**Simplicity**

**When ice storms recently pummeled large portions of Kentucky, hundreds of thousands of people were left helpless and without power. But their Amish neighbors, who have lived all their lives without the benefits of electricity, came to their rescue. Amish families lent out kerosene lamps, cooked meals on wood-burning stoves, and provided advice about making do without modern appliances. “Best neighbors we’ve ever had,” said 76-year-old James Hutchins of Mayfield, who was without power for almost a week, “and we’ve been around a few places.” *(The Week magazine, March 6, 2009)***

**The assembly line occasionally jammed at the British Ford engine plant in South Wales. The firm spent $36,000 over three months to figure out how to fix it. Finally, they assigned an official kicker wearing steel-toed boots to stand close and kick the pallets when they stall. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**When names change, they almost always seem to get shorter. The Music Hall Promenade Concerts were renamed the Boston Popular Concerts, which wound up as the Boston Pops. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Brassiere, 1914: New York partygoer Mary Jacob didn’t like the feel of a whalebone corset under her new slinky dress and so chucked the whalebone and wore some handkerchiefs tied with ribbon over her breasts. In 1914 she patented the brassiere, later selling out to a major corset company. (*Hunter Davies’ Book of Lists, p. 105)***

**America’s own home-grown version of Nostradamus is the well-known “Sleeping Prophet,” Edgar Cayce. This meek, unassuming farm boy, born in 1877 near Hopkinsville, Kentucky, dropped out of school in the seventh grade and grew up to become the most famous prophet and psychic of his time. Yet for all his mystic powers, he remained a simple country sort, fundamentalist who remained a simple country sort, a fundamentalist who read his Bible daily and taught Sunday school for most of his life. *(James Finn Garner, in Apocalypse Wow!, p. 50)***

**If you divide the history of life on Earth into six ages, you can say the first five belonged to one-celled critters only. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**While on vacation traveling south from Yellowstone Park, we came upon a rustic, log-cabin chapel along the roadside. For the sake of rest and relaxation, and out of a bit of curiosity, we stopped to investigate. The chapel of rough timbers had a few hard wooden pews and a wooden altar of little splendor. On the altar sat a simple wooden cross. Behind the altar, a large glass window revealed a view of the snowcapped, jagged peaks of the Grand Teton Mountains. The simplicity of the chapel and its setting was the secret of its magnificence *(John R. Sternberg, in Portals of Prayer)***

**Not all the words in China’s Mandarin language are one syllable only, just almost all. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The Hope Diamond is the biggest (45 1/2 carats) blue diamond known in the world. Colored diamonds, especially blue ones, are very rare. In 1958, after it had several other owners, a jeweler, Harry Winston, gave it to the Smithsonian. He didn't deliver it in an armored car. He simply wrapped it in brown paper and mailed it, insuring it for $1 million. It arrived safely. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**It seems to be a law of some kind that the longer an electronic gadget is on the market, the more complicated it gets. It is the rare cell phone now that doesn’t play music, take photos and videos, text-message and browse the Internet. But there is a problem with all this progress, reports The Wall Street Journal, especially with the over-40 crowd who find the exotic features more complication than convenience and, as a result, don’t much use the device and certainly aren’t inclined to buy another. So now, the Journal reports, there is a move afoot in the consumer-electronics business to begin offering simpler, more functional versions of their products. Philips Electronics has established a Simplicity Advisory Board of outside experts. The new Vodaphone Simply is easy to hold, has larger keys, handles voice calls and text messages, and that is about it. When the battery runs low, the screen says “please charge.” Imagine that. A cell phone that’s a phone and not a home entertainment center. What miracles will modern marketing think of next? *(Rocky Mountain News, August 22, 2005)***

**In the 3rd century B.C., Eratosthenes, using a stick to cast a shadow on the ground, calculated the earth's circumference to be 26,350 miles. He was off by only 1,500 miles. *(Quentin Compson, in Amazing Facts)***

**Those who study first families of the United States say that first lady Pat Nixon ironed her own dresses, first lady Rosalynn Carter mended the family’s clothes, and President Harry Truman washed his own undergarments. *(Samantha Weaver, in Tidbits)***

**Using a plastic shovel, 5-year-old Emily Baldry of Wiltshire, England, uncovered a 130-pound, 160-million-old fossil on her first-ever dig at a nature preserve in Gloucestershire. With the help of her father, Jon, and Neville Hollingworth, a paleontologist, Emily freed the rare Rieneckia ammonite fossil from the ground. “To give you some idea of how rare this is, I have been looking for these for around 25 years, and have only every found three,” said Hollingworth, who noted that this was the biggest specimen he’d ever seen. The fossil is being cleaned and will soon go on display. *(The Week magazine, April 1, 2011)***

**Well before the famous kite experiment, Ben Franklin had speculated that lightning was electricity. His revolutionary idea was to conduct that electricity safely into the ground to save buildings from fires. The simple metal rod connected to a wire made Franklin famous throughout Europe and the colonies. *(Time magazine)***

**Incan soldiers invented the process of freeze-drying food. The process was primitive but effective – potatoes would be left outside to freeze overnight, then thawed and stomped on to remove excess water. (Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 148)**

**Those flying discs you see people tossing around in parks on sunny summer days are, of course, Frisbees – but did you ever stop to wonder where that decidedly odd name came from? In the 1920s, the Frisbie Baking Company sold pies to many colleges in New England. After the pies were consumed, students realized that the empty pie tins soared beautifully when they were tossed. The craze spread, and a variety of companies began manufacturing discs specifically for the new sport. Eventually, Wham-O was looking for a catchy name to use in marketing, and it trademarked the name Frisbee as a tribute to the baking company that started it all. *(Samantha Weaver, in Tidbits)***

**Abraham Lincoln apparently liked short words. Almost 200 of the 275 in his Gettysburg Address are single-syllabled. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The Hope Diamond passed through many hands before being donated to the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C., in 1958. Its owner sent the priceless stone to the museum through the U.S. mail in a plain brown paper bag. *(Don Voorhees, in The Super Book of Useless Information, p. 232)***

**Novelist E. L. Doctorow claims that the most difficult thing for a writer to compose is a simple household note: I had to write to the teacher when my daughter Caroline missed a day of school. “The bus is coming in a few minutes,” she said and gave me a pad and pencil. So I started, “Dear Mrs. So-and-So, my daughter Caroline . . .” and then I thought, “No, that's not right. Obviously it's my daughter Caroline.” I started again. “Yesterday my child . . .” That wasn't right either -- too much like a deposition. This went on until a horn blew outside. Caroline was panicking. There was a pile of crumpled notes on the floor, and my wife was saying, “I can't believe this.” She took the pad and pencil and dashed something off. I had been trying to write the perfect absence note. *(The Paris Review)***

**Simplest of all house humidifiers is a pie plate full of water in front of a hot-air furnace outlet. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**If things are too simple to construct, patents do no good. For example, in 1816 the Scottish physicist David Brewster invented the kaleidoscope. He patented it and sold it at a rate of thousands a day. However, many other people began to construct kaleidoscopes, and it became impossible to sue them all. Brewster made virtually no money out of his invention after the first few days*. (Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 63)***

**A shore-based officer, I had the opportunity to go aboard a Navy vessel for a week of training. On the first day we were pivoting into a slip on the pier, and the commanding officer patiently explained a variety of technical terms. Wanting to increase my shipboard vocabulary, I commented on the way we were pulling into port and asked the CO if there was a term to describe our maneuver. “Yes,” he answered. “We call it backing up.” *(Lt. j.g. Tanya L. Wallace, in Reader's Digest)***

**Penny Marshall, like the heroines of A League of Their Own, the most recent film she has directed, owes her success to her ability to keep it simple. For each film she directs, Marshall keeps one sentence in her head to remind her what the film is about. In League, it was “Don’t be ashamed of your talents.” This trick keeps her clear-headed, but also contributes to charges that her films are corny. “I know I’m called simplistic,” she says. “But I stick with what moves me. Sometimes I go to other people’s movies and think, ‘I don’t get it.’ Those artsy parts go right past me.” A League editor suggested the final scene was too sentimental and should be cut. “Nahhh,” Marshall said. “Leave it that way. I like it like that.” *(Peggy Orenstein, in New York Times Magazine)***

**The three greatest masterpieces in literature, it is said, are the Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-Third Psalm, and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Not a three-syllable word in them: hardly any two-syllable words. All the greatest things in human life are one-syllable things -- love, joy, hope, home, child, wife, trust, faith, God. All great things are simple. *(Good Reading)***

**The real Mayberry: Mayberry isn’t just a fictional place, said Martha Waggoner in the Associated Press. The small-town setting of TV’s The Andy Griffith Show was inspired by Mount Airy, N.C., a throwback burg that remains home to the Andy Griffith Museum and is celebrating the 52nd edition of its annual Mayberry Days festival September 27-30. Tourism was up this summer following the death in July of Mount Airy’s hometown hero, but visitors have never stopped rolling in for “a glimpse of small-town life and the simpler times portrayed on the show.” They can stay at a bed-and-breakfast located in the actor’s childhood home, tour the city in a squad car like the one Sheriff Andy drove on the show, or “satisfy a sweet tooth” at Opie’s Candy Store, named after Ron Howard’s character. Mount Airy isn’t exactly frozen in time, but it’s close enough. “Because of Andy and our tourism,” says the museum’s director, “we’ve got a Main Street with no empty stores.” *(The Week magazine, October 5, 2012)***

**Lars: “I'm trying to simplify my life, Axel.” Axel: “Care to elaborate?” Lars: “I would, but I've started by simplifying my mind.” *(J. C. Duffy, in The Fusco Brothers comic strip)***

**First girl: “When I grow up I'd like to be a model. Think I'll make it?” Second girl: “Your face is wrong. You don't have the figure. You have no sparkle. Your eyes are dull.” First girl: “I would have been satisfied with a simple yes or no.” *(Bud Blake, in Tiger comic strip)***

**The item reads: “When speaking of Abu al-Qasim Mohammed ibn Abd Allah ibn al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, most people just say Mahommed.” *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), one of the greatest of modern French composers, referred to his most famous work, Bolero, as “seventeen minutes of orchestra without any music.” He limited himself to an eight-measure theme that he repeated, with different orchestral colors for the entire piece. *(Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts, p. 385)***

**In the past decade, 18 newspapers, including The Boston Globe, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Miami Herald, have closed their foreign bureaus. *(Newsweek, as it appeared in The Week magazine, May 6, 2011)***

**Siri Nome, a Norwegian pianist, composed a piece called “In C” in which the C note is played nonstop for 26 minutes. When the houselights came on after his performance, the hall was empty. *(Ripley's Believe It or Not!: Book of Chance, p. 26)***

**The three most popular four-digit PINs are 1234, 1111, and 0000, which account for nearly 20 percent of all four-digit pass codes, according to an analysis of millions of passwords by data analysis firm Data Genetics. The least popular is 8068. *(Slate.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, October 5, 2012)***

**Winner of “the most original recording” section of a British wildlife-recording competition was a Gloucestershire man whose entry was a tape of a snail munching lettuce. *(Forum World Features)***

**Who is to say what shall have lasting value? My fiancee didn't want a diamond ring. As a joke, I bought a simple ring with a knock-your-socks-off stone. The best Woolworth's had: $2.98. I put it in a box from a fancy jeweler and gave it to her on our wedding day. She was nonplussed. But when I gave her the receipt so she could return it, she all but bowled me over with a laughing embrace. She still loves that stupid ring, 23 years later, as if it were real. And it is real, isn't it? *(Robert Fulghum, in From Beginning to End: The Rituals of Our Lives)***

**The road to success is simplicity: Keep things simple, said Schumpeter. That is the key to a successful business, according to Bain & Company consultants Chris Zook and James Allen. In their new book, Repeatability, they lay out how the world’s most successful companies “make a cult of simplicity” and relentlessly apply stripped-down business models to new opportunities. You can see this winning formula of “simplify and repeat” In Ikea’s flat-packed furniture, McDonald’s hamburgers, and Berkshire Hathaway’s buy, improve, and hold approach to investing. Lego learned the lesson the hard way. In the mid-1990s, the Danish toy company expanded feverishly into theme parks, television, and clothing lines; that led to years of dismal results. Only when it went back “to its roots” – those little plastic bricks – did big profits return. Businesses have a natural tendency “to grow more complex as they mature,” and that complexity can be a “silent killer.” For all the worries companies have about being “crushed by the next big thing,” the best way to survive dramatic change is to “keep hammering away at the simplicity mantra.” *(The Week magazine, May 18, 2012)***

**Ruth Ryan, wife of legendary pitcher Nolan Ryan, recalls the one moment that stands out for her in Ryan's illustrious 26-year baseball career: It probably happened the first time on the high-school baseball diamond in Alvin, Texas, in the mid-1960s. Then it happened repeatedly for three decades after that. Inevitably, sometime during the game, Nolan would pop up out of the dugout and scan the stands behind home plate, looking for me. He would find my face and grin at me, maybe snapping his head up in a quick nod as if to say, “There you are, I'm glad.” I'd wave and flash him a smile. Then he'd duck under the roof and turn back to the game. It was a simple moment, never noted in record books or career summaries. But of all the moments in all the games, it was the one most important to me. *(Ruth Ryan, in Covering Home)***

**Charles Schwab, the chairman of Bethlehem Steel, once asked a consultant how he could work more efficiently. The consultant followed Schwab around for a day and gave him this simple advice: Make a list of priority items to accomplish each day. Don’t move on to the second item until the first is completed. Schwab didn’t think much of this advice but asked the consultant how much he charged. The consultant told him to use the method for 6 months and then send him whatever he thought it was worth. Six months later, Schwab sent him a check for $25,000. *(Ben Franklin’s Almanac)***

**Surveys show people tend to simplify their signatures as they get older. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**My brother in Lacombe, Louisiana, rented three adjacent stores in his new shopping plaza to three competitors. The fellow on the left got right to work covering his doors and windows with huge signs saying, “Gigantic Sale!” and “Super Bargains!” Upon seeing this, the shopkeeper on the right plastered his storefront with signs proclaiming, “All prices slashed 25 percent!” and “Fantastic Discounts!” After observing the building, the owner of the store in the center prepared his own sign. It simply stated, “ENTRANCE.” *(Sr. Mary Ann Carollo, O.S.B., in Catholic Digest)***

**Before silver polish was invented, women soaked their silver in a mixture of 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1 teaspoon salt and 1 quart water with a small piece of aluminum foil added. This may sound odd, but the mixture really works, and it’s a safe, non-toxic alternative to silver polish. *(Reminisce magazine)***

**A total of 1,683 guitarists performed “Smoke on the Water” at Community American Ballpark in Kansas City, Kansas, in June in an attempt to set a Guinness World Record for the most guitarists simultaneously playing a song. The 1972 Deep Purple song was chosen because it’s one that many beginning guitarists learn. *(American Profile magazine, September 23, 2007)***

**Once I had occasion to buy a silver soup ladle. The obliging salesman brought forth quite an array of them, including ultimately one that was as plain and unadorned as the unclouded sky – and about as beautiful. But the price! It was nearly double any of the others. “You see,” the salesman explained, “in this highly ornamental ware the flaws don’t show. This plain one has to be the very best. Any defect would be apparent.” There, if you please, is the final basis of comparison of all things: the bare dignity of the unadorned that may stand before the world all unashamed, in the consciousness of perfection. *(Frank Norris, in Complete Works)***

**Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman captured the world's attention during the Presidential commission's investigation into the Challenger space shuttle explosion. By dropping a piece of the rocket booster's O-ring into a glass of ice water, he demonstrated how this overlooked piece of rubber could in fact be the root cause of the disaster. Feynman explained his philosophy of looking at the world: Learn by trying to understand simple things -- always honestly and directly. What keeps the clouds up, why can’t I see the stars in the daytime, why do colors appear in oily water, what makes the lines on the surface of water being poured from a pitcher, why does the hanging lamp swing back and forth? Then when you have learned what an explanation really is, you can go on to more subtle questions. *(From a letter, in Reader's Digest)***

**Indiana – The official state beverage is water, so-designated in March. *(American Profile magazine, September 23, 2007)***

**The best teacher, until one comes to adult pupils, is not the one who knows most, but the one who is most capable of reducing knowledge to that simple compound of the obvious and the wonderful which slips into the infantile comprehension. *(H. L. Mencken, American author-journalist)***

**On the fourth of July, 1845, a month and a half after Sir John Franklin set out from London with the ships Erebus and Terror to find the Northwest Passage, Henry David Thoreau set out from the family home in Concord, Massachusetts, to take up residence at nearby Walden Pond to find himself. He was not yet 28. He had a degree from Harvard College, he had tried teaching and failed, and he possessed some skill in surveying. He had almost no money, but he had friends, by far the most valuable of whom was his neighbor Ralph Waldo Emerson. Thoreau had built himself a 10 - by 15 - foot cabin with secondhand lumber on shoreline property at Walden owned by Emerson. Thoreau lived at the pond for two years, two months and two days. His idea was to conduct an experiment in simple living, to lead a life according to nature and to determine the real necessities of life. “It would be some advantage,” he wrote, “to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization.” Walden, published 150 years ago this month, is Thoreau’s report on this modest – almost backyard – experiment in getting back to basics. *(Robert D. Richardson, in Smithsonian magazine, August, 2004)***

**One of the most influential books of this century was titled: “Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice.” Then Adolf Hitler's business manager persuaded him to change the title to “Mein Kampf.” *(L. M. Boyd)***

**VeggieTales debuted in 1993. Big Idea Productions, Inc., which produces VeggieTales and licenses the videos, toys, books, live shows, and now a full-length movie, boasts sales in the millions, making it one of the most successful crossovers from Christian to mainstream media in recent years. Why vegetables? Simple animation enabled Phil Vischer and Mike Nawrocki to stretch their limited funding. Their vegetables had no limbs, no hair, no clothes -- just mouths and eyes. “They were easy to animate,” Nawrocki says. *(Maria Douglas Reeve, in Catholic Digest)***

**When the walkie-talkie was first introduced commercially, in 1934, it was described as a “portable super-regenerative receiver and transmitter.” *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 74)***

**Two simple words are the key to kicking off conversations: “Tell me.” Most people ask closed questions that already contain the answer. This relegates the other person to confirming or denying what you just said. “Did you have fun at the dance?” “Yeah.” “Did you enjoy the ballgame?” “It was okay.” End of conversation. “Tell me” – as in “Tell me about the dance” – gives people a hook on which to hang a conversation. *(Sam Horn, in Concrete Confidence)***

**Next time you're thinking about using a big word, either to impress the reader or impress yourself, think about what Ernest Hemingway, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, said about William Faulkner. When Hemingway won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, Faulkner said that Hemingway “had never been known to use a word that might send the reader to the dictionary.” Upon hearing this, Hemingway said, “Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the 10-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use.” It would also be wise to remember one of Hemingway's definitions of a good writer: One who knows what to OMIT, not necessarily what to put in. *(Bartlett's Book of Anecdotes)***

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