

INVENTIONS

I've been watching "Dragon's Den" on the CBC, where inventors seek financial support from a panel of zillionaires. The inventors for the most part are well intentioned wacky people who think they have a wonderful idea that will change the world, or at least change their current financial position. The zillionaires tend to be arrogant and rude except for the odd case where the inventor has a good idea, then they're polite while they try to screw him out of it.

The thing is, most of the world changing inventions haven't done much for me. Splitting the atom, micro-miniaturization, the space program, the Hubbel telescope, things that have the scientific community in an excited uproar, well they really haven't changed *my* life any. I don't drink Tang, so the space program hasn't affected me much. I have no plans to annihilate any nation so atom splitting is a nothing to me... and so on.

The items that have affected my life are wonderful inventions which, as far as I know, have not been recognized for the shifts in attitude and behaviour they have caused. The open faced spinning reel for example. This was invented in my lifetime and has changed the face of fishing. When I was young, we used the "bait casting" reel. You needed a fairly heavy weight to get the momentum to throw out your bait, and you slowed down the spinning spool with your thumb. If everything did not go perfectly, the spool kept turning after the bait had hit the water, resulting in a sudden clump of tangled fishing line called a "birds nest" in your hand. This took most of the day to untangle, at a point where the fish began merrily jumping all around the boat. Never mind how, but the spinning reel changed all that, allowing a neophyte to throw a light bait great distances with little effort and hardly ever a tangle. Jim Balsillie got lots of money and lots of fame for the blackberry which has affected me not at all. I give plaudits to the inventor of the spinning reel which has changed my life, even though he remains anonymous.

What about Velcro? Without it, life expectancy would drastically decline as old folks would be tipping over as they stretched for shoelaces they cannot reach. Who invented this? What credit did the inventor get? I can only hope he patented Velcro and is basking in the reflected glow of gold coin. A Canadian, Gideon Sundback, invented the zipper in 1913, which is a pretty good invention. They say as you age, first you forget names, then faces, then you forget to pull your zipper up, and finally you forget to pull it down. That's when they send you to the home.

Another miraculous invention is the ball point pen. Can you remember dipping your pen in a well of ink, or pulling the lever on your fountain pen which sucked ink out of a bottle into your pen? Invariably much of the ink would deposit itself on your hands and shirt. In grade school, we practiced the Rhinehart method of writing with a pen that

you dipped in an inkwell on your desk. The beautifully formed letters were riddled with spots of ink and blurred lines where your sleeve had trailed through the letters.

I once wrote an article for an Italian publication, and in return they sent me a beautiful gold fountain pen, billed as "The Ferrari of Fountain Pens." It even had a registration number. I was anxious to show off this exciting piece of art to my confederates at work so clipped it on my pocket and set off. First though, even though I felt I was a pretty important guy with an incredible fountain pen to prove it, I had to take out the garbage. When I got to work, the fountain pen was no longer clipped to my pocket. It had fallen out as I placed the garbage curbside. Somewhere there is a garbage man signing his IOU's with soiled hands clutching the golden "Ferrari of Fountain Pens."

I know somebody invented left and right shoes, because for a millennium or two there was no such thing. Shoes were identical and could be worn with equal discomfort on either foot. Patent Law was probably not invented yet, so the shoemaker who came up with the idea probably didn't reap the rewards. I just read about an artificial Christmas tree that is sliced in half vertically so that it can be erected flat to a wall instead of in the middle of the room. Is that a great idea or what? The inventor better have patented that. I wish I had thought of it.

Canadians are no slouches as inventors. Arthur

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