

1972

A LOOK BACK AT AN AMAZING YEAR

From 'Rocket Man' and Watergate to Mr. Coffee and *The Godfather*, many world changers appeared 50 years ago. Here are 50 of them

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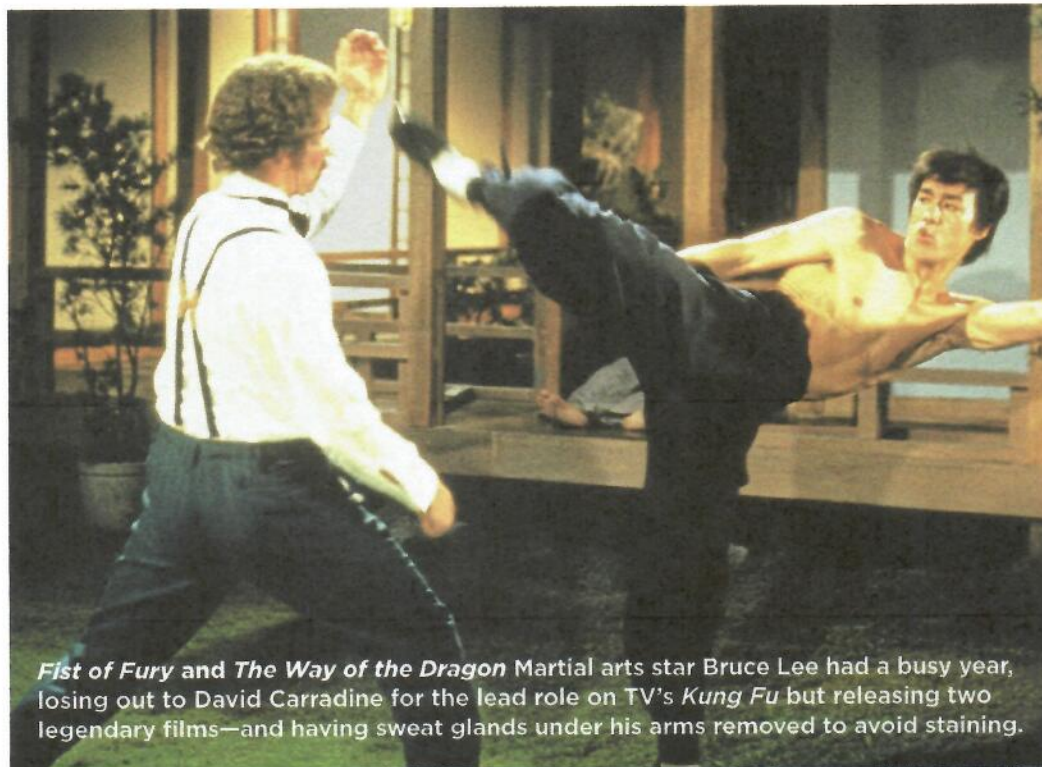
Big Flix



The Godfather Would it still be considered one of the greatest and most influential films ever made if Paramount had had its way and swapped in Robert Redford for Al Pacino (Michael Corleone) and Danny Thomas for Marlon Brando (Vito)?

Deliverance

The song "Dueling Banjos," which soared in the charts after appearing in this dark Burt Reynolds film, was also used on a 1963 episode of *The Andy Griffith Show*.



Fist of Fury and The Way of the Dragon Martial arts star Bruce Lee had a busy year, losing out to David Carradine for the lead role on TV's *Kung Fu* but releasing two legendary films—and having sweat glands under his arms removed to avoid staining.



The Poseidon Adventure Eight years later, Leslie Nielsen would pivot from his dramatic turn as

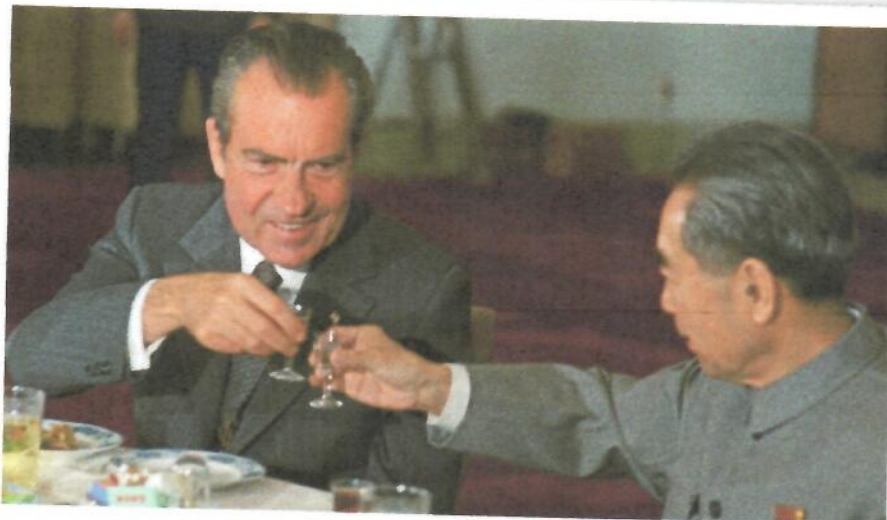
the captain of a capsized ocean liner in this big-hit disaster flick (also featuring Ernest Borgnine and Shelley Winters) to play the hilarious doctor in *Airplane!*



Last Tango in Paris Actress Maria Schneider, then 19, said she was bullied into performing the rape scene with Marlon Brando in this film, which got an X rating yet was compared by an eminent critic to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

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History Got Made



Nixon visits China When Patricia Nixon mentioned to Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, over dinner, that she liked pandas, he sent two to America, starting “panda diplomacy.” Nixon’s return gift? Two musk oxen.



Mark Spitz conquers the Munich Olympics The swimmer not only won all seven gold medals he competed for that year and set a new world record in each event, he also was accepted to dental school.



The Watergate is broken into The perps worked for the aptly named Committee to Re-elect the President, or CREEP.

Wall Streeters Wondering Of Future as Dow Hits 1000

The Dow hits 1,000 It took 76 years, and *The New York Times* likened the number to “the breaking of the four-minute mile and the first moon landing.” (The Dow on March 1, 2022: 33,295.)

American Bobby Fischer beats Russian Boris Spassky

Chess phenom Fischer, far right, went to high school with Barbra Streisand before he dropped out; 13 years later he won a great Cold War victory, ousting world champ Spassky in Iceland to become the first non-Soviet chess champion since 1946.



On the Playlist



‘The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face’ —*Roberta Flack* The biggest song of the year had been recorded by the Kingston Trio, Gordon Lightfoot, and Peter, Paul and Mary.

‘Rocket Man’ —*Elton John* Bernie Taupin based the lyrics on a Ray Bradbury short story about space flight becoming drudgery.

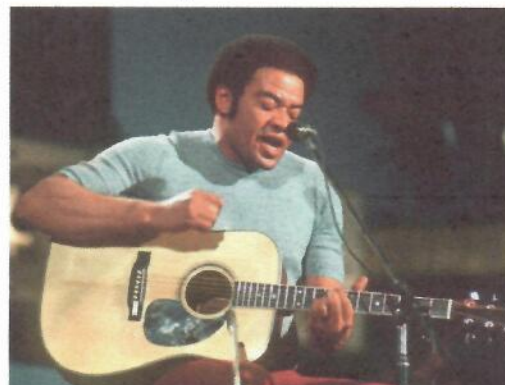


‘I Can See Clearly Now’ —*Johnny Nash* Nash was not, as was widely thought, a reggae singer from Jamaica but a Texan who had performed on Arthur Godfrey’s shows for seven years.

‘Brandy (You’re a Fine Girl)’ —*Looking Glass* In 1971, “Brandy” was the 353rd most popular girl’s name; in 1973, it was 82nd. (See also Kurt Russell’s hilarious send-up of the song in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*.)



‘Lean on Me’ —*Bill Withers* “It’s a rural song that translates across demographic lines,” the West Virginia native once said. His version hit number 1, as would a 1987 dance cover by Club Nouveau. →



TV Debuts



The Waltons President George H.W. Bush said America needs to “make American families a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons,” but John-Boy actor Richard Thomas called the characters foolish and hotheaded.



HBO cable network For the first nine years, until Showtime started to air 24/7, the channel showed only about nine hours of programming a day.

The Bob Newhart Show

Newhart left a successful stand-up career to pursue this sitcom about a shrink with zany clients. “For 12 years I’d been on the road,” he said. “I wanted a normal life where I could be home with my family.”



Sanford and Son The hit comedy show—dubbed *Sanford and Son* after Redd Foxx’s real name, John Sanford—was adapted from a British TV series, *Steptoe and Son*.

Maude A couple of months into this darkly humorous show revolving around a self-described “women’s libber,” Bea Arthur’s 47-year-old character had an abortion (two months before *Roe v. Wade*).



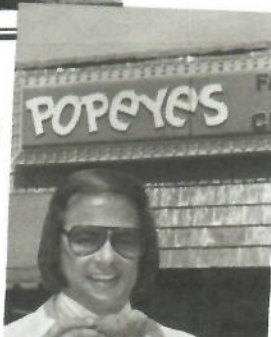
Foodstuffs

Egg Beaters This product—99 percent egg whites in a box—transformed breakfast prep.



Popeyes

Al Copeland founded it in a New Orleans suburb. He joked he was too poor to afford the apostrophe.



Products We Can No Longer Live Without



Honda Civic Soon to be ubiquitous, this tiny auto turned a company known for motorcycles into a car brand. Sales of the reliable, fuel-efficient vehicle spiked as oil prices soared.



Mr. Coffee drip coffee maker In 1973, a company cofounder got Joe DiMaggio’s unlisted San Francisco phone number and convinced him to be the pitchman, despite his taste for Sanka.

Silly String The U.S. Army sprayed this party favorite in Iraq to spot trip wires on explosive devices.

BOGGLE

The game’s creator, Alan Turoff, and his future wife called in an alarm when they spotted smoke at New York City’s FAO Schwarz toy store. They were later married inside the dollhouse there.



CT scanner Thanks to its sales of Beatles records, EMI (Electric and Musical Industries) financed a long-shot research project to develop this brain-imaging device.



Pong Atari created the first hit arcade video game by letting players imagine what it might be like to play table tennis.

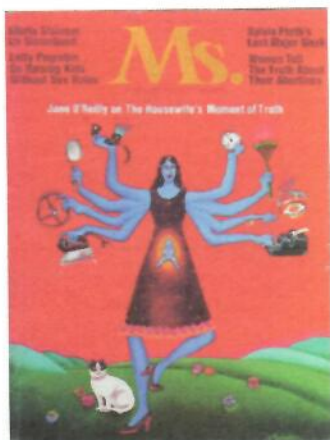


Yellow tennis balls Tournament balls were white until optic yellow was OK’d for play; research showed the bright color was more visible on TV.



Ruby Tuesday Founder Sandy Beall wasn’t a Rolling Stones fan but went with the name after one of his coinvesting college fraternity brothers suggested it.

Culture-Shaping Launches



Ms. magazine Other names Gloria Steinem considered for her *New York* magazine spin-off included *Sisters*, *Sojourner*, *Lilith* and *Bimbo*.

Carnival Cruise Line

The company started with only one ship and enough fuel to make it from Miami to San Juan. But not back.

'A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste'

Vice President Dan Quayle famously mangled this United Negro College Fund slogan while addressing the organization in 1989.



Watership Down Richard Adams, a civil servant with the U.K. Ministry of Housing, made up this ultra-popular story about rabbits for his two daughters while on long family car trips.

ABBA The band was called Björn & Benny, Agnetha & Anni-Frid until they created the acronym (which was also the name of a Swedish canned-fish company).

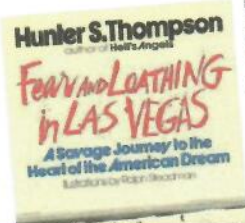
The Joy of Sex

It spent 11 weeks on top of *The New York Times* best seller list (and another 70-plus weeks in the top five). A 2009 review noted that the rather furry illustrated male "bears a side-splitting resemblance to the GEICO caveman."

'I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing' The line from an Alka-Seltzer ad is what Homer Simpson put next to his yearbook photo.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

Hunter S. Thompson's 250-word caption assignment for *Sports Illustrated* was rejected for being too long, then made its way into *Rolling Stone*, a book—and counterculture history.



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The Equal Rights Amendment

Both houses of Congress passed it, but Phyllis Schlafly spent the next 10 years fighting to prevent state legislatures from ratifying it, claiming women would be drafted.

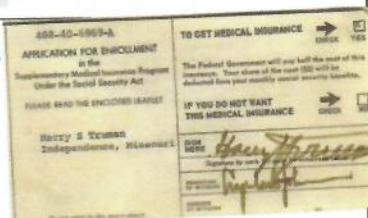
Endings

Apollo program Eugene Cernan, Apollo 17 mission commander, was the last man on the moon.



Bewitched In its eighth season, it was getting crushed in the ratings, running in the same time slot as *All in the Family*, then the most-watched show.

George Carlin's 'Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television' We can't say them here either.



Harry S. Truman A big supporter of Medicare, he was its first enrollee.



J. Edgar Hoover He ran the FBI for 48 years, through eight presidents, from Coolidge through Nixon.

Roberto Clemente His last regular-season at-bat, before his death in a plane crash, resulted in his 3,000th career hit.

Beginnings

Gwyneth Paltrow

Friends call her G.P., which led to the name of her lifestyle company, Goop.



Dwayne Johnson

The Rock's father, wrestler Rocky Johnson, jumped into the ring to defend his son in WrestleMania 13.

Shaquille O'Neal

The likable NBA star has done everything to tout his personal brand, including driving a Zamboni at a New Jersey Devils game.



Cameron Diaz

The actress went to

high school in Long Beach, California, with Snoop Dogg and thinks she may have bought weed from him.

Maya Rudolph

Her parents, Minnie Riperton and Richard Rudolph, wrote the hit song "Lovin' You" in tribute to her.

Did we miss one of your faves from 1972? Let us know what you think at facebook.com/aarp.