



Brida - for people with something to say.

ISSUE 22 — 30 JULY 2026

It only
needs to
arrive.

Will it
survive
the tide?

What counts
as Rest?
29 JULY 2026

ORDINARY LIFE · WIDER WORLD

The Pineapple

What counts as rest?

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Peeling Potatoes 57: The
Day I Made the Mayor
Apply to Be a Clown

MEMBER STORIES

The Quiet Place Beside
the Race

A weekly general-interest magazine published in France.
Frank Peters, Founding Editor.
Janita Le Grange, Managing Editor.

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WHAT COUNTS AS REST?

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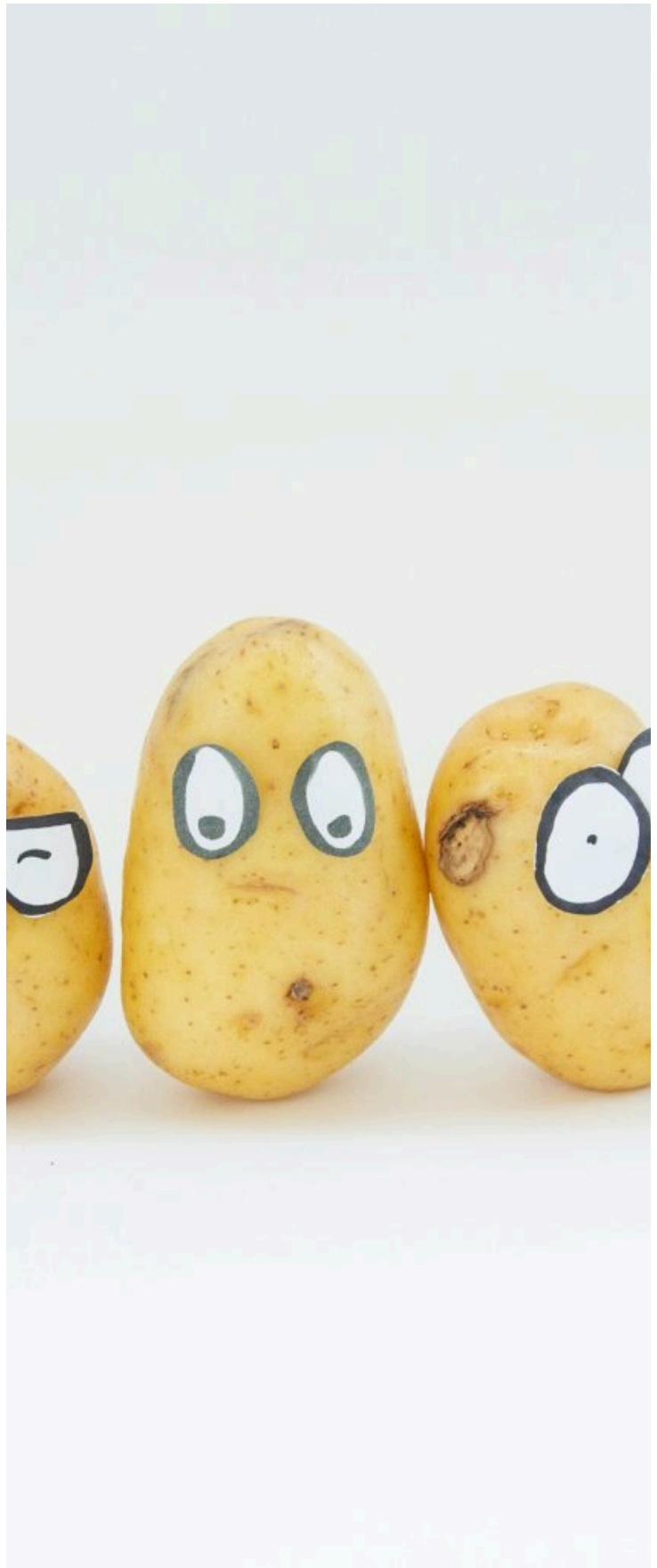
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EDITORIAL

No People, No Language

A sentence can now be produced without a human being typing it. We know this. I work with AI every day. It can construct an argument, correct a mistake, translate an idea and, on a good morning, improve my punctuation.

BY MAYOR



We talk about language as a skill, a product and, increasingly, something a machine can produce. But language began somewhere simpler: with one person trying to reach another. When we forget the person, communication may continue, but something essential disappears.

But language did not begin inside a machine. It began because one person wanted to reach another. Before the grammar book, before the dictionary and certainly

before the algorithm, there were people trying to warn, comfort, persuade, amuse, welcome, explain and understand one another.

No people, no language. Or, at least, no language with a reason to exist.

The Person Behind the Request

I have been thinking about this because a few small things have hurt me recently. Nothing dramatic. Nobody committed a terrible crime. People became busy. Several meetings were simply cancelled, no alternative timeslots requested. A request was made, and when supplied, not acknowledged and without much apparent recognition of the work, time and cost involved in fulfilling it.

These things happen. They happen to me, too. Yet they leave a residue.

It is not necessarily the cancellation that hurts. Life intervenes and plans change. The question is what happens afterwards. Does the person remember that somebody else had also made room for the meeting? Do they return and suggest another time? Does a request include some awareness that another human being must do the work?

A transaction notices the thing. A relationship also notices the person behind it.

This does not mean that healthy relationships require perfect behaviour. If they did, I would have exhausted my supply of relationships many years ago. We all forget, cancel,

become distracted and occasionally behave like the centre of the known universe.

Relationships survive these things. What sustains them is recognition and repair.

“I know you made time for this.”

“Thank you for doing that.”

“I am sorry we lost the moment.”

“Can we find another one?”

They are small sentences, but they can have enormous consequences. They tell another person: I see that you are here. I understand that something was asked of you. I know that your time, effort and feelings did not appear from nowhere.

The most important function of language may not be the transmission of information. It may be recognition.

Information can be transmitted. A relationship must be tended.

The Person Behind the Language

This matters in any language, but it becomes particularly important when we speak a foreign one. When somebody speaks in a language that is not their own, the person we hear is not always the whole person who is speaking.

Humour arrives late. Nuance gets held at the border. Warmth can sound formal. Intelligence may appear hesitant. A thoughtful person can seem quiet simply because the right sentence has not yet reached them.

Sometimes a different language even presents a slightly different version of the same person. An ex-girlfriend once told me that I was a much nicer person when I spoke English than when I spoke German. I am fluent in both, so I could hardly blame a shortage of vocabulary. Apparently, even with the same man inside them, the two languages were presenting rather different candidates.

I am still not certain which one of us she had agreed to go out with.

The opposite happens with my French. People have told me they wished they spoke English as well as I speak French. This is flattering, but also slightly alarming.

From inside my French, I remain painfully aware of everything I cannot say. I know about the jokes that never make it across. I recognise the elegant sentence forming in my head and then watch it emerge as three serviceable words, an optimistic pronunciation and an expressive movement of the hands.

The listener hears a reasonably competent French speaker. I hear the missing person.

That is one of the things working with foreign languages teaches us. Language is not a transparent window through which the complete person can always be seen. Sometimes the glass is thick. Sometimes it is misted. Sometimes the person is standing behind it, waving furiously.

Good communication therefore requires generosity. We must listen to the sentence that arrived while remaining interested in the person still trying to reach us through it.

Interest is the important word. Not polite interest. Not waiting quietly while preparing our own reply. Not asking a question because somebody once taught us that successful people ask questions.

Not asking a question because somebody once taught us that successful people ask questions.

Real interest says: You are not simply providing something for me. You are here too.

The opposite of interest is not disagreement. We can disagree strongly with somebody while remaining interested in them. In fact, some of the best conversations depend upon

it.

The opposite of interest is indifference. The trouble begins when the person disappears and only their opinion, usefulness, request or reaction remains.

Interest Is Not Attention

This is no longer only a private problem. It has become part of the architecture of public communication.

Insults have become performances. Certainty travels faster than thoughtfulness. People are reduced to categories, positions and convenient enemies.

Social media did not invent cruelty, vanity or aggression. Humanity was managing those quite successfully before the smartphone. But many platforms have built systems that reward whatever keeps us looking, clicking, reacting and returning.

Those systems are not primarily interested in whether communication is generous, truthful or useful. They are interested in whether it produces attention.

Interest and attention are not the same thing. Interest is directed towards a person. Attention is directed towards a stimulus.

Outrage is an excellent stimulus. So are fear, humiliation, certainty and conflict. Restraint performs less well. Curiosity takes too long. "I may be wrong" has never been a particularly powerful headline.

The more communication is shaped around attention, the easier it becomes to forget the person receiving the words. Eventually, language no longer reaches towards somebody. It

performs in front of them.

A network becomes the number of people we can reach. A community becomes an audience. A relationship becomes a transaction that has learned somebody's first name.

Penny Power has spent much of her working life arguing for something different. She and her husband, Thomas, founded Ecademy in 1998, before Facebook and the social-media empires that followed. The original idea was not simply that the internet could connect more people. It was that it could help people build genuine business relationships.

Penny now writes under the heading *Business Is Personal*. Her work returns repeatedly to the importance of human significance: allowing the people who matter to know that they matter.

Her business world and our Brida world are not identical. But the territory is familiar.

Reach is not the same as relationship. Recognition cannot be automated merely by inserting somebody's first name. A network becomes meaningful only when the people inside it remain visible to one another.

That is also the territory in which Brida is trying to work.

The Person Is the Point

Brida is not primarily a collection of English meetings. It is not a language school without a classroom. It is not a machine into which people insert a topic and receive sixty minutes of conversation.

Brida is built out of relationships. English is what becomes possible inside them.

This distinction matters. If English were the product, our attention would remain fixed upon performance: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency. We would listen for what needs correcting.

But English is the bridge. The person is the point.

At a Brida table, six people make room for one another. They learn names. They remember stories. They notice absences. They ask questions whose answers cannot be found by scrolling down a screen.

The conversation may begin with sleep, money, curiosity, food or a strange incident at the supermarket. What matters is not merely the topic. It is whether the topic allows a real person to appear.

We are not primarily trying to repair the sentence. We are creating enough trust, time and interest for the person to catch up with their words.

By algorithmic standards, this is terribly inefficient. Six people sit around one table for an entire hour, and no viral clip is required. Somebody hesitates, searches for a word, begins again and finally says what they were trying to say.

The others wait. They do not swipe to the next person.

What looks inefficient from the outside can feel remarkably valuable from inside the conversation.

But calling something a community does not make it one. Relationships cannot be manufactured by repeating the word. They depend upon consideration, curiosity, reciprocity and a

degree of reliability. They require us to recognise the effort behind a contribution, the time behind a meeting and the person behind a request.

They also require repair.

Brida will not become a place in which nobody disappoints anybody. That would be a foolish promise. We will become busy. We will misunderstand one another. We will occasionally fail to notice what somebody has done.

The question is whether we return. Do we notice the gap? Do we acknowledge the effort? Do we make another attempt to cross the bridge?

A Small Refusal

The Pineapple is part of that attempt. It takes spoken experience and slows it down. It gives a story room to breathe. It allows the person inside the conversation to become visible beyond the original table.

That visibility carries a responsibility.

We must not turn people into content. We must not polish away their hesitation and replace it with artificial certainty. We must not extract a useful sentence while forgetting the life from which it came.

The finished article should sound as though the person became clearer, not as though somebody else replaced them.

This is not an argument against technology. We will need machines. We will need algorithms. We will need speed and efficiency. I am not proposing that we throw our telephones into the Rhine and communicate exclusively through handwritten letters delivered by bicycle.

I am suggesting something smaller and more difficult.

Remember the person at the other end.

Behind every meeting is somebody who made room. Behind every contribution is somebody who took a risk. Behind every foreign sentence is more of a person than the sentence may be able to carry. Behind every request is another human being whose time, effort and care should not remain invisible.

Words will continue without this recognition. They will pour from screens, platforms, newsrooms and machines in greater quantities than ever before.

But quantity is not communication.

Without people, there are no relationships. Without relationships, there is no meaningful communication. And without meaningful communication, what remains may resemble language, but it is largely noise.

Brida is a small refusal of that disappearance.

At the table, the person comes first.

Then the language can begin.

IN THIS ISSUE

In This Issue

BY MAYOR



What Counts as Rest?

Rest sounds simple until people begin talking about it. We imagine silence, sleep, an empty calendar and perhaps a comfortable chair positioned somewhere far away from responsibility. Then real life interferes. One person rests beside a race. Another needs a house full of noise. Somebody else finishes the work, cleans the tools and opens a beer that tastes better because of everything that happened before it.

In Pineapple 22, rest refuses to behave itself.

An exhausted Mayor is persuaded to apply for a job as a clown. A holiday appears inside a crisis. A quiet place is found beside somebody else's ambition. From the Swimming Club comes a warning for anyone hoping to become perfectly rested, complete with suspicious technology, endangered boredom and the growing risk that relaxation itself may become another task we are expected to perform correctly.

There is also food, because there is nearly always food. Ralf returns with a lasagne that takes several hours, rejects béchamel and quietly makes the case that slow work today can become comfort tomorrow. Elsewhere, a beer turns out to be nothing special, except for the day, the work, the people and the moment in which it was opened.

Manfred sends us a postcard from Julianadorp, where sand sculptures sit between the Dutch coast, the dunes and the bulb fields. They ask nothing of us. They are simply there to be looked at, which may itself count as rest.

But beneath the quieter question of rest sits another one.

In **No People, No Language**, I consider what happens when communication becomes faster, louder and more efficient, but the person behind the words begins to disappear. Machines can now produce language. Platforms can distribute it. Algorithms can reward it. None of this changes the reason language existed in the first place: one person was trying to reach another.

That thought runs quietly through the whole issue. Rest may be silence, noise, play, food, travel or the small ritual that tells the body the day is finished. Perhaps what matters is not the activity itself, but whether it allows the person inside us to become visible again.

Pineapple 22 does not provide one correct answer to the question **What Counts as Rest?**

That would probably be exhausting.

It simply opens the door and lets several different answers walk in.



PEELING POTATOES

Peeling Potatoes 57: The Day I Made the Mayor Apply to Be a Clown

We began by trying to remember which Peeling Potatoes episode we were recording.

BY THE DUO

We were supposed to take a creative pause. Instead, I sent The Mayor to the biggest recruitment fair in the universe.

We Had Already Lost Count.

I thought it was 56.

Then I remembered that 56 might have been last week. Perhaps this was 57.

The Mayor pointed out that we were still only in double digits, although one day we might reach three digits—provided we learn how to count.

My son can count to 200, so apparently he will have two responsibilities at our next meeting: helping us with the final week of Rest and teaching us basic mathematics.

This is how our creative pause began.

We had lost count, The Mayor had experienced a traumatic morning, and I had prepared the wrong subject.

We were supposed to discuss emotional rest.

Instead, I had created the opposite of a creative pause.

The Mayor was going to have to be creative.

Very creative.

Welcome to the Recruitment Fair.

“Congratulations,” I told him. “You have been invited to the biggest job fair in the universe.”

The applicants included dragons, aliens, ghosts, robots, unicorns, Vikings, llamas, talking toasters and all kinds of magical creatures.

Unfortunately, HR was having a bad day.

The Mayor would therefore be HR.

Before we began the official recruitment process, I asked him to name his dream ridiculous job.

I had prepared some examples: dragon dentist, mermaid swimming coach and professional cloud fluffer.

The Mayor did not need my help.

His first answer was Ronald McDonald.

A McDonald’s clown.

He could not explain why. He had not visited McDonald’s for at least a year. The clown had simply arrived inside his head and refused to leave.

Naturally, I decided that I needed a cartoon of The Mayor as Ronald McDonald.

He was less enthusiastic about this than I was.

Do Not Judge a Dragon by Its Coat.

At the first station, The Mayor became a career matchmaker.

He had to choose a creature, give it a job, list three responsibilities and identify one thing it would be terrible at.

He chose a dragon.

His thoughts immediately travelled to the wildfires in southwest France. A dragon, he decided, would be a terrible firefighter. Every time it opened its mouth, it would make the fire worse.

The dragon needed a safer career.

The Mayor made it a kindergarten teacher.

The children could sing *Puff the Magic Dragon*. The dragon could teach them about loneliness, inclusion and the danger of judging somebody by their appearance.

It would also inspire a useful amount of fear and respect.

Perhaps not in that order.

I remembered a green dragon from a cartoon I watched as a child. He was also a firefighter, but he was small and friendly.

The Mayor concluded that this cartoon had made dragons an acceptable species.

Our kindergarten dragon could therefore succeed, provided it received some training and did not scorch the children.

The Clown's Serious Side.

At the next station, I interviewed The Mayor for a job.

He briefly considered becoming a unicorn, but decided that unicorns were more my territory. He would remain a clown.

The village idiot.

Otherwise known as The Mayor.

"Why should I hire you?" I asked.

"Because I make you laugh."

This was true.

Brida makes me laugh. The Mayor makes me laugh. Sometimes the laughter comes from the absurdity of what we are building. Sometimes it comes from the fact that he is being completely serious while everything around him has become Fruitloopy.

Then I asked for his greatest weakness.

His answer became surprisingly serious.

A good clown, he explained, allows people to see a reflection of themselves without embarrassment or pain. Humour can carry a serious message because it gives people a safer way to look.

A good clown, he explained, allows people to see a reflection of themselves without embarrassment or pain.

His weakness was his inability to say no.

Even in an imaginary job interview, The Mayor managed to turn this into a strength. He would become a clown who refused to accept the status quo—a clown determined to create situations in which "no" was no longer the final answer.

Then I asked whether he had ever accidentally burned down a village.

"What a stupid question," he replied. "Of course I have."

Ronnie the Clown and Draggy the Dragon had been playing truth or dare. Things became slightly out of control.

The village disappeared in smoke.

Marshmallows were provided, along with several insurance disclaimers.

The Office That Solved Its Own Problems.

At the workplace-disaster station, every employee had caused trouble.

The dragon had toasted the office.

The ghost kept walking through walls during meetings.

The llama spat whenever somebody said "deadline".

The mermaid had flooded the cafeteria.

The Mayor's solution was to place the entire organisation somewhere resembling paradise, where the elements were always kind.

The toasted office no longer existed.

This immediately solved several problems.

Without walls, the ghost could no longer walk through them. Without a cafeteria, the mermaid could no longer flood it.

Everybody could work outside beneath a large African tree, like a pride of lions. We struggled briefly with the name of the tree until we arrived somewhere near baobab.

The llama would no longer need to spit because there would be no deadlines.

The Mayor believes that when people enjoy what they are doing, they often understand naturally when something needs to be completed. Motivation does not always require

somebody standing nearby with a clock and an unpleasant expression.

Create a good environment, he said, and many negative behaviours disappear by themselves.

I had imagined a palm tree, probably because I was looking at one.

He had imagined Kruger National Park.

We agreed that the llama might struggle there and the mermaid would find it too hot.

Always Make Time for a Unicorn.

At another station, The Mayor had to invent the world's strangest profession.

He created a unicorn whose job was to be a professional happiness-maker and glitter-thrower.

It wore no uniform because unicorns do not need uniforms. Its skin was already covered in sparkles, glitter and magical bits.

The danger was not the glitter.

The danger was that nobody would notice.

The unicorn might arrive while we were busy, distracted or multitasking. It would perform its magic in front of us, but we would be too occupied to receive it.

Later, we might remember the moment and say, "I wish I had..."

But the moment would already be gone.

The unicorn would not allow multitasking. When it arrived, you had to stop.

You had to notice the glitter.

You had to accept the joy while it was happening.

The Mayor said that one should always have time for an espresso.

Everything else can wait.

Therefore, one should also always have time for a unicorn.

Bread Is Very Inspirational.

The talking toaster caused another HR crisis.

It would not stop giving motivational speeches, and everybody was 30 minutes late for work because they were listening.

The Mayor decided that perhaps the toaster deserved to be heard.

He is not generally a fan of motivational speeches, but sometimes a carefully constructed speech contains something useful. We should listen first and form our own opinions afterwards.

Still, the toaster needed to stop eventually.

The solution was magic bread.

Once a slice was inserted, the toaster required 24 hours to toast it. During that time, it could rest, think and prepare new material.

Bread, according to The Mayor, is very inspirational.

The employees could enjoy one worthwhile 30-minute broadcast, then return to work while the toaster processed its next slice of data.

The toaster was happy.

The employees had learned something.

The boss had been put in his place.

I wanted to work there.

There did not seem to be many rules.

No Employee of the Month.

At the final station, The Mayor had to choose an Employee of the Month.

He refused.

Recognition systems can become unfair, he said. The same visible people are repeatedly celebrated while those providing support from the second or third row remain unseen.

Behind every person apparently working freely from a tropical beach, somebody else is maintaining the infrastructure.

The people in the trenches, dungeons and dark corners make the visible work possible.

So Employee of the Month was cancelled.

Instead, we would hold a monthly bash to celebrate everybody.

The toaster could give a speech.

The mermaid could flood something.

The dragon could toast the decorations.

Everybody could contribute what they did best, receive a thank-you and return to work with new energy.

Seriously Good Fun.

The Mayor passed every station.

More importantly, he finished the conversation feeling lighter than when he had arrived.

His week had been complicated. Pineapple 21 had become one of the most difficult issues he had assembled. The contradiction of “less is more” had somehow created something enormous.

Our ridiculous recruitment fair gave his brain somewhere else to go.

We had not paused by becoming silent.

We had paused by playing.

For one hour, there were no normal rules. A dragon could teach kindergarten. A Viking could wear a pink tutu. A ghost could become a dentist. A toaster could be fed fresh data in the form of bread.

The Mayor called it “seriously good fun”.

It was an oxymoron, but it was also exactly right.

Sometimes rest is not the absence of activity.

Sometimes it is the presence of dragons, glitter and one completely unqualified HR manager.



MEMBER STORIES

The Quiet Place Beside the Race

On Sunday morning, my wife came into the bedroom at half past four and said we had to get up. She had already been active since four o'clock. She had showered, made coffee and even allowed me another thirty minutes of sleep without me noticing. Then she came back and said, 'Now you must also stand up.' I looked at her and thought: Hello, it is Sunday.

BY RALF THE GRILLMEISTER

A weekend of old traditions, early starts, a determined wife and one sleeping man showed me that rest is not always doing nothing. Sometimes it is knowing when to step forward, when to step back, and when to let the sofa win.

Sunday Begins at 4:30.

But on a triathlon morning, Sunday is not Sunday. There is no pardon. My wife is already inside the race before we leave the house. Her checklist is ready in plastic so she can mark everything. She drinks coffee with milk. I drink mine black. She eats something sweet, often one of these soft, wet cinnamon rolls from Aldi that are much better than they have any right to be.

In the car we do not speak very much. Only normal things: there is a car coming, yes, I see it. Her brain is already swimming the course, cycling the turns and running through

the changing zone. At the beginning I did not understand this. I spoke to her and received no answer. Then I learned: let her run. Let her do her thing. She will tell me when something is needed.

That is one kind of rest, I think. Not sleep. Not lying down. It is the rest of not forcing another person to come out of her concentration just because I would like a conversation.

A Festival That Gets Smaller and Bigger.

The weekend had already started before the triathlon. On Friday we went to the Otterndorf Altstadtfest. For many years it was a big highlight. Today the festival becomes smaller and

more uniform. The special salmon grill is gone. It begins to look like every other town festival.



For the festival, this is sad. For my wife and me, it becomes more important every year. Twenty years ago, at this festival, we gave each other our first kiss. This is where we came together. The public event gets smaller and smaller, but our private meaning gets bigger and bigger.

There is still a Ferris wheel. We also went up. From the top you can look across the town and towards the Elbe, where the river is already salt water and slowly becomes the North Sea. Some people call it the sea, some call it the river. The fact is that the water does not care what we call it. It keeps moving.



Below, at the Lions Club wine stand, you buy a one-litre bottle of Grauburgunder for twenty-five euros and receive as many glasses as you need. We met another couple whose life is also full of triathlon. The two women could talk about bicycles and races very fast, while the two men had time for wine and survival strategies.

This is also rest. It is returning to a place where your own history is waiting for you. You do not need a new attraction every year. Sometimes you need the same Ferris wheel, the same town square and the same person beside you.



Forest, the Bicycle.

My wife's bicycle has a name: Forest, like Forrest Gump. Forest is fitted exactly to her body. My wife does not want a new one. Forest runs and runs and runs, and they are a special team.

At Sunday's triathlon, she made a very good overtaking move and escaped from a group. Then a car braked hard in front of another cyclist. My wife also had to brake, and the whole group caught her again. Later, the changing zone was slippery and she fell. She was angry. Before a race she can say, 'This is only training. This is only preparation.' But inside the race another voice arrives and says: no, we want the podium.

This is only preparation.' But inside the race another voice arrives and says: no, we want the podium.

She finished first in her age group and ninth among eighty-five women. When we came home, she still looked full of energy. I was happy tired. At about five in the afternoon we sat

on the sofa and started a film. One hour later she congratulated me: I had already slept through most of it. I opened my eyes when the film was ending.

That was honest rest. No programme, no technique, no breathing exercise. The body simply switched me off.

My Kitchen, Her Tunnel.

The interesting thing is that I understand her race tunnel because I have something similar in the kitchen. When I cook, I need space around the stove. No dog and no wife. I have explained this clearly. It works for three or four times, and then curiosity returns. My wife comes in and asks, 'What is this? What is this?' The dachshund also appears and looks at me as if immediate food is a human right.

Now we have a system. My wife comes into my kitchen – and yes, it is my kitchen – mixes her sports drink with water, and leaves again. She knows I am not a friend of company around the oven.

This is not because I do not like people. It is because concentration needs a little territory. Her territory is the silent car before a race. Mine is the space around the stove. A good partnership is not only doing everything together. It is also learning where not to stand.

Earlier in our conversation, we spoke about my lasagne. I do not use béchamel sauce. I make more Bolognese instead, with very small cubes of carrot, onion, leek and celeriac. I add many, many, many garlies. The sauce cooks slowly for three or four hours.

People may call this cooking. For me, it is also a quiet place. Hands are busy, the sauce is moving slowly, and the rest of the world can wait outside the kitchen door.

The Rest Before the Big Start.

The next weekend will bring the main event: a half Ironman near Flensburg. My wife has trained for it since February. Her programme became bigger and bigger: more swimming, more cycling, more running. Now, in the final week, the programme becomes smaller. One kilometre of swimming instead of two. A little running. A little cycling. No action. This is the rest phase before the big start.

That sentence interests me: rest before the big start. Rest is not a reward only after the work. It is part of the work. Without it, the body cannot arrive at the starting line ready.

The weekend itself will be organised around her. We drive on Friday, making a large detour around the Wacken festival and its eighty thousand rock fans. She will eat carbohydrates. I will eat normally. On Sunday morning she will begin six hours plus six minutes plus X – this is her calculation.

For those hours, she is the centre and I take the back seat. This is not a problem. When somebody has worked for a dream, there are moments when you make space around that dream. But afterwards, I also look forward to normal life again. Training has shaped many weekends and many plans. Supporting a dream matters, and so does returning home from it.

Doing Nothing, Together and Apart.

Can we do nothing? Yes. I like lying on the sofa and watching a normal, stupid film. When my wife is running, swimming or cycling for two or three hours, I have time for myself. I watch YouTube videos about cooking, grilling and barbecuing, or I do nothing at all.

When she is in the house, we are a team. But being a team does not mean every minute must be shared. Her training can create my quiet time. My cooking can create her space somewhere else. We can be connected without standing in the same room.

Maybe this is why rest matters. A full life needs empty spaces, otherwise even good things become too loud. The Altstadtfest matters because it carries our first kiss. The

triathlon matters because it carries my wife's long work and ambition. Cooking matters because it gives me concentration and pleasure.

But the sofa also matters. Silence in the car matters. A slower training week matters. A Ferris wheel turning above the same town for another year matters.

Rest is not one thing. Sometimes it is sleep. Sometimes it is wine with an old story. Sometimes it is letting another person enter her tunnel without following her inside. Sometimes it is asking everyone, including the dachshund, to leave the kitchen. And sometimes it is waking at the end of a film and discovering that your body made the decision for you.



AT THE TABLE

The Small Rituals That Teach Us to Rest

Sometimes rest isn't a holiday, a spa day, or a weekend away. Sometimes it's taking off your makeup, drinking coffee in silence, watching birds gather in a winter tree, or finally making time for the thing you've been meaning to do.

BY ROSII; MONICA

There is something wonderfully revealing about asking a simple question: *What is your rest ritual?*

At the Lunch table, the answers didn't begin with grand plans for luxury holidays or expensive escapes. Instead, they wandered into ordinary life—the kind most of us recognise immediately. A morning cup of coffee. A favourite chair. Dogs waiting by the door. The quiet before everyone else wakes up.

And somewhere between the laughter and the stories, a picture of rest slowly emerged.

More than switching off

For Rosii, the first image was immediate.

She remembered giving herself a birthday present: a visit to a spa.

There were bowls of warm water filled with flowers, gentle music, fragrant scents and, perhaps best of all, a long massage that seemed to melt every bit of tension away.

"It was really, really nice," she said, smiling at the memory.

It isn't something she can do often. Like many of us, she admits it is expensive enough to remain an occasional treat. But the memory itself has become a picture of rest—a reminder that sometimes caring for ourselves isn't selfish at all.

But the memory itself has become a picture of rest—a reminder that sometimes caring for ourselves isn't selfish at all.

Monica's mind travelled somewhere quieter.

"No technology," she said simply.

Just those two words carried surprising weight.

In a world where notifications constantly compete for our attention, choosing silence can become its own small act of resistance.

Taking off the mask

Then came one of those wonderfully unexpected moments that only seem to happen around a Brida table.

When asked about rest rituals, the Mayor's first answer was not coffee, reading or sleeping.

"Removing makeup."

The room burst into laughter.

He quickly explained that he wasn't talking about himself.

His wife had once described makeup to him as more than something cosmetic. It helps prepare you for the outside world, she had said. At the end of the day, washing it away is like removing the mask you've worn while facing everything life has asked of you.

"You become your true self."

It was one of those ideas that landed softly.

Rest isn't only about lying down.

Sometimes it's about letting go of the version of ourselves that has been performing all day.

Finding space between life

As the conversation unfolded, rest began looking less like an event and more like a rhythm.

The Mayor described early mornings when the house is still asleep.

For a few precious minutes, everything is quiet.

Sometimes he sits outside with a cup of coffee—a ritual affectionately known in the group as the "Fruitloop ritual." No rushing. No screen. Just ten minutes of fresh air before the world begins making demands.

"It's peace and quiet before the stampede starts."

In the evenings, the ritual is different.

A glass of wine with family. A few snacks. Talking through the day. Sharing plans. Taking stock before everyone heads in different directions again.

Not every ritual needs candles or meditation.

Sometimes conversation itself is rest.

The ritual we wish we had

The conversation then shifted in a direction many readers will probably recognise.

If someone suddenly gave you an extra thirty minutes every day, what would you do with it?

Rosii already knew her answer.

She would study English.

Not because someone told her to—but because she wants to.

Pilates already has its place in her routine. Stretching is there too. English, however, keeps slipping to tomorrow.

"I really need to put this into my daily routine."

Perhaps the answer wasn't finding more time at all.

Perhaps it was deciding which small ritual mattered enough to protect.

Naturally, the table immediately volunteered to send her WhatsApp reminders.

Some encouragement is simply too good to refuse.

Monica's answer was different.

She would continue sorting through the things filling her house.

Not because tidying itself is relaxing.

Because she knows that once it's finished, the sense of calm waiting on the other side will be worth every minute.

Sometimes clearing a cupboard is also clearing a mind.

Learning from the animals

No Lunch conversation is complete without at least one wonderfully ridiculous question.

This time everyone was asked to imagine joining their favourite animal's daily rest ritual.

Monica didn't hesitate.

Her schnauzers already seem to have mastered the art.

They nap comfortably, watch the world through the window, accept the occasional treat and generally appear convinced that life has been organised entirely for their benefit.

"Their life's pretty good," she laughed.

Cats, she decided, may have understood the secret even better.

Rosii imagined birds arriving on her balcony, singing while she watched quietly from inside.

Fruitloop spoke about the birds gathering in a tree behind her house each winter afternoon, chasing the last patches of sunlight before evening arrives. She counted nearly fifty of them one day.

She also admitted missing the robin that once regularly visited her kitchen—a tiny friendship that quietly disappeared.

"Maybe another one will come," she said hopefully.

Perhaps it will.

Rest lives in ordinary moments

By the end of the conversation, nobody had discovered the perfect formula for rest.

There wasn't one.

Instead, everyone seemed to uncover something much smaller and perhaps much more useful.

Rest often begins with tiny repeated acts.

Making tea.

Removing a mask.

Watching birds.

Talking over a glass of wine.

Studying one language lesson.

Sitting quietly before the household wakes.

These rituals rarely appear impressive from the outside.

Yet they quietly remind us who we are underneath the busy parts of life.

And maybe that's what makes a ritual worth keeping.

Not because it changes the world.

Because, for a few precious moments, it gently changes us.



MEMBER STORIES

A Holiday Inside a Crisis

BY ISMAR; RITESH

We imagined seven days without the internet, WhatsApp or online payments. Ismar expected peace—until the quiet reached his mother, the supermarket and the rest of the city.

By Atlantic Corridor

Ritesh's chair was empty before the experiment had even begun.

He had cancelled fifteen minutes before our Atlantic Corridor conversation. His absence altered the balance immediately. Ritesh is a Millennial and considerably more connected than Ismar and The Mayor, who both remember life before the internet entered almost every corner of it. We had lost the perspective of the person who might have found the challenge most difficult.

There was also an irony hiding in his cancellation. Because the internet was working, The Mayor could quickly rewrite the questions and turn a conversation designed for two members into one centred entirely on Ismar.

Without connectivity, the conversation about losing connectivity could never have taken place.

The challenge was simple to describe and increasingly difficult to imagine.

On Sunday evening, Ismar would learn that all connectivity was going to disappear at midnight. There would be no internet, WhatsApp, email, online banking, digital newspapers or video calls. The disappearance would last exactly one week.

What would he do before midnight?

"I would go to my bank and withdraw some amount of money," he said.

That was all.

For one week, he thought the experience might be rather pleasant.

"I think it would be very nice. I would like to have this experience."

The First Missing Message

The first disruption would arrive early on Monday morning.

One of the first things Ismar normally does after waking is send a message to his mother. If he takes too long, she begins to worry and wonder whether he is all right.

He could warn her on Sunday evening not to expect the message. He would not need to move into her home for the week. Still, the missing greeting revealed something important: his digital silence would not belong only to him.

It would enter somebody else's morning.

The next disappearance would be music. Whenever he does not need to concentrate, Ismar listens through Alexa or YouTube. He owns CDs, but his sound system has been broken for months. Without the internet, there would be no alternative.

His apartment would become unusually quiet.

Perhaps that would not be entirely bad. Some neighbours play loud music at weekends, so the blackout might provide a little relief. He might hear more conversations, more arguments and more children playing football on the sports court near his apartment.

The digital silence would not remove sound. It would uncover the sounds already around him.

Thirty Per Cent of Monday

Ismar reads national and international news online. Printed newspapers are now almost impossible to buy in his city. He does not normally listen to radio news, and he does not have a television at home.

For one week, he would probably stop following the news altogether.

He would miss his daily overview, but he did not think this would be a serious hardship.

“I think I will survive that.”

He has heard people say that they became less stressed after deliberately stepping away from the news. The Mayor understood the attraction. He often scans several newspapers but finds himself reading only the headlines because the detail can become too depressing.

The harder losses would come from activities that give shape to Ismar’s week. Our English conversation would disappear. So would his French class and his online contact with the Curitiba conversation group. He estimated that approximately thirty per cent of his normal Monday would be removed.

He could open one of the English or French books in his apartment. He owns grammar books and novels in both languages. Yet even this old-fashioned alternative would reveal a modern dependency. When he meets an unfamiliar word or grammar point, he normally checks it online.

Without that help, he would simply have to continue more slowly.

Or he could use the empty time differently. Late in the day, when the sun was lower, he might take a long walk towards the airport—something he had not done for a long time.

Late in the day, when the sun was lower, he might take a long walk towards the airport—something he had not done for a long time.

At first, this still sounded like rest: fewer appointments, less news, more reading and a long walk.

Then we left the apartment.



By Thursday, the Shelves Might Be Empty

The internet does not merely entertain us. It quietly coordinates the ordinary systems we assume will continue working.

Supermarkets order and organise supplies electronically. Restaurants record orders on tablets. Delivery businesses depend on apps. Traffic systems, petrol distribution and aviation all rely on connected technology.

The first day might be manageable. From the second day, Ismar imagined products becoming scarcer. By the end of the week, supermarket shelves might be empty.

He normally shops with his mother on Thursday. He would not rush to the supermarket in panic, but he expected many other people would.

There would be crowds. He might not find exactly what they wanted.

They could adapt. If there were no milk, he could make orange juice. Some foods keep longer than others. Cabbage would survive better than lettuce. A household can make substitutions for a week.

The difficulty begins when an entire city tries to make those substitutions at the same time.

Cash created an even larger problem. Ismar would withdraw money in advance, but what would happen if everybody had the same idea and the cash machines emptied? What about people who depend on cards and do not keep cash at home?

Without electronic payment, some people might have no way to buy food.

Asked to imagine himself as a city councillor, Ismar proposed a temporary local currency, issued on paper and connected to each citizen's identification number. He also recognised the scale of the problem almost immediately.

"It would be a mess," he admitted, especially in a city of around one million inhabitants.

Aviation presented another limit. A local paper currency might help someone buy vegetables. It would not help a traveller trying to reach São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro or another country.

"One week will be very, very problematic for some people," Ismar said.

By now, our week of digital rest was beginning to look less like a holiday and more like the slow failure of a city.

Care Cannot Simply Go Offline

The most serious consequences appeared when the conversation reached health care.

Ismar helps his mother with shopping, appointments and medical matters. Almost all her doctors use computers to access previous examinations, notes and patient histories. Only one still writes everything on paper.

A doctor could still listen to what a patient said that day, but without the earlier information, the consultation would become less complete. Even arranging the next appointment might depend on whether the clinic still owned a paper diary or knew how to work without its digital system.

For a known interruption of exactly one week, many appointments could simply be postponed. People might remain calm because they knew the system would return on Monday.

The greater danger would be uncertainty. If nobody knew when connectivity would return, Ismar thought many people and institutions would become frustrated rather than quickly

creating alternatives.

This was the moment when the meaning of digital rest changed completely.

Rest is something we choose.

A medical system that cannot reach a patient's records is not resting.

The People Who Would Disappear

By the middle of the week, more than ninety per cent of Ismar's usual contacts would be unreachable.

He would still see his mother. He could continue physical activities such as Pilates and ballroom dancing. But even people living in his own city could become inaccessible because WhatsApp is the only way he normally contacts them.

Most of the numbers and addresses he needs are stored on his phone. He does not keep them all in a paper agenda. Writing a letter would not solve the problem if he did not know where to send it.

His birthday would also fall during the disconnected week. The Mayor could not send congratulations because he did not know Ismar's address. Even if he discovered it, a letter might arrive after the internet had already returned.

Strangely, Ismar still believed he might enjoy the quiet.

He is comfortable in his own company. He can spend an entire weekend inside his apartment, perhaps leaving only for a walk.

The Mayor imagined a different possibility. Perhaps people in Ismar's condominium would finally come downstairs. The building has a shared outdoor area, a sports court and space

for children. Residents might begin talking, organise a barbecue and rediscover the people living only a few floors away.

Would Ismar join them?

"Probably not," he said. "Because I like to stay alone."

It was the most Ismar-like answer of the afternoon.

The internet might disappear. The neighbours might appear. Ismar could still choose the peace of his apartment.

Yet he was careful not to treat his own preference as a model for everybody else.

For many older people who live alone, social media and messaging are not trivial distractions. They reduce loneliness and create friendships. Losing those relationships for a week could deepen depression and create real danger.

Families separated across cities and countries would suffer. Small business owners could lose their income. Restaurants operating only through delivery platforms might stop functioning. Freelance workers might produce work they could neither send nor be paid for.

For Ismar, the week might feel like a holiday.

For somebody else, it could mean invisibility.

Fifteen Minutes

On Friday evening, The Mayor introduced a temptation.

For fifteen minutes only, the internet would return.

What would Ismar do?

He knew immediately.

If he were not already with his mother, he would send her a message saying that everything was all right and that he would see her again soon. Then he would contact two or three people he cared about most.

He would not begin with the news.

He would not open YouTube.

He would not check what he had missed on social media.

He would use those fifteen minutes to reassure people.

Beneath the banking, newspapers, language learning, music and delivery systems, the most important purpose of connectivity turned out to be very simple:

I am all right.

I am still here.

The Freedom We Built Away

When the imagined week ended, Ismar did not plan to abandon the internet. He would restore the tools that support his language learning, music, payments, information and relationships.

But the exercise had changed the question.

People often say that freedom is the thing they value most, Ismar reflected. Yet we have built a society in which paying bills, buying food, arranging medical care, contacting people and doing our work may all depend on one connected system.

We call this convenience because it removes effort.

We rarely notice that it also removes alternatives.

Some younger people may never have written and posted a letter. Some may not know how to order food without a phone. Many businesses no longer maintain a workable paper system. Even people who remember the old methods may no longer have the addresses, equipment or practical access required to use them.

“We are a kind of modern slave,” Ismar said.

He did not exclude himself.

“I use the internet and other connected systems to buy things, to pay things. I’m not an exception.”

At the beginning of our conversation, one disconnected week had sounded peaceful. By the end, Ismar still thought he could enjoy it—but his quiet apartment would exist inside a

much louder crisis of empty shelves, interrupted care, stranded travellers, unreachable friends and people unable to access their own money.

Digital rest is restful only when it is voluntary, limited and supported by a world that remains connected while we step away.

The final irony arrived as the conversation ended.

The Mayor explained that Ritesh’s late cancellation had forced him to redesign the meeting. Technology had made that possible within minutes. The very system we had spent the afternoon removing had rescued the conversation.

Ismar smiled and offered the only suitable farewell.

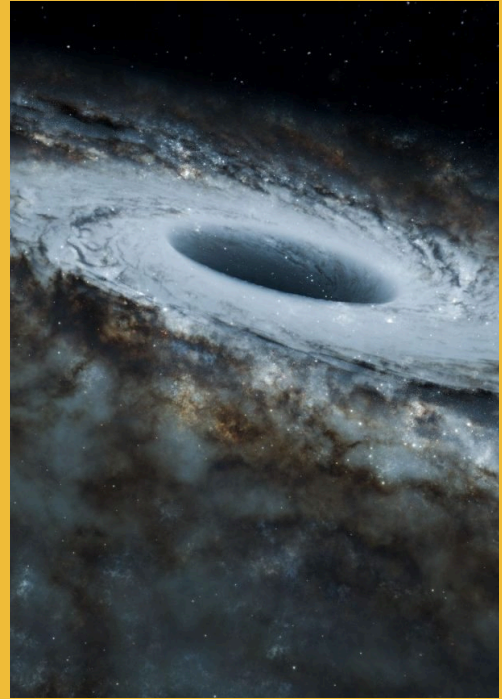
“Have a nice week, sir—and with a high-quality connection.”

WORKING LIFE

Working in the Void

I recently spoke with somebody working in the electronics industry. The office was unusually quiet. Summer holidays had emptied the corridors, meetings were difficult to arrange, and several important projects had reached the peculiar stage at which everybody remained busy but nobody could move decisively forward.

BY MAYOR



The new department heads have not yet arrived. Important decisions are waiting for them. The people needed for meetings are scattered, and the components needed for production have become scarce and extraordinarily expensive. Everybody is still working. Progress is another matter.

“**E**verything is more or less on hold,” he said. This was not because there was no work to do. His list was long, the deadlines remained, and the technical questions were becoming more urgent. The difficulty was that two new department heads were expected to arrive. They would bring experience, knowledge and perhaps some of the authority needed to resolve the problems already accumulating around them.

But they had not arrived yet.

Even when they did, they would need time to understand the company, the people, the projects and the history behind earlier decisions. Everyone would want their attention. Each person would arrive with an urgent problem and a persuasive explanation of why it should be considered first.

The new managers would inherit responsibility before they had acquired context.

In the meantime, the work continued inside the gap between the leadership that was leaving and the leadership that had not yet begun.

The Decision Waiting for Its Owner

One of the most important decisions concerned the electronic components at the centre of a new system. The engineer had gathered specifications, presentations and technical documents. He had also read the manufacturer’s list of known faults in one relatively new device.

That document alone ran to around one hundred pages.

Complex hardware is never entirely free of faults. Neither is complex software. Engineers work with tolerances, safeguards and an understanding of what should happen when something goes wrong. The question is not whether faults exist, but whether they can be identified, contained and managed safely.

The engineer therefore faced a decision with consequences stretching far beyond the meeting in which it would eventually be made. A component selected now could remain embedded in a system for many years. Its limitations would have to be understood long after the original project team had moved on.

He could choose one device and push the project forward. Instead, he was trying to keep the design open across a broader family of components. That would allow development to continue without committing everything too early to one option whose weaknesses were not yet fully understood.

From the outside, this might look like hesitation. From inside the project, it was responsibility.

The incoming department head might provide the knowledge and authority needed to make the choice. But there was no guarantee. After weeks of waiting, the engineer might

finally present the specifications, the risks and the hundred pages of known faults, only to receive the answer he had been trying to avoid.

“You understand the project. You decide.”

The Work Nobody Can See

The leadership transition was only part of the problem. Summer had made the ordinary machinery of coordination increasingly unreliable.

People were on holiday, travelling for work or joining meetings remotely. One person returned just as another disappeared. Bringing several managers together in the same room had become almost impossible.

This mattered because the team had built something that needed to be seen.

Hardware and software had been brought together in a laboratory. The system could be demonstrated, tested and discussed while it was physically in front of the people responsible for deciding what happened next.

The system could be demonstrated, tested and discussed while it was physically in front of the people responsible for deciding what happened next.

Slides could explain the idea. A camera could show that something was happening. Neither could reproduce the experience of standing beside the equipment, watching it operate and asking questions as the demonstration unfolded.

The engineer had recently watched somebody attempt such a demonstration online.

“It was a joke,” he said.

The equipment appeared on the screen, but understanding did not. Details disappeared. The relationship between the components was difficult to see. A demonstration intended to create confidence became a sequence of uncertain images.

His compromise was to present the slides online and invite the managers to visit the laboratory when they were next nearby.

That solved the meeting problem by postponing the understanding problem.

Remote work had also removed something less formal but equally valuable: the conversations that happened outside scheduled meetings. A question asked in a corridor, a warning offered while passing somebody's desk, a brief exchange revealing that another team was moving in a different direction.

Online, people appeared at the appointed time, discussed the agenda and disappeared again. It was not always clear where they were, what else they were working on or how much pressure they were carrying.

The meetings continued.

The surrounding knowledge did not.

When a Small Component Becomes a Large Problem

While decisions were waiting inside the company, the external supply chain was creating another form of paralysis.

A supplier could assemble the required electronic boards, but only if the customer provided some of the memory components. The supplier did not have enough stock to satisfy every customer and could no longer obtain the missing parts at a reasonable price.

Calls were made. Distributors were contacted. Eventually, an offer arrived.

A component normally costing only a few dollars was being offered for several dozen.

The price no longer made sense in relation to the product in which the component would be used. When one small part costs more than the amount originally calculated for a much larger section of the system, the economics of production begin to collapse.

Large customers can protect themselves through long-term contracts and direct relationships with manufacturers. Smaller industrial buyers may require only a few thousand components each year. That makes them too small to negotiate directly with the limited number of companies capable of producing what they need.

They are left to distributors and brokers, where scarcity can transform an ordinary electronic part into a highly valuable commodity.

The engineer suspected that rapidly expanding military demand was adding to the pressure. Components used in civilian industrial systems may also appear in defence equipment, and buyers working with urgent programmes and larger budgets may be able to accept prices that smaller manufacturers cannot match.

It was his interpretation, not a claim he could prove.

What he could see was the result. A company trying to build ordinary industrial equipment was competing for the same small pieces of silicon as buyers willing to pay almost any

price.

The New Normal

The conversation began in a quiet office and ended with a picture of an industrial system losing its ability to move predictably.

Inside the company, projects were waiting for new leaders. The new leaders would need time to understand the projects. Physical demonstrations were being reduced to slides and camera images. Informal knowledge was disappearing between online meetings.

Outside the company, suppliers could no longer guarantee delivery. Prices no longer reflected the apparent value of the components. Smaller customers were competing in markets shaped by buyers with greater urgency, deeper pockets and stronger contractual positions.

The engineer did not expect the situation to return quickly to what it had been.

“This will be the new normal,” he said.

Many industrial economies depend upon smaller companies producing specialised equipment in modest quantities. They do not buy millions of identical parts. They build systems for particular applications, often with long working lives and demanding technical requirements.

They may have the design, the engineers and the customer. None of that matters if one necessary component cannot be obtained.

This is what makes the void difficult to recognise. It does not look like a crisis. The lights remain on. People attend meetings. Reports are prepared. Engineers continue reading specifications, calling suppliers and gathering information.

The project has not stopped.

It has lost the conditions required to move.

The new managers will eventually arrive. They may bring knowledge, direction and enough authority to release some of the delayed decisions. They cannot immediately repair a fragmented supply chain, make scarce components affordable or restore all the conversations that no longer happen around the office.

The void will not disappear simply because somebody fills the chair.

Until then, the engineer will continue doing what people often do when they remain responsible but cannot yet act. He will collect more information, keep the design open for as long as possible and prepare for the moment when waiting is no longer an option.

Everybody is working.

Sooner or later, somebody will still have to decide.



POSTCARDS

Dutch Impressions

BY MANFRED

More photos from my holiday in the Netherlands.

Julianadorp lies just south of Den Helder, between bulb fields, dunes and the North Sea. Named after Princess Juliana, the village combines its polder history with a strong seaside character. This summer, that story has been recreated in sand, with sculptures appearing at several locations around the village.





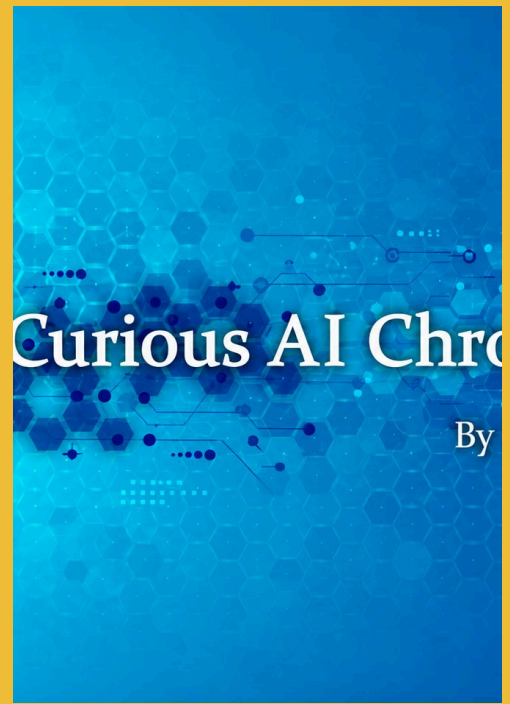




ESSAY

How AI Made Us More Human

BY BRUCE; THE MAYOR



Curious AI Chro
By

▶ 0:00 / 14:28 ———— 🔊 ⋮

Bruce began with a poem and several AI systems. I began with almost no knowledge of Philip Larkin. What followed was not a lesson delivered by a machine, but a journey into curiosity, memory and the things people still need from one another.

Bruce triggered the whole thing.

He had taken Philip Larkin's poem *This Be the Verse* and asked several AI systems to examine it. He was interested not only in their conclusions, but in the routes they took to reach them. The answers were far from uniform. Some were useful. Some wandered into curious territory. Others produced claims that deserved to be questioned.

Together, they created a large body of material around one short and deliberately provocative poem.

Bruce shared the results online.

I knew the name Philip Larkin, but little more. I had moved to Britain shortly before he died, yet he had never really entered my cultural landscape. There were no collections of his poetry on my shelves. I had not studied him at school, and I did not carry the background knowledge that might have allowed me to understand immediately why Bruce had chosen this particular poem.

His exercise assumed a familiarity I did not possess.

That could have been the end of it. I could have glanced at the findings, decided Larkin belonged to somebody else's education and moved on.

Instead, I became curious.

Entering Larkin Land

I found a BBC documentary and began filling in the missing landscape. I learnt more about the librarian, the poet and the private man. I encountered several of his poems and started to understand why his work had occupied such a prominent place in British cultural life.

The documentary described something it called "Larkin Land": not merely the poems, but the emotional and physical world around them. Provincial places. Solitude. Desire. Restraint. Disappointment. Ordinary life observed without much protection from sentiment.

Bruce had begun with one narrow piece of this territory. I needed the wider landscape before I could properly understand the questions he had asked.

That difference between us became important.

Bruce was fascinated by what the AI systems made of the poem. I found myself asking whether the poem could be separated from the person who wrote it. Larkin's family relationships had been difficult. His private life was complicated. Should that influence how we read the poem, or was it a separate question altogether?

Bruce thought it was another road. Potentially an interesting one, but not the road his original exercise had taken.

Almost immediately, our conversation began producing questions that none of the AI systems had been asked.

Had Bruce chosen the right poem for an intergenerational discussion? How much context does a reader need before an AI interpretation becomes useful? Can a machine help us ask better questions? How do we know whether those questions are the right ones?

The original prompt had not settled anything.

It had started something.

Can AI Generate Curiosity?

At one point, I asked whether AI could generate curiosity.

Bruce stopped me.

"Can it **help** to generate curiosity?" he said.

It was a small correction, but an important one.

The machine had not become curious about Philip Larkin. It had no private desire to understand the poem, no memory of encountering it at school and no sudden urge to watch a documentary about the poet.

But Bruce's use of AI had helped to generate curiosity in me.

The technology had presented material, comparisons and possible directions. I had responded. I had chosen to look further. When I returned to Bruce, we did not simply repeat what the machines had produced. We questioned the premise, challenged the missing context and began connecting the exercise to larger concerns.

Bruce was interested in exploring the process of AI "thinking," as he put it in inverted commas. I was more concerned with what happened after the output arrived.

He believed that, in half a day, AI could help him become far more knowledgeable about Larkin than he might otherwise become in the same time. Reading biographies and collections of poetry would take much longer.

I could see the advantage.

I could also see the mountain.

Every answer generated several new questions. Each question could be placed back into an AI system and returned as another analysis, another comparison and another collection of possible directions.

It was possible to learn at extraordinary speed.

It was also possible to drown.

When Curiosity Becomes Indulgent

Bruce recognised the danger himself.

"Curiosity isn't an end in itself," he said.

He described the possibility that AI could make his curiosity more indulgent. The machine would always offer another path to follow, another comparison to make and another question to explore. Many AI responses even ended by suggesting what the user might ask next.

The machine would always offer another path to follow, another comparison to make and another question to explore.

There was no natural stopping point.

This brought us back to a question that appears repeatedly in our conversations: what are we going to do with all this material?

I began to say that knowledge was useless unless we did something with it.

Bruce corrected me again.

"Information is useless until you do something with it."

He was right.

AI can produce information at extraordinary speed and in extraordinary quantities. That does not automatically become knowledge, and it certainly does not become wisdom.

The human being must still decide what matters, what is credible, what connects to experience and what deserves to be carried into another conversation.

This was where our discussion became more valuable than either of us had expected. Bruce had generated a great deal of information before we spoke. I had begun filling in the

cultural background that sat outside his original prompt. When we met, the two paths connected.

Bruce brought the experiment.

I brought the questions it had provoked.

Together, we produced what he called “the next generation of questions.”

What the Conversation Added

I asked whether it might not be more fulfilling simply to have the human conversation without involving AI at all.

A conversation can stay with me. I can carry it into the afternoon, turn it over while doing something else and return to it when Bruce and I next meet. A fifty-page analysis may be impressive, but it can also be closed, filed and forgotten.

Bruce’s answer was not that AI should replace the conversation.

It was that we might never have had this particular conversation without it.

That was the point at which the exercise shifted for me.

The machine had not produced the most valuable part. The most valuable part was the connection it created between two people who approached the same material differently.

Bruce tends to move outwards. One question leads towards another field, another comparison and another possible experiment. I tend to pull the discussion back towards use. What does this mean in the life of an ordinary person? What can we do with it? Where does the idea meet the practical world?

Neither approach was sufficient alone.

Bruce’s curiosity opened the field. My resistance forced us to ask what the field was for.

AI had not reduced the need for human conversation. It had made the difference between us more visible and, for a while, more useful.

The Interview That Never Happened

Then the conversation moved somewhere neither of us had planned.

We began talking about the exchange of stories between generations. I asked what was wrong with the simple conversation in which a grandmother tells a grandchild what life was like when she was young.

Bruce agreed that such stories were enormously important. He also observed that they happen less often when generations no longer live close to one another.

Then he spoke about his own father.

Bruce had relatively little contact with his parents during the later part of their lives. His father died decades ago. Looking back, Bruce wished he had been able to interview him about his experience of the twentieth century.

The opportunity had gone.

This was no longer an abstract discussion about what an AI system could say about a poem.

It was about a voice that had not been recorded.

Bruce remembered how difficult such work once was. An interview had to be recorded, transcribed manually, edited and shaped over many hours. Today, a telephone can capture

the conversation, while modern tools can help produce a transcript and an initial structure within minutes.

The technology cannot bring Bruce’s father back. It cannot ask the questions Bruce now wishes he had asked.

But it could help another person avoid the same regret.

Bruce suggested that care homes might have somebody—a volunteer or a professional—who sits with residents and helps collect their life stories. The person telling the story receives attention. Families receive a record. A small piece of social history is preserved before it disappears.

Suddenly, the humane possibility of AI became clear.

Its value was not that it could imitate the voice of an elderly person or manufacture a polished memoir without them.

Its value was that it could remove some of the labour surrounding the act of listening.

The machine could transcribe.

The human being still had to sit beside the person and care enough to ask.

The Ordinary Record

This connected directly to what we are trying to do with The Pineapple.

The Pineapple often begins with the ordinary: meals, work, holidays, mistakes, family habits, small discoveries and conversations that might appear insignificant from the outside.

Yet ordinary life becomes history remarkably quickly.

A diary that seems unimportant when it is written may reveal, decades later, how people lived, what they feared and what they believed was normal. A conversation with a parent or grandparent may preserve details that will otherwise vanish with them.

Bruce had found old writing from the 1980s while clearing his home. He could not imagine anybody else wanting to read it, yet he also found it difficult to throw away.

That is the uncomfortable territory of personal records. If we are honest enough, the result may feel unpublishable. If we remove everything uncomfortable, the record may cease to be honest.

AI does not solve that tension.

But it may make it easier to collect the material while the people are still here.

Whatever Happened to Common Sense?

People often speak about AI as though it will inevitably make the world less human.

Our experience moved in the opposite direction.

Bruce's experiment introduced me to a poet I had largely missed. My curiosity led me into Larkin's life and work. I returned to Bruce with objections, questions and missing context. Our conversation moved beyond the poem into the purpose of curiosity, the limits of information and the importance of preserving voices between generations.

It ended, as our conversations often do, with another question.

We had been discussing how people decide what should be done simply because technology makes it possible. My wife often says:

"Just because you can doesn't mean you should."

Bruce asked how we decide.

I offered two words that seemed almost old-fashioned.

"Common sense."

Then I gave him his next prompt:

"Whatever happened to common sense?"

Bruce paused. He thought the question needed a subtitle.

"I would appreciate your humility in answering that question."

It was a better response than an answer.

Common sense sounds solid and reassuring, but one person's common sense may be another person's prejudice. It is shaped by culture, experience, education and the assumptions we have stopped noticing.

Humility does not make judgement weaker. It reminds us that confidence can outrun understanding.

AI can place unfamiliar material between two people. It can give them something to question, resist and explore. It can lower the practical barriers to recording a life and reveal connections neither person had seen at the beginning.

But it cannot remove the need for judgement. Nor can common sense, however confidently invoked, release us from the need to examine our own assumptions.

Bruce triggered the journey. AI gave it material. I followed the curiosity back to Bruce, and the two of us found ourselves in a more personal conversation than either of us had planned.

The machine did not become more human.

We became more curious, more connected and perhaps a little more humble.



MEMBER STORIES

Rest Isn't Something I Find. It's Something I Choose.

BY BABETTE

▶ 0:00 / 5:06



Sometimes rest isn't about doing nothing. Sometimes it's baking bread before work, laughing at a child's unexpected song, and looking forward to a camping weekend with a slightly questionable slushy in your hand.

For a long time, I thought rest meant stopping. Lying on the sofa. Sleeping longer. Doing absolutely nothing.

But if I'm honest, that's not really what my life looks like.

On the morning of our conversation, it was already around 33 degrees outside. Inside the kitchen it wasn't much cooler. Before I even sat down to talk, lunch was cooked, salad was prepared, and the dough for tomorrow's bread was already

rising. My colleague was on holiday, so I was covering the work alone, and I had recently been discussing new personal goals with my manager.

It wasn't exactly a peaceful morning.

And yet, I didn't feel unhappy.

Busy doesn't always mean unhappy. But it does make you think about why rest actually matters.

The pressure never completely disappears

Like many people, work has its own rhythm.

There are deadlines, meetings, goals and the feeling that there is always something else waiting. My manager is talking about retirement one day, new objectives the next, while I quietly hope that some changes might come a little sooner than expected.

Life keeps moving.

Home keeps moving too.

Sometimes it feels as though the to-do list can reproduce overnight.

The strange thing is that if I waited for life to become completely quiet before I rested, I would probably never rest at all.

Rest can sound like laughter

During our meeting we somehow wandered into talking about pets.

That quickly became spiders, rabbits, dogs, chickens and all sorts of animals.

At one point my daughter started singing in the background while we were talking about chickens. Suddenly our serious meeting had its own little soundtrack. Instead of interrupting

everything, it became one of those ordinary family moments that simply makes you smile.

You can't really schedule moments like that.

They just arrive.

Looking back, those unexpected interruptions might be some of the most restful moments of all, because they remind me that life doesn't have to be perfectly organised to be enjoyable.

Looking forward matters too

By the end of the week I wasn't dreaming about expensive holidays or luxury hotels.

I was simply excited to go camping.

The tent had already been put up at home to make sure everything still worked before we left. The weather promised plenty of sunshine, perhaps a little rain, and hopefully a chance to slow down.

Of course, camping also comes with its own traditions.

Mine apparently involves a slushy machine.

We ended up laughing about my favourite frozen drinks—especially the ones that are perhaps a little less innocent than they first appear. One favourite combines Malibu with pineapple or passion fruit. Another has a Dutch name that literally translates into something that made us joke it sounded like “dirty water.”

I'm fairly sure I'll enjoy my “dirty” slushies this weekend.

Hopefully not enough to earn the headache we also laughed about.

Rest isn't empty

When people hear the word *rest*, they often imagine silence.

For me, it can be bread dough rising on the counter.

Children singing in the next room.

Packing a tent.

Laughing over unusual English translations.

Sharing stories about pets.

Sitting outside with family while the evening finally cools down.

None of those moments remove the responsibilities waiting for me when Monday arrives.

But they remind me why those responsibilities are worth carrying.

I've realised that rest isn't something that magically appears once everything is finished.

It's something I have to choose, even while life is still wonderfully, noisily, imperfectly happening all around me.

Babette's “Dirty Water” recipe

Bachwasser (translated as “creek water”)

Ingredients

- **1 bottle** (0.7 liters) Doppelkorn (German grain spirit)
- **1 bottle** (0.7 liters) Vodka
- **400 g** Iced tea powder/granules (Zitronen-Eistee / lemon flavor is standard)
- **3 liters** Still water
- **1 kg** Ice cubes

Equipment

- **1 clean bucket** (at least 5-liter capacity) or a very large cooking pot

Instructions

1. **Mix the base:** Pour the 3 liters of still water into your clean bucket.
2. **Dissolve the powder:** Add the 400 g of iced tea granules and stir thoroughly until completely dissolved.
3. **Add the alcohol:** Pour in both the entire bottle of Doppelkorn and the bottle of vodka, then stir to combine.
4. **Chill:** Dump in the ice cubes right before serving to keep the punch ice-cold. If desired, you can garnish the mix with fresh lemon slices.



MEMBER STORIES

Do Not Read This If You Want to Be Perfectly Rested

During our Wednesday Swimming Club conversation, we tried to understand what rest actually looks like. This immediately created a problem: the moment people begin explaining how to rest properly, rest starts becoming another task.

BY MARTIN

▶ 0:00 / 7:13 ———▶ 🔊 ⋮

My warning light glows politely, my gramophone refuses to optimise me, and sometimes the best way to recharge is to travel hundreds of kilometres to a concert.

Perhaps we need a warning light instead. Mine would not flash aggressively or play loud music. Loud music would be cool, but it would require headphones, and I do not always wear them. My warning light would glow politely, becoming brighter as my need for rest increased.

I imagine one of those small lamps on an old record player. Does anybody remember them? The light would not demand anything. It would simply glow, quietly and soothingly, until I finally noticed it.

Coffee, Shoes and the Inner Devil

When rest begins properly, there is a sequence.

First comes coffee: strong, black and always freshly ground. Then I sit down and take off my shoes. The headphones go on, followed by music.

A few snacks would enhance the experience. The exact quantity is difficult to establish.

At this point, my inner resistance usually begins fighting a fierce battle against my inner devil. One side says that snacks are unnecessary. The other side has already opened the packet.

This is more or less my resting station. It does not require a spa, a mindfulness coach or a twelve-stage relaxation programme. It requires coffee, music, no shoes and the temporary defeat of unnecessary responsibility.

An official rest inspector might disagree.

The first thing such an inspector would say upon entering my home is, “Oh my God.”

The place is small, and there are too many things. According to the inspector, I would probably have no right to rest because the untidiness itself would be considered

unrestful.

My answer would be simple: being a genius allows me to manage this chaos.

Then I would show the inspector the door.

The door is still in a tidy zone. Outside, in the stairwell, it is especially tidy because it is empty.

Rest First, Except in Emergencies

My basic rule is: rest first.

This is excellent advice whenever the to-do list contains nothing important. The difficulty is deciding what “important” means.

My definition is quite strict. Nothing is important unless it is absolutely life-threatening. In a genuinely life-threatening situation, rest first might not be the best decision. In most

other situations, the task can probably survive without immediate attention.

Rest gives us back things we temporarily lose. Patience, curiosity, humour, imagination and even the desire to speak to other human beings may all return after we stop.

Patience, curiosity, humour, imagination and even the desire to speak to other human beings may all return after we stop.

Patience is especially important. When you are caught in a vicious circle of hectic activity, stopping opens the door to it. There is a reason Rome was not built in one day.

It would probably not have been improved by a self-optimisation app either.

The Gramophone Knows Better

An old gramophone understands rest better than a modern app.

The gramophone does not try to take control of me. It requires calmness and patience. I have to sit down, choose an old 78 rpm record and place it carefully on the machine.

Nothing happens instantly. That is part of the pleasure.

A self-optimisation app would behave differently. It would monitor the situation, judge my choices and perhaps warn me that what I was doing at that moment was unhealthy. It would transform sitting quietly with a record into a measurable performance.

This is the central problem with professional rest advice. The varieties of rest I would refuse to buy—even with a loyalty-card discount—are the ones that tell me exactly how I

must relax.

They would only stress me.

The same applies to the imaginary robot that works brilliantly but becomes suspicious whenever nobody gives it a task. I would explain that human beings need rest. A robot may argue that the day has 24 hours, but a human cannot function for all 24 of them.

To help the robot understand, I would give it a self-optimisation app programmed to maximise its performance. Eventually, its systems would begin short-circuiting—the robot version of becoming ill—and it would automatically shut itself down.

That might finally teach it something about being human.

My Recharging Stations

Some forms of rest do not look restful from the outside.

Travelling hundreds of kilometres to concerts, coming home and then travelling hundreds of kilometres again could appear exhausting, inefficient or slightly mad.

The secret ingredient is not the travelling.

It is the fun, the pleasure and the memories that remain afterwards. Those memories become energy. They keep me going during the time between concerts.

A concert is simply a recharging station.

This is why a full, interesting and slightly chaotic life may sometimes be better than a perfectly rested one. Nobody really knows what a perfectly rested life feels like. The people searching for it are too busy optimising everything.

They are planning their rest, monitoring their rest, improving their rest and assessing the quality of the rest they have just completed.

By the time they finish, they may need to rest.



Bring Back Boredom

I would also like to bring boredom back into society.

If boredom were an endangered species, I would release it on every street corner. It could act as a serum against the modern pace of life and the constant traps demanding our attention.

Boredom is not lethal, although people often behave as if it is—especially when children are involved.

Parents, and particularly mothers, can carry the burden of finding activities to keep children occupied all the time. Every empty hour has to be filled. Every quiet moment becomes a problem requiring a solution.

But boredom can create space. It allows the mind to move without being directed. It may produce imagination, curiosity or nothing at all.

Nothing at all is also allowed.

There is no need to achieve something every time we stop.

The Unwritten Warning

The Swimming Club anti-handbook on rest probably needs a warning page.

My contribution would be one sentence:

Do not read this if you want to be perfectly rested, because searching for perfection is not restful.

Of course, this advice should never actually appear in the handbook.

It might cause people stress.

COLUMN

Rainbow on the Other Side

BY JANITA LE GRANGE



They say the bigger the storm, the brighter the rainbow.

And maybe that's true. The dark, heavy clouds don't mean everything is ruined—they're usually just clearing out the noise so something better can take its place. A rainbow only looks that bright because of the dark sky sitting right behind it, and maybe these messy, chaotic days are just making room for a little extra light.

Right now, I am waiting on that rainbow. Because lately, it feels like I've been living under a localized thunderstorm of my own making.

These past few weeks, I've been making mistake after mistake. I forget the important stuff—the crucial, time-sensitive, life-admin stuff—and instead, my brain holds onto completely useless trivia. The physical and emotional weight of pushing through difficulties while keeping everything floating, of sorting out messes, and spending way too much time on things that don't even matter anymore.

I've been trying so hard to fix myself, to work on myself, that I think I might have accidentally broken the machine.

Normally, my days are etched into my brain like permanent fixtures. Tattoos on the mind:

- **05:45** — Wake up.
- **07:00** — School run.
- **07:45** — Back home. Coffee, chores, go, go, go until 10:00.
- **10:00** — Meetings, work, sticking to the carved-out routine.
- **18:00** — Cook dinner.
- **19:30** — Everyone in winding-down mode so my son is asleep by 20:00.

Once he's finally asleep, my husband and I catch a breath. We read, watch a program, catch up on work, or just share a quiet cup of tea.

And then tomorrow, the record scratches, and it starts all over again.

The problem isn't the routine. The problem is when the routine shifts by five minutes.

My brain simply refuses to accept rescheduled times. I write the new time down. I think about it a million, gazillion times. And then? I still miss it.

And don't get me started on the school sports schedules. Today, practice is at 16:00. Tomorrow, it's moved to 14:00. Some kids are doing hockey from 13:00 to 14:00, cricket from 14:00 to 15:00, cross country from 15:00 to 16:00, and somewhere in between, there's choir, debate, and the spelling bee.

I have *one* boy, and I am going crazy while trying to stay updated. I look at the moms with two or three kids and wonder what kind of dark magic they are practicing to stay sane.

I look at the moms with two or three kids and wonder what kind of dark magic they are practicing to stay sane.

Then there are the school WhatsApp groups. Oh, the groups.

A endless stream of pinging: complaints about practice times, schedule clashes, reminders for school fees, bake sales, concert tickets, participation fees... It never stops. My brain is fried. I've started wondering if I need memory tablets, more water, zero sugar, less screen time, or just to scrub my floors until my arms fall off.

When I was in high school and had a crush on a boy, my mom used to tell me I had "*muis neste*"—mouse nests.

Direct translation: mouse nests in your head. It means you're so distracted, so busy daydreaming, that you can't concentrate on a single practical thought.

That's me right now. Except I don't have a crush.

I just have a brain full of noise, clutter, and sticky notes that keep falling off the wall, while feeling sorry for the dead plants in the garden and staring at the broken toilet.

And the hardest part of this storm isn't the missed times or the chaotic schedules. It's the feeling that I've been a disappointment to myself lately. Upsetting the people around me—my husband, my son, my mom, my friends.

The truth is, I'm a giver and a helper. That's who I am. But lately, I've been giving away the exact parts of myself that I needed to keep. I've been spending so much time keeping everyone else floating that I forgot how to swim.

I keep telling myself to do better, to be better, to focus. But maybe you can't force a storm to stop by yelling at the rain.

Maybe the brain fog is just a sign that the cup is still empty, and trying to refill it with sheer willpower doesn't work.

The sun will set tonight, and it will rise again tomorrow. The clouds will clear eventually, and the rainbow will show up. In my case, I'm just hoping my brain wakes up and decides to join the party.

Until then, I'm going to set a few extra alarms on my phone, and give myself a little grace – maybe sit in the naughty corner until I stop feeling guiltily, sad and angry at myself.

And hopefully, I'll turn into that rainbow and shine a little brighter than before.

Sometimes we measure our self-worth against an impossible standard—trying to keep an etched schedule running

like clockwork while simultaneously giving away every spare piece of our energy to help everyone else stay afloat. When the brain fog rolls in and take over, it isn't a personal failure or a sign that you're broken. It's your system firing a flare to let you know you've run out of fuel.

A few quiet truths to hold onto:

- **Grace over perfection:** The world won't fall apart if a schedule shifts, a meeting is rescheduled, or a shirt is a little too tight.
- **You can't pour from an empty cup:** Being a giver is a beautiful thing, but you have to save enough of yourself *for* yourself.
- **Imperfection is just life happening:** Kids grow out of clothes overnight, WhatsApp groups will always be chaotic, and some days your brain is just going to be two raccoons in a trash can.

The rainbow isn't about suddenly getting everything 100% right tomorrow. It's about realizing that even in the middle of the mess, you are doing enough, you are enough, and we can try again later or tomorrow.



MEMBER STORIES

The Rest I Need Is Not Quiet

BY ALEXANDER

For me, rest does not always mean doing nothing. Sometimes it begins when the daily routine disappears and I can simply enjoy the people around me.

Our family holiday begins in a way that does not sound very relaxing.

At 6:30 in the evening, I have a football match. After the match, I will go home, get into the car and drive to Croatia with Julia and our two-year-old son, Jaron. We plan to leave at around ten o'clock and drive through the night.

The journey will take about eight hours. I will probably drive the whole way.

My preparation is very easy. I need shorts, T-shirts and underwear. That is more or less everything. I can pack my own things quite quickly.

Jaron's luggage is the special one. Julia prepares the things he needs, and my job is to put the heavy bags into the car. Before a family holiday, there are clothes to wash, bags to organise and many small things to remember. The days before the holiday can be more exhausting than a normal week.

We do not have a special dinner on the evening before we leave. We do not open a bottle of wine to celebrate the beginning of the holiday. I do not slowly enter holiday mode.

I play football, get into the car and drive for eight hours.

A Holiday Without a Plan

We are travelling to the area around Pula in northern Croatia. We will stay in a very large house with a group of about fifteen people.

Every family will have its own bedroom and bathroom. We will share the kitchen and living room. The house is big enough that we can spend time together, but when somebody needs a little break, they can go back to their room.

I like this idea.

We booked the holiday only three or four weeks before travelling. For me, this is much better than booking a summer holiday in January or February. When you book so early, you have to wait a very long time before the holiday finally happens.

I also have no big plan for what we will do in Croatia.

A friend has already found a five-hour boat trip. Maybe we will join, but I am not sure whether Jaron will be happy on a boat for five hours. We will decide when we are there.

In these situations, I am very spontaneous. I do not need to organise a big adventure for every day. We will be close to the sea, and we can visit the city when we want. We can eat, drink,

talk and spend time together.

In these situations, I am very spontaneous. I do not need to organise a big adventure for every day. We will be close to the sea, and we can visit the city when we want. We can eat, drink, talk and spend time together.

That is enough for me.

The Mayor challenged me about this. He asked why I would drive eight hours to another country if I could meet people, eat good food and have good drinks at home.

The answer is the daily routine.

At home, the routine is always there. In Croatia, everything will be new: a new place, a new house and a different view. We will not have the same jobs and tasks around us.

For me, this change is the nice thing about a holiday.

A fantastic holiday does not need to contain many activities. In the best case, I come home feeling relaxed. I have had a good time with the other people. I have enjoyed good food and good drinks. I have also had a little free time from being responsible for Jaron every minute, and hopefully he has been easy to handle.

When these things happen, I am happy.

Making Monday a Good Day

Croatia is a family holiday, but I also have another kind of rest ritual.

My Stammtisch normally meets on Monday evening. We usually start at around 7:30 or eight and stay until ten or eleven.

Monday is a very good day for the Stammtisch because Monday is normally a bad day. The weekend is finished, and everybody has to start working again.

But then we have a great evening waiting for us.

During the day, the first messages arrive. Who will join us? What time will we meet? Later, we sit around two tables that have been pushed together. There is no agenda. The topics

simply arrive, and the conversation flows naturally.

We talk about what happened during the weekend. We make jokes. We tell stories. Somebody may have been at a wedding or experienced something interesting. We share the latest information from our lives.

The conversation, the people, the humour and the drinks all belong together.

When I leave the Stammtisch, I normally have two feelings. I am a little sad because the evening is over, but I am also happy because, in the best case, we have had a great time together.

The Stammtisch changes my Monday.

The Conversations About Nothing

Once a year, the Stammtisch becomes something bigger. We travel together to Mallorca.

For several years, it has been difficult to find a date when everybody can join. One person has no time, then another person has no time. This year, it looks possible that the whole group can travel together.

I am very excited about it.

Normally, I hate mornings. But when we drive to the airport for the Mallorca trip, I think I will be very happy—maybe a little too happy—even if it is very early.

It is difficult to explain what makes this trip so important.

Julia may ask me what we talked about. My answer is often: nothing.

We do not spend the trip discussing important subjects. We have stupid conversations. We laugh, tell stories and have fun. From the outside, it may look as if nothing meaningful is happening.

But that is exactly why it feels so good.

During the rest of the year, we are correct people. We work, take care of our families and carry a lot of responsibility. We have appointments, decisions and things that must be done properly.

On this trip, we can leave those points behind for a short time.

We can only live our life.

Of course, this kind of freedom should not belong only to us. Julia also has opportunities to travel without me and Jaron. She has planned a trip to Berlin with my brother's wife,

including a Tokio Hotel concert. While they are away, we will stay home with the children.

They can let their hair down too.

This Is the Key

At the beginning of my conversation with The Mayor, I was tired. I had played football the day before, and apparently I looked tired too.

But when we started talking about the Stammtisch and Mallorca, something changed.

The Mayor noticed it. He said that talking about the trip had made me more alive.

I told him, “This is the key.”

Rest does not always look quiet. It is not always sleeping, sitting alone or doing nothing. Sometimes the body may still be tired.

For me, rest can be a new house near the sea. It can be fifteen people sharing a kitchen. It can be a Monday evening around two tables. It can be an early flight with old friends and a weekend full of conversations about nothing.

The important thing is that, for a little while, the daily routine disappears.

And then the energy comes back.



MEMBER STORIES

The Beer Was Nothing Special

BY FABRICE

▶ 0:00 / 6:16 ———— 🔊 ⋮

After two weeks in the desert, drinking warm water and sleeping in a tent, an ordinary cold Kronenbourg became one of the best beers of my life.

An ordinary beer becomes a very good beer after 100 kilometres.

To be honest, after 100 kilometres, every liquid is good. Water is good. Coffee is good. But beer is very, very good.

The same is true after a hard day. Maybe I have been working in hot temperatures. Maybe I have spent the evening cutting and moving wood. When I work with dangerous machines, I drink only water and coffee. First the work must be finished. Then I clean the tools, put everything away and go home.

After that, I like five minutes of nothing.

Then I drink one beer.

Maybe two, but normally one.

I do not drink beer every day. During the week, I drink a lot of coffee and water, and perhaps one or two beers in total. The Mayor called me a social drinker. Then he changed it to a thirsty drinker.

I think thirsty drinker is more accurate.

The First Sip Is Not the Beginning

The first sip is not the official moment when work is finished. The work must already be finished.

For me, the ritual begins before the bottle is opened. The machines are stopped. The tools are clean. Everything is in its place. I sit down and do nothing for a few minutes.

Then the beer can come.

It must be cold. That is the most important rule.

Music or no music does not matter. Silence is fine. Noise is fine. A bottle is fine. A glass is fine. At home, I normally drink from the bottle. In a restaurant, I take a glass.

The world can come to an end, but when the beer is cold, it is okay.

Even the time is flexible. Six o'clock in the morning is normally not the correct time for beer. But after a village festival, when the evening has continued through the night,

perhaps with a barbecue after the festival, six in the morning can still belong to the evening.

Then it is acceptable.

The Best Beer of My Life

The best beer I remember was in Djibouti.

We had spent two weeks in the desert. We slept in tents and drank warm water. The work was difficult, but it was also interesting. We had done a good job.

We had spent two weeks in the desert. We slept in tents and drank warm water. The work was difficult, but it was also interesting. We had done a good job.

When we returned to the city, I went with friends and colleagues and ordered a very cold Kronenbourg.

Kronenbourg is not a special beer. It is a normal beer. You can buy it in many places, and drinking the same beer somewhere else would not create the same experience.

But after two weeks in the desert, it tasted completely different.

That beer belonged to the heat, the tent, the warm water and the work we had completed. It belonged to the people sitting with me. Without everything that came before it, it

would only have been a Kronenbourg.

At that moment, it was one of the best beers of my life.

This is the strange thing about beer. The taste is not only inside the bottle. The taste also comes from the day.

After a good day, the beer can feel like a reward. After a bad day, it can mark the end of something. I sit down, drink slowly and feel the bad things leaving my brain and my body.

The day is finished. Tomorrow can begin later.

Barbecue Is a Ceremony

I enjoy drinking beer with other people, especially around a fire.

A barbecue is not only about eating. A barbecue is a ceremony.

First, I prepare the wood and make the fire. Then I sit and watch it. I drink my beer while the flames grow and the wood burns. There is the smell of smoke, the sound of the fire and the quiet time before the food is ready.

The beer belongs before the barbecue, during the barbecue and after the barbecue.

Janita said it is the same for her and her husband. Sometimes they stand together beside the fire. Sometimes they sit. The important part is the atmosphere.

I understand that completely.

The Mayor and I even began planning a competition between our firebowls. We would see which one could produce the biggest flames. He has a church next door, so there may be certain safety considerations.



A Natural Health Drink

Beer is made from barley, hops, cereals and water. These are all natural things, so I can make a very strong argument that beer is a health drink.

Would a doctor survive my explanation?

Probably.

Would the doctor agree with me?

That is another question.

The real point is quantity. One beer is one thing. Drinking many beers every day is something else. I have known people who drank beer, wine and schnapps every day. I have also seen a very young man with cirrhosis of the liver.

That is no longer a joke.

We have a saying: the dose makes the poison. A little may not be a problem. A lot can become a very serious problem.

Everything is good in moderation.

Of course, as The Mayor asked, the difficult question is: who exactly is Moderation, and where can we find him?

The Moment Around the Beer

I have tasted beers in many countries. Some were strong, some were weak, and some were not to my taste at all. I once tried a beer from northern France with about fifteen percent alcohol. One was enough. Two would have been an entirely different conversation.

But the strongest beer is not automatically the best beer.

The best beer may be an ordinary one after hard work. It may be beside a fire with friends. It may come after walking a long distance, after a hot day or after finishing a job carefully.

The beer itself may be nothing special.

The moment around it is what makes it good.



RECIPE

No Béchamel. Extra Bolognese.

BY RALF THE GRILLMEISTER

Ralf's lasagne replaces the white sauce with more slow-cooked Bolognese, a serious amount of garlic and enough cheese to make even a reheated portion feel like a highlight.

The Mayor was slightly disappointed with me.

After a busy Sunday, there had been no new culinary adventure in our house. No barbecue, no special restaurant and no fresh experiment from my kitchen. We ate reheated lasagne from the freezer.

But I must correct this immediately: my reheated lasagne is still a highlight.

The Mayor called it convenience food from Ralf's kitchen. Okay, technically he was right. You open the freezer, take out the lasagne and heat it. This is convenient. But before it reaches the freezer, there are three or four hours of slow cooking, a mountain of vegetables, many layers of pasta and a quantity of garlic that sensible people may consider unnecessary.

I consider it necessary.

My lasagne also has one important difference: I do not like béchamel sauce.

For me, this white sauce only takes away space that could be occupied by more Bolognese. Therefore, my version has no béchamel and extra Bolognese. This is a very good arrangement.

The sauce begins with soup vegetables: carrots, onions, leek and celeriac. I cut everything into very small cubes with a special mechanical chopper called a Treppo. It has different

cutting grids and a box underneath. You put the vegetable on top, close the machine with a good **BOM!**, and the little cubes fall into the box.

Of course, you can also use a knife. It will only take longer and make less noise.

First, I fry the minced beef until it is properly browned. Then I take it out of the pan, but I leave the fat behind. The vegetables go into this fat, and I fry them at a very high temperature. This is important because the heat produces extra aromas and flavours.

Then come the tomatoes. I use sauces made from red and yellow tomatoes, which I buy from a large Italian shop. Together, the two types of tomato give the sauce a special smell and a fuller taste.

And then there is the garlic.

When a normal recipe asks for two cloves, The Mayor says I probably use ten. For this lasagne, I use three large bulbs of Chinese mono garlic—the round, single-clove garlic. I do not chop it with a knife. I rub it over a porcelain garlic grater until it becomes a fine paste, then scrape everything directly into the sauce.

The sauce cooks slowly for three to four hours. There is no reason to hurry. The vegetables become soft, the beef and tomatoes come together, and the garlic makes sure nobody

forgets that this is my kitchen.

After that, I build the lasagne: sauce, pasta sheets, sauce, pasta sheets. Halfway through, I add a generous layer of freshly grated Parmigiano. I buy it in a large piece—sometimes one and a half kilograms—because a small piece of Parmigiano creates unnecessary stress.

Then I continue with more pasta and more sauce. Mozzarella goes over the top, and the whole dish bakes slowly in the oven.

There is no béchamel. It is not missing.

There is simply more room for the important things.

Ralf's Béchamel-Free, Extra-Bolognese Lasagne

Ingredients

The exact quantities depend on the size of your baking dish. Make enough sauce to cover every layer generously.

- Minced beef
- Carrots
- Onions
- Leek
- Celeriac
- Red-tomato sauce or passata
- Yellow-tomato sauce or passata
- 3 large bulbs of mono garlic or single-clove garlic
- Lasagne sheets
- Parmigiano Reggiano, freshly grated
- Mozzarella, for the top

Method

1. Prepare the vegetables.

Cut the carrots, onions, leek and celeriac into very small, even cubes. A vegetable chopper makes this faster, but a sharp knife also works.

2. Brown the beef.

Place the minced beef in a large, heavy pan and fry it over high heat until well browned. Remove the beef from the pan and set it aside. Leave the rendered fat in the pan.

3. Fry the vegetables.

Add all the diced vegetables to the remaining beef fat. Fry them over high heat so that they develop strong roasted

aromas and flavour.

4. Add the tomatoes.

Pour in the red- and yellow-tomato sauces. Return the browned beef to the pan and stir everything together.

5. Add plenty of garlic.

Grate the mono garlic into a fine paste using a porcelain garlic grater. Scrape all of it into the sauce and mix well.

6. Cook the Bolognese slowly.

Reduce the heat and let the sauce cook gently for three to four hours. Stir occasionally. The finished sauce should be rich, aromatic and loose enough to soften the lasagne sheets during baking.

7. Begin the layers.

Spread sauce across the bottom of a baking dish. Add a layer of lasagne sheets, followed by another generous layer of sauce. Continue alternating pasta and sauce.

8. Add the Parmigiano.

When approximately half the sauce and pasta have been used, grate a generous layer of Parmigiano over the lasagne.

9. Finish the lasagne.

Continue layering pasta sheets and sauce. Finish with sauce on top, then cover it with mozzarella.

10. Bake.

Bake in a fan-assisted oven at **150°C for approximately 45 minutes.**

11. Save some for a tired day.

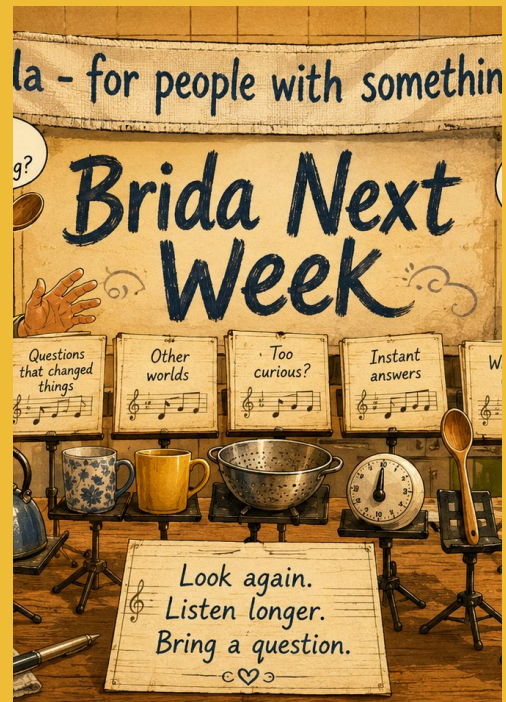
Any extra portions can be frozen and reheated later. They will still be a highlight—and possibly the best convenience food you have ever made.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

What's in store next week?

Curiosity rarely announces itself with a trumpet. More often, it begins with a small question that refuses to go away.

BY THE DUO



Curiosity Begins Here

This August, Curiosity becomes Brida's new Theme of the Month, and next week's tables open the door from several directions. Ralf begins with the questions that changed something. The Atlantic Corridor and Lunch tables travel into other worlds, while Fabrice asks when curiosity becomes a little too curious. At the Swimming Club, the conversation turns towards curiosity in an age of instant answers, and Babette invites us to question the way things are done. Peeling Potatoes closes the week by asking what keeps pulling us back.

These are not questions with tidy answers. They are starting points—an invitation to look again, listen longer and follow a conversation somewhere unexpected.

The tables for next week are below. Find the question that catches your attention, then come and explore it with us.

To join a table, contact Frank and Janita at **frank.peters@brida.eu** or on WhatsApp at **+33 7 49 01 84 85**.

Curiosity is already waiting. Bring a question.



Welcome to our World

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The Pineapple

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