Criticized First

Louisa May Alcott, the author of “Little Women,” was encouraged to find work as a servant or seamstress by her family. (CS1m p. 228)

Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales were greeted by bad reviews: “. . . quite unsuitable for children . . . positively harmful for the mind . . .” *(Isaac Asimov)*  
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Some of the greatest dance sequences in the history of the movies have been created and performed by actor-dancer Fred Astaire, who earned an Academy Award “for his unique artistry and his contribution to the techniques of motion pictures.” This contrasts ironically with the report on his first screen test for MGM that read: “Can’t act, slightly bald, can dance a little.” *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World)*

Popular actor and dancer Fred Astaire appeared in over 35 movies, dancing his way to fame with partner Ginger Rogers.  Following his first screen test, he was judged: “Can’t act, slightly bald, can dance a little.” *(Tidbits)*

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They teased and tormented him, called him the “ninety-seven pound runt” as a boy. He worked endlessly to build his muscular physique. Charles Atlas created a physique that has been used as a model for numerous famous statues in America. *(Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker’s Sourcebook)*

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When Lucille Ball began studying to be an actress in 1927, she was told by the head instructor of the John Murray Anderson Drama School, “Try any other profession. Any other.” *(Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, in A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup, p. 251)*

Teachers at John Murray Anderson’s Dramatic School in New York sent a young student home because she was “too shy” to make an actress out of her. The girl’s name? Lucille Ball. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 13)*

**Lucille Ball was thrown out of the New York Robert Minton-John Murray Anderson School of Drama at the age of fifteen because her instructor thought she was “too quiet and shy.” *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 7)***

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**In 1962 the Decca Recording Company turned down the opportunity to work with the Beatles. Their rationale? “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out.” Of course, the Beatles turned that imminent failure into prominent success. *(Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker’s Sourcebook)***

In 1962, four nervous young musicians played their first record audition for the executives of the Decca Record Company. The executives were not impressed. While turning down this British rock group called the Beatles, one executive said, “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out.” *(Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, in A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup, p. 252)*

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Who was told at an early age that he had no talent for music but whose name is synonymous with music quality? Ludwig van Beethoven. *(Glenn Van Ekeren, in The Speaker’s Sourcebook, p. 355)*

**You may be surprised to learn that this event actually took place in Leipzig, Germany, in the early 1800s and the subject of the public criticism was Ludwig van Beethoven. The work under critical review was an early performance of Beethoven's Second Symphony, composed in 1802 when Beethoven was suffering great despair at the prospect of completely losing his hearing. The work, today considered a timeless classic, is performed hundreds of times a year in concert halls around the world. *(Michael Snyder, in Plain Truth magazine)***

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**Alexander Graham Bell was called a fool when he exhibited his telephone at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. *(E. C. McKenzie, in Tantalizing Facts, p. 40)***

**Probably no one ever looked less like a fine athlete than short, squat Yogi Berra when he first showed up at Yankee Stadium in 1947. Bench jockeys around the league jeered at his face, his gait, and his malapropisms. His throwing was wild. Once, firing to second base, he hit his pitcher in the chest. Another time he beaned the second-base umpire, who was standing ten feet from the bag. But Yogi worked endlessly to overcome his shortcomings as a catcher, spent extra hours in the batting cage, studied rival hitters until he knew their every weakness. The result: Yogi played on 14 pennant-winning teams, hit  358 homers, was voted the league’s Most Valuable Player three times, and set 18 World Series records. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**Lee Strasberg, head of the famed Actors Studio, once told Robert Blake he could never learn to act. Blake went on to star in the popular American TV show Baretta and was voted outstanding actor in a dramatic series in 1975 by the U. S. Academy of TV Arts and Sciences. *(Ripley’s Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 12)***

When Luther Burbank published his seed catalogue at the turn of the century describing new varieties of plants he had developed by cross-breeding, he was charged with blasphemy and denounced by churches for interfering with nature and bringing forth new creations, a power considered to be God’s alone. *(Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 178)*

The parents of the famous opera singer Enrico Caruso wanted him to be an engineer. His teacher said he had no voice at all and could not sing.  
(CS1 229)

Godfrey Hounsfield (inventor of the CAT scanner) was told the CAT scan was “impractical.” *(Bits & Pieces)*

Florence Chadwick raced in swimming meets for nineteen years and never won once. Coaches called her a misfit and told her to quit. But at thirty-five she was acclaimed the greatest distance swimmer in the world. *(Derric Johnson, in The Wonder of America, p. 137)*

G. K. Chesterton, the English ****writer****, could not read until he was eight. One of his masters told him, “If we could open your head we should not find any brain but only a lump of white fat." He stayed at the bottom of his classes until, at 15, a budding friendship with future author E. C. Bentley ended his introversion. (Wallechinsky/Wallace, in The Book of Lists - #2, p. 269)

****Winston Churchill**** failed in his first two attempts to gain admittance to Sandhurst, the British army school, and his father considered using his social connections with the Rothschilds in order to obtain Winston a position in business. However, Winston was tutored for the Sandhurst exam and passed - barely - on his third try. His father was greatly displeased by the marks and wrote a scathing letter predicting his son's future to be that of a “wastrel" leading a futile life. (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 345)

Harry “King" Cohn was a school **dropout** from New York who went west to plug songs. He eventually founded Columbia studios where his difficulties with the English language became famous. His own executives used to bet him he couldn't spell the studio's name and Cohn usually lost. (Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance)  
Discussing her early career as a would-be stage actress at England’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, “Dynasty” star Joan Collins reveals that her first report card there contained a rather ironic assessment of her talents.  It read: “Joan has a good personality and lots of stage presence. But she must try to improve her voice projection or she will wind up in films and TV, and that would be a pity.” *(People Weekly)*

Columbus was bitterly attacked for believing the Earth was round. *(G. Edward Griffin, in World Without Cancer, p. 47)*

**Ray Conniff was a prolific composer and big-band leader who achieved global commercial success with innovative arrangements that millions loved, but which critics dismissed as “elevator music.” The Grammy Award winner’s career spanned more than six decades, beginning with a small band in Boston. *(Brian Macquarrie, in Boston Globe)***

Naturalist Charles Darwin did so poorly in a school noted for its classical education that his father once told him, “You care for nothing but shooting, dogs, and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family.” *(Wallechinsky/Wallace, in The Book of Lists - #2, p. 270)*

**As a recluse and an unknown writer, Emily Dickinson showed some of her poetry to the literary lion Thomas Wentworth Highinson, who advised her not to try to publish her poems because they were “strange” and “peculiar.” Dickinson, after her death, was recognized as one of the world’s great poets. Higginson is no longer recognizable. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 13)***

**In 1946, Marion Donovan was surprised when her prototype for disposable paper diapers was met with ridicule. She journeyed to all the major U.S. paper companies, and was laughed at for proposing such an “unnecessary and Impractical” item to replace cotton diapers. After nearly 10 years of pitching the revolutionary idea. Victor Mills had the foresight to capitalize on it, and he became the creator of Pampers. *(Joe Edelman & David Samson, in Useless Knowledge, p. 103)***

**Dune by Frank Herbert: Herbert's massive science-fiction tale was rejected by 13 publishers with comments like “too slow,” “confusing and irritating,” “too long,” and "issues too clear-cut and old fashioned." But the persistence of Herbert and his agent, Lurton Blassingame, finally paid off. Dune won the two highest awards in the science-fiction writing and has sold over 10 million copies. (Wallace/Wallechinsky, in The Book of Lists, #2)**

Clint Eastwood was once told by a Universal Pictures executive that his future wasn’t very promising. The man said, “You have a chip on your tooth, your Adam’s apple sticks out too far, and you talk too slow.” *(Ed Lucaire, in Celebrity Setbacks)*

**Because his teachers considered Thomas Edison “addled,” he was home-schooled by his mother. The first invention of the boy scientist: feeding a young friend a large dose of gas-producing powder to see if the gas would make the boy float off the ground. Later, young Edison got a job selling candy on trains, and built a lab for himself in a baggage car. He received his first patent when he was twenty-one. He eventually won 1,093 of them. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 21)***

**In his home town of Ulm, Germany, the young Albert Einstein was regarded as “slow, perhaps retarded” by his schoolteachers. Later on, he did okay for himself, relatively speaking. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 16)***

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In 1954, Jimmy Denny, manager of the Grand Ole Opry, fired Elvis Presley, after one performance. He told Presley, “You ain’t goin’ nowhere . . . son.  You ought to go back to drivin’ a truck.” Elvis Presley went on to become the most popular singer in America. *(Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, in A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup, p. 252)*

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At the Pasadena Playhouse, Gene Hackman and classmate Dustin Hoffman were voted the two least likely to succeed. *(2002 People Almanac, p. 386)*  
William Harvey was disgraced as a physician for believing that blood was pumped by the heart and actually moved around the body through arteries. *(G. Edward Griffin, in World Without Cancer)*

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)*

**Paul Cohen, Nashville “Artists and Repertoire Man” for Decca Records,**

**while firing Buddy Holly from the Decca label in 1956, called Holly “the biggest no-talent I ever worked with.” Twenty years later Rolling Stone called Holly, along with Chuck Berry, “the major influence on the rock music of the sixties.” *(Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup, p. 252)***

William Jenner, when he first developed a vaccine against smallpox, also was called a quack and was strongly criticized as a physician for his supposedly cruel and inhuman experiments on children. *(G. Edward Griffin, in World Without Cancer)*

A young man was fired from his job as a **reporter** on a San Francisco newspaper and was told by the editor, “You just don't know how to use the English language. This isn't a kindergarten for amateur writers.” This fellow went on to prove his editor wrong, authoring over 300 short stories and several novels, including The Jungle Book and Captains Courageous. The gentleman, Rudyard Kipling, was awarded a Nobel Prize for literature in 1907. (Tidbits)

Beethoven is not alone in hearing critical heat from journalists and public officials. The history of ****music**** abounds with references from journalists, music critics, religious leaders and politicians, condemning everyone from Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to the Beatles to Leonard Bernstein. (Michael Snyder, in Plain Truth magazine)

Early reviews of music classics:

1. Romeo and Juliet: “Ridiculous little noise”

2. Bizet’s music: “painful, repulsive”

3. Bizet’s operas: “like meowing of a cat”

4. La Traviata: “colossal fiasco”

5. Carmen: “If the Devil would write an opera . . .” *(World Features Syndicate)*

Other shoe companies thought Bill Bowerman's (inventor of ****Nike**** shoes) waffle shoe was a “really stupid idea.” (Bits & Pieces)  
   
Dr. Lee De Forest, the father of radio, was arrested and prosecuted for selling stock in his invention, which the judge called a “worthless piece of glass.” His radio vacuum tubes made it possible for the first radio broadcast in 1910, a recording of Caruso. *(Ripley”s Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 94)*

**Franz Schubert’s masterpiece, his Sixth Symphony, was turned down by the Paris Symphony Orchestra. The London Philharmonic laughed at it, and its conductor withdrew it from rehearsal. The piece was not played publicly until thirty years after it was written. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 112)***

Charles Schulz, the cartoonist who draws Peanuts, was told by his high school’s yearbook staff that his cartoons were not acceptable for the annual. But Charles Schulz knew that he was of importance to God.  He kept on drawing and eventually became known internationally for his considerable talent. *(Charles E. Ferrell, in The Clergy Journal)*

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What others thought of ****Shakespeare**** and his work: Byron – “plays so doting"; Voltaire – “a drunken savage"; Playwright R. Greene – “an upstart crow"; Hume –“a disproportioned and misshapen giant"; Critic J. Dennis – “devoid of celestial fire"; Poet J. Dryden – “writes below the dullest writers". (Robert Hendrickson, in The Literary Life & Other Curiosities)

**Even Shakespeare had his critics. One named Robert Greene described the young playwright as an “upstart young crow” or arrogant upstart, accusing him of borrowing ideas from his seniors in the theater world for his own plays. *(Noel Botham, in The Best Book of Useless Information Ever, p. 190)***

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****Socrates**** was called “a corrupter of youth.” (Robert Wood, in Along The Path)

**Masaru Ibuka (honorary chairman, Sony) got comments like: “A recorder with no speaker and no recorder--are you crazy?” Result: The Sony Walkman. *(Bits & Pieces)***

In grade school her classmates called her names—“Big Beak,” “Cross Eyes,” and “Mieskeit.” (Yiddish for ugliness). Although she was an excellent student, the young Barbra Streisand was small and thin, awkward, and had a rather large nose. When she graduated from high school and tried to get work as an actress, most casting directors thought she had talent but weren’t impressed with her looks. Undaunted, she transformed herself with clothes, makeup, and a new hairstyle, taking full advantage of her striking blue eyes and long, slender neck. When the Broadway show Funny Girl made her a celebrity overnight, the homely Streisand suddenly found herself one of the world’s most beautiful and glamorous entertainers. Women flocked to beauty salons to ask for the “Streisand look.” *(Carol Orsag Madigan and Ann Elwood, in When They Were Kids, p. 168)*

Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, an invention without which the business world of today could not even begin to function, was hard pressed to find a major backer. In 1876, the year he patented the telephone, Bell approached Western Union, then the largest communications company in America, and offered it exclusive rights to the invention for $100,000. William Orton, Western Union’s president, turned down the offer, posing one of the most shortsighted questions in business history: “What use could this company make of an electrical toy?” *(M. Hirsh Goldberg, in The Blunder Book, p. 151)*

Liv Ullman, two-time Academy Award nominee for Best Actress, failed an audition for the state theater school in Norway. The judges told her she had no talent. *(The Best of Bits & Pieces, p. 60)*

Robin Williams, Tom Cruise, Gene Hackman, and Dr. Seuss were all voted “Least Likely to Succeed” by their classmates. *(Harry Bright & Harlan Briscoe, in So, Now You Know, p. 148)*

In 1957, Don Hewitt, now executive producer of “60 Minutes” told Barbara Walters: “You’re marvelous, but stay out of television." *(2002 People Almanac, p. 477)*

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Westinghouse was treated as a mild lunatic by most railroad executives.  “Stopping a train by wind! The man’s crazy!” Yet he persevered and finally sold the air-brake idea.  *(Paul Lee Tan, in Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations)*Another man was regarded as moderately deranged by most railroad executives when he suggested a train could be stopped - using wind. Yet George Westinghouse persevered and finally sold to the industry what is now known as the Westinghouse Air Brake, a standard feature on American trains.  *(Dr. Charles Dickson, in New Realities magazine)*

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When he was considered only an eccentric and not one of America’s greatest poets, Walt Whitman would walk the streets of Camden, New Jersey, selling copies of his book “Leaves of Grass” from a pack on his back. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 20)*  
At Redwood High School in Tiburon, California, ****Robin Williams**** was elected “Least Likely to Succeed" and “Most Humorous". (Ed Lucaire, in Celebrity Setbacks, p. 124)

F. W. Woolworth’s employers at the dry goods store said he had not enough sense to wait upon customers. *(Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, in A 1st Helping of Chicken Soup, p. 230))*

Seven days before the Wright brothers first **flew** a powered heavier-than-air ship, in 1903, an editorial in The New York Times said that “time and money spent in airship experiments are wasted." (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 416)

William Roentgen, the discoverer of ****X-rays****, at first was called a quack and then condemned out of fear that his “ray" would invade the privacy of the bedroom. (G. Edward Griffin, in World Without Cancer)

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