



Optimism Backstory

Thomas Alva Edison was born on Feb. 11, 1847 in Milan, Ohio, the youngest of seven children. As a child, Edison had an insatiable curiosity about how things worked and was a voracious reader. He ended up being home schooled when the teacher couldn't handle his curiosity. When he was 11, he decided to read every book in his local library. His parents convinced him to be more selective instead. He was very interested in books on science.

Edison suffered hearing loss due to contracting scarlet fever and possibly being struck by a train conductor in his early teens. He left home to seek his fortune at age 15. He had already trained as a telegraph operator and traveled extensively working in telegraph stations. As he traveled, he began to invent.

He returned home briefly in 1868 and then moved to Boston to work for Western Union for several months. During this time, he met many other inventors and scientists as Boston was considered the hub of the scientific, educational, and cultural universe.

Edison then decided to move to New York City since it was the financial center of the United States. While he was homeless and hungry, Edison fixed a broken stock ticker for a panicked office manager. He was hired on the spot to do more repairs.

In 1877, he patented the first phonograph. He followed that with the development of the first practical incandescent light bulb in 1879, after trying 10,000 times. And if that wasn't enough, in 1884, Edison introduced the world's first economically viable system of centrally generating and distributing electric light, heat, and power. In other words, he developed the first power system that could deliver electricity at reasonable cost throughout a city.

Edison also created the first silent film in 1903 and later worked on combining audio with the silent moving pictures. In all, Edison obtained 1,093 patents. He died on October 18, 1931 at the age of 84. His optimism led him to try new ideas and keep trying despite the odds against him.

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