THE TIMES
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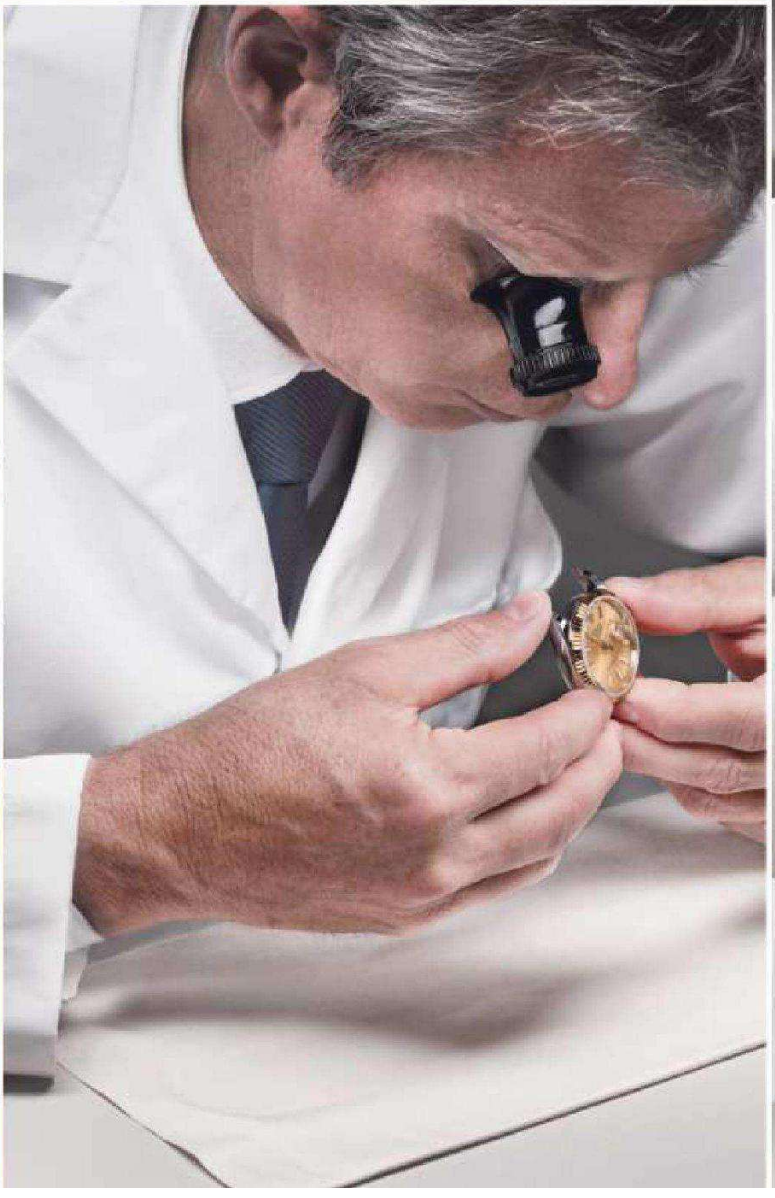
20.04.24

‘HOW LONG HAVE WE GOT?’

Me and my cancer buddy

By Jeremy Langmead

Eat! *200-CALORIE SWEET TREATS*



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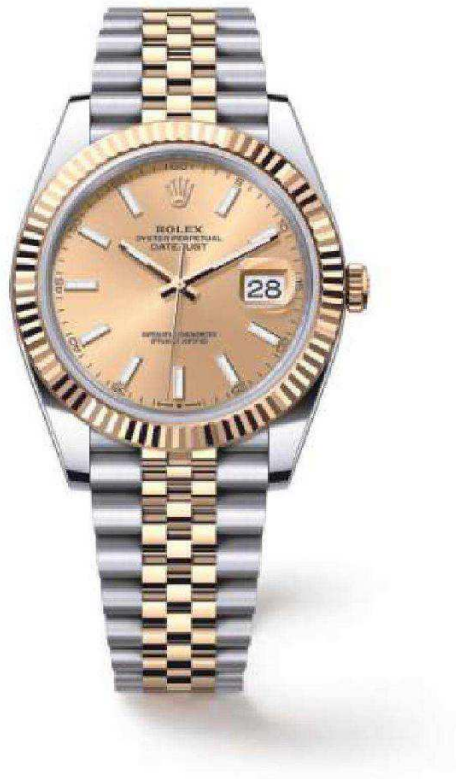

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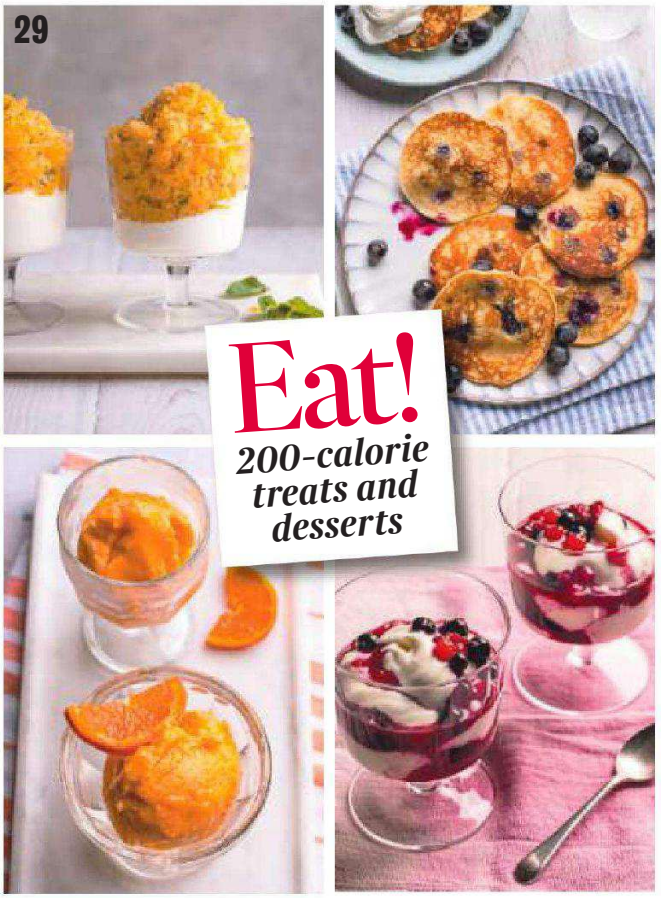

7 Caitlin Moran I'm going on tour – and ready to meet my groupies. **9 Spinal column: Melanie Reid** Why do strangers tell me their problems? **11 What I've learnt** Historian Tom Holland on his new obsession: working out. **12 Is woke over?** Polly Vernon on the divisive four-letter word. **18 Cover story Me and my cancer buddy** A year ago Jeremy Langmead wrote about being diagnosed with prostate cancer. He reveals what happened next. **24 The couple who made a fortune from fasting** Dr Clare Bailey on life with her husband Michael Mosley, the man who invented the 5:2 diet – and why she hides the chocolate at home. **Plus, 29 Eat!** Fast Treats: 200-calorie desserts. **34 Vote for Blur** The band's drummer, Dave Rowntree, explains why he's trying to become a Labour MP. **38 Have I got ADHD?** Frustrated by her chaotic approach to life, Kate Spicer seeks help in middle age. **42 Marriage material** Comedy couple Marcus Brigstocke and Rachel Parris have turned their life into a podcast. **48 Pout!** Nadine Baggott's 20 beauty bargains. **50 Giles Coren reviews** Twenty Eight, Chester. **58 Beta male: Robert Crampton** Oh no, my wife's ill – and my bedside manner still needs work.

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CAITLIN MORAN

I'm excited and ready to meet my groupies. Last time I was asked to sign breasts

I'm going on tour – my 12th now – in June. The paperback of the No 1 bestseller *What About Men?* is being published, which means a pleasant trot around Britain talking about it, answering questions about it and then afterwards meeting everyone in the signing queue. This bit's always the best. The effect is like having a party of the world's nicest people, slowly moving towards you on a conveyor belt.

Over the years, people in the signing queue have cleverly and spontaneously come up with a way to discuss the often quite intimate or difficult subjects of my books, while in a very busy room. "I found chapter 14 of *How to Be a Woman* particularly useful," they'll say. Or, "We're going through chapter 11 of *More than a Woman* right now." And so I will know we are discussing, respectively, abortion or a child with an eating disorder. Other times, the cue will be "chapter 1 of *How To Build a Girl*" – and so I will know I'm with someone who also had early sexual fantasies about Aslan. It's a neat and effective system.

If the venue has – wisely, humanely and also lucratively – left the bar open, by the end of the queue, people are often quite... "festive". I once had three generations of a family rock up – grandmother, mother and baby. The grandmother and the mother asked me to sign their breasts. Then they asked me to sign the baby. That was in Dublin. Dublin is always fun. At one gig there, someone came up to the stage, 20 minutes into the show, and – apologetically – vomited. The stage manager simply walked over to the unfortunate puddle, emptied a box of Daz onto it, then swept it all away. As if he'd done it before. After, I asked him if he'd done it before. "Oh, I've done it before," he said. "This is Dublin."

That was in 2012, though. As the years have gone by, the raucousness has definitely decreased. My first books were about being young and messy, and we were all – me and the audience – a lot more boozy back then. I used to drink a couple of gins on stage, which seems mad to me now, but also possibly explains why part of my live show included flopping my two delightful rolls of post-pregnancy belly skin over the top of my jeans, then manipulating them into a cheerful, smiley "mouth" – in the interests of body positivity.

ROBERT WILSON

On a book tour in Dublin, a grandmother and mother asked me to autograph their chests, and then the woman's baby

Three dates and many gins later, I'd added two cartoon eyes to my bra and a nose below – all etched on with Sharpie. I once unleashed this cheerful creation at the Cheltenham Literature Festival while being interviewed on stage by Hugo Rifkind – whom I had, regrettably, not pre-warned about my new invention. His calmness in the face of this considerable visual ambush suggests he could have become a top-notch war correspondent. Although, once again, Hugo: I'm sorry.

These days, however, my "Feminist Smile" has retired to live a quiet life in my pants, and I won't even have a cup of tea after 3.30pm, or else the caffeine will keep me awake reading New Scientist until 2am. My "rider" for every gig is now very minimal: one (1) bottle of fizzy water, one (1) packet of ready salted crisps and one (1) banana. Beyoncé apparently requests "handcarved ice balls", freshly painted dressing-room walls, titanium drinking straws and a new toilet seat. The only possible advantage I have over Beyoncé as a live performer is that I am much, much cheaper. And more willing to just use a wet wipe on a pre-existing lavvy.

"Going on tour" when you're a middle-aged woman is fundamentally an amusing thing: instead of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll, I'll be sitting in a corridor of a theatre in Northampton, trying to fill in an online appointment for the dog to get her claws trimmed. But I guess if "groupies" are fundamentally people who understand how lonely touring is and offer a bit of human connection while you're in town, then yes, I have groupies. A lovely 60-year-old man took me around the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, and, in the café, warned me there was ham in the salad I was about to order. And when I played in Bath, a lovely Times reader emailed me to offer me the use of her nearby field: "If you want to relax and have a picnic in my meadow, just let me know."

And so I am excited to once more get buzzing by knocking back my one (1) banana, then leap on stage, crying, "Hello, Norwich! Are you ready to discuss Fifth Wave feminism, mental illness and men's trousers? LET'S ROCK!" ■

Tour: Hay Festival, May 31; Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton, June 1; Corn Exchange, Brighton, June 2; Clapham Grand, London, June 3; Epic Studios, Norwich, June 5; Memorial Hall, Sheffield, June 6 (seetickets.com/tour/caitlin-moran)

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SPINAL COLUMN
MELANIE REID

My wheelchair may embarrass me, but it's like having a puppy – strangers tell me their secrets

MURDO MACLEOD

It's happened again – two strangers in one day pausing to tell me their life stories. I have a theory about why random people talk to me, and it's less to do with me than it is to do with them and their place in a cacophonous world, never busier, shoutier or more isolating.

Partly it happens because the sight of the wheelchair is a catalyst, an ice-breaker. The chair may eternally embarrass and irritate me (oh, get over it, I hear people cry; I'd love to – it isn't that simple), but it's like having a puppy: it seems in some peculiar way to put other people at ease.

I watch them get out of their vehicles. There's that fleeting instant when I see them notice the chair and imperceptibly they relax, their body language softening in the tiniest way.

Darkly appropriate, armchair psychology does work. My thesis is a wheelchair sends a subconscious, double-sided message to people. One, it's a signal about me: here's someone who's disabled, who might be lonely and welcome a chat, plus obviously something rubbish has happened to them at some point to put them where they are, so a bit of kindness wouldn't go amiss.

And two, equally important, it's a signal for them: here's someone who is stationary in a world in constant motion (never underestimate stillness). Who has time; who might, through their evident disadvantage, be sympathetic. Someone who is safe, diminished, approachable, no threat at all.

Maybe I have that kind of face. Not necessarily so. Maybe as a journalist I know how to get people to talk about themselves, know the power of listening. Whatever, it's the case that people I don't know, and who don't know me, time and again will confide in me.

In the morning it was a lorry driver, who got out of his cab apologising because he'd met Janice on the track and got her to phone me, fretting about the access. He was worried, he said, because there was nothing worse than driving somewhere that's getting narrower and narrower and you don't know whether you'll get turned at the end.

Oh, I know, I said. I really understand. I have the same deep-seated horror of driving somewhere new, worried I won't be able to find anywhere to park when I get there and the stress it will put me through. In fact I rarely go anywhere I haven't been before for that reason.

And the man's face melted and he blurted out that he had exactly the same problems because his young son was getting chemotherapy for leukaemia and every time they went to hospital they had such a nightmare trying to park even before they got to meet the doctors. Briefly he told me the story of a little boy who had suffered so much, for so long, and who they prayed and hoped was on the cusp of getting the all clear, while I sat in my chair and realised how heavy are the burdens that so many people carry round with them every day. And how you just never know. You just never know people's private courage.

Anyway, we had that sweet moment of communication between strangers, brief and deep, and then he drove away. And along came my supermarket delivery. The staff are unfailingly pleasant when they see I'm in a chair – they help unpack the crates onto the kitchen table.

This particular chap was great. He was chatty. He told me driving was a new job to him. What did you do before you retired, I asked. As he decanted shopping he spoke fluently and shrewdly of a fascinating career, working in the media and in industry. Now he was enjoying the finite, limited responsibilities of delivering – no worries to take home at night, no carry-over of dread in the morning, no planning. Just do the job and go home.

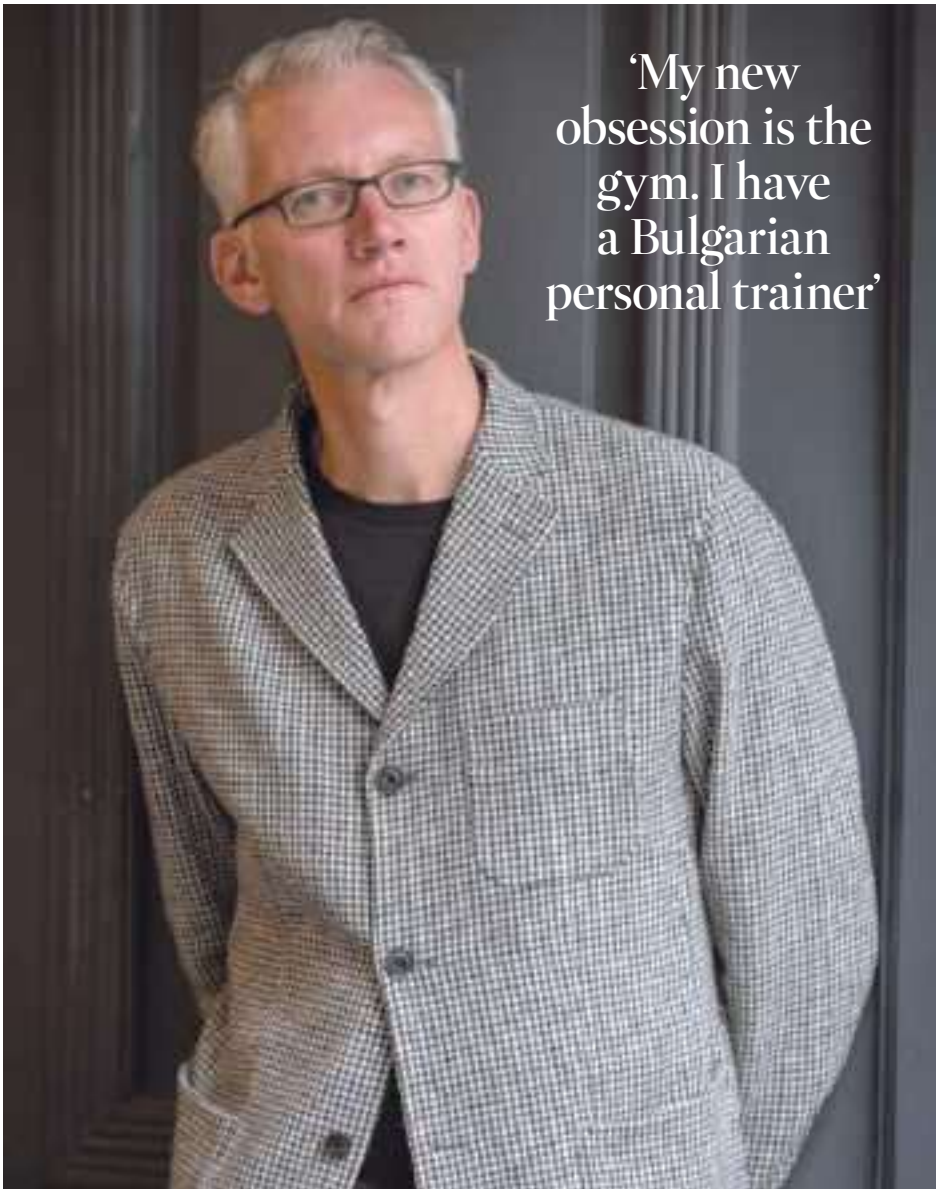
I wasn't an especially good listener when I could walk. I was always on the move, impatient, rushed, too diffident to ask many questions. But disability, for all it puts up barriers, also brings them clattering down. Despite recent publicity about hate crime towards disability (among other characteristics), it's worth saying we're a zillion times more likely to experience kindness. And everyone craves someone with time to listen to them. Apart from anything else, Dave did always say it was the surefire way to land the girls. ■

@Mel_ReidTimes
Melanie Reid is tetraplegic after breaking her neck and back in a riding accident in April 2010

THE WHITE COMPANY
LONDON

What I've learnt Tom Holland

The historian and author Tom Holland, 56, grew up in Wiltshire and wrote gothic horror novels before dedicating his time to writing about history, including books on Christianity, the Roman Empire and the rise of Islam. In 2020 he started The Rest is History podcast with Dominic Sandbrook. He lives with his wife, Sadie, in south London. The couple have two daughters in their twenties.



FRANÇOIS BOUCHON/FIGAROPHOTO/CAMERA PRESS

INTERVIEW Georgia Heneage

My forebears were coal miners from Stoke. I'd have been a terrible coal miner. I would have been physically lacking and I would have had a vague sense that exciting things were happening that I couldn't be a part of.

My subconscious is howling against ageing. I am 56 now and I've been playing cricket since I was 13. I am clinging on to it with my fingernails, but the past few seasons I've been haunted by nightmares where I'm bowling a shuttlecock or running through sand or my arm falls off.

My new obsession is the gym. I've hired a Bulgarian personal trainer to get me up to scratch with bowling again. He doesn't know anything about cricket, but he's gone away and studied it for me. Everything I do in the gym is tailored to a sport he knows nothing about.

The past few years have been so busy I've felt a bit like overspread margarine. *The Rest is History* obliterated everything else. There was no time for holidays or walks or cricket. It was like climbing a hill in the Lake District – you keep thinking you've reached the summit and there's another ridge swathed in mist ahead of you.

I married my best friend. We met on our first day at Cambridge. She introduced herself as Sadie and I said, "Sexy Sadie?" Rather than giving me a slap, she recognised the allusion to the Beatles song and we were friends for three years. When she told me she was leaving for a scholarship at Stanford, I suddenly thought, "I can't bear this." The marriage works because she is still my best friend.

I have always had a sense that the past is more interesting than the present. One of my earliest memories is sitting in the multistorey car park in Salisbury (my mum had forgotten her shopping and left me in the back) thinking, I wish that I was in the Mesozoic era with the dinosaurs, although I wouldn't have lasted a minute. There was this vivid sense that, compared with the past, the present was just a bit grey.

When you're a child, you assume the way you are is absolutely normal. I had an overly developed interior life and I think that denied me a talent for living in the here and now. I was always jealous that my friends had a better capacity for fun. I was having fun – just in my head.

I wanted to be a great novelist. The novels were mostly about vampires and it turned out I wasn't a great novelist, which was demoralising. I realised I wasn't interested in the stuff that makes great fiction: the richness and complexity of the world in which we live. My life ambition is to put flesh on the bones of people long dead.

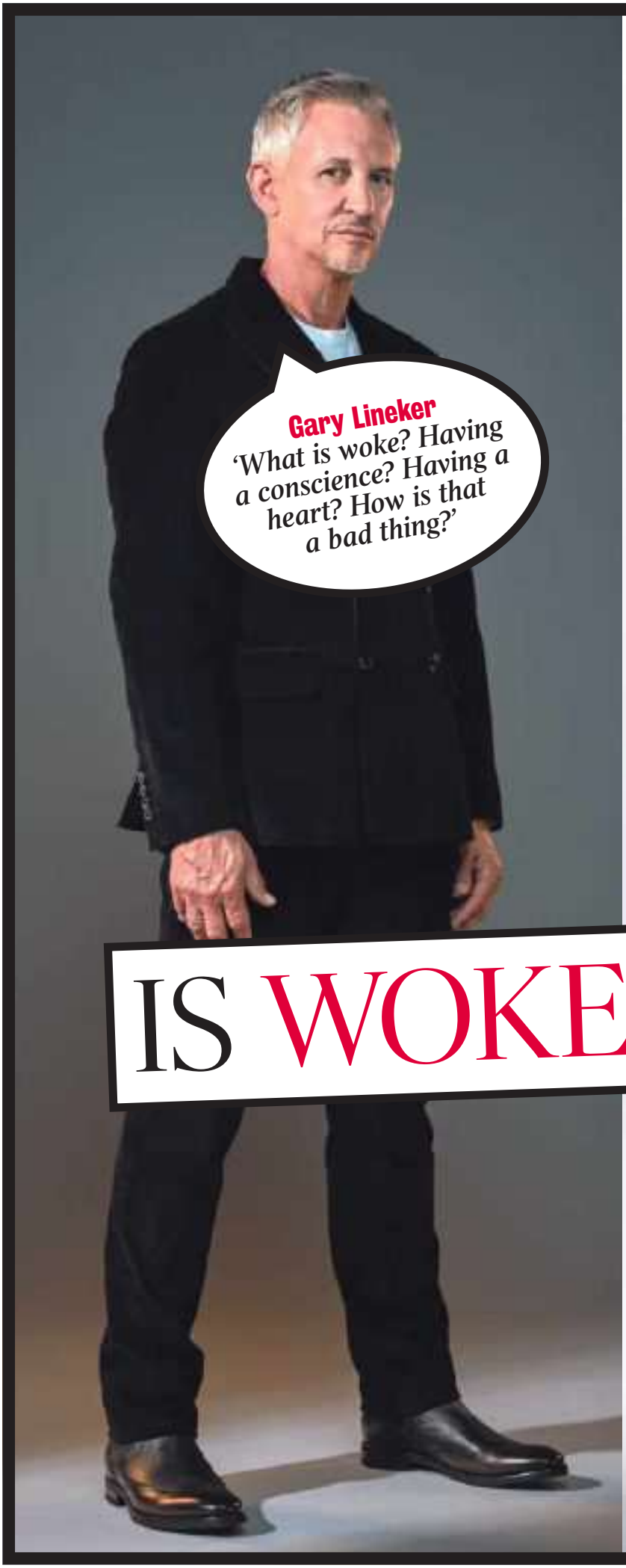
Sometimes it feels like I need a recipe and I don't have one. My daughters have a talent, a genius, for doing things. They can rummage around inside a fridge and rustle up something. I always have to plan ahead and map out all the ingredients and I get stressed if I can't get it right.

The things I love – palaeontology, my family, cricket – I really love. I'm a bit obsessive and things stir me very deeply. Maybe because I enjoy them so much, when I see other people enjoying other things I always get a slight sense of fomo.

My guiding principle is "custom is king". It's a saying from the ancient Greek poet Pindar. I try not to be totalitarian in my moral assumptions. History should teach us a degree of humility. People in the past had very different views about things that we today regard as completely primal, such as eating, family or sex. History teaches us that there are infinite ways to be human.

The Rest is History gave me opportunities I hadn't expected, such as doing live shows and going on tour to America, Australia and New Zealand. I was also writing *Pax* [his new history book], so I was reading about the Romans by day and in the evenings Lady Jane Grey or the Loch Ness monster for the podcast. It was intense, but it was an exciting time. ■

The Rest is History, *presented by Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook, is available on all podcast platforms*


Gary Lineker
'What is woke? Having a conscience? Having a heart? How is that a bad thing?'

Elon Musk
'The woke mind virus is killing western civilisation'

IS WOKE OVER?

Oat milk is out, real fur is back, pronouns are disappearing, vegan cafés closing. Even Hollywood actors are calling out virtue signalling. Has a certain four-letter word... been cancelled? Polly Vernon reports

Is "woke" over? Terminally devalued, way past relevance? Past, even, being reduced to the status of weak farce, written off to the murky wastelands of no one even mentioning it any more, acting like they never did, never said it, have forgotten it was even A Thing? Having dominated the discourse for the past seven years (I'm basing this timeline on a Times article I wrote in March 2018, *Have we reached peak woke?*, which invoked Meghan Markle's impending wedding to Prince Harry, hummus, Black Lives Matter and the Oxford English Dictionary's 2017 definition of the word as "alert to racial or social discrimination and injustice"), at some undefined point in early 2024, woke just... died. Quietly. On its own. And no one noticed – until, well, I did, just now.

Might the Cass report mark the final nail in its coffin? Much of what it exposes – the wholly inadequate research into the safety, reliability and appropriateness of medicine and surgery offered to children presenting with gender distress – was allowed to pass for so long because so many people were afraid of appearing Not Woke. Might Cass expose woke as not merely waning in the fashion stakes, but potentially even dangerous?

It has certainly waned in the fashion stakes. No one's used the word in a sincere way since, what, late Covid? Remember the heady days of 2020, when the middle-aged bosses of big corporations concerned with ensnaring the hearts and minds of a younger, more righteous clientele were in the habit of saying things such as, "There's nothing wrong with being woke. *I'm* woke"? Me neither, but it did happen. Through 2021 and '22, there was a struggle for woke's virtue. The forces of the populist right commandeered it as a term of sneering, dismissive offence, a bit like "hippy" in the Sixties, while those who still felt there was merit in declaring themselves woke persisted in applying it to themselves and the things of which they approved on the internet. (This is give or take a few weeks when some began wondering if to use the word "woke" was in fact not woke, it having been originally associated with the movement for racial equality, so might a white person applying it to, say, their veganism, gender identity or their perception of other people's crimes of cultural appropriation etc *actually amount to cultural appropriation in and of itself?)*

Then came the era of woke-washing, 2022 into '23, when businesses leveraged woke in ad and marketing campaigns with a cynicism so blatant, so naked, they managed to anger those who still considered themselves honest-to-goodness woke *and* those who loathed it and everything it stood for. The expression "go woke, go broke" was born of this moment, the most regularly invoked example being that of Bud Light, the beer brand, which, in April 2023, partnered with the trans TikTok activist Dylan Mulvaney, ended up on the wrong end of mass online calls for a boycott of the beer, experienced a 17 per cent drop in sales and related fall in the stock price of its parent company – none of which proved fatal, no one went broke – but which apparently did persuade marketeers against attempting to harness the woke dollar (or pound or yen) ever again. Because no one has.

By the summer of 2023, woke only ever appeared in the context of deeply negative clickbaiting, a screaming headline intended to enervate all who saw it into reading yet more evidence wokeness was at once an absurd yet somehow dangerous property. But now? Even those who historically loathed woke, who never used it as anything but an insult, are over it.

So, yeah. I'm calling it, here and now: woke, the word, is dead.

But what of the approach it denoted so passionately? The public living of your life according to the most just, righteous, morally upstanding virtues? The competing to do it better than anyone else (Woke Top Trumps, I called it, in that 2018 article)? The urge to be the most inclusive, most sustainable, most equal of them all? To be more vehement and nit-picky in your "calling out" (we don't say that any more either, do we?) of injustice, whenever and wherever we encountered it? Has that gone the way of woke the word? Is that dead too? Nameless, so by extension, non-existent?

> 'When we look at what's going on in the world, maybe we just think it's all a bit silly'

Maybe. I first started wondering about all this on realising, quite recently, that oat milk was in rapid decline. Because if woke had a coffee order, it was surely an oat milk latte (or maybe a flat white) made in an independent coffee shop with painstaking diligence by an earnest barista whose beard was kempt, whose nail polish was chipped and whose spoken word side hustle was bubbling along like milk beneath a frother. Oat milk just became one of those emblems of wokeness "associated with the liberal faction for whatever reason", according to a thread on the social media platform Reddit. "Maybe the thinking process is milk alternative = vegan = eco-conscious = woke," it wondered. "Or maybe it's because lactose intolerance is a bit lib-tardy."

Oat milk was presumed more sustainable than cow's milk, disrupting of the diary business, therefore an active force in the diminishing of greenhouse gases (woke!). It was perceived as a scrappy outsider, fighting the good fight (woke!) and, crucially, as healthier than traditional milk, which the woke really liked, because their ultimate goal was to outlive the dinosaur generations ahead of them, the ghastly boomers who had screwed up the world in the Nineties and early 2000s and, once they died off, huzzah! Generation Woke could make it all shiny and good again. This made being healthier a sort of woke duty.

Oat milk flourished on this perception. The Swedish brand Oatly erupted onto international markets in 2016. By 2020, the group behind it was valued at $2 billion. Oat milk sales overall grew by almost 700 per cent between 2018 and 2019 in America, about the time I started taking it in my coffee. I liked it. Liked ordering it, liked how it tasted, liked how, if not woke, then certainly modern choosing it made me feel. But then, oh dear. Maybe I wasn't modern in my oat milk consumption at all. Earlier this year, I found myself at a wellness event in the company of a biohacker and an extremely influential wellness influencer. When the three of us ordered our coffees, the biohacker and influencer fell deathly silent when I requested oat milk.

"Cow. I want cow in mine," the influencer enunciated clearly. The biohacker took hers black.

I realised I had made a terrible gaffe.

On investigating further, I discovered an article called *Goodbye, Oat Milk*, published in January on vogue.com, in which the author revealed oat milk is not particularly healthy, that it may cause our glucose to spike more violently than cow's milk, which has more sugar in it than oat but also has more fat and protein, both of which mitigate the glucose spike. Furthermore, the more damning elements of the wellness industry had already renamed it "starch juice". Oatly, I then discovered, had not only quietly added more heavily processed rapeseed oil to its recipe, but had sold off a significant portion of its company to the private equity firm Blackstone. Less "outsider", more Big Oat.

What did that mean for sales? In my local coffee shop I ask George, the young barista, if he has noticed a drop in oat milk orders.

"I have. I think we're over veganism generally," he says, speaking for society at large and his cohort of twentysomething friends in particular. This is demonstrably the case. Through the course of 2023, the UK vegan market, another emblem of wokeness, began to stagnate. Nestlé withdrew their vegan ranges from shop ➡

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ART STREIBER/AUGUST, ROBERT WILSON, MARK HARRISON. THIS SPREAD: DAN KENNEDY, GETTY IMAGES

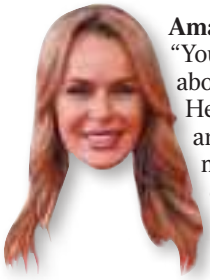
WOKE, MOI? DID I REALLY SAY THAT?

Jennifer Aniston
"I'm so over cancel culture. I probably just got cancelled by saying that. I just don't understand what it means. Is there no redemption? I don't know. I don't put everybody in the Harvey Weinstein basket."
In WSJ Magazine

Barack Obama
"This idea of purity and you're never compromised and you're always politically woke and all that stuff, you should get over that quickly. The world is messy. People who do really good stuff have flaws. People who you are fighting may love their kids and share certain things with you. If I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right or used the wrong verb, I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself. 'Man, you see how woke I was. I called you out,' but that's not activism. That's not bringing about change."
At an Obama Foundation summit event

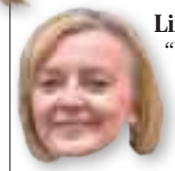
Gary Lineker
"I mean, what is woke? Having a conscience, having a heart, having empathy? How is that a bad thing?"
In The Guardian

Ricky Gervais
"I am trying to be more woke. For example, I love illegal immigrants. Sue me. Sometimes I just go down to Dover and I see a f***ing dinghy with 60 of them on and I go, 'Come on, welcome! Women and children first. Oh, there are no women – just you lads, is it?'"
On his Netflix show, Armageddon



Amanda Holden
"You know what I loved about Paul O'Grady? He was not woke in any way. He really had massive opinions on everything. I love people like that."
On Heart FM

Meghan Markle
"I thought a lot about words that become unnecessarily charged as it pertains to women, like feminism, for example, often treated as taboo as the f-word or the word 'woke'. I know I'm saying woke – I fully realise I am spoonfeeding the clickbait – but here's why. Because woke, by definition, means alert to injustice in society, especially racism."
On her Archetypes podcast



Liz Truss
"We're seeing the spreading of wokery, of left-wing ideas." *On GB News*

Donald Trump
"I don't like the term 'woke' because I hear, 'Woke, woke, woke...' Half the people can't even define it. They don't know what it is."
At the Westside Conservative Club Breakfast in Iowa

Brian Cox
"The whole woke culture is truly awful."
On Piers Morgan Uncensored

Elon Musk
"The woke mind virus is killing western civilisation."
On X/Twitter

Kemi Badenoch
"I don't call it 'war on woke', because I think it's far, far more serious than that. Sometimes when we say 'war on woke' or we use the word 'woke', people think these are trivial issues."
On GB News

JK Rowling
'Scoop up the woke cookies and bask in a virtue-signalling afterglow. There's joy, relief and safety in conformity'

Katy Perry
"Don't you feel like we're in a race to become the most woke? Somewhere along the way I realised that there is no destination, it's just a journey. Can someone tell me where the starting line and the finish line of all the wokeness is?"
In NME

Sir Keir Starmer
"In its desperation to cling on to power at all costs, the Tory party is... trying to find woke agendas in the very civic institutions they once regarded with respect... It's desperate. It's divisive. It's damaging."
In a speech to the Civil Society Summit

Suella Braverman
"Yes, I'm afraid it's the Labour Party, it's the Lib Dems, it's the coalition of chaos, it's the Guardian-reading, tofu-eating wokerati, dare I say, the anti-growth coalition that we have to thank for the disruption that we are seeing on our roads today." *In a speech in the House of Commons*

Sharon Osbourne
"Woke people are like born-agains. It's like a religion. The woke people, they are entitled to opinions, God bless them, even though they bore me to death – but the rest of us are not. They have a new word every day, and a new campaign every day, and if anyone goes against it... what? We're the devil? They certainly act like we are."
In the New York Post

Fiona Bruce
"No one would be able to say whether I was woke or not. Maybe that means I am bland."
In The Times

Tommy Hilfiger
"There are some businesses that are awake and some that are not. We are very woke." *In The Independent*

Grant Shapps
"Over time, a woke culture has seeped into public life and it is poisoning common-sense discourse. Anyone who questions it is dismissed out of hand. And anyone who does want a woke armed forces would take us back to square one like the Labour Party."
In the Daily Express

➡

shelves, Innocent Drinks discontinued its milk-alternative smoothies and Oatly culled an attempted foray into ice cream.

"I think maybe, when we look at what's going on in the world," George continues, "the wars, maybe we just think it's all a bit silly, relatively."

So we are no longer doing oat milk or veganism, but what else? Which other signifiers of wokeness have gone, along with the word itself? Oh, I know. Anyone else noticed preferred pronouns vanishing from the sign-off on people's emails and their social media profiles? Long before Cass made us all revisit our positions on who identified how, and for what reasons?

I certainly have. A dwindling number of unsolicited she/hers, he/hims and they/thems in the tail end of day-to-day admin, disappearing like smoke.

"Gen Z think pronouns are what older people do," a friend, a parent of teenagers, says. "And by 'older', they mean 27 years and above." Another friend, a secondary school teacher, says she spent a good five years diligently learning the pronouns of all her students. "Just really, really didn't want to get it wrong," she says. "Then, the year before last, September 2022, that intake, I realised it had just stopped. Same this September. Not a pronoun among them. It's like it never happened."

Finally, may I present for your consideration the return of real fur. *I know*, but it is happening. I live near the fashion college Central Saint Martins. When I noticed one student, then two, then lots of them wearing jackets made of real fur – clearly vintage, you could almost smell the mothballs rising off them – I realised something was up.

"It's vintage, it already exists," a stylist friend says. "It's more sustainable than buying a new coat." She has been hearing whispers about maybe, just maybe, using it on photoshoots again.

My real fur coat is an old fox that I picked up at a market back when fur was last acceptable. It has been loitering in the back of my wardrobe for a decade. During this time, I have not even dared look at it, lest Peta catch wind.

I pull it out for the first time in for ever.

"I'm having that when you die," an 18-year-old with a reasonable claim on all my clothes informs me.

I thought you didn't want it, I say.

"That was when I was woke," she says.

I put the vintage fox on, wear it out, just to see whether I get denounced in the street by some last remaining representative of The Woke, but I am not and it feels fine.

I wear it to my local café.

"Nice jacket," says George.

It's real, I say.

He shrugs, then, "Oat flat white?"

No, I say. I'll take it with cow's milk from now on. ■

TOM JACKSON, MARK HARRISON, GETTY IMAGES

Clive Myrie
"If woke means believing that people are equal, that diversity is a good thing, that colour is skin-deep, that we should all be treated fairly and decently, I am as woke as the next person." *In The Times*

Nigel Farage
"Is it any wonder that we have this woke madness going on?" *On X/Twitter*

Rishi Sunak
"[Labour's 2010 Equality Act] has been a Trojan horse that has allowed every kind of woke nonsense to permeate public life." *In a speech in West Sussex*

Caitlyn Jenner
"Take trans people – I think they've taken the woke ideology and are just taking it to the max and worse." *On GB News*

Kim Kardashian
"There's nothing worse than when someone is, like, so woke and they're on this therapy journey and they expect you to be right there with them." *On Jay Shetty's podcast*

Piers Morgan
"I'm not right wing at all... but the left has lost its mind. This woke stuff is insane. Everybody's sick and tired of woke companies telling us every day that we're evil." *On his TalkTV show*

Laurence Fox
"The woke ideology is a parasite, destroying the great work of genuine civil rights movements under the pretence of creating a more diverse, equitable and inclusive world. It uses minority groups as a shield to hide its true intention. Which is to undermine all we hold dear." *On X/Twitter*

Helena Bonham Carter
"Do you ban a genius for their sexual practices? There would be millions of people who, if you looked closely enough at their personal life, would be disqualified. You can't ban people. I hate cancel culture. It has become quite hysterical and there's a kind of witch-hunt and a lack of understanding." *In The Times*

Ulrika Jonsson
"Where are the cheerleaders [on the new series of *Gladiators*]? I don't know if this is some kind of woke rubbish, but it's disappointing." *In The Sun*

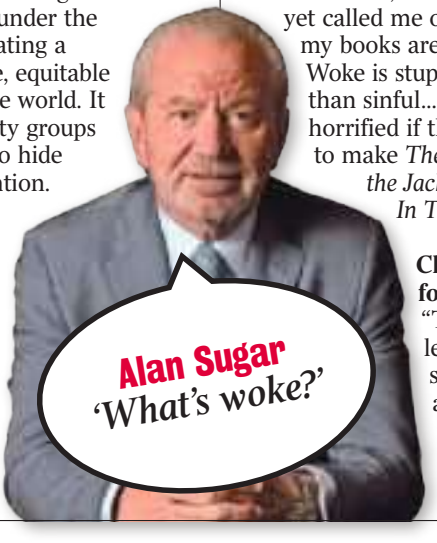
Cathy Tyson
"I imagine some of the readership use the word 'woke'. For me, it's as bad a term as offensive racial slurs. The terms 'woke' and 'race card' are deeply offensive to me." *In The Telegraph*

Spike Lee
"I've been saying wake up before it was chic to be woke. Way before woke." *In WSJ Magazine*

Michael Sheen
"The idea that being aware of social issues and aware of the injustices done to people... the idea that that gets labelled as woke and then is used as a pejorative, it just makes it so easy for people on the right, doesn't it? It's like microwave dinners as politics." *In The Independent*

Kathy Burke
"Being woke is a very decent thing; it's about being a decent human being." *On her podcast*

Frederick Forsyth
"Touch wood, no one has yet called me out, saying my books are unwoke. Woke is stupid rather than sinful... I'd be horrified if they tried to make *The Day of the Jackal* woke." *In The Telegraph*



Chris Philp, minister for policing
"The self-righteous woke left turn out not to be so much the nice guys after all." *On X/Twitter*

Research by Ceci Browning

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WIGS, WINE AND PENIS PUMPS

Me and my cancer buddy

Jeremy Langmead, 58, with his dog, Ruby, and Sarah Edmundson, 38, photographed by Dan Kennedy

A year ago, when Jeremy Langmead wrote about having prostate cancer, he hoped he was in the clear. Shortly afterwards, doctors told him it had returned. Now he's launching a podcast with his cancer comrade, Sarah Edmundson

Just over a year ago, I wrote a piece for The Times about my cancer diagnosis. A regular checkup with my GP in May 2022 had shown a rise in my PSA levels – prostate specific antigens – that can sometimes indicate a potential prostate cancer lurking down below. After a few months of MRI scans, biopsies and PET scans, I was told that I had an aggressive, high-grade tumour. It came as a complete surprise since I had no clue that anything was wrong: not a single symptom, ache or pain.

Fortunately, it appeared not to have spread beyond my prostate. When it does so, usually to the bones or liver, it is no longer curable. I was advised by a leading urological surgeon – Ben Challacombe, a friend of a friend – that I needed to get rid of it as soon as possible. I should wait only weeks, not months. So in September 2022, eight days after the Queen was buried, I underwent a robotic radical prostatectomy at Guy's Hospital in London: robotic arms operated by the surgeon via a console wielded forceps, hooks, needle drivers and cameras as they burrowed down through my abdomen to the prostate area and removed the gland, as well as 20 of the surrounding lymph nodes in case the cancer had spread to them too.

After a few weeks of recovery – and learning how to handle catheters, blood-thinning injections and lymph node drains – life began to return to relative normality. Since nerves had been severed and tissue damaged between the urethra and rectum – an unavoidable part of the process – I had to pray that my bladder control would return to normal (it did) and that, after a few months, I would once again be able to get an erection (this can take months, or even years).

Six weeks after the operation, I went to London for another PSA test followed by an appointment with the surgeon to find out if the cancer had gone. Challacombe smiled as he open the door to his consulting room: "You're cancer-free," he told me. My family and friends were thrilled when I rang them with the news: plans were made; parties arranged. Weirdly, I just felt numb. It somehow seemed too good to be true. Was this surreal six months spent in waiting rooms and on operating tables wondering whether I would live or die really over? Well, it wasn't. Twelve weeks later, shortly after my story was published in this newspaper, a series of blood tests confirmed that the cancer had returned.

Strangely, perhaps, I wasn't devastated. Deep down I knew this would be the case and that my cancer journey was yet to have a few twists and turns; that there were a few more chapters to this story. I also knew that many men with prostate cancer – and many men and women with other cancers – were facing a lot worse. When my story appeared in The Times I received hundreds of messages via the paper's comments section online, DMs in my Instagram feed and also on LinkedIn. The latter was clearly the favoured messaging platform of middle-aged men.

I was genuinely touched and humbled that so many people shared their very personal stories with me. There were men who were recovering from operations like mine; others who were undergoing numerous treatments – radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy – over many years; two men told me that they only had days or weeks to live, but had decided to make the most of the short time they had left and spend it with their loved ones; others told me about the husbands they had sadly lost to the disease. It was an emotional mailbag. But it also highlighted what a caring and compassionate community the members of Club Cancer are.

Before long, I was back having Zooms and in-person appointments with cancer specialists. This time, instead of talking to urological surgeons, I was meeting clinical oncologists. Dr Vinod Mullassery specialises in treating tumours with radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy at Guy's and St Thomas'. I had spoken to him the year before when deciding whether to have the radical prostatectomy or a course of radiotherapy to treat my initial cancer. I had decided on the operation after learning that radiation can cause secondary cancers, urinary issues, problems with bowel function and fatigue; while the hormone replacement therapy can lead to erectile dysfunction, gynecomastia (the growth of breast tissue), depression, heart disease, weight gain, loss of muscle mass and osteoporosis. Just typical that I was going to end up having both options.

I TOLD MY SISTER VERY MATTER-OF-FACTLY THAT I WANTED TO DIE. A LITTLE SELF-INDULGENT, I ADMIT

Before undergoing radiotherapy, Mullassery was going to put me on a course of hormone therapy. For a recurrent prostate cancer such as mine I would be on it altogether for two years – and for six months before the radiotherapy would start. Hormone therapy sounds a lot more benign than it actually is. It is effectively chemical castration. It stops your body producing testosterone. This won't cure the cancer but aims to stop it growing. Testosterone is usually a very good thing in a bloke: it is responsible for a man's bone density, fat distribution, muscle strength and mass, facial and body hair, red blood cell production, sex drive and sperm production (semen went out the window with my prostate, so no loss there).

Jeremy's original Magazine story, February 2023

Testosterone is also the favoured food of prostate cancer cells. So every 12 weeks a small pellet of a hormonal therapy drug called Zoladex, the size of a grain of rice, is injected under the skin in my stomach to block the production of testosterone. They don't use a local anaesthetic and it blimmin' hurts. The nurses always tell me how much they dread performing this procedure. At least it's quick.

Oh my Lord, the side-effects though. It's always the side-effects that irk you, rather than the actual cancer. It basically gives you all the symptoms of the menopause (ladies, I truly feel your pain). I suffer from hot flushes during the day (beads of sweat suddenly appear and I rip off my sweater only to want to put it back on again minutes later), night sweats (the bedsheets are soaked each morning), fatigue, memory lapses and muscle loss.

Most of my body hair has gone (thankfully not the hair on my head, as it has cost me a fortune to keep it there over the years); I have rheumatoid arthritis symptoms (I can't move my fingers first thing in the morning... I look like Edward Scissorhands when I get up for a pee); my thighs and bum have grown to compete in size with Kim Kardashian's, so I am no longer able to fit into any of my regular trousers (thank God elasticated waists are currently fashionable), and I have zero sex drive. Not even a teeny-tiny jot of one. The chances are that my erectile tissues have healed by now and I am physically able to have sex again. Can I be bothered to see if that's the case? Nah. It's really weird to have no sexual desire at all. And not so great for

DAN KENNEDY; MAKE-UP: ALY STEER AT ME AGENCY USING LOLA LASHES AND BOBBI BROWN

With Sarah Edmundson

my husband (or perhaps it is). On the plus side, however, I have yet to grow breasts.

If I'm honest, the hormone therapy has been the most difficult part of the treatment so far. And others I've spoken to who are on it feel the same. Zoladex is a necessary evil, but it is evil. It feels weird not being the boss of your own body. Every week or so there seems to be a different part of you that doesn't quite work like it used to. Going for a hike becomes exhausting; going for a wee becomes more frequent; going out becomes less appealing. And every pill or injection you take to treat the side-effects has a side-effect of its own. For instance, the steroid injection I had to ease the rheumatoid arthritis symptoms definitely helped. My hands and feet are less swollen and more mobile. But I now develop frequent cramps in my fingers and toes. I've even had to stop once or twice while writing this piece to gently ease my fingers back into place.

It was hard to imagine how I would find the six and a half week course of radiotherapy. I would be having 66 doses over 33 consecutive days (excluding weekends). The thought of going to hospital every day to lie under a giant machine whose high-energy beams are designed to kill cancer cells or shrink tumours was a difficult one to grasp.

And when the radiation is aimed at your pelvis each day there are a number of unappealing precautions to take. Your bladder and rectum need to be the same size for each session to ensure the accuracy of the beam and that the surrounding areas remain as unaffected as possible. So before your radiotherapy session you have to ensure you have a full bladder, an empty rectum and no gas. This means you need to be well hydrated, you have to empty your bladder when arriving at the hospital and then fill it again – as full as it can be without you needing to return to the loo until after the radiotherapy – and you also need to use a micro-enema each morning.

This process takes around an hour, the actual radiotherapy only about ten minutes. For the latter you are helped into position under the machine – they have markers designed to your measurements – and then the radiographers leave the room while the machine hums loudly, cranks into place, and moves slowly around your body aiming its killer beams at the small permanent tattoos they have inked around your groin so that they know where to aim. You have to remain as still as is humanly possible.

Typically, and dumb I know, it was the toilet issues that worried me the most. If the pre-scan each day revealed that your bladder wasn't full enough, your rectum empty enough or that you had wind, you would be ignominiously sent away to poo or fart before they could begin. I would often hear other men being told to go and pass wind and watch them walk past me as they headed to the loo, their bare bottoms peering out of the backs of the badly tied hospital gowns, carrying their plastic baskets of shoes and clothes with them. This was not going to happen to me. Some foods can make your rectum bigger or fill it with gas and so you are advised to reduce the fibre in your diet, cut out fizzy drinks, beans, pulses and leafy vegetables. For six and a half weeks I ate nothing but lean chicken, fish, white bread and milk chocolate. Not especially healthy but, thankfully, I never got sent to the loo.

The radiotherapy wasn't as terrible as it may sound. The cancer centre at Guy's is light, bright and airy and designed to feel as calm and pleasant as possible. The radiotherapy floor is the first in Europe to be above ground; radiotherapy, due to the immense weight of the equipment, is usually below ground. As a result, the cancer centre building weighs more than the entire 72 floors of the neighbouring Shard.

The people who greet you at reception each morning are charming and friendly, the radiographers beyond kind and welcoming despite the constant stream of people they treat – like a conveyor belt – and it soon becomes your new normal. This was the NHS at its best.

Yes, I felt more tired as the weeks passed but the side-effects were minimal. The only fly in the ointment was one morning, when waiting for my radiotherapy to begin, I began to feel cold and to shiver. A lot. I had no idea why. I got changed and went into the radiotherapy room and we discussed whether I could keep still enough for the session. I began to shake more violently and my lips turned blue. Within seconds, an oxygen mask was placed over my face, I was helped onto a trolley and whisked upstairs. I was put on a drip of antibiotics and in a bed in a small room on the chemotherapy floor. I only caught a brief glimpse of the people having chemo but saw enough to know that I never wanted that to be me. Even wearing an oxygen mask, and with a temperature above 38C, I felt lucky.

For the next few hours I was wheeled around the hospital, drips and all, for scans, X-rays and blood tests as they tried to find out what was wrong. By the end of the day, my temperature had regulated, the shivering stopped, and I asked if I could go home. They weren't sure it was a good idea as none of the test results had come back yet. I told them I was OK and would be back the next day for radiotherapy in any case. They relented and my sister – my husband was at home in Cumbria – came to collect me. I felt weak but OK as I jostled with commuters on the Tube home; I've always hated travelling by taxi. I went straight to bed and fell asleep.

I don't really remember much about that night but I apparently woke up with a fever once more. I was soaked in sweat and felt frightful. My sister rang a doctor friend and asked what she should do. He advised her to use a tepid flannel on my forehead, and to alternate between doses of ibuprofen and paracetamol. She also gave me some antibiotics that the hospital had given me for the next morning.

Apparently – although I have no recollection – I said I'd had enough. I told my sister, very matter-of-factly, that I just wanted to die. I was bored of constantly battling illnesses. I couldn't be arsed to carry on like this for the rest of my life. A little self-indulgent, I admit. Temperature back down, I eventually fell asleep at 6am.

Fortunately, I have a short attention span and woke up later that morning and said I felt fine; well enough to take my ➡

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dog for a walk in the local park. Halfway around Primrose Hill I realised I didn't feel great and sat on a bench to get my strength back. When I got home, my mobile rang. It was the hospital. The test results had come back and I needed to go in. And I was to bring a bag with clothes and toiletries. Will I be staying overnight, I asked. You'll be staying at least a week, she said. Perhaps six.

It turned out that I had a bacterial blood infection: group B strep. There was a large area of swelling and a rash over my right groin consistent with cellulitis (not cellulite, I kept telling everyone). They were worried about sepsis.

I was intravenously fed antibiotics through a drip for seven days and nights in my cubicle on a ward of around 20 men ill with complications from cancer. The ward was not pretty – the bedsheets were worn and threadbare, the pillowcases had holes and the food was watery. But who cared. The nurses, doctors and specialists were angels. I have never felt safer. The only revelation was that most middle-aged men don't seem to know that headphones have been invented. The other patients on my ward watched TV, YouTube videos and held FaceTime calls day and night, all without headphones, so for all to hear. Extraordinary.

I carried on with my radiotherapy while there. The first couple of days they insisted on wheeling me from my ward in the main hospital to the radiotherapy unit in the cancer care centre in a wheelchair. Eventually I persuaded them to let me walk. It was only five minutes. And wheelchairs are so very ageing.

Before long my week's stay in hospital was up, and my six and half weeks of radiotherapy was complete. I felt sad, not pleased. I would miss the daily routine, the kind faces, the camaraderie among the patients in the cancer centre, some of whom looked so ill and yet always greeted you with a nod or a smile. I would miss being part of a gang of ill people in the room, rather than the only one. Weird, I know.

We will have no idea whether the treatments have worked until I stop taking the hormone therapy in the summer of next year; the Zoladex masks the signs of cancer and so you have no real indication what's going on until you come off it. My cancer might have gone. Or it might have spread. No clue as to which.

Arriving home in Cumbria last November seemed odd at first. Everything was weirdly normal. The food shop needed doing, the dog needed walking, my consultancy clients needed calling, and my husband was still quite untidy. I looked well, felt OK and had learnt how to handle the side-effects. Life returned to relative normality. I couldn't forget I had cancer, but decided I was going to turn it from an illness into a hobby. Instead of worrying me, it would intrigue me. I would keep an eye on it, but not obsess about it.

The previous year when I had finished treatment and thought I was cancer-free, I was disappointed that I hadn't had an epiphany. Now I sort of did. I decided to make the most of the time I had as I had no idea how long that might be. I would put myself in fewer stressful work situations (even though I used to thrive in those); I would say yes to opportunities that might be fun (I've visited friends in California, Barcelona, Marrakesh and the Dolomites over the past few months), and I would also be more open to meeting new people outside my close friendship group.

I'm particularly glad about the latter. After I returned home I had received a sweet message on Instagram from someone called Sarah Edmundson who lives nearby. She had heard about my cancer, had been through something similar herself, and told me to call her if I ever wanted to talk about it. I thanked her profusely and said I'd be in touch if I did, but I was OK for now. A few weeks later I bumped into her in the local pub. Sarah is one of those people whose good energy lights up a room. She is full of life, and both funny and pretty. We chatted as if we had known each other for years.

A performance and leadership specialist, who also runs a property business and a charity, Sarah is living with secondary breast cancer. Her original diagnosis was in 2021. Sarah has had a bilateral mastectomy with full reconstruction and is currently on her third round of chemotherapy. She has triple

negative breast cancer, a rare and aggressive form of the disease – her condition is treatable but not curable. Sarah is 38 years old.

Being friends with someone else who has cancer brings with it a particular bond. In the same way that journalists love to talk about journalism with each other and fashion folk love to talk about clothes, people with cancer often like to swap tales too. There are some elements of the disease that only others who have been through it truly understand. The not knowing, the blurry future, the inability to truly plan or commit, the loss of control, the disloyalty of your own body, the physical changes... They are hard to convey in true Technicolor to everyone else.

Sarah and I go for regular lunch dates where we animatedly discuss all that we are going through without sentiment or reserve. With wine. (I googled wine and cancer multiple times until I finally found a website that said it was perfectly fine. I didn't check its credentials, as that might have sullied the sanction.) We talk about the funny things that happen (there are more of those than you'd imagine); the wonderful things that happen (the friendships, the inner strength, the kindness of strangers); the number of things the professionals never warn you about (those pesky side-effects again); the stealth of cancer (despite the severity of her condition, Sarah has never felt ill from the actual cancer, only from the treatment); sex and relationships (Sarah is single and dating – how do you bring up the big C on a date without being a Debbie Downer?), and the accessories (she has a great wig; I have a penis pump). We even talk about dying. Friends and family, understandably, don't really like to hear death discussed. But, of course, it's on our minds. I listened to a

CANCER MIGHT HAVE GONE OR SPREAD: MY DRUGS MEAN I'VE NO CLUE WHICH YET

discussion on death literacy on Radio 4 the other week, and I'm all for it. We shouldn't pretend it doesn't happen.

But despite our different cancer journeys so far, what we soon realised from having these frank discussions was how informative and transformative it was to discuss these issues in the open, discover tips and insights that nobody had shared with us, and feel part of a community that truly understood what we were going through. The obvious next step, it seemed, was to launch a podcast so that others could – if they wished – join in the conversation too.

So Sarah and I have launched a podcast series called *How Long Have You Got?*. The question that's on everyone's mind and the answer that's on nobody's lips. We hope others with prostate or breast cancer – or any cancer – will find it helpful. As the series develops we will bring in other people's experiences, leading surgeons and cancer specialists, and anyone else that listeners suggest to us. I suppose our aim is to take the kerfuffle out of cancer and to tell it as it is.

Neither Sarah nor I ever expected to be in this position. I'm relatively lucky so far, and I'm 58. Whatever happens, I've had a good run. I find it shocking and unfair that Sarah – who barely ever complains – is facing what she is at only 38. But it is what it is and we've decided to make the most of it. Launching the podcast series, and taking part in Macmillan's Mighty Hike this June – we're doing a half-marathon here in the Lake District to raise funds for those living with cancer and who are less fortunate than us – helps us make sense of it all. It helps turn a negative into a positive. And, you know, we also manage to have a lot of fun. As Sarah likes to say, "We're thriving, not just surviving." ■

How Long Have You Got? *is available on Apple and Spotify. To sponsor Jeremy and Sarah's Macmillan Mighty Hike go to Just Giving (justgiving.com/team/langmead). Instagram.com/howlonghaveyougot2024*

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ARE WE EATING TODAY, DARLING?

The couple who got rich on fasting

Clare Bailey, 62, and Michael Mosley, 67

Dr Clare Bailey was sceptical when her husband, Michael Mosley, said he could reverse his type 2 diabetes by fasting. Then his Fast Diet became a bestseller and they turned the 5:2 phenomenon into a lifestyle juggernaut. Interview by Claire Cohen

It could seem sad, when arriving at a house built by the Cadbury family in 1905, not to be offered chocolate. But then this rambling white pebble-dashed family home in Buckinghamshire, once the servants' quarters, is no longer occupied by the Dairy Milk dynasty but the Mosleys, more famous for popularising intermittent fasting. Any chocolate that makes it through the front door is swiftly squirrelled away by Dr Clare Bailey, wife of Dr Michael Mosley, inventor of the 5:2 diet.

"I have to hide chocolate from him and it drives me bonkers," Bailey says. "I put it in more and more ingenious places – in the top of the broom cupboard or behind the china. I'm just thinking, this is ridiculous."

This does not stop him from finding it, however. "You can hear this sort of rustling and Mike doesn't do things quietly, so I know," she says. "When I want to cook with it, it's not there. I get very grumpy sometimes."

Which goes some way to explaining her book, part of the couple's bestselling *Fast 800* series of low-carb recipes that help their devotees stick to consuming 800 calories a day. Except *The Fast 800 Treats Recipe Book* is what Bailey calls a "deviation", aimed not at restricted eating but designed to ensure that when we do enjoy desserts they are of the low-carb, low-sugar, protein-rich variety. Yum?

They mostly look tempting. And while you are never going to convince me that a ring of apple covered in peanut butter is remotely comparable to a doughnut, there are familiar puddings in which the sugar has simply been traded for dried fruit, which is higher in fibre and releases its sugars more slowly.

"I'm lucky because growing up, we almost never had sweets, so I don't miss them," says Bailey. "But Michael struggles. It's almost a constant battle.

"We say that he's a labrador, because they eat anything. There were times when he would open a packet of biscuits and the whole lot would be gone. Whereas I'm a greyhound – one of those annoying people who doesn't have weight to lose," she adds, proffering a bowl of pistachios. "At 62, I feel as fit as I ever have."

Mosley, 67, credits his wife, whom he met at medical school 44 years ago, with having "shaped what I consume".

"We would sit in the café at lunchtime and Michael would have sandwiches with bright red salami," she says. "He never ate greens. His default, to be honest, was school food. That's why I had to do an apple crumble in the book."

We are speaking in Bailey's office, a small room that is filled with the sort of mementoes any family might accumulate over 24 years in the same home. Well, almost. Alongside novelty mugs and photographs of their four children there are dozens of nutrition books. I also spy a certificate marking Mosley's Emmy nomination in 2002 as the executive producer on John Cleese's documentary series *The Human Face*.

Having decided the medical profession was not for him, Mosley got a job with the BBC. In 2013, after reversing his type 2 diabetes through intermittent fasting, he published *The Fast Diet*, which kick-started a health revolution and changed the couple's lives almost overnight.

"As a GP, I had been really quite sceptical that Michael could reverse his diabetes by losing weight," Bailey says. "It was a major eye-opener for me. It's been incredibly rewarding and exciting. And there is still a long way to go."

Hence the recipe books, the first of which appeared in 2016. Bailey writes all the recipes, which make healthy swaps when cooking family favourites, for instance mashing cauliflower instead of potato. Say what you like – and many have, with some calling the programme "extreme" – but the simplistic approach, which doesn't shy away from frozen ingredients or microwaves, has sold millions of books and earned her 122,000 Instagram followers.

Mornings start with their seven-minute fitness routine. They stop eating three hours before bed

"It's a world away from ultraprocessed foods where you don't recognise the ingredients," says Bailey, who retired as a GP in 2022. She thinks it is "devastating" that UPFs make up half the average Brit's calorie intake. So she presumably never indulges herself?

"I will occasionally buy something off a shop counter. Grabbing a bar here or there isn't the end of the world," she says. "But they are designed to make you want to eat more. I have a savoury tooth, so if I open a bag of tortilla chips, I find it difficult not to finish the whole lot."

Not that there is any evidence on show in the Bailey-Mosley kitchen, an airy space dominated by a range cooker atop of which is a Le Creuset casserole dish of turmeric-spiced dal. ("That's lunch. We eke it out over the week.") A recently drained cafetière sits to one side and I notice Bailey adds whole milk to her tea.

"I have a cup of tea with breakfast and a couple in the afternoon," she says. "But I wait until an hour or two after waking to savour a coffee with frothy milk. Having it sooner can interfere with your morning cortisol spike and leave you anxious."

They enjoy wine – generally red, which is known to contain the antioxidant resveratrol – but try to save it for the weekends. They don't buy red meat, favouring instead dinners of fish, sweet potato and greens.

"We do have bacon occasionally and chorizo in small quantities. It gives fantastic flavour," says Bailey. "We can't be purist about it."

Mornings start with the couple's seven-minute fitness routine immediately after getting out of bed, which consists of planks and push-ups. That's not the end of it. Mosley runs while Bailey prefers a local outdoor boot camp "come rain or shine".

Breakfast revolves around eggs or kippers. "My staple is scrambled eggs with a bit of butter and Marmite on sourdough," Bailey says. Mosley, she says, is trying to avoid toast. "That's his other thing: toast and marmalade. He's like Paddington. I can hear him – it's either the rustling of chocolate wrappers or the toaster – but I don't want to be his keeper."

Mosley fasts once a week (more if the weight is creeping on) and they avoid eating in the three hours before bed because "it gets laid down as fat". I would say that is the least of their nocturnal worries. Bailey sleepwalks once or twice a week while Mosley snores, albeit not at the "jet plane" level he did before losing weight, when his wife would record his snoring and play it back to him.

Bailey's biggest foible was always timekeeping. Then a few years ago, in her fifties, she realised that her constant

OPENING SPREAD: LEZLI+ROSE/DAILY MAIL/DMG MEDIA LICENSING.
THIS SPREAD: DAILY MAIL/DMG MEDIA LICENSING

Clare Bailey and Michael Mosley

lateness was probably down to having ADHD. "I have no sense of time," she says. "I can't leave the rice on the hob because, if I go out of the room, I'll get absorbed in something else and there will be smoke pouring out of the kitchen."

Now that their children – sons aged 33, 31 and 29 and a 24-year-old daughter – have left home, it is usually just the two of them around the dinner table, where they often discuss the latest dietary research. "It's a little embarrassing," Bailey says. "We're probably very boring."

Once a week they are joined for dinner by the Ukrainian family, a mother and three teenagers, who have lived with them for the past two years. The old Mosley 4x4 went to Ukraine to become an ambulance.

"They escaped a couple of weeks after the start of the war and came to us via a friend," Bailey says. "We felt we had the space. They are delightful and we cross paths in the house very happily. It's been a real pleasure to have that extra family around. If you're clear about your boundaries, it works."

Which could arguably be their family motto. As health gurus, surely they must feel pressure to keep the weight off and stay looking good?

"I don't think about it, to be really honest," Bailey says. "I think Mike would if he started putting on significant weight, but we're relaxed. I don't think we're diet fascists, though other people may say otherwise." ■

EAT! Turn over for recipes from The Fast 800 Treats Recipe Book by Clare Bailey

DR BAILEY'S RULES

How to have treats and stay healthy When it comes to treats, not only does it matter how many treats you eat, but also when you eat and what you eat alongside your treat. If you eat carb-rich foods on an empty stomach, you are more likely to get a rapid spike in blood sugars, quickly followed by a sugar crash that leaves you craving more.

Eat treats after a meal If you eat the same amount of carbs straight after a healthy meal they will be absorbed more gradually, leading to a lower spike. This is because the fat, fibre and protein in the meal you've just eaten will flatten the glucose curve and allow a slower release of glucose into your bloodstream.

Cut out late-night snacks The time of day you eat your treat matters too. Studies have shown that food eaten later at night, within three hours of going to bed, is more likely to end up being stored as fat than a similar snack eaten earlier in the day. Eating late at night is more likely to lead to acid reflux and disrupted sleep, as your body struggles to process food when your circadian clock is telling your digestive system to close down for the night.

Give your gut time to rest By cutting out late-night snacks, your overnight fast is extended and your gut gets a well-earned break from the hard work of digesting food. Think of your gut as being like a motorway that needs to be closed overnight for the surface to be repaired. It's only when there is no late-night food travelling down your digestive tract that your body can get on with the essential business of repairing the lining of your gut.

Restrict your eating window We are fans of time-restricted eating (TRE), where you limit your eating window and extend your normal overnight fast. You might want to try eating your last meal at least three hours before you go to bed, and then delay breakfast until an hour or so after you wake up. If you stop eating by 8pm and don't eat again until 8am, that is a form of TRE known as 12:12. If you find that easy to do, you might want to try 14:10 or even a 16:8. TRE is something that you can readily combine with the Fast 800 programme.

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THE TIMES

Eat!

Really fast easy desserts

4-PAGE PULLOUT

ALL UNDER 200 CALORIES

By Dr Clare Bailey

39 CALORIES
Peach and mint granita

SERVES 4, PREP 10 mins, FREEZE 3–4 hours

Neither ice cream, nor sorbet, nor slushie, this makes an elegant and interesting dessert that is zingy, crunchy and beautifully cooling.

- **1 x 410g tin peaches (ideally stored in fruit juice), drained**
- **A few sprigs of fresh mint, leaves picked and finely chopped**
- **4 tbsp coconut yoghurt**

1. Place the peaches in a food processor or blender and blitz until smooth. Stir in the chopped mint.
2. Pour into a lidded plastic container and place in the freezer for 3-4 hours to set.
3. To serve, divide the yoghurt between four bowls or glasses. Break up the granita with a fork and divide between the bowls or glasses.

COOK'S TIP
You may want to allow 5-10 minutes for the granita to soften before serving

RECIPES Dr Clare Bailey and Kathryn Bruton
PHOTOGRAPHS Smith & Gilmour

66 CALORIES
Creamy tangerine sorbet

SERVES 2, PREP 2 mins, FREEZE 1 hour

An elegantly simple sorbet based on blitzing frozen tangerine segments. It's sweet and tart with a creamy orange flavour. Fun to make with the help of little ones – kids will love to eat it too.

- **4 medium tangerines (or mandarins), peeled and segments separated**
- **2 tbsp full-fat Greek yoghurt, or dairy-free equivalent**
- **A few chopped mint leaves, for decoration (optional)**

1. Put the tangerine (or mandarin) pieces on a small tray or plate and place in the freezer for at least 1 hour.
2. Place the frozen segments in a food processor or blender with the yoghurt and blitz to make a creamy, tangy sorbet.
3. Share between two bowls and scatter over the mint, if using.

79 CALORIES
Blueberry protein pancakes

MAKES 8, PREP 5 mins, COOK 8 mins

Easy and delicious, these are lovely served with yoghurt and more fresh blueberries.

- **30g ground almonds**
- **60g full-fat cream cheese, or dairy-free equivalent, softened**
- **2 medium free-range eggs**
- **½ tsp vanilla extract**
- **80g blueberries, plus extra to decorate**
- **15g butter (or coconut oil)**

1. Place the ground almonds, cream cheese, eggs and vanilla extract in a medium bowl and mix with an electric whisk until smooth. Stir in the blueberries.
2. Melt half the butter or coconut oil in a large nonstick frying pan over a medium heat. Pour in 4 tbsp batter to make 4 small pancakes. Cook for about 2 minutes, or until golden, then flip and cook on the other side for the same amount of time. Transfer to a plate and repeat.
3. Serve warm with extra blueberries and full-fat Greek yoghurt, if you like.

COOK'S TIP
The pancakes freeze well. Store with nonstick baking paper between each one. Thaw in the fridge and warm gently in a medium oven to serve.

84 CALORIES
Mango and lime sorbet

SERVES 2, PREP 10 mins

Mango and lime are a match made in heaven. This is superquick and easy to make, and tastes delicious.

- **150g frozen mango chunks**
- **Zest of 1 lime**
- **65g coconut yoghurt**
- **1 tsp honey**

1. Place all the ingredients in a food processor or blender and blitz until smooth.
2. Divide between two bowls and eat at once, or keep in the freezer until needed.

106 CALORIES
Banana ice cream

SERVES 4, PREP 10 mins, FREEZE 1 hour

Simple, sweet and creamy with a nutty crunch, a hint of mint and the bananas add probiotic fibre. Surprisingly moreish.

- **2 small ripe bananas, peeled, sliced and frozen**
- **50g shelled pistachios, chopped, plus 20g, to serve**
- **5g fresh mint leaves, plus extra to serve**

1. Blitz all the ingredients together in a jug with a handheld blender until smooth. You could also do this in a food processor or blender.
2. Serve at once with a few extra chopped nuts and extra mint leaves sprinkled on top, or keep in the freezer for another day.

107 CALORIES
Mixed berry fool

SERVES 2, PREP 5 mins

This elegant berry dessert is deceptively easy and won't spike blood sugars due to the cushioning effect of the full-fat Greek yoghurt. You could replace the berries with any seasonal or tinned fruit, such as apricots, cherries or diced mango.

- **140g full-fat Greek yoghurt, or dairy-free equivalent**
- **½ tsp vanilla extract**
- **½ tsp honey**
- **50g frozen mixed berries, defrosted**

1. Mix the yoghurt, vanilla extract and honey together in a bowl.
2. Divide the yoghurt mixture between two small bowls. Add the berries and stir gently to create a marbled effect.

COOK'S TIP
If you only have fresh berries, mash them before adding to the yoghurt to release some of the juice. ➨

109 CALORIES
Ginger frozen yoghurt

SERVES 4, PREP 15 mins, FREEZE 5 hours

Tangy yoghurt is sweetened with ginger and banana for a wonderful frozen treat. Chia seeds increase the creaminess and add some extra protein.

- **2 balls stem ginger in syrup, drained and finely chopped**
- **1 tsp stem ginger syrup (from the jar)**
- **150g full-fat Greek yoghurt, or dairy-free equivalent**
- **1 medium ripe banana, peeled and mashed**
- **1 tsp coconut oil**
- **1 tsp chia seeds (optional)**

1. Place all the ingredients, except the chia seeds, in a high-sided bowl or jug and blitz with a handheld blender until smooth. Stir through the chia seeds.
2. Pour into a lidded plastic container and place in the freezer for about 5 hours.

Extracted from *The Fast 800 Treats Recipe Book* by Dr Clare Bailey and Kathryn Bruton (Short, £18.99), published on April 25. To order a copy call 020 3176 2935 or go to timesbookshop.co.uk. Discount available for Times+ members

170 CALORIES
Scorched chilli pineapple

SERVES 2, PREP 10 mins, COOK 4 mins

Those of you who were around in the Seventies might be delighted to try this old favourite with a chilli twist. Anyone younger will find intriguing bursts of sweet, juicy, tangy pineapple with a hint of chilli to cut through the sweetness. Pineapple also has a surprising range of health benefits, including containing antioxidants, vitamin C and fibre.

- **1 x 435g tin pineapple (ideally stored in fruit juice), drained and chopped into 1–2cm pieces**
- **¼–½ tsp chilli flakes**
- **Pinch of salt**
- **Handful of toasted nuts, such as shelled pistachios, flaked almonds or crushed walnuts**
- **3–4 mint leaves, finely chopped**
- **2 tbsp full-fat crème fraîche, Greek yoghurt or dairy-free equivalent**

1. Place the pineapple on some kitchen roll to remove any remaining liquid.
2. Heat a griddle or frying pan until hot. Spread the pineapple pieces over the hot griddle, then scatter with the chilli flakes and a tiny pinch of salt. Lightly scorch the fruit for 4 minutes, turning halfway through.
3. Divide the slightly browned pineapple between two small plates and top with the nuts and mint to decorate. Serve with a tablespoon of crème fraîche or full-fat Greek yoghurt.

183 CALORIES
Chocolate mousse

SERVES 4, PREP 10 mins, REFRIGERATE 2 hours

A surprisingly simple yet indulgent chocolate mousse.

- **125g dark chocolate (at least 70 per cent cocoa), broken into pieces**
- **1 tsp coconut oil**
- **4 medium free-range egg whites**
- **Pinch of salt**

1. Place the chocolate and coconut oil in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure the bowl does not touch the water, and stir until melted. Remove from the heat and leave to cool for about 5 minutes.
2. Place the egg whites in a separate clean bowl with a pinch of salt and use an electric whisk to achieve stiff peaks.
3. When the chocolate has cooled, add a quarter of the egg whites to the chocolate and use the electric whisk to beat them in. This will stop the chocolate from seizing. Now fold in the remaining egg whites with a spatula or metal spoon, until incorporated and the mousse is aerated and light.
4. Divide between four small glasses and refrigerate for about 2 hours, until set. Serve with berries, if you like. ■

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WOULD YOU VOTE FOR THE MAN FROM BLUR?

Dave Rowntree, right, with fellow Blur members Alex James, Graham Coxon and Damon Albarn, Tokyo, 1994

Dave Rowntree, the drummer and 'quiet one' in Blur, is swapping the tour bus for the battle bus and standing for Labour at the next general election. But can he overturn a huge Conservative majority in the Mid Sussex constituency? By Will Hodgkinson

Dave Rowntree, 59, photographed by Tom Jackson at the Shepherd & Dog pub, Fulking, West Sussex

Interviews with rock stars have taken me to some exotic locations over the years. There was a fantasy island with Prince, an enchanted forest with Shane MacGowan, a Camden pub with Amy Winehouse. This is a new one, though: a concrete wasteland with Dave Rowntree of Blur. In the rain.

"This used to be the heart of Burgess Hill," says Rowntree, a 59-year-old everyman in a corduroy jacket and denim jeans, as he points out the damage poor planning has done to this town in Mid Sussex, the constituency for which he is standing as Labour candidate. "There was a big shopping centre called the Martlets, a library, a community space, small shops... The council sold the town centre to a bunch of developers in a job lot. The developers razed the Martlets to the ground before deciding it wasn't commercially viable to do the plans they presented. So they knocked down the heart and soul of Burgess Hill and left behind a zombie wasteland."

Rock stars making political statements are ten a penny. You can't tune into an awards ceremony without someone accompanying a raised fist with a shout of, "F*** the Tories!" before being whisked off in a limo. Not many, however, are prepared to give it all up for their political beliefs. Now Rowntree has an even bigger battle on his hands than when Blur went up against Oasis for the UK's No 1 single in 1995. Mid Sussex has been a safe Conservative seat since it was created in 1974; in 2019, Mims Davies, a minister in the Department for Work and Pensions, won with 53.3 per cent of the vote. Can a drummer in a Britpop band, I ask him, really convince the Tory voters of Mid Sussex to make the switch to Labour?

"My focus is on a reform of the planning system," says Rowntree as we climb into his Tesla and drive through the winding roads of the South Downs. "You can kill a village by putting a housing estate next to it or you can transform it into a beautiful thriving community, and we have a once in a generation chance to rebuild the planning system from the ground up. The doors I've knocked on, development has proved to be the biggest issue and people agree: we need to build not just houses, but communities."

Development in the area, he says, has been driven by people moving down from London or up from Brighton and that has changed the voting demographic. "Now, you look at the polling, the Conservatives are only one percentage point in front."

While not in any danger of becoming the next Jeremy Paxman, I point out that he hasn't answered my original question. How will he change the minds of true blue Tories? "A lot of Conservative voters want continuity, calm, a measured approach to running the country," he replies. "And all they see is chaos. The government is acting in increasingly bizarre ways, talking about locking up homeless people for smelling bad... How does that sit with traditional Conservatives, who want to do the best by people? I've spoken to plenty who just want the current lot out."

Blur at the MTV Europe Music Awards, Paris, 1995

It must be a shock for unassuming Sussex locals to open the door to find the drummer from Blur standing there. "It was a thing for a while. When I was a Labour councillor in Norfolk, on the first visit it would be, 'It's Dave Rowntree from Blur!'" He imitates excitement. "By the 14th visit, it would be, 'It's that bloody drummer again. Can't they send the guitarist next time?'"

Rowntree is on a planning policy roll. We shouldn't wave through permission for 100 new homes in an empty field without insisting on an obligation to also build medical centres and schools, to fix pothole-ridden roads. "Why should the burden of that go to the taxpayer, yet the opportunity for making millions go to the developer?" he asks as the car bounces, helpfully, over a pothole. "That's what I want to change: the lack of infrastructure. You don't think you're going to need this stuff – most people aren't in hospital; most people don't rely on adult social care – until you do."

Growing up in Colchester, Essex, the child of classical musician parents – "lifelong Tories" – Rowntree came on holidays to West Sussex as a child, fell in love with the place, and moved here with his girlfriend, the film composer Michelle de Vries. Meanwhile, his drive toward politics came from a surprising source: being in a band.

"It can be a recipe for becoming a very unpleasant person," says Rowntree of life in a group, as we pull into the car park of his local, the Shepherd & Dog, a low-beamed pub in the village of Fulking. "The more successful you get, the more isolated you become from the real world, because everything is secondary to the gig you have just sold 10,000 tickets for. That leads to you being increasingly mollycoddled, which is dangerous if there is nobody to keep you grounded. After a while, I realised I would never be happy unless I could be helpful to others in a practical sense."

Rowntree has also been a criminal lawyer, an animator and a soundtrack composer: the music for *Bros: After the Screaming Stops* is one of his. "You think success in these fields is predicated on technical skill, but actually they are people jobs," he points out. "And being in a band is a very political thing. You have to navigate interpersonal relationships because you are with each other all day, every day, which is the reason why most bands split up. After five or ten years, they can't stand the sight of each other."

Rowntree joined the Labour Party in 2002 and, after years of being what he describes as "an armchair member who never turned up to a meeting", in 2010 he stood as MP for the safe Conservative seat

PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES. THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES, MARY TURNER/THE TIMES

Rowntree when he was a criminal lawyer, speaking at a 2013 rally about changes to the legal aid system

‘I’M QUITE USED TO PEOPLE SAYING UNFAIR THINGS... BUT I’VE MADE SOME CATASTROPHIC MISTAKES’

of Cities of London and Westminster. He lost, but he was bitten by the bug.

“Things have got to change, haven’t they?” says Rowntree, when I ask him why he is running to be an MP in Sussex when he could just have a nice time playing in Blur for the rest of his life. “The UK is a disaster area. Fourteen years of the Tories and their failed idea that all you have to do is make a few people incredibly rich and everything trickles down to everyone else... As an economic theory, it is nonsense, isn’t it? The chaos we’re living with now is the result of that childish, facile idea. It takes skill, discipline and creativity to shape a society, none of which this lot appear to have.”

Inside the pub, Rowntree, generally viewed as the quiet one in Blur against its ferociously ambitious singer Damon Albarn, its louche bassist turned gentleman farmer Alex James and its neurotic genius guitarist Graham Coxon, proves to be far more garrulous than you might expect. The curse of being in a successful band, he says, is that you become removed from the one thing you are meant to be doing: making music that changes people’s lives. It is alienating as a result.

“It turned out, as I started becoming this rather odd person the music industry can make you, that one of the things I was missing in life was looking people in the eye and trying to help them deal with their problems,” says Rowntree. “I think it is a fundamental need of humanity. Once I discovered it, I never looked back.”

In the early days of the band, no money meant everyone remained grounded. “We practised all the time because the studio we used provided us with pizza and cigarettes. We used to call ourselves the poverty jet-set, because we were in this unusual position of flying around first class on someone else’s money only to come home and not have enough cash to buy teabags.”

Back in the early Nineties, indie music was extremely unfashionable – the preserve of callow youths with guitars who smoked roll-ups and hung around the back rooms of pubs. It all changed as the country changed. Tony Blair ushered in a new era for Labour in 1997, two years after Blur and Oasis became such a phenomenon that they even made the *BBC News at Ten*.

“It changed in 1994, around the time of *Parklife*,” says Rowntree, citing Blur’s third album, which alongside spawning the hits *Parklife* and *Girls & Boys* captured a new age of Britishness: ironic, hedonistic, carefree, colourful. “Suddenly we were on the bottom rung of the top ladder, and it is incredible how natural success feels and how painful and unfair failure feels. I felt – we all felt – that, finally, people were realising we’re the best band in the world and everyone else is hopeless.”

A self-mocking laugh reveals Rowntree’s feelings on such hubris today, but it makes me think: when you’re in a band, everyone loves you. When you’re a politician, everyone hates you. How is he going to deal with that?

“I wouldn’t say I’ve got the thickest skin, but I’m quite used to people saying things I feel are unfair. Music journalism in the UK has never been about fairness.”

I ask Rowntree how he feels about Sir Keir Starmer being Britain’s next prime minister. “I think Keir has done an extraordinary job in transforming the party,” he replies. “It was so unelectable, so tainted, that everyone said it would take a decade before Labour could win an election and govern sensibly. And the person to do that job won’t be a Tony Blair-style charisma merchant; it will be someone who can get stuff done. We’ve had enough charisma merchants. We’ve seen where that can lead.”

Rowntree says that although Blur were not involved in the New Labour party, it was an exciting time. “There are not many periods in recent history when people have looked enviously at our culture and society and industry. Now, post-Brexit, we’re the laughing stock of the world.”

What can be done? “There is no reason for having the most distant relationship possible with Europe, which is what Boris Johnson sold to the country,” he reasons. “That was a political position he took to get people to vote for him and there is no economic justification for it. Equally, there is no appetite to fight the battle again with another referendum, but we can have a more sensible relationship with Europe. Imposing tariffs on British goods in Europe, for example – who does that benefit?”

How about renationalisation of the railways? “Very popular on the doorstep,” says Rowntree. “When I go up to London from Burgess Hill I don’t have a choice of train operators, so there is no market pressure to improve services. We’re handing out monopolies to these franchises and it is cronyism, not capitalism.” Is he saying we should renationalise essential services, not least after Thames Water defaulted on a £400 million loan? “If we’re going to have services from limited companies who answer to their shareholders, they need to be regulated properly. If people are given a monopoly opportunity, we have to make damn sure they don’t exploit that.”

Potholes are a major issue in Mid Sussex. “And it’s not because of the weather. It’s because the Tories cut money to fill them – £250 million cut across the south of England! On top of that, there are all these lorries charging around and the roads cannot keep up with the pace of development, but it shouldn’t be the responsibility of the community to pay for that. That’s why, if I’m lucky enough to be an MP for the area, I’ll make bloody sure we have a root-and-branch reform of the community planning system.”

It all sounds good, but hang on. Why is the wealthy drummer of Blur, who last July played two sold-out concerts at Wembley Stadium, coming at us with his champagne socialism? “It’s a funny thing associated with the creative industries, isn’t it? If I were a merchant banker, people wouldn’t be going, ‘Why has he got political opinions?’ But when I knock on doors, people allow you into their lives and it is a wonderful thing, so none of that matters.”

How will he do all this when the old band gets back together? “If I’m a full-time MP, I’m a full-time MP. I won’t be taking time off to do a world tour with Blur.”

Before it is time to let Rowntree get on with his canvassing, I have one more question on the realities of being an indie rocker turned Labour politician. Too much cocaine in 2003 led to an incident where he was caught on film intimidating the Canadian celebrity journalist Narduwar, and it makes for painful viewing. If he does become an MP, this kind of thing will come up a lot. How will he deal with it?

“I’ve made some catastrophic mistakes,” he confirms. “I’m also not someone who studied politics at university, worked their way up to being a special adviser and was parachuted into a safe seat. So I’ll say, ‘Do people want members of parliament to have some life experience or not?’ I’ve done a whole other job. I don’t think that’s a bad thing.” ■

Drugs, drink, chaotic spending

Risk-taking, oversharing

DO I HAVE ADHD?

When author Kate Spicer was told six years ago that she might want to consider getting an ADHD assessment, she ignored the advice. Now she's not so sure. This is what happened when she finally sought a diagnosis

Kate Spicer, 54, photographed by Lezli + Rose. Opposite: portraits by Louise Haywood-Schiefer

I have a scattered and chaotic mind. Lately, I've been taking drugs designed for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and it has been going well. The first time I felt the effects of the dinky, pale blue cylindrical pill containing the stimulant compound methylphenidate, I knew this could be life-changing for me. I could see efficiency with work, money, time-keeping and the dreaded life admin improving. It quietened my jabbering monkey mind and made me less emotionally porous. If someone was curt or dismissive, instead of their perceived malevolence penetrating me to the core, I just thought, ah well. This pill, brand name Concerta, gave me hope. Until it ran out.

I'd acquired the pills via a friend who has them prescribed by a private doctor for her child. She gave me a few as an act of kindness and I couldn't ask again. This little exchange was, of course, illegal. The drug had been prescribed for her kid. And the compound in Concerta, methylphenidate, is a class B drug.

Concerta effectively tipped my brain out of its overthinking default mode network, or DMN (DeMoN, as I call it), with its simultaneous and multiple tiers of thoughts, ideas, concerns, feelings and distractions and its endless shower of ants in my pants, into the more productive and focused task positive network, known as the TPN. What it made me feel, mostly, was that I wanted to have this medication prescribed to me legally by someone properly qualified. For that, I would need an ADHD diagnosis, which is difficult to come by.

This month, a Nuffield Trust report on rapidly growing waiting lists for autism and ADHD assessments showed the NHS cannot possibly keep up. "The extraordinary, unpredicted and unprecedented rise in demand... has completely overtaken the NHS's capacity. It is frankly impossible to imagine how the system can grow fast enough to fulfil this demand," said the think tank's chief executive, Thea Stein.

If I have to wait for eternity to be assessed, how will I get my hands on "the meds"? A girlfriend splits with me a spare box of Dexedrine, another stimulant used to treat ADHD that also increases the concentration of the neurotransmitters dopamine and noradrenaline in the brain. The packet was a windfall of sorts. It had been rejected by her son's school because the packaging was damaged. It's a bit milder than Concerta and the effects don't last as long. The result is more or less the same, though. I get stuff done. My mind is clear; I stop thinking so much.

I watch the blisters empty day by day and feel tempted to explore the dark web for more, but cannot face working out how to do it. I have heard about a dodgy pharmacist who sells prescription drugs under the counter. The prices, I am told, are not very different from what you would pay for a private prescription for ADHD medication. "Dexys" are cheaper than Concerta. I could probably get them for less than 50 quid.

I'm 54, and for a year now I have been wondering if I have ADHD. First, I completed the NHS-approved adult ADHD self-report scale. Questions include "How often do you misplace or have difficulty finding things at home or at work?" and "How often are you distracted by activity or noise around you?" Then there was the emotion regulation questionnaire, a lesser known metric for a lesser known symptom of ADHD. Sample question: I keep my emotions to myself. Strongly disagree. I moved on to less credible self-assessment questionnaires online. Adults with ADHD are highly self-critical... Misplacing stuff... Sometimes you overshare... Always late... Craving crunchy things... Listening to the same song over and over again. So many ticks. All my answers came out "highly consistent" with ADHD. Sometimes I did a quiz multiple times in different moods.

But surely everyone can answer yes to a few of these questions. As my teenage niece says, "Oh, Katie, literally everyone has ADHD," before going on to tell me about someone at her school who sells their meds in the playground. (I did not ask her to hook me up. Can't promise I didn't think about it.)

Many in my quite large family roll their eyes whenever I discuss ADHD. My father is a retired paediatric surgeon, a much loved man who saved seriously sick children's lives in an increasingly stressed NHS for more than 50 years. It is not hard to imagine why he might find some people hand-flapping about poor concentration a bit of an irritation. He has always been sceptical about what he sees as the growing pathologising of personality. I overheard him talking to one of my brothers over dinner a few weeks ago about the near permanent news about oversubscribed autism and ADHD waiting lists. "ADHD is for people who feel they don't quite fit in and need a label to make them feel better," he said. Ouch, but possibly fair.

The letters ADHD have hovered about me for a few years now. It's just that I ignored them until I tried the meds. In 2019 I had dinner at the Royal College of Physicians with Dad and his old friend, the rather eminent-sounding Professor Ricky Richardson, with whom he had set up children's health services in Oman in the Eighties. ADHD and I came up and Dad poo-pooed it. I'm not going to mention this again, I thought. But then Richardson piped up, "I could have told you that when I met her as a teenager." I was surprised anyone was even talking about it back then, but Richardson is a general paediatrician with a special interest in ADHD, autism and Asperger's. To me, at least, this felt somewhat validating.

He has not been the only professional to suggest I have ADHD, albeit in an off-duty sort of way, like a hairdresser might say, "You'd look fantastic with a few lowlights." The first was Dr Thilo Beck, whom I interviewed in 2017 on assignment at a rehab facility in Zurich. We talked journalist to expert about the unique nature of his super-rich patients' addictions, then he asked about me and I was delighted to describe a few top-line issues. Perhaps I would get some handy hints.

As we talked, my notepad ran out and I vocally despaired at the parlous way I wrote chaotically all around the page, like a spider on acid, and often ran on writing over the covers. "You do the job in your way," he said, his psychotherapy poker face never cracking. As I wrapped up the interview and closed my scrawled-on notebook, he said, "You have ADHD," and suggested I get it diagnosed formally.

When I returned home, I said to my boyfriend, "When I was doing this story, the psychiatrist said I should test for

Kate Spicer with her dog, Wolfy, about whom she wrote a book, at Locanda Locatelli, London

The waiting list for ADHD assessments isn't long, said my GP. 'It's closed'

PREVIOUS SPREAD: LEZLI + ROSE/DMG MEDIA. THIS SPREAD: CHRIS FLOYD

There are an estimated 2.6 million people with ADHD in the UK

ADHD and I wondered if that might explain some things." I am not sure he even responded, despite the fact that almost everything we fight about is due to my poor executive function and excessive hours spent with the DeMoN when I would be better served in the TPN.

He has budged a tiny bit. We have gone from, "You don't have ADHD. You just don't try hard enough," to a cautious ambivalence: "Hmm, you're not going to take those mad medications, are you?"

Still, my more urgent quest to uncover my brain's pathology did not really crank up until a friend started telling me over and over that she thought I had the ADHD she had been diagnosed with. Any time I said anything or did anything, or if certain issues came up, she'd say, "Well, that'll be the ADHD." It began to feel like an assault. She said it in front of other friends once or twice. "Please stop saying that," I'd say. It felt like she had crossed a line. Wildly, inappropriately so.

A few days ago, as I mulled the wisdom of publicly discussing this subject at all, my Uncle Nigel said, "What is ADHD?" He listened quietly to my telling of it and then shrugged and went, "Isn't that just people?"

Sometimes I do wonder what is worse, the stigma of being diagnosed with ADHD – a colleague texted me recently to insist they never wanted to work with someone with ADHD again (upon hearing this, I decide I am someone who only thinks they have it) – or the stigma of just thinking you are someone with it?

Last year, ADHD was the second most viewed health condition on the NHS website after Covid. In 2022, it came in fifth. In October 2023, ADHD UK, after a number of freedom of information requests, found that waiting lists for assessment varied from 12 weeks to more than 550 weeks. That is well over ten years.

After the Concerta epiphany, I arranged a telephone appointment with my GP. I told her my story, and she said, "Yes, it does sound very likely you have ADHD."

"The waiting list for assessment is very long, I know that," I said.

"No, it is not long," she said. My hopes lifted briefly. "I am sorry to tell you that the waiting list is closed."

Closed? I was stunned. ADHD UK estimates 2.6 million people in the UK have the condition, the majority of whom remain undiagnosed. There are no clear figures for formal diagnoses. The charity says some 70 per cent of people with a formal diagnosis opt to take medication. Yet NHS England data indicates only 240,000 people had a prescription in 2023.

My GP went on to say, "I have so many patients who have a bit of trouble focusing and insist I refer them for ADHD assessment. People are clamouring for autism, ADHD and gender reassignment diagnoses as answers to their existential crises and the NHS is overwhelmed."

So what next for me? I cannot take my quiz to the chemist. A private assessment costs in the region of £1,000. Drugs from a private pharmacy then cost about £200 a month, rather than a tenner. I do not have that kind of spare cash. Being crap with money is very ADHD. I resolve to do what I have always done: get by.

Looking back, I realise I have used good, bad and indifferent methods to try to corral my mind. Let's gloss over the disastrous impulsive choices that trashed my late teens and early twenties. Since, there has been smoking (definitely helps with focus; downside, it's smoking), caffeine (OK, but it can only do so much), targeted supplements (hard to judge) and cold water immersion (absolutely lifts mood and focus, when I can face it). Sleep and exercise are crucial. Until I got my time-consuming dogs, I was always engaged in some physical antic such as an ultra-marathon or mad sea swim.

These, however, were never enough to curtail the procrastination – which can be epic – to which I have lost desperate weeks.

My attempts at self-medication, meanwhile, have differed wildly in efficacy from nearly killing me to helping me write a couple of modestly successful books. Before setting about writing each book I spent two illicit weekends, one in a village hall in England, the other in Scotland, trying the South American hallucinogenic drug ayahuasca, which is often touted as doing a year's worth of therapy in one session. It is hard staring down the contents of your mind while your brain does a quick rewiring job under the influence of psychedelics. It is dreadful, but by weathering a night of strategic misery curled into a foetal position with only a sheepskin I took out of the dog's bed between me and the floor, I went on to enjoy some lovely months of a far quieter and less critical mind. One small trial has shown benefits with microdosing psychedelics for ADHD (which should be a bit easier than the macrodosing), but psychedelics are illegal too. Class A, in fact.

Back to the drawing board.

With the knowledge I have now, I realise that the tender memoir I wrote in 2019 about my lovely first dog should be reframed as *Lost Dog, a Classic Tale of ADHD Behaviour*. The substance abuse, drinking, chaotic spending, procrastination, impulsiveness, the ordinary madness, hyperfocus, the risk-taking, the wild emotional drama – it's all in there.

I have gone round and round in circles with psychotherapists all my life who have never mentioned it. At first, seeing shrinks was helpful, but after I had talked incessantly about Mum and Dad's miserable divorce in the mid-Seventies, I kept waiting for something to shift. Life still felt like trying to operate a confusing electrical item for which I had no manual. No one diagnosed ADHD; no one explained how my brain worked. Instead, I learnt that from a clear 80-minute lecture, *Rise of the Planet of the Neurodivergents,* by Dr Alberto Pertusa on YouTube. His ADHD specialist London Psychiatry Clinic has tripled in size since the pandemic.

It is now six years since Beck muttered his gnomic suggestion and a year since Richardson brought it up and still I can only suspect that I have ADHD. I do not know. I just know that I have spent my whole life thinking I need to sort myself out and get on top of my shopping-trolley brain with the wobbly wheel that veers all over the place except where I want it to go. In some ways, discovering that I have ADHD would be a relief. I don't ever want to use it as an excuse. "Hi, sorry my copy is late but I have ADHD." "Hi, sorry I defaulted on the mortgage. I have ADHD."

But I would love to be able to say to myself, and believe it for once, "Kate, it's OK. It's not your fault." ■

How to turn your marriage into a middle-class joke.
(It helps if you're both comedians)

Marcus Brigstocke, 50, and Rachel Parris, 39

‘We want to take people into the heart of darkness that is the modern relationship,’ say comedy power couple Marcus Brigstocke and Rachel Parris. Which means nothing’s off limits, be it age gaps, stepchildren, class differences or loss. We have plenty of material, they tell Michael Odell

PORTRAIT Jude Edginton

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How early is too early to play classical music on your partner's vibrator? 7am? 8am? It is just before 8 o'clock on a weekday morning in Marcus Brigstocke and his wife Rachel Parris's south London home. Their two-year-old son, Billy, has just departed for nursery. I can see adorable little squares of his leftover toast on the breakfast bar.

Thankfully, he is not present to hear his father play Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* on an imaginary dildo.

Brigstocke can hardly complete the performance because he is laughing so much. Parris doesn't look so sure.

"Lean into it because this encapsulates our mission, darling," Brigstocke says. "We want to take people right into the heart of darkness that is a modern relationship."

Brigstocke, 50, is a veteran of stand-up comedy, countless Radio 4 shows, not to mention West End productions such as *Spamalot* and *Barnum*. Parris, 39, made her comedy reputation on the BBC's now defunct satirical show *The Mash Report* (her *How NOT to Sexually Harass Someone* sketch has been viewed more than 2.6 million times on YouTube).

"But all that was straightforward comedy," says Brigstocke. "We have been working hard to develop a tool that will show people how to actually live in the modern world."

"Yes, you are the perfect tool," says Parris.

The tool is a podcast about love and relationships called *How Was It For You?*. "I guarantee oversharing," says Brigstocke. "How else do we reveal important stuff like what is the stress threshold at which an ordinary man becomes an arsehole? People want to know that. I want to know that."

Parris glugs more coffee.

"For many women, this is the universal question," she says.

Hmm, a new podcast. Obviously, it is a crowded market, but Brigstocke and Parris have already proved that their relationship – a blended family affair (Brigstocke was previously married and has two older children), complete with class differences ("I'm posh and the only thing I've ever had to really work at was getting into rehab," says Brigstocke) and a significant age gap (Brigstocke is 11 years Parris's senior) – is a thing of curiosity.

During the first Covid lockdown their knockabout online show *Tuesday Night Club* proved a viral sensation. The pair only got married in late 2019, but their undoubted chemistry drove its success. First Parris attracted 100,000 views lip-synching to a rendition of Iggy Azalea's *Trouble*, then Brigstocke responded with a rather disturbing version of the Prodigy's *Firestarter* (the clips exploded online and the couple ended up being interviewed on the US behemoth *Good Morning America* as a result).

Parris and Brigstocke at the TV Baftas, 2018

GETTY IMAGES

As the first lockdown was announced in March 2020 Parris fell pregnant and, naturally, their online audience took a lively interest. By August, following complications revealed in a scan, doctors told Parris her baby daughter would not survive. There followed an agonising period in hospital, during most of which she could only talk to Brigstocke via FaceTime, before Parris gave birth to her stillborn child.

"And then I had to explain to everyone what had happened because it felt like our audience had been through the pregnancy with me," she says. "They were genuinely so lovely and supportive in the aftermath."

'I'm the senior party in this marriage but that doesn't mean I'm more mature'

Long-term, the grief of that loss was harder to deal with. Parris has heard all types of well-meaning platitudes, but they don't really match up to her experience.

"People said things like, 'What's for you won't pass you' [an old Irish proverb], but I found the idea that there is a higher power deciding what happens didn't work for me," she says. "It was just a very sad and awful thing."

"No one met our baby so they couldn't say, 'Oh, she was so this or she was so that,'" says Brigstocke. "So they just didn't know what to say."

Things did get better, though. By 2021 Parris was pregnant again and although doctors gave her only a 50/50 chance of success, she gave birth to Billy.

"People moan about NHS funding or their efficiency but that's just the money and logistics side," says Brigstocke. "What they actually did for us as human beings was just astonishing."

When I arrived at their house Brigstocke was heading out of the front door in a tracksuit, T-shirt and a pair of Crocs. He looked like a student, but he was taking his son to nursery.

"Please can you make lots of coffee, darling," was his grizzled parting shot to Parris as he patted down an egregious bed-head.

Parris seems like the rock. She chats, makes the coffee and shows me the family's chameleon, Roy, who lives on a diet of grasshoppers in a vivarium by the downstairs toilet.

"He's 85 in chameleon years," she informs me.

"Nearly as old as me," Brigstocke says on his return. "But just because I'm the senior party in this marriage doesn't mean I'm more mature."

"Don't say that," says Parris supportively, although sometimes she says, "Don't say that," with her head in her hands.

If Parris seems grounded and sensible, Brigstocke presents as puppyish and happy-go-lucky. He wasn't always like that. It's there in the podcast. Sure, they joke about how annoying soft fruit can be or naughty things they did doing student jobs (Parris once worked in a music shop and filed the work of Einaudi and Katherine Jenkins under "non-musical recordings"), but it gets real when they discuss seeing the musical *Oliver!* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

"Can I exorcise the trauma I have around the musical *Oliver!*?" Brigstocke asks his wife, recalling being overlooked for the iconic Dickens role as a child actor. Why? Because Oliver Twist is a hungry waif who famously asks Mr Bumble ➡

WILD TIMES IN THE LONE STAR STATE

Grand landscapes, gentle horseback trails and authentic cowboy culture make West Texas an epic ride, explains Rob Crossan

Whether you are soaking up the vibe in old-time towns, hiking into untouched wilderness or saddling up for horseback adventures, the plains, prairies and valleys of Texas make for an astonishing journey. This is a land rich in legends and sensational natural wonders – read on to discover how you could immerse yourself in a little authentic western culture.

AN ENCHANTED DUSK

Shaped like a colossal, pink-hued loaf, the granite Enchanted Rock stands 130m high at the top. Hike up to its summit before sunset to take in the view across the rugged terrain below – and listen carefully: as night falls, you might just hear the rock start to creak, just as the old legends insist it does at twilight.

BIG RIVER ADVENTURE

Lazing on the water Texas-style involves hiring a "tube", which makes for the comfiest of seats as you glide down the mighty Guadalupe River. Let the shadows of the huge cypress trees give you some shade en route, while you spot softshell turtles along with the odd white-tailed deer peering from the grassy riverbank.

THE DUDES ABIDE

The legend of Bandera as the cowboy capital of the world was born around a century ago, when dude ranchers made the small town, right, their home. Today, its charming array of down-home bars showcasing authentic live country music, plus the myriad of dude ranches and the lazy current of the Medina River, make for a place where the true soul of rural Texas works its magic on you.

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MEET THE REAL COWBOYS

Fort Worth, as Texans will tell you, is known as Cowtown. And they really mean it. Every morning and afternoon, a herd of longhorns trundles along Exchange Avenue in the world's only daily cattle drive. The cows are heading to the stockyards – and so should you be. This rejuvenated district is full of buzzy bars and restaurants set amid grand early 20th-century buildings.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS?

West Texas is where even hardened UFO sceptics find themselves baffled by the Marfa Lights. These yellow-tinted orbs have been spotted flashing above the desert sky around dusk for decades. Head to the Mystery Light Viewing Area and see if you can solve this nocturnal riddle for yourself.

HIKE A NATURAL WONDER

Located in the Texas panhandle, Palo Duro is the second largest canyon in North America, plummeting more than 240 metres. The highlight of a trek in this ruggedly beautiful region is to climb to the Lighthouse, a sandstone rock formation. From here, you can marvel at the view across miles of dramatic Texas wilderness.

PARK AND RIDE

With vistas reaching out across Rio Grande, Big Bend National Park is open night and day, free to enter and very beautiful. To truly get a feel for the timeless Texan landscape, saddle up for a trail-riding experience across the plains and let your equine companion guide you through desert valleys and river gorges.

EXPLORE THE DEPTHS

Previously only accessible to experienced spelunkers, a section of the Natural Bridge Caverns – a huge cave system near San Antonio – has now been opened to allcomers. It includes a new viewing area overlooking a passage called the Box Canyon, which provides a natural theatre for a sound and light show.

To find out what Texas has in store for you, visit traveltexas.com

LET'S TEXAS

for "more" while Brigstocke was a 14-year-old schoolboy who weighed 20 stone. "I was a very fat child," he says. "So Mr Bumble could have been excused for saying, 'More? I think you've had quite enough, young man.'"

The son of a City stockbroker dad and a headteacher mum, Brigstocke's food addiction problems began when he was sent to board at a prep school, aged seven.

"I ask myself how on earth my parents could have walked away from a seven-year-old," he once told an interviewer.

At school he began overeating. By 14, he hit 20 stone and a doctor prescribed lithium. According to Brigstocke, that same doctor had a brutal assessment of his mental health struggles.

"You see, Marcus, the problem is you're so terribly fat," he said.

Brigstocke also began stealing alcohol and taking drugs and was eventually sent to a special school in Devon.

"There's a lot of pain there still," he says sadly.

Finally, in 1990 his mother referred him to Dr Robert Lefever and Beechy Colclough, addiction experts at a rehab centre in Kent (Colclough was a therapist to Elton John and Kate Moss, but was struck off in 2006 for having affairs with vulnerable female clients).

With his mother waiting outside the consulting room, Lefever's diagnosis was simple. "Well, they've really f***ed you up," he said to Brigstocke.

"And he was right," Brigstocke says. "Listen, I don't blame my parents one bit for my addictions, but at the time that's what I needed to hear. Without that intervention, I believe I'd be dead."

Brigstocke went on a crash diet and lost 12 stone in 7 months. Even more extraordinarily, he began travelling up to London to go clubbing and, before long, was talent-spotted as a podium dancer at the Ministry of Sound nightclub.

"I had this new body, which I loved, so I started showing it off," he says. "I also had a job on an oil rig, so I was literally Alex from *Flashdance* [the 1983 film], who is a welder by day and a dancer at night."

Parris puts down her mug, shaking her head in disbelief.

"That's a thing that happens in relationships, isn't it?" she says. "You get round to asking your partner about the years before you knew them. With Marcus, my eyes are on stalks. He led an insane life before he became a comedian."

Brigstocke addressed his complex relationship with his parents in a 2019 autobiographical play, *The Red*. His fictional father asks if he is responsible for making the son an alcoholic.

"And the honest answer is no," says Brigstocke. "I have learnt after years doing 12-step recovery that if you blame a core trauma, then you will not stay sober. It's not the external event, it's your choices after it that matter."

Parris on Late Night Mash, 2022

He clearly loves his parents. I can see a photograph of them smiling on holiday in South Africa pinned to the fridge.

"They are lovely," he says "But I'm occasionally sad that fine wine means so much to my dad and I can't be part of that. I have to sit there drinking something called Nozeco [a brand of alcohol-free prosecco]."

"I think Nozeco is delicious," says Parris, rubbing his back supportively.

Brigstocke's complicated relationship with food remains. He used to binge on steak, cheese and chips, and describes being so big he would sometimes roll back down the stairs. But he also recalls eating six lettuces. How does anyone eat six whole lettuces?

'I have a chip on my shoulder. I still don't believe I can do anything right'

"Oh, easy," he says. "I could eat six no problem right now."

Parris looks up at him in awe, as though he has just revealed a secret talent, such as playing the flute.

"I think the real problem is you are an amazing cook who loves food," she says.

Last year Brigstocke reached the semi-final of *Celebrity MasterChef*.

"That was a good idea, wasn't it? Send a man who can't stop eating somewhere where he learns to make even more incredible grub."

Maybe it wasn't that incredible. He was sent home after serving Greg Wallace raw meat (Wallace: "Oh, Marcus, I'm sorry. We've got undercooked pork here").

The kitchen we are standing in certainly looks like the den of a culinary maestro and he does all the family cooking. Brigstocke's real Achilles heel, though, is cheese.

"I could eat all the cheese in the world," he says. "And talk in an impressively expert tone as I did so."

Brigstocke is not joking. He is a qualified cheese judge and sat on the panel at the World Cheese Awards in Bergamo, Italy, in 2019.

"The triggers for me going overboard with food are always emotional," he says. "I overeat when things are going wrong."

And of course things do go wrong. They lost their baby. Then there is all the childhood stuff, plus his first marriage to the film-maker Sophie Prideaux, which ended in 2013 after he had an affair with an actress with whom he'd appeared in the musical *Spamalot*.

"For a long time I believed that the end of my first marriage was my fault, which is a really difficult belief system to have," he says. "But that's just not how any relationship works, is it?"

Parris calls him the love of her life.

"I'll have a crack at living up to that," he says, joking yet beaming.

Becoming a stepmum to Brigstocke's children Alfie, 21 and Emily, 19, is no small challenge for Parris.

"When you have been good friends with someone who has children and suddenly there are romantic feelings, you know you cannot mess it up because there really is no going back," she says. "But yes, he is the love of my life and his children are a part of him. I was the youngest in my family and was used to getting attention so the lesson for me has been, it's not all about you, Rachel."

How Was It For You? promises to excavate the tribulations of modern relationships. It also shows how different this pair are. Despite the difficulties, Brigstocke often mentions how being privately educated gave him confidence.

"Rightly or wrongly, posh people like me confront challenges and think, yeah, I can probably puzzle that out in ten minutes," he says.

Parris's parents were self-described "normal people", a hairdresser mum and a bank clerk dad, in Leicester. Her natural talents won her a scholarship to a private school and she then went on to study music at Oxford University. Just don't call her middle class.

"I have a bit of a chip on my shoulder because someone recently wrote, 'Oxford-educated, rich parents, married a successful comedian, it's a stolen career.' F*** off! Marcus had about four private educations, all squandered, and I had one via an assisted place, got to Oxford, yet I still often don't believe I can do anything right because of impostor syndrome."

"Agreed," says Brigstocke. "It would never have occurred to Rachel that it's OK to play classical music on a vibrator immediately after breakfast." ■

How Was It For You? is available on all podcast providers. Tickets for Rachel Parris's live tour, Poise*, are on sale now*

Pout! 20 BEST BEAUTY BUYS UNDER

1 e.l.f. Bronzing Drops *(£12; elfcosmetics.co.uk)*
I will admit that these have more than a passing resemblance to a Drunk Elephant product but, at a third of the price, you will not hear me complaining. Once applied, they give a soft hint of bronzing glow and can be worn alone, mixed into skincare products or with foundation, and are a safe "tanning" option for faces of all ages. Available in three shades.

2 Ciaté Dewy Stix Highlighter *(£19; ciatelondon.com)*
I am too damn old to wear a shimmery highlighter and who wants to look like the Tin Man? But this clever stick is part skincare, part illuminator without a hint of glitter or shimmer. Instead, it just draws light to the high points of the face (under the brows, tops of cheekbones) and plumps fine lines and crepey skin too. It is perfection and now comes in a Bronzing Balm option (£22).

3 The Ordinary Hyaluronic Acid 2% + B5 *(£8.80; theordinary.com)*
This is a bestselling serum that has had a bit of a facelift. In addition to plumping and hydrating hyaluronic acid, it now has ceramides to lock in water, repair your skin barrier and make the formula less sticky. This is a serum for all skin types for summer when the thought of applying a rich cream is just too much.

4 Huda Beauty Baby Bake *(£19; boots.com)*
This loose setting powder was used on me recently when I appeared on *This Morning* and wow, it really does set concealer under the eyes, but somehow does not settle into fine lines or crepey skin. The pinky peachy colour also counteracts dark circles. Tip: use this to set your SPF around your eyes so it doesn't migrate into them and sting.

5 Neutrogena Hydrate Day to Night Bundle *(£19.15; boots.com)*
This is on offer at Boots and online (it normally costs £27.98) and is great value for money. You not only get the bestselling Hydro Boost Gel Cream moisturiser, but the night one too. These products are all any face needs to stay hydrated and soothed.

6 Soap & Glory Thick & Fast Tubing Mascara *(£11.99; boots.com)*
A tubing mascara works to coat each lash in a polymer that is tinted black. Why is this important? Because it makes it waterproof and means it won't smudge or transfer in warmer weather, but it comes off without the need for stripping eye make-up removers. You just add water, gently massage and it falls away in miniature black swirls.

7 Bioderma Cicabio Creme+ Ultra-Repairing Soothing Cream *(£12; boots.com)*
Sometimes you need a handy tube of SOS balm and this is perfect for dabbing on dry cuticles, cracked heels, cuts and grazes, parched lips, even suddenly exposed dry knees and shins. It is more of a pleasant-to-use thick cream than an unguent balm and suits the whole family.

8 TreSemmé 1 Minute Wow! Smooth Intensive Treatment *(£4.99; superdrug.com)*
The ideal frizzy/fluffy hair-taming conditioner that you can stick in the shower and not panic if a teenager or partner uses it because it's such great value for money. I defy anyone to tell me an expensive salon mask works any better.

9 Natural Collection Bronzer *(£3; boots.com)*
If this flattering matt-finish powder bronzer in a choice of six shades doesn't make you question the mark-up on high-end make-up, then nothing else will. It performs like something ten times the price (OK, the packaging is basic, but that's a small price to pay). Once on your face, no one will know and it doubles as a contourer and eyeshadow.

10 Hello Sunday The Rose One Tinted Lip Balm SPF50 *(£9; boots.com)*
The perfect rose-tinted lip balm for summer. It is a high-protecting SPF50 that also serves as a flattering lip colour and ticks all the minimum effort, maximum results, multitasking summer make-up boxes.

11 Glaze Super Color Conditioning Gloss *(£15.99; superdrug.com and amazon.co.uk)*
A semi-permanent colour gloss at a fraction of the price of a salon treatment. Choose transparent Sheer Glow if you just want the shine and deep condition, but there are 13 colours for auburn, varying shades of blonde, brunette or black hair. Apply after shampooing, leave on for 10 minutes, then rinse.

12 Me+ 10% Vitamin C Booster *(£12.99; superdrug.com)*
This is a blend of three stable new-generation vitamin C molecules, so it is suitable even for sensitive skin and works to protect against pollution and boost the

ELISABETH HOFF, MADAME FIGARO/JORGEN GOMNAES/CAMERA PRESS

£20 My bargains for spring, by Nadine Baggott

effect of your daily face and neck sun protection. Well worth trying if you can't use traditional L-ascorbic acid serums.

13 Dermatica Balancing Glycerin Gel Cleanser *(£12.95; dermatica.co.uk)* The teledermatology company now offers brilliant skincare basics at affordable prices. This gentle gel cleanser is perfect for a quick morning cleanse in the shower, ideal for both teens and mature skin and great for guys pre or post-shaving. It is super-soothing and hydrating and ideal for use in warmer weather.

14 L'Oréal Paris Hydra Pure 72H Purifying Shampoo *(£8; lookfantastic.com)* This shampoo solves the oily scalp, dry ends dilemma. It deep-cleanses a greasy or sweaty scalp, but protects the dryer, older hair lengths and ends so you don't end up with hair like straw. This product enables me to go three full days between shampooing, which means less heat styling and therefore less damage to my hair. Suitable for all hair types, it's a game-changer.

15 Byoma Sensitive Skin Body Wash *(£11.99; boots.com)* Byoma is a standout high street skincare line and now it is doing body products. This oat-based body wash is perfect from top to toe, even on intimate areas. It hydrates and soothes while cleansing gently. A brilliant combination of European colloidal oat technology and Korean hydration.

16 The Inkey List Glycolic Acid Exfoliating Body Stick *(£15; uk.theinkeylist.com)* Glycolic is the fastest exfoliating acid and this clever deodorant-looking push-up stick not only instantly transforms dry heels, knees and elbows to silky, shiny skin, it also gets rid of dead, dry skin cells. Apply morning and night. You can even use it as an antiperspirant if your underarms are not sensitive as it will stop the smell and unclog ingrown hairs while it's working.

17 Kiko Glamour Multi Finish Eyeshadow Palette *(£15.99; kikocosmetics.com)* This nine-shadow palette comes in a choice of three colourways, but Earth Tones has the classic staples of dark browns and mid-toned neutrals in a selection of matts, soft shimmers and one sparkle. This is all you need – liner, brows, shadow and highlighter in one.

18 Garnier Ambre Solaire Dry Mist SPF30 *(£9.50; sainsburys.co.uk)* The perfect dry-touch SPF spray for spring. It is so light and fine you can apply it once dressed if caught short without SPF and suddenly the sun shines. Just remember to spray each area three times to get the stated SPF protection. Great for on-the-run children too.

19 M&S Discover Soft Iris eau de toilette *(£10; marksandspencer.com)* The Discover range has been formulated to allow you to try a new fragrance without heavy financial commitment. This is eau de toilette, so technically much weaker than eau de parfum and won't last, but what a great way to test Iris, a velvety, soft green scent. There's also Pink Pepper (£6), a spicy fresh fragrance, or Midnight Blossom (£10), a sexy citrus. More options are available in store. Worth sniffing out.

20 No7 Sheer Temptation Lipstick *(£9.95; boots.com)* It started with YSL, then Nars took the beauty counters by storm with Afterglow. Now sheer balms/lipsticks are available on the high street and I really like the 13 shades offered by No7. My favourite is Cuckoo Coral, but get down to Boots to test them all. The bullet is perfectly shaped, the colour subtle and it really lasts. ■

Find @nadinebaggott on Instagram and YouTube where she will answer all your beauty questions

‘The bao bun with Korean fried chicken was as good as such a thing can be – worth the day trip in itself. And just £6’

TOM JACKSON

Twenty Eight, Chester

“Hey, Siri!”

“Mm hm.”

“Show me a brand new restaurant where two people can lunch royally on innovative world cooking with a strong street food vibe but beautiful table service for no more than fifteen quid a head, within two or three minutes of an hour-long circular post-lunch walk with gorgeous rooftop views of castles, parks and world-class Roman ruins.”

“In London? You’re having a laugh!”

“No, not necessarily in London. I’m happy with a shortish, reasonably priced train ride through beautiful English spring countryside.”

“Oh well, that’s easy then. You want to go to Twenty Eight in Chester. Chef is Jay Tanner, previously head chef at local legend Sticky Walnut. It’s a sort of directional tapas offshoot of the famous Chef’s Table in Chester from Liam McKay, which came out of lockdown with new partners in the shape of Growing@Field28, moved to smart new premises on Pepper Street Row and installed Jay in his own restaurant next door, offering a cheaper menu – although Chef’s Table prices are hardly astronomic – on a sharing plates principle.”

“Er, Siri?”

“Mm hm?”

“What’s Growing@Field28?”

“You’re kidding, right? It’s the pesticide and biocide-free farm in Daresbury that grows all sorts of specialist leaves, microgreens, edible flowers and heritage vegetables on traditional no-dig gardening principles, distributing to top restaurants all over the UK. You’re a restaurant critic. You’re supposed to know this shit.”

“Yeah, well. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Is it open for lunch midweek?”

“Just Thursdays and Fridays.”

“Cool. I’ll go there then.”

“The phrase you’re looking for, Giles, is, ‘Thank you.’”

I didn’t think I’d been to Chester before. Didn’t really know where it was and was genuinely surprised to find people on the train who reckoned they were on their way to Wales. All I really know is that *Hollyoaks* happens there, if it still does. Which I only know because my friend Shebah Ronay was in the original cast back in the Nineties, and there was a piece about her in The Sun, or possibly the Daily Mirror, that said she “puts the chest into Chester”. And it wasn’t because she had a big box of pirate treasure.

But then when I came out of Chester station and found myself in what amounts to an almost fully preserved Roman town, I suddenly remembered “*Castra Deva*”, “Camp on the Dee”, and a long-forgotten prep-school history field trip in 1979, when we’d dressed up as Roman gladiators and fought with wooden swords in an actual amphitheatre.

And there it was! Right on the way to Pepper Street Row. Not a huge one, if you’ve been to Side or Ephesus or,

Twenty Eight
7 Pepper Street Row, Chester (01244 848528; restaurant28.com)
Cooking 7
Service 9
Bao bun 10
Location 10
Score 9
Price FIFTEEN POUNDS A HEAD if you share at lunchtime (not counting booze and a big fat tip for Esther).

well, Rome, but a jolly little provincial entertainment spot for second and third-century Romans garrisoned hundreds of miles from home, and very nicely preserved. And still full of small children in togas forming quincunxes. Signs round the edge explain that wild beasts such as wolves and bears would have been used to slaughter the tethered locals for the amusement of the Romans, but does not mention that the huge Travelodge opposite was where the really unlucky ones were sent.

Twenty Eight is on the (by comparison) slightly disappointing main drag the other side of the Roman walls and shares a front door – and loos – with the Chef's Table, which you can see into on the other side, thanks to all the walls being made of glass.

My waitress introduced herself as "Esther" and I said, "No way!" and she said, "Yes way! Esther from Chester!" And I laughed and said that sounded like a stripper. And then immediately regretted it. Because saying things like that to young women I don't know in towns far away is what is going to lose me this job one of these days.

But luckily Esther laughed and so did the two ladies at the next table, and I explained that I was sorry but the reason I expressed surprise was that she had the same name as my wife. And even that came out sounding inappropriate, so I quickly changed the subject to beer and she recommended a Camden Hells. But I told her that I'd gone to some effort this morning to leave Camden for once, and would prefer something more local. So I went with a delicious Weetwood pilsner from Kelsall, and picked up the lunch menu, which said on it, "British tapas fresh from the field".

The pricing is three plates for £18 or five for £30. So you don't have to be Alan Turing to see that it's six quid a plate. I guess if you wanted four it would be £24 or £36 for six. I could show off my handiness with the whole six times table, if you like, but that might get boring. And in truth it does get trickier after seven.

Esther recommended two or three dishes (weird, as normally Esther just tells me what's for dinner) such as the cauliflower croquettes, the Kentucky fried artichokes and the Cheshire endive salad, from which I inferred, correctly, that she is a vegetarian. So I thanked her and politely included all those things in my order and then added some carnivorous stuff. And on the basis that there cannot be much on a six-quid plate, I ordered eight dishes, to get across the menu.

First out was a "snack" of crispy chickpeas with coconut yoghurt, chilli, cucumber and shallot, which was compelling at first, a cool, crunchy salad with a back note of Malibu (or Hawaiian Tropic) from the coconut, but the chickpeas were a bit hard to keep chomping at after a while, so it's lucky I had other stuff to come.

Next up, a delicious, freshly baked sourdough crumpet stuffed with spicy 'nduja, Lockerbie cheddar and Weetwood ale into a sort of rarebit, but with the heft and tang and stickiness of that great Andalusian breakfast dish, the hot *sobrasada* sandwich.

The two caramelised cauliflower croquettes had gorgeously crisp shells and were nice and creamy inside, earthy-floral and slathered with parmesan, but the highlight of the dish, as Esther had said it would be (and Esther is always right), was the homemade mushroom ketchup, all zingy and brown and fresh, like a natural, living HP Sauce. If they could bottle it, they would be millionaires. Except then I suppose it would just be HP Sauce.

From the specials board, I had a hot flatbread with wild garlic and mushrooms that looked and chewed like a topping of crispy shredded duck and was terrific, buttery, bosky, folded over like a calzone and liberally salted by me.

The Kentucky fried artichokes with smoked garlic honey drizzle and aïoli had a lovely woody flavour and their crispness, allied to the sweet honey drizzle, gave them more than a suggestion of the classic 1970s Chinese toffee apple dessert – probably the first restaurant dish to truly steal my heart.

Best of all, though, was the bao bun with Korean fried chicken that was born in their Asian street food lockdown project, Siu Tang, and was as good as such a thing can be: the boned chicken thigh perfectly cooked, sweet, juicy, properly rested, a really soft, light homemade bun, tangy gochujang mayo, the bite of crispy chilli oil (probably Lao Gan Ma) and a handful of their own "28" spring onions, fresh that morning, just disciplined on the griddle, lending a layer of fibre and grassy mystery. A bun for the ages. Worth the day trip in itself. And for £6, where in London you're looking at £10, £12, maybe even £14.

There were big leftovers. Five of these plates could have fed two people easily. To properly full. With a great range of flavours. Astounding value. Just astounding. And then Esther suggested I go for a walk round the city walls, a 50-minute round trip, and hop off when I see the train station. And as we all know, what Esther says, Giles does.

And it was perfect. Up onto the ramparts and then away you go. Can't get lost and everything you see could break your heart: perfect Tudor frontages, Georgian town houses, gardens in blossom, cloisters, Chester Castle, for heaven's sake, squatting atop an actual motte, spires, great striped lawns, cobbled streets, the cathedral... It's like Oxford, except nice. And then when you see the amphitheatre again, it's time to come down and head for the station.

What a city. What a restaurant. What a vibe. What did the Romans ever do for us? This, my friend. They did this. ■

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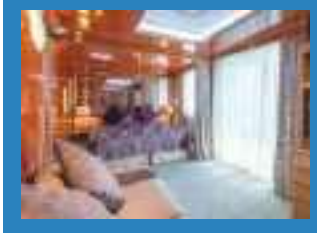
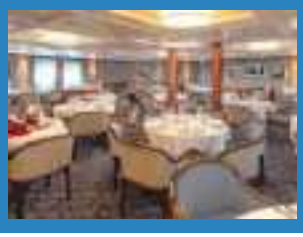
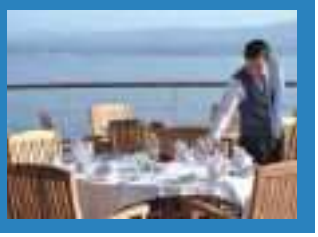

THE ITINERARY IN BRIEF

Day 1 London or Manchester to Naples, Italy. Fly by scheduled flight. Arrive and transfer to the MS Hebridean Sky.

Day 2 Naples, Herculaneum & Ischia. From our berth in Naples there will be a choice of tours today including a visit to Herculaneum, a wealthy Roman town which was completely submerged by volcanic mud following the 79 AD eruption of Vesuvius. Since its rediscovery in 1709, excavations have revealed beautiful public baths, villas and gardens of noble families, decorated with murals and floor mosaics, and the remains of a theatre. Return to the ship for lunch and a free afternoon to explore the vibrant city of Naples at your own pace. Alternatively, on a full day tour, we will use

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the local ferry to visit the island of Ischia. Here our focus will be on "La Mortella", a wonderful garden designed by architect Russell Page for Lord and Lady William Walton. Spread over two hectares there are fountains, ponds, streams and scattered everywhere are water-loving plants.

Day 3 Gaeta & Ninfa Gardens. Sail this morning into Gaeta, a pretty town built on the slopes of Monte Orlando. Surrounded by the mighty walls of the Angevin Aragonese Castle, Gaeta's historic centre is a collection of narrow streets and small porticoes dominated by the 12th century Duomo. Choose to stay and explore the town or join a full day tour which visits the beautiful gardens located on the ruins of the old city of Ninfa where jasmine and wisteria wind over ruined towers and walls, rejoicing in the lush damp conditions. The setting is indescribably atmospheric, with roses scrambling for footholds in ruined archways, and the frescoed church wall still standing open to the weather.

Day 4 Salerno, Paestum & Cilento. Overnight we will have sailed around the Amalfi coast to the ancient city of Salerno, our gateway to the Cilento region, a mix of small villages, coastal paths, archaeological sites, national parks and renowned as the home of the Mediterranean diet. Maybe choose to visit the site of Paestum, which was founded by Greeks in 600 BC. This well preserved and fascinating site was rediscovered in 1752 and during our time we will see the impressive Temple of Poseidon, the Basilica, Amphitheatre and Aethenian. Alternatively, learn about one of the region's main exports as we visit a farm to hear about the production of the local Mozzarella di Bufala or enjoy a tasting at one of the Cilento vineyards.

Day 5 Vibo Valentia, Tropea & Stromboli. Arrive this morning into the Calabrian town of Vibo Valentia. Founded as a Greek colony, known as Hipponion and part of Magna Graecia, the town has since been under the rule of the Brutti, Romans, Normans, Arabs and Byzantines. This morning we can explore the Medieval historical centre which is dominated by the ancient Norman Castle, which now houses the state archaeological museum and the bell tower of San Michele. Later, we drive to nearby Tropea, a clifftop village voted one of the most beautiful in Italy. As we explore the historical centre we see the Norman Cathedral before continuing to the Sanctuary of Santa Maria dell'Isola, an 11th century chapel originally built on an island but now connected to the town by a causeway. We will also try the town's famous delicacy of sweet red onions. Return to the ship for lunch and an afternoon at sea as we sail to Stromboli, the 'Lighthouse of the Mediterranean'. Enjoy dinner on board and, if weather permits, we hope to view the eruptions from the island's active volcano. *Please note that we may be at anchor this morning and if so will use the onboard Zodiacs or local tenders to go ashore.*

Day 6 Messina for Taormina, Sicily. From the nearby port of Messina we will visit Taormina, a walled town lying in the shadow of Mount Etna, Europe's highest volcano. The town has been a popular tourist destination since the 19th century and our guided tour will include walking the characteristic alleys before visiting the 15th century Palazzo Corvaja and the impressive Greek Theatre from where there are marvellous views over the town and coast.

Day 7 Catania & Mount Etna. This morning we arrive in Catania and on a morning walking tour we will see the magnificent Piazza del Duomo which is a World Heritage Site, St Agatha's Cathedral and the imposing 13th century Castello Ursino. Alternatively, leave the city as we drive to the slopes of Mount Etna, Europe's largest active volcano. Our drive will take us past scenic countryside, small towns and vineyards before arriving at the Silvestri Craters that were created by the eruption of 1892. Located approximately 2,000 metres above sea level, we will walk along a comfortable path from which there is a wonderful view of the coast and then take a stroll on the lava stream with our guide. A final option will drive south to Lentini, which was founded in 729 BC by the Greeks, as we make our way to the Contrada Biviere and the villa of Princess Borghese. During a tour of the gardens we can see palms, cheerful blue jacaranda, old roses and an unusual sprawling Xanthorrea arborea which faces the Sant'Andrea chapel.

Day 8 Syracuse. Our last day is spent in Syracuse which was founded by the Greeks in 734 BC. This morning you may choose to visit the Neapolis Archaeological Park to discover the well-preserved Greek theatre with seats carved from limestone. Paradise Quarry, now an attractive garden and orange grove, was the primary source of that limestone and is the site of the curious 'Ear of Dionysius' – a vast grotto with an amplifying resonance. Alternatively, enjoy a private visit to the gardens of the Marquis of San Giuliano. Set in 60 hectares and divided into 'rooms' we can see the Mediterranean, Arabian and Tropical gardens, the lawned park and enclosed courtyards. We can walk under vine covered pergolas and along mosaic paths all whilst enjoying the views towards Mount Etna in the distance. Enjoy an afternoon at leisure in beautiful Syracuse.

Day 9 Valletta, Malta to London or Manchester. Disembark this morning and transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight.

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Beta male
Robert Crampton

‘If I’m ill, nothing changes around the house. If it’s my wife, I start to break stuff. I can’t help myself’

DAN KENNEDY

First my daughter and now my wife chooses to fall ill. Unlike Rachel, Nicola has not succumbed to the after-effects of a punishing skiing holiday on (and off) the piste, but rather a nasty bout of asthma, a condition she first developed only a few years ago. Late onset. Hacking cough, no energy, very poor score on the peak flow test. As with Rachel a fortnight earlier (and also, conveniently for me, at the weekend), Nicola took to her bed. I had to step up once again. Manfully.

Step up manfully and, indeed, literally, making a record 42 separate ascents of the stairs to my patient, bearing an array of hot and cold drinks, treats, light snacks, medicines, hot water bottles, reading material and inquiries about when she might, er, you know, “get better”.

Yup, while I think I’m a decent enough nurse in most respects, my bedside manner needs work.

Anyway, Nicola’s incapacitation was excellent news for my “flights climbed” stats, which you will recall last year averaged a mere 18 a day but thus far in 2024 are nudging 30, or 300 feet of accumulated elevation, like traipsing to the top of the Statue of Liberty every day. But with a considerably less dramatic view, seen 42 times, from the top.

If I’m ill, nothing much changes around the house. I wouldn’t say nobody cares or even notices, but they do a good job of soldiering on regardless. On the rare occasions when my wife is out of action, however, the normal rhythms of the family are radically altered.

You know those plastic wind-up toys you get in some Christmas crackers? We had one a while back, a frog. You set it going and it clacks and hops around, gradually declining from a frenetic peak of movement, then it slows... and slows... and slows... before giving one final exhausted nod and stopping dead. That’s what I’m like – and, if they’re around, Sam and Rachel too – when the boss is hors de combat. After the first few hours, I don’t know what to do.

In Copenhagen for the new year four and a bit years ago, the four of us were in a hotel and Nicola and I got quite badly ill with what I now realise must have been Covid-19 (officially then still weeks in the future but evidently already rife across Europe), given it was the worst cough I’ve ever had, such that a bruise the size of a decent saucer blossomed blue, yellow and purple on my chest.

Nicola wasn’t nearly as struck down as I was, but on the fourth or fifth morning in Denmark she announced she had absolutely no energy and needed to go back to bed. I’d recovered somewhat by then and she suggested the three of us go out. But we couldn’t decide what to do or where to go, so after some minutes of aimless milling around, the children and I all went back to bed too.

“Command presence”, the US army calls it, when an officer exudes leadership quality. Nicola has command presence. Rachel, to be fair, has developed it too over the years. Me and Sam? Cannon fodder.

Besides me lolling around directionless, the other big impact of Nicola’s absence is the fabric of our home starts to degrade.

I’m OK maintaining the supply line of food and drink because I do my share of local Lidl/Iceland/Mustafa shopping already. I’m fine with washing-up/laundry/cat/bins/tidying duties, because again I pull my weight on those in normal times. And over some tasks, such as bog-roll distribution, I hold a virtual monopoly. But without Nicola around to warn, consult and restrain, I have a tendency to break stuff.

A door handle gets sticky? Stiff? Recalcitrant? In normal circumstances I alert Nicola, she talks me through the problem or she fixes it. With her laid up I pull, twist, rattle and swear. I issue the door handle with a warning. I pull and twist and rattle and swear harder, longer, louder, stronger. Then I issue the second and final warning. Then, in a semi-rage, with full force deployed, “Because it’s the only language this bastard understands,” either I solve the problem or I wrench the handle out of its fixings. Break it, in other words. With no clue how to mend it.

Same goes for tricky blinds, window catches, fasteners, fiddly buttons or press studs on duvets, combination padlocks, rogue cutlery baskets in the dishwasher. When those buggers get wind that I’m unsupervised, they’d better raise their game or suffer the consequences.

Someone once called me “a rough diamond”. I didn’t really know what it meant but it sounded sexy so I thought, I’ll take that. But the truth is, the teacher who 50 years ago dismissed me as “a bull in a china shop”, a far less desirable description, was more on the money.

Nicola, and her toolkit, will be up and about before long, I’m sure. ■

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