Life’s a Parade!

Aileen Marshall

Have you ever watched the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and wondered who all those people under the giant balloons were? I had the privilege to find out for myself in 2002. A Macy’s employee I knew invited me to join the balloon vehicle team. It has been a real thrill these past twelve years to be part of such a classic American event.

For those of you not familiar with the parade, it has been a tradition in New York for years. The parade started in 1924, organized by a group of Macy’s employees. The 1927 parade featured the first giant helium character balloons. Until 1998 about two dozen balloon handlers managed the ropes attached to the balloon. That year two Toro Workman vehicles were added to each balloon to add stability. Attending the parade has been part of a Thanksgiving routine for many families in the metropolitan area.

To take part in the parade, one must be a Macy’s employee or sponsored by one, as I am. The first year I had to attend a class at Macy’s with very detailed information on how the balloons fly. I also had to attend two practices. Finally I had to help at the press event a few weeks before the parade. In subsequent years it is still required to attend at least one practice.

In the class I learned about how a balloon is created, and things such as properties of helium, drag, blow down angles, and free lift. I was impressed by how much flying these balloons involve principles from sailing and aviation.

During the practices, early on a Saturday morning in an empty Meadowlands parking lot, I learned to interpret the pilot’s hand signals. The pilot walks backwards in front of each balloon, issues commands to direct the flight of the balloon, and makes sure it stays within the “safety zone”, the area between the curbs. I learned about emergency landing and about deflation procedures. Since I had my position is vehicle manager, I had to learn about the Toro Workmans. The front vehicle acts as an anchor and is attached to the “super patch” at the center of the balloon with a rope, somewhat like an umbilical cord. This line is used to determine the flying height of the balloon. The rear vehicle acts as a guide, like a rudder on a boat. My job as a vehicle manager is to maintain radio communications between the pilot and my vehicle team. I also watch out for potential obstacles along the way, and track the position of the tether line attached to that vehicle.

Each year Macy’s introduces the new balloons to the media in early November at a press event. The identities of the new balloons are a closely guarded secret until then. (There are six this year!) NBC, which covers the parade, and other networks are there. It is always a little exciting to watch the news that evening and look for glimpses of yourself and your friends there.

Specific assignments are mailed out in early November. I report to the New Yorker Hotel at 6:00 a.m. parade morning and stand in a very long line in the cold to get my coveralls and radio. It is rather surreal to see 34th Street at dawn filled with people dressed as clowns or cartoon characters. Buses take us to the staging area near the beginning of the parade route. Then I find my balloon and report to the pilot. After getting our instructions and radio check, we try to keep warm while waiting for our cue to launch. I find that my adrenaline pumping in anticipation of the job I have to do and the thrill of being in the parade helps to keep me warm.

While on the parade route, I do need to focus on my task. Yet, it is such a kick to hear the crowds cheer as your balloon approaches, even to hear them ooh as a gust of wind blows the balloon to one side. It is satisfying to see the children look at us with such awe, knowing I was once one of them. Glimpsing friends and family who come to watch is encouraging. These are the rewards for all the practices and getting up so early in the morning. This will be my twelfth year and I still get a buzz out of being on the balloon team.

The parade starts at 9:00 a.m. Thanksgiving morning at 77th Street and Central Park West. It proceeds down Central Park West to 59th Street, and then turns onto 6th Avenue to 34th Street in front of Macy’s. It is broadcast on NBC from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon. For one of the best New York experiences, come and watch the parade!
It started with a twitch. Sometime around 1770 in Bologna, Luigi Galvani charged his Leiden jar, an early capacitor, with static electricity using a hand cranked friction machine. He then took a wire connected to the jar and touched it to the exposed spinal cord of a dissected frog. We don’t fully know the original purpose of the experiment, but we remember Galvani’s name for what happened next. The dead frog’s legs moved.

That first demonstration of life’s animation as the product of a then mysterious electrical force became a founding moment of neuroscience. Over the next hundred years, studies of bioelectricity would reveal that the physics of moving electrons applied to everything with a nervous system and could be measured with a device named for Luigi, the galvanometer. By the late 1800’s, nerves had been thoroughly described anatomically, and budding neurophysiologists were able to measure voltages and describe the impulses carried across scores of them. But there was a problem. While the galvanometer could measure impulses across collections of nerves, it wasn’t sensitive enough to make measurements from single nerve cells, nor was there a device fast enough to record them.

The chance overlapping of two scientific meetings in Chicago in 1920 helped change that. Attending the American Physiological Society meeting was Herbert Gasser, recently appointed to the faculty at Washington University in St. Louis by his mentor Joseph Erlanger. Gasser and an old medical school classmate, Sidney Newmark, had recently built an amplifier to boost the signal from galvanometer measurements of the canine phrenic nerve, though they couldn’t get fast enough recordings and much remained to improve.

Gasser learned from a colleague that the Physical Society’s meeting across town featured a speaker from the Western Electric Company, describing a new heated cathode ray tube (CRT). Aware of its potential, Gasser slipped out of the APA meeting and heard the company’s presentation to physicists. He left convinced that he had found the right tool.

Western Electric tubes were then commercially unavailable, but Gasser and Erlanger were undeterred, and started building one using an Erlenmeyer flask coated in fluorescent paint. Coupling their homemade CRT to their amplifier, and designing the control circuit to govern the sweep of the electron beam to form an image on the bottom of the flask, Gasser and Erlanger succeeded in creating the first practical cathode ray oscilloscope for electrophysiological measurements (see image below).

The device they created, with over 57 switches and needing a stack of dry cell batteries to operate, filled a room and took hours to set up properly each day, but it worked. In 1922, this time with a proper Western Electric tube, Gasser, Erlanger and George Bishop faithfully recorded the impulses of single cells in the frog sciatric nerve. This particular bit of frog wire was what Galvani had triggered to make frog’s legs jerk, and had become a favorite of neurophysiologists for its large size and stability at room temperature. It was composed, however, not of a single nerve cell but a collection of nerve cells of various diameters. Gasser, Erlanger, and Bishop showed for the first time that size mattered: far from every nerve propagating its impulse at the same speed, larger cells had faster conduction velocities than smaller cells. This unexpected observation helped explain the complex waveforms of measurements across many nerves at once, and Gasser correctly deduced that these complex waveforms could be mathematically recreated if one knew the number and size of the nerve cells contributing to it. In a sense, many of the basic conclusions reached by Gasser on the nature of the nerve impulse had been predicted or partially confirmed previously, particularly by colleagues in Britain, Charles Scott Sherrington and Edgar Douglas Adrian foremost. Still, the instantaneousness and sensitivity of the cathode ray oscilloscope was indeed a breakthrough, and before long it became a rite of passage for electrophysiologists to construct their own oscilloscopes before starting experiments.

In 1935, Gasser undertook a new challenge, succeeding Simon Flexner as the second director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. This would mark the beginning of a long legacy of...
A couple of years ago, we rejoined forces to experiment in that time of youth with long solos and emotional musical communions. I met Curtis years ago in college where we’d often do musical jams in the evenings, excepting in the early days of excitement and the belief in limitless possibilities for change in the world for the better.

For years, I’ve owned a recording of a live version of Eric Clapton in his solo years doing an acous-

tic version of the Blind Faith song “Can’t Find My Home.” When Steve Winwood and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Photo credit: Mary Ellen Matthews
Thanksgiving’s Traditional Main Course

Susan Russo

Benjamin Franklin, an American founder, philosopher, diplomat, and bon vivant, famously wrote to his daughter Sarah, “I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen as the Representation of our Country; he is a bird of bad moral Character….The turkey is a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original Native of America….”

Your mother’s or grandmother’s turkey roasting recipe may be the one you always use, but you will find recipes, traditional and nouvelle, in abundance on the Web.

Below are some chefs’ suggestions that you might want to consider, whether you select a frozen turkey, a “heritage” or “heirloom” turkey (which might have an earthier flavor), or a kosher bird. For size, allow one to one-and-a-half pounds of turkey per person. If your family or guests are mostly white meat-eaters, you could roast a turkey breast in addition to the whole bird.

Most chefs and cooks recommend strongly that you buy or borrow a meat thermometer to test for doneness (as over-cooked turkey has been likened by one chef to “jerky”).

If you use a frozen bird, defrost it in the refrigerator for two to four days, depending on the size, and take it out of the refrigerator 30 minutes before preparing to roast.

Brining is a common method to render the turkey juicier, but it’s not necessary if you have a kosher bird, which is prepared using salt.

Pat the turkey skin and inside dry, and then rub with generous amounts of butter (or oil). If you are not adding the stuffing, add lemon, salt and pepper (omit this step if the bird is brined or kosher), onions, celery, and herbs to the cavity of the bird, in order to enhance the flavor of the meat and the gravy.

Many food authorities recommend that you not put the stuffing in the turkey, but prepare it in a separate pan.

Another suggestion is to layer carrots, onions and celery in the prepared buttered (or oiled) pan, and put the roast on top, adding more moisture.

Traditional cooks favor basting the bird every half hour or so, but many chefs judge that the opening and closing of the oven results in drying out the meat and not providing the crispiest skin and deepest color.

The turkey is done when the thermometer, inserted into the thickest part of the thigh (avoiding the bone!) reaches 160-165°F. Loosely “tent” the top of the turkey with aluminum foil for 15-20 minutes before carving. Meanwhile, prepare the gravy, using the strained drippings from the roasting pan.

For more ideas, you could check out Thanksgiving at Bobby’s with Chef Bobby Flay on TV’s Food Network on Saturday, November 22 at noon.

The recipe below, from the American Heritage Cookbook, is one that I have used for years to prepare stuffing outside the turkey.

Corn Bread Stuffing

Preheat oven to 450°F (or whatever temperature you are using for the turkey)

1-1/2 cups corn meal
2 cups flour
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon salt
4 teaspoon baking powder
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 cups milk
4 teaspoon bacon drippings or butter

Grease two 9-inch square pans. Sift the corn meal, flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder in a bowl, then stir in eggs, milk, and drippings or butter until mixed.

Spread in pans and bake for 30 minutes. Cool, then crumble. (Or buy good store-bought corn bread, but make sure that some sugar is used in its preparation, to counter-balance the sausage).

1 pound sausage meat (I use sweet Italian, with the casings removed)
4 medium onions, chopped fine
4 stalks celery, chopped fine
½ teaspoon dried sage
½ teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon salt and dash pepper

Cook the sausage meat over a low heat, breaking into pieces until it is light-
New York State of Mind

This Month Natural Selections interviews Fred Leon, a clerk from The Darst Lab.

How long have you been living in the New York area?
I was born, raised and grazed here in New York City.

Where do you currently live?
I currently live in Woodhaven Queens but I grew up in Jamaica, Queens.

Which is your favorite neighborhood?
I have been to all boroughs and I have to say that I would like to move to Bayside in Queens because the neighborhood is clean and quiet. The homes there are very pretty but I don’t want to sound like a Queens fan boy.

What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city?
I think that the most overrated thing in the city right now in my opinion would be those stupid Citibikes. I mean really, you have people all over the city riding them and they are ugly and they take up a lot of potential parking spaces (from this driver’s perspective). We have cyclists here in the city already that drive erratically and there are rules that they don’t abide by, throw in some tourists now with no sense of direction and, boom, a recipe for disaster. Those should be left to the rental store. Don’t let me get started on the Halal carts. Also, I would have to say public transportation because most neighborhoods it’s pretty hard to get to a bus or train without having to walk a few blocks to find one. It’s not like the city where you can hop in cabs, buses and boats in a blink of an eye. If you live outside Manhattan you might want to invest in a car. It takes you everywhere on your own time instead of a schedule like some buses. In my final thought I think we need more lines.

What do you miss most when you are out of town?
The sounds and lights of the city. When I am far away especially on long drives you go through the long roads of the highways with no ambient sounds except the cars passing you by. I love when I am driving I see the city lights with The Empire State building and New World Trade One welcoming me home. The bright lights of the buildings and planes landing on both the same area airports is my beacon home. The sounds of life on the move, even at night, is always something to look forward to.

If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?
Our mayor, Ha! That is a topic of a different sort. I would have to say the school system needs help, our kids are in crowded classes and the elimination of arts and music in most schools I feel take away from potential creativity and it may make some, if not most, fall behind because there is no time for individual or concentrated help.

What is your favorite weekend activity in NYC?
Well for me it has to be shopping because many know me as a tech junkie, I have to have the latest or keep up with the times. Except you won’t find me on any Apple products—they suck and the sheeple that buy them (just fanning the flames). I also love the park, since a kid my parents always took me to the park to go play and get some fresh air. Nowadays I go just to relax and go out to get some air. I like to go out and eat, even if it’s bad Chinese food and end it with a movie.

What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?
I can say the most memorable day in NYC for me was the first time I stepped into Yankee Stadium (the old one). I was in awe just to see the vastness of the field and the crowd surrounding me. The atmosphere was electric. I remember going to the field and meeting the players to take pictures and get autographs. Oh yeah, when I got married here on campus, but I should have mentioned that first—well moving along….

If you could live anywhere else, where would that be?
Hmm, I would say in Tokyo Japan. Where else can I hang out in a crazy setting other than New York where the crowd seems like a blast to hang out with, crazy shops where you find the weirdest and yet coolest items. I always have had a fascination with Asian culture.

Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?
Man, I tell you this city has given me a lot to be thankful for. There is no place that can beat these streets—nuff said. I got my attitude from here so heck yeah, I’m a New Yorker. Peace!

ly browned

Add corn bread and mix. Remove from heat.

Cook onions in bacon drippings (or butter) until limp. Add to sausage/bread mixture, then add celery, herbs, salt and pepper. Mix well. Bake in oven for the last 30-45 minutes of roasting the turkey. (Moisten with a little chicken broth if the stuffing appears dry after 30 minutes.) Turn off the oven after the turkey is removed, but keep the stuffing in the oven, lightly covered with aluminum foil, unless you think it could benefit from a little more browning.
Over the Moon

GEORGE BARANY AND ELLEN ROSS

George Barany is a Rockefeller alum (1977) and Ellen Ross is a Chicago-based humorist. This puzzle, which celebrates a recent birth in a well-known American family, may be found specifically at http://tinyurl.com/moonpuz, which includes links to on-line solving, the solution, and a “midrash” that explains much about it. More Barany and Friends crosswords are at http://tinyurl.com/gbpuzzle

Across
1. 007 had one to kill: Abbr. 27. Yesterday, in Pisa
4. These come before 21-Down (slang about male priorities) 28. Destination for Shackleton
8. Budgetary setbacks 29. Poetic contraction
12. “Ciao!” 30. DeWitt or George
15. Ames inst. 32. White who was with the girl in the red velvet swing
16. Slave in a love triangle 35. Dennings who plays one of 2 Broke Girls
17. Terror haute? 36. Suave competitor
18. Ref. work featured in “The Professor and the Madman” 39. Animal house
19. Collaborators responsible for 48-Across 40. Motivate
22. Unprocessed 43. Not too bright
23. Hoops 52. Long division?
25. “Does this ___ bell?” 54. Political or religious mentor

55. Bit of frivolity
56. Palindromic exclamation
57. It’s covered by the WSJ
58. ___ Bingle
59. Main, Rawlings, or Post
63. Eponymous school founder whose motto was “Eluceat omnibus lux”
67. Buffalo Mini-Me (and a crossword puzzle standby)
68. Joins forces
72. Long fellow?
73. Ashley’s sister
75. Includes, as a tip
76. Healer of Hellas
77. ___-di-dah
78. Their address was once 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue ... and may be yet again
81. Guido’s high note (another crossword puzzle standby)
82. Has a bawl?
83. One hanging around the house
84. It’s good for “absolutely nothing” according to a 1970 hit
85. British mil. decoration
86. They don’t count as ABs in calculating BAs
87. Eyesore?
88. Norm: Abbr.

Down
1. ____ system (primitive brain system)
2. Novelist Allende (niece of a President)
3. Amazon muscle relaxant: Var.
4. Jezebel’s idol
5. First name in dog stars
6. Type of favorite
7. Meistersinger Hans
8. Most serene
9. Dethrone
10. No-win situation?
11. The Lion King’s brother
12. Third largest island in the world
13. He was played by Shepard in “The Right Stuff”
14. Kennedy or Teller
15. Church seating
16. Sour note
17. See 4-Across
18. Skinny?
19. Bunk
20. “Yoicks! A fox!”
21. ____ Battalion (Ukrainian detachment funded by oligarchs)
22. Saw
23. “____ the Bunny”
24. Gray’s grave words?
25. Tar Baby’s uncle
26. Secure, as a victory
27. Measure of conductance
28. Put down in writing?
29. Scoreboard fig.
30. Shih ____
31. Clairvoyance, e.g.
32. “Ukelele ____” (Cliff Edwards)
33. ISIS stronghold in the news
34. What the nose knows
35. Before, before
36. “Unicorn of the Sea”
37. Cali’s Shangri-La
38. First Florida-bred horse to win the Kentucky Derby
39. Pickpocket
40. Sent
41. They’re history
42. Dorothy ____ of Park Ridge, Illinois, who was remembered in a White House ceremony on November 1, 2011
43. Right-leaning?
44. Martha’s Vineyard accessory for 48-Across, soon enough
45. Continental code?
46. Ogle
47. ___ Skynyrd (Southern rock band)
48. Lovelace and Huxtable
49. ISP with a multicolored butterfly logo
50. Combatants
51. Kindergarten stuff
52. Ryan Murphy’s “baby”
53. Roth wroth this
54. Flora in the Friendly Confines

Ten Years of Natural Selections

Daniel Briskin

Continuing on with our salute to the tenth anniversary of Natural Selections, here is a comic republished from 2004.
On a Sunday afternoon, I decided to have a walk in Paris, to enjoy the city, take a few pictures, and keep an eye open: what has changed in the past years? As my footsteps were inexorably leading me towards the river Seine, I was struck by the evidence: I don’t remember seeing any seagulls—or at least not so many—in the city. I must admit they do look better than ugly fat pigeons!