

# What Can We Count On?

Gail Balden's Column for  
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One year, I was voted the most dependable person in my high school class. The next year I was voted the most gullible. That means you could tell me anything and I could be depended upon to believe it. What can we count on these days?

We can count on the seasons that roll around just as they should. Though the shortest month of the year, February, that month driving us out of winter and toward spring, was a packed month. We started off with the Super Bowl on the first day of the month. Lucky for us that it wasn't played on February 2, or it might have been called the Groundhog Bowl and we'd still be watching it. February commemorated the 200<sup>th</sup> birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin and the 210<sup>th</sup> birthday of George Washington. It was the month of the 133<sup>rd</sup> Westminster Dog Show, the second oldest continuously held sporting event in the United States. This year a 10-year old Sussex spaniel, "Stump," came out of retirement to win Best in Show out of 2500 dogs. Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? Oregon turned 150 years old and Washington State, 156 in February. It was Black History Month, and included Valentine's Day, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Marti Gras and the 51<sup>st</sup> annual Daytona 500 car races. For those of us on the coast still mopping up after December storms, we can't forget February 7, the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1996 flood.

This year the Vernal Equinox or the first day of spring as most of us call it, occurs March 20. We can count on the daffodils popping up, just like always. Already the forsythia and English daisies are in bloom. Skunk cabbage is coming to life by the creek. My father's ancient double-white lilac bush is swelled with buds as is the flowering quince and rhododendrons. With the advent of spring, small inhabitants of the earth are stirring from their winter siesta. Coping with critters will once again move to the top of the garden list. The moles have already created a checkerboard pattern on the lawn. The raccoons are up to their old tricks, swiping the bird feeders and suet cake holders, raiding the compost bin. We now call our under-the-counter compost bucket the Raccoon's Lunchbox because most of it disappears from the outside bin overnight.

I can count on the 'Big White Dogs' from Childress' place across the pasture to drop by once or twice a week. Their visits help distract us from our life without a dog, an adjustment that takes time. Sometimes it feels like there's sadness at the heart of all things.

These are troubled times for the world. We don't need to look any farther than our own pocket books or financial statements to feel the pinch. In this recession, most of us are trying to figure out how or when to spend money, save

or cut back. Despite the circumstances, life can be rich even if it's simply sharing a home-cooked meal with friends by candlelight or watching the return of the hummingbirds at the feeder.

Maybe that's where we can find the most certainty in this life--in the joy of simple things; in the creatures we share this net of life with, in the natural world, in listening to and trusting our own heart. Here in our little towns we need each other and have the best opportunity to help one another through tough times. I try to live the words of Plato, Greek author and philosopher: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."