

# Reader's digest

JANUARY  
2017

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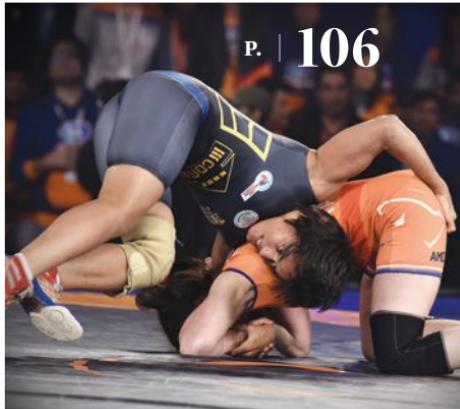
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# Editor's Note

## New Beginnings

AS I WRITE TO YOU ON THIS CHILLY Sunday morning, gentle sunlight floods the deck of our study. The dog is curled up at my feet, chewing satisfactorily at his toy. On the table are some new books waiting to be read; I pick up one and take in its crisp scent. I see a wood apple tree across the window—it is weighed down by fruits. I've not noticed them before, I realize. It's not a surprise because, like so many people, my days are a haze.

Remember that scene from Chaplin's *Modern Times*, the one where busy factory workers are going about their tasks in fast, jerky movements? We too are living from one chore to the next, like androids. You don't have to be busy to be stressed. It's in the air.



Originating in the Old French *estresse* or 'oppression' and the Middle English 'distress', it came to mean psychological strain only in the 1930s and '40s. It's now flung about freely on a daily basis: I've even heard school kids use the word, which is scary. It can disrupt our relationships and careers, ruin our health. You can now trace lifestyle conditions such as heart disease, hypertension and diabetes to it. "Dying of stress" isn't hyperbole anymore.

At *Reader's Digest* we decided to take it up in our number one issue this year and find a way to fight it. '25 Things You Need to Know About Stress Right Now' (p 58) relies on excellent research and expert advice and offers strategies to overpower it. Read the sound advice and take charge of your life!

This issue also features two remarkable 18-year-old women. One is Kavya Srivatsa, a girl from Bengaluru, who completed a road trip with her family, from home to Scotland, carrying the message of organ donation. Read her travelogue on page 118. The other is a lovely young lady from the interiors of Bihar, who was maimed by an acid attack when she was 14. Yet, Tuba Tabassum's lust for life is all-consuming—she is an aspiring doctor who refuses to give up. Read her inspiring story on page 74.

Let's hope 2017 brings the best for all of us. Here's to new beginnings!

Sanghamitra

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**BEST  
DEAL**

The desktop monitor displays a full-page article titled "Kindness OF STRANGERS". The smartphone shows a smaller version of the same article. The tablet displays the front cover of the magazine with the title "Reader's digest" and a photo of a puppy.



# Over to You

FEEDBACK ON OUR NOVEMBER ISSUE

WRITE  
&  
WIN!

## SECRETS REVEALED

This refers to the cover story 'Get On Board the Brain Health Revolution.' The human brain is shaped by life experiences. That is why it is "livewired". One is reminded of the timeless tip passed on to us by our parents: keep learning. An idle mind is the devil's workshop, and the devil's name is Alzheimer's.

BEENA MATHUR, Pune

## A TEXTBOOK CASE

I disagree with the verdict [You Be the Judge]. Students need books for studying, but that doesn't make it right to photocopy without giving due credit to the author. Plagiarism is an infringement of copyright, which is a criminal offence punishable with a maximum imprisonment of three years and a fine of ₹2 lakh.

KIRAN JOHNSON, TISS, Hyderabad

## WE HEAR YOU

With reference to Severn Cullis-Suzuki's speech in 'Do You Hear Us?', we can compare our society to a rich man who sells his family silver to sustain his lifestyle and in the end leaves nothing for his children. What is worse, in our case, is we would pass



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RAJ KRISHNA,

National Law University, Patna

Raj Krishna gets this month's Best Letter prize of ₹1,000.—EDS

on huge debts to our children. Unfortunately, because of our profligacy, our children will suffer in a resource-depleted world. Few think of tomorrow and what we are doing to our children's world.

KAMAL KOTHARI, Mumbai

## ROOM FOR EVERYONE

I was extremely happy to read about Ebba [Room at the Table] and her efforts to make immigrants feel at



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home. When people meet over dinner, food helps in breaking the ice. It has the power to bring together cultures and civilizations that have for years been apart.

**ANANDO GHOSH, Nagpur**

## CHANGE YOUR DIET

'Defeat Diabetes Now!' is very informative and useful. Poor food choices, as mentioned, are a key reason for the rising instances of diabetes in our country. Good dietary habits from the start can save our children from not only diabetes, but also other lifestyle-related diseases like increased blood pressure, heart attack, and so on.

**DR PARVESH K SABLOK, Himachal Pradesh**

## DISCOVER YOURSELF

'How Travelling Has Changed Me' is one of the finest articles I have read recently. It helped me enter my own self and see the world from the writer's perspective.

**DIVYA AGARWAL, Raipur**

## ONE OF US

'Abhimanyu, Our Son' was an inspirational read. Like Abhimanyu's smile, it's the free-spirited laughter of our elder daughter, a cerebral palsy patient, which motivates us to surmount challenges, though her obstinacy and anger come with her uninhibited laugh. She does not socialize much because of the difficulty in wheeling her around beyond the neighbourhood, but, after reading the article, we are determined to take her out more often.

**VIJAI PANT, Kashipur, Uttarakhand**

## SHAME, SHAME

It is a shame that even seven decades after Independence, our society has not shed its age-old belief of seeing the girl-child as a burden [That's Outrageous]. Indeed, education is the only solution to get rid of this malady, of not only the younger generation, but also the parents. Along with it, punishment should be stringent for those who are guilty of such acts.

**SUNANDA SANKARAN, Mumbai**

## BRIDGES BUILT

'The Bridge of Life' was a captivating read. It was sheer luck that the Ramaswamys were rescued. If a well-planned colony could not escape the deluge, I shudder at the plight of thousands in unplanned settlements during this calamity. It was revealed later that the choking of drains was among the reasons that had led to the flooding. City planners ought to look into these aspects to avoid such disasters.

**L. R. SHARMA, Sundernagar, Himachal Pradesh**

## A CORRECTION

'The Bridge of Life,' a story of kindness and bravery, was erroneously attributed to Nirmala Rangaswamy in the print version of *Reader's Digest*. The author's name, in fact, is Nirmala Ramaswamy. We sincerely regret the error.

R

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# Laugh Lines

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

I bought one of those tapes to teach you Spanish in your sleep. During the night, the tape skipped. Now I can only stutter in Spanish.

STEVEN WRIGHT

If you understand English, press 1. If you do not understand English, press 2.

Recording on an Australian tax helpline

I don't want to brag, but I do speak pig Latin; I mean, I'm not fluent, but I'm sure if I ever went there, I could get by.

BONNIE MCFARLANE

The four most beautiful words in our common language:  
*I told you so.*

GORE VIDAL

All pro athletes are bilingual. They speak English and profanity.

GORDIE HOWE,  
hockey player

Some people just have a way with words, and other people ... oh ... not have way.

STEVE MARTIN





Welcome To The Myriad Facets Of Indian Traditions, Culture And Vibrant Geographies. With Indian Tourism Branched Into Several Forms, India Has A Chunk For Every Kind Of Traveler. To Address This Diversity, India Today Tourism Awards Asks India To Vote For The Best Tourism Destinations. Watch This Space, As Week On Week These Myriad Facets Unveil, And India Announces Their Choice In A Nationwide Online Poll On [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)



# ADVENTURE DESTINATIONS

"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing."



## RAFTING ON RIVER SIANG, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

For river sports enthusiasts the thrill of rafting on the Siang River in Arunachal Pradesh is a must have experience.



## KHANGCHENDZONGA NATIONAL PARK SIKKIM

The Khangchendzonga (High Altitude) National Park, Sikkim is a UNESCO World Heritage site that has spectacular wilderness with Mt. Khangchendzonga towering over it, making it a popular destination for mountaineering, trekking and skiing in the eastern Himalayas.

# HERITAGE DESTINATIONS

**"If We Know Where We Came From, We May Better Know Where To Go. If We Know Who We Came From We May Better Understand Who We Are"**

The following Heritage destinations are the bedrock of Indian Culture & Traditions and more than often they are ignored in lieu of glamorous alternatives. Take this chance to reminisce about the beacons of Indian heritage & Culture.

## TAWANG MONASTERY

### TAWANG, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

One of the largest Lamaseries of the Mahayana Sect in Asia that represents the most important element in the social and religious life of the Monpa tribe.



VOTE

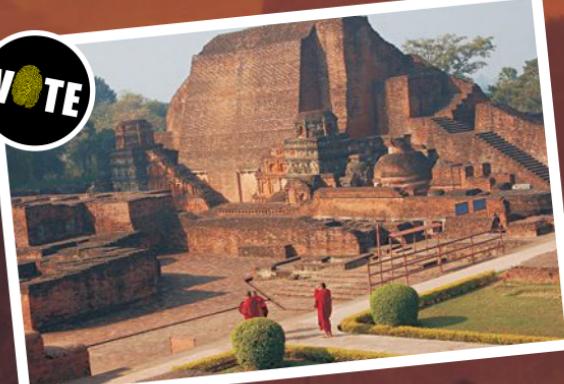
## NALANDA

### VISHVAVIDYALAY, NALANDA, BIHAR

Known as the world's most ancient university and the symbol of excellence in education & purity of monastic life architecture of this unique university.



VOTE



 VOTE

### PARASNATH TEMPLE, GIRIDIH, JHARKHAND

Situated on the highest hill in Jharkhand, the Parasnath Temple is considered to be one of the most sanctified holy places of the Jains as 23 out of 24 Tirthankaras, including Parasvanatha, are believed to have attained salvation here.



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### TAKHT SHRI HARMINDER SAHIB JI, BIHAR

The Har Mandir Takht is one of the four sacred shrines of the Sikhs, stands at this holy site and contains belongings of the Guru and Sikh holy texts.

 VOTE

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# Humour in Uniform



*"They're throwing pies just to draw a fire."*

**DURING BASIC TRAINING** one day, at the Air Force training centre in Belgaum, Karnataka, the mess in-charge asked for a volunteer who painted well. I jumped at the chance, keen to explore my artistic side. I was handed a tin of red oil paint and a brush and then taken to a room in the mess, where meat was being cut ... and ordered to paint its walls!

PRAKASH PARALE, VETERAN SERGEANT, Pune

**LIFE IN THE SQUADRON** had become quite difficult with the new adjutant, especially with his penchant

for implementing every rule to the letter, rather than the spirit.

One Saturday, the other officers and I cornered him. We told him that, as an officer, he could use his discretion to interpret the rules as necessary, while keeping the squadron's common good in mind. He heard us out and then exclaimed, "Show me the rule which says this."

AVM C. N. RANGANATH (RETD), Bengaluru

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

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*On a clean-up drive:  
Temsutula Imsong*





# EVERYDAY HEROES



Her crusade to clean Varanasi's ghats has added a shine to the holy city

## A Labour of Love

BY SUNALINI MATHEW

**S**ON 1 APRIL 2015, Temsutula Imsong, 34, got a message from a friend saying the Prime Minister had mentioned her in a tweet. Temsu, as she is called by those close to her, texted back saying it was the best April Fool's Day joke ever. "I didn't believe that the Prime Minister of India was congratulating me for doing *jahoo*," she says with a laugh.

But in the days before the media blitzkrieg of Swachh Bharat, Temsutula, and her band of volunteers, did more than just pick up a broom. It was work that saw the *shramdaanis*—as Temsutula calls the volunteers, over 30–40 of them at the height of the

movement in 2015—traverse six ghats across the holy city. The PM's acknowledgement was of two years of work, cleaning mountains of dirt and hours of hard labour under a sun that had hardened the filth on the ghats for over several decades.

It started in 2013 when, feeling unfulfilled by her teaching job in Delhi, Temsutula moved to Varanasi to join her friend Shailesh Pandey. He was setting up Sakaar, an NGO dedicated to creating opportunities in villages around Varanasi. "We were a bunch of friends from different parts of the country," she says.

It was during this time, while

wandering the alleys of the ancient city along with her friend, Darshika Shah, that Temsutula realized the dichotomy. She wondered how people believed Kashi—the stretch between the rivers Varuna and Assi—was the holiest of places, yet defecated there.

So, she and Darshika gathered a few volunteers from the neighbourhood. They began with Prabhu Ghat. Years of excrement had built up, so they took along the basics: buckets, bleaching powder, phenyl, gloves. They first scattered bleaching power all over the ghat and swept whatever they could into a heap. The boatmen advised them to throw it into the water for the fish to eat. Instead, they carted the garbage to the municipal dumping ground.

Volunteers slept on the ghat and clicked pictures of people who defecated on the steps in the morning. The idea was to shame them into stopping it. Then they'd give them buckets to clean the spot. "This night vigil led to the Kashi Debates, where we'd get together and discuss topics of public interest. Sometimes, the kids from BHU (Banaras Hindu University) would bring their guitars and turn it into a jam session. It was a period of learning from people and also, by default, of keeping the youth away from smoking and drinking," she says. As

#MissionPrabhuGhat grew in popularity, more volunteers joined in. In a week's time, it was shining.

"When the Prime Minister tweeted out to us, we realized that recognition came with responsibility, and we were encouraged to do more," says Temsutula. They moved to Babua Pandey Ghat, also known as Dhobi Ghat.

"This stretch, over 60 metres long, was a dumping ground of everything. Name the garbage, and it was there. In fact, steps were buried under hardened garbage and silt." This took months of cleaning, but by now, the municipal authorities had begun to send their boats to collect the

mountains of dirt.

They moved boulders, saris, glass bottles, plastic packets—all in the scorching sun between April and June 2015. As they cleaned and cleaned, they found that nine steps had been buried under! In the end, they even constructed a volleyball court, so people would use the area more constructively and placed dustbins all over.

Temsutula found herself drawing on her experiences—whether it was her work in the church social outreach programmes back home in Ungma village in Nagaland's Mokokchung district or her involvement in Saakar's work when she had just moved to Varanasi. Then, the effort had been to

—————“—————

***They moved saris,  
glass bottles,  
plastic packets—  
all under the  
scorching sun.***

—————“—————



*It took months to remove the debris and garbage at Varanasi's ghats.*

work with people living in villages around the holy city, helping them understand basic hygiene practices and support education. "We take so much for granted, but when you go into the villages you realize that people have not even seen a nail-cutter! They cut their nails with knives or blades, leading to many health complications. The smallest things need to be explained—like why it's necessary to keep nails clipped," she says.

As she soaked up life in Varanasi, she understood that mythology was the holy thread that ran through the city. And this young woman from the faraway hills of the northeast is full of stories—she recounts myths and legends, sometimes in chaste, albeit accented, Hindi.

Her fondness for Varanasi is evident, as is her passion to keep the ghats clean. The success of her crusade saw similar movements pick up the momentum, as did her attempt to unite all volunteers from across the

country under a common umbrella, or Shramdaan as she calls it.

"It's great that the visibility went up, and, with it, the glamour of cleaning. Because, if you remove the ghats from Varanasi, what is the city? I was once asked by a journalist why I was cleaning the ghat, being a Christian. I think the ghats are for everyone. And the Ganga is a lifeline for India. The reality is that it is not a river that belongs only to the Hindus, but to all Indians."

So in 2015, on Dev Deepawali, when she and a group of *shramdaanis* covered the ghats with about 10,000 diyas, Varanasi poured out to help—the Hindu priests, the Muslim weavers and the small band of Christians visiting the city. Because, finally, it's about goodness, and religion is just a path to find that in each of us. R

*Temsutula is now married to the founder of Sakaar, Shailesh Pandey. Together, with their band of volunteers, they have cleaned many more ghats and even a few water bodies in Varanasi.*

If I Ruled the World

## In Gul Panag's Reign ...

*... Women would have equal rights  
(No, really!)*

I would ensure equal access to opportunity economically, politically and socially. It stems from the desire for equality in all aspects of life—a natural corollary to an equal society. In India, however, our societal conditioning is such that women do not naturally take the lead. This is achieved even without an attempt to disenfranchise women from making choices.

*... The planet would be protected.*  
Climate change is a macro issue that can be addressed at a micro level. We have to be wary of how we use non-replenishable resources and how that impacts the big picture. People don't realize that this is not a zero-sum game. If something doesn't impact us immediately, it doesn't mean it will not affect someone elsewhere. Take air pollution. The largest source in India is commercial vehicles, construction sites and crop burning.



ILLUSTRATION BY KESHAV KAPIL

It's important to aggressively educate farming communities, warn them against crop burning and offer them a viable alternative. There's no point in talking to them about the impact of crop burning, because when it's the question of livelihoods, people don't think about the environment. There is a need to bring about best practices on construction sites and encourage the use of public transport to decongest our roads.

*... There would be room for every ideology.*

We need to create space for every kind of thought to exist. It is dangerous when a certain kind of thought gathers traction and gains majoritarian tones, because you then move towards mob culture or vigilantism. When the left-liberal space becomes loud, it drowns out the right. Similarly, when you lean too much towards the right, it leads to disastrous consequences. The idea is to encourage pluralism in public discourse. What we are seeing today is majoritarianism of one kind, which will eventually be replaced by one of another kind. For too long in India, we have had a left-liberal discourse. Today, the pendulum has swung to the other end. The idea is to keep the pendulum in the centre, as much as possible, by creating a

wide space for public discourse where people of different ideologies can participate.

*... Education and quality healthcare would ensure a level playing field.*

My biggest duty would be to create equal opportunities and level the playing field. How do you create equal opportunity? By ensuring greater investment in public education and providing quality public healthcare. Everybody will need to have equal access to public healthcare and public education. I would increase expenditure on both so infrastructure is upgraded and quality care and education are available to everyone, especially to those in need. Our current expenditure on public health and education is abysmal, given the scale of our population and the socio-economic inequality.

*... Humour would be mandatory.*

We don't laugh at ourselves enough. In fact, we take ourselves too seriously. There will be time set aside for humour in our institutions, be it the Parliament or the courts. Perhaps we can introduce humour as a subject in schools and colleges. Only then can we learn to laugh at ourselves.

—AS TOLD TO GAGAN DHILLON 

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**Gul Panag is an actor, activist, biker and politician and recently earned her wings to become a licensed pilot.**



# My Mother Gives the Weirdest Gifts

BY IJEOMA OLUO  
FROM THE GUARDIAN



IJEOMA OLUO  
*is a writer and speaker. Her book, So You Want to Talk About Race, will be published by Seal Press in 2017.*



“I STARED AT THE text message in disbelief. The attached photo scared and confused me. The message said, ‘For Lindy! They’re in her size!’”

I was used to getting text messages from my mum around the holidays with gift ideas for members of the family, including my sister-in-law. I would laugh or sigh or roll my eyes and answer “Neat!” or “What?” But this time, as I looked at a picture of a pair of black leather chaps [chaparajos, or leather trousers without a seat, worn by cowboys over ordinary trousers] hanging in the dressing room of a thrift store, I simply answered, “No.”

She had gone too far.

When you get a less than desirable gift, people like to say, “It’s the thought that counts,” but with my mother’s

gifts, you've really got to wonder, *What thought was that, exactly?* My mother is the type of person to see a pair of plus-size leather chaps and say, "They're in her size!" without ever saying to herself, *What would my future daughter-in-law do with leather chaps?*

Still, my mother's presents are never given with malice or mischief; they are always presented with wide-eyed, innocent excitement. "Do you like it?" she always asks expectantly, and we nod our heads while we try to figure out what "it" is. Over the years, her Christmas presents have become infamous for the amusement and bewilderment—and sometimes horror—that they evoke. New family members, like Lindy, find themselves smiling, confused and slightly scared.

Two years ago, my mother gave me red ruffled panties. They were large, bright red and completely covered in obscenely fluffy ruffles, the kind that you see little girls wearing under their fancy dresses in old-timey pictures. They were the type of panties that I imagined, when worn under clothes, would make the wearer look like she was wearing a lumpy and quite full diaper. As I held

them up, mystified by the bow in front, my mother remarked, "You know, because you're dating now."

Last Christmas, she bought my brother and Lindy the Clapper—you know, "Clap on, clap off. THE CLAPPER." On the surface, an "as seen on TV" gift from the early '90s might

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seem like a harmless—even hipster—gift. But to my mother, it was genius. She talked about it for weeks before the holiday. "Did you hear what I got your brother?" she'd say, and before I could answer "Yes," she'd answer, "The Clapper? You know, 'Clap on, clap off'?" Then she'd chuckle and say, "He's going to love it."

When Christmas

arrived and we were exchanging gifts, my mother realized she had left the present at home. "Aham, Lindy—I can't believe I forgot the best part of your Christmas! I got you the Clapper." Then she looked at them expectantly.

"Oh, cool, Mom!" my brother said, slightly strained and a little relieved. My mother, excited, clapped twice, and then twice again, to show them what they could look forward to. She never did remember to bring the Clapper to Aham and Lindy, so her hands-on demonstration ended up

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*Two years ago,  
my mother gave  
me red ruffled  
panties. As I  
held them up,  
she remarked,  
"Because you're  
dating now."*

---

being their only gift.

Several years ago, my mother spent days working on handmade clay sculptures for my brother, my sister and me: lovingly crafted, grotesque interpretations of our heads. "I made the nose extra large so you can rest your glasses on her face at night," my mother explained when she gave the head to me. "Keep it on your bathroom counter."

I took the head home and placed it in my bathroom as instructed. I soon discovered that few things terrify a two-year-old child more than a small, garish version of his mother's decapitated head staring at him while he poops. He'd forget it was there and then see it out of the corner of his eye and start screaming.

My son used the downstairs bathroom more and more, and he eventually refused to take a bath if the head was in the room. We both endured its presence until one day, as I was doing dishes, I heard a series of bumps, followed by a large crash. I walked over to the stairs, and there, at the bottom, was the head, broken into a dozen pieces. At the top of the stairs stood my son, triumphant.

But far and away, the most terrifying gifts my mother has ever given any of us came on Christmas 2004, when she paid a craftsperson to make life-size replica cloth dolls for my son and for my brother's daughter. These dolls were the same height as our kids, had

the same skin tones and curly hair and were dressed in our children's actual clothes (which my mother had sneaked out of our homes). They also had manic, wide-eyed grins painted on their flat faces. If any doll was going to murder you in your sleep, it was going to be one of them.

My brother and I soon learnt that the dolls were not going to kill us in our beds—they were, instead, planning on killing us when we were wide awake. Nothing takes you from zero to heart attack faster than coming home from work and seeing a life-size replica of your child lying facedown on the floor.

Still, the clueless, endless and enthusiastic love embodied in my mother's strange presents is the same love with which she raised me and my siblings. She has always loved us for our boring, reserved personalities unconditionally, and we—with all our eye rolls and sighs around the Christmas tree—love her unconditionally as well. Maybe there's no better gift to give children than the knowledge that they can be weird or awkward and still feel loved, just the way they are. Besides, one day—many long years from now—when our mother is gone, we can pass these objects on to our children and our grandchildren. And we'll stare at them with goofy grins on our faces while we say, "Get it? Clap on, clap off. THE CLAPPER." R

# “The best part about living in my hometown is ...”



... waking up to a steaming  
**cup of coffee**

and watching the sunset  
from Marine Drive.

**APARNA V. MENON,**  
*Ernakulam, Kerala*

... never  
**getting lost,**

even in a labyrinth of its  
hundred lanes and gullies.

**SUBRAMANIAM MOHAN,**  
*Chennai*

... watching  
**the aarti**

with my family by the  
ghats of the Ganga,  
at Har ki Pauri.

**RAKHI JAIN,**  
*Navi Mumbai*



... rising to  
**birds chirping,**

my little Lhasa Apso tugging  
at my blankets and delicious  
homemade breakfast.

**PRANITA MATANI, Shimla**



... it's more  
**home**

than town!  
**MANISH MISHRA,**  
*Bengaluru*

... I know all the  
**shortcuts!**

**ZAINAB PERWEEN,**  
*Purulia, West Bengal*



... the sense of  
**familiarity**

I have with all the monuments,  
roads and buildings I grew  
up around.

**VINITA ASHIT JAIN, Ajmer**

... getting  
recognized by  
everyone—feels like  
**stardom.**

**AADIL MAJEED,**  
*Handwara,  
Jammu & Kashmir*



... having  
**fafda jalebis**

for breakfast on Sundays!  
**APOORVA SINGHAL, Ahmedabad**

Your homework assignment from a famous novelist:  
Make art. Then destroy it

# How to Grow Your Soul

BY KURT VONNEGUT

FROM THE BOOK LETTERS OF NOTE

IN 2006, A NEW YORK CITY English teacher named Ms Lockwood asked her students to write to their favourite author and persuade them to visit the school. Five of those pupils chose novelist Kurt Vonnegut. Though he never made the trip to Xavier High School, Vonnegut did respond to the students with the following letter. He was the only author to reply.



PHOTOGRAPH BY THE VOORHES

5 November 2006

Dear Xavier High School, and Ms Lockwood, and Messrs Perin, McFeely, Batten, Maurer and Congiusta:

I thank you for your friendly letters. You sure know how to cheer up a really old geezer (84) in his sunset years. I don't make public appearances anymore because I now resemble nothing so much as an iguana.

What I had to say to you, moreover, would not take long, to wit: Practise any art—music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage—no matter how well or badly, not to get money and fame, but to experience *becoming*, to find out what's inside you, *to make your soul grow*.

Seriously! I mean starting right now, do art and do it for the rest of your lives. Draw a funny or nice picture of Ms Lockwood and give it to her. Dance home after school, and sing in the shower, and on and on. Make a face in your mashed potatoes. Pretend you're Count Dracula.

Here's an assignment for tonight, and I hope Ms Lockwood will flunk you if you don't do it: Write a six-line poem about anything, but *rhymed*. No fair tennis without a net. Make it as good as you possibly can. But don't tell anybody what you're doing. Don't show it or recite it to anybody, not even your girlfriend or parents or whatever, or Ms Lockwood. OK?

Tear it up into teeny-weeny pieces and discard them into widely separated trash receptacles. You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learnt a lot more about what's inside you, and you have made your soul grow.

God bless you all!  
Kurt Vonnegut

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“  
*Practise any art,  
however well  
or badly, not  
to get money  
and fame, but to  
find out what's  
inside you.*

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**Kurt Vonnegut is the author of 14 novels, including *Slaughterhouse-Five*, consistently rated one of the 100 best English-language books of the 20th century.**



Should everyone have  
the right to enter a  
place of worship?

# The Case of the Temple Entry

BY NAOREM ANUJA

**NESTLED IN THE FORESTS** of the Western Ghats in Kerala, atop a hill is the Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple, devoted to Lord Ayyappan, a *brahmachari* [celibate] deity. Every year, millions of pilgrims make the arduous journey to the temple. And for the Travancore Devaswom Board running the temple, everyone is welcome, except women between the ages of 10 and 50.

In 1990, S. Mahendran, a devotee, filed a petition in the Kerala High Court protesting against the entry of young women to the shrine (which was contrary to the temple's customs). He cited the example of S. Chandrika, the board's former commissioner. She had conducted a first rice-feeding ceremony for her granddaughter in the presence of several women.



The court issued a notice to the complainant S. Mahendran, S. Chandrika and the Devaswom Board asking for an explanation. After hearing the arguments, the court felt that the questions that arose were fundamental in nature and could have an impact on the faith of the temple. Hence the complaint was converted into an original petition—a public interest litigation—under Article 226 of the Indian Constitution.

The Devaswom Board sought a dismissal, arguing that they “cannot conceive of any religious practice under the Hindu religion, which deprives a worshipper of his rights to enter the temple and worship therein according to his belief”. They noted that the board issued notifications during Mandalam, Makaravilakku and

Vishu preventing the entry of women while taking into account religious sentiments and practices. The Indian Federation of Women Lawyers, became party to the litigation and argued, "... prevention of entry of women ... of 10 to 50 will affect the fundamental rights ... guaranteed under Articles 15 and 25 of the Constitution of India." This amounts to discrimination on the ground of sex, they said.

The Kerala High Court ruled in favour of the petitioner, restricting women in the age group of 10 to 50. It was enforced under Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965, that prohibits the entry of women at such time during which they are not by custom and usage allowed to

enter a place of public worship.

In 2006, the Indian Young Lawyers Association challenged it and sought removal of the ban in the Supreme Court. It argued, "Hindu women have a right to enter the temple as part of their right to practise religion under Article 25 of the Constitution ... gender justice ... is part of the constitutional morality of India ... The denial of entry between the ages of 10 to 50 is based on the fact of menstruation during that period alone ... is therefore based on biological factors of womanhood. It is therefore discrimination based on sex and not protected by the Article 26."

***Should places of worship restrict entry for some sections of the population or should everyone have the right to enter them? You be the judge.***



## THE VERDICT

In April 1991, the Kerala High Court imposed a ban restricting temple entry to women aged 10 to 50. Quoting the *thantri* [head priest] and other witnesses, the court stated that, "the deity at Sabarimala is in the form of a *naisthik brahmachari* ... it is therefore believed that young women should not offer worship in the temple so that even the slightest deviation from celibacy and austerity observed by the deity is not caused by the presence of such women". The court concluded, "The restriction imposed on women ... from trekking the holy hills of Sabarimala and offering worship at Sabarimala Shrine is in accordance with the usage prevalent from time immemorial ... Such restriction ... is not violative of Articles 15, 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India."

Since 2006, the Supreme Court has had several hearings with the next one scheduled for February 2017. As the case raises several constitutional questions, the Supreme Court will examine whether the matter requires to be referred to a five-judge Constitution bench.

R

Agree? Disagree? Sound off at [editor.india@rd.com](mailto:editor.india@rd.com).



SOME POSITIVE STORIES THAT CAME OUR WAY

# Good News

BY GAGAN DHILLON

## The science of stars

**SCIENCE** Ignore the memes, viral videos and controversial posts you see online and head straight to Aryan Mishra's Facebook page. (Search for AstronomerAryan.) This 16-year-old aspires to be an astronaut. But here's the impressive bit: Mishra grew up in a Delhi slum and, in 2014, he and his classmate Keerti Vardhan, discovered a near-Earth asteroid as part of the All India Asteroid Search Campaign. Mishra now gives inspirational talks on astronomy to children all over the world with the aim of encouraging a passion for space.

## Power of the sun

**SUSTAINABILITY** Gone are the days when villagers in Dharnai, Bihar, went about their daily chores under the glow of a kerosene lamp. Today, it has become India's first solar-powered, energy-independent village with undisrupted supply of electricity. A 100-kilowatt micro-grid costing around ₹3 crore was set up in 2014, as part of an initiative by Greenpeace, along with two other organizations, Ceed (Centre for Environment and Energy Development) and BASIX.



Besides powering homes, schools and businesses, the solar grid also provides energy for water-pumping systems and irrigation. Imagine what we can accomplish as a nation if this model is replicated all over the country—safer streets, cleaner environment and the opportunity to study after daylight.

## A safe haven

**WILDLIFE** Catching a glimpse of wildlife is rare enough, especially the elusive Indian wolf. What's exceptional is witnessing a pack of wolves in action. A group of environmentalists and conservationists were in for a treat when they drove into Bor Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra and came across a thriving pack of 10 wolves. This rare encounter is special, considering

## HEROES

Generosity was not in short supply last month, even if cash was. Amid the demonetization chaos, there were those who stepped up with many small selfless acts of kindness.

**Karnataka** Mumtaz Engineer, a 50-year-old vegetable vendor from Hubli gave away vegetables free of cost to those in need. She also offered vegetables on credit to those who had the means, but lacked liquidity at the time.

**Uttar Pradesh** Mahendra Kumar Dublish, a 60-year-old chartered accountant from Noida set up a stall outside a branch of ICICI Bank. He then hired a caterer for three days on 15 November and offered fresh tea and snacks to bank employees and those waiting in the long queues at the bank. Dublish and his staff welcomed everyone, from senior citizens to rickshaw-pullers and auto drivers ferrying people to the bank.

**Maharashtra** When preparations for a young woman's wedding

came to an abrupt halt, the people of Yalgud village in Kolhapur came together to help out one of their own. They lined up at the local bank to withdraw new currency to support the family with payments for wedding arrangements, gifts and even the trousseau.

**Uttar Pradesh** The children of Varuna Nagram colony in Varanasi didn't think twice about lending a helping hand. They had painstakingly saved their pocket money at an exclusive Children's Bank. It was set up by the non-profit Vishal Bharat Sansthan to inculcate the habit of saving and offer support to low-income families. The children lined up at their bank to withdraw their savings and help their families. Now that's a lesson in sharing!

wolves are extinct in most parts of the country. Their numbers continue to dwindle at an alarming rate due to a lack of natural habitat, pesticide poisoning and persecution for attacking cattle. Even so, wolves are listed as a "Least-Concerned Species" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature. But it

seems that the Indian wolf may have found safe haven at Bor Tiger Reserve. Hopefully, with this sighting, things will change.

R

Sources: Science: [www.thelogicalindia.com](http://www.thelogicalindia.com), 25 October 2016. Sustainability: [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org) Wildlife: [www.homegrown.co.in](http://www.homegrown.co.in), 22 November 2016. Heroes: Karnataka: [www.thebetterindia.com](http://www.thebetterindia.com), 24 November 2016. Others: [www.timesofindia.com](http://www.timesofindia.com), 26 November 2016, [www.indiatimes.com](http://www.indiatimes.com), 23 November 2016.



# Points to Ponder

INDIA HAS NEVER HAD a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE,  
*poet, humanist and Nobel laureate*

A GOOD EDUCATION teaches us to hold contradictions reflectively rather than reactively, a habit of the heart that lies behind all social, cultural and scientific breakthroughs.

PARKER J. PALMER,  
*author and activist, in his book  
Healing the Heart of Democracy*

WHEN WE DESIGN for disability first, we often stumble upon solutions that are not only inclusive, but also are often better than when we design for the norm.

ELISE ROY,  
*hearing-impaired lawyer, artist, artisan  
and human rights advocate*

LIFE AFTER THE OLYMPICS has been a series of felicitations and ... engagements. But that is not the real deal. What matters more is that many more young kids are picking up the racket after my silver.

P. V. SINDHU,  
*badminton player and Olympic medallist*

WE MUST ALWAYS take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

ELIE WIESEL,  
*Nobel-winning author, teacher and activist*

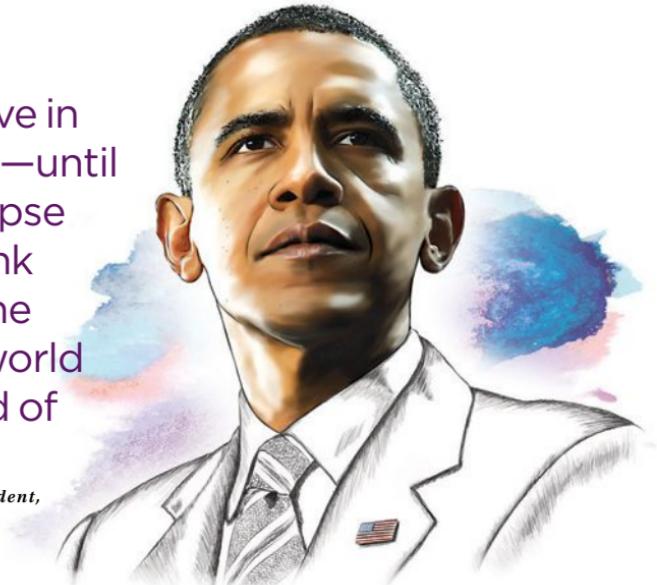
I THINK IT'S ABOUT where ideas come from—they come from day-dreaming, from drifting, from that moment when you're just sitting there ... The trouble is that it's really hard to get bored. I have 2.4 million people on Twitter who will entertain me at any moment ... I'm much better at putting my phone away, going for boring walks, actually trying to find the space to get bored in. That's what I've started saying to people who say "I want to be a writer", I say, "Great, get bored."

NEIL GAIMAN, *author*

I don't believe in apocalyptic—until the apocalypse comes. I think nothing is the end of the world until the end of the world.

BARACK OBAMA, US President,

in *The New Yorker*



IF SOMEONE HAD ever told me that I had the slightest chance of winning the Nobel Prize, I would have to think that I'd have about the same odds as standing on the moon. In fact, during the year I was born and for a few years after, there wasn't anyone in the world who was considered good enough to win this Nobel Prize. So, I recognize that I am in very rare company, to say the least.

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BOB DYLAN,

*songwriter and singer*, in his written acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in literature

THE REAL INDEX of civilization is when people are kinder than they need to be.

---

LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES,  
*novelist*

TELLING THE PUBLIC suddenly that the promissory notes you have do not promise anything with certainty is a more complex manifestation of authoritarianism, allegedly justified—or so the government claims—because some of these notes, held by some crooked people, involve black money. At one stroke the move declares all Indians—indeed all holders of Indian currency—as possibly crooks, unless they can establish they are not.

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AMARTYA SEN,  
*economist and Nobel laureate*

YOU CAN'T BE A SLAVE to technology—you have to empower it and make it work your way.

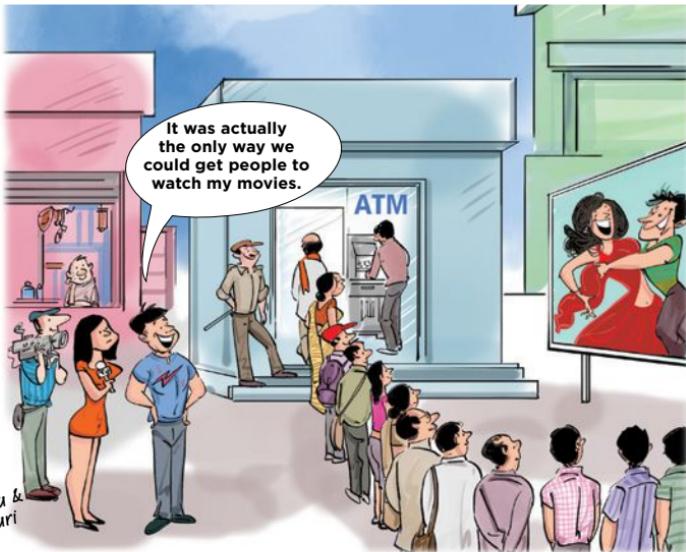
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A. R. RAHMAN,  
*music composer*



IT HAPPENS

# Only in India



**ROBBERS HAVE ALSO** borne the brunt of demonetization. Vikas Kumar, a labourer, was walking towards a bus stop in Greater Noida when he was accosted by two men on a motorcycle. They snatched his purse that had three ₹500 notes and fled. Just as Kumar was deciding what to do, he spotted them returning. They threw the purse at him and proceeded to chastise him, telling him that he should have carried money in 100-rupee notes.

Source: huffingtonpost.in

**HERE'S A POLITICIAN** who believes in being bulletproof at all times—

even the bathroom. Telengana chief minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao's sprawling bathroom in his 'official' residence in Begumpet has been outfitted with bulletproof glass. Two bedrooms have been secured in a similar fashion. Needless to say, the entire exercise cost several lakh rupees. All in the name of security, of course.

*Submitted by: C. RADHIKA, Secunderabad.*

Source: *The Times of India*

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

# ART *of* LIVING



No more broken promises, just hit refresh.

Use these tricks to stick to your goals

## Make Your Resolutions Work

BY GAGAN DHILLON



## NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

can be a slippery slope. The harder you push, the greater the odds that you may trip. According to recent research by behavioural scientist Katherine Milkman from the University of Pennsylvania, USA, there are certain moments when we are most motivated to improve ourselves and make a change. This itch to 'do more' is most prevalent around times that mark a new beginning. Think New Year, the beginning of a week or month, your birthday or the end of a phase. This feeling of a clean slate doubly motivates you to take action.

This is also a time when we tend to overestimate our abilities and underestimate the effort our goals may require.

Counter any loopholes with these tactics.

## I will read more

**Action plan** You are reading an article on meditation; midway you see a link on green spaces and click. By the second paragraph you're on another essay on garden pests. This 'hyperlink-reading' exhausts the brain. It makes you forgetful and impatient. Go old school and pick up a book. Set aside time to read every day, perhaps on your commute or before bedtime.

**Why it works** Reading is an ageless activity that nourishes your brain

and relieves stress (see page 64). Starting in early childhood can have a positive impact on intelligence in later years, says a study in *Child Development*. Among the elderly, such cognitive activities keep the brain sharp and slow down memory decline, states a study in *Neurology*.

## I will make time for myself

**Action plan** Sometimes it is okay to say 'no,' to keep aside 10–15 minutes for yourself. It is easier said than done, as most of us just about manage to keep afloat under the daily grind. Mumbai-based psycho-

therapist Shalini Anant suggests making time first thing in the morning to nurture yourself and spend it doing things that give you pleasure. Make it a daily ritual and guard it vehemently.

**Why it works** We make small choices daily, usually in auto mode, which decide what kind of energy takes over our

“  
*Changing  
behaviour  
is about  
setting helpful  
defaults, not  
willpower.*

day. "Doing something you love—listening to music, or spending time outdoors—starts the day on a good note and helps you handle stress better," says Anant. Avoid situations that drain you. Do this liberally with people who pillage your mental calm, but do draw energy from a thoughtful gesture, a smile or a random act of kindness.

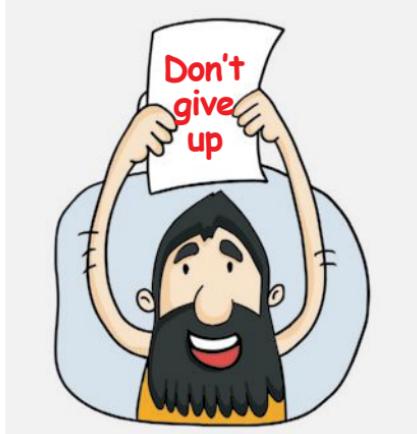
## I will live a healthier life

**Action plan** Changing behaviour isn't about willpower. Our environment influences our decisions, so it is about setting helpful defaults. Borrow Milkman's strategy of "temptation bundling". Combine what you 'want to do' with something you 'should do'. Walk on the treadmill while you watch your favourite TV show. If you prefer walking outdoors get your partner or children to tag along and use the time to catch up. Not drinking enough water? Time your breaks from sitting in such a way that you walk to get a glass of water. To quit smoking, get a friend to join you; look for someone who is also committed to stubbing the butt.

**Why it works** "The activity that you dread or are avoiding becomes achievable when you combine it with something you love," says Gurgaon-based life skills expert Aparna Samuel Balasundaram. It works wonders when you want to nix habits that come from poor self-control. Try this if you are struggling to sleep on time. Schedule a bedtime and stick to it. If sleep eludes you, meditate or keep a gratitude journal. Or motivate yourself to *finally* declutter your room by playing upbeat music, enjoying hourly treats and relaxing at a spa once you are done.

## I will be more present

**Action plan** Make a conscious effort to drown out physical, emotional and



mental distractions. Train your brain to ignore the hum of the car engine, your buzzing mobile phone and the whirlwind of thoughts stealing your focus. Every time you get distracted, imagine lifting the distraction and dropping it outside your space. Then, return to the present. Use app blockers to free yourself from smartphone distractions.

**Why it works** Being focused helps you concentrate and absorb what you are experiencing. You'll notice fewer brain farts (forgetting basic information). Being mindful trains your brain to flex its concentration muscle. A 2014 study in *Frontiers in Psychology* found that when the chatter around you is on mute the brain rewards you with a spike in creativity. It also helps you enjoy meaningful relationships because you'll give them the attention they deserve.

## I will choose happiness

**Action plan** Practise ‘self-compassion’. Acknowledge and value your emotions. Cherish your relationships and let those who warm your heart know that they make a difference. In fact, a 2015 survey of the Harvard Grant Study, a 75-year long study on adult development, found three key aspects to happiness—choosing to be happy with what you have, investing in close relationships and taking care of your well-being. Anant suggests: “Look into a mirror and tell yourself, ‘I love you and I accept you the way you are.’”

**Why it works** A *Science-Direct* study explains self-compassion as being “kind towards oneself in instances of pain or failure; perceiving one’s experiences as part of the larger human experience; and holding painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness”. Anant adds that this will bring health, happiness and love to your life.

## I will buy less and experience more

**Action plan** Move out of your comfort zone. Instead of splurging on clothes or gadgets, plan a vacation, see a play, loiter around your city or be part of a heritage

walk. Do something you wouldn’t usually do. You may discover a new passion and uncover layers to your personality.

**Why it works** Things collect dust, but experiences add value to our lives. Make the year count by doing something memorable, if not remarkable. Consider volunteering your time with a cause that’s close to you, or ticking off an item from your bucket list. The conversations you’ll have, the places you’ll visit, the feelings your action will invoke will stay with you, etched in memory.

## I will save with a plan

*Things collect dust, but experiences add value to our lives. Make the year count.*

**Action plan** The best way to achieve a goal is by knowing why you are doing it, says Anant. So, decide on the date when you make your first saving, the minimum amount and how often you’ll deposit the money. If in doubt, ask a qualified expert for help.

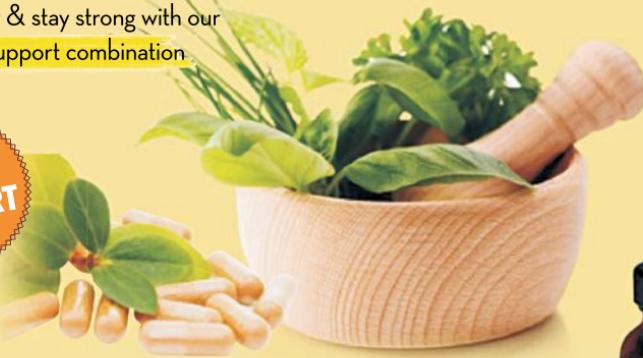
**Why it works** Balasundaram says breaking down a seemingly abstract goal into clear objectives will give you a base to check your progress against. It will cease to be insurmountable once you see how far you’ve come and what needs to be done. For this race, you’ve got to be slow and steady, so you can plan for the years to come. R

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Doctor's Orders

# 6 Ways to Be Healthier in 2017 (Without Dieting)

BY THE PHYSICIANS OF *THE DOCTORS*

## 1 TAKE A FIVE-MINUTE WALK FOR EACH HOUR YOU SIT

Indiana University, USA, researchers recently found that if people sat for just one hour, they experienced a 50 per cent drop in their leg arteries' ability to expand. Over time, this impairment can increase the risk of cardiovascular problems. But study participants who walked for five minutes for each hour they spent on their duffs, had no changes in blood vessel function.

## 2 MAKE YOUR BED

Bed-makers were 19 per cent more likely to report getting a good night's sleep than people who leave their blankets messy in the morning, found a poll from the National Sleep Foundation, USA. There may be a connection between feeling good about where you sleep and your

tendency to sleep through the night, according to the NSF.

## 3 READ FOR PLEASURE, WITHOUT DISTRACTION

Proponents of the 'slow reading' movement advocate curling up with a good book for at least a half hour, uninterrupted by text messages or Facebook alerts. The practice may reduce stress and promote clearer thinking. Studies have shown that when people read multimedia content—say, text coupled with images and videos—their reading comprehension is lower than when they read only text.

## 4 STASH DISINFECTING WIPES AT YOUR DESK

How's this for gross? Fewer than four hours after University of Arizona, USA, researchers swabbed

virus samples on to common workplace surfaces, like tabletops or doorknobs, they found traces of the germs on 40 to 60 per cent of other frequently touched objects in the building. Protect yourself by sanitizing your own workspace—wipe down your desk, keyboard and phone with disinfecting wipes. In



the study, this helped reduce virus spread by up to 99 per cent.

## 5

### WATCH ONE FEWER TV SHOW A DAY

The older adults get, the more they tend to watch TV. According to recent numbers from the media ratings company Nielsen, people in their 30s and 40s log nearly five hours of TV a day on average; those in their 50s and early 60s watch about six hours daily; and adults ages 65 and older spend a whopping seven hours in front of their television set each day. Too much sedentary screen time in mid-life is linked with type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

## 6

### FIND A DOC YOU LOVE

When physicians received 'bedside manner' training about empathy and communication, their patients often had significant improvements in blood pressure, weight loss or pain management, found a 2014 research from Harvard Medical School scientists. If you're not crazy about your doctor, ask friends or colleagues for recommendations. Or speak up about the factors that frustrate you. Maybe your doctor could use clearer language or give you a little more time during visits.

R

*The Doctors* is an American TV show hosted by Jennifer Ashton, MD, and Travis Stork, MD.



# Put Some Super in Your Food

BY MANDY OAKLANDER  
AND GAGAN DHILLON

INDIAPICTURE

CERTAIN SUPERFOODS contain antioxidants that are fat-soluble (meaning your body absorbs them better when they're paired with a fat) and water-soluble (nutrients will leach out if the food is prepared in water). Maximize their benefits with this cheat sheet courtesy of food scientist Bradley Bolling, PhD.

## TURMERIC

**How:** In hot water or milk

**Why:** Turmeric is known for its immunity-boosting and antiseptic properties. Heating turmeric helps increase its solubility and boosts the absorption of the disease-fighting antioxidant curcumin.



## GINGER

**How:** Dried, boiled for five minutes  
**Why:** The concentration of essential oils increases as the root ages and with it, its many benefits. Research shows that gingerol, dried ginger extract, reduces oxidative stress, swelling and inflammation. Eat raw or heat-treated ginger to ease post-exercise aches. Drink ginger water to ease indigestion or nix nausea.

## ONIONS

**How:** Chop into wedges, let sit for 15 minutes, then roast at 190°C to 200°C for 20 minutes

**Why:** When a cut onion is allowed to rest, an enzyme forms that creates health-promoting sulphur compounds throughout the entire onion. Roasting it preserves the phytochemicals—and provides the bonus of a sweet, caramelized flavour.

## CARROTS

**How:** Peel carefully, coat in oil and roast

**Why:** The healthy polyacetylene compounds found in carrots are concentrated near the surface; peel too

aggressively and you risk losing them. Polyacetylenes are fat-soluble, so you won't lose them by boiling or steaming, but roasting these veggies makes them taste best.

## PARSLEY

**How:** Make a salad like tabbouleh.

**Why:** Parsley is rich in flavonoids—especially the potential cancer-fighter apigenin—and tabbouleh is rich in parsley. "People typically use parsley as a garnish, but in tabbouleh, you can eat more than just a little," says Bolling.

## CORN

**How:** Roast ears, then cut kernels off the cob and pop them into vegetable broth with fresh herbs like thyme and basil to make fresh corn chowder.

**Why:** Roasting corn first heightens the flavour. Cooking and serving it in broth will extract and retain corn's water-soluble phytochemicals.

## PEPPERS

**How:** Coat with oil and grill

**Why:** Grilling maximizes phytochemicals by breaking down the plant cell walls. Add a little oil for flavour and to help your body absorb those valuable carotenoids.

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A ready reckoner for good manners at the workplace

# How Not to Be a Pest at the Office

BY SUCHISMITA UKIL

**☛ HERE'S A SITUATION:** You are racing to meet a deadline and have been labouring on the story for hours, but the cantankerous colleague from across the office floor, who you're calling unprintable names in your head by now, is having an animated and extremely personal conversation with their ex. You do not want to be a part of it, but their voice just keeps drilling deeper. And now you're panicking and sweating from places unimaginable and desperately looking for a way out.

We all hate this colleague. Don't be like them. Thankfully, there are ways to improve on your interpersonal skills and keep out of your (high-strung) colleague's hair (this is turning out to be oddly autobiographical). Here are quick fixes for getting by at work without stepping on too many toes—and looking good in the process.

**BE A GOOD CITIZEN.** Value your workplace; it makes you value your co-workers automatically. This translates to being mindful of others' space (particularly in today's open-plan offices) and time. What it means is, you put your phone on silent mode—or, at least, turn the volume down so no one is subjected to your ringtone—and avoid talking loudly in your bay (worse, near someone else's).

Surely you do not want to be remembered as the jerk that jumped the line at the cafeteria or forgot to give the right of way at the gate during rush hour? And I hope the person who keeps taking away my chair (and never putting it back!) reads this. While on the subject, it's best not to dawdle or loiter about inside the office—a breakout area is designed for you to unwind, so make the most of it! If there's none, just take

five and step out.

Offering to pay for a birthday gift or a contributory lunch, informing in case of a delay and not keeping your colleagues waiting are some of the things that are guaranteed to get you in their good books. Avoid borrowing money or disturbing them after office hours. These tend to get people's goat.

#### **COMMUNICATION IS KEY.**

Be tactful wherever possible, particularly with your seniors. Avoid vocabulary—and body language—that could work to your disadvantage. Do be courteous—‘please’ and ‘thank you’ go a long way. And I cannot stress this enough, treat office email with a degree of formality.

Do not interrupt colleagues or butt in on conversations that don’t involve you. On a similar note, always offer to help out, but never compromise on your own work. And do give credit when it’s due.

If a subject you know well is being discussed, it is good to sound knowledgeable but do not talk down or appear like an obnoxious know-all. Also, leaning in is great, but wild self-promotion isn’t. Strike a balance.

No harm in being friendly, but do not flirt with your co-workers—it is



never charming. As some learn the hard way, innuendos can amount to sexual harassment. Also, avoid getting personal, like remarking on people’s appearances. A seemingly harmless “Oh, you look so good today” may not land as well as expected, so it’s best to stay out of such meaningless controversy. As an aside, do not get drunk at an office party, just because the drinks are on the house. And never reciprocate bad behaviour; turn the proverbial cheek!

**DO NOT BE A DRAMA QUEEN.** Do not be the ‘difficult’ person that the team avoids like the plague. Avoid backbiting and/or gossiping—it’s rude and damaging. Do not play politics, whine or burst into tears in the office.

**SHOW THEM WHO’S THE BOSS.** Fine-tune your relationship with the boss.

There's quite a bit of room between a mole and a boss's lackey, so find that space. A blatant attempt to please can be off-putting. As the saying goes—and I'm not making this up—admire, don't slobber. If you need to correct them on something, you need to repeat after me: finesse, finesse, finesse. In case your differences are a matter of perspective, not facts, respectfully agree to disagree! Pssst... Keep your entitlement a secret; it irritates the hell out of bosses. Telling them you're busy is also not the best move either.

Now, bosses, take note: Don't name and shame, please. Humiliating an employee in front of others reflects badly on you. There is always a better way of handling a situation—even if it's the hardest thing you have to do.

Prioritize your tasks and meet deadlines—you will always be appreciated for it. Do not go into a meeting without looking at the agenda or doing your homework. Keep a few questions/suggestions ready. Conversely, do not hog all the attention or speak non-stop. You will get a thumbs up from not just the boss, but your colleagues as well.



—————“—————

***Maintain house rules—contrary to popular belief, rules are not meant to be broken.***

—————“—————

**DON'T BE A PIG.** No one will tell you to shower regularly, but it is a good start. Do not go to work if you're too sick. If you do, you are pushing yourself in the wrong direction and exposing your colleagues to your germs.

Maintain house rules; there's a reason they're there (eye-roll at another

mention of “rules are meant to be broken”). Keep your workspace clean and make sure cups and leftovers are cleared. Don't eat smelly or messy food at your desk, please? I've stopped keeping a track of the times I've walked in to dirty toilet seats and a messy trail of toilet-paper horror—that's the stuff nightmares are made of. As they say, cleanliness is right next to godliness. R



Clever tricks to organize your car

# Top Gear

BY KELSEY KLOSS

ADAM VOORHEES; (PROP STYLIST) ROBIN FINLAY

## Group your goods

For efficient unloading (and a tidy vehicle), keep a laundry basket in your trunk. Fill it with shopping bags and carry it inside once you're home. Return it to the car the next time you leave.

## Minimize the mess

Crumbs seem to have an affinity for sticky spaces. To avoid grit build-up in your cup holders, use silicone muffin liners. When they get grimy, pop them out to wash.

## Keep your hands clean

Place a bottle of sanitizer in the side compartment of the driver's door.

This facilitates quick clean-ups after pushing a grocery cart.

## File your bills

Keep an envelope labelled "Receipts" in the main console and use it to stash parking and shopping chits. Every week, take a moment to decide which ones are important to keep.

## Contain the trash

Prevent debris from finding its way into every corner and compartment by re-purposing a plastic container or empty tissue box to hold all garbage. Empty it every week.

R

A guide to understanding your four-legged best friend

# Dog Myths Debunked

BY SHIRIN MERCHANT

**MYTH AND SUPERSTITIONS** continue to flourish freely in the canine world despite advances in science and research. The old wives' tales have been around for so long, they have turned into clichés or catchphrases. In the end, though, the ones that suffer the most are the dogs themselves. So, to clear the air, here are the myths, the aphorisms and the truth.

**MYTH My dog knows when he's done something wrong. He looks guilty when I scold him.**

**FACT** Submissive displays like cowering or, as we humans call it, "looking guilty" have nothing to do with your dog "knowing that he's done something wrong". Most owners scold a dog well after it has committed its naughty act, arguing that the dog knows it did something wrong. Since a dog cannot associate praise or punishment with an action, unless it immediately follows the action, he has no idea why he is being scolded. He

looks guilty because he is frightened of the owner's aggressive behaviour and is trying to placate him using a display that, in a dog's mind, should work. Under normal circumstances, a dominant dog won't continue to challenge a dog that is showing submission. If you do want to scold your dog for any reason, make sure you do it only if you catch your dog in the act and, even then, keep it short.

**MYTH A wagging tail is a sign of a happy dog.**

**FACT** Most of us think a wagging tail is a sign of a friendly dog, but did you know that a dog would also wag his tail just before he is going to bite? Dogs communicate with their tails, so it's a good idea to learn what the canine means when it uses this highly mobile appendage. For example, an aggressive dog will hold its tail erect and wag it very stiffly from side to side. A friendly or happy dog will hold its tail horizontally and wag really fast—the whole rear end moves.

A frightened dog will hold its tail low, close to its legs and wag in a nervous manner. Before approaching an unfamiliar canine, it's important to note its entire demeanour, not just the tail.

**MYTH Dogs kiss us on the lips as a sign of affection.**

**FACT** Kissing is a primate's and not a canine's way of showing affection. Puppies lick their mother on the lips to get her to regurgitate food. They often do the same with humans and the behaviour, if rewarded, can quickly turn into an attention-seeking one. Licking can also be a signal of submission—if you scold a pup, it might try to lick your lips in a similar gesture of pacification. So while face-licking may not represent love, it nevertheless can be interpreted as a token of a dog's affection or respect.

**MYTH Dogs are scavengers and can eat all kinds of human foods.**

**FACT** While some human foods are beneficial to dogs, such as



eggs, yoghurt [some dogs may be lactose intolerant], flaxseed, chicken liver and green beans, some are actually poisonous. For instance, chocolate can cause theobromine poisoning and be fatal—even a small amount can cause lethargy, vomiting and diarrhoea. Onions fed over a long period of time can cause anaemia. Bones can cause choking, internal punctures and, in some cases, even death. Macadamia nuts can cause indigestion, and grapes and raisins are known to cause kidney failure. So feed human foods to dogs with caution. R

**Shirin Merchant** is a Mumbai-based canine behaviourist and trainer. She is also the founder and director of Canines Can Care.



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YE



EAH!



Beat back stress and take charge of your life with these expert-approved tips. Here's to a healthier, happier year!

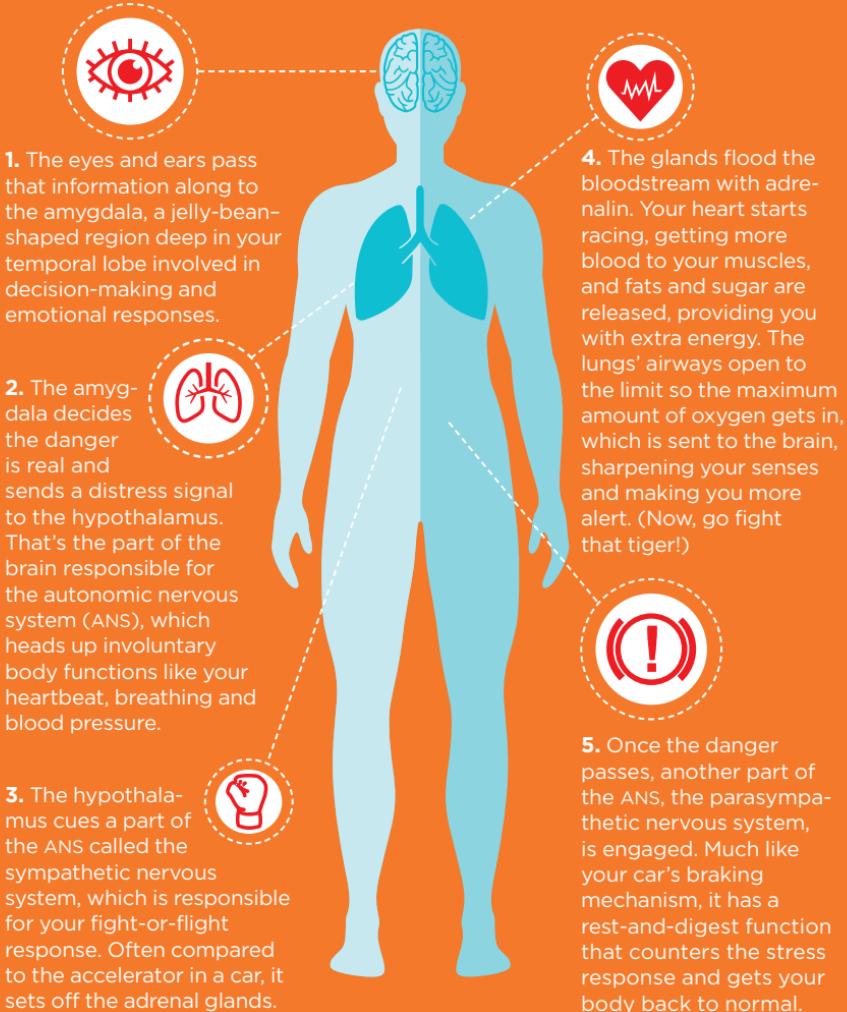
# 25 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT **STRESS** RIGHT NOW

BY DANIELLE GROEN

**1**

## What happens to your body under pressure?

Stress gives us the energy to fight or flee, which is pretty useful if you're staring down a sabre-toothed tiger but not quite as productive in the lead-up to a job interview. Here's what happens in your brain when you sense danger:



## 2) THERE'S A FORMULA TO HELP YOU DETERMINE WHAT'S TRIGGERING THOSE FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT FEELINGS.

After 60 years of research, scientists have determined what provokes stress, says Dr Sonia Lupien, director of the Centre for Studies on Human Stress in Montreal. There's even a handy acronym: NUTS.

- N** is for **Novelty**: "This is something new you've not experienced before, like the first day of school or a new job."
- U** is for **Unpredictability**: "When you don't know how something is going to [take shape, as is the case during] a trip to the dentist."
- T** is for **Threat to the Ego**: "When your competence is threatened, such as in front of colleagues. We're very sensitive to this."
- S** is for **Sense of Control**: "When you feel you have little or no control over the situation, like being stuck in traffic."

It's helpful to identify your sources of stress, Lupien says, because "a problem well-defined is a problem almost solved". She notes that the opposite of stress is not relaxation—it's resilience. "If you tell your brain that you can deal with this, it will stop producing the stress hormone and you will calm down." But if you need a quick fix, Lupien suggests these techniques:

- Breathe deeply:** "Extend your diaphragm; once the muscle is activated, it will stop the stress response."
- Sing:** "Singing makes you do abdominal breathing without you even realizing—it's funny like that."
- Exercise:** "You have to use the energy that you mobilize. Then it is eliminated."
- Laugh:** "The same region that makes you stressed, the hippocampus, makes you laugh. When we laugh, we produce hormones that stop the stress response."

3

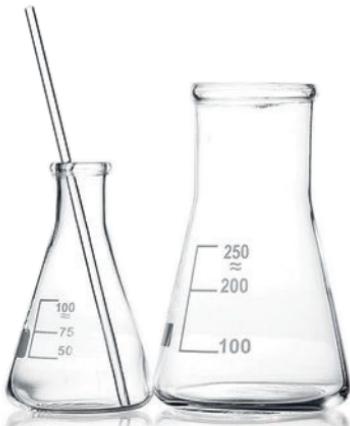
# 40.5%

Percentage of corporate employees in India who sleep for less than six hours a day due to high stress levels, as released by a 2016 study conducted by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM). In fact, 45.5 per cent of the respondents reported general anxiety or depression.

## 4) Men and women have different stress dreams.

In 2013, psychologists from the University of Montreal found that while men's nightmares tended towards the catastrophic—earthquakes, the apocalypse, vermin—women were twice as likely to have bad dreams about interpersonal conflict, betrayal and humiliation.





## 5 Science is trying to build a stress Breathalyser.

In a small 2013 study out of the United Kingdom, participants were subjected to a super-stressful experience (a tricky maths test) and a neutral one (hearing classical music). After testing for six compounds in the breath, researchers found that, after the quiz, two were elevated and four reduced, potentially due to more rapid breathing. This could be the first step towards a 'stress-alyzer', allowing doctors to more quickly diagnose a problem that, over time, increases your risk for heart attack and stroke.



## 6) YOU CAN SMELL THE STRESS ON SOMEONE.

Emotional stress releases odours that aren't present during exercise. In 2009, researchers from New York's Stony Brook University School of Medicine had some subjects run for 20 minutes and others fall from the sky for 20 minutes (with an instructor). When members of a third group entered brain scanners and sniffed the stressed-out sample, it lit up the amygdala, which governs emotional responses. The runners' sweat had no effect.

## 7 Stress is contagious.

A 2013 German study published in the journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology* provided more proof of second-hand stress. Thirty per cent of people showed spiked levels of cortisol after simply observing someone in a stressful situation, and 24 per cent of them still experienced stress when they were watching that tense person in a video recording, instead of face to face.

## 8

**It's especially contagious if you love the person.**

When our romantic partners are involved, it's even easier to "catch" second-hand stress. The German study found that 40 per cent of subjects felt triggered after being exposed to a loved one's anxiety.

## Get on your bike!

As various bits of research have shown, cycling will lower your stress levels, whether you're doing a quick errand or committing to a lifetime on two wheels.

### 15 MINUTES LATER

**9** A 2013 study out of Japan showed a marked drop in people's cortisol levels after they pedalled for just 15 minutes on a stationary bike.

### AN HOUR LATER

**10** Researchers from California's Stanford University found in 2015 that, compared to their cycling colleagues, those who drove or took the subway breathed more shallowly an hour later—a sure sign of stress.

### 18 YEARS LATER

**11** After following 17,985 adult commuters for 18 years, UK researchers discovered in 2014 that those who walked or biked reported being happier, more confident and better able to face their problems.

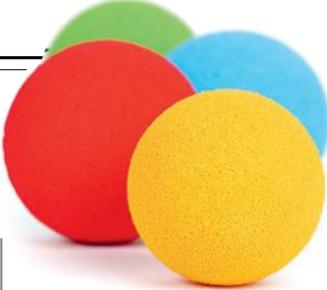
### 12) IF YOU HAVE TO DRIVE SOMEWHERE, PLAN AHEAD.

In a 2012 study from the University of California, drivers in San Jose reported they felt less stressed after using traffic-navigation technology for their commutes than when they chose to just wing it.

**13**

### Chew gum; cut down stress.

At Cardiff University in Wales, 133 volunteers were tested on memory, motor skills and reaction time while sitting in silence and when industrial noise was played at the volume of a vacuum cleaner. Chewing gum during the blasting noise was associated with better performance and a better mood than those who went without.



### 14) TOYS CAN DO THE TRICK.

Being conscious for an operation is a preposterously stressful situation. So in 2015, psychologists at the University of Surrey in England asked nearly 400 patients to either listen to music, talk to a nurse, watch a DVD or fiddle with a stress ball while undergoing minimally invasive vein surgery. Music made no difference to their reported levels of anxiety or pain, while subjects who used stress balls experienced 18 per cent less anxiety and 22 per cent less pain than those undergoing treatment with no distraction. A good conversation can help, too: While the balls were best for managing physical discomfort, interacting with a nurse resulted in the biggest drop in participants' anxiety levels, at 30 per cent.

## 15 You can read your way out of stress.

Neuropsychologists at the University of Sussex in Brighton, England, discovered a pretty terrific formula:

# six minutes

of reading is all you need to reduce stress levels by 68 per cent. That's better than listening to music (at 61 per cent), having a cup of tea (54 per cent) or taking a walk (42 per cent).

... but you can build it back up to size with:

**17 DIET:** A 2014 study out of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) found that the hippocampus—related to memory and emotional resilience—was 14 per cent larger in seniors who ate baked or broiled fish on a weekly basis than those who didn't.

**18 EXERCISE:** Scientists from the University of Illinois, USA, followed 120 elders for a year. In 2010, they found that the volume of the hippocampus jumped by two per cent in those who walked for 40 minutes, three times a week.

**19 MEDITATION:** Based on 2010 research out of Harvard University, eight weeks of meditation (for an average of 27 minutes a day) boosted density in the hippocampus.



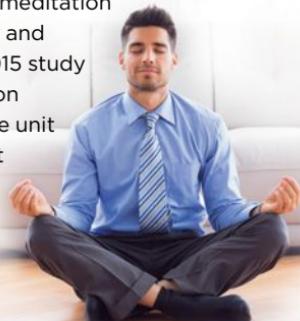
## 16) STRESS SHRINKS YOUR BRAIN ...

According to Yale University scientists in Connecticut who, in 2012, examined tissue donated from a brain bank, chronic stress leads to a loss of synapses between brain cells, specifically the ones responsible for emotion and cognition. That, in turn, leads to a loss of brain mass, making your noggin a little lighter.

## 20) SERIOUSLY, START MEDITATING.

A 2013 meta-analysis of 200-plus studies on mindfulness-based therapy, conducted by psychologists at Boston University, the University of Montreal and Quebec's Laval University, concluded that meditation reduces anxiety and stress. And a 2015 study of Ohio nurses on an intensive care unit found that eight weeks of meditation cut stress levels by 40 per cent.

INDIAPICTURE



## 21 Try mindful breathing.

A 2016 *Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy* study found that Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique (PMRT), which is systematically tensing and relaxing all your muscles, and mindfulness breathing, reduced stress levels among employed Indian women and home-makers. To give mindful breathing a shot:

1. Keep your back straight.
2. Breathe naturally, through the nostrils.
3. Don't try to control the breath.
4. When your mind wanders, concentrate on the breath. Count if it helps keep you focused.
5. Breathe this way for 10 to 15 minutes each day.
6. Gradually, distracting thoughts subside.

## 22) HUG YOUR FAMILY!

In a 2015 study, researchers from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada, subjected 66 teen girls to a stress test. Some of them held their mothers' hands during the test; others had to do it alone. The girls who had contact with their mums were able to manage stress more effectively. It's what psychologists refer to as emotional load sharing.

## 23

### Stress doesn't make it harder to get pregnant.

A 2011 *British Medical Journal* meta-analysis of 14 studies found that women with extreme levels of emotional distress were as likely to get pregnant as women with milder levels after one round of in-vitro fertilization.



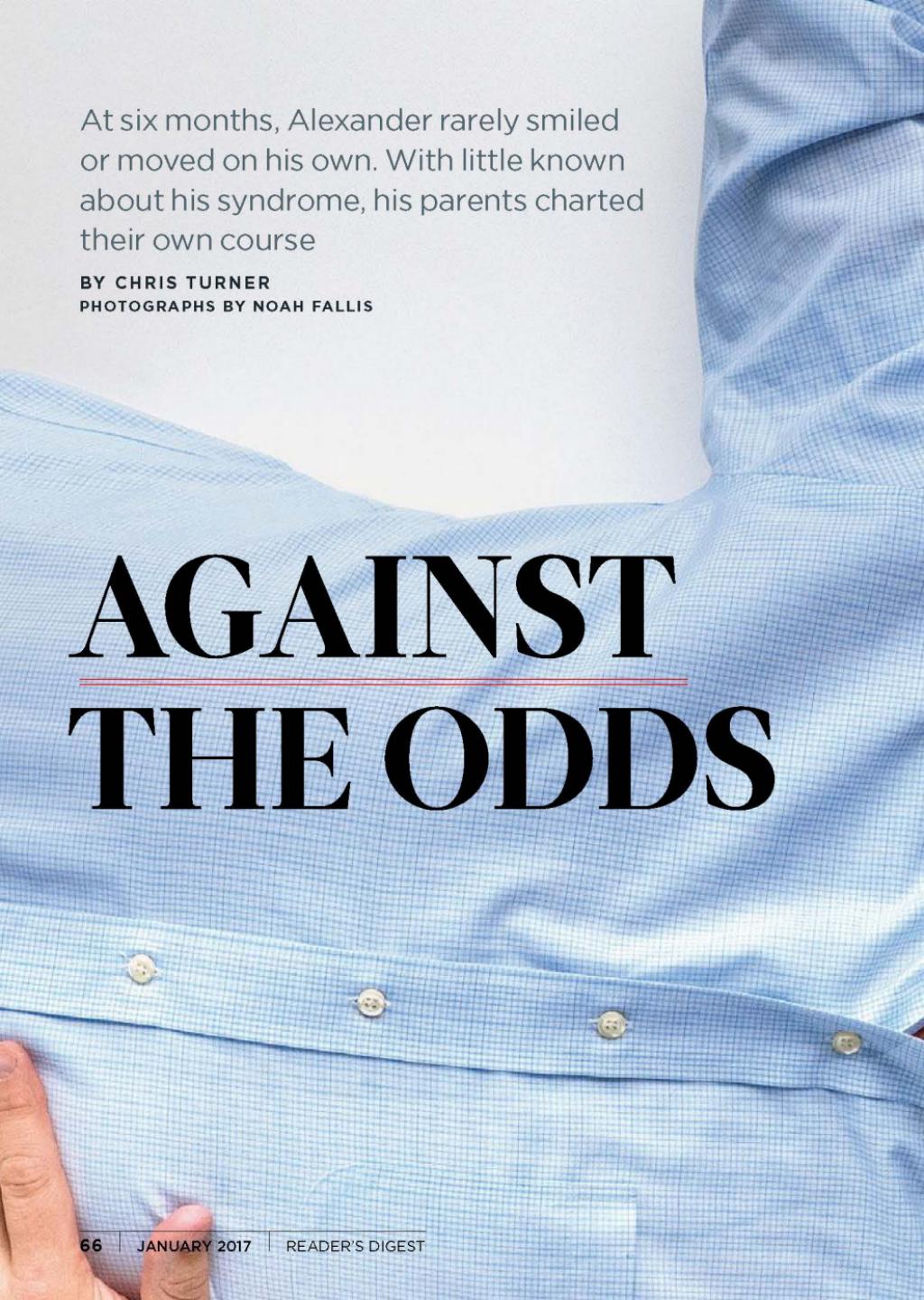
## 24) Get a companion.

In a 2007 University of California, Los Angeles study, some patients hospitalized for heart failure spent 12 minutes with a therapy dog, while another group interacted with a volunteer. The canine crowd experienced greater decreases in their adrenalin and anxiety levels compared to those patients whose visitors could actually talk back.

## 25) SELF-ESTEEM IS A NATURAL STRESS BUSTER.

Researchers from Concordia University in Canada met with 147 adults over 60 for four years. After factoring in economic and marriage status, they found that high self-esteem levels produced lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Let us help kick-start that confidence: We think you're great. R

—WITH INPUTS FROM GAGAN DHILLON



At six months, Alexander rarely smiled or moved on his own. With little known about his syndrome, his parents charted their own course

BY CHRIS TURNER  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY NOAH FALLIS

# AGAINST THE ODDS



**FOR THE FIRST SIX MONTHS** of Alexander's life, I wanted to believe he might get well on his own. I would often lie down on the floor and make faces at him, trying to tease out a smile. Sometimes, after lots of effort, it worked. But mostly, my son was motionless and silent, his eyes focused on nothing in particular.

It was fall 2009 and my wife, Ashley, and I had only just moved into a new home in downtown Calgary, Canada. We had a vivacious four-year-old daughter named Sloane, a grouchy Siamese cat and an infant son who was a mystery. Alexander had been born hypotonic—floppy, basically—with an abdominal hernia, a heart murmur, strange folds on his ears and a V-shaped birthmark in the centre of his forehead. The geneticist assigned to us in intensive care, Micheil Innes, knew these were markers of a genetic disorder, but he couldn't place it.

Even after Alexander was healthy enough to come home, he remained undersized and underweight, hardly able to hold up his head. Amid the blurry rush of feeding and diapers and getting Sloane off to school, I could pretend he was just a little quiet

and weak for his age. But the truth is, we often wondered if there was any awareness inside him at all.

The first tentative answer arrived on a dark afternoon in December. We were called to a small room at the Alberta Children's Hospital where Innes explained that a piece of our son's genetic coding simply wasn't there. He showed us the lab results: rows of striped squiggles like some ancient alphabet and a red dot indicating the location of the missing material—near the end of the 'q' branch of the ninth pair of chromosomes. The precise spot, in technical terms, was 9q34.3.

Innes then handed us a pamphlet that had been printed off a website. The document explained that "9q34.3 subtelomeric deletion syndrome" was usually an uninherited, spontaneous mutation, likely occurring at conception. The condition was later renamed Kleefstra syndrome, after a Dutch researcher who studies it. Innes believed there were fewer than 100 verified diagnoses worldwide at the time. Alexander's developmental problems were born of a single cause—the tiniest of wounds, duplicated in every single cell in his body, forever.



WE WERE TERRIFIED OUR MUTE CHILD  
WOULD NEVER WALK OR TALK, LET  
ALONE RUN ACROSS A PLAYGROUND.



*Alexander with his mum, Ashley Bristowe, in their Calgary home in late 2014.*

Because there were so few cases, the pamphlet provided anecdotes rather than a prognosis; a series of expected obstacles—to speech, mobility, learning—that our son might overcome, if lucky, after a lifetime of hard work.

Ashley and I drove home from the hospital in devastated silence, as if some vital swatch of our family's fabric had been ripped away. Later, as I watched Alexander in bed, I was too numb even to cry. I started to indulge in wishful thinking. Maybe he'll simply catch up to his peers, I thought to myself. Maybe someone will figure out how to fix this. I was convinced, in any case, that I couldn't.

A few days after meeting the geneticist, we were having dinner when Sloane jumped from her seat and skipped to her brother in his high chair at the other end of the table. We hadn't discussed Alexander's diagnosis with her, but Sloane's internal radar for her parents' moods had always been impeccable, and we were both far too shaken to hide it very well. My wife, usually a boisterous, no-holds-barred play fighter, had already put the roughhousing on hold as the house filled with a formless, boundless anxiety.

Sloane set herself up behind Alexander, hands clutching either side

of his chair, and started flinging herself from one side of his head to the other. With each swing, she bellowed giddily, “Hello, Mr Chubby Cheeks!” Alexander began to swing his head back and forth in time with her. His face erupted in a gap-mouthed grin. And then, for the first time in his life, Alexander laughed. Hard. A sudden, gurgling, exuberant laugh. And then we all did.

Somewhere on the other side of the diagnosis was a boy who could feel joy. It was our job to find him.

We began where almost all parents with a special-needs child begin: monthly visits to an over-worked early-intervention clinic that recommended rudimentary physical therapy—exercises to encourage rolling over and sitting up, for example. The workouts seemed arbitrary and totally out of proportion to Alexander’s need, like Band-Aids on broken limbs.

My wife pushed the therapists at the early-intervention clinic for better ways to address Alexander’s disorder. The medical professionals were invariably kind and competent, but Kleefstra syndrome was a question mark for them, too. The message was to wait and see, to react once Alexander’s symptoms were clearer. Had we acquiesced, the “intensive” part of my son’s therapy would’ve started around the age of three, at the earliest.

Ashley has never accepted the default position on anything, and when it came to her gnawing fear of her son’s

diminished prospects, she was relentless. She used her background as a research editor and radio producer to dig deeper. Books on disability and the brain piled up on her bedside table. One of those titles, recommended by a friend, was Glenn Doman’s *What To Do About Your Brain-Injured Child*. Doman—who died in 2013, at 93—was the founder of The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, an unconventional teaching institute in Philadelphia. Using its methods, neurologically impaired kids learn not only to walk and talk but read and count—often well ahead of unimpaired peers. Ashley had been begging me to look at Alexander’s condition as a crisis that—though it could never be fully eradicated—could still be treated. Here, finally, was corroborating evidence.

As a physical therapist in the 1940s, Doman was frustrated by the high failure rate of the techniques being used on stroke victims and, later, disabled children. Through trial and error, he and his clinic developed a new approach, founded on the theory—today called neuroplasticity—that the brain can grow and change through use. Doman’s clinic amassed evidence, case by case, that with enough hard work, kids like Alexander often exceeded every limitation that had been placed on them.

Following specifications in a book by Doman’s son, Douglas, my father and I built a “crawling track” in our living room. It was a simple ramp with

low sides made of heavy plywood, like a jungle-gym slide, wrapped in padding and turquoise vinyl. Following the instructions, we propped the track at an incline steep enough that Alexander's slightest wiggle would result in movement.

Then, against any number of parental instincts, we placed my son at the top. He was seven months old and had never wilfully moved an inch in his life. He howled in protest, squirmed in

by three dozen parents who had come from as far away as Belarus, Singapore and India. In a week of all-day lectures, our expectations for Alexander—and of our role in his therapy—turned upside down. The clinic's programme was wildly ambitious and nearly impossible to implement fully. It involved almost constant, regimented stimulation, physical activity and intellectual engagement—daily crawling distance targets, reading and maths exercises,

## ALEXANDER'S DAILY THERAPY, INCLUDING EXERCISE, DIET AND LEARNING TOOLS, NOW LOOKED LIKE AN OLYMPIC ATHLETE'S.

defiance—and the motion sent him skidding down the track.

Within a week, he was propelling himself skilfully, angry at first but eventually with resolve and even joy. We reduced the incline as he improved, until it was lying flat. A few months later, he crawled right off the end of it. And then he kept right on going.

We signed up for the next available introductory session at Doman's clinic, now directed by his daughter-in-law, Rosalind Doman. Alexander was to be the first diagnosed Kleefstra kid the clinic would ever treat.

In Philadelphia the following April, when Alexander was just 11 months old, we found ourselves surrounded

workouts aimed at improving breathing and coordination, all of it done by parents themselves. As Rosalind told us at the time, "There are lots of reasonable programmes out there. Trouble is, they don't work very well."

When we returned home the next week, we reorganized the main floor of our house around Alexander's therapy. We filled our living room with mats and flash cards emblazoned with words and dots for counting. As part of Alexander's physical therapy, we installed an elaborate "monkey bar" ladder apparatus. (Learning to walk while alternating hands on the rungs helped train Alexander's brain in "cross-pattern" movement, and the

raised arms encouraged good posture.) Our son's diet was stripped of known allergens and inflammatory substances to eliminate any possible nutritional impediments to his development. His daily regimen looked like something prescribed to an Olympic athlete.

The standard approach for a developmentally delayed person is nowhere near this ambitious. But we didn't want to wait until after our child's malleable

either of us leaving the house except to ferry our daughter to and from school.

Still, we agreed that the strain on our family was better by far than the despair of not knowing what to do. We believed, most of the time, that there was a smart little boy straining to emerge from those flapping, disorganized limbs. Alexander's programme required a platoon of volunteer helpers, which meant most of

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**ALEXANDER HAS PROVEN THAT MANY OF  
THE LIMITS WE THOUGHT COULD NOT BE  
OVERCOME FALL AWAY WITH HARD WORK.**

---

brain had stiffened into adulthood. Ashley and I now had the tools to make the most of Alexander's crucial early years. We intended to use them all.

Ashley threw herself into running Alexander's therapy programme full-time, and my daily routine as a work-from-home freelancer soon involved at least as much duty as a therapy assistant. The stress was enormous, and our debt grew whenever we sacrificed more work time for Alexander's sessions. For my wife, the manager of our ersatz team, administering the multiple programmes meant constructing a self-made cage. Our professional lives had involved extended research trips, and now whole weeks could pass without

our block knew all about his condition. The spring after he turned three, when he started to walk up and down the street on his own, his first trips were victory laps to cheering neighbours.

We would have to wait another year for proof that the reading and maths exercises were sinking in. Day in and day out, we dutifully held up flash cards containing words and numbers, sentences and equations. But how could we know for sure how much of it was working when Alexander could only speak in fragments and monosyllables? Incontrovertible evidence came one day when we were in the car, about to pull out of a parking lot. Ashley was listing off rhyming words for Alexander to attempt to repeat. "Car,"

she recited. Alexander repeated it. Then they ran through "far", "bar", "star".

Ashley paused, thinking the game was over. From the back seat, a thin, cheerful voice: "Guitar!" An unprompted, two-syllable rhyme. Our explosive cheer was so loud it startled Alexander almost to tears. The kid could talk—and rhyme! Every agonizing day of his therapy had been worth it for that marvellous rhyme.

Alexander recently turned seven, and we no longer have reason to doubt his ability to learn. His daily life is an inventory of things he wasn't expected to do—possibly ever, certainly not by now. He can tell you his name and address. He'll ask you to draw a cement truck on his whiteboard, then spell the letters with glee as you write them out. Last fall, just a year behind schedule, Alexander started kindergarten in a standard classroom. At the grocery store, he counts off the aisles from the signs overhead, calling "Aisle 5!" with particular delight. Then we stand in beloved Aisle 5 to wait for the automated checkout kiosks. "Comm-poo-ter!" Alexander announces as I sweep our groceries over the sensor, raising his arms in excitement. Gazing out

from beneath a tussle of golden hair, his deep brown eyes are magnetic—they never fail to tease a smile from the checkout attendant.

Whatever Alexander's limitations are, he is nowhere near them yet. He might never be completely self-sufficient. But I believe, if he winds up anywhere near such a state, it will be because, against the advice of many experts, we maximized every moment during his early years when his brain was most able to reorganize itself to compensate for that tiny missing sliver of gene in every cell. I want Alexander to be seen as a model of how early intervention should be done: all day, every day, as much as a distressed family can possibly cram in, from the moment anyone suspects anything is wrong.

This, I hope, is Alexander's lesson for all of us. We've only just left the dark ages when it comes to our understanding of how the human brain works. The potential waiting there is an enormous untapped resource. And as Alexander has proven already, many of the limits we long believed were impossible to overcome fall away quickly in the face of the right kind of hard work. R

\* \* \*

#### AND YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE HAVING A BAD DAY ...

Today, like most days, my cat tried to wake me up with a gentle, fluffy paw pat on my nose. This morning, however, he managed to get his claw caught inside my nostril.

Source: [www.fmylife.com](http://www.fmylife.com)

*Tuba Tabassum*



After surviving an acid attack, Tuba Tabassum's lust for life is all-consuming

# BLACK MIRROR

BY SUCHISMITA UKIL  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BANDEEP SINGH

**FIRST MET TUBA TABASSUM AT WORK.** She was covered from head to toe, wearing salwar kameez, her dupatta bound tightly around her head, oversized sunglasses firmly in place. Her parents, Arif Ashraf and Tabassum Parveen, had accompanied her for some paperwork to Care Today, the India Today Group's corporate social responsibility initiative. She is preparing for a national-level medical entrance test later this year and Care Today is funding her tuition at a private institute in New Delhi. Coming from a small village in Bihar, she needs all the help she can get. She is 18, a young woman finding her way in the world. She is also an acid attack survivor.

**ACID ATTACK IS A FORM** of gender-based violence, which in turn is a violation of human rights. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by the Indian government, prohibits “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”, resulting in perpetuation of gender inequality and discrimination.

Sally Engle Merry, professor of anthropology at New York University and faculty director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at the New York University School of Law, notes in her book *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*, “Because violence against women refers to bodily injury as do other human rights violations such as torture, it is relatively a straightforward violation. Like torture, it is about injury, pain and death. But in many parts of the world it appears to be an everyday, normal problem rather than a violation of human rights. Moreover, because gender violence is deeply embedded in systems of kinship, religion, warfare and nationalism, its prevention requires major social changes in communities, families and nations.”

An acid attack is targeted on an individual, most often women, with sulphuric, hydrochloric or nitric acid that causes severe burns. The results are permanent, and can lead to loss of

sight and hearing. The acid continues to burn through the skin and tissues even after the attack is over until neutralized by water, unlike other surface burns. The term ‘survivor’ is preferred over the passive ‘victim’ by those who have lived through an attack, where the healing is an active process.

### **THE SECOND TIME I MET TUBA**

was a month later at her hostel, on a warm afternoon last September. She had shifted to Delhi and was living by herself for the first time. She invited me into her room, which she shares with another girl. The study table adjacent to the bed is stacked with fat books on medicine, a few images of gods belonging to her Hindu roommate and a small bottle of eye-drops. The cooler in the corner hummed loudly, blowing cool air in our direction. She needs it continuously as she cannot tolerate the heat. I pulled up a chair and sat down, with Tuba on the bed facing me.

Tuba has never lived without her parents. “I cried a lot when I first came to Delhi, but it had to be done. If I want to study I have to make some compromises. But I like it here now; everyone’s so good to me. Problems are a part of life, whether here or back home,” she says. Because of the blatantly curious stares and the insensitive comments, she covers up whenever she goes out.

As we spoke, five curious girls emerged and made themselves comfortable on the two single beds

joined together. It was clear that they have found a family in each other, away from home. Tuba was without her headscarf and sunglasses, in a loosely fitted salwar kameez, her scars exposed, laughing and completely at ease. Grown up beyond her years, and perhaps a bit too soon, it was a rare glimpse of the carefree teenager.

### **FLASHBACK TO 26 SEPTEMBER**

**2012**, Harihans village, district Siwan, Bihar. With the Class X board examinations approaching fast, Tuba took private tuitions at a coaching centre in her village. She went for her classes early in the morning, returned home and then left for school. There was a young man in her class who had been quite taken with her. She had resisted his advances and it had looked like he had taken the hint and moved on. Several months had passed.

On an ordinary Wednesday morning, Tuba left home for tuition. She didn't get too far when she was attacked with acid by four boys from her neighbourhood, one of them the rejected suitor. They had probably worked on their plan for a while—it

requires a fair amount of premeditation to take revenge and with the intent to maim and disfigure but not kill (the survival rate is high in such cases). Often ostracized by society and unable to find work or earn a decent living, acid attack survivors are marginalized.

### **RELIVING THAT MOMENT, TUBA**

**SAYS:** "My face ... I lost one eye right then. My arms ... my clothes had burnt and started to fall off. I ran from there as fast as I could, screaming.

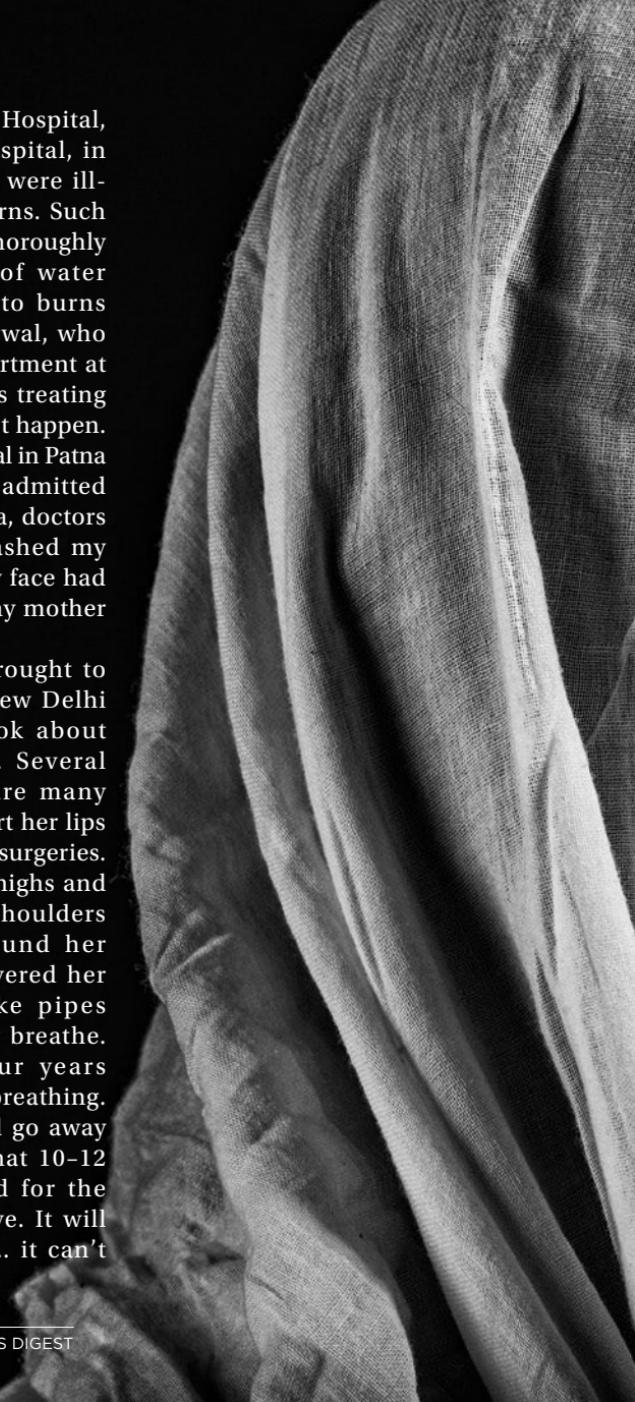
My entire back, legs [were affected]. But the droplets of acid got everywhere. My entire body got burnt. My plait fell off. I didn't know what was going on. I was in a daze of pain and confusion.

My grandfather met me as he was leaving the mosque near my house after the morning namaz. I thought they had thrown hot water on me. But [at the sight of flesh melting, hair burning and noxious fumes] he shouted, 'No, this is acid!' My

*It requires  
premeditation  
to take revenge,  
with the intent  
to maim but  
not kill.*



parents came out when they heard the din. The entire neighbourhood had gathered by then. Nobody could grasp what had happened, or what to do next."



She was taken to Sadar Hospital, the nearest municipal hospital, in Siwan. The doctors there were ill-equipped to treat acid burns. Such burns should be washed thoroughly with copious amounts of water immediately, according to burns specialist Dr Karoon Agarwal, who also heads the burns department at Safdarjung Hospital and is treating her, which apparently didn't happen. She was referred to a hospital in Patna 150 kilometres away, and admitted there for 15 days. "In Patna, doctors and the hospital staff washed my burns with a hosepipe. My face had swollen to twice its size, my mother told me later."

From Patna she was brought to Safdarjung Hospital in New Delhi where the treatment took about two and a half months. Several surgeries down, there are many more to go. She cannot part her lips fully, even after corrective surgeries. Skin was taken from her thighs and grafted on to her back, shoulders and face. The skin around her nose had melted and covered her nostrils; small, tusk-like pipes were fitted in to help her breathe. "They're still there four years later, and I have trouble breathing. Doctors tell me these will go away post-surgery. They say that 10-12 surgeries will be needed for the nose; similarly for the eye. It will take time, a lot of time ... it can't happen overnight."



## TUBA LIVES IN A GIRLS' HOSTEL

in north-west Delhi; her study centre is within walking distance. She attends classes four days a week with her mates from the institute, and studies the rest of the time. The medical entrance examination is no child's play, and it is tougher for her with an eye lost to acid. But she's powering through like a real trooper.

She knows that the damaged eye is beyond repair now. While she can see with the other eye, it has become weak and waters often. "If I push myself too hard, both my eyes start hurting and watering. I can't read much, or non-stop."

It isn't very ironic then that she wants to specialize in ophthalmology. She asks me, repeatedly, why is it that only those with locomotor disabilities qualify for reservation under the physically handicapped category in government medical colleges? Her burns, the scar tissues that have still not healed, a disfigured skin that cannot tolerate heat, a face that was taken away from her, leaving her with a distorted reflection for life—are her disabilities not big enough to get her a seat in the reserved section? I don't have an answer.

Things do seem to be changing, albeit slowly. In December 2015, the Supreme Court directed all states and union territories to take appropriate steps to include the names of acid violence survivors under the persons with disabilities list.

Last December, the Indian Parliament passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2016, expanding the list of disabilities from seven to 21 to include acid attacks, among others. Javed Abidi, director, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), while acknowledging certain lacunae in the bill, reiterated that it was a "huge leap in the future. Two things it does very clearly: First, it recognizes acid attack survivors as persons with disabilities; and second, the anti-discriminatory measures that are contained in the bill are extended to the survivors."

With respect to acid attack survivors, the bill doesn't guarantee reservation in education, but it ensures non-discrimination—it empowers high courts in every state to set up fast-track courts to see to it that this is followed through. It does provide job reservations for acid attack survivors, though, clubbing them with the locomotor disabled—the quota ceiling, proposed to be raised from 3 to 5 per cent, was restricted to 4 per cent. It is yet to be implemented, but it's a start.

## HER VOICE ASSUMES A BITTER TONE

when she speaks about the violence on her body, the nightmares that don't stop. Tuba laments, "We've been getting dates after dates at the Patna High Court for the past four years. [The accused] are in jail (in Siwan) right now, but they deserve to be punished.

What good is a jail for them? They get to eat and live comfortably. But my problems don't seem to end. Thinking about it, I get very disturbed."

Tuba's family wants justice for their daughter. Her family, especially her father, Arif, has been her voice of reason, supporting her, guiding her, loving her. Parveen, her mother, gave up her job as a teacher to take care of her daughter round-the-clock. "I would see them [the attackers] everywhere and replay the incident in my head. I wanted my parents to be with me at all times; I couldn't let go even for a bit. My family has held me together—I am here because of them," Tuba says.

Two of the four accused claim they were juveniles. If guilty, this would qualify them for a maximum sentence of three years in a juvenile home. "They were older to me by about four years at least. How could they be children? They had planned to do this to me ... there was nothing unintentional or childlike about it," says Tuba.

**WITH THE ADDITION** of Section 326A in the Indian Penal Code in 2013,

acid throwing was given the status of a cognizable and non-bailable offence, carrying a minimum punishment of 10 years and a maximum of life, effective immediately. With Section 326B, a person could face a sentence of at least five years, which may extend to seven, for attempting to throw acid. Another ruling passed by the Supreme Court in 2013 called for the regulation of sale of concentrated acid, required the maintenance of a detailed

record of purchasers and prohibited its sale to minors.

However, there is a gap between what's on paper and its implementation. Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs suggest that there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of acid violence, from 83 in 2011 and 116 in 2013 to 222 in 2015. Bikramjit Sen, deputy director of Acid Survivors' Foundation India, headquartered in Kolkata, estimates that there could be as

many as 500 acid attack cases in India every year.

**AS WE EXPERIENCED** ourselves while purchasing a concentrated form of acid (the "good stuff", as the store

***They had  
planned to do  
this to me ...  
There was  
nothing childlike  
about it.***



owner put it), procuring it is still child's play. A male colleague and I went looking at a large wholesale market in Noida after work. We didn't have to look too hard—friendly passersby directed us to a dingy chemical store in an alley, where he bought two litres of it for ₹100 (while I waited in the car). He didn't need any identification.

Says Sen, "Looking at the laws passed by Bangladesh in 2002 and their success in effectively containing acid violence, it is necessary to have fast-track courts for such offences. It would also be helpful to have a fixed time period (90 days) for completion of police investigation."

**PROPER MEDICAL CARE** needs to be ensured and rehabilitative measures put in place for bringing back the affected into the mainstream. ASFI is facing problems in getting the survivors compensation from the government or free treatment at private hospitals. Sen adds, "There are no government schemes or initiatives for promoting rehabilitation currently."

Tuba echoed his thoughts: "If there is quick and efficient punishment, commensurate with the crime, only then will people be deterred and think twice about ruining someone's life this way."

According to Sen, there is a lack of awareness even among those responsible for implementation. "Many times an FIR is lodged under

sections other than 326A or 326B, so that the accused gets bail very easily. Acid is still easily available and cheap. With fairly low conviction rates, the threat of punishment fails to discourage the perpetrators." It is also widely acknowledged that violence against women is under-reported globally and official estimates are lower than the actual rate of incidence. With acid violence being seen as a "low-risk" or an easy crime to commit, it is imperative that the government step up and take notice of this.

**TUBA HEARD VOICES** of hope, which she wanted to believe. "They told me things would be normal in no time. My father said he would take me to America to get my skin fixed with plastic surgery. But I know now that that's not true. Sure, they will give me a new nose, or a fake eye. But they won't be able to give me back what I lost; they won't be able to make me see." But the fire within her is not dead, it's burning bright, one that kindles hope. While in conversation with Bandeep Singh, who photographed her for the story, she said: "I never think about my face not being 'original.' This is me, this is my real face."

Tuba calls for a ban on acid sale in the country and harsher punishment. Meanwhile, she is trying to focus on her dream of becoming an eye doctor, and wishes that no one has to go through what she, and others like her, did. R

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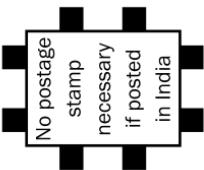


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What teachers really think about  
some pupils and parents

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# TALKING OUT OF SCHOOL

BY PATRICE ROMAIN  
FROM *RECTO-VERSO*

Parents expect their children to have opinions about their teachers, but few parents give much thought to what teachers think about pupils and parents. For more than 35 years, including 25 as both teacher and parent, educator Patrice Romain often witnessed teachers letting off steam, either at schools where he worked or in private gatherings. He noted down their wittiest and most cutting remarks. Here's a pick of the finest gems from his collection.



## They take no interest in their children's education

**VIRGINIE'S PARENTS ARE** awaiting her junior high certificate with as much impatience as a turkey awaits Christmas.

**EVERY WEEK**, Charlotte's parents remember to forget to sign her notebook.

**HIS PARENTS ARE** professionally unemployed and have solemnly promised to make their kid work. Do you see the contradiction?

## They don't take their role as parents seriously

**THE LAST TIME** he took any interest in his son was when he went to city hall to declare his birth.

**IT'S NOT SURPRISING** that Anatole is a bit lost: His father is old enough to be his grandfather, his stepmother is young enough to be his older sister, his older sister is old enough to be his mother and he is almost old enough to be his half-brother's father!

**BEFORE TRYING TO** save the world, the Duvals should first try and save their son. They may as well start with the biggest challenge.

## They think their children are the best

**IT TOOK TWO** of the Dupuis to make an idiot, and they want me to turn him into a genius single-handedly!

**I DIDN'T REALIZE IT**, but according to the parents, I have two Einsteins, five Marie Curies and eight Leonardo da Vincis in my class.

**THE MOTHER ASKED** me more questions in five minutes than her daughter did in a whole term.

## They're not rocket scientists!

**FABIEN'S PARENTS** are a very close couple—they've shared a single neuron for 10 years.

**HE'S SUCH A NICE KID**—he must have been swapped at birth ...

**WHEN YOU SEE** how intelligent the son is and how stupid the father is, you can only suggest that he gets a DNA test.

## Their children's academic level is disastrous

**KHALIL HAS BEATEN** Gagarin hands down—he's been in orbit for 10 years.

**THE LEVEL OF** the oceans has risen and that of pupils has fallen—it balances out.

**IF STUPIDITY KILLED**, I would be unemployed.

**I'M TEACHING** the future James Bond—just look at his marks: zero, zero, seven!

**I'VE MARKED** Sabrina's homework. It's shorter than the McDonald's menu and even less appetizing.

**IT'S NOT IN** my class that Rodin would have found a model for his Thinker!

## Their children are hard to put up with

**I'VE BEEN SWINDLED:** I was lured with the promise of becoming a teacher and I've ended up as a zookeeper.

**1969: NEIL ARMSTRONG** walks on the moon. 2015: Maxence has yet to come down from it.

**I DIDN'T DARE ASK** Marjolaine a question this morning as she'd already made a superhuman effort: she'd brought her books and pens.



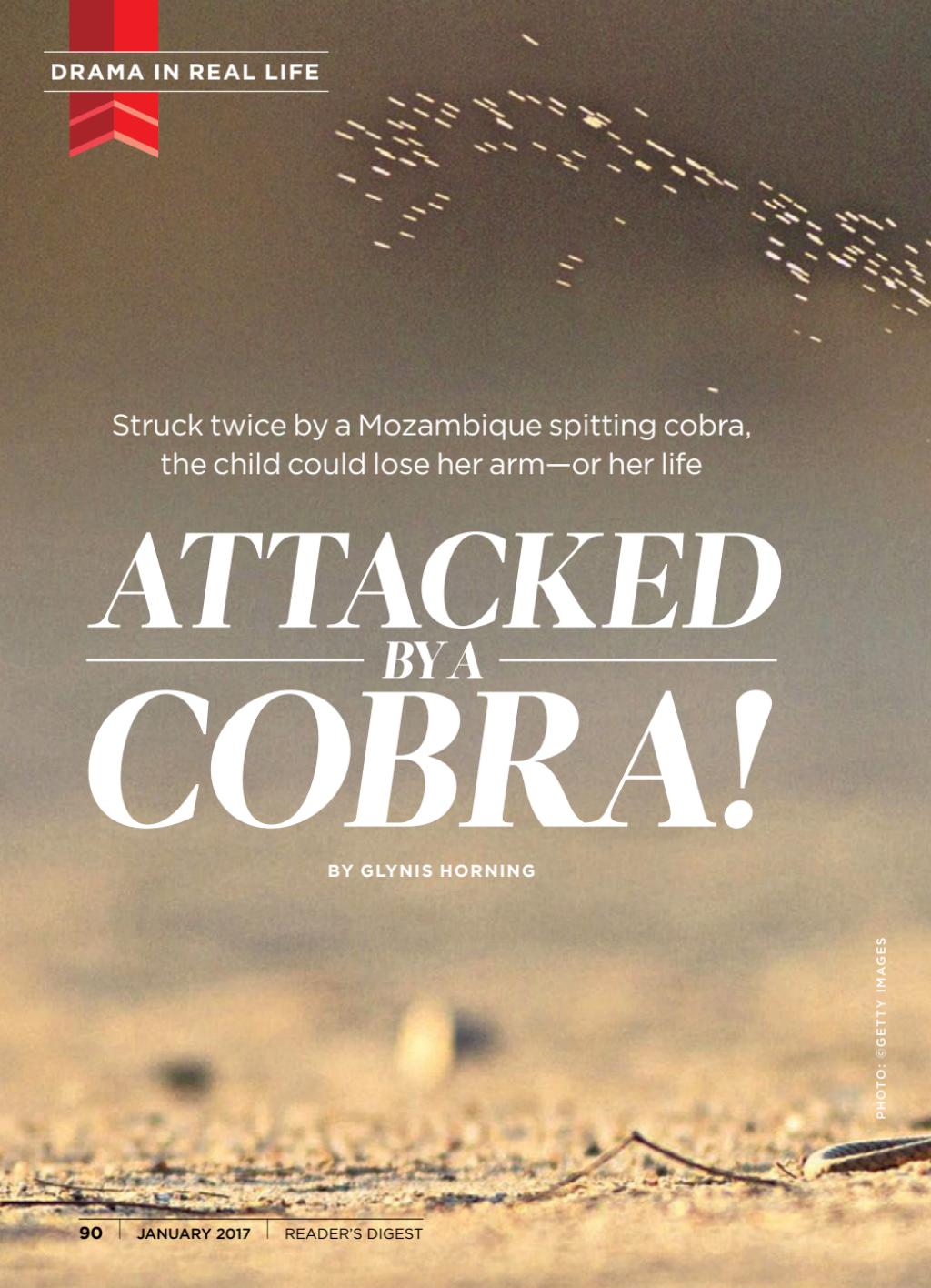
**ANTHONY MOVES AROUND** so much in class that if I put a pot of cream on his head at the start of the lesson, it would have turned to butter by the end of it.

## So teachers philosophize ...

**THIS PUPIL HAS** two saviours: the school bell and Wikipedia.

**IS EDUCATION GETTING** better because pupils are getting worse, or is it the other way around?

**IN HIGH PLACES**, they talk about dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia. In the meantime, discipline is my problem. R



Struck twice by a Mozambique spitting cobra,  
the child could lose her arm—or her life

# ATTACKED BY A COBRA!

BY GLYNIS HORNING

PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES

*The venom of a  
spitting cobra  
can blind victims.*



**C**HARMAINE ROBBERTSE was tired but content. It was a week before Christmas, and the 46-year-old former insurance broker had finally settled her large family in their dream home—a rambling farmstead on 60 hectares of rugged bushveld near Lephalale, far north of Pretoria, South Africa.

Charmaine and her husband, Bertus, a supervisor at a nearby chemical company, together had seven children from previous marriages, three grandchildren, and a changing array of foster children who the pair tried to put back together with patience and love.

But one foster child was particularly special. Mikayla, an elfin five-year-old girl with lively brown eyes, was the daughter of Bertus's 25-year-old son, Lampie. The girl's mother separated from Lampie before she gave birth, but when Mikayla was born with foetal alcohol syndrome, the young mother struggled to cope. Lampie was often away for work, so Charmaine and Bertus became Mikayla's full-time carers and officially fostered her soon after.

By nine o'clock that Monday night in 2011, Mikayla's excited chatter about their new home 'with the wild animals' had stopped, and she dozed happily on a sofa near Lampie and her pet Pekingese, Jimmy. Bertus scooped Mikayla into his arms, and Charmaine

led the way to her bedroom. She lifted the duvet in a routine bush check for creepy crawlies, then Bertus slid Mikayla in. The couple smiled down at the child for a moment, then crept out.

## WAKE-UP CALL

It was 11:30 p.m. when the bushveld stillness was broken by Mikayla's piercing screams. "Snake! Kayla's been bitten by a snake!" exclaimed Lampie, shocked to discover a puncture wound on his daughter's left middle finger and another on her elbow.

Bertus left his son to find and identify the snake, and quickly bundled Mikayla into the cab of his Nissan van. Charmaine cradled the child on her lap while Bertus drove as fast as he dared down the dirt road to the Ellisras Hospital, about 40 minutes away.



*Mikayla's swollen left hand where the snake venom had damaged tissue; the hand was temporarily attached to her groin to promote blood flow and tissue regeneration.*

As they pulled in, the call came from Lampie: he had found a metre-long Mozambique spitting cobra behind a bedroom cupboard. The snake—one of the most dangerous in Africa—is capable of spitting venom and blinding victims with deadly accuracy. Lampie fiercely dispatched it with a spade, his thoughts on his daughter.

At Ellisras, doctors placed a mask over Mikayla's pale face and gave her oxygen before injecting two vials of polyvalent anti-venom into her slender arm. "Is that enough?" asked Charmaine anxiously. She was assured it was for a child so small and that Mikayla should be fine by morning.

But by dawn Mikayla was struggling to breathe. Charmaine was told that the child needed to be transferred to nearby Marapong Private Hospital. After an examination at Marapong, the doctors advised that Mikayla needed more specialized care at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria. But that was 300 kilometres away and there was no ambulance available.

## NIGHTMARE RIDE

**W**ith Bertus called away for work, Lampie arranged to have a friend drive his stepmother and daughter. In readiness for the journey, the Marapong doctors taught Charmaine how to perform CPR and urged her, "Stay calm, the child's life depends on it." This became her mantra as she nursed Mikayla in the back seat of Lampie's friend's car.

Three times the child stopped breathing; three times a terrified Charmaine managed to revive her. But by the time they reached Warmbaths, Mikayla was unconscious, and they were still 100 kilometres from Pretoria.

A rapid response vehicle had been alerted and raced to meet their car.

“STAY CALM. THE CHILD'S LIFE DEPENDS ON IT,” A DOCTOR TOLD CHARMAINE. THIS BECAME HER MANTRA AS SHE NURSED MIKAYLA IN THE CAR.

Soon its flashing red lights were in view, bringing Charmaine unspeakable relief. The paramedics managed to stabilize Mikayla, but she was so weak they sped her not to the Steve Biko Academic Hospital but to the closer private Netcare Montana Hospital.

Although the Robbertses could not afford the fees, Mikayla spent three days in the clinic's ICU. Her kidneys and lungs were failing, doctors informed them gravely. Mozambique spitting cobra venom is cytotoxic, with digestive enzymes that eat flesh as they spread, and as these reached her liver, they were affecting it, too.

At the same time, Mikayla's small hand was swelling obscenely and slowly turning black. The doctors were terribly sorry, especially as she was left-handed, but her finger and probably her arm would need to be amputated to save her.

### THE SNAKE MAN

With mounting private hospital expenses, it was decided to transfer Mikayla to the Steve Biko Academic Hospital, a government hospital, for the operation. On the way, a desperate Charmaine called a mobile number slipped to her by a paramedic at Montana. It was for Arno Naudé, an expert in snake identification and bite treatment, who lectures to medical students at the University of Pretoria.

When she told Arno that Mikayla would likely have her arm amputated, he had one word: "Whoa!" Doctors can be too quick to amputate, he said, and advised that they wait for the venom to run its course.

In the end, the decision was made for them—Mikayla's liver, underdeveloped from the foetal alcohol syndrome, was too seriously affected by the venom for her to undergo surgery.

Two days before Christmas, Mikayla's little face and body had become distended and her skin had turned yellow. Doctors told Charmaine and Bertus she was unlikely to survive the night

and advised them to summon the rest of the family.

Arno joined the family during their tearful bedside vigil. He told Charmaine that Mikayla should have been given at least eight vials of anti-venom—four times the dose she received. He explained that smaller patients need just as much anti-venom as adults. Now, he said, there was nothing to do but wait and pray.

### CHRISTMAS GIFT

**C**harmaine and Bertus did both, fervently, and by morning Mikayla had stabilized. By Christmas Day she was conscious, smiling through nausea at the gifts her family brought, and asking after Jimmy, her Pekingese dog.

Mikayla continued to rally, and on 28 December was wheeled into theatre—not for an amputation but for doctors to open the massive blister that covered her hand and inspect the damage below. This was more extensive than imagined—the venom had tunneled under the skin, eating away tissue to halfway up her forearm.

A plastic surgeon, Dr Anton Brewis, assessed the damage. He explained that the wound would need to be cleaned of infected tissue. Following that, he was confident that he could save Mikayla's arm with a surgical procedure that temporarily attached her hand to a flap of skin on her groin.

On 13 January the wound was cleaned a final time, and exposed to the bone. Mikayla's hand was stitched into place and remained there for the next two weeks while the flesh attached itself, slowly rebuilding her hand.

There was surprisingly little pain from the wound itself, but cleaning it was an ordeal, and Mikayla's liver struggled to cope with the powerful medications she required. However, the feisty child never complained. On 27 January Mikayla's hand was separated from her groin, and the remaining wounds on her forearm were patched with skin taken from her thigh. On 31 January, Mikayla returned to Lephalale. Residents turned out to welcome her with banners and balloons, but all Mikayla wanted was to play with Jimmy and her toys, which included a large candy-striped knitted snake.

"Some snakes are naughty," Mikayla observed, "but some snakes are nice."

## WORK IN PROGRESS

In November 2012, Mikayla had the swelling on her hand reduced by liposuction to help her bitten finger grow straight. Her surgeon also transferred tendons from her left forearm to her hand to improve finger extension.

Focus shifted to helping Mikayla use her right hand for writing and drawing, overcoming her natural left-handedness. She was moved to



*In hospital, Mikayla reverted to her usual bouncy self after the operations.*

a special school, where she has surged ahead, coming top of her class last year.

Mikayla, now 10, proudly displays her 'funny hand' for educational talks about snakes with a local snake handler in primary schools, demonstrating that apart from writing, she can do most things with it, even holding a glass of juice. And instead of being afraid of the snakes the handler uses, "She loves them!" says Charmaine.

In fact, Jimmy has had a rival for Mikayla's affections: Fudge, a ball python, a gift from the snake catcher that he offered to care for at his home.

"We don't feel comfortable with snakes in the house," Charmaine confides. But, says Mikayla, happily, "Fudge is sweet, he doesn't bite. People must just know which snakes do. And take care!"

R





From cancer to migraine to arthritis,  
some exciting advances  
in early diagnosis and treatments

# GOOD HEALTH! NEWS!

BY MARY S. AIKINS

## NEW TESTS DETECT DEADLY LUNG CANCER EARLY

**EARLY DIAGNOSIS IS** one of the best ways to beat cancer and there is good news on this front. Two new tests for lung cancer can detect this killer in time for treatment to be effective, thus giving patients a better chance for a cure.

In the first test, developed by Vadim Backman, professor of Biomedical Engineering at Northwestern University, Illinois, USA, cell samples taken from inside an individual's cheek are viewed through a specialized microscope. The microscope detects particular cellular changes, indicating whether lung cancer may be developing.

The second is a simple breath test! Exhaled breath contains thousands of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that vary in composition and pattern. A subset of four VOCs have been discovered in the exhaled breath of lung cancer patients.

Cambridge, England-based Owlstone Medical developed a microchip



sensor technology to measure VOCs in exhaled breath. This type of technology already exists. Co-founder and president of Owlstone Medical, Billy Boyle says their smaller and less expensive device may become an in-office tool for doctors.

"We hope that breath analysis will allow us to diagnose patients with primary or recurrent lung cancer long before they suffer from symptoms, when we have more options for treating them, giving them the best chance for cure," says cardiothoracic surgeon, Erin M. Schumer, MD, MPH, whose research on this technique was published in early 2016 in *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*.



## SMELL TEST COULD DETECT PROSTATE CANCER

**A 'SMELL' TEST** promises to be an immediate and accurate diagnostic tool for prostate cancer. This may save thousands of lives and save thousands of men from having to undergo inva-

sive investigations. The test is now in advanced clinical trials and is expected to be available in late 2017.

Dr Raj Persad, consultant urologist at Southmead Hospital, England, said: "If this test succeeds a full medical trial it will revolutionize diagnostics.

"Even with detailed biopsies there is a risk we may fail to detect prostate cancer in some cases."

Around 1.4 million cases of prostate cancer were recorded globally in 2013, as per the Global Burden of Cancer 2013 study published in *Europe PubMed Central*.

## WHAT'S YOUR HEART ATTACK RISK?

**IMAGINE THE DAY** when a blood test could predict whether you are likely to have a heart attack within five years, thus allowing you and your medical practitioner to do everything possible to prevent such an event.

Well, another simple blood test, developed by researchers at the National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College London, promises to do just that.

If clinical trials are successful, instead of using age, sex, cholesterol and blood pressure levels and medical history to evaluate your risk of heart problems, the new test looks at protective antibodies that already exist in your system. These immune-system-produced antibodies, called IgG, seem to shield the body from a heart attack, even when cholesterol and blood pressure are high.

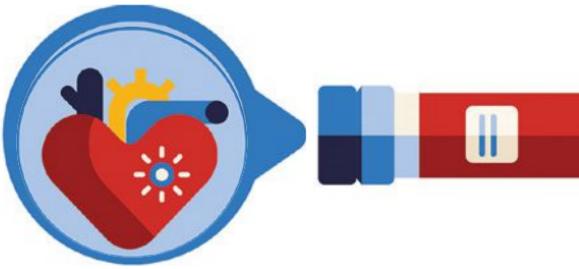
In the trial, those with the highest number of IgGs had a 58 per cent lower risk of developing coronary heart disease or having heart attack. These individuals also had a 38 per cent lower chance of suffering a stroke during the five-year trial period.

## TREATMENT BREAKTHROUGH FOR BREAST CANCER

"**ASTONISHING!**" and "Ground breaking!" and "Game-changing potential!" is how breast cancer experts are describing the results from a recent trial.

Researchers from Cancer Research UK gave women with aggres-

**Imagine a blood test that could predict whether you are likely to have a heart attack within five years.**



sive breast cancer a combination of two cancer-treating drugs: Herceptin (trastuzumab) and Tyverb (lapatinib). After 11 days of treatment with the drug combo, 17 per cent of women saw their tumours shrink drastically. Even more impressive: Tumours completely disappeared in another 11 per cent of women given both drugs.

In the trial, the researchers had been looking to see how the combined drug treatment affected tumours between diagnosis and surgery; the “unexpected” results were “dramatic”. Both drugs are current breast cancer treatments, so the combination therapy could be prescribed very soon—excellent news for some breast cancer patients.

### **NON-INVASIVE HELP FOR THE PARTIALLY BLIND**

**UNTIL NOW**, vision loss due to glaucoma or optic nerve damage has generally been considered irreversible. But a German clinical trial results published in June 2016

have demonstrated significant vision improvement in partially blind patients after 10 days of noninvasive, transorbital alternating current stimulation (ACS): This is when alternating currents of electricity are applied to the area of the brain that processes vision.

“ACS treatment is a safe and effective means to partially restore vision after optic nerve damage,” commented lead investigator Bernhard A. Sabel, PhD, Otto-von-Guericke University of Magdeburg, Germany.

And more good news for those with low vision: A specialized miniature camera mounted onto their eyeglasses dramatically improves their ability to read.

The device recognizes text and reads it to the user who uses an earpiece, according to researchers with UC Davis Health System, California. It can also be programmed to recognize faces, money and grocery items.

### **BLOOD TESTS ACCURATELY DETECT ALZHEIMER'S**

**LIKE CANCER**, early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease can be of tremendous benefit to the patient. Two blood tests—developed separately and an ocean apart—can detect with an extremely high degree of accuracy if a person with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is in the early stages of Alzheimer's, or another cause of dementia.





Researchers at Rowan University in New Jersey, USA and the Universities of Ruhr Bochum and Gottingen, Germany, developed the blood tests. More than 47 million people worldwide have dementia, and, for the majority of them, their dementia is caused by Alzheimer's.

This is a big advance as it offers many potential benefits for Alzheimer patients. It could allow specialists to slow the progression of the disease through lifestyle adjustments, medication and planned medical care. The German test has completed clinical trial, and further studies are now needed.

## STUNNING RECOVERIES LONG AFTER A STROKE

**A 71-YEAR-OLD** wheelchair-bound stroke victim is walking again.

Scientists at California's Stanford University School of Medicine have reported that seven of 18 stroke patients who agreed to undergo a trial therapy, injecting stem cells into the damaged parts of their brains, have showed stunning results.

Gary Steinberg, the study's lead author and chair of neurosurgery at Stanford, said in an interview that while he is cautious about "overselling" the results of such a small study,

his team has been "stunned" that seven of the 18 patients experienced significant improvement in their abilities following treatment.

"Their recovery was not just a minimal recovery, like someone who couldn't move a thumb now being able to wiggle it. It was much more meaningful," said Steinberg, who personally performed most of the surgeries.

Incredibly, the therapy worked for patients whose strokes had occurred between six months and three years previously. The new therapy essentially turns the adult brain back to an infant brain so that it can rebuild itself—something that was not thought possible until now.



**Patients' improvements show what was thought to be impossible: the brain can rebuild itself.**

The scientists believe the therapy could also work for traumatic brain injury and neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's and Lou Gehrig's disease also known as ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

Nicholas Boulis, a neurosurgeon and researcher at Emory University, Georgia, USA, said, "There is certainly reason to be enthusiastic based on the magnitude of responses from these patients."



## VACCINE COMING TO FIGHT AGAINST HOSPITAL GERMS

**TODAY WE WORRY** that we may get sicker when we're in hospital than we were when admitted—and it's no joke. Germs continue to flourish in hospitals, and *C-difficile* is one of the most prevalent and dangerous, especially for the elderly. But a vaccine may soon be available.

Scientists from the Max Planck

Institute of Colloids and Interfaces, in Potsdam, and the Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany, have developed a substance that elicits an immune response against the gut bacterium, *Clostridium difficile*.

The potential vaccine primes the immune system to recognize the pathogen itself, and produce antibodies to destroy it. The discovery may pave the way for developing inexpensive and effective vaccines and drugs against *C-difficile*. Other companies are also working on a vaccine, including Pfizer and Sanofi Pasteur.

## LIGHTING CAN LIGHTEN THE PAIN FOR MIGRAINE SUFFERERS

**GREEN LIGHT** gets the green light for migraine sufferers as researchers at Harvard University have found that low-intensity green light seems to reduce pain.

It's been known for some time that light can trigger or increase pain for migraine sufferers: White, blue, red and amber light all increase migraine pain. But with the discovery that green reduces the pain, the team hopes that specially developed sunglasses that screen out all lightwaves except green will help.

Says Rami Burstein, PhD and Harvard professor of anaesthesia, "We were surprised to see that blue light was no more painful than

white or amber or red," says Burstein. "They were all painful."

But even more surprising was the finding that low intensities of green light lowered the volunteers' suffering.



### ELECTRICAL STIMULUS REDUCES ARTHRITIS PAIN

**CLINICAL TRIALS** delivering electric current to the vagus nerve—which runs from our brain stem to our abdomen—have demonstrated that stimulating the vagus nerve significantly improved pain and swelling in patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

RA is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects approximately three million people across continental

Europe. The findings were announced in July 2016 by Dutch and American researchers.

"These results support our ongoing development of bioelectronic medicines designed to improve the lives of people suffering from chronic inflammatory diseases and give healthcare providers new and potentially safer treatment alternatives at a much lower total cost for the healthcare system," says Anthony Arnold, chief executive officer of SetPoint Medical

While focused on rheumatoid arthritis, the trial's results may have implications for patients suffering from other inflammatory diseases, including Crohn's, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and others. R



### THE DUMBEST THINGS OVERHEARD

- In a college chemistry class: "Is cotton an element?"
- What website would I go to to google that?
- What do you think is closer, the stars or that plane?
- Manhattan's an island, right? How does it float with all those buildings on it?
- In a high school science class: "Are mountains plants?"
- While on an aeroplane: "Why can't we open the windows, like, what if I get hot?"

Source: reddit.com



# Laughter

THE BEST MEDICINE



**Q:** What did the farmer say when his hay blew away?

**A:** Hay! Come back!

Source reddit.com

**SUE WENT TO UNIVERSITY** and joined an animal-rights group. When she returned home, she was shocked to find her mother wearing a pricey fur coat.

"Don't you realize some poor, defenceless animal had to suffer for you to get that coat?" Sue asked her mother, impassioned.

"Don't talk about your father like that again!" came the reply.

**CATHERINE HISCOX**

**ACCORDING TO MOST STUDIES,** people's number-one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means, to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.

**JERRY SEINFELD, comedian**

ILLUSTRATION BY RAJU

**A MAN CALLS 911.** When the dispatcher picks up, the man yells, "You have to send the firefighters immediately. There's a fire!"

"Okay, sir," the dispatcher says. "Please, tell us how to get to you."

Puzzled, the man asks, "What, you don't have those big red trucks anymore?"

Source: [short-funny.com](http://short-funny.com)

**I ASKED MY** father to embrace his mistakes. He cried, and then he hugged my sister and me.

JADE MOTSWIRI

**I WENT TO SEE** a psychiatrist. I keep having dreams where I'm a famous author working on the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. He said it sounds like I've been Tolkien in my sleep.

Source: [funnyshortjokes.com](http://funnyshortjokes.com)

**MY FAVOURITE ROAD SIGN** is "Fall-ing Rocks". What exactly am I supposed to do with that information? They may as well have a sign saying, "Random accidents ahead. Life's a lottery. Be lucky." **JIMMY CARR**, comedian

**A REVEREND** woke up on a Sunday morning and decided he just had to play golf. So he told the verger that he was feeling sick and convinced him to look after the service for him.

As soon as the verger left the room, the reverend headed out of town to a golf course about 80 kilometres away—that way, he knew he wouldn't accidentally meet any-

one from his parish. Setting up on the first tee, he was alone. After all, it was Sunday morning and many others were in church!

At about this time, Saint Peter leaned over to the Lord while looking down from the heavens and said, "You're not going to let him get away with this, are you?"

The Lord sighed and said, "No, I suppose not."

Just then the reverend hit the ball and it shot straight towards the pin, dropping just short and to the side of it, rolled along, hit a tiny bump and fell into the hole. It was a 380-yard hole-in-one!

Saint Peter was astonished. He looked at the Lord and asked, "Why did you let him do that?"

Said the Lord, "Who's he going to tell?"

GRAHAME JONES

**TWO HORSES ARE** standing in a field.

"I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," says the first. "Moo!" says the second.

Source: [reddit.com](http://reddit.com)

**A WOMAN WALKS INTO** a store and asks the clerk, "Can I try on the dress in the shop window, please?"

"I'm sorry, but you can't," says the employee. "We have changing rooms for that."

Source: [short-funny.com](http://short-funny.com)

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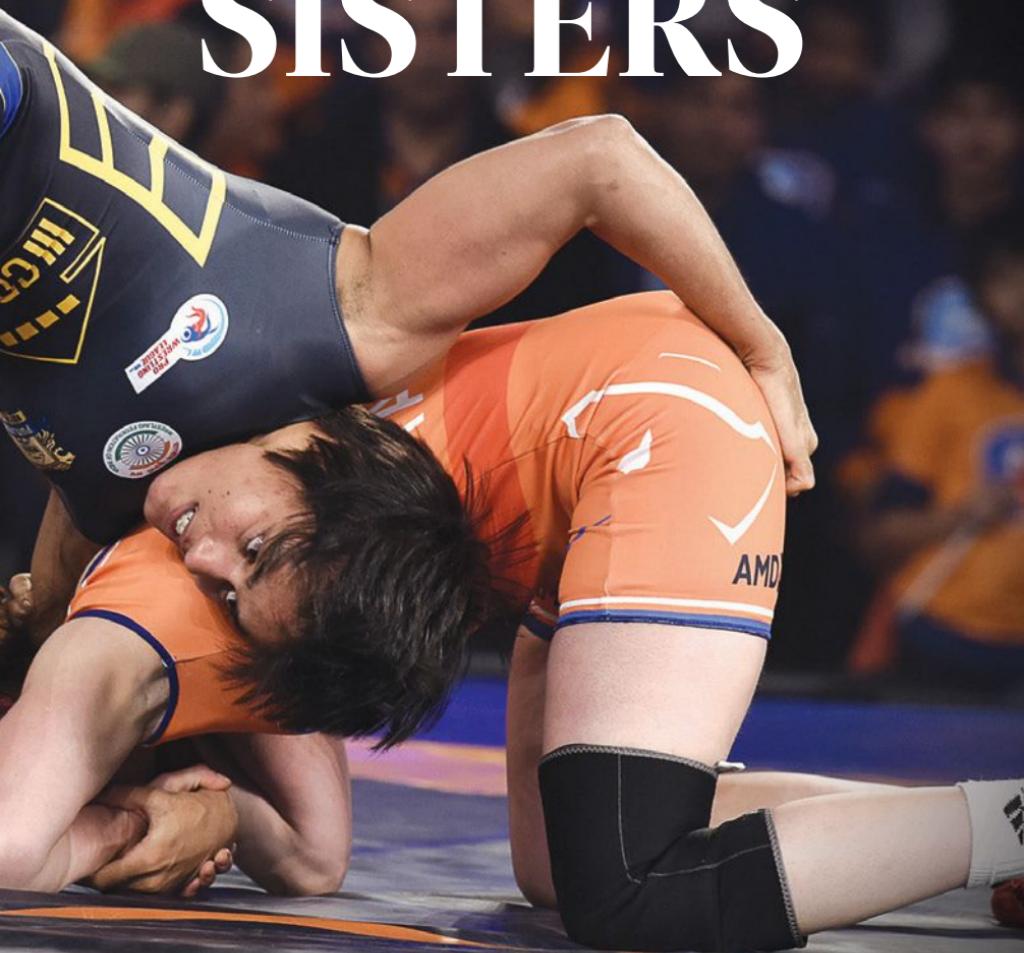
Women were not allowed to enter the *dangal*, until six girls from Haryana decided to break in. The story of how they pushed the boundaries of tradition

BY RUDRANEIL SENGUPTA  
FROM ENTER THE DANGAL



Priyanka Phogat (in blue) battles Tatyana Kit during the Pro Wrestling League semi-final in New Delhi, December 2015.

# THE WRESTLING SISTERS



## THE DISTINCTION OF BEING INDIA'S FIRST WOMAN

wrestler to qualify for the Olympics belongs to Geeta Phogat, who competed at the 2012 London Games ... Geeta belongs to what is perhaps wrestling's most remarkable family. Her father, Mahavir Singh Phogat, came to Delhi from the village of Balali in Haryana to train under Chandgi Ram\* when he was just 16 ...

**Balali is deep country.** It is still untouched by Haryana's hurried pace of urbanization, and sits hidden in the middle of wheat fields and guava and citrus groves. In the afternoon, you can walk around Balali's slim tracery of cobbled streets and meet not a single person.

Inside Mahavir's house—an elongated rectangle of flat white—there is a stirring of post-siesta activity. There is a gathering of village elders, all in white kurtas, who have lit the communal hookah and broken out the cards. Mahavir himself is on his charpoy, eyes still resolutely closed. His wife Daya has swung into action. The family's immense black buffaloes have been led out of the shed, their troughs filled with feed. Daya is laying out the buckets she will use for milking.

Mahavir opens his eyes abruptly, pulls out his phone and scolds someone at the other end: "Where's your daughter? We start in five minutes. Tell her to run."

He stands up and shuffles towards the house. It's not a house. It's a large wrestling hall: a double-sized mat on one side, top-of-the-line weight machines in another, thick ropes

dangling from the high ceiling, and a series of small windows overlooking lush farmland.

Mahavir's six girls are the first on the mat—Geeta, Babita, Ritu, Sangeeta, Vinesh and Priyanka—all dressed in dry-fit tees and training tights [Mahavir has four daughters and two adopted daughters from his brother after he was killed in a land dispute]. Two more girls come running in. Then three boys. "Warm up," Mahavir barks, pointing to the mat.

That there are girls wrestling at all, in these rural settings, is in itself a miracle, let alone the quality of international success they have managed.

**Geeta is a gentle, soft-spoken** woman with an aquiline nose and an easy smile. She is the only one of the six sisters with long hair, which she ties in a high ponytail during her bouts. The rest have identical short crops that barely cross the nape. As the eldest sister, Geeta has forged a remarkable path for the rest to follow—Commonwealth Games (CWG) gold in 2010 was followed by a bronze at the 2012 World Championship, a first for Indian women; then she qualified for the Olympics. The sisters are

\*Legendary freestyle wrestler who was the first to encourage and promote women's wrestling.

not far behind. Babita won silver at the 2010 CWG, and gold at the 2014 version, where Vinesh also won gold. Ritu has every major international medal at the junior level (including multiple World Championships), and is about to make her leap to the senior team.

Sangeeta and Priyanka have medals from junior Asian Championships.

What if all six of them land up in the same competition one day, and all of them finish with medals?

"Let that be the Olympics!" Babita is thrilled with the idea. It has occurred to her before.

"Well, perhaps not all six. Let's say three," Geeta says. "Now that's not fantasy—that can happen in Rio."

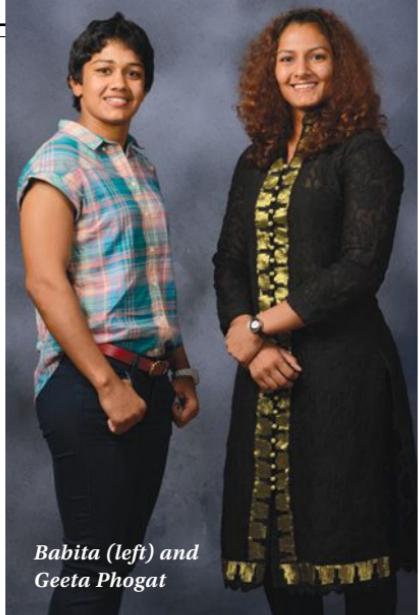
"Yes, and then papa will finally say—" Now Babita makes her voice heavy and manly: "Fine, not bad. Now you can rest a little."

The sisters laugh.

Despite Chandgi Ram's efforts, no village in India has a wrestling school where women are allowed, except here, in Balali. Even in the cities, the number of private akhadas that allow women can be counted on your fingers ...

"The general atmosphere is still strongly against women in wrestling," says Kripa Shankar [Kripa Shankar Patel, Olympian and former coach of the national women's team] ...

"We have a very small talent pool to pick from," Kripa Shankar says. "Maharashtra, which produces hundreds of male wrestlers, has nothing for women. Madhya Pradesh has very little,



*Babita (left) and  
Geeta Phogat*

Jabbar Singh is alone in Uttar Pradesh. Only Haryana is really trying. Women's wrestling is still new to the world, and we could have stepped ahead, taken the lead and dominated it for years. But no, we are stuck being backwards, judgemental and idiotic."

Not Mahavir, not in Balali.

"Masterji [Chandgi Ram] opened my eyes," Mahavir says. "He used to tell me, 'What you are doing for your girls, you will see one day that it will bring you great happiness. So keep doing it, don't be scared, face your difficulties like you face opponents, and be deaf to the criticism."

Geeta remembers that morning when her father woke her and Babita up at five one morning, and said, "I want to see how well you two run."

She was 10 then, Babita eight, and

they were both a bit puzzled.

"It was fun though," Geeta says. "We ran laughing through the fields when everyone else was asleep, it felt like a secret game."

A week of that, and Mahavir in the meantime had finished making a level square of soft earth next to his house, and had raised a tin roof over it. The akhada was ready.

**"People said, Mahavir has lost his mind," he says.** "They said, he is destroying the village, he has no shame, and he is making an exhibit out of his own girls."

But there was only so much the villagers could do to oppose this unprecedented development—Mahavir was the sarpanch, and the family had both influence and land.

"So we were spared the worst of it," Daya says. "They could not come up to me and say these things to my face. But I was told many times, 'Your daughters will become like boys, their faces will get messed up, they won't be able to bear children, their ears will get mangled, and who will marry them?' I felt the stress of that. But I felt angry that there was so much opposition to the girls doing anything different, so I wanted to see the fight through the end."

Geeta and Babita were exposed to some of this harassment; people in the village stopped talking to them. They would not even make eye contact with the sisters. "After a few months,

there were a couple of boys also at the akhada, and papa started training us together. We would fight the boys, and wrestling's such an intimate sport," Babita says. "That was a step too far for most people in the village. There was constant trouble during that time."

Despite the social boycott, the Phogat girls loved the life of the wrestler—the pain, the euphoria, the fighting, sleeping exhausted after a hard day's training, the liberating experience of wearing shorts and T-shirts, all the fuss over their diet.

"It was a great adventure," Babita says, "And what made it special was that we knew no other girls in our village or in any nearby village who were doing this!"

In 2010, when Geeta won India's first Commonwealth gold in women's wrestling, Balali went berserk. The celebrations lasted 10 days. The word spread to nearby villages. So many girls started coming for training that Mahavir had to build a hostel for them. Thirty-six girls live there now ...

"Just don't hide them at home," he says. "When I was growing up, girls did not go to school here. Now every single one in the village is working for a college degree. So, things are changing."

... It is spreading, ever so slowly. Dangals in Haryana still don't have official competitions for women, but nearly all of them hold exhibition matches, sometimes allowing the girls to fight boys as well.



A still from *Dangal*

**I remember a slow Sunday** morning at Mehr Singh's\* akhada. Everyone had slept late. There was an easy lightness to the day, and the mood was gently joyous, almost festive. The wrestling halls with their mats were empty, but some of the pahalwans were getting a light workout by digging, tilling and flattening out the earthen wrestling pit. A senior wrestler had brought his two young daughters to the akhada. One was eight, the other a year younger, and the two of them tumbled on the tilled earthen pit, with their father yelling out instructions with a big smile on his face. Wrestlers crowded around the pit, divided into neat little camps—each side had picked a girl to support and instruct. The young girls were already technically adept, and it was both amusing and thrilling to see the two tiny figures so seriously engaged in

*Mahavir Phogat in his akhada at Balali village, Haryana, training his daughters Priyanka (in red) and Sangeeta (in white).*

combat, while their father shouted out things like "get your elbow on top of her neck and push down hard" or "jam your knee into her stomach, c'mon, you can do it, bring your left leg in, no left, and jam the knee into her stomach. Good, now push-up with the knee. Yes!"

The girls showed no signs of tiring, their pretty pink and white dresses covered in dirt.

Chandgi Ram would have thrilled at the sight. R

*Wrestling was a male bastion in India up until 1997. Chandgi Ram became the first pahalwan in the country to encourage and train women in the sport, beginning with his daughters Sonika and Deepika Kaliraman. His determination to include women in the sport played a huge role in influencing one of his talented students, Mahavir Singh Phogat.*

*Phogat's story has now been made into *Dangal*, starring Aamir Khan.*

EXCERPT FROM *ENTER THE DANGAL* BY RUDRANEIL SENGUPTA.  
PUBLISHED WITH PERMISSION FROM HARPERCOLLINS  
PUBLISHERS INDIA

\* National wrestler from Haryana, now retired



*Sukari the Maasai giraffe  
is disturbed by men  
with large cameras.*

Can a giraffe get anxious? Can sheep feel depressed?  
Animal behaviourist Vint Virga thinks so

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# CREATURE DISCOMFORTS

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BY ALEX HALBERSTADT FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

**DR VINT VIRGA LIKES** to arrive at a zoo before it opens and watch the animals. That's because what to an average visitor resembles frolicking, restlessness or boredom looks to Virga like a veritable Russian novel of truculence, joy, horniness, ire, melancholy and even humour.

Interpreting animal behaviour isn't easy. Do you know what it means when an elephant lowers its head and folds

its trunk underneath it? Or when a red fox screams, sounding disconcertingly like an infant?

Virga does. He's a behaviourist whose job is tending to the psychological welfare of animals in captivity. The profession is strange by nature: declaring that you're an expert is sometimes enough to be taken for one.

Most behaviourists are former

animal trainers; Virga happens to be a veterinarian. The 57-year-old works with zoos in the United States, where he is based, as well as some in Europe. Like most mental-health professionals, he believes his patients possess vibrant personalities and emotional lives.

The notion that animals think and feel makes all kinds of scientific types uncomfortable. In 2012, Dr Philip Low, chairman, CEO and chief scientific officer at neurotechnology company NeuroVigil and a research affiliate at MIT, authored *The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness in Human and Non-human Animals*. It was signed by leading neuroscientists and animal researchers. "If you ask my colleagues whether animals have emotions and thoughts," Low says, "many will drop to a whisper or change the subject. They don't want to touch it."

That may be changing. Recent studies have shown animals are far closer to us than we believed—it turns out that shore crabs feel and remember pain, and dogs experience elation in their owners' presence.

Virga isn't a researcher; his convictions about animal individuality predate the recent science. Zoos call him when animals develop

ailments that vets and keepers can't address: He has treated depressed snow leopards, brown bears with obsessive-compulsive disorder and phobic zebras.

"Scientists say that we don't know what animals feel because they can't report their inner states," Virga says. "But they *are* reporting their inner states; we're just not listening."

**THERE'S NO** denying the public qualms about keeping animals captive. Much of the mistrust that clings to zoos stems from their less-than-benevolent

past. "Zoos typically had an all-male, high-school-educated workforce," Mark C. Reed, executive director of the Sedgwick County Zoo in Wichita, Kansas, USA, recalls. "Administering a sedative meant using a dart gun; at the sight of it, the terrified animal would panic."

Today, methods such as positive reinforcement—

the use of clickers and treats to reward desired behaviours—have replaced angry gestures and sprays from a water hose. More and more, zoo-exhibit designers are guided by the ethos of enrichment, which Virga defines as "attempting to give animals a stimulating environment and an abundance of choices".

But can improved conditions justify captivity? One case study turned out

—————“—————  
AS A KID, VIRGA  
LIKED BEING  
ALONE WITH  
ANIMALS. “THEY  
UNDERSTOOD  
ME BETTER  
THAN MY  
FAMILY.”—————

to be his patient Molly, an aoudad, more commonly known as a Barbary sheep, at Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island. Virga has worked with the zoo for nine years. I joined him as he was about to begin his rounds. We met Molly in the enclosed, hay-carpeted barn where she spends her nights. She sniffed at me and then bleated an abrupt greeting—or maybe it was a warning.

Molly had been a typical seven-year-old aoudad when she lost control over her tail, which Barbary sheep use to signal danger and bat away insects. The area under her immobile appendage became vulnerable to infection, and the zoo's staff made the decision to amputate.

Shortly after, Molly grew agitated and twitchy. She began to confine herself to three spots in the exhibit, where she stood scanning the air for non-existent insects, and lost interest in the other aoudads.

The initial plan was to redirect her attention, tempting her with hay, leaves on a branch, a mudhole—Molly ignored every overture. Virga tried to habituate her to the flies, giving her grain when she grew calm, but the changes were slow.

Reluctantly, Virga prescribed Prozac. Within weeks, Molly began to eat more, and after months of work, Virga eased her back into the flock.

Virga says that in the arid mountains of North Africa, where most aoudads live, Molly would have been eaten by

a leopard or a caracal. "A lot of people might say that it is part of the natural order that Molly would have been eaten, that it's preferable to her being on display at a zoo," he says. "Except, I think, if you could ask her, Molly would tell you that she prefers not to be a leopard's meal."

**VIRGA IDENTIFIED WITH** animals early on. Growing up in suburban San Diego in the '60s, his favourite pastime was hanging around the horses at nearby stables. Later, he got a summer job at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, where he cared for sea lions. Mostly, Virga enjoyed being alone in nature or with animals. "They understood me better than my family," he says.

After graduating from veterinary school in 1987, Virga was hired by an animal clinic in Oregon. In the early '90s, he had an epiphany while treating a flat-coated retriever named Pongo who'd been hit by a car. Pongo's pulse was weak, his breathing laboured. The dog was dying. Virga checked in on him at 3 a.m. and saw Pongo's condition had worsened. Resigned, he filled out medical records while draping his other hand over Pongo's back. The dog's pulse grew stronger, and by the time the sun rose, he was nuzzling in Virga's lap.

There was no sound medical reason for the recovery. Virga couldn't escape the conviction that the physical contact and the closeness had



*Virga feeds Molly, a Barbary sheep with a history of depression.*

effected the sudden change. In the coming years, Virga noticed similar recoveries. In 1994, he left general practice, eventually enrolling in a post-graduate animal-behaviour residency at Cornell University in New York.

A second epiphany happened a few years later at a zoo where Virga was a resident. He was working with a clouded leopard who occupied a roughly 3.5 metre by 7.5 metre

space containing little except a dead eucalyptus tree and a jungle mural. The leopard perched on the tree and stared vacantly ahead.

Virga watched the animal for hours, both at the zoo and on videotapes at home, but could find nothing obviously wrong. "She had lost all interest in her world because it offered nothing to do or explore," he tells me. "You could say that she was suffering from severe clinical depression." The case made Virga determined to help zoo animals however he could.

**I ASKED VIRGA** to come with me to a large US zoo that was in the midst of a transition from old-fashioned habitats to more considered ones. The brown bears nearby were playing in a swimming hole, with trees and places to climb. Later, we spotted two black panthers in a space smaller than a one-room apartment. Their sleek bodies were contracted and their expressions wan. Virga watched them for maybe 20 minutes. "This is the worst thing I've seen in a long time," he said, then turned and wiped his eyes.

Back at Roger Williams, several staff told me privately that they felt uncomfortable talking about what animals felt, especially in front of supervisors, but they were convinced the creatures had thoughts and emotions.

"Most reasonable people will be on the side of animals being sentient creatures. There is plenty of good,

convergent ‘weight of evidence’ for this,” explains Jaak Panksepp, a professor at Washington State University who has studied emotional responses in animals such as rats, dogs and crayfish, as well as in humans. “But all good scientists tend to be skeptics. The problem is, if you’re going against existing scientific biases, you’re not likely to get your research funded.”

Irene Pepperberg, a comparative psychologist at Harvard University in Massachusetts, recalls comments from colleagues on an early grant proposal to study verbal comprehension in African grey parrots: “One of the notes was, ‘What is this woman smoking?’”

In the past, Virga was timid about expressing his convictions. “But we get to a point in our careers when we say, ‘This is what I feel,’” he says. “And now my job is to prove it.” He’s convinced he could not be effective at work without understanding animals’ complex personalities and psychological lives.

**IT'S SOBERING TO** imagine people at a zoo from the animals’ perspective. During a trip Virga and I took to Central Park Zoo in New York City, we watched a man nearly bayonet a red panda with a camcorder-and-zoom-lens combo of early microwave-oven dimensions.

I saw the fallout of photographic harassment when I visited Sukari, a 22-year-old Maasai giraffe at Roger Williams. The giraffe had developed a fear of men with large cameras and

eventually began refusing meals. Over a few months, her weight dropped from around 839 kilograms to about 725. After a while, she wanted no part of the public side of the yard.

Zoo vets examined her mouth for an abscess or an oral lesion, but nothing appeared to be amiss. Sukari was given antacids and painkillers until colic was ruled out.

“With animals, we often don’t know the reason for a behaviour,” Virga says. “And searching for a cause can be a time-consuming trap. The important thing is treating the symptoms.” Virga spent entire afternoons with Sukari. He eased her closer to visitors and rewarded her each time with leafy branches, her favourite food.

Often he simply waited, remembering the lesson of Pongo: that the relationship itself was sometimes the best medicine. Gradually, Sukari’s weight rose. Virga knew he wasn’t likely to cure her, yet the giraffe’s fear of cameras continued to fade.

**BEFORE WRAPPING UP** at Roger Williams, I looked in on Molly. She was vigilantly standing on a rock. Just then, five or six teenagers with Down’s syndrome wandered in. They regarded Molly with remarkable seriousness. “What is it thinking?” a girl asked. Everyone stood looking, the teenagers at the aoudad and the aoudad at the teenagers, until Molly hopped down from the rock and darted away. R

# The Gift of a Lifetime

BY KAVYA SRIVATSA

*At a pit stop in Tibet:  
Anil Srivatsa  
(standing left) and  
his daughter Kavya  
(standing right).*



On a trip across three continents to spread the word of organ donation, a young woman discovered there's still kindness in the world

**H**E LOOKED LIKE SOMEONE just asked for his kidney. We've heard this often enough but it was only recently that the true weight of these words was brought home to me. The year was 2014 and my uncle's health was deteriorating slowly due to his failing kidneys. While dialysis was an option, it would entail years of discomfort and, as a neurosurgeon, he would not be able to perform surgeries. Sooner or later he would need a transplant. My dad, media entrepreneur Anil Srivatsa, mentioned that if the need arose he would give his brother a kidney. I found myself stuck between a rock and a hard place.





*The Rotary Club of Moscow welcomed the GOLA team with warmth and support.*

While my uncle, Dr Arjun Srivatsa, was fighting to stay alive there was also the risk of something happening to dad. Thankfully, this dilemma lasted all of two minutes and my dad had my complete support. My mother, Deepali, was more fearful than the rest of us, but my younger brother, Soorya, and I managed to assuage her fears and give her the confidence she needed.

## My Father Finds a Cause

"Aren't you scared?" my friends and family asked me frequently. No, I wasn't. "Nothing bad is going to happen," I kept telling myself. The way I saw it, if I left even the tiniest room for negativity, it would occupy the entire space. I wasn't going to allow that when the lives of my loved ones were at stake. Luckily, the surgeries were completed successfully. It was the end

of a trying time in our lives, but also the beginning of an incredible journey.

My dad is a bit of an adrenaline junkie. Just before his surgery, he ran off to the Himalayas for a rigorous trek exploring the great lakes of Kashmir. Later, as he recuperated from the surgery, a friend came over to visit and left the seed of an idea behind. After all, when you speak to a guy like my dad, about driving from India to the UK, operation sutures or not, you can be certain that the wheels in his mind would start spinning.

"So I might be driving to Scotland," he said in a matter-of-fact tone over dinner one evening.

"What?" "Are you crazy?" "Is that even possible?" A barrage of questions piled up in front of him.

He countered our scepticism with detailed information. Suddenly, there

were sponsors involved, a cause attached—promoting awareness about organ donation—there was a logo and a brand identity. The Gift of Life Adventure (GOLA) was born.

My father declared that my brother and I would be joining the expedition. He knighted me the ‘official blogger for GOLA’. We would drive from Bengaluru to John O’Groats in Scotland starting 1 April 2016 and that was that. End of discussion.

The journey would last approximately 80 days and we would drive through 17 different countries, including India. Joining the four of us were three co-expeditioners we had connected with over social media. No number of Google searches could have prepared me for what was easily the road trip of a lifetime.

## Strangers Become Friends

The 72 days we spent on the road were enriching and eventful. From breathtaking views of lofty peaks and glittering seas to a myriad of flavours that tickled our taste buds, there was enough adventure to last us all a lifetime. But, at the end of it all, it is the amazing people we met and their memories that will always stay with me.

On more than one occasion, we crossed paths with people in ways that made me believe that we were being watched over by guardian angels. The Hindi-speaking stranger in an obscure Kyrgyz town; the family that opened their home to us when we were

## BECOME AN ORGAN DONOR

**YOU CAN PLEDGE** your kidneys, heart, liver, pancreas, lungs, cornea, small intestines, skin and bones.

Donors should fill out official consent forms available on the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website or from the medical facility approached for donation. This needs to be witnessed by two people, one of whom should be a close relative.

Before the donor surgery, doctors need a written consent form from the custodian of the deceased in the format available on the ministry’s website or the hospitals they approach.

A donor card can be obtained from organ donation agencies such as the MOHAN Foundation and Organ India. While these cards are not legally binding, they are an effective tool to make your family aware of your desire. Another way to do this would be through the Million Donor Project’s app (Turn the page for more information).

forced to spend the night between the borders of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; the kind Swede who offered us his home to “stay as long as we’d like”, and the Bangladeshi restaurant-owner in Scotland who made sure our stomachs were filled with delicious homestyle food. Before the trip, I believed that the world was a terrible place—being exposed to horrendous stories of cruelty and terror on a daily



*Rose, an English teacher, offered the GOLA team shelter at her home in Kazakhstan.*

basis would do that to you. I couldn't have been more wrong.

I can attribute my shift in opinion to an encounter one Sunday morning in Samara, a small town in Russia that hugged the highway on either side. We were looking for a garage to repair a tyre and had spotted one with the sign for a café just above it. Within minutes, a group of slightly tipsy middle-aged mechanics came forward to assist us. When I watched them approach us from the safety of the car, I had assumed the absolute worst. Between planning an escape route and looking for a place to hide, I found myself looking on curiously. The mechanics were laughing loudly, swinging their arms with a flourish to prove a point. One of them picked a flower off a nearby shrub and offered it to my mother. Feeling foolish I ventured out. With the tyre fixed, we had to find a food place

as the café above the workshop was closed. The next thing I knew, we were ushered through the dimly lit garage into a room next to it. To be honest, I was preparing myself for some pretty scary stuff, but instead of a scene from a thriller, it was like entering the sets of a Russian adaptation of F.R.I.E.N.D.S. A whole bunch of them was seated around the table—with what seemed to be Sunday lunch being served. They invited us to join in, which we did happily and ended up having a great time.

### Language Without Borders

Another lesson this road trip taught me is that there is really no such thing as language barrier. If two people truly wish to communicate, they will find a way regardless. I found myself appreciating the nuances of body language, vocal tones and facial expressions. The things that we take for granted in our

daily lives suddenly became tools for survival. There were times when just an inquiry about accommodation or a restaurant became a challenging exercise. However, we could not take chances on our main mission: We displayed the signs we had created for spreading the message of organ donation—on the car, with people we met. We had enthusiastic participation on our social media and the Gift of Life YouTube channel in creating awareness from large numbers of people we met. The posts and videos also became a chronicle of our journey.

Along the way, we met plenty of people who had either pledged their organs or knew of someone who had undergone a transplant. We even encountered some donors. One such donor (and recipient) was Troels 'Mirakelmannen' Mathisen from Norway. Or, as we fondly dubbed him, The Miracle Man.

Mathisen reached out to the GOLA team through the Norwegian NGO Stiftelsen Organdonasjon, which works towards increasing awareness about organ donation, and invited us to Oslo. Born with cystic fibrosis, Mathisen was on the waiting list for new lungs and a liver by the time he was 18, and was lucky to get the organs within a year. The doctors explained that the procedure would be simplified if the lungs, liver and heart were from the same body. So, he received someone else's heart and donated his own, making him one of the few heart

## THE MILLION DONOR PROJECT

**THE APP HELPS** you sign up as an organ donor and shares this news with selected family and close friends. This message triggers a dialogue and the donor's wishes are made known to the next of kin. Once signed up, a Donor Card is generated which can be shared with physicians, caregivers, next of kin or close friends. The aim of the project is two-fold: one, to get a million future donors to sign up. Second, to make this wish known to next of kin so that it can be honoured and all formalities completed for a successful donation (*Available on Android*).

donors who have lived to tell the tale. Post-surgery, due to heavy medication and prescribed immunosuppressants, his kidneys began to deteriorate. This time, he remained on the waiting list for two-and-a-half years and underwent dialysis until he was able to undergo the transplant. Despite all this, Mathisen lives a full life. He hasn't let the surgeries stop him from trekking, rafting or doing anything that he wants to do.

His story is an inspiration to people who don't believe that their life can go back to 'normal' after undergoing a transplant or donation surgery. Going by Mathisen's story, it can even be extraordinary! Our meeting with him proved especially fruitful—it galva-



*The GOLA team in Sweden with Troels Mathisen (fourth from left).*

nized Dad and gave him the idea for the Million Donor Project (see box).

## Another Beginning

On 10 June 2016, team GOLA arrived at John O'Groats—its destination. But there was still plenty of unfinished business. The week which followed was spent driving all over the UK, spreading awareness about organ donation. Our message was simple—be an organ donor and as soon as you choose to do so, tell your family about it. It was rewarding to see we could reach out to so many people and humbling to witness their support. Our journey ended with a press conference at the British House of Commons. It was here that my father announced the Million Donor Project, and revealed his plan to create an app that would make it easier to communicate your wish to be an organ donor. The response was overwhelming and

we boarded our flight home with a sense of great accomplishment.

We had managed to start the dialogue, but there is still much left to accomplish. The Million Donor app was formally launched on 24 September 2016 in Bengaluru. When one journey finishes another begins, and by the time we had settled into our daily routines, Dad was already planning the second edition of the Gift of Life Adventure. Inspired by the holiday spirit of giving, he is scheduled to set off on a solo road trip from Italy to the Middle East in December 2016, with the aim of promoting the Million Donor app. Just one question remains: Are you an organ donor yet? R

Bengaluru-based Kavya Srivatsa is 18 and completed her Cambridge 'A' Levels in 2016. She is working as a freelance writer and model during her gap year, and plans to study marketing and communications.



# As Kids See It



Chapman

*"If owls are so wise, why are they always eating mice instead of pizza?"*

**MY THREE-YEAR-OLD brother, Frankie, had a very bad cold. My mum said, "Frankie, your nose is running." He looked up at her, confused, then pointed at his face and said, "No, it's not! It's right here."**

SHIRLEY CROSSLEY

**MY SIX-YEAR-OLD daughter recently forgot to ask us to sign one of her tests from school. She's a good student and didn't want to get in trouble. Panicking, she tried to fake my signature. In the top left corner of her test sheet she wrote: "Mum."**

LEN CHAPMAN

reddit.com

**MY GRANDSON NEVAN once asked me, "How do we get to heaven?" I told him people could hope to reach there, if they were good. "No," he exclaimed, "How do you go there?"**

I realized he wanted to know the route. "Nobody who has been there has ever come back to tell us the way," I said. The seven-year-old pondered a bit and then said, "What if we do a Google search?"

T. M. VALLIKAPPEN, Kottayam, Kerala

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

# The Future of Flight

Flying in  
economy?  
Get ready for  
an upgrade

BY PAUL SILLERS

**IT'S BAD ENOUGH GETTING THROUGH THE SERIES** of queues at major airports—check-in, passport control, security and boarding. But the relief at finally getting to your seat can quickly evaporate with cramped conditions, full overhead lockers and the realization that you should have brought your own sandwiches. Flying, for many of us, has turned from a thrilling experience into a tiresome ordeal. With the global air passenger numbers set to double

*Icelandair  
lighting  
simulates  
the aurora  
borealis; time  
to snooze in  
Air Astana's  
economy  
sleeper class.*



to more than 6 billion over the next 20 years, according to industry statistics, it's a challenge that airlines are trying to confront. And with some success.

When Jill and Jeremy Joseph from London flew from Heathrow to Nice to attend a medical conference in Monaco recently, they noticed a number of improvements to British Airways's economy cabin: contoured leather seats, accessorized with a fully adjustable headrest, a relocated magazine receptacle—now at the top of the seat back to free up some extra leg space—plus a tablet holder for attaching an iPad. BA's short-haul revamp also includes mood lighting, powered by ecologically efficient light emitting diodes (LEDs).

It's part of a global aero-industry trend towards using technology to put customers in their comfort zone.

Comfort is not just about ergonomic seats, of course. It's about creating a sense of well-being the whole way down the line—through crew attentiveness, cabin ambience and a sense of spaciousness.

Catering and inflight entertainment are factors, too.

"I think BA exceeds the standard," says Jeremy, whose work as an eye surgeon makes him especially appreciative of visual aspects,

though his comment also applies to the quality of service and the crew's experience underpinning it. Jill adds: "When we choose an airline, we want to feel we're in safe hands. Traditional airlines convey that sense of maturity and assurance. For us, that's a comfort factor."

### NEW CONCEPTS

Successfully reconciling comfort for the maximum number of passengers with the in-built limitations of aircraft cabins is the holy grail of the airline industry. Though psychological factors have a role in building the comfort perception, the big challenge for airlines is simply how to maximize physical space for economy-class passengers.

Every spring in Hamburg, airline executives converge on the Aircraft Interiors EXPO, where the latest cabin products are showcased by industry suppliers. Adventurous concepts and prototypes are exhibited to excited executives.

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**The big  
challenge is  
how to maximize  
physical  
space for  
economy-class  
passengers.**

—————

At recent EXPOS seating in all kinds of unconventional configurations have been proposed. Airbus caused a stir in February 2016 when it filed a patent for a "reconfigurable passenger bench"—a seat that can be rapidly adapted for different



**BA has introduced seat-back tablet holders for economy passengers.**

combinations of passengers, from families with small children to people with restricted mobility.

It's not uncommon for the kind of cabin amenities enjoyed in first and business class to filter down to economy as airlines leapfrog each other to provide more comfort at the back of the plane. We've seen this already on long-haul flights, where fully flat beds, once the preserve of first class, have become the norm for business class across Europe.

Beds are now starting to appear in economy, too. Air New Zealand got the ball rolling with its 'Skycouch', with a triple economy seat that converts into a double bed. It's a trend that's starting to be seen in Europe, with Air Astana launching its 'Economy Sleeper Class' on flights between Kazakhstan and London Heathrow,

Frankfurt, Paris and Hong Kong.

For many airlines, reconfiguring the seating isn't an option, but might something be done with existing seating to improve comfort? Swiss textiles company Lantal has come up with Pneumatic Comfort System (PCS), which lets passengers adjust the firmness of cushions.

The PCS cushions—which have been installed in some Lufthansa, Swiss, Austrian, JetBlue and Edelweiss planes—are lighter than standard airline cushions, and this weight-saving could be exploited to add further amenities.

### CARRY ON CARRYING ON

Cabin comfort is also about having adequate stowage space for the paraphernalia that passengers bring onboard these days.

Predrag Sasic is a petrochemicals trader who flies every week from Zurich across Europe and beyond, with various airlines—in both business and economy class. "My ever-changing work schedule and the fact that I have to hop on flights at short notice—sometimes with tight connections—means that there isn't time to check luggage into the hold. So a bit of extra overhead stowage space would be welcome." That would suit airlines too, because speedier stowage of carry-on luggage helps shave off valuable seconds when boarding and disembarking.

Boeing has unveiled its solution to



the issue in the form of 'Space Bins'. These new-generation overhead lockers have 48 per cent more capacity than previous versions of its 737; so 194 wheelie bags, rather than 132, can be stowed. Alaska Airlines was the first to install them in October 2015, and European airlines Air Europa and Jet2.com are set to follow.

### GETTING CONNECTED

All that extra gear that we're taking with us on flights includes the digital devices that have so quickly become part and parcel of our daily lives. Funnily enough, airlines are actually quite keen for us to bring our gadgets into the cabin. Personal electronic devices (PEDs), such as smartphones and tablets, are improving at such a pace that airlines are struggling to upgrade their embedded seat-back

entertainment systems fast enough. Airlines are asking themselves why they should invest in costly entertainment systems that add weight, become obsolete quickly and actually deliver inferior quality compared to their passengers' own devices. An aviation IT survey indicates that two-thirds of passengers want to be able to use their own PEDs for in-flight entertainment.

Airlines haven't wasted time responding: International Airlines Group struck a deal with Chicago-based aviation technology provider Gogo to bring its satellite-based high-speed broadband system to 118 BA, four Aer Lingus Boeing 757 and up to 15 Iberia long-haul aircraft. Installation starts early this year on the BA fleet with completion scheduled for 2019.

So the drive towards connectivity is gathering pace—although for the time being it's up to each airline to decide exactly when and how passengers can access the mobile networks.

Passengers might appreciate internet access using their own devices, but Predrag Sasic cautions that there has to be a balance: "On short flights I listen to music, and on long-haul I watch movies. I guess it would be useful to read emails on long flights, so you are not missing anything. On the other hand, sometimes it's nice not to be reachable."

#### **APPEALING TO THE SENSES**

Linking with our gadgets is one thing but airlines are also trying to connect with us through our emotions, via the touchy-feely elements of the in-flight experience. Those flying long-haul may have noticed a trend for using artificially sequenced LED 'mood lighting' that simulates the tones of sunset and sunrise, which, the makers maintain, can help reduce jet-lag; Virgin Atlantic and Emirates are well known for this. Mood control lighting is spreading to short-haul flights: In 2015 Icelandair installed an LED system on one of its 757s, Hekla Aurora, that uses flashing coloured lights to recreate

the experience of the aurora borealis in the cabin. The well-being effect of lighting isn't the only benefit. LEDs last 10 times longer than previous lighting technologies. The system can even be adjusted to cast a warm orange glow to make inflight meals look more appetizing.

Appealing to the senses takes in smell, too. Iberia has created its own cabin fragrance, called 'Mediterráneo de Iberia'. The scent is intended to give passengers a "sense of well-being", with notes of fruit, flowers and wood, and a touch of citrus.

#### **WHAT'S COOKING?**

Mealtimes are a key part of the in-flight experience on any self-respecting airline. While the smell and ambience of a fine restaurant can whet the appetite, the food has to meet expectations. At altitude, cabin pressure reduces our senses of taste and smell by around 30 per cent, so European carriers are

—————  
**Iberia has  
created its own  
cabin fragrance,  
intended to  
give passengers  
a "sense of  
well-being".**  
—————

using new approaches to making food more palatable while retaining traditional presentation.

Travellers increasingly expect the kind of dishes they enjoy eating in a restaurant to be replicated at 30,000 feet. But much kitchen equipment

is incompatible with onboard safety standards, and a niche industry has emerged—making airliner-compatible espresso machines, convection ovens, skillets and rice steamers—to cater for the more adventurous and demanding tastes of the worldly-wise traveller.

When Predrag Sasic's wife, Mira, flew economy class from Zurich to Belgrade on Air Serbia, she felt the airline was recreating a sense of nostalgia: "Stewardesses were dressed like Pan Am crew and they served food with proper metal cutlery. I thought I was in for a return to the days of traditional service."

### CARBON IS COMING

So much for the interior. What about the planes themselves? There are some subtle differences in the shape of planes these days. More and more of them have winglets, or sharklets—those pointy tips at the end of the wings. And if you're flying on Boeing's 787 Dreamliner, you may notice the zig-zag shaped trailing edge on the engines. These developments save fuel, reduce emissions, drive down ticket prices—and also improve the in-flight experience by reducing cabin noise.

All of these features are made possible by increasing use of carbon composite

in aircraft construction. It's an incredibly tough and resilient material, composed of carbon fibres that are bonded and reinforced with polymers, superseding aluminium alloys and steel.

The latest Boeings and Airbuses, the Dreamliner and A350XWB, are around 50 per cent carbon composite, providing strength and weight advantages. Aesthetically, composite material also enables design in the cabin to be more fluid. A new cabin design concept called 'Airspace' by Airbus has already been incorporated into its new A330neo. Airbus says that Airspace cabins will be "more relaxing, inspiring, beautiful and functional". Among the improvements will be larger overhead storage bins, more spacious lavatories, wider seats and aisles, and unobstructed under-seat foot space.

“  
***Don't be surprised if, in the near future, crew have an idea of your musical tastes.***

### THE HUMAN FACTOR

"Remember what it was like before Southwest Airlines? You didn't have hostesses in hot pants," suggestively declares a blonde air hostess in the airline's TV adverts

of 1972. Some passengers may lament the disappearance of revealing crew attire, but today's crew image is a little subtler—about assurance, personal service and a gentle sense of humour.



*A sense of spaciousness is central to Airbus's new Airspace economy cabin.*

Jeremy recalls, "I was flying back to London from Namibia in June just as results of the UK's referendum [Brexit] on Europe were starting to come through, and the captain quipped through the cabin PA system that he wasn't sure whether or not we would be landing in the European Union that evening".

Mira echoes that appreciation of the human factor: "It's just so nice to step aboard an airline from your native country and feel a sense of being back home already." She observes that "Swiss crew consistently strike the right balance of service with a smile".

The next trend in cabin crew service will be the use of 'big data', as airlines continue to capture more passenger intel and use it to ask if you want your favourite drink, as they address you and your companions by name.

Some of this data comes from

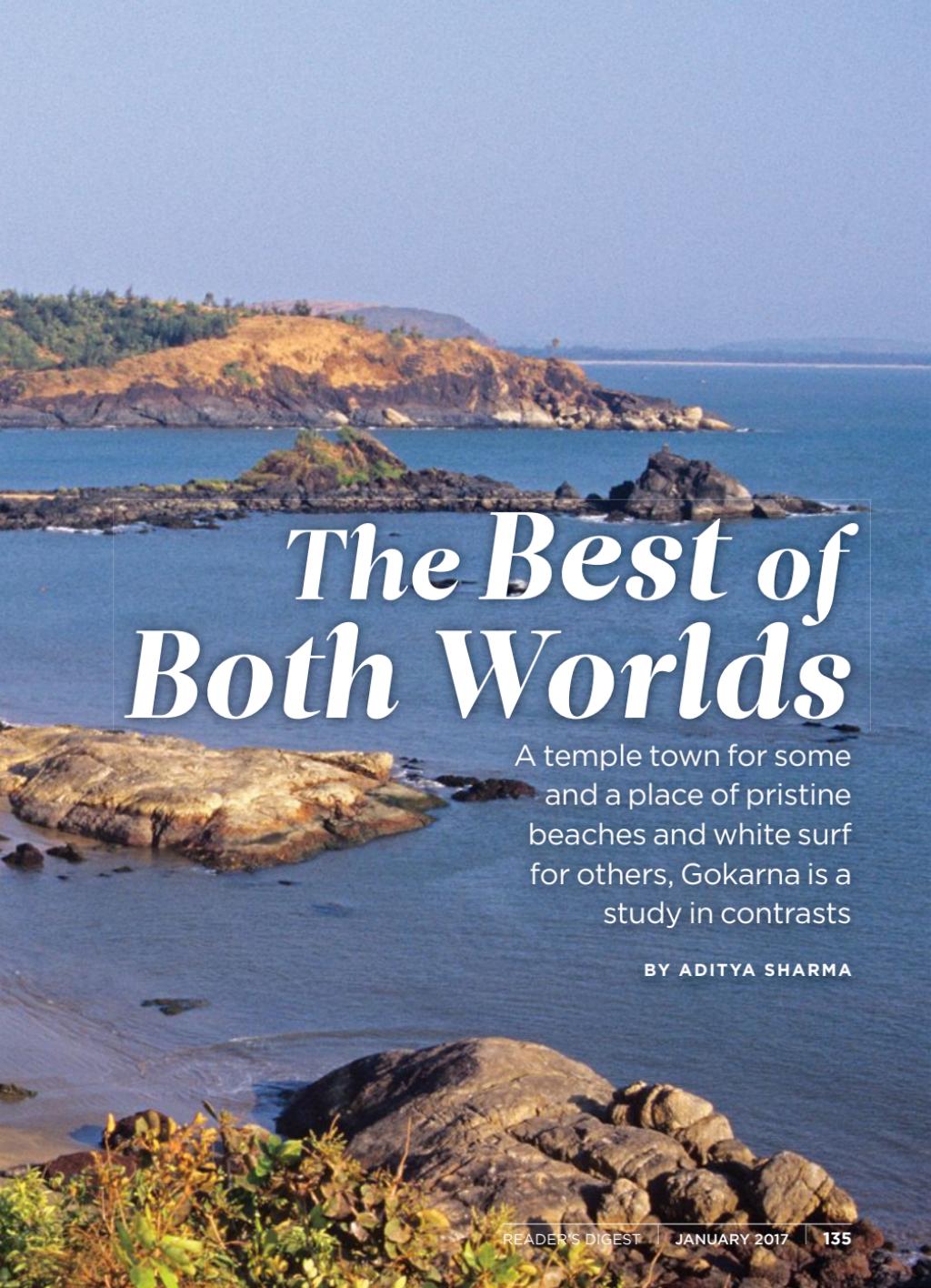
passengers subscribing to airline loyalty programmes, creating a digital trail in their wake. Preferences are also tracked from online questionnaires and by listening to passenger comments and feedback on social media. So don't be surprised if, in the near future, crew have an idea of your musical tastes.

There are some things that smart technology will never replace. On Jill and Jeremy Joseph's flight back from Nice, the pilot intermittently related the goal tally of the Liverpool versus Sevilla match as the Europa League final progressed. In an age where the pilots are locked out of sight behind the cockpit door "it's always nice to hear from the captain" says Jill, who appreciates that "pilots seem to have that mastery of understatement".

Let's hope that's one thing that doesn't change about the in-flight experience. R

*The curved shoreline  
of Om beach bears a  
striking resemblance to  
the Sanskrit syllable.*





# The Best of Both Worlds

A temple town for some and a place of pristine beaches and white surf for others, Gokarna is a study in contrasts

BY ADITYA SHARMA

*On Om Beach where eagles fly  
It's so natural to be high ...*

The lines from 'Chai Chillum Chapati' play on a loop in my mind, as I stand on a hillock looking down at Om Beach in Gokarna, along the Karnataka coast. The curved shoreline and rock formation look like the Sanskrit syllable 'Om' to near perfection. Even the name Gokarna, or cow's ear, comes from the ear-shaped landscape created by the confluence of the rivers Gangavali and Aghanashini.

**DOTTED WITH TEMPLES**, both public and private, the town of Gokarna attracts the pious. It also attracts weekend escape artists, like me, to its pristine beaches. It became my hideaway after I visited it with a friend in 2009.

This time, my fifth visit in six years, I check into a shack—a hut made from dried coconut wood and leaves—run by Spanish Place, one of the many restaurants along the kilometre-long, palm-fringed Kudle Beach, right below two hills. It's about 6 p.m. and the beach is humming with tourists. They are strumming guitars, singing, swimming or watching the golden sun disappear into the Arabian Sea. The crisp sea breeze is exhilarating. Tired from the overnight journey, I doze off, listening to the distant murmur of the waves.

The next morning, I head to Gokarna Beach at the edge of the town, north of Kudle. Both the beaches are divided by

a broad hill that's flat at the top, where local kids play cricket. From the summit, the sight of blue waves breaking into white foam is breathtaking.

**STANDING ON THE BEACH**, I let the waves lap at my feet and notice a flock of sandpipers hopping about, foraging for food. Sand crabs skitter into their holes, sensing my footsteps as I walk past. The nearly five-kilometre-long beach is lined with several restaurants, with thatched roofs. I pass fishermen sorting their nets, carting their catch in wicker baskets or repairing their boats.

I run into Adam Pietraszko, a 53-year-old Polish national whom I first met three years ago. He has come here via Goa, which he feels has become expensive and commercial. Gokarna is perfect for someone on a shoestring budget, he says. "With its relaxed pace of life and beautiful topography, I find it more charming."

South of Kudle, separated by a hillock, lies the scenic Om Beach. "When I come here, I think I'll write for my upcoming films, but Gokarna is so lovely that I forget all my deadlines," says Jayant Kaikini, noted Kannada writer and lyricist, who was born here. His childhood town has now become a popular destination, he says. "Because of its unspoilt beaches, ample sunshine and glorious weather between November and March, many foreign tourists stay on for several weeks," he says.

Further south are less frequented beaches, such as Half Moon, Paradise



*Clockwise from top left: The many idols and temples make Gokarna a true-blue temple town; the imposing chariot that travels through the streets carrying the revered Shiva idol; close to serene beaches, Gokarna has also become home to yoga schools.*



and Belekan that has an old lighthouse. About five kilometres from the town is a salt production factory at Sanikatta village that dates back to 1720.

**THE TWO MAIN STREETS** are lined with shops. They sell provisions, idols, puja essentials and even cow-dung shampoo! Internet cafes and travel agents have sprung up as well. There are bicycles and motorbikes available on rent.

Flanked by temples and *mutts*, the streets reverberate with chants of mantras, temple bells and conches through the day. The fragrance of burning camphor and incense sticks lingers in the air. Bare-chested priests—aged 10 to 80—attired in the traditional dhoti and sacred thread, are a common sight, reciting Sanskrit hymns around temples.

The revered Mahabaleshwar Temple, built with granite, attracts devotees from Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. On Shivratri, thousands of devotees gather for the annual procession, where an imposing chariot carries Lord Shiva's idol through the streets. It is little wonder then that this small temple town is known, among the locals, as the Kashi of the south.

**I WALK OVER TO STUDY CIRCLE**, a spacious library on the broad hill between the Kudle and Gokarna beaches. Overlooking the Arabian Sea, it has a collection of about 70,000 books in 38 languages. The brainchild of 85-year-old G. M. Vedeshwar, it is a culmination



## TRAVEL TIPS

**Getting There** Fly to Goa; Gokarna is another 140 km by road. For train, go via Mangaluru, Karnataka or Margao, Goa to Gokarna Road (GOK) station. KSRTC runs regular bus services from Bengaluru and other cities.

**Lodging** Options range from Kudle Beach View Resort & Spa (₹5,445 per night) to yoga retreats (₹7,500 per night), beach shacks (₹200–900) and a Zostel (₹750 for a dorm bed).

**Dining** There are many vegetarian options, some specializing in Kannada cuisine. Shacks offer a variety of fresh seafood and international fare.

of his untiring efforts. He set it up in 1948, when he was 18, reaching out to publishers, embassies and authors for books and periodicals. “To make ends meet,” he says, “I made Ganesha idols, painted signboards, designed costumes for plays and rented out the mandap for marriages. To keep my books in good shape, I learnt to bind them from discarded cloth and cardboard.”

He ran the library from the first floor of his home for over 60 years, until old age and lack of space forced him to stop. Help came in 2001, when Elias Tabet, a French stage director,

*Shacks and restaurants line the popular Om Beach, a favourite with tourists.*



visited Gokarna and was bowled over by the collection. In Paris, he and his wife Daphné Piquet formed Pandrata Circle to help build the new library. The formidable task of raising ₹45 lakh took him about a decade. Today it is a hub of cultural activities.

**THE RESTAURANTS** on the beaches are a world in themselves, a melting pot of diverse cultures. Bearing names like German Bakery, Sunset Cafe and Sea View, they offer a variety of local and continental cuisines.

At night, from the veranda at Spanish Place, I can see the lights of fishing boats out at sea flicker in the distance. As I chat with Mari P. Shastri, the owner, he tells me how he met and fell in love with a girl from Spain. "We married soon after and decided to call our restaurant Spanish Place," he says with a smile.

There are those who come here and stay, yet others who return again and again. Like Paul Patrick Cullen, an avid

traveller and birder from Denmark, who first came here in 1993. The quaint town with its diversity and rich fauna keeps calling him back.

Gokarna's face has changed over the years. Agni Kumar, Vedeshwar's son, remembers the '80s when there were just a handful of restaurants and lodges. Pilgrims and tourists stayed with locals. As visitors multiplied, houses turned into lodges and restaurants opened up on the beaches. Many locals and tourists now fear that Gokarna will be irrevocably commercialized.

**FACING SWEEPING CHANGES,** Gokarna is caught between modern-day challenges and its old-world charm. It is a study of contrasts: Pilgrims visit Gokarna to pray in its temples and the tourists throng its beaches to party and soak in the natural beauty. Welcoming both in its loving embrace, this sleepy hamlet offers everyone a beautiful world, far from the madding crowd. R



ALL IN

# A Day's Work

## BEFORE INSTAGRAM



**OUR NEW HIRE** did not have a great start. On his very first day, he was two and a half hours late. Luckily for him, he called in to explain.

"I know this sounds bad," he began, "but I didn't realize today was Monday."

MICHELLE CHOATE

**I AM IN CHARGE** of the legal cell in

my office and always struggle to understand the jargon and inconclusive statements that one lawyer sends us. However, two lines are unfailingly clear: "Also, please find enclosed herewith my bill for the consultation fee. You are requested to release the payment at the earliest." RATNA THAKUR, *New Delhi*

**THE SKILLS SECTION** of your résumé is where you can impress hiring managers with your qualifications. Or not, as these real examples show:

- “I offer mediocrity at its best.”
- “I’m try-lingual.”
- “Phone tap.”
- “I’ve got a PhD in human feelings.”
- “Grate communication skills.”
- “PlayStation 2.”

- “Familiar with all faucets of accounting.”
- “Extensive background in public accounting. I can also stand on my head!”
- “Ability to meet deadlines while maintaining composer.”

From [resumania.com](http://resumania.com)

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



## ODE TO THE OFFICE FRIDGE

Riper than a comely wench,  
Greener than a shrub.  
Pulsing, so it seems, with life:  
My colleague's turkey club.

I see it every morning, yea,  
When I dare open wide  
The mini office Frigidaire  
To stuff my lunch inside.

In goes my humble bag of brown  
To wait till half past one,  
Between a rusting StarKist tin  
And krypton Cinnabon.

Carrots that can bend themselves  
Like gymnasts from the East,  
Speak of diet dreams ignored  
In favour of McFeast.

And on the swinging door we find  
One Grey Poupon gone blue,  
A jar of ranch that bought the farm,  
A Yoplait turned Yoglue.

The “stew” my boss made for his wife  
(Did someone call it swill?)  
“Bring it for the office, hon.”  
He did. It sits here still.

And do not ask about the milks!  
A cast of cartons wait,  
To fleck my coffee grey with lumps  
Unseen until too late.

Frigidaire, O Frigidaire,  
So small and yet so potent.  
Your presence is proclaimed to all  
The minute you are opent.

**LENORE SKENAZY**, from her book *Has the World Gone Skenazy?* (Creators Publishing)

Could you ever forgive a serial killer?  
What if he was your father? Here, the tale  
of Kerri Rawson's 10-year hunt for answers

# My Father Was the **BTK** **Killer**

BY ROY WENZL FROM THE WICHITA EAGLE

**THE MAN KNOCKED** on Kerri Rawson's door around noon on 25 February 2005. She looked out at him from inside her apartment near Detroit—he was holding an FBI badge.

She almost didn't answer. Her father, a code compliance officer in Park City, a suburb of Wichita, Kansas, USA, had taught her to be wary of strangers, and this one had sat in his car for an hour outside her



Kerri Rawson in  
2015, 10 years  
after learning  
the truth about  
her father.

home. But she decided to let the FBI agent into her kitchen, where she had made chocolate Bundt cake. From then on, the smell of chocolate cake would make her queasy.

The man asked if she knew what BTK was. Yes, she did. BTK—bind, torture, kill—was the nickname for the serial killer who had scared her mum decades ago and who was responsible for murdering 10 people in Kansas between 1974 and 1991.

defended Dennis. Back in Detroit, Kerri yelled at the FBI agent. The last time she had seen her dad was in Park City at Christmas. He'd looked sad. She remembered his bear hug, how he smelt, his brown uniform. This could not be true, she told the man. Dad had called last night, asking if she'd checked the oil in her car.

At that point she did something she would do many times over the next seven days: defend and then doubt

“

“Should I tell you that I grew up adoring you,”  
**she wrote in an unsent letter to him,**  
 “that you were the sunshine of my life?”

The FBI guy was her dad's age, in his late 50s, wearing glasses and a necktie, nervous. Kerri was a 26-year-old substitute teacher taking a day off, still in her pyjamas. The man said her dad had been arrested as a BTK suspect. He needed to swab her cheek for DNA.

At that moment, in Park City, Kerri's mother, Paula Rader, 56, sat down to lunch at home, waiting for her husband, Dennis. Cops rushed in, guns drawn. A week later, Paula's lunch still sat uneaten in the house she had shared with Dennis since the early 1970s. She'd never sleep there again.

Cops arrested Dennis as he was driving home for lunch. In Wichita, officers picked up family and friends for questioning. At the police station, Paula

her father at the same time. She told the agent about Marine Hedge. Hedge, 53, was a grandmother with a silky southern accent, five feet tall, weighing no more than 45 kg. She'd lived six doors down from the Raders and disappeared in 1985, when Kerri was six. Hedge's body was later found in a ditch. Paula had been fearful. “Don't worry,” Dad had said. “We're safe.”

Kerri remembered that when Hedge disappeared, her dad wasn't home. “It was stormy, and I didn't want to sleep by myself. My mum let me in her bed—that's how I know he was gone.”

After the FBI agent left, she took down a picture of her father from the hallway and stuck it in a closet. She googled “BTK” for proof that he was



Celebrating Christmas at the Rader home in 1984 in Park City, Kansas (left); a father-daughter fishing trip to Oklahoma in 2002 (right)

innocent, but then told her husband she was matching her memories to BTK's murder timeline, wondering if her whole life might be a lie.

**T**HE NEXT DAY, police and politicians gathered in Wichita's city hall. "BTK is arrested," the police chief announced. Kerri was furious when she learnt that to link her dad to BTK, cops had obtained one of her Pap smears taken years before at Kansas State University's clinic. They used it to confirm that the Rader family DNA closely matched DNA in the semen that BTK left at the scene of a quadruple homicide in 1974. The FBI guy had asked Kerri for a cheek swab so he could double-check her DNA.

The first nights, Kerri and her husband, Darian, slept as if one of them needed to be on watch—she on the couch, he on the floor. TV crews

camped outside, and when Darian drove to work, they followed.

Darian watched his wife change. Athletic and nearly five foot ten, she was no girlie girl, and he loved that. She could walk for days carrying a backpack. But now, she was BTK's daughter. She even looked like her dad: same dark hair, same eyes. She shared his middle name, Lynn. She felt as if she'd done something wrong.

Kerri searched her memories. The night of Hedge's murder, Dad had taken Brian, her brother, on a Boy Scout camp out. Was it an alibi so he could sneak out and murder their neighbour? In 2004, around Christmas, after BTK threatened in letters to the police and news outlets that he would kill again, Dad had driven her to the airport to pick up her brother. But Dad had wandered off. Was he mailing one of those letters? Watching

the news to see if he was mentioned? She minutely analyzed her whole life.

Kerri remembered how he spoke sharply if she sat in his chair or failed to put her shoes away. Cops said BTK made strange marks in his communications to them. She recalled weird marks Dad made on newspaper stories. "Code," he'd called it.

Three days after her dad's arrest, Kerri flew back to Kansas City. On the plane, she escaped by reading *Harry*

Everybody assumed BTK was a sadistic genius. But the real BTK is an ordinary, inarticulate doofus, Darian thought. And a good dad, Kerri said. With Paula, he'd taught the kids' godliness. Kerri had two college degrees; Brian, her older brother, had been an Eagle Scout and was training to serve on US Navy nuclear submarines.

Dennis couldn't understand why no family members visited. Kerri wrote to him: "You have had these secrets,



Dennis committed his first murders at age 29.

At age 29, Kerri became a mother, and  
**suddenly she truly despised her father.**

*Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. But on her layover, she saw her father's face on the airport's TV screens.

Mike Clark, the family's pastor, visited Dennis Rader in jail a week after his arrest. Clark called Paula afterwards, and Kerri watched her mother take the call, with a yellow legal pad in her hand. Paula wrote, "He's confessing" and underlined it as they talked.

It was true. He had murdered the Oteros: a mum, a dad, and two children, ages 11 and 9. He had tortured victims, sexually defiled several. He had taken Hedge's body inside Christ Lutheran Church, where he was congregation president. He posed her and took photos. BTK had started his crimes in 1974, before Kerri was born.

this 'double life' for 30 years; we have only had knowledge of it for three months ... We are trying to cope and survive ... You lied to us, deceived us."

The family dreaded a trial, where his crimes would be described. Dennis pleaded guilty to spare them. Kerri felt relieved until the plea hearing. Her dad told a TV audience at length how he had killed people, lingering over how he'd murdered the Otero kids. He seemed to enjoy the story. He even brought up Kerri. "Joseph Otero had a daughter; I had a daughter."



**NE NIGHT** the next year, while Darian slept, Kerri lay beside him and wrote to her father. "Should I tell you that I grew up

adoring you, that you were the sunshine of my life ... true, even if it is coming out jaded and bitter now ... Sometimes I just want to go out and buy the biggest, buttery tub [of popcorn] I can find and wave it in your face and say, 'Ha, you won't ever have this again' and ask was it worth it? In the next breath I want to ask if you're staying warm at night ... I'm so sorry that you're alone in that small cold concrete cell and sometimes I just wish I could give you a hug."

She never sent that letter. And when her dad wrote, his letters sometimes went into the trash, where she dumped cat litter on them. Other times she'd write, and he would not reply, later telling her he'd been busy.

**D**ENNIS COMMITTED his first murders at age 29. At 29, Kerri became a mother, and suddenly she truly despised her dad. In 1974, he had killed two children. In 1977, he had strangled Shirley Vian while her six-year-old son watched through a keyhole. In 1986, he killed Vicki Wegerle as her two-year-old stood in a playpen. "Man hurt Mommy," the child told police. Kerri stopped writing to her father and cut him out of her life.

Sue Parker, a therapist, treated Kerri for five months in 2007. Parker saw a woman with above average intelligence, poise and post-traumatic stress. (Kerri gave permission for Parker to be interviewed for this story.) Many factors determine how well

people can recover. "It's about the severity of the trauma and how long it goes on, but it also depends on the coping mechanisms the victims have ... their support system, who they have around them," Parker said.

Kerri had had good people around all her life, Parker thought. A loving husband. Church. Friends. And good parents. Not just Mom. Dad too.

The cops said Dennis Rader fancied himself a James Bond character with cover stories—Boy Scout volunteer, congregation president. But BTK had also been a good dad, Parker said. "Maybe it was all a cover story," she added. "But if it was, it was a cover story that actually worked."

While betrayed on a level only God can understand, Parker said, Kerri seemed healthy and strong when she left Parker's care. After her daughter, Emilie, was born, Kerri clung to teachings about God's love. But when a sermon on forgiveness was announced at church, she stayed away. She had a second child, Ian, in 2011, but her dad's betrayals kept poisoning her life. When Emilie was five, she asked her mother where her grandfather was.

"In a long time-out," Kerri replied. Could Kerri see him? Emilie asked. "It's a really long time-out," Kerri answered.



**NE DAY AT CHURCH**, Darian and Kerri listened to a woman describe being raped. She said she forgave not to help the rapist but



Dennis Rader walks Kerri down the aisle at her wedding in 2003.

to lighten her own suffering. Kerri talked about that idea for days. In August 2012, she announced at church that her father was a serial killer and told her story. "I have not forgiven him," she said. Marijo Swanson, a friend, talked to her. "If we choose not to forgive or not work at healing from the betrayal," she told Kerri, "we continue to give the other person power to control us and our feelings."

That fall, Kerri suffered a fracture in her tibia. She was laid up for weeks. Shortly afterwards, forgiveness poured over her one day. She sobbed so hard while driving that she had to pull the car over. The anger was gone. In December [2012], Kerri wrote to her dad for the first time in five years. She told him she would never forget his crimes or be at peace with them, but she was at peace with the man who had raised her. Then she wrote of her life and of the grandchildren he would

never meet. "I don't know if I will ever be able to make it for a visit but know that I love you and hope to see you in heaven some day."

After that letter, Kerri changed. "Before she forgave him, she thought of herself as BTK's daughter," Darian said later. "But as soon as she forgave him, she was Kerri again."

In February 2013, Kerri spoke at church. "[God] told me, 'You have a dad problem; you have a trust and obedience problem. You trusted and obeyed your earthly father, and he hurt you, so now you're holding out on me. Let's fix that.'"

She said, "I told Him that 'I love you.' He said, 'Then show me.'"

And so she had done it, she told them. She had forgiven him. She wrote again to her father, telling him once more that she forgave him. Her father was stunned. "Forgiveness is there between the lines," he wrote in his rambling style. "She recalls all that we did as a family—many good memories, and that helps her make the day. That is true love from a daughter's heart. What else can a father ask for?"

That was not the end to Kerri's struggles. In September 2013, Stephen King said in a TV interview that he'd written a story inspired by the Rader family called *A Good Marriage*, about discovering a monster in the house. Furious, Kerri gave her own interview, lashing out at King. Among people giving her rave reviews: Dad.

"She reminds me of me," he wrote to *The Wichita Eagle*. "Independence, fearless, uses the media. I was touch[ed] by it ... People reading ... will see we had a 'good Family.' Nothing to hide; Only me with my 'Dark Secrets.' Like she said, I was a good Dad, (but only did bad things.)"

Memories came back to Kerri. In 1996, the Raders had lost a cousin to a car wreck and were losing a grandfather to illness. To comfort the family, her mum made manicotti, but the Raders got into a fight at dinner. "We had this old rickety table and someone—I don't remember who—pounded on it, and the legs broke and all the dinner came crashing down ... My dad was so angry at my brother, he put his hands around my brother's neck and started to try to choke him. I can still picture it clearly, and I can see the intense anger in my dad's face and eyes. Close to manic."

For Kerri, life continued to be complicated. "I fight my dad sometimes in my dreams, never understanding who let him out of prison," she said. "I'm always very fearful of him and very angry in my dreams. Sometimes I'm even fighting for my life or frantically trying to convince others of the truth."

**O**N A BITTER MORNING in January 2015, Kerri is in Wichita. "Coming back here to Wichita is like stepping into enemy

territory," she says. She wonders whether people might recognize her, and she talks about forgiveness. "I feel bad for the 30 years of ... bad things because of one man, my dad ... I forgave him. But I didn't do that for him," she says. "I did it for me."

She returns to her old block and points. "There's my grandma's house, and there's where Mrs Hedge lived ... And here is where our house was."

It is a vacant lot. The city razed the house to discourage gawkers. "To get to my grandma's house, I had to walk past Mrs Hedge's house, and now [at age six] I was afraid. And the guy who killed her was living in our house."

She shows where a tree house stood, built by her dad. She indicates with her arms how big his garden had been. "He turned my bedroom into a nursery for plants when I was three, and I'd sleep with my brother in the bunk bed. I was so annoyed with my dad. But now you realize that kept him out of trouble. He was trying to stop. So it was plants—or murder."

She points to a depression in the grass: the grave of Patches, a pet dog long dead. The cops were so suspicious of BTK that they had dug up the dog's remains to see whether BTK had buried any secrets with them. He had not.

But nothing about her life was spared, Kerri says. Not even the graves of long-dead dogs.

R

# WHO ? KNEW

## 13 Things You Should Know About Optimism

BY ANDREA BENNETT

**1** Looking on the sunny side is good for your heart. A 2015 study conducted in the United States found that optimistic people were twice as likely to have strong cardiovascular health because they had lower levels of stress hormones, exercised more and were less likely to smoke.

**2** According to a 2010 University of Kentucky study that monitored the link between the immune systems of first-year law students and their hopeful approach to their studies, positive expectations for the future can help strengthen immunity.

**3** Count your blessings. Emiliana Simon-Thomas of the Greater Good Science Center at the Uni-



versity of California, Berkeley, USA, says that remembering what you're grateful for will boost cheerful emotions. She suggests trying to keep a gratitude journal to get into the habit.

**4** When it comes to cultivating a bright outlook, our sense of community is more important than our material possessions or even our career status, explains Simon-Thomas. "Having close relationships and interacting with people are terrific sources of happiness," she says.

**5** Research suggests that people who stay in the moment feel happier than those who spend too

much time fantasizing about things they'll experience in the future—like a tropical vacation. Find your mind wandering? Simon-Thomas recommends practising mindfulness: take a moment to home in on your surroundings and the sensations your body feels.

**6** Research shows that athletic people are much more optimistic than their sedentary counterparts. Half an hour to an hour of brisk walking or jogging several times a week should do the trick.

**7** Solid sleep can make you upbeat. A 2013 study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* found that adults who got seven to eight hours of shut-eye per night scored higher on tests for optimism and self-esteem than those who snoozed for fewer than six hours or more than nine.

**8** Happy thinking has its limits. Extreme optimists are less likely to save money or pay off credit card debt. This may be because they tend to worry less about their economic situations deteriorating in the future.

**9** As such, Barbara Fredrickson, a professor in the department of psychology and neuroscience at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, suggests viewing positivity and negativity like a

sailboat, where negative emotions are the keel, balancing the boat, and cheerfulness is the mast, holding up the sail and driving the vessel forward. The goal isn't to *eliminate* gloomy feelings—the boat would capsize—but to balance them with cheery ones.

**10** To find that equilibrium, combine your sunny outlook with pragmatism. If you catch yourself getting lost in the clouds, consult statistics and set modest, reachable goals.

**11** Bring your positivity to work. When the chips are down at the office, a buoyant disposition can help you stay energetic, dedicated and invested in your responsibilities.

**12** To remain hopeful on the job, counter stressful moments with calming ones. Despairing over a missed deadline? Watch a silly cat video before getting back to work.

**13** Pay it forward. Positive thinking can prepare young people for school and the workforce—optimistic first-year university students are less lonely, have more self-esteem and are better able to set goals than their pessimistic peers. To build upbeat outlooks, encourage kids to establish a network of mentors and supporters that make them feel connected and confident. **R**



# 5 Great Songs Almost Ruined by Their Original Titles

BY BRANDON SPECKTOR

## 'HEY JUDE' WAS

## 'HEY JULES'

When John and Cynthia Lennon split in 1968, Paul McCartney felt so bad for their five-year-old son, Julian, that he drove out to the suburbs to console him. By the time he arrived, McCartney had written the boy a ballad called 'Hey Jules'—a name he later obscured before sharing the song with the world.

## 'MRS ROBINSON' WAS 'MRS ROOSEVELT.'

While scoring *The Graduate*, director Mike Nichols turned his lonely eyes to Simon and Garfunkel. Paul Simon was too busy touring to write, but he had been tinkering with a tune called 'Mrs Roosevelt', a

tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt and the glorious past. Nichols agreed to use it only if Simon changed the title. He did.

## 'TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART' WAS 'VAMPIRES IN LOVE.'

Bonnie Tyler's wrenching ballad about "love in the dark" was almost much darker. According to lyricist Jim Steinman, "I actually wrote that to be a vampire love song ... Its original title was 'Vampires in Love' because I was working on a musical of *Nosferatu*."

## 'TUTTI FRUTTI, AW ROOTIE' WAS 'TUTTI FRUTTI, GOOD BOOTY'.

Frustrated in the studio one day, struggling artist Little Richard started

hammering the nearest piano and wailing a raunchy tune he used to play in southern clubs. Producer Bumps Blackwell liked what he heard but eventually swapped "good booty" for a slang expression meaning "all right". The rest, as they say, is aw rootie.

## 'IRON MAN' WAS

## 'NEARLY 'IRON BLOKE'.

Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi had just written one of the greatest rock riffs of all time, but he needed lyrics. Ever inspired, vocalist Ozzy Osbourne posited that the riff sounded just like "a big iron bloke walking about". For months, 'Iron Bloke' remained the song's working title. R



# Life's Like That



ILLUSTRATION BY RAJU

**IT WAS A DAY** after the government demonetized ₹500 and ₹1000 notes, and my husband joked about how the lone ₹100 note in his wallet had become his most prized possession. By noon that day, however, someone stole the ₹100 note. Surprise, surprise! The thief did leave some notes behind, except that they were ₹500 notes of the old currency. In case you were wondering, he's a lawyer who spends most of his day at the Delhi High Court.

G. KULLAR, *Delhi*

**I'M OF CHINESE DESCENT**, but I never really managed to learn my parents' language.

One evening, I came home boasting about a wonderful meal I'd had in our local Chinatown.

I couldn't remember the restaurant's name, but was able to write out the character from the door and showed it to my mother.

"Do you know what it says?" she asked, with a smile. "Pull."

BARBARA MAO



**AS A KID**, I used to go to the nearby barber's shop with my father. He was a known face in the neighbourhood and well respected. Once I insisted on going alone for a haircut. After I was done with it, the barber asked for money. I told him that my father would pay him back when he came for his cut. "And who is your father?" asked the barber. "Babubhai Somani. He's a regular at your shop." "Oh! Mr Somani is your dad? Sit, sit. Let me cut your hair properly!" came the response.

KISHOR SOMANI, Rajkot

**I WAS INTERNING** at a telemarketing firm that was rather unorganized. One of my fellow interns didn't turn up to work one day. She sent an email saying her inbox had been hacked via the computer she'd used at work, and she didn't feel safe at this office any more. The office staff weren't that surprised when the IT officer

checked her computer and found 'How to quit a crappy internship' in the internet history.

SANA FIJIWALA

**MY FATHER WENT TO** the supermarket to buy some boneless chicken breasts. But at the shop he was disappointed to find only a few skimpy, pre-packaged portions of poultry—so he complained to the butcher in the deli section.

"Don't worry," she said. "I'll pack some more trays and have them ready by the time you finish shopping." A few minutes later, he heard the female butcher's voice boom over the speaker: "Will the gentleman who wanted bigger breasts please meet me at the back of the store?"

JANA AITCH

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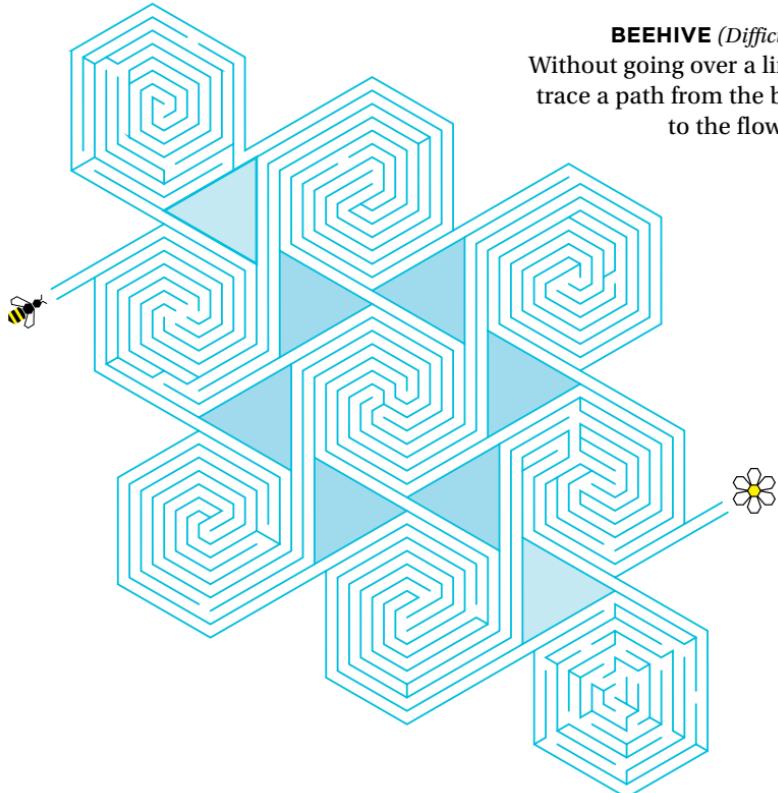


# Brain Teasers

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*Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind-stretchers,  
then check your answers below.*

---



**BEEHIVE** (*Difficult*)

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

---

**SEQUENCER** (*Moderately difficult*)

What should come next in the following sequence?

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

**NO MORE,****NO LESS** (Easy)

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

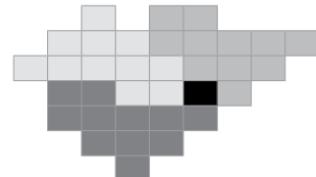
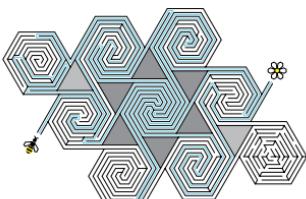
1	1	3	4
2	0	1	0
8	3	9	8
4	4	0	5
8	9	1	2
9	8	5	2
5	7	8	2
5	7	8	1
0	3	6	1
6	7	5	1
9	7	6	3

BRAIN-TEASERS:  
ANSWERS

NO LESS

**SEQUENCER**

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

**DISSSECTION****BEEHIVE**

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



IT PAYS TO ENRICH YOUR

# Word Power

*It takes all kinds of people to make a world and an expansive vocabulary to describe everyone. Take on the role of a word sleuth as you tackle this quiz about different types of characters.*

BY ROB LUTES

## **1. rantipole—**

- A: wild, reckless individual.
- B: constant complainer.
- C: fast talker.

## **2. populist—**

- A: person who is well-liked.
- B: individual who enjoys crowds.
- C: politician who seeks support from ordinary people.

## **3. scaramouch—**

- A: buffoon.
- B: scallywag.
- C: shoemaker.

## **4. ailurophile—**

- A: fan of relaxing music.
- B: cat lover.
- C: frequent flyer.

## **5. doomster—**

- A: person who predicts disaster.
- B: medieval judge.
- C: astrologer.

## **6. peterman—**

- A: snoop.
- B: robber of safes.
- C: worker who transports goods by ship.

## **7. snudge—**

- A: miser.
- B: rude individual.
- C: judgemental man or woman.

## **8. narcissist—**

- A: medication abuser.
- B: habitual oversleeper.
- C: someone in love with themselves.

## **9. skinker—**

- A: sailor.
- B: bartender.
- C: tax collector.

## **10. sophist—**

- A: person who uses clever but unsound arguments.
- B: traitor.
- C: one who promises more than is possible.

## **11. phillumenist—**

- A: stamp collector.
- B: matchbox collector.
- C: toy-car collector.

## **12. pugilist—**

- A: boxer.
- B: dog trainer.
- C: pollster.

## **13. bellibone—**

- A: French horn player.
- B: kind, beautiful woman.
- C: Inuit carver.

## **14. nihilist—**

- A: one who rejects all religious and moral principles.
- B: owner of very few possessions.
- C: amphibian and reptile enthusiast.

## **15. Micawber—**

- A: person with a high-pitched voice.
- B: one who prefers darkness.
- C: eternal optimist.

## Answers

- 1. rantipole**—[A] wild, reckless individual. Known to disappear for days, Pari was considered a *rantipole* by her parents.
- 2. populist**—[C] politician who seeks support from ordinary people. A *populist* to the core, Mahmoud promised to lower taxes and build a new sports stadium, despite experts' warnings that both would be harmful to the city's budget.
- 3. scaramouch**—[A] buffoon. The *scaramouch* made a fool of himself by attempting the dance, fandango.
- 4. ailurophile**—[B] cat lover. Hoping to meet fellow *ailurophiles*, Mouli headed to the cat café.
- 5. doomster**—[A] person who predicts disaster. Tara was a good accountant, but she was also a *doomster* whose rants were bad for her colleagues' morale.
- 6. peterman**—[B] robber of safes. More than 10 years as a locksmith helped Ramesh become a very successful *peterman*.
- 7. snudge**—[A] miser. Following the fundraising concert, several *snudges* snuck out the back door without making donations.
- 8. narcissist**—[C] someone in love with themselves. Karuna had rarely seen a *narcissist* like Kai, who could

bring even a conversation about a sick colleague back to himself.

**9. skinker**—[B] bartender. Wang called to the *skinker* to bring the group another round.

**10. sophist**—[A] person who uses clever but unsound arguments. Arvind was a *sophist* whose well-crafted conspiracy theories convinced many to follow his blog.

**11. phillumenist**—[B] matchbox collector. A set of rare Mexican matchboxes was a treasure to Samir, a lifelong *phillumenist*.

**12. pugilist**—[A] boxer. The two brothers stood facing each other, fists raised like *pugilists* in a ring.

**13. bellibone**—[B] kind, beautiful woman. Monica was a *bellibone* who exceeded all of Jacob's hopes.

**14. nihilist**—[A] one who rejects all religious and moral principles. In reaction to the religious war that tore apart his homeland, Garood became a *nihilist*.

**15. Micawber**—[C] eternal optimist. Despite her money issues, Shireen was a *Micawber* who believed she would retire wealthy.

---

### VOCABULARY RATINGS

**7–10:** neophyte

**11–12:** savant

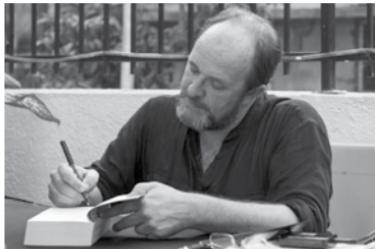
**13–15:** oracle



# Me & My Shelf

10 GEMS FROM WILLIAM DALRYMPLE'S BOOK COLLECTION

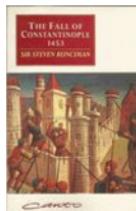
A non-fiction writer, William Dalrymple is known for his travelogues—*In Xanadu* traces the path taken by Marco Polo, while *City of Djinns* documents his love affair with Delhi—and historical narratives, like *White Mughals*, which attacks the shaky theory of the ‘clash of civilizations’. His recent work with Anita Anand, *Kohinoor* (Juggernaut), tells the intriguing tale of the infamous diamond.



**IN PATAGONIA** Bruce Chatwin, Penguin Classics, ₹861.

“One of the most brilliantly written books of recent times, in wonderfully cool, precise, perfect prose”, Chatwin’s account of his adventures in Patagonia, in 1974, revolutionized travel writing. Divided into 97 untitled sections, they piece together to form a complete narrative.

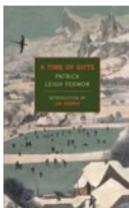
**THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE 1453** Sir Steven Runciman, Canto, ₹3,165. An account of the defeat of the Eastern Romans at the hands of the Ottomans, this is Dalrymple’s “favourite history book and the model for *The Last Mughal*—brilliantly capturing a moment in time, and featuring major historical research in many languages.”



**BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S** Truman Capote, Penguin Essentials, ₹350. Set in the 1940s, this is the story of socialite Holly Golightly and her glamorous life in New York City—Dalrymple describes it as “an almost perfect novella, as glittering as its subject”.



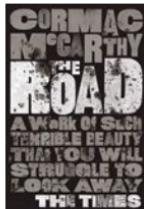
**MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL** John Berendt, Vintage Books, ₹499. Based on the murder of a male prostitute in the 1980s, Dalrymple says it is “half detective story and half travel book.”



**A TIME OF GIFTS** Sir Patrick Leigh Fermor, NYRB Classics, ₹800. One of the “most beautifully written travel books of our times”, this is a travelogue by the British author, a memoir of his journey from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople on foot in the 1930s.

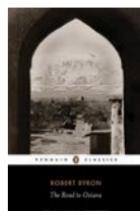
### WAR AND PEACE

Lew Tolstoy, Modern Library, ₹700. Dalrymple describes this classic best: “Greatest novel ever written ... it is an extraordinary peek into or the recreation of our society—encyclopedic and evolving. No other has succeeded in conveying both the micro and the macro of daily lives with such brilliance.”



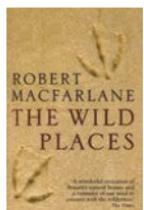
### THE ROAD

Cormac McCarthy, Picador, ₹370. “A book that terrified me and made me howl with grief with its confusing chapters, which were deeply moving,” this is the Pulitzer-winning story of a father-son journey across a post-apocalyptic America.



### THE ROAD TO OXIANA

Robert Byron, Penguin Classics, ₹499. First published in 1937, it is regarded as the first example of great travel writing. An account of the writer’s journey to Central Asia in 1933–34, with beautiful descriptions of landscape and architecture, it “inspired me to become a travel writer”.



### THE WILD PLACES

Robert Macfarlane, Granta, ₹705. “Robert Macfarlane has taken on the mantle from Robert Byron, [Sir Patrick] Leigh Fermor and the great British travel writers.” An account of his travels in the British Isles, which is, as its name suggests, a search for wildness in modern Britain.

**POSSESSION: A ROMANCE** A. S. Byatt, Vintage, ₹499. “My favourite Booker winner and the most brilliant fictionalization of the life of the biographer, and of obsession and possession,” this bestselling novel explores the postmodern troubles of our current times through historical and meta fiction.



—COMPILED BY SUCHISMITA UKIL

Book prices are subject to change.



# Entertainment

OUR TOP PICKS OF THE MONTH

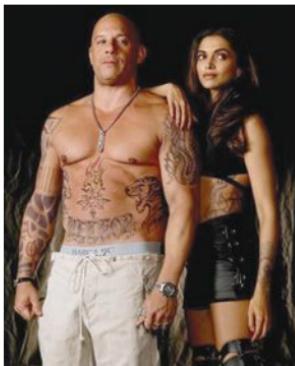


## Films

Shah Rukh Khan stars as the eponymous hero in *Raees*, the year's first blockbuster. Other releases to look forward to include Konkona Sen Sharma's directorial debut *A Death in the Gunj*, and *OK Jaanu*, the Hindi remake of Mani Ratnam's Tamil rom-com *OK Kanmani*. Studded with A. R. Rahman's ballads, we can't wait to be swept away!

Among international releases, *Hidden Figures* (Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, Kevin Costner) focuses on black women mathematicians,

physicists and scientists whose work was crucial to America's success in the Space Race. The highly anticipated sequel *T2: Trainspotting* brings together the original cast and director Danny Boyle for a second madcap run. Then there is M. Night Shyamalan's latest psychological thriller *Split*, starring James McAvoy as a schizophrenic who abducts three teenage girls and has to dig deep into his own mind to find them. And finally, Deepika Padukone makes her Hollywood debut in Vin Diesel's *XXX: Return of Xander Cage*.



## EVENTS

Head to Ahmedabad for the International Kite Festival (January 7-15) where the sky will cheer up with colourful kites of all shapes and sizes to mark Uttarayan. In its 10th year, the latest edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival (January 19-23) is scheduled to feature talks by literary heavyweights Paul Beatty, Roberto Cailloso, Vikram Chandra, Chitra Banerjee



Divakaruni, Gulzar, Javed Akhtar, Manju Kapur, Mark Tully, Patrick French and A. N. Wilson, among others. Book lovers also get to indulge them-

selves at the New Delhi World Book Fair (January 7-15) and the International Kolkata Book Fair (January 25-February 5).



## Television

We've waited three years for season 4 of *Sherlock* (Benedict Cumberbatch, Martin Freeman) and it will be broadcast in the very first week of January! The trailers promise the return of Moriarty and Toby Jones as a new

villain. Can. Not. Wait. Said to be the precursors to the Oscars, the 74th Golden Globe Awards are scheduled for 8 January. Netflix debuts a new iteration of *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* with Neil Patrick Harris as the dreaded Count Olaf. Also premiering in January is *The Celebrity Apprentice* with Arnold Schwarzenegger as the host. If you grew up reading Archie Comics, look out for his shenanigans in *Riverdale*, a subversive avatar of the well-known all-American town. Jude Law stars as the first American Pope in HBO's *The Young Pope*. **R**

—COMPILED BY GARIMA GUPTA

All release dates are subject to change.



# Studio



**UNTITLED BY DEBASISH DUTTA**  
**ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 55 × 46 INCHES, 2012**

Debasish Dutta's paintings are a reflection of the world as experienced by him, a figurative and structural exploration of the chaotic reality of urban existence. Miniature paintings have influenced him greatly, as visible in his artistic renditions, in the way he approaches his subjects and themes, fitting as much life as possible in a single frame, every fragment telling a different story, every character a protagonist. A product of Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, and Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, the artist lives and works out of Vadodara and has numerous solo and group exhibitions to his credit.

—SUCHISMITA UKIL **R**



# Quotable Quotes

“

**In the depth of winter  
I finally learnt that  
there was in me an  
invincible summer.**

**ALBERT CAMUS,**  
*author*

Life is like a game of cards.  
The hand you are dealt is  
determinism; the way you  
play it is free will.

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU,**  
*first Prime Minister of free India*



The positive thinker sees the  
invisible, feels the intangible and  
achieves the impossible.

**WINSTON CHURCHILL,** *statesman*



**WE ARE HERE TO LAUGH  
AT THE ODDS AND LIVE  
OUR LIVES SO WELL THAT  
DEATH WILL TREMBLE TO  
TAKE US.**

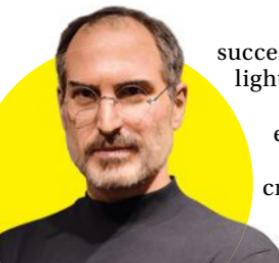
**CHARLES BUKOWSKI,** *writer*

**Every day brings a chance for  
you to draw in a breath, kick  
off your shoes, and dance.**

**OPRAH WINFREY,** *talk show host*

**And now we  
welcome the  
new year, full of  
things that have  
never been.**

**RAINER MARIA RILKE,**  
*poet*



The heaviness of being  
successful was replaced by the  
lightness of being a beginner  
again, less sure about  
everything. It freed me to  
enter one of the most  
creative periods of my life.

**STEVE JOBS,** *co-founder  
of Apple Inc.*

Never say “no”, never say “I cannot”, for you are infinite.  
All the power is within you. You can do anything.

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA,** *philosopher*

welcome to a  
lovelier world.



Safety features like dual airbags and ABS with EBD are part of the Safety package in the Maruti Suzuki Dzire VXi variant only. Car model, features and accessories shown may vary from the actual product and variant. Images used are for illustration purposes only - for creative illustration.

- STEERING MOUNTED AUDIO CONTROLS WITH BLUETOOTH
- PUSH START-STOP BUTTON
- DUAL AIRBAGS & ABS\*\*
- AUTO GEAR SHIFT TECHNOLOGY
- KEYLESS ENTRY

Dzire

**ONE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION  
ONE COUNSELING  
ONE COURSE  
ONE FEE**

**ALL B.Tech PROGRAMMES  
ALL CAMPUSES**



**SRM**  
UNIVERSITY

(Under Section 3 of UGC Act 1956)



**SRMJEEE 2017**  
Online examination:  
**1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

- Aerospace • Automobile
- Biomedical • Biotechnology
- Chemical • Civil • CSE • EEE
- ECE • EIE • Genetics • IT
- Mech • Mechatronics
- Nanotech • Software

**Ranking and Accreditation**

- Ranked in India's top 30 by Times Higher Education (THE), UK
- Ranked India's No. 1 by India Today (Factual) and Times of India

**Accreditation of Kattankulathur Campus Programs**



B.Tech Programs Civil, Mech, EEE and ECE are accredited by Engineering Accreditation Commission and B.Tech IT Program by Computing Accreditation Commission of ABET, USA, <http://www.abet.org>

**Academics**

**Choice-based Flexible Credit System (CFCs)**

- Aggregation of credits through flexible ways
- Opportunity to enter Honours College
- Earn credits through MOOCs, Industry Modules, and International Competitions
- Choice of subjects, teacher and time of study
- Students are taught by Scientists of SRM Research Institute

**National Level Facilities and Industry Partners**

- UNESCO Bioethic India Nodal Center
- SRM DBT Platform for Advanced Life Science Technologies
- SRM-ZOLLER Professional Training Center for Tool Management Solutions
- Bosch Rexroth Hydraulic and Pneumatic Training Center

**Center for Higher Order Thinking (CHOT)**  
e-Lab | e-Learn | e-Think

**Center for Cultural and Language Studies (CCLS)**

- ELS English Language Center  
Taiwan Education Center  
European Language Center  
Asia and Far East Language Center

**Student Abroad and Transfer Program (SATP)**

**Semester Abroad**

- Sponsored by SRM to study one semester abroad
- 500+ Students • 13 Countries
- 25+ Universities such as MIT, CMU, CORNELL, HARVARD, UC Davis, Warwick, Kyushu University

**Dual Degree**

- USA** : University of Pittsburgh | Illinois Institute of Technology | Dayton | Virginia CW | Missouri State

- UK** : Warwick | Lancaster | Birmingham City

- Australia** : New South Wales | Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) | LaTrobe University

- France** : Polytechnic Tours  
**Germany** : University of Applied Sciences Bochum

**Twinning**

- USA** : Carnegie Mellon University

- UK** : Lancaster University

- MoUs 80+** with top ranked universities & industries for exchanges & internships

**Placement**

- No. of companies - 244, No. of Offers - 6064
- International Offer: YKK, Japan (Highest pay ₹18 Lacs PA)
- Prime Offers - Amazon | CISCO | Deloitte | Verizon | Ericsson | Airbus | Alcatel | ABB | Fuji Xerox | Goldman Sachs | Honeywell | Vodafone | Schaffer | Siemens | Honda | Hyundai | Mahindra & Mahindra | INFOSYS | Wipro | Cognizant | TCS | Wabag | HP

**Diversity of Students**

- Around 1500 students from 56 countries  
Around 600 students are foreign nationals  
Around 200 international students on study tours to SRM every year

**Research Opportunities**

More than ₹95 Crore worth of research projects for students to associate with Journal publications: H-index of the institution stands at 46  
SRMSAT fully designed by students and faculty

**To Apply:** Make e-payment or fill application online, download and courier with DD for ₹1060.

**Scholarships: Founders' Scholarship, Board Merit Scholarship**

\* No. Private Engineering University by Times Engineering, Times of India -13 Research Consultant Survey 2016|2015|2014

**Online applications open from  
18<sup>th</sup> November 2016 onwards**

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