

# THEODORE ROOSEVELT

AND THE

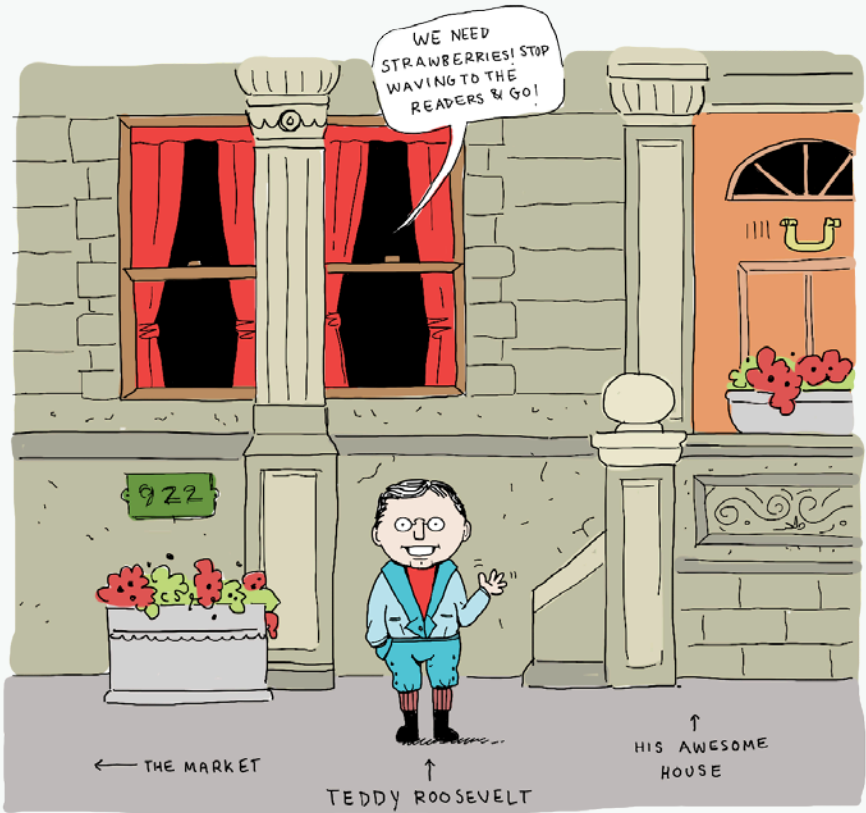
**BROADWAY**

**SEAL**

**BORN 1858**

**N**obody likes doing chores. But even a rich kid like Theodore Roosevelt—known as “Teedie” to his mom and dad—has to run errands sometimes. In Teedie’s case, a simple trip to the market wound up changing his life forever.

Theodore Roosevelt was born into a wealthy family. He grew up in a beautiful brownstone mansion in New York City. One morning when he was about seven years old, Teedie's mother sent him to the market to buy strawberries for breakfast.



On his way up Broadway, the city's main commercial thoroughfare, Teedie pushed his way past hawkers, peddlers, and mongers selling all kinds of fish, meat, fruits, and vegetables.

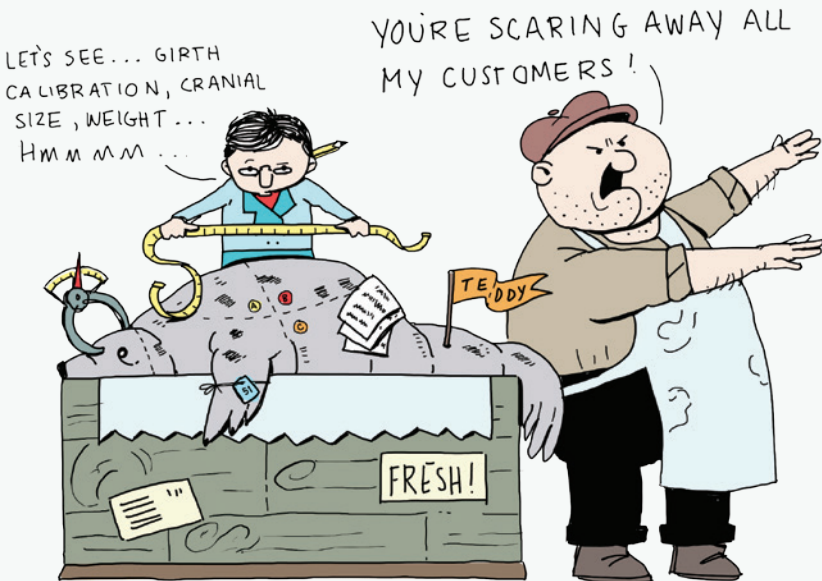


And that's when he saw it. There, stretched out on a plank of wood, was the most mysterious creature Teedie had ever seen—six feet long and weighing nearly three hundred pounds, with a dusty spotted coat that glistened in the morning sun.

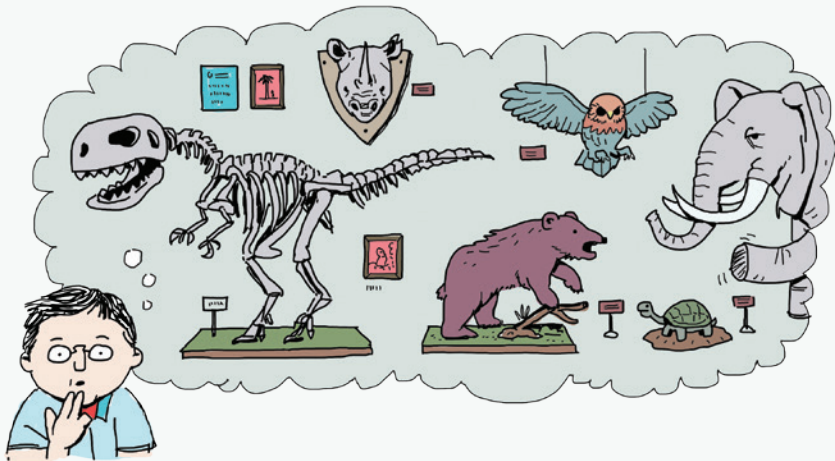


A harbor seal! Teedie was mesmerized. He had never seen anything quite like it. The enormous creature looked like it belonged in the thrilling adventure stories he read at bedtime.

When he returned home that evening, he couldn't stop thinking about it. He wanted to see it again; he wanted to learn all about it. So day after day, Teedie returned to the market to get another look. He brought a folding pocket ruler to measure the seal's length. To calibrate its girth, he had to maneuver the stiff wooden rule awkwardly over the surface of the creature's flabby body. Then he recorded every detail of the seal's anatomy in his notebook.



Teedie wanted to keep the seal for himself. He hoped to display it in a “museum” he was starting with two of his cousins. It would be an amazing museum with all the world’s wonders on display.



But first he needed to convince the fishmonger to give him the seal . . .



Teedie tried and begged and pleaded—but it was no use. The fishmonger refused to give up his prize catch.



And then one morning Teedie returned to the market to find the creature was gone. Some lucky New Yorker would be enjoying seal steaks for dinner that evening (believe it or not, there was a time in New York when people ate seal for dinner).

Teedie was devastated. He couldn't believe that he'd missed his chance. But the fishmonger recognized Teedie and called him over. He said he had a surprise for him. To Teedie's astonishment, the fishmonger reached underneath his table and pulled out the seal's skull.



Teedie was thrilled. The enormous skull was more than mysterious—it was absolutely out of this world! Stripped of its wooly blubber, it resembled the fossilized head of an ancient dinosaur. Who knew seals had fangs?!? It looked ferocious, as if it might bite him at any moment.

The harbor seal skull became the first of many exhibits in the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History, for Teedie made good on his plan to become the world's smallest zoologist. The Roosevelt family's stately home was soon overrun with frogs, snakes, field mice, woodchucks, snapping turtles, and guinea pigs. Inspired by his encounter with the seal, Teedie learned how to skin and mount his animal specimens himself. And just as he did with the seal, he took detailed notes about each new addition. He even catalogued the contents of their stomachs.



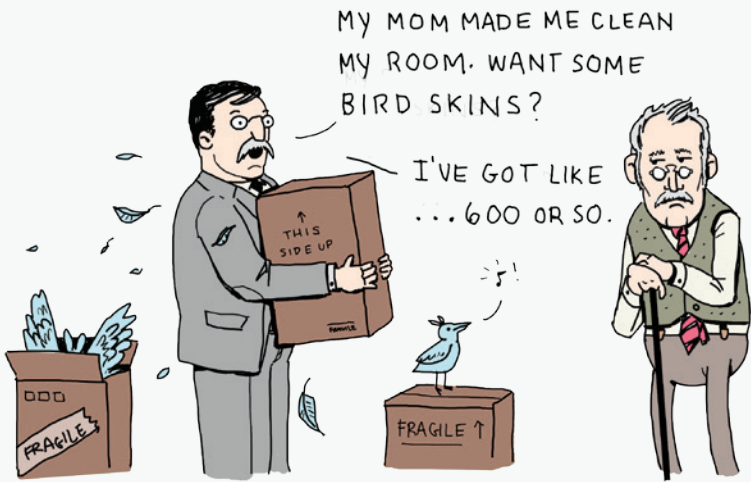
At first, Teedie kept his collection in his bedroom. But when a chambermaid complained about it to his parents, he was forced to move it into a bookcase he kept tucked away in a back hallway.



When Teedie traveled, the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History traveled with him, to the disgust of relatives who found themselves forced to share hotel rooms with tiny Teedie's roving taxidermy lab.

As he grew older, Teedie's collection became too big for him to manage all by himself. When he was twelve, he donated part of it—a dozen mice, a bat, a turtle, four birds' eggs, and the skull of a red squirrel—to the American Museum of Natural History. Eleven years later, he presented 622 meticulously preserved bird skins to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C.





Teddy Roosevelt grew up to be one of America's greatest presidents. But when he left the White House in 1909, he returned to his first love—the study and preservation of animals and their habitats. In recognition of his efforts to save many animals from extinction, several fish and wildlife species—including an especially fearsome variety of elk—bear the scientific name *Roosevelti* in his honor.

