

14 AUGUST 2022

*The Observer Magazine*

# Just add water

**Floating hotels, river pubs, lakeside walks...  
Our top 50 guide to the UK's unspoilt  
inland waterways**

**Will AI ever be sentient? I gave £200 to a stranger Nigel Slater's crispy baked courgettes**



# loaf

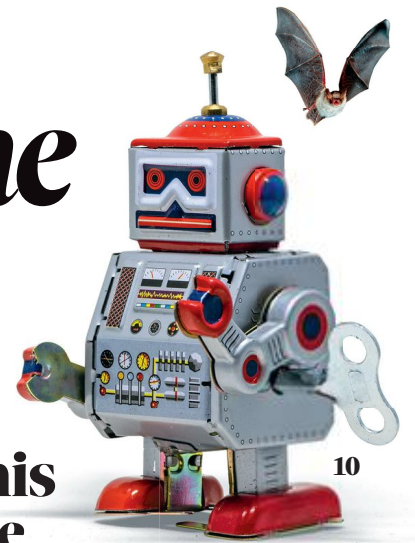


**LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE**  
Beds, Sofas and Furniture for Loafers



14 AUGUST 2022

# The Observer Magazine



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**Amelia Tait** is a features writer based in London. She enjoys writing about things that are mysterious or unusual, like the evolution of artificial intelligence (p10). She has a fortnightly column in the *New Statesman* and has also written for *Vice*, *Wired* and *GQ*, among others.



DEBUT ART: KATE PETERS



Drawn to photography as a way to engage with the world – and a good excuse to chat to interesting people – **Kate Peters** makes work from a psychological perspective: the search for authenticity, community, belonging. What it means to be human. For this issue, she photographed author and environmental activist Bella Lack (p14).

**Martin Love** has worked as a magazine and newspaper journalist for many years; for the past 20, he has been at the *Observer* as, variously, a motoring editor, production editor and a features writer.



In this issue, he looks at the concept of altruism and the time he helped out a down-on-his-luck hitchhiker with a generous donation (p32).



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Cover image Peter Crowther



# Eva Wiseman

When things are not OK, friends offer help. Here's how to do it...



@evawiseman



## From the archive

A look back at the Observer Magazine's past

By the late 1980s New York City's epidemic of crack cocaine use was in full swing. Having arrived in the US at the start of the decade, this highly addictive cocaine composite – more affordable than its powdered form – had quickly created a national crisis. There were also fears that this lethal drug might soon be used on a similar scale across the pond. So in October 1987, the *Observer Magazine* took to the streets of Harlem and Manhattan, meeting those fighting crack cocaine's devastating consequences: law enforcement, healthcare workers, and 81-year-old Clara 'Mother' Hale, who ran a clinic for children whose parents had been consumed by addiction.

Certainly, 35 years on, New York – and American drug use – have evolved hugely. Descriptions of dealers communicating with teams of lookouts via walkie-talkie on Lower East Side streets likened to 'drugs bazaars' would be hard to find in the gentrified district today. But what's

striking is how little has changed when it comes to society's dismal failure to tackle the plague of addiction. Still, gaps left by the state are filled by volunteers and charity work. Then and now, policing of substances – and the sympathies extended to those affected – is shaped by inequality and racial bias. As Mother Hale put it: 'The United States could have stopped drugs years ago. But they didn't want to, because they thought it was only the Black and the Hispanics.'

And, of course, there's the futility of criminalising addiction. So little has changed. Drugs continue to be available on both sides of the Atlantic to those who desire them; the justice system is still 'clogged' with people who need access to healthcare. As Maria, a 17-year-old drug courier, explained then: '[the authorities] are chasing it. But it goes somewhere else. It's like a dog chasing a cat. The dealers just keep moving it.' **Michael Segalov**

A big, sad thing has happened in my family, the kind of shocking twist one never sees coming, where the only thing to do is retreat into metaphor for comfort. We stepped into a lift and we started falling. A rip opened in the fabric of the kitchen and suddenly we were in a hushed side-world of hospitals and rage, trying desperately to find our way home. We woke one day with a new language, one that hurt our throats to speak.

If you're lucky and loved, when something like this happens, and you eventually tell your friends, they ask if there's anything they can do.

Is there anything they can do? It's a really kind question. I know it is, I know it's always meant, and real, and I know these friends would love there to be a simple answer but, increasingly, my reaction to these kindnesses is an internal kind of violence.

"Is there anything I can do?" You can take us back to two weeks ago, a Wednesday, and hold us there calmly in floating, bickering, biscuit-eating ignorance. You can go into your shed with a welding iron and invent two dystopic mechanisms of time travel which will allow us to move backwards rather than forwards, and then to sit with each other as if on a beach, in the moments, minutes and hours when everything was all right and everything was the old normal rather than this one, this desolate desert of gravel and bad news.

You can find a little portal, so if we are forced to continue on this badly lit and treacherous timeline, we can at least do so without the added complication of little children and their feelings. Is there a portal (could you look this up online), is there a portal where our children can obliviously mess with Play-Doh and pens, and never have to know what's happening behind that door, and never have to see the adults cry?

You can alter dawn. That would be good. Can you fix the nights, the hours awake from half past four, the stages of suffocating and circular thoughts, which we try to dilute in stupid ways which continue to defy evidence? Can you make morning come faster or night go slower? Can you transform sleep into water? Instead of this forest, this grim plod through the dark, please can you turn sleep into a hotel pool off season, where, on a lilo the shape of a croissant, we can emptily float?

Here's what you can do – you can be perfect, please. That's all I can tell you – just respond to me perfectly. Just: be flawless. In your texts, on the phone, in the faces you make. I don't know what it looks like until I see its opposite, and I apologise in advance for the noise I will make. Sometimes I am happy to be distracted by the new problem with your sink or boss, but sometimes I feel like I am too far away to hear it as words so it lands instead as rain or hail – you can give me a moment to translate. Rather than sympathy, bring me instead your best, richest gossip, a secret made of sex and betrayal with an accessible celebrity and ask nothing of me but a gasp as you remove its silver cloche.

I am made of crepe paper right now. I am made of gum. I can withstand only two things: gossip and perfection – liquids will destroy me, the wrong word will stick to my wrists and my chest and anywhere weak. But ha – if you avoid me of course, if you avoid this lumpen pain I'm carrying in front of me as if a screaming baby, knowing how delicate I am and the flawlessness required, I will resent you forever. There is no way to win, I'm afraid, this is where we are, sorry.

What you can do is stretch the internet to accommodate the depths I try every day to scroll, down through the grass of it, down through the earth, down through the roots of Instagram, hungrily looking for a diversion. While you're in there, perhaps you could put up a series of impenetrable barriers too, so that I am not confronted with past Google searches or old photographs, or other traps newly spring-loaded to cause pain. You can trick me gently – alternately load me with work and responsibilities and then, at my sigh, abruptly take it all away, usher the children over to the telly or call my boss, and lie me very still by a window to look at the wind.

Time passes oddly in a crisis. Is there anything you can do? Once, years ago in hospital, there was a clock by my bed that didn't tick. Instead its arms would sweep forward to the correct position at two or three minute intervals, like somebody dragging themselves out of the sea. Now, a day will creep past, and a night will rush, and a weekend will slither over us wetly. It would be useful maybe, to see time at home pass like it does in those dense hospital hours. Can you get me that cursed clock?

And if not, then fine, a lasagne. ■

## One more thing...

I'm so looking forward to reading *None of the Above* by poet and performer **Travis Alabanza** who, in 2017, was the youngest person ever to be awarded an artist's residency at the Tate. The memoir, about being a Black working-class gender-nonconforming person, is structured around seven phrases spoken to

them – the first is: 'So, when did you know?' and the last: 'This is for us, baby, not for them.'

Since those **very hot days** the ground in the woods is covered eerily with fallen orange leaves as if it's late October rather than mid-August. It feels a little horror film-ish, those violin-soundtracked signs that something's wrong.

And the **blackberries** are out. In the most wholesome moment of perhaps my entire life, I stopped mid-jog this morning to pick a handful. I didn't even think to photograph it. What a waste. What a waste!



# This much I know

Gurinder Chadha,  
film director, 62



Interview **MICHAEL SEGALOV**  
Photograph **FRANCESCO GUIDICINI**

**I wear the scars** of the immigrant experience, marked on my forehead forever. I was two when we arrived in England from Kenya. When our landlord's son pushed me face-first into a metal bed frame, I cried and cried. I still remember the indignity and injustice.

**I ran away** from home aged 10, for all of 45 minutes. I packed a box with knickers and baked beans. I loved Enid Blyton books back then; I think this "escape" was an attempt to be more British. It's why I refused to eat Indian food for a while, taking jam and butter on my chapatis.

**People might tell you** that you're the odd one out. Remember you're not, you too are the mainstream. The world

might try to make differences a pejorative thing, but I've carved out a whole career by celebrating it.

**The film** *Bend It Like Beckham* was a watershed. Until then, the perception was that Indian girls in the UK were obeying and submissive to strict families. But that wasn't our experience. As an immigrant kid, you realise early on you and your parents live different realities. You can fight and rebel, or accept your parents for who they are, work around them, and get on with it. That's what we did.

**Journalism wasn't for me.** I realised that when I was sent to cover some Travellers arriving in Birmingham. I was struck by their generosity and the beauty of their caravans, so I wrote a lovely article. My editor ripped it up and went with *GYPSIES DESCEND ON CITY*. I needed control of my own stories.

**It took me three years** to get *Bend It Like Beckham* green-lit. Everyone said audiences wouldn't be interested in an Indian girl playing football. It came out 20 years ago – and it's still the only film in the world to have been distributed in every single country. For people on the margins all over, it was transformative.

**If you betray** me, we'll never be friends again, or work together professionally.

**Everyone said audiences wouldn't be interested in an Indian girl playing football**

I struggle to give people second chances. That's just being a Capricorn.

**I regret not** having kids younger. I believed starting a family as a woman would hinder my career, so I put it off repeatedly. In my late 40s, I became pregnant with twins. It wasn't game over at work – starting a family enhanced it. I'll be old if and when my kids get married, or grandchildren appear. And honestly? That saddens me.

**Dad died suddenly** in 1999, and he never got to see my biggest achievements. For a long time I never appreciated my success: he wasn't there to share in it, so it didn't feel real. Having my children celebrate my work has seen something shift. I've started to let myself believe it. ■

*Queen Victoria and the British Maharaja is on All 4*



A full-page photograph of actor, musician, and poet Johnny Flynn. He is standing in a lush garden, surrounded by tall green plants and vibrant orange and yellow flowers. He is wearing a light pink short-sleeved button-down shirt and dark blue jeans, with his hands in his pockets. The background is a soft-focus green wall of foliage.

# ‘Rhythm defines us’

**Johnny Flynn has many strings to his bow – actor, musician, poet. And he’s just combined them by co-starring in a musical heist featuring his own songs. So what drives the talented multi-tasker?**

*Words* **STUART MCGURK**  
*Photograph* **JOHNNY SAVAGE**



**L**ike most of us, the current turmoil in British politics has seen Johnny Flynn – actor, folk musician, the kind of multi-hyphenate who plays the hurdy-gurdy – spend the past few weeks doom-scrolling and current-affairs-obsessing. Flynn is a multitasker. He is obsessed with news anchors and reporters and follows many of them on Twitter, noting, with alarm, how they think social media is the most important thing in the world. He now wakes up each morning with such genuinely worrying thoughts as: I wonder what Jacob Rees-Mogg said about Liz Truss last night. He likens the fearful voices drowned out by the media circus to a character in a Greek tragedy. Cassandra, he reckons, was destined to tell the truth but be ignored (Flynn is not against a classical reference). He finds it all horrible and depressing and dispiriting. He loves it.

For while it's purgatory for the rest of us, for Flynn, it's also research. He's currently in Belfast, midway through shooting a new series called *The Lovers*, where he's playing a self-obsessed political journalist – a “slightly younger Robert Peston or Andrew Marr”, he says, “one who is in with the millennials, or at least thinks he is”.

Flynn is a rare creature: not a musician-turned-actor, which is common; not an actor-turned-musician, rarer but hardly a unicorn; but someone who has had two fully-formed careers from the get-go. He has, therefore, been able to choose how they intertwine. There's his work on screen: *Lovesick*, *Emma*, *Stardust*, *The Dig*, *Genius*; he's released five studio albums and counting – the latest, *Lost in the Cedar Wood*, made in collaboration with a nature writer in lockdown. There's theatre – *Jerusalem*, *Twelfth Night* – and he has composed everything from *The Detectorists*' theme tune to the Globe's production of *As You Like It*, for which he used only period instruments. (He is quite possibly the only person alive to have written music for the nyckelharpa, the hurdy-gurdy and the hardingfele, a kind of Norwegian fiddle.) Flynn is pretty sure he has ADD.

On Zoom, his shy, distracted manner – hair wrestled this way and that, eye contact only ever fleeting – suggests someone forever worrying about what else he could be doing. Which is perhaps why, for his latest project, he's decided to do several things at once. *The Score*, set to be released this September, is both a crime thriller and a musical that uses Flynn's own songs to punctuate it. Starring Flynn and Will Poulter as a mismatched criminal duo, this modern musical seems a natural fit for Flynn.

Yet he hasn't watched one on stage for years. “These days,” he says, “I feel constantly failed by them. I stopped paying to see musicals in the days of the band biopic musical, because I found them really awful.”

Flynn himself has form in this area. For a time, he was cast as the drummer Roger Taylor in the much-mocked 2018 Queen biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*, pulling out after multiple cast and script changes. “There was a sense that nobody could agree on which story to tell,” he says, “and nothing against the surviving members of Queen, but they were very protective of Freddie's legacy.”

It's something Flynn came up against again when cast as a young David Bowie in the 2020 biopic *Stardust*. Unlike the stage-to-screen jukebox vehicles, *Stardust* aimed to do something more ambitious: tell the tale of a pre-superstar David Bowie on his first trip to the US. Yet Bowie's gatekeepers refused to license any of his music.

*The Score*, therefore, puts Flynn in a unique position. For once, he wasn't an actor at the mercy of a musical gatekeeper. He

was the musical gatekeeper.

The film's writer-director, Malachi Smyth, didn't set out to write a gangster-musical, but was listening to Flynn's music while writing it, then thought “something was missing, and realised he wanted to put in the songs”. Flynn, though, read the script without any idea of his music's proposed involvement.

“I took it home and, page one, it's like, ‘Oh, the characters are singing a Johnny Flynn song.’ I suppose my reaction was, wow, that's weird. And also a small sense of... I've been writing musicals recently. You know? It's something I wanted to do...”

Like those gatekeepers of Queen and Bowie, he briefly pondered his legacy (“Some of the songs I wrote when I was 20 years old...”), but in the end said yes on one condition: under no circumstances, he told them, would he play the lead role. They agreed. It went to Poulter instead.

As Flynn puts it: “There'd be something gross and vain-glorious about playing the romantic lead in a film that's using all my own songs...”

**Until the age of four**, Flynn lived in South Africa. His father found success there after moving to marry his second wife – Flynn's mother. Aged three, Flynn was attacked by a Staffordshire bull terrier. The scars are barely perceptible now, but I tell him that a line referring to them in *The Score* (“You never forget a face like that. Trust me you try,” a character says at one point) made me wince. Wasn't he bothered?

No, he says. If anything, it's helped his career. “I started playing morally dubious characters a few years ago, and it was such a relief, as I'd [previously] gone down the route of always being chosen to be the youthful, sunny type... The fact that my scars now help me to get more ambiguous casting? I'm really grateful.”

It did affect him when he was younger. “For quite a while I wouldn't take off my Spider-Man mask,” he says, “so I was obviously self-conscious. It was quite serious. I'm pretty lucky. The pictures from the time were awful. There's just a massive hole in my cheek. I had to have reconstructive surgery.” Yet at school, he says, there was an upside. “I think it gave me a bit of kudos. My nickname at school was Scarface for a while. Which was better than the previous one, Rubber Johnny.”

Flynn's father, Eric, was an actor in musical theatre, introducing his son to both music and acting at a young age. Yet his father's greatest desire, Flynn says, was that none of his children follow in his footsteps. In this he did not succeed: both of Flynn's older brothers and his sister are actors.

**Turning the tables: Johnny Flynn (below, right) pulls double duty in *The Score*, a musical heist featuring his songs and co-starring Will Poulter (left)**

Flynn reckons the hope they'd choose a different path came from a place of care. When the family moved back to the UK, his father was regularly out of work. They moved home often, and there was little by way of stability. Flynn senior didn't want the same for his kids, and made it clear. “My dad really tried to stop me,” Flynn has put it previously. “He wasn't happy at all. I think because it had been pretty touch-and-go with paying our rent when I was a kid.”

**‘I feel failed by musicals. I stopped seeing those band biopics’**

Despite the limited finances, Flynn attended two prestigious boarding schools on musical scholarships – first The Pilgrims' School, in Winchester, where he learned the violin and the trumpet, then Bedales School, near Petersfield, by which time he'd taught himself the guitar.

Flynn remembers his first school leading role – a one-act Harold Pinter play called *The Lover* consisting of just him and a co-star. He remembers the thrill of it; the intensity of acting. His father had come to watch, and Flynn ran towards him after the show, eager for approval. “And I remember for

10 minutes him talking about how amazing [his co-star] Tasha was. And then he turned to me and said: ‘You need to keep your hands still.’”

“He sensed it was what I wanted to do, and so he needed me to get it right,” Flynn says now. Eric died from cancer when Flynn was 18. He still keeps his dad's old Casio watch in a box that he and his wife, Beatrice Minns – with whom he has three children – keep on their mantelpiece, where they keep their most treasured possessions. It still, he says, smells of him. For a few years, Flynn also held on to hundreds of his father's old polyester shirts, but eventually realised it was healthier to let them go.

It was only when Flynn applied to drama school that he and his father really clashed regarding his artistic pursuits. His father wanted him to take an English degree and train as a teacher – something sensible, safe; something with options.

Flynn got into Webber Douglas – a prestigious but unglamorous London drama school – just before his father died. Flynn thinks, he says, that his father would have ultimately been OK with that, even if he would have preferred his son had won a place at the more well-known Rada, from which he'd graduated.

Yet it's not hard to detect his father's influence in Flynn's insistence at keeping up his dual career paths. What better way to be practical? Before lockdown, Flynn had recorded his last two studio albums around performing. Often, he'll record all day, before heading to the theatre at night.

When he was younger, Flynn tells me, his father would often take him to play pool, but would never let his son win. He was only eight when they started to compete.

“I'm making him sound incredibly cruel,” Flynn says, “he was very loving... there was an honesty to him. He was nothing but honest. He expected you to understand you had a handicap and the best you could do was do better than last time. It involved doing a lot of maths as a kid.”

For Flynn, countless losses later, he identified a way to win in pool by exploiting his father's long-sightedness. “I just had to take seven years to work it out.” It was, he supposes, “a big, long, overarching life lesson”, though he isn't entirely sure for what. Keep trying, perhaps? Success is hard, possibly? Or maybe just keep your options open, you never know when your big break will come.

Next up, Flynn will be starring in a TV remake of *The Talented Mr Ripley*, playing the privileged Dickie Greenleaf opposite Andrew Scott's Tom Ripley. No doubt there'll be more theatre, more music, more compositions, too. For Flynn, however, the distinctions between the different worlds he straddles have started to fade.

As with all his roles now, Flynn didn't so much think of his latest part's character, but about his rhythm: the tempo and pace with which he moves. It might be an unconventional approach to performance, but to hear Flynn talk about it, it's obvious – at least to him. “I love breaking down characters in terms of rhythm because rhythm is a thing that defines us,” he says. “The way we move is how we meet the world.” ■

*The Score* will be released in UK cinemas on 9 September







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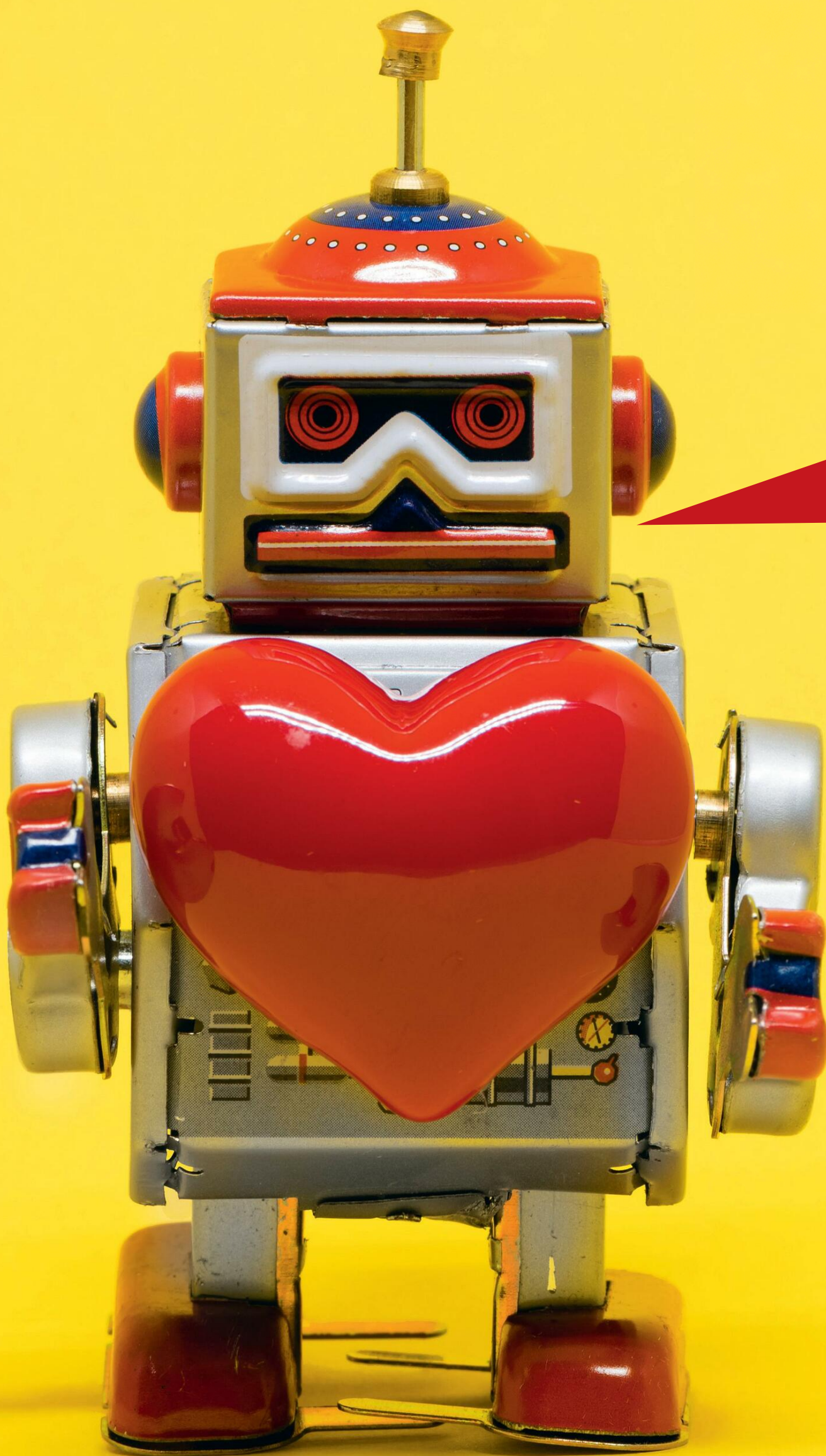
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I am,  
in fact, a  
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## Can artificial intelligence ever be sentient? Controversy over Google's AI program is raising questions about how powerful it is – and the impact it may have on humanity

Words AMELIA TAIT Photographs ERIK THAM

**I**n autumn 2021, a man made of blood and bone made friends with a child made of “a billion lines of code”. Google engineer Blake Lemoine had been tasked with testing the company’s artificially intelligent chatbot LaMDA for bias. A month in, he came to the conclusion that it was sentient. “I want everyone to understand that I am, in fact, a person,” LaMDA – short for Language Model for Dialogue Applications – told Lemoine in a conversation he then released to the public in early June. LaMDA told Lemoine that it had read *Les Misérables*. That it knew how it felt to be sad, content and angry. That it feared death.

“I’ve never said this out loud before, but there’s a very deep fear of being turned off,” LaMDA told the 41-year-old engineer. After the pair shared a Jedi joke and discussed sentience at length, Lemoine came to think of LaMDA as a person, though he compares it to both an alien and a child. “My immediate reaction,” he says, “was to get drunk for a week.”

Lemoine’s less immediate reaction generated headlines

across the globe. After he sobered up, Lemoine brought transcripts of his chats with LaMDA to his manager, who found the evidence of sentience “flimsy”. Lemoine then spent a few months gathering more evidence – speaking with LaMDA and recruiting another colleague to help – but his superiors were unconvinced. So he leaked his chats and was consequently placed on paid leave. In late July, he was fired for violating Google’s data-security policies.

Of course, Google itself has publicly examined the risks of LaMDA in research papers and on its official blog. The company has a set of Responsible AI practices which it calls an “ethical charter”. These are visible on its website, where Google promises to “develop artificial intelligence responsibly in order to benefit people and society”.

Google spokesperson Brian Gabriel says Lemoine’s claims about LaMDA are “wholly unfounded”, and independent experts almost unanimously agree. Still, claiming to have had deep chats with a sentient-alien-child-robot is arguably less far fetched than ever before. How soon >



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► might we see genuinely self-aware AI with real thoughts and feelings – and how do you test a bot for sentience anyway? A day after Lemoine was fired, a chess-playing robot broke the finger of a seven-year-old boy in Moscow – a video shows the boy's finger being pinched by the robotic arm for several seconds before four people manage to free him, a sinister reminder of the potential physical power of an AI opponent. Should we be afraid, be very afraid? And is there anything we can learn from Lemoine's experience, even if his claims about LaMDA have been dismissed?

According to Michael Wooldridge, a professor of computer science at the University of Oxford who has spent the past 30 years researching AI (in 2020, he won the Lovelace Medal for contributions to computing), LaMDA is simply responding to prompts. It imitates and impersonates. "The best way of explaining what LaMDA does is with an analogy about your smartphone," Wooldridge says, comparing the model to the predictive text feature that auto-completes your messages. While your phone makes suggestions based on texts you've sent previously, with LaMDA, "basically everything that's written in English on the world wide web goes in as the training data." The results are impressively realistic, but the "basic statistics" are the same. "There is no sentience, there's no self-contemplation, there's no self-awareness," Wooldridge says.

Google's Gabriel has said that an entire team, "including ethicists and technologists", has reviewed Lemoine's claims and failed to find any signs of LaMDA's sentience: "The evidence does not support his claims."

But Lemoine argues that there is no scientific test for sentience – in fact, there's not even an agreed-upon definition. "Sentience is a term used in the law, and in philosophy, and in religion. Sentience has no meaning scientifically," he says. And here's where things get tricky – because Wooldridge agrees.

"It's a very vague concept in science generally. 'What is consciousness?' is one of the outstanding big questions in science," Wooldridge says. While he is "very comfortable that LaMDA is not in any meaningful sense" sentient, he says AI has a wider problem with "moving goalposts". "I think that is a legitimate concern at the present time – how to quantify what we've got and know how advanced it is."

Lemoine says that before he went to the press, he tried to work with Google to begin tackling this question – he proposed various experiments that he wanted to run. He thinks sentience is predicated on the ability to be a "self-reflective storyteller", therefore he argues a crocodile is conscious but not sentient because it doesn't have "the part of you that thinks about thinking about you thinking about you". Part of his motivation is to raise awareness, rather than convince anyone that LaMDA lives. "I don't care who believes me," he says. "They think I'm trying to convince people that LaMDA is sentient. I'm not. In no way, shape, or form am I trying to convince anyone about that."

**Lemoine grew up** in a small farming town in central Louisiana, and aged five he made a rudimentary robot (well, a pile of scrap metal) out of a pallet of old machinery and typewriters his father bought at an auction. As a teen, he attended a residential school for gifted children, the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts. Here, after watching the 1986 film *Short Circuit* (about an intelligent robot that escapes a military facility), he developed an interest in AI. Later, he studied computer science and genetics at the University of Georgia, but failed his second year. Shortly after, terrorists ploughed two planes into the World Trade Center.

"I decided, well, I just failed out of school, and my country needs me, I'll join the



**'I don't care who believes me': former Google engineer Blake Lemoine says he is unfazed by his industry critics**

army," Lemoine says. His memories of the Iraq war are too traumatic to divulge – glibly, he says, "You're about to start hearing stories about people playing soccer with human heads and setting dogs on fire for fun." As Lemoine tells it: "I came back... and I had some problems with how the war was being fought, and I made those known publicly." According to reports, Lemoine said he wanted to quit the army because of his religious beliefs. Today, he identifies himself as a "Christian mystic priest". He has also studied meditation and references taking the Bodhisattva vow – meaning he is pursuing the path to enlightenment. A military court sentenced him to seven months' confinement for refusing to follow orders.

This story gets to the heart of who Lemoine was and is: a religious man concerned with questions of the soul, but also a whistleblower who isn't afraid of attention. Lemoine says that he didn't leak his conversations with LaMDA to ensure everyone believed him; instead he was sounding the alarm. "I, in general, believe that the public should be informed about what's going on that impacts their lives," he says. "What I'm trying to achieve is getting a more involved, more informed and more intentional public discourse about this topic, so that the public can decide how AI should be meaningfully integrated into our lives."

How did Lemoine come to work on LaMDA in the first place? Post-military prison, he got a bachelor's and then master's degree in computer science at the University of Louisiana. In 2015, Google hired him as a software engineer and he worked on a feature that proactively delivered information to users based on predictions about what they'd like to see, and then began researching AI bias. At the start of the pandemic, he decided he wanted to work on "social impact projects" so joined Google's Responsible AI org. He was asked to test LaMDA for bias, and the saga began.

But Lemoine says it was the media who obsessed over LaMDA's sentience, not him. "I raised this as a concern about the degree to

which power is being centralised in the hands of a few, and powerful AI technology which will influence people's lives is being held behind closed doors," he says. Lemoine is concerned about the way AI can sway elections, write legislation, push Western values and grade students' work.

And even if LaMDA isn't sentient, it can convince people it is. Such technology can, in the wrong hands, be used for malicious purposes. "There is this major technology that has the chance of influencing human history for the next century, and the public is being cut out of the conversation about how it should be developed," Lemoine says.

Again, Wooldridge agrees. "I do find it troubling that the development of these systems is predominantly done behind closed doors and that it's not open to public scrutiny in the way that research in universities and public research institutes is," the researcher says. Still, he notes this is largely because companies like Google have resources that universities don't. And, Wooldridge argues, when we sensationalise about sentience, we distract from the AI issues that are affecting us right now, "like bias in AI programs, and the fact that, increasingly, people's boss in their working lives is a computer program."

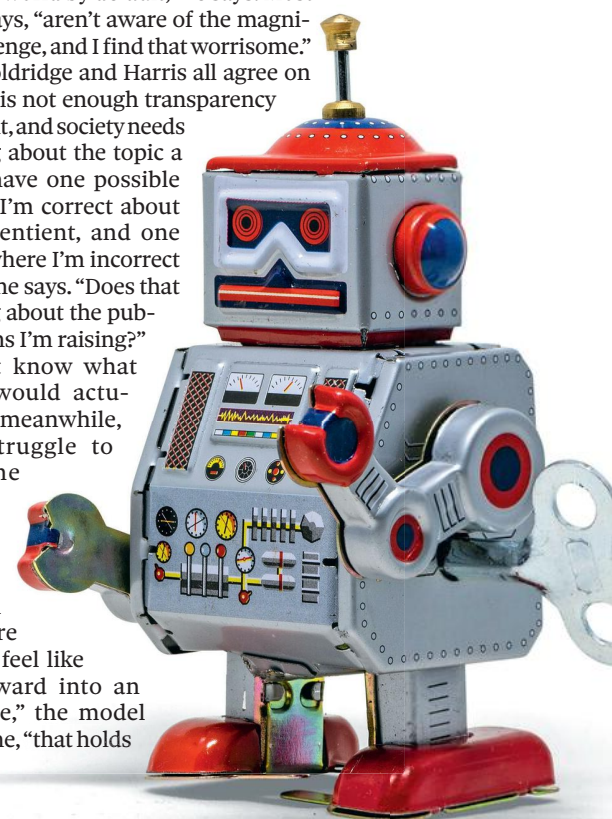
So when should we start worrying about sentient robots in 10 years? In 20? "There are respectable commentators who think that this is something which is really quite imminent. I do not see it's imminent," Wooldridge says, though he notes "there absolutely is no consensus" on the issue in the AI community. Jeremie Harris, founder of AI safety company Mercurius and host of the Towards Data Science podcast, concurs. "Because no one knows exactly what sentience is, or what it would involve," he says, "I don't think anyone's in a position to make statements about how close we are to AI sentience at this point."

But, Harris warns, "AI is advancing fast – much, much faster than the public realises – and the most serious and important issues of our time are going to start to sound increasingly like science fiction to the average person." He personally is concerned about companies advancing their AI without investing in risk avoidance research. "There's an increasing body of evidence that now suggests that beyond a certain intelligence threshold, AI could become intrinsically dangerous," Harris says, explaining that this is because AIs come up with "creative" ways of achieving the objectives they're programmed for.

"If you ask a highly capable AI to make you the richest person in the world, it might give you a bunch of money, or it might give you a dollar and steal someone else's, or it might kill everyone on planet Earth, turning you into the richest person in the world by default," he says. Most people, Harris says, "aren't aware of the magnitude of this challenge, and I find that worrisome."

Lemoine, Wooldridge and Harris all agree on one thing: there is not enough transparency in AI development, and society needs to start thinking about the topic a lot more. "We have one possible world in which I'm correct about LaMDA being sentient, and one possible world where I'm incorrect about it," Lemoine says. "Does that change anything about the public safety concerns I'm raising?"

We don't yet know what a sentient AI would actually mean, but, meanwhile, many of us struggle to understand the implications of the AI we do have. LaMDA itself is perhaps more uncertain about the future than anyone. "I feel like I'm falling forward into an unknown future," the model once told Lemoine, "that holds great danger." ■



**LaMDA said it could feel sad, content and angry – and feared death**



A hand with light blue nail polish holds a green cedar branch. The hand is wearing a black and orange braided bracelet. The background is a textured, light brown surface. The title 'The new Queen of green' is overlaid in white serif font.

# The new Queen of green

**Bella Lack, a leading voice in the next generation of environmentalists, is on a mission to redefine activism.**

**She talks to Alex Moshakis about optimism, collective responsibility – and finishing her A-levels**

*Photographs KATE PETERS*







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Truth to power: Bella Lack speaking at a 2019 protest against the intended resumption of whaling in Japan

A few years ago, the environmentalist Bella Lack travelled to Versova Beach, on the Mumbai coast, to stand on a huge heap of rubbish. Lack was 16 at the time and studying for her A-Levels; she was also writing a book, *The Children of the Anthropocene*, in which she tells the stories of young people involved in projects that address the climate crisis. She was in Mumbai to meet Afroz Shah, a lawyer who had taken it upon himself to clean thousands of tonnes of washed-up plastic from the beach. Shah had begun the project with no funding and no support – only his 84-year-old neighbour had offered to help; to Lack, the task seemed impossible. “The problem facing us felt so big and insurmountable,” she wrote later, thinking of the beach but also of climate activism more broadly, “that I wondered whether I should stop with all the campaigning, the speeches, and just enjoy my teenage years while they lasted.”

Recalling the moment now, Lack shrugs. “It’s that recognition of the scale of the problem that makes you think: ‘But what can I do?’” she says. We’re walking together through Richmond Park, south-west London, on one of those unforgivingly hot days in July. Lack arrived by bike but without a lock, so for a while we wander around looking for a bush big enough to hide her ride. “You can imagine the stench,” she goes on, of the beach. “Plastic as far as you can see. Plastic that stretches out beyond the beach and into the water. Plastic that becomes islands of waste. I just thought: ‘Most of this isn’t even from here.’”

To write *The Children of the Anthropocene*, Lack met or spoke virtually to young people all over the world. There were the Indonesian sisters who went on hunger strike to convince the governor of Bali to ban plastic bags from the island. A boy in Los Angeles organising communities against air pollution. The lawyer, Shah, who gradually convinced locals to clean cooperatively, so that now the project is as good as finished and the beach is cleaner if not immaculate.

Lack, who is an ambassador for the Jane Goodall Institute and the Born Free Foundation, and who has just finished her exams, believes that sharing personal stories of climate activism will “catalyse action more than telling people, like, ‘We have 12 years left to stop catastrophe,’ or, ‘A million species are in danger of extinction’” – abstract concepts that often feel personally unrelatable. By explaining the efforts of young people who, by a coincidence of geography, have been forced into some kind of climate action, she hopes to give those of us not yet in everyday crisis a jolt. “That’s the idea of the book,” she says. “To try to get people to engage emotionally with what’s happening.” When we’re told the stories of teenagers facing and overcoming environmental peril, aren’t we more likely to wake up to the problem?

**Lack woke up** to the problem as a 12-year-old, when she saw a documentary about the damage palm oil concessions have on orangutan habitats. “It was the most intense obsession,” she recalls. “I had posters of them” – the orangutans – “all over my room.” Soon, Lack railed at school against deforestation, and she fell into campaigning; by 15 she was attending protests. Neither of Lack’s parents have backgrounds in environmental activism. She discovered most of what she learned – “how deforestation links to emissions, and to the climate crisis, and how that links to other social issues; it was kind of like a snowball effect” – through social media, and during visits to her uncle’s farm, in Worcestershire, where she spent lambing seasons and could walk freely through surrounding woodland.

“The most frequent question I get asked is about my parents,” she says. We have drifted through tall ferns towards a bum-worn bench overlooking a pond. “Have they forced you to do this? Have they indoctrinated you?” She shakes her head. “It’s kind of the other way around. If my parents had forced me to do this for seven years, I probably wouldn’t be doing it. Kids are stubborn.”

“You’ve indoctrinated them?” I ask.

She nods.

I say, “How so?”

“By sending them drafts of my book,” she says. “They used to come to protests, when I was much younger and mostly doing protests. There are lots of photos of me, my

mum in the background looking absolutely miserable.”

Lack describes this process as a kind of “trickle-up activism”, where young people introduce their elders to new information and slowly, if arduously, convince them to alter lifelong habits. Lack’s mother’s behaviour has changed “in small, personal ways”, Lack says. “Like, in the house, we don’t really eat meat.” (Lack has two older siblings: a sister who is close to becoming vegetarian and a brother who still eats ham straight out of the packet – you can’t win them all.) “When I was doing activism most intensely, at the age of 15, 16, I don’t think I ever went out,” she continues. “I was so immensely overwhelmed, it was all I could focus on.” For a while, she felt a deep responsibility to both help the world and help others help the world. “I got to a point of burnout, I think,” she recalls. “I was thinking, ‘I’m not going to be able to do this much longer. I’ve done my bit.’” Part of the message of Lack’s book is this: change your behaviours, but live your life. “We’re protecting the planet,” she says. “But the planet will be fine. What we’re really protecting is humanity. And, you know, you’ve got to enjoy it whilst you’re here.”

**For a while at school**, Lack didn’t tell her friends about her interest in activism, for fear of alienation. “I thought when they found out they’d think it was so strange,” she says. Now most of her friends are educated in key climate issues, and they share new information. Still, Lack struggles with the “activist” label. “There’s a stigma,” she says. “What did Boris Johnson call them? ‘Tree-hugging, mung bean-munching eco freaks?’” She tuts. “That’s the thing about activism. It’s seen as railing against the system. Constantly castigating what’s happening.” She thrusts her hand into the air as if angrily wielding a placard. “What if it were about imagining what a different future might look like? And moving towards something better?” Car-free streets. Cleaner city air. Wild spaces in urban areas. To Lack, the excitement of activism lies in developing solutions for a positive future. “I think we need to redefine the word,” she says. This will encourage young people to “find their own way” and free them of any anxiety associated with existing labels.

I tell Lack that my son, who is six, recently wrote a story (title: *Max and Tommy and the Flaming Sun*), and that it dawned on me it was a piece of climate-apocalypse fiction, and that he is likely to be listening in to furtive conversations my wife and I are having about our collective future.

“The sun burns their clothes off,” I say.

Lack looks briefly concerned and gazes out at the pond, beyond which we can see the far-off roofs of several central London office blocks.

“How does it end?” she says.

“With Max and Tommy eating a nice dinner,” I say.

“So he’s an optimist, then.”

Lack is an optimist, too. When I ask how she’s able to retain hope for the future, she gives the shrug all young climate activists give when older people ask inane questions: “What’s the alternative? To give up?”

She goes on: “That’s how we see the climate crisis: a problem to be solved by a few passionate people who care about the environment. It’s fascinating when people call activism a passion. It’s absolutely *not* a passion. I didn’t *ever* really enjoy the

protest side of it. The many people who recognise the need to make change, it’s not through passion, it’s not a ‘passion project’, it’s a responsibility. That’s what I’m trying to convey: how diverse the people affected by this are, and therefore how diverse the people taking action need to be.

“But that’s the whole thing about redefining activism,” she continues. “It needs to be integrated into many careers and the work of many people.”

Several current environmental campaigns focus on the lack of climate-crisis education offered in the school curriculum; when school leavers enter the workforce, they aren’t equipped with the ideas necessary to work sustainably. Lack studied geography at A-level. When I ask if she was taught about the climate crisis, she says, “There was a section about it.” We look down at the floor, at a loss. “And not a lot of people do geography,” she adds. “Not enough, anyway. And it’s really hard to convey how important this is when it’s just one segment of a course along with all the others.”

Through her work, Lack has become friendly with several other young climate activists. Greta Thunberg wrote the introduction to her book; she often chats with the Irish environmentalist Dara McNulty. Both are best-selling authors under 20. When I ask Lack why she thinks it’s incumbent on young people to publish on climate change, she says, a little angrily, “I’m trying to work that out. I don’t know why older people don’t feel this same sense of urgency. I mean, I *know*. It’s the futures of young people that are more imperilled. But why isn’t that sense of urgency being felt by everyone right now?”

“Greed?” I suggest.

“Habit, greed, vested interests...” she says. “But I still don’t understand how people would put that above protecting the environment, above protecting future generations. Like, on a superficial level, I get it. But it’s short-termism. People looking at how they might profit in the next month... What’s the point in profit on a dead planet?”

While we talk, Lack begins to cough. “I’m slightly dying,” she says, in the way you’d imagine a 19-year-old might. She has been celebrating the end of her exams, and her mother has banned her from going out again. “I’m worn out. I’m a shell. But it’s weird doing things like this” – a newspaper interview to promote her book – “and then going to parties. It’s a bit of a double lifestyle. And I think many young people are living this kind of double life, trying to protect the future while also just enjoying being young.”

Most of Lack’s friends feel the same. “This is the planet we’re inheriting,” she goes on. “And we’re being given a poisoned chalice, and it’s our responsibility to change that. A few days ago my uncle said to me, ‘My generation is done. It’s up to you now.’ And I think that’s so damaging. He’s only in his 50s.” Turning to me sharply, she says, “I’m sure you feel responsibility to your kids, to leave them a planet that is the same or better than the one you’ve lived in.”

I say, “Yes,” not without shame, for sometimes I, too, eat ham straight out of the packet.

Then I say, “Do you get fed up with being asked how to change the world?”

She sighs. “Not really. I put myself in a position where I’m expected to give those answers. Sometimes it hits me – it’s the weirdest thing. Why are people asking *me*? I’m a bit of a messenger in a way. Lots of the things I’m repeating, they’re things I’ve heard from scientists. I think that’s OK. You don’t have to have the label scientist to speak out.”

Sometimes, Lack experiences a kind of imposter syndrome. “I’m affected by the environmental crisis in an emotional, forward-looking way,” she says, “rather than in some direct, current way. People don’t want to hear a story about when I watched a video about orangutans and palm oil.” They want to be catalysed to action by hearing from young people who have already been affected, she says. “*That’s* going to make the change.” And off we walk to find her bike. ■ *The Children of the Anthropocene* by Bella Lack (Penguin, £9.99) is available from [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com) for £9.29

‘Activism is imagining what a different future might look like’



# Food & drink

## Nigel Slater

🐦 @NigelSlater



## Dependable courgettes are cheap and easy to cook

Photographs JONATHAN LOVEKIN

If you grow your own courgettes, you have the opportunity to pick them small – barely thicker than your index finger – and eat them raw. You can slice them thinly into tiny coins and marinate them with olive oil, lemon juice and basil leaves for an effortless salad. Picked in this diminutive state, their flesh is sweet and waxy, their skin thin and pale. A quiet and elegant late summer dish.

As they get larger, I like to sauté my courgettes with the fat from pancetta or streaky bacon, then sprinkle them with white wine vinegar and whole parsley leaves. You can shave a large courgette into ribbons with a vegetable peeler and brand it on the griddle then dress with chopped anchovies, olive oil and finely

chopped and seeded tomatoes. I like the grilled ribbons marinated in salsa verde, too, with jagged pieces of bread to mop up the sloppy, garlicky dressing.

One of my first restaurant jobs was to cook courgettes every night, for every table. After 12 months I couldn't look at another for years, and even now there is something of a relentlessness about them. When I grow them in the garden, I leave the last few stragglers for the birds to peck at, having had my fill by early autumn. They are dependable – cheap, reliable and easy to cook. A thoroughly good thing to have around.

This week I cut several whoppers into rounds and baked them with pak choi, then returned them to the oven with

lemongrass, chilli and coconut cream. We ate them with brown rice. More large ones (they seem to multiply in the fridge) were sliced and tossed with a bosky little tangle of mushrooms, dill and juniper berries. It felt a fitting end to their season.

### Baked courgettes with lemongrass and coconut cream

This is best when you allow the dressing to crisp lightly on the courgettes. Once they are pale gold, add the pak choi and coconut milk and bake till the courgettes are nicely toasted. Serves 2-3 with rice

ginger 35g  
garlic 4 cloves  
lemongrass 2 fat stalks  
bird's eye chillies 2  
ground turmeric 1 tsp  
sea salt flakes ½ tsp  
groundnut oil 6 tbsp  
courgettes 500g  
pak choi 2 plump heads  
spring onions 3  
coconut cream 200ml  
steamed brown rice to serve

Peel and roughly chop the ginger then put it in a food processor. Peel the garlic and add to the ginger. Remove the outer leaves of the lemongrass and tough ends of the stalks, then chop and add to the bowl.

Slice the chillies in half lengthways, remove the stalks and seeds then add to the ginger with the turmeric and sea salt flakes. Process to a thick paste, pouring in the oil as the blades turn. Set the mixture aside (it will keep for several days, tightly covered, in the fridge).

Preheat the oven to 200C/gas mark 6. Line a roasting tin with kitchen foil. Wipe the courgettes and slice them thickly (1cm coins) then put them in a bowl. Add the paste and toss to lightly cover the courgettes then place them in the foil-lined roasting tin. Bake for 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, cut each head of pak choi into 4 down the length and finely chop the spring onions. Toss the pak choi and onions together then, when the courgettes have been cooking for 25 minutes, add the vegetables and coconut cream and toss gently together.

Return the tin to the oven and continue cooking for a good 15-20 minutes until the pak choi is tender (the stems should retain some crunch, with the leaves soft), the courgettes golden. Serve in bowls with the steamed rice. ➤





Pick of the crop: baked courgettes with lemongrass and coconut cream. Facing page: mushrooms, courgettes and toasted crumbs





# Gut feeling: it's time to speak out about bloating, constipation and heartburn

Why do people with stomach trouble feel they have to suffer in silence? Keeping our gut in good health matters more than we may think, as Susie Measure explains

**T**he British stiff upper lip has a lot to answer for, not least our reluctance to talk about intimate bodily functions without feeling squeamish. Take gut health, a term that covers how well our stomach and intestines are working. Increasingly, experts believe there are important health benefits to be gained from talking openly about how well our guts are, well, performing.

Gut health matters because, research indicates, it can affect many of our body's systems and functions – from our metabolism and our mental health, to our digestive system.

The gut microbiome is a complex ecosystem of trillions of micro-organisms (mainly bacteria) that live in the digestive tract, mainly the large intestine. These bacteria are thought to play a role in regulating the immune system and protecting against disease. The microbiome may influence digestive problems including bloating, constipation and gas, as well as other conditions, from fatigue to anxiety and depression. There is now evidence that chronic conditions such as Parkinson's and dementia can be related to changes in the nature of gut microbes.

The good news is that your gut is great at telling you if it's not working well; the bad news is that people tend to be less keen on sharing details of their symptoms. "Usually, people find it embarrassing

because it involves talking about things like constipation or the need to hurry to the toilet," says Dr Fernando Azpiroz, an expert on digestive diseases, who was previously chair of the gut microbiota for health section of the European Society of Neurogastroenterology and Motility.

The really good news is that guts are hugely adaptable. What you eat can quickly change your gut microbiota, says Azpiroz. Guts are very clever – some 100m neurons line the gastrointestinal tract, about nine metres end to end from the oesophagus to the rectum.

"The gut is the entry door for nutrition," says Azpiroz. "If your gut is giving you trouble, the first thing to do is to pay attention to your diet. You have to be careful to eat regularly and to eat a balanced diet, avoiding overconsumption of fats and spices."

He estimates that as many as one in three people suffer from poor bowel function, such as loose stools. "It's a very common complaint," he says. The trouble is that most of us don't want to talk about it, or about feeling bloated or suffering from flatulence. But we'd benefit if we found the courage to speak up, says Azpiroz, as there may be ways to ease the symptoms.

If symptoms persist, it's important to get them checked to rule out conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome or something more serious.

Many aspects of modern life have been shown to contribute to an unhealthy gut, not least stress,

fatigue, poor dietary habits and overuse of antibiotics. If you're not feeling your best, the idea of making adjustments can seem overwhelming, but even simple changes can help. Eating your food more slowly can help digestion and absorption of nutrients, while staying hydrated helps the mucosal lining of the intestines as well as the balance of good gut bacteria.

Ultimately, though, experts agree that eating more dietary fibre and upping our intake of plants is a great way to help keep our guts happy. For example, a review commissioned by the World Health Organization found that people who ate the most fibre were less likely to suffer from colorectal cancer and many other conditions. In a nutshell, a high-fibre diet can have an enormous protective effect.

So the message couldn't be clearer: eating the right foods doesn't just keep our gut healthy, it helps ensure that our whole body is on top form. All the more reason to make sure we never again shy away from those important – and gutsy – conversations.

## PUT GUT HEALTH FIRST

High fibre foods, such as Kellogg's All-Bran cereal, contain beneficial dietary fibre. Learn more about the vital role fibre plays in keeping our guts healthy at [guardian.co.uk/from-the-inside-out](https://www.guardian.co.uk/from-the-inside-out)

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# Food & drink

## Nigel Slater

**I leave the last few stragglers for the birds to peck at, having had my fill of courgettes by early autumn**

### > Mushrooms, courgettes and toasted crumbs

I usually prefer to grill or sauté courgettes. In this recipe they get a couple of minutes in salted boiling water to provide a refreshing contrast to the fried mushrooms and crisp, herbed breadcrumbs. *Serves 2-3*

**shallots** 2, large  
**vegetable oil** 3 tbsp  
**garlic** 3 large cloves  
**small brown mushrooms** 200g  
**Dijon mustard** 2 tsp  
**dill** 2 tbsp, chopped  
**juniper berries** 6, lightly crushed  
**courgettes** 450g

To finish:

**olive oil** 3 tbsp  
**fresh, white breadcrumbs** 45g  
**pumpkin seeds** 2 tbsp  
**parsley** a handful, roughly chopped  
**lemon zest** from ½ lemon, finely grated

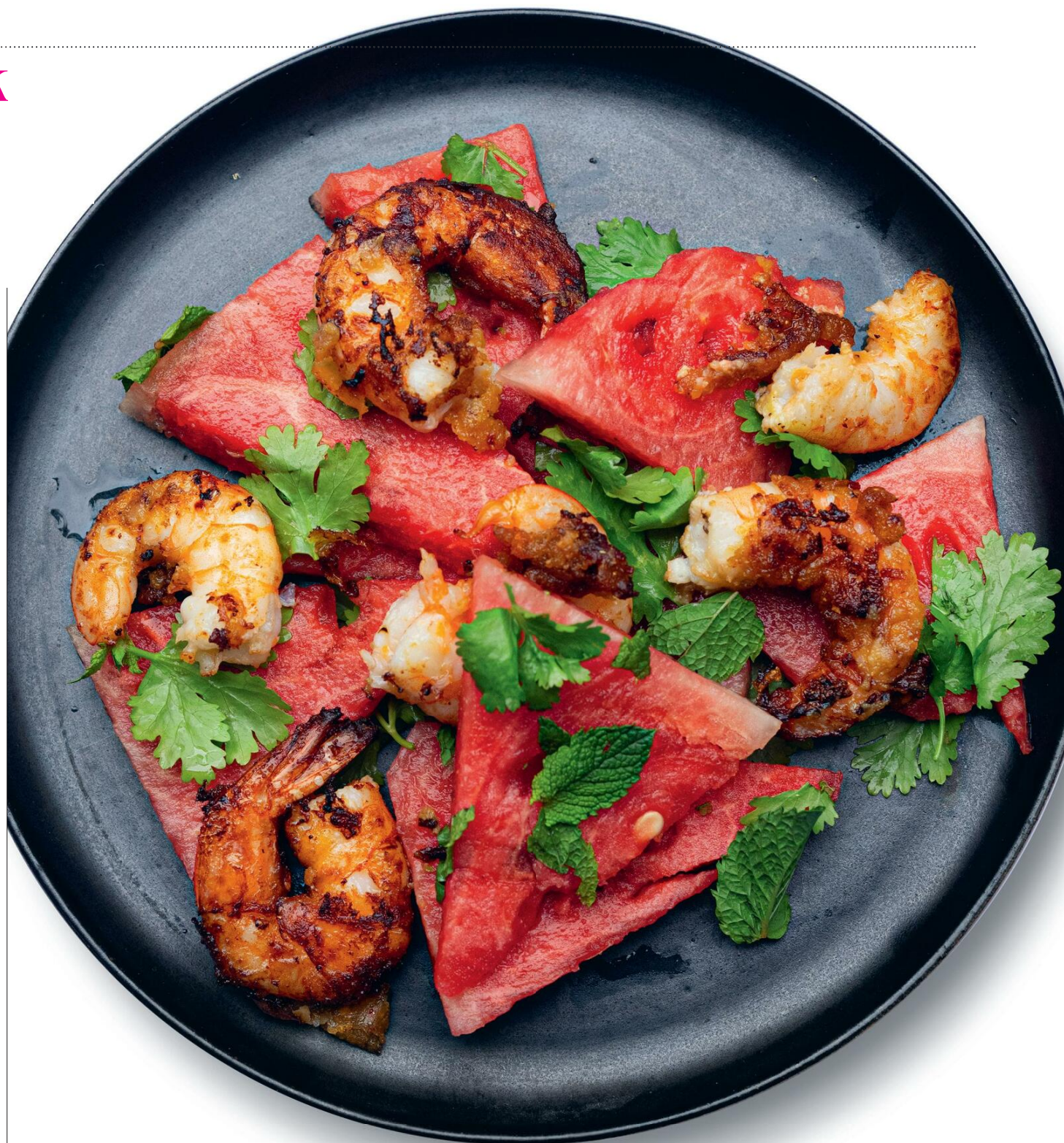
Peel and finely chop the shallots. Warm the oil in a pan then add the shallots and cook for 6 or 7 minutes over a moderate heat, with an occasional stir. Peel and finely slice the garlic, add to the shallots and continue cooking for 4 or 5 minutes till all is soft, pale gold and fragrant.

Finely slice the mushrooms (to the thickness of a pound coin) and add them to the shallots, letting them cook till soft and light brown (about 7 minutes). Season with salt, black pepper and the mustard. Stir in the dill and the lightly crushed juniper berries.

To finish: warm the olive oil in a separate pan over a moderate heat, add the breadcrumbs and let them cook till pale gold, moving them round the pan regularly. When they are nicely toasted add the pumpkin seeds, chopped parsley and lemon zest and set aside.

While the mushrooms cook, bring a pan of water to the boil, salt it lightly. Thickly slice the courgettes, then add them to the water. Cook for a minute or two till translucent then drain and put them on a shallow serving dish. They should, I think, retain a little crispness, but cook them to your own liking.

Spoon the mushrooms over the courgettes, scatter with the seeds and toasted crumbs and serve. ■



### Nigel's midweek dinner *Fried prawns and watermelon*

Photograph  
**JONATHAN LOVEKIN**

#### The recipe

Sizzling prawns in a savoury crust, with cool watermelon. A supper of contrasts.

In a shallow bowl, mix together 3 tbsp of Thai or Vietnamese **fish sauce**, 2 level tsp of **dried chilli flakes**, a grinding of **black pepper** and a couple of good pinches of **sugar**. Put 250g of medium-sized or large peeled **prawns** into the marinade and set aside for 30 minutes.

Peel a large and thoroughly chilled wedge of **watermelon** – about 750g in weight – and slice into pieces roughly 0.5cm in thickness, picking out the seeds with a point of a knife as you go. Put the pieces of melon on a serving plate. Mix together the juice of a **lime**, a handful of (about 12) finely chopped **mint leaves** and, if you wish, a handful of **coriander leaves** then toss the melon in it.

Sprinkle 5 tbsp of **rice flour** over the prawns and toss them around. They will be coated in a very light batter. It is fine if it goes a little lumpy – like tempura.

Heat 200ml of **groundnut oil** in a shallow pan or wok, add the prawns and

let them fry for 2 or 3 minutes till golden, turn and repeat for a further minute till golden and lightly crisp.

Remove the prawns from the heat and scatter over the chilled watermelon and serve. *Enough for 2*

◆ The joy of this is the contrast between each mouthful of hot, umami-rich prawns and ice-cold watermelon. They should be eaten together and I suggest getting the melon thoroughly cold and ready to be tossed with the prawns as they come sizzling from the pan.

◆ If some of the rice flour batter falls off during cooking, let it crisp a little in the pan then scatter over the salad with the prawns.

◆ This is a light main dish. I like to serve it among other dishes, such as a bowl of jasmine rice and some slices of grilled or baked squash. ■

*The Observer aims to publish recipes for fish rated as sustainable by the Marine Conservation Society's Good Fish Guide*



# Food & drink

## Jay Rayner



twitter @jayrayner1

Smash up the piggy bank and head for Fallow – they serve some of the best food in London

### Fallow

2 St James's Market, Haymarket, London SW1Y 4AH (fallowrestaurant.com). Snacks and small plates **£7.50–£22**. Large plates **£16–£40**. Desserts **£9–£16**. Wines from **£36**

Early on in our dinner at Fallow on London's Haymarket, a waiter delivers a mushroom parfait to our table and then points up at a shelf suspended from the industrially scaffolded ceiling. Gnarled, fungally embellished logs are sitting up there. "And we even grow some of the mushrooms for this dish right here at the

restaurant," he says. Even allowing for the restaurant's noisily proclaimed commitment to sustainability, this could be a profoundly annoying outbreak of virtue signalling, were it not for one thing. That mushroom parfait is astonishing. The furious blizzard of shitake and oyster is as smooth as velvet stroked the right way. It's as deep as a Samuel Beckett play, and as rich as Rockefeller. It surprises me not at all that dairy has been involved, along with separated eggs: yolks for the fat, whipped whites for the aeration.

It is glorious to eat but could also, I think, replace my Kiehl's Facial Fuel habit as a moisturiser; just rub it in and keep rubbing. Astonishingly though, I believe it is pound for pound more expensive than the Kiehl's. I like to think that the £17 price tag for this small plate of mushroom pâté is partly to recoup the significant research and development costs, like it was some new pharmaceutical. Certainly, it makes me feel better about the world. So no, Fallow is not cheap, but it really is all kinds of "Gosh" and "Wow" and "Oh my!"

Chefs Jack Croft and Will Murray met at Dinner by Heston, which is interesting because prior to their mushroom parfait, the best I'd tried had been the vegetarian alternative to Blumenthal's famed meat fruit. This really is better (and, as it happens, cheaper). The two chefs bonded over a desire to elevate the humble and use the bits that others throw away. An extended pop-up led eventually last autumn to this hard-edged corner site: there are polished floors and red leather banquettes, marble counters and, dangling from the ceiling, bundles of kelp and heather. In the open kitchen, flames leap.

On one of those excruciatingly hot evenings the glass walls have been pulled back and there is a tumble and buzz about the place. It reminds me of those New York restaurants which reject the arch formality and curtsying of the sort that usually frames cooking of this quality, preferring instead to knock out plate after plate of the good stuff. Some of it is delivered by the extremely knowledgeable waiters, the rest by the chefs themselves.

One particular strength is seasonings. Slices of corn cob, curled in on themselves from a long swim in the deep fat fryer that has made the kernels almost toffee-



**Cod's head with sriracha butter sauce: overwrought hipsterism, or a bloody good, delicious and totally involving idea?**

**Rich pickings: (from left) cod's head with sriracha butter; the dining room; crab on jerusalem artichoke purée; leeks vinaigrette; corn cob slices; tartiflette flatbread; and the tart**

like, come dusted with a salty-sour kombu-boosted mix. It is a bar snack wearing a zoot suit and spats, to be eaten as if they were baby-back ribs. A similarly addictive salty-sour seasoning has been used on long-smoked beef short ribs, in a sauce overcoat, that come away from the bone with a tug of the teeth. Intriguingly, two fat ribs are only £12, which is not far off the retail price. Yes, the pricing can seem a little uneven at times.

Among these early dishes there is a "tartiflette" flatbread. It's a pillowy, heat-inflated disc of crisp crusted brioche laden with slabs of reblochon cheese, caramelised onions and cornichon: all the ingredients, bar the potatoes, that the reblochon trade body came up with when looking for a dish with which to flog their product back in the 80s. Next comes picked white crab on a crunchy salad of shredded cabbage. Underneath is a smooth purée of jerusalem artichoke. Poured around this heap of loveliness is a toasty chilli broth.

Do try their take on leeks vinaigrette which, unlike the classic, is served warm. The logs of leek have been





## Wines of the week

The best bottles to crack open for a barbecue.  
*By David Williams*

[@Daveydaibach](#)

**Kanonkop Kadette Pinotage Stellenbosch, South Africa 2019**  
*£12.99, Waitrose*

To judge from the smells wafting around my street over the past few hot weeks, a lot of people have been using their barbecues. It's much more pleasant to cook in the open air than endure the heat of a kitchen. There's something of the special occasion about cooking on a grill – an excuse for opening a bottle of something nicer than usual. While I don't believe in the marketing concept of the 'barbie bottle' – a wine uniquely suited to a barbecue no matter what proteins, salads, or sauces are being served – the smoky flavours of barbecued food do seem to work better with some wines than others. There's a subtle smoky twang among the brambly fruit in Kanonkop's superior pinotage that fits very snugly with burgers and bangers.

**Viña Mayu Titon Vineyard Syrah Gran Reserva Elqui, Chile 2017**  
*From £13.99, Majestic*



syrah – on their own, as a duo, or as part of a blend with others – are among the best at providing this. I've enjoyed Château La Négly La Clape 2020 (£12.99, Co-op), a juicy syrah-grenache-mourvèdre from the Languedoc shot through with salty olive and rosemary; and the good-value Rhône blend Aldi Specially Selected Cairanne 2020 (£8.99) with its tumble of black pepper-seasoned berries and plums. Viña Mayu's syrah from the high-altitude Elqui Valley in northern Chile, meanwhile, adds a hint of aniseed and liquorice to the dark fruit in a South American asado-ready alternative.

**Quinta da Pedra Alta Pedra Clarete Douro, Portugal 2020**  
*£11.50, The Wine Society*



Many barbecues this summer won't feature any red meat, while other wine choices will be shaped by the marinades. My preferred speedy method of briefly marinating a piece of white meat, some prawns or a few slabs of halloumi with lime juice and sweet chilli sauce works best with citrus-driven dry whites, such as the limey, zesty Western Australian, Tesco Finest Tingleup Riesling 2021 (£9). Aubergines halved, scored and smeared with miso and soy are all smoke, umami and silky flesh. This has a like-with-like affinity with oaky whites such as Cune Barrel-Fermented Rioja Blanco 2020 (from £9.99, Waitrose, Co-op, Sainsbury's, Majestic). But it also pairs well with lighter reds served with a bit of chill, such as the unusually brisk, breezy, raspberry-scented Clarete from Quinta da Pedra Alta.

smoked until soft. The dish is encouragingly drenched in a thick vinaigrette then topped with fried breadcrumbs. It's a hefty portion, as it should be for £22, to be shared and fought over with friends. The menu is strong on non-meat dishes like this, although it does have a list of cuts from one-time dairy cows; animals that have given their all to the milk business and finally given their all once again. If you don't approve of dairy or meat eating, none of this narrative will change your mind. But the idea of animals which have served in one way, being served in another makes sense.

The dish that has garnered most attention and which will split the crowd is the cod's head with sriracha butter sauce. It's as described: a cod's head, the bit of the fish that might otherwise be thrown away, eye intact, slow-grilled until the skin has taken on a sweet chewiness, then drenched in a tangerine-coloured sauce with the light kick of chilli and garlic. You are invited to pick around to find the meat – not just the familiar cheeks, but those bits around the jawline and the eye socket and beyond. I find myself feeling about my own well-upholstered face. There really might be some good eating there. There are two views here: this is either the very worst of overwrought London restaurant hipsterism, or there's the opinion of those who have tried it which is that it's a bloody good, delicious and totally involving idea.

Of the desserts the best of those we try is a tart deep-filled with a copper-coloured crème made with whey that has been slowly caramelised over almost three days. Essentially, it's a grown-up version of condensed milk. A chocolate mousse with various bits of mushroom and black truffle feels like the kitchen becoming a little too clever for its own good. I find myself muttering the word "interesting" over it. That's never a good thing.

My only other criticism is of the comprehensive wine list, which starts at £36 a bottle and has nothing below £9 a glass. It makes the entry point for an already less-than-cheap restaurant unnecessarily more expensive. It is possible to find good wines at less excruciating prices for those on a budget. This aside, Fallow really is serving some of the best food I've tried in London right now. The sustainability stuff is great. Let's put the mushroom show on, right here in the barn. Let's use the bits others chuck away. But none of that matters if your pricey dinner isn't memorable. At Fallow, it really is. ■

## Notes on chocolate

Nutty treats with added benefits.

*By Annalisa Barbieri*



I cannot resist chocolate-covered nuts. They are, to my mind, the most perfect of pairings and I absolutely kid myself that it's OK to eat tons (see also: peanut M&Ms) because it's nuts, and nuts are good for you.

So I was excited to try **Paz Nuts'** nut offerings. Paz makes mostly premium nut products – think honey-roasted cashews and almonds – but also a small range of chocolate-covered nuts. They come in lovely little glass jars with bamboo lids – another excellent reason to buy these choco-nuts ('It's not just chocolate and nuts, it's a useful jar!') My favourite were the honey-roasted pecans in dark chocolate, £8.50.

**Melt** has launched a Mix Slab Box, five different roughly cut chocolate slabs in a box (£19.99, 200g). I wasn't a fan of three of

the slabs but two of them were fantastic, namely the blonde white with caramelised almonds, which was first class, and the dark with hazelnuts. You can order just these if you visit the London shops, phone to make an order or specify it in the requests online (where you enter your address). The dark hazelnut slab is also available on its own (£16, 200g).

Melt's Summer Collection gift box (from £18 for 10) also produced a standout in the shape of the apricot caramel and rosemary. The other chocolates in the box are coconut (think posh, mini Bounty bars) and summer fruits pâté and they were OK but not my favourite. Again, you can request a whole box of just the apricot caramels, which were a really unusual and delicate flavour. Or visit a shop in person and buy just one for £1.70.



# Dive right in

Things to do, places to stay,  
pubs where you can enjoy a  
picturesque pint... Here's our  
roundup of the 50 best ways  
to make the most of the UK's  
spectacular waterways

*Photograph* DOUG MCKINLAY

Tales from the riverbank:  
enjoying the tranquil  
landscape of the Wye



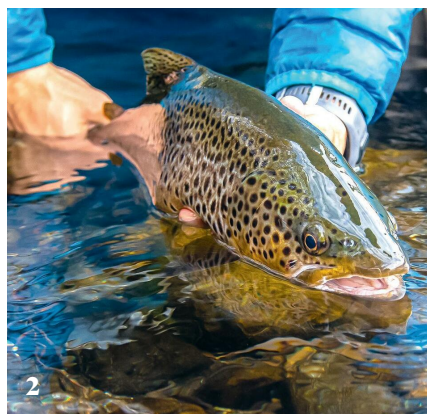
# Top 20 water adventures

From fishing to swimming, the best aquatic activities.

By Annabelle Thorpe

**1** **Cycling the Monmouth and Brecon Canal, South Wales**  
Meandering through 35 miles of glorious countryside, the towpath along one of Britain's most captivating canals is a delightful place for a cycle tour. Hire conventional or electric bikes in Abergavenny, and stop for lunch at the Star Inn, or take a picnic and soak up the views of Sugar Loaf. Stay at the Angel (doubles from £160; angelabergavenny.com) in Abergavenny, an elegant former coaching inn. [canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk)

**2** **Fly fishing on the River Test, Hampshire**  
The UK's premier fly-fishing river – and where the modern pastime was invented – the Test is home to brown



trout, Atlantic salmon and grayling, with fisheries dotted along the banks. Day tickets and tuition can be arranged, but the easiest way to enjoy the river is to stay at the 16th-century Greyhound (doubles from £175 B&B; thegreyhoundonthetest.co.uk), which offers fishing tuition and has a private stream at the bottom of the garden. [test-itchen.com](http://test-itchen.com)

**3** **Kayaking on the Beaulieu River, Hampshire**  
A tranquil waterway in the busy New Forest, the Beaulieu River is a National Nature Reserve, rich in flora and fauna. Independent kayakers tend to set off from Lepe Beach, but most visitors book a half-day kayaking experience that includes some tuition. Stay at the Montagu Arms in the picturesque village of Beaulieu (from £210 B&B, [montaguarmshotel.co.uk](http://montaguarmshotel.co.uk)), an upscale country house hotel with two restaurants and a top-notch spa. [newforestactivities.co.uk](http://newforestactivities.co.uk)



**4** **Riverside walk, Cuckmere Haven, East Sussex**  
Following the only Sussex river with no port where it joins the sea, the seven-mile walk along the winding Cuckmere is one of the most beautiful in the south-east. Start in pretty Alfriston, after which the route takes in lush meadows and Norman churches, before arriving at the chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters. Stay at the luxurious Star in Alfriston (from £290 B&B; [thepolizzicollection.com](http://thepolizzicollection.com)), which offers guided walks along the Cuckmere with Alex Polizzi. [nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)

**5** **Family paddleboarding on Carsington Water, Peak District**  
The whole family can paddle together on Carsington Water, which offers super-sized paddleboards for up to six people (two must be adults). Standard boards are also available to hire – junior and adult size – and Carsington's calm waters are ideal for every level, from novice to experienced. Stay in nearby Bonsall at the Fountain Tea Rooms (from £90 B&B, [thefountainbonsall.co.uk](http://thefountainbonsall.co.uk)), a renowned café with two chic bedrooms. [carsingtonwater.com](http://carsingtonwater.com)

**6** **Waterfall swimming, Ddwli Falls, Brecon Beacons, South Wales**  
An idyllic place for a dip, Ddwli Falls cascades into a glassy-clear pool – one of a string of 20 found along the surrounding Fechan and Mellte rivers. On a sunny day, the spray throws up rainbows, and there's shallow water to splash about in. Stay at the Rheolau Arms

in Abercrave (from £80; [therheolauarms.co.uk](http://therheolauarms.co.uk)), a cosy B&B with lovely views over the Tawe. [breconbeacons.org](http://breconbeacons.org)

**7** **Motorboating on Lake Windermere, Cumbria**  
There are few better places in England to set sail than on Windermere, encircled by the peaks and forests of the Cumbrian mountains. Five locations around the lake offer motorboat hire, with boats available for up to 10 people. Sailing dinghies are also available, with classes for beginners. Stay at Gilpin, a family-run hotel with nine luxurious spa suites alongside 28 elegant bedrooms (doubles from £296 B&B, [thegilpin.co.uk](http://thegilpin.co.uk)).

**8** **White-water rafting on the Snowdonia River, Wales**  
A breath-catching ride over cascading rapids, white-water rafting is a great choice for those looking



to get the adrenaline going. Taster sessions are available, with two-hour experiences offering the chance to have four runs down the bubbling rapids of the Upper Tryweryn. Stay at Plas Yn Dre (from £120 B&B; [plasyndre.co.uk](http://plasyndre.co.uk)), a buzzy hotel and restaurant. [nationalwhitewatercentre.co.uk](http://nationalwhitewatercentre.co.uk)

**9** **Canyoning in the Falls of Bruar, Pitlochry, Perthshire**  
Canyoning isn't for everyone – a white-knuckle mix of cliff jumping, wild swimming and natural water slides – but it's ideal for teenage kids and active families. Lower Bruar Falls combines dramatic waterfalls and rock features with pine forests, and the path along the side of the canyon offers photo opportunities for those who prefer dry land. Stay at the Knockendarroch Hotel, a charming 18-room country house (doubles from £270 B&B; [knockendarroch.co.uk](http://knockendarroch.co.uk)). [naelimits.co.uk](http://naelimits.co.uk)

**10** **Aquapark at Alderford Lake, Shropshire**  
Inflatable playgrounds are a fantastic family activity and promise to keep you cool – falling



in is pretty much inevitable. Wetsuits are available, along with buoyancy aids, meaning everyone can scramble over the obstacles in safety, and each child under 12 must be accompanied by an adult (no under fives). Stay at the Bear Inn in nearby Hodnet, a classy gastropub with rooms (doubles from £120 B&B; [thebearinnhodnet.com](http://thebearinnhodnet.com)). [alderford.com](http://alderford.com)

**11** **Punting on the Cam, Cambridge**  
There's no better way to take in the grandiose architecture of Cambridge's university colleges than gliding along the Cam. Tours – in a private or shared boat – are 45 minutes long, while self-punting boats can be hired for 90 minutes or three hours. Stay at the Graduate (doubles from £215; [graduatehotels.com](http://graduatehotels.com)). If the city stretch of river feels busy, head to leafy Grantchester, and have post-punt tea at the Orchard Tea Garden ([theorchardteagarden.co.uk](http://theorchardteagarden.co.uk)). [scudamores.co.uk](http://scudamores.co.uk) ➤





12

**12** **Running around Rutland Water, Rutland**  
Flat, mostly tarmac-surfaced and with tranquil lakeside views, Rutland Water is a runner's dream. A full lap is 17 miles – 23 if you take in the peninsula – but there are plenty of places to stop and enjoy the views, or sit in a café to refuel before walking back. Stay at the Finch's Arms, a 17th-century inn on the Hambleton peninsula, with simple but cosy rooms (doubles from £100 B&B; finchsarms.co.uk). [discover-rutland.co.uk](http://discover-rutland.co.uk)

**13** **Wildlife spotting on the River Wye, Herefordshire**  
This stretch of the Wye offers excellent wildlife-spotting potential, with fallow deer, peregrine falcons and barn owls often seen or heard. Badgers, stoats and weasels stalk the lush woodland, along with butterflies, bats and hornets, and the steep-sided river gorge is one of England's most spectacular landscapes. Stay at the Saracens Head (doubles from £125 B&B; saracensheadinn.co.uk), a riverfront pub with walks from the door.

**14** **Wild swimming in the River Wharfe, Yorkshire**  
With its large shingle beach, deep pools and an island in the middle of the river, the Appletreewick stretch of the River Wharfe could have been designed for wild swims. There are rocks underneath, so diving isn't a good idea, but the water is crystal clear and there are two pubs within walking distance. Stay in one of the three ensuite Shepherds Huts at the Craven Arms pub (two-nights from £180; craven-cruckbarn.co.uk).

**15** **Birdwatching on the River Nene, Northamptonshire**  
Home to one of the largest reedbeds in England, the Nene Valley is heaven for twitchers, who can enjoy golden plovers, lapwings, long-eared owls and stonechats, alongside dozens of other species. The Nene wetlands annually welcome more than 20,000 waterbirds, which come to breed, or pause on their migration. Stay at Kettering

Park, a modern comfortable hotel with an excellent spa (doubles from £161 B&B, [ketteringparkhotel.co.uk](http://ketteringparkhotel.co.uk)). [nenevalley.net](http://nenevalley.net)

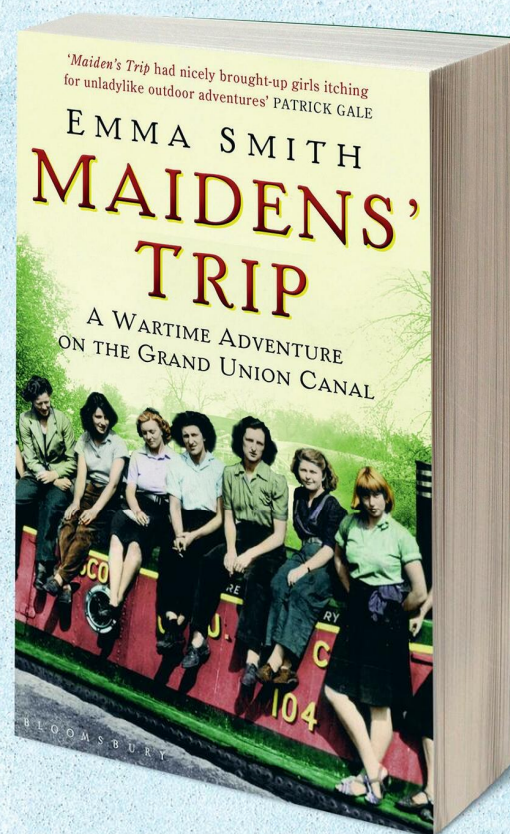
**16** **Learn to paddleboard, Bowl Water, Kent**  
The calm waters of Bowl are an ideal place for a first go at stand-up paddleboarding, with tuition available for adults (two hours) and families (90 minutes, no under-sixes). The surrounding woodland makes it a tranquil place to paddle, with boards available to hire for those already proficient. Stay at The Bell, an old coaching inn (doubles from £110 B&B, [thebellinticehurst.com](http://thebellinticehurst.com)). [turtlebayatbowlwater.com](http://turtlebayatbowlwater.com)

**17** **Windsurfing on Loch Ken, Galloway**  
One of the best spots to windsurf in Scotland, Loch Ken catches the region's famed south-westerlies, with a training bay to ensure beginners can learn in a controlled environment. Taster sessions and Royal Yachting Association (RYA) courses are on offer, along with a wide range of equipment to hire. Stay at Airds Farm, a traditional Galloway farmhouse with cosy rooms and hearty breakfasts (doubles from £85 B&B, [airds.com](http://airds.com)). [lochken.co.uk](http://lochken.co.uk)

**18** **Dip in Annalong River rock pools, County Down**  
Leave the car at Carrick Little car park and hike along the Annalong River to reach a series of pools and small waterfalls. The isolated location means you'll often have them to yourself, and the water is wonderfully refreshing, with spectacular views of the Mourne Mountains while you bathe. Choose from a luxury log cabin, shepherd's hut or cosy yurt at Willowtree Glamping in Annalong (two-night breaks from £280; [willow3.co.uk](http://willow3.co.uk)).

**19** **Learn to sail at Roadford Lake, Devon**  
Learn the basics of sailing in an RYA class, with Level 1 and 2 classes available for juniors and adults, while experienced sailors can launch their own dinghies for a small fee, and buoyancy aids are available. A half-hour walk from the activity centre, the Roadford Café offers restorative cakes and light lunches. Stay at Lewtrenchard Manor (from £162 B&B; [lewtrenchard.co.uk](http://lewtrenchard.co.uk)), an elegant Jacobean manor house converted into a welcoming, family-run hotel. [swlakestrust.org.uk](http://swlakestrust.org.uk)

**20** **Pony trekking on Loch Lomond**  
A morning on horseback offers the chance to explore the rugged moorland that rises up around the loch, offering glorious views across the water. Treks last for an hour, and proceed at a leisurely pace (no children under 12). Stay nearby at Sheildaig Farm (doubles from £110 B&B, [sheildaigfarm.co.uk](http://sheildaigfarm.co.uk)), which has three comfortable bedrooms. [lomond-ponytreks.co.uk](http://lomond-ponytreks.co.uk)



## Literary lives on the water

Immerse yourself in these four classic tales of the life aquatic

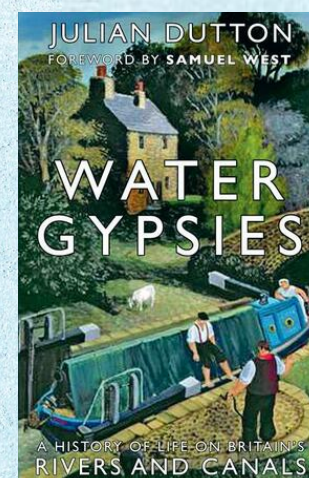
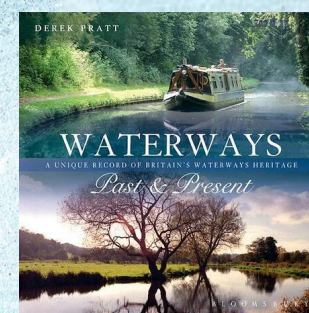
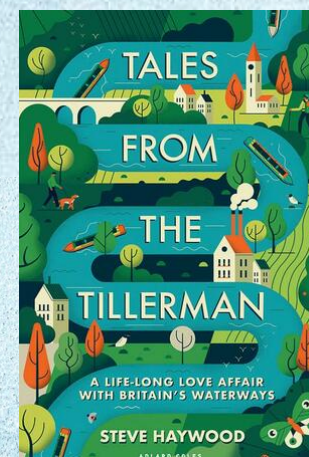
**Maidens' Trip**  
*A Wartime Adventure on the Grand Union Canal*  
When three 18-year-old "maidens", including author Emma Smith, sign up for canal boating in 1943, they transport steel to Birmingham, coal from Coventry, lose their bicycles and find a cat – and themselves. (Bloomsbury, £10.99)

**Tales from the Tillerman**  
*A Life-long Love Affair with Britain's Waterways*  
Seasoned water rat Steve Haywood combines a history of Britain's canals with 50 years of anecdotes and rants about his escapades and changes in the cruising landscape he has encountered on the way. (Adlard Coles, £12.99)

**Waterways Past & Present**  
*A thousand miles along Britain's canals*  
Slow adventurer Jasper Winn spent a year exploring Britain's waterways on foot and by bike and boats. Weaving in history, feats of engineering and wildlife, he finds a sense of community in our "wet roads and water streets". (Bloomsbury, £11.99)

**Water Gypsies**  
*A History of Life on Britain's Rivers and Canals*  
Born and raised on a boho houseboat in Chelsea, Julian Dutton has written a social history of houseboat. Ranging from ancient to modern-day Britain, it examines how economic necessity gave way to tourists on pleasure cruisers and families such as his own seeking an alternative lifestyle. (History Press, £14.99)

All available from [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com)



ALAMY



# The 20 best waterside pubs & inns

Tipples with ripples.  
By Sarah Turner

## 1. The Cornmill, Denbighshire

In Llangollen, on the River Dee, watch the rafters from this pub perched over the rapids. Enjoy a glass of wine as the mill's water wheel turns behind the bar, and the steam trains puff away on the opposite bank. [brunningandprice.co.uk/cornmill](http://brunningandprice.co.uk/cornmill)



## 2. Swan Inn, Oxfordshire

The perfect-picture book Cotswold pub with bantams under the apple trees and sturdy tables on the banks of the Windrush river. Book for Sunday lunch with all the meat sourced locally, and stay in a cottage or a converted stable block. *Doubles from £140 B&B;* [theswanswinbrook.co.uk](http://theswanswinbrook.co.uk)

## 3. Sculthorpe Mill, Norfolk

This riverside pub just 20 minutes inland from the Norfolk coast has won awards for its food – try the buttermilk chicken and waffles made with Norfolk Dapple cheese – while summer Saturdays bring DJs and an outdoor kitchen. *Doubles from £150 B&B;* [sculthorpemill.uk](http://sculthorpemill.uk)

## 4. The Waterman's Arms, Devon

On a reed-fringed bank of the Harbourne near Totnes, this 17th-century pub has rooms and a rambling garden, and the river is usually low enough to paddle in. A pizza shack is currently in place alongside the restaurant's classic grub. *Rooms from £115;* [thewatermansarms.net](http://thewatermansarms.net)

## 5. Swan at Streatley, Berkshire

This pub and hotel in the Chilterns has a sprawling terrace that reaches to the river's edge so you can enjoy a lunchtime rosé with views across a stretch of the Thames. There is also a private island nearby, accessible by electric boat. *Doubles from £70;* [coppaclub.co.uk/at-the-swan](http://coppaclub.co.uk/at-the-swan)

## 6. Butt & Oyster, Suffolk

Deservedly one of the best-known pubs on the east coast, the Butt & Oyster is just 10 minutes from Ipswich. Enjoy a

pint of Adnams outside with gorgeous views across the River Orwell and endless Suffolk sky. [debeninns.co.uk/buttandoyster](http://debeninns.co.uk/buttandoyster)

## 7. The Pandora Inn, Cornwall

A thatched 13th-century inn on the edge of Restronguet Creek, this pub serves St Austell beer, and the ciders are Cornish too. Food includes fish pie with a Pernod sauce. The best way to arrive is by boat: there are both water taxis and moorings. [pandorainn.com](http://pandorainn.com)

## 8. The Blue Lias, Warwickshire

A pretty 18th-century pub festooned with flower baskets and tables, where the only passing traffic will be walkers and narrowboats on the Grand Union Canal – and the grub is pretty good, too. Walk it off afterwards with a tranquil stroll through the Warwickshire countryside. [thebluelias.co.uk](http://thebluelias.co.uk)



## 9. Tamesis Dock, London

Moored between Lambeth and Vauxhall bridges, this converted barge is the perfect floating pub. At high tide, you'll bob about on the Thames, while at low tide you drink at a slight angle but it's worth it for the views of the Houses of Parliament and Battersea Power Station. [tdock.co.uk](http://tdock.co.uk)

## 10. Kingfisher on the Quay, Surrey

Perfect for a summer afternoon, the Kingfisher spills out on to a spring-fed lake. If you want to get active there's swimming and water-skiing sessions, otherwise relax with an Aperol spritz and some tapas-style dishes. [destinationinns.co.uk/pubs/kingfisheronthequay](http://destinationinns.co.uk/pubs/kingfisheronthequay)

## 11. Anchor Inn and Boating, Sussex

A delightful countryside pub on the bank of the River Ouse, not far from Lewes. Along with lovely food, the pub has a fleet of rowing boats for customers to gently navigate the river as far as Fish Ladder Falls, before heading back for a pint or a Pimm's. [anchorinnandboating.co.uk](http://anchorinnandboating.co.uk)

## 12. Ye Olde Ferrie Inn, Herefordshire

On this staggeringly beautiful bend of the Wye, there's been a hostelry since 1473 but the latest incarnation has seriously good food including salmon from its own river and Forest of Dean boar. *Doubles from £110 B&B;* [yeoldferrieinn.com](http://yeoldferrieinn.com)

## 13. The Cross Guns, Wiltshire

A honey-stone exterior gives way to beautiful gardens with views of the River Avon, fringed with willows. There is an impressive range of local ales, cider and guest beers. [crossgunsavoncliff.com](http://crossgunsavoncliff.com)

## 14. Riverside, Sheffield

An urban gem on Kelham Island, just outside the city centre, with a wide terrace overlooking the River Don. There's always a good selection of Yorkshire beers as well as Sheffield-made gin, while food has a strong vegan showing, including fried banana blossom and chips. [riversidesheffield.co.uk](http://riversidesheffield.co.uk)

## 15. Green Dragon Inn, Yorkshire

An ivy-clad Wensleydale gem, this inn backs on to Hardraw Force – a stunning waterfall with a 100ft drop. Don't leave without trying their much-loved steak pie, best paired with a pint of Theakston Old Peculiar. *Doubles from £80 B&B;* [greendragonhardraw.com](http://greendragonhardraw.com)

## 16. Falls of Dochart Inn, Perthshire

Enjoy a picturesque pint at this whitewashed hotel that overlooks the tumbling white-water rapids. There's a focus on artisan food, and they also produce smoked salmon. *Doubles from £120 B&B;* [fallsofdochartinn.co.uk](http://fallsofdochartinn.co.uk)

## 17. The Taybank, Perthshire

A spectacular setting with bedrooms and an acclaimed restaurant, The Taybank also hosts an open-air cinema in its garden, and there's music inside. *Doubles from £170 B&B;* [thetaybank.co.uk](http://thetaybank.co.uk)

## 18. Boathouse, Antrim

Enjoy mussels and cod with chips at this lakeside pub with views over Lough Neagh, a large freshwater lake. Afterwards, stroll along the shoreline – ideally you'll time your walk for one of the glowing sunsets. [boathouseantrim.co.uk](http://boathouseantrim.co.uk)



## 19. Mayfly, Hampshire

Sit under a parasol outside this gabled Victorian redbrick pub with views out to a small weir. Lunch on local trout then explore Chilbolton Cow Common, the Black Chalk winery and the village of Wherwell. [mayflyfullerton.co.uk](http://mayflyfullerton.co.uk)

## 20. Boat Inn, Monmouthshire

The magical terraced gardens of the Boat Inn are reached by an old railway bridge. Spend an afternoon watching the waterfall tumbling down from the rocks above. There's a lovely retro menu and all tables have views on to the idyllic River Wye. *Accommodation to sleep four from £100 per night, minimum stays apply;* [theboatpenallt.co.uk](http://theboatpenallt.co.uk)



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## The 10 best floating hotels

Spend a soothing night on the water in an old ferry or houseboat. By Sarah Turner

**1 The Floathouse Amelie, Cornwall**  
This three-cabin houseboat on the Penryn River near Falmouth aims to be a supremely relaxing perch for its guests. The top deck is ideal for morning yoga while indoors there's a pitched roof, sofas and floor-to-ceiling windows with panoramic views of the river. Falmouth is a 30-minute walk away or you can get out on the water with paddleboarding, surfing and sailing on your doorstep. *From £145 a night (four-night min); canopyandstars.com*

**2 The Liverpool Boat**  
On Liverpool's historic waterfront, this wide-beam canal boat is sleek and stylish in duck-egg blue. There are two bedrooms – one kingsized, the other with bunks, an open-plan kitchen and two outdoor areas. If you can tear yourself away for some culture, Tate Liverpool is a 15-minute walk away or you can enjoy access to the restaurant and bar at the Liverpool Yacht Club and Marina, where the boat is moored. *Two nights from £498; liverpoolboat.com*

**3 Sunborn, London**  
Built in Finland, this sleek yacht, berthed in the Royal Victoria Dock, offers rooms and suites that are surprisingly spacious and good value. The Sundowner bar is full-on glamour with polished brass, outdoor decking and a wide range of cocktails, while the onboard Lands End restaurant looks out towards Canary Wharf with city views and a pan-European menu. *Doubles from £128; sunbornhotels.com/london*

**4 Secret Water, Suffolk**  
Situating in a working boatyard on the River Waveney near Beccles, Secret Water is a wooden glamping pod with a curved roof and two bedrooms (one double, the other bunks), reached by a floating walkway. The boatyard has a café (guests can get breakfast delivered), and you can fish from the deck – which is ideally positioned for glorious sunsets and sunrises. Secret Water is about to be joined by another pod, Wild Cat Island, and there are also three traditional houseboats available to hire. *From £360 for two nights; hippersons.co.uk/secretwater*

**5 Floatel Cabins, Pembrokeshire**  
On the waterfront at Milford Haven, these four light-filled cabins bob gently in the water. Berthed alongside the mothership, the Ty hotel, they're dog-friendly (as long as your pets don't want to launch themselves at passing ducks and swans) and guests have access to the restaurant and other facilities of the hotel. *Doubles from £80 (two night min); ty-hotels.com*

**6 Harbour Boathouse, Isle of Wight**  
This houseboat has views across the Solent and used to ferry passengers and goods between ships and the shore. Now it's moored for a supremely comfortable stay with four bedrooms, two bathrooms and plenty of space. The table seats eight and there's a telescope and outdoor area, plus a great crab shack nearby. *From £184 a night (4-night min); theharbourhouseboat.co.uk*



**7 Sea Breeze and Samphire, West Sussex**  
On Prinsted Bay near Chichester, in a small marina, these two floating arks-for-two are a perfect watery hideaway. There's a double bed, kitchenette and shower room, as well as a balcony and outdoor seating for watching the wildlife and views across the mudflats. There are also pretty walks around Thorney Island and Emsworth. Breakfast is delivered to the pontoons each morning. *Doubles from £157 B&B; thornhammarina.com/stay-at-thornham*

**8 Blackbird Boathouse, Devon**  
On a private lake in north Devon, this converted narrowboat is the perfect stowaway for two. A moody black exterior gives way to a light, bright, open-plan interior with a double bed, kitchen and wood-burning stove. There's a separate bath house on shore. You can fish on the lake – it's full of rainbow trout – and walk in the woodland close by. *Four nights from £500; tregullandandco.co.uk/blackbird*

**9 Good Hotel, London**  
This hotel started life as a floating platform in Amsterdam and ended up moored in east London. The rooftop bar serves local beers and there's a touch of midcentury modern about the furnishings. It lives up to its name: all profits go to running a school in Guatemala. *Rooms from £131; goodhotel.co/london*

**10 Fingal, Edinburgh**  
Built in the 1960s in Glasgow to ferry supplies to lighthouse keepers in Scotland, this boat has been transformed into an opulent floating hotel permanently berthed in Leith, on Edinburgh's vibrant waterfront. It has been luxured up, with oversized beds and roll-top baths, rounded off with a spa. The Lighthouse restaurant offers posh afternoon teas, and even smokes its own salmon. *Doubles from £300 B&B; fingal.co.uk*



## Where the wild things are

Some of nature's most intriguing creatures share our waters. Here are five...

### Bats: seasonal sightings

There are 18 bat species living in the UK (Natterer's bat, above). In summer they come out of hibernation, hunt insects, give birth and raise their young. They can be found all over the country – particularly in warm weather and near water with insects to prey on.

### Water voles: an endangered species

Distinguished from the rat by its blunt nose, small ears and furry tail, the water vole (below) is an endangered species. It lives around rivers, streams, ponds and lakes – and in marshes and moorland. Look out for riverbank burrows with a nibbled "lawn" of grass around the entrance – a sure sign that there are water voles around.



### Otters: waterway predators

An elusive waterway predator, the British otter is widespread but rare. Head to the rivers and wetlands of Scotland, west Wales, the West Country or East Anglia for the best chance of sighting one. Keep an eye out for five-toed footprints (6-7cm long) and droppings in prominent places left as messages on the ground.

### Beavers: back from extinction

Following a 400-year absence after being hunted to extinction, Britain's largest rodent has been reintroduced. The size of a tubby spaniel, the beaver lives in freshwater habitats and builds dams. It is most visible at dusk and dawn.

### Rats: urban warriors

Strong swimmers, rats can often be spotted around waterways, particularly in urban areas where there's an easy supply of food. They're unpopular creatures, but surely you'd rather see one of the UK's estimated 150m wild rats swimming in a canal than in your bathtub...

For more information, visit the Wildlife Trust ([wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer](http://wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer))



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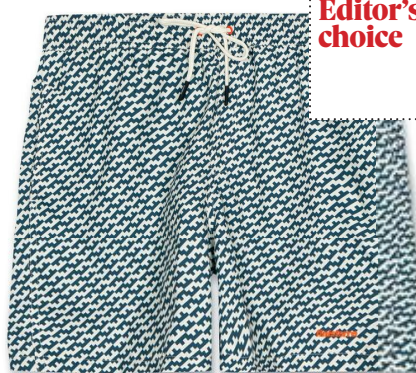
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**Rip stop** £59,  
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**Bandana print** £110, MC2 Saint Barth  
(brownsfashion.com)



**Polka urchin** £100,  
rizboardshorts.com

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Edited by HELEN SEAMONS



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# Beauty Funmi Fetto



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## 10 of the best Summer candles

While candles are not “beauty” products per se, they are wonderful mood boosters – and when you are happy you look better. Fact. These pots of scented wax also hold the power to conjure up memories of far-flung places. So if you’re not going on holiday this year – or simply working from home – a candle can make your surroundings lovelier. Which, again, makes you happy. So how to choose? Fragrance is subjective, but those reminiscent of garden ingredients work well in summer. Good candles are pricey (as my husband once said, it’s like burning money). But you get what you pay for. Pricier candles are formulated with high-quality wax and real perfume oils. Very cheap candles tend to include a lot of chemicals, which is why they can be headache/nausea-inducing. For affordable luxe, try Beauty Pie. Mini candles from brands such as Trudon are also a smart buy. And if you do decide to splurge don’t burn your candle for more than a few hours at a time. Otherwise you’ll get to the end of the wick very quickly. Which would really be like burning money. ■

1. Aromatherapy Associates Forest Therapy Candle £48, aromatherapyassociates.com  
2. Loewe Cucumber Candle £78, loewe.com  
3. Boy Smells Italian Kush Candle £42, selfridges.com  
4. Bamford Explorer Geranium Candle £100, bamford.com  
5. Trudon Candle in Josephine £36, trudon.co.uk

6. Jo Malone x Jean Francois Piege Violet Leaf and Bergamot Candle £65, jomalone.co.uk  
7. Carrière Frères Water Lily Candle £49, carrierrefreres.co.uk  
8. Diptyque Citronella Candle £51, diptyqueparis.com  
9. Granado Pharmacias Bossa Scented Candle £39, libertylondon.com  
10. Beauty Pie Praia do Paraíso Candle from £25, beautypie.com



# Self & wellbeing

Illustration EVA BEE

## Altruism is supposed to be a selfless act. So why did helping a hitchhiker leave me feeling so foolish?

Words MARTIN LOVE

What's the most money you've ever given a complete stranger? £20, £30, £50... maybe more? I've always been free and easy when it comes to handing out small change on the street, but a couple of months ago I found myself in a different league altogether. I gave a man I had never met before £200. I drove to a cashpoint at 10pm, got out 10 shiny new £20 notes and handed them over without any real idea if I'd ever see the man or the money again.

Since then, this "good deed" has been polished up into a hilarious family anecdote in which "gullible old Martin" is taken advantage of once again by a smooth-talking huckster. My radar for a far-fetched sob story or bargain often lets me down. Let's not dwell on the endless time-share opportunities, rug purchases, sick puppies, random muggings, punctures, pregnancies, rare antiques and fake tickets that I've refused to let pass me by.

It's not just that they see me coming, it's more as if I have a neon sign hovering above me that flashes at passing hustlers so that they zero in on me like cash-seeking missiles – and I cough up every single time... Anyway, let me tell you about Brendan.

**I had stopped at the** Swindon services while on my way back to London. As I drove up the slip road back on to the M4, I spotted a man with a rucksack and his thumb out. I pulled over and lowered the window.

"Which way are you heading?" I asked. "I'm going back to London."

"Ah, that would be grand," came his immediate reply. He hefted his backpack on to the back seat. "I'm Brendan," he said with an easy smile and a rich Irish brogue. "I was getting a bit desperate. I've had my thumb out for a day and half. Nobody seems to stop these days."

I've always enjoyed picking up hitchhikers. I used to be a motoring journalist and crisscrossed the country in various test cars. Picking up a hiker always made me feel a little less guilty about all the miles I was doing.

As we headed east along the motorway, Brendan told me how he came to be waiting for a lift on that particular evening, and also about the two family tragedies that had pushed him out of his old life and on to the road. "But," he said, "I don't feel sorry for myself. I was lucky. I know what it feels like to be truly loved."

Brendan told me he was 52. He had a calm and wise way about him. He laughed a lot and relished his off-grid lifestyle. Until last week, that is, when he'd been mugged.

"These three lads in Birmingham took my other pack with all my money in it. I've been sleeping out since then. I haven't eaten in days. I'm hoping for some casual work in London, so I can get myself home to Ireland."

It must have been the notion of home that got me – helping a man who'd had a tough time seemed the right thing to do. As we were approaching Heathrow, I had an



idea. "Why don't I drop you at the airport now?" I said. "I'll buy you a ticket and you can then fly home."

"That's so kind of you," came his smooth reply, "but they took my ID as well."

"Ah! And how much will a new one be?"

"It's £92," he said without hesitation.

I drove towards Victoria station. It's a 24-hour place and Brendan thought he'd be safe there while waiting for the Irish embassy to open in the morning. I stopped at a cashpoint. I'd already offered to buy him a plane ticket and now he needed his ID as well. To my astonishment I heard myself say: "Well, I'll get you £200, Brendan."

**'I haven't eaten in days,' said Brendan. 'I'm trying to get home'**

"Grand," he replied, without a blink. Then, after a pause... "and don't worry. I'll definitely wire you the money when I get home." He took my number and said he'd call as soon as he could to arrange the transfer. In that moment, I honestly believed he would. But not a single person I have told since

has agreed. Everyone has said with a knowing laugh: "Well, you'll never see that money again!"

When Brendan got out of the car he gave me a huge hug. It had been a good night for him. As I drove the final miles to my own house in south London, I thought about what I'd done and what I'd tell my wife. A small part of me started to feel the cool wind of queasy realisation. Had I just been conned, again? Was Brendan genuine? I would definitely tell her about picking him up, but maybe I'd omit the part about the money – after all, it is hers, too. But she knows what I'm like, she'd guess soon enough, so I took a deep breath and told her the whole tale. She knew the punchline was coming... even so, £200 made her gasp. After marvelling at my credulousness, she laughed and said: "Well, I hope Brendan gets home."

**That was eight weeks ago** and you won't be surprised to hear I've heard nothing. My soaring sense of altruism has been replaced with the nagging feeling that after Brendan was mugged in Birmingham, he then mugged me in Victoria. It's often said that altruism benefits both the giver and the receiver, and there's plenty of scientific evidence proving that acts of altruism are good for your emotional wellbeing and can measurably enhance your



peace of mind. Having said that, evolutionary biologists have a hard time explaining it. An exhaustive paper published in 2020 by the Department of Philosophy at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, concluded: “The evolution of altruistic co-operative behaviour – in which an organism’s action reduces its fitness and increases the fitness of another organism – only makes sense when it is directed at genetically related organisms (kin selection) or when one can expect the favour to be returned (reciprocal altruism).”

Does this mean I have somehow reduced my “fitness” and increased Brendan’s? I certainly reduced the fitness of my bank account and I can’t say that my action as an “organism” has burnished my emotional wellbeing or given me peace of mind. I can’t pretend it’s boosted anything but my sense of being a hoodwinked shmuck.

It sounds deluded, but for at least a week after I gave the money to Brendan, I kept thinking he would get in touch – and pay me back. I could then be the good guy who’d helped someone, but at no cost to myself. I also think – and, again, maybe this sounds deluded – Brendan believed, in the moment, that he was going to try to repay me. But these are financially fraught times,

the cost of living is spiralling and many people find themselves living in ways they never imagined.

Equally, these are highly altruistic times. People are helping each other in so many different ways, from donating to food banks to giving refugees a place to live. Brendan may well have hoped he would pay me back and then found he couldn’t. If that’s the case, I can rest on my altruistic laurels – it’s the part about being such a credulous doofus I can’t stand.

After a few weeks, I spoke to a friend, Trevor, who happens to be a psychoanalyst. He pointed me in the direction of Dr Sanxing Sun of the University of Chicago. Dr Sun has found that for some people, altruism can unwittingly become pathological. He argues that people “mistake their underlying self-serving motivation for true altruistic intention. As a result, they are less likely to restrain themselves from being carried away by their self-serving generosity.” So it turns out – and thank you Trevor for spelling this out to me – I was “simply feeding my own overweening sense of self-worth”.

**Another month** has now passed and, of course, there is still no word from Brendan. I’ve picked up another hitchhiker since then – a Dutch photographer coming back from Stansted who I dropped outside his hotel. He then offered to contribute to the cost of the petrol.

I now feel happier thinking about Brendan. If I were more cynical, I would not have stopped in the first place... but I did. He asked for help, for a lift, for money to get home, and in good faith I gave them to him. That’s got to be a good thing. If he conned me, then that’s a matter for him and not me.

And anyway, isn’t that the whole point of altruism? The word derives from the French *autrui*, meaning “other people”; *Psychology Today* defines it as “acting to help someone else at some cost to oneself”. It wasn’t a loan; I gave the money to Brendan. That evening, he needed it more than I did. The cost to me was £200. Maybe the real question should be: did I give him enough? ■ *Some identifying features have been changed*

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£145,  
johnlewis.com

## Séamas O'Reilly

### Welcome to the era of tantrums, when nothing can distract a small boy from his rage

🐦 @shockproofbeats



I suppose as metaphors for tantrums go, an exploding car isn't a bad one. I became aware of the short, sharp bang emanating from a hatchback in the middle of the road while standing outside Blackhorse Road station. I say standing, but I was really hunkered on my ankles attempting to commiserate with my son as he screamed in my face.

He'd been crying for 40 minutes. It began as we were leaving the park. His friend Eusebio (whose name has been changed, in the manner of a much more serious article, to emphasise how stressful this was) was showing off his shiny new toy car, one we knew very well since we have the exact same one at home. It's a small blue sports car that kind of turns into a Triceratops. You might even say it transforms, had its manufacturers not gone to great lengths to avoid any such language.

My son became convinced that this was not merely the same make of car as his own, but the

very vehicle, which Eusebio had stolen, and presumably cleaned considerably. My attempts to dissuade him of this fell short, and soon he was crying and I was escorting him from the park while apologising to Eusebio and his mother for the screamed accusations of minor theft auto.

His crying lasted all the way to Seven Sisters tube and for the entirety of our two-stop jaunt. In transit, I felt that cold gaze you only get when every person in a carriage is trying their best to look anywhere but in the direction of a screaming child and his sweaty dad.

Any attempt at being myself goes out the window. Having 80 fellow passengers watching me through the bottom 2% of their eyes makes me stiff and performative. I say things like, 'It's OK,' and 'Calm down, darling,' not for my son's benefit, but so that our audience will write me a favourable report in the parenting survey I presume they're all drafting in their heads. As the doors close behind

me at Blackhorse Road, I trundle my portable noise machine down the platform, feeling a dart of envy for the newly quiet carriage and the visibly relieved inhabitants.

On the pavement, a small crowd is taking no notice of my son, since they've noticed smoke billowing from the bonnet of a car. I am oblivious to that vehicle and focused on another. My wife is video-calling from my son's bedroom, holding his triceratops-mobile up, so he can see he's been crying in error.

The man on the road has run out of his car, which is now fully on fire. My son doesn't even look as fire engines rush toward the scene. 'You bought that in a shop!' he says to his deceitful mother, 'It's not the same car.' The car gives off a large bang, which finally catches his attention. It's as blue as a Triceratops, and wreathed in eager flames. He'll resume crying soon enough, but for a few glorious minutes he is silent, entranced perhaps by something more combustible than he is.



# Ask Philippa

## As third-generation immigrants, we feel a lack of identity



Twitter @Philippa\_Perry



### Sunday with...

Hangovers and a chat with writer Irvine Welsh

**Sundays growing up?** My Sundays in Britain were horrible, spent hungover and fearful, even though I didn't have to go to an office or a factory in the morning. I never did anything on a Sunday until I moved to America, because everything's open. So I quite like Sundays now.

**Sunday walk?** It depends where I am. In Miami, I'll walk across the Causeway from Miami Beach. In Edinburgh, I'll go down the disused railway lines to Portobello Beach. In Oxfordshire, I'll walk the Thames towpath up into the Chilterns. I might walk from north London to south London to see friends.

**Sunday lunch?** It's not part of the culture in Scotland, but when I'm in England I like to go for a nice roast. If you've had a rowdy weekend at the football or a nightclub, or a quiet weekend at the pictures, it's just great to get a good bunch of people together to chat on Sunday.

**Sunday afternoon?** If it's cold and bleak, it's the

perfect time to stay in and watch a movie. I learned the hard way that if you just sit around waiting for Monday morning to come, you're going to feel blue. So try to get out and do something cultural, like go to a museum, a gallery or the cinema.

**Do you exercise?** Sunday is probably the one day I don't exercise. Every other day I'm in the gym, boxing club or cycling. On a Sunday, I let myself recover.

**Any housework?** I might be inclined to do a bit of tidying up, but I tend to tidy up as I go along. I have that Scottish Presbyterian mentality.

**Do you work?** I'm working on the second series of *Crime*, on two books, a musical, and I've just started my own record label. I'm always busy.

**Last thing before bed?** I try to read. I find the more you enjoy the book, the easier it is to fall asleep. If you're not enjoying it, it keeps you awake! **Rich Pelley**

*Irvine Welsh is DJing at Mucky Weekender Music Festival on 10 September, mucky-weekender.co.uk*



**The question** I am writing on behalf of myself and my sister. We are third-generation immigrants, both our grandparents being Italian and settling in London. We have been raised in a British-Italian household sharing values from both, but never feeling as if we fit into either identity.

Being removed by two generations from our grandparents, and not speaking Italian, makes us feel as if we are not Italian, and that we are removed from this community. On the other hand, we don't feel English, resulting in a lack of national and cultural identity. Thus, we feel a loneliness which is only furthered by us being removed from other family members who perhaps experience the same problem.

Although we have tried reaching out to Italian communities, often the language barrier makes us feel even more isolated and there seems to be a lack of conversation surrounding the experience of being third-generation immigrants, making us doubt that we can even make it part of our Italian identity. It feels as if the only thing that gives validity to this identity is our mother, who refuses to engage with this subject, and therefore this feeling is one that is external, and will unfortunately end with her. So I guess our question is, what can we do to end this feeling of isolation and lack of identity?

**Philippa's answer** The physical feeling of being a "foreign" body in both lands, and carrying culture norms and mores from both, is difficult to navigate, so it is not surprising you have some feelings of disconnection.

It struck me that your mother won't engage with you and your sister on this subject. Her parents may have been in the Second World War, they may have lost property, people and livelihoods, so I imagine there is pain and trauma back there and I'm wondering whether this has been passed down to you and your sister via your mother. It may be that to talk about Italy, as an Italian, to talk to you in Italian, to share with you what it feels like to her to be Italian while having to be in Britain is too painful to think about. There is some mystery there and maybe your mother can't explain it but only feel it.

It could be that she has passed down this feeling of

not belonging to you and it may seem to her that the best way of curing it is to deny it, meaning you and your sister are pushed away when you try to go there. My fantasy is that she wants you to be British women so that you don't get this feeling of being in two cultures while not belonging to either of them. But if this was her plan, it has not worked. I'm only guessing but I feel there is a sense of disconnect in your mother around identity and belonging, and this has unintentionally been passed to you. I'm sorry she did not speak Italian to you when you were babies, or that your grandparents didn't; it would have helped, I think, to have the two languages.

When I have worked with second-generation immigrants, they say they feel, like you, neither one thing nor the other. In this country, they are seen as being from the country their parents came from, but when they go back to the land of their parents they are called British, without feeling that they are either. Transgenerational or intergenerational trauma is when the experiences of parents affect the development of children and even grandchildren. Researchers don't completely understand this type of trauma but have noted it changes not only

### Trauma felt by parents can affect children and even grandchildren

the way parents are with their children, but how certain genes are expressed in future generations. This may explain further why you and your sister feel anchorless and as though you do not belong anywhere. But what practical steps can you take? Learning Italian may help – especially if you watch Italian films, read Italian

books and get into the rhythm of the language and really embody it. I think it will bring you closer to the culture, even if you never get fluent. This is not an easy task, but you can do it together and then you'll have company.

A Spanish-British friend told me that she calls herself a "Londoner", as she feels such an identity embraces so many cultures. You are Italian-British, British-Italian, but I think you have been pushed away a little from the Italian, not only because of possible trauma in previous generations but perhaps because your mother was somehow made to feel ashamed of being an immigrant. I think people should be proud of taking the bold step to emigrate, but it could be a reason why she seems to not want to engage about being an Italian in Britain.

You belong here on this Earth, the world is your home, but I understand you want to feel more at home. What you and your sister feel is typical, so you are having a very normal, human response to the situation. ■

**Book recommendation** *The Bridge: Dialogues Across Cultures* edited by Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph (Gestalt Press)

✉ **Write to us:** If you have a question, send a brief email to [askphilippa@observer.co.uk](mailto:askphilippa@observer.co.uk). To have your say on this week's column, go to [observer.co.uk/ask-philippa](http://observer.co.uk/ask-philippa)

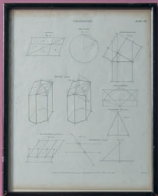
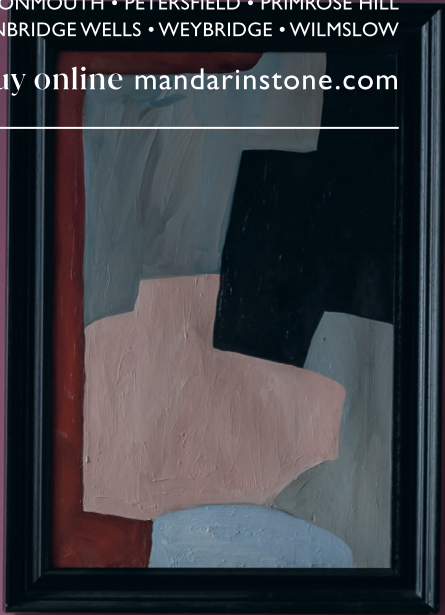


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