# Overcoming

**So David prevailed over the Philistine   
with a sling and with a stone,   
and smote the Philistine and slew him;   
but there was no sword in the hand of David.  
*(1 Samuel 17:50)***

**Every valley shall be filled,**

**and every mountain and hill shall be made low.**

**(St. Luke 3:5)**

### We are distressed in every way, but not overwhelmed; we are harassed on all sides, but not conquered; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

**The Atlanta Braves started a season long salute Thursday night honoring Hank Aaron on the 25th anniversary of his historic 715th home run that broke Babe Ruth’s record. The tribute has helped Aaron, who finished with 755 home runs, forget his somewhat bittersweet memories of the chase to beat Ruth. As he closed in on the record, Aaron received hundreds of thousands of parcels of mail, many filled with hate because there were people who did not like the idea that a black man from Mobile, Ala., was going to pass Ruth. Adding to the hurt was the fact that then-commissioner Bowie Kuhn was not even at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium on the night when Aaron broke the record. *(Denver Rocky Mountain News)***

**Ex-NFL quarterback Troy Aikman was born with a clubfoot. He was in plaster casts till he was eight months old and wore special shoes until he was three. After being injured in his first season at Oklahoma and losing the starting quarterback job, he transferred to UCLA, where he went on to stardom. Aikman’s ninety wins in the 1990s make him the winningest quarterback of any decade. *(Don Voorhees, in The Super Book of Useless Information, p. 116)***

**Baseball: The Red Sox win the World Series? Unlikely, since they were cursed by Babe Ruth. To make matters worse, they were down three games to none in the best-of-seven American League Championship Series (against the Yankees) and were trailing 4-3 in the bottom of the ninth. The rest is history, as the BoSox later shocked the St. Louis Cardinals with a four-game sweep in the Fall Classic. *(Armchair Reader: Vitally Useless Information, p. 278)***

**The incredible Beethoven: One of the most amazing achievements in the history of the arts was Beethoven’s ability to create immortal music even though he often couldn’t hear what he was composing. Beethoven began losing his hearing before he was thirty, and it got progressively worse, until he was totally deaf. During this period, he wrote many of his most famous works, including the majestic Ninth Symphony. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 90)***

**California’s twisted trees: It’s hard to believe that anything can grow on the California-Nevada border, much less “the oldest living things on the planet,” said Dan Blackburn in the Los Angeles Times. In the mountains that straddle the two states, it rains less than a foot a year, strong winds blow almost constantly, and temperatures can dip below zero. But the area is home to “the ancient warped and twisted bristlecone pine tree,” a species that dots the landscape with specimens up to 5,000 years old. A big draw to painters and photographers, the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest teems with trees that have been shaped by the harsh winds – some twisted like corkscrews. “Perhaps most remarkable is the color of the exposed wood, which glows with shades of orange and gold” that seem too intense to be natural. (The Week magazine, September 2, 2011)**

### 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) ****George Burns**** was born Nathan Birnbaum on January 20, 1896, in a slum tenement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He had seven sisters and four brothers. His father died when George was seven, and the family, which had always been poor, was now poorer. (Maurice Zolotow, in Reader's Digest)

### Jim Carrey: From Rags - He had to drop out of high school and take a job as a janitor in a factory. In fact, his entire family worked in that factory, living in a small cottage on the grounds. At his lowest low, Carrey wrote a $10 million check to himself . . . to be redeemed when he made the big time. To Riches - After working the comedy circuit for years, Carrey landed a role on In Living Color, which led to a movie deal. In 1996 he became the highest paid actor ever when he received $20 million to star in Cable Guy. When his father died, Carrey placed the check he had written to himself in his dad’s burial suit. *(Uncle John’s Unstoppable Bathroom Reader)* \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*****George Washington Carver****, whose research on such common crops as the peanut led the South away from its perilous one-crop economy (cotton), was illiterate until the age of twenty. (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 160)

**George Washington Carver was fourteen when Mariah Watkins found him asleep on her woodpile in 1878. The young black had set off to make his way in the world with his few possessions tied in a bandana. Mariah took him in. He attended Lincoln School, a fourteen-by-sixteen foot room with seventy-five students. During recess, he’d go through the yard to Mariah’s house to do chores and study. Carver learned as much as he could and then wandered off, taking odd jobs and picking up schooling where he could. At twenty-five he was accepted at Highland University, but the school quickly changed its mind when he showed up. “We don’t take Negroes here,” he was told. Finally, at age thirty, Carver was accepted at all-white Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa, but the twelve-dollar tuition took at his savings. After he paid it, he had ten cents left. He got through school by taking in laundry, washed in two tubs he’d bought on credit. When he graduated, Carver went on to teach at Iowa State College and Tuskegee Institute. He began experimenting with the lowly peanut and eventually came up with 300 peanut products, ranging from soap to ink. He made 118 products from the sweet potato, 75 from the pecan, and won international fame as a scientist. *(Whitcomb, in Oh Say Can You See, p. 149)***

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**You know that little dog called the chihuahua? It’s ancestors were mute. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Winston Churchill did not become prime minister of England until he was 62, and then only after a lifetime of defeats and setbacks.  His greatest contributions came when he was a senior citizen. *(Joe Griffith, in Speaker’s Library of Business, p. 250)***

### The summer was uncomfortably hot. Window blinds offered some protection from the sun but the delegates were frequently uncomfortable in their close-fitting clothes and wigs. When the windows were shut to reduce the outside noise, the air became oppressive; when they were opened, flies buzzed in.” Perhaps the stifling Philadelphia summer of 1787 was what the 55 men from 12 states needed to forge the ****Constitution****. At the beginning, diverse opinions threatened to scuttle the convention. The smaller states were jealous of the larger ones, the South distrusted the North, great property owners thought differently than merchants. The 55 men met and argued, then raged some more until -- on July 16, 1787 -- they struck the “Great Compromise,” which set up equal representation for each state in the Senate, and representation by population in the House of Representatives. After the compromise, it was a relatively speedy trip on the road to completing the Constitution. (Michael Carlton, in Denver Post)

### Gary Cooper wore his best suit to a tryout for a western movie, but suspicious producers thought the big actor was a dude and made him prove he could ride--and fall off--a horse. He went on to a career that culminated in the classic High Noon, but before he made it big, Coop was fired and rehired by the movie bosses seven times. *(Ripley’s Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 8)*

### France's Charles de Gaulle probably is the head of state who survived the most ****assassination**** attempts. Between 1944 and 1966, there were 31 attempts on his life. (L. M. Boyd)

**Tom Dempsey, born in 1947 with only half a foot, was encouraged by his father as he grew up to play sports ant take part in all activities like the other kids. He did, and even excelled at them. He holds the NFL’s record for the longest field goal – 63 yards. *(Barbara Seuling, in You Can’t Sneeze with Your Eyes Open, p. 7)***

**Neil Diamond was on his way to becoming the first member of his family to graduate from college when he dropped out in his senior year to take a songwriting job with a music-publishing company. “It was a chance to step into my career,” he explains. The job lasted only four months. Eventually, he was fired by five other music publishers. “I loved writing music and lyrics,” he says, “and I thought, ‘There’s got to be a place for me somewhere.’ After eight years of knocking around and bringing songs to publishers and still being basically nowhere, I met two very successful producers and writers, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, who liked the way I sang. They took me from being a guy with a guitar to a guy who could make real records,” he adds. *(Claire Carter, in Parade magazine)***

### In 1921 ****Walt Disney**** started the Laugh-O-Gram Corp. in Kansas City, Mo., with $15,000 from investors. But he was forced to file for bankruptcy two years later when his backers pulled out because of problems with New York distributors of his animated fairy tales. Then in July, 1923, Disney left for Hollywood with all his belongings: a pair of pants, a coat, one shirt, two sets of underwear, two pairs of socks, and some salvaged drawing materials. (Wallechinsky/Wallace, in The Book of Lists - #2 , p. 297)

**Amelia Earhart, the famed pilot, drove into Bloomington, Illinois, for a 1936 appearance because she was too broke to fly. *(Bill Flick, 1997)***

**Albert Einstein couldn’t speak fluently when he was nine. His parents thought he might be mentally retarded. In 1921, Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work with the photoelectric effect. *(Noel Botham, in The Book of Useless Information, p. 16)***

### Michael Faraday was born into poverty in the eighteenth century, had no formal education, and was considered to possess a bad memory. Faraday went on to become one of history’s greatest scientists, discovering the principles of electromagnetic induction, the electric motor, the dynamo, and electrolysis while also discovering stainless steel, benzene, and butylene. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 16)*

**Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor in America, started her practice in New York in 1851. Not only was she unable to find patients - no one would even rent her a room once she mentioned that she was a doctor. After weeks of trudging the streets, she finally rented rooms from a landlady who asked no questions about what Elizabeth planned to do with them. Quaker women, who had always been receptive to the goal of equal rights, became Elizabeth’s first patients. But no hospital would allow her on its staff. Finally, with financial help from her Quaker friends, Elizabeth opened her own clinic in one of New York’s worst slums. The clinic opened in March, 1853. Elizabeth hung a sign out announcing that all patients would be treated free. Yet, for the first few weeks, no one showed up. Then one day a woman in such agony that she didn’t care who treated her, staggered up the steps and collapsed in Elizabeth’s arms. When the woman was treated and recovered, she told all her friends about the wonderful woman doctor on Seventh Street. The dispensary was soon going well, and eventually expanded into the New York Infirmary for Women and Children -- now a large and thriving hospital on East Fifteenth Street. *(Bits & Pieces)***

### Remember the four-minute ****mile****? People had been trying to achieve it since the days of the ancient Greeks. In fact, folklore has it that the Greeks had lions chase the runners, thinking that would make them run faster. They also tried tigers' milk--not the stuff you get down at the health-food store, but the real thing. Nothing worked. So they decided it was impossible. And for thousands of years everyone believed it. It was physiologically impossible for a human being to run a mile in four minutes. Our bone structure was all wrong. Wind resistance too great. Inadequate lung power. There were a million reasons. Then one man, one single human being, proved that the doctors, the trainers, the athletes, and the millions and millions before him who tried and failed, were all wrong. And miracle of miracles, the year after Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile, thirty-seven other runners broke the four-minute mile, and the year after that three hundred runners broke the four-minute mile. A few years ago, in New York, I stood at the finish line of the Fifth Avenue Mile and watched thirteen out of thirteen runners break the four-minute mile in a single race. In other words, the runner who finished dead last would have been regarded as having accomplished the impossible a few decades ago. What happened? There were no great breakthroughs in training. Human bone structure didn't suddenly improve. But human attitudes did. (Harvey Mackay, in Swim with the Sharks, p. 67)

**Frederick the Great of Prussia was anything but great as a youth. His father, King Frederick, abused the boy, labeling him a weakling. At the age of twenty, Frederick deserted from his father’s army, was caught, and was thrown into prison. Once released he became the greatest military leader of a war-mad eighteenty century and surprisingly, a great leader, granting his people more liberties than any other monarch of his time. *(Bob Fenster, in They Did What!?, p. 16)***

### ****Galileo**** was imprisoned for teaching that the Earth moved around the Sun. (G. Edward Griffin, in World Without Cancer)

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### During the 1830s, it had almost become a sport for creditors to take poor ****Charles**** ****Goodyear**** to court, have him declared bankrupt, and toss him into debtors' prisons in Philadelphia, New Haven, and Boston. Still, his wife's unshakable loyalty and his own pluck saw him through the bad times. It was between stays in jail that he discovered how to vulcanize rubber. (Wallechinsky/Wallace, in The Book of Lists - #2, p. 298)

### Hard rubber cost Goodyear ten years of study, poverty and public ridicule. *(Paul Lee Tan, in Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations)*

### \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Alex Haley, was raised from infancy by his grandmother, because his mother had passed away and his father, a student in another state, was unable to care for him. As an adult, Haley served twenty years in the Coast Guard, then left to pursue a career as a free-lance writer in New York. The years after Haley left the Coast Guard were not easy, personally or financially. He endured times of overwhelming poverty. Yet Haley had a burning desire to become a successful and self-supporting writer. He committed himself to writing the stage of his family’s genealogy. Despite the hardship and lack of material resources, Haley spent twelve years writing Roots. Finally, seventeen years after he left the Coast Guard, Roots was published. The book was translated into thirty-seven languages and became the basis for two incredibly successful television miniseries. *(Elaine B. Travis, in Unity magazine)* Although in his later years, George Handel, the famous German composer, suffered from paralysis of the left hand and was totally blind, he continued to conduct and compose music. *(Bruce D. Witherspoon, in Astounding Facts, p. 178)*

### When I got cut from the varsity team as a sophomore in high school, I learned something. I knew I never wanted to feel that bad again. I never wanted to have that taste in my mouth, that hole in my stomach. So I set a goal of becoming a starter on the varsity. (Michael Jordan, basketball star)

### Buster Keaton, whose first crib was his parents vaudeville trunk, made his debut at the tender age of four, stoically enduring his parents’ brutal comedy routines, which often verged on outright child abuse. He got the nickname. Buster, from fellow vaudevillian Henry Houdini, who marvelled at the young child’s toughness and stoicism in the face of abuse. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s a Weird World, p. 35)*

**Throughout his life Henry Wadsworth Longfellow suffered from periodic bouts of severe insomnia. Out of desperation he decided to put his sleepless nights to some good use, and he began to write poetry in bed -- including his 1842 classic The Wreck of the Hesperus. *(The Book of Lists, #2)***

### In his first fight, future heavyweight champ ****Joe Louis**** was floored six times in three rounds. (L. M. Boyd)

### All of filmmaker George Lucas’s achievements will come together when he begins filming the next Star Wars trilogy, the first installment of which should be in theaters by 1999. Many of the scenes will be created digitally, and Lucas estimates each film will cost just $60 million -- about half the cost using traditional methods. Not bad for a lone guy who couldn’t afford his $80-a-month rent while at the University of Southern California film school. *(Randall Lane, in Reader’s Digest)*

### ****Baseball**** legend Willie Mays got only one hit in his first 26 at-bats in the major leagues. (L. M. Boyd) Military leaders in their first major battles: George Washington -- lost battle; Frederick the Great -- deserted; Jefferson Davis -- suffered foot wound; Winfield Scott -- was captured; Napoleon -- suffered bayonet wound; Chester Nimitz -- court-martialed for running his first destroyer aground. *(World Features Syndicate)* ****Florence Nightingale**** nominated herself to accept the challenge of upgrading hospital standards, improving patient care, enhancing sanitation, and promoting nursing education. The efforts of this Englishwoman transformed hospitals from a place where people die to a place of hope and healing. Nightingale faced a double challenge. Her own ill-defined illness restricted the activity of her adult life. But she was adamantly committed to meet the challenge of caring for injured soldiers and ailing people. During the Crimean War, she arose by 4:30 A.M. to leave for the battlefields, where inferior medical care caused British soldiers to die unnecessarily. After incredible exploits, saving lives with her contingent of trained nurses, Nightingale returned home to England. Restricted to her sick bed, she somehow managed to establish, at age forty, the Nightingale School and Home for Nurses in London. She created a medical revolution from her bed and continued to mastermind and direct those efforts until her death at age ninety. Florence Nightingale never enjoyed the benefits of a typical lifestyle but was determined to be victorious in her lofty challenge. Speaking of challenges, John Norley said, “All things are difficult before they are easy.” The difficulties Nightingale endured eased the pain of many. (Glenn Van Ekeren, in Speaker's Sourcebook II, p. 107)

**Alfred Nobel finally invented dynamite, true, but he blew up his house, his laboratory and his brother Emil before he got it under control. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Oprah Winfrey: From Rags - Born In Mississippi to unwed teenage parents, Winfrey grew up in poverty. While living in Milwaukee, she was molested by relatives. Not knowing what else to do, her mother sent her to live in a detention home. To Riches - Fortunately, the detention home was full and Winfrey went to live with her father. He nurtured her abilities and helped her get to college. Now, as the queen of the talk show, Winfrey is worth an estimated $1 billion. *(Uncle John’s Unstoppable Bathroom Reader)***

**Scottie Pippen of the world-champion Chicago Bulls is one of basketball’s best forwards. But nine years ago in Hamburg, Arkansas, Pippen was just a six-foot-two, 145-pound point guard on his high-school team--with no prospects. The coach from the state campus at Monticello told Pippen, sorry, no vacancies. As a “last shot,” Pippen worked out for the University of Central Arkansas’s head basketball coach. Donald Dyer, who offered him a work-study scholarship to be the team manager. Most players would have been insulted by such an offer, but not Pippen. He had already served as manager for Hamburg High School’s football team, dispensing towels in the locker room as easily as he did the basketball on the court. *(Harvey Araton, in New York Times)***

### On September 4, 1983, John Elway of the Denver Broncos completed only one pass in his opening game against Pittsburgh and was replaced by Steve DeBerg, who produced a victory. On October 9, 1983, Elway was demoted from his No. 1 spot and replaced by DeBerg. On November 22, 1998, with a 5-yard pass to Willie Green in the first quarter, John Elway -- back in the lineup despite bruised ribs -- became only the third NFL ****quarterback**** to pass for 50,000 yards in a career. He also threw for three scores in a 40-14 rout of the Raiders. (Denver Rocky Mountain News) 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)

**Until the 1830s, most Americans thought the Rocky Mountains were impassable. (*Uncle John’s Bathroom Reader: Wise Up!, p. 177)***

**Of musical note: The Rolling Stones -- 800 at first U.S. concert (1964); Detroit stadium held 13,000. *(World Feature’s Syndicate)***

**Sarah Delano Roosevelt never learned to entrust her son with the management of the family’s financial affairs and never thought he was up to the task – even though Franklin D. presided over eight annual budgets of the largest fiscal entity on earth: the United States. *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 134)***

**The poet Carl Sandburg received an appointment in 1899 to West Point but he was kicked out before becoming a plebe. The reason? He failed written tests in grammar, as well as arithmetic. Despite the military's low opinion of his writing skills, he went on to become one of the world's great poets. (Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It's a Weird World)**

**On January 15, 1967, it wasn’t yet the Super Bowl. Rather, it was the first World Championship Game, and it hardly resembled the Super event it is today. There were nearly 28,000 empty seats at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and tickets could be had for just $6. Nonetheless, the Vince Lombardi-led Green Bay Packers launched a new era with their 35-10 win against American Football League champion Kansas Ciry. The star of the game was a 34-year-old wide receiver named Max McGee, whose all-night cavorting left him a super hangover but didn’t keep him from catching seven Bart Starr passes -- three more than he caught all season. *(Lyn DeBruin, in Rocky Mountain News)***

### The United States greatest naval victory – Midway -- occurred only six months after its greatest naval defeat--Pearl Harbor. (L. M. Boyd) 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) At that time we had the pleasure of visiting with Mary Oliff Ward, whose husband, William Arthur Ward, is one of America’s most quoted writers of inspirational maxims. Mary told how Bill kept a rolling pin around which he wrapped all rejection slips received. When one of his students complained about rejected work, yet one more time, Bill would unwind the rolling pin to reveal yards of rejection slips! *(Dr. Delia Sellers, in Abundant Living magazine)*

### \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*The United States won its independence from Britain under the military leadership of a soldier who would have been turned down flat by a modern draft board. When George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775. Dr. Rudolph Marx writes in American Heritage, the 43-year-old general was a man rendered hopelessly 4-F by previous attacks of smallpox, influenza, tubercular pleurisy, dysentery, malaria. Despite his sickly condition, Marx says, “we have no record that Washington was ever incapacitated all during the Revolutionary War.” *(Newsweek)*

**It was at Valley Forge, almost 200 years ago, that the people of the United States proved that they had the courage to be a nation. Valley Forge is known as one of America’s finest hours, but the only battle ever fought there was the battle of hunger and cold and despair. You see the plains of Valley Forge and Pennsylvania were the last citadels of a dissipated American army. After two disastrous defeats at the hands of the British, General George Washington had led his discouraged troops in retreat to Valley Forge for the winter. The wind blew across the plains, and temperatures dropped far below zero in one of the worst winters in history. The General himself wrote, “There are men in camp unfit for duty, because they are barefoot and naked.” The soldiers lived in small huts built of logs and clay. Many sat up all night by the fire because there were not enough blankets. There was near famine in the camp; men went weeks without meat. But Washington provided strict discipline for strength, and his wife Martha tempered it with tenderness as she moved among the men daily, praying for them. When spring arrived they took count. One-third of the army had died and another third of the army had quit and gone home. The remaining third simply marched out and won the Revolutionary War. The United States of America was born. *(Derric Johnson, in The Wonder of America, p. 170)***

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