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YOU CAN'T PUT YOUR ARM AROUND A MEMORY

What is your strongest memory? Is it a first—like your first day of school, first concert, or first-time skiing? If so, then why do we remember so little of our first years on this planet? The causes of ‘infantile amnesia’ have long puzzled scientists: Sigmund Freud, predictably, blamed this on repression of early sexual experiences. Scientists from Toronto studying the rate of neurogenesis in rat hippocampal neurones looked at the rate of neurone formation. The quicker their growth the poorer was the rat’s long-term memory formation. They speculate that rapid neuronal growth during infancy disrupts the brain circuitry, making old memories inaccessible. Could this also be the mechanism behind accelerated forgetting in epilepsy?

Science 2014;344:598–602.

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

Stress is when your mind says, “No!” and your mouth says, “Of course, that would be a pleasure!” So how should you balance up an invitation to travel and give a talk? Rutkove and colleagues have the answer with a ‘Should I Travel Index’ that weighs up: home factor (disruption to domestic life if you leave); fun factor (is this an exciting destination?); networking factor; audience size; payment received; time travelled; relaxation factors (are you travelling in excess of cattle class?); and how much might you be out of pocket? For those without a mathematical bent, thankfully there is an online calculator—(www.shoulditravel.org/)

Ann Neurol 2015. doi: 10.1002/ana.24516

NMD, EH?

Yes, A Fo Ben is getting predictable and keeps telling the same stories. In this case the story of Knut the polar bear from Berlin Zoo is worth retelling. Initially described in these pages as a sudden unexpected death in epilepsy, there is a disturbing video of said charismatic megafauna stumbling into the water and drowning. A thorough postmortem identified high levels of NMDA-receptor antibodies targeted against the NR1 subunit in Knut’s CSF. Similarly there were histological signs of encephalitis. This report makes A Fo Ben ponder whether esoteric disorders in Man may be more common in other mammals; we know that wire haired dachshunds get epilepsy from Lafora body disease and Carphology *passim* brought you leprosy in armadillos. Is there Whipple’s in the wildebeest? Or Aicardi’s in agoutis?

Sci Rep 2015;5:12805.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING...

Do you feel stupid? Then you’re probably doing it right. In 2008, Schwartz extolled the virtues of stupidity: the feeling of comfort we have revelling in the new, the obscure or the obtuse. The scope of what we don’t know is (rounding up) infinite. The trick is to be productive and stupid. His subsequent essay focuses on the importance for scientists of passionate disinterest, or, as Buddhists call it, non-attachment. Acknowledge the unusual, but don’t let your investment in the hypothesis cloud your thinking. He suggests that adopting this mindset is healthier for young researchers than any number of mandated ethics courses.

J Cell Sci 2015;128:2745–6.

J Cell Sci 2008;121:1771.

MOSTLY ARMLESS

A Fo Ben is oft accused of being unable to differentiate his elbow from his posterior. For limbed animals, as it happens, the differences are not always clear. Studying the genomes of mice, lizards and snakes, scientists have identified genetic regulatory mechanisms that work similarly for the limbs and the phallus. That these patterns are retained in snake genomes are of great interest and give new insights in to appendage formation.

Dev Cell 2015. S1534-5807(15)00583-3.



Figure 1 Brainsapes. Laura Jacobson is an artist from Palo Alto, California, USA. This art, inspired by axial MRI images is called ‘Brain Sapes’ is featured at the Stanford Center for Cognitive and Neurological Imaging. The base is vitrified clay holding the varied media in place (<http://www.laurajacobson.com>).



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