Before they were funny

Nowadays we know them as stand-up comedians, but that’s not how they started out.

**Greg Davies** was a teacher in secondary schools in Berkshire and Twickenham for 13 years. When asked if he’d consider going back to school, Davies said: “After everything I’ve said about teaching; the profession wouldn’t have me back. The feeling is mutual!”

**Harry Hill** trained as a doctor at Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Hill told *Celeb Now* in 2013: “I spent my whole time as a doctor hoping no one was going to get ill.”

**Peter Kay** worked in supermarkets, petrol stations, a cinema, a bingo hall and a toilet-roll factory in his native Lancashire, which influenced his comedy writing in series such as *That Peter Kay Thing*. Kay later said: “I never settled because I wasn’t meant to pack toilet rolls or stack shelves…I was destined to make people laugh.”

*The Times, 2018*
Southwest hires low flyers

What most of us wouldn’t do to a child with an out of the ordinary name is point at them and laugh. We say most because that’s exactly what a Southwest Airlines employee did to one of the company’s five-year-old passenger. Abcde (pronounced “ab-city”) Redford was about to fly to El Paso, Texas, with her mom when she was openly ridiculed for her unique name.

The employee saw Abcde’s name on her passport and began to audibly laugh, loud enough for both the little girl and her mom to hear. He then proceeded to take a photo of the passport and posted it on Facebook.

Southwest Airlines has apologized to Abcde and her mother, but it is not part of the company’s policy to divulge how it has dealt with the employee in question. It’s not the first time an employee of Southwest has been in the media spotlight for all the wrong reasons. A Southwest baggage handler at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport was caught on camera throwing a box labeled “living fish”. Not a good look.

*thetravel.com, 2018*
Babies on a plane
by Justin McCurry in Tokyo

1 Being stuck on a long-haul flight within earshot of a crying baby could be a thing of the past for passengers on Japan Airlines (JAL).
2 ...
3 ...
4 ...

The Guardian, 2019
Home sweet tree-home

1 Is it possible to live a life that is self-sufficient and sustainable? This was the question that chef and set designer Nick Weston asked himself when he embarked on life as a 21st-century hunter-gatherer for a tree house he built in Sussex. After work became scarce in the recession, Nick felt that he had nothing to lose by trying to make a change so he scoured builders’ skips, friends’ garages and demolition yards to recycle the materials he needed to build a surprisingly comfortable tree house.

2 “This was not supposed to be an exercise in all-out survival. Life would go on as normal, except for my diet and living arrangements,” he explained. He timed his arboreal adventure to make the most of the wild larder in spring, summer and autumn and allowed himself a few staples (olive oil, flour, water, vinegar, tea, coffee, sugar, rice, yeast, salt and pepper) to help convert fresh produce into appetising meals. He also planned to fish and shoot for protein and kept a small vegetable patch.

3 Nick constructed his five by four-and-a-half metre studio-flat tree house mostly by himself. The shower, a compost loo and kitchen sink unit were constructed outside the structure. The inside, meanwhile, was far from bare with a double bed, a rabbit-pelt rug, table and chairs and a stove fashioned from a steel drum. “After foraging in the rain, firing her up with birch logs was the best way to get warmth and a singing kettle.”

Nick’s book, The Tree House Diaries, is available to Country Living readers for a special price — visit www.allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk.

_Tekst 4_

Country Living, 2010
South Korea School Enrolls Grandmothers

1 GANGJIN COUNTY, South Korea — Every morning on her way to school, Hwang Wol-geum, a first grader, rides the same yellow bus as three of her family members: One is a kindergartener, another a third grader and the other a fifth grader. Ms. Hwang is 70 — and her schoolmates are her grandchildren. Illiterate all her life, she remembers hiding behind a tree and weeping as she saw her friends trot off to school six decades ago.

2 But this year the local school was running out of school-age children and was desperate to fill its classrooms with students. South Korea’s birthrate has been plummeting in recent decades, falling to less than one child per woman last year, one of the lowest in the world. The hardest hit areas are rural counties, where babies have become an increasingly rare sight as young couples migrate en masse to big cities for better paying jobs.

3 Like other rural schools, Daegu Elementary, in Ms. Hwang’s district, has seen its number of students decrease. “We went around villages looking for just one precious kid to enroll as a first grader,” said the principal, Lee Ju-young. “There was none.” So Ms. Lee and local residents, desperate to save the 96-year-old school, came up with an idea: How about enrolling older villagers who wanted to learn to read and write? Ms. Hwang and seven other women, aged 56 to 80, stepped forward, with at least four others asking to be enrolled next year.

4 For younger people who want to stay in the area, the future of their town depended on keeping the school alive. “Who would start a family here if there were no school?” asked Noh Soon-ah, 40, whose husband quit his job in an auto parts factory in a big city and resettled his family here five years ago to take over his parents’ farming business. “Children are what brings laughter and vitality to a town.”

5 The local education office warmed to the idea, and Ms. Hwang started attending classes last month. Like many first graders on their first day, Ms. Hwang cried. 11 “I couldn’t believe this was actually happening to me,” she said. “Carrying a school bag has always been my dream.”

6 Decades ago, Korean families often focused what little resources they had on educating their sons. Many girls were expected to stay home and look after younger siblings while their parents worked outside. Being illiterate brought Ms. Hwang many humiliations later in life. Posting packages was always a problem because she could not write addresses. Years ago, she and her husband, Chae Jan-ho, 72, were visiting their son in the country's
capital when they got separated in the bustling subway. Ms. Hwang could not read any of the signs and was hopelessly lost until a stranger helped her find her way.

Now she and her fellow students are determined to make up for lost time. “They are eager to learn,” said Ms. Jo, the teacher, about her first-grade students. “They are probably the only students here asking for more homework.” Ms. Hwang has already hatched an ambitious plan. “I am going to run for president of the village women’s society,” she said. “People used to ask me to run, but I always declined. It’s a job for someone who can read and write.”

*The New York Times, 2019*
What Tony’s Chocolonely wants to achieve

adapted from an article by Jessica Brown

1 In 2005, Dutch journalist Teun van de Keuken took himself to the police and asked to be arrested, hired a lawyer to help send him to jail, and asked a judge to convict him of driving child slavery. In an attempt to get more attention he even went to West Africa and brought back a former child slave. Much to his disappointment the judge wouldn’t convict van de Keuken, because his crime was eating a chocolate bar.

2 Then Teun van de Keuken decided he’d try to stop child slavery from the inside instead, and set up a chocolate company — Tony’s Chocolonely — dedicated to eradicating it from West Africa, where 70 per cent of the world’s cocoa beans come from. The brand is now the Netherlands’ favourite chocolate company, and enjoys 20 per cent of the market share. Tony’s is expanding to UK supermarkets, and hopes to shake up the chocolate industry here, too.

3 “We’re not a chocolate company, we’re an impact company that makes chocolate,” says Henk Jan Beltman, the company’s chief chocolate officer. Beltman flew in from the Netherlands for the brand’s UK launch, which for a few weeks in March, enticed people off the streets and into a Soho venue under the guise of free chocolate. These people are then shown a video about child slavery in West Africa and told there is no such thing as free chocolate. This tactic is a long way from the press stunts of founder van de Keuken. However, the brand has been consistent in putting the messaging before the chocolate.

4 “We have to prove to our competition and to governments that you can make tasty chocolate and be commercially successful while eradicating slavery from the value chain. And sometimes this goes very much in the opposite direction of our ideas of commercial success,” Beltman says. The
organisation has five cooperatives in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, with whom it works to ensure its cocoa is segregated at every point in the supply chain to ensure it’s as close to slave-free as possible. Tony’s pays farmers a living wage by taking into consideration the size of their family and their farm, and adding a “Tony’s premium” on top. This is the most crucial part, because it’s widely established that child slavery is driven by low wages and poverty, says Dan Morey, head of commercial partnerships at Fairtrade.

5 The price of cocoa on the world market is instable, and in recent years has dipped as much as 40 per cent. “When this happened in Holland we ended up paying more to pay the difference, because we’d never want to profit from a drop in price of cocoa — and we want all companies to do that,” Ben Greensmith, Tony’s UK Country manager explains. The largest chocolate manufacturers, however, seem more interested in keeping the price of cocoa down, he adds, and Tony’s wants to show them that another way is not only possible, but profitable. This isn’t the only part of the market that needs to change, Greensmith adds, because UK retailers heavily promote this chocolate, meaning UK consumers are accustomed to paying so little for it.

6 Overcoming all of this will be tough, Greensmith admits, but he argues there is no better time than the present — particularly because there’s such an appetite, particularly among younger generations for knowing exactly what their money is being spent on. “Ethics and fair trade isn’t always at the top of shoppers’ minds, but we’ve seen how this understanding can grow. If you can get that understanding there, consumers really do want to act on it. They have a huge part to play in eradicating child slavery, but can only do this if the options are there. We want people to accept that chocolate is a luxury, and to pay more for it.”

7 Tony’s ambitions are commendable, but Morey takes a more realistic approach to the impact Tony’s can have in the UK. “We’re excited to be welcoming Tony’s to the UK, and it’s joining numerous successful brands with a similar stance, including Divine and Ben and Jerry’s,” he says.

independent.co.uk, 2019
Genderless model Nakayama

adapted from an article by Matthew Hernon

1 With the encouragement of her mother, Satsuki Nakayama began modeling when she was just 12 years old. Her first break came with a shoot for Pichi Lemon, a style magazine for girls. She loved wearing dresses, she loved her long hair — but that changed when she caught a glimpse of a Korean model named Kaito on a fashion brand website. “I just assumed he was a guy,” the 19-year-old says.

2 “Finding out she was a girl came as a bit of a shock, but it wasn’t an awkward surprise or anything. I just thought she was really cool and suddenly wanted to look like that myself,” Nakayama recalls. “That week I threw out my skirts and got my hair cut short. I immediately felt liberated — it was great.”

3 Her management was concerned she’d lose out on opportunities. “I was just a junior high school student so I wasn’t thinking about my career at all,” Nakayama says. “It was how I wanted to look and that was it. For about 12 months, work did dry up a little, but over the past couple of years things have gone in the opposite direction. I’m often chosen by companies because my style is a bit different to that of other Japanese models. I was labelled with this tag of being a ‘genderless’ or ‘androgynous’ girl early on and it has stuck. I don’t mind at all. In fact, I like it.”

4 Androgyny is __25__. Fashion model Twiggy caused a craze in Britain during the 1960s when she cut her hair short, and David Bowie’s androgynous style was a major influence on pop culture. Recently, thanks to a more open way of thinking when it comes to gender fluidity, androgynous models have been major hits on the catwalk — from Andreja Pejic to Rain Dove.

5 “There aren’t as many genderless female models in Japan as there are in say Europe or America, and that has helped to open doors for me,” Nakayama says. “That said, I have still been surprised by the interest. My Twitter and Instagram account followers just exploded and I’ve been getting quite a few comments from abroad, which usually require translation software from my end (laughs). People stop me in the street and I’ve sat next to people on trains who’ve said they recognized me. It feels strange getting noticed in public, but I can’t say I don’t enjoy it.”
Though she tends to present a somewhat mysterious visage in her photo shoots, Nakayama is bright and bubbly in person. Like many of her peers, she says she loves Disney and karaoke. “A lot of photographers are quite surprised when they meet me for the first time,” she says. “I guess they are expecting a moody adolescent who doesn’t speak and could be difficult, but I’m not like that at all. I’m a positive person who always goes into work in a cheerful mood because I love what I do.”

You might argue that Nakayama was able to stumble into her current career thanks to good timing. After all, androgyny is fashionable in a big way. Speaking with her, however, it’s her confidence that really makes her stand out. “The androgynous look has been great for my career, but what’s more important than that is the fact that I feel comfortable,” she says. “Fashion is something to enjoy. It’s about finding your own style rather than following trends. I hope we see more young people in the future doing their own thing and not worrying about what others might think.”

* japantimes.co, 2017 *
English ban on single-use plastics

1 Plastic drinking straws, cotton buds and other single-use plastics could be banned from sale in England next year in the next phase of the campaign to try to halt the pollution of the world’s rivers and oceans. Cotton buds, often flushed down the lavatory, are one of the most serious sources of marine pollution. Altogether it is estimated that there are 150m tonnes of plastic in the world’s oceans, and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating or getting tangled up in plastic waste.

2 Plastic microbeads have already been banned, and the introduction of the 5p plastic bag charge in England has led to a dramatic fall in their use: 9bn fewer bags have been distributed, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) figures show. A consultation will start later in 2018, and a ban could be enforced as early as next year. Other work, such as research into the impact of a tax on disposable coffee cups and a deposit return scheme on plastic bottles, is also under way in an attempt to get Britons to change their present, polluting habits.

3 But sources say behaviour will not be changed through regulation and compulsion. Ministers are keen that the public should be better informed about plastics that are reusable and recyclable, and want the process to be well supported, as the plastics bag charge was when it was finally implemented.

4 There is evidence that increasingly prosperous countries of the global south are beginning to react to environmental damage and pollution. Earlier this year, China decreased imports of plastic rubbish. As a result it became painfully clear how much the UK relied on sending its waste offshore. In India, Delhi banned all forms of disposable plastic more than a year ago after complaints about the illegal mass burning of plastic and other waste at local rubbish dumps, and the air pollution it caused.

5 The evidence of the damage that plastics do not just to wildlife and the food chain but to some of the world’s most beautiful places is now widely reported. The government has committed £61.4m to its latest initiative, some of which will be used for research and to help Commonwealth countries develop ways of stopping plastic waste entering oceans.

adapted from The Guardian, 2018

noot 1 Commonwealth = de Gemenebest: samenwerkingsverband van een aantal landen, voornamelijk voormalige koloniën van het Verenigd Koninkrijk
Drought and waterholes

adapted from an article by Izak Smit

It is never pleasant to see animals suffer during droughts, and there is sometimes an expectation that they should be helped during those periods and providing additional waterholes is frequently considered an obvious intervention.

In a natural situation, animals typically prefer to stay in areas where there is adequate food in close proximity to water. However, during droughts, food close to water is the first to be 34 and animals have to go further to find water. Stronger and less water-dependent creatures will be able to make the journey of increasing distance between food and water, yet some of the water-dependent species and weak ones may 35 as they cannot cover these distances. If water is too widely provided across the landscape, bringing all food within easy walking distance of water, then weak and water-dependent animals also compete for food. In the end, even the strong and less water-dependent creatures are at risk of starvation as there are no “reserve forage” areas left.

Due to these lessons learned from previous droughts, SANParks management started closing artificial waterholes in the Kruger National Park during the 1990s.

Still, the tourist value of waterholes is appreciated and that’s why Kruger is creating roads to natural water pools along seasonal rivers, providing viewing opportunities while also 36 sound ecological management. In order to conserve nature, we need to consider the system holistically.

SANParks Times, 2017

noot 1 SANParks = South African National Parks
Jeremy Clarkson mocks Scottish electric car project

by John Jeffay

1 Scottish university researchers are not amused after Jeremy Clarkson mocked their electric ‘airport trolley’ cars.

2 The tiny Esprit (Easily diStributed Personal Rapid Transit) vehicles are designed for short city-centre hops and are to be tested in Glasgow, Lyon and L'Hospitalet de Llobregat near Barcelona. Like shopping trolleys, they can travel linked together in trains of up to eight.

3 In an episode of Grand Tour on Amazon Prime, Jeremy Clarkson compared the lightweight 30mph vehicles to the misshapen monster from the B-movie horror film The Human Centipede and said: “The future is going to be very unpleasant.”

4 A spokesman for the university said: “We’re happy to help improve Jeremy Clarkson’s understanding of this innovative solution to city centre congestion. One of the main strengths of the concept is that the stacking function enables the redistribution of empty vehicles, overcoming the main weakness of one-way car sharing. As Esprit is specifically designed for the first or last mile of a journey, you’ll still be able to use your own car to get close to your destination. With car-sharing schemes expanding throughout Europe, Esprit will create a system that will help reduce congestion and noise and air pollution, while providing greater energy efficiency.”

scotsman.com, 2019
Disease Hotline

Scientists have come up with a system to forecast the outbreak of diseases such as dengue fever and Ebola from telephone calls.

Researchers from New York University have based their disease-predicting technique on telephone calls to a public-health hotline. They claim it can forecast an outbreak two to three weeks ahead of time with a high degree of precision. The system measures the number of calls received at a health hotline facility to forecast the number of cases.

“We think our technique can be of use to public-health officials in their fight against the spread of crippling diseases” says Professor Subramanian. “Once a hotspot has been identified, healthcare workers can move to stop its spread.”

Collecting disease surveillance data is expensive and time-consuming, say the researchers. “Early warning systems in the past only generate alerts of disease outbreaks on a city or state level,” said Nabeel Abdur Rehman, who also worked on the research. “We have developed a system that can pinpoint the location inside a city where disease activity has increased so the government could perform targeted control of a disease,” he added.

*iWeekend, 2016*
INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF A THEATRE ACTOR

The world of theatre is an incredibly exciting one, where that initial position within a cast, even within a minor role, can serve up experiences and excitement untold. And for the theatre actor who’s taken numerous leads and truly made it within the industry, life can be particularly impressive.

40-1
Theatre can take a company around the world and the very best of shows will be in-demand continuously (such as the classic Les Misérables show, which has ongoing dates within 42 countries). Whilst touring, lead actors of a show may likely have entire days to themselves, with even the odd day completely off so that they can explore all that whatever country they are in has to offer. Ensuring you have quality lodgings or an apartment for the long haul of a stay in a city is a necessity and many prefer serviced apartments over hotel rooms as they allow for plenty of room of your own and the chance to do your own thing.

40-2
Reaching the top of the theatre industry requires consistent performances and rehearsals, readings and shows, which will likely demand 7-day working weeks and 15-hour working days. As a lead actor the success of an entire play schedule can depend upon you and so it’s essential that in this position you take good care of yourself. During show runs this can mean the avoidance of all alcohol, junk food and late nights and can instead require gym sessions, healthy food and super early bedtimes.

40-3
Being a veteran of the industry means that your knowledge and input are both in demand and respected. This in itself can open up new opportunities to positions beyond the boards, such as mentoring the younger generations as they train for the industry, or moving into other areas such as production or directorship. Of course for the truly successful there’s always early retirement based upon a rather healthy bank balance, however few actors choose to leave an industry that they truly love and have dedicated their lives to.

theamta.com, 2019
Ancient chapel seeks hermit

Graham Keeley

For those seeking to escape the rat race and find a little inner peace, the job sounds ideal: hermit wanted to look after a hilltop sanctuary. The post is at the Mare de Deu de la Roca — Our lady of the Rock — hermitage, which is perched above the town of Mont-Roig del Camp in north-eastern Spain.

A key stipulation is that only the pure in mind should apply, because the successful candidate will have to avoid all “immoral activities” during their year-long tenure. The job description posted on Facebook, asks that he or she should be prepared to carry out “all the proper functions of a hermit”. The successful candidate will also be expected to be sociable and entertain tourists visiting the area, however, the advert states.

This unexpected aspect to the role can come as quite a shock for hermits looking forward to a life of meditation and solitude.

The job at Mare de Deu de la Roca comes with free board and lodging with a local family, and a stipend of €1,000 for the year. Candidates have until Monday to submit their applications.

The Times, 2015