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Most children at the tender age of six or so are full of most impractical scheme for becoming policemen, firemen or train drivers when they grow up. But when I was that age, I could not be bothered with such mundane ambitions. I knew exactly what I wanted to do, I was going to have my own zoo. At the time, this did not seem to me, and still does not seem, a very unreasonable idea. My friends and relatives, who had long found me strange because I showed little interest in anything that did not have fur or feathers, accepted this as just another manifestation of my strangeness. They felt that, if they ignored my often-repeated remarks about owning my own zoo, I would eventually grow out of it.

As the years passed, however, to the bewilderment of those friends and relatives, my resolve to have my own zoo grew greater and greater and eventually, after going on a number of expeditions to bring back animals for other zoos, I felt the time was ripe to acquire my own.

From my latest trip to West Africa, I had brought back a considerable collection of animals which were living, temporarily I assured her, in my sister's suburban garden in Bournemouth. But after a number of unsuccessful attempts to convince local councils in various areas to support my plans, I began to investigate the possibility of starting my zoo on the island of Jersey in the English Channel.

I was given an introduction to a man named Hugh Fraser who, I was told, was a broad-minded, kindly soul. He would show me around the island and point out suitable sites. So, I flew to Jersey and was met by Hugh Fraser who drove us to his family home, probably one of the most beautiful old houses on the island. There was a huge walled garden with lots of outbuildings all built in the beautiful local stone which was the colour of autumn leaves glowing in the sunshine. Turning to my wife, I said: "What a marvellous place for a zoo."

If my host had promptly fainted on the spot, I could not have blamed him. The thought of creating the average person's idea of a zoo, with all the grey cement and iron bars, in such a lovely spot was horrible. To my astonishment, however, Hugh Fraser did not faint, but merely cocked an enquiring eyebrow at me and asked whether I really meant what I said. Slightly embarrassed, I replied that I had meant it, but

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added hastily that I realised that it was impossible. Hugh said he did not think it was as impossible as all that.

He went on to explain that the house and grounds were too big for him to keep up as a private individual, and so he wanted to move to a smaller place in England. Would I care to consider renting the property for the purpose of establishing my zoo? I could not imagine more attractive surroundings for my purpose, and by the time lunch was over, the bargain had been sealed.

The alarm displayed by all who knew me when this was announced can be imagined. The only exception to the general chorus of disapproval was my sister. Although she thought it a mad scheme, at least it would rid her back garden of the assorted jungle creatures that were beginning to put a great strain on her relationship with her neighbours.

1. The writer's friends and family _____
 - A. encouraged him in his childhood ambition.
 - B. took no notice of his childhood ambition.
 - C. tried to talk him out of his childhood ambition.
 - D. tried to interest him in other things.
2. In paragraph 2 the word "bewilderment" means that the writer's friends and relatives _____
 - A. were pleasantly surprised by him.
 - B. became increasingly angry with him.
 - C. were shown to be right about his ideas.
 - D. didn't really understand his ambitions.
3. The writer didn't start a zoo in England because _____
 - A. nobody wanted to help him.
 - B. he had too many animals.
 - C. his sister was against it.
 - D. he couldn't get permission.
4. The writer was introduced to Hugh Fraser because _____
 - A. Hugh knew a lot about zoos.
 - B. Hugh owned a number of houses.
 - C. Hugh knew the island very well.
 - D. Hugh had offered land for rent.
5. When the writer made a comment about the walled garden, Hugh _____
 - A. was horrified at the prospect.
 - B. was surprised by the suggestion.
 - C. was too embarrassed to reply.
 - D. was interested in the idea.

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6. The writer particularly liked the place he chose for the zoo because of its _____.
A. size. B. price. C. setting. D. facilities.
7. When the writer's sister learned about the establishment of the zoo in Jersey, she felt _____.
A. alarmed B. relieved C. supportive D. disappointed



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The middle-aged woman's voice on the other end of the phone was icily imperious: "Oliver, come and speak to this lady, now, she's from clearing."

Judging by Oliver's rather slow response, it was apparent he was reluctant to discuss his plans for further education, in the light of his disappointing A-level results. But when he finally made it to the receiver, he was met with the soothing, tones of a clearing centre adviser.

At universities across the country, similar scenes were played out from the moment clearing lines were opened, in some cases as early as 8.30 am.

Candidates who missed their target results by a grade or two desperately dialled their admissions tutors to discover if they would still be accepted. Those who did much worse than expected, turned to clearing, the system through which temporarily unplaced students apply for spare places on degree courses.

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"I'm here to help by matchmaking students with courses," said Ryan Saunders, 29, a paid volunteer at Kingston University. "I've just had a bloke who skipped lots of his exams and wanted to get on a business course, for which he needed 180 points, but he only had 60. Certainly he wasn't accepted by us. He was quite a persuasive talker. I personally think he's got a great career in sales."

Figures show that there was a rise of more than 16,000 people from 2002. Almost one student in 11 found a place on a degree course through clearing.

Universities are typically at pains to stress that students should take time before making major decisions. They claim they are careful of awarding places to applicants who have hitherto shown no interest in a subject. Their advice to anyone who hasn't got into their first choice university is to ring around and see what's available elsewhere rather than simply taking the first course they're offered. It's better to make a considered decision than end up on the wrong course in the wrong place.

All the same, nationwide, there was a mood similar to the opening day of a budget airline internet sale. Anyone who lost their nerve and hesitated ran the risk that the place would be snapped up when they called back later.

At Greenwich University some professional training courses were filled within hours. Nursing, midwifery and education proved popular, followed by newly introduced courses in criminology and forensic science.

With hundreds of clearing places available, the university had 100 phone lines open but was still swamped by the flood of calls just after 10 am, the time when many students received their results.

The overall quality of the students calling up is better than in previous years. Back at Kingston University admissions tutor for geological sciences was confident the majority of his 15 places would be filled through clearing.

"As far as we're concerned, once an applicant is accepted by us it doesn't matter whether they've come through clearing or not," he said. "It often has a positive effect. Some students suddenly realize they need to work harder than they have done in the past."

1. The purpose of clearing is to provide school leavers with _____.
A. work place B. mobile phones
C. university degree D. training courses

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2. Who turns to clearing system?
 - A. Those whose results lack a grade or two.
 - B. Those who do much worse than they should have.
 - C. Admissions tutors
 - D. Internet users
3. Universities want students to _____.
 - A. choose the university
 - B. take only professional courses
 - C. think carefully before choosing the course
 - D. hurry in order not to lose the place
4. Clearing system _____.
 - A. provides only professional courses.
 - B. provides cheap air tickets.
 - C. suffers lack of good students applying.
 - D. invites students with perfect A-level results.
5. More people call the Clearing system _____.
 - A. after 10 am.
 - B. from 8.30am.
 - C. on the opening day of the sale.
 - D. when they make their decision.
6. One of the candidates called clearing because _____.
 - A. he wanted to upgrade his results.
 - B. he was a good sales representative.
 - C. he wanted to apply for a course.
 - D. he was very assertive.
7. Clearing provides candidates with degree courses at _____.
 - A. Kingston University.
 - B. Universities across the country.
 - C. 15 places.
 - D. Greenwich University.

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It started with shepherd's pie 30 years ago and now ready-made meals have transformed the nation's eating habits. Britons spent £1.9 billion on ready-made meals last year, twice as much as the French and Germans, four times as much as the Italians and six times as much as the Spanish. Nearly one in three British adults eats a ready-made meal more than once a week. Demand for instant meals increased by 29 per cent between 1998 and 2002 across Europe as a whole but in Britain it increased by 44 per cent.

Britain became the European capital of ready-made meals, second only in the world to America. Some claim that the reason for it is an excuse "Can't cook, won't cook". However, others consider it to be a case of culture. Regular cooking has disappeared first in the US and then in Britain. In France, Germany, Spain, Italy, there is still a tradition of going home to a cooked meal.

Convenience is definitely part of the attraction. A recent survey found that 77 per cent of buyers said they only bought ready meals when they did not have time to cook.

Dr Susan Jebb, head of nutrition at the Medical Research Council, said: "People in the UK work the longest hours, we are very time-poor, and we don't have a strong cultural history of cooking."

The ready-made meal boom also reflects changing social trends in Britain. More people live alone and so are less likely to cook. And with families eating apart more often, ready-meals allow people to eat what they want when they want. Besides, people are becoming much more demanding as there's pressure on time.

But ready meals also reflect changing tastes in food. Britain's multiculturalism has brought a wider range of restaurants than other European countries, and ethnic cuisines, which people are often scared of cooking, are far more popular. One quarter of chilled meals are Indian, and nearly one in five is Chinese. Traditional British food accounts for only 18 per cent of sales.

"We've always had more Chinese and Indian takeaways and more ethnic restaurants," says a consultant nutritionist.

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Supermarkets have responded by offering a wider range. "As increasing numbers of British people travel to the Far East and regularly eat out at oriental restaurants, customers are now looking for authentic Eastern foods they can enjoy at home."

The quality of ready-made meals has become better since the 1970s. However, Dr Jebb says: "Ready-made meals tend to be higher in fat, sugar and salt than the meals we would cook ourselves at home. Fat is cheap and it adds flavour. Most of the salt we eat is added by manufacturers – people like it." But it is not necessarily bad. People can choose healthy options, or have ready-made salads. There is a whole generation that has been brought up with ready meals. They haven't grown up with cooking, they have neither the ability nor the desire to cook and that is alarming.

If we cook, we are interested in life. For many of us, cooking is a way of keeping some control over our own health and happiness. There is no way to guarantee a long and healthy life, but there are three ways to make it possible. The first is to drink a lot of water, the second is to walk a lot and the third is to cook.

1. According to the article, British people _____.
A. Buy less than 30 years ago
B. Buy less than other Europeans
C. Buy the same as the French and Germans
D. Buy more ready-made meals than other Europeans
2. The reason for buying ready-meals is _____.
A. The US influence
B. Lack of time
C. Laziness
D. Tradition
3. According to the article, the reason for changing tastes in food is _____.
A. Ethnic diversity in Britain
B. Lack of cultural history of cooking
C. The influence of the supermarkets
D. Eating out
4. The most popular ready-made meal is _____.
A. Ethnic food B. Indian food C. British food D. Chinese food
5. Ready-made meals are _____.
A. of poor quality
B. as good as home-made
C. bad for people
D. varied
6. The growing popularity of ready meals _____.
A. makes food cheaper
B. is a natural process
C. leads to a longer life
D. spoilt a whole generation

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7. The advice given in the article is _____
- A. to eat ready-made salads
 - B. to start cooking
 - C. to be healthy and happy
 - D. to follow three rules to have a long and healthy life

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