

## Editor's notes:

August 2004, Volume 20-11

*"A vacation is having nothing to do and all day to do it in."*

-- Robert Orben

Just in case you need an excuse to take that vacation, consider this: Recent research indicates that taking vacations may prolong your life. Researchers studied more than 12,000 men at high risk for coronary heart disease over a nine-year period. Those who took regular annual vacations had a lower risk of death -- even when the researchers took into account such variables as their social and economic status. In addition to reducing stress, researchers suggest that vacations give people the opportunity to interact with friends and family and to exercise, both of which contribute to good health.

If you're planning a summer driving vacation, you might want to avoid the most dangerous days of the week. According to the United States' National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, most fatal automobile accidents occur on Fridays and Saturdays. The number starts to build on Fridays around 3 p.m., the start of the evening rush hour, and continues until 3 a.m. the following day, when more drivers are likely to be intoxicated. On Saturdays, accidents peak between 6 p.m. and 3 a.m. Sunday. If at all possible, avoid driving through big cities during these periods.

Here are some dates to consider in August:

**Twins Day Festival, August 6-8** -- Twinsburg, Ohio, is host to the Twins Day Festival, held every year on the first full weekend of August. The first festival in 1976 brought 37 sets of twins; today, it attracts more than 3,000 pairs, (the largest annual gathering of twins in the world), as well as parents of twins, triplets, and other multiple births.

Festival highlights include a Double Take Parade featuring identical twins, twin talent shows, a group photo, and many twin contests for things like most look-alike/least look-alike twins. In 1993, the festival hosted its first double wedding of two sets of twins (two brothers marrying two sisters).

**Elvis Week at Graceland, August 7 - 16** -- Thousands of fans will converge on Graceland, Elvis Presley's 14-acre estate in Memphis, Tennessee, during Elvis Week. Since it was opened to the public in 1982, Graceland has become second only to the White House in the number of people who visit it, with 700,000 American and foreign visitors touring the estate each year.

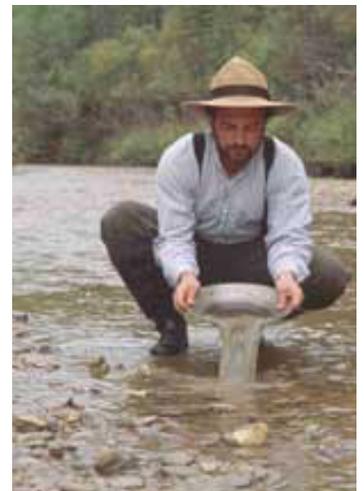


**International Left-hander's Day, August 13** -- This year marks the 28th anniversary of International Lefthander's Day, sponsored by Lefthanders International, a non-profit group that promotes and celebrates the southpaws among us. It estimates that as many as 13 percent of the population is left-handed.

The first International Lefthander's Day was held on a Friday the 13th to make a connection between "bad luck" and being left-handed. According to the group, the Bible makes more than 100 favourable references to the right hand, while it makes 25 negative references to the left hand. "The devil is nearly always portrayed as left-handed, and evil spirits lurk over the left shoulder," L.I. says.

The negative perception of lefties goes back centuries. Ancient Greeks and Romans supposedly wore their wedding rings on the third finger of the left hand to ward off evil associated with that hand. Joan of Arc was portrayed as a left-hander to make her appear villainous. The expression "getting out of bed on the wrong side" is said to have originated with getting out of bed with the left foot first, thus dooming the owner to a day of misfortunes. A left-handed compliment is no compliment at all. Our word "sinister" comes from Latin for "left."

**Yukon Discovery Day, August 18** -- In 1896, gold was found in the Klondike River region of the northwestern Canadian Territory of the Yukon. The local prospectors panned the abundant gold for nearly a year, making themselves "Klondike kings" before word spread. In July of 1897, a steamship from the area arrived in Seattle with more than a ton of gold, and the famous gold rush began. More than 100,000 set out on the arduous journey, but only 30,000 survived the trip, with many dying or turning back.



**Vinegar Day, August 21** -- This day is promoted by Vinegar Connoisseurs International to celebrate the many varieties and uses of vinegar. According to the Vinegar institute, the typical grocery store offers 29 varieties, including cider, balsamic, red wine, and rice. The word vinegar comes from "vinagre," French for "sour wine."

# Did you know . . . ?

## Who invented the telescope?

Hans Lippershey, a Dutch eyeglass maker, is believed to have invented the telescope or, at least, to have been the first to patent a tube between two lenses - one concave and the other convex. His 1608 patent application termed it a "kijker," or "looker" in Dutch. It was described as a "certain device by means of which all things at a very great distance can be seen as if they were nearby." Many sources believe that it was an accidental discovery, with some holding that Lippershey merely looked through two lenses at the same time and realized that the image was magnified three to four times. Others credit children playing in his shop for making the discovery. The Dutch government refused to grant a patent for such a seemingly simple device, arguing that it could not be kept a secret. However, it did commission Lippershey to make several binocular versions and paid him handsomely for them.



## How many words are there in the English language?

Different dictionaries peg the number of words in the English language at between 450,000 to 790,000. Linguists attribute the wide discrepancy to variations in accounting for multiple tenses, pluralizations, and meanings. For example, some dictionaries don't count "person" and "persons" as two separate words, but others do.

More than 750 million speak English, but less than half consider it their native language.

According to Bill Bryson, author of *The Mother Tongue*, there are 200,000 English words in common usage, which is more than German at 185,000 and French at less than 100,000. Bryson contends that William Shakespeare used a vocabulary of only 33,000 words. Other linguists say that the average person knows about 20,000 words and uses 2,000 different words in any given week. Still others assert that most people have learned 60,000 words by the time they reach 18, for an average of 10 new words a day from the first birthday on.

## How Hurricanes are named?

For hundreds of years, hurricanes in the West Indies were named after the saint's day on which they occurred. In the late 19th century, an Australian meteorologist, Clement Wragge, began giving women's names to tropical storms, deeming them appropriate for these unpredictable and dangerous occurrences. The U.S. National Weather Service, which tracks hurricanes and issues warnings and watches, began using female names for storms in 1953. By the late 1970s, as the growing number of women meteorologists raised the consciousness of the field, NWS began to alternate women's and men's names.

Hurricanes are named in alphabetical order, omitting Q, U, and Z. Storms in the Atlantic may be named in English, French, or Spanish. The World Meteorological Association uses six lists of names in rotation, repeating each list every six years. However, sometimes a hurricane is so deadly or costly that its name is retired (such as hurricane Andrew, retired in 1992; Hugo, 1989; Mitch, 1998; and Lili in 2002).

## The Tradition of Birthday Cake Candles?

Many historians believe that the custom of putting candles on a birthday cake dates back to ancient Greeks who celebrated their birthdays around full moons (because few people then knew their actual birth date). They would bake a cake in honour of the moon goddess, Artemis. They put candles on the cake to make it appear glowing, like a full moon.

Others believe the German candle-makers began the tradition, with cake candles having a religious meaning, perhaps symbolizing faith as the "light of one's life."

Some historians credit Galileo Galilei for inventing the telescope, and there is evidence that he introduced a telescope similar to a pair of opera glasses in 1609, which could magnify images up to 30 times. Today, the Hubble Space Telescope, which is more than 43-feet long (about the size of a tractor trailer) can enlarge images up to 8,000 times.



## How the 'Wiz' got his name?



This month marks the 65th anniversary of the classic movie *The Wizard of Oz*. The film, based on the book by L. Frank Baum, was published in 1900. Did you know that . . . Baum came up with

the name "Oz" from a drawer on his filing cabinet marked O-Z.

Producers considered casting Shirley Temple as Dorothy, fearing that Judy Garland at 16 might not be experienced enough.

Buddy Ebsen was originally set to play the role of the Tinman, but developed a serious allergy to the silvery makeup and was hospitalized for two weeks. Jack Haley was cast instead.

The film won the Oscar in 1940 for best score and best original song ("Over the Rainbow"). Judy Garland was given a special Academy Award for Best Juvenile Performance.