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# Reader's

## Digest

TRY OUR  
GENIUS  
SECTION

*Fascinating*  
**FACTS**  
*that are*  
**FALSE!**

PAGE 60

**AN INJURED DOG'S  
Incredible Journey**

PAGE 36

**FROM CYBER  
SCAMMERS  
to Heroes**

PAGE 26

**What to Do  
When Your  
CHILD HATES  
SCHOOL**

PAGE 52

**How a  
Quiet  
Tech Guy  
RIGGED  
THE  
LOTTERY**

PAGE 70



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# CONTENTS

OCTOBER 2019

## Features

26

**THE STRANGER WHO  
CHANGED MY LIFE**

**The Internet  
Chump Who  
Became A Champ**

An online scam that turns into a business partnership and a great friendship.

STEVE HARTMAN  
FROM CBSNEWS.COM

32

**POWER OF ONE  
Compassion  
in Calais**

Volunteers in France help refugees in the port city of Calais.

LUCY ASH

36

**DRAMA IN REAL LIFE**

**The Dog that Came  
Back from the Dead**

A morning run turns into a close call for this family and their dog.

ERIC WAGENKNECT  
WITH TESS STROKES  
FROM OUTSIDEONLINE.COM

52



43

**THE FOOD ON YOUR PLATE**

**Oats: How A Weed  
Grew Into A Health  
Hero**

From an inauspicious start, oats have become a staple lauded by health professionals.

KATE LOWENSTEIN  
AND DANIEL GRITZER

64

**LIFE WELL LIVED**

**A Lesson in Grace**

This author reconnects with her mother with the help of her five-year-old daughter.

LESLIE KENDALL DYE  
FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

43



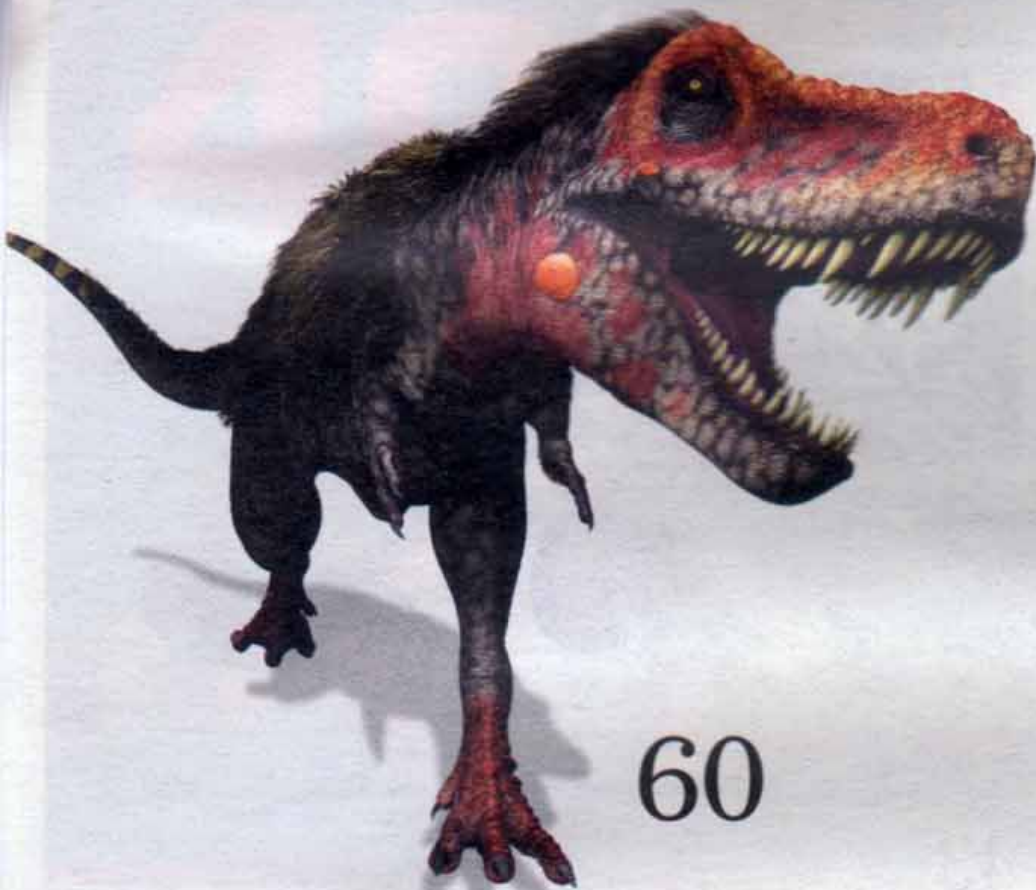
52

**PARENTING**

**My Child Hates  
School**

Strategies to help support your child and remedy the situation. SUE BROWDER

ON THE COVER: FACT OR FICTION - PAGE 60



60



94

60

**DID YOU KNOW?**

### Fact or Fiction?

Test your knowledge with impossibly true tales and 'facts' that are actually myths.

MARISSA LALIBERTE,  
ASHLEY LEWIS, JACOPO  
DELLA QUERCIA

70

**TRUE CRIME**

### The Man Who Rigged the Lottery

A cunning software programmer changes the outcome of a million-dollar lottery.

REID FORGRAVE FROM THE  
NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

## CONTENTS

OCTOBER 2019

80

**ANIMAL KINGDOM**

### Elephant Mother

A female elephant helps a group of orphaned youngsters to become a herd.

DR MARION E GARAÏ FROM THE  
LAST ELEPHANTS BY DON PINNOCK  
AND COLIN BELL

91

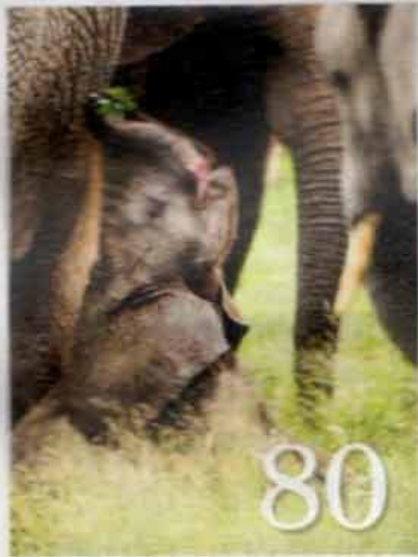
**LIFE HACKS**

### 9 Tricks to Improve Your Life

From carrying water on a plane to rescuing a drenched laptop, we've found a fix. RD.COM



91



94

**TRAVEL**

**Welcome to Music City**

We visit Nashville, country music capital of the world, to find out if it's still in touch with its roots. **ROBERT KIENER**

102

**BOOK BONUS**

**150 Minutes of Hell**

Californian firefighters recount a fire tornado that ripped through a quiet township, taking everything in its path. **LIZZIE JOHNSON** FROM SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE



18

**Departments**

**THE DIGEST**

- 18 **Pets**
- 20 **Health**
- 24 **News From the World of Medicine**
- 115 **RD Recommends**

**REGULARS**

- 4 **Editor's Note**
- 6 **Letters**
- 10 **News Worth Sharing**
- 12 **My Story**
- 16 **Smart Animals**
- 56 **Look Twice**
- 88 **Quotable Quotes**
- 90 **That's Outrageous**

**HUMOUR**

- 50 **Life's Like That**
- 68 **Laughter, the Best Medicine**
- 78 **All in a Day's Work**

**THE GENIUS SECTION**

- 120 **This is Your Brain on Stress**
- 123 **Family Fun**
- 124 **Puzzles**
- 126 **Trivia**
- 127 **Word Power**



120



20



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|||||  
**DID YOU KNOW?**  
|||||

**11 TALL TALES THAT ARE IMPOSSIBLY TRUE...**



**FACT**

... AND 12 FACTS THAT ARE ACTUALLY MYTHS



**OR**

**FICTION?**

*By Marissa Laliberte, Ashley Lewis and Jacopo della Quercia*

## STRANGE BUT IMPOSSIBLY TRUE



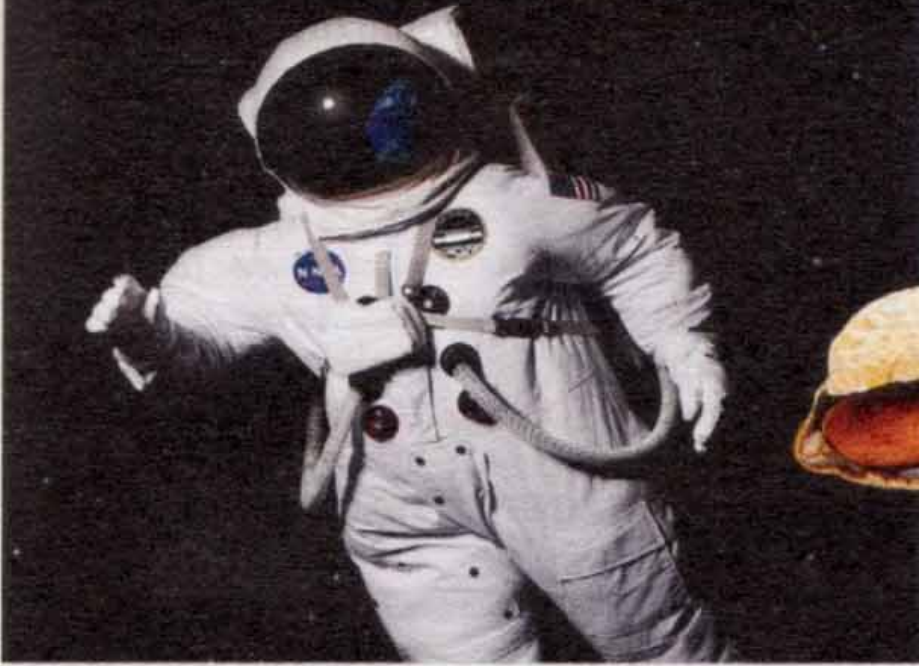
**1** **Dinosaurs had feathers.** That's what archaeologists have found in the fossil evidence of some species, including velociraptors. Whether bigger species such as *Tyrannosaurus rex* had them is still in debate, but some scientists believe they had light feathering. In fact, researchers have long noted that chickens and other birds share skeletal similarities with T-rex.

**2** **Sloths can hold their breath longer than dolphins.** Dolphins need air after ten minutes, but a swimming sloth can hold its breath for up to 40 minutes by slowing its heart rate at will.



**3** **Firefighters use chemicals to make water 'wetter'.** The wetting agents reduce the surface tension of plain water so it spreads and soaks into objects more easily, which is why what fire crews use is known as 'wet water'.

**4** Astronauts can cry in space. But with no gravity to pull the tears down their faces, the water just pools into a ball on the astronauts' cheeks. No-flow crying "stings a bit", says astronaut Chris Hadfield.



**5** Peanuts aren't technically nuts. They're legumes.

According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, a nut is only defined as a nut if it's 'a hard-shelled dry fruit or seed with a separable rind or shell and interior kernel'.



**6** McDonald's once created bubble-gum-flavoured broccoli.

Not surprisingly, the bizarre attempt to get kids to eat healthier did not go over well with the child testers.

**7** The inventor of the Internet regrets the URL setup. Tim Berners-Lee, who created the main software of the World Wide Web, admitted he regrets one thing: adding '//' after 'https:' in a web address. It was standard for computer programming at the time but didn't serve any real purpose, and when looking back in 2009, he said leaving it out would have saved time and space. We guess we can forgive him.





**8** **The founders of Adidas and Puma were brothers.** Adi and Rudi Dassler went into the shoe business in 1924 as Dassler Brothers Shoe Factory. They made running shoes for Jesse Owens, among others. But their sibling rivalry boiled over in 1948, when they split the company: Adi launched Adidas; Rudi created Puma.

**9** **The CIA has a top secret coffee shop.** Yes, it's called Starbucks, but the branch in the CIA's Virginia headquarters is unlike any other. The baristas have to pass extensive background checks and can't write customers' names on the cups, since some of them are undercover agents. The store's name on the receipt is 'Store No 1.'



**10** **Australia may be surrounded by water, but it doesn't have the world's longest coastline.** Being its own continent and completely surrounded by water, you'd think Australia would easily take the honour of the country with the longest coastline. However, that title goes to Canada, which has 244,781 kilometres of coastline, compared to Australia's 25,749. In fact, Australia only ranks seventh on the list of the world's longest coastlines.

**11** **The lighter was invented before the match.** In 1823, a German chemist created the world's first lighter, Döbereiner's lamp, which was used in industrial settings. It wasn't until three years later that an English chemist made the first friction match.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES (STARBUCKS CUP); BOTH SHUTTERSTOCK; MATTHEW COHEN (CUP)

## 'FACTS' THAT ARE FICTION

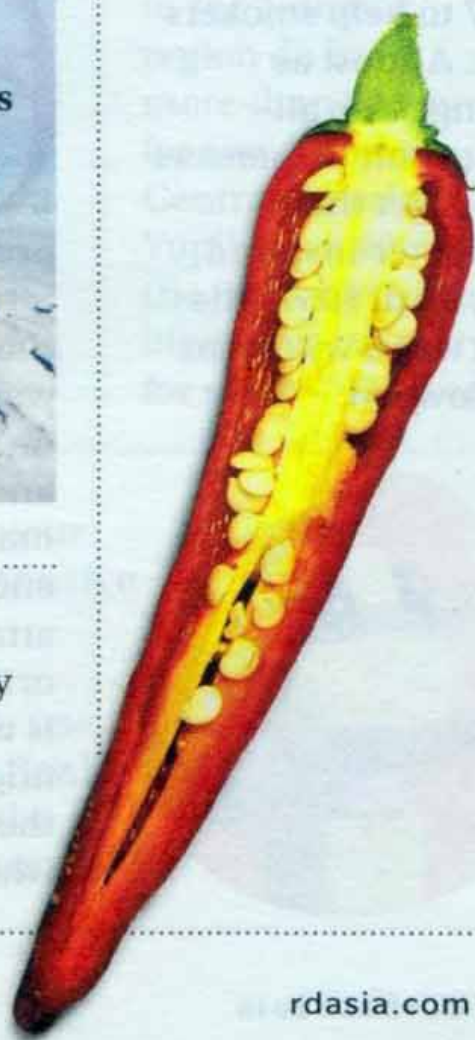
**1** **The Sahara is the world's largest desert.** Technically, Antarctica is. The US Geological Survey defines a desert as 'arid land with meagre rainfall [usually less than 25 centimetres per year] that supports only sparse vegetation and a limited population of people and animals'. Antarctica averages 15 centimetres of rain a year and is around 14.2 million square kilometres. The Sahara is only about 8.6 million square kilometres.



**2** **Blood is blue inside your body.** Human blood is the same colour inside your body as it is outside: red. Our veins look blue because the tissue covering them changes the way light is absorbed and scattered, which affects our perception of their colour.

**3** **The hottest part of a chilli pepper is the seeds.**

Capsaicin, a chemical compound that binds to the pain receptors on our nerves to produce that fiery heat, is most concentrated in the inner white rib of the chilli pepper. The seeds don't actually contain any capsaicin, but they may be coated in it because they touch the rib.





**4** eBay was founded by a man who wanted to help his fiancée

trade PEZ dispensers.

That's the story that circulated when the online auction house began, but it was really just a PR tall tale. It is true that PEZ (named after the German word for peppermint, *Pfefferminz*) were originally created in 1927 to help smokers quit. Almost as strange: the all-important dispensers didn't get their character-inspired tops until 1957. The first was a witch, for Halloween.



**5** Chameleons can change their colour to match any background. The lizards do adjust their skin tone to camouflage themselves in certain environments, but their colour range is limited. The really vibrant hues you see on TV and in books aren't usually meant for tricking predators. Those chameleons are trying to attract a mate or defend their territory. Male chameleons have even been known to change their colours to appear female, which helps them sneak by other males without the threat of a fight.

**6** Julius Caesar was born via caesarean section – and the

procedure was named after him. In Caesar's time, a caesarean was performed only on dying women, and Caesar's mother most likely lived long enough to see him attack England. The origin of the name is uncertain, but it might have come from the Latin *caedere*, which means 'to cut'.



**7** Citronella candles are the best way to keep mosquitoes out of your yard. The smoke from citronella candles is as effective as that from regular candles – and neither helps much. If you want an all-natural mosquito repellent, try planting some catnip. (Your cat will thank you, too.)



**9 Neanderthals were dumb.** They were probably just as intelligent as *Homo sapiens*, but scientists think that Neanderthals didn't fare well when the animals they hunted died out after the Ice Age.

**8 Lemmings will blindly join in mass suicide.** Norwegian lemmings do migrate in packs, but the well-known image of their mass suicide was staged for the 1958 documentary *White Wilderness*. Filmmakers tipped brown lemmings from a truck over a cliff's edge, making it look as if they were following one another to their deaths.

**10 A Factoid is a fun mini-fact. In fact, it's the opposite of a fact.** Writer Norman Mailer coined the term in 1973 to describe 'facts' that were invented by gossip reporters. The suffix -oid (as in humanoid) refers to something that appears like something else but is not.

**11 Eskimos have more words for snow than any other culture.** The Canadian Inuit in the Nunavik region do have more than 50 words for snow, and the Central Siberian Yupik have 40. But the Scots have the biggest vocabulary for snow - 421 words.

**12 The green paste served with your sushi is wasabi.** Wasabi is expensive and difficult to grow. Since it belongs to the same family as horseradish, most restaurants use horseradish (with food colouring) instead. Real wasabi is more complex and sweeter than the 'wasabi' you get at a typical Japanese restaurant. **R**

