**Lemons into Lemonade**

## Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

**In the Africa of 1811, a botanist with an East India company, one William Burchell, was about to get married when his girlfriend ran out on him. Mortified, he loaded a wagon with muskets, gunpowder, beads, handkerchiefs, tobacco, trinkets and set off into the bush for Hottentot country. Stayed four years. He’s listed as the man who invented the African safari. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**An apple grower had built up a good mail-order business and was justifiably proud of his product. His apples were wonderful -- crisp, juicy, bright red, and shiny as a carefully polished brass rail. His customers came to expect only the best in taste and appearance. Then one year a hailstorm occurred just before the harvest. Nearly every apple was marred by hail. The apple grower had thousands of orders and checks, and his customers were fully expecting baskets and boxes of his bountiful fruit for the holiday season. He had a problem. If he sent out the pock-marked fruit he would have thousands of dissatisfied customers and his business would suffer--perhaps even dry up. The problem was in the appearance of the apples. How could he turn this liability into an asset? The fact was, they tasted great. The taste was better than normal because cold weather improves the flavor of apples when they are approaching ripeness. So the grower decided to fill the orders he had. But with each shipment he enclosed a card that said, “Note the hail marks that have caused minor skin blemishes on some of these apples. They are proof of their growth at a high mountain altitude where the sudden chills from hailstorms help firm the flesh, develop the fruit sugars, and give these apples their incomparable flavor." Nobody sent the apples back. And the next year the apple grower got orders with many notes expressing a preference for hail-marked apples rather than unblemished ones. (Bits & Pieces)**

**The oldest of seven children when her father died, Wanda Gag turned to art and writing to support her family and created the popular children’s book Millions of Cats. Gag was born in 1893 in New Ulm, Minnesota. (Marti Attoun, in American Profile magazine)**

**You cannot drill for oil in Beverly Hills. Why not? The developers did. And came up with 30 dry holes. In 1905. For awhile there, it looked as though they had blown the $670,000 they paid for that big bean patch. Then they put in streets and sold lots with the no-oil-drilling stipulation. How much of Beverly Hills would $670,000 buy you now. (L. M. Boyd)**

**In the early 1960s, two Bell Labs researchers, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, were hard at work at a research facility in Holmdel, N.J., modifying an antenna to pick up radio signals from our galaxy. But their readings were continuously contaminated by low-level static. Hoping that their equipment was at fault, the two cleaned and thoroughly tested the antenna. Still no luck. The noise would not go away. Now they could easily have given up and gone on to another project, but the two were determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. Could the static be, they wondered, a remnant of the massive explosion that began the universe? The big bang was an intriguing idea in astrophysics at the time, but it lacked proof. If the big-bang theory was right, Earth would be enveloped in constant low-level radiation. This, Penzias theorized, must be the static his antenna was picking up. Experiments eventually confirmed his theory, and in 1978 Penzias and Wilson were awarded the Nobel Prize in physics -- all because they wouldn't ignore a little background noise. (Robert McGarvey, in Reader's Digest)**

**Labrador must be a good place to learn all about cold temperatures.  That’s where Clarence Birdseye was when he figured out how to quick freeze foods.  *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Two Kansas City brothers, Henry and Richard Bloch, got into franchising because they were unable to sell one of their H & R Block tax preparation offices. They opened their first office in Kansas City, then a second one in New York. But neither of the brothers wanted to run the New York office, so they tried to sell it. When no one would meet their asking price, they decided to accept a $10,000 fee to let a buyer take over the office and use the H & R Block name, Luxenberg said in his book.  *(Dan McDonald)***

**On display at the French Academy of Sciences is a shoemaker's awl. It looks ordinary, but behind the little awl are both tragedy and victory. It fell one day from the shoemaker's table and put out the eye of his nine-year-old son. Within weeks the child was blind in both eyes, and had to attend a special school for the sightless. At that time the blind read by using large carved wooden blocks that were clumsy and awkward to handle. The shoemaker's son, when he grew up, devised a new reading system of punched dots on paper. And to do this, Louis Braille used the same awl that had blinded him. Tragedy will come to each of our lives, but we can choose how it affects us. When it strikes some of us ask, “Why did God allow this to happen?” Others ask, “How will God use this?” (Patricia Houck Sparkle)**

**Buffalo wings were first created at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo, New York, after they had received an over-shipment of chicken wings. *(Don Voorhees, in The Essential Book of Useless Information, p. 235)***

**My friend Mark and I work in a lawn-mower-parts warehouse. Somehow Mark got the idea that his wife did not want a card on Valentine's Day, but when he spoke to her on the phone he discovered she was expecting one. Not having time to buy a card on his way home, Mark was in a quandary. Then he looked at the lawn-mower trade magazines scattered around the office -- and got an idea. Using scissors and glue, he created a card with pictures of mowers, next to which he wrote: “I lawn for you mower and mower each day.” Mark's wife loved it. The card immediately graced their refrigerator door. (Gene Hyde, in Reader's Digest)**

**Lemon’s Aide: You say your car’s a lemon? You should be so lucky. Anthony Ashill, a clockmaker in Kidderminster, England, had a hunch that if he slit the extremities of a common lemon and put a piece of copper in one end and some zinc in the other, the citric acid natural to the fruit would create an electric battery strong enough to power a small motor. Eureka! He was right. Ashill put the contraption in his shop window, and incredibly, a full year later, the motor was still humming along at 120 revolutions per minute. “I had no idea there was so much juice in a lemon,” said Ashill, “electrically speaking, that is.” Which suggests that it’s high time to quit libeling the lemon as the symbol of mechanical unreliability. How about switching to, say, the cantaloupe? As in: “Poor Charlie. That car he bought is turning out to be a real cantaloupe.” (Quest, 1981)**

**As a child, Morris J. “Mo” Siegel suffered from asthma. Rather than give in to the disease, he hiked for miles in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains near his Colorado home. The hiking paid off when he and some friends started collecting wild herbs. A college dropout, Siegel began blending the herbs to make tea. Siegel dubbed his company Celestial Seasonings. (Doug Garr, in Reader's Digest)**

**In time the Sanders Cafe grew into a 142-seat enterprise, with a motel attached, valued at $164,000. Then disaster struck. In the mid 1950s, the two roads on which the restaurant stood were bypassed by new super-highways, and Colonel Sanders, whose place was isolated by the change, was forced to sell at auction for just enough to cover his debts. Faced with the prospect of trying to live on Social Security and his small savings, he struck out at the age of 66 for new frontiers. Sanders' principal asset was his method of frying chicken. Loading up his 1946 Ford with a 50-pound can of seasoning and his beloved pressure cooker, he took to the road. “Let me cook chicken for you and your staff,” he told restaurateurs. “If you like the way it tastes, I'll sell you my seasoning, teach you how to cook it, and you pay me a four-cent royalty on every chicken you sell.” By 1964, there were 638 KFC outlets, grossing $37 million a year, and the Colonel had begun to mutter that “this danged business is beginning to run right over me.” (James Stewart-Gordon, in Reader's Digest)  
When he was a little boy the other children called him “Sparky,” after a comic-strip horse named Sparkplug. Sparky never did shake that nickname. School was all but impossible for Sparky. He failed every subject in the eighth grade. Every subject! He flunked physics in high school. Receiving a flat zero in the course, he distinguished himself as the worst physics student in his school's history. He also flunked Latin. And Algebra. And English. He didn't do much better in sports. Although he managed to make the school golf team, he promptly lost the only important match of the year. There was a consolation match. Sparky lost that too. Throughout his youth Sparky was awkward socially. He was not actually disliked by the other youngsters. No one cared that much. He was astonished if a classmate ever said hello to him outside school hours. No way to tell how he might have done at dating. In high school Sparky never once asked a girl out. He was too afraid of being turned down. Sparky was a loser. He, his classmates, everyone knew it. So he rolled with it. One something was important to Sparky: drawing. He was proud of his own artwork. Of course, no one else appreciated it. So you know what Sparky did? He wrote his autobiography in Cartoons. He described his childhood self, the little boy loser, the chronic underachiever, in a cartoon character the whole world now knows. For the boy who failed the entire eighth grade, the young artist whose work was rejected not only by Walt Disney Studios but his own high school yearbook, that young man was “Sparky” Charles Monroe Schulz. He created the “Peanuts” comic strip and the little cartoon boy whose kite would never fly -- Charlie Brown. (Paul Aurandt)  
  
The French underwater explorer, Jacques Cousteau, trained as a naval pilot in France but a near-fatal automobile accident ended his flying career. His doctors wanted to amputate his left arm because it was badly crushed but he refused to approve the operation and began swimming as therapy. Cousteau went on to invent the Aqua-lung. (Ed Lucaire, in Celebrity Setbacks)**

**When Leonardo da Vinci, when but a small boy, drew a picture of a horrible monster, then placed it near a window to surprise his father. When Daddy came home, he nearly had a heart attack. The monster was so realistically painted Pop was sure his time had come. He promptly enrolled Leonardo in an art class. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 35)  
  
Sixty years ago, in a state of shock, a struggling young animator boarded a westbound train in New York. Walt Disney had traveled east to negotiate a better distribution deal for his cartoons starring Oswald the Rabbit -- only to be told that his distributor owned the rights to the rabbit and had signed up Disney's key artists. Defiantly, Walt told his wife, Lilly, that he'd think up a new character. As the train pulled out, he was already scribbling away on his pad. Somewhere in the 900 miles between Toluca, IL, and La Junta, CO, Walt remembered a field mouse that once sat on his drawing board when he was getting started in Kansas City. Walt decided to turn the mouse into a character and call him Mortimer Mouse. “Mortimer is a horrible name for a mouse,” Lilly objected. “Well, then, how about Mickey?” Walt suggested. “Mickey Mouse has a good, friendly sound.” (John Culhane, in Reader's Digest)**

**Dr. Pepper: In Virginia in the 1880s, a pharmacist’s assistant named Wade Morrison fell in love with his boss’s daughter. The pharmacist decided Morrison was too old for his daughter and encouraged him to move on. He did, settling down in Waco, Texas, where he bought his own drugstore. When one of his employees developed a new soft drink syrup, Morrison named it after the man who got him started in the pharmacist business – his old flame’s father, Dr. Kenneth Pepper. (Uncle John’s Best Bathroom Reader, p. 28)**

**It all began when Chester Greenwood’s ears got cold. Allergic to the woolen scarves that others tied around their heads, the industrious teenager wanted a better way to warm his ears in Maine’s chilly winter weather. So, using wire, beaver fur, cloth and a pair of pliers, he fashioned the first set of earmuffs in 1873. Only 15 at the time, he hardly could have imagined that, a century later, his hometown would dedicate a day in his honor, complete with a parade, speeches from local dignitaries, and the raising of a Chester Greenwood Flag at the Franklin Country Courthouse. However, that’s exactly what the town of Farmington, Maine, has done each year since 1977 when the state Legislature designated Chester Greenwood Day, celebrated on the first Saturday in December. (Richard Matthews, in American Profile magazine)**

**Thomas Alva Edison was one of a fair number of geniuses who did poorly in school. (Einstein, Newton, and Pasteur were three others.) In fact, Edison’s mother, a schoolteacher, was so offended with the bad reports young Tom was getting at school that she took him out of school altogether and taught him herself. (Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 154)**

**A football coach gave this advice on how to deal with failure: “When you’re about to be run out of town, get out in front and make it look like you’re leading a parade.” (Bits & Pieces)**

**Fountain pen manufacturer Lewis E. Waterman began his business career as an insurance agent. At one time, after working on a client for several weeks, he persuaded the man to take out a large policy. Waterman called on him with the contract ready for signature. He placed it on the desk and took a fountain pen from his pocket. As he opened it, the pen began to leak, and ink ran over the contract. Waterman hurried back to his office for another policy form. By the time he returned, however, the man had changed his mind. Waterman was so disgusted that he gave up the insurance business then and there and devoted his time to the development of a reliable fountain pen. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**In 1960 a 20-year-old college dropout named Wayne took a job working on a garbage truck. Talk about a dead-end job! But instead of seeing a low-status, low-paying job, Wayne saw a wealth-creating opportunity. He learned the business, worked his way up to manager, saved his money, and then bought his own garbage truck. Soon Wayne started buying up small local garbage hauling companies, then companies in nearby cities, then companies in cities all across America. Ten years later Wayne was part owner in Waste Management, the largest business of its kind in the world, earning over $2 billion in annual revenues! In 1986 Wayne saw another opportunity in the emerging market of video rentals. He bought into a small chain of video stores named Blockbuster Video. Seven years later the original three Blockbuster stores had grown to 4,500 stores in 10 countries. Today Wayne Huizenga is the owner of three professional sports teams in the Miami area, including the Miami Dolphins football team! *(Burke Hedges, in You Can’t Steal Second With Your Foot On First, p. 99)***

**“When I am unhappy,” says a woman I know, “I can't be grateful enough for my garden. The weeds won't wait until I'm through crying; they have to be pulled now, and that takes all my energy.” The more difficult and challenging the thing we are working at, the better, for we can't work hard without using up some of the energy that might go into self-pity. (Ardis Whitman, in Reader's Digest)**

**Grasshoppers swept over Tulsa in 1912. But private enterprise finds a way. People raked them up and sold them as chicken feed.  *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The masterpiece Messiah was written when Handel was debt-ridden, spiritless, and failing in health. His creditors were threatening to throw him in jail. (Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker's Sourcebook , p. 154)**

**There is a story about a 10-year-old boy who decided to study judo in spite of the fact that he had lost his left arm in a devastating car accident. He began lessons with an old Japanese judo master. The boy was doing well, so he couldn’t understand why, after three months of training, the master had taught him only one move. “Sensei,” the boy said, “Shouldn’t I be learning more moves?” “This is the only move you will ever need to know,” the sensei replied. The boy believed his teacher, and kept training. Several months later, the sensei took the boy to his first tournament. Surprising himself, the boy easily won his first two matches. The third match proved to be more difficult, but after a while his opponent became impatient and sensei answered. “First, you’ve almost mastered one of the most difficult throws in all of judo. And second, the only known defense for that move is for your opponent to grab your left arm.” The boy’s biggest weakness had become his biggest strength. (Dr. Delia Sellers, in Abundant Living magazine)**

**James Keiller ran a grocery store near Scotland’s coast in 1797. A Spanish ship loaded with Seville oranges washed ashore and he bought the cargo. The oranges were too sour, but his wife Janet refused to take the loss. She experimented until she came up with a concoction everybody liked – the world’s first marmalade. (L. M. Boyd)**

**In Philadelphia in 1929, Charles Darrow lost his job as an engineer. He found himself with plenty of spare time, so he spent hours inventing a board game on his kitchen table to keep himself busy. For the game, he used street names from Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he used to visit. The name of the game was “Monopoly,” which became one of America's most popular games, and Charles Darrow became rich -- all because he had lost his job. (Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 123)**

**A pitcher named Stan Musial was playing baseball for the Daytona Beach Islanders in 1940 when he injured his left shoulder. He concentrated then on hitting and won seven National League batting titles. (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 83)**

**I frequently hear music in the heart of noise. (George Gershwin)**

**Andronicus Livius, a Roman actor in the Third Century, B.C., didn’t have much of a speaking voice, evidently. He lost it entirely during a performance, improvised silently, and the audience liked him that way. It thus was he who originated pantomime. (L. M. Boyd)**

**Potato chips were invented in Saratoga Springs in 1853 by chef George Crum. They were a mocking response to a patron who complained that his French fries were too thick. *(Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 166)***

**In 1916, DeWitt Wallace went back to St. Paul to work as a mail-order manager for a greeting card company. Bored with his job, he immediately enlisted in the army when World War I broke out. In France, half his battalion was killed and Wallace was hit with shrapnel in the neck, nose, abdomen, and lungs. He spent the rest of his stint in a French hospital. While there, he filled the time by reading American magazines. As an experiment, Wallace began rewriting some of the articles, shrinking them in length while retaining as many of the author's original words as possible. He came to the conclusion that most could be shortened by at least 75 percent without losing their flavor or meaning. By the time Wallace returned to the States in 1919, he had perfected the technique of “condensing” popular literature. In 1920 he put together a sample copy of what he was already calling The Reader's Digest. (Jack Mingo, in How the Cadillac Got Its Fins , p. 105)**

**Henri Dunant, at age 30, was a wealthy Swiss banker and financier. His life would probably have continued much as it had except for one fateful day, June 24, 1859 that changed everything. Dunant had been sent by his government to talk to Napoleon III. He was to discuss a business deal between the Swiss and the French that would benefit both. But Napoleon was not in Paris; he was on the plain of Solferino about to do battle with Austrians. Henri Dunant tried to reach the scene before the battle began, but he was too late. His carriage came to a halt on top of a hill that overlooked the battlefield. Suddenly trumpets blared, muskets cracked, cannons boomed. The two cavalries charged and the battle was on. Henri Dunant, as if in a box seat at the theater, sat transfixed. He could see the dust rising, hear the screams of the injured, the dying. Dunant sat as if in a trance at the horror below him. But the real horror was later – when he entered the small town after the battle was over. Every house, every building was filled with the mangled, the injured, the dead. Driven by pity at the suffering he saw all around him, Dunant stayed in the town for three days doing everything he could to help. At the first Geneva Conference he carried on a one-man assault against war. As a result, the Conference passed the first international law against war – a movement that was to give birth eventually to both the League of Nations and the U.N. In 1901, Dunant was awarded the first Nobel Peace prize. And though he was penniless and living in a poorhouse, he gave the entire prize to the worldwide movement he had founded. Henri Dunant died in 1910 almost totally forgotten by the world. But Dunant needed no monument to make his grave. As a symbol of the organization he had fathered, he had taken the Swiss flag, a white cross on a red background and reversed it: a red cross on a white background. The organization on that became his everlasting monument was the Red Cross. (Bits & Pieces)**

**A young man, Robert L. Ripley, of “Believe It Or Not” fame, was enthusiastically entering upon a career of big-league baseball.  However, after long months of practice and keen anticipation, he fractured his arm during the first game that he pitched. Doctors warned him not to do any work that would strain his arm. Disappointed but not despondent, the youthful Ripley taught himself to draw. A job as a newspaper sports cartoonist afforded him preliminary training for his highly successful career. His word-pictures and penciled drawings, so familiar for many years to radio and television audiences and to newspaper readers, brought him worldwide fame as “Mr. Believe It Or Not”, who unearthed more oddities than any other person in history. During the remainder of his life, Ripley continued to regard the fractured arm in his first major-league ball game as the luckiest “break” he ever had. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**Christmastime was especially tough for Steven as a young boy. His family lived at that time in Haddonfield, New Jersey, on a block that won awards for its Christmas decorations. Surrounded by brightly lit houses, Steven called his own undecorated home “the black hole.” “Can’t we put some lights up?” he asked his father. “We’re Jewish,” Arnold Spielberg replied. “Be proud of who you are.” However, Steven wasn’t proud, because he felt different – and alone. This sense was heightened when the family moved to Phoenix and again were among the neighborhood’s few Jews. Feeling alien, Steven created an imaginary friend to confide in – a short, hairless creature from outer space. But even greater success would come with a small, hairless creature from outer space. Based on Spielberg’s imaginary childhood friend, E.T. – The Extra-Terrestrial (1982) captured audiences – and profits – as no film ever had. (Reader’s Digest)**

**Levi Strauss was a flop as a tentmaker in the California gold fields of 1850. Stuck with bales of denim, he invented blue jeans and sold them for $13.50 -- a dozen. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 14)***

**Velcro was invented in 1948 by a Swiss engineer, George deMestral, who came home from a walk in the woods one day, and was irritated to find cockleburrs stuck all over his clothes as well as his dog's coat. He decided to find out why they stuck so stubbornly without any adhesive substance. Under a microscope he discovered that the burr's ends were actually tiny hooks that grabbed onto anything fuzzy. The hook-and-loop fastener was born. Its name was a combination of velvet and crochet, the French word for hook. (Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It's a Weird World, p. 15)**

### George de Mestral, a Swiss engineer, found himself in a sticky situation. One day in the late 1940s, he returned from a walk in the woods, musing over the cockleburs that clung to his trousers and his dog. Examining the burs under a microscope, he discovered that they were composed of hundreds of tiny hooks that latched onto anything loopy. De Mestral figured out a way to weave nylon so that thousands of tiny hooks on one piece engaged thousands of tiny loops on another. He called the odd product Velcro, for velours and crochet . (Judith Stone, in Reader's Digest)

**The Jack Pine was once a “weed.” It was not only too small to use for lumber, but a substance within its cellular structure prevented its use for pulp in the manufacture of paper. Jack Pine was considered a “tree weed,” with little present value and none foreseeable. Millions of acres of Jack Pine were considered waste land -- an area larger than the State of Connecticut. But men of a paper company in Michigan believed “that a weed is merely a plant for which man has not yet found a use.” They did what others considered impossible. They found an economical way to remove the substance contained in Jack Pine's cellular structure which had prevented its use for paper pulp. As a result, this firm is now making a beautiful, high-quality paper out of Jack Pine -- employing many thousands in this work. Those who claimed nothing from Jack Pine -- received nothing. Those who planted their seeds, believing in their own success -- reaped the harvest. (Jon Speller, in Seed Money in Action , p. 24)**

**As a child, Robin Williams spent a lot of time alone. His late father, Robert, was an automotive executive, and when his older half-siblings moved away, Williams was often lonely. To amuse himself, he put together a make-believe world, a precursor perhaps to the creation of the hilarious characters that define his comedy routines today. When Robin's not up, is he down? “When people see that I'm quiet, they think something's wrong,” he says. “In down times I like to go for a long bike ride or run. The other thing I'm doing in that quiet time is just observing. But I'm also recharging. The truth is I'm probably addicted to laughter. My energy has been described as manic, but it's more like that of a kid having a great time.” (Jonathan Alter, in USA Weekend)**

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