

# THE BENEFITS OF GIVING

It was Mother Teresa who said,  
“Not all of us can do great things.  
But we can do small things with  
great love.” She was right.

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*By Kathy Buchanan*





**LET'S FACE IT**, when we are busy and focused on our own lives, sometimes it's hard to see how we can help others - by donating our money or our time.

As it turns out, the act of giving is a very important one. Not only does giving benefit your health, but it also helps to build a 'circle of generosity'. There's a technical term for it - experts call it 'upstream reciprocity' - yet the thoughts and feelings behind it are simple. By lending a helping hand, in whatever way we can, we begin to create a positive new life, both for ourselves and for others.

A 2011 study in the US by Dr Stephen G. Post, a professor of

**“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”**

- *Winston Churchill*

preventive medicine at Stony Brook University in New York, confirmed that giving is linked to happiness, health, wellbeing and longevity. Volunteering your time or sharing your money can both yield benefits. It's about being generous with whatever you can afford at the time.

Researchers at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) worked with

PHOTO: ISTOCK



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the National Institute on Mental Health (NIMH) and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) on a cognitive and emotional health project called The Healthy Brain. They discovered a physiological basis for the experience that seems to accompany an act of giving.

In their experiment, 19 people were given money and a list of a variety of causes to which they were invited to make a contribution. So, what happened? Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) revealed that when these people made a donation, it activated the mesolimbic pathway. This is the brain's reward centre, which is responsible for dopamine-mediated euphoria. In simple terms, being a little generous made them feel really great.

Numerous other scientific and

**“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”**

– Mahatma Gandhi

medical studies have found that the act of giving elevates our mood. It seems that helping others has a positive effect on our happiness, mental health and self-esteem.

Of course, we all have responsibilities to meet, either to ourselves or loved ones. But most of us have either a little time or a little money available to share. As Mother Teresa said, “If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one.”

Who will you help next? ●



PHOTO: ISTOCK

# Your gift to Guide Dogs will touch many lives



It costs over \$35,000 to breed, raise and train an amazing Guide Dog like Teena, who was provided free-of-charge to Beth. For Beth, having a Guide Dog doesn't just mean independence. It means being the mum she wants to be to her three children.

**Please leave a gift in your Will to Guide Dogs, Australia's most trusted charity and help make sure that when someone loses their sight, they don't lose their freedom as well.**



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## AUSSIE HELPERS

# HELPING THE HEART OF OUR COUNTRY

Founded by Brian and Nerida Egan, Aussie Helpers has been helping make life a bit easier for Australia's farmers since 2002.

**THE PAST FEW YEARS** have been tough for Australian farmers. Aussie Helpers volunteers are currently working in Victoria and Tasmania, assisting dairy farmers who have had their industry turned upside down by milk processors dramatically reducing the price of milk.



In times like this, all Australians should show some support to keep our dairy farmers and their cows in business – and this support can be achieved by donating a few dollars to Aussie Helpers.

Widely respected across rural Australia for its commitment to ensuring the wellbeing of farmers, Aussie Helpers provides them with more than \$1 million worth of aid every year. This takes the form of practical, day-to-day items such as hay, groceries and toiletries – but Aussie Helpers volunteers also strive to look after the mental health of

the families they work with, too.

With an ethos of 'Care, Share, Respect', people confiding in Aussie Helpers know that they can be guaranteed confidentiality.

Currently, Aussie Helpers stay in touch with hundreds of farming families around the country to ensure they're being looked after through good and bad times alike. Supporting Australia's hard-working farmers is a privilege.

Though it can be challenging, it never stops being rewarding – seeing people smile again makes it all worthwhile.

*Why not get involved in the Aussie Helpers cause? To find out how you can get involved, whether through financial aid, fundraising or volunteering, just visit [www.aussiehelpers.org.au](http://www.aussiehelpers.org.au)*

# AUSSIE HELPERS

*Helping the heart of our country*

For more than fourteen years the People of Australia have supported Aussie Helpers in helping to keep "The dream alive" in rural regions.

Without your wonderful support we could not achieve our objectives as we receive no government funding, so good on you Australia for helping to keep our Farmers farming, growing the best food in the world.

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## BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

# BRINGING HOPE TO THOUSANDS IN NEED

Founded in 2002 and with a mission of building a mentally healthier world for all of us, the Black Dog Institute brings together the strength of a medical research institute and a not-for-profit organisation.

### THE BLACK DOG INSTITUTE'S

work helps thousands of people every year, people just like Scott who experienced depression for a long period before finally being diagnosed in his mid-40s. He now volunteers at the Institute to help others. This is his story.



"I have an outgoing personality, so when I first went to my GP to talk about depression and anxiety, the doctor was shocked. As a teenager and university student I struggled to keep on top of things. And I can remember always having a heavy feeling in my stomach.

"My anxiety was extreme and it turned into a deep depression. Then, at the age of 45, I was forced to confront what was going on with my mental health when I tried to take my own life. At the time I felt like there was no end in sight; I had lost hope. But I am lucky. I've always had a supportive family, a wife and two adult sons, who have always been there for me.

"I stay well by taking medication and have found various talking therapies helpful. I also exercise and am involved in the local community. While the physical activity is important for keeping healthy and well, the sense of belonging that comes with being part of a community is equally important.

"Volunteering with the Black Dog Institute is rewarding. I love talking to people; it relieves the stigma of mental illness. I also love the ethos of the Institute with its focus of practice, research and community education. Anything that engages the community is really useful."

For more information visit [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

Our vision is of a mentally healthier world



Each year 1 in 5 Australians experience a mental illness. It affects people from all walks of life. But there is hope.

The Black Dog Institute is internationally recognised as a pioneer in the identification, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses and suicide.

As a medical research institute and nonprofit we aim to improve the lives of those affected by integrating research discoveries into everything we do – clinical care, online treatments, health professional training and community education.

Visit [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au) for information about our services, mental health fact sheets, self-help programs or to support our work.

For information about how you can get involved return the form below to **Black Dog Institute, Hospital Road, Randwick 2031.**



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**CANCER COUNCIL**

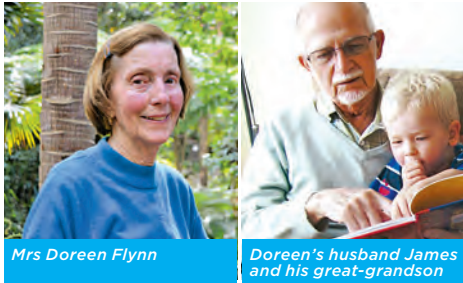
# HELP CREATE A CANCER-FREE FUTURE

A bequest in your will helps to make a difference towards beating cancer, and helping to support cancer patients, their families and friends, as well as future generations.

**AT CURRENT RATES,** one in two Australian men, and one in three women, will be diagnosed with cancer by age 85. Cancer is the second most common cause of death in Australia, responsible for about three in every ten deaths overall.

Yet there is hope on the horizon. Research by Cancer Council has found that over the past 20 years 61,000 cancer deaths have been avoided thanks to improvements in prevention, screening and treatment. Work undertaken by Cancer Council has made a significant contribution to the number of lives saved. But more research is needed and you can help. A bequest gift may be the most important donation many of us will be able to make.

Doreen's husband, son and grandson have all been touched by cancer. Sadly, her husband James and son Timothy both passed away. Her grandson survived and



Mrs Doreen Flynn

Doreen's husband James and his great-grandson

is now well. Doreen knows that research requires constant funding, and that's why she has decided to support Cancer Council with a gift in her will. "No funding means no research," she says.

When her husband had treatment, he lived for five more years after he was diagnosed; sadly, her son was not so fortunate. She says Cancer Council has been very close to her and has been supporting her in every way. Doreen is leaving a bequest to Cancer Council. "Without cancer research, my husband James would not have been around to meet his two lovely great-grandsons." ●

For information on how to leave a bequest in your will, contact **Cancer Council** in your state or territory, or visit [cancer.org.au/bequests](http://cancer.org.au/bequests)



**Give a lifetime of hope.**

## Leave a gift in your will to Cancer Council.

Including a bequest to Cancer Council in your will is not an alternative to looking after your loved ones, it's a part of it. Your contribution will fund vital research to help us beat cancer. Call us today to receive more information and the correct wording to use in your will.

**Your bequest – more than a gift, it's hope for the future.**



Fill in the coupon today and find out how your will can help beat cancer.

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Kings Cross NSW 1340

Visit [cancer.org.au/bequests](http://cancer.org.au/bequests) or call for a private chat with our Request Manager on 13 11 20

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**CMRI - JEANS FOR GENES®**

# LEAVE THE GIFT OF LOVE BEHIND

Retiree Nigel Armstrong supports Children's Medical Research Institute (CMRI). Here's why he's leaving love behind.

*"AFTER MY WIFE passed away from breast cancer in 2003, I got in touch with CMRI and learned about the work they are doing on DNA and telomerase. If we can stop telomerase in cancers we can stop them from proliferating.*

*"After my wife died, I wanted to do something worthwhile. When I heard about Sir Lorimer Dods, and the way he had set up the funding for CMRI for the long term, I thought it was a good thing. Research takes about 15-20 years or longer, and you can't rely on governments that change to keep it going. The way CMRI is set up, you can be sure that a line of research will be followed through to its finality... CMRI's research has the potential to help everyone, children and adults. That's why I've decided to leave a bequest to CMRI in my will."*



*Sir Lorimer Dods founded CMRI to give every child a chance at a healthy life.*

Apart from accidents, the leading cause of death in children under four is birth defects and genetic disease - and for ages four to 14 it's cancer.

CMRI focuses on four main areas where we've achieved world-class excellence: cancer, neurobiology, birth defects and gene therapy. We believe that no disease, whether it is cancer or a genetic disorder, is unstoppable.

With your help, together we can beat childhood diseases. ●

If you would like to learn more about CMRI's work or about leaving a gift in your will, please contact us. You can also visit our website.

📞 1800 436 437

✉️ [bequests@cmri.org.au](mailto:bequests@cmri.org.au)

🌐 [cmri.org.au](http://cmri.org.au)

# Leave the gift of love behind

Families share a love that never fades – a love that endures, inspires and protects.

Just as you have passed down your knowledge to your children, and even grandchildren, you can pass down the gift of good health to the next generation.

Children's Medical Research Institute (CMRI) is dedicated to finding new cures and treatments for genetic diseases.

Currently, 1 in 20 children are born with a birth defect or genetic disease. Leaving a bequest to CMRI will help us continue our work towards finding new cures and treatments for childhood diseases. Your legacy can be the health and wellbeing of generations to come.

For more information about our work or leaving a legacy call us on 1800 436 437, email us at [bequests@cmri.org.au](mailto:bequests@cmri.org.au) or visit [cmri.org.au/bequest](http://cmri.org.au/bequest)



## MIND AUSTRALIA

# GIVE THE GIFT OF MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

Mind Australia is a leading non-government provider of mental health and psychosocial disability support services.

**WITH ONE IN FIVE** Australians suffering from some form of mental ill-health in their lives, there is a growing need to provide mental health and disability support services.

For 40 years, Mind has been supporting people with severe mental ill-health, their families and carers. Operating in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, this year Mind will support 11,500 people on their journey to live productive, independent and purposeful lives.

Mind provides a wide range of services including information and advice, outreach support, residential rehabilitation and recovery services, care coordination, group programs, peer support groups and online forums, psychological counselling, respite and family and carer support.

Mind also operates the award-winning Mind Recovery College™, where you are a student, rather than a patient or client.

By becoming an iMind donor,



you will support programs that help people with mental ill health re-enter the community and lead productive lives. Your monthly gift will support the operation of Mind Recovery College™, our educational scholarships program, and research into mental health, helping reduce the stigma of mental ill-health.

*"I give to iMind because when my daughter was diagnosed with schizophrenia, Mind was there for us. Mind supported not only my daughter but also my wife, who was acting as her carer. Mind started us on our journey to recovery, and that is why I support iMind."* – John (iMind Donor). ●

To donate call **1300 286 463** or visit  
[www.mindaustralia.org.au/help-us/imind-donors](http://www.mindaustralia.org.au/help-us/imind-donors)

# 1 in 5 Australians, aged 16-85, will suffer from mental ill-health\*



**MIND** is a leading non-government provider of mental health services. This year we will assist over 11,500 people with mental ill-health, their families and carers. Your support helps us to reach more people and transform lives.



To donate call **1300 286 463** or visit  
[www.mindaustralia.org.au/help-us/imind-donors](http://www.mindaustralia.org.au/help-us/imind-donors)

\*Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008



# Helping the Homeless

Three selfless people saw a need – and took the initiative to jump in and address it themselves

BY ALYSSA JUNG

AN OLD BLUE BUS pulls up to a wellness centre in downtown San Francisco, and a small crowd forms. Young and old, men and women are waiting to board for their turn to bathe.

This city bus has been modified as a sanitation station with two private bathrooms, each including a shower, toilet, sink and changing area.

The brainchild of Doniece Sandoval, a former public relations executive, Lava Mae (a play on the Spanish for 'wash me') provides up to 500 showers a week for the thousands of

homeless people who sleep on the streets in this city.

"We reconnect people with their dignity," says Doniece.

Two years ago, Doniece overheard a homeless woman on a San Francisco sidewalk say that she'd never be clean. "That made me wonder what her opportunities were to actually get clean," says Doniece.

She learned that San Francisco had only eight public shower facilities. "I thought, *If you can put food on wheels, why not showers?*" she says.

Doniece persuaded the city to give

her four decommissioned buses that she then had remodelled with \$75,000 she'd raised on a crowdfunding website. Each bus connects to a fire hydrant for water, which is heated by large batteries on board. Waste water is expelled into city sewers.

The first bus hit the road in July 2014; a second one rolled out in early 2015. Doniece plans to put the other two buses elsewhere in the Bay Area and imagines expanding the programme internationally.

Those in need of a shower sign up for a 15-minute timeslot at a local homeless shelter, and Lava Mae provides towels, shampoo, soap and a new pair of socks.

*"We want to reach people where they are," says Doniece Sandoval*

*"We reconnect people with their dignity"*

"No matter how clean you try to stay on the street, you're going to be grimy," said Silas Borden, a military veteran who showers weekly on a Lava Mae bus in the Mission neighbourhood. "And I want to wash it off."

Says Doniece, "It's a humbling experience to see people come off the bus so grateful for something that should be a natural human right."

ALL THREE PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKE MCGREGOR; ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MICHELE WOJCIĘCHÓWSKI

# Waste Not Want Not

BY BRANDON SPEKTOR

AS A PRIMARY school student in New York, Robert Lee would stare in disbelief at his classmates throwing away half-eaten sandwiches after lunch. His Korean immigrant parents had taught him and his older brother not to waste food. “They said it was bad karma,” says Robert, 24.

While studying finance and accounting at New York University, Robert recalled this lesson and joined Two Birds One Stone, a food-rescue club on campus delivering uneaten pasta, vegetables, and other leftovers from the dining hall to nearby homeless shelters five days a week.

When Robert and fellow club member Louisa Chen entered a college entrepreneurship contest, they proposed a slightly different idea for a food-rescue non-profit group: their programme wouldn’t have a donation minimum (meaning they would gladly pick up one bag of leftover bagels or a single pot of soup), would operate seven days a week, and would be staffed entirely by volunteers.

Their idea won the competition. With the \$1000 prize, they founded Rescuing Leftover Cuisine (RLC) in July 2013. In just the first few weeks, Robert’s team delivered a donation of

enough spaghetti and meatballs to feed 20 people in line at a New York shelter of the homeless that had run out of food.

Robert, who had taken a job as an analyst at J.P. Morgan, devoted his spare time to creating a network of New York restaurants, from family-run delicatessens to large chains such as Starbucks and Panera Bread, that agreed to donate food, and he enlisted volunteers to make food deliveries to homeless shelters.

After RLC received national press attention, homeless shelters and soup kitchens in other cities contacted Robert for partnership advice. To date, RLC has distributed more than

**“They said it was  
bad karma”**

110,000 kilograms of food in 12 cities around the US.

Only a year into his finance job, Robert gave up his six-figure salary to focus on RLC. “I compared one hour of impact at J.P. Morgan to one hour at RLC, and the difference was just tremendous,” he says. He’s now the group’s only full-time employee.

“One shelter recently told us that our donations allow them to provide entire dinners for more than 300 people, three nights a week,” Robert says. “Things like that make me glad I quit my job.”

*“This group saves shelters thousands of dollars,” says Robert Lee*



# From Jackets to Jobs

BY BETH DREHER

WHEN VERONIKA SCOTT was a student at the College for Creative Studies in her native city of Detroit, she received an assignment to ‘design to fill a need.’ She dreamed up an idea for insulated overcoats that would double as sleeping bags, made 25 of them, and handed them out to people living in makeshift shelters on a run-down city playground.

While her efforts were greeted mostly with enthusiasm from those braving Detroit’s brutal winters, one woman voiced dissent. “We don’t need coats; we need jobs,” she told Veronika. Then she had her second inspiration.

Veronika, now 26, found an expert to teach two homeless women to sew and hired them to assemble the coats. She paid them with donations she received through her blog. At first, the coats were made in a homeless shelter’s utility closet. “The top of the coat would hit one wall, and the bottom would be out the door,” says Veronika.

After graduating from college in 2012, she moved the shop into an old downtown warehouse for socially conscious businesses and founded the Empowerment Plan, a non-profit organisation. Clothing manufacturer

Carhartt donated several old industrial sewing machines and reams of fabric and zippers. GM and other companies chipped in operating funds and insulating material. To date, the Empowerment Plan has produced more than 10,000 coats and distributed them in 30 US states, Canada and elsewhere abroad.

The group employs about 20 people – mostly single mothers, some of whom have served time or worked as prostitutes – and pays them more than Michigan’s minimum wage. “We don’t require a high school certificate or even previous employment,” Veronika says. “We’re looking for people who are motivated.”

The Empowerment Plan provides free high school equivalency diplomas and financial-literacy classes and also offers micro-loans to those who qualify. Nearly all the employees eventually move into permanent housing, and some go on to jobs in the car industry and construction.

Veronika has refined the coat’s design by switching to an outer layer of lightweight polyethylene that resists air, wind and water and an inner layer of synthetic fabric that stores body heat. Her latest innovation is to make the bottom of the sleeping bag removable.

Still, Veronika is less focused on the coats than on the workers who make them. “At the end of the day,” she says, “the coat is a vehicle for us to employ people.” **R**

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MICHELE WOJCIECHOWSKI

“Design to fill a need”



*“I want to give people a chance without judging them,” says Veronika Scott*

# The Bridal Party

BY SARAH LISS

Sisters Abigail Sampson and Nicola Topsom help Haitians dress for their big day - and secure steady employment

WHEN NICOLA TOPSOM first visited Haiti in 2006, one word echoed in her mind: 'potential.' The country had just held its first democratic election since 2004, when a coup ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Political upheaval, gang violence and tropical storms had made chaos and destitution the norm.

Even so, Topsom, who lives in Ontario, Canada, saw possibility. "If you could look through the fog of corruption, poverty and despair, the potential was there for locals to improve their lives - if the resources were provided," she says.

Topsom returned to Haiti to do volunteer work nine more times. In 2010, she adopted her daughter Divna, now eight, who'd been evacuated from

Port-au-Prince after a devastating earthquake. But it took until November 2014 for the right idea to present itself.

Inspired by an organisation that shipped used prom dresses to African countries, Topsom's sister, Abigail Sampson, suggested something similar: they would bring bridal gowns - "new-looking, beautiful, quality stuff," says Sampson - to Haiti. The dresses would then be sold or rented at pay-what-you-can rates, with proceeds going to the local employees.

Sampson and Topsom christened their charity the Floriana Wedding Project (after their father's Maltese birthplace), set up a Facebook page and started fielding offers from private donors and bridal shops across Canada. In 2015, with two Canadian



PHOTOGRAPHED BY BROOKE WEDLOCK

*Sampson (left) and Topsom want to provide single mothers in Haiti with employment alternatives to prostitution, begging or sweatshop work*

US\$40, which represents 40 per cent of a schoolteacher's monthly salary.) Some of the couples in the group wedding were older couples who'd never had a chance to recite vows. "It was wonderful," says Topsom, "to watch a groom's face light up as his 70-year-old bride walked down the aisle."

While facilitating fairytale nuptials has its own rewards, providing gainful employment is the game-changer. Single mum Fernanda, Floriana's primary seamstress, supports her four kids by using damaged dress material and an ancient Singer pedal machine to create items to sell at the market. A trio of young men - Caleb Antoine, Odeline 'Roro' Brissault and Wadley Marcelin - oversee the charity's original shop and its satellite location.

"This is a great opportunity," says Marcelin. "When my sister got pregnant, the baby's father didn't want to take care of them, so I adopted my niece. If I didn't have this job, I don't think I'd be able to help."

Floriana has yet to become self-sustaining - Topsom and Sampson currently pay the annual US\$2400 rent out of their own pockets.

Through their charity, the sisters are looking to improve the lives of a few Haitians right now; over time, they hope that number will grow into the thousands. **R**

volunteers and 48 dresses in tow, they rented a retail space in Port-au-Prince and hired three locals to run it.

Satisfied customers have included Eunice, a nanny at the orphanage from which Divna was adopted, who was married in a white gown with a long train; and 50 brides taking part in a group wedding in Cap-Haitien.

"These people could barely afford to take the day off work, let alone buy a dress," says Sampson. (A gown can be purchased for approximately



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– a treasured legacy

# The Heritage Collection



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**Reader's Digest Australia** has recently created an exclusive range of stationery and gifts featuring beautiful illustrations from its extensive archive. Flowers, butterflies, animals and birds – all drawn and painted in the most exquisite detail – are now blooming and flourishing on limited edition notebooks, journals, calendars and other unique products. But what was the origin of these remarkable vintage illustrations?

In addition to its global presence as a magazine publisher, Reader's Digest has a long tradition as an international book-publishing company. Over more than four decades, our offices around the world have produced high-quality illustrated reference books on subjects including gardening, natural history, health, science and cookery.

For most of that time, illustration was king in publishing. Photography had its place, of course, but it very much played second fiddle to an astonishing line-up of artists whose tools were ink, gouache, watercolour, oil paint, pens, pencils and brushes.



It is said that a camera never lies, but the eyes of a talented artist can capture something that eludes the camera's lens. The illustrations from our archives are not only accurate in their botanical or anatomical detail, but they have presence. Rendered in a style unique to each of the artists, every flower is trembling with life; every animal has character. They are living things, with a purpose and a personality.

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*The Heritage Bridge Card Set features cards and scoring pads with dramatic jungle scenes of jaguars, exotic birds and frogs. All for only \$29.98 plus p&h.*

Research into how we choose our mate reveals some surprises

# Is It Love or Something Else?

BY LISA FIELDS

**Y**OU MAY NOT realise it, but when you gaze into your partner's eyes, there's a good chance that you're looking at a modified reflection of yourself.

Researchers have found that people choose mates who tend to be of similar size, shape and ethnicity as themselves ... and they may even have facial features in common.

Take Lot Geels of Amsterdam and her American husband Brock Mosovsky, for example. "We both have blond hair and blue eyes," says Geels. "Neither of us is very tall. We're both built athletically and we're both mainly of European descent."

Even if you don't look like your partner, you likely share non-physical characteristics, according to a growing field of research, like education level,

ILLUSTRATION BY MARTA ANTELO



socioeconomic standing, religion, personality traits, even core values.

Geels and Mosovsky fall into this category, as well. "We both have PhDs and work in research," she says. "We both love an active lifestyle, mainly rock climbing and skiing/snowboarding. Our world views are pretty similar, and we're both hard-working, social and friendly people."

Researchers have been studying the phenomenon of people with similarities pairing up – known as positive assortative mating – for decades. If you're sure that 'opposites attract,' you may be surprised by their research findings, which prove that like attracts like.

However, if you believe that 'birds of a feather flock together,' you probably understand why people overwhelmingly seek life partners who remind them, on some comforting level, of themselves.

"There's an element of predictability when you date somebody of a similar background," says Ty Tashiro, author of *The Science of Happily Ever After*.

"They're less threatening, less scary. They'll be more of a familiar person from the start. Familiarity is something we find attractive."

For most people, positive assortative mating takes place unconsciously (unless you actively seek someone from the same ethnic background or religion). Here's how it plays out in real life.

## The people in your neighbourhood

The simplest reason why you may marry someone like yourself hinges on convenience and geography. "It's more likely you'll meet someone from your own social circles because they go to the same church or school or university or live in the same area," says Abdel Abdellaoui, a genetics researcher at VU University Amsterdam.

Abdellaoui found that in the Netherlands, people who live in the northern part of the country are genetically distinguishable from people in the southern part of the country because people tend to marry their neighbours. "Many of the genetic similarities can be explained by people with similar ancestries having children," Abdellaoui says. "Our studies look at whether people assortatively mate or not, and they do, clearly. The majority of the spouse pairs resemble each other more than you would expect by chance."

Of course, you may not always live in the neighbourhood where you're raised. If you attend university, you move onto a campus where you're surrounded by your intellectual and socioeconomic equals. Once you start working, you may relocate to a city where it's easier to find a job in your field, then spend the majority of your waking hours interacting with business associates with the same education level and similar socioeconomic standing.

If you're a lawyer, you're much more likely to fall in love with a lawyer or another professional you meet through colleagues or friends. You've still found a partner through positive assortative mating, but your similarities are less physically obvious. "Higher-educated spouses have children that have a little more genetic variation than those with lower education because they migrate less," Abdellaoui says.

## What's cookin', good lookin'?

If you've ever done a double-take because you've seen a beautiful woman walking hand-in-hand with a very unattractive man, you won't be surprised to learn that research confirms that this doesn't happen often: most people assortatively mate for levels of attractiveness.

"The most attractive people will pair up with the most attractive, and the medium attractiveness people will pair up and the lowest attractiveness people match up," Tashiro says. "You can get mismatches, of course, usually due to socioeconomic differences. In general, you get attractive people with attractive people." This doesn't mean that unattractive people don't find attractive people appealing. Rather, Tashiro explains, "people are self-aware of their standing in the world of attractiveness and realise that their best chance of reciprocated attraction is with those at roughly the same level."

"There's a thing called fidelity insurance," says John Speakman, a professor at the University of Aberdeen's Institute of Biological and Environmental Sciences. "What that suggests is that we choose partners that are around our level of physical attractiveness because we're trying to ensure our partner doesn't cheat on us."



FAMILIARITY IS  
ATTRACTIVE. WE  
OVERWHELMINGLY  
SEEK LIFE PARTNERS  
WHO REMIND US  
OF OURSELVES

## Weighing your options

Fidelity insurance and assortative mating may also influence choices regarding potential mates' body types. Speakman's research has shown that obese people tend to be married to other obese people. "If you ask people of a range of body weights what they find attractive, they all choose slim people," Speakman says. "But obese people may not see slim people as a good choice for a lifetime partner."

Because this is a relatively new field of study, it's unknown whether married obese couples were obese when they met. Researchers speculate that some couples grow obese together, due to shared diet and exercise habits.

For the same reasons, researchers think that slender partners stay fit because of shared healthy habits.

"People end up with partners who are similar to them in terms of attractiveness, but part of that is due to how people change each other over time," says Paul Eastwick, associate professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Davis.

### The long and short of it

Assortative mating doesn't stop with weight. Tall people tend to pair up. So do short ones. "In the 1950s and 1960s, researchers measured couples for things like wrist circumference, head size, leg length, foot size," says



A MAN WHO'S TALLER  
THAN 90 PER CENT  
OF MEN WILL LIKELY  
MARRY A WOMAN  
WHO'S TALLER THAN  
90 PER CENT OF WOMEN

Anthony Little, a psychology lecturer at the University of Stirling, in the UK. "What they found is you get small but positive correlations for a lot of these body measurements. In some ways, that isn't surprising. Tall people pair up with tall people, heavier people pair up with heavier people."

Because on average men are taller

than women, couples match by height ratios, not exact measurements. A man who's taller than 90 per cent of other men will likely marry a woman who's taller than roughly 90 per cent of other women. "It's really rare to see a tall woman with a short man," Speakman says, "unless the man has phenomenal resources to offset his height, like Tom Cruise."

Many people select partners who look like them in some way, whether it's the same hair colour and complexion or a similar shape to the cheekbones or jawline. "It's all about visual exposure," Little says. "The more we see something, the more we like it. We may like people who look like us because we are very familiar with our own features."

Some research suggests that people are reassured by others who look like themselves. "There is some evidence that we are more likely to trust a novel face if that face is morphed slightly to look like our own face," Eastwick says.

### Valuing values

Many spouses share qualities such as approachability, generosity and kindness. "Several studies conducted in different countries have shown that spouses have similar values of altruistic traits," says Arnaud Tognetti, a researcher at the Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, France.

Some studies have found that the more time couples spend together, the more likely they are to have similar

levels of generosity and cooperation. But Tognetti, in a recent study, found that some couples share similar levels of generosity and cooperation from the start of their relationships, which may help them seem more appealing to each other.

"Cooperative behaviours may be a signal of the propensity to engage in other altruistic actions, such as child-care and provisioning," Tognetti says. "By choosing a cooperative partner, people could select a mother/father who will invest a lot of energy, time and resources to take care of their children. Because parental investment (from both parents) is a crucial resource, reproduction with a cooperative mate who invests in offspring is likely to be beneficial."

People also assortatively mate for personality traits. "We found the best evidence that couples are alike for extroversion: being sociable, friendly and approachable," Little says. There were also positive correlations between couples for confidence, conscientiousness and having a broad range of interests.

The reverse is also true: some studies have found that couples assortatively mate for conditions such as depression, anxiety and ADHD. "The

more severe the symptoms are, the stronger the assortative mating," Abdellaoui says. "We're not sure yet why. Perhaps they have a stronger bond because they've shared similar stressful experiences."

### The happiness factor

If you share many similarities with your partner, rejoice: some research has shown that the more you have in common, the more likely you are to stay together.

"In a cross-sample of the population, relationship length was positively correlated with similarity," Little says. "There is research suggesting that couples are less likely to stick together if they are dissimilar. People who stay together are the most similar."

But there's no recipe to ensure a blissful union yet: researchers haven't found that the presence or absence of any specific characteristics improves relationship quality.

"We are not even close to being able to predict the success of your relationship," Abdellaoui says. "I would not dare to advise someone on partner choice based on what we know, especially genetics-wise. Just follow your heart." R



### WISE QUACKS

I find a duck's opinion of me is very much influenced by whether or not I have bread.

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