

Editor's notes:

May 2007, Volume 22-9

The origin of this month's name dates back to the Latin words "Maius" and "Maiia" -- Roman male and female deities representing magnitude or bigness, possibly a reference to the prime growing season for plants and spring-born animals in the northern hemisphere.

This month is chock full of important dates to consider. Here are a few:

May Day, May 1 -- May Day, the first of May was in olden times a date to mark the transition from the colder to the warmer season and has been observed for centuries in various ways.

The most famous May Day tradition: putting up a May pole, originally a live tree brought to the village to commemorate the beginning of summer. Townspeople would also forage in the woods for greenery to decorate their homes.

American folklore added a twist to it: girls in the Ozarks believed if they washed their faces in the May Day dew, they would grow up to marry the man of their dreams.

Today, many European countries officially recognize the day as a worker's day and have designated it a legal holiday.

Robert's Rules Day, May 2 -- This day celebrates the 1837 anniversary of the birth of Henry Robert, author of *Robert's Rules of Order*, the widely used procedures for deliberative assemblies. Robert was a U.S. Army major when, in 1863, he was asked to preside over a church meeting. Embarrassed by his poor performance at leading the meeting, he determined to learn more about parliamentary law. Robert's subsequent exposure to disorganized meetings of various groups convinced him of the need for a manual on parliamentary procedure. He published the first edition in 1876 using rules that were loosely based on those used in the House of Representatives with adaptations for ordinary meetings.

Kentucky Derby, May 5 -- The 133rd running of the most famous horse race takes place on the first Saturday in May. The Kentucky Derby is the first "jewel" in the Triple Crown of horse racing -- the other two are the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes.

Cinco de Mayo, May 5 -- According to Pace Foods, more salsa is sold in May in North America than any other month because of the amount consumed during the celebration of Cinco de Mayo, a Mexican holiday observed on May 5th. Salsa overtook ketchup as America's best-selling condiment in the mid-1990s, with annual sales of \$700 million.

Salsa, which is Spanish for "sauce," dates back to the ancient Aztecs of Mexico who cultivated tomato and pepper plants. The Spanish explorers relished the tasty dish. The Royal

Spanish Academy Dictionary defines it as a "mixture of several edible substances, diluted, made to dress or season food."

V-E Day, May 8 -- Victory in Europe Day, May 8 -- This day commemorates the unconditional surrender of Germany to Allied forces in 1945. The surrender document was signed at General Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters at Reims, effective at one minute past midnight on May 9, 1945, with hostilities ending at that time. A separate German surrender to the USSR was signed at Karlshorst, near Berlin, on May 8.

Limerick Day, May 12 -- This day, which honours one of the verse forms indigenous to the English language, is observed on the birthday of English limerick writer, Edward Lear.

Traditional limericks are five lines of rhyming verse:

*There was a young poet named Lear
Who said, it is just as I fear
Five lines are enough
For this kind of stuff
Make a limerick each day of the year*

Mother's Day, May 13 -- A very special day to honour the mothers in your life. Mother's Day celebrations can be traced back to the time of the ancient Greeks who feted Rhea, the mother of the gods and goddesses.

Canadian Tulip Festival, May 4-21 -- Ottawa is host to the largest tulip festival in North America with three million blooms. The event grew out of a thank you gift of 100,000 bulbs from the Dutch Royal Family who were exiled to Canada during War World II.

More than half a million people attend the annual event, which features decorated floats, parades, floral sculptures and fireworks.

Victoria Day, May 21 -- This year marks the 50th anniversary of Canada's permanent appointment of Victoria Day as the Queen's birthday. Celebrated each year on the Monday preceding May 25th, this holiday -- which originally celebrated the birthday of England's Queen Victoria -- is now a celebration of the birthday of the reigning Queen. Prior to 1957, the monarch's birthday was celebrated on a variety of dates, often unrelated to the actual birthdate.

World Turtle Day, May 23 -- American Tortoise Rescue, a conservation group, founded this day in 2000 to bring attention to the plight of turtles, whose numbers are dwindling due to fishing operations, pollution, and development. If you see a turtle crossing the road, stop and move it safely in the direction it was going.

The Custom of Shaking Hands

The first written record of the practice of shaking hands dates back to 2800 B.C. in ancient Egypt, but historians believe the custom could be older than that. They speculate that extending an open, outreaching right hand, demonstrated that a person was not holding a sword; over time, the gesture came to be viewed as a greeting of peace and acceptance.

The Purpose of Eyebrows

While a raised or lowered eyebrow can speak volumes in non-verbal communication, anthropologists believe that they were key to primitive man's survival. The arched shape diverts rain and sweat to the sides of the face. Both of these liquids could blur vision and impede an escape from predators.

The Value of Reciting Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes have delighted parents and children for decades, and it turns out they are educational as well as fun. According to the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, reciting nursery rhymes to children teaches them the rhythm of speech and helps them become aware of the syllables and sounds that form words. It draws attention to the grammatical structure of language and helps children learn to pronounce consonants clearly.

Clinking Glasses Explained

When you sit down to a meal, you can see, taste, and feel the texture of the food; but you can't hear it. That's why ancient Greeks clinked their glasses in a toast -- to round out the sensory enjoyment of a meal.

Picnic Time

The word "picnic" comes from a 17th century French phrase "pique nique," with the first part meaning "to peck" and the latter being a silly rhyming accompaniment. It meant "pot-luck" or a meal in which everyone contributed a dish. The French and English aristocracy of the 18th century used to host elaborate indoor "picnics" complete with servants, tables, chairs, fine linens, china, and crystal. The notion of an outdoor meal didn't take hold until the 19th century.

Mayflowers

In England, hawthorn blossoms are called mayflowers because their beautiful pink or white flowers appear in May. The hawthorn tree can grow as tall as 30 feet, and its wood is prized for its lovely finish.

Bright red hawthorn berries, which ripen in the fall, are used in cooking and are a source of vitamin C, the B vitamins, and bioflavonoids. Hawthorn berry juice has been used as a tonic since the first century B.C.E. in ancient Greece. The Romans and Greeks thought of the hawthorn as a symbol of love and marriage, and the Romans used it to ward off evil spirits.

The Word on Hummingbirds

May is the month that many species of hummingbird complete their migration back to the United States and southern Canada after wintering in Central America. When Spanish explorers first encountered the birds, they called them "Joyas voladoras," or "flying jewels"; the Portuguese called them "flower kissers."

In English, these birds are called hummingbirds because their wings beat so fast (75 to 200 beats per second) that they create a humming sound. Hummingbirds, found only in the Western Hemisphere, can be as small as two inches in length and weigh six one-hundredth of an ounce, although some large species in the Andes can reach 8 1/2 inches and weigh half an ounce. A hummingbird's heart beats 1,260 times per minute during the day and slows to 50 beats at night. Hummingbirds eat flies and other small insects as well as nectar, and must consume up to three times their body weight each day. They cannot walk, but they are the only birds able to fly backwards.

Panama Anyone?

It is no secret any more that the Republic of Panama is the 'hot spot' in Latin America. Investment in the country, including in the famous canal, is in the billions of dollars. North Americans and Europeans are flocking there by the thousands to invest in vacation or retirement homes, often at a fraction of what they would pay closer to home.

I visited Panama for the first time in November of 2005. I was astounded at the opportunities there and with everything about the country. It is safe, the economy is booming, the people are friendly, the climate ranges from tropical at sea level to temperate in the mountain areas, and the country is an ecological paradise. I knew right away that I would be doing business there in some way, as an excuse to visit regularly.

Now, several partners and I have begun development of a residential community in the mountains near the much-publicized town of Boquete, a bit over an hour's drive from the Costa Rican border. Anyone interested in joining us, either as another partner or to purchase a retirement property, can check us out here: www.rocamilagro.com, or call me, Sieg Pedde, at 519-453-0501 or email me at spedde@helixcourier.com.

Happy
Mother's
Day

