

The Funniest People in Families,

**Volume 2:
250 Anecdotes**

David Bruce

Dedicated with love to Hartley

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This is a short, quick, and easy read.

Anecdotes are usually short humorous stories. Sometimes they are thought-provoking or informative, not amusing.

Educate Yourself

Read Like A Wolf Eats

Be Excellent to Each Other

Books Then, Books Now, Books Forever

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Dedicated to Carl Eugene Bruce and Josephine Saturday Bruce

My father, Carl Eugene Bruce, died on 24 October 2013. He used to work for Ohio Power, and at one time, his job was to shut off the electricity of people who had not paid their bills. He sometimes would find a home with an impoverished mother and some children. Instead of shutting off their electricity, he would tell the mother that she needed to pay her bill or soon her electricity would be shut off. He would write on a form that no one was home when he stopped by because if no one was home he did not have to shut off their electricity.

The best good deed that anyone ever did for my father occurred after a storm that knocked down many power lines. He and other linemen worked long hours and got wet and cold. Their feet were freezing because water got into their boots and soaked their socks. Fortunately, a kind woman gave my father and the other linemen dry socks to wear.

My mother, Josephine Saturday Bruce, died on 14 June 2003. She used to work at a store that sold clothing. One day, an impoverished mother with a baby clothed in rags walked into the store and started shoplifting in an interesting way: The mother took the rags off her baby and dressed the infant in new clothing. My mother knew that this mother could not afford to buy the clothing, but she helped the mother dress her baby and then she watched as the mother walked out of the store without paying.

My mother and my father both died at 7:40 p.m.

Chapter 1: From Alcohol to Children and Teenagers

Alcohol

- John Steinbeck always toasted Ava Gardner whenever he began to drink. Here's the story: While Mr. Steinbeck was in Hollywood working as a scriptwriter, he got a call from Nunnally Johnson's wife inviting him to a party and asking if he would escort Ava Gardner. Mr. Steinbeck was agreeable, but he later received another call saying that Ms. Gardner was ill and could he escort Ann Southern instead. Once again, he was agreeable, and so he escorted Ms. Southern and her chaperone, Elaine Scott, to the party. Mr. Steinbeck and Ms. Southern dated a few times, but one night Ms. Southern was busy and so she asked him to take care of Elaine. Mr. Steinbeck took Elaine out, discovered he really liked her, and he later married her. That's why he always began his drinking by saying, "Here's to Ava Gardner."¹
- Patricia Cockburn's mother once discovered the butler drunk and under the dining room table moments before a dinner party was to begin. She told him, "Stay where you are, Jones, and don't touch any of the ladies' ankles."²

Animals

- Late in the life of Rudolf Nureyev, the great ballet dancer owned a dog named Soloria that seemed completely unmanageable no matter what language they used to scold her. One day, Jeanette Etheredge made Mr. Nureyev a lunch and went to him in order to announce that it was ready. However, when they walked into the dining room, they discovered that Soloria had eaten everything. Ms. Etheredge told Mr. Nureyev, "You have to find a language that dog can understand!" Mr. Nureyev then shouted at the dog in German, and he succeeded in frightening it so much that it ran away and hid for two hours. Finally, they had discovered a language that the dog understood. After Mr. Nureyev died, the dog was adopted by Marika Besobrasova, who succeeded in teaching it to obey commands in several languages.³
- American ballet master George Balanchine once choreographed a ballet, featuring 50 elephants and 50 young women, for the Ringling Brothers Circus. But first, he called on his friend, composer Igor Stravinsky, to write the music for the ballet. Mr. Stravinsky first asked for whom the ballet would be created. Mr. Balanchine replied, "For some elephants." Mr. Stravinsky then asked, "How old?" Hearing the answer, "Very young," Mr. Stravinsky said, "All right. If they are very young elephants, I will do it." The dedication of his score for the ballet *Circus Polka* said, "For a young elephant."⁴
- When Sue Pirtle was growing up in the small town of Stonewall, Oklahoma, residents treated Everett Shaw with a great deal of respect because he was a world champion steer roper. One woman marveled, "Isn't it nice — a small town of only 300 like ours can produce a world champion!" Mr. Pirtle gave young Sue her first Shetland pony and soon, with lots of help from Mr. Shaw and another friend named Terry Allison, Sue became the town's second world champion. In 1974 and 1976, Ms. Pirtle earned the Girls' Rodeo Association title of All-Around Champion Cowgirl.⁵
- Wilson Mizner was an unruly youth, so his family decided to send him to Santa Clara College, which had a reputation for straightening out upper-class delinquents. The "college" even had half-starved, ferocious dogs roaming the grounds at night to keep the youths from slipping away for some fun. Young Wilson got even with the authorities by tying a sirloin steak

to the fire bell rope. In their attempts to eat the steak, the dogs kept jumping up and ringing the fire bell all night.⁶

- Poet Nikki Giovanni's father once had some bushes trimmed, and the trimming destroyed some birds' nests. When Ms. Giovanni's young son, Thomas, found some dead baby birds lying on the ground, he became very angry with his grandfather. Ms. Giovanni says that her father had never apologized to anyone in his entire life, but after thinking for a while, he apologized to his grandson.⁷

- Actor Vincent Price's dog, Joe, was once accused of running in front of a bicycle and causing an accident that broke the cyclist's collarbone. In the resulting trial, Mr. Price and Joe were forced to appear in court. At one point in the proceedings, an X-ray of the cyclist's broken collarbone was shown and Joe stood up and begged for food. (By the way, the jury found Joe innocent.)⁸

- When country comedian Jerry Clower was a boy, his family owned a bulldog named Mike. This bulldog looked out for the children of the family, and whenever Jerry's mother wanted to spank him, first she had to lock up the bulldog, because if she didn't, as soon as she started to spank Jerry, it would bite her.⁹

- When she was young, track and field star Florence Griffith Joyner owned a pet five-foot-long boa constrictor named Brandy. Whenever Brandy shed her skin, Florence kept it and painted it various colors. One day, Florence took her snake to the mall, but she had to take it home because shoppers were scared of it.¹⁰

- In Paris, ballerina Suzanne Farrell and her choreographer husband, Paul Mejia, went to a fancy restaurant, where the maitre d' offered to look after their dog for them. After the meal was over, they discovered that their dog had been fed a meal on a silver platter and the meal was charged to them!¹¹

- Dogs can be mischievous pets. When Albert E. Kahn was in the home of Soviet ballerina Galina Ulanova, her dog, which she had named Bolshoi, ate part of the skirt of Tamara Mamedova, who was too busy translating to notice the dog's meal.¹²

- Ballerina Yvette Chauviré, a favorite of the 1950s Paris Opéra, collected swans. They were tributes to her wonderful performances as the dying swan. Unfortunately, many of the swans were chipped — her cats did not respect her collection.¹³

- Susan Butcher, a four-time winner of the 1,049-mile-long Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in Alaska, had a dog named Crackers, so whenever he sired a new litter of puppies, she gave the puppies the names of various kinds of crackers.¹⁴

Birth

- Senator Chauncey Depew once made fun of President William Taft's obesity by looking at his waistline, then saying, "I hope, if it is a girl, Mr. Taft will name it for his charming wife." President Taft overheard him and replied, "If it is a girl, I shall, of course, name it for my lovely helpmate of many years. And if it is a boy, I shall claim the father's prerogative and name it Junior. But if, as I suspect, it is only a bag of wind, I shall name it Chauncey Depew."¹⁵

- An expectant father was waiting by the delivery room, from which screams were coming. The father paced up and down, sweating and wringing his hands as he listened to the screams. Finally, the screams stopped and the physician came to him and said, “Congratulations, you are the father of a healthy baby girl.” “Thank God,” said the father. “She’ll never have to go through what I just went through.”¹⁶

- Richard Wagner was happy at the birth of his son, Siegfried, and to celebrate, he wrote his *Siegfried Idyll*. The first person to hear it — other than the musicians who practiced it — was his wife, Cosima. Mr. Wagner brought a small orchestra of 11 men into his house, stationed them beneath a staircase that led to his wife’s bedroom, then conducted them in the music honoring the birth of his son.¹⁷

- Composer Arnold Schoenberg was visiting fellow composer George Gershwin’s estate and playing tennis one day when he said, “Somehow I feel tired. I can’t understand it.” He thought a moment, then added, “That’s right. I was up at five this morning. My wife gave birth to a boy.”¹⁸

- Conductor Arturo Toscanini felt that Walter, his son, was not punctual. According to Mr. Toscanini, only once was his son punctual: “I was married June 21; he was born March 21.”¹⁹

Books

- Aby Warburg could have been an important banker since he was the oldest son of the famous Warburg banking family. However, he was bookish, so he entered into an agreement with Max, the second-oldest son, to allow Max to take over the banking business in return for buying Aby all the books he wanted. Aby profited immensely by the deal, acquiring 80,000 books — many of them rare and costly — during his lifetime. At one point, Aby’s house was filled to bursting with books, so his brothers decided to build him a library next door to house his collection.²⁰

- Small children know what they like, and they like to hear their favorite stories read to them over and over. After having Beatrix Potter’s *Tale of Two Bad Mice* read to her, Carol, Dorothy White’s daughter, said, “I love it, I love it, I love it. Again!”²¹

- Angelica Shirley Carpenter and Jean Shirley are a daughter-and-mother writing team who collaborate on biographies by each writing a biography on the same person, then combining the two books into one volume.²²

Children and Teenagers

- Al Capp, creator of the comic strip *Li'l Abner*, was forced to use a wooden leg after falling into the path of a trolley car when he was nine years old. Of course, his limp made children curious. Often, a child would see Mr. Capp limping, then ask him what was wrong with his leg. Mr. Capp handled such situations by telling the truth, and if the child wanted to see his wooden leg, he would show it to him. Usually, that worked best, but once it didn’t work at all. He showed his leg to one boy, but the next day the boy and a friend were waiting for him, and they demanded that he show them his wooden leg. That was a little less fine, but the following day four children were waiting for him, and their leader danced around him, demanding, “Lift up your pants, and show us all your wooden leg.” Mr. Capp managed to stop further escalation by yelling at the children: “*You all get the hell out of here — or I’ll kick you with it!*”²³

- As a little girl in Honolulu, Bette Midler went to hula dancing school, where she was not the best student. In fact, her teacher put her in the back row because young Bette could not remember the movements and got by only through watching what the other young dancers were doing. At a recital, her teacher fixed young Bette's hair, pulling it back so tightly that her eyes were slits she could barely see out of, with the result that she couldn't watch the other young dancers and imitate them. On stage, young Bette danced, accidentally smacking into the other dancers and knocking them down, thus giving herself the prominent position of front and center. The audience laughed and roared its approval, and young Bette decided to go into show business.²⁴

- Wimbledon tennis champion Althea Gibson was not afraid of a fight. When she was a girl, she discovered her uncle lying drunk outside his apartment building. Standing around him was a group of boys, one of whom was going through his pockets. Althea yelled, "That's my uncle!" She then helped him up the steps to the apartment building and safety. Unfortunately, the leader of the gang threw a screwdriver at her, hitting her hand. After Althea had gotten her uncle to his apartment, she went outside and chased the boy who had thrown the screwdriver at her. Eventually, she caught him, and a long, bloody fight ensued. Years afterward, residents in the neighborhood remembered that fight, which Althea called a draw.²⁵

- Christian writer Dale Hanson Bourke and Chase, her very young son, once went crabbing, and Ms. Bourke soon discovered that her son didn't know that people went crabbing in order to eat the crabs, so she decided that they would simply show the crabs to other people, then release them back into the water. However, she must have said something that made Chase suspicious about crabbing, because he started asking her questions. "Mom, why did God make trees?" "To give us shade and wood." "Why did God make chickens?" "To give us eggs and meat." "Why did God make crabs?" She replied, "So we could have an adventure," and her young son retained his innocence.²⁶

- Francis Hodgson Burnett, author of *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*, used to spend a lot of time writing, and her two young sons complained that they didn't see her enough. However, her youngest son, Vivian, suggested a way for her to make things even — write a book that could be read by little boys. Ms. Burnett responded by writing *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and based the title character on Vivian. (Vivian got his name because his mother had hoped to name a daughter Vivien. When she gave birth to a boy, however, she changed the spelling of the name to that of a male character in a then-popular work of fiction.)²⁷

- As a child, soccer superstar Julie Foudy continually practiced her skills. She used to kick the soccer ball against her family's garage door — which eventually needed to be replaced. She also used to practice kicking the ball in the living room, keeping it low to hit a marble step at the base of the fireplace. Her mother kept an expensive glass vase at the top of the step, but Julie assured her mother that she wouldn't break the vase. One day, she kicked the soccer ball too high and broke the vase. She says, "I got a good earful. My mom was pretty mad."²⁸

- Comedian Carol Burnett has three children, and it seemed that when they were growing up the maximum number of children who could be good at one time was two. On a trip to a restaurant, it was the youngest daughter's turn to be naughty. When it was time to order, the youngest daughter, Erin, told the waitress, "Just dessert, please." Carol said, "No dinner, no dessert." Erin replied, "Fine. I won't eat." Later, Erin wanted to get back on her mother's good side, so she told her father, "Daddy, I love you. And, Daddy, I also love your wife."²⁹

- As a youth at the college-preparatory Groton School in Massachusetts, Franklin Delano Roosevelt weighed only 100 pounds — too light to be an outstanding athlete. However, his drive to succeed led him to become the best at an athletic event known as the high kick. This was an odd event in which the athlete leaped high in the air and kicked a tin pan that hung from the ceiling of the gymnasium. To be the best at the event, Franklin practiced for hours, eventually kicking as high as 7 feet, 3 1/2 inches — two feet taller than himself.³⁰

- When ballet dancer Linda Maybarduk was 15 years old, she got a chance to meet her idol, Rudolf Nureyev, after one of his performances. Unfortunately, despite her wish to act like a sophisticated young lady when she met him, the moment was too much for her, and she started crying. Mr. Nureyev was very encouraging to young Linda, but it was her father who ended up having a 15-minute talk with the dance superstar. In adult life, Ms. Maybarduk danced with her idol in professional performances.³¹

- The family life of a minister can be hectic. In one such family, the father had to travel to preach in a different city, the mother had to drive the older daughter to college in a different state, and only their seven-year-old daughter would be at home, in the company of a babysitter. Contemplating the not-at-all-unusual activity as various family members prepared for their trips, the seven-year-old asked, “Daddy, how did a family like us ever get together in the first place?”³²

- Fanny Brice was famous as a comedian (one of her most famous characters was Baby Snooks) and singer (one of her most famous songs was “My Man”). Although she had no need to steal when she was a youngster, she often stole — but was generous with her spoils. Fanny sometimes stole money to buy gifts for neighborhood children. Once, Fanny even used her mother’s charge account at a shoe store to buy five pairs of shoes for needy neighborhood children.³³

- Humorist H. Allen Smith’s wife was not above trying to get a good deal. She and her son once took a train trip. Although her son was seven years old, she was determined to pass him off as five in order to get the lower fare. Unfortunately, when the train conductor came to get their tickets, her son was reading the front page of *The New York Times*. As instructed, he looked at the train conductor and asked in baby talk, “Is ooo duh tun-dutt-er?”³⁴

- Yoki, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.’s daughter, wanted to go to an amusement park called Funtown, but she was turned away because of her race. At the time, her father was in prison because he was fighting for civil rights. Yoki asked why he was in prison, and her mother replied that he was fighting for the right of people to go wherever they pleased. Yoki said, “Good. Tell him to stay in jail until I can go to Funtown.” Hearing this, Reverend King laughed.³⁵

- Because of her job, Beth Joiner, a children’s dance teacher in Georgia, is very aware of the romantic lives of her young pupils. For example, whenever there is a movie Friday afternoon at school, her students tell her with whom they will be going. Once, a long succession of students told her about the boys they were going with, and the last student said, “I’m going with Edwin. I don’t really like him, but he’s the only one left.”³⁶

- Sometimes life is like a cartoon. When he was a youngster, *Peanuts* creator Charles M. Schultz stood in line at a movie theater which had advertised that the first 500 children buying a ticket would get a free Butterfingers candy bar. When he arrived at the ticket booth, he was

informed that the theater had run out of candy bars. Mr. Schultz figures that he must have been the 501st child in line.³⁷

- When movie director Alfred Hitchcock was six years old, he was naughty, so his parents sent him to the local jail with a note for the police officer in charge. The officer took the note, read it, then locked young Alfred in a cell. After five minutes had passed, the officer released young Alfred and said, “This is what we do to naughty boys.” For the rest of his life, Mr. Hitchcock was terrified of the police.³⁸

- A small child attended a tea party at which G.K. Chesterton, author of the Father Brown stories, was present. Her parents were excited that their daughter would meet the great man and told her that she could learn something from him. After the tea party was over, they asked their daughter what she had learned. She said, “He taught me how to throw buns into the air and catch them in my mouth.”³⁹

- When she was seven years old, Sammy Fancher Thurman rode a pony that decided to run away. It galloped, lost its footing, and fell and rolled over on top of her. Sammy’s father ran over to her and asked, “Are you all right?” She answered, “I’m OK, but my pony isn’t. He’s got to learn some manners.” She then started training the pony to obey her. Later, she became a star rodeo competitor.⁴⁰

- According to the Bible, we are all children of God. A little girl once asked a new girl in the neighborhood what church she attended. However, the new girl replied, “I don’t go to church. I go to a temple. I’m a Jew.” The first girl asked, “What’s that?” The new girl answered, “You know that there are Protestants, Catholics, and Jews — they’re all just different ways of voting for God.”⁴¹

- James Roosevelt took his five-year-old son, Franklin Delano, to see President Grover Cleveland in the White House. President Cleveland told young Franklin, “My little man, I am making a strange wish for you. It is that you may never be President of the United States.” The wish did not come true — Franklin grew up to become the 32nd President of the United States.⁴²

- Soccer star Michelle Akers almost did not get involved in soccer. When she was eight years old, her mother signed her up to play soccer. However, Michelle wanted to quit right away because her team’s uniforms were pink and yellow, which she considered “girlie” colors. Fortunately for soccer fans everywhere, she kept playing.⁴³

- As a child, figure skater Ingo Steuer participated in the athletic system of East Germany, a communist country known for its strict control of athletes, all of whom were expected to train and diet rigorously. One day, Ingo bought and ate an ice cream cone. The next morning, his coach not only knew that he had eaten an ice cream cone, but its flavor.⁴⁴

- While in a store, Donna McLean’s eight-year-old son wanted a toy but didn’t have the money to buy it. Since Ms. McLean wanted him to learn fiscal responsibility, she said that she wouldn’t give him the extra money. Therefore, her son reached into his mouth and pulled out a baby tooth, then handed it to her. She bought him the toy.⁴⁵

- When she was a child, Hillary Rodham Clinton was victimized by a bully named Suzy. Hillary often ran home crying to her mother, until her mother told her, “There’s no room in this

house for cowards. You're going to have to stand up to her." The next time Suzy tried to victimize Hillary, Hillary knocked her down.⁴⁶

- A family walked past a Baptist church primarily attended by African-Americans. Inside the church, the worshippers were making "a joyful noise unto the Lord." The family's seven-year-old son asked his mother, "Why can't we go to this church? They have a lot more fun than we do."⁴⁷

- When he was a six-year-old boy, baseball player Cal Ripken, Jr., attempted to set up a five-jump move in a checkers game against a friend. When he succeeded, he was so excited that he jumped up, hit his head on a concrete windowsill, and opened a gash that required stitches.⁴⁸

- When Ruth Bader Ginsburg graduated from Columbia Law School in 1959, her daughter yelled as Ms. Ginsburg walked across the stage, "That's my Mommy!" In 1993, President Bill Clinton appointed Ms. Ginsburg to the United States Supreme Court.⁴⁹

- When home run king Willie Mays was thirteen years old, he climbed a tree to watch a high school baseball game. The game was exciting, and Willie forgot that he was in a tree. He started to applaud a play, fell to the ground, and broke an arm.⁵⁰

- In 1997, when Tara Lipinski became the youngest person ever to win a United States senior figure skating championship, she was just 14 years and 8 months old. In fact, one week before becoming champion, she had lost her one remaining baby tooth.⁵¹

- Speed skater Bonnie Blair won three Olympic gold medals in the 500-meter race. As a child, she competed in Tiny Tots races, but she was so young that she sometimes got very tired, fell asleep in her mother's lap, and slept through her races.⁵²

- When he was very young, Maury Maverick, Jr., attended a movie theater which showed a March of Time newsreel in which his politician father was featured. Young Maury yelled, "That's my pop!" — and was almost kicked out of the theater.⁵³

- When horror writer Stephen King's children were growing up, they earned their allowance by recording books — such as novels by John Steinbeck — on tape so their father could listen to them as he drove.⁵⁴

- When poet Edna St. Vincent Millay was a child, the pipes burst in her family's kitchen during winter, flooding the floor with water that quickly froze — so Edna and her sisters ice skated in the kitchen.⁵⁵

- Ballerina Yvette Chauviré has always loved to dance. When she was a child, she drew the attention of passersby as she danced arabesques on country lanes.⁵⁶

Chapter 2: From Christmas to Fathers

Christmas

- Ben, a young nephew of lesbian humorist Ellen Orleans, wanted a Barbie for Christmas, but not for his birthday, because he didn't want the other kids to see what he was getting. Ms. Orleans was a little surprised by the request, and she asked her sister-in-law about it. As it happened, the sister-in-law didn't particularly like her son's desire in toys, but only because she regards Barbie as a sexist toy. Ms. Orleans ended up buying her nephew a Barbie and two outfits: a white satin dress and a cowboy outfit — the cowboy outfit had actually been created for Barbie's boyfriend, Ken. She sent it to her nephew in a box marked "Private! For Ben Only!" She also enclosed this note: "Remember, Ben, in real life women do not have permanently arched feet." Later, she received a note from her sister-in-law about the gift: "Great minds think alike. I bought Ben a Dancin' Barbie. He's in heaven."⁵⁷
- Christmas of 1950 was a lean one for the family of impoverished actor Patrick Macnee, who later became famous as John Steed in the British TV cult classic series *The Avengers*. He bought a small turkey, but a stray dog grabbed the turkey and ran away. Things looked bleak, but James, Mr. Macnee's brother, saved the day by disappearing and later returning with a huge turkey. He absolutely refused to say where the turkey had come from, but his clothes were streaked with mud and the recently deceased turkey was still warm.⁵⁸
- Figure skater Lucinda Ruh is known for her spins, as is another athlete born in Switzerland, Denise Biellmann, who invented a spin in which she raises her foot backwards above her head. When Lucinda was nine years old, her father saw Ms. Biellmann do her famous spin and suggested to Lucinda that she learn how to do it. Just before Christmas, Lucinda asked her father to come to the ice rink, where she gave him his Christmas present — she performed the Biellmann spin for him.⁵⁹

Couples

- The original edition of Gilbert Seldes' book *The Seven Lively Arts* once figured in a romantic escapade. Several of the people Mr. Seldes wrote about in the book were illustrated by photographs. One of the men so illustrated fell in love with a woman whose parents opposed their marriage. Because the woman was forbidden to have a photograph of the man, she carried around a copy of *The Seven Lively Arts* instead — until her parents found out why she was carrying the book around. Eventually all ended happily with the marriage of the young woman and the young man: Ellin Mackay and Irving Berlin.⁶⁰
- A gay man at work was surrounded by women who were always trying to fix him up with other women. One day, the man he was currently dating came to the office, and he told the women that the man was his date. They laughed at the idea, so a couple of days later, he showed them a few photographs of him and the man hugging and kissing, so they knew. However, they treated him the same way they had treated him before — except that now they tried to fix him up with other gay men.⁶¹
- Andrew Tobias and his former significant other, the late Charles Nolan, were opposites. Mr. Tobias wrote about finance, and Mr. Nolan designed women's clothing. Mr. Tobias described the difference between them by saying that when the federal budget is published, he is excited

by the numbers inside (“Look what they’ve done with defense!”), while Mr. Nolan was excited by the binding outside (“Blue and gold! Someone is Washington is finally getting it!”).⁶²

- Readers of the comic strip *Peanuts* know that Charlie Brown is in love with a little red-haired girl who doesn’t know that he exists. When Charles Schulz, the creator of *Peanuts*, was a young man, he fell in love with a red-haired woman named Donna Mae Johnson. She dated other men as well as Mr. Schulz, and eventually she accepted the marriage proposal of another man, devastating Mr. Schulz.⁶³

- When she was 15 years old, world-class figure skater Janet Lynn asked a boy to a Sadie Hawkins dance. Unfortunately, there was a drawback. After they had arrived at the dance, Janet had to tell her date that they could stay only 15 minutes because she had to get up early to practice.⁶⁴

- John Custis and Fidelia Custis were not happy after they were married. Once, they attempted a reconciliation and even drew up a contract between each other. In the contract, they agreed, among other things, not to hide the other’s silver.⁶⁵

- Dating a cowgirl can be a little different from dating other women. Jeana Day Felts, the World Champion Barrel Racer in 1974, was just setting out on a date when he reminded her, “Jeana, take off your spurs.”⁶⁶

Daughters

- Humorist H. Allen Smith once came up with a wonderful idea to keep his teenage daughter from spending so many hours on the telephone. He decided to have her telephone tapped so that by flipping a switch he could have her calls broadcast through the house. That way, he could give her a reasonable amount of time to talk, then flip the switch, and as soon as she heard her voice booming through the loudspeakers, of course she would immediately hang up the telephone. Unfortunately, Mr. Smith was unable to put his idea in action, as this kind of wiretapping — even if it’s your own telephone — was illegal. Later, the manager of the telephone company told Mr. Smith that he was glad that wiretapping was illegal. Other fathers had heard of Mr. Smith’s idea and the telephone company was being swamped with requests to put Mr. Smith’s idea in action.⁶⁷

- Sometimes, fathers and stepfathers become feminists because their daughters or stepdaughters want to do something other people don’t want them to do. As a teenager, Sandy Smith wanted to ride bulls in the rodeo. Many cowboys would say things such as, “Girls can’t ride bucking stock.” However, her stepfather told her, “Sandy, at your age a girl’s coordination is as good as a guy’s. Don’t take any lip from them — they’re just afraid you’re going to show them up.” Young Sandy did as she wished and rode bucking bulls in rodeos.⁶⁸

- Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, started to smoke while her father was President. He would not allow her to smoke *in* the White House, so she used to climb up to the roof and smoke there. About his daughter, President Roosevelt said, “I can do one of two things. I can be President of the United States, or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both.”⁶⁹

- Rod Chisholm coached football, so of course his young daughters, ages 10 and four, wanted to be cheerleaders. They practiced their cheers in the basement, then came upstairs to perform

before their parents. That evening, the youngest daughter said her bedtime prayer in a special way: “God bless Ma, God bless Pa, God bless everybody, rah rah rah!”⁷⁰

- Judge Roy Bean had two daughters, and sometimes when he wanted them, they were gone. Therefore, he used to take a shotgun and go looking for his daughters, telling the people he met, “I ought to kill ’em.” However, although the judge was frequently loaded, the shotgun never was.⁷¹

- Lady Mills (Mary Hayley Bell) once gave a party at the conclusion of which her five-year-old daughter made a surprise entrance. As the guests were leaving, her perfectly healthy daughter stood at the top of a stairway and announced in a calm voice, “Mummy, my heart has stopped.”⁷²

Death

- A “cold call” is a telephone call that a broker makes to drum up business with someone he doesn’t know. During the Roaring Twenties, a broker called a prospective customer only to be told that the person he was calling had died — so the broker asked to speak to the next of kin!⁷³

- Harry Lehr, America’s Court Jester, got married, but he later grew to hate his wife. When he died, his will stated that he had left her “my houses, lands, silver plate, tapestries, pictures, carriages, yachts and motor cars.” However, Mr. Lehr didn’t own any of that stuff.⁷⁴

- After comedian Lou Costello’s son accidentally drowned in a swimming pool, Mr. Costello ordered a bracelet to be made that bore his son’s name, then he had the bracelet welded to his wrist. When Mr. Costello died, he was buried wearing that bracelet.⁷⁵

Easter

- Joanne Hinch of Woodland Hills, California, had taught her children the traditional Easter greeting “He is risen!” and the traditional reply “He is risen, indeed!” On Easter morning, they wanted to surprise their father with this greeting, but three-year-old Dan forgot the words and greeted his father by saying, “Daddy, God’s back!”⁷⁶

Education

- Wavy Gravy (aka Hugh Romney) is a wonderful human being and a wonderful teacher. At his Camp Winnarainbow, the rule is, “If you got ’em, brush ’em” (teeth, that is). Wavy Gravy himself has only six teeth left — and lots of false teeth that are colored like a rainbow. At camp orientation, Wavy Gravy stands on stage in the darkness, with only a spotlight on his mouth. He then tells the horrific story of how he lost his teeth (mainly through neglect), leaving out no detail. Finally, at the end of his story, he yanks out his false teeth, opening his mouth wide to reveal his few remaining stumps of real teeth. Every year after camp is over, he receives letters like this from parents: “I don’t know what you did to our little Billy but he has been home only a month and he has already worn out three brand-new toothbrushes.”⁷⁷

- Comedian Jay Leno attended Emerson College, where he was a mediocre student at best. However, one semester he surprised his parents by getting straight A’s. This is what happened: For one semester only, Emerson College implemented a “progressive” idea — it let students grade themselves. Mr. Leno recognized an opportunity when he saw it, and he put himself on the dean’s list. The next semester, Emerson College changed back to its old system of grading,

and Mr. Leno received his usual D's and F's. His father asked, "WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO?" — and Mr. Leno said that his courses were harder this semester than last semester.⁷⁸

- Geneticist Barbara McClintock knew how to concentrate on important things. While attending Cornell University, she took a biology exam for which she was very well prepared. She whizzed through the questions, finished the exam very early, then noticed that she hadn't written her name on her exam. Unfortunately, she couldn't remember her name and she was too embarrassed to ask anyone what her name was. After waiting 20 minutes, she remembered her name, wrote it on the exam, and handed the exam in. For this exam, she had concentrated so hard on the important things that she had forgotten a relatively unimportant thing.⁷⁹

- While attending Ohio State University, R.L. Stine, writer of hundreds of comedy and horror books for children, decided to run a not-at-all-serious campaign for the Student Senate presidency even though he was a senior and would be graduating. According to Mr. Stine, students expect the Student Senate to do absolutely nothing anyway, and since he was graduating and would not be around, he was in a better position than anyone else to deliver what the students expected — nothing at all. The campaign failed to get him elected, although he did receive 1,163 write-in votes — Ohio State officials refused to let his name appear on the ballot.⁸⁰

- As a youngster, athlete Jim Thorpe frequently ran away from his boarding school, which taught the ways of white people and ignored Native American culture. However, his father valued education and each time his son ran away, he made him return to the school. Once, after Jim had run away, his father took him back to the school. Jim went in the front door and out the back door. By taking shortcuts home, he managed to reduce the 23-mile journey to 18 miles, and he managed to walk home faster than his father was able to drive his horses and wagon home. When his father reached home, Jim was waiting for him.⁸¹

- When author Michael Thomas Ford was in high school, one of his teachers tried to teach students how difficult it is to care for an infant by having each student carry around a raw egg for a week. At night, the egg could be refrigerated, but at all other times, it had to be in the care of the student, or the student had to find a "babysitter" for it. This may not have been a good idea. Early in the week, a few students accidentally dropped their eggs, resulting in a failing grade. Because they didn't want to be the only failing students, they started to deliberately trip other students and commit "eggicide."⁸²

- The parents of Marian Wright Edelman were serious about education. Each school night, she and her siblings were expected to sit down and do their homework. Whenever one of the children said that the teacher had not assigned any homework, her father used to say, "Well, assign yourself." Ms. Edelman once made out a list of "Twenty-Five Lessons for Life," based on the values she had learned from her parents. Lesson 3 was, "Assign yourself. Don't wait around to be told what to do." In 1973, she founded the Children's Defense Fund, which attempts to get federal legislation passed to help children.⁸³

- When Trey Reely, the band director of Paragould High School in Paragould, Arkansas, was in school, he had a hard-working, caring teacher who one day got very angry at her students. After she recited a long list of things she had done for the students that the students did not appreciate, she told them, "If you think I do a good job, raise your hands." The students were stunned by her tirade and sat without making a move. The teacher then yelled, "GET YOUR HANDS UP!" They did.⁸⁴

- Much of the United States is more tolerant than one might expect from hearing talk radio shows and reading letters to the editor. A few years ago, Charles Rice attended his senior prom at Taylor High School in Pierson, Florida, in drag — high heels and all. The high school administration was a little upset, but the students were nonchalant. Jennifer Strickland even said of Mr. Rice’s drag queen talents, “I’ve seen him dressed up and you can’t tell [he’s a guy] until you look at his feet.”⁸⁵

- While studying art at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, Andy Warhol was an original. Sometimes he handed in artwork that had little or nothing to do with the assignment. For example, pictorial design professor Robert Lepper once assigned his students to find a building that served as a home, imagine what kind of family lived there, and then draw the living room that they imagined could be found in that home. Mr. Warhol drew his own family’s living room.⁸⁶

- Janet Lynn was such a talented figure skater that when she was only three-and-a-half years old, she was already in a skating class for teenagers. One problem arose when the teacher of the class told the students to write a paper about figure skating — Janet was so young that she hadn’t learned yet to write. Fortunately, she was able to pass the class by drawing pictures with crayons.⁸⁷

- Emma Blades, the paternal grandmother of Panamanian salsa singer Rubén Blades, educated her sons at home so she could use her scarce money to have her daughters educated at school. She had a good reason for doing this. Since she felt that this is a man’s world, she believed that her daughters needed the education more than her sons.⁸⁸

- In 1978, Cal Ripken, Jr., signed a contract to play baseball for the Baltimore Orioles organization. For an 18-year-old, Mr. Ripken showed remarkable intelligence. His signing bonus was only \$20,000, but he insisted on a clause requiring the Orioles to give him a four-year college scholarship if baseball didn’t work out.⁸⁹

- Clara Null was teaching a Sunday School class to third-graders. The topic was the Ten Commandments, and she was worried that she might get some embarrassing questions when she reached “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Sure enough, one little girl raised her hand and asked, “What does ‘commit’ mean?”⁹⁰

- When cartoonist Matt Groening was in high school, he ran for office on the Students for Decency ticket. His campaign slogan was, “If you’re against decency, what are you for?” Once elected class president, he tried but failed to have the student government constitution changed to give him absolute power.⁹¹

- Track and golf star Babe Didrikson’s early coach, Colonel Melvin J. McCombs, knew exactly how to motivate her. While she was training for the high jump, he promised her a treat each time she successfully jumped a new personal high two times in a row — a chocolate soda.⁹²

Fathers

- The 1930s were the age of the joke letter. When Joe Bryan, aka author J. Bryan III, and his wife had their first son in 1936, they asked Arthur H. Samuels, a magazine editor, to become the child’s godfather. Mr. Samuels accepted, and he wrote a letter to the child, saying how delighted he was to become his godfather, because he had always admired the child’s mother and had always found her very attractive and he felt very close to her, especially now. In fact,

he wrote that since the child would no doubt grow up to be a man of the world he did not mind revealing that their relationship was not really that of godfather and godchild, but was indeed very much closer. Mr. Bryan and his wife never showed the letter to their parents, being afraid that they would not understand that it was a joke, but they saved the letter and gave it to their son when he came of age.⁹³

- Briefly, comedian Jay Leno was a member of the Boy Scouts. His scoutmaster was determined to get parents involved in the organization, although many of them did not want to get involved. The scoutmaster even gave Jay's father a bunch of merit badges and asked for help in administering tests and giving the merit badges out to the scouts. Reluctant to be involved, Jay's father asked the scouts, "What kind of tree is that over there?" Because apples were hanging from the tree's branches, they quickly identified the tree, and Jay's father started handing five or six merit badges to each scout — including merit badges that had nothing to do with tree identification. When the scoutmaster saw the merit badges being worn by the scouts, he angrily started ripping them off the scouts' uniforms. Shortly thereafter, Jay stopped being a scout.⁹⁴

- Christian writer Dale Hanson Bourke once attended a meeting at which a man received a note and left. He was gone for some time, and because his scheduled presentation was important, little was accomplished at the meeting while he was gone. At first, Ms. Bourke was impatient, but then she learned the reason for the man's absence. A friend of the man told her, "He ... uh ... had a little personal problem. His daughter bit another child, and he had to go down to the day-care center and take her home."⁹⁵

- When the Cincinnati Reds traded Ken Griffey, Sr., to the New York Yankees, his family stayed in Cincinnati while he moved to New York. However, his son, Ken Griffey, Jr., stayed in touch with him by telephone. Sometimes, young Ken made a mistake in a baseball game and called his father to talk about it. Sometimes, his father would fly him to New York, teach him what he needed to learn about baseball, then fly him back to Cincinnati.⁹⁶

- Figure skater Peggy Fleming's father knew how to handle teenage smoking. When she was a young teenager, Peggy got hold of a pack of cigarettes and lit one up in the garage. Her father walked into the garage, saw her smoking, and said, "Hmm, you're smoking? Great. I feel like smoking, too. Why don't we smoke together?" They ended up smoking the whole pack of cigarettes together. Young Peggy got sick, and she never smoked again.⁹⁷

- When Steven Spielberg was a boy, his father didn't want him to watch too much TV. To determine whether Steven was watching TV, his father used to place a hair over the power switch of the family TV, but Steven knew about the hair, and he would remove it, watch TV, then carefully replace the hair so his father wouldn't know that he had been watching TV.⁹⁸

- Band director Trey Reely studied trumpet as a child, but in the eighth grade he felt that he was too busy to take lessons. His father, however, convinced him to take a lesson every two weeks. This worked out well. Trey studied enough that he didn't forget everything he knew, and eventually he started taking lessons his usual once a week.⁹⁹

- Hiram P. Thorpe, the father of athlete Jim Thorpe, was called "Big Hiram," and his strength was immense. Once, father and young son went hunting together. They didn't have enough horses to carry all the deer they killed, so Big Hiram put a buck deer over each of his shoulders, and he carried the two deer twenty miles to their home.¹⁰⁰

- Theatrical producer Jed Harris and his daughter once hopped together down a sidewalk. A friend saw them from across the street and later asked Mr. Harris what they had been doing. Mr. Harris replied, “We were rabbits.”¹⁰¹

Chapter 3: From Food to Husbands and Wives

Food

- Early in his married life, L. Frank Baum, who later wrote *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, brought home a dozen filled doughnuts. This made his wife unhappy, and she asked him if he disliked the kind of food she bought. Mr. Baum said that he liked her cooking, but that doughnuts were good to eat, too. He ate two doughnuts the first day, and two the second day, but on the third day he said that they were stale and so he didn't eat any. Nevertheless, his wife served them to him again on day four, so he took the doughnuts, wrapped them up, and hid them in a cupboard. His wife, however, found them and served them to him the next day, so this time he dug a hole and buried the doughnuts. His wife still had a point to make, so she dug up the doughnuts, brushed the dirt off them, and served the rock-hard doughnuts to him again. Eventually, they made a truce. Mr. Baum did not have to eat the doughnuts, but he did have to leave the grocery shopping to his wife.¹⁰²

- Opera singer Leo Slezak was forced to diet for most of each year because, being a huge man (he was 6-foot-7), he had a large appetite and gained weight easily. (One of the few days of the year that he didn't diet was his birthday.) When he was dieting, his wife carefully measured out portions of food on a scale and those portions were all he had to eat. Of course, Mr. Slezak ate the food quickly and then muttered that the food scale *had* to be wrong. Once, for a few meals in a row, Mr. Slezak didn't complain about the portions of food he was doled out. His wife praised his will power and suspected nothing until she walked into her husband's den and discovered that the family dog was very interested in the middle drawer of her husband's desk. Opening the drawer, she found a large salami.¹⁰³

- Malcolm Glenn Wyer once worked as a librarian in Iowa City, the location of the State University of Iowa. Later, while working at another library Mr. Wyer met an exchange professor from Austria who had taught for a while at the State University of Iowa. The professor asked Mr. Wyer to clear up a puzzle for him — he had dined at the homes of several Iowa professors, and he wondered why the servants always looked alike. Mr. Wyer was able to clear up the puzzle. The professors did not have any servants — when they entertained, they hired the Kasper sisters to cater the affair.¹⁰⁴

- Comedian Flash Rosenberg's mother brought her up to be analytical. For example, if she refused to eat her peas, her mother wouldn't just let her say that she didn't like peas. She had to have a reason *why* she didn't like peas. So she would say, "I don't like the way the skin is kind of tough and the inside is kind of mushy. I just don't know how to get my teeth ready." And her mother would reply, "That's a good reason," and so young Flash didn't have to eat her peas.¹⁰⁵

- Wavy Gravy (aka Hugh Romney) met his wife when he ordered a hamburger. Her name was Bonnie Jean Beechie, aka Country Pie, and she ran a restaurant named the Fred C. Dobbs on Sunset Boulevard. Her beauty was definitely noticeable, but the other thing that got her noticed by Wavy Gravy was that when he ordered the hamburger, she put a few peanuts in the center of the patty before cooking it.¹⁰⁶

- One evening at the dinner table, Amy, Charles M. Schultz' daughter, was making a lot of noise, so he asked her, "Amy, couldn't you be quiet for just a little while?" Amy stopped

making noise, and she started buttering a piece of bread. She then looked up and asked, “Am I buttering too loud for you?” This situation made its way into a *Peanuts* comic strip starring Linus.¹⁰⁷

- Comedian Carol Burnett married Joe Hamilton, a divorced man with eight children. They then proceeded to add three daughters to the already large family. With the addition of other family members and friends, they enjoyed some very large dinners. For a single meal, Carol once fried 67 pieces of chicken!¹⁰⁸

Friends

- Friends Bing Crosby and Bob Hope played an exhibition golf match together. Getting ready to putt, Mr. Crosby wanted to know how fast the green was, so he asked his caddy if the green had been cut that morning. After hearing that it had been cut, Mr. Crosby putted — and holed out. Mr. Hope then prepared to putt and asked the same caddy, “What time this morning?”¹⁰⁹

- At the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan, Tara Lipinski was in second place following the short program. However, Tara telephoned her best friend, Erin Elbe, to say, “I’m in second. Tomorrow it’ll be different.” It was different — Tara came from behind to win the gold medal in women’s figure skating.¹¹⁰

- Joe Louis clobbered Max Baer for a while before knocking him out. Afterward, Mr. Baer told his friend, Jack Dempsey, “Kid me all you like, but just the same I gave Louis a terrific scare.” Mr. Dempsey agreed: “You sure did. For a while, he must have thought he killed you.”¹¹¹

Gays and Lesbians

- Sometimes, homosexuals are accepted by people who seem unlikely to accept them — even people they have been warned not to come out to because it might kill them. A gay man from an Italian Catholic family was visiting his 81-year-old grandmother while she was watching soap operas, and suddenly she pointed to an actor and said, “Isn’t he beautiful?” He looked surprised, so she said, “I’m not stupid, you know. I know you don’t like girls.” Then she smiled and added, “I watch all of the talk shows. I know what’s going on in the world.” Finally, the gay man was able to say, “Grandma, I’m gay, and I was afraid to tell you.” She told him, “When you get to be my age, a lot of things don’t bother you that used to bother you. You realize that a lot of things aren’t important enough to get upset over. What’s important is that people are happy.”¹¹²

- Lesbian comedian Judy Carter knows a lesbian mother who came out to her children. Her 14-year-old son was worried about what his friends might think, so she promised that she would not out herself to his friends. In addition, she said that if any of his friends ever asked if she was a lesbian, he should joke, “Why? Does your mother want to date her?”¹¹³

- When gay author Michael Thomas Ford came out to his sister, her response was, “Well, you know I’m okay with it, but God says it’s wrong, so you’re probably going to hell.”¹¹⁴

Gifts

- At the 1992 Olympic Games in Albertville, France, figure skater Elvis Stojko finished seventh. When he returned home, his aunt and uncle gave him a gift: a round medallion that had been specially made for him. On one side of the medallion appears an engraving of the Olympic rings and the words, “Sixteenth Olympic Winter Games.” On the other side of the

medallion appear the words, “Congratulations, Elvis, You’re Number One.” Mr. Stojko has worn that medallion at every competition he has appeared in since it was given to him.¹¹⁵

- A few years after Martina Navratilova defected from Czechoslovakia to the United States, her parents moved to Dallas, Texas, and tried to adapt to American life. However, they grew homesick for their home country, language, and culture, so they moved back to Czechoslovakia. Martina gave them \$50,000 so they could buy a very nice home and 40 apple trees.¹¹⁶

- The best friend of R.L. Stine, author of the *Fear Street* and *Goosebumps* books, is Joe Arthur, who is known for his absolutely inappropriate but always funny gifts. When Mr. Stein’s son, Matt, was born, Mr. Arthur sent him a baby present — a very heavy shot put that cost almost \$100 to mail. And when Matt was older, Joe gave him *one* walkie-talkie.¹¹⁷

- A woman once sent her nephew a gift — cherries, preserved in brandy. The nephew wrote her a very nice thank-you note: “Dear Aunt, a thousand thanks for your kind gift. I appreciate the cherries immensely, not so much for themselves as for the spirit in which they are sent.”¹¹⁸

- Ballet master George Balanchine once made a mistake when he gave ballerina Alexandra Danilova a gift of English cologne. Why was that a mistake? Ms. Danilova was then living in Paris, center of the best perfume in the world.¹¹⁹

- Even at age five, Rita Rudner was a comedian. When she received a bikini as a gift, she held up the top and said, “Thank you very much, Aunt Mabel. This will come in handy if I ever have to blindfold the cat.”¹²⁰

- Ballerina Alicia Markova loved gardenias. One of the best presents she ever received came from her dance partner Anton Dolin, who sent her a pillow of gardenias to sleep on.¹²¹

Good Deeds

- Figure skating can be expensive. When Todd Eldridge, numerous times American men’s skating champion, was 10 years old, he moved to Philadelphia to train under elite coach Richard Callaghan (who also trained Tara Lipinski). For a while, the Eldridge family managed financially, but when Todd’s skating expenses reached \$15,000 a year, they considered having him come back to his hometown of Chatham, Massachusetts — from which they had to drive Todd to Boston for skating lessons. Fortunately, Todd’s hometown rallied behind him — a committee held clambakes and dinner dances, and sent out pledge cards to raise money to pay for Todd’s skating expenses. The town sponsored Todd for several years, finally ending its sponsorship in 1993, when Todd was able to earn enough money from his skating to cover his expenses.¹²²

- One of the good things that Bud Abbott and Lou Costello did in their lives was to finance a community center for children in a poor section of Los Angeles. At Mr. Abbott’s suggestion, the community center was named the Lou Costello, Jr., Youth Foundation, after Mr. Costello’s son, who had accidentally drowned in a swimming pool.¹²³

Grandparents

- When country comedian Jerry Clower was a very small boy, his grandfather got up before dawn, left the house, and returned after sunset three days in a row. Young Jerry asked where he

had been, and his grandfather replied, “I been doing public work — working for the county. We have a poll tax we have to pay before we can vote, and I didn’t have the two dollars to pay it. So the county agreed to let me work three days and they would pay me two dollars.” Then his grandfather smiled and said, “Hallelujah! I done earned two dollars. I can vote! Thank God. Boy, your granddaddy is going to be able to vote.”¹²⁴

- When Carol Burnett made her first appearance on national television — December 15, 1955, on *The Paul Winchell Show* — she called her grandmother so she would know to watch the program. However, her grandmother wanted Carol to say hi to her on the program, something that was impossible. Therefore, Carol worked out a code — instead of saying hi directly, she pulled her left earlobe as a greeting to her grandmother. After her grandmother died, Carol continued to pull her left earlobe — as a way to say hi to her children.¹²⁵

- Actor Walter Slezak’s grandmother was very curious. When he was a small boy, he asked her to keep for him a large box tied with string, but not to tell his parents about it because it was a secret. In particular, she had to promise not to look inside the box. As soon as he left the room, his grandmother began to untie the string. Inside the box she found a smaller box, and inside that box she found an even smaller box. When she finally opened the smallest box, she found this note: “Hello, nosy, you broke your promise.”¹²⁶

Halloween

- When Olympic medalist Shannon Miller was a pre-teen gymnast, she wore a memorable costume to a Halloween meet at Dynamo Gymnastics. She went as a bag of groceries. Because she was so small, a grocery bag (with the bottom cut out) fit around her torso. To the top of the bag were glued such items as cereal boxes and egg cartons, and her mask consisted of a potato chip bag with holes cut out for her eyes and nose. Shannon’s costume was voted by the applause of the audience to be the best in the meet. (And her mother didn’t even have to sew anything!)¹²⁷

Husbands and Wives

- Early in their married life, horror writer Stephen King and his wife, Tabitha, had little money. In fact, at their wedding, Mr. King walked down the aisle wearing a borrowed suit, tie, and shoes. (Since he took the morning off to get married, his pay at the Laundromat where he worked was docked.) Mr. King wrote a novel, but he was so disgusted at the low pay he was receiving for his writing that he threw away the manuscript. Fortunately, his wife retrieved it from the garbage and convinced him to send it to a friendly editor at Doubleday. In 1973, the book, titled *Carrie*, was published in hardback, and he received \$2,500 for it. Later, the paperback rights to the successful novel were sold. Mr. King figured that he would get \$5,000 for the paperback rights, and when he learned that the rights had sold for \$400,000, he celebrated by buying his wife a hair dryer.¹²⁸

- Actor Van Heflin and his wife decided to play a practical joke on Al Horwits, a friend who was a public relations man. They knew that Mr. Horwits’ wife was returning home after a long trip, so while Mr. Horwits was at the airport to meet her, they went to the Horwitses’ apartment and scattered ladies underwear, hairpins, and other feminine objects throughout the apartment. However, Mrs. Horwits had the last laugh. The next time she saw the Van Heflins, she handed Mrs. Van Heflin a bag containing the ladies underwear and said, “Here are some things you forgot the last time you were up in Al’s apartment.”¹²⁹

- Comedian Tim Conway's first wife, Marianne, loved to play bridge, and she insisted on taking him to some parties where everyone talked about bridge. This bored Mr. Conway, so at one party, he went to the bathroom and looked in the medicine chest, where he found some Vaseline and some Q-Tips. Wanting to have some fun, he smeared the Vaseline on his face, then he stuck the Q-Tips in the Vaseline, and finally he rejoined the party. Conversation stopped as everyone saw Mr. Conway. "Oh, this," he said, pointing to his face. "The Q-Tips box exploded." Shortly afterward, he and his first wife divorced.¹³⁰

- Bill Clinton was a student at Yale when he stared at a young woman studying in the Yale Law School Library. She noticed him, then walked up to him and said, "Look, if you're going to keep staring at me, I think we should at least introduce ourselves. I'm Hillary Rodham. What's your name?" Later, they were married. One of the reasons they were married is that Hillary is a strong woman whom many men find intimidating, and she says about Bill, "He wasn't afraid of me."¹³¹

- The great jockey Tod Sloan married musical comedy star Julia Sanderson. One of Ms. Sanderson's friends, a theatrical producer, was skeptical about the marriage and told her, "You won't live with that guy for a year." She replied, "I'll bet you a kiss," and the producer made the bet. A year later, the producer was standing on a street corner when a taxi pulled up. Ms. Sanderson got out of the taxi, gave the producer a kiss, said "There," and got back into the taxi.¹³²

- If you're a popular entertainer, you can quickly get used to applause. Country comedian Jerry Clower used to take a few weeks off during the holiday season to be with his family, but occasionally he missed the applause. Once, he told his family, "I'm going to go back out and make an entrance. I want y'all to jump up and applaud. It's going to be the first part of January before people applaud me and I need this fix." His wife told him, "Phfft."¹³³

- Despite a happy engagement, John Custis and Fidelia Custis were not happy after they were married. To attempt a reconciliation, they took a carriage drive together along Chesapeake Bay. However, John grew angry when Fidelia stayed silent, and so he drove his team and carriage into the bay. This prompted Fidelia to ask, "Where are you going, Sir?" Her husband told her, "To hell, Ma'am." Fidelia replied, "Drive on, then."¹³⁴

- When Susan Butcher, four-time winner of the 1,049-mile-long Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in Alaska, married David Monson, they had ring bearers, just as other brides and grooms do — but at their wedding, the ring bearers were two husky sled dogs, Tekla and Granite. (Before being married, the happy couple had a long-distance relationship — they dated despite living 600 miles away from each other.)¹³⁵

- In the first half of the 20th century, the Chicago White Sox had an effective way of ensuring that players maintained their training. Whenever a player would stay out late at night while on the road, manager Jimmy Dykes would send this form letter to the player's wife: "Your husband has got into the habit of staying out late of nights. I wish you would find where he goes and what he does and let me know."¹³⁶

- Fred Astaire's first wife, Phyllis, once asked him to do the dishes. Fred went into the kitchen, and a few moments later, the sound of breaking dishes filled the air. Phyllis went into the kitchen to see what was going on, and she saw her husband breaking the dishes one at a time.

He told her, “Never ask me to do dishes again.” Phyllis laughed, then she helped him break the rest of the dishes.¹³⁷

- Jerry Stiller married Anna Meara (they are the parents of Ben Stiller) because he was impressed by what she did on an early date — she stole spoons from the restaurant where they were dining. According to Mr. Stiller, “I fell in love when I saw her swipe those spoons. I respected her for it. I felt it showed that she was an Irish girl who had a lot of guts — or at least a lot of spoons.”¹³⁸

- When Charles Darwin was deciding whether to marry, he made two columns on a scrap of paper and headed one column “Marry” and the other column “Not Marry.” In the two columns, he listed all the reasons why he should marry and all the reasons why he should not marry. The column labeled “Marry” won, and he proposed to Emma Wedgwood, who happily accepted.¹³⁹

- Ballerina Suzanne Farrell’s choreographer husband, Paul Mejia, used to be the director of Ballet Guatemala, despite the precarious political situation in that country. One day, he was talking during a long-distance telephone call to his wife, and she heard shots in the background. Mr. Mejia explained, “There’s a revolution going on outside my window.”¹⁴⁰

- A man and his wife once approached comedian Groucho Marx. The couple introduced themselves, then the man said that his wife was a big fan of Groucho’s and was dying to be insulted by him. Groucho replied to the husband, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself. With a wife like that, it ought to be easy to think of your own insults.”¹⁴¹

- As an old married couple, Charles Darwin and his wife, Emma, used to play backgammon together. Ever meticulous, Mr. Darwin kept a running total of the games he and his wife had won. He once wrote in a letter to a friend, “Emma, poor creature, has won only 2,490 games, whilst I have won, Hurrah, Hurrah, 2,795 games.”¹⁴²

- Comedian Rita Rudner’s father was very good at making Rita’s mother hurry when he was anxious to go somewhere. He would yell “P.C.U.,” which stood for “Pulling the Car Out.” At that point, he was ready to leave without her, and she would have to finish putting on her makeup in the car.¹⁴³

- Comedian Fanny Brice met and married the elegant Nicky Arnstein. She knew she was hooked on him when she looked in his hotel bathroom and discovered that he owned seven — *seven!* — toothbrushes. According to Ms. Brice, “I came out of that bathroom full of personality.”¹⁴⁴

- Whenever opera singer Enrico Caruso and his wife, Dorothy, were invited to dine out, he would ask his hostess if he and his wife could sit together — “Else, dear madame, we cannot come. You see, I can sit by her at home and I married Doro to be near her.”¹⁴⁵

- Actor Maurice Barrymore was a wit — so was his wife, Georgie. Once, Maurice came home early in the morning after a night of revelry only to meet his wife going out. He asked her, “Where are you going, Georgie?” She replied, “To Mass — and you can go to Hell.”¹⁴⁶

- Ed Muskie’s wife, Jane, was shy, but as the wife of a politician, she occasionally had to make a public speech. Once, in New Hampshire, she said, “Oh, I think I’m going to faint. But before I do, I’d like to say a few words about my husband.”¹⁴⁷

- Thomas Alva Edison and Mina, his second wife, were able to converse privately in a room filled with people by tapping the other's palm with Morse code. In fact, Mr. Edison used this form of communication to propose to her.¹⁴⁸
- Benjamin Disraeli once complimented his wife by saying, "Why, my dear, you are more like a mistress than a wife." She was pleased with the compliment.¹⁴⁹
- When Wilson Mizner sued his wife for divorce, he was asked on which grounds he wanted the divorce. He replied, "Marriage is sufficient."¹⁵⁰

Chapter 4: From Language to Olympics

Language

- Martha, the daughter of Quaker humorist Tom Mullen, married a Japanese man and moved to Japan. She learned the language and adjusted to the differences in cultures well. When her parents, Tom and Nancy, visited, they tried to learn a few phrases of Japanese. However, Martha sometimes laughed at their attempts to speak the language, telling them that they had invited some people to eat lunch in the bathroom or had called someone a train station.¹⁵¹
- When Panamanian salsa singer Rubén Blades married Lisa Lebenzon, an Anglo (a white American not of Spanish descent) non-Spanish speaker, he asked her to learn Spanish so he could speak his native language at home. She finished in only seven months a Spanish course that normally took three years.¹⁵²

Mishaps

- Arturo Toscanini loved music so much that if something went wrong at a concert, he would tear his dressing room apart — and sometimes the offending musicians. At a performance of *La Bohème*, the brasses entered a little too soon at the conclusion. Only a professional could tell, but Mr. Toscanini was a professional. After retiring to his dressing room and kicking it to pieces (despite the immense applause of the audience), he sent for the brasses, who were still waiting because they knew Mr. Toscanini would want to talk to them. The brasses walked into the Maestro's dressing room with their heads hanging down. Mr. Toscanini inspected them, then said, "I hang my head in shame. After what happened tonight, my life is finished. For me it is impossible to look in the face of anybody. I can live no more." Mr. Toscanini then focused on the main offender, the leader of the brasses: "But you — you will sleep with your wife tonight as if nothing happened. I know you."¹⁵³
- Lady Georgina Coleridge had a Great-Aunt Christine who was very absent-minded. One day, Great-Aunt Christine and her son John were riding in a train when it suddenly came to an emergency stop—Great-Aunt Christine had somehow hooked her umbrella into the emergency cord and pulled it. There was a great commotion and her son John ended up paying a fine. One day, Great-Aunt Christine and her son John were riding in a train when it suddenly came to an emergency stop — Great-Aunt Christine had somehow hooked her umbrella into the emergency cord and pulled it. There was a great commotion and her son, John, ended up paying a fine. The train started again, and Great-Aunt Christine mulled over the incident. Finally, she said to her son, "Darling, I cannot understand why those men made such a fuss. All I did was this" — and she hooked her umbrella into the emergency cord and pulled it again. The result? Both Great-Aunt Christine and her son spent the night at a police station.¹⁵⁴
- When Ohio University student Nathaniel Sturgil was a child, an alarm clock caused a major panic in his family. The alarm was set very loud to allow the family to wake up to music, but one morning a radio drama was playing on the station. The radio drama was about a house fire, and the crackling of the flames could be heard very clearly. His mother ran screaming through the house, waking up her children and making them go outside until she realized her mistake.¹⁵⁵

- Lord Charles Beresford once enjoyed a visit to an English house in the country. That night, he made his way in the dark to what he thought was the door to his lover's bedroom. Unfortunately, he had missed his way. Entering what he thought was the right bedroom, he cried "Cock-a-doodle-doo," and jumped into bed — only to land in between the Bishop of Leicester and the Bishop's wife.¹⁵⁶

- Many families have stories about how the parents met, fell in love, got engaged, then married, and started raising a family. For example, when the father of Ohio University student Emily Kresiak proposed to her mother, it was April Fool's Day, although he didn't realize that. It took a long time for her mother to realize that her father was serious in proposing to her.¹⁵⁷

Money

- When Kathryn Forbes was growing up, sometimes her parents found money difficult to come by. However, she always felt safe and secure because her parents had a savings account in a bank — in times of great need, they could withdraw money from the bank. However, the money was to be used only for emergencies, and so her family would sometimes meet to figure out ways to cut down on costs so they wouldn't have to withdraw money from the bank account. Fortunately, these meetings were always successful, and never did the family have to go to the bank to withdraw money. Years later, after she had become an adult, Ms. Forbes discovered that her parents had no bank account and that her mother had never even been in a bank. The "bank account" was an invention. Ms. Forbes' mother explained, "Is not *good* for little ones to be afraid — to not feel secure."¹⁵⁸

- When Forrest Evashevski began coaching football at Iowa University after it had endured a number of losing seasons, he let other people know, "I'm running this team, not you." He also let it be known that if he were interfered with, he would immediately move on, saying, "My father-in-law has got plenty of dough. I don't need to coach football to live." Mr. Evashevski coached well, and he turned the Iowa players into winners. In fact, he was so successful that the university offered him a 10-year contract at a very high salary. Newspapers printed articles about the salary offer, and Mr. Evashevski's father-in-law sent him this telegram: "Accept now, son. Not as rich as you think I am."¹⁵⁹

- Anna Russell and her Aunt Al Schuyler once traveled to Canada. Ms. Russell had very little money, but she did have lots of valuable jewelry that had been willed to her. To avoid paying the customs tax, which she could ill afford, she decided to stuff the jewelry into her underwear and smuggle it into the country. Her Aunt Al helped her out by also smuggling in a few items. Being a world traveler and bon vivant, Aunt Al was well known to the customs officials, who gave her luggage a good going over. Elated at finding a few items of contraband, the customs officials confiscated them and gave Aunt Al a small fine — and let Ms. Russell through customs without checking her.¹⁶⁰

- Oscar Levant, Billy Rose, and Mort Dixon collaborated on a song they titled "If You Want the Rainbow, You Must Have the Rain." They decided to take the song to music publisher Joe Keit and ask for a \$3,000 advance. Mr. Keit listened to the song and their request for an advance of \$1,000 each, then put his hand on Mr. Levant's shoulder and said, "This boy is like a son to me. I published his first song. He wouldn't ask me to pay that much advance." "Okay," Mr. Rose replied. "Just pay Dixon and me \$1,000 each and we'll let your son worry about himself."¹⁶¹

- Bob Denver played beatnik Maynard G. Krebs for four years on the TV series *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*. After the series had ended, his wife gave birth to Megan, their daughter, and Mr. Denver worried about finding work. One day, a residual check for *Dobie Gillis* arrived in the mail. Mr. Denver was happy, thinking he could pay the hospital bill, then he opened the envelope and discovered that the check was for 30 cents. (Fortunately, Mr. Denver did find work again — he starred in *Gilligan's Island*.)¹⁶²

- When she was a child, Marian Wright Edelman used to occasionally ask her father, a Baptist minister, for money, but he always replied that he couldn't give her the money because he didn't have change for a \$20 bill. Only after she was grown up did she realize that her family was poor in money and that her father didn't have a \$20 bill in his pocket. In 1973, Ms. Edelman founded the Children's Defense Fund.¹⁶³

- Actress Judi Dench dislikes appearing as herself, but when she was starring in the British sitcom *A Fine Romance* she used to go in front of the stage and answer questions from the audience. Backstage, she groaned one day about facing the audience and asked, "Why are we doing this?" Her husband and co-star, Michael Williams, answered, "The money, Jude, the money."¹⁶⁴

Mothers

- When she was a young girl, Nancy Lieberman-Cline loved basketball, and she often traveled the subway into Harlem to play pick-up games. However, her mother didn't think Nancy had a future in basketball, so she used a screwdriver to puncture her basketball. (Previously, her mother had made her stop playing tackle football against the neighborhood boys, which is why young Nancy started playing basketball in the first place.) The stratagem didn't work. Nancy grew up to play basketball at Old Dominion University, then played professionally in the United States Basketball League (USBL), a minor league composed of men who had played basketball in college. She also played against the Harlem Globetrotters and helped train tennis star Martina Navratilova.¹⁶⁵

- In 1978, just before the all-around finals of the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, Canada, a ladybug flew onto gymnast Elfi Schlegel's leg. Her mother was delighted because she felt that this was a good-luck omen, so she put the ladybug in a jar with some air holes punched in the lid. In fact, young Elfi won the all-around, and during the press conference afterward, her mother told the reporters about the ladybug and showed them the jar. The ladybug received a lot of media attention, and when Elfi and her mother returned home to Toronto, many cards and presents were waiting for them — all with a ladybug theme. Today, even though Ms. Schlegel is grown up, ladybugs are her good-luck charm.¹⁶⁶

- Bela Karolyi is a celebrated women's gymnastics coach. When future Olympic gold medalist Shannon Miller was eight years old, she attended one of Mr. Karolyi's gymnastics camps. Shannon's mother, Claudia, wanted a photograph of herself and Mr. Karolyi. He was agreeable, and a secretary took the photograph. Unfortunately, when the photograph was developed at a one-hour service, Mr. Karolyi's head was not in the shot. Therefore, Claudia drove back to Mr. Karolyi's camp and asked for another photograph. He laughed, and the second photograph, which was *not* taken by the secretary, turned out well.¹⁶⁷

- Dame Lilian Braithwaite and Joyce Carey, her daughter, were English actresses. During World War II, they shared an apartment in London at a time when the Nazis were regularly

bombing the city. One night, an explosion waked up Ms. Carey, and she discovered that her bed was covered in rubble. She lay in bed for a moment, terrified of what she might find when she went to her mother's bedroom. Just then, she heard her mother's theatrical tones coming from the next room: "WELL! REALLY!"¹⁶⁸

- When they were able to afford it, comedians George Burns and Gracie Allen had a swimming pool constructed at their house. The children quickly learned to swim, but Gracie never went in the pool. However, Gracie began to worry about what their children would think if she didn't learn to swim, so she took swimming lessons. One day, she told the children, "Watch this," then she jumped into the water and swam the length of the pool. After that, she never swam again.¹⁶⁹

- Only the United States President can appoint a Supreme Court Justice. Jane, Ruth Bader Ginsburg's daughter, wrote in her 1973 high school yearbook that someday her mother would become a United States Supreme Court Justice. Jane added that if necessary, she herself would appoint her mother to the Supreme Court. In 1993, President Bill Clinton saved Jane the trouble by making Ms. Ginsburg the second woman to sit on the Supreme Court.¹⁷⁰

- Actress Laurette Taylor's mother, Elizabeth Cooney, was illiterate. Early in her life, she was suspicious of reading and writing, and she sometimes threw her husband's books into the fireplace. Later, however, she changed her mind about literacy. Shortly before she died, she gave her daughter a surprise — she demonstrated that she had learned to read and write.¹⁷¹

- Even when he was ten years old, Ken Griffey, Jr., was a superior baseball player — so superior that the parents of players on other teams thought that he was older than ten and therefore should not be allowed to play. Young Ken's mother, Alberta, started to carry his birth certificate to games so that she could prove his age when it was challenged.¹⁷²

- After Martina Navratilova defected from Czechoslovakia in 1975, she didn't see her mother again for a long time. Finally, in 1979, her mother was allowed to see Martina play in the finals at Wimbledon. While Martina played on center court, her mother sat in the players' box. As a gift, Martina's mother had brought her a box of homemade cookies.¹⁷³

- Track and field star Florence Griffith Joyner had a caring mother. When Florence was young, she had to obey the rules her mother set, including turning lights off at 10 p.m. and not watching television during the week. In addition, her family held weekly Bible discussions during which the children would talk about what they had done wrong recently.¹⁷⁴

- As a young boy, Tiger Woods got angry in a golf tournament and threw his clubs on the ground. As a result, he was tossed out of the tournament. He complained to his mother, "But, Mom, the white kids do it all the time; they don't get thrown out." She told him, "Tiger, you're not one of those guys; only worry about what you do."¹⁷⁵

- In 1914, famed ballerina Galina Ulanova was a little girl seeing her very first ballet, *Sleeping Beauty*. Things went well until the Lilac Fairy appeared — then young Galina cried out for everyone to hear, "That's Mama! My Mama!" She spoke truly. Her mother danced the role of the Lilac Fairy, and young Galina wanted everyone to know.¹⁷⁶

- Dick Tuck used to play a lot of practical jokes in politics. Back when Richard Nixon was running for President, Mr. Tuck hired several pregnant women to troop through the lobby of

the hotel where Nixon was staying. The obviously pregnant women all carried signs bearing Mr. Nixon's campaign slogan: "Nixon's the one!"¹⁷⁷

- Michael Thomas Ford hates to have his photograph taken. One day, his mother asked for a photograph of him, so he took a photo of a look-alike cousin, then gave it to her. For years, it decorated her refrigerator door, much to the astonishment of the cousin's mother.¹⁷⁸
- Hugh Troy was once driving a mother and her two small children. The children began acting up, so the mother scolded them, but Mr. Troy told the children, "You can jump and scream all you like, but if your mother says another word, I'll put her out of the car."¹⁷⁹
- While visibly pregnant, actress Judi Dench performed the role of Grace Harkaway (who was supposed to be a virgin) in *London Assurance*. One line the audience laughed at was spoken by Janet Whiteside to her: "Do you feel nothing stirring?"¹⁸⁰
- When comedian Bob Smith wrote an honest book about his life as a gay man, his mother's comments about the book were favorable. She told her other children, "I wish all you kids would write books. Then I'd know what you're thinking."¹⁸¹
- Steven Spielberg's mother supported his movie-making hobby when he was a teenager. Once, he needed lots of gore for a scene, so she took 30 cans of cherries and exploded them in a pressure cooker to create what looked like a bloody mess.¹⁸²
- Nancy, the wife of Quaker humorist Tom Mullen, was very good with children, especially with Brett, her son. She would listen carefully, and if the home were too quiet, she would tell her husband, "Tom, go find Brett and tell him to stop."¹⁸³

Music

- Fanny Brice made it in show business at age 19 when Flo Ziegfeld sent her a telegram to meet him. At the meeting, he offered her a role in his Follies. From that time on, she was famous. Well, almost. Lots of very good people were in the Follies, and it was difficult to stand out. Fanny wanted a good song, but so did all of the other singers in the Follies. And all of the other singers were surrounding Mr. Ziegfeld's two African-American songwriters, Joe Jordan and Will Marion Cook, hoping to get them to write a song especially for them. How to get noticed? And how to get a song written especially for her? Fanny asked Mr. Jordan and Mr. Cook, "How would you like a real, home-cooked meal? My Mom is the best cook in New York." The ploy worked. The well-fed songwriters gave the song "Lovey Joe" to Fanny.¹⁸⁴
- Figure skater Elvis Stojko is named after Elvis Presley. Although it seemed natural for him to skate to Elvis' music, he resisted doing so for years, waiting until exactly the right moment. In January 1994, after he won his first Canadian national championship, he skated to Elvis' music at the exhibition. Only three people knew about the program beforehand — it was a surprise even to his Elvis Presley-loving parents.¹⁸⁵
- While at home, conductor Arturo Toscanini was poring over scores with some friends. While talking passionately about music, he began to perspire. Walter, his son, took out a handkerchief, mopped Mr. Toscanini's brow, and asked, "Why are you perspiring?" Mr. Toscanini replied, "Because I am warm! When I talk about music, I am not cold!"¹⁸⁶

Names

- Charles E. Perkins was the president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad. Long ago, he, his young daughter, whose name was Elsie, and the railroad's chief engineer went on a trip through Nebraska, while the two men planned where to start new towns. One day, the chief engineer told Elsie that he and her father had run out of names for the new towns, so they would let her name the next one. She couldn't think of a name, so the chief engineer decided to name it after her: Elsie. Years later, Elsie, by then a grown-up woman, went on a trip to Scotland, where she met a woman who had lived for a while in Nebraska. When Elsie asked her where, the woman replied, "Oh, in a little town you never heard of, in western Nebraska, named Elsie. I have often wondered how it got that name."¹⁸⁷

- When opera singer Enrico Caruso's daughter was born on December 18, 1919, she was named Gloria, because Mr. Caruso said she was his crowning glory. She also had other names. Mary — for the Virgin Mary. Ameriga — because of being born in America. Vittoria — because the United States won World War I. And Grazianna — to give thanks to his mother, Anna. When Mr. Caruso sang in public for the first time after her birth, the audience cried, "Viva papa!"¹⁸⁸

- After Vincent Price married his second wife, the happy couple created a new family tradition: All of their pets were given names beginning with P, because the name "Price" begins with a P. Therefore, the new litter of poodles from their pet, Prudence, were named Pablo, Paderewski, Pansy, Pasquale, Patience, Penelope, Percival, Picayune, and Pinto. Mr. Price's dog from before he married a second time was renamed PJoe.¹⁸⁹

- Many Jews decided to change their names to less Jewish-sounding names to fit in better after becoming successful in the United States. William Seligman once went to his brother Joseph and said that since they had both become very successful as investment bankers, they ought to change their names. Joseph replied, "I agree that you should change your name, William. I suggest you change it to *Schlemiel*." *Schlemiel*." (*Schlemiel* is Yiddish for a stupid, unlucky, or awkward person.)¹⁹⁰

- As a kid, because of poverty, George Burns stole. In fact, according to Mr. Burns, he got the name of Burns because he and a friend used to follow a Burns Brothers coal truck until it was near his home, then steal enough coal to fill their pockets. (Mr. Burns' name at birth was Nathan Birnbaum.)¹⁹¹

- Mildred Ella Didrikson received her nickname — Babe — because while playing pickup games as a youngster she hit home runs just like Babe Ruth. In 1932, she won two Olympic gold medals as a track star, and later she won several national and international golf tournaments.¹⁹²

- When comedian Geraldine Ann "Geri" Jewell was born prematurely, there was a mix-up about her name at the hospital. She was placed in an isolette on which was a chart labeled "JEWELL, PRECIOUS."¹⁹³

Nieces

- Star ballerinas are celebrities. Alicia Markova arranged for her six-year-old niece, Susie, to attend a matinee of *Giselle*, and to come backstage after Ms. Markova's performance. Of course, after the performance, many well-wishers stopped by to congratulate Ms. Markova, and this puzzled Susie because she could see the visitors knew who Ms. Markova was, but that

often Ms. Markova did not know the visitors. Susie asked, “If I’m a famous dancer and dance *Giselle*, will I have a lot of people who know me but don’t know me?”¹⁹⁴

- At the 1992 Olympic Games in Calgary, which is located in western Canada, several members of speed skater Bonnie Blair’s family were in attendance to show support. One sign hanging in the audience section said, “Dear Aunt Bonnie, Skate Fast. Love, Brittany.” Brittany was Ms. Blair’s niece and perhaps her tiniest fan — she was only four-and-a-half-months’ old. The sign must have helped, for Aunt Bonnie won two gold medals.¹⁹⁵

Olympics

- After Julie Foudy won an Olympic gold medal as a member of the United States women’s national soccer team, she enjoyed showing it off. One day, she showed it to a Federal Express delivery driver. A little later, a knock came at the door, and her regular mail carrier asked, “Is it true there’s a gold medal here?” A little after that, another knock came at the door. This time, it was a UPS delivery driver, who said, “I hear there’s an Olympic medal at this house.” Of course, her husband’s parents were proud that their daughter-in-law had won an Olympic medal. After a visit, her husband’s parents left behind a roll of film. Ms. Foudy had the film developed — the photographs all showed her husband’s parents posing with the medal in different rooms of the house.¹⁹⁶

- When Dominique Moceanu was just an infant, her parents decided to test her strength to see if she could become a skilled gymnast. They stretched out a clothesline, allowed her to grasp it with her hands, then let go of her. They were prepared to catch her if she let go of the clothesline, but she held on to it. This test of strength convinced them that Dominique could become a skilled gymnast and they made plans to help her get the training she needed to succeed in gymnastics. In 1996, she won a gold medal at the Atlanta Olympic Games as a member of the United States women’s gymnastics team.¹⁹⁷

- Canadian Elizabeth Manley won a silver medal in the 1988 Olympics. During her amateur career, her mother financially supported her, even going \$26,000 into debt for her. Ms. Manley eventually turned professional, received a \$50,000 bonus for signing with the Ice Capades, and immediately used the money to pay off her mother’s debt.¹⁹⁸

- Being a winner acts as an aphrodisiac — to fans. After figure skater Katerina Witt defeated Rosalynn Summers for the gold medal at the 1984 Olympics Games, she received 35,000 love letters.¹⁹⁹

Chapter 5: From Parents to Weddings

Parents

- Even as a child, Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Barbara McClintock was unconventional, and her parents were unconventional. Her father, a physician, didn't believe in homework, figuring that if a child worked hard during school hours, the child should be able to pursue personal interests at home. Young Barbara often played hooky from school, with her parents' full approval. Once, she disliked her schoolteacher, so she stayed home from school for an entire semester. On another occasion, a woman in the neighborhood scolded Barbara because she didn't wear dresses and act like the other young girls. Barbara told her mother, who called the woman and told her, "Don't ever do that again!"²⁰⁰
- Andrew Tobias knows a couple of gay men who are raising a daughter who is trilingual. The gay men speak English and French around the house, and the babysitter speaks nothing but Spanish. Not allowing their daughter to watch TV, the gay men bought her instead a bunch of Disney videotapes — all in Spanish. For a long time, their daughter thought the TV set spoke only Spanish.²⁰¹
- When world-class gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi works with gymnasts in his gym near Houston, parents are allowed to watch their children — but only from either a balcony or from benches placed behind a large window. Why? Mr. Karolyi says, "I don't go in their kitchen and advise them what kind of soup to make for dinner."²⁰²
- Experience has taught Beth Joiner, a children's dance teacher, that kids say the most embarrassing things. For example, one young student told Ms. Joiner that the student's father liked picking him up after dance class because he could see Miss Beth wearing her leotard.²⁰³

People With Handicaps

- Clement Freud, who was later a Member of Parliament, remembers his most embarrassing moment. When he was young, he went to a cocktail party, where he went up to a young couple and asked if he could get them some drinks. The young woman made a few movements with her hands, then said, "No, thank you." So Mr. Freud asked if he could get them some canapés. Once again, the woman made a few movements with her hands, then said, "No, thank you very much." Mr. Freud then asked if she had ever tried this, and he beat out a pat-a-cake rhythm on the table, then stuck his fingers in his ears. The woman replied, "Actually, my husband is deaf and I was explaining your questions to him."²⁰⁴
- "Tiger" Jim Sewell became blind as a result of an injury suffered on the carrier *USS Hornet* during World War II. He immediately sent a telegram to his fiancé to call off the wedding, but she caught the next plane to his hometown and said to him, "You are not going to get out of marrying me because you're blind." They were married three days later. Mr. Sewell, who became a Texas legislator, believed, "A blind person has to work at making sighted people around him comfortable." Frequently, he complimented women he couldn't see: "You look so nice today." Also, he would sometimes comment to his friends, "Just look at that sunset. Isn't it pretty?"²⁰⁵
- Nicole suffered from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, which reduces her ability to walk, run, and play physical games. However, her friends included her in their games anyway. In games

that require running, Nicole served as referee. When her friends had skating parties, they invited Nicole, who played arcade games while the others skated. Once her friends finished skating, they played arcade games with Nicole.²⁰⁶

- Al Capp, creator of the comic strip *Li'l Abner*, had a wooden leg, a fact which his children and later his grandchildren took in stride. When his children were young, they would rise early to get their father's "broken leg" out so that he could use it. In addition, Mr. Capp used to pleasantly shock his children and grandchildren with his method of keeping his sock up on his wooden leg — he used tacks.²⁰⁷

Physicians

- A three-year-old boy named Tommy Hess broke his foot, and his physician explained that he would have to wear a cast on it. The physician also explained that getting the cast put on could be painful. Little Tommy extended his foot, the physician put the cast on it, and after the 45-minute procedure was over, the physician discovered that little Tommy had extended the foot that was not broken.²⁰⁸

- Dr. Cyril Solomon of New York once received a telephone call from a man who asked him to help his wife, who had a case of appendicitis. Dr. Solomon said, "Nonsense. I took your wife's appendix out five years ago. Nobody can have appendicitis again after their appendix has been removed." The man replied, "Maybe so, but a man can get divorced, then remarried, can't he?"²⁰⁹

Prejudice

- Bette Midler says, "Group conformity scares the pants off me because it's so often a prelude to cruelty towards anyone who doesn't want to — or can't — join the Big Parade." She has good reason to believe this. Back in her sophomore year in high school, she knew a boy named Angel Wong of Puerto Rican and Chinese parentage. Unfortunately for him, he was skinny, weighed little, had crossed eyes, and walked with a limp. He also played a bass fiddle that was larger than he was. This combination, of course, made him a favorite target of the group conformists. One day, some group conformists locked him in his empty bass fiddle case, and left him there until a teacher asked where he was. That night, Angel didn't go home, and the next morning his parents went to the school to ask what had happened to him. A week later, his corpse was found dangling from a tree 10 miles outside of town. He had left a suicide note: "I'M TIRED OF BEING THE PUNCH LINE."²¹⁰

- In 1969, the Civil Rights movement was going full blast in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Blacks boycotted most white-owned stores, but they continued to buy groceries from a store owned by Deacon Patenotte, a white member of the NAACP. Some of the few whites who continued to buy groceries from that store were country comedian Jerry Clower and his family. Once, another white man forcefully told Mr. Clower that he should not be buying his groceries there. Mr. Clower replied, "Go ahead, call [newscaster] Walter Cronkite on the telephone. Go down there, and as I come out the front door of the store, shoot me. And let Walter focus that camera on the blood and say, 'War veteran, father of four, shot down in a free country trying to buy groceries at the store of his choice.'"²¹¹

- When lesbian humorist Ellen Orleans stopped in Ann Arbor, Michigan, during a book tour, a bookstore named Once Upon a Time mightily impressed her with its gay and lesbian

merchandise — not just books, but also such materials as mouse pads with gay themes, greeting cards with gay themes, and rainbow jogging shorts. At first, she assumed the people from the university were good customers there, but she was mistaken. A worker explained why the college crowd was afraid to come there: “This is farm country. Conservative farm country. Gay people lose jobs.”²¹²

- Female hockey player Cammi Granato sometimes ran into prejudice because of her gender. When she was a kid playing on a boys’ hockey team, an opposing player hit her, knocked her out briefly, and gave her a concussion. After the game, the boy apologized, saying, “I’m really sorry I hit you — my dad made me do it.” In 1998, she won an Olympic gold medal as a member of the United States women’s hockey team.²¹³

- Martin Luther King, Jr.’s first experience with prejudice came early in his life. Before he was old enough to go to school, he played with two white boys who lived across the street. Unfortunately, as soon as Martin and the other boys were old enough to go to school, Martin went to the school for African Americans and his white friends went to the school for whites. When Martin went across the street to play with the white boys, their mother told him that they couldn’t play with him anymore.²¹⁴

- Occasionally, lesbian comedian Judy Carter hears a bigot say something like, “Homosexuals have an abominable lifestyle. People who care about traditional family values must not encourage the open expression of this sexual depravity.” When this happens, she tells the bigot, “The family values we homosexuals uphold are support, love, understanding, and respect.”²¹⁵

Profanity

- In the excellent family book *Mama’s Bank Account* (and excellent family movie *I Remember Mama*), Uncle Chris teaches a couple of Norwegian cuss words to a young boy who is in pain after an operation. One cuss word is to be used when the pain is great, and the other, even worse cuss word is to be used when the pain is very great. According to the young boy, using the cuss words helps. (Remember: Cuss words will *not* help if you use them casually, so save them for when you need them — and before having an operation, learn some cuss words in a foreign language so you don’t shock the Candystripers.)²¹⁶

- Ky Laffoon was known to get very angry occasionally on the golf course, and when he got angry, he was known to engage in profanity that profoundly embarrassed his wife, who left whenever she heard him using such language. Once, after promising his wife that he would not cuss because of his golf game, Mr. Laffoon made a mighty effort, but under great duress due to hitting his ball into a bed of honeysuckle, he let fly with some awful language. As usual, his wife started to walk away, but Mr. Laffoon ran after her and explained, “It wasn’t anything to do with the golf — I just don’t like honeysuckle.”²¹⁷

- As a youngster, Dominique Moceanu began her training in gymnastics with some other girls. They disliked one particular coach, so Dominique taught the other young gymnasts some Romanian words to say to him. Fellow gymnast Shelly Cavaliere guesses that they were “bad words.”²¹⁸

- When Nikki Giovanni was a young child, her older sister helped her get ready for school by teaching her such things as numbers and letters — and a couple of dirty words.²¹⁹

Problem-Solving

- Edmund Hillary was one of the first two people to successfully climb Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. When he was a child, he liked to stay awake at night and read books. However, his father checked on his children to make sure their lights were out and they were asleep. Therefore, Edmund and his sister arranged a signal. They ran a long string between her bedroom and his bedroom, with the string running along a dark hallway. When his sister heard their father walking in the hallway and checking on the children, she would pull on the string, alerting Edmund, who had the other end of the string tied to a big toe. He then shut out the light and pretended to be asleep until his father finished the bed check.²²⁰

- As a child, Nicole developed juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, which reduced her ability to carry around heavy books. However, she developed ways to solve that problem. For example, one of her classes used a very heavy book, so she received two copies of the book — one to keep at home, and one to keep at school. That way, she didn't need to carry the book back and forth between home and school.²²¹

Rosh Hashanah

- At the Jewish New Year — Rosh Hashanah — the sounding of the ram's horn, or shofar, takes place. One year a rabbi interviewed several men who were candidates to blow the shofar. He asked each of the candidates the question, "What will you be thinking about when you sound the shofar on the holy day?" One man replied that he would be thinking about the glory of God. A second man replied that he would be thinking about the enormity of sin. A third man said that he would be thinking about the money he would earn, because it would feed his children, who would otherwise be hungry. The man chosen to sound the shofar was the man who would bring the most sincerity, urgency, and passion to the sounding of the shofar — and that was the man who needed the job to feed his children.²²²

Sex

- Syndicated columnist Connie Schultz remembers when she was in the 5th grade and her mother told her how babies are made. Connie, of course, was a baby once, and she had parents like other babies, and she shrieked at her mother, "With dad?" When her father arrived home later, he noticed that Connie was behaving strangely, and so he asked, "What's wrong with Connie?" Connie mother whispered to him, and he chuckled. Connie says, "[T]hat was the only time I got away with not speaking to my father at the dinner table."²²³

- Columnist Ann Landers once asked her female heterosexual readers whether they preferred cuddling to the act of lovemaking. A majority preferred cuddling. Curious, writer Gail Sausser asked a lesbian friend whether she preferred cuddling to the act of lovemaking. The friend was shocked by the question: "What do you mean? Cuddling *is* part of the act — sex *is* affectionate!"²²⁴

- When Edward VII died, his wife, Queen Alexandra, sent to his mistress, Lily Langtry, a box of handkerchiefs monogrammed with Lily's initials. The handkerchiefs had been collected one by one from the Royal bedroom as Lily had carelessly left them behind. Not only were the handkerchiefs carefully laundered, but the Queen enclosed a letter of sympathy about her and Lily's mutual loss.²²⁵

Siblings

- Practical joker Hugh Troy had an aunt whom he considered officious. Once, she arrived for a visit while his parents were out of town, so he and his sister prepared for her visit by bringing down several pieces of furniture from the attic to the living room. After eating supper, the officious aunt was sitting in the living room when Hugh and his sister arrived carrying hatchets and loudly discussing the furniture, saying that there was way too much and that it was always getting in their way. They then started chopping up the furniture and carrying it out of the house. The aunt returned to her home the next morning.²²⁶

- When Adele Astaire was four years old, she began to take dance lessons. Occasionally, her mother would take Adele's younger brother, Fred, along when it was time to pick her up after class. According to a family story, Fred discovered a pair of ballet slippers, put them on, then imitated the dancers he saw by standing on his toes. Later, Fred and Adele became a famous dance team in vaudeville. After Adele retired to get married, Fred went on to become a famous movie star and danced with such luminaries as Ginger Rogers.²²⁷

- When Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Mary Lou Retton was a very young child, she wanted to be a cheerleader. Her older sister, Shari, often used that fact to get what she wanted from Mary Lou. For example, when they took baths together, Shari used to say, "Now, Mary Lou, if you want to be a cheerleader when you get big, you've got to sit in the back." Because Mary Lou believed her, she sat in the back of the bathtub, and so she never enjoyed bath bubbles or hot water.²²⁸

- When comedian Geri Jewell was a young child, her older brother, David, taught her to believe in fairies by rigging the house with tape recorders. One day, while young Geri was recuperating at home from a bike accident, she asked the blue fairy (more than one fairy lived in the house, of course) to get her some doughnuts, then she walked down to the kitchen — on every knob of the kitchen cupboard hung a doughnut.²²⁹

- Paul and Isabelle Duchesnay, a brother-and-sister ice dancing team, went through some tough times while training in Obertsdorf, Germany. Often they dined on what they called "white spaghetti," a dish that consisted only of cooked spaghetti noodles — no butter, no sauce, no cheese. The sacrifice paid off — they were World Champions in ice dancing in 1991.²³⁰

- Elfi Schlegel's older sister, Chris, also competed in gymnastics. She was very interested in Elfi's career, and once, when they were competing in the same meet, she was so engrossed in watching Elfi perform the floor exercise that she didn't even hear her own name being called to compete on balance beam.²³¹

- Playwright Robert Sherwood was invited to eat dinner at the White House with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat. When Robert's brother, Arthur, found out, he asked Robert to bring a souvenir home for him. Knowing that Arthur was a Republican, Robert asked, "What would you like — his scalp?"²³²

- After participating in a United States men's ice skating championship competition, skater Michael Weiss came off the ice and saw three women waiting for him: his current girlfriend, an old girlfriend, and his sister. He chose to hug his sister. He later explained, "I went with the safe one."²³³

- Minnie, Wilson Mizner's sister, was a snob. When a newly rich family began to live in a mansion on a cliff above her own residence, she objected. Seeing the newly rich family hold an

outdoor party, Minnie burned piles of trash, sending huge clouds of smoke upward to disrupt the party.²³⁴

- John Barrymore came from a famous theatrical family whose members included his brother, Lionel, and his sister, Ethel. Once a clerk asked John his name. When he replied, “Barrymore,” the clerk asked, “Which one?” John stared at the clerk, then replied with his teeth clenched, “Ethel.”²³⁵

Sons

- In an episode of *Gilligan’s Island*, Patrick Denver, the son of Bob Denver (who played Gilligan) guest starred as the young Gilligan. For that day’s shooting, Bob Denver’s parking spot said “Patrick Denver,” a small Gilligan costume was laid out in Bob Denver’s dressing room (which now had the name “Patrick Denver” printed on the door), a small chair with “Patrick Denver” written on it appeared in place of Bob Denver’s big chair, and everyone pretended not to recognize Bob Denver but instead paid deference to little Patrick.²³⁶

- As a young man, Arthur, Groucho Marx’s son, liked to stay out late without his father’s knowing it. This was difficult, because Groucho suffered from insomnia and his bedroom was over the driveway. Coming home very late one night, Arthur turned off the engine early and coasted up to the garage, then very quietly got out of the car and tiptoed up the sidewalk. It didn’t work, because he heard Groucho’s voice above him playfully saying, “I still heard you.”²³⁷

- When Olympic gold medalist Peggy Fleming skated for Andy, her son, for the first time since he was a baby, she did her regular show, then appeared in an encore, skating to Vanilla Ice’s “Ice Ice Baby” before a very enthusiastic audience. After the show, her son was also very enthusiastic: “Mom, you *ruled!*” She says, “I don’t care if they give me a ticker tape parade down Broadway — I could never dream of feeling more gratified.”²³⁸

- L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, was not a strict disciplinarian. He once spanked Kenneth, his son, but this made him feel so guilty that later that night he woke up his son to apologize to him.²³⁹

- After Harpo and Susan Marx adopted a baby, Oscar Levant sent them this telegram: “CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR SON. IF HE NEEDS BROTHER, WIRE TERMS.”²⁴⁰

- Being an explorer has its disadvantages. When Sir Edmund Hillary returned from an expedition to Antarctica, his four-year-old son, Peter, did not recognize him.²⁴¹

Thanksgiving

- Commercial and pop artist Andy Warhol grew up poor, and he didn’t always know how to use his money once he began making it. Once, a friend discovered an uncashed, forgotten \$700 paycheck in Mr. Warhol’s apartment. Mr. Warhol used one early paycheck to buy one hundred Brooks Brothers white shirts — all identical. (Later in life, he usually dressed completely in black.) One Thanksgiving, Mr. Warhol and his mother ate Thanksgiving dinner at a Woolworth’s lunch counter.²⁴²

- At a church service before Thanksgiving, members of the congregation brought nonperishable items of food to be donated to the local food pantry. Shirley Thomsen’s three-

year-old granddaughter, Denise, asked about the food, which had been placed around the altar, and Ms. Thomsen told her that the food was for poor people. As the members of the choir made their way toward the altar, Denise said, “Look, Grandma! Here come the poor people now!”²⁴³

Valentine’s Day

- One Valentine’s Day, Gail Sausser found herself holding a ladder for a lesbian friend who, wearing pink tights and cape and holding a rose between her teeth, climbed to the fire escape, then went to a third-floor window, tapped on it, and presented her lover with the rose.²⁴⁴

Weddings

- Judge Roy Bean used to perform weddings, saying, “By the authority of the Constitution of the United States, the great state of Texas, and the Law West of the Pecos, I, Roy Bean, Justice of the Peace of this district, hereby pronounce you man and wife.” He then was accustomed to add, “May God have mercy on your souls.” Judge Bean also used to grant divorces. When a District Court informed him that he didn’t have the legal authority to grant divorces, Mr. Bean explained, “Well, I married ’em, so I figure I’ve got the right to rectify my errors.”²⁴⁵

- Rabbi Wayne Dosick once discussed the marriage plans of a young couple at whose wedding he would officiate. The young couple wanted to be married outside, but they were afraid that rain would ruin the wedding. Therefore, they asked Rabbi Dosick to talk with God and pray for sunshine. After all, as a rabbi, he must have some influence. Rabbi Dosick joked, “I’d like to help, but I’m only in *sales*, not *management*.”²⁴⁶

- Comic singer Anna Russell married a Jewish man and had a traditional Jewish wedding, complete with the breaking of a wine glass. Attending the wedding was her Aunt Al Schuyler, who was very old and very deaf. When the time came to break the wine glass, Aunt Al saw the glass and said loudly, “No one offered *me* a cocktail.”²⁴⁷

- Luci Johnson got married while her father, Lyndon Baines Johnson, was President of the United States. In such cases, a desire for privacy often is ignored. After her wedding, which was attended by hundreds of people, Luci complained, “I wanted just my immediate family and friends. My parents invited only the immediate nation.”²⁴⁸

- Dorothy Parker married Alan Campbell, divorced him, then married him again. At the reception following the remarriage, she said, “People who haven’t talked to each other in years are on speaking terms again today — including the bride and groom.”²⁴⁹

- When actor Patrick Macnee was 66, he married a 66-year-old woman. After performing their wedding, the Reverend Shirley Fletcher gave them a wedding gift — information on birth control for newlyweds.²⁵⁰

Appendix A: Bibliography

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Appendix B: About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a Bachelor's with a double major in both areas in 1980, then I added a Master's in English in 1984 and a Master's in Philosophy in 1985. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled "Wise Up!" for *The Athens News* and I am a retired English instructor at Ohio U.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

Appendix C: Some Books by David Bruce

Anecdote Collections

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

250 Music Anecdotes

Be a Work of Art: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in the Arts: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

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