

# BILINGUALS: EXOTIC BIRDS OR EVERYDAY PEOPLE?

by Johan Acosta

**G**randpa shouts, "Dinner's ready" in Danish. My mother asks me in English to set the table. As I do so, I catch the theme tune of the Brazilian soap opera on TV in the living room, where my sister is relaxing. She speaks perfect Portuguese. My father asks her to record the program in his native Spanish, and we take our places at the table. And what's on the menu? Italian meatballs.

We know we aren't a normal family. At any moment, you might hear conversations in four different languages, and almost everyone understands almost everything. But what is normal these days? My mother is half-Danish, half-English, and my father, who is from Bolivia, speaks Spanish and Guarani. Because of my mother's work (she's now retired), we lived in Brazil, Italy and Germany, so we picked up three more languages. Now as adults, my sister and I both speak six languages.

Being bilingual, or in our case multilingual, has so many advantages. All the recent research suggests we benefit in many ways: social, cultural, economic, academic and intellectual. The research has also destroyed some of those persistent myths.



One of the myths is that bilingualism is uncommon, as if we bilinguals were like rare, exotic birds. The truth is that around fifty percent of the world's inhabitants are bilingual. The continents with the most linguistic diversity are Asia and Africa. In Nigeria alone, 500 languages are spoken, and, in India, 400.

Some people believe that you have to learn both languages as a child to be truly bilingual. My sister and I are fortunate in this respect, but we know countless people who have mastered a second language as adults. They may not have such perfect pronunciation as those who acquire their second language as children, but they are still completely fluent and accurate.

Another myth about bilinguals concerns identity. Some people think we have split personalities. As kids, my sister and I were often asked, "But where are you really from? Don't you get confused?" Not at all. I am me, the product of many cultures. I can switch languages easily, according to where I am and whom I'm with, and this seems completely natural to me.

As for the benefits, bilinguals do better on certain tests, are better protected against mental illnesses such as Alzheimer's, gain insights into other cultures, have access to more of the world's information, and are in some contexts more employable. Being bilingual has made me who I am, and for that I'm grateful.

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**C** Underline words or phrases in the text that have the following meanings 1–6 below.

1 relating to...



# What Women Really Think



Stella magazine commissioned YouGov, a research agency, to interview over 1,000 women in the U.K. about everything from their eating habits to their relationships and family values to find out what they really think.

How do you think they responded?

- 1** **How many women in the U.K. would prefer to have a male boss?**  
a) less than 30%   b) about 50%   c) over 70%

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- 2** **How many women spend more than seven hours a week exercising?**  
a) 4%   b) 15%   c) 30%

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- 3** **What is the biggest challenge for women today?**  
a) staying healthy   b) making enough money  
c) balancing home and work life

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- 4** **What do women think is the best age to get married?**  
a) between 21 and 24   b) between 25 and 29  
c) over 30

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- 5** **What do 59% of women think fathers should take more responsibility for?**  
a) their children   b) doing the housework  
c) organizing vacations

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- 6** **According to women, how much housework do they do?**  
a) more than 50%   b) over 75%   c) nearly all of it

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- 7** **How many women 45–54 years of age met their husbands through the Internet?**  
a) 1%   b) 9%   c) 16%

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- 8** **How many women have gone on a diet in the past?**  
a) 20%   b) between 35% and 45%   c) over 50%





# 5 Tips to Help You Do Well in Interviews

How do you get into the college or get the job of your dreams? Even before the interview, you might need to catch someone's attention. The Dean of Admissions at Harvard University says he often receives flowers and chocolates from potential students. One student sent references every day for three months. Eventually, he even sent a letter from his dentist saying how nice his teeth were. He didn't get an interview.

**For those of you who do make the interview stage, here are five top tips:**

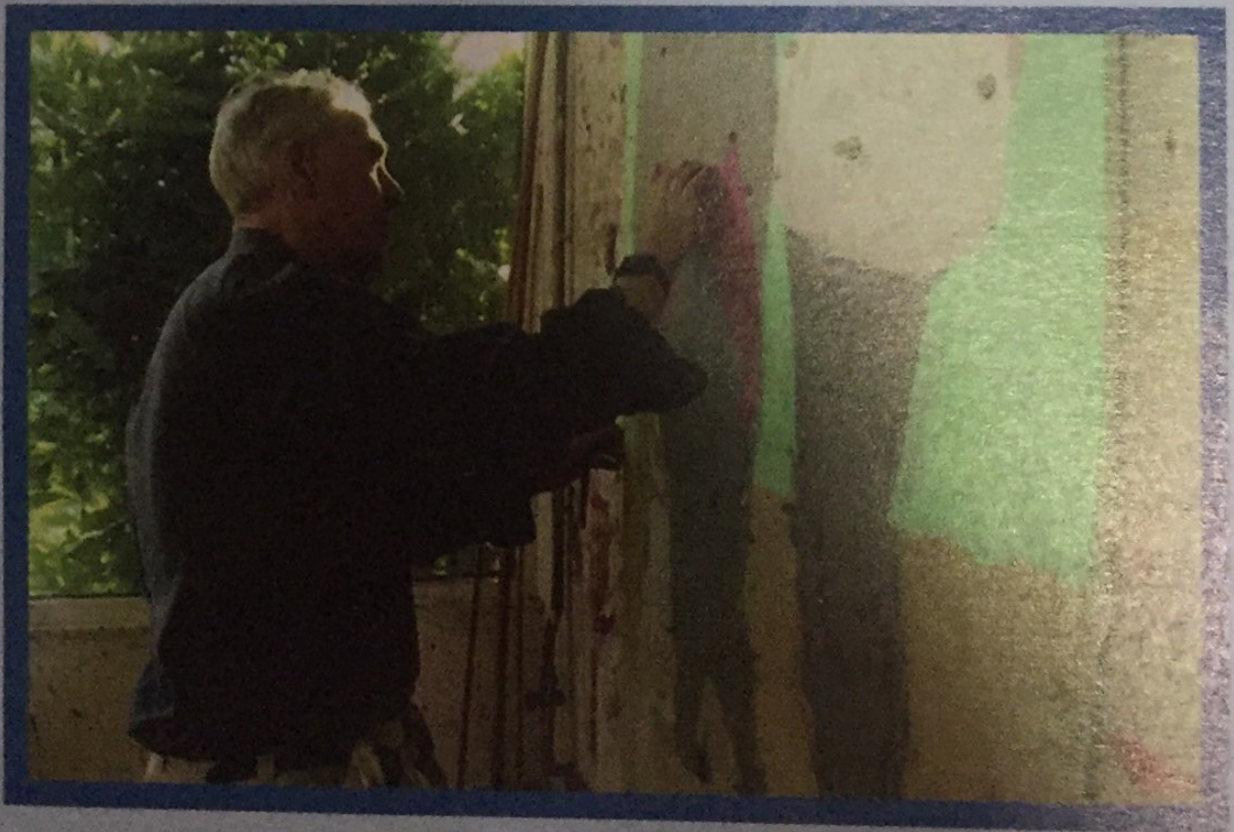
- 1** Be prepared. Do some research about the college or company so you know what questions to ask.
- 2** Dress appropriately. You don't have to dress fashionably, but you should look clean. And don't wear "bling" (large, showy jewelry).
- 3** Arrive on time. Fifteen minutes early is OK.
- 4** Shake hands firmly and make eye contact. First impressions are important.
- 5** Speak clearly and try to offer full answers rather than short responses. This shows your enthusiasm.





# The Blind Painter

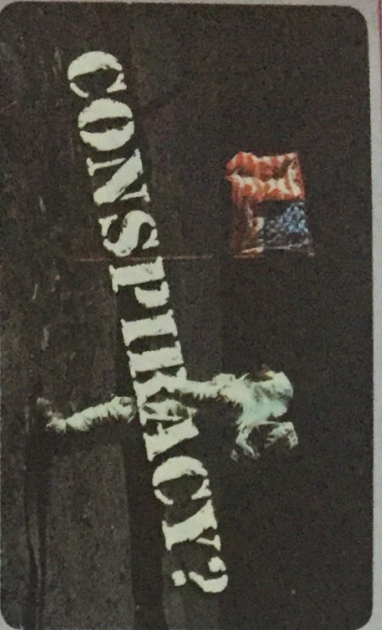
Sargy Mann painted all of his professional life, first as a teacher and later as a professional artist. In his mid-30s, he developed cataracts in both eyes, eventually leading to total blindness. He continued to paint. Twenty-five years later, Sargy's work was very popular with art collectors, with paintings regularly selling for more than \$80,000 (£50,000). He spoke to BBC News about his life and how he continued to work.



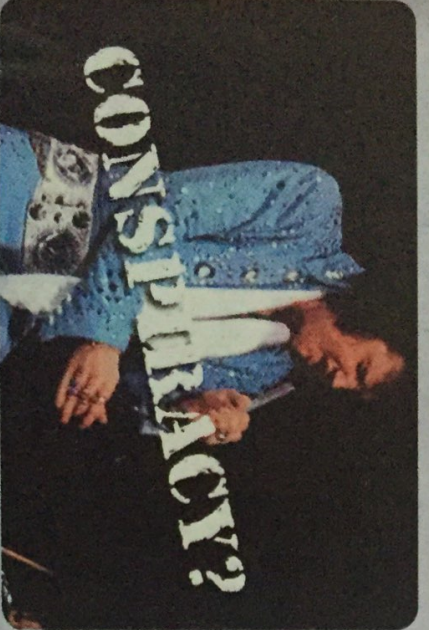




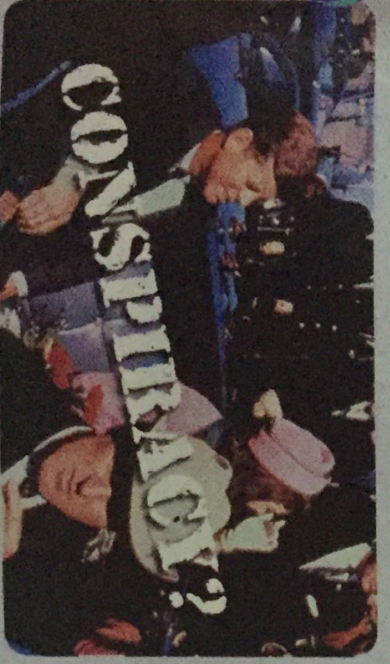
# The World's Best-known Conspiracy Theories



**Man on the Moon** We've seen the photos, but many people claim that Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" never really happened. They suspect that the astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin never left Earth, but acted out the scene and took photographs in a studio. Conspiracy theorists say there were strange shadows falling in the photos, and surprisingly no stars are visible. They point out that the U.S. flag, planted by Buzz Aldrin, was apparently waving, although there is no wind on the moon. However, these doubts can be explained logically. The lighting conditions on the moon were complicated, and the flag only appears to "flutter" because the astronauts moved it.



**The King Is Dead** When Elvis Presley was found lying unconscious on his bathroom floor at his home, Graceland, his family and friends desperately tried to save him. An ambulance was called, and Elvis was rushed to the hospital where a special room had been prepared for him. However, the "King of Rock'n'Roll" was already dead when he arrived there. At first, doctors said that Elvis died because his heart had stopped, but later they claimed that drugs were involved. Elvis had taken painkillers because he had a toothache and he couldn't sleep. However, for years his fans refused to believe that Elvis was gone, and there were numerous sightings of "Elvis" around the world. There is even a website, elvis-is-alive.com, dedicated to finding out the truth.



**The Death of a President** President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. He was riding through crowds in his car when a gunman shot him once in the head. Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested almost immediately after Kennedy's death and charged with killing him. He was murdered two days later. A report in 1964 concluded that Oswald had acted alone. But conspiracy theorists have doubts and believe more people were involved. Suspects include the CIA, the FBI and the Cuban leader Fidel Castro. In 1979 a new report agreed that Oswald had killed Kennedy, but also concluded that the President was killed "as a result of conspiracy" by unknown people.





## Fraud Fugitive in Facebook Trap

A man who was on the run from police in the U.S. revealed where he was hiding through a series of Facebook updates.

Cameroon-born Maxi Sopo falsely obtained credit from banks while he was living in the U.S. By the time he had finished, he had stolen more than \$200,000. He then escaped to Cancun,

in Mexico, where he was happily spending the money, until he made posts on his Facebook page telling the world that he was "living in paradise."

"He was posting about how beautiful life is and how he was having a good time with his buddies," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Scoville. "He was definitely not living the way we wanted him to be living, given the charges he was facing," he added.

However, during his time in Cancun, Mr. Sopo also befriended a former justice department official on the networking site. This man, who had only met Mr. Sopo a few times, was able to discover exactly where Mr. Sopo was living. As soon as he had this information, he passed it to the Mexican authorities who arrested Sopo last month.

The twenty-six-year-old is currently in custody in Mexico City.



## Famous Painting Stolen

On August 21, 1911, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, one of the most famous paintings in the world, was stolen from the wall of the Louvre Museum, in Paris. At first, the police thought one of the guards might have stolen the painting, but seventeen days after the theft, they arrested poet Guillaume Apollinaire. However, he was released when police could find no evidence that he had committed the crime. Two years later, the real thief, Vincenzo Peruggia, was arrested in Italy. Peruggia had worked at the museum and had stolen the painting because he was angry about how many Italian paintings were on display in France. He had planned to return the painting to the Uffizi gallery, in Florence, Italy. The public was so excited at the news of finding the *Mona Lisa* that the painting was displayed throughout Italy before it was returned to France in 1913.



## **Hustle**

*Hustle* is a drama series about a team of criminals who try to obtain and sell things in an illegal or dishonest way. In this program, we meet Finch, a burglar. He's in trouble with Customs, which believes that he has stolen a valuable piece of art. Unfortunately for Finch, when he stole the painting, things didn't go quite according to plan.

