

Our peculiar PASTIMES!

Three women share the unusual hobbies they enjoy, which might surprise people they know

'Curling has played a huge part in my life'

Vicky Gumley, 58, is an Airbnb host. She lives in Edinburgh with her husband John, 57.

Aged 13, I went with my parents to my local ice rink. I had seen how much excitement being part of the sociable curling community had brought my parents and, as a sporty kid, I was happy to try something new. I didn't know then that curling would take me to various countries across the world, introduce me to my husband, build long-lasting friendships and still be such an important part of my life more than 40 years later.

When I was playing for my school curling team, I saw John on the ice and I can still remember the white Adidas curling shoes he was wearing. We got together, coincidentally on Valentine's Day, after both



'I play up to 10 games a week'

playing in the Scottish Curling Championships.

In 2022, I went on the Senior Women's Tour to the USA, where we played every day across 11 states.

I love the sound the stones make, the tactics, the environment and the community. I've been curling with some of my friends since we were teenagers. Sometimes I play up to 10 games a week. I become so absorbed when playing that I'm often still on

the ice at 11.30 at night, having lost all track of time.

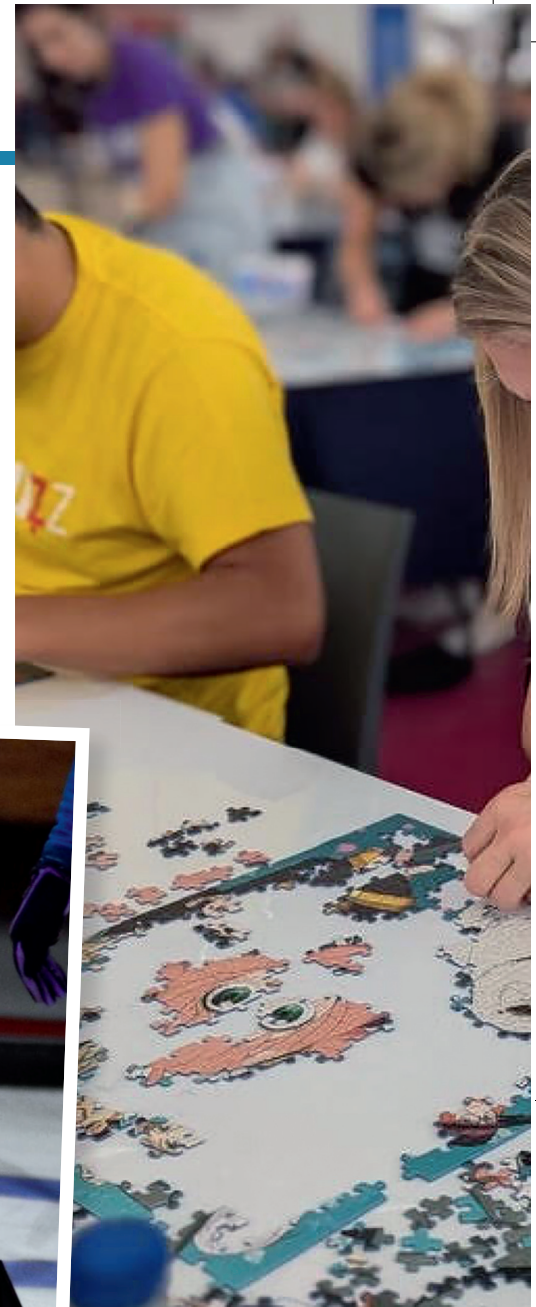
I'm on the ice almost every day in winter. Most people don't want to go out on dark Scottish winter nights, but the rink is always bright and white, which I find uplifting.

I give back to the sport through coaching others. I've coached in Poland, and the French and Nigerian national teams. Life has come full circle as I also now serve on the board of directors at the ice rink back where it started all those years ago.

'My body confidence and strength have grown'

Kath Hamer, 57, is a swimming teacher from Cheshire. She lives with her husband, Nick, 61, her two youngest children, Callum, 21, and Lilianna, 19, plus their cockapoos Maggie and Mabel.

After watching my daughter perform in a Christmas aerial arts show in 2018, I stayed to see the adults perform pole fitness. I was completely blown away by the strength and flexibility of the women, many of whom were in their





'I love having a hobby that no one would expect'

Aneka Thompson, 40, is a CrossFit coach who lives in Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

My grandad was a problem solver who was always doing crosswords or jigsaw puzzles. I have happy memories of doing jigsaws with him in his later life and as a family at Christmastime. Like many people, I returned to puzzling during lockdown. When friends remarked how quickly I was completing them, I went online to see what a fast time was. I discovered the World Speed Jigsaw Championship in Spain and that I was nowhere near as fast as the winning times.

'It releases serotonin in your brain'

I joined a Facebook group for speed jigsaw puzzlers, where I shared time-lapse videos doing jigsaws with a welcoming and supportive group. Living Down Under at the time, I joined the Australian Jigsaw Puzzle Association, and by 2021, I had signed up for the World Jigsaw Puzzle Championship

taking place the following year.

This event is an incredible experience. Your adrenaline is through the roof! Every time you connect a puzzle piece serotonin is released in your brain, so imagine that happening at a fast pace.

This year was my third time at the World Championship. I can complete a 500-piece jigsaw in just under an hour, but the winner took just 26 minutes! It's amazing to see so many people

arrive as strangers but leave as friends after competing as a pair or part of a team.

I now run the UK Jigsaw Puzzle

Association, hosting lots of online and in-person competitions, and I'm excited for our first National Championship in Bradford in April this year.

My CrossFitters tease me and ask if I'm going to throw a puzzle into the workout, but I absolutely love my unusual hobby. I think it's cool to do something that nobody would guess I do if they saw me walking down the street.



50s, like me. Feeling ready for a new challenge, I signed up for the beginners' class in the new year.

It was nerve-racking walking in for the first time, and I was wearing far more clothing than everyone else! I found it painful to use unconditioned parts of my body to grip a steel pole, and felt embarrassed by how much of the instructor's time I was taking up.

I apologised and said I wouldn't come again, but the instructor, Alex, and the other women encouraged me to come back the following week. I was covered in bruises after that first session, but I did go back, as everyone had been so nice and supportive.

By the end of 2019, I was

performing in the Christmas show that had inspired me in the first place! I was so nervous, but I felt such a huge buzz afterwards and was very proud of myself.

Now I'm at the studio almost every day, doing a combination of pole fitness, stretch classes, aerial arts and aerial yoga. I enjoy the supportive environment, the challenge, and being able to just be in the moment and switch off. It took a while before I braved dancing on the pole with heels, but my body confidence and strength have grown. I still get bruises – or pole kisses as we like to call them – but now, I wear them with pride.



'I enjoy being in the moment'