

We can celebrate almost anything—July proves it

Clay Nelson © 10 July 2016

Every year, countless people choose to leave work, skip school, and possibly come together to form a group to celebrate... The people come in all shapes and sizes, and nationality or religion need not be an issue. What do they celebrate? It doesn't matter.

July proves it. If we are American, we celebrate the Fourth of July. If French, Bastille Day, but there are plenty of other celebrations for everyone else, but a lot of them, admittedly, have a bias for the northern hemisphere. What else is new? We're used to it: Christmas BBQs at the beach; Easter chrysanthemums instead of lilies.

July 1 is Creative Ice Cream Flavour Day. As great as vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and Hokey Pokey are, this day is for fans of those unusual flavour combinations that make you question the limitations of culinary science and marvel at their possibilities! Ever had garlic ice cream? I have. I suspect Ben and Jerry are behind the origins of this holiday.

July 2 is World UFO Day. Keep your eyes on the night sky on this day, because they are out there. According to the World UFO Day website, the celebration of all things unidentified, object, and airborne started officially in 2001, but some believe the celebrations began many millennia ago and that the truth has been suppressed. If you're feeling extra conspiratorial, holiday organisers implore you to use this day to "encourage governments to declassify their knowledge about sightings throughout history."

July 4 isn't just a celebration of American independence, but is also **Sidewalk Egg Frying Day** or as we know it **Footpath Egg Frying Day**. We will probably take a pass on celebrating this in New Zealand until global warming gets a lot worse. But in warmer northern hemisphere climates it is not unusual in July to hear folks lament, "it's so hot outside you could fry an egg." This is the day that expression is put to the test. Though the origins of this holiday are unknown, I imagine heat-inclined US states were the earliest adopters.

July 6 is International Kissing Day. This is a day that can heat things up even in New Zealand. It is not hemisphere-specific. Formerly known as National Kissing Day in the United Kingdom, it caught on like frying an egg on concrete never will. This holiday was invented to remind us all of the simple pleasure a sweet kiss can bring.

July 8 is for those nostalgic days before there was Twitter, cable news, or even a newspaper to keep the public abreast of all comings and goings. Hear ye, hear ye the eighth day of July is proclaimed to be **International Town Criers Day**. On this day you have full permission to shout your appreciation from the rooftops—it's how they wanted it.

Today, **July 10**, is **Teddy Bear Picnic Day**. In the early 20th century, John Walter Bratton composed an instrumental song entitled "The Teddy Bears' Picnic." In the late 1980s, collectible items dealer Royal Selangor decided to turn that into a holiday. He also had the idea to conveniently release toy boxes and collectible items in

conjunction with said event. Regardless of capitalist motives, the day became a holiday and remains popular throughout Europe, and as near as Australia, and among many reputable stuffed bear circles.

While not an annual celebration, and while quite local in origin, today is also **Welcome New Members Day** at the Auckland Unitarian Church, but more about that in a moment.

July 11 is World Population Day. The United Nations Population Fund celebrates this day by advocating its Universal Access to Reproductive Health initiative. Celebrants are encouraged to use a condom.

July 14, in addition to being **Bastille Day**, is **National Nude Day**. We can take some patriotic pride in this holiday. It originated in New Zealand, but I'm going to bet that we didn't designate the middle of winter for displaying and celebrating our all-natural form.

July 19 is National Flitch Day in England. In the 15th century, a "flitch" referred to the amount of bacon offered as a prize to married couples by local monks who could prove they had had a year of matrimonial bliss to a jury of their single peers. Thought to have originated in Dunmore, England, the modern-day flitch ceremony now takes place once every four years. Except for the bacon, it hasn't really caught on beyond Dunmore.

July 26 is National Talk in a Lift Day. I'm kidding. It is really called **National Talk in an Elevator Day**. We all do it. We look at our phone, at our feet, or at the fresh coffee stain on our shirts. We do anything we can to avoid making eye contact with our fellow lift riders. Not this day. Throw out the social compact, and strike up a conversation with the nearest stranger while in a small space for a short period of time. Not sure what to say? Unitarians can practice their "elevator speech". Not so long ago Unitarian Universalists were encouraged to be able to explain their faith community in the time it takes to ride an elevator... I mean lift.

With my partner being a Mackintosh, here is a celebration I shouldn't forget. **July 27 is Bagpipe Appreciation Day.** I know, I know, every day should be **Bagpipe Appreciation Day**. There are enough fun facts about bagpipes to share one every day for a year. For instance they have been around since Mesopotamians were making shopping lists on stone tablets. Since the 16th century in Scotland they were considered an instrument of war. They terrorized the enemy and aroused the troops. If you want to be a wet blanket at a Scottish country dance tell a Highlander that most bagpipes today are produced in Pakistan.

Last but not least is **National Lasagne Day** on **July 29**. Catch up on some Garfield comics, head to an Italian restaurant, or grab some ricotta, pasta and Bolognese and whip one up yourself—there are many ways to celebrate **National Lasagne Day**. The only wrong way is to not celebrate it at all.

What the month of July proves is that Ecclesiastes was right:

"For everything there is a season,

And a time for every matter under heaven:
... A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance..." (3:1-8)

While what we celebrate doesn't matter, why we celebrate does.

What do these diverse celebrations have in common? They build bridges. They bring people together. They lift up different universal human emotions and qualities, from tears to dancing, or even both. They are an opportunity to proclaim common values and ideals. They bring us together in peace, harmony, and unity. They give us respite from our troubles and allow us to be happy and experience the peace that is required to improve and help the world. When people come together to celebrate whatever needs celebrating, they do so in a way that ignores prejudice and overcomes shyness. Celebrations are an antidote to isolation. Even on solemn occasions where we remember past tragedies or the loss of a loved one, they bring us together to remember, celebrate, and support one another.

Celebrations involve rituals like kissing our special loved one as the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve. Our need for rituals is a basic human instinct, as real, as urgent, as our need for food, shelter and love. They are crucial to our survival. In addition to marking important milestones in life's journey, they are a source of unity, continuity, connectivity, reverence and awe. This morning's Welcome of New Members is no exception.

Rituals compress time, past, present and future, into a single moment. We are one today not only with each other, but with our spiritual forbears, our tupuna, and those who will sign the membership book long after we are gone, our mokopuna. This morning is an opportunity to celebrate 114 years of our promoting progressive spirituality in New Zealand and over 500 years of Unitarians embodying the ideal of religious freedom. It gives each of us an opportunity today to reaffirm our commitment to our values and mission. It offers promise that the just, sustainable and compassionate world we seek remains a possibility.

In welcoming our new members we are celebrating our appreciation of what each of you will bring to our community while accepting we will not be the same community after today. We are transformed by your commitment to bring all of who you are into the community. Our purpose, mission and vision will not be changed, but we will be and so will you. We will be stretched, asking, "Who are we now?" We will see the world and ourselves with new eyes. We will ask new questions that will lead us into an unforeseen direction. So, that's the "what" and the "why". Let the celebrating begin.