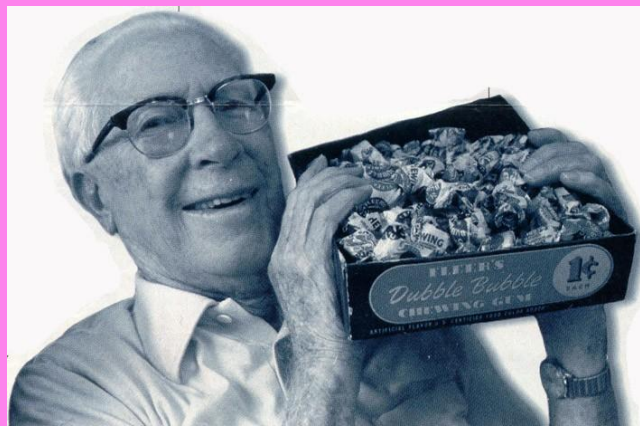


BUBBLE GUM

(1928)

Walter E. Diemer



In 1928, bubble gum was invented by a man named Walter E. Diemer. Here's what Walter Diemer, the inventor himself, said about it just a year or two before he died: "It was an accident." "I was doing something else," Mr. Diemer explained, "and ended up with something with bubbles." And history took one giant pop forward. What Mr. Diemer was supposed to be doing, back in 1928, was working as an accountant for the Fleeer Chewing Gum Company in Philadelphia; what he wound up doing in his spare time was playing around with new gum recipes. But this latest brew of Walter Diemer's was -- unexpectedly, crucially -- different. It was less sticky than regular chewing gum. It also stretched more easily. Walter Diemer, 23 years old, saw the bubbles. He saw the possibilities. One day he carried a five-pound glop of the stuff to a grocery store; it sold out in a single afternoon.

Before long, the folks at Fleeer were marketing Diemer's creation and Diemer himself was teaching cheeky salesmen to blow bubbles, to demonstrate exactly what made this gum different from all other gums. The only food coloring in the factory was pink. Walter used it. That is why most bubble gum today is pink.

Gilbert Mustin, President of Fleeer named the gum Double Bubble and it controlled the bubble-gum market unchallenged for years, at least until Bazooka came along to share the wealth. Walter Diemer stayed with Fleeer for decades, eventually becoming a senior vice president.

He never received royalties for his invention, his wife told the newspapers, but he didn't seem to mind; knowing what he'd created was reward enough. Sometimes he'd invite a bunch of kids to the house and tell them the story of his wonderful, accidental invention. Then he'd hold bubble-blowing contests for them.



Various colors of gumballs.

Bubblegum is available in many colors and flavors. A "bubblegum flavor" is the taste of the unflavored gum, made from chemicals such as ethyl methylphenylglycidate, isoamyl acetate, fruit extracts and others, although the exact ingredients were kept a mystery to customers. When blended, the chemicals and extracts fuse to make a sweet, palatable flavor. Gum with vanilla, coconut, peppermint and almond extracts are available.

Flavors include blue raspberry, strawberry, apple, cherry, watermelon, cinnamon, banana, peppermint, cotton candy and grape of which strawberry and banana can be achieved with ethyl methylphenylglycidate and isoamyl acetate limonene, respectively. Malic acid can be used for apple flavor, allyl hexanoate for pineapple, ethyl propionate for fruit punch, cinnamic aldehyde for cinnamon and acetophenone for cherry. More unusual flavors such as berry, cola, lemon

lime, peach, tropical fruit, pineapple, orange fruit punch can also be found, as well as novelty tastes such as bacon or popcorn.

In taste tests, children tend to prefer strawberry and watermelon flavors, rejecting more complex flavors as they say these make them want to swallow the gum rather than continue chewing.