

## The Colors of Devotion



March 1 and 2 bring India's most famous Hindu holiday, Holi, which is known as the "festival of love" or the "festival of color," but it is really a festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil. Hindu scriptures tell of the arrogant

Demon King Hiranyakashyap, whose own son, Prahlad, refused to worship him in favor of Vishnu. The Demon King called on his sister Holika to sit with Prahlad atop a burning pyre. Thanks to Prahlad's prayers to Vishnu, he survived, but Holika, who thought herself immune to the fire, was consumed. It is through this story we learn how the virtues of goodness, faith, and devotion are used to conquer forces of evil. This story is so important that before this holiday was called Holi, it was called Holika after the Demon King's sister.

The first day of Holi sees the ritual burning of pyres, with celebrants daring to race through the flames, hoping to emerge as unscathed as Prahlad. The fire purifies the spirit, proving one's devotion and reaffirming the triumph of good over evil. But the story of Holi does not end here. The second day of the holiday is perhaps the most well-known. On this day, celebrants gather in massive crowds and throw colored powder at each other. This practice, too, has its roots in Hindu mythology.

The supreme deity Krishna fell in love with the goddess Radha but was concerned that they would be a poor match because his skin was blue. Krishna's mother advised him to paint her face in order to erase their differences. Like Krishna, celebrants joyfully paint each other in a rainbow of colors, erasing any and all notions of caste or ethnicity. During this celebration, it becomes nearly impossible to recognize others, so all are loved equally. Furthermore, colored powders are often made of crushed medicinal herbs such as bilva, haldi, kumkum, and neem. Throwing these healing herbs is reminiscent of the healing nature of the holiday—the power of spring and the vigor, purity, youth, and playfulness of the spirit.

## March Birthdays

In astrology, those born between March 1–20 are Pisces. Friendly and selfless, Fish are always willing to help others with their hearts on their sleeves. Thanks to an intuitive understanding of life, Pisces make deep connections with other living beings. Aries' Rams are born between March 21–31. As the first sign of the zodiac, Aries are energetic and assertive initiators. With bravery, zeal, and speed, they jump headfirst into life, confident that they can navigate any challenges.

## Residents March Birthdays

**3/3** Vicki C.

**3/4** Marilyn S.

**3/7** Doris R. & Gerry L.

**3/20** Pearl W. & Lorraine K.

**3/30** Richard P.

## February Almond Joy Award



The dedicated staff here at Almond Heights Senior Living are always striving to provide the best service to our residents and families. The Almond Joy Award is one way we reward those who have gone above and beyond. This month's winner is Faith Gallegos.

Thank you Faith for your dedication to our residents!

# Almond Heights Post

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## Egg-ceptional Spring Traditions

With the arrival of spring on March 20 comes all the holidays and traditions associated with the end of winter: religious traditions like Passover and Easter, and Nowruz, the Persian New Year. All of these celebrations share an important symbol: the egg.

For millennia, the egg has been an exalted symbol of birth, rebirth, and hope. Ancient Egyptians told stories of the sun god hatching from an egg. Sometimes the sun was considered an egg, laid each day by Seb, a cosmic goose and god of the earth. In Hinduism, the egg represents the makeup of the universe. The shell is the heavens, the white is the air, and the yolk is the earth. In the Persian story of creation, Good and Evil are locked in an epic battle. When Evil is hurled into an abyss, Good lays an egg, which represents the universe, with Earth suspended from the heavens as a halfway point between Good above and Evil below. Eggs have always been a symbol of the beginnings of the universe and life itself. No wonder that after the long dark of winter, with the return of the sun, eggs are revered as harbingers of life.

When Jews sit together for the Passover seder on March 30, an egg will adorn the seder plate as a symbol of the ritual offering to the Temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the egg symbolizes—you guessed it—life itself. For Christians, Easter is a holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so using an egg as a symbol of rebirth was a natural choice. The traditional color to dye Easter eggs is red, symbolizing the blood Jesus shed on the cross. In Macedonia, congregants bring their red eggs to Easter church services, and when the priest proclaims, "Christ is risen," it is customary to eat the egg as a ritual breaking of the Lenten fast. Elsewhere, in Iran, Persians prepare for their new year, Nowruz, by preparing their ceremonial table, the *haftseen*, with symbolic foods and objects, including painted eggs representing fertility. All over the world, people will be looking at eggs in a different light.

## Celebrating March

**Mad for Plaid Month**

**Play the Recorder Month**

**Women's History Month**

**World Compliment Day**  
*March 1*

**Proofreading Day**  
*March 8*

**Shakespeare Week**  
*March 12–18*

**St. Patrick's Day**  
*March 17*

**World Poetry Day**  
*March 21*

**Mom and Pop Business Owners Day**  
*March 29*

## Awaiting a Return to Capistrano



On March 19, the residents of San Juan, California, look forward to the return of special visitors to the old Spanish mission: cliff swallows. The return of the

cliff swallows to the San Juan Capistrano Mission is legendary. Hundreds of years ago, local shopkeepers drove away the swallows, which built mud nests on shops and homes. The displaced birds built new nests in the eaves of the old stone church, named for the warrior-priest Giovanni de Capistrano. Every year since the 1930s, the community has heralded the return of the swallows to Capistrano with great fanfare.

In recent years, though, the swallows have returned in decreasing numbers. Some people blame urbanization. For a century or more, the mission was the largest building in San Juan, a perfect target for the nesting swallows. As the population increased, more buildings were built, and swallows began to find alternate nesting sites. Things were complicated further in the 1990s when preservations performed a restoration of the church, the oldest continually used structure in California, and removed the mud nests. Cliff swallows are known to be attracted to places with old nests. The restoration, while architecturally important, discouraged the birds. That's when the mission sought the help of a professional.

Dr. Charles R. Brown, professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Tulsa and cliff swallow expert, was charged with the task of luring the birds back to the mission. He has employed everything from broadcasting cliff swallow song to building an artificial wall of swallow nests out of plaster. The good news is that the birds have again been spotted in the area of the mission, even though they have not been nesting on the church. Yet every year on March 19, St. Joseph's Day, the swallows are welcomed with the ringing of the mission bell, flamenco dances, food, and fanfare. Even if the cliff swallows aren't ready to return to Capistrano, the locals are ready for them.

## Making History, I Presume

David Livingstone may have been a Scottish missionary and physician, but he is most famous for his explorations of Africa during the 19th century. Livingstone was one of the first Europeans to see the Zambezi River and Victoria Falls, cross the continent from west to east, as well as witness the harsh realities of the slave trade, which made him a staunch abolitionist. Livingstone's travels made him an international celebrity, and when he disappeared in 1866 on a search for the source of the Nile River, many feared him dead. American journalist Henry Stanley mounted an expedition to find him and departed the island of Zanzibar off Africa's eastern coast on March 21, 1871. Eight months later, Stanley arrived in the village of Ujiji on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. It was there that Stanley saw a bearded white man and said, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" Stanley's presumptuous words became as famous as the old explorer himself.

## A Slice of Pi



When one measures a circular object, it always turns out that its circumference, or the length around, is a little more than three times its width across—3.1415926 to be exact. This number,

known as pi, actually goes on forever. Scientists have calculated its value to more than one trillion digits past its decimal. But for the purposes of celebration, Pi Day is held on March 14, or 3/14, each year. The first Pi Day was organized in 1988 by physicist Larry Shaw, who worked at the San Francisco Exploratorium. The original celebration consisted of Exploratorium staff walking around in a circle and eating pies. Celebrations have evolved since then, including competitions to see who can recite the most digits of pi and Albert Einstein look-alike contests, thanks to that famous scientist's birthday also falling on March 14. It's a mathematical holiday Einstein likely would have been pleased to be a part of.

## St. Paddy's Pastimes Debunked



They say that everyone is a little bit Irish on St. Patrick's Day, and the world will be draped in green on March 17, when St. Patrick's Day celebrations take place across the globe in honor of the patron saint of Ireland. But if you really want to celebrate the right way, be sure to take a look at these facts behind St. Patrick.

St. Patrick may be one of Ireland's patron saints (along with St. Brigid and St. Columcille), but he was not Irish. Evidence suggests that he was, in fact, British. By some accounts, he was born with the name Maewyn Succat in either Scotland or Wales. Yet it is important to realize that even though St. Patrick may have been born in Britain in the year 390, at the time of his birth, Britain was occupied by the Romans. Thus, it is very likely that Patrick's family was from Roman aristocracy. Indeed, Ireland's precious St. Patrick may well have been Italian.

But don't trade in Irish green for Italy's tricolor green, white, and red just yet. The true color of Ireland might be blue. King Henry VIII flew a blue flag over Ireland during the 16th century. Knights of the Most Illustrious Order of Saint Patrick, a society of Irish knights founded by King George III in 1783, wore a light blue color known as St. Patrick's blue. The Irish president flies a blue flag with a harp. So when did green become the color of Ireland? During the Great Irish Rebellion of 1641, Irishmen flew a green flag against King James. Green became the color of Irish nationalism and independence during the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a notion promulgated in the ballad "The Wearing of the Green."

So whether you're marching in Dublin, raising a pint of Guinness in New York, Irish dancing in Sydney, or eating corned beef and cabbage in Montreal, just remember that none of these pastimes come from the original St. Patrick's Day. The Roman Catholic feast day was traditionally spent in quiet prayer, a far cry from the raucous celebrations of today.

## The Boston Massacre

It was a cold, snowy night in Boston on March 5, 1770. Despite the weather, American colonists (calling themselves patriots) gathered outside Boston's Customs House to taunt the British troops who had been stationed in the city to enforce newly decreed taxation measures. When the redcoats affixed bayonets to their rifles, the Americans responded by throwing snowballs and rocks. Moments later, shots were fired. Five Americans were the first fatalities of the American Revolutionary War in what would become known as the Boston Massacre. What is often forgotten in this episode of American Independence is how avowed patriot and future president John Adams, a lawyer, defended the British soldiers who were subsequently put on trial. Two of the eight were convicted of manslaughter, but for many Americans, justice was far from done. Paul Revere, famed for his midnight ride, turned the Boston Massacre into a provocative engraving, creating an effective piece of propaganda that helped turn Americans against the British.

## A Doll's Life



March 3 is a special day in Japan. *Hinamatsuri*, known as both Doll's Day and Girls' Day, is a day to celebrate girls and pray for their health and happiness. The most interesting part of Hinamatsuri is the

elaborate dolls displayed on red-carpeted, stepped platforms. Families either buy a set of dolls when their first daughter is born or receive a set handed down from generation to generation. Sets include a male and female dressed in Imperial attire, representing the emperor and empress, accompanied by three court ladies, five musicians, and other court attendants. The dolls are arranged in order of importance from the top step down and displays are placed in the home for all to see. This tradition has roots in an ancient belief that dolls could attract and contain bad spirits. It was once common practice for the dolls, and any ill fortune, to be tossed into rivers and streams and washed away for good.