

FIRST THINGS FIRST



UNCLE FERGUS'S EXTREMELY QUESTIONABLE GUIDE TO LIFE

Advice on love, weather, wildlife, hospitality, emergency transportation, and the correct use of bagpipes in almost every circumstance.

BY UNCLE FERGUS

(as suspiciously reconstructed for readers)



Before We Begin

A WORD FROM THE PUBLISHER

Uncle Fergus never actually sat down and wrote this book. That would require sitting still. This companion mini-book uses real incidents, preferences, and bits of advice from First Things First, then expands them into new comic material in his established voice.

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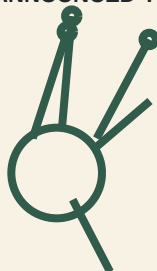
- 1 Never waste a perfectly good doorbell.
- 2 Bagpipes are a complete wildlife-management system.
- 3 Weather is mostly a matter of attitude.
- 4 Listen to people. This is apparently relationship advice.
- 5 Apologies should be edible, but also sincere.
- 6 A useful uncle should own several forms of transportation.
- 7 Know when to joke - and when not to.
- 8 Music solves problems. Sometimes by ending conversations.
- 9 Carry an emergency kit no sane person would pack.
- 10 When in doubt, choose the memorable option.

Doorbells Are Merely Suggestions

1

FERGUS RULE

IF SOMEONE CAN HEAR YOU, YOU HAVE ANNOUNCED YOURSELF.



RECOMMENDED HOUSEHOLD SIGNALS

Amazing Grace: someone is at the door. Happy Birthday: your ride has arrived. Loch Lomond: I am at the door but pretending this is completely normal. Waltzing Matilda: travelers have returned from Australia.

STRAIGHT FROM FERGUS

In the novel, *Amazing Grace* on the pipes is enough for Simon and Andy to know exactly who is at the door.

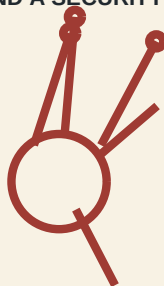
FERGUS'S VERDICT: KNOCKING IS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT LUNGS.

Wildlife Control, Highland Style

2

FERGUS RULE

A BAGPIPE IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT AND A SECURITY DEVICE.



FIELD-TESTED TECHNIQUE

For animals: begin with one sustained note and increase confidence as necessary. For golfers: '99 Bottles of Pop on the Wall.' Fergus reports that they normally scatter around bottle 93 or 92, long before the full experiment is required.

WARNING

This guide has not been reviewed by wildlife professionals, golfers, musicians, raccoons, or anyone else with a reputation to protect.

Utah Weather: A Scottish Perspective

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FERGUS RULE

IF YOU CAN STILL FEEL YOUR LEGS, IT IS PROBABLY FINE.



When Andy suggests that Fergus might want to bundle up in a blizzard, Fergus answers with the sort of meteorological precision one expects from a man wearing

STRAIGHT FROM FERGUS

"They've got a saying where I'm from. It's balmy out until you can't feel your legs."

THE FERGUS WEATHER SCALE

Pleasant: your moustache moves in the breeze. Brisk: your bagpipe drones collect frost. Cold: the snowmobile starts complaining. Proper winter: your nephew is wearing six layers and you are still discussing whether a coat is really necessary.

The Art of Actually Listening

4

FERGUS RULE

THE SECRET TO RELATIONSHIPS IS NOTICEABLY LESS EXCITING THAN BAGPIPES.



Andy has known Courtney for years, yet Fergus is the one who can rattle off her favorite soda, snacks, music, films, and baseball team. His explanation is deeply j

STRAIGHT FROM FERGUS

"We've gotten to talking about the things that are important to her. You ought to try it."

FERGUS RELATIONSHIP METHOD

Step 1: ask a question. Step 2: let the other person finish the answer. Step 3: remember at least some of it. Step 4: do not call this 'advanced romantic strategy' within earshot of the person involved.

Apologies: Snacks Are Not a Substitute

5

FERGUS RULE

FOOD OPENS THE DOOR. SINCERITY KEEPS IT OPEN.

Fergus helps Andy build an apology kit around things Courtney genuinely likes: pineapple Fanta, chocolate truffles, salt-and-vinegar chips, classical music, and pineapple. This is a great starting point for building an apology kit around things Courtney genuinely likes.

STRAIGHT FROM FERGUS

"Apologies always go better with food, right?" "Right... But it's not everything. Make sure you're sincere."



PINEAPPLE FANTA



TRUFFLES



SALT + VINEGAR



SINCERITY

Fergus recommends using all four. Especially the one no store sells.

Always Own the Correct Vehicle

6

FERGUS RULE

IF ONE VEHICLE CANNOT CARRY THE BAGPIPES, FIND ANOTHER.



THE ACTUAL LESSON

Be the person who can help. Drive someone to the cabin. Pick up the stranded teenager. Open the locked door. Bring the ridiculous tool that becomes unexpectedly useful. Competence is allowed to look eccentric.

FERGUS TRANSPORT HIERARCHY

1. Golf cart when practical. 2. Snowmobile when dramatic. 3. Anything else if the pipes still fit.

Know When Not to Be Funny

7

FERGUS RULE

HUMOR IS A TOOL, NOT A HIDING PLACE.

Fergus jokes about nearly everything, including his late wife's resting place. But the joke does not erase the love underneath it. He tells Andy that he had six wonderful years with Freya, lost her to cancer, came to Utah to be near family, found the

THE PART FERGUS WOULD PRETEND ISN'T ADVICE

You can be cheerful without pretending nothing hurts. You can make a joke without making the loss small. And sometimes the person who seems least serious has survived enough to know what matters.



Raise the volume. Do not lower the compassion.

Cultural Education Is Best Delivered Loudly

8

FERGUS RULE

EVERY GOOD EXPLANATION SHOULD INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE LEOPARD.

When Andy wonders whether angels might have enormous feet, Fergus uses the

FERGUS'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

If a student asks one question, answer three. Include history, art criticism, theology, and an animal if possible. The student may not learn what he asked, but he will remember the conversation.

ACADEMIC FOOTNOTE

Fergus is not a licensed art historian. This has never slowed him down before.

The Bagpipe Song Selection Matrix



FERGUS RULE
THE RIGHT SONG COMMUNICATES WHAT WORDS WOULD ONLY MAKE AWKWARD.



Someone arrives	Amazing Grace	Subtle enough.
Someone has a birthday	Happy Birthday	Impossible to ignore.
Australians return	Waltzing Matilda	Geographically responsible.
Someone should leave	Goodnight, Sweetheart	Devastatingly efficient.
Funeral invitation denied	Anything, apparently	Family veto likely.

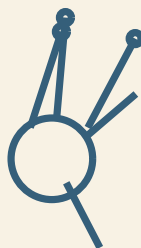
Rule of thumb: if the message can be delivered in under four minutes, Fergus considers that suspicious.

Know When the Evening Is Over

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FERGUS RULE

WHEN HINTS FAIL, USE A TUNE EVERYONE RECOGNIZES.



At the end of Andy and Courtney's long final conversation, they realize how late it has become only when a familiar tune drifts in through the windows. Fergus has selected 'Goodnight Sweetheart' Andy gets the hint

STRAIGHT FROM FERGUS

"Hardly a traditional Scottish tune, but I guess I can take the hint."

ADVANCED SOCIAL SKILL

You do not need to announce, 'It is late and everyone should go home.' You can create an atmosphere in which the correct decision becomes obvious. Preferably from another room. Preferably with drones.

The Fergus-Approved Emergency Kit

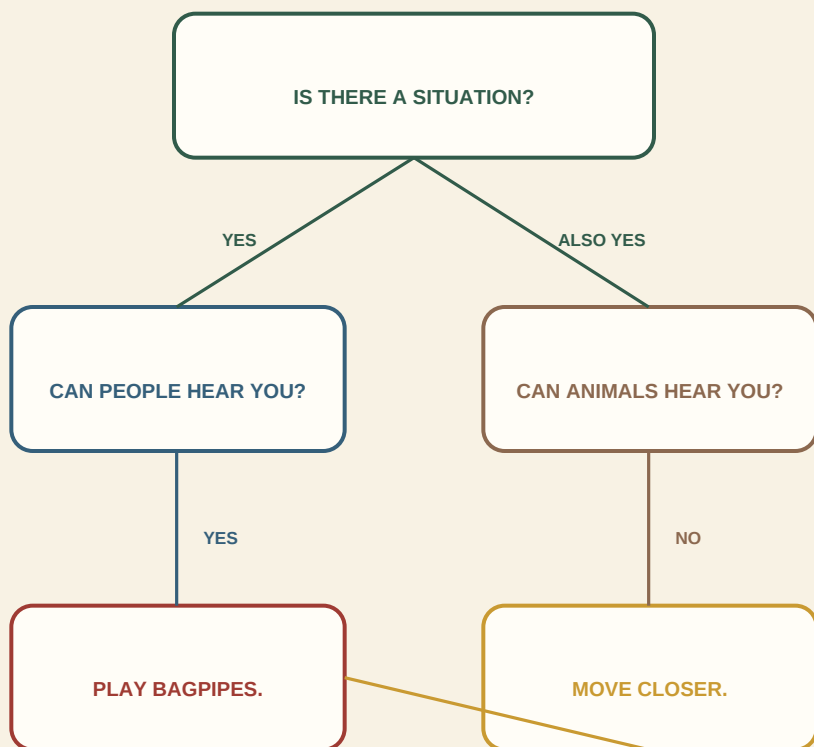
ONE BAG. QUESTIONABLE CONTENTS.

- **Bagpipes** Doorbell, wildlife deterrent, golfer dispersal, musical semaphore.
- **Key ring** Cabins, gates, mysteries, and the occasional rescue.
- **Pineapple Fanta** Apology support system.
- **Salt-and-vinegar chips** Same.
- **Chocolate truffles** Same, but with higher diplomatic value.
- **Gas mask** For entering a teenage boy's cabin on cleaning day.
- **Warm clothing** Optional, apparently.
- **Transportation** Golf cart or snowmobile preferred.

IF IT DOESN'T FIT, REMOVE THE WARM CLOTHING FIRST.

Should I Use the Bagpipes?

A DECISION TREE BY UNCLE FERGUS



Special exception: if Simon Burke explicitly tells you not to bring the pipes to a funeral, the decision tree is temporarily suspended.

Ten Extremely Questionable Commandments

- 1. Thou shalt never waste a doorbell opportunity.
- 2. Thou shalt distrust any raccoon described as cuddly.
- 3. Thou shalt define 'balmy' generously.
- 4. Thou shalt listen when people tell thee what matters to them.
- 5. Thou shalt bring snacks when apologizing.
- 6. Thou shalt remember that snacks are not the apology.
- 7. Thou shalt keep a useful key ring.
- 8. Thou shalt joke loudly and care quietly.
- 9. Thou shalt choose the song that says what needs saying.

FINAL FERGUS RATING: QUESTIONABLE METHODS. SURPRISINGLY SOLID HEART.



A GOOD LIFE NEEDS
GOOD PEOPLE,
A GOOD STORY,
AND APPARENTLY
BAGPIPES.

Inspired by Uncle Fergus's appearances in *First Things First* by
Michael D. Young.