



Štěpánka Sekaninová

Hobbies and Pleasures of the Famous

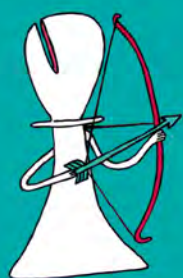


Hobbies



and

Pleasures



of the



Famous



B4U Publishing

Empress Sissi on horseback

I was fifteen and my life lay ahead of me. As I sat in a spreading tree, having escaped the boredom of my compulsory schooling, of what did I dream?

Of romantic love, of course; for sure of crazy rides on the back of an untamed horse; no doubt of collections of my own extraordinary poetry. Did I dream of what it would be like to be an empress? I'm quite sure I didn't! Which girl in her right mind would dream of being shackled to the prim-and-proper imperial court in Vienna? Who would long to have duties of royal protocol and an ascetic mother-in-law who looks down on you from the lofty height of all her titles?

So it'll come as no surprise for you to learn that I kept running away from my husband, Franz Joseph, whom I never loved. But you must admit that if you're married to an emperor, there's no question of your dumping him...

So I replaced my lost dreams of true love with an activity I adored – horse riding. I liked my riding to be tumultuous and furious. Sensitive ladies would frown on what I was doing, in the belief that I should ride as they did, side-saddle. But I had no interest in that. I rode like a man, hugging the horse's body between my legs, urging it onwards.

Some historians think that another thing I enjoyed was my beauty. They're wrong. I had little belief in my looks, so I cared for them ever more obsessively and frantically. I gave my beauty all I had, including my time and my health.

As I got older I discovered my next and last obsession – travel. I visited Portugal, Algeria, Corfu and Corsica. I loved travelling by boat on a stormy sea, as it reminded me of the boisterous horse rides of my past. My passion for travel proved fatal for me. It was 10 September 1898, and I was in Swit-

zerland, about to leave Geneva. I was hurrying to catch the steamship. On the promenade, a man stumbled against me. I fell to the ground and got up again, apparently unharmed. Then I felt a slight pain near my heart, just a slight one – the kind of prick you feel when you realize someone you

trust has let you down. Slowly, I proceeded to the boat. With every step, however, I felt the life draining out of me. Slowly, ever so slowly, but nonetheless unstoppably. On board, I was examined by a nurse, who discovered a small wound above my breast. Later that day, the wound would bring about my death.

How strange that my subjects mourned me little, saving their pity for my newly widowed husband. They never really liked me or knew me; I was a stranger to them. A forgotten empress...

Was I happy with my life? Well, would you have been happy in my place?

**Elisabeth of Bavaria,
known as Sissi**

24 December 1837

10 September 1898

Empress of Austria, Queen of Bohemia and Hungary; her life was ended by a needle file to the heart, dealt by an Italian anarchist.





Beatrix Potter

passionate mycologist

12

The magnificent stream of Autumn is moving across the land, turning here and there to shake the last tired leaves from the trees. A woman is walking above a small valley, her long skirt brushing the wet grass. Aged twenty, she is more girl than woman. Her gaze is fixed on the ground. Sometimes she bends to the wet soil, to carefully dig out a fragile mushroom. She cleans the mushroom thoroughly but daintily, ensuring that this ethereal 'creature' does not fall apart in her fingers; then she places it in her wicker basket, alongside her other specimens. Autumn smiles at the girl's consideration, before planting on her a kiss so big that she blushes. Happy with her haul, the girl walks home at a brisk pace. Having scurried to her room, she sets the mushrooms on the desk and studies them closely. In time, under the guidance of the modest, rather shy Charles McIntosh, who is an outstanding amateur mycologist and a postman by profession, she will learn to examine her favourite mushrooms under the microscope. With bated breath, she will study the spores, before writing a study on how these wild fairies reproduce. Nor does she stop at mushrooms: she writes about lichens and algae, too. Her detailed observations will bring her to the ground-breaking conclusion that lichens are both fungus and alga – composite organisms that arise from the symbiotic relationship between fungi and algae. The fungi provide water for the algae, while its filaments give the lichens their shape; the algae provide organic

substances for the fungi and lichens. So it happens that the great gentleman scholars are upstaged by a mere woman. Not only has she taken the study of fungi to a new level, her detailed watercolour pictures – which we appreciate as both art and science – provide such a splendid survey of fungi, algae and lichens that leading mycologists refer to them to this day. The name of this girl is Beatrix Potter, and she lived in the latter part of the 19th century and the earlier part of the 20th. In 1897, as a woman she was disqualified from taking part in a scientists' conference; her paper *On the Germination of Spores* was presented by her uncle. Impossible, you say? The thing is, at the time in which Beatrix Potter lived, gentleman scientists were fiercely protective of their profession, regarding it as a male-only domain. Beatrix Potter did not wish to spend her life as a mere housewife. As she was excluded from being an authority on fungus, she turned to the writing of stories for children with animal heroes. Her illustrations for these stories can be appreciated as both art and science, as is the case with her drawings of fungi, algae and lichens.


Autumn flies over the land once more, before fleeing the scene. He mustn't be caught by Winter, who is hot on his heels, and whose teeth cut like knives. Ms. Potter shivers and huddles in her coat as she gazes on a beloved 19th- and 20th-century landscape which she is about to leave behind.



Beatrix Potter

28 July 1866 — 22 December 1943

English writer and illustrator, author of the Peter Rabbit books, mycologist and keen conservationist





Thomas Jefferson president and violinist

"I had many interests in my life, including archaeology, books, literature, architecture and gardening. I designed our family home in Monticello. But the violin was closest to my heart. I started playing the violin when I was a boy, and I played with superhuman zeal. I would play every day, for several hours at a stretch. Even as an adult inundated with responsibilities of the greatest importance, I found time for my instrument. The music I made went far beyond the confines of my soul. It allowed me to experience true feeling, when what was expected of me were stark rationality, high seriousness and stern matter-of-factness. My beloved violin opened the way for me to the best kind of inner freedom I could wish for.

Thanks to the violin, I won the heart of the woman who became my wife. Martha Skelton was an outstanding musician, a brilliant harpsichordist. Let me tell you a strange story. On a visit to Martha early in our acquaintance, I was so shy that I didn't know what to say, so I reached for my violin. Martha moved over to the harpsichord, and we began to play and sing. In those few magical moments, our hearts made a true connection. Two rivals for Martha's attentions were waiting to be received outside

Thomas Jefferson

13 April 1743 — 4 July 1823

Third president of the United States of America; author of the Declaration of Independence, the document that pronounced the independence of the Thirteen Colonies from Great Britain

the room; on overhearing the strength and passion of our music-making, they turned tail and moved on to the next house. My violin and love of music won me the woman of my heart's desire. Naturally, music played a role in our married life, too. Our house in Monticello had a music room with a pianoforte, a harpsichord and, of course, my violins (I had three of them). Whenever possible, my wife and I, and later our two daughters, would make music. In addition to the classics, our library was filled with works by Corelli, Vivaldi, Handel, Pugnani, Boccherini and other leading world composers. Music was so important to me that I hired a celebrated Italian musician called Francis Albert to further my education in playing and music in general. I would have been lost without notes and melodies. Wherever I happened to be, you would find me humming, singing or mumbling all kinds of melodies to myself; that was the way I was. When my mother's house was burning, above all else it occurred to me to save my precious violin, an Italian instrument from Cremona, which I couldn't be without. I sought out my poor mother only after assuring myself that my violin was unharmed. But please don't think badly of me: such is the lot of people who sell their soul to the wonderful world of notes and melodies.

How I would love the chance once more to rosin my bow, place my instrument under my chin and play – all day and all night, all year if I could. It's such a terribly long time since my strings sounded last...





Walt Disney and the railroad

"If I could live my life over, I'd be a train driver," Walt Disney might have said, in answer to a prying journalist. "I've loved trains large and small, tracks and rails since I was a kid," he may have continued. "I was just five when we moved from Chicago to the state of Missouri, and that was where I discovered the railroad, and locomotives that merrily and rhythmically blew off steam. I used to go to watch them; I was fascinated by them. I enjoyed putting an ear to the track and listening to the rumble of an approaching train. I had a role model in my Uncle Mike, who was a railroad engineer. How I bragged about him to my friends! And their eyes were as big as saucers when I took them to the station and got my uncle to show them the magnificent steam-blowing beauties up close! I liked the railwaymen's uniforms, too. They were close-fitting and elegant, with a splendid hat and shiny buttons on the coat... Oh yes, it was very stylish.

"Even after I became a successful, wealthy maker of animated movies, my love of trains never left me. Indeed, I loved trains so much that I had a railroad built in my

own backyard. I designed the coaches myself and put them together with my own hands. Then I was ready to go!

Actually, to tell the truth, it wasn't so easy. My wife protested: she didn't like the idea of a train circling our house. But I liked it so much that I was determined to get my own way! In the end, I went to a lawyer to find out what I could and couldn't do. Then I presented my beloved with a permit for the operating of a railroad on our property – which, with a heavy heart, she signed.

"Toot, toot! Train departing! Isn't it wonderful? And it's right in front of me, in my own backyard. Suddenly I feel like a five-year-old kid, seeing the splendour and beauty of a locomotive for the very first time. It's a dream come true...

"You may be surprised to learn that the animator Ub Iwerks and I were on a train when we came up with our famous Mickey Mouse character.

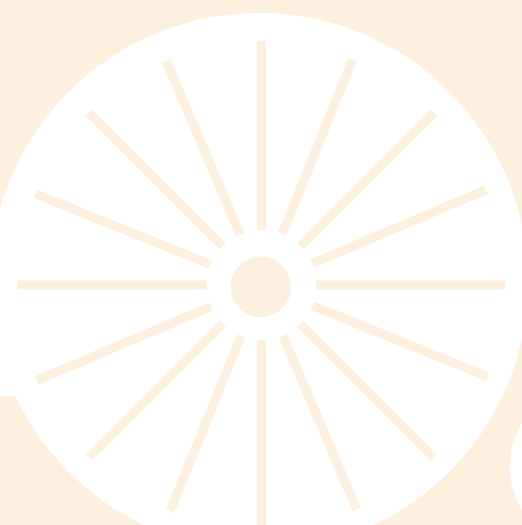
"Although I have my own train circling my house, in my next life I'm sure I'll be a train driver, or at least a dispatcher. In fact, you can bet your house on it!"

Walt Disney

(5 December 1901

15 December 1966)

American movie producer,
animator, director, screenwriter
and entertainment industry
pioneer





Nikola Tesla pigeon fancier

In a park, a man in a long coat stands surrounded by a flock of pigeons. The man is feeding scraps of bread to his avian friends. Some of the scraps he tosses, others he hands to the birds. The creatures with the metallic grey feathers battle over every piece, flapping their wings, pushing each other, cooing their excitement in a minor key. "Calm down, my friends," the man whispers, as he pulls more bread from his pocket. "Don't shove. I've got more than enough for all of you." More and more birds appear in the sky in great clouds, before descending to the ground. Some settle on the man's head and shoulders. The man is happy.

A while later, we see the same man hurrying into a nearby hotel, opening the door to his room, counting the towels there... yes, there are eighteen of them, as there should be, a number divisible by three; we

see him open a window and sprinkle grain onto the sill. Pigeons rise from all over the city and fly unerringly to the window, land on the sill and greedily peck the grain from the metal frame. The bolder among them go further, into the room. There, they settle on the desk, the bed, the wardrobe. Before long, the room is filled with pigeons cooing their satisfaction.

The next day, as they scrub and mop the floor to remove all the pigeons' 'muck', the chambermaids angrily shake their heads. And the hotel's proprietor? He does not know what to do, except order the white-washing of room 24, again. Another number we can divide by three – further assurance that everything in the world is as it should be.

The moustached man with a greater fondness for pigeons than his fellow humans was none other than Nikola Tesla,

genius of new technologies and wizard of electricity. He was born on 10 July 1856, in the small village of Smiljan, which is in modern-day Croatia. The circumstances of his birth suggest that science was his destiny. He arrived in the world when a great storm was in progress, with lightning forking across the sky. With its blinding, glowing flashes all around him, it is no wonder that he developed a liking for electrical energy.

And it was electric current – of the alternating variety – that would enchant the young Tesla to such a degree that he entered into a fierce, never-resolved dispute with the celebrated inventor and proponent of direct current Thomas Edison, in the famous "War of Currents". Having lost the support of his wealthy scientist benefactor, Tesla struggled to make a living. Alone, all he had, apart from his brilliant ideas, was his love of pigeons, which he fed every day without fail.

Nikola Tesla's torment was at its worst just before his death, when he was confined to his bed, thinking of his beloved pigeons. Who would feed them now that he could no longer stand and open the window, let alone go to the middle of the park and pull from his pockets all the bread he had gathered for his feathered friends?

Nikola Tesla

10 July 1856

7 January 1943

One of the most important electrical engineers the world has ever seen; as the inventor of wireless communication and the AC induction motor, he laid the foundations of modern electrical engineering





The giant soldiers of Prussian King Friedrich

"How sad I feel! Bring me my soldiers – cried Friedrich Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, as he tossed and turned on his couch. A liveried servant bowed and quietly backed out of the room. Before long, a whole regiment of tall, well-built men in beautiful blue uniforms and grenadier hats marched in. From his divan, Friedrich admired them, a smile of pride on his face. How large they were, proper giants! How he wished he could extend his own 5' 5" frame by ten inches or so! But nothing could be done about that – it was God's will that he should be short, and possession of such an exclusive army was splendid compensation for the lack. Each man in the unit before him was at least a head taller than the average. The condition for admission to the group was clear: the smallest of these giants was over 6 feet tall.

Friedrich Wilhelm I – King of Prussia and peacemaker – coddled the soldiers of his super-special army as one would coddle a baby. They were given extra food rations to help them thrive, dressed in uniforms of the finest fabrics, and accommodated in more than luxurious quarters. But as to morale and military discipline, they were less well endowed. Pampering and discipline do not sit well together.

The king's servants travelled throughout his realm in search of men as high-grown as

the tallest pines. Some of the 'chosen ones' went with them voluntarily, happy to give up the trade they had learned, in exchange for a comfortable, privileged life at court as a pet of the king himself – by dint of something ordinary in the extreme, their height.

The taller you were, the more generous your reward – such was King Friedrich Wilhelm I's equation.

If you believe that all big guys were glad of the opportunity to serve in Friedrich's army, you are mistaken, however. The great majority of them were taken from their homes by force; some were even taken captive and borne away. Dressed in blue uniforms against their will, not even the finest fabrics could please them. Boom-ta-ra-ta-boom, boom-boom... March, you dolls, you circus marionettes! March for the greedy king, as you give up your soul and your dreams! As you succumb to comfort and the pride of the chosen!

When Friedrich Wilhelm I, King of Prussia died in 1740, his strangest of all armies numbered 2500 men. His son Friedrich II, known as the Great, did not share his father's hobby. In fact, he considered the giants a band of scroungers. He drafted most of them into active military service. The super-select giants' regiment was formally and definitively disbanded in 1806. Today, maybe their blue uniforms of the finest cloth, with their properly polished buttons, lie folded in an attic somewhere, along with the 18-inch-high grenadier hats. How magnificent those giant soldiers must have looked!

Friedrich Wilhelm I

1688 – 1740

Elector of Brandenburg from the House of Hohenzollern who reigned from 1713 to 1740





Štěpánka Sekaninová


Hobbies and Pleasures of the Famous



There's nothing quite like a hobby to help us forget our worries. Favourite free-time activities do people the world of good – famous, brilliant people as well as the rest of us. Anyone who doubts this should take a look at this book. It is filled with celebrated, highly respected figures, and it introduces us in an engaging way to their hobbies, interests and leisure activities – from the most ordinary to the truly eccentric. What did Albert Einstein or Marie Antoinette do for fun? In addition to thirty-three stories about the hobbies and pastimes of thirty-three famous individuals, this publication contains thirty-three impressive full-page illustrations by Czech and Slovak illustrators, some well known, some just starting out.



ISBN + EAN

 b4u publishing

www.albatrosmedia.eu

© Designed by B4U Publishing,
member of Albatros Media Group, 2020.