

Editor's notes:

*The quiet August noon has come;
A slumberous silence fills the sky,
The fields are still, the woods are dumb,
In glassy sleep the waters lie.*

-- William Cullen Bryant

The "lazy, hazy days" of August shouldn't stop us from celebrating some of these dates this month:

Civic Holiday, August 8 -- In 1871, Sir John Lubbock, a member of Britain's House of Commons, declared that an August holiday in Canada would be "advisable and satisfactory," given the warm weather. This paid vacation day is celebrated in all but three of the country's provinces.

Elvis Week, August 8-16 -- Every year, thousands of Elvis Presley fans flock to Memphis, Tennessee, to visit Graceland, view Elvis movies, and attend commemorative concerts. This year, they can also visit Lauderdale Courts, the apartment complex where Elvis lived as a teenager with his parents. He practiced guitar in the basement laundry room and gave performances in the courtyard for family and friends. The complex was scheduled for demolition in the mid-1990s, but preservation organizations fought to put it on the National Register of Historic Places. The complex has now been renamed Uptown Square, and Presley's apartment #238 has been restored to reflect the lifestyle of the early 1950s.

Perseid Meteor Showers, August 9-13 -- Each year, Earth passes through a stream of debris left behind by the comet Swift-Tuttle, which makes a swing around the sun every 130 years or so before returning to deep space. The leftover particles burn up in the earth's atmosphere and produce meteors, commonly known as shooting stars. The Perseid meteor showers (so called because the streaks of light appear to come from the constellation Perseus) will be raining down from August 9-13. Lie back, look up, and enjoy the best shows between 2 a.m. and dawn.

Yukon Discovery Day, August 18 -- In 1896, gold was found in the Klondike River region 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.

I love mankind. It's the people I can't stand.

-- Charles Schulz

Vesuvius Day, August 24 -- This day memorializes the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE in Italy, which buried the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Mt. Vesuvius is the only active volcano on the European mainland and has since had multiple eruptions, killing thousands.

'Mucho grande' Food Fight, August 27 -- Every year on the last Wednesday in August, Bunol, Spain, hosts La Tomatin, the world's biggest food fight. More than 20,000 participants from around the world take part in a week-long celebration -- and throw more than 90,000 pounds of tomatoes at one another. The tradition began on a day in the 1940s, when a group of friends began pelting each other with the fruit. Passers-by joined in, and, before long, much of the town as well. They had so much fun that the food fight became an annual affair. Today, the main event is preceded by a week of fireworks, parades, food, and street parties. On the final day of the festival, large tomato-laden trucks roll into town, and "officials" begin the pelting, setting the stage for a free-for-all. It takes about a half-hour to run through 150,000 tomatoes.

Summer Treat

According to the American National Watermelon Promotion Board, this tasty fruit probably originated in the Kalahari Desert of Africa. Egyptian hieroglyphics depicted the first watermelon harvest nearly 5,000 years ago, and watermelons were often placed in burial tombs to nourish rulers in the afterlife. By the 10th century, watermelon cultivation had spread to China, which is now the world's largest producer. The fruit made its way to the New World with African slaves. Today, watermelon is grown in 96 countries. By weight, it is the most-consumed melon in the United States, which produced more than 4 billion pounds in 2001.

Put Your Feet Up

If your job requires sitting at a desk for hours and you suffer from neck or back pain, get yourself a footrest. "When you're sitting, you want your feet firmly supported either on the floor or on a footrest," says Anne Kramer, president of Ergo Works, an ergonomic consulting firm. "If you have to elevate your chair to get the right working height and your feet don't touch the floor, then you need a footrest. Otherwise, your feet dangle, putting pressure on your thighs and negatively impacting blood circulation. Also, a footrest helps you push yourself back into the chair and encourages better seating posture."

Kramer prefers a gliding footrest that rocks back and forth and also recommends finding one that permits vertical heights as well as angle adjustment.

The Great Wall of China

Deemed one of the great wonders of the world and an engineering marvel, historians believe that construction of the Great Wall of China began in the 7th century, with individual parts of the country constructing their own walls for defense and protection against marauding tribes from the north. After the state of Chin unified with China in 221 B.C., the walls were joined and extended for a total of 4,500 miles. The wall was constantly being rebuilt over 1,000 years; it runs east to west from the Korean mountains to the Gobi desert. The average height is 25 feet; the average width is 16 feet. Early construction of the wall, built from masonry, rocks and packed earth -- proceeded at a rate of one mile a day. Today, erosion and vandalism has reduced the existing wall to roughly 3,500 miles. Although many believe it is the only man-made structure visible from space, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration disagrees, pointing out that many buildings are visible from orbit. From the moon, no man-made structures are visible and even the continents are difficult to make out.

Why eating Ice Cream is such a treat!

Ever wonder why you see people smiling when they're eating ice cream? Nutritionists have found that ingesting the milk sugar in ice cream triggers the release of endorphins, which are naturally occurring chemical compounds in the brain that foster a sense of well being. If you're having a tough day and craving ice cream, Elizabeth Somers, a registered dietitian, says it doesn't take much to release endorphins and suggests making it a special ritual: "Instead of eating half a gallon of ice cream in front of the freezer, spoon some out into a nice bowl, sit in your favourite chair, eat slowly, and savour each bite."

The History of the Good Humor Bar

In 1920, confectioner Harry Burt created a lollypop called the Jolly Boy Sucker, which he sold in his ice cream parlour in Youngstown, Ohio. Later that year, he developed a chocolate coating for blocks of ice cream, a concoction that was delicious but messy to eat. Burt's young son suggested freezing a lollypop stick into the ice cream -- giving the world the first Good Humor bar. The name came from a belief that a person's temperament, or humor, was related to his or her sense of taste. Burt peddled his new ice cream treat from a fleet of as many as 12 trucks that made door-to-door deliveries and used bells to summon ice cream lovers. In 1930, Burt sold the national rights, which in 1961 were acquired by the Thomas J. Lipton Co., which built its truck fleet to 200. In 1976, Good Humor trucks were phased out in favour of sales through grocery stores. The few Good Humor trucks that remain on the streets today are owned by ice cream distributors or private individuals.

Common Nightmares

If you're like most people, your nightmares have recurring themes. Some of the most common:

- Being chased by a monster;
- Appearing naked in public;
- Falling through space;
- Losing something valuable;
- Being unprepared for a big test or challenge.

Children, especially those between the ages of three and six, have nightmares more frequently than adults, according to the Centre for Sleep and Dream Studies in Ottawa. Women tend to have twice as many nightmares as men, and as many as four times the number by some estimates. Having a nightmare once a week is considered normal.

Overcoming Writer's Block

If you find yourself having trouble writing, take this advice from novelist Anne Lamott and others:

1. Write your initial thoughts down on paper without worrying whether they are complete or perfect. Accept the fact that most first drafts are rough.
2. Write a second draft, fixing errors and clarifying your points.
3. If necessary, write a third draft to redefine your wording and to tighten your message.

Positive Gossip

Bob Nelson, author of 1001 Ways to Energize Employees, says spreading positive gossip at work can have a ripple effect of boosting morale and decreasing negativity. What is positive gossip? "It's the behind-the-scenes information you bring up or pass on to others intended to raise someone's credibility. It's mentioning the great job someone did when that person is not around. It's sharing tidbits of someone's experience or qualifications that you are privy to or passing on positive words that you hear about someone in the work place."

Happy Birthday to Us!

On September 4, 2005,
Helix will be 37 years old.

Thank you for your
part in keeping us #1
for so many years.

