



Is it . . . Just Another Day?

My birthday©

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MindOH! Guest Author



Is it ... Just Another Day? My Birthday

A few weeks ago I was in Seattle at my mother in-law's birthday party in China Town. Our usual place didn't have room for us, but this new one did. The food wasn't too good, but we were all together and that was what mattered to my mother in-law, May Wong. She uses the Lunar (Chinese) calendar to determine which day is her special day, so the date changes from year to year.

I was sitting next to my nephew Jeffery who would soon be turning 18 years old in a few short months and I asked him what he was going to do for his special 18th birthday. "Nothin", he replied quite calmly. "Nothing", I said in a shocked voice. "What do you mean, nothing?" "It's your birthday", I said, and "you're turning 18 years old." "That's a big deal", I said. His reply, "no, not really, it's just another day." I felt so sad for him and tried to explain just why it was such a special day. But it did not begin to faze him. He wasn't even excited about his graduation from High School next year.

How sad that a youngster felt nothing about his special day. I began to look at the reasons why and found some of them very close to home. It's not his fault. It's our fault. Kids get those kinds of attitudes from folks they are surrounded with. And why aren't some of us excited about the day of our birth, or a monumental event like graduation? It's a sad place when we can't instill in others the kind of sheer joy those things deserve. Where did our love of life go, our childlike curiosity, and sense of wonder? Have we dulled it down with our expensive Lattes, office memos, and the business of "life" and cell phone calls that never stop? Things that pull at our time with a false sense of urgency, while the really important things in life go unannounced, unnoticed? Don't we owe it to ourselves, and especially our children to go back to the basics and celebrate the important things in life that deserve and cry for a real celebration? Celebrations that are noisy, colorful, and passed down from one generation to another.

Let's look at one example very close to home. I had to speak up to set the record straight – get things on the right track before it went on another year.

Did I hear you right? "Just another day"? Are you kidding me, just another day? Well if it's just another day, tell me, why am I driving three hard (fast) hours to Seattle, with three carefully chosen, brightly colored wrapped presents, along with my husband and our son? If it's just another day, then why are we staying over night and going to China Town to celebrate and hand



out the tiny red Hung Bough envelopes? If it's just another day, then I'm staying home. Forget it, why bother? "Ok, ok," my father in-law slowly replies, "I guess it's a special day." Ok, that's more like it. I guess I'll make the drive after all.

It drives me crazy when I hear that kind of talk. I want to take people, shake them up and say, "how can you say, just another day"? It's **anything but** another day. This is the day, when I came into being, the day I was cheerfully pronounced Tamara Jane Hufford at 11:25 a.m., daughter of Ned and Phyllis Hufford of Upper Sandusky, Ohio. Lucky for me. What if my folks never felt like being close? My guess is, I wouldn't be here and what a shame that would be. Nothing wrong with my ego is there?

Before my dad died in a hospital bed, he fought hard to live for 46 days. He knew how precious life was. He instilled that in me, and tried to show others how special they were and how significant their birthday was. He would call you every time and say, weeks in advance, "did you mail your aunt, (mom, grandparent's, or sibling) a card yet?" My normal response was, "no, not yet Dad, but I have it." Months ahead of time he would begin giving you hints about your birthday gift. "Where did it come from dad?" "Oh, I have my connections." And he did, because he and my mom owned four - five & ten-cent stores. He gave the most fabulous gifts you could imagine, and many you never even thought of. For my 21st birthday, he gave me Guatemalan wedding beads. Pure silver beads that were to worn taunt, around the bride and groom necks while they repeated their vows. The beads were to make sure the couple stayed together. I thought this was fascinating. Maybe I have the story wrong, but this is what I remember.

Have my birthdays always been happy? They have been special days, but not always happy days. I remember my 18th birthday when I was terribly sad, I thought I would die. My heart ached so badly, I was suffering physically. You know those hard cries you push down so deep, that your chest and throat begin to hurt? My boyfriend Frankie had just broken up with me, to date around. How dare he, the creep. And on top of that, my mother was not speaking to me. So there was no cake, no candles, no card no celebration- nothing. I felt like I did not exist. I remember sitting on a big cement step on the back porch and balling my eyes out, when out of the door pops my sister Tonya with a beautifully made pizza with mushrooms making the number 18. I stopped crying and began to smile. She knew how special of a day it was supposed to be and she proved it, by making me the most glorious pizza I had ever seen.

But, overall, I love my birthday. On December 29th, of any given year, I gladly announce, six months from today is my birthday, just to get people in the mood. I can't wait for it to come. I start getting excited long in advance. This year I actually began in October. Our son Schuyler's



birthday is on May 29th. Should we take down the crepe paper and balloons? Heck no, my birthday is only a month away from today and then we can add more to it. Yes, that is what we do every year. Sometimes folks will come to the house and say, “whose birthday is it? And I reply it was mine, but I don’t want to take down the decorations just yet. They make me happy. I love the bright colors, the long flowing streamers and, that for one time a year I gladly put scotch tape on my new white walls. Yes, and lots of it too! What I’m not mentioning here is that I still don’t take the decorations down after my birthday, because July 29th is our wedding anniversary, so why waste any time or supplies re-decorating again? However, I will share with you that I do take it down before my husband’s birthday on November 28th. He blew our 29 thing.

Ok, so back to my birthday, which was, June 29th, see I’m already getting you prepared for next year. My day began with phone calls, voice messages, e-mail messages, e-cards, (those things are amazing). I played one e-card five times it was so funny, and, holy cow, I even got flowers delivered from a florist. Again, it was my lucky day. Shy and I then proceeded to the mall. On the way there, we got gas. At \$2.05 a gallon, I couldn’t resist filling up. When Julie, the Chevron lady told me to have a nice day, I said, “ I will.” “Today’s my birthday.” “Well . . . Happy Birthday”, she shouted from the next pump over, and then my reply, “thank you!” The day went on like this all day long. Was my 12-year-old son embarrassed? No, he’s finally used to it. Perhaps some mild rolling of the eyes, but he gets into it too. And besides, he likes seeing his mother grin from ear to ear. When I bought some new clothes at a store in the mall, I told them it was my birthday. By the time I left an hour later (good thing Shy had his Gameboy), everyone in the store had walked up to me smiling and told me “happy birthday”, and of course my usual reply, “well thank you.” Folks like telling you happy birthday. They feel they are sharing something special with you, and indeed they are. You came to be on this very day so many years ago, and in my case, ok- many, many years ago. But it makes them happy, and of course, that makes me even happier. I’m about ready to bust, I’m so happy. Talk about a glow, I had it all day long.

And I couldn't even sleep in yesterday because I woke up and thought, hey today's my birthday. Who can sleep with that on their mind? Not me. I want to rush down my 16 steps and call my sister on the phone back in Ohio and open her cards and gifts while she waits patiently on the other end of the line. She can't sing to me when I am on the phone, she has to call back to leave a message. Tonya, my sister misses me too bad, and I her, that she will begin to “tear up” as she calls it and she doesn't want to do that. Me, I call it crying or balling my eyes out, but hey, that's me.

Fast forward to evening. When it was supertime, my husband told them, “it’s a special day, it’s her birthday.” And so it was. Everyone was especially nice to me and then they all gathered



around our cozy booth. Eight waiters, waitresses, hosts, and managers sang the birthday song to me real loud. Was I embarrassed? Heck no. Should I be? Absolutely not! I want the whole world to know it's my birthday. I never understand the folks who say, "please don't sing to me, I'll be embarrassed." My thinking is, embarrassed of what? I want to yell, quite loudly, what could you possibly be embarrassed about? You were born on this day, it is a day to celebrate, to cherish, to make memories and take delight in the fact that YOU ARE ALIVE, and that this day is the reason why. Hey this is huge, people!

When I blew out the candles on the lovely white cake my husband baked, (I like box mix in case you're wondering) I felt complete. I kissed my husband Roger who gave me the most beautiful card I have ever received, and our boy Schuyler who also gave me an elegant hand made card – plus a gorgeous fuschia billfold which he paid for himself, and then, then I was ready for bed. What was I planning on dreaming of? My birthday of course. And was it, "just another day?" Hardly.

About the Author

Tamara J. Hufford-Wong is the founder of Tamara J Whole Communication™, a communication company in Portland, Oregon dedicated to creating an awareness and understanding of proper communication to achieve an empowered and fulfilled life, both professionally and personally. Armed with more than 25 years experience working with the public, along with a degree in Communication and Public Relations, Tamara knows what does and does not work when communicating with others. She will help you and your employees learn how to not only survive, but also thrive in today's ever-changing workplace. Tamara feels so strongly that the right communication can make all the difference, that she created a greeting card line 10 years ago, called T.J. Originals, dedicated to help promote a better understanding between people. Ms. Hufford-Wong is the co-author of a book titled: Wise Women Speak: Changes Along the Path, which was released in November of 2004.