Reader's Digest

APRIL 2020

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OFFICE JOKERS

Clueless Bosses, Dumb Employees, Clients From Hell

Wake Up Your Brain!

35 Health Myths—Busted!

DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

Attacked By A Dead Snake

Courage Under Fire

4 HEROES FROM DELHI'S RIOTS

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Irrfan Khan

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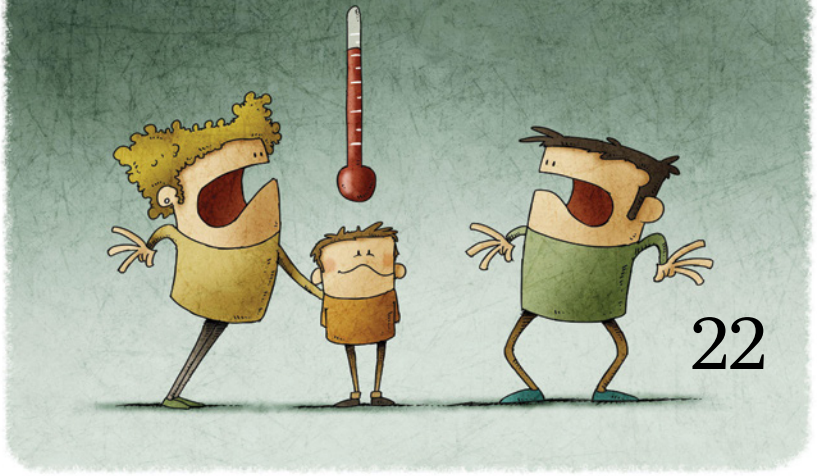
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LEFT: YOGEN SHAH, RIGHT: JENNY STURM/SHUTTERSTOCK





स्वदेशी और ग्रामोद्योग आयोग
KVIC
कामये दुःखतप्तानाम्।
प्राणिनाम् आर्तिनाशनम्॥

Khadi India





KHADI: THE ETERNAL SYMBOL OF INDIA

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a statutory body, which has helped Khadi institutions achieve significant development in the Khadi sector and rural economy. KVIC is also one of those unique institutions in India that weaves the nation's past, present and future through – self-reliance and sustainability.

Mahatma Gandhi used Khadi as a movement to empower the downtrodden and the poorest of the poor, in the process of forging a new national pride in self-reliance. Many programmes have been initiated by KVIC to provide economic sustainability to people in far-off areas and to create a sense of participation in a development-oriented governance.

- Khadi is a special fabric, which finds its roots exclusively in India.
- Khadi is revered in India and worldwide due to its uniqueness of being hand spun, hand-woven and is a truly sustainable fabric.
- It is the most skin friendly fabric due to its exceptional quality of **"warm in winter and cool in summer".**

The Prime Minister has often called this phase as 'Khadi for Fashion' and 'Khadi for Economic Transformation'. In these changing times, although the models of development have changed to some extent, sustainability has always been at the core for Khadi. With its diversified canvas, Khadi's principles of sustainable development reverberate from every direction: from helping terrorism-affected families and finding life-support, to giving economic support to families of tiger-attack victims and rehabilitating poaching affected communities to self-employing displaced people in the Narmada valley.

Thus, KVIC is exploring uncharted waters and experimenting in new trends and designs which could appeal to Indian as well international markets. It has opened doors for new thoughts



"Khadi is the timeless fabric of transformation which is transforming the lives in rural areas every day".
Chairman, KVIC

and ideas, which could leverage the Khadi fabric and help the growth of Khadi and Village Industries, thus promoting rural entrepreneurs and Khadi artisans. It is time to uphold our badge of honor-Khadi-and offer it the respect and dignity it deserves.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that, it is a gateway to self-employment and prosperity for lakhs of Indians. In the past few years, KVIC has generated around 27 lakh employment opportunities.

Over the past few years, Khadi and Village Industries Products have registered highest sales and have passionately strived to strengthen the rural Industries through various schemes and initiatives such as Khadi, PMEGP, Honey Mission, Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojana etc. KVIC over the past 5 years has created employment opportunities for around 27 lakh people through its schemes and programmes.

From the House of Khadi

Khadi Fabric: KVIC spins employment and weaves prosperity in India. Khadi as a hand-spun and hand-woven, fabric signifies honesty, dedication, sincerity and purity, empowering the poorest of the poor. It is the only product in modern history that has stood the test of time as a vehicle of sustainable development and self-reliance.

Honey: KVIC launched Honey Mission in 2017 and has been training beekeepers, distributing bee boxes and helping rural, educated but unemployed youth to earn extra income through beekeeping activities, at their doorstep. KVIC has been continuously evolving new ways so as to make this process easier and less laborious. Production of healthy honey and wax, and bee-keeping has certainly opened up new avenues for unemployed youths and for the aspiring young.

Aggarbatti: It seems Achche Din (good days) have come for the agarbatti manufacturers in India, after a government order to put raw aggarbatti and other fragrances under the 'Restricted Category' of Import on 29th August this year.

It was this heroic and historic decision which has given a ray of hope to the aggarbatti artisans. It would have remained a distant dream for aggarbatti to revive if the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) had not appraised the concerned Ministers about the pathetic conditions of agarbatti-making units.

Toiletries: Toiletries such as soaps, shampoos, moisturizing creams, face wash, under-eye gels and many more products manufactured under the aegis of KVIC are enriched with natural ingredients like raw honey and the natural healing properties of aloe vera. These products contain natural and herbal ingredients like heena, neem, tulsi, rosemary and dhatura which effectively cleanses the skin and hair without damaging the hair, thus providing a clean, soft, well manageable & healthy hair. Khadi products are also fortified with strong bio-stimulant

herbal actives like fenugreek, rosemary, chamomile and basil, which promotes skin health at the cellular level. Similarly, these remarkable products from Khadi give a soothing effect which heals and pampers skin like a true skin repair agent. Herbs combined with honey not only hydrate and moisturize the skin but is also rich in anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties.

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DEAR READER

How Fragile We Are



As I write to you, scenes playing out across the world, flashing through our screens, seem straight out of a Hollywood disaster film. Who would have thought humans would be fighting back an invisible, sinister enemy that, at the time of going to press, had invaded 177 countries, killing more than 15,000 people?

Currently, along with most of western Europe and the United States, many Indian states are under a lockdown. A haunting video clip of an empty Times Square in New York City, that never sleeps, has been burnt into our brains forever. The economic shockwaves are being felt the world over.

Many of the offices in Noida, where we are headquartered, have been shut down. You are in our thoughts, as we try to bring you reliable information (p 32, 36, 22) to help you and your family stay safe. Do also follow our social-media handles and website, where there are daily updates on the coronavirus situation.

As if a raging pandemic is not enough, there are man-made tragedies that wake us up to the impermanence of life, and how diabolical humans can turn when consumed by hatred. In late February, Delhi witnessed frenzied mobs overrun working-class suburbs in its north-eastern fringes, killing 53 people and rendering thousands homeless.

The *Reader's Digest* team brings you stories—from ground zero—of real-life heroes, who threw caution to the wind, saving lives and restoring our faith in humanity (p 50).

At this extraordinarily challenging time, let's pray for sanity and everyone's safety.



Sanghamitra Chakraborty
EDITOR

Send an email to
editor.india@rd.com

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANAND GOGOI, HAIR & MAKE-UP BY ROLIKA PRAKASH; SHUTTERSTOCK

OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE *February* ISSUE



India on a Platter

This was a delicious read, featuring foods and recipes found across the length and breadth of India. As a Maharashtrian, I find that *puran poli* truly represents the state. While *vada pav* is mostly popular in Mumbai and Thane, other cities too have their own delicacies, like *puneri misal* in Pune and *chivda* in Nashik. However, I feel that pakora, made with ingredients as diverse as vegetables, fruits, meat and bread, is the one versatile dish that is truly Indian.

—JAYSHREE THATTE, *Thane*

***Jayshree Thatte gets this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000.* —EDs**

Banking on Hope

Perhaps, only someone who has worked very closely with the poor across different states, and built an institution to empower them, can truly dream of improving India's human development index through his vision. It is not an exaggeration to say that Chandra Shekhar Ghosh is to India what the Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is to Bangladesh. Mr Ghosh has the compassion within him to uplift the impoverished and ailing.

—BAL GOVIND, *Noida*

"I Never Forgot You"

It was a befitting coincidence that I happened to read Marilena and Aldo's 'true love story' on Valentine's Day. The story eloquently narrates how one's first love is a profoundly deep emotional experience that endures throughout our lives, beyond the limits of time and space. It was also rather heart-warming to read about their children and grandchildren encouraging and helping them resurrect their long-lost love and share a few happy moments in their old age. Not everyone, though, can be as lucky as Aldo, and may have to console themselves with Lord Tennyson's words:

'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

—M. M. MATHUR, *New Delhi*

A Writer after 200 Rejections

I read with great interest the story of the struggling author Abdullah Khan, whose dream of becoming a writer came true after 21 years. What struck me as extraordinary was the fact that Khan had never met his wife before their

marriage or knew much about her—and yet, she, like a pillar, was pushing and encouraging him to complete the novel, despite the numerous setbacks. I salute Tarannum Khan for her dedication, determination and never-say-die attitude.
—R. A. M. VARMA, *Kochi*

Is Student Politics a Waste of Time?
Kamal Mitra Chenoy has correctly stressed on the importance of student activism. I strongly feel that the opinions of educated youth can improve political discourses, as they can be unbiased and bold. However, student bodies should ensure that they are not used by political parties. These bodies ought to uphold their independence of thought, at all times.
—JAY KARAJGIKAR, *via email*

News from the World of Medicine
Breast cancer is a fatal disease for women. But sadly many of them are shy to reveal or talk about the symptoms in the initial stages and end up suffering greatly as a result. The government must frame a health policy for screening women from a certain age onwards , so as to stall its advent in the initial stages. Screening vans are available in a few big cities, but they are far less in number, compared to the number of women who need them.
—MANJEET SINGH ISHAR, *Mohali*

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



SHUTTERSTOCK

STORIES OF KINDNESS

Good deeds can often come from the most unexpected quarters. While conventional wisdom tells us to be wary of strangers, we at *Reader's Digest* believe that random acts of kindness come our way from people we may not even know, and often when we least expect it. Have you experienced such an act of benevolence, no questions asked, from strangers? **Send your stories, with the subject line 'Kindness of Strangers', to editor.india@rd.com by 15 April 2020 and your entry could be featured.** Do not forget to mention your name and location!



"It's good, but I don't know if it's refrigerator-door good."

BARBARA SMALLER/EVERYONE'S A CRITIC/COURTESY PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

LIFE'S *Like That*

Over dinner, I could sense something was bothering my mother, so I asked if anything was wrong. "Yes," she admitted. "What's all this I hear on the news about banning baking products?"

I patted her hand reassuringly and said, "That's *vaping* products."

—JOSEPH MCLAUGHLIN

When I was a boy, I had a disease that required me to eat dirt three times a day in order to survive. It's a good thing my older brother told me about it.

—*onelinefun.com*

In one of his last interviews, Eddie Money, the late musician and star of AXS TV's reality show *Real Money,* admitted to *Rolling Stone* that his wife didn't like how he

The difference between dog people and cat people: Dog people wish their dogs were people. Cat people wish they were cats.

—@SIMONSINEK

appeared on-screen.

"My wife says to me, 'You look heavy on TV.' I said, 'Honey, the camera adds 10 pounds.' She said to me, 'How many cameras did they use?' "

Kitchen Yin ...

My husband's favourite place to stand is right in front of whatever cabinet I need.

—@SIXFOOTCANDY

... and Yang

Pretty sure my wife's memoir would be called *Just Take the Extra Two Seconds and Put It in the Dishwasher.*

—@TIRED_DAD_OF_2

Something tells me

I need to lose some weight. During a recent trip to visit my son and his family, I stopped off at a bakery to pick up dessert. After scanning the display case, I settled on a dozen pound-cake cupcakes. The clerk's pleasant response: "Is that for here or to go?"

—MIKE COWAN

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

WHY, GRANDMOTHER, WHAT A SHARP TONGUE YOU HAVE!

Sure, they look sweet, but some grandmas just don't have a filter.



- My freshman year of college, my grandma mailed me sugar cookies for my birthday but wrote in the card that she'd put jalapeños in them so that I would know she was thinking of me "but wouldn't gain the weight."
- When my older sister told my family she was pregnant out of wedlock and not in a relationship, my grandma sighed, looked at me, and said, "We always thought it would be you."
- I had just met my boyfriend's family for the first time. As I was leaving, his grandma gave me a hug and said it was wonderful to meet me. I said, "Thank you. It's nice to know I have approval." To which she replied, "Oh, now, dear, just because we like you doesn't mean we approve."

—*thechive.com*

ABRAMOVA ELENA/SHUTTERSTOCK (BACON), OLLLIKEBALLOON/SHUTTERSTOCK (ARMS+LEGS)





SEE THE WORLD ...
turn the page ➝

PHOTO: © ACTION PRESS/SOUTH WEST NEWS SERVICE



PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES/ANDY CLEMENT - ANDYC.COM



... DIFFERENTLY

What looks like an abandoned ballroom is actually the inside of a violin! Artist Adrian Borda usually works more with the brush than the camera, but an advertising campaign for the Berliner Philharmoniker inspired the Romanian painter to create a series of extraordinary photos. In his hometown of Reghin, also known as the city of violins, he began to repurpose old, retired instruments to create these extraordinary cathedrals of light.



"Controlling your emotions and not letting your mind wander is unique to chess", says grandmaster Viswanathan Anand.

UP CLOSE

The Mind of a Champion

Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand discusses the battles in his mind and how he handles victories and losses

BY *V. Kumara Swamy*

What are the life lessons unique to chess?

Ultimately, be they mental or physical, most games are lost in the head. Although, I feel that chess is unique in the sense that during a game we are unable to release our emotions. We can't scream or celebrate with others on the field. Controlling your emotions and not letting your mind wander is unique to chess.

What was the idea behind your recent book *Mind Master: Winning Lessons from a Champion's Life*?

When I wrote this book, I wanted to share with chess fans the most significant moments in my life and how I experienced them, as opposed to the chess moves I played and their evaluation. I probe into how I felt before and after success and failure, and explore the lessons I learnt from those life-changing moments. Other than these experiences, I also describe [in the book] what I felt while participating in competitions and my feelings approaching them, how things worked out when I was confident, what the right frame of mind was and how I achieved that frame. I think not only chess audiences but others too can connect with my story.

Sports psychologists emphasize visualizing victory for a 'winning mindset'. You seem to have a slightly different take on this. Do you?

Visualizing victory is helpful, but you should know who you are. One of the problems with me is when I visualize victory, I tend to relax and think the job is already done. It is a case of reminding myself not to count my chickens before they hatch. However, visualizing scenarios before they occur is important, and I stick to that advice 100 per cent.

ALAMY

Chess is about concentration. But why do you speak of the importance of distractions to keep the mind calm?
Concentration is important, but it's not always achievable in chess. You struggle to remain focused for five or six hours, but your mind can wander. One has to be realistic—maintain a semblance of concentration and be aware of guarding against the moment when it is slipping away. Distractions can be nice, off the tournaments. Taking your mind off chess in the evenings or after the tournament can allow you to arrive at a new game afresh.

Would you say that being instinctive and taking risks, as compared to planning, has given you more satisfaction?
What's satisfying is winning games, however that may happen. But you do feel good about yourself when you are forced to do something [new] over the board. You come to discover something you did not know before. When a risk pays off, it feels very rewarding. But equally, I would pat myself on the back if I have followed my preparation and I anticipated my opponent well. That is a different kind of satisfaction.

In your nearly 35-year-long chess career, was there ever a time when you put yourself under so much pressure that you reached a breaking point?
I have put pressure on myself on many occasions. In my youth, I would go through long periods of success, and then face a slump—sometimes short and sometimes long. You could call it the ebb and flow of chess. Once you achieve a fair amount of success, you harbour unrealistic expectations of yourself. But after a failure, you face trouble recovering your confidence. At best, I would say I know what steps I need to take to overcome a slump faster. But it is still a part of the game—you inevitably fall there. It's a chance to revisit all your working methods and the assumptions you had before.

Your celebrations after victories are very understated. How come?
That's correct. I don't usually do anything insane after winning. At most, I am just dying to talk to someone and release the pressure of the tournament. I'm happiest just getting back to a private place with family and friends and slowly letting the tension ebb away. I don't remember doing anything wild after a victory, at least not in public.

You started a revolution of sorts for chess in India. How do you look back at it?
Yes, I am very proud that I became the first grandmaster, the first junior champion and also the first world champion from India. I also know that a lot of people took to chess after my achievements and because of heightened interest in the game. However, I will be the first to acknowledge that I benefited from the previous generation. The next generation will have new heroes as well. R



SHUTTERSTOCK

DEPARTMENT OF WIT

What If Old Age Was All the Rage?

BY *Anne Roumanoff*

THE FASHION WORLD is constantly reinventing itself. Here's what things would look like if old age became the latest craze:

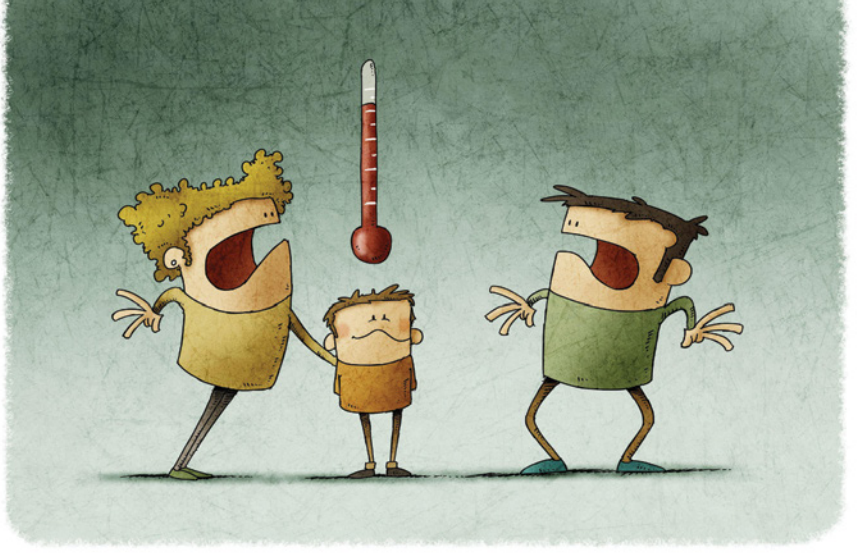
At the cosmetic surgery clinic: I'm begging you, doctor, I can't stand looking so young. What can you do for me? I'd love to look older. I was thinking of having crow's feet injected around my eyes or having my jawline softened to look saggy. Maybe you could put age spots on my hands? You can't put a price on looking old. Four thousand euros for ageing procedures? That's pretty expensive, but my husband will be so pleased. He's always niggling me for looking too young. I'm petrified he'll leave me for an older woman.

At the hairdresser's: I'd love to have lots of white hair. I look far too youthful as I am. It's a disaster. So, yes, bleach my hair and give me grey highlights. I just can't bear it when people tell me how young I look.

At job interviews: Sorry, we're looking for someone a lot older and more mature, at least in their sixties. You just can't beat the elderly for injecting energy into a company. The problem is that, with everyone looking for old people right now, they're very hard to find.

In the editorial department of women's magazines: We need a really old woman for the cover. 75? No, too young. 88? That's perfect. Is she really wrinkly? You wouldn't have anyone a bit older, would you? 95? Love it. The only thing I'm not sure about is the cover line: 'Wild for White Hair' or 'Old is Beautiful'. R

Anne Roumanoff is a well-known French humorist. She lives in Paris.



SLICE OF LIFE

Hello, Hypochondria!

Obsessing with a feeling of unease, slight feverishness and a bit of body ache? Could it be 'season change' or the C-word?

BY *Sandip Roy*

BENGALIS HAVE A VERY SPECIFIC untranslatable condition called '*gaa myaj myaj*'. It's a feeling of unease, slight feverishness, a bit of body ache and more-than-usual ennui. It's a staple during this time of the year which Bengalis call 'season change'. This year, of course, the usual hypochondria that afflicts the Bengali body and soul has a new name—corona-panic.

The other day, a neighbour made polite noises about how unusually pleasant the Kolkata weather was for a March evening. Then he said ruefully, "Of course, now everyone is anxiously awaiting the full heat of summer, hoping it will fry the coronavirus as well." We are never happy.

Yesterday Once More

Bengal, which has bandh culture in its

ALAMY

bone marrow, can easily comprehend what is fashionably being called 'social distancing' these days—schools shut, movie theatres closed, stores shuttered. It feels like yesterday once more.

Actually, the malls are not yet shuttered since Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee thinks that could lead to food shortage. Instead, there are people at the entrance squirting hand sanitizer. Of course, the new divide between the haves and the have-nots is between those who have the luxury to self-isolate and those who don't because their jobs require them to man the gates of malls, work in hospitals and keep buses running.

A Connected Community

I get a barrage of emails from everyone, from food delivery apps to airlines to retail chains, all titled 'An important message for our community' instead of offering discounts.

The irony is we have all discovered how connected we are as a community, thanks to a virus that requires us to self-isolate. Of course, we all have our own ideas of what self-isolation and community mean. I am sure some of us piously going into self-quarantine think we are all alone at home by which we mean we are all 'alone' with two maids, the cook and the driver. My mother is anxiously monitoring her daily soaps, nervous that as shooting stops, she will be doomed to watch reruns. Her club has cancelled its corona-talk because of corona-fears.

A New World is Breathing

In India, the virus footprint is still officially low. Whether that is because of good luck, pre-emptive measures or just reflects a lack of mass-testing is up for debate. But it means that we can sit in Kolkata and shake our heads over headlines about Northern California, which includes Silicon Valley, putting some seven million people in stay-at-home lockdown.

We still have not come to terms with the economic impact this will have on businesses, especially those which require customers to come through their doors. We still have what sounds like the '*ga-myaj-myaj* version' of a pandemic that is striking terror in European capitals and American cities. The world order seems to be standing on its head as African countries are imposing a ban on European visitors. America, once nervous about who it let into its borders, now, finds itself considered as the undesirable immigrant, subject to cancelled visas and thermal scans.

But for the moment, we are taking baby steps in learning to live in a different way. As Arundhati Roy once wrote in another context, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing." As we self-isolate and simultaneously discover that we are all in this together, we might be able to hear that new world breathing. It's just sad that it took a rogue virus to drive home that message. R

GOOD NEWS
FOR A
Better Planet



Rajni Sathi (left) with her son, Deepak, outside the exam centre in Ludhiana

Mother–Son Examinees

EDUCATION There are not too many occasions when parents and children take the same exam. But when 18-year-old Deepak Sathi appeared for the class-12 exam of the Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) in Ludhiana recently, his 46-year-old mother Rajni did so too. Rajni was compelled to give up her studies and it was almost after three decades that she took her class-10 exams two years ago, with Deepak. "I always wanted to complete my education. It is only now that I am able to fulfill my dreams. My aim is now to complete my graduation," says Rajni, who works as a ward assistant in a government hospital. Deepak hopes that his mother will accompany him for the bachelor's degree exam, three years from now. We wish Rajni the very best.

Safe Homes for Inter-Faith Couples

DIVERSITY In a country where inter-faith and inter-caste couples face social ostracization and often violence, the Kerala government's

ABOVE: RAJNI SATHI, RIGHT: CAROLINE

move to offer 'safe homes' for such potential victims recently was welcomed with applause on social media. The state minister for health and social justice K. K. Shailaja, said in the state assembly last month that safe homes will be set up in all districts of the state. Under the initiative, the couples can stay upto a year in these homes, with the state ensuring their financial stability. Shailaja also announced that couples who may be holding government jobs will be considered for transfers on a priority basis. These homes are likely to come up soon across Kerala. We hope that other state governments take a cue.

Jail Hands to the Rescue

SERVICE News comes that the inmates of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Central Jail in Jabalpur, have been busy making masks to tackle the coronavirus. Around 50 inmates went to work, making cotton masks that can be sold in the market for ₹7 apiece. The jail authorities claimed that the masks were prepared in the power looms within the jail and they met the safety standards prescribed by the World Health Organization. At a time when masks have disappeared or are being sold at inflated prices, this initiative and the work of these inmates deserves to be lauded.

—COMPILED BY V. KUMARA SWAMY

Sources: Education—*The Tribune* 03.03.20, Government—*New Indian Express*, 05.03.20, Service—*BusinessToday.In*, 15.03.20, Heroes—*The Telegraph*, 12.02.20

HEROES: Young and Brave



Caroline Malsawmtluangi, 11, became a household name in Mizoram in June last year, when she risked her life to save a kidnapped minor. She received the National Bravery Award for her presence of mind and courage. However, the pre-teen recently demonstrated that not only was she brave, but she also had a heart of gold. Caroline, who lives near Aizwal, visited the minor girl at Thualthu village in the Lunglei district in southern Mizoram and shared half of the ₹20,000 that she received for her act of bravery. Her parents said that Caroline was really disturbed by how deprived the young girl was and decided to share her prize money. We doff our hats to Caroline. R

POINTS TO PONDER

... a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? ... It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met ... large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.

Martin Luther King Jr, *activist*

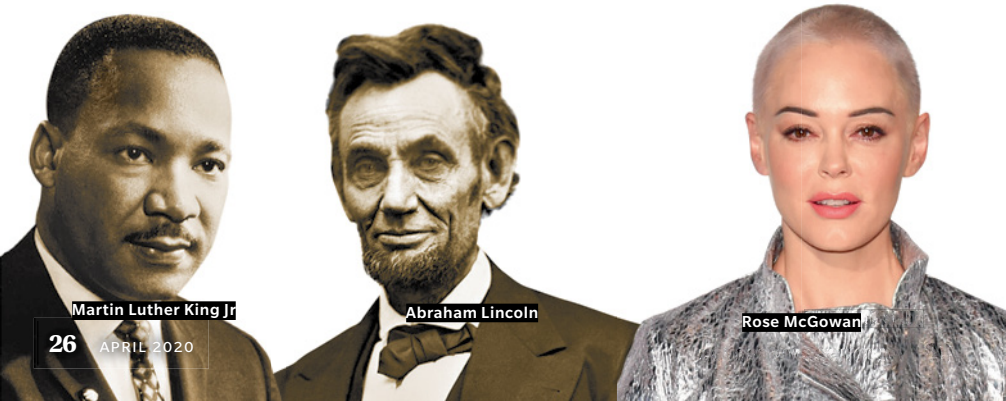
Elections belong to the people. It's their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters.

Abraham Lincoln, *former American President*

... we are white women ... and of some means and it still took this many of us to even get him [Harvey Weinstein] to have one day in court, just tells you...how almost impossible it is to even be heard.

Rose McGowan, *actor*

FROM LEFT: ALAMY, SHUTTERSTOCK



Having travelled, ... having come into contact with different races, different communities, different religions, ... friends, my vision is clear. I have no prejudice of race, creed, caste or colour ... Until you, students, have acquired and mastered the spirit of brotherhood, do not believe it possible that you will ever cease to be sectarian ... if I may use such word ... you will ever be national!

Sarojini Naidu, *poet*

There is a distinction between neutrality and impartiality ... Impartiality is non-compromisable for a judge. It is an essential attribute. On neutrality, the Constitution, in my view, requires the judge at all levels to be able to discern the weak from the strong litigant in terms of their capacities to access justice and lean on the side of the vulnerable in order to attempt to achieve equality of arms.

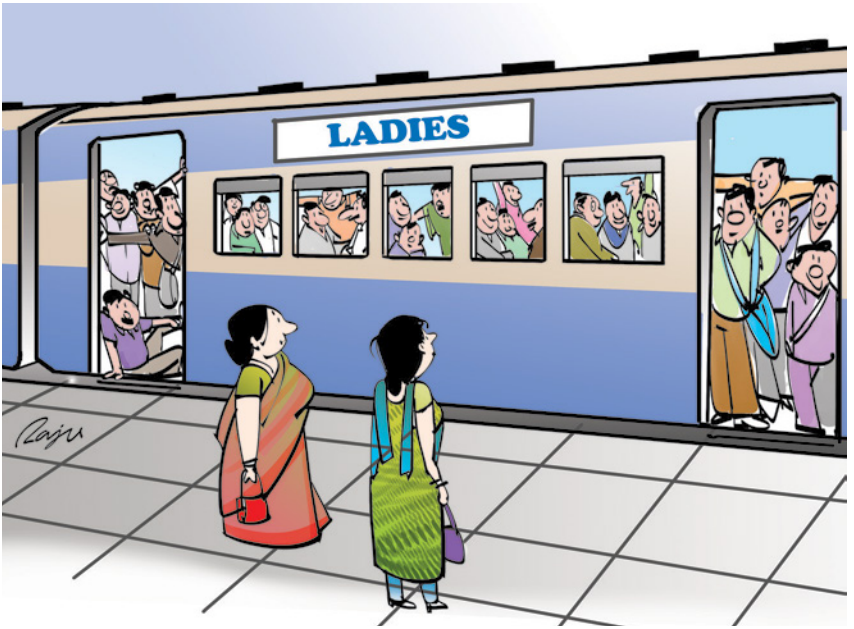
S. Muralidhar, *judge*

We all bear conflicting needs within us. We want both, simplicity and abundance.

Steven Weinberg, *Nobel laureate*



LEFT: ALAMY, RIGHT: SHUTTERSTOCK



It Happens

ONLY IN INDIA

Recently, patriarchy sunk to a new low. Swami Krushnaswarup Dasji, a religious leader from Gujarat sermonized that menstruating women, who cook for their husbands are cursed to be reborn as "bitches". As for the men who dare eat the "polluted" food, they can look forward to being reincarnated as bovines. Dasji claimed, he was simply invoking the *shastras*.

The aforementioned cleric is associated with the Swaminarayan Temple, which runs a college in Bhuj. The administration of the same institution that was in the news, earlier this year, for forcing over 60 women to remove their undergarments to check if they were menstruating. Why? The hostel had a rule that women on their period

ILLUSTRATION BY *Raju Epuri*

were forbidden to eat their meals with the other residents, which is equal parts revolting and ridiculous.
Source: *The Hindu*

The price for drunken driving can be high, but this one was a whopper. Rishabh Arora, a stockbroker from Noida, was driving back from Saturday night partying. He stopped by the road at Noida's Sector 90, alighted from his BMW car to relieve himself quickly, hoping that no one would notice. The next thing he knew was some miscreants had zoomed off with his luxury vehicle.

The car belonged to Arora's brother-in-law, who still has a ₹40 lakh loan on it. His misfortune aside, was Arora booked for drunk driving? The answer is no. Deputy Commissioner of Police, Central Noida, Harish Chander told the Press Trust of India (PTI), "The priority is to recover the BMW and ensure arrest of the culprits." Though Arora claimed that a gun was involved in the carjacking, the police seemed a bit skeptical of his account as he, according to them, was "highly drunk". Is it too much to expect that drunken drivers and those who target them stay off the road?
Source: *indiatoday.in*

With a pandemic raging around us, you would think that our elected representatives would disseminate correct information and ensure shutting down gibberish regarding this public health emergency. Well, that's not what happened. On the contrary, the Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Ramdas Athawale in the presence of the Chinese Consul General, Tang Guocai, decided to huddle up in a circle at Mumbai's Gateway of India and chant "Go, Corona, go". This was at a prayer meet, organized to stop the spread of the pandemic in China. Athawale's chant was met with suitable derision and disbelief but has now gone viral through some catchy remixes and Tik-Tok videos.
Source: *Times of India*



A 'pure' vegetarian restaurant, with the trade secret of turning meat and fish items into standard vegetarian fare.

PHOTO CREDIT: ANAND MAHINDRA/TWITTER

—COMPILED BY NAOREM ANUJA

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

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

For my final supper, I'd like to have ...



... the deadly desserts
I've been resisting all my life.
NILANJANA LAHIRI CHATTERJEE,
Kolkata



... a cup of water.
VIJAYALAKSHMI PRAVIN PAI,
Pandharpur, Maharashtra

... the pages of my favourite book.
NIDA KHWAJA,
Ghaziabad

... Lord Jesus at the table.
DIVYA MONA,
Chennai



... ice cream.
PRACHI JAVERI HARIYANI,
via Instagram

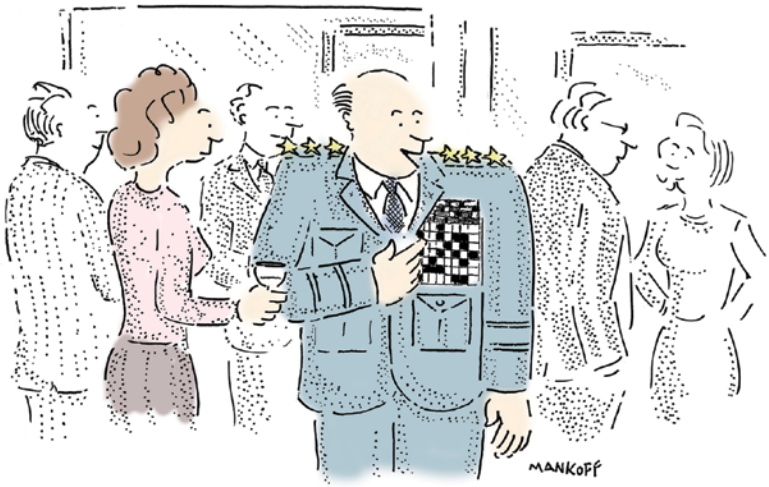
... bhang and *malai gilori* [a sweet].
ROCHAK MEHROTRA,
Bengaluru





... nectar and ambrosia.
NENDING KOJING,
Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh

SHUTTERSTOCK



"And this is a crossword puzzle I'm working on."

BOB MANKOFF/CARTOONCOLLECTIONS

HUMOUR *in* UNIFORM

When I was a Navy student pilot, I visited the home of a classmate. I met his wife and baby and was impressed that he had all his flight gear neatly laid out on a table. But something struck me as odd.

Picking up some unidentifiable gear, I said, "I didn't get one of these!"

"Ummm ... no, you're good," he mumbled. "That's my wife's breast pump."
—CURT GREGORY

As part of my Naval Reserve requirements at Emory University Dental School, I attended a talk about proper dental procedures following nuclear warfare. Evidently, one of my classmates found the talk less than stimulating and fell asleep.

Unfortunately for him, our lecturer caught him. Sidling right up to the student, the speaker shouted in his ear, "What would you do for a patient in the event of a nuclear war?!"

My startled classmate sat up and responded, "Place a temporary filling, sir!"
—R. H. SASSER JR, DDS

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

BETTER LIVING

CORONA Takes The Crown

A top public-health expert decodes the novel coronavirus and how you can protect yourself from this sinister infection

BY *Dr Professor K. Srinath Reddy*



IF THERE WERE A PAGEANT for viruses this year, the undoubted winner would be the debutant COVID-19 virus which has captured global attention like no other. Emerging in Wuhan in China, it has swept across countries and continents with speed and stealth, to bring global travel, trade and economy to a shuddering slowdown.

Deriving its name from its resemblance to a crown, the coronavirus family includes both the inconvenient but innocuous common-cold virus as well as the sinister SARS virus. The COVID-19 virus, the most recently known member, has revealed itself to be more threatening than its cold-causing cousin, but far less menacing than its killer kinsman SARS. However, it is the ease and speed with which this highly infectious virus spreads that has led to more deaths than from SARS, within a mere two months of its emergence.

The COVID-19 virus belongs to the species-crossing band of zoonotic viruses, which transfer from a primary, non-human animal host to humans, directly or through a secondary animal host. Humans first acquire them by eating an infected animal or fruit contaminated by animal faeces or saliva. Then they spread from human to human through direct contact with bodily secretions or aerially through the respiratory route. Based on the number of people to whom an infected



individual transfers the virus, it can spread wide or remain restricted to a smaller number. The COVID-19 virus is a Formula-One racer in this regard.

The disease COVID-19 appears to have originated among bats and passed on to humans through animals, such as the pangolin, found in the wet markets of Wuhan. Most zoonotic viruses originate in the wild where they are relatively quiescent but become more virulent when humans create conveyor belts for their entry into captive veterinary populations and then into human habitats. When a large population of close-bred animals or freely travelling humans becomes available, the virus multiplies and even mutates with ease, posing increased danger. Deforestation for agriculture, fuel, mining and housing opens the ecological window of opportunity, which viruses seize to propagate themselves, exploiting the host's cells for their genetic replication.

The wave of panic created globally by COVID appears unwarranted, as the overall mortality rate is around two per cent. Serious complications (lung damage and respiratory failure) and deaths occur mostly in the elderly or those with serious pre-heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or compromised immunity. The fittest may remain asymptomatic, while many will experience only a mild febrile illness with a dry cough. The time from acquiring the virus to developing symptoms, ranges between five and 14 days. Healthcare personnel, even young people, have raised their risk because of repetitive exposure to high viral loads. Spare a thought for them!

Infected persons and their close contacts are quarantined for 14 days and released when tested negative for the virus. No COVID-specific drugs or vaccines are currently available. Their development, testing in clinical trials and general availability may take from 12 to 18 months. Most patients do well with antipyretics for fever, adequate fluid intake, nourishing food, rest and good sleep. Sicker patients would need hospitalization and possible ventilatory support for respiratory distress.

Personal protective measures, to prevent the virus from entering one's airways, include frequent handwashing with water and soap for 20 seconds (see page 36), use of hand sanitizer, avoiding contact with potentially infected surfaces with bare hands, keeping a distance of more than one metre (three feet) from an infected person, avoiding crowded locations, getting good sleep and consuming plenty of water, fruit and vegetables. Beyond personal protection, we also need to rethink our self-destructive development paradigms that invite viruses from the wild into our midst. That is COVID's message to us. R

Dr Prof. K. Srinath Reddy is President, Public Health Foundation of India, and author of Make Health in India: Reaching a Billion Plus. *Views expressed in this article are personal.*

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HEALTH

Health in Your Hands



Are you cleaning your hands the right way? Here's a guide to help you make sure

BY *Ishani Nandi*

Soap and Water is the Way to Go

✦ Wet your hands with clean, running water (hot or cold) and apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces.
✦ Lather your hands up to your wrist and rub them together with the soap.
✦ Scrub the soap along the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.
✦ Continue for 20 seconds, or the time it takes to sing the 'Happy Birthday' song from start to end—twice.
✦ Dry hands thoroughly with a single-use towel. Bacteria are more likely to stay on and transfer from moist hands.
✦ Use a towel or tissue to close the tap.

Make it Better

✦ Avoid touching faucet handles before or after washing up to prevent re-infecting clean hands. If unavoidable, use a paper towel and throw it away later. Wipe them down with disinfectant frequently at home.
✦ Wash towels in hot water every day.
✦ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no added health benefit for consumers using soaps containing antibacterial ingredients compared with plain soap.

The Virtues of Hand Sanitizer

Washing your hands with soap and water is ideal, but if you don't have access to either, hand sanitizers, with at least 60 per cent alcohol, is a good alternative. Here's how to use it:
✦ Pump a coin-sized portion of the product to the palm of one hand.
✦ Rub your hands together.
✦ Cover the gel over all the surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry. This should take around 20 seconds.

Caution: Hand Sanitizers ...

✦ ... are highly flammable.
✦ ... are not effective if your hands are heavily soiled or greasy.
✦ ... do not eliminate all types of germs or remove harmful chemicals, like pesticides and heavy metals. R

SHUTTERSTOCK

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



"If you want me to give 110 per cent, I want a 10 per cent raise."

CARTOON BY *Phil Witte*

ALL *in a Day's* WORK

A co-worker was telling us all about her trip to Las Vegas. "That sounds great. Where did you stay?" asked a colleague.

"I can't remember," she said. "But I think it began with an *s*."

"Was it Caesar's?"

—DARRELL BERGER

My job as a facilities maintenance engineer required a wide range of skills. One day I might have to fix the furnace, while the next day could see me painting the CEO's office.

When I described it to a co-worker as 'I'm a jack of all trades, master of none', I was amused, yet slightly offended, when she offered a less than complimentary interpretation from her native Cantonese: "Equipped with knives all over, yet none are very sharp."

—CHARLES GOETZINGER

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News FROM THE
WORLD OF MEDICINE

COVID-19 VACCINE: FIRST STEPS TAKEN

A home-grown vaccine for COVID-19 could take around 12 to 18 months. Scientists at the National Institute of Virology, Pune, claim to have 11 coronavirus isolates and sequenced genomes of 10 already. Raman R. Gangakhedkar of Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) recently said that the isolation of the virus will lead to understanding the evolution of the virus in India and its genetic affinity with isolates from other countries. A home-grown vaccine could be designed based on the research.

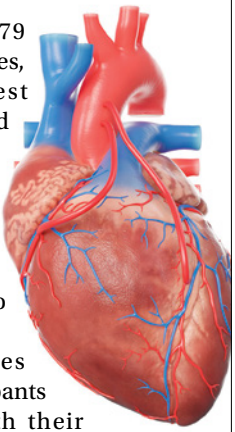
Diabetes Drug May Help Treat Breast Cancer

In a new study, researchers treated certain types of breast cancer cells in the lab with metformin, a medication used to help lower the blood sugar levels of people with type 2 diabetes. With less sugar to feed on, these cells developed a sugar 'addiction,' which made them work harder to break down the sugar. That extra effort, in turn, made the cancer more vulnerable to treatment with anticancer drugs. Researchers found that when metformin was combined with a cancer treatment, the cancer cells' growth slowed by 76 per cent. This new approach is particularly promising for treating triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive form of the disease that doesn't respond well to existing treatments.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Many Heart Procedures Are Unnecessary

Got coronary artery disease? Think twice before opting for a stent or bypass surgery to improve your blood flow. Confirming the results of a smaller study in 2007, a recent one found that for people with stable heart conditions, these procedures are no better than medication at reducing the risk of having a heart attack or dying from heart disease.



Researchers followed 5,179 men and women in 37 countries, all of whom had stress-test results indicating they had clogged arteries. Participants were given lifestyle advice and prescribed medication such as aspirin, cholesterol-lowering drugs or blood pressure–lowering drugs to improve heart health.

Once dangerous blockages were ruled out, half the participants were asked to continue with their lifestyle changes and medication alone. The other half were assigned to undergo either bypass surgery (in which doctors reroute blood flow around blockages) or an angioplasty (in which doctors inflate a tiny balloon and/or place a stent in the artery to help widen it).

Contrary to what many in the medical community expected, rates of heart attacks, heart-related death, cardiac arrests and hospitalizations for worsening chest pain or heart failure were similar regardless of treatment over the next four years. The invasive procedures did provide one benefit: Those who had them felt chest pain less often.

SCIEPRO/GETTY IMAGES

Neck Scan Could Diagnose Alzheimer's

In a study of almost 3,200 people ages 58 to 74, those who had the most intense pulses in the blood vessels in the neck (measured by ultrasound) were up to 50 per cent more likely to suffer symptoms of dementia over the next 14 years. More intense pulses might damage blood vessels in the brain, leading to Alzheimer's.

When REM Sleep Hurts

According to a study, people become even more distressed about upsetting experiences if their REM sleep is fragmented. Researchers believe that's because REM sleep is the only time the brain stops producing noradrenaline. It converts the events of the day into memories. Without REM sleep, bad feelings stay fresh in your mind. R

—WITH INPUTS FROM V. KUMARA SWAMY

MONEY

How to Make Tax Breaks Work for You

Think before you jump in to make tax-related investments for the sake of it

BY *Harsh Roongta*

I LEARNT EARLY ON in my career as an investment advisor that it was far more important that my clients avoid investment mistakes than make great investment choices. This holds true in the context of tax breaks too.

At least four generations of Indians, driven by the lure of tax breaks, have subscribed to investment-cum-insurance products—money-backs, endowments, child plans among others—which are, frankly, terrible investments and provide negligible insurance. Investors who value a tax break for its own sake rather than for what it actually does are most easily trapped. Here's an example: Say you are thinking about two schemes from the same company. Both are similar in all respects, except one—the first provides five per cent returns that are tax-free and the second 10 per cent returns that are taxable. The first scheme may be tempting, but the second is a better move because even after paying taxes your net returns will still be higher.

In investments, a tax break increases the percentage of returns. In the context of expenses, say health insurance premiums, tax breaks reduce the cost of insurance (to the extent of the reduction in your tax) but, lower or not, it's an expense, which, no matter how 'reduced', is best avoided if it does not make commercial sense.

What smart investors should do:
First, consider expenses you are committed to (tax break or not) and make sure that you claim tax breaks on them. Tuition fees for your children, principal portion of home loans, premiums on term life and health insurance, interest paid on education



loans, home-loan interest, house rent and donations made to eligible charitable entities are good examples.

Second, consider investments you must continue—contributions to employee provident fund, premiums on investment-cum-insurance policies that would be disadvantageous to discontinue or National Pension Scheme (NPS) contributions. Claim tax breaks on them as well.

Finally, and only after you've covered the first two areas, consider fresh investments, which should offer returns that can be enhanced by tax breaks. For this, it is always best to decide on the right investments for you—fixed income or equity. This depends on your risk appetite and how long you can wait for returns. If you have greater risk-taking ability, and can wait eight to 10 years for returns, pick equity instruments. Of these, the ones with tax breaks are equity mutual funds (equity-linked saving schemes) or NPS (with equity option). If fixed income instruments are more feasible then try senior citizens' savings schemes, Public Provident Fund (PPF), NPS (with debt option), National Savings Certificates or five-year, tax-saving, fixed deposits.

Taxpayers are in a conundrum after the Union Budget 2020. They can opt to pay taxes at lower rates, but without tax breaks. The alternative is that tax breaks are availed, but taxes are paid at the older, higher rates.

For most taxpayers, especially those with committed expenses and investments, the 'lower tax rate–no tax break' option makes little sense. From a tax-saving point of view, this only works for young, middle-income employees or the self-employed. Even then, the minor savings it yields comes at the cost of not investing for the future.

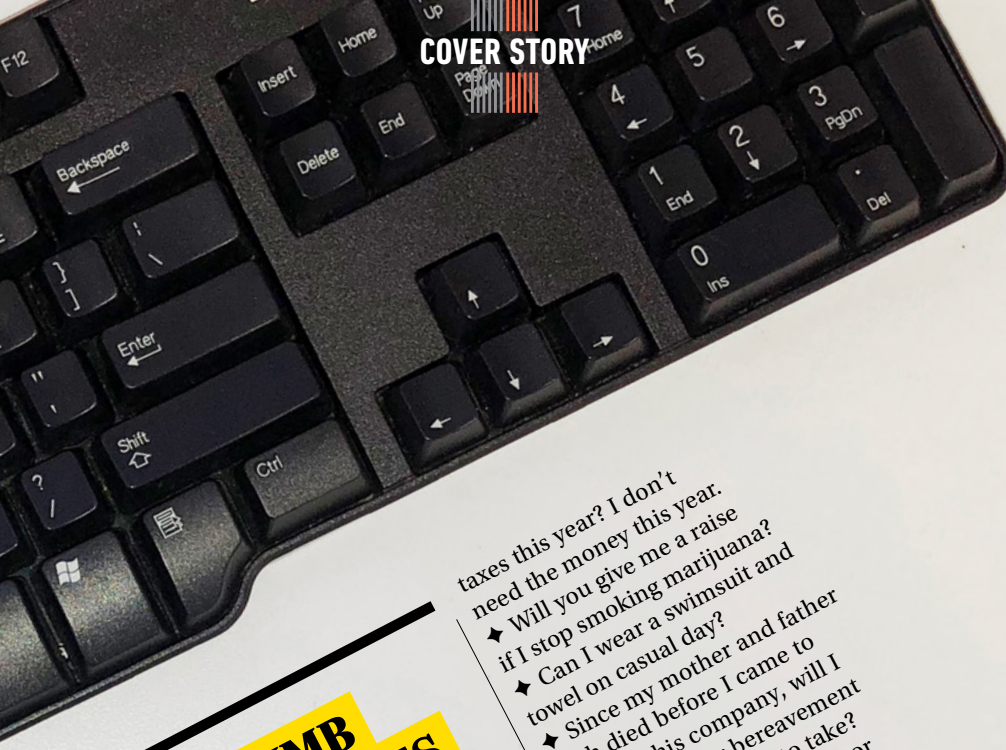
A variety of options are out there, so always seek professional advice before making serious financial commitments so as to meet your specific needs and protect your fiscal future. R

Harsh Roongta is a Mumbai-based financial advisor

SHUTTERSTOCK



THE FUNNIEST CONFESSIONS FROM BOSSES, CO-WORKERS AND CLUELESS APPLICANTS



DUMB EMPLOYEES

Haven't you heard there are no dumb questions in business? From these HR queries, that truism is clearly not true.

- I falsified my résumé. Now that I'm working here, can I change it?
- Can my supervisor require me to have specific working hours?
- Can I have my salary deferred until next year so I don't have to pay taxes this year? I don't need the money this year.
- Will you give me a raise if I stop smoking marijuana?
- Can I wear a swimsuit and towel on casual day?
- Since my mother and father both died before I came to work at this company, will I be credited for bereavement leave I didn't have to take?
- Every day my supervisor tells me to stop chatting and get back to work. Can he do that?

—*workforce.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Rebecca Simpson Steele*

Some excuses for missing work are so dumb they are almost inspired. (Feel free to borrow from these in the future.)

✦ The employee said that he couldn't come to work because his fortune teller had asked him not to step out of the house or he would suffer a brain haemorrhage.
✦ An employee refused to come to work because his fish was unwell.
✦ The employee said he'd gotten drunk the night before and was now suffering from a hangover.
✦ The employee insisted he'd locked himself in his house by mistake and that the house did not have any windows to crawl out of.
✦ An employee said his mother made his favourite dish and he ate too much. —*jobcluster.com*

Doctors and nurses in hospitals work long, strenuous hours. Sometimes, it shows up in the odd things they accidentally write in the patient charts.

✦ The patient is tearful and crying constantly. She also appears to be depressed.
✦ On the second day the knee was better and on the third day it had completely disappeared.
✦ Bleeding began in the rectal area and continued all the way to Los Angeles.
✦ She is numb from her toes down.
✦ The skin was moist and dry.
✦ Social history reveals this one-year-old patient does not smoke or drink and is presently unemployed.
✦ Patient has two teenage children but no other abnormalities.

—*nursebuff.com* AND *nurseslabs.com*

Of course, sometimes HR itself is the issue, thanks to some questionable workplace directives.

✦ I'm a teacher, so I have a million stupid rules I have to follow. But the worst one is that my performance evaluation is based on student improvement on a statewide literacy test. I teach woodworking class.
✦ At my old job, HR held a meeting to tell us that there was too much swearing on the sales floor. Someone pointed out that swearing is very common in our industry and that is the way that our customers speak. HR later sent out a memo explaining that swearing should be limited to conversations with clients.
✦ My workplace doesn't let you use the word 'problems'. Instead, we have to say 'challenges' if something is wrong. —*reddit.com*

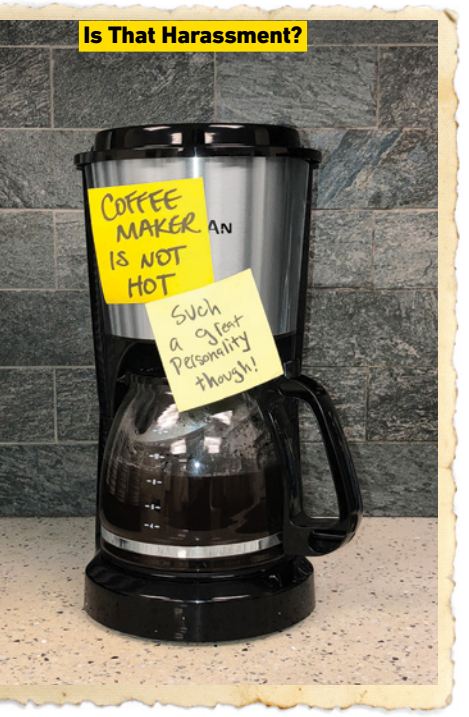
DUMB BOSSES

After two days of heated wrangling, we got one of our vendors to agree to a 35 per cent discount. As we were about to sign the contract, my boss, who had not been a party to the negotiations, walked in and tore it

ALI BLUMENTHAL (PHOTO BORDERS)

Bathroom Etiquette





up, saying, "I'm going to teach you purchasing people how to play hardball. That's the way you make it in this world." He turned to the vendor's sales rep and said, "We want a 20 per cent discount; take it or leave it." The delighted rep immediately agreed. As my boss left, he said to us, "I hope you learnt something from that."

—inc.com

When corporate came to visit, the CEO complimented me by saying, "You aren't as dumb as HR made you out to be."

—pleasefireme.tumblr.com

My boss heard there was an opening for a plant manager in our South American facility. To better prepare himself, he decided to attend Spanish classes on the company's time and at its expense. The only problem? The plant is in Brazil, where they speak Portuguese. *—cbsnews.com*

My boss used to tell me and another co-worker, he hadn't showered in days and wanted us to make sure clients didn't get close to him at events.

—cosmopolitan.com

I work for a family-owned cheque-cashing company. One day, I was robbed at gunpoint. The next day, the owners deducted the stolen cash from my pay cheque. They said I had willingly complied with the robber's wishes. *—cbsnews.com*

My boss ate all the breading off of three pieces of leftover fried chicken I'd brought to work for lunch, and then he put the naked chicken back into the break-room fridge like nothing happened.

—@RYANLOSTINTX

Inspirational quotes from the men and women who lead us during work days:

✦ If you are on schedule, then your plan was not aggressive enough. If you are behind

schedule, you must be goofing off.
✦ I know my plan won't work, but don't disagree with me in front of others.
✦ What this department lacks is leadership.
✦ Bonuses in my department are awarded to team players who have demonstrated an appreciation for my leadership.
✦ I tried to email you to tell you that my email wasn't working, but my email wasn't working.

—inc.com

I got a citation in my employee file because I told my boss that Bob Marley did not sing 'Red Red Wine'.
—@DABERHASHER

DUMB CUSTOMERS

Found this gem of an email in the inbox today:
Client: Hello. My fiancée and I are looking for a wedding photographer but are having some issues with the contracts we are coming across. We want a clause that guarantees us a refund should we ever get divorced, since we would not need the photos in that situation. Please let me know if this is something you have in your contract or would be willing to add. Thank you! *—clientsfromhell.net*

A customer came to the counter and wanted to buy a Big Mac burger. When I told her we didn't have those, she asked for a Whopper instead. I told her we didn't have those either, and she got mad at me and walked away. I work at KFC.

—pleasefireme.tumblr.com

Three designers share their oddest client requests:
✦ I want you to build me an app store. Like the Apple App Store, but better.
✦ The roast duck on the menu looks kind of dull. Can you make it look more alive and happy?
✦ Can you please move the image up a tad and down a hair?

—clientsfromhell.net

When you're a cop, Joe and Jane Public are your clients. And on occasion you can expect bizarre emergency calls such as these.
✦ A woman requested to talk with a police officer because her housekeeper wasn't putting her towels away properly.
✦ Police receive a report of a newborn infant found in a trash can. Upon investigation, officers discover it was only a burrito.
✦ During a disturbance call, a man gave an officer a false name and was arrested after he was found to have warrants for both names.
✦ A woman whose finger got stuck in a drain was reported

to be conscious and breathing. ✦ Suspicious people were reportedly doing something with flashlights. A deputy checked and found the people were not suspicious, but merely Canadian.

—policeone.com, huffingtonpost.com, mercurynews.com

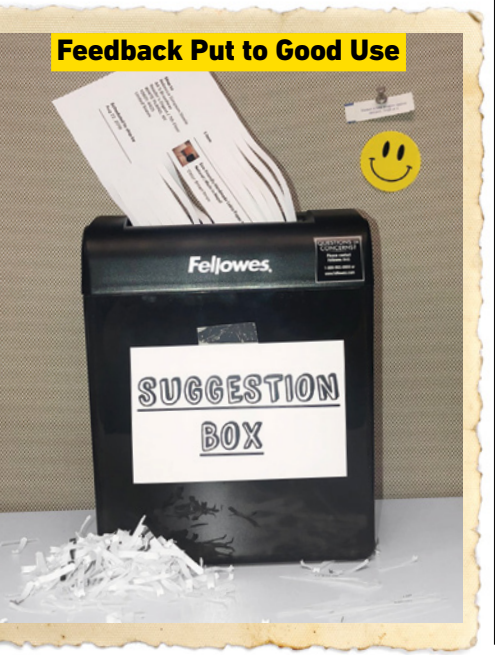
It's come to this: A Florida gas station owner has had to place a sign in her store asking customers not to warm their urine in the microwave. Parul Patel's Jacksonville gas station cum convenience store is just a few blocks from two drug-testing services. Why the urine has to be delivered warm we can only guess, but when Patel confronted one woman, she indignantly demanded to see a sign that bans nuking urine in her store. Hence the sign. *—nbcmiami.com*

I work at a museum, and a woman asked me if mummies were older than dinosaurs.

—pleasefireme.tumblr.com

"We actually get this question on a pretty regular basis," says an official with Iowa's Department of Transportation. The source of confusion: the deer-crossing signs that are posted along the road. And the question: "Why don't you put these signs where it's safer for the deer to cross?"

—kcrg.com



AND JUST PLAIN DUMB

I showed up wearing two different-coloured shoes to make a major presentation to an audience of 230 people.

—businessinsider.com

"The weirdest thing is happening here. I've been watching that clock for the last hour, and it hasn't moved," my fellow colleague once remarked. I explained to him

that the battery had died. He was not in a time warp.

—reddit.com

At the end of a phone call, I told my boss I loved him. I caught myself, but started rambling: "Oh my God! I didn't mean that. I absolutely don't love you ... No, I mean, I like working for you but I know you're married and I'm married, and I'm not flirting, so please don't report me to HR ..." At some point, he just hung up.

—quickbase.com

I once sent a company-wide virus warning by forwarding an email so people could see what it looked like should they receive one and forgetting to remove the infected attachment.

—@ENTROPY72

On my first day of work, I accidentally called my boss 'Daddy'.

—coburgbanks.co.uk

As I strolled through the department store, I had a suspicion that a man was tailing me. If I paused, so did he; if I moved, he did the same. My hunch was proven right. As I accosted him and demanded to know what's cooking, he replied a bit apologetically, "Sorry sir. I work here and I am keeping watch as the CCTV has a snag."

RAGHOTHAMAN RAO, *Bengaluru*

DUMB APPLICANTS

Looking for a job? Make sure your résumé is up to snuff. A lot of job seekers don't, and we've pulled together some actual blunders to prove it.

OBJECTIVE

"To secure a position as a front office."

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Last job: "Drove a toe truck."
Before that: "Worked in the dessert."
And before that: "Oversaw all new corporate accusations." "Responsibilities included recruiting, interviewing, and executing final candidates."
And before that one: "Watered, groomed, and fed the family dog for years."

SKILLS

"Perfectionist with a keen I for details."
"Being bilingual in three languages."
"Natural born larder."

REFERENCES

"Clare."

COMPENSATION

"Current salary: $36,000.
Salary desired: $2,23,000."

INTERESTS

"I enjoy cooking Chinese and Italians."
"My three biggest hobbies are cars, racquetball, golf and reading."
"I like doughnuts, cupcakes, chocolate and ice cream. Together."
"Honestly, I like doing nothing."

EDUCATION

"Graduated in 2911."

—roberthalf.com, almagreta.com, coburgbanks.co.uk, archive.fortune.com

Courage Under Fire

Four heroic men and women, who turned saviours—and champions of humanity—during the communal riots in Delhi

BY *Team RD*

MUSHTARI KHATOON
Chandu Nagar, Delhi

When the phone rang early on the morning of 25 February—Mushtari Khatoon, her husband Mohammed Hakim and their three teenaged children were asleep in their home in north-east Delhi's Chandu Nagar. As Hakim handed her the phone and Mushtari grabbed it, a chill ran through her spine. "They are going to kill us, Chachi! For God's sake, save us!" howled her young nephew Muhammad Niyaj at the other end.

The petite Mushtari, 42, rushed out in a blind panic to Khajuri Khas, across the dusty, broken road, from where her family had called. Trouble had been brewing, but no one had imagined the cauldron of communal hatred would boil over with such vengeance in Delhi, which was hosting US President Donald Trump at the time. This madness took away 53 lives, both Muslims and Hindus, and left hundreds homeless and orphaned, in the north-eastern fringes of the capital.

Reaching the lanes of Khajuri Khas, Mushtari watched in disbelief as

PHOTO: YASIR IQBAL



Mushtari Khatoon in her Chandu Nagar home among the families she saved

hundreds of armed men shouting "*Jai Shri Ram*" flooded the narrow lanes, dressed in riot-police gear. "Carrying petrol bombs, country-made pistols, lathis and tear-gas shells, they went on the rampage," Fayaz Alam, Mushtari's nephew, says.

"I trembled within, but knew I had to jump in, else my family would be killed," recalls Mushtari. She ferried them, making five trips across to her home in Chandu Nagar, a Muslim-majority area. On her last round, however, she got stuck along with a crowd, their lives hanging by a thin thread.

Khajuri Khas is a grubby urban settlement, where homes of Hindus and Muslims lie cheek-by-jowl with small businesses dotting the lanes. Skirted by open drains and the sludgy Chand Bagh nullah, it is home to migrant labourers who came here to build a better life. Mushtari and her large clan are among them.

Growing up in Bihar's Khagaria district, Mushtari is a homemaker with only basic skills that would see her through in Delhi. However, that day she stood up to blind terror with the power of a matriarch.

"The mob targeted Muslim households and forced them to leave their homes," says Mohammad Munazir, who lost his small, windowless house, built with his life savings, in the mayhem. "I called the police at least 10 times, as did others, but nothing," says Mushtari, a week later.

The rioters busted doorways, broke open shutters and hounded out victims, while spitting communal taunts at them. Then they unleashed large-scale loot and arson. Targeted by the mob, some 150 terrified people took shelter on one Mehboob's roof, escorted by paramilitary men. Meanwhile, the basement had been set ablaze. "We had no place to escape, and waited for a grisly end on that rooftop," says 22-year-old student Mushahid.

Hysterical with fear, they explored their next move, when the paramilitary men ordered that the men must stay and the women and children should leave. "This is when I put my foot down. 'Everyone will leave, else we will all die here' I told them firmly," says Mushtari. She then supervised the evacuation of 50 men, women and children, including a mother, who jumped across three rooftops carrying her six-day-old baby to reach safety.

These nine families were in her care, when we visited, in two tiny rooms, where they took turns to sleep. The couple opened up their home and hearts to create a safe house for these refugees of hatred.

As we walk back through the charred remains of destroyed homes, broken glass and the many dreams that died that day in Khajuri Khas, Mushtari clasps my hand, her eyes welling up in grief. This is the woman, who saved more lives than any policeman that day.

— SANGHAMITRA CHAKRABORTY

PREMKANT BAGHEL
Futa Road, Delhi

When 25-year-old Premkant Baghel woke up on the morning of 26 February, he found himself in a stranger's home. His mind was blank. All he could register was the pain—pulsating, intense, everywhere. Terrible scenes from the previous night came back in flashes—a frenzied mob; screaming innocents caught in a tornado of hate; a house set ablaze; the inferno from which panicked, desperate voices shouted for aid; the blast that turned everything black.

Baghel is single, semi-literate and apolitical. Like others living in this mixed community, he tries to make an honest living and stay out of trouble. But on 25 February, trouble found him and the hapless residents who were attacked by communal rioters, pelting rocks and hateful chants.

By the time Baghel, a pickup truck driver, reached his brother's house in Shiv Vihar, it was 9:30 p.m. and pandemonium had ensued. "We were inside the house and heard a commotion—the mob had set fire to a building. I knew Premkant had arrived, but he never came up," says 39-year-old Vijay Pal, Baghel's oldest brother, looking over at his injured sibling. Lying in bed, Baghel stares at the wall, his eyes dull with pain and his breathing shallow. A blanket half covers his arms, wrapped in bandages from shoulder to palm. Newly formed skin—from



Premkant Baghel sustained burns on 70 per cent of his body trying to save seven people from a burning building.

areas badly burnt—shine on his shoulders, face and neck. "I heard people shouting inside the burning house and ran over. Breaking open the metal gate with a rock, I pulled six or seven people out," says Baghel. "Then there was an explosion—a gas cylinder had blown up, I learnt later—and I passed out."

"We knew nothing until a neighbour, who found Premkant unconscious and took him home, called us in the morning. They put toothpaste on his burns and kept him safe," says Vijay Pal.

For the next few hours, the young hero's life hung in the balance, as police remained absent despite multiple calls. Even ambulances refused to enter the area. But young Baghel's faith in humanity is undiminished. "I don't understand what violence achieves. Hindus and Muslims should try to live together and work in peace." From his lips to God's ears.

—ISHANI NANDI

PHOTO: RAJWANT RAWAT



"If I had fled that day, I would have lived with the regret that I didn't do my duty," says Dr M. A. Anwar, founding doctor of Al Hind Hospital.

PHOTO: RAJWANT RAWAT

Dr M. A. ANWAR
Old Mustafabad, Delhi

24 February 2020 was a busy day at Al Hind Hospital at Delhi's Old Mustafabad. This three-storied hospital, in a Muslim-dominated neighbourhood, found itself in the eye of a communal storm, and its founding doctor—40-year-old M. A. Anwar, a migrant from Bihar—thrust into the foreground.

"Patients started coming in from 2:30–3 a.m. The facility is small; we didn't have the infrastructure, but became the only refuge for those who needed medical help," Anwar says.

Through the next few days of communal fire, nearly 600 patients streamed in, turning the first floor into a makeshift emergency ward. Mattresses and sheets were requisitioned, ropes were strung across the room to hang drip feeds. Alarmingly, many of the injuries Anwar treated were from bullets and pellets; some were worse. "Every wound I witnessed wasn't just trauma—it was plain savagery. They spread a man's legs until his groin split in half."

"There were attacks everywhere. All the entry points into Mustafabad were barricaded," he continues.

"We tried to call ambulances but the Centralized Accident Trauma Services, meant for this very purpose, flatly refused." The police were no better. "We had wheeled out a patient with a severe head injury on a stretcher, and others with pellet injuries, about a quarter of a kilometre from here." When an ambulance organized by some of Anwar's doctor friends reached, the police refused entry. "They said, 'Our constable was killed, so how does it matter if eight or 10 of yours also die'. Kids with pellet injuries were beaten up mercilessly by men in uniform."

Handicapped by institutional failure, Anwar found himself doubting his ability to help. But, he found his resolve soon, "I decided, we will try our best. For the rest, *kudrat* [nature] will take its course."

His faith paid off. Justice S. Muralidhar of the Delhi High Court was to hear a plea on 25 February on allowing safe passage to the wounded from Al Hind Hospital to Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, which was better equipped to treat these severe injuries. Advocate Suroor Mander arranged for Anwar to testify on the desperate situation at the hospital. "The honourable judge—simply doing his duty, listening to those affected—saved us."

Doing one's duty—and doing it well—is exactly what sets Anwar apart too. Not abandoning his station, even when he had the opportunity to, speaks volumes of his commitment to his profession. "It is during times of trouble that a doctor is needed. I didn't have the time to think it through, but had I fled that day with my family, I would have lived with the regret that I didn't do my duty. I have just done my job."

Witnessing this scale of violence could shake anyone's faith in humanity but Anwar disagrees: "We all have our conscience. It's been suppressed to an extent in some; sometimes it feels like it has taken leave of others. But everyone has a sense of what is right. And everyone knows what happened was wrong, even if they don't have the courage to speak up."

While Mustafabad heals, Al Hind Hospital is now a sanctuary—over 50 people, left homeless by the politics of hate, are housed there. "We are trying to rehabilitate them. Give them rent and rations for a couple of months; most of them had low-income jobs, so we are also trying to find them work. Currently, we are building a database of those who want to help and those in need—to bring them together."

Anwar moved to Delhi almost 18 years ago from Bihar's Champaran district. After he decided to pursue a career in medicine, his mother would tell him, that once he became a doctor, he shouldn't charge fees. "I think, now, I have kept her word," he laughs.

— NAOREM ANUJA



Having received love and protection during the anti-Sikh violence of 1984, Mohinder Singh (right) and his son Inderjeet paid it forward during the Delhi riots.

MOHINDER SINGH
Gokulpuri, Delhi

Mohinder Singh is a gentle giant. At a little over six feet, he bends over while twirling his moustache and stroking his white flowing beard, and speaks softly. If it wasn't for his ceremonial dagger, he is more Santa Claus than Sikh warrior. This 53-year-old man single-handedly saved scores of people from the marauding mobs during the communal violence in Delhi.

"In Gokulpuri, where we have always lived in harmony, we have never seen such riots since 1984," says Singh, manning his shop counter, where he sells cheap electronic items, in the riot-hit suburb of north-east Delhi.

This Hindu-majority area has signs of carnage writ large all over it: burnt houses and shops and a masjid covered in a maze of electric wires. Two shops away from Singh's is a watch store belonging to a Muslim trader that was looted. The vacant, upturned shelves capture the horrors of that day.

It all started on the evening of 24 February when rioters in masks and helmets started targeting the

PHOTO: RAJWANT RAWAT

mosque across Singh's house. The violence spilled over to other houses along the lane, later.

"After the police chased away the first wave of rioters, many Muslim families wanted to get out of the area," recalls Singh, who called in his 26-year-old son Inderjeet and got to work. "We decided to evacuate as many people as we could," he says. Their destination was to be Kardam Puri Chowk, a little over a kilometre south-east of Gokulpuri. Meanwhile, Singh's wife, Mandeep Kaur, provided shelter to several women and children in their home.

"We first started ferrying the children, sometimes three pillion riders at a time, on our two-wheelers," Inderjeet says. They feared some people would be profiled and "recognized" by the bloodthirsty mobs: Mohammed Hamza, 24, a post-graduate student, whose house was set on fire, was among them. "Since I have a beard, a maroon turban was tied around my head, as Inderjeet rode me to safety. It's amazing how many lives they saved on that day," Hamza says.

The father-son duo made at least 20 trips each on their bikes transporting around 60 people that evening. They braved stones, negotiated blocked roads and escaped mobs looking out for targets, to carry their terrified neighbours to safety.

"We just wanted to save everyone," Singh says. Once the media spoke to the rescued families, the Singhs became local heroes overnight. But very few realized, at first, they were also paying it forward. In the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, thousands of Sikhs lost their lives and lakhs their livelihoods. Singh and his family emerged unscathed, protected, as they were, by their Hindu neighbours. "We lived in a neighbour's home for three days and many stood guard in front of our house. Their brotherhood and empathy saved us, it was my turn this time," the senior Singh says.

Mohinder Singh is now a much most sought-after person. As we speak, a Member of Parliament from Amritsar, Gurjeet Singh Aujla, comes calling to felicitate him. Singh will soon be off to Pune where he is being honoured by an NGO. There are many more invitations from other parts of the country that he must respond to.

Recognition, however, was far from his mind at the time—he simply followed his conscience, even if it meant putting his life on the line. But not everyone praises his efforts. "I am being targeted for what I have done. I hear some people are cross. 'The Sardar shouldn't have done this,' they say. Look, I just did my duty and I only fear God," he quips matter-of-factly.

Singh has his next job cut out for him. "The displaced families must return home. We need to form committees and bring back peace to our area," he says. If there's one person who can do it, it's him.

— V. KUMARA SWAMY R



35 HEALTH FACTS

Your Doctor Wants You to Know



BY *Marissa Laliberte*

Knowing which of these statements have been verified by ***SCIENCE****—and which are* ***MYTHS****—could boost your health*

1 Cold weather makes you sick.

Myth! Germs are the only thing that can make you sick. You can go out in the freezing cold with wet hair, and if there aren't any germs around, you'll stay sniffle-free. But there is a correlation: The viruses that cause the common cold thrive in low temperatures.

2 Eating too much sugar will give you diabetes.

Myth! Sweet foods don't directly lead to chronically high blood sugar. But they can contribute to obesity, which is a risk factor for diabetes, so keeping a well-balanced diet and limiting treats is still the right idea.

3 You shouldn't ice a burn.

Truth! Most skin damage from a burn comes from the inflammatory response, and ice can damage cells and make it worse. Instead, immerse the burn in cool water for about five minutes. Then wash with mild soap and apply an antibiotic ointment.

4 Antiperspirants cause cancer.

Myth! Antiperspirants temporarily keep sweat from escaping, and some scientists have suggested that letting it build up in the ducts could cause tumours.

But research hasn't confirmed that theory, and the largest study to date on the subject found no link between cancer and antiperspirants or deodorants.

5 CPR doesn't require mouth-to-mouth breathing.

Truth! A 2017 study found that when bystanders gave CPR to people in cardiac arrest, survival rates were higher when they employed uninterrupted chest compressions rather than pausing for rescue breaths.

6 Being overweight shortens your life expectancy.

Myth! It's what researchers call the 'obesity paradox', though the 'overweight paradox' would be more accurate. Obesity is linked with a host of health problems, including the so-called all-cause mortality, but the evidence isn't strong for overweightedness. A recent review looked at 10 studies of more than 1,90,000 people and found that overweight people had the same longevity as normal-weight adults, though they did have a higher risk of heart disease.

7 You shouldn't let someone with a concussion sleep right away.

Truth! For several hours after the initial blow, it's a good idea to keep

PREVIOUS SPREAD: SET BY SARA FOLDENAUER, ARCADY/SHUTTERSTOCK (FLAP)

the person awake and monitor symptoms. But after that, taking naps and getting plenty of sleep at night are recommended to aid recovery.

8 Tilt your head back if you have a nosebleed.
Myth! Tilting your head back might make you swallow blood, which could irritate the stomach and potentially make you vomit. Instead, tip your head slightly forwards and pinch your nose shut for 10 minutes.

9 You should eat several small meals throughout the day instead of three big ones.
Myth! While some people who are natural grazers might do better on a small-meal eating plan, others won't feel satisfied, and the diet will backfire. The goal should be to pay attention to the overall nutrients and calories you're getting in your meals, not to how you're spreading them out.

10 A person having a seizure is at risk of swallowing his or her tongue.
Myth! Following conventional wisdom and putting a spoon in the person's mouth won't prevent tongue swallowing—in fact, it could harm the teeth or jaws. Instead, turn the person on his or her side to prevent choking on saliva or vomit, and cushion the head with a pillow.



11 Carrots help your eyesight.
Myth! Carrots get their vision-boosting reputation from the chemical that gives them their orange colour: beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is converted into vitamin A, which helps your eyes see better in the dark. But the conversion process isn't very efficient, and once you've taken in a certain amount, the body stops converting it. For improved eyesight, eat vegetables high in vitamin A itself, including leafy greens such as kale and spinach.

12 Stress will give you an ulcer.
Myth! The two main causes of stomach ulcers are overuse of NSAIDs (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen, and infection from the bacteria *Helicobacter pylori*. Stress might make an existing ulcer worse (and ulcers might trigger stress), but the current science shows it isn't a direct cause.

13 You should return to working out after a heart attack.
Truth! "Too often, heart patients use their condition as an excuse to cut back on physical activity when they should be doing the opposite," says Salim Virani, MD, chair of the American College of Cardiology's Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease Council. Hitting the standard 20 to 30 minutes most days can help strengthen your heart. Talk to your doctor about creating a safe routine.

14 Reading in dim light will harm your eyes.
Myth! It might tire your eyes in the short term, but there's no evidence that it will do any lasting damage. When reading, position light to shine directly on the page rather than from over your shoulder to reduce glare.

15 Coughing too much can make you throw up.
Truth! Little kids are especially prone to vomiting after coughing fits because their gag reflexes are extra sensitive, but it can also happen to adults. It usually isn't a big deal, but if you keep puking, see a doctor.

16 Cracking your knuckles will give you arthritis.
Myth! Recent studies haven't found a link between cracked joints and arthritis. But some studies showed that cracking your knuckles can result in soft-tissue damage (which can cause swelling) and a decrease in hand-grip strength.



17 Bar soap is covered in germs.
Myth! You might transfer germs to the soap while you scrub up, but they won't last long enough to spread. The most rigorous study on the subject, published in 1965, found that bacteria on a bar of soap die within minutes and are not transmitted to the next person to use the soap.

18 You don't need eight glasses of water every day.
Truth! There's no scientific evidence that eight is the magic number. You might need more or less than that, depending on factors such as climate and body size. To make sure you are getting enough, just drink water throughout the day.

19 Sitting up straight can be bad for your back.
Truth! "Hunching can certainly be bad for your back. But the opposite is true, too," says Neel Anand, MD, professor of orthopaedic surgery and medical director of spine trauma surgery at Cedars-Sinai Spine Center, Los Angeles, USA. "Sitting up

straight for too long without a break can also cause strain." While sitting, keep your lower back supported and your legs uncrossed with your knees at a 90° angle, and get up to stretch every half hour or so.

20 People with dark skin can't get skin cancer.

Myth! Dark skin is less likely to burn, but it isn't immune to harmful ultraviolet rays and the damage they cause. People of all skin types need to use sunscreen.

21 You need less sleep as you get older.

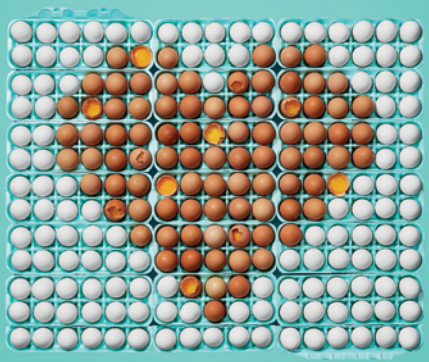
Myth! Older adults often sleep less as a result of chronic conditions that are more common with age as well as the medications used to treat them. But that doesn't mean they require less sleep. While sleep needs vary from person to person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends adults get at least seven hours of sleep for optimal health.

22 Holding in a sneeze is unhealthy.

Truth! As your body gets ready to sneeze, pressure builds in your lungs. When your body tries to push the air out, it needs somewhere to go—and if you're pinching your nose and mouth, it could be rerouted to the ears. In rare cases, sending the sneeze in that direction can lead to damage, such as ruptured eardrums.

23 You can get the flu more than once a season.

Truth! Every year, there's more than one flu strain circulating. Getting sick from (or being vaccinated against) one of them won't protect you or your loved ones from the other strains. That's why it's important to take everyday preventive actions during flu season: covering your nose and mouth with a tissue while coughing or sneezing, and washing your hands often with soap and water.



24 Eggs are bad for your heart.

Myth! The old thinking was that cholesterol in food would raise blood cholesterol levels and in turn increase the risk of heart disease. A recent study of more than 4,00,000 adults found that eating an egg a day increased good cholesterol and cut the risk of cardiovascular death by 18 per cent.

25 You can stop taking antibiotics when your symptoms go away.
Myth! Even if you're back in tip-top shape, continue taking your meds as prescribed. The symptoms can fade before the infection clears, meaning you could get sick all over again—and this time it might be more resistant to the antibiotic.

26 You should rinse the toothpaste from your mouth after brushing.
Myth! When you rinse with non-fluoride mouthwash or water, you're spitting out the fluoride that prevents tooth decay without giving it enough time to work. If you still feel like you need to rinse, studies suggest using a tiny bit of water to swish the toothpaste foam, then spitting it out. This will keep more fluoride on your teeth.

27 Alcohol warms you up when it's cold outside.
Myth! You might feel warmer and your face may start to flush as you sip that hot toddy, because alcohol causes your blood vessels to dilate, moving warm blood closer to the skin. But this perception of warmth also causes you to stop shivering, which actually brings your core temperature down.



28 Running is bad for knees.
Myth! Research has found that recreational runners are not at increased risk of having symptoms of knee arthritis or other orthopaedic problems. "In fact," says James Smoliga, PhD, associate director of High Point University's Human Biomechanics and Physiology Laboratory, "running may strengthen muscles that stabilize the knee, which may help prevent injuries and arthritis."

20 Caffeine is good for hearts.
Truth! It might seem as if anything that makes your heart race would put stress on your ticker, but mounting evidence says just the opposite. Studies suggest that drinking three cups of coffee a day is linked to a lower risk of cardiovascular problems. The antioxidants in coffee may play a role, and caffeine might speed up cellular processes that help repair the heart.

30 A workout won't counteract the effects of sitting all day.
Truth! A study of almost 8,000 adults found that people who sat the longest overall and for the longest uninterrupted time had the greatest risk for death, regardless of whether they'd squeezed in a

workout. That's not to say exercise is useless, but it's important to scatter activity throughout the day in addition to a designated workout.

31 Sitting too close to the TV damages your eyes.

Myth! Until the late 1960s, the amount of radiation coming from TVs wasn't well regulated, so some people worried that sitting too close could cause health problems. Modern TVs don't pose that risk. Staring at anything for a long time can make the eyes feel tired, but it won't do permanent damage.

32 Probiotics can help ease diarrhoea.

Truth! While studies haven't pinned down which 'good' bacteria, yeast strains and doses are most helpful against diarrhoea, the research is promising. There's evidence that probiotics can prevent or reduce diarrhoea associated with antibiotics and can ease symptoms in people with irritable bowel syndrome. Other potential benefits of probiotics include weight loss, cold prevention, and protection from tooth decay, though the studies aren't conclusive.

34 Holding in a fart can damage the gastrointestinal tract.

Myth! For better or for worse, when you hold back your gas, that flatulence stays right where it is. Eventually, your body will expel it when you aren't paying attention, no harm done (at least to you—your neighbours might disagree). The only time it could potentially cause harm is if your colon is severely blocked and the pressure builds up to the point of bursting—and even then it's rare.



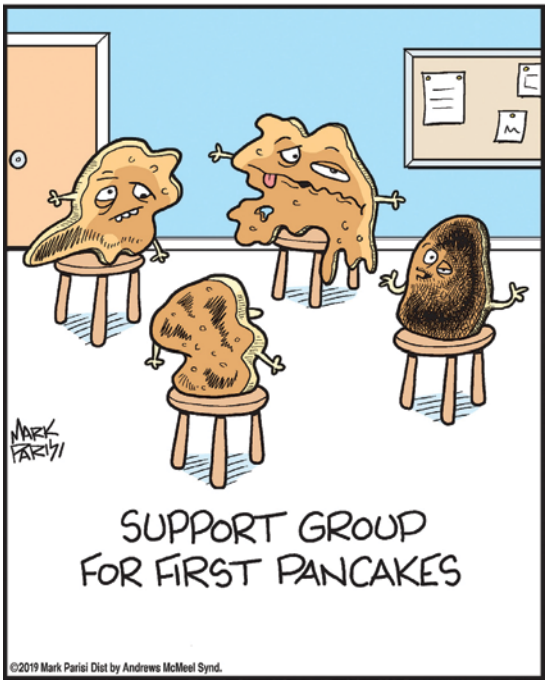
33 Sugar causes cancer.

Myth! It's true that cancer cells tend to get their fuel from sugar, but that doesn't mean that eating less sugar will prevent or slow down cancer. The body makes its own glucose when you eat less sugar, which could negate any cancer-fighting benefit. That said, obesity is a risk factor for certain cancers, so staying off sweets can have an indirect anticancer effect.

35 Depression is incurable.

Myth! "Recovery from depression is not only possible; it's actually likely when people receive the specific kind and amount of help that they need," says Mark Henick, MS, a mental health advocate. "When you combine medication with psychological therapy as well as social supports like housing, employment, and engagement, that's the gold standard for recovery." R

LAUGHTER
THE BEST *Medicine*



A Swiss man looking for directions pulls up at a bus stop in Zurich where two American tourists are waiting.

"Entschuldigung, können Sie Deutsch sprechen?" he asks.

The two Americans just stare at him.

"Parlez-vous français?" he tries.

The two Americans continue to stare.

"Parlate italiano?"

No response.

The Swiss guy gives up and drives off. The first American turns to the second and says, "We should really learn a foreign language."

"Why?" asks the second. "That guy knew three, and it didn't do him any good!"

—*englishforum.ch*

What happens when an artist has trouble finding inspiration? She draws a blank.

— CHERYL HERMAN

So you're telling me ...

... a shrimp fried this rice?

—@ZULUONLY

... a flea runs this market?

—@ADAM_DERPIN

... this garage is on sale?

—@SLIMSHANESHARK

The police arrested a man selling 'secret formula' tablets he claimed gave eternal youth. It was actually the fifth time he'd been caught for committing

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I just read that 4,153,237 people got married last year. Not to cause any trouble, but shouldn't that be an even number?

—MADDANY94 on *reddit.com*

the same medical fraud. He had been arrested in 1794, 1856, 1928 and 1983.

—*investorshub.advfn.com*

Ramesh on his deathbed: "Sanjita, are my sons and daughters all here?"

"Yes, my husband.

"Then who's running my shop?"

—DEVIDUTTA SAHOO, *Bhubaneswar*

My husband cooks for me like I'm a god—by placing burnt offerings before me every night.

—BOKBREATH *on reddit.com*

Two old guys, Fred and Sam, went to the movies. A few minutes into the film, Fred noticed Sam searching for something under his seat.

"What are you doing?" Fred asked.

"Well"—Sam sounded aggravated—"I had a candy in my mouth, but it fell out."

"Forget it. It'll be dirty by now."

"I've got to find it—my teeth are in it."

—FERN HANSEN

My dad suggested that I register for an organ-donor card. He's a man after my own heart.

—MASAI GRAHAM, *comedian*

"Did the grammar teacher impress you?"

"Yes, indeed. I am spellbound."

—V. R. SHANKAR, *Visakhapatnam*

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

DEAD LINES



An obituary for someone you don't know can seem bland, but these lines (from real obits!) might just make you miss a person you never met:

"His regrets were few, but include eating a rotisserie hot dog from a convenience store in the summer of 2002."

"Civilians will recognize him best as Spider-Man and thank him for protecting our city."

"His wife refuses to honour his request to have him standing in the corner of the room with a glass of Jack Daniel's in his hand so that he would appear more natural to visitors."

"When the doctors confronted his daughters with the news that 'Your father is a very sick man,' in unison they replied, 'You have no idea.'"

—*loveliveson.com* AND *The New York Times*

FOTOSR52/SHUTTERSTOCK

THE MAN WITH A HEART OF GOLD

How a simple man's selflessness turned a painful tragedy into a lifetime of contentment

BY *Himanshu B. Dave*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Atri*

RAHUL, AT AGE 11, was obsessed with cricket. He observed the game in fascination, whenever his friends, in the working-class neighbourhood of Gujarat's Nadiad, played. On one such day, he had moved too close to the stumps. Jignesh*, the batsman, barely a year older than Rahul, swung his bat hard, gathering up all his might. The next moment, a dull thud echoed through the grounds—Rahul had collapsed in a heap. The boy was hit severely on the head by accident and was bleeding profusely. The children in the field, dazed and confused, rushed him to the local hospital, where the doctor on duty suggested he be shifted to the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, some 50 kilometres away. Unfortunately, the emergency journey could not be possible—Rahul died within an hour of the incident due to trauma and excessive bleeding.

The news came as a crushing blow for Rahul's uncle Dinesh Talapada (32), who has been my driver for the past decade. Dinesh, unfortunately

*NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED.



was not in town at the time of the incident—who knows if Rahul could have been saved if his beloved uncle was able to get him the emergency treatment he needed? Dinesh rushed home that very evening, but it was too late. He was disconsolate, when he found Rahul was gone, forever. Dinesh was very attached to the boy ever since he brought Rahul home to raise him, after the boy's father, Arjun, passed away. "As if losing my cousin wasn't enough! It's Rahul, now," Dinesh sobbed in grief.

DINESH DID NOT PRESS CHARGES AGAINST THEM. "I DO NOT WISH TO HARM ANYBODY, NEITHER DO I WANT TO COMMIT A WRONGFUL DEED," HE SAID.

Losing a dear cousin and an adopted son within four years of each other seemed to have driven Dinesh into the dark hole of despair—or so we had thought. This simple, austere man with no addictions other than tea, displayed another remarkable side to him: his utter resilience and extraordinary conviction in the face of overwhelming tragedy. *One day, these troubles will be over*, he believed. I watched in admiration, as Dinesh's faith in this simple mantra and God remained steadfast.

Even though the police were investigating the case and were willing to act against young Jignesh and his family, Dinesh had made up his mind that he would not press charges. "I do not wish to harm anybody, neither do I want to commit a wrongful deed. Jignesh is just a boy and had not hit Rahul intentionally. Besides, filing a complaint would not bring my Rahul back now, will it?" Dinesh insisted. For the police, the matter ended with Dinesh's firm refusal.

Jignesh's father was naturally relieved. He thanked Dinesh profusely for sparing them the trouble with the police and offered him ₹50,000 out of gratitude. The good-natured Dinesh, unsure of what to do, came to me for advice the very next day.

"Should I take the money, sir? What then? My nephew will still be gone."

"Why refuse?" I replied. "If you do not want to keep the money, you could give it to some organization or the other. There are a few institutions that are doing good charitable work in our town."

The idea seemed to strike a chord in Dinesh, albeit in a slightly different way than I had imagined. A few days later, he came back and said, "Sir, there is a poor family in my neighbourhood—two girls and their widowed



Dinesh Talapada faced back-to-back tragedies, but remained generous.

mother. The girls are frequently harassed by scoundrels in the *basti*. I have tried to reason with the boys, but they threatened me instead. Their mother is keen to marry off both girls—in fact, the elder one can be married immediately, as they have found a boy. Once she is settled with her in-laws, this problem can be resolved. Her mother has saved up some money for her wedding, and if I top it up with ₹50,000, the marriage can take place smoothly. What do you think?"

What could I say? I was blown away by Dinesh's magnanimity. He was a man of modest means and had to work really hard to support his family. To have even thought of giving away such a large sum of money to another family, seemed beyond extraordinary. I simply asked him to seek the girls' mother's consent before offering her the money. She assented, on the condition that Dinesh would have to 'give away' the girl at the *kanyadaan* ceremony. Dinesh went a step ahead—finding a suitable groom for the younger girl, he was able to organize the wedding of both young ladies on the same day. He took charge of everything—from fixing the date to deciding on the priest, to choosing the venue and making catering arrangements, even spending an additional ₹7,000 in the process. Both the girls lead peaceful, contented lives today.

Four years have passed since then. Dinesh lives with his elderly, infirm parents and two married sisters. Another of his brothers, who lived with them, passed away last year. Most privileged people are unable to grasp how even a few thousand rupees can make a big difference in the lives of people like Dinesh. And yet, he was able to give away a large sum of money to a family he did not know, out of sheer generosity, benevolence and compassion. Such acts require a special kind of courage and conviction and a large heart—one that flickers and shines like a lamp through the darkness that surrounds us quite often. R

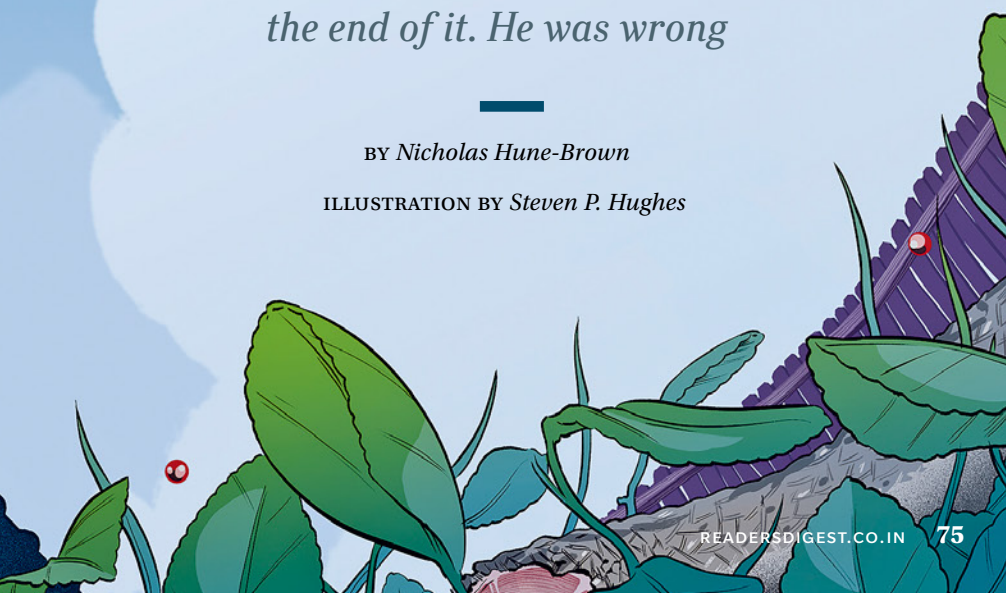


THE SNAKE'S REVENGE

When Jeremy Sutcliffe decapitated the poisonous rattlesnake threatening his wife, he assumed that would be the end of it. He was wrong

BY *Nicholas Hune-Brown*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Steven P. Hughes*



BEFORE THE incident—before his body became a battleground for competing poisons and his story the subject of zoological curiosity—Jeremy Sutcliffe had actually liked snakes. He'd found them beautiful, even.

Besides, the tattooed 40-year-old wasn't someone who shied away from wild creatures. He was an avid outdoorsman who took every chance he could to camp and fish. That love of nature had been part of the reason Jeremy and his wife Jennifer, 43, had recently moved to South Texas from Kansas. The place they'd bought on Lake Corpus Christi, a short drive from the Gulf of Mexico, was their dream home. Or that's what it was going to be. At the moment, they were living in a trailer on their one-acre lot, and the house was still a fixer-upper. A "total gut job", Jeremy called it, with the pride of someone who plans on doing the gutting himself.

On a steamy Sunday morning in May 2018, the couple was tidying their yard in preparation for an evening cookout with their daughter and her two young children. At around 10:30 a.m., Jeremy began mowing the lawn while Jennifer worked on the garden. She had just reached down to grab a weed when she saw it: a western diamondback rattlesnake, right next to her hand.

Jennifer leapt up as the snake, a metre long, rose into a striking position, with its dusty triangular head tensed and its tail rattling. "Snake!" yelled Jennifer as she backed away. "Snake!"

When he heard his wife's cry, Jeremy figured she'd run into one of the harmless rat snakes that often showed up on the property. He grabbed a shovel to shoo the creature away and jogged around the house to the garden. That's when he heard the rattling. His wife was cornered between some shrubbery and the wall of the house, the snake directly in her path.

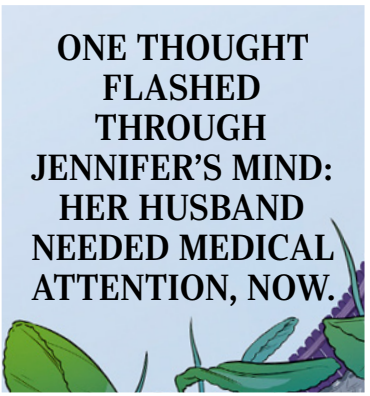
He first tried to scoop up the rattler using the shovel, without success. Then he did what was necessary: He raised the garden tool and brought the edge down hard through the snake's body just below the head, decapitating it.

Jennifer went into the house, her heart hammering, while Jeremy headed back to the garden. About 10 minutes later, when Jennifer said she was going to let their two small dogs out, he decided to move the dead reptile. He looked at the creature lying limp on the ground. Its head, attached to a stub of body, rested on a paving stone.

He bent down to pick up a stick lying next to the snake's head so that he could flick it away. But before his hand even touched the ground, the snake attacked—a blur of motion as the creature launched itself forwards. Burying its fangs into Jeremy's right hand down to the bone, the snake injected venom that immediately made his hand feel like it had been smashed by a massive weight. "It bit me!" he yelled in horror.

For Jeremy, it was like something out a zombie movie—an undead creature's final act of revenge: But the truth is, bites from decapitated snakes aren't uncommon. It's like a chicken with its head cut off, only with a much longer survival time because it's a cold-blooded reptile with a slow metabolism.

In that moment, however, all Jeremy was thinking about was that the snake that he'd killed was now trying to kill him. The creature's jaws were clamped around his hand. Desperate to free himself, Jeremy inserted the fingers of his left hand beneath the snake's upper jaw and tried to pry the fangs free. He managed to remove one of the fangs from his middle finger, but as he tried to pull the head loose, the viper's jaw clenched again, burying the fang in his ring finger this time. At the sound of his cry, Jennifer, a trained nurse, had come running. When she saw her husband struggling with the rattlesnake's head, one thought flashed through her mind: He needed medical attention, now. She ran back into the trailer to get the car keys while Jeremy continued to yank at the snake's head until finally the fangs came loose and he could fling the viper away.



Jennifer told her husband to get in the car. She wheeled out on to the broiling Texas asphalt, already on the phone with 911 dispatchers. They were a half-hour away from the nearest hospital and she had no idea which of the medical centres in the area held antivenom. All she knew was that they didn't have much time.

JENNIFER SUTCLIFFE HAD always been quick to act under pressure. In Texas, she was a nurse consultant, but back when she'd worked in hospitals she'd always been the go-to person for CPR(Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation)—someone colleagues would turn to when competence and quick thinking could be the difference between life and death.

She's known her husband for their entire adult lives. They'd met in the summer of 1993, when they were both students working at a nursing home. She'd liked his sparkling blue eyes and the fact that he was kind. The two became friends, then more.

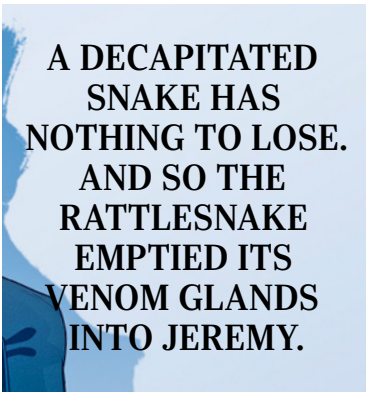
They were married a couple of years later and went on to have a son and a daughter. Jeremy was handy, a builder and a tinkerer who worked installing

heating and air conditioning. He always seemed to be helping out one neighbour or another.

In 2011, at the age of 34, he was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare and mysterious condition that causes the immune system to attack healthy nerve cells. The disease left Jeremy weak and exhausted, unable to work more than a few hours a day, but the couple got through it together. When they bought the house in Corpus Christi, it felt like the ideal situation. While she worked, he would slowly create their dream home.

Now, as Jennifer sped down the highway, she could feel that fantasy slipping away. On the phone, the 911 dispatcher was directing her down the highway to a spot where an ambulance would meet them to bring her husband to the nearest hospital. Mere minutes after being bitten, however, Jeremy was already feeling the effects of the venom coursing through his body. When he blinked, he saw nothing but blackness. "I can't see," he said, panic in his voice, before passing out. Jennifer shook her husband with one hand while keeping the other on the wheel. Jeremy woke up, only to pass out again. Then he began having a seizure. The 911 operator told Jennifer to pull over and wait in front of a church for the paramedics.

Finally, after the longest 15 minutes of her life—during which Jeremy alternated between babbling incoherently and losing consciousness—the paramedics arrived. They transferred Jeremy to the ambulance and sped down the highway, with Jennifer speeding behind. After just 10 minutes, however, the ambulance pulled over into the parking lot of an abandoned building. When Jennifer pulled up next to them, they told her that her husband was in bad shape. His blood pressure had plummeted, and they were worried he wasn't going to make it to the hospital.



"We have to get the HALO (a heavy transport helicopter)," one of the paramedics said. Instead of driving to the hospital half an hour away, they were sending for a helicopter that would get him into a different emergency room in 10 minutes. Moments later, the chopper touched down and whisked Jeremy away.

RATTLESNAKE VENOM IS a miracle of evolution—a complex cocktail of enzymes and proteins that, when injected into a victim's bloodstream, acts like a powerful blood thinner,



Left: The snake's head. Right: Jeremy Sutcliffe during dialysis in mid-June, after his first amputation

COURTESY OF JENNIFER SUTCLIFFE

destroying skin tissue and blood cells and causing internal haemorrhaging. A rattlesnake's fangs are connected to venom glands at the back of its head. Snakes can control how much venom they inject, and because producing venom takes energy, they typically don't want to waste it. When cornered, an adult rattlesnake will usually deliver a light defensive strike to scare off a threat.

A snake that has been decapitated, however, has nothing to lose, so the snake that bit Jeremy emptied its venom glands into his hand. When Jennifer got to the emergency department at Christus Spohn Hospital, Corpus Christi–Shoreline, about an hour and 15 minutes after her husband, she found a hectic scene. There were six or seven doctors working on her husband, desperately trying to get his blood pressure up. Just two hours after being bitten, Jeremy's right hand was enormous and swollen, an angry red creeping up his forearm.

She watched with her nurse's eyes as doctors gave him a host of treatments—cryoprecipitate and vitamin K to clot the blood, and dose after dose of antivenom. The average snakebite victim is given two to four doses of antivenom. In total, Jeremy received 26.

Jennifer knew IVs: If a patient needed fluid quickly, you simply increased the flow, turning a drip into a steady trickle. But the doctors here had put the IV bag

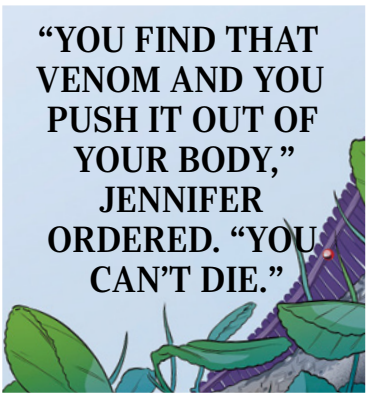
into an inflatable sleeve that they'd pumped up like a blood-pressure cuff, literally squeezing fluid into her husband's body as fast as they could. She'd never seen anything like it before. The sight terrified her.

At 5 p.m., after five hours of working on Jeremy, the doctors came to a decision. Sutcliffe's organs were failing—they needed to induce a coma and put him on a ventilator. Jennifer numbly agreed.

At around 3 a.m., one of the doctors approached her. Her husband wasn't doing well. His blood pressure was still dangerously low. The mean arterial pressure (or MAP) that doctors were looking for was 65—anything lower and the heart can't push blood through the body. They had Jeremy on the maximum dosage of four medications designed to increase his blood pressure, but his MAP refused to budge above 60. "We're at the point where there's nothing else we can do," the doctor said. There was a good chance Sutcliffe wouldn't make it through the night.

Jennifer felt her heart plummet. She somehow hadn't registered the gravity of the situation. She went to her husband's bedside and grabbed his hand. "You find that venom and you push it out of your body," she ordered. "You can't die."

Over the next half-hour, she stood by her husband's side in the ICU, her eyes glued to the monitor next to his bed. Slowly, miraculously, she watched as Jeremy's blood pressure ticked up. It made it to 65, then 70. The doctors began taking him off the medications, and his pressure remained stable. By sunrise the following day, the worst was over.



On 31 May, five days after the rattlesnake he killed nearly killed him, Jeremy emerged from his coma and found himself in a strange hospital room. His mind was foggy. His entire body was swollen with more than 20 kilograms worth of water weight. Pain radiated from his legs, his arms, his bowels, everywhere. But as he looked around, he saw that he was surrounded by family: his daughter and her children, his son, Jennifer.

The next weeks were difficult. The mixture of venom and antivenom had caused severe kidney damage, and Jeremy needed dialysis. The toxins had left him with gallstones, kidney stones and fierce abdominal pain. He was so weak he couldn't stand. The medical

expenses piled up—close to $60,000 (₹43,87,230)—so the couple started a GoFundMe account to pay for the battery of treatments. The fingers of Jeremy's right hand were badly wounded; the doctors tried skin grafts but were unsuccessful. In the end, they were forced to amputate his ring and middle fingers. For anyone else, the loss of two fingers would be devastating. But Jeremy didn't see it that way. After getting a glimpse of the worst, he was feeling positive. About a month after the bite, his kidneys were working well enough for doctors to take him off dialysis. "I'd trade a couple of fingers for my kidneys coming back," he said.

Lying in a hospital bed, slowly recovering, he'd had time to think. "When I first came to and things were all right, I'd cry a lot and think about all the dumb things I'd done, the people I've hurt," Jeremy says. He remembered skipping his kids' events or ignoring Jennifer while he was off working on a neighbour's house. It wasn't that he'd done anything so terrible—just that his new perspective suddenly made every misstep seem like a tragic waste. The experience had changed him. "The things that used to matter don't feel like they matter as much," he says. "My wife and my family seem so much more important now."

IN LATE JUNE, he was released from the hospital and the couple moved back to their dream-home-in-progress. And one evening in July, they finally had the cookout they'd been planning. Their daughter and grandchildren came over, as did a neighbour. Everyone sat out in the garden, eating hamburgers, grilled corn and potatoes and enjoying the warm Texas air. The Sutcliffes paused to take it all in. This was their paradise, and no snake could change that. R



Chew On This?

Bubblegum, made in 1906, was originally called Blibber-Blubber.

History.com

What Will They Call It Now?

The Leaning Tower of Pisa is getting taller! In 1990, engineers closed the 185-foot white marble building for a decade to make structural adjustments that corrected the lean by 17 inches. Recently, the Italian government announced that the tower had recovered 1.57 more inches largely on its own (and thanks to its shored-up foundation). At this rate, the tower will be perfectly straight—in 4,000 years.



THE BEST ADVICE I EVER GOT

RD readers share the most valuable words of wisdom they've received

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *The Voorhes*

INSPIRATION

One of the few constants people encounter in their lives is advice. As children or as adults, we receive so much of it—some from the most unexpected corners—that it often becomes difficult for us to sift the valuable from the worthless. For the few who have struck it lucky, the experience has been inspiring and potentially life-changing. *Reader's Digest* looks at a selection of the best pieces of advice our readers have received and the difference it has made to their lives.

90 per cent of success is just showing up

Hindi was a nightmare for me—I particularly dreaded the exams. On the day of my Hindi class-12 board exams, I panicked and refused to take it. My mother sat me down and calmly said, "Darling, just go, write your name, and the date. Then, read the question paper—if you still think you don't know anything, come right back. But **fill in your details so that the examiners know that you made an attempt to show up**." Her words inspired me and I managed to score 60 per cent in the subject.

—SUSAN MUCHHALA, *Mumbai*

Develop your unique strength

Many years ago, a fellow passenger on a train gave me the best advice of my life. Although his bearded face is now hazy, I distinctly remember his words—"**By dint of your application, you must so develop your unique strength that people will remember you primarily for an outstanding feature of your personality; even overlooking some of your flaws**. The koel is remembered for its melodious voice, its ordinary looks notwithstanding. The peacock, on the other hand, grabs the limelight for its attractively coloured feathers, its raucous voice notwithstanding.

—P. V. RAGHU, *New Delhi*

Learn from your setbacks

I wasn't a brilliant student, but was always good at English. It came as a rude shock when I failed English in my final year of school. Looking at the answer script, my father agreed with my teacher's assessment. Extremely upset, I sulked in my room, believing the whole world was against me. Dad knocked on my door later and said I had two choices—I could either **learn from my setback or**

continue believing I was perfect and that the world was wrong. These words changed my attitude and defined it for the rest of my life.

—PRADEEP SWAMINATHAN, *Bengaluru*

You are not alone

A Ruskin Bond story I read as a child had a message that has always stayed with me. It goes like this: **"Remember, if all the worries of this world were to be taken and made into a huge pile, every one of us would end up picking our own, old troubles."** This wisdom has helped me countless times.

Looking around, you realize that this is everyone's story—and suddenly, all our problems seem a little lighter. It taught me to take life's challenges head-on.

—SUNAINA SHARMA, *Mumbai*

Stand on your own two feet to survive

Women should live a life of self-respect, my mother always said. She was a teacher in a village school, balancing work with household chores and bringing up four children. She pushed us all to study hard so we could be independent. Hence, my sister and I felt it was only natural that as adults we become earning members of the family. I am proud that I was able to fulfil my mother's wish and grateful to her for providing us with this outlook. In fact, I followed in my mother's footsteps by passing on this advice to my kids.

—RAMANI RAMACHANDRAN, *Chennai*

Focus on the stars, not the darkness

During one of the most trying times of my life, one of my friends gave me the following life-changing advice: **"The darker the night, the brighter the stars. You just need to focus on the stars, not the night."** Her advice helped me back then, just as it does even today. Perhaps, this is what Lord Byron meant when he wrote:

So thank your stars that matters are no worse,
And read your Bible, sir, and mind your purse."

—VARSHA S., *Navi Mumbai*

Giving is more rewarding

My wonderful parents gave me many a good suggestion that made me realize how beautiful the world is and the impact our thoughts have on our lives.

- **Do as much as you can for others,** but never harbour expectations.
- **Giving is always more satisfying than receiving.**
- **Keep smiling, no matter your own problems.** When you smile, you will give others a positive vibe.
- **Aim for a simple life**, but lofty thoughts.

—A. RADHAKRISHNAN, *Pune*



Life is not a marathon; it is a leisurely walk, enjoy it.



Life is not a marathon

"Shefali, hurry up, I am waiting outside!"—I would bellow at my wife, whenever we went out. When I did, she would grow anxious and fumble, causing further delay. Things often turned quite ugly. Once, when my parents visited us, my mother noticed this and asked me to build my body before our trip to Varanasi. When I explained I needed time, she retorted, "Shefali also needs time to get ready—dressing up the kids, turning off the lights and gas—before leaving the house. **Life is not a marathon; it is a leisurely walk, enjoy it.**" This advice has been priceless.

—BHUSHAN CHANDER JINDAL, *Mumbai*

Zip up your go-go boots and smile

At 26, I suffered from a mysterious, incapacitating illness. I had no energy, was constantly anxious and shunned company. I consulted many doctors but to no avail. In 1961, finally, a doctor asked me a few questions about my work and life. To my surprise, he prescribed no medicines but said, **"Young man, run a mile every day—you will be okay. You are perfectly healthy and an educated, intelligent person, so you can solve your own problems!"** This sane advice he offered, without even charging a fee, was truly a turning point in my life.

—AMARJIT SINGH HAYER, *Ludhiana*

FROM A FEW FAMOUS FOLKS

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED



J. K. Rowling
It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default. Now, I am not going to tell you that failure is fun. [But] the knowledge that you have **emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks** means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive.

Richard Branson
My mother always taught me **never to look back in regret** but to move on to the next thing. The amount of time people waste dwelling on failures rather than putting that energy into another project always amazes me.

George Clooney
The best advice I got from my aunt, the great singer Rosemary Clooney, and from my dad, who

ADVICE "An old actor said to me once, 'Learn how to nap.'" LIAM NEESON

was a game show host and news anchor, was: Don't wake up at 70 years old sighing over what you should have tried. **Just do it, be willing to fail** and at least you gave it a shot.

Rahul Dravid
I failed a lot more times than I succeeded. I'm more a failure than a success. So, I'm quite qualified to talk about failure ... One of the things that I picked up from the great players who I have played with, and the athletes I know, is their attitude towards failure. They **know how to fail well.**

Laura Linney
As the late great Jack Lemmon once said, "Failure seldom stops you. What stops you is the fear of failure." You will never achieve a deeper understanding of your work, or **learn the tough lessons**, if you are liked or comfortable all the time

Michael Jordan
I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. **I've failed over and over and over again** in my life. And that is why I succeed.

Steer clear of being judgemental

In the mid '70s, I was a bank officer. Newly recruited office assistants, those days, were asked to manage the bank counters from day one and expected to learn on the job. Invariably, tense moments and face-offs were common.

"It may be common sense for you, but not for me," a new recruit told me one day, when I had reprimanded him for a mistake, without considering if he was even aware of the rules in the first place. Almost 40 years later, I still consider his response as a piece of advice to **not judge others based on my likes, dislikes and expectations.**

—N. K. PADHI, *Hyderabad*

Think 'It's okay'

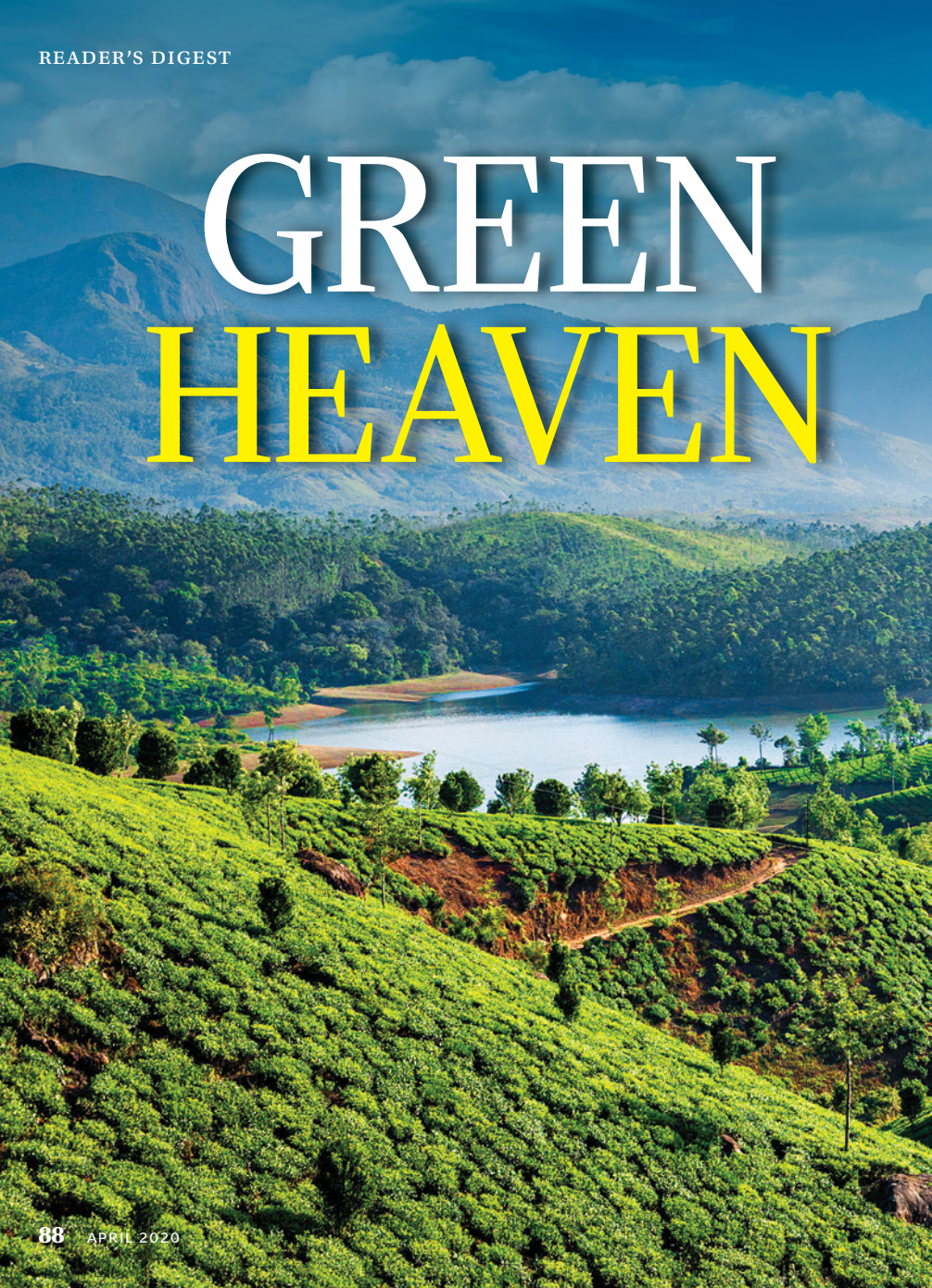
When I was growing up, my strict mother scolded me for every mistake I made. After I got married, one morning, while decorating a framed deity I accidentally shattered the glass. I froze in fear. Just then, my father-in-law came by and I told him what had happened. He looked at me and said, **"Never mind, it's okay."** Those words soothed my guilt and anxiety instantly. When I reflect on my life, it was perhaps the single best advice. Whenever someone makes a mistake, I say it and let them move on.

—KAMINI AGARWAL, *Mumbai* R

—COMPILED BY SAPTAK CHOUDHURY

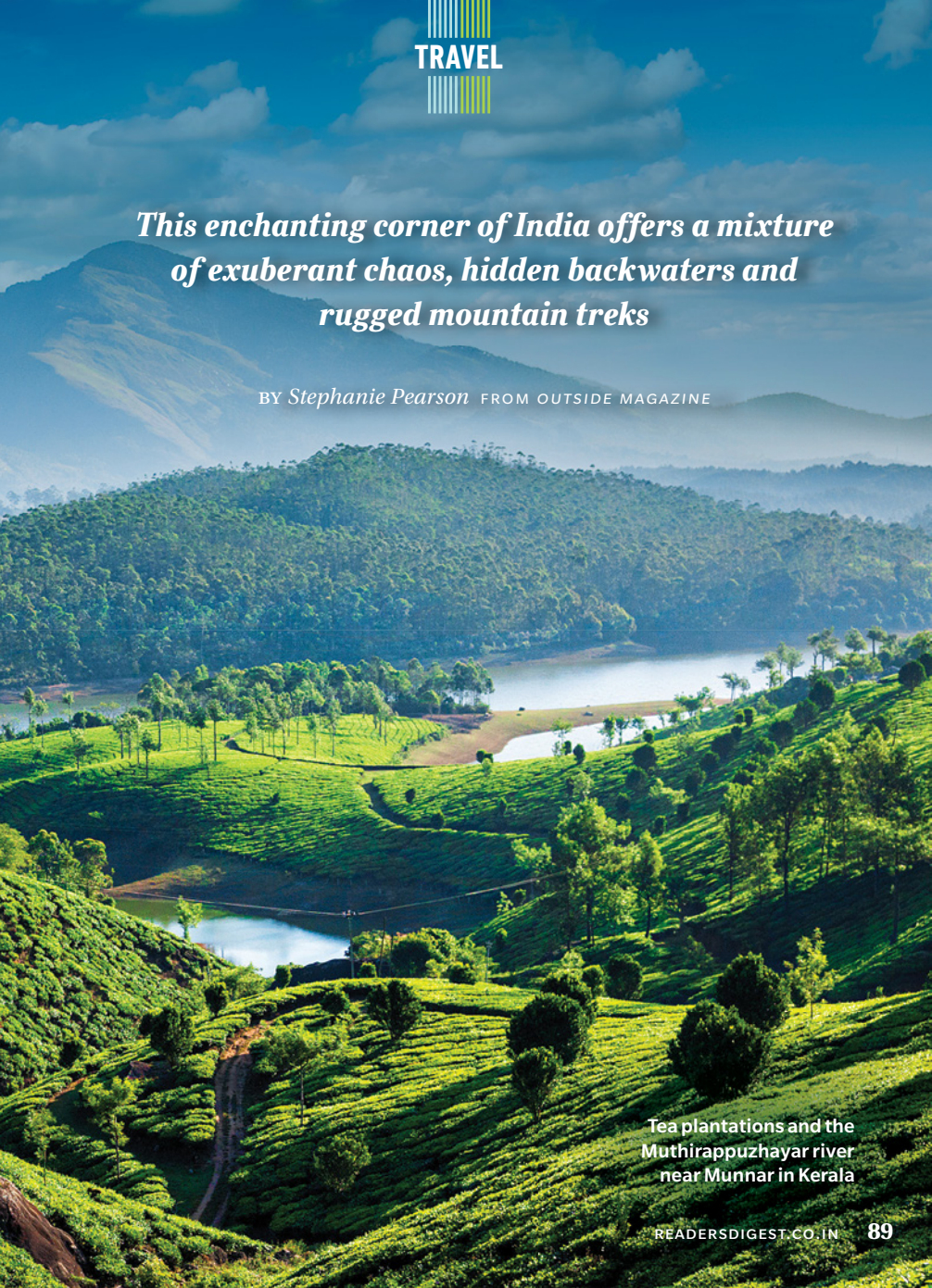
"You have to show up, so why not compete?" VENUS WILLIAMS

GREEN HEAVEN



This enchanting corner of India offers a mixture of exuberant chaos, hidden backwaters and rugged mountain treks

BY *Stephanie Pearson* FROM OUTSIDE MAGAZINE



Tea plantations and the Muthirappuzhayar river near Munnar in Kerala

EACH AUTUMN, RESIDENTS of the South Indian state of Kerala celebrate Onam, their 10-day harvest festival. It commemorates the return of the legendary king Mahabali, who is said to have given every Keralite—whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jew, or other—equal rights and prosperity.

I bumped into Mahabali in the city of Vaikom. As I attempted to cross the street, a parade of hundreds following a bejewelled man with a giant belly came along. Mahabali handed me a piece of candy, while a TV news reporter stuck a mike in my face and asked: "What do you think of Onam?"



PLANT ANYTHING HERE AND IT WILL GROW, FROM COCONUTS TO MANGOES TO GINGER.

"It's a happy time!" I stammered.

When I made my plans to travel to Kerala, I knew nothing about Onam. All I knew was that I had always wanted to see the vivid beauty of this vast country but was intimidated by the volume of humanity—India is home to 1.33 billion people. In Kerala, I had heard, one could still experience the diversity of India, yet also find quiet beauty, tropical ocean beaches and cultural festivals that attract visitors from around the world.

After a few days of exuberance, I can attest that Keralites know how to celebrate. At the Coconut Lagoon eco-resort, I feasted on the traditional Onam meal known as *sadya*. The 26 vegetarian servings included ash gourd, masala curry, sambhar, papads and mango pickles.

On the festival's last day I attended the Aranmula Boat Race, a 700-year-old contest that starts at the Aranmula temple on the river Pamba. Thirty-metre-long *palliyodams*, or snake boats, from 48 villages went head-to-head in front of thousands of spectators. The race had the pomp and circumstance of the Olympics.

During the race, one of the boats capsized, and the revellers gasped as the paddlers swam towards the opposite shore. A motorboat packed with men impersonating foreign tourists with devil masks, fake boobs and blonde wigs sped past. If this raucous festival was an accurate representation of life in the state known as 'God's own country', then, I decided, God must thrive on chaos and fun.

"In Kerala, many things make sense and many things don't," said my guide, Rajesh 'Raj' Padmanabha Iyer Rama Krishnan, a 36-year-old Hindu priest and yoga instructor. On our nearly 1,000-kilometre car-and-train journey across the state, he chanted in melodic

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: © DMITRY RUKHLENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK



A houseboat tour through the backwaters of Kerala

devotion to Lord Shiva, one of Hinduism's primary forms of God.

"It boils down to a plea for victory over death," Raj said of the prayer. Which makes sense—I don't have a seat belt, so I'm trusting Shiva for safe passage through the rolling countryside of rubber and banana plantations, Hindu and Christian shrines, goats, cows, people and autos.

KERALA IS SMALLER than the Netherlands but has about twice the number of people—35 million. Crowded or not, it is intensely beautiful. In the west, 580 kilometres of sandy coastline hug the Arabian Sea. To the east, the mountainous Western Ghats rise up to the 2,700-metre summit of Anamudi. Herds of wild elephants and solitary tigers roam the Ghats through the sprawling Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

In between are the backwaters, an interconnected waterway of lagoons, canals and lakes near the Arabian Sea. Plant anything here and it will grow, from coconuts to mangoes to ginger.

"Kerala can not only be a great recuperation site after a big Himalayan trek or expedition, but a destination in itself," says Mandip Soin, a mountaineer, founding president of the Ecotourism Society of India and the owner of Ibex Expeditions. Together, we mapped out an itinerary between Kerala's five national parks, 17 wildlife sanctuaries, hundreds of kilometres of forest and endless beaches.

As the epicentre of the world's spice trade, Kerala has endured as a largely independent, multicultural society for centuries. "Kerala is perhaps the only place in India that is able to produce both a practising Catholic and an agitated communist," says Jose Dominic, the managing director of CGH Earth Hotels, a group of eco-resorts and properties in southern India.

Yes, Kerala has communists. In 1957, the state became the first in the world to democratically elect a communist government. The communists enacted

PHOTO: ©CHRISTIAN OUELLET/SHUTTERSTOCK

a major step in land reform in 1970, making Kerala one of the first Indian states to end the feudal system.

Drawing on a long history of enlightened Hindu rulers and Christian missionaries, the communists and successive parties made education a priority. Today, about 94 per cent of Kerala's population is literate. It also has affordable universal health care, the lowest infant mortality rate in India and a life expectancy of 74.9, seven years higher than the national average.

Which isn't to say that Kerala is without struggles, including occasional outbursts of political violence, strikes and one of the highest rates of alcoholism in India. And in a state where there are 860 people per square kilometre, my Western notions of wide-open spaces may need a little adjusting.



ALMOST EVERYTHING NEEDED TO SUSTAIN LIFE CAN BE FOUND ALONG THE WATERWAYS.

RAJ AND I are kayaking on Meenapally Kayal, a wide, beautiful lake and an important link in the backwater ecosystem. It's also a popular backdrop for Mollywood blockbusters (Malayalam-language movies), because of its impressive expanse and uncluttered shoreline ringed with coconut palms.

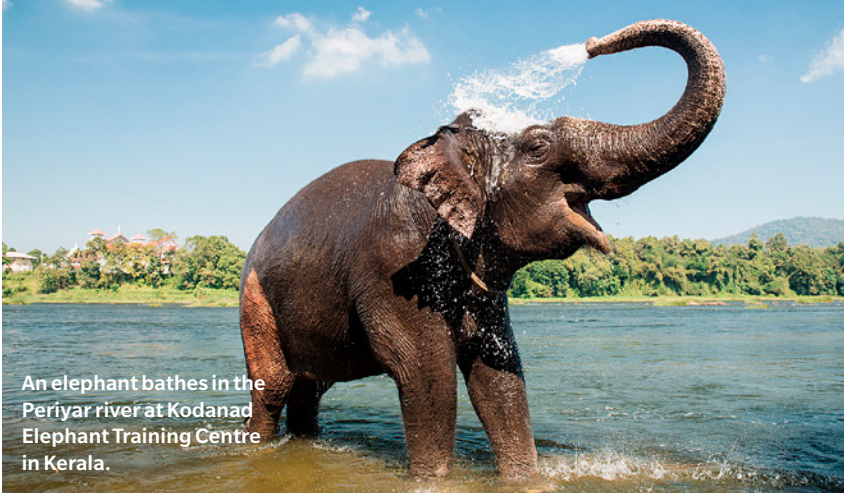
Known as 'the rice bowl of Kerala', the backwaters are one of the few places in the world outside of Holland where land is cultivated below sea level. Small villages line the canals and are surrounded by rice paddies, banana leaves and gardens of spinach and long beans. Lavender houses, women in brightly coloured saris and men in plaid dhotis pop out of the foliage in brilliant relief. This is the land of Arundhati Roy, who spent part of her childhood in the village of Aymanam, where she set her haunting novel *The God of Small Things*.

Normally Raj leads trips through the backwaters on *kettuvallams*, rice-and-spice trade boats that are now motorized party barges for tourists. But to reach the remote channels, a kayak is required, which is why we're with Binu Joseph, a 26-year-old local guide.

"They are not experiencing the backwaters," Binu tells me as we paddle past *kettuvallams* belching diesel fumes.

We stop at an open-air restaurant for a breakfast of *appam*, which is like a rice-batter pancake, accompanied by sambhar, a South Indian lentil stew, and some fresh toddy, a fermented coconut alcohol. It's a little sweet, a little tangy and it goes down smoothly. Next we paddle past a Hindu temple and the local Communist Party headquarters before heading into peaceful Muslim,

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An elephant bathes in the Periyar river at Kodanad Elephant Training Centre in Kerala.

PHOTO: ©DMYTRO GILITUKHA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Christian and Hindu neighbourhoods, where orchids grow with abandon, kids race us in wooden canoes as kingfishers, egrets and cormorants dart about. Almost everything needed to sustain life can be found along the waterways—including a floating medical clinic, churches, schools, mosques, temples and supermarkets. At one point the canal is so narrow and choked with water hyacinths that it feels like we're on a path of no return. But after a few hundred metres, the channel widens and spits us back into the lake.

Binu is married and has a bachelor's degree in business from Kerala University. His family hopes that he'll go to law school, but, he tells me, "I don't want to go to the court. I like my life."

I can see why. I felt the pull of the backwaters a few mornings earlier when I awoke to a pre-dawn monsoon shower at a family-run inn called Philipkutty's Farm. Crickets, frogs and roosters chirped, croaked and crowed the world to life. Minutes later their cries were drowned out by the staccato blast of firecrackers, a Hindu offering popular during the Onam festival. By 6 a.m., a melodious hymn wafted over the water. Believers at St. Mary's Church in Kudavechoor were already celebrating Mass.

"DO YOU SEE this? It's Spanish Lady, we use it to treat kidney stones," says Renjith Hadlee, a wiry 28-year-old in an elephant T-shirt. "And this is camphor basil. We use it to treat cold and flu. This is an African tulip. The bark is good for treating malaria."

I'm at 465 metres from the hill station of Munnar in the Western Ghats. Hadlee, who runs a trekking and mountain-biking company called Kestrel Adventures, is leading me up and down a moss-covered path through a *shola*, or tropical mountain forest. It's hard to believe that this mist-shrouded mountain landscape, filled with wild herbs and

exotic birds, is in the same state as the backwaters.

Hadlee sees this *shola* as a medicine chest for Ayurveda, an Indian healing practice that dates back 5,000 years. I have yet to experience a treatment, but it's evident that these hills are alive with healing powers.

Over the next few days I visit three more hill stations, including one near Periyar National Park, a 777-square-kilometre tiger and elephant sanctuary, and Nagarhole National Park in neighbouring Karnataka state, which has one of the highest tiger densities in the world. The big cats evade me at both, which isn't surprising—they are solitary and nocturnal. But at Nagarhole, I see a bull elephant, wild peacocks, a gaur and a crested hawk eagle.



IT'S EVIDENT THAT THE HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH HEALING POWERS.

Between stints at the hill stations, we take a short detour to Marari Beach. Even as temperatures were pushing the high twenties [Celsius], the long stretch of white sand was nearly empty, save for a woman in a black burka chasing a toddler, a few Indian honeymooners and a dozen fishermen launching a boat into the sea.

Most Keralites seem to have a distant relationship with the ocean. "It is not part of our culture," a Keralite businessman tells me later. "The ocean means a lot of sun, and we don't need the tan."

As much as I want to shed my long skirt and long sleeves, seeing the burka reminds me to stay covered in a conservative culture that doesn't easily tolerate women in bathing suits.

I HAVE AN EARLY-MORNING appointment with Sony Sumi, the first woman in a long family line of male doctors to practise Ayurveda, at her office at Spice Village, an Ayurvedic spa on the edge of Periyar National Park.

"How is your bowel movement?" she asks. "How is your appetite? Your immunity power?" After the rapid-fire Q&A, Sumi, who is wearing an elegant gold salwar kameez, takes my pulse. Behind us is an ornate copper lamp. Its flame, Sumi explaines, illuminates the presence of God. "Before and after the treatments, we pray to God. God resides everywhere," she says.

Hindus believe that Ayurveda was handed down from Brahma, the god of creation. Its premise is that we are a mixture of three doshas, or energies. If our doshas are out of balance, disease, depression and physical pain set in. Balancing the doshas requires a stringent routine of diet, exercise, massage, meditation and, often less pleasant,

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Snakeboat oarsmen participating in the Aranmula boat race

TRAVEL TIPS

After the worst flooding in almost a century in August 2018, Kerala's major tourist destinations are again operational.

HOW TO GET THERE From Delhi, it's a two- to three-hour flight to Kozhikode, Kochi or Thiruvananthapuram.

WHEN TO GO Tourism season starts in October. January through March is high season and monsoon-free, with temperatures in the high 20s and low 30s (°C).

GETTING AROUND Travel between cities by rail or hire a driver.

LODGING Orange County, Kabini, on the edge of Nagarhole National Park, has cabanas from ₹33,000. Philipkutty's Farm in the backwaters has bungalows and the best fish *moilee* for ₹19,000, all-inclusive. Eco-resort Coconut Lagoon on Vembanadu Lake has yoga classes, and a great menu of Kerala food, from ₹17,000. Marari Beach Resort has a lawn that extends to the white-sand beach; from ₹25,000.

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detoxifiers, such as enemas, bloodletting and vomiting.

"In modern medicines, they treat the particular symptom," Sumi tells me. "In Ayurveda, we treat the disease from its root." Diagnosis and treatment can take up to three weeks, but I have only a day, so Sumi diagnoses my primary dosha as vata. "Basically, the quality of vata is movement, very fast acting," she says, which is no surprise, considering that I'm a restless wanderer and chronic insomniac. She gives me a long list of foods to eat (like maple syrup and avocado) and to avoid (chocolate and raw garlic) and recommends a *sirodhara* Ayurvedic treatment.

After a rigorous scalp and body massage, I lay on my back on a traditional teak Ayurvedic treatment bed while a clay pot that swings a few feet above me drips sandalwood-infused sacred oil across my forehead, directly over the third eye. The steady drip relaxes the nervous system and relieves migraines, insomnia, stress and fatigue. It puts me in such a relaxed trance that I wonder if Shiva himself is reaching down to erase my worry lines. R

FROM *OUTSIDE MAGAZINE* (FEBRUARY 2015), COPYRIGHT © STEPHANIE PEARSON



Three-year-old Conner in 2015, the year before he got sick

His parents were exhausted and frustrated. Conner's life, and theirs, had been upended by a medical riddle

"What's Wrong With Conner?"

BY *Amitha Kalaichandran*
FROM *THE ATAVIST MAGAZINE*

THE LIGHTNING HIT on a stormy June afternoon in 2016. It thrashed through the chimney of the two-storey home, before setting off a gas explosion in the basement that shook the walls.

Jeff Beish was in the living room with his three-year-old son Conner watching television. He grabbed Conner, ran outside and called 911. While they stood in the yard, fire surged through the living room floor.

Jeff's wife, Hollie, and the Beishes' other son, seven-year-old Jaxon, had been out running errands. By the time they got home, firefighters had extinguished the flames. The Beishes spent the next month at a nearby hotel while the house underwent repairs.

Which would have been fine, except that Conner was sick and got worse at the hotel. The Beishes hoped that the elusive condition wasn't serious. Certainly, they reassured themselves, it was nothing catastrophic. After all, lightning never strikes the same place twice.

BORN IN AUGUST 2012, Conner had been a healthy infant. By the time he turned one, he had a full head of wavy blonde hair and a wide, mischievous smile. He started walking at 13 months.

Words came slowly to Conner. By his second birthday, he'd mastered about 10 of them; the number should have been at least 50. "I assumed it was because Jaxon would always speak for him," Hollie said, something big brothers often do. The Beishes' paediatrician said not to worry, that some children gain words in bursts.

Months passed and Conner's progress was still glacial. The Beishes took him to a speech pathologist.

Hollie was in her late 20s then, five-foot-three with green eyes. Jeff was a few years older and much taller. A truck driver, he was often away from their home in Denton, Maryland, for extended stretches of time. As a full-time mom, Hollie adapted the most to Conner's limited communication.

If Conner didn't know a word, he would make a sound instead—imitating the sucking of liquid through a straw if he was thirsty, for instance. Some words he understood but couldn't quite say: Jaxon was 'Bubba,' Jeff was 'Da,' and Hollie was 'Me.'

Conner started preschool at three. When picture day rolled around, on 1 October 2015, Hollie noticed that he seemed tired. At school, Conner sat for his picture, offering the photographer a close-lipped smile. Then, as he returned to his seat, Conner crumpled on to the carpet. His teacher rushed him to the nurse's office. His forehead felt warm, and soon he began convulsing. The seizure lasted six minutes.

When the school called Hollie, she jumped in her dark purple Ford SUV and resisted the urge to speed. She also forced herself to stop crying, because the tears were blurring her vision.





(Left to right) Jeff and Hollie Beish at their wedding in October 2006; Jaxon, 6, and Conner, 3, in April 2016

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BEISH FAMILY

At the hospital where Conner had been rushed in an ambulance, doctors ruled out an infection like meningitis. Then they sent him home. "It could happen again, or it might not happen again," one of them told Hollie. If it did, she shouldn't worry. High temperatures can trigger an episode in a developing brain. The doctor instructed Hollie to give Conner Tylenol [a common paracetamol] if he experienced one of these so-called febrile seizures.

Jeff was "scared to death" when Hollie called to tell him what had happened. Hollie, though, was comforted by what the doctors had said. When Conner had more seizures—after his night-time bath, while playing in his room—she imagined that she and Jeff would one day remember these episodes as part of a passing phase.

A Medical Mystery

Two months later, Conner had an electroencephalogram, which measures brain activity through electrodes attached to the scalp. The results were abnormal: He endured multiple seizures during the procedure, some so small that his body never visibly moved. Conner was prescribed an anti-seizure medication, and by the time of his follow-up appointment in February 2016, he'd been seizure-free for three months.

The good news didn't last long. An MRI revealed that Conner's cerebellum, the part of the brain responsible for balance and coordination, was unusually small. They would need to run more tests.

The doctors were able to figure out that Conner didn't have cerebral palsy—but little else. By May, the seizures were back and worse than ever. "He was standing beside his wooden train-table and fell and smashed his face on it," Hollie said of one attack. His doctors increased his medication. It didn't work.

Hollie and Jeff were exhausted and frustrated. Conner's life, and theirs, had been upended by a medical riddle.

The Beishes didn't think the seizures had anything to do with Conner's speech delay. He still had a small vocabulary, though some words weren't exactly right: 'Moo' was 'cow', for example, and 'meow' was 'cat'. He knew his colours, too, especially red, green and blue. One day in August, a few weeks after lightning struck the Beishes' house, Hollie and Conner were working on a puzzle. "What colour is this?" Hollie asked, holding up a blue piece. Conner stared at her. "He was looking at me like, *what do you want me to do?*" Hollie recalled. Blue was the first word Conner lost.

Horrifying Diagnosis

Soon after the Beishes moved back into their home after the lightning strike, Conner was hospitalized twice for tonic-clonic seizures, marked by a loss of consciousness and violent limb contractions. Doctors diagnosed him with a form of childhood epilepsy. For Hollie, it was comforting to have an answer.



Shock had quickly morphed into anger. Why had it taken nearly 16 months to get the right answer?

Conner had just turned four. As he headed into his second year of preschool, he took various combinations of anti-seizure medications as his doctors tried to find a cocktail that worked. Sometimes he would scream when he couldn't remember a word for something, which seemed to happen more

and more often. His legs began trembling when he walked.

That fall, a blood test found that Conner might be missing an essential enzyme called tripeptidyl-peptidase1 (TPP1). A second blood test would confirm if Conner had a rare genetic disorder called Batten disease. Although the doctor advised Hollie not to look anything up on the Internet, she did as soon as she hung up.

What she saw was horrifying. Being born without TPP1 enzyme was a slow death sentence. A speech delay is often the first noticeable sign of disease. After that come seizures, language regression, motor dysfunction and blindness. Patients die between the ages of eight and 12.

There was no cure and no treatment. Hollie saw videos of kindergarten-age children unable to speak or control their limbs. She began to sob.

As fall turned to winter, Conner stopped running around with his brother, and he could barely speak. He developed tremors in both hands. Hollie had to hold his cup when he drank.

By December, Conner had to grasp one of his parent's hands to walk. Hollie emailed the doctors and requested that if the news from the blood test was bad, that they not deliver it before Christmas. She wanted the holidays to be happy. As a gift for Conner, the Beishes adopted a yellow Labrador retriever named Joy. Conner shrieked with glee when he saw the puppy.

On 19 January 2017, Hollie called the doctors for an update. It turned out someone had put Conner's test results in the wrong part of his chart. A doctor would call with answers the next day.

Hours passed the following day. As the sun was setting, the Beishes sat side by side, Hollie's iPhone clenched in her hand. Finally it rang.

"I'm sorry I couldn't call earlier," the doctor said. "But ..." She paused. Conner was missing the enzyme TPP1. "He has Batten disease," the doctor said.

"OK," Hollie said weakly. Jeff held his hands up in a gesture that seemed to plead, tell me what's happening.

Hollie could barely hear what the doctor on the phone said next about Conner's diagnosis. Shock had quickly morphed into anger. Why had it taken so long—nearly 16 months since Conner's first seizure—to get the right answer?

"We'd like for you to come into the office to discuss it further."

"That's OK," Hollie interrupted. "I'm not interested. I'd like to find a new doctor." Then she hung up and told Jeff everything. Together they cried.

The next day, Hollie found herself strangely invigorated. "All of our questions and the wondering were just gone," she said. "Now it became, what can we do to help Conner?"

The Beishes read about various hospitals and specialists. "It was time to find a doctor who knew what this

disease was," Hollie said. Their families began doing research, too. Jeff's mother read about the Batten Disease Support and Research Association, a network for families, and called its director. "Please speak with my daughter-in-law," she begged.

The director phoned Hollie and said she should call Dr Emily de los Reyes. "She's the Batten Disease guru." Not only that, but Nationwide Children's Hospital had a clinical trial under way that Conner might be able to enrol in.

A Case Unlike Any Other

Growing up in Manila, Emily de los Reyes had two career choices. "All the women in my family were teachers or doctors," she said. Her family was well off, so they didn't feel the most acute effects of the Philippines' widespread corruption and privation. When she went to medical school, however, she witnessed social ills first-hand. On Sunday afternoons, she helped care for children in poor parts of the city. Hundreds of kids would queue up—some with parents, some on their own. The experience stayed with de los Reyes as she pursued a career in paediatrics.

After graduating, she moved to San Francisco, then to Charleston, West Virginia. There she met an American doctor who soon became her husband.

Dr de los Reyes decided to specialize in paediatric neurology, and eventually was recruited to work as a neurodevelopmental specialist at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

It was there, in 2001, that she saw a case unlike anything she'd ever treated. A nine-year-old girl who'd been born healthy was losing her eyesight. Her family was from Guam. They'd travelled more than 11,000 kms for the appointment at the Little Rock hospital, which they'd learnt had excellent eye specialists. The parents described a constellation of other symptoms: speech delay, seizures and difficulty walking.

Tests ruled out macular dystrophy—a genetic condition that destroys cells in the retina—keratomalacia, a severe deficiency of vitamin A that causes blindness—and a brain tumour. Stumped, Dr de los Reyes called Dr Paul Dyken, an expert in childhood brain disorders. After she spelled out everything she'd learnt, Dr Dyken let out a heavy sigh.

The little girl had a condition so rare that most paediatricians hadn't heard of it. If she was lucky, Dr Dyken said, the girl would live to be 20. Dr de los Reyes could help her die a slow, inevitable death as painlessly as possible—nothing more.

It was the first Batten disease case that Dr de los Reyes had seen. First identified by British physician Frederick Batten in 1903, the disease is caused by a glitch in the body's nervous system. Brain cells produce waste, but Batten disease sufferers lack certain enzymes or proteins required to process it. Eventually, the cells become clogged and die. Be-



The script she recited to parents was excruciating: There is no cure. Your child will die.

tween two and four of every 1,00,000 children in the United States are born with the disease, according to the US National Institutes of Health. There are 14 subtypes. The Guam girl's subtype was CLN3, indicated by a protein missing from cellular membranes.

Explaining a fatal illness to parents who'd come thousands of miles to Little Rock, armed with faith in doctors' abilities to help their daughter, "was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do," Dr de los Reyes recalled.

Emily de los Reyes diagnosed several more cases in Arkansas before being recruited to Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. As the head of the neurodevelopmental department, she turned Nationwide into a hub of Batten disease research and patient-care. Families travelled from around the world for appointments with her.

Dr de los Reyes was proud of her work, but the script she recited to parents was excruciating: There is no cure. Your child will die. She advised them to spend as much time as they could with their sick kids. She promised to support them with medication, physical therapy and walking aids. She hoped that things would be different one day.

Unravelling a Disease

While Dr de los Reyes was delivering tough news in Little Rock and Columbus, Peter Lobel and David Sleat were hard at work in a lab at Rutgers University in New Jersey. During the late 1990s, the two scientists isolated the TPP1 enzyme—missing in children with Batten subtype CLN2—and demonstrated its role in processing cellular waste. Their research led to a new hypothesis: Children missing TPP1 should get better when given the enzyme.

Lobel and Sleat replicated the missing enzyme in mice and administered lab-made TPP1. Young mice didn't develop signs of Batten disease. Older subjects with severe symptoms experienced only mild gains. Early treatment, the research confirmed, was crucial.

Meanwhile, at the University of Missouri, Martin Katz was studying dogs' brains for clues to help solve neurodevelopmental problems in humans. In 2005, he examined tissue samples from the brain of a one-year-old dachshund named Frodo that had died after developing seizures and ceasing to walk and eat on its own.

Katz came to a surprising conclusion: Cellular waste that had accumulated in Frodo's brain was essentially identical to that found in human subjects who'd died of Batten disease. Katz traced Frodo to a breeder, who agreed to let Katz adopt two adult dachshunds, Captain and Autumn. Both dogs were perfectly healthy; the genetic mutation that causes Batten was recessive in their DNA. They produced several litters, each bearing a few puppies with Batten disease.

Around 2009, Katz and BioMarin, a pharmaceutical company that develops treatments for uncommon genetic disorders, together launched a pilot study. Two puppies received TPP1 infusions every other week for a few hours at a time. For a couple of months, Waylon and Lulu behaved like healthy dogs. When Batten disease symptoms finally appeared, they progressed slowly. Ultimately, Waylon and Lulu lived 50 per cent longer than the dogs that didn't receive TPP1 infusions.

In the summer of 2012, a BioMarin researcher presented the study's results at a meeting hosted by the Batten Disease Support and Research Association. Katz ended with split-screen video footage. On one side, two puppies that had had TPP1 injections to their brains were running; on the other, two dogs of the same age struggled to walk.

"The whole room gasped," said Dr de los Reyes, who attended the conference. She initially considered Katz's findings too good to be true. When her skepticism subsided, however, her thoughts turned to the obvious question: *When can we give this to kids*?

In 2013, BIOMARIN launched human trials of the treatment, cerliponase alfa, which it gave the trade name Brineura. Twenty-one children would receive infusions at hospitals in Italy, Germany and England. BioMarin also wanted a small research cohort in America, and Dr de los Reyes was adamant that Nationwide participate. The hospital's ethics board and research coordinators had concerns. Delivering an enzyme directly to a child's delicate brain had never been done before, and it was a scary prospect. "Even with rare diseases where children are dying, we don't want to hasten their death," Dr de los Reyes explained.

She invited the hospital's decision-makers to her clinic to meet children with Batten disease. Some had never seen an afflicted patient. By the end of the tour, one of the research directors was crying. "Emily, we want to help,"



The hospital had concerns. Delivering an enzyme directly to a child's brain was a scary prospect.

she said. Need was weighed against risk, and Nationwide's participation in the trial was approved.

Three children were enrolled at the Ohio site. One by one, starting in December 2014, they had catheters and ports inserted into their skulls. After that, Dr de los Reyes used the surgical implants to administer the infusions.

Weeks passed, then months. None of the three children got sicker. They maintained their motor skills or even made gains. "They were acquiring new words, which is so important," Dr de los Reyes said. "They could tell their family what they wanted."

The first trial results weren't released until March 2016. On average, participants' clinical decline was 80 per cent slower than expected during the first 48 weeks of treatment. In nearly two-thirds of cases, the disease stabilized. Batten disease, effectively, had been halted in its tracks.

News of the results reached the Beishes in late January 2017. Hollie immediately called Dr de los Reyes and left a message: She wanted Conner in the trial.

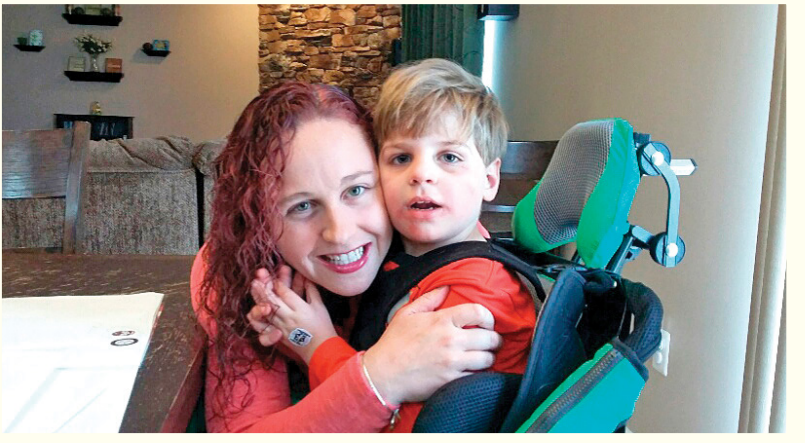
When Dr de los Reyes called back, she offered to evaluate Conner as soon as the Beishes could get him to Ohio. On 12 March 2017, the day before the appointment, Hollie, Jeff and Conner piled into the family's SUV. It was an eight-hour drive through snow and slush to Columbus.

Agonizing Wait

In the exam room at Nationwide Hospital, Conner sat on a narrow green table, a sippy cup in one hand. When Dr de los Reyes came in, Hollie was struck by how tiny she was—scarcely five feet tall.

"Hi, Conner," Dr de los Reyes said. "You're holding that cup very well!"

She was soon joined by an occupational therapist, two physiotherapists and a speech pathologist. They examined Conner, watching him take a few assisted steps and listening to his strained speech. They peppered Hollie with questions.



Hollie and Conner, a month before his first treatment in 2017

When the examination ended, Dr de los Reyes said the trial was closed. Hollie's heart sank. The Beishes would have to wait for the treatment to get approval from the Food and Drug Administration. The doctor was hopeful that that would happen soon.

BioMarin had filed for rapid assessment of Brineura the previous year. On one hand, the enzyme-replacement study had a small number of participants and a limited time frame. No one had any idea how TPP1 infusions would affect a child two or five or 10 years into treatment. On the other hand, Brineura targeted a fatal disease and had positive early results.

The FDA would weigh all these factors in its ruling, Dr de los Reyes told the Beishes. In the meantime, she prescribed Conner leg braces, a gait trainer and adjustments to his seizure medications. The Beishes went home to wait and hope for good news—yet again.

Before long Conner lost one of his last words. "When I picked him up from school, he would say, 'Me! Me! Me!'" Hollie explained. As his disease worsened, he had stopped repeating his word for her. Finally, in the spring of 2017, he stopped entirely.

"I picked him up, and he smiled. But he didn't say 'Me,'" Hollie recalled. "He never said it again."

Approval, At Last

On the morning of 27 April 2017, Hollie was in her car when Dr de los Reyes called her. "Brineura was just granted approval," the doctor said. It was the first time the FDA had given its blessing to any sort of Batten disease

care. The rapid decision was based largely on trial data showing improved ambulation—that is, kids with CLN2 who received Brineura were able to walk better.

If the Beishes wanted, Dr de los Reyes said, she could treat Conner in Columbus. He would be part of an expanded research cohort, monitored for long-term safety implications.

"Tell us when we need to be there," Hollie replied.

Then she called Jeff, who was driving a tractor-trailer and didn't immediately pick up. When he noticed several urgent notifications on his screen, he pulled over and called his wife back. "I cried my eyes out," Jeff recalled. "You have no hope. Then you get the call."

Conner's surgery was scheduled for 22 May in Columbus. The morning of the procedure, Hollie reassured Conner, who seemed scared of going into a big, cold room without his parents. "You're going to go to sleep, and when you wake up, you'll see us," Hollie said, giving her son a kiss. "Everything will be OK."

After Conner was put under, a surgeon sliced through the first layer of skin on the right side of the little boy's forehead. Next came antiseptic, followed by a local anaesthetic and the surgeon made a second cut through muscle.

Once the blood was cleared away, the surgeon drilled through bone, then penetrated the dura, the thin grey layer of tissue that envelops the brain. The surgeon double-checked that he was in the right place, then picked up a small plastic dome attached to a thin tube containing a catheter.



In the coming weeks, Conner would learn to feed himself and say "Da" for Jeff.

The surgeon guided the tube into Conner's brain until the dome was flush with Conner's skull. This was the port where TPP1 would be injected every other week. From there the enzyme would flow through the catheter and soak Conner's brain.

After a doctor stitched Conner's scalp back together, the little boy was brought out of anaesthesia. Hollie



Conner, with Jaxon, in September 2018. He wasn't able to stand the year before.

and Jeff were allowed to see him. "Hi, buddy," Jeff said softly at his bedside. The Beishes climbed up on either side of their son, where they stayed while he slept.

Conner went home to Denton three days later. After less than two weeks, Hollie ferried him to Columbus for his first infusion. Her father, Bruce, went with them. Jeff stayed behind to throw Jaxon his eighth birthday party. As ever, the Beishes tried to keep their lives normal.

When the medical staff attempted to access the reservoir in Conner's scalp with a needle, there was still swelling from the surgery. He began to cry. Finally, they got a needle into the port. TPP1 began to flow through an IV drip. Conner settled down, intermittently napping and watching movies during the four-hour procedure.

Two weeks later, he did it again. And again two weeks after that. Nothing about Conner's health seemed to improve. "It was frustrating and hard," Hollie said. "I had to tell myself to keep going." Dr de los Reyes explained that the enzyme could take a while to have an effect. Or it might not work at all.

At every infusion Conner watched *The Lorax*, the movie based on the beloved Dr Seuss story of the same name. "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot," the main character says at one point, "nothing is going to get better. It's not." In Dr de los Reyes's clinic, it was a familiar mantra.

One day around his fifth birthday, in August 2017, Hollie was reading Conner a story. She pointed at various objects on the pages, naming them slowly. The method was supposed to help Conner gain words, but that hadn't happened in almost two years.

Hollie placed her finger on a star and named it. She was about to move on when Conner raised his right hand and placed his index finger on the page. There was a long pause. Then Conner spoke.

"Star," he repeated.

In October 2017, I visited the Beishes' home in a quiet residential neighbourhood in Denton. Hollie and I had met once before, at an infusion appointment in Columbus, right after Conner started saying words again.

We settled on to a sofa in the living room. Joy, the yellow Lab, lay across my lap. Conner was on the floor playing. At one point, he hoisted himself up to stroke Joy, making eye contact with me. He was more responsive, more interactive and more deliberate than I remembered.

In the coming weeks, Conner would learn to feed himself and say "Bee", his name for his grandmother. Then came "Da", for Jeff.

The Beishes would need to be cautiously optimistic. No one had ever survived Batten disease. They tried to think like scientists: incrementally, with judicious notions of progress. "I've heard of kids who can now walk 30 steps and kids who couldn't sit up who can now sit up," Hollie told me.

Dr de los Reyes described Brineura as "a treatment until we find a cure". She told me that she was starting an extension study of the trial to examine the long-term safety and effectiveness of Brineura. BioMarin is also studying whether children under three could be effectively treated before they ever showed symptoms of CLN2. The goal was to determine whether toddlers could be treated before they ever showed symptoms of CLN2. At Rush University in Chicago, researchers have been investigating therapies that could treat TPP1 deficiencies with pills already approved for addressing other medical conditions.

For its part, BioMarin is scaling up production of Brineura. It's also investigating the treatment as a model for other direct-to-brain care, which could lead to breakthroughs for patients suffering from other rare neurological diseases.

Sitting on the couch, Hollie showed me some old home videos on her iPad. There was Conner at age two running around the backyard, at three eating a cupcake. Then Hollie showed me a video from June 2016 of Conner playing outside. "This was just before the lightning hit," she said.

Hollie was moving on to another video when she looked up. "You know, sometimes, when the air-conditioning is on," she told me, "it will blow, and for a few minutes the room will smell like a campfire." R

Conner's mother reports that he is continuing to progress. A recent MRI showed no additional brain atrophy. Seizure activity is stable, so his medication has been reduced. He can now climb on the couch and walk better in his gait trainer. He is babbling more and making different sounds. His tremor has improved and he can reach for things and grasp them more accurately.

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With Kindness As His Mantra

After a long absence from the spotlight, Irrfan Khan reflects on his diagnosis, on patience and a clean mental slate

BY *Anna M. M. Vetticad*



Your childhood ambition was to play professional cricket. If your family had financially supported this dream, would you have still ended up in films?

I loved cricket. When I love something, I don't calculate where it will take me. Perhaps it's a funny example, but my last house was in Madh Island, far away from the city [Mumbai]—a serene, beautiful house. People often wondered why I bought this property even though I wasn't retired.

But I was happy there as I could see very little of the city. It was surreal, the view of the distant city skyline from my balcony—all the noise, pollution and chatter were miles away. Hundreds of migratory birds would come to spend the night in a 200-year-old tamarind tree across my balcony.

For me, Madh Island was a nest away from the cacophony of the urban jungle. I didn't calculate that I would spend extra time commuting, or that my kids would travel so far for school—we were just happy. Besides, kids learn to adjust faster than we think. They could only see the sea and coconut trees from their rooms, instead of skyscrapers and hearing the deafening traffic.

I CAN'T DO THINGS HALF-HEARTEDLY. IT WAS NOT LIKE, LET ME GIVE CRICKET A TRY, AND IF IT DOESN'T WORK I WILL TRY ACTING.

The point is, one cannot calculate everything in life, but parents do, to ensure the best for their child. And they push you to do what they think is best. If I had taken that route, cricket would have been my Mecca. I can't do things half-heartedly. It was not like, *Let me give cricket a try, and if it doesn't work I will try acting.* I had not looked at acting as a second passion until I abandoned the first for many reasons. I explored acting later, after I saw Naseerbhai [Naseeruddin Shah] in *Nishant* and Mithun Chakraborty in *Mrigayaa*. That's when I realized, this is engaging; that as much as I liked cricket, this can be the '*bhoot*' [spirit] I am possessed with.

In your first film in theatres—Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay*—you had a very small role. Could you describe the novelty of that experience?

Oh, it was immense! I was still in NSD [National School Drama], close to graduating. I couldn't believe it. I was 20-something then. I remember telling my then girlfriend, now wife, Sutapa (writer–producer Sutapa Sikdar), "Let's shift to Bombay. Life has begun." It felt unreal. We felt hope looking at the Queen's Necklace, shimmering from Sangam Apartment in Marine Lines where we were put up for Barry John's workshop. In my life as an actor, I have stayed in the most luxurious hotels across the world, but the thrill I felt at Sangam could never be matched.

There are signs and lessons for you to pick up in every experience. The reality was, my time hadn't exactly arrived yet.

YOGEN SHAH



Irrfan Khan with his wife, Sutapa Sikdar and their elder son, Babil (left), in London in 2019

When you look back at your efforts to gain a foothold in films, which experience stands out the most for you?

I did not do any networking and waited for my turn. That's my biggest takeaway. Somewhere deep down, I was very sure I would evolve because I was very critical of my work.

You have been away from the public eye during your (cancer) treatment. Have you grown as an artiste in this time?

I was never a very public person; I simply did whatever was required of me for work. I took a sabbatical for my treatment, which cut down my interaction with people, essentially from the industry.

During my stay in London, I had a lot of time to go out, watch plays, films we don't get to see in India, meet people unrelated to the film world—things I can't do back home because I am recognized. It rejuvenated me. Visiting parks was one of my favourite pastimes there. Those long hours made me introspect about life. See, I was under treatment and the medicines take a toll on you physically and mentally. So the best way to deal with it is to clean your mental slate as much as possible. I didn't even know when I would act again, so I didn't practise my craft (if that's what you

PHOTO COURTESY: SUTAPA SIKDAR

mean)—but yes, I cleaned out the clutter. And when I got back to acting with *Angrezi Medium*, I approached it from a fresh perspective with no formula and no method.

What was your first reaction when you received the news of your diagnosis?
Disbelief.

Any thoughts you could share with those going through a similar experience?
There is no similarity in the situation as this condition manifests differently in different people. What helped me was my ability to become less and less anxious, to let go and be in the present. Fear had to be conquered. I strongly recommend meditation.

Did you use your relationship with your sons as a reference for the father-daughter relationship in *Angrezi Medium*?
I always wanted a daughter. Oh, I would have loved to have a daughter. A father-daughter relationship is special. For *Angrezi Medium*, I did not draw analogies from observations. Instead, I played the imaginary relationship I had in my mind that I would have with my daughter, if I had one. Of course, the situation would be completely different if I'd really had a daughter, but the bond and the love came from the heart.

Have your personal experiences always contributed to your craft?
Yes. The evocation from personal experiences may not be similar at all to the scene you are enacting, but the grain of the emotion can be the same. You could extract the essence from

WHAT HELPED ME WAS MY ABILITY TO BECOME LESS AND LESS ANXIOUS, TO LET GO AND BE IN THE PRESENT.

the memories that are alive in your subconscious. All of the *nava rasa* [nine emotions] are there in your life. So, while drawing on an emotion, it always helps to hunt for personal ones.

You recorded an audio message for fans to accompany *Angrezi Medium*'s trailer release. One line in your message was, "Be kind to each other". What prompted you to say that?
This has been on my mind throughout my journey over the last two years. We are not kind to people, to nature and it's the reason why we are going the way we are. Nature is revolting. Kindness just makes life more bearable, as more happy people will make a happy world. R

RD RECOMMENDS

Films

ENGLISH: ***MISBEHAVIOUR,*** starring Keira Knightley, Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Jessie Buckley, is set during the time of the 1970 Miss World beauty pageant in London. This comedic film, harbouring feminist ideals and sympathies, enacts the disruption of the competition by the Women's Liberation Movement. It will release in India on 10 April.

HINDI: National Academy Award winning director Bipin Nadkarni adapts a story by Rabindranath Tagore for ***DARBAAN,*** which portrays the moving tale of a master and his caretaker. The caretaker's life is turned upside down when he commits a blunder.





The cast of *Misbehaviour*

Sharab Hashmi, Sharad Kelkar and Rasika Dugal play leading roles in this film, releasing 2 April.

Ranveer Singh will essay Kapil Dev's character in ***'83,*** a biographical film depicting India's journey to the pinnacle in the 1983 World Cup. Also starring Pankaj Tripathi and Deepika Padukone, the film is set for a 10 April release.

Anurag Basu's upcoming film, ***LUDO,*** will portray the seemingly inevitable perils of living in Indian metropolises in four chapters. Starring Abhishek Bachchan, Rajkummar Rao and Sanya Malhotra, the stories in this slice-of-life film will all be connected to each other. Releasing on 24 April.

Ranveer Singh in *'83*

Streaming

SERGIO: Based on a true story, *Sergio* tells the story of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a UN diplomat who has spent most of his life dealing and negotiating with presidents, revolutionaries and war criminals.

On the verge of transitioning to a simpler life with the woman he loves, his life is imperilled when he takes on an assignment in Baghdad, where a bomb explodes outside the UN headquarters he's at. What follows is the saga of a man who's pushed to the extremities of his physical and emotional limits. This Netflix film will stream on 17 April.



A still from *Sergio*

#WATCHLIST: ON OUR RADAR

Brews Brothers: In this Netflix series, two estranged brothers, both master brewers but poles apart in their personalities and beer-making techniques, find themselves running a brewery. This series streams from 10 April.

After Life Season 2: The second season of this dark comedy series from Ricky Gervais will feature Tony, the newspaper-writer, still coming to terms with the loss of his wife, while trying to be nice and caring to the people around him. Streams on Netflix from 24 April.

Money Heist Season 4: Fractures develop in the team of robbers who have previously pulled off feats at the Royal Mint of Spain and the Bank of Spain. This Netflix series streams from 3 April.



A still from *After Life Season 2*

NETFLIX

Books

***Rising Heat* by Perumal Murugan, Penguin Random House**

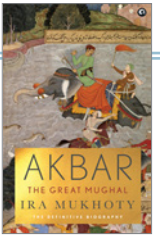
The first novel of master novelist Perumal Murugan finally sees an English translation. *Rising Heat* tells the story of Selvan, a young boy whose life is turned upside down when his family's ancestral land is sold, ironically, to build a new housing colony. Now deprived of their home, Selvan and his family are forced to move to smaller lodgings. As the harsh realities of their situation gradually overpower them, Selvan witnesses his family fall prey to greed and jealousy, which change



the way they lead their lives. A masterpiece in its own right, Murugan's debut novel exposes and poses important and relevant questions about the very human costs of reckless urbanization and development.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ... *Chosen Spirits* by Samit Basu (Simon & Schuster India): Samit Basu's latest offering is set in dystopic Delhi in the late 2020s. Events are set in motion when Joey saves her childhood friend, Rudra, from the horrific life he's forced to lead, in a city where even the walls have eyes and trust is impossible.



Scope Out

***Akbar: The Great Mughal* (Aleph):** Ira Mukhoty's biography of one of India's greatest emperors captures every aspect of the monarch's life in vivid detail.

***Treta: Dharma in the Ramayana* (HarperCollins):** A collection of essays, Arshia Sattar's book explores the various forms of dharma as exhibited by the colourful cast of characters in the *Ramayana*.

***A Poem A Day* (HarperCollins):** Gulzar's compilation and translation (into Hindustani) of 366 poems from the past seven decades by 279 poets in the Indian subcontinent is a must-read for any literature-enthusiast.

BOOK COVERS COURTESY: PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, SIMON & SCHUSTER INDIA, ALEPH BOOK COMPANY

Rising Star

Aamir Aziz

Hailing from a hamlet close to Patna, poet Aamir Aziz gives form to fear and paranoia in his soulful ballads. The 29-year-old, who has shot to limelight for his powerful laments, does not shy away from the political. One of his offerings on his YouTube Channel, '*Achche Din* Blues', was a scathing indictment of India in the post-demonetization era, while his dirge, 'The Ballad of Pehlu Khan', touches upon the brutal lynching of Pehlu Khan, a dairy farmer, in 2017. More recently, he has composed '*Sab Yaad Rakha Jayega*', a hard-hitting diatribe against the excesses of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the anti-Muslim violence the country saw in its wake—spoken, rather than sung, without the accompaniment of any instrument.

Aziz's YouTube channel has now seen several lakh viewers, and has contributed to an important conversation on issues of burning importance. Aziz has also garnered international acclaim—in February 2020, Roger Waters, former Pink Floyd bassist, read out lines from '*Sab Yaad Rakha Jayega*' during a London protest.



Poet and singer Aamir Aziz

COURTESY: AAMIR AZIZ TWITTER

THROWBACK

Historic milestones in books, popular culture and entertainment

✦**The Birth of Apple:** Stephen G. Wozniak, Steven P. Jobs and Ronald G. Wayne sign the founding partnership agreement for Apple Computer on 1 April 1976.

✦**The End of the Beatles?:** Paul McCartney 'quit' the Beatles on 10 April 1970 after issuing a negative communique on the future of the band.

✦***Robinson Crusoe* sees the light of day:** Daniel Defoe's classic work was first published in London by W. Taylor on 25 April 1719.

—COMPILED BY SAPTAK CHOUDHURY

REVIEW

It's a Rich Man's World

A compelling exposé of rich and corrupt empires, *Dirty Money* has a refreshingly honest perspective

BY *Shougat Dasgupta*



A still from *Dirty Money* season 2

MIDWAY THROUGH AN episode in the second season of *Dirty Money*, available on Netflix since 11 March, *The New Yorker* magazine writer Rachel Aviv describes a US scheme in which court-appointed guardians look after the elderly, including their finances, as "based on this idea of benevolent paternalism and yet, in practice, it often seemed to create this kind of capitalist dystopia." And how's this for dystopic: In India, the top one per cent account for 56.1 per cent of the national income and over 70 per cent of the country's wealth.

The first season of *Dirty Money* (2018) was compelling because it was so angry. In the first episode, Alex Gibney, the Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker and an executive producer of the series, buys a Volkswagen (VW). "I was furious", he tells the viewer, "VW ... had pitched me a vision of my dream car, but sold me my worst nightmare. A car that was polluting 50 times more than advertised." At least, VW paid billions in fines and its executives were jailed. Donald Trump, a shameless mountebank, according to the episode that closed the first season, became US President. In season two, Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is exposed as a slumlord who steals from the poor, while jumping into bed with Russian oligarchs and Gulf royals.

Dirty Money has an agenda. Better an honest perspective, though, than the sanctimonious 'neutrality' of, say, the Indian media. How can you not be angry, the series contends, when education, healthcare and food-for-all is 'impossible' only because of the extreme greed of a tiny fraction and a system built to foster and protect that greed? R

NETFLIX

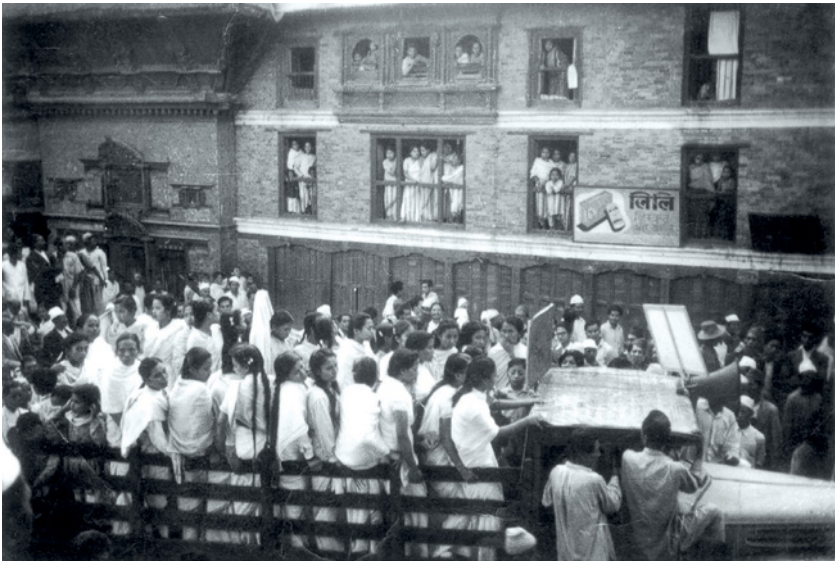


IMAGE COURTESY: NEPAL PICTURE LIBRARY

STUDIO

The Feminist Memory Project
by Nepal Picture Library
Details, medium: Unknown

THE FEMINIST MEMORY PROJECT was launched in April 2018 by the Nepal Picture Library—a digital photo archive in Kathmandu—with a focus on creating an inclusive visual archive, grounding women and their presence in Nepal's history.

Part of the section 'The women of the people', this photo from the Sahana Pradhan collection chronicles a rally in Kathmandu, taken out by women to demand suffrage during the pro-democracy revolution in 1951. The historical memory of Nepal's march to democracy and its struggle for progress has been dominated by men. Women and their participation have largely been relegated to the margins of history, captive to gendered norms and spaces. 'The women of the people' is a visual repository created to draw "attention to the ways women made new positions and subjectivities possible through their entry into public life". Starting with the movement against the Rana oligarchy, the section travels through the decades seeking to register and amplify the memory and visibility of women in Nepal's political history. R

— BY NAOREM ANUJA

ME & MY SHELF

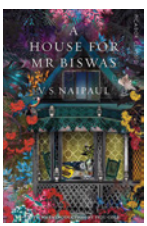


Roshan Ali is a writer and novelist. His debut novel *Ib's Endless Search for Satisfaction* was shortlisted for the JCB Prize for Literature, The Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize and the Mathrubhumi Book of the Year. His work has appeared in *The Indian Express*, *The Huffington Post India* and *The Hindu*. He lives in Bengaluru.

The Origins of Totalitarianism

BY HANNAH ARENDT, *Penguin Modern Classics*, ₹599 Arendt's tack-sharp eye, scathing inferences and timeless wisdom make you wonder every time an authoritarian figure, garlanded and smiling, emerges on the national scene: *What would she say to this?* And you feel a pang of regret that the little Jewish lady isn't alive to eviscerate their vacuous notions and disembowel their fatuous bigotry.

A House for Mr Biswas



BY V. S. NAIPAUL, *Picador Classic*, ₹550 This novel gives a complete picture of a man's existence—from an unfortunate birth to an unfortunate death—and contains a breathtaking spectrum of human experience and behaviour. Naipaul's extraordinary skills lend the characters such a presence that by the end you feel like you know Mr Mohun Biswas as a close friend.

Lolita

BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV, *Penguin Books*, ₹399 Nabokov's prose shimmers on the page as if the letters were typeset in gold. *Lolita* marries this transcendental, numinous language with a moral depravity that is shocking even now—the contrast bringing both qualities into relief. It's the type of book aspiring and insecure writers should avoid.

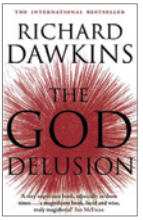
Ulysses

BY JAMES JOYCE, *Wordsworth Classics*, ₹195. This book is the greatest expression of the English language—at times, excep-

PHOTO: ANITA KHEMKA

tionally absorbing; other times, it's notoriously difficult to follow. But its opacity and esotericism never let you forget the freakish genius of Joyce.

The God Delusion



BY RICHARD DAWKINS, *Black Swan,* ₹*399* This book sparked the most significant intellectual awakening in my life by impressing upon me the sheer power of reason and the evils of religion. This book made me what I am today.

Money

BY MARTIN AMIS, *Vintage,* ₹*499* A disturbing, coruscating, almost haunting portrayal of modern excess, celebrity culture and Hollywood—in other words, the USA. Amis is possibly the greatest living writer.

India after Gandhi

BY RAMACHANDRA GUHA, *Picador India,* ₹*799* The best way I can describe this book is to say that it is relevant at all times, but even more so now when history is being distorted and facts erased to suit the Hindutva narrative of India.



Arguably

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, *Atlantic Books,* ₹*699* Hitchens' astonishing erudition and articulation make this an endless bounty of information and opinions. Topics range from literary essays on Dickens and Hannah Arendt to brutal demolitions of specious monarchs like Prince Charles. One essay is dedicated to register the writer's annoyance of waiters who interrupt meal conversations.

Dubliners

BY JAMES JOYCE, *Collins Classics,* ₹*225* All complaints about Joyce being a difficult writer are resolved when you read his short stories. 'The Dead' is the greatest short story I have ever read. The others are extraordinary portraits of life in Dublin, microscopic in technique but universal in vision.

The Book I Loved Most...



The Adventures of Augie March

BY SAUL BELLOW, *Penguin Modern Classics,* ₹ *850*
This book made my book. It is a comic masterpiece, an existential opera—a discovery of a country by an immigrant. The voice is so authentic and raw that you feel like Augie is narrating the story to you personally. A life-changing book. R

Book prices are subject to change.

THE GENIUS SECTION

9 Pages TO SHARPEN *Your Mind*



WAKE UP YOUR BRAIN

The secret to keeping everyday life from becoming boring is surprisingly easy

BY *Juli Fraga*
ADAPTED FROM *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Matthew Cohen*



Last spring, I started a new exercise class. As someone who dislikes doing jumping jacks, burpees and push-ups, I found the workouts surprisingly enjoyable, at least for a while. But after several months, my hobby began to feel like watching the same episode of a sitcom on repeat. I was overly familiar with the class routine, and my excitement had been replaced with boredom.

A 2016 study for the American Psychological Association estimated that 63 per cent of us suffer from boredom regularly. And research shows that chronically bored people are more prone to depression, substance use and anxiety.

Even though we all feel apathetic from time to time, according to Mary Mann, author of *Yawn: Adventures in Boredom*, it's often seen as being self-inflicted. 'Only boring people get bored' is a popular belief.

But boredom isn't a character flaw. It's a state brought on by something called hedonic adaptation, or the tendency to get used to things over time. This explains why activities—and even relationships—that were initially gratifying, can sometimes lose their lustre.

Humans are remarkably good at growing accustomed to changes in our lives, both positive and negative, according to Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside. This is a good thing when we are faced with adjusting to adversities such as losing a loved one or a job. But becoming immune to positive events can prove detrimental. Think about the last time you got a raise, bought a car, or moved. At first, these experiences can bring immense joy. But over time, they become part of the routine. We are ready for the next new thing to excite us. Think of it as a hedonic treadmill.

While boredom can be a downer when it drains the pleasure from our lives, it can provide a sort of service. "If our emotional reactions didn't weaken with time, we couldn't recognize novel changes that may signal rewards or threats," Lyubomirsky says. In other words, we'd overlook cues signalling us to make important decisions about our relationships and safety.

It's not unlike how our reactions change when we fall in love or experience loss. Being caught in the glow of happiness or the web of sadness can make us distracted or forgetful. We may miss signals that indicate whether we're about to make a smart move—or a disastrous one. The good news is that understanding the connection between hedonic adaptation and boredom can help us manoeuver.

A study published in 2018 in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* showed that finding quirky ways to interact with familiar people, places and things can make everyday experiences feel exciting. In other words, sometimes you've just got to shake things up! Need some ideas for keeping life fresh? Read on.

While you're working

Spending too much time in the same environment can keep us from achieving 'flow'—being immersed in an activity with full energy and enjoyment. Changes don't have to be big to make an impact, according to Rachel Loock, a leadership coach at the University of Maryland, USA. Buy some flowers for your desk, she suggests. Move your home office to the library or a coffee shop a few days a week. Approach a routine task in a new way. For instance, if you're charged with leading a Monday meeting, try starting it with meditation or a non-work discussion.

With your significant other

"Boredom is an emotional state and happens when couples stop taking the opportunity to grow and deeply connect with each other," says Venus Nicolino, PhD, host of *Marriage Boot Camp: Reality Stars*. Look for new challenges to take on together. Try mixing up different sets of friends to do something creative, such as a group cooking lesson, a themed dinner or an old-fashioned tea party.

With other people we care about

Instead of "How was your day?" try asking "What are you looking forward to today?" or "Is there anything I can help you with this week?" Our curiosity can remind people that we're interested in who they are, and that's the key to maintaining intimacy. Studies show that being curious about others can make us more engaging to be around too.



The same old, same old is a sure path to boredom. Try mixing things up.

When you're eating

The *Bulletin* study found that eating foods in unconventional ways, such as using chopsticks to pick up kernels of popcorn, can re-spark the excitement we feel when something is brand new. Consider the chopsticks a metaphor for shaking up any familiar habit.

During your commute

If you drive, take a different route or listen to a new podcast. If you walk or use public transportation, greet a stranger or put away your phone and do some people-watching. "Simply observing one's surroundings may seem boring, but done mindfully, it can become interesting and even potentially profound," says Tim Lomas, PhD, a lecturer in positive psychology at the University of East London. Just remember, whatever you do to quell boredom today, try something different tomorrow—and the day after that. R

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STYLIST: MAE LANDER

LAUGH LINES

Never get into a lane-merging game of chicken with a person who has a garbage bag for a car-door window.
—@MelvinOfYork

The worst thing about parallel parking is witnesses.
—@armyVet1972

Now that I've removed my windshield wipers I shouldn't be getting any more parking tickets.
—Mariah Scary
ON TWITTER

The Highway to Howls

Somebody actually complimented my driving today. They left a little note on the windshield that said 'parking fine'.
—@aadil

How is it that a parking spot gets paid more per hour than I do?
—@markedly



The irony of being hit by a Dodge.
—@rikpayne

JENNY STURM/SHUTTERSTOCK

BRAINTEASERS

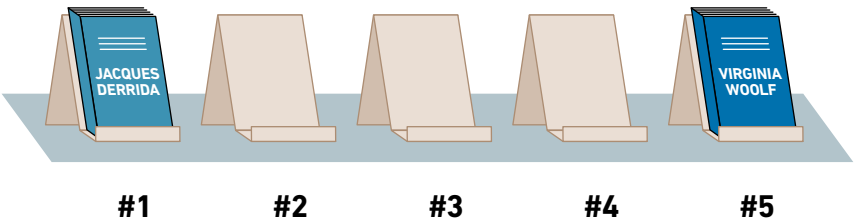
Rectangles

Moderately difficult Subdivide this region along the grid lines into non-overlapping squares and rectangles. Each of these rectangles or squares must contain exactly one number that indicates how many cells make up its area. Can you draw the right boundaries?

4		8							
		7							
						12			
					6	3			5
						6			
					9				8
12									

People of Letters

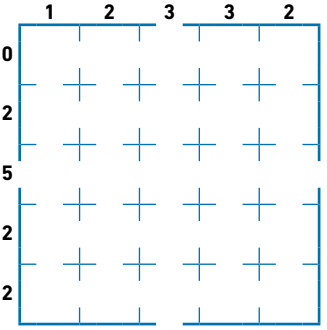
Easy Neel has a box containing 26 books, each one written by an author whose surname begins with a different letter of the basic Latin alphabet. He plans to draw five books randomly out of the box and display them in alphabetical order (by the authors' surnames) on the display stands shown below. As you can see, he's already drawn and placed two of them. He now takes out one by Selma Lagerlöf. In order to minimize the likelihood of being forced to move books to different stands as he goes along, where should Neel place it?

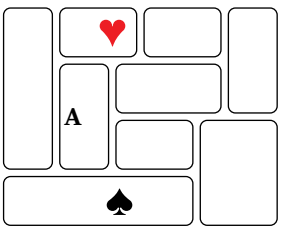


(RECTANGLES) FRASER SIMPSON; (PEOPLE OF LETTERS) SUE DOHRIN

Path Puzzle

Moderately difficult Draw a path that leads from one of the grid's openings to another. (There are four openings, so you'll need to figure out which two are part of the solution.) As the path winds from one cell to the next, it can move up, down, left or right but not diagonally. It cannot pass through any cell more than once. The numbers tell how many cells the path passes through in the corresponding rows or columns. Can you trace it?





Decking of Cards

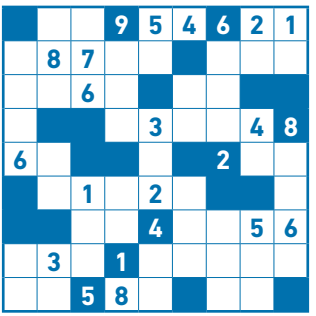
Moderately difficult Mark each of the cards in the diagram at left as one of the following:

A♥, A♦, A♣
2♥, 2♦, 2♠
3♣, 3♠
4♣

All the cards should be used, but no two cards that are next to each other should share a rank or a suit. Some of the suits and ranks have been filled in for you.

Str8ts

Moderately difficult Fill in the white cells with whole numbers between 1 and 9 so that no number repeats in any row or column. Dark cells divide the rows and columns into 'compartments'. Each compartment needs to contain a 'straight'. A straight is a set of numbers that have no gaps between them but that can appear in any order (for example, 2, 3, 5, 4). A clue in a dark cell removes that number as an option in the cell's row and column, but it is not part of any straight.



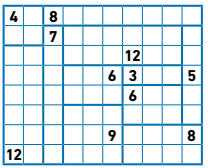
For answers, turn to **PAGE 128**

(PATH PUZZLE) RODERICK KIMBALL; (DECKING OF CARDS) DARREN RIGBY; (STR8TS) JEFF WIDDERICH

BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

FROM PAGE 126 & 127

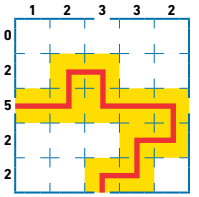
Rectangles



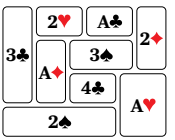
People of Letters

On stand #3.

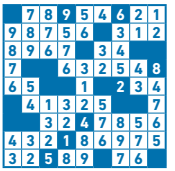
Path Puzzle



Decking of Cards



Str8ts



SUDOKU

BY *Jeff Widderich*

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

To Solve This Puzzle

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

✦ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;

✦ each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

SOLUTION

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

WORD POWER

Are you in search of a kind word—or perhaps the perfect put-down? Before you start doling out compliments or throwing stones, take this quiz to brush up on words of esteem and contempt. We won't be offended if you check the next page for answers.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

1. Adonis *n.*
(uh-'dow-niss)
A handsome man.
B star player.
C evil witch.

2. popinjay *n.*
('pawh-pin-jay)
A sneaky thief.
B unwelcome visitor.
C vain windbag.

3. impeccable *adj.*
(im-'peck-uh-bull)
A flawless.
B unruly.
C charming.

4. adroit *adj.*
(uh-'droyt)
A idiotic.
B vulgar.
C masterful.

5. churl *n.*
(cherl)
A ill-bred person.
B friend to many.
C lazybones.

6. magnanimous *adj.*
(mag-'nan-ih-muss)
A coarse.
B self-centred.
C big-hearted.

7. poltroon *n.*
(pawl-'troon)
A criminal.
B fool.
C coward.

8. nonpareil *adj.*
(non-puh-'rel)
A unequalled.
B useless.
C sweet.

9. braggadocio *n.*
(brag-uh-'doh-see-oh)
A arrogant boaster.
B womanizer.
C conquering hero.

10. urbane *adj.*
(er-'bayn)
A playful.
B sophisticated.
C childish.

11. skinflint *n.*
('skin-flint)
A skilled artisan.
B cheapskate.
C fraud.

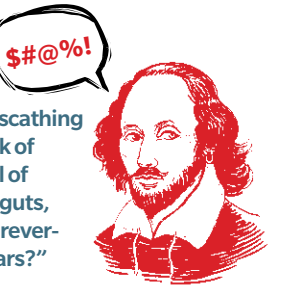
12. kibitzer *n.*
('kih-bit-ser)
A misfit.
B meddler.
C nitpicker.

13. smarmy *adj.*
('smar-mee)
A insincerely earnest.
B well dressed.
C inadequate.

14. contumely *n.*
(kon-'tyoom-lee)
A arrogant rudeness.
B ravishing beauty.
C scrumptious meal.

15. brick *n.*
(brik)
A careless person.
B reliable person.
C pig-headed person.

A Burn from the Bard



Shakespeare was a master of colourful insults. One of his most scathing comes when Prince Henry slams Falstaff in *Henry IV*: "That trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years?"

Word Power ANSWERS

1. Adonis (A) *handsome man.* Arya has fallen hard for a blue-eyed Adonis at the gym.

2. popinjay (C) *vain windbag.* Please don't seat me next to that popinjay; he'll talk my ear off.

3. impeccable (A) *flawless.* After an impeccable performance on the balance beam, Jaya received a perfect score.

4. adroit (C) *masterful.* Harry Houdini was an adroit escape artist, freeing himself from handcuffs and straitjackets.

5. churl (A) *ill-bred person.* Remove your elbows from the table, you churl!

6. magnanimous (C) *big-hearted.* The magnanimous dentist treated needy patients for free.

7. poltroon (C) *coward.* "You're all poltroons, scared of your own shadows," muttered the king.

8. nonpareil (A) *unequalled.* Lipi's baking skills are nonpareil—his cakes are almost too beautiful to eat.

9. braggadocio (A) *arrogant boaster.* Kavita's boyfriend is a loud-mouthed braggadocio who loves talking about his fancy car.

10. urbane (B) *sophisticated.* Witty and urbane, Partha speaks three languages and has travelled the world.

11. skinflint (B) *cheapskate.* Does reusing coffee filters make me a skinflint?

12. kibitzer (B) *meddler.* "Maybe I'm just being a kibitzer, but I do think you should wear your blue dress instead of the red," Mom said.

13. smarmy (A) *insincerely earnest.* The heiress was wooed by smarmy suitors interested only in her money.

14. contumely (A) *arrogant rudeness.* I don't know how much more of your contumely I can take.

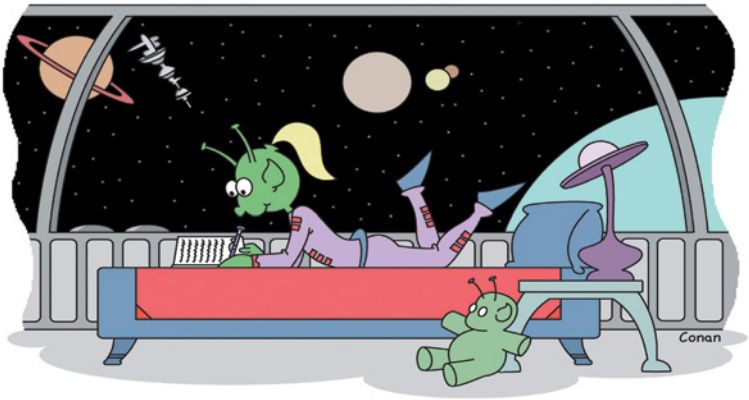
15. brick (B) *reliable person.* My best friend has been an absolute brick during my illness.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: middling
10–12: accomplished
13–15: transcendent

ALEXBLACKSEA/SHUTTERSTOCK

AS KIDS SEE IT



"Greetings, diary."

CONAN DE VRIES

My husband and I were on a flight when we looked over and saw our three-year-old daughter picking her nose. I quickly said, "Hey! Stop picking your nose!" She responded, "I wasn't picking my nose; my nose was sucking on my finger!"
— DARCI VICKERY

My wife and I were babysitting our grandchildren during a family camping trip. As nightfall approached, they became unruly. We were at our wits' end until I spotted a banana on the picnic table. I told them that I had the power to turn that banana into a phone and call their parents to report their misbehaviour. That trick worked until the morning, when they woke us up shouting, "You can't call anyone anymore—we ate your banana phone!"
— CHARLIE GALLANT

Our eight-year-old grandson told his mom that he wanted to be an accountant when he grew up. "Oh," she said. "You want to count people's money?" "No," he replied. "I want to hold their money."
— VI HUGHES

Today my four-year-old asked me, "Daddy, does the moon have a job or does it just sit there?"
— @THECATWHISPRER

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

QUOTABLE QUOTES

We all know that person who tells a lie so often they believe it. That's basically all of mankind right now ... We're in a battle with our own lies.

Vir Das, *comedian*

I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much.

Mother Teresa, *Catholic saint*

Work eight hours and sleep eight hours, and make sure they are not the same eight hours.

T. Boone Pickens, *businessman*



ALAMY (2), SHUTTERSTOCK



Hesitation to give customer service? In branding, first serve then deserve.

JAGDEEP KAPOOR, brand guru

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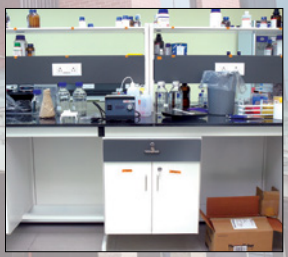
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