

Weasel stalked between the trees. Hostile and starving, he watched a beautiful peacock and peahen strutting in the meadow. He had been unsuccessful while hunting food for his large family. In the twilight, he observed the birds. The pair was ignoring their nest. It contained two freshly laid eggs. Weasel was frantic. The birds' razor-sharp beaks made stealing the eggs a dangerous mission. However, tonight he was willing to put aside all wisdom, instinct, and fear to feed his family.

Desperate, Weasel crept closer to the nest. He kept a watchful eye on Farmer O'Neal, who was at the chicken coop. The farmer was blissfully feeding the chickens a stale loaf of bread. The birds had just finished their evening walk and were headed back to their nest. The farmer had no reason to suspect mayhem was about to take place in the barnyard. So, the mild-mannered man continued feeding the chickens.

Weasel grunted softly. His nose was twitching as he crouched closer to the nest. He reached it just as the birds arrived. Suddenly, Farmer O'Neal heard the peacock's shrill shrieking. He looked up and spotted Weasel frozen in fear, a front paw on an egg. He ran across the yard screaming and waving his arms! Slowly, Weasel backed away from the nest and then scurried off. Tonight, Weasel would have to look elsewhere for food for his hungry family.

Although the two children were twins, they were quite different. Both wanted to take part in school activities to make new friends. Marta was timid and took very few risks. She especially avoided sports and academic contests. Carlos, on the other hand, had a lot of confidence. He would try out for anything. However, he did not practice before tryouts, so he did not always make the team. One day the twins discussed their different personalities. Each decided there was a trait they wanted to change.

Marta wanted to be more outgoing. She hesitantly agreed to audition for the school's spelling bee. Much to her surprise, she won first place. She was going to represent her age group in the state contest. At the state finals, she won fourth place. This scholastic triumph was the best anyone at her school had ever achieved.

Carlos decided to focus and excel in one specialized area. He wanted to be the lead actor in the class play. He knew it would take energy, preparation, and practice to learn the long speeches. For weeks, Carlos rehearsed his lines and acting techniques. He attempted to express just the right amount of pain and emotion when his character died. He was so well prepared that he got the part. He gave an eloquent performance. Marta and Carlos were both pleased with their efforts.

Most of Paul's friends are football fanatics. They watch the Super Bowl every year. However, Paul prefers viewing televised stock-car races. He likes watching the cars speed around the raceway. Each driver wants to take first place. It is exciting to him when a driver comes from behind and surpasses the leader.

The day of his favorite auto race was fast approaching. The weather forecasters predicted rain. Paul earnestly hoped the speedway would not get too slick. Wet asphalt could delay the contest. The roadway was designed to drain water from the track. Nevertheless, rainwater could still cause grease to splatter on the cars' powerful engines. This could ignite an engine fire and end the competition for the driver and his team.

Paul tried to predict who would win. He kept penciled notes of critical speeds and the number of laps drivers completed. During the race, he pretended he was riding with his favorite driver. He would worry when precious moments were lost during pit stops.

This avid young fan hopes to someday become a stock car racer. He wants to win trophies and earn big prize money. At one time, Paul had thought it was an impossible dream. Now he was more determined than ever to pursue his greatest desire.

To follow dreams, one must overcome trying conditions. Maya Angelou is a person who overcame obstacles. She was raised in a small, rural town in the south. There, she survived a violent attack at the age of eight. For quite some time, she was mute. This means she was unable to speak. Her humble start in life was the subject of her first book. It was entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Maya has unlimited talents. She is well known in several artistic fields. She is a famous author of poetry and children's stories. She was the first African-American woman to have a screenplay become a feature film. She was a stage performer and sang in a modern opera. This versatile woman studied dance with a famous dance instructor. She also acted in movies and on TV.

Her talents have achieved acclaim across the nation. Maya received a special request from President Bill Clinton. He asked her to read a poem when he was sworn into office at the White House. She was awarded the National Medal of Arts. Ms. Angelou has won the hearts of people around the world.

During the early 1900s, an awful sickness struck many children. It made victims' muscles become lifeless. This disease was called polio. Doctors didn't know what caused the dreadful illness. Some people believed the hot, humid days of August were the reason. Another theory was that swimming in cold rivers and lakes brought on the disease. Others thought peach fuzz was the culprit. So mothers wore rubber gloves to hold the peaches while peeling them. Because the disease was widespread, people were looking for a quick way to ease the suffering.

A nurse in Australia developed a way to help ailing children. She rubbed the patients' paralyzed muscles. She claimed it helped improve mobility. Some doctors didn't approve of her method. The most serious cases were taken to the hospital. Children were placed in iron lungs. These machines were tightly sealed metal tubes. They helped children breathe. They forced patients' lungs to inhale and exhale air. Neither of these treatments was a cure.

The search for a cure was a priority. In 1954, Doctor Jonas Salk took a scientific approach. First, he found out polio was a virus. Then he developed the first vaccine to combat the illness. School children took part in a blind study. Some were given a shot of sugar water. Others were given the actual vaccine. Dr. Salk wanted to see if his cure would work. It did. To his credit, millions of children have been spared unnecessary anguish and pain.

Long ago, pioneers didn't live close to a doctor. People were treated with homemade cures when they were sick. These household mixtures were made from herbs, salt, and ointments. The remedies were used for a variety of diseases. To treat a cold, raw onions were wrapped in a towel and placed on the ailing person's chest. A piece of bread soaked in milk and placed on a wound was said to heal an infection. Sterilized cotton rags were used for bandages. A black, silk ribbon loosely tied around the neck was thought to stop a terrible hacking cough.

Many children became ill with chicken pox, measles, and mumps. These childhood diseases were common. They often went untreated. When children were ill, they were kept in darkened rooms. The family tried to take good care of them, but they had to get well on their own. If an illness was contagious, a quarantine sign would be placed on their front door. They had to wait until everyone in the home was no longer sick. All contaminated materials were burned to prevent an epidemic.

As doctors moved westward, medicine was easier to get. However, doctors had to make house calls to reach people in rural areas. They often had to ride several miles to reach the home of a sick patient.

Sam and his younger sister were looking for red squirrels and foxes in the backwoods. Suddenly they realized they had wandered far from camp and were lost in unfamiliar terrain. Luckily, Sam had taken a survival course and knew the importance of staying calm. Panicking would only make matters worse.

By the angle of the sun, Sam was able to calculate it was mid-morning. He stood facing east, the direction of the sun. He explained to his sister south was to his right and north was to his left. West was at his back. He knew their family's campground was on the west edge of a small river. Concentrating on these helpful clues, Sam drew a crude map in the dirt with a stick. They decided to head east.

Walking toward the sun, they soon reached the riverbank. There, they quickly gathered dry twigs. They located a sandy clearing beside the water and used matches from Sam's survival kit to start a small fire. The kindling began to burn. Sam and his sister steadily placed green leaves and pine needles on the hot flames. Thick, pungent smoke billowed up over the trees. A rescue squad saw the alarming smoke signal and came to investigate. They transported the two siblings safely back to camp.

Plant life is abundant in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. There the average rainfall is only about seven inches a year. How have plants learned to survive in these arid, southwestern regions? They have adapted in a variety of ways to this harsh terrain.

Desert plant life does not bloom during phases of drought. If it did, the flowers would wither and die in the remorseless sun. These unique plants are capable of lying dormant for years until it rains. Then once the plants have enough water, flowers quickly mature and bloom.

Most cactus plants have thorns instead of leaves. The surface area of thorns is much smaller than leaves. This reduces the plant's exposure to the parched, hot air. Therefore, not much moisture can evaporate from the vegetation.

The barrel cactus is short and fat. It is shaped like a round accordion. This allows it to expand during rainfall. When water is absorbed through its roots, it gets bigger. As it loses moisture during the dry season, it contracts.

The creosote bush thrives in the desert. It does not grow in bunches because it doesn't like sharing the scarce water. It has an unpleasant, acrid aroma. This smell keeps other flora from growing nearby.

These are ways plant life endures the deserts of the United States.



Jan listened to her favorite music on the radio. She had decided she wanted to be a disk jockey. She didn't want anything to get in the way of her future goal. She asked her school counselor what she should do to make her dream come true. He said that having a pleasant voice would increase her chances. He suggested she practice talking into a recorder. Jan was to play it back and listen to the tape. Practice would help to improve her voice quality. He also encouraged her to use proper grammar.

He told her to study different music labels to learn which artists had signed contracts. Becoming familiar with various music companies might also help. It would give her a greater understanding of music trends. She was told to learn as much as possible on her own. College courses would round out her education.

Not being very studious, Jan thought this seemed complicated. She had hoped all she needed for success was desire. She thought sitting in the studio, playing music, and telling jokes were all she would have to do. Now Jan understood. Wanting a career in a certain field and getting it were two different things. It would take lots of preparation. Yet, she was not discouraged. She had great passion for radio announcing and was an ambitious, young girl. It would be worth all her efforts when she succeeded and landed her first job.

At one time, language only consisted of simple grunts and gestures. It took thousands of years for writing to evolve. Ancient man carved symbols and pictures in rocks. Some of those early drawings are still visible in caves and on canyon walls.

Some cultures used these pictures to record their daily activities. Others created an alphabet. Pen and paper made sharing one's thoughts possible. A messenger could take news from one place to another. Yet, news only traveled as far as man could walk, ride, or sail. It often took months for a package to arrive.

In the 1840s, the Morse code was invented. The phone and radio came next. News could be sent long distances by wire or air. These devices changed the way people shared ideas. TV was viewed as a miracle of modern science sixty years ago. This brought moving pictures into people's homes. Today, people can exchange ideas over the Internet. People can talk around the world almost instantly.

New inventions are made every day. With each idea, the world seems smaller. Imagine what communication will be like in the future!

Not long ago, the majestic condor was nearly extinct. This huge bird has a wingspan of nine feet or more. During the 1980s, the Los Angeles Zoo began a program to save these giant scavengers. At that time, only twenty-seven existed in the entire nation. All but one of them lived in captivity. In 1987, the last wild condor was caught. It was a nineteen-pound male.

Many people feared condors would perish in the zoo. They didn't want to have the last of its kind removed from nature. Those who opposed confining the bird chained themselves to the zoo gate. This forced the keepers to ship the condor to the San Diego Zoo. The purpose of this act was to get the bird away from the protestors. A year later, the bird was returned to L.A.

One of the females captured in 1986 was named Adult Condor-8. While at the zoo, she produced nine babies. She remained in captivity for fourteen years. This bird was the first to be given her freedom. At the same time, two juveniles born at the zoo were released. The youngsters were placed under the watchful care of Adult Condor-8. People rejoiced when the birds were able to freely soar the skies of their natural habitat.

Still considered endangered, condor numbers had grown to 198 in the year 2002. Over one-third of the birds live in the wild.

America got many of its ideas about freedom from William Penn. He was born in England. His father was a member of the Church of England. From an early age, Penn did not like the teachings of this church. After hearing a sermon by a preacher, he joined the Quaker church. At that time, this religion had been outlawed in England.

Penn was expelled from college because of his beliefs. He was sent to prison six times for stating his opinions. He became bothered by the lack of spiritual freedom in his country. So, he moved to America. There, he created a safe haven. In his colony, people lived free from religious bias.

Penn was a champion of human rights. He insisted that women deserved equal rights with men. He is also known for his fair treatment of Indians. He made a treaty with Indians living in his colony. It was intended to last “as long as the sun gave light.”

Penn was put in jail for treason on a return trip to England. The authorities thought he wanted to overthrow the king. He was cleared of the charges. Then he returned to America. The people living in his colony still wanted more freedom. Penn listened. The resulting document was called “The Charter of Privileges.”