https://freemagazines.top

AUSTRALIAN
Reader's Digest
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2026

Would You Trust a Driverless Car?
AND OTHER TERRIFYING QUESTIONS OF THE MODERN AGE
By **SHERON WHITE**

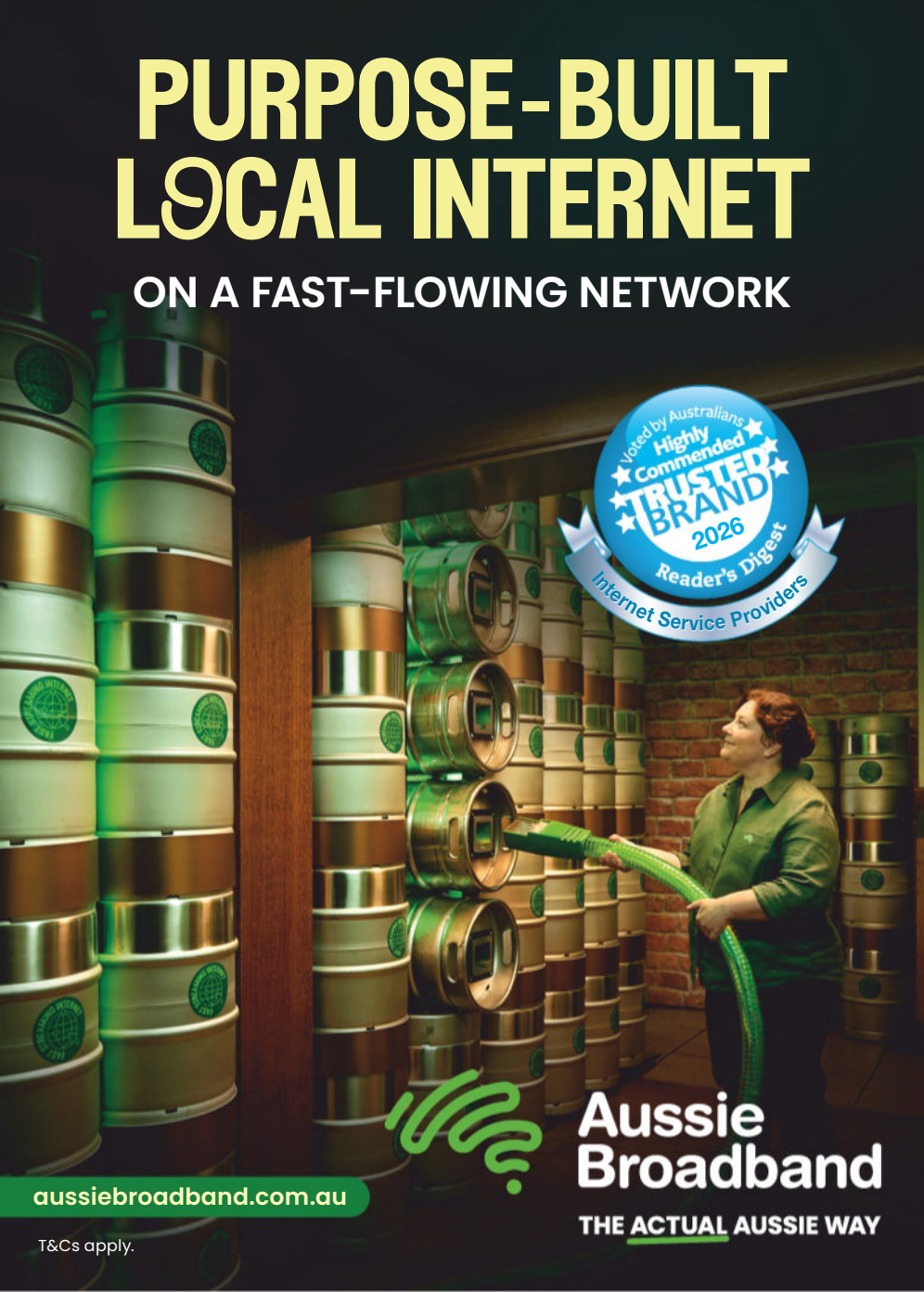
The Climb That Changes Lives
By **KATHY BUCHANAN**

The Health Benefits of Fiber
BEYOND DIGESTION

The Cruise That Does Things Differently
By **KATHY BUCHANAN**

PURPOSE-BUILT LOCAL INTERNET

ON A FAST-FLOWING NETWORK



Aussie Broadband

THE ACTUAL AUSSIE WAY

aussiebroadband.com.au

T&Cs apply.

Reader's Digest
A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

Features

72
COVER STORY
WOULD YOU SIT IN A DRIVERLESS CAR?
(And Other Terrifying Questions of the Modern Age)
BY SHERON WHITE

14
TRAVEL
See More, Unpack Once: The Unique Appeal of River Voyages
How Viking's effortless pace lets guests discover the unique character of its river destinations.
BY KATHY BUCHANAN

25
INSPIRATIONAL
More Than a Mountain: The Krazy Kosci Klimb
How the Cerebral Palsy Alliance helped 9-year old Hudson shoot the highest basketball shot on top of Mount Kosciuszko.
BY KATHY BUCHANAN

34
TRUSTED BRANDS
Trusted Brands Australia 2026 Photo Feature
Austalia's Most Trusted Brands receive their trophies.

62
INSPIRATIONAL
On the Frontlines of Change
How MSF is navigating the Climate Health Crisis in the Pacific.
STORY SUPPLIED BY MSF

104
DRAMA IN REAL LIFE
Rescue on the Elk River
A kayaker clings desperately to a branch. Will he find help before he is swept away?
BY DEREK BURNETT

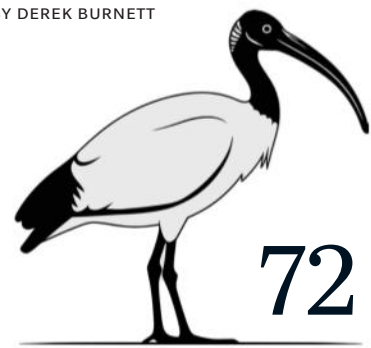


IMAGE CREDIT: SENDAL, VIA ADOBE STOCK

COVER IMAGE *by Sheron White*

Departments

4 **Dear Reader**

EVERYDAY HEROES

6 **Under the Sweltering Sky**
BY JOHN ROSENGREN

13 THINGS

40 **13 Things About Horse Racing**
BY MOIRA AND TOM FANNING

LIFE WELL LIVED

96 **Finding Refuge in Each Other**
BY BRETT W. SUMMERS
FROM *THE BOSTON GLOBE*

EVERYDAY HEROES

100 **The Best Kind of Auto Care**
BY SYDNEY PAGE FROM THE *WASHINGTON POST*

Humour

Life 11
Humour in Uniform 45
All in a Day's Work .. 47
Laughter 58

88

JUST FOR FUN

114 **Why Did The (Rubber) Chicken Cross the Road?**
BY BYARD DUNCAN
FROM *SLATE*

THE LIST

125 ***The Dink*, and More**

BOOK REVIEW

129 **Remembering Elysha**
BY PAUL FOLINO GALLO

QUOTABLE QUOTES

136 **Issa Rae, Ocean Vuong, Ilona Maher and more**

The Healthy

49 **When the Body Attacks Itself**
BY PATRICIA VARACALLO DO

54 **News from the World of Medicine**
BY KRISTINE GASBARRE

88 **Fiber Optics**
BY RACHAEL MOELLER GORMAN FROM *EATING WELL*

Brain Games

138 **The ORBISCULATE Challenge, Just the Ticket, Hashtag House and More**

142 **Word Power**

VOL. 212, NO. 1238, AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2026
READER'S DIGEST IS PUBLISHED UNDER LICENCE BY DIRECT PUBLISHING PTY LTD., 431 WARRINGAH ROAD, FRENCHS FOREST, NSW 2086, © 2025 DIRECT PUBLISHING PTY LTD (ABN 81000565471) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, REPRODUCTION IN ANY MANNER IN WHOLE OR PART IN ENGLISH OR OTHER LANGUAGES PROHIBITED. REQUESTS FOR PERMISSION TO REPRINT ANY MATERIAL FROM READER'S DIGEST SHOULD BE SENT TO **PERMISSIONS@TMBI.COM.**
FOR LETTER, STORY AND READER INQUIRIES, SEND ALL EMAILS TO **LETTERS@READERSDIGEST.COM.AU**
WITH YOUR NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER. PUBLISHED STORIES AND LETTERS WILL RECEIVE A READER'S DIGEST COLLECTED EDITION BOOK. PUBLISHED STORIES MAY BE EDITED FOR CONTENT OR LENGTH CONSTRAINTS, AND MAY BE USED ACROSS ALL ELECTRONIC MEDIA.
FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES, EMAIL **SHERON.WHITE@DIRECTPUBLISHING.COM.AU**

IMAGE CREDIT: ANDRIY ONUFRIYENKO/GETTY IMAGES

equal®

Most trusted brand 14 years in a row

DITCH SUGAR. SWITCH TO equal®

DEAR READER

Innovation, Impact, and Trust

Growing up, I never could have imagined a world with driverless cars. Yet, that reality is already here. As the mother of a son who only recently passed his driving test, I admit I still get a bit terrified riding in the passenger seat with him, so I am not entirely sure how I'd feel handing the wheel over to an algorithm! It feels like a massive step up from a driverless train; at least those have tracks to hold onto. Then again, I recently went to see the musical adaptation of the 1980 film Back to the Future, and it made me think: who knows? Maybe time travel is next. You can dive into the fascinating world of autonomous vehicles in our cover story on page 60.

This issue is truly packed with stories that highlight the incredible power of human resilience and community. On page 18, we feature the amazing Krazy Kosci Klimb, an annual event organized by the Cerebral Palsy Alliance. It challenges young people with cerebral palsy or similar disabilities to trek or wheel 18.6km to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko. Read about Hudson and his inspiring family and see how companies come together to raise vital funds that prove the sky is the limit.

Staying with the theme of impactful organizations, page 50 shines a light on the critical work of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). While we often associate MSF with conflict zones, their medical teams are increasingly adapting to the global climate crisis. We share a powerful perspective from Kiribati, where rising sea levels and water scarcity are directly impacting public health, proving that local environmental changes have massive global consequences.

Finally, if you have ever dreamed of a holiday at sea, turn to page 12 to discover what makes Viking Cruises so unique. They were recently voted Australia's Most Trusted Cruise Operator. Speaking of trust, you can also look back at our special photo feature on page 26, celebrating all the incredible winners from our annual Trusted Brands awards event held earlier this year.

There is so much more to explore in these pages. Enjoy the read, and please don't forget to share your own stories with us at **letters@readersdigest.com.au** Happy reading!

Sheron White,
GM OF SALES & PUBLISHING

TASTE THE BEST IN HEALTH!

Herman Brot

BAKERS SINCE 1850

Multi-award-winning and featured in RetailWorld, Herman Brot Complete Protein Bread is officially recognized as the ultimate nutritious choice.

Crafted from sprouted seeds, hemp, and pea protein, this premium, Low GI bread offers a delicious, soy-free way to fuel your day.

EVERYDAY HEROES

Under the Sweltering Sky

A retired firefighter knew that a delirious hiker was close to death in the 100-degree heat. Could he coax the much larger man down the mountain and save both their lives?

BY *John Rosengren*

On a Wednesday morning in May 2024, Colt Johnson, a 26-year old electrician on vacation in central Arizona, set out to hike a remote trail in the Superstition Mountains by himself. Accustomed to hiking the shaded, cooler trails near his home in Blackfoot, Idaho, Johnson was undone by the brutal 100-degree heat of Arizona's naked sun. After five hours, he found himself lost and out of water. Lightheaded and dizzy, he texted his wife, "I need help."

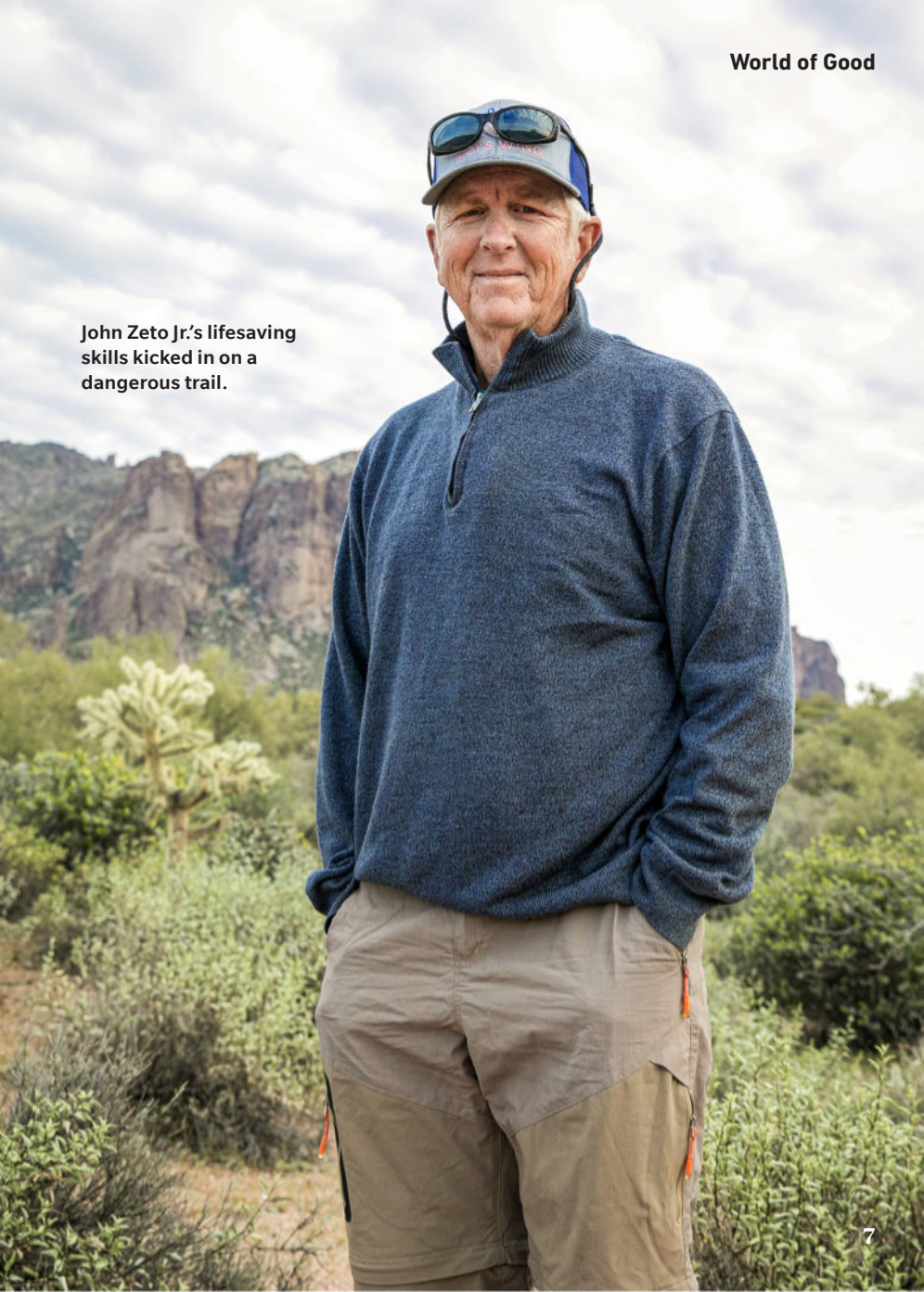
But his text didn't go through; his phone had no service. Johnson nibbled some gummy worms, fearing they would be his last meal. He thought of his wife, Malia Johnson, five months pregnant, and their 3-year-old daughter, Della, hoping that he would get to see them again.

Desperate, he fired a distress signal from the 10 mm handgun he carried to fend off bears—a last-ditch call for help.

The sound carried across the rocks and mesas to John Zeto Jr., a 57-year-old retired firefighter from Tampa, Florida, enjoying his new hobby—hiking mountain trails in Arizona. He'd passed a sign banning target practice, so he thought the pair of shots might be someone shooting at an animal. But when he heard another pair about half an hour later, his instincts, honed over 30 years responding to calls for help, told him the repeated shots must be a distress signal.

On previous hikes, Zeto had come across other hikers in need. There was a

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Marion Rhoades Photography*



John Zeto Jr.'s lifesaving skills kicked in on a dangerous trail.

Zeto hiking in the Superstition Mountains

man who fell and bloodied his head, a woman who broke her leg. As a result, he'd started carrying extra supplies in case others needed help. He hiked in the direction of the shots, and about 45 minutes later, cresting a ridge, he spotted gear scattered off the trail. Soon he came across Johnson, lying on his side.

He could tell that Johnson was confused, disoriented and in rough shape. Zeto gave him some of the extra water he'd packed along with an electrolyte gel. In his delirious state, Johnson rambled on about Malia and Della.

"Where's your car parked?" Zeto asked.

Johnson mumbled something about a lake. Must be Canyon Lake, Zeto figured, looking at a photo of the map on his phone. It was about 3 miles away. "Let's go," Zeto said firmly. "We're wasting time."

It was around 2 p.m. when they got moving. Johnson was woozy but could put one foot ahead of the other. Zeto knew the situation was urgent and wanted to take advantage of what strength the younger man had while it lasted.

Within half an hour, Johnson had finished off Zeto's 3 liters of water. But still, he grew weaker. Shivers shook him, likely brought on by an elevated body temperature. Soon, Zeto had to support Johnson so he wouldn't stumble and fall. Zeto, 5 foot 7 and 155 pounds, draped Johnson's arm over his shoulder to help support the sagging man's 6-foot-5, 210-pound frame. "If he'd fallen, my job then would have been to run and get cell service so I could call for help," Zeto says. "I can't lift him."

It made for slow going. When they'd reach a boulder, Zeto would push Johnson up from behind, then scramble around to help guide him down the other side.

They took several short breaks in the shade of the rocks. Zeto was tiring from the effort but remained standing. "If I

sat down, it would mean it was over for both of us," Zeto says.

But during one break, Johnson sat, closed his eyes and refused to move.

If they didn't get off the mountain, Zeto figured Johnson could probably make it through that day but not the next, not in that heat with his core temperature already dangerously high. Zeto's experience rescuing people in Florida's heat told him that Johnson's symptoms—the wooziness, the chills, the mumbling—meant he was heading toward a stroke unless he got help soon. And even though he'd hydrated in advance, Zeto, parched, was also in need of liquids.

He had to keep Johnson going. He got in his face: "You got a daughter? Want to see her again? Then get off your butt! You're putting us both in danger."

That got Johnson moving. But next time they took a break, he again didn't want to get up. "C'mon!" Zeto barked.

This scene played out several times. Slowly, they made their way down, carefully picking their way along the switchbacks that cut through the steep terrain, taking care not to slip on the sharp shell rock that lined the trail. Zeto knew that a twisted ankle could sideline them both.

The more Johnson slumped against Zeto, the heavier he became. Tired as he was, though, Zeto was determined to get them both to safety. "The hills weren't easy for me either, but I was able to muscle over them," he said.

At around 4:30 p.m.—after almost three tedious hours of trekking and climbing and stopping—Zeto and Johnson finally made it to Johnson's Toyota Highlander, parked by a trailhead near Canyon Lake .

As Johnson slipped in and out of consciousness, Zeto found his car keys, shoveled him inside the Highlander and drove the half hour to Apache Junction, the closest town.

Zeto then helped Johnson out of the car and into an air-conditioned souvenir shop. They sat down and poured Gatorade down their throats. After a spell, Johnson began to feel more like himself. Zeto could tell: His voice was more distinct, his words no longer gibberish.

Eventually, the two drove back to the trailhead. Johnson assured Zeto he was well enough to drive back to his family in Casa Grande, Arizona, roughly an hour and a half away. After they parted ways in their respective cars, Zeto checked in periodically by phone to make sure Johnson arrived safely.

It wasn't the last time the two men spoke. In fact, they've stayed in touch ever since, with Zeto spending five days in Idaho with Johnson and his family, which now includes another daughter, Scottie, about 1½ years old.

Like a lot of heroes, Zeto downplays his role in the rescue. "I was on a hike; this guy needed help," he says. "I got him down the hill. Now we're friends."

Johnson sees things differently, saying: "He definitely saved my life on that mountain." R

Pictured: Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Client Sora holds a yellow Labrador puppy.

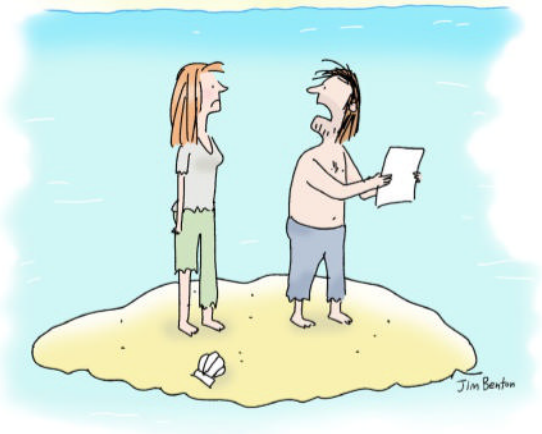
Built on trust. Guided by care.

For the fourteenth time, Guide Dogs Australia has been recognised in the Reader's Digest Most Trusted Brands awards – a testament to the enduring faith Australians place in us.
For more than 65 years, we've supported people with blindness or low vision to live with freedom, independence, and confidence. That trust underpins the extraordinary partnership between a Guide Dog Handler and their Guide Dog, shapes the personalised services our Clients rely on at every stage of life, and is reflected in the generosity of the community who stand with us year after year.
This milestone recognises the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and Puppy Raisers across Australia, and our shared belief that access and inclusion matter for everyone.
We never take that trust for granted. It inspires us to keep raising the bar for generations to come.

Visit **guidedogs.com.au** to learn more.

Guide Dogs.

LIFE



"It's from the HOA. We have to get rid of the shell."

It was the journey of a lifetime: My 14-year-old grandson spent 20 days canoeing in a secluded part of Canada, along with 10 other boys plus counselors. On his return, my wife asked what he had learned from the trip.

My grandson responded: "Don't be annoying to people you're going to spend 20 days with."
—JAMES WALPOLE
Lewes, DE

Overheard in a clothing store: "That's a pretty top. I'd never wear it, but it would look good hanging in my closet."
—BONNIE HAWKS
Christiansburg, VA

My mom and I never forgot hearing a woman tell the announcer on a local call-in radio show: "I'm the one who called in yesterday in response to the person who wanted to know how to keep squirrels out of her rosebushes. I suggested spreading peanuts on the ground around the bushes. I'm calling back now to find out if it worked."
—KEN WESTHASSEL
Medford, MA

I consider myself reasonably intelligent, but I cannot process how to play complex board games. You all sound like, "And then if you roll a level-up glitter cabbage you get 6.5 ergometric points, which can be used every fourth turn as long as no one has zorped the Cones of Dunshire."
—X@SEWISTWRITES

Two things I learned yesterday:
I'm not too old to sit in a beanbag,
but I am too old to get out of one.
—X@SIXFOOTCANDY

CARTOON BY *Jim Benton*

Massachusetts asked the public to recommend a new state motto to replace "By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty." A date to announce a winner has not been decided, but we'd be fine with any of these submissions:

- "Witch-free since 1693"
- "Massachusetts: We Made Your CEO"
- "In Cod We Trust"
- "The Gateway to New Hampshire"
- Massachusetts: Providing Spelling Bee Fodder for the Ages

—MASS.GOV

Last night, my friend changed all my contacts in my phone. I have been texted by Batman, Donatello and Hermione Granger. I have no idea who they are, and it doesn't upset me at all.

—TEXTSFROMLASTNIGHT.COM

Confined to a hospital room following my open-heart surgery, I had nothing to do but read or watch TV. After a week, I was bored and miserable. When my doctor stopped by on his rounds, he asked, "How's it going?"

"Honestly, I'm depressed," I said.

He nodded understandingly and advised, "Stop watching the news."

—DAVID ELTON
Lewisburg, PA

Dad, ever the strategizer, decided it was time to prearrange funeral plans for himself and my mother. On his way out the door to the funeral home, he asked if she wanted to come along. "You can pick out your own casket that way," he explained excitedly.

Mom, who wasn't as gung-ho about the project, replied, "No. You do it. I want to be surprised."

—KEN WENDLE
Alton, IL

YOUR FUNNY STORY *about friends or family could be worth $$$. For details, go to page 2 or* **RD.COM/SUBMIT.**

HE WRITES IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

You can't say God doesn't have a sense of humor after reading these signs found outside churches:

- "Lord, help us to be the people our dogs think we are."
- "Forgive your enemies—it messes with their heads."
- "Live your life well so we don't have to lie at your funeral."
- "Cremation is your last chance for a smoking-hot body."
- "Acting perfect in church is like dressing up for an X-ray."

—BOREDPANDA.COM

TOM WINDEKNECHT/GETTY IMAGES

JIREH HOSPITALITY GROUP

Your New Zealand Journey

BOUNTY MOTEL

bountymotel.co.nz

Bay of Island

AUCKLAND CITY HOTEL

achhobson.co.nz

Auckland CBD

NOA HOTEL

noahotel.co.nz

Auckland Newmarket

Make a direct booking & Get 20% off!

USE PROMO CODE
Jireh passport

For Bounty Motel bookings, please email stay@bountymotel.co.nz and include the promo code JIREHPASSPORT to receive a 20% discount.
*Terms & Conditions: Offer subject to availability. The 20% discount applies to room rates only. This promotion cannot be combined with any other offers. Valid until 31 December 2026.

Pictured: The *Viking Buri* longship on the Ardèche River, a picturesque tributary of the River Rhône in France.

TRAVEL

See More, Unpack Once: The Unique Appeal of River Voyages

One of the greatest pleasures of a Viking river voyage is its effortless pace. Unpack once, settle into life on board, and spend your days discovering spectacular scenery, centuries of history, and the unique character of each destination.

BY *Kathy Buchanan*

Your floating boutique hotel becomes both your home and your window to Europe. As the scenery slips by, there's time to unwind, wander through charming towns, and share the experience. Instead of living out of a suitcase, you can simply settle in and enjoy the journey—one filled with fascinating places, and memorable encounters.

A Viking river voyage invites you to slow the pace. Unpack once, relax in the comfort of your stateroom, and watch Europe unfold outside your window as you glide past medieval towns, rolling vineyards, grand castles, and landscapes steeped in history.

Along the way, you'll share the journey with like-minded adults who value meaningful experiences, comfortable travel, and the simple pleasures of exploring new places.

Relaxed holidays reimagined: Unmatched Access

A Viking river voyage is about far more than seeing new destinations—it's about truly

PHOTO CREDIT: VIKING RIVER CRUISES

Viking once again won the *River Cruises* category for the Reader's Digest Trusted Brands Awards 2026

Above: A *Viking* River Cruise Ship docks in Portugal's Douro River

experiencing them. Each country comes to life through enriching onboard talks, thoughtfully curated excursions, and even delicious regional menus.

Unlike larger ocean cruises, river voyages offer a more intimate way to travel. With fewer guests on board, there's time to connect and gain a deeper understanding of each destination.

More than simply a holiday, it's a journey that combines culture, and discovery—returning you home not only refreshed, but with a richer appreciation of the places you've experienced.

"The experience with Viking far exceeds other cruise lines and what you would expect in terms of quality, enrichment and enjoyment."
– Luke M

Viking is renowned for their thoughtfully curated shore excursions and regionally inspired cuisine, but one of their greatest advantages is where they can take you. Unlike many other river cruise lines, which often dock some distance from major attractions, Viking's award-winning Longships have longstanding grandfather rights with many ports, meaning they are able to dock in the heart of towns and cities. That means less time travelling and more time exploring.

Step ashore and you're immediately immersed in your destination—wandering historic

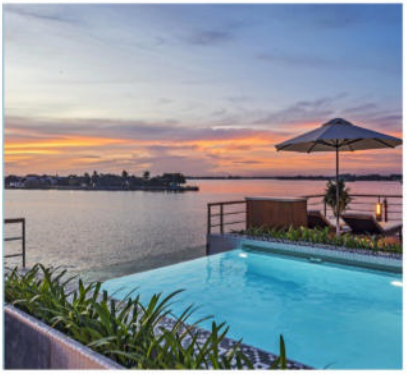
streets, visiting local markets, discovering iconic landmarks or joining a guided excursion. Instead of spending precious holiday hours getting to the sights, you're already there, free to experience the history, culture and everyday life that make each destination unique.

The Viking Difference: Designed for Discovery

Purpose-built for the world's great rivers, Viking's elegant vessels are designed to offer a more intimate way to explore the world. With fewer guests on board, travellers can enjoy a relaxed atmosphere while still experiencing the comfort and service of a premium river journey.

Take the Danube, for example. Winding through some of Europe's most culturally rich regions, the river reveals a tapestry of historic cities, charming villages and breathtaking landscapes. From Vienna's famous café culture and grand architecture to medieval towns and evenings filled with the musical heritage of composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, every stop offers a new story to discover.

The options are endless. Choose a river voyage on the Nile to walk the streets of Cairo and explore the pyramids or the Mississippi Delta Explorer from New Orleans to Memphis, Tenessee and indulge in specialty barbeque. Or even the Mekong River where you can discover the best of Vietnam and Cambodia. The scale of Viking's river presence is extraordinary.



Above: Dusk in Vietnam from the deck pool of the *Viking Tonle* River Ship

Everything Is Taken Care Of: Relax, Explore, Repeat

For first-time river travellers, one of the greatest surprises is just how effortless the experience can be. Unpack once, settle into your comfortable suite or stateroom, and wake each morning to a new destination waiting to be explored. There is no need to repeatedly check in and out of hotels, repack your belongings, or worry about the logistics of getting from one place to the next.

With every stateroom designed to offer a view, guests can enjoy ever-changing scenery from the comfort of

PHOTO CREDIT: VIKING RIVER CRUISES

their own private space. As the river gently carries you onwards, historic towns, beautiful landscapes and fascinating cultures unfold right outside your window.

The simplicity continues on board. From the moment you step onto the ship, everything is thoughtfully arranged so you can focus on enjoying the journey. Dining, beer and wine with lunch and dinner, gratuities, WI-FI and an included shore excursion in every port are all part of the experience.

Rather than constantly reaching for your wallet, you can relax knowing the details have been taken care of—leaving more time to explore, connect and enjoy the journey.

Refined Fun: A More Relaxed Way to Travel

A Viking River voyage offers a different kind of holiday experience. These are not party ships filled with casinos and crowds, but that doesn't mean they lack enjoyment. Instead, the focus is on relaxed discovery, meaningful experiences and the simple pleasure of travelling well.

With an adults-only atmosphere, guests can enjoy a more peaceful style of travel where conversations flow easily, friendships form naturally, and every day brings something new to discover.

"The food is amazing, the staff are superb, the tours sensational and leave you wanting more, the accommodations are five star."
– Susan B

Since Viking was founded in 1997, their focus has been delivering destination centric journeys for curious travellers who want to explore the world in comfort. They have never tried to be all things to all people – there are no children, no casinos and no unnecessary add ons across the fleet. Instead, they create experiences for the thinking person: guests who value culture, history, science and cuisine. Their itineraries immerse travellers in each destination through enriching experiences on board and on shore, aligned with The Viking Way of exploration.

Guests consistently say how much they value a serene, adult focused environment. That's why their ocean and expedition voyages have always been 18 plus, and in 2018 they extended the same minimum age to their river fleet, maintaining the calm, refined environment our guests expect on every Viking voyage.

Above: A view of the Mekong River from a windowed library room on the *Viking Tonle* river ship.

Viking is For the Thinking Person

Viking river cruises are designed for curious travellers, offering destination-focused and culturally enriching itineraries that bring guests closer to the heart of each region. The onboard experience includes lectures, regional cuisine, and immersive excursions, making Viking the thinking person's cruise for those who seek meaningful connections and deeper understanding of their destinations.

"Love the included excursions, which provide a fabulous introduction to each port. You can balance this with time for self-exploration, gaining a unique experience each time."

– Kathryn F

Smaller Ships, Deeper Connections

The atmosphere encourages conversation and camaraderie, while still allowing guests the freedom to enjoy their own space.

River voyages often appeal to couples and solo travellers alike, with a large mix of nationalities—including Australians and New Zealanders—creating a welcoming international community on board. Every stateroom offers a view, with no inside cabins, allowing guests to enjoy the changing scenery throughout their journey.

PHOTO CREDIT: VIKING RIVER CRUISES

More Time in Port, Less Time in Transit

One of the greatest advantages of river travel is the ability to spend more time exploring destinations and less time simply travelling between them.

Guests can choose from included excursions or explore independently at their own pace. The experience is designed to be unhurried, giving travellers the freedom to linger, wander and truly absorb each destination.

Effortless Service, Scandinavian Style

From the moment guests arrive, the experience is designed to feel seamless. Luggage is taken care of, the check-in process is smooth, and everything is thoughtfully arranged so travellers can settle in and enjoy the journey.

The ships themselves reflect Viking's Scandinavian heritage, with elegant interiors, clean lines and understated design creating a calm and comfortable environment.

Whether sharing a meal, attending a destination talk, enjoying a quiet moment on deck or exploring a new port, a Viking river voyage is about more than getting from one place to another—it is about experiencing the journey along the way.

Discover The Viking Difference: Exclusive Experiences

Privileged Access to world-class museums and cultural sites, along with seamless pre- and post-cruise extensions to tailor your holiday. Viking have arranged exclusive entry for guests to cultural treasures all around the world. Visit seldom-seen collections with before- and after-hours access to world-class museums; be a special guest at private homes and palaces not open to just anyone; or attend cultural performances of folklore, ballet and opera to get an insider's view during these private tours.

Explore what makes Viking different in the world of travel—from its elegant Scandinavian-inspired design and destination-focused experiences to the thoughtful service

Film Lover Alert!

Discover a Treasure Trove of movies to watch here: Find a detailed filmography focused on individual countries or Viking itineraries so you can watch these before, during or after your voyage. Crack open the red wine and get the popcorn ready. Anyone say … film night?!

PHOTO CREDIT: VIKING RIVER CRUISES

"As we sailed quietly down the smooth waters of the Rhine, sitting outside on the deck, we both drifted off thinking on how the castles were built. Then the Viking team gently tapped our shoulder, it was time for our hot chocolate drink and warm biscuit."

– Kerry V

Above: The *Viking Buri* longship stops by Tournon along the River Rhône in France.

that helps travellers connect more deeply with every river journey. And discover why this distinctive approach has continued to inspire guests and earn recognition from respected industry awards for almost 30 years, including Premier Traveller, Cruise Critic, Reader's Digest Trusted Brands and Reader's Digest Quality Service Awards.

Visit Find a Cruise to find our more, sign up to their free newsletter or call: 138747 in Australia to discover more or to request a free brochure. Or speak to your local travel agent.

Explore river voyages available for Europe, through Asia, or Egypt

Join a free 2026 Viking Explorer Session

Step into the world of Viking with their complimentary Explorer Sessions, designed for curious, culturally minded travellers seeking thoughtful experiences and award-winning journeys. Whether you're drawn to Eastern Europe's cultural treasures, Scandinavia's dramatic coastlines, France's art and cuisine, or Alaska's natural beauty, there's a session for you.

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

VIKING

PHOTO CREDIT: VIKING RIVER CRUISES

5 Viking Guests share their favourite aspect of their river cruise experience

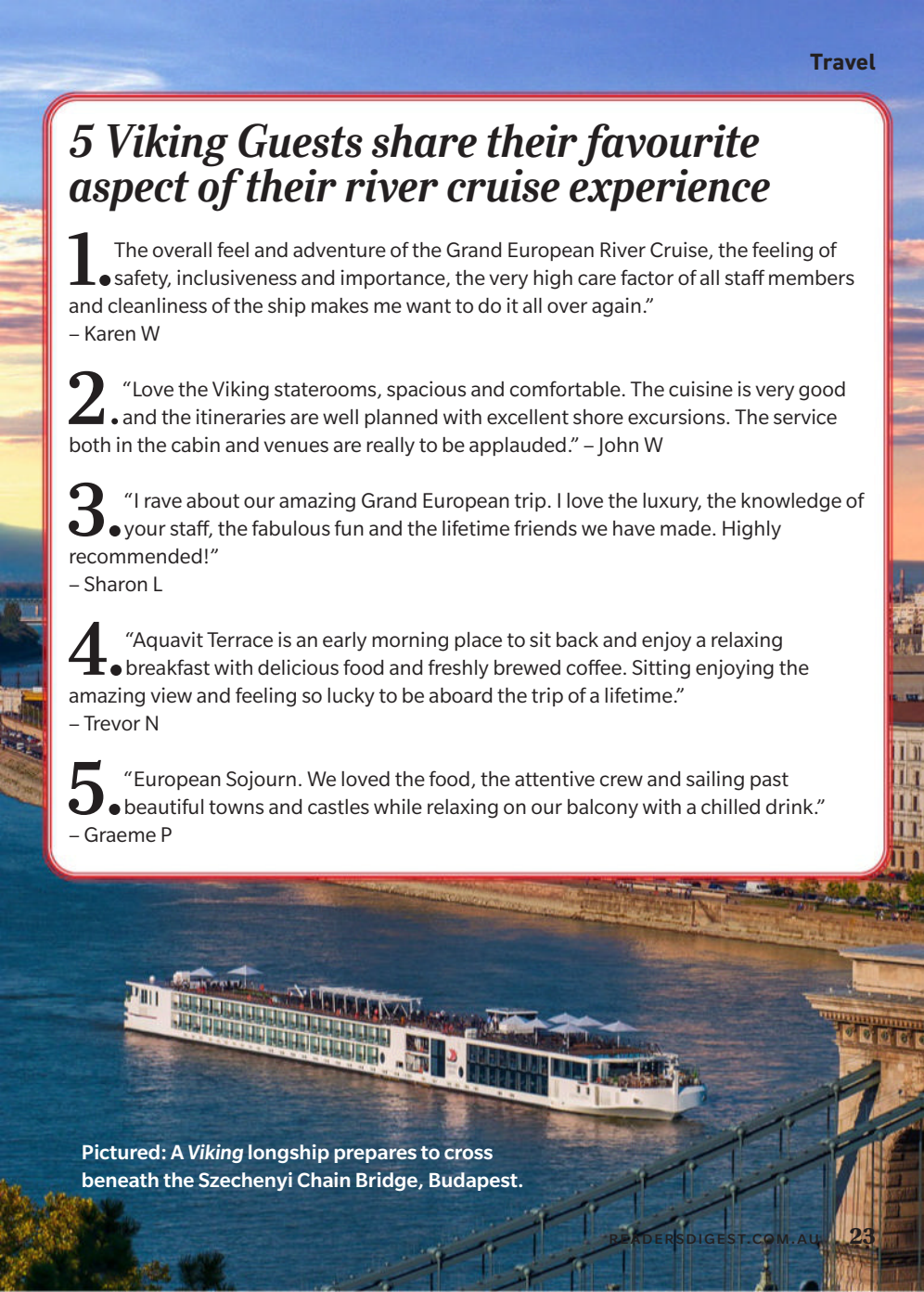
1. The overall feel and adventure of the Grand European River Cruise, the feeling of safety, inclusiveness and importance, the very high care factor of all staff members and cleanliness of the ship makes me want to do it all over again."
– Karen W

2. "Love the Viking staterooms, spacious and comfortable. The cuisine is very good and the itineraries are well planned with excellent shore excursions. The service both in the cabin and venues are really to be applauded." – John W

3. "I rave about our amazing Grand European trip. I love the luxury, the knowledge of your staff, the fabulous fun and the lifetime friends we have made. Highly recommended!"
– Sharon L

4. "Aquavit Terrace is an early morning place to sit back and enjoy a relaxing breakfast with delicious food and freshly brewed coffee. Sitting enjoying the amazing view and feeling so lucky to be aboard the trip of a lifetime."
– Trevor N

5. "European Sojourn. We loved the food, the attentive crew and sailing past beautiful towns and castles while relaxing on our balcony with a chilled drink."
– Graeme P



Pictured: A *Viking* longship prepares to cross beneath the Szechenyi Chain Bridge, Budapest.

VIKING

Seven continents. Endless discoveries.

One Viking

DISCOVER THE
VIKING DIFFERENCE

VIKING.COM

Winner 2025 Most Trusted Brand Reader's Digest River Cruise Operators

Winner 2026 Most Trusted Brand Reader's Digest River Cruise Operators

INSPIRATIONAL

MORE THAN A MOUNTAIN: THE KRAZY KOSCI KLIMB

BY KATHY BUCHANAN

For children with cerebral palsy, every milestone can be hard-earned. However, achieving an unexpected goal can help create an exciting new path. The Krazy Kosci Klimb is turning therapy into a fundraising adventure, helping children build strength, confidence, and independence. Most of all, it is a lot of fun!

The annual Krazy Kosci Klimb started in 2012.

Every day, people with cerebral palsy (CP) overcome challenges that many of us never have to consider. Yet with determination, support, love and the right opportunities, they continue to inspire others and achieve remarkable things.

The annual Krazy Kosci Klimb established in 2012, is more than just a fundraising event created by the Cerebral Palsy Alliance—it's a celebration of resilience, inclusion and community, bringing people together to raise awareness and vital funds that help individuals with CP reach new heights. Around 250 people each year climb to the top of Mt. Kosciuszko. Consisting of roughly 15 teams comprising of a young person with cerebral palsy, who has been selected, family members, a Cerebral Palsy Alliance team lead and corporate sponsors.

Despite declining statistics due to improved medical attention, cerebral palsy is still the most common physical disability in childhood, with around 1 in 700 Australian babies diagnosed each year. In total, more than 34,000 Australians live with cerebral palsy, and around 50 million people worldwide live with the condition.

For many parents, the experience can feel isolating. Thankfully, there is much being done to help support through organisations such as The Cerebral Palsy Alliance.

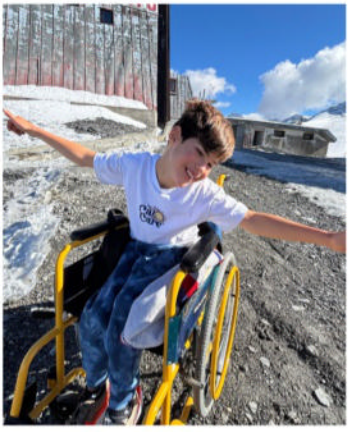
Neil and Audrie McLeod, founded the alliance in Sydney in 1945, after their daughter Jennifer was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. At the time, many families were told little could be done for the child. Cerebral Palsy Alliance was built on the belief that children with CP deserved therapy, education, support and opportunity.

PHOTO CREDIT TO COME

What is Cerebral Palsy?

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a lifelong physical disability that affects movement and posture. It happens when a child's developing brain is injured or affected, usually before, during or shortly after birth. It is not progressive, meaning the original brain injury does not get worse over time. However, its physical impacts can change throughout life.

There is no single cause. In many cases, the exact cause is unknown. Risk factors that are linked to cerebral palsy can include prematurity, low birth weight, being a twin or triplet, infection during pregnancy, stroke, jaundice, newborn seizures, brain infection, placental problems and complications around birth.



Hudson Nicholas made the Klimb when he was just 9 years old.

Early diagnosis and early intervention can improve outcomes. Support such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and family support can also help children build movement, communication, independence and everyday skills.

Signs of potential cerebral palsy may include floppy or stiff muscles, delayed rolling, sitting or walking, poor head control, feeding difficulties, unusual posture, poor coordination, or a strong preference for using one side of the body in young infants. Parents should seek advice if they are concerned about milestones or notice unusual movement patterns.

"I Loved Every Moment!"

The Krazi Kosci Klimb was created to allow young people with cerebral palsy to achieve a physical goal and to literally climb a mountain.

At just 9-years of age, Hudson Nicholas was proudly chosen to take part in the 18-kilometre Krazy Kosci Klimb, which took place in February 2025. As one of the youngest people to ever complete the amazing adventure, which challenges young people with cerebral palsy to reach the summit of Mt Kosciuszko. Hudson still shouts from the rooftops about the experience, "I loved every moment!"

The Sydney-sider who is now 10 and in grade 4, loves playing basketball, soccer, tennis, golf, AFL, going swimming, surfing and paddleboarding on the Northern beaches on weekends with his loving Dad Pete.

PHOTO CREDIT TO COME

Hudson's proud Mum, Brooklyn Nicholas says, "The dream was being able to show Hudson that he can do and achieve anything."

Another important aspect of the event is fundraising, which in Hudson's case was mainly done by the team at Multiplex, who beat the money that was raised from the previous year. "Two of our neighbours work with Multiplex, and they immediately wanted to help to get Hudson to the summit," says Brooklyn proudly.

Hudson and his parents, Brooklyn and Pete, after achieving the highest basketball shot on top of Mt. Kosciuszko.

Family and friends helping to raise $130,000 was a huge achievement before the event. However, the physical preparation for Hudson went on for about six months, including a joint Sydney training event where all local team members and family members participated and helped each other along, buoyed by lots of laughs and support. In 2026, the incredible Klimbers on the Krazy Kosci Klimb raised an impressive $462,799

"We did a lot of preparation; however, nothing really prepares you for the walk itself and the energy and the vibe on the day," says Brooklyn happily. The family were joined by supportive neighbours, including Sean Ryan and Daren Marshall from Multiplex, Matt and Siobhan Dampney and their 12-year-old son Dusty.

"The whole team called 'The Hudson Globetrotters' all took part in pushing and pulling Hudson in his chair up the mountain. There was a bit of wild weather on the way down, but it was fun despite the rain. At the peak, Hudson spent about 20-minutes happily taking trick shots and enjoying the view."

At the peak of Mt Kosciuszko, Hudson proudly made history after making the highest basketball shot in Australia after his Dad carried a basketball hoop all the way up the 9.3 km trail and helped Hudson show that the sky is the limit!

"The impact and change I have seen in my son since returning. It's

PHOTO CREDIT TO COME

almost like he's finally started to find himself," says Hudson's Dad, Pete Nicholas.

Brooklyn continues, "Hudson doesn't tend to focus too much on his cerebral palsy. I was once talking to Hudson about someone's disability and tried to explain it to him, like his legs that don't work properly. He turned around and told me, "My legs are fine, Mum!"

"The only thing he doesn't like is all the hospital visits, the pain from procedures and how much harder he has to work and all the therapy he has to have compared to his friends and everyone else. He'd like people to understand that things are harder for him but not impossible and that he can do anything they can – sometimes it's just a little different," she adds.

Hudson isn't sitting on the side watching others live life. He can do anything that they can do, including climbing a mountain!

"His Krazi Kosci Klimb was amazing – words can't explain how much he has changed from doing the climb. The next morning, he dressed himself. He is still unable to do buttons and zippers or tie his shoelaces. But the fact that he wanted to the next day just opened his eyes to things he never thought possible."

"He was on the ABC's BTN (Behind the News) and all his classmates saw it – they were super excited by it all and very encouraging," adds Brooklyn proudly.

When asked what he learnt from the experience, Hudson adds, "That I can do anything, including a trick shot on top of a mountain!"

A Huge Achievement Inspiring A New Lease On Life

"I CAN DO ANYTHING, INCLUDING A TRICK SHOT ON TOP OF A MOUNTAIN!"

"It's certainly one of his biggest achievements, and we believe it was the catalyst for him and us as a family to start taking on life without fear or the unknown. Going through something as we did with Hudson and his diagnosis is that often, as parents, we put the limitations on him and ourselves. However, this Krazy Kosci Klimb adventure removed this barrier for us all and made us realise we can actually achieve anything."

The Krazy Kosci Klimb experience drew this already tight-knit family even closer. "Pete and Hudson have always been very close; they have actually just come back from a camping holiday in Bendalong, surfing, walking, fishing, and having big chats around the fire at night, and of course, lots of basketball.

"The boys couldn't be any closer, but as a family, it gave us the confidence that we can do anything. After the climb last year, we packed up our house and spent four months in Italy with Hudson's godparents, who live in Tuscany. We were in our own house in the forest, miles away from home, hospitals, therapy and school. It was such an adventure!

We then took him on a 12-day cruise to hard-to-access beaches in Greece and Santorini with all the cliff tops. We pushed him in his wheelchair everywhere. We would love to do as many adventures as we can to make up for the year we lost living in the hospital when he was younger. He has now been to seven countries and counting!"

Star Support Inspiring 'The Hudson Globetrotters'

Hudson is a huge fan of the Harlem Globetrotters and received a personalised video of encouragement for his Kosi Krazy Klimb from Thunder Law. "He was over the moon to hear from Corey (Thunder) Law – at first, he thought it was AI and wasn't real.

The experience has continued, and Hudson was able to go backstage and meet the whole Harlem Globetrotters team on their recent tour. Brooklyn adds, "He got all their signatures, got to do some tricks with them, and then they asked him to sit with them on the bench with the team during the whole game – getting high fives throughout! Now he wants to start training to join the team one day!"

"Hudson is a natural athlete. He and Dad go surfing every weekend, go on camping trips, play basketball, tennis, soccer, AFL and go on walks. He has started looking at narrowing down a sport he would like to focus on through athletics and is considering trying to qualify for the Brisbane Paralympics 2032."

"Pete and I couldn't be prouder of Hudson. When he was born, we were told that he wouldn't walk or talk, and that we should lower our expectations as parents; he just blows our mind with how happy, funny and determined he is."

"Apart from the confronting medical procedures we watched Hudson endure, and the moments when we were told we might have to say goodbye, one of the hardest parts has been navigating the NDIS. It can feel like you're expected to be grateful for whatever support is approved, while knowing that if you question a decision, it could all be taken away just as quickly. Even something as simple as renewing an accessible parking permit means repeatedly proving that Hudson still has cerebral palsy—as though it's a condition he might one day grow out of!"

PHOTO CREDIT TO COME

Hudson and his family meet his favourite team, the Harlem Globetrotters on tour.

The family's goal is to continue their travelling adventures. "We want to take Hudson to as many countries as we can and show him the world is a big place and there are adventures to be had – our next adventure is to Indonesia, to go surfing in Bali with Dad.'

And if someone asks Hudson if doing the Krazy Kosci Klimb is a good experience, what would he say?

"Just do it! It will be amazing! I loved it!"

Do you know a young person with cerebral palsy? Or an organisation that wants to experience real inclusion? Discover more by visiting The Krazy Kosci Klimb and Instagram at thekrazykosciklimb.

Cerebral Palsy ALLIANCE

Understanding Cerebral Palsy

When you hear the words cerebral palsy, you might think you know what it means—but the reality is often more complex. Every person with cerebral palsy has a unique story, and understanding the condition is the first step toward breaking down misconceptions, building empathy, and celebrating the strengths of those who live with it every day.

Q. What is the biggest misconceptions about cerebral palsy?

A. That it impacts everyone the same way or that everyone with

cerebral palsy has an intellectual disability. In fact, about 50% of people with CP do not have an intellectual impairment. Cerebral palsy affects people very differently. Some people walk independently, while others use mobility aids or need lifelong support.

Q. What is the best treatment?

A. There is no one-size-fits-all treatment. Research shows that the best support is personalised and may include therapy, assistive technology, mobility equipment, communication support, medical care, school support and community inclusion.

Q. What support is available?

A. Support may be available through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), early childhood services, allied health therapy, hospitals, schools, specialist disability providers and organisations such as Cerebral Palsy Alliance.

Q. Are there different types of Cerebral Palsy?

A. Yes. Cerebral palsy can also affect different body areas: one side of the body, mainly the legs, or both arms and legs. CP affects people very differently. There are different types of CP, including spastic (most common, muscles are stiff and tight), dyskinetic (causes involuntary movements that are hard to control), ataxic (affecting balance and co-ordination), or mixed (a combination of more than one type). CP can affect different parts of the body: one side of the body (hemiplegia), mainly the legs (diplegia), or both arms and legs (quadriplegia). Some people with CP can walk independently, others walk with the support of crutches or a walking frame, and others use a wheelchair to get around.

Get Appy!

Click here for information on cpThrive, a mobile app that puts the latest information about cerebral palsy at your fingertips.

Q. How do people who need it get support?

A. Families can start by speaking with their GP, child and family health nurse, paediatrician or early childhood professional. They can also contact Cerebral Palsy Alliance for early diagnosis, therapy, NDIS support and other service options.

The Cerebral Palsy Alliance have **Early Diagnosis Clinics**, which are free clinics for babies from as early as 3 months who are at risk of cerebral palsy, founded on research outcomes, helping families gain access to early intervention and support.

Q. How can anyone help support those with cerebral palsy?

A. People can support by donating, fundraising, volunteering, sharing accurate information and learning more about what cerebral palsy actually is. They can also advocate by challenging misconceptions, listening to people with lived experience, and helping create more accessible communities, schools, workplaces and events. On a personal level: speak directly to the person, do not make assumptions, ask what support they prefer, be patient, and make spaces accessible. To find out more, access support, or learn how to get involved, visit **Cerebral Palsy Alliance**.

WIN!

A CADBURY GIFT HAMPER

(5 X HAMPERS TO BE WON)

Valued at up to $100 RRP Each

Hamper contents subject to availability & in discretion of prize provider.

Delicious Cadbury Gift Hamper to Share

Featuring a delightful assortment of Cadbury goodies including Cadbury Favourites, Cadbury Roses, and a variety of Cadbury blocks and bars.

Cadbury

For your chance to win, tell us why you trust Cadbury in 25 words or less. To enter, click here or visit the giveaway page on

www.trustedbrands.com.au

*Full terms and conditions can be found online. Entries close 30th September 2026.

DAIRY MILK, CADBURY FAVOURITES AND THE COLOUR PURPLE IS A TRADE MARK USED UNDER LICENCE

Life Insurance
Reader's Digest
Winner
TRUSTED
BRAND
2026
Voted by Australians
AAMI

TRUSTED BRANDS

Australia's Trusted Brands Award Ceremony 2026

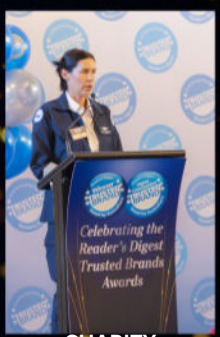
In May, we recognized the Most Trusted Brands of 2026 in Australia, as voted by Australian consumers.

This trust was celebrated at the 27th Anniversary awards ceremony, where the coveted Trusted Brands trophies were presented by Direct Group CEO Algy Pereira and CFO Steven Bright, as well as presenting an opportunity to give back - raising $4,500 for the Cerebral Palsy Alliance organisation.

AUSTRALIAN ICONIC BRANDS
WINNER: BUNNINGS

CHARITY
HIGHLY COMMENDED: CANCER COUNCIL

CHARITY
HIGHLY COMMENDED: GUIDE DOGS



CHARITY
WINNER: ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

AGED CARE & RETIREMENT VILLAGES
WINNER: ANGLICARE SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

AIR CONDITIONERS:
HIGHLY COMMENDED: GENERAL AUSTRALIA
(formerly Fujitsu General)

AIR CONDITIONERS:

WINNER: DAIKIN

BARBECUES

WINNER: WEBER

DISHWASHING TABLETS
WINNER: FINISH

FUNERAL INSURANCE
WINNER: AUSTRALIAN SENIORS

GARDEN POWER TOOLS
WINNER: STIHL

GARDENING PRODUCTS
WINNER: YATES

HOME CARE SA/NT
HIGHLY COMMENDED: RESTHAVEN

HOME CARE SA/NT
HIGHLY COMMENDED: ANGLICARESA

HOME CARE VIC/TAS
HIGHLY COMMENDED: AUSTRALIAN UNITY

HOME CARE VIC/TAS
HIGHLY COMMENDED: MERCY HEALTH

BREAKFAST FOODS
WINNER:
SANITARIUM
WEET-BIX

CAR RENTALS
WINNER: BUDGET

CARS
WINNER: TOYOTA

CONFECTIONERY
WINNER: CADBURY

HEARING SERVICES
HIGHLY
COMMENDED:
AMPLIFON

HEARING SERVICES
HIGHLY COMMENDED:
SPECSAVERS
AUDIOLOGY

HEARING SERVICES
WINNER:
HEARING AUSTRALIA

HOME CARE QLD
HIGHLY COMMENDED:
ANGLICARE SOUTHERN
QUEENSLAND

HOME CARE VIC/TAS
WINNER:
UNITING AGEWELL

HOUSEHOLD CLEANING PRODUCTS
WINNER: DETTOL

INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS
WINNER: TENA

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS
HIGHLY COMMENDED:
AUSSIE BROADBAND

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS
WINNER: TELSTRA

LAWN MOWERS
WINNER: VICTA

LIFE INSURANCE
WINNER: AAMI

OCEAN CRUISE OPERATORS
HIGHLY COMMENDED: PRINCESS CRUISES

PET CARE (EXC. FOOD)
WINNER: NEXGARD

PLANT MILK
WINNER: SANITARIUM SO GOOD

RETAILERS
(EXC. SUPERMARKETS)
WINNER: BUNNINGS

RIVER CRUISE OPERATORS
WINNER: VIKING

SUNSCREEN
WINNER: CANCER COUNCIL

SUPERANNUATION
WINNER: AUSTRALIANSUPER

TYRES
WINNER: BRIDGESTONE

VITAMINS & SUPPLEMENTS
HIGHLY COMMENDED: BLACKMORES

OPTOMETRISTS
WINNER:
SPECSAVERS

PAIN RELIEF
HIGHLY
COMMENDED:
NUROFEN

PAIN RELIEF

WINNER: PANADOL

PAINT

WINNER: DULUX

SOLAR PANEL INSTALLERS

WINNER: SOLAHART

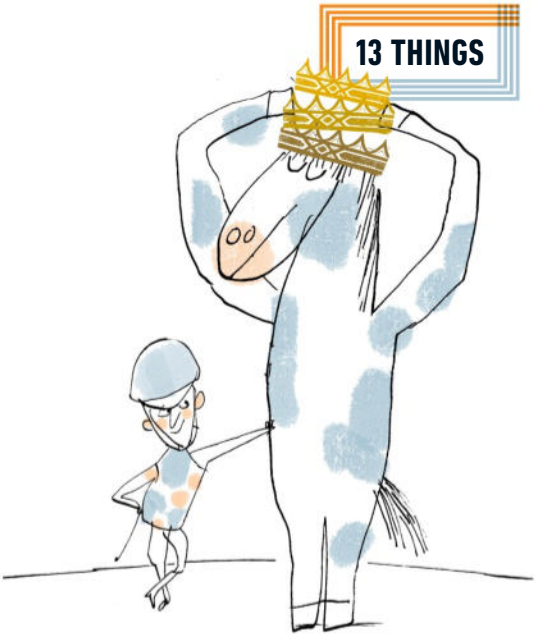
STAIN REMOVERS

WINNER: VANISH

SUGAR SUBSTITUTES
WINNER:
EQUAL

SUNSCREEN
HIGHLY
COMMENDED:
BANANA BOAT

VITAMINS & SUPPLEMENTS
WINNER: SWISSE



Off to the Races

BY *Moira and Tom Fanning*

1 THE TRIPLE CROWN is one of the most elusive titles in sports. To achieve it, a Thoroughbred must win three races: The Kentucky Derby kicks it off the first Saturday in May at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky. Two weeks later, the Preakness Stakes takes place at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, Maryland. And three weeks after that, the Belmont Stakes is run at Belmont Park outside of New York City. (The final two legs will be held elsewhere this year as Pimlico Race Course and Belmont Park undergo renovations.)

2 ALL THREE races have existed since the 1870s. But it wasn't until the 1930s, when *Daily Racing Form* sports writer Charles Hatton started referring to them as the triple crown, that the term became popular. It became official in 1950, when the Thoroughbred Racing Associations retroactively awarded the title to Sir Barton, the first horse to win all three races (in 1919).

3 THE KENTUCKY Derby is often called the most exciting two minutes in sports, but only two horses have finished it in that time. Monarchos ran it in 1:59.97 in 2001, and Secretariat put up the best time of 1:59.4 in 1973. Only three fillies (female horses) have won, and the biggest long shot to pull it off did so at odds of 91-1. Americans bet more than $10 billion on

ILLUSTRATION BY *Serge Bloch*

horse racing each year. Churchill Downs saw $349 million in wagers last Derby Day alone.

4 ARGUABLY THE greatest racehorse of all time, Secretariat is one of 13 horses that have won the Triple Crown. He won 16 of his 21 races, and placed lower than third only once—in his very first race. In its list of the 100 best athletes of the 20th century, ESPN put him at 35th, just behind Lou Gehrig. Secretariat isn't the only racehorse on the list, but he's the highest ranking by a mile—a familiar feeling for him.

5 SECRETARIAT'S HEART weighed about 22 pounds, nearly triple the average of 8½ pounds, which greatly aided his stamina. It's said that none of Secretariat's sons inherited his huge heart, but some of his daughters did. All 19 entrants in last year's Kentucky Derby were his descendants.

6 UP TO 20 horses can compete in the 1.25-mile Kentucky Derby and race for its $5 million purse, which is spread across the top five finishers. Owners usually collect 80% of their horse's winnings; the jockey and trainer split the remaining 20%. Both the 1.19-mile Preakness Stakes (with up to 14 entrants) and the 1.5-mile Belmont Stakes (up to 16) boast $2 million purses. The Belmont Stakes usually has the fewest entrants since it's the last and longest race, making it the hardest to win. Thoroughbreds get just one chance at the Triple Crown because only 3-year-old horses are eligible for its three races.

7 A HORSE'S height is measured in hands, a unit of about 4 inches. To measure, hold your hands horizontally and count as you stack from the ground up to the bony ridge above the horse's shoulder blades, an area called the withers. Thoroughbreds usually stand 16 hands and weigh 1,000 pounds.

8 JOCKEYS TYPICALLY stand between 4 foot 10 and 5 foot 6. John "Red" Pollard, who rode the famously undersized Seabiscuit, was considered big for a jockey at 5 foot 7. It may seem that the horse is doing all the work, but jockeys are amazing athletes. Try holding a low squat for an entire race. It's hard enough in your living room, let alone atop a half-ton horse thundering along at 40 mph.

9 IN HARNESS racing, horses either trot or pace while pulling drivers behind them in lightweight two-wheeled "sulkies." Trotting horses move their opposite fore and hind legs forward at the same time, while pacers move the legs on the same side of their bodies simultaneously. Since pacing is faster, pacers and trotters race separately. The sport's

FUJITSU

GENERAL | AIRSTAGE

Purchase any General Airstage ducted system with Cool Finance and you'll pay **no deposit and no interest for up to 60 months***

COOL FINANCE
BY GENERAL AUSTRALIA
Powered by humm90

MOST LOVED Finder AWARDS 2024 AIR CONDITIONER

TOP VALUE Finder AWARDS 2024 AIR CONDITIONER

2023 WINNER 2024 WINNER 2025 WINNER 2026 AWARDS WINNER

TOP RATED APPLIANCE BRANDS

Winner TRUSTED BRAND 2019-2022 Reader's Digest Air Conditioners

Trusted TRUSTED BRAND 2023-26 Reader's Digest Air Conditioners

OFFER VALID 1ST JUNE 2026 – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2026 ON DUCTED SYSTEMS

*Purchase by 11:59pm AEST 30/09/26. Install by 5pm AEDT 30/10/26. Offer is for Cool Finance, no deposit & 0% interest for up to 60 months. Domestic residential purchases only. **Approved applicants only.** Fees and charges apply, including a monthly account fee of $9.95 that applies on account opening. T&Cs and minimum finance amount applies. **For Long Term Interest Free purchases:** Minimum monthly payments must be made by the due date each month, otherwise interest at the humm90 Expired Promotional Rate (currently 28.99% p.a.) applies. **For other purchases:** Up to 110 days interest free and payment holiday can apply (excluding purchases we treat as cash advances), after which minimum monthly payments are required. Interest at the humm90 Purchase Rate (currently 27.30%) applies if purchase amount is not repaid within Interest Free Period or if other Interest Free Criteria are not met. All fees, charges and interest rates are current as at 6 March 2026 and subject to change - see humm90.com/au. Credit provided by humm Cards Pty Ltd ABN 31 099 651 877 Australian Credit Licence number 247415. Offer only available from finance accredited GENERAL Australia Authorised Partners.

AUSTRALIA'S FAVOURITE AIR®

biggest event is the Hambletonian Stakes in East Rutherford, New Jersey, a 1-mile trot for $1 million.

10 THE NBA'S Indiana Pacers are named in part for the pacing gait, as their original home court was across from the harness racetrack at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. The Pacers aren't the only crossover between the two sports: Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokić spends offseasons at his harness racing stable in his native Serbia. "That's kind of my secret goal, to be a driver ... and race horses," he said on the *Curious Mike* podcast.

11 HIP-HOP LEGEND MC Hammer owned a horse named Dance Floor who placed third in the 1992 Kentucky Derby. Owners get creative when naming their racehorses because no two can have the same name. The Jockey Club keeps a registry and has rules, including a ban on vulgarity—though somehow the name Hoof Hearted slipped by. (Say it out loud.)

12 EVEN IF you don't follow horse racing, you may tune in for the fascinating fascinators many attendees wear. The colorful hats are the vision of Churchill Downs founder Meriwether Lewis Clark Jr. (yes—grandson of the explorer William Clark, as in Lewis and Clark), who admired the pageantry of European races. Once the Kentucky Derby started being televised in the 1960s, hats became extra extravagant as spectators sought to stand out in the crowd.

13 EACH TRIPLE Crown race has a signature cocktail. The Kentucky Derby's mint julep (mint simple syrup and bourbon poured over crushed ice and garnished with fresh mint) might be the most famous. But the Preakness Stakes' black-eyed Susan (vodka, elderflower liqueur, pineapple juice, lime juice and orange juice, shaken and garnished with an orange wedge) and the Belmont Stakes' Belmont Jewel (bourbon, lemonade and pomegranate juice, garnished with a lemon twist) also offer refreshing respite on a hot day at the track—or in your living room. Cheers!

Move Over, Spot!

Luna is now the most popular dog name in the United States, followed by Bella, Charlie and Max.

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

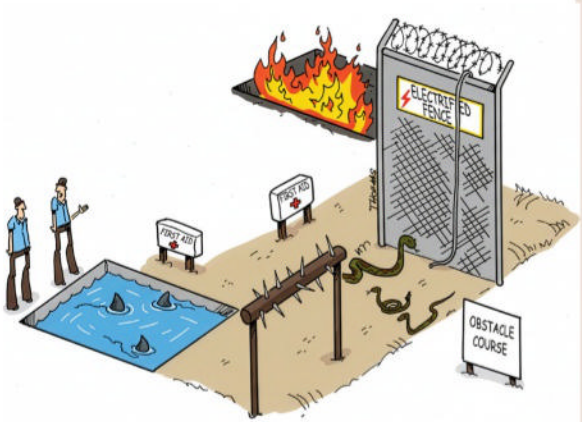
Specsavers

Most trusted brand for optometrists 7 years running

Thank you

for trusting us with your care

HUMOR *in* UNIFORM



"Is it me, or are the obstacle courses getting harder?"

My friend's military role takes him around the world, sometimes at the last minute. His wife is understanding, but she reached her limit when he announced a quick trip to Azerbaijan. "If you want a weekend away with the guys, just tell me," she said tersely. "You don't have to go making up countries."
—CYNTHIA WHITE
Rhinelander, WI

Did you know that flour tortillas are served on the International Space Station instead of bread? It may or may not have something to do with astronauts John Young and Gus Grissom. Feeling noshy on their Gemini 3 flight in 1965, Young pulled out a contraband corned beef sandwich that he'd snuck on board inside his spacesuit (evidently, the freeze-dried menu was not up to snuff). Grissom took a bite, and bread crumbs began to orbit them, threatening to get wedged in sensitive equipment. That ended the meal.

Sandwichgate caused such a furor back on Earth that Congress held a hearing, leading a NASA official to assure everyone, "We have taken steps to prevent recurrence of corned beef sandwiches in future flights."
—NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Struggling with a report he was writing, an Air Force base commander asked my father and a few other subordinates, "Do we have an English major in this outfit?"

While others strained to think, a helpful voice answered, "No sir, but we do have an Italian captain."
—STEVE SCARANO
Vista, CA

YOUR FUNNY MILITARY *story could be worth $$$. For details, go to* **RD.COM/SUBMIT.**

CARTOON BY *Bill Thomas/Thomas Toons*

AUSTRALIA'S #1
STAIN REMOVER BRAND*

*Claim based on NIQ Retailer Scan Sales for the Fabric Care category Prewash segment for the 52-week period ending 20th January 2026 in total Australia Grocery channel, client defined hierarchy.

ALL *in a Day's* WORK

During a physical therapy session, my client's daughter asked what her mother could do at home to help maintain her progress once therapy was completed. I suggested the patient sign up for tai chi classes.

"Tai chi?" said the patient. "Wasn't that what we had to drink last week?"

Her daughter shook her head. "No, Mom, that was chai tea."

—MARY NICHOLS
Chesterfield, VA

Our band was performing at the Indiana Women's Prison, and even though our lead singer, Laurie, was nailing a ballad, the audience was giggling. And then it dawned on me. Laurie, 8 months pregnant, had just sung the lyric, "I never met a man I called a stranger."

—NELSON GOUD
Indianapolis, IN

"You're joining the company at a very exciting time."

CARTOON BY *Tom Toro/CartoonStock.com*

People don't understand the purpose of online ratings. You'll see a review for a pair of shoes and it'll be like, "Great shoe. Even cuter in person. Just perfect. But I ordered the wrong size so I had to give it 1 star."

—X@LATKEDELREY

For adventure guides, the real adventure comes when tourists ask questions like these:

- "Has the ocean been sprayed for sharks?"
- "Does the water go all the way around the island?"
- "At what age does a rhino turn into a hippo?"

—OUTSIDEONLINE.COM

YOUR FUNNY WORK *story could be worth $$$. For details, go to page 2 or* **RD.COM/SUBMIT.**

Dettol

KILLS 99.9% OF GERMS*

Voted Australia's Most Trusted Household Cleaning Brand since 2016†

Voted by Australians 2016-2026 TRUSTED BRAND 11 Years Reader's Digest Household Cleaning Products

Spread the love, not the germs

Visit www.dettol.com.au to find out more

* E. Coli, Salmonella, S. aureus.
†Reader's Digest Trusted Brands survey 2016-2026.
Always read the label and follow the directions for use.

The
HEALTHY
WELLNESS FROM THEHEALTHY.COM

When the Body Attacks Itself

The mystery and misery of autoimmune diseases

BY *Patricia Varacallo, DO*

HEIDI HUGHES FROM Tampa, Florida, was 34 when she noticed that her fingers were unusually stiff. At first she thought it was just from sleeping in a strange position, or perhaps carpal tunnel syndrome from hours spent typing on her computer. But the stiffness continued, and her fingers began to ache and swell. Eventually, she struggled even to open a jar of peanut butter, with pain shooting through her wrists.

Albert Stowell was in his 60s when he started to experience slurred speech,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Kate Traynor*

double vision, choking episodes and muscle weakness. A farmer in the Austin, Texas, area, he was having trouble managing his livestock and machinery.

Chelsea H. of Lakeland, Florida, was in high school when she started feeling bloated and uncomfortable after eating common foods like pizza and pasta. As she began her career in marketing, the bloating became painful and more frequent. She was constantly exhausted, barely scraping together the energy she needed for work.

Each of these people would visit doctor after doctor, take test after test, before finally getting a diagnosis. Heidi learned she has rheumatoid arthritis, when the immune system attacks the lining of the joints. Albert has myasthenia gravis, which occurs when the immune system's antibodies interfere with communication between nerves and muscles, leading to muscle weakness that worsens with activity. And Chelsea is dealing with celiac disease, in which eating gluten—a protein found in wheat, barley and rye—prompts an immune attack on the lining of the small intestine, leading to bloating, diarrhea, abdominal pain and fatigue.

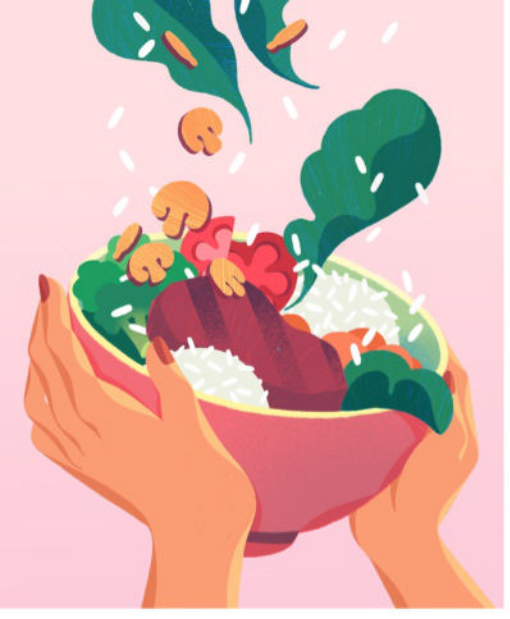
All are autoimmune diseases. They occur when the immune system, which is supposed to defend the body from illness, mistakenly attacks it instead. While the exact cause is unknown, there are different theories about why the immune system suddenly malfunctions, including genetics, hormones, physical stress, injury or other illness.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, there are over 100 types of autoimmune diseases. Although they target different organs and tissues, all result in chronic inflammation from a misdirected immune response. And while the early symptoms of autoimmune diseases can be subtle, if they're left unchecked, the chronic inflammation can eventually cause irreparable damage.

This bodily "glitch" is surprisingly common. A December 2024 study published in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* found that about 15 million people in the U.S. have an autoimmune disease, and a third of those have more than one. Some experts believe the true number is closer to 50 million, since many people remain undiagnosed or misdiagnosed for years. About 80% of those with autoimmune diseases are women (63% to 95%, depending on the disease). Researchers say this likely stems from a combination of hormonal and genetic factors: Estrogen boosts the immune response, and the X chromosome carries more immune-related genes than the Y chromosome.

Concerningly, the rates of autoimmune diseases are on the rise. Experts suspect that this surge is linked to a combination of environmental exposures such as pollution and chemicals, gut microbiome changes, viral infections, and lifestyle factors such as stress, diet and sleep.

Some other common autoimmune diseases include Hashimoto's thyroiditis, Sjögren's syndrome, psoriasis,



lupus, type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, vitiligo, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, Graves' disease and alopecia areata. Treatment varies depending on which organs or tissues are affected. Autoimmune conditions can not yet be definitely cured, and so far only limited preventive strategies exist for high-risk individuals. Therapy generally focuses on controlling symptoms and limiting damage, often with a combination of medications and lifestyle changes such as diet, stress management, physical therapy and exercise.

A variety of drugs work by suppressing the entire immune system, leaving those taking them vulnerable to infections and other illnesses. But newer biologic therapies—treatments made from living cells—are able to target specific parts of the immune system, giving patients fewer side effects and better control over their symptoms. In some cases, patients may receive infusions of antibodies from donated plasma, or, in severe cases, have a bone marrow transplant. Scientists are also studying CAR-T cell therapy—where the immune system's T cells are reprogrammed to eliminate its B cells, which cause many autoimmune diseases—as a new treatment.

HEIDI, CHELSEA AND ALBERT each found a way to manage their conditions. Heidi finally found relief with a biologic drug called adalimumab (brand name Humira and others), physical therapy and an anti-inflammatory diet. Chelsea follows a strictly gluten-free diet and takes a daily multivitamin to make sure her body gets the nutrients it needs. While she admits that there are lots of foods she misses, she also says she'll take how she feels now any day over how she felt when she was eating gluten.

As for Albert, it took a year and a half and visits to seven different neurologists before he finally got his diagnosis of myasthenia gravis. Even then, the first treatments he tried weren't very helpful. But then in 2020 he entered a clinical trial for zilucoplan (brand name Zilbrysq), a drug that targets a specific part of the immune system that affects myasthenia gravis symptoms. That, he says, was like spotting a light at the end of a dark tunnel. Today, his symptoms are under control, he says, and he can once again enjoy time with his family and handle his daily tasks. R

Panadol 70 YEARS

AUSTRALIA's MOST TRUSTED

PAIN RELIEF BRAND*

*Reader's Digest Trusted Brand Survey 2026 Panadol Brand.

HALEON

More consistent absorption than standard paracetamol tablets in the first 30 minutes

Works on pain relief
10 mins faster than regular Panadol tablets

Tough pain relief
Greater pain relief than standard paracetamol tablets

That's one for Panadol

Always read the label and follow the directions for use.
Incorrect use could be harmful.

News FROM THE
WORLD OF MEDICINE
BY *Kristine Gasbarre*

SHARP MEMORY

A study in the journal *Neurology* found that eating cheese could play a role in dementia prevention. A team of researchers from Sweden's Lund University found that among nearly 28,000 Swedish residents over a 25-year period, more than 3,200 ultimately developed dementia. However, those who reported eating 1.7 ounces or more per day of high-fat cheese (defined as having more than 20% fat, such as cheddar, Brie and Gouda) were 13% less likely to develop dementia than those who ate ½ ounce or less daily. The protective association appeared strongest for people without a gene variant called APOE e4, a genetic risk factor for dementia. In contrast, low-fat dairy showed no meaningful link to lower dementia risk.

Shot at Prevention

Only a handful of cancer types are currently preventable by a vaccine—and an aggressive breast cancer may soon be joining them. Anixa Biosciences announced in November 2025 that it had secured a patent for a vaccine that trains the immune system to attack alpha-lactalbumin, a protein typically present during late pregnancy and lactation, and also expressed in the majority of triple-negative breast cancer cases. The idea was first developed at the Cleveland Clinic, where Phase 1 of the trial is projected to be completed this summer. If additional trials confirm its efficacy, the vaccine could be available by 2030, with priority given to those with genetic dispositions.

Power Trio

Falling is now the leading cause of injury-related deaths among

TMB STUDIO. RESEARCH BY LAUREN GRAY

PHOTOGRAPH BY *Emiko Franzen*

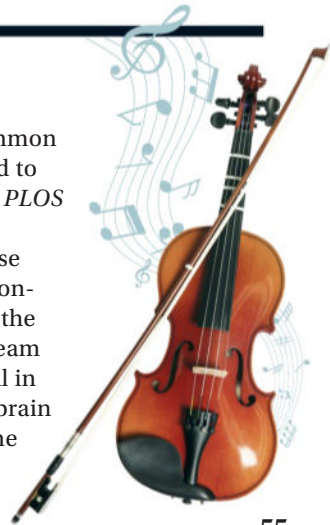
adults 65 and older—a result of muscle loss that begins around age 50. But a study by sports science researchers in China has shown a promising way to counteract natural declines. After analyzing studies involving more than 7,500 participants, the team determined that resistance and balance training effectively preserved muscle for everyday functional movement, like rising swiftly from a chair. Meanwhile, resistance training plus protein supplementation led to the largest increases in strength and muscle mass. And combining all three (resistance training, balance training and protein) led to the largest improvements in other measures of functional health, such as grip strength, gait speed and skeletal muscle index.

Craving Connection

Keeping a seat at the table for friends or family can improve key markers of healthy aging, while eating alone showed the opposite effect. After reviewing data collected across 10 countries, Australian nutrition researchers determined that those who routinely ate alone consumed less food—specifically, fewer fruits and vegetables and less protein. Part of the research suggested that those who consistently ate alone were more than twice as likely to drop significant weight—a risk factor widely linked to higher rates of chronic illness and increased mortality in seniors. Cooking for (and eating with) others naturally encourages better habits, the team theorized, because "social cues can be beneficial in facilitating eating behaviors."

Eye Got Rhythm

Dancing, swaying or finger-tapping to music is a common voluntary response that speaks to the power of sound to move us. But a recent study published in the journal *PLOS Biology* showed that our brains may be involuntarily syncing to the beat as well. Researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences played classical music to 123 non-musicians and measured their spontaneous blinks—the ones our eyes perform without our awareness. The team found that the participants' blinking involuntarily fell in line with the beat. The effect may highlight how the brain processes, predicts and adapts to sonic patterns in the environment, even when we're unaware.



JUN2/GETTY IMAGES (VIOLIN)

Travel Insurance for Over 50s

Get comprehensive travel cover for your medical conditions and enjoy your next trip with peace of mind.

- ✔ Unlimited medical emergency expenses cover with 24/7 emergency medical helpline
- ✔ Unlimited cancellation cover available*
- ✔ No upper age limit

Multi-award winning

Proud winners of Best Specialist & Best Seniors Travel Insurance WeMoney Awards 2025

Call our Australian Call Centre Toll-Free

1800 130 262

AllClearTravel.com.au

*Unlimited cancellation cover available on Gold and Gold+ products only. Trustpilot Apr 2026. Winner WeMoney Awards 2025. Mozo Experts Choice Award 2025. This insurance is underwritten by the insurer Europ Assistance Australia Pty Ltd (EAA) ABN 71140219594, AFSL 552106. AllClear Insurance Services Pty Ltd, ACN 165 270 066, trading as AllClear Travel Insurance, is an Authorised Representative (AR number 1311154) appointed by EAA to distribute and administer this insurance product.

Travel Insurance for pre-existing medical conditions

We believe Travel Insurance should be available to everyone.

That's why we can cover your medical conditions and have no upper age limits on our policies.

98%

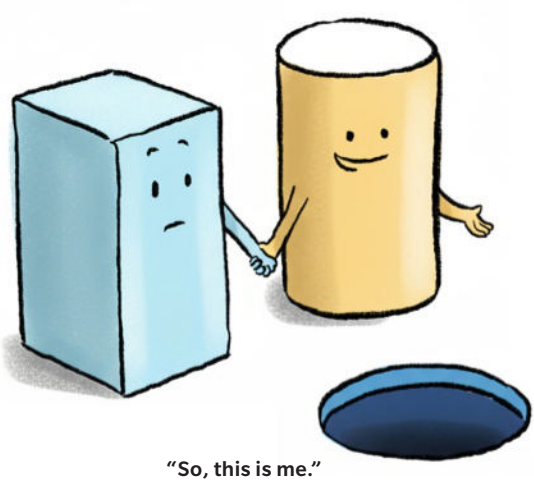
of our customers would recommend AllClear to family and friends.^

Get covered today!

AllClear™

^Based on AllClear's post purchase survey, 373 responses, correct as of 29/05/25. Any advice is general advice only. Consider and read the combined FSG/PDS and TMD and your personal circumstances before purchase. Sub-limits, terms, conditions, and exclusions may apply.

LAUGHTER
THE BEST *Medicine*



"So, this is me."

To bide their time on a long train trip, three priests agree to share their darkest secrets.

"Once a month," says the first priest, "I go on a bender and get blind drunk."

"I've gotten into gambling online," admits the second priest. "Worse yet, I use Sunday collection plate donations to fund my bets."

"And you," the first priest says to the third, "what's your chief vice?"

"Me?" says the third priest. "I'm an inveterate gossip."

— Submitted by
GARY KATZ

When a wealthy businessman began to choke on a fish bone at a restaurant, a doctor seated nearby sprang up, performed the Heimlich maneuver and saved his life.

"Thank you, thank you!" said the businessman. "Please, I insist on paying you. Just name the fee."

"OK," said the doctor. "How about half of what you'd have offered when the bone was still stuck in your throat?"

—FACMEDICINE.COM

The worst job I ever had was as a forensic pathologist for the United Nations. I remember uncovering the mass grave of 1,000 snowmen. Fortunately, it turned out to be just a field full of carrots.

—Comedian
MILTON JONES

I called the tinnitus helpline, but it just keeps ringing.

—Submitted by
DAN CUSATO

I am woman, watch me fit 94 bottles of shampoo and 15 different body washes on my shower ledge.

—X@KRYZAZZY

What happened when two silkworms got into a fight? It ended in a tie.
—Submitted by ALICE MURRAY

CARTOON BY *Will Santino/CartoonStock.com*

Voted by Australians Highly Commended Trusted Brand 2022-2026 Reader's Digest Home Care QLD

Anglicare Southern Queensland

Trusted in Home Care

Supporting older Queenslanders to maintain their independence at home.

1300 610 610

anglicaresq.org.au

Internet headlines from the 19th century:
- "Women near you want to show you their ankles! Click here!"
- "Why your bourgeois boss hates Karl Marx (and you should too)"
- "Arsenic: The miracle chemical in future medicine!"
- "10 signs your corset is slowly killing you (No. 7 is terrifying)"
- "This one simple trick cures milk leg, dropsy and the vapors!"

—REDDIT

A fisherman shouted out to a man wading in the water, "Can I rent a boat on this lake?"

"Yes," the wader yelled back. "They're $10 or $25 an hour."

"Would you recommend the $10 boat?"

"Absolutely not! I'm standing in one."

—Submitted by
GENE NEWMAN

My husband got stung on his forehead by a bee. He's in the ER now, his face swollen and bruised. He almost died! Luckily, I was close enough to hit the bee with my shovel.

—THE PODCAST *HOW TO KILL AN HOUR*

After visiting her husband in prison, a woman stopped a correctional officer and laid into him. "You shouldn't make my husband work so hard," she said. "He's exhausted!"

The officer laughed. "Work? He doesn't do anything but eat, sleep and sit in his cell!"

"That's strange," said the woman. "He told me he's been digging a tunnel for months."

—Submitted by
DAVID MITEFF

YOUR FUNNY STORY *could be published here! Send your stories to* **LETTERS@READERSDIGEST.COM.AU**

YOU SAID A MEOWFUL!

Cats have a knack for knocking things off counters. To honor that adorable—albeit messy—trait, here are knock-knock jokes from *The Impawsibly Good Book of Cat Jokes* (Chronicle Books), edited by Thomas Nowak.

Knock, Knock.
Who's there?
Annie.
Annie who?
Is Annie-body going to feed me or what?!

Knock, knock.
Who's there?
Feline.
Feline who?
Feline fine after my fifth nap of the day!

Knock, knock.
Who's there?
Pasture.
Pasture who?
Pasture leg and had to rub against it.

Knock, knock.
Who's there?
Tamara.
Tamara who?
Tamara I want tuna for dinner.

STEPHANIE_ZIEBER/GETTY IMAGES

Did you know?

Cats' claws really are rather remarkable. They can extend and retract and their curved design makes climbing a cinch for your kitty.

Take a meow-ment to learn some fun facts about your cat's claws:

- Claws are made of keratin, just like human nails but unlike our nails cats' claws are directly connected to the bone rather than flesh. Each claw sits at the very tip of the toe bone.
- Clawing at the furniture isn't about being naughty, it's a way for your cat to mark their territory. Cats have scent glands in the pads of their feet and leave pheromones wherever they scratch.
- Like dogs, cats have dewclaws on the inside of their front paws. Dewclaws are especially helpful when climbing and catching their favourite toys.
- Kittens are born with non-retractable claws and can't retract them until they are about one month old.
- Cats are digitigrade creatures meaning they walk on their toes, and claws can act as hooks helping them cling to uneven surfaces, but hopefully not your curtains!

Claw care - Be sure to have at least a couple of good scratching posts around your home, these will help your cat to exercise their paws and to shed the dead part of the nail. Make a habit of regularly checking your cat's paws and claws – ingrown claws are a common problem for older cats and can cause extreme pain. Claw trimming is a skill – leave it to the professionals unless you're very confident.

cat protection society OF NSW

For more information, advice and assistance on cat care and everything feline, visit
www.catprotection.org.au
or call us on (02) 9557 4818

Find us on /catprotectionsocietynsw

Rehoming Organisation Number R251000224

INSPIRATIONAL

Frontlines of Change

How MSF is Navigating the Climate Health Crisis in the Pacific

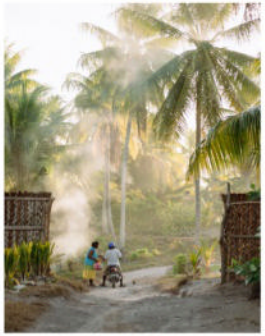
STORY SUPPLIED BY *MSF*

"When I was young, I did not understand climate change. Droughts, flooding during king tides and coastal erosion, felt like normal parts of island life," explains Mila Tirikai, Médecins Sans Frontières' water, sanitation and hygiene supervisor in Kiribati, a remote Pacific island nation where health challenges are quietly compounding under the weight of climate vulnerability.

"Sometimes our rainwater tanks would run dry and water became very limited. We also saw the sea slowly affecting the land near our homes. At that time, we simply adapted without thinking of it as part of a global problem. Now working with MSF, I understand that the challenges we face are not just local issues, but part of a larger global climate crisis that affects small island nations like Kiribati the most."

When people think of Médecins Sans Frontières, also known by its English name Doctors Without Borders or MSF, they often picture emergency teams responding in conflict zones or epidemics. But MSF's approach continues to evolve, particularly as climate and environmental changes increasingly intersect with health, even outside traditional crisis settings. That's why MSF is working in Kiribati, which like many small island states, faces the realities of rising sea levels, water and food insecurity, a complex health burden and rapidly changing living environments.

PHOTO CREDIT: KEIRA SARGEANT/MSF



Above: Abaiang island, Kiribati.

Situated in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Kiribati's 33 low-lying atolls are spread across more than 3.5 million square kilometres of ocean and are home to more than 130,000 people. It is a nation that is acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

In early 2024, MSF partnered with the Kiribati Ministry of Health and Medical Services to develop a project built on a planetary health model, acknowledging that human health is deeply interconnected with the health of the environment. The project is addressing non-communicable diseases, particularly in women and children, supporting improvements in healthcare waste management, as well as improving long-term access to safe water to support public health needs.

"Rehabilitating wells and rainwater harvesting systems is a key part of my work, because rainwater is scarce and groundwater is vulnerable, every water source is very important for daily life in Kiribati," says Mila. "I also work closely with communities and healthcare staff to make sure WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) activities respond to real community needs and promote good hygiene practices. The impacts of the climate crisis here in Kiribati are happening more often and are more serious. Saltwater is entering groundwater, making wells too salty to drink from. Droughts last longer, weather patterns are less predictable, and flood during high tides happen more frequently. Fresh water, which was already limited, is now under even more pressure."

Working alongside Mila has been Australian doctor Neil McNulty who spent six months in Kiribati. "Before

PHOTO CREDIT: KEIRA SARGEANT/MSF

applying and coming here, I had little conception of this place outside of certain unique geographical features such as its size, scattered population, remoteness and vulnerability to climate change."

"Seeing a seemingly peaceful land densely covered by coconut palms and surrounded by clear blue water, initial impressions could be misleading. When taking short flights and seeing the size of these tiny islands from above and expanses between the islands, it is hard not to be mindful of how vulnerable it all is to climate and environmental changes and that for I-Kiribati people there really is no other place to go."

Kiribati was Neil's first assignment with MSF. He had always been interested in the medical humanitarian organisation and admired its commitment to working in some of the most challenging contexts. Prior to this, he spent four years working as a rural generalist doctor in Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities in the Northern Territory.

He says there are some similarities in the challenges of delivering health services in remote, First Nations communities in Australia and for people living in Kiribati.

"The resource and health personnel limitations I witnessed during my time in Kiribati are of an even greater magnitude. There are the logistical challenges of distance and the decision making it entails. People on the outer islands live a long boat ride or an infrequent and expensive flight away from the central island of Tarawa with its hospitals, medical specialists, and treatments."

Above: Doctor Neil McNulty spent six months working in Kiribati in 2026.

"In common with Australia's remote health workers, I have great respect for the nurses who service the outer island village clinics. Out of necessity they are taking on a greatly expanded role as the first and often only point of contact for

PHOTO CREDIT: VICTOR CARINGAL/MSF

all manner of health conditions."

Over the last few years MSF's work has focused on the outer island of Abaiang, one of Kiribati's northern atolls which has a population of about 6,000 people. At the heart of the project is a focus on women of childbearing age who are screened for non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension, two of the region's most pressing public health concerns. These conditions are closely tied to shifting diets driven by food insecurity and reduced access to traditional food sources.

"It would not be unusual," says Neil, "for a day in Abaiang to be spent with the MSF team in the back of a truck driving either north or south along the sandy road to visit the nurses that reside at each of their respective clinics. I would usually see patients together with the nurses, using the challenging cases as an opportunity for teaching. The island's health clinics consist of a collection of open walled huts with coconut palm roofs and elevated floors. In these wards patients would receive care, deliver babies or wait multiple days while awaiting transfer to the hospital on the main island."

"It has truly been an incredible experience being in Kiribati and I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience the warmth, openness and strength of the people who make up this country," says Neil.

Kiribati may be small, but its challenges are not isolated. What MSF learns here could inform future responses across the Pacific and beyond — ensuring that health systems evolve in step with a rapidly changing climate.

At the heart of MSF's project in Kiribati are the 23 locally hired team members including Mila, "My hope is that our country can become stronger and more resilient in the face of climate change. I want communities to feel secure, with reliable water, proper sanitation, and infrastructure that protects both health and dignity. I hope to see more I-Kiribati leading our nation's development."

New Zealand midwife Shelley Harris-Studdart also spent time working in Kiribati and will be returning there in mid-2026 for a three-month stint. Shelley has been working with the organisation since 2018, in Uganda, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Yemen, Ethiopia and in 2025 in Gaza, during the war. Most recently Shelley has been based in Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria, a vast country of 325 million people that reaches

Above: Shelley Harris-Studdart worked as a midwife in Kiribati in 2022.

from the Sahel in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south. The project she's been part of is in the north-west of the country, in Jigawa State where MSF teams run the maternity and neonatal departments of Jahun General Hospital.

In Nigeria, the number of women dying in pregnancy or childbirth is among the highest in the world. Maternal mortality rates in Jigawa State are even worse, far exceeding the country average. The most significant risk factor is the limited access pregnant women have to antenatal care and care for complications in childbirth.

"Childbirth is one of the most dangerous activities a woman will undertake in her lifetime," says Shelley who was working as a Midwife Technical Support in the hospital. "It's been very sobering for me to witness the realities of these circumstances, especially in a country which has one of the wealthiest economies in Africa."

"Amongst the harsh realities contributing to high maternal mortality rates in Nigeria are malnutrition, poverty, malaria, rurality and inconsistent provision of antenatal, maternity and medical services. Chronic underfunding of the healthcare system means health centres and hospitals are short staffed, ill-resourced and unreliable," explains Shelley.

"My day starts at 8am with the morning shift change and handover in the triage, labour and delivery department. This is where my work is focused. It's unpredictable how occupancy will be each morning. Like an emergency department in any hospital the delivery unit can go from zero to being in the 'red

PHOTO CREDIT: MSF

Above: The entrance of Jahun General hospital, Nigeria.

zone' within an hour. Jahun maternity is a Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care 'unit which means that alongside regular maternity services, we provide surgical birth by caesarean section and importantly in this context maintain a blood bank. The blood bank is critical with the high rates of extreme anaemia in pregnancy we see. Anaemia becomes more potentially life-threatening in the immediate postpartum moments as it increases the risk of postpartum haemorrhage which can be fatal."

"In the 12-bed pre-delivery ward, service traffic can be so high women must share a bed. Eighty-four per cent of women admitted to Jahun maternity come with complex conditions. At any one time there can be multiple blood transfusions underway for severely anaemic women in labour, alongside multiple women receiving magnesium sulphate the treatment for eclamptic seizures. I stand beside my Nigerian colleague midwives supporting them in decision-making, providing an extra pair of hands when needed and observing how we can provide optimal and sustainable midwifery care in these challenging conditions."

Shelley says that working with an MSF maternity team is deeply challenging and rewarding at the same time. "Women arrive to Jahun hospital very often on the brink, having travelled for many hours, knowing that MSF provides the most reliable, effective, free maternity care in the region. The stamina, resilience and strength of

PHOTO CREDIT: ALEXANDRE MARCOU/MSF

Above: Women wait at the triage room before receiving appropriate obstetric or newborn care treatment at Jahun general hospital, Nigeria.

these women is profound. To be here, treating one woman at a time, supporting one midwife at a time, delivering one (or two) babies at a time brings huge fulfillment."

"Travelling, living and being welcomed into communities often seen only on the '6 o'clock news' in my home country has been humbling and a privilege. My aim was to join an organisation that reached those in need, to bring relief and aid to people praying for that, for their loved ones, for their families and communities. Whilst doing this, I have witnessed deeply held common human values and traits like the love of a mother for her children, the responsibility felt by a provider for their family, the sisterhood of women supporting women, the utter delight of children flying a kite made from sticks and plastic bags, despite religion, race, nationality or political agenda."

Médecins Sans Frontières is an international, independent, medical humanitarian organisation that was founded in France in 1971. The organisation delivers medical aid to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters or exclusion from healthcare. MSF is a worldwide movement with 67,000 staff members from 159 nationalities, working in over 70 countries. The vast majority of its team members are locally hired staff from the countries where MSF's projects are based. Every year, approximately 120 Australians and New Zealanders work on overseas assignments as doctors, midwives, psychologists, laboratory technicians, human resource/finance coordinators, pharmacists, mental health specialists and logisticians.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALEXANDRE MARCOU/MSF

Caring for the most complex hearing needs – and yours.

Trust your hearing to the same experts who care for some of the most complex hearing needs in Australia.

For almost 80 years, Hearing Australia has been helping Australians stay connected to the sounds and moments that matter. Voted the Reader's Digest #1 Most Trusted Hearing Services Provider for six years running, we're committed to providing expert hearing care across the country – from major cities to some of the most remote parts of Australia.

When you visit a Hearing Australia centre, you'll meet caring professionals who take the time to understand your lifestyle, budget, hearing needs and concerns. Whether you're checking your hearing for the first time or upgrading your hearing aids, their qualified clinicians ensure your experience is relaxed and informative. With centres nationwide, expert help is always nearby.

Take control of your hearing health today:

- Go to hearing.com.au to book a free 15-minute adult hearing check
- Call **134 432** to speak with Hearing Australia's friendly team
- Plus eligible pensioners pay $0* for fully subsidised hearing aids

**Other services may attract fees. Conditions apply under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program.*

Hearing Australia

Hearing is our expertise. ***Care*** is our purpose.

Book your free 15-minute adult hearing check at

Hearing Australia

TECHNOLOGY

Would You Sit in a Driverless Car?

(And Other Terrifying Questions of the Modern Age)

BY *Sheron White*

It is a funny thing to look back over a single lifespan and chart the steady, quiet march of human progress. If you had cornered me when I was a young girl and told me that one day, people would willingly walk into a shop and pay hard-earned money for a plastic bottle of plain water, I would have given you a proper belly laugh. Water? From a shop? Don't be ridiculous that's what taps are for!

I would have been equally amazed if you told me that the future held a magical counter-top machine capable of turning ordinary water into fizzy drinks at the touch of a button. Growing up, the weekly arrival of soft drink was a sacred family ritual. Every Wednesday, Mum would come home with three glass bottles of fizzy treasure: one Coca-Cola, one lemonade, and one sweet bottle of American cream soda.

That was it for the week. We children knew the rules: that precious haul had to be rationed with mathematical precision to stretch across the dinner table for the next three days. One modest glass each per lunchtime, and not a drop more. If someone had leaned over the table back then and whispered that in thirty years, a device called a SodaStream would let us manufacture our own bubbles on demand, it would have utterly blown my childhood mind.

Yet, here we are. The future arrived, bringing with it bottled water, counter-top fizzy drinks, and smartphones that possess more computing power than the rockets

IMAGE CREDIT: SHERON WHITE, VIA GEN AI

LESS HASSLES
MORE GOOD STUFF

Our range, customer service and locations make car rental effortless, affordable and reliable all at the same time. Get to the good stuff sooner by booking at **budget.com.au**

Voted by Australians
Winner
TRUSTED BRAND
2024-2025
Reader's Digest
Car Rentals

Budget®

that sent man to the moon. We absorbed it all, adapted, and moved on.

But now, we are standing on the precipice of a brand-new technological dawn. In the not-too-distant future, we are being asked to accept a reality that feels less like standard progress and more like a Hollywood movie set. Specifically, we are being asked to step off the curb, open a door, and sit comfortably inside a driverless car.

I must admit, the very concept blows my mind. And if I am being completely honest, it also terrifies me down to my sensible, flat-soled shoes.

The Foot on the Invisible Brake

To understand my profound hesitation about handing over the keys of civilization to a computer, you only have to look at my current situation as a passenger.

I am still a nervous wreck when I sit in a vehicle driven by my own son. Now, to be fair to him, he is not a reckless teenager. He is actually a late starter to the world of motoring he is 34 years old, possesses a fully developed prefrontal cortex, and has been driving for a little over two years.

Before he even booked his practical test, he completed his hundreds of hours of supervised driving training. He endured countless nerve-shredding lessons with his father, and equally numerous, white-knuckled sessions with me. To top it all off, we invested in an intense, five-day professional driving course. The investment paid off beautifully; he passed his test on the first go.

Yet, despite his impeccable credentials, sitting in the passenger seat while someone who only got their license two years ago takes the wheel makes me an absolute basket case.

Whenever I am in the car with him, my left foot is permanently stamped down on the passenger-side floorboard, desperately pressing an invisible brake pedal that does absolutely nothing. My poor son doesn't just get a driver; he gets a relentless, real-time, high-fidelity running commentary from the passenger seat.

"Get in the left-hand lane, Jack." "Put your indicator on now." "Watch that lady on the pavement, I think she's about to approach the zebra crossing!" "Ohhh, look out, we're about to hit a school zone!" "What in the bird was that?!"

I am bloody relentless. By the time we arrive at our destination, I feel genuinely sorry for my son. I practically tumble out of the passenger door, gasping for air, while he sits there holding the steering wheel, blinking in shell-shocked silence.

So, if that is how I behave with a flesh-and-blood human being whom I love and raised, what on earth would I be like in a driverless vehicle?

I imagine I would emerge from the journey a physical wreck, having spent forty-five minutes shouting frantic, unheeded demands at a completely empty steering wheel.

And what about the local wildlife? Imagine driving down a suburban street in Sydney or Auckland and spotting a lazy bin chicken the infamous Australian white ibis foraging for an old chip on the side of the road. As a human driver, I possess the empathy and local knowledge to slow down, giving our notoriously unbothered, feathered friend a moment to awkwardly flap out of the way.

Would an artificial intelligence understand the cultural nuance of the bin chicken? Or would my driverless car fail to recognize it as a living creature, turning my feathered friend into a tragic byproduct that ironically ends up in the bin? Will the algorithms of the future accommodate the unpredictable nature of our local wildlife?

Meanwhile, Across the Seas

While I sit in Sydney nursing my existential motoring dread, the rest of the world is moving at breakneck speed. Just recently, a massive milestone was crossed over in Europe that brought the driverless future one step closer to reality.

A Berlin-based autonomous mobility startup called Bliq secured a historic permit to operate a fleet of vehicles in Estonia. While dozens of tech companies around the globe have been testing autonomous cars for years, they have almost always done so with a human "safety

driver" sitting behind the wheel, ready to grab the controls if the computer throws a tantrum.

Bliq's new permit changes the game entirely. It marks the very first authorization in a European Union member state allowing a fleet to operate completely driverless on public roads. When these cars pull up, the driver's seat is entirely, ghostly empty.

Now, to soothe the nerves of people like me, there is a catch. The technology relies heavily on what they call "Remote Human Supervision." The car's onboard artificial intelligence handles the heavy lifting of steering, braking, and navigating city streets. However, the vehicle is constantly connected via high-speed data networks to a central control room.

Inside that control room, licensed human operators monitor the journeys remotely via live camera feeds. If the vehicle encounters a complex scenario say, an unpredictable roadblock, a sudden detour, or a confusing construction site the remote human can instantly step in via "teleoperation" to guide the vehicle safely through.

It makes me wonder: if one of these Estonian cars encountered a stray bin chicken in the middle of a Tallinn intersection, would the remote operator sitting in a control room thousands of miles away know what to do? Or would they just stare at their monitor in confusion, wondering why a giant, prehistoric-looking bird is aggressively rummaging through a roadside rubbish bin?

Interestingly, Bliq's founders, Julian Glaab and Torgen Hauschild, have stated that their ultimate goal isn't to build another standard, Uber-style ride-hailing app. Instead, they are aiming for a private and business-use vehicle subscription model. Their long-term vision is to allow everyday consumers and businesses to enjoy the privacy and convenience of "owning" a vehicle that drives, parks, and cleans itself, without ever needing a dedicated, human chauffeur.

When I read that, I couldn't help

IMAGE CREDIT: SHERON WHITE, VIA GEN AI

Free nbn® fibre upgrade

Check your eligibility at **telstra.com/fibre**
or visit your local Telstra store

Selected addresses only. Eligible plan required. Free upgrade for standard installation only. Additional charges may apply if you require equipment to be installed in a specific location.

but think: Well, that sounds like a luxury meant strictly for the very elite.

Which brings me back to my own reality. In our household, the title of Main Chauffeur does not belong to a sophisticated AI suite built in Berlin. It belongs squarely to me.

I am the one who drives to drop my partner off at football. I am the one who manoeuvres through the traffic for a family night out at a restaurant. When the evening arrives and everyone else is happily looking forward to enjoying a glass of wine or two, I am the one who automatically remains completely teetotal so I can safely pilot the family vessel back home. I don't even see the point of having a single drink if you are the designated driver; it's simply not worth the risk.

I can guarantee you that as a household chauffeur, I am significantly cheaper than a cutting-edge, subscriber-based autonomous vehicle from Europe. And I come with built-in, highly vocal opinions about parallel parking.

Mind you, my husband Arcadi would argue that I am highly vocal in the car all the time, but he is hardly one to talk. The moment Arcadi steps into the passenger seat, he undergoes a magical, sci-fi transformation of his own. He instantly turns into a sentient, automated navigation system that apparently knows absolutely everything there is to know about Sydney roads. He suddenly becomes an expert on precisely which lane I should be in, which shortcuts we should take, and exactly how many millimetres of space I have left on my left-hand side.

He becomes especially super-efficient at this navigation technique after he's had a couple of beers. It is a remarkable scientific phenomenon: the more amber fluid he consumes, the more his internal GPS updates with real-time traffic data.

I constantly have to turn to him and firmly remind him of the golden rule of the road: I am the dedicated chauffeur, you are the cargo. This, as you can imagine, has led to the odd heated debate at sixty kilometres an hour, with Jack frequently trapped in the back seat as an unwilling, shell-shocked witness to our marital motoring tribunals.

Honestly, who needs artificial intelligence when you have a husband who has had two Coronas

acting as a backseat driving algorithm?

Hailing a Ghost in China

If Europe is currently dipping its toes into the autonomous water, China has already dove headfirst into the deep end. They are the undisputed global leaders in scaling driverless robotaxis, having moved way beyond the experimental phase into full-blown commercial reality.

In major Chinese megacities like Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Chongqing, calling a completely driverless taxi is no longer a sci-fi novelty it is as ordinary as hailing a regular rideshare.

The biggest player by far is tech giant Baidu, through their autonomous ride-hailing platform called "Apollo Go" (known locally as Luobo Kuaipao). To give you an idea of the staggering scale of this operation, Baidu runs a massive fleet of over 1,000 completely driverless robotaxis in the city of Wuhan alone, operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

They aren't alone, either. Autonomous driving powerhouses like WeRide and Pony.ai are competing fiercely for dominance. WeRide recently launched its next-generation "GXR" robotaxi fleet, and they are already looking to export their technology to international markets, including right-hand-drive regions like Hong Kong.

For the average commuter in Wuhan or Beijing, the process of riding in a ghost car has become completely frictionless. You simply open a ride-hailing app on your smartphone, type in your destination, and request a vehicle exactly as you would with an Uber or a Didi. When the car pulls up to the curb with its eerily empty front seat, you walk up and enter a unique security PIN code directly onto a sleek touchscreen mounted on the rear window. The doors click open, you slide into the back seat, the front cabin is strictly off-limits, usually blocked by a clear safety screen and fasten your seatbelt.

Once inside, screens mounted on the back of the front headrests blink to life, displaying a real-time, digital recreation of exactly what the car's laser sensors are seeing. You watch digital outlines of nearby pedestrians, cyclists, and traffic

IMAGE CREDIT: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

lights dance across the monitor, giving you a strange sense of security. Finally, you tap a prominent "Start Journey" button on the screen. The steering wheel spins completely on its own, the car indicators flash, and you merge smoothly into the roaring city traffic.

It all sounds incredibly slick, efficient, and sophisticated. The type of seamless, automated world that makes you stop and marvel at what modern human engineering can achieve.

But as any writer or storyteller knows, the best tales happen when things don't go exactly to plan. And despite the incredible, multi-billion-dollar technology backing these autonomous systems, it turns out that artificial intelligence is still perfectly capable of having a spectacularly bad day at the office.

Because these driverless cars are now sharing real-world streets with millions of unpredictable humans, they are encountering everyday city challenges that simply cannot be perfectly simulated in a sterile computer laboratory. And the results can be absolutely magnificent failures.

Take that massive fleet in Wuhan, for instance. Just a few months ago, a minor system glitch rippled through the central network. Instead of smoothly navigating the urban landscape, roughly 100 Baidu robotaxis simultaneously suffered a collective digital brain-freeze. The vehicles all pulled to a dead stop in the middle of a major, multi-lane city highway. They sat there in perfect, silent alignment, completely paralysed, creating a truly monumental traffic jam that backed up for kilometers before engineers could manually reset the system and clear the road. Imagine being a commuter trapped behind a hundred driverless cars that have collectively decided to go on strike!

But my absolute favourite example of artificial intelligence

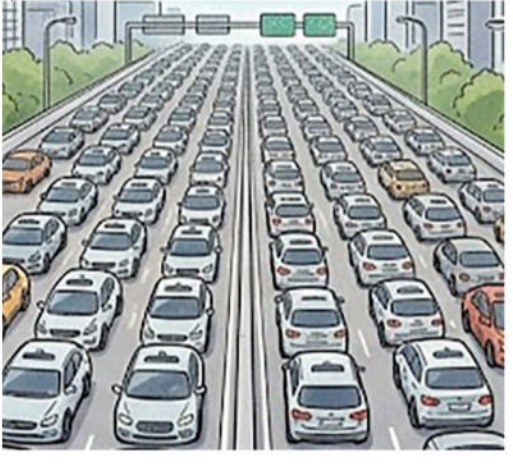
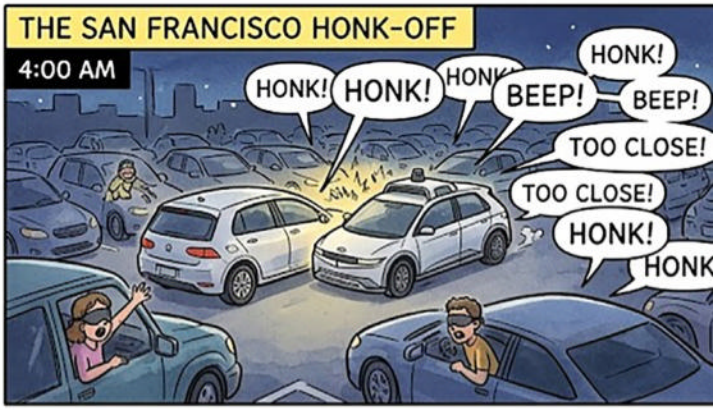


IMAGE CREDIT: SHERON WHITE, VIA GEN AI

getting completely muddled occurred in San Francisco, during what the locals now refer to as the "Great 4:00 AM Honk-Off."



In August 2024, a very famous tech giant opened its driverless taxi service to the general public in California. Between passenger fares, these empty cars were programmed to autonomously navigate back to a shared neighbourhood parking lot to rest, recharge their batteries, and quietly wait for the next morning booking.

The software engineers, being highly responsible designers, had programmed the vehicles with an excellent safety feature: if another car started backing up a little too close to them, this infamous driverless vehicle was supposed to emit a quick, defensive warning honk to alert the other driver—exactly what an alert human would do.

What the engineers completely failed to anticipate, however, was what would happen when you packed dozens of these hyper-vigilant, driverless cars into the exact same dark parking lot at the exact same time.

Around four o'clock in the morning, one empty car would attempt to autonomously parallel park. As it backed up, it would get slightly too close to a second empty car. The second car would instantly issue a sharp defensive honk. That sudden noise and movement would startle a third empty car nearby, causing it to shift into reverse to get out of the way, which would promptly trigger an aggressive honk from a fourth empty car.

Within minutes, a cascading, circular loop of digital panic would erupt. Nearby residents were jolted awake night after night at 4:00 AM to the utterly absurd spectacle of a

IMAGE CREDIT: SHERON WHITE, VIA GEN AI

Voted by Australians
Winner
TRUSTED BRAND
2018-2026
Reader's Digest
Lawn Mowers

9 YEARS IN A ROW!

AUSTRALIA'S #1 LAWN MOWER BRAND

PROUDLY AUSTRALIAN OWNED & OPERATED

VICTA.COM.AU

VICTA®

dark, completely empty parking lot filled with millions of dollars of cutting-edge automotive technology, aggressively beep-bopping, flashing their hazard lights, and honking furiously at one another. It looked for all the world like a bunch of irritable, sleep-deprived taxi drivers having a screaming argument over a fare at the end of a long shift; except there wasn't a single soul inside.

Then there was the incident where a driverless car met its match in a patch of fresh pavement. The vehicle was cruising casually down a San Francisco street when it encountered a city road maintenance crew. The workers had just finished pouring a large, smooth section of fresh, wet, liquid concrete across the roadway and had set up bright orange construction signs and barriers.

Unfortunately, the vehicle's onboard artificial intelligence looked at the fresh concrete and saw a perfectly level, grey, unobstructed surface. It simply couldn't distinguish between dry asphalt and liquid cement. Ignoring the frantic, waving arms of the construction workers, the car drove right past the warning signs and steered directly into the sludge. It instantly sank up to its shiny metal axles, becoming hopelessly and comically immobilized.

A local resident who stood on the pavement watching the crew struggle to hoist the high-tech wonder out of the mire summed it up perfectly to the local news: "It thinks it's a road and it ain't, because it ain't got a brain and it can't tell that it's freshly poured concrete."

Well, thankfully, I do have a brain, and because of that, I will proudly remain the undisputed chief chauffeur in our household. Besides, for the time being on our side of the world, you still legally need a real-life driver at the wheel. But we are due for a major law change in the Land of Oz very soon. Currently, Australian road laws strictly require a human driver to be physically and legally responsible for the vehicle at all times. Even with Tesla officially rolling out its "Full Self-Driving (Supervised)" software across Australia, the key word there is supervised. While the car can steer, brake, and navigate complex suburban streets entirely on its own, you must keep your hands on the wheel and remain legally responsible if anything goes wrong.

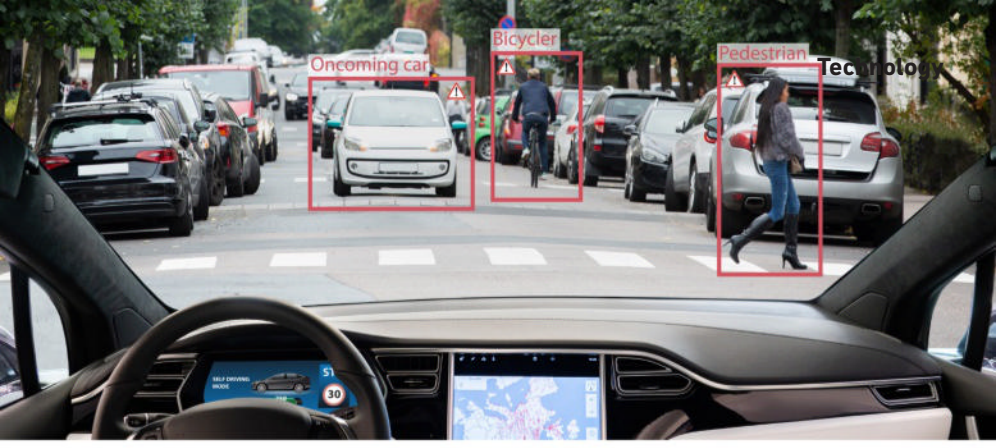


IMAGE CREDIT: SCHARFSINN86, VIA ADOBE STOCK

However, Australia's transport ministers recently agreed on a sweeping national framework that will officially allow the conditional deployment of fully automated, truly driverless vehicles starting in 2027, lets ee if that happens, the laws are forever changing.

Across the Tasman ditch in New Zealand, the situation is even more interesting. Due to the unique way their transport laws were originally drafted decades ago, New Zealand's existing legislation doesn't actually contain an explicit ban on driverless cars—simply because the lawmakers of the time couldn't conceive of a vehicle operating without a human being inside!

Provided an autonomous car meets strict baseline safety standards, New Zealand's flexible legal framework makes it a premier global testing ground. In fact, several of Tesla's highly anticipated, purpose-built "Cybercabs"—futuristic, two-seater vehicles built completely without a steering wheel or pedals—were recently spotted on a transport truck in the South Island. They were being quietly whisked away to the Southern Hemisphere Proving Grounds near Queenstown and Wanaka for secretive winter and cold-weather performance testing.

But don't panic just yet if you live in New Zealand. While the transport agency, Waka Kotahi, welcomes manufacturers to test their hardware in the alpine snow, they still maintain an incredibly stringent approval process before anyone will be permitted to launch a commercial, driverless passenger service on public city streets.

The current consensus for our corner of the world is that "robostyle" cars will start appearing

in highly controlled, limited public trials by late 2027, with actual commercial availability becoming a normal part of regular city life closer to 2030.

But even if that legislation sails through over the next few years, I think I will always stick to sitting in a car with a real, live human being behind the wheel. Specifically, a human being behind the wheel of a Volvo. Yes, I am indeed a Volvo driver.

Now, I know what you're thinking. For decades, Volvo drivers have carried a bit of a reputation on our roads for being overwhelmingly cautious, terribly sensible, and notoriously slow. There's even an old, rather cheeky joke that asks: What is the difference between a Volvo and a hedgehog? The answer, of course, is that with a hedgehog, the pricks are on the outside.

But I am proud to say I am a Volvo driver myself, and the brand has undergone a massive glow-up. Gone are the days of the boxy, tank-like sedans of the 1980s. Today, they are sleek, modern, and undeniably stylish, all while retaining their legendary status as one of the safest vehicles on the planet. Even my own boss Algy, who happens to be an absolute car buff and incredibly particular about what he hits the tarmac in, proudly drives a Volvo. If it is sophisticated enough to win over a true automotive connoisseur, it is certainly advanced enough for me.

But no matter how many high-tech safety features, collision-avoidance systems, or automated braking sensors my modern Volvo possesses, the most crucial element will always be the person in the driver's seat.

There is a certain comfort in the familiar, human rhythm of the road, complete with a living, breathing driver verbally abusing the traffic that cuts in front of them, and carefully swerving around stubborn bin chickens looking for a casual snack on the bitumen. After all, a computer algorithm will never understand the true art of defensive suburban navigation. And let's be honest, an empty, autonomous steering wheel simply isn't half as much fun to shout at.

IMAGE CREDIT: SENDAL, VIA ADOBE STOCK

Thank you again, **Australia**

For every year that there has been an award for barbecues, Weber has been voted by Australians as the Most Trusted Barbecue brand. **So thank you, Australia**

www.weber.com/au

ANDRIY ONUFRIYENKO/GETTY IMAGES

FIBER'S OPTICS

The everyday nutrient is having a major moment—and experts say its recent fame is well deserved

BY *Rachael Moeller Gorman*
FROM **EATING WELL**

I'VE SPENT MY life bored by fiber, thinking it was only good for bowel regularity or, at best, an intergenerational conversation starter. But when I scroll through recipes on social media these days, the videos showing up on my feed reveal a different and, dare I say, exciting side of this essential nutrient. One creator smashes magenta raspberries into a jammy layer for chia pudding. Another tosses sun-soaked orange sweet potatoes and vibrant green kale into a polychromatic salad. And one thing all those extremely colorful ingredients have in common? Fiber.

While we may have spent the last couple of years fixated on protein, lately the media has been buzzing with "fibermaxxing." This trend has people boosting their daily fiber intake to meet or exceed the recommended levels. Food companies are creating new or enhanced products with added fiber, like sports drinks, chips and prebiotic sodas.

"The nutrient of the year is fiber," says Andrew Reynolds, PhD, MPH, a nutrition epidemiologist at the University of Otago in New Zealand who studies dietary fiber.

So what's changed? How did fiber go from boring old constipation-preventer to a superstar of 2026? Is it social media, our growing interest in gut health or something new in the research?

What Does Fiber Actually Do in the Body?

On paper, fiber sounds unimpressive. It's not a vitamin that helps fuel our cells or a mineral that transports oxygen. It's

Dermal THERAPY

The Ultimate Hydrating Regimen to Support Your Skin Through Life's Next Chapter!

Step 1:
Cleanse without stripping skin of natural oils

Step 2:
Treat with an ultra-hydrating and non-greasy formula

Step 3:
Maintain skin hydration with 24-hour mositure lock

AUSTRALIAN MADE & OWNED

just the indigestible portion of plant foods—material our bodies can't break down or absorb.

So how can something we don't even digest wield so much power? Teresa Fung, RD, ScD, lights up when I ask. A nutritional epidemiologist, she was part of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, the group that assembled evidence for the U.S. fiber guidelines. Fung says fiber's refusal to be digested is exactly where its strength lies.

When we eat plants, she says, many different types of fibers, including cellulose, lignin, resistant starch and beta-glucans, enter the digestive tract. Fiber exists throughout plant tissues, but the highest concentrations are found in the bran and germ of cereal grains, in the skins of fruits and vegetables, and in legumes. While many people still use the terms *soluble* and *insoluble*, Fung says that experts increasingly categorize fiber as viscous (gel-forming) or nonviscous. In the small intestine, viscous fibers absorb water and form a thick gel that moves slowly, almost like honey. "Viscous fiber, because it holds water … it makes the material soft," she explains. "It prevents constipation."

HIGHER FIBER INTAKE IS LINKED TO LOWER COLORECTAL CANCER RISK.

But it does more than keep things moving. Viscous fibers, such as the beta-glucan found in oats and barley, bind cholesterol in the small intestine, helping lower levels of circulating LDL cholesterol (the "bad" cholesterol). They also slow the absorption of sugar, preventing sharp blood sugar spikes and reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Take an apple, for instance. Its fiber creates a natural scaffold around the fruit's sugars, so your body has to work through that structure before accessing the sugar. The result is a steadier release into the bloodstream. Compare this to apple juice, where the fiber is gone and the sugar hits fast.

"So instead of having a quick spike in your blood sugars, which your body then has to respond to, fiber actually slows down that spike," says Reynolds.

In the large intestine, fiber continues its work. Some types help speed waste through the colon, reducing the time that potential toxins, such as cadmium and lead, linger. And Reynolds notes that certain types of fiber are abrasive and can scrape off cells from the colon's walls as they move through, which may help promote turnover of those cells. Researchers suspect this could be one reason that higher fiber intake is linked to lower colorectal cancer risk.

The interesting thing, Fung says, is that we define fiber primarily by its relationship to us: "When humans cannot

digest parts of the plants, that's fiber." Our inability to digest fiber is fiber's gift.

TWOMEOWS/GETTY IMAGES

Fiber Feeds the Gut Microbiome

Once fiber moves through the small intestine into the large intestine, a second round of nutritional magic happens. "We are the hosts of a massive organization called the gut microbiome, and the microbes that live in that organization have the ability to digest fiber," says Reynolds.

Fermentable fibers act as prebiotics, meaning they feed beneficial bacteria. As Fung puts it, "We've got to feed those bacteria. It's like having a pet."

When microbes break down these fibers, they produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) such as acetate, butyrate and propionate. These compounds help maintain the integrity of the intestinal lining and may reduce chronic inflammation, a process linked to conditions such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Some research suggests SCFAs may also improve insulin sensitivity (which refers to how effectively your body responds to insulin and moves sugar from your bloodstream into your cells) and may stimulate the release of GLP-1, a hormone that plays a role in satiety, similar to GLP-1-activating drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy.

Even more intriguing, early-stage research is exploring how these fatty acids may influence communication between the gut and the brain. Scientists are studying what's known as the microbiota-gut-brain axis to better understand how fiber, gut bacteria and those bacteria's byproducts might affect cognitive function and mental health. One review, for example, notes that fiber supports the growth of beneficial bacteria associated with improved cognitive function.

Fiber Is the Ultimate Nutritional Multitasker

With its diverse ways of interacting with the body, fiber greases many physiological wheels. Reynolds explains

FAST FIBER

You can add fiber to your diet with whole grains, vegetables, fruits and some proteins, in addition to many ready-to-eat breakfast cereals that are high in fiber. Here are 10 options to help you get within the recommended range of 25 grams to 28 grams every day, based on nutrition estimates from the USDA.

- 3 cups of popcorn (5.8 grams)
- 1 cup of cooked white lima beans (13.2 grams)
- 1 cup of cooked broccoli (5.2 grams)
- 1 cup of raw red bell pepper (3.1 grams)
- 1 cup of raspberries (8 grams)
- 1 grapefruit (5 grams)
- 1 medium apple, with skin (4.8 grams)
- 1 ounce of whole pumpkin seeds (5.2 grams)
- 1 tablespoon of chia seeds (4.1 grams)
- 1 ounce of almonds (3.5 grams)

that fiber does everything "from blunting sugars to reducing the amount of circulating cholesterol to producing the benefits from the microbiome, as well as having effects on things like satiety and hunger."

Reynolds worked on the 2023 World Health Organization recommendation for fiber, in which he and his colleagues analyzed 58 clinical trials and 185 prospective studies to examine the link between fiber intake and disease. The findings were striking. Besides its link to lower colorectal cancer risk, higher fiber intake is also associated with lower body weight, blood pressure and total cholesterol, as well as a reduced risk of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes.

Other recent research adds to the picture. An observational and genetic study last year found that people consuming more than 18 grams of fiber per day had a reduced risk of stroke. Another study from last year found that fiber-rich, plant-forward diets were linked to fewer high-risk coronary plaques, while lower-fiber diets were associated with more unstable plaques that could rupture and lead to heart attacks. Going beyond cardiovascular health, a cross-sectional study of 30,000 people found that daily fiber intake of between 14 grams and 28 grams was associated with a 27% lower risk of developing osteoarthritis compared to lower daily fiber intake.

And here's the cherry on top. In 2024, researchers pooled data from 64 cohort studies following more than 3.5 million people over many years. Those consuming higher amounts of fiber had a 23% lower risk of death from any cause compared to those consuming the least.

Fiber Steps into the Spotlight

Taken together, the evidence helps explain why fiber is having a moment. Colorectal cancer rates are rising among younger adults, and dietary patterns higher in fiber may play a protective role. Meanwhile, many people are taking GLP-1 medications such as Ozem-

pic and Wegovy for diabetes and weight management. These drugs slow gastric emptying and can cause constipation and digestive discomfort, so health-care providers commonly advise people taking them to prioritize fiber to support regularity, stabilize blood sugar and promote satiety.

In other words, fiber is showing up exactly where modern health concerns are. And that raises a practical question: If fiber is doing all of this behind the scenes, how much fiber do we actually need to reap the benefits?

The short answer: Probably more than you're getting. It's not just people on GLP-1 drugs who need to eat more fiber. When I asked scientists and dietitians how much fiber a typical person should eat, they invariably said, "More."

According to Reynolds' meta-analysis for the World Health Organization recommendations, eating 25 grams to 29 grams of fiber per day may reduce your risk of chronic disease and help you live a healthy life.

The FDA's Nutrition Facts label similarly advises consuming around 28 grams of fiber per day; the "%DV" (percent daily value) you'll see there is based on this number. Most American adults consume about half that. (Note that an individualized fiber intake recommendation depends on factors including age and sex.)

Whole foods remain the gold standard for getting your fiber, delivering it alongside vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients that work together in ways that extracted fibers likely can't replicate. However, fiber-enriched products and supplements may help fill gaps.

"If you can get it from foods, great," says Reynolds. "But if you can't achieve that amount with food, go to the supplement pathway." Before beginning a supplement or bumping up your fiber intake significantly, check with your health-care provider to ensure the change meets your needs and won't interact with any medications or other supplements you're taking.

Experts suggest ramping up slowly. It takes time for your gut to get used to more fiber. Suddenly doubling your intake, for instance, could lead to bloating or an uncomfortable stomach. Also, make sure to drink plenty of water as you go—it will help reduce initial discomfort. Fiber works best when it has fluid to move with it.

So though *fibermaxxing* may be a buzzy term, the science behind it is solid. Luckily, fiber-rich foods are rarely dull. They're crunchy, colorful, satisfying and often right in your pantry or produce section. (I'm going to stir a can of black beans into my family's taco meat tonight. Easy—and yummy.) In a sea of extreme diets and quick fixes, eating more fiber is a trend wave I'm happy to ride. R

EATINGWELL.COM (MARCH 15, 2026) © 2026 PEOPLE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRINTED/TRANSLATED FROM EATINGWELL AND PUBLISHED WITH PERMISSION OF PEOPLE INC. REPRODUCTION IN ANY MANNER IN ANY LANGUAGE IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

Voted by Australians
Winner
TRUSTED BRAND
2026
Reader's Digest
Confectionery
THANK YOU
FOR VOTING US
READER'S DIGEST MOST TRUSTED
CONFECTIONERY BRAND
Cadbury
THE COLOUR PURPLE IS A TRADE MARK USED UNDER LICENCE.

LIFE WELL LIVED

Finding Refuge in Each Other

A family takes in a student during a school shooting

BY *Brett W. Summers*
FROM **THE BOSTON GLOBE**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Clare Mallison*

We were standing in our kitchen in Providence, Rhode Island, last December when Dave got the text alert from Brown University. I had just begun setting out ingredients for dinner.

"Oh no," he said, his shoulders pulled down by the horror of it. "There's a live shooter at Brown."

Dave, my spouse, teaches in the medical school. I followed him into the living room as he looked at his phone for information. "They're already reporting two dead," he said. "Oh God." We were safe in our house but uneasy, imagining the terror in that building just 2 miles away.

Then he said, "Wait, did you put out the tofu?" I had, yes, both blocks. But the dog had eaten half of it—gone in an instant of our inattention. Now what? That was our dinner.

"I'll dash out and get more," I offered, trying to salvage some piece of the evening. Safety demanded that I not drive toward Brown, so I went the other way to a corner grocery store, where I overheard the owner say they had a student hanging out in their restaurant across the street.

"A Brown student?" I asked, tofu in hand.

"Yes, yes," he said. "She can't get back to the university. But it's too cold outside, so she's at the restaurant staying warm now."

I didn't have my wits about me to head right across the street, but once I got home, Dave encouraged me to go back to extend an offer of refuge.

At the restaurant, I approached the student, who had started eating her dinner, the shock of the day's events reflected in her dark eyes. She accepted my invitation.

"We have dogs," I said, once we were in the car.

"That's OK. I have a dog at home. Tofu."

"What?"

"Tofu—that's his name." I took in the strange coincidence. "Are you connected to Brown?" she asked.

SHE'D COME ALONG SO EASILY, ESPECIALLY IN THE MIDST OF SUCH TURMOIL.

My answer seemed to put her at ease, and she looked even more relaxed when we pulled into the driveway after a few blocks. I loved that she'd come along so easily, especially in the midst of such turmoil in the world at large.

Once we entered the house, the woodstove warmth and the smell of spiced butter for our Nashville tofu sliders made us feel cozy. Our guest sat at the kitchen table and texted her parents, her brother (a senior at Brown, locked down in his dorm) and her friends that she was safe.

Our teenage daughter, Hazel, came downstairs, and we all talked over dinner. Something about having this student in the house centered and comforted us. We made her tea and gave her a fleece to keep warm.

She sat down at our piano and played a Tom Waits song; Dave played the guitar. All the while, we kept checking our phones for updates.

As the night wore on, more links between us came to light. When her high school principal texted her, I realized she'd gone to the same school my father had attended. She mentioned she'd lived in northern Thailand when she was little. I texted my rowing partner, who also grew up in Thailand, confirming that she, too, was from Chiang Mai.

The young woman seemed comfortable from the moment she came in the door and slipped off her shoes right up to bedtime, when we put her in the room that used to be our son's—he's now in California. It didn't matter that she was in a house belonging to people she didn't know.

And we felt that she had returned us to a place of humanity, where everything we shared held more importance than locking the door.

FROM THE BOSTON GLOBE (JAN. 7, 2026), © 2026 BOSTON GLOBE MEDIA PARTNERS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USED UNDER LICENSE.

NexGard®

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PARASITE PROTECTION RANGE FOR DOGS.*

Trusted protection in a tasty chew.

See product labels for full claim details and directions for use. *Based on industry reported Sales Data for AU MAT Q3 2025. Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health Australia Pty Ltd. Level 1, 78 Waterloo Road, North Ryde NSW 2113. ABN 53 071 187 285. ®NexGard and NexGard SPECTRA are registered trademarks of the Boehringer Ingelheim Group. PET-0049-2026

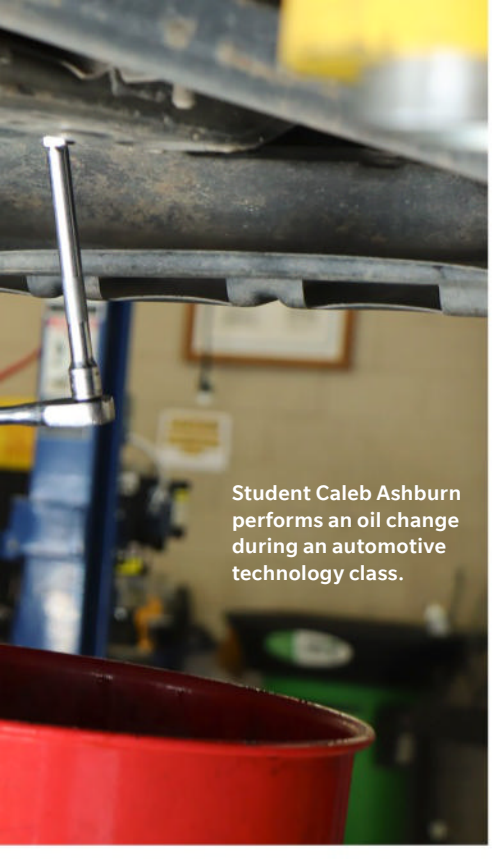
ANDREW WOOLFOLK/LOUISA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS VIA WASHINGTON POST

EVERYDAY HEROES

The Best Kind of Auto Care

A learning experience for students leads to freedom for single mothers

BY *Sydney Page* FROM **THE WASHINGTON POST**



Student Caleb Ashburn performs an oil change during an automotive technology class.

JESSICA RADER KNEW she was getting a car. Still, when the keys to a 2007 gold Prius were handed to her, she wept.

"It's not just about the car," says Rader. "It's about community."

Students at Louisa County High School in Mineral, Virginia, spent several months repairing and refurbishing the car before they presented it to Rader, a single mother of three.

For the past eight years, students enrolled in the school's automotive technology program have been reviving timeworn vehicles and giving them to single mothers for free.

The giveaway program is done in partnership with Giving Words, a local nonprofit that supports single mothers, mainly through car repairs and donations.

"A broken-down car means she can lose her job, miss her appointments," says Eddie Brown, who founded Giving Words with his wife, Ginny Brown, in 2018. Single mothers are relying on Ubers, buses and family, "and some of those can be unreliable," he says.

The Browns were both single parents before they met. "The idea came from our own experiences being single parents and struggling with transportation issues," Eddie says. He taught himself how to do simple car repairs and soon began fixing other people's cars in his driveway.

Eddie and Ginny focused on helping single mothers because around 80% or more of single parents in the United States are mothers. The Browns formed partnerships with local repair shops, as well as Louisa County High School and Charlottesville Area Technical Education Center, to be able to do more repairs and help more women. The cars are donated by individuals and automotive businesses.

Since its inception, Giving Words has provided more than 60 cars to single mothers in need of a vehicle. High school students worked on about half of those cars, and the rest were refurbished by repair shops.

High school students present a single mom with a car that they refurbished.

"Getting the students involved has a direct impact on them. ... It builds character and empathy," Eddie says. "Everything has a ripple effect."

About 20 students work on each car, handling tasks such as fluid changes and battery testing, as well as repairs on brakes, tires, and heating and cooling systems. "They get a real shop experience," says Shane Robertson, an automotive teacher at the school. "You've got real life intersecting with education."

When a car is complete, it's towed to a shop to undergo a safety inspection before students present it to the new owner.

Before winter break last year, Holden Pekary, 16, and his classmates presented a repaired vehicle to a woman with a baby. "We raised the garage doors, and we all clapped for her," he says. "It was nice. I put the license plate on the car for her, and she had a little baby in her arms." Knowing where the cars are going, Pekary says, is motivating. "It gives you more of a purpose."

Rader says she remains stunned by the students' dedication: "It gave me a different perspective on adolescents. There was nothing in return for them."

She has three sons—ages 15, 9 and 5—one of whom lives with his father. Before the students fixed up the car for her, Rader often relied on lifts from friends and family to get to work and to get her children to activities.

Rader had long struggled with drug addiction, she says, and after becoming sober in March 2022, she lived in a transitional home, where she was told about Giving Words. "It wasn't even three months later, and they gave me a car," Rader says. "Because I had that vehicle, I was able to go from a part-time job to a full-time job; I was able to start school."

She finally had a car to drive her sons to and from school, to doctor appointments and extracurricular activities. Rader says the students' generosity has left a lasting impression. "There are people," she says, "who just want to help people."

THE WASHINGTON POST (JAN. 12, 2026),
COPYRIGHT © 2026 BY THE WASHINGTON POST.

ANDREW WOOLFOLK/LOUISA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS VIA WASHINGTON POST

Solahart

GO SOLAR
WITH THE BRAND AUSSIES TRUST

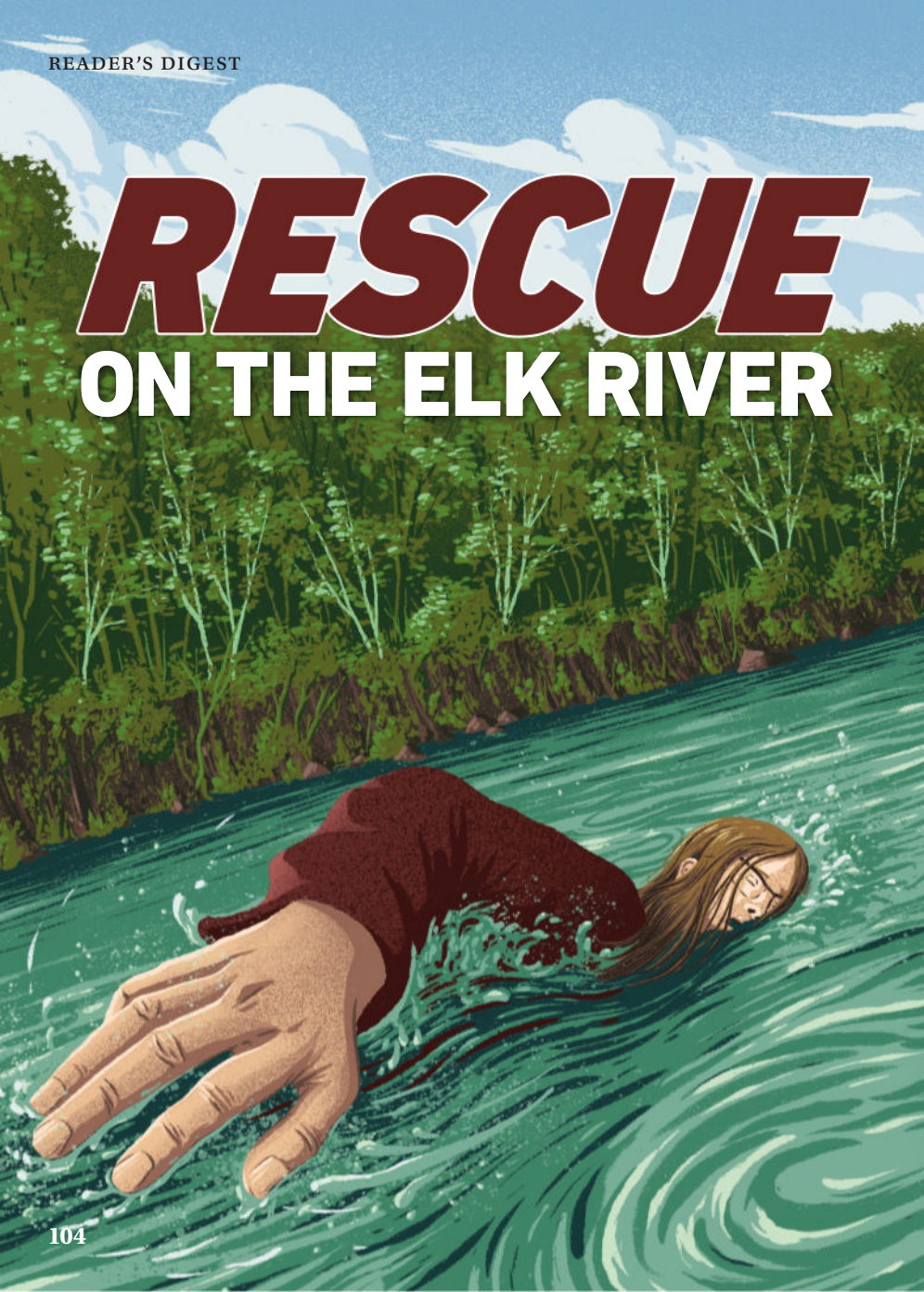
Take control of your energy future with a total home energy solution from Solahart, Australia's trusted solar experts since 1953. If you're ready to go solar, contact your local Solahart dealer today.

GET SMART
GET SOLAHART

70 YEARS IN 2023

solahart.com.au

RESCUE ON THE ELK RIVER



The kayaker desperately clung to a branch after falling into the cold, remote river. Would anyone find him before he was swept away?

BY *Derek Burnett*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Mark Frudd*

Even in Alabama, late March is early in the year for fishing, but this was 31-year-old Caleb Bennett's third outing of the season. It was midmorning on Good Friday, March 29, 2024, when he loaded his 10-foot kayak into his pickup and drove, fittingly enough, to where Easter Ferry Road crosses the Elk River, about 25 minutes from his home in Athens, Alabama. His was the only vehicle parked at the out-of-the-way boat launch, a simple clearing surrounded by empty woods. From the concrete boat ramp jutting out of the steep riverbank downstream from the parking area, it was a clear view 100 feet upstream to the bridge over the river.

Bennett had the day off work from his job as a warehouse manager and distribution dispatcher for an industrial supply company. His plan was to cruise upstream past the bridge until he found a creek mouth, fish it for bass, catfish or crappie for a couple of hours, then hurry home to catch his 4-year-old daughter's T-ball game that afternoon.

The water temperature was just over 50 degrees, and the day was sunny, in the mid-60s. That was a nice change after the rainy weather the week before, which had swollen the river and amplified its current, visible against the opposite bank some 160 feet away. On the shore, Bennett loaded the kayak with three rods and reels, bait, a tackle box and a fish finder. At the stern, he attached a small trolling motor.

Something was missing, though—he'd forgotten his outriggers at home. Normally he'd fasten them, pontoon-like, on either side of the little kayak to improve its stability. He looked out at the muddy river. Its surface was smooth, but sticks and leaves rushed past in the current. He'd have to be extra careful.

A burly man standing 6 foot 3 and weighing more than 240 pounds, Bennett eased himself into the boat, started the motor and pushed off, angling upriver toward the far bank, which was less obstructed by overhanging branches and debris. He'd gotten most of the way across when a confusion of currents—probably caused by the supports of the bridge—began spinning him around.

Uh-oh, he thought. *This is probably not a good idea.*

Working the tiller, he pulled the kayak out of its spin and nosed it upriver. But almost immediately, it fell into another spin.

OK, this is definitely not a good idea. Let's head back.

He pointed the kayak back toward the boat launch, but a crosscurrent broadsided him, and the little craft flipped. One second he'd been sitting upright; the next he was submerged in the shockingly cold, steadily moving water.

FOR 40-YEAR-OLD John Reinhardt to have ended up at that same spot on the

Elk River that morning is what believers might call a miracle and skeptics might call a fluke. He was spending the Easter break camping with his four kids, along with his sister Pattie Smith and her four children, on family land about 11 miles outside Athens. His own kids, who ranged in age from 3 to 13, had surprised him by asking if they could go fishing during their camping week. Reinhardt couldn't remember the last time he'd fished, but he had agreed and bought some gear. There were plenty of good spots closer to their land, but Reinhardt, without being able to articulate why, decided they'd fish near the Elk River's Easter Ferry Road bridge.

While Smith and her kids went to collect some more gear, Reinhardt and his children pulled into the parking area around 11:30 a.m. The kids were chattering excitedly while Reinhardt parked and turned off the engine. As he stepped out of the truck, a loud gunshot rang out, alarmingly close by. He ducked back into the truck and retrieved his pistol from its locked case under the driver's seat.

"I want you kids to stay here," he said. "I'm going to see what's going on."

Even as he spoke, a second shot shattered the peace of the still day.

Gun in hand, Reinhardt stalked toward the far edge of the clearing, scanning it closely as he went. What was this? Someone "plinking" (casual target shooting)? Or was it something more serious, like a shoot-out? Or ...

A third ringing shot cemented in his mind the other possibility: These were distress shots.

"Hello?" he called out.

From the river, he heard a faint "hello" in reply.

"Are you good or not good?" he yelled.

"Not good," came the answer.

Reinhardt ran toward the riverbank.

THINGS HAD GONE from bad to worse for Bennett. When he'd fallen into the river, the frigid water had taken his breath away, jangling every nerve. Surfacing, he saw the kayak drifting beside him, belly-up. He tried to swim for it, but his clothing had become instantly waterlogged, and his rubber boots had filled with water. His life jacket, buoyed by the water, jammed up against his throat, choking off his breath.

Swallowing back panic, he kicked off his boots and swam toward the boat. *If I can climb back up in there* … Kicking hard, he threw his arms over the hull and clutched at the submerged decking on the other side. Then he leaned back to flip the kayak—it didn't budge. He tried a few times, but the boat seemed impossible to turn over.

Bennett knew he was wasting his time and energy while the current tugged him inexorably along. He needed to get back to land, but he'd never be able to climb up the steep banks of the near shore. His only hope was the boat ramp, some 145 feet back across the river. When he looked at his target, he realized with a jolt that he didn't have much time—the current had already brought him dangerously far downstream. If it swept him past the ramp, there wasn't another place to come ashore for miles, and he'd be overcome with exhaustion and hypothermia long before he got there.

He bid his kayak and gear farewell and began swimming furiously toward the boat ramp. The ill-fitting life jacket continued to choke him, hindering his breathing and his ability to swim. He unzipped it and tore it off, and the current snatched it from his grasp. Unencumbered but now in more danger than ever, he kept swimming. Eddies from the currents washed over him and filled his mouth with water. Already, the cold was stiffening his limbs.

Bennett looked up. There was no way he was going to make it to the ramp. But there in the water, some 25 feet from shore, was an overhanging branch from a large poplar tree growing right beside the ramp. If he could catch it, maybe he could pull himself to shore.

His hope renewed, he swam with everything he had. *If I don't make it to that branch, I could die here*, he thought. Without a second to spare, he reached up and caught the branch just before the current swept him out of reach.

It was so slender—perhaps an inch in diameter—that he wondered whether it would snap. With his weight pulling on it, the end of the branch now lay in the

water. Bennett pulled his elbows over it and found that he could rest with his legs trailing behind him in the current. But now what? Let go, and swim the remaining 25 feet to shore? The current would carry him downriver away from the ramp. Climb up the branch? That, he realized, had been a wild fantasy, given his weakened state.

Then Bennett remembered: *My phone!* But when he reached into his pocket, he found that the phone was gone. As he checked his other pocket, his hand brushed against the Glock 21 pistol he always wore on his hip when he fished, in case of snakes or coyotes. Maybe he could signal for help.

He drew the pistol from its holster and held it in front of him. He had 13 rounds in the magazine. Shivering, he watched the bridge, waiting for a vehicle to show itself.

At last a car came into sight, and he fired three shots toward the opposite shore. The car didn't stop.

Minutes went by. Then another car, another three shots. No luck.

Bennett's situation was growing desperate. He could scarcely feel his legs, and he could tell that his cognition was slowing. At last another vehicle passed over the bridge. He fired once, twice—and then nothing. He ejected the dud round and fired a third shot. The car kept going.

Three rounds left.

Another car droned by on the bridge. Bennett fired his final three shots and

dropped the now-useless pistol into the river. But a second after his very last bullet hit the opposite shore, he heard a voice. "Hello?"

"HOW ARE YOU FEELING?" Reinhardt called to Bennett.

"Freezing cold," Bennett said. "Man, I'm barely able to hold on."

"I'm going to get you out of there," Reinhardt said. "Hold on."

Bennett could not have picked a better rescuer than John Reinhardt. These days, Reinhardt worked as an information technology project manager and volunteered as a youth pastor, but he had fought in Afghanistan in the U.S. Army infantry, had received training in combat water survival and combat trauma, and had been a certified lifeguard back in high school. As a disaster-recovery volunteer, he'd pulled people out of car wrecks, set bones and rescued puppies. He saw his skills and experiences as a responsibility to help others.

Reinhardt ran back to his truck. "There's somebody in the water who needs help," he told his kids. "I'm going to have to get into the water." He turned to his eldest, 13-year-old Maelie. "I'm going to need you to help me," he told her. He instructed 8-year-old Macie to stay in the vehicle and look after her younger two siblings, ages 4 and 3.

He knew it was only a matter of time before the exhausted Bennett lost his

grip on the branch and was carried away by the current. If only he'd brought a rope along, he could have thrown it out to Bennett and hauled him ashore.

Unfortunately, he didn't have all his usual emergency equipment with him, as he'd recently bought this truck and hadn't yet transferred over all his gear. He and Maelie scrounged for any kind of rope in their vehicle and Bennett's. All they came up with was a 6-foot ratchet strap, an oversized trash bag and a roll of duct tape.

With the bag and the duct tape, Reinhardt knew, they could improvise a flotation device that he could use. And Maelie could hang on to the ratchet strap in case he could use it later. He would have to get into the water and swim Bennett back to shore—a dreadful thought, considering how much Reinhardt despised cold water.

Still standing next to his truck, he called 911 and gave the dispatcher a "nine-line"—a terse, just-the-facts accounting of what was going on and what was needed. He explained that he'd be getting in the water, so the first responders should prepare for the possibility of two victims, not just one. The dispatcher had more questions, but Reinhardt cut in. "Hey, I need to get off the phone. I got to go help this guy."

He hung up and handed the phone to Maelie. "Be ready to call 911 if anything happens to me," he told her.

They ran down to the water, where he swooped the trash bag through the air to inflate it, then taped it shut. With Maelie by his side, he said a quick prayer. "Give me a calm heart, God. Guide my actions. Protect him, and protect me."

The base of the tree that Bennett was clinging to stood just downstream of the boat ramp, leaning at a 45-degree angle over the water. Reinhardt stripped down to his underwear, climbed along the trunk above the current for a few feet, drew a breath and jumped into the water, holding the makeshift flotation device above his head.

REINHARDT'S HEAD WENT UNDERWATER AGAIN AND AGAIN, AND HE HAD TO FIGHT TO RESURFACE.

Within seconds, he reached Bennett. "Here, hold on to this," he gasped, passing Bennett the inflated trash bag. But Bennett couldn't grasp the bag with his numb fingers, and it drifted off down the river. *My fault, not his*, Reinhardt thought. *I made it too big to hold on to.*

"It's OK," he said. "We're going to swim to shore."

"I don't think I can use my legs," Bennett managed to say. He'd been in the water for nearly an hour and was in the throes of Stage 2 hypothermia, with difficulty speaking and thinking, numbness, loss of motor function.

Bennett draped his arms over Reinhardt's shoulders from behind, and they set out. Almost immediately, the

current and Bennett's weight pushed Reinhardt's head underwater. He was a strong swimmer, but his 5-foot-9 frame weighed only about 155 pounds, a good 90 pounds less than Bennett. He'd taken on a herculean task.

He swam with all his strength, angling toward the boat ramp, desperate to hit shore at the clearing, where they'd have a chance of making it up the bank, which was about 8 feet high. But it wasn't working.

Again and again, Reinhardt's head went underwater and he had to fight to resurface, gasping and gagging. Long experience had taught him to tamp down panic, but now he could feel it coming over him. *Oh, crap*, Reinhardt thought, *we're both going down the river*. He had nothing left in the tank—his muscles felt dead with fatigue.

So he said a silent prayer: *God, I need your strength right now to help him.*

With a sudden burst of energy, he finished the upstream swim, coming to rest at the base of the tree, where a mass of its roots jutted out of the muddy bank.

The water was too deep to stand, so Reinhardt laid Bennett's chest over a slick muddy outcropping and guided his arms through loops formed by the tree's roots. The two men lay there for a long moment, spent—vomiting from exertion and from swallowing water. Now, how to get Bennett up onto dry land?

WITHIN A COUPLE of minutes, a deputy from the Limestone County Sheriff's Office arrived and peered down over the bank. "What do you need?" he called.

"Rope," Reinhardt answered. "Do you have any?"

"I don't."

"Maelie," Reinhardt said, "give him the ratchet strap."

The deputy came partway down the embankment and lowered the strap to Reinhardt, who used it to fashion a makeshift harness, passing it around Bennett's chest and fastening it to his belt loop. By now, Bennett was slipping in and out of consciousness.

For 10 minutes, the deputy pulled from above while Reinhardt pushed from below. But the deputy couldn't get any footing on the steep, muddy embankment, and Reinhardt, barefoot and in his underwear, had nothing to stand on. He'd been in the water for at least 20 minutes and was in the early stages of hypothermia himself—shivering and going numb in his extremities.

At last, a volunteer firefighter showed up with a 20-foot rope. He passed one end down to Reinhardt, who quickly tied it to the ratchet strap and then scrambled up the bank. The three of them, standing on dry ground, pulled, but Bennett kept slipping back down the bank, his limbs and clothing snagging in the roots.

"Hold on," Reinhardt said.

He climbed back down the bank and slid, again, into the frigid water. He set his right shoulder under Bennett's butt, dug his hands and feet into the muddy bank, and called out "One, two, three,

lift!" With all his strength, he pushed up while the firefighter and deputy pulled on the rope. Bennett's nearly lifeless body rose a few inches.

Reinhardt braced himself and called the cadence again. Inch by inch, using every ounce of their energy, the three men hauled Bennett up onto dry ground. He lay there, unable to move, scarcely able to speak.

Smith had arrived with the gear, and when she saw her brother shivering in his boxers, covered in mud and exhausted, her mouth dropped open. "Just another day in the life of John Reinhardt," he quipped.

Moments later, the EMS arrived, loaded Bennett onto a stretcher and took him to Athens-Limestone Hospital. His core temperature had dropped into the low 80s, near the threshold of potentially deadly Stage 3 hypothermia. He later estimated he'd been in the water for nearly 90 minutes. He missed his daughter's T-ball game, but by that evening, he was resting in his parents' home with his little girl by his side. He was sore and exhausted, yet blessedly alive.

It wouldn't be until almost bedtime that evening, huddled beside the campfire at his family's campsite, that Reinhardt would really feel warm again. But for the moment, back at the Easter Ferry Boat Launch, he dried himself off, put his clothes back on—and unloaded the kids' rods and reels from the truck. They'd come here to fish, after all. R

WHY DID THE (RUBBER) CHICKEN CROSS THE ROAD?

Feeling the creep of a midlife crisis, I decided to break the strangest world record I could find

BY *Byard Duncan*
FROM **SLATE**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Bill Ledger*

WE THINK OF chickens as flightless birds, but they're not. In fact, it's common for them to travel modest distances via stints of explosive flapping. This phenomenon, known as burst flight, is sort of beautiful to watch: Chickens leap upward at a sharp angle, then start pumping with manic abandon. As their wings cut tight figure eights, they shoot forward and drop into a glide. They never get very far, but there's something existentially profound in the effort. Chickens fly as if they're trying to escape the inevitable.

Much of this is true of rubber chickens too. To get airborne, they first need a hefty shot of kinetic force. From there, it's a question of how far this force can take them in defiance of gravity's pull. Like living chickens, they tend to land gracelessly.

The first rubber chicken I ever threw didn't go very far. Part of this was simple physics: The wind was against me, and the projectile was large and light. The other factors were physical. The vessel propelling my rubber chicken into the air was the right arm of a 38-year-old male. I am 5 foot 10 and weigh 165 pounds. I am not—nor have I ever been—elite at any form of sport. I am becoming familiar with the slow betrayals of aging. Each morning, my heels and lower back ache for reasons that elude me. Gravity tugs at my love handles and salt-stubbled jowls, and I suspect that I'm slowly becoming lactose intolerant.

If you'd like the literal reason I started throwing rubber chickens, it's because I wanted to break the Guinness World Record for the longest throw of one. If you want the more honest reason, it's because I had recently sunk into a midlife crisis.

One morning last year, I woke up unemployed and profoundly depressed, questioning whether the time and care I'd poured into my career had been worth anything at all. It didn't feel like it. It felt as if I'd fallen asleep and woken up 10 years behind many of my smarter and more charismatic peers. My children, meanwhile, were no longer doughy cherubs, reliant on my strength and my cereal-reaching capabilities. They had taken to stomping around the house, slamming doors and making Spotify playlists. Recently, my son handed me a fatherhood report card he'd drawn with a "Z-minus" grade on it.

Because it is in my nature, I began speaking to experts, who assured me that a lot of this is normal. Normal to experience angst and uncertainty during this time of life, normal to have doubts and take stock. But something about my scenario seemed dire. My brain chemicals had edited together a nonstop blooper reel of my failures. I needed a win.

The rubber chicken idea came one summer evening while my wife clipped the kids' toenails. As they watched Guinness highlights on YouTube, I saw the current record holder, a Turkish security

Like people, rubber chickens come in all shapes and sizes.

guard named Osman Gürcü, loft his own toy chicken a distance of 114 feet and 9 inches across a soccer field. Gürcü seemed roughly as athletic as I was, and a little older. His throwing technique involved a sort of javelin-style stutter step, followed by a primal scream.

I chuckled at first, marveling at the inanity. Then I remembered the calamitous nature of my own affairs. Who was I to judge? Wasn't there actually something dignified about Going For It, whatever *it* might be? And why not a rubber chicken, America's trusty totem of self-parody? Desperate times called for farcical measures.

My body ignited with a hot resolve. I had to break this record. I had to make a mark—to prove something, the exact contours of which could be sorted out later.

But first I would need to prepare.

"SO WOULD THIS be some sort of discus motion, then?"

It was late September, and I had finally reached Adrien Mellion, the proprietor of a California-based track and field training outfit called ThrowsLab. He was the first (and only) throwing coach to respond to my inquiries, and I could hear his bewilderment as we spoke over the phone. He had ignored my previous emails, believing them to be a joke or scam. But now, perhaps picking up on the anxious tremolo in my voice, he agreed to a one-on-one session.

BYARD DUNCAN

We met two weeks later at an athletic field in Modesto, California, an hour and a half from my home in Oakland. Mellion is sturdily built, with a gravelly laugh and a Clorox-white smile. The thing all the great throwers have, he explained, is an obsession with consistency: Throwing is all about repetition and small adjustments that might earn you a tiny edge here or there.

"You can't get too high; you can't get too low," he told me. "You're gonna have bad throws. That's why we throw so much in practice. You just try to balance it out—but it's never a finished product."

Mellion waited for his small class of throwers to wrap up, then took me to a nearby discus field. He instructed me to grasp my rubber chicken by the neck and plant my back foot. I needed to bend my knee and pivot through the big toe, winding up for a sort of hip-powered whipping motion.

The goal was to release my chicken at a 45-degree angle as my right arm flew around. I wound up again and again, imagining myself delivering superhero-strength blows to some monstrous villain. Mellion watched closely, occasionally adjusting my posture or reminding me to breathe.

It was surprising to witness the seriousness he brought to my task. He was focused on the small details, undaunted by the absurdity. It felt as if I had brought him a puzzle he couldn't resist trying to solve. After about half an hour of watching me throw, Mellion took out his phone and tapped

Everyone (even the chickens) brought a "heads-down seriousness" to the task.

BYARD DUNCAN

open its measurement app. He reported the distance: roughly 75 feet. It was well shy of Gürcü's record, but honestly a lot better than I'd expected.

"I think you can break this record," he said, smiling.

He wasn't alone. A few weeks later, I found myself face-to-face, via Google Meet, with Gürcü himself. It was late at night in Turkey, but he was full of energy—thrilled that someone in the United States had taken an interest in his record setting. He had drunk a cup of coffee after getting off work to prepare for our meeting.

We began with a review of the Guinness ground rules. The rubber chicken could be any size, make and weight as long as it was "commercially available." The toy couldn't be modified in any way, and I had to grip its body, not its neck or head, during my toss.

There would be no official Guinness representative at the site of my attempt in Oakland. Instead, I had to invite two witnesses to film the throw, as well as a professional surveyor to measure the distance and slope of the terrain. Then I needed to upload that evidence, along with a cover letter, to the Guinness website.

I had been nervous to tell Gürcü I was coming for his record. But when I did, he was elated and eager to talk shop. To maximize my distance, Gürcü explained, I would need a chicken whose weight exceeded 150 grams (about 5⅓ ounces) and whose height was short enough that it didn't catch too much drag in midair. He held up his winning chicken, a 13-inch latex bird with a crimson head and cartoonish blue eyes. He'd found it at a local pet shop.

As we finished our conversation, Gürcü urged me to stay in touch with questions about technique or chicken dimensions. He followed up with a barrage of direct messages on Instagram: words of advice, links to chickens he thought might be up to the task. It was a strange feeling, being lifted up by him and Coach Mellion in this way. Odd to have two strangers in my corner, invested in my trivial quest for dubious renown. It was also sort of contagious.

"This is when I actually realize the importance and the magic of Guinness—the value it brings," Gürcü had told me before we said goodbye. "Through Guinness and the contest, I have something to show my kids in the future."

IT'S COMMON—fashionable even—for each generation to diagnose its conditions as uniquely, ahistorically dire. But could there finally be something to that sentiment for millennials, with the youngest of our cohort turning 30 and the oldest around 45?

Like every generation that has come before us, we're inking an unsteady truce with our own mortality, while also trying to decipher how, exactly, to enter our second acts with dignity.

But then there's also the world to grapple with. A recent survey about

millennial midlife crises found that more than half of us don't think we've succeeded in adulthood, 38% of us don't feel mentally stable, and a staggering 87% don't believe that older generations understand the challenges we're up against. More than other age groups captured in another recent study, we're burning through our paid time off to simply lie down and sleep. Unlike middle-aged adults of yore, we wake up each morning to phones that barf out bleak factoids about climate change, political violence, racism and automation. Our economy, meanwhile, is little more than a plaything for man-child billionaires who have finally grown too lazy to disguise their misdeeds. Staggering wealth inequality has become the cloud cover of our daily lives. Forget affording the ill-advised red Mazda Miata. We can't afford even the divorce.

Experts agree that millennials' circumstances are unique. "A lot of the things that go on in midlife really haven't changed," says Margie Lachman, a psychology professor at Brandeis University who has studied the concept for 30 years. "What's changed, to a certain extent, is the external forces, or the environment, or things that are affecting people's ability to accomplish the goals that they had set for midlife."

Yet she's also quick to point out that the stereotypical trappings of a midlife crisis—sports cars, affairs, leather jackets—are mostly just Hollywood hogwash. In fact, midlife can present a happy array of opportunities: You're old enough to have mastered a vocation or hobby, yet not so old that your skills have deteriorated. As proof of this, Lachman, in studying the output of inventors, has found that their most productive periods occurred in their late 30s and early 40s.

I wondered if my chicken-throwing record might count in the same way. After all, wasn't I deploying an entire array of skills—physical, intellectual, administrative—that few others would have the persistence to meld in such a way? And when all was said and done, wouldn't I enjoy telling my children, my friends, that I was the world leader in a lone, esoteric feat? Was I not at the peak of my powers?

"Don't think you're running out of time," Lachman told me. "Realize you have a lot of time left. You have half a life left!" In the immediate term, though, I had just a few weeks to break this record.

JUST AS THERE IS an art to throwing rubber chickens, so too is there an art to practicing the act without detection. In the lead-up to my Guinness attempt, I had taken to training in a local park's tree-lined corner. The timing of these sessions was critical: I needed to get my reps in before elementary-age children arrived at the after-school program nearby and started asking tough questions: *Who are you? Why are you throwing rubber chickens? Do you really think this will cure your nagging sense of abstract forfeit?* In times of doubt,

I called to mind advice from Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow, who years ago warned the next generation of athletes against turning their workouts into TikTok fodder. "Work in silence," he advised. "Don't show everybody what you're doing."

Thus, I settled into a weekly routine: I would walk to this park with a peep of chickens tucked into a canvas *New Yorker* bag. (I had to be careful not to halt or pivot abruptly, lest the sack emit a chorus of mortifying squawks.) I would warm up with a few dozen tennis ball tosses against a cement wall, then it was off to the field to chuck my birds. Because of the Guinness rules forbidding a participant from gripping the chicken by the head or neck, I had tweaked my approach to more closely resemble a javelin toss.

The first time I broke the record, unofficially and by myself, was on a breezy November day. The chicken I was throwing was not the same model Gürcü had used. But it was store-bought and met several essential criteria: not too long, as heavy as possible. My best throw that day—around 116 feet—was undoubtedly wind-assisted. But it felt monumental anyway.

As I was packing up to leave, I heard a child's voice coming from the school building nearby. He had been watching me the whole time, despite my efforts at subterfuge.

"You can do it!" he shouted through an open classroom window.

I smiled and waved.

FOR ALL VOLANT BIRDS, takeoff is its own art, complete with trade-offs and limitations. Consider pigeons. Thanks to a combination of body composition and instinct, they can fire themselves effortlessly into the air an instant before getting flattened by your boot or car tire. Herons, on the other hand, are lankier and heavier. They need a lot of runway. That's why you might see one preparing its wings when a predator is still creeping around nearly 200 yards away. They're skittish—hardwired with an understanding of their own limitations.

I, too, was mulling limitations on the afternoon of my official attempt. It was a bright and chilly December day, and I had controlled what variables I could—practiced as much as felt sensible, tested nearly a dozen chickens, identified an athletic field that was most likely to create favorable wind conditions. Dimensions-wise, the rubber chicken I'd settled on was a near match to the one Gürcü had recommended, though there were key sartorial differences. My $6.83 Outward Hound Squawkers squeaky latex dog toy was named Henrietta and came clad in a purple polka-dot bikini and swim cap. This outfit, I had to admit, felt appropriate.

I had arranged for a team of surveyors to meet me at the field, per Guinness rules. In addition to measuring each throw's distance, they had to ensure that the surface was completely level. For all Guinness throwing records, the average gradient under your attempt cannot exceed 1:1000. If it does, you must throw uphill. By sheer chance, the surveyors I had found—a father-daughter duo—had both been competitive throwers themselves. They were delighted to be taking part in this attempt and, like Coach Mellion, went about their duties with a heads-down seriousness that felt more than a little misaligned with the task.

I THREW TILL MY ARM ACHED AND THE WIND CHAPPED MY LIPS.

My warm-up throws, aided by a trusty onshore breeze, were promising. I watched with satisfaction as Henrietta sailed past the 100-foot mark once, twice. There were other sources of lift too. As I wound up, I thought of Gürcü, who had wished me luck, via Instagram direct message, earlier in the day; of my wife and her colleague Nick, who had

come to record my attempts for the Guinness application. I thought of my friends' excitement when they had learned about my project.

But in the end, gravity won.

As I was warming up, the surveyors approached me with unfortunate news: The field I'd selected had an almost imperceptible slant that precluded me from throwing in the same direction as the wind. I would instead have to throw across the wind, aiming my chicken far to the right and watching it slice down into our agreed-upon target area. Not ideal, especially since records this niche are won on the margins. I'd found the right chicken, the right mechanics. But perhaps the wrong venue.

I threw till my arm ached and the wind chapped my lips. My best attempt was about 103 feet—roughly 12 short of Gürcü's record. I called it after about an hour. As the surveyors packed up, they refused to let me pay their customary $225 hourly fee. Instead, they instructed me to get in touch again when I had found a flat field and a good tail wind. They'd be back to help.

I had failed, technically. So why did I feel like less of a failure than I had in months? Perhaps because focusing on the project had helped me siphon brainpower away from my turbo-charged self-doubt cortex. Perhaps because it was enough to know that friends, family and unidentified schoolchildren were rooting for me, no matter how ridiculous the task at hand. Or perhaps Lachman was right: I hadn't given the opportunities of midlife the consideration they deserved.

Whatever it was, I drove away from the field feeling lifted, lighter. Maybe I'd considered only limitations and forgotten that my second act had yet to be written. Maybe I was simply in burst flight, with plenty of flapping to go before gravity finally pulled me down.

FROM SLATE (JAN. 19, 2026), © 2026 THE SLATE GROUP LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USED UNDER LICENSE.

Big Dogs on Campus

The Penn Vet Working Dog Center in Philadelphia is, essentially, dog college. It offers training in disaster response, disease detection, invasive species monitoring and more. Just as college students declare their majors, the canines choose their own career paths: They indicate their interests through eagerness and ambivalence, and they are allowed to proceed accordingly. Caring for and educating each dog at the center costs upwards of $50,000 (the center sustains itself through donations and grants). The graduation rate is above 90%. And almost every dog who enters the program exits into a stable job.

POPULAR SCIENCE

Resthaven

Support at Home by Resthaven

Experience Counts

experiencecounts.resthaven.asn.au

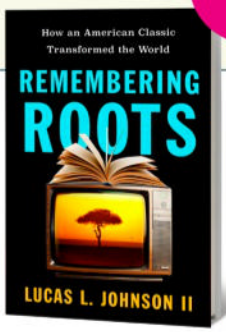
The Dink

Starring Jake Johnson

GET READY TO ROOT for Dusty "The Hammer" Boyd (Jake Johnson), a former tennis prodigy now unhappily working for his old man (Ed Harris) at a suburban country club. When Boyd injures his wrist, a doctor (Ben Stiller) suggests he starts playing the very game he despises: pickleball. He even flies off the handle—paddle?—when he mistakenly thinks pickleball players are insulting him by calling him a *dink*. (The term refers to a soft volley shot.) But his rehab takes a turn when he's partnered with Candace (Mary Steenburgen), a lonely country music–loving divorcee. The unlikely friends bring out the best in each other on and off the court, empowering Boyd to confront past failure and attempt to earn his father's respect. Real-life tennis champions Andy Roddick and John McEnroe ace their cameos. *(Streaming July 24 on Apple TV)* —*Mara Reinstein*

COURTESY OF APPLE (3). THE NOUN PROJECT (FILM ICON)

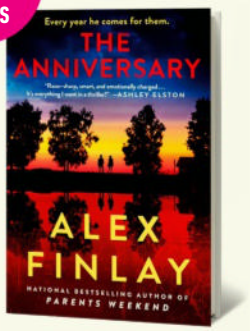
BOOKS



Remembering Roots

By Lucas L. Johnson II

You can basically divide time into "B.R." and "A.R." ("Before *Roots*" and "After *Roots*"). Prior to the publication of Alex Haley's Pulitzer Prize–winning historical novel, *Roots*, inspired by his decade-long quest to learn his family's history in Africa and America, few people knew much about their own genealogy. Now it seems everyone is looking into their family tree. As the book turns 50 this year—the TV adaptation aired in 1977—*Remembering Roots* writer Lucas L. Johnson II shows how Haley got the spark. (Hearing his grandmother's native tongue inspired Haley to learn about ancestors he knew only by name: Kunta Kinte, Kizzy, Chicken George.) Johnson's book contains excerpts from *Roots* that were first published in 1974 in the pages of *Reader's Digest*, which had funded Haley's research while he was a contributing editor to the magazine, as well as accounts of what that masterpiece meant to figures including LeVar Burton (who played Kunta Kinte in the miniseries), Halle Berry and more. Johnson emphasizes the ever-prescient words that Haley, who died in 1992, wrote almost 50 years ago: "In this country, we have been like people who live in the same house and tend to stay in our own rooms, doing no more than peeking out and then ducking back. If only we could all come out together, say in the living room, and learn more about each other … It would show us our future as a collective people—retaining, being proud of, our differences, but coming together in collective strength. That, I believe, is the hope for America." *—Jody L. Rohlena*



The Anniversary

By Alex Finlay

High school golden girl Jules Delaney has everything going for her. Not so for classmate Quinn Riley, raised on the wrong side of the tracks by his struggling single mom. But one evening in May, the two find their fates changed forever when each suffers a separate life-altering tragedy. As years pass, their lives intertwine as both seek to expose buried secrets and untold truths about what happened to them. Along the way, these two battered hearts might just find solace in each another. Part love story, part thriller, *The Anniversary* is like nothing you've read before. *—Amy Reilly*

MINOTAUR BOOKS (THE ANNIVERSARY); THE NOUN PROJECT (BOOK ICON)

finish

#1 AUTO-DISH BRAND^

EXPERIENCE OUR DIAMOND STANDARD™ OF CLEAN*

Voted by Australians Winner TRUSTED BRAND 2026 Reader's Digest Dishwashing Tablets

NEW

PAPER-BASED RECYCLABLE PACKS[1]

Paper-based packs[1] available in select ranges & sizes of 46 - 80 tablets

[1]Consists of 75% paper. Recyclability excludes zipper - refer to pack for recycling instructions.

*Tested in a 30-minute quick cycle

^Source: NIQ® Scan, Auto Dishwash, Australia and New Zealand for MAT to 18/05/25.

™ is a trademark of Reckitt.

Voted by Australians
Winner
TRUSTED BRAND
2019-2026
Reader's Digest
Aged Care & Retirement Villages

Anglicare
Southern Queensland

Most Trusted in Residential Aged Care

A warm home-like environment with specialised support for residents.

1300 610 610
anglicaresq.org.au

BOOK REVIEW

Remembering Elysha

By Paul Folino Gallo

When the person you planned your life with is gone, how do you find a way forward?

IN HIS DEEPLY personal debut memoir, Remembering Elysha, Paul Folino Gallo shares an honest, raw insight into love, devastating loss, and the reality of rebuilding a life forever changed after the death of his wife.

Written from a perspective rarely explored in contemporary literature, Gallo opens the door to the quiet, complicated reality of male grief. He captures the intricate balance of navigating life as a grieving husband and a newly single father, refusing to rely on easy clichés about "moving on." Instead, this is a profound reflection on moving forward learning to carry love through the hardest moments while honouring the person who shaped your world.

Early readers have praised the memoir as "raw, brave, and profoundly human," offering words to a kind of heartbreak many carry but struggle to express. Ultimately, it is a comforting, essential reminder that even after unimaginable tragedy, hope, family, and connection remain.

TURN THE PAGE:
An exclusive six-page extract of Remembering Elysha begins on the next page

PRE-ORDER NOW

AMAZON AUSTRALIA:
https://www.amazon.com.au/Remembering-Elysha-Grief-Fatherhood-Continues/dp/1923514881

INTERNATIONAL:
https://www.readings.com.au/product/9781923514881/remembering-elysha--paul-folino-gallo--2026--9781923514881

The Village

There's wisdom in that oft-quoted proverb: 'It takes a village to raise a child.' What the proverb doesn't mention is how that village assembles itself in crisis, how community reveals its true nature – not during ordinary times but in moments of catastrophic need. After Elysha died, I discovered our village was both smaller and larger than imagined. Some pillars crumbled under the weight of grief, while support emerged from unexpected sources, creating a network that sustained us when individual capacity faltered.

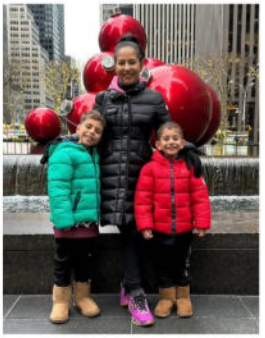
"Dad, my birthday is only twelve lasagnes away!"

The initial response was a tsunami of pasta, flowers, and sympathy cards. The meal train could have fed a small nation; by week three, our freezer held thirty-seven lasagnes. Giorgio began measuring time in pasta: 'Dad, my birthday is only twelve lasagnes away!' I even had stress dreams of being chased by a giant, ricotta-filled monster.

While well-intentioned, these gestures created an administrative burden. There were notes to write, containers to return, and overlapping offers to coordinate when my emotional resources were depleted. A hierarchy of grief responses soon emerged. At the top were those who dropped off food and left immediately, expecting nothing. At the bottom were those who rang the doorbell during naptime to deliver unsolicited advice and casseroles containing raisins. There should be a law against inflicting grief platitudes and suspicious dried fruits simultaneously.

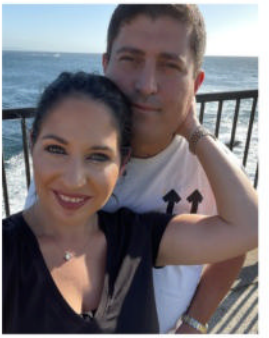
One afternoon, three families arrived within an hour, each bearing elaborate meals. As the boys watched, I struggled to find fridge space while maintaining a grateful composure. That night, I threw away spoiled food, feeling both ungrateful and overwhelmed. We didn't need more lasagne; we needed someone to organise the influx and create systems for our actual needs.

Elysha's brother, Christian, became an essential cornerstone. A man in his thirties, he moved in for



From left, Giorgio, Elysha & Valentino - New York, December 2023.

Clockwise from top left, Paul, Elysha, Valentino & Giorgio - Hawaii Vow Renewal.



From left, Elysha & Paul.

several weeks with neither fanfare nor expectation. He didn't bring casseroles; he simply stayed. He walked the dog, provided quiet company, and took Giorgio to be fitted for a funeral shirt. This quiet reliability removed daily responsibilities from my plate without the need for negotiation.

Christian asked for nothing – no emotional processing or reciprocal investment. He provided practical support exactly when it was required. Meanwhile, foundational friendships revealed unexpected fragility.

Closest friends who messaged daily in the first weeks dwindled to weekly check-ins by month two. By four months, they had stopped entirely. Conversely, a colleague I considered a mere acquaintance emerged as a mainstay. He offered his holiday house when the boys needed an escape, referred us to counsellors, and hosted quiet lunches where conversation balanced work matters with our devastating reality. He never promised what he couldn't deliver.

In contrast, a distant acquaintance cornered me at the grocery store to insist that 'everything happens for a reason.' I nodded politely, thinking that sometimes the reason is simply that life is a chaotic dumpster fire. I then spent twenty minutes pretending to study pasta sauce brands to avoid further cosmic wisdom.

The school community was equally complex. Some parents maintained a careful distance, as if grief were contagious; others provided support without emotional acknowledgement. The

teaching staff became significant village members, creating an environment that acknowledged the boys' loss without defining them by it. They adjusted timelines when academic demands became overwhelming and intervened with gentle redirection when other children asked awkward questions. Crucially, they recognised significant dates and volunteered to provide lunches for the first semester. Their attendance at Elysha's funeral meant a great deal.

Vanessa, who had been with us since Valentino was a toddler and had long since become more friend than employee, also became essential. She had watched the boys grow. She had loved them for years before she was asked to love them through loss. She recognised that Giorgio and Valentino required distinct forms of support. Giorgio processed grief through intellectual engagement – reading about loss and asking about biological mechanisms. Valentino needed sensory connection and physical comfort. Vanessa's intuition complemented my own instincts, which often defaulted to the verbal explanations Giorgio preferred. In crisis, my capacity to maintain these differentiated approaches had narrowed.

As the first year progressed, our needs evolved from crisis intervention to sustainable structures. Immediate help with meals became less necessary as basic functions stabilised. We required ongoing emotional support that acknowledged grief 's continuing presence.

From left, Giorgio, Elysha & Valentino

This evolution required explicit communication. I learnt that 'let me know if you need anything' rarely led to help unless I was specific. I began responding with: 'Actually, it would be helpful if you could take the boys for a few hours on Saturday so I can catch up on work.' This specificity transformed intentions into support. While some people disappeared when faced with sustained commitment, those who remained became increasingly valuable.

Paul and Elysha's Engagement - Walsh Bay - August 2015.

My mother was another cornerstone, providing stability during school holidays and maintaining household systems when my capacity diminished. 'You don't have to do everything perfectly,' she reminded me. 'The boys need consistency and love more than ideal execution. Some days, good enough really is good enough.'

My father had been gone two and a half years by the time Elysha died. I sometimes wondered what he would have said to me now, though I think I already knew: he would have arrived without calling, handed me a ciabatta roll with mortadella, watched me eat it, and left. His absence overlaid Elysha's – a quieter shape in the silence.

Other family members were less consistent, making grand promises to the boys that went unfulfilled. I had to establish boundaries, requiring advance notice for visits and setting time limits that matched the boys' emotional capacity.

Even one of Elysha's closest friends initially struggled. 'I can't come into your place yet,' she admitted. 'Everything reminds me of her.' This honesty allowed for a necessary recalibration. Three months later, we met at a café – a neutral location where the boys had hot chocolate and the adults could talk, acknowledging the grief without being dominated by it.

Beyond family and friends, the village extended to professionals whose expertise provided essential support. A grief counsellor offered developmental perspectives I could not have accessed alone, while legal and financial professionals managed practical matters with a sensitivity that eased the

administrative burden of emotional devastation.

The most unexpected support emerged from professional connections. Colleagues redistributed cases to accommodate periods when my capacity diminished, creating a buffer against client expectations. 'We're carrying some of your load so you can carry what only you can carry,' my clerk explained. 'That's what chambers is for.' A year later, this village continues to evolve. Some members have stepped back as acute crisis transformed into chronic adaptation; others remain as needs shift. New connections have emerged where our journey intersected with others navigating similar territory. While Melissa gradually resumed her life in Brisbane, she maintains regular communication with the boys. Ben and Emily, local café owners who were once merely cheerful acquaintances, have become a crucial part

of our extended network.

This village did not replace what was lost. No amount of support could substitute for Elysha's specific presence. However, it provided an essential foundation when my capacity fluctuated under grief 's unpredictable intensity and the demands of solo parenting.

Elysha in Hawaii.

The village that assembled around us was neither perfect nor comprehensive. Yet its messy, inconsistent, and evolving presence demonstrated a profound capacity for genuine connection. It showed the value of showing up imperfectly but authentically – offering what is available rather than what is ideal and acknowledging limitation without surrendering the relationship when there are no easy answers.

Get the home care that gets you.

- ✓ **Trusted** provider
- ✓ **Quality** tailored care
- ✓ **Full range** of services
- ✓ **Compassionate** professionals
- ✓ **Help** navigating aged care

Voted by Australians 2025 Reader's Digest Quality Service Award WINNER Home Care Services NSW/ACT

Voted by Australians 2025 Reader's Digest Quality Service Award SILVER Home Care Services NSW/ACT

Voted by Australians Highly Commended TRUSTED BRAND 2026 Reader's Digest Home Care NSW/ACT

Voted by Australians Winner TRUSTED BRAND 2024 Reader's Digest Home Care NSW/ACT

Voted by Australians Highly Commended TRUSTED BRAND 2022 Reader's Digest Home Care NSW/ACT

Find out more

1800 864 846

Join our Uniting Seniors Hub

Uniting

QUOTABLE QUOTES

I love Mondays, and the first of the year is like a super Monday for me. To be able to open a new journal was very exciting in the nerdiest way possible.

—**Issa Rae,** ACTOR, IN *TIME*

A loaf of rye is rising out of itself, growing lighter as it takes up more of the world. In humans, we call this aging. In bread, we call it proof.

—**Ocean Vuong,** POET, IN THE BOOK *TIME IS A MOTHER*

If your church isn't telling you to love your enemies, but keeps telling you who your enemies are, you're not really in a church.

—**John Fugelsang,** BROADCASTER, IN THE BOOK *SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND HATE*

F.I.S.K.—a guide to romantic partners. I tell my kids that these are the essential ingredients you should look for in a mate: funny, interesting, smart and kind. ... Kind is highly underrated. But over the long haul, it pays off in dividends.

—**Graydon Carter,** EDITOR, IN THE BOOK *WHEN THE GOING WAS GOOD*

Take up space. Pitch it faster. Run harder. Put another plate on the bar. And never tone it down.

—**Ilona Maher,** RUGBY PLAYER, AT THE 2025 ESPY AWARDS

DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES (RAE). VICTOR BOYKO/GETTY IMAGES (CARTER). FIONA GOODALL/GETTY IMAGES (MAHER)

Specsavers

Audiology

Highly commended for hearing services

5 years running

Thank you

for trusting us with your care

Brain GAMES

SHARPEN YOUR MIND

The ORBISCULATE Challenge

EASY How many words can you find within the 11-letter word below? Words must be at least three letters long and appear in the dictionary (we use Merriam-Webster) to count toward your score.

H A R P S I C H O R D

YOUR SCORE:

_____

BONUS The longest word we found within HARPISCHORD is nine letters long. Can you find it? (See answer below.)

What's With This Game's Crazy Name?

We first published "Warning: This Fruit May Orbisculate," about a family's made-up word, in our December 2021/January 2022 issue. *Orbisculate* means "when you dig your spoon into a grapefruit (or another fruit or vegetable), and it squirts juice directly in your eye." Soon after, reader Sue Mollineaux of Torrington, Connecticut, wrote us to say that residents of her senior community had put their heads together and found 223 words using the letters in *orbisculate* (like *orb*, *brace* or—good one—*aerobics*). After we shared her letter, hundreds of readers took up the challenge and wrote us with their scores. We were so delighted, we decided to feature the ORBISCULATE Challenge, with a new (legit, not made-up!) word in every issue of *Reader's Digest*.

Answer: Rhapsodic

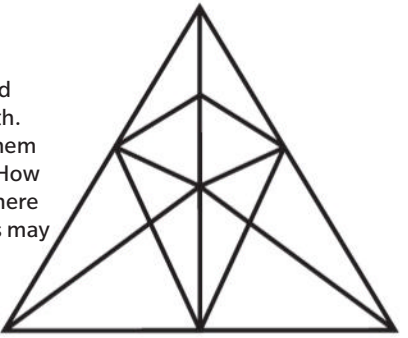
KOLONKO/GETTY IMAGES

Just the Ticket

DIFFICULT Thanksgiving is a busy time of year—especially at the airport. These plane tickets feature real American airport codes. And while their letters form words or abbreviations that are meaningful in other ways, they also provide hints as to where the airports are located. Can you identify the places connected by these trips?

Diamonds in the Rough

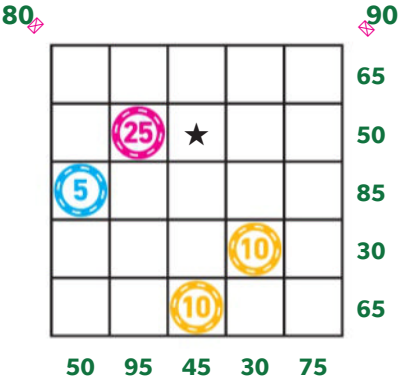
EASY In geometry, a diamond has four sides of equal length. But in this puzzle, most of them are shaped more like kites. How many diamonds/kites are there in this triangle? (The shapes may be symmetrical or skewed.)



Place Your Chips

DIFFICULT You have poker chips with values of $5, $10 and $25. Place them on the squares of this grid—no more than one chip per square—so that their values total the amounts shown for each row, column and diagonal.

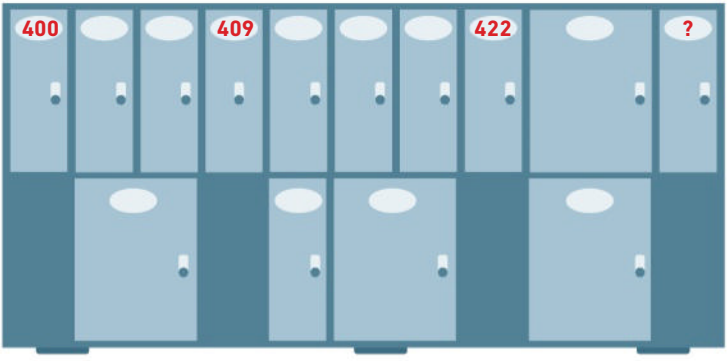
Hint: Not every square will have a chip on it. Several chips and one blank space (indicated by a star) have been placed to get you started.



EMILY GOODMAN (JUST THE TICKET, DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH). FRASER SIMPSON (PLACE YOUR CHIPS)

Locker Numbers

EASY Each of the two sizes of lockers in this bank increases the locker number by a fixed amount. Given the numbers shown, what number should the last locker be?



Hashtag House

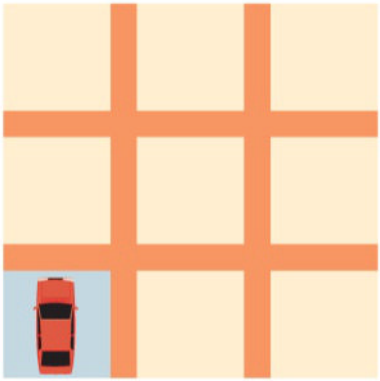
MEDIUM The ground floor of this house has nine rooms, arranged three by three, separated by long, straight hallways. The garage is in one corner, as indicated.

The following pairs of rooms are across a hall from each other:

kitchen	➤	dining room
living room	➤	office
garage	➤	mud room
foyer	➤	living room
kitchen	➤	sunroom
garage	➤	foyer

And these pairs of rooms are NOT across a hall from each other:

office	✖	sunroom
powder room	✖	foyer
dining room	✖	mud room



Using this, can you reconstruct the floor plan? (There are two possible solutions!)

For more Brain Games, go to **RD.COM/BRAINGAMES.**

For answers, turn to **PAGE 143.**

DARREN RIGBY (LOCKER NUMBERS, HASHTAG HOUSE). CENKERDEM/GETTY IMAGES (CAR)

PHOTO CREDIT TO COME

Mercy Health
Care first

Home care you can trust

For two decades, Mercy Health Home Care has supported older Australians to live safely and confidently at home.

Our compassionate, skilled team provides reliable, personalised care that is thoughtfully tailored to your needs, your routines, and your independence.

Discover why so many people trust Mercy Health to support life at home, your way.

Call us today 1300 478 776

Mercyhealth.com.au/homecare

WORD POWER

Adverbs pack a punch. They modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs and even whole sentences. These grammatical workhorses explain a lot: When? Where? In what way? For each one below, read the options closely and select your answer decisively. Turn the page quickly to see if you chose correctly.

BY *Sarah Chassé*

1. cogently *adv.*
('koh-juhnt-lee)
A cautiously
B collectively
C convincingly

2. gratis *adv.*
('gra-tuhs)
A free of charge
B in appreciation of
C with cheese

3. discreetly *adv.*
(dih-'skreet-lee)
A piece by piece
B avoiding notice
C at once

4. alfresco *adv.*
(al-'freh-skoh)
A freehand
B altogether
C outdoors

5. ostensibly *adv.*
(ah-'sten-suh-blee)
A supposedly
B falsely
C awkwardly

6. plumb *adv.*
(pluhm)
A on both sides
B underfoot
C in a vertical line

7. askance *adv.*
(uh-'skans)
A in a hurry
B with distrust
C upside down

8. blithely *adv.*
('blighth-lee)
A cheerfully
B inhumanely
C mistakenly

9. in situ *adv.*
(in-'sigh-too)
A at first glance
B by the book
C in the original position

10. pell-mell *adv.*
(pel-'mel)
A so-so
B wildly
C neatly

11. eminently *adv.*
('eh-muh-nuhnt-lee)
A highly
B shortly
C widely

12. asunder *adv.*
(uh-'suhn-dr)
A underground
B second
C apart

13. hitherto *adv.*
('hih-thr-too)
A therefore
B until now
C farther

14. duly *adv.*
('doo-lee)
A doubly
B appropriately
C plainly

15. prolifically *adv.*
(pruh-'li-fik-lee)
A wastefully
B handsomely
C plentifully

AustralianSuper

Celebrating 14 years as Australia's most trusted super fund*

It's Australian.
It's super.
And it's yours.

Join AustralianSuper today.
australiansuper.com/jointoday

* Reader's Digest Most Trusted Brands – Superannuation category winner 2013–2026. Awards and ratings are only one factor to be taken into account when choosing a super fund. AustralianSuper Pty Ltd ABN 94 006 457 987, AFSL 233788, Trustee of AustralianSuper ABN 65 714 394 898. Read the PDS and TMD at **australiansuper.com**

Truly, Madly, Deeply

A lot of great writers hate adverbs, especially ones ending in *ly*. "The road to hell is paved with adverbs," Stephen King once said. Mark Twain, Toni Morrison and Elmore Leonard also weren't fans. Although too many adverbs clutter prose, they can be effective, as the famously terse Ernest Hemingway shows in *The Sun Also Rises*: "How did you go bankrupt?" Bill asked. "Two ways," Mike said. "Gradually and then suddenly."

Word Power ANSWERS

1. cogently
(C) *convincingly*
Students in debate club learn to argue cogently and respectfully.

2. gratis
(A) *free of charge*
"When you dine here on your birthday, we offer dessert gratis," the maître d' said.

3. discreetly
(B) *avoiding notice*
As the meeting dragged on, Siobhan discreetly checked her watch.

4. alfresco (C) *outdoors*
What a beautiful day—shall we dine alfresco?

5. ostensibly
(A) *supposedly*
Though the book is ostensibly fiction, it mirrors the author's life.

6. plumb
(C) *in a vertical line*
Norm set each fence post plumb in the wet concrete.

7. askance
(B) *with distrust*
The villagers look askance at outsiders.

8. blithely (A) *cheerfully*
Tatum blithely ignored the rain as she began her hike.

9. in situ
(C) *in the original position*
Fossils preserved in situ offer insight into how the animals died.

10. pell-mell (B) *wildly*
My dogs jump around pell-mell when they hear the word *treat*.

11. eminently (A) *highly*
The eminently quotable Yogi Berra once said, "You can observe a lot by watching."

12. asunder (C) *apart*
The tornado tore the old oak tree asunder.

13. hitherto (B) *until now*
The biologist was thrilled to have found a hitherto unknown slug species, not least because she then got to name it.

14. duly (B) *appropriately*
"Your objection has been duly noted, Counselor!" Judge Cruz barked.

15. prolifically
(C) *plentifully*
Karli posts prolifically on Instagram, sharing every detail of her life.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: passably
10-12: amply
13-15: splendidly

XUBINGRUO/GETTY IMAGES

Keep moving forward, with care that moves with you.

At Australian Unity, we offer progressive, home health and care services designed to help you embrace active ageing and navigate life's ups and downs.

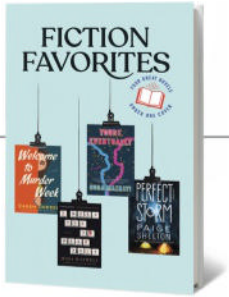
Whether you need support to recover at home, assistance with daily living, or a preventative health program, we're here to ensure you keep moving forward.

Our goal is to help you strengthen your independence and live comfortably, with purpose—right where you belong: at home.

Australian Unity Home Care

Home Health and Care
1300 318 837

Australian Unity
Real Wellbeing



SPECIAL OFFER

Read More Books in Less Time

Why choose between quality and quantity? With *Reader's Digest Fiction Favorites*, you get both! We pick novels by acclaimed authors such as Lee Child and Michael Connelly, as well as exciting new writers, then streamline them so you can enjoy the stories in a fraction of the time. From romance to suspense, there's something for everyone. Order now and get free shipping, plus a bonus puzzle book. Reserve at **fictionfavorites.com/2502EP**.

ANSWERS

WHERE, OH WHERE?

(page 144)

D. Gatlinburg, Tennessee

BRAIN GAMES

(pages 138-139)

Just the Ticket

1. Yuma International in Yuma, Arizona, to Fresno Yosemite International (formerly Fresno Air Terminal) in Fresno, California; 2. Sioux Gateway in Sioux City, Iowa, to Gerald R. Ford International in Grand Rapids, Michigan; 3. Butler Memorial in Butler, Missouri, to Derby Field in Lovelock, Nevada.

Diamonds in the Rough

15. ABCDEFHI, ABCD, CD, CDEFHI, HI, GEHK, IFLJ, DFJ, GEC, EC, DF, ACE, BDF, KHI, LIH

Place Your Chips

Locker Numbers

430. The small lockers go up by 2, the large by 3.

Hashtag House

SUNROOM	KITCHEN	DINING
FOYER	LIVING	OFFICE
GARAGE	MUD	POWDER

OR

POWDER	OFFICE	DINING
MUD	LIVING	KITCHEN
GARAGE	FOYER	SUNROOM

Reader's Digest (ISSN 0034-0375) (USPS 865-820), (CPM Agreement# 40031457), Vol. 206, No. 1209, October/November 2025. © 2025. Published bimonthly (subject to change without notice) by Trusted Media Brands, Inc., 1610 N. 2nd St., Suite 102, Milwaukee, WI 53212-3906. Periodicals postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Reader's Digest, P.O. Box 5813, Tipton, IA 52772-0533. Send undeliverable Canadian addresses to ca.postal.affairs@rd.com. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction, in any manner, is prohibited. Reader's Digest and The Digest are registered trademarks of Trusted Media Brands, Inc. Marca Registrada. Printed in U.S.A. **SUBSCRIBERS:** You may cancel your subscription at any time and receive a refund for copies not previously addressed. Your subscription will expire with the issue identified above your name on the address label. If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. A special *Reader's Digest* Large Print with selected articles from *Reader's Digest* is published by Trusted Media Brands, Inc. For details, write: Reader's Digest Large Print, P.O. Box 5813, Tipton, IA 52772-0533. **CONSUMER INFORMATION:** *Reader's Digest* may share information about you with third parties for the purpose of offering products and services that may interest you. If you would rather not receive such offers via postal mail, please write to Reader's Digest Customer Mailing List, P.O. Box 5813, Tipton, IA 52772-0533. You can also visit www.tmbi.com/preference-center to manage your preferences and opt out of receiving such offers via email. Please see our Privacy Policy at www.tmbi.com/privacy-policy.

Voted by Australians
Winner
TRUSTED BRAND
2026
Reader's Digest
Gardening Products
Helping Aussies experience the joys of gardening.
Yates

VICKS

THAT VICKS SCENT

Ahhh Soothing

DURING COUGH AND COLD SEASON

Voted by Australians Winner TRUSTED BRAND 2026 Reader's Digest Vaporisers

Certain trademarks used under license from The Procter & Gamble Company or its affiliates.
© 2026, All rights reserved.