

INTRODUCTION

Holy moly! What a couple of years it's been! As we all tentatively removed our masks in 2022 and ventured back into the outside world, it's evident that things have changed: the Bathroom Readers' Institute staff is washing our hands a lot more and still maintaining a respectful distance from others, and we're also embracing new fashion trends (we wrote most of this year's Bathroom Reader in our comfiest athleisure duds), distracting ourselves with all the streaming services on offer, and taking advantage of relaxed work-from-anywhere policies. (The nice thing about a laptop? It's a lot easier to use in the bathroom than the typewriters we started on 36 years ago.)

Most important about being back on the social scene after doing the socially *distanced* scene for a couple of years: it's reminded me once again that variety is the spice of life, and that unique people, places, and activities are what keep that life interesting. That reminder is what inspired this year's Bathroom Reader:

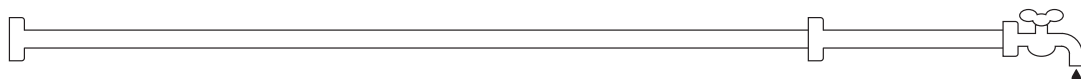
WHAT A WONDERFUL (WEIRD) WORLD

Luckily for us here at the BRI, “wonderful and weird” is our bread and butter. Since we published our first Reader in the late 1980s, we've been collecting the most interesting, entertaining, astonishing, amusing, and *weird* stories that we can find, and sharing those stories with our *wonderful* readers. This year's absorbing collection is no exception. Speaking of “absorbing,” within these pages you'll find instructions for how to create your own toilet paper (so you'll never have to resort to tearing pages out of your beloved Bathroom Reader collection), a story of college students clogging the pipes with TP for a social-media stunt (hope it doesn't cause a shortage—we all remember how that went in 2020!), and innovations in toilet tech that include luxury recycled toilet paper made from bamboo (what's more weird and wonderful than that?).

What else will you find?

WEIRD: Creepy facts about crows, animal-care jobs you have to read about to believe, old radio programs that will make you wonder just how desperate people were for entertainment prior to television, and downright bizarre thrift-store donations.

POP CULTURE: How *Bob's Burgers* came to be, 12 musical artists with real-life Spinal Tap mishaps, a comprehensive look at the life of Betty White, celebrity ghosts, albums by major artists that were recorded but never released, and the biggest flops in video game history.



LAUGHS: Punny racehorse names, random quotes from famous people, accidentally hilarious headlines, and 38 rhyming ways to accuse someone of farting.

LANGUAGE: Tips for writing well, lots of word origins, odd place names, terms invented by Shakespeare, and a guide to the slang you'll hear on the hiking trail.

ARTSY: The origins and mysteries surrounding the Venus de Milo, the 15th-century religious painting that thieves can't keep their hands off, amazing thrift-store finds, and the teenagers who stumbled on the world's best-preserved Paleolithic art.

FOOD: A delicious guide to barbecue styles, an equally delicious guide to tacos, forgotten fad restaurants, food truck names sure to whet your appetite, the origins of macaroni and cheese, and the dark side of licorice.

WONDERFUL: Everyday folks who ended up local heroes, helpful household hacks, long-tenured employees who *really* love their jobs, amazing accidental archaeological finds, and plain ol' nice stories.

And much, much more!

Big thanks to the weird...er, I mean...*wonderful* people at the BRI who have contributed to this year's Bathroom Reader—this book wouldn't be possible without these talented folks.

Gordon Javna

Jay Newman

Brian Boone

Angela Garcia

Traci Douglas

Julie Chapa

Jeanette Rabbit

Eric Watanabe

Bruce Langley

Nathaniel Hornblower

Samuel Rosenbaum

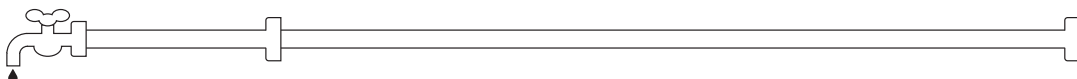
Thomas Crapper

And of course we must thank our readers, who continue to support this annual endeavor. Whether this is your first Bathroom Reader or your 36th, we're so pleased to have you along for the adventure.

Happy reading, and, as ever,

Go with the flow!

—Uncle John and the BRI Staff



YOU'RE MY INSPIRATION

It's always interesting to find out where the architects of pop culture get their ideas. Some of these may surprise you.

Matchbox Cars: In 1952, a little London girl named Anne had the naughty habit of bringing spiders to school in a matchbox. Her dad, an engineer named Jack Odell, wanted to break Anne of that habit, so he made her a tiny brass steamroller that he painted red and green. Anne's friends liked her little "matchbox toy" so much that Odell converted a pub into a factory and started mass-producing them. Since then, more than three billion Matchbox cars have sold.

Forrest Gump: Tom Hanks wasn't sure how he was going to play the slow-witted character—which made it difficult to cast a child actor to play young Forrest. Hanks had a thought: "You'll never get a kid to re-create what I come up with." So they cast the kid first, Tennessee-born Michael Humphreys. Hanks's Forrest is a spot-on impersonation of Humphreys being himself.

Paddington Bear: The hero of the 1958 children's book *A Bear Called Paddington* is first seen by readers at a train station, with the tag, "Please look after this bear. Thank you." While staring at a blank page, British author Michael Bond thought back to 20 years earlier when he was at Reading Station in London and saw child refugees who'd recently been liberated from Nazi Europe. "They all had a label round their neck," he recalled, "with their name and address on and a little case containing all their treasured possessions." Inspired, Bond wrote the first line, "Mr. and Mrs. Brown first met Paddington on a railway platform."

Wonder Woman: Gal Gadot, on how she came up with the persona for her version of Diana Prince: "I remember watching a documentary about Princess Diana and there was a part where they said she was full of compassion and always cared for the people and that was like, 'Ding, ding, ding,' that should be the Wonder Woman we have!"

The Sims: The Oakland-Berkeley Firestorm of 1991 killed 25 people and destroyed more than 3,000 homes—one of which belonged to video game designer Will Wright. Afterward, he had to figure out everything he'd need to rebuild. Wright, who is fascinated by architecture, had already designed the 1985 game *SimCity* and was currently working on *Sim Ant* (which simulates an ant colony). The fire got him thinking about psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which posits that you can't seek enlightenment unless your basic needs are taken care of first. "I started to wonder about all the things we have and how we purchased them for a reason," Wright said. From that came *The Sims*, the best-selling personal computer game of all time.

Only major airport in use named after a comedian:
Will Rogers World Airport in Oklahoma City.

36 BITS OF 36 TRIVIA

It's our 36th Bathroom Reader, so here are 36 bits of trivia about subjects closely related to the big 3-6.

6 FAMOUS PEOPLE BORN IN 1936

- Robert Redford
- Mary Tyler Moore
- Burt Reynolds
- Jim Henson
- John McCain
- Buddy Holly

6 MAJOR EVENTS OF 1836

- The Texas Revolution, with Texas winning its independence weeks after the Battle of the Alamo.
- The U.S. Patent Office is formed and starts numbering patents; no. 1 goes to John Ruggles, who invented a steam locomotive traction wheel.
- Charles Darwin completes his research mission around the world, collecting the research that would become *On the Origin of Species*, the blueprint for the theory of evolution.
- The Arc de Triomphe is completed and dedicated in Paris.
- The first stretch of Canadian railroad opens, stretching from La Prairie to St. John in Quebec.
- Martin Van Buren is elected president of the United States, the first commander in chief for whom English was a second language (after Dutch).

6 HALL OF FAME ATHLETES WHO WORE A NUMBER 36 JERSEY

- Shaquille O'Neal (NBA)
- Dave Cowens (NBA)
- Jim Kaat (MLB)



More than two-thirds of American astronauts, and 11 of 12 moonwalkers, were Boy Scouts.

- Gaylord Perry (MLB)
- Jerome Bettis (NFL)
- Matthew Barnaby (NHL)

6 FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO DIED AT AGE 36

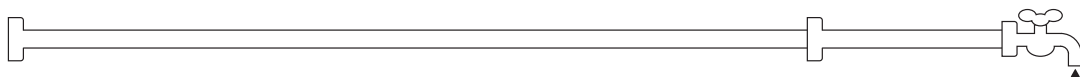
- Princess Diana
- Marilyn Monroe
 - Bob Marley
 - Lord Byron
 - Doc Holliday
- General George Armstrong Custer

6 36TH THINGS

- 36th biggest hit of all time on the *Billboard* Hot 100: “Somebody That I Used to Know” by Gotye featuring Kimbra (2011)
- 36th highest grossing movie of all time: *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest* (2006)
- 36th pope: Liberius (AD 352–366)
- 36th state to join the U.S.: Nevada (1864)
- 36th largest metropolitan area in the U.S.: San Jose–Santa Clara, California (population 1.95 million)
- 36th play written and staged by William Shakespeare: *The Tempest* (1611)

6 FACTS ABOUT 36

- The atomic number for the element krypton.
- The total number of possible combinations of two thrown dice.
- The total number of inches in a yard.
- Is a perfect score on the ACT college admissions standardized test.
- Is the number of truly righteous people in each generation, according to the Torah, the sacred text of the Jewish faith.
- The number of gods who collaborated to create the first human, according to Maori legend.



Laser tattoo removal procedures can remove birthmarks.

FAST-FOOD FOLLIES

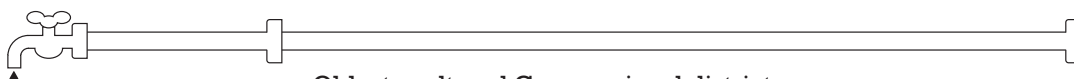
For better or for worse, fast food is a big part of American life. With so many of us grabbing a quick burger on the run, the thousands of fast-food restaurants across the globe are bound to be the setting of some crimes or weird activity every now and then.

Taking the Order

In May 2022, Texas school employee Kelsey Golden was working from home; when her two-year-old son, Barrett, started messing around with her phone, she was so busy that she let him have it. “He likes to look at his reflection,” Golden said, unaware that her toddler even knew how to use apps or play games on it. A few minutes later, after Barrett returned her phone, Golden received a notification that her DoorDash driver was on the way, even though she hadn’t placed an order. She was more confused when a car pulled up to her house, and a driver popped out with a giant bag of the 31 McDonald’s cheeseburgers she’d apparently ordered. “Then it dawned on me that Barrett was playing with my phone,” she said. “I went back and looked at my phone and an order was placed at that time that he was playing with my phone.” Making things all the odder was that Barrett doesn’t even like cheeseburgers, and neither does Golden, so she offered them up for free on Facebook. “One woman came by, she was pregnant and wanted six of them,” Golden said. “No judgment.”

Long Live the King

When Jonathan Pruitt opened a business in the Concord Mall in Wilmington, Delaware, in 2022, he was given a key to a storage room. He opened it up and found not a closet, but a perfectly preserved Burger King. With decor dating to the 1990s, everything in the former fast-food restaurant was intact—booths, bolted-down chairs, kitchen equipment, and the art on the walls. According to mall records, the Burger King opened with the rest of the mall in 1987 but was closed in 2009 and subsequently walled up and made completely invisible from both the inside and outside of the mall; its exterior windows had been boarded up and painted over. It had been used as a storage facility until 2019, at which point new owner Namdar Realty Group purchased the mall and locked it up. Photos and videos of the eerie, totally preserved Burger King went viral in spring 2022. “It’s kind of cool. When I first saw it, I was blown away myself,” said Tom Dahlke, Concord Mall’s general manager.



Oldest unaltered Congressional district:
the one comprising the entire state of Delaware, unchanged since 1789.

Would You Like Drugs with That?

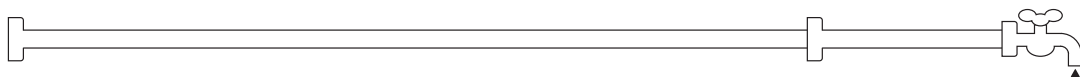
In June 2022, hungover after celebrating her 21st birthday, Emily Somers of Leeds, England, ordered a vegetarian McPlant burger (with ketchup and cheese) from McDonald's, for delivery. When it arrived, the burger box bore a sticker with the handwritten words, "Only Ketamin, Sandwich, Cheese." Fearing that the sandwich was part of some ill-fated drug transaction—ketamine (not ketamin) is a powerful narcotic—Somers and her boyfriend examined the burger for tampering and lacing. "The fact it goes through the kitchen and then someone delivers it, that puts a bit of worry on your mind," Somers told reporters. With nothing amiss, Somers believes that a McDonald's employee added the "-amin" to the "ket" ketchup abbreviation written on the sticker. In response, McDonald's sent Somers a coupon for £7.50 (\$9.17) off her next order.

The Footlong Arm of the Law

Businesses that conduct a lot of cash transactions—such as fast-food places and sandwich shops—are a common target for burglars and armed robbers looking to make a quick score. At about 2:00 a.m. one night in August 2019, an unidentified man broke into a Subway near the George Washington University campus in Washington, D.C. But according to surveillance video, the individual had no interest in making off with the outlet's cash on hand. The man walked into the Subway, grabbed a bag of potato chips, then jumped over the counter and made himself a chicken sandwich with all the fixings. Then he walked out with the sandwich and chips. Total amount of stolen goods: \$8.49.

Not-So-Secret Sauce

Bel-Fries is a boutique, upscale fast-food restaurant in New York City specializing in French fries, prepared in the traditional Belgian method and served with special sauces, which cost an additional \$1.75 apiece. At 4:00 a.m. one night in July 2022, three women put in their orders and asked for some extra dipping sauce. When told they'd be charged accordingly, the trio erupted. "We explained to them that this is a business rule and that it is the same for everyone, but they did not understand," head cook Rafael Nuñez told reporters. The women started grabbing and throwing anything they could get their hands on, including bottles of fry sauce, a computerized cash register terminal, and a plastic barrier bolted to the counter. Then the women climbed up to the counter and started dancing. "Two of my employees were hit in the head with glass bottles," co-owner Annalee Schlossberg said. Chitara Plasencia, Tatiyanna Johnson, and Pearl Ozoria were arrested, with the latter facing additional charges of stealing money out of the register and punching her arresting officer in the face.



Highest-grossing foreign-made film ever in Estonia: *Tenet* (\$1.2 million).

OOPS!

Everyone makes outrageous blunders from time to time. So go ahead and feel superior for a few minutes.

EEK EEK! DELETE DELETE!

The 2017 finale of *The Great British Bake Off*—between home bakers Sophie Faldo, Kate Lyon, and Steven Carter-Bailey—brought in 7.7 million viewers. It’s too bad that a lot of those viewers already knew who the winner was going to be. Blame Dame Prue Leith for that. The celebrity chef, 81—one of the reality show’s two judges—explained that, six hours before the finale aired, “I was having a siesta in Bhutan and I picked up my phone and I saw a message from the production company who said ‘don’t forget to congratulate the winner after 10 p.m.’ I looked at my watch and quickly tweeted ‘bravo Sophie.’” But Leith had forgotten to account for the time difference. A moment later, “A text came whizzing in which just said ‘eek eek it’s tonight delete delete!’” Even though the tweet was barely up for a minute and a half, a screenshot went viral and caused an uproar on social media. “It was absolutely awful,” Leith said. But at least one person wasn’t mad at her: “What’s interesting is the prime minister of Bhutan rang me up and said, ‘You have put Bhutan on the map.’”

A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

On April 20, 2022, in Washington, D.C., the United States Congress was in recess, but there were still scores of people staffing the 20 buildings of the Capitol complex (including the famous Rotunda). At around 6:30 p.m., an airplane entered the Capitol’s restricted air space. Unaware of any scheduled air traffic, the U.S. Capitol Police ordered an immediate evacuation of the entire complex. As everyone was making their way outside, the single-engine airplane flew over...and kept on going to Nationals Park—home of Major League Baseball’s Washington Nationals—where members of the U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team parachuted onto the field before a home game.

The team and the fans knew the plane was coming; so did the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which had cleared the flight in advance. How come no one told the Capitol Police? Because of an “extremely unusual oversight,” as the FAA put it. In other words, they forgot to tell them. It’s “outrageous and inexcusable,” said Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). “The unnecessary panic caused by this apparent negligence was particularly harmful for Members, staff and institutional workers still grappling with the trauma of the attack on their workplace on January 6th.” The FAA apologized, acknowledging that “our actions affect others.”



Royal Australian Navy ships are adorned with red kangaroo pictures to avoid confusion with British Royal Navy vessels.

BASEMENT DWELLERS

“We recommend you have professionals deal with any pest control issue,” said Pete Piringer of the Montgomery County (Maryland) Fire & Rescue Service. Because an exterminator would have found a safer way to clear a snake infestation than what this homeowner (unnamed in press reports) attempted in November 2021. Hoping to “smoke” the reptiles out of the basement of his \$1.8 million manor, he placed some hot coals near the snakes...and also near some “combustible materials” (also unidentified). Then the homeowner left the house. Hours later, a neighbor saw smoke coming from the building and called 911. It took 75 firefighters all night to extinguish the fire—which cost an estimated \$1 million. An investigation concluded that it was an accident. “Firefighters located evidence that some snakes did not survive,” said Piringer. “However others likely did.”

WAIT, WAS THAT TODAY?

On July 4, 1922, the *New York Times* printed a facsimile of the Declaration of Independence on the final page of its A-section, beginning an Independence Day tradition that went unbroken for 100 years...almost. On July 4, 2022, readers flipped to that page of the print edition, but there was no Declaration of Independence. The *Times*'s critics quickly took to Twitter, some simply mocking the omission, with others accusing the newspaper of “betraying America”—like former White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, who tweeted, “As the leftists at the @washingtonpost say, democracy dies in darkness.” The *Times* printed the Declaration on July 5, along with an assurance that it was not their intention to break the tradition. The omission was blamed on “human error,” thus absolving any nonhumans from blame.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR

A recent population boost to the city of Cuernavaca, located in the Mexican state of Morelos, caused increased pollution in the local waterways. In June 2022, after city leaders announced a cleanup program, they held a ceremonial river walk to inaugurate a new footbridge over a stream. Most of the delegation was on the bridge—made of wooden boards held together by chains—when the chains failed and more than two dozen people plunged 10 feet into the shallow, rocky creek. According to press reports, “Four city council members, two other city officials, and a local reporter were injured and had to be extracted on stretchers from the gully and were taken to local hospitals.” Here’s the “Oops!” part: Not only did the delegation far exceed the bridge’s maximum capacity, but as they were crossing the bridge, several people started jumping up and down to make it sway. “That was reckless,” said Mayor José Luis Urióstegui...outside the hospital where he too was treated for minor injuries.



Only person nominated in seven different Oscar categories: **Kenneth Branagh.**

WORD ORIGINS

This is how we (Rick)roll.

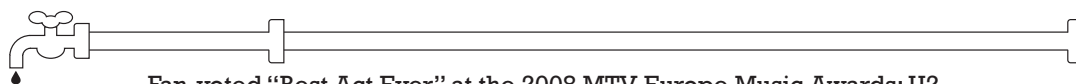
Never: This word goes all the way back to Proto-Indo-European (PIE), the theoretical ancient language that split into dozens of modern languages whose words have similar roots. *Never* entered Old English in the 5th century as *næfre*—from *ne* (“not”) and *æfre* (ever).

Gonna: Origin unknown, but linguists believe this contraction of “going to” originated with the Scots’ usage of *ganna*. It entered English around the turn of the 20th century.

Give: Another PIE word (*ghabh*, “to give or receive”), *give* entered Old English as *giefan*, and then Middle English as *yiven*. The modern pronunciation comes from the Old Norse word *gefa*. The phrase “give up” dates to the 1570s.

You: This second-person personal pronoun goes back to PIE and entered Old English as *eow*. In early modern English, *you* was the plural form of *thou* (which entered Old English from the Proto-Germanic *thu*). The singular *thou* was used as the subject (“thou singest”); the singular *thee* was the object (“of thee I sing”). Likewise, the plural *you* was the subject (the only modern equivalent is the informal *y’all*) and the plural *ye* was the object (“Hear ye, hear ye!”). So how come only *you* is left? In the 1400s, well-to-do English speakers were influenced by the French plural *vous*, the formal way to address the aristocracy—so they adopted the similar-sounding *you* for formal settings, and it came to be accepted for singular or plural (eventually replacing *ye*). *You* got a big boost in the 15th century thanks to *you*-users Queen Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare substituting it for *thou* and *thee*: “I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest” (*Much Ado about Nothing*). By the 1700s, *thou* and *thee* had become so informal that they were considered vulgar. Proper Londoners, afraid of sounding vulgar, dropped the words altogether. Ironic result: English—which has more synonyms than any other language—has only one word for *you*. It can mean one or many, be a subject or an object, and can be formal or informal. Compare that to Spanish’s *tú*, *usted*, *ustedes*, *vos*, and *vosotros*. (German has even more.)

Up: One of the oldest unchanged words in English, this adverb entered Old English from PIE with the same basic spelling and pronunciation it has today. The versatile *up* can be a preposition (“up the tree”), a noun (“ups and downs”), an adjective (“the up escalator”), a verb (“up the ante”), or an adverb (“give you up”). So don’t worry, *up* will never let you down.



Fan-voted “Best Act Ever” at the 2008 MTV Europe Music Awards: U2, Britney Spears, and Christina Aguilera lost to 1980s English pop singer Rick Astley.

WEIRD ANIMAL NEWS

This year's installment of Weird Animal News features a "grilled" goose, a fish out of water, highly aroused sea snakes, and fuzzy widdle baby duckies.

HOW YOU DOIN'?

A few facts about olive sea snakes: they're highly venomous, they can grow up to six feet long, they have poor eyesight, and the males can get really horny. Added up, that's bad news for snorkelers and scuba divers in Australia's Great Barrier Reef, where these snakes thrive. Tim Lynch learned this all too well when he spent two years in the mid-1990s collecting data about olive sea snakes for his PhD thesis. While diving, he recorded 158 encounters—many of them unprovoked attacks. When Lynch compiled his data (which he didn't publish until 2020), he realized that most of the attacks came during breeding season. Conclusion: "A reproductively active male, highly aroused, mistakes the diver for another snake (a female or a rival male)." That's where the snakes' bad eyesight comes into play. What should you do if a libidinous sea snake swims up and coils around your leg? Absolutely nothing. "Allow for the snake to investigate chemical cues with its tongue," advises Lynch. "A bite is unlikely unless the animal is threatened or injured...Attempting to flee is likely to be futile and may even increase the ardor of the pursuit; and attempting to drive the animal away may induce retaliation." Thankfully, most land snakes are not known to behave so amorously.

FREE RIDE

In June 2019, a Canada goose (or, as Foxnews.com incorrectly spelled it, a "Canadian goose") became lodged in the grille of a pizza delivery car. Behind the wheel was Ryan Harrington of Burlington, Vermont. He said that when he saw the two-foot-tall waterfowl waddling across the road, he slammed on his brakes...but not in time. "I heard a thud, and I thought, 'Oh my god, I just hit a goose.'" Harrington didn't even realize until he got back to work that the goose was stuck in the car's grille. The animal was alive and alert, but Harrington had no idea how to free it, so he notified his manager. They called, well, everyone, and before long, a ragtag team of rescuers—including wildlife officials, firefighters, and Esther Lotz, of a nonprofit called Helping Animals in Crisis—were all working together to get the goose free. Once they did, Lotz took the newly named Roberto (or Roberta, if it's female) to a rehabilitation center, where it was diagnosed with a broken pelvis. At last report, Roberto (or Roberta) was expected to make a full recovery.

