

NOT A FAN OF VALENTINE'S DAY OR GROUNDHOG DAY?

CHECK OUT SOME OF THESE LITTLE-KNOWN FEBRUARY HOLIDAYS INSTEAD!

If you're married or you have a significant other, you'll probably celebrate Valentine's Day this month, and you're probably at least aware of Groundhog Day. Beyond that, you might struggle to think of holidays worth celebrating in the month of February. However as little known as many are, there are several smaller holidays in February I think are at least worth remembering.

FEB. 1: NO POLITICS DAY AND SPUNKY OLD BROAD DAY

After the year we've just lived through, all of us could use a day off from politics. If you're worried about being out of the loop by not looking at your preferred news sites for a day, don't fret — all your politics will still be there on Feb. 2.

The idea behind Spunky Old Broad Day just entertains me to no end. It's a day started by Dr. Gayle Carson, an author and motivational speaker, to celebrate women who are intelligent, self-reliant, outgoing, and outspoken. It's also a day when younger women can begin their journey to becoming spunky old broads themselves!

FEB. 6: EAT ICE CREAM FOR BREAKFAST DAY

I occasionally let my sons eat ice cream for breakfast when they were little, and they seemed to enjoy that. That's not to say adults can't enjoy observing this day too!

FEB. 9: NATIONAL PIZZA DAY

Another day to eat your favorite food (like any of us need a special reason to eat pizza!). It's also



my son Max's birthday that day, so maybe we'll celebrate by eating a slice or three.

FEB. 13: GET A DIFFERENT NAME DAY

This day makes me think about my mom. Her name was Wilma, but she never liked it. I think she had this notion it conflicted with her chic lifestyle when she was younger. She worked at Macy's in the cosmetics department and thought she was living large. I guess she just didn't think that the name "Wilma" befitted that. She would have been all over the idea behind this day!

FEB. 16: GROUCH DAY

This day actually makes me think of my dad. People always affectionately called him a cantankerous old cuss, and I say that myself with fondness. He was in sales for most of his life and, therefore, was not known for being quiet. He would holler out in church and share his opinions without flinching but, like Will Rogers, "he never met a man he didn't like." He also always said that he'd run his mouth for half an hour after he was dead. So, I had his tombstone read "Still running my mouth" when he was buried. He would have gotten a kick out of that.

FEB. 17: RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY

For me personally, this is a day to celebrate our clients, many of whom have



brought us everything from flowers to smoked turkey and homemade hot sauce as a thank-you for helping them with their cases. Those random acts of kindness always leave us feeling appreciated.

FEB. 20: CHERRY PIE DAY

Yet another day to celebrate delicious food. Cherry is my favorite flavor of pie, besides pecan.

FEB. 28: NATIONAL CHILI DAY AND PUBLIC SLEEPING DAY

Chili is one of the best winter foods in the world. I've always wanted to enter a chili cook-off because I think I can make a mean batch — I've just never found the time. It's convenient that Public Sleeping Day is on the same day as National Chili Day, since wherever you are when you gobble down some chili, you're probably going to want a nap afterward.



These are far from the only other holidays observed this month. If you didn't find a holiday you want to celebrate in the above list, do some research and find one you do like. There's a little celebration for everyone!

-Jim Monast

THE ORIGINAL DEATH BY CHOCOLATE

17th Century Chocoholics Get Revenge

How much do you love chocolate? Would you be willing to die for a taste of your favorite candy bar? Would you kill for one? You've probably never thought to ask yourself these questions, but if tall tales can be believed, arguments over chocolate have, in fact, turned deadly.

National Dark Chocolate Day and National Chocolate Fondue Day both fall this month (on Feb. 1 and Feb. 5, respectively), and in honor of those tasty holidays, we investigated the original "death by chocolate" — an act of legendary revenge.

Rumor has it that the controversy started in the 1600s in Chiapas, Mexico, when a group of chocoholic churchgoers started bringing their favorite sweet snack to services. This annoyed the bishop, who resorted to banning parishioners from eating chocolate during church. As an article in *Indian Country Today* tells it, the chocoholics got back at the bishop by poisoning his daily cup of *chocolatl*, an

Aztec chocolate drink. Who knew the ancestor of hot cocoa could be so deadly?

Surprisingly, this crazy story isn't the origin of the "death by chocolate" cake we love today. That dessert was created in 1993 by Chef Marcel Desaulniers, then-owner of The Trellis restaurant in Williamsburg, Virginia. Here's the restaurant's mouthwatering description of the seven-layer confection, which takes three days to make:

"The decadence begins with layers of moist chocolate cake, dark chocolate ganache, crunchy chocolate meringue, and an airy chocolate mousse. The cake is

then coated in a glaze of dark chocolate and served on a pool of chocolate sauce with house-made milk chocolate ice cream, topped with a hand-rolled white chocolate truffle, and finally dusted with white chocolate powder."

Is your mouth watering yet? The original version of death by chocolate might be a bit complex for the average chef, but if you're craving a slice, you can find more accessible recipes at Delish.com and SugarGeekShow.com. Just remember that when you pull it out of the oven, we don't live in the 1600s, so you should probably restrain yourself from poisoning anyone who steals a bite!

INTRODUCING CHRIS AND MENDY! TWO EXCELLENT TEAM MEMBERS

In this space, I typically share a client story of someone who's strapped themselves to the mast and journeyed through the treacherous waters of workers' compensation. This time, I figured I would introduce you to a couple folks with whom some of you have talked: Chris Hjelle and Mendy Gray.

Chris has been with me about three years now. He grew up in Brockport, New York, and came to Ohio on a swimming scholarship at Wittenberg in Springfield. He got an Honorable Mention All-American and was the team captain for two years. He did workers' compensation work on the Dark Side, first taking hearings and then running the settlement department for a huge TPA, representing hundreds

of employers. After several years, he saw the light and began evaluating claims and negotiating settlements for the good guys (meaning injured workers). His considerable experience representing employers, knowing how and when rates impact their premiums and just how they think when it comes to those numbers, is invaluable.

Chris still swims early every morning and coaches travel softball. He and his wife, Jennifer, have three kiddos. He's an easy guy to talk with, and, if you ever have questions about settlement and whether it's worth considering in your claim, he's a guy we want looking things over.

Moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, we have Mendy Gray, who's been with us just a few weeks. I've known and respected her for a long time, as she, like Chris, took hearings for employers for many years. I always found her tough but fair, well prepared, and a straight shooter. She is a delightful person and helps us in many ways: talking on the phone, investigating claims, following up with doctors, haranguing employers and the BWC when they need it, etc. Coincidentally, she was at Wittenberg at the same time as Chris and even knew him! She was on the Wittenberg varsity tennis team and won the OAC tournament



Chris just snagged a big settlement! (He doesn't usually look this good.)

her sophomore year. After graduation, she earned her MBA at Capital University and learned the nuts and bolts of Ohio workers' compensation from the ground up, working first at Davis and Associates and then at Frank Gates Service Company.

She still enjoys playing tennis and golf, reading her Bible, and spending time with friends. Mendy and her husband, Terry, have two daughters — also tennis players. With the many knee injuries they've had playing tennis, the family has kept orthopedic surgeons busy!

We are fortunate to have both Chris and Mendy working here, as they are knowledgeable, professional, and fun people who listen well and know their stuff!



Mendy is hard at work, making sure our clients' cases get the attention they need!

People Were More Satisfied Than Ever

WITH THEIR HOMES IN 2020

They say home is where the heart is, but this past year, it's where the rest of our bodies were too. Whether the pandemic caused you to go remote for your workplace, made you quarantine, or left you without many reasons to go out, you probably spent a lot more time in your house or apartment than you would have otherwise. And it seems like for some people, that came with a silver lining.

According to one survey, nearly two-thirds of participants said that throughout the course of 2020, they became the happiest with their homes they had ever been.

You would think that a year of being cooped up at home would leave most people sick of their houses. But,

since many people had time to actually make changes and renovations to their living spaces and a reason to make the space comfortable and inviting, people have made their homes into places they don't want to leave rather than just a place they can't leave.

things like adding built-in coffee machines to their kitchens, reworking garages into at-home exercise rooms, and investing in more comfortable office furniture for their remote workspaces. About 46% of participants also said that they've invested in a smart appliance since the beginning of the pandemic.

The pandemic has undoubtedly left its mark on nearly every facet of our society, mostly in some bad and not-so-good ways. However, it's nice that even in the midst of all of that, many of us have found ways to make living, working, and playing at home more bearable. And who knows? Maybe as the vaccines do their work and society opens back up, we'll still find more opportunities to spend time in our living spaces and make them more into our dream homes.



According to the same survey, 26% of participants upgraded a kitchen appliance, another 26% rearranged their furniture, 25% redecorated, and 24% upgraded their furniture. More specific upgrades included

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ANSWER

NIBBLES WITH NUG



STRAWBERRY KISSED ALMOND BUTTER MUFFINS

Inspired by AmbitiousKitchen.com

Enjoy this Valentine's Day-themed muffin with your Valentine or treat yourself!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup ripe bananas, mashed
- 3/4 cup natural creamy almond butter (can substitute creamy peanut butter)
- 2 large eggs
- 1/4 cup pure maple syrup (or honey)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup oat flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup strawberry fruit spread, divided (we recommend Bonne Maman INTENSE)

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 F.
2. Line a 12-cup muffin tin with liners and spray with nonstick cooking spray.
3. In a large bowl, mix bananas, almond butter, eggs, maple syrup, and vanilla extract.
4. Stir in oat flour, baking powder, and salt until smooth.
5. Evenly divide batter into liners. Add 1 tsp strawberry fruit spread to the top of each muffin.
6. Use a butter knife to gently swirl the spread into the batter.
7. Bake for 22-27 minutes until a toothpick comes out clean.
8. Transfer muffins to wire rack to cool and enjoy!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1** Little-Known (But Very Fun) February Holidays
- 2** The Deadly Revenge of 17th Century Chocoholics
- 2** Introducing Chris and Mendy!
- 3** A Silver Lining From Staying at Home
- 3** Strawberry Kissed Almond Butter Muffins
- 4** A Tiny Dog Is Crowned the Biggest Hero

Heroes Come in All Sizes

MACKENZIE THE CHIHUAHUA IS ONE BIG HERO

The American Humane Hero Dog Awards competition is an annual celebration that honors some of the world's most extraordinary canines. The awards recognize dogs that have gone above and beyond the call of duty, whether it's saving lives on the battlefield, comforting the ill or elderly, or demonstrating just how powerful the bond between humans and animals can be. Winners are crowned in several categories, but the "American Hero Dog" is the top winner selected by expert panelists and a popular vote. It most often goes to dogs who show astute bravery in what they do, and in 2020, that bravery came in a 4-pound package.

MacKenzie the Chihuahua bested over 400 competitors to be selected as 2020's American Hero Dog. Born seven years ago with a cleft palate and severe pneumonia that nearly took her life, MacKenzie fought hard to overcome her sickness and birth defects. Soon after she defied

all odds, her owners noticed her affinity for other animals — despite being tiny compared to many of them. That's when they gave her a special job: caring for baby animals born with birth defects just like she was.

Many of the rescue animals MacKenzie helps care for have medical problems that prohibit them from staying with their mothers, but MacKenzie takes a genuine interest in each baby from the moment they're introduced, no matter its species or size. She plays nurse, cleans, and comforts them through their recovery, becoming a pseudo-mother that teaches them how to socialize and play. She's nurtured countless puppies, kittens, birds, squirrels, mice, goats, and turkeys. Despite her tiny size, she's even mothered a Great Dane.

In addition to caring for rescued animals, MacKenzie also helps kids learn to be open-



minded about both animals and people with physical differences or disabilities. The Chihuahua teaches the kids kindness and patience and shows them that no matter how small you might be, you can make a big difference.

MacKenzie lost her ability to bark very early in life, but she has one of the loudest voices when it comes to speaking for disadvantaged animals. Heroism truly comes in all shapes, sizes, and forms, but MacKenzie demonstrates that the most heroic act of all is exuding compassion for others, no matter their circumstances.