

***The Most Interesting
People Who Live Life:
250 Anecdotes***

David Bruce

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

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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.

The doing of good deeds is important. As a free person, you can choose to live your life as a good person or as a bad person. To be a good person, do good deeds. To be a bad person, do bad deeds. If you do good deeds, you will become good. If you do bad deeds, you will become bad. To become the person you want to be, act as if you already are that kind of person. Each of us chooses what kind of person we will become. To become a good person, do the things a good person does. To become a bad person, do the things a bad person does. The opportunity to take action to become the kind of person you want to be is yours.

Human beings have free will. According to the Babylonian Niddah 16b, whenever a baby is to be conceived, the Lailah (angel in charge of contraception) takes the drop of semen that will result in the conception and asks God, "Sovereign of the Universe, what is going to be the fate of this drop? Will it develop into a robust or into a weak person? An intelligent or a stupid person? A wealthy or a poor person?" The Lailah asks all these questions, but it does not ask, "Will it develop into a righteous or a wicked person?" The answer to that question lies in the decisions to be freely made by the human being that is the result of the conception.

A Buddhist monk visiting a class wrote this on the chalkboard: "EVERYONE WANTS TO SAVE THE WORLD, BUT NO ONE WANTS TO HELP MOM DO THE DISHES." The students laughed, but the monk then said, "Statistically, it's highly unlikely that any of you will ever have the opportunity to run into a burning orphanage and rescue an infant. But, in the smallest gesture of kindness — a warm smile, holding the door for the person behind you, shoveling the driveway of the elderly person next door — you have committed an act of immeasurable profundity, because to each of us, our life is our universe."

Chapter 1: FROM ADVICE TO CHRISTMAS

Advice

- It helps to know what you're getting into before you get into it. At a rodeo, a girl from Cincinnati, Ohio, entered a bucking stock contest and drew a bull by the name of Bone Crusher. Shortly before she was scheduled to ride, she asked the stock contractor, "What's going to happen when I get on?" He asked, "Have you ever ridden bucking stock before?" She replied, "No, I haven't. I've never ridden anything before." And while another girl, 16-year-old Diane Schott, was sitting on a bull moments before it was released to begin bucking in a rodeo arena, an attendant asked her, "Are you nervous?" She ignored him, so he said, "Well, you better get nervous." It's good advice — you can stay on the bull's back longer if all of your muscles are tense.¹

- A friend of *Guardian* columnist Oliver Burkeman remembers being in her final week at her university. She asked her favorite tutor, a feminist historian and pioneer of the field, for some advice — the advice that she would give her younger self. Of course, this provided an opportunity to say something profound — or pretentious. However, the pioneer of feminist history replied, "Use moisturizer every day — and don't forget your neck." This may sound flippant, but Mr. Burkeman writes, "True, it wasn't particularly inspirational advice. But anyone can do inspirational advice. It's actionable advice that's truly rare."²

- Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr., were friends, but when Sammy started taking cocaine, Frank dropped him as a friend — fast. For three years, they didn't talk, but then they happened to meet again. Frank said, "Sam, I'm so f**king disappointed in you, with that s**t. Dump it. You're breaking your friends' hearts, Sam." Sammy replied, "I'll give it up, Frank." Then he gave it up.³

Alcohol

- Some preachers at a restaurant were served the wrong dessert — watermelon spiked with alcohol. Learning of the mistake, the maître d'hotel asked a waiter to get the dessert back if the preachers hadn't already started eating it. However, the waiter reported that the preachers had already started eating the dessert. "In that case," said the maître d'hotel, "do they like it?" "They didn't say," replied the waiter. "They were too busy putting the seeds in their pockets."⁴

- Oscar Wilde used to dine at Chez Weber on rue Royale in Paris, where he was accustomed to order a drink and a bottle of Vichy water. The drink was for himself, and he used the water to freshen the sunflower he carried with him as a young poet about town.⁵

- Craig McNair Wilson wonders what kind of wine Jesus drank at the Last Supper. Perhaps a nice Christian Brothers Cabernet.⁶

Animals

- A Quaker had a cow that had the habit of kicking over the milk bucket. One day, the Quaker started milking the cow, and when the milk bucket was half full, the cow kicked it over. So the Quaker started milking the cow again, and when the bucket was half full again, the cow kicked it over again. Once more, the Quaker started milking the cow, but for a third time the cow kicked over the milk bucket. Finally, the Quaker, a nonviolent person, could stand it no longer.

He walked to the head of the cow and told it, “Friend cow, thee knows I will not curse thee. And thee knows I will not beat thee. But has thee considered that I can sell thee to a Presbyterian?” (Note: Presbyterians are welcome to change the end of this story.)⁷

- Preachers in the frontier backwoods were sometimes astonished by the ignorance of the people they attempted to win over for the Lord. One frontier preacher saw a man laboring in the fields and asked him if he wanted to be “a laborer for the Lord.” The man answered, “No, thank you. I have a job.” A Presbyterian preacher once asked a frontier woman if any Presbyterians were in that part of the country. She answered that she didn’t know exactly what a Presbyterian was, but he could look at the back of the cabin, where her husband kept the skins of the animals he had killed, because “if there’s any Presbyterians in this country, he’s caught one by now.”⁸

- At a public park, a woman told author Michael Thomas Ford, who was walking his dog, “Can’t you read the signs? Dogs have to be on leashes. What if your dog attacks my little girl?” Mr. Ford looked at the little girl, who was happily playing with his dog, then he replied, “I’ll tell you what. If he bites her, I’ll have him shot. And if your little girl bites him, I’ll have her shot.”⁹

- Early in his career, Pop artist Andy Warhol worked at a television station where he drew suns and clouds for an early-morning weather report. Only his hand was shown as he drew the pictures, but his hand needed makeup because of its excessive whiteness. By the way, Mr. Warhol kept twenty cats as pets — all of them were named Sam.¹⁰

Art

- At the age of twenty-four, Michelangelo Buonarroti sculpted the masterpiece known as the *Pietà*, which depicts the dead body of Jesus held in his mother Mary’s arms. People did not believe that a twenty-four-old man could have carved such a masterpiece, so Michelangelo carved into Mary’s sash these words: “*Michel Angelus Bonarotus Florent Faciebat.*” The Latin means, “Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence made it.” This is the only artwork signed by Michelangelo.¹¹

- Sometimes, it can be difficult even for the cartoonist to keep up with every little detail about the characters he or she has created. For example, in one cartoon Alison Bechdel, creator of *Dykes to Watch Out For*, has her character Clarice mention a tattoo, but in all the cartoons that Ms. Bechdel has drawn of Clarice naked, a tattoo has never been shown. Ms. Bechdel originated the Bechdel Test (sometimes called the Bechdel-Wallace Test), which is about representation of women in movies. To pass the Bechdel test, two women characters (who have names) in the movie need to have a conversation about something other than men.¹²

- James McNeill Whistler used drawings of a butterfly to adorn his letters. Whenever he wrote a biting comment in a letter, he would also put in a drawing of a butterfly — but he would give the tail end of the butterfly a stinger.¹³

- Movie sales agent Irvin Shapiro has a Picasso hanging on a wall of his office — when he was a young man, he had traded a bottle of wine to Picasso for the painting.¹⁴

Automobiles

- *Guardian* columnist John Crace writes that the American-made “Cozy Coupe is a stunningly unattractive red and yellow plastic Little Tikes pedal car that, if you have children, has at some point or other almost certainly blocked your hallway or crashed into your kitchen table and had you longing for the day when you could offload it on to some other poor sucker.” He bought his son a Cozy Coupe, but it quickly developed a problem: one of the front wheels kept falling off. Was this a fault in manufacturing the vehicle? No. The front wheel kept falling off because Mr. Crace kept loosening the nut on the bolt that kept the wheel on the Cozy Coupe. Mr. Crace told his son, “Oh dear, Robbie. It seems to be broken. Perhaps we should get rid of it.”¹⁵

- In 1990, tennis player Monica Seles defeated Steffi Graf to win the French Open. To motivate herself to win tournaments, the teenaged Monica often promised herself a reward, such as a new stuffed animal or a new piece of clothing. But this time she had promised herself a brand-new, bright yellow, very expensive sports car — a Lamborghini. However, her parents vetoed this idea on the grounds that a 16-year-old was too young to have a \$130,000 automobile.¹⁶

- Nancy Cartwright, the voice of TV’s Bart Simpson, owns these vanity license plates: ELBARTO and DNTHVCW (short for Don’t Have a Cow). Before she could afford to buy good cars, she owned a 1968 Opel Kadette, paying \$350 for it although it could barely go 45 mph. Because people got so angry at how slowly she drove, she put this bumper sticker on it: “It’s flooded.”¹⁷

- At the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, American gymnast Mary Lou Retton won five medals. Afterwards, the 16-year-old looked forward to getting her driver’s license. However, because Ms. Retton is only 4-feet-9, her father said, “She’ll have to sit on a cushion; she can’t even reach the gas pedal.”¹⁸

Baseball

- Baseball’s Jose Canseco is known for his hitting and running, not for his fielding. In 1963, his Texas Rangers were playing the Indians in Cleveland. A long fly ball came Mr. Canseco’s way and he ran into position under it, then looked to see how close he was to the fence. Big mistake. The ball hit Mr. Canseco on the head, then it bounced over the wall for a Cleveland home run. However, Mr. Canseco was able to joke about the error. After the game, he asked, “Anybody got a Band-aid?” His teammates were also able to joke about it. Jeff Huson referred to soccer, a sport in which players can hit the ball with their head, when he said, “The World Cup is coming to Dallas in 1994. Jose was just practicing.”¹⁹

- Baseball player Mark Fidrych was known for talking to the ball. Pitcher Rip Sewell once joked that he also talked to the ball. Sometimes after throwing it, he would yell, “Come back! Come back!”²⁰

Basketball

- Jerry West was a great scorer for both West Virginia University and the Los Angeles Lakers. As a kid, he practiced for many, many hours — even during rainstorms. Once, when he was 10 years old, he and a friend played basketball in a big rainstorm — young Jerry had to come into his house three times to change his sopping-wet sneakers.²¹

- The last time Michael Jordan played in the old Chicago Stadium before it was torn down was in a charity game organized by Scottie Pippen. Mr. Jordan scored 52 points to lead his team to

victory, and as he left the game with six seconds left, he kissed the Chicago Bulls logo in the center of the court to say goodbye.²²

Bathrooms

- The Ramones were one of the greatest rock bands ever onstage, but apparently managing the Ramones backstage was a lot like managing a bunch of unruly children on a school bus. According to Ramones guitar tech George Tabb, just before going onstage for a concert, Dee Dee would say that he had to go to the bathroom. Exasperated, tour manager Monte A. Melnick would say, “Dee Dee, didn’t I ask you before if you had to go?” Dee Dee would reply, “But, Monte, I didn’t have to go then. I have to go now.” Then Monte would ask, “Joey, are you sure you don’t have to go?” Joey would reply, “No, I don’t have to go.” Next, Johnny would say, “Make him go, Monte.” And Joey would say, “Tell Johnny to f**k off, but I’ll go.” According to an exasperated Mr. Monte, both Dee Dee and Joey had small bladders.²³

- Competitive figure skating can be nerve-racking, so the skaters often don’t wish to hear the competition’s scores. Canadian skater Brian Orser used to turn on the shower in the men’s dressing room so he couldn’t hear the competition’s scores being announced over the loudspeaker. American skater Elaine Zayak used to flush toilets whenever her competition’s scores were announced.²⁴

- Indianapolis high school senior Tim Wood once set the world record for sit-ups, doing 15,525 in 10 hours. After Mr. Wood finally finished setting the world record, a reporter asked him what he was going to do next. Mr. Wood replied, “Go to the bathroom.”²⁵

Behavior — Bad and Good

- In 1985, Lyn St. James drove at Watkins Glen, New York, in an IMSA GT race. She was supposed to share driving duties with another driver named Whitney Ganz, but when she came in for the final pit stop, she refused to get out of the car and let Mr. Ganz take over. She ended up winning the race, but she was alone at the victory celebration after crossing the finish line, even though normally the crew celebrates with the winning driver. In protest at her hogging the glory, the members of her crew stayed away.²⁶

- After African-American runner Wilma Rudolph became THE story of the 1960 Rome Olympic Games, she was given a dinner in her hometown of Clarksville, Tennessee — the first-ever integrated dinner there. County Judge William Hudson eulogized her with tears in his eyes: “If I can overcome my emotion, I’ll make you a little speech. Wilma has competed with the world and brought home three gold medals. If you want to get good music out of a piano, you have to play both white and black keys.”²⁷

Boxing

- After boxer Cassius Clay, who later changed his name to Muhammad Ali, won a gold medal at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, he wore it constantly. He even wore it to bed, even though he had to sleep on his back to keep the medal from digging into his skin. His father was just as proud of the medal as young Cassius, and he celebrated by painting the front steps to their home red, white, and blue.²⁸

- Professional boxer Sam Langford once touched gloves with an opponent before the first round, although usually boxers touch gloves before the final round. However, Sam explained ringside that it was the final round — then he knocked out his opponent.²⁹

Children

- When professional beach volleyball player Gabrielle Reece was a child, she lived with her mother in Mexico City after her parents split up. But when three-year-old Gabrielle developed whooping cough, her mother decided that the air — much polluted — of Mexico City was bad for her young daughter, so Gabrielle went to live with her mother’s best friends, Norette and Joe Zucarello, in Long Island, New York. Gabrielle stayed with “Aunt” Norette and “Uncle” Joe until she was seven, when her mother sent for her again to come live with her in Puerto Rico. By this time, Gabrielle wanted to stay with the Zucarellos, and she stood on the couch, pleading, “Can’t you get a lawyer?” However, the Zucarellos respected the wishes of Gabrielle’s mother, although Norette cried every day for 12 months after Gabrielle had gone.³⁰

- Ecaterina Szabo started training with Bela Karolyi at a very young age. In fact, she was younger than Mr. Karolyi wanted his athletes to be. While on a hunting trip, Mr. Karolyi was asked by a fellow hunter to look at the five-year-old daughter of the hunter’s brother to see if she could become a gymnast. Mr. Karolyi did so, but he explained that the girl would have to be six years old to attend his gymnastics school. Nevertheless, the girl and her father appeared at his school one day. Mr. Karolyi wasn’t sure what to do, so he left to ask advice from his wife, Marta. When he returned, the young girl’s father had disappeared and she was crying. She stayed at the school, and in 1984, she earned silver in the all-around competition at the Los Angeles Olympics. (Mary Lou Retton earned the gold.)³¹

- When Zen master Seisetsu was a boy studying at a temple, he was asked to rub the back of a samurai warrior who had traveled a long way. The samurai was deeply grateful, and he promised Seisetsu a new religious robe the next time he returned from the capital. After the samurai had returned to the capital and then come back to the temple, Seisetsu again rubbed the samurai’s back and asked him about the robe. “I completely forgot,” said the samurai. Seisetsu grew enraged, and shouted, “What kind of samurai is this who says one thing and does another?” Then he hit the samurai on the head and stalked off. The samurai was impressed by Seisetsu and told the boy’s Zen teacher to take good care of him.³²

- When Erma Bombeck’s first book, *At Wit’s End*, was published, she went on her first tour to publicize it. At one book signing, she spent three hours in a department store with a stack of her books on the desk at which she was sitting, but only two people approached her: A woman wanted directions to the ladies room, and a man asked her the price of the desk. Later, after she had written several bestsellers, the lines of people waiting to have her autograph a book became very long. Once, a woman with an infant waited in line to have Ms. Bombeck sign a book. When Ms. Bombeck said that the infant was adorable, the woman replied, “Thank you. It was born in the line.”³³

- Rhett Miller, lead vocalist for the alterative country/rock band The Old 97’s, is a funny guy. Asked about his hidden talents, he says, “I can hang at least eight spoons from my face (including ears) at once. I do this to amuse small children and embarrass bigger children. I did it at my own wedding reception. I intend to do it at my funeral.” And when asked about what is “essential to life: coffee, vodka, cigarettes, chocolate, or...,” he says, “Jameson’s Irish Whisky.

I used to think sleep, but now that I have kids I know that to be false. You can live without it, but man, you get cranky sometimes.”³⁴

- Nikolai Andrianov, a Soviet athlete, became an Olympic and World Champion in men’s gymnastics in the ’70s, but the road to athletic perfection was difficult. As a boy, he used to smoke cigarettes as one of his friends tried to convince him to start taking gymnastics lessons. Once he did start taking the lessons, he didn’t last long, dropping out after a month. Fortunately, his coach, Nikolai Tolkachov, hunted for him, grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, and dragged him into the gym — to keep him out of trouble and off the streets. At the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, Mr. Andrianov won seven medals.³⁵

- Birth control is controversial for many people. Raymond Wilson, a Quaker who was at one time the secretary to the Friends Committee on National Legislation, spoke long ago about government support for birth control. A woman Quaker said to him after the talk, “I am the youngest of six children, and where would I be if my parents had practiced birth control?” Mr. Wilson answered, “But Friend, neither I nor the FCNL have ever suggested that this policy should be applied retroactively.”³⁶

- This is a good project to do with children. Each fall, people see beautifully colored leaves, but of course the leaves eventually dry out and lose their beautiful colors. Here is a way to keep that from happening: Put a leaf between two pieces of waxed paper, then put the leaf and waxed paper between two pieces of brown butcher’s paper. Finally, iron both pieces of butcher’s paper. The wax from the waxed paper will be melted onto the leaf and it will neither dry out nor lose its beautiful color.³⁷

- Olympic-gold-medal-winning speed skater Bonnie Blair started skating when she was only two years old. Often, children that young wear what are known as “double-runners” when they skate — instead of having just one blade per skate, each skate has two, placed about one inch apart, in order to make it easier for the child to balance. However, young Bonnie didn’t get that advantage. Instead, her family got the smallest regular skates they could find and Bonnie learned to skate in them.³⁸

- President Abraham Lincoln gave many pardons to soldiers who were accused of dereliction of duty. His sons, Tad and Willie, played with a doll they named Jack. Pretending that Jack was a soldier, the two boys gave him a trial and sentenced him to death for sleeping while on picket duty, and then they asked their father to pardon Jack. President Lincoln wrote on Executive Mansion stationery, “The doll Jack is pardoned. By order of the President. A. Lincoln.”³⁹

- David, Donny, and Darren are identical triplets, and unsurprisingly, other people sometimes get mixed up when trying to tell them apart. More surprisingly, they have been known to get mixed up themselves. Darren was at the dinner table, and he got up for some water. Donny also got up, and Darren said, “David, you need to wait until I’m done.” Donny laughed, and Darren realized his mistake: “Oh, no. You’re Donny, not David!”⁴⁰

- Women’s gymnast Olga Korbut became the media darling — and the darling of gymnastics fans worldwide — at the 1972 Olympic Games. She was only seventeen years old, weighed 85 pounds, and stood only 4 feet, 11 inches tall. Just a few years before the Olympics, she had been very troubled because of all the students in her class at school, she was the shortest.⁴¹

- Before her first Olympic Games, in 1988, 15-year-old Svetlana Boginskaya did not understand how important a competition it was, and because she was tired, she nearly dropped out. She says, “My coach nearly had a heart attack.” Fortunately, she competed and won two gold medals: one for the team competition and one for the vault.⁴²
- Sometimes, competitions don’t go the way athletes want them to go. At her very first competition as a young gymnast, four-time Canadian World Championship Team Member Yvonne Tousek started her floor exercise, completely forgot her routine, started crying, and ran off the mat.⁴³
- When salsa singer Rubén Blades was campaigning to become President of his native Panama, he accidentally broke the strap on a little girl’s sandal. He promised to replace the sandal, and he went into a drug store and bought her a new pair of sandals.⁴⁴
- Olympic gold medalist diver Pat McCormack grew up in a household with an older brother as a favorite companion. She says that she didn’t realize she was a girl until she was playing football at age 10 and heard someone say, “Block that dame!”⁴⁵
- When children’s book illustrator Anna M. Rich was very young, her mother kept a baby book about her. Under “Baby’s First Words,” her mother wrote, “Anna knows all her colors.”⁴⁶

Christmas

- Do you know the legend behind the tinsel used to decorate Christmas trees? When Jesus was an infant, his family took him and fled from the cruel leader Herod, who was trying to kill the Christ-child. They came to a cave, where they sheltered. A spider saw the Christ-child, felt sorry for him, and wondered what he could do to help. Finally, the spider decided to make a web across the entrance of the cave to serve as a blanket against the cold night air. The next morning, when Herod’s soldiers arrived, looking for the Christ-child, they did not enter the cave, because they saw the spider’s web glittering with dew and thought that no one could be inside the cave because they would have broken the web. The Christmas-tree tinsel represents the spider’s web, wet with dew, glittering in the sun.⁴⁷
- Even as a young child, Wayne Gretzky loved playing hockey. When the grass froze each winter, his father, Walter, created a personal hockey rink for Wayne by flooding the backyard with water. Young Wayne and his friends played hockey there, and Wayne even bribed his friends with nickels to keep them playing longer. His Christmas gifts each year included hockey nets because, his father explained, “These didn’t last too long. Every Christmas, he looked forward to hockey nets. He never bothered with toys or guns as a little boy.” When Wayne was still a little boy, he lost three front teeth. Driving to the hospital, his father told him, “You look like a hockey player.” And as a young player, Wayne had so many newspaper articles written about him that his teammates nicknamed him “Ink .”⁴⁸
- Many Christians say, “Keep Christ in Christmas.” This is good advice, and it’s nice to know that Christ is also in Xmas, since X in Greek is the symbol for Christ.⁴⁹

Chapter 2: FROM CHURCH TO FATHERS

Church

- Old-time Church of Christ preachers felt no compunction about borrowing sermons from other preachers — and were often encouraged to do so. A young preacher, Cornelius Abbott, once borrowed a sermon from an older preacher, H. Leo Boles, and used it as needed. One Sunday, the young preacher was giving the sermon when he noticed preacher Boles sitting in the congregation. He broke off giving the sermon, and said to preacher Boles, “I did not see you in the audience, and if I had I would not be here delivering your sermon.” Preacher Boles stood up and said, “That’s all right. The fellow I got it from said you could preach it, too.”⁵⁰

- All too often, we forget that wonders occur in the World. During frontier days, a Baptist visited Jefferson, Texas, then returned home, where he told his friends that he had seen ice being made during July. Members of his church found out about this claim and were convinced that the man was lying, but first they decided to send another man to Jefferson, Texas, to investigate the first man’s claim. This man, too, reported that he had seen ice being made during the hot days of summer. The Baptists threw both men out of their congregation for lying. (Jefferson, Texas, is the place where the first artificial ice was made in the United States.)⁵¹

- Msgr. Vincent Fecher is a Catholic priest in Uvalde, Texas, where drought is often a problem. Frequently, he and his congregation pray for rain. One week, parishioners formed a praying procession. Before the 6:30 a.m. Mass, parishioners marched around the block as they prayed the rosary in behalf of rain. This worked — rain fell. However, the processions took place in mid-August, and the rain fell in late September. Nevertheless, Father Vincent told the parishioners that the delay was understandable — whenever you order something, it often takes five to six weeks for delivery.⁵²

- The very young and very tired daughter of a Salvation Army churchgoer disrupted one sermon by crying out “Amen! Amen!” over and over again, despite being hushed by her mother. Later, the daughter told her mother, “I kept saying, ‘Amen,’ but that man would *not* stop talking.”⁵³

Clothing

- When Olympic medalist Shannon Miller was born, her feet turned inward, so she had to wear a brace to make her feet grow straight. This may have made her shoe-conscious. When young Shannon started crawling, her mother “lost” her in a mall. At first, her mother wasn’t panicked — Shannon had been present a moment ago — but she looked and couldn’t find her, so she requested help from sale clerks. Eventually, Shannon was located in the men’s department — she had put two enormous men’s black shoes on her feet. As you would expect, the Olympic gold-medal-winning gymnast is used to being asked for her autograph — even when she is at the mall to buy underwear.⁵⁴

- Before the invention of air conditioning, Church of Christ preacher J.D. Tant was speaking on a hot day and so he took off his coat. This didn’t suit one of the women in the congregation, and she let preacher Tant know it after the sermon. Preacher Tant, known for his feistiness, looked at the woman from toe to head, taking in her sheer stockings and her sleeveless, low-cut

dress, and then he said, “Why, I could pull off my pants and still have on more than you are wearing.”⁵⁵

- Wingy Manone played jazz trumpet despite losing his right arm. After the house of his friend Bing Crosby burned down, Mr. Manone helped him sort through the wreckage. They came across a clothes closet in which several sports coats were hanging, all of them with the right arm burned off. Mr. Manone looked at the sports coats, then said, “Hey, man, these are for me!”⁵⁶

- While attending Cal State — Fullerton in Fullerton, California, Carol Johnston, who was born with only one arm, bet her gymnastics coach, Lynn Rogers, a sweatsuit that she could do a certain move on the uneven bars. He bet that she couldn’t do it, and when she did the move, he gave her a new sweatsuit.⁵⁷

- Olga Korbut made a number of exhibition appearances in North America between the Munich and the Montreal Olympic Games. Once, during a visit to Montreal, she made headlines by buying a wedding dress although she did not have a groom picked out yet.⁵⁸

Coaches

- Most Olympic ice skaters come from middle- or upper-middle-class families, but Peggy Fleming, winner of the gold medal at the 1968 Olympics, came from a working-class family. Before an important meet in Boston, an early coach, Doryann Sweet, told Ms. Fleming’s mother, “Either you get a new wardrobe and hairstyle, or I don’t go to Boston with you.” Big mistake. The Flemings had no money for even an ice-skating costume for Peggy, much less a new wardrobe and a new hairstyle for her mother. Ms. Sweet was fired, and when Ms. Fleming won her Olympic gold medal, it was with another coach.⁵⁹

- Gustave Lussi of Switzerland coached American Dick Button, who won the gold medal in men’s figure skating in the 1948 and the 1952 Olympics. Mr. Button trusted Mr. Lussi completely, saying that if Mr. Lussi should order him to jump from a window, he would do it — while making sure his toe was pointed and his head was in the proper position.⁶⁰

Comedians

- Early in his career, Bob Newhart wasn’t sure that he wanted to be a stand-up comedian, so he thought that he would write for other comedians. He showed a routine he had written to another comedian who said that he couldn’t use it but would like to see other routines he had written. Shortly afterward, the comedian appeared on Steve Allen’s late-night show — and performed Bob’s routine. Bob thought, “I’m sitting at home watching my own material being done, and I’m not getting paid for it.” Therefore, he decided to become a stand-up comedian and perform his own material rather than let someone else steal it.⁶¹

- Country comedian Jerry Clower used to come up with ideas for stories to record while driving by himself. He would make a note of the story, and when he got home, he would put the note in a box. A month before he was scheduled to record a new album, he would get the box out and look at the notes — sometimes five notes would be identical.⁶²

Couples

- When Plácido Domingo fell in love with Marta Ornelas, her mother opposed the match. Fortunately, Mr. Domingo's heritage is Spanish, and so he knew how to win her over — with the serenade. He hired a mariachi band, informed them that he would do the singing, and serenaded the Ornelas family — more than once. He made sure each time to sing some songs by the Mexican balladeer Jorge Negrete, who was Mrs. Ornelas' favorite singer. Of course, some of the Ornelas family's neighbors complained and called the police, but the police officers told them, "What are you protesting about? You're getting a beautiful performance, free, by a member of the National Opera." On 1 August 1962, Plácido and Marta got married.⁶³

- Opera singers need injections, inhalations, pills, and other medical aids to keep their voices in the very best condition. A physician once gave Russian soprano Luba Tcheresky an injection in her bare bottom. Amused, her husband told the physician, "You must have seen a lot of famous derrières." The physician replied, "Yes, and it sure beats peering down inflamed throats."⁶⁴

- Shamrocks — the leaves of the clover plant — are thought to bring good luck to people and to protect them from evil spirits. They have other benefits as well. According to folklore, if a young woman wishes to keep her boyfriend, she can put a shamrock in his shoe. That way, he won't be attracted to other young women and will continue to woo her.⁶⁵

Crime

- Mulla Nasrudin and his wife arrived home after a trip only to find that their house had been robbed. "You fool," exclaimed his wife. "Didn't you lock the windows?" Nasrudin's neighbors also criticized him for not taking more precautions against being robbed. "Isn't there someone else we should be blaming?" Nasrudin asked. "Who?" asked his wife and neighbors. "The thief!"⁶⁶

- A friend of Nancy Cartwright, the voice of Bart Simpson, tells her that when she is pulled over by the police for speeding, she should say something to arouse sympathy, such as, "There was a car following me!" Once, Ms. Cartwright's friend was so successful in using this tactic that she received a police escort!⁶⁷

Critics

- Roger Ebert once was at a Cannes luncheon that was hosted by B-movie maven Sam Arkoff, who produced *Beach Blanket Bingo* and executive produced *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*. Movie critic Rex Reed had just seen *Q*, which Mr. Arkoff had executive produced, and in which a winged monster preyed on stockbrokers. Mr. Reed enthused, "What a surprise! Right in the middle of all that schlock, a great Method performance by Michael Moriarty!" Mr. Reed's enthusiasm pleased Mr. Arkoff, who boasted, "The schlock was my idea."⁶⁸

- Russian bass Fyodor Chaliapin was not well received during a performance of *Mefistofele* at the Rome Opera, and a "fan" whistled derisively. The fan did not know with whom he was messing. Mr. Chaliapin, who had worked as a Volga River deckhand, put two fingers to his lips and whistled so loudly that audience members covered their ears, then he shouted, "If you're going to whistle, DO ... IT ... RIGHT!"⁶⁹

- As a drama critic, Percy Hammond was frequently merciless. He once wrote of a musical, “I find that I have knocked everything but the chorus girls’ knees, and there God anticipated me.” He also once said, “Dramatic criticism is the venom from contented rattlesnakes.” By the way, as a young actor, Albert Finney acted the lead in *Macbeth*. A critic (not Mr. Hammond) did not like his performance, describing it as “like a juvenile delinquent in a kilt.”⁷⁰

Death

- One of the toughest and most competitive players in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was Lagrange, Ohio’s Mickey Maguire, who was married to Corporal Thomas J. Maguire. On 9 June 1944, moments before her Milwaukee Chicks started playing a game, Ms. Maguire was informed that her husband had been killed while fighting in Italy. She requested that no one inform the crowd of her husband’s death, and she played the game. A newspaper reporter called her action “the most dramatic exhibition of courage shown in the girls loop in its short, one-season history.”⁷¹

- When Jacques Offenbach turned 56 years old, musicians gathered outside his home and played some of his music. Mr. Offenbach was delighted, until he remembered that an ill old woman lived in the apartment below his. He asked someone to check on her to see if the music was bothersome, but she replied, “Don’t worry about me. I can’t think of any way I’d rather die than to the music of the can-can.”⁷²

- In a Harmony, Rhode Island, cemetery is a headstone which bears the inscription “If there is another world / I live in bliss. / If not another, / I have made the best of this.” And in a Boxford, Massachusetts, cemetery is a tombstone the front of which is dedicated to Sarah J. Wood. On the back of the tombstone is the inscription “Here at my feet lies my dear pet cat, Tommy, Aug. 24, 1875, aged 17 yrs.”⁷³

- The epitaph on William Shakespeare’s gravestone reads, “Good friend, for Jesus sake forbear / To dig the dust enclosed here. / Blest be the man that spares these stones, / And curst be he that moves my bones.” Although Shakespeare’s wife and daughter wished to be buried in the same grave as he, people so feared the curse written in the epitaph that their wishes were not respected.⁷⁴

- Mother Teresa said that in her homes people die peacefully, without bitterness and without cursing. An example: She picked up a man from the streets of Calcutta and took him to her Home for the Dying. He told her, “I have lived like an animal on the streets, but I am going to die like an angel. I will die smiling.”⁷⁵

- When Leonor Acevedo de Borges, the mother of author Jorge Luis Borges, reached 95 years old, she told her son, “Goodness me, Georgie, I think I overdid it.” Every night from then until she died at age 98, she prayed that in the morning she would not wake up.”⁷⁶

- When Trixie, the wife of James McNeill Whistler, died, he ran out into the street, where someone tried to speak to him. Mr. Whistler cried, “Don’t speak! Don’t speak! It’s terrible!” — then he ran away.⁷⁷

- Western judge Roy Bean enjoyed gallows humor. He often told defendants in his court that they would receive a fair trial — and then be hung.⁷⁸

Education

- Rod Chisholm both coached football and taught history in Iowa. Before an important game, he decided to devote a history class to football, believing that the fans would enjoy the game more if they understood the game better. Therefore, he had the football players in his class explain the game to the non-football players. However, he warned the class that the state inspector of schools might come into the classroom, and if he did, the students were to immediately start talking about history. In fact, the state inspector of schools did come into the classroom, and a player more proficient in football than in history raised his hand. Mr. Chisholm was worried about what the football player would say, and he felt relieved when the player asked, “What I want to know, coach, is where did the Pilgrims come from: Holland or England?” After class was over and the state inspector of schools had been fooled, Mr. Chisholm told the football player — who was a shaky student at best — that he had passed the course.⁷⁹

- When Patrick Henry was a child, he and his family used to attend the church where Reverend Samuel Davies preached. Reverend Davies knew how to preach in such a way as to make people laugh or make people cry, and he became known as the best preacher in the South. Following the church service, Patrick’s parents used to ask him to repeat as much as he could remember of the sermon. This helped develop Patrick’s memory and helped him to learn how to use language to make people laugh or make people cry. As an adult, Mr. Henry became a lawyer and then a famous orator during the American War of Independence. As a young lawyer, Mr. Henry used to stop to hunt on his way to perform legal duties. Sometimes, when he arrived at court, several ducks were hanging from his saddle.⁸⁰

- The book *The Unwritten Curriculum* by Arthur and Phyllis Blumberg contains this story: In the 4th grade, a student was in band. Because of band practice, he always missed half of an hour-long class. Once, an IQ test was given during that hour, and he was given only 30 minutes to complete it although the other students had an entire hour. Because of this, the test said that he had a very low IQ and he was assigned to a “slow” class in the 5th grade. Another IQ test was given in this grade. Because he was in a slow class, the student was given extra time to complete the test. Of course, this time the test said that he had a very high IQ and he was assigned to a “fast” class in the 6th grade. The student grew up to become an educator whose goal is to end standardized testing.⁸¹

- Civil-rights leader Jesse Jackson was greatly influenced by his 6th-grade teacher, Sara Shelton, who shocked him and her other students on the first day of class when she wrote a number of hard words on the chalkboard. Someone in the class told her, “Uh, Mizz Shelton? Those are 8th-grade words. We only in the 6th grade here.” She replied, “I know what grade you are. I work here. I know what grade I’m teaching. And you’ll learn every one of these words, and a lot more like ’em ’fore this year is over. I will not teach down to you. One of you brats just might be mayor or governor or president someday, and I’m gonna make sure you’re ready.” She then turned back to the chalkboard and wrote more hard words.⁸²

- Trey Reely, the band director of Paragould High School in Paragould, Arkansas, once scheduled his band to perform PDQ Bach’s *Grand Serenade for an Awful Lot of Winds and Percussion*. To add to the comedy, he asked the father of a band student to do his clown act while playing percussion. The father agreed and arrived in character as the clown “Uncle Dan”

at the school for the performance. Unfortunately, a teacher who needed to lighten up asked him to remove his clown hat as wearing a hat indoors was a violation of school rules. Uncle Dan did what any clown would do. He removed his hat, then jammed it on again with a foolish grin, infuriating the teacher. The high school students loved it.⁸³

- Cassius Clay, who later changed his name to Muhammad Ali, was a poor student and graduated from high school with a D- average near the bottom of his class. (He later claimed, “I only said I was the greatest; I never said I was the smartest.”) Some teachers didn’t think he should be allowed to graduate, but the principal, Atwood Wilson, felt differently and argued that Cassius would be a success in life: “Why, in one night, he’ll make more money than the principal and all you teachers make in one year. If every teacher here fails him, he’s still not going to fail.” When Cassius’ name was announced at the commencement ceremony, his fellow students gave him a standing ovation.⁸⁴

- The Zen master Gisan was taking a bath. The water was too hot, so he asked a student to add some cold water to the bath. The student brought a bucket of cold water, added some cold water to the bath, and then threw the rest of the water on a rocky path. Gisan scolded the student: “Everything can be used. Why did you waste the rest of the water by pouring it on the path? There are some plants nearby which could have used the water. What right do you have to waste even a drop of water?” The student became enlightened and changed his name to Tekisui, which means “Drop of Water.”⁸⁵

- The young Warren Buffett was a master at psyching out his classmates in typing class during the days of typewriters when you had to manually move the carriage back to start a new line of writing. Whenever the class had a speed-typing test, young Warren would race through the first line so he could slam back the carriage. He says, “Everybody else would stop at that point, because they were still on the first word when they would hear my ‘ding!’ Then they’d panic, and they’d try to go faster, and they’d screw up. So I had a lot of fun in typing class.”⁸⁶

- Nicole was a child who had juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Like others suffering from the disease, she developed skills to cope with and make up for her loss in mobility. For example, when she was in the 3rd grade, she was reading at a high-school level. By the way, the eight-year-old Nicole liked to eat spaghetti, but she liked to slurp her spaghetti — eating spaghetti in a polite way is no fun. That’s why she stopped ordering spaghetti in restaurants.⁸⁷

- Uh Huh Her consists of Leisha Hailey and Camila Grey. When a reporter asked Ms. Grey which of her accomplishments she was proudest of, she replied that it was getting into music school even though she couldn’t read music. She remembers “the admissions woman on the phone asking me, ‘Ok, if there are four sharps, what is the key?’ I answered, ‘Does it really matter?’”⁸⁸

- A king once asked his wise men for a saying that would make him happy when he was sad, yet would make him sad when he was happy. The wise men thought, then gave the king a ring on which these words were engraved: “This too shall pass.”⁸⁹

Epiphany

- In Spain, Epiphany — January 6 — is an important day; it is the day that the three Magi visited the Christ child. It is called Three Kings Day, and on this day the Three Kings, not

Santa Claus, brings presents for children. The night before Epiphany, children leave meals for the Three Kings, and pitchers of water for the animals the three Kings ride: a horse, a camel, and an elephant. In 1949, young Plácido Domingo and Miri Pepa (his sister) were sailing from Spain to Mexico, arriving on January 18. The children were delighted to discover that the Three Kings had found their ship in the ocean and had dropped off some presents.⁹⁰

Fame

- Some refugees have been famous or have become famous. Physicist Albert Einstein was a refugee from Nazi Germany. Ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev received his freedom from the Soviet Union by asking French police for asylum in a Paris airport. As a child, concert promoter Bill Graham grew up in Germany while the Nazis were growing in power. His mother placed him in a boarding school where he would be safe, and in 1939, the boarding school moved out of Germany. As an adult, Mr. Graham helped make the music of Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, and other rock-and-roll stars famous all over the world.⁹¹
- Before competing in the 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Calgary, Canada, Eddie “The Eagle” Edwards was famous for holding the ski-jumping record for Great Britain — he also happened to be the only competitive ski jumper in Great Britain.⁹²
- Soprano Renata Tebaldi didn’t let fame go to her head. At some dinner parties, the guest of honor sat next to her, and sitting next to the guest of honor was her chauffeur.⁹³

Fans

- At the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the American gymnasts were given the use of some Datsuns to use to motor around town. After driving one of these cars, gymnast Tim Daggett was excited because people recognized him wherever he went. He told his teammates, “You guys won’t believe this — everywhere I go people pull up alongside of me to honk and wave and wish me good luck in the Olympics.” However, fellow gymnast Bart Conner knew why Mr. Daggett was being recognized so easily — and not just because of his broad shoulders and big muscles. He told Mr. Daggett, “What’s the matter with you? First, you look like you just escaped from a gym, and second, you’ve got a three-foot sign on the side of the car that says ‘Official Car of the U.S. Olympics Gymnastics Team.’” Mr. Daggett replied, “Oh, yeah. I guess you’re right.” (After winning gold at the Olympics, of course, both Mr. Daggett and Mr. Conner are recognized wherever they go — even when they aren’t driving Official Cars of the U.S. Olympics Gymnastics Team.)⁹⁴
- Just before competing in the 1984 Olympics Games, ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean practiced their *Bolero* program at 6 a.m. in the presence of a group of 20 or 30 cleaners. They put everything they had into the program, and when they were finished, the cleaners, who had stopped working to watch, broke into applause. In competition, Torvill and Dean’s performance of *Bolero* received nine perfect 6’s for artistic impression, and they won the Olympic gold medal.⁹⁵
- When Theresa Weld won the bronze medal in ladies’ figure skating at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp, Belgium, she won in front of a large contingent of American soldiers. At

the awards ceremony, the soldiers jumped onto the ice and presented her with bouquets of flowers that were tied with ribbons that identified their regiments.⁹⁶

- American speed skater Bonnie Blair trained for a while in the Netherlands, where she was a celebrity because of the popularity of her sport and her skill in it. Sometimes, when she trained at a rink in Heerenveen, the 16,000 fans watching her sang “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean.”⁹⁷

- Being a winner acts as an aphrodisiac — to fans. After figure skater Katerina Witt defeated Rosalynn Sumners for the gold medal at the 1984 Olympics Games, she received 35,000 love letters.⁹⁸

Fathers

- George Gershwin wrote “Somebody Loves Me” for one of the *Scandals* produced on Broadway by George White. Mr. Gershwin’s father once told him that he loved that song, and so Mr. Gershwin started to play it on the piano, but his father said that was the wrong song. Mr. Gershwin then played every song from the Broadway show, but none of them was the right one, so he said, “It must be something from another show.” He then absentmindedly started to play “Somebody Loves Me” again. His father said, “That’s it! That’s it! Why didn’t you play it for me in the first place?”⁹⁹

- The biological father of country comedian Jerry Clower was an alcoholic who abandoned his family. Once, Mr. Clower was criticizing his father when a black woman who was doing the ironing told him, “Boy, you’d better not criticize your daddy. The Bible says to honor your father and your mother. They’re the ones that birthed you. It don’t say honor your father and your mother if they don’t drink whiskey. It just says honor your father and mother.”¹⁰⁰

- Tom Danehy, columnist for the *Tucson Weekly*, is and always has been a big *Star Trek* fan, preferring it over *Star Wars*, although he is a fan of George Lucas. Mr. Danehy even goes so far as to embarrass his son by using Mr. Spock’s split-finger sign to say goodbye to his son — when lots of his son’s friends are witnesses. One of those friends told his son, “My dad drinks, but your dad is way worse.”¹⁰¹

Chapter 3: FROM FOOD TO MISHAPS

Food

- A pastor friend of Wesleyan preacher William Woughter once forgot that he had two dinner invitations the same day. The early dinner went fine — the kind couple who had invited him to dinner took him to a special restaurant where they insisted that he eat a special dessert. After dinner, however, he went back home and immediately there arrived at his door a second couple to take him out to eat. This kind couple took him to the same special restaurant where they insisted that he eat the same special dessert. The server looked at him strangely, but fortunately she didn't say anything to give him away. However, the pastor did pay for not writing his dinner invitations down — after the second dinner, he never before in his life felt so bloated.¹⁰²
- When conductor Arturo Toscanini first dined at the home of Samuel Chotzinoff, several people wanted to be invited so they could meet the famed conductor. Mr. Chotzinoff's sister-in-law was so eager to see Maestro Toscanini in person that she agreed to serve as a maid. During the dinner, Toscanini was very favorably impressed with her beauty. At a later dinner, Mr. Chotzinoff decided to play a trick on Toscanini. This time, his sister-in-law blackened her teeth and turned herself into a frump. Near the end of the meal, she sat on Toscanini's lap and kissed him. The Maestro was horrified at first, but once the trick was explained and he knew the identity of the "maid," he was delighted with the trick.¹⁰³
- Mulla Nasrudin lived on a poor person's diet of chickpeas and bread, while his rich neighbor, who served the emperor, feasted on sumptuous food. The rich neighbor said to Nasrudin, "If only you would learn to flatter the emperor like I do, then you would not have to live on chickpeas and bread." Nasrudin replied, "If only you would learn to live on chickpeas and bread like I do, then you would not have to flatter the emperor."¹⁰⁴
- Rab's wife was contrary. When her husband requested beans, she prepared lentils. When he requested lentils, she prepared beans. Their son noticed what she was doing, so he began to lie to her. When Rab wanted beans, their son told Rab's wife that Rab wanted lentils, and therefore she prepared beans. After a few days, their son told Rab why his wife had seemed to change, but Rab told him not to lie, lest he begin to lie habitually.¹⁰⁵
- Was Steve Jobs of Apple Computer obsessive? When his family needed to buy a new washing machine, he and his family discussed it during dinner for two weeks. They discussed what an ideal machine would have: What would be its ecological footprint? What would be its cleaning ability? How much water would it use? Then Mr. Jobs bought the best washing machine available that met their criteria: an expensive one from Germany.¹⁰⁶
- Before an important meet, about the only thing ice skater Peggy Fleming could keep down was macaroni and cheese. Before the 1966 National Championships, her coach, Carlo Fassi, had to make a quick trip to a grocery store to buy her favorite pre-competition food.¹⁰⁷
- Louis Armstrong's first wife, Lil Hardin, was ambitious for him, and she made him wear good clothing and go on a diet. At the dinner table, Mr. Armstrong would sometimes say "Tweet, tweet" because he felt that his wife was feeding him nothing but birdseed.¹⁰⁸

- Drama critic Percy Hammond enjoyed eating, and his enjoyment soon showed in the stoutness of his figure. Mrs. Robert Mantell, the wife of a Shakespearian actor, once looked at him and then said, “Ah, that one so gross should write of Art!”¹⁰⁹

Football

- More than 55 years ago, Minnesota Viking Jim Marshall committed a sports blooper that was so remarkable that it is still talked about today. In October 1964, the Vikings played the 49ers in San Francisco, California. It was a blustery afternoon, and Mr. Marshall got turned around when he scooped up a fumble and started running toward what he thought was his team’s goal line. Unfortunately for Mr. Marshall and the Vikings, he crossed the 49ers’ goal line and instead of scoring a touchdown for the Vikings, he scored a safety for the 49ers. Fortunately, Mr. Marshall did not give up after his blooper. In the second half, he tackled an opposing player so hard that the player fumbled and a Minnesota player turned the San Francisco error into a game-winning touchdown. When a video titled *NFL’s 100 Greatest Follies* was going to be made, producer Steve Sabol asked for votes on which bloopers to include. Mr. Marshall’s wrong-way run received the most votes in a landslide.¹¹⁰
- In 1944, Notre Dame faced a superior Army football team. Before the game, Notre Dame coach Ed McKeever gave a rousing speech in which he said that a Notre Dame victory would give his ailing, close-to-dying father a much-needed boost. Later, with Army beating Notre Dame, 59-0, a Notre Dame player said, “I guess McKeever’s old man must be dead by now.”¹¹¹

Gays and Lesbians

- Financial guru Suze Orman is an out lesbian — now. When she was about 12 years old, the very first rumor that she was a lesbian surfaced. She denied it. Years later, in her first year of college, she knew she was a lesbian, so she went to the person who had spread the rumor and said, “Laurie, remember that rumor you started about me years ago? Well, that was true.”¹¹²
- In 1969, the modern gay rights movement started when police raided the Stonewall Inn and arrested several drag queens who fought back. A documentary shows a police officer arresting a drag queen, then telling her, “I bet you don’t know whether you want to kiss me or hit me.” Actually, the drag queen did know — she clobbered him.¹¹³

Gifts

- Entertainer Sammy Davis, Jr., a black man, married Swedish actress May Britt, a white woman. Frank Sinatra was best man, and he and Dean Martin went together on their gift to the happy couple. Frank bought an antique loveseat, and Dean had it upholstered — in zebra skin. Frank was surprised by the zebra skin, and he asked Dean why he had chosen it. Dean replied, “Well, when they sit on it, they won’t clash.”¹¹⁴
- Tracee Talavera’s grandfather — “Big Rip” — knew how Tracee and Coral, her older sister, loved gymnastics, so he decided to give them a gymnastics gift which he had made himself: a balance beam. Each Sunday, Tracee and Coral visited Big Rip and practiced all day on the balance beam. Later, with the help of a welder, he made Tracee a set of homemade uneven bars.¹¹⁵

- Author Joel Perry once wrote an article that praised shopping at Bloomingdale's. The good people at Bloomingdale's liked the article so much they sent him a bag filled with free goodies. Mr. Perry's only regret is that he didn't write the article about Tiffany's.¹¹⁶

- Elise Ray, a member of the United States women's gymnastics team at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, took to meet a gift she received from Magnificent Seven member Dominique Dawes — a Cookie Monster doll.¹¹⁷

Golf

- In 1982, a golfer named Jack Murphy played a round of golf by himself in a course in Raleigh, North Carolina. He astonished himself by hitting a hole-in-one on the 5th hole. Unfortunately, the hole-in-one did not count because he was playing by himself. After he finished playing the game, Mr. Murphy went back to the 5th hole with a caddy. Once again, he hit a hole-in-one. Once again, the hole-in-one did not count — this time because it wasn't recorded in an official game.¹¹⁸

Grandparents

- Figure skater Dorothy Hamill's grandparents were Esther Jones and Willis Clough. Esther was a dental hygienist, and the two became engaged as Esther was cleaning Willis' teeth. By the way, while practicing on a bitter winter morning, Dorothy became so cold that her teeth started chattering, so she stopped for a few moments to warm up with hot chocolate. Another skater rubbed her frozen hands together, said, "I think they're dead," and then asked, "Why do we do it — why do we torture ourselves like this?" Young Dorothy replied, "Because we are mad — stark, raving mad."¹¹⁹

- U.S. gymnast Tim Daggett scored a perfect 10 on the high bar in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles to help his team win a gold medal. His grandfather, Charlie Shields, was watching at home on TV. Mr. Shields was so proud of his grandson's feat that he went outside in the middle of the night and raised the American flag. Mr. Shields later said, "I was so thrilled that I had to tell everyone who went by that something had happened."¹²⁰

Gymnastics

- At the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Bart Conner and some other American gymnasts got into an official bus that carried them past three barbed-wire fences, some guards with machine guns, and a security checkpoint. Someone said, "Well — there are the guns — this must be the Olympics." Sadly, this is one way to tell you are at a major competition. According to Mr. Conner, "I've been to a lot of international competitions and security is the same at all of them. You get used to seeing guys standing around with machine guns."¹²¹

- Olga Korbut, the darling of the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, had a lot of clout. At the Olympics, she became one of the first gymnasts to perform a backwards flip on the balance board. After the Olympics, the International Gymnastics Federation wanted to ban the move because they thought it was too dangerous. Ms. Korbut said, "If the decision is put into effect, I simply do not see any place for myself in gymnastics." Rather than lose its brightest star, the International Gymnastics Federation decided not to ban the move.¹²²

- Shannon Miller won gold as a member of the United States “Magnificent Seven” women’s gymnastics team in 1996 at the Atlanta Olympic Games. Ms. Miller says that the Magnificent Seven were so caught up in doing their routines as well as possible that they forgot about the other gymnasts. According to Ms. Miller, “We were so excited at the end when the results were known, we could hardly believe there was still a competitor on the beam!”¹²³

- Success in gymnastics makes a huge improvement in some athletes’ lives. Tatiana Gutsu used to live in a two-room apartment in Odessa, Ukraine, with her parents and three sisters. However, after achieving great success in gymnastics, including winning all-around gold at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics (beating the USA’s Shannon Miller by .012 point), she was rewarded with a three-bedroom apartment for herself and her family.¹²⁴

Halloween

- The late central Ohio sportscaster Jimmy Crum — a big celebrity in the Ohio State Buckeye territory — once returned to his alma mater, Ohio University, for Halloween. Wearing one of his trademark flashy sports coats, he watched a group of OU students wearing prisoner costumes walk by, dragging their ball and chains. Suddenly, one of the “prisoners” saw Mr. Crum and shouted, “There’s somebody dressed up like Jimmy Crum!” Mr. Crum, who died on 5 January 2009, worked tirelessly for charity, and way back in 1993, a spokesperson for Columbus, Ohio’s channel 4 station, for which Mr. Crum worked, estimated that Mr. Crum had raised over \$23 million for charity. Channel 4 co-anchor Colleen Marshall remembers working with Mr. Crum at a firefighters’ toy drive. He told her, “This is the most important work I do. This is what we are here for.” Ms. Marshall says, “I think people will remember him more for what he did for the community and what he did for the children of this community. That had his heart.”¹²⁵

Illnesses and Injuries

- R’ Zalmele was visiting another rabbi, when a man came to consult the rabbi about whether certain tasks could be performed for a person who was ill although the tasks were normally prohibited on the Sabbath. The rabbi wasn’t sure, so he started to consult a volume of Jewish law, but seeing this, R’ Zalmele immediately said, “It is permitted.” This shocked everyone present, as it is considered unwarranted for one rabbi to make a ruling when another rabbi has been consulted, but after the man had gone, R’ Zalmele explained, “I hope you did not take offense at my action, but it is essential that a Rav should have at his fingertips all the laws that deal with a person whose life is in danger, because we are talking about human life.”¹²⁶

- In 1921, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was stricken by polio, although he was an adult and usually the disease struck children. Near Christmas, Mr. Roosevelt returned home, where he kept up his spirits despite not being able to walk on his own. When his son James came home from the college-preparatory Groton School in Massachusetts, he saw his father, who had been so active, lying in bed, and he started crying. However, Mr. Roosevelt smiled at him — and defeated him in an arm-wrestling contest. Later, he was elected President of the United States and became the only President who could not walk without assistance.¹²⁷

- Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook was once ill in a hospital. He asked that the Shofar (ram’s horn) be blown at the beginning of the Jewish month of Elul so that he might listen to it; however, his doctor was worried that the sound might have a bad effect on the rabbi. Therefore, one of

the rabbi's pupils asked Rabbi Kook, "Won't the sound of the Shofar disturb the other patients in the hospital?" Rabbi Kook thought a moment, then said, "Perhaps you are right. Do not blow the Shofar."¹²⁸

- Circus people are tough, and they work hard. While learning the scissors jump on a low tightrope, 10-year-old circus performer Maud Gruss fell and gashed her leg, requiring seven stitches. Two weeks later, as soon as the stitches were removed, she was back practicing the scissors jump, which she had never performed well before. Her first jump was perfect, and she performed 23 perfect scissors jumps within the next hour.¹²⁹

- At times, a world-class gymnast must fight through pain. At the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, Soviet gymnast Boris Shakhlin was performing on the high bar when suddenly he broke one of the leather bands he was wearing to protect the palms of his hands from blisters. Mr. Shakhlin kept on competing. At the end of his routine, he had both a bloody hand and a bronze medal.¹³⁰

- A friend once said to country comedian Jerry Clower, "I see you got the furniture disease." Mr. Clower asked what the furniture disease was, and his friend told him, "Your chest has done dropped down into your drawers."¹³¹

Insults

- Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges had a strong sense of honor. In 1971, he lectured at Columbia University. Some Puerto Rican students protested Columbia University, which was a landlord in some impoverished areas. One of the Puerto Rican students insulted Mr. Borges, who invited him to step outside and fight. The Puerto Rican student was approximately 20 years old, while Mr. Borges was 72 years old and needed a cane to steady himself while walking.¹³²

- At one time, the Brooklyn Dodgers had trouble being better than mediocre, and the team's fans knew it. Once, a cabbie at Ebbets Field asked an usher how the Dodgers were doing in the game. The usher replied, "They have three men on base." The cabbie asked, "Which base?"¹³³

Language

- Country comedian Jerry Clower once was on an airplane that had to return to the airport because of equipment failure. The pilot got on the intercom and said that something was wrong, but it wasn't serious. He also gave an explanation that consisted of a lot of words that Mr. Clower didn't understand, such as "vector." When the plane had landed (after bouncing on the landing strip three times), Mr. Clower asked the pilot to say in plain language what was wrong. The pilot said that because of the equipment malfunction, "I didn't know how high I was, and I didn't know how fast we were going."¹³⁴

- When he defected from Romania to the United States, world-class gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi, the coach of many Olympic medalists, knew six languages; unfortunately, none of them was English. He says that knowing these six languages "means nothing in America. If you cannot explain yourself in English, you begin at the bottom." In fact, Mr. Karolyi learned English with the help of *Sesame Street* because the characters spoke slowly and because letters appeared on the television screen.¹³⁵

- Amy Chow won Olympics gold as a member of the United States “Magnificent Seven” women’s gymnastics team in 1996. Her father was born in Canton, China, and her mother was born in Hong Kong, but Amy was born in San Jose, California. Because her parents wanted her to speak English without an accent, they hired an American babysitter and they made sure that Amy and Kevin, her baby brother, learned English as their first language.¹³⁶

- Once a minister wanted a chandelier for his church, but although he asked for it frequently, his request was never acted on. He asked the church clerk about the problem, and she replied, “First, I can’t spell that word ‘chandelier,’ so I never put your request in the minutes. Second, none of our local musicians can play one of those things. Finally, what we really need around here are some new lights.”¹³⁷

- At an Army camp dinner, a soldier doing Kitchen Patrol duty spilled hot soup in a chaplain’s lap. The chaplain kept cool and didn’t curse, as so many other Army officers would have done, but he did ask the people he was eating with, “Will one of you laymen say something appropriate?”¹³⁸

- Between 1892 and 1898, some very unusual performances took place at the Metropolitan Opera — the performances were given in two or three languages, so that occasionally a lover would speak French to the loved one, and the loved one would answer in Italian.¹³⁹

- Erma Bombeck once misspelled the word “inauguration” in a news story. When her editor informed her of the misspelling, she replied, “Oh well, I have plenty of time to look it up. It won’t happen again for four years.”¹⁴⁰

Letters

- Benjamin Disraeli admitted that it was only because of her money that he first became interested in the woman, fifteen years his senior, whom he eventually married. However, their marriage was very happy and he often wrote her two or three love notes in between the time he saw her in the morning and the time he saw her in the evening.¹⁴¹

- New York Mayor Fiorella La Guardia had an interesting way of answering letters. He would read letters, then hand them one at a time to his secretary while saying the appropriate reply: “Say yes, say no, throw it away, tell him to go to H*ll.”¹⁴²

Mishaps

- The late Columbus, Ohio, TV sportscaster Jimmy Crum began attending Ohio University in 1948 — long before the Army Corps of Engineers moved the Hocking River and stopped the flooding that frequently occurred on East Green. While Mr. Crum was attending Ohio University, East Green was known as “Hog Island” because of all the mud. Ohio University officials placed boards over the bad spots, but many drunk students had trouble navigating the boards late at night and fell into the mud.¹⁴³

- Louis Armstrong sometimes sang, and when he sang he sometimes scatted — he sang nonsense syllables instead of real words. For example, he did that on “Heebie Jeebies.” According to one story, the scating came about by accident. While recording the song, Mr. Armstrong dropped the piece of paper with the lyrics on it, and he was forced to improvise.

Supposedly, both Mr. Armstrong and fellow musician Richard Marigny “My Knee” Jones reached for the piece of paper at the same time, and they bumped heads.¹⁴⁴

- While working with Sir Donald Wolfit, Eric Porter ran into a problem at a school matinee performance of *Macbeth*. Sir Donald disliked schoolchildren’s giggling during a performance, so he told the schoolchildren before the play started that there was absolutely no reason to laugh during *Macbeth*. However, Mr. Porter was playing the porter, who is a humorous character, and he said afterwards, “I had to stand on my head, practically, before I could raise a giggle!”¹⁴⁵

- In 1994, the United States Postal Service honored African-American rodeo star Bill Pickett by issuing a stamp bearing his likeness in its Legends of the West postage stamp series. Unfortunately, Mr. Pickett’s great-grandson informed the Postal Service that the likeness was not that of Mr. Pickett, but of Ben, his brother. The stamps were withdrawn, and new stamps bearing the correct likeness were quickly issued.¹⁴⁶

- Patrina Thomas is a big African-American woman who has won many medals in weightlifting, discus, and shotput. Since she is so big, she was once rejected for life insurance because the agent thought that she must be out of shape. Ms. Thomas told the life insurance agent, “Dude, I’m an Olympic weightlifter! I wouldn’t be about to do this if I wasn’t in shape.”¹⁴⁷

- At the 1896 Olympic Games in Greece, American swimmer Gardner Williams performed poorly. He was used to swimming in indoor pools, and when he jumped into the very cold Bay of Zea to swim in the 100-meter race, he yelled, “I’m freezing!” — then he climbed back onto the pier.¹⁴⁸

- At the 1968 Winter Olympic Games, fog obscured the gates of the Giant Shalom, and many skiers were disqualified because they could not see the flags and missed one or more gates. Afterward, United States skier Rich Chaffee said, “I made every gate I could see.”¹⁴⁹

- Georges Bizet, composer of the opera *Carmen*, once paid a visit to his girlfriend. Unfortunately, just as he knocked on his girlfriend’s window, her mother emptied a chamberpot from an upper floor — directly onto his head.¹⁵⁰

Chapter 4: FROM MONEY TO PITCHERS

Money

- A Sheikh once saw an old man planting date palms, so he asked, “How many years does it take for a date palm to bear fruit?” The old man answered, “Some take as much as 100 years to give fruit, so I will not live long enough to eat the fruit of these date palms I am planting now. However, I eat the fruit of date palms planted by people who lived before me, and so I am very happy to plant these date palms for people who will live after me.” This answer pleased the Sheikh, so he threw the old man a bag of gold. The old man said, “Praise be to God, for these date palms have borne fruit.” This also pleased the Sheikh, so he threw the old man another bag of gold. The old man then said, “Praise be to God, for date palms usually bear fruit only once a year, but these date palms have borne fruit twice this year.” The Sheikh threw the old man a third bag of gold, and then he told his servant, “Let’s get out of here before this old man makes me a beggar.”¹⁵¹

- Richard Roeper once ate dinner with actor Nicolas Cage at Joe’s on Grand and Rush in Chicago, after which they fought over the bill only to discover that the meal was on the house. Mr. Roeper then said that he would get the tip, and Mr. Cage agreed as long as he could pay for the next meal they ate together. Unfortunately, Mr. Roeper discovered that he had forgotten his wallet. He tried to text-message friends to come to Joe’s and lend him money, but no one was close enough to help. He was also too embarrassed to tell Mr. Cage, who was busy talking to some other people, that he had left his wallet at home. Mr. Roeper left the restaurant without leaving a tip, and he rushed home to get money for the tip. However, before he could return to tip the waitress, the restaurant had closed. This could be the end of the story, but the next morning, when Joe’s opened, Mr. Roeper’s personal assistant was outside with an envelope containing the tip for the waitress.¹⁵²

- While serving a small-town parish in Uvalde, Texas, Msgr. Vincent Fecher was unable to sleep one night because in three months, \$21,000 was due to the bank as a semi-annual payment on a building loan. The parish’s building fund account had only \$5,000, and with all the current expenses, it seemed unlikely that the parish could come up with the semi-annual payment. Father Vincent tossed and turned for a while, and then he said, “Darn it, Lord! It’s Your parish! You worry about it! I’m going to get some sleep, or I’ll be in terrible shape tomorrow and all day long. No sense both of us losing sleep over this. I need the rest and You don’t. So, *Buona Notte!*” This may seem funny, but Father Vincent did get some much-needed sleep, and when the date for the semi-annual payment arrived, the building fund account held \$25,675.¹⁵³

- Soviet weightlifter Vasily Alexeyev dominated weightlifting for nearly a decade — he was undefeated from 1970 to 1978. In 1969, Mr. Alexeyev entered the Soviet weightlifting championship, where he finished third. However, he wrote on the photographs of the champion and the runner-up, “I want to be first.” Next year, he was. During his career, he set 80 world records. Because the Soviet authorities paid their athletes \$1,500 for each new world record they set, Mr. Alexeyev’s many world records made them nervous. After he set seven world records on June 27, 1971, in a Russian competition, the Soviet authorities decided to pay only \$700 per new world record — and the world records had to be set in world competitions, not in national competitions.¹⁵⁴

- Once Mulla Nasrudin went to a Turkish bath. Because he was poorly dressed, the two attendants gave him very poor service. However, when he left, he tipped the attendants a gold coin each. The attendants were amazed and wondered how much Nasrudin would tip if he were given excellent service. The next time Nasrudin appeared at the Turkish bath, he was treated like a king and given the best possible service. However, when he left, he tipped the attendants a copper coin each. “These copper coins are the tip for my previous visit,” he said. “The gold coins were my tip for this visit.”¹⁵⁵

- Mulla Nasrudin was thought to be an idiot. He would sometimes stand on street corners and people would come up to him and hold up two coins and say that he could have his choice. Nasrudin always chose the coin of lesser value. One day a man said to him, “You should take the coin of greater value. Then you will have more money and people will no longer make a laughing-stock of you.” Nasrudin replied, “If I were to take the coin of greater value, people would stop offering me money to prove that I am more idiotic than they. Then I would have no money at all.”¹⁵⁶

- An orphaned boy played on the city streets instead of going to school because he had no way to pay the school’s tuition. This upset Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, and he pleaded the boy’s case to the members of the community, who stated that they had no money to pay for the boy’s tuition. This did not satisfy Rabbi Salanter, who told them, “If you lack money, sell one of the scrolls of the Torah and use that money to pay for the orphan’s tuition.”¹⁵⁷

- George Gershwin was an amazing success as a composer of popular music, but he also wanted to be a composer of serious music. He once asked Igor Stravinsky how much he would charge to teach him orchestration. In turn, Mr. Stravinsky asked Mr. Gershwin how much money he had made last year. On hearing the answer — \$100,000 — Mr. Stravinsky asked Mr. Gershwin to give him lessons.¹⁵⁸

- One reason to write is to make money. When Ian Fleming was looking for an American publisher for his first James Bond book, he wrote a friend, “What I want is not a publisher, but a ‘factory’ which will shift this opus of mine like ‘Gone With the Naked and the Dead.’ (This is a portmanteau title made by combining the titles *The Naked and the Dead* and *Gone with the Wind*.) I am not being vain about this book, but simply trying to squeeze the last dirty cent out of it.”¹⁵⁹

- Pop artist Andy Warhol dreaded one particular question that reporters frequently asked during interviews: “Are you rich?” To answer the question, he used to quietly point to his shoes, on which paint was splattered. By the way, the correct answer to the question would have been this: Yes, I am. After Mr. Warhol died on 22 February 1987, his estate was estimated to be worth \$100 million.¹⁶⁰

- During the late 1890s, as Hannah Salz was minding the family store in Safed, Palestine, while her husband was traveling on business, a Turkish military officer came in, arrogantly helped himself to whatever he wanted, and then tried to leave without paying. Ms. Salz stood in the doorway to block his exit and slapped his face. The officer paid.¹⁶¹

- Paying for the training of an elite-level gymnast is expensive. The parents of Tracee Talavera, who won a silver team medal at the 1984 Olympic Games, worked hard to pay for her training.

Her father once said, “Gymnastics is our only luxury. For recreation, we go running out the front door. It’s free.”¹⁶²

- Pro basketball referee Joe Gushue took his young son Michael to a game in Detroit. Unfortunately, the fans were not happy with the referees, and so they threw pennies on the court. Mr. Gushue scooped up the pennies and gave them to his son, who said, “This town is bush. In New York they throw quarters.”¹⁶³

- Pet rocks were one of the oddest fads of the 1970s. People used to pay good money to buy a carton containing a small attractive rock and a booklet of instructions for the care and handling of their new “pet.” One command that many people taught their pet rocks to obey was “Stay.”¹⁶⁴

- Italian tenor Enrico Caruso collected gold objects such as watches, snuff boxes, and coins. He owned nearly 2,000 coins, all of them gold, causing a fellow coin collector, King Victor Emmanuel III, to say, “If I were Caruso, I too would only bother with gold.”¹⁶⁵

- Someone told Mother Teresa that they would not touch a leper for even a million dollars. Mother Teresa replied, “Neither would I. If it were a case of money, I would not even do it for two million. On the other hand, I do it gladly for love of God.”¹⁶⁶

- Making an independent film can be a low-budget experience. While filming the horror movie *Evil Dead*, actor Bruce Campbell once thought about buying a pack of gum and then realized that he didn’t have the money to pay for it.¹⁶⁷

- One of many, many stories told about Enrico Caruso is that when a hostess asked him to hum something at the dinner table, he obliged — and the next day he sent his hostess a bill for \$3,000.¹⁶⁸

Mothers

- Two of Elaine Madsen’s children — Michael and Virginia — became actors when they grew up. Virginia remembers, “Everything was a holiday when we were growing up. Mom was always into production numbers. Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, you’d get up for breakfast, everything would be all decorated.” After all, Elaine believes, “Life should be a special occasion.” Michael remembers, “We put on a lot of theatricals around the house. Puppet shows, little skits, magic shows. We did an act where I put Virginia into the clothes hamper and then pretended to skewer her with swords.” Hearing this, movie critic Roger Ebert asked, “Fake swords?” Elaine replied, “A real sword. I got it for them at a rummage sale.”¹⁶⁹

- Johnny Cash’s mother recognized that he had musical talent, and she bought him a Sears Roebuck guitar for \$6.98. She also washed and ironed someone else’s laundry so she could earn money to buy him voice lessons. She gave him 50 cents for a half-hour lesson, and young Johnny went to voice teacher Miss LaVanda Mae Fiedler. She listened to him sing “Long Gone Lonesome Blues,” a country hit by Hank Williams, and she listened to him sing it again. She then told him that he was a natural singer and she couldn’t teach him anything. Johnny was relieved — now his mother did not have to wash and iron someone else’s laundry.¹⁷⁰

- Women often bear witness to the great pain of giving birth, but being the mother of a world-class women’s gymnast may have hidden advantages. Gymnasts tend to be small, and when

Camelia Moceanu gave birth to Dominique, her daughter who won team gold at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, she thought, “That’s it? That’s the pain?”¹⁷¹

- On 7 September 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s mother died. While going through her possessions, he found a box containing some of his baby toys and some gifts that he had made for her when he was a child. He cried.¹⁷²

Music

- Composer George Gershwin enjoyed playing the piano at parties. While at the home of Lou and Emily Paley, he was playing away, and the sound of the music shook the chandelier in the living room of lyricist Howard Dietz, who lived in the apartment below. He eventually went upstairs to complain, but he was impressed by the music and took a seat. Soon afterward, Mr. Dietz’ wife arrived to find her husband. She, too, was impressed by the music and took a seat. They stopped worrying about their chandelier and instead became welcome guests at the parties held by the Paleys.¹⁷³

- Danny Elfman wrote the theme music for *The Simpsons*, but Alf Clausen does much of the music that appears within the episodes. In this long-time job, he has had the chance to work with many famous musicians, including the late Tito Puente and his orchestra. When the two men met, Mr. Puente asked, “Well, are you going to tell me what to do, or am I going to tell you what to do?” Mr. Clausen replied, “I’m a really good listener, Tito.” And Mr. Puente said, “Well, good. Then you tell me what to do.” The two men had a good time working together.¹⁷⁴

- Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins were friends. One day, Mr. Cash told him about a staff sergeant named C.V. White, whom he had known while he was in the Air Force. Sergeant White was well groomed, and although he wore the same Air Force shoes as everyone else, he would joke, “Just don’t step on my blue suede shoes.” Hearing that, Mr. Perkins was struck by inspiration. Grabbing a paper bag and a pencil, he wrote the biggest hit of his career — “Blue Suede Shoes” — in 10 minutes.¹⁷⁵

- Conductor Arturo Toscanini had a fabulous memory. At the beginning of a rehearsal, a clarinetist told Maestro Toscanini that something was wrong with his clarinet and he couldn’t sound B-flat. Maestro Toscanini was silent a moment as he thought about all the works to be rehearsed that day, then he told the clarinetist, “It is all right. There isn’t any B-flat in your parts this afternoon.”¹⁷⁶

- Soprano Nellie Melba attended a party thrown by the famous architect Sir Edwin Landseer Luytens, who told her, “I’ve never seen you look so ravishing. All that I need to make me completely happy is to hear a few of your golden notes.” Ms. Melba replied, “Hear them you shall — if you decorate my new house in return.” The two quickly made the bargain — and kept it.¹⁷⁷

- As Plácido Domingo was warming up and really opening up his throat while he was being driven to the Metropolitan Opera, he noticed some people in the car next to his laughing at him. He rolled down his window and asked where they were heading. When he heard the reply, “To the Met,” he said, “Don’t laugh, because you’ll be hearing me in a few minutes!”¹⁷⁸

- One of Ludwig van Beethoven's students, Carl Czerny, reports that the composer did not keep regular hours. He worked whenever he wished, which was usually all the time. According to Mr. Czerny, "He would often get up at midnight, startling his neighbors with loud chords, thumping, singing, etc. His singing voice was absolutely horrible."¹⁷⁹
- Musicians can make good music well into their old age. Brass pedagogue Arnold Jacobs once attended an exhibition of new instruments when he was in his 80s. He picked up a tuba, and tested it to see how good it was. A crowd gathered around him because they liked the music he was making.¹⁸⁰
- Conductor Pierre Monteux taught at a school for conductors, where a student conducted a very light Mozart piece as if it were a heavy, leaden piece. Mr. Monteux stopped the student and informed him, "*Mon Dieu!* It is not Strauss, it is not Mahler, and it is not Khrushchev!"¹⁸¹
- In 1897, Enrico Caruso visited Giacomo Puccini. Mr. Caruso sang a few pages of music, and Mr. Puccini jumped up from the piano and asked, "Who sent you to me — God?"¹⁸²

Names

- Shaquille O'Neal's mother wanted him to have a unique name. He says that "one day when she was looking through a book of Islamic names, she came upon it: Shaquille Rashuan, which means 'Little Warrior.' I was never little, but I was always a warrior." Actually, at one time the 7-foot, 300-pound warrior, aka NBA basketball player, was little. At birth, he weighed only 7 pounds, 11 ounces. He always had a big appetite. He says, "My mother and grandmother used to hide extra bottles in my room. I was the kind of kid that used to hunt them down and drink them all!" He grew fast, and when he met Louisiana State University's head basketball coach, Dale Brown, in Germany (where Shaquille's father was stationed), Mr. Brown thought that Shaq was a soldier. Shaq, who at the time was 6 feet, 7 inches tall, had to tell him, "I'm only thirteen."¹⁸³
- Actress Swoosie Kurtz sometimes disliked working on TV. Once, she spoke a line and the director told her co-star not to speak too quickly after the line "because Swoosie's going to get a laugh with that." When Swoosie asked how he knew that, he said, "Oh, we'll put one in." Swoosie thinks laugh tracks have harmed many TV sitcoms. By the way, Swoosie was named after an airplane. Her father, Frank Kurtz, was a famous bomber pilot in the Air Force, and he had flown a B-17 named "The Swoose" in World War II. When she was born, the press wrote such things as "The other Swoose has landed."¹⁸⁴
- The quaintly named Picabo Street is an Olympic gold medalist in skiing. For the first three years of her life, she didn't have a name, but her hippie parents decided to go on vacation and they needed a name for her to put on her passport. A town in southern Idaho was named "Picabo" — it means "shining waters" in a native American language. They asked their young daughter if she liked "Picabo" as a name, she nodded yes, and that became her name.¹⁸⁵
- At the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Soviet gymnast Polina Grigorievna Astakhova won gold on bars, silver in the floor exercise, and bronze in the all-around competition. For a gymnast, she was tall. She also had light skin and blonde hair, and she stood very erect. For these reasons, her friends and fans referred to her as "the Russian birch tree." And when Cathy Rigby first started taking gymnastics, she was so small that her nickname was "Peanut."¹⁸⁶

- Women’s gymnast Mary Lou Retton became the major star of the 1984 Olympic Games, in large part because she won the gold medal in the all-around competition by scoring a perfect 10 in her final event: the vault. Before the 1988 Olympic Games, Kristie Phillips was repeatedly compared to Ms. Retton. In 1986, she said, “I guess it’s good exposure for me to be Mary Lou Number Two, but I’d rather be Kristie Number One.”¹⁸⁷
- When she was 17 years old, Evelyn Cornwall teased a friend because he had lost a drag race. Her friends told her, “Put up or shut up,” so they went to the drag racing strip, where she raced and won! Her mother was very upset and told her, “You’re not going to do that again.” Later, Evelyn Cornwall changed her name to Lyn St. James and drove in the Indianapolis 500 — she was only the second woman to do so.¹⁸⁸
- Catherine Shipley was both a Quaker and a character. While living in Philadelphia, she visited businesses, collecting money for charity. One businessperson was very interested in what she had to say, and he asked what her name was because he wanted to write out a check for her. She replied, “Does thee know, I really have forgotten, but I’ll just walk around the block, and tell thee when I get back.”¹⁸⁹
- When the Buddha needed help, he called all the animals of the world to his bedside. However, only 12 animals showed up: a rat, an ox, a tiger, a rabbit, a dog, a horse, a sheep, a monkey, a rooster, a dog, and a pig. To honor these animals, the Buddha created a year for each of them, and therefore each Chinese year is the year of the rat or the year of the ox or the year of the tiger, etc.¹⁹⁰
- Sportswriters were confused about whether fighter Bat Nelson spelled his full nickname as “Battling” or “Batling,” so they wrote to ask if he spelled it with one T or two. Bat wrote back, “I spell it with one T.” However, he signed his name, “Battling Nelson.”¹⁹¹
- Major-league baseball player Alex Rodriguez has acquired several nicknames. Because of his friendship with Ken Griffey, Jr., he is sometimes called “Junior Jr.” Others call him “A-Rod,” because of his name. And Mr. Griffey calls him “Young Buck.”¹⁹²
- Mildred Didrikson was nicknamed “Baby” when she was growing up, but after she hit seven home runs in one baseball game, a feat reminiscent of Babe Ruth, her name was changed to “Babe.”¹⁹³
- Amanda Borden, captain of the gold-winning USA women’s gymnastics team at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, became known as the Pepsodent Kid because of her big, warm, winning smile.¹⁹⁴
- Dorothy Parker once owned a black French poodle she named Cliché because at the time black French poodles were very popular in her neighborhood.¹⁹⁵
- One of the people participating in the CB radio fad of the 1970s was First Lady Betty Ford. She used the CB handle “First Mama.”¹⁹⁶

Nobility

- A nobleman deeply loved his garden of chrysanthemums. In fact, he loved the flowers more than he loved his wife, and he used to severely punish anyone who accidentally broke off a

blossom while walking in his garden. Zen master Sengai learned of the nobleman's behavior, so he walked into the nobleman's garden one day with a sickle. Hearing a noise in his garden, the nobleman went to investigate — and discovered that Sengai had cut down every chrysanthemum. Sengai told the nobleman, "Even weeds like this become rank if they are not cut." The nobleman realized that he had been wrong and began to treat people with more respect.¹⁹⁷

- Bahlul was thought to be a fool. One day, a king told him that if he could prove that the king was no more powerful than other men, he would reward him with 100 gold coins, but that if he could not, the king would have him beaten. Bahlul replied, "I will be happy to attempt what you order, but first please order these flies to stop bothering me." The king gave Bahlul 100 gold coins.¹⁹⁸

Pitchers

- Dodger pitcher Preacher Roe gave up a lot of home runs because he hated to walk hitters and because he kept his pitches close to the strike zone. His not often walking hitters also meant that he usually didn't give up big-scoring home runs. In the 9th inning of one game, he had a 5-0 lead, but gave three straight home runs on three straight pitches after getting an out. He then got the two remaining outs and a 5-3 win. Of course, after the game, the sports writers were asking about the three consecutive home runs, but Preacher told them, "Just say old Preacher pitched a complete game today and won. He scattered five hits. Two inside the park and three outside."¹⁹⁹

- Pitcher Bobo Newsome was having a rough time in a game. His St. Louis Browns were behind 15-0 against the Philadelphia Athletics. A teammate told him, "They're hitting you all over the lot. You won't win today." Mr. Newsome replied, "A pitcher can't win ball games if his team can't get him any runs."²⁰⁰

Chapter 5: FROM POLITICIANS TO WORK

Politicians

- One of the people watching on television as the United States women’s gymnastics team won the gold medal at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta was President Bill Clinton. Actually, because of his Presidential duties he watched only the first rotation live, then he had someone record the competition so he could watch it later. To make sure no one would reveal the outcome to him before he watched the competition, he told the person making the recording, “If you tell me or anybody else what happened, I’ll just cream ya.”²⁰¹

- Sam Rayburn, the late Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, was noted for keeping his word. Hundreds of people saw him each day and asked for favors, and Mr. Rayburn always gave an answer to their requests — yes, no, or maybe. However, although he spoke to so many people a day, he never made a note of his promises — and he never forgot a promise. When he was asked how he was able to do this, Mr. Rayburn replied, “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember.”²⁰²

Prejudice

- Track star Jesse Owens attended Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, in the 1930s. Of the school’s 14,000 students, only about 100 were African Americans. Because he was black, he was not allowed to live on-campus. Instead, he and the other African-American students lived in an off-campus boarding house. According to Mr. Owens’ teammate Charles Beetham, many restaurants and theaters in Columbus would not serve blacks. While traveling to compete, Mr. Owens had to eat in his room, as the hotel would not serve him in its coffee shop or restaurant. In addition, he could not compete in the South because blacks were not allowed to compete against whites there.²⁰³

- In 1968, at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, two African-American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, made a memorable protest against American racism. They won the gold and bronze medals in the 200-meter dash, and on the awards stand, they each donned a black glove, raised the black-gloved hand in the air, made a fist, and bowed their heads. This Black Power salute raised consciousness about racism in the United States — and got them suspended from the United States Olympic team.²⁰⁴

Problem-Solving

- In 1831, the land of Israel was ruled by Egypt and the governor Ibrahim Pasha. One day, the governor met a Jewish goldsmith who complained about a robbery, insisting that before Egypt ruled the land, he had never been robbed, but as soon as Egypt had gained control of the land, he had been robbed. The governor did not want the Jewish goldsmith to think that Egyptian justice was nonexistent, so he announced that the next day in front of the goldsmith’s shop a miracle would occur. The next day, a crowd gathered to see the miracle. The governor then sentenced the door of the goldsmith’s shop to 100 lashes for failing to protect the shop against robbery. After he had given the door 100 lashes, he leaned toward the door in a listening attitude, then said angrily, “What you are saying is nonsense. I sentence you to another 100 lashes.” Again, after giving the door 100 lashes, he leaned toward the door in a listening attitude, and then he said loudly, “You say that the thief is present in this gathering, and that he

still has a cobweb from the store sticking to his fez!” A man in the crowd took off his fez to examine it for cobwebs, the governor had that man arrested, the man confessed, and the Jewish goldsmith was satisfied with Egyptian justice.²⁰⁵

- Céline Dion grew up in a large family — she has 13 brothers and sisters. Her parents, Thérèse and Adhémar, worked hard to support the family. They wanted to raise their children in a rural setting, so they decided to buy land in the country. Instead of spending 40 cents for bus fare, her father walked to and from work, and then he added the 40 cents to the family savings. Eventually, they bought land, but not a house. No problem. They built one. Although she was pregnant, Céline’s mother climbed up a ladder and hammered nails in the roof. Céline started entertaining her family at age four, standing on the table and using a fork or a spoon as a pretend microphone. In 1973, her brother Michel got married, and Céline, who was then five years old, entertained by singing. Even then, she was good. With so many people in the family, the kids had to do chores. For example, everyone in the family washed his or own dinner plates. To reduce the number of dishes they had to do, sometimes they would eat dinner and then turn the dinner plates upside down so that they could use them as dessert plates, too.²⁰⁶

- During the Middle Ages, a man went on a long religious pilgrimage. Before leaving, he sold all his possessions and used the money he received to buy a few jewels that he gave to a grocer for safekeeping. However, after he returned from the pilgrimage, the grocer refused to return his jewels. Wailing for his lost possessions, the pilgrim met a wise man, who said he would solve the pilgrim’s problem if the pilgrim would meet him at noon and enter the grocer’s establishment a minute after the wise man had entered it. The next day, the two met at the grocer’s and the wise man entered first. The wise man showed the grocer a large bag that he had filled with several pieces of glass cut to resemble very valuable jewels. The wise man said, “I am going on a pilgrimage and I wish to leave these jewels with a trustworthy man who will take care of them for me. Can I trust you with them?” “Of course,” answered the grocer. Just then, the pilgrim entered the shop and asked the grocer for his jewels. “I’ll get them for you,” the grocer said.²⁰⁷

- In 1968, skier Jean-Claude Killy won three gold medals at the Winter Games held in Grenoble, France. At the time, Olympic officials would take skis away from the athletes immediately following a competition so that the brand names of the skis would not appear in photographs and give the manufacturers free publicity. However, Dynamic paid Mr. Killy to wear its skis, and so he wanted to give the company free publicity. Therefore, he made sure that a friend — conspicuously wearing a pouch with the word “Dynamic” printed on it — congratulated him when he was photographed. The friend, Michel Arpin, also took one of his own Dynamic skis, which had the Dynamic trademark sign of two yellow bars, and planted it in the snow where it would appear behind Mr. Killy’s head in the photographs.²⁰⁸

- Richard Bell of North Carolina has a trick for dealing with harassing telephone callers: “One of my all-time favorite tricks for any harassing phone caller is to get a tape or mp3 of the late Alexander Scourby reading some esoteric verses from the Old Testament handy to play into the handset.” And Tom Brennan of California received a telephone call from a debt collector in 2006. The caller asked, “When do you think you will repay this debt?” Mr. Brennan replied, “No comment.” In fact, that was his reply to every question the debt collector asked. Eventually, he did say something different; he said that “No comment” was the only reply he

would ever make to the debt collector's questions. Mr. Brennan says, "He laughed and I laughed and we said good night and they never called again."²⁰⁹

- A week before a scheduled performance of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, conductor Arturo Toscanini became unhappy with one of his singers — a man who was a good man and a good singer, but who was unsuited for his part. Taking thought about how to replace the singer — but without harming the singer's reputation — Maestro Toscanini composed a letter in which he said that during rehearsals he had noticed that the singer was not well, and if the singer should wish to withdraw from the performance, he would understand. The singer was no dummy — he took the hint and told the Maestro that yes, he was ill, and yes, he would withdraw from the performance. His replacement was better suited for the part, and *Die Meistersinger* was a success.²¹⁰

- Two men who were engaged in a dispute came to R' Avraham Yitzchak of Karritch and asked him to make a ruling. For hours, the two men presented their cases, making argument after argument. After they had finished speaking, he quickly made his ruling, which the two men accepted, and the two men departed as friends. Afterwards, R' Avraham Yitzchak was asked why he had listened for hours to arguments when the case was simple. He said, "Had I cut them off before each had his full say, neither of them would have been satisfied. Both would have felt that an injustice had been done. After I gave them all that time to say everything they had to say, they felt that justice was done, and they accepted the verdict gladly."²¹¹

- Rabbi Yitzchak of Worka asked a rich man to make a donation to charity, but the rich man refused. Rabbi Yitzchak remained sitting. Again the rich man said that he had no intention whatsoever of making a donation. Again Rabbi Yitzchak remained sitting. This continued until the rich man asked Rabbi Yitzchak to explain himself. Rabbi Yitzchak said that all human beings have two inclinations: a good one and a bad one. We receive a bad inclination at birth, but we don't receive the good one until we are age 13. The rich man's bad inclination had spoken first, which was proper, since it was older. Now Rabbi Yitzchak said that he was waiting for the rich man's good inclination to speak. The rich man made a donation.²¹²

- Ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean ran into a problem with the music to their Olympic performance of *Bolero*. The music was simply too long, even though it had been compressed into 4 minutes and 28 seconds. The maximum length of performance allowed at the Olympics was only 4 minutes and 10 seconds, but compressing the music further would have hurt its quality. Fortunately, Torvill and Dean checked the rules regarding the timing of performances. The timing started when the skaters began to skate, so when the music started Torvill and Dean were on their knees. They allowed a few seconds of music to play, and then they began to skate.²¹³

- As a man with cerebral palsy, which makes his arm movements difficult to control, Cordell Brown has had many interesting experiences in life. Once he took a test for a license to ride a motorized scooter. He did fine on the written part of the test and on most of the driving test, but his driving instructor laughed at Mr. Brown's attempts to control his arm movements and signal turns. Although the driving instructor laughed, he still was forced to deny Mr. Brown his license. No problem. Mr. Brown simply installed turn signals on his scooter and passed the test the second time he took it.²¹⁴

- Bob Dole wanted an Illinois farmer named John Block to be named Secretary of Agriculture, but he was afraid that the Ronald Reagan administration was going to give all the Cabinet positions to fat cats from the Coasts. Therefore, he sent a map of the United States with a circle around the middle to Reagan intimate Paul Laxalt. In a note, Mr. Dole wrote, “Paul, that blank space is what is referred to as the Midwest.” Mr. Block was appointed Secretary of Agriculture.²¹⁵
- Many Jews do not think it right to smoke on the Sabbath. Once, a Jew asked Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel (known as the Malbim) whether he could figure out a way for Jews to smoke on the Sabbath. The rabbi replied, “Yes, but you will have to smoke in a different way on the Sabbath than on other days.” “And what way is that?” asked the smoker. “You will have to smoke with the burning end of the cigarette in your mouth.”²¹⁶
- Kristen Maloney has an older brother and an older sister. When she was young, she also had a tendency to be jealous of her older siblings’ accomplishments. To combat the jealousy and enable Kristen to make her own accomplishments, her mother, Linda, enrolled her in a gymnastics program. Kristen did succeed — she was the United States national all-around champion in 1998 and 1999, and she was an Olympian in 2000.²¹⁷
- Back in the days when chewing gum in school was regarded as a heinous crime, some teachers would punish young offenders by telling them to put the gum on the end of their nose and leave it there until they got home. The school bus drivers helped the teachers to enforce the punishment. (Nowadays, this kind of punishment would probably get a teacher fired.)²¹⁸
- One problem of Quaker worship is that small children sometimes find the unprogrammed meetings, which can be filled with long silences, tiresome, so they grow restless. At the Rich Square Meeting in Indiana, Lydia Parker White noticed some small children growing restless, so she went to them, reached into one of her pockets, and gave each of them a homemade cookie. Problem solved.²¹⁹
- If the paparazzi are following you to get photographs to sell for big bucks, and you happen not to like the paparazzi, what can you do? Jennifer Aniston has interesting problem-solving skills. She knows that she can’t totally stop the paparazzi from taking photographs of her, but to lessen the value of the photographs they shoot, she will sometimes wear the same outfit many days in a row.²²⁰
- Before travel by air was common, international athletes had to train while traveling by ship to a competition. While traveling to the 1912 Olympic Games in Sweden, American athletes figured out how to practice throwing the discus and javelin on board ship. They attached ropes to the discus and javelin, hurled them out to sea, and then retrieved them by pulling in the ropes.²²¹
- Basketball player Michael Jordan endorsed Nike shoes, not Reebok shoes. When Mr. Jordan was playing for the United States basketball team in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain, the official sponsor of the team was Reebok, so when Mr. Jordan accepted his gold medal, he covered up the Reebok logo on his team warm-up suit with a United States flag.²²²
- Bob Dole was a problem-solver back when he was attending Russell High School in Russell, Kansas. He didn’t like taking tests, so when the teacher told his journalism class that they

would take a test on a certain day, Bob brought a five-gallon container of ice cream to class that day. Everybody ate ice cream and forgot about the test.²²³

- Karate fighters often make a loud yell while kicking or hitting. The yell is called a *kiai* (Japanese for “spirit shout”), and it can be effective in making an opponent run away. An old karate master once met a tiger on a road one night. The old master unleashed a *kiai*, and the tiger ran away from him.²²⁴

Religion

- According to Leviticus Rabbah XXXIV, 3, after Hillel the Elder had finished a session with his students, he left the House of Study. His students asked where he was going, and Hillel replied, “To fulfill a religious obligation.” The religious obligation was to have a bath in the bathhouse. The students asked if having a bath really was a religious obligation, and Hillel replied, “Yes! If the statues of the kings that are placed in theatres and circuses are daily cleaned and washed, [...] how much more does this apply to me, seeing that I have been made in the image and likeness of God! For it is written in Genesis 9:6, ‘In the image of God did He make man.’”²²⁵

- A student once asked a Zen master how one could practice the Tao. The Zen master replied, “When you are hungry, eat, and when you are tired, sleep.” Puzzled, the student asked, “But isn’t that what people already do?” “No,” replied the Zen master. “When most people eat, they are filled with 1,000 worries, and when they sleep, they are bothered by 1,000 cares.”²²⁶

Signs

- P.T. Barnum had a problem with his museum of curiosities in New York — people stayed too long when looking at the exhibits. Therefore, to lure people to leave his museum, he put up a huge sign that many people believed at first glance was directing them to another exhibit. The sign said: “TO THE EGRESS.”²²⁷

- Queen Julianna of the Netherlands once visited the United States, where the funniest thing she saw was the sign of an undertaker in Los Angeles, which said, “Why walk around half dead, when we can bury you for \$39.95?”²²⁸

- While in Ireland, musician Bill Worland noticed this sign in front of a cemetery: “NO DUMPING!” He also saw an Irish pub with this sign in the window: “We are open until closing time.”²²⁹

Sports

- Jim Thorpe was a descendant of Sac warrior Black Hawk. Mr. Thorpe’s Native American name was Wa-tho-huck, which means “Bright Path.” Mr. Thorpe attended Carlisle Indian School, where he saw some track and field athletes unsuccessfully trying to jump a high bar set at the height of five feet, nine inches. He asked for a chance to try, and the other athletes laughed at the overalls and heavy shoes that Mr. Thorpe was wearing. Nevertheless, they let Mr. Thorpe attempt to jump the high bar — and he succeeded. Coach Glenn Scobey “Pop” Warner heard about the jump, and he informed Mr. Thorpe that he had just broken the school record for the high jump. He also informed Mr. Thorpe that he had become a member of the

Carlisle track and field team. Carlisle track star Albert Exendine helped train Mr. Thorpe, and he did such a good job that his pupil broke all of his track records at Carlisle.²³⁰

- Opera singer Plácido Domingo is a soccer fan. During the World Cup, he watched the match backstage. When he had to appear onstage in *Pagliacci* and sing “*Un grande spettacolo a ventitrè ore*” (“A big show at 11 p.m.”), he did not hold up the usual sign saying “11 p.m.” Instead, he held up a sign telling the audience the score of the World Cup game. On another occasion, after a performance, he wanted to leave the opera house as quickly as possible so he could watch a World Cup soccer match, so while making his bows, he pantomimed the kicking of a soccer ball to let the audience know what he wanted to do.²³¹

- When Kurt Thomas joined the Miami (Florida) Central Rockets high-school gymnastics team as a freshman, the team was rated dead last out of 14 teams before the season started — but it went undefeated for the entire season. Remarkably, the team was number one despite horrible training conditions. Team members practiced gymnastics while other students played basketball around them. In addition, the team had only one mat that they had to drag from one piece of apparatus to another.²³²

- Jenny Thompson has won several Olympic gold medals in swimming, a sport that requires strong arms. Once, a guy she was dating told her that although he liked her, he was freaked out by her arms. She worried briefly and then decided, “My arms are what make me swim so fast and they’re part of who I am.” She adds, “Being a strong woman and an athlete isn’t entirely acceptable in society.”²³³

- Early in his career, Olympic figure skater Michael Weiss also played hockey, and when the members of a rival hockey team teased him about being a figure skater, he challenged them to get a radar gun and find out who was fastest. Mr. Weiss defeated the members of the rival hockey team by achieving a speed of 22 miles an hour.²³⁴

Superstitions

- Many athletes believe in superstitions to help them through competitions. Curtis Hibbert, a black Canadian gymnast who was a Commonwealth Games champion in 1990, used to play solitaire until he won a game the day before a competition. That may not be such a good superstition to believe in, for Mr. Hibbert admits that to win a game, “Sometimes I had to stay up pretty late.”²³⁵

- Ice skater Linda Fratianne used to perform while wearing a little blue pouch filled with good-luck charms: a medal the Pope had blessed, two four-leaf clovers, a piece of green yarn, and a bit of gold foil.²³⁶

Training

- Being a world-class and Olympic gymnast involves long, grueling workouts, and the resulting exhaustion means that the gymnast sleeps really well. For example, when Mary Lou Retton was training with Bela Karolyi in Texas, she slept through a tornado that cut her host family’s house in half. During the tornado, one of the host family’s sons, Preston, came into her room and said, “Get up. Get out of bed.” Mary Lou replied, “Get *out* of here. I’m sleeping.” He finally carried her out of the house.²³⁷

- Training in gymnastics is very important. After the 1996 Olympics, gymnast John Roethlisberger listened to an interview of an Olympic decathlete, in which the decathlete said that he begins training really seriously two months before a competition. Mr. Roethlisberger says, “I’m standing there thinking, ‘O.K., the Olympics just ended and I took two weeks off — if I don’t get to training right now, I’ll never be ready for the Games in 2000.”²³⁸

War

- In 1948, Israel fought a war for independence, despite shortages of weapons. Sometimes, Israelites were told to pretend that they had weapons. For example, a soldier on guard duty was told to pretend that he had a gun, as no guns were available. That night, he heard someone coming toward him, and he yelled, “Stop! Or I’ll shoot!” The person kept coming toward him, and when the person got close enough, the sentry saw with relief that it was another unarmed Israeli soldier. The sentry said, “Why didn’t you stop? You could have gotten killed!” The other Israeli soldier replied, “You couldn’t have hurt me. I’m a tank.”²³⁹

- Emperor Sing-un’s country was on the verge of war. The emperor prepared his country as much as possible by training soldiers, storing supplies, and stockpiling food, and then he asked Buddhist priest Si-tien for advice about waging war. Si-tien advised, “Go, and watch carefully the matches between heavyweight wrestlers and heavyweight boxers.” Emperor Sing-un asked, “Why heavyweights?” Si-tien replied, “They hit seldom, but with much consequence.”²⁴⁰

Wisdom

- Human beings have free will. According to the Babylonian Niddah 16b, whenever a baby is to be conceived, the Lailah (angel in charge of contraception) takes the drop of semen that will result in the conception and asks God, “Sovereign of the Universe, what is going to be the fate of this drop? Will it develop into a robust or into a weak person? An intelligent or a stupid person? A wealthy or a poor person?” The Lailah asks all these questions, but it does not ask, “Will it develop into a righteous or a wicked person?” The answer to that question lies in the decisions to be freely made by the human being that is the result of the conception.²⁴¹

- Chin-sin asked his teacher, the Buddhist priest Si-tien, how he could be sure he was welcome when lying was so prevalent in the World. Si-tien replied, “A man knows he is welcome when he is asked to come again.”²⁴²

Work

- A gay man was in a bad relationship with his lover, who threatened to go to his very Republican boss, tell her that he was gay, and get him fired because he was gay. Frightened, the gay man told his very Republican boss everything. She replied, “First of all, you need to know that only I can fire you, and you’re doing a fantastic job, so I have absolutely no reason to fire you. And if he comes here, we’ll call security.” By the way, some parents react well when their son reveals that he is gay, saying merely, “Is that all?” (Another good response is, “You go, girl.”)²⁴³

- A fisherman was taking it easy, lying on the shore on a beautiful day. A rich man saw him and was horrified, so he told the fisherman, “You should be out fishing.” The fisherman replied, “I’ve already caught enough for one day.” The rich man said, “If you catch more fish and save your money, you can acquire another boat and hire men to fish for you. Eventually,

you will be able to acquire a whole fleet of boats and be a rich man. Then you can take it easy and enjoy life.” The fisherman replied, “What do you think I’m doing now?”²⁴⁴

- After Stan Freberg graduated from high school, he took a bus to Hollywood, got off at the Stars of Tomorrow agency, did a few voices and impressions, and got an interview with Warner’s cartoon director Fritz Freling. Mr. Freberg did so well at the interview that Mr. Freling asked, “Why haven’t we heard of you before?” Mr. Freberg answered, “Beats me. I’ve been around, you know.” Mr. Freling apologized, saying, “I didn’t mean that the way it sounded. I’m sure you didn’t just get off the bus.” Actually, Mr. Freberg had just gotten off the bus.²⁴⁵

- Genius requires hard work. One of Ludwig van Beethoven’s students, Carl Czerny, reports that the composer’s fingers were powerful but not long. Because Beethoven had played the piano so much, the tips of his fingers were flattened. As you would expect, Beethoven concentrated on the important things. His young student Carl Czerny often would show up for a piano lesson, but Beethoven would cancel it because he was busy composing.²⁴⁶

- Japanese gymnasts such as Kenmotsu and Tsukahara used to work in Japanese private industries such as banks that helped them to become great athletes by allowing them to train in the afternoons. This was a win-win situation. The athletes received financial remuneration for their work, and the private industries received prestige by having an Olympic athlete working for them.²⁴⁷

- Not all basketball players work hard, but Chris Mullin is one who did. When Mr. Mullin joined the Golden State Warriors, the team wasn’t very good and lost many more games than it won. Mr. Mullin often stayed after practice to work some more on his shooting, but one of his teammates criticized him: “Hey, man — are you crazy? You’re making us look bad.” By the way, Mr. Mullin certainly loved his dog, Kuma — sometimes he even fixed Kuma hot meals.²⁴⁸

- A man once applied for a job and submitted a resume that had three preachers listed as references. The prospective employer looked at the references, and then told the job hunter, “Around here we don’t work on Sunday. Do you have any references from people who see you on weekdays?”²⁴⁹

- In Jerusalem, some of the old people who work at Lifeline for the Old mend books. In each book they mend, this bookplate is placed: “Your book has been renewed by the Old People of Jerusalem.”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 degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a Master of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. Yes, I have my MAMA degree.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Comedy*, *Homer’s Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare’s Hamlet: A Retelling in Prose*.

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

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Create, Then Take a Break: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

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The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 1: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Reality is Fabulous: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Resist Psychic Death: 250 Anecdotes

Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

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