

# Brain Aerobics Weekly



Vol. 2, No. 32, August 10, 2009, ISSN 1941-2746



## Potpourri

### Julia's Joy

Julia Child was born 97 years ago this week (August 15, 1912). Also just released is a new movie based on her life, as described in her memoir, *My Life in France*, and on the experiences of Julie Powell who wrote a blog and then a book about her preparing all 524 recipes in Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in a year.

Americans (citizens of other countries, too?) are eating more and cooking less, and Time Magazine has just come out with an article that says losing/maintaining weight has

more to do with what you eat than how much you exercise

(<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1914857,00.html?xid=newsletter-daily>), so why not order the book and start having fun with Julia?

What do you know about Julia Child? Here are excerpts and adaptations from a quiz on her found at <http://www.funtrivia.com/playquiz/quiz30366622c3c78.html>:

1. Where was Julia Child born?
  - a. Augusta, Maine
  - b. Albany, New York
  - c. Boston, Massachusetts
  - d. Pasadena, California
2. In what branch of the service did Julia Child serve during World War II?
  - a. The Office of Strategic Services
  - b. The Navy WAVES
  - c. The Women's Army Corps
  - d. The USO
3. What happened in China in 1944?
  - a. She was sent home
  - b. She was taken prisoner
  - c. She met her future husband
  - d. She became very ill
4. How tall was Julia Child?
  - a. 5'10"
  - b. 6'
  - c. 6'2"
  - d. 6' 4"
5. What were the secrets of her television popularity?
  - a. She clearly loved what she was doing and her enthusiasm was infectious.
  - b. When she made a mistake, she treated it as no big deal.
  - c. She instilled confidence in others that they, too, could *master* French cooking.
  - d. All of the above.



Answers to Julia Child trivia quiz:

1. d
2. a; Julia had been turned down by the US Navy as too tall and instead joined the Office of Strategic Services, a spy agency that was the precursor to the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). Child's work was top-secret, and only became public knowledge in 2008. Another little-known fact: She was partly responsible for "cooking up" a shark repellent during World War II to keep the creatures away from underwater bombs.
3. c; Julia met Paul Cushing Child while both were working for the US spy agency. He was a high-ranking OSS official, and she worked cataloging highly classified documents.
4. c; which made for some tricky cinematography as she is portrayed by 5'6" Meryl Streep.
5. d. *Bon Appetit!*

To order Julia Child's ***Mastering the Art of French Cooking***, [click here](#).

To order her memoir, ***My Life in France***, [click here](#).

### August 15 is Joe Miller Joke Day

According to the website <http://www.staggernation.com/jmj/>, Joe Miller was a popular actor on the London stage from 1709 until his death on this date in 1738. A year later, a book of jests appeared under his name, because it was a common and successful practice at the time to attach the name of well-known actors to books in order to sell more copies. In reality, while Joseph Miller played comic roles, he was known as an uncommonly serious fellow who never told jokes. Perhaps that's why "a Joe Miller joke" is a "groaner". We will spare you the originals from 1739, many of which are not appropriate to this G-rated weekly, but in his honor, here are a few groaners from other sources:

Q: What are the last words from a frontier man to his son right before they are stampeded by buffalo?

A: Bison. (Bye, son)

Q: What succeeds most of the time?

A: A Toothless Bird! (sucks-seeds)

Q: How do you make a bandstand?

A: Take their chairs away.

Q: Why do seagulls fly over the sea?

A. Because if they flew over the bay they would be bagels!

Q: What happened to the dog that swallowed a firefly?

A: It barked with de-light!



### Current plans for next week's celebrations (subject to change):

- Which is?
- Poetry
- Mae West



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### Does your mind wander? Good!

"It happened to Archimedes in the bath. To Descartes it took place in bed while watching flies on his ceiling. And to Newton it occurred in an orchard, when he saw an apple fall. Each had a moment of insight. To Archimedes came a way to calculate density and volume; to Descartes, the idea of coordinate geometry; and to Newton, the law of universal gravity."

According to a *Wall Street Journal* article written by Robert Lee Hotz last June that begins with the above comments, "A wandering mind heads straight toward insight."

(<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124535297048828601.html>)



Mr. Hotz wrote: "[W]e've all had our 'Aha' moments. They materialize without warning, often through an unconscious shift in mental perspective that can abruptly alter how we perceive a problem." He quotes psychologist John Kounios at Drexel University in Philadelphia, who notes, "An 'aha' moment is any sudden comprehension that allows you to see something in a different light. It could be the solution to a problem; it could be getting a joke; or suddenly recognizing a face. It could be realizing that a friend of yours is not really a friend."

These sudden insights are the result of complex brain wave patterns that have been studied by various researchers, whose main finding is that they are the result of a mind that is working very hard behind the scenes, solving problems before we become consciously aware of the solutions. Mr. Hotz writes that cognitive neuroscientist Kalina Christoff at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver "suspects that the flypaper of an unfocused mind may trap new ideas and unexpected associations more effectively than methodical reasoning." Those freewheeling associations may create the mental framework for new ideas.

We also know that insights favor a positive mood and a prepared mind. That sounds logical; we are more likely to solve problems when we believe we can and are not distracted by other stressors. It also helps to understand the subject matter. I could let my mind wander for my entire lifetime and never come up with the theory of relativity.

Nevertheless, it's interesting to note that, as Mr. Hotz writes, "much of our creative thought is the product of neurons and nerve chemistry outside our awareness and beyond our direct control." The end result is that as Dr. Christoff, says, "When we don't notice [our thoughts] is when we may be thinking most creatively."

- What sudden insights have *you* had? What did they lead to?





As legend would have it, Archimedes was so excited by his insight that he jumped out of his tub and ran naked through the streets, shouting to his startled neighbors: "Eureka! I've got it."

According to a bad joke, what did Archimedes say to the skunk? You guessed it: "Eureka!"

### From talking to plants to playing the sax for cows

Many people swear their plants thrive when they are spoken to with love and encouragement. To date, no one seems to have studied what plants can comprehend, but there *has* been research which suggests plants are sensitive to noise.



If the jury is still out on plants, less ambiguous is the first hand research on cows enjoying saxophone music. An old article (June 2007) in *Ode Magazine* titled "The audience mooded," noted that Franz Braun sat in a Wisconsin pasture one sunny day playing his baritone saxophone, when he soon discovered he had an audience of cattle who had gathered around for the open air concert. The farmer who owned the cattle said they gave a record amount of milk that day, and it tasted especially sweet. According to the article, Mr. Braun "has since gone on tour – of dairy farms, playing impassioned pop tunes to enthusiastic herds." Even better: No tax dollars were spent in pursuit of this research.

- Do you believe animals respond positively to music and sweet talk and negatively to noise? What examples can you give among pets or other animals you have known?
- Do you believe plants have similar reactions? Can you cite examples?

### Topsy-turvy Tom Swifties

The following "Tom Swifties" don't quite fit the definition in the proper format for our word quiz, but they were too amusing not to add to this week's delights:

- "What's the best time to plant peonies?" was Tom's perennial question.
- "I can't be drowning in African waters!" pleaded Tom, deep in denial.
- "My dog will only eat cantaloupes," was Tom's melancholy complaint.

