

# DID YOU KNOW...?

## Did a company try to create a device that translates a dog's thoughts into English?

By Jack Bagley didyouknowcolumn@gmail.com

This week, it's a birthday celebration. No, not for me; that was back in September. And not for the column, that was back in October.

The birthday in question is that of our sixteenth President, Abraham Lincoln. If he were still with us today, Honest Abe would be turning 215 years old.

The world has changed so very much since Abe was born, and will continue to change - it would be a very dull world if it didn't change, don't you think? But leadership like Lincoln's only comes along once in a century, it seems.

We sure could use someone like Abe Lincoln today, couldn't we?

And you sure could use some trivia. I just happen to have a fresh batch right here.

Did you know ...

... a Soviet leader really believed in purges? When Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) held one of his occasional purges of members of the Communist party leadership, he went to great lengths to ensure that person was gone. He would have their names removed from any historical documents, and would even go so far as to have the person airbrushed out of any official photographs. Stalin wanted no record to remain of the person he would "un-person." (Gives a new meaning to the old saw, "Here today, gone tomorrow.")

... schoolwork was real in the Harry Potter series of movies? According to set insiders, when the main actors in the films - Daniel Radcliff (born 1989), Emma Watson (born 1990), and Rupert Grint (born 1988) - were shown doing their "homework" for Hogwarts School for Wizards, they were sometimes actually doing their real-world school homework. (Hope their grades were good.)

... the Earth's rotation is slowing down? No, you won't be late (or early) for any appointments because of that, not any time soon. But if you can hang around another, say, 140 million years, you'll discover that a day will be 25 hours long. Earth's rotation has slowed over the eons; during the time when dinosaurs ruled the planet, a day was only about 22 hours long. (Now I understand why some days drag on longer than others.)

... a law in Chicago once made it illegal for "ugly" people to be in public? Passed in 1881 in an attempt to eradicate beggars from the public streets, the law prohibited people "who are diseased, maimed, mutilated or in any way deformed" from appearing in any public places. Violators of the law faced fines between \$1 and \$50, and were sometimes sent out of town. Shockingly, the law stayed on the books until the 1970s. (There are times when I'm ashamed to call Chicago my home town. This is one of them.)

... a company tried to create a device that would translate a dog's thoughts into English? The Nordic Society for Invention and Discovery, or NSID, advertised in 2013 that they were trying to invent a device which would be attached to a dog and would translate the dog's brain waves into English. Called "No More Woof," they claimed the device would be available by May of 2014 and opened a crowdfunding source for it. The gadget was to be worn on the dog's head, and would detect neural patterns that corresponded to "I'm hungry," or "I'm tired," or "Who are you?" The device wasn't ready by May of 2014 and isn't ready today ... and investors are finally getting their money back. A spokesman for NSID said that "No More Woof" was a real thing, but that the real difficulty in developing the device is simple - it's hard to get a dog to allow you to stick something on its head. (I'd really be dogged if I tried to make a joke on this one.)

... Charles Darwin ate an example of every animal he "discovered"? Darwin (1809-1882), the scientist who formulated the Theory of Evolution, was quite the gourmand when it came to newly discovered life. He was a member of the Glutton Club at Cambridge University, a group devoted to "devouring birds and beasts which were before unknown to human palates." During his voyages on HMS Beagle, Darwin ate: puma, iguana, armadillo, giant tortoise, agouti, rhea, and many other species that normally don't make it to a human's dinner table. (Suddenly, I'm hungry ...)

... movie effects have always been very expensive? Nowadays, most effects are generated in computers, which carries its own sometimes-hefty price tag. But back before there were computers, there were real life effects. For instance, in the 1957 classic The Bridge on the River Kwai, an actual full-sized bridge was constructed and an actual train was sent across it for (spoiler alert) the scene where the bridge goes boom. The cost of the effect was \$250,000 - an effect that would cost \$2,636,220 today. (But it was indeed convincing!)

... an actor played a historic character to whom he was distantly related? In the 2016 BBC miniseries The Hollow Crown, actor Benedict Cumberbatch (born 1976) portrayed King Richard III of England (1452-1485). Genealogists have determined that Cumberbatch is the second cousin, sixteen times removed, of the king. (What are the odds?)

... you might want to hurkle-durkle one day? Before you go thinking I've called you a dirty word, you should know that a hurkle-durkle is an old Scottish term for "lying in bed and lounging after it's time to go to work." (I think we should all hurkle-durkle every Monday, myself.)

Now ... you know!



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