**They Failed First**

**Woody Allen, Academy Award-winning writer/producer/director, flunked motion picture production at New York University and the City College of New York and failed English at N.Y.U. *(The Best of Bits & Pieces, p. 60)***

**Who flunked first and fourth grades yet went on to become an astronaut? Ed Gibson. *(Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker’s Sourcebook, p. 355)***  
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**Companies that went bankrupt: H. J. Heinz, Westinghouse Electric, The Washington Post, Montgomery Ward, Seven Up/RC Bottling, and GTE (Operating as "Associated Telephone Utilities") *(World Features Syndicate)***

**Big companies that went bankrupt:**  
**1. Quaker Oats (3 times)**  
**2. Pepsi-Cola (3 times)**  
**3. Birds Eye Frozen Foods**  
**4. Borden’s**  
**5. Aunt Jemima**  
**6. Wrigley’s (3 times). *(Press-Telegram newspaper, Long Beach, CA)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**Milton Berle tried radio six times. No luck. Then he tried TV. Instant spectacular success. Never can tell. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Gregor Johann Mendel (1822-1884) the Austrian botanist who discovered the basic laws of heredity, never was able to pass the examination to become a full-fledged teacher of science. *(Ripley’s Believe It or Not!: Weird Inventions and Discoveries, p. 67)***

**Cheers was almost canceled when it finished seventy-seventh, or dead last, in the ratings after its first week on the air in September 1982. After surviving cancellation, it went on to become one of the most successful sitcoms of all time, airing until May 1993. *(Don Voorhees, in The Perfectly Useless Book of Useless Information, p. 100)***

**As a teenager, British leader Winston Churchill failed the entrance exams to the Royal Military Academy -- twice. (He made it on the third try, and the rest is history.) *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 16)***

**Turn On, a television series hosted by Tim Conway, proved to be a turn off. It premiered on February 5, 1969, and was cancelled the same day. *(Jack Kreismer, in The Bathroom Trivia Book, p. 88)***

**Twenty dollars a week was all the salary Joan Crawford drew in her first job on the stage. She was a dancer in a road show which closed two weeks after it opened. *(Sunshine magazine)***   
  
**Paul Ehrlich, the German bacteriologist, always performed badly at school, and he particularly loathed examinations. He had a flair for microscopic staining work, however, and this carried him through his education despite his ineptness at composition and oral presentations. He eventually used his talent with the microscope to develop the field of chemotherapy, and he was awarded a Nobel Prize in medicine in 1908. *(Wallace/Wallechinsky, in The Book of Lists, #2)***

**Albert Einstein did poorly in elementary school, and he failed his first college entrance exam at Zurich Polytechnic. But he became one of the greatest scientists in the history of the world. *(Charles Reichblum,* in *Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 137)***

**If starting your own business is what you’d like to do, please note that studies at Tulane University suggest the average entrepreneur fails 3.8 times before making it work. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**William Faulkner failed to graduate from high school because he didn’t have enough credits. He bummed around the United States and Canada, enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force, trying to get into a university and later working as a postmaster until he was fired for reading on the job. He then tried writing and had five books finished by 1930 but failed to earn enough money to support a family. But he kept going and became popular in the mid 1930’s. He eventually received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. *(Ripley’s Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 37)***  
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**Henry Ford failed and went broke five times before he finally succeeded. *(Joe Griffith, in Speaker’s Library of Business, p. 250)***

**Henry Ford forgot to put reverse gear in the first car he manufactured. Then in 1957, he bragged about the car of the decade. It was the Edsel, renowned for doors that wouldn’t close, a hood that wouldn’t open, paint that peeled, a horn that stuck, and a reputation that made it impossible to resell. However, Ford’s future track record contains more glowing productions. *(Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker’s Sourcebook, p. 150)***  
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**The Jimi Hendrix Experience once opened for the Monkees. They were booed by fans and thrown off the tour, Jimi and the Experience that is.**   
***(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 14)***

**On November 8, 1923, Adolf Hitler launched his first attempt at seizing power with a failed coup in Munich, Germany, the “Beer-Hall Putsch.” *(Associated Press)***

**One November night, Michael Jordan and I found ourselves alone, and he told me about being cut as a sophomore from his high-school basketball team in Wilmington, N.C. “The day the cut list was going up, a friend--Leroy Smith--and I went to the gym to look together,” Jordan recalled. “If your name was on the list, you made the team. Leroy’s name was there, and mine wasn’t. I went through the day numb. After school, I hurried home, closed the door to my room and cried so hard. It was all I wanted -- to play on that team.” *(Bob Greene, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Who flunked the first grade and went on to become attorney general? Robert F. Kennedy. *(Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker’s Sourcebook)***

**When he was 22, he failed in business. When he was 23, he ran for the legislature and lost. When he was 24, he failed in business again. The following year he was elected to the legislature. When he was 26, his sweetheart died. At the age of 27, he had a nervous breakdown. When he was 29, he was defeated for the post of Speaker of the House in the State Legislature. When he was 31, he was defeated as Elector. When he was 34, he ran for Congress and lost. At the age of 37, he ran for Congress and finally won. Two years later, he ran again and lost his seat in Congress. At the age of 46, he ran for the U.S. Senate and lost. The following year he ran for Vice President and lost that, too. He ran for the Senate again, and again lost. Finally, at the age of 51, he was elected President of the United States. Who was this perpetual “loser”? Abraham Lincoln. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman*, in *It’s a Weird World, p. 74)***

**When Mickey Mantle graduated from Commerce High (Oklahoma) in 1949 he was not voted “Most Athletic.” That’s right, the man who possessed the greatest combination of power from both sides of the plate (he hit the longest home run in major league history, 565 feet in 1953) and speed (some experts suggested he could have won a track medal in the Olympics) lost out in the voting to his best friend, Bill Mosley. *(Jim Kreuz, in Baseball Digest)***

**The first collaboration of the great musical team of Lerner and Loewe (My Fair Lady), was a 1942 farce called “Life of the Party.” It ran a total of one performance. Although Frederick Loewe was from a prominent Viennese musical family, when he came to the United States to achieve musical fame, he wound up out west prospecting for gold and working as a cowboy. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World, p. 60)***

**By the age of twenty-five, he had been expelled from the army and was disgraced, despondent, without funds, apparently without a future, and suicidal. The man was Napoleon (1769-1821). One year later, he was the youngest general in the French army and began winning victories with ragged troops that were at the point of starvation. *(Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 259)***

**Didn’t President Ronald Reagan once do a song-and-dance comedy routine in Las Vegas? For two weeks in 1954, yes. At the Last Frontier Hotel there. Wasn’t what he did best. It didn’t go over*. (Boyd’s Curiosity Shop, p. 169)***

**The poet Carl Sandburg flunked out of West Point, according to the record, because of deficiencies in English. *(L. M. Boyd)***  
  
**When did Tom Selleck got his start on television and in the movies? - *(Amanda Plum, Hope, Arkansas)* The Detroit-born actor made his television debut as one of the three bachelor contestants on an episode of The Dating Game in 1967. (He didn’t get chosen.) He paid his acting dues on various TV shoes, including the daytime soap The Young and the Restless, before finally striking gold in 1980 with Magnam, P.I.) *(American Profile magazine)***

**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)***

**Shirley Temple failed a screen test for the Our Gang movie comedies. (*Uncle John’s Bathroom Reader: Wise Up!, p. 246)***

**How they did in their first professional tennis matches:**   
**Andre Agassi -- lost in 2nd round (1986)**  
**Pete Sampras -- lost in 2nd round (1986)**  
**Todd Martin -- lost in 2nd round (1990)**  
**Juan Carlos Ferrero -- lost in 2nd round (1998)**  
**Yevgeny Kafelnikov -- lost in 1st round (1992)**  
**Roger Federer -- lost in 1st round (1998)**

**Thomas Johansson -- lost in 1st round (1994). *(World Features Syndicate)***

**Henry David Thoreau became famous for writing Walden. But his earlier book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, was a complete bust, selling fewer than three hundred copies out of a first printing of one thousand. Thoreau bought the remaining copies of the book himself and wrote in his journal, “I now have a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself.” *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 13)***

**Leon Uris, author of the bestseller Exodus, failed high school English**

**three times. *(Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup, p. 251)***

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**George Washington lived in the day of the Duke of Wellington and Napoleon, both of whom far outshone him as military geniuses. He made some rather tragic blunders on the battlefield but somehow managed to bring our troops through that long and painful war to victory. *(Dr. D. James Kennedy)***

**In George Washington’s first action as a military leader, he led a small contingent of colonial militiamen against the French in the Ohio River Valley, was captured, and was sent back to Virginia. A year later, he returned as aide to a British general and again was defeated by the French. He eventually had better luck fighting against the British than he did fighting for them. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 13)***  
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**Then great French writer Honore de Balzac spent ten years as a failure before he had a successful book. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 16)***

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