

## The Home Forum

# Happy 'Make Up Your Own Holiday' day!

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WHO DECIDES IF IT'S A HOLIDAY OR NOT? THE PRESIDENT, THE GOVERNOR, THE MAYOR – OR JUST A CITIZEN WITH A GOOD IDEA.

IF YOU'VE EVER wanted to declare a holiday, now is your chance. Tomorrow, March 26, is "Make Up Your Own Holiday" day, according to the reference book Chase's Calendar of Events. Since 1957, this publication has been collecting and publishing a list of holidays, festivals, fairs, and anniversaries. There are thousands of them.

Of course, some holidays are a little more official than others. But all it takes to make a holiday is to name the day, decide what to do, and get other people to do it along with you. Even our best-known holidays started out this way.

Thanksgiving is now a national holiday, proclaimed by the president of the United States. But celebrating days of thanks during harvest season is an old tradition in many countries. Pilgrims brought the tradition to America, although different colonies celebrated on different days. The first official Thanksgiving Day in the US was in 1798, when President George Washington proclaimed the holiday. He didn't make it an annual event, however, and the colonies continued holding their separate harvest feasts.

### How one person created a popular holiday

One person's persistence can help create a holiday. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the Ladies' Magazine in Boston, began writing editorials urg-

ing that a uniform day of thanks be observed throughout the US. She also wrote letters to successive presidents and governors. Finally, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that the last Thursday in November would be national Thanksgiving Day. The day has been observed annually since then. In 1941, Congress passed a joint resolution placing the holiday permanently on the fourth Thursday in November.

Another well-known holiday has never had official recognition. April Fools' Day (April 1) is not a legal holiday. But for hundreds of years it has been a special day to play practical jokes.

April Fools may have started in France in 1564. April 1 used to be New Year's Day in France, but in 1564 the beginning of the new year was changed to Jan. 1. People who continued to celebrate the April 1 New Year were called "April fools" and people began to play jokes on them. They would send them to buy "sweet vinegar" (there's no such thing) or find a stick with only one end. Some scholars point out that April Fools' Day is similar to a portion of the Hindu festival of Holi. This five-day holiday is celebrated with bonfires and dancing. Unsuspecting people are sent on fool's errands on the final day, March 31. Sweden, Portugal, Scotland, and England also have similar customs.

But while April Fools' Day has roots going back to ancient times, new holidays can also just spring up. Kwanzaa is one such "young" holiday. It was created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga. He wanted to create a holiday to bring African-Americans together to celebrate their culture. He didn't start with Congress. He decided how the holiday would be celebrated and invited people to join in. From a small start, this holiday has grown to become well-known and practiced.

To be official, a holiday must be declared official by a government. The government can be national, state, county, or city. If you wanted to make March 30 "National Yu-Gi-Oh Day," for example, you'd need to follow the same process used to create a new national law – with a few differences.

To become a national law, a proposed new law (a bill) is usually examined by a smaller committee first. If approved by the committee, it is discussed and voted upon by the full House of Representatives or Senate. Bills must be approved by both houses of Congress before they are sent to the president for his signature. But to pass a resolu-



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID BRION

'HUG YOUR CAT DAY' (MAY 3): Cats act as though they don't want or need attention – but they do. Today, embrace your cat without fear of scratches.

tion recognizing a special day, a committee can suspend the rules and send the bill right to the full House or Senate. The resolution can be passed by one or both houses, and it doesn't have to be signed by the president. However, it is not considered to have the force of law.

### President declares lots of special days

The president also can declare a special day. In 2000, President Clinton proclaimed 127 special days, including Mother's Day and Thanksgiving Day. Governors declare state holidays and mayors do the same for their cities. A company that makes candy bars can simply announce that it's National Candy Bar Week and advertise it. (Plenty of people would be happy to celebrate that one!) Cities and states often honor distinguished citizens by proclaiming a day in their honor, such as Hawaii's Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalaniano'le Day (March 26). Causes can be promoted by naming a special month, such as Women's History Month (March).

But if you want your holiday to have a little more authority, there's always March 26. This "Make Up Your Own Holiday" day was proclaimed by Thomas and Ruth Roy, who make a hobby of thinking up fun days to celebrate, such as Hug an Australian Day (April 26) and No Homework Day (May 6). They have been featured in magazines and newspapers and on TV shows telling people about their holidays. One of their special days, "Northern Hemisphere Hoodie-Hoo Day," is actually celebrated with parties in towns in Texas and Pennsylvania. You can find all their holidays described on their website: [www.wellcat.com](http://www.wellcat.com).

If you'd like to check out some of the other holidays you might not know about, your local library should have a copy of Chase's Calendar of Events. It's published every year and includes thousands of good reasons to celebrate.

Sharon J. Huntington

'LUMPY RUG DAY' (MAY 3): If you're not busy hugging your cat (see far right), try shoving a few unwelcome facts under the rug instead of dealing with them. (We're kidding, of course. But it's a real day.)



## Sites to help you celebrate

[www.wellcat.com/holiday.html](http://www.wellcat.com/holiday.html)

Wellcat Holidays are created by Thomas and Ruth Roy, who love to find fun new excuses to have a celebration.

[www.holidays.net](http://www.holidays.net)

Holidays on the Net lists upcoming holidays and gives the history and significance of some of the most widely celebrated days.

[www.infoplease.com/ipa/a0875655.html](http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/a0875655.html)

Infoplease.com's webpage lists secular, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and other holidays.

S.J.H.

# April 1 is not just for foolin'

EVERY DAY has many holidays, if you know where to look. Many are sponsored by special groups, including corporations, farmers, teachers, environmentalists, and others. Here are some of the events and celebrations listed in 'Chase's Calendar of Events 2003' (McGraw-Hill) for the day, week, and month of April 1.

## MONTH-LONG EVENTS

**Community Spirit Days** – Collect items to distribute to local charities.

**Fresh Florida Tomato Month** – To publicize the Florida tomato.

**Holy Humor Month** – To recognize the healing power of joy.

**Keep America Beautiful Month** – Clean up your neighborhood.

**Mathematics Education Month** – Focus on the importance of math education.

**National Kite Month** – Go fly a kite!

**National Pecan Month** – Celebrate the great taste and versatility of pecans.

**National Poetry Month** – Honor the contributions of poets and poetry.

**National Woodworking Month** – Emphasize the beauty and satisfaction of working with wood.

**Straw Hat Month** – Local businesses are encouraged to promote hat-related activities.

**Tackle Your Clutter Month** – Clean up all those storage places, donate items to charity, and start collecting your clutter for another year.

**World Habitat Awareness Month** – Learn how to protect the habitat of all Earth's creatures.

## WEEK-LONG EVENTS

**Golden Rule Week** (April 1-7) – Remember to treat others as you would want them to treat you.

**Laugh at Work Week** (April 1-7) – Reduce stress and increase productivity through laughter.

## SPECIAL DAYS

**April Fools' Day** – A day of practical jokes. (March 32 is 'April Fools' Eve.' Just kidding.)

**Saint Lasarus's Day** – Ancient Slavic holiday of young girls in Bulgaria.

**Islamic Republic Day** – Anniversary of the approval of the new Constitution in Iran in 1979.

**Sorry Charlie Day** – Honor Charlie the Tuna, who is always rejected for the tuna fish can but keeps on trying.

**US Air Force Academy Anniversary** – Established in 1954 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

**Anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa** – Took place in 1945, the last year of World War II.



**NATIONAL WINDMILL DAY (MAY 10):** On this holiday in the Netherlands, the second Saturday in May, as many surviving windmills as possible are set in motion for tourists. The country has some 950 windmills, about 300 of which are still used occasionally.

## TODAY'S ARTICLE ON CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

Bringing a spiritual perspective to daily life

# Comfort from grief

THE CELEBRATION of the 150th birthday of Vincent Van Gogh reminded me of a visit to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. The first painting I saw was one of his paintings of shoes. I was amazed at its impact. I was not just seeing a painting of shoes. The best way I can explain it is that I was seeing the *idea* of shoes, and this idea was much more real to me than any depicted on canvas.

I have thought about this over the years as I've striven to understand the difference between ideas and physical objects. Aiding me in this thinking are the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, who founded this newspaper for thinkers worldwide. She also wrote a textbook that challenges many people's assumptions about many things. She described man, including male and female, in this way: "Man is idea, the image, of Love; he is not physique" ("Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," pg. 475). Earlier in the book she included a dictionary definition: "IDEA: An image in Mind; the immediate object of understanding" (pg. 115). Each one of us is the idea of God.

Whatever takes our loved ones from us, we can still find comfort.

Remembering how it was the idea in Van Gogh's painting that has been so real to me over the years, this way of seeing others as ideas is not as abstract as it might seem. Knowing another to be "the immediate object" of my understanding, and then carrying this reasoning further to see that one as the object of God's understanding, has given me a spiritual, eternal view of myself and others.

### When I was left alone

The value of this understanding was proved when my husband passed on. We had hardly ever been separated. We were partners in every aspect of our lives. When my wonderfully supportive family members left and I was alone, I could hardly stand the grief. One day I fled the apartment to a nearby park. As I walked, I was comforted by the realization that my husband was the *idea* of God. The consciousness of his presence was more real than any physical presence. I knew that the qualities he expressed were still with me and tangible – his unconditional love, wit, lack of guile, and total dependability.

For years I had never understood what people meant when they said of the departed that his or her qualities were still present. Now I understood because I had experienced his presence as God's idea and not as physique.

Whatever takes our loved ones from us – war, accident, or disease – we can still find comfort. Our very pain sometimes makes us flee from merely material or physical assumptions to a spiritual reality that finds all true being in God, eternally joyous and satisfied. I didn't remain forever after in that

spiritual altitude, but I learned about grief and how to ward it off. I found that the unhealthy, discomfiting grieving and debilitating feelings came mostly in the wake of pity and remorse, self-imposed or evoked by others.

Others who pitied my plight would unintentionally induce in me self-pity, which someone has described as walking through molasses, and which most of us find unbearable. Sometimes, even without being prompted, I would be tempted to feel sorrowful about my situation and my future.

But those times would vanish as I was consciously and deliberately grateful for my husband, yes, for the always-present idea of him, and for the fact that he had come into my life and enriched it. This, of course, was powerful in assuaging fears for the future without him. I wasn't without him because he was "idea," even "the immediate object of understanding." He existed forever in God, and the closer I drew to God, the closer I felt to my husband.

There were two results from this kind of thinking. First, memories of his shortcomings rarely came to thought. Human failings are no part of the real idea, man, and therefore they had no foundation or continuance in memory. Second, I began expressing more of the qualities that he exemplified, especially unconditional love.

### Turning remorse around

As for remorse, I am learning to turn it to a healing advantage. I always knew that all I ever had to do was ask him for forgiveness and it was given. I often felt that I was forgiven before I asked. So, instead of lingering remorsefully over the wish that I'd been a better wife/partner, I try to be a better person right now, and a greater benefit to society in general.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" is a profound statement (Matt. 5:4). We can experience it on several levels. We can be grateful for its promise that those who mourn will be comforted even if we don't have the opportunity to come to their aid. The deeper promise is that as we join with those who mourn, including those who have lost loved ones in fighting for their country, we can comfort the bereaved. Even if unacquainted with surviving family members, we can hold in prayer the recognition that the one who has passed from sight is, in essence, a spiritual idea, forever the immediate object of God's understanding and love. And finding our own comfort in knowing God better contributes to a mental atmosphere that not only comforts but also heals.

## Play the 'Votes for Women' game

Last year, in honor of Women's History Month, the Monitor's Kidspace section created and presented a special board game about how women in America won the right to vote. We thought you might be interested in playing it again! The simple game includes a game board and special cards with questions on them to cut out and use in play. You provide a die and game markers (Susan B. Anthony dollar coins, perhaps?). To download and print out a full-size color version of the game, go to: [www.csmonitor.com/womensgame](http://www.csmonitor.com/womensgame)

