

RANDOM SAMPLES

STILL IN THE DARK ABOUT TIME? NOT US

Originally published in *The Blade* on Friday, March 12, 2010

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Humanity is responsible for many impressive feats. We invented skyscrapers, walked on the moon, and made Paris Hilton a star.

But one accomplishment that I'm always reminded of at this time of year towers over them, proving once and for all our ability to hold dominion over the world around us: We can bend time to our will. Isn't that what day-light saving time is all about?

I grew up thinking that it had something to do with farmers, but it turns out they've been among the concept's strongest opponents. Farmers' schedules are based around the sun, not the time on a watch, so just because our clocks move ahead an hour Sunday won't make the dew in the fields dry any sooner, as Michael Downing points out in *Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time*.

The idea of saving daylight actually goes back to 1784 when Benjamin Franklin was minister to France and lightheartedly suggested that Parisians could save huge amounts of money on candles if they slept less while the sun was out.

Few took the concept seriously until much later, and it wasn't until World War I that anyone put the idea of advancing the clock to provide more daylight during waking hours into practice. Germany led the way in 1916 as a means of conserving fuel during the conflict, and the United States officially followed suit two years later.

Time changed, just like that. Then it changed again. And again.

In the decades that followed, politicians took turns rescinding the controversial practice, then reinstating it. Sometimes it was nationwide, sometimes it wasn't, and the result could be total confusion.

During the '50s and '60s, there were times when Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were not on the same time as Cleveland or Baltimore, but Chicago was. More amazingly, passengers who took one bus route from Ohio to West Virginia had to change their watches seven times in 35 miles, according to David Prerau in *Seize the Daylight: The Curious and Contentious Story of Daylight Saving Time*.

The craziness continued until 1966, when Lyndon B. Johnson decided it was time to sign the Uniform Time Act. It set definite start and end dates for day-light saving time, but allowed states (like Arizona and Hawaii) the option of not observing it at all. The dates have changed since then, but the effect has been similar.

Whether it's springing forward in March or falling back in November, there are all sorts of reasons people give for supporting the practice, here and abroad (where the dates in countries that use it often differ). Proponents say it reduces crime because muggings are more likely to take place in the dark. They contend it saves energy because people don't have to use their lights as much if it stays light later.

Others dispute this and say it's a costly and annoying inconvenience that can play havoc with schedules. I once had a teacher in college who used the switch from day-light saving time as an excuse for showing up to class an hour late — two days after the change happened.

I'm just happy to spend more of my waking minutes in the daylight. If that means I have to walk around my house twice a year changing watches and clocks for 10 minutes — at a collective cost of \$1.7 billion worth of time for all Americans, according to a University of Mississippi economist — so be it.

In the end, though, I think it's our little way of saying: Hey! We're here! We're in control!



You would think that any people who can control time should have no problem with figuring out a solution to health care or the economy, but maybe we've got even bigger things on our minds.

Look out, gravity. You're next.

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