

Editor's notes:

Summer afternoon . . . the two most beautiful words in the English language.

-- Henry James

And since there's nothing more to add to those pithy words we move on to the origin of the word 'August.' August was named to honour the first Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar, who lengthened the month to 31 days by taking a day from February.

Here are some dates of interest to consider this month:

Civic Holiday, August 2 -- The first Monday in August is observed by the government as a holiday in seven of Canada's provinces. For most of us it's a lovely long weekend.

International Beer Day, August 5 -- First celebrated in 2007. The three basic principles of International Beer Day: Drink beer, gather with friends, and enjoy yourself.

Halfway point of summer, August 7 -- Only 46 days left until September 23, the autumnal equinox and the start of autumn.

International Mustard Day, August 7 -- Don't be shy about slathering this condiment on hot dogs or hamburgers or any other foods. Nutritionally, a gram of mustard has a mere four calories, no cholesterol, trace amounts of vegetable fat, and is around 30 percent protein. Mustard contains calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, and Vitamin B. It stimulates the appetite and digestion and clears the sinuses.

Mustard plasters are a time-honoured treatment for chest congestion, increasing blood flow to inflamed areas so that your natural healing processes can be more effective.

V-J Day, August 14 -- On this date in 1945, President Truman announced that Japan had surrendered to Allied forces, bringing World War II to an end.

Elvis Week, August 10-16 -- Celebrating the life of the American rock and roll icon, this Memphis event includes a Graceland Trivia Tour, youth karaoke, and, of course, lots and lots of Elvis tribute artists.

International Left-hander Day, August 13 -- The Left-Handers Club initiated this celebration of sinistrality in 1992 to increase public awareness of the benefits and disadvantages of being left-handed.

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Sleep: Get the right amount

Not getting enough sleep won't just make you tired and cranky. It may kill you prematurely, according to researchers at Warwick University.

The study, which tracked more than 1.3 million people for as long as 25 years, found that people who sleep for less than six hours a night were 12 percent more likely to die prematurely than those who get the recommended six to eight hours of shuteye.

On the other hand, sleeping too much isn't necessarily healthy either. Sleeping more than nine hours a night doesn't seem to increase risk of death by itself, but the researchers found excessive sleeping patterns to be a significant marker of serious illness.

Left-Handers Day, August 13

For thousands of years, left-handedness was associated with the devil, and lefties were shunned or forced to make their right hands dominant. One example: the word "sinister" stems from the Latin root for "left." (By contrast, the word "dexterity" comes from the Latin root for "right.") Today there is less prejudice, but being left-handed can still be a challenge because most tools, office equipment, and household items are designed for right-handers. In 1990, the Left-Handers Club was formed in Britain to encourage the manufacture of more left-handed products, keep members in touch with new developments, and support research into left-handedness. In 1992, the club launched International Left-Handers Day to increase public awareness of this characteristic. Recent studies estimate that between 12 and 15 percent of the population is left-handed.

Do You Know the Way to Cathay?

Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain on August 3, 1492. He sailed for the eastern empire of Cathay with three ships, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria and crews totaling 90. Instead of Cathay, Columbus discovered the "new world of the Americas" on October 12 when he landed on Guanahani (now San Salvador) in the Bahamas.

Columbus, like many explorers of the time, was sure that one could reach land by sailing west from Europe.

This month's moment of reflection is provided by Groucho Marx who once said:

"politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies."

Exercise your brain for inspiration

You can't turn on creativity like starting a car, but you can't always sit around and wait for inspiration to strike either. You have to cultivate creativity on an ongoing basis. Here are some ideas:

Keep a journal. Record ideas as soon as they come to you by keeping a notebook close at hand all the time. A real notebook, not a digital one, is best, allowing you to make sketches and drawings, but anything that lets you capture your thoughts will work. When you need to charge up your creativity, search your notebook for ideas and examples.

Relax your mind. Give your subconscious a chance to work by turning your brain off from time to time. Don't focus on work or solving problems constantly. Take time to exercise and relax, and give yourself permission to think about other things. A tired mind won't generate fresh ideas.

Turn problems around. Switch gears by looking for the opposite of what you want. Exploring how you could make a bad situation worse can sometimes tell you what not to do. Looking for a bad idea may lead you to a good one.

Combine random elements. Try this exercise: Look at two items on your desk right now and figure out a way to put them together. A clock radio and a coffee mug, for instance, could be turned into a coffee mug with a clock on it (maybe at the bottom). This won't necessarily generate a useful idea, but it will train your mind to see different possibilities.

Recruit a partner. With another person involved, you're not limited to your own experience and perspective. Bounce ideas off another person -- someone you're comfortable with, but someone who will challenge you when necessary.

Words to play with

Can you match these August hot-weather words with their meanings?

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| 1. <i>Torrid</i> | A. <i>Thundercloud</i> |
| 2. <i>Sultry</i> | B. <i>Sun worshipper</i> |
| 3. <i>Cumulonimbus</i> | C. <i>Hot</i> |
| 4. <i>Bask</i> | D. <i>Humid; muggy</i> |
| 5. <i>Heliolater</i> | E. <i>Expose yourself to pleasant warmth</i> |

Answers: 1C; 2D; 3A; 4E; 5B

And some more lingo. . .

Match the word or phrase to the definition also to the industry it's used in:

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| 1. <i>Baby bond</i> | A) <i>Throw it out.</i> |
| 2. <i>86 it</i> | B) <i>The rate at which data travels along a path connecting internal parts of a computer or to external devices.</i> |
| 3. <i>Red eye</i> | C) <i>Bond with a denomination of less than \$1,000.</i> |
| 4. <i>Backdoor pilot</i> | D) <i>Overnight flight</i> |
| 5. <i>Bus Speed</i> | E) <i>A pilot episode of a TV show filmed as a stand-alone movie in case it's not picked up as a series.</i> |
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| 1. <i>Restaurant business</i> |
| 2. <i>Entertainment business</i> |
| 3. <i>Airline industry</i> |
| 4. <i>Wall Street</i> |
| 5. <i>Computer industry</i> |

Answers: 1C4; 2A1; 3D3; 4E2; 5B5

Anniversary of the Opening of the Panama Canal, August 15, 1914

Sixteenth century Spanish explorers appreciated the value of a waterway across the 50-mile isthmus, but digging a canal was beyond their capabilities; instead, they paved mule trails with cobblestones to carry gold across the isthmus to transport it from Peru to Spain. In 1880, French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had successfully built the Suez Canal in Egypt, proposed digging a sea level canal. But the project suffered from lack of funds and was greatly impeded by the death of tens of thousands of workers from mud slides and yellow fever. In 1889, de Lessep's company was liquidated, and the French government dropped the undertaking.

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt began negotiations for the United States to buy the French canal property and equipment. The following year, the United States paid Panama \$10 million for the canal zone and rights to build. Work began in 1904, but the American effort ran into the same problems of engineering and disease. Dr. William Gorgas made the connection between mosquitos and yellow fever and succeeded in eradicating it by the end of 1905. American engineers opted for a lock system rather than a sea level canal, which made construction feasible. It took 10 years, the labour of 75,000 men, and almost \$400 million to complete the job.

A ship traveling from New York City to San Francisco can save 7,872 miles using the Panama Canal. Since its opening, the canal has seen more than 800,000 transits.

Currently, the Panama Canal is undergoing a multi-billion dollar widening and dredging, to make it easier for super-sized container ships and tankers to pass through.

Sieg Pedde, owner of Helix Courier Limited, is head of a residential development in Panama, called Roca Milagro, near the Costa Rican border and the famous retirement town of Boquete. Check it out: www.rocamilagro.com. If you would like information, please call Sieg at his Helix office, 519-453-0501, or email him at spedde@rocamilagro.com.