

7/Savor Summer
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Word Count: 700

Life is uncertain. Eat dessert first. That's how the saying goes, and there's no better time than summer for desserts—strawberry shortcake, campfire s'mores, peach pie, blueberry crumble. Summer is a time for bare feet, an afternoon in the hammock with our favorite book, a glass of lemonade or sweet tea. It's a time to savor seasonal food—tomatoes ripe on the vine from the garden, freshly picked sweet corn on the cob, salmon on the grill. We're fortunate to have the Manzanita Farmers Market where every Friday we can buy what we don't grow ourselves along with organic meats, fresh bread, flowers and sweet treats. Summer brings houseguests and yard work, but also more daylight hours to take a nap, hang out in the garden, make plans, travel.

Author Annie Dillard says, "Summer is a time to recover the eyes of childhood." Out of the three holidays crammed into the 90 days of summer, Independence Day may be our happiest and hold our fondest childhood memories. Many people treat Memorial Day as just another day off and forget to remember. Labor Day is so tied with the beginning of school that it brings feelings of angst as soon as August winds down. But the 4th of July, the crown of summer, is pure fun for everyone except perhaps the family dog. In our small towns, we can enjoy a good old-fashioned parade complete with the sirens of the volunteer fire department, our FEMA (**F**irst **E**ver **M**anzanita **A**rea) marching band, and a whole gaggle of floats from the community. We can eat hot dogs and not feel guilty, take a picnic to the beach and everyone, young and old, can manage to stay awake for the fireworks, just this once.

Regarding happiness, I was surprised to learn that according to LiveScience.com, despite the anxieties of these times, a new survey finds happiness has been on the rise around the world in recent years. In a list of 40 nations surveyed for happiness, the United States, however, ranks 16th with Denmark at the top and Zimbabwe at the bottom. A recent headline of the Sunday Oregonian read, “America is Falling Apart.” Though it was referring to our infrastructure, we all know it’s a lot more than that. Globally, nationally, regionally, locally, people fight and bicker, eager to express their frustrations and angst over the way the world is going. A public opinion poll released by the Pew Research Center in April found that 81 percent of Americans say they believe the country is on the “wrong track,” a response that is the most negative in the 25 years pollsters have asked the question. But on a sunny lazy day in the Northwest, where we get over 100 inches of rain a year, I savor the moments of summer, the blue sky, soft breeze and blooming garden. I want to say to those who bicker and point fingers rather than act, “Just stop it!” Life’s too short. We have much to be unhappy about, but still we can yearn towards hope, do something positive, express a kind act each and every day. Whatever happened to the lyrics of the Beatles song: Hey, ***Jude, don't make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better?***

In July when we celebrate freedom, perhaps it is wise to remember the words of Somerset Maugham: “If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose its freedom; and the irony of it is that if it is comfort or money that it values more, it will lose that too.” In our country, freedom has lead to attitudes of indulgence, freedom to do as we please while getting what we want, not thinking of the impact on others. We need to remember the responsibilities as well as opportunities that come with freedom and

choose wisely. Educator and activist Jane Goodall, when asked what can we all do to give back and make a positive change in the world said: “It starts very simply. Just take a little time to learn more about the consequences of the small choices you make each day.” Wise words to ponder while we savor summer. Life really is uncertain. Eat dessert first.