

# You don't need to be old to have a senior moment

Fiona MacRae

If you think memory problems are the preserve of the elderly, forget it. Young people frequently struggle to remember things too.

A British study shows that men and women in their twenties regularly forget anything from why they entered the room to where they put their keys, while more than half struggle to find the right word at least once a week.

The researchers from Edinburgh University said we should not worry about memory lapses so much when we are older because we also have them when we are younger — in other words, memory problems are not always the first sign of dementia.

Laura McWhirter, a neuropsychiatrist at the University of Edinburgh, questioned 124 healthy adults aged between 18 and 59 on how good they thought their memory was.

The volunteers, who had an average age of 27, were also asked how often they experienced memory lapses.

Only 13 per cent rated their memory

as excellent. Almost four out of ten — 39 per cent — said their memory was worse than five years ago, while 24 per cent thought that it was worse than that of others of the same age.

More than half, 56 per cent, were scared of developing dementia, including 13 per cent who were “very afraid”.

Half of respondents said they forgot why they had entered a room at least once a week and 40 per cent misplaced their mobile phone at least weekly. In fact, 17 per cent said they lost their phone numerous times a week.

Some 48 per cent forgot to buy items on their shopping list at least once a week, 21 per cent could not find their keys and 18 per cent had had a mental blank over their PIN. An absent-minded 33 per cent could not remember where they had left their car or bike once a month or more.

However, importantly, the memory lapses were as common among those in their twenties as in the 50-somethings.

The findings were reported in the journal *CNS Spectrums*.

Dr McWhirter said: “A lot of people

will be surprised at how frequent the memory lapses were. I think people think that if you are starting to forget things — something like misplacing your keys — that it is something to worry about, but it is normal.

“It is just a function of how the brain works and how attention works. You can only remember something if you properly attend to it. If you are doing lots of different things and not concentrating when you get in and just put your keys down somewhere, you may well forget where you have put them.

“You can get up and have your breakfast and drive to work and later not

remember driving to work and that's not abnormal. It's just that your attention wasn't really focused on the driving because you were on autopilot.

“Don't worry about these things because they are normal.”

James Goodwin, a physiologist at Loughborough University and director of the campaign group the Brain Health Network, said the advice rang true.

“We know that older people worry far more about their memory and are more embarrassed about lapses than younger people,” he said.

“So, when we forget things as we get older, it's easy to think that we are los-

ing it. But although it is harder to form new memories as we get older, forgetting things doesn't necessarily mean we are on the road to dementia.”

Dr McWhirter added that although someone in the early stages of dementia would have memory lapses, they would tend to be unaware of them.

In contrast, a healthy person would be able to remember that they had forgotten their keys last week.

Other signs of concern include becoming lost or disorientated when out and about, asking the same thing over and over again and having difficulty with cooking and multitasking.

## TMS

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### Trump faces Gotham's best

Now he has left office, Donald Trump's impeachment trial will be presided over by the Senate's most senior Democrat. Patrick Leahy will be the fourth person to handle a US impeachment but the first to have appeared in the *Batman* films, Chief Justice John Roberts having just pipped Michelle Pfeiffer to do Trump's first one. Leahy has had five cameos in the *Caped Crusader* franchise after his actor son told producers that the Vermont senator had loved *Batman* since childhood. He even got some lines in *The Dark Knight*, where he says Heath Ledger's Joker “scared the heck” out of him. His latest role was as a character called Senator Purrington, surely a subtle sign that in the next film Leahy will be revealed as the alter ego of Catwoman.

The broadcaster Michael Crick has explained why he left the BBC's *Newsnight* in 2011 after almost 20 years. It's because they offered to make him editor-at-large, a euphemism that threatened to swell more than his ego. “What that means,” he tells the *All Talk* podcast, “is you take people out to lunch every day and get larger and larger.”

#### ANYTHING BY SOFT CELL

Everyone likes having fans but the veteran DJ David Hamilton felt uneasy when one of his most ardent listeners asked for a meeting. In 1985, while doing a gig on the Isle of Wight, Hamilton got an invitation from HMP Parkhurst saying that Reggie Kray was a big fan and asking if he would pop in to say hello. Hamilton politely declined but the East End gangster kept trying. A few years later, Hamilton was working for Capital



PATRICK KIDD

FM and unwittingly read out a dedication on air to a “Reg in Maidstone”. He was later told that this had come from Kray, below, who was now at the Kent prison. “I can't remember what I played,” says Hamilton, who is about to host a new show on Boom Radio, “but it may have been *Release Me* by Engelbert Humperdinck.”

**CLASSIC COMBINATION** Boris Johnson and Mark Drakeford may seem like calx and Caerphilly but Wales's socialist first minister has one thing in common with the Old Etonian PM: they both studied Latin at university. Interviewed by Guto Harri for S4C, Drakeford says there is a Latin phrase he would love to say to Johnson one day: *Rem acu tetigisti*, a line from the Roman playwright Plautus that loosely means, “You've hit the nail right on the head.” It would make a change from hitting his thumb.

*A last one for my series on politicians putting off interviewers. Stephen Claypole tells me that Ian Paisley's trademark tactic was to growl, “Is that the devil's buttermilk I smell on your breath?” before being asked his views on Northern Ireland. Alive to this, when Claypole interviewed him for BBC radio news, he replied with: “Is that sanctimony I smell on yours?”*

#### MAD AS A BOX OF ...

Are you a speciesist? The animal rights organisation Peta wants us to stop using the names of animals to insult people since this “perpetuates oppression” and “reinforces the myth that humans are superior”. We must use coward instead of chicken, they say, snitch for rat, jerk for snake, repulsive rather than piggish, and lazy not slothful. This advice was put out in a tweet, though perhaps we should not call it that lest people think it's for the birds.

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