

MAY 2020

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# Tumbleweeds Usually Tumble, But Sometimes They Tornado

Matt McKnight caught a botanical maelstrom on camera in Eastern Washington.

BY JESSICA LEIGH HESTER MAY 4, 2020

## Tumbleweeds Usually Tumble, But Sometimes They Tornado

AT THE END OF APRIL, Matt McKnight was driving Bessie, his Westfalia campervan, on State Route 240 in Washington when he encountered something he hadn't warged on: dozens of tumbleweeds whipped into a vortex, and heading right for the van.

McKnight is a Seattle-based journalist for Crosscut, an independent news site, and has been traveling across the state to cover the COVID-19 crisis. Bessie is a good companion on these journeys—McKnight can load her up with provisions and then sleep in the back at night, so that he's not imperiling himself or the communities he covers. He was driving through a vast expanse of flat land when the tumbleweed storm arrived.

Tumbleweed is the final chapter in the life cycle of Russian thistle (an umbrella term that includes *Salsola tragus* and several other species), a plant introduced to America from Eurasia roughly two centuries ago. When the plants mature, a part of them breaks off and blows away, sowing seeds as it somersaults. Tumbleweeds are commonly seen on American highways, and they snowed in this stretch of State Route 240 back in December; they had to be cleared away with snowplows. But this was something else. "I've lived in Wyoming and Idaho and Utah, and the High Desert of California, so I'm not a stranger to tumbleweeds," McKnight says. "I'm not a stranger to dust devils, either, but I've never, ever in my life seen two of them merge together and then come straight at my face." McKnight tweeted that the sight looked like a "tumbleweed tornado."

A few minutes before the bizarre sight, McKnight saw a lone tumbleweed scuttling down the road; he thought it looked cute, and kept driving. “Then I saw kind of a mass of them coming—maybe 15—and I was like, ‘Oh, that’s kinda cool. There’s more.’” He slowed down a little, but pressed on. Then he and Bessie crested a small hill. “I saw a tumbledevil, a tumblenado, whatever you wanna call it, forming on the side.” It seemed like a good time to stop. “I was like, ‘Okay, hell no. I’m not going to be driving into that thing.’”

## **“Hell no. I’m not going to be driving into that thing.”**

McKnight put the car in park but kept the engine on, and he propped his cell phone up against the dashboard. He started filming a video, and within seconds, tumbleweeds were battering the windshield, just a few inches from his face. In the recording, they sound like noisy, flapping wings, and McKnight says it was even louder in person. The video also features a little creaking, as McKnight steadied himself to get a good angle—but there aren’t any shrieks. “I wasn’t nervous as they started hitting me,” he says. “I was like, ‘Okay, this is kinda crazy,’ but at the same time, I had my journalist I’m-just-gonna-be-calm-and-see-this-through type of demeanor.”

It was over in five or 10 seconds, he says. When the storm passed, he looked behind him and saw it clearing the fence onto the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, which once produced plutonium for the bomb that detonated over Nagasaki in 1945. By the time the “tornado” blew onto the grounds of the old facility, it had lost some steam. “I think it tapered off pretty quickly,” McKnight says.

He didn’t stick around to find out. “My biggest concern in that moment was, I’ve got a running engine and dry tumbleweed,” he says. “Knowing that tumbleweeds are really dry and they’ve been known to start fires, I wanted to get out of that pile really quickly.” He drove through a heap of 30 or 40 tumbleweeds that had surrounded Bessie, and then pulled over around 50 feet down the road to pick bits of tumbleweed from the grill and from underneath the van. It was still pretty windy, but not dangerous, and a few more tumbleweeds kept bumping toward him. “It was just normal tumbleweeds hitting the van, and

me kicking and cursing them.” Days later, he found a bit of charred tumbleweed while tightening a loose screw in the engine.

McKnight thought his footage would appeal to his coworkers, and maybe to a couple buddies in Seattle. Instead, it racked up more than 1.2 million views on Twitter and was broadcast on *Good Morning America*. McKnight suspects that it was a welcome break from news about the pandemic, and he’s been hearing three kinds of responses to the footage. Some people think he should pair it with the winsome, wistful Sons of the Pioneers song, “Tumbling Tumbleweeds.” Others joke that it’s proof that we’re all doomed—or that “nature is healing” with many of us hunkered down at home.

“Apparently, everybody needed the tumbleweed tornado,” McKnight says. “You just look at it and it spins and it either makes you feel scared or happy.” McKnight and Bessie will be back on State Route 240 in the coming week or so—hopefully, this time, without any tumblenados along for the ride.

## Who Am I? – Guessing a Mystery Person

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Print a “Who Am I?” [sign](#). Add a clue in the text box, print, and post on your bulletin board. Post a different clue every day or so and see who can guess the identity of the mystery person of the month. Then plan a “Who am I?” discussion and reminiscence activity.

**Do you know who I am?** Here are some clues:

1. I was born on May 11, 1904, in Figueres, Spain.
2. Throughout my lifetime, I have been quite temperamental.
3. At various times in my career, I collaborated with famous people.
4. I lost my mother to cancer early in life.
5. People have always considered me an eccentric.
6. During World War II, I emigrated to the United States.
7. I had a very unusual relationship with my only brother.
8. Some people claim that greed is my middle name.
9. I am obsessed with clocks.
10. My career spanned more than half a century.
11. The best gift I ever gave my wife was an ancient castle in the countryside.
12. Cauliflower is my favorite vegetable.
13. During my childhood, my family vacationed at a seaside home that inspired me.
14. I was able to fulfill one aspect of my “Destino” posthumously.
15. Despite being excluded from my professional network, I achieved great success.
16. *Sesame Street* is one of my favorite TV shows.
17. I had a complicated relationship with my father.
18. My autobiography exposed all of my “secrets.”

19. I married my muse, much to the detriment of my existing friendships.
20. Diego Velázquez is one of my favorite artists.
21. In the 1950s, I was interviewed by Mike Wallace.
22. Gala was the center of my world.
23. I was devastated by my inability to hold a paintbrush at the end of my life.
24. My moustache may be more famous than I am.
25. I am one of the best-known Surrealist painters in history.

**Can you guess who I am?** Your *Persistence of Memory* has paid off. I am Salvador Dalí.



Print a copy of the [pictures](#) to pass around as you share and discuss the information in the article with your group. Play a video of a [Salvador Dalí interview with Mike Wallace](#) (1958).

## Introduction

Spanish artist Salvador Dalí is one of the best-known Surrealist painters who depicted the subconscious mind on canvas. His most memorable work, *The Persistence of Memory*, features melting clocks dotting a barren landscape. Dalí's eccentric personality was marked by his unconventional appearance, odd stunts, and provocative works of art.

## Early Years

Born Salvador Felipe Jacinto Dalí y Domènech on May 11, 1904, in Figueres, Spain, the future painter was the second child born to Salvador Dalí y Cusi and Felipa Domènech Ferres. His lawyer father was the disciplinarian of the family and severely punished his son's childish antics and frequent tantrums. Conversely, Salvador's mother was very nurturing of him and his artistic gifts. However, both recognized his immense talent, and Salvador's parents encouraged him to hone his skills in the art studio they set up for him in their vacation home located in the coastal village of Cadaques.

By the age of 10, Salvador was taking drawing lessons at the Colegio de Hermanos Maristas, but his tendency to daydream marked him as an eccentric and earned him rebuke from his father and instructors. Convincing his father that he could have a career as an artist, he was permitted to enroll in the Madrid School of Fine Arts, where he was exposed to various artistic styles, including modern painting, which piqued his interest. While Salvador's family proudly showcased his charcoal drawings in the family home shortly after his first year of art school, his first public exhibition was held at the Municipal Theatre of Figueres.

At the age of 16, Dalí experienced a devastating loss when his mother died of breast cancer. As was the custom at the time, his father married his deceased wife's sister, which only further strained the relationship between father and son. Their estrangement continued for years until the elder Dalí's death in 1950.

### Discussion Starters

- What childhood experiences—such as family dynamics, decisions about your education or career path, or loss—impacted your life in significant ways? Explain.
- Do you recall what you wanted to be when you grew up? Did you ultimately pursue a path that aligned with your initial aspirations? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, what can we learn from adversity? Please share experiences from your life.

### The Artist

During Dalí's time in art school in Madrid, he was exposed to many different artistic styles from the classical Renaissance and Baroque to the more progressive Cubism and Dadaism. In the late 1920s, he had several opportunities to travel to Paris, where he became acquainted with the most influential artists and intellectuals of the era, including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Paul Éluard, and René Magritte. During this period of artistic experimentation, Dalí was introduced to Surrealism and began painting canvases with disturbing images from his dreams and subconscious thoughts.

Over the next decade, Salvador Dalí became one of the most accomplished Surrealist artists in the world. Critics consider this period the most creative of his career. His signature works featured the juxtaposition and manipulation of ordinary objects in a dreamlike fashion to express his opinions on the human mind and behavior. In 1931, his most famous painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, was unveiled to the world. With its melting pocket watches and stark landscape, the startling imagery challenged the notion that time is absolute and enduring.



Because of his volatile personality and deeply held ideological views that conflicted with the other members of the Surrealist movement, Salvador Dalí was expelled from the group in 1934. Although he was isolated from his former colleagues, the famous artist continued to produce Surrealist works and exhibit them in international expositions during the 1930s and 1940s. In all, he produced more than 770 Surrealist paintings throughout his 60-year career.

### Discussion Starters

- Who are some of the people who have influenced you throughout your lifetime? What impact (either positive or negative) did they make?
- What is your view of time? Is it fixed or flexible? Does Dalí's image of a melting pocket watch align with your viewpoint?
- In your experience, what does it feel like to be excluded from a group? What recommendations would you give to someone facing this type of rejection?

## Dalí's Muse

Salvador Dalí was enraptured with Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova when he first met her in 1929. At the time, she was married to the Surrealist writer Paul Éluard, but given their immediate attraction, it did not take long for her to leave her husband and marry Dalí in 1934. Gala, as she was known, became his muse and business manager. Her levelheadedness was the perfect counterbalance to Dalí's creative leanings. In this role, she managed his legal and financial matters and protected his personal interests. Their partnership was so strong that he allowed his wife to sign her name to his paintings. Ten years his senior, Gala was his most fervent supporter, and they shared a very passionate relationship.

World War II brought new adventures for the couple. Worried, they moved to the United States to live until 1948, when it was safe to move back to their home in Spain. During their time in the U.S., Dalí had a retrospective exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1941. The following year, he published an autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. His art transitioned from Surrealism to other more classical styles. He also experimented with previously unexplored subjects. In 1969, Dalí bought an ancient castle in a small town in Catalonia as a gift for his wife. She would escape to this retreat to enjoy some quiet time. Even Dalí needed to request permission before visiting.

In the early 1980s, Salvador Dalí's health began to suffer, to the point he was no longer able to hold a paintbrush. Losing the ability to express himself through art was demoralizing for him. With Gala's death in 1982, Dalí slipped into a deep depression. Not only did he break several laws by driving his wife's body to her beloved home in Púbol to be buried but he also moved there so that he could remain close to her, even in death. Just a few years later, the famous painter suffered some significant burns from a fire and was confined to a wheelchair as a result. Returning to his home in Figueres, Salvador Dalí died of heart failure on January 23, 1989, at the age of 84.

## Discussion Starters

- Do you believe that everyone has a soulmate? Why or why not? In what ways does/did your significant other complement you (strengths and weaknesses)?
- In your opinion, is it selfish to give a gift to a loved one that you can benefit from as well? Why or why not? Explain.
- What brings you the most joy in life? Elaborate.

## Q&A with Salvador Dalí

1. Salvador Dalí had a very unique sense of style to match his eccentric personality. What was his most well-known physical feature?

**Answer:** A long, thin, and curled mustache. According to some reports, Dalí grew this facial hair to pay homage to 17th-century Spanish master painter Diego Velázquez. He typically completed his signature look by wearing a cape and carrying a walking stick.





2. Dalí dabbled in filmmaking to expand his artistic influence onto the silver screen, collaborating with several celebrated filmmakers. One project in particular was delayed for so long that neither Dalí nor this famous studio head would live to see it realized. Can you guess who his famous collaborator was?

**Answer:** Walt Disney. In 1945, Disney Studios approached Dalí to collaborate on an animated film called *Destino*. The artist created 22 oil paintings along with other drawings for the project, but due to budgetary restraints, the project was halted. It would be more than 50 years before Walt's nephew Roy decided to revisit the project, and Disney animators began to recreate Dalí's original storyboards to create the six-minute short film that was released in 2003.

3. According to reports, Dalí was obsessed with money. He enjoyed making it and never wanted to part with it. What clever tactic did he employ to avoid paying the restaurant bill when dining out with friends?

**Answer:** He would sketch an original work of art on the back of his check, knowing that the recipient would never cash it, and he would therefore not have to pay the bill.

4. Starting in 1948, Dalí created one "monumental" painting per year known as the "Dalí Masterworks." How large were these canvasses?

**Answer:** Five feet long and often nearly as high. It would typically take Dalí an entire year to complete one of these massive paintings. He would work on them in his studio, which had been equipped with a unique mechanism to raise and lower the canvasses to facilitate the painting process. Throughout his career, it is estimated that Dalí painted approximately 18 of these monumental works.

5. Salvador Dalí was known for his unusual publicity stunts. During one, he drove a car filled to the roof with this grocery store staple. What was it?

**Answer:** Cauliflower. In 1955 while traveling from Spain to Paris, where he was scheduled to give a lecture at La Sorbonne, Dalí filled up a Rolls Royce Phantom II with more than 1,000 pounds of cauliflower to accompany him on his journey. When asked about the stunt, he reasoned that "everything ends up in the cauliflower!"

6. On which beloved television program was Salvador Dalí spoofed?

**Answer:** *Sesame Street*. The show introduced a mustached puppet named Salvador Dada in 1974, with Jim Henson lending his voice to the French artist character. Dalí's most famous painting made an appearance in the 2015 *Sesame Street* special in which the Muppets visit the Museum of Modern Cookie and see *The Persistence of Cookies*.

7. With which family member did the famous painter share a strong yet unusual connection?

**Answer:** His older brother. Dalí's older brother, also named Salvador, was born in 1901, but sadly died in 1903, from a stomach infection. Nine months after his death, the baby who would grow up to become the famous artist was born. His parents felt that their new son was the reincarnation of their firstborn son, and so gave him the same name as his brother. Since the brothers closely resembled each other, everyone considered the younger Salvador to be the reincarnation of his own dead brother. Naturally, the psychological impact of this unusual family dynamic greatly affected Dalí's life and work. Dalí is quoted as saying of his brother, "[We] resembled each other like two drops of water, but we had different reflections."

## Salvador Dalí in His Own Words

The famous painter earned the nickname Avida Dollars, which is both an anagram of Salvador Dalí and a reference to his love of money. Read the following Dalí quotes about money, ambition, and other things.

- Progressive art can assist people to learn not only about the objective forces at work in the society in which they live, but also about the intensely social character of their interior lives. Ultimately, it can propel people toward social emancipation.
- Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing.
- Intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings.
- There is only one difference between a madman and me. The madman thinks he is sane. I know I am mad.
- Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it.
- Drawing is the honesty of the art. There is no possibility of cheating. It is either good or bad.
- The difference between false memories and true ones is the same as for jewels: it is always the false ones that look the most real, the most brilliant.
- Each morning when I awake, I experience again a supreme pleasure—that of being Salvador Dalí.
- There are some days when I think I'm going to die from an overdose of satisfaction.
- The thermometer of success is merely the jealousy of the malcontents.
- Instead of stubbornly attempting to use Surrealism for purposes of subversion, it is necessary to try to make of Surrealism something as solid, complete and classic as the works of museums.
- Liking money like I like it, is nothing less than mysticism. Money is a glory.

### Discussion Starters

- Do any of Salvador Dalí's quotes resonate with you? If so, which one(s)? Why?
- Do you agree that we will never reach perfection? Why or why not?
- In your experience, what is the relationship between success and jealousy? What advice would you give to others who are jealous of others' success?

### Additional Activities

1. Watch [Salvador Dalí: In Search of Immortality](#), the 2018 documentary that profiles the life of Surrealist painter Salvador Dalí and his relationship with his wife, Gala Dalí.
2. Read the 1942 autobiography [The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí](#) for insight into Dalí's life, works, and eccentricities.
3. Explore Dalí's [full collection](#) of works with insights and analysis.



# THE DAILY CHRONICLE

MONDAY, MAY 11, 2020

## On This Date

**1927** – The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded by Louis B. Mayer. However, the first Oscars were not presented for another two years.

**1959** – “Kookie, Kookie (Lend Me Your Comb)” hit #4 on the charts. The song was sung by Connie Stevens and Edd Byrnes. Byrnes was the actor who played Kookie on the hit television show *77 Sunset Strip*.

**1997** – Deep Blue, a chess-playing supercomputer, defeated (human) world champion chess player Garry Kasparov.



## Patriotic Trivia

In 1940, Irving Berlin designated that all of the royalties from “God Bless America” be donated to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. To date, that equals about \$10 million. Berlin chose this way to thank his adopted country.

## Quote of the Day

“Life is 10 percent how you make it, and 90 percent how you take it.”

~ *Irving Berlin*

## Happy Birthday!

**Irving Berlin** (1888–1989) is heralded as one the greatest songwriters in American history. The Russian-born composer, who came to the U.S. at age five, published his first song at 19. In 1911, Berlin’s hit song “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” launched an international dance craze and passion for ragtime music. Over his 60-year career, Berlin wrote over 1,500 songs, including for popular movies and Broadway



shows. Some of his standouts are “White Christmas,” “Blue Skies,” “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” and “God Bless America.”

# Easy/Medium Cryptograms

Presented by Puzzle Baron

AYSP GKCUG YBP LPGWAMPL JC SYTP VG QPPR ZPJJPB YZCVJ JKP  
BYMLCS, VGPRPGG QYXJG JKYJ YBP YRR UP KYDP RPQJ CQ CVB  
PLVXYJWCM.

– Chuck Palahniuk  
Puzzle #Z989FQ

GFDEA FJNYRF OYIARFCB IGGFUFRRSAHCO PY QSGWFA – S THASUCF TSO  
GYP RSDF OYI... SGQ HB HP QYFR, HP VHCC ZF QFQIUPFQ BAYT OYIA  
RXSAF YB CIUL YA TFAHP.

– Talmud  
Puzzle #J563VV

S ZVNBX KHP ZV JBZCJB MHKESXJNZX NEHN EB MHK ZXB ZV NEB VBM SX  
NEB MEZGB ESKNZCP ZV NEB MZCGQ MEZ MHK XZN AHCCSBQ HMHP UP  
LZMBC.

– Robert Frost  
Puzzle #D593JH

L CLKI, WF GRYGBLGKZG, HUDH HUG QLKI DKI HUG WMIF DBG QMBG HUDK  
QDBBLGI, CMB HUGF DBG QMXH LKHLQDHGOF AKLHGI; DKI PUGK MKG  
XACCGBX, HUG MHUGB XFQYDHULNGX.

– Philip Dormer Stanhope  
Puzzle #O319FC

# Mixed-Up Post Office

Unscramble the letters to reveal words associated with the post office.



1. EOEVPENL

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2. SDAESDR

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3. SSTAPM

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4. GCEPKAA

---

5. IDRLEVE

---

6. ADFWRRO

---

7. SSXREEP

---

8. EINRNCAUS

---

9. HTEELDRATE

---

10. BALMOXI

---

11. ZGNAAEMI

---

12. APETGOS

---

13. HSELTCA

---

14. OPALST AIRRERC

---

15. KGCNARTI

---

16. COATPRDS

---

17. TRIFS SSALC

---

18. IOGNERTHV

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# Mixed-Up Post Office

(solution)

1. envelope
2. address
3. stamps
4. package
5. deliver
6. forward
7. express
8. insurance
9. letterhead
10. mailbox
11. magazine
12. postage
13. satchel
14. postal carrier
15. tracking
16. postcard
17. first class
18. overnight