

Reader's digest

DEC 2017/JAN 2018

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Dear Readers

IT'S AN EPIDEMIC, BRUCE," Edna is saying on the phone. "These guys probably have your date of birth, Social Security number, address, maybe much more. It's a total facsimile of you."

A facsimile of me? What does that even mean? It means my passive-aggressive issues around security have caught up to me. It means my identity has been stolen.

I'm that guy who gets some prehistoric adrenaline kick when he leaves the house and car unlocked or reads his credit card number and security code aloud to anyone who asks—in a store, wherever. Bring on the risk! I treat hackers as if they were urban myths. To wit, as I'm talking to Edna, I'm on my laptop, where ALL Kelley log-ins and passwords—actually, one password, stubbornly stuck to for 20 years—exist in an open document on my desktop called "IDs."

"If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees," Kahlil Gibran said. But I've always blamed the wind, losing my temper whenever my bank or cable company tried to save me from myself. How dare you ask me to alert you when we travel or to add a "special character" to my one easy-to-remember, easy-to-hack password? My convenience is more important than your attempts to protect me!

That contempt sounds harmless in theory, but as Edna, our very reasonable tax preparer, explains, the bad guys have apparently made a mockery of my bad attitude. In fact, they've turned it into a fake W-2 in my name that has allowed them to successfully file tax returns and be due cash refunds in not one but two states. My only solace: I'm far from the only victim out there, as "How to Protect Your Identity Now" on page 54 reveals—15.4 million American consumers were victims of identity fraud in 2016.

I thank Edna for alerting the two states to the crimes, which as a result won't cost us anything—anything except the stress of knowing they still had "me."

When I put down the phone, I am newly mature. I go out to the driveway and lock my car door. Baby steps!



Bruce Kelley, editor-in-chief
Write to me at letters@rd.com.

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Letters

COMMENTS ON THE OCTOBER ISSUE

Smart People Do the Dumbest Things!

After reading the cover story about less-than-bright bosses, criminals, and others, I am convinced that more people should consider themselves members of Densa, the low-IQ society (a parody of Mensa, the group for people with an IQ of 140 or higher). Google “Densa” to take its low-IQ test for 15 minutes of fun.

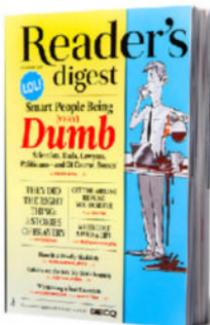
S. JOSEPH DAVIDIAN, *Clovis, California*

Not more than 30 minutes after reading the feature on smart humans and dumb acts, I was getting ready to play tennis. Remembering how Andy Simmons’s three-year-old daughter had pointed out that his T-shirt was on backward, I checked my own shirt. Sure enough, I could read the washing label below my chin. Not again!

BARBARA WILLIAMS, *Denver, Colorado*

Opening Doors for My Autistic Son

Judith Newman has a gift for explaining the gripping love, fears,



and hopes each of us with an autistic child in the family shares. As she wrote of Gus, who clearly would be best friends with my grandson, Aidan, I kept thinking, That’s it! That’s how I feel! Ms. Newman,

thank you for being the articulate voice many of us lack. Much

love to you and your family.

DIANA DICKRADER, *Holts Summit, Missouri*

This story about Gus has really blown my mind. I am autistic and work at a community job. I feel sorry for him that he was fired from his job. People with autism need to be treated fairly. I hope Gus finds a job where he will be treated fairly and be able to keep it.

EMILEE JASKOWIAK, *Springfield, Ohio*

A Lifesaving Golf Date With His Dad

What a great article about a young veteran who changed his mind about committing suicide because he had plans to play golf with his dad. However, not everyone has a dad to golf with or a buddy to grab a drink

with. If you need someone to talk to, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

BRITTANY WINNICK, *Lititz, Pennsylvania*

This Exorcist Is Real

I always read *Reader's Digest* in bed before I go to sleep because the stories are generally comforting and upbeat. This one startled me and essentially had me back to looking under the bed. Perhaps you could have a separate column of "scaredy-cat stories" so we could know which ones not to read before sleep! But I would prefer they not be there at all.

SUE R. KELLY, *Emeryville, California*

13 Things Garbage Collectors Want You To Know

Here's one more: Wash your hands thoroughly after touching your garbage cans. We wear gloves to protect us from the filth that we handle. But whatever gets on the outside of our gloves will get on your garbage cans, especially the handles and lids.

DOUGLAS BALDWIN,
Pittsfield, Massachusetts



A PERFECT PRESENT

Still doing your holiday shopping? How about a *Reader's Digest* subscription? It's the gift that keeps on giving. Don't just take our word for it:

I was given a subscription as valedictorian of my high school class. I have renewed every year for the past 65 years. I just received my 785th copy! I have given subscriptions as gifts and always pass my copies on to a neighbor or friend.

CHARLENE PATTERSON

My sweet 90-year-old grandmother passed away this year. She had generously gifted a subscription to me for the past 15-plus years. Now the postcard reads "Amount due ..." instead of "Gift from ..." A sweet legacy to continue in her memory.

SHARI BROWN

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Jim Woods, VP, Magazine Planning



EVERYDAY HEROES



He warms the holidays for families too filled with grief to celebrate on their own

Letting in Some Light

BY JULIANA LABIANCA

 **AFTER STEWART** and Debbie Wilder lost their 17-year-old son, Cameron, to suicide in 2013, the last thing on their minds was decorating for the holiday season. “We haven’t put anything up in three years. It has all stayed boxed up,” Debbie told KTVB in November 2016. “All of Cameron’s friends come home for Thanksgiving to visit their families, and we don’t have him.”

But in December 2016, the house was lit up like, well, Christmas, with strings of white bulbs cheerfully lining the roof and eaves. It wasn’t

the Wilders who’d finally made the house twinkle, however. Instead it was a stranger, 30-year-old Carson Zickgraf, who hangs lights professionally through his business, CZ Enterprises LLC. The Treasure Valley, Idaho, man is on a mission to brighten the lives of families affected by suicide, especially during the difficult holiday season—and it works. “I started crying,” Debbie says about seeing the lights for the first time. “It was really special.”

Zickgraf has been donating his light-stringing services since 

*Carson Zickgraf
gets to work on a
neighbor's home.*



2015 and has decorated the houses of more than two dozen families so far. They are mostly strangers whom Zickgraf learns about from Not One More Suicide, a support group. When Zickgraf arrives at a home to hang lights, he'll knock on the door to tell the family his plan, but if everyone is away, he'll put up the lights as a surprise. At one of the surprise houses, he began to work without realizing the owner was home. When she discovered what Zickgraf and his crew were up to, she ran outside—and gave them all hugs.

Zickgraf started the project by chance. He was hanging lights on a client's home when the owner mentioned that some neighbors were having a hard time that holiday season because their son had recently died by suicide. On the spot, Zickgraf had an epiphany. "I sent my crew there to decorate that house too," he says. The family was delighted.

Zickgraf realized that he'd found a kind of calling. In fact, he had two friends who had died by suicide, and he'd always wished he could ease the pain for their loved ones. Now he'd found a way. "You can mow their lawn or take them for a meal, but you always wish you could do more," says Zickgraf. "There's

something special about Christmas lights. They warm the spirit."

After he gets the names of families from Not One More Suicide, Zickgraf often hangs the lights himself with help from a friend, Sean Miner. When he sends his paid crew members to do the job, he doesn't tell them the

backstory out of respect for the family's privacy, though the workers sometimes figure it out. "A few times when my employees have found out we were doing lights for suicide survivors, they stopped the clock and wouldn't take pay."

The lights go up around mid-November and are taken down

after the New Year. Each job takes about an hour, though Zickgraf often prepares before arriving at a home. If he speaks to the family before starting, he asks what color lights the deceased would have liked. But when the job is a surprise, he takes the matter into his own experienced hands. He reads online memorials and obituaries to get a sense of the person, then picks the color he thinks would have pleased him or her. Zickgraf knows his efforts can't completely lift the veil of grief from these families, but he can make the holidays a little cheerier. "I wish I had a bigger company so I could do more houses," he says. **R**

“*You can mow their lawn or take them for a meal, but you always wish you could do more.*”

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Reader's
digest

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A Soldier's Fresh Recruit

BY JULIANA LABIANCA

ARMY SPC. LARRY HARRIS was doing community-outreach work in Grand Rapids, Michigan, when seven-year-old Xzayvier Burchard-Mease rushed up to him on the sidewalk—only to rush back into his house to collect something to show the soldier. It was a stuffed bear dressed in full camouflage, just as Harris was. Xzayvier's life dream was to become a soldier, his parents explained. "They told me that because of his leg condition, he'll never be able to," Harris said to WZZM 13.

Xzayvier's condition is called knee flexion contracture, in which one's leg—the right one, in Xzayvier's case—fails to straighten at the knee. Amputation was a real possibility, his parents told Harris. That was all the soldier needed to hear. He started to devise a remarkable plan.

A month later, in October 2016, Harris poked his head into Xzayvier's classroom and, in front of his classmates, asked the surprised boy, "Do you want to take a ride with me?"

Outside the school, a convoy of police cars and Army Humvees was waiting. It escorted him to the Army Reserve Center, where, with family, friends, and military and law



Newly minted honorary soldier Xzayvier Burchard-Mease, seated in front of the flag, with Army Spc. Larry Harris at his left

enforcement personnel looking on, Lt. Col. Melvin Bauman (Ret.) asked Xzayvier to raise his right hand and "repeat after me." They recited the Oath of Enlistment. When they were done, Bauman stated: "On this 14th day of October, you are now an honorary soldier." The room erupted in applause as a tear trickled down Xzayvier's cheek.

"Today I became a soldier," Xzayvier told WZZM. "It's something I will remember for the rest of my life."

The man who made it all happen, Spc. Larry Harris, said that his actions were simply part of his job description. "When I took the oath, I swore to protect domestic and non-domestic," he said. "And that means protecting the dreams of a child." **R**

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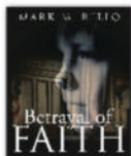
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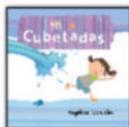
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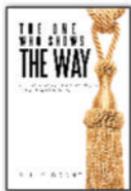
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VOICES & VIEWS

Department of Wit

Putting My Word-of-the- Day Calendar To Good Use

BY JEREMY WOODCOCK



JEREMY WOODCOCK won the Canadian Comedy Award for Best Writing in a TV Series or Special in 2015.

JANUARY 1

A new year ahead, full of *auspicious* and promising things! Think I'll stop by Dairy Queen for a Blizzard, but is that too *auspicious* this early in the year? Hard to say. Hard to say.

JANUARY 2

Had a fun breakfast with my girlfriend, Meredith. *Risible*, even. Later, I had a *risible* chat with Jeff at the watercooler. It's nice to be back at work, though my holidays were pretty *risible*, too, by which I guess I mean a situation or thing having qualities by which to provoke laughter and/or amusement.

JANUARY 3

Packed some *pasta puttanesca* for lunch today. I had a big presentation to make, which didn't go so great. It went downhill when I described our first-quarter profits as having "the consistency of a *pasta puttanesca*," and my boss kept ➔➔

asking me to clarify what I meant. I tried, but he just got angrier, turning red like you *know what*.

JANUARY 4

Today's page was missing from my calendar! That's quite *vexing*! Meredith had said that might happen, since the box seemed to have been opened when I bought it. I didn't find it *vexing* at the time, but I guess I should have because now it's very *vexing* to have had this happen! In the end, I just skipped to tomorrow's word.

JANUARY 5

Another *vexing* day.

JANUARY 6

Meredith asked whether I'd go to the new Jennifer Lawrence movie with her. I said sure, but she'd have to check the times, since I'm not a *soothsayer*. Suddenly she asked me to sit down. She said I'd been acting weird and insisted that things had to change. OK, so just tell me that next time! I can't guess—I'm not a *soothsayer*.

JANUARY 7

Today's events can be summed up in one word: *esplanade*.

JANUARY 8

Meredith broke up with me. I can't

really *glean* why. I said, "Meredith, can you please move your stuff off the kitchen table? I can barely see the newspaper I'm reading to *glean* what happened in the world today!" Next thing I could *glean*, she'd lost it.

JANUARY 9

Got fired today. It happened in a really *pusillanimous* way. I'm just working at my desk when my boss suddenly comes over and starts asking me whether I've been feeling OK. I mentioned my recent breakup but

insisted it would be pretty *pusillanimous* to let that get me down. Next thing I knew, all my possessions, including my calendar, were in a box, and I was headed out the door.

JANUARY 10

I'm still hopeful, despite recent *dyspeptic* events. I'm using my extra time to *hasten* my *pilgrimage* through my calendar. Now I can take a minute, an hour, or even a *yocto-second* to really *ruminate* over that thing. I've been a bit *itinerant* lately, but I can *vouchsafe* that things will *ameliorate* from here.

JANUARY 11

Lost my word-of-the-day calendar. Oh boy. This is *vexing*.

“
*Today's page
 was missing
 from my
 calendar. That's
 quite vexing!*”



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who needs a loving family. Our daughter passed away while I was pregnant with her five years ago.

ADRIANNA STUHR

Find a church

that truly accepts my alternative family.

KRIS HAMLIN

Learn to play the
ukulele.

STEVE RICHARDS

San Antonio,
TX

next year if I can ...

Brag about my fifth
Eagle Scout grandson.

No pressure, Cody!
JEANETTE GRONDA

Stop listening

to my psychic.
TIA MCCAWE

Boscobel, WI

Grosse Ile, MI

Danbury, CT

Schaumburg, IL

Port Republic, NJ

Martinsville, IN

Salem, VA

Help someone

overcome addiction.
DONNA PASSARELLI

Still drink

great milk shakes
and have good
health. Those two
go together, right?

ANDY DAVIS

West Pelzer, SC

Get hired

full-time at the job
where I'm working
part-time now. I
really love it!

MARGE DURHAM

 Go to facebook.com/readersdigest or join our
Inner Circle Community at tmbinnercircle.com for
the chance to finish the next sentence.

PHOTO

OF LASTING
INTEREST

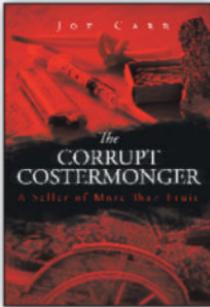




Alert: Stormtroopers On the Prowl

Star Wars: Episode IX won't land until the end of 2019, but the Force is with us already. In fact, wannabe warriors, such as these stormtroopers who turned up on London's Millennium Bridge last year, roam the galaxy all the time. There are 88 "garrisons" sanctioned worldwide by an enthusiast organization called 501st Legion, and members take their characters seriously. The costumes are required to be 100 percent faithful to the movie versions, and each one can cost \$1,800 or more. They're worn to premieres, of course, but these superfans spend much of their time appearing at charity events and fund-raisers. Stormtroopers as a force of good? Let's hope that Darth Vader doesn't find out.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LEON NEAL



The Corrupt Costermonger

A Seller of More Than Fruit

Joe Carr

www.xlibrispublishing.co.uk

\$39.92 hc | \$23.28 sc | \$4.99 eb

A trusted informant appears to be floundering in the changing world of drugs, murder, illegal immigrants, and terrorists. Because of this, Det. Sgt. Ron O' Neill is drawn into an enquiry that will change his career forever. After answering a telephone call, O' Neill is thrust to a new and challenging chase of truth and freedom.



CELLITOONS NO. 2

Dan Celli

www.xlibris.com

\$22.99 hc | \$15.99 sc | \$3.99 eb

In his new book titles *CELLITOONS NO.2*, Dan Celli showcases his "tooning" collection, featuring doctors, seniors, musicians, lovers and many more. It also offers humor ranging from mild to wild.



Broken Sand Dollar

Finding the Missing Peace

Nicole Saint-Clair

www.iuniverse.com

\$19.95 sc | \$3.99 eb

A terrifying college spring break trip becomes a decades-long nightmare. Elizabeth's brush with sexual violence spins out of control with four powerful well-connected Ivy-Leaguers. Goodbyes aren't always forever - even when we wish they were. God intervenes.



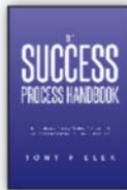
The 1300 Year's War

Robert Maddock

www.xlibris.com

\$34.99 hc | \$21.99 sc | \$3.99 eb

The book in two volumes describes the evolution of Judeo Christianity and Islam and 1300 years of warfare between them. Islam and Christianity follow Gods with different characteristics and differing doctrine, free-will vs. determinism. These differences have consequences until today.



The Success Process Handbook

Tony Fielek

www.xlibris.com

\$15.99 hc | \$12.99 sc | \$3.99 eb

The Success Process Handbook is author Tony Fielek's detailed program that uses motivational and persuasive methods to show you how you can influence the key people who are important to your success in your social life, career and personal relationships.



Can a city citing safety concerns pull the plug on a family's popular holiday tradition?

The Case of the Extreme Christmas Lights

BY VICKI GLEBOCKI

IT'S NO SURPRISE that the Hyatt family of Plantation, Florida, calls its annual holiday display Hyatt Extreme Christmas. Ever since 2006, on the day after Thanksgiving, Kathy and Mark Hyatt and their two kids have unveiled the full spectacle: more than 200,000 lights, a 30-foot Christmas tree, a 20-foot Ferris wheel, a 20-foot inflatable movie screen that shows Disney movies on a loop, life-size gingerbread men, blowing snow, a giant Nativity scene, Santa's workshop, a Christmas countdown sign, and live animals, including a "reindeer" horse

named Yofi—all packed onto the Hyatts' just-under-an-acre lot.

The display takes three months to assemble and attracts approximately 2,000 visitors each holiday season. It is lit Sunday through Thursday from 6 to 10 p.m. and until 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, and it all stays up until December 28, when everything gets packed away for the next year. Some neighbors on the cul-de-sac the Hyatts share with seven other large homes move temporarily to avoid the five weeks of what one described as a "nightmare" of litter, ➔

blocked driveways, and the din of nonstop caroling and jingle-belling.

The city, though, has been most concerned about safety. When there's no available parking on the cul-de-sac, visitors walk to the Hyatts' after parking around the corner on Old Hiatus Road, a dimly lit two-lane street with no crosswalks. Plantation's police department has tried over the years to make the area safer when the display is all merry and bright. For example, in 2013, the department paid overtime for two officers to control the traffic on a busy weekend and also created a "safe zone" for pedestrians on Old Hiatus, blocking off nonresidential traffic on a stretch of the road. But despite No Parking signs, visitors continued to park there.

In February 2014, the city filed a complaint in circuit court. It claimed that the display's "carnival-like atmosphere" was a public nuisance, since it posed a public-safety threat. It asked the court to order the Hyatts "to refrain from promoting, erecting, and operating a holiday display at their residence of a nature, extravagance, or size [that attracts] large numbers of the public."

But attracting the public is the point. As the family explains on its website, "The Hyatts love this time of the year as it give[s] us an opportunity to spread 'Joy' and 'Holiday Wishes' to so many people."

Should the Hyatts be forced to limit or even shut down their holiday display? You be the judge.



THE VERDICT

No. A four-day trial was held in September 2016, and Judge Marina Garcia-Wood ruled a month later that the display itself didn't threaten public safety. "There was no testimony or evidence that the Hyatts utilize their property in such a way that results in injury ... of the City or to its residents," she wrote. Further, she concluded that traffic congestion was "being exacerbated by the City and the City's police department safety zones, not the Hyatts."

So the Hyatts opened the gates in 2016 to much rejoicing. The ruling "almost brought me to my knees," Mark Hyatt told the *Sun Sentinel*. For 2017, the Hyatts are, as Mark describes it, "taking our display to the next level." They're adding a fancy new movie-like projector to light up the one part of their house that has always remained dark—the windows. They're adding a new feature outside too: Santa's reindeer stables. R

Your True Stories

IN 100 WORDS

NOT ON GRANDMA'S WATCH

The Christmas Eve meal was ready, and Grandma was pacing, waiting for the men to return. They had been sent out in my uncle's truck for eggnog hours ago. Looking back, I wonder at the fact that none of the women seemed worried. In fact, the general consensus was that the errand runners had landed themselves in some sort of foolishness. They had. When the defeated crew returned from what turned out to be a four-wheeling side trip gone wrong, they found a bench set up in the garage with their meal on it. No one messes with Grandma's holiday.

NICOLE BURRELL, *Belleville, New Jersey*

OFF-LINE CALENDAR

My mother informed me one day that she had been using her smartphone to keep track of "all her important dates." She wasn't always the most tech-savvy person and was still figuring out



the intricacies of her new gadget, so I was impressed that she had apparently been using the calendar app to stay organized. But then she turned her phone over to reveal the sticky note with a list of upcoming birthdays. As I started laughing, Mom asked bewilderedly, "What's wrong?"

MATT DAVIS, *Olathe, Kansas*

PUPPY LOVE

After having our second child, I was anxious to get home from the hospital to show our five-year-old daughter her new little sister. When I got out of the car, I asked my daughter what she thought of our bundle of joy. I expected a gleeful response. Instead, she looked disgusted and replied, "I told you that I wanted a puppy!" Fortunately, she has adapted to her role as big sister a bit more since then.

PAM VOGEL, *Rockford, Illinois*

To read more 100-word stories and to submit your own, go to rd.com/stories. If your story is selected for publication in the magazine, we'll pay you \$100.

Boys learn from an early age that shedding even one tear in public will make them look weak. Yet weeping used to be manly enough. After all, Jesus did it.

Men Don't Cry. Why?

BY SANDRA NEWMAN
FROM AEON.CO



☞ ONE OF OUR MOST FIRMLY entrenched ideas of masculinity is that a real man doesn't cry. Although he might shed a discreet tear at a funeral, he is expected to quickly regain control. Sobbing openly is for girls.

This isn't just a social expectation. One study found that women report crying significantly more than men do—five times as often, on average, and almost twice as long per episode.

So it's perhaps surprising to learn that the gender gap in crying seems to be a recent development. Historically, men routinely wept, and no one saw it as feminine or shameful.

For example, in chronicles of the Middle Ages, we find one ambassador repeatedly bursting into tears when addressing Philip the Good, and the entire audience at a peace congress throwing themselves on the ground, sobbing and groaning as they listen to the speeches.

In medieval romances, knights cried purely because they missed their girlfriends. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot, or, The Knight of the Cart*, no less a hero than Lancelot weeps at a brief separation from Guinevere. At another point, he cries on a lady's shoulder at the thought that he won't get to go to a big tournament because of his captivity. What's more, instead of being disgusted by this sniveling, the lady is moved to help.

There's no mention of the men in these stories trying to

restrain or hide their tears. No one pretends to have something in his eye. No one makes an excuse to leave the room. They cry in a crowded hall with their heads held high. Nor do their companions make fun of this public blubbering; it's universally regarded as an admirable expression of feeling.

The Bible is full of references to demonstrative weeping by kings, entire peoples, and God himself, as incarnated in Jesus. In fact, one of the most famous verses in the Bible, John 11:35, reads, "Jesus wept."

So where did all the male tears go? There was no anti-crying movement. No leaders of church or state introduced measures to discourage them. Nevertheless, by the Romantic

period, masculine tears were reserved for poets. From there, it was just a short leap to the poker-faced heroes of Ernest Hemingway, who, despite their poetic leanings, could not express grief by any means but tipping and shooting the occasional buffalo.

The most obvious possibility is that this shift is the result of changes that took place as we moved from a



SANDRA
NEWMAN
*is a writer and
the author of
three novels,
including
The Country of
Ice Cream Star.*

feudal agrarian society to one that was urban and industrial. In the Middle Ages, most people spent their lives among those they had known since birth. A typical village had around 250 to 300 inhabitants, most of them related by blood or marriage. If men cried, they did so with people who would empathize.

But from the 18th to 20th centuries, the population became increasingly urbanized, and people were living in the midst of thousands of strangers. Furthermore, changes in the economy required men to work together in factories and offices where emotional expression and even private conversation were discouraged as time wasting. As Tom Lutz writes in *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*, “You don’t want emotions interfering with the smooth running of things.”

Yet human beings weren’t designed to swallow their emotions, and there’s reason to believe that suppressing tears can be hazardous to your well-being. Research from the 1980s has suggested a relationship between stress-related illnesses and inadequate crying. Weeping is also, somewhat counterintuitively, correlated with happiness and

wealth. Countries where people cry the most tend to be more democratic and their populations more extroverted.

You might also suffer if you simply hide your tears from others, as men are now expected to do. As we’ve seen, crying can be a tool to elicit

care. While this might be inappropriate during a performance review, it could be an essential way of alerting others that you need support.

Taboos against male expressiveness mean that men are less likely than women to get help when they’re suffering from depression. This,

in turn, is correlated with higher suicide rates (men are three to four times as likely to commit suicide as women), as well as higher rates of alcoholism and drug addiction.

It’s time to open the floodgates. Time for men to give up emulating the stone-faced heroes of action movies and be more like the emotive heroes of Homer, like the weeping kings, saints, and statesmen of thousands of years of human history. When misfortune strikes, let us all—men and women—join together and cry until our sleeves are drenched. As the Old Testament has it: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” **R**

“
*Countries where
people cry the
most tend to be
richer and more
extroverted and
democratic.*

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Life

IN THESE UNITED STATES



A CLASSMATE AND I were walking past a poster in our school hallway. It featured a photo of Einstein with the words *Even Einstein Read Books*.

My friend was amazed: "I didn't know Einstein's first name was Evan."

Source: reddit.com

MY FRIEND STRUCK UP a conversation with a stranger. When the stranger asked where she was

from, my friend replied, "Iowa."

"Where?"

"Iowa. I-owe-uh."

"Oh," said the woman. "Where I'm from, we pronounce it 'Oh-hi-oh.'"

H. ELAINE PARSONS, *Midland, Michigan*

MY PERFORMANCE IN "I'm so sad I can't make it to your Christmas party" is already generating Oscar buzz.

🐦 @ROBINMCCAULEY

FIVE-YEAR-OLD: Just one more question before I go to bed.

Me: What?

Five-year-old: What are the lines on your forehead for?

Me: ...

Five-year-old: Now they look angry.

🐦@PAIGEKELLERMAN

AT A RECENT WEDDING I attended, the groom and groomsmen stood at the altar in eager anticipation of the bride's arrival. My three-year-old niece, sitting next to me, was also filled with anticipation. Pointing to the men, she shouted, "I wonder which one she'll pick?"

RUTH MUCHEMORE, *Omaha, Nebraska*

NINETY PERCENT of being married is just shouting, "What?" from other rooms.

🐦@KEETPOTATO

WHEN I TOLD my daughter's boyfriend that I didn't own a TV set, he was shocked. "If you don't have a TV," he asked, "how do you know how to arrange your furniture?"

MEL VANNICE, *Seattle, Washington*

ON A WINTRY DAY, my 90-year-old father was in the supermarket trying to pay for his groceries. Bundled up against the cold, his gloved hands were having trouble retrieving and

counting the exact change. The transaction evidently took too long for the man behind him in line, who muttered a curse. Dad stopped counting, turned around, and warned, "Be quiet or I'll write a check."

JOHN SHOUSE, *Fullerton, California*

WHAT A LONG, STRANGE TRIP IT WAS

Holiday travels not living up to expectations? Borrow one of these complaints collected by travel agents.

- "There was no sign telling you that you shouldn't get on the hot-air balloon ride if you're afraid of heights."
- "I compared the size of our one-bedroom apartment with our friends' three-bedroom apartment, and ours was significantly smaller."
- "We could not enjoy the tour, as our guide was too ugly. You can't be expected to admire a beautiful view when you're staring at a face like his."
- "The street signs weren't in English. I don't understand how anyone can get around."
- "You said the town was next to a volcano, but we went, and there was no lava. I'm pretty sure it was just a mountain."

Source: telegraph.co.uk



Got a funny story about friends or family? It could be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, see page 3 or go to rd.com/submit.

THE ROAD TO YOUR
HAPPY PLACE IS PAVED WITH
RAISINS AND FLAKES.
AND PAVEMENT.



ART *of* LIVING



Before you buy one more present, try these tips

No-Hassle Holiday Shopping

BY JODY L. ROHLENA

IF ONE THING ON YOUR wish list is a stress-free holiday, we've got a present for you. These shopping tips will save you time and money, with suggestions on how to investigate, automate, and delegate your gift hunt. Don't feel guilty about outsourcing—after all, Santa employs helpers too.

1 Don't Rack Your Brain

Can't figure out what to buy? Don't be afraid to look for clues and ask for ideas. First, see whether the folks on your to-buy-for list have already dropped some virtual hints, in the form of a wish list on amazon.com or gifthero.com, or a Pinterest board of coveted items. If you strike out, encourage your lucky recipients to go on a virtual shopping spree, posting items they wish someone would buy for them.

You can also find inspiration in the many online gift guides. They are typically organized by recipient, interest, and/or price range: Gifts for Dads, Gifts for Golfers ... You get the idea. Good ones include Target's gift finder (search online for "Target + gift finder," then choose For Him, For Kids, etc.), uncommongoods.com (click on Gifts, then select your recipient or price range, or browse by interest), and gifthero.com (click on Explore, then type in whom you're buying for, such as "Mom" or "cook," or browse the many idea boards to see gift items from various retailers).

2 Get Someone Else to Do Your Shopping

You really can enlist your own personal elves. Many stores have free professional shoppers who can pick out presents for you. We're not talking just high-end stores such as Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom. Mall stalwarts Macy's, J. Crew, Pottery Barn, and others will let you leave the shopping to them—they're all hungry to win your business away from online retailers. You'll likely need an appointment, so call ahead or search retailers' websites for "personal shopping"; you'll typically find a link on the home page under Contact Us or Services. And if you just stop by a store, any good sales clerk will happily offer suggestions. Independent retailers are known for this personal touch, one of the best (and unsung) reasons to shop local.

3 Have Gifts Delivered

Time is money, and for not a lot of money you can save a lot of time by having your gifts delivered right to your door. Some mom-and-pop shops offer delivery and free setup on items such as bikes, grills, and furniture. Chain stores tend to charge for the service, but it still might be worth paying for the convenience. (Be sure to ask your independent retailer whether it will match the price you found at a chain store.)

For local stores that don't offer this convenience, try the Postmates delivery service. First go to postmates.com

or download the free app and see whether it's available in your area. Then type the name of a store into the search bar, click on the store, and enter the item you want. You can even add a photo. You'll pay for the item, plus a delivery fee of \$3.99 to \$5.99. Best bet: \$9.99 for a monthly unlimited subscription and free delivery on orders over \$20—a no-brainer if you have a long shopping list.

Need help with assembly? You can post an ad at taskrabbit.com describing what you need, then weigh the bids that come in. Fees vary by job, helper, and location, but the company says the average is about \$35 an hour.

4 Never Wrap Again

Free gift wrapping is not as common as it once was, but some stores still offer it—or at least provide free gift packaging, typically a box, tissue paper, and ribbon. The list includes Barnes & Noble, Pottery Barn, Sephora, and Williams-Sonoma, along with many local businesses. Other stores and online retailers will wrap for a small fee.

Also, keep your eyes open for gift-wrapping tables in the mall at holiday time. They're usually staffed by volunteers from local charities, and

with a small donation to a good cause, you can have all your wrapping done for you.

5 Make Black Friday Optional

Black Friday isn't just a day anymore; holiday creep has turned it into a weeks-long sales marathon. If you really love the ritual of hitting the stores that day (or even Thanksgiving Day), you will find major markdowns

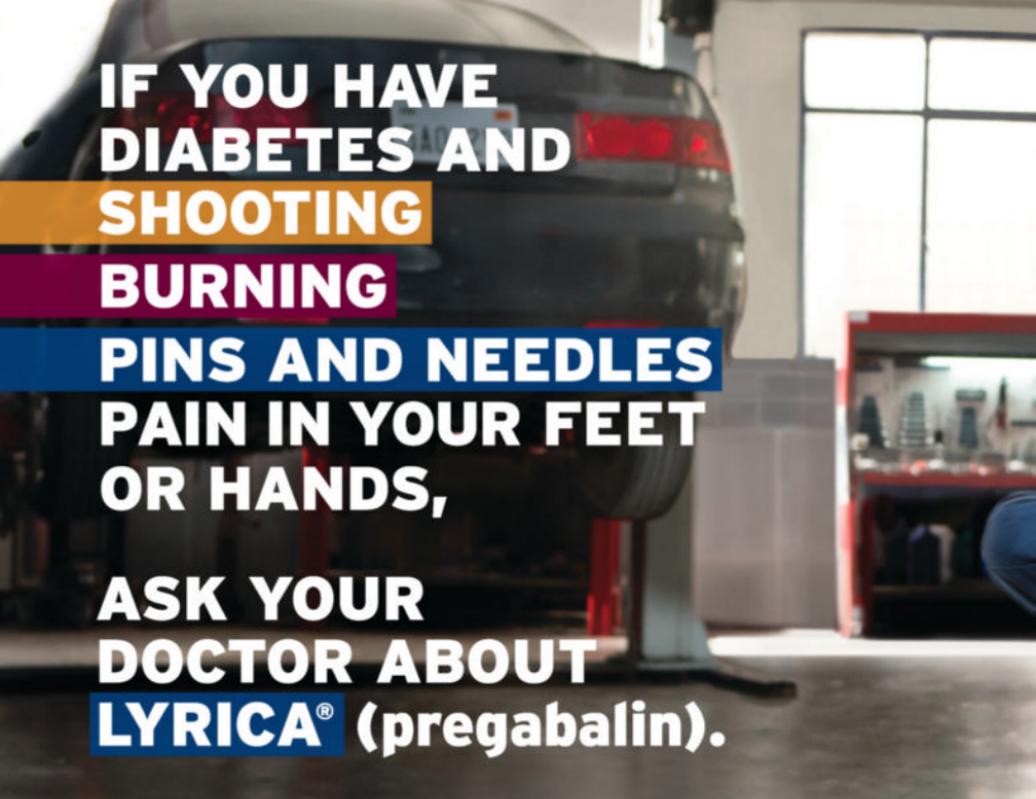
in many stores as well as online. Hot-ticket items will include TVs, laptops, iPhones (even the new ones!), video game consoles, and appliances (large and small), according to bestblackfriday.com.

If you'd rather skip the mayhem, know that sales will be going

on in the weeks leading up to Christmas. A good day to target this year is December 15, Free Shipping Day, when many online merchants promise Christmas Eve delivery without rush fees. Also, watch for deals on exercise equipment (December 10), tools (December 13), toys (December 16), and jewelry (December 4 to 25), according to predictions from shopping expert Kyle James of ratherbeshopping.com. To keep an eye on sales as they are announced, watch bestblackfriday.com, theblackfriday.com, and blackfriday.com. **R**

Gift cards are an easy option, but they can also be a big waste of money.

An estimated **\$1 BILLION** worth of cards went unredeemed in 2015.



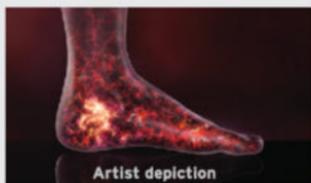
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Prescription LYRICA is not for everyone. Tell your doctor right away about any serious allergic reaction that causes swelling of the face, mouth, lips, gums, tongue, throat, or neck or any trouble breathing, rash, hives or blisters. LYRICA may cause suicidal thoughts or actions in a very small number of people. Patients, family members or caregivers should call the doctor right away if they notice suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of self harm, or any unusual changes in mood or behavior. These changes may include new or worsening depression, anxiety, restlessness, trouble sleeping, panic attacks, anger, irritability, agitation, aggression, dangerous impulses or violence, or extreme increases in activity or talking. If you have suicidal thoughts or actions, do not stop LYRICA without first talking to your doctor. LYRICA may cause swelling of your hands, legs and feet. Some of the most common side effects of LYRICA are dizziness and sleepiness. Do not drive or work with machines until you know how LYRICA affects you. Other common side effects are blurry vision, weight gain, trouble concentrating, dry mouth, and feeling "high." Also, tell your doctor right away about muscle pain along with feeling sick and feverish, or any changes in your eyesight including blurry vision or any skin sores if you have diabetes. You may have a higher chance of swelling, hives or gaining weight if you are also



**FOR SOME PATIENTS,
LYRICA CAN PROVIDE
SIGNIFICANT RELIEF
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*Individual results may vary.



Artist depiction

Diabetes damages nerves, which may cause pain.



Artist depiction

LYRICA is FDA-approved to treat diabetic nerve pain.

Important Safety Information (continued) taking certain diabetes or high blood pressure medicines. Do not drink alcohol while taking LYRICA. You may have more dizziness and sleepiness if you take LYRICA with alcohol, narcotic pain medicines, or medicines for anxiety. If you have had a drug or alcohol problem, you may be more likely to misuse LYRICA. Tell your doctor if you are planning to father a child, if you are pregnant, or plan to become pregnant. Breastfeeding is not recommended while taking LYRICA. Talk with your doctor before you stop taking LYRICA or any other prescription medication.

Please see Important Risk Information for LYRICA on the following page.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA.

Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Ask your doctor about LYRICA and visit LYRICA.com
or call 1-888-9-LYRICA (1-888-959-7422).



IT'S SPECIFIC TREATMENT FOR DIABETIC NERVE PAIN

IMPORTANT FACTS



(LEER-i-kah)
(pregabalin)

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION ABOUT LYRICA

LYRICA may cause serious, even life threatening, allergic reactions.

Stop taking LYRICA and call your doctor right away if you have any signs of a serious allergic reaction:

- Swelling of your face, mouth, lips, gums, tongue, throat or neck
- Have any trouble breathing
- Rash, hives (raised bumps) or blisters

Like other antiepileptic drugs, LYRICA may cause suicidal thoughts or actions in a very small number of people, about 1 in 500.

Call your doctor right away if you have any symptoms, especially if they are new, worse or worry you, including:

- suicidal thoughts or actions
- new or worse depression
- new or worse anxiety
- feeling agitated or restless
- panic attacks
- trouble sleeping
- new or worse irritability
- acting aggressive, being angry, or violent
- acting on dangerous impulses
- an extreme increase in activity and talking
- other unusual changes in behavior or mood

If you have suicidal thoughts or actions, do not stop LYRICA without first talking to your doctor.

LYRICA may cause swelling of your hands, legs and feet.

This swelling can be a serious problem with people with heart problems.

LYRICA may cause dizziness or sleepiness.

Do not drive a car, work with machines, or do other dangerous things until you know how LYRICA affects you. Ask your doctor when it is okay to do these things.

ABOUT LYRICA

LYRICA is a prescription medicine used in adults 18 years and older to treat:

- Pain from damaged nerves that happens with diabetes or that follows healing of shingles, or spinal cord injury
- Partial seizures when taken together with other seizure medicines
- Fibromyalgia (pain all over your body)

Who should NOT take LYRICA:

- Anyone who is allergic to anything in LYRICA

BEFORE STARTING LYRICA

Tell your doctor about all your medical conditions, including if you:

- Have had depression, mood problems or suicidal thoughts or behavior
- Have or had kidney problems or dialysis
- Have heart problems, including heart failure
- Have a bleeding problem or a low blood platelet count
- Have abused prescription medicines, street drugs or alcohol in the past
- Have ever had swelling of your face, mouth, tongue, lips, gums, neck, or throat (angioedema)
- Plan to father a child. It is not known if problems seen in animal studies can happen in humans.
- Are pregnant, plan to become pregnant. It is not known if LYRICA will harm your unborn baby. You and your doctor will decide whether you should take LYRICA.
- Are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. LYRICA passes into your breast milk. It is not known if LYRICA can harm your baby. Breastfeeding is not recommended while taking LYRICA.

Tell your doctor about all your medicines. Include over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. LYRICA and other medicines may affect each other causing side effects. Especially tell your doctor if you take:

BEFORE STARTING LYRICA, continued

- Angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors. You may have a higher chance for swelling and hives.
- Avandia® (rosiglitazone)*, Avandamet® (rosiglitazone and metformin)* or Actos® (pioglitazone)** for diabetes. You may have a higher chance of weight gain or swelling of your hands or feet.
- Narcotic pain medicines (such as oxycodone), tranquilizers or medicines for anxiety (such as lorazepam). You may have a higher chance for dizziness and sleepiness.
- Any medicines that make you sleepy.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LYRICA

LYRICA may cause serious side effects, including:

- See “Important Safety Information About LYRICA.”
- Muscle problems, pain, soreness or weakness along with feeling sick and fever
- Eyesight problems including blurry vision
- Weight gain. Weight gain may affect control of diabetes and can be serious for people with heart problems.
- Feeling “high”

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LYRICA are:

- Dizziness
- Blurry vision
- Weight gain
- Sleepiness
- Trouble concentrating
- Swelling of hands and feet
- Dry mouth

If you have diabetes, you should pay extra attention to your skin while taking LYRICA.

HOW TO TAKE LYRICA

Do:

- Take LYRICA exactly as your doctor tells you. Your doctor will tell you how much to take and when to take it. Take LYRICA at the same times each day.
- Take LYRICA with or without food.

Don't:

- Drive a car or use machines if you feel dizzy or sleepy while taking LYRICA.
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We wanted a guard dog, but we had no idea how much he would protect us

The Dog Who Saved Our Family

BY GRACE EVANS



WE MET MAX at the cargo pickup area of Alaska Airlines. A standard poodle born on Valentine's Day in 2002, he came to us in a small blue crate. We had adopted him from an out-of-state breeder, and our only request was that he have a calm demeanor, able to endure the poking and cuddling of our eight-year-old daughter and six-year-old son.

We were a sweet little family—me, my husband, and our children, Sophie and Jake. But for years I'd felt as if we wouldn't really be complete until we had a dog. Also, my husband traveled some 200 days a year for his job, and I knew I'd feel safer with a large animal sleeping by the door.

When we opened the crate, the last piece of our puzzle fell into place.

With his curly black hair and intelligent eyes, Max was beautiful. He was so small that he fit into the palm of my hand, his big paws lapping over the sides. He was also scared. As I pulled him close, I felt his heart pound and wondered if we'd done the right thing, taking him from his mother. But it was too late. Sophie and Jake were already fighting over who would hold him next.

Over the following months, we spent endless hours watching Max play with his Kong toy or roll around the living room rug. Like most poodles, he was smart. He mastered house-training quickly and never chewed on our furniture or shoes. He had little interest in his kibble and never quite saw the point of playing

fetch, a pursuit for—sniff!—dogs. He considered himself one of us.

Some days after school, I'd find Jake curled up with Max inside his crate. When I suggested that my son get out of the dog crate, Jake yelled, "Max wants me in here! We're brothers!"

By his first birthday, Max had grown into a vigilant 50-pound guard dog. He manned the front door like a Marine, barking ferociously at terriers and Chihuahuas walking by. At night, he situated himself so he could watch all three bedrooms and the back door. I felt safe with him there, especially when my husband was away. Sometimes, when I was missing my husband a lot, I held Max close. It comforted me as I longed for the man who made me laugh, the man I adored.

Years passed. The kids grew and started middle school and high school. Then one day, shortly before Sophie's senior year, our world fell apart. Sophie discovered an e-mail account full of messages between my husband and one of my friends. They'd been having an affair for years.

My husband insisted on a divorce. I grieved so deeply, I felt as though I'd been widowed. I tried to keep everything stable for Sophie and Jake: making meals, paying bills, letting them know I was there for their

grief too. But seeing the weight of my sorrow, they hesitated to lean on me. So they turned to Max.

Jake, in particular, was bereft. He was a 15-year-old boy in a home with no father, struggling to become a man. I sometimes caught him crying as he suited up for football. Un-

solicited, Max would lick Jake's hand—he no longer waited for a cut or a scrape. He sensed the wounds were much deeper.

Sophie went off to college. She loved school and made the dean's list her first semester. But when she stepped off the plane after her sophomore

fall semester, she looked like a homeless person. Her hair was matted. She had a blanket draped around her. I was shocked, wondering where my beautiful girl had gone.

She didn't go back to school. Instead she stayed home sleeping all day, curled into Max. When he kept jumping off her twin bed, she set up a sleeping mat in our living room. She lay there clinging to him, 15 to 20 hours a day. All that time—as I struggled to get her help, trying to figure out what was wrong—Max lay by her side. I realize now he was keeping her alive. A few months after coming home, she told us what had happened: At college, she'd been raped.

“

*Some days I'd
find Jake curled
up with Max
inside his crate.
“We're brothers!”
Jake said.*

”

As Sophie turned to alcohol to numb her pain, our home filled with tension. Jake started smoking pot to calm himself. On better days, he'd take Max for hikes in the hills above our house. Max leaped at the chance to get out. But he always returned to Sophie's side.

Truth be told, Max was the stabilizing force in our family then. He was the one we turned to when we could not turn to one another.

Around this time, I hired a "house healer," hoping she could rid our home of the negative energy left from the divorce. The woman shooed me out, allowing only Max to stay inside. She went through the house, clearing it of bad energy. After she finished, she said, "You know this is a very special dog, right?"

I nodded.

"He's here to play a very important role in your family," she said.

After that, things slowly started to turn around. I was able to get Sophie into a residential treatment facility. We sold our house and moved to a prettier one, with fewer painful memories. Jake went off to college.

And then, suddenly, I was alone. I had loved my family wildly, all of them, and they had left. Except for Max. He followed me from room to

room, looking at me as if I'd hung the moon, sometimes staying so close I nearly tripped over him. When I saw this elegant animal looking at me this way, I started to see it too. Maybe I was worthy of being adored.

As time went on, Max grew deaf and blind. His joints became creaky.

He grew less perky on our walks. Sometimes I'd look at him and say, "Don't even think about it." I felt I'd lost so much that I couldn't bear to lose him too.

One day, I found him paralyzed in the hind legs. A few days later, he went into congestive heart failure. Jake flew home to be there when

we said goodbye. By then, Max had stopped eating and drinking. All he could do was lie on the floor. So Jake pulled the sleeping mat out again—the one Sophie had used for that terrible year—and lay beside Max all night. I took a picture: a boy and his dog. A boy and his brother.

When we took him to the vet, I thanked Max for all he'd done for our family. Pulling him close, Jake said, "Thank you for being there when I felt like no one else was. You were my best friend."

Then Max was gone. Yet all along, he had known what we were just learning: Even without him, we were already complete. **R**

“
*When I saw Max
looking at me,
I started to see
it too. Maybe
I was worthy of
being adored.*

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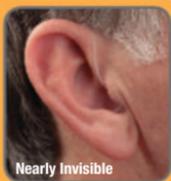


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Especially effective against diabetes, new medical programs are giving fresh groceries to low-income patients—and saving everyone money

When Is Healthy Food The Best Medicine? When It's Free

BY ASHLEY LEWIS

• THAT OLD SAYING “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” may hold some truth. In fact, one study found that in 2012, almost half of the deaths in America caused by heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes were linked to poor diet.

But knowing you should eat healthfully and actually doing it are two different things, and making the right choice isn't any easier when a pound of grapes costs more than twice as much as a pound of pasta. The Fresh Food Pharmacy aims to change that. A pilot program created by the

Geisinger Health System, a hospital network in Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey, this pharmacy resembles a grocery store stocked with fresh produce, lean meats, canned beans, and more. Even better, it's all free.

Under the program, patients with type 2 diabetes and qualifying income are prescribed a week's worth of food for their entire household, and dietitians show them how to transform it into healthy meals. After the first year, all 180 participants had improved in key health measurements, in particular their



hemoglobin A1c levels (HbA1c), the gold standard for tracking blood sugar control.

In 2012, the estimated costs associated with diabetes in the United States were \$245 billion. Geisinger will spend only about \$1,000 annually on each food-pharmacy patient. David Feinberg, Geisinger's president and CEO, calculates that "a decrease in HbA1c of one point saves us about \$8,000." With many of the patients dropping three points, the program could save \$24,000 (or more) a year in health-care costs—as well as reduce the risk of amputation, blindness, and other complications.

Geisinger isn't the only organization experimenting with produce prescriptions. Nonprofits, food banks, hospitals, and even doctors' offices around the country have implemented programs that bring the

"food is medicine" concept to life. Boston Medical Center's Preventive Food Pantry was the first such program in the country when it opened in 2001. Today it serves approximately 7,000 patients a month.

In 2010, the nonprofit organization

Wholesome Wave started the Fruit and Vegetable Rx program. Doctors give each family member \$1 per day to spend at a participating farmers' market or grocery store. The program has helped more than 11,000 low-income patients; in 2014, almost half decreased their body mass index,

thus lowering their risk for heart disease, some cancers, and many other health conditions. A new Johns Hopkins study estimates that losing weight can save up to \$16,000 per person in direct medical costs, depending upon age and the amount lost. How do you like them apples? **R**

“
All 180 people improved in key measurements, including hemoglobin A1c levels.

* * *

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AREN'T ALL THEY'RE CRACKED UP TO BE

A picture by impressionist Henri Matisse hung upside down in New York's Museum of Modern Art for 47 days in 1961 before anyone noticed. In coverage of the blunder, the *New York Times* ran part of its headline upside down.

Source: artnet.com

NOTE: Ads were removed from this edition. Please continue to page 50.

World of Medicine

Interrupted Sleep May Increase Risk for Alzheimer's

If you keep waking up in the middle of the night, your brain may be in trouble. Three recent studies have shown that breathing disorders that interrupt sleep are linked to higher levels of the beta-amyloid protein, which is associated with Alzheimer's. This was true both for people who have been diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment and for those with no symptoms. It's not clear yet if sleep disruptions actually cause dementia, but addressing them will help your brain work better in any case. If you're tired all the time, get tested by a sleep specialist.

Moderate Drinking May Reduce Diabetes Risk

While alcohol may raise your blood sugar levels, a new study of more than 70,000 healthy adults found that men who knocked back an average of 14 drinks per week reduced their risk of developing diabetes by

43 percent; women who enjoyed an average of 9 drinks per week, by 58 percent. What they drank also mattered. Choosing wine significantly reduced risk for both men and women. Beer also proved helpful for men. But women who drank spirits increased their diabetes risk by 83 percent.

Just One Workout Boosts Women's Body Image

Need a pick-me-up? In a new study, women who completed a 30-minute workout felt stronger and thinner, and the feel-good buzz lasted for at least 20 minutes. Yes, participants in the study were all regular gym goers. But what's surprising is that they got this mental boost after just one short, discrete period of exercising. The study's author believes that the quick psychological payoff could help women feel better about their bodies and embrace the power of exercise even in small amounts.



Raw Dairy a Major Cause of Food Poisoning

Raw milk is all the rage, with some nutritionists claiming that it's easier to digest than the pasteurized variety. But the Food and Drug Administration actually prohibits the interstate sale of raw milk for human consumption, and here's one good reason: According to a new study that analyzed outbreaks of food poisoning from 2009 to 2014, unpasteurized milk—along with cheese made from it—was responsible for 96 percent of all dairy-caused foodborne illnesses. That was 840 times the number of outbreaks caused by pasteurized products.

Mildly Obese More Likely to Survive Heart Attack

New research published in the *European Heart Journal: Quality of Care & Clinical Outcomes* has found that in the three years following a heart attack, mildly obese patients—those with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 to 34.9—were 30 percent more likely to spend less time in the hospital and survive than patients at a normal weight (with a BMI between

18.5 and 24.9). What's more, patients of normal weight fared as poorly as those who were extremely obese (with a BMI of 40 or higher). But don't jump to the wrong conclusion. The study's author suspects that the normal-weight patients were older and more likely to smoke than the heavier ones. "This does not suggest," the study cautions, "that heart attack patients should try to gain weight if they are of normal weight."

Cows and HIV Protection

A study published in *Nature* showed that the immune systems of cows were able to adapt and combat HIV at an unprecedented rate. Cows neutralize 20 percent of the virus strains at 42 days and 96 percent at 381 days. "In humans," one of the study authors noted, "it takes more than five years to develop the antibodies we're talking about." Cow antibodies are naturally long and loopy in structure, which turns out to be similar to antibodies that can block infection. Researchers hope this is the first step toward developing an effective vaccine for HIV infection and/or AIDS. **R**



RISE AND WHINE

I love waking up to the sound of birds arguing with their spouses.

@CONANOBRIEN

ALL IN

A Day's Work



"We have to move out—I just sold a painting."

MANUFACTURERS often give shower curtains ethereal names such as Anastasia, Summer Mist, and even Cambridge. One day, a customer walked into our home-furnishings store while I was inputting an order for shower curtains. "Excuse me," he said. "Do you have Sunday Hours?"

I looked up from my computer and said, "Can you tell me what the pattern looks like?"

"Let me rephrase," he said. "Are you open on Sundays?"

PETE HOELSCHER, Vancouver, Washington

MY ULTRASOUND technician told me about a colleague's patient. Her doctor had told her she might be having twins, and the young mother-to-be seemed anxious. But at the exam, the technician assured her, "You're not having twins. There's only one baby in there."

The young woman sighed with relief. "Oh, thank God," she said. "I really don't think I could have stood being pregnant for 18 months."

KAREN PELHAM O'STEEN, Laurel, Maryland

A FRIEND'S SON worked at a fast-food restaurant. One night while he was manning the drive-through, a customer told him that the intercom wasn't working properly. My friend's son went about filling the order while a female coworker fiddled with the intercom. She asked, "Is that OK now?"

"Well, no," the customer said.
"Now you sound like a girl." From gcfi.net

FIVE QUOTES FROM BOSSES that will leave you thinking, Hey, I can be a boss too!

■ "We're going to treat this as being required but not mandatory." (From an office in Chicago)

■ "Wait, is the Internet on?" (From an office in Bethesda, Maryland)

■ "We'll hit that bridge when we come to it." (From an office in London)

■ "Don't send information; it just confuses me." (From an office in Columbus, Ohio)

■ "It's one of those chicken-before-the-horse things." (From an office in Seattle)

Source: overheardintheoffice.com

AFTER PHOTOGRAPHING my client for a few minutes, I felt compelled to stop shooting and say, "I gotta tell ya, that's a great smile you have."

Beaming, he said, "Thanks. I got it for my birthday."

BEVERLY GUHL, Austin, Texas

SCENE: A sixth-grade class
Teacher: What are the harmful environmental effects of oil on fish?

Student: When my mom opened a can of sardines last night, it was full of oil and all the sardines were dead.

Source: gophercentral.com



OFFICE PARTY FOLLIES

Jimmy Fallon asked viewers of *The Tonight Show* for horror stories from their work's year-end gala. Here are some they survived—barely.

■ I stayed sober to avoid embarrassing myself in front of my coworkers. Then my heel broke, and I fell into the punch bowl.

■ My boss ordered two pizzas for 15 employees, then ate one all by herself.

■ My coworker got so drunk, he asked his girlfriend whether she was single. She said yes.

■ Did a Secret Santa gift exchange; mine got me a can of creamed corn.

Source: The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon

Anything funny happen to you at work lately? It could be worth \$\$\$. For details, see page 3 or go to rd.com/submit.



MONEY

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR IDENTITY **NOW**

BY JODY L. ROHLENA
AND LAUREN CAHN

IT'S SHOPPING SEASON, WHICH means you'll be looking for a steal. Unfortunately, you'll have lots of company. Pulling those credit and debit cards out of your wallet, entering your digits online—the holidays provide identity thieves with countless opportunities to swipe and swindle. That's an especially big concern this year, after the Equifax security breach, which exposed the personal information—including birth dates, addresses, credit card numbers, and Social Security numbers—of more than 145

PHOTOGRAPHS BY YASU + JUNKO





million Americans to potential crooks.

As bad as that may sound, let's put the Equifax disaster in perspective. Truth be told, some of your information was probably compromised long before that. Yahoo now says that data breaches have likely affected every one of its users. Target has just begun to settle cases related to its 2013 credit card hack, involving some 40 million customers. All told, 15.4 million Americans fell prey to identity fraud in 2016.

The thieves may seem anonymous, but they do get caught. The Internal Revenue Service has prosecuted ringleaders who paid college students to file false tax returns, mail carriers who stole refund checks, and a Walmart cashier who knowingly cashed forged refund checks. The Department of Justice is on the case too; officials believe they know the culprits behind at least one of the Yahoo attacks: Russian intelligence agents.

As frightening as the enemies may seem, they can be stopped—and fairly easily. If you are someone who ignores all the advice on how to protect your identity, it's time to act. While these high-tech thieves are certainly sophisticated, there are many monkey wrenches you can toss in their path. Here are five of the easiest—and most effective.

FIX NO. 1 Protect your Social Security number.

Your Social Security number is not as secure as you would hope. Of its nine digits, the first three are tied to where you lived when you applied for your number, the next two are a group number within that geographical location, and the last four are your serial

number. Since it's not that hard for a criminal to suss out where you were born, it's really only those last four digits that stand between you and all the problems you're trying to avoid. So guard your number with your life. Don't use it anywhere you don't have to—and you don't have to use it as often as you might think.

Jen (not her real name, as her investigation is ongoing) believes that her number was stolen after she included it on a medical form, along with the rest of her personal information. "Unfortunately," Jen told credit.com, "the police said people take those forms and sell them on the black market for others to use." The numbers could be stolen by unscrupulous staffers or captured by hackers who tap into the computer system at the health-care provider or insurance company. That said, you aren't required to give your doctor,



YOU DON'T
HAVE TO USE
YOUR SOCIAL
SECURITY
NUMBER AS
OFTEN AS YOU
MIGHT THINK.

or anyone else, your Social Security number. If you're asked for yours on a form, simply write in, "Supplied upon request." Then discuss with your doctor's staff whether they really need to have it. The stealing of Social Security numbers has become such a concern that Medicare has introduced new ID cards for senior citizens that omit the numbers.

If you believe that your Social Security number has been compromised, you can change it, though you'll need to provide the Social Security Administration with a valid reason and proof that your current number is being misused.

Unfortunately, Jen had plenty of evidence. At first, she didn't know that her identity had been stolen—she found out when she got a rejection for a Macy's credit card she hadn't applied for. When she checked her credit reports, she discovered that thieves had taken out a \$30,000 car loan and bought a used Lexus, then applied for and received an insurance policy for the vehicle. Experts say that one good way to safeguard yourself is to request a free report from one of the three major



credit bureaus every four months and look for anything suspicious.

FIX NO. 2 Strengthen all your log-in information.

If your passwords and the answers to your reminder questions are easy enough for a thief to guess, then your bank accounts, e-mail, shopping log-ins, and other secure accounts aren't secure at all. And yet cybersecurity firm Keeper Security reports that the most common



use a long nonsense phrase you might actually remember: *1W1\$h1H@dM0r3\$!* as your bank password, for example.

To make managing your passwords easier, some experts recommend using a service such as 1Password, Dashlane, Keeper, LastPass, or Apple's iCloud Keychain. All are free to download.

As for your password reminder questions, avoid using anything that could be answered with clues that thieves could dig up on social media or elsewhere online. So no high school mascot, no mother's maiden name, no street you grew up on. In 2012, a hacker got into Mitt Romney's personal e-

password—used by nearly one in six online account holders—is *123456*. The word *password* itself is the eighth most common.

As unpleasant as it may sound, experts suggest that you have a unique password for every one of your online accounts. They should be as complicated as each site's system can bear and never fewer than 12 characters, says Richard Roszko, a computer engineer and an IT consultant. Also make sure you use a mix of letters, numbers, and special characters. A good strategy is to

mail by figuring out the answer to the security question "What is your favorite pet?" His dog's name, Seamus, had appeared in many news stories.

The safest question, according to Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University, may be "What's your father's middle name?" It's easy for you to remember, but it's hard for a thief to guess and is unlikely to be floating out on the Internet. Other safer questions include "What was your first phone number?" and "Who was your favorite teacher?"

Some experts recommend answering with a non sequitur: “What is your mother’s maiden name?” *Platypus*. But any one-word answer is vulnerable, even a random one. Better to use a nonsense phrase here too.

FIX NO. 3 Lock up your phone.

Always keep your device locked and use a strong, long pass code. (You can customize its length in Settings.) Those annoying software updates often address new security issues, so don’t skip them. And don’t let apps save your passwords; they can provide entrée to your phone’s wealth of personal information.

“If you take only one extra step, a hacker will pass you up and try elsewhere,” says Roger Entner, founder of Recon Analytics, a telecom research firm.

A good safeguard plan is to use two-factor authentication. Turn it on for your phone (via Settings) and for your various e-mail, bank, credit card, and other accounts you’d like to keep secure. Once it’s activated, you’ll need two “keys” to access those accounts—usually a password and a security code.

WHERE TO TURN

If you suspect or know that your identity has been compromised or just want to learn more about identity theft:

■ **Federal Trade Commission’s ID theft hub** identitytheft.gov
877-ID-THEFT

■ **ID Theft Resource Center** idtheftcenter.org
888-400-5530

If you suspect or know that someone has filed a fraudulent tax return in your name:

■ **IRS Taxpayer Guide to Identity Theft** irs.gov/newsroom/taxpayer-guide-to-identity-theft

You receive the code in a text, an e-mail, or a phone call from whatever company’s site or app you’re trying to access. So if you’re the one trying to access the account (on, say, your sister’s laptop), you’ll be fine. But if it’s a thief who doesn’t have your phone, he or she won’t receive the code and will be locked out.

Learn more about how to keep your specific phone safe by using the Federal Communications Commission’s Smartphone Security Checker, at fcc.gov/smartphone-security.

FIX NO. 4

Don’t pay with a debit card.

Using debit cards for online shopping is a double serving of daring fate. You’re vulnerable not only because you’re shopping online but also because when a debit card is stolen, you may be out of luck. “If a credit card is hacked, you owe zero dollars on the fraud, but if your debit card gets hacked, the money is drained from your account,” Roszko explains. “You probably won’t even realize the money is gone until you get your statement, and by then, it’s gone

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO HAVE YOUR IDENTITY STOLEN

BY CHHAYA NENE

After two weeks in Finland enjoying a much-needed family vacation, I was home in California checking my mail when I saw a letter from the IRS. I thought, Finally! They've sent my refund! Wrong. It was a letter saying my identity theft claim had been received and they had opened a case. The odd thing was, I had never filed a claim.

I was puzzled, so the first thing I did was call the IRS. I found out that someone had filed a return in my name in January, two months before I usually file. He or she had created a direct deposit account with no name specified and had also filed a change of address form so that my mail would be redirected to an old address of mine.

Although the criminal investigation unit of the IRS had flagged that tax return as fraudulent, a \$1,400 refund was still



sent to the direct deposit account with no name attached to it. I couldn't believe it. When my real return arrived in March, the IRS realized that identity theft had occurred and began sending me letters informing me of the theft and the delay of my refund. But I never got those letters because they were sent to my old address and then stolen.

I had a real mess to clean up. I had to file a form requesting that the IRS trace my refund to see who had received it. The rep also said that I needed to call the Federal Trade Commission, the Social Security office, my bank, my tax

preparer, and one of the credit bureaus to alert them about what had happened. I also got a special PIN to put on my returns going forward, indicating that I'd experienced identity theft.

I finally got my refund money months later. I never found out who stole my identity or whether the crook or crooks were ever caught.

Now I'm extra careful about shredding my mail, checking my credit report regularly, and safeguarding my personal information. For example, at doctors' offices, I don't write my Social Security number on any forms. Whenever I mail anything to the IRS, I send it by Certified Mail.

I'll have to take precautions for the rest of my life. It's annoying. The worst part is that the thief or thieves got away with my refund. What a waste of taxpayer money!

COURTESY CHHAYA NENE

forever." Banks will reimburse you if you notify them within 48 hours, so monitor bank-account activity closely.

After a credit card, the next-best option is to use PayPal, one payment site trusted by all the experts we spoke to. Most agree that the newer Apple Pay and Android Pay options are safe as well.

Also be careful to shop online only with reputable, secure websites. How do you know what's secure? Look for a URL that starts with *https*—the *s* stands for "secure." And never buy anything when you are on a public Wi-Fi network, because thieves can grab your credit card number and home address. Turn off "connect automatically" settings so that your devices don't join any public network they detect. While no Wi-Fi is 100 percent safe, your home network has security settings that protect against hackers. Use a strong, long password here too.

FIX NO. 5 Get rid of those preapproved credit offers.

We're not talking about shredding them, though you certainly should. In 2003, the Federal Trade Commission estimated that 400,000 Americans had their identities stolen via mail. In fact, mail theft is on the rise, according to the U.S. Postal Service. In one extreme case in June 2016, a postal carrier was robbed at gunpoint in Rancho Cordova, California. The robber, Juan Carlos Maldonado, was part of a ring that

stole about 800 pieces of mail, which the thieves scoured for personal information they could use to access bank accounts and open credit cards. Maldonado pleaded guilty to bank fraud, identity theft, and armed robbery. He was sentenced to seven years in prison.

It's easy to stop those credit card offers. Simply call 888-5-OPTOUT, and financial institutions will remove you from their mailing lists.

Then, if you aren't planning to apply for new credit anytime soon, you should put a freeze on your credit report. A freeze will prevent anyone from taking out a loan or a credit card in your name. Of course, that includes you, which means when you're actually applying for credit—say, a mortgage, a home equity line, or a store credit card—you'll have to unfreeze your credit file. This can cost \$5 to \$10 per freeze and unfreeze through Experian and TransUnion, two of the big three credit bureaus, but it's free for life through Equifax, a concession made by the company after it admittedly bungled its response to its data breach.

Another precaution is setting up a fraud alert with one of the credit bureaus. This is a notice on your file that tells lenders to contact you before approving any applications for new credit. It's free, and when you place it with one bureau, it will notify the others to do the same. For maximum protection, *Consumer Reports* recommends using both a credit freeze and a fraud alert. **R**

IS YOUR BLADDER ALWAYS DISRUPTING YOUR DAY?

Ask your doctor about Myrbetriq® (mirabegron), the first and only overactive bladder (OAB) treatment in its class. Myrbetriq treats OAB symptoms of urgency, frequency, and leakage in adults.

In clinical trials, those taking Myrbetriq made fewer trips to the bathroom and had fewer leaks than those not taking Myrbetriq. Your results may vary.



You may be able to get your first prescription at no cost with Momentum.* Visit Myrbetriq.com.

USE OF MYRBETRIQ (meer-BEH-trick)

Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) is a prescription medicine for adults used to treat overactive bladder (OAB) with symptoms of urgency, frequency, and leakage.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Myrbetriq is not for everyone. Do not use Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any ingredients in Myrbetriq. Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq.

Please see additional Important Safety Information on next page.

*Subject to eligibility. Restrictions may apply.



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IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream.

Myrbetriq may cause allergic reactions that may be serious. If you experience swelling of the face, lips, throat or tongue, with or without difficulty breathing, stop taking Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take including medications for overactive bladder or other medicines such as thioridazine (Mellaril™ and Mellaril-S™), flecainide (Tambacor®), propafenone (Rythmol®), digoxin (Lanoxin®). Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Before taking Myrbetriq, tell your doctor if you have liver or kidney problems. The most common side effects of Myrbetriq include increased blood pressure, common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis), urinary tract infection, constipation, diarrhea, dizziness, and headache.

For further information, please talk to your healthcare professional and see Brief Summary of Prescribing Information for Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) on the following pages.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

 **Myrbetriq®**
(mirabegron)
extended-release tablets
25 mg, 50 mg



Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) extended-release tablets 25 mg, 50 mg

Brief Summary based on FDA-approved patient labeling

Read the Patient Information that comes with Myrbetriq® (mirabegron) before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This summary does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment.

What is Myrbetriq (meer-BEH-trick)?

Myrbetriq is a prescription medication for **adults** used to treat the following symptoms due to a condition called **overactive bladder**:

- urge urinary incontinence: a strong need to urinate with leaking or wetting accidents
- urgency: a strong need to urinate right away
- frequency: urinating often

It is not known if Myrbetriq is safe and effective in children.

Who should not use Myrbetriq?

Do not use Myrbetriq if you have an allergy to mirabegron or any of the ingredients in Myrbetriq. See the end of this leaflet for a complete list of ingredients in Myrbetriq.

What is overactive bladder?

Overactive bladder occurs when you cannot control your bladder contractions. When these muscle contractions happen too often or cannot be controlled, you can get symptoms of overactive bladder, which are urinary frequency, urinary urgency, and urinary incontinence (leakage).

What should I tell my doctor before taking Myrbetriq?

Before you take Myrbetriq, tell your doctor if you:

- have liver problems or kidney problems
- have very high uncontrolled blood pressure
- have trouble emptying your bladder or you have a weak urine stream
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if Myrbetriq will harm your unborn baby. Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Myrbetriq passes into your breast milk. You and your doctor should decide if you will take Myrbetriq or breastfeed. You should not do both.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Myrbetriq may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how Myrbetriq works.

Tell your doctor if you take:

- thioridazine (Mellaril™ or Mellaril-S™)
- flecainide (Tambocor®)
- propafenone (Rythmol®)
- digoxin (Lanoxin®)

How should I take Myrbetriq?

- Take Myrbetriq exactly as your doctor tells you to take it.
- You should take 1 Myrbetriq tablet 1 time a day.
- You should take Myrbetriq with water and swallow the tablet whole.
- Do not crush or chew the tablet.
- You can take Myrbetriq with or without food.
- If you miss a dose of Myrbetriq, begin taking Myrbetriq again the next day. Do not take 2 doses of Myrbetriq the same day.
- If you take too much Myrbetriq, call your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.

What are the possible side effects of Myrbetriq?

Myrbetriq may cause serious side effects including:

- **increased blood pressure.** Myrbetriq may cause your blood pressure to increase or make your blood pressure worse if you have a history of high blood pressure. It is recommended that your doctor check your blood pressure while you are taking Myrbetriq.

- **inability to empty your bladder (urinary retention).** Myrbetriq may increase your chances of not being able to empty your bladder if you have bladder outlet obstruction or if you are taking other medicines to treat overactive bladder. Tell your doctor right away if you are unable to empty your bladder.
- **angioedema.** Myrbetriq may cause an allergic reaction with swelling of the lips, face, tongue, throat with or without difficulty breathing. Stop using Myrbetriq and tell your doctor right away.

The **most common side effects** of Myrbetriq include:

- increased blood pressure
- common cold symptoms (nasopharyngitis)
- urinary tract infection
- constipation
- diarrhea
- dizziness
- headache

Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away or if you have swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat, hives, skin rash or itching while taking Myrbetriq.

These are not all the possible side effects of Myrbetriq.

For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

How should I store Myrbetriq?

- Store Myrbetriq between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C). Keep the bottle closed.
- Safely throw away medicine that is out of date or no longer needed.

Keep Myrbetriq and all medicines out of the reach of children.

General information about the safe and effective use of Myrbetriq

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in the Patient Information leaflet. Do not use Myrbetriq for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give Myrbetriq to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

Where can I go for more information?

This is a summary of the most important information about Myrbetriq. If you would like more information, talk with your doctor. You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about Myrbetriq that is written for health professionals.

For more information, visit www.Myrbetriq.com or call (800) 727-7003.

What are the ingredients in Myrbetriq?

Active ingredient: mirabegron

Inactive ingredients: polyethylene oxide, polyethylene glycol, hydroxypropyl cellulose, butylated hydroxytoluene, magnesium stearate, hypromellose, yellow ferric oxide and red ferric oxide (25 mg Myrbetriq tablet only).

Rx Only

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Astellas Pharma US, Inc.
Northbrook, Illinois 60062

 **Myrbetriq[®]**
(mirabegron)
extended release tablets
25 mg, 50 mg

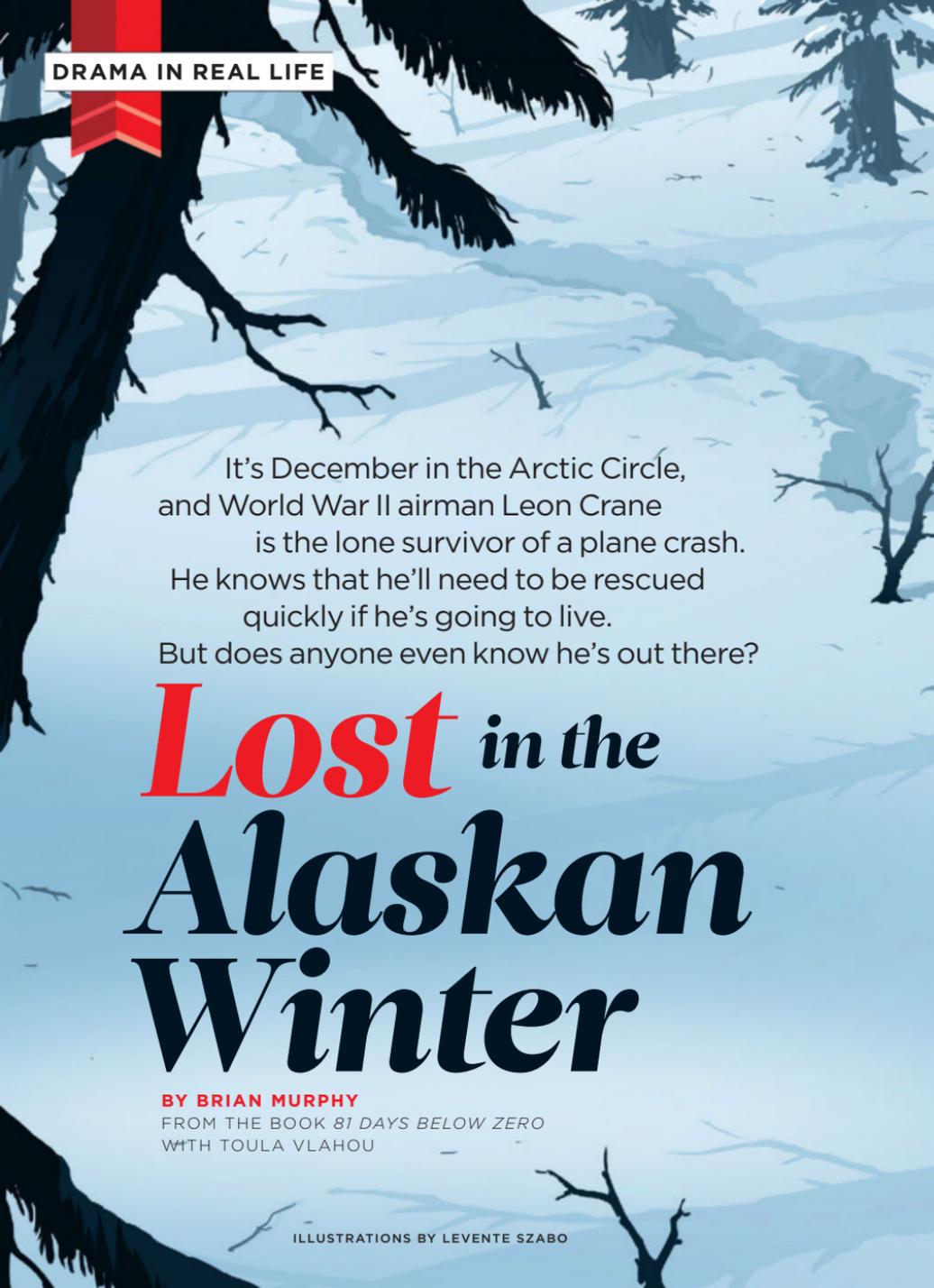
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DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

It's December in the Arctic Circle, and World War II airman Leon Crane is the lone survivor of a plane crash. He knows that he'll need to be rescued quickly if he's going to live. But does anyone even know he's out there?

Lost in the *Alaskan Winter*

BY BRIAN MURPHY

FROM THE BOOK *81 DAYS BELOW ZERO*
WITH TOULA VLAHOU

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEVENTE SZABO



It was approaching noon on December 21, 1943, in the Tanana River valley of Alaska, not far from the Arctic Circle, and the five men on the *Iceberg Inez* were preparing to crash. Minutes before, the crew of the B-24 bomber had been testing a modified system on the plane's four propellers when the plane seemed to

stall, sending it diving into a roller-coaster plunge. G-forces slammed pilots Leon Crane and Harold Hoskin as they lurched at the controls. Wind screamed over the cockpit glass. The airspeed gauge was redlining. The flight instruments were blinking out. Then something that sounded like a pistol shot came from the tail, followed by cracking noises.

"Open bomb bays!" Crane shouted to the crew chief.

"Bail out!" Hoskin yelled to the other crew members.

The crash alarm bells jangled like a fire drill as Crane yanked off his mittens to secure his chute. And then, before he knew what was happening, he was in a free fall. He felt for the rip cord. The chute poured out. He swayed beneath it and watched the *Iceberg Inez* spin off before it slammed into a mountain slope and erupted in flames. Crane himself thudded into the powdery snow near the banks of a stream, two miles away from his plane, he guessed. The gas on board would keep the

wreckage burning for a while, which would be good for a rescue mission. But the fire also meant the supplies on board—sleeping bags, signal flares, a gun, and ammunition—were lost, almost certainly along

with any other crew members who might have survived the crash.

Still, Crane shouted out for Hoskin and the rest of the men. He listened for any hint of life. Nothing. He was alone.

The sky was already turning dark. Crane took a few stumbling steps and found that the snow covered a jumble of rocks that made walking nearly impossible. There was no chance to reach the crash site before nightfall, nor did he have any idea where he was. And a broken ankle would be a death sentence.

Fortunately, the 23-year-old pilot had a few provisions to keep him warm until help arrived. He had the silk parachute, which he could use as a sleeping bag. His flight suit was intact. He had on three pairs of wool socks under his heavy mukluks. He also had his flight helmet and a pack of matches, as well as a knife. But he didn't have his mittens, which he'd left on board in the rush to prep his chute. Without them, his unprotected fingers could

become frostbitten within ten minutes.

He tucked his hands in his armpits and thought back to the last radio contact with the air base at Ladd Field in Fairbanks. That had been at least an hour before the plane had fallen, which meant the search area would be huge—a radius of about 200 miles from their last known position.

It was minus-60 degrees Fahrenheit. Crane knew he needed to get a fire going or he might not last the night, so he gathered driftwood. His fingers were numb, but he managed to strike a match. The little flame wasn't enough to catch. He tried four matches, but they did nothing except singe his fingertips.

Then he remembered a letter from his father he kept in his parka. Crane fed it into the wood. The fifth match worked, and a fire rose up. He let the fire thaw his fingers before wrapping himself in the chute. He thought about what would happen if rescue never came. How long, he wondered, would it take to die?

IN THE MORNING, Crane ran through his odds of being saved. The short daylight allowed little time for search planes. And in this climate, the hunt would be measured in days, not weeks, before it was called off. What if a plane never found him? There was water gurgling up through the ice on the stream, but he had no food. And his hands were already developing a pasty white look—the first signs of frostbite.



Crane was convinced that his best chance of survival was to leave the crash area and explore downstream. The water had to eventually drain into something, he reasoned, probably the Yukon River, and there was a chance of finding a trapper riding out the winter. But first he called out for his crewmates once again. When there was no response, he gathered up his parachute and his matches and set off. It took hours to cover one mile through the waist-deep drifts and ice-coated rocks.

As the sky darkened, Crane picked a patch of level ground by the stream to build a fire. But he had already burned his only kindling, his father's letter, so it took several matches to get flames going. At this rate, he would have only a two-week supply of matches.

By the fire's warmth, he inspected his hands. They were numb, and the color had drained from his fingertips. It was insanity to try to walk farther, he realized. It was wiser to stay in the vicinity of the crash site for a week, after which the air base would probably call off the search. Then he'd start walking again.

HUNGER GRIPPED Crane with an angry, clawing need. He had to find something to eat. Walking in deadly cold under these harsh conditions could demand about 6,000 calories a day. A few days of that and he'd simply collapse.

He saw a few red squirrels, one of the few animals that do not migrate

or hibernate during the Alaskan winter. Crane broke off a branch, took out his knife, and began to whittle down a point until he had a spear. Then he took aim and threw. The spear flew through the air, wobbly and slow, missing its target by a foot. Next, Crane tried a sneak attack, jabbing at one of the spry animals. He missed, then missed again. Enraged, Crane grabbed rocks and hurled them at the squirrels. "Go to hell!" he yelled.

Beaten, he spent the next three days wrapped in his parachute in a kind of hibernation, climbing out only to drink from the river and feed the fire.

ALTHOUGH CRANE was alone in the wilderness, he'd not been forgotten. The first rescue flight went out of Ladd Field eight hours after the last radio contact with the *Iceberg Inez*. Within two days, more than 20 search missions were launched—all coming up empty. At the base, the crew's bunks and lockers remained untouched for a while. Eventually, though, their personal items were packed up and shipped to the next of kin.

WITH NO FOOD and fading hopes, Crane felt the need to do something. He decided the river was too much of an unknown, so on December 29, eight days after the crash of the *Iceberg Inez*, he began hiking overland in search of civilization. With each step, he had to plow aside snow. Numbness began to spread downward from his knees. Not



a single stride landed easily. He stumbled several times, which forced him to pull his hands from the warmth and safety of his pockets to avoid toppling over. At midday, Crane stopped. In two hours, he had gone all of roughly 300 feet. I'm simply marching to my death, he thought. Crane turned around and followed his tracks back to his campsite on the river. The fire was nearly out, but some wood still glowed. He coaxed flames from the spruce and cloaked himself in the parachute for another night.

He left again the next morning, this time trying to walk atop the frozen river. Crane followed the pathway through white hills, telling himself, Around the next bend, there will be a cabin with a fire and a family who will feed me supper with steaming coffee. But bend after bend, it was just more river, more hills. And there was something else



IN TWO HOURS,
CRANE HAD GONE
ROUGHLY 300 FEET.
I'M MARCHING TO MY
DEATH, HE THOUGHT.

concerning him. It had started with a few moments of disjointed, meandering thoughts, and a few times over the past few days, he'd found himself in a daze. Crane felt himself slipping, his judgment fraying because of cold, hunger, fatigue, and loneliness.

Dusk gave way to darkness, and as he blindly trundled on, a log cabin came into view, half covered with snow. He stumbled over rocks, running and yelling, not caring that his hands were exposed. He cleared away a drift and opened the door.

The place was about ten feet wide, with a dirt floor and a low ceiling. A wooden bunk stood in the corner. There was a table with burlap sacks on it, tied with twine. His frigid fingers couldn't loosen the knots, so he cut a bag with his knife. Sugar! There was a tin of cocoa, one of dried milk, and a box of raisins. Crane stuffed the raisins into his mouth. He lit a fire and filled a frying pan with snow, and soon he was holding a tin cup of hot cocoa in both hands. Then he fell asleep in the bunk.



HE WAS NAKED AND
LOSING BODY HEAT.
HE WRUNG OUT HIS
CLOTHES AND LAID
THEM NEAR THE FIRE.

When he awoke, he made more cocoa. Sated, he filled his pockets with raisins and set off downriver, certain that there must be a village nearby. The river bent to the west, and the valley narrowed. He hiked on, hour after hour. All he saw was more wilderness. Darkness fell, and a half-moon rose in the cloudless sky. The temperature had tumbled down to 40 below, he figured. It was decision time. His hands were too numb to light a match, and he knew he could not ride out the night without a fire. He made the painful choice. There was no village. He had to return to the cabin.

He stumbled back along the river. Icicles hung from his nose. It hurt too much to brush them off. To stop was to perish. He just kept his legs moving. One step. One breath. Dawn came, and still there was no sign of the cabin. The landscape was not familiar—he had paid no attention when he'd headed out the previous morning. It was close to noon—after 30 hours of walking—before Crane saw the cabin again. He staggered through the door and made a fire. Then he wrapped himself inside the silk folds of his parachute and collapsed into the bunk.

CRANE SPENT 48 hours in bed before hunger forced him to his feet. He stepped outside to explore a small shelter he'd noticed earlier. As luck would have it, it held food, clothes, a rifle, ammunition, and, most important, a pair of moose-hide mittens. Crane used the next three weeks to regain his strength. But if he was going to make it, he'd need to carry more supplies. So he took two old boards for runners, pulled a window frame from the cabin, and nailed a washtub to the frame to make a sled. He packed it with food and gear.

At dawn on February 12, 1944, 53 days since the crash, he said goodbye to the cabin that had saved his life. He looped a rope harness around his chest and hauled the sled over the riverbank and onto the ice.

The going was tough. The harness dug into his chest, and he managed

only one mile in the first hour. For four days he hiked on, his world whittled down to the act of a single step, then the next step. At one point, as Crane leaned forward to push through a drift, the ice folded under his feet. He gulped a breath as the surface gave way. The sled halted his fall long enough for him to twist around, grab the rope, and haul himself back. He could feel the water leaking through the tops of his mukluks and soaking his body below his waist.

He had to act fast. Crane lumbered toward the bank with the sled in tow. He surged onto the rocky shore and, with trembling hands that could barely strike a match, made a fire.

Crane strung a rope between two trees and draped his tent over it, forming a crude shelter. He pulled off his flight suit, long underwear, mukluks, and socks. He was naked and losing body heat. He wrung out his clothes as best he could and laid them near the fire. Then he cowered naked and let the warmth of the fire slow his shivering.

The next day, his clothes dry, Crane was back on the move. A week had passed since he'd left the safety of the cabin. His legs just kept moving,

making maybe four miles a day. He came upon another deserted cabin. Then more days of walking. March 7, March 8, March 9 ...

On March 10, at first light, Crane stumbled upon a trail and followed it. It led away from the river, then back toward the ice. There, on the other side of the river, was a cabin. Then came barking. The sound of a dog.

"Ho!" Crane yelled. "Anyone there?"

And for the first time in 81 days, someone answered.

A TRAPPER took Crane in, gave him food and clothes, and took him by dogsled to Woodchopper, Alaska, where a mail plane flew him back to Ladd Field. He was the lone survivor of the crash of the *Iceberg Inez*.

Crane met a nurse at Ladd Field. After the war, they got married and had six children. They made their home in the Philadelphia area, where Crane had a career first as an aeronautical engineer and later as a home builder. Leon Crane, who died in 2002 at age 83, rarely spoke of his time in Alaska. Other people had faced far worse in the war, he'd explain. What he experienced was, by comparison, simply a breeze. **R**

ADAPTED FROM *81 DAYS BELOW ZERO: THE INCREDIBLE SURVIVAL STORY OF A WORLD WAR II PILOT IN ALASKA'S FROZEN WILDERNESS*.
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ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

I wish I had a voodoo doll of myself so I could give it a back rub.

ESTRANGER81 on reddit.com

Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus ... And We've Met Him!

24 magical, heartening,
joyous reader encounters with
the jolly man in the red suit

Last year, when our three-year-old great-granddaughter Kylie was taken to see Santa Claus, she made sure to give him her wish list of toys. A week later, she ran into a different Santa in a mall. He stopped to ask what she wanted for Christmas. Kylie was appalled and let him know: **"If you can't remember what I told you last week, how are you going to remember on Christmas Eve?!"**

MARY PAUL, *Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

One Christmas Eve, there was a knock on our door. It was Santa—red suit, white beard, and all! My parents invited him in, and he proceeded to pose for photos with us and eat our cookies. After a while, he wished us all a merry Christmas and left. **Once the door closed behind him, we all looked at one another and asked, "Who ordered the Santa?"** To this day, we have no idea who that man was.

KATHY BRODY, *Chino Hills, California*





"I want an American Girl doll, Polly Pockets, a gerbil, a karaoke machine ..."

Years ago, drowning in too many responsibilities, I found myself devoid of any Christmas spirit. One day, I stopped at a red light. As I sorted through my long list of onerous tasks, a beat-up sedan pulled up next to me. **Behind the wheel was Santa Claus belting out Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline."** The man did not have a care in the world. Realizing he had an audience, he turned, looked me straight in the eye, and shouted,

"Merry Christmas!" As he drove off, his enthusiasm lifted my spirits and officially kicked off my holiday season.

THOMAS WARRNER, Winter Springs, Florida

As my son Mike and I drove to the mall, we passed a Salvation Army Santa ringing his bell. "Mike," I said, "there's Santa!" He shook his head. "That's just some guy in a Santa suit," he said. It saddened me to think that maybe my son no longer believed in

Santa, and we drove the rest of the way in silence. At the mall, we spotted another Santa greeting young believers. Suddenly, Mike took off toward him. Turning back to me, he shouted, **"Now, there's the real Santa!"**

MICHAEL E. FAHEY, Huntley, Illinois

A friend asked me to dress as Santa to surprise her son. I went over to their house, changed into a Santa suit in the bathroom, and, to the delight of the little boy, came out with a loud "Ho, ho, ho!" **After a half hour, I returned to the bathroom, changed back into my regular clothes, and exited the bathroom. The boy went in after me.**

He looked around for Santa. Then, reaching the only possible conclusion, he lifted the toilet seat and shouted, "Bye, Santa!"

KEVIN CUDDIHY,
Fairfax, Virginia

It had been a rough year: A single father with two young daughters, I was out of work and out of money. With little choice, I told the girls, "It looks like our gift from Santa will be the gift of our love for each other." Then a miracle occurred. I won \$1,000 in a contest. I kept it a secret as I went on a shopping spree and spent Christmas Eve wrapping presents for my girls, all the time thinking, Boy, will they be surprised!

The next morning, I went to the living room to lay out the gifts and froze. There were already dozens of presents under the Christmas tree—all with my name on them. **My girls had felt bad that Dad wouldn't be getting any gifts, so they'd carefully wrapped their favorite stuffed animals and other toys so that I would have a merry Christmas.** As I stared at the gifts through tear-filled eyes, I promised myself to never again doubt Santa Claus.

ANDREW SHEKTOR,
Berwick, Pennsylvania



My six-year-old granddaughter attended a Christmas party where Santa was the honored guest. When it was her turn to sit on his lap, Santa asked her name. "Shelbi," she whispered. "Can you repeat that?" asked Santa. Annoyed, Shelbi said loudly, **"Oh, you know me, Larry. You're my bus driver."**

ELLEN SEEDALL,
Idaho Falls, Idaho

On Christmas Eve, my husband went next door to retrieve a gift for our son and daughter. I had just slipped into bed when I heard him return. **Our three-year-old son also heard him, and soon he was in my bed clinging to me, nervously excited that Santa was in the house.**

We waited in silence

for a few minutes, until he whispered, "Too bad Daddy can't be here."

CONNIE CHAMBERLAIN,
West Lafayette, Indiana

When Santa came to the nursing home where I worked, the first patient he visited was Margaret. She was confined to her bed but was thrilled when he roared "Ho, ho, ho"

in her doorway. "Santa!" she said softly.

"Merry Christmas, Margaret. What do you want for Christmas, little girl?"

"I want a kiss from you, Santa," she said with a grin. Santa gently took Margaret's hand, bent down, and kissed her. He then added quietly, "God bless you, Margaret."

"God bless you, too, Santa," she whispered back.

Santa went on to visit every bedridden patient in the home. Afterward, he asked his nurse escort whether he could say goodbye to Margaret. Struggling to find the right words, she told him that Margaret had died soon after he'd left her room. She said that in her final moments, Margaret had spoken of being blessed by Santa. Santa thanked the nurse for telling him and then quickly left the floor. After all, nobody would want to see Santa Claus cry.

STEPHEN RUSINIAK, Wayne, New Jersey

I was five when my brother took me to the firehouse to see Santa Claus, who, unbeknownst to me then, was actually my father. Later, when I got home, I excitedly told my mother that Santa had boots just like Dad's! She smiled. **Then I added, "And he had lots of women come sit on his lap too."** There went the smile.

DIANNA REED, Millersburg, Pennsylvania

We immigrated to America from China when I was six. Because I was shy and didn't speak English, I had few friends. My days were spent at home with my brother. Sometimes we'd help our neighbor Mr. Mueller pull weeds. One Christmas Day, there was a knock at the door. Grandma opened

**"AHHHH,
THE SWEET LIFE!"**



**FROSTED SWEET.
CRUNCHY
WHEAT.**

**FEED YOUR
INNER KID**

it, and there stood a big fellow in red with a snow-white beard, laughing, **"Ho, ho, ho!" He handed out presents and made us laugh.** I had so much fun. It was years later when I learned that our special Santa was our neighbor Mr. Mueller.

JOANNE TANG,
Litchfield Park, Arizona

It was Christmas Eve, and our three-year-old son was wired. "You need to go to bed right away," my husband told him, "because Santa will look in your window to make sure you're asleep before he leaves presents." Suddenly, our son's eyes grew big, and his voice quavered as he shrieked, **"I don't want the big, scary man with the beard looking in my window!"** Needless to say, we were up very, very late that Christmas Eve with our son in bed between us.

MICHELLE RODENBURG, *Arvada, Colorado*

My nearly two-year-old granddaughter was reluctant to meet Santa Claus for the first time. Nevertheless, **she patiently sat on his lap and waited while we took picture after picture. Finally, having had enough, she figured a way out of her predicament.** She turned to Santa and stated, "I pooped." With

that, Santa said, "She's done," lifted her up, and handed her back to her mother.

RUTH TURNER, *Callao, Virginia*

While I was president of a state college in New York, I came

home from work one December day and drove my five-year-old son, Brett, to Santa's village. Brett was nervous but excited and had a long wish list of toys clutched in his hand. When it was our turn, we approached the great man seated in his big chair. **That was when Santa, who turned out to be a student at my college, stood up, extended his hand, and said, "Dr. Andersen. This is an unexpected pleasure!"** Brett dropped his list, stared at me with astonishment, and said, "Why didn't you

tell me you knew Santa?"

ROGER ANDERSEN, *Roseville, California*

I'd been hired to appear at a church dressed as Santa. But **traffic was so bad, my elves and I were late. When we finally arrived, we were met with scowls from the annoyed parishioners.** Suddenly, the angry silence was pierced by a shout: "Santa!" A small four-year-old



My sister-in-law had driven her five-year-old son Josh to the mall with the purpose of visiting Santa and telling him what he wanted for Christmas. After parking the car, they got as far as the entrance when Josh stopped, threw out his hands to block their path, and announced, **"Wait! I forgot the toy catalog!"**

LAUREL HOLT,
Murfreesboro, Tennessee



girl came running from the other side of the room and leaped into my arms. "Oh, Santa," she breathlessly cried out, "I love you!" That turned the scowls into smiles.

DUNCAN FIFE, *Foster City, California*

It was December 1935, during the Depression. Although she was a single mother of three with little money, Mom never turned away any hungry person who came to our door. One day, she welcomed in a man with white hair and a great white beard. While she fixed him a meal, he asked me in the kindest way, "What do you want for Christmas?" "Skates," I quickly replied. "You'll get them," he assured me. I was elated. Not so my mother—she couldn't afford them. **Christmas morning came, and there were no skates under the tree. Mother tried to explain that I wouldn't be getting them, but I knew differently.**

I ran to the front door and threw it open, and there on the porch was a pair of skates. My mother later told me that a family friend had left them there for me. But I know it was Santa.

ZIZA BIVENS, *Port Orchard, Washington*

Several years ago, after numerous fertility-drug treatments, I became pregnant. Six months later, we lost the baby. My husband and I were devastated. A few years and tears later, we tried another round of treatments. But after many months of futility, my wonderful husband said, "Neither one of us can take this much longer. So let's agree, if after this last treatment we do not get pregnant, we'll do

"YEP, STILL CRUNCHY!"



**FROSTED SWEET.
CRUNCHY
WHEAT.**

**FEED YOUR
INNER KID**

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something crazy like purchase a 1967 candy-apple-red Corvette and enjoy our lives as is." I agreed.

Lo and behold, we finally had our bouncing baby boy. A few months later, we were at the mall, snapping photos of Santa holding him. **As Santa handed our son back, he shocked us both by saying, "It's a lot better than a Corvette, no?"**

ANNEMARIE WENNER,
Chardon, Ohio

Funds were tight for my friend Jo and her husband. But Tinker, Jo's five-year-old, was convinced that since he'd been good all year, Santa would bring him a bike. And not just any bike, but a rare yellow one. "Don't worry, Mom," he said. "He'll bring it." Jo's sister and her five-year-old son lived with Jo, and as it happened that little boy was getting a red bike.

On Christmas Eve, I told my mother the story of Tinker and the yellow bike. **"You can't let that happen!" she said. "That little boy won't understand why Santa brought his cousin a new bike and not him!"** Mom handed me a pile of bills. "Take this, and get him that bike." By now it was late, and most stores were closed. I called the only place I knew that sold

bikes. A man answered. I asked if he had any boys' bikes left. "Only one," he said. Then he added apologetically, "But it's yellow."

CAROLE MARTINEZ, *New Orleans, Louisiana*

When I was eight, I attended a Christmas party with my mother, since Daddy was working late. Unfortunately, I had a terrible headache and begged my mom to take me home.

She said she would, but only after Santa had passed out our gifts. Then Santa arrived.

When he called my name, I sat on his lap. That's when I saw his distinctive mechanic's hands, covered with grease and calloused.

Santa was my dad. Amazingly, my headache didn't hurt so much anymore.

DEBI MICHEL,
Santa Cruz, California



My two granddaughters had a visit from Santa (my son-in-law's coworker). Santa asked the two-year-old, "So what do you want for Christmas?" Before the shy little girl could give an answer, her four-year-old sister gave it for her:

"She wants me to have a Barbie doll."

BRENDA MORRIS,
Salisbury, North Carolina



Because we didn't have much money, our family

focused less on gift giving and more on the birth of Jesus. But that doesn't mean we went without. **We lived close to a Franciscan convent, and each Christmas, the nuns brought us a huge box overflowing with aromatic baked goods—some dipped in decadent**

chocolate, others with a chewy fruitcake texture. What a treasure to discover that Santa dresses in many colors besides red. Sometimes Santa arrives in plain black dresses and can bake.

MELANIE SALAVA, *Riverview, Florida*

One Christmas Eve, Dad wanted us to experience watching Santa place gifts under the tree. So, unknown to my siblings and me, he had a coworker dress as Santa and come to our house around the time we were going to bed. **When Dad's friend "sneaked" into the house, I was so excited to see Santa. So was our dog, who attacked him.** I reached the kitchen in time to find red and white fur on the floor and to see Santa leaping over the back fence for his life.

STANLEY SONS, *Prosser, Washington*

By the time I was seven, my parents had been divorced three years. Still, when we woke up that Christmas morning, Daddy was there. My little sister and I were told there was a gift from Santa waiting for us outside. We sprinted out the door, and there it was, a beautiful white playhouse complete with a front porch. Inside, it was furnished with a table and two chairs, a small baby cradle with two dolls, and a kitchen area with dishes. Daddy had constructed it, while Mother bought the furniture and made curtains. We spent the morning eating breakfast in our little white playhouse with Mother and Daddy. **Even though our parents were no longer together, we knew they would always be "together" for their girls. And they were.** **R**

SHARON SMITHERMAN, *Woodstock, Virginia*

**"YOU GUESSED IT,
STILL CRUNCHY!"**



**FROSTED SWEET.
CRUNCHY
WHEAT.**

**FEED YOUR
INNER KID**

From office get-togethers to swanky shindigs, you can commit a party foul anywhere. These tips can help save you.

'Tis the Season of Social Disasters

BY LAURA LEE

FROM THE BOOK *AVOIDING EVERYDAY DISASTERS*

THE AWKWARD GREETING

Smiling conveys openness and warmth, but if you immediately jump to a full-on grin, you will come across like a salesperson. Instead, try this trick: Stand in front of a mirror and repeat the word

great in a number of funny voices. This should make you smile. The next time you meet someone, think *great*, and you'll flash a natural-looking smile. Keep your arms uncrossed and your hands unclenched. If you can, stand up for greetings. If you're in a booth at a restaurant and can't get up, extend your hand and say, "Excuse me for not standing. Pleased to meet you." Lastly, poor eye contact will make you seem dishonest, but don't carry it too far. If you stare too long, you'll make the other person uncomfortable.



...Um? I forget the next bit...

YAWN!

YAWN!



THE JOKE'S ON YOU

This may sound obvious, but to tell a joke, you have to remember it. The biggest joke disasters happen when you launch into your humorous tale only to discover that you have not quite committed the pertinent details—for example, the punch line—to memory. So as soon as you hear a joke that you might want to tell later, write it down.

Telling a joke is not like reenacting *The Barber of Seville*. Be brief, upbeat, and to the point. Get to the punch line in as few steps as possible, but be sure you don't leave out any important bits.

PLAYING PASS THE BABY

When you meet a new baby, there is a good chance that someone will ask whether you want to hold her. If you are the type that gets nervous about this, have faith. You do not randomly

drop other things, so the odds are you can manage to cradle a newborn for two minutes. Just relax and let the baby rest in your arms. The main thing to remember is that you need to support her head: In the first four to six weeks, a baby's head is actually heavier than the muscles of the neck can handle, and she won't develop enough neck control to hold up her own head until she is three to four months old. It is not necessary to bring the baby a gift, although it's not wrong to do so and will likely be appreciated. If the new arrival has siblings, bring something small for them, too, so they do not feel jealous.





SHOWDOWN AT HIGH SPOON

If you're not one for parties with formal table settings, there is a simple rule that will keep you from committing a cutlery gaffe. Start with the outermost fork and work your way in. There is an exception—a soup spoon may be needed before you get to the next fork on the far left—but it should be obvious that even the stiff set does not use forks for soup.

Bread is the most common way people mess up on etiquette, at least in the minds of those with an eye for such things. Instead of biting into a whole roll, put it on your bread plate and tear off bite-size pieces to butter and eat. You should also check your napkin use. Once everyone at your table is seated, unfold the napkin and lay it across your lap. When you finish eating and leave the table, loosely crumple your napkin to hide any stains and set it to the left of your plate.

MEET MY EX-BEST FRIEND'S LOVER'S SON

You're over 30 and have been with the same guy for three years, but you are not married. Calling him your *boyfriend* seems childish. *Significant other* is a euphemistic mouthful. *Partner* sounds as if you're in business together, and *lover* seems too steamy. How do you introduce him? Along similar lines, how do you introduce your ex-husband? Or his sister, who is still your friend, or his biological children with his new wife?

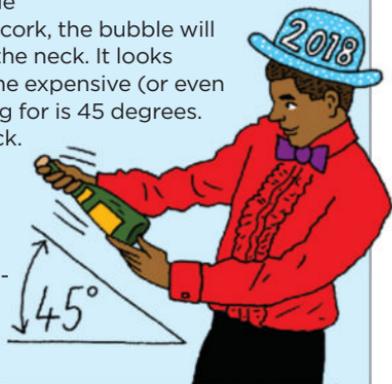
Simple. Introduce the person by name. "Debbie, I'd like you to meet Ian. Ian, this is Debbie." As the conversation progresses, the subject of how you know each other may come up naturally. You can decide then how much to disclose. Most people you meet will not need to know—nor will they even be that interested in—your family history and dramas.



CHAMPAGNE AND SUFFERING

You do not want the bubbly bottle to be vertical when you're opening it, or you might shoot yourself in the face. If it is too close to horizontal, however, the gas will float up and form a bubble in the bottle's shoulder. When you remove the cork, the bubble will expand all at once and shoot the liquid out of the neck. It looks impressive, but it's messy, and you'll waste some expensive (or even cheap) champagne. So the angle you're looking for is 45 degrees. This tilt will ensure that the gas stays in the neck.

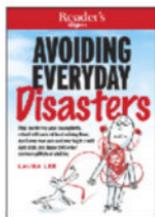
Still, just to be sure, do not aim the bottle directly at any person or anything fragile—it is considered a social faux pas to destroy your aunt Minnie's collection of Precious Moments figurines. To avoid losing your grip and accidentally dropping the bottle on your feet, twist the bottle rather than the cork.



POST-PARTY DISORDER

Dehydration is one of the main causes of hangover symptoms. The best thing to do is to alternate each alcoholic drink with a glass of water.

The next day, drink a lot of water or an electrolyte solution (such as Gatorade). Even though you may not feel like it, eat a well-balanced breakfast. Alcohol raises your insulin levels, which can make you feel weak. Eating will raise your glucose levels. If you feel nauseated, snack on toast or crackers to settle your stomach. Avoid coffee; caffeine narrows your blood vessels and boosts your blood pressure, which will make your hangover worse. Also, as much as you may want pain relief, steer clear of ibuprofen, aspirin, and acetaminophen. All may aggravate inflammation in the stomach and liver caused by the alcohol. **R**



To dodge 496 other home, health, money, and life screwups, check out *Avoiding Everyday Disasters*, available at rdstore.com/avoiding-everyday-disasters and wherever books are sold.



68 *Secrets Travelers Need to Know*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE VOORHES

Follow these no-nonsense rules to take the pain out of every trip this holiday season—and beyond



JUST THE TICKET



1.

Do Know What a Great Deal Looks Like

“When to fly and buy” reports from hopper.com will tell you what price is a good deal for any given route. And Google Flights’ “tracked prices” feature will e-mail you when the price of a selected itinerary has gone up or down.

2.

Don't Stress if You Haven't Booked Yet

“Data from the past two years suggest the best time to book a domestic flight for the 2017 holiday season will be between three and seven weeks out,” says Randi Wolfson, head of communications at the travel-search site skyscanner.com.

3.

Do Check Several Online Travel Agencies

“There’s a misconception that every online travel agency [OTA] has the same fares,” says George Hobica of airfarewatchdog.com. “But because they sometimes cut special deals with the airlines, it’s worth it to check them all.” A site such as kayak.com will scan multiple agencies in one search.

4.

Don't Overlook Airlines That Aren't in Searches

Delta has stopped working with certain OTAs, so make

sure you've seen its fares for your itinerary before you book. And you'll always have to check Southwest's website for its fares.

5.

Do Book Through The Airline

If there's not much difference in price between an airline's fare and an OTA's fare, book with the airline. In the event of a delay or a cancellation, you'll need to go back to whoever issued your ticket to get rebooked, and you could be better off if you dealt with the airline directly rather than with a third-party agent, explains Akash Gupta of thepointsguy.com.

6.

Don't Always Book the Family Together

If you're buying multiple tickets, search for them individually and as a group. Airline ticket prices are full of quirks, and sometimes individual seats are cheaper than a block. If you decide to buy individually, make sure there's no per-ticket processing charge that would offset the savings.

7.

Do Fly on Christmas

If dinner doesn't hit the table until early evening, consider flying on Christmas morning to save an average of \$50 per person compared with traveling on the Friday preceding the holiday. Depart before that Friday to cut costs further. Flights on Wednesday, December 20, and Wednesday, December 27, are likely to have the deepest discounts this season, according to cheapair.com.

8.

Don't Ignore Air+Hotel Bundles

Booking both at the same time may cost a lot less than booking separately. "If the hotel doesn't have to show their price and the airlines don't have to show their price, both are willing to give lower prices not available otherwise," Tim MacDonald, former general manager of expedia.com, told the *New York Times*.

9.

Do Subscribe to a Newsletter

Airlines often offer discounts via e-mail.

Put your name on their lists and you'll be in the know about promo codes, flash sales, and other special offers. We've seen discounts of up to 50 percent on certain airlines and routes.

10.

Don't Miss Out on Fare-Drop Refunds

The law requires airlines to allow you to rebook your flight for free within 24 hours of buying your ticket, as long as you're more than a week from the departure date. After that, most airlines charge up to \$200 to change flights, but Southwest will never charge a fee.

11.

Do Review Your Group Memberships

AARP members get up to 10 percent off at many hotel chains and up to 25 percent off some car rentals. AAA offers similar deals. One surprising source of discounts: Costco. It offers its members deals on cars and hotels as well as on some excellent vacation packages. Many employers also offer airline and hotel discounts.

PAIN RELIEF



12. DON'T SIT WITH YOUR KNEES IN YOUR CHIN JetBlue offers the most legroom in economy, according to *Consumer Reports*. Each airline has its own signature amenity, so you might want to shop accordingly. For instance, if in-flight entertainment is your priority, opt for Virgin America, which offers free Wi-Fi, movies, and television shows.

13. DO BE A (VERY) EARLY BIRD Delays inevitably stack up over the course of the day. The earlier in the morning you fly, the better chance you have of avoiding them.

14. DON'T GO NEAR THE COLD IF YOU CAN HELP IT If you have connecting flights, choose warm-weather cities for your layovers. Phoenix and Atlanta are less susceptible to severe winter weather—and the flight delays and cancellations it often brings—than, say, Chicago or Denver.

15. DO POP A PEPTO-BISMOL The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says travelers can reduce the risk of intestinal trouble by about 50 percent by taking Pepto-Bismol or Kaopectate preventively—either two chewable tablets or two ounces of liquid—four times a day. If you have other health conditions, check with your doctor first.

16. DON'T FORGET TO CHECK IN THE NIGHT BEFORE If you end up getting to the airport late, the airline is more likely to give away your seat if you haven't checked in.



HACK YOUR BAGS



17. Do Work Out A Color Scheme

"I wear black almost exclusively when I travel," says flight attendant Kara Mulder. If that feels too solemn for your holiday festivities, try planning your outfits around a cheerier color. The goal is to be able to mix and match a good

number of outfits so you need fewer articles of clothing overall.

18. Don't Pack the Way Santa Does

Shop online and ship gifts directly to your destination—especially if you're staying with friends or family and can easily do your wrapping there.

19. Do Seal In Freshness

Top the inside of your suitcase with a dryer sheet. Your clothes will smell laundry fresh when you arrive at your destination.

20. Don't Walk on Your Clothes

Put your shoes in a shower cap before you pack them, and



you'll keep dirty footprints off your clean duds.

21. Do Protect With Plastic

"I'll even Ziploc my clothes," says Mulder. It's much cheaper to wrap up that fancy Christmas party outfit than it is to buy a new one if your moisturizer explodes.

22. Don't Use a Purse As Your Personal Item

To maximize what you can take on board, use a tote or a backpack as your personal item. If you still want your purse with you, slip it inside the larger bag.

23. Do Get a Shampoo Bar

Lush Cosmetics offers one for \$10.95 that lasts three times as long as a bottle of shampoo and won't be confiscated by the TSA. Plus, it can't leak.

24. Don't Lose Track of Your Bag

Tile (thetileapp.com, \$25) is a Bluetooth device that sends a signal from your bag (or whatever you attach it to) to your phone. It has a range of up to 200 feet, depending on the model, enough to alert you when your suitcase is approaching the baggage claim.

AT THE AIRPORT



25. DON'T BUY WATER "Most airports have filtered water systems," says Jeanette Pavini, a savings expert at coupons.com. Bring an empty refillable water bottle through security, and then fill it at the terminal.

26. DO SIT NEAR THE AIRPORT LOUNGE You might be able to hop on the lounge's Wi-Fi, if the airport doesn't provide any. Visit foxnomad.com for a map with Wi-Fi passwords for airports around the world.

27. DON'T BUY ELECTRONICS Headphones at the airport are especially overpriced. "If you must buy them, you'll get prices closest to retail at Best Buy's kiosks," says Coleman Collins, author of *The Road Warrior*.

28. DO READ AND RETURN Many airport bookstores are owned by the same company, and if you buy a book from one of them, you can return it to any of the chain's stores for a half-price refund. Just keep your receipt and return the book within six months. Ask a cashier for details.

29. DO AMUSE YOURSELF IF YOU'RE DELAYED The site gateguru.com lists amenities—restaurants, spas, children's play areas—at dozens of airports.

30. DON'T WAIT FOR THE GATE AGENT IF YOUR FLIGHT IS CANCELED

Instead, call the airline as you stand in line. You'll likely reach an agent faster, and he or she won't be as frazzled as the poor soul at the airport.



SURVIVING WITH THE FAMILY

31. DON'T LET A SQUABBLE GET OUT OF HAND According to family therapist Hal Runkel, the word *ouch* can stop an argument in its tracks. Say, "Ouch. That one hurt. I don't know whether you were meaning to hurt me, but that's what you did," Runkel tells *Business Insider Australia*. This wake-up call can get you back to the core issue and away from hurtful territory.

32. DO SUGGEST WAYS TO HELP Everyone has one relative who never pitches in. Give Uncle Lazybones the benefit of the doubt and assume he doesn't know how to help—then offer suggestions. For example, "Uncle, I'll leave the laundry detergent on top of the washer should you need it."

33. DON'T GET INTO IT WITH ADULT CHILDREN Whether they've been out of the house for five years or fifty, trust adult children to make their own decisions, even if you disagree. Comments about your children's parenting strategies or how they split their holiday time with their spouses' families can be especially sensitive.

34. DO SKIP A LITTLE OF THE FUN One study by consumer behaviorists found that interrupting a pleasant experience with a less pleasant one can intensify a person's overall enjoyment. Tackle one annoying task—such as starting your taxes—and the contrast will remind you how special vacation time with the family can be.

WHEELS UP



35. Do Speak Up if You're Afraid to Fly "Tell a flight attendant, and he or she will keep an eye on you," says Mulder. That could mean anything from a few calming words to a complimentary glass of wine.

36. Don't Skip the Safety Video Even if you've seen it a hundred times, watch it again. It's about safety first, of course. But some of them are actually fun now, as the airlines have been putting on a talent competition with their videos lately. (Virgin America's looks like something from MTV.)

37. Do Count the Rows to the Nearest Emergency Exit Yes, it's a worst-case-scenario thing to do, but if the plane should have problems, the cabin could fill with smoke and become difficult to navigate. Making a mental note of how far you need to go to get to the exit could save your life.

38. Don't Sleep Through Takeoff and Landing You'll limit your ability to pop your ears, which could lead to pain

or even moderate to severe hearing loss.

39. Do Give Kids a Lollipop If they are too young for chewing gum, sucking on a lollipop will relieve pressure in their ears. (It's all about swallowing frequently.)

40. Don't Get Dehydrated Not all flight-induced headaches are caused by increased air pressure. "It's really easy to get dehydrated in the events leading up to the flight," says Mulder. Drink eight ounces of water for every hour in the air.

41. Do Try This Turbulence Trick Jiggle your body slightly when you hit rough air, suggests Jamie Wortley, a public relations consultant at skyscanner.com. Your movement will counteract that of the plane and help you feel less jostled around. (Don't be self-conscious: The plane will be making the other passengers jiggle a little too.)

42. Don't Close the Air Vent Keep it open to create an air current that blows germs away from you, increasing the odds that you'll stay healthy. That said, use a tissue to touch the vent. Research has shown it's one of the dirtiest spots on the plane.



43. Do Take a Hike

Sitting for too long in a confined space can lead to potentially harmful blood clots. The CDC recommends getting up and walking around the cabin every two to three hours to reduce the risk. And don't cross your legs while you're sitting.

44. Don't Catch a

Cold One study found that close quarters and low cabin humidity (which lowers immunity) make you 113 times more likely to catch a cold on a plane than on an ordinary day. Keep your nose moisturized and ward off germs with a saline nasal spray, and use hand sanitizer frequently.

45. Do Ask About

Switching Seats One study found that sitting within two rows of someone with flu-like symptoms increases your chance of getting sick by 3.6 percent. Sit within two seats of the sick passenger, and your chance of coming down with the flu goes up by 7.7 percent. If there's room, quietly ask the flight attendant if a move might be possible.

46. Don't Hurt Your

Back Using a lumbar pillow or a rolled-up jacket to support your lower back can work wonders. Also, keeping your arms on the armrests will alleviate pressure on your back.

47. Do Make the Airplane Food Taste a Little Less Bland

The key here is to wear headphones. Oxford University professor of experimental psychology Charles Spence says that the sound of the plane's engines can contribute to fliers' inability to taste and smell food. Wearing noise-canceling headphones could mitigate that, he says.

48. Don't Use Your U-Shaped Pillow as Directed

Position it backward to prevent your chin from falling forward should you nod off. Also, spray it with lavender linen spray for a soothing scent that could help lull you to sleep faster.

DRIVERS' ED**49. DO ADD YOUR OWN SHOCK ABSORBERS**

If your journey entails a long drive, consider purchasing padding or seat cushions. Full-seat foam options are available for as little as \$30.

50. DON'T EAT CANDY

It might give you a quick energy boost, but it wears off fast. Opt for a healthy protein-rich snack such as

nuts to rejuvenate yourself without the sugar crash.

51. DO STOP MORE OFTEN THAN YOU'RE USED TO

Every two hours or so, stop to stretch your legs and rest your eyes. Even if you don't have time for a nap while you're stopped, the change of pace will keep you more alert once you set off again.



52. DON'T TAKE BREAKS WHILE TRAFFIC IS MOVING

You'll need to stop, but save gas by doing it during rush hour. Stop-and-go traffic drains your mileage as well as your patience.

53. DO HANG A SHOE ORGANIZER OVER THE SEAT

Especially if you've got kids, it's a great way to organize first-aid items, snacks, books, and electronics.

54. DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE (EVEN NONALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES)

A study by the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration found that distracted driving, which includes drinking and eating at the wheel, causes 80 percent of crashes. Hot coffee, which has a tendency to spill, is a major no-no. Chocolate is, too, since it easily becomes a melted mess.

55. DO CONSIDER DITCHING THE CAR

Need to decide between renting a car and relying on taxis? If the longest distance you're traveling is between the airport and where you're staying, you're probably better off using cabs or services such as Uber and Lyft.

GET A ROOM



56. DON'T BE SHY ABOUT BARGAINING

Find the best hotel deal you can online, and then call the hotel directly to ask if it can beat what you've found, says Pavini. Booking with the hotel will give you more flexibility should you need to change your reservation, and talking to a person gives you a higher chance of nabbing an upgrade.

57. DO BRING UP A SPECIAL OCCASION

Celebrating a birthday or an anniversary? Tell the booking agent. "They'll make note of that in your reservation, and you will often get an upgrade when you check in," says Pavini.

58. DON'T SKIP THE REWARDS CLUBS

They're free, and they get you perks such as free Wi-Fi, priority check-in, late check-out, and

points toward future free stays. If you're not a member, mention that when you book your room, says Pavini: "Say, 'If I join now, can you upgrade me or can I get a better deal?'"

59. DO ASK ABOUT THE AIRPORT SHUTTLE

Many guests find out their hotel offers a complimentary one only after they've arrived.

60. DON'T GET STUCK IN A NOISY ROOM

Especially around the holidays, other guests might gather before parties or return from them in the wee hours. Rooms in the middle of a floor are

ECELOP/SHUTTERSTOCK



generally the quietest, since they're not near the elevators, ice machines, or cleaning closets.

61. DO LOOK INTO RENTALS

Airbnb, Home-Away, and other short-term rentals are great options, especially if they can take the place of renting several hotel rooms for big families. But be careful: This type of accommodation isn't legal everywhere—and you could be evicted mid-stay if your rental isn't up to code. New York City and New Orleans are among the destinations that put restrictions on renting a person's private home.

62. DON'T USE THE ICE BUCKET

Home to cool, moist contents, hotel ice buckets can easily become breeding grounds for germs, says Jennifer Stagg, MD. Use the plastic liner that comes with the bucket (or ask for one if it doesn't).

63. DO REMOVE THE BED-SPREAD ASAP

It might be changed only four times a year, Reneta McCarthy, a former housekeeping manager for a major American hotel chain, told huffingtonpost.com.

64. DON'T FORGET THE RULE OF OPPOSITES

In general, you'll want to book business hotels during their downtime (on weekends) and resort hotels during theirs (on weekdays). Sunday, which isn't in demand by business or leisure travelers, is almost always the cheapest night to book.

65. DO PEEL AN ORANGE WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Hotel rooms can smell a little antiseptic. Peeling an orange will give off a naturally clean and homey aroma.

66. DON'T SUFFER WITH DRY AIR

Because of climate-controlled rooms and

windows that don't open, the air in hotels can be dry. If your room has a kitchen area, heat water in the teakettle and let the steam escape into the room until most of the water has evaporated. Or run water over a towel and hang it near the air vent.

67. DO TRY A DIY PRICE DROP

Notice that the price dropped on rooms at your hotel? Book it. Then cancel your old reservation—most hotels will let you cancel within 48 or even 24 hours before your arrival date. (Check your booking terms first.)

68. DON'T ORDER ROOM SERVICE

Sure, it can be fun and even a bit romantic, but room service is also pricey. Save money by having food delivered from a local eatery. Seamless or Grubhub will show you what's nearby—it'll most likely taste better too. **R**



PART OF YOUR BALANCED BREAKFAST

The reality is, a vanilla soy latte is a type of three-bean soup.

@LOCKWOODDEWITT

Laughter

THE BEST MEDICINE



A WOMAN IS in an exclusive pet store looking to buy a sweater for her dog. After witnessing much hemming and hawing and the scrutinizing of the size of each item, the salesperson finally pipes in. “Why don’t you bring the dog in for a fitting?” he says.

“I can’t do that,” the customer says. “The sweater is a surprise.”

Submitted by **GEORGE KLOSS**,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

ON THE 13TH DAY of Christmas, my true love said to me, “I think I might be a hoarder.”

@JENSTATSKY

A TURTLE’S CROSSING the road when he’s mugged by two snails. When the police show up to investigate, they ask him what happened. The shaken turtle replies, “I don’t know. It all happened so fast.”

Source: beinghuman.com

LATE SHOW HOST Stephen Colbert has a few things he'd like to confess ...

■ Sometimes when I'm out to dinner with my wife, I'll propose so we'll get free dessert.

■ I like being an adult, but I wish all my shoes were Velcro.

■ When I go into a McDonald's that has the calories printed on the menu, I pretend they're points and I'm going to win.

■ Sometimes I lie awake at night, afraid I'll die before I get to use all my Forever stamps.

■ Sometimes I wish I had more health problems because the people in pharmaceutical ads have more picnics than I do.

*From Stephen Colbert's Midnight Confessions
by Stephen Colbert (Simon & Schuster)*

AN ELDERLY WOMAN lived in Canada, near the North Dakota border. One day, her son ran into the house holding a letter. "Mom," he said, "the government has decided that our land is really part of the United States. We can choose whether we're Americans or Canadians!"

"We'll say we're Americans," his mother said. "I couldn't stand another one of those Canadian winters."

Source: jerrymabbott.com

PRINCE PHILIP looks out the window on Christmas Eve. "That's some reindeer," he says.

The queen replies, "Sixty-three years. Yes, that is a lot." Source: express.co.uk



NOW WE'RE COOKIN'

■ Billion-dollar idea. A smoke detector that shuts off when you yell, "I'm just cooking!"

🐦@LEMMYWINKLER

■ I never realized how much of parenthood would involve competing with the dog for my kids' leftover fries. 🐦@LURKATHOMEMOM

■ A lady posted her grandmother's brownie recipe, so I tried making them. Turns out her grandma was a terrible baker.

🐦@DDSMIDT

■ Relationship status: My wife asked me what I wanted for dinner and then told me I was wrong.

🐦@XPLODINGUNICORN

■ I wanted to go out tonight, but the avocado I bought this week will finally be ripe enough to eat between 8 p.m. and 8:15 p.m., so I can't.

🐦@TANISHALOVE

(TANISHA L. RAMIREZ)

■ Just ate a burrito so big that I had to forget algebra to make room.

ALISON AGOSTI, comedian

■ Cheese. The adult form of milk.

RICHARD CONDON, novelist

Your funny joke, list, or quote might be worth \$\$\$\$. For details, see page 3 or go to rd.com/submit.



WHEN AN ENCYCLOPEDIA MISPRINT
BRINGS TWO BOOK LOVERS TOGETHER,
THE ONLY THING THAT STANDS BETWEEN THEM
IS THE BARS OF A MARYLAND PRISON

The
PRISONER
and the
ENCYCLOPEDIA
EDITOR

BY DANIEL A. GROSS FROM NEWYORKER.COM

ONE DAY IN MID-2016, Robin Woods drove seven hours from his home in Maryland to visit a man named Mark Stevens in Amherst, Massachusetts. The two had corresponded for years, and they'd spoken on the

phone dozens of times. But they had never met in person. Woods, who is bald and broad shouldered, parked his car and walked along a tree-lined street to Stevens's house. He seemed nervous and excited as he knocked on the door. A wiry man with white hair and glasses opened it.

Within a few minutes, Woods, 54, and Stevens, 66, were sitting in the living room, talking about books. The conversation seemed both apt and improbable: When Woods had first written to Stevens, in 2004, he was serving a 16-year prison sentence in Jessup, Maryland, for breaking and entering.

And yet it was a book that had brought them together.

At Jessup, Woods had bought and begun reading *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia*, a nearly five-pound tome that starts with an entry on the German city of Aachen and ends with *zymogen*, an inactive protein precursor to enzymes. He

in a letter. "I am writing to you at this time to advise you of a misprint in your FINE!! Collegiate Encyclopedia." He described the error and offered his thanks for Merriam-Webster's reference books. "I would be lost without them," he wrote, unsure whether he'd ever get a response.

What Woods didn't mention in his first letter to Stevens was that the encyclopedia represented the culmination of his self-education. Woods grew up in a housing project in Cumberland, Maryland. Cumberland was once an industrial center but has become one of the poorest metropolitan areas in America. Woods was first sent to prison at

23, for firing his grandfather's rifle through an apartment window after a drug-related dispute. He was young, embittered, and almost completely

illiterate. "I had never read a book in my life," he says.

Woods remembers enjoying first grade, but he says he was bullied because of his light skin. (Woods was raised by his mother, who was African American. His father was of mixed race.) In second grade, he developed an antagonistic relationship with his teacher, who made him sit in a coat closet whenever he annoyed her. Eventually, the school transferred him to a special education

**"EVEN THOUGH I WAS CONFINED
IN A CELL, MY MIND WAS FREE,"
WOODS SAYS. "I COULD ESCAPE."**

hoped to read all its alphabetical entries, which exceeded 25,000, and he spent hours flipping through the pages. One day, he was puzzled to read an entry stating that the 11th-century ruler Toghril Beg had entered Baghdad in 1955. He quickly realized that it should have been 1055. "I read it several times to make sure," he says. Then he turned to the masthead, which listed the editor, Mark A. Stevens.

"Dear Mr. Stevens," Woods wrote



Stevens (right) asked the prison to return Woods's books, vouching for his character.

program. As he progressed through the grades, instead of learning to read and write, he was given chores such as collecting attendance slips and stacking milk in the cafeteria refrigerator. These tasks earned him mostly A's and B's. "Of course, I didn't learn nothing," he says. "They say it takes a community to raise a child. It takes one to destroy a child too." Woods ultimately dropped out of high school.

During his first stint in prison, Woods began his own course of study. He was sent to a notoriously harsh prison in Hagerstown, Maryland. He resented authority figures and often directed outbursts at the guards, who responded by putting him on lockup. For 23 hours at a time, and sometimes longer, Woods would be alone in a cell that had no television or radio. One day, a man with a cart of books wound his way

through the lockup tiers, shouting, "Library call!" Woods wasn't interested at first, but his boredom won out: He decided to borrow *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *The Sicilian*, a Mafia novel by Mario Puzo.

The autobiography proved "too complicated," and *The Sicilian* was only slightly easier. Still, Woods persisted. "Many, many words I had to skip over because I couldn't read them," Woods recalls. Each page took him about five minutes but left him with a glow of accomplishment. By the time he got to the end, about a week had passed. "I remember that I wept," Woods says—not because of what he had read but because he had succeeded in reading.

Woods soon bought his first dictionary at the prison commissary and began etching words into his memory by copying them down and reading them aloud. He read into the early hours of the morning. "Even though I was confined in a cell, my mind was free," Woods says. "I could escape."

For a brief time, Woods also regained his physical freedom. In 1987, he finished his sentence and moved back to Cumberland, where he lived in a shack and worked occasionally for a man who cleaned offices. Books had expanded Woods's

world, but they hadn't made it any easier for him to stay out of trouble. One night, Woods says, he drove to one of the offices he'd helped clean, knocked out a window, and stole several thousand dollars' worth of equipment.

The next day, he went to a local club and, over a game of pool, tried to sell some of the equipment. When a group of state troopers walked in the side door, he didn't put up a fight. Not even two years had passed since his release, and Woods was once again incarcerated at the prison in Hagerstown—an institution he had come to detest. Because of his prior record, Woods received a harsh sentence: 16 years for two counts of breaking and entering. In 1991, after Woods got caught up in a prison riot, his sentence was extended by seven years.

THERE ARE A FEW WAYS that books enter prisons. They're sold at prison commissaries and lent by prison libraries; nonprofits also distribute donated books to prisoners. There are state and federal restrictions, of course: In some institutions, hardcover books may be sent to an inmate only if they're from a publisher, a book club, or a bookstore; the U.S. Bureau of Prisons also prohibits texts that are "detrimental to the security, good order, or discipline of the institution" or that "may

facilitate criminal activity." Many prisons also add their own idiosyncratic rules.

Even so, Woods managed to assemble a small library in his cell. "A lot of prisoners put emphasis on how many Nike shoes they have," he says. "I would wear a pair of prison tennis shoes if necessary, but I had eight or nine hundred dollars' worth of books." Woods ordered his encyclopedia through the mail after reading about it in a catalog. When it arrived, he says, it was carefully inspected for contraband.

IN LATE NOVEMBER 2004, when Mark Stevens received his first letter from Robin Woods, he responded on Merriam-Webster, Inc., letterhead. "I believe you're the first to have spotted the error in the Toghriil Beg entry; by 1955 Toghriil was no longer exactly in his prime," Stevens wrote. "Please stay on the lookout for more." Woods was thrilled, and soon he wrote again, highlighting errors in the entries for Edward the Confessor and 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān—"not as a critic, but as a friend," he explained in his letter. "For I believe that M.W.I. is the *crème de la crème*. I would like to help it to stay that away [sic]!"

Over the next two years, Stevens sent 18 letters to Woods; Woods sent several dozen to Stevens. They discussed the life of Cleopatra and the self-education of Malcolm X, but

Woods barely discussed his criminal record, and Stevens never asked. "They were perfectly executed letters, and very courteous," Stevens says. "It still seems astonishing to me." One letter concluded, "I have the honor to be, Sir, your most obedient servant."

But in 2005, it seemed as if all of that was about to change. Woods learned that he would be transferred, without a clear explanation, to a supermax prison in Baltimore. Officials told him he wouldn't be allowed to bring his books.

Woods protested. Within days of arriving at his new cell, he went on a hunger strike. "I've gone crazy and will not eat until they allow me to keep my books," he wrote to Stevens. Several weeks later, he wrote another letter, this one short and despondent: "I look like walking death. But I'm hardheaded and shall not give up." Locked in a single room, Woods lost about 70 pounds.

One day, as Woods remembers it, he saw a shadow on the wall of his cell. It was the Maryland commissioner of corrections, who asked about his health. "He had a very curious look on his face," Woods recalls. Finally, the commissioner asked, "Who is this Mark Stevens?"

Woods remembers thinking, How does he know Mr. Stevens? As it

turns out, Stevens had written to two prison wardens, and eventually word had gotten to the commissioner, who called him. They spoke about Woods and the encyclopedia. Not long after that, the commissioner offered Woods a deal. If he would end his hunger strike and follow the rules for a year, the commissioner would cut short the extended sentence and send Woods home. In the meantime, his books would be restored to him.

"I feel like a kid getting out of high

**"I'VE GONE CRAZY AND WILL
NOT EAT UNTIL THEY ALLOW
ME TO KEEP MY BOOKS,"
HE WROTE TO STEVENS.**

school," Woods wrote to Stevens near the end of 2006. "The whole world is waiting for me!" In January 2007, 18 years after the start of his incarceration and five years before the scheduled conclusion of his extended sentence, Robin Woods was discharged from prison. He had about \$50 to his name, the minimum required by law.

Woods once more moved back to Cumberland, where he was given housing by a local pastor. Every few months, he called Stevens. The calls continued for a decade before they finally arranged to meet.

When Woods visited Stevens at his

home in Amherst in June 2016, they were soon acting like old friends. “I never met you until today, but I love you very much,” Woods told Stevens. “You’re a good man.” They took hikes, went to a play, and visited

partly, he says, because it takes considerable effort just to pay the bills and keep clear of the law. But he still keeps a copy of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia* close.

“While my body is here in prison, my mind has seen the world,” Woods once wrote to Stevens. “There are a lot of places that I hope to see that I have read about in my many books.”

“I NEVER MET YOU UNTIL TODAY, BUT I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH,” WOODS TOLD STEVENS. “YOU’RE A GOOD MAN.”

the home of Emily Dickinson, where a plaque quotes her lines: “There is no Frigate like a Book / To take us Lands away.” On Sunday, after a goodbye hug, Woods began the long drive home.

Woods rarely reads anymore—

Stevens responded by quoting another book, T. H. White’s *The Once and Future King*.

“The best thing for being sad,” Merlyn says in the novel, “is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails.” 

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CLASSIC POEMS AS INTERNET HEADLINES

- “This Man Stops by Woods on a Snowy Eve ... You Won’t BELIEVE What Happens Next!” by Robert Frost
- “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud—Until This Dog’s Instagram Gave My Life Meaning!” by William Wordsworth
- “First I Was like, ‘Who Cares About a Grecian Urn?’ But by the End, I Was in TEARS” by John Keats
- “We Should All Go Gentle into That Good Night, Right? Here Are 10 Reasons Why You’re Dead Wrong” by Dylan Thomas

GRAHAM BARNHART AND PAIGE QUINONES from mcsweeneys.net

That's Outrageous!

BOTTOMS UP!

IF YOU DISLIKE drinking alone but your best friend is your cat, good news! There's now wine available with the feline barfly in mind. Your tabby can enjoy a fine Pinot Meow or White Kittendel from Colorado-based Apollo Peak. Or, if kitty has a refined palate, perhaps some Meow & Chandon from the Pet Winery in Fort Myers, Florida. The kitty hooch is essentially nonalcoholic watered-down catnip because, let's face it, cats can be bad drunks.

Source: *New York Times*



SPEAKING OF literary mixology, book titles, it turns out, lend themselves to quirky-sounding cocktails. *Tequila Mockingbird* by Tim Federle is devoted to such concoctions. Among the more tortured entries: The Pitcher of Dorian Grey Goose (Grey Goose vodka, lemonade, mint), Are You There God? It's Me, Margarita (tequila, lime juice, triple sec), and Bridget Jones's Daiquiri (strawberries, champagne, lemon juice, and granulated sugar).

FOR THOSE WHO love books but hate to read, take a page from the Columbia Room in Washington, DC. As part of a recent tasting menu, the bar served a libation made from old texts. Century-old tomes were vacuum-sealed in grape-seed oil, and the infusion was washed with a neutral high-proof spirit. The tincture was then combined with Armagnac, sherry, a porcini cordial, and eucalyptus. The result, said the chief bartender, had "that musty, fusty, old library quality to it."

Source: *Washingtonian*

IF YOU CAN SURVIVE the harsh Yukon winters, chances are you can stomach anything, including a Sour-toe Cocktail. It's a shot of your favorite liquor garnished with a petrified human toe. You read that right: Hard liquor is involved ... and a human toe, one of more than ten that the Sourdough Saloon in Dawson City has been gifted by unfortunates who lost them to frostbite or accident. Apparently, in the Great White North, this is how they while away the winters—more than 100,000 brave souls have ordered these toetails.

Source: dawsoncity.ca

*Sarah and Callum,
at their home in
Washington, DC*



First told at a show by the Moth,
the live storytelling group, at the
Tarrytown Music Hall in Tarrytown, New York

When one of her identical twins died
shortly after he was born, a brave mother
decided to donate his tissue to science.
Then she followed it wherever it went.

A Family **DISCOVERS** *Its* **RARE GIFT**

BY SARAH GRAY

I WAS THREE MONTHS PREGNANT with identical twin boys when my husband, Ross, and I learned that one of them had a fatal birth defect. Our son Thomas had anencephaly, which means that his skull and brain were not formed properly. Babies with this diagnosis typically die in utero or within minutes, hours, or days of being born.

This news was devastating, and also confusing. I had never heard of this before, and it didn't run in my family. I wondered, Was it something I ate, was it something I drank, was it something I did? But then, even if it was, why was one of them healthy?

So I was wrestling with a lot of questions that would never have answers. And I had to make peace with that. It was like having an annoying hum in the background.

Six months later, the twins were born, and they were both born alive. Thomas lived for six days. Callum was healthy, and Ross and I moved on the best that we could. We had a beautiful, healthy boy to raise.

We decided early on to tell Callum the truth about his brother. We have a few pictures of Thomas in our home. It was a few years later that Callum started to comprehend what we were trying to tell him.

Sometimes he said things that were sad, and sometimes he said things that were kind of funny. We visit Thomas's grave a couple of times a year, and one time we told Callum that we were going to bring some flowers to put on Thomas's grave.

Callum picked up one of his little Matchbox cars and said, "I want to put this on the grave too," which I thought was really sweet.

And once we were there, Callum said, "Is Thomas scared under there?"

Of course I don't really know the answer to that, you know? But I could pretend, so I said, "No, he's not scared."

Later on, we were on the couch watching cartoons, and Callum said, "Mommy, what is it like in heaven?"

Again, I don't really know, so I did my best. I just said, "You know, some people think it's a place you go when you die. Some people don't believe it's there."



We were able to donate his liver, cord blood, retinas, and corneas. I was curious about whether these donations made a difference.

I was also curious about Thomas's after-life, but in a totally different way. Ross and I had decided to donate Thomas's organs to science. While his death was inevitable, we thought maybe it could be productive. We learned that because he would be too small at birth to qualify for transplant, he'd be a good

candidate to donate for research. We were able to donate his liver, his cord blood, his retinas, and his corneas.

I was curious about whether these donations made a difference. A short time later, I was on a business trip in Boston, and I remembered that Thomas's corneas had gone to a division of Harvard Medical School called the Schepens Eye Research Institute. So I looked, and I saw it was only a few miles from my hotel, and I thought, I would love to visit this lab and learn more about where Thomas's donation went.

Because I'd given them a donation, but it wasn't just signing a check or



giving a bag of clothes—I had given them the gift of my child.

However, in order to donate, I had to sign away my rights to any future information about the donation.

So if they did not welcome me, I would understand. Although I felt in my heart that I wanted to visit, that I should be allowed to visit, and that if I asked the right person, I might even be invited for a visit. But I also wondered, If they reject me, am I emotionally ready for that? What's that going to do to my grief?

But I called. I explained to the receptionist, "I donated my son's eyes to you a couple of years ago. I'm in town on business for a couple of days. Is there any chance I can stop by for a ten-minute tour?"

There was a pause. And lucky for me, the receptionist was very compassionate. She didn't laugh or say it was

Thomas lived for six days. Years later, doctors still relied on his donated tissue.

weird, when it was a little weird.

She said, "I've never had this request before. I don't know who to transfer you to, but don't hang up. I'm going to find somebody for you. Don't hang up."

So she connected me to someone in donor relations. It was not organ donor relations. It was *financial* donor relations, but she knew how to give a tour. So we set an appointment.

I showed up the next day, and she introduced me to one of the people who requested corneas, Dr. James Zieske, an associate professor of ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School. I stood in his doorway, and the donor relations woman explained who I was. Dr. Zieske was eating a salad at his desk, and he stood up, and he thanked me for my donation.

He shook my hand and said, "Do you have any questions for me?"

I was so emotional at meeting him.

I said, “How many corneas do you request in a year?”

He said, “My lab requests about ten a year. We would request more, but they are hard to get, and infant eyes are like gold to us.”

My heart was just in my throat. I could barely choke out the words.

I said, “Could you tell me why?”

He said that infant eyes are unusual because most of us are older when we die, and that’s when you donate your eyes. But unlike adult eyes, infant eyes have the potential to regenerate longer in the lab because the cells are younger and divide more easily.

He said, “If you don’t mind my asking, how many years ago did your son die?”

I said, “About two years ago.”

He said, “We are likely still studying your son’s eye cells, and they are probably in this lab right now.”

So the tour concluded, and my guide said to me, “I’ll never forget you. Please keep in touch with me.”

I felt something in me starting to change. I felt that my son had found his place in the world, and that place was Harvard.

So my son got into Harvard, and I’m now an Ivy League mom.

But I also got the bug, and I thought

maybe I could visit the three other places too. I made some phone calls, I set up two appointments in Durham, North Carolina, and this time I took my husband and our son.

Our next visit was to Duke University, at the Center for Human Genet-

ics, where the cord blood had gone. We met the director of the center, who had also worked on the Human Genome Project. He explained that being able to study the blood from each twin’s umbilical cord was extremely valuable to them. He was studying a field called epigenetics, which

means “on top of genetics.” Epigenetic changes can help determine whether genes are turned on or off, and it’s one of the reasons that identical twins can still be different. Our twins’ cord blood was able to help the researchers establish a benchmark to learn more about how anencephaly develops.

We then drove down the street to Cytonet, which is the place that got Thomas’s liver. We met the president and eight staff members and even the woman who’d held Thomas’s liver in her hands. They explained to us that his liver had been used in a six-liver study to determine the best temperature at which to freeze infant liver cells for a lifesaving therapy. They also said we were the only donor family who had ever visited.



“We would request more corneas, but they are hard to get. Infant eyes are like gold to us.”



Ross, Callum, one-year-old Jocelyn, and the author, in their living room

A few years later, I set up the final appointment, in Philadelphia, and Ross, Callum, and I went to visit the University of Pennsylvania. That's where we met the researcher who'd received Thomas's retinas. She was studying retinoblastoma, which is a potentially deadly cancer of the retina. She explained that she had been waiting six years for a sample like Thomas's. It was so precious to her that she had saved some of it, and five years later, she still had some of it in her freezer, and did we want to see it?

Yes, we did.

She then gave Callum a Penn T-shirt, and she offered him an internship.

So I had thought when we made these donations—in the abstract, in

the generic sense—that it was a nice thing to do. But I was amazed and blown away when I met the researchers and they told me specifically what they were doing with each donation. My feeling of grief started to turn into pride. I felt that Thomas was introducing us to his colleagues and his coworkers. He was introducing me to people I never would have met and taking me to places I never would have been.

The humming that I felt in the back of my mind stopped.

Recently, Ross, Callum, and I went to Philadelphia to accept an award from the National Disease Research Interchange for advocacy. We went onstage, and Callum accepted the award. He was so proud. I took the opportunity to ask him a question.

I asked, "Do you know why we are accepting this award?"

And he said, "For helping people."

I know that as he grows older, there will be more questions, tough questions. And I'm going to have to teach him that there are some times in life when there are questions that are important, but you'll still never get the answer. But it's worth the try, and you never know until you ask. **R**

*Sarah Gray is the author of **A Life Everlasting: The Extraordinary Story of One Boy's Gift to Medical Science.***

Some 44 million Americans owe \$1.4 trillion in college loans. That's certainly bad news for the next generation—and for some older folks too. So who's getting rich while borrowers struggle?

THE STUDENT DEBT RACKET

BY JAMES B. STEELE AND LANCE WILLIAMS
FROM REVEAL

IN THE SUMMER OF 2010, Saul Newton was a 20-year-old rifleman stationed at a U.S. Army outpost in the remote, dangerous Arghandab River valley in Afghanistan.

It was a radical change for a kid from suburban Milwaukee, who only months before had been a student at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. But after two years of tuition hikes, Newton found himself with about



\$6,500



\$13,000



\$3,000



\$24,000



\$0



\$22,000



\$218,000



\$0



\$102,000



\$90,000



\$173,000



\$180,000



\$67,000



\$0



\$42,000



\$17,000



\$67,000



\$157,000



\$150,000



\$0



\$3,000



\$49,000



\$9,000



\$22,000



\$125,000

\$10,000 in federal student loans and the prospect of borrowing still more if he stayed in school. “I couldn’t afford it anymore,” he says. He dropped out and enlisted, hoping to go back to school one day with financial help from the GI Bill. And then he went off to fight the Taliban.

But no matter what he faced in Afghanistan, once a month, Newton says, he went to the wooden shack on the outpost where the unit kept a laptop computer. That’s where he made his monthly \$100 student-loan payment. He worried that if he didn’t pay his loans on time, his credit would never recover. (The government offers student-loan deferments to active soldiers in wartime, but Newton wasn’t aware of that.)

Today, back home and the executive director of the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, he has just made his last loan payment. However, reaching that milestone hasn’t made Newton any more optimistic about the choices other young people face, especially given the steadily rising cost of college combined with many states’ steep cuts to their education programs. “You shouldn’t have to go to war to get a college education,” he says.

ALMOST EVERYONE KNOWS someone like Newton, someone up to his or her neck in student-loan payments. There are roughly 44 million Americans in debt to their educations. Their average bill is \$32,731. Do the math,

and the country’s total school debt is a staggering \$1.4 trillion. That’s more than the annual salaries of everyone who lives in Australia combined. All of which raises some obvious but often unexplored questions: Who is getting rich off of student loans? Where does all that money go?

To the colleges and universities and all the diplomas they issue, in part. But a generation ago, Congress changed the student-aid system to give private companies a piece of the action and shrink the government’s role in the process. The result has been an enormous financial windfall for Wall Street and beyond. Now just about everyone in the industry makes money off students: the banks, private investors, and even the one group Congress wanted to push out of the financial-aid business—the federal government. And the profits keep rolling in; student-loan debt generally grows by some \$80 billion a year.

This is not what President Lyndon B. Johnson envisioned when he signed the Higher Education Act of 1965. Before the law, Americans who wanted to go to college had to finance it themselves. That meant paying out of their own pockets, securing scholarships, or taking out expensive private loans. After the bill, students could go to a bank for a less costly student loan guaranteed by the government. “This nation could never rest,” Johnson stressed, “while the door to knowledge remained closed to any American.”

In 1972, Congress created the Student Loan Marketing Association, or Sallie Mae, a quasi-governmental agency whose mission was to increase the amount of money available to borrow for higher education. Banks loaned money to students, and Sallie Mae bought the federally backed loans from the banks, freeing them up to lend more money. But when lawmakers turned Sallie Mae into a private company in 1996, it gained the authority to make its own loans, both federal ones guaranteed by the government and more profitable private loans, which command higher interest rates and come without governmental guarantees or restrictions.

Once only a facilitator of loans, Sallie Mae became a profiteer. And it did what it could to maximize those profits.

It paid a New Jersey agency some \$14 million to market Sallie Mae to colleges as their preferred campus loan provider. It paid college loan officers to serve as consultants on its advisory boards. It placed its own employees in university call centers to field questions from students who thought they were getting advice from college loan officers. Eventually, the business of

collecting premiums and penalty fees was also consolidated under Sallie Mae's very large umbrella.

Freed from governmental control, the company became a juggernaut. In 2014, it spun off most of its student-loan business into a new company, Navient, and today's Sallie Mae handles only private loans. The most tell-tale sign of the company's success: CEO Albert Lord received pay and stock totaling hundreds of millions of dollars before he retired in 2013.

Meanwhile, cash-starved states cut back funding to public universities. In turn, schools had to charge more to make up the deficit. The average annual cost of tuition, fees, and room and board at American colleges and universities rocketed from

\$4,563 in 1985 to \$21,728 in 2015—an increase of about 13 percent a year. Over the same 30-year period, wages rose 6 percent annually at most.

If state governments had continued to support public higher education at the rate they did in 1980, they would have invested at least an additional \$500 billion in their university systems, according to an analysis of



**“YOU
SHOULDN'T
HAVE TO
GO TO WAR
TO GET A
COLLEGE
EDUCATION.”**

SAUL NEWTON

data research from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. That's roughly the amount of outstanding student debt now held by those who enrolled in public colleges and universities.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT holds more than 90 percent of the \$1.4 trillion in outstanding student loans, either as the original lender or the backer, making the Department of Education (DOE) effectively one of the world's largest banks. Private lenders, including Wells Fargo, SunTrust, and other big banks, hold the rest. By the DOE's own calculations, the government earns as much as 20 percent on each of its loans. The profit arises from the government's ability to borrow money at a low rate and then lend it to students at a higher rate.

The federal loans issued between 2007 and 2012 were projected to generate \$66 billion in income for the government, according to a 2014 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). (In 2013, Congress lowered the interest rate for incoming student borrowers yet refused to extend the same benefit to the more than 40 million Americans who had already borrowed for their educations.)

"The United States government turns young people who are trying to get an education into profit centers to bring in more revenue for the federal government," Sen. Elizabeth Warren said on the Senate floor in February

2016. "This is obscene. The federal government should be helping students get an education, not making a profit off their backs."

JESSIE SUREN, an energetic 29-year-old who wanted a career in law enforcement, attended a free boarding school for underprivileged youth in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and then enrolled in La Salle University in Philadelphia. Scholarships didn't cover the cost of the private college, so she borrowed about \$71,000 in federal loans, much of it from Sallie Mae. A job with the U.S. Marshals Service fell through, and since graduation she has scrambled to keep current on her payments, sometimes working 16 hours a day at two low-paying jobs. She has made no headway on her loans. Just the opposite: Today her balance tops \$90,000—and that figure would be higher if she'd borrowed from a private lender.

"My loans are a black cloud hanging over me," Suren says. "I'm a student-debt slave."

Young adults aren't the only ones sucked into the student-loan hurricane. In 2004, Richard Brown, 66, of Ossining, New York, and his wife had good jobs in information technology. He took out \$50,000 in federal student loans for his daughter. They didn't want her to go into debt and could afford to help. But then the recession hit. Brown lost his job in 2009 and, at 58, couldn't find another.



**“MY LOANS ARE A BLACK CLOUD HANGING
OVER ME.”** JESSIE SUREN

Three years later, his wife lost her job when her company was acquired by a competitor. Their debts mounted, and by 2013, the loan balances, with compounding interest and penalties, had risen to \$135,000.

The couple filed for bankruptcy, but the loans were still payable in full. Through aggressive lobbying, the banks had helped enact a law that makes student loans virtually the only consumer debt that cannot be discharged in bankruptcy except in the rarest of cases. Brown was shocked when the federal government began taking \$250 a month from his Social Security check of \$1,700.

“This is money we need to live on,”

he says. “We worked 35 or 40 years to be eligible. I had no idea they could do that.”

In fact, the government can take as much as 15 percent of a debtor’s Social Security. In 2013, the government garnished the benefits of 155,000 Americans who were in default on their federal student loans, according to a GAO report, up from 31,000 in 2002. This policy of withholding federal payments to delinquent borrowers, known as administrative offset, can also apply to tax refunds and disability checks.

TODAY, ONE IN FOUR borrowers is behind in his or her payments or is

struggling to make them, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which estimates that nearly 8 million loans are in default. The number of federal loans in default jumped 14 percent from 2015 to 2016, according to an analysis by the Consumer Federation of America.

For all it has invested in the student-loan program, the government doesn't have the resources to hunt down all the people who are behind on their payments. Since 1981, the DOE has hired debt collectors to do the dirty work—on the taxpayers' dime. For fiscal 2016, officials estimated that these contractors would receive \$2.1 billion in commissions on the money they'd recover from borrowers in default.

IRONICALLY, as Jessie Suren scrambled to pay back her loans, one of her jobs was to try to get money out of people who were delinquent on their student loans. She was paid \$12 an hour at a call center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Some of the calls were scary, she says; angry borrowers would curse and threaten her, declaring they were jobless and broke. Other calls were heart-breaking; borrowers would claim they or their children were terminally ill.

Whatever their story, Suren had to tell them what would happen if they didn't pay: The company could garnish their wages and take their tax refunds. After hanging up, Suren would sometimes reflect on her own student loans, thinking, This is going to be me in a couple of years. **R**

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HELP FOR THOSE WHO FALL BEHIND

Whether the student loan is issued by the federal government or a bank, the first option is to reach out to the loan issuer. Many employ an ombudsman to help borrowers resolve their problems and come up with a repayment plan they can better afford.

Those with federal loans, which is most borrowers, may be eligible for a lower monthly payment plan. Private loans don't offer the same consumer protections and flexible payment plans that federal loans do. To explore other options, check out these resources:

- The Department of Education's Federal Student Aid website: studentaid.ed.gov. Click on How to Repay Your Loans; the Repayment Estimator can help calculate options.
- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's interactive tool at consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college/repay-student-debt

Laugh Lines

HIGHER RESOLUTIONS



I bought a treadmill because my New Year's resolution is to have more things to put my laundry on.

🐦@DANWLIN
(DANIEL LIN)

Forgot to make resolutions? Just write out everything you did last night, and at the beginning, add the word *stop*.

🐦@PETEHOLMES

I've seen six people post that their New Year's resolution is to "loose weight." I can think of a slightly more useful resolution for them.

🐦@FUNNYBRAD (BRAD WILLIAMS)

For those of you who have already failed your New Year's resolution, like I have, there is always the Chinese New Year to try again.

🐦@THOMASPANKONIN

Resolution: Don't let someone take up emotional real estate if they aren't paying rent.

🐦@KAYSARAHSERA (SARAH KAY)

My New Year's resolution is to be more assertive if that's OK with you guys?

🐦@MEGANKCOMEDY
(MEGAN KELLY DUNN)

WHO

?

KNEW



13 Things You Didn't Know About the Holiday Season

BY LAUREN CAHN

1 Who put the *X* in *Xmas*? Turns out the Greeks did. What we English speakers know as the letter *X* is the same shape as the Greek letter chi, best known for its supporting role in sorority house names as well as in the Greek word for Christ (Χριστός). Modern speakers aren't the first to borrow Jesus's Greek name for a holiday abbreviation: There's evidence of *Christmas* being abbreviated to *Xmas* as far back as the 16th century; no offense intended then or now.

2 There is no right way to spell *Hanukkah*. That's because it's a Hebrew word beginning with the consonant *het*, which has no English equivalent (the closest is probably the throaty *ch* sound at the end of *Bach*). While there's no official way to transliterate this in English, Google search results do declare a popular winner: *Hanukkah*, with about 17 million hits, soundly beats out runner-up *Chanukah* (with a mere 4.8 million hits).

3 *Kwanzaa*, on the other hand, is intentionally misspelled. The nonreligious festival (observed from December 26 to January 1) was created by Maulana Karenga in 1966 to empower the black community in the aftermath of the deadly Watts riots in Los Angeles. Modeling his holiday on traditional African harvest festivals, Karenga took the name *Kwanzaa* from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, which means “first fruits.” The extra *a* was added simply to accommodate the seven children at an early Kwanzaa celebration, each of whom wanted to represent a letter.

4 Another holiday invented in 1966: Festivus. Made famous by a 1997 episode of *Seinfeld* in which the Costanza family gathers around an aluminum pole for the annual “airing of grievances,” this secular nonholiday was actually invented decades earlier by *Reader’s Digest* editor Daniel O’Keefe Sr., who wanted a low-pressure way to celebrate the anniversary of his first date with his wife. Festivus became an O’Keefe family staple—and eventually a cultural icon, after Dan O’Keefe Jr. shared his holiday memories with colleagues in the *Seinfeld* writers’ room. Festivus is celebrated worldwide on December 23.

5 In Korea, everyone’s birthday is New Year’s Day, regardless of the day anyone was actually born. Odder

still, on the day you’re born, you’re considered to be one year old—so you will be considered two years old on the next New Year’s Day of your life. While most legal records in Korea use a person’s “international age,” the traditional age system still matters. A person can legally buy alcohol or tobacco in Korea, for example, on January 1 of the 19th year after his or her birth.

6 The Chinese Lunar New Year celebration (which starts on February 16 in 2018) brings with it the largest annual migration in the world, starting roughly 15 days before the festival and lasting 40 days. Known as the Chunyun period, it’s a seasonal travel rush of hundreds of millions of people returning to their hometowns to celebrate the holiday with family. In 2017, an estimated 2.98 billion passenger trips were made for the New Year festivities.

7 Want to celebrate Ethiopian New Year? Mark your calendar for the first of Meskerem. Ethiopia is the only country in the world that hasn’t adopted the 12-month Gregorian calendar, instead using its own 13-month Coptic calendar (which contains twelve 30-day months and a 13th month that has five days—except in a leap year, when it has six). On our Gregorian calendar, Ethiopian New Year falls on September 11 every non-leap year.

8 In Japan, if it's Christmas, you're eating KFC. The tradition began in 1974 after a Kentucky Fried Chicken manager overheard a couple of foreigners talking about missing the Christmas turkey. KFC embraced the opportunity, debuting a special Christmas deal: a fried-chicken dinner (plus wine) for the equivalent of about \$52. Today, families order their finger-licking-good Christmas chicken weeks in advance, to the tune of about 3.6 million orders a year.

9 If it's Christmas in Peru, put up your dukes. Takanakuy is a festival held every Christmas Day in the province of Chumbivilcas. The festival consists of dancing and fist fighting, whether to settle old conflicts or simply to display manhood. (In the United States, we try to avoid fighting on holidays—theoretically.)

10 Krampus is the original Bad Santa. For hundreds of years, this half goat, half demon has served as the anti-Santa in a number of European countries (including Austria, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic), encouraging kids to behave lest they be whipped, stuffed in a bag, and taken to the underworld. A lump of coal sounds peachy in comparison.

11 Jews have been celebrating Hanukkah with menorahs and fried food for the past 19 centuries or

so. It was only in the late 1880s that eight nights of presents became part of the ritual. That's when two Reform rabbis in Cincinnati intentionally brought a Christmasy feel to the festivities, hoping to make Jewish children more connected with their synagogues by turning Hanukkah into a gift-giving holiday. It took off.

12 Contrary to its pugilistic moniker, Boxing Day has nothing to do with prizefighting. It's actually a celebration of charitable giving, held on the day after Christmas in the United Kingdom. The name comes from the ritual of opening "the box"—the alms box—in the local parish church and distributing the contents to the poor.

13 There's a reason December has so many holidays. You can thank the winter solstice, which is not only the shortest day of the year but also kicks off six months during which sunset comes a little later every day and thus has been celebrated for thousands of years as a sort of birth of light. It is believed that when the Christian religion began marking the birth of Jesus Christ at the end of the third century, church officials chose December 25 to coincide with existing pagan solstice festivals, making it easier to persuade people to accept Christianity. Happy holidays! **R**

Sources: *National Geographic*, smithsonian.com, npr.org, pbs.org, qz.com, festivusweb.com, and snopes.com

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1 Like a blast of bird shot, the initial “jet phase” of a sneeze lasts only milliseconds but can send an estimated 40,000 droplets of various sizes scattering outward as fast as a car on a highway.

Anatomy of a Sneeze

BY BRANDON SPECKTOR

Simultaneously expressing itself as a solid, a liquid, and a gas, the common sneeze is one of nature’s grossest miracles. MIT researcher Lydia Bourouiba has a different name for sneezes, though: *violent expiratory events*. That’s also the title of a recent study in which her team analyzed sneezes, millisecond by millisecond, with a high-speed camera and sophisticated computer models. What did they find? There’s more to a sneeze than what you see in your hankie—and that could influence our understanding of the way diseases spread. Here’s a closer look at what scientists see when you say *a-choo!* (For more, visit lbourouiba.mit.edu.)



2 The largest droplets (illustrated in green) rocket out of the sneezer's mouth and rapidly plummet under their own weight within a few seconds. Average distance traveled: 3 to 6.5 feet.

3 In the "puff phase" of a sneeze (illustrated in red), a turbulent cloud of warm, moist air swirls through the air, carrying the sneeze droplets with it.

4 The cloud grows and slows as it pulls in air from the environment, carrying the smallest droplets up to 26 feet from their point of origin.

5 Buoyed by the cloud, small droplets can easily stay airborne long enough to reach overhead vents (and thus anywhere in a building). It's a big problem. But there's a solution an arm's length away: Cover sneezes with a sleeve or tissue, wash your hands regularly, and keep those germs to yourself.

How To: Fix Your Fatigue and Get More Energy

According to patients at the Center for Restorative Medicine, a discovery has completely transformed their lives.

Founder and Director **Dr. Steven Gundry** is a world-renowned heart surgeon, a best-selling author, and the personal physician to many celebrities. But his breakthrough could be the most important accomplishment of his career.

Dr. Gundry has unveiled a simple — yet highly effective — solution to issues that plague millions of Americans over 40: low energy, low metabolism and constant fatigue.

“When you’re feeling low energy, that’s your body screaming **HELP!**” Dr. Gundry’s radical solution was inspired by a breakthrough with a “hopeless” patient who had been massively overweight, chronically fatigued and suffering from severely clogged arteries.

The secret to his breakthrough? “**There are key ‘micronutrients’ missing from your diet,**” Dr. Gundry said, “If you can replenish them in very high dosages, the results can be astonishing.”

This unorthodox philosophy is what led Dr. Gundry to create an at-home method for fatigue — which has since become remarkably successful with his patients.

“They’re reporting natural, long-lasting energy without a ‘crash’ and they’re feeling slim, fit and active,” he revealed yesterday.



Dr. Gundry’s team released a **comprehensive video presentation**, so that the public can be educated as to exactly how it works.

Watch the presentation here at www.GetEnergy56.com

Within just a few hours, this video had gotten thousands of hits, and is now considered to have gone viral. One viewer commented: “If this works, it’s exactly what I’ve been praying for my whole life. I’ve never seen anything like this solution before...the truth about my diet was shocking and eye-opening.”

It makes a lot of sense, and it sounds great in theory, but we’ll have to wait and see what the results are. Knowing Dr. Gundry, however, there is a great deal of potential.

See his presentation here at www.GetEnergy56.com

IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

Word Power

Just in time for the last month of the year, we bring you some zippy words starting with the last letter of the alphabet. Proceed with zeal and zest, and when you need to check your answers, zoom over to the next page.

BY EMILY COX & HENRY RATHVON

- 1. zabaglione** (zah-buhl-'yo-nee) *n.*—A: canvas sack. B: stage villain. C: whipped dessert served in a glass.
- 2. zaftig** ('zahf-tihg) *adj.*—A: charmingly witty. B: pleasingly plump. C: completely famished.
- 3. zax** (zacks) *n.*—A: roofing tool. B: music synthesizer. C: caffeine pill.
- 4. zephyr** ('zeh-fer) *n.*—A: ancient lute. B: gentle breeze. C: crown prince.
- 5. zeta** ('zay-tuh) *n.*—A: prototype. B: sixth letter of the Greek alphabet. C: great beauty.
- 6. zetetic** (zuh-'tet-ik) *adj.*—A: arid. B: investigative. C: made of hemp.
- 7. ziggurat** ('zih-guh-rat) *n.*—A: lightning bolt. B: pyramidal tower. C: flying squirrel.
- 8. zinfandel** ('zin-fuhn-del) *n.*—A: narrow valley. B: heretic. C: red wine.
- 9. zircon** ('zer-kahn) *n.*—A: gas-powered blimp. B: gemstone. C: traffic cone.
- 10. zloty** ('zlah-tee) *n.*—A: airhead. B: Polish currency. C: earphone jack.
- 11. zoetrope** ('zoh-ee-trohp) *n.*—A: optical spinning toy. B: sun-loving flower. C: exaggeration.
- 12. zori** ('zohr-ee) *n.*—A: antelope. B: flat sandal. C: seaweed wrap.
- 13. zydeco** ('zy-deh-koh) *n.*—A: music of southern Louisiana. B: magnifying glass. C: secret password.
- 14. zygomatic** (zy-guh-'mat-ik) *adj.*—A: related to the cheekbone. B: mysterious. C: of pond life.
- 15. zyzyva** ('ziz-uh-vuh) *n.*—A: type of weevil. B: tricky situation. C: fertilized cell.

 To play an interactive version of Word Power on your iPad, download the Reader's Digest app.

Answers

1. zabaglione—[C] whipped dessert served in a glass. I hate to waste a good *zabaglione*, but I'm on a diet.

2. zaftig—[B] pleasingly plump. The character in that film was a bit *zaftig*, thanks to her chocolate habit.

3. zax—[A] roofing tool. Kamal built this entire cabin himself, from laying every floorboard to trimming every roof tile with a *zax*.

4. zephyr—[B] gentle breeze. On stressful days, I like to fantasize I'm on a tropical beach with a cool *zephyr* blowing through my hair.

5. zeta—[B] sixth letter of the Greek alphabet. The up-and-coming tech firm uses a *zeta* as its logo.

6. zetetic—[B] investigative. "My *zetetic* methods," said Sherlock Holmes, "are quite elementary, my dear Watson."

7. ziggurat—[B] pyramidal tower. The king ordered his subjects to build a great *ziggurat* in his honor.

8. zinfandel—[C] red wine. "Do you think *zinfandel* pairs well with nachos?" Alyssa asked with a smirk.

9. zircon—[B] gemstone. She thought he gave her a diamond engagement ring, but those gems were just *zircons*.

10. zloty—[B] Polish currency. How's the *zloty* holding up against the euro?

11. zoetrope—[A] optical spinning toy. Before there were movies, people could get the illusion of motion from a *zoetrope's* whirling images.

12. zori—[B] flat sandal. After the strap on her *zori* snapped, Joelle had to go barefoot for the rest of the day.

13. zydeco—[A] music of southern Louisiana. Ian became a big fan of *zydeco* on his last trip to New Orleans.

14. zygomatic—[A] related to the cheekbone. Many football players use a *zygomatic* stripe of greasepaint to reduce glare.

15. zyzyva—[A] type of weevil. "I can't believe this—there are *zyzyvas* in the organic quinoa I just bought!" Matthew exclaimed.

WHAT'S FUNNY ABOUT JOHNNY?

In Italian comedies of the 16th to 18th centuries, a clown named Giovanni was a stock figure. Typically a servant who cleverly mocked the other characters, this clown became known by the nickname Zanni. Eventually Zanni became the adjective *zany*, which we use today to mean kooky and madcap, like a screwball comedy.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

9 & below: zonked
10-12: in the zone
13-15: at the zenith

Humor in Uniform



"I had all my medals made into one big medal."

THE VETERANS who attend our church were invited to wear their uniforms one Sunday. My husband, who did not wear his, instead stood up and pointed to his lapel and the First Cavalry Division emblem he'd received in Korea. He then explained sheepishly, "This is the only part of my uniform that still fits."

PAT QUESENBURY, Arlington, Texas

Your funniest military anecdote may be worth \$\$\$! For details, go to rd.com/submit.

MY SIX-YEAR-OLD was playing with his toy soldiers, using a different voice for each one.

Soldier No. 1: I have a bazooka, and I make a big boom.

Soldier No. 2: I have a pistol that goes bang.

Soldier No. 3: I have a Swiffer, and I can make your house really clean.

That last soldier caught my attention. On further examination, I discovered that Soldier No. 3 was holding a mine detector.

DONNA LAWRENCE, Albia, Iowa

Quotable Quotes



I always say,
“On the day I die,
I hope I learn
something new.”

KATHIE LEE GIFFORD,
television host

**ALL DADS COME
ARMED WITH UIFS
(UNIVERSALLY
INOFFENSIVE
FACTOIDS).**

CLAY SKIPPER, *writer*

**MY RULE IS, IF IT'S NOT MORE FUN THAN
GOING SURFING, I'M NOT GONNA DO IT.**

SPIKE JONZE, *director*

**BEING POOR
HELPED
ME BE MORE
CREATIVE.
IT WAS MY
SUPERPOWER.**

JANELLE MONÁE,
singer and actress



I meditate ...
Man, being in the
moment is where
it's at. **JOE WALSH,** *musician*

**One of my beliefs is that I
have to talk about my beliefs.**

JASON ISBELL, *singer-songwriter*



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