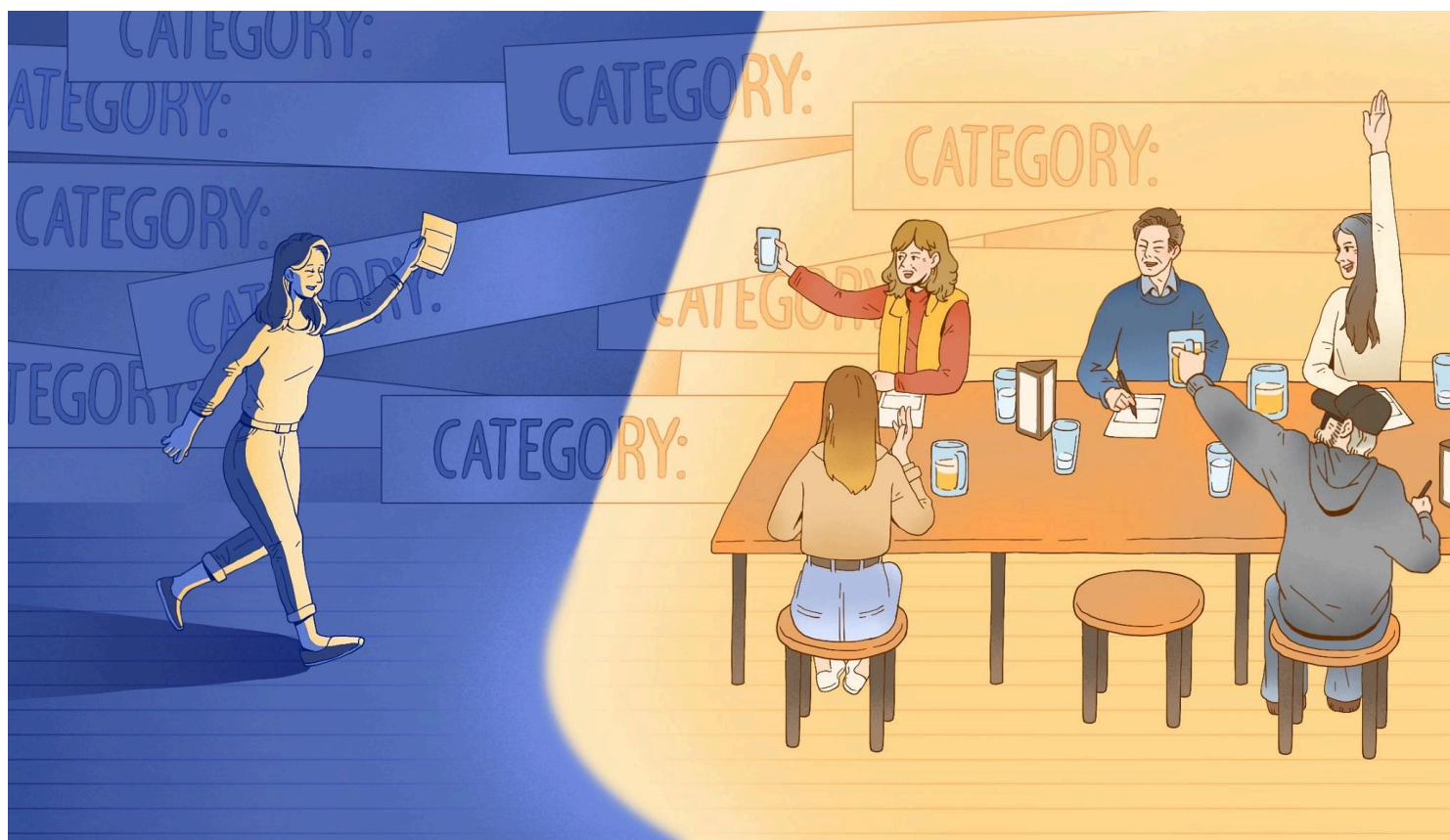


# When Trivia Isn't Trivial

How a weekly pub night tradition helps us cope with being in the sandwich generation

By Kim O'Connell, AARP

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Weekly trivia night at her neighborhood Irish pub is a way for writer Kim O'Connell to connect with friends also navigating life as part of the "sandwich generation."

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It's another Wednesday trivia night at our local Irish pub, and the category is "songs about flying." It's a three-part audio question, trickier than most, but music categories tend to work well with our trivia team. Nearly all of us — about a dozen strong in any given week — are in our 50s, so our musical knowledge stretches from The Beatles and Rolling Stones to grunge and boy bands, from Madonna and Britney to Taylor Swift and beyond. A couple members, including my husband, Eric, are musicians. So we feel confident when the first song is a softball: "Fly Me to the Moon." We all

instantly recognize Frank Sinatra, that icon from our parents' generation. The next song is from 2000, hitting us squarely in our Gen X hearts: "I'm Like a Bird." Nelly Furtado. We've got this.



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Then comes the third song, "Flying or Crying." The singer's twang tells us it's a country song, released long after our formative years. Although we like to think we're staying current with music via our kids and pop culture — we'd gotten a Sabrina Carpenter question correct in a previous week, after all — now we're stumped. On my answer sheet, I put down a random name that we all suspect is wrong, and it is. The song is actually by Zach Bryan. But we shrug it off and move on.

Classic Hollywood. Major-league sluggers. Irish rebellions. 20th-century novels. *Saturday Night Live* hosts. All of these and more have been topics that my trivia team and I have tackled in recent months. Most of us met each other when our kids rowed together on the local high school crew, and so our team name is Mötley Crëw, in honor of both the unlauted '80s heavy metal band (albeit not their spelling) and our kids' sport. After they all graduated, we wondered how we'd stay in touch when we wouldn't see each other at regattas. So we started a team of our own, and it quickly became an important tradition: Over rounds of beer and chicken wings, we try to win. We rarely do win, but every Wednesday night, we show up for each other.

When you're in [the sandwich generation](#), it feels like all you do is show up. For me, [trivia](#) has been a necessary escape from [being the primary caregiver](#) for my frail and elderly mother, as she has been navigating a serious and ongoing medical situation. For months now, I have been driving her to a range of appointments leading up to a risky but necessary surgery. With her, the categories are pain levels, medical histories and living wills. At the same time, my husband and I have also just launched our firstborn child to college, even as we are actively parenting his sister, still in high school. Here, the topics include shower caddies, grades, friend drama, and all our hopes and fears.

Our weekly pub night get-together is a terrific reprieve from day-to-day pressures. But the summer before our kids left for college, in between question rounds, my friends and I dared to say the quiet parts out loud — that we were feeling sad and worried, but excited, too, about our children [flying from the nest](#). Some questions are harder than others. "What will we do?" we ask ourselves. "Who will we be now?"

[Trivia night](#) is like life in some ways. You show up without any idea of what the topics are going to be or whether you'll know the answer. Some answers are wholly unknowable, like the exact right moment to suggest assisted living for our elderly parents, or to take their car keys away, two topics I know I need to tackle soon. With my mother and my son alike, I walk a tightrope between

respecting that they are adults, separate from me and capable of making their own decisions, and helping them be safe and whole.



*At a recent trivia night, O'Connell (second on the left, with her arm around her husband) and her team were joined by some of their college-aged kids.*

COURTESY KIM A. O'CONNELL

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But trivia night also teaches us that none of us need to have or find the answers alone. Our team astonishes me with its level of accomplishment: We have among us a physician, a college dean, government executives, data crunchers, a schoolteacher, retirees and world travelers. We each literally bring something special and unique to the table in the back corner of the pub.



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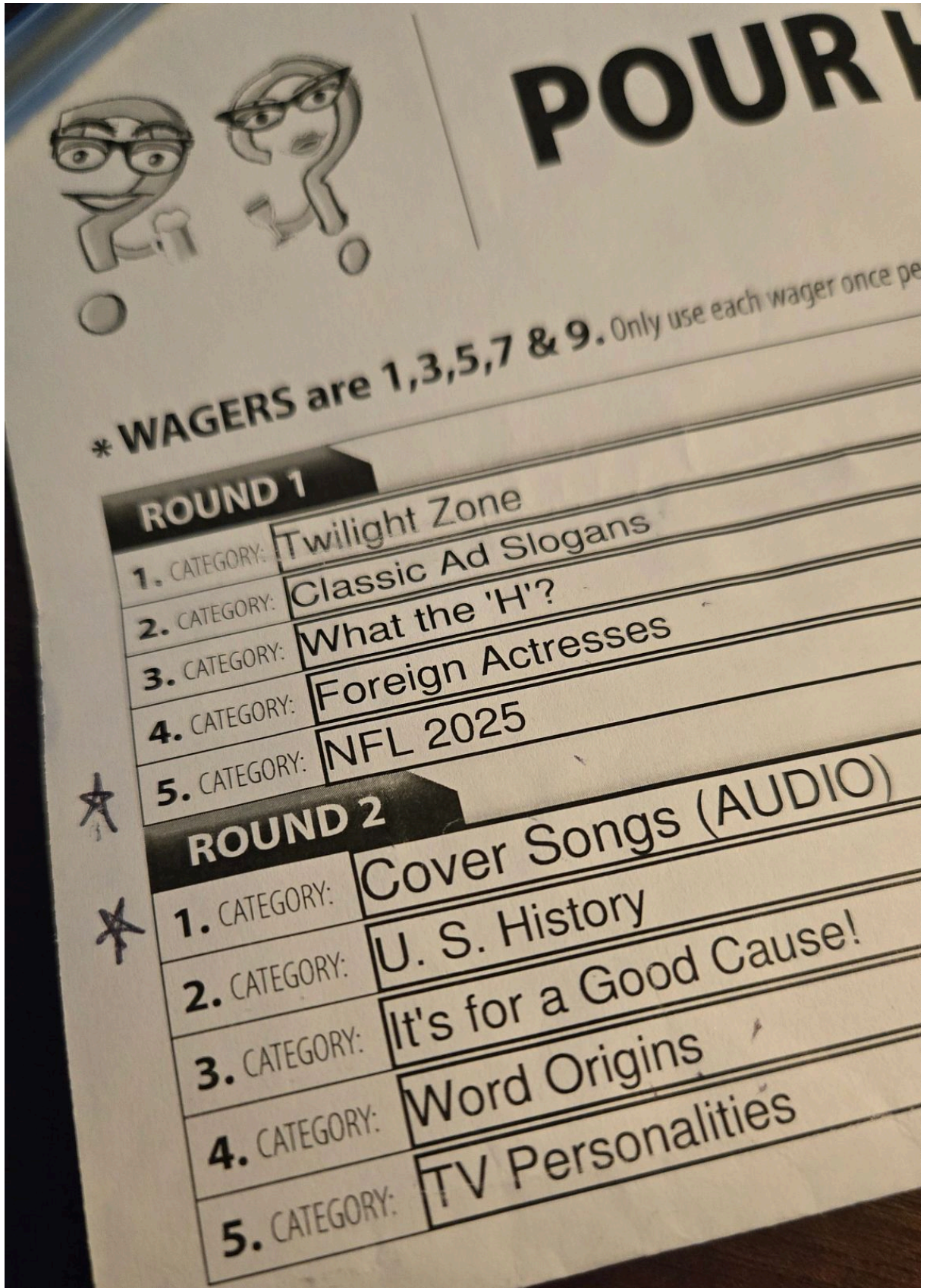
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My mother and my children — and my life with them as I have known it — are changing. For many of my friends, it is much the same. Perhaps it is not surprising that we find ourselves seeking out something we can count on, that feels the same, week after week.

So we keep showing up for Wednesday night pub trivia, where the topics might include world geography, anatomical terms and card games, but will always include consolation, laughter and friendship.

When we heard that the category was going to be “songs about flying,” we began tossing out song titles just to get the neurons going. Someone suggested the Tom Petty classic “Learning to Fly.” Turns out that wasn’t one of the answers, but I like the answer all the same: “The good old days may not return,” Petty sang. “And the rocks might melt and the sea may burn. I’m learning to fly, but I ain’t got wings.” No, we don’t, but every week at the pub, we do have each other.

*AARP essays share a point of view in the author’s voice, drawn from expertise or experience, and do not necessarily reflect the views of AARP.*



A trivia-night answer sheet shows categories ranging from sports to history.

COURTESY KIM A. O'CONNELL

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[Kim O'Connell](#) is a longtime freelance writer based in Arlington, Virginia, whose articles and essays have appeared in national and regional publications including The New York Times, The Washington Post, HuffPost Personal, National Parks Traveler, Catapult, Atlas Obscura, Al Jazeera and more.

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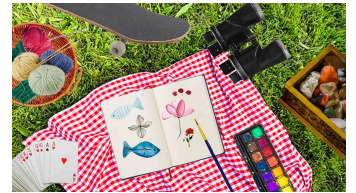
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