

GREEN GODDESS 'BY 2030 THREE-QUARTERS OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION WILL BE URBAN'

LOUISA PEARSON

NOT long ago there was talk of a European city break. Of dancing in Rome's Trevi fountain or marvelling at the Gaudi architecture in Barcelona. The air miles were somehow justified and cheap flights were being searched for online. But before you could say "un gelato misto" the doubts began to seep in. "There'll be lots of people." "It'll be hot." "There'll be lots of people." "It'll be expensive." Did I mention "there'll be lots of people?" Instead of visualising the warm sun on my back, I was thinking about airport delays, cities filled with traffic fumes and tourist-priced cups of coffee. A Plan B was required.

My bags are packed and tomorrow my trusty companion and I will be heading to Ross and Cromarty, a tantalisingly scenic part of the country with a population density of 10 people per square kilometre. In fact I should have been going on this holiday exactly seven years ago. It wasn't so much a "holiday" as a "honeymoon". Alas Mr Goddess decided to enrol at art school, and the honeymoon dates clashed with matriculation. My bottom lip trembled as I said: "You've got to follow your dreams," and the selflessness shone from mine own eyes. Seven years on, I'm suffused with an itch to go on the trip I spent all those months planning. And so back to that stuff about population densities. Here in the Borders, we have 24 people wedged into every square kilometre, so the emptiness of Ross and Cromarty will be a blessed relief.

This investigation into populations is relevant not just to my unsociable tendencies, but also to World Habitat Day (4 October, www.unhabitat.org). This United Nations initiative is designed to focus our attention on the state of our cities. By 2030, it's anticipated that three-quarters of the world's population will be urban, and the biggest cities will be in the developing world. In terms of population density, Glasgow comes 73rd in global rankings, with 3,300 people per square kilometre, but topping the list is Mumbai with 29,650. I'm trying to visualise what that number of people would look like in the Borders and it's giving me an anxiety attack.

Having people living in such close quarters leads to well-documented problems in terms of shelter, sanitation and access to education and health services. Add climate change to the mix and the risks get worse.

The world's one billion slum dwellers are the most vulnerable and in cities like Mumbai, Lagos and Mexico City there are millions of people crammed into dwellings built on fault lines or flood-prone areas. Meanwhile, in the cities of the developed world, the environmental impact is focused less on climate-related disasters than on the amount of resources city-dwellers get through on a daily basis.

There are lots of other organisations trying to future-proof our cities. C40 (www.c40cities.org) is an alliance that has pledged to reduce carbon emissions and increase energy efficiency. These measures are going to be easier for some cities than others, but at least the powers that be are looking ahead at the worst case scenarios to plan for a brighter tomorrow. And on that note, I'm heading off to where over-crowding isn't an issue, unless you count the midges. ■

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Band aid

Having weight loss surgery is not a quick fix. Those wanting a lighter body have an uphill struggle afterwards

WORDS RUTH WALKER

WHEN Vanessa Feltz was fitted with a gastric band back in June, she joked that in no time at all, she'd be performing as Cheryl Cole's body double. Less than three months later - and still a long way from being mistaken for the *X-Factor* judge - she was confessing to having squeezed a cupcake through the band. Proof, were it needed, that bariatric surgery is far from the quick-fix it is sometimes portrayed to be.

And while there are celebrity success stories - from Fern Britton and Roseanne Barr to Anne Diamond and Diego Maradona - there are one or two cautionary tales. Sharon Osbourne, for instance, who lost more than 100 pounds after surgery in 1999. But in 2006 she announced she had gained weight and was having the band removed.

Some estimates claim around five per cent of weight loss surgery patients regain the weight. For the rest, it's a life-changing procedure that is growing in popularity. A recent *British Medical Journal* report found the number of people in England undergoing the surgery on the NHS had increased tenfold in under a decade, from 238 a year to more than 2,543 in 2007.

However, in Scotland, despite the fact that 40 per cent of the population who have a BMI over 35 are both eligible and willing to undergo surgery - that's around 24,000 people - only 300 procedures a year are available and only half of these are available on the NHS.

A Scottish taskforce has been set up to address this shortfall. Called Severe and Complicated Obesity Treatment Service, or SCOTS, the group is led by Duff Bruce, a bariatric surgeon based in Aberdeen who claims bariatric surgery is the only effective long-term treatment for severe obesity and, by curing associated conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancers, it could save the Scottish health service more than £171 million a year.

Carol Bowen Ball underwent a gastric bypass in November 2009, after she had seen her weight soar to 17 stones over a period of 30 years. "Weight loss surgery is the last thing you ever do," she admits. "It is a very serious operation. The work doesn't start until you have the surgery because that is just the tool to help you. Life afterwards, to begin with, is more difficult than it was before."

Post-surgery, patients have to get used to a new way of eating. First, it's

SHRINK FIT Both Diego Maradona and Fern Britton underwent gastric band surgery to lose weight



fluids, then soft foods like porridge and scrambled eggs, then foods they will eat for life. "But they're very different to what you would have been eating before," cautions Bowen Ball. "You have to make sure they're high in protein, low in fat and sugar. People will have between 600 and 1,000 calories a day, but they have to pack in about 70g of protein which means food has to be highly nutritious. You won't find that in a ready meal."

She maintains that the advice available varies enormously. "If you think it's a magic wand and all you have to do is eat half the amount you used to eat, my goodness me you're mistaken. There are ways of putting weight back on. You have to have major lifestyle changes and most people struggle. They come from hospital, stand in front of the fridge and think: now what?"

Aware of the difficulties many face, Bowen Ball founded the UK's first bariatric cookery website, which has now become the UK's first bariatric cookery



HEALTHY BITE

'MY WASHING LINE IS A SOURCE OF SOME PRIDE, I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU'

RUTH WALKER

WHEN it comes to the battle of the sexes, it is not the disparity between career opportunities and earning potential that truly separates us. Nor is it anything to do with an ability to multi-task, the distribution of household chores and childcare responsibilities or our occasionally differing attitudes to the correct position of the toilet seat.

It is not even – and I know you'll find this hard to believe – the fact that women can shop for pleasure, are able to ask for directions without feeling in any way diminished sexually, or can spend nearly £100 on a haircut without smarting.

Bins? When we see a full one, we think: "Better empty that." When blokes see one, they think: "Plenty room yet." It's as if they're a one-man diamond mine, crushing increasing amounts of waste into an impossibly small space until it can only end in tears (that's as in the ripped bin bag variety – burst tea bags, rotting apple cores and scrunched-up lottery tickets all over the floor; guess who's going to clear that little lot up).

And, boys, here's the thing. There is no such creature as the toothpaste fairy, the soap sprite or the loo roll elf. That's us, your long-suffering better halves, faithfully and reliably replacing stuff just as it runs out. Spooky, isn't it?

But, hey, what's a slightly blunt razor or a kitchen surface covered in toast crumbs between friends, eh? What really separates the inhabitants of Mars and Venus is the way we hang up our washing.

My washing line is a source of some pride, I don't mind telling you. It's colour-coordinated. And size-specific. Before anything goes up, it is given a good shake to get rid of crinkles. Socks are paired, trousers dangle together in a row and T-shirts are always pegged from under the arms. Not the shoulders. Not the hems. The pits. That way you don't get any visible peg puckerings, see?

Furthermore, there are two overflowing boxes under my bed containing single socks, all in vaguely differing shades of black. I could put them together, ignoring the fact that they are mis-matched, but then what would I do when the pair re-appeared?

You can imagine, then, my shock and dismay, when I learned this is not a universal quality shared by the rest of the civilised world. Indeed, some very distinct, gender-specific differences have come to my attention. One friend, for instance, doesn't pair socks. And if his daughter occasionally goes out in public wearing slightly odd hose, well, it's quirky, right?

A colleague doesn't get the straightening-out thing – he just hangs his stuff as it comes out of the machine.

It's not uncommon for his trousers to droop by one peg from some vague patch of fabric to the right of the crotch. Doesn't he realise they dry like that?

Another colleague's husband insists on hanging her jumpers by the sleeves. The neighbours are convinced a family of orangutans is living in their back garden.

Anyway, I tell her, everyone knows you should reshape jumpers while damp then dry them flat on a towel on the bed.

"Not if you have one of those special racks from Lakeland," she retorts. Someone should really tell monkey boy. ■

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book. The recipes start with smoothies you can take post-surgery, followed by soft foods like soufflés before moving on to high-protein foods for life.

Now weighing around 11 and a half stones, she says: "The one thing surgery did for me is get rid of the diet police in my head. I do weigh myself, but if one day it happens to be higher than another, it doesn't worry me."

More than that, however; it has given her a new zest for life. "It's made a difference in that I get up in the morning having had a good night's sleep. I can walk to the wardrobe and pull out anything and know it will fit. Just being able to get out and about."

But she admits it's a learning curve all the time. "When you start losing weight, there's a terrible temptation to go back to old eating habits. And I have been told if you were that way inclined you could stretch the pouch. You can bypass the band by puréeing things – we've heard about people melting chocolate – but why you would want to sabotage your chances I don't know. The band just gives you the tool to get it right but if you still have issues with food you can work round it.

"There's a huge responsibility on GPs to inform patients about everything," she adds, "but it's your own duty to find out absolutely everything you can. This is not a bus you get on and two stops later you get off. This is for life. It's a big deal." ■

Return To Slender by Carol Bowen Ball, £9.95, www.bariatriccooker.com

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ENLARGED PROSTATE *I have an enlarged prostate which I am told is non-cancerous. What is available for this condition?*
Michael, Bo'ness

Benign (non-cancerous) enlargement of the prostate continues to affect more than half of men over the age of 60.

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Mr Antony Riddick is a specialist consultant urologist with a sub-specialty interest in diseases of the prostate and urological oncology at Spire Murrayfield Hospital. Mr Riddick can provide a consultation for anyone seeking help with prostatic symptoms and for consideration of Green Light Laser therapy.

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