

The short but eventful month of February

February might be the shortest month of the year, but for what it's lacking in days, it makes up for in holidays. I like to imagine that not-so-long ago, Americans started getting holiday withdrawal after the festive Christmas and New Years holidays and thus decided to create a couple of silly holidays to hold them over until St. Patrick's Day and Easter. The funny thing is that they're not even real holidays. We don't get time off of work or school, but they're engrained in our conscious as dates that are just as important as the Forth of July or Thanksgiving.

First, there's Valentine's day, which according to Wikipedia, is based around a couple of little-known martyrs from the first century. I mean, it makes perfect sense to me to commemorate Christian martyrs by spoiling your loved ones. Although Valentine's day is an international holiday, I can't help to think that Americans take it one step further. We like to pride ourselves on being business savvy and it's no secret that businesses love Valentine's day, and it's not hard to blame them for making this holiday into the monster it is. Gift giving gets pretty slow after Christmas, so they needed something to fill in the gap.

A much less commercial but much more quirky holiday is Groundhog's Day. Before the days of satellites, man turned to nature to try to predict the weather. One common method in North America was to observe the hibernation habits of groundhogs - a 4 to 9 pound herbivorous marmot. If the groundhog comes up from his burrow and sees his shadow this means that we are due for six more weeks of winter. If he doesn't see his shadow, it's time for spring! Although recent studies have put the groundhog's weather predicting capabilities at around 30%, it doesn't stop us from looking forward to what the groundhog is going to tell us this year!

So every February 2nd, school kids and adults alike excitedly await the news of the groundhog. There are a few groundhog festivals around the country but the biggest and most famous of them all is in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania - the place where people from all across the country get their groundhog weather prediction. It was also the center of a brilliantly hilarious film, *Groundhog's Day* starring Bill Murray. In it he plays a disgruntled weatherman who comes to Punxsutawney to cover the groundhog festival for the local news and then oddly wakes up every day thereafter to re-live the same day over and over.

So, while weather-wise, February may be cold and and snowy, it doesn't mean we can't have a good time. Americans are a group of people who, when handed lemons in life, really know how to make lemonade. Sure the holidays I just talked about are silly and even frivolous, but there's nothing wrong with having a good time every now and then.

