

The Magazine



AARP

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Regent

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No matter where a luxury traveler may find themselves, they may taste the spirit and flavors of Asia at **Pacific Rim** and treat their palate to the rich regional diversity of authentic Italian fare at **Sette Mari at La Veranda**. They can celebrate a special occasion at an upscale steakhouse at **Prime 7** and discover the next evolution of French cuisine at **Chartreuse**. They can relax in a festive, stylish and casual atmosphere at the **Pool Grill** or attempt to push the limits of culinary innovation when designing their own meal at **Compass Rose**.

And that's only a glimpse of the experiences available on board.

Imagine waking up to the gentle sway of the ocean and starting your day with a masterclass from a renowned chef. As you sail to breathtaking destinations, each day brings new opportunities to savor local flavors and learn from culinary experts. That was the inspiration behind their culinary-themed immersive experiences, called **Epicurean Explorations™**.

Ranging across every region, Regent's shoreside culinary experiences invite guests to explore historic markets, sample famed drinks, witness traditional cooking methods, and taste local specialties. There are specialized Wine & Spirits Tours to experience the most delectable drinks, from famed vineyards in Bordeaux to a distillery in Ireland. They also offer themed **Epicurean Land Programs** before or after select voyages that center around unique flavors and culinary heritage.

For the ultimate immersive experience, **Epicurean Spotlight Voyages** are hosted by renowned culinary luminaires. Further, **Epicurean Engagements** offer enlightening talks and presentations from a variety of culinary experts, as well as **Epicurean Tastings** feature curated wine and spirit tastings led by sommeliers and mixologists. These are perfect opportunities to discover new favorites and learn the stories behind some of the world's most renowned labels.

Aboard *Seven Seas Grandeur*[®], *Seven Seas Splendor*[®] and *Seven Seas Explorer*[®], guests enjoy hands-on cooking classes at a professional-grade teaching facility called the **Culinary Arts Kitchen**. Whether perfecting pasta-making skills in Italy or exploring the art of sushi in Japan, these classes are designed to enhance culinary prowess from home cook to amateur chef.

Whether you're indulging in the exquisite meals, fine wines and spirits on board or heading ashore to delve into **Epicurean Explorations**[™], Regent provides a myriad of opportunities to satiate your inner gourmand.



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Clockwise from top: Rick Wenzel/Getty Images; Greg Segal; (Big 5-Oh) Sean McCabe/Moray; Doug Chikley; (Water) Beth Walronde; Derek Reed; Shutterstock; Courtesy Royal Caribbean; Fitness) Peter Oumanski

ON the COVER: Drew Barrymore photographed by Ramona Rosales in New York City on November 14, 2024. Producer: Anderson Hopkins/Kindly Productions; Set Design: WayOut Studio; Wardrobe Stylist: Lee Harris at the Wall Group; Hair Stylist: Daniel Howell for Walter Schupfer Management; Makeup Artist: Lauren Lazaro Gulino for Walter Schupfer Management.



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Money Woes? Been There

Financial setbacks can hit without warning. Everybody needs a recovery plan

THERE IS AN old saying, which I have modified for our purposes here: Into each life a little financial rain must fall. By the time we're 50 or older, who hasn't weathered the storms of a job loss or a health crisis? Who hasn't sat down with family at the kitchen table to figure out a path through a panic? Having spent my career in journalism, one of many fields that has been dramatically transformed in the internet age, I look back on my earlier self and see someone midway across a rope bridge suspended over a deep canyon. There were times when fire burned the bridge on one side and the rope frayed at the other, and at those times the race was to get to safety—or, as fate would have it, to the next canyon and bridge.

That's the cartoon version, but yes, like so many Americans, I have been laid off or taken pay cuts so deep they felt like being fired. Three times, in fact. Then, too, there was the fire that drove us from our home for three years. And each time there was little choice but to figure out how to bounce back. I sat down with my wife, and we planned. We treated finding a new job for me as a new job. I wrote a detailed plan of action for myself while my wife went to work on our budget, figuring out how to split a penny three ways. I looked up old colleagues for freelance assignments or, as it's now called, gig work.

In this issue, we look at three other Americans who faced significant financial shocks and had to bounce back after 50. In "Shock!



Betrayal! Disaster!" (page 44), you'll read about the ways that illness, marital issues and natural disasters can upend a well-planned financial life. And you'll learn how determination, savvy and a new perspective can help people recover.



Executive Editor George Mannes manages to find the drama and humanity behind stories about money and investing.

The feature was put together by George Mannes, our money and finance editor. George has been writing about investing and personal finance for more than 25 years, and he takes the challenge personally. You may have seen him in these pages and in the *AARP Bulletin* recounting his first-person money adventures: working as a volunteer tax preparer, trying to sell his old coins or intentionally ruining his own credit score

to discover how you can avoid doing that to yours.

Luckily, George's credit report is on the mend ... and as you can tell from where you're reading this, I managed to find steady work again. I'm clocking my 11th year as editor in chief of this publication.

I hope that your financial skies stay mainly sunny—and that even when they're not, the advice and inspiration in our story can be your umbrella in a storm.

Bob



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Our December 2024/
January 2025 issue
featured
Michelle Yeoh.



SHE'S EVERYWHERE

I love that Michelle Yeoh [“I Want More!”] is finally getting the recognition she deserves! *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was my favorite of her movies, and then came *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

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ELAINE KARADEEMA
Facebook

SURVIVING

A huge thank you to Rachael Bale for making the focus of her article [“The Survivors”] on the survivors of mass shootings, and not the shooters. She didn’t include a single shooter’s name, just referred to each as “the

gunman”—so powerful in a culture where the media brings far too much attention to these people.

JENIFER PACK
Loveland, Ohio

These stories break my heart—these individuals have had such long roads to recovery, through pain, loss and all types of anguish. There is truly nothing routine about life for these survivors.

GRACE REYNOLDS
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Love Danny DeVito [“What I Know Now”]. A true Hollywood legend, inspiring us with his talent, warmth, and family values.

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Facebook



He’s a wonderful actor. And *Taxi* was great!

MARY McCORMICK
Facebook

CORRECTION: In “*Movies for Grownups*” in the December/January issue, we wrote that Conclave was based on a book by Thomas Harris; the author is Robert Harris.

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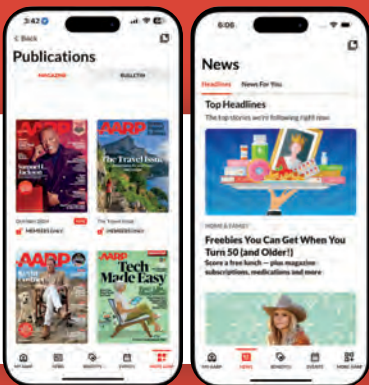
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Upfront The **A**List

5 Surprising Things About Kevin Bacon

1 He was the baby of six Bacon children

The youngest by eight years, so I was 100 percent an accident. My parents were loving and big on creativity. Write a song and play it, bang on a pot, do something! But when I left home, I was on my own.

2 He's had his ass kicked

When I got the call to be in *Animal House* [1978], I thought I was off to the races. Then I went to the premiere, but wasn't given the VIP ticket. I was on the other side of the rope watching the cast get out of the limo and walk down the red carpet. If you want to stick it out, you've got to have thick skin, because you will get your ass kicked.

3 He still doesn't think he's made it

I really don't. But I would say there was a moment when I thought: I don't have to go back to waiting tables. That was probably around 1982 when *Diner* came out.

4 He's been married to Kyra Sedgwick since 1988, but don't ask for their secret

I hesitate because it ends up being a quote that minimizes 36 years of marriage. And



“It’s astounding considering the number of failures I’ve had that this magazine would even be willing to talk to me!”

think about what the possible answers would be: “Oh, she’s my best friend.” Get outta here! Marriage doesn’t work. Look how many end in divorce. I’m not sure it’s a good idea, honestly. It’s like, yes, we’re still married and that’s that.

5 The whole ‘Six Degrees’ thing has been a blessing and a curse

I say this with gratitude for coming as far as I have and being able to make a living at what I love to do. But with *Six Degrees*, there’s an element of almost being more famous for being me than the work I’ve done.

—As told to Chris Nashawaty

The Golden Globe-winning actor Kevin Bacon, 66, stars in the upcoming Amazon series *The Bondsman* as well as Netflix’s *Sirens*, in which he appears opposite Julianne Moore.



MEMBERS ONLY
For an exclusive video, scan this code or visit aarp.org/kevinbacon.

Food Culture on Aisle Two

Grocery store tourism gives you a serving of local flavor

THERE'S A TREND on TikTok, where young people post videos at supermarkets in the U.S. and around the world, marveling at the frozen pizzas in Wisconsin or the flavored potato chips in Asia. They aren't searching out specialty shops, but rather hitting major retail food stores. Yep, Gen Z has figured out what we older folks have known for decades: A trip to a grocery store is a fabulous way to get a feel for the local culture. Says avid traveler Malinee Churanakoses, 51, of San Diego: "It is interesting to see how people live, what flavors or experiences they have." —*Jamie Seaton*



GREAT BRITAIN

- Swizzels Squashies candy
- Jammie Dodgers cookies
- Jaffa Cakes, with chocolate and fruit flavor



100 Years of the Appalachian Trail

Some fascinating footnotes about this popular passage

MARCH 1925 is considered the official birth of the Appalachian Trail, with the founding of what is now called the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). Here's a look at a century of natural bliss.

> Thru-hiking took some time.

The first hiker to complete an end-to-end hike of the roughly 2,200-mile trail was Earl Shaffer, in 1948. It took him 124 days. "Peace Pilgrim" Mildred Norman Ryder, *below*, became the first woman to pull off the feat, in 1952.

> You can do it in pieces.

It's OK to knock it off in smaller sections over several years. Or just hike whatever bit pleases you for an outing.

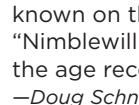
> Bill Bryson didn't hike the whole thing.

The AT may be best known via Bryson's 1998 humorous book *A Walk in the Woods*, later turned into a film starring Robert Redford and Nick Nolte, *below*. But Bryson and his companion only covered about 870 miles.

> The oldest person to complete the trail was 83.

The veteran thru-hiker M.J. Eberhart, *right*, known on the trail as "Nimblewill Nomad," set the age record in 2021.

—*Doug Schnitzspahn*



SINGAPORE
Kaya, a creamy jam made with coconut milk, eggs and sugar, and flavored with pandan leaf



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THAILAND
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NORWAY
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SOUTH AFRICA
Woolworths Fruit & Nut Rusks, like tiny granola bars



WHAT'S THAT ODOR?

When your car smells like that, do this

- Rotten eggs** ➤ Get the catalytic converter checked.
- Burning oil** ➤ Check for low oil or leaks.
- Maple syrup** ➤ Check the coolant level.
- Moldy odor** ➤ Get air-conditioning checked.
- Burning plastic** ➤ Stop immediately. Get the car towed to a mechanic for an electrical check. —*Jodi Helmer*

Sources: Jake Horvat, director at GM Parts Direct; Duane "Doc" Watson, technical trainer at Bosch Mobility Aftermarket; Kyle Parman, president of corporate store operations at RNR Tire Express

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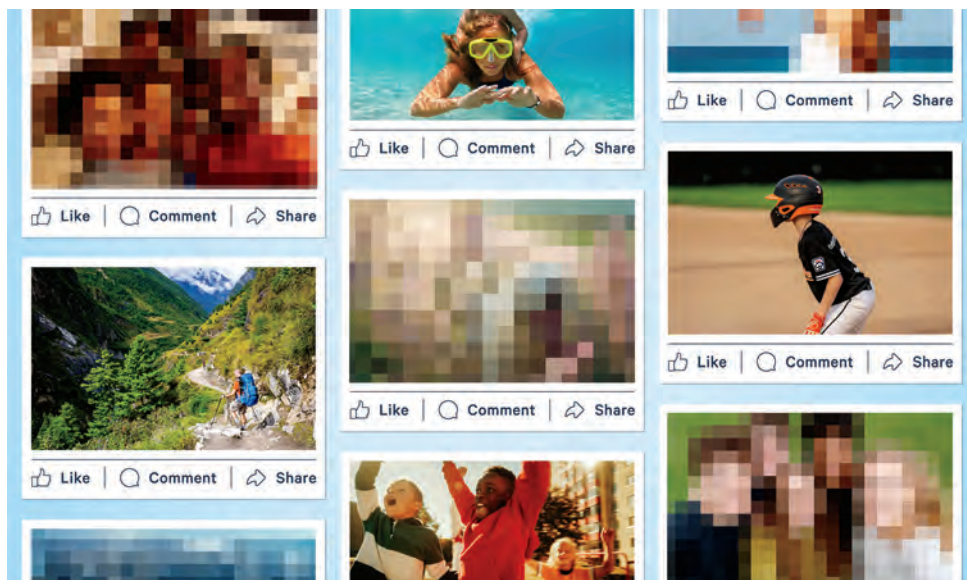
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**ASK THE
TECH
GURU**

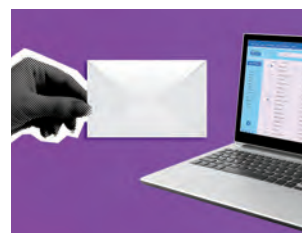
Can I unsend a text or email after having second thoughts?

AARP tech writer Edward C. Baig answers:

In some cases, yes, but you must act quickly.

Google Gmail: Set up the recall feature in advance (a one-time fix). Go to Gmail on your computer and click on Settings. Click See All Settings. Next to Undo Send, select a cancellation period, up to 30 seconds. Click Save Changes. When you send an email, you'll see an Undo option for the amount of time selected.

Apple Mail: After sending an email, tap Undo Send at the bottom of the screen. By default, you have up to 10 seconds to recall a



message, though you can change the delay to last longer in your settings: On an iPhone, tap Settings, then Apps, then Mail, then Undo Send Delay. Choose 20 or 30 seconds.

iMessages: When sending Apple's version of a text message to most other Apple users, you can unsend the message within 20 seconds. On an iPhone or iPad, press down on the message bubble, then tap Undo Send. The recipient will get a note that a message was discarded but won't see its contents. Unfortunately, there is no way to unsend a standard text message.

Have a question? Email personaltech@aarp.org.

Suppressing Bad Memories

You can hide Facebook notifications on any device with a few simple steps

FACEBOOK BELIEVES it's doing you a favor by reminding you about posts you've made in the past. Called Memories, these resurfaced items are visible only to you, unless you decide to share them ("Hey, look at this cute thing my kid did 10 years ago!"). But for some older users, memories can be painful. Who wants to see that picture of an ex-spouse, for example? You have a couple of options to minimize distress.

Filter out certain people:

On your computer, go to facebook.com/memories and click on Hide People. Type the name of the person you don't want to see and click Save.

Filter out certain time periods:

Go to facebook.com/memories and click on Hide Dates. Click on Add New Date Range. Enter the period of memories you don't want to see. Save.

Turn off Memories altogether:

Go to facebook.com/memories and click on Notifications. Choose None from the options. —Marc Saltzman

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TuneIn. This app is known for streaming radio stations and podcasts, but it also offers a selection of free audiobooks (albeit with ads built in). | tunein.com —JD Sartain

Clockwise from top left: Photo illustration by Matt Chase, Shutterstock (8); Ranni Niami, AARP, Getty Images (5); photo, courtesy ManyBooks, Alamy Stock Photo, Alimed Zagorudi/Alamy Stock Photo, Shutterstock, Koshiro K/Alamy Stock Photo.

Beyond the Button

Six mushrooms every cook should know. Chef William Atkins of the Braai Experience in New Jersey offers tips on cooking with them.

MAITAKE (Hen of the Woods)

Taste: Woody, savory, spicy
Best for: Risottos; stuffed mushrooms



SHIITAKE

Taste: Smoky flavor, chewy texture
Best for: Stir-fries; ramen soups



ENOKI

Taste: Crisp, delicate, slightly fruity flavor
Best for: Add to vegetable spring rolls for tender texture



OYSTER

Taste: Mild sweetness, smooth buttery texture
Best for: Breaded and pan fried for po'boy sandwiches



CREMINI (Baby Bella)

Taste: Earthy, tender texture
Best for: Raw salads
—Halona Black



PORTOBELLO

Taste: Earthy, meaty feel
Best for: Grill in place of a burger patty



Food stylist: Loren Wood; prop stylist: Laurel Bozeman



Good Mornings
start with
Cheerios Protein



PROTEIN 8g PER SERVING



Upfront / EAT

Porridge Perfection

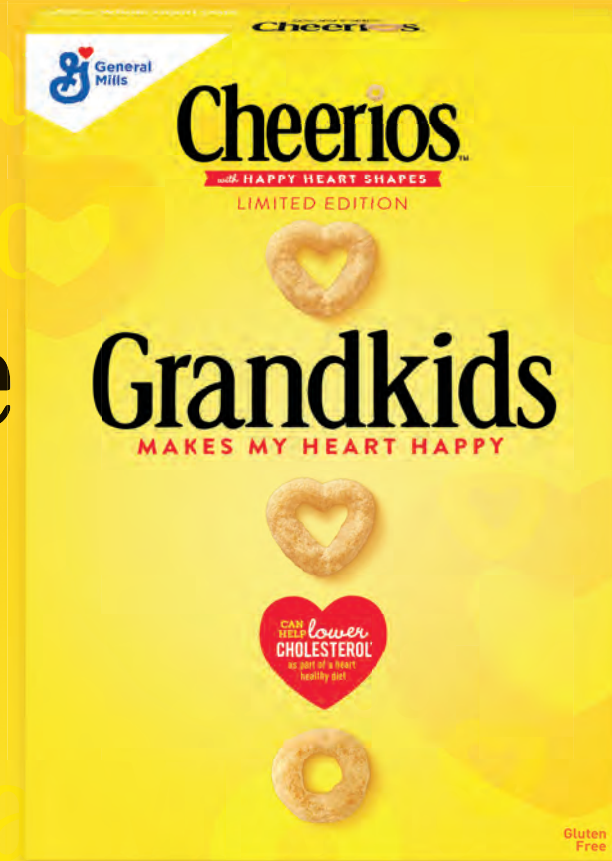
Heart-healthy, nutrient-packed, easy to fix and endlessly customizable, oatmeal might be the perfect breakfast! Four foodies share prep ideas



Savory oatmeal

	COMFORTING	SAVORY	FRUIT-FORWARD VEGAN	CINNAMON & CITRUS
MIX	Old-fashioned oats	Stone-cut or steel-cut oats	Organic traditional rolled oats	Steel-cut oats (pretoasted for 12 minutes at 350°F)
SEASONING	Milk	Water	Water or coconut water	Whole milk, heavy cream, water
ADDITIONAL TOPPINGS	Sea salt to taste	Mediterranean sea salt	A pinch of ground cinnamon	Dark brown sugar, ground cinnamon, unsalted butter, salt
	Nuts, dates and dried apricots —Ann Hood, best-selling memoirist and author of Kitchen Yarns: Notes on Life, Love, and Food	Roasted butternut squash and Parmesan cheese, or a puree of seasonal vegetables —Suzanne Vizethann, owner and founder of Buttermilk Kitchen and author of Welcome to Buttermilk Kitchen	Fresh or frozen organic wild blueberries, raspberries and blackberries, chia seeds, maple syrup, coconut yogurt, toasted coconut flakes —Deborah Kaloper, author, Good Mornings: 50 Delicious Recipes to Kick Start Your Day	Dried black mission figs, orange and grapefruit sections (membranes removed) —John Currence, award-winning chef, author of Big Bad Breakfast: The Most Important Book of the Day and owner of Big Bad Breakfast —Vonnie Williams

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And for the friends you  and the daughter you  and everyone else you .



Good Morning



Flush With Features

Technology inevitably comes to toilets

FRESH OFF a 14-hour flight from New York, I arrived in Tokyo in a jet-lagged brain fog. I found a surprise in my hotel room that night—a toilet that illuminated itself and had a warm seat.

But then came the hard part: flushing. The toilet was outfitted with buttons next to the seat, offering myriad functions. Luckily, there were pictographs, like tiny cartoons. I discovered the warm-water bidet spray.

Upon returning to the U.S., I found myself missing this high-tech throne.

Many Americans agree. A 2024 National Kitchen and Bath Association trend report says U.S. buyers are interested in toilets that self-clean after every flush, warm the seat, and open and close the lid automatically.

Part of this can be attributed to the aging of America. Andrew Van Gorden, a Kohler senior product

manager, says such functions can be beneficial in a household with someone dealing with mobility issues.

But how much are technological advancements in toileting worth? A seat with bidet functions can go for about \$285 to \$350. Full-on smart toilets start at about \$1,100 but can exceed \$8,000.

All this advanced technology is moving beyond pampering. A company called Casana expects to bring a toilet seat to market next year that will monitor your blood pressure. (Full disclosure: Casana is a participant in the AgeTech Collaborative from AARP.)

I wasn't thinking about anything that tech-forward when my gas furnace recently went out and nature called at 2 a.m. Groggy and shivering, I decided life's too short not to have a warm bum. —Michael Frank

What Not to Buy at a Yard Sale

As we head into spring cleaning and yard sale season, here are some secondhand items you should avoid.



X Stuffed Animals
Plush toys can harbor bugs and allergens. "If you're with your granddaughter at a yard sale, I would go with a game or puzzle instead," says Mona Scavo, owner of Tag Sales by Mona.



X Baby Items
Car seats have an actual expiration date. Older cribs and high chairs can be unsafe. Heather Aiello, founder of The Organized You, a home organization company, says not to buy them used.



X Helmets
"Bike helmets are only meant to last so long," Aiello says. They can lose their effectiveness. Plus, it can be difficult to wash the foam inside to remove potential allergens or bugs.



X Cosmetics and perfume
If the seller dipped a finger into the product, bacteria and fungi may have been introduced. Sealed or not, "some may be past their shelf life, already used, diluted or tampered with," the Food and Drug Administration warns.—Donna Fuscaldo

IN A DIVORCE, WHO GETS THE DOG?



WHEN TERRA and Mark Osterling divorced, they faced a question common among older couples: Can we share custody ... of the dog?

The answer is yes. The upstate New Yorkers worked with a mediator to draw up an

agreement spelling out expectations for their mixed breed: Neither will withhold access to Willy without due cause. They'll collaborate to provide primary care in the event of his illness or injury. If one travels, the other will take over Willy's care—and will not pass on that care to an

unapproved third party. DanaMarie Pannella, an associate attorney in Sharon Center, Ohio, says some couples don't wait until divorce; they draw up custody arrangements when they get the pet. She calls such an agreement a "pup-nup."
—Robin L. Flanigan

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61	\$30.50	\$22.35	\$60.00	\$43.70	\$89.50	\$65.05	\$148.50	\$107.75
62	\$31.45	\$22.90	\$61.90	\$44.80	\$92.35	\$66.70	\$153.25	\$110.50
63	\$32.50	\$23.70	\$64.00	\$46.40	\$95.50	\$69.10	\$158.50	\$114.50
64	\$33.50	\$24.55	\$66.00	\$48.10	\$98.50	\$71.65	\$163.50	\$118.75
65	\$34.75	\$25.50	\$68.50	\$50.00	\$102.25	\$74.50	\$169.75	\$123.50
66	\$35.90	\$26.35	\$70.80	\$51.70	\$105.70	\$77.05	\$175.50	\$127.75
67	\$37.05	\$27.25	\$73.10	\$53.50	\$109.15	\$79.75	\$181.25	\$132.25
68	\$38.70	\$28.95	\$76.40	\$56.90	\$114.10	\$84.85	\$189.50	\$140.75
69	\$39.75	\$30.60	\$78.50	\$60.20	\$117.25	\$89.80	\$194.75	\$149.00
70	\$43.85	\$32.45	\$86.70	\$63.90	\$129.55	\$95.35	\$215.25	\$158.25

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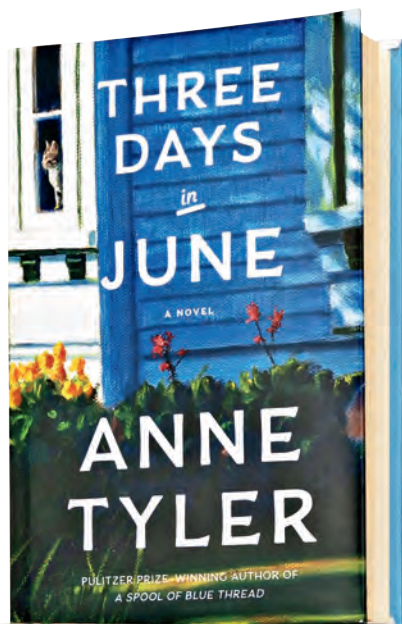
Older and Wiser (or Not?!)

Featuring characters of a certain age

The Tiny Slice

“One of the wonderful things about getting older is that I don’t need to conform. I don’t need to fit in, nor do I need to prove a damn thing to anybody.”

—From **Food for Thought: Essays and Ruminations** by **Food Network star Alton Brown** (February 4)



Reviews

We All Live Here by Jojo Moyes

The *Me Before You* author offers a heartwarming story about Lila, dealing at midlife with a broken marriage, career troubles, teen drama and more. As if that’s not messy enough, she adds a sexy fling into the mix. (February 11)

Three Days in June by Anne Tyler

This short, absorbing novel—full of Tyler’s usual warmth and wit—focuses on a socially awkward woman, Gail, 61, who’s forced to reconnect with her ex-husband while navigating her daughter’s wedding. (February 11)

Kills Well With Others by Deanna Raybourn

In Raybourn’s riotous, sequel to *Killers of Certain Age*, the quartet of elite female assassins are pulled out of retirement when an old mark’s family gets a hankering for overdue retribution. (March 11)
—Christina Lanzito

Memorable Memoirs

The dancer-actress-singer **Josephine Baker**’s 1949 memoir **Fearless and Free**, now publishing in English (February 4), tells of her Jazz Age stardom and spying for the French Resistance. In **Legends and Soles** (February 25), **Sonny Vaccaro**, 85, details his role in signing Michael Jordan for Nike, and **Waiting on the Moon: Artists, Drifters, Grifters, and Goddesses** (March 11) by **Peter Wolf**, 78, is the J. Geils Band frontman’s rock ‘n’ roll story.

Tales From Midlife

Curtis Sittenfeld, 49, author of best-selling novels like *Prep* and *Romantic Comedy*, is back with an eclectic collection of stories, **Show Don’t Tell** (February 25), many featuring beautifully drawn middle-aged characters—including one that brings back Lee Fiora from *Prep*, now older and attending her boarding school reunion.



See our exclusive interview with **Bill Gates**, author of a new memoir, **Source Code: My Beginnings** (February 4), on aarp.org/billgates

ALSO OF NOTE



NOVEL
Blood Ties by **Jo Nesbo** (February 11)



MEDICINE
Doctored: Fraud, Arrogance, and Tragedy in the Quest to Cure Alzheimer’s by **Charles Piller** (February 4)



NOVEL
Dream Count by **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** (March 4)



BIO
Harriet Tubman: Military Scout and Tenacious Visionary: From Her Roots in Ghana to Her Legacy on the Eastern Shore by **Jean Marie Wiesen and Rita Daniels** (February 4)



**Now
Playing**

AARP critic Tim Appelo picks upcoming movies and shows to watch

CAPTAIN AMERICA: BRAVE NEW WORLD

📅 In theaters February 14 • In 2025's most anticipated movie, Captain America (Anthony Mackie) battles

President Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross (Harrison Ford, 82), who transforms into the wicked Red Hulk.

LOVE HURTS

📅 In theaters February 7 • *Everything Everywhere All at Once* Oscar winner Ke Huy Quan, 54, makes his action-hero debut as a hitman-turned-Realtor forced to fight his crime lord brother Knuckles (Daniel Wu, 50). *John Wick* stunt coordinator JoJo Eusebio, 51, directs.

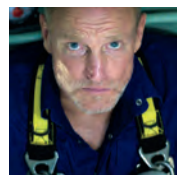


BRIDGET JONES: MAD ABOUT THE BOY

📅 On Peacock February 13 • Bridget (Renee Zellweger, 55), now a widowed mom, plunges back into the dating pool, pursued by a dreamy young hunk (*The White Lotus*' Leo Woodall) while getting close with her son's teacher (Chiwetel Ejiofor)—and encouraged by her ex (Hugh Grant, 64).

ZERO DAY

📅 On Netflix February 20 • In his first TV series, Robert De Niro, 81, plays an ex-president who comes out of retirement to investigate a catastrophic cyberattack—but he may be losing his grip on reality.



LAST BREATH

📅 In theaters February 28 • Woody Harrelson, 63, stars in a thriller about the race to rescue a diver trapped at the bottom of the North Sea. (If you can't wait to see it, watch *Last Breath* (2019), the documentary that inspired it—it's got actual footage of the event.)

MY DEAD FRIEND ZOE

📅 In theaters February 28 • Bronze Star-winning U.S. Army paratrooper Kyle Hausmann-Stokes directs a ghost story about an Afghanistan War vet (Sonequa Martin-Green) haunted by the wisecracking shade of a fellow soldier (Natalie Morales). Air Force vet Morgan Freeman, 87, plays her VA therapy counselor and Ed Harris, 74, her Vietnam vet granddad, afflicted with incipient Alzheimer's.



SNL50 PRIMETIME SPECIAL

📅 On NBC and Peacock February 16 • You can count on a parade of past *SNL* cast members and guest hosts. "We'll bring everyone back," producer Lorne Michaels, 80, told *The New York Times*. "It will be ... very emotional."

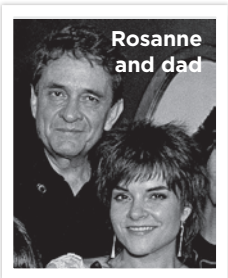
Clockwise from top left: Eiji Adé/Marvel; Courtesy Universal; Michael Moritz/Briarcliff Entertainment; Courtesy Netflix; Courtesy Focus Features; Will Heath/NBC; Jay Maidment/Universal Pictures.

Rosanne Cash

The singer-songwriter riffs on life with her parents, finding normal, and the importance of legacy

The beginning matters

My parents were very young and extremely poor when I was born. My mother had two dresses. And they had one fountain pen, which they had to share. Dad [the musician Johnny Cash] took it to work, so Mom couldn't write anything down until he brought it home. And then my dad went on the road all the time. My mom had a lot of anxiety about that. And about my dad starting fires. Once the whole hillside burned, which was an accident—he was driving his tractor through dry brush. I still remember the feel of the smoke in my chest. And my mother suspected my dad was having affairs. When he got with June Carter, it was clear he was moving away. My mother became depressed and anorexic, and probably had a borderline personality. So I had to become an adult, caring for my three younger sisters. As an artist, I don't believe you have to keep suffering. But I think the original wounds can be source material, a place that's open.



Rosanne and dad

Seek refuge

I love language. I love grammar and punctuation, the Oxford comma, the sound of words. Onomatopoeia. Shakespeare. At 4, I desperately wanted to go to school. I asked my mother about every word I saw. I wanted to go to the library and read. There was so much going on at home that I tried to find safety in my imaginary life and in the library and in books and music, particularly when I got



to be in my early teens. All that was refuge, and it seeded the inspiration for later.

Learning what's normal

John [Leventhal, her husband] says that I "front" normal. Coming from such an abnormal childhood, I worked really hard to seem normal my whole life. I would think to myself: "What do people do on New Year's Eve? They drink champagne. OK, I'll do that." It's the reason I love the *Little House* books. It's washing on Monday, scrubbing on Tuesday, baking on Wednesday.

Make change happen

When I was 20, I spent six months in London working

for a record company, and it utterly changed my life. I was trying to make myself something different while I was there. That's harder when you're older.

How to channel a song

If it doesn't sound too self-aggrandizing, I'd say there are songs out in the universe that are complete, and if you've gotten to a certain place in your songwriting, you can receive them.

Embrace your legacy

When the Country Music Hall of Fame asked me to do an exhibition [Rosanne Cash: Time Is a Mirror, through March 2026], I started pulling out lyric books and photographs and clothing, like the green suede jacket that my dad had made for me in Greenwich Village when I was 14.

Hair and makeup stylist: Rosemary Redlin

ASK THE EXPERT



ED EVANS
Chief Executive Officer
Consumer Cellular Inc.

Paul: Ed, why are wireless customers—especially those over 50—getting the short end of the stick with their current phone plans?

Ed: The data tells a compelling story about wireless plans for customers over 50. Most older adults use significantly less data than younger people—averaging less than 5GB of data monthly—yet frequently remain on expensive unlimited plans.

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Paul McIntosh is a Director at Consumer Cellular’s Phoenix call center. He’s an expert listening to customer feedback and is always willing to jump in and help.

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These things are now really precious to me and I realized that some of the things you push away the hardest when you’re young are the things that you embrace the tightest when you get older.



Immortal Johnny

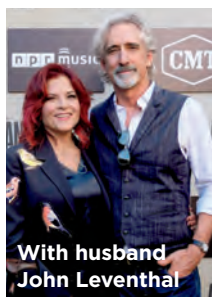
My dad now has a statue in the Capitol, representing Arkansas along with [civil rights hero] Daisy Bates of the Little Rock Nine. He would be prouder of that than any award he ever got, because that’s touching immortality. It was like an out-of-body experience at the unveiling. But there was a feeling of sweet grief, as well, because my son, Jake, said, “Once he’s in bronze, he’s really gone.”

Solace in Psalms

When my dad’s eyesight was failing, one of the great regrets of his life was that he couldn’t read anymore, because he loved his books. So I would read the Psalms to him every morning on the phone. He’d go, “Slow down, slow down,” because he really wanted to take in every word. Once, and I still feel terrible about this, I went up to the country and forgot to take a Bible with me. But I found a book, and I said, “Dad, I don’t have the Psalms. I have Shakespeare.” And he went, “Shakespeare, huh? I’ll just wait.” [Laughs]

Fine-tuning parenting

My first husband [singer-songwriter] Rodney Crowell and I raised four daughters [including Rodney’s daughter Hannah from his earlier marriage] and then John and I had a son. One of my really big life lessons is that girls and boys are very different. My girls are all dramatic, and their feelings are out in the open, and everything is big. But Jake taught me to respect his emotional privacy. Something else that I learned is that all my kids take unsolicited advice as criticism. So



With husband John Leventhal

I’ve learned to keep my mouth shut, even if I have to bite my tongue.

It isn’t brain surgery—oh wait ...

In the late ’90s, I had polyps on my vocal cords and couldn’t sing for a couple of years. And then I had debilitating headaches that led to brain surgery in 2007. Pain is a very lonely country, and at some point you stop talking about it, because that further distances you from people. But those kinds of experiences gave me more compassion for others in ways that nothing else could have taught me.

Being 69

I’m turning 70 in May. And I’m nervous about it, in part because both my parents died at 71. I don’t feel old, but there is no universe in which I can claim to be young anymore. My knees kill me, and I get more tired. I was talking to Elvis Costello about this, and he said he lies in bed and does the math. I do that, too. Can I make it until my grandchildren graduate from high school?

“Pain is a very lonely country, and at some point you stop talking about it because that distances you from people.”

Come together

I think about community a lot, because we need it more than ever, given the cultural narcissism that goes on, when it’s all about me, my house, what I want for my kids—not *our* kids, not *our* climate, *our* future. At the end of the show every night I say, “We’ve created community in two hours. You can spread it out to your town, the rest of the country, the world.” Every individual has power. —As told to Alanna Nash

Four-time Grammy winner Rosanne Cash, 69, just released Rosanne Cash: The Essential Collection, on her label, RumbleStrip Records.



MEMBERS ONLY
For our video of Rosanne Cash, scan this code or visit aarp.org/rosannecash

Healthy You

A Tasty Way to Boost Your Brain

Adding more nuts and seeds to your diet may help improve your mood, sharpen your cognition and fend off the diseases of aging By KELSEY OGLETREE

THERE MAY BE no such thing as a “perfect” food, but nuts and seeds come close. These nutritional nuggets contain omega-3 fatty acids and other unsaturated fats to help reduce inflammation and promote heart health, says registered dietitian Jessica Cording. With 3 to 7 grams of protein per ounce, nuts and seeds help fuel muscle maintenance and repair. They also keep you feeling full, helping with weight management.

But, in addition, these morsels have an unsung superpower: They help protect your brain. In part, that’s due to their mix of healthy fats and antioxidants. But it’s also a function of their fiber content. “Eating enough fiber from food helps maintain a more balanced microbiome, which supports overall physical and mental well-being,” says Uma Naidoo, M.D., a nutritional psychiatrist and author of *This Is Your Brain on Food*. Because nuts are high in calories, keep your snacking to about 1 ounce (¼ cup) of nuts per day; that’s about 23 almonds or 14 walnut halves. Here are Naidoo’s choices for top nuts and seeds to keep your brain sharp.

Raw or Roasted?

There’s not a big difference, health-wise, between raw and roasted. “It’s more important that you’re consuming nuts and seeds at all,” says dietitian Jessica Cording.

Dry-roasted nuts,

which are roasted without any oil, have a similar nutrient profile to raw. You can dry-roast nuts at home to enhance their flavor and texture; most do well baked at about 300°F until fragrant, about 10 to 25 minutes. (Different nuts cook at different rates.) There’s one caveat, though: “Do not overcook them, as that can reduce

their antioxidant potential,” says dietitian Kelly Jones.

Whether you’re buying whole nuts or nut butters, the same rules apply. “Look for products with as few ingredients as possible—ideally just the nuts or seeds,” Cording says. If you see oils (such as palm oil), preservatives or added sugar, keep looking.

Bake nuts @ about 300° for 10-25 minutes

Turn to “AARP Takes on Brain Health” on page 69 for more resources.





← **CHIA SEEDS** and **FLAXSEEDS** are very rich in omega 3-fatty acids in the form of ALA, or alpha-linolenic acid, which research suggests supports brain health. Use ground flaxseed to maximize your body's ability to digest it.

← **WALNUTS** might be shaped like little brains for a reason: They provide higher amounts of ALA than any other nut. Emerging research also links regular intake of walnuts with a lower prevalence of depressive symptoms and improved mood, says registered sports dietitian Kelly Jones. Like other nuts and seeds, they're also rich in protein and fiber.

← Researchers at Loma Linda University found that nuts have a positive impact on the brain's ability to generate brain waves, including gamma waves, which are critical for cognition and memory. Among the nuts tested, **PISTACHIOS** had the greatest effect on gamma waves.

← Among all nuts, **ALMONDS** are by far the most potent source of vitamin E. Low intake of vitamin E has been linked to an increase in dementia risk.

← **BRAZIL NUTS** are a great source of selenium, an antioxidant that has been associated with improved brain health, says Cording. (Just one a day will more than cover your daily need of 55 mcg).

← **PINE NUTS** are rich in a rare and specific fat called pinolenic acid, which has been shown to reduce inflammation levels.



WHAT IF I'M ALLERGIC?

An estimated 3.9 million Americans are allergic to tree nuts, including almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, hazelnuts, pistachios and walnuts. That doesn't mean they can't enjoy similar health benefits by eating seeds, Jones says. "Roasted pumpkin seeds and hemp seeds are excellent additions to oatmeal, salads and side dishes, while flax and chia seeds are great blended into smoothies as well as oatmeal and baked goods," she adds.

Kelsey Ogletree writes on food and nutrition for Real Simple and other magazines.

Water, Water Everywhere

Supermarket aisles are flooded with all different types of bottled water. Are any of them worth the money?

By ANDREA WICKSTROM



IF YOU COULD travel back in time a few decades, landing in the 1960s or '70s, say, you'd be amused by some of the quaint things we used to do on a daily basis: Dial up a friend from a home phone, for example. Or show slides of our family vacation on a projector screen. Or drink water from the tap.

As normal as that seemed when we were kids, today many of us won't drink tap water: Americans spent an estimated \$49 billion in 2023 on bottled water and drank about 16 billion gallons, according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation. That's a lot of bottled-up H₂O.

And it adds up to a lot of extra money and a lot of extra plastic floating around the environment. Buying water for your family can be confusing and a bit stressful, though, because we're not just buying jugs that say "water" on them. Now we have to choose between vitamin water, hydrogen water, mineral water, electrolyte water. How are all these options different? Is one better than another? And, are there any real health benefits to spending extra money on something that you can get for pennies from your kitchen sink?

The case for tap water

In general, the United States has some of the world's safest drinking water, thanks to quality standards that public water systems must meet, and ongoing monitoring by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Regardless of its source, public water is treated before it arrives in homes, to remove potential chemical and bacterial contamination before consumption.

In addition, an estimated 43 million Americans get their water from private underground wells. This water is not regulated, so homeowners are responsible for ensuring their supply is safe for drinking, usually through recommended annual testing.

Tap water doesn't always taste or smell good—especially water from private wells, which can be cloudy or smell of sulfur—but that doesn't necessarily mean it's not good for

you. A safe amount of chlorine, for example, may be used in city or county water to kill bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms that can make us sick. “Water can sometimes have a bad smell, taste or appearance, but these features don’t usually last long or indicate a public health concern,” says registered dietitian Kourtney Johnson. “Chlorine, chemicals or a medicine-like taste or smell don’t typically mean there’s an immediate health threat.” If there is an issue such as flooding or a chemical spill that endangers the local water supply, your local government or water utility will issue an advisory. (Be sure not to use ice or drink water from your refrigerator during an advisory.)

Still, there has been a lot of media attention around contaminated drinking water. In April 2024, the Biden administration finalized limits on “forever chemicals” in drinking water, requiring utilities to reduce them to the lowest measurable levels. Government officials say these chemicals, called PFAS (polyfluoroalkyl substances), are linked to liver disease, heart disease and certain cancers. In October 2024, the Biden administration also finalized rules requiring water systems around the country to identify and replace lead pipes within the next 10 years.

The facts about bottled water

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) strictly regulates bottled water production and distribution. Bottled water companies are required to maintain sanitary conditions, protect the approved water sources and test the final product. So, like tap water, bottled water is generally safe. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t concerns.

Filtered water may remove fluoride, which at currently approved levels is safe to drink and helps prevent tooth decay. (Sometimes, manufacturers will reintroduce minerals after purification.)

Another concern is the plastic bottles most water comes in. Plastic breaks down over time, and tiny bits of the bottles themselves—known as microplastics—can enter the water. Plastic bottles may also contain chemicals such as bisphenol A (BPA) and other substances used to give plastic bottles transparency, shape and flexibility, and can leach into the water.

“Growing evidence shows that microplastics negatively affect the endocrine, reproductive and immune systems, as well as bacteria found in the gut. The thyroid plays a role in regulating almost all organs in the body, and long-term exposure to plastics negatively affects its ability to regulate growth, development, metabolism and reproduction,” Johnson says.

What are the different types of bottled water? These categories often overlap, but here’s a general breakdown.



Your Bottled Water Guide

Here’s what the labels really mean



Bottled Water

(Dasani, Aquafina, Pure Life)

▶ Many large brands of bottled water come from municipal water supplies—the same place tap water comes from. Bottlers may then use additional purification measures, such as reverse osmosis, to remove unwanted tastes.



Spring Water

(Acqua Panna, Crystal Geyser, Evian, Poland Spring)

▶ Spring water originates from rainwater that moves underground and is filtered naturally by rocks and minerals. After it is pushed up to the ground’s surface, the water is collected from the spring. Per FDA regulations, when manufacturers bottle and sell it, it must have the same composition

and quality as the spring water at its source.



Mineral Water

(Gerolsteiner, Perrier, Topo Chico, San Pellegrino)

▶ To be labeled mineral water, this type of spring water—which can be either sparkling or still—must contain at least 250 parts per million total dissolved solids (minerals and trace elements) that are present at the water source, which may include calcium, chlorine, magnesium, potassium, and iron.




Alkaline Water

(Evamor, Flow, BodyArmor SportWater)

▶ Alkaline water is altered to a higher pH, which some claim can neutralize acid in the bloodstream, provide for enhanced


workout recovery and help prevent disease. The science on these claims is limited, however.

“The body does an incredible job at keeping our pH within a very tight and controlled range. Consuming more alkaline water will not shift your pH outside of its normal range,” says Jen Hernandez, a registered dietitian who works with people with kidney disease.

 **Enhanced Waters**
(Vitaminwater, Essentia Hydroboost, Adirondack Enhanced Water)


► Some manufacturers enhance water by adding micronutrients, including vitamins and sometimes minerals. This water usually comes in sugar-sweetened and sugar-free options. In some brands, a 20-fluid-ounce bottle has up to 27 grams of added sugar—more than the American Heart Association recommends women consume in an entire day.

Vitamin-infused waters may contain more than 100 percent of the daily recommended value of vitamins B and C. But these are water-soluble vitamins, meaning that the kidneys will excrete any excess in your urine, Hernandez says. “It is ideal to get our vitamins from foods as they provide many other nutrients.”


 **Electrolyte Water**
(Core Hydration, Propel, Gatorade)

► Sports drinks are intended for athletes who lose a lot of fluid and electrolytes through sweat. Such drinks often aren't necessary for moderate exercisers or sedentary

people. Electrolyte water may be beneficial under certain circumstances, such as intense exercise, prolonged exposure to heat or when coping with vomiting and diarrhea. Experts say regular water is usually sufficient for meeting moderate exercise hydration needs.

 **Hydrogen Water**
(HFactor, H2 for Life, Susosu)

► Hydrogen water is plain water with hydrogen gas added to it. The water can be bought with the hydrogen in it, or people can purchase hydrogen tablets to add to water at home. Because hydrogen molecules are very tiny, they don't create fizziness the way carbon dioxide molecules do, nor do they change the flavor of the water. A 2024 review of studies found that hydrogen water may have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, as well as improve physical endurance. Most studies have been small, however, and findings are mixed.

 **Purified Water**
(Pure Life, Dasani Purified, Refreshe)

► To be labeled purified, the water goes into a production plant and through a process that can include distillation, deionization or reverse osmosis. It is then sold in individual, sanitary, sealed containers. Purification typically removes all unpleasant tastes and odors from the water as well.

Andrea Wickstrom is a registered nurse who has covered health and medical topics as well as health-related news for multiple publications including Next Avenue, NurseJournal, HeartValveSurgery.com and Healthnews.

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KID CLIQUES, UPDATED

THE FIVE STUDENTS in *The Breakfast Club*—released February 15, 1985—had a shorthand for their social sets. Forty years on, here's how researchers and kids say high schoolers sort themselves. —Mike Zimmerman



ATHLETE
AKA: Jock, sporto, musclehead

"Jock" tends to refer to boys. With the increasing presence of girls in sports, those kids are called "athletes," or identified by their specific sport—"soccer girls" or "field hockey girls."



BASKET CASE
AKA: Goth, punk, skater

You can still be a "goth"—or, at some schools, an "emo"—and there are also "loners." The kids we consulted understand that many misfit teens are dealing with treatable mental health conditions.



PRINCESS
AKA: Richie, preppie

Kids may call them "aesthetics," while researchers call them "populars." But many in this group now aspire to be influencers. One sub-category: VSCO girls, whose label comes from a photo-editing app.



BRAIN
AKA: Nerd, dweeb, geek

Some kids told us that brains are called "smarts" at their schools. And the term "geek" isn't the insult it once was, now that geek culture—gamers, hackers, D&D, manga—has gone mainstream.



CRIMINAL
AKA: Hood, metal-head, pothead

These antiauthoritarian teens have several negative labels, including "deviants." One that parents may want to be aware of: We're told "feins" are kids who use pot or other drugs through vaporizers.

70% of Gen Xers say that, in an emergency, they would prioritize their pets' needs over their own.

SOURCE: TALKER RESEARCH SURVEY FOR NEWSWEEK



IF IT'S TIME for an aging relative to move to assisted living, you can make the difficult process easier. Here's what experts recommend.

- 1 Acknowledge Concerns:** Leaving one's home "is a significant and often upsetting transition," says Kate Granigan, president of the Aging Life Care Association. Ask your loved one about their feelings, and really listen to their responses.
- 2 Test the Waters:** Many assisted living communities offer "respite" stays—as short as overnight or as long as two weeks—so prospective residents can get a sense of life in the community.

- 3 Seek Their People:** Jill McNamara, Care.com's general manager of senior care, suggests signing up for activities and clubs in advance. An activities coordinator or resident "ambassador" at the facility can help.
- 4 Bring Home Along:** Ask what they'll miss most. Is there something at home they'd like to be photographed with, like a tree they planted? Go through photo albums to make a memory book.
- 5 Decorate for Comfort:** If repainting is allowed, consider a line with colors designed to please older eyes, such as Sherwin-Williams Senior Living Collections, PPG's Senior Living Color Palette or Behr's senior living palettes.
- 6 Make an Entrance:** Your loved one may want to shop for a new outfit to arrive in, says gerontologist Sherri Snelling, author of *Me Time Monday*. "Do as much as you can to make it positive," she counsels. —Julie Halpert

WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT YOUR 50s

Jim Gaffigan

"I just wish I'd had this mental peace in my 30s—this perspective of 'enjoy the process' rather than these goals that mean nothing or getting caught up in other people's expectations. I see it with my teenagers, and I'm not saying they're suffering from it, but you're just under attack as a teenager, and you're finding your way in your 20s. I like being the age I am. I like the focus and the maturity that I've acquired."

Emmy-winning comedian Jim Gaffigan, 58, appears in the Hulu stand-up comedy special *Jim Gaffigan: The Skinny*. Read his interview with Gayle Jo Carter at aarp.org/quickquestions.



The Breakfast Club: Photofest (5); Gaffigan: Mark Seliger

The New Rules for Dating in Your 50s

Less time now? New priorities? How to get back into the pool—and even find joy in the process

I F YOU'RE SINGLE in your 50s, you're in good company. About 29 percent of U.S. adults ages 50 to 64 say they're unpartnered, according to Pew Research Center. That's higher than the percentage of thirty- and fortysomethings (21 percent) who say the same.

Whether you're newly single or never married, you've probably noticed that dating is different in your 50s. There are fewer prospects, for one thing, since the majority of people your age are already in relationships. You also likely have more demands on your time than in your early dating years, whether due to family obligations, work or caregiving. What you're looking for in a romantic partner may have changed, too, now that finding a coparent for future kids may be off the table. Just 27 percent of Gen X singles who have been married say they want to get married again, according to a 2023 study by Match.

Dating via websites and apps may seem like a good way to meet age-appropriate singles—23 percent of U.S. adults in their 50s have tried a platform at some point, according to Pew—but they definitely have their downsides. In fact, among people over 50, 38 percent of men and 57 percent of women say their online dating experiences have been negative, Pew found.

So what are the best ways to date in your 50s—and have fun doing it? Experts suggest these tips.

Be intentional. Focus on “quality over quantity” of dates, advises Francesca Maximé, a licensed psychotherapist in New York. Lara Starr, 55, a publicist in San Anselmo, California, who is widowed, has a simple test to decide whether to accept a second date: “I ask myself, *Would I rather spend more time with him, or would I rather stay home and watch Netflix?*”

Expand your “type.” That goes for looks, race or ethnicity, profession and even age—whether older than you or younger than you. “People tend to live in the past and recreate what they knew, as opposed to trying to establish something new,” says Lawrence Siegel, a clinical sexologist

who has researched dating and intimacy issues among older adults. “We’ve got to figure out who we are now, what we want now, what’s important to us now,” he adds.

Know your own mind. “People get caught up in what society wants—what we’re supposed to do,” Siegel says. Dig deep and acknowledge what you want from a relationship. Then make sure you’re upfront with dates about what that is. Keith Zandler, 59, an unmarried Detroit entrepreneur, says his definition of dating success has changed since he was younger. Now, he says, it means “finding a real companion.”

Go beyond tech. Try the apps, sure, but don’t limit yourself to them. Consider signing up for a new activity that brings you into regular contact with the same people—a class, a club, a volunteer gig—since those people may turn into friends, casual dates or more. Bonus: New experiences in your 50s can have brain benefits, such as creating “more dendritic connections that keep your brain alive,” says Stan Tatkin, a relationship therapist and best-selling author of *Wired for Love*.

Enjoy the ride. There’s no set deadline or destination for spending time with an interesting new person in your 50s. “Dating really should be a process of getting to know this person and getting to know myself with this person,” says Siegel. “Approaching it from a perspective of discovery can make a big difference.”

—Leslie Quander Wooldridge





Get Your 401(k) Rollover Right

SWITCHING JOBS and want to avoid lopping \$67,000 or so off your retirement nest egg? Try this one trick: Make sure your 401(k) rollover money is being properly invested.

That might not sound like much of a trick. But not doing it is surprisingly common—and can cost you a bundle.

Here's why: Unlike contributions to 401(k) plans, which generally default into target-date funds (TDF) that hold both stocks and bonds, money deposited in IRAs is typically parked in a cash account with a much lower yield, like a money market fund or bank sweep product. And there it stays, unless you tell the IRA provider you want another investment option.

More than 1 in 4 investors who rolled a 401(k) into a Vanguard IRA in 2022 still had their money in cash or a cash equivalent for at least a year after the transfer, according to a July 2024 report by the financial firm. A 55-year-old worker who put their IRA savings in a TDF could have nearly \$67,000 more at age 65 than one who leaves it in cash, according to Andy Reed, head of investor behavior research at Vanguard and coauthor of the report.

When you leave a job, there are four things you may be able to do with money in your 401(k) account:

- Leave it in your old employer's plan.
- Roll it into a retirement plan at your new workplace, if one is offered.
- Roll it into an IRA.
- Cash it out.

“Whichever path you choose, the most important thing is to maintain your savings and investing momentum throughout your career,” says Reed. “This way you can steadily build wealth and retirement readiness no matter how many times you change jobs.” —Paul Katzeff

My FIRST VISIT TO A PLASTIC SURGEON

WHEN I SEPARATED from my husband of 28 years, I took a long, hard look in the mirror and knew what I had to do. I went to see a plastic surgeon. I was 55, had three children—all C-sections—and the only weights I lifted regularly were a hair dryer and a glass of wine.

That said, I had slimmed down so I thought I looked pretty good. Boy, was I wrong. The surgeon took a pen and went full Picasso on my body. Marked up like a butcher diagram, I felt vulnerable and inadequate. Who would want to date someone who looked like me?

When I got home, my kids set me straight. “No more body shaming!” they



said. They stood me in front of that same mirror and told me to love my womanly, lived-in body. I can't say it happened overnight, but I eventually embraced my un-flat belly and my surgery scar because they represent my greatest accomplishment: my kids.

That was four years ago. I never went back to that doctor, but I have been on plenty of dates in this lived-in body of mine, and I've never had one complaint. —Maria A. Brown

YOU'RE NOT TOO YOUNG TO SNAG A DEAL

YOU ALREADY know that AARP members can get a ton of discounts, regardless of age (see aarp.org/ourbenefits for the full list). But you can also find retail “senior” deals that start at age 50 or 55—if you're willing to hunt. Here are four to look into. —Ken Budd



Walgreens

On the first Tuesday of each month, those 55+ get 20% off eligible regular-priced items.



Ross Dress for Less

Here you'll find togs, toys—and 10% off on Tuesdays, if you're 55+.



Michael's

Register for a rewards account at 55+ and get 10% off your whole purchase.



Caesars

There's a 10% discount for those 50+ at 40 participating hotels in 12 states.



PERSONALIZE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Set your preferences to see more of the benefits that matter most to you, browse newsletters, sign up for AARP Rewards, add a second member of your household to your membership for free and more. It's quick and easy at aarp.org/justforme.



COME BACK, HAIR!

STRANDS GETTING SPARSE? A common culprit is androgenic alopecia. We asked Carolyn Goh, associate clinical professor in dermatology at UCLA; Brian Abittan, director of skin and hair rejuvenation and

director of hair transplantation at Mount Sinai Health System in New York City; and Aanand Geria, dermatologist at Geria Dermatology in Rutherford, New Jersey about available treatments. —Anissa Gabbara



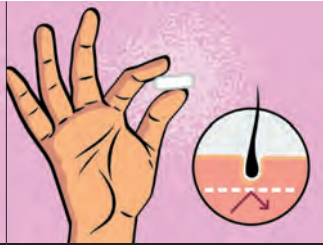
TOPICAL MINOXIDIL

WHAT IT IS: A solution or foam applied to the scalp to stimulate hair follicles.
PROS: Well tolerated. Affordable. Good evidence it can help reverse hair loss. Available over the counter.
CONS: Greasy, sticky and time-consuming to apply. Side effects include irritation, facial hair growth and in rare cases lightheadedness, heart palpitations or headaches.
COST: \$15 to \$50 for a three-month supply.



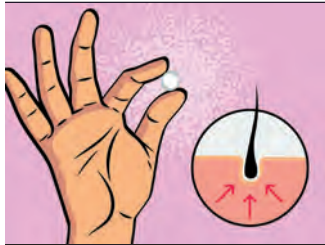
LOW-LEVEL LIGHT THERAPY

WHAT IT IS: Waves of light beamed onto your scalp regularly to improve circulation, which is thought to promote hair growth.
PROS: Easy-to-use cap that is typically worn for 10 minutes a day. Can be done at home.
CONS: Costly. Must be used indefinitely. Evidence of efficacy is mixed.
COST: For at-home treatment, a one-time cost of \$500 to \$3,000 for the apparatus.



FINASTERIDE

WHAT IT IS: A prescription pill to block the production of dihydrotestosterone—a hormone—and reduce or even reverse hair loss.
PROS: Relatively safe and well tolerated. Effective option to decrease shedding.
CONS: FDA-approved only for men, but prescribed off-label for women. Small risk of erectile dysfunction in men or sexual dysfunction in women.
COST: \$10 to \$20 per month.



ORAL MINOXIDIL

WHAT IT IS: A prescription pill that can increase blood flow to your hair follicles.
PROS: Relatively safe at low doses. Good evidence that it can help reverse hair loss in both men and women. Easier to add to your routine than a topical solution.
CONS: Temporary hair shedding. Can boost hair growth on other parts of the body. Can lower blood pressure and cause lightheadedness, fluid retention and increased heart rate.
COST: \$10 to \$30 per month.



PLATELET-RICH PLASMA

WHAT IT IS: Blood plasma mixed with a high concentration of platelets, injected into the scalp.
PROS: Uses the patient's natural tissue rather than drugs. Can be effective at regrowing hair in men and women.
CONS: Costly. Treatment can be painful. Not guaranteed to work.
COST: \$500 to \$800 per treatment, with typically three to four initial treatments and maintenance every three to six months.



HAIR TRANSPLANTATION

WHAT IT IS: Surgery to transfer existing hair—usually from other areas of the head—to balding or thinning areas.
PROS: One-time treatment with permanent gains
CONS: Costly. Surgical risks and a few days of downtime for recovery. Can still lose nontransplanted hairs. Results may not approximate natural hairline.
COST: \$4,000 to \$15,000, depending on the type of procedure and how much hair is transplanted.

Is There a Female Viagra?

Women (and men) in their 50s want to know



IN MENOPAUSE, some women have trouble with arousal. Can drugs help? Maybe. But before you seek a pharma fix, doctors suggest you get a physical to make sure your symptoms are not due to your meds or a medical condition. You may also want to get checked for female sexual interest/arousal disorder, or FSIAD. Treatment options include counseling and physical therapy.

If, after eliminating any other health issues, you want to try a treatment to boost your arousal, there are a few on the market.

Viagra pills. While it's not FDA-approved for use by women, some providers do prescribe the drug to female patients. (Don't just take your husband's.)

Viagra cream. Called topical sildenafil, the cream shows promise for women. You apply it 30 to 45 minutes before sex.

Eros. This vacuum pump is meant to improve clitoral blood flow. It doesn't require a prescription.

Addyi and Vyleesi. These two drugs are targeted at premenopausal women, but some physicians do prescribe them for those in menopause.

—Ellen Uzelac

This story is adapted from the "In the Mood" sex column on AARP Members Edition. To read more questions, or to submit your own, visit aarp.org/inthemood.



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HAPPY BIRTHDAY
**Big
5-Oh!**
DREW BARRYMORE



Drew Barrymore,
photographed
for AARP in New
York on November
14, 2024

Is Drew Barrymore Really All Grown Up??!!



As she turns 50, after 5 decades in the (sometimes cruel) spotlight, the one-time child star has hit her stride as a zany, emotive talk show host—and a fierce and loving single mom

By **Natasha Stoyloff**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMONA ROSALES

AFTER DREW Barrymore recently finished a gleeful—and one imagines, exhausting—afternoon of dancing, hugging, singing, posing, cooking, noshing and hamming it up with guests while taping an episode of her talk show, *The Drew Barrymore Show*, the cameras in a midtown Manhattan studio stopped rolling.

But the actress-turned-television host's most important work as a BFF to millions of adoring fans had just begun. It was time to wander into the predominantly female audience, cameras off, and get into some heavy-duty baring of the soul—in short, girl talk.

"I feel lost," one woman cried into a microphone, saying she'd barely dragged herself out of bed that morning. Barrymore raced up an aisle—her rescue dog, Douglas, in tow—plopped down next to the woman and threw an arm around her.

"You are beautiful," she insisted in her signature Valleyspeak lilt. Then she stood up and called out to

the other women in the studio. "We've got to turn off the nasty critics in our head," she urged, weaving her way through the group. "I hate that critic! I want to love myself. Don't you?"

The audience stood and cheered. "Yes! We do!"

And yes, you better believe it. Drew Barrymore—who partied at Studio 54 as a kid, whose troubled teen years spilled onto tabloid covers, who parlayed that bad-girl image into B movies in the early '90s and posed for *Playboy* at 19—is today an inspirational, wise sister sage to her followers.

And why not? She has played many roles on and off the screen. For many of us she'll always be the pigtailed cutie pie Gertie in Steven Spielberg's iconic fantasy, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, in 1982. For others, she's the big sis or kooky friend from her female-empowerment chick flicks and rom-coms of the later '90s and early aughts (*Never Been Kissed*, *The Wedding Singer*, *50 First Dates*, *Charlie's Angels*).

Either way, she's family. And she has been a vulnera-

ble, open book with the public, sharing details of her roller-coaster life in two memoirs (1990's *Little Girl Lost* and 2014's *Wildflower*) during her journey from then to now.

This month, Barrymore turns 50.

But it doesn't shock or worry her in the least. In fact, "I'm thrilled," she says, as we make our way backstage at the CBS Broadcast Center.

"[*Grey's Anatomy's*] Ellen Pompeo was on the show, and she described turning 50 as getting this superpower where you finally stop fretting and driving yourself crazy," Barrymore says. It's a superpower she covets after her third marriage—to actor Will Kopelman—ended in heartbreaking divorce in 2016. She's been juggling work and co-raising their two daughters Olive, 12, and Frankie, 10, ever since.

"This last decade," says Barrymore, with a sigh, "has been ass-kicking."

YET LATELY she has not only survived, but moved onward and upward. I've interviewed her four times over 20 years and am happy to report that despite the years of arse-whoopin', she's been restored to what I think of as her effervescent, bubbly core, while also owning a surprising new maturity.

Backstage now, she slips into a purple, green and fuchsia outfit—a whimsical *Sex and the City* meets Dr. Seuss ensemble. Someone puts on a moody Gigi Perez tune.

"This is my favorite song!" she cries, bouncing in her heels. "Turn it up!"

As she kisses puppy Douglas, Barrymore unconsciously poses, like a consummate professional who has got showbiz pumping through her veins, which of course she does.

Born into the British-American Barrymore acting dynasty (great-uncle Lionel, great-aunt Ethel, father John Drew and many more) Barrymore was a natural, shooting her first commercial (for puppy food) before she was a year old. But her childhood was fragmented and her parents were often neglectful. They split before she was born, and her wild-child, aspiring actress mom, Jaid, raised Drew with few rules and plenty of partying. Her dad—an addict who died in 2004—was mostly absent.

That upbringing, and the sudden, epic success of *E.T.*, led to a drinking problem by age 11, drug addiction by 12, followed by rehab, a suicide attempt, then 18 months in a psychiatric ward at Van Nuys Behavioral Health Hospital.

"I think I thought I was a bad girl," she says now.

By the time Barrymore was 15, she was out of the hospi-

tal and an emancipated minor, living on her own in Los Angeles. She was also a movie star has-been and couldn't find work, so she "changed the narrative," she says, and transformed her screen image from cute to dangerous-sexy—in films like *Poison Ivy*.

"That was fun for a while," she muses, "then I was like, 'OK, now what?'"

In 1995, at 20, Barrymore took charge of her career and cofounded the production company Flower Films with friend (and, later, wife of Jimmy Fallon) Nancy Juvonen. Together the women have since produced a wealth of box office gold (1999's *Never Been Kissed* and two *Charlie's Angels* flicks) and the recent hit television show, *Santa Clarita Diet*, with meaty roles for Barrymore as quirky, lovable, daring women.

"Steven Spielberg and Flower Films were two giant tipping points in my life," she says. "The third and biggest turning point for me was having kids."

Being a mom has rocked her world to its core, she says. So much so, that she has currently sworn off men, booze and acting to focus on being "present" for her girls as she works on the fifth season of her Emmy-winning, feel-good talk show. For the Big 5-Oh, her only birthday wish is to cook with friends, hang out at home with Olive and Frankie, blare some Beatles, and "do some real middle-aged woman s---."

After playing—both on and off film—the precocious kid, rebellious teen, rom-com queen and other personas, the only role Drew Barrymore wants to play today is a stable, happy version of herself. And she wants to help other women do the same.

"It took me years to find my way," she says, "and now I want to be true to myself."

But first, more girl talk ...

Q. It's going to be a full moon tonight, so I'm thinking it's a perfect time for a heart-to-heart. I know! I checked my moon tracker app. It's a beaver moon, a supermoon—which means it's much closer to earth. I'm so emotional.

Q. Yesterday as I watched the taping of your show, you told the audience you were "out of your mind" PMS-ing, and hundreds of women nodded in unison.

Totally. In one day, we covered gynecology, hot flashes, pooping in your pants, PMS—and we weren't even doing a medical show! Sometimes when I'm waiting to walk out, I'll have a lot of stuff on my plate—I'm worried about my parent-teacher conference meeting that didn't go per-

Five Decades of Drew

1978 TV debut in film *Suddenly, Love*, age 3



1982 *E.T.* and worldwide fame, age 7



1984 First starring film role, in *Firestarter*, age 9



1990 Releases memoir, *Little Girl Lost*, age 14



Drew Barrymore on the set of her show and with various guests



“I have no issues with aging—*this is the happiest I’ve been in my life!*”

Q. On the show you have your own touchy-feely interview style—which some criticize, but it works—it’s very you. Thank you. I was terrified when I started. I felt very insecure and suffered a sort of impostor syndrome, judging myself. We launched in the pandemic and if we did get to talk to somebody live, it was on Zoom. I had time-management issues—the interviews would go on for 30, 40 minutes and people would be like, “How do you make a television show if you’re taking two hours of film to make 42 minutes of film time?” Five years in, it’s getting a lot better. But it wasn’t overnight.

Q. How did you find your way? Whenever I was interviewed by journalists, they had an agenda, a set of questions. Now I have a game plan going in, too. I do my research. I know where I’d like to start. I know I’ve got to finish at a certain point. But I’m not fanatical about following a set of questions—I love discovering anything surprising or natural that happens along the way.

Q. You come from a legendary acting family. Did you feel pressure to follow in their footsteps and stick with it? Never. I always wanted to act. I really do thank my mom, even though it destroyed our relationship—I think we sacrificed being mother and daughter for this wild job. When I was 11 months old, she took me on an audition and I got a commercial. Then she got me to Steven Spielberg’s office somehow and he single-handedly changed my life by casting me in *E.T.* If I hadn’t wanted to do it, I wouldn’t have done it. But I mostly loved it. I loved the people I found along the way. I loved the weird travel, living in different places, seeing the world, seeing how different people live, getting to know this whole country from the inside out. It’s been educational, it’s been life-affirming, it’s been creative.

factly. Or I just fell 3 feet and hurt my ankle, and I’ve got to go to an MRI that afternoon. But then I limp out and say, “Can we just be real about this? Let’s put it all out there. Let’s cheer each other on. Let’s laugh. Let’s cry. Let’s call each other out on our s---. It’s special, so let’s not fake it.”

Q. Plus, they’re not strangers. We’ve grown up with you, since you were a kid in *E.T.* Yup. I think that should be the name of my show, “We Grew Up Together.”

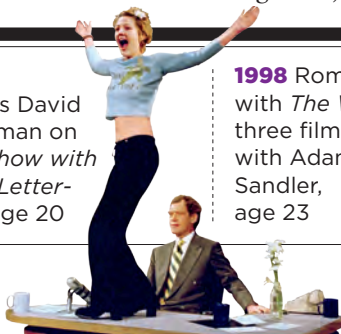
Q. Your audience feels so connected, almost as if you were leading an intimate group therapy session. I never thought this show would relate back to when I was in an institution as a teen. But the show is just like that room we’d go into every Wednesday night, with everyone lined up in their chairs around the walls. And someone different would go into the middle of the circle and put it all out there. These kids would just talk. It was funny and heartbreaking, but cathartic. And I thought, that is what this room feels like on the show—welcoming.

Courtesy Ashley Beam/CBS (4). All remaining photos, page 74



1992 Nominated for a Golden Globe best actress award for *Gun Crazy*, age 17

1995 Flashes David Letterman on *Late Show with David Letterman*, age 20



1998 Rom-com reign begins with *The Wedding Singer*, first of three films with Adam Sandler, age 23



2000 Box office success with *Charlie’s Angels*, age 25



Q. What happened to you after *E.T.*? I went through an awkward puberty. I was not that cute, model-y little kid. I was heavy. I had crazy hair. My eyes looked sad. It was real rough patch. At age 11 or 12, I couldn't get work. Then I went into the institution, and everyone thought I was so screwed up. When I got out I was 15 and going on auditions but couldn't get a job. I would sit there and they'd literally tell me, "You're too fat. You're too old. You're too young. You're too blond. You're not blond enough." I felt angry toward people who wanted to alter me to fit the mold. I thought, "That's on you. I'm not going to allow you to make me not who I am."

Q. What did you do in the years that you weren't working? I was super artistic—taking pictures, painting, drawing and decorating. I was also hanging out with my friends. It was so much fun. It was the '90s. People didn't have phones. There wasn't technology to take all your time up.

Q. After your rough patch, you became the "it girl" of the late '90s and early aughts. You formed a production company, Flower Films, and found great roles for yourself. Gwen Stefani said the other day she wanted to be you back then. Oh my God. So wild. So, it had been a solid 12, 14 years of a lot of pain associated with work. It wasn't working. It was a wrong time. I'm actually surprised I kept going back to the well on something that did not seem to be the right fit. And even at 16, 17, I was doing B movies. It wasn't until my early 20s when I did *Ever After* and *Never Been Kissed* and *Wedding Singer*, and all those types of movies when I was like, "Oh good. This thing I really love and I don't question, there's a space for me here."

Q. You said acting has been educational. What have you learned? I didn't have a family and I really wanted one. *E.T.* taught me you could build families at work. *Ever After* taught me never to be someone who didn't take care of themselves at the end of the day, who waits to be rescued, rather than rescuing themselves. That was the ultimate life lesson from that one. With Adam Sandler and *The Wedding Singer*, I learned you can form lifelong friendships. I stalked Adam and told him, "I have a premonition. It may sound crazy, but I believe you and I are supposed to work together numerous times. I don't know why I think this, but I really do. And it's so palpable. I have to tell you." And I mean, we've done three movies, like one every 10 years, and it's been really important to me. With *Charlie's Angels* I learned that women can be the greatest support for

each other, and that women can do anything that they



2002 Stars in George Clooney's directorial debut, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, age 27

2004 Gets star on Hollywood Walk of Fame, age 28



2007 *People* magazine cover for its "100 Most Beautiful," age 32

2010 Golden Globe, SAG best actress awards for *Grey Gardens*, age 34



2012 Daughter Olive born, age 37



2014 Daughter Frankie born, age 39



want. And they don't have to pretend to be men or hate men to do that.

Q. Speaking of growing up, you have a milestone birthday coming up—the Big 5-0h. It can't come soon enough. I feel like Frodo [in *The Lord of the Rings*] I see that brass ring and I'm so excited! I have no issues with aging—this is the happiest I've been in my life.

Q. That's quite a change from how you felt when your marriage to Will Kopelman ended in 2016. At 40, I was married and having kids and was like, "Well, I've done this. I'm doing it. I'm in it." But my dream, to have this solid family, did not happen. I thought nothing could be worse than what I went through as a kid, but the divorce was so much worse. It just shocked the s--- out of me. I really broke as a human being. I had two young kids and I didn't know what I wanted to do for work or in life. My dream family was falling apart and I didn't know how to put one foot in front of the other. And I had grown up so fast but now I didn't know what age to feel—I just knew that my life was heavy, and painful and sad—and I sat in that for a while. Eventually, thank goodness, I lifted myself out of it. I had two kids and I had to figure it out. They're literally worth everything, and I'm going to love them, and be inspired by them, and not be codependent. They can be my why, but I think

I know how to do this without making them the center of my universe.

Q. Still, you took big breaks over the last decade after having your daughters, saying you didn't feel comfortable "playing a character" anymore. Not right now, no. Not while I'm my kids' mom. It felt like I was cheating on myself, a professional cuckold. I was in my early 40s, and not learning how to be my own healthy, independent individual, how to be the parent I dream to be.

Being other people doesn't help me figure that out right now. And the long hours of doing films were hours I wouldn't have with my kids. I wasn't going to do that.

Q. Do you still believe in happily ever after?

I think my dad leaving my mom before I was born made me very aware that nothing's guaranteed. I invest in my relationships; I know they take work. I was like, I could either go into hardcore abandonment issues and be needy and screwed up, and untrusting, and take it out on the world and the people around me, or I can feel lucky, I can be grateful for those who stick around. I can work to be someone people want to stay around.

Q. You sound hopeful. Your great-uncle, Lionel Barrymore, was in one of the most hopeful, positive-message movies of all time, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

I think we have all felt like George Bailey at different parts of our life. We've all been brought to our knees with pain and devastation, whether it happened to us or it was self-inflicted. Or we thought we'd never go through something that hard again, only to find ourselves in a place a long time later in something equally as devastating or maybe even worse. And you ask: "Can I handle all of this? Can I make it through this? Am I going to survive this?" And it's so good when you do.

Q. What's life like today with your girls? We talk about everything. We love to laugh, we love humor. I say things that probably don't sound very parent-like and I swear and I'm irreverent. Driving in the car with the girls and blasting music is the best. They are like musical libraries, always teaching me. I learned my current favorite song, Gigi Perez's "Sailor Song" from Olive. Yeah, they'll be teenagers soon. It's funny when people say, "Oh, you're in the good years." I'm like, "Have you lived in my house? We have been through a lot of s--- here." I think we'll be prepared. It doesn't mean it's going to be easy,

but we'll get through it. We're going to be good girls, not bad girls. My biggest thing to teach them is to be kind to people. Kind, safe, accountable. With a lot of funny.

Q. Do you see men and romance in your future? My house is really full of a lot of women. It's a constant hive feeling. My girlfriends are here. I work with other women. There's a real commune feeling. It's not like we're in this lonely household. Would it be nice if someone came into my life? I don't even know who fits into this. I date occasionally, but no way am I ready to open that door. My girls say I should go on dates, but I also know how I felt when men were around when I was little—it didn't feel safe to me, so I'm probably overcautious from those experiences.

Q. Finding mom a new beau. Sounds like a reality show in the making ...

No way would I ever do a reality show. It's funny you said I'm so open and vulnerable. Because I have clear boundaries. When we were launching the show during the pandemic, they floated the idea of doing it in my house. I was like, never. You don't see my kids anywhere. They're not on Instagram, they're not up for grabs. I am so Doberman about that.

Q. You said to the audience the other day that you're through beating yourself up, that it's time to embrace happiness. Yeah, I'm so sick of the guilt and sadness. It's the greatest habit I will ever break in my life. The show helps: When I talk about beating myself up, I see heads nodding and I'm like, "We can't do this to ourselves anymore. I've seen the light." It doesn't mean I've got it mastered, but I see the light enough to know that this isn't good.

So the show is aiding me as a person and what I want to do as a female, as a parent, as a human, as someone who's now curious about health in different ways. It's an outlet for food, and design, and news, and all these things that I'm passionate about, but it's much bigger than that at the same time—I proved to myself that I'm capable of change. I would have never guessed that I would feel peace. It's been hard-earned. I would like to live the second half of my life like the B side of a record, not the same way as the A side. ■

*Natasha Stoyanoff is an award-winning journalist and New York Times best-selling coauthor of 15 books who frequently writes about celebrities and culture for AARP The Magazine. Her most recent book is *Bones: Anorexia, Anxiety, and My Path to Self-Love*, with Robyn Shumer.*

With additional reporting by Caitlin Rossmann



Want More Drew?

For an exclusive behind-the-scenes video of Barrymore, scan this code with your phone camera or visit aarp.org/drewbarrymore.



2020 Launches *The Drew Barrymore Show*, age 45

2020

Announces to Martha Stewart she's taking a "hiatus" from acting, age 45



2023

Named one of the "Time 100" most influential people in the world, age 48



2023

Experiences first perimenopausal hot flash on her show while interviewing Adam Sandler and Jennifer Aniston, age 48



2025

February 22, turns 50, in New York City

GET FIT FOR A BETTER FUTURE

7 simple exercises that will prepare you to live your best life for years to come **BY MYATT MURPHY**

WHETHER IT'S KEEPING up with grandkids, enjoying your favorite sports and hobbies, or just doing ordinary chores without discomfort, you have a choice: You can take steps today to keep the strength, flexibility and fitness you need to live your best life, or you can struggle in the future to regain what you've lost.

Age can hamper our ability to move through life. So we asked Conner Lorenzo, director of operations in fitness science at University of Rochester Orthopaedics and Physical Performance, and others from the University of Rochester, to name some of the most common activities people have trouble with as they get older. Then we asked what people over 50 can do today to ensure they can continue to enjoy those activities well into the future.

The result: a list of seven everyday activities, each paired with an exercise that can help preserve your capabilities for a lifetime. These exercises can also minimize your risk of falls, injuries, and other major health and wellness issues that can result from the gradual loss of strength, flexibility and balance over time.

In adults 60 and over, more time spent being physically active may improve health-related quality of life and well-being, researchers at the University of Cambridge have found. So consider this set of exercises the physical equivalent of investing in a retirement account.



THE ACTIVITY |

Carrying Groceries

WHEN YOU walk while holding an object, one side of your body usually works a little harder than the other. This stresses various muscles unevenly, and any weak link in your body's chain can result in pain and stiffness, making the simple task difficult.

"Adding an exercise that strengthens your glutes, core, pelvic stabilizers, shoulders, upper back, forearms, and especially your wrists and hands, can keep your body prepared for anything," says Julianna M. Gatto, physical therapist at the University of Rochester Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.



THE EXERCISE | Farmer's Carry

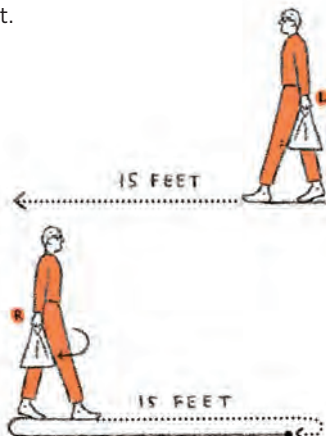
For this exercise, you'll need a dumbbell or any weighted object you can hold with one hand. "Choose a weight that's heavy enough to challenge you but doesn't make it difficult to keep your balance as you walk," advises Gatto. A reusable shopping bag containing some cans of soup could do the trick.



1 Hold the weight in your left hand and let your arms hang straight down at your sides. Stand upright with your feet hip-width apart, core muscles contracted, and your shoulder blades pulled back toward each other. Holding this posture, walk forward about 10 to 15 feet. Stop, turn around, switch the weight to your right hand, then retrace your steps.

2 Repeat a total of 6 to 8 times. Keep your shoulders even as you walk—if you start to sag toward the weighted side, either correct your posture or switch to a lighter weight.

TIP Instead of keeping your arm by your side, try changing the position of your working arm to mimic different situations (such as holding a child on your hip or a box in front of you, for example).



THE ACTIVITY

Walking Pain-Free

ONE OF the biggest impediments to walking comfortably is hip pain, Lorenzo says. But the source of that pain may surprise you.

"There's a very strong correlation between hip pain and ankle immobility," Lorenzo says. When our ankles get stiff, we adjust our stride to accommodate our lack of mobility; that can eventually lead to sore hips. This exercise strengthens the muscles that run up the front of your shins, helping to reduce your risk of pain when walking up or down hills; it also loosens up the Achilles tendon and the muscles of the lower leg.



THE EXERCISE

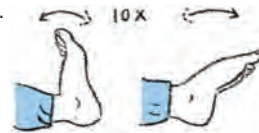
Tibialis Anterior Raise



1 Sit on a chair or bench with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Raise your left foot off the floor a few inches, and straighten your left leg out in front of you. Holding this position, slowly draw your toes back toward your shin as far as you comfortably can. Hold this flexed position for 1 to 2 seconds, then reverse the motion by pointing your toes forward and down.



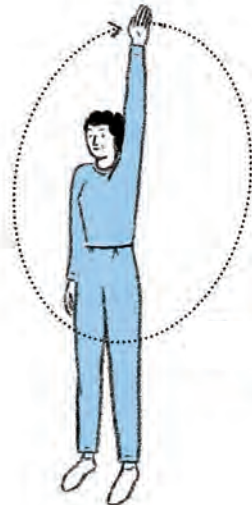
2 Flex and extend your left foot for a total of 10 repetitions, then switch legs (extending your right leg out in front of you) to work your right ankle. Perform 2 to 3 sets for each foot.



TIP As you get more comfortable with the move, try adding resistance: Drape a towel over the top of your foot to make curling your foot toward you more difficult. The heavier the towel, the greater the resistance.

THE ACTIVITY

Putting Away Dishes



REACHING UP high to put things away in your cabinets, stow luggage in the overhead compartment of an airplane, or toss a basketball into a hoop is as much about mobility as it is about strength. “Though having strong rotator cuff muscles can make lifting things overhead less difficult and safer,” Lorenzo says, “the starting point for most people is improving the overall range of their shoulder joint so they can raise their arms more easily.”



THE EXERCISE

Controlled Articular Rotations

1 Stand with your arms down by your sides. Keeping your left arm straight, rotate it in a circle by raising it up and out in front of you, then overhead and back down behind you until you return to the starting position. (Your right arm should remain motion-

less.) Imagine you’re drawing a big circle at your side, and try to bring your shoulder through the greatest range of motion possible. Do two sets of 12 circles with each arm.

TIP “The only thing that should be moving is your working arm,” says Lorenzo. “Twisting your torso or hips only minimizes the effort placed on your shoulder joint.”

THE ACTIVITY

Sliding Out of Bed

“GETTING OUT of bed is a much different movement than lifting yourself up from a chair,” Gatto says, “because your hips have to rotate as you get up.” This move targets the muscles involved (including your core, hip flexors, abductors, adductors, external rotators and pelvic stability muscles) and will make exiting a vehicle or tub easier to do, too.



THE EXERCISE

Standing Hurdles

1 Stand next to a sturdy chair and place a box or stack of towels along the outside of your left foot. Keeping an eye on your feet and a hand on the chair for balance, step your left foot up and over the box, then step your right foot up and over. Reverse the motion by stepping your right foot up and over, followed by your left. Do 10 to 15 reps, then place the box along the outside of your right foot and repeat.

TIP To challenge your balance more, try the exercise without using a support, or look forward instead of at your feet while stepping over the box.

THE ACTIVITY

Opening Jars



STRONG HANDS and forearms make life easier. “Whether it’s turning keys, opening doors, holding a pet’s leash, or maintaining a firm, safe grip on knives when cooking, your grip strength goes beyond being able to twist something open,” Gatto says. Grip strength has been associated with one’s risk for frailty and cognitive decline. A strong grip also keeps you safer by making it easier to hold onto handles and railings, as well as being able to catch yourself if you lose your balance.

THE EXERCISE

Multidirectional Towel Squeezes

1 Hold a loosely scrunched washcloth in your right hand with your right arm in front of you, palm facing the ceiling. Squeeze the washcloth as tightly as you can for one second, then relax your grip. Repeat at a quick pace for 20 seconds.

2 Turn your wrist so your palm faces toward your left. Repeat for 20 seconds, then finish by facing your palm down toward the floor for a final 20 seconds. Repeat for each hand 2 to 3 times.



TIP You don’t need to open your hand fully after each squeeze. Just relax your fingers enough so that you’re still loosely holding the washcloth.



MEMBERS ONLY

For more information on how to perform these exercises, scan this code with your camera or go to aarp.org/fitforthefuture.



TIP “Don’t round your back or excessively bend your knees as you go,” Gatto says. “Doing so can put unnecessary stress on your lower back and minimize the effectiveness of the movement on your hips, glutes and hamstrings.”

THE ACTIVITY

Lifting Little Ones

BENDING DOWN to pick something (or someone) up requires strength and flexibility in what’s known as the posterior chain muscles (lower back, hamstrings and buttocks). This exercise stretches and strengthens those muscles and helps maintain flexibility in your hips as well, and will make any activity that involves bending down easier.

THE EXERCISE **Hip Hinges**

- 1 Stand with your feet hip-width apart, knees slightly bent, a light dumbbell in each hand, palms facing your thighs. Gently tighten your core and buttocks.
- 2 Keeping your back straight, bend forward at the hips so your bottom moves backwards; stop once you feel a stretch in the back of your thighs. Reverse the motion by shifting your hips forward; you should straighten up naturally. (Try not to use the muscles of your back.) Squeeze your glutes once you’re back in a standing position. Do the movement 8 to 12 times, rest for 120 seconds, then repeat the exercise twice more.



THE ACTIVITY

Climbing the Stairs

CLIMBING STAIRS calls heavily on the quadriceps—the muscles at the front of your thighs—particularly the vastus medialis obliquus (or VMOs).

“Your VMOs help stabilize your knees, which is why weakness in this muscle is linked to knee pain walking up and down steps,” Lorenzo says. “Targeting this muscle regularly not only makes climbing stairs more tolerable and less painful, it improves overall knee stability and balance.” The best exercise for these muscles is simply climbing stairs. But if stairs aren’t plentiful where you live, consider adding this exercise into your daily routine.

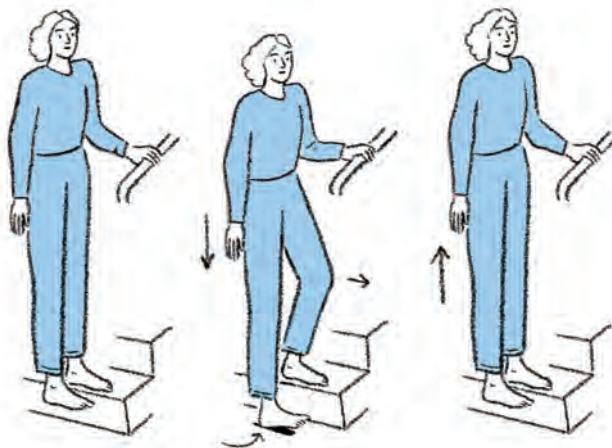


THE EXERCISE

Lateral Heel Tap

For this exercise, you’ll need a stable object 6 to 12 inches high; you can use the bottom step of the staircase or, if you don’t have stairs, a sturdy box or exercise bench. Make sure you’re close to a wall or banister for balance.

- 1 Step up and stand with both feet on the bottom step of a staircase. Now turn your entire body 90 degrees to the right, keeping your left foot flat on the step, but allowing your right foot to hang off it—all of your body weight should be shifted onto your left leg.
- 2 Keeping your back straight, bend your left leg slightly and lightly



touch your right heel to the floor, then stand back up. Repeat for as many repetitions as possible until fatigued. (Stop when you could *maybe* do 2 more.)

- 3 Rest until you feel fully recovered, then switch positions (right foot flat on the step, left foot hanging off of it) and repeat the exercise. Perform 2 to 3 sets of the move with each leg.

TIP As you get stronger, you can hold a light weight in your hand on the side that’s dangling off the step. So, left foot on the step, right foot dangling, weight in your right hand. Switch the weight to the other side when you switch feet.

Myatt Murphy has written more than a dozen books on health and fitness.

SHOCK! BETRAYAL! DISASTER!

THREE TRUE STORIES OF RESILIENCE IN FINANCIAL CRISES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOUG CHAKYA





NO RETIREMENT FOR ME

I SAVED AND PLANNED FOR A LONG ONE. THEN I HEARD FROM MY DOCTOR

BY JONATHAN CLEMENTS

THIS WON'T come as a big surprise: Dying makes you look at the world in a different way—the world of money included.

Among friends and family, I'm known for hard work and self-discipline. I spent almost two decades at *The Wall Street Journal*, churning out personal finance columns every week. I saved so diligently that I could have retired at age 51, but instead opted to write books and launch a personal finance website. My self-control extends to exercise: I've run or bicycled pretty much every day since 1995.

What was my reward for this life of industry, frugality and clean living? In May 2024, at age 61, I got an out-

of-the-blue diagnosis of cancer, the result of a defective gene. The cancer had metastasized from my lung to my chest, liver and brain. My oncologist said I might have a year to live. I'm hoping for a tad longer because my body has responded well to treatment. Still, it's only a matter of time before cancer gets the upper hand.

In the meantime, I find myself wandering through life with a different mindset from almost everybody else. How so? Here are 19 ways that my thinking and my finances have been transformed by my diagnosis.

1 I spent nearly my entire adult life saving like crazy so I could retire in comfort—and yet, faced with

my terminal illness, I have no plans to retire. Instead, I want to keep doing what I've been doing for years: getting up early, making coffee, exercising, writing and editing, napping after lunch, taking an afternoon walk, enjoying an evening glass of wine. These are the things that bring me pleasure each day, and I have no desire to stop now.

2 Do I regret my decades of frugality, including previously living for 20 years in a modest house I never much liked? Far from it. The money I saved won't go toward my retirement, but it still bought me a lot of happiness—because it allowed me to avoid financial worries for much of my adult life.

3 I could spend with reckless abandon now, but my old frugality persists. My partner, Elaine, and I had been living together for four years and were already engaged when I got my diagnosis. We married four days later, partly because she won't qualify for Social Security survivor benefits unless I'm still alive nine months after our wedding. Since then, we've taken a few special trips, and we have a few more planned. But I'll only open up my wallet so far. You won't find me paying \$5,000 to fly business class to Europe.

4 Never an enthusiastic shopper, I'm now even less inclined to buy new things. Last fall, Elaine insisted I purchase new shoes for my son's December 2024 wedding. I wear those shoes whenever I get the chance—because it's the only way I could justify the cost.

5 Gifting has become a top financial goal. One reason I'm not spending like crazy: I want to make sure I bequeath a healthy sum to Elaine and my two children, now in their 30s, from my previous marriage. I also made some financial gifts right away, including writing large checks to my kids and funding 529 college savings plans for my two grandsons.

6 I've long invested aggressively, keeping 80 percent or more of my portfolio in stock-index funds. Now that I know it's likely I won't

live more than another year or two, I'm even more aggressive. Why? I'm no longer investing for my retirement. Instead, I'm investing for my heirs, and their time horizon is far longer than mine.

7 Because old age is no longer in the cards, all kinds of issues are off the table. I don't have to fret over future long-term care costs, or whether to choose original Medicare or Medicare Advantage, or how to minimize my retirement tax bill. Instead, my top priority is making sure everything is in good shape for my heirs.

8 As of my 62nd birthday in January of this year, I could have applied for Social Security. But I won't. My goal is to get Elaine a healthy stream of Social Security benefits. After much research—including a consultation with the developer of opensocialsecurity.com, a free Social Security strategy calculator—I figured out that in our situation, I should skip claiming. Instead, Elaine will claim survivor benefits based on my earnings record when I die. Once she turns 70, she'll swap to a benefit based on her own record.

9 I thought my financial affairs were well organized. I was kidding myself. I've spent months shredding old tax returns, ripping up investment statements and organizing what remains. I fear that if I don't throw out unneeded paperwork, my family will think it's important—and I will have bequeathed them unnecessary confusion.

10 There's always more to throw away. I've moved four times since 2011, shedding possessions on each occasion. Yet I keep finding more things to toss or give away. My 13 years of downsizing have taught me to be ruthless. The fact is, there's nothing that I've unloaded over the past 13 years that I wish I could have back.

11 For years, I've been carting around a box of old mail: notes from old girlfriends, Christmas cards from 1986, letters I got while at college. Mixed in there was some really bad poetry I wrote. Did I carefully

review everything in the box? Hardly. I tore up most items after a quick glance and added them to the recycling bin. Am I glad my kids will never see all this stuff? You bet.

12 My finances were pretty simple, but I've been simplifying them even more. I've closed two of my four credit cards, liquidated a small IRA I

inherited from my father, and folded a solo Roth 401(k) into my Roth IRA. All this is a whole lot easier for me to do now than it will be after my death, when family members will have to produce death certificates and prove they have the authority to act.

13 I've added Elaine to my various insurance policies and made her the joint account holder on my two checking accounts. One of those checking accounts is debited for all utilities—gas, water, electricity, internet, cellphones—so it'll be easy for her to take over the household finances.

14 Two days after I was diagnosed with cancer, I sat down with Elaine and my children to walk them through my estate plan. I quickly realized one conversation wouldn't be enough. Stuff that was second nature to a financial nerd like me was baffling to them—things like the difference between traditional and Roth IRAs and what a “step-up in cost basis” means. Since then, I've fielded countless questions from Elaine and my kids.

15 Even as I tidy up my affairs, I'm also getting the house fixed up, including taking on a two-month bathroom remodeling project. I've learned that this is an affliction that often hits men confronting their mortality: They want to make sure all is in good order for their spouse or partner.

16 Time has always been more valuable than money, and never more so than right now. I want to devote each day to the things that I really care about, while minimizing annoy-



“I THOUGHT MY FINANCIAL AFFAIRS WERE WELL ORGANIZED. I WAS KIDDING MYSELF.”

ances. What if contractors or customer service reps are being unresponsive? If necessary, I'll play the C card, telling them I don't have long to live. Yes, it's surprisingly effective.

17 As news of my cancer has spread, I've been inundated with countless messages. If I read every book about cancer that's been recommended to me

or agreed to meet with everybody who wanted to visit, I'd have no time for the things that matter to me. The good news: When a dying man says “No,” people tend to listen.

18 I still want to make a difference in the lives of others. That's why I continue to write and edit every day. In return, I end each day feeling fulfilled and with that pleasant sense of progress that makes me happy.

19 I refuse to feel angry about my bad luck or despondent over the years I'll never enjoy. Instead, I'm determined to make the most of each day. I've long thought happiness has three key ingredients: a sense of financial security, time with family and friends, and doing work I love. My diagnosis has made me even more focused on those three things.

Every few months, I have a brain MRI and a body scan to see whether the cancer has spread. Every three weeks, I get blood drawn, which may offer a warning sign of trouble. Someday—maybe next month, maybe next year—the results won't be in my favor.

Until then, Elaine and I will continue to make plans for the four or five months that lie ahead, but no more than that. It's the frugality thing again. We can cancel hotel rooms and rental cars without penalty. But changing airline tickets and cruises can be costly. And I sure don't want to be confronted by both death *and* cancellation fees.

Jonathan Clements is the founder of HumbleDollar.com and the former personal finance columnist for The Wall Street Journal.



TILL DEBT DO US PART

A \$32,000 'MISTAKE' WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING

BY JEAN CHATZKY

FOR MARY Anderson, the first sign of trouble was a background check. Working at US Bank in Minnesota in 2015, she had access to federal government accounts. So it was important to verify she didn't have any financial problems in her life that she might try to solve with other people's money. But Mary had nothing to hide.

To her surprise, however, the examiners told her they'd found \$32,000 in bad credit card debt. Most of it was on a card Mary held jointly with her husband—a card she thought had been closed years before.

She went home and told David, her husband of 24 years, what had happened. David, a sales manager at an auto dealer, seemed just as confused as she was. It has to be a mistake, he insisted. "We have a common last name," she reasoned. But the bank's investigators assured her there was no error. They had the right Mary Anderson. Each day she went to work "scared to

death" that she was going to be fired for not revealing this supposed debt. Each night her husband shrugged his shoulders.

Finally, about five days later, David caved. Six years earlier, the couple had added a new kitchen and family room to their starter home. Costs had gotten out of control, he told her. He'd put the expenses on joint credit cards but didn't pay the balances.

Once Mary explained the situation to her employer, she was able to keep her job. But the experience was humiliating: A woman responsible for guarding against financial hanky-panky at the office was oblivious to a huge money problem at home.

"For many years he was making more money than I was, so it seemed to make sense for him to handle the money and the bills," Mary says. Unlike her, he was able

to come home during the day and intercept any bills in the mail. She'd occasionally see odd notices about their mortgage and unpaid bills, but he'd tell her it was all taken care of. "I trusted him to handle the finances," she says.

A few months later, she tried to withdraw money from a savings account she'd long held at a local bank. Instead of the \$8,000 she expected to find, the account was empty. David had withdrawn the money. She doesn't remember his response to her questions about where the money had gone. "It was tough to pull information out of him," she says.

The financial dominoes continued to fall. In the summer of 2019, she received a notice that the state was garnishing her wages. "I called [David] and asked him about it. He said, 'It must be a mistake.'" In an empty hallway in her office, she huddled in a corner and sobbed.

After Minnesota's department of revenue confirmed she owed unpaid taxes, Mary, suspecting more bad news, called the IRS. A customer service agent told her that she and David owed \$40,000 in back taxes. "How is this possible?" she asked. "We don't make that much money."

"Honey," the rep answered, "someone is lying to you." David, it turned out, had cashed in his retirement account and an old one of hers, worth \$24,000. He had failed to report some of his income. And he'd hidden years of IRS correspondence demanding payment and penalties.

Where was the money going? "We got into a situation where we were spending more than we had on both sides," David says. "To maintain it, and not draw attention, I made some unwise choices." As for the timeline of events that Mary recalls, he says, "I have nothing that I'll dispute. It's mostly true." But, he adds, "It's deeper than just money. There were mistakes. I



"IF YOU'RE A MARRIED COUPLE, YOU BOTH NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON."

made some. She made some. We should have had better communication.”

Mary, who was 49 when she learned of all these secret debts, couldn't bring herself to leave David. One stumbling block was that she didn't think she could afford it. Another was religion. “I was raised Lutheran,” she says. “To me, divorce was wrong.”

Instead, they agreed to sell their house. The home equity they'd accumulated was enough to pay their back taxes. They'd start all over with a clean slate. And this time, she'd pay meticulous attention to the money. They separated their bank accounts and credit cards. And she started regularly pulling her credit report to make sure nothing was amiss.

Yet living in their rented townhouse, Mary was still miserable—

married to a man she no longer trusted. She had always been a runner. But when her runs didn't ease her stress, she started training for an Ironman triathlon—a race comprising a 2.4 mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, then a full 26.2-mile marathon. “People would say to me, ‘Training takes so much time. Don't you want your time back?’” Mary remembers. “But it took my mind off all the other things in my life that weren't going right.”

Her debut Ironman, in Madison, Wisconsin, in September 2022, ended poorly. Near the end of the cycling segment, heavy rain and a hilly course made braking dangerous. “I didn't feel safe on the course,” she said, “so I stopped.” Two weeks later, she signed onto the IRS website and saw that she and David were (CONTINUED ON PAGE 74)

SWEPT AWAY

HURRICANE HELENE TOOK HIS POSSESSIONS BUT LEFT HIM A LIFELINE

BY SARA MURPHY

CHRISTOPHER Fielden is no stranger to floods. Over the 18 years he's lived in Swannanoa, North Carolina, 10 miles east of Asheville, he estimates that the Swannanoa River has overflowed its banks and flooded part of his property maybe 30 times. But the buildings at the farther end had remained untouched.

As Hurricane Helene approached last fall, however, Fielden, 53, took no chances. He placed straw bales in a makeshift berm around his one-story house, and he rented a pump to remove any water that might leak through.

It wasn't enough. By 6 a.m. on Friday, September 26, water was entering the house. Wearing a headlamp in the darkness, Fielden grabbed his computer and backpack, then drove his 2004 Toyota truck to safety.

He returned the next day to survey the damage. The water had risen 8 feet in the two-bedroom home. The greenhouses and the barn on the property were destroyed. Also ruined were two other dwellings—a mobile home and an attachment to the barn—which he had been renting to current and past students from nearby Warren Wilson College. (His tenants had evacuated before the storm hit.) Every inch of land was covered in mud and debris.

“It looks like a bomb went off,” Fielden says.

Later he drove to the Center for Conscious Living and Dying (CCLD), a community-supported home for end-

RESCUING YOUR FINANCES AFTER A CRISIS

4 tips to help you recover from the damage done to your money when your life has been turned upside down BY ELISE CEYRAL

▷ Focus on the now.

After a disaster, take an hour to write down everything that's making you anxious, advises Megan McCoy, an assistant professor of personal financial planning at Kansas State University. Once that's done, start taking care of things you have control over. After a hurricane, for example, document damage and notify your insurer. But don't waste your energy imagining catastrophic aftereffects off in the future, she says.

▷ Be on guard against scams.

Criminals know how to use our emotions against us. Because of that, our heightened reactions to catastrophic events—panic or regret, perhaps—make us an obvious target. After natural disasters, for example, scammers

posing as contractors may rush you into paying high fees for bogus or poor-quality repairs. If you've lost money to a fraud, another criminal might pose as someone from the government who will help you get it back. “We always encourage people not to be pressured to act fast,” says Jessica Prell, adviser to AARP's fraud prevention programs. “Always take time to do your research.”

▷ **Make a long-term plan.** Once you've taken care of basic needs such as food and



shelter, start developing a sustainable budget, recommends Jordan Naffa, director of financial planning at Arista Wealth Management in Las Vegas. If necessary, reach out to creditors and try to negotiate your obligations based on your changed financial circumstances.

▷ Practice self-care.

Friends, family and professionals can help you deal with the damage to your mental health that financial emergencies can inflict. Reaching out to a support group might be helpful, Naffa says. Lauren Lindsay, a financial planner at Beacon Financial Planning in Houston—many of whose clients have endured multiple hurricanes—says a friend who is *not* going through the same trauma might give you a helpful perspective.



of-life care where he had been volunteering. Three other volunteers and a resident were sitting outside, enjoying the now-sunny weather. “I said, ‘It’s all gone. I lost it all,’ and I just collapsed and started crying,” Fielden recalls. The resident, seated in his wheelchair, held Fielden’s hand and sang. “I looked up at him,” says Fielden, “and I said, ‘Who’s helping who here?’”

Living Off the Land

In 2006, Fielden and his then-partner had bought five acres, hoping to live sustainably off the land. They built their house, then launched Red Wing Farm, selling plant starts and produce locally. Later, they added dairy goats and chickens. Net income reached \$28,000 in a good year. So both he and his partner worked other jobs as well: she for nonprofits, he as an architectural draftsman.

In 2016, they bought the adjacent six acres along the river, plus the mobile home on the land. But several years later, after Fielden

had suffered two medical setbacks, he decided sustainable farming was neither financially nor physically feasible for him. Red Wing Farm closed, and Fielden started a business consulting on ADA-compliant accessibility.

By 2023, Fielden had split from his partner and had bought out her share of their properties. At the time Helene arrived, he was making monthly mortgage payments of nearly \$4,000. Along with his consulting income, he was collecting \$2,700 in monthly rent.

“I had a financial plan for the rest of my life, including retirement,” says Fielden. The mortgages would be paid off around the time he turned 65, and the rental income would support him as he aged. “Now all that’s gone.”



**“IF I DON’T
HAVE
PEOPLE,
IT DOESN’T
MATTER HOW
MUCH MONEY
I HAVE.”**

Money In, Money Out

Regaining his composure at the CCLD, Fielden started looking for ways to help out. With power still out, residents had to be evacuated and generators connected. The CCLD directors invited him to move into one of the

rooms reserved for families. “That’s been a beautiful gift,” he says.

But what would become of his home? Never believing it was in danger, he hadn’t covered it with flood insurance. Luckily, by the Monday after the storm, he had cellphone service and was able to connect with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for aid. He soon received a \$53,000 check through the disaster assistance program, earmarked mostly for home repair.

And he did have flood insurance on the property with the mobile home, since it had been required for getting a mortgage. With the money he received, he paid off the balance and now owns that tract outright. He still has a mortgage on the five acres where the remains of the house sit, and in December resumed making the \$1,750 monthly payment on that property.

Fielden restarted his consulting work about two weeks after the storm. “In the short term, right now, I am able to pay my bills,” he says.

The Power of Community

Just before Thanksgiving, Fielden moved out of CCLD and into a furnished apartment in East Asheville owned by a fellow volunteer.

Asked to share any financial lessons he has learned in the aftermath of the hurricane, Fielden offers some obvious ones: *Don’t* buy property in a floodplain. *Do* buy flood insurance.

But the most valuable lesson, he says, isn’t financial. “What’s most important for getting through a moment like this is community, family, support, love, and having close relationships with people,” he says. “If anything comes out of this experience, personally for me, as well as the collective experience in Asheville, let this be a wake-up call for people: If you don’t have the level of community that you want and need in your life, prioritize that. Because if I don’t have people, it doesn’t matter how much money I have.”

Sara Murphy is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.

My Best Cruise Ever!

(And the voyages that could have been better)



CONTRIBUTORS: AMY ALIPIO, ED CONDRAN, MAISY FERNANDEZ, DAVID SWANSON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRISTINE RÖSCH

THERE ARE so many factors to consider when booking a cruise. Where will your journey take you? How many days will you be at sea or in port? In what type of cabin will you rest your head? What entertainment will pique your interest? Will you take prearranged shore excursions, or set out on your own? And you'll likely encounter dozens of other small

decisions along the way that can impact your vacation.

So we asked the real experts—older Americans who have walked the lido deck—to share their stories. About a time they experienced a brag-worthy vacation. And about a time things could have gone better.

Before you head off into uncharted waters, learn from these travel tales. Bon voyage!

◀ **MY BEST**

I Won a Trip to a Private Island

I TOOK a seven-night Carnival cruise to Mexico from Galveston, Texas. The first day, they did a presentation on their shore excursions and drew one name to win a free experience. My then-husband and I won the big prize: two passes to Isla Pasion, a private island off Cozumel. That spoiled me! Now every time I cruise, I expect to win the big prize, and am disappointed when I don't. My advice to others: Always go to those presentations and enter the drawing. You never know. —*Michael Palmer, 52, Henryetta, Oklahoma*



Study the brochures:

Every cruise line will say it's the right one for you and there's something for everyone, but there are clues to tell you more. Look for advertising photos that showcase people who appear to be of your age, Palmer says.



MY WORST ▲

I Didn't Know There Would Be So Many Kids

MY LAST CRUISE, to the Dominican Republic, was my least favorite. There were too many kids. The Jacuzzi was filled with kids who never got out, and parents weren't really supervising them. It wasn't spring break or anything, but what we didn't realize upon booking the trip was that the cruise line was running a special where kids cruise for free. So make sure you know what kind of cruise it is, and whether any special packages might alter the typical vibe or passengers on board. —*Yvonne Howard, 53, Smyrna, Delaware*

MY BEST ▶

I Spent Most of My Time on Land, Not at Sea

I WAS ON a 12-day Princess cruise, leaving from the U.K. and going to Ireland, Scotland and all the way around the British Isles. It was port-intensive, so we spent more days at port than at sea, on excursions that included castles and cathedrals—top tier.

—*Jazminn Davis, 64, Pittsfield, New Hampshire*



Ask an expert: There are so many cruises out there; it's easy to go down a rabbit hole looking at them. A cruise expert can help you narrow it down, Davis says. They ask questions, such as how far are you willing to travel to the departure point and your desired port-to-at-sea ratio, and find the right fit.

MY BEST

We Made Friends With Locals

MY WIFE calls me a human GPS because I can find my way around anywhere. When I retired, we went on an Alaskan cruise with Princess, and we would walk into the port towns and talk to people. We wouldn't take an excursion offered by the ship. In Ketchikan, we saw what looked like a run-down little store, but the sign said "radio station." And we talked to the DJ and found out that he knew my brother! The best experiences are just getting to know the locals. —*Glenn Kessler, 67, Sugar Land, Texas*



Variety is the spice of life:

Do something different every day of your cruise. Go to karaoke night even if you don't sing, Palmer says. If cruising alone, do activities where you meet others. You may make a friend to cruise with again. →

Clockwise from left: Shutterstock; Alamy Stock Photo; Riccardo Spila/Sime/eStock Photo

MY BEST ▾

Our Second Choice Turned Out to Be a Dream Destination

IN 2007, we wanted to go to Antarctica. My partner, John, had retired four years before and this was our way to start exploring the world. We called Lindblad Expeditions Cruises, but Antarctic cruises were sold out for the season. They suggested going to Svalbard, Norway, instead. We'd never heard of it but we said, "Let's do it!" That first cruise to a destination that wasn't our first choice became our dream trip. We saw over 30 polar bears. We saw walrus. We had a blue whale right alongside the ship. We went past these bird cliffs that probably had 100,000 birds nesting on them. I kayaked for the

first time. The naturalist said to stop paddling once in a while and just listen and I'd hear the "ice crispies"—which is the air being released out of the glacial ice. It really does snap, crackle and pop. —Annabelle Lee, 68, Thousand Oaks, California



Manage your money:

Carolyn Spencer Brown, former editor in chief of *Cruise Critic*, is a fan of package pricing for amenities. "As we get older, we want less hassle," she says. "We want our brains at rest when we're on vacation, not totaling up sums of extra fee options."



MY WORST ▲

Family Time ... in a Cramped Cabin

OUR GOAL was the destination, Alaska. But we learned an important lesson, which is that you shouldn't put four people (two adults and two teenage boys) in one stateroom. We didn't realize how small the room was going to be. We had two sets of bunk beds in our room. There was no place to chill out. So, the journey is as important as the destination.

—Ranu Muttreja, 56, Philadelphia



Create extra storage:

Rooms can be tight, but bringing a few small items can maximize space, traveler Jazminn Davis says. The ship's walls are metal, so take magnetic hooks to hang purses, hats, sandals and more. A portable, over-the-door shoe rack keeps shoes out of the way, and a netted shower bag can be used to hold your products in a tight cabin bathroom.

Clockwise from top right: Shutterstock; Stocksy (2); Courtesy Norwegian Cruise Line; Rosemary Behan/Alamy; Stock Photo

What's New for 2025

The latest in amenities and itineraries



SO MANY NEW SHIPS

Several new ships are expected to launch this year. They range from two 125-passenger American Cruise Lines vessels that are designed for cruising the Atlantic coast, to Royal Caribbean's *Star of the Seas*, a massive ship that can hold more than 5,600 guests.

REVAMPED MENUS

Vegetarian, vegan and plant-based menus—along with no-alcohol mocktails—are found on lines such as Oceania, Regent Seven Seas, Celebrity, Windstar and Carnival. Holland America Line has developed a global network to source and serve 80 types of fresh fish.



MY WORST ▾

We Were Considered Too Old to Have Fun on an Excursion

I STARTED scuba diving in the 1960s. I was inspired by Lloyd Bridges and *Sea Hunt* and taught by a Navy frogman. These days, although we're still certified divers, Donnelle and I tend to take snorkeling trips. We booked a Caribbean cruise, and learned about age limits for "active" shore excursions. A snorkeling trip in Costa Maya had a 65-year age limit. We called and questioned that. Even in our 80s, we're capable snorkelers. We jumped through hoops, and even sent a letter from our doctor. Eventually they OK'd us. But when we checked in, the guy with the clipboard told us we were too old, and they put us on a silly glass-bottom boat tour instead. We were so annoyed and insulted. We prefer sailing on lines that don't discriminate against older cruisers. —Dale Leatherman, 80, Northern Virginia



Clockwise from top right: Getty Images; Shutterstock; Getty Images



MY BEST ▲

I Got to Experience Stunningly Beautiful Dutch Landscapes

HAVE YOU ever been in Kansas and seen its miles of flat plains? Imagine that as tulips and that's what it was like visiting the flower fields on Viking's Tulips and Windmills cruise in the Netherlands. Tulips to the left, to the right, tulips behind you, in red and orange and yellow. Just unbelievable beauty. I learned so much on this tour, not just about tulips, but about Van Gogh and Rembrandt, World War II history, and the technology that exists to help prevent flooding in a small country that's partly below sea level. The cruise is only available for a few weeks, but don't go the first couple of weeks; you're not guaranteed

the full flower experience because of the weather. —Rachel Sinnett, 74, Rockville, Maryland



Be weather-aware:

Michael Johnson, 71, of Fredericksburg, Texas, remembers traveling on a cruise from Boston to Montreal in mid-October. "I had visions of relaxing on a big veranda, looking at the fall colors," he says. "But it was cold and drizzly." At one shore excursion, he asked a sales clerk at a store in Maine when she thought the storm would end. "She looked at me with a puzzled look and said, 'This isn't a storm, this is the weather!'"

SPECIAL PORTS

Cruise line-developed hot spots are multiplying in the Bahamas. MSC Cruises has developed the Ocean Cay. Disney has opened Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point. And coming later this year: Carnival's Celebration Key and Royal Caribbean's Royal Beach Club Paradise Island.

CHARTING REMOTE WATERS

Western Australia's Kimberley region is luring cruisers to see rugged red gorges and ancient rock art (Seabourn, Silversea and Ponant offer cruises). Viking has announced new China-focused itineraries along the coast. —David Swanson



AARP Smart Guide to Cruises

AARP members can read 47 helpful tips for planning a cruise vacation, landing good deals, packing for the trip and more. Go to: aarp.org/smartguides.



SAVING SANDRA

AN AARP MEDICAL MYSTERY

By Sari Harrar

ILLUSTRATIONS BY OWEN FREEMAN

On January 5, 2022, Sandra Carlson planned to end her life. / At 53, she needed a walker to take a few steps. Even with it, she crashed to the ground. Her left leg was cold, paralyzed, with searing pain ripping through it. She took the opioid painkiller Dilaudid—at least four times stronger than morphine—every day. The drug barely took the edge off the pain and left her nauseated and fuzzy-headed. She had lost control of her bowels. / This had been

Carlson's life for two years. Yet visits to a series of specialists near her Savannah, Georgia, home and at hospitals, major medical centers and emergency rooms in two other states hadn't yielded a diagnosis or treatment. "I couldn't take any more," she says. "I was absolutely exhausted and tired of hurting. My life was done." Then her mysterious condition got even worse.

PETITE AND BLOND, with a lilting Southern accent, Carlson had run track and played softball in high school. As a young adult she regularly jogged two to three miles a day and exercised at a gym. But she was also no stranger to pain. A workplace injury in the late 1990s ended her career in a government job she loved and led to spinal fusion surgeries. Afterward, Carlson stayed busy. She overhauled her diet and did daily workouts in a swimming pool. She lost 70 pounds and kept the weight off. She loved to cook, visit family and friends, play with her beloved dogs and attend church.

Then, in early 2020, she felt a shooting pain in her left leg. This was new. After consulting an orthopedic surgeon, she underwent another spinal fusion procedure in June 2020. But afterward, her pain continued.

In December 2020, Carlson began falling—hard—with no warning. Shocked, but assuming it was a spine-related symptom, she consulted another surgeon and had yet another painful spine procedure in June 2021. She hoped the problem was solved.

Within about two weeks, the falls were back—and now she'd lost control of her bladder and bowels.

I dropped, Carlson told us. I had no control. I just went straight down. My left leg would give out completely like nothing was there. Sometimes I'd go straight backwards and hit my head on the floor.

July 3, 2021, was really a kicker.

I was in my front yard giving a plant some water. It was hot outside. All of a sudden, I went down. I managed to get back up, but I noticed I had used the bathroom on myself, and I'm

like oh, what's this? That scared me. I got myself into the house and I cleaned myself up. I started making calls. My neurosurgeon's office suggested I go to the emergency room.

HER FEAR NOW ratcheted up again, Carlson spent four days in a local hospital, hoping for answers. She was discharged without a diagnosis. After taking her home, her husband, Travis Carlson, went to a drugstore to buy incontinence supplies for her.

I was so embarrassed. I was in so much pain, and my husband was very concerned. He didn't know if there was an infection or what the deal was.

In early August 2021, Travis drove Sandra 140 miles to the emergency room of a major medical center in northern Florida. They didn't have an appointment. The nation was in the grip of the COVID pandemic. A headline-grabbing surge in cases had filled hospitals beyond capacity across the South. Some were turning patients away from emergency rooms. It wasn't long before they turned Carlson away.

Travis couldn't go in [to the hospital] with me because it was still COVID. [The doctor] didn't have much to say to me other than to go back where I came from. I said, "You're not going to do any tests? I really think this needs to be looked into." I think because I said that she ran one MRI. Then we went right home.

IN SEPTEMBER, the couple drove about a hundred miles to a major medical center in South Carolina for an appointment with a spine specialist. Carlson could still move her left leg but her foot was ice cold. She was forced to use a cane to get around. Due to the pain, she was barely getting any sleep. After she outlined her symptoms, the physician suggested medication to help her get some rest.

They had a lot of compassion for me, a lot of empathy. The



Sandra's pain sent her and Travis to the ER.

'OH, IT WAS THE WORST IMAGINABLE PAIN. LIKE AN ELECTRICAL SHOCK. IT WAS SO BAD THAT I LOST MY HAIR. I BROKE OUT IN HIVES. I JUST COULDN'T FUNCTION.'

doctor said, "You really need to find a specialist to really dig into this because you've got some issues somewhere. I can't treat you." I had respect for him because of that. They sent me home with a grabber, some pull-up shorts to go over my Depends and a device to help me get my socks on. They went way out of their way to help me.

In October, the couple traveled 122 miles to the office of an incontinence specialist at a university medical center in Georgia that was recommended by a digestive-system specialist close to home. There, Sandra got a clue—but still no diagnosis.

This doctor said, "You really need to have some sort of surgery to fix the root cause of the problem before I can help fix the incontinence. Once you do, come back and I'll be more than happy to help you." He did extensive testing, and he could see where I had feeling on the right side, but I would be lax on the left side.

THE PAIN continued. It was sharp and constant, and she tried a variety of medications, but only Dilaudid (hydromorphone), prescribed by a pain-management specialist, blunted the agony. The drug made her throw up, so four times a day she took melt-in-the-mouth tablets of the anti-nausea drug Zofran (ondansetron), often prescribed for nausea from cancer treatments. Dilaudid made her mentally fuzzy, so it was hard to do the word puzzles that she enjoyed to pass the time. She rarely left the house.

Oh, it was the worst imaginable pain. Like an electrical shock. It was so bad that I lost my hair. I broke out in hives. I just couldn't function. Bad words came out of my mouth. I don't take heavy-duty medication. But I had to be on Dilaudid to survive. The pain broke through the Dilaudid, and that's some strong medicine. I would throw it up, but I'd still wait several hours to take the next dose. I didn't want to take too much.

When pain struck, Carlson would grab a black marking pen and trace its route across her leg. It was always the same. As a last resort, she had begun trying to diagnose herself.

I could draw the path. It followed my quadriceps muscle along my thigh, down the inside of my knee and calf and would shoot down to my foot. I would go to appointments with the lines marked on my leg. I wanted them to see it.

DETERMINED TO stay active and recover, Carlson had started physical therapy after her spinal fusion surgeries. Despite the pain and the embarrassment of incontinence, she continued to go as often as three times a week. It wasn't easy. On the widely used Numeric Pain Rating Scale—where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain imaginable—Carlson's pain "was a 7 out of 10 on her best days," says physical therapist Stuart Fife, of Fife Therapy in Savannah, Georgia, where she had her PT sessions. "She could walk a little bit, but she was at risk for falling. We tried an assistive brace for her left leg. But it was clumsy and took a lot of effort to walk in it. But Sandra kept pushing, pushing, pushing. I remember her saying 'I'm going to walk again.'"

She wore a medical-alert bracelet explaining that she was

at risk for falls and had an emergency call button. When Travis, a car mechanic, was at work during the day, Carlson's companions were her dogs, a rat terrier named Lita and a black Labrador retriever named Simba, who had undergone service-dog training.

Simba would follow me everywhere I went. Any time I dropped a spoon or fork or envelope, she picked it up, so gently. That dog saw everything. I would fall anywhere. I would just be standing there and all of a sudden I would be on the floor. A hard fall. Sometimes before I tried to get back up, she would just sit on the floor with me. She was able to position herself so I could use her shoulder blades and hips, where she's sturdy, to get up.

Both of my dogs licked my tears. Many times, I just wondered why this was happening to me. They would give me relief, saying it's OK, it's going to be alright. The power of an animal is unreal.

The Meaning of Pain

PAIN IS THE body's warning signal. It's a symptom—but when doctors can't find the cause, people with chronic pain can spend years searching for a diagnosis, says Thomas Tung, M.D., a plastic surgeon and professor of surgery at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis who specializes in treating painful nerve problems. With different types of chronic pain, it is not unknown for people to wait six, eight or even 12 years to get a diagnosis or treatment, research shows.

Meanwhile, pain persists, boosting risk for depression or anxiety fivefold, according to a July 2024 study of nearly 32,000 Americans published in the journal *Pain*. "Chronic pain and depression can share several brain regions," says lead study author Jennifer Schultz De La Rosa, strategy director at the Comprehensive Center for Pain and Addiction at University of Arizona Health Sciences. Both modulate neurotransmitters like norepinephrine, dopamine and dynorphin that influence sleep, mood and even the body's fight-or-flight response. Inflammation within the central nervous system caused by chronic pain may contribute to depression and/or anxiety, De La Rosa notes.

Even treatments for Carlson's pain came with added risk. In a 2022 study of 5,146 people using opioids long-term for chronic pain published in *Pain*, those using the drugs most days were up to 40 percent more likely to develop depression than less-frequent users. "Opioids interfere with our normal biological reward process," says study coauthor Jeffrey F. Scherrer, professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at Saint Louis University School of Medicine. "They dampen our ability to feel pleasure and joy."

For people like Carlson, who experience disabling high-impact chronic pain for years and take opioids regularly for long periods



Through his search, Travis finally found the right doctor.

of time, the risks are even higher. Chronic pain itself can increase risk of suicidal thoughts by 18 to 50 percent. "Suicide is an attempt to escape from unbearable suffering," De La Rosa says. "One recent study shows that mental defeat—when you perhaps feel you can't fight anymore, that the pain has destroyed you as a person—puts you at high risk." (If you are thinking about harming yourself, tell someone who can help now. You can call 911, visit your local ER, or call or text 988 for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.)

Carlson reached this low point on a chilly morning in January 2022. Reasoning that her spine could be the source of her symptoms, she and her husband had met with a neurosurgeon the day before. The couple say the visit was frustrating and troubling. The doctor hadn't read her extensive records. After a conversation in an exam room, they spent hours in a waiting room and finally left to find their way out in the evening—making their way through the dark office building that had largely closed for the night.

I stayed awake all that night. I was ready to give up. When I got up in the morning, I told my husband to go on to work. I was in tears when I sent him off. I knew that I would be gone before he got back. I didn't want to die, but I didn't want to live through this anymore. I didn't want



MEMBERS ONLY
To watch an interview with
Sandra Carlson, scan this code or
go to aarp.org/savingsandra.

THAT MORNING, TRAVIS SENSED THAT THINGS HAD REACHED A CRISIS POINT. 'EVERYTHING I TRIED WAS NOT WORKING,' HE SAYS. 'I WAS AT THE EDGE...'

my husband to suffer anymore. I didn't want to suffer. I was really going to take my life that day. I don't want to say how, but I had a plan.

That morning, Travis sensed that things had reached a crisis point. "Everything I tried was not working," he says. "I was at the edge there trying to keep her [going]. I kept telling her, 'Don't worry, I'll get you taken care of.' Because that's what I'm supposed to do. That's a husband's job, whether it's a leak in the roof or the car won't crank. Or she needs something fixed on her body that I can't fix and we go to the doctor."

At work, demoralized and not knowing where to turn, Travis called Sandra's Aunt Sue. "I had to get somebody with more of a woman's way of doing things. So that's what I did." He urged Sue to hurry over to the Carlson home. The front door was unlocked, he told her. Check on Sandra. The woman let herself in and found Sandra on the couch—still alive. The couple don't want to talk about how Sandra had planned to end her life, but it would have been a swift and certain death. Sue's arrival was a miraculous intervention.

She just came on in. Travis told her where to find me. She was in tears because she was afraid of what she would find. Within minutes I would have been gone. She stayed with me for a good long time. It was a very emotional day. I'll be grateful to Travis and my aunt for the rest of my life.

'Just Amputate It'

THE DETERMINATION to end her life passed. But that didn't keep things from getting even worse. In February 2022, Carlson had a follow-up visit with the incontinence specialist. She underwent several tests of the nerve and muscle function of her intestinal system—including one that involved trying to expel a small balloon as if it were a bowel movement and another that measured nerve activity.

I couldn't respond except a little on the right side. It was a flat line on the left. No feeling. Paralysis. On the ride home, I was in so much pain.

Travis drove back to their house to pick up a few things, then continued driving to take Sandra back to the emergency room at the northern Florida hospital they'd visited in 2021—a nearly 400-mile drive in all.

It was a long trip for me, but I did it. I was admitted, then they were going to discharge me because they didn't know what was wrong.

As Carlson waited to be discharged, Travis left to pick up food for the ride home. That's when things got even worse. Sandra had a stroke-like event.

The left side of my face was numb, and the doctor was trying to get a response out of me. I couldn't open my mouth. My tongue was tied. It messed up my vision. I don't remember anything until about 24 hours later. They gave me blood thinners with Travis' permission. They determined I didn't have a stroke because my brain images were coming back clean. They thought I was in so much pain that my brain shut down.

As bewildering as it was to the couple, brain attacks that mirror a stroke are actually commonplace, according to the American Heart Association. About 25 percent of suspected strokes treated in hospital emergency rooms in the U.S. are stroke mimics, a 2021 study found. Among the suspected triggers are pain, fatigue, depression and stress. But while Carlson's episode wasn't a brain-damaging stroke, it left her in worse shape than before.

From that episode, I never walked again. I was always in a wheelchair. Before we drove home, we had to go buy one.

In March 2022, Carlson saw a neurologist at a large medical center in Atlanta.

He showed me a film [of her spine] and said, "You've got cauda equina syndrome." [A disorder of nerves at the base of the spine.] I had done enough research to understand what that was, and I said, "I don't have that." He told me to get a lawyer and said "You're never going to get any better. You're stuck with this for the rest of your life." I looked the man in the eye and said, "How about you just amputate the leg? Just take it off all the way up to where my (CONTINUED ON PAGE 72)



REAL/PEOPLE

More than 300 animals, including two zebras, live at the sanctuary.



Inspiring stories
of friends and
neighbors, in
their own words

INSIDE • SKATEBOARD CHAMP P. 62

A STAR TREK LABOR OF LOVE P. 63

MORE THAN 60 YEARS LATE, A NASA
TRAINEE'S FIRST TRIP TO SPACE P. 64



Last Chance Ranch

Where the Zebras Roam Free

Claire Staples left a glamorous career to rescue mustangs, horses and a few lucky others

IN THE U.S., horses are companion animals. We don't kill them for their meat or hides. But if their owners don't want them for whatever reason, they're often bought at auction and shipped to Canada or Mexico for slaughter. Wild mustangs get rounded up and sold the same way. Even zebras and other exotic animals can end up in kill pens—they're often the babies of mothers that have been bred in captivity and then hunted for sport. The public can buy horses and other animals from the kill pens before they ship—and that's what I do.

I used to work in the entertainment industry as a producer. I had all the material and external things that were supposed to fill that hole in your soul. But they didn't work. At 50, I wanted to change my life. I'd always loved horses, so I started riding again. That's how I heard about the kill pens and slaughter pipeline for horses.

When I saved my first mustang, I boarded him at a stable. Then I bought my first ranch in Calabasas. By the time I'd met and married my husband, I had nine horses and a few donkeys. I started visiting wild horse sanctuaries to see how they worked. And I turned to my husband and said, "We're going to need a bigger ranch."

With a 9,000-acre property in Oregon, I could rescue more horses, and eventually I started a nonprofit to support their care. We currently have 260 horses and about 60 burros. If the animals are healthy enough, we turn them out with a herd we think they'll like. They live like wild horses, though we do daily checks to make sure they're healthy and well-fed.

Rescuing horses has taught me a lot about patience, forgiveness and living in the moment. But the main thing it has taught me is that you can't achieve happiness by going after material things for yourself. For me, seeing the light come back into a horse's eyes, letting it run free and watching it grow into its own happiness is the greatest joy there is. —As told to Leslie Quander Wooldridge

Clare Staples is the founder of the nonprofit Skydog Sanctuary in Malibu, California, and Bend, Oregon.



A World-Class Competitor

Skateboarder Judi Oyama took a 20-year break from racing. She's back—and faster than ever

AT 19, I WAS a professional skateboarder, and often the only girl in the race. Women weren't taken seriously in the sport back then. One guy actually told me, "I'll never consider you a pro, because you're a female." But that just motivated me more.

Then in the early '80s, most of the skateparks closed because of liability lawsuits. Suddenly, the downhill and slalom races I'd been racing dried up. For about 20 years, I stopped competing. Worked as a graphic designer, got married, had kids.

When slalom racing started to get

popular again in the early 2000s, a guy I knew from the old days encouraged me to race. Slalom is a downhill race on a closed road, where you weave between cones. It requires strength, dexterity and balance.

I never thought I'd still be skating today, not to mention improving. I'm going faster than I've gone in my whole career, in part because the equipment has gotten better. The hills we're racing are faster and steeper, too.

I've turned 65 and I'm racing against teenagers. At the World Skate Games in Italy last year, I came in third among U.S. women overall. Maggie Harrison, a 14-year-old girl I've been mentoring, was just ahead of me.

Working out has been key to my longevity as an athlete. Barbell lifting is key for bone density and balance. I deadlift over 200 pounds. I'm helping motivate 40- and 50-year-olds. Mountain bikers and snowboarders send me messages that say, "Just saw your video. You made me realize I could keep going."

My biggest fear is burdening my kids when I get older. My mother had dementia, and now my father has it. That has motivated me to stay active. I may race against kids now, but I still feel like a kid myself.

People ask me whether skateboarding isn't too dangerous at my age, but I figure I could get hurt walking down the stairs. I've tripped over stuff and fallen on pavement. At least when I'm on my board, I have protective gear on. —As told to Gregg Segal

Graphic designer Judi Oyama, 65, of Aptos, California, has won two Slalom Skateboard World Championship titles.



MEMBERS ONLY
To watch a video of Oyama in action, scan this code or visit aarp.org/judioyama.

Welcome Aboard the Starship Enterprise

How James Cawley went from *Star Trek* superfan—and professional Elvis Presley impersonator—to museum impresario

IF ANYONE HAD told my 10-year-old self that one day Bill Shatner would be sitting in an exact replica of the Starship Enterprise bridge that I'd built, I'd have said, "You're crazy." But it's true. The first time Shatner saw my bridge, he stood there, it seemed like forever, and finally said, "Bravo, your proportions, they're perfect."

They ought to be. I inherited the blueprints from William Ware Theiss, *Star Trek*'s costume designer. I'd first contacted Theiss when I was in high school in the late '80s and wanted to make my own Captain Kirk uniform. Theiss sent me a pattern and fabrics left over from the original series. After I sent him photos of the finished shirt, he called and hired me to help with costumes for a series then just starting production: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. I made sweaters for the Wesley Crusher character and spandex jumpsuits for the background crew. In 1992, when Theiss passed, he left me a few things in his will, including those blueprints.

At the time, I was working as an Elvis impersonator, touring the country with the Jordanaires. When I'd get a break from touring, I'd come home to Ticonderoga, New York, and reconnect with *Star Trek*. I built set pieces with my grandfather, who had a workshop in his barn. When the work started to outgrow the barn, I moved the sets to a car dealership I'd rented.

Collaborating with other *Star Trek* fans, I produced and shot the first episode of a web series called *Star Trek: New Voyages* in 2003. The idea was to do the fourth and fifth year of the original series, which had ended after three years. I played Kirk.

One of our Klingons happened to



be the bodyguard for Walter Koenig, who'd played Chekov on TV. That's how we got Koenig to play Chekov in our next episode. Then Nichelle Nichols, who'd played Uhuru, came for an episode. When she arrived on the set, she gasped. Then she just kept saying, "My God, I'm home."

In 2014, I moved the set to an abandoned grocery store and arranged with CBS to open the Starship Enterprise as a museum.

Bill Shatner leads tours twice a year. His energy level is just incred-

ible. They say, "Never meet your heroes." But when it comes to Bill Shatner, they couldn't be more wrong.

When fans come, they get a history lesson. It was the 1960s. The Cold War, Vietnam, the Watts Riots. And here's *Star Trek* with every race, all equals. That's the strength of the show, its morality. *Star Trek* teaches us how far we've come, and how far we have to go. —As told to Gregg Segal

Actor and film producer James Cawley, 57, owns the *Star Trek* Original Series Set Tour attraction in Ticonderoga, New York.

The Ride of His Life

Onetime NASA recruit Ed Dwight finally made it to space



Dwight in his U.S. Air Force uniform circa 1962 and, below, celebrating his return to Earth

BACK IN 1961, I'd been an Air Force test pilot when I received a letter from President Kennedy, encouraging me to apply to the NASA training program. I was accepted and finished seventh out of 17 in my class. While there, I experienced a lot of racism, discouragement and even veiled threats from some of the NASA training leadership, especially after the president's assassination in 1963. Everything changed with his loss.

Still, the Black community put a lot of its hopes in me. I was on magazine covers—*Jet*, *Sepia*—and received thousands of fan letters a week. But I wasn't selected to be an astronaut. In 1966, I resigned from the military and went to work for IBM, then became a sculptor, specializing in figures from African American history. The first Black astronauts weren't named until 1978.

I was involved with those astronauts from the very beginning. They would call me to talk, and they'd bring me flags that had been to space. Some of them visited my art studio in Denver, and they've even taken a few of my sculptures into space.

After it became pos-

sible to go into space as a "tourist" a few years ago, a group of Black astronauts started talking about trying to make it happen for me. Once I heard their proposition, I said, "Yeah, let's do it."

It took awhile to arrange, but sponsorships to fund my spot were lined up from Blue Origin, the space flight company owned by Jeff Bezos; the nonprofit Space for Humanity; and the Jaison and Jamie Robinson Family Foundation. In May, I joined a ride on Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket. At 90, I was the oldest person to go to space, a couple of months older than William Shatner when he flew.

I had logged more than 9,000 hours of flying time, including as a test pilot and a zero-G pilot, so I had some experience. I'd even been up to 80,000 feet, where I could begin to see the blue shell of the atmosphere. But there are some things you can

just never prepare for. The noise of the rocket on liftoff was unbearably loud—they gave me and the other five crew members earplugs to dampen the noise. And I had assumed that as we left the atmosphere, there would be a gradual separation from light to the darkness of space. But there isn't. It's a sharp border. It seemed like a dark curtain had fallen over the large windows we were sitting next to.

And then suddenly we were floating in zero gravity. Out the window, I could see the Earth. Everything looked ordered and neat and wonderful and beautiful. There was no separation between countries or states. And you ask yourself: *As wonderful as it all is, why can't the people who live on it get along? Why don't they want to take care of such a beautiful place?*

It's almost spiritual to see how precious our planet is. I'm glad I finally got to see it from that perspective.

—*As told to John Rosengren*

Ed Dwight, 91, works as an artist in Denver, where his studio produces bronze sculptures of historical figures.



1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
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15					16				17			
		18		19		20		21				
22	23					24				25	26	27
28				29	30					31		
32				33				34	35			
		36	37					38				
39	40				41		42		43		44	45
46					47				48			
49					50				51			

CROSSWORD

Sunny Side Down

ACROSS

- 1 Vessels for cooking
- 5 Had a meal
- 8 Swedish superstar quartet
- 12 Wrap, as a flag
- 13 Prefix for function
- 14 Installs, as carpeting
- 15 Italian farewell
- 16 Mischievous child
- 17 Spanish cheers
- 18 Corporate officers, for short
- 20 Rice alternative
- 22 Piece of bed linen
- 24 Proud __ peacock
- 25 Remind too much
- 28 Electrified fish
- 29 Worker made of steel

- 31 U.S. espionage agency
- 32 Hole-punching tool
- 33 Once __ blue moon
- 34 App developer's customers
- 36 Suggest indirectly
- 38 British tavern
- 39 Women's golf organization
- 41 Exists
- 43 Fortune-teller
- 46 Honolulu's island
- 47 Roll call's "no" vote
- 48 Rabbit relative
- 49 "Opposed to" prefix
- 50 Fabric coloring
- 51 Giant screen film format

DOWN

- 1 Sgt.'s subordinate
- 2 French assent
- 3 Pack only the essentials
- 4 Skiing surface
- 5 "What __, a mind reader?"
- 6 Florida American Leaguer
- 7 City on the Rio Grande
- 8 Frequently
- 9 Gymnastics event
- 10 Parting word
- 11 Stubborn equine
- 19 Bacon slice
- 21 Took sudden interest
- 22 Large briny body
- 23 Chop down with an ax
- 26 What fills a football
- 27 Fuel for some stoves
- 30 Back from a cruise
- 35 Japanese "bar" food
- 37 Island near 46 Across
- 39 Hawaii's Mauna __
- 40 Vessel for cooking
- 42 Hurricane's center
- 44 Period of history
- 45 "Jurassic Park" beast T. __

BRAIN TIP

Take Care of Your Brain

Take these steps to reduce dementia risk. One: Treat vision loss. We've advised you previously to protect your hearing. Take care of your sight too. Your brain thrives on sensory stimulation. Two: Control your cholesterol. What's good for the heart is good for the brain, according to the Lancet Commission.



WORDPLAY

TRIPLE DOUBLE

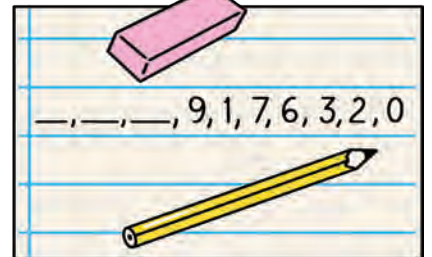
What common office job, a 10-letter word, consists of three consecutive pairs of double letters?



NUMBER FUN

WRITE ORDER

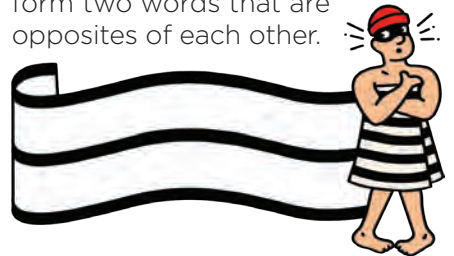
The seven different digits below are listed in a special order. Maintaining this order, place the other three digits (4, 5, and 8) correctly in the three blank spaces.



THINK!

ANAGRAM TIME

Rearrange the letters in the phrase MODEST FELON to form two words that are opposites of each other.



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Up-to-date news, resources and tips on dementia and cognitive health

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AARP Volunteers Help With Tax Headaches

AARP Foundation's free program has worked to take the dread out of tax-filing day since 1968

TAX SEASON can be daunting and confusing, especially for financially challenged older Americans.

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide has been helping people get through the process for more than half a century.

In 1968, AARP created its own free tax preparation service to make sure older Americans, especially those living with a low income, could get the help they need.

"It's a very intimidating, complex system. There are rebates and credits that could benefit older adults that they may not know about," says Claire Casey, AARP Foundation president. "But we know about

them, and we're able to maximize their returns."

The Tax-Aide program is the largest free tax-assistance and preparation service in the U.S. Beginning in February, thousands of AARP Foundation volunteers who have been trained and certified by the IRS welcome older adults in various locations across all 50 states.

During the 2024 tax season, AARP Foundation volunteers helped almost 1.7 million taxpayers of all ages, including nearly 1 million older adults with low income. Tax-Aide participants received more than \$1.3 billion in refunds and credits.

Some facts about the program:

▶ It primarily helps older adults with

low to moderate incomes, but there are no eligibility requirements. In addition, you don't need to be an AARP member to use this service.

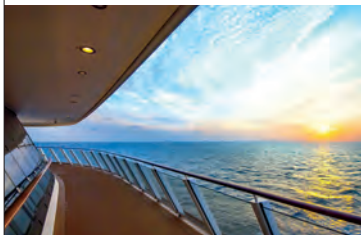
- ▶ Most appointments are in person, but you also can get assistance online. You can use the Tax-Aide Locator to find a site close to you.
- ▶ Make sure to bring all the documents listed on the Tax-Aide website.
- ▶ AARP Foundation volunteers can also coach you so that you can prepare your taxes yourself.

The Tax-Aide program depends almost exclusively on its volunteers. "Some have been doing this for 20 years," says Linn Hogg, the Tax-Aide program's national recruitment and outreach committee chair. "It is a community, and it gives you a profound sense of purpose and connection," Casey says. To find out more about volunteering, visit aarpfoundation.org/taxvolunteer.


For information on how to get free help filing your own taxes, go to aarpfoundation.org/taxprep.

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HOW WE'RE FIGHTING FOR YOU

AARP TAKES ON BRAIN HEALTH

AARP HAS LONG been a leader in helping older Americans build healthy habits to support healthy brains. From suggesting lifestyle changes to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline to tackling the stigma surrounding Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, here's what AARP is doing for you.

► **Staying Sharp.** Through our online program Staying Sharp, you can build healthy habits for your brain, based on six pillars: eat right, be social, manage stress, engage your brain, exercise regularly and get good sleep. Research collaborations with Oregon Health & Science University and Massachusetts General Hospital are reporting exciting results about the impact of lifestyle behaviors among people using Staying Sharp. Much of Staying Sharp—including a monthly cognitive assessment—is available free at aarp.org; AARP members get more.

► **Research partnership.** AARP, the Alzheimer's Disease Data Initiative, and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington launched the Dementia Risk Reduction Project to identify how air pollution, depression, high blood pressure and other factors vary by state, and how these factors correlate with dementia risk. And AARP's Global Council on Brain Health continues to develop and



update reports on topics including the impact of physical activity, social engagement and more.

► **A new brain health caregiving documentary.** *Taking Care* follows filmmaker Lauren Miller Rogen and actor Seth Rogen as they cared for Lauren's mother, Adele, who had early onset Alzheimer's disease. "AARP helped develop the documentary to inspire people to take care of their brain health and to support caregivers," says Sarah Lock, AARP's senior vice president for policy and brain health, and executive producer of the film.

► **Hearing and your brain.** Hearing loss is a big risk factor for dementia, as it reduces brain stimulation and can lead to social isolation. AARP makes it easy to evaluate your hearing via the National Hearing Test, a scientifically validated checkup developed with funding from the National Institutes of Health. This simple 10-minute test is free to AARP members and can be done at home on your phone.

Learn more about the test and AARP's resources at aarp.org/brainhealth. —Cori Vanchieri, AARP executive editor for brain health

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When Elizabeth Seaver had a question about her taxes, she knew who to call. AARP Foundation Tax-Aide volunteer Harv Grassian had been helping her do her taxes for many years. He found the answer and helped her secure a big refund – and peace of mind.

Elizabeth isn't alone. Every year, nearly 1 million older adults with low income conquer tax season with our trusted volunteers by their side.



See how at aarpfoundation.org/trust

SAVING SANDRA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59

hip is. I can get a device to help me walk. Just amputate it!" I was dead serious. He said no.

That was a real low point. On the way home. I said, "That was a disaster. I'm in a horror story." I just had no hope.

Sandra's experience—multiple specialists, no answers, worsening pain and frustration—are all too common, research shows. Misdiagnosis, lack of pain knowledge by health care practitioners and downplaying people's pain are just part of the problem, a 2023 survey of pain specialists in Greece found. There's also a lack of clear steps for making a diagnosis. Too often, chronic pain patients are seen as trouble. The U.S. Pain Foundation's 2022 survey of 2,275 adults with chronic pain found that 63 percent felt their health care practitioners had a bias against them because of their pain.

For the rest of 2022, Carlson left the house only for physical therapy, the occasional medical appointment and trips to a local hospital emergency room for two milder stroke-like episodes.

I'm not a quitter. I kept trying until I got beat so low to the ground that I couldn't get back up. I didn't tell my husband, but I gave up. Every place we went, the answer was not there. I could see the stress in my husband's eyes. I said, "If it kills me, it will kill me." I just gave up. My husband saw it. He kept doing research. He reached his hand out and said, "We're going to keep going." How he did it, I don't know, but he did.

Travis never gave up. He searched the internet and phoned medical centers across the U.S. at night, on weekends and during scraps of time at work. "I had to really think harder now," he says. Sandra now suspected all her symptoms pointed to a nerve problem. She suggested he look there. "I just kept on trying," Travis says. "We just had to tough it out before goodness would come."

At times it seemed hopeless. But Travis, a loving husband with no medical

education, had faith. He didn't know it yet, but he was on the verge of a discovery that would change everything in their lives.

'Press Here'

ONE OF TRAVIS' searches had led him to Anthony Echo, M.D., a plastic surgeon at Houston Methodist Hospital who specializes in peripheral nerve surgery. Travis had emailed an emotional letter to Echo about his wife's condition.

After reading the letter, Echo thought he could help. He agreed to do a teleconference with the couple in January 2023. But on that critical day, they were unable to log in from their computer. So they had to use Sandra's cellphone. She sat in her wheelchair, with Travis beside her on the living room couch. The technical snafu underscored her sense that this was another in an endless line of disappointments.

THE TRANSFORMATION WAS RAPID AND AMAZING. CARLSON STOPPED TAKING DILAUDID TWO WEEKS LATER. SHE WAS OUT OF HER WHEELCHAIR IN OCTOBER.

When my husband found Dr. Echo, I didn't think he would be able to help me. There was no way to get my hopes up because there was no hope, absolutely none! I was just existing in a body that was no good for me, just buying time, and I knew my time was running out.

In fact, in the unlikeliest of ways, the moment had come that would give Sandra Carlson back her life.

Over the phone, Echo began a series of questions about Sandra's symptoms, then asked her to press on her left hip and at her left groin crease. Every touch was painful. The simple test, combined with Carlson's symptoms, made Echo suspect that the lateral femoral cutaneous nerve and the lateral femoral nerve that help control muscles and provide sensation in the hip

and leg might have been compressed on Carlson's left side. But he couldn't make a diagnosis without an exam. He told the couple he thought he knew the cause. Could Carlson come to Houston for an exam?

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. My knee-jerk reaction was, "Did he just say that?" Doctors had been sending me home with nothing, and here he is telling me that he thinks he knows what it is. It was like God shining a light down on me. Travis set up the appointment and got plane tickets right away.

In February 2023, the couple flew to Houston. Physical exams and tests ruled out other causes of her pain such as muscle, tendon or joint problems. A consultation with a Houston Methodist specialist confirmed that the source of Carlson's symptoms was not her spine. Echo was sure Carlson's nerves were getting squeezed at points where they pass through narrow openings surrounded by large muscles and thick connective tissue. When nerves, which he describes as soft and squishy "like

gummy worms," are compressed, it can reduce blood flow and even damage the nerve fibers, hindering the flow of signals between the brain and body. "I use the analogy of a garden hose," Echo says. "Water is going

through the hose, but if you step on it, only a limited amount will go through. When you take your foot off the hose, the flow returns. From a rudimentary standpoint, it's like nerves when they're kinked because of pressure from fascia or surrounding tissues or scar tissue, then the signals are not going to go back and forth as they should, and it will manifest as weakness, pain or paralysis."

The Road Back

IN APRIL 2023, Echo operated to decompress her lateral femoral cutaneous and lateral femoral nerves. "My goal was to improve her pain," he says. "I had no expectations of her being able to move her leg and walk

again.” Carlson says immediately afterward her leg felt warm, instead of icy cold. Her pain diminished. In August 2023, Echo operated again, to decompress Carlson’s sciatic and common peroneal nerves. Carlson began to feel creepy-crawly sensations down her leg as the nerve began conducting signals again. “She started getting muscle function back,” Echo says. “That was the surprising part.”

The transformation was rapid and amazing. Carlson stopped taking Dilaudid two weeks later. She was out of her wheelchair in October. By December she was no longer incontinent. The journey wasn’t over by any means, however. Her left knee was “frozen” and unbendable due to arthrofibrosis, the build-up of scar tissue in the joint from disuse. But she could walk, with crutches. Carlson returned to Houston Methodist for knee surgery in April 2024 to remove scar tissue and restore her range of motion.

I can move fairly normally. I don't use a wheelchair. I don't use crutches. I was praying for a miracle every day of my life. God was tired of hearing from me. I just wanted this one miracle, and he gave it to me through Dr. Echo. I just had to keep my faith. It was hard, but God gave me a test, and I passed it through Dr. Echo. I am a nonquitter.

IN LATE September of 2024, she underwent another surgery to address lingering nerve pain in her knee and ankle. Throughout this time, she has continued physical therapy in Savannah and for a while in Houston, after her knee procedure. She exercises several times a day at home.

“She’s conquered so much,” says physical therapy assistant Jennifer Poston, who has worked one-on-one with Carlson at Fife Therapy in Savannah since 2020. “Her pain was so bad. When she walked into physical thera-

By last spring, Sandra could walk unaided.



py after her surgeries, not in a wheelchair, we all cried. It’s been a powerful, emotional journey.”

Echo says he sees many patients like Carlson who’ve consulted many specialists for unexplained pain and loss of muscle function before finding out the cause is nerve compression. The condition, also called pinched nerve or nerve entrapment syndrome, can happen to nerves throughout the body. An estimated 10 percent of adults experience some type of neuropathic pain. The most widely recognized type is carpal tunnel syndrome, in which the median nerve to the hand gets squeezed in a bony passageway between the wrist and palm.

“Many of my patients have seen 10 to 20 different specialists by the time they are diagnosed with a peripheral nerve problem,” he says. There are few nerve compression surgeons practicing in the U.S., he notes, and there has been low awareness of nerve compression in the

medical community. “A lot of very good doctors in their own specialties may overlook the peripheral nervous system as a source of chronic pain. Neurosurgeons look at the brain and the spinal cord. Others, such as orthopedists, look to find out if there is a musculoskeletal problem.”

Nerve compression can be difficult to diagnose. “There are no numerical tests that can measure the amount of pain that a patient is having,” says Tung, the Washington University School of Medicine plastic surgeon. He specializes in peripheral nerve compression. “Electrical stud-

ies [of nerves and muscles] are part of it, but a big part also is examining the patient, and it relies a lot more on the physician’s physical and clinical diagnostic skills.”

As a result, compressed nerves may be misdiagnosed or overlooked, according to a 2021 textbook on the subject. Various types of painful nerve compression have been misdiagnosed as a psychological problem, infections, an inflamed prostate, failed back surgery, or foot problems like plantar fasciitis and heel spurs.

Searching for answers can take time and determination, Echo says. Carlson “was trying hard to get better, looking at all the options. Seeing her walk when she assumed that she would never walk again and be in a wheelchair for the rest of her life was amazing.”

For Sandra and Travis Carlson, it was a miracle. ■

Sari Harrar is a contributing editor to AARP The Magazine.



Sandra and Travis, left, and Sandra with Anthony Echo, M.D., in Houston after her September surgery.

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TILL DEBT DO US PART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 48

another \$16,000 in arrears—this debt dating back to 2019. She picked up the phone and called an attorney. “I can’t live like this anymore,” she said.

The divorce was finalized a few months later, but the couple continued to live together until May 2023, when their lease was up. Mary moved into a studio apartment that she describes as “not New York-small, but small enough.” That September, she suited up once again for the Ironman in Madison. Sixteen hours and 24 minutes later, she crossed the finish line. Though she was near the back of the pack, completing the Ironman felt like victory: “Everything I overcame financially. Everything I had gone through to get there. It was the best thing, ever.”

Mary came away from her divorce with about \$200,000 in a 401(k) and a \$150,000 inheritance from her late parents, held in accounts that, as things had turned “messy,” she had taken precautions to keep out of David’s reach. Now 58, she doesn’t see retirement in the cards anytime soon. Having left US Bank in 2020, she now has a customer service job at an equipment finance company and supplements her income with work for a women’s boutique and a grocery delivery service. She lives modestly, driving a 2018 Buick wagon she bought with cash. Still, she says, it’s a vast improvement over where she was just two years ago. “I don’t have the financial unknowns hanging over my head,” she says. “I know where my money is coming and going.”

And what did she learn? Lesson one: “Don’t trust anyone with your finances,” she says. “You have to stay on top of them yourself.” Lesson two: “If you’re a married couple, you both need to know what’s going on,” she says. “If one says, ‘Everything’s fine,’ that’s not OK. If your gut feeling says something is off, it’s off.” And finally, lesson three: “I’m stronger than I thought I was,” she says. “It was a wild ride.”

Jean Chatzky, a longtime financial journalist and CEO of HerMoney, writes the “Chatzky to the Rescue” column for AARP The Magazine.

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SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLES ON PAGE 65

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Eva Longoria

(MARCH 15): The *Desperate Housewives* star cares deeply about education, community and food.

DEGREES OF EVA: Longoria has a bachelor's degree in kinesiology from Texas A&M University and a master's in Chicano studies from Cal State Northridge. "In a parallel universe ... I'd just be a student forever," she told *The Guardian*.

\$13 million
Her salary topped *Forbes'* 2011 TV actress list.

BEHIND THE CAMERA: In 2023, she made her movie directorial debut (*Flamin' Hot*).

CHARITY WORK: She founded the nonprofit Eva's Heroes, which helps enrich the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, and the Eva Longoria Foundation, which works to narrow the opportunity gap for Latinas.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: She has been involved in many food-related projects, including two CNN travel series. —Whitney Matheson



MORE MILESTONE BIRTHDAYS

Chelsea Handler
FEBRUARY 25
Comedian has written six NYT best-selling books, including memoirs and essay collections.

will.i.am
MARCH 15
Black Eyed Peas frontman is founder of an AI company, FYI (Focus Your Ideas).

Chris Rock
FEBRUARY 7
Former *SNL* actor was among the comedians invited to the Vatican by Pope Francis in 2024.

Dr. Dre
FEBRUARY 18
The Grammys' Dr. Dre Global Impact Award is inspired by the hip-hop music legend.

Sarah Jessica Parker
MARCH 25
Sex and the City actress is a book lover with her own book imprint, SJP Lit.

Kelsey Grammer
FEBRUARY 21
Cheers actor reprised role as Frasier Crane in reboot for Paramount+.

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