

POP!

THE INVENTION OF
BUBBLE GUM

Meghan McCarthy





SIMON & SCHUSTER BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS
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A PAULA WISEMAN BOOK

SIMON & SCHUSTER BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

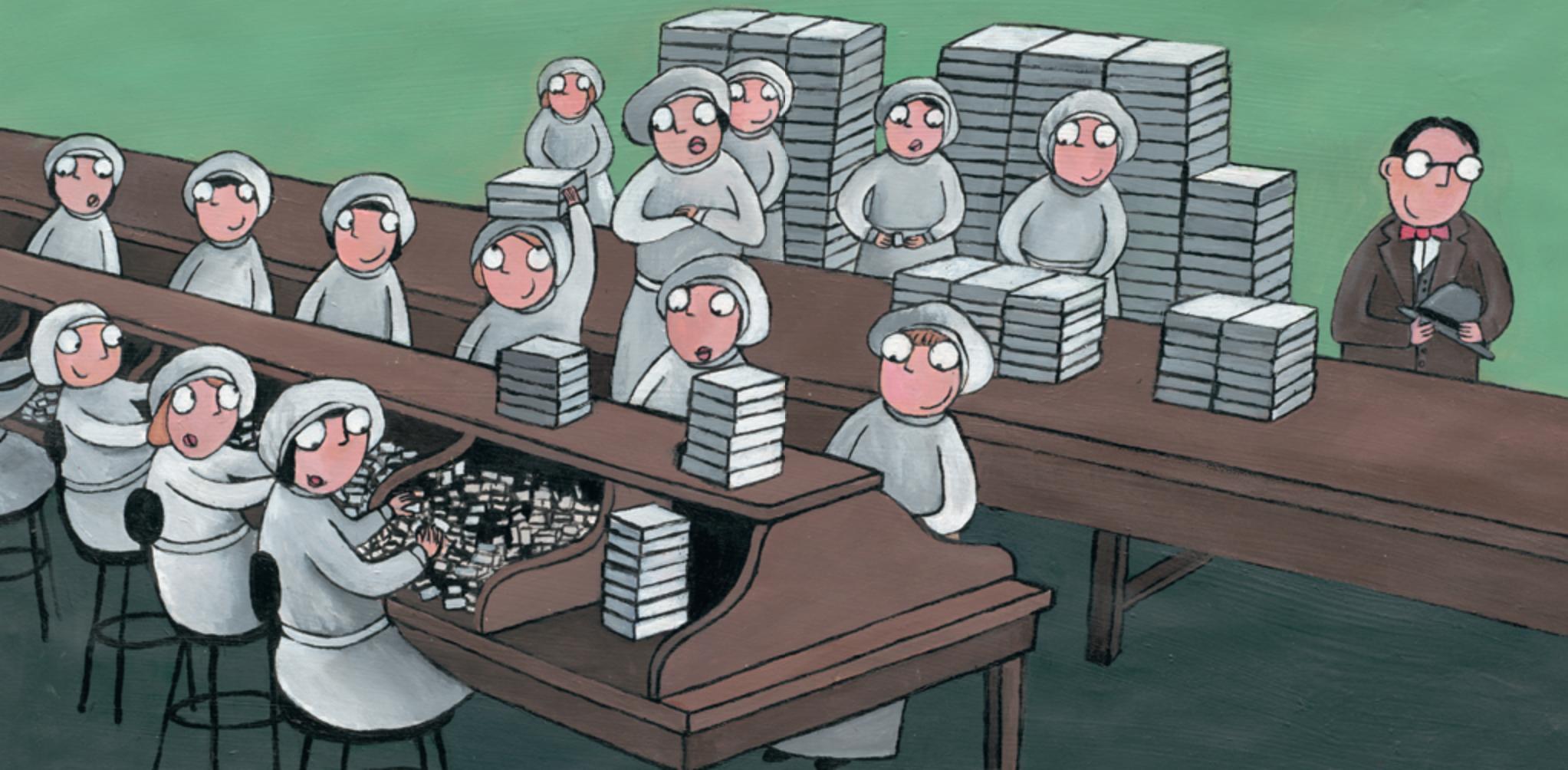
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On a small street in Philadelphia in the 1920s,
there was a factory owned by the Fleer family. . . .



Inside the factory, lots of gum and candy were made. . . .



Working upstairs was a young accountant named Walter Diemer. His job was to add numbers and balance budgets. He knew lots about math but not much about gum.



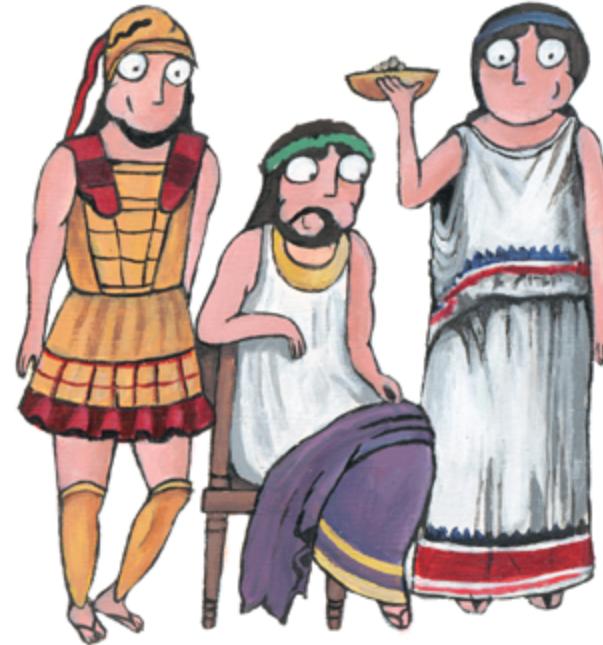
There wasn't enough space in the building,
so a new experimental laboratory was moved
into the office next to Walter's.

In came lots of beakers and pots and tubes!
What could be going on?



The big secret was that the company was trying to make a new kind of gum.

Chewing gum had already been around for centuries—men in top hats and women in puffy dresses chewed gum for fun and to cure things like stomachaches.



The Ancient Greeks chewed the sap of the mastic tree.

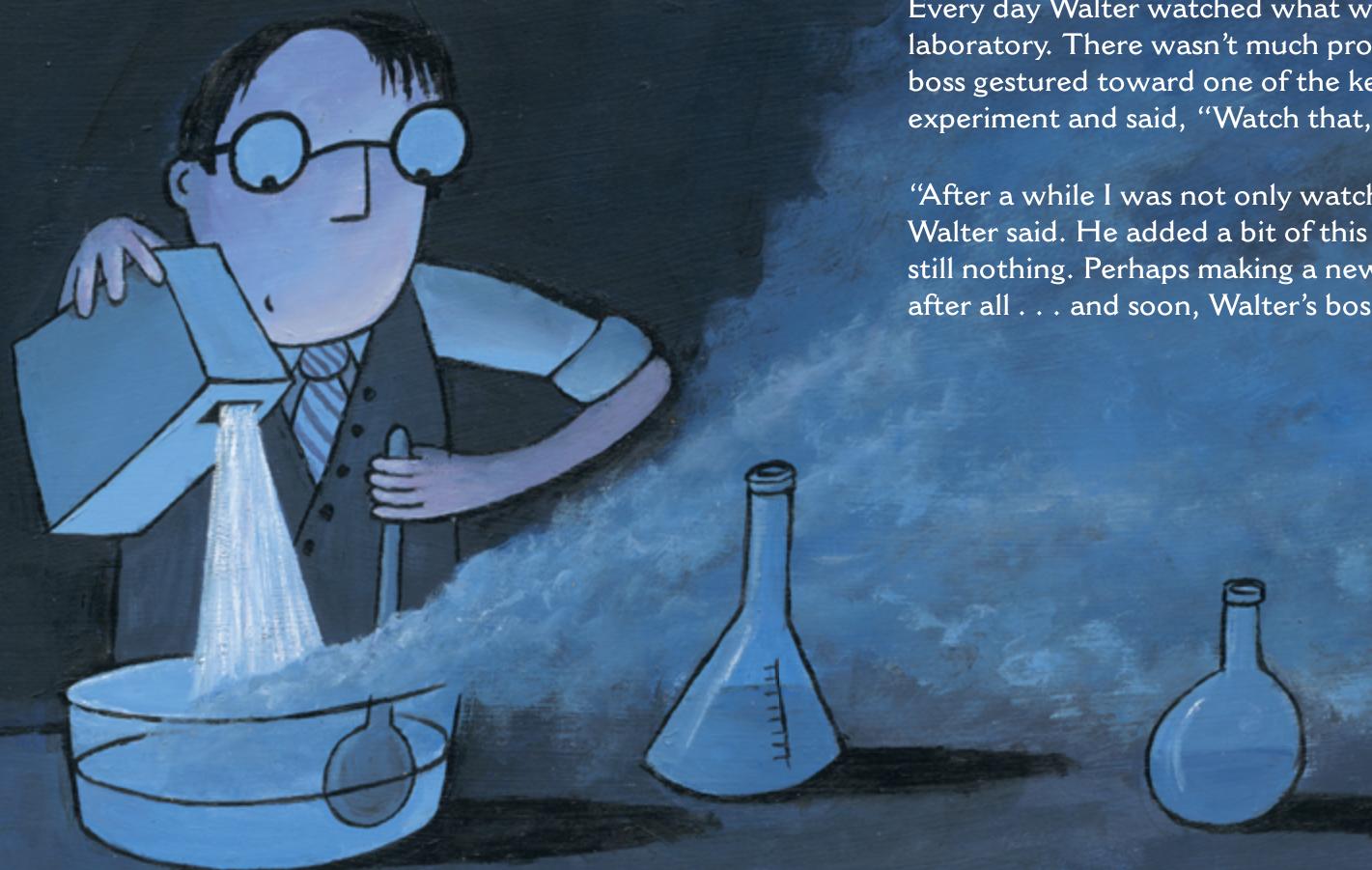


And American Indians introduced early settlers to spruce tree resin, a sticky substance that could be chewed.

Ho hum. Gum wasn't *that* exciting. But what if gum chewers could blow bubbles?

Now that would be something—a world full of bubble gum blowers!





Every day Walter watched what went on inside the laboratory. There wasn't much progress. One day his boss gestured toward one of the kettles containing a gum experiment and said, "Watch that, will you?"

"After a while I was not only watching it, I was doing it," Walter said. He added a bit of this and a bit of that . . . but still nothing. Perhaps making a new gum wasn't possible after all . . . and soon, Walter's boss had given up.



But Walter hadn't. He spent months playing
with different mixtures.

Finally something was happening! Bubbles!
Big, glorious bubbles!

The mixture needed flavor, so Walter added a bit of
cinnamon, a dash of wintergreen, a drop of vanilla . . .

Could this bubbling batch be bubble gum?

Walter put a wad into his mouth and began to chew. When the time was right, he blew a magnificent bubble! "I had it!" Walter said.

Excitedly, he passed out the mixture for his coworkers to try. "We were blowing bubbles and prancing all over the place!"



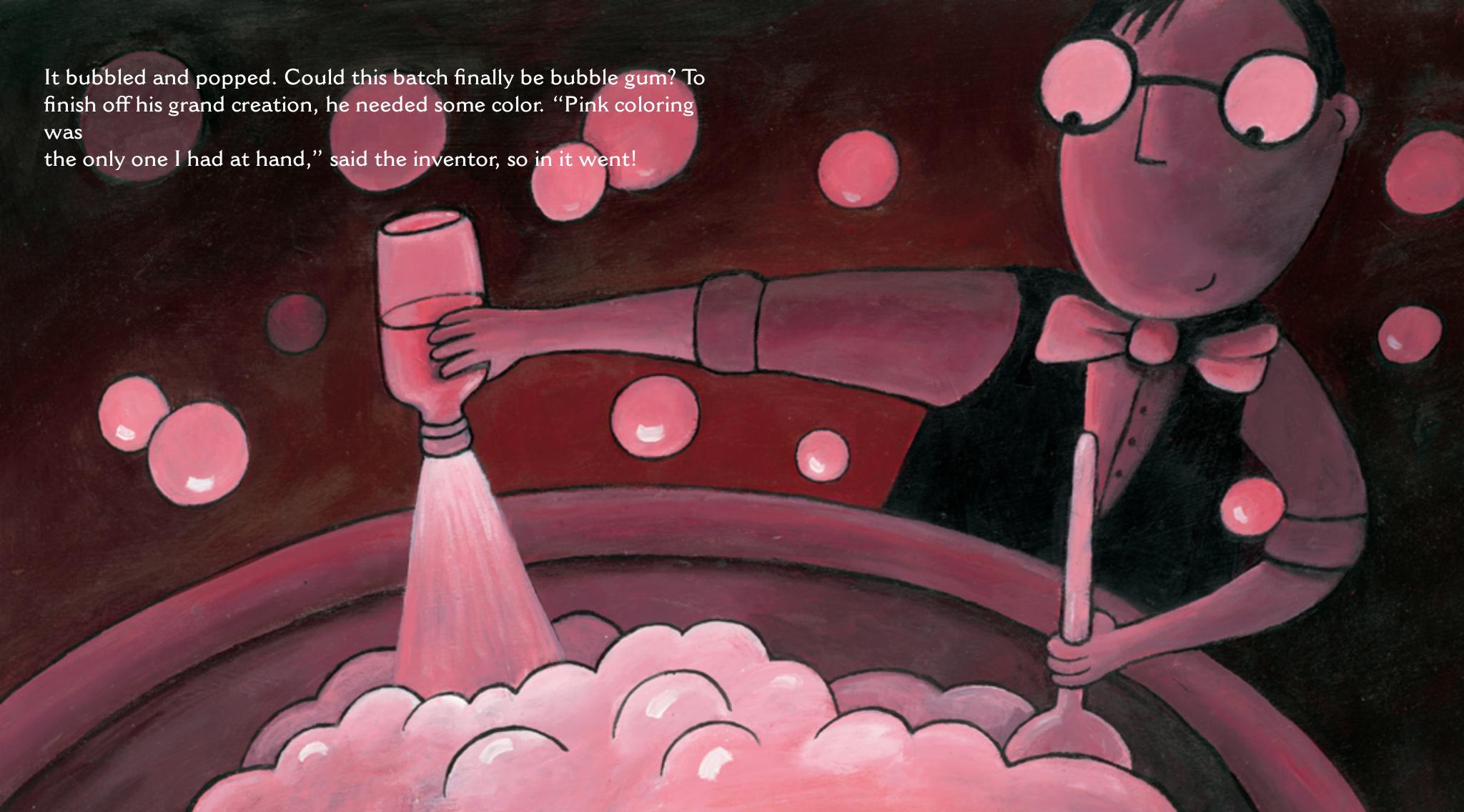


Sadly, the next day the mixture was as hard as a rock.
“It wouldn’t blow a bubble worth a darn.”

But Walter didn’t give up. Back to work he went!
After many more months of adding this and that . . .
(top secret ingredients he would never share!) Walter found
what he was looking for.

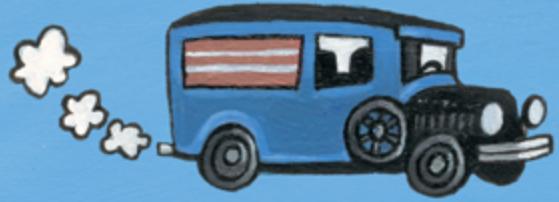


It bubbled and popped. Could this batch finally be bubble gum? To finish off his grand creation, he needed some color. "Pink coloring was the only one I had at hand," said the inventor, so in it went!





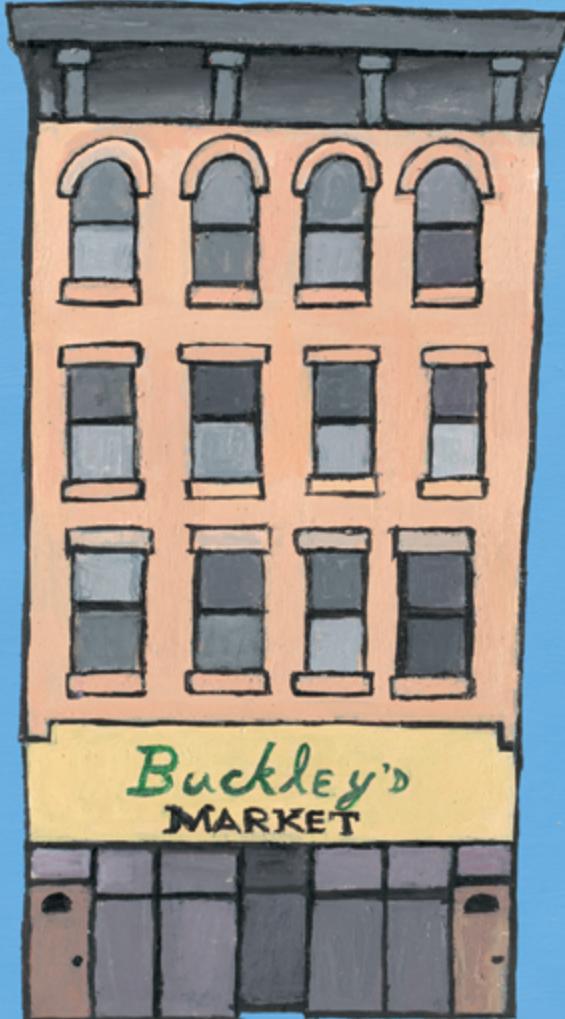
A batch was cut into pieces and five pounds of it was brought to a local mom-and-pop store. It was the day after Christmas, and the kids who came into the store got the present of a lifetime! They were the first people in the world to try a bubble gum that worked. That day Walter gave lessons on how to blow bubbles. Everyone loved bubble gum! "When the kids discovered what it could do, it sold out that afternoon," Walter said.



Walter's Dubble Bubble was such a success
that the Fleer Corporation made
truckloads of delicious bubble gum.



It was delivered to small stores . . .



and big stores alike.



After being promoted to vice president and then later retiring from Fleer, Walter enjoyed the rest of his life in a relaxed manner. He was known to ride around on a giant tricycle, and liked to invite the neighborhood kids over for . . . what else? Gum-blowing contests!



Walter Diemer never got rich from his invention, but he didn't seem to mind. "I've done something with my life," he said. "I've made kids happy around the world."



Walter Diemer: More About the Man Behind Bubble Gum

Not only did Diemer invent something the company had given up on making, but he also helped save the company. The Fleer Corporation, according to Diemer, was failing. "At the Christmas party in 1927, the president told me I probably wouldn't have a job at this time next year because business was so bad." Thanks to Dubble Bubble, it lasted for another seventy years.



In the early twentieth century city kids sold chewing gum and newspapers to help support their families.

Facts About Gum

Who chewed the most gum in 2006? If you voted kids, you'd be wrong. The answer is college-educated women in their thirties. Go figure!

Studies have shown that chewing gum actually helps people concentrate.

If you swallow your gum, it won't stay in your stomach for seven years, as folklore suggests. It ends up in the same place the rest of your food does.

Chewing gum on an airplane will prevent your ears from popping. The more chewing you do, the more saliva you make, and the more you will swallow which causes the pressure in your head to become balanced.

Detectives can find criminals by comparing their chewed gum (an imprint of their teeth is left in it) to their dental records.

If you chew gum nonstop for a year straight you will lose eleven pounds (good luck with that, though!).

Chewing sugarless gum can prevent tooth decay (increasing saliva gets rid of that nasty bacteria, and xylitol found in gum is thought to actually heal cavities).

A new kind of gum is being invented—one that doesn't stick. Professor Cosgrove is a British scientist who works with plastics. After noticing blackened wads of gum on the sidewalks, he thought, "You think perhaps it's pigeon poo." He tested his new invention on some sidewalks in England and found that it rinses off with rainwater.



Quotes in the Book Can Be Found in the Following Books and Articles

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More Facts About Gum

Scientists found a wad of chewed birch resin in Sweden that dates back 9,000 years, to what would be considered caveman days.

Dubble Bubble was included in ration kits for American soldiers serving in World War II.

Gum was rationed during World War II because of a shortage of chicle, Siamese jelutong sap, and sugar. Walter Diemer remembered this, saying, "The government took all the materials used in bubble gum. . . . It almost broke my heart."

Desperate times called for desperate measures. During World War II some kids kept their Dubble Bubble "alive" in glasses of water at night. Some even managed to continue chewing one piece for as long as a month!

Dubble Bubble, although harder and not as flavorful as newer brands, does blow some of the best bubbles. It's recommended that you chew the gum until it loses most of its flavoring, or chew a sugarless brand.

The sugar in the gum makes it harder to blow big bubbles because it doesn't stretch well.

Susan Montgomery Williams of Fresno, California, is the record holder for the largest bubble twenty-three inches.

For more than forty-five years, thousands have stuck chewed gum to the walls of buildings along an alley in San Luis Obispo, California. It's unofficially known as "Bubble Gum Alley." Seattle's Post Alley has been collecting gum deposits since the early nineties.



Post Alley in the Pike's Place Market in Seattle





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