

**By ANNE DONNELL**

*What's the story behind celebrating birthdays? Is this ancient or more recent? Finally, should I write Happy Birthday! or Happy birthday! I can see reasons for either way. I have to say I love celebrating birthdays (mine included). When's yours? -Everyday Is Somebody's Birthday*

First things first. My birthday is in the wonderful month of May, full of flowers and graduations and school closings and, icing on the cake, Mother's Day. May is named for Maia (meaning "the great one"), a mountain nymph (one of the seven Pleiades), the goddess of spring, parent with Zeus (Jupiter) of Hermes (Mercury).

To bring this thing really down home, Mercury in copper (maybe with a little tin in it to make bronze) was on top of Union Station in Nashville. He toppled off in a storm in 1951. BUT, you pagans needn't worry because over at the Parthenon "they" put up a huge (41 feet, 10 inches tall) pagan image -- Mercury's cousin Athena (she sprang from the head of his father; perhaps cousin covers this) and there's another smaller statue of Mercury (in steel this time) back on the station. The gods are humming in Music City all right.

A reminder: this is still called the Bible Belt.

Speaking of the Bible, in Genesis 40 a celebration of the Pharaoh's birthday is mentioned as part of the Joseph story. Celebrating birthdays, at least those of the powerful, is ancient. Births were seen as the heralds of new ages, which we throughout history have always hoped would be better ages.

The first necessity, though, was to establish a calendar accurate enough to know the date of a birth and to know when the date has returned.

Though other sources disagree, the following ideas might be how celebrating us ordinary folk's big days started happening. From coolest-kid-birthday-parties.com: "It is also said that birthday

celebrations began as a form of protection. It was a common belief that evil spirits were more dangerous to a person when he or she experienced a change in their daily life, such as turning a year older. To protect them from harm, friends and family would gather around the birthday person and bring good cheers, thoughts and wishes. Giving gifts brought even more good cheer to ward off the evil spirits. Noisemakers are thought to be used at parties as a way of scaring away the evil spirits. The birthday history custom of lighting candles originated with people believing that the gods lived in the sky and by lighting candles and torches they were sending a signal or prayer to the gods so they could be answered. When you blow out the candles and make a wish this is another way of sending a signal and a message."

The famous song came from two women at a Louisville, Ky., kindergarten. It has a more complicated history that one would expect, and its copyright is currently owned by Warner Communication. It's OK to sing it around your dining table, though, unless you're a Kardashian. Well, there's a lot that bunch shouldn't be allowed to do, starting with being on TV.

As to Happy Birthday! or Happy birthday!, go with the first. It's customary and respectful, giving a birthday some well-deserved status.

**ONLINE DEPARTMENT** □ **"Uh, Oh!" (Thanks, A.W.) Two little boys, ages 8 and 10, were excessively mischievous, always getting into trouble. The boys' mother heard that a local preacher had been successful in disciplining children, so she asked if he would speak with her boys. The preacher agreed, but he asked to see them individually. The mother sent the younger boy in the morning. The preacher, a huge man with a deep booming voice, sat the boy down and asked him sternly, "Do you know where God is, son?"** □ **The boy's mouth dropped open, but he made no response, sitting there wide-eyed with his mouth hanging open. So the preacher repeated the question in an even sterner tone, "Where is God?" Again, the boy made no attempt to answer. The preacher raised his voice even more and shook his finger in the boy's face and bellowed, "WHERE IS GOD?"** □ **The boy screamed and bolted from the room, ran directly home and dove into his closet, slamming the door behind him. When his older brother found him in the closet, he asked, "What happened?" The younger brother, gasping for breath, replied, "We are in BIG trouble this time! GOD is missing, and they think WE did it!"**

"Punography" (Thanks, C. D. and L.D.) □ *I changed my iPod's name to Titanic. It's syncing now.* □ *When chemists die, they barium.* □ *Jokes about German sausage are the wurst.* □ *I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He says he can stop any time.* □ *How does Moses make his tea? Hebrews it.* □ *I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Then it dawned on me.* □ *This girl said she recognized me from the vegetarian club, but I'd never met herbivore.* □ *I'm*

*reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down. □ I did a theatrical performance about puns. It was a play on words. □ They told me I had type-A blood, but it was a Type-O. □ Did you hear about the cross-eyed teacher who lost her job because she couldn't control her pupils? □ Broken pencils are pointless. □ I tried to catch some fog, but I mist. □ What do you call a dinosaur with an extensive vocabulary? A thesaurus. □ England has no kidney bank, but it does have a Liverpool. □ I used to be a banker, but then I lost interest. □ I got a job at a bakery because I kneaded dough. □ Haunted French pancakes give me the crêpes. □ Velcro - what a rip off!*

**BW (Bigtime Word) mallecho – mischief. Well, read what Goethe (1749-1832. □ German poet, dramatist, novelist, and scientist) had to say, “I respect the man who knows distinctly what he wishes. The greater part of all mischief in the world arises from the fact that men do not sufficiently understand their own aims. They have undertaken to build a tower, and spend no more labor on the foundation than would be necessary to erect a hut.” That doesn't cover Prince Harry in Las Vegas, though.**