

Your Personal Coach

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Americans love holidays and we're all familiar with the major ones be they religious or secular. In the United States, Mothers are honored on the second Sunday in May, Fathers on the third Sunday in June, Grandparents on the first Sunday after Labor Day. A groundhog gets to strut his stuff on February 2 and we celebrate trees on the last Friday in April (Arbor Day).

There are lesser known celebrations as well. Though not an official holiday -- banks are open and schools are in session -- September 9 is Teddy Bear Day. The whole month of September is Children's Good Manners Month (perhaps this should last much longer). National Potato Chip Day is March 14 (Hmmm. Should we give gifts for this? Dip?). February is National Cherry Pie Month and, thankfully, also National Children's Dental Health Month. November 3 is National Sandwich Day which, of course includes the pinkish lunch meat Spam™ while May 22 is Global Anti-Spam Day -- not the lunch meat, but the annoying, unsolicited emails that routinely clog up your server. It seems like there is an occasion to celebrate just about everything and this week -- the third week in August -- is no exception. We are smack in the middle of National Friendship Week.

Although not an official holiday, it seems like the idea of designating a week to celebrate our friends originated with Eleanor Roosevelt who seemed to understand the essence of friendship when she wrote: "Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart." The former First Lady was not the only one to tell such truths about friends. Aristotle defined friendship as, "A single soul dwelling in two bodies." A Nigerian proverb reminds us to, "Hold a true friend with both your hands" and an ancient Jewish saying says, "Who finds a faithful friend, finds a treasure." Ralph Waldo Emerson had it right when he wrote, "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature."

In spite of the power of friendship to double our joy and divide our grief, our friendships are in a sad state of repair. Recent studies have shown that Americans report having fewer friends and are limited in the kinds of friends they can call at three in the morning when their lives hit the fan. Today, in spite of technology that allows for instant communication, we are more isolated and lonelier than ever. We are less socially connected than at any other time in history. Given all this unequivocal research, I'm of a mind to take National Friendship Week seriously.

It seems to me that we might use this week to become more conscious about our friendships. We might spend some time and energy in shoring up our friendships, bringing acquaintances into deeper relationship, and letting our attached-at-the-heart friends know how much we love them. This might be as simple as giving a call or sending an email or card to an old friend who we haven't communicated with in a while. We might make a special effort to let our good friends know just how important they are to us.

Research has shown that people who have deep, loving connections to friends live longer, healthier lives. With a good friend we have a soulmate with whom to share our good times and bad ones. With friends, we feel contained by and attached to others through the power of love. Certainly, this is something worth celebrating and more important than Teddy Bears or potato chips.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.