Starting Young

Neil Armstrong of Wapakoneta, Ohio, the first human to set foot on the moon, was granted his pilot’s license at age 16. *(Peter Fossel, in American Profile magazine)*

When seven authors started writing:  
Anne Rice -- wrote first book in fifth grade  
Stephen King -- wrote first short story, age 7  
Isaac Asimov -- age 11  
Truman Capote -- age 8  
John Cheever -- age 8  
Dean Koontz -- age 8  
J. K. Rowling (Harry Potter fame) -- wrote first story at age 6 (about a rabbit). *(World Features Syndicate)*

Before their teen years: John Lennon – read most of the classics, age 10; Thomas Edison – worked full time on train, age 12; Beverly Sills – knew 22 arias, age 7; Vladimir Lenin – expert chess player, age 8; Harry Truman – read Bible three times by age 11; Davy Crockett – accidentally shot neighbor, age 12. *(World Features Syndicate)*  
Warren Buffett, legendary investor and self-made multi-billionaire, filed his first income tax return at age 13, reporting revenue from a newspaper delivery job. He claimed a $35 deduction for his bicycle. *(Harry Bright & Jakob Anser, in That’s A Fact, Jack!, p. 127)*

**At the age of 12, Andrew Carnegie worked as a millhand for $1.20 a week. Half a century later, he sold his steel company for nearly $500 million. *(Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 58)***

**Pat Brady, the person who does the Rose Is Rose cartoon – is that a man or a woman? That Pat’s a male. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, and apparently born to be a cartoonist, Brady began submitting cartoon strips to newspapers at age 11. *(Rocky Mountain News)***

**Hanson Gregory is an important American inventor. He isn’t in a class with Alexander Bell or Thomas Edison, but as a fifteen-year-old boy he staked his claim to fame. He was the first person to cut the center holes in doughnuts. *(Valmarie Carson, in Tidbits)***

**Chopin made his debut as a pianist at the age of eight. *(Noel Botham, in The World’s Greatest Book of Useless Information, p. 12)***

**Five who entered college at early ages: Cotton Mather – entered Harvard, age 12; Ralph Waldo Emerson – Harvard, age 14; Thomas Wolfe – University of North Carolina, age 15; Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. – Harvard, age 16; Roberta Flack – Howard University, age 15 – on scholarship; Flack graduated in three years. (*World Features Syndicate)***

**Teen-age creators: Doughnut – creator was 15; Earmuffs – creator was 15; Synthetic dye – creator was 18; Tom and Jerry characters – creator was 19; Sony “Chopstick” – creator was 16; Snowmobile – creator was 15. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**The youngest general in the history of the Army was George Custer, who was a brigadier at age 23. *(L. M. Boyd)***

The Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso, is both the spiritual leader and head of state of Tibet. Born on July 6, 1935, he was just 2 years old when he was recognized as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso. He took the throne at age 4 and became a monk at age 6. *(Charlotte Lowe, in Fact-O-Pedia, p. 67)*

**They did it in their youth: Orson Welles – memorized King Lear, age 7; Beverly Sills – memorized 22 arias, age 7; Mozart – composed first symphony, age 8; Mendelssohn – debut as concert pianist, age 9; Paul McCartney – wrote Let It Be, age 14, following his mother’s death. *(World Features Syndicate)***

The English poet Thomas Chatterton died at seventeen. Mozart died at thirty-six, Raphael died at thirty-seven, Aubrey Beardsley died at twenty-six, and the painter Masaccio died at twenty-seven. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 129)*

**Six who earned their ways early: Woody Allen – sold jokes to Walter Winchell, age 16; Paul McCartney – wrote “Love Me Do,” age 16; Donald Sutherland – on Canadian radio, age 14; Walter Winchell – in vaudeville, age 13; Simon & Garfunkel – first sang together, age 14; Liberace – played with Chicago symphony, age 17. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**On February 12, 1912, Hsian-T'ung, the last emperor of China, was forced to abdicate, ending 2,000 years of imperial rule. Only six years old, he was allowed to keep his residence in Beijing's Forbidden City. *(The Daily Chronicle)***

**On January 25, 1924, the first Winter Olympics were held in Chamonix, France. Athletes from 16 nations competed. Sonja Henie, at just 11 years old, skated in the ladies' figure skating competition. *(The Daily Chronicle)***

**The University of Southern California has offered a football scholarship to schoolboy quarterback David Sills, who can’t sign a binding letter of intent until 2015. That’s because Sills, 13, is in the seventh grade. *(Los Angeles Times, as it appeared in The Week magazine, February 19, 2010)***

**Scientists last week reported a finding of the largest-known marine reptile ever – and the discovery was made by an 11-year-old English girl. Ruby Reynolds, now 15, had been fossil hunting with here father for years around their home when, in 2020, they found several fossilized pieces of bone along the River Severn estuary. Paleontologists concluded they came from an 82-foot long, 202-million-year-old ichthyosaur and named the specimen ichthyotitan severnensis. And there’s a historical bonus: The very first icththyosaur fossil was discovered in England in 1811 – by a 12-year-old girl. *(The Week magazine, May 3, 2024)***

**6 top-20 finishes for 15-year-old golfing phenom Michelle Wie in her seven LPGA starts. If she had been a pro she would have won $257,931 and been 43rd on the money list. Her average winnings over a 20-event schedule would have placed her in the top 10. *(Rocky Mountain News, October 20, 2004)***

**When they graduated from high school: Debra Winger – at age 15; Jimmy Carter – at age 15; Alex Haley – at age 15; Lyndon Johnson – at age 15; Martin Luther King – at age 15. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**Infamous at early ages: Pretty Boy Floyd – robbed grocery store, age 14; Jesse James – robbed first bank, age 18; Alvin Karpis – grocery-store break-in, age 10; Bugsy Moran – 26 robberies before age 20; Al Capone – led Chicago gang, age 26. *(World Features Syndicate)***

As the most famous pharaoh of Egypt, King Tut (1341-1323 B.C.E.) was only eight years old when he became the king and reigned for nearly ten years. *(Charlotte Lowe, in Useless History Fact-O-Pedia, p. 157)*

The sons of knights would often begin their training in the art of warfare and chivalry from the age of seven using toy weapons. *(Charlotte Lowe, in Useless History Fact-O-Pedia, p. 158)*

Lafayette was a major general in the United States at the age of nineteen. Lafayette’s whole name takes up an entire line on a page. Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 122)*

A little about Liberace: First played piano – age 4. *(The Encyclopedia of Bad Taste)*

Felix Mendelssohn was only 17 when he wrote one of his greatest compositions, the overture to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” (He had already written a couple of operas, a number of octets, violin and piano sonatas, and a dozen or so symphonies.) *(Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 49)*

When they became millionaires: John Paul Getty – age 23; Aristotle Onassis – age 24; Thomas Lipton – age 29; Thomas Edison – age 30; Milton Hershey – age 29; Bill Gates – age 20. *(World Features Syndicate)*

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756. A musical prodigy, he began composing at the age of 5 and played for the Austrian empress when he was 6. The wunderkind went on tour and by the age of 12 was producing such works as the German operetta Bastien und Bastienne. *(Chad Woodham, in Smithsonian magazine)***

**The Famous Mr. Peanut: In 1906, Amadeo Obici, founded the Planter’s Nut & Chocolate Company in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. In 1916, he sponsored a contest to help him find a logo for his company. The winner was 13-year-old Antonio Gentile from Suffolk, Virginia. He won five dollars for his depiction of a peanut man. A commercial artist added a hat, cane, and monocle, and Mr. Peanut was born, who made his debut in The Saturday Evening Post in 1918. *(Isabell Mattingly, in Tidbits)***

Some people are born with a magical sense of music, but without early training the gift may be lost. So says a scientist who studies the shape and size of the brain in the musically talented. Pictures of the brains of 30 classically trained musicians show that those who have perfect pitch -- the ability to identify isolated musical notes they hear -- have a greatly enlarged structure on the left side of the brain. Dr. Gottfried Schlaug of Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, said that musicians in the study who lacked perfect pitch had brains much like those of people who can't play a note. But the gifted had to start early to use what nature gave them. *(Associated Press)*

When Musicians Started Playing:  
Sheryl Crow -- started piano, age 6  
Johnny Mathis -- started studying opera, age 13  
Duke Ellington -- started piano, age 7  
Muddy Waters -- started harmonica, age 9; guitar, age 15  
George Benson -- started guitar, age 8  
Carlos Santana -- started violin, age 5; guitar, 8. *(World Features Syndicate)*

Napoleon had conquered Italy by the time he was twenty-six. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 118)*

Political poet, John Trumbull, passed the entrance examination to Yale University at age 7. (*E. C. McKenzie, in Tantalizing Facts, p. 108)*

Race car driver Tony Stewart began his career at age 7 behind the wheel of a go-kart in Columbus, Indiana. In 2002, he won NASCAR’s Wilson Cup championship. *(American Profile magazine)*

Early reading: Harry Truman – read entire encyclopedia in high school; Richard Nixon – read papers (not comics), age 6; Ronald Reagan – started reading, age 5. *(World Features Syndicate)*

1980: More than 100 million Rubik’s Cubes are sold in the first two years of the toy’s existence. You Can Do the Cube, a solution manual by a 12-year-old boy, is the best-selling book of 1981. (*The Week magazine, January 20, 2006)*

Celine Dion and Gladys Knight both made their public singing debuts when they were only 5 years old. *(Samantha Weaver, in Tidbits)*

The started young:

Christina Applegate – appeared in Days of Our Lives, age 3

Anne Bancroft – singing debut, age 2

Antonio Banderas – Spanish TV series, age 4

Warren Buffett – bought three shares stock, age 11

Leonardo DiCaprio – on Romper Room TV show, age 5

Joan Collins – dance school, age 2

Jack Daniels – bought distillery, age 13 -- from Lutheran minister, who taught him the trade

Robert Downing Jr. – film debut, age 5

Jodie Foster – read own scripts, age 5

Judy Garland – on stage, age 2

Bill Gates – wrote first program, age 13

John Paul Getty – bought oil lease, age 11

Gregory Hines – studied dance before age 3

Peter Jennings – own TV show, age 9

Shirley Maclaine – danced ballet, age 3

Jerry Mathers – film debit, age 4

Marilyn Monroe – played Jesus in school play, age 6

Marie Osmond – on Andy Williams Show, age 3

Luciano Pavarotti – sang arias, age 5

Joe Pesci – singing debut, age 4

Keshia Knight Pullman – TV ad, age 8 months

Molly Ringwald – sang in dad’s band, age 4

Kelly Ripa – dance lessons, age 3

Shakira – singer/lyricist since age 8; first album, age 14

Nina Simone – played piano, age 6

Orson Welles – in opera, age 5

Oprah Winfrey – first public recital, age 3; learned to read by age 3.

*(World Features Syndicate)*

Brigitte Xie started studying piano in the fall of 2020 at the age of 3 when her father signed her up for Zoom lessons. “I never expected her to be a prodigy or anything,” he said. But her parents and teacher quickly noticed her passion for music and her aptitude for learning chords and notes. Less than one year later, the Connecticut resident wowed the judges of the prestigious Elite International Music Competition, becoming the youngest-ever winner: Brigitte is just 4 years old. Her prize, a chance to perform on stage at Carnegie Hall, will have to wait due to the pandemic, but Brigitte is happy to keep practicing at home in the meantime. *(The Week magazine, September 24, 2021)*

The inventor of television, Philo T. Farnsworth, came up with the idea in 1921, when he was just 15 years old. *(Samantha Weaver, in Tidbits)*

**Shirley Temple was only three years old when she appeared in her first film, crime drama The Red-Haired Alibi. *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 8)***

**They started early:**

**Warren Buffett – bought three shares of stock, age 11**

**Bill Gates – wrote first program, age 13**

**John Paul Getty – bought oil lease, age 11**

**Jack Daniels – bought distillery, age 13 (From Lutheran minister, who taught him the trade). *(World Features Syndicate)***

**They started very young:**

**Kelly Ripa – dance lessons, age 3**

**Luciano Pavarotti – sang arias, age 5**

**Joan Collins – dance school, age 2**

**Nina Simone – played piano, age 6**

**Gregory Hines – studied dance before age 3**

**Oprah Winfrey – learned to read by age 3**

**Christina Applegate – appeared in Day of Our Lives, age 3. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**They started young:**

**Joe Pesci – singing debut, age 4**

**Molly Ringwald – sang in dad’s band, age 4**

**Marie Osmond – on Andy Williams Show, age 3**

**Shirley Maclaine – danced ballet, age 3**

**Keshia Knight Pullman – TV ad, 8 months**

**Robert Downey Jr. – film debut, age 5**

**Jerry Mathers – film debut, age 4**

**Antonio Banderas – Spanish TV series, age 4**

**Peter Jennings – own TV show, age 9**

**Orson Welles – in opera, age 5**

**Judy Garland – on stage, age 2**

**Shakira – singer/lyricist since age 8; first album, age 14. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**When stars were kids:**

**Marilyn Monroe – played Jesus in school play, age 6**

**Oprah Winfrey – first public recital, age 3**

**Antonio Banderas – Spanish TV series, age 4**

**Anne Bancroft – singing debut, age 2**

**Jodie Foster – read own scripts, age 5**

**Leonardo DiCaprio – on Romper Room TV show, age 5 (dismissed for disruptive behavior). *World Features Syndicate)***

**When they wrote their first songs: Willie Nelson – age 7; Patty Loveless – age 11; Richard Rodgers – age 14; Andrew Lloyd Webber – age 11; Smokey Robinson – in first grade (for a play his class was doing about Uncle Remus). (*World Features Syndicate)***

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