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M A G A Z I N E

APRIL 2022

## Behind the Scenes Hero

**Tory Richards**  
volunteers  
through video

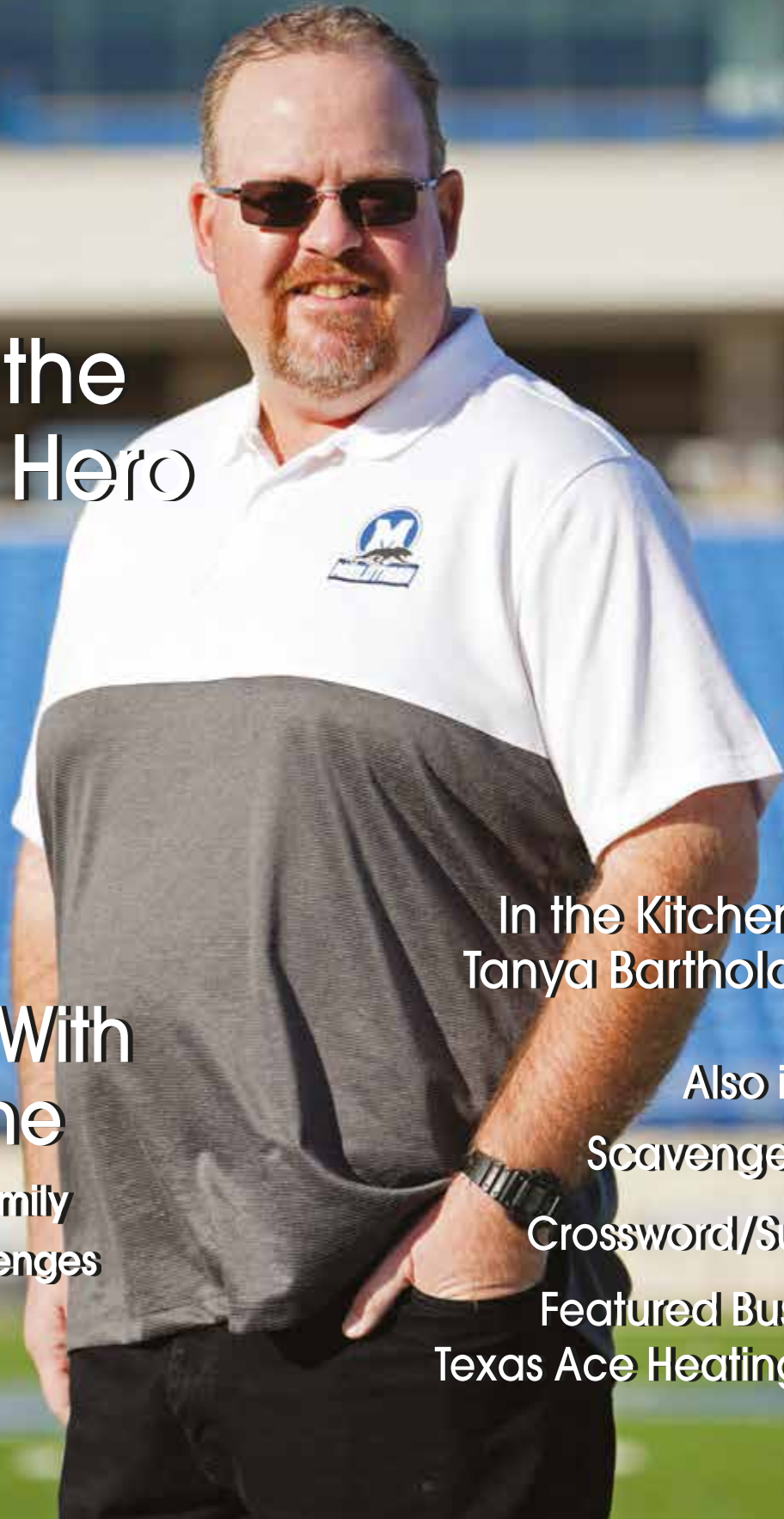
## Dealing With Duchenne

**The Anderson family**  
embraces challenges

**In the Kitchen With**  
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**Also inside:**  
Scavenger Hunt  
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# CONTENTS

## 8 BEHIND THE SCENES HERO

An avid football fan contributes to the success of the MHS football team.

## 14 DEALING WITH DUCHENNE

Jonah and Evan Anderson face muscular dystrophy head on.

## 18 IMPOSSIBLE OR TRUE?

María de Jesús de Ágreda mysteriously shared Christianity without traveling.

## 36 MISSING THE /

Visitors to the historic town of Hico, Texas, complete the name.

8



22 Around TownNOW

26 BusinessNOW

30 CookingNOW

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## ON THE COVER

Tory Richards hit the decade mark of volunteering last fall.

**Photo by**  
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# EDITOR'S NOTE



*Angel*

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## *Advice for April?*

Nationwide advice columnist Ann Landers, who died 20 years ago this year, lives on through memories of her writing and her wit. She's said to have counseled millions of people with her newspaper advice column, "Ask Ann Landers," which addressed readers' questions on everything from the problems of puberty to the woe of widowhood. Born Esther Pauline "Eppie" Lederer in 1918, she took over the pen name created by the original author of the Ann Landers column in 1955.

For more than four decades Ann navigated the male-dominated newspaper industry and developed what's called the most widely syndicated advice column of the time. She's credited with initiating the practice of seeking input from specialists in various fields in order to give wise counsel. She promised readers, "For the price of a stamp, you can receive advice from a renowned expert." Pre-email's existence, Ann received handwritten letters through the old-school post.

Ann became famous for common sense advice, sometimes delivered tenderly, other times firmly, earning her the unofficial title of "America's Mother." Like many moms, her opinions weren't always popular, and she found herself caught up in a few controversies. Mostly she stood firm to her words, but sometimes she recanted. Undoubtedly, she learned much with the changing times.

It would be interesting if Ann were here today to weigh in on life's questions — to see what advice held true from the beginning and in what ways time brought new wisdom. For the month of April, it is suiting to recall her words, "A person doesn't know how much he has to be thankful for until he has to pay taxes on it."

*Happy returns!*

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# BEHIND THE SCENES HERO

— By Sandra Walters

*Tory Richards' passion for football started at a young age. "I grew up watching football. I am a die-hard Dallas Cowboy's fan. I love the Cowboys," Tory admitted.*

In 1996-1997 he had the opportunity to work as a cameraman for Duncanville High School's football team during his junior year. Tory had worked as the equipment manager for the two years prior. He loved being a part of Friday night lights, and the idea of photographing and filming the squad during the game filled his heart. As he considered the new possibility, his eyes brightened. That was the beginning of him discovering the love of videography.

Today, people simply record with their phones, but Tory learned back when VHS tapes and large camcorders were the norm. "I recall the seniors teaching me how to record from various angles, and I took great delight in being one of our team's videographers," he said. "Those two final years passed extremely fast. Ever since I graduated from Duncanville, I had a dream of becoming a football coach. Not necessarily a head coach, but maybe an assistant coach who was in charge of filming."

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*Tory Richards*  
*Film Coordinator*

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As years passed, he still longed to be a videographer for a football team. He loved the energy that football produced, so Tory wrote letters to his favorite football teams, hoping to get a volunteer position as a videographer. He said, "I sent letters to the Dallas Cowboys, Texas A&M University, Duncanville High School football and Midlothian High School football. Midlothian was the only team to respond, which I was overjoyed about."

"I heard about Tory through someone on the staff claiming that a cameraman wanted to volunteer to help us," former Coach Frank Griffin acknowledged. "People rarely volunteer for that position, so I was ecstatic. We needed someone to film our practices."

Tory began filming practices and junior varsity home and away games in 2011. After the first year, the team recognized him at its football banquet. The head coach presented him with a plaque. The words on the plaque expressed how thankful they were for his contribution and gave him a special title. It read: *Film Coordinator*. This made Tory extremely proud, especially as he reflected on his dream. He knew he had found his place.

"He worked behind the scenes. The kids knew he was there. He definitely would be considered the unsung hero. He is a great guy. He became an honorary member of the athletic program," Coach Griffin stated.

Over the course of time, Tory has been one of the guys who records footage for practices and games. This







allows coaches to take a deeper look at the offensive and defensive plays, in order to enhance their coaching ability, which provides the players with visual representations of how to make changes.

These videos are used to highlight countless football players' best plays and showcase their talents on platforms like Huddle. As they prepare to progress to the next level, many Midlothian football players may and have used these films to document their brilliance by sharing them with college coaches.

In 2016, Tory received one of the best compliments while volunteering for a Midlothian football team. Tory said, "One day during an away game, one of the players looked at me and asked me a question by addressing me as coach. Wow ... they see me as a coach! I've always dreamed of being a coach in some capacity. That day, I felt like my dream came true. However, I think he was just asking what time it was. I smiled from ear to ear and thought, *That's cool. I have one player.*"

During football season, Tory prepares his spot by setting up his equipment above the tunnel where the team enters and exits. He can be found there recording during practices as well. Lately, he has been filming with his smartphone during Facebook Lives.

During home games, Tory now has the honor of leading the squad from the locker room to the home side stands. Some players carry American flags, as people point, cheer and take photos of the team. Tory looks forward to those moments as much as videoing next season. "I've enjoyed 10 years of being a volunteer videographer for Midlothian High School Football Team," he counted. "The coaches, students and families helped make my dream come true." **NOW**



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# DEALING WITH DUCHENNE

— By Angel Morris

*The Anderson family began when Scott and Julie met in college and married after graduation in 2004. Scott settled into his career, and Julie stayed home to raise their family.*

Their first child, daughter Peyton, was active, so when their first son, Jonah, was born, the Andersons noticed differences. “Around age 2, we noticed Jonah couldn’t run or jump,” Julie recalled. “Around age 4, I took him to a neurologist who looked at him and knew what was going on from watching him walk.”

Seven months pregnant with their third child, Julie learned Jonah had Duchenne muscular dystrophy. “We learned Duchenne comes through the mother, but my initial testing showed up negative as a carrier,” Julie noted.

When the mother is a carrier, sons have a 50 percent likelihood of contracting Duchenne. Since Julie was not a carrier, she was told it was unlikely her unborn son would have DMD. “One in every 3,500 boys in the U.S. has it. Although rare, it’s the most frequent genetic condition affecting boys,” Julie explained.

After Jonah’s diagnosis, the Andersons left Wyoming

for Texas to be near family, for easier access to medical care and for the warmer weather. “Evan was 3 months old when we moved and about a year old when he, too, was diagnosed with Duchenne,” Julie said.

Turns out, Julie’s initial genetic testing had been done incorrectly, and she is a carrier. Now, the Andersons had to manage raising two boys with DMD.

“Every person with it develops differently. Because their muscles cannot grow, the boys lost the ability to walk at ages 10 and 7, respectively,” Julie outlined.

The Andersons turned to their Christian faith as well as the Facebook group, Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy, for strength. “We went to our church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, to explain to Jonah what he would be experiencing. We thought it was important to have the conversation there,” Julie said. “Finding the Facebook group helped us, too,” Julie continued. “We share resources and can get an idea of what’s to come.”

While there are significant challenges, the Andersons said having the boys in local schools has been a great experience. As they navigated the pandemic, the Andersons said school remained important to their sons. “MISD has been awesome. It had not been our plan to stay in Midlothian, but we fell in love with the school district,” Julie praised.



After a year of remote learning during COVID-19, Jonah returned to eighth grade at Walnut Grove Middle School this year, while Evan is in fourth grade at Longbranch Elementary. "Jonah is shy but very smart. Evan thrives around people. Both of them are where they need to be, or ahead, intellectually," Julie said. "The boys' friends have been wonderful. Especially in elementary, their friends would almost fight to be the ones to get to help them."

Both boys need assistance dressing and sometimes eating. Jonah has special wheelchair attachments to aid in lifting and standing. A GoFundMe account helped the Andersons with a down payment on a van custom fitted for two wheelchairs, allowing the family to live as fully as possible. Peyton, a sophomore at Heritage High School, is a big help around the house, and the boys enjoy watching her perform on stage with theater and with the school drill team at football games. "But Evan really hates when the football team loses. He does not like that at all!" Julie laughed.

The Andersons said the opportunity to educate and encourage others is a silver lining to their sons' diagnoses, as is appreciating whatever time together they are given. "We find ways to do the things they love, even with difficulties. The boys enjoy cars, video games, Marvel movies and cooking. We like to play the piano and sing together," Julie shared.

The family attends an annual board game convention in Dallas where they especially enjoy playing Dungeons and Dragons. "We also like to swim in the summer, and the boys will attend MDA Summer Camp, paid for by donations to the Muscular Dystrophy Association," Julie noted. "Things we once thought were impossible are not closed to them. They can drive. They can even go to college with a caregiver. The future is whatever they want it to be."

While life is still filled with normal annoyances, Julie said DMD reminds them there are bigger things to worry about. "We choose to focus on the things we can do and the things that bring us joy." **NOW**



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## TALES OF TEXAS

# Impossible *or* True?

— By Lisa Bell

*While legends often sound far-fetched, all of them have a basis of truth. In the case of María de Jesús de Ágreda, many pieces of her story have no explanation outside a mysterious and miraculous event.*

Born April 2, 1602, María Fernández Coronel grew up with a zeal for telling people the Gospel story, wanting nothing more than to see people come to a saving knowledge of her Lord. From early childhood, she longed to become a missionary in the New World. Unfortunately, young girls of her era didn't have that career option.

Some say even as an infant, she had divine knowledge. A child prone to visions, preoccupation with spirituality and obsessed with compassion for the poor, her family misunderstood her. Often feeling wounded and unloved, she retreated to the depths of her soul. With desires of mission work squashed, María made a decision. At only 8 years old, the girl announced a determination to take a chastity vow and enter the sisterhood.

Seven years later, her father and two brothers entered a monastery. Following what they all believed as guidance from the Lord, María's parents converted their castle into a convent — the Franciscan Convent of the Immaculate Conception at

Ágreda. Sister María de Jesús (as she was known after taking her vows) entered the sisterhood without ever leaving her home.

Instead of esteeming her, the other nuns ridiculed and humiliated her. At one point, the Mother Superior requested an ecclesiastical examination. After much questioning, the Provincial of Burgos, Fray Anthorn de Villacre, declared her neither foolish nor mad. He declared that Sister María de Jesús attained true sanctity, a transcendent state of spirituality. The nuns then held her in the highest esteem, thrusting her into unwanted limelight.

Not long after that, during fervent prayer following communion one day, the young nun entered a trance. She found herself walking among dark-skinned men where they gathered, hunted and lived a simple life. Returning many times in the same fashion, sometimes two and three times a day, she taught them the fundamentals of Christian faith and lifestyle. Sister María de Jesús claimed over 500 visits to the New World, although she physically never left Spain.

Later, under the guidance of her confessor, Francisco Andres de la Torre, she detailed accounts of her journeys in a book titled, *The Mystical City of God*. Questioned extensively, Sister María de Jesús provided glorious details that she could not possibly know without having been among the native Americans.

The Jumano tribe, inhabitants of Texas and parts of New Mexico, have long shared stories of the Blue Nun. They say she appeared hundreds of times to them, coming from the sky.



Because of the cobalt blue clothing she wore, they called her the Lady in Blue. Many settlers also claimed this same woman came to them, ministering to their souls.

The Jumano Braves, moved by the nun, traveled to a mission in New Mexico and shared with the priests what they learned from her. From 1620, increasing numbers of native Americans came, requesting missionaries so they could learn more and receive blessings. When friars finally visited the village, the natives welcomed them with two wooden crosses, covered with flowers they said the Lady in Blue helped them decorate. When shown a photo of an older Franciscan nun, they declared their Lady in Blue wore the same clothing but was much younger and very beautiful.

The Jumano legend states that the morning after the Blue Nun's last visit, they woke to a field of beautiful flowers that matched the color of her cloak. According to them, the Texas bluebonnet appeared in her absence.

A few years after her death in 1665, the church declared Sister María de Jesús de Ágreda venerable. In the 20th century, they opened her coffin and found the beloved nun's body uncorrupted by death.

Did she indeed visit America at the same time she remained in Spain? Some believe she did, although no one can explain the possibility of such visits outside a miracle of bi-location.

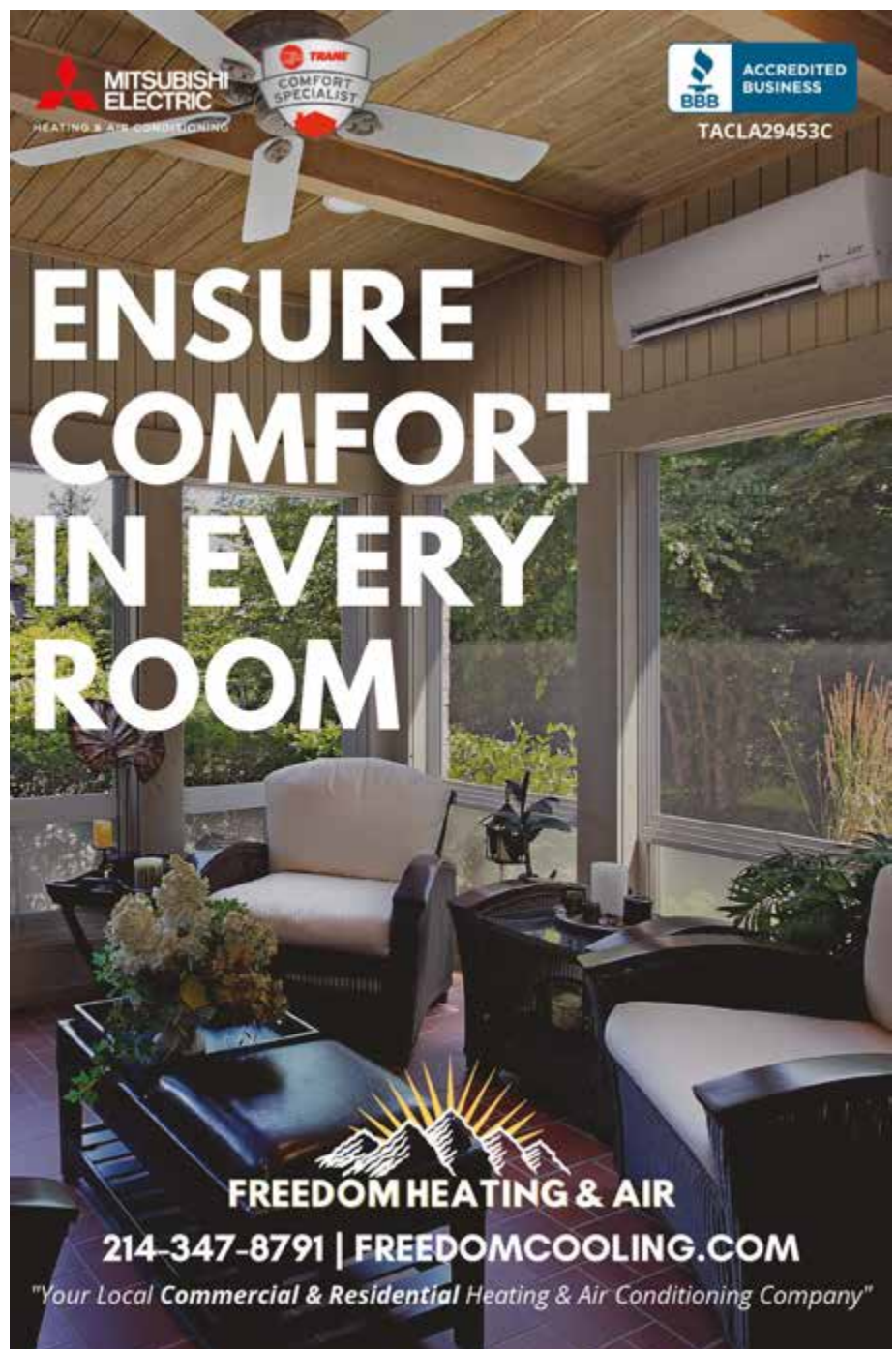
Those who saw the Lady in Blue recorded and told their stories for generations. Whether a true visit by a miracle, or a vision that appeared to many people, the Jumano tribe, settlers and others learned about Christianity — enough to want more knowledge and blessings from the church. Sister Maria's deepest desire to see people in the New World learn about Christianity came to fruition — a fact history can't dispute. **NOW**

#### Sources:

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## Zoomed In: Noah Clayton

By Angel Morris

Midlothian Heritage High School Senior Noah Clayton recently placed fourth in state wrestling, after being introduced to the sport in eighth grade, when his middle school started offering it. "Placing at state was a great moment because I was proud of all the work my team and I have put in to get where we are today," Noah explained. "We've come a long way from beginners in the sport, to now wrestling at a competitive level."

Noah plans to continue training and wrestle at University of the Ozarks in the fall. "When I'm not wrestling," he admitted, "I am usually in the gym lifting weights."



New to Midlothian, the Yarn family experiences the mayor's annual walk event at Mockingbird Nature Park.



Jennifer Legere, Laci Spencer and Leah Robinson enjoy some girl time at Midlothian Market.



Fifth-graders from T.E. Baxter Elementary name Methodist Medical Center's new surgical robot, Slick STITCH — Surgical Tiny Incision Technical Collaborative Helper, in a district-wide competition.



Khloe Clark receives a \$6,532 check toward her battle against cancer from the MHHS Boys Soccer team, which sold blankets, concessions, shirts and auction items on her behalf.





Markie Baltierra, aka Bickey the Bobcat, gets the crowd excited at a Dieterich Middle School basketball game.



Chris Coronado marks his birthday with his attentive server at Campuzano Mexican Food restaurant.



Travis Kelley and Claire Pustejovsky are named The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Students of the Year for raising \$125,116 toward LLS causes in honor of their cousin.

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— By Angel Morris

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Following his father's and uncle's example of owning one's own business, Jory McDaniel launched Texas Ace Heating & Air in Midlothian a decade ago this month. "I worked in the steel industry for 17 years. I was in quality control, then got into maintenance and then the AC field," Jory reflected. "I always wanted something more, and in 2012, I started this business."

Jory said his wife, company co-owner Teresa, and their five children, along with the Texas Ace Heating & Air employees



are its foundation. "I couldn't have done this without the support of my family and the sacrifices they made. Also, the people currently employed at Texas Ace built Texas Ace. When you have the right employees, everything else falls into place."

That "everything" includes installation and repair of all brands and types of HVAC equipment for residential, commercial and multifamily unit clients. And while the company prides itself on promising 100 percent customer satisfaction, Texas HVAC employees also care about what they do beyond the business. "We're very involved in the community and participate in charitable events with churches, schools and Manna House. We believe in building relationships, involving families and, most importantly, helping children," Office Manager Lynlee Wise explained. "Our employees love it, and we have an overabundance of volunteers at every event."

Many are familiar with the company's Bikes for Tykes program that has provided new bicycles to underprivileged children on Christmas morning for nine years. The community



donates thousands of dollars toward about 150 bikes annually, which are distributed through Manna House. "Manna House does a lot for Midlothian, Texas. They get all the credit for getting the families lined up, and we're happy to say every child that has qualified has gotten a bike every year," Jory noted.

Few know that Texas Ace also participates in Homes for Our Troops, a program providing new residences to severely injured post-9/11 veterans. "At least once a year, we donate the labor, the units and parts at zero cost to put HVACs in these homes," said Roger Villarreal, who — instead of a title — has been dubbed the company's "voice of reason."

**"I couldn't have done this without the support of my family and the sacrifices they made."**

Annually, Texas Ace provides free installation of a system through The Feel The Love program sponsored by Lennox, which helps people nominated by their community. Residential Manager Shawn Bell explained, "We do these things because they are important to us and our team. We recognize it's community that supports us, and we want to provide support in return."

While Texas Ace contributes in these and other ways, you won't see much from the company in the way of self-promotion. "We don't do it for attention. We do it because we're capable of it. And because it's why we're put on this earth — to build people up and serve others," Jory said.

So, if you're looking for an HVAC company that not only cares about quality workmanship but also about the city and people it serves, Texas Ace may be your choice. "When I would call my uncle at work years ago, I'd ask what he was doing, and he'd say, 'Living the American dream.' I believe that's what we're doing here," Jory admitted. "We have a business footprint that has worked for years, and we're not going to change." **NOW**

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CookingNOW

## In the Kitchen With TANYA BARTHOLOMEW

By Angel Morris



Tanya Bartholomew grew up on the eastern shore of Virginia and came to Texas for college. “I have now lived here much longer than I grew up there, and I am raising seven native Texans, so I consider myself a Texan!” she admitted.

Having a paternal grandmother famous for her homemade pies and cookies inspired Tanya to try her hand at cookies. “I used to be the cookie queen but took a cake decorating class because I figured it would save me a lot of money on birthdays as my family grew,” Tanya recalled. “I soon discovered cupcakes were easier.”

With children ranging in age from 11 to 24, and now two grandchildren, Tanya has been homeschooling for 18 years. “We have lived in Midlothian since 2012, and we love it here,” Tanya noted. “My home-based cupcake business, BeeBee’s Bakery, is my other love!” **NOW**

### Carrot Cake Cupcakes With Cream Cheese Icing

*Cupcakes:*

- 1 box carrot cake mix (or spice cake mix)
- 1/2 cup oil
- 3 eggs
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2/3 cup carrots, grated
- 1/4 cup crushed pineapple
- 2-3 Tbsp. pineapple juice from can
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup pecans, chopped (optional)

*Icing:*

- 1 8-oz. block cream cheese or Neufchâtel cheese
- 1 1/2 sticks butter, room temperature
- 1 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 6-7 cups powdered sugar

1. *For cupcakes:* Mix all the ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Line muffin pans with paper liners; fill each cup halfway with batter. *Note: This should make 24 cupcakes.*
2. *For icing:* Mix the cream cheese, butter and vanilla with a mixer. Slowly add in 6 cups of powdered sugar, mixing well as you

add. If needed, add more powdered sugar until the icing is the right consistency to pipe or spread. *Note: This makes enough for 2 dozen cupcakes or 1 9x13-inch sheet cake or 1 8-inch layer cake.*

### Unbeatable Mac and Cheese

- 18 oz. extra-broad egg noodles
- 1 stick butter
- 1 10.5-oz. can Campbell’s Cheddar Cheese Soup
- 3 1/2 cups milk
- 1 Tbsp. yellow mustard (or 1 tsp. mustard powder)
- 2 eggs
- 3 cups cheddar cheese, grated (I use sharp or extra-sharp.)

1. Cook the pasta according to the package directions. Drain; return to the pot. Add the butter to the hot noodles, stir well.
2. Add remaining ingredients; mix well.
3. Pour the mixture into a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Bake at 350 F for 35-40 minutes or until the edges are brown and bubbling.



## Anytime Pumpkin Bread

By Jenny Blumberg. Makes 2 loaves.

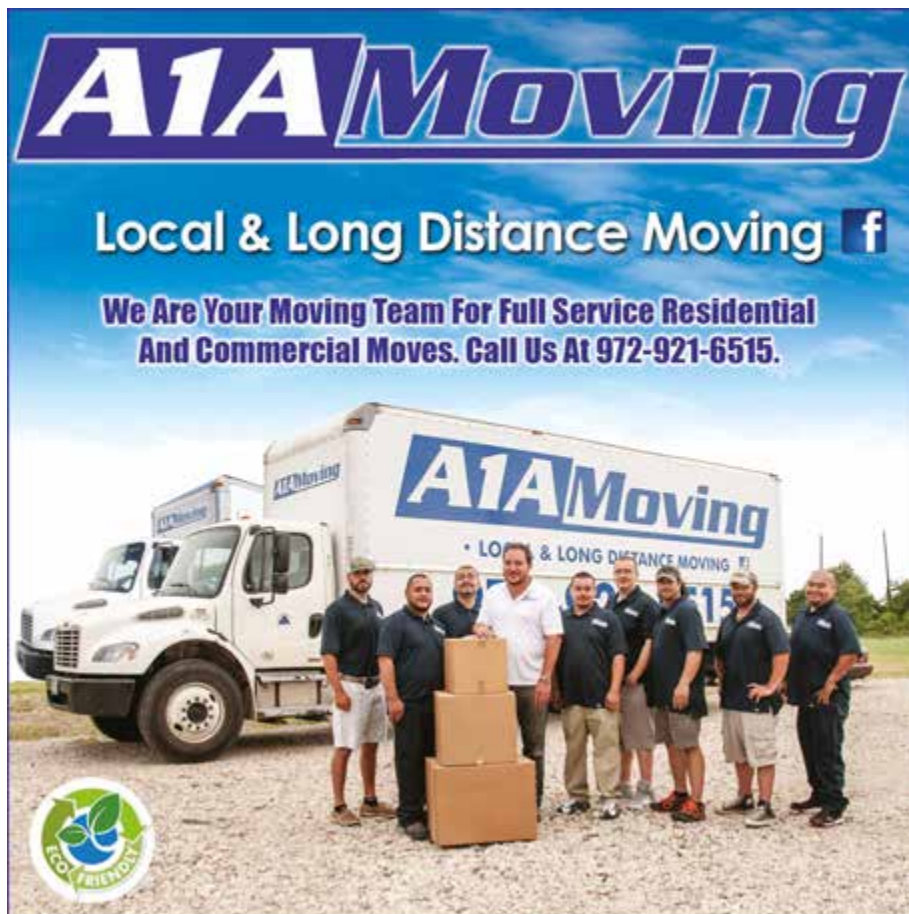
- 3 cups sugar
- 1 cup oil
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 1 15-oz. can pumpkin
- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 1 tsp. allspice
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. cloves
- 2/3 cup water

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Mix the sugar and oil. Add the eggs and pumpkin; mix well.
2. In a separate bowl, mix the flour and remaining dry ingredients. Add to the pumpkin mixture alternately with the water. Mix well between additions.
3. Pour into 2 greased loaf pans. Bake 70-75 minutes. Cool 30 minutes before removing from pans. Store in the refrigerator. Freezes well.

## Tater Tot Casserole Comfort Food

- 2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 small onion, chopped (optional)
- 2 lbs. frozen cut green beans
- 1 tsp. onion powder
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 2 10.5-oz. cans cream of mushroom soup
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 32-oz. bag frozen tater tots

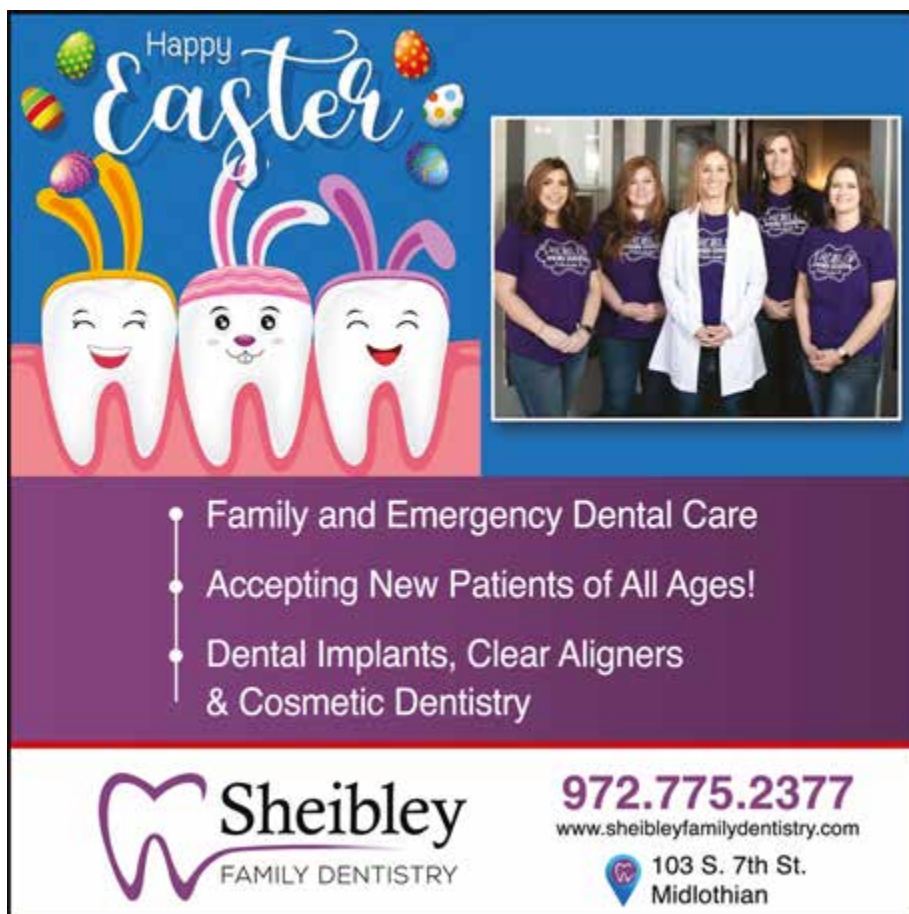
1. Brown the ground beef with the chopped onions; drain the grease.
2. While the meat is browning, partially steam the green beans in the microwave for 6-7 minutes.
3. Reduce the heat; add the seasonings to the meat. Mix well. Turn off heat; spread the seasoned meat into the bottom of a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Layer the drained green beans on top of the meat.
4. Spread the cream of mushroom soup over the green beans, covering well. Sprinkle cheddar cheese on top of the soup; arrange tater tots in rows on top. Bake, uncovered, in a 350 F oven until the casserole is bubbling and the tater tots are well browned, approximately 40 minutes.



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## Great Aunt Mary's Buttermilk Waffles

2 cups flour  
1 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. baking soda  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1 cup shortening  
2 eggs  
2 cups buttermilk

1. Mix the dry ingredients in a mixing bowl. Add the shortening; mix with a fork. Add the egg and buttermilk; mix with a fork. Cook in a waffle iron until golden brown. Serve with butter and maple syrup.

## North Carolina Brunswick Stew

By Billy Trevathan. Serves 8.

1 1/2 lbs. fresh or frozen boneless chicken (I use white meat, but you can use thighs.)  
1 1/2 tsp. salt, or to taste  
1 tsp. black pepper, or to taste  
20 oz. crushed tomatoes  
2 15-oz. cans lima beans  
2 15-oz. cans creamed corn  
1 15-oz. can butter beans

1 15-oz. can chicken broth  
1 cup instant mashed potatoes, for thickening (or to taste)  
Splash of Tabasco sauce (optional)

1. Place the frozen chicken in a stock pot; cover with water. Add salt and pepper; bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium; simmer for a couple of hours, until fork tender. Reduce the heat to low; shred the

chicken. *Note: I use a hand mixer directly in the pot. It takes just a minute or two and shreds perfectly.*

2. Add the tomatoes, lima beans, creamed corn, butter beans and chicken broth. Simmer, covered, on medium or medium-low for an hour or so.

3. Sprinkle in the instant mashed potatoes to thicken. Add a splash of Tabasco sauce, if desired.

Anytime Pumpkin Bread





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# HICO

— By Lisa Bell

# MISSING THE



*The historic town of Hico, Texas, made its debut on Honey Creek in the late 19th century. With the coming of the railroad, the town's forefathers moved toward the new mode of transportation in 1880, a decision that proved prosperous for the community. New landmark buildings appeared, which have now withstood more than 100 years of the ebb and flow of commerce and populations. Hico prospered as the shipping center for cotton and other crops.*

Many of the historic buildings remain along the main streets of the town, transformed into shops and restaurants, with fresh entities opening. Many, however, visit the small community for a more notorious reason. Locals adhere to the legend that Billy the Kid lived there as an old man. In the middle of the main street, a small museum tells the stories, providing scores of artifacts from the man they knew as Brushy Bill Roberts. For historians, a visit to the museum offers facts about Billy the Kid, whether or not you believe the local tales. Outside the room with Billy's life story, other historic artifacts exist for visitors to browse.

Near the museum, Blue Star Trading Company houses a fun shop ranging from clothing to furniture and a gallery featuring local artists. An antique riding horse and life-size stallion make it a fun place for all ages to visit.



Upstairs in the mezzanine you will find a post office front and other antiques, including a vault built around the safe inside. When a fire destroyed the entire mezzanine, the vault became a floating time capsule. No one had the combination to the safe, but when they finally opened it, they discovered letters, documents and ledgers from 1917 to 1940. With the mezzanine restored, the upper part now houses a pictorial history of Hico. Doubling as an event center, the pictorial experience takes a step back in time.

All buildings in the downtown area contain brick or rock walls, built in earlier centuries to stop raging fires from moving between shops. From the city watering station to a historic log cabin at Peppermint Square, the museums and buildings Hico contains offer enough history to keep any interested person busy all day. Throughout the city center, murals painted on walls also give visitors an opportunity to view art. Entering the area, you can't miss the iconic larger-than-life letters HCO. The space between H and C allows visitors to become the I in Hico.

For those who prefer the outdoors and adventure, the city park includes RV parking spaces. Situated beside the Bosque River, visitors can enjoy nature. Nearby, Pete's Path winds around a sports complex and contains a disc golf course. Designed in honor of fallen heroes, the trail provides a paved sidewalk for exercise and dog walks while strolling along the river. Picnic tables dot the area for those who want to enjoy a meal or snack.

A newer attraction to Hico, Siloville opened in 2015. Built from three silos, it offers harnessed climbing, both indoors and out, low ropes, ninja warrior courses and ziplining. The less adventurous can climb a ladder and watch the sunset from the top of the silos.

With ample places to stay and eat, visitors can plan a weekend in the small community to step back in history and enjoy a bit of adventure. Located 100 miles or less from the DFW Metroplex, it also makes a fantastic day trip. **NOW**

*Photos by Lisa Bell.*

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## Introduction to

# VAN LIFE

— By Bill Smith



Van life is a term that has grown in popularity during recent years, and while it may mean living minimally and full time in a converted van as depicted in the Oscar-winning movie *Nomadland*, van life is also popular for those looking for a custom rig for traveling part time and for vacations. Some may choose to purchase a stock class B motor home. Some may purchase a new or used cargo van and take it to a custom outfitter for the conversion, while others may take on the challenge of a do-it-yourself project.

Of course, the first step is the purchase of the cargo van. The most popular style is the high-roof model, and today, there are popular offerings from Ford, Mercedes-Benz and Ram. The high-roof models allow users up to (or even a little over) 6 feet tall to stand up in the van — even after installing insulation

and the floor and ceiling. However, there are still a lot of self-conversions being done on the low- and mid-roof models.

Speaking of insulation, it is one of the first things to consider in a conversion. Some converters use none, but most opt for some form of insulation. Popular insulation choices are wool, Thinsulate, denim, spray foam, polyiso or XPS foam board. Some choose to include vapor barriers and/or sound deadening material. All the choices have their pros and cons, and a cursory review of YouTube will help you decide which one is right for your project.

Ventilation is critical in the small living space that a van affords. Even before the insulation is in place, one must decide whether they will have adequate ventilation from windows, or if cutting a hole (or two) in the ceiling for installing an electric fan is in order. Most of the available fans require a 14-inch hole to be cut for the fan. It is critical that the installation include sealing with butyl tape and some kind of lap sealant to prevent leaks around the opening. While air conditioning may be an option, it seems most van lifers do not consider it viable if they are going to be living/camping where there isn't a shore-power connection.

That obviously leads to consideration of how to power the living area. Lights, outlets to charge cell phones and computers,



water pumps, refrigerators and electric cooking are all conveniences that van lifers tend to enjoy with their self-contained electrical systems. A general layout of the van can be drawn on graph paper. Some choose to put tape on the floor to indicate where the sleeping area, dining area, living area, cabinets and perhaps bathroom will be. After this is done, wiring for the van outlets and appliances can take place.

Most conversions will include a house battery (not the same one that powers the ignition and vehicle systems). The house battery may be a DIY project of its own including several batteries wired together along with an inverter and charge controller, or it may be one of the "all in one" systems that include the various components and are essentially plug and play. Batteries can be charged in various ways, including a special connection to the van's alternator, so it charges while the engine is running but will not discharge the engine battery. Shore power should be an option for charging the house battery, and most van lifers today install solar panels on the roof of the van, so the batteries can be charging while parked in remote areas for days at a time.

Having running water in a van is common. Fresh water can be stored in plastic containers and pumped to faucets with either manually operated or electric pumps. Gray water also must be accounted for, so the conversion should plan for storage of both fresh and gray water.

Cooking may be done with electricity if you have a large enough battery bank or with shore power, but many van lifers choose propane. Great care must be taken when installing propane to insure it is properly installed and vented. One may choose to do the majority of their cooking on a portable propane stove outside the van, and perhaps use a small electric induction cooktop inside during inclement weather.

Converting an empty van may include the skills of a number of trade contractors, including electricians, plumbers and carpenters. Thankfully, the van life community likes to share, and there are a great number of resources available that can be Googled and found on YouTube. **NOW**



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Solutions on page 52



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## APRIL

4/2

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4/29

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4/9

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### Easter Egg Hunt:

Collect toy-filled eggs and prizes scattered across the softball fields. Bring your baskets and cameras for photos with the Easter bunny. Arrive early to park as hunt begins promptly at 10:00 a.m., Midlothian Sports Complex softball fields, 1000 S. 14th St. Rain-out date is April 15 at 10:00 a.m.

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4/23

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*Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to [angel.morris@nowmagazines.com](mailto:angel.morris@nowmagazines.com).*



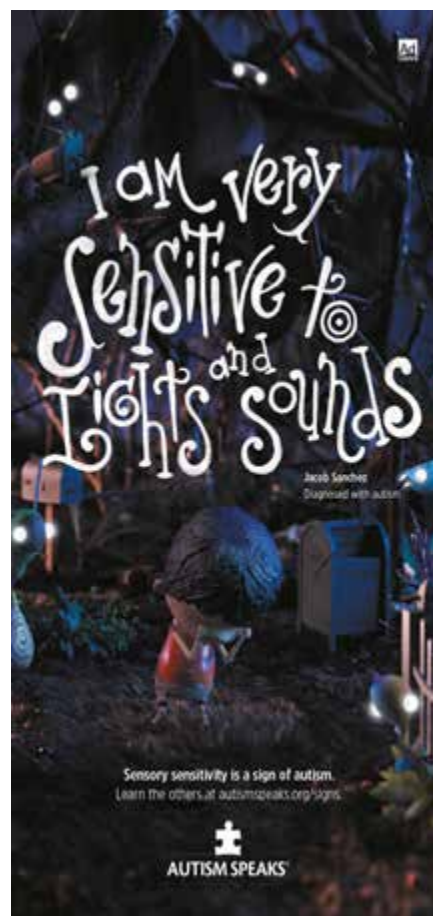
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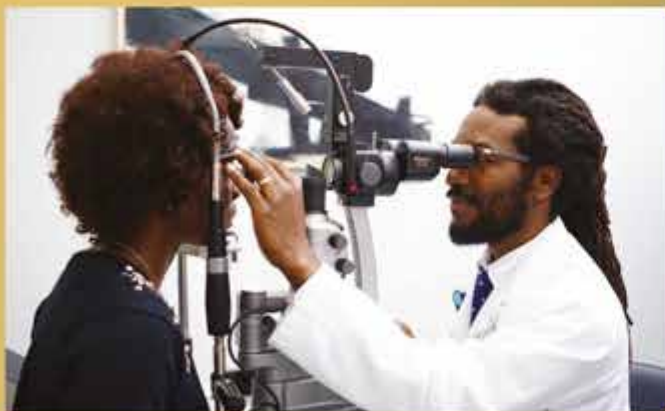
  
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# Crossword - Sudoku Solutions

1	C	R	A	M	P	S		7	P	U	T	
10	L	O	S	E	I	T		11	I	S	A	Y
13	A	V	E	N	G	E		14	S	A	K	E
15	M	E	A	T			16	I	S	A	B	E
							18	A	I	N	T	
21	S	A	I	L	S		24	O	P	E	N	S
26	P	E	G			27	I	O	W	A		
29	E	R	U	P	T	S		31	R	O	T	E
35	C	I	A	O			38	A	M	E	L	I
38	S	A	N	E			39	K	I	N	D	E
							40	L	A	M		
							41	A	L	T	E	R

Easy

2	6	9	7	4	1	3	8	5
1	4	3	8	5	6	2	7	9
8	7	5	2	9	3	4	6	1
6	9	4	1	2	5	7	3	8
7	5	1	6	3	8	9	4	2
3	2	8	4	7	9	5	1	6
9	3	6	5	8	4	1	2	7
5	1	7	3	6	2	8	9	4
4	8	2	9	1	7	6	5	3

Medium

1	7	6	5	3	8	2	4	9
9	2	5	4	6	7	1	3	8
8	3	4	9	1	2	5	7	6
3	1	7	8	5	9	4	6	2
6	9	8	2	4	3	7	1	5
4	5	2	6	7	1	8	9	3
2	6	1	7	9	5	3	8	4
7	8	9	3	2	4	6	5	1
5	4	3	1	8	6	9	2	7

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