

## Generations

# More amazing facts about everyday items

I'm a sucker for stuff I didn't learn in school or pick up during the 71 years I've been around on earth. So, my favorite place to visit is still [www.bestlifeonline.com](http://www.bestlifeonline.com) because I know I'll find something interesting almost every day and author Alex Daniel didn't let me down today.

Take for instance the fact that high heels were originally men's shoes, not women's, which would have saved us gals pain from bunions, corns and other foot pains, because we fell for the beauty of thin-heeled stilettos.

Sometime around the 10th century, in a horse-riding culture, someone figured that your foot would stay more firmly in the stirrups if your shoe had a bit of a raised heel. The innovation spread quickly, and soon whole armies — of men — rode into battle wearing pumps. Although pumps killed my feet, what might

hurt more was picturing Matt Dillon walking down the streets of Dodge City, ready for a gunfight with a smart aleck side-winder, in pumps.



**Peg DeMarco**

One of my passions is playing cards, from canasta to poker, to my favorite game of hearts. I didn't realize that playing cards have historical meanings. Legend has it that the four suits of a deck of playing cards comes from the four pillars of the medieval economy: hearts for the church, spades for the military, diamonds for the merchants and clubs for the farmers. Each king is also said to represent a real historical ruler: The king of hearts is Charles or Charlemagne, the king of spades is the biblical King David, the king of

diamonds is Julius Caesar, and the king of clubs is Alexander the Great. And as author Alex Daniel pointed out in his article, "Whether that's what the makers of the deck intended or whether it was a tale added over time, it is undoubtedly true that the king of hearts is the only one without a mustache."

I'm on a salt-free diet, and the Morton's substitute works just fine, but I've always known that salt is used to preserve food, especially in cans. But salt also had monetary value, which I didn't know. The ancient Romans used it as money, paying their soldiers in rations of salt. In fact, that's where we get the English word "salary." It's also where we get the English word "salad," which was named not for leafy greens but for those same Romans who liked to sprinkle their greens with salt to improve the flavor.

Bubble wrap is a neces-

sary staple in my house because mailing packages has always been part of my job. However, I never imagined that bubble wrap's intended use was as wallpaper. That's right — wallpaper. In 1957, two engineers came up with the idea to glue two shower curtains together, trapping tiny bubbles of air in between them. They were trying to come up with a type of textured wallpaper, but it didn't take off. Then they marketed their creation as greenhouse insulation, but again, it went nowhere. Finally, in 1960, IBM needed to ship some delicate data processors, and bubble wrap came to the rescue.

When someone offers me use of their home computer, the first question I ask is, "Do you have a mouse," because a mouse-less computer is painful for someone who has grown up with a mouse and clumsy without one. However, manu-

facturers of early versions referred to it as a turtle, with its hard shell on top and moving parts underneath. Although early computer experts weren't sure computer mice would catch on, and for a time were hard to come by, they tell me that too many people complained and they're here to stay.

Pencils come in all sorts of colors, but if you had to pick a "standard" pencil color, you'd probably think of a yellow-gold color — and that's no accident. When pencils started to go into mass production in the 1890s, the finest available graphite (not lead) to fill them came from China. Pencil manufacturers wanted everyone to know that they used only the best Chinese graphite, so they painted their pencils yellow, which happens to be the traditional Chinese color of royalty.

And, finally, this one was a shocker to me: cotton candy was invented by

a dentist. Sure, I've had this treasure at many fairs and at the circus as I'm sure you have. Made of liquid sugar spun into tiny strands, cotton candy was invented in 1895 by John C. Wharton, a candy maker, and William Morrison, a dentist. They called their creation "fairy floss" and sold thousands of servings at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 (I guess we know where the name for dental floss came from). It wasn't renamed "cotton candy" until the 1920s by Josef Lascaux, another dentist, who sold the sweet confection to his patients. It was a hit, selling 68,655 boxes at 24 cents a box.

Not only did it keep dentists in business, but it was a mighty fine "sweet" profit!

Peg DeMarco is a Morganton resident who writes a weekly features column for The News Herald. Contact her at [pegdemarco@earthlink.net](mailto:pegdemarco@earthlink.net).