Story #2 of the Week

**The night before Christmas, the French children polish their shoes and leave them by the fireplace. Le Pere Noel or Saint Nicholas will fill them with candles, nuts and fruits. He also brings gifts in a big basket on his back. Le Pere Noel travels on a donkey. After midnight church families gather for a very fancy supper. In many parts of France people stay up all night on Christmas Eve. *(Bruce D. Witherspoon, in Astounding Facts, p. 273)***

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**At a later date you can find this excerpt in the Christmas Around The World document. Scroll down to the Christmas-section of documents, click open the Christmas Around The World document, and put the word France in to the search box. With a click of the mouse you will be taken to this excerpt to read all about it.**

**Or, key words describing each excerpt are listed in blue (all entries except for funnies) or red (funnies) and are in alphabetical order. So after opening the Christmas Around The World document, you only have to scroll down toward the middle of this document to the word France, in this same color blue, and read all about it!**

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**December 25th, 2021: The Christmas tree as modern Americans know it actually originated with the Druids a couple of thousand years ago. Druids worshiped trees, as people did for at least 4,000 years before Christ. During the winter solstice, Druids tied apples to the branches of oaks and firs to thank the god Odin for blessing them with fruitfulness. They also made offerings of cakes shaped like fish, birds and other animals. Lighted candles honoring the sun god Balder were placed on the boughs. It was this evergreen laden with apples that eventually evolved into our modern Christmas tree. *(Sheryld Ann Karas, in The Solstice Evergreen)***

**December 11th, 2021: The San Fernando Valley was in the midst of a blistering heat wave in July 1946 when Mel Torme stopped by to visit his musical collaborator, Robert Wells. Torme sat down at the piano and saw an open notebook, with some scrambled notes: “Chestnuts roasting ... Jack Frost nipping ... Yuletide carols ... Folks dressed up like Eskimos.” Wells explained that he was trying to cool off by thinking of wintry images. Torme decided that the random thoughts had the potential to be a hit song, and 40 minutes later, “The Christmas Song” (often called “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire”) was completed. *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**December 4th, 2021: Back in 1932 a fellow named Charles Darrow was out of a job and broke. His wife was expecting a baby. Though he was a heating engineer, there were no jobs available, and Darrow and his wife were just barely subsisting on the few odd jobs he could get as a handyman. Things were bleak. Fate didn’t reckon with the courage of this man and his wife, however. They laughed at it – literally. In the evenings, to take their minds off their troubles, they made up a little game in which they could pretend they were millionaires. Recalling pleasant vacations in nearby Atlantic City, they reconstructed the area adjoining the boardwalk. Darrow carved hotels and houses out of small pieces of wood. They called it Monopoly. Three years later, in 1935, the game was marketed nationally by Parker Brothers and Darrow and his wife became millionaires. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**November 27th, 2021: A Canadian woman who was woken in the middle of the night by a loud crash was shocked to discover that a softball-size meteorite had smashed through her roof – and landed on a pillow just inches from her face. “I’ve never been so scared,” said Ruth Hamilton. The Golden, B. C. resident called police, who determined that the 2.8 pound rock was part of a meteor shower that had lit up the sky. Hamilton says the experience has given her a new appreciation for the fragility of life. “You’re sound asleep, safe, you think, in your bed, and you can get taken out by a meteorite, apparently.” *(The Week magazine, October 29, 2021)***

**A couple in Belgium have given their 11 children names using different variations of the same four letters: a, e. l, and x. Gwenny Blanckaert and Marino Vaneeno landed on the novel strategy after naming their first child Alex and second one Axel. “We realized that they were the same letters, so we decided to continue like this,” said Gwenny. The next nine became Xela, Lexa, Xael, Xeal, Exla, Leax, Xale, Elax, and Alxe. No name has been selected for their 12th child, due in April, but they have 13 remaining combinations to choose from. *(The Week magazine, November 5, 2021)***

**November 19th. 2021: As the child continues to talk non-stop, the father says to her: “Penny, I know you have a lot to say, but I’m going to give you a little advice. You have two eyes, two ears and only one mouth. That means you should look and listen twice as much as you talk!” Penny: “Oh. Then I should also smell twice as much, because I have two nostrils!” Father: “Well, I guess that’s right.” Penny: “And I should walk twice as much because I have two feet! And I should clap twice as much because I have two hands! And I should wiggle my toes ten times as much because . . .” *(Kevin Fagan, in Drabble comic strip)***

**November 12th, 2021: The story is told that Samuel Hanagid, an eleventh century Spanish-Jewish poet who was prime minister to the king of Granada, was once insulted by an enemy in the presence of the king. The king was so angered that he ordered his prime minister to punish the offender by cutting out his tongue. Contrary to the king's mandate, Samuel treated his enemy with utmost kindness. When the king learned that his order had not been carried out, he was greatly astonished. Samuel was ready with a pleasant answer. He said, “I have carried out your order, Your Majesty, I have cut out his evil tongue and have given him instead a kindly tongue.” *(Bits & Pieces)***

**November 5, 2021: The damp north wind was blowing a chill off the moors. It would be good to be inside on an evening like this. The American drew his coat collar tighter as he made his way to the home of his Scottish friend. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle had enjoyed a strong friendship through correspondence for many years before they actually met. Now, after all that time, Emerson had finally come to Europe, making a special journey to Scotland, so that he could at last meet the renowned essayist and historian face-to-face. When Emerson arrived for the momentous occasion, Carlyle greeted him warmly, offered him a pipe, and then lighted one for himself. The great men then sat together in virtual silence until it was time to retire for the night. At that point the two warmly shook hands and praised each other for the fruitful evening they had shared together. (Richard & Mary-Alice Jafolla, in The Quest , p. 127)**

**October 29th, 2021: It’s a rare person who doesn’t get discouraged. Whether it happens to us or to an associate we’re trying to cheer up, the answer centers around one word: perseverance. The value of courage, persistence, and perseverance has rarely been illustrated more convincingly than in the life story of this man: At age 22, he failed in business; at age 23, he ran for legislature and was defeated; at age 24, again he failed in business; at age 25, he was elected to legislature; at age 26, his sweetheart died; at age 27, he had a nervous breakdown*;* at age 29, he was defeated for Speaker; at age 3l, he was defeated for Elector; at age 34, he was defeated for Congress; at age 37, he was elected to Congress; at age 39, he was defeated for Congress; at age 46, he was defeated for Senate; at age 47, he was defeated for Vice President; at age 49, he was defeated for Senate; and at age 51, he was elected President of the United States. That’s the record of Abraham Lincoln. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**October 22nd, 2021: On a stormy night, many years ago, an elderly man and his wife entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia. “All the big hotels are filled up,” said the man. “Could you possibly give us a room here?’ The clerk explained that there were three conventions in town, and that there were no rooms to be had anywhere. “All our rooms are filled, too,” he said, “still I simply can’t send a nice couple like you out in the rain at one o’clock in the morning. Would you perhaps he willing to sleep in my room?” The couple replied that they couldn’t do that, but the clerk insisted. “Don’t worry about me; I’ll make out just fine,” he told them. Next morning, as he paid his bill, the elderly man said to the clerk, “You are the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe someday I’ll build one for you.” The clerk looked at the man and his wife and smiled. The three had a good laugh over the old man’s little joke, and then the clerk helped them with their bags to the street. Two years passed and the clerk had nearly forgotten the incident when he received a letter from the man. It recalled that night and enclosed a round trip ticket to New York, asking the young man to pay them a visit. When he reached New York the old man led him to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street and pointed to a great new building there, a palace of reddish stone, with turrets and watchtowers, like a castle from fairyland thrusting up into the sky. “That,” said the elderly man, “is the hotel I have just built for you to manage.” “You must be joking,” the young man said, not quite knowing whether to believe his friend or not. “I most assuredly am not,” said the older man, a sly smile playing around his mouth. “Who – who are you?” stammered the other. “My name is William Waldorf Astor.” The hotel was the original Waldorf-Astoria and the young clerk, who became its first manager, was George C. Boldt. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**October 15th, 1021: When 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)**

**October 8th, 2021: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the famous nineteenth-century poet and artist, was once approached by an elderly man. The old fellow had some sketches and drawings that he wanted Rossetti to look at and tell him if they were any good, or if they, at least, showed potential talent. Rossetti looked them over carefully. After the first few he knew that they were worthless, showing not the least sign of artistic talent. But Rossetti was a kind man and he told the elderly man as gently as possible that the pictures were without much value and showed little talent. He was sorry, but he could not lie to the man. The visitor was disappointed, but seemed to expect Rossetti’s judgment., He then apologized for taking up Rossetti’s time, but would he just look at a few more drawings – these done by a young art student? Rossetti looked over the second batch of sketches and immediately enthused over the talent they revealed. “These, he said, “ah, these are good. This young man, whoever he is, has great talent. He should be given every help and encouragement in his career as an artist. He has a great future, if he will work hard and stick with it.” Rossetti could see that the old fellow was deeply moved. “Who is this young artist?” he asked. “Your son?” “No,” said the old fellow sadly. “It is me – forty years ago. If only I heard your praise then . . . for you see, I got discouraged and gave up – too soon.” *(Bits & Pieces)***

**October 1st, 2021: A loaf of bread fell from a bakery truck and as it hit the pavement a crumb broke off. Three sparrows swooped down on the crumb and began fighting over it. One bird finally succeeded in flying off with the crumb, the two others in close pursuit. A series of frenzied aerial maneuvers followed until the crumb was at last consumed by one of the birds. The loaf was untouched. Only the crumb had seemed worth the fight. If the birds had displayed more vision and less greed, they could have all been satisfied. People, like birds, quarrel over trivialities. In the heat of the struggle life’s bigger, more enriching prizes escape them. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**September 25th, 2021: A doctor who had devoted his life to helping the underprivileged lived over a liquor store in the poor section of a large city. In front of the liquor store was a sign reading: “Dr. Williams is upstairs.” When he died, he had no relatives and he left no money for his burial. He had never asked for payment from anyone he had ever treated. Friends and patients scraped enough money together to bury the good doctor, but they had no money for a tombstone. It appeared that his grave was going to be unmarked until someone came up with a wonderful suggestion. They took the sign from in front of the liquor store and nailed it to a post over his grave. It made a lovely epitaph: “Dr. Williams is upstairs.” (Bits & Pieces)**

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**September 11th, 2021: Take, for example, the instructors at the Pan Am International Flight Academy in Eagan, Minnesota. They had a Middle Eastern student who said he wanted to learn to fly a jet but didn't want to learn about landing or taking off -- skills most aspiring pilots are highly motivated to master. Because a couple of people listened to their intuition and called the FBI in August of 2001 (a month before our imaginations were so painfully expanded), and because the FBI took Zacarias Moussaoui into custody, we didn't have to find out the hard way exactly what it was he had in mind. It's fair to assume now that he was just a few weeks away from doing something terrible. (Gavin de Becker, in Fearless, p. 7)**

**At a flight school in Florida, two men from the Middle East paid a lot of money to use a commercial-jet simulator even though they had logged nowhere near enough training hours to fly a commercial aircraft. It was not a joyride, for they were stern faced as they focused most of their time on steering. It might seem outrageous now that nobody called officials about Mohamed Atta and Marwan Al-Shehhi, but in fairness, the folks at the Florida flight school were among thousands of Americans who had literally thousands of encounters with the men who committed the mass murders of September 11. (Gavin de Becker, in Fearless, p. 15)**

**September 4th, 2021: Can you imagine a major league baseball player leading the league in making the most errors . . . in being struck out the most times . . . in hitting into the most double plays – and still being voted Most Valuable Player for that year? It happened. In 1942 Joe Gordon did all these things and still won the MVP award that season in the American League. What’s the business lesson in this? Joe Gordon’s case shows that even though you (or others) have faults, you can overcome them and be recognized for your good points. *(Bits & Pieces)***

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**August 27th, 2021: A 7-year-old who reviews toys is the highest paid YouTube star, earning $22 million last year. Ryan, of Ryan Toys Review, has garnered 26 billion views and 17.3 billion followers since his parents set up his YouTube Channel in 2015. Nearly all the money is generated from ads shown before the videos, which he posts nearly every day. He bested YouTube star Jake Paul by $500,000. In third place was Dude Perfect, five guys performing silly, dexterous tricks, with $20 million. *(Forbes, as it appeared in The Week magazine, December 14, 2018)***

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**August 20th, 2021: They brought him delicious dishes, even the things he liked best on earth. Smith was having a wonderful time eating, sleeping, and calling for more good things. But presently he wanted something more. He called for games. They came in profusion. Then he called for books and read with excitement and pleasure. He called for anything that struck his fancy and received it in abundant measure. But at last the final boredom caught up with him, and he shouted, “I want something to DO!” The attendant appeared and said, “I am sorry, but that is the only thing we cannot give you here.” By this time Smith was frantic for something to do and in his terrible frustration cried out, “I’m sick and tired of everything here; I’d rather go to hell!” “Where do you think you are?” asked the attendant. (Bits & Pieces)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*August 13, 2021: This tendency to blame was illustrated by an episode in Charles Schultz’s Peanuts comic strip where Charlie Brown informs Lucy that he has received bad grades on his report card. When Lucy inquires as to how his parents will react to this news, Charlie tells her they will do the normal thing – blame the teacher. The underlying message in all this is often, “If only somebody else had done something differently, I wouldn’t be in the predicament I’m in. It’s their fault and I’m not responsible*.”* *(Charles Dickson, in New Realities magazine)***

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**August 6, 2021: In Illinois at the turn of the century, a young Swedish immigrant boy sent twenty-five cents to a publishing company for a book on his favorite subject, photography. The publisher made a shipping error in filling the order and instead sent him a book on ventriloquism. He turned that mistake into an asset by keeping the book, learning ventriloquism, and launching a career that was to make him famous. The boy's name was Edgar Bergen and his alter ego, Charlie McCarthy. *(Charles Dickson, in New Realities magazine)***

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