition when he was hit by a bus. No damage to the heart. But it costs £100,000!"

The old man, waving off the last part about the cost, asks the doctor to tell him about the second donor.

"This one belonged to a 16-year-old long-distance swimmer, secondary-school kid. Lean and mean. Drowned when he hit his head on the side of the pool. That heart'll set you back £150,000!"

"OK," said the old man, "what about the third heart?"

"Well this one belonged to a 58-year-old man; smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, weighed over 20 stone, never exercised, drank like a fish...this heart is going for £500,000."

"Five-hundred grand?" the old man exclaimed. "Why so expensive?"

"Well," said the doctor, "this heart belonged to a lawyer—so it was never used."

LEE HALL, *Kent*

**WHAT HAPPENS** to a frog's car when it breaks down?

It gets toad away.

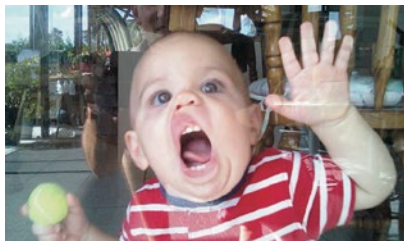
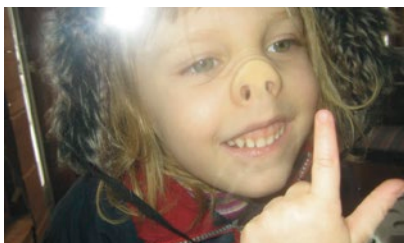
SEEN ONLINE

**MY NAME IS FIN**, which means it's very hard for me to end emails without sounding pretentious.

COMEDIAN FIN TAYLOR

## UP CLOSE...

...and personal. Why is it you can't keep kids away from a good pane of glass? (seen at sadanduseless.com)



**MY DAD HAS SUGGESTED** that I register for a donor card. He's a man after my own heart.

COMEDIAN MASAI GRAHAM

**HAVING JUST BEEN** taken home by taxi, a man asked the driver how much the fare was.

"£10.50," the driver said.

Finding only £10 in his pocket, the man asked the driver, "Could you reverse back a bit?"

ANDREW MCNAMEE, *South Lanarkshire*

**IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL**, a nun places a note in front of a pile of apples: *Only take one. God is watching.* Further down the line is a pile of biscuits. A little boy writes his own note: *Take all you want. God is watching the apples.*

SEEN ONLINE

**DID YOU HEAR** about the kidnapping at school?

It's OK—he woke up.

SEEN AT SHORT-FUNNY.COM

**I OFTEN CONFUSE** Americans and Canadians. By using long words.

COMEDIAN GARY DELANEY

**"JUST RELAX,"** the hospital staff kept telling Jim—but it was to no avail. Jim's wife was in labour and he was a nervous wreck. After what seemed like an eternity—to both Jim and the hospital staff—a nurse came out with the happy news.

"It's a girl!" she cried.

"Thank God, a girl!" exclaimed Jim. "At least she won't have to go through what I just went through."

SEEN ONLINE



## SEVEN YEARS OF WISDOM

*Mum-of-three @kellyoxford regularly posts about the conversations she has with her daughter Bea. Is it just us, or is she the coolest seven-year-old ever?*

**"Seven-year-old: 'Do women get their periods on weekends too?'**

**Me: 'Yes.'**

**Seven-year-old mutters to herself: 'Jesus Christ.'"**

"'Why do they beep out swear words on TV? They show people getting hurt and swearing isn't worse than that,' said my seven-year-old daughter."

**"Seven-year-old daughter walked in the room, casually confirmed, 'You have a backstory to why you're evil, right?' And walked out."**

"My seven-year-old just saw me topless and stared, whispering, 'I'm never gonna take off my bra.' :("

# 60-Second Stand-Up

We had a chat with the cheeky **Dom Joly**

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE OF YOUR OWN JOKES?

We once travelled all the way to Newfoundland, Canada, to smash a pair cymbals behind a man's head. A lot of effort to do something pointless is very funny to me.

## HAVE YOU FOUND ANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY TO BE FUNNIER THAN OTHERS?

No. I could be sold-out one night, with people howling with laughter—and then on the next night, five miles down the road, there'd be just seven people throwing things at me.

## WHAT'S YOUR MOST MEMORABLE HECKLE EXPERIENCE?

A guy stood up and said, "Oi! Dom Joly! What are you going to do about my cat?" I'd never met him before.

## ANY FUNNY TALES ABOUT A TIME YOU BOMBED ON STAGE?

Oh yes. For every one thing that works on *Trigger Happy TV*, 40 things don't.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ONE-LINER?

"My egg must be boiled." I pretended to be a Dutch tourist and repeatedly said this to a black-cab driver.



## WHO'S YOUR COMEDY INSPIRATION?

Paul Kaye, as the character Dennis Pennis. He once said to Demi Moore, "If the script called for it, and the money was right, would you consider keeping your clothes on in one film?"

## IF YOU WERE A FLY ON THE WALL, WHOSE WALL WOULD YOU BE ON?

I'd like to be a fly on the wall of Donald Trump's home for the day. I'd be a male fly, though, otherwise he'd try and touch my fly lady parts. ■

Watch Dom in the all-new series of *Trigger Happy TV* on [channel4.com](http://channel4.com)

# Beat the Cartoonist!



Think of a witty caption for this cartoon—the three best suggestions, along with the cartoonist's original, will be posted on our website in mid-January. If your entry gets the most votes, you'll win **£100 and a framed copy of the cartoon**, with your caption.

Submit to [captions@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:captions@readersdigest.co.uk) or online at [readersdigest.co.uk/caption](http://readersdigest.co.uk/caption) by January 13. We'll announce the winner in our March issue.

## December's Winner



It was close this month, with cartoonist Steve Jones coming a respectable second with his caption: **"It gets worse—I've heard they put a lighted candle inside**

**your head too."** However, the crown goes to Gerhard Ogbeide, who won over 40 per cent of the votes with his clever pun: **"I don't know about you, but I'm simply not carved out for Halloween."** Good work!

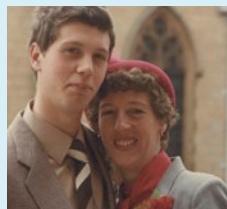
CARTOONS: STEVE JONES

## IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE



### "I Remember": Chris Tarrant

The TV presenter chats about his life and the toughest job he's ever had.



## Mind The Gap

Meet the couples whose affections have traversed the decades.

### Plus

- Best of British: Fish and Chips
- The Other Honolulu
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\*Euromonitor research conducted September 2016. For more information visit <http://www.olay.co.uk/en-gb/3pointnight>