

# The PACKARD PRESS

A collection of thoughts and stories to educate, entertain, and inspire.

## LEGAL BATTLES BY DAY, EPIC ADVENTURES BY NIGHT

### THE JOY OF DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

As a lawyer, I must conquer insurance companies, the court system, government bureaucracies, and stacks of paperwork to reign victorious. But, when the workday is through, I trade in my briefcase for a set of polyhedral dice and embark on a different type of quest. I'm a full-blown, proud Dungeons and Dragons fanatic! That's right; I find an incredible amount of enjoyment in this tabletop role-playing game. Much like a good movie, D&D takes you to new worlds and forces creativity to make or break you on an epic adventure.

I believe in the value of hobbies and how they can help us grow as people and de-stress from the day. Honestly, part of me wants to introduce everyone I meet to the world of D&D because it has changed my life in such a significant and beneficial way, one that I wasn't expecting. Embrace Your Geekness Day happens in July, and I think it's as good a time as any to geek out on my favorite hobby.

I've always enjoyed games, but it wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns that I stumbled onto D&D. I was waiting at Target for the pharmacy line to calm down and I wandered into the board games section to find something new to pass the time with my kids. The shelves were almost completely wiped out, but I found a starter box for Dungeons and Dragons and wondered if I could learn to play. Little did I know that \$15 would be one of the best purchases of my life.

I busted out these strange dice, character sheets, and instructions and played with

the kids nearly every day for three weeks straight. I got most of my kids on board, and my wife even played a few times. For those first few weeks of the pandemic, D&D pretty much took over our living room.

I was hooked on this exciting and collaborative form of storytelling. It's a unique creative outlet that allows you to co-create with others. When done well, the Dungeon Master (the player who serves as referee and storyteller) doesn't just narrate; they discover the world alongside the other players. Everyone plays as their own character with unique skill sets, but completing a quest takes teamwork. Along with how this game engages my creativity, it also has the added social component I love. I meet up with friends and family to play D&D whenever I can. (And even though my wife still plays in our group, I haven't convinced her that it counts as date night!)

Hobbies activate different parts of our brain and teach many skills we can use in the real world. D&D and other activities require patience, experimentation, and adaptation. Another benefit of hobbies is they give us a particular frame of reference from which to view the world. When talking to someone that enjoys the same hobby you do, not only do you get to bond with that person, but you can pull from dozens of analogies that apply to many other aspects of their lives. Additionally, hobbies and games can help us work through different (and sometimes difficult) situations when the stakes are low. We can experience defeat,



share victory, hold strategy sessions, and feel a full range of emotions. In other words, even if my D&D character dies, I learn to rise and fight another day.

In many ways, Dungeons and Dragons harkens to an ancient social ritual humans have engaged in since the beginning — the shared experience of storytelling. We used to sit around a fire and feel the magic of watching the flames dance as we told stories to the tribe about the most recent hunt. Now, hobbies allow us to do something similar. We come together and share in the human experience, still telling stories to our tribe.

There are no right or wrong ways to play D&D. You just need to use your imagination, set aside some time, find the right group of players, and give in to the adventure. Whether it's D&D or another hobby you love, geek out proudly! And, if you need tips on coming up with the perfect Dungeons and Dragons character, you know who to ask.

Happy questing!

—*Michael Packard*

# From Bombs Bursting in Air to National Anthem

## THE BATTLE THAT INSPIRED THE 'STAR-SPANGLED BANNER'

You've probably sung the national anthem at a sporting event, but do you know what it means? The "Star-Bangled Banner" story dates back to 1814, inspired by the American flag and its red, white, and blue colors shining through a haze of smoke and battle. It embodies the spirit of a young nation standing tall amidst the chaos of war. As we reflect on Independence Day this month, let's remember the story of our country's anthem.

It was a dark day on Sept. 13, 1814, when British warships attacked Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor. The Battle of Baltimore came just weeks after the British burned the Capitol, the Treasury, and the president's home in Washington, D.C. The British ships' bombardment of the American fort lasted about 25 hours.

An American lawyer named Francis Scott Key got an unwanted front-row seat to the entire event. Just a week earlier, Key had traveled to the Chesapeake Bay, boarding a British ship hoping to convince them to release his recently arrested friend. Though Key's persuasion was successful, he and his companions now knew too much about the planned attack on Baltimore. The British returned them to their boat but wouldn't release them, holding guard over their ship as the attack began.

As Key watched, he was sure the Americans would lose until the smoke lifted in "the dawn's early light," and he could see the American flag waving in victory over the fort. Key jotted down his thoughts about what he witnessed on the back of a letter he carried in his pocket, and upon his release, newspapers in the U.S. printed his poem "Defence of Fort M'Henry."

The poem, which tells the story of Key searching through the "rockets red glare" and "bombs bursting in air" for the flag's stars and stripes, became an instant hit. The words were then put to the melody of "The Anacreontic Song" and gained popularity through the 19th century.

In 1931, more than a century after Key's poetic account of the Battle of Baltimore, the "Star-Spangled Banner" was officially designated as the United States' national anthem. As we sing these powerful verses today, remember we're commemorating the resilience and bravery of those who fought for our country's freedom.

—Michael Packard

# FROM FINGERS TO FORKS

## The Evolution of Dining Etiquette

Have you ever feasted on chicken wings, your hands stained with barbecue sauce, and thought, *Why don't we just eat everything like this?* As it turns out, *we did* — people only started eating their meals with cutlery fairly recently. Many cultures around the world *still* eat primarily with their hands. So, why are placemats adorned with forks, spoons, and knives commonplace today? To find out, we have to get our hands dirty — because the history of cutlery, much like the history of civilization, is complex, nuanced, and full of gossip.

### BIG SPOON LITTLE SPOON

Perhaps unsurprisingly, spoons are the oldest examples of cutlery people used consistently for millennia. After all, what good is a fine pot of communal soup without a spoon to eat it with? Likewise, knives have always been used to cut up meat and prepare our meals, but only the advent of individualized meals rather than buffet-style brought along the advent of dinner knives.

Forks, however, are an altogether newer invention. Although large serving forks can be traced as far back as Ancient Egypt, the individual, smaller version has its roots in the Byzantine Empire. Around one thousand years ago, the Byzantine noblewoman Theodora Doukaina brought a golden fork to her wedding feast in Venice. It became quite controversial among the Italians, with many shunning the novel tool as posh and overly decadent. However, as royals began to intermarry, the fork gradually caught on. Royals increasingly ate with cutlery and became weary of dirtying their hands with their food. By the 1800s, cutlery was widespread in the Western world, and today, most people and establishments serve meals with silverware!

### ANTIQUITY — MAKING A COMEBACK

There's a reason movie theater popcorn doesn't come with a popcorn spoon and your favorite burger joint doesn't offer sporks; some food is *meant* to be eaten with your hands. While most sit-down meals will always be the domain of the cutlery-wielding elite, finger food isn't going anywhere anytime soon, and if history has any say, it never will.



# THE HEALING POWER OF A HUG

## STRESS RELIEF AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

A hug from a friend, a gentle pat on the back, a victorious high-five, or even a simple handshake — physical touch can seemingly melt away the stresses of life or provide us comfort when we are down. But did you know it's scientifically proven to benefit your body and mind? In this distanced world, the positive impacts of touch are more important than ever. Not only does consensual, skin-to-skin micro-contact decrease stress and keep us healthy, but it also brings us closer together and strengthens relationships.

Let's tap into how human contact touches our hearts, minds, and bodies.

### FOSTERS POSITIVITY

Hugging and other forms of human touch trigger the brain to release the hormone oxytocin, also known as the "feel-good" hormone.

Oxytocin inspires positive thoughts and an optimistic viewpoint. It can also

do beautiful things for social interactions, such as contribute to trustworthiness via a handshake or build empathy and a collaborative spirit. This hormone is your body's way of rewarding you, so it's hard not to feel a boost of happiness when you come into contact with others.

### REDUCES STRESS

We've all probably felt the relief that comes from an embrace or someone squeezing your hand in a difficult situation. You have the hormones dopamine and serotonin to thank for that. Physical touch increases the levels of these neurotransmitters that offset feelings of anxiety. Studies have found that people who engage regularly in this kind of physical contact are less likely to experience feelings of anxiety overall. Conversely, those deprived of touch tend to experience greater loneliness and stress.

### BOOSTS IMMUNE SYSTEM

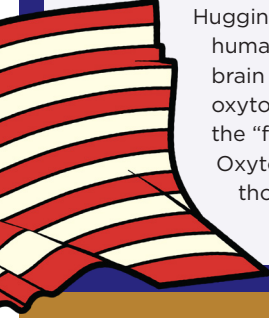
Physical touch doesn't just boost how we feel mentally; it also aids in our body's functions. Intimacy improves our immune



system, and studies have found that those who engage in regular physical touch have more immune cells in their bloodstream. Touch also has positive effects on blood pressure and heart rate.

With screens dominating our lives constantly, it's easy to feel isolated and alone. Don't forget how powerful and comforting a warm hug, squeeze of a hand, or simple touch can be. Physical touch makes us feel better and fosters more profound connections with others. Let's reach out, hold on, and remind ourselves that sometimes, the most potent healing lies simply in our hands.

—Michael Packard



## TAKE A BREAK

P	G	Y	R	R	E	H	C	F	A	K	F	E	D	U
A	U	B	Q	H	Z	T	D	F	I	V	C	T	H	L
D	U	A	A	Y	O	V	Q	B	O	N	R	W	E	L
D	M	X	L	R	Y	P	A	U	E	A	F	T	N	I
L	S	N	I	H	E	L	T	D	O	R	C	H	I	D
E	Y	G	E	F	L	K	N	Q	P	F	P	L	L	H
B	N	Q	N	P	W	E	C	A	J	U	E	G	O	N
O	L	E	A	A	P	E	T	A	E	B	P	G	P	B
A	O	R	E	E	L	R	M	F	R	J	J	A	M	R
R	K	X	D	R	I	L	E	J	N	C	D	L	A	A
D	R	N	Z	O	C	Y	Y	R	X	T	E	F	R	B
Q	I	S	T	N	K	S	H	G	F	V	I	R	T	I
F	U	I	B	H	V	B	N	X	X	P	H	P	I	S
G	C	B	P	U	V	K	T	U	L	A	E	Y	U	F
P	F	E	A	D	N	U	S	H	S	H	X	B	K	Z

Alien	Flag	Patriotic
Ballpark	Independence	Sundae
Cherry	Orchid	Sunscreen
Firecracker	Paddleboard	Trampoline



## SUMMER PIZZA

### Ingredients

Inspired by AllRecipes.com

- 1 lb pizza dough
- 1/4 cup pesto
- 1/3 cup shredded quesadilla cheese
- 10 thin slices of zucchini
- 10 thin slices of summer squash
- 2 mini bell peppers, thinly sliced
- 1 thin slice of red onion, diced
- 1 strip cooked bacon, chopped

### Butter Glaze (optional)

- 1 tbsp butter
- 1 tsp steak seasoning

### Directions

1. Preheat grill to high heat on one side.
2. Reduce the flame on half of the grill burners to low.
3. Roll out pizza dough into a circle. Place dough on the grill over high heat.
4. Close the cover and let dough grill for 1-3 minutes until bottom is slightly cooked and shows char marks.
5. Use tongs to flip crust over and move it to the low-heat side.
6. Brush dough with pesto, sprinkle with cheese, and evenly distribute veggies and bacon.
7. Grill for about 3 minutes until cheese is melted; then carefully remove.
8. Optional: Combine butter and seasoning. Brush crust edges with butter glaze and place pizza in broiler until golden.

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## *Fluffy's Heroic Deed Saves a Veteran*

In 2020, Ron Williams, a Korean War veteran in his mid-80s, lived alone. His only lifeline was his Life Alert, a small device designed to alert healthcare officials if an emergency occurred. That was until he was gifted a black-and-white spotted cat named Fluffy. From the moment they met, it was clear the two would make a perfect pair. But what Ron didn't know was that he had been given more than a companion — he had been given a savior.

### FELINE FRIEND

While Ron did not have many *people* to talk to, he did have Fluffy. The two shared mostly one-sided conversations, likely interspersed with the occasional meow. Whenever Ron received a call on his cellphone, he got in the habit of saying, "Ring-a-ding." While the two shared a deep bond, Ron never considered that Fluffy was actually listening.



"I just fell in love with him," Ron said of Fluffy in an interview with FOX17 in Michigan. As it turned out, Fluffy loved him back.

### FLUFFY TO THE RESCUE

One fateful day, at around 8 a.m., Ron slipped and fell on his way out of the shower. He landed on his arm, which became pinned under him. His Life Alert, which he had relied upon for situations like this, was charging in the other room. His cell phone, his only other means of calling for help, was on the bathroom counter, out of reach. The hours ticked away, and Ron lay in agonizing pain on the bathroom floor. At just past midnight the next day, Ron had an idea. Fluffy had wandered into the bathroom to check on his friend.

"Ring-a-ding," Ron told him, and Fluffy knew to retrieve his phone and bring it to him. Ron was able to call for help in time to save his life. Fluffy's quick thinking prevented tragedy. This heroic act is a great reminder that our pets care — and listen — more than we may ever give them credit for.