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We want to help protect society against smuggling — whether it’s drugs coming in or criminal money going out. We believe the best way to do this is to ask legitimate boat users to help us by reporting any suspicious activity.

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e-mail: customs.confidential@hmce.gsi.gov.uk

Freepost Customs Confidential
Freepost SEA 939,
PO Box 100, Gravesend,
Kent DA12 2BW
**Walk a Mile in My Shoes**

A giant shoebox, containing a diverse collection of shoes and stories from all over the world, will appear across Britain. “Customers” will be invited to temporarily exchange their own shoes for an unfamiliar pair belonging to a stranger. They will put on a pair of headphones and take a walk with the stranger’s shoes on their feet and their voice in the ears, via an MP3 player.

The storytellers include a British boxer fighting to stay in the country, an RNLI lifesaver patrolling the Thames, a Syrian refugee in the UK and an ex-convict saved by art. The pop-up Empathy Museum believes that the act of slipping into someone else’s shoes and spending time “listening” has the “profound effect of connecting people with our shared humanity, and at a time when divisions are especially plentiful, building understanding and empathy.”

Clare Patey, Empathy Museum director, said: “The ‘Walk a Mile in My Shoes’ project connects participants with people they might never meet in their day-to-day lives. It’s also a reminder not to judge people until you’ve seen things from their perspective.”

*inews.co.uk, 2018*
Crowdfunding a Well-Deserved Break

adapted from an article by TEJAL RAO

1 I had hoped readers would enjoy following a food vendor around on the streets of Manhattan for a day, but I hadn’t expected the story I wrote about Kabir Ahmed to take on a life of its own.

2 Mr. Ahmed, 46, immigrated from Bangladesh 23 years ago and now works five or six days a week selling chicken biryani and other hot dishes out of a halal food cart in the Financial District. He is one of more than 10,000 people, most of them immigrants, who make a living selling food on the city’s sidewalks. The job is difficult and unglamorous, like many jobs in the food industry. It does not pay well.

3 Mr. Ahmed’s wife had mentioned to him, in passing, the idea of saving up for a family cruise in the Caribbean. It was a luxury that Mr. Ahmed knew they could not afford for their family of six, but for some reason it had stuck with him. At the end of my article I wrote about Mr. Ahmed’s longing to go on vacation.

4 Not long after my piece was published, readers sent emails asking how they could be helpful. I suggested they buy lunch at food carts, and tip well, especially on rainy days when business slows down. Then one reader started a crowdfunding campaign to raise money for Mr. Ahmed and his family and their dream vacation. This past Friday, a couple of weeks after I had spent that day with Mr. Ahmed, I stopped by his cart to show him that the campaign for his family had reached over $5,000. “I cannot believe this, I cannot,” he said.

5 I wanted to know what Mr. Ahmed thought about the article. His wife and son liked the story very much, he said, and his customers seemed to like it, too. As we shared a doughnut, it occurred to me that Mr. Ahmed himself hadn’t read the piece. “I started to read it on the train, but then I fell asleep. You know, Tejal, I was very tired.”

The New York Times, 2017
Primary school sports day: battle of the sexes

adapted from an article by Anna Kessel

1 A primary school in Inverness has announced that girls and boys will not compete together on sports days. The news has prompted national debate.

2 First, a quick sense check — we are talking about the egg-and-spoon race here, for kids aged four and upwards. As I write, my daughter is out in the playground practising the three-legged race with her classmates as they get ready for their sports day this week. She’s excited and determined to win a medal, like last year, and it won’t have occurred to her for a millisecond that she shouldn’t be racing alongside 50% of her classmates because they are boys.

3 As Dr Hilary Jones said, introducing the debate on Good Morning Britain, girls and boys are physically on an even level at primary age so there is no scientific reason to separate them. For the local councillor who defended the decision made in Inverness by saying that the Olympics didn’t do mixed-gender competitions — 6. The Olympics include mixed-gender relays in swimming, athletics and triathlon, as well as mixed team events in archery, fencing and judo. In sports such as equestrianism and horse racing, men and women have long been competing directly against each other.

4 Back in Inverness one parent reportedly said that their son had been bullied as a result of being beaten by a girl. I’m sorry to hear of anyone being bullied, but isn’t the crux of the problem here archaic ideas about girls being less physically able than boys? We should be teaching girls and boys to respect each other, not supporting regressive gender stereotypes.

5 Crucially we are a nation of inactive adults and increasingly inactive children, the consequences of which will play havoc with our physical and mental health. School sports day should be about fun. We want children to learn that moving their bodies, gaining physical literacy and competing is enjoyable. For too many kids that message is still not getting through, creating negative associations about sport and exercise that last a lifetime.

6 I do agree that sometimes having all-girl teams can be a good idea, even for young children. So I actively support Women in Football’s #WhatIfcampaign.
that helps set up a girls' football club. Few girls at my daughter's school have had the opportunity to play our national game. In contrast, their male peers have been developing their skills on the ball for years. In this instance, it's about evening up a historical inequality. I would not want to prolong a culture in which girls are less likely to play football than boys.

Certainly as physical changes start to impact on boys and girls it makes sense to have separate competitions. But for four-year-olds doing the egg-and-spoon race? Come off it. That's when we truly know the world's gone mad.

theguardian.com, 2018
High fashion from old clothes

adapted from an article by Michelle Ng

1 Sustainability and fashion usually do not go hand in hand. But things might be changing. This month, Switzerland-based fashion brand Sottes created waves when it launched its waste-free collection in Singapore.

2 The label’s founders are Jeanne Guenat and Elliot Upton. Their brand, Sottes, focuses on upcycling, a process in which unwanted pieces of fabric are transformed through design and creativity into something more valuable. Using waste fabric collected from a community shop in the neighborhood, the designers work with a team of 12 local seamstresses on the designs in the collection.

3 The collection comprises shirts, jackets, pants and shorts. The designs are gender-less and size-less. The different items feature drawstrings and fastenings that allow the wearer to customize the garment to their liking. Guenat says: “With the different fastenings, both men and women of all body shapes can wear our creations. It could be high fashion on one person and streetwear on another. It’s all about letting the personalities show through in your clothes.”

4 In Singapore there are more brands and individuals that upcycle textile waste into clothes, accessories and bags. Local fashion brand Taikensonzai, which can be found at eco-conscious shops, has been using only upcycled fabric to make its accessories and clothes since 2014. Designer Adeline Huang uses textile scraps and off-cuts to make eclectic wearable products and accessories such as necklaces and bags. “With accessories, there’s no worry about fit and comfort, unlike clothing,” she says. “And I think there is still a stigma associated with second-hand clothing here.”

5 Raye Padit, owner of a swapping retail store, says affordable fast fashion is one of the biggest hindrances when it comes to promoting fabric upcycling. “Costs play a big part. Why would someone pay $100 to upcycle an old dress when you can easily buy a new one?” To provide an alternative to mindless fashion consumption, he set up The Fashion Pulpit, where store members can swap their lesser-worn clothes for “new” ones. Members are assigned points based on the quality and condition of the clothes they bring in and use these points to swap for other pieces in the store.
Agatha Lee is another strong upcycling advocate who shares her sewing and embroidery works on her Instagram account. Once a month, she conducts sewing and dyeing workshops. “I want to show people you can start simple by adding buttons or embellishments or even dyeing a pair of worn-out jeans. I try to make sure participants have fun and pick up new skills while having conversations about recycling and reducing waste,” she says.

When asked about the future of upcycled fashion, the local designers and retailers agree that educating the public is the best way forward. “Yes, upcycled clothing means it’s pre-loved, but there is nothing to be scared of. It’s just clothes. It’s the wearer who gives life to the clothes,” says Padit.

*The Straits Times, 2018*
Crime and Punishment

adapted from an article by Lori Saunders

1 Early last year, Anne McLellan, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, introduced the new Youth Criminal Justice Act. According to McLellan, the unreformed youth justice system didn’t seem to be working very well, with increasing numbers of young people in jail for relatively minor offences.

2 “Putting kids in jail, though sometimes necessary, is not an effective response to youth crime,” McLellan says. “Putting more young people in jail for longer will not make this a safer society,” she adds. She feels, “We need to acknowledge that when serious things happen, there need to be meaningful consequences.” The Reform party, McLellan’s political opponent, says youth get caught in a cycle of crime because they know there are no serious repercussions.

3 *Faze Teen* spoke with ‘John Doe’ who at the age of 15 was charged with Grand Theft Auto and Possession over $1000. When asked why he did it, he responded, “I did it for something to do — it was all for fun.” John went on to say, “I knew the law. I knew the worst thing that could happen was serving some community hours because I was a young offender and it would be my first offence.” So perhaps the Reform party is right. However, he also added: “I thought I would get away with it so it didn’t matter what the penalties were.”

4 According to the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, lawyers who are familiar with young offenders are unanimous in stating that, “These youths, at the time of their offence, gave no consideration to the consequences of their actions and they would in no way be deterred from committing offences if they knew that their name would be published in the paper; no more than they would be if they knew that they would be subjected to more severe sanctions.”

5 *Faze* spoke with another young offender, ‘Jane Doe’. When asked what was going through her head when she went after a young girl, she answered, “She had provoked me for months, so at the time, I was mad — and she was just making me madder!” She recalls, “There were four teachers, two principals and several students watching, so I knew I’d be caught but didn’t care at that time.” Would severe consequences have
deterred her from the assault? She says, “I probably still would have done it since I wasn’t thinking about the punishment anyway.”

6 Needless to say, this new legislation will not please everyone. Justice Minister McLellan says that calls for tougher sentences for young offenders are **19**. Throwing children or teenagers who break the law into prisons designed for adults makes no sense, she adds. The legislation is part of a wider strategy dealing with youth crime that doesn’t always involve judges and jails, but community-based efforts to prevent kids from becoming criminals.

*faZe.ca, 2014*
The story of the original Siamese twins

1 The conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker were born into poverty in rural Thailand in 1811. They were joined just above the waist by a thick strip of flesh. Until the age of 18, they lived remarkably unremarkable lives in an obscure village in the kingdom Siam. Were it not for an enterprising and unscrupulous Scotsman named Robert Hunter, they would have remained curiosities. Hunter paid the boys' parents to allow him to display them abroad for five years. They never returned.

2 First stop was America where they were exhibited everywhere: coffee shops, public halls, philosophical societies and museums of curiosities. People gawped as they played chess and turned cartwheels. Doctors poked and prodded and amateur philosophers stroked their chins. Did the boys share a soul? If one committed a crime, could you send both of them to prison?

3 Unfortunately for their “owners”, Chang and Eng were more than just a pair of helpless and ignorant sideshow freaks. They were young men. On reaching their 21st birthday the twins wrote a firm letter to their “owners” explaining they now considered themselves free men.

4 To celebrate that freedom they went boating in the Niagara Falls and treated themselves to some extravagant presents: 500 cigars, a horse and new suits of clothes. Thus equipped, they took on America on their own terms. Despite experiencing horrific (and usually racist) abuse and getting into fights (on at least one occasion with each other), they raked in considerable sums of money.

5 But Chang and Eng yearned for domesticity and marriage. Aged 28 they settled in North Carolina. Between them they had saved $10,000 from their show, a sum that allowed them to purchase a house and some land. The twins gave up performing and turned their hands (all four of them) to farming. The question of marriage was trickier. Their deformity and foreign appearance were both hindrances. Plus could one twin marry while the other remained single? The solution came in the form of two sisters, Sarah and Adelaide Yates, who may have been softened towards the idea of marrying the conjoined twins because of their considerable wealth. Between them the brothers fathered more than 20 children.

6 Much of Chang and Eng’s fortune was wiped out by the Civil War and they were reduced to performing again. By all accounts the sight of two old, disappointed men trying to entertain an audience was deeply
depressing. Chang suffered a stroke and began drinking heavily. He died after the pair fell from a carriage in 1874. Eng followed him only hours after.

Had they been born today, Chan and Eng Bunker would have lived perfectly normal lives. A modern surgeon would probably have separated them as babies, their only shared organ being a strip of liver. Nowadays, even twins joined at the skull stand a chance of being successfully separated. Chang and Eng, 26, were born in the 19th century and the extraordinary course of their lives was determined by that small strip of flesh and liver.

adapted from *The Times, 2018*
New York City sees Wildlife

adapted from an article by Oliver Milman

1 For most New Yorkers, wildlife spotting is confined to squirrels, the odd raccoon and anguished encounters with rats. But in the waters surrounding the city a very different animal experience is quietly booming: sightings of whales. According to the citizen science group Gotham Whale 272 whale sightings were recorded in New York City waters last year. That is an extraordinary leap from 2011, when just five of the huge cetaceans were witnessed frolicking near the most populated urban area in the US.

2 The sightings, almost all of humpbacks, have been logged by Gotham Whale members who are building a catalogue of known individuals, of which there are currently 112. “The numbers keep increasing and increasing very dramatically,” said Paul Sieswerda, founder of Gotham Whale. “Humpbacks were nearly hunted to extinction but the populations are coming back.”

3 Sieswerda said the increase in sightings was down to a number of factors, including legislation such as the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act that have mopped up pollution flowing from the Hudson River and helped safeguard humpbacks from direct harm. Cleaner water from the Hudson is bringing nutrients that feed a fish called menhaden. Menhaden are a key prey species for humpback whales.

4 Among the sightings is one of a whale that entered New York harbour in 2016 and carried on up the Hudson, startling people looking down from apartments on the Upper West Side. Another whale was photographed breaking through the water to scoop up a tight formation of fish, the Empire State Building in the background. Most of the whales are spotted near the Rockaways, along Long Island and close to the New Jersey shore.
5 Scientists are yet to see a full picture of the state of New York’s whale population, however. In April, the Wildlife Conservation Society’s New York Aquarium and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution announced a plan to use two new acoustic buoys. It is hoped that monitoring whales even when boats are not nearby will help detect fin whales, as well as more regularly sighted humpbacks.

6 Howard Rosenbaum, senior scientist at the New York Aquarium, said: “It’s fantastic that you can go out from the Rockaways less distance than most New Yorkers commute on the subway each day and get to see some of the largest animals on the planet.” He pointed out that it can be hard to ascertain if the increased sightings are down to a growing population or simply a growing number of people taking the time to look. Longer-term and more complete research will be needed. “We have to be careful when we are talking about New York whale populations, but it is safe to say whales are being seen with increasing regularity and that there is an overall recovery happening among humpbacks,” he said. “Last year was amazing for whale sightings and I hope it’s the same this year.”

theguardian.com, 2019
Spacebuzz wants to send 100 million kids a year to space (sort of)

adapted from an article by Davide Banis

1 Last December, I published an article on why — if we want to tackle today’s global challenges — we need to start thinking of planet Earth as a single entity, beyond the narrowness of national borders. We face challenges that can only be resolved with the joined effort of nations and states worldwide. When gathering information about these issues, I bumped into a freshly-launched Dutch organization called Spacebuzz that is working towards giving more people the chance to see our planet from space.

2 In particular, they want to help children aged 9-12 experience the so-called overview effect, a cognitive shift in awareness reported by many astronauts. They tell us that having been in outer space has made them experience our planet as a boundaryless “tiny, fragile ball of life.” Since shipping lots of children to space might get a bit complicated, Spacebuzz figured out a nifty workaround. They created an experience that combines virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology to give children a first-hand (or first-eye...) taste of the overview effect.

3 Sounds cool? Not cool enough for the Spacebuzz folks that decided to set up the VR/AR experience inside a real-looking space rocket mounted on a truck and use it to tour schools across Europe. I reached out to Hidde Hoogcarspel, the founder of Spacebuzz foundation. Together with Dutch investor Zoran Van Gessel, he raised a pretty penny to build the epitome of coolness — a slick space rocket on wheels. The hope is that if 100 million children will get to experience the overview effect yearly, then a generation will emerge that will be cognitively better equipped to tackle global issues such as climate change.
4 To guarantee that the experience will actually have a positive impact on the children’s education, Dr. Max Louwerse, professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Tilburg, will supervise Spacebuzz missions’ results and astronaut André Kuipers will guide the children during their missions.

5 The first Dutch astronaut, Wubbo Ockels, played a pivotal role in making Spacebuzz come together. He spent his scientific career researching how to make our life on planet Earth more sustainable for future generations. Before he died, he delivered a moving speech in which he expressed his dream to transmit the knowledge he gained as an astronaut to all the people in the world. “I had the idea to create Spacebuzz before I heard Wubbo’s last speech,” Hidde told me. “But when I finally listened to it, it was really a powerful confirmation: yes, this is our vision — I thought — this is the dream we want to pursue. Let’s send as many kids as we can to space.”

kinder.world, 2019
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adapted from theguardian.com, 2019
Say Cheese!

1 FOR those who enjoy a slice of creamy camembert or a wedge of cheddar, be thankful our ancestors were lactose intolerant.

2 Scientists have analysed a collection of pottery fragments, approximately 5000 years old, that are laced with milk fat and believe they provide the earliest evidence of cheesemaking. The researchers suspect early European farmers, who had not developed the biological enzymes to process lactose as adults, turned milk into cheese because it was easier to digest.

3 “Keeping cows for their milk was a major innovation in prehistoric societies, enabling the supply of nutritious food without the slaughtering of precious livestock,” the study’s lead author, chemist Richard Evershed said. Professor Evershed’s international team suggest that the 50 pottery fragments, from 34 specialised pottery vessels, were used by early farmers as sieves to separate the fat-rich curd from the whey that contained lactose.

4 With sophisticated analytic techniques Professor Evershed and his colleagues were able to show that the presence of fatty acids residue in the pots was linked to milk processing. Turning milk into cheese made it suitable for consumption for populations with limited dairy exposure and easier to transport. Besides, cheese could be stored longer than milk, which meant the nutritional benefits of dairy were available year round.

*The Sydney Morning Herald, 2012*
Mall’s poops & oops

1 Officials at a Queens mall solved their pigeon infestation by blasting the sounds of more aggressive birds. A recording of screeching macaws is played at a third floor atrium leading to Bed, Bath & Beyond, an area where pigeons had roosted in the rafters and made a mess according to nearby store workers. And with the exception of some excrement and feathers left behind, the plan has worked.

2 Daniel Catry, 78, said that a pigeon once pooped on his knee at the shopping center. But he added: “If you stay here for an hour, the noise starts to bother you. It is very distracting and compromising the ambiance.” And he’s among many customers who no longer flock as often as they used to what once was a heavily trafficked area. In fact, shopper after shopper used the same word to describe the soundtrack: “annoying”.

3 Michael Perlman, who visits the mall weekly, said that he never even noticed any pigeons in the enclave before the noise began and that he’d take a few pooping pigeons over the current clamor. “I appreciate birds,” he noted.

New York Post, 2017