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Category: Did You Know?

In his memoirs ("At Random") Bennett Cerf, head of Random House, wrote the following about the early fame days of William Saroyan in the '30s:

"Bill had never been east in his life. He came from the great vineyards of Fresno, California. He was a natural, an absolute natural—the cockiest young Armenian that ever lived—and he charmed everybody. He had never been to a show on Broadway, and the first thing we did was take him to the theater because he said he wanted to be a playwright. It was a very amusing evening. The play was "Ceiling Zero" and Osgood Parker was in it, a superb actor, father of Tony Perkins. Those were the early days of flying commercial flying, and the locale of "Ceiling Zero" was an airport. After the first act—it was quite a hit and the lobby was crowded—we walked for a breather, and I said to Bill, "Well, what do you think of a Broadway show?" expecting him to be bowled over. Bill said, "So, that's a Broadway show. For God's sake, I could write a better one than that in twenty-four hours." That was his reaction to the first play he ever saw on Broadway—this hick from the vineyards of Fresno. But he did it! In 1939 he had not one, but two successful plays produced—"My Heart's in the Highlands" and "The Time of Your Life", for which he declined the 1940 Pulitzer Prize. He was an amazing man.

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