



## A Good Kind of Weird

by Gail Nickerson

When I was a child I always thought I was weird.

I had pneumonia when I was five. Back in 1951, that wasn't good. They did have penicillin and I guess that pulled me through, but I was still out of school for months. I started first grade late and felt like a total outsider.

I didn't learn how to read Dick and Jane as quickly as everyone else did and was put in the low group. Sometimes the teacher told me to just play in the back of the room with Janet, who was also supposed to be 'slow,' so I thought I was stupid as well.

Turns out that I'm dyslectic and so was Janet; she turned out to be a nuclear physicist and worked at NASA for a while.

I was never good at history, not in school anyway, but I was always fascinated by odd little bits of information. I was sick quite a bit growing up and spent many months in bed, watching old movies and reading, so I picked up a lot of little known factoids. That's how I learned Tarzan's real name, how wagon trains carried canned peaches and that Betsy Ross didn't wear underpants.

It was interesting to find out that George Washington owned the biggest brewery in Virginia but if he enlisted in the army today he would be considered physically unfit for duty. Benjamin Franklin was a dirty old man, Annie Oakley was a Quaker, P.T. Barnum didn't own his first circus until he was 61 and Louisa May Alcott was a lesbian.

Concord stage coaches have better suspension than Cadillacs and Conestoga wagons were amphibious. The main cause of death among settlers on the Great Plains wasn't Indian attacks but suicide from loneliness; and the U.S. cavalry once fought off an Indian attack riding on camels.

I can probably identify 80% of all the character actors in movies made between 1925 and 1964 including Anne Revere who was a descent of Paul, Elisha Cook Jr., Noah Beery Jr., and Smiley Burnett who could play over a hundred musical instruments. I don't think I ever made an extra dime knowing all this stuff, but little bits of information intrigued me and still do.

Back then, everybody thought I was weird and so did I. Now that I'm not five years old anymore, unless you multiply that by twelve, I'm a lot more comfortable in my own skin. Maybe I am weird, but I'm a good kind of weird. And now people think I'm smart, especially when we play Trivia.

Gail Nickerson is a cozy mystery writer from Harwich.

## An Only Child Grows Up

by Carol Michels

From my earliest memory, I was bitterly disappointed that I did not have brothers and sisters. When I was young, everyone I knew had at least one sibling, and the lucky ones had several. I was repeatedly embarrassed when other kids discovered this defect in my character. They'd look at me strangely, amazed that such a perversion could exist.

Of course, until I was twelve, I wore glasses, often with patches, to correct a lazy eye. So perhaps the kids were looking at me strangely because of my glasses and crooked eyes, not because my parents wouldn't or couldn't have more children.

Other girls frequently expressed great envy, wishing they could be rid of their siblings so they could garner all their parent's attention and possessions. Boys thought it was weird, but also thought I must have a great life and get everything I wanted. I didn't think I was on Easy Street in the toy department, and would have gladly exchanged all the things I ever owned for a little sister.

I imagined I had brothers and sisters, and chatted and played with them until I was far too old for such self-entertainment. I made lists of every person I'd ever heard of, from extended family members I hadn't met, to the man who ran the gas station in my grandmother's town. It would seem, in retrospect, I was very lonely.

As a young adult, my "defect" took the form of a need to be perfect. I felt pressured to never disappoint my parents because, of course, they had no one else upon whom to focus. I didn't realize until I was a parent myself that no matter how many children one has, one focuses as hard on one as on another.

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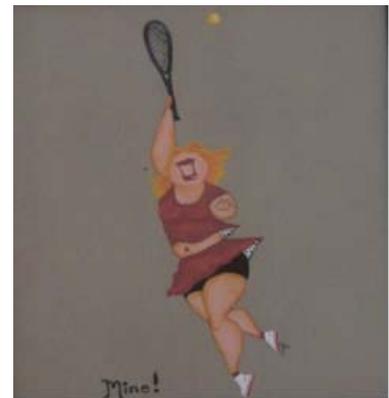
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Mine! By Jo Salata

Now, as a very senior only child, I occasionally regret not having siblings to populate my life, but I am also able to see my condition from another, even positive, point of view.

My relationship with my parents was a lifelong source of love and strength. Because I didn't have to share them with siblings, I was lucky to have them all to myself for the last years of their long lives. My beautiful, graceful mother was probably the most intelligent woman I've ever known. She and I shared so many happy hours over the years that the memories still warm me many times a day. Would I have been that close to her had she had more children? I don't know.

And, because of my "defect," I believe that I am a better friend. Perhaps because I have no immediate family, I've become deeply attached to a number of wonderful folks. I realize now that the melancholy I felt growing up has been replaced by the security and affection I can give and receive from some very special people.

I have sisters and brothers after all. The ones I have chosen to be my friends.

Carol Michels writes humorous essays about her life and family. She is working on an historical fiction, set in the 1890's, about the romance between a Spanish Princess and a society clothier from New York

Visit Carol's blog at [www.blogshewrote.com](http://www.blogshewrote.com)

## Wrinkles

by Johanne Kieffer

As I was flipping through the TV channels the other day, I happened upon one of those shopping networks. They were selling a miracle wrinkle cream. It wasn't the marketing chit-chat that kept me tuned in, it was the price. My jaw dropped just looking at the numbers, 2 - 4 - 0, YES TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY DOLLARS for a couple of ounces! Women were actually calling in and buying it!

Wrinkles, they're inevitable. We age, it's a natural process. After fifty our fine lines turn into deep crevices, carving deep pathways into the surface of the epidermis. Our faces eventually look like road maps! Well, not exactly, but you get the picture.

You have to have a sense of humor, laugh at yourself, smile and surrender remembering where these lines came from. Years of laughing so hard your belly hurts. Years of making funny faces as a kid. Years of making funny faces at your kids.

Worry lines, lines of sadness, of deep sorrow and perhaps regret. Lines from thinking too hard. From trying to get through college. From trying just to graduate! Lines from squinting in the sun at the beach, while fishing off a dock, or watching your favorite baseball team.

The lines on your face tell a story, your story. A life that has been truly lived. Why would anyone call a product that erased lines of a life fully lived a miracle cream? Why would you want to erase that?

Wouldn't two hundred and forty dollars be better invested in the creation of another memory? A memory that puts a smile on your face and, if you're lucky, adds another wrinkle to your story.

Johanne Kieffer is a frequent contributing writer to CWO, a licensed massage therapist and Reiki Master. She lives in Orleans.