

Women of the World Unite



Women around the world will take to the streets promoting women's rights to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8. The first National Women's Day occurred over 100 years ago on February 28, 1909, in New York.

Theresa Malkiel, a factory worker who rose to the top of the leadership of the Women's National Committee of the Socialist Party, proposed the first celebration. Malkiel believed that socialism was the path toward the liberation and equality of women. When the men of the party showed no true interest in equal rights for women members, Malkiel took it upon herself to organize her fellow women and strengthen their place in the party. The first Women's Day celebration was a show of strength for the women she organized.

The struggle for women's rights was not unique to America. Across Europe, women were organizing for workers' rights and the right to vote. In 1910, at the International Socialist Women's Conference in Denmark, European activists decided to establish an international holiday modeled on the one organized by Malkiel. The following year, on March 11, 1911, International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland. Women took to the streets, marching for the right to vote, to hold public office, and to enjoy equal opportunities for employment. Six years later, on March 8, 1917, International Women's Day marchers across Russia marched for "Bread and Peace," demanding an end to World War I, tsarism, and government-imposed food shortages. This marked the beginning of Russia's February Revolution (according to their old calendar). Seven days later, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne, and women were granted the right to vote. Over the decades, the holiday has transformed from a socialist holiday to a mainstream celebration of political activism by women. While the day is an official holiday in many countries, the fact that it is not observed in many places speaks to the pressing need to continue the fight for women's rights.

March Birthdays

In astrology, those born between March 1–20 are the Fish of Pisces. Fish feel things deeply, as in under-the-sea deep. These intuitive, creative, and intelligent people have strong feelings of right and wrong and also love to help others. Those born between March 21–31 are the Rams of Aries. As the first sign of the zodiac, Aries like to be number one. Bold, courageous, passionate, and somewhat impulsive, Rams dive headfirst into even the most challenging situations.

Theodor Seuss Geisel (writer) – March 2, 1904
 Lou Costello (comedian) – March 6, 1906
 Mickey Dolenz (Monkee) – March 8, 1945
 Liza Minnelli (actress) – March 12, 1946
 Simone Biles (gymnast) – March 14, 1997
 Moms Mabley (comedienne) – March 19, 1894
 Fred Rogers (neighbor) – March 20, 1928
 Chaka Khan (singer) – March 23, 1953
 Harry Houdini (magician) – March 24, 1874
 Flannery O'Connor (author) – March 25, 1925
 Mariah Carey (singer) – March 27, 1970
 Liz Claiborne (designer) – March 31, 1929

Won't You Be My Neighbor?



Each year, March 20 is celebrated as Won't You Be My Neighbor Day in honor of the birthday of Fred Rogers, everybody's favorite television neighbor. Rogers suffered a lonely childhood and was often taunted about being overweight. He overcame his shyness to become a Presbyterian minister but left the seminary to go into television. He hated TV and wanted to transform it into a means of nurturing those who would watch and listen. Rogers was a natural when it came to children's broadcasting, using his talents to develop puppets, music, and characters that appealed to kids' better natures. By the time the show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* aired in 1968, he had mastered his use of imaginative elements and the kind, quiet manner that became his trademark.

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The Power of Names

The power of bestowing names is so great that in the Old Testament of the Bible it is God who grants this amazing gift to Adam and Eve. Modern psychologists agree that names are significant. As children develop the ability to speak, they name things to make sense of the world around them. The first full week of March is Celebrate Your Name Week, a time to appreciate our names.

In 1948, professors at Harvard University studied the success of recent Harvard graduates. As it turned out, those with common names like Mike had found more success than those with unusual names such as Berrien. The professors concluded that rare or unusual names had negative psychological effects. More studies followed, and they bore out similar results. Names seemingly influence where we go to school, where we choose to live, who we marry, and even the kind of financial investments we make. Psychologists have attempted to explain this phenomenon as a result of the "implicit-egoism" effect, or the fact that we are drawn to things that resemble us. Other psychologists offer a different explanation.

Names send powerful signals about where we come from: our native country, ethnicity, religion, and economic background. When we hear a name, we hear so much more.

Of course, not everyone loves their given name. According to Legal Zoom, people often change their name if it's very common. They list Britney and Ashley as two examples. Another reason people change their name is because it's difficult to spell or pronounce.

Celebrate Your Name Week is a chance to be proud of not just our names but of who we are. When you introduce yourself, say your name loud and proud, for the way you treat your name shows the way that you want to be treated.



Celebrating March

Irish-American Heritage Month

Women's History Month

International Black Women in Jazz and the Arts Month

World Compliment Day

March 1

International Women's Day

March 8

Wellderly Week

March 16–22

St. Patrick's Day

March 17

Tuskegee Airmen Day

March 22

Make Up Your Own Holiday

Day

March 26

Mirthful Medicine



March was declared International Mirth Month by self-proclaimed “jollytologist” Allen Klein. Klein’s interest in the healing power of mirth came in 1974 when his young wife died of liver disease. Despite her deteriorating health, Klein’s wife kept her sense of humor to the end. She inspired Klein to give up his career in the theater and become a crusader for the stress-relieving benefits of humor.

Whether facing sicknesses or enduring other stressful situations at home or in the workplace, humor has been proven to be beneficial for both the body and the soul. Our human ancestors were aware of the benefits of laughter thousands of years ago. A proverb from the Old Testament states, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” More recently, doctors studying the effects of laughter on human physiology have compiled empirical evidence to support these claims. Laughter releases endorphins, the body’s natural pain-relieving hormones; increases the production of cells responsible for strengthening our immune systems; and lowers cortisol, the hormone responsible for stress. Furthermore, humor has been shown to help us dispel fear and encourage creative thinking. In so many ways, our ancestors were right!

So how do we add more mirth to our daily routines? First and foremost, when you laugh, be sure to do it loud and proud. Big belly laughs leave muscles relaxed for 45 minutes. Funny television shows, YouTube clips, or friends are worth their weight in gold. Perhaps most importantly, learn to laugh at yourself. Don’t be afraid to share your own shortcomings or funny mistakes. Anthropologists believe that sharing our funny moments and drawing laughter is one of the strongest types of social glue, bringing friends nearer and keeping them close.

If you want to learn more about humor theory, check out *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny* by Peter McGraw and Joel Warner.

Istanbul Not Constantinople

On March 28, 1930, the city of Constantinople, Turkey, changed its name to Istanbul, a change famously celebrated by the Four Lads in their 1953 novelty song “Istanbul (Not Constantinople),” a song that enjoyed a resurgence in 1990 thanks to a cover by the band They Might Be Giants. Why did Turkey change the name of its most important city? In AD 330, the city, then called Byzantium, was the world’s hub of culture and trade. Emperor Constantine declared the city the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire and changed its name to Constantinople. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1923, the newfound Republic of Turkey changed the name from Constantinople to Istanbul, a name many had used to describe the city. *Istanbul* was a Turkish translation of an old Greek phrase meaning “in the city.” Despite the official change, travelers, businesses, and even foreign governments still referred to the city as Constantinople. This all changed in 1930 when the Turkish government decreed that all mail addressed to Constantinople would not be delivered.

The Old New Year



During the Colonial era in America, New Year’s Day was celebrated not on January 1, but on March 25, a date that can be traced to the colonies’ roots in England. As a Protestant nation, England and its Protestant ruler Queen Elizabeth I refused to adopt the Gregorian calendar proposed by the Catholic Pope Gregory XIII. As such, March 25 officially remained the date of the start of the new year. This date was chosen to coincide with the Feast of the Annunciation, the date when the archangel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary to announce that she would be the mother of Jesus, the son of God. For this reason, the date was also called Lady Day. The new year was held on Lady Day from 1155 until 1752, when the Gregorian calendar was finally adopted.

The Great Escape



On March 24, 1944, the British bomber pilot Leslie “Johnny” Bull poked his head out of the ground and took his first breath of freedom after suffering as a prisoner of war in the Nazi-controlled Stalag Luft III camp. The so-called “Great Escape” had begun, one of the most daring mass breakouts ever attempted during wartime.

In 1944, the camp housed over 10,000 Allied service members. The location of the camp was chosen in part due to its sandy soil, which made any attempts to tunnel out extremely difficult. This did not deter Royal Air Force Squadron Leader Roger Bushell from devising a grand tunneling scheme. His plan consisted of “three bloody deep, bloody long tunnels,” code-named Tom, Dick, and Harry. Previous escapes had been attempted, but none on the scale Bushell proposed. Not only did he oversee the excavation of three tunnels but he also devised a system of signals that allowed POWs to track prison guards and communicate their whereabouts. He also procured civilian clothes for escapees, forged travel documents, and equipment for the 600 digging inmates. As the plan’s mastermind, Bushell was given the code name “Big X.”

His plan proved ingenious. Powdered milk cans distributed by the Red Cross were fashioned into shovels, picks, and lanterns. Excavated dirt was smuggled to the surface inside inmates’ trouser legs and then scattered while the prisoners walked around. The tunnels were 30-feet deep and just 2-feet square, the walls shored up with pieces of wood scavenged from all over the camp, most notably the prisoners’ bunk beds. Many of the guards, who were openly anti-Nazi, assisted in the procuring of forged documents and materials. By the moonless night of March 24, 1944, the tunnel “Harry” was complete, and 76 men tunneled to freedom. Of the 76 escapees, 73 were captured, but the dramatic “Great Escape” became the stuff of legend and a Hollywood blockbuster.

Sock Monkey Day

The fabulous folk-art-toy-turned-kitschy-gift known as the sock monkey enjoys its own holiday on March 7. (Some sources say March 1.) The sock monkey can trace its origins back to England’s Victorian era and the exploration of the continent of Africa. Tales of exotic new animals were recounted in news reports and fictional tales such as Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*. It became fashionable to decorate children’s rooms with all manner of stuffed animals such as lions and monkeys. It did not take long before the trend reached America. Swedish immigrant to America John Nelson patented a sock-knitting machine in Rockford, Illinois, in 1868. His socks became so popular that they became known as “Rockford Red-Heels.” During the Great Depression in America, economical families created their own stuffed animals, notably monkeys, using these trademark red-heeled socks. The red heels gave the “sock monkeys” their distinctive red mouths. In 1953, a woman named Helen Cooke patented the “sock monkey” and eventually sold her idea back to the Nelson Knitting Company, still located in Rockford.

Fit to the Finish?



The first Sunday in March is known as Finisher’s Medal Day, honoring all those who don’t win the race but just cross the finish line. The day was designed to encourage everyone to participate in races, not just those with a real shot at winning. But this begs the question, does awarding a medal or trophy just for participation send a good message? Some argue that such participation medals diminish excellence. They become worthless mementos of participation rather than true tokens of achievement. They send the message that everyone is a winner, when in real life there are winners and losers. In some ways, these medals rob kids of the important lessons of losing, like how to cope with disappointment and how to remain resilient in the face of defeat.