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# Reader's digest

DECEMBER 2016

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**Tony Robinson:**  
“I’ve always had  
great resilience”

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## EDITOR'S LETTER



**WE CAN LEARN SO MUCH FROM OLDER PEOPLE**, including how to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

With the number of people reaching their 100th birthday doubling every decade in the UK, we asked three centenarians to share their secrets on p74. We hope this inspires you to get involved with Age UK's Christmas appeal on p82, while on p20 we chat to one of Age UK's ambassadors—our cover star Sir Tony Robinson, who discusses his far-reaching career.

For a lot of people, however, the festive season is all about the knotty problem of feeding a huge number of family and friends. But don't fret—we've got all the tips you'll need on p53. We've even managed to make sprouts seem exciting...

Finally, after two and a half years as editor, I'll be handing over to my wonderful assistant Fiona Hicks on next month. Thank you for all your support in that time—it's the readers who have made my job such fun!

Tom Browne

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## The most wonderful time of the year

Deck the halls and pour out the brandy—Christmas is here again! The elves have been busy over at **readersdigest.co.uk**, where you can learn how to have an ethical Christmas, the secret to cooking sprouts people actually want to eat and how to beat the dreaded festive bloat. Kick off the merriment by heading to **readersdigest.co.uk/Christmas**

## A year at the pictures

As 2016 comes to a close, we're looking back on the best books and films of the year. *I, Daniel Blake* (right) has made the cut—but what about your favourites?



We're also warming up for 2017 with a sneak peek at the television that will have us glued to our sofas for the foreseeable. Block out your schedule and visit **readersdigest.co.uk/entertainment** 🖱

## SANTA'S LITTLE HELPERS? HARDLY

Meet the pets who've gone out of their way to ruin Christmas for everyone. Bah humbug!



See the full gallery at **readersdigest.co.uk/humbug**



# Over to You

LETTERS ON THE OCTOBER ISSUE

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

## ★ LETTER OF THE MONTH...

I do so agree with Philippa Gregory's suggestion in "Making History" that history lessons in schools should start with the present day and work backwards. At my traditional grammar school, we began with the rise

of the Sumerian civilisation around 5400BC, continued in strict chronological order and—to my best recollection—just about made it to the start of the Industrial Revolution.

That being the case, my knowledge of events from the start of Victoria's reign onwards was decidedly sketchy until I began to educate myself. Surely it's more important for our young people to gain an understanding of 21st-century issues before facing them with the family squabbles of Plantagenets, Tudors or Stuarts?

**MAGGIE COBBETT, North Yorkshire**



## SOCIAL MUDDLE

Olly Mann's article about social media, "Making Unwanted Connections", really struck a chord with me. I'm a regular user of Facebook, but only in a basic way. In fact, I'm a self-confessed "un-media-savvy" type. I've tried, and failed, to get to grips with Twitter,

and I've unsuccessfully dabbled with LinkedIn—but that's as far as it goes. I hadn't realised that "social media" is a modern-age skill!

After having read the article, I logged into my previously abandoned LinkedIn account. I was disgruntled to be told that my profile is "weak".

**JANE GILL, Surrey**

## A GRAND DAY OUT

I enjoyed “Best of British: Roman Britain”. When visiting Chichester, our family went to Fishbourne Roman Palace. On arriving, we thought it looked like a school or unused leisure centre, but don’t be put off. Inside there were amazing mosaics and walls, with even more remains outside.

The site is much bigger than we expected, and the friendly staff gave excellent talks on the history—so good that we went back for a second one later in the day!

**MARY METHLEY, Oxfordshire**

## MYSTERY SOLVED?

Thank you for your article “Mystery Stomach Pain”. I’m in my fifties and for many years I’ve suffered from alternating constipation and diarrhoea, but I just regarded it as “one of those things” that happens as we age. As I read the article one word immediately jumped out at me: “heartburn”. I’ve been having increasing problems with heartburn recently, but had never made the connection with my bowel problems and IBS.

I’ve now started keeping a food diary and I’ll be logging any instances of bowel irregularities too. Thanks to

your informative article, I think I may be on my way to solving this mystery—and hopefully curing it.

**ANDREW BEDFORD, West Yorkshire**

## SIMPLE PLEASURES

It was good to see your pudding of the month in “Food and Drink” was a simple semolina pudding. There are too many chefs’ recipes printed in magazines that seem too complicated for the inexperienced to try. Also, some items on long lists of ingredients aren’t readily available or too expensive to buy for only occasional use.

The children loved the creamy semolina I called “comfort pudding” when I was a school cook. The only disappointing aspect was that after all the seconds were served up, there was rarely a spoonful left for me!

**HONOR WOODCOCK, Fife**

## GO JO!

Long distance runner Jo Pavey is a woman after my own heart with some of her comments in “If I Ruled the World”. I couldn’t agree more that it should be acceptable to have a messy house! I would far rather spend time with my daughters outdoors than be inside obsessing over housework.

**MELANIE LODGE, West Yorkshire**

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# SEE THE WORLD

Turn the page ➡➡







# ...DIFFERENTLY



The gentoo penguin can swim up to 22mph through the water before piercing its surface, shooting through the air and “landing” on solid ground. That makes these otherwise flightless birds the fastest of their kind.

Speed is also a must when they fight among themselves for the best nesting locations on Cuverville Island in Antarctica. Here, during November and December, this meagre two square miles of land is shared by up to 9,000 mating penguin couples.



Why a long-planned round of home improvement is causing **Olly Mann** so much worry and guilt

# Arrested Development?



**Olly Mann**  
is a writer,  
radio presenter  
and serial  
podcaster, with  
shows including  
*Answer Me  
This!*, *The  
Media Podcast*  
and *The  
Modern Mann*

☞ **WE'RE GETTING AN EXTENSION.** We only moved in three-and-a-half years ago; upgrading from our urban flat to a semi-detached house in the sticks. At first our new home seemed enormous, what with its front-garden path, staircase, French doors, attic, garage and many other cottagey features that so enthrall the city-dwelling Millennial (A fireplace! A gate! A gnome!).

But now we're getting an extension—or at least we've applied for planning permission, but we're likely to get the greenlight because neighbours on both sides have added rooms to their properties. Mann HQ should soon boast a front hall, a utility room, a larger kitchen, a bigger study, a double-height bedroom, a downstairs toilet, an en-suite bathroom, a walk-in wardrobe, a skylight and an internal balcony. That's *two* more toilets, folks! One for me, one for the wife, one for the kid. We can all poop together. Exciting times.

**SO WHY DON'T I FEEL EXCITED?** Whenever I contemplate our extension (and I think about it *a lot*: every time I traverse laminate flooring; every time a Velux ad comes on telly; every time I'm within a mile of B&Q), I feel a tad nervous. What if we don't get planning permission because our bribes to the planning office go unnoticed? (I jest! Hertsmere County Council are, of course, entirely incorruptible and—let me be clear—simply wonderful people, each and every one.)



eva bee

Then there's the disruptive building work: it's going to take around six months, I reckon, and that's lots of early-morning ceiling-drilling, lots of cups of tea for the builders, lots of "Will this dust kill the cat?!"

There's the cost to consider too: we're going to have to borrow more against the house, increasing our mortgage payments, to afford it. I'm freelance and my wife works part-time following maternity leave.



There's little room in the budget for anything to go wrong.

Perhaps all these things, floating round my mind, prevent me jumping for joy as I consider our new kitchen work surfaces, megaflo boiler and underfloor heating. But I think there's another factor at play: guilt.

I know, I know: middle-class guilt, how preposterous!

Particularly so when there are so many problems in the world. But I can't help it, I feel it: guilt that I'm in a position to consider making improvements to my home, when so many of my peers will never afford one of their own. Guilt that I'm borrowing more money to make it happen, a luxury never granted to my grandparents' generation, who bought all they had with money they'd earned. And, perhaps most pressingly, guilt that I'm turning our Edwardian homestead—until the 1980s a council property, designated for staff of a nearby hospital—into another open-plan chic “space” for middle-class professionals. Guilt, basically, that I'm gentrifying my house.

This is silly, of course, because it's not as if the changes we're making are for the benefit of anyone else: we're not pimping up the property to sell it

on for a profit, or flooding it with new features to keep up with the Joneses. We've thought long and hard, having lived in the building since 2013, about what might make our lives better, so our family can live here for years to come—perhaps even the rest of our lives. And we're trying to keep as many period features as possible.



**I feel guilt that  
I'm turning  
our Edwardian  
homestead  
into another  
chic space for  
middle-class  
professionals**

**BUT I KEEP COMING BACK** to that morning; that dull February morning when we first fell in love with the house. It was perhaps the tenth or eleventh property we'd viewed, and we were beginning to think we'd never find a home we'd want to buy. Then we drove up to this cute cottage, surrounded by open countryside, and just knew we wanted to live

in it. It had a quaint porch with roses climbing up from the garden. It had a sense of character and history. An eccentric charm. A weird bolt running through the living-room ceiling. It was everything we wanted, because it wasn't everything we didn't want. It was anti-suburbia.

In our extension plans, currently being considered by the council, the porch has been scrapped. It was the porch or the front hall, and we wanted a hall because we “need” somewhere

to park our boy's buggy. We've tried to echo the triangular shape of the porch in the roof instead. It's not as pretty. The views are amplified, but only through the addition of many more windows, which are, somehow, less homely.

I wonder if my melancholic train of thought about what is, essentially, an incredible extravagance is really

anxiety about getting older: Getting An Extension is something that grown-ups do, not young people. But I also worry that in making our home more convenient for us, we may strip it of the very qualities that once made it so appealing.

But all things considered, I'd rather mull over my thoughts in a bespoke, freshly-painted home office... ■



## BEYOND THE BLACK CAT

*So you've avoided walking under that ladder or putting up an umbrella indoors. Unfortunately, there are many more superstitions you need to be aware of from around the world:*

**France:** it's good luck to step in dog poo with your left foot, but bad luck to step in it with your right.

**Russia:** carrying an empty bucket, or even seeing someone carrying an empty bucket, is a bad omen. Tsar Alexander II was reportedly assassinated by a man with an empty bucket.

**Senegal:** keep your travel plans to yourself—if anyone learns about your upcoming holiday or move, it's destined to be ruined.

**Germany:** it's bad luck to say cheers with water, because you're literally wishing death on everyone with whom you're drinking.

**Rwanda:** women shouldn't eat goat meat, because it will cause them to grow facial hair.

**Malaysia:** sitting on a pillow will cause your bottom and backside to be covered in boils, blisters and other sores.

**Portugal:** don't walk backwards—it teaches the devil your path.

**Egypt:** it's bad luck to open and close a pair of scissors without cutting anything. What's even worse is leaving them open—you're cutting evil spirits that linger in the air, and they'll get angry.

SOURCE: DIPLY.COM



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# Films

Movie  
of the  
Month

BY TOM BROWNE

■ **DRAMA: *SULLY*** At the age of 86, Clint Eastwood shows no sign of stopping, and this—the 35th film he’s directed—shows off his flair for dramatic tension. The “Sully” of the title is Captain Chesley Sullenberger (Tom Hanks), who made headlines in 2009 when the Airbus he was flying out of New York was the victim of a bird strike, forcing an emergency landing on the Hudson River. Although lauded as a hero, Sullenberger is haunted by the incident and harshly questioned by the authorities, who claim that ditching in the river was unnecessary and dangerous.

The flashback structure of the movie is a little awkward and the accuracy of the crash investigation is questionable, but this is still an amazing story, skillfully told and acted—even though you don’t want to watch it before you jet off on holiday.

■ **SCI-FI: *PASSENGERS*** Oscar-winner Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pine co-star as passengers on a spaceship transporting thousands of people to a colony planet. When they’re woken early, that have to work out what’s gone wrong with the ship and reconcile their growing feelings for each other. Like 2014’s *Interstellar*, this combines sci-fi spectacle with intimacy in a script that’s apparently been exciting interest for several years.



Aaron Eckhart and Tom Hanks struggle for control in *Sully*

■ **COMEDY: *WHY HIM?*** The title refers to the question many parents have asked when meeting their daughter’s new boyfriend—in this case, the wealthy but profane and overbearing Laird Mayhew (James Franco). The wonderful Bryan Cranston and Megan Mullally star as the horrified parents, who their besotted daughter (Zoey Deutch) tries to win around during their five-day visit, while Laird plans a proposal...

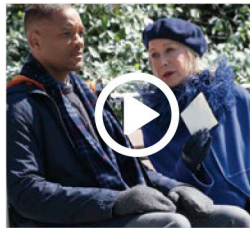




■ **BIG BUDGET: ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY** The success of last year's *The Force Awakens* has certainly whetted the public appetite for more *Star Wars* material, and now comes this prequel, set before the events of the original 1977 film. Felicity Jones and Diego Luna star as members of the Rebel Alliance, who plot to steal the plans for the Galactic Empire's Death Star. Gareth Edwards—of *Godzilla* and *Monsters* fame—directs.

## ■ **DRAMA: COLLATERAL BEAUTY**

Another Christmas, another painfully earnest drama set in New York. Will Smith is Howard Inlet, an advertising executive struggling with the tragic loss of his daughter. Over the course of the film, he meets three people representing different elements—Keira Knightley (“Love”), Jacob Latimore (“Time”) and Helen Mirren (“Death”)—who help him move on. Not for everyone.



## DVD of the month

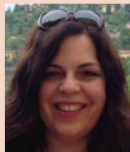
### ■ **JULIETA\***

Pedro Almodóvar's moving adaptation of three Alice Munro short stories.



## On Your Radar Donna Smith, writer

**WATCHING: *A Place in the Sun* (Channel 4)** A programme about people buying homes in sunny countries is the perfect antidote to winter blues.



**READING: *The Humans* by Matt Haig** I'm re-reading this for the fourth time—it's witty and wise.

**ONLINE: OpenLearn** I've just completed the free “What Is Poetry?” Open University course, and I now have a huge back-catalogue of poetry!

**LISTENING: Radio 4** The variety of topics covered each day is mind-blowing. It's a rich source of inspiration for my writing.

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

# Music

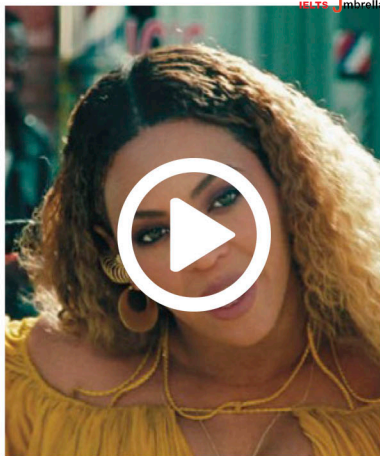
BY ANNA WALKER

The  
Best of  
2016

## ALBUM OF THE YEAR

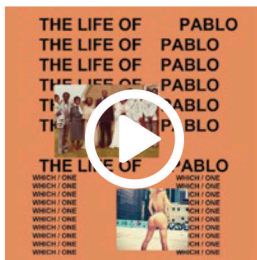
### *Lemonade* by Beyoncé

This sensational visual album caused an internet storm upon its surprise release back in April—and rightly so. It's a triumph. The story of Beyoncé reacting to her husband's (rapper Jay Z) infidelity, it's an R&B record of dark, dazzling anger, razor-sharp sass and irrepressible strength, cut through with lilts of blues, rock, gospel and dancehall.



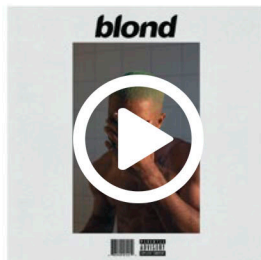
### ART ROCK: *Blackstar* by David Bowie

The world mourned in January at the news of Bowie's death. Released just two days before he passed, *Blackstar* is his 25th album. Ethereal and odd, it's a lush, jazz-infused record, fittingly absurd for the final work of this boundary-defying icon.



### HIP HOP: *The Life of Pablo* by Kanye West

It's easy to forget how talented Kanye West is. His latest work wrestles with the discord between family life and the rap game. The album might be conflicted, but it's also joyful, reflective and—like anything West creates—very funny.



### POP: *Blond* by Frank Ocean

Four years in the making, this hotly anticipated album delivers everything that Ocean's absence promised. Responding meditatively to US police brutality, his distorted and dreamlike hymns are sewn through with moving interviews with his family. ■





# *From Turnips to Titles*

For Sir Tony Robinson, the path from drama school to knight of the realm, via *Blackadder* and *Time Team*, has been a long and varied one. And, as he reveals to **Tom Browne**, he's not exactly sure how he got there...

## How on earth should I address him?

That's my main thought as I wait for Sir Tony Robinson to answer the phone for our interview. The prologue to his highly readable new autobiography speaks of his shock at receiving a knighthood in 2013, and he doesn't seem like the type of person to insist on formality. So what should it be? Sir Tony? Mr Robinson? Or maybe just Tony?

"Nowadays, nobody knows how to address a knight," he says good-humouredly at the start of our chat. "I often I get called 'Sir Robinson,' because in a lot of organisations your first and last names are entered into a computer, and the 'Sir' is put down as your first name. Is there irritation when somebody gets it wrong? Well, maybe occasionally!"

I make a mental note at this point, but he seems pretty relaxed about it. Of course, it's been three years since he was ennobled, so has he got used to Sir Tony yet?

"I do forget it most of the time. For the first six months, I thought, *God, this is going to be at the forefront of my mind for the rest of my life*. But now whole weeks go by and it doesn't impinge. I'll get a letter that says 'Sir Tony,' or a waiter will come up to me in a restaurant and say, 'This way, Sir Tony,' and I'll think, *S\*\*\*, that's me!*"

**For those who only know Tony** as the turnip-loving Baldrick in the BBC sitcom *Blackadder*, or the presenter



of Channel 4's *Time Team*, it may be surprising to learn just how far-reaching his career has been. In the early chapters of his book, we're introduced to characters from Tony's drama-school days, such as Steve Marriott (later of *The Small Faces*) and Vivian MacKerrell (immortalised by Richard E Grant in the cult film





*Tony with Blackadder co-star Rowan Atkinson: "I wasn't dropped fully formed into the role of Baldrick"*

*Withnail & I*). What it was like to encounter those people?

"Well, you have no notion that they will be any different from your other friends," Tony replies with a chuckle. "It wasn't until *Withnail & I* came out that I began to put inverted commas around my relationship with Vivian. I was always quite impressed by him

and flattered that he wanted to be friends with me, but he was just another guy at drama school. It was the same with Steve."

*Withnail & I*, of course, tells the tragic tale of a struggling actor, and Tony's autobiography serves as a rather salutary lesson in how tough this world can be, where failure,

rejection and uncertainty lurk round every corner.

"I know in any job it hurts when you get the boot," says Tony, recalling how he lost out on a role in Dennis Potter's TV play *Blue Remembered Hills*. "But the trouble with actors is that their job is so closely identified with their personality. Any rejection seems like a rejection of them, rather than their ability, say, to solder two joints together."

Given the high drop-out rate, was he ever tempted to give up acting and drama after his early setbacks?

"No, I don't think I was," replies Tony after a thoughtful pause. "I've always had a huge doggedness about this profession. It doesn't have to be acting in plays—it can be writing, it can be directing, it can be a whole host of different media. But this is where my heart lives. I remember the head of my drama school saying to me, 'Don't be an actor if you want to be an actor; be an actor if you have to be an actor.' I mean, for God's sake, it's not Syria, but I've always felt lucky that I have resilience."

**Although Tony claims** he never really believed in the concept of "the lucky break" ("that always seemed to me a rather Hollywood notion—Mickey Rooney or Judy Garland

might have a lucky break"), what happened next was, in retrospect, the luckiest break possible. I say in retrospect, because the production of *Blackadder*—beset by strikes and casting issues—nearly didn't happen at all, and Tony was on the verge of dropping out completely when it did happen.

It's noticeable, however, that his autobiography (despite being called *No Cunning Plan*), doesn't devote a disproportionate amount of space to Baldrick, his most famous role. It's easy to forget that Tony, who turned 70 this year, only landed the part at the age of 38, and his book is careful to put the episode into context.

"I think I wanted to write a kind of ticking time-bomb, to show that I wasn't dropped fully formed into the role of Baldrick," explains Tony. "I don't think I'd have been able to deal with celebrity—or all the other things



Tony with first wife Mary on their wedding day in 1972

I've been asked to do since—had it not been for the fact that *Blackadder* came along quite late.”

So fame would been harder at an earlier age?

“Oh, I'd have been ghastly if I'd become famous in my twenties! By the time it happened, I'd got two children, I'd undergone the death of loved ones, I'd had enormous knocks and learned how to deal with them.

When you're in your twenties, the likelihood is you'll think you've achieved success because you're God's gift. I certainly would have, I'm sure of it.”

“I mean,” he continues, warming to his theme, “you look at other people who've got knighthoods and you imagine some kind of blessed pathway, some grand strategic plan, some great loving figure who's guided you to the place your heart desired. None of that happened to me at all. It was all a great surprise after a life that's frankly been a shambles.”

This is a characteristically modest way of describing a path that's gone in some interesting directions. While many actors' memoirs are a fiesta of name-dropping and gossip, Tony's recollections are grounded by the twin pillars of family and politics. By far the most moving section deals

with his parents and their struggles with dementia, something that's motivated Tony's support for the Alzheimer's Society.

“My parents were so important in my life,” he confesses. “However much you might have demonstrated your love for them, you always think, *Oh my God, I never said enough, I never did enough.* I still feel emotional about it. I still feel that political

parties on both sides haven't really taken into consideration the fact that people are still human beings after retirement age. You hear an awful lot of the rhetoric, particularly in the run-up to elections, about how older people will be looked after by the next government, but it's bogus.”

“  
***I'd have  
been ghastly  
if I'd become  
famous in  
my twenties—  
I'd have  
thought I was  
God's gift***”

### Politics in one form or another

runs in Tony's veins, whether it's his time as vice-president of the actors' union Equity or his long-standing commitment to the Labour Party, culminating in his election to its National Executive Committee in 2000.

At the time of our interview, the Labour leadership contest is still in full swing, and it's clear that Tony has agonised over the direction in which it's going. Some of the online exchanges he's had with Jeremy



Corbyn supporters have been blunt, to say the least.

"It's amazing the contempt people have for me on social media," says Tony sadly, "just because I want to get the balance between leadership, power and principle. Those three things are incredibly difficult. But if you feel let down by politicians, this rage comes out and anyone who doesn't feel the same way is a class traitor. I understand that. Do I think they're right? Of course not. Would I have thought they were right 35 years ago? Probably yes.

"I got an extraordinary tweet last night that said, 'You're like a white man who's joined the ANC and told everyone to vote for a white man rather than Nelson Mandela.' It's a very torturous but also very revealing tweet—this idea that the person who you want to win is Mandela, and anyone opposed to him is akin to a South African fascist."

But although this might discourage some people, Tony simply doesn't do pessimism. Whether it's modern-day politics or the current state of television ("we're living in a golden age"), he seems to have a lot of hope for the future. Interestingly, the opening quotation of Tony's book is from one of his old Tory adversaries, William Waldegrave: "Happiness may not be something to pursue directly. Perhaps it's a side effect of working hard at something to the best of one's ability."

"That's certainly true for me," says Tony in conclusion. "I lot of people that get to my age feel an awful lot of doom and gloom. There's this sense that things can never get better. But I just don't think that's the case." ■

**Sir Tony's autobiography *No Cunning Plan* is out now. You can read more extracts from this interview at [readersdigest.co.uk/entertainment](http://readersdigest.co.uk/entertainment)**



## A BRILLIANT BATTLE OF WITS

In a wonderful act of cultured rebellion, a teenage son decided to give his father a spelling lesson—replying to a note pinned to their microwave with one of his own...

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Monty Don, 61, is one of the UK's best-loved garden writers and broadcasters. Since 2003 he's been the lead presenter of BBC2's *Gardeners' World*, ably assisted by his golden retriever Nigel

# Monty Don

## "I Remember"

**...BEING WRAPPED IN A TOWEL AND HELD BY MY MOTHER.** It's my earliest memory. She was kneeling on the bathroom floor and I was standing on her thighs, having just been lifted out of the tub.

My mother was busy and driven, and there wasn't a lot of touchy-feely stuff from her for any of us five children. It was the first and last time I recall being cuddled by her.

**...MY FATHER SEEMED LIKE THE ODD ONE OUT.** He'd been an only child and was a natural loner, but then found himself with a large, noisy family. He was a rather distant figure

to us; he'd go off to work and would always leave the table straight after dinner to retreat to his study.

When I was at university he sent me a recording he'd made of the evening birdsong. I was touched by his attempt to be on the same wavelength as me and to reach out; I was as much moved by the clumsiness of the gesture as I was by the gift.

**...THE SCARY GAMEKEEPERS.** I grew up in Hampshire and we always had dogs. All us children were assigned daily chores and I quickly cottoned on that taking



*Monty with the “charming and lovely” Nigel; (right) Monty’s father, who was also fond of dogs*

the dogs for a walk was a soft option—apart from the fear of meeting the gamekeepers.

They were a formidable father-and-son duo, Mr and Mr Brown. They both wore flat caps and drove a pale blue Land Rover, with a shotgun balanced menacingly between them. Even when I’d spotted them coming, the dogs would be blissfully unaware, chasing







*With Sarah, his wife of 33 years, whom he met while at Cambridge University*

the pheasants even as I frantically yelled at them. Then I'd get a proper telling-off from the Browns. I didn't hate them though, as I knew it wasn't personal—they were just doing their job. But I spent a lot of those walks hiding behind hedges.

**...I WAS VERY NAUGHTY.** Too naughty for my nice primary school; they couldn't cope with me at all and I was asked to leave.

I suppose I'd be called a "disruptive influence" today. I was also expelled from my secondary school, Malvern, and I even remember being kicked out of confirmation classes because I questioned Christianity! So I went to the local comprehensive after that.

### **...HAVING A DAMASCENE MOMENT SOWING CARROT SEEDS.**

Because I was coming home every day [after school], I was given the vegetable garden to look after. The soil around us was chalky and when it warmed up it had a very distinctive smell. I remember pouring the carrot seeds into my hand and being absolutely overwhelmed with the feeling that I was in the right place at the right time, and that I couldn't want for anything else.

Until then—aged 17—I'd thought that what I wanted was sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll. It took a few more years to work out that gardening was something that could be an important part of my life.



***The breakdown of our business was the only time I'd truly failed at anything—and I felt like I'd let everyone down***

**...KEEPING MY DOG GRETEL AT CAMBRIDGE.** In my first term my room was on a corner above traffic lights. The lorries stopped and then revved up their engines, and the streetlights kept me awake. I was a country boy and asked if I could move. I was given a room with two other students—one of whom remains a dear friend—and Gretel, my yellow Labrador, moved in with us. I'd walk her before anyone else was up. We also put chickens in our backyard and converted the outdoor loo into a henhouse.

**...LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.** Sarah was married when we met at Cambridge. But I knew she was the one. The fact that her husband was away in Nepal at the time and hadn't contacted her in three months was in my favour.

Soon after we met she needed some help with her tiny back garden, so I said I'd cut the grass for her—the lawn wasn't big enough to merit the purchase of a lawn mower. She left me to it but the only thing I could find to do the job was a pair of scissors.

I got down on my hands and knees, and had just about finished when she returned. I'll never forget the look on her face—a look I've grown to know well over the last 37 years. It was a mixture of utter disbelief mixed with, dare I say, approval.

I've always been of the opinion that there's no physical job one can't do. Of course, certain skilful jobs are beyond me, but I'll always give things requiring simple brawn a go.

**...FEELING DEEPLY ASHAMED AND HUMILIATED.** Sarah and I set up a jewellery business in the 1980s. It was successful and we were able to buy a beautiful home together. But we took on too much, got into debt and, like lambs to the slaughter, we lost everything, including our house.

The breakdown of our business was the only time I'd truly failed at anything and I felt like I'd let everyone down. I sank into depression.

**...LEARNING WHO MY FRIENDS WERE.** When something as huge as that happens, all the clichés come true—you find out that the people you thought were friends don't want to know you any more, while people to whom perhaps you hadn't given enough time go the extra mile. But what I learned most was that there's nothing you can't let go of. I cared about letting Sarah down, but I learned that love is more important than any possession. It got us through.

**...THE HEARTACHE OF GIVING ONE OF OUR DOGS AWAY.** We had two Blackdogs in the mid 1980s, but after three years I knew that Baffin would be happier elsewhere. He went to live on a Scottish island and had a lovely long life.

You can only give away what you most love because you do what's right for them. His brother Beaufort stayed with me; he was a one-man dog and I've always thought he was the most like me—a bit troubled, a bit of him that you couldn't quite get to...

**...RATS IN THE DRAWERS.** After we were forced to sell our home, we rented a farmhouse that hadn't been touched for over 30 years. We kept noticing that the fruit in the bowl appeared to be getting half-eaten, but it wasn't until I opened the cutlery drawer and saw a rat tail disappearing that we realised the house was infested. Our son Tom, only a few months old, slept in our room to make sure the rodents didn't get him. I can't begin to explain the chaos of our lives at that time.

We got a rat catcher and he taught me two things: rats must have access to water, so make sure you don't have any broken pipes, and they don't like being disturbed—so disturb them.

**...GOOSE AND BOILED POTATOES FOR CHRISTMAS LUNCH.** Sitting around the table in the rat house on Christmas day 1991 might have been







***Christmas 1991 was remarkably happy—we'd stripped down to the minimum, but the minimum was enough***

a low point. But I vividly remember it as a remarkably happy gathering. My wife and our three children were around me, we were healthy, wearing the silly hats and sharing the experience together...and eating potatoes and a cabbage I'd grown. We'd stripped down to the minimum, but the minimum was enough.

**...SEEING LONGMEADOW FOR THE FIRST TIME.** We were able to buy Longmeadow after my mother died and left me £47,000 of stocks and shares. We'd seen 68 other houses by then, but it took us only 30 seconds to decide that we wanted to live there.

**...TRYING TO DO MY JOB WELL.** I'd been working in TV for a long time before *Gardener's World* came my way in 2003.

I remember the first screen test I ever did for *This Morning* back in the early 1990s. I imagined I was talking to Sarah's Auntie Mary in Leominster. How can I explain this to someone who's intelligent but perhaps not knowledgeable on the

*Nigel receives many letters. "He soaks up the limelight on film and always seems to find the best bit of light"*



subject? How can I make sure this is accessible without being patronising?

I always felt at home gardening on TV and I take my job seriously. One of the paradoxical skills of presenting is to make it look like you're not trying too hard. To keep it natural I work out what I want to say, but not necessarily *how* to say it until it comes out my mouth on the day.

**...KNOWING NIGEL WAS GOING TO BE A STAR.** He soaks up the limelight on film and always seems to find the best bit of light to wander into or lie down in.

The degree of affection people have for him is extraordinary. He's charming and lovely, though not particularly clever—but that's the secret to his appeal. When he started to get letters addressed to him, I realised that he's the dog that people

want him to be. He plays his role as the everyman to perfection—he's the everydog.

**...REALISING THAT EVERY-THING IN LIFE IS CONNECTED.**

One of the great beauties of getting older is understanding that you don't have separate bits of your life and that everything impacts on another part. I see that no experience is wasted, that I'm simply the sum of it all.

I don't dwell on the past but accept what life has thrown at me and wouldn't change a thing. Acknowledging that has made me easier on myself and makes me a more contented man. ■

**As told to Caroline Hutton**

Monty's latest book *Nigel, My Family and Other Dogs* (Two Roads, £20) is out now.



## MIDDLE-CLASS FLIRTING

*There's nothing like a bit of bourgeois banter. Try these while in line at your local luxury deli...*

**"You had me at halloumi."**

"Is that a fair-trade banana in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see me?"

**"Want to come back to mine and watch me bake my own bread?"**

"Did it hurt, falling from heaven? Because I've got BUPA."

**"I like your dress. It would look great on my reclaimed parquet floor."**

SOURCE: THEPOKE.CO.UK



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**Refusing to ignore people in crisis**



Oh, those  
embarrassing  
bodily functions!  
What happens  
to your body as  
you get older—  
and what you can  
do about it

# ***DON'T WORRY,*** ***IT'S*** ***NORMAL***

BY JULIE STEWART



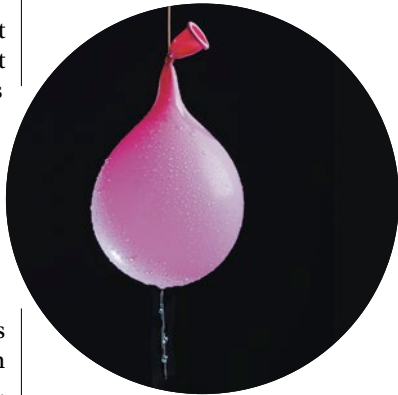
## 1 WHY HAVE I SPRUNG A LEAK?

EVERYBODY LOVES TO LAUGH, but what if a good joke makes you squirt a little? Stress urinary incontinence is pretty common, says Dr Alan Wein, chief of urology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. “The result is people can leak when they laugh, cough or sneeze.”

Blame the ageing body. “The nerves and structures that hold things in place—and prevent the urethra from moving excessively when you laugh, cough or sneeze—deteriorate,” he says. Pelvic muscle tears suffered during childbirth increase risk in women, while prostate surgery increases risk in men, says Wein.

One solution? it the loo more often. This leaves less fluid to leak from your bladder. Also learn to squeeze: contract your pelvic muscles as if stopping your urine midstream. Do this for ten seconds, ten contractions, ten times a day to strengthen your urinary sphincter muscles. Squeeze when you cough or sneeze.

Writing down what you eat and drink, and when you go to the toilet or leak, will help your doctor determine whether you have stress incontinence or “urge incontinence” (when your bladder muscles contract at the wrong time). Your doctor may advise a surgical fix, and can check for infection or bladder cancer.



## 2 WHEN DID MY BREATH BECOME GROSS?

**MOST BAD BREATH ODOUR** is bred on the back of your tongue, says Patricia Lenton, director of the Oral Health Clinical Research Clinic at the University of Minnesota. Your tongue is like a shag carpet, she says, and bacteria hide between the bumps. Plus, as we age, we take more medications. Many cause dry mouth, which exacerbates bad breath.

Solutions include cleaning your tongue with a smooth-edged tongue scraper, says Lenton. “Start as far back as you can.” A mouthwash with zinc and cetylpyridinium chloride (CPC) is your best bet against stinky mouth bacteria, studies suggest.

When your mouth is at an alkaline



pH, volatile sulphur compounds are released. When you eat, your mouth becomes more acidic, reducing the stench, adds Lenton.

Get checked to rule out tooth decay and gum disease, or even an underlying health problem, such as a chronic sinus infection or kidney disease.

### 3 **WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY TOENAILS?**

**CRACKED, BRITTLE, DISCOLOURED** and thick nails from a fungal infection are embarrassing, especially if you like open-toed shoes. Fungus feeds on the nail, damaging it, says Dr David Tran, an assistant professor at the California School of Podiatric Medicine at Samuel Merritt University.

Age is the biggest risk factor, according to a paper published in *PLOS Pathogens*. People with diabetes and

conditions that limit circulation are also susceptible. Early treatment with a prescription topical solution such as Jublia or Kerydin is best. A more severe infection may need oral meds that require liver checks for harmful side effects, Tran says. Another option: laser treatments work in 80 per cent of cases, one study shows.

Be sure to visit a doctor if your nails change markedly. Discolouration can be the result of skin cancer, which is often diagnosed late when it occurs under nails.

### 4 **WHO MOVED THE TOILET?**

**IF YOU'VE EVER LOST CONTROL** of your bowels before getting to the toilet, don't panic—you have plenty of company. A recent peer-reviewed study reports that faecal incontinence, also known as accidental bowel leakage (ABL), affects more than 16 per cent of people over 70.

"As we get older, our nerves and muscles degenerate," says Dr Satish Rao, director of the Digestive Health Centre at Augusta University in Georgia. The same squeezing exercises that help with urinary problems can also strengthen your anal sphincter, giving you extra time to get where you're going.

Because certain foods can cause problems, ask a gastroenterologist for a breath test to see whether you properly metabolise foods that include the



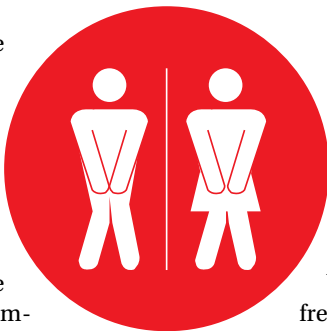
fruit sugar fructose, the milk sugar lactose and fructan, a string of molecules in foods such as wheat products, onions, garlic and artichokes, recommends Rao.

In some people, the rectum—usually a “compliant reservoir”—stiffens into a tube that can’t accommodate pile-ups. In this case, your doctor may use a balloon to stretch your rectum, or recommend surgery. Also see your doctor if you have chronic diarrhoea, blood or pus in your stool, fever, diarrhoea at night, dehydration or unexpected weight loss.

## 5 WHERE DID THESE SPOTS COME FROM?

**MOST DARK SPOTS** caused by the sun aren’t dangerous, but a dermatologist will identify changing patterns that can signal problems, says Dr Jane Grant-Kels, director of dermatopathology at the University of Connecticut.

About 14 per cent of middle-aged people have harmless brown spots, also known as age spots, notes a study in *PLOS One*. These appear more as you age, in places exposed to UV rays, such as your face, hands and forearms. You can use a skin-lightening cream, or a dermatologist can zap them with liquid nitrogen or a laser.



Seborrheic keratoses—genetic wart-like growths ranging from yellow to brown to black—are harmless. Grant-Kels encourages most patients to leave the spots alone, but a dermatologist can freeze them for you.

Red bumps called cherry angiomas—clusters of dilated blood vessels—are benign, but a doctor can erase them with a laser or a scalpel.

If any skin spot concerns you, see your dermatologist. Skin cancer is one of the most common cancers in the UK in both men and women, according to figures from Cancer Research UK. Symptoms for basal and squamous cell cancers include an unusual growth that doesn’t heal. Signs of melanoma include a new spot, or one that changes size, shape or colour.



## 6 IS IT ME, OR IS MY NOSE GETTING BIGGER?

**ALTHOUGH THE BONES** in our faces stop growing around 15, the cartilage in our noses and ears continues to stretch, says Dr Steve Daveluy, an assistant professor of dermatology at Wayne State University in Michigan. At middle age, the bones and fat in our cheeks sink inward, making our noses more pronounced. "Maybe it got only less than one millimetre larger, but because the cheeks shrunk, it adds up," Daveluy says. Gravity pulls your earlobes too, especially if you've spent years wearing heavy earrings.

Applying sunscreen to your nose and ears daily will help stave off age-related damage that makes skin droopy, Daveluy says. But cosmetic surgery is the only way to shrink your nose or ears.

If your nose is thickening and red,

you might have rhinophyma, a complication of untreated rosacea. See your doctor; surgery or laser treatment can help.

## 7 WHY AM I SO GASSY?

**WHEN THE BACTERIA** in your gut ferment food in your colon, gases such as hydrogen and carbon dioxide are released, causing even healthy people to pass gas up to 20 times a day. As we age, some people let go more often and with more odour. For instance, some develop trouble digesting lactose, making them feel bloated and causing more eruptions.

An over-the-counter anti-gas medicine with simethicone can break up gas bubbles. Swallow probiotics. When taken consistently, these good bacteria can help calm gas, bloating and other components of irritable bowel syndrome, according to a study review published in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*. Or spoon up a daily helping of five to eight ounces of probiotic yogurt.

Some people struggle with gas, bloating and belching because they suck in too much air when they drink carbonated beverages or smoke cigarettes. "It's funny how often this comes up," says Dr William Chey, director of the GI nutrition and behavioural wellness programme at the University of Michigan. "People come in for bloating and belching, and they're drinking



eight Diet Cokes a day.” Also, avoid consuming a lot of sugar-free sweets and gums containing sugar alcohols such as sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol. Your body can’t absorb them, and that can cause bloating and gas.

If gas, bloating or burping strikes often, a gastroenterologist can help determine if you have a chronic problem digesting certain foods, says Rao of Augusta University.

## 8 WHAT DID YOU SAY?

MANY PEOPLE SUFFER some hearing loss in one or both ears: nearly a third of people aged 50-59; nearly half of those aged 60-69; and three-quarters of people over 70. While all those rock concerts didn’t help, there are other contributors, including aging, genetics, smoking, a poor diet and diabetes, says Craig Newman, section head of audiology at the Cleveland Clinic. These all destroy hair cells in the inner ear that send auditory signals to your brain.

Get a hearing aid. Once hair cells

are damaged, they’re kaput. And the longer you wait, the harder it will be to treat. Fortunately, the brain can “relearn” the ability to hear. “That means you have to ‘teach’ your brain to hear again, by wearing hearing aids regularly,” Newman says.

But if you suddenly lose most, or all, of your hearing, “get to the doctor within hours,” Newman cautions. Depending on the cause—virus, reaction to medication or, in rare cases, benign tumours called acoustic neuromas—steroids or antiviral medications can help with this. ■

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### MAKING YOUR MEANING UNCLEAR

*Fans of simple prose will enjoy the Gobbledygook Generator at [plainenglish.co.uk](http://plainenglish.co.uk). Here are some of the nonsense phrases it gave us:*

**The consultants recommend knowledge-based reciprocal hardware.**

We need to cascade memos about our interactive strategic paradigm shifts.

**The solution can only be responsive third-generation mobility.**



# How To Avoid Seasonal Slip-Ups

BY SUSANNAH HICKLING



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

☞ **BELIEVE IT OR NOT**, more than 80,000 people a year need hospital treatment for injuries sustained over the festive period. The good news is that a lot of them are preventable.

## Ladder lapse

The trend for lighting up the outside of our houses in December is putting Christmas decorators at increased risk of falling from a great height.

**STAY-SAFE SECRETS:** Always use a ladder during daylight hours and don't stand on a rung higher than fourth from the top. Place all the lights in a container and raise and lower it using a rope while maintaining three-point contact with the ladder: one hand/two feet or two hands/one foot.

## Ticker trouble

Deaths from heart attacks are high at this time of the year, as cold weather makes your ticker do overtime to keep your body warm. Part of the problem is that some heart-attack symptoms are similar to those of indigestion—another seasonal hazard.

**STAY-SAFE SECRETS:** Sudden chest, neck, throat, jaw or arm discomfort—or shortness of breath or nausea that comes out of the blue—needs to be taken seriously. Family history, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes and being overweight increase the risk. If in doubt, go to A&E.



## Smoke alarm

All those candles make fires more likely, as does all the cooking. Of course, your Christmas tree is a fire hazard too.

**STAY-SAFE SECRETS:** Never leave food unattended on the hob and don't let candles burn in an empty room. Make sure they're a long way from the tree and other flammable items, such as wrapping paper. Watering your tree every day will also make it less likely to go up like a torch.

## Killer turkeys

There's a spike in food poisoning over the festive break. Washing your turkey will spread germs to the kitchen surfaces, while eating cold turkey when it's past its best doesn't help either. Undercooking the bird can also make you ill.

**STAY-SAFE SECRETS:** Don't wash your turkey before cooking it but do wash your hands after they've been in contact with the raw bird. Clean work surfaces thoroughly too. Make sure the juices run clear when you pierce the cooked meat, and eat up any leftovers within two days.

## A CASE FOR LAST-MINUTE CHRISTMAS TREES

Did you know that it's possible to be allergic to your Christmas tree? If you regularly get the Yuletide sniffles, it makes sense to put up the tree as late as possible. Here are some other tips:

### Preparation

Make sure you hose it down before bringing it into the house, as this can help remove some of the mould and spores that cause the allergic reaction.

### Decoration

Get another member of the family to do the decorating, but if they refuse—or you insist on hanging the baubles on it yourself—try to disturb the branches as little as possible.

### Protection

Consider using an allergen barrier balm, dabbing it around your nostrils to help prevent allergens getting in.

# Are You Looking After Yourself?

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# Making Your Breath Sweeter

## DO...

- Start with your diet. Garlic, spices, onions and dairy products are common culprits when it comes to bad breath.
- Focus on oral hygiene. Bacteria accumulates easily on the teeth, soft tissue and tongue, causing gingivitis, inflammation and even periodontitis. Prevent it by brushing at least twice and flossing once a day.
- Sort out gum disease. If you already have problems, your dentist should be able to help. A scale and polish, root planing (a deep under-the-gum clean) and even surgical treatments may be needed.

## DON'T...

- Let your mouth dry out. Saliva naturally cleans the mouth and has an antimicrobial effect. Drinking lots of water will help prevent halitosis.
- Think mouthwash will work miracles. It may temporarily mask bad breath but it doesn't help correct the underlying problem. The alcohol in some mouthwashes can also dry out your mouth.
- Smoke. The dreaded cigs are a common cause of unpleasant odour



because they diminish the oxygen available in the mouth, creating a viable environment for bacteria.

- Ignore gastric reflux. Yes, gastric reflux—main symptom heartburn—can cause whiffy breath. If you regularly have it, see your doctor.

## 4 TIPS FOR CLEANER TEETH

- 1. Angle your brush 45 degrees to the gum line.** Clean in a circular motion for about five seconds, then move forward one tooth at a time.
- 2. Avoid eating for an hour before bed.** This gives saliva a chance to clear away food debris and neutralise acid.
- 3. Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.** You don't need more.
- 4. Don't wet toothbrush bristles straightaway.** Keeping them dry will improve plaque removal.



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# Merry Morsels

## TURKEY

Low in calories and saturated fat but scoring high on vitamin B6, protein and the mineral selenium, turkey should definitely be on your healthy Christmas menu. Some studies have suggested that a selenium-rich diet may help reduce the risk of prostate cancer in men. And it's good for women too, assisting with thyroid function and boosting immunity.

## WALNUTS

Nuts contain protein and the good-for-you omega-3 fats, which are linked to a reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. But that's not all; research has shown that adding omega-3s to your diet on a regular basis can help lower bad LDL cholesterol by almost seven per cent—without causing weight gain. Pass the nutcrackers!

## OLIVES

These cocktail nibbles—along with olive oil—offer a generous dose of the fat-soluble antioxidant vitamin E, which plays a vital role in reducing inflammation and damage caused by free radicals to our skin, as well as strengthening our immune system.

## MEN'S HEALTH

### KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON WITH CHRISTMAS

A study last year discovered that almost half of men consider the stress of Christmas worse than being dumped by their partner, losing their job or moving home. To stop you going Christmas crackers:

#### 1. Make a to-do list and use it.

Breaking down stressful chores into small, manageable tasks makes you more likely to achieve them.

**2. Accentuate the positives.** Do you have a few days off work? Can you spend time with the children? Focus on the festive benefits.

#### 3. Keep a lid on your drinking.

Too much Christmas spirit will just end up making you feel more anxious and less able to tackle holiday tasks.

**4. Breathe deeply.** Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for about five seconds, then exhale through your mouth, emptying your lungs completely. Aim for six to eight deep breaths a minute.

**5. Put on some calm music.** Soothing tunes produce slower brain-wave patterns, like those in people about to fall asleep. ■



# The Culture Of Complaint

BY MAX  
PEMBERTON



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

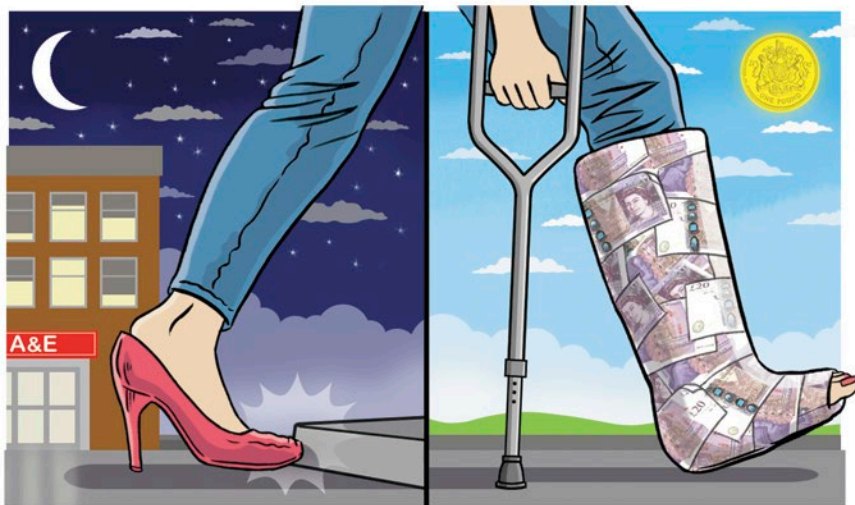
“THERE’S BEEN A COMPLAINT ABOUT YOU,” says the woman on the phone. It’s one of those heart-sink moments that doctors dread. What could I have done wrong?

Much of being a doctor is a judgement call, and of course there are patients you see that prey on your mind once they’ve gone home. You worry that you missed something, and you want to run up to them and kiss them when you see them alive and well in Sainsbury’s a few weeks later.

But the person who complained about me wasn’t one of those. Instead she was a lady in her 30s who’d been out that evening, got roaring drunk and stumbled into the department. She was seen by the A&E doctor, declared as being medically fit and promptly shown the door. At this point she mentioned that she was feeling depressed, and so I was called.

This is frustratingly common. I saw her, assessed her and decided that this was the drink talking. She spent a few hours in the department, had a cup of tea, a sandwich and then left. Fine. Case closed. Or so I thought.

WHAT I DIDN’T KNOW until I saw the letter she’d written to the head of the Trust, was that as she left the department, she slipped over and hurt her leg. Apparently it wasn’t so severe that she needed treatment, as she didn’t bother coming back into A&E. Her complaint was that both myself and the A&E doctor were negligent in letting her leave the department while she was still under the influence of alcohol.



This gobsnacked me. Drunk people have a tendency to fall over. This is because alcohol, legs and pavements don't mix well. We can't be expected to admit everyone that's drunk just in case they trip over. Surely I can't be held accountable for other people's choices? Surely if anyone should take responsibility, it's her? But apparently not.

"I know it's ridiculous, but it's become a formal complaint against you, so I have to investigate," the woman on the phone informs me.

After a ton of paperwork, the trust offered their apologies in an attempt to pacify the situation—and when she tried to get compensation, the case was thrown out. I was relieved, but it did make me think about this "compensation culture" and the cash-cow that the NHS has become.

**MISTAKES ARE MADE**, and it's only right that those who've been wronged get some sort of compensation for it. But increasingly hospitals find it easier just to pay out and move on rather than engage in drawn-out legal disputes with people, regardless of how daft their claim is.

There's an idea underpinning this culture that when something goes wrong, someone must be to blame. But even when the NHS *is* to blame, is it right that people are awarded the equivalent of lottery wins? The NHS has limited funds and awarding such large sums not only gives the wrong impression, but also ironically means there's less to spend on services.

There are attempts to limit the amount people can claim from the NHS. It seems desperately needed to me. I'm certainly not complaining.



## MEDICAL MYTHS—BUSTED!

# Older People Are More At Risk Of Hypothermia When It's Very Cold

**WHERE DID THE MYTH COME FROM?**

We know that, tragically, thousands of older people die from hypothermia each winter. The myth that the colder it is, the riskier it is for older people seems obvious. It's not true though. In fact, they're most at risk when the temperature is cold but not freezing.

**WHAT'S THE TRUTH?**

The vast majority of coldness-related deaths occur when the temperatures

outside are between 2C and 6C. This is because people—especially those on low incomes such as pensioners—try and avoid putting the heating up. They make do, without realising that actually their bodies are struggling. But when it's freezing, they're more likely to give in and turn on the heating. It's also likely that when it's very cold, neighbours, friends and family become worried and check on them, and pick up on any problems.

**SO WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

It's important that older people don't scrimp when it comes to heating. They should check that it's working before the cold snaps start. It's also vitally important that you drop in on elderly neighbours or relatives, even if it's not freezing outside. You could literally save their lives. It also helps tackle that other issue affecting older people: loneliness. Let's all do our bit this winter to help. ■

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## The Importance of Protecting Your Home & Possessions Correctly

**WHO LIKES PAYING MORE** than they need to for their home insurance? The answer is surely no one. However, when considering the cost of protection for your home and possessions, it's vital only to compare like-for-like cover and search for a policy that provides the protection you need.

It may surprise you to learn that comprehensive home insurance—which includes all the important levels of cover as standard—may not cost as much as you'd 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% of their clients **paid less than £240** for their new home-insurance policy this year.



If you're paying too little for your insurance premium, you risk being underinsured. This can have a devastating impact should you need to make a claim. Say you have an insurance policy that covers £40,000 of household contents, but the actual value of all the items in your home is £80,000. This means you're underinsured by 50% and so, if you had to make a claim for £30,000 of stolen items after a burglary, you'd receive a payment of just 50% of this amount.

Calculating the true value of your contents can be difficult. At *Reader's Digest* Insurance Services, we can help you find the policy that suits your exact needs. We provide a range of home-insurance policies from leading insurers such as Aviva, Ageas, Axa, Allianz and Legal & General.

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# Christmas

## Food & Drink Special

By Rachel Walker

Recipes, tips and tricks—plus the best shop-bought picks—  
to create a delicious (and stress-free) festive season





**Serves 12–15 (as a canapé)**

- 2tbsps olive oil
- 2 red onions, diced
- 1tbsp fennel seeds
- 450g good sausages
- 2tbsps grainy mustard
- 1tsp freshly ground pepper
- 375g ready-rolled puff pastry
- 1 egg
- 2tsps poppy seeds

## Sausage Roll Garland

© SAINSBURY'S

**DID YOU THINK THAT A GARLAND** was for the yuletide door knocker? Think again! Twist an oblong sausage roll into a circular, garland shape to make a buffet centrepiece.

- 1 Preheat the oven to 200C.
- 2 Heat the olive oil and sweat the diced onions until soft. Add the fennel seeds and cook for 1 more minute, until fragrant. Leave to cool.
- 3 Squeeze the sausage meat out of their casings into a mixing bowl. Use your hands to combine the sausage meat with the diced onions fennel seeds, mustard and pepper.
- 4 Unfurl the puff pastry

onto a board. Trim one 5cm length, cut out star shapes and put to one side. Next, cut the remaining pastry in half—lengthways—into two long oblongs. Put a line of sausage meat down the middle and scrimp shut.

- 5 Move both rolls onto a lined baking tray, curl them into a wreath shape and scrimp both ends together.

Decorate with the stars, brush with an egg wash and sprinkle with poppy seeds. Cook for 25 minutes and serve hot.

### Tip

Make sure the puff pastry behaves itself by ensuring the oven is up to temperature—and don't open the door while it's cooking!

### BUY IT IN

**Sainsbury's** Turkey & Sausage Garland, **£7**  
**Aldi** Specially Selected Sausage Roll Garland, **£3.29**

**Serves 6**

**For the Marie Rose sauce**

- 6tbsps tomato ketchup
- 6tbsps mayonnaise
- 1tsp Worcestershire sauce
- Optional: pinch of cayenne pepper, dash of Tabasco sauce

- 1 lemon, juiced
- 2 avocados, roughly diced
- 8–10 baby radishes, roughly diced
- 2 baby gem lettuces, washed, halved and thinly sliced
- 300g cooked and peeled prawns
- 1 lemon cut into wedges, to garnish

## Prawn Cocktail

**THIS RETRO STARTER** is making a comeback. Great news! Not only because it's a delicious dish, but also because it's easy-peasy. Make the sauce the day before and keep it in an airtight container—so all you need to do on the big day is put together a simple salad and assemble the prawn cocktails.

**1** First, make the Marie Rose sauce by mixing together the tomato ketchup, mayonnaise and Worcestershire sauce. Season to taste with the cayenne pepper and Tabasco sauce. If making in advance, store in an airtight jar in the fridge.

**2** Squeeze the lemon juice into a bowl and add the avocado as you dice it to stop it from turning brown. Add the diced radishes and finely slice the lettuce.

**3** Assemble the prawn cocktail by dividing half the drained avocado and radishes between six glasses. Top with a pinch of baby gem

lettuces, a tablespoon of the Marie Rose sauce and half the prawns. Repeat the layers and garnish with lemon wedge.

### Tip

Pop some cracked black pepper and freshly chopped chives into little bowls on the table so people can add their own

### BUY IT IN

**Morrisons** The Best

Prawn Cocktail, **£2.50**

**Marks & Spencer** Shellfish

Knickerbocker Glory, **£8**

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customer. You may be asked to provide ID to prove you are the required legal age to purchase an age restricted product. Please drink responsibly.



# Main Course

## WHITE MEAT OR BROWN MEAT?

It divides opinion. If you're part of a family with a united preference, then consider buying a joint instead. A large turkey crown will feed a group of white-meat lovers, while a couple of turkey thighs will cater for a family that prefers brown meat.

## Turkey crown

The turkey crown is the whole bird—just without the wings or legs. It means that the joint is easier to carve and it minimises leftovers.

The only thing to watch out for is that white meat has a tendency to dry out. Counter this by basting

the bird with juices from the pan several times during cooking, and halfway through cover it with back bacon or a bacon lattice to help keep in the moisture.

As with cooking the whole bird, allow 70 minutes, plus an extra 20 minutes for every kilogram, at 180C.

## Turkey leg

Turkey legs should be slow-cooked, so the brown meat can be easily lifted from the bone. They work well with robust flavours—such as roasted shallots or garlic—and are good in a tray bake.

For an easy dish, rub olive oil, salt and pepper

## Timings

Roast a 2kg turkey crown for 110 minutes, or a 2.5kg turkey crown for 120 minutes



**Carrots...& Cumin**  
Toss 1kg of peeled and halved carrots with 2tbsps of olive oil and 1tbsp of dried cumin seeds.

## Spice Up Your Sides

into the turkey leg and then cook for 90 minutes at 180C, basting halfway through. Consider adding other roast vegetables—carrots, celeriac or parsnips—to the pan halfway through cooking, to save on the washing-up!

### BUY IT IN

#### **Crown Marks & Spencer**

*Pork & Cranberry Oakham Turkey with Maple Bacon Crown 2kg (serves 6-8), £35*

**Leg Morrisons** Whole Turkey Leg 1.6kg, £4.50

**The whole bird Asda** Extra Special Corn-Fed Bronze Dry Plucked & Aged Turkey, £17

### Tip

A meat probe helps tell when a turkey is cooked. Poke it in the thickest part and check it reads 75-80C



### **Cranberry Sauce... & Allspice**

Heat 250ml of orange juice and stir in 150g of sugar to make a syrup. Simmer 500g of cranberries for 10 minutes until they burst, and add a dash of allspice to taste.



### **Brussels...& Bacon**

Halve 500g of Brussel sprouts and simmer for 2-3 minutes while frying 200g smoked lardons. Drain, add the Brussel sprouts to the frying pan with the lardons and cook for 5 more minutes. Garnish with torn sage leaves.





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Taste the Difference Pork belly squares 300g, £4.50, £1.50/100g. Serving suggestion. Selected larger supermarkets. Excludes Centrals and Locals.





**Serves 6**

- 150ml cream
- 50ml milk
- 200g milk chocolate
- 3 egg yolks

## Chocolate Pots

**BY THE END OF CHRISTMAS LUNCH**, there's no need for a hulking-big pudding. Little chocolate pots are an elegant way to wind down proceedings. These are extra super-quick to prepare and ideally should be made the night before—so there's even less to think about on Christmas Day.

**1** Pour the cream and milk into a pan and heat gently until it's close to simmering—but not quite bubbling yet.

**2** Before opening the chocolate, bang it on the work surface and then break up the pieces straight into the pan of

hot milk. Continue cooking on a very low heat, while stirring constantly until all the chocolate melts.

**3** Take the chocolate mixture off the heat and add the egg yolks straight away. Stir for another two minutes on a gentle heat so the eggs thicken the hot liquid. Tip into a jug and then pour into four espresso cups or ramekins. Chill for at least 6 hours, preferably overnight.



### Tip

For a twist, put a tablespoon of dulce de leche at the bottom of each glass. Chill before spooning the chocolate on top

### BUY IT IN

**Marks & Spencer**

*Chocolate Pine*

*Cones, £12*

**Pots & Co** Salted

*Caramel and chocolate Pot, Ocado, £2 per pot*



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# Tokaji

**“HAVE YOU EVER TRIED PAIRING STILTON WITH TOKAJI?”** I was asked at the Sainsbury’s Christmas show earlier this year. I hadn’t. But in the name of research, thought I’d better. The honey-golden dessert wine from north-east Hungary (pronounced so that it rhymes with “och-aye”) isn’t a regular sight in supermarkets after all. Or so I thought. But there it was again at the Aldi Christmas show, and again at Marks & Spencer.

It might seem like the new kid on

the block, but Tokaji is a historic wine, with intact bottles dating back to 1680. King Louis XIV allegedly gave Madame de Pompadour a glass, declaring: “*Vinum Regum, Rex Vinorum*” (“Wine of Kings, King of Wines”), and it’s thought that Rasputin was handed spiked Tokaji—the Tsars’ favourite tippie—during an assassination attempt.

The wine is made from late-harvest grapes that are left to linger on the vines, encouraging the approach of a fungus called noble rot. This causes the grapes to shrivel, concentrating their sweetness. It was among the most in-demand wine for centuries. Hungarian vineyards suffered under the communist regime though, and it fell off the radar—until this year’s Christmas shows, it seems.

Tokaji is usually served slightly chilled (11–14C) and is traditionally enjoyed as a dessert wine. I doff my cap to the supermarkets that brought it to my attention—and can confirm that it’s a revelation when sipped alongside a lump of Stilton.

## TOKAJI TO TRY

- ***Taste the Difference Late Harvest Tokaji 2015***, £12, Sainsbury’s
- ***St Stephen’s Crown Tokaji Aszu 5\* 2013***, £19.99, Aldi
- ***Tokaji Aszú 5 Puttonyos***, £25, Marks & Spencer



# Top 3 Cheese Boards

**I'M NOT BIG ON WHOPPING WICKER HAMPERS**, but I can't

think of a better parcel to arrive on my doorstep than a box of cheese to take me through the festive season. The advantage of buying online is the access to enormous variety—a cracking Christmas treat for anyone not lucky enough to live near a good, old-fashioned cheesemonger.

***“Gongs”, The Fine Cheese Company, £33/750g parcel***

A selection of award-winning cheeses from this Bath-based company. Browse the condiment selection before checking out, and pop some slow-baked Dottato figs (£5.76) in your basket.

***“British Cheese Awards Selection”, The Courtyard Dairy, £29.50/1kg parcel***

Four British cheeses—one sheep, one goat, as well as unpasteurised and pasteurised cow's milk cheese—from this family-owned Yorkshire cheesemonger.

***“Christmas Extravaganza Box”, Pong Cheese, £49.95/1.5kg parcel***

Five delicious cheeses to take you through Christmas—from cave-aged Wookey Hole Cheddar to soft, nutty Reblochon. Vegetarian boxes also available with rennet-free cheeses.



## Tip

Pick a blue cheese, a hard cheese and a soft cheese, allowing 50-75g per person. Remove from the fridge two hours before serving





# Online Food Shopping

By Fiona Hicks

Beat the crowds this Christmas and order festive fare  
from the comfort of your own home





## Melbury & Appleton

A busy professional family—who mysteriously don't reveal their name—originally opened this business as a high-street shop in north London.

"We were frustrated by the lack of variety in supermarkets," say the founders. "When we wanted to try out new recipes at home, we struggled to find the ingredients we needed, often travelling miles to track down a key item. We knew others must experience similar frustrations, so we were inspired to open a shop."

Demand for such rare luxuries as Italian candied chestnuts was so great that the shop expanded to an online supplier, which now boasts the largest range of food ingredients available in the UK. From Mexico to Malaysia, delights from all corners of the globe are covered—and they regularly hold clearance sales, in which you can pick up a real edible bargain.

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



## Cup of Tea

Bored of your bog-standard brew? This website is here to take your tea-drinking up a gear. Set up by Simon and Christine Collins—experts with decades' worth of experience in the industry—Cup of Tea sources leaves from the best estates in China, India, Sri Lanka and beyond. "Orthodox"



*Only hand-picked  
leaves make the  
cut in Cup of Tea's  
extensive selection*



methods are used, which means only hand-picked (and impeccable) leaves make the cut.

That's not to say there's a lack of choice, as the extensive selection features black, green, white, oolong and fruit teas, herbal infusions and tea caddies (great for gifts)—all ready to be delivered to your door.

"Buying online can be faceless, but we encourage our customers to talk to us if they need any help in choosing their teas," says Simon. Those with a real passion for char can travel down to rural Somerset, where Simon and Christine host popular tea-tasting workshops.

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



## Summer Isles Foods

The real-world foundations of this website are on the picturesque banks of the Cromarty Firth, north Scotland. Here lies a small smokehouse, which has been producing smoked fish, meats and Scottish cheeses for almost 40 years.

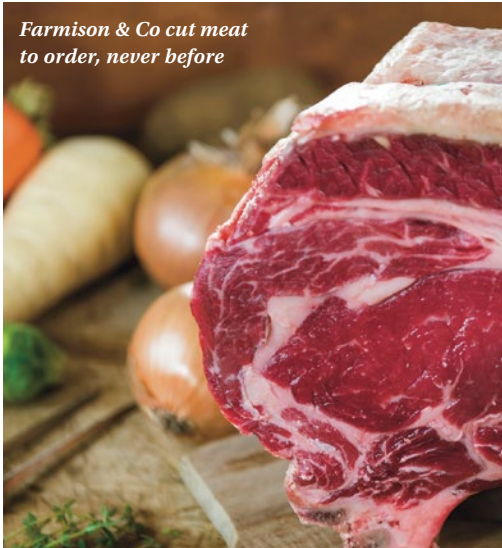
The popularity of their products is largely down to their meticulous and unique smoking technique. Most smokers simply dry-salt their fish before smoking, but the Summer Isles method involves marinating both sides of the salmon with a brine mixture infused with molasses, juniper berries and peppercorns, before smoking the fish for a full 24 hours using fragrant oak shavings.

One of their selection boxes would make for a great Christmas lunch starter. As well as being incredibly good value, they include free delivery to any UK address.

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



*Farmison & Co cut meat to order, never before*



## Farmison & Co

These days there's no shortage of online butchers, but Farmison & Co is really leading the pack. Their focus is on championing the best meat from around the country and making it available to everyone.

"The British Isles has some of the finest beef, pork and lamb breeds in the world," says managing director



John Pallagi. “They were bred to perfection in the 18th and 19th centuries, to yield more marbling and fuller flavours.”

Farmison & Co may supply some “world-famous kitchens”, but they make a point of treating every customer like a top chef. Meat is only cut to order (never before), and delivered fresh (not frozen) to any UK address within 48 hours. Perhaps it’s time to take a break from that turkey...

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

## Irish Gourmet

We think one of the best parts about this site is that they have to have a dedicated section for “Alcohol-Free Hampers” —because booze is somewhat plentiful elsewhere.

Of course, it’s just not an Irish Christmas if there’s not a bit of liquor to help the food slip down nicely, but that’s not to say the food plays second fiddle. Far from it. These hampers, which come ready-made or with the option to “create your own”, feature some of Ireland’s most delectable offerings. Lots of the products are hand-made with artisanal flair, and a good number are winners of the Great Taste Award.

With everything from Green Pepper Venison Salami to Skellig’s Mint Crème Truffles, there’s bound to be something that caters even to Aunt Evelyn’s fussy tastes this Christmas.

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





This is how Gousto works: you choose the recipes you like the sound of (from a selection of ten each week), all the ingredients are measured out, pre-portioned and generally *sorted out* (you know, all those fussy



## Gousto

You know you're living in a golden age of convenience when you neither have to visit a supermarket nor even think about what ingredients you need. Nowadays, if you want a delicious home-cooked meal, a creative chef and some charming food-packaging people can do most of the hard work for you.

preparatory bits that take an irritating amount of time), and then they're delivered to your door. You receive a sleek recipe card with each meal, so all you need to do is a casual bit of chopping, some chilled-out stirring, probably a bit of sprinkling and hey presto...you have a gourmet-standard, home-made meal. It's great for mid-week suppers and, as you've probably guessed, a dream for festive dinner parties.

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



*Abel & Cole were delivering organic fruit and vegetables way before the internet boom*



## Abel & Cole

Having begun 27 years ago—way before the internet boom, even—this is one of the original grocery delivery companies.

The legend has it that it all started with a man named Keith Abel and some spuds. He went to a potato farm, saw all the chemicals used to grow them (some of which had a skull and crossbones on the tin) and decided there must be another way. He set up Abel & Cole to encourage a return to organic farming, and it's a standard that infuses the company's practices and products today.

Says culture director Claudia Ruane, "Fantastic organic food makes our heart sing because it's



a healthier way of farming that works with nature, not against it. It protects our countryside and, frankly, we reckon it tastes heaps better."

It certainly does. Their organic fruit and vegetable boxes can be self-selected or filled according to the season. It's a wonderful way of getting back in touch with our bountiful land—even if you live in the middle of a city.

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

**Do you know a fantastic online food supplier? Email [readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk](mailto:readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk) and tell us about it!**



# How to Live to 100

Since the 1950s, the number of centenarians has more than doubled every decade—and now one in three babies born in the UK is expected to reach their 100th year. **Amanda Riley-Jones** asks three such people to share their advice for a long and happy life





## Gordon Browne, Kent 100 on November 30, 2016 “Adapt and try new things”

“My attitude has always been to make the best of what you’ve got,” declares Gordon Browne, who lives in a 15th-century Wealden house that’s been in the family for 100 years. “Stay positive and do your best to keep going!”

Gordon still cooks his own meals and his retired sons visit frequently. He uses a trolley or two sticks to get about (“I had a hip replacement at 94, but I won’t have the other one done unless it gets too bad”), but he’s sharp as a pin and smartly turned out. No wonder some of his friends still call him “Major.”

Gordon was born in Bangalore, India. Growing up in an army family, he and his two older sisters became used to moving around. “It’s vital to adapt, not try to resist change,” he explains. “I’ve always been anxious to do things that are new.”

At British boarding school, Gordon played rugby, athletics, hockey and squash, and he was still playing tennis until he was 80. He only “puffed at cigarettes occasionally” as a youngster and never drank much. Longevity seems to be in his genes. “My father died in his mid-seventies and my mother was 92,” he remembers. “My grandparents lived until their eighties—ancient for those days!”

After Sandhurst, Gordon joined the army as an officer and married his

teenage sweetheart two days after war was declared. He and Molly had four sons—Richard, Robin, Nicholas and Julian—and were married 61 years. “Throughout my life, my family has given me enormous pleasure,” he says.

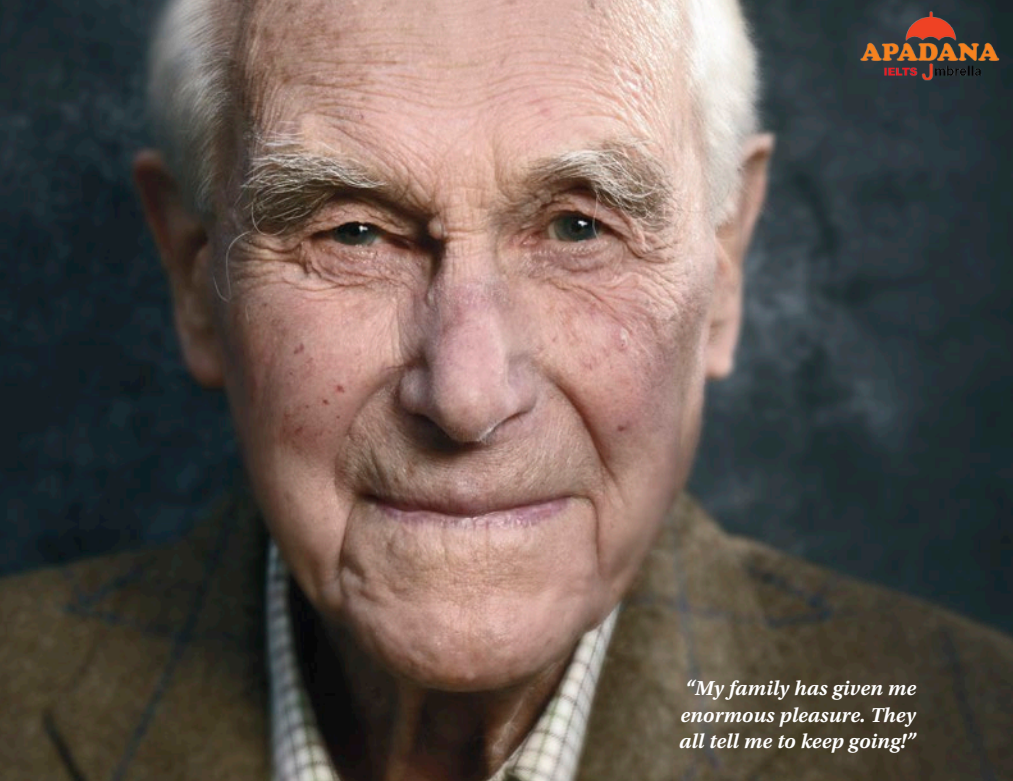
Of his career, he says, “I’ve been extremely lucky, except during the war, to do things that have interested me deeply.” He became a major by the age of 26 and recalls, “You’re posted somewhere you don’t know a soul and you have to get on with it. Good pressure spurs you on.”

While fighting the Japanese in India, he caught a glimpse of an enemy helmet in some bushes. “I’m still alive because I have very quick reactions. I shouted ‘Japs!’ and dived into the undergrowth, as did my men. A grenade exploded where I’d been standing.”

Gordon left the army in 1950 and joined MI5 the same year, in the early days of the Cold War. “I was involved in very interesting work, both at home and abroad—including meetings with



“PEOPLE WHO GET INVOLVED ARE GOING TO ENJOY LIFE MORE THAN SOMEONE WHO SPENDS ALL THEIR TIME WATCHING TV”



*"My family has given me enormous pleasure. They all tell me to keep going!"*

Winston Churchill and President Eisenhower when helping to oversee the security for the Three-Power Conference at Bermuda in 1953."

**Gordon retired in 1976**, having been awarded a CBE. But he's stayed on the go, volunteering for his church, successfully campaigning against the development of a local airfield and looking after his Grade II-listed home ("Gardening is a good contribution to a long life"). He enjoys keeping up with current affairs, saying, "Taking an intelligent interest in life keeps one on the ball. People who learn things

and get involved are going to enjoy life more than someone who spends all their time watching TV."

Inevitably, Gordon has outlived many loved ones, including his son Nicholas and beloved wife Molly. "It's difficult to overcome and you never forget, but those who've gone don't want you to be miserable," he says. "You've got to put it behind you and carry on."

He plans to celebrate his birthday surrounded by family, including 12 grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. "I'm lucky to still be here. My family all tell me to keep going!"



James Rhodes, 41, is a professional and applauded concert pianist who performs all over the world. His memoir *Instrumental* was an international best-seller

# If I Ruled the World

## James Rhodes

🌀 **Music education would be a priority.** I'd make our government accountable to the promise they made in 2011 to give every child, whatever their background, the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and for teachers to have the budget and training to embed it into the curriculum. That hasn't happened and it's terribly sad because we know the benefits are astonishing: better academic results, greater focus in class and improved discipline throughout the school. I've seen kids, who previously couldn't be in the same room, rehearsing together as a team and helping each other tune their instruments.

**Everyone would be afforded the time to have 45 minutes a day to do something creative.** The world we live in nowadays is manic and external, and it's too much. We need to stop and find calm so anything that allows us to go inside ourselves is a wonderful thing. In *How to Play the Piano*, I show it's perfectly



ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES SMITH

feasible to play a piece by Bach in six weeks if you put 45 minutes a day aside to do so. Finding the time is hard, but focusing completely on something is where creativity starts.

**No more than two adjectives could be used to order a coffee.** No more skinny or wet anything, or any of the other ridiculous adjectives. White or black is enough. How fussy do you need to be?

**We wouldn't abandon our dreams.** Although I knew I wanted to be a pianist from a young age, I stopped for ten years and worked in a high-paying city job. It made me very unhappy. I went back to the piano and, although it took a lot of energy and time to get to where I am now, I've never looked back. We get bogged down with responsibilities but, if we're persistent, we can reawaken our childish optimism. What are you passionate about? Everyone I most admire, alive or dead, has been single-minded in their relentless pursuit of whatever it is they love.

**I'd end the segregation of musical genres.** I'd never dream of saying to a ten-year-old girl that Beethoven is more worthy than Jessie J; it's all just music. The biggest problem with classical music is that certain people like to keep it in a weird gilded cage, as though they don't want to share it with the wrong types. That breaks my

heart. Radio stations should play all different genres of music; the more we get everyone listening the better.

**We'd be more honest.** Life would be much simpler if people said what was on their mind—in a tactful, loving way. Otherwise we end up playing games with each other and I, for one, find it terribly confusing. Would the world be a better place if, when you asked someone how they were doing, they actually told the truth? I don't know, but it's a starting point to the world being a more trustworthy place. A big part of being honest is not pretending—outside of playing the piano I have no clue what I'm doing, but I'm OK with that.

**I'd make it illegal for anyone to walk down the street glued to their mobile phone.** Or use a phone while having a face-to-face conversation with someone else. If you go out for a meal with friends you should all put your phones on the table. The first person who touches their phone, for whatever reason, pays for the meal.

**Kindness would be our primary aim.** You can take medication or go to therapy, but nothing compares to someone being kind to you—it dissolves all the barriers. ■

**As told to Caroline Hutton**

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**James's book *How to Play the Piano* is out now, published by Quercus.**

## Joan Pettman, West Sussex 100 on August 1, 2016 **“Accept your fate and make the most of it”**

“I don’t feel a hundred,” laughs Joan Pettman, who’s chatting in her garden-facing room at Church Farm Care Home near Chichester. “I had a birthday do in a local hall and thought to myself, *Who is this 100-year-old?*”

“I just woke up one day and I was old. Sometimes it gives me a jolt. It’s important to keep up standards and look decent. I get my hair done once a week and I’m going to get my teeth whitened,” adds Joan, who’s beautifully made up and coiffured.

She was driving until she was 98 and is full of praise for the surgeons who replaced both hips and one ankle. “I was hobbling with arthritis and they made me into a bionic woman!” smiles Joan. She still gets around using a wheeled frame.

### **Joan and her younger sister**

Bernice grew up in Margate, Kent. After a brief stint as an apprentice hairdresser, 21-year-old Joan married husband Tom and moved to London. At five-foot-nine, she landed a job modelling clothes at Bourne and Hollingsworth department store in Oxford Street. She remembers one particularly beautiful long scarlet gown.

When war broke out, Joan recalls,

*Joan today  
and (below)  
as a young  
woman. “It’s  
important to  
look decent”*



“An incendiary bomb dropped on our terrace of houses. But I wasn’t afraid. I’ve always been able to take things in my stride.”

While Tom was abroad with the navy, Joan spent much of the war working in a NAAFI (Navy, Army and



Air Force Institutes) canteen. "I was worried about doing the books and figures. But the war taught us how to deal with things and of course it's good to learn something new."

Later, Joan was busy running the family home and raising children Michael, Richard and Penny, who are now 69, 67 and 57 respectively.

"I used to like throwing big parties. All my life I've found people so interesting. It's essential to connect

with others and have good friends," she says.

Joan's husband, who was a company director, died four days after their 75th wedding anniversary. Framed family photographs fill her room and she talks joyfully of the youngsters in the family.

"Grandchildren are such a pleasure and keep you going. I enjoy talking to them about new things and we have a special bond."

Joan has visitors every day, including her son Michael, who lives nearby and also uses a wheelchair. "Two of my children have muscular dystrophy [a disorder that weakens muscles]. My husband and I both carried the recessive gene. It was a million-to-one chance," she says without self-pity. Her mother and father lived to be 72 and 89, although sadly her mother and sister both had Parkinson's disease.

**So what's the secret to Joan's longevity?** "I don't think I've done anything special," she replies. "I only smoked a little during the war. I went without sugar during rationing and haven't had any since. Oh, and my friend and I walked four miles every day until I was 75!"

"I was initially upset when I had to leave my home and come here," she admits. "But I was soon resigned to it. If I were to give advice, I'd say always accept your fate and make the most of it."



## Marjorie Hodnett, Devon 102 on April 1, 2016 **“Do all the good you can, for as long as you can”**

“I’ve always been interested in eating healthily and I was teetotal until I was 50—but genes must have something to do with it. I’m the sixth centenarian in our family!” says Marjorie, who was born in Harlesden, London, in 1914. “My great-aunt and two cousins from each side of the family lived for over a century. My mother lived to 94 and my father to 82, even though he contracted illnesses as a soldier. And his five sisters were all ninety-plus!”

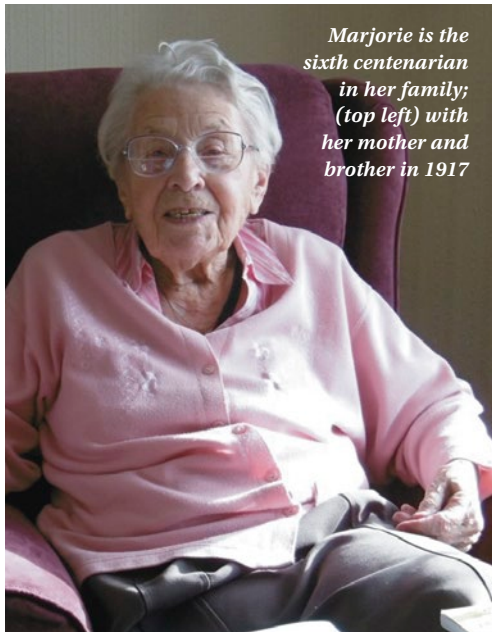
After her father was called up, Marjorie, her mother and older brother Gilbert moved in with an aunt. When her mother patriotically returned to work, little Marjorie spent some days with another aunt. Aged four, she spent one term at school in Folkestone, staying with a third aunt.

“Travelling and experiencing change helped me to become independent. And I’ve always been able to see the best side of things!” laughs Marjorie, who’s visited every month by her niece.

**Marjorie was raised** a Wesleyan Methodist—with a strong social

conscience. “Doing good is good for the soul and helps keep you out of mischief,” she smiles, before quoting the teaching attributed to founder John Wesley: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you can.” When she was widowed for the second time at 48, she found great support in her church.

Marjorie was a devoted teacher—indeed, a former pupil comes in to do her hair. Other passions included country dancing and painting. At 50, she took seven months’ leave to sail to New Zealand. She advises, “Stay busy and



*Marjorie is the sixth centenarian in her family; (top left) with her mother and brother in 1917*

never turn down an opportunity!"

Marjorie was also President of Sidbury Women's Institute, volunteered with Meals on Wheels and led a choir until she was 95. She moved into Sidmouth's Abbeyfield Court sheltered accommodation in 2008 and still enjoys helping others—by helping teach perspective in the weekly drawing classes and entertaining other residents by "playing DJ" in the lounge.

This year she published a book of her poetry to help raise money to bring Abbeyfield Court's garden back



to life. Marjorie, who took up writing poetry when she joined the WI, has sold 272 copies of *A Sideways Glance at Life Around Sidmouth*, and raised over £1,000. Anything inspires her to pick up a pen, from the sea in winter to overweight tourists—and even the car-park attendant!

Her final piece of advice for a long, happy life is: "Look forward with hope, not back with regret. I hope I'll be here to see the garden restored. It will be a good legacy." ■

**Majorie's book *A Sideways Glance at Life Around Sidmouth* is available from Abbeyfield Court (01395 515 366).**

## WHAT DO CENTENARIANS HAVE IN COMMON?

"In my view, it helps to have active and engaged lives, including physical and mental exercise," says University of Southampton professor Asghar Zaidi, an expert in the well-being of older people. "Those who haven't felt loneliness and who feel independent are more likely to live longer than others."

A 2015 study of centenarians showed that men who live with a spouse are more likely to live to 100. But for women, living alone is more advantageous.

Some studies suggest that the chance of living to 100 runs in families. Dr Thomas Perls of the New England Centenarian Study found that children of centenarians weigh less, take fewer medications and have a lower incidence of hypertension and heart disease. Is there really a centenarian gene, or could this be picking up healthy lifestyle habits from long-lived parents?

Reducing stress and having a sense of purpose also help, as does using our bodies: scientists say that our walking speed is a stronger predictor of lifespan than any other lifestyle habit.



# No One Should Have No One At Christmas

## **FOR MOST, CHRISTMAS IS USUALLY A TIME FOR CELEBRATION**

with those you love. It's an opportunity to create memories and enjoy traditions with family, friends and colleagues. The build-up to Christmas is often an exciting and busy time. However, this isn't always the case for older people. For some, it can reinforce feelings of loss, loneliness and of life passing them by.

Last year, Age UK found that around a quarter of all over-65s—nearly three million older people\*—aren't looking forward to Christmas, with around 555,000\*\* of them

saying it's because the festive season brings back too many memories of loved ones who've passed away.

Loneliness can be a personally devastating experience and also a serious public health issue, undermining older people's quality of life, well-being and resilience. Age UK takes the issue seriously because it's not only unpleasant, it's also profoundly damaging to older people—with evidence clearly showing that feeling lonely is associated with poor physical and mental health.

Age UK has supported older people such as John, who came to his local

## Christmas Appeal



Age UK following his wife's dementia diagnosis. They put him in contact with a nearby dementia cafe, which

he attends regularly with his wife. This has been a lifeline—he's enjoyed meeting new friends and being able to talk regularly with people.

And Lisa, 81, says she felt like a "non-person" with nothing going on in her life following her husband's death, almost as though she didn't exist. "Age UK wrapped their arms around me from the moment I walked in the door. Coming here has literally brought me back to life. I was ready to give up, but these groups give me something to live for and I absolutely love it."

Age UK is doing everything it can to help older people through a range of services, which provide friendship and support. Not having someone there regularly can be lonely and isolating, but a friendly chat on the phone, a visit from a volunteer or connecting with the local community can make all the difference. ▀

With Christmas round the corner, **Age UK** is urging everybody to support its "No one should have no one at Christmas" campaign. To find out more about how you can help support **Age UK**, go to [ageuk.org.uk/no-one](http://ageuk.org.uk/no-one)

Older people and their families can also get in touch with **Age UK** to see how the charity could help someone who may be feeling lonely by calling **Age UK Advice** for free (365 days a year) on **0800 169 65 65**



\* The exact figure is 2,736,000 people. TNS polling for Age UK: fieldwork 14/11/15–25/10/15. Base sample: 1,793, all adults aged 65+ in the UK.

\*\* The exact figure is 547,200 people. TNS polling for Age UK: fieldwork 14/11/15–25/10/15. Base sample: 1,793, all adults aged 65+ in the UK.



# 100 Word STORY

Our annual short-story competition is up and running, so get your entries in! Here are two more tales to inspire you

## Terms and 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.

## Matilda Svensson Going Home

**HE PICKED UP THE PAPER** on his way to Waterloo station. Front page showed pictures of immigrants arriving to London.

"Can't they just go home?" he grumbled and threw the paper in the bin.

00.14. Six minutes to the last train home. He pulled out his topped-up Oyster card from his pocket.

BEEP.

"SEEK ASSISTANCE" flashed red.

He tried again. And again.

People around him passed through without taking any notice.

"Hello? I need help! I can't get through!" he shouted, but no one aided him. Behind the barriers, he watched powerlessly as the last train left the station.

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



## Anthony Horowitz Heart Attack

**GARY BLAKE HAD SOLD** second-hand cars all his life, some of them nice little motors, others...well, that was the game, wasn't it?

And here he was, on his back in the operating theatre, in need of a heart transplant. Who'd have thought it? He would quit smoking. Drink less. Lay off the white powder. He promised himself.

The surgeon leaned over him. "Nice to see you again, Mr Blake." When had they met before?

"I've got a perfect heart for you. Only one owner. Ticking over nicely. A real bargain..."

Gary felt the touch of the scalpel and screamed.

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



**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.

*A paved path,  
flat terrain and  
sunshine—New  
Zealand's wine  
region at its finest*



Two days among the vines and  
tasting rooms of New Zealand's  
premier wine region

# Rolling Along on the Wine Trail

BY JANIE ALLEN

**B**Y MID-MORNING, light breezes have swept away the dawn overcast, leaving only some wispy clouds. It's February—high summer in New Zealand—and the scent of flowering lavender is in the air. My husband and I are in the Marlborough wine region, located at the top of the South Island, and we're about to start two days of cycling in the vineyards.

"Ready?" says Jo Hill, handing us a map to nearby cellar doors (as tasting rooms are called here). About 40 of Marlborough's 140 or so wineries are open to the public—many are in easy cycling range—but Jo suggests we visit at



most five a day. “By the fifth winery, your taste buds are shot,” she explains.

Jo and her husband Steve own Wine Tours by Bike in Renwick. The village is in the broad Wairau Valley, home to many family-owned and some corporate wineries, such as Cloudy Bay. Her map lays out a 12-mile circuit for the day. I hope I’m up to it—it’s been a while since I spent that much time on a bicycle. “There’s just one wee hill,” she says as we leave.

Glen and I push off to a wobbly start on the crunchy gravel driveway and turn our sturdy, three-speed bikes onto a quiet country road—already among grape vines.

**T**ODAY, THE MARLBOROUGH wine region—made up of the Wairau Valley, Southern Valleys and Awatere subregions—is known around the world for its sauvignon blanc—savvy, as the locals call it. But it wasn’t always so. This was farming country in 1973, when Frank Yukich of Montana Winery in Auckland bought land south of Renwick and planted vines. Among the grape varieties he tested was sauvignon blanc. Marlborough’s sunny days and cool nights created a surprisingly pungent wine, tangy and aromatic, soon to fulfill Yukich’s prediction, “Wines from here will become world-famous.”

In 1979, the year Yukich released his first sauvignon blanc vintage, a young Irishman working in the liquor business in Christchurch, Ernie Hunter,

also planted sauvignon blanc in the region. In 1986 he entered his wine in the *Sunday Times* Vintage Festival in London—and won both the gold medal and the popular vote. It stunned the wine world.

“New Zealand sauvignon blanc was so different, it surprised everyone,” says Jane Hunter, an internationally respected vintner who’s managed Hunter’s winery since her husband’s death in 1987. “It was our oak-aged sauvignon blanc,” she adds. “Back then the sauvignon blanc was really grassy—quite greenish and very overpowering.” Ageing it in oak barrels created a more mellow and elegant wine, she explained. Hunter’s Wines won the competition three years in a row.

The trophies were game-changing for New Zealand wines. “There had been nothing new in the world of wine for centuries,” says Tessa Nicholson, a reputed New Zealand wine writer. “Now it’s a worldwide phenomenon.” It’s gone from nothing to more £678m in wine exports.”

“IS THIS THE WEE HILL Jo warned us about?” I wonder aloud, as a half-hour later I’m pedalling hard to get up the short but steep hill to Seresin Estate.

But it’s worth it. At the top is a horse-drawn wagon, and Melissa Rae, who’s originally from Lapland but has worked at Seresin for ten years, invites us on board. She tells us Seresin’s vineyards are among a handful in Marlborough to be certified biodynamic. It’s more



*Hunter's award-winning vintages were a game-changer for the industry in the 1980s. Today, the winery's Garden Cafe is set among two hectares of native plants*

restrictive than organic, she explains. "If we take anything from the land we put it back, that's the principle." To qualify, vineyards must be farmed in a way that promotes soil health. Everything from mulch and fertilisers to sprays are made on the estate.

At the small cellar door, manager Fran Broad has lined up four wines on the antique wood counter for us to taste. She pours the sauvignon blanc, which slides over our palates with a tangy crispness—delicious! The chardonnay, riesling and pinot noir—the latter a Marlborough up-and-comer—are also exceptional.

Fifteen minutes later we're back on our bikes. We veer onto a picturesque lane and cross a stream edged with old willow trees to arrive at Bladen Wines' cellar door, a sheltered stand

on an expansive lawn. Picnic tables and lounge chairs under silver birch trees look inviting. Owners Dave and Christine Macdonald arrived in Marlborough in 1989, part of a wave of small wineries that started up after Ernie Hunter's success.

Christine, a cheerful brunette in her 50s, poured us an gewürztraminer, sweeter than the savvies and creamy on the palate. "We're quite chuffed with this gewürz," Christine says with a smile, adding that *Cuisine*, one of New Zealand's top food magazines, rated it second among 33 New Zealand gewürztraminer wines.

She and Dave were in their 20s, living in Wellington and working in jobs a world away from wine when they "got caught up in the fire that was happening here," she says.

"We bought this land off a farmer," Christine continues. "It was stony and dry." Their eight hectares hadn't been cultivated in years. They commuted from Wellington to Marlborough on weekends for three years, planting gewürztraminer, semillon and pinot gris grapes. "The varieties we liked to drink," she says. They later added riesling and sauvignon blanc.

They banded together in a trading company with other small wineries and went to international fairs to promote Marlborough wines. "That was the best thing that happened for all of us," she added. "This industry has been amazing, watching it grow the way it has," she says.

So far everyone we'd met had proven Steve Hill right when he had told us, "The beauty of this region is everyone's small enough that they're interested in meeting people and passionate about what they do!"

BY THE TIME we leave Bladen, it's midday, and we head north to Rapaura Road, known as the "Golden Mile" for the dozen-plus wineries on it. We work up an appetite cycling the mile or so to our next stop, Wairau River Wines, and it has a restaurant.

Passing through the winery's large and modern cellar door, we enter a busy dining room with a contemporary vibe that looks more Manhattan than rural New Zealand. We're shown to a table on a covered patio overlooking a manicured lawn.

The menu has crowd-pleasing appeal—curry, pizza and burgers—all with a gourmet flair. We order the house speciality: a double-baked blue-cheese soufflé, with rocket, pear and walnut salad—and, of course, a glass of pinot gris. The soufflé was light and luscious and the wine a perfect pairing. We linger over a second glass.

## WHEN YOU GO

**LODGING** **Bell Tower on Dog Point B&B**, Blenheim, \$450\*, thebelltower.co.nz; Steve and Jo Hill's **Hillsfield House B&B**, Renwick, \$225, hillsfield.co.nz; **171 on High Motel**, Blenheim, walk to town, \$150, 171onhighmotel.co.nz

**DINING** **Arbour**, 36 Godfrey Road, Blenheim, three-course "Just Feed Me" starts at \$73, mains from \$35, stellar wine list, arbour.co.nz; **Herzog Bistro**: mains from \$28. **Herzog Restaurant**: tasting menu from \$89, herzog.co.nz; **Wairau River Wines Restaurant**, mains from \$20, wairauriverwines.com

**CYCLING AND WINE TASTING** **Wine Tours by Bike**. 33 Blinks Road, Renwick. Five-hour rental, \$45, winetoursbybike.co.nz. There are 20 cellar doors within three miles of the shop; wineries may charge a small tasting fee.



*The Wairau Valley in autumn, set against the Wither Hills to the south*

The winery's owners, Phil and Chris Rose, farmed lucerne and alfalfa on the family farm here in the 1970s, says marketing executive Gemma Lyons. It took a court battle for the Roses to get permission from the county council to plant grapes. Farmers objected to the change in use of the land, the forestry industry feared they wouldn't be able to use sprays if grapes were growing nearby, and church groups objected to alcohol.

We visited two more wineries that afternoon, ending the day at Te Whare Ra (Maori for "house in the sun"). Anna Flowerday, 42, a tall brunette with a quick way of speaking, greeted us at the small cellar door.

She and her husband Jason, 38, both from wine-making families, bought the 14-hectare wine estate 12 years ago. Since then they've had two sets of twins, now 12 and nine. "We're

pretty good with multitasking around here," she says with a smile.

Te Whare Ra was named "Winery of the Year" for 2014 by Raymond Chan Wine Reviews. A New Zealander with more than two decades of wine judging, retailing and writing experience, Chan called Te Whare Ra the "modern and young face of wine-growing in New Zealand", and cited its wines and respect for the environment.

"That's what gets me out of bed in the morning," says Anna. "I want to be the best. If people have only got one day and can only see five wineries, I want to be on that list."

**AFTER A DAY** of touring cellar doors, it was a delight to enter Arbour, an independent restaurant where we'd enjoy the finest meal of our trip. Located in a low-slung modern building tucked between vineyards, the dining room



had a high ceiling and a décor in shades of grey, green and silver—a cool, crisp ambience warmed by the smiles of the polite serving staff.

We ordered the four-course *prix fixe* menu, named “Just Feed Me”. The feast included a combination of vegetables and sauces with local Ora King salmon and Cloudy Bay clams, pork-neck medallions and beef sirloin, served with wine, of course! First a glass of delightful sauvignon blanc, next a fine pinot noir. Chocolate mousse with a blueberry-raspberry coulis and a glass of imported port was a divine finish.

**OUR SECOND DAY** was to be more relaxed than the first. Jo gave us a new map that took us back to the Golden Mile to visit wineries, then to lunch at the bistro at Hans Herzog Estate.

We dined on fresh skate and lamb on a sun-dappled terrace under the plane trees—I felt transported to Provence. Therese Herzog, in her 50s, with a smile for everyone and an ebullient laugh, runs the winery bistro and restaurant. Before they moved to Marlborough, she and Hans had owned a successful winery and Michelin-starred restaurant in Switzerland.

For several years they’d divided their time between the two countries. “But after two vintages, Hans said, ‘Why do we make wines in Switzerland? This vineyard is performing better than I ever imagined.’ ”

The couple moved to New Zealand in 1999 and started the restaurant soon after arriving. Their chef, Louis Schindler, immigrated with them. “Who else would I have?” she says. “This is how we show our wines—they’re food wines.”

After lunch, we cycled two miles to Nautilus Estate—where assistant wine-maker Tim Ritchie gave us a tour of the tank room—and then it was a short ride to our last stop, the pretty gardens and cellar of Framingham Wines. Every wine we’d tasted over our two days had been exceptional. At Framingham, manager Maureen Hamilton surprised us with a ten-year-old riesling that was unexpectedly dry and flavourful, a perfect way to end our tour.

On the way back to the bike shop, Glen and I savoured the beautiful countryside. All was still. It was as if the vintners—and the grapes themselves—were collectively holding their breath before the next 24/7 harvest frenzy, less than a month away. ■



## GET BUILDING!

During the Christmas period, nearly 28 LEGO sets are sold every second.

SOURCE: TELEGRAPH.CO.UK

## The Importance of Protecting Your Home & Possessions Correctly

**WHO LIKES PAYING MORE** than they need to for their home insurance? The answer is surely no one. However, when considering the cost of protection for your home and possessions, it's vital only to compare like-for-like cover and search for a policy that provides the protection you need.

It may surprise you to learn that comprehensive home insurance—which includes all the important levels of cover as standard—may not cost as much as you'd 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% of their clients **paid less than £240** for their new home-insurance policy this year.



If you're paying too little for your insurance premium, you risk being underinsured. This can have a devastating impact should you need to make a claim. Say you have an insurance policy that covers £40,000 of household contents, but the actual value of all the items in your home is £80,000. This means you're underinsured by 50% and so, if you had to make a claim for £30,000 of stolen items after a burglary, you'd receive a payment of just 50% of this amount.

Calculating the true value of your contents can be difficult. At *Reader's Digest* Insurance Services, we can help you find the policy that suits your exact needs. We 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**

\*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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BY CATHY ADAMS

# My Great Escape: Actively Relaxing

**Brenda Storey** from Perthshire kayaks around a Swedish archipelago



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

 **KAYAKING IN SWEDEN** isn't everyone's first thought for a holiday. For me and my partner Russell, however, it was a real break from the rat race: warm, lazy days paddling among the thousands of islands that make up the St Anna archipelago, just south of Stockholm.

We flew into Stockholm and caught the train south to Norrköping, where our trip started with a night in a hotel—the last chance for a shower for the next five days. We weren't just kayaking but camping too.

During the day we paddled among the tiny islands of the archipelago, taking it slow, enjoying the cool breeze (who knew that Sweden could be *so* hot?) and stopping at skerries to enjoy the view.

It was generally calm water: I'm no kayaker, but after a few hours my technique improved. We found bays of smooth water—lined by reeds to steer the boat through—shimmering with iridescent blue dragonflies. We saw a mink basking on a rock and a couple of water snakes gliding through the water, heads up like little submarine periscopes.

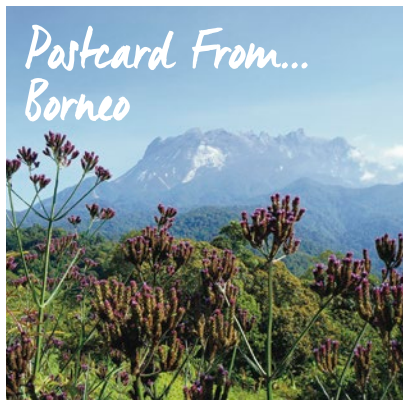
For five glorious days there was no make-up, no hairbrush

and no shower. Washing involved a bottle of water and a flannel, or a quick bracing dip. Toilets? Ducking into the trees with a towel and some loo roll wasn't a big deal. One of the pleasures was being away from everything, only talking to each other and to the few people we met in their kayaks and boats.

For anyone looking for a holiday with a difference, miles away from the demands of technology and one that challenges their everyday life, this is an ideal break. We'll be back...

#### ■ PADDLE AWAY

For more information on kayaking trips in the St Anna archipelago, visit Do The North (dothenorth.com). Ryanair flies to Stockholm from £9.99 one way (ryanair.com).



**THIS SOUTH-EAST ASIAN COUNTRY** is home to myriad wildlife—including the famous orangutans—plus vast unexplored beaches and relaxing resorts, such as Shangri-La Rasa Ria on the country's northern coast.

On the bill for this autumn is the “breakfast with a view” experience, which involves trekking through the resort's acres of jungle, spotting wildlife like local macaques and butterflies, before a champagne breakfast overlooking Mount Kinabalu, Malaysia's highest peak. An early start—but it's worth it.

#### ■ A ROOM WITH A VIEW

The breakfast with a view package costs £84pp (shangri-la.com).

**WE WANT  
TO HEAR  
FROM  
YOU!**

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



# Things To Do This Month



## LAPLAND IN TWO MINUTES

■ **STAY: ICEHOTEL 365** This month, the famous Icehotel in Swedish Lapland opens for its 27th winter—but this time it's joined by Icehotel 365, which will stay open throughout the year. It'll be kept cold in the summer months by solar panels—powered, conversely, by the midnight sun ([icehotel.com](http://icehotel.com)).

## ■ WATCH: THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

The winter months are the prime time to catch one of the world's best spectacles: the Northern Lights. And up in Swedish Lapland, the green and pale pink lights are right outside your front door.

■ **DO: HUSKY SLEDDING** Imagine picture-postcard scenes of being pulled through pristine pine forests by a pack of huskies—this is a regular day in the life of a visitor to Lapland ([discover-the-world.co.uk/icehotel](http://discover-the-world.co.uk/icehotel)).

## LONG/SHORT HAUL: MINDFULNESS HOLIDAYS



**LONG: India** Where better than to reflect on the past year than at a retreat in southern India? Set amid 25 acres of private gardens, the programme at Shreyas Silent Retreat involves meditation by candlelight, private yoga and massages. From £2,195pp ([healthandfitnessstravel.com](http://healthandfitnessstravel.com)).

**SHORT: Norfolk** Mental well-being is a priority at Satvada Retreats' five-day mindfulness retreat in Norfolk this month. The menu includes long walks, silence and absolutely no mobile phones. From £599pp ([satvada-retreats.co.uk](http://satvada-retreats.co.uk)). ■



## TRAVEL APP OF THE MONTH

**What Now?!, Free, iOS.** Add places to your itinerary while connected to WiFi, then unplug to use offline around town. The app simulates a live experience—without using data.





**accident advice** *helpline*

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# INJURED IN A ROAD ACCIDENT?

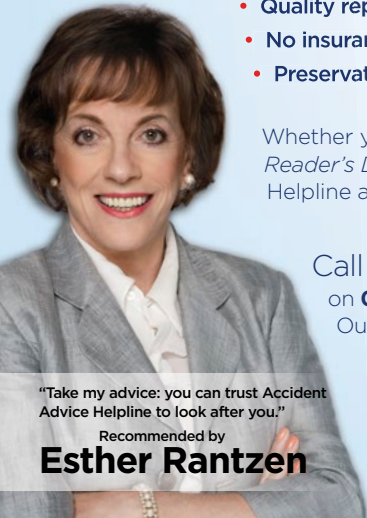
## Get maximum compensation with minimum fuss

If you've been injured in a road accident and it wasn't your fault, call **Accident Advice Helpline** for a **FREE** claim assessment to see if you could claim compensation.

The expert lawyers at **Accident Advice Helpline** can help you claim the maximum compensation with the minimum of hassle and help you on the road to recovery. No money is needed to make a claim and there are no hidden fees. All claims are run on a **100% no-win no-fee\*** basis, so there's no risk.

If you're a driver and your vehicle has been damaged in the accident, we can help with that too. Our free accident management service saves you time and money. Unlike many insurance companies, we can provide the following valuable benefits for drivers:

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- Quality repairs at a garage of your choice
- No insurance excess to pay
- Preservation of your No Claims Bonus\*



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Recommended by

**Esther Rantzen**

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*A kindergarten class rehearse for an end-of-year performance of "identity celebrations"; (opposite) children play together at Hand in Hand Wadi Ara School in Israel*



# A Hand Across the Divide

In a nation torn apart by segregation,  
one organisation is cultivating a new  
generation of acceptance

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRAIG STENNETT



**“WE HAVE TO CHANGE OUR RELATIONSHIP** with the Arabs,” says Shuli Dichter. “It’s not to be the relationship of rider and horse—it has to be one of mutuality.” The 60-year-old is executive director of the Hand in Hand Foundation, a non-profit organisation that runs six integrated, state-funded and approved schools in Israel.

We’re relaxing on the porch of his house in the Ma’anit Kibbutz in Northern Israel. The kibbutz saw extensive military action in the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948; bullet marks can still be found around it. It’s a place that Shuli’s parents helped build and that he grew up in.

**W**hile we graze over a breakfast of olives, he lays out his vision: “We have to create a new society—one in which equality between Jews and Arabs is essential, sharing power and resources.”

Briefly pausing to let his concept fully sink in, he continues, “When Jewish and Arab children don’t meet each other in their day-to-day lives—while being raised in a war zone—how do you ensure they don’t grow up to hate everyone from the other side? You have to bring them together and let them play side-by-side. This is what we do in Hand in Hand. Where Jews and Arabs learn together, there’s hope for a shared society.”

This concept was conceived in 1997 by Amin Khalaf, an Arab teacher, and Lee Gordon, a Jewish-American social activist, after they met while promoting Arab-Jewish dialogue in Israel.

The schools they pioneered host an equal number of Jewish and Arab students respectively, and two teachers hold the lessons in both Arabic and Hebrew. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are also taught with equal weight to all students, and each faith’s

respective religious holidays are observed.

Emphasis is given not only to one’s own culture and language, but also to those of the “other”. The kids study two accounts of history: the creation of the “Jewish homeland” and the narrative of the Palestinian struggle.

This is a revolutionary approach within the tight

confines of the Israeli educational system. Almost every other school that teaches the two million children of Israel is segregated along racial and religious lines—not by law, but by a tradition that goes back to before the establishment of the State of Israel in



*Executive director  
Shuli Dichter*



1948, when Palestine was under the British mandate. Arabs go to Arab schools and Jews to Jewish—they always have.

This isolation, the lack of contact and communication between the two communities that both inhabit the “Holy Land”, is established from an early age. Hand in Hand’s mission is to overcome this.

**LOCATED JUST A SHORT DRIVE** from the Ma’anit Kibbutz is the Arab town of Kafr Qara. It’s situated within

*Principal Hasan Agbaria and vice principal Masha Krasnitsky with pupils at the Hand in Hand Wadi Ara School*

a stretch of land known as the “Triangle”, an area of Israel that’s predominantly Arab. Here is the Bridge over The

Wadi School, one of six Hand in Hand schools in Israel.

Opened in 2004, the school offers education to 263 Arab and Jewish students from kindergarten until the age of 12. Significantly, Jewish parents have to journey into an Arab town for their children to attend school—which they’ve never done before.

Zohar Shachar, a scriptwriter and



*The pupils are all smiles at school; (right) Zohar Shachar with her three children Alon, Yasmeeen and Iris*

mother of three children at Bridge over The Wadi, says, "From an Jewish-Israeli perspective you have to understand that an Arab village is considered a very dangerous place. When my husband's parents first learned I was going to send my kids here, they thought I was putting them at great risk and—as they saw it—sending them beyond enemy lines! But the minute we stepped inside, we knew it was the correct place for our children."

Fellow parent Tharwat Masalha joins us. He adds, "At first I didn't agree with





the school. I didn't want my children to be educated with Jewish children as I was afraid they'd lose their identity. However, over time I started to realise I was wrong, that my kids will learn the Jewish culture *and* their own."

Tharwat admits that he never met a Jew to speak to until he was 16, while Zohar admits to never speaking to an Arab "eye-to-eye" until she was 25.

"We look ahead and we see how complicated it is to solve everything in Israel," says Tharwat, "but what we have here with the school is a dialogue that allows us to meet each other and understand each other."

He's specifically referring to the dialogue groups that Hand in Hand runs as a community activity for adults outside school hours. The groups provide an opportunity for an open and frank exchange of views, highlighting the shared but different interpretations of their communal history. These encounters can be emotionally raw—as Zohar recalls, "Tears have been shed at these meetings."

Tharwat adds, "In the dialogue groups, we have Jews that have simply never heard the Palestinian story. This is what we should be doing—telling



*Students Lor Sawalha, Aline Kitane and Duna Gawi heading to the playground*

our stories, experiences and history to one another."

Around us, Bridge over The Wadi School is gearing up for its graduation ceremony, where the students will be putting on a performance dedicated to nations around the world.

The Students Council has decided to continue this theme at brektime with a "chocolate activity": croissants for France (with chocolate filling, of course), waffles for Belgium and ice cream for Italy are being served at three counters. Soul Control's "Choco, Choco, Chocolate" pumps out the speaker system while teachers Shuli Klein and Amina Tamne take the floor, transforming the playground into a makeshift dance studio. Pupils run around excitedly, joyfully shouting "Chocolate!" for all their worth.





*Co-principal Nadia Kinani says, "Many of our students go on to set up organisations and projects that foster co-existence"*

**ONLY FIVE MILES** from the Wailing Wall and the Dome of the Rock, between the Jewish neighbourhood of Pat and the Arab community of Beit Zafafa, stands The Max Rayne Hand in Hand Jerusalem School. It's the NGO's flagship school, offering education to approximately 530 children up to the age of 18.

Following the Hand in Hand philosophy, the school has co-principals: Nadia Kinani, an Arab from Nazareth, administrates the lower school, while Arik Saporta, a Jew born in Jerusalem, is the upper-school principal.

Tackling the complex question of the school's role in fostering co-existence, Nadia outlines her thoughts: "People think we'll solve the conflict alone, but it's such a big question, it's beyond us to change it all. However, we believe we can make a small difference that

can change people's lives. Our students will take that difference with them when they leave."

Arik nods in agreement as Nadia's continues, "Many of our students go on to set up organisations and projects that foster co-existence. Some people say that we're living in a bubble here, but it's the outside that isn't real. You can't have two groups occupying the same land and living lives where they ignore each other."

The director of the educational department for Hand in Hand is Dr Inas Deeb, an Arab Israeli who chooses to live in the West Bank, making the daily commute to the school through the Israeli Defence Force checkpoints. She concludes that it's not enough to put two groups of kids together to learn and play. It has to be "a shared bilingual education with equality of status

among pupils, shared goals and institutional support to give the most effective form of education for reducing intergroup biases”.

Hand in Hand's vision is to extend its base of six schools with 1,320 Jewish and Arab students, which presently involve about 6,000 community members of parents and staff, to a further ten to 15 schools, which will involve some 20,000 Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens. As Shuli Dichter says, “Then we'll have a movement.”

**REVISITING HER** Jerusalem school today is 21-year-old Shira Minglegrin. Having graduated in 2012, she's just finished her two-year compulsory National Service in the Israeli Defence Force. She says, “When the last war was going on in Gaza, my Arab friends were calling me to check if I was OK, while I was calling them back to see if they were fine in Jerusalem.”

Shira is now going on to study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. When asked what she's gained from Hand in



*Dr Inas Deeb would like to extend Hand in Hand to up to 15 schools*

Hand, she answers clearly: “It gave me the ability to consider other people's point of view. It's a light even during the darkest times.”

**For more details of Hand in Hand and to make a donation, visit [handinhandk12.org](http://handinhandk12.org)**



## THE WORST POP LYRICS OF 2015

“Heaven can't reach us. We're high-fiving Jesus!” **“Levels” by Nick Jonas**

“How deep is your love? Is it like the ocean?”

**“How Deep Is Your Love” by Calvin Harris featuring Ina Wroldsen**

“And don't forget the flowers every anniversary.

‘Cause if you treat me right, I'll be the perfect wife, buying groceries”

**“Dear Future Husband” by Meghan Trainor**

SOURCE: CONSEQUENCEOFSOUND.NET

# Beat The Festive Finances Hangover

Christmas is just around the corner—and for most people that means spend, spend, spend

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 AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SPENDS £429 on gifts, food, travel and socialising over the festive season, the Money Advice Service found, with a third of people borrowing on credit cards and overdrafts to cover it. This can make for a stressful January as the bills start to drop through the letter box.

It's not too late to make a few financial changes to help you ease into the New Year with fewer worries—and more money.

## Don't panic buy

Around Christmas shops can be manic and stocks can be low, forcing you to just grab “something”. The important thing here is sticking to your budget. Your friends and family won't want you getting into debt just for a present.

Even better, agree a budget between you ahead of time so neither of you are forced to spend more than you can afford.

## Plan your food

Every year I eat more than I should at Christmas, but even with all the excess there's often more than we need, especially with Christmas dinner. It's money in the bin.

To combat food waste, plan out how much you'll really need and factor in subsequent meals that can make the most of leftovers. If you can't use them straight away, the freezer is your friend. Even unused gravy or wine can be put into ice-cube trays for later use.



### Use unwanted gifts

Even if you've tried to talk to people about what you'd like, you're bound to open at least one unsuitable present. Days later it's under the bed and stays there for years until you finally get around to a clear out.

Instead, see if you can sell it on auction websites such as eBay. You could also try regifting it to someone you think will like it for their birthday or next Christmas—just make sure you don't give the present back to the person who bought it for you!

### Pre-buy for next Christmas

The best time to buy little Christmas extras such as cards, wrapping paper and decorations is in the weeks after Christmas Day. You can often save

up to 75%, cutting your spend in November and December next year by a decent chunk.

### Surviving January

Times are often tight in the New Year. You likely spent a lot in December and if you were paid early for Christmas, there's a longer wait for January's pay-check. Plus, it's likely you have larger-than-usual credit-card bills.

Hopefully you've enough to cover the gaps—but if you're worrying about how you'll cover essentials, don't stick your head in the sand. Instead, seek out some free and independent advice. The Money Advice Service has a tool to help you find someone near you to talk to, and begin to get yourself back in the black.



# Millions Are At Risk With Savings Of £100 Or Less

Two in five of the UK's working population have less than £100 in savings, putting them and their finances at risk if an unexpected bill lands. Research by the Money Advice Service found just one emergency could easily push 16.8 million into debt.

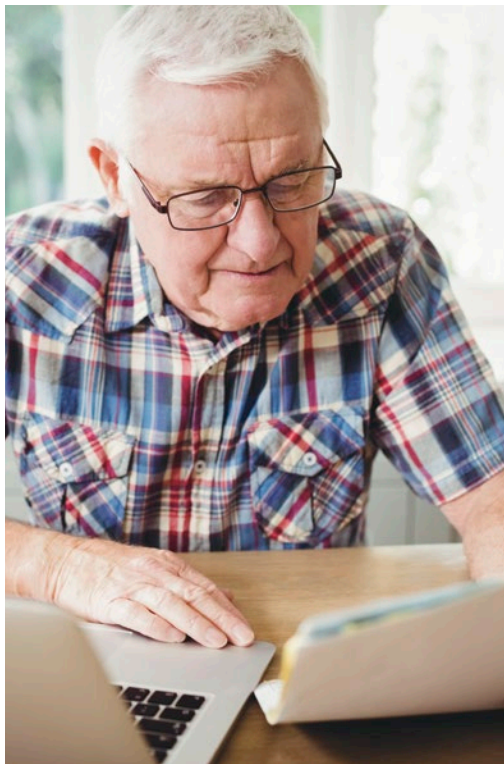
Many wanted to save, but felt they weren't able to because of a lack of spare money, motivation or even just the skills needed to manage money.

However, even households on low incomes manage to save, with a quarter of those earning under £13,500 having more than £1,000 saved up—showing even regular small savings can add up and help protect against life's surprises.

## Ways to get saving

If you're not saving, or feel you'd like to save more, here's how you can start or get better at putting money away for a rainy day or another goal.

- Work out your budget to see how much is coming in and going out.



- If you're managing to make ends meet, set yourself a realistic savings goal and start small.
- Make a plan to reach this goal. Think about how much time you have to save and work out how much you need to save each month to reach your goal.
- Find ways to cut back on spending each month to help you save.
- Set up a regular standing order to a savings account to get in the savings habit.

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# Watch Out For Financial Abuse

Just because a partner isn't physically violent, it doesn't mean they aren't abusive. According to a study by domestic violence charity Refuge and The Co-operative Bank, one in five women and one in seven men have experienced financial abuse in a relationship.

And it can happen to anyone—regardless of your age, income, religion, race or sexual orientation—leaving you feeling isolated, lacking in confidence and trapped. Financial abuse is now recognised in law as a form of domestic abuse and is seen as a criminal offence.

## WHAT COUNTS AS FINANCIAL ABUSE?

Typical behaviours can include:

- Stopping you from getting (or keeping) a job.
- Making you hand over your wages.
- Making you ask your partner—or others—for money.
- Not allowing you to spend on yourself or your kids.
- Controlling your bank account.
- Stealing, taking or demanding money from you.
- Making you account for every

penny you spend—by showing receipts, for example.

- Running up debts in your name.
- Controlling your access to money to prevent you escaping the abuse.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOU FEEL YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS BEING FINANCIALLY ABUSED

Everyone has the right to financial independence—so if you notice any of these signs in your relationship or in a friend's, there's help at hand.

These organisations support victims of domestic abuse. They're trained to help you regain control of your finances, as well as helping you rebuild your emotional health.

- Women's Aid (England):  
0808 2000 247
- Women's Aid (Wales):  
0808 8010 800
- Women's Aid (Northern Ireland):  
0808 802 1414
- Women's Aid (Scotland):  
0808 027 1234
- Men's Advice Line:  
0808 8010 327



BY LYNDA  
CLARK


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

## Table Talk

CHRISTMAS IS THE PERFECT TIME to make an impact by creating a stylish table setting.

A classic silver or gold colour theme will always be striking, or for a more modern touch choose teal or purple. Candles are a must to add a glow, so why not try placing tealights in front of each setting to really make the table twinkle? Place names written in a glittery pen add a personal touch—and don't forget crackers!

**12-piece Decadence dinner set, £45; silver glitter place mats (pack of 8), £20; 16-piece Kensington cutlery set, £26; silver ombre glasses (pack of 4), £24; star bowls (set of 2), £16; silver crackers (pack of 6), £12; sequin table runner, £22; packs of baubles, from £8; metal stag tealight holder, £20.**

■ All available from Next ([next.co.uk](http://next.co.uk))

## Get The Look

Accessories to make your home sparkle.

- **Reindeer candelabra, £30,** [debenhams.com](http://debenhams.com)
- **Nouveau plate, £8,** [marksandspencer.com](http://marksandspencer.com)
- **Holly scatter leaves, £3.49,** [lakeland.co.uk](http://lakeland.co.uk)
- **Winter glitter tree candle, £10,** [sainsburys.co.uk](http://sainsburys.co.uk)





## CATCHING THE RAYS!

An ancient method of telling the time, it's believed the first sundial was built in Egypt around 1500BC. In today's modern world, they're a perfect gift for a garden-lover. Border Sundials offer beautiful, bespoke models. There are five different designs, including the intricate topograph, which allows you to choose places around the world that have a special meaning (from £139, at [bordersundials.co.uk](http://bordersundials.co.uk)). ■



## TREE-MENDOUS!

Set the mood for the festive season with a pretty Christmas tree



Enjoy a pot-grown tree, available from one- to five-foot high, *from* £19.99 ([dobbies.com](http://dobbies.com)).



This Rockingham bluetooth musical tree will delight the kids, £148 ([diy.com](http://diy.com)).



Break from tradition with this light-up bauble tree, £74.99 ([lakeland.co.uk](http://lakeland.co.uk)).



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## Now It's Even Better!

**For once the hype is justified, because the brand new Gtech AirRam Mk.2 vacuum cleaner really will make it easier and faster to clean your home**

**T**HE NEW MODEL is the result of four years of research and redesign. Gtech have listened to customers and designed out the things everyone hates about heavy, old vacuums. They've come up with something that's genuinely different—and it's available right now.

So what do you get with the new **Gtech AirRam**? You get a high-performance vacuum that weighs just 3.5kg. It's cordless, so you can stop worrying about plug sockets or stretching power cords round corners. And yet it has the power to clean your home thoroughly, even dreaded pet hair.

There are no settings to change as you glide from room to room. The lithium-ion battery gives you a remarkable runtime of up to 40 minutes on a single charge—and it's designed to use less energy than a traditional upright, so it's kinder to your pocket as well.

As well as the new patented **AirLOC** dirt-collection system, the **AirRam Mk.2** has cleaner emptying: dust and dirt is compressed into the unique snail-shell bin forming a tubular bale. This can then be ejected into a dustbin with a slide of the dirt ejector arm, meaning no annoying dust clouds when you empty. There's even an LED light, so you can see into dark corners—dirt and dust really does have nowhere to hide! Oh, and because the handle slides neatly into the body, the AirRam needs less room to store than a traditional upright.

It's the future of cleaning—see it in action at **gtech.co.uk**. ■



Buy your loved ones video games, fitness tech or the ultimate selfie experience with...

# The Gadget Gift Guide

BY OLLY MANN



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

## RELAXWELL ALASKAN HUSKY FAUX FUR HEATED CUSHION, £39.99

Hot water bottle, meet your match. No more fiddly refills, no more diminishing heat—this cuddly, machine-washable cushion has five heat settings and only uses a penny's worth of electricity for every three-hour use. Basically, it's the heated blanket for the lady who wouldn't be seen dead in a heated blanket...



GIFTS  
FOR  
MUM

## SNUGS CUSTOM EARPHONES, £159 INCLUDING FITTING

Many people find in-ear earphones uncomfortable, or even discover that they fall out of their ears. Custom-fitted earphones are a luxurious solution—and make for an amusing gift too, as the bizarre process of getting your ears scanned to create the moulds is all part of the experience.



## TEFAL COOK4ME CONNECT, £299.99

In France, where microwave meals are taboo, these electric pressure cookers shift by the bucketload. There are 50 delicious single-pot recipes built in, or it can sync with your tablet to provide illustrated guides on a bigger screen. Conjures up super stews and soups in minutes.



**GIFTS  
FOR  
DAD**

## SEGA MEGADRIVE RETRO GAMING WIRELESS CONSOLE, £50

If you believe video games hit their peak in the 1980s—when play was restricted to running left to right and/or repeatedly bashing baddies in the face—this plug-and-play console is a must-have. All you need to do is stick it in your telly's HDMI port and you can relive no less than 80 classic Sega titles, including *Mortal Kombat* and—yes!—*Sonic the Hedgehog*. Just try keeping it from the kids.



## NORDIC WARE 365 KETTLE SMOKER, £88

You can hardly move in Britain's cities these days for BBQ joints, but if you want to recreate that finger-lickin' taste at home, you need a garden, or at least a patio, which most city-dwellers don't possess. This little pot, though, sits atop your (gas) hob and achieves wood-smoked ribs, fish and chicken indoors. A thermometer, recipe book and wood chips are included; lumberjack shirt and beard are optional.



## PARROT DISCO FPV, £1,149

Drones became that little bit less special when their prices dropped and every Tom, Dick and Droney got busy papping the neighbourhood with their quadcopters. But now you can bask in privilege once more, with this ludicrously expensive 50mph single-prop plane. It includes a "first-person-view" headset, which transmits live pictures to your face so you feel like you're in the cockpit. Pointless yet brilliant—like all good executive toys.




 GIFTS  
FOR  
BOYS

### PLAYSTATION VR, £349.99

There's negligible competition from Microsoft—who've just released a 4K Xbox—but let's not beat around the bush: this is *the* gaming device of the year. Sony's virtual reality headset is relatively comfortable, looks futuristic as hell and launches with 50 games.

It's compatible with any PS4, but if you're buying your whole set-up fresh, opt for the PS4 Pro (also £349.99), which handles graphics more smoothly.



### NERF BATTLESCOUT, £59.99

It's difficult to buy a toy gun these days—this is a “blaster” and it takes “darts”, not bullets. But there's no hiding this bad boy's ferocity, with its pump-action ten-dart cartridge.

There's an on-board camera too—which can be mounted to any Nerf gun... sorry, blaster... so you can film your sprees in HD. Watch the clips back and it's like you're in your own video game.

### SAMSUNG GEAR FIT 2, £149

This is a straight-up GPS fitness band—not a smartwatch—so it makes no pretence to high fashion and doesn't require you to carry your smartphone. Its sweat-resistant band and bright AMOLED screen make it easy to read whatever the weather, so tracking your heart rate, route and distance data is a cinch. Sometimes less is more, as the fashionistas would say.



# **LAST EVER SALE** for Iconic Furniture

**HURRY!** The copyright laws have changed to conform with the latest legislation. This means it will be illegal to sell new reproductions of iconic furniture after January 2017.



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The Eames inspired Lounge Chair and Ottoman are available in Black, Brown or White Leather and come complete with a lifetime warranty\*. To order and claim your EXTRA £25 discount\* simply quote **RD22NOV16** at **wallacesacks.com** or call **020 8808 3275**. FREE delivery on orders over £1000. Offer ends 13.12.2016

†Plus delivery \*See website for details \*\*Correct at time of going to press \*Only 1 discount per order



**Charles & Ray Eames** - designers of the original Lounge Chair with Ottoman



**w a l l a c e s a c k s**  
DESIGNER FURNITURE GUARANTEED FOR LIFE\*

## FUJIFILM INSTAX SHARE SP-2, £154

This palm-sized printer creates Polaroid-style print-outs from your smartphone photos. It can print in colour, black and white, or even a split template that looks like a particularly fabulous Instagram layout.

Up to eight devices can be connected, so it's a good gadget to wheel out at a party. Great retro larks—though sadly the film hasn't got any cheaper since the 1990s.



**GIFTS  
FOR  
GIRLS**

## WORLD'S APART SELFIE MIC, £19.99

Combining two irritating trends—selfies and karaoke—in one neat device, Selfie Mic is essentially just a selfie stick with a microphone instead of a handle, but don't underestimate the hours of fun that can generate.

There's plenty to appeal to young performers, including songs by Justin Bieber, Little Mix and Ed Sheeran. The app plays these and creates music videos as you sing along with the on-screen lyrics. You can't quite sing to your heart's desire,

though: a limited number of "tokens" are included—after that, each track carries an extra cost.



## SONY GTK-XB7, £280

This chunky Bluetooth boom box has all the power and quality you'd expect from

Sony, effortlessly turning your pocket tunes into party anthems. But it's the pulsating DJ effects and embedded multi-coloured LED lights that make it stand out from the crowd. Sit back, hit "EXTRA BASS" and hope that you won't hear your parents begging you to turn it down and do your homework. ■



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\*Model shown for illustrative purposes only



BY GEORGINA  
YATES


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

# Pin-Up Style

THIS SEASON, it's not only the tree that must be decorated—hair accessories are fashion's equivalent of the gold star at the top. Helmed by hairstylist Guido Palau, Alexander McQueen's AW16 catwalk pioneered the trend for glittering hair accessories; draped up-dos were pinned in place with an array of silver and beaded clips. Hair Jewellery was also ubiquitous at Peter Pilotto's catwalk, while Sophia Webster's models wore pretty floral crowns.

As the catwalk commands, so shall it be done, and this trend has now hit the high street. Accessory staple Accessorize has an abundance of ornate clips, headbands and hair-pins that are sure to transform your up-do into a glittering example of the festive beauty look.

■ Available at [uk.accessorize.com](http://uk.accessorize.com)



## JOIN THE GLITTERATI

■ Young girls will love the chunky glitter and stick-on stars from **In Your Dreams** (£5.50–£6.50, [inyourdreams.com](http://inyourdreams.com)). Apply the glitter using some organic Paw-paw balm and either a Q-tip or an old make-up brush. It's great for fancy dress and will make your little princess really feel like one.



## MAKING WAVES

■ The Perfect Curl Secret from **BaByliss** (£119.99, [boots.com](http://boots.com)) takes seconds to create glamorous curls. Wash and dry your hair as normal and place a small section of your hair into the centre of the device. The tool draws the lock into a ceramic barrel, where it's heated from all sides to produce long-lasting curls.



## FLOWERS BY MOONLIGHT

**For Her**



■ Pair this flowing A-line skirt with a black silk blouse for understated elegance (£49.50, marksandspencers.com).

■ This season, even Cath Kidston is dipping into a darker colour palette for its signature floral prints (£40, cathkidston.co.uk).



■ Bloom from head to toe to with these brocade-inspired heels (£85, dunelondon.com).

**For Him**



■ Inky blue florals add a subtle splash of colour to formal suits (£54.50, boden.co.uk).

■ Smart and unique, Simon Carter's dusky blue printed shirt will be a hit at the office Christmas party (£150, simoncarter.net).



■ Feeling brave? Opt for a beautiful and bold print set against a navy base for a look that will work well with wintery jackets (£40, debenhams.com). ■

Whether you prefer chilling murder plots or tales of burgeoning love, your Christmas reading is covered

# December Fiction

BY JAMES  
WALTON



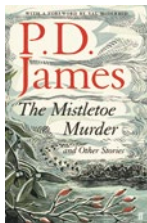
*James writes  
and presents  
the BBC Radio  
4 literary quiz  
The Write Stuff*

## ***The Mistletoe Murder and Other Stories***

by P D James (Faber, £10)

This beautifully produced book brings together four stories that the late P D James wrote for various newspapers and magazines keen on giving their readers something nice and murderous for Christmas. All find her on top form, her writing as elegant and unhurried as ever, even when faced with the tricky task of providing fully realised characters, a thoroughly imagined setting and a proper murder plot in around 30 pages.

Perhaps because they *were* written for Christmas, the stories tend to the traditional, with country houses, locked rooms and last-minute twists a speciality. ("I don't think I'll have another case like it," reflects James's regular detective Adam Dalgliesh at the end of one tale. "It was pure Agatha Christie.") Nonetheless, this touching respect for the conventions of the genre doesn't prevent James from supplying a psychological and social depth not generally found in those earlier writers she so clearly admires. She



### NAME THE AUTHOR

(Answer on p128)

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

1. She used a pseudonym, but her real surname was Lamburn.
2. Her most famous character's surname is Brown...
3. ...and his first name is William.

also adds touches of genuine creepiness, especially in “A Very Commonplace Murder”, where events take a far darker turn than anything in Christie.



## ***A Fairy Tale for Christmas***

by **Chrissie Manby**  
(Hodder, £7.99)

In chapter one of Chrissie Manby’s latest novel we meet 32-year-old Kirsty, who’s trying hard not to notice that her fab new boyfriend is a bit arrogant and doesn’t always make her feel good about herself. Chapter two then cuts to Ben Teesdale, hunky widower and all-round decent guy of about the same age living nearby with his eight-year-old daughter. (Oh yes, and he’s a fantastic dad too.)

By this stage, then, experienced chick-lit readers might already think they can hazard a guess as to where the main story is heading. But they certainly won’t be able to predict how ingeniously Manby gets there. Or how many entertaining subplots she manages to throw in along the way, thanks to a large and varied cast.

By the end, in fact, almost every classic chick-lit ingredient has been stirred into the mix. Yet the result never feels mechanical. Instead, it’s a big, warm-hearted read, with an infectious fondness for the characters and plenty of good jokes.

## **CHILDREN’S BOOKS**

■ ***Dave’s Cave* by Frann Preston-Gannon** (Nosy Crow, £5.99, under-5s) Charming book about a cave-hunting Neanderthal that’s set to become a new bed-time classic—always welcome news (let’s face it) for parents tired of the old ones.

■ ***Jinks and O’Hare Funfair Repair* by Philip Reeve and Sarah McIntyre** (OUP, £8.99, 5–9 years) Great mix of words and pictures in a thrilling adventure on a funfair planet.

■ ***Ottoline and the Purple Fox* by Chris Riddell** (Macmillan, £10.99, 7–11 years) Latest in the much-loved Ottoline series from the children’s laureate—again bursting with energy and humour.

■ ***A First Book of Animals* by Nicola Davies** (Walker, £14.99) Winning combination of pictures, facts and poems for animal-loving children of all ages.

■ ***The Road to Ever After* by Moira Young** (Macmillan, £9.99, 9–12 years) An orphan, a dog and an elderly recluse form a magical friendship in a book full of wonders.





## RD'S RECOMMENDED READ

From crackers to carol singing, a festive tome explores the customs of our most popular calendar event

# Christmas Curiosities

MARK FORSYTH BEGINS his terrific new book by reminding us just how weird Christmas is: a time when we sit around a dead tree wearing paper crowns and telling our children the good news that a fat bloke with a beard broke into their bedrooms last night. But what's stranger, Forsyth (right) suggests, is that we no longer think of any of it as strange. So how did Christmas get this way?

For those who want to sound clever, he says, the two usual answers are that Christmas is all pagan, or that it was invented by the Victorians—neither of which is true. Christmas is not a Christian version of the Roman feast of Saturnalia, and it was already being described as “the mother of all festivals” in 386AD—the same year, incidentally,



that Gregory of Nazianzus started another great Yuletide tradition by complaining that “feasting to excess” was blinding people to the true meaning of Christmas.

Forsyth made his name with fact-filled but witty books about unusual words. Now he applies the same combination of careful research and a breezy writing style to all aspects of what made Christmas so crazy, from the invention of crackers to how a fourth-century Turkish bishop ended up travelling the sky in a reindeer-driven sleigh. And, here, to carols...



***A Christmas Cornucopia: the Hidden Stories behind our Yuletide Traditions*** by Mark Forsyth is published by Viking at £9.99.

“The carol service was invented in Truro in 1880 by a chap called Edward White Benson. The story goes that on Christmas Eve everybody in Truro would get disgustingly drunk, and that the Bishop of Truro (Benson) was so disgusted he decided to lure everybody out of the pub with his new service. The problem with this story is that there’s no evidence that that’s what motivated Benson. And we do know a lot about him. He later became Archbishop of Canterbury and his whole family had something of a mania for writing. His wife had 39 lesbian lovers. How do we know that? Because she kept a diary, and numbered them. One of his sons was the eminent gay novelist E F Benson. Another was the eminent gay poet Arthur Benson, who wrote the words to ‘Land of Hope and Glory’.

Anyway, in 1880 this family was in the brand-new diocese of Truro—and Benson decided to invent the carol service, perhaps not to get the people out of the pubs, but to get the carols out.

You see, before this, Christmas carols hadn’t been sung in the church, they’d been sung in the pub. Carols were folk songs. This is why so many of them are really rather odd. Why would you see three ships come sailing by? The answer is that nobody knows. It doesn’t make any sense anyway as a Christmas hymn because Bethlehem is landlocked.

## RD EXCLUSIVE: MARK FORSYTH’S BEST CHRISTMAS READS

■ ***The Box of Delights* by John Masefield.** My favourite children’s novel, filled with snow, sleigh-bells and wolves.

■ ***Jeeves and the Yule-Tide Spirit* by P G Wodehouse.** All the ingredients of the classic Wodehouse story, including Jeeves’s immortal advice: “I would always hesitate to recommend as a life’s companion a young lady with quite such a vivid shade of red hair.”

■ ***A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.** Because it would be illegal and immoral to make a list like this without it. Moreover, while researching *A Christmas Cornucopia*, I watched *The Muppet Christmas Carol* and was astonished to discover that it’s brilliant—the best Dickens adaptation I’ve ever seen.

■ ***Christmas* by John Betjeman.** A beautiful and moving poem about the true meaning of Christmas. It also contains the best description of a bad Christmas present: the “hideous tie so kindly meant”.

Then in the 18th and 19th centuries folklorists started to collect these folk songs, and people started to write new ones. But even these new ones changed all the time. For example, the co-founder of Methodism Charles Wesley wrote a carol that began: 'Hark how all the welkin

provided they print them just as they are.' He goes on to say that he doesn't want to be held 'accountable for the doggerel of other men'. But he is. Look in any hymn-book and 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' will be clearly listed: words by Wesley, tune by Mendelssohn.



## ***Mendelssohn wrote in a letter that he didn't mind what new words were written so long as they weren't religious***

rings/Glory to the King of Kings'. And that's how it went for 20 years, until another preacher, George Whitefield, published a version that went: 'Hark, the herald angels sing/Glory to the new-born King!'

Wesley was not amused. He wrote: 'Many gentlemen have done my brother and me (though without naming us) the honour to reprint many of our hymns. They are perfectly welcome to do so

Mendelssohn would be even more vexed by the whole thing. He died without even hearing of the hymn. All he did was to write a song about Gutenberg. It was precisely 400 years since the invention of the printing press and Mendelssohn knocked out a song about it. However, he realised that once the anniversary had passed, it would probably need some new words as songs about type aren't that popular. He wrote in a letter that he didn't mind what new words were written so long as they weren't religious. Then he died, and a few years later somebody noticed the tune would work very well with 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' and that was that. And ever since, people have been carolling away unaware that they are going against the explicit, written wishes of both the lyricist and the composer.



### **AND THE NAME OF THE AUTHOR IS...**

Richmal Crompton, creator of *Just William*—although, rather sadly, she much preferred her novels for adults. (And several thousand bonus points if you can name any.)

# Books

THAT CHANGED MY LIFE



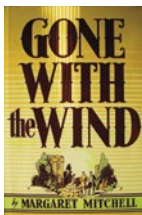
Jodi Picoult is the author of 21 best-selling novels, including *My Sister's Keeper*. Her new novel *Small Great Things* has just been published by Hodder and Stoughton.

## Gone with the Wind

BY MARGARET MITCHELL

I loved to act out the roles of Rhett and Scarlett when I read this at 13 years old.

I was amazed that an author could create such a vivid world out of words. I thought, *Why couldn't I do that too?* I credit this as the book that made me want to be a writer. Mitchell was such a trendsetter in creating the strong, feminist Scarlett.



are almost simplistic. It was as if words failed her because they couldn't contain all her emotions. Might what a character doesn't say tell you more about her than what she does say?

## The Paper Bag Princess

BY ROBERT MUNSCH

When my daughter Sammy was young, I read this to her every night. Princess

Elizabeth's town gets ravaged by a dragon that burns everything (including her clothes) and steals away Prince Ronald. Elizabeth puts on a paper bag and rescues him—not with force, but with intelligence.

But when she succeeds, Ronald says she doesn't look much like a princess. She tells him that while he may look every inch the prince, he's a jerk and she leaves him. I love that woman-power message, and I think it resonated deeply with Sammy. ■

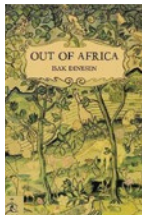
**As told to Caroline Hutton**



## Out of Africa

BY ISAK DINESEN

This memoir might have been written by Hemingway, so spare is the language. I was fascinated by the way Dinesen's writing became stripped down the closer the tale was to her own life; at the most complicated point, during her relationship with Denys Finch-Hatton, the sentences





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**I HEARD** my barely-three-year-old daughter muttering to herself in the bathroom the other day. Knowing she was too short to flush the chain herself, I approached to help her, when I heard her repeating in an exasperated tone, "Hey, Siri, flush the toilet!"

**TZVANI RICH, Manchester**

**TELEPHONING OUR LOCAL HOSPITAL** to rearrange an appointment—which had been postponed by them—the young clerk apologised and said that she couldn't help. Apparently the secretary was away and they were operating "with a skeleton staff!"

**HEATHER FOULKES, Isle of Wight**

**MY TEENAGE SON** came home from school and told us they'd had someone come in that day to teach them about first aid. He asked if anyone at home knew about CPR.

His six-year-old brother then piped up, "That's silly. I know the whole alphabet."

**CORRINA WILLIAMS, Denbighshire**



**A CLOSE FRIEND**, Abigail, was keen to make a good impression at her interview, after a decade of caring for her children full-time.

While in the lift to the interview, Abigail was reading a publication on making a good impression, when a hand suddenly blocked her vision. Afraid, she smacked the hand, only to hear a man's voice exclaim, "I was trying to press the third-floor button!"

Entering the interview room,

CARTOON: GUTO DIAS

Abigail was overwhelmed with embarrassment when she noticed the man she'd smacked sitting on the panel. She didn't get the job.

JILL COHEN, *Yorkshire*

**WE TOOK** our two young children to a smart restaurant for the first time. My husband ordered his usual bottle of wine with the meal. The waitress came over to our table and began the ritual uncorking, pouring out a small amount for me to taste first.

Before I could try it, my youngest spoke: "Mummy has a *lot* more in her glass than that at home."

JOSIE DRURIE, *Flintshire*

**MY HUSBAND** went for an MRI scan and was helped into the machine at the hospital by a pretty, young nurse. When the scan was over, a far older nurse helped him out.

My husband remarked, "Goodness, how long was I in there for?"

MICHA BRYN, *Liverpool*

**HAVING RECENTLY** put our family home on the market, I was discussing moving house with my four-year-old son. In an effort to dispel any anxiety about moving, I explained that moving house would be an exciting adventure and he'd be able to make lots of new friends.

My son went very quiet for a few minutes and then said, "So where are we going to move our house to?"

JANE GILL, *Surrey*

**MY MOTHER** was telling Jacob, her grandson, that it was time to go sleep after she'd read him a story.

He replied that he couldn't possibly go to sleep straight away. When she asked him why, he replied, "I hate the inside of my eyelids!"

P J MADDOCKS, *Hertfordshire*

## IN THE CREATIVE-WRITING CLASS

I used to attend, there was one student who would always offer constructive criticism. He'd say something like, "I enjoyed this part, but..."

My tutor valued his contributions and missed him if he wasn't there, as the rest of us were too frightened to critique the work of others.

When the student left the course, my tutor was left red-faced when he declared to the class that he missed having this student's "But!"

LISA DAVIS, *by email*

**A POST-OFFICE CLERK** said to my father, who was posting a parcel containing a Bible, "Is there anything breakable in it?"

"Only the Ten Commandments!" he replied.

SHULAH CLARKSON, *Norfolk*

**WHEN MY DAUGHTER** was four years old, we walked by a squashed hedgehog on the side of the road.

Noticing it, my daughter shook her head sadly and said, "Oh no!" before adding, matter-of-factly, "He didn't hold his mummy's hand."

MELANIE LODGE, *Yorkshire*

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# Word Power

*As Harry Potter and the Cursed Child continues to wow audiences in London's West End, we've conjured up a quiz for you, using words from the wizards of Hogwarts. Confundus! Not to worry—just a little spell to confuse you. Answers on the next page.*

**1. peruse** *v*—A: to argue convincingly.  
B: read thoroughly. C: lie under oath.

**2. diatribe** *n*—A: criticism. B: lengthy letter. C: exclusive club.

**3. tawny** *adj*—A: strong. B: golden.  
C: gaudy.

**4. cavort** *v*—A: to trick. B: tell the truth. C: prance about.

**5. illicit** *adj*—A: perfectly clear.  
B: not stated but implied. C: unlawful.

**6. divination** *n*—A: supernatural foresight. B: huge, godlike character. C: distraction.

**7. gargoyle** *n*—A: carved figure.  
B: military troop. C: gaggling sound.

**8. colossal** *adj*—A: evil. B: colourful.  
C: gigantic.

**9. moor** *v*—A: to curse. B: hike.  
C: secure.

**10. peevish** *adj*—A: very weak.  
B: complaining or cross. C: having no equal.

**11. incantation** *n*—A: magical chant. B: sudden disappearance. C: human form.

**12. brandish** *v*—A: to burn with a hot iron. B: label. C: wave about.

**13. fortnight** *n*—A: two-week period. B: emotional strength. C: month-long period.

**14. chivvy** *v*—A: to chase. B: shiver uncontrollably. C: hurry.

**15. askance** *adv*—A: divisively.  
B: sceptically or suspiciously.  
C: in a slanderous tone.



## Answers

**1. peruse**—[B] to read thoroughly. "Before the interview began, I made a point of *perusing* the applicant's CV and cover note."

**2. diatribe**—[A] criticism. "His angry *diatribe* left his wife in tears, and marked the beginning of the end of their marriage."

**3. tawny**—[B] golden. "The *tawny* owl swooped below the trees."

**4. cavort**—[C] To prance about. "The antelopes *cavorting* in the meadow were quite a sight."

**5. illicit**—[C] unlawful. "Their *illicit* actions led to a lengthy review by the union."

**6. divination**—[A] supernatural foresight. "The villagers were frightened by the woman's talent for *divination*."

**7. gargoyle**—[A] carved figure. "She was unsettled by the creepy *gargoyles* that adorned the ancient mansion."

**8. colossal**—[C] Gigantic. "She knew her new job was a *colossal* waste of time."

**9. moor**—[C] secure. "We took time to *moor* the boat properly before going ashore."

**10. peevish**—[B] complaining or cross. "When asked to revise the report a third time, the young writer responded in a *peevish* tone."

**11. incantation**—[A] magical chant. "The frightening *incantations* of Shakespeare's witches filled the darkened theatre."

**12. brandish**—[C] wave about. "The knight leapt from his horse and *brandished* a sword."

**13. fortnight**—[A] two-week period. "Wimbledon is the most important *fortnight* in tennis."

**14. chivvy**—[A] to chase. "The librarian *chivvied* the noisy children from the room."

### WORD OF THE DAY\*

#### KAIROS:

a perfect moment.

#### Alternative suggestions:

"When reading a word backwards causes a 'sore eye ache'."

"Chaos in Cairo."

"A lesser-known Greek god who now works under cover as a chiropractor in Egypt."

**15. askance**—[B] Sceptically or suspiciously. "He looked at me *askance* when I began concocting my complex lie."

### VOCABULARY RATINGS

**9 & below:** toad

**10-12:** broomstick

**13-15:** wizard

# 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN SPITFIRE MECHANICAL WATCH

**Yours for just £25.99 now,**  
followed by four further interest-free instalments of £25.99



Pride of Fighter Command, the iconic Supermarine Spitfire fighter plane soared into military history during the 1940 Battle of Britain. Led by Group Captain Douglas Bader, 242 Squadron thundered through the battle-strewn skies, defending Britain against enemy oppression. Commemorate these exceptional planes and courageous pilots with a limited edition watch.

This handcrafted mechanical timepiece features an oversized crown and numerals, sleek hands inspired by WWII pilots watches and a brown genuine leather strap with tan stitching. The working mechanism of the timepiece is exposed, surrounded by a rose gold pattern depicting laurel leaves of victory, whilst the face also features a detailed Supermarine Spitfire design and accents of gold-plating. The watch reverse is expertly engraved with a tribute to this aircraft in addition to Group Captain Douglas Baders' replica signature.

Only 4,999 of these watches are available, and to validate this each is engraved on the reverse with the individual edition. Accompanied by a Certificate of Authenticity. Applications are now open and this offer is likely to attract considerable interest from watch collectors and Spitfire enthusiasts alike, so apply promptly.

## KEY DETAILS

**EVENT:** The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain in 1940.

**LIMITED RELEASE:** Only 4,999 of these watches have been handcrafted. Each one is engraved on the reverse with the individual number. The earlier you order the lower your watch number will be.

**HIGH SPECIFICATION:** This collector's watch features a gold-plated casing, a genuine leather strap, exposed working mechanism and Group Captain Douglas Baders' replica signature.

**COULD BE YOURS FOR £129.95 (plus £9.99 S&H)\*, payable in five interest-free instalments of £25.99 each. Pay nothing now.**



Watch face measures 1.62 inches (4 cm) in diameter (inc. casing). Strap measures 10.2 inches (26 cm) in length x 0.75 inches (2 cm) in width.

The rear of the casing features Group Captain Douglas Baders' Engraved Signature

## FORMAL APPLICATION: 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY BATTLE OF BRITAIN SPITFIRE MECHANICAL WATCH

**DO NOT SEND ANY PAYMENT WITH THIS APPLICATION:**

**if successful, you will be notified in writing within 7 days**

YES, I wish to apply for \_\_\_\_\_ (Qty) of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Battle Of Britain Spitfire Mechanical Watch for just £25.99 (plus £9.99 S&H)\*, followed by four further interest-free monthly instalments of just £25.99 each – that's only £129.95 (plus £9.99 S&H). The edition is limited to just 4,999, each one accompanied by an individually-numbered Certificate of Authenticity. A custom-designed presentation case is included free of charge.

**I do not need to send any money now.** If my application is successful I will be notified in writing within 7 days. I understand the watch is covered by your 120-day money-back guarantee. I confirm I am 18 years or over.

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**www.bradford.co.uk**

**In the search box, please enter SPITFIRE WATCH**  
Lines open Mon-Fri 9.00am - 8.00pm and Sat 9.00am - 5.30pm.

OFFICIALLY LICENSED BY DOUGLAS BADER FOUNDATION  
(CHARITY NUMBER 800435)

Send this coupon to: THE BRADFORD EXCHANGE, PO BOX 653, STOKE-ON-TRENT, ST4 4RA

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Please note, we may contact you via email with information about your order

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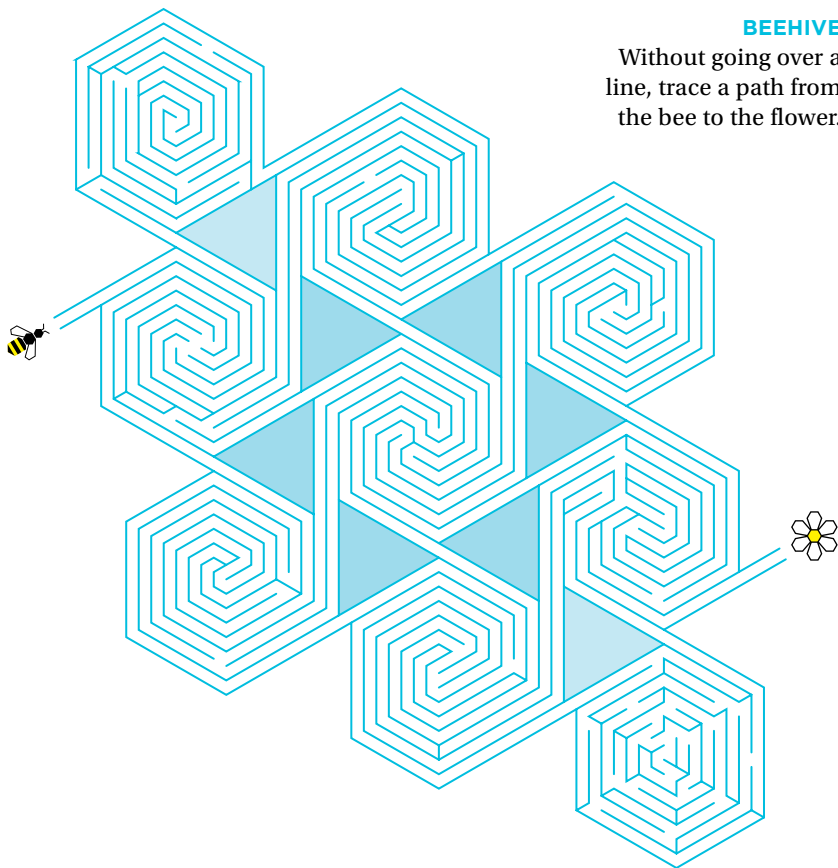
[www.apadana-ielts.com](http://www.apadana-ielts.com)

# BrainTeasers

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

## BEEHIVE

Without going over a line, trace a path from the bee to the flower.



(BEEHIVE) CRAIG KAPLAN

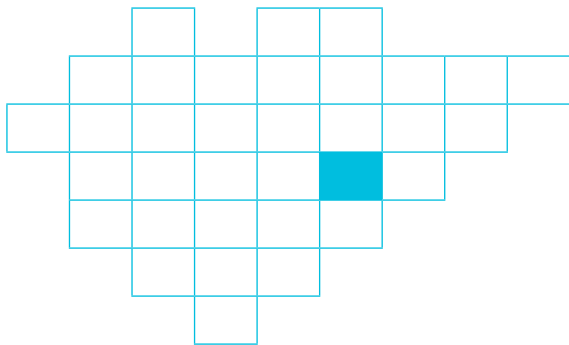
### A TALL ORDER

Order these digits from shortest to tallest in only three moves. A move consists of taking a single digit out of the line and reinserting it at another position.

3 6 4 1 5 2

### DISSECTION

Can you divide the grid below into three rotated but otherwise identical pieces? The solid rectangle is not part of any piece.



### SEQUENCER

What should come next in the following sequence?

4	2	9	7	16	14	25	?
---	---	---	---	----	----	----	---

### NO MORE, NO LESS

Find a path from the highlighted 1 at the top of the box to the highlighted 3 at the bottom. You may move horizontally or vertically but not diagonally. The sum of all the numbers in your path, including the two highlighted numbers, must equal 23.

1	1	3	4
2	0	1	0
8	3	9	8
4	4	0	5
8	9	1	2
9	8	5	2
5	7	8	2
5	7	8	1
0	3	6	1
6	7	5	1
9	7	6	3



## CROSSWISE

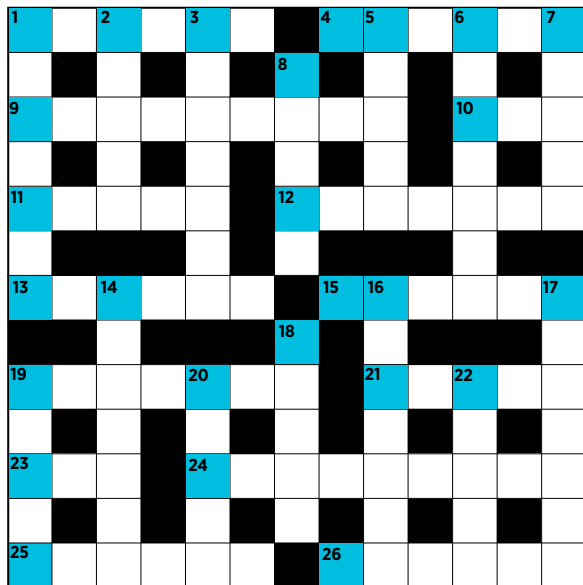
Test your general knowledge

## ACROSS

- 1 Heat or friendliness (6)
- 4 Expensive (6)
- 9 Naked (2,3,4)
- 10 Fluid in pens (3)
- 11 Poor light or sadness (5)
- 12 Bombing attack from overhead (3-4)
- 13 Sale of tickets to win prizes (6)
- 15 Reject all connection with (6)
- 19 Artist's sketch (7)
- 21 Earth forced up between furrows (5)
- 23 Travel across snow (3)
- 24 Move over a larger area (6,3)
- 25 Unwrapped (a present) (6)
- 26 US actress, \_\_\_ Judd (6)

## DOWN

- 1 Complainer (7)
- 2 Clothes or music in the style of the recent past (5)
- 3 Rising current of hot air (7)
- 5 \_\_\_ to, mention (5)
- 6 USA's "windy city" (7)
- 7 Linked like oxen (5)
- 8 Large mountain wild cats (5)
- 14 Easily broken or damaged (7)



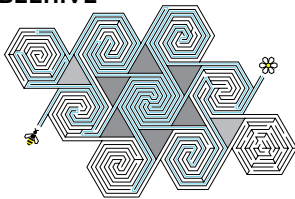
- 16 Make \_\_\_, encroach (7)
- 17 Traffic sign meaning "keep out" (2,5)
- 18 Violent behaviour (5)
- 19 Club for dancing (5)
- 20 Edition (of a magazine, etc) (5)
- 22 Slaver, drivel (5)

**Down:**  
1 Whinger 2 Retro 3 Thermal 4 Pricey 5 Refer 6 Chicago 7 Yoked 8 Pumas 9 In The Buff 10 Link 11 Gloom 12 Air Raid 13 Raffle 14 Fragile 15 Disown 16 Inroads 17 No Entry 18 Aggro 19 Disco 20 Issue 21 Ridge 22 Drool 23 Sk 24 Spread Out 25 Opened 26 Ashley

## ANSWERS

## BrainTeasers: Answers

### BEEHIVE

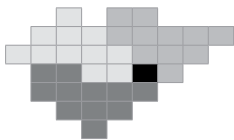


### A TALL ORDER

The three moves below could be performed in any order:

- Move 6 to the position after 5.
- Move 1 to the first position.
- Move 2 to the position before 3.

### DISSECTION



### SEQUENCER

23. The odd-numbered positions are occupied by square numbers in ascending order (4, 9, 16, 25.) Even-numbered positions are occupied by the result of subtracting two from each preceding number.

### NO MORE, NO LESS

1	1	3	4
2	0	1	0
8	3	9	8
4	4	0	5
8	9	1	2
9	8	5	2
5	7	8	2
5	7	8	1
0	3	6	1
6	7	5	1
9	7	6	3

## £50 PRIZE QUESTION

### Answer published in the January issue

When Robert threw die A, Bett Wager paid him £15; when Karen threw die B, Betty paid her £18; and when Helen threw die C, Betty paid her £6. How much should Betty pay John, who threw die D?



A



B



C



D

The first correct answer we pick on December 1 wins £50!\* Email **excerpts** @readersdigest.co.uk

## ANSWER TO NOVEMBER'S PRIZE QUESTION

$$((13+5) \times (3+2) \times 11) + 7 = 997$$

There are ten other possible solutions.

### AND THE £50 GOES TO...

Sam Pake, Guildford

# Laugh!

Win £50 for every reader's joke we publish! Go to [readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us](http://readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us) or [facebook.com/readersdigestuk](https://facebook.com/readersdigestuk)

**A BANK ROBBER** pulls out a gun, points it at the teller and says, "Give me all the money or you're geography!"

The puzzled teller replies, "Don't you mean history?"

The robber says, "Don't change the subject!" **SEEN AT FACEBOOK.COM**

**AN OLD WOMAN** is very upset at her husband's funeral. She says, "You have him in a brown suit and I wanted him in a blue suit."

The mortician says, "We'll take care of it, madam," and shouts to the back, "Ed, switch the heads on two and four!" **SEEN ONLINE**

**EVERY TIME PETER**, the man next door, headed towards Paul's house, Paul knew he was coming to borrow something. He was always doing this and it was driving Paul crazy.

"Peter won't get away with it this time," muttered Paul to his wife Liz. "Watch this."

"Er, I wondered if you'd be using your hedge trimmer this morning?" asked Peter the neighbour.

"Crikey, I'm terribly sorry," said Paul with a smug look, "but the fact of the matter is, I'll be using it all day."

"In that case," smiled Peter, "you won't be using your golf clubs. Mind if I borrow them?"

**KAY MADDOCKS, Hertfordshire**

**WHY DID THE WITCHES' TEAM** lose the cricket match?

Because their bats flew away.

**SEEN ONLINE**

**A MAN GOES TO SEE HIS PRIEST.**

"Father, I'd like to confide in you and ask for advice."

The priest asks, "What's wrong?"

The man replies, "My wife is poisoning me."

The priest, very surprised by this, asks, "How can that be?"

"Honestly, I'm certain she's poisoning me, what should I do?"

"Tell you what," says the priest, "let me talk to her. I'll see what I can find out and I'll let you know."

A week later the priest calls and says, "Well, I spoke to your wife. She

kept me on the phone for three hours.

"You want my advice?"

"Yes, Father."

"Take the poison."

GRAHAME JONES, *London*

**A MAN NAMED GEORGE** was going to bed when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in the shed. George opened the door to go and turn the light off—but saw there were people in the shed in the process of stealing things.

He immediately phoned the police, who asked, "Is someone in your house?"

George said no and explained the situation. Then they explained that all patrols were busy, and that he should simply lock his door and an officer would be there when available.

George said, "OK." He hung up, counted to 30 and phoned again.

"Hello, I just called you a few seconds ago because there were people in my shed. You don't have to worry about them now because I've just shot them all."

Then he hung up. Within five minutes, an armed-response unit, three squad cars and an ambulance showed up. The police caught the burglars red-handed.

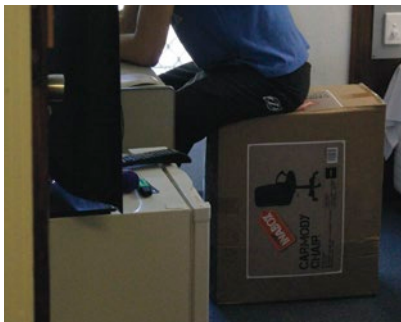
One of the policemen said to George, "I thought you said that you'd shot them!"

George said, "I thought you said there was nobody available."

SEEN AT LAUGHFACTORY.COM

## IMPRESSIVELY LAZY

It may be season to slow down and kick back—but some people are at it all year round (from the poke.co.uk)





**A TEENAGER** takes a shortcut home through the graveyard. Halfway across, he's startled by a tapping noise coming from the shadows. Trembling with fear, he spots an old man with a hammer and chisel, chipping away at a headstone.

"I thought you were a ghost!" says the relieved teen. "What are you doing working so late?"

"Oh, those idiots," grumbles the old man. "They misspelled my name!"

GINETTE HUGHES, *Hertfordshire*

**I'VE JUST SWITCHED** from venison to pheasant. Absolute game-changer.

COMEDIAN DARREN WALSH

**WHICH TWO LETTERS** in the alphabet are always jealous?

N, V.

SEEN ONLINE

**WHAT DO YOU CALL A KID** who doesn't believe in Father Christmas?  
A rebel without a Claus.

SEEN AT JOKES4US.COM

**APPARENTLY ONE IN THREE**

Britons are conceived in an IKEA bed, which is mad because those places are really well lit.

COMEDIAN MARK SMITH

**I BOUGHT MY GIRLFRIEND** a fridge for her birthday.

I know it's not the greatest gift, but you should have seen her face light up when she opened it.

SEEN ONLINE

**ARE HEADPHONES** getting bigger or are idiots getting smaller?

COMEDIAN HENRY PAKER



## INTELLIGENCE IS SEXY

*So says Twitter's @50NerdsOfGrey, whose parody of the famous novel series 50 Shades of Grey will have you steaming up your glasses—with laughter:*

**"'I've been a very bad girl,' she said, biting her lip. 'I need to be punished.' 'Very well,' he said—and installed Windows 10 on her laptop."**

"He was heavily into BDSM—Batman, Dungeons & Dragons, Star Trek and Mathematics."

**"'I'm all yours!' she cried. 'You can do things with me you'd never dare do with any other woman.'"**

**'Alright,' he said, and made eye contact."**

"She told him she was turned on by dangerous men. So he disabled his firewall."

# 60-Second Stand-Up

We chatted to sardonic-yet-sensitive soul **Sam Simmons**

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE OF YOUR OWN JOKES?

Imagine you're just walking down the street one day and a hamburger appears mid-air. You bite into the hamburger—and the next thing you know, you're on the moon. Is that what it's like for fish when we go fishing?

It's a philosophical joke.

## WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF YOUR CURRENT TOUR OR SET?

There's a bit where I have a beer on stage with the audience—that feels really good.

## HAVE YOU FOUND ANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY TO BE FUNNIER THAN OTHERS ON YOUR TOURS?

Extreme north and extreme south are good. The middle's a bit weird—but being Australian, I'm exotic.

## WHAT'S YOUR MOST MEMORABLE HECKLE EXPERIENCE?

On one occasion, I hadn't even got to the microphone when someone shouted out, "Oh no! A bald c\*\*\*!" I just thought, *How are the musings of a bald man going to be any worse than the musings of a man with hair?*



## WHO'S YOUR COMEDY INSPIRATION?

My mother. She's a very difficult woman: bitter, twisted and generally propped up by peach-coloured, U-shaped pillows devouring Danielle Steel novels. She's the funniest person I've ever met in my life.

## IF YOU WERE A FLY, WHO'S WALL WOULD YOU BE ON?

If I were a time-travelling fly, I'd spy on the Rat Pack. I think Sinatra might have been a very, very bad man. ■

Visit [facebook.com/samsimmonscomedy](https://facebook.com/samsimmonscomedy) for more information on Sam's tours.

# 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-December. 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 December 9. We'll announce the winner in our February issue.

## October's Winner



It was a much closer contest this month, but still no joy for the pros. Cartoonist Peter King garnered some support for his caption, **"You're lucky to catch him in. He's usually found lurking in his shed"**,

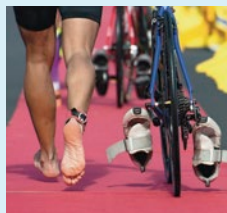
but he was pipped at the post by reader Kelvin Jay, who gave us **"I think you'll agree, he's not the man I married"**. Well done, and keep up the standard!

## IN THE JANUARY ISSUE



### Alan Davies interview

The actor discusses his career and the new *Jonathan Creek*.



### Taking on the Triathlon

Its popularity is on the rise, but why would anybody want to do it?

### Plus

- Best of British: Charity Shops
- Ways to Avoid Diabetes
- Lost in the Arctic
- How IKEA Took Over the World

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