# How They Were Inspired

## Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. (Joel 2:28)

**In 1872, J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City, Nebraska, induced the state to set aside a spring day for the planting of trees. It became known as Arbor Day, and other states soon followed suit. *(Peter Fossel, in American Profile magazine)***

**Legend has it that Greek mathematician Archimedes discovered the principle of specific gravity while taking a bath. He noticed that the water went up when he lowered himself into the bath. “Eureka,” he cried and raced home naked to try measuring the volume of objects by seeing how much water they displaced. The technique is still used today! (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 147)**

**Artist Grant Wood said all his really good ideas came to him while milking cows. (L. M. Boyd)**

**Scientific discoveries are where you find them. The English astronomer James Bradley was puzzled over certain shifts in star positions in the course of the year. In 1728, he was on a pleasure sail on the Thames River and noted that the pennant on top of the mast changed direction according to the relative motion of ship and wind and not according to the direction of the wind alone. In a flash, he found he understood the important principle of “the aberration of light.” (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 100)**

**On January 20, 1892, the first organized basketball game was played at the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts. Canadian-born James Naismith, a physical education teacher, invented the game as a form of winter exercise. His inspiration came from a children's game called duck-on-a-rock, in which players threw a small rock at a "duck" placed on top of a larger rock in an attempt to knock it off*. (The Daily Chronicles)***

**Beethoven poured cold water over his head when he sat down to compose music, believing that it stimulated his brain’s creative process. And no one ever doubted his creative genius. *(Harvey Mackay, in Outswimming the Sharks)***

**In 1865, German chemist Friedrich Kekule fell asleep puzzling over the structure of the benzene molecule. Kekule dreamed of thousands of atoms dancing before his eyes, some forming patterns and twisting like snakes. Suddenly one snake grabbed its own tail. In a flash, Kekule awakened with the idea of a closed-chain structure of benzene--a brilliant scientific discovery. (Dudley Lynch, in Reader's Digest)  
A little birdie gave Bertha Diugi the idea for the invention of the parakeet diaper. (Jack Kreismer, in The Bathroom Trivia Book, p. 63)  
Birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger was one of 11 children. (L. M. Boyd)**

**Treasure hunt indeed: Dan Brown’s blockbuster was partly inspired by his Christmas mornings as a child. Instead of finding his presents under the tree, “I might find a treasure map with codes and clues that we would follow from room to room and eventually find our presents hidden somewhere else in the house,” Brown has told reporters. (Patti Thorn, in Rocky Mountain News)**

**No graduate of Cornell should forget it was that school’s red-and-white football uniforms that inspired the color scheme on Campbell’s Soup labels. (L. M. Boyd)**

**While on a steamship, James J. Ritty of Dayton, Ohio, noted with interest a certain device that counted the revolutions of the ship’s propeller. He promptly went home and invented the cash register. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Many of Johnny Cash's songs were inspired by the tough times his family faced tending the land on Arkansas farms, as well as the gospel songs he heard growing up. (The Daily Chronicles)**

**Casanova worked best in bed, under the blankets. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 34)**

**More than 600 acres of native grassland at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie near Red Cloud, Nebraska, offer a glimpse of the land that inspired the settings and characters for the Pulitzer Prize-winning author who grew up in Red Cloud. (American Profile magazine)**

**Both Scarlatti and Chopin were inspired by cats. When Scarlatti's cat struck certain notes on the keys of his harpsichord, one by one, with its paws, Scarlatti proceeded to write “The Cat's Fugue,” a fugue for harpsichord in D minor. While Chopin was composing Waltz No. 3 in F major, his cat ran across the keys of the piano, amusing Chopin so much that he tried for the same sounds in what is called “The Cat's Waltz.” (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 388)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Agatha Christie claimed she did most of the plotting for her detective stories while sitting in a bathtub eating apples. *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 116)***

**Writer Agatha Christie said she did much of the planning for her books while washing dishes. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**There’s a church in the valley by the wildwood, no lovelier spot in the dale: These words to a sentimental and popular old hymn, The Church in the Wildwood, describe a spot where something of a miracle occurred about 150 years ago. It seems that a young music teacher named William Pitts was traveling to visit his bride-to-be in 1857 when the stagecoach stopped briefly in a wooded glade where Pitts envisioned a little church being built. Returning home, he wrote a poem, Church in the Wildwood, which he later set to music. When Pitts and his bride returned to the area to settle five years later, they found a little brown church had just been built in the same glade that inspired him to write the hymn years earlier. Pitts’ song was sung at the church’s dedication service. (Billie Shelton, in American Profile magazine)**

**The church that was found by a dream: The Church of Stavros now used for regular services on the island of Perissa, Greece, had been buried for 400 years until a farmer named Gerassimos, in the village of Gonia, Greece, saw the location of the lost edifice in a dream! (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Odd Places, p. 17)  
\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his famous poem “Kubla Khan” directly from a dream. Coleridge was in the midst of writing down the visions he had seen in this dream when someone knocked on the door and he rose to let him in. On returning to his work, Coleridge found that he could not remember the rest of the dream. That is why “Kubla Khan" remains unfinished. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 91)**

**A great composer does not set down to work because they are inspired, but become inspired because they are working. Beethoven, Wagner, Bach, and Mozart settled down day after day to the job at hand with as much regularity as an accountant settles down each day to his figures. They didn't waste time waiting for inspiration. (Ernest Newman)**

**Since 1950, cartoonist Hank Ketcham has been depicting wholesome family life in his strip “Dennis the Menace.” Daily details may have changed since the 1950s, like exchanging tricycles for skateboards, but not the essential view. It is a world where Mom is at home with the kids and profanity doesn’t get stronger than “heckuva.” “It was a nice life,” Ketcham recalls wistfully. Ketcham has told the story of the strip’s creation many times, but still warms to it. A free-lance cartoonist, he was sitting at his drawing board when his wife stormed into his studio with the words, “Your son is a menace!” “You mean Dennis?” A light bulb lit up in his head, and a comic-strip character was born. (Judith Weinraub, in Washington Post)**

**Charles Dickens wrote (and slept) facing north, aligning himself with the poles of the earth.(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 121)  
Why don't you start writing your masterpiece when you go on vacation? That's what Bram Stoker did. He wrote “Dracula” during his visits to the Scottish coast. (L. M. Boyd)**

**One night in 1879 at a bar in a little town called Menlo Park, New Jersey, some men were drinking beer, when suddenly one of them announced that he was going to invent an electric light. The others laughed, but that man got up, put on his coat and hat, and accidentally walked into the fireplace, thereby setting his coat on fire. This gave Thomas Edison, who was at another table drinking coffee, the idea of using carbonized cotton as the filament in his light bulb. (Dave Berry, in Denver Post magazine)**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous essayist, valued the writings of other men more for stimulation than for guidance. “I read them,” he said, “to make my top spin.” (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 80)**

**On January 24, 1922, Christian K. Nelson patented the Eskimo Pie. He got the idea for the chocolate-covered ice cream bar when a boy in his store was unable to decide whether to spend his money on ice cream or a chocolate bar. (The Daily Chronicles)**

**Andre Cassagnes had his eureka moment in 1955. The French electrician was peeling a translucent decal from a new light-switch plate when he noticed that an electrostatic charge had caused metallic powder to cling almost magically to the plastic sheet. Where he touched his pencil to the decal, the powder fell away. Realizing that the phenomenon could be used to create a drawing toy, he spent several years working up a prototype in his basement workshop. Cassagnes hawked his invention, L’Ecran Magique (The Magic Screen), around European toy fairs, and in 1959 the Ohio Art Co. bought the rights to the device for $25,000. The firm tweaked the design and in 1960 launched the toy in the U.S. with a catchier name: Etch A Sketch. (The Week magazine, February 15, 2013)**

**Where was the Ferris wheel invented? Fort Genoa, Nevada. That's where George Washington Ferris got the idea while watching an irrigation wheel. (L. M. Boyd)**

**It’s a matter of historical record that Benjamin Franklin did much of his writing mornings. In his bedroom. In the nude. (L. M. Boyd)**

**A group of West Coast entrepreneurs met in a tavern over a few beers and came up with Genetech Inc. in 1976. It is now one of the leading companies in the development of new drugs and chemicals. (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 90)**

**While working on a better way to make glass, British inventor Alastair Pilkington noticed a film of fat floating in his wife's dishwasher. That idea hook inspired a process where molten glass is floated on a layer of melted metal to provide an otherwise unachievable smoothness. (Joe Griffith, in Speaker's Library of Business, p. 305)**

**Christoph Gluck would write only when seated in the middle of a field.  
(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 109)**

**Creative people can find inspiration from the most mundane things. Architect Eero Saarinen, for instance, was commissioned in 1956 to design a building for TWA at what is now New York's Kennedy Airport. His first model did not suit him, but he kept working at it. Then one morning at breakfast, he found himself staring at the curved shell of a grapefruit. He turned it over, began carving arches in it, and carried the finished product off to work, adding it to the other models involved in the final design. When the terminal was completed, it was described by an architectural magazine as “a totality of fluid form curving and circling within itself,” suggesting “the flight of a great bird.” The grapefruit wasn't mentioned. (Madigan/Elwood, in Brainstorms & Thunderbolts)**

**On February 23, 1940, inspired by his experiences during a cross-country trip, folk singer Woody Guthrie wrote "This Land Is Your Land." (The Daily Chronicle)**

**In 1906, schoolchildren in Clarion, Iowa, gave four-leaf clovers to Superintendent O. H. Benson during a visit and inspired the emblem for the area’s agriculture clubs: 4-H. (Marti Attoun, in American Profile magazine)**

**J. M. Haggar, founder of the Haggar Company, became inspired by Henry Ford's idea of the production line and mass production. If automobiles can be mass-produced, why can't men's fine trousers be mass-produced and sold at popular prices? Those in the clothing industry said he'd never make it. However, using the ends of suit fabrics instead of denim, Haggar made a new kind of dress pants he called “slacks,” and in the process, J. M. Haggar revolutionized the clothing industry. (Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker's Sourcebook)**

**Haydn could write music only on clean white paper. Haydn believed he could not compose well unless he was wearing a ring given to him by Frederick the Great. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 109)**

**Ernest Hemingway, the journalist, novelist and short-story writer, wrote his books while standing up. (Craig Varoga & the Associated Press editors, in It's A Fact , p. 29)**

**It’s a matter of historical record that Dr. Homer Croy went west to Kansas to get away from a nagging wife. It was Croy who wrote “Home on the Range,” the song with the line, “Where seldom is heard a discouraging word …” Croy knew about discouraging words. (L. M. Boyd)**

**Consider how Montgolfier invented the hot-air balloon. Looking into the fireplace, one of the brothers saw burnt paper scraps rise above the flames and up the chimney. Heated air could make a balloon rise from the earth, he realized. (Joe Griffith, in Speaker's Library of Business, p. 305)**

**The inspirations for:**

**Tinker Toys – from kids’ poking holes in spools of thread**

**Vacuum – from railroad-car cleaner blowing dust into containers**

**Queen Anne Furniture – from Queen Anne’s bowed legs**

**Pneumatic tire (Dunlap) – to give his kid a head start in tricycle race**

**Gutenberg printing press – from a winemaking press**

**Practical pull-top can – inventor forgot can opener at picnic (and had to use car bumper). (World Features Syndicate)**

**You've been up here a long time. That I have. What inspired you to come up here in the first place? An Internal Revenue auditor. (Johnny Hart, in B.C. comic strip)**

**Sam Johnson needed “a purring cat, an orange peel and a cup of tea” to write. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 34)**

**Kant, the philosopher, meditated while staring out of his window at a stone tower, and when trees grew up to obscure the tower he chopped 'em down. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 34)**

**I get my best ideas in the middle of the night. If I wake up and think of something that I can develop into a cartoon, I grab a pencil and write down a few words. I don't wake my wife; I don't turn on the light.  
The next morning, I look and it says: “Zup fmph fomph film.” At first I can't figure out what the words are, but when I get to the drawing board, the idea comes back to me. (Bil Keane, cartoonist)**

**Illustrator, author and creator of the Kewpie doll, Rose O’Neill spent much of her time at her family’s home, a 14-room mansion called Bonniebrook, near Branson, Missouri. She claimed that the idea for the plump cupids with turnip-shaped heads came to her in a dream in 1909. (American Profile magazine)**

**Rudyard Kipling would only write when he had black ink in his pen.  
(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 121)**

**In 1957, Vic Barouh's company made carbon paper. One day he saw a secretary use chalk to erase a mistake. This is how the idea for Ko-Rec-Type was born. (Joe Griffith, in Speaker's Library of Business, p. 303)**

**Alabamian Harper Lee, who wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel To Kill a Mockingbird, did much of her creative thinking while golfing. “In Monroeville,” she explained, “if people know you’re working at home, they think nothing of walking right in for coffee. But they wouldn’t dream of interrupting you on the golf course.” (Bruce Felton and Mark Fowler, in Writer’s Digest)**

**There really was a Mary who inspired the 1830 poem “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Editor Sarah Josepha Hale wrote the poem for Godey's Ladies' Magazine when she saw little Mary Tyler's pet lamb following her to school one day ... which was against the rules. (Jeff Rovin, in The Unbelievable Truth!)**

**1820: The whaling ship Essex, out of Nantucket, Massachusetts, was attacked and sunk by an 80-ton sperm whale. Herman Melville based his novel Moby Dick in part on the incident. (Ben Franklin’s Almanac, p. 342)  
The Chicago fire of 1871 inspired Dwight L. Moody to build a school that would train young people to know the Bible and spread its teachings. (Glenn Van Ekeren, in Speaker's Sourcebook, p. 275)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Mozart composed while playing billiards. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 109)**

**It was said of Mozart, for example, that his music wrote itself while he traveled, strolled or dozed. (Dudley Lynch, in Reader's Digest)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*The Father of the National Park Service was John Muir, who spent his boyhood at Fountain Lake Farm in Marquette County, Wisconsin. The lake and the natural beauty that inspired him are preserved at the county’s John Muir’ Memorial Park in Buffalo, Wisconsin. (American Profile magazine)**

**Screenwriter James Cameron dreamed of a robot with a red eye, then woke up and started his script for The Termninator. Steve Allen’s song “This Could Be the Start of Something Big” came from a dream, as did the new swing that enabled Jack Nicklaus to climb out of a golfing slump. (Kristin von Kreisler, in Reader’s Digest)**

**Bill Bowerman, founder of Nike, got his first shoe idea after staring at a waffle iron. He got the idea of using squared spikes to make shoes lighter. *(Noel Botham, in The Book of Useless Information, p. 114)***

**Where did writer William Sydney Porter get his nom de plume “O Henry”? He’d once worked in a pharmacy and noted there that writings of a French chemist named Ossian-Henry were indexed under “O. Henry.” (L. M. Boyd)  
  
Lewis H. Dedner, composer of the music to “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” claimed that the hymn's melody came to him in a dream on Christmas Eve. Charles Wesley, author of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” (written in 1730), wrote a total of 6,000 hymns. He was inspired to write “Hark” while listening to the pealing of bells as he walked to church one Christmas morning. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 110)**

**Frank Baum, who wrote The Wizard of Oz, chose the name of the wizard this way: While writing the book, Baum was gazing around his office, trying to decide what to call the wizard. Baum saw the letters on his three file drawers across the room. One file read “A-G,” the next “H-N," and the third “O-Z.” And “Oz” it became. (Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Rene Antoine de Reaumur, the French scientist, discovered how to make paper from wood by watching wasps make paperlike nests by chewing up food. (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Weird Inventions & Discoveries, p. 82)**

**This tailor worked in Sterling, Massachusetts. One evening in 1863, he was watching his wife trying to cut out a dress when the notion hit him she needed a pattern. He snipped out a bunch of paper patterns and wholesaled them for 10 cents each. Eight years later, moving 6 million patterns a year, Ebenezer Butterick was a wealthy fellow. (L. M. Boyd)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*When he was a child, Blaise Pascal once locked himself in his room for several days and would not allow anyone to enter. When he emerged, he had figured out all of Euclid’s geometrical propositions totally on his own. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 129)***

**Most of all, develop and practice a “passion for living.” Pablo Picasso marveled at everything. “I look at flies, at flowers, at leaves and trees around me,” he said. “I let my mind drift at ease, just like a boat in the current. Sooner or later, it is caught by something.” (Dudley Lynch, in Reader's Digest)**

**Hog racers at state fairs wanted to come up with some enticement to inspire pigs to sprint. Turned out, finally, that what never failed to motivate the pigs was an Oreo cookie. Smart animal, the pig. (L. M. Boyd)**

**January 17, 1929 -- Popeye, created by Elzie C. Segar, made his first appearance in the comic strip Thimble Theatre. The character inspired millions of children to eat their spinach. (The Daily Chronicle Extra)**

**Charles William Post first sampled a hot cereal beverage while he was recuperating from a stomach ulcer. He liked the idea of a decaffeinated alternative to coffee and tea, and years later he set to work on his own formula for a hot breakfast beverage. Today, his concoction, Postum, is enjoyed by millions of people. (Lester David, in Reader’s Digest)**

**Proust worked in bed, and only in a soundproof room. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 121)**

**George Pullman saw the bunks in the Colorado mining camps and made a creative jump to design the first sleeping cars for trains. (L. M. Boyd)**

**Herman Hollerith, a college graduate with a degree in engineering, helped compile the 1880 national census. It took 7 years of tedious, routine work to gather and tabulate all the information. Hollerith was sure there must be a quicker way. One day, while riding on a train, he noticed the conductor punch holes in a railway ticket to record the bearer's destination and the fare. Using the idea, Hollerith designed a punch to record a person's vital statistics by means of holes in a card. The cards were then read with an electromagnet. Because of this punch card invention, the 1990 census took only 3 years to complete, with a saving of $5 million. His device was a forerunner of today's computer. (Bits & Pieces)**

**Ravel’s great musical piece, “Bolero,” was inspired by a trip to a noisy steel mill. (Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World, p. 56)**

**Good reading can be very inspiring -- it always inspires me to do more reading. (Ashleigh Brilliant, in Pot Shots)**

**Samuel Colt (1814-1862) inventor of the revolver that bears his name, got the idea for its revolving cylinder as a 16-year-old seaman watching the helmsman turn the ship's wheel--each spoke aligning with a clutch that held it fast. (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, page 99)**

**Robert L. Ripley’s amazing worldwide industry is a true American success story, for it started humbly with one man and an idea. In 1918, the twenty-five-year-old Ripley was a hard-working sports cartoonist for the New York Globe newspaper. It happened one day that he was stuck for a cartoon to draw. As his daily deadline approached, he was still staring at a blank sheet on his drawing board when inspiration struck. Ripley dug into his files where he kept notes on all sorts of unusual sports achievements. He quickly sketched nine of the more interesting and bizarre items onto his page, and a legend was born. That first page was titled “Champs and Chumps.” Ripley’s editor quickly came up with a snappier name and “Believe It or Not! became an overnight sensation. *(The Ripley’s 100th Anniversary Series)***

**Daniel Defoe's “Robinson Crusoe” was inspired by the true-life story of Scottish sailor, Alexander Selkirk, who lived on an uninhabited Caribbean island for 52 months, from 1704-1709, before he was rescued. (Jeff Rovin, in The Unbelievable Truth!, p. 102)**

**Rossini composed most of his music when he was drunk. Rossini covered himself with blankets when he composed. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 109 & 121)**

**Dunlop got the idea for the rubber tire by looking at a garden hose. (Joe Griffith, in Speaker's Library of Business, p. 305)**

**In Hamilton, Ohio, not long ago, a struggling young manufacturer named Herbert Piker sat staring at a fisherman’s minnow bucket (one bucket fits inside another). Suddenly he got an idea. Why not put insulation between those two cans? With ice cubes inside, it would be a perfect picnic box to keep food and drinks cold. That was the origin of the now-famous Scotch Kooler. In four years Piker’s company jumped from a rundown maker of strongboxes – the business he had inherited from his father – to a concern grossing five million dollars a year. *(Bits & Pieces, February, 1988)***

**Billy, while seeing Abraham Lincoln on TV wearing his tall hat, said: “I’ll bet Abraham Lincoln gave Dr. Seuss the idea for the hat on the cat.” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Nobel Prize-winning physicist Dennis Gabor says that, like Einstein before him, he gets his best ideas while shaving. (Dudley Lynch)**

**Husband to wife: “The only idea that ever came to me while shaving was to grow a beard.”(Jim Fiebig, NANA)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*George Bernard Shaw had a tiny eight-foot-square writing hut built on wheels so that he could rotate it by hand to follow the sun all day long. (Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It's a Weird World, p. 86)**

**Balto, a sled dog who helped deliver serum to a diphtheria-stricken Nome, Alaska, in 1925, enjoyed short-lived fame and then was sold to a vaudeville show. A Cleveland, Ohio, businessman organized a successful, fund-raising campaign to buy him, and Balto lived out his life at the Brookside Zoo, now the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. His journey to Nome was the inspiration behind Alaska’s annual Iditarod dog sled race. (American Profile magazine)**

**A friend of mine worked in a lab experimenting with a new solar material gallium arsenide. Her job was to make precision cuts in the material with a high-speed wafer saw. Every time she did so, the material cracked. At home, she was watching her husband make wooden cabinets and noticed that, when he wanted to make precision cuts on certain types of wood, he reduced his saw’s speed. She tried that on the gallium arsenide and it worked. (Roger von Oech)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Steve Hillenburg created the Nickelodeon cartoon Sponge Bob Square Pants, the story of a yellow sea sponge who lives in a pineapple at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean with his pet snail, Gary; Hillenburg got his inspiration for the idea while working as a marine science educator. *(Harry Bright & Harlan Briscoe, in So, Now You Know, p. 63)***

**It all started with a character called Bob the Sponge that I drew in an educational comic I wrote back when I was teaching marine biology. It didn’t get published beyond me Xeroxing it and handing it out to friends. After I went back to school for animation, I worked for a while on Rocko’s Modern Life (1993-96). It dawned on me that if I was going to do a show on animals, I’d do a show about undersea animals – all the one that I’m interested in and know a lot about. I focused on the sponge because it’s one of the more peculiar creatures. Bob the Sponge wasn’t exactly SpongeBob, but he was the germ for the character. For the voice, I had worked with Tom Kenny on Rocko and I knew I wanted him for the show. I told Tom I wanted the voice to be basically like a Munchkin from The Wizard of Oz. And he imitated, on the spot, this Christmas dwarf he had overheard in the mall. I said, “That’s it!” And that’s really how we got there. The line he had overheard was “If it wasn’t for Christmas, I’d never bleepin’ work.” So thanks to some Santa’s elf somewhere, we have SpongeBob. (Stephen Hillenburg, in Entertainment Weekly)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Francis Scott Key was a young lawyer who wrote the poem “The Star Spangled Banner” after being inspired by watching the Americans fight off the British attack of Baltimore during the War of 1812. The poem became the words to the national anthem. *(Noel Botham, in The Book of Useless Information, p. 152)***

**It sometimes pays to relax. When James Watt was trying to work out an improvement on the Newcomen steam engine that would make it truly practical, the deepest concentration didn’t help. One Sunday afternoon in 1764, he took a peaceful, relaxed walk, and the key notion popped into his head. Chance favors the prepared mind. (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts)**

**As a young medical school student in 19th century Paris, Rene Theophile Hyacinthe Laennec had developed a talent for placing his ear on patients’ chests to hear different sounds. This only worked well, or course, if the patient was sufficiently slender. One afternoon, Laennec saw some children playing with wooden boards. One tyke would scratch or tap softly on the end, while another put his ear on the other end to hear the sound. Laennec went back to his office and constructed a long tube out of several pieces of rolled-up paper. Placing the end of the cylinder on the patient’s chest, he discovered that he could hear sounds much more clearly that even before. He experimented with different materials and designs, and in 1819 the stethoscope (as he had named it) was officially accepted by the medical community as a valuable diagnostic tool. (Tidbits)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**“Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” was the result of a Robert Louis Stevenson dream. In fact, Stevenson said he was able to dream plots for his stories whenever he felt like it. (Jack Kreismer, in The Bathroom Trivia Book, p. 81)**

**“Treasure Island” was created by Robert Louis Stevenson on a lark. Drawing a treasure map for his stepson on a rainy day, Stevenson was urged by the child to make up stories to go along with the drawings. Stevenson liked the stories so much he wrote them down, and these became the basis for his great novel. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 90)**

**After spending fruitless years looking for a story that would match his “strong sense of man’s double being,” Robert Louis Stevenson dreamed the plot of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. (Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 207)**

**It's not certain if that was his inspiration, but Robert Louis Stevenson was on his honeymoon when he wrote Travels with a Donkey. (Jack Kreismer)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Fritz Kreisler, the great violinist, was walking down the street one day with his friend, John McCormack, and they stopped to look in the window of a shop. A fine catch of fish, mouths open and eyes staring, were ranged in a display. Kreisler suddenly clutched John by the arm. “Great heavens!” he exclaimed, “That reminds me – I should be playing at a concert.” (Ireland’s Own)**

**Wagner found it easiest to compose when he was dressed up in historical costumes. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 109)**

**Weed Eaters: In 1971, an automatic car wash's spinning brushes caught the attention of George Ballas, a 60-year-old Texan, and he imagined something similar to get rid of dandelions. (Owen Edwards & Andrew Nelson, in Special Report)**

**It was stormy as I taxied my 727 out of the gate at New York’s La Guardia Airport one night. Air traffic was backed up everywhere. The controller in the tower was frenzied as the ground-control frequency became jammed with pilots calling at the same time. Then there was a brief pause in transmission, which allowed a lone, plaintive voice to come over the radio. In a slow drawl, he said, “Wilbur, this is Orville. Meet me down at the bicycle shop. I’ve got a great idea.” (J. T. Garner, in Reader’s Digest)**

**Virginia Woolf wrote all her books standing up. *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 119)***

**Writing habits of seven famous authors:**

**Truman Capote – wrote lying down**

**Ernest Hemingway – wrote standing up**

**Lewis Carroll – wrote standing up**

**Virginia Woolf – wrote standing up**

**Robert Louis Stevenson – wrote lying down**

**Mark Twain – wrote lying down**

**Alexandre Dumas – wrote nonfiction on rose-colored paper, novels on blue paper and poetry on yellow paper. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***