

MARCH/APRIL 2023

# Reader's Digest

YOUR  
SPORTS  
STORIES  
By  
RD READERS

CELEBRATE  
**SPRING**

**LAWN GONE**  
Is It Time to  
Ditch Your Yard?

By DAN ZAK AND KARUNA EBERL

NICK OFFERMAN  
His Tips for  
Getting Outside

A Family's Quest  
to Hit Every  
National Park

By TOM HALLMAN JR.

An Exotic Dancer  
TAKES DOWN  
TERRORISTS

A DRAMA IN REAL LIFE





# Reader's Digest

A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

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## DEAR READER

# Growing Together

I NEVER PLANNED to be a plant guy. It all started with a half-dead jade plant left behind in a small store my wife and I took over many years ago. I brought home what was left of the plant, put it on my desk and obsessed over it as if it were a baby bird. The jade plant grew big and healthy and turned me into our family's plant person. Now I'm in charge of all plants inside and outside our home.

I don't mind. I recommend everyone (especially my own kids) foster hobbies that don't include screens—hiking, biking, gardening. Anything that gets you outdoors is good. The added benefit of being outside is that it has helped me meet more people in our new neighborhood than I would have otherwise. One neighbor, a much better gardener than me, offers advice that I desperately need. We trade hydrangea cuttings with the folks across the street. A woman a few houses down dropped off tulip bulbs. I've learned a lot about



**Help us find the nicest place in America.**

gardening and, more importantly, I've learned about my neighborhood.

Now it's your turn. What helps you connect with people in your community? We've launched our annual search for the Nicest Places in America, and we want to hear about places where people lift one another up or pull together when times are tough. Tell us your story by grabbing your cellphone, opening the camera and pointing it at the black "scan me" box below or by visiting us at [rd.com/nicest](http://rd.com/nicest).

Communities, like gardens, need attention and care to grow. Tell us about yours.

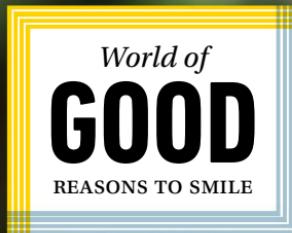


SCAN ME



**Jason Buhrmester,**  
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER

**Write to me at**  
**[letters@rd.com](mailto:letters@rd.com).**



## Brunch Is Served

HERE'S NO NEED to make a reservation at Rosie's Café. Just walk up to this eatery in Norwich, Connecticut, look for one of six outdoor picnic tables, and watch the clientele enjoy some nuts and fruit. It serves a limited menu, targeting its best customers: squirrels and chipmunks. The tiny restaurant is the brainchild of amateur photographer Kristen Flagg, who was looking to create something upbeat during the pandemic. Her husband built the tables in their backyard, she supplies the food, and the animals bring the cute. **R**



KRISTEN FLAGG

**EVERYDAY HEROES**

# Forging Guns into Garden Tools

*It takes 2,000 degrees of heat  
and dozens of volunteer blacksmiths*

---

BY Davis Dunavin, from WSHU Public Radio

THE RIGHT REV. Jim Curry lights the furnace of his portable blacksmith's shop in the parking lot of Christ Episcopal Church in Guilford, Connecticut. The furnace glows orange and lets off a low roar. It'll get up to 2,000 degrees, hot enough to soften the metal of a tray of disassembled shotgun parts so they can be hammered against an anvil and remolded.

A crowd is watching, and Curry picks out a 9-year-old named Oliver to help him. "This is really magic," Curry says. "Right before your very eyes, you're gonna see Oliver transform this gun, this instrument of potential harm, into something that could never be a

gun ever again. It's gonna be a trowel."

Curry lines a sawed-off portion of a shotgun barrel against the anvil and hands Oliver the hammer. Oliver swings cautiously at first, flakes of red-hot metal falling around his feet. The metal shotgun barrel starts to bend. He reshapes it into a trowel you could use to plant flowers in a garden.

"It was exciting," Oliver says. "I love the fact that you can take metal that's random and shape it into something useful."

Curry, a retired Episcopal bishop, is a co-founder of Swords to Plowshares Northeast, the organization putting on this event, which helps



Bishop Curry  
holding tools  
crafted from  
gun parts

police departments manage their gun buyback programs and repurpose the weapons into gardening tools. Those doing the repurposing are often prisoners, volunteer blacksmiths or, as on this summer day last year, eager participants plucked out of the crowd.

## **"PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW THAT WE CAN CHANGE. THERE IS HOPE."**

---

The finished tools are donated to community gardens and agricultural high schools and the harvested vegetables donated to soup kitchens and homeless shelters, according to the group's website, s2pnortheast.org.

Curry says he was inspired by a Mennonite group in Colorado that reforged guns into garden tools. The phrase *swords to plowshares* has a biblical origin.

"It comes from the prophet Isaiah, who was talking about a terribly troubled, violent, uncertain society," he says. "And what he said is they'll beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not raise up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." A wonderful sentiment, considering that in 2021 almost 49,000 Americans were killed by guns.

Retired Episcopal priest Mary

Ann Osborne first volunteered with Swords to Plowshares when a family member fell victim to gun violence. She helps collect guns through police buybacks.

"You see the guns lying there—AR-15s, handguns, antique guns—and then you see them get broken down," she says. "And then you see people here go to the anvil and hammer them, and then you see people digging their gardens and something grows. You actually see the transformation."

She says the hammer, anvil and forge are powerful symbols that the epidemic of gun violence can be reshaped into something positive and peaceful. "When there's such despair now in our country, people need to know that we can change. There is hope," she says.

Curry wears a constant reminder of that hope around his neck. It's two large pieces of metal molded into the shape of a cross. When Mozambique's civil war ended in the 1990s, artists gathered guns used in the war and found ways to repurpose them into works of art, like this cross.

"It's made out of pieces of an AK-47, the piston that creates the automatic action and the sights" used for killing, he says. "But God takes that element and then God's love breaks it apart, reshapes it, then transforms it into the sign of greatest hope—the cross. And that's why I wear it." □

# GLAD TO HEAR IT

3 STORIES TO  
*Make Your Day*



## A Marine's New Mission

Steve Jimenez felt adrift after leaving the regimented life of the Marine Corps. Then a friend told him about bees. They were in worse shape than he was. Since 2011, 40% of America's bee colonies have been lost to pesticides, pests and climate change. Marines need a mission, and Jimenez, now a businessman, had found his—helping Mother Nature's pollinators survive. "You're taking care of something bigger than yourself," he told *Texas Monthly*. Seeing how the work helped him, in 2018 he founded Hives for Heroes, a Houston-based nonprofit that has taught more than 1,200 troubled veterans to tend their own hives. "You actually have responsibility over it," Jimenez says. "And you're like, 'Man, I'd rather do that than go to the bar.'"

## A Clean Start

Each day, 3 million bars of used hotel soap are thrown out. Technology executive Shawn Seipler thought that was a shame, given that each day 9,000 children worldwide die from hygiene-related illnesses. Seipler launched the nonprofit Clean the World Foundation to collect used soap from hotel chains. Hair, dirt and debris are filtered out in a refining machine. What remains is sterilized, pulverized and compressed into new bars of soap. Since 2009, Clean the World has sent 68 million bars to 127 countries. "That little bar of soap in your hotel room," Seipler told *The Hustle*, "can literally save a life."

## What Goes Around ...

Tulane University students Franziska Trautmann and Max Steitz had just finished a bottle of wine when they realized that because New Orleans, where they live, doesn't recycle glass, that empty would end up in a landfill. So they conceived Glass Half Full, a glass recycling project that may also be the answer to another problem. Since the 1930s, the state has lost about a third of its wetlands to rising seas and other factors. Glass Half Full fights that trend by pulverizing the glass back into its original form, sand, replenishing beaches and filling sandbags that fortify levees, while diverting 2 million pounds of glass from landfills. Trautmann told ABC News, "I realized how much individuals can do." **R**



## Henry the Reading Buddy

SCOTTSDALE, AZ

**M**Y IRISH SETTER, Henry, was bred to be a show dog. But I recognized his uniqueness right away—his calm, welcoming presence and docile nature—and instead trained him to be a therapy dog. His job was to visit elementary school classes and listen to students read to him. They loved it and so did he.

Henry gave rapt attention to the readers and never corrected them or smirked when they stuttered. When they finished their book, students got

to put a treat on Henry's nose, which he'd flip up and catch in his mouth.

One day, a special education student joined us in the library. Henry lay next to him on the floor as the boy worked hard at reading his picture book, repeating the lines aloud as Henry looked over his shoulder.

When they finished, the teacher whispered, "That was amazing!" Thinking she meant Henry's demeanor, I replied, "Yes, he's quite a dog."

"No," she said, "that was the first time this student has ever read aloud!"

It was just one of many times I saw the value of the tiny miracles that Henry could create. □

—Nominated by GERALD NABOURS

# The PLANS HE HAS FOR ME

A 12-Week Daily Devotional for Freedom from Alcohol

Your devotional to hope, healing, and freedom from alcohol abuse

"Rose Ann Forte wants to share with an audience what worked and continues to work for her, in hopes that it will help her readers."



"A truly helpful non-fiction read."

Pacific Book Review

## The PLANS HE HAS FOR ME

A 12-Week Daily Devotional for Freedom from Alcohol

Experience the FORT that you were created to be and find power in the psychological theory of your deepest beliefs.



ROSE ANN FORTE

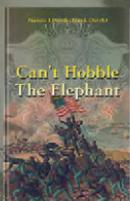
"...Forte provides insight into the verse of the day... You may find surprising wisdom after letting them steep for a time in your mind." -Portland Book Review

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Rose Ann Forte



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## Can't Hobble The Elephant

by Frank J. Dutch

The Civil War is over, yet Josh O'Donnell is on the run from the Union army, the very army in which he served so loyally. Will he ever be able to hobble the elephant?



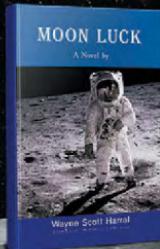
Frank J. Dutch  
dutch.f@gmail.com

## MOON LUCK

Wayne Scott Harral

In the foreseeable future, humans will erect permanent colonies on the Moon. And it is inevitable that human life will be taken by another while we live in one of these moon colonies. Will we be prepared for the first time it happens?

Moonluck@earthlink.net  
www.scottharral.com



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## OUTLAND EXILE

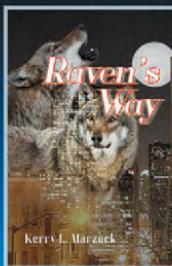
BOOK 1 OLD MEN AND INFIDELS

W. CLARK BOUTWELL

Malia Chis, a middle-aged teenager from the Glorious Unity, has been sent into the outlands for her real and manufactured sins only to be captured by a murderous, disfigured, ancient (and also middle-aged) Outlander. Working through their mutual disdain, the pair break the elements, slay the most vicious plants, and construct to reveal the history of the once youth obsessed nation while showing Malia the truths of the oppressed outlands and the joys of seeing the stars.

Email: oldmenandinfidels@outlook.com

Phone: (334) 657-7198



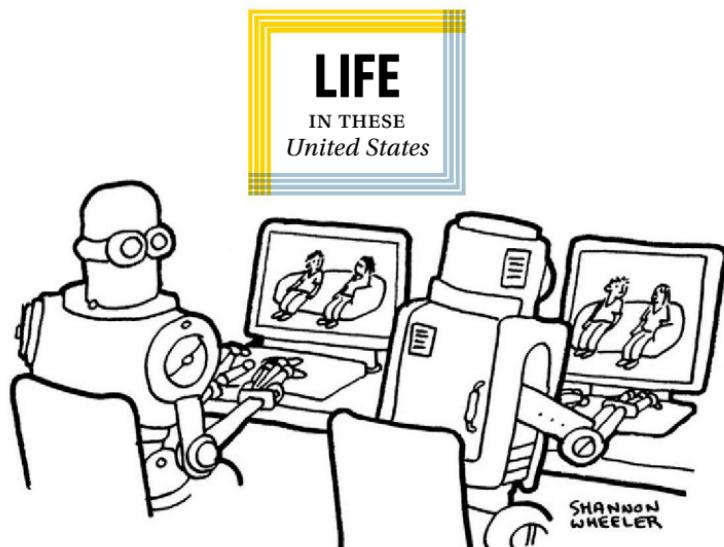
This book is available at  
ReadersMagnet and  
Amazon

Raven's Way is a voyage through blood and death, love and vengeance, and it takes place on the streets of Philadelphia, where no one is safe from harm or death. Creatures now prowl the moonlit streets that Detective Kathleen Morello has sworn to protect.

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"They're talking about birdhouses again. Time to send them birdhouse ads."

**Helplessly lost** in a small town in upstate New York, I waved down a passing police officer. Turns out the address I was looking for was in the opposite direction.

"Is it OK if I make a U-turn?" I asked.  
"If I don't see you,"

he said, walking back to his car.

I quickly did a U-turn and got about a block before he came up behind me and pulled me over. Ambling over, he said, "I saw you."

—BARBARA HONIG  
*Beverly Hills, CA*

---

I love hanging out at my apartment. All my stuff is here.

— @MARIOKARTDWO

**Been dating** this guy for four months and today he asked me why I don't have a boyfriend.

— @PALLNANDI

**Spotted on** Facebook Marketplace:  
"Giving away a brand-new coffin. Bought it for my husband but he has lived longer than I had hoped and expected so no longer required, and it's cluttering up my house."

**My mother** has a medical podcast where she self-diagnoses her ailments. It's called my voicemail and it happens every morning at 9 a.m.

—**@KIMMYMONTE**

**I was visiting** a local art gallery when I noticed a middle-aged couple paused in front of a life-size painting depicting a beautiful naked woman with a cluster of leaves strategically placed around her body. The wife

stated that the picture was in bad taste and moved on. Not her husband, who stood gazing at the painting.

"What are you waiting for?" his wife demanded.

He replied, "Fall."  
—**YEFIM M. BRODD**  
*Kirkland, WA*

"**I think I'm** getting gray hairs," I told my husband. "But I can't be sure because my eyesight isn't what it used to be."

My eternally

optimistic spouse replied, "Sounds like it's all working out fine!"

—**CINDY SMITH**  
*Big Canoe, GA*

**A group of** hippopotamuses is called a bloat. I think I've found my people.

—**@HEATINBLACK**

**GOT A FUNNY STORY**  
*about friends or family?*  
*It could be worth \$\$\$.*  
*For details, go to page 2*  
**or RD.COM/SUBMIT.**

## GOING DEEP

My 6-year-old daughter said, "I know what they say, but what do stop signs really mean?"

—**JOVAN BROWN**  
*Overland Park, KS*

Driving home, I said, "Traffic is really light tonight."

My 6-year-old son observed, "Everyone is where they're at." —**CALVIN PARKER**  
*Greensboro, GA*

I gently woke up my 4-year-old to get ready for day care. He sadly said, "You broke my dream," rolled over and pulled the covers over his head.

—**REDDIT.COM**

Me: "Different people believe in different things." My daughter: "Like how some people believe in unicorns and some believe in turtles."

—**@KATIEDEAL99**

Recently, my 5-year-old grandson asked his father, "If I ate myself, would I become twice as big, or would I completely disappear?"

—**CHIP CRAWFORD**  
*Mesa, AZ*



We Found a

# FIX

HELP, HACKS,  
& HOW TO

## 1 COOKING Repurpose Your Pizza Cutter

A pizza cutter is perfect for cutting herbs in all directions. Bunch them up on the cutting board and wheel back and forth until you've sliced and diced to your desired consistency. It's much quicker and more precise than a kitchen knife—you no longer need your biggest blade for your tiniest ingredients.

SOURCE: TASTEOFHOME.COM



TMB STUDIO

## 2 HEALTH Break a Nail-Biting Habit

You've tried everything—keeping them short, applying nail polish, quitting cold turkey—but old habits die hard. Snuff it out for good with a behavioral approach. First, clock when you typically bite your nails: your mood, surroundings, etc. Then you can anticipate the urge and do something else (like clasp your hands or pinch your fingers together). Catching and replacing the behavior will rewire your brain's reward center.

SOURCE: NYTIMES.COM

## 3 TECH The Right Way to Recycle Gadgets

"There's no way to take a truck full of old cellphones, melt them down and make new cellphones," says Kyle Wiens, CEO of iFixit. Many of the materials are difficult and costly (or impossible) to separate, so recycling should be a last resort. Look to repurpose the old stuff instead. Phones, tablets and laptops can become music players, webcams, DVD players, emergency phones or basic text-and-call-only phones for kids. Remember, it's reduce, reuse, then recycle.

SOURCE: THEATLANTIC.COM

## 4 HOME Make Any Rug Feel Plush

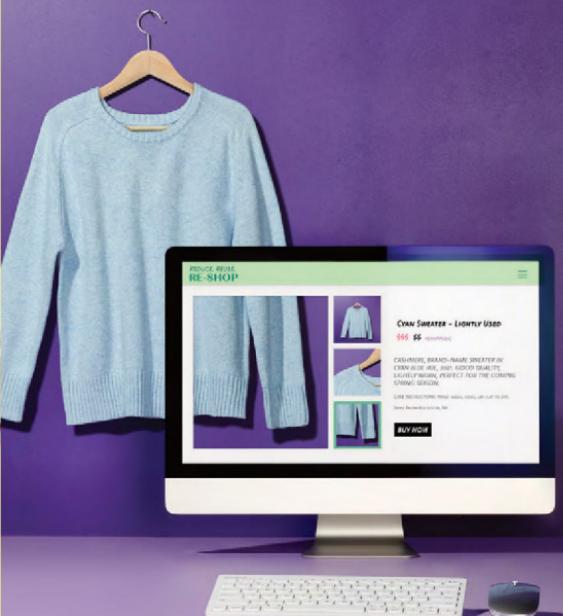
For an extra layer of comfort, add a layer of carpet padding underneath your rugs (especially ones that get a lot of traffic). It'll help keep rugs in place, and your feet and knees will thank you while you stand there washing that mountain of dishes.

SOURCE: FAMILYHANDYMAN.COM

## 5 MONEY Follow the "One In, One Out" Rule

When you make a new purchase, make a habit of selling an item of comparable value. Bought three new outfits? Post three old ones on clothing resale sites such as Poshmark or Mercari, or at least donate the items to make room in your closet. Splurged on a new dining set? Sell the old one on Facebook Marketplace or Craigslist instead of surrendering it to bulky pickup. This won't fully neutralize the cost of your new stuff, but it'll certainly help impede clutter accumulation. **R**

SOURCE: FORBES.COM





# The Buzz on Hot Honey

BY Emily Tyra

**S**AY HELLO TO your new condiment crush: hot honey. The elements are simple—honey infused with fresh or dried chile peppers—but the resulting liquid gold has an irresistible warmth and dimensional sweetness. Plus it's surprisingly versatile.

Just a kiss of hot honey instantly levels up basic dishes: plain pizza, bagels with cream cheese, even freshly dressed salad greens. But part of the fun for experimental home cooks, not to mention mixologists, is how easily hot honey can shift from down-home to uptown. Bloody Marys at weekend brunch will never be the same after you start coating the bacon slices in hot honey before cooking and candying them in the oven. (Just don't forget to flip them over midway!) Try hot honey dolloped on warm buttered biscuits or cornbread, drizzled on crackly-crisp fried chicken or shaken into a sunny paloma cocktail.

If you prefer to leave the infusing to the pros, you can buy your honey already hot. Bees Knees Spicy Honey and Mike's Hot Honey are two of the best-known brands. Mike's founder, Mike Kurtz, created his honey after he couldn't stop swooning over the one he'd had during his semester abroad in Brazil. His own chile-infused home honey experiment made its commercial debut on pies at Paulie Gee's, the Brooklyn pizzeria where he worked. In fact, Mike's Hot Honey still anoints one of Paulie Gee's signature pizzas, the Hellboy, along with fresh mozzarella, tomatoes, soppressata piccante and Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Even big brands have gotten into the hot honey game. When Heinz launched its Infused Honey with Hot Chili variety last summer, *Eater* food writer Jaya Saxena wrote, "Congratulations, hot honey, on completing the journey from indie condiment to market saturation."

Indeed, you can find hot honey at retailers coast to coast, including versions from many a mom-and-pop apiary. Sleeping Bear Farms—which has hives in Michigan and the Florida Panhandle—infuses star thistle honey with habaneros, bird's eye chiles and Aleppo pepper for a handcrafted variety called Kirk's Hot Honey, named for the owner and head beekeeper. The farm's hive-to-holiday table inspiration: hot-honey grilled pineapple spears, which pair perfectly with an Easter ham. □

## READY TO MAKE HOT HONEY YOUR MAIN SQUEEZE?

This sweetly hot (or hotly sweet) flavor boost can kick up any meal, from sandwiches and sides to drinks and desserts. Spread it on a ham-and-gruyere grilled cheese sandwich, or blend it with butter to slather on fresh corn. Use it to glaze pan-seared salmon, then spoon the rest over oven-roasted carrots or Brussels sprouts. Hot honey stirs right into a hot toddy or a margarita, and adds warmth to fruit crisps or baklava.



HUMOR *in*  
**UNIFORM**

A buddy and I were discussing where to go camping when a man nearby interrupted. "Guys," he said, "I was in the Army for 26 years. The last thing I'd want to do with my weekend is go camping! I have a boat that I take out on a lake and relax."

My pal said, "I was in the Navy for 30 years. The last thing I'd want to do is be on the water!"

"I can relate," I said with a self-deprecating smile. "After 20 years as an Air Force officer, the last thing I'd want to do with my weekends is be on a golf course."

—CHRIS MORTENSON  
*Colorado Springs, CO*

**My nephew** told his teacher that his mom is on parole. Actually,



"Here's the weak point."

she's on patrol, serving in the National Guard. Patrol.

— @CAI\_LYFE

**My first assignment** as a second lieutenant was at NORAD headquarters. That first day, I encountered scads of high-ranking officers walking around and quickly found myself constantly saluting someone—a general here,

a colonel there. It was only later when I learned that the last person in uniform I had saluted was a mailman.

—SKIP MCTIGHE  
*Punta Gorda, FL*

**GOT A FUNNY STORY about the military? It could be worth \$\$\$.** For details, see page 2 or go to **RD.COM/SUBMIT**.

## 13 THINGS

# Earn Your Poetic License

BY Sarah Chassé



**1** SPRING IS prime time for poetry, and not just because writers have long been inspired by April's sweet showers or the darling buds of May. UNESCO's annual World Poetry Day is March 21, and April is National Poetry Month in the United States and Canada. But you can celebrate poetry in any season;

the largest poetry event in North America, the Dodge Poetry Festival, is held every other fall in New Jersey.

**2** POETRY IS an ancient art form—in fact, it predates prose and literacy itself. Even before we could read or write, people were reciting and singing verses to preserve and pass down history, genealogy and law. Early agricultural societies also likely chanted spells or prayers for bountiful harvests.

**3** THE WORLD'S oldest surviving printed poem is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, composed 4,000 years ago in what is now Iraq

and Syria. Scratched onto clay tablets in wedge-shaped characters called cuneiform, the mythic tale of the warrior king Gilgamesh describes a huge flood similar to the one in the Bible, even including a Noah-like character and an ark.

**4** IN 15TH-CENTURY Scotland, one way to duke it out with your archenemy was called flying, a verbal showdown in verse—in essence, a medieval rap battle full of insults and boasting. While flying went out of fashion after the Middle Ages, players of the 2020 video game *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* can still fling taunting rhymes at virtual foes such as Fergal the Faceless and Chadwick, Monger of Gossip.

**5** BECAUSE THERE are so many types of poems, from funny nursery rhymes to somber elegies, rhyming villanelles to freewheeling free verse,

it can be hard to pin down what poetry actually *is*. Many have tried: William Wordsworth thought poetry was “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” Kahlil Gibran said, “Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.” And Emily Dickinson wrote, “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.” More precisely (and perhaps less poetically), poetry can be defined as writing that uses meter, metaphor and/or rhyme to elicit an emotional response.

**6** A 2018 STUDY by the National Endowment for the Arts found that poetry readership has increased in recent years, especially among those under age 35. Still, many people find poetry unapproachable or worry if they don’t immediately “get” a poem’s meaning. Edward Hirsch, author of *How to Read a Poem*:

*And Fall in Love with Poetry*, advises reading a poem out loud a few times, discussing it with a friend and, most importantly, getting comfortable with a little ambiguity.

**7** DID EDGAR ALLAN POE almost write “The Raven” about ... a parrot? That was his original concept for the 1845 poem’s talking bird, but he later settled on the more ominous raven. Poe was almost certainly inspired by Grip, the beloved pet raven of fellow author Charles Dickens.

**8** IN JANUARY 1961, Robert Frost became the first poet to speak at an American president’s inauguration. He arrived at the podium planning to read “Dedication,” written specifically to honor the man of the hour, John F. Kennedy. But the bright winter sunshine reflecting off the recent snowfall made the typed poem illegible, even after

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson tried blocking the sunlight with his hat. The 86-year-old Frost instead launched into his poem “The Gift Outright” from memory.

**9** SIXTY YEARS later, Amanda Gorman became the youngest inaugural poet at just 22, reading “The Hill We Climb” at President Joe Biden’s 2021 ceremony. Over the next few months, the newly famous Gorman also performed at the Super Bowl and graced the cover of *Vogue*. She’s not the only up-and-coming poet who has crossed over into pop culture: Canadian Rupi Kaur is a breakout “Instapoet”—that is, a poet popular on Instagram—with 4.5 million followers hanging on her every word.

**10** SHEL SILVERSTEIN’s 1981 illustrated poetry book, *A Light in the Attic*, was the first children’s book to land

on the *New York Times* bestseller list, where it appeared for 182 weeks, breaking the previous record for hardcovers. Before he started writing for the younger set (originally under the name Uncle Shelby), Silverstein contributed to *Playboy*. And he wrote the Johnny Cash song “A Boy Named Sue,” winning a 1970 Grammy for Best Country Song.

**11** NOT ALL poems are classics, but few are such stinkers that they inspire an entire competition devoted to wretched writing. Fairly or not, Joyce Kilmer’s “Trees” (which begins “I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree”) spawned Columbia University’s annual Alfred Joyce Kilmer Memorial Bad Poetry Contest, in which students recite the most hackneyed verses they can come up with. The event ends with a group recitation of “Trees.”

**12** HERE’S ONE WAY to clap back at the haters: After E.E. Cummings’s collection *70 Poems* was firmly rejected by 14 publishing houses, he self-published it under the snarky title *No Thanks*—and he dedicated the book to those very same companies, arranging their names in the shape of a funeral urn.

**13** “THERE ONCE was a man from Nantucket ...” That’s the first line of many a popular limerick, a five-line rhyming poem that is usually humorous (and sometimes crude). The name *limerick* most likely came from a popular 18th-century drinking song about the Irish city of Limerick that people often added cheeky improvised verses to, or possibly from the term *Learic*, referring to the surname of the form’s most famous practitioner, Victorian writer Edward Lear. **R**



**A relative of mine,** a minister, once performed a wedding ceremony in a car. The pair were too old and frail to get out, so he got on his knees in the front seat and turned to them in the back.

After declaring them husband and wife, he told the groom, "At this time, it's customary to kiss the bride."

The weary groom responded, "Go ahead."

—PEGGY LEWIS  
*Greenville, SC*

**I'm an EMT.** I once responded to a man complaining of an



"I'm going to ask you a series of scary questions. When I'm done, let's see if you can guess why I'm asking them."

insect crawling into his right ear. But more bothersome was the burning sensation in his left ear. That's when we noticed his wife holding a bottle of insect spray. Turns out, she had sprayed insecticide into his left ear

thinking it would "flush" the insect out of his right ear. I had to explain to her that our ear canals are separated by our brain.

—REDDIT.COM

**Remembering** that time in grad school when my adviser, a great ornithologist, got a random call: **Drunk guy** (bar noises in background): IS THIS THE BIRD PROFESSOR?

I can't be the only person who says "please leave me alone" quietly out loud to her email.

—@ASHLEYN1COLE

**My adviser:** Um ... yes?

**Drunk guy:** DO HUMMINGBIRDS HAVE FEET?

**My adviser:** ... Yes. (wild cheering over phone from bar)

—[@NORTHERNSPRW](https://twitter.com/NORTHERNSPRW)

**I think we can** all agree that hairdressers are the unsung heroes for looking at the pictures of celebrity hair we want and not laughing in our faces.

—[@IHIDEFROMMYKIDS](https://twitter.com/IHIDEFROMMYKIDS)

**During my** sixth-grade language arts class, the topic of rhetorical appeals came up. I mentioned that the idea comes from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Later, as I went over their notes, I was pleased to see that

YOUR FUNNY WORK story could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, go to p. 2 or [RD.COM/SUBMIT](http://RD.COM/SUBMIT).

at least one student had paid attention.

He'd written that rhetorical appeals were the creation of one Mr. Eric Stottle.

—LISA QUINN

Tampa, FL

**Client to** graphic artist:

"We really like your illustration style, very artsy. But we don't feel you can put a price on art. So, can you do it for free?"

—[NOTALWAYSRIGHT.COM](https://notalwaysright.com)

## THE BEST MAN FOR THE JOB!

Len Markidan is the chief marketing officer at the internet marketing platform Podia. But, as his LinkedIn profile shows, his experience as an active consumer has been his most important job:

**Netflix—**

**Account Manager**

Apr 2009–Present

- ◆ Responsible for managing (and paying for) account shared by five globally distributed family members.
- ◆ Exceeded market benchmarks by typing password using Roku remote with 48% accuracy or greater.
- ◆ Multiyear recipient of suggestions for movies I've already watched.

823% over seven years.

- ◆ Regularly reported on product quality using review portal.

**Apple—**

**Uncertified Genius**

Nov 2003–Present

- ◆ Led remote tech support for older family members throughout the country.
- ◆ Once put off a software update for over eight months.



**Amazon—**

**Prime Member**

Feb 2008–Present

- ◆ Increased order volume by



The  
**HEALTHY**

WELLNESS FROM THEHEALTHY.COM

# Good Vibes Grow on Trees

*Science shows  
that our plants take  
care of us too*

---

BY Lauren David

ILLUSTRATIONS BY James Steinberg

**R**ESEARCH HAS REVEALED many benefits to being in the presence of nature, whether that's walking in a forest, having a small garden or keeping a few household plants.

"One study showed that patients at a hospital who had plants in their rooms reported less pain, lower blood pressure, less fatigue and less anxiety than patients without plants in

their rooms," says Jenny Seham, PhD, founder and director of AIM (Arts and Integrated Medicine) at Montefiore Health Systems in Bronx, New York. She explains: "Cortisol, the stress hormone, has been shown to lower with plant interaction, lowering fatigue, irritability and blood pressure. Gardening and caring for plants can help turn people away from negative thoughts or emotions."

Houseplant collections have become a popular social media trend. Jamie Keaton Jones, PhD, a psychotherapist in Washington, D.C., says that for many people, tending to plants has surfaced as a hobby that enables them to experience greater comfort and beauty from the presence of living things sharing their space.

"Plants and exposure to greenery have been found to have multiple mental health benefits, such as

lowering stress, decreasing feelings of depression, increasing sociability, restoring focus, improving cognitive performance, improving mood and increasing self-esteem," says Jones.

Studies have also shown that plants and gardening increase productivity and levels of serotonin, the neurotransmitter responsible for uplifting mood.

"Rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future, plant care helps one focus on the present moment and provides a feeling of accomplishment," says Gayle Weill, a therapist in New York and Connecticut.

Like any new skill or hobby, taking care of houseplants comes with a learning curve. Anyone starting to care for plants should be patient and allow themselves time to learn the basics, leaving room for a little trial

#### I TRIED IT...

## Trapeze Classes

**A couple of years ago,** at 32, I took up the hobby of aerial circus arts after a friend invited me to join her for a flying trapeze class. I never expected what came next. Everyone's nerves are on fire the first time they climb up to the flying trapeze platform, but by the end of that class I felt an incredible sense of excitement and ambition. I was reignited. After an intensely deep sleep and even deeper stretching of sore muscles, I craved more. A year later, I'm in the best physical and mental shape of my life. If anyone ever tries to wrangle you into a trapeze class, it's a leap worth taking! —Leslie Finlay



HENRIK SORENSEN/GETTY IMAGES



and error. Here are eight plants that experts recommend for conferring mental health benefits:

#### **Snake plant**

These popular indoor plants have a striking appearance, with dark green sword-shaped leaves that often have mustard yellow or white stripes. "Also known as mother-in-law's tongue, the snake plant is a great first plant," says Jones. "It is very easy to care for, thrives in spaces with low sunlight, has visual appeal and filters the air."

#### **Spider plants**

With light green foliage and plenty of leaves, spider plants are another

low-maintenance selection. "They do well with humidity, and actually can handle varying forms of light, but do best with medium light," says Tyler Keith, a social worker and avid gardener in Wilmington, North Carolina. "Sometimes individuals will put spider plants in their bathrooms to have a warmer, cozier feeling in the space that helps a relaxing bath feel that much more relaxing," he says.

#### **Aloe vera**

Drought-resistant and easy to grow, "aloe vera is low maintenance—you can just water it monthly—and it produces a healing gel that you can use straight from the leaf," says Seham.

### Pothos

If you want to go bright green, try pothos, with its chartreuse heart-shaped waxy leaves. The plants grow long vines that can trail or hang from a pot and grow downward, or the vines can climb and be supported with a trellis to grow upward. Jones likes pothos plants because "they are also easy to care for, filter the air and look beautiful cascading down a bookcase or shelf."

### Lavender

Well known for its relaxing scent, lavender "has a calming effect, aids in reducing stress, promotes sleep and has anti-inflammatory properties when used as a topical for skin," Weill says. You can clip and dry the leaves and put them in a bowl or even sprinkle them into your bath.

### Basil

"The experience of growing, picking and using herbs you've grown yourself has a positive impact on your mental health, creating positive sensory experiences as well as a sense of accomplishment," says Seham. Eating basil has health benefits too, Weill adds. "It has properties that help to relieve stress and anxiety, and eating it can improve mental clarity."

### Lemon balm

This fragrant green herb is part of the mint family and is simple to cultivate. "Known for its calming properties, it

has a light lemony scent and has been used to improve sleep, reduce stress and anxiety, improve appetite, and help with indigestion," says Seham.

### Spearmint

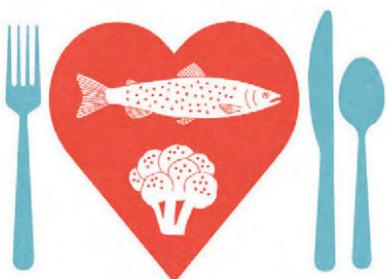
This hardy herb grows quickly and makes a wonderful addition to drinks. "It's great to just smell the leaves, without even needing to make a tea, for an immediate soothing effect," Seham says.

Before you bring home a boatload of botanicals, Jones says it's not about how many plants you have, but rather how you interact with them. For instance, are the plants in areas where you spend a lot of time? Do you care for them daily? If you have a small space or aren't sure how much time you're willing to invest in plant parenting, starting out with a lot of plants could be overwhelming.

"Just one plant can make a difference; it can engage you by its smell or color that creates a positive mood response with every interaction," says Seham.

Remember that while indoor gardening can be a boon for your mental well-being and can help with stress and relaxation, it's not a cure-all.

"Having a plant doesn't immediately or directly impact mental health processes," says Keith. But caring for plants can be a useful and enjoyable part of an overall holistic wellness routine. □



## The Best and Worst Diets for Your Heart

BY *Leslie Finlay*

**D**OZENS OF DIETS are touted as "best," but it's easy to lose track of the fact that healthy eating needs to be about overall wellness, not just weight loss. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, so we asked Norman E. Lepor, MD, a cardiologist at Smidt Heart Institute at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles, for the best—and worst—diets for your heart.

### Best: the Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet encourages people to eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, legumes and healthy fats. Dr. Lepor says incorporating more sources of

monounsaturated fats (found in avocado, olive oil and seeds) and polyunsaturated fats (in walnuts, flaxseeds and fish) is a good place to start. "We recommend using oils that are not tropical oils, but using canola or high-quality olive oil instead," he says. Fish and seafood are regulars in the Mediterranean diet, while other protein sources, like eggs, poultry and dairy, are eaten in moderation. Red meat is eaten sparingly.

### Worst: the Keto Diet

Because consuming a higher amount of saturated fats increases your risk of developing cardiovascular disease, Dr. Lepor does not recommend the keto diet, which is a high-fat eating plan. "People tend to say they can lose weight fast on the keto diet, and they eat foods that reduce their appetite, but they're really increasing their intake of saturated fats," he says.

Unfortunately, in the U.S. even people who aren't following the keto diet consume too many saturated fats and trans fats, as well as added sugars, sodium and overall calories—all potential risk factors for heart disease. Dr. Lepor says eating a diet that focuses on sources of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats—as well as lean proteins like chicken, seafood and plant-based options such as legumes—can benefit our hearts and our overall health over time. **R**



## IT DOESN'T MATTER WHEN YOU EXERCISE

Cramming your exercise into the weekend might be just as beneficial as spreading it out over the week, suggests a recent Brazilian-led analysis. The key to having a significantly lower risk of death is to clock a weekly total of 150 minutes of moderate activity (like brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous activity (like running).



### The Best Time to Eat If You Have Type 2 Diabetes

It's not unusual to spread a day's food intake over 14 hours—say from breakfast at 7 a.m. until an evening snack at 9 p.m. Narrowing that window down to 10 hours could benefit people with type 2 diabetes, according to a study by researchers at Maastricht University Medical Center in the Netherlands.

This allows the body to reach a fasting state during the night and lower overall blood sugar levels. The study's findings line up with previous research where even shorter time windows—such as eight hours—led to an increase in fat burning and improved insulin sensitivity in people with obesity.

# TWO MORE REASONS TO GET MORE SLEEP

Whether or not you choose to help someone else may partly depend on how well rested you are, concludes a report from the University of California, Berkeley. It describes recent research analyzing brain images from volunteers after eight hours of sleep and after staying up all night. Brain areas involved with trying to understand what others might be feeling or needing were less active when the subjects were tired. In another study from the same report, participants felt more willing to perform kind actions, such as helping an injured stranger or volunteering for a worthy cause, after a decent night's sleep. A third study noted that charitable donations in the United States dropped by around 10% each spring—but only in places that observed daylight saving time, where people lose an hour of sleep when the clocks move ahead. All these results suggest that insufficient sleep makes us less compassionate and helpful.

Another unsung benefit to getting enough sleep is better decision making. If you've ever felt tapped out after concentrating for hours, that's because the effort makes a molecule called glutamate build up in your brain's prefrontal cortex. High levels can disrupt brain function, as scientists in Paris figured out using a measurement called spectrometry; this causes fatigue and lazy decision making that prioritizes easy indulgences over long-term gains.

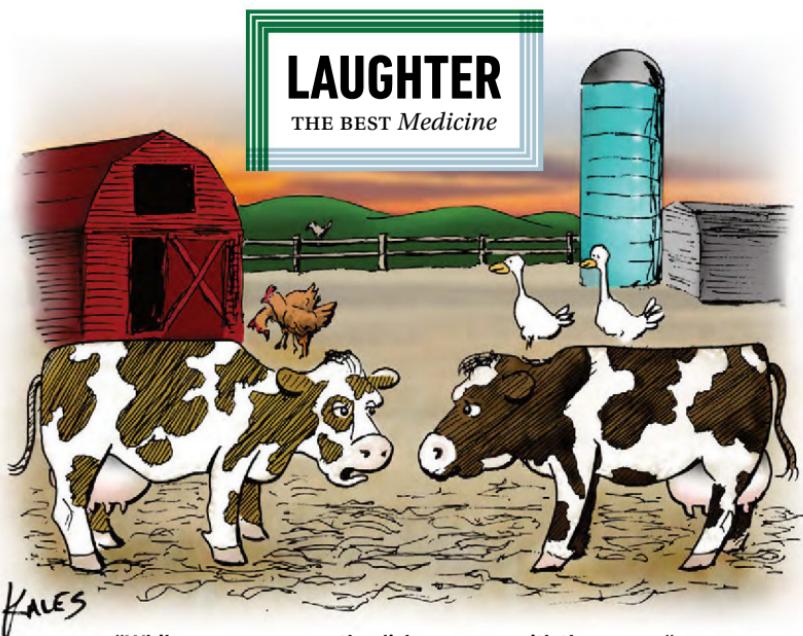


## Autoimmune Disorders and Your Heart

Around 10% of Americans and Europeans have at least one autoimmune disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis or psoriasis. In all cases, the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy organs and tissues, often causing inflammation.

New research out of KU Leuven, a university in Belgium, has shown that people with an autoimmune disorder were at least 1.4 times more likely to develop cardiovascular disease. Meanwhile, the risk more than doubled among subjects with two autoimmune disorders.

The researchers hope their work will encourage patients and doctors to discuss prevention strategies for cardiovascular problems, such as eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly—just as general practitioners do for people living with other risk factors. □



"While you were away, the dish ran away with the spoon."

**An airplane** encounters turbulence and starts rocking from side to side. The flight crew quickly wheels out the drinks cart for the jittery passengers.

"Would you like a drink?" the flight

attendant asks a businesswoman.

"Yes," she replies.  
"I'll have whatever the pilot's having."

—AJOKEDAY.COM

**My glass coffin** company Remains To Be

Seen is not doing as well as I thought it would.

—@KIMMYMONTE

**A musician** hears of a loner who dies with no friends or next of kin. Touched, he decides to go to the funeral and play his bagpipes as a tribute. Lost on his way to the gravesite, he finally arrives an hour late to find two men

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Not to victim blame but why did you bring a needle into a haystack in the first place?

—@EGGSHELLFRIEND

shoveling dirt back into a hole in the ground. The musician jumps out of his car, pulls on his bagpipes and proceeds to play "Amazing Grace." It's so beautiful that the two men stop shoveling to wipe away a few tears.

"That," says one to the other, "is the most fitting tribute I have ever witnessed to the installation of a septic tank."

—ROGER SIMMONS  
*Wilmington, NC*

**Swimming** is a confusing sport, because sometimes you do it for fun, and other times you do it to not die.

—DEMETRI MARTIN,  
*comedian*

**Two psychiatrists** pass each other in a hallway. One says, "Hey, how're you doing?"

The other thinks to himself, *I wonder what he meant by that ...*

—SOUMYA PANDALAI  
*Phoenix, AZ*

**Pessimists** see life through morose-colored glasses.

—JIM-BOB WILLIAMS  
*St. Albans, WV*

### This National Library

Workers Day (April 25), make sure to take out a book and leave a gag:

- ◆ A woman walks into a library and asks if they have any books about paranoia. The librarian says, "They're right behind you!"

- ◆ A man asks the librarian if she has any books on turtles. "Hardback?" asks the librarian. "Yes," he says. "And little heads."

- ◆ A drunk goes up to the desk and shouts, "I'll have a burger, fries and a milkshake." The librarian says, "Sir, this is a library!" "Sorry," he whispers. "I'll have a burger, fries and a milkshake."

**GOT A FUNNY JOKE?**  
It could be worth \$\$.  
For details, go to  
[RD.COM/SUBMIT](http://RD.COM/SUBMIT).

### SAY WHAT?

Whoever let Vince Rozmiarek take control of the local community center's roadside message board in Indian Hills, Colorado, has allowed him to turn the small town into a laughingstock. And they seem perfectly happy with that result.



COVER STORY

# LAWN



TM&B STUDIO



# GONE

EVERYONE LOVES THEIR YARD ...  
EXCEPT MOTHER NATURE

—  
BY *Dan Zak*  
FROM THE WASHINGTON POST  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY *K. Synold*



# *Lawns. They're part of American life.*

You throw a football on them, you picnic on them, you lounge and loaf on them.

In a blog post titled "Why the anti-lawn movement bugs me a little," landscaper Dave Marciiniak reminds us that "Nothing holds up to foot traffic and hard use like turfgrass. Lawns also provide visual relief, a place for the eye to rest while it digests all the botanical awesomeness around it."

Sounds great! But the chemical-fed, water-gulping lawn has a seedier side, one that's not as nature-friendly as we might hope from all that green. And even as our planet accelerates its

revolt against us, we tend our lawns, one part of Earth we can control. Society falters, resources dwindle and, still, lawns.

Lawns: burned out, blond and dead, in the air fryer of August. Lawns: emerald green—no, alien green—and kept that way by maniacal vigilance and an elaborate system of pipes and potions, organic and otherwise, in defiance of ecology.

And for what? To have, in this chaos, dominion over something? (Lawn and order?) To drape a veil of verdancy over a world gone to seed? To feel equal or superior to Ron, across the street, whose lawn always



## 5 REASONS TO KICK YOUR LAWN HABIT

Every week, Americans mow and maintain an area larger than the size of Florida. And all that fussing has consequences.

### 1 Lawns are thirsty.

Watering a lawn for an hour uses more than 1,000 gallons of water. That adds up to 9 billion gallons a day across the country and makes turfgrass our country's single largest irrigated crop—this, while more than half of the lower 48 states were in a drought at the end of last summer.

### 2 Running on fumes.

Here's a fun fact: In 2018, gas-powered lawn mowers, leaf blowers and other garden equipment guzzled almost 3 billion gallons of gas in the United States, roughly the same amount as 6 million passenger cars driven for a year.

### 3 Cough, cough, wheeze, wheeze.

Running a lawn mower for an hour emits the same amount of pollution as driving a car 45 miles. Gas-powered lawn and garden equipment produces up to 5% of our country's air pollution.

### 4 Non-fertile grounds.

Our lawns use 10 times more fertilizer—which releases nitrous oxide,

a greenhouse gas—than our agricultural crops. Those fertilizers leach into wetlands, rivers and oceans, creating algae blooms that deoxygenate water, causing fish to die.

**5 Bug off!** The 80 million pounds of pesticides and herbicides we add to our lawns each year also disrupt the food chain, killing helpful insects and plants.

**"Nature is not happy out there anymore. In fact, there is no 'out there.' It's gone."**

— DOUG TALLAMY, *founder of Homegrown National Park and wildlife ecology professor at the University of Delaware*



looks like the 18th at Pebble Beach?

We've been sweeping our anxieties under these green comfort blankets for quite some time. A "smooth, closely shaven surface of grass is by far the most essential element of beauty on the grounds of a suburban home," Frank J. Scott wrote in 1870, around the time of the first lawn mower patent, in a book titled *The Art of Beautifying Suburban Home Grounds of Small Extent* (Chapter XIII: The Lawn).

"For 'setting off' both the house and the landscape, planting a good lawn is of vital importance," declared a caption in the *New York Times* in 1937.

Around that time, during the Great Depression, the Mattei family in Cincinnati did not have a lawn. They had

## M.J. VEVERKA FILLED IN HER POOL, REMOVED THE LAWN AND TURNED THE SPACE INTO AN OASIS OF NATIVE PLANTS.

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a yard, and the yard was functional. It was for the chickens and tomato plants. It was not for grass. One of the Matteis, Vic, used the GI Bill to get to graduate school and become a research scientist. He made a family of his own in the Philadelphia suburb of Cinnaminson, New Jersey, in

a subdivision that paved over Quaker farmland to accommodate Americans who were tinkering with the Aegis radar system for the nearby RCA Corp. Everyone in the subdivision had a lawn, of course. What was the American dream, in the 20th century, if it wasn't aproned by a quarter-acre of Kentucky bluegrass, which is good for recreation and admiration and not much else?

Vic had some token vegetable plants on the property, but the yard was not for survival. The yard was for lawn, and the lawn was for mowing.

"He was mowing the lawn every Saturday," says Vic's daughter, Edamarie Mattei. "And that was success: having the lawn. Mowing the lawn."

It is now a half-century later. Mattei, a landscape designer, is standing on a lawn in a leafy crook of Bethesda, Maryland. She is talking to the owner of the lawn about getting rid of it.

"It contributes nothing," homeowner M.J. Veverka says about her lawn, which she's watered and weeded and mowed and toiled over for 31 years—and for what? The lawn is static, nonfunctional, tedious. Last year Veverka filled in her backyard pool, removed the surrounding lawn and enlisted Mattei's company to turn the space into an oasis of native plants, a "homegrown national park," in the words of a grassroots movement for regenerating biodiversity. Veverka so loves the backyard—which is now an evolving work of horticultural art

## WE'RE WILD ABOUT REWILDLING

Rewilding is the act of restoring an area to its natural state.

Here's why you'll want to try it.

### We're in the money!

Homeowners spend billions of dollars on fertilizers every year while watching water bills rise. Replant with native plants—they don't need much, if any, of the above.

### Whoa, that's deep

Native grasses and plants have deeper roots, which sequester more carbon from the atmosphere.

### The birds and the bees

You'll not only help pollinators and birds, you'll get a captivating nature show every day, like nesting birds and cheery butterflies.

### To your health

Studies show how nature improves our mental health, making us happier, boosting the immune system and even lowering blood pressure.

### Reclaim some time

What would you do with your Saturdays if you didn't have to tend that aggravating swath of turf?

### The talk of the town

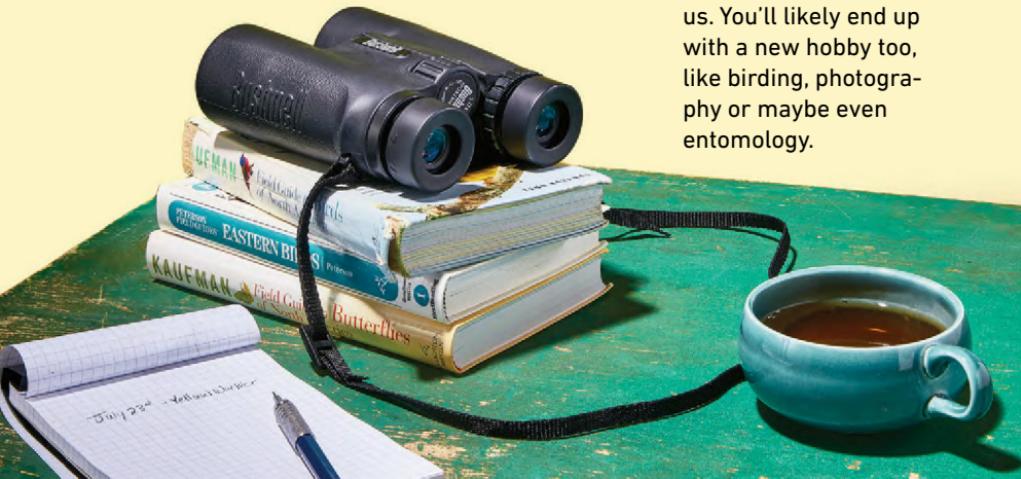
Sit on your porch and watch neighbors ooh and aah over your front yard filled with a colorful array of wild strawberries, Pennsylvania sedge and purple love grass.

**"This is a chance to re-imagine our landscaping, our setting, our piece of ground that holds our home and our families. That's kind of a cool adventure."**

—GARY FERGUSON, *author and naturalist*

### Imagine that

As biodiversity blossoms in our little wildlife refuge, it reboots the curious kid inside of us. You'll likely end up with a new hobby too, like birding, photography or maybe even entomology.



and a functioning component of the surrounding ecosystem—that she wants to do the same thing with her front yard.

Mattei used to spend more time educating clients about the benefits of turf removal and native plantings; in the past two years, for whatever reason, new clients have started coming to her with those very ideas. Maybe, in this climate-conscious era, we are thinking outside the strict geometry of the lawn, which Mattei describes as ecologically dead, a monoculture in a world that needs biodiversity.

**OVER A CENTURY**, from around the 1870s to the 1970s, Americans slowly fell in love with lawns. Lawns were a sign of taste, calm, power, privilege, order and discipline, especially in the aftermath of World War II.

"On the American front lawn men use power machinery and chemicals, the tools of war, to engage in a battle for supremacy with Mother Nature,"

## WE POUR 9 BILLION GALLONS OF WATER ON LANDSCAPING EVERY DAY.

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writes Virginia Scott Jenkins in her book *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession*.

Over the past 50 years, we've slowly fallen out of love with lawns. They

began to signal waste, disregard, disharmony, homogeneity, gentrification, zombie boomerism.

"Wasn't there something a bit decadent about millions of Americans applying millions of pounds of fertilizer and pouring millions of gallons of water on the ground to grow something you couldn't eat unless you were a Jersey cow?" columnist Ellen Goodman wrote in the *Boston Globe* way back in 1977.

"I think we're growing up as a country," Mattei says. "For a lot of American history, it seemed like we had boundless access to land, and we kept extracting from it and building on it. I see a real change from looking at land as a demonstration of power or success to looking at land as a precious resource."

She adds: "When we are lawn people, we are one thing. When we are not lawn people, we are another thing."

We are still, largely, lawn people. The biggest irrigated crop, by area, in the United States? Not corn or soybeans, but lawn. Unproductive, ornamental lawn: around 40 million acres of it, or 2% of the land area of the Lower 48, according to multiple estimates cited by Garik Gutman, program manager for NASA's Land-Cover/Land-Use Change Program.

Forty million acres: The entire state of Georgia couldn't contain America's total lawnage. And we pour 9 billion gallons of water on landscaping every

## LET YOUR IMAGINATION GO REWILD!

OK, you got rid of your lawn. Now what?

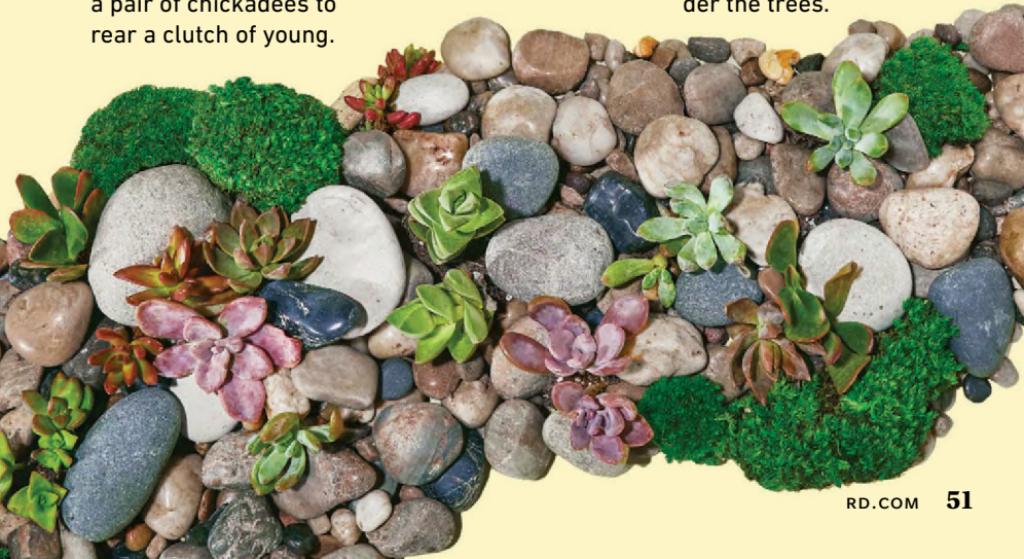
**Go native.** Swap turf for native shrubs, wildflowers, trees and grasses. They require little if any watering or supplemental nutrients because they thrive in local weather and soil conditions. Insects and tiny creatures will thank you because they prefer to eat and reproduce on these plants. Without them, the tiny creatures starve, as do birds and other animals that feed on them. And birds are hungry—it takes more than 6,000 caterpillars for a pair of chickadees to rear a clutch of young.

**Try alternative ground cover.** Still want a wide-open space? Replace grass with wildflowers, clover, daisy-like chamomile, purple thyme, and native grasses like buffalo grass, red fescue and bent grass.

**Try a really alternative ground cover: rock.** Xeriscaping is a fancy word for a yard that needs little to no water to stay alive. These are popular in desert areas but can be made elsewhere. They often

include a mix of drought tolerant plants like cactuses, agave and bright yellow rabbitbrush, plus rocks, gravel and mulch.

**Think colorfully.** Replace one-dimensional turf with layers and textures of visual intrigue. The solution is to create symmetry in the landscape. Put tall plants in the back and short plants in the front, then add other elements, like a winding path, a birdbath and beds under the trees.



day, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Meanwhile, the southwestern United States is enduring a megadrought; the past two decades constitute its driest period since the year 800. In a world thirsty for water, lawns are a sneaky siphon.

These days we have No Mow May, a movement to let grass grow uncut for the month of May, creating habitat and forage for early season pollinators and where neighbors test each other's tolerance for nonconformity. We have Twitter users sharing before and after photos of their "war on lawns," which

*"WE HAVE BOULDERS SO  
PEOPLE CAN SIT AND  
BE PART OF THE LANDSCAPE.  
LANDSCAPING IS MEANT  
TO BE INTERACTIVE."*

turn flat slabs of sickly green into colorful kingdoms of billowing flora. We have a channel on Reddit called NoLawns and TikTok hashtags such as #antilawn, which might direct you to a performance of a profane anti-lawn song by a 27-year-old Nashville musician named Mel Bryant.

"At the time, all of my neighbors were obsessed with their lawns," says Bryant, who wrote the song on Earth Day 2020. "Everyone was mowing constantly, every day. At any point in

time you'd hear lawn mowers going. And it drove me fricking insane. I still have this one neighbor who, I swear, on the Fourth of July was mowing at 7:30 p.m. What are you doing, dude? This can wait."

Bryant's song racked up tens of thousands of views, spreading through TikTok's #cottagecore hashtag, where younger people advertise their cozy, quaint, sustainable, back-to-nature ethos.

"I do think it's pretty generational," Bryant says. "I've definitely noticed in the past few years that so many people around my age are getting into gardening, and taking their lawns and turning them into gardens."

**WALT WHITMAN WROTE** of grass in 1855: "I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven."

Said Hank Hill, fictional Texas propane salesman, in 1997: "Look, some people hoist a flag to show they love our country. Well, my lawn is my flag."

But lawn has become a liability—or, in some cases, an asset on the condition of its removal. California's main water utility is paying customers between \$2 and \$5 for each square foot of living turf that they remove. Last year Nevada outlawed certain types of lawn, or, rather, the state legislature prohibited the use of water from the dribbling Colorado River to feed certain types of "nonfunctional

## THE LAWN SWAPPERS

**Marina Richie**

Bend, OR

I began small—replacing a patch of grass with native butterfly host plants. Today, my yard is a complex wildlife refuge bursting with flowers, shrubs, native grasses and trees—and lots of birds, like white-headed woodpeckers, nuthatches, quails and goldfinches. I take a lot of pride in how many birds have raised their young here. I recommend putting your best plantings close to the house, where you can see them out the window. I have some really perfumed shrubs like mock orange, with this wonderful orange wild smell every time you open the window. I find a lot of healing in the garden.

**Freddy Arthur**

Tacoma, WA

When we purchased our home, the front yard was a postage stamp of hard-baked surface with no privacy and three or four struggling non-native ornamental shrubs. It was lifeless and depressing. I've since replaced that with over 100 species of native trees, shrubs and flowers. My choice for native plants is for wildlife. They were here first. To not put back what has

been taken is just rude. I can watch juncos and chickadees gathering food and nesting materials, and flocks of bushtits mobbing the plantings during peak harvest times of bugs or seeds. I wanted a space I could enjoy, not be a slave to, for the benefit of wildlife, and my eyes and heart. I feel like an emissary of Mother Earth, and it is good.

**Ernie Ewaschuk**

St. Albert, AB

Ripping up one's lawn 30 years ago wasn't normal, and I got a lot of attention from neighbors and newspapers. But today, I have a creek bed that gathers leaves, and it's usually just full of ladybugs in the spring and fall, and there's usually some kind of grassland sparrows nesting in the shrubs. My backyard has been converted into a vegetable garden, which I keep planting for myself and my kids. They're scattered all over the place now, but it keeps them coming home.



## BUT I LIKE MY LAWN!

Grass isn't inherently evil. Smaller patches surrounded by wild areas are a good balance, with enough space for both humans and creatures to hang out, and kids and dogs to play on. Here are four steps to making your lawn a little friendlier:

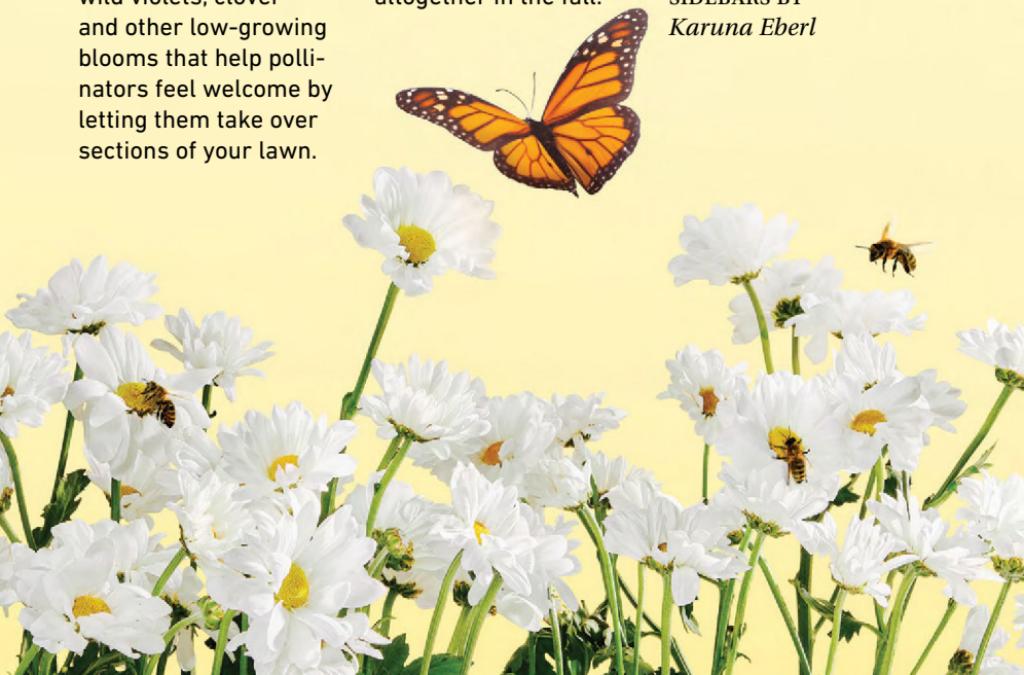
**Step 1: Start small.** No need to do everything all at once. Break changes into stages. First try a border bed full of wildflowers and shrubs in front of your house. The following year, build a vegetable garden.

**Step 2: Embrace weeds.** Make uninvited wild violets, clover and other low-growing blooms that help pollinators feel welcome by letting them take over sections of your lawn.

**Step 3: Stow the lawn mower.** No-Mow May means exactly that: Don't mow in May, which helps bees and other early season pollinators find nourishment when food sources are scarce. Hate the idea of not mowing? Then mow less—every two or three weeks—and stop altogether in the fall.

**Step 4: Get certified!** Certify your nature-friendly yard as a wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation or become one of Audubon Rockies' Habitat Heroes. Certification for each comes with a sign for your yard to show off to the neighborhood.

SIDEBARS BY  
*Karuna Eberl*



turf," which in southern Nevada slurps up to 12 billion gallons of water every year (more than 10% of the state's usage of the river). The law created a committee to sort "functional" turf from "nonfunctional"; discussions were had about how to categorize "pet relief" areas and "wedding lawns at golf courses."

Before the law passed, Sun City Anthem, an active-adult community in Henderson, Nevada, had already removed almost 40,000 square feet of grass, which nearly halved its water bill.

Larry Fossan, facilities manager and landscape supervisor, replaced the lawn with xeriscaping: native plants like lantana, cactuses, Mexican feathergrass. Last year on the property Fossan saw something he'd never seen before in Nevada: monarch butterflies, about 25 of them, migrating through.

"There's flowers, color, butterflies, hummingbirds," Fossan says of lawnless living. "Different parts of the day you see different things. We have

boulders so people can sit and be part of the landscape. When we had grass, people just walked into the building, but now they'll stop and ooh and aah. Landscaping is meant to be interactive. It's meant to be part of your life."

Landscaper Marciak—he of the "Why the anti-lawn movement bugs me a little" blog post—accepts and even welcomes changing landscaping tastes. He notes, however, that change is slow.

"As much as Americans like to call themselves rugged individuals, there's a lot of looking around to see what other people are doing," says Marciak, who lives in suburban Culpeper, Virginia. "I explain to people advocating anti-lawn: Look, it's not going to happen overnight. If you want to get people away from lawns, we have to show them it can be beautiful, it can be desirable."

And perhaps most importantly: "It can make the neighbors jealous." R

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## How to Find a Four-Leaf Clover

**"First, you have to believe that you'll find one and trust that they're there,"** says Professor Leslie Hirst of the Rhode Island School of Design. **Look for ruptures in pattern instead of counting leaves: Three-leafers appear triangular, four-leafers square. Sunlight flattens clovers into a green blob, so look in the shade. Four-leafers are the product of genetics and environment, so if you're unsuccessful in one patch, move to greener pastures. Good luck!**

NYTIMES.COM

READER'S DIGEST



FJS  
ink

HUMOR



Nick Offerman's  
GUIDE TO  
**NATURE'S  
BOUNTY**

*The Parks and Recreation star offers  
handy tips for bartering  
with Mother Nature*

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BY Nick Offerman

ILLUSTRATIONS BY Frank Stockton





**LET'S TALK ABOUT GIFTS,** and I don't mean Christmas. Santa Claus, Schmanta Claus. Tooth Fairy? Easter Bunny? I scoff. *Brrroiy!* That's the sound of me lightly trumpeting an insouciant nether-toot in their general direction, because they are rank amateurs. You want the gifts that keep on giving, year-round? Straight up largesse? Talk to Mother Nature. Hers is the bag that holds the bounty to be harvested from the circle of life itself, every day of the year!

When you can unplug from the modern, consumerist distraction channels to be found pretty much anywhere "on the grid" 24/7 and immerse yourself in the quietude of a

hike, spelunk, dive or paddle, the riches that become available to you are quite tasty, indeed.

Let's take the Great Lakes for starters. You can hike through unlimited acres of near-virgin conifer forest, lousy with squirrels, raccoons, you name it. Skunks. Cute as hell. You emerge along the shores of Lake Superior, where you're able to employ your large, strong hands in the harvesting of willow fronds, enough for a good-sized creel, or fish basket. Please note that these fronds cost zero dollars. When gathering your willow, select at least three contrasting "autumn" colors so your basket wouldn't feel out of place on the cover of *Sunset*

magazine. Take your time and weave the hell out of that creel, adding the final flourish of a hand-tooled leather strap to serve as a hasp. Next, take that creel to the nearest big town and find a local butcher or meat counter at a grocery and cannily barter your weaving project for literal pounds of smoked bacon. Boom. Mother Nature just paid you. With the gift of pork.

Or this. Head down to Texas Hill Country during the rainy season and go entirely bonkers harvesting morel, chanterelle and chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms. These savory treats are highly prized, but remember that you

When your chosen area has received an inch or two of steady rain over a few days, head into the live oaks to spot the brightly fruiting mushrooms. To be sure you avoid any poisonous varieties, try reading a book for once. When you have amassed a few dry gallons of alien-looking shrooms, then you are sittin' pretty, because these woodland treats are absolute delicacies to idiots who like to eat dirty mold and fungus. Head into town and find some. These easy marks are known to congregate at embarrassingly bougie eateries. These restaurants are simple to find

*Head around to the back door  
and brandish your haul  
like it's contraband,  
because in Texas it is.*



are technically not allowed to forage for fungi on public or private land unless you have permission. Some national parks and preserves allow each citizen to collect an amount for personal use (less than a gallon), but beware: If they catch you selling your treasures, you will find yourself in deep ordure (an excellent place to grow mushrooms, by the way). You can bypass this pitfall by purchasing a \$50 commercial permit—if you're a sucker, that is, but guess who has a better idea? That's right. Me.

because they refer to themselves as “eateries.” I usually see if I can sniff out the kind of place that serves snails, pâté or any dish topped with “coriander fish foam.”

Head around to the back door and brandish your haul like it's contraband, because in Texas it is. These “foodies,” as they proudly refer to themselves, will lose their feeble minds at the merest prospect of adding your “forage” to their stews, and here's the good part: For your troubles you can get them to swap you (thus



bypassing the illegal “selling”) four young Berkshire hogs, or, in a pinch, you may accept Chester Whites, which you then drive or haul to your homestead. Allow them to root out their own supply of acorns and wild grubs, and they will fatten into dozens of savory, delicious meals.

My final example involves another of nature’s wonderful gifts: that of time spent with my family. It’s almost perfectly natural, except that my cousin Margie likes to wear synthetic

fabrics (which are made from crude oil—this is not the only way in which she’s a nincompoop). We love nothing more than to go fishing together in Minnesota every summer, and catch up to our legal limit in all the available fish species: in ascending order of size, perch, bluegill, crappie, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike, muskie. We do catch and release—we catch the fish and then release them into the fish basket. I actually don’t know the

legal limits; I just said that in case any lawyers read this. We basically fill up Grandpa Mike's two big coolers with as many frozen specimens of the above species as we can fit and take them into Motley, to Morey's Seafood Markets. Out back we meet this lady named Eloise who runs a BBQ truck, and she trades us four racks of pork ribs per cooler, which is a pretty astonishingly good deal, if you have tasted her ribs.

These are but a few of the many ways that you, utilizing your human ingenuity, can glean the most precious gifts that Mother Nature can

offer, which are also known as pork products. Next time somebody brings up the topic of exchanging presents, you have been afforded this priceless life hack with which to vanquish any and all friends, relatives and acquaintances. And so, on behalf of myself and everyone here at the '*gest*, allow me to say "You're welcome."

*Nick Offerman is an actor, outdoorsman and author. His latest book, Where the Deer and the Antelope Play, is available now. He is also the audiobook narrator of The Need to Be Whole by Wendell Berry. R*



## 5 Very Literal Translations

**Papier vampier (Afrikaans)**

**Translation:** “paper vampire”

**What we call it:** stapler

**Bergmal (Icelandic)**

**Translation:** “rock language”

**What we call it:** echo

**Schlagzeug (German)**

**Translation:** “hit stuff”

**What we call it:** drums

**Gavisti (Sanskrit)**

**Translation:** “desire for cattle”

**What we call it:** war

**Niu zai ku (Mandarin)**

**Translation:** “cowboy pants”

**What we call it:** jeans

SOURCE: MENTAL FLOSS



*A grandmother and grandson find a way  
to mend their broken relationship,  
one national park at a time*

BY Tom Hallman Jr.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Brad Ryan,  
*@grandmajoysroadtrip*



Grandma Joy and Brad  
at Theodore Roosevelt  
National Park in  
North Dakota



Joy and 2-year-old Brad en route to a fishing camp in 1983

He was halfway through his evening shift when he felt his cellphone vibrate. It was his mother. His younger sister had announced her engagement and a wedding date had been set for a Duncan Falls church.

Brad's heart sank. He loved his sister, but there was no way he'd attend the wedding. Grandma Joy would be there.

**A**VOIDING PEOPLE IN A small town requires the skills of a spy. So Brad Ryan moved like a ghost, taking precautions to stay far away from the woman who had broken his heart. He had not seen or spoken to Grandma Joy in six years.

Brad, 27, had returned to Duncan Falls, Ohio, where he was born and raised, only because he wanted to enroll at Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Already paying off student loans, Brad needed to save money and take a series of upper-level chemistry and physics classes at a local college before applying to vet school. He lived with his mother in his childhood home, and worked nights as a waiter in a local restaurant.

**DESPITE JOY RYAN'S** first name, there wasn't much joy in her life. She grew up in a home with no electricity, running water or plumbing. She attended a one-room schoolhouse. Engaged at 16 and married at 18, she had her first child—Brad's father—at 21. Two more boys followed, both of whom met tragic ends. Her youngest son died of a drug overdose. The second passed from brain cancer.

She was a housewife, sold Avon products to women in town and babysat for other mothers. When the kids moved out of the house, she took a job behind the deli counter in a grocery store.

By the time of the wedding, she was 78 and a widow for 14 years. She was content but lived a small life that stopped at the edge of the county line. Other than a vacation to Florida and a trip to see relatives in Louisiana,

Joy had never traveled far from Duncan Falls, a town that for most of her life had only a single traffic light. So she felt blessed when her oldest son and his wife moved nearby and had a baby.

"Brad was my first grandchild," she says. "He was at our house all the time."

Grandma Joy's first-born son was a hunter and star high school athlete. His son did not follow in his footsteps. Brad wanted to hold animals.

"My earliest memory of her is when I was 3," says Brad. "We'd walk to Blue Rock State Park, which is close to her house. She'd help me lift rocks in the creek to find crawfish. We'd hold them in our hands and talk about how beautiful it was being in nature. No one else in my family thought like that." As he grew older, Brad, who later came out as gay, was the victim of teasing and bullying. He felt alone. Grandma Joy was the one person in his world he could count on.

By the time Brad left for college he'd grown emotionally distant from his father and, ultimately, they had no relationship. His parents split and then divorced. It was then that Brad learned that his father had been having an affair, and that Grandma Joy

had known and never said a word.

In 2002, Brad came home from college to confront his father. When he arrived, he found Grandma Joy by his father's side. The two men argued. Brad remembers his father grabbing his arm and verbally threatening him. Brad turned to his grandmother, hoping for help or just a kind word. He got neither.

"I yelled at her," he says. "I asked her how she could be proud to have this man as her son."

Grandma Joy remained impassive. "I was shocked," she recalled. "I didn't know what to do."

"That was the end of my relationship with Grandma Joy," he says.

Over the next six years, he'd come to accept it and he no longer thought about it. And then, the wedding. He considered

leaving town, but he didn't. It was his sister's big day. Of course he'd go.



## **I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT. WAS HE STILL MAD?"**

**FROM WHERE HE SAT** in a pew, Brad saw his grandmother, thin and gaunt, walk unsteadily into the Duncan Falls church. She had not been well, he learned from a friend there, and was barely able to stand. Brad reluctantly walked over to her.

"I was surprised to see him," says Grandma Joy. "He gave me his arm and I took it."



**Above:** Old Faithful geyser at Yellowstone National Park. **Right:** The General Sherman Tree at Sequoia National Park.

The two didn't say much, just a few pleasant words. No hug or smile to show they were kin. They were simply two people attending a wedding.

"This was not the venue or occasion to contend with the demons in our relationship," Brad says. "I simply wanted to get her to her seat."

Brad went through the niceties. He posed for family pictures and made the rounds, but he knew he was moving on, getting away from Duncan Falls. He'd always wanted to hike portions of the Appalachian Trail, and in February 2009, six months after the wedding, he did just that. The isolation on the trail, the physical and

emotional demands, turned out to be a spiritual experience. His thoughts were his only companion, and he found himself thinking a lot about his grandmother and the time they spent at Blue Rock State Park looking for crawfish. It puzzled him why that memory in particular stayed with him.

**IN 2011, AFTER GETTING** his master's at Ohio State University, he returned home to visit his mother. He decided to call Grandma Joy. It would be their first real conversation in nearly a decade. She invited him over.

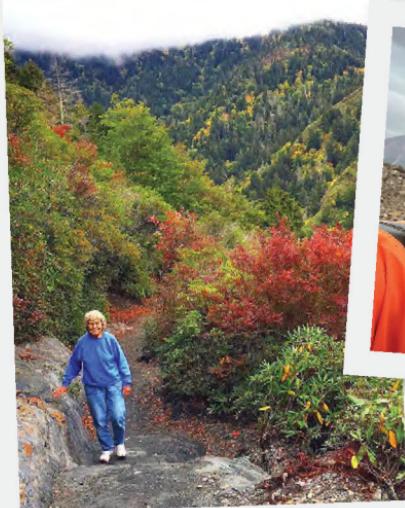
"I answered the door and there he was," says Grandma Joy. "I didn't know what to expect. What did he want? Was he still mad? It had been so long ... I'd given up on ever seeing him again." She did what came natural to her. "I gave him a big hug."

They walked into her kitchen. "It was familiar and yet strange," says Brad. "It looked the same. But I was looking at a woman who had aged."

They made small talk. Brad said she looked good. Her health, she said, had improved. Then an awkward pause. "I needed an icebreaker," says Brad. "I asked if she wanted to go to Blue Rock State Park. It was a bit of a walk, but she told me she stayed in shape walking on the cemetery grounds behind her house."

On the way there, Grandma Joy admitted she had many regrets in





**Left:** Climbing the Alum Cave Trail in Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains National Park. **Above:** Whitewater rafting in Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

her life. One of them, she says, was that aside from this state park, she'd never had the chance to see what she called the great outdoors. When they arrived at the creek, the special place where long ago they'd searched out the crawfish, they stood silently, lost in thought. A loud splash broke the silence. The tail of a massive beaver gliding below broke the water's surface. Stunned, they both laughed.

"We looked at each other," says Brad, "and we both realized we were still the same people."

Brad left Duncan Falls and by September 2015 was deep in the rigors of veterinary school. Between grueling classes, lab work and shifts in the school's veterinary hospital he was feeling stressed. He needed to step

away from school. Then he thought of Grandma Joy, Blue Rock State Park and her sadness of not seeing more of nature.

"I was overwhelmed," he says, "with what I perceived would be a lifelong regret if I didn't reach out again."

He came up with an idea even he knew was crazy. On his next free weekend he'd make the 400-mile trip from the veterinary school to Duncan Falls to take Grandma Joy on a camping trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, located on the border of North Carolina and Tennessee.

Brad knew it was impractical. Grandma Joy was 85. To get to the park they would have to drive 500 miles through the night. It would be the first time in her life

she'd camped and slept outdoors.

He called his grandmother and filled her in on his outlandish proposal. In the long pause that followed, Brad expected, for all the right reasons, that it just wasn't practical.

The old lady surprised him by asking, "When do we leave?"

**THEY ARRIVED AT THE** campground at around 1:30 a.m. in the middle of a rainstorm. Brad scrambled to set up the tent. Finally successful, they climbed inside. Grandma Joy's air mattress kept deflating.

"Brad would get it filled up, and then I'd slip off," she says. "It was like a Laurel and Hardy movie. I got to laughing. Then Brad got to laughing. It felt like when he was little, and we did everything together."

The skies cleared the next day and

Brad asked his grandmother if she felt like making the 3-mile hike to reach the bluff. They set off. She clung to cables when they crossed a ravine and avoided slipping on the wet trail. She moved with the pace of an 85-year-old woman looking at coupons while moving down the aisle of a grocery store. People passed her, and Brad asked if she wanted to turn around.

"I'm getting up that hill if it kills me," she told Brad. When they finally got to the top, the 20 or so hikers there gave her an ovation.

That night Brad made a campfire. He and his grandmother sat next to each other, feeling the warmth and looking at stars. Brad and Grandma Joy opened the lockbox of their past. They talked about families and parents, about loss, pain and regret. They told each other they'd wasted



Left and above: California's Channel Islands National Park



Badlands National  
Park in South Dakota



too many years being estranged. They talked about Brad's relationship with his father.

She told Brad she understood that he felt she was siding with his father. "But I also said I'd feel bad if I died and didn't have anything to do with my son too. And I told Brad I loved every bit of him."

Brad realized his grandmother might not have the introspection necessary to understand how the past had affected him. But he knew now his grandmother loved him, and he loved her.

"And that was enough," he says.

That night in the tent Grandma Joy reached over to touch Brad's hand. She knew that back in Duncan Falls her friends were watching TV and complaining about aches and pains.

"Here I was, in the middle of nowhere, with my grandson," she says. "I thanked him. I had tears in my eyes. But they were good tears."

The camping trip over, Brad dropped his grandmother at her home and returned to school. He graduated and got a job in New Hampshire at an exotic pet veterinary practice. But in the quiet moments, he found himself thinking about a way for Grandma Joy and him to do it again.

"I wanted her to see Old Faithful, walk among giant redwoods and experience sunrise at the Grand Canyon," he says.

The United States has 63 national parks. He and Grandma Joy had crossed one off the list. Brad thought they should next go to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. While looking at the map, he discovered that Badlands National Park was in South Dakota.

"I was amazed," he says. "We could drive just a little farther and see two parks. Then I saw that Grand Teton National Park is right next to Yellowstone. And Glacier National Park is not too far away in Montana."

Brad became obsessed. "I began calculating the distance to drive from one park to the next." In 28 days, they could visit 21 national parks in South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Utah, Colorado and Kentucky.

He called Grandma Joy.

"He told me we'd be staying in that tent again," says Grandma Joy. "We'd be driving all these miles."

She was 88. What more did she need out of life? This trip.

**GRANDMA JOY AND BRAD** have now visited 62 national parks, logging



## I'VE SEEN THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED IN THIS WORLD.

more than 50,000 miles on his car. The difference in their ages made no difference.

"Age doesn't change the way one beholds the incandescent glow of Zion National Park's vermillion sandstone cliffs at sunset," he says.

Grandma Joy's favorite stop was in Katmai National Park in Alaska to watch the annual salmon run at Brooks Falls. More than 35 bears were vying to catch leaping salmon, fattening up before it was time for them to hibernate.

"The most thrilling experience I've ever had," she says. "I chuckled when I watched one smart bear stay in the back and wait until another guy got

the fish. Then he ran over and took it away from him."

Traveling far from Duncan Falls was life-changing for Grandma Joy, who once thought an adventure meant walking into the woods to pick flowers. "I've seen things most people have never seen," she says. "I've seen things I didn't know existed in this beautiful world."

The open road also provided the time for the pair to share their life stories. "I learned about his school," says Grandma Joy. "Operating on animals. What he saw on the Appalachian Trail. All those things I never would have known about."

She, too, had her own surprises to share. Her first job out of high school, she told him, was as a telephone switchboard operator in a nearby town. She admitted that she and some of her co-workers eavesdropped on the line when calls were routed to the local house of prostitution.



**Left:** Alaska's Katmai National Park and Preserve. **Right:** Alaska's Noatak National Preserve in the Arctic Circle.



**Brad and Grandma Joy finally take it easy atop Hurricane Ridge in Washington's Olympic National Park.**



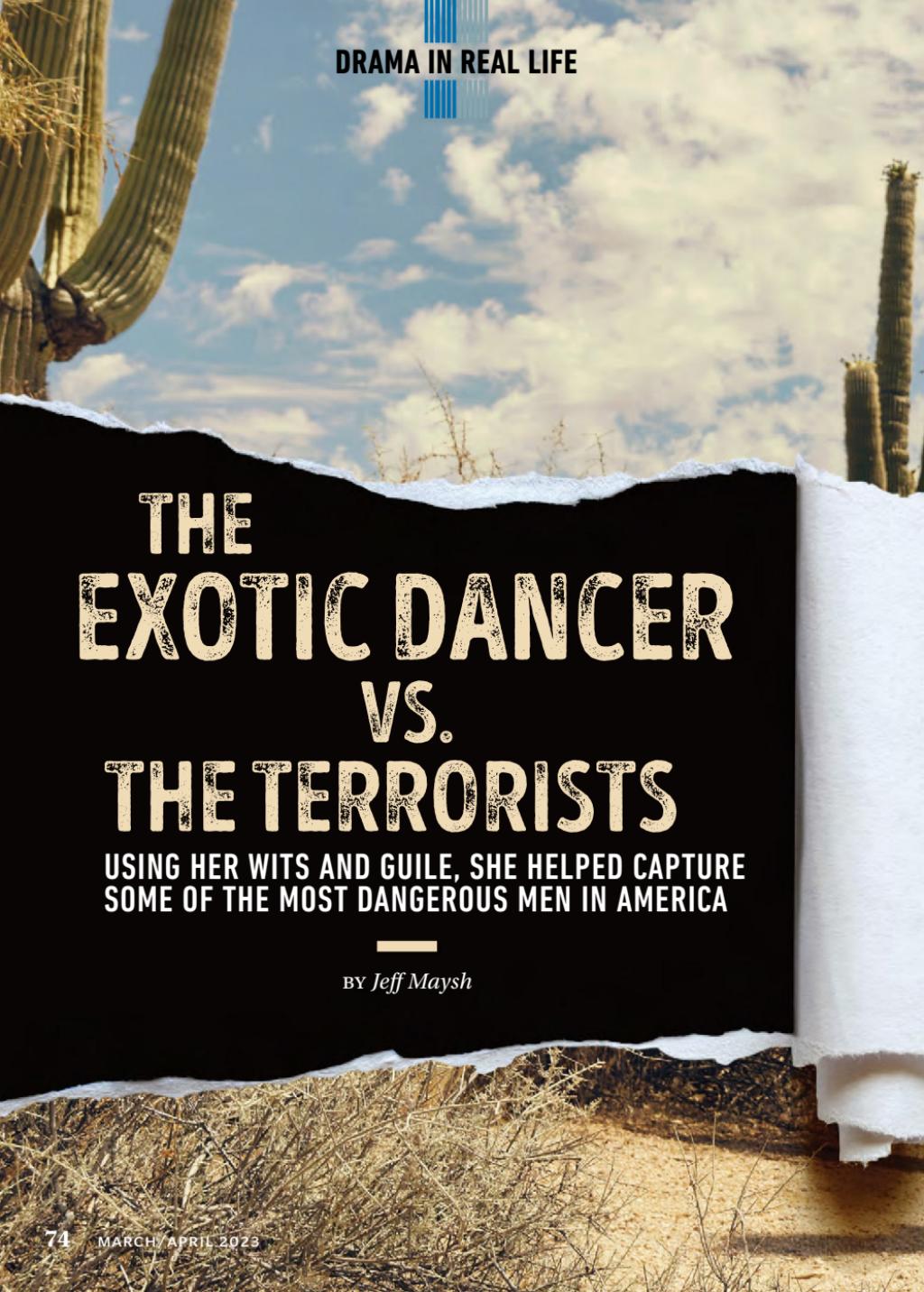
"She recounted the wealth of dirty secrets that had remained locked in her brain for 70 years," says Brad. "Grandma Joy even spilled names. I laughed so hard I came close to driving off the road."

Brad says he has learned a lot traveling with his grandmother, the most important being that life is about choices made. "At any given moment we all face a choice," he says. "What you choose can lead us on a new path."

For Brad it began many years ago when he decided to go to his sister's wedding, knowing he would have to see the woman who had once caused him such pain. Now they're not just traveling partners, not just a grandmother and grandson, but friends.

They plan to visit the last park on their list, the National Park of America Samoa, sometime in 2023. And then?

"Canada," says Brad. "That country has 37 national parks!" □



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

# THE EXOTIC DANCER VS. THE TERRORISTS

USING HER WITS AND GUILE, SHE HELPED CAPTURE  
SOME OF THE MOST DANGEROUS MEN IN AMERICA

---

BY *Jeff Maysh*



**Rebecca Williams always dreamed of fighting crime like her father, who was a cop and a Baptist minister. Living in a rough suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, with her divorced mother, she spent much of her childhood bingeing true crime TV shows and confronting bullies. “I put myself in situations that most people wouldn’t, just wanting to do the right thing,” she said. Then things changed.**

At 15, Williams fell in love with an 18-year-old grocery store manager. She dropped out of high school, and they moved in together. At 19, she gave birth to a daughter. Amanda (not her real name) was deaf, autistic and unable to talk. The young parents scraped by with odd jobs until 13 months later, when they had a son, and money got even tighter.

Williams began working as a cocktail waitress at various nightclubs. With a glamorous Farrah Fawcett hairstyle, she looked like “a sailor’s dream,” said a neighbor. At Tiffany’s Cabaret, she jumped on stage during amateur night and was quickly

promoted to exotic dancer. She loved the thrill of transforming each night into Stevie (after Stevie Nicks, of course), a blond bombshell who whizzed around the pole to AC/DC’s “You Shook Me All Night Long.” Men were obsessed.

She spent her tip money on batteries for her daughter’s hearing aids, and still longed to fight crime. In 1999, after 14 years together, the couple separated.

Fearful that the school system was failing Amanda, Williams enrolled her in a residential home for deaf children, seeing her only on weekends. By 2003, she was cleaning

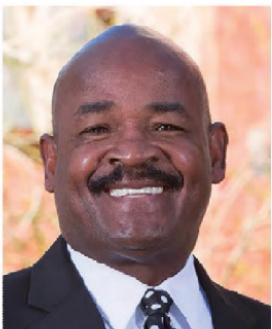
toilets to pay the bills and living with her teenage son in a double-wide trailer. Her brother, known to all as Krusher, lived in a smaller trailer in her backyard.

Krusher was a career criminal who, after selling drugs to an undercover officer, had agreed to go undercover with the Hells Angels.

One day federal agents came to visit Krusher and noticed Williams. "His handler asked me if I was interested

was 1 p.m. when a colleague at reception handed him a curious package the size of a shoebox.

Logan carried the box to the second floor and asked his secretary, Renita Linyard, for scissors. When he opened the box, he heard a loud pop. Time slowed as a floor-to-ceiling window shattered, debris fell from the ceiling, and the room filled with smoke and screams. Logan thought he'd been shot. Through blood-stained glasses,



**From left:** Williams as her cabaret alter ego, Stevie; Williams's brother Krusher; Don Logan, the victim of the bombing that first sent Williams undercover

in undercover work," she recalled. "It sounded cool, sort of sexy, you know, the whole spying game." She would not wait long for her first assignment.

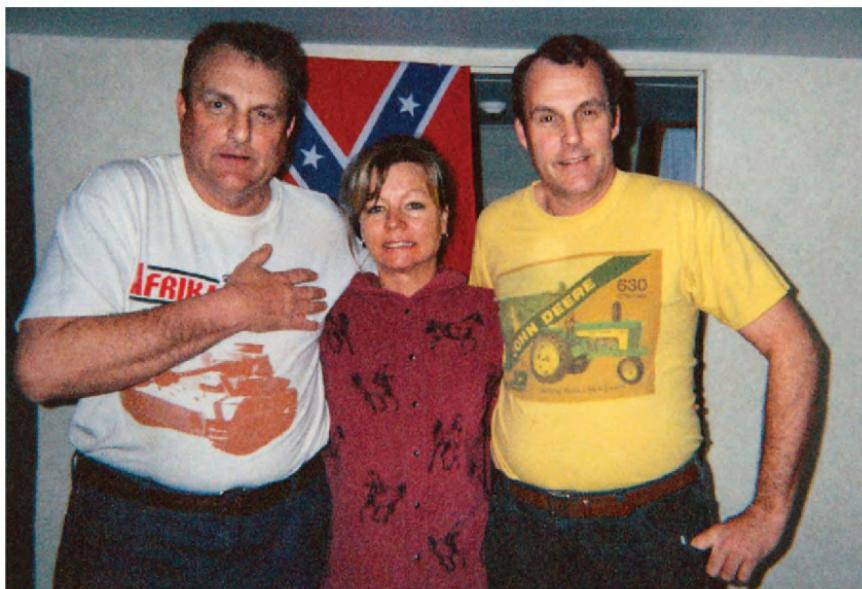
ON FEB. 26, 2004, in Scottsdale, Arizona, Don Logan finished his lunch and strolled back to the city's Office of Diversity and Dialogue. As a Black man in a predominantly White city, Logan said his job as diversity director was "to create an environment where diversity is valued and encouraged." It

Linyard watched Logan stagger to the door, blood gushing down his arm.

After an ambulance raced Logan to the hospital, doctors fought to save his forearm using skin grafts and screws.

Soon the crime scene was crawling with investigators. Leading the inquiry was a pale 40-year-old man with curly hair tinged with gray: Tristan Moreland, an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

Moreland's team rushed fragments



**Williams, aka Becca Stephens, with white supremacists Daniel (left) and Dennis Mahon**

of the pipe bomb to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service lab in Dulles, Virginia, where experts discovered it was made from hobby rocket motors and igniters that were impossible to trace. But there was one clue. Five months earlier, someone had left a warning on Logan's answering machine. Incredibly, the caller left his name: "This is Dennis Mahon. The White Aryan Resistance is standing up."

"Dennis and Daniel Mahon are twins from Illinois," Moreland later told a court. "They began their white supremacist career as members and Grand Dragons of the KKK" before joining the White Aryan Resistance. "They're into all kinds of

causes: anti-abortion of white children, anti-tax, anti-government in general." Dennis was an associate of Timothy McVeigh, who detonated a truck bomb outside a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people.

A serial bomber himself, Dennis, in a 1994 interview published online by an anonymous blogger, admitted: "In south Florida, '83 or '84, I did some pretty serious bombings. Pretty serious shootings. We also did some major activities against abortion clinics." Dennis and Daniel, who both worked as aircraft mechanics, had access to the tools needed to make bombs.

But Dennis had an Achilles' heel.

During the Oklahoma City bombing investigation, the ATF planted a female confidential informant (CI) posing as a skinhead to get close to him. Dennis was smitten and boasted to her about his terror activities, yet it was not enough to arrest him. Moreland planned to send in another CI to see if Dennis would brag about the Scottsdale attack. He needed a woman who was not only alluring but also brave, because the mission would be fraught with danger.

IN JANUARY 2005, the ATF summoned Williams to its Phoenix office. *She's lived a little in life, she has a lot of street smarts and she's run with some rough crowds*, Moreland recalled thinking after they met. She had an edge and would be believable. When he told Williams there had been a

**Dennis Mahon, in full KKK regalia, had boasted that he was a Grand Dragon.**



bombing that seriously injured a Black person, she was intrigued.

"It was an honorable thing to do to save lives," Williams said. She signed an agreement to become a CI in exchange for \$100 a day and up to \$100,000 if the Mahons were convicted. A neighbor agreed to watch Williams's son, and soon she was on a flight to Oklahoma.

Onboard, Moreland gave her a cover story and a driver's license in the name of Becca Stephens. She was a woman on the run from the law, a white nationalist. Williams would have to transform into a very different person. While Williams was a caring person who, growing up, was taught that everyone was a child of God, Becca Stephens hated anybody of color.

They drove from the airport to an abandoned Walmart, where a trailer attached to a blue Dodge truck sat. Inside the trailer, a light switch above the stove turned on pinhole cameras in the ceiling covering every part of the trailer except the bedroom and bathroom. The trailer transmitted live audio and video to a nearby hotel room where ATF agents lay in wait. An audio recorder was hidden in a keychain that swung from Williams's belt.

Moreland introduced her to "Shelly," a brunette ATF agent who would play her friend.

"I was like, 'OK, this looks like it's gonna be fun,'" Williams recalled. As she and Shelly drove toward an RV camp, Williams was buzzing. "There

was an adrenaline rush going for sure," she said.

Williams had no idea it was just the beginning of a grueling seven-year ordeal to bring the Mahons to justice. No one could know what she was doing, not even her family.

IT DIDN'T TAKE long for the Mahon brothers to notice two attractive women parking their trailer, with a Confederate flag hanging in their window, next to theirs. Daniel offered to hook up their sewer and water connections while Dennis cracked jokes. The brothers were 54 years old and shared the same goofy smile. Dennis, 3 inches shorter, was the more dominant brother.

"He told me that he was the Grand Dragon of the KKK," Williams recalled. To prove it, he showed her a photograph of him wearing a green

switch, which triggered the recording device. Soon they were chatting over beers and booze. Daniel boasted about drive-by shootings and blowing up cars. "We were just trying to send a message," he told Williams.

Williams, hoping to captivate the men the way Stevie did customers at the strip club, stayed quiet, even standoffish. Dennis was smitten. "I just want to cuddle with you. You're so beautiful," he told her.

"Your day may come," she teased, steering him out the door. Hidden microphones later recorded Williams as she whispered, "Weirdo."

After three days of hanging out with the brothers, Williams told Dennis that she was on the run and had a warrant out for her arrest. Breaking down in fake tears, she confessed that she had tried to bomb a child molester's car in California. Moved, Dennis touched her arm. "I want to hurt him real bad," she told him. Soon, ATF devices recorded Dennis telling her how to send a mail bomb and blow up a car using a condom and liquid explosives.

Days later, at a gun show, after Williams asked if he'd worked on bombs, Dennis whispered: "Yes, the diversity officer ... Scottsdale ... had his fingers blown off." Then he caught himself and said he had told "white cops how to do it."

After 12 days, Williams left the campsite, telling the brothers that she needed to keep moving to evade

**DENNIS WAS SMITTEN.  
"YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL,"  
HE TOLD HER.**

ceremonial hood. In another image, he performed Hitler's *Sieg heil* salute. Williams invited the brothers into her trailer and flicked the light



**Williams with government agents posing as white supremacists in a staged photo**

the law. She promised to write, and drove away, with Shelly pulling the ATF trailer full of secret video footage. She returned home to her children and her life.

But the job wasn't done. The ATF wanted more evidence.

By May 2005, she and Dennis were frequent pen pals. She continued the flirtatious behavior, in December mailing Dennis a Christmas card with a suggestive photograph. "Thought you'd love the butt shot," she wrote. Dennis, whose love language was hate, mailed Williams books called

### *Creative Revenge and A Manual of Urban Guerilla Warfare.*

In May 2006, Dennis suggested that she meet Robert Joos. Joos ran an extremist training camp in rural Missouri, as well as a church, the Sacerdotal Order of the David Company, where he preached to "apocalyptic Christians."

Joos, a former Eagle Scout and Air Force Academy cadet, was on parole after serving a two-year sentence for driving without a license—a felony because it was his third such offense (he claims he answers to God and



In another staged photo by the ATF, Williams shows off her marksmanship.

not the government). Earlier, a Joos henchman had tracked down a Missouri state trooper who had arrested Joos and shot him through his kitchen window. Joos was untouchable.

"He's a brilliant guy. His IQ is well above mine," Moreland said. No cops could get into his remote compound without risking an ambush. But for a \$100,000 reward, Williams was willing to go into the belly of the beast.

It was January 2008 when Williams drove to a Sonic Burger in Joplin, Missouri, to meet Joos. He was easy to find. Wearing prayer beads, a long beard and a royal blue bandanna holding back his long gray hair, he looked like Charles Manson.

"It's been a while since I've had a lady around to open a door for," Joos said when they reached her rental car. When Williams

dropped into a curtsy, he blushed.

Joos called out directions as Williams weaved through country roads to Joos's 200-acre church compound an hour away. Because of the remote location, ATF surveillance was impossible. She was going in alone. No backup. Moreland had told her to wear a pink ribbon in her hair to help aerial teams identify her.

They arrived at a large gate. After she drove in, he locked it behind them. "At that moment, I realized, *I am truly in the grace of God*," she recalled.

They drove through a graveyard of broken-down cars. Inside rickety buildings, Williams noted several long guns, and as they strolled among the walnut trees, Joos taught her how to make napalm using household soap.

Joos led her deeper into the woods, showing her caves where he hid

supplies. "He said if he ever found out that somebody was trying to infiltrate them, that they would disappear," she said. She thought about her keychain secretly recording them and imagined her dead body decomposing in a cave. She wondered if the pink ribbon was to help agents identify her body.

IN MAY 2008, the Mahons announced they were headed to Arizona, and Moreland hatched a plan to get them talking about the Scottsdale bomb. "I provided her a traffic ticket court notice from the City of Scottsdale," he later recalled. Williams asked the twins to drive with her to the courthouse—next to the bombing site.

When they passed the building where the bomb had exploded in Don Logan's face, "they both automatically flinched and ducked down into a fetal position," Williams recalled.

Daniel said, "That's where Logan's from," before Dennis repeated his previous assertion to Williams, "I didn't plant the bomb; I helped make it."

Later, the ATF recorded a rattled Daniel telling his brother that Williams "had an agenda." She was certain she was compromised.

The next day, Williams appeared at the brothers' hotel pool wearing a Confederate flag bikini that seemed to lift the fog of suspicion. Dennis talked about how much he loved Williams, how he wanted to settle down with her. He talked about raising Williams's son and teaching him to hunt.

By September 2008, Williams wanted to quit. Her three years as a confidential informant had taken a toll on her family life. It was exhausting lying to her mother and her teenage children. She hated being away from Amanda, and she couldn't relax. At any moment she might have to snap into character, chatting about the "new world order."

Even her relationship with Moreland had begun to fray. "There were a lot of heated arguments," Moreland said. "I think she might have even punched me a couple times."

AS OF JANUARY 2009, Williams had gathered hundreds of hours of video and audio evidence that linked Dennis Mahon to the Scottsdale bombing and proved that Robert Joos was

## THEY FOUND A PHOTO OF OSAMA BIN LADEN INSCRIBED "OUR HERO."

stockpiling weapons. But Moreland wanted more. He would accompany Williams back to the compound, but this time going as his alter ego, Jimmy "the Wolf" Foster.

"Jimmy's a hardcore extremist," said Moreland, packing a \$10,000 semi-automatic rifle that would give

him instant credibility with Joos.

"I told him that I was with a small cell in Arizona," Moreland later told a court. "My affiliations were with the White Aryan Resistance. I dealt guns. I messed around with explosives."

The ruse worked. "I was ultimately able to get Joos to teach me how to build a bomb that was going to be used in a fictitious bombing," Moreland told me.

Joos had fallen for Jimmy the Wolf's story, and Moreland was invited to join The Order, a murderous white supremacist group. "I got hired by The Order to kill Judge Richard Matsch, who was the judge in the Timothy McVeigh trial," he said.

In April 2009, Williams drove Moreland to meet Dennis and Daniel at their home in Illinois. The brothers also fell for his Jimmy the Wolf routine.

"Don't put a swastika on a synagogue; bomb it if you want to do something about it" was just one piece of advice Dennis gave Moreland. When they passed an outbuilding, Dennis said, "This is where I make my bombs."

Moreland was satisfied. With all the evidence that he and Williams had compiled, there was no reason to put things off any longer. It was time to stop the Mahons.

At 7 a.m. on June 25, 2009, armed ATF agents surrounded the Mahon



A defense lawyer referred to Williams, shown here near her home, as the Trailer Park Mata Hari.

THOMAS INGERSOLL VIA JEFF MAYSH

house, where Daniel and Dennis were caring for their ailing mother. Agents smashed down the door, handcuffed the twins and ransacked the house. They found high explosives, improvised bombs, assault weapons, ammunition, bulletproof vests, a Nazi armband and a photo of Osama bin Laden inscribed “our hero.” When Jimmy the Wolf read them their rights, Dennis said: “We knew. You and the girl. We knew.”

**WITH THE MAHONS,** Joos and other associated white supremacists arrested, Williams could finally return to ordinary life. She took a job at a motorcycle rental store in Flagstaff. On July Fourth, she rode on the store’s float in a parade. As a band fell into the national anthem, Williams thought of the terrorists she had put behind bars, and swelled with pride. That night in Chicago, Dennis Mahon sat in a jail cell and confessed to his cellmate that he had planted the bomb that injured Don Logan “as payback” for the City of Scottsdale’s firing of three White police officers.

The Mahons’ trial began in January 2012. While the district attorney showed proof that Daniel wanted to “pop” and “cap” Don Logan, his lawyer argued that Daniel was just a braggart who was not involved in the bombing. The court agreed, and Daniel was found not guilty of any crime. Dennis was found guilty on three counts and sentenced to 40 years.

For the prohibited possession of firearms, Robert Joos received a sentence of 78 months in prison. He can never again legally own a weapon.

Tristan Moreland retired in 2014 and is now a drummer in a band. “It worked out in the end,” Moreland said about his work with Williams. “She was fearless.”

The ATF recommended that Williams enter the witness relocation program for her safety, but she refused to cut off contact with her children. Instead, she bought a trailer and vanished.

When I tracked her down in June 2022, Williams was living with Amanda at the off-the-grid property she bought with her ATF money. Solar-powered security cameras often capture them brushing their ponies or making ice cream from their goats’ milk. At night, behind reinforced doors, they often throw dance parties. “Amanda has a speaker, and she likes to hold it and feel the vibrations,” Williams explained.

Williams revealed that she’s volunteered to investigate a cold case, a mysterious double murder in a nearby ghost town. She thinks she can use her skills as an undercover informant to solve the case. “The police have come to a dead end on this, and it’s because they haven’t done any fieldwork,” she said. “My dad still thinks I should become a detective.” **R**

JULY 2022 © 2022 JEFF MAYSH

YOUR TRUE STORIES

# PUT ME IN, COACH!

*Readers share their sports stories,  
from the highlights that won trophies  
to the bloopers that won hearts*

BY Reader's Digest Readers



## Who's on First?

Trying to keep my Little Leaguers settled in the dugout was quite the task. I explained that the next batter up is called "on deck." The batter after that is "in the hole." If they weren't on deck or in the hole, they had to sit down. One player kept asking what the batter after "in the hole" is called. I kept saying there was no name for that. He called those batters "IN THE WAY!" It was so funny, and that's what we called it for the rest of the season.

—CHERYL STETZ BAMERT

*Parsippany, NJ*

## A Swing and a Miss

I played on a softball team with many rookies who'd never played before. One of my teammates hit a hard line drive. As she rounded first, we hollered, "Go to third!" And so she did—right across the pitcher's mound.

—GAIL VALENCE *Henrietta, NY*

## A Hail Mary Play

When no one else stepped up, my husband volunteered to coach our son's soccer team despite having no knowledge of the sport. The boys went the entire season without scoring. Before the final game, one player told my husband, "At Sunday school this morning, I prayed to score a goal." That game, the team scored their first goal ever! But they still lost 2-1. That same player said after the game, "I guess I should've prayed to win."

—NANCY BEASLEY *Portage, WI*

OLEKSANDR BLISHCH / GETTY IMAGES (BACKGROUND), JOSE LUIS PELAEZ INC / GETTY IMAGES (BOY)

## And with the Assist ...

My daughter and her friend played on the high school basketball team. My daughter usually started, while her friend spent more time on the bench. One night, they burst through our front door. My daughter yelled, "I scored 20 points!" Her friend yelled, "And I jumped up and down a lot!"

—SUSAN SHELLEY *Mesa, AZ*

## Chippy Chirping

My husband explained to our hockey-playing son that sometimes referees ask "Do you want this penalty or that one?" when players simultaneously commit two violations that have equal time penalties. It's a way to point out that you saw both. The following week, our son was playing in a rough game and getting hit quite a bit. At one point, the referee asked, "Do you want the slash or the hook?" Frustrated, he replied, "Neither, since you missed the cross-check to my back!" He got five minutes in the penalty box for that remark. Moral of the story: Don't respond to a multiple-choice question with a fill-in-the-blank answer.

—KRIS PENSABENE *Mount Laurel, NJ*

## Advice from the Greats

My high school had a legendary basketball coach who retired just prior to my arrival. He still came to give us a pep talk before a big game against the best team in the state. He told us, "Those boys put their britches

on the same way you do." Inspired by his wisdom, we went out on the court and got beat like a drum. I saw the coach in the lobby after the game. He smiled and said, "I probably should've told you their britches were a lot bigger and moved faster than yours."

—BOBBY HART *Sanderson, FL*

### Stepping Up to the Plate

I coached my son's Little League team. We lost every game until the last. In the final inning, we were in the field, ahead by 1 with no outs and the bases loaded. The batter hit a line drive right to our third baseman. She stuck out her glove with one hand and covered her eyes with the other. The ball landed in

her glove. She jumped up and down, stomping on third base to make the second out.

Then she stuck out her glove to show me the ball, tagging the runner coming in—an unassisted triple play! Our team ran to the pitcher's mound in celebration as if it were the World Series.

—ROBERT DROZEL *Exton, PA*

### First Down—and Then Some

My brother Nick was an excellent halfback, and my dad often



volunteered to work the first-down chains during his football games. Our team was down and the clock ticking when Nick got the handoff and broke free of the defense, charging down-field. Everyone was on their feet cheering. Caught up in the excitement, Dad ran down the sideline alongside Nick holding the chain pole above his head, yelling "Go, son, go!" The poor men on the other end of the chain just let go and started cheering too. Nick scored and ran to Dad for a big hug. The referee shook my dad's hand, took the chain and politely told him his chain-holding days were over.

—JOSEPHINE EVERETT

*Walnut Creek, CA*

### My Lucky Strike

Years ago, I joined a bowling league. My score rarely broke 100, but one night I threw a ball that popped out of the gutter and knocked down all 10 pins. I was thrilled to have gotten a strike—until my teammates told me it didn't count. When we had our awards dinner, I received an award for being the only person to ever get a gutter strike at that bowling alley. Even though it didn't count, I still did something no one else had.

—LISA HARRIS *Shallotte, NC*

### Slightly Off Base

Before my 7-year-old daughter's softball season started, I told her I wanted her to do two things: Have fun and get one player out. As the season

was ending, she'd had a blast but she hadn't made an out. Finally, a ground ball was hit to her, and I yelled, "First base! First base!" She stood and made a perfect throw—to second base. When she got back to the dugout, I asked why she threw to second. She said, "Dad, when I looked up, second was the first base I saw."

—SCOTT BURKS *Salem, OR*



### When the Going Gets Tough ...

My daughter was very competitive growing up, but she was smaller than most kids, so I was always protective. Once, during an intense basketball game against an aggressive team, she got hit in the face pretty hard with the ball. From the second row, I jumped up to help her. She saw, pointed and yelled "No, Mom!" and played on. That was the day I learned she'd be just fine.

—KRISTINE BERGLUND *Aledo, IL*

### Blood, Sweat and Veneers

When I coached high school tennis, there were never enough courts, so

people were always waiting to play. One younger player passed time by tossing his racket back and forth from hand to hand. After some time, he asked for my help finding something—his tooth, which he'd knocked out when he hit himself in the face with the racket. Players from both squads were on their hands and knees searching the grass. No luck. The player said, "That's OK, Coach. It was artificial. I knocked that same tooth out last year."

—WAYNE SANDERS II *Akron, OH*

### A Heads-Up Play

The score was close and the end of our volleyball game near. I dived for a ball but pulled up when I saw another teammate already after it. She bumped it straight up in the air. I leaped to my feet but didn't know where the ball was. Suddenly, the ball hit me—no joke—square on top of the head. It arched up into a perfect set that another teammate spiked over the net. We won the point and the game.

—SUSANNAH REAVIS *Houston, TX* 

## HAVE A GOOD BABYSITTING STORY?

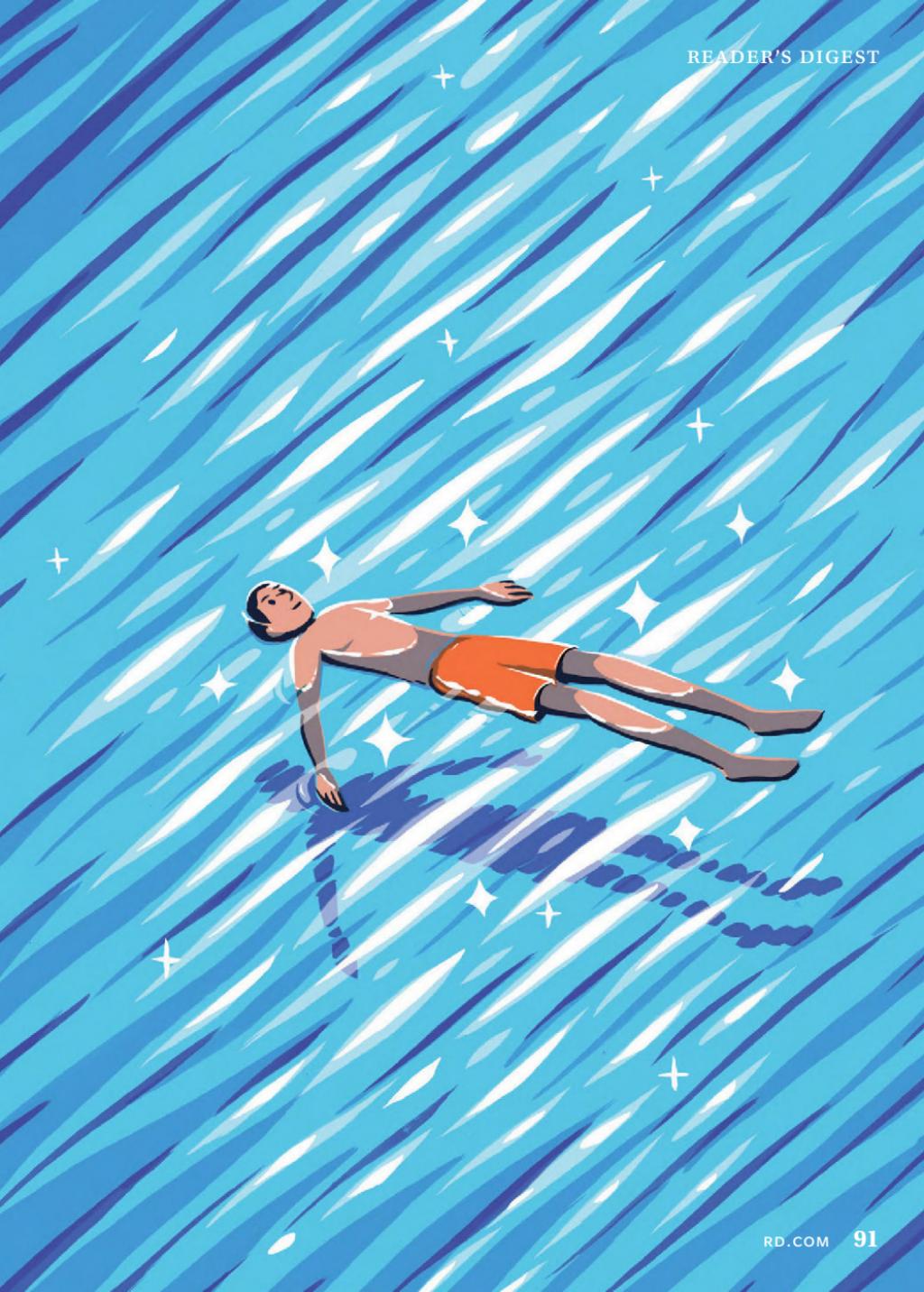
Teens just don't hustle their way through Saturday nights on \$20, a delivery pizza and a promise of a ride home the way they used to. Do you have a babysitting memory, as the sitter or the sat, that has stayed with you? Maybe your babysitter was a modern-day Mary Poppins or a daffy but dear Mrs. Doubtfire. Perhaps you once took your eyes off the kids for one second to find they'd colored you a lovely rainbow—all over the living room wall. Quirky bedtime rituals, major mishaps, fond memories—we want to hear them all. See terms and share your story at [rd.com/babysitting](http://rd.com/babysitting).

# The Healing Power of *WATER*

*It's not just our bodies that need the element of life—it's our minds too*



BY Elizabeth Bernstein  
FROM THE WALL STREET JOURNAL





**O**n a dusty August day in 2020, Wallace J. Nichols hiked into the California valley where he had lived for more than 20 years to find his family's home and all their possessions destroyed by a wildfire.

Stunned, Nichols searched the debris. He walked the entire property. Then he did the only helpful thing he could think to do: He went down to the nearby creek, stripped off his clothes and submerged himself.

Nichols, who is a marine scientist,

was seeking the healing power of water.

It has been a rough few years. Many of us are finding ourselves exhausted, burned out, struggling to build balance back into our lives. We need to recharge.

Water can help. Neuroscientists say that spending time near oceans, lakes, rivers and other blue spaces can provide a range of benefits including reducing anxiety, easing mental fatigue and rejuvenating us.

Participating in water activities such as swimming or surfing can help us enter a “flow state,” where we become fully

immersed in what we’re doing. This calms the mind, which is often absorbed by rumination and worry, says Ricardo Gil-da-Costa, a neuroscientist and chief executive of the neurotechnology company Neuroverse, who has studied how water affects our brain.

Bodies of water also can produce a glorious sense of awe—the emotional response to something vast that expands and challenges how we see the world. Awe can decrease stress and help us put things into perspective.

Water naturally relaxes us (and helps focus our thoughts) “by taking

away all the noise," says Nichols, whose work centers on how blue spaces affect our well-being. "All we have to do is show up."

Water has special properties that may boost nature's positive impact, environmental psychologists say. When you are near water, there is often less visual and auditory information to process. Your mind can rest.

The sound of water, typically steady and soft, soothes us. Its smell can provoke positive memories and associations. When we're floating in water, our bodies can rest too, in a way we never can on land.

Most important: Water is dynamic. It moves rhythmically, producing a play of light, color and sound that is mesmerizing. It holds our attention, but not in an overly demanding way. Researchers call this soft fascination. It gives our brains a break from the intense, focused, cognitively depleting attention that much of daily life requires.

"Water helps your mind wander in a positive way," says Marc Berman, director of the Environmental Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Chicago. "This is what is so restorative."

Here's some advice on how to harness the healing power of water.

### **Remember that all water counts.**

You likely have some close by, even if it is just a creek alongside the road.

Start there. Then branch out to water you can visit on the weekend or a vacation.

Urban water counts—rivers, canals and fountains. So does domestic water—in pools, bathtubs, even sprinklers. Pay attention to the sound, play of light and movement, says Nichols, author of *Blue Mind*, which explores how water makes us happier and healthier.

If you can't get to actual water, then paintings, photographs, videos and

### **MANY OF THE MOST POPULAR SOUNDSCAPES INVOLVE WATER.**



movies can produce some of the same benefits, he says. If you want to boost the positive effect, choose locations that represent positive memories for you.

Even virtual reality helps. In research studies, computer-generated virtual reality water scenes boosted participants' moods, likely because they got to interact with the virtual environment.

### **Go often.**

A little bit makes a big difference.

A 2019 study found that it takes at least two hours a week in nature to improve our well-being, although that time can be broken into smaller



stretches. A more recent, yet-to-be-published study found that spending a similar amount of time near water has the same benefits, says Mathew White, an environmental psychologist at the University of Vienna, who studies the health benefits of water environments and was lead researcher on both studies. Scientists also have found that people who peered into aquariums had lower heart rates and better moods after just 15 minutes.

### Try a water sport.

And get good at it. This will help you

experience a flow state where time and your worries fall away as you become fully engaged in what you are doing, says Gil-da-Costa. When you become proficient at an activity, your brain changes: It forms new neural pathways, which become faster and stronger. This makes it even easier in the future to enter a state of flow while doing this same activity.

### Listen.

It is no coincidence that many of the most-popular soundscapes on the Calm app, such as “Rain on Leaves,” involve water.

One of the most calming properties of water is its sound, White says. In a recent study, he and colleagues found that the water sounds people find most restorative are rain in a rainforest, waves lapping on a beach, and

## YOU CAN SPEND TIME ON THE WATER ANYWHERE, ANYTIME IN YOUR MIND.

a babbling brook. When the researchers added biotic sounds, from living beings, to the water sounds, people liked them even more.

Make an audio recording of your favorite water. It will trigger happy memories.

You can spend time on the water anywhere, anytime in your mind. Visualize the sun sparkling on its surface or the sound of its waves splashing against the shore. And when the water you imagine is water you have enjoyed in real life, the positive effect will be even stronger, Nichols says.

When Nichols surfaced for air after submerging himself in the creek behind the ruins of his still-smoldering home, he sobbed. Then he floated on his back until he felt calm.

Since then, he has gone into the creek each day. "It is like a daily reset," he says. "I don't know how I would have gotten through all my feelings without it." R

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### Jitterbug

Perhaps the mark of a true rock star is having an insect named after you:

*Desis bobmarleyi* is a spider named in honor of the song "High Tide or Low Tide" by Bob Marley and the Wailers, because it lives in the intertidal zone.

*Selenacentrus wallacei* is a type of insect known as a treehopper that lives in southern Texas, where Selena was born.

*Agromyza princei* is a fly first spotted on the leaf of a raspberry plant, named for Prince's song "Raspberry Beret."

*Petroperla mickjaggeri*, *Lapisperla keithrichardsi*, *Electroneuria ronwoodi*, *Largusoperla charliewattsi*, *L. brianjonesi*, *L. micktaylori* and *L. billwymani* are collectively referred to as the rolling stoneflies.

SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE



# MY LUCKY BAMBOO

*If the plant could thrive, maybe  
I could too, even with cancer*

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BY David Meyers

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

MY WIFE, Hannah, and I don't usually keep houseplants. Anything in pots gets either overwatered or underwatered. But after my diagnosis with glioblastoma, a terminal brain cancer, with a prognosis of little more than a year to live, I loved the idea of having something new and green around.

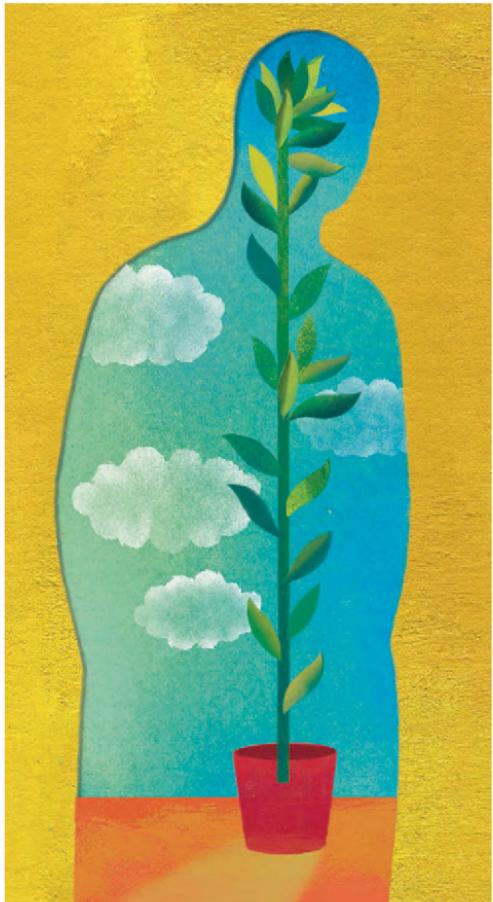
My friend Mitch gave me what he said was a lucky bamboo plant in a deep-green pottery bowl with three pencil-size stalks braided together. We placed the plant in the living room window across from the couch where I spent much of the day. I smiled

when I looked at it over the rim of the mug of coffee Hannah brought me each morning.

I told Hannah I wanted to care for the plant myself. When it didn't immediately turn yellow or brown or lose all its leaves, I was pleasantly surprised.

Tending to the plant gave me a sense of accomplishment at a time when I sometimes felt useless. Glioblastoma limited my ability to walk, and the treatment left me fatigued, making it hard for me to accomplish everyday tasks. As a family physician, I was used to being the one who





provided care, not the one who received it.

Since my diagnosis in August 2018, far too often, it seemed, I had to rely on help from other people. The enormous change left me feeling adrift and unsettled. Watering the plant, as small an act as it was, connected me to a core part of my old identity

and taught me I could still be a caregiver. Plants and people could still depend on me.

Over the next few months, I recovered from surgery and completed radiation and the first round of chemotherapy. Even after I returned to work, I continued to care for the plant. Soon, it had nearly doubled in height and its leaves were shiny and lush. Both the tree and I were thriving.

Then, mysteriously, it began to show signs of stress. I increased my watering, then decreased it. I nestled coffee grounds into the soil (a common fertilization method). I fed it commercial plant food. No matter what I did, the leaves kept browning and dropping to the floor. I grew more and more frustrated and uneasy.

"I can't even care for a simple plant!" I yelled. "I'm failing!"

Hannah reminded me that we'd seen houseplants die before. She asked me why I was getting so worked up about this particular one.

"If my lucky bamboo dies," I blurted out, "I might die too!"

I couldn't shake the feeling that the plant had become a symbol of my own precarious health. Identifying with the green and growing plant

had offered me solace. Now that the tree was struggling, I felt increasingly fearful. Its shriveling leaves, I worried, might signal the recurrence of my brain tumor.

I realized I had wrongly connected my careful nurturing of the plant—something over which I had at least

As my anxiety lessened, I began to pore over online tutorials to help me figure out how to care for my ailing plant. Following the instructions, I transplanted the tree to a larger pot, untangling its roots to give it room to grow. When it was back in the sunny window, we both began to thrive again.

## WATERING TAUGHT ME THAT PEOPLE AND PLANTS COULD STILL DEPEND ON ME.

some control—with my own survival—something over which I had no control.

When my tumor inevitably returned, it would not be because of any failure on my part—not because I ate sugar occasionally and certainly not because I failed to keep this plant alive.

Whenever I look at the tree with its braided stalks in its new pot, I make a point to think of Mitch and the other people who have cared for and supported me. If the plant outlives me, I hope it will comfort Hannah and remind her that our large community will continue to nurture her after I am gone. ■



### **Now, That's a Horse of a Different Color!**

**Some of the newest additions to the official Scrabble dictionary  
might have you scratching your head ...**

**DUMPSTER** (a large container of trash): Until recently, the term was trademarked.

**EMBIGGEN** (to enlarge): The variants **EMBIGGENED** and **EMBIGGENING** are also acceptable.

**VERBING** (to use as a verb): That's right—the word **verb** is now itself a verb.

**ZONKEY** (a hybrid between a zebra and a donkey): It's also called a **ZEEDONK**, which you may also play.

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FILM

## 80 for Brady

*Starring Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Sally Field, Rita Moreno and Tom Brady*

**ARE YOU READY FOR SOME ...** comedy with serious game? Inspired by a true story, Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Rita Moreno and Sally Field play octogenarian bffs who trek to 2017's Super Bowl LI to cheer on their beloved Tom Brady. It's an all-out blitz to get inside the stadium. The ladies even try winning Guy Fieri's hot wing-eating contest and sneaking in as Billy Porter's backup dancers. Brady portrays himself to re-create the New England Patriots'

epic win over the Atlanta Falcons. It's a toss-up for who makes a better comedy team: Fonda, Tomlin, Moreno and Field, or Brady and former teammates Rob Gronkowski, Julian Edelman and Danny Amendola. "Not only are they true professionals and experts at their craft," Brady said of the veteran actors, "but they are even better people, and it was an honor to be on set with them." Now those are some good sports. (*In theaters Feb. 3*) —*Mara Reinstein*



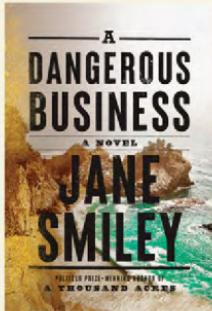
## Poker Face

Starring Natasha Lyonne

**It doesn't matter how good your poker face is.** Charlie Cale (Natasha Lyonne) knows when you're lying. In this 10-episode case-of-the-week, Lyonne's acerbic *Russian Doll* sensibilities fuse masterfully with creator Rian Johnson's enigmatic *Knives Out* brilliance. Cale has an uncanny, unfailing ability to detect a lie—it's in detecting the lie's purpose that calamity abounds. The scrappy vigilante hits the road in her Plymouth Barracuda, stumbling across a new mystery, place and cast of characters in every episode. Expect a star-studded ensemble each week: Adrien Brody, Clea DuVall, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Luis Guzmán, Tim Meadows, Dascha Polanco, Chloë Sevigny and more make guest appearances. (*Streaming Thursdays on Peacock starting Jan. 26*) —Caroline Fanning

EVANS VESTAL WARD/PEACOCK. NOUN PROJECT (TV ICON)





## A Dangerous Business

By Jane Smiley

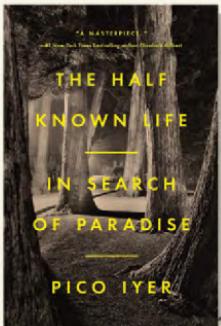
Eliza Ripley's newfound work in a California brothel during the gold rush provides much more security (financial and physical) than life with her abusive, bar-brawling husband ever did in this fictional jaunt. Like Smiley's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Thousand Acres* (which mirrors King Lear), *A Dangerous Business* also makes use of the classics. Ripley is captivated by stories of Edgar Allan Poe's Detective Dupin, so when the bodies of murdered young women begin turning up outside of town, Ripley can't help but investigate in this intriguing blend of Western and true crime. —CF

## The Half Known Life

By Pico Iyer

After almost 50 years of traveling to some of the world's most far-flung places, there's only one unexplored frontier left for Pico Iyer: the Promised Land. Iyer notes that amid the diversity of the places and cultures he has encountered, all uphold an idea of paradise (no matter the contrast among their versions). From the banks of the Ganges to the tips of the Himalayas, all think it achievable, be it by death, hard work or a virtuous life. Beautiful, inspiring and insightful, *The Half Known Life* unfolds before us like a wondrous journey.

—Michael Lee Simpson



PODCASTS

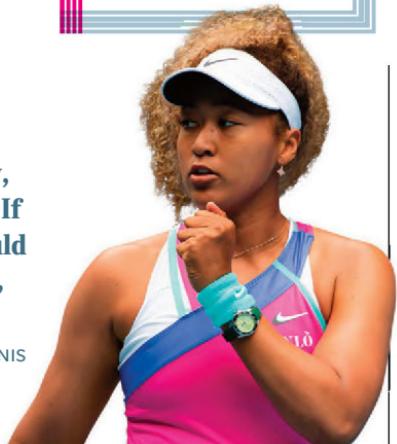
## Dedicated with Doug Brunt

*New York Times* best-selling writer Doug Brunt shares a preferred cocktail and good conversation with your favorite authors in this SiriusXM podcast, touted as *Inside the Actors Studio* for book lovers. Guests include Nelson DeMille (*Plum Island*, *Dewar's on the rocks*), Jennifer Egan (*A Visit from the Goon Squad*, *Gold Rush*) and Lee Child (*Jack Reacher* series, good champagne). Topics include writing and publishing processes, rejections, and film adaptations. In Child's episode, the author says that he pictured Jack Reacher similar to NFL analyst Howie Long—quite the “reach” from Tom Cruise! —CF

## QUOTEABLE QUOTES

If you're happy,  
you're wealthy. If  
rich humans could  
buy happiness,  
they would.

—Naomi Osaka, TENNIS  
PLAYER, ON TWITTER



Capitalism isn't just "Everybody should make as much money as they can." Capitalism is about finding solutions to problems.

—Mark Cuban, ENTREPRENEUR, IN TIME

When you reach for your phone first thing in the morning, it's like having 100 people in your bedroom screaming at you.

—Robin Roberts,  
NEWS ANCHOR, IN PEOPLE



Nothing in the future exists yet. But anything is possible right now. Including the thing you think you cannot do.

—Laura McKown,  
AUTHOR, IN THE BOOK  
WE ARE THE LUCKIEST:  
THE SURPRISING MAGIC  
OF A SOBER LIFE

If you build castles, everyone that approaches is an enemy. But if you're amongst the people, everybody's an ally.

—Jonathan Majors,  
ACTOR, IN MEN'S HEALTH



# *Brain* **GAMES**

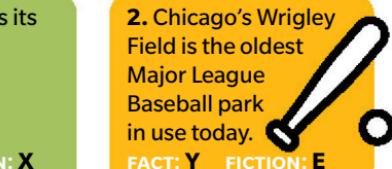
**SHARPEN YOUR MIND**

## Fact or Fiction?

**MEDIUM** Determine whether each statement is fact or fiction. To reveal the solution to the bonus question at the bottom, write the letters indicated by your responses in the corresponding numbered blanks. Turn the page upside down for the answers.

**1. Easter Island is its own country.**

**FACT: H FICTION: X**



**2.** Chicago's Wrigley Field is the oldest Major League Baseball park in use today.

**FACT: Y FICTION: E**

**3. Humans are the only animals with chins.**

**FACT: R    FICTION: D**

**4.** President Kennedy started the Easter egg roll on the White House lawn.



#### **FACT: R FICTiON:**

**5.** Nothing of note happened on April 18, 1930.

**FACT: S FICTION: A**

**6. The Bible has been translated into Elvish and Klingon.**

**FACT: C FICTION: U**

**7.** April is the wettest month in the United States.



**FACT: L FICTION: A**

**8. Johnny Cash's brother is also a singer/songwriter.**

**FACT: P FICITION: ■**

**9.** German chocolate cake was invented by Kaiser Wilhelm's royal chef



**FACT: C FICTION: E**

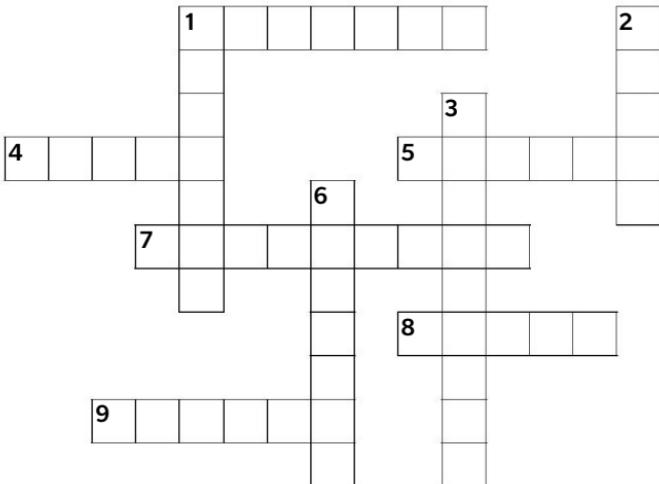
**BONUS QUESTION** Which term refers to a style of yard that needs little to no water to stay alive? (Need help? Turn to “Lawn Gone” on page 44.)

**Bonus Information:** Extra credit  
songs that include "I'm Walkin' the Line", "My Mother's Other Son", "9", "Fiction", the desseret was created by a man named

**Quick Crossword**

**EASY** March is Women's History Month, so fit the names of these female icons into the grid—then make sure you know who they are!

ANGELOU  
ANTHONY  
BARTON  
CURIE  
EARHART  
FRANK  
LAMARR  
PARKS  
SACAGAWEA  
YOUAFZAI

**Order Up**

**MEDIUM** A family of four (two adults and two children) decides to race up the climbing wall at their gym to see who can get to the top the fastest. From these clues, rank all four by age, height and speed.

1. If these four people stand in order of height, the fastest person is not at either end.
2. Kali, being only 8, is both the youngest and the shortest person, but she's not the slowest.
3. Emily is faster at climbing the wall than her father, John.
4. Anne suggested that Emily's extra height is the only reason she beat Anne to the top.
5. The oldest person would have felt embarrassed to be beaten by Kali.
6. None of the three orderings are exactly the same.
7. Anne hopes to be as active as John when she's his age.

**On the Dot****DIFFICULT**

How many dots should go under the last set of numbers?

**3 5 2**  
•••••

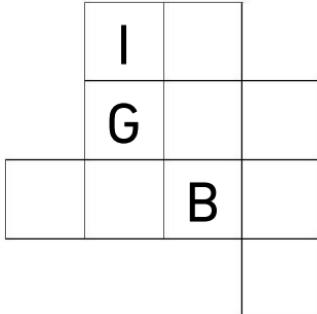
**5 9 7**  
•••••••

**5 5 2**  
••••••••

**7 8 5**  
•••••••••

**12 5 8**  
••••••••••

**9 9 8**  
?

**Block Letters****DIFFICULT** Insert the letters

A to J, one per square, so that no two consecutive letters in alphabetical order are in squares that touch in any way, even at a corner. Three letters have been placed to get you started.

**Hidden Spreads**

**EASY** Within the text of the silly story below, the names of eight different condiments are hidden. Can you find them all? (The names of these dips, sauces and spreads are made up of consecutive letters between consecutive words.)

Example: The **colossal saga** (salsa) of his jailbreak is one of the greatest **escape stories** (pesto) of all time.

I'm a young exchange student in Shanghai. Olivia, my little sister, sends me letters from home. The one I got today was a bit harsh, but for us to quarrel is hardly unusual. She was complaining that my old hand-me-down sweaters aren't just ugly, but terribly itchy too. Oh, ho-hum! Must she always make it all about her? Meanwhile, I'm dealing with strict teachers who deem us tardy even if we get to school early, and a competitive classmate, Allegra, vying with me for valedictorian.



For more Brain Games,  
go to [RD.COM  
/BRAINGAMES](http://RD.COM/BRAINGAMES).

For answers, turn to  
**PAGE 111.**

## WORD POWER

**Roses are red;** violets are blue.

This quiz is on poetry—how will you do?  
 Poems not your thing? Don't get stressed.  
 Choose the answer that fits each word best.  
 After you make your selections with care,  
 Go to the next page; the answers are there.

BY Sarah Chassé

**1. troubadour** *n.*

('troo-buh-dor)

- A** ode to a king
- B** poet-musician
- C** French verse form

**2. allusion** *n.*

(uh-'loo-zhun)

- A** brief reference
- B** dreamworld
- C** main theme

**3. refrain** *n.*

(rih-'frayn)

- A** introduction
- B** repeated phrase
- C** conclusion

**4. idyllic** *adj.*

(eye-'dih-lik)

- A** exaggerated
- B** perfect
- C** picturesque

**5. metaphor** *n.*

('meh-tuh-fohr)

- A** bragging chant
- B** word order
- C** direct comparison

**6. muse** *n.*

(myooz)

- A** final stanza
- B** source of inspiration
- C** anonymous author

**7. caesura** *n.*

(sih-'zyer-uh)

- A** pause
- B** lullaby
- C** near rhyme

**8. personify** *v.*

(per-'sah-nih-fy)

- A** narrate
- B** compliment
- C** present as human

**9. madrigal** *n.*

('mad-rih-guhl)

- A** short medieval poem
- B** main theme
- C** anthology

**10. canon** *n.*

('kan-uhn)

- A** literary prize
- B** inkwell
- C** body of work

**11. onomatopoeia** *n.*

(ah-nuh-mah-tuh-'pee-uh)

- A** line break
- B** word that echoes sound
- C** ancient Greek drama

**12. canto** *n.*

('kan-toh)

- A** poem section
- B** courtly love
- C** illustrated manuscript

**13. lyric** *adj.*

('leer-ik)

- A** mournful
- B** songlike
- C** flowery

**14. quatrain** *n.*

('kwah-trayn)

- A** four-line poem
- B** stressed syllable
- C** untitled work

**15. cadence** *n.*

('kay-dents)

- A** dedication
- B** public reading
- C** rhythmic pattern



## The Last Word

Poets frequently ponder death, and some even write their own epitaphs. Emily Dickinson's reads simply "Called back." Dorothy Parker's ashes are buried under an epitaph she'd once jokingly tossed off in *Vanity Fair*: "Excuse my dust." And Conrad Aiken's final resting place has multiple inscriptions. Its bench shape speaks loudest—according to legend, he hoped well-wishers would sit and enjoy a drink in his honor.

### Word Power ANSWERS

#### 1. troubadour

**(B)** poet-musician

A modern-day troubadour, Bob Dylan has penned more than 600 songs.

#### 2. allusion

**(A)** brief reference

After the CEO's allusion to the *Titanic* in her quarterly update, the company's stock plunged.

#### 3. refrain

**(B)** repeated phrase

The raven uttered its eerie refrain: "Nevermore."

#### 4. idyllic **(C)** picturesque

Gwendolyn rented an idyllic lakeside cabin for the weekend.

#### 5. metaphor

**(C)** direct comparison

"All the world's a stage" is one of Shakespeare's most famous metaphors.

#### 6. muse

**(B)** source of inspiration

My beloved poodle was the muse for my latest short story.

#### 7. caesura **(A)** pause

Shall we take a brief caesura before dessert?

#### 8. personify

**(C)** present as human

Some people personify their cars by giving them names.

#### 9. madrigal

**(A)** short medieval poem

The bard composed a madrigal about the beautiful Lady Rosalind.

#### 10. canon

**(C)** body of work

Maya Angelou's canon includes not just poems, but also autobiographies and screenplays.

#### 11. onomatopoeia

**(B)** word that echoes sound

Comic books often use onomatopoeia,

with words like POW! punctuating the action.

#### 12. canto

**(A)** poem section

The last few cantos of Dante's *Inferno* take readers to the ninth circle of hell.

#### 13. lyric **(B)** songlike

"This novel features lyric prose, an inventive plot and memorable characters," the critic raved.

#### 14. quatrain

**(A)** four-line poem

Mrs. Fox's students wrote quatrains for homework.

#### 15. cadence

**(C)** rhythmic pattern

The cadence of the keynote speaker's voice lulled me right to sleep.

### Vocabulary Ratings

**9 & BELOW:** couplet

**10-12:** sonnet

**13-15:** epic



## SPECIAL OFFER

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Get ready to lose track of time while poring over our (aptly named) new collection, *The Best of Reader's Digest Timeless Favorites*. Inside, you'll find 40+ editor-selected highlights spanning the past 100 years, stories that will surely thrill your senses and warm your heart. As a bonus, these tales of survival and second chances sit alongside amazing true reader stories, including some never before published. The book is yours for just \$10. Reserve a copy at [rd.com/RDJUN](http://rd.com/RDJUN).

# ANSWERS

## BRAIN GAMES

(pages 107-108)

### Quick Crossword

#### ACROSS

1. ANTHONY
4. CURIE
5. BARTON
7. YOUSAFZAI
8. PARKS
9. LAMARR

#### DOWN

1. ANGELOU
2. FRANK
3. SACAGAWEA
6. EARHART

### Order Up

From oldest to youngest:

John, Anne, Emily, Kali.

From tallest to shortest:

John, Emily, Anne, Kali.

From fastest to slowest:

Emily, John, Kali, Anne.

## On the Dot

10. The amount of dots is calculated by adding the first two numbers in each set and then subtracting the third number.

## Hidden Spreads

**I'm a young** (mayo); **Shanghai**. **Olivia** (aioli); **was a bit** (wasabi); **quarrel is** hardly (relish); **but terribly** (butter); **ho-hum**. **Must** (hummus); **deem us tardy** (mustard); and **Allegra**, **vying** (gravy).

## Block Letters

I	A	
G	D	F
C	J	B
		H
		E

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A TRUSTED FRIEND IN A COMPLICATED WORLD

*We Are Nature* by Helena Perez Garcia, exclusively for Reader's Digest