

On Springing Forward

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor



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Well, they went and did it again. They made us spring forward.

Seems like only yesterday we were falling back, doesn't it? In reality, it was four months ago. We now spend only four months a year on Standard Time. (Is it just me, or does that completely upend the meaning of "standard"?) Yes, my friends, Daylight Savings Time is steadily expanding – creeping like kudzu right under our noses – and we're just letting it happen. Some people even *like* it.

Did you know it's actually called Daylight *Saving* Time? Like most folks, I've always said "Savings," but according to my research, that's erroneous. I'm ticked off right now, though – haven't had enough sleep! – so I'm sticking with "Savings

out of pure spite

(Which may be why lots of people say "Walmarts," come to think of it.)
For the purposes of this column, we'll just go with DST.

There is much to love about the coming of spring. The warming days . . . the blooming bushes . . . the changing character of the light . . . the festival of birds. I've even grown fond of the little gifts my feline family members bring in through the cat door this time of year. Our orange tabby, Arthur, likes to present me with yellow butterflies and legless lizards (which may, or may not, be "skinks," depending on who you ask). He bolts through the door with these living creatures in his mouth, trots over to my desk, and gazes up at me eagerly. *For you, m'lady*, I imagine him saying. This used to give me the willies, but once I learned to gently extract the still-fluttering butterflies from his mouth for release – and discovered that the lizards weren't actually snakes! – I began to get a kick out of these love offerings.

But much like my cat's more grizzly tokens of affection – (a bright red cardinal's head under the kitchen table will ruin your breakfast) – DST is not one of my favorite spring harbingers.

Confession: I'm writing this on Friday *before* springing forward on Sunday, which feels marginally dishonest. (Writing for a print publication is a bit like playing chess. You always have to be thinking several moves ahead. I'm awful at chess.) But I know exactly how I'll be feeling next week – I've been springing forward for these many decades – so just indulge me as I pretend this week *is* next week.

I complained about the coming of DST on Facebook a few days ago and was surprised to learn that so many people actually welcome it. I always kind of assumed *everybody* hated springing forward, but apparently, some people have Circadian clocks of steel. They don't mind losing that hour of sleep – or driving their kids to school in the dark, or that overwhelming sense that something's terribly off – as long as it means gaining an hour of sunlight at the end of the day.

Fair enough. We all like sunshine. But guess what? The days get longer all on their own. We don't have to tamper with Mother Nature! So, when late July comes rolling around and it's hot as . . . well, *Beaufort in late July* . . . don't come crying to me in your sticky clothes and your melted make-up with the sun still blazing at 8:50 pm. I'll be in my house with the curtains drawn, sipping Chardonnay. On ice.

My college friend Tommy lives in Tuscaloosa and is a big fan of DST. He reminded me that for those on Central time, the sun is down by 8 pm, even in deep summer – I just made up that term, "deep summer" – and I find that to be a much more civilized hour than 9 pm. (Central time zone folks get all the perks! Their 10 pm TV shows come on at 9 pm, which means they can actually watch them in real time.) I guess I might not mind DST so much if I still lived in Alabama.

Of course, my mom still lives in Alabama, and she says I get my DST Derangement Syndrome from her. Like me, she believes the physical and mental transition we're forced to make is unnatural and unhealthy. "And now I can actually see my dogs when I let them out in the morning," she told me last week, "but next week it will be dark again, and I'll have to turn on all the lights outside, or worry about the coyotes lurking out there looking for a snack."

Coyotes, y'all. DST isn't just annoying, it's dangerous.

You laugh, but according to standardtime.com – the quintessential “End Daylight Saving Time” website – there is an actual cost in human lives every time we spring forward. Read on:

“When year-round daylight saving time was tried in 1973, one reason it was repealed was because of an increased number of school bus accidents in the morning. Further, (there was) a study of traffic accidents throughout Canada in 1991 and 1992 by Stanley Coren of the University of British Columbia. . . Alarmingly, he found an eight percent jump in traffic accidents on the Monday after clocks are moved ahead. He attributes the jump to the lost hour of sleep. In a letter to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Coren explained, ‘These data show that small changes in the amount of sleep that people get can have major consequences in everyday activities.’ He undertook the study as a follow up to research showing that even an hour's change can disrupt sleep patterns and ‘persist for up to five days after each time shift.’ Other observers attribute the huge spike in accidents on the first Monday of DST to the sudden change in the amount of light during driving times.”

Meanwhile, according to *Forbes* magazine, other studies suggest links between DST and increases in heart attacks and upticks in criminal behavior. (And don't forget the coyotes.)

While looking into all this, I discovered that great confusion exists about why we started DSL in the first place, and why we still have it. Like many people, I always thought it had something to do with helping farmers by giving them more time to work their fields. Wrong. DST started during World War I, to save fuel by reducing the need for artificial lighting. Saving energy is always a good thing, in wartime or peacetime, but studies suggest that if we're saving any at all today, it's a negligible amount. (One third of 1 percent is the highest figure I could find, and it's hotly contested.) My guess is that for every light that's not turned on at 8:30 pm in the summer, there's an AC that's cranking much harder than it would if the sun were down.

Like it *should* be.

Okay, I'm getting hot and bothered just thinking about this, so I'll let it go. But I'll leave you

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with this wonderful bit of folk wisdom my friend Donna passed along while we were discussing this topic. Supposedly, these are the words of a Navaho chief, in reference to DST:

□□ *“Only the government would believe that you could cut a foot off the top of a blanket, sew it to the bottom, and have a longer blanket.”*

Preach it, brother. Preach it.