# 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)***

**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 Chronicle)***

**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)**

**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 Chronicle)**

**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)**

**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)  
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)**

**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 Chronicle)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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. (American Profile magazine)  
  
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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**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)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*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)**

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**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)**

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**“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)**

**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)**

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**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)**

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