

# DID YOU KNOW...?

## When did the Muppets make their first appearance on network television?

By Jack Bagley didyouknowcolumn@gmail.com

Valentine’s Day was last week, and I hope the person you’re sweet on remembered.

Candy, flowers, a nice card, maybe even dinner out ... the things that make Valentine’s Day special. Sure is nice to get them, isn’t it?

Hmph. Me, I just chalk it up as another day.

This week we have President’s Day for a holiday, so if you’re getting your column fix a day late, blame the guy in the White House. Meanwhile, settle in for some fun reading as the trivia comes your way!

Did you know ...

... you can visit a museum dedicated to chocolate? Travel to Barcelona, Spain, and you can stop into the Museu de la Xocolata, or Chocolate Museum. The exhibits trace the history of chocolate, and even feature sculptures made of chocolate. (Which have to be replaced sometimes, I’m sure, thanks to the visitors nibbling on them.)

... cardinals and ants have a strange relationship? The beautiful red birds will sometimes cover themselves in ants, both living and dead. If you wonder why (and I did), no one is certain, but one theory is that the ants secrete formic acid, and that helps rid the birds of lice. Another theory is that the ants clean up dried oils left over from the cardinals’ preening. What if ants aren’t handy? Well, the birds will sometimes use beetles, coffee or even discarded cigarette butts. (Those are available all over St. Louis, I hear. Obligatory baseball reference made.)

... many of the original rides at Disneyland are still in use? According to Mental Floss, as of 2021, the Jungle Cruise, Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride, Mark Twain Riverboat, Peter Pan’s Flight, and the King Arthur Carousel are still in use in Disneyland, which opened in 1955. (Regular maintenance can do wonders, can’t it?)

... you may have the urge to taradiddle? If you do, you’re apt to be spouting pretentious nonsense. The antiquated term also can be used to describe a trivial lie, better known as a fib. (No taradiddling here, of course!)

... the phrase “sleep tight” has a history? In the 1500s, mattresses were secured to bed frames by ropes, and the sleeper would pull on the ropes to tighten the mattress and make it firmer. The phrase “sleep tight” wishes the sleeper a good night on a firm mattress. (Which is always, always a good thing.)

... the first network television appearance of the Muppets was not on The Ed Sullivan Show? Fans of the delightful puppet characters created by Jim Henson (1936-1990) have long thought that they first appeared on network television on September 18, 1966, on the CBS variety show hosted by Ed Sullivan (1901-1974). But the Muppets had been on television several times before, with their first nationwide appearance coming March 15, 1963, on NBC’s The Jack Paar Program. On that show, a Muppet who would later be Kermit the Frog (wearing a wig) did a three-minute appearance, singing the song “I’ve Grown Accustomed To Your Face.” The proto-Kermit sang to another Muppet covered in a cloth with a face drawn on it, which was eaten by the Muppet revealing a rather gruesome face. Henson had started the troupe of puppets in the 1950s and they made their first-ever TV appearance in a Henson-produced five minute show called Sam and Friends on May 9, 1955 over WRC-TV in Washington, D.C. Additional trivia note: Kermit was originally just a lizard-like character. He didn’t officially become a frog until Henson produced a special called The Frog Prince in 1971, though he was introduced as a frog by Johnny Carson (1925-2005) on The Tonight Show on December 31, 1965.

... birds see everything in total focus? The human eye is globular, and the lens has to adjust to seeing things at varying distances. However, a bird’s eye is more flat, and it can take in everything at once, in a single glance. (Hence the saying, “a bird’s eye view.”)

... people facing execution can have strange senses of humor? For instance, check the last request of one James W. Rodgers (1910-1960), who was executed by firing squad in Utah. Asked his last request, Rodgers quipped, “A bulletproof vest.” Or perhaps you could look at one James D. French (1936-1966), who said to the assembled reporters as he was being strapped into Oklahoma’s electric chair, “Hey fellows, how’s this for your headline? French fries.”

... wild turkeys have been known to surround a dead animal in the road, like cultists after a sacrifice? (Raising a glass of Wild Turkey, no doubt.)

... a full one-fourth of the population of the world lives on less than \$200 a year? (Fortunately, I’m not one of them, though it does feel like that sometimes.)

... the typical tax evader in the United States is male? He’s also under the age of 50, in the highest tax bracket, and files a particularly complicated tax return. This fiend’s most common method of tax evasion is overstatement of charitable contributions – primarily church donations. (I’m not in there, of course, since I’m not in anybody’s definition of a high tax bracket.)

... Canada has a Strategic Maple Syrup Reserve? (That makes an odd kind of sense, if you ask me.)

... artists in Mexico can pay their taxes using their created art instead of money? (Can you imagine if they let writers do that here? I could just ... ah, no use dreaming, I suppose.)

Now ... you know!



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