



You do what?

ORDINARY PEOPLE WITH EXTRAORDINARY JOBS

CLAUDIA CHAMBERS, 44 CAJÓN PLAYER AND TEACHER

I've always been very passionate about dancing, and did it on the side while teaching English. When I was 30, I was in a car accident where I could very easily have died, but miraculously was hardly injured. Out of that came a real desire to follow my dream, so a month later I bought a one-way ticket to Spain to study flamenco dancing.

I took classes most days, while teaching English at night. Unfortunately, after 18 months I had a knee injury and had to stop dancing. I was devastated, but while I was recovering I went to a flamenco gig where I first saw the cajón. I remember thinking how much fun it looked, so I decided to take it up.

The cajón is a wooden box that you sit on and play with your hands; it often gets called a drum kit in a box. It's got guitar strings resting just behind the front plate, which is made from fine plywood, and a resonance hole in the back. You get bass sounds from hitting the centre at the top, and a snare effect from the middle. You can knock on it, flick it, and even play it with snare-drum brushes for a softer effect.

A lot of my friends in Spain were dancers, so I got gigs with them. I also started busking and one day Rodrigo y Gabriela, a famous Mexican duo, walked past and offered me

two gigs in Ireland. Luka Bloom [an Irish folk-rock musician] came to one and offered me some touring work, so I ended up staying in Ireland for 2½ years.

I returned to Australia five years ago because I wanted to create an online classroom and community for the cajón. When I first arrived back almost no one knew what the cajón was, but people are becoming increasingly aware. For a long time it was found almost exclusively in traditional Peruvian and Cuban music, but it's now in music genres such as blues, rock, hip hop and swing. Alicia Keys, Jennifer Lopez, Bob Dylan and Pink all use it now, too.

I love that the cajón is so accessible; you can pick up a \$300 instrument that'll last you a lifetime. You can work yourself up to a professional level, or just have it for fun in your lounge room, using it as a little coffee table until a friend comes over with a guitar.

I'm also attracted to its simplicity. When African slaves were shipped to Latin America [as early as the 16th century], they used crates on the ship to play music on. Over time, those crates developed into the cajón. There's so much sophistication in our modern world, so it's nice to get back to basics with an instrument that allows anyone to make music. **NINA KARNIKOWSKI**

NUMBER CRUNCH

BY JOHN S. CROUCHER*

1

Rank of Lily in list of most popular baby girls' names in Australia in 2010; Ruby: 2; Charlotte: 3; Chloe and Sophie (tied): 4

64

Number of extant species of rat (of genus *Rattus*)

50%

Proportion of surveyed US women aged 25-34 who say they would probably consider IVF if they had trouble conceiving; aged 35-45: 35%

1837

Number of Australians who died from skin cancer in 2009; from traffic accidents: 1417

\$1.2 trillion

Total household debt in Australia at the beginning of 2010; increase from five years earlier: 71 per cent

40%

Proportion of surveyed Australian women who feel lost without their mobile phone

6

Number of Best Actress Academy Award nominations for Deborah Kerr; number she won: 0

40%

Estimated proportion of unwanted Christmas gifts in Australia that come from family; from friends: 30 per cent



MODERN GURU

DANNY KATZ SOLVES YOUR ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE DILEMMAS

While on junior netball scoring duty for my daughter's team, I found myself without a pen. I asked a fellow parent if they had one. "No," they replied, but I could clearly see a pen sticking out of her handbag. I asked to use the pen, and she begrudgingly gave it to me. Should I have been offended?

M.S., SEDDON, VIC

You're seeking sympathy for your penless predicament but you won't get it from me, for I am a professional parent who always comes fully pen-prepared (both Kilometrico AND Officeworks generic) for junior sports-scoring duties. In my son's footy team I am reverently known as The Scoreboard Scorelord: the noble one who inscribes scores upon the sacred scoresheet. And at the end of the match I ring a bell with great gusto, for I am also that shadowy figure spoken about in hushed tones ... The Swinger of the Donger.

Like all professional parents, any time I am assigned a junior-sports-duty role, I spend the days leading up to the match chanting the holy mantra that is etched across the sports-duty roster: "Scorekeepers and timekeepers, BYO pen!" THAT is why this parent was so begrudging about handing over her pen - it's her own private pen and it symbolises her parental professionalism and sports-duty self-respect, and it's something she can clean her ears with during stretches of netball inactivity.

So if you ever arrive penless at netball again, you should be struck off the scorekeepers roster and assigned the most lowly parent task: kiosk duty. Or peeling oranges for the kids who can't take the pith. **GW**

Dear Guru... Send your questions (maximum 80 words) to: Modern Guru, Good Weekend, GPO Box 506, Sydney, 2001. Fax: (02) 9282 1628. Email: guru@fairfax.com.au. Please include your initials, suburb and home state.



DICTIONARY FOR THE MODERN WORLD

BY JACQUELINE MALEY

SOCIAL CONTAGION

Social scientists Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler theorise that fatness, happiness and quitting smoking are "social contagions" that we can catch from our friends. They say our social networks are powerful influences on our behaviour - even more reason to choose your friends wisely.

STAR WHACKERS

In 2010, actor Randy Quaid sought refugee status in Canada, claiming that a shadowy group he called "star whackers" were out to get him and were responsible for the deaths of stars including David Carradine and Heath Ledger. At the time, Quaid was not exactly what you would call a star himself.

NICK CUBBIN: * JOHN S. CROUCHER, PROFESSOR OF STATISTICS, MGSM, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY