**Humble Beginnings**

**Even you, Bethlehem of Judah,**

**you are not insignificant in the eyes of the kings of Judah,**

**for from you shall come out a king,**

**who will shepherd my people Israel.**

***(St. Matthew 2:6)***

**The American Automobile Association has become a ubiquitous presence in modern America; motorists across the country take advantage of its discounts, roadside service and maps. The company has been around nearly as long as cars -- AAA published its first road map as early as 1905. For those who are curious, the map was of Staten Island, and it was hand-drawn on linen. *(Samantha Weaver, in Tidbits)*
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**Arguments continues over the whereabouts of the nation’s first air-conditioner office building. A New Yorker claims it was the old Larkin Building now gone, in Buffalo. Was built by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1904 and had ducts to distribute air forced over ice blocks. *(L. M. Boyd)*

The nation’s first air-conditioner was built by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1904 and had ducts to distribute air forced over ice blocks. *(L. M. Boyd)
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**How did America come about? Remember, two hundred years ago it was a wilderness. Have you ever gone out in the woods and left the path for just a few moments and seen all those trees and underbrush, the thistles and the thorns, the creeks and the rivers, the mountains? Not to mention mosquitos, black flies and chiggers? And thunderstorms, tornadoes. Not to mention the wintertime; the ice and the cold and the sleet. How on earth did they do it. *(Foster McClellan, Unity teacher)***

**From humble beginnings: Benji (movie Benji) -- found in an animal shelter; Murray (TV’s Mad About You) -- animal shelter; Original Lassie -- a kennel; Quincy (TV’s Coach) -- animal shelter; Comet (TV’s Full House) -- animal shelter; Mike (Down and Out in Beverly Hills) -- a sheep farm; Toto (Wizard of Oz) -- a kennel. *(Pauline Bartel, in Amazing Animal Actors)***

**Jennifer Aniston: Like her “Friends” character, Aniston worked as a waitress after graduation from school. The rail-thin Aniston actually used to be fat. When she realized that was keeping her from landing acting parts, she went on the Nutri/System diet and lost 30 pounds.
*(2002 People Almanac, p. 332)
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You know those convicts sent in the late 1700’s from England to the penal colony in Australia? Not a dangerous bunch, for the most part. Among the 700-plus in the first batch were petty thieves, mostly, plus some con artists, a perjurer and several forgers. *(L. M. Boyd)*
In the Irish uprising of 1848, the men were captured, tried and convicted of treason against Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. All were sentenced to death. Passionate protest from all over the world persuaded the Queen to commute the death sentences. The men were banished to Australia--as remote and full of prisoners as Russian Siberia. Years passed. In 1874 Queen Victoria learned that a Sir Charles Duffy who had been elected Prime Minister of Australia was the same Charles Duffy who had been banished 26 years earlier. She asked what had become of the other eight convicts. She learned that: Patrick Donahue became a Brigadier General in the United States Army. Morris Lyene became Attorney General for Australia. Michael Ireland succeeded Lyene as Attorney General. Thomas McGee became Minister of. Agriculture for Canada. Terrence McManus became a Brigadier General in the United States Army. Thomas Meagher was elected Governor of Montana. John Mitchell became a prominent New York politician and his son, John Purroy Mitchell, a famous Mayor of New York City. Richard O’Gorman became Governor of Newfoundland. *(Johnny Rocco, in Abundant Living magazine)
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Students entering Harvard are brought to a special section of the library where the rough drafts of famous authors are kept. This exercise has quite an impact on young writers who previously thought that the work of geniuses arrived complete. In a single stroke of inspiration. Here, the freshman can examine how a successful artist often starts with an apparently random series of ideas later proved superfluous to the**

**final design. But were essential to the process of developing a new concept. That is, the early drafts are not discarded like mistakes, but are viewed as the initial steps in unfolding the idea. *(Dr. Neil A. Fiore, in Reader’s Digest)
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**In December 1891, a physical-education instructor at the Y.M.C.A. Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, invented a new game. He asked the school janitor to find two boxes and nail them at opposite ends of the gymnasium balcony. The janitor couldn’t find any boxes so he substituted two peach baskets. If the janitor had been able to find some boxes, the game probably would have become known as “box-ball”; instead it was named “basketball.” *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World, p. 10)***

**Basketball was born in 1891 when James Naismith, an instructor at a school for YMCA workers in Springfield, Mass., was directed to devise some recreational exercise for students bored by routine calisthenics. He designed a game that involved throwing a ball through bottomless peach baskets. Colleges and YMCAs quickly took up the new sport. *(Earl and Miriam Selby, in Reader's Digest)
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**That the bridal veil started out as a sack over the bride’s head is widely known. But rarely mentioned. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**What legendary tough guy wore his sister’s dresses to school because his family couldn’t afford new clothes for him? Charles Bronson. *(Ed Lucaire, in Celebrity Setbacks, back cover)***

**In 1983, Martha Coolidge, director of a film called Valley Girl, was angry with the casting director, who kept auditioning “pretty boys” for the lead role. So Coolidge went to the reject pile, pulled the first photo off the top, held it up and said, “Bring me someone like this.” The picture was of Nicolas Cage, and he got the part. It was his first lead role. *(Uncle John’s All-Purpose Bathroom Reader, p. 34)*
James Cagney’s first professional stage job was as a chorus girl wearing a red wig and tutu in a female impersonation act. *(Ed Lucaire, in Celebrity Setbacks, p. 84)***

**Andrew Carnegie arrived from Scotland penniless, got a job in a Pittsburgh steel mill for $4.80 a month, and fifty years later retired with a guaranteed income of one million dollars per month. He gave away 90% of his fortune before he died in 1911, to good causes, of course . . . such as public libraries, among many others. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 40)**

**Cheers debuted on NBC on September 30, 1982, to little acclaim. In fact, it was the lowest rated television show that week. And it didn’t improve much that first season -- finishing the year in 77th place. Cheers was almost canceled, but Grant Tinker, president of NBC, loved the show and gave it another chance. Over the next year, as America came to love the Cheers family and the bar “where everybody knows your name,” the show caught on and eventually became a huge hit with a devoted audience. It turned that cast of unknowns into household names, and one of the best TV ensembles ever*. (Joe Garner, in Stay Tuned, p. 46)***

**Kansas City Chiefs coach Marty Schottenheimer had a humble beginning to his winning career. At the January 1975 Senior Bowl, he pestered NFL coaches for any entry into the league. There was no vacancy, so Schottenheimer offered to compile a scouting report of World Football League players for then Giants coach Bill Arnsparger. “I got all the film of the games and completed a report on nearly every player,” Schottenheimer remembers. “I thought Bill said they would pay me $1500.” When Arnsparger sent him $125, Schottenheimer didn’t call to complain. He would have done it for nothing, he said; he was building bridges. Then Arnsparger called with a job: linebacker coach, Giants. Three months later Schottenheimer asked Armsparger what had happened to the $1500 fee. “Bill kept copious notes,” Schottenheimer recalls. “He looked it up and said, ‘No, Marty, says right here I said $50 to $100.’” Schottenheimer had actually earned a $25 bonus for his hard work. *(Thomas George, in New York Times)***

**It is not clear where cottage cheese got it’s name, which is made by straining the curds of slightly soured milk, was developed. Some sources say it was centuries ago in Europe; others say more recently in America. There are many variations, which could account for the confusion. There’s no consensus on the name, either, except that it originally was made in small batches at home, and the name captures that humble beginning. *(Rocky Mountain News)***

**The old Romans counted by moving pebbles. Latin for pebble is “calculi.” That gave us our word “calculate.” *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The first Drive-In movie theater was opened on June 6, 1933, by salesman Richard M. Hollingshead in Camden, N.J. On the bill was a twilight showing of the British comedy Wife Beware. Hollingshead had worked out the technology with a 1928 Kodak projector that he mounted on the hood of his car and aimed at a sheet. The film was a little-known second-run feature, and the neighbors complained about the noise. From those decidedly humble beginnings, a U.S. institution was born, one that exploded in the post-World War II automobile culture. The drive-in peaked in 1958, with nearly 5,000 theaters across the U.S. *(Lisa McLaughlin, in Time)***

**Pierre Omidyar founded eBay in September 1995 in his California home. He called his business AuctionWeb and meant it to be a marketplace where individuals could buy and sell goods and services. Omidyar got things started by selling a broken laser pointer for about $14. *(Rocky Mountain News)*

In 2003, Estee Lauder Cos had 21,500 employees and an estimated worth of about $10 billion. Its products are sold in more than 130 countries across five continents. The company’s roots go back to the 1920s with facial creams concocted over a gas stove in a modest kitchen by her uncle, John Schotz. *(Richard Severo, in The New York Times)*By all accounts, his career at Maine Township High School in Des Plaines, Illinois, was remarkable only in its mediocrity. Known as Harry--if he was known at all--the shy student never rose above a C average. And while his peers found glory as football stars or student government officers, Harry toiled in obscurity, wheeling projectors from room to room as an audiovisual assistant. Such a nonentity was Harry that one classmate, Ernest Ricketts, recalls, “A girl I knew accepted a date with him and then decided, ‘Nope, can’t do it. Too much of a geek.’” Call it a case of late blooming--or just plain Revenge of the Nerd. As fate would have it, Harry--after dropping out of college and several years spent hammering away as a carpenter--evolved into sexy, box-office swashbuckler Harrison Ford. *(People magazine)***

**As a child, Grandma Moses began painting, squeezing juice out of grapes and lemons to obtain colors. She laid Masonite flat on an old kitchen table for her work rather than using an easel. She shared her “studio” with the washer and dryer. The family moved to a farm at Eagle Bridge, New York, and it was here that she completed her first painting. While wallpapering her parlor, she ran out of paper, pasted up plain white paper and painted a scene. That first work still hangs today in a Bennington, Vermont museum. *(Tidbits of the Foothills)***

**Larry Hagman made his acting debut in a grade school pageant--and it was a disaster! He had only one line. But when the time came for him to say it, his mind went blank--and he just stared dumbly out into the audience, triggering guffaws of laughter. *(Leon Adams, in National Enquirer)*
In 1955, more than 200 drag racers revved up at an abandoned airstrip in Great Bend, Kansas, for the National Hot Rod Association’s first national event. *(American Profile magazine)***

**Hero of Alexandria created a hollow sphere out of bronze and attached two L-shaped tubes on opposite sides. He poured water into the sphere and suspended it over fire. Steam hissing out of the tubes forced the sphere to rotate. Was first known man-made example of jet power. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The jukebox has been around since 1889, when the machine made its debut at a saloon in San Francisco. (Though it wasn’t called a jukebox then; at the time, it was known as a “nickel-in-the-slot player.”) And it wasn’t exactly like the music players we’re familiar with today. It was simply a wooden cabinet with a phonograph player inside. Four tubes that resembled stethoscopes were attached to the cabinet, so no more than four people could enjoy the music at any given time -- and each of those four people had to deposit five cents to activate the listening tube.
*(Samantha Weaver, in Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Abraham Lincoln, like most writers of great prose, began by writing bad poetry. Early experiments with words are almost always stilted, formal, tentative. Economy of words, grip, precision, come later (if at all). A Gettysburg Address does not precede rhetoric but burns its way through the lesser toward the greater eloquence, by long discipline. Lincoln not only exemplifies this process but studied it, in himself and others. He was a student of the word. *(Garry Wills, in Atlantic Monthly)*
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**Where six famous people lived as children:
Oprah Winfrey -- in farmhouse with no indoor plumbing
George Gershwin -- in 28 apartments
Charlie Chaplin -- in an orphanage
Coco Chanel -- in a convent
Estee Lauder -- above father’s hardware store
Elvis Presley -- in house with no running water. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**Where they lived while growing up:
Leslie Nielsen -- log cabin near Arctic Circle;
Richard Pryor -- in a brothel;
Rock Hudson -- 11 people in one-bedroom apartment;
Victor Mature -- in rented garage and tent;
Ann-Margret -- in an extra room in funeral parlor. *(World features Syndicate)
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**Loretta Lynn is a legendary country music singer. She grew up in poverty in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky. She gained musical experience singing in church. After she married, her husband gave her her first guitar. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)*
On February 17, 1904, Giacomo Puccini’s opera “Madama Butterfly” was poorly received at its world premiere at La Scala in Milan, Italy. Puccini revised his work, which went on to enjoy great success. *(Associated Press)***

**The Mona Lisa is undoubtedly the most famous and most valuable painting in the world. However, the husband of the woman depicted in the “Mona Lisa” is said to have disliked the painting so much that he refused to pay for it. It once hung in the bathroom of Francis I, the King of France. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World, p. 108)***

**Lord Laurence Olivier is acknowledged by many critics as the greatest actor in the 20th century. However, his debut as an actor was that of a policeman in a play called “The Ghost Train.” At his first entrance -- the very first time he had ever set foot on the professional stage -- he tripped over the door sill and fell headfirst into the footlights. Looking back on his long and illustrious career, Olivier later claimed that he received from the audience the biggest laugh of his career. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World, p. 25)***

**Lawrence Tibbett, internationally famous Metropolitan Opera star, first saw the inside of that building from the $2.20 standing room space, because he couldn’t afford to buy a seat. *(Sunshine magazine)***

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**Oprah Winfrey once approached Aretha Franklin as she was stepping out of a limo and convinced Franklin that she had been abandoned. Aretha gave her $100, which Oprah used to stay in a hotel. After being sexually abused at age 9 by an older cousin and later by a family friend, she ran away from home at age 13. She bore a child when she was 14 though the baby died as an infant. *(2002 - People Almanac, p. 482)***

**Oprah Winfrey’s family was so poor that she didn’t get her first pair of shoes until she was six. *(Don Voorhees, in The Perfectly Useless Book of Useless Information, p. 106)*
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**Pablo Picasso, one of whose paintings recently sold for $3,000,000, was so poor early in his career, that he burned some of his drawings to keep warm. *(Ripley’s Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 325)***

**As a youth, Sidney was raised in poverty on Cat Island in the Bahamas. At sixteen, with less than two years of education and three dollars in his pocket, he moved to New York City in search of a better life. When he arrived, the only place he could find to sleep was a rooftop. His first job was that of dishwasher. Although he knew nothing about acting, Sidney responded to a want ad listed by the American Negro Theater. Because of his limited education, he could not read all the words in the script. The director interrupted his audition, shouting, “Stop wasting my time.” While that rejection would have stopped and even destroyed the ambitions of most people, the young man walked away more determined than ever. Saving money from his meager dishwasher’s salary, Sidney bought a radio. He used it as an educational tool, listening to people’s voices for hours, trying to enunciate as clearly as they did.  At the restaurant, he found a waiter to tutor him in reading. Later Sidney returned to the American Negro Theater persuading officials to let him take acting lessons. Privately, he resolved to become not only the best black actor but the best actor. His name is Sidney Poitier, and he is regarded as one of the finest actors of his generation. *(Victor M. Parachin, in Unity magazine)***

**Ezra Pound lived on potatoes while waiting for fame. He paid the printer himself for his first book which sold for 6 cents a copy.
*(Ripley’s Believe It Or Not!: Book of Chance)***

**On February 6, 1911, our fortieth president was born in a second-floor apartment above a brown-floorboard saloon in a hard cold sleet that blanketed the prairie town in gray. That’s right, Ronald Reagan was born above a bar. The Tampico (Illinois) Historical Society erroneously claims on its website that Reagan was born above a bakery, likely because it sounds more wholesome than a tavern. The first floor of the Graham Building – at 111 South Main Street – didn’t become a bakery until 1915, four years after Reagan’s birth and long after his family had moved to their next house on Glassburn Street. *(Douglas Brinkley)***

**When they started, the Ringling Brothers Circus had no money for anything fancy. Their first wild animal was a blind hyena. When they made more money, they imported a giraffe to America, claiming it was the last one on Earth. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**J. K. Rowling: From Rags - As a single mother living on public assistance, Rowling started writing Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone in a cafe while her baby daughter napped. Why the cafe? Because it was warmer than the tiny flat she lived in. When Bloomsbury Books bought her manuscript in 1996, she was thrilled. The L1,500 (about $2,400) she was advanced was more money than she’d ever received at one time in her life. To riches - Four years and three more books later, Rowling was worth more than $400 million . . . and she’s not done yet.
*(Uncle John’s Unstoppable Bathroom Reader)***

**Vidal Sassoon’s early clients as a haircutter were mostly prostitutes.
*(Ed Lucaire, in Celebrity Setbacks)***

**In 1873, Fred Hatch built the nation’s first upright silo on his father’s farm near Spring Grove, Illinois. He dug an 8-foot-deep hole, lined it with rock and mortar, and extended the wooden tower 16 feet above ground to store corn silage. *(American Profile)*
A once-famous singer offered to work free in “From Here to Eternity” because he thought he was washed up. Frank Sinatra got the part of Sergeant Maggio for a small salary and the movie led to a new start as an actor. It also produced a generation of fans who wanted him to sing again. Thirty years later Sinatra was still the biggest in the business in Las Vegas. *(Ripley’s Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 9)***

**All human speech is said to evolve out of grunts. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Ben Franklin had nothing to do with the potbellied stove known by his name today. Rather, his invention was a complicated -- and ultimately unsuccessful -- device intended to force heat into a room while carrying smoke away. But installing the stove meant rebuilding an entire fireplace, and the device apparently couldn’t generate enough air flow to force the smoke out. Nevertheless, Franklin’s invention was an important stepping-stone in the development of more efficient home heating. *(Time)***

**On April 2, 1902, the first American theater devoted solely to movies opened in Los Angeles. Housed in a circus tent, the venue was dubbed “The Electric Theater.” Admission was about 10 cents for a one-hour show. *(Moments in Time, The History Channel)***

**First time-keeping instrument of record was a bowl of water. A tender watched it. When it sank, the tender emptied it, set it afloat again, and ran a gong. This was in the China of 4,000 years ago. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**In 1920, a Detroit policeman named William L. Potts worked out an electric light system that allowed him to control three street intersections from one tower. He picked the colors red, yellow, and green because railroads used them. These were the first street traffic lights. *(Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 288)***

**In the 1930s, George Nissen built a canvas bouncing apparatus with springs made from inner-tube scraps. He called it a trampoline and jumped into business in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. *(American Profile)***

**Harry Wayne Huizenga, another college dropout, started a trash-hauling business with a beat-up old truck. By the time he was 31, he and his partner, Dean L. Buntrock, had built the business into the world’s largest waste-services company, Waste Management, Inc. Later he turned his attention to a Dallas video-rental store that he built into Blockbuster Video. *(Peter Lynch and John Rothchild, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Shania Twain grew up so poor her Canadian family often went without meat. Says she of Ojibwa Indian ancestry, but was actually adopted by her Indian stepfather. Raised her three younger siblings after her parents died in an auto accident when she was 21. *(2002 People Almanac, p. 474)***

**To open their first ever theater in 1903 in New Castle, Pennsylvania, the Warner brothers, Jack, Harry, Sam, and Albert, borrowed the ninety-nine chairs they needed from the local undertaker, which had to be taken back later for funerals. *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 18)***

**Believe it or not, people have been sleeping on water-filled bags for more than 3,500 years. The Persians were apparently the first -- they sewed goatskins together, filled them with water, and left them in the sun to get warm. The direct ancestor of the modern waterbed was invented in 1853 by Dr. William Hooper of Portsmouth, England, who saw the beds as a medical device that could be used to treat bedridden patients suffering from bedsores, as well as burn victims, and arthritis and rheumatism sufferers. His water bed wasn’t much more than a rubber hot water bottle big enough to sleep on. It wasn’t until 1967 that San Francisco design student Charles Hall made an improved model out of vinyl and added an electric heater to keep the bed warm all the time.
*(Uncle John’s Unstoppable Bathroom Reader)***

**When President and Mrs. John Adams arrived in Washington in 1800 to become first residents of the White House, they found water had to be carried from a spring five blocks away and there were no bathrooms. It wasn’t until 1833 that a pipe was laid from Franklin Park to provide running water for the mansion. Understandable. Without a bathroom, who needs running water. *(Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 243)***

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