

NICE STORIES

*Every now and then we like to lock our inner cynics
in a box and share some good news.*

IT WAS A PIECE OF CAKE

In 1991, a struggling musician named John McCrea was at a garage sale in Sacramento, California, when, on a whim, he bought a three-foot-tall tree sapling for \$7.00. McCrea took it to his apartment building and, not having a yard, he planted the tiny tree in a median. Not long after, his alternative rock band CAKE (named for caked mud, not the dessert) made it big with their album *Fashion Nugget*. McCrea moved to Los Angeles and forgot about the tree until he visited his old haunts many years later. Much to his surprise, the tree was nearly 30 feet tall. “It just blew my mind, and it just dwarfed my sense of time,” he said. “And I guess it occurred to me that everyone should have some sort of experience that does that.” So, since the early 2000s, McCrea has given away a tree at nearly every CAKE concert. First, he chooses a young tree that’s native to the region in which they’re playing. (According to the band’s publicist, “More often than not, we’ve given away fruit-bearing trees—always based on the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map.”) The tree spends most of the concert on stage, and then McCrea asks if anyone would like to take it home. In some cases, the audience member he chooses will have to tell a joke or “do a little dance,” but every tree bearer must meet three criteria: They have to have a good place to plant it, be able to take care of it, and promise to send CAKE photos of its progress. As of 2021, the band estimates it has gifted more than 2,000 trees. “Although there is no way we’re going to save the world by giving away a few trees,” says McCrea, “it’s just something that I think, maybe if a few more people can have that experience, it probably is a good thing.”

NOT A BOBBER JERKER

One day in July 2020, Joseph Feeney of Wisconsin received the “phone call of a lifetime” from an old friend named Thomas Cook, who reminded him of a handshake deal the two men had made back in 1992—that if either one of them ever won the lottery, they’d split the winnings. Well, guess what Cook had in his hands? A \$22 million winning Powerball ticket. “Are you jerking my bobber?” asked Feeney. Cook wasn’t jerking his bobber (a fishing idiom, if you’re unfamiliar). At a press conference, Cook said that it had never occurred to him to not honor the deal. “Handshake’s a handshake,” he said.

RESCUE CAT

“This is so cliché, but so very true for me,” said Bridgid Staub. “I may have saved her life by adopting her, but she has very much saved my life as well!” Staub had



Mountains take up about three-quarters of all the territory in Japan.

just returned home from a month in the hospital after combating a serious illness. Feeling there was something lacking in her life, she went to her local animal shelter in San Antonio, Texas, and asked for the cat that had been there the longest. Out came Cali. Staffers said they didn't know how old Cali was—she'd come in as a stray. She was elderly, mostly toothless, deaf, and she'd been there for many months because no one had wanted her. But when Staub introduced herself to the “beautiful calico cat with huge green eyes,” Cali instantly took to her, pushing up against her to be petted. “This made me smile for the first time in a while,” she wrote on the cat adoption website Love Meow. Although Cali had trouble sleeping the first night, Staub reported that by the next day she was right at home, living in the lap of luxury for perhaps the first time in her life.

DESK JOB

In October 2020, when COVID-19 had forced millions of schoolkids to adapt to remote learning from home, one of the difficulties for many was the lack of a separate space for the student and their supplies. Faced with that issue, a building inspector named Mitchell Couch of Lemoore, California, decided to build a simple, yet functional, desk for his daughter. It didn't take the skilled carpenter too long, and the wood and hardware only cost about \$20. He posted a photo of the desk on social media, and soon started to receive requests for directions. So Couch decided to make a YouTube tutorial, telling viewers: “You can get a sheet of plywood and...a few 2×4's to make the legs. Some glue and some nails and you put it together. They're super strong.” Within hours of its upload, the tutorial “went crazy.” Couch awoke to more than 200 requests for blueprints. Then a friend who owns a grocery store paid for enough supplies for Couch to build 40 desks, resulting in even more publicity. Within a few weeks, his tutorial had received 30,000 views, giving thousands of students a much-needed classroom away from home.

PASSING IT FORWARD

On January 12, 2019, a winter storm hammered Kansas City as the Chiefs players were trying to make their way to the stadium for an NFL playoff game. Offensive lineman Jeff Allen was navigating the icy roads when his truck got stuck in a snowbank. He tried pushing it out, but it wouldn't budge. And no one around could help him because they were all stuck as well. He was running out of time. That's when a stranger drove up in a Chevy Suburban. He parked safely on the shoulder and started pushing people's cars off the road. He ran over to Allen and started digging out the front tire, and before Allen knew it, his truck was free. He thanked the man, who said his name was Dave, and was back on the road. He got to the game on time, and the Chiefs won. Afterward, Allen took to social media to try

Allen took to social media to try and find the “nice guy named Dave” who “helped pull me out.”

When Wendy's founder Dave Thomas finally earned his GED in 1993, his class voted him “Most Likely to Succeed.”

and find the “nice guy named Dave” who “helped pull me out without knowing I was a player.” He had free tickets to the upcoming AFC Championship game against the New England Patriots. The next day, Allen posted an update: “Despite the recent influx in people changing their name to Dave in the KC area lol, I was actually able to track down the Dave that helped me thanks to the power of social media and #ChiefsKingdom. Thanks for your kindness.” The kind stranger, Dave Cochran, was bewildered at first. And his story touched a lot of people because, as it turned out, he lives in that Suburban, telling reporters, “That’s right, I’m homeless.” He said he would have helped Allen if he were a “normal person” and not a pro football player. But he’s sure glad he did. He’d lived in Kansas City his whole life and had never been to a game. Now he got to see them play the NFL’s most notorious team (the Chiefs lost in a nail-biter). Cochran told 41 Action News, “Call me soft if you want to, home boys, but I started bawling.” After the story ran, the station reported that “people from all over the country are reaching out and asking, ‘How can we help Dave?’” The *Kansas City Star* later reported that Cochran was a recovering addict and ex-convict who was already putting his life back together when the incident happened. The show of support overwhelmed him: “We’ve got a lot of caring, good-hearted people in Kansas City. I want to use this to build myself up. I want to give back.”

THE WORLD’S FIVE MOST EXPENSIVE CITIES

1. Zurich, Switzerland

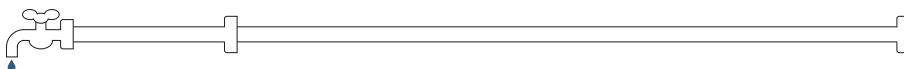
2. Paris, France

3. Hong Kong, China

4. Singapore

5. Tel Aviv, Israel

Each year, the *Economist* magazine gathers cost-of-living data from 133 cities to calculate the costliest places to live. Rankings are based on the cost of things ordinary people spend money on: food, clothing, housing, recreation, transportation, etc. New York is the median from which they judged (it’s ranked #7). These are the 2020 results.



Cows greet each other by licking their faces and necks.