

HOW NOT TO MURDER  
YOUR GRUMPY

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The colophon of Saffkhet is a representation of the ancient Egyptian goddess of  
wisdom and knowledge, who is credited with inventing writing.  
Saffkhet Publishing is named after her because the founders met in Egypt.

## INTRODUCTION

If you have picked up this book, you more than likely have a Grumpy Old Man to deal with. You have my sympathy. Endearing as he might be, he'll need careful handling. If your Grumpy is suffering from "Irritable Male Syndrome", driving you mad by hanging around the house or facing retirement, then you have come to the right place.

You have here the key to the most difficult of achievements—keeping your GOM occupied, stimulated and most importantly, out from under your feet.

Take heart. There are over 700 ideas in this book to enchant your chap and entice him into a world of his own. They are not just your ordinary choices, selected randomly from a list. Many of the following activities and hobbies have been tested out on my very own retired Mr G. He has been the most perfect, unwitting guinea pig.

GOMs facing not just older age, but also retirement, will be anxious about their future. They will require challenges and activities to stimulate them. They have just spent their whole lives working and being occupied. Now they need other passions to keep them from feeling unworthy or depressed.

Recent research shows age is no barrier to pursuing hobbies:

- Nearly three quarters of Brits have tried new activities since turning 60.
- Fifty-three percent revel in the freedom that the later years offer.
- One in five Brits says active hobbies help them feel younger.

Many people over the age of 60 in the UK are embracing their senior years by taking up new activities, according to recent research from Age UK. Seventy-one percent of those are tackling new challenges like learning a foreign language, taking to the dance floor, or even getting the adrenaline pumping with outdoor activities like bungee jumping, kayaking, and mountain climbing.

There is no excuse for your grouch to stay at home and vegetate in his twilight years. He needs to stop wrestling with retirement and tackle a new venture, if only to prevent you from losing all patience and your own sanity.

In this book, you'll find a whole host of exciting ideas for your beloved Grumpy to try out. After all, a happy Grumpy is one less problem for you to deal with each day.

Author's note: No Grumpy Old Men were harmed in the writing of this book.

# A

Without further ado, let's look at the abundance of activities that your Grumpy can enjoy beginning with the letter A.

Introduce your Grumpy to the absorbing and completely time-consuming hobby of aviation, particularly **aeroplanes**.

First, get him a copy of *Top Gun* (or any good film about flying) to whet his appetite. Next, purchase a trial flying lesson. He'll love it. Honestly, he will. Don't be mean though, and get him an aerobatic flight. He'll come home a horrible pasty shade of grey, and you'll never get him to agree to that holiday to Alicante you hoped you could take next year.

Once he has "the flying bug", ensure he signs up for flying lessons. Now, you'll have to make some serious economies to fund this new hobby, and you'll have to forget that holiday to Alicante for a while, but it'll be worth it. He'll soon transform into a new man, and which one of us wouldn't fancy a Tom Cruise-a-like coming home after a long day up in the clouds?

Flying doesn't just keep these Grumpy Old Men out of the house for an hour or two. Oh no, they have to get to the airfield early to set up, have a pre-flight briefing, a couple of cups of coffee and some cake, chat to their mates and ensure they have planned a route. Then, there is the actual flying, followed by a debrief, and the obligatory drink at the pub to recap the entire flight.

There are exams to be taken and much studying to be done. Many a night will be spent sitting at the dining table with pencils in their mouths, as they attempt to learn the principles of aviation law or meteorology. You'll be able to relax on the settee and watch all those soaps without any dark muttering coming from the other end.

You may find that you will need to learn the phonetic alphabet though, just to show willingness and give him a hand. Let me assist you by starting with: Golf, Romeo, Uniform, Mike, Papa, Yankee.

If you can't interest him in this particular hobby, then you could try him with a remote-controlled aircraft. This is the best of both worlds. He can fly his aeroplane without taking examinations, wherever he fancies, and it won't cost a fortune. There will be more about remote-controlled vehicles later.

Last but not least, you could offer him the chance to do some plane spotting. This is obviously the cheapest option, and can be enjoyed at the airport or in your back garden if you are fortunate enough to live under the flight path.

If he decides on the latter, you'll be able to book that trip to Alicante. After all, he'll see plenty of aeroplanes.

What do William Tell, Robin Hood, and Cupid have in common? The answer is **archery** or toxophily as it is also called. (You might need that piece of information for a pub quiz.)

Archery is one of the most ancient sports known to mankind. In ancient times and the medieval period, this activity was used for protecting people from enemies and for hunting wild animals. Today, it is regarded as a recreational activity or sport, and is looked upon as a way to improve concentration, mental strength, and precision ... where was I? Oh yes, sorry, I was thinking about Kevin Costner in the 1991 film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and got distracted. Today, two forms of archery are prevalent: target archery and field archery.

Sign your fractious man up for lessons and watch him improve, along with his game. Word of warning: don't let him place an apple on your head "for practice".

question: what did the lustful maiden  
say to the handsome archer?  
answer: you make me quiver.

There are an amazing number of activities beginning with the letter A, including **art**, **alpine skiing** (not much good if you live a long way from mountains), **angling**, **American football**, **allotments**, **anagrams**, **antiques**, **archaeology**, **arm wrestling**, **aromatherapy**, **arts and crafts**, **athletics**,

**astronomy, astrology, astral projections, auctions, autographs, and automobilia.**

Has your Grumpy still got a sense of adventure, like feisty Doris Long from Hayling Island, who threw herself from the top of the civic office building in Portsmouth on her 96th birthday, accompanied by BBC presenter Chris Evans and actor James Corden, in a 220-foot **abseil**?

Doris, well known for her fund-raising efforts, has since broken her record of being the oldest person to abseil down a building, when she abseiled down a 200-foot block of flats on her ninety-seventh birthday. I wonder what plans she has for her next one.

**Art** comes in many forms and guises. I am a fan of works by Matisse, Jackson Pollack, and Picasso, so I don't know if I am the right person to guide you through the choices available for your man. There are books and materials galore for him to try out, and with luck, he will find what works best for him, be it charcoal or oil. If you can't find a medium that suits your grouchy fellow, hit him over the head with the easel.

Here are a few fun facts to hurl at him; see if you can capture his interest in this activity:

- Leonardo da Vinci worked on Mona Lisa for twelve to fifteen years intermittently.
- He also invented high heels. (Don't you just love this man?)
- Henri Matisse's painting *Le Bateau* spent forty-six days hanging upside down at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. No one noticed until then.
- English artist Andy Brown created a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II by stitching together 1,000 used tea bags.
- Picasso could draw before he could walk, and his first word was Spanish for pencil.
- The first pencil was invented in England in 1565. (I wonder if it was 2B or not 2B.)

question: what do you call an  
american drawing?  
answer: a yankee doodle.

If you fail to bring out his artistic side, you could attempt to hook him with **angling**. And if you reel him in on this one, he'll be one of a staggering twenty percent of the population who have been freshwater fishing over the last ten years, according to a 2010 report in the *Angling Times*.

The report discovered that angling had become an acceptable pastime, even among the young. There was a thirty-five percent increase in rod licence sales over the decade, pointing to an increasing interest in this hobby.

I don't want to carp on about it, but if he fails to rise to this bait, a fish and chip supper will be the closest you'll get him to this hobby.

I was tempted to tell you about collecting **airline sick bags** as a hobby, but with the rise in budget airlines, it will soon be the case that you take your own.

**Astronomy** will probably be more to his taste than **astrology**. A dark starlit night and a large telescope can keep a GOM amused for some time. Ensure his lens is pointing in the direction of the stars and not towards next door's sixty-inch plasma screen television, even if they do have Sky and you don't.

I end this section with **amateur dramatics**. I am sure deep within your crotchety chap, there is a desire to express himself and be heard. There are many local amateur dramatic productions. If he can't act, he could get involved with the props, make-up, or costumes, filming the entire play, or serving ice creams in the intervals. "Surely, there must be something he can do, Lovey?"



## B

Hobbies your other half might be encouraged to take up include the following: **birdwatching**, **butterflies**, **bowling** (forget Crown or lawn bowls—send him to France to learn the art of Boules), **bingo**, **badminton**, **battery-operated toys**, **bridge**, **bicycles**, or **bagpipes** (invest in a large stock of ear plugs if your man takes up the bagpipes).

More unusual hobbies might include **bungee jumping** from high structures such as bridges or specially made platforms while attached to a thick rubberised rope and harness. Think that might be too dangerous? Apparently not for John Macdonald of Eriskay, who dropped forty metres (131 feet) from the Garry Bridge in Killiecrankie, Perthshire, to mark his eightieth birthday in November 2011. However, he is not the oldest bungee jumper. The oldest recorded bungee jumper in the world is 96-year-old Mohr Keets, who jumped 216 metres (708 feet) off a bridge in South Africa in 2010.

If your Grumpy is still adventurous at heart but doesn't fancy launching himself off a bridge, you could encourage him to take up **bodyflying**, where he would be suspended in the air by means of jets of air blowing upwards from the ground.

When a skydiver jumps from a plane, their drop speed is around 120 miles per hour. In bodyflying, or indoor skydiving as it is sometimes called, air is blown upwards at a speed of 120 miles per hour which will lift a human body to simulate flying. This activity is undertaken indoors and the person flying can move his body up and down and do somersaults, rolls and many other manoeuvres.

There are a few places, Milton Keynes and Manchester for example, where you can send your GOM for this experience and, with a bit of luck, he'll come back not only exhilarated, but sporting a new hairstyle.

Not keen on the above? Why not drag him into the twenty-first century and introduce your sourpuss to the joys of **blogging**? This is a subject close to my heart, having started my own blog only a couple of years ago. I did it as an experiment and research for my novel *Mini Skirts and Laughter Lines*, in which a middle-aged woman sets up a blog to upload the blunders and bloopers that populate her days. Like the main character, I soon found myself part of an enormous supportive community of bloggers. Some of them are, in fact, Grumpy Old Men whose own blogs make me roar with laughter.

Your GOM could benefit hugely from starting up his own blog. There are a staggering number of bloggers in cyber-land, and although the majority appear to be female, statistics show that sixty percent of blogs in the States<sup>1</sup> are written by men.

Your Grumpy will like to moan or complain, and there can no better way to do it than online. He can vent about everything from the weather and finance to politics and the state of young people today, without unleashing it all onto you. He might even attract other Grumps, and they could form a grumpy online clan which should keep him out of mischief all day.

Blogs already run by grumpy guys include Grumpy Bloggers, Grumpy Git, and Grumpy Blog. See, he wouldn't be alone.

Blogs are easy to set up, cost nothing and fill oodles of time. The most popular blogging platforms are Wordpress and Blogger. Blogging started in the 1990s when people shared interests, hobbies, thoughts and so on. By 2012, it has become a major publishing business with blogs covering any subject. There are an estimated 31 million bloggers in the States.

You are never too old to blog, and indeed, some of my followers who also blog, are in their eighties. The world's oldest blogger, Ruth Hamilton, died three days shy of her 110th birthday. She blogged to the end.

If you fancy some muscle, then suggest he takes up **body building**. Don't let him tell you he is too old. Point him in the direction of 91-year-old Charles Eugster, who had a crisis at 85. According to an article in the *Guardian* (2011), "I looked at myself in the mirror and saw an old man. I was overweight, my posture

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Bullas *Blogging Statistics, Facts and Figures in 2012—Infographic*

was terrible and there was skin hanging off me. I looked like a wreck.”

Since then, Charles has taken up body building, trains regularly and looks fantastic. He isn't chasing youth though; he is chasing health, and is a shining example to us all. If that doesn't serve to send him to the gym, pin up a photograph of a topless Sylvester Stallone training in the gym. He's 66 and will still make your heart flutter.

I should probably bounce over **breakdancing**, **belly dancing**, and **ballet** to mention **ballroom dancing**. I'll touch on this again under the letter D. I discovered various YouTube clips of aged people breakdancing, and one of a 90-year-old granny dancing to Whitney Houston. Even more impressive is Frederick Salter, who, after performing the rumba, cha-cha, samba, paso, waltz, quickstep, tango, and foxtrot, passed his IDTA Gold Bar Level 3 examinations in Latin and ballroom with honours at the age of 100 years 245 days, in Eltham, London, on 15th October 2011. He is the oldest competitive ballroom dancer in the world. (Information from *The Guinness World Records* 2013)

**question: how do hens dance?**  
**answer: chick to chick.**

Akin to birdwatching is budgerigar-keeping. **Budgerigars** are believed to have been brought from Australia to England in 1840. In fact, bones discovered in Australia show that wild budgies have been on this planet even longer than humans. Budgies are the most popular pet in the world today and, with proper training, can learn to say about one hundred words. Unlike the human species, the males are more likely to talk or whistle than females. Don't let your Grumpy teach it, or it'll no doubt yell, "I can't believe it!" a hundred times a day.

Budgies might be chatterboxes, but **bees** are productive. Honey bees have been around for millions of years, and honey is the only food that includes all the substances necessary to sustain life, including enzymes, vitamins, minerals, and water. It also contains “pinocembrin”, an antioxidant associated with improved brain functioning.

Bees are under threat at the moment, so your Grump would be doing us all a favour if he took up this hobby. Bees are generally very easy to keep, and if handled correctly, stings are rare. I would recommend he seeks professional advice, rather than buzzing off and starting up without correct guidelines.

question: what kind of bee hums and  
drops things?  
answer: a fumble bee.

question: what kind of bee can't be  
understood?  
answer: a mumble bee.

question: who is a bee's favourite  
painter?  
answer: pablo beecasso.

question: what do bees do if they  
want to use public transport?  
answer: wait at a buzz stop.

Okay, I'll stop now and move onto my next suggestion, which should hold a certain appeal: **Beer**. Not just the drinking of beer, as enjoyable as that may seem, or brewing of beer, which you can read about under Home Brew, but the collection of beer caps, tops, glasses, bottles, or mats. You can take the last one a little further and attempt beer-mat flipping. It'll take some time before your Grumpy will be able to beat a record set by Mat Hand, who flipped and caught a pile of 112 beer mats in 2001 in Nottingham, UK. It took him over 4 hours and 129 attempts before he broke the previous record of 111. (Information from The Guinness World Records 2012)

Other activities include **billiards, books, brass rubbing, brass bands, botany, bonsai, bus tickets**, and last but not least, **bus racing**, which is probably best tried out in game form, even though the BBC programme *Top Gear* attempted to bring it to life. Genuine races are held in the States, but I found little evidence of any in the UK. I can't see it catching on here, somehow.

## C

The list of hobbies beginning with the letter C offers a cornucopia of delights. Possibilities include: **caravans**, **canal boats**, **coin-collecting** (they should be good at that since they don't like spending money), **cooking**, **calligraphy**, **crossword puzzles**, **clay pigeon shooting**, **CAMERA** (real-ale drinking), **cinema**, **cribbage**, **cricket**, **curtain-making**, or **crocheting**.

The melodic sound of church bells ringing on a Sunday morning could mean more than a welcome to church. It could mean your GOM is out of the house practising his new hobby of **campanology**. It is quite an art, and some musical knowledge is required, but if you could pique his interest, not only will he be out of the house on a Sunday morning, allowing you to have a peaceful lie-in, but he'll need to go to bell-ringing practice. These often occur on an evening, which will mean you can watch your favourite soaps on television—the ones he invariably complains about. “Dingdong ... result!”

Doesn't ring his bell? Given that any old Grumpy harps on about the *Good Old Days*, especially where **cars** are concerned, why not invest in a project for him? Encourage him to buy an old car, one with a “proper” engine he can work on, that will require hours of labour and much mess in your kitchen, but will keep your beloved a happy man. A few days working on an old car and bringing it back to life will put a smile on any crabby face.

To make sure this is a project for him, start by questioning him about his first car. If he gets all misty-eyed about that Mini he used to own, then you know you have cracked it. Check through motoring magazines for a cheap second-hand car, and Bob's your uncle. Give it to him tied up with a large bow as a present with the heart-felt message, “I thought you would like to recapture