For Love of Country
Four Generations of Musical Storytellers Talk About the Things That Unite Us
Page 32
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Big Country

The all-American musical style has grown and changed along with the nation. It’s time we paid tribute to this vibrant—and still evolving—art form.

Country music was on the record player in our home, but it had to fight for its turn. With five kids raised on rock ‘n’ roll and, yes, one stereo, music often sparked a family feud. My father was a big fan of country and western, as it was called back then, and eventually I became one, too, but we arrived at our uneasy alliance after traveling different roads.

My dad, a World War II veteran, loved Eddy Arnold, the Tennessee Plowboy. Starting in 1945, Arnold released a series of sweet, earnest recordings for a war-weary greatest generation. Later, as country shrugged off its hillbilly past and got sophisticated, the Plowboy-turned-crossover crooner found his biggest audiences with hits such as “Make the World Go Away,” released in 1965. This lovely record was polished to a sheen by Nashville’s studio geniuses, who layered on strings and backup singers. That style later evolved into slick “country-populism”: easy listening music that I sneered at. As unfair as this youthful judgment was—Arnold scored 92 top-10 hits and 28 at number 1, and he was honored in 2008 as Billboard’s number 1 country artist of all time—to me he was strictly squaresville.

I found my country on the hippie folk-rock trail. The Beatles, great appreciators of American culture, were devotes of twang. On the Help! soundtrack album, Ringo Starr covered a Buck Owens song, “Act Naturally,” and George Harrison played the solo on his Gretsch Tennessean guitar. Five years later, the Grateful Dead’s classic album Workingman’s Dead convinced me to go out and buy a five-string banjo, and to fall in love with the Foggy Mountain Boys and bluegrass. It’s funny how age can broaden your musical tastes, and it wasn’t too long before I could listen respectfully to Eddy Arnold, while my father could hum Beatles tunes.

In this issue, we’re doing our first-ever tribute to country music. The package starts on page 32 and features interviews with top country stars and famous fans like Ringo. As you’ll see, our point here is: Country today is big and wide, with deep roots in our American story. It has evolved mightily from its dual origins in Southern blues and mountain music—a big bang of immigrant, native and African American cultures. Along the way it spun off folk, bluegrass, outlaw, alt-, western swing and modern, radio-friendly Nashville—as well as Johnny, Dolly, Willie, Garth and other icons who have forged their own brands. As our century rolls on, country has grown more diverse. The biggest-selling country single of all time is Lil Nas X’s duet with Billy Ray Cyrus, “Old Town Road.” Lil Nas X is a young, gay African American of great talent and drive, and he’s just one of the acts who are making this big, welcoming and fully American art form bigger and more welcoming. (See “Changing Nashville,” page 38.)

Kane Brown is another artist emerging from this new generation. Time magazine named the biracial singer one of the most influential people in the world in 2021. Brown told us that he foresees a bright future for country music. “People are opening their eyes, ears and hearts,” he says. As another barrier breaker, fellow country artist Darius Rucker, has said, “Kane is setting the bar so high for the next generation. I hope kids see him and now think, ‘I can do that.’”
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TAKE WITH LIAM

Great cover story on Liam Neeson [“Liam Neeson, Actually,” April/May]! Whenever there’s a new movie out with him, I can’t wait to watch—I’m always on the edge of my seat. He’s one of the best actors we have. Strong, handsome, compassionate and romantic. Cheers to Liam for a great career. I’m “taken” with him.

LIZZY GANNON
Belmont, North Carolina

ROAD TO RECOVERY

In the article “You Asked. We Answered,” question 21 discussed fitness watches. My fitness watch was a game changer after hip-replacement surgery. It reminded me to stand every hour and to take a mindfulness break. It tracked my heart rate, oxygen levels and steps (which helped keep my physical therapy progressing). Most importantly it gave me peace of mind, because I knew if I fell I could call 911.

JENNY DOLING
Palm Desert, California

TO OUR MEMBERS

Due to ongoing manufacturing and delivery challenges, your issues of AARP The Magazine and the AARP Bulletin might arrive later than usual through the end of this year. We regret any inconvenience. Digital editions of both publications are available to members as soon as each issue is released. Access them on your computer desktop at aarp.org/MOA, or on your smartphone or tablet using the free AARP Publications app (details at aarp.org/mobile).

WHAT YOU’RE SAYING

He has a heart and he is caring.
Virginia Arnold, Facebook

Love Liam and loved Natasha!
Kathleen Turner, Facebook

I look forward to some non-action films.
Patricia Libbey, Facebook

One of my favorite actors.
John Petocz, Facebook

He lost his beautiful wife and parented their sons beautifully. Bless him.
June-Ruth Canonico, Facebook

UP AND AT ‘EM

As a sleep educator, I’ve researched the topic of sleep extensively and interviewed many experts [“Banish Distraction”]. The article was full of good stuff, but it’s more important to keep a consistent wake time than it is to get to bed on time. Many are unaware of this, yet it was the only answer I received when asking experts to share their number one tip.

SUSAN HARRIS
Lincoln, Nebraska

COPING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

The documentary on her life with MS was illuminating, sad and hopeful [“7 Things Selma Blair Suggests Doing Now”]. What strength and courage.

SHARON DIAS
Facebook

A SMART BLONDE

I’ve always admired Jean Smart as an actress [“What I Know Now”]. And even more now after learning more about her through her experiences.

JENNY DOLING
Palm Desert, California

MARY SULLIVAN
Facebook

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> I WAS THERE! Enjoy "I Witnessed History" on page 50? Four other Americans share tales of encounters with the Beatles, the space shuttle, Star Wars and more. …………

> TELLING YOUR TALE In his quest to learn about his grandfather, writer Russell Shrott discovered the joys and secrets of exploring one’s past.

> PEACHES! How to turn a favorite summertime fruit into amazing drinks, sauces, salads and more.

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> JUST FOR YOU, GUYS Enjoy an extended version of the magazine with Bryan Cranston and four country music legends.

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“On a bad day, I look around and try to focus on really specific things I’m thankful for—that tree, my dog, the green grass. It’s hard to be sad while being grateful.”

—Angie Harmon, 49

1 Use Your Powers for Good
Fame helps with dinner reservations—that’s the number one thing! But seriously, if you use it correctly—for example, to bring attention to people in need—it can benefit the world. As you grow, you understand that.

2 Prioritize What’s Precious
I had a job and career, but then I became a mom and that became my top priority. After *Rizzoli & Isles* ended in 2016, I told the girls I wouldn’t work on a show that took me away from them like that. And I haven’t.

3 Embrace Your Kin
I never really saw myself as a mom. But my girls are the coolest people I’ve ever met—hilarious, beautiful, all three of them. They are at the age—teenagers—where everyone else goes, “Ugh.” And I think to myself, *Mine are kind of amazing.*

4 Take Stock
I needed to do more than model, and acting was what I landed on. But I actually loved modeling. I look back now at those modeling days when I walked the Great Wall of China with Valentino and lived in Paris and in Milan—things I didn’t appreciate when they were happening—and think, *Wow, I am so lucky. I have already lived an amazing life.*

5 Find Your Thing
I’ve directed before and am happiest when I’m both directing and acting at the same time. Some people call it fluidity; some people call it nuts.

6 Stay Open
I had no idea I loved flowers so much. I have roses, hydrangeas, giant gardenias—and I love fine china. Apparently I’m a bit of an old lady.

7 Take a Breather
I had lived on airplanes almost my entire life, flying between my home in North Carolina and Hollywood. COVID forced me to stop, slow down, appreciate my home, spend time with my girls. Turns out I’m more of a homebody than I thought I was.

—As told to Janet Kinosian

Angie Harmon, of NBC’s *Law & Order* fame, stars in the Lifetime original movie *Buried in Bars* (June 4).
### Flipping Great Burgers
5 chefs share their favorite ways to make a satisfying classic

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<td>Ground beef (chuck and short rib)</td>
<td>Salt and pepper</td>
<td>Toasted sesame seed bun</td>
<td>American cheese, 2 slices</td>
<td>Beefsteak tomato, lettuce, 3 pickle rounds, 1 slice red onion</td>
<td>Dijon mustard</td>
<td>Anita Lo, Tour de Forks host, Michelin-starred chef, author</td>
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<td>Ground beef</td>
<td>Salt, paprika, lemon pepper, barbecue seasoning</td>
<td>Sourdough or gluten-free bun</td>
<td>1 slice cheddar or Swiss</td>
<td>Caramelized onions, crisp lettuce</td>
<td>Mayo mixed with sriracha</td>
<td>Zorah Booley, The Everyday Low-FODMAP Cookbook author</td>
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<td>Pork, ham and chorizo, ground together</td>
<td>Adobo seasoning (salt, pepper, cumin, garlic, oregano)</td>
<td>Toasted Cuban roll or burger bun</td>
<td>Crispy shoestring potatoes</td>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Mustard, spicy ketchup</td>
<td>Douglas Rodriguez, author, James Beard Award winner</td>
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<td>Ground turkey, with dark meat</td>
<td>Minced ginger, garlic, scallions, sea salt, toasted sesame oil</td>
<td>No bun</td>
<td>Sesame-ginger coleslaw</td>
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<td>Mayo mixed with Asian chile-garlic sauce</td>
<td>Ashleigh VanHouten, coauthor of Carnivore-ish</td>
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<td>Blend of black beans, mushrooms, brown rice and veggies</td>
<td>Italian herb seasoning blend</td>
<td>Whole-grain bun</td>
<td>Grilled onions and red bell peppers</td>
<td>Garlic, fresh basil, fresh kale and avocado slices</td>
<td>Salsa</td>
<td>Tracye McQuirter, author, founder of 10 Million Black Vegan Women</td>
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**Photograph by Ren Fuller**
How Plant-Healthy Is Your Yard?

Walk through any neighborhood and it seems every yard has a different level of greenness, weeds and bare spots. What gives? Turns out, yard and garden ecosystems are tricky to diagnose—the answers can be, quite literally, underground. To assess your yard’s health, take this quiz. What you learn might surprise you.

1. How often should you test your soil?
   A. You can test your soil?
   B. Every year
   C. Every three years
   D. B or C, depending
   Answer: D. Understanding your soil helps you add the right nutrients. Gretel Anspach, a Massachusetts Horticultural Society trustee, says to test annually until healthy, then every three to five years.

2. What portion of your trees, shrubs and flowers are native to your area?
   A. Most
   B. Some
   C. None
   D. I don’t know
   Any answer except C is acceptable. But in general, choose native plants. They support an array of native wildlife, which promotes a healthy ecosystem.

3. When you see a few dandelions in your lawn, you:
   A. Pull them out.
   B. Bust out the herbicide.
   C. Enjoy the splash of color.
   D. Hit them with a golf club.
   The only wrong answer is B. “Everything we spray that ends with ‘-cide’ kills something, and that has ripple effects,” Anspach says. Either pull the dandelions or leave them.

Trash to Treasure

Find value in what others throw away

You’re driving along and spot an old bookcase on the curb. Should you get it or forget it? A guide:

Prefab? Pass. Look for solid, well-built pieces that can be refinished, says blogger and furniture artist Denise Zdziennicki, who runs the website Salvaged Inspirations.

Take a close look. Give the piece a wobble test and inspect for any cracks, splits or broken wood, Zdziennicki advises.

Have some vision. “Light scratches and outdated hardware or furniture feet are easy to fix or swap out,” Zdziennicki says.

Know when to say no. See water damage, mold or significant structural defects? Leave it. And be wary of upholstered items in general because of the possibility of bedbugs.

Sell the stuff? If a find isn’t right for you, try selling it at a resale shop or an online marketplace. Learn what sells dependably, then keep an eye out for those items, says New York-based appraiser Helaine Fendelman.

—Marie Proeller

Huston

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Huston
The New Rules of Car Cleaning
Modern materials mean different tools and techniques

TODAY’S CARS TEND to look good longer than those of past generations. Clear-coat finishes retain their shine, synthetic materials and fabrics are easy to clean, and little exposed steel means rust is no longer an issue. But some care is still needed.

Ride the tunnel. “Go to one of those newer tunnel car washes,” says Perry Dodd of European Detail in Scottsdale, Arizona. “No one ever touches your car.” With hand washes, just a little grit in a cloth can scratch your finish.

Do some debugging. When you wash your car at home, start by getting rid of all the dead insects on the front with some bug and tar remover.

Watch the wheels. Tires and wheel coverings can get dirty fast. Scrub with soap and water and then apply a commercial tire spray or foam.

Get buff. If the car looks dull, have it buffed. A professional can buff a clear-coat finish up to 30 times without hurting the paint.

Do an inside job. When cleaning the interior, avoid products containing ammonia or bleach. Get a vapor steamer and a foam cleaner for the carpet and seats, Dodd recommends. For the touch screen, use distilled water and a microfiber cloth.

Don’t damage the dash. Dodd isn’t a fan of sprays that make your dash shiny. The glare is potentially dangerous, and many of the products can dry out the plastic. Instead, use a mild soap-and-water solution. —Rick DeBruhl

No Towing Required
THE LATEST trend in RV travel is ditching the RV. Instead of pulling a trailer behind you, just pull up to one of these decked-out units and stay for a bit.

This Marfa, Texas, getaway has 14 vintage campers with private kitchens, two hammock groves, an outdoor kitchen and dining area, a community lounge and an outdoor stage. $170/night and up

Set on a salt marsh in Kennebunkport, Maine, the campground has vintage campers, covered wagons, rustic cabins and glamping tents. Also on site, there are firepits and a saltwater pool. $135/night and up

With locations in California, Massachusetts and New York, AutoCamp features Airstream suites that have walk-in showers, wood floors and Tempur-Pedic mattresses. $129/night and up —Ronda Kaysen

STAR-STUDED VACATIONS
See stunning night skies at the darkest national parks

◆ Arches, Utah This park stands out for its more than 2,000 sandstone arches, forming a dramatic backdrop for the celestial show. Stargazing programs take place in spring and fall during new moons.

◆ Big Bend, Texas Thanks to its remote desert location and low humidity, this national park has the least light pollution of any in the continental U.S.

◆ Grand Canyon, Arizona Both the north and south rims hold star parties every June, and you can join night-sky photography workshops and constellation talks all year.

◆ Voyageurs, Minnesota In August, this park hosts a two-day star party, with Perseid meteor shower viewing, constellation tours and solar system walks. —Veronica Stoddart

Clockwise from top: Illustration by Glenn Harvey; Getty Images; Matt Kisiday; Douglas Merriam; Nick Simonite (2).
It’s a summer ritual – the road trip vacation!

3 Ways You Can Save

Here are ways to save money, so you can spend more on making memories!

- Make (and follow) a packing list so you bring everything you need to avoid overpaying on the road.
- Plan your overnight stops and reserve accommodations in advance. Research lets you pick the best prices on rooms.
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**Upfront / TECH**

**Better TV Over the Airwaves**
Get improved picture and sound with new broadcast signals

**THIRTEEN YEARS** ago, people who relied on antennas over cable or satellite receivers marveled at the clarity of high-definition television broadcasts. Since then, there haven’t been a lot of improvements. That’s about to change, with the introduction of ATSC 3.0, better known as NextGen TV, a new broadcast standard that could once again revolutionize our TV sets.

**What’s NextGen TV?**
It will bring higher quality 4K video and clearer Dolby audio. The technology can also deliver television to your phone, tablet or car, assuming the manufacturer of that device allows it.

**What else can NextGen TV do?**
It is also designed for interactivity. Imagine being able to push a button on your remote for a map of where a news event is happening or to access more interviews on a topic.

**Does it require special equipment?**
No new antenna needed, but you may need a newer TV. Look for the NextGen TV logo on the box at the store. Or connect a NextGen TV tuner (under $300) to an older TV.

**What programs will benefit?**
Movies in particular should look better. Many feature films are shot in the highest resolution, and 4K video should allow them to maintain that picture quality on televisions.

**Will I still be able to watch TV using my older TV set?**
Yes. Stations are required to continue broadcasting HDTV even if they adopt NextGen TV, meaning no one’s over-the-air set will be useless.

**Will I be able to watch on my phone?**
This technology is designed with phones and tablets in mind, but device manufacturers need to include tuners and antennas in the devices. So far, none have. —Chris Morris

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**ASK THE TECH GURU**

I have email accounts on Yahoo!, Hotmail and Gmail. To access them on my phone, I have downloaded apps for each. Is there an easier way?

Jason R. Rich, author of tech how-to books for AARP, explains how to combine accounts.

On an iPhone, use the default email app. To add an account, open the Settings app, access the Mail submenu, select Accounts and tap on Add Account. Choose the provider and follow the prompts. For Android, download the Gmail app. Tap the menu icon at the top left, tap on Settings and select Add Account. Choose an account provider and follow the prompts.
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Make every look count
The TOY STORY spin-off movie Lightyear (June 17) stars Chris Evans as the voice of Buzz Lightyear, the Space Ranger, with James Brolin (whose role as young Dr. Steven Kiley on MARCUS WELBY, M.D. launched his career) voicing Emperor Zurg, Buzz’s nemesis. The film targets not only children but also nostalgic elders who’d like to bond with them—over a character so popular that in a 2010 poll of schoolchildren, 10 percent said Buzz Lightyear was the first man on the moon. “So many grandkids watch these animated things, so I watch many of them,” says Brolin, who turned down the chance to play Superman long ago and lost the role of James Bond at the last minute when Roger Moore decided not to quit. But now he’s delighted to be a hot voice-animation star at 81. “Suddenly, now I’m in business. It’s nice to be part of a hit when you’ve been sitting home for a while.” Brolin lives with wife Barbra Streisand, 80, whom he met on a blind date 26 years ago. Any chance they might cosstar sometime—say, as Empress and Emperor Zurg? “We had two projects she wanted to do,” he says. “One never knows.” —Gayle Jo Carter

Hustle (Netflix, June 8)
Queen Latifah, 52, plays the wife of Adam Sandler, 55, a luckless NBA scout who tries to revive his career with a talented amateur he discovers in Spain (actual Utah Jazz forward Juancho Hernangomez). With LeBron James coproducing the film, it should be a hit with hoops fans.

The Old Man (FX, June 16)
In his first lead TV role, Jeff Bridges, 72, plays a rogue CIA agent sought by his old associate (John Lithgow, 76). “Our chickens have come home to roost,” says Bridges, happily back at work after almost two years of battling cancer and COVID. “I feel terrific!”

Father of the Bride (HBO Max, June 16)
Andy Garcia, 66, and Gloria Estefan, 64, remake the classic comedy (Spencer Tracy and Steve Martin did previous versions) about a dad coping with his daughter’s marriage. This time it’s about a big, sprawling Cuban American family. —Tim Appelo

Mimi Rogers Returns
MIMI ROGERS, 67, has excelled in more than 100 movies and TV series, from Hill Street Blues to Mad Men to Amazon’s recent hit Bosch in the role of Honey Chandler—a smart, shrewd attorney who’s the adversary of detective Harry Bosch (Titus Welliver, 60). Now Chandler and Bosch team up to fight crime in Bosch: Legacy on Freevee, a new streaming service. “The role is manna from heaven,” says Rogers. “As actresses get older, you get looked at to be the mother or aunt. Chandler is just Chandler—a strong, complicated character. For female actors of a certain age, streaming shows have been a renaissance.” —G.J.C.
Bryan Cranston
The actor extols the power of work, silence and escape

Sneaky Pete
My parents were together until I was 11. It was a good life, but then my dad had the typical midlife crisis. He had affairs, and my mother became an alcoholic. I could manipulate her easily. My uncle gave me the nickname Sneaky Pete [which later inspired Cranston to co-create an Amazon series of that name] because I would circumvent accountability. In high school I would walk up to a teacher and say, “What do I need to do to get a C?”

Finding your calling
In college I was going to study administration of justice, then go into the LAPD. But I took one acting class, and the first week I happened to be reading opposite a very attractive girl. The script said, “A young couple is making out on a park bench.” That never happened in police science courses.

Work, work, work
I spent a year living with my grandparents as a kid. I had to collect eggs from a ranch, and I loved having a job and responsibility. That helped me when I was in my early 20s. There are always going to be people who are more talented than you. But you can control how much time and energy you put into your work.

Competitors become colleagues
When you’re in your 20s, a whole bunch of wannabe actors get off the bus to try to work in Hollywood or New York. When you’re in your 30s, there are a lot fewer of them left, and by 40, even fewer. Now, I’m looking around and it’s mostly friends left.

Keep your own counsel
When I did eight shows a week playing LBJ on Broadway, I would lose my voice. Audra McDonald was doing Porgy and Bess at the time. And I said to her, “How the hell do you do that, eight shows a week?” She said, “Don’t talk.” So I started doing Silent Mondays, where I would write notes to my wife and not speak. Silent Mondays gave me a perspective of how much slower life can be if I’m not on my phone talking.

Staying fresh
As we get older, we put ourselves in a position of being a beginner less and less. The tendency is to say, “This is what I do. And outside that circle is what I don’t do.” Even, “This is when I go to bed. This is when I eat.” But it’s really important to keep broadening your circles so that you are open to experiencing new things.

Ask questions
I’m doing a play called Power of Sail. It is about the conversation that is happening to really embrace equity among all people. It’s time to say, “What am I missing? What are my blind spots?”

Escape is noble
The film Jerry and Marge Go Large was a true story to tell, about a guy who came up with a legal way to win a big lottery. It was uplifting. It was sweet. This movie is not going to change the world. But it could change the next couple hours for somebody. And that’s enough.

—As told to Joel Stein

Bryan Cranston, 66, stars in the movie Jerry and Marge Go Large with Annette Bening, streaming on Paramount+.
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†Nicholas Hall’s global CHC database, DB6, 2019 value sales at MSP
Brimming With Benefits
Iced tea is more than a cool remedy for a hot day
By KELSEY OGLETREE

THREE FAST reasons to brew iced tea, rather than buy bottled: It’s cheaper, you’ll likely add less sugar, and it’s healthier—bottled teas contain far fewer polyphenols than fresh-brewed tea, studies show. And you want polyphenols. These antioxidants protect the body’s tissues against free radicals—unstable molecules that can increase the risk of illnesses such as coronary heart disease and cancer. Then there’s reason number four: You can choose the exact tea you want. We asked registered dietitian-nutritionist Janette Marsac to weigh in on the most common varieties.

Black tea contains the most caffeine of any steeped tea—47 milligrams (mg) in 1 cup, about half the amount in coffee—and it’s a rich source of theaflavins, which may help lower blood cholesterol.

Oolong is a traditional Chinese tea with a flavor that can range from light and fruity to bold and earthy. It has 38 mg of caffeine per cup, and its antioxidants are similar to those in black and green tea.

Green tea retains more disease-fighting compounds than black tea does, because of its air-drying process, which results in less oxidation. Green tea may also boost metabolism and improve insulin sensitivity. It contains 29 mg of caffeine per cup.

Matcha tea is made from whole green-tea leaves ground into a fine powder, then mixed with hot water. It has about three times more antioxidants than green tea does and has more caffeine, about 70 mg for 1 cup of tea made with 1 teaspoon powder.

Masala chai is black tea infused with spices, from cardamom to nutmeg to cinnamon. These spices enhance the tea’s antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

White tea is harvested as buds, rather than leaves, and retains a high level of antioxidants. It generally has a lighter taste and less caffeine than black or green tea. White tea also has oral-health benefits, including plaque prevention (plus, it won’t stain your teeth).

Chamomile tea is a caffeine-free herbal tea with a slightly earthy, sweet taste. It contains apigenin, an antioxidant that may induce sleepiness and reduce insomnia, especially in older adults.

Hibiscus tea is fruity and slightly sour, and this caffeine-free tea contains high levels of antioxidants. Sip with caution: Too much hibiscus can have a laxative effect. Kelsey Ogletree writes on food for Bon Appétit and Shape.
How Sexy Are Your 50s?
If you think sex is the province of the young, you’re wrong. People in their 20s have less sex now than ever before, studies show, so it’s possible that you’re as active, or more so, than the average millennial. About a third of us are getting busy several times a week, one survey found. And most of us are still in the game: 91 percent of men and 86 percent of women in their 50s report being sexually active, although activity levels vary wildly. So, there’s no “normal” amount of sex for people our age. What matters more is that you and your partner are happy with your sex life. Men and women age differently, and some studies indicate that sexual interest wanes differently as well. Combine that with emotional and physical issues, and it’s possible that you and your partner aren’t on the same wavelength when it comes to making waves.

The upsides, however, go way beyond our cravings for intimacy, pleasure and connection. Sex boosts our immune systems, improves self-esteem, decreases depression and anxiety, relieves pain, encourages sleep, reduces stress and increases heart health. (In one study, men who had sex at least twice a week were 50 percent less likely to die of heart disease than their less active peers.) Another bonus: You burn more calories making love than by watching The Great British Baking Show. Not only is there a lot of science around the subject of later-life lovemaking; there’s also a range of products and medicines that can help. Take these steps to revitalize your sex life.

Connect emotionally. Women are twice as likely as men to lose their enthusiasm for sex in long-term relationships, research shows. The problem isn’t always reduced estrogen but an absence of emotional closeness. In these cases, try listening more, praising more and showing more kindness. Individual, couples and/or sex therapy can help as well. Look for a sex therapist certified by the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists.

Address vaginal dryness. It’s one of the top impediments to sex among older women: 34 percent of those who are ages 57 to 59 experience dryness and discomfort during intercourse, one study found. For help, try over-the-counter remedies before and during sex, such as water-based lubricants (K-Y Jelly and Astroglide), oil-based lubes (olive, coconut and baby oils) and OTC moisturizers (Replens and Revaaree). Use these a few times a week, even if you’re not having sex.

Emphasize foreplay. “Regardless of the level of dryness, every woman needs to be primed with foreplay before intercourse,” says Elizabeth Kavaler, M.D., a urologist/urogynecologist at Total Urology Care of New York. Another tip: Encourage a woman to orgasm first, which provides more moisture for intercourse and other penetration.

Don’t let ED keep you down. Half of men who are in their 50s experience erectile dysfunction (ED), and the gold standard for treatment is prescription meds. Safe, effective options...
include Viagra (lasts for four to six hours), Levitra (four hours), Cialis (up to 18 hours) and Stendra (up to six hours).

For the minority of men who can’t rely on a pill, other choices include alprostadil (a drug that’s self-injected into the penis) and Muse (a suppository that slides into the penis). Vacuum pumps use suction to coax erections, and new treatments include platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy, which may regenerate nerves and improve blood circulation.

**Don’t ignore other conditions.** Any problem that affects overall health can interfere with sexual pleasure. “Cardiovascular issues such as high blood pressure, as well as diabetes, can negatively impact blood flow,” which isn’t good for sexual arousal, notes New York ob-gyn Alyssa Dweck, M.D., coauthor of *The Complete A to Z for Your V*. “And depression or anxiety can reduce the desire or ability to have sex.” The problem? Medicines that treat these conditions may also affect sexual desire and response. Speak with your health care provider about side effects and possibly switching meds or adjusting the dosage or timing.

**Think about lasers.** A treatment called fractional laser therapy can help reduce vaginal dryness without estrogen. It works like this: A laser creates tiny superficial burns in the vaginal canal. As the area heals, it spurs fresher collagen and increases blood supply, which makes the area more elastic and responsive, Kavaler explains. (She cautions against vaginal-rejuvenation surgery, which is a cosmetic procedure: “It can reduce sensitivity in the area and can make orgasms even more difficult to achieve or, in some cases, sexual intercourse permanently painful.”)

**Consider estrogen.** Women, if over-the-counter lubricants aren’t doing the trick, consider estrogen replacement therapy (ERT), which treats hot flashes and vaginal dryness. The most common delivery methods are creams and pills (you can self-apply Estrace and Premarin with an applicator or take these in pill form), insertable tablets (with Vagifem, you use an applicator to slide a tiny tablet into the vagina) and a ring ( Estr sling, which is inserted by your doctor, or you can do this yourself; it needs to be replaced every three months). ERT is not recommended for anyone who has or had breast cancer, or for those who have recurrent or active endometrial cancer, abnormal vaginal bleeding, recurrent or active blood clots, or a history of stroke.

**Confront incontinence issues.** In a national poll of more than 1,000 women, nearly half of those over age 50 reported bladder leakage during sex. The primary reason: Sexual stimulation puts pressure on the bladder and urethra. If you’re hoping to get lucky in the hours ahead, avoid consuming beverages or foods with caffeine, such as coffee and chocolate; caffeine stimulates the bladder and acts as a diuretic (citrus fruits and juices are diuretics, too). Men whose prostates have been removed can also experience incontinence during sex. This condition, known as climacturia, can be treated in a number of surgical and nonsurgical ways. Plus, medications such as Ditropan and Vescicare can decrease urination frequency.

**Turn down testosterone.** In late 2020, the American College of Physicians stated that testosterone replacement should no longer be administered to treat a lagging libido (testosterone can have serious side effects, including an increased risk of prostate abnormalities). Denver urologist David Sobel, M.D., offers three easy alternatives: “sleep, reducing stress, and the big one—exercise.” Even better: Work out with your lover. Seventy-one percent of runners say that running as a couple plays a healthy role in their sex life, according to a 2021 survey.

**Overcome arthritis aches.** About 58 million Americans have arthritis, and over half are younger than 65, reports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Arthritis can limit your ability to engage in sex. In addition, an empathetic partner may resist sex, to avoid creating discomfort. An option: Ask your partner to experiment with more comfortable positions. Also, time sex for when you feel best (rheumatoid arthritis pain is usually more acute in the morning), the Arthritis Foundation advises. Taking a warm bath, alone or together, can help relax joints before making love. If the pain is severe, try an OTC medicine such as ibuprofen before having sex, or speak with your doctor about prescription medications. ||

Robin Westen is coauthor of the sexual-health book *The Complete A to Z for Your V.*
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MoneySaver

Home, Home on the Middle of the Price Range

The median cost of an existing home earlier this year was $357,300. Here’s what that would buy you in different parts of the country

By GABRIEL BAUMGAERTNER

1. Bakersfield, California
   - $350,000
   - 3 bedrooms, 2 baths
   - 1,282 square feet
   - Spacious backyard and covered patio on a quiet street

2. Albuquerque, New Mexico
   - $350,000
   - 2 bedrooms, 2 baths
   - 1,582 square feet
   - Walk-in shower, walk-in closet, large public park nearby

3. Oklahoma City
   - $350,000
   - 4 bedrooms, 3 baths
   - 2,968 square feet
   - New windows, roof and gutters

4. Madison, Wisconsin
   - $350,000
   - 3 bedrooms, 2 baths
   - 1,544 square feet
   - Renovated and remodeled; close to hospitals, lakes, an arboretum and a zoo

5. Chattanooga, Tennessee
   - $350,000
   - 4 bedrooms, 2 baths
   - 2,334 square feet
   - Large screened deck, 2-acre lot

6. New York City
   - $360,000
   - 0 bedrooms, 1 bath
   - 289 square feet
   - Studio apartment by Columbia University with a landscaped roof garden

7. West Monroe, Louisiana
   - $349,900
   - 4 bedrooms, 4 baths
   - 3,505 square feet
   - 4-car garage, 1-acre lot near a national wildlife refuge

Where the Changes Are

While home prices are highest in the West, recent increases have been greatest in the South.

Median price and 1-year percentage increase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Median Price</th>
<th>1-Year Percentage Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
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<td>+7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>$248,900</td>
<td>+7.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>+7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Association of Realtors; prices drawn from listings found in March 2022
Your Next Important Investment Decisions

Sell your stocks? Lend to your child? Experts weigh in

By KAREN HUBE

CHOICE #1

I’m worried about how much of my retirement savings are in the stock market. Given all the turmoil in the world, should I just pull my money out?

THE ANSWER is almost always no, says Matt McGrath, managing partner at Evensky & Katz/Foldes Financial Wealth Management in Coral Gables, Florida. If you have a diversified portfolio that is balanced between stocks and bonds, your best chance of earning the highest returns over the long run is to ride the ups and downs and stay put, even if the downs include war tensions, rising inflation or political upheaval, he says. “You’ll almost certainly lose by trying to time the market. That’s a fool’s game.”

Market timers inevitably either get out too soon or get back in too late—or both—and miss gains. “If you miss up-cycles, you can’t recover, especially if you are later in life,” McGrath says. “That can have implications on how much you can withdraw from your portfolio for the rest of your life.”

Here’s an eye-opener: Putnam Investments looked at the impact of missing upsweeps in the S&P 500—a basket of shares in large U.S. companies—between 2007 and 2021. Assuming you initially invested $10,000 and reinvested all dividends, you would have had $45,682 by the end of 2021 if you hadn’t touched your portfolio. If you had been on the sidelines and missed the index’s 10 best days over all those years, you would have had $20,929. Missing the 20 best days would have left you with $12,671.

During frightening times, it may be helpful to recall that declines are normal, McGrath says. Since 2000, the S&P 500 has dropped about 10 percent or more at some point during 14 of the ensuing years, yet the index also had positive returns in 17 of those years, and the average annual return for the whole period was 7.3 percent.

There is an exception to the stay-put advice: if money fears are truly, deeply affecting your sense of well-being. “If you can’t sleep well at night, you probably have to adjust your asset allocation,” McGrath says. That is, you might want to shift some of your money out of stocks and into safer investments, such as bonds and cash. To feel comfortable during the stock market’s ups and downs, you should aim for cash reserves sufficient for about a year’s income needs, he adds: “Then you don’t have to worry if the Dow drops.”
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I have a new job and my first 401(k). How much should I put in? How should I invest?

**CONGRATULATIONS** on your 401(k) plan! You get to invest earnings straight out of your paycheck, so they don’t get taxed this year. Once invested, your money grows tax-deferred.

How much to contribute? If your employer matches a portion of what you put in, sock away at least enough to get the full match, says Renora Nelson, a financial adviser at Merit Financial Advisors in Atlanta. “That’s like free money, and you don’t want to leave that on the table.” So if you make $50,000 and get a 100 percent match on up to 3 percent of your salary, putting in at least $1,500 would get you $1,500 more from your employer.

The farther away your retirement, the more you should invest in stocks, says Nelson. “If you have a decade or more, aim for 70 percent in a diversified U.S. large-cap stock fund and 30 percent in a diversified bond fund, and gradually scale stocks back to about 50 percent as you get within a few years of retirement,” she says. A simpler option: Buy a target-date fund, which shifts to a more conservative mix as your retirement nears.

My adult child could really use some cash to launch a business and has asked me to pitch in. Should I? And if so, how should I do it?

**ASSESS YOUR OWN** financial needs before agreeing to pitch in. “You may have the desire in your heart to do it, but if it puts you in a tough spot financially, you have to pass,” says Samantha Garcia, an adviser at Halbert Hargrove in Long Beach, California.

Take into account how responsible your child is and the soundness of the business idea, Garcia adds. “Children should pitch to their parents the way they would to Mark Cuban on Shark Tank,” she says. “Have them present a business plan and projected financials.” If you’re ready to help, consider the following options.

- **Make a cash gift with no strings attached.** But be wary of family dynamics, Garcia advises. “If there are siblings, will you gift to all the kids? Think carefully before you write a check.” Also, if you give more than $16,000 ($32,000 if you’re a couple) to someone in 2022, you’ll have to file a gift tax form next year reporting the excess amount. Neither you nor your child will have to pay gift taxes then, and it’s likely you never will, given the high exemptions for estate and gift taxes in the U.S.

- **Lend the money.** Formalize the loan with a signed contract. “This helps make it clear that this is a business arrangement, and you’re changing the relationship from parent-child to lender-borrower,” Garcia says. So that the IRS will regard the transaction as a loan, charge at least the agency’s applicable federal rate of interest, which is typically lower than those for commercial loans.

Prepare for the possibility that your child will have trouble repaying. “Maybe the business goes belly-up,” says Garcia. “Whenever you lend money, don’t count on that money to buy your groceries in the future.”

- **Go all in.** If you’re really excited about your child’s idea, discuss a possible partnership, Garcia says. Decide on a structure for ownership, control and responsibilities. “Are you going to get a percentage of revenue until you’re paid back? Will you be a minority silent partner?” Garcia asks. “A formal business agreement should be drawn up by an attorney, so everyone understands the terms and there are no surprises.”

Karen Hube is a veteran financial writer and a contributing editor for Barron’s.
Long-Term Care Worries
A couple wants insurance but is having trouble sorting through all the options

THE PROBLEM
“I have been shopping long-term care policies over the last several months and feel very confused, frustrated and overwhelmed,” wrote Sheila Mabbitt, 50, an airline pilot living outside Nashville, Tennessee. Mabbitt wanted policies for herself and her husband, Mike Sturm, a 59-year-old landscaper. She’s in good health. He has type 2 diabetes, which is under control. Their bigger concern was that his mother had Alzheimer’s. “We just want to be sure that if he needs memory care, it’s available to us,” she explained.

THE ADVICE
Long-term care can be expensive. Unfortunately, LTC insurance can be expensive, too, and terms can be complicated. Fewer than 10 percent of Americans 50 and older have it. (For more on America’s need for long-term care, see “The Crisis Everyone Must Face” in the May AARP Bulletin.)

I’m constantly asked questions about LTC insurance. Here are my answers for Mabbitt and Sturm.

1 Should we buy it? LTC insurance makes sense for a certain set of people: those who have too much in assets to qualify for Medicaid—which, unlike Medicare, will help pay for long-term care (in a nursing home or at home)—but who don’t have enough in savings to comfortably pay for care on their own. Mabbitt and Sturm sit in that category. “We’re watching friends’ parents,” Mabbitt says. “The next thing you know, one is in a full-time care facility and it’s draining their savings.”

2 When to buy Mabbitt is at the age when experts typically recommend to start shopping, says Jesse Slome, executive director of the American Association for Long-Term Care Insurance. Sturm’s diabetes is a reason to shop sooner rather than later, says Slome, since finding coverage will be harder if his health worsens.

3 What kind There are two types of policies: traditional and hybrid. Traditional entails pricey annual premiums. A 55-year-old male, on average, will pay $2,220 a year, and a 55-year-old female $3,700 a year, for a policy that will pay a benefit of $150 a day for three years, or $165,000 total, with a cost-of-living increase of 3 percent annually. If you don’t need care, you don’t get your money back. If you stop paying premiums, which tend to increase over time, you lose coverage.

Hybrid is a combo platter. It’s typically either a life insurance policy that allows you to dig into the death benefit to pay for long-term care, or it’s an annuity that pays more if you need care. Hybrids often have “limited pay” options, meaning you pay premiums for a set period of 10 or 20 years, then draw on them later in life.

Hybrid policies are typically more expensive than traditional ones, but these policies appeal to many people because they’ll get some money back even if they don’t need care.

4 How to buy Prices for all these policies have risen sharply in recent years. Annual premiums for 55-year-olds on that $165,000 policy have jumped at least 31 percent since 2020. Marc Cohen, professor of gerontology at the University of Massachusetts Boston, advises not to try to insure all your potential costs but, rather, to supplement your savings with a smaller policy that you can afford over time. “When you try to solve 100 percent, you often end up with nothing,” he says. Another savings tactic: Check for any group plans offered through your workplace.

THE OUTCOME
Weighing all the options, which included plans offered through Mabbitt’s union, the couple this spring was leaning toward a hybrid life insurance policy. The premiums for this plan could be paid for in 10 years. “Our biggest concern is, we want the premium paid before retirement,” Mabbitt said. “I don’t want to be paying $6,000 a year until I’m 85 or 90.”

Want Jean Chatzky’s help in sorting out a financial problem? Send an email to rescue@aarp.org.
THE BRICK IS BACK

You’ve matured—and so has LEGO. The company recently expanded its product line to include Gen X–friendly sets such as the café from TV’s Friends ($60). The truly brick-happy will gather online on June 18 at a virtual LEGO fan convention, to view creations like the 6,785-piece Star Wars AT-AT, a collector’s-edition model more than 2 feet long ($800). —David Hochman

GET FIT BY PHONE P.27
NON-MOM JEANS P.28
MARRYING OFF A KID P.28
BETTER SLEEP P.29

IN YOUR 50s, your eyes can start to feel dry and scratchy due to hormonal changes or certain drugs. For new nuisance symptoms, see an eye doc, but you may not need drugs to feel better. One strategy that experts advise: Liquefy and unblock your eyelids’ lubricating oils with a warm compress or a heated eye mask (such as from Bruder, Thermalon or Tear-Restore) for five to 15 minutes once or twice a day. —Karen Asp

‘LIVE IN THE NOW!’
—Garth Algar (Dana Carvey), advising fellow headbanger Wayne Campbell (Mike Myers) in the first Wayne’s World movie. The film turned 30 this year … but Garth’s sage advice is timeless.

SAY IT WITH SOCKS

NECKTIES MAY be on the outs for men’s business wear, but for a splash of color and verve, novelty socks are having a moment. In honor of Father’s Day, we’ve picked a few eye-catchers from manufacturers’ latest offerings. Maybe one will be right for the dad in your life or for your own bit of wardrobe rebellion. —Dian Holton

HE’LL FLIP • $14
Call Me Maybe
Remember these?
Old-school flip phones, agape.
(Happy Socks)

MEOW • $14
Cat Dad
Wear your love for Fluffy and Puff on your ankles, as well as on your sleeve. (Hotsox)

FACE IT • $16
Jumbo Smiley Dot
The smile is as old as humanity; the Smiley trademark is 50 this year.
(Happy Socks)

GO FISH • $14
Keeping It Reel
Pay tribute to the thrill of the catch. One fish takes the bait; others glide below.
(Hotsox)
How to Make the Most of Your Midlife Crisis

The soul-searching that’s natural in your 50s can lead to big mistakes—or big improvements

You’ve heard the clichés about midlife crises: spendy sports cars, ill-considered plastic surgeries, next-generation replacement spouses. But often, experts say, midlife crises look more like the one Adam Earnheardt went through. Last year, at age 50, the Youngstown, Ohio, college professor and writer suddenly started purging objects and activities from his life. He decluttered his house, cut back on work and focused on spending more time with his family. In a pandemic-inspired fit of introspection, Earnheardt says, he had decided to get rid of anything that distracted him from what mattered most: “I was not only decluttering my house. I was decluttering my life.”

While it’s not uncommon for people to brood or become restless at some point in their 50s, those emotions don’t have to lead to big, foolish changes, experts note. Handled well, midlife introspection and reevaluation can lead to growth and a new sense of purpose.

It’s clear that many who are in their 50s are stressed out, says David Almeida, a professor of human development and family studies at Penn State University. “Midlife is a time when you’re responsible for a lot of people,” he points out. And it’s getting worse. In 2012, those ages 45 to 64 reported nearly 20 percent more stressful days than the same age group had reported in 1995, according to Almeida. Add a pandemic, he says, and you get stress “on steroids.”

Plus, economists have repeatedly found that midlife adults report a decreased sense of well-being compared with both younger and older adults, creating a so-called U-shaped curve in happiness. “The evidence is completely overpowering,” argues David Blanchflower, a professor of economics at Dartmouth College. Blanchflower identifies the low point of adult happiness as being at around age 50.

The term “midlife crisis” was born in 1957, when Canadian psychoanalyst Elliott Jaques presented an academic paper that called midlife “a period of anguish and depression.” (It should be noted, however, that Jaques defined “midlife” as age 35.) Author Gail Sheehy ran with the concept in her influential 1976 book, Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life. From there, the idea took root in popular culture—think 44-year-old Dudley Moore chasing a 22-year-old Bo Derek in 1979’s hit film 10.

For psychological researchers such as Margie Lachman, though, the notion of the destructive midlife crisis has...
been overblown. The 50s are, indeed, a stressful time, she acknowledges. But they’re also a time when people have the experience and skills to deal constructively with the problems that arise. Lachman, a professor of psychology at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, is a leader of the landmark Midlife Development in the U.S. (MIDUS) project, launched in 1995 to study the well-being of 7,100 Americans as they progressed through life. According to MIDUS and other longitudinal studies, most Americans in their 50s report feeling contented with their lives. “A lot of people do suffer in midlife,” Lachman says, “but many people consider midlife the prime of life.”

Maybe the reason is that, in midlife, you still have the time and energy to make positive changes in your life. A key element in succeeding, Lachman’s research has shown, is believing that change is possible. In fact, the more a person believes that they can change their behavior or circumstances, the more likely they are to achieve those changes—which in turn creates the confidence to try more new things.

Douglas LaBier, a business psychologist and psychotherapist in Washington, D.C., sees many midlife patients at a crossroads. A few, he says, fit the old midlife-crisis stereotype: Struggling with unresolved pasts and uncertain futures, “they escape through something that looks momentarily pleasurable,” such as a splurge or a bender. But many more, he notes, take more constructive steps. For one person, that might mean changing careers; for another, it might be taking up a hobby. Some people do get long- overdue divorces; others find new ways to connect with their partners.

Kristin van Ogtrop, 58, has done some midlife rebalancing herself. Several years ago she quit her job as editor in chief of a national magazine. “It’s hard to start a new career in your 50s,” admits van Ogtrop, now a literary agent and author. But, she says, it was worth the struggle.

In her book, Did I Say That Out Loud?: Midlife Indignities and How to Survive Them, van Ogtrop writes about the hardships and annoyances of midlife, including root canals and colonoscopies. Yet, she adds, she’d take her 50s over her unsettled 20s any day. While “everyone has really different life circumstances,” she says, her own midlife is good. “With every year, I’m more grateful.” —Kim Painter

**A Cliché, Crushed**

Are 50-somethings really driven to buy hot new cars? Maybe not. Gen Xers make up the biggest part of the used-car market—39%—but boomers account for the largest share of new-car sales—37%.

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**DENIM DILEMMA**

**What Comes After Skinny Jeans?**

**UNTHINKABLE!** They once seemed timeless, but today, nothing says “mom jeans” like skinny-fit styles. If you care, you’ll have to adjust.

Based on balance and proportion, the most flattering styles for 50-something women are boot cuts and flares. Pick a waistband that hits just below the belly button, rather than the fashionable (but uncomfortable) high-rise options. And avoid distressed. On a grownup body, artfully tattered jeans are the definition of trying too hard. —Kim Marcum

**MY FIRST ...**

**DAUGHTER-IN-LAW**

“When are you coming home again?” I asked my newly married son. And then I caught myself.

I’d made the same mistake 35 years earlier, when I was the newlywed. Leaving my parents’ house, I’d teared up and told my new husband I was sad to be leaving “home.”

“That’s not your home anymore,” he’d responded. “Your home is with me.”

Now, I realize, the Virginia home we’d made for our three children was down one resident. My son’s home is in Chicago, with his bride. She’s much taller than I am (as is he), a health care worker with a quick mind and ready smile, as beautiful inside as out.

What’s more, she truly gets my son and appreciates his occasional goofiness. I adore her.

Still, it took strength for me to step back and let go of him—to listen more than talk, to avoid overstaying my welcome, to keep a lid on unsolicited advice. It’s sometimes a balancing act, and I don’t always succeed. But, as we taught all our children, when someone makes a mistake, they always have the option to shake themselves off and try again. Even me. —Amy Brecount White

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**EXERCISE AT HOME**

AARP’s Online Fitness powered by LIFT has workouts, webinars and personalized training. aarp.org/onlinefitness

**SAVE MORE MONEY**

AARP’s new Member Benefits experience makes finding offers even easier. aarp.org/ourbenefits

**MAKE NEW FRIENDS**

Newsletters like The Girlfriend, Sisters From AARP, The Arrow and The Ethel bring people together. Sign up at aarp.org.
**Bedroom Bliss**

Design ideas to make your nights more peaceful

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**GET READING-LIGHT SMART**

**THOSE SPINDLY**

Little book lights can shine right in your eyeballs. Try setting up a reading nook for the night owl, says Santa Monica, California-based interior designer Sarah Barnard. Another option is an e-reader with a front-lit display, thought to be more conducive to sleep than backlit models.

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**UPGRADE YOUR MATTRESS**

**OVER TIME, people (and mattresses) tend to get softer.** Vanessa Hill, a behavioral scientist and sleep researcher, advises investing in a mattress that absorbs movement and reduces disturbances. A dense latex or memory foam style is worth considering. If you have a queen, think about upsizing.

**IF EVERY twist and tug of the covers wakes you up, do as the Scandinavians do—share one bottom sheet, but use two separate duvets on top.** For a king bed, purchase two twin-size duvets. You can even choose two different thicknesses if one of you sleeps warm and the other sleeps cool.

**DID YOU know that bolting your headboard to the wall can prevent vibrations when your partner shifts? First, try tightening the headboard. If that doesn’t work, attach it to the wall using Z clips or cleats,** recommends Tina Delia, a hospitality and residential interior designer in Philadelphia.

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**EMBRACE SEPARATE BEDDING**

**IF SOMEONE rummaging around for a remote has woken you too many times, Barnard has a simple fix:** Stash remotes in a dedicated location, such as a nightstand drawer. Compartment in the drawer will keep everything organized and easily visible, minimizing noise at night.

—Shelby Deering

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**SILENCE THE HEADBOARD**

**CORRAL THE REMOTES**

**WHO SHOULD BORROW?**

*If you’ve promised to pay for your kid’s education, that’s laudable. But experts say it’s wise to let your child take out federal student loans before you explore parent loans. Here are four reasons why.*

- **Lower interest rates** Last year’s federal student loan rate was 3.73 percent, while parent PLUS loans were at 6.28 percent. Rates reset in July, so check for updates.
- **More repayment plans** Students have access to several income-driven options and public service loan forgiveness. Parents have some options but not as many.
- **Lack of transferability** Many parents assume they can transfer their PLUS loans to their student later on. Not so.
- **A sense of ownership** You can always help pay off student loans, as long as your retirement savings are on track. But the education is your child’s—and he or she should know what it cost.

—Joanna Nesbit

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M y father did a lot of instructing, but my siblings and I did not always take away the lesson he intended. The most helpful instruction might come via a side remark or gesture, the slouch of his shoulders or a smile that started in his eyes and spread across his face. If a certain song, like Frank Sinatra's “There Used to Be a Ballpark,” struck him as profound, he'd say, “Listen to the words! It’s not about a ballpark! It’s about life!”

Or maybe it was all misdirection; maybe he meant for us to learn less from the words than from the music. He could be tricky that way. It’s what he meant by the difference between the what and the how.

“What you say is often less important than how you say it,” he'd explain. “It’s like the difference between the head and the heart, between the knowing and the believing.”

Consider the way he taught my sister, my brother and me how to drive. After coaching us through every sort of K-turn, lane change and merge, he’d announce the lesson over, pick a seemingly random destination—Michael’s hot dogs in Highland Park, say—and announce, “Drive me there.” Then, as you made the turn into traffic, he'd slug you hard in the ribs, steady the wheel if you swerved and say, “You just failed the test: what to do if stung by a bee.”

When I turned 21, Dad took me to buy a car. It was to be my first negotiation, an experience akin, in his mind, to losing one’s virginity. He made a long list in preparation for this transaction, a catalog of features my first car had to have. According to this list, the perfect
HERB Cohen, my father, is an expert in the art of the deal and the author of You Can Negotiate Anything, a publishing phenomenon that came out of nowhere in 1980 to sell over a million copies. He's a speaker, a guru of the corporate retreat, the gun hired to close the deal, the wise man helicop- tered in to settle the strike. He advised Jimmy Carter during the Iran hostage crisis in 1980 and 1981. He was part of the American team at the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in the 1980s, where he went “eyeball to eyeball with the Ruskies” and learned what he calls “the Soviet style,” which lives on in Russia today. Those who practice the Soviet style—you’ll meet them everywhere—believe in zero-sum deals: The only way they can win is if you lose. By contrast, Dad believes in, and may well have coined, the negotiating term “win-win.”

Though he has lectured at Harvard and Yale and worked for many Fortune 500 companies, Dad says he learned everything he needed to know about negotiation as a kid in Brooklyn, cit-
What makes me proud about this country? People. In my mind, that’s all any country really is. We are all in this together—trying, searching for that thing that we like to call the American dream. Sure, we can speak our minds, but that doesn’t mean we won’t get persecuted for it, or that we don’t need to watch our mouths. But we do have freedom of speech. We’re able to be free, to walk free and to be who we are. That’s America. We should all be proud of that.

Who am I? Well, I’m a storyteller, and I do it through music. Some of my favorite songs were written about my childhood, growing up here in the Smoky Mountains—like “Appalachian Memories” and “My Tennessee Mountain Home.” These stories talk about the lifestyle and the people I grew up with. Music lets us do that. It’s pure and it’s simple. It’s how real people tell ordinary stories. It gives us a voice.

In my 1971 song “Coat of Many Colors,” I tell the story of how my mama

Country music reflects America in all her denim and rhinestone glory. As we celebrate our nation’s birthday, its beloved stars take a moment to celebrate all that unites us.
made me a coat out of rags. It’s about a little girl living in the rural United States, where people grew up poor and worked hard for a living, but it could’ve taken place anywhere. People are people.

But really, “Coat of Many Colors” is more than just a song to me. I wrote it from a special place in my heart about my mama. It turns out to also be a song about bullying—about not picking on other kids. It’s about love and family and believing. It struck a chord with a lot of people, so they’ve made a schoolbook out of it. I’m proud of that; I know my mama would be, too.

My daddy couldn’t read or write, and I know it bothered him. To honor him, I started the Imagination Library; I wanted to do my part to help kids fall in love with reading. I am as proud of that program as anything I have done. We’ve given away almost 200 million books, and it’s still growing. It is all over the U.S. and in many parts of the world. I truly believe that you can’t get enough books into the hands of children.

As a whole, I go where my heart leads me. I pray every day that God will guide me, and I honestly believe he does. I’m trying my best to lift people up and do my part to make the world a better place. I’ve been so blessed with great opportunities, and I feel if you’re lucky enough to get in a position to help, you should. People helping people, because it’s the right thing to do.

That’s my America. My hope is that it’s your America, too.

—As told to Meg Grant
Our Song For
Four generations of country stars share with us

We Can Speak Our Truth
By Loretta Lynn

Freedom for me was what I learned comin’ up from the holler, though I might not have known it as a young girl. It was freedom to do as you wanted, love as you wanted and say what you wanted, even though some people might not like it.

Record producer Owen Bradley allowed me to write and sing as I believed. Yes, some radio stations were not playing those songs at first—like “Wings Upon Your Horns” and “Rated X”—but they became hits anyway. I never intended to be some woman activist, but I guess a lot of people related to it. So that freedom for me was freedom for a few others. —As told to Alanna Nash

*Loretta Lynn, 90, grew up in Butcher Holler, Kentucky, and became the first woman in country music to receive a certified gold album.

We Rise Together By Willie Nelson

America, I was born during your Great Depression of the 1930s, so I had some early experience with hard times. My sister, Bobbie, and I were raised by our grandparents. For Thanksgiving one year, we split a can of soup! Now, hard times have come again once more. We are trying to hold on to each other and to your great American dream for every person. We’re trying to find what unites us—to remember our shared beliefs in family, in love and in your democratic ideals, so we can come through as a stronger America. If we don’t find what unites us, we will again be a house divided. We tried that in the 1860s, and 600,000 Americans died fighting each other. That should be our reminder that we need to get our s--- together and remember the ways we are alike rather than focusing on the ways we’re different.


Strangers Are Welcomed By Shania Twain

I left Canada really with nothing, and came to the U.S. looking for a future. I had no parents after they died in a car accident. Luckily, I was embraced by mentors who would invite me to their house on weekends to be with their family. We’d play guitar and sing. They cooked Southern food. I was welcomed on a personal level, which gave me a good impression of America. —A.N.

*As Shania Twain, 56, plans a new album, her Las Vegas residency runs through September 10.
I was doing a show and getting ready to sing one of my hits. A man gave me flowers. He was from somewhere like Iran, and he said, “We were not allowed to listen to music on the radio.” I said, “What do you mean?” I had no idea where to go with that kind of comment. This guy blew the doors off when he said that. I looked at him and said, “Oh, my God, tell me more.” He said, “You don’t know what it’s like to not be able to listen to music.” I don’t. To be an American means I will never have to think about what it’s like not to have choices. I think the song I was about to sing was “She Is His Only Need,” ironically. —A.N.

Now mostly a solo artist, Wynonna Judd, 58, was a 2021 inductee into the Country Music Hall of Fame with her late mother, Naomi, as the Judds.

We Value Hard Work
By Kane Brown

I’ve gotten to tour all over the U.S. and internationally. There are so many communities across the U.S. that, while people might not have the town name memorized on a map, have been some of my favorite places to visit. They have a pride of home and sense of community and helping and looking out for each other.

I have a song called “Famous Friends” with Chris Young that talks about this. All these people you grow up with that are staples in your life—and famous to you day to day. I thought about this a lot this year with all of the local heroes and frontline workers who went to work every day in their hometowns, too. —A.N.

Kane Brown, 28, was the first artist to top all five of Billboard’s main country charts at the same time.

Our Founders Were Brilliant
By Clint Black

It all really stems from the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the idea that this was a new thing in the world. They called it an experiment, but it was a lot of brilliant people who had seen how things had gone wrong elsewhere. They created this thing that could be self-correcting. They put in mechanisms to keep it from going too far astray.

You as an individual, for the first time in history, have a chance to make positive changes to the country you were born in. That’s a big reason for me to be glad to be born in the U.S. —A.N.

Clint Black, 60, resumes his “Mostly Hits & the Mrs.” tour this fall, with wife Lisa Hartman Black. He hosts Talking in Circles With Clint Black on the Circle network.

We Honor Our Protectors
By Barbara Mandrell

I appreciate when someone says to one of our veterans, “Thank you for your service.” These people give everything and live to defend and protect our nation. And their families have to sacrifice just as much. Our first Christmas as man and wife, Ken was overseas. If you’re the children or the spouse of someone serving, you’re all serving. I can’t think of any folks who are greater than those Americans who serve us. —A.N.

Barbara Mandrell, 73, performed regularly for U.S. troops. Husband Ken Dudney was a Navy pilot.
Even a Farm Boy Can Write an Anthem
By Lee Greenwood

In 1983, I finally wrote the song that I wanted to write. I put down my feelings, my emotions, my beliefs—that I understand why America is a free country and how we should appreciate it. From that moment on, “God Bless the U.S.A.” became more than just my original piece of music. World events, international crises, Hurricane Katrina and the attack on America in 2001 have made it something more. Event after event brought “God Bless the U.S.A.” and its refrain, “And I’m proud to be an American / Where at least I know I’m free,” to the forefront and pushed me into a leading role to be America’s patriot. I thought it was important that a farm boy from California could be a patriot. —A.N.

Natural Beauty Abounds
By Zac Brown

People have become disconnected from nature; an iPad is the standard babysitter for kids. But we’re supposed to be scratched up from briars and getting our knees dirty. At my Camp Southern Ground, we take the devices away. We put people out in nature. There is so much power in putting people in a situation where they have to rely on each other. —A.N.

It’s About Community
By Lee Ann Womack

In the small town where I grew up, there are dance halls that were built mostly by German or Czech immigrants. They were community centers, a gathering place. People would go there for meetings, like fraternal organizations, then hear music on Saturday night and go to church there on Sunday morning. If you moved to this vast, open place called Texas from Germany or Central Europe, you needed a place to feel like you belonged, a place to gather, bring food and music from home—a sense of community. And this is where a lot of these German polka beats you came to hear in early Texas country music—and blues and Tejano music—came together. —A.N.

A Vow for Democracy
By Ronnie Dunn

Our democracy is not something that just shows up; it’s something you have to work at, like a marriage. You don’t just say, “I do.” We’re still growing. —A.N.

We Inspire Others
By Martina McBride

I got tons of mail about my song “Independence Day,” people telling me how it gave them the courage to leave a bad relationship. They felt like someone understood what they were going through, or they understood that it wasn’t their fault. This song took on a life of its own.

“Independence Day” peaked at number 10, which also taught me that songs are sometimes bigger than a chart number. —A.N.

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Lee Ann Womack, 55, is from Jacksonville, Texas. Over a 25-year career in music, she has won six Country Music Association Awards.
We Share What We Have
By Amy Grant and Vince Gill

Amy: I have a friend who lives a simple life. She worked at a dress store. Every year she would give to my charity her bonus check of $10,000 and say, “I feel like you’re more in touch with the needs of everyday people.” One year a friend came from the emergency room. A little girl didn’t have a coat. That’s just one small example of where some of her money went. My friend loved the experience of helping people. She said, “This is so much fun!” When you decide to give, you look at the world differently.

Vince: We get to feel better about ourselves through philanthropy. That is, to some degree, the point of all of this. We live in a world where it’s easy to beat yourself up, but it feels better when you chip in. Like Christmas.

Amy Grant, 61, and husband Vince Gill, 65, are active philanthropists in Nashville. She oversees the Helping Hands Foundation, and for 27 years, he sponsored the Vinny Pro-Celebrity Golf Invitational.

We Are the Dream
By Rodney Crowell

I guess for some folks, the American dream is becoming rich and famous. For me, it was finding something I loved and could make a living from at the same time. Then, when I witnessed the screaming at four Brits on The Ed Sullivan Show, it registered with me that playing guitar and singing in a band was how you got a girl.

My first teen rock ’n’ roll band wasn’t very good. Nor was its name, the Rolling Tones. Nearly three decades later, I met Claudia, who became my wife, on the set of a video for my song “Lovin’ All Night.” So I thank the Rolling Tones; because of that band, I chased my dream.


STORY OF AMERICA, IN SONG

Want to understand our country and its people? Start with these selections
By Peter Cooper

“The Gambler” Don Schlitz wrote this hit for Kenny Rogers. “You’ve got to know when to hold ‘em / Know when to fold ‘em” has become life advice.

“(Old Dogs, Children and) Watermelon Wine” Tom T. Hall wrote this after he met a man cleaning up in a Miami airport lounge. The man told him that only these three things held true in the world.

“Amarillo by Morning” Cowboy culture is a major part of America. Terry Stafford and Paul Fraser wrote this song, and George Strait made it a hit. Here, the cowboy is broken—but his spirit is indomitable.

“Will the Circle Be Unbroken” In the 1930s, country music’s first family—the Carter Family—recorded this song of eternal renewal as “Can the Circle Be Unbroken.” It’s now country music’s anthem.


“America” Waylon Jennings is known as an outlaw, but this song, written by Sammy Johns, is a call for inclusion and an acknowledgment of the U.S.’ multicultural roots.

“Fox Chase” In 1927, Black harmonica player DeFord Bailey became a star of the Grand Ole Opry in a time of Southern segregation and rancor.

“Jolene” Dolly Parton wrote this song in a moment of emotional frailty, wondering if another woman might take her husband.

“He Stopped Loving Her Today” The world’s saddest love song was a hit for George Jones. Written by Bobby Braddock and Curly Putman, it is considered by many to be the greatest country song of all time.

“You Don’t Know Me” Cindy Walker, one of the first prominent female country songwriters, wrote this with Eddy Arnold. Ray Charles recorded the most famous version for his 1962 album Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music.

“Friends in Low Places” A celebration of tavern life over the black-tie scene. Written by Earl Bud Lee and Dewayne Blackwell, the song went to number 1 for Garth Brooks in 1990.

Peter Cooper is a former music journalist for The Tennessean who now works for the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Listen to these songs on AARP’s Country Music Playlist on Spotify.
Today there is more diversity in country music than ever. Black artists include Jimmie Allen, Mickey Guyton, Kane Brown (who is biracial), Brittney Spencer, Willie Jones and Breland. Gay artists, including T.J. Osborne of the Brothers Osborne and Chely Wright, are also finding more acceptance. And Latino artists are expanding their country profiles beyond Freddy Fender, Johnny Rodriguez and Rick Trevino, particularly with Alex Garrido and Kat Luna, known as Kat & Alex.

When it comes to race, Beverly Keel, dean of the College of Media and Entertainment at Middle Tennessee State University, sees three main factors at work today. The industry has discovered that the audience will accept talented artists of color. The cultural effect of George Floyd’s murder prompted a sort of racial reckoning in America. And, Keel says, “there was an erroneous, widespread belief that African Americans weren’t interested in making country music.”

Country did have a Black radio star as far back as the late 1920s in DeFord Bailey, a harmonica player and mainstay of the Grand Ole Opry for nearly two decades. But with the exception of Charley Pride, who had a long and successful career, Black artists would hit the charts in recent decades like pebbles in a pond, rather than crashing waves. From the ’70s through the ’90s, only a few Black musicians charted with singles.

It wasn’t until 2008—when Darius Rucker, the former lead singer of Hootie and the Blowfish, came over to country—that Nashville had an-
other bona fide Black star. “Don’t Think I Don’t Think About It” made him the first African American to hit number 1 on the Billboard country singles chart since Pride in 1983. Still, Rucker remained alone as a modern Black country hitmaker until 2018. That’s when Jimmie Allen became the second Black country artist to see his debut single (“Best Shot”) hit number 1. In 2021, he won the Country Music Association award for new artist of the year. “From my vantage point,” says Sarah Trahern, CEO of the Country Music Association, “I see the industry expanding its own lens, which is allowing a more diverse range of stories to be told by artists from all backgrounds.”

Kane Brown might be the modern distillation of it all. His mother is white, and his father is African American and Cherokee. He was raised by a single parent and was sometimes homeless. Now he’s a multiple-platinum-selling artist who made Time magazine’s list of the 100 most influential people last year.

“It’s 2022. I think people are opening their eyes, ears and hearts,” Brown says. “There is absolutely room to make more progress, but the truth is this has always been a format with fans that looked and are diverse, but the industry hasn’t always fully reflected that. I am hopeful that by the time my daughter is a little older, she sees herself when she looks at all areas of entertainment, including country music.”

For gay artists, the road has been similarly bumpy but is starting to smooth out. In early 2021, T.J. Osborne came out, saying, “I’m ready to put this behind me.” In so doing, he became the first mainstream country artist to make such an announcement while in the prime of his career.

Chely Wright, best known for the singles “Shut Up and Drive” and “Single White Female,” took it on the chin when she came out in 2010. She says the distress over her sexuality and career nearly drove her to suicide. After the publication of her memoir, Like Me: Confessions of a Heartland Country Singer, the work dried up. By then she was heavily into activism.

“In terms of Black and brown people or queer people or gender nonbinary folks in country music,” Wright assesses, “anyone who tells you that who you love or the experiences you’ve had in the past shouldn’t be high stakes for people either lacks an empathy bone or an education bone, or just isn’t paying attention.” In 2019, Wright was surprised to be invited back to play the Grand Ole Opry House, where she had made many appearances before her career stalled. “I can’t tell you how that fed and watered my spirit.”

Last year, Trisha Yearwood made an Opry appearance with the out singer Brooke Eden, modifying the title of a Yearwood hit to “She’s in Love With the Girl.” “It was a little scary,” Yearwood remembers. “I didn’t know how it would be received. But it’s just time.”

Alanna Nash is the author of 10 books, including Behind Closed Doors: Talking With the Legends of Country Music. She has also written for Vanity Fair, People, Rolling Stone and The New York Times, and is a winner of a Country Music Association Media Achievement award.

### How Well Do You Know Country Music?

**LYRIC**

(1) “And I turned 21 in prison doin’ life without parole”

(2) “They say roses are red and violets are purple / Sugar’s sweet and so is maple surple”

(3) “I’ve known a few guys who thought they were pretty smart / But you’ve got being right down to an art”

(4) “Riding on a horse, ha / You can whip your Porsche”

(5) “Mine is just another scene / From the world of broken dreams”

(6) “It takes one hand to count the things I can count on”

(7) “I dug my key into the side / Of his pretty little souped-up four-wheel drive”

(8) “We got married in a fever, hotter than a pepper sprout”

**SONG NAME**

(a) “Jackson,” Johnny Cash and June Carter (1967)

(b) “Before He Cheats,” Carrie Underwood (2005)

(c) “Old Town Road,” Lil Nas X (2019)

(d) “Dang Me,” Roger Miller (1964)

(e) “Mama Tried,” Merle Haggard (1968)

(f) “Nite Life,” Willie Nelson (1960)

(g) “That Don’t Impress Me Much,” Shania Twain (1997)


**ANSWERS:** a: June Carter, b: Carrie Underwood, c: Lil Nas X, d: Roger Miller, e: Merle Haggard, f: Willie Nelson, g: Shania Twain, h: Luke Combs.
Lester Holt
I was focused on becoming a radio disc jockey. That’s all I really wanted when I was in high school. I managed to land my first job at a country-and-western station in Sacramento. I did a show on Saturdays and Sundays, midnight to 6 a.m. I didn’t know much about country music, frankly, but I learned some appreciation. Later in life, especially during my years at the Today show, I was able to do a lot of stories with country artists and really became a fan.
An important part of what we do in the news business is stories that people can relate to. Country music also taps into something inside us that will ring familiar about our lives and how we see the world. —As told to Alanna Nash
*Lester Holt, 63, is the anchor and managing editor of NBC Nightly News and the anchor of Dateline NBC. He also plays bass.*

Sissy Spacek
Growing up in Texas, I was exposed to progressive country like Jerry Jeff Walker and Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt. The ’60s and ’70s were so rich for all kinds of music, and I dabbled in all of it. But I was naive about the roots of country music. It wasn’t until I met Loretta [Lynn] and started to work with her and go to the Grand Ole Opry that I really listened to country music.

We asked some famous Americans (and one pretty famous Brit) to tell us why they love country music.
Children were running down onto the floor to hug their moms and dads. This song was playing, and I will remember that time forever.

I feel that country music is probably the one genre that has really spoken to those that have served. There are songs that make me want to pull off on the side of the road sometimes and cry because they talk about love of country, and sometimes they speak to the incredible loss that families have gone through. I don’t know of any other genres that really talk about the patriotism and the pain that go with wearing a uniform. —As told to Jim Lenahan

**Senator Joni Ernst**, who turns 52 in July, is a Republican from Iowa. She also served as a company commander for the Iowa National Guard in Kuwait and Iraq during the Iraq War.

**Terry Bradshaw**

My earliest recollection of music is when we went to my mother’s parents’ home, which was a farm in Holsum, Louisiana. We had a battery-operated radio, and on Saturday nights we would all gather in this little den. I would lie on the floor at my grandfather’s feet and use his leg as a pillow, and we would listen to the Grand Ole Opry.

Sometimes on Saturdays we boys would climb in the wagon, and the horses would take us on a gravel road or a dirt road, and we’d go to Slim’s Barbershop—everybody, all the kids, the uncles, we’d all pile in there—and they would have the Grand Ole Opry on in there and there would always be discussions, like, “Man, that guy can sing.”

You know what? I’ve been asked this a few times: If I could switch my life, what would I be? I’d want to write songs and perform, because that’s something you can do your entire life. —As told to Jeffrey Lee Puckett

**Ringo Starr**

I love country music because of where I came from in Liverpool. To this day it is known as the country music capital of England. A lot of lads in my neighborhood who were in the Merchant Navy would go on the ships to America and bring back country-and-western records and blues records. When I heard Hank Williams, I just loved his presence on the records. He started the ball rolling for me. I’m an emotional person, and there is a lot of emotion in country music. That’s what got me hooked.

In the Beatles days, I had to find songs to sing because I wasn’t writing songs in the beginning. How great is “Act Naturally”? Buck Owens did it, I did it, and then we did it together in 1989. Buck was rock-country. He was a forward guy. I just love that song.

—As told to A.N.

**Senator Tim Kaine**, 64, is a Democrat from Virginia.

****Country music is a melting pot. It comes from all over. Its influence is deep, and it’s so American. I believe that we need it to bring our country together. —A.N.****

**Sissy Spacek**, 72, won an Oscar for her portrayal of Loretta Lynn in the 1980 film Coal Miner’s Daughter and recorded the album Hangin’ Up My Heart in 1983. Her next projects are the Prime Video series Night Sky and the movie Sam & Kate.
I think country music is important for getting your mind in the right spot—at least it is for me. You can be stressed-out; you turn on some country and it tends to settle you right down.

There are plenty of things in agriculture these days that could stress you out, from weather to bad crop prices. I think country music has some therapeutic value for folks in agriculture.

But I’m not sure that country music doesn’t have therapeutic value for folks all over. We in rural areas don’t own the store on anxiety, for sure. —J.L.

Senator Jon Tester, 65, is a Democrat from Montana. He also runs his family farm.

Ken Burns
What I understood from country music was that there is only “us.” There is no “them.” We are all in this together. None of us get out of this alive. And we need each other, and we need the music that we sing to each other to survive. —A.N.


Senator Mike Crapo
Country music became comforting music for me, especially in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. While our nation faced its worst terrorist attack on American soil, Americans united together and lifted each other up in unprecedented ways. The song that has stuck with me since is Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the U.S.A.” The themes of that song resonate broadly for any number of issues, including now, as we watch Russia’s barbaric attacks on Ukraine. —J.L.

Senator Mike Crapo, 71, is a Republican from Idaho.

Sammy Hagar
My father is from Texas, and he listened to country music, so when I was 3 or 4 years old, riding in the car, he had the radio on and he’d be whistling or he’d be yodeling. He was listening to Gene Autry, Hank Snow and Hank Williams. I would sing along to those songs. That’s how I became a singer.

I’ve just recorded a rock record at the old RCA Studio in Nashville. Every time we took a break, I went out into the lobby and looked at the pictures on the wall. I saw Dolly Parton with Porter Wagoner, and I saw Johnny Cash. I was just mesmerized by that. I wasn’t going around seeing if Judas Priest was there. —J.L.P.

Sammy Hagar, 74, has a new album, These Crazy Times, planned for release this year.

Senator Marsha Blackburn
One of my favorite moments in Washington was having Garth Brooks come to accept the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song. Capitol Hill can be a real circus, but when Garth walks into a room, you forget all that and focus on the great time you’re about to have. As Americans, we are bound by common values—faith, family, freedom, hope and opportunity—and it’s those deeply human moments that help us find deeper connections that transcend geography. There’s no such thing as “flyover country” when a music lover in New York or L.A. can hit play on a Jason Aldean song and suddenly find solace on a back road they didn’t know existed. There’s your common ground. —J.L.

Senator Marsha Blackburn, 70, is a Republican from Tennessee.

Robin Meade
I remember in a time of my life suffering through panic attacks at the start of newscasts, when I was a news anchor in Chicago. I’d spend so much time off the air worrying about whether I’d be racked with jagged breath and a palpitating heart. To keep my brain in the moment, I listened to Faith Hill’s Faith album. It’s hard to feel anxious when you’re singing “This Kiss.” —A.N.

Robin Meade, 53, is the anchor of HLN’s Morning Express. She has also recorded two country albums.

From venues to museums, some

Red Dragon Listening Room
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
A nonprofit run by a former liquor distributor who lives to hear great music, the Red Dragon is filled with mismatched couches and rows of chairs in front of a stage. But don’t let appearances fool you: Some amazing musicians have played here, including Rosanne Cash and Guy Clark.

Buck Owens’ Crystal Palace
Bakersfield, California
Owens built this restaurant and performance space as a shrine to the “Bakersfield sound,” which helped transform country music in the 1960s (and also counted Merle Haggard among its practitioners). The menu includes what is purported to be the last meal Owens ate before his 2006 death: Skillet Licker Chicken Fried Steak.

The world’s longest-running live radio program, the Grand Ole Opry, makes its home here. Each show is packed with a variety of performers, and countless legends have graced its stage.
**Birthplace of Country Music Museum**

**Bristol, Virginia**
Located on the Virginia side of Bristol, a city that straddles that state and Tennessee, the museum offers lively examinations of early country music. It also hosts regular performances and supports the annual Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion festival (pictured).

**Station Inn**

**Nashville, Tennessee**

Nearly every famous bluegrass musician, from Bill Monroe to Ricky Skaggs to Alison Krauss, has played this small but hallowed stage. Seating is general admission, and tickets usually are available only at the door on the day of each performance; fans line up as much as 90 minutes before showtime to avoid the “Sold Out” sign. It’s worth the hassle: On any night, you’ll hear some of the best acoustic music in Nashville.

**Gruene Hall**

**New Braunfels, Texas**

Built in 1878 in the Hill Country, this is Texas’ oldest dance hall. The schedule features rowdy “Texas country,” along with songwriting greats. Recent performers include Lyle Lovett, Patty Griffin and Ray Wylie Hubbard. It’s a quintessential Texas experience, tucked into a beautiful landscape.

**Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum**

**Owensboro, Kentucky**

Visitors can watch historic film footage, view memorabilia from the likes of Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs, and even make music on banjos and other instruments. Plus, there’s a theater for concerts.

**Carter Family Fold**

**Hiltons, Virginia**

This spot honors the first family of country music. It’s open to visitors on Saturdays for tours of A.P. Carter’s artifact-rich cabin as well as traditional country music concerts held at an 800-seat outdoor shed.

**The Bluebird Cafe**

**Nashville**

Located in a strip mall, this 90-seat listening room draws some of the finest country songwriters in the world. Garth Brooks and Taylor Swift are among the stars who played the Bluebird in their younger years. The audience is sworn not to secrecy but to silence—you can get tossed for talking during shows.

**Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum**

**Nashville**

Housed in this massive building is the world’s largest collection of country music artifacts. More than a million visitors enter the museum each year to view the instruments, outfits and even automobiles on display.
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Everyone knows that Chicago is famous for deep-dish pizza and New England has top-notch lobster rolls, but many places have wonderful signature dishes, even if only the locals know about them. As you head out on your spring and summer road trips, sample some of the hometown cuisine America has to offer. By Andrew Zimmern and Kelsey Ogletree

If you like breakfast sausage, try ... Goetta. Also called Cincinnati caviar, this sausage (say “get-uh”) is cooked in a loaf, then sliced and fried. Eckerlin Meats makes the best I’ve tried. — A.Z.

If you like cheeseburgers, try ... Hanky-Panky. Small pumpernickel buns are piled high with a heap of beef and then baked. Try them at KnockBack Nats or Tavern on the Bend. — K.O.

If you like potato chips, try ... Grippo’s. These tangy, smoky, heavily seasoned hot-and-sweet chips have been made locally for a century. — K.O.

If you like brats, try ... a Half-Smoke. D.C.’s signature dish is like a hot dog but spicier, sometimes slit down the middle and usually smoked before being grilled. These sausages are tucked into a steamed white bun and often topped with onions, cheese and chili sauce. Ben’s Chili Bowl serves them up at locations around the city. — K.O.

If you like barbecue sauce, try ... Mambo Sauce. This tomato-based sweet-and-spicy red sauce is thought to have originated in the 1960s at Wings-n-Things. Use it with fried chicken, Chinese takeout, over half-smokes or as a dip for fries. Experience the goodness at Wings N’ More Wings or Henry’s Soul Café (where it’s called Mumbo sauce). — K.O.

If you like chili, try ... Birria de Chivo. Fresh takes on birria, the popular stew made with meats and spices, have proliferated at Mexican food trucks, stands and restaurants. This version, made with sweet, mild goat braised for hours, is a hot order at places such as El Parian. The late Jonathan Gold, famed Los Angeles Times food critic, once hailed it as the best Mexican dish in the city. — K.O.

If you like Meatless Mondays, try ... Vegan Comfort Food. L.A. has a wide selection of meat-free menus, with choices ranging from the Impossible burgers at Monty’s Good Burger to the fried-poultry alternatives at Wolfie’s Hot Chicken and the cauliflower “wings” at Jackfruit Cafe. — K.O.

If you like Indian food, try ... Ethiopian Food. One of the world’s great cuisines is a must-eat when you’re in the nation’s capital, where there are plenty of authentic restaurants. Dishes to try: doro wat (a kind of chicken curry), kitfo (minced raw or rare beef), beef tibs and the superb injera (spongy flatbread). Tip: Don’t under-order! — A.Z.

If you like barbecue sauce, try ... Mambo Sauce. This tomato-based sweet-and-spicy red sauce is thought to have originated in the 1960s at Wings-n-Things. Use it with fried chicken, Chinese takeout, over half-smokes or as a dip for fries. Experience the goodness at Wings N’ More Wings or Henry’s Soul Café (where it’s called Mumbo sauce). — K.O.
ST. LOUIS

If you like pizza—who doesn’t?—try ...  
St. Louis-Style Pizza. Wafer-thin prefab pizza crusts are schmeared with sweet tomato sauce and topped with Provel, a quick-melting processed cheese that fans insist is made of Swiss, provolone and cheddar. Although I can’t detect any trace of those flavors in the stuff, I will say that the gloppy, gooey mess is addictive. Go to a neighborhood tavern, grab a table and an icy lager, and order up one of these pies. —A.Z.

If you like rich desserts, try ... Gooey Butter Cake. Bakeries all over the city whip up their own take on this staple. Legend has it this cake was invented by accident about a century ago when a chef added too much butter to a batter. A shortbread cookie-like crust is topped with a rich, super-sweet custard layer—made from little more than butter, sugar and eggs—then dusted with powdered sugar for a delectable treat that pairs perfectly with coffee. —K.O.
HAWAII
If you like a big breakfast, try ... Loco Moco. This is Hawaii’s top comfort food, and I love having it for breakfast (and then skipping lunch). Loco moco starts with white rice, adds a hamburger patty (or two) and a fried egg, then finishes the whole thing off with brown gravy. —A.Z.
If you like sushi, try ... Poke. Not to be confused with the fast-casual dish you find on the mainland, Hawaiian poke incorporates only a few locally sourced ingredients: raw ahi (tuna), limu (seaweed), inamona (kukui nut paste) and pa’akai (Hawaiian sea salt). —K.O.
If you like doughnuts, try ... Malasadas. These sweet, fried yeast pastries can be sprinkled with sugar and filled with creamy custard or made with poi, a paste created from purple taro root. —K.O.

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
If you like grilled cheese, try ... a Hot Brown. An open-faced turkey-and-bacon sandwich, topped with Mornay sauce and sliced tomato, it was supposedly created to satisfy late-night party hounds at Louisville’s Brown Hotel. —A.Z.
If you like finger foods, try ... Benedictine. This cucumber-based cream cheese is attributed to Jennie Carter Benedict, a trailblazing female chef. Find it delicately slathered onto finger sandwiches. —K.O.

THE WILD WEST
If you like having sweet and savory together, try ... Chili and Cinnamon Rolls. People from around here start ’em young on this comforting combo, a regular menu item in school lunchrooms. There’s something about a bowl of spicy, hearty chili that pairs deliciously with a rich roll smothered in cream cheese frosting (try ripping off a piece and dipping for ultimate satisfaction). —K.O.
If you like meat and more meat, try ... Pitchfork Fondue. Grab some steaks, sausages, chicken and pork, and heat up some vats of oil. Get a few dozen pitchforks, load the meats on the tines, and start cooking. Families hold their own pitchfork fondue gatherings, or you can visit restaurants that have picked up the practice, including Pitchfork Fondue in Pinedale, Wyoming, and Pitchfork Steak Fondue in Medora, North Dakota. —A.Z.

GO AHEAD—HAVE A PLATE OF THAT
Worried about busting your diet on vacation? Relax. A healthy body can withstand a splurge. But be smart. If you suffer from reflux, struggle to manage blood sugar or take medication that might be affected, choose your food accordingly. —Heidi Skolnik, nutritionist and coauthor of The Whole Body Reset, an AARP book

48 AARP THE MAGAZINE
NEW JERSEY

If you like a bacon sandwich, try ... a sub with Taylor Ham/Pork Roll. This deli meat, which predates the Civil War, is made of ground cured pork, both salty and hammy, and can be sliced and eaten cold but is almost always griddled and crisped. Piled onto a breakfast sandwich, swapped in for bacon in a BLT, loaded into a crusty torpedo loaf with cheese and onions, or simply crisped and eaten as a breakfast or lunch meat, it is a true only-in-Jersey food that shouldn’t be missed. —A.Z.

If you like your pizza simple, try ... Tomato Pie. The main distinction between this and New York pizza is the order of the toppings: cheese on the bottom and the sauce—made from the state’s high-quality tomatoes—on top. —K.O.

MIAMI

If you like Mexican food, try ... Nicaraguan Food. This cuisine doesn’t get enough credit. Hit up Fritanga Montelimar for some carne asada, perfect maduros fritos (fried plantains), gallo pinto (rice and beans) and a crazy-good nacatamal (similar to a Mexican tamale). —A.Z.

If you like turnovers, try ... Pastelitos. Dozens of Cuban bakeries serve up these popular flaky pastries brimming with savory or sweet fillings, from beef to guava and cream cheese (guayaba y queso). —K.O.

If you like chicken nuggets, try ... Alligator. It’s mild, white, juicy, and a great platform for spices and breading. —K.O.

NORTH CAROLINA

If you like fried shrimp, try ... Blowfish Tails. In the spring, just about every seafood shack fries these up by the bushel; they’re usually a few ounces each and have a clean whitefish flavor. —A.Z.

If you like Spam, try ... Livermush. It tastes better than its name suggests. Made of seasoned ground pork and liver mashed with cornmeal mush, it is molded into blocks, then sliced and panfried. —K.O.

If you like pie, try ... Sonker. Dating to Scottish immigrants in the early 1700s, this hot, fruity dessert topped with a sugary crust is usually made with blueberries, though sometimes other juicy fruits or even sweet potatoes are used. Surry County has its own Sonker Trail, with eight spots (including a few bakeries, restaurants and a general store) where you can dig in with a spoon. —K.O.

See our mobile edition for picks from Rochester, New York, and Louisiana.
I Witnessed History

Jenyce Gush was a teenager skipping school in Dallas. Dean Kahler was a college kid walking to class. Clara Jean Ester was a young woman hoping to meet a hero in Memphis. Each was an ordinary person who lived through an extraordinary event. In the following pages, you'll read about people like us who saw a page or even a chapter added to the history of our time. By A.J. Baime

Death of the President

Jenyce Gush, 73, director of volunteer services at the Suicide and Crisis Center in Dallas, on the JFK assassination

On November 22, 1963, a friend and I decided to skip school. We knew that the president was visiting Dallas and that his motorcade was going to come right down Lemmon Avenue. I was 15 years old, going to Rusk Junior High. The whole city came alive. It was the most exciting thing I'd ever seen. I was standing on the curb on Lemmon Avenue, wearing big pink rollers in my hair, when I saw the governor of Texas, John Connally. And then there they were—the president and the first lady—in an open Lincoln limousine.

I was in awe. This was the Camelot era. There had never been a president like John F. Kennedy or a first lady like Jackie. I was surprised to see them in an open car, that there was no bullet-proof bubble. But mostly I was thinking about how attractive he was. He had on a pinstriped shirt, and he had these bushy eyebrows. I looked at Jackie, who was the epitome of beauty, with lipstick that matched her pink suit. I waved at them, and President Kennedy’s eyes fixed on me, because I looked funny wearing these big pink rollers in my hair. He waved.

About a half hour after I saw the president, suddenly I saw this lady hysterically screaming in front of what was
then Skillern’s Drug Store. She was yelling, “They shot him! They shot him!” I thought she was talking about someone she knew, a family member or something.

“They shot who?” I asked.
“They shot the president!”
“No, no,” I said. “We just saw him.”
I went into Skillern’s Drug Store and saw people huddled around a TV. No one spoke. It was surreal. That is when I heard Walter Cronkite say those haunting words: “From Dallas, Texas, the flash, apparently official, President Kennedy died at 1 p.m. Central Standard Time, 2 o’clock Eastern Standard Time, some 38 minutes ago.”

I thought, This can’t be happening.

For days, it was all anyone could talk about. It was such a dark time for the whole world. My mother had previously worked as a waitress for Jack Ruby, at the Carousel Club. So when Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested, and Jack Ruby was captured on a television camera shooting Oswald, it was just unbelievable. Within a short period of time, the FBI showed up at our door. I answered, and there were these two agents with badges. I panicked, shut the door in their faces and ran to get my mother, who was asleep. “Mother!” I said. “My God! The FBI is here! Did you all kill the president?” Somehow, my young mind had made that leap. Of course, she had nothing to do with it.

Looking back, it was something you never dreamed could happen, and certainly not in your own hometown.

**The Ballad OF LADY DIANA**

Mary Robertson, 78, unlikely friend of the princess, on the day of her funeral

In 1980, my husband got transferred to London for his job at Exxon, and before we left, a neighbor gave me the name of an agency she had used when she was in London, to find a babysitter. I was going to work for a bank part-time and needed help with my 6-month-old son, Patrick. We got to London and I rang the agency, which was called Occasional & Permanent Nannies. “Here’s someone,” the woman on the phone said. “Her name is Diana Spencer.”

So, this young woman showed up for an interview. She was 18. The name Diana Spencer meant nothing to me. She and I hit it off, and I hired her on the spot—didn’t even check her references. For the next year, she came to my house two days a week. We had a very intimate relationship. I called her Diana, and she called me Mrs. Robertson.

One day I found a bank deposit slip sticking out of a sofa in my living room. The slip was from Coutts, the bank for the aristocracy and the royal family. And the name on it was Lady Diana Spencer. I knew that this was an important title. So, I took the deposit slip to the bank where I was working, and there we looked up Lady Diana Spencer in a book on the aristocracy. It just seemed impossible, and one of the British bankers said, “We think you’re great. But there’s no way that someone with her pedigree would be working for an ordinary American like you.”

She had been taking my son to “Kensington” to play with her sister’s little girl. She did not tell me that Kensington meant Kensington Palace, because her sister was married to the queen’s assistant private secretary. When our family moved back to the States, these little blue airmail letters started arriving. She wanted to share what was going on in her life and to tell us how much she missed Patrick and me. Of course, I was reading in the newspapers about her relationship with Prince Charles. Then, one day in February 1981, my phone rang. It was a friend from London. She said, “Your girl made it!” I literally jumped for joy. Then came another note. “Of course,” Diana wrote, “you will be receiving an invitation to the wedding.” We went to the wedding and also to this fabulous party at Buckingham Palace two days before. Prince Charles could not have been more gracious. I believed in the fairy tale. I thought this was going to work out wonderfully.

For the rest of Diana’s life, we wrote letters and saw each other when we could. I knew she was having a hard time. The last time I saw her was at a private lunch at Kensington Palace, just her and me and my two children. The food was not kid-friendly, but Diana cut my daughter Caroline’s chicken puff pastry for her. Caroline fell in love. This was a real-life princess.

One night in August of 1997, I was awake at 2 a.m. because we had had a family party. A friend called. “Mary,” she said, “go turn on your television. Diana has just been killed in a car crash in Paris.” I rushed downstairs, turned on CNN and watched for hours. It all seemed so unbelievable. I’ll never know who thought to invite us to the funeral. Diana was the only person in the royal family that we knew. But I got a call
Here was this lonely little coffin and the sweet little note from Prince Harry that said ‘Mummy.’

from Lord Chamberlain, inviting me. The sorrow felt so real, you could touch it. Here, inside Westminster Abbey, was this lonely little coffin with drapery over it, and the flowers, and the sweet little note from Prince Harry that said “Mummy.” Elton John sang a song, and after, we heard what sounded like rain. But it was a sunny September day. I realized that there were crowds all around the outside of the church, and they were clapping in support of Diana. When the soldiers carried her coffin out of the church, there was dead silence. All you could hear was the sound of their footsteps echoing. It was truly heartbreaking.

Fall of the Berlin Wall

In September 1989, I got to West Berlin. I was 26 and a Ph.D. student at Cornell University. It was a time of great change. People were trying to leave East Germany. Protests were going on. In October, East Germany’s leader, Erich Ernst Paul Honecker, resigned. It was clear something important was going on, but nobody was talking about the wall coming down. That seemed a long way off, if it was to happen at all. On the afternoon of November 9, I was listening to a press conference. A communist East German official was reading a new policy on how East Germans could leave the country, and he kind of messed it up. From what he was saying, it sounded like the Berlin Wall was going to open up, although that was not his intention. Crowds began to gather in East Berlin. I was in the West, so I couldn’t see these crowds, but I knew the pressure was building. Eventually, some border guards opened gates, and the crowds from East Berlin poured into the West. The following morning I went down to the wall. I have a picture of myself standing on the wall that day, celebrating. West Berlin was full of East Germans, and they were welcomed. There was a party atmosphere. Many from the East were driving their smoky East German cars—the Trabants. Everyone was delighted, because nobody expected it.

Over the next days, the wall came crumbling down, and I have pieces of it. You could tell who was from the East by their clothing—they didn’t have Western jeans, for example—and by their hairstyles. Little details stand out. I remember the West Berlin newspapers had inserts with free maps in them, because East German maps showed West Berlin as basically uncharted territory, so the newspaper map inserts showed the East Germans where the streets were and how to get around. Many East Germans saw food items they had never seen before; bananas were talked about at the time, because you wouldn’t have been able to get bananas in East Germany.

I stayed in Germany for nearly another two years. I ended up moving to a cheap, dilapidated apartment in what was formerly East Berlin, and I was in Germany on October 3, 1990, when the country reunited. I was there researching German foreign policy, and I was able to include my experiences in my dissertation and later in a book. What I remember, most importantly, I think, is how unexpected the fall of the wall was, how quickly it happened and the lesson we can learn. Circumstances that you can take for granted can change so quickly. Just because things are the way they are today does not mean they will be like that tomorrow.

Birth of THE MUSTANG

On April 15, 1964, I went with my parents to Johnson Ford, a car dealership on Cicero Avenue in Chicago, to buy a new car. I was 22 years old and had just graduated from Chicago Teachers College. I’d gotten a job in the suburbs, but I still lived at home, so I needed a car to get there.

“I want a convertible,” I told the salesman. “Come in the back room with me,” he said. “I have something special to show you.”

We went into the back room, and there was this car, under a tarp. He pulled off the cover, revealing this marvelous skylight blue automobile. It looked sporty and small, and it had bucket seats. I loved it right away. The salesman explained that he wasn’t supposed to show anyone this car, that it was going to debut two days later. But he let me buy it. It was a convertible and had all the bells and whistles, and I paid $3,447.50. My parents loaned me the money. Many years would pass—decades, in fact—before I would learn that I was the first person in the U.S. ever to buy a Ford Mustang. That day, when I drove out of the dealership, people were waving and asking me to slow down so they could see the car. Even police officers. The day after that, when I drove to my job, the seventh- and eighth-grade boys...
gathered around the car. They were so excited! I felt like a movie star. I wrote a letter to my boyfriend, Tom, now my husband of 56 years, about the car. He was in the Navy, out at sea, and when he wrote back to me, he told me he had never heard of a Ford Mustang.

On April 17, two days after I'd bought my car, Ford Motor Company debuted the Mustang at the New York World's Fair, in a ceremony with Lee Iacocca, who became known as the Father of the Mustang. Suddenly there were Mustangs everywhere. The car became so popular that Ford could not make them fast enough.

My husband and I drove that car for 15 years. Then one day he came home from work and said, “There’s something wrong with the car.” He put it in the garage and said he would fix it “next week.” That next week turned into 27 years. Tom saw a guy online claiming to be the first Mustang owner. He said he had bought his Mustang on April 14, 1964, in Canada. But I had bought mine on April 15, and I had all the paperwork. Eventually, Ford verified that my Mustang was the first one sold in the U.S.

Tom and I still drive our Mustang. The purchase in 1964 was just a chance encounter that has turned into a wonderful adventure. It feels like I won the lottery.

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I started at Kent State University in the spring of 1970, at 20 years old. I had never been to an anti-war demonstration, because if you worked on a farm or in a steel mill, as I had, there was no time for such things. I was the son of a World War II veteran, and I was involved in my church. On the night of April 30, I was in a pub in the town of Kent, listening to President Nixon’s speech. When the president announced that U.S. troops would be invading Cambodia, the pub erupted in boos. It seemed like this was going to be an expansion of the war instead of a reduction. Students were angry, me included. I went home for the weekend, and while I was gone, protesters burned an ROTC building. When I returned to campus Sunday evening, the place was like an armed camp. National Guard troops were everywhere. It was shocking, because this was rural Ohio—not exactly a hotbed of liberal thinking.

The next day, May 4, I figured I would go to the protest that was to start at noon. There were two or three thousand people gathered, shouting anti-war chants. The National Guard troops were there, putting on their gas masks and helmets. At one point, some troops came out in a Jeep with a campus police officer holding a bullhorn. If we didn’t disperse, he said, the National Guard would disperse us. That didn’t go over well. So, the National Guard troops got into formation and began firing tear gas. There was chaos. I ended up in a gravel parking lot wiping tear gas out of my eyes and nose.

I remained about 100 yards from the troops. I watched as they formed two lines, with their rifles and bayonets forward. They began to march toward a crowd of students, who cleared a path for them. The troops reached the top of a hill. I was at the bottom. They turned in unison and aimed their weapons down the hill. I thought, My God! They’re going to shoot!

I jumped down and covered my head, and all of a sudden, I heard bullets hitting the ground around me, making this zoop sound. Then I felt something like a beesting in my back, and I felt my legs tighten up, then relax. When the shooting stopped, there was this awful silence. Then people started seeing the bodies and the chaos resumed. Four young people were killed by National Guard troops, and many more lay heavily injured.

I ended up at Robinson Memorial Hospital, still conscious. They put me in an induced coma after surgery. When I awoke days later and learned of my fate, I was angry. But when the doctors told me what they had told my parents, I felt truly thankful to be alive. They told my parents to pray for me to survive one hour. And if I did, then to pray that I would survive two hours. And if I made it 12 hours, I would probably survive.

I have lived 52 years as a paraplegic. I have had a rewarding career, and I am a wheelchair runner currently training for my third marathon. I still feel today the way I did when I awoke in the hospital: thankful to be alive.
The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., on the eve of his death.

'T've Seen the PROMISED LAND'
Clara Jean Ester, 74, a community organizer, on the last moments of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life

The church was packed. There were people standing in the aisles of the Mason Temple. Martin Luther King Jr. was in Memphis, but there was a tornado watch and he had been advised to stay at the Lorraine Motel. Ralph Abernathy would do the talking this night. There were so many people! Somebody called Dr. King and said, “The people didn’t come to hear Ralph. They came to hear you. You need to get dressed and come down here.” I was a junior at LeMoyne College in Memphis and very engaged in the movement. There was a sanitation strike going on, and Dr. King had come to lead a nonviolent protest in support of the workers. When he came to the Mason Temple that night to speak—April 3, 1968—I was there. No one could know that this was the last speech he would ever make. He started to talk about his life story. In retrospect, it was like he was giving his own eulogy. He said he knew there had been threats on his life, but that didn't matter. “Because I’ve been to the mountaintop,” he said, “and I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.” The feeling in the church when he said these words was indescribable.

The next day, Dr. King had catfish for lunch at the Lorraine Motel, and fellow organizer James Orange said that this catfish was so good, he wanted to treat everyone. I was at the Clayborn Temple, and I got in my car to drive to the Lorraine Motel, with my car full of people. When we got there, we headed for the lobby entrance. Dr. King came out of his room (just above us on a balcony), and I could see him talking to some people and smiling. Someone told him to go back and get a coat because it was going to get a little cooler at night. He turned, but Ralph Abernathy stopped him and said he would get the coat.

Suddenly, I heard what sounded like a truck backfiring and people saying, “Get down! Get down!” I took off up the stairs. Dr. King was flat on his back. I tried to grab his wrist to take his pulse. I was on the side where the wound was. He was losing a lot of blood. I could see his chest rising, so I thought, That’s a good sign. He’s still alive.

His eyes were open and looking upward. All I could think about was his speech from the night before, when he said, “I may not get there with you.” Soon police officers arrived and the ambulance got there with the stretcher. The police wouldn’t let us leave, and as we were waiting there, it came on the news that Dr. King was dead. I didn’t talk about it for a long time. I never went back to the Lorraine Motel until it became a museum. I picked up my life and kept on going. Every year, I celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. on his birthday, because he was a gift from God. Every April 4, I mourn, because that gift was taken away.

Suddenly I heard what sounded like a truck backfiring and people saying, ‘Get down! Get down!’

‘The Giants Win THE PENNANT!’
George Hirsch, 87, founding publisher of New York magazine and chairman of New York Road Runners, on baseball’s greatest home run

On October 3, 1951, my friends and I were sitting in our homeroom class at New Rochelle High School, north of New York City—bored and frustrated 17-year-olds. That afternoon, at the Polo Grounds in Manhattan, the Brooklyn Dodgers were taking on the New York Giants in a game that would decide the National League pennant. You could not overstate how important baseball was at that time in American culture. Or how important it was to us. My buddies and I had a brainstorm. What are we doing here in class? Let’s hit the road! We snuck out of school and headed for the Polo Grounds. New York was the center of the baseball universe. All season long, the Dodgers had held a commanding lead in the standings over the Giants. But the Giants salvaged their season with a 16-game winning streak. Incredibly, the regular season ended in a dead tie. I was a Dodgers fan, and these players were my heroes—Jackie Robinson, Duke Snider, Gil Hodges, Carl Furillo.

We stood in line two hours for our tickets and paid $2 apiece. The game was so close, all 34,000-plus fans held their breath through every pitch. But in the eighth inning, Sal Maglie, the Giants’ pitcher, weakened, allowing the Dodgers to take a 4-1 lead. I’ll admit, I celebrated too early. In the bottom of the ninth, the Giants scored a run and had two men on base when Bobby Thomson came to bat. On deck stood Willie Mays, the 20-year-old rookie for whom I would later name my son. The Dodgers summoned Ralph Branca from the bullpen to replace the starter, Don “Newk” Newcombe. Branca’s first pitch was a fastball down the middle. Thomson didn’t move. The time was...
3:58 p.m. In his novel Underworld, Don DeLillo describes Branca’s next pitch: “Not a good pitch to hit, up and in, but Thomson swings and tomahawks the ball and everybody, everybody watches.”

“All I can remember was the pure shock of it,” recalls my friend Steve Goddard, sitting next to me at that moment. “And then I was crying.” My friend Buster Grossman, also sitting next to me, along with our buddy Greg Dillon, recalls hearing the now-famous refrain from a nearby radio, from the announcer Russ Hodges: “The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant!” We watched in awe as Thomson circled the bases, jumping up and down. I left the Polo Grounds that day feeling like I’d been struck by lightning, and Bobby Thomson’s home run has since become known as the shot heard round the world. Today, over 70 years later, I’m still friends with the three guys I went to see that game with. My late wife, Shay, gave me a photo autographed by Thomson and the pitcher Branca, which hangs in my office. I remember that night when I got home, after the game. “Someday,” my father told me, “you’ll get over it.” Maybe someday I will.

This Is
THE BIG ONE
Gary Shigenaka, 68, National Oceanic
and Atmospheric Administration
(NOAA) emeritus scientist, on the
Exxon Valdez spill

On March 24, 1989, I was working in the offices of NOAA in Seattle when I heard a commotion down the hall. People from our Hazardous Material Response Branch were scrambling, and I heard the head of that team say the words, “This is the big one.” That’s when I learned that the supertanker Exxon Valdez had run aground off the coast of Alaska. The hazmat team was dispatched as the first responders, and my scientific research group quickly followed. The federal government is not known for getting things done quickly, but in an amazingly short time, NOAA took an old mothballed hydrographic-survey ship called the Fairweather, which was outfitted to gather information for nautical charts, and turned it into a scientific-research vessel. In May, I flew from Seattle to meet the ship in Cordova, Alaska, and our mission began. The first time I grasped the magnitude of this catastrophe was when I saw the Exxon Valdez, which had been moved from Bligh Reef, where it ran aground, to an anchorage off Naked Island. This ship was longer than three football fields.

Eleven million gallons of crude oil had been dumped into this pristine body of water. When you looked at Prince William Sound’s shoreline, you thought, How can this environment ever recover? My team began its work, moving through the sound on a launch, taking samples of water and fish. Early in our work in 1989, the crew aboard the Exxon Valdez noticed that schools of fish were swimming into a cargo space that had once held oil but had been ripped open. I was part of a team that boarded the ship to catch these fish and study them.

One of the most important things we discovered was that our cleanup methods were not what we had hoped. We needed scientific research, and I took over a program to study how the shorelines recovered not just from oil exposure but from how we remedied it. So, in effect, the Exxon Valdez determined the direction of my career for the next 20 years, studying how to respond better to spills in natural habitats. That research—not just by me, but by many others as well—changed the way first responders do their work.

I have a collection of memorabilia from the Exxon Valdez, including glasses used during the christening, with “Exxon Valdez, September 20, 1986” etched into the glass, and a jar of crude oil gathered off an Alaskan beach. When I look back, it amazes me how much the Alaskan ecosystem recovered. If you went now and kayaked off the shores of Prince William Sound, you’d never know this catastrophe happened here. The resiliency of the natural world continues to inspire me.

James Patterson in his home’s writing studio in 2018. His books have sold more than 450 million copies across the globe.
MO ST WEEKS, AVID READERS are likely to find at least one James Patterson book—either solo projects or collaborations with other writers. They’ll include thrillers, children’s graphic novels, middle-grade fiction and nonfiction. His current hit is *Run, Rose, Run*, written with Dolly Parton (who wrote music to go along with it).

Now Patterson, 75, has turned his prodigious storytelling skills to looking back on his own journey. His new memoir, *James Patterson by James Patterson: The Stories of My Life*, is written as a sequence of short, often amusing tales covering his working-class childhood in Newburgh, New York—where he’d sometimes drink beer at the bar with his dad at age 5 or 6—and his unlikely path to fame. That included some 25 years in the advertising business (he cowrote the jingle “I’m
a Toys ‘R’ Us kid”), until he quit in 1996 to write full-time. Reading his memoir is a bit like hanging out with a wry, down-to-earth raconteur who, by many accounts, just happens to sell more books than anyone else on the planet.

Enjoy a glimpse into Patterson as he tells it like it was.

You’re slipping, James

According to Patterson family lore, on March 22, 1947, I nearly died at birth at St. Luke’s Hospital in Newburgh, New York. I don’t remember, but I did live to tell about it.

Let’s start with my father. Charles Henry Patterson was a quiet but tough man who came from tough times and from a tough river town.

My dad grew up in the Newburgh poorhouse (think about that for a second or two). It was called the Pogie. His mom was the charwoman there. She cleaned the kitchens and bathrooms, worked, she said, from “7 to 7, seven days a week.” For her long, hard work, she and my father got to share a single room on the basement floor. They weren’t homeless, but they were damn close. My father never met his father, at least not as far as he could remember.

My mother, Isabelle Ann, attended high school with my dad. After college she became a fourth grade teacher at St. Patrick’s, one of the four Catholic schools in Newburgh. She made next to nothing. Maybe even a little less than that. I’m surprised the parish priests didn’t ask her to pay them for the privilege of teaching at their school. Several nights a week, she would be bent over the dining-room table grading papers until 9 or 10.

She had a cool mission as a teacher: She wanted to turn mirrors into windows. She pretty much followed the same philosophy at home. Mirrors, physical or symbolic, weren’t big in the Patterson house.

My sisters—Mary Ellen, Carole and Teresa—ruled the roost. In their view of the world, I was hired help. I was muscle. I was their minion. So I handled the garbage detail, the lawn work, the snow removal, and the repair of bicycles, small electrical appliances, deflated balls of all sizes and shapes. We were a very ball-sy family.

I was always a good student, driven to be number one in, well, everything, but I’d get a 97 on a test and my mom or dad would say, “How come you didn’t get a hundred? You’re slipping, James.”

The idea I had growing up—and I held on to it into my 40s—was that my folks only cared about me as long as I was number one in my class. I don’t blame them, because I feel they were doing the best that they could. I think they honestly believed the next Great Depression was just around the corner, and they always clung to, Careful. Careful. Go slow. Look both ways. Then look again. Your best isn’t good enough. You’re slipping, James.

My favorite dad story

Just a few weeks before my father got shipped out to fight in World War II, he received a long-distance phone call [from a man who identified himself as George Hazelton from Port Jervis, a town about 40 miles from Newburgh. George told my dad he was about to leave for the Pacific theater with the Navy, and the night before, his father had said to him, “George, you know we love you very much, and you’re about to go off to fight in this horrible war, so we have to tell you something that we’ve kept from you all these years. We’re not your natural parents. We adopted you when you were 1 year old.”

Then George Hazelton told my father—over the phone—that he was his brother.

So Charles Patterson and George Hazelton, two brothers who still hadn’t actually met, both went off to fight for their country in World War II.

Miraculously, they both also came home. They became best friends, extremely loyal and loving toward one another. The thing I remember best about the two of them was that when they were together, they would laugh and laugh. And my father didn’t laugh all that much.

My father would sometimes tear up when he told the story about how he and his big brother, George, found one another. I think it was the only time I ever saw him cry.

A few years after the war ended, my Uncle George called my father again. This time he started with the punch line: “I found our father.”

My uncle went on to report that their father was tending bar in Poughkeepsie, New York. He was working in a seedy
just right for a scene in a novel about upstate New York by months—here inside, bellied up to the bar. The joint reeked of sitting under the Poughkeepsie bridge. A couple of rutmard. I'm not going with you, George.”

C'mon, Pat, let's go to Poughkeepsie. The two of us. I want joint under the Mid-Hudson Bridge. My Uncle George said, “C'mon, Pat, let's go to Poughkeepsie. The two of us. I want to meet him.”

My father said, “Well, I don't. I'm not interested in meeting the bastard. I'm not going with you, George.”

So my uncle went all by himself to this ugly little gin mill sitting under the Poughkeepsie bridge. A couple of rummies were inside, bellied up to the bar. The joint reeked of months-old stale beer and hard liquor that was even older. Just right for a scene in a novel about upstate New York by William Kennedy or Richard Russo.

My Uncle George didn't drink, so he ordered a Coca-Cola. Then he sat there nursing his soda, watching his father, who he'd never met, growing so disgusted by this poor excuse for a human being that he never even introduced himself. After half an hour—an excruciating time, I imagine—Uncle George left the bar and drove back to Port Jervis alone. His father never knew that one of his sons had been there.

And to this day, I don't know my grandpa Patterson's first name.

Small-town bars actually played a big part in my youth. On many a Saturday afternoon, my father would drag me along to a local joint on Broadway in Newburgh. My dad called it “babysitting the boy.”

Here was our ritual: The bartender would slap half a mug of beer down in front of me. I was 5 or 6 years old. I'd quaff the beer in one big sip. Every Saturday. The guys in the bar would cheer for me, and my dad was clearly proud. Somehow, I didn't become an alcoholic, but encouraging your kid to chug down beers at 6 was an interesting way of being a dad. I don't recommend it.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 73**
Pratt, on the site of the future Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing, with a life-size cutout of P22
Safe Crossing for Cats

The way Beth Pratt became the de facto BFF of the Hollywood cougar

MOST PEOPLE are never going to see a mountain lion up close. They’re nicknamed “ghost cats” because they stay secretive. But they’re around. P22 is a very famous mountain lion that lives in Los Angeles. I call him “the Brad Pitt of the cougar world.” He’s handsome. He has aged well. He’s very comfortable chilling under the Hollywood sign.

This cat is why I got involved in creating a bridge for wildlife over the 101 Freeway. The P in his name stands for “puma,” and he’s the 22nd one tagged in a National Park Service study. But he’s the only one living in Griffith Park. He’s separated from the rest of the local cougars—a group of about 10 to 15—by roads and freeways. No one is sure how he survived crossing two of the busiest highways in the country to find a home.

In 2012, I was told that, because of highways fragmenting habitat and the cougars’ shrinking gene pool, scientists feared the local ones might go extinct. I thought, Not on my watch. I just felt that this was a problem we could solve. By building a 175-foot-wide vegetated bridge over the highway, we could safely reconnect the cougars’ habitat.

I got the organization I work for, the National Wildlife Federation, to join the other project partners, such as the National Park Service and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Later, the Annenberg Foundation got involved, along with a lot of individual donors. Finally, on Earth Day of this year, we broke ground. We expect the crossing to be completed by 2025, and I can’t wait to see the first animal use it!

I don’t want anyone to fear wildlife. The wild world is marvelous. It gives me joy and awe and wonder. I want that for everybody.

—As told to Leslie Quander Wooldridge

Beth Pratt, 53, is the California regional director for the National Wildlife Federation. She splits her time between Los Angeles and her home near Yosemite National Park.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGG SEGAL
‘You’re Just Like a Brother’

Robert Pineda had been homeless for 30 years. Then he met Scott Kuczmarski

SCOTT KUCZMARSKI: In May 2019, I retired and found myself at home in Rhode Island, pondering my deeper purpose. I read the Dalai Lama’s book The Art of Happiness, where he writes that happiness comes from seeking other people’s happiness. ROBERT PINEDA: At that time, our lives were pretty different. I’d been living on the streets around Palo Alto, California, for 30 years. SCOTT: My son had a medical school rotation at Stanford, so I said, “I’ll go with you.” We rented an Airbnb, and I took along my dachshund. ROBERT: One morning I’m heading to my usual spot for a cup of coffee ... SCOTT: ... and I’m walking my dog. I see this guy riding his bike with about 200 pounds of stuff piled on it. Clearly his life is a struggle, but he’s smiling from ear to ear. I thought, I’ve got to meet this guy.

ROBERT: My first impression of Scott was, Maybe he wants to start something, some drama. But I stayed put. SCOTT: As you started talking, I realized you were an amazing person and you could use some help. Over the next three weeks, we had breakfast together almost every day.

ROBERT: When you were ready to go back to Rhode Island, I gave you my email, and we stayed in touch.

SCOTT: Meanwhile, I was in contact with social services in Palo Alto. I suspected you were dealing with schizophrenia. I called around and made a plan. That October, my son had a rotation at UCLA, so I went back to California with him, and you and I met up in Palo Alto.

ROBERT: That’s when you told me about arranging a medical evaluation. The doctor prescribed medication, and we drove directly to the pharmacy. I felt like I was going through a time machine. I’d had a good life before I became homeless. I was a carpenter; I had a wife, a home. Then things got rough. But getting back into life is kind of like riding a bike. I remembered how to do it.

SCOTT: Online, I found a small cabin in the woods about 50 minutes from my own house. By March 2020, you had agreed to move back here, and I bought it and rented it to you for $1 a month. With a lease and everything.

ROBERT: It still feels surreal to have a place of my own. You have gone beyond the stars to help me. You gave me a second chance.

SCOTT: We just have a connection—I don’t know how to explain it. You’re just like a brother. I’ve always felt like you must have done this for me in a previous life and I’m only paying you back. —As told to Robin Westen

Photograph by Jesse Burke

Retirees Scott Kuczmarski, 57, and Robert Pineda, 60, live in Rhode Island.
My father was a very big part of the Chinatown community in San Francisco. He was a liquor salesman, and he knew every restaurant owner there. We couldn’t walk more than 20 steps on the street without somebody calling out his name. So, San Francisco’s Chinatown always felt like home to me.

The one in New York City was different. Even though I’ve lived in New York for 40 years and would go to Chinatown regularly to shop, I never made an effort to get to know the people who lived and worked there. I’m a little shy. The neighborhood was so busy—the sidewalks were so crowded that I’d have to weave my way through to find ingredients for the recipes I’d develop.

That all changed in January of 2020. Suddenly, all the stores were empty. People were afraid to come to Chinatown, just because the COVID-19 virus had originated in China. When I saw the neighborhood as a ghost town, it made me think about what we’d lose if it were gone.

The story of Chinatown, like those of other traditional immigrant neighborhoods, is an American story. So many of these entrepreneurs had come to this country with nothing, and through sheer grit and hard work had realized the American dream. I think the place should be designated as a living national treasure.

With videographer Dan Ahn, I began what became an 11-part video series called Coronavirus: Chinatown Stories, to bring attention to the struggles of New York’s Chinatown and other Chinese communities. Then I began to stumble upon other ways to help. When hate-motivated attacks on Asian Americans started to rise, I worked with a group called Asian Americans for Equality, to distribute personal-security devices in Chinatown. With the community organization Welcome to Chinatown, I raised money to buy meals from Chinatown’s legacy restaurants and deliver them to older people and those in need. Last October, I partnered with the James Beard Foundation and Poster House museum to launch the social media campaign #LoveAAPI, to support Asian American and Pacific Islander small businesses, which are still the targets of hate crimes.

There have been many days when I’ve felt down. But recently a friend sent me this quote: “Action is the antidote to despair.” And I thought, Yes. The work I’ve done for Chinatown has actually given me focus and purpose over the past two years. Maybe the biggest lesson I’ve learned from this is that there are no magical heroes waiting in the wings. If we don’t help each other, nothing will happen. But if everyone does what they can, it really does make a difference.

—As told to Andrea Adleman

Cookbook author Grace Young, 66, who is known as the Stir-Fry Guru, is the James Beard Foundation’s humanitarian of the year. She will receive the 2022 Julia Child Award in October.

Find Young’s summer stir-fry recipe at aarp.org/realpeoplerecipes.
Finally, last March, I left my dog, cat and husband to take care of one another and started my journey in Georgia. To complete my south-to-north journey before the harsh New England winter set in, I had to average about 12 miles per day. There were some sections so steep, I had to remove my pack and place it on a higher surface before hoisting myself up. Other times, I had to leap as far as 3 feet across crevasses so deep you could feel cold air emanating from the ground as you passed over the gaps.

While I felt very prepared, there were challenges I couldn’t anticipate. One time in Maine, I encountered a rock face so steep, it was nearly vertical. That was where I lost my footing and somersaulted backward. I was lucky my pack, instead of my head, hit the ground. When my body stopped rolling, I was shaking. I didn’t consider stopping, though. The only way out was through.

Five months, five days and 2,193.1 miles after I started, I summited the final peak, Maine’s Mount Katahdin. This was by far the most grueling challenge I’ve ever accomplished. Most of my fellow thru-hikers were in their 20s and 30s, but my age was an advantage. Experiencing so much pain in my life—emotionally and physically—helped me maintain perspective when things went wrong on the trail. Plus, being older means you’re used to having aches and pains. Honestly, I’ve never been afraid of aging. I’m thrilled I’m still alive. —As told to Pam Moore

Gwen Buchanan, 52, is a physical therapist who lives in Mehoopany, Pennsylvania.
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<th>Company</th>
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<td>ALLSTATE</td>
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<td><strong>PEACE OF MIND:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accident Forgiveness(^3),</td>
<td>assurance that your rates won’t go up after your first at-fault accident.</td>
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<td><strong>ADDED VALUE:</strong></td>
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<td>New Car Replacement(^3),</td>
<td>one of many valuable benefits available when you switch.</td>
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<td>A 24/7 Claims Hotline and a 6-point Claims Commitment.</td>
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\(^3\)Terms and conditions apply. Accident Forgiveness is not available to CA policyholders.

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The Grandmother of Juneteenth
How activist Opal Lee sparked the movement that turned a cherished tradition into our newest national holiday

HAVENEVER had a gut feeling about something? I felt, positively, like I hadn’t done enough with my life. I’d finished college, gotten a master’s degree, taught school, worked as a social worker, had children. We had a farm. Our food bank served 500 families a day. I was volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. But even into my 80s, I had a nagging feeling that I should be doing more.

And I had always thought that Juneteenth was a day everybody ought to know about: the day in 1865 when the last of the people held in bondage in Texas learned they were free. So, in 2016, I began a march from Fort Worth to Washington, D.C., to draw attention to Juneteenth. I didn’t walk the whole way, but I did make it to Washington. In 2019, I started a petition, and we garnered 1.5 million signatures in favor of the holiday. People talked about it. And, of course, the death of George Floyd and the demonstrations for social justice that followed have helped draw attention to the cause. The fact that Juneteenth became a national holiday in my lifetime—I’m still on cloud nine. I could do a holy dance except they’d say I was twerking!

Older people don’t always remember this, but we have power. We have so much to teach the younger generations. I know some people are afraid. They don’t want to be bothered, or they draw into themselves. But the future depends on us. We can’t be satisfied with just having Juneteenth made into law. We’ve got joblessness, homelessness, health care, climate change. If we don’t address these things, nobody’s going to. We have to educate, because the books don’t always tell the truth. I’ve seen pictures in textbooks of Black folks picking cotton, and they almost looked like they were enjoying themselves. I picked cotton, and ain’t nothing enjoyable about it. You have to stand up and say, “These things cannot happen anymore.”

Lately, you hear talk about our differences, but under our skin we are the same. We bleed red blood, all of us. Freedom isn’t something just for Black people to celebrate. It’s for everybody. I’d like to see our country celebrate freedom from Juneteenth to the Fourth of July. Now that would be a celebration! If each one of us could convince one person who’s not on the same page, we could do it. It’s not gonna happen in a day or a week. We have to work on it. Slowly. Persistently. That’s how change happens. —As told to David Hochman

Retired teacher Opal Lee, 95, lives in Fort Worth, Texas. On June 18 she will lead a multicity fundraising walk called Opal’s Walk for Freedom.

The History of Juneteenth

1865
The U.S. Army arrives in Galveston, Texas, and on June 19 informs enslaved African Americans of their freedom.

1866
Annual June 19 Jubilee Day celebrations begin in Texas, with parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings and music.

1968
The Reverend Ralph Abernathy calls Juneteenth “Solidarity Day” in the Poor People’s Campaign.

1979
The Texas legislature makes Juneteenth a state holiday.

2016
With 45 states now recognizing Juneteenth, Opal Lee, 89, begins her journey from Texas to Washington, D.C.

2021
Congress passes a law to make Juneteenth a federal holiday.
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Reset Your Brain
Keep Sharp: Build a Better Brain at Any Age
Keep your brain healthy with this science-driven guide by neurosurgeon and CNN correspondent Sanjay Gupta, M.D., and based on the work of the Global Council on Brain Health, convened by AARP; aarp.org/keepsharp.

Reset Your Life Plans
The second edition of the award-winning Checklist for My Family walks you through the process of organizing your finances, legal documents and more. With this one-of-a-kind guide, you’ll stay in control and have peace of mind knowing that should anything happen to you, you—and your family—will be well prepared. AARP members get 40 percent off by going to aarp.org/formyfamily, clicking on ABA and applying the discount code “AARP” at checkout. (The discount is not available through Amazon or other retailers.)

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Matt Paxton, the downsizing expert and star of Legacy List With Matt Paxton, helps you sift through the clutter so you can focus on living the life you want; aarp.org/keepthememories.

For helpful tips on saving for your retirement, visit AceYourRetirement.org.
HOW WE’RE FIGHTING FOR YOU

AARP TAKES ON RX PRICES

We have been listening to you about the costs of your prescription drugs. And we’re as mad as you are. Thousands of older Americans have shared with us how paying for their medications has become a burden—in some cases making them choose between their drugs and rent or groceries. In 2019, AARP launched a multiyear campaign to lower drug prices. And despite fierce opposition from powerful pharmaceutical-company lobbyists, we are winning this fight.

AARP has already worked to help pass dozens of bills at the state level. But more needs to be done. Take retired police officer Larry Zarzecki, who told AARP he had to sell his home to afford medication to treat his Parkinson’s disease.

Inspired by people like him, AARP is ramping up the pressure on Congress to pass national prescription drug reform. As part of our Fair Drug Prices Now campaign, AARP members and activists have delivered more than 4 million petitions, sent 1.2 million emails and made more than 100,000 calls to Congress. We launched a national advertising campaign to keep up the pressure. And it’s working. Last November, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to allow Medicare to negotiate some drug prices, potentially saving hundreds of billions of dollars over a decade.

Now the legislation is in the Senate, where hearings have been held. A vote on the package could happen in late spring or early summer. If it passes, it would then go to President Joe Biden, who has publicly endorsed the bill, to be signed into law.

“Letting Medicare negotiate lower drug prices has broad support with voters from all parties and saves money for seniors and taxpayers,” says my colleague Nancy LeaMond, AARP chief advocacy and engagement officer. “There is no reason Congress can’t get this done.” The fight goes on.

Americans are tired of paying nearly three times what people in other countries pay for drugs. AARP won’t stop until every American has access to affordable prescription drugs.

JOIN AARP’S EFFORTS

• Help AARP work to lower prescription drug prices; aarp.org/getinvolved.
• Learn more about AARP’s Fair Drug Prices Now campaign; aarp.org/rx.

—Bill Sweeney, senior vice president for government affairs, leads AARP’s advocacy efforts.

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Staying Sharp / Games

PUZZLES BY STANLEY NEWMAN

CROSSWORD

Cool Centennial

ACROSS
1. Flying buzzer
4. Blacksmith's product
8. Kindhearted
12. Hole-punching tool
13. Sound of contentment
14. Botanical balm
15. Centrifugal __ (cool invention of 1922)
18. Early-afternoon hour
19. To the rear, at sea
20. Roundish shape
23. ___ loss for words
24. Crunchy lunch
27. Inventor of 15 Across
31. Elongated fish
32. Family nickname
33. Toe the line
34. Basketball arbiter
35. Early-afternoon hour

DOWN
1. Candy option
2. Flock female
3. North Pole assistant
4. Go round and round
5. Colossal
6. Mine resource
7. List of misprints
8. Light bulb measure
9. “Float like a butterfly” boxer
10. One of Pooh’s pals
11. Fathers and grandfathers
16. Dice throw
17. Worship from ___
20. Be obligated to
21. Compete (for)
22. Totally
23. What we have
24. High chair wear
25. Director Spike
26. Take a taste of
28. “Now it makes sense”
29. Baker’s gadget
30. Ultimate cause
31. Stand up
35. Beverages brewed from bags
36. Methods
37. Fuel economy no.
38. Liquid for frying
39. Flok-in-flight formation
40. Original network for The Sopranos
41. Shade tree
42. Strawberry shade
43. Plea from the sea

37. Among the first public places to install 15 Across
44. Crusty desserts
45. Online auctioneer
46. Four-legged zodiac sign
47. Great joy
48. Legendary flag maker
49. Physicians, for short

ALL WET

Rearrange the eight letters in SHIP and BOAT to get a two-word place you might visit before going on the water.

PLAY SUM MUSIC

Each of the 10 different letters in the equation below represents a different digit. If P is three times I, and E is 3, what is the unique sum?

W + E + M + U + S + H = ___

BRAINTEASER

MATCHING MONTHS

This year, two months have exactly the same day-and-date calendar. Can you figure out which they are without consulting a calendar?

Hint one: A Saturday is the first of the month for both. Hint two: These two months ALWAYS have the same day-and-date calendar in non-leap years.

STAYINGSHARP.AARP.ORG

Explore brain-health resources, and play fun games.

All puzzle solutions on page 74

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JAMES PATTERSON
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59

Passion keeps you going ... but it doesn't pay the rent.

WHEN I FIRST arrived in New York [after college], I would force myself to get up at 5 every morning to squeeze in a couple of hours of writing before I went to work at the ad factory. I was full of hope and big dreams but not enough confidence to quit my day job and write for my supper.

I’d play some music, maybe a little Harry Nilsson (“Gotta Get Up”), and do my first stint of scribbling sentences, cutting sentences, adding sentences, driving myself crazy.

The book’s getting better, right? The book’s getting worse. Every sentence I write is inferior to the last.

I’m going to be the next Graham Greene.

Don’t quit your day job, chump.

You start thinking you’re a fraud, “a big fat failure.” OK, OK, so that’s a line out of the movie You’ve Got Mail. So is, “You are what you read.”

As I said, I was driving myself crazy. It goes with the territory. I think that’s what first-time novelists are supposed to do. Our rite of passage. Every night after work, I’d come home in a daze of jingle lyrics and cutesy catchphrases, sit in my kitchen, stare around at the tiny antiseptic space, then start writing again. I’d go till 11 or 12. That’s how I wrote The Thomas Berryman Number.

I did the first draft in pencil.

But then I typed. The two-finger minuet. I had to reach up to the counter to peck at the keys of my gloss-black Underwood Champion. Eventually I hurt my back. That’s when I stopped typing and started writing everything in pencil again.

I still write in pencil. I’m writing this with a number 2 pencil. The pencils were gifts from my old friend Tom McGoey. They each say Alex Cross Lives Here. My handwriting is impossible to read—even for me. Hell, I’m not sure what I just wrote.

After about a thousand revisions, when I thought the manuscript for The Thomas Berryman Number might be ready for human consumption, I mailed it out myself. No agent. No early readers. No compelling pitch letter.

I got rejections. Mostly form letters. A couple of handwritten notes from editors that were encouraging. One publisher, Morrow, held on to the manuscript for two months before rejecting it. With a form letter.

Then I read an article in The New York Times Book Review about the literary agency Sanford Greenburger Associates. Sanford Greenburger, the founder of the agency, had died in 1971. His son Francis took over the business. Francis was in his 20s, not much older than me. The article in the Times said they were accepting manuscripts from unpublished writers. That would be me.

I sent over the manuscript that had already been rejected 30 times. We’re talking 400 typewritten pages secured in a cardboard box. Two days later, I got a phone call from Greenburger Associates. I’m thinking to myself, I can’t believe they turned my book down so fast!

The caller was Francis himself. He said, “No, no, no, I’m not turning your novel down. Just the opposite. Come on over and see me. I want to sell this thing. I will sell your book.”

So Francis hooked me up with Jay Acton, a hot young editor at Thomas Crowell, a small, family-owned New York publisher. Jay and I got along beautifully. He worked with me for about a month on the manuscript.

Then Jay rejected it. My 31st rejection.

But Francis Greenburger talked me down off a ledge of the 30-story Graybar Building, where J. Walter Thompson had its offices. “Don’t worry your pretty little head. I’m going to sell it this week.”

And he sold it to Little, Brown. That week. 

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

**Sofia Vergara**

*(JULY 10)* You know Sofia Vergara as the passionate Gloria Delgado-Pritchett on ABC’s *Modern Family*, which wrapped, after 11 seasons, in 2020. She’s since put her mega-watt charisma to use as a judge on *America’s Got Talent* and as the late Colombian drug queenpin Griselda Blanco in Netflix’s upcoming series *Griselda*. While Vergara also hails from Colombia, her similarity with Blanco more or less ends there. But she is like the comedic Gloria, as are the Colombian women she’s known, Vergara has said in response to criticism that the character perpetuates Latina stereotypes. “I created Gloria as a mixture of my mom and my aunt and the women that I grew up with in Colombia,” she told Variety last year. “They were super colorful, super crazy, minding everybody’s business, super passionate and loving…. I always laughed about [the criticism] because if Gloria was stereotypical, then that’s just what I am.” —Nicholas DeRenzo

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**MORE MILESTONE BIRTHDAYS**

- **Maya Rudolph**
  *JULY 27*
  Comic actress won two 2021 Emmys, for hosting *SNL* and for her *Big Mouth* voice role.

- **Paula Abdul**
  *JUNE 19*
  Singer-dancer choreographed Tom Hanks’ giant-keyboard dance routine in 1988’s *Big*.

- **Tom Cruise**
  *JULY 3*
  Action hero did his own stunts while filming *Mission: Impossible 7* (out next year) in Norway.

- **Wesley Snipes**
  *JULY 31*
  Actor is a martial artist, and he wants to show off his “body mastery” in future movies.

- **John Goodman**
  *JUNE 20*
  *The Conners* dad lost an estimated 100 pounds, with portion control and exercise.

- **Brian Wilson**
  *JUNE 20*
  Beach Boy’s 2021 album, *At My Piano*, offers mellow versions of hits such as “California Girls.”

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*Photograph credits and information on page 74*
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