

## #HIPPOS

### Hippos Are Not Fat

Hippos don't swim in the traditional sense. Instead, they are incredibly buoyant, and they 'walk' along the riverbed



Hippos are often misunderstood as slow, fat creatures, but there's much more to them than meets the eye. Despite their size, hippos are not simply overweight; their bulk comes from thick skin and dense connective tissue, not from excessive fat. Additionally, their unique biology and adaptations make them fascinating creatures. From their impressive tusks to their ability to thrive in water, hippos are a marvel of evolution.

#### Hippos Aren't Actually Fat

A common misconception is that hippos are fat, but this isn't entirely accurate. While they are large animals, most of their bulk comes from thick skin and muscle mass, not fat. Hippos have a 5 cm thick layer of skin, which is packed with dense connective tissue. This thick skin, instead of fat, gives them their rounded appearance. The layer acts as armor, protecting them from the harsh elements and possible predators. Hippos' large body mass is also vital for maintaining heat balance, helping them stay cool under the African sun.

#### Hippos Can't Swim Underwater

Another myth is that hippos are excellent swimmers. In reality, hippos don't swim in the traditional sense. Instead, they are incredibly buoyant, and they 'walk' along the riverbed. They can stay submerged for several minutes by holding their breath, but they don't use their legs to swim. Instead, they rely on the water's buoyancy to float and move around, pushing off the bottom with their powerful legs. When submerged, hippos use this method to travel short distances underwater, then surface for air.

#### Thick Skin and Connective Tissue

Hippos' 5 cm thick skin is designed to protect them from the elements, and it's not just a cosmetic feature. Beneath this tough outer layer, they have dense connective tissue that helps retain moisture and keep them hydrated in dry environments. Their skin also shields them from cuts, abrasions, and sunburn. This protective layer is vital in the hot African climate where they often spend time, out of the water.

Despite their bulk and somewhat intimidating appearance, hippos are not fat in the conventional sense. Their massive bodies are the result of thick skin and powerful muscles, not excess fat. They are highly adapted to their environment with features like their protective skin, red secretion, and unique tusks. While they aren't great swimmers, their ability to move efficiently in water and thrive in the harsh African climate makes them one of nature's most fascinating creatures.



# Gunnhild, Viking, Witch And Mother of Kings

Gunnhild's fury had not abated with their journey; she still blamed Egil for their fall. She set to work a spell against him, that he should find no peace in Iceland until she had seen him. A year later, Egil set sail for England to see King Æthelstan. Gunnhild's curse wrapped its fingers around Egil's fate: he was shipwrecked, and the storm brought him directly to the shores of Gunnhild's lands in Northumbria. Realising that he could not escape, Egil went to Erik and Gunnhild, imploring them to be reconciled. Gunnhild's anger was not to be turned. Erik decreed that Egil should be killed the next morning. Egil did not spend his last night idly; instead, he worked until daybreak to compose a great poem in tribute to King Erik, in hope that it might win him his life. It did.

#### ● Kshema Jatuhkarna

**In secret, riding through the air she comes, Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance With Lapland witches, while the labouring moon Eclipses at their charms.**

**John Milton, Paradise Lost (1667)**  
Gunnhild, the infamous Viking queen that ruled over three nations, had many names: queen, sorceress, mother to a generation. Seen as a scourge to kings and kin alike, much of what we know of her must be pieced together from fragmented stories and the bile of her enemies. Many argue that she is a work of fiction, an amalgamation of various characters, all pulled together by later authors as a plot device in their political stories.

While her origins are shrouded in mystery, we do know that she was the 10th-century wife of Erik Bloodaxe, King of Norway, Orkney and Northumbria, with Gunnhild serving as his fierce queen. Most likely the daughter of Gorm the Old, King of Denmark, Gunnhild and Erik Bloodaxe were introduced to one another at a feast held by Gunnhild's father. In this version, their union was intended to join two houses: the Norwegian Yngling family and the early Danish monarchy. Yet, a much darker story is told in the Icelandic sagas, where she is instead the daughter of Ozar Toti from Hålogaland in northern Norway. In this version, Erik meets Gunnhild when he is given five warships by his father, King Harald Fairhair of Norway, and sets out on a long journey to the north, to Finmark, a remote northeastern corner of Norway.

#### Captive of two wizards

Here, they find a beautiful woman, held captive by two Finmar wizards. This is Gunnhild. She tells the visitors that while the men are the wisest sorcerers in Finmark and they teach her their magic, they both want to marry her. She says that

nothing can escape them, as they can track as well as dogs, and when they are angry, the ground turns about, and all living things fall dead. She beseeches the men to hide and lie in wait for the sorcerers, as they have killed all men that have been to the hut so far. On their return, Gunnhild soothes the wizards, promising that no one has visited while they were out, yet, that night both men stayed awake, each jealously watching the other. Gunnhild called both to her bed, waiting until they slept soundly. She hurriedly tied them up, placing bags over their heads. She signalled to the hiding visitors, who jumped up and killed the wizards instantly, making for Erik's ship the next day. Gunnhild sailed with Erik to Hålogaland to ask her father's permission for their marriage, which he gave, and then they set sail together for the south.

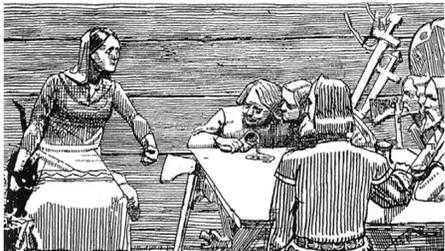
While we, as modern readers, might have sympathy with Gunnhild being held by two men against her will, at the time these stories were written down as histories of the people, attitudes were very different. This story would help readers to believe that Gunnhild was a sorceress and murderer, certainly not a suitable wife for a king. We can see the seeds of doubt being planted in the minds of the people that King Erik's later reign of tyranny and bloodshed can be blamed on Gunnhild, and her reputation is only compounded as her story progresses, when she is painted as the archenemy of the legendary hero, Egil Skallagrimsson, the protagonist of Egil's Saga, the earliest copy of which dates from the 12th century.

The pair has a long history in the sagas, coming together time after time in a battle of wits steeped in death and treachery. Their story begins at a feast to the guardian spirits, where Egil insulted his hosts, Gunnhild and Erik, by boasting that their beer could not quench his thirst, a dire insult to their hospitality. Gunnhild retaliated by mixing together a poison to kill Egil, yet, realising what was happening, Egil, who was said to wield his own magic, made a spell against them by



A box brooch that contained white lead used in ointments. Found in the grave of a Norse seer – or völva – in Denmark, from the National Museum of Denmark.

## #A VIKING TALE



Gunnhild and her sons by Christian Krohg, 1899.

cutting runes into the drinking horn and smearing his blood on to it, before killing their overlord and making his escape. Egil evaded Gunnhild's vengeance often and she was infuriated at his insult and trickery.

#### From scheming and unruly to ruthless

It's in the middle of the story that Gunnhild's reputation went from scheming and unruly to ruthless and politically dangerous. When Harald Fairhair was 80 years old, he turned over rule of the kingdom to Erik, giving him sole control over all of his lands, and naming Gunnhild's own son, Harald Greycloak, as the next heir. Erik's brothers were enraged and a savage feud ensued, ending in bloodshed on all sides, with Erik notoriously killing four of them. Many of the early blamed Gunnhild's sinister machinations for his actions in her relentless quest for power. Mutterings of how Queen Gunnhild hired a witch to brew a poison to kill his thirst, a dire insult to their hospitality. Gunnhild retaliated by mixing together a poison to kill Egil, yet, realising what was happening, Egil, who was said to wield his own magic, made a spell against them by

diminishing, and something had to be done. In the time after Harald Fairhair's death, Erik went to war against his brothers, raising a great army and winning victory at Tunsberg, and killing two of his brothers Ólaf and Sigroth to secure his reign. While still revelling from their victory, a tragic course of events were set in motion when Rögnvald, Gunnhild's son, was killed by Egil during a raid. As a further blow to the royal couple, Egil set a curse upon them so macabre that the details are recorded clearly in the sagas.

#### A desperate spell

First of all, the sorcerer Egil set himself at the top of a headland, facing the raging seas below. Next, he took a hazel staff and cut runes into the shaft in a manner reserved only for the direst of situations. He fixed the pole in the ground, securing the severed head of a horse on top, pointing it towards the waves. Swiftly, he turned the head to face



## Raising Awareness And Breaking Stigma: World Bipolar Day

Observed every year on March 30, World Bipolar Day aims to raise awareness about bipolar disorder and eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health conditions. The date marks the birth anniversary of artist Vincent van Gogh, who is believed to have lived with bipolar disorder. The day encourages open conversations about mood disorders, early diagnosis, and access to proper treatment. Bipolar disorder is characterised by extreme mood swings ranging from emotional highs (mania or hypomania) to depressive episodes. Through education, empathy and support, World Bipolar Day highlights the importance of understanding mental health and fostering inclusive, compassionate communities worldwide.



Gunnhild convinces Eric Bloodaxe to kill the Finnish wizards by Christian Krohg, 1899.

## #A VIKING TALE

A year after King Harald Fairhair died, his son Håkon, later Håkon the Good, heard news of Erik's tyranny in Norway, and set sail from England to challenge him. It was a turbulent voyage across fierce seas, and soon, a message reached Norway that Håkon was lost at sea. Yet, Gunnhild stood firm, resolutely telling Erik that Håkon was alive.

gers around Egil's fate: he was shipwrecked, and the storm brought him directly to the shores of Gunnhild's lands in Northumbria. Realising that he could not escape, Egil went to Erik and Gunnhild, imploring them to be reconciled. Gunnhild's anger was not to be turned. Erik decreed that Egil should be killed the next morning. Egil did not spend his last night idly; instead, he worked until daybreak to compose a great poem in tribute to King Erik, in hope that it might win him his life. It did.

Gunnhild and Erik lived on Northumbria until around 954, when their seat was threatened as a wave of political upheaval fell over England. Erik chose to leave Northumbria, becoming a source of terror across the country, before he was finally stopped by the English at the Battle of Stainmore, with his death closing the book on Viking rule in the north of the country.

#### It now had ended

When this news reached Gunnhild, like as she knew it ended: the people of England blamed her for the bloodshed that Erik had rained on them. She gathered her wits, drawing all of their possessions and wealth together, before fleeing, once more, to Orkney with all the men and ships they could muster. Thorfinn Skullcleaver, Earl of Orkney, made them welcome, and Gunnhild and her sons took power there for a while, until they heard news from Harald Bluetooth, Gunnhild's brother and King of Denmark, that he was displeased with King Håkon, concluding that they might at last be able to return home to Norway. She married her daughter Ragnhild to Thorfinn to form an alliance in Orkney and took refuge with Harald Bluetooth, where he gave them lands to support them.

#### Mother of Kings

Gunnhild stayed in Denmark for many years while her sons tried to win back their father's lands from King Håkon. It seemed that Egil's curse against them was finally losing power when they mustered a considerable army against him and won a great victory in the Battle of Fitjar in 961. Their enemy, Håkon,

was mortally wounded with what was said to be an arrow to the shoulder and there were once more whisperings that it was her dark magic that had won them both the day and the Kingdom of Norway. Gunnhild revelled in her position when her son, Harald Greycloak, came into power, and she had much sway in the government of the country; it was at this point that she was given the title Mother of Kings.

Like in other areas of her life, Gunnhild wielded her sexual prowess as a weapon. After Erik's death, Gunnhild took a younger lover and made no secret of it. Hrut, a young Icelandic, caught Gunnhild's eye when he arrived from the west by boat, armed with the task of pursuing a man named Soti who had taken his inheritance. Gunnhild unabashedly offered her help with his plight, suggesting that he and his friend Ozar stay with her over the winter. Being patroned by a powerful queen like Gunnhild changed the course of Hrut's life forever. At first, he had more than luck on his side, with Gunnhild bestowing lavish gifts and refusing to believe that any man could better him in cleverness. She even went so far as to encourage her son, King Harald Greycloak, to take him on as a bodyguard.

While we see other women in the sagas shrinking away from their men's rough embraces, Gunnhild breaks convention by flaunting her affair with Hrut, kissing and embracing him in public like a married couple would. She went so far as to spend two whole weeks with him, both sleeping each night locked together in her bedchamber. While she didn't mind engaging in her affair openly, Njáls Saga does show her threatening the guards that they if they spoke of the relationship, she would have them put to death. Most scandalous of all in the eyes of her contemporaries was the age difference between them: Gunnhild was a generation older than Hrut, yet, this didn't bother either of them. That was until Hrut set out to pursue Soti to Denmark, with the gift of two longboats from Gunnhild. On his return, Gunnhild noticed that Hrut had grown quieter, and she suspected something



A Viking longboat by Edward Moran.



A silver amulet to Freya, the Norse goddess of magic and seduction, from the National Museum of Denmark.

was amiss. She questioned him about having found another lover while away. Hrut protested, and denied every accusation, yet, soon requested leave from King Harald Greycloak that he should return to Iceland. Before he left, Gunnhild gave him a gift: a fine gold bangle, which she placed on his arm with her own hands. She leaned in to whisper her parting words: a spell. She cursed Hrut that he would have no pleasure with the woman he secretly intended to marry in Iceland, as he had lied to her. Hrut left her with a smile, but it was a smile that would not last.

#### Revenge worked

On his marriage to Unn, he found that he was not impotent, but instead hyper-potent. The sagas go to great lengths to labour the point with the warrior kennings used for Hrut: spear-sharpener and bow-bender are just two of these, and the irony cannot escape us that the name 'Hrut' itself means ram. Unn finally confided in her father that 'there's a spell on his spindle.' Like many fathers would, he advised that she should fall ill, while taking other men to her bed. Only then should she proclaim a divorce. On Hrut's return, he found his wife gone. Gunnhild had won her revenge; her spell against him had worked. Hrut learned that Gunnhild was a powerful ally, but an even more powerful enemy.

Gunnhild's tempestuous rule ended when her own brother, Harald Bluetooth, turned against them in 971, scheming with the noblemen of Norway to kill Harald Greycloak, her son. Now an elderly woman, Gunnhild fled to her daughter in Orkney with her family once more, where they ruled until the men under her influence were dead. If ending as a wife and mother who outlived both her husband and her sons was not cruel fate enough, six years later in 977, Harald Bluetooth dealt her one final blow: he decreed that, for her wickedness, she should be thrown into a bog and drowned. Gunnhild was killed at the hands of her own kin.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

## #HOME

# Everyday Life Hacks That Make Cleaning Easier

Mix a small amount of hair conditioner with water while mopping. It helps reduce static, leaves floors shiny, and prevents dust from sticking quickly

Modern life often makes us forget that simple household items can solve everyday problems efficiently and cheaply. From cleaning floors and kitchens to fixing dull tools and removing stubborn stains, these practical life hacks use common items like soap, vinegar, alcohol, toothpaste, and even beer. While not all methods replace professional products, they are helpful in emergencies or for quick fixes.



#### Smart Floor-Cleaning Hacks

##### Mop the floor with old clothes

Instead of a mop, place old clothes or towels on the floor and step on them to wipe surfaces. This works especially well for quick cleaning and hard-to-reach corners.

##### Add conditioner for smoother floors

Mix a small amount of hair conditioner with water while mopping. This helps loosen dirt and improves cutting performance.

##### Vinegar for bathroom floors

Adding white vinegar to mop water helps remove soap residue, kill bacteria, and eliminate odors in bathrooms.

##### Liquor to prevent grease buildup

Alcohol or clear liquor mixed with water helps break down grease, especially in kitchens, leaving floors less sticky.

##### Fixing Scratches and Marks on Floors

##### Toilet cleaner and toothpaste for scratches

Apply a small amount of toilet cleaner and toothpaste to light floor scratches. Gently brush with a soft brush or cloth to remove visibility.

##### Restoring Dull Kitchen Tools

Sharpen a dull kitchen knife. Sprinkle salt and vinegar along the blade. Dip a cut potato into the mixture and rub it along both sides of the knife. Rinse and dry thoroughly.



#### Revive dull scissors

Pour beer into a container, add vinegar, and soak scissors overnight. This helps loosen rust and improves cutting performance.

#### Emergency and Creative Hacks

##### Emergency soap lamp

Poke a hole through a bar of soap, insert a cotton swab or wick, light it, and you have a temporary emergency lamp.

##### Cut tape easily by hand

Fold the tape at a 45-degree angle and pull. Alternatively, pull tape from both sides instead of tearing straight down for a cleaner cut.

##### Shoe Cleaning and Stain Removal

##### Alcohol and soap for shoe stains

Spray alcohol onto soap, dip a brush into the mixture, and scrub stains off shoes.

##### Oil stains on shoes

Spray alcohol on the stain first, then press a softened bar of soap onto it to absorb grease.

##### Foundation marks on shoes

Mix glycerine with soap, wrap

the soap in a towel, spray alcohol on it, and gently wipe off makeup marks.

#### Beer and laundry detergent for shoes

Mix beer with laundry detergent and scrub shoes to remove stubborn dirt and odor.

#### Liquor and conditioner for shoe shine

A small amount of liquor mixed with conditioner can restore shine and softness to certain shoe materials.

#### Kitchen and Utensil Hacks

Clean moldy or blackened chopsticks. Squeeze toothpaste into a pot, add salt, white vinegar, and water. Place chopsticks in the mixture and bring it to a boil to remove mold and stains.

#### Clean a kettle with sugar and vinegar

Add sugar, water, and vinegar to a kettle and bring it to a boil. Pour it out to remove scale and residue, leaving the kettle clean.

#### Household Cleaning Tricks

##### Fridge deodorizer and cleaner

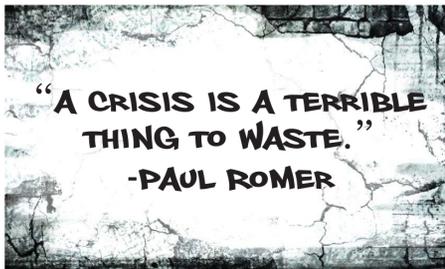
Place tea leaves in a bowl, add liquor, baking soda, white vinegar, and warm water. This mixture absorbs odors and helps clean fridge surfaces.

##### Facial cleanser and toothpaste for stains

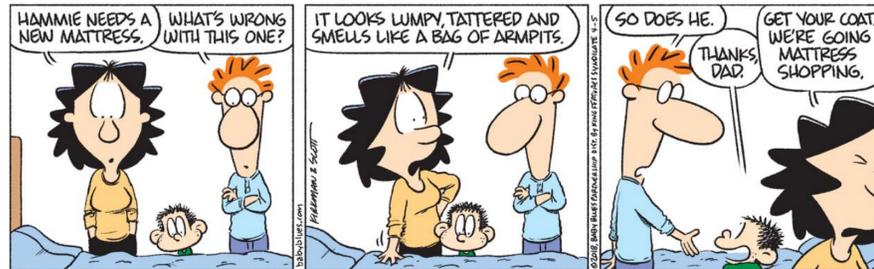
Mix facial cleanser with toothpaste to gently remove light stains from various household surfaces.

These life hacks show how everyday items can be repurposed in clever ways to solve common household problems. While they are best suited for light cleaning and quick fixes, they save time, reduce waste, and help you make the most of what you already have at home. A little creativity can go a long way in making daily life easier and more efficient.

## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



## ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman