



FROM
LINGUA FRANCA
Language and writing in academe

Mensiversaries

By GEOFFREY PULLUM

IT WAS HER IDEA. We had met at a winter solstice, on the 21st of December, and subsequently, as our relationship developed, at some point we started treating every 21st as a kind of mini-anniversary. Except that anniversary wasn't the right word. *Anniversarius* in Latin means "repeated yearly" (*ann-* "year" + *vers-* "turn"); *dies anniversaria* meant "day returning each year." I was the linguist, so it was my job, she said, to come up with a better word. And I saw immediately what it should be. Just substitute *mens-* ("month") for *ann-* ("year"): mensiversary.

It's not in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or any other dictionary in print. I had personally assembled it from generic flat-packed Latin parts. But I never thought it likely that it was solely mine. Linguists learn caution about such things. Many of the innovations that people imagine they see in English turn out to be hundreds of years old. The probability that no one else had ever thought up "mensiversary," I figured, was roughly zero.

Google agreed. Though the first-page estimated hit count of 24,500 was wildly wrong (Google estimates total hit counts from a sample of its index, and for rare words the error can be huge), there were 170 hits. The word is extremely rare, but Google Books yields respectable 19th-century occurrences (Ben Zimmer mentioned this in *The New York Times* in 2010 and even found that at the time the word had a Facebook support group!).

Recent citations are often didactic, explaining the word or answering questions about it. Annie Gabillet, for example, posted a little article on Popsugar asking "Do You Celebrate Your 'Mensiversary'?" in November 2010 — two or three years before I reinvented it.

Tricia already regarded solstices as special. They fall in June and December, and are on the 21st in 73 percent of the years between 2010 and 2020. On the June 21st solstice in 2011, she had been told that she was clear of cancer. Her surgery had been successful, the chemotherapy had worked, no trace of residual breast-cancer cells could be found.

Six months later she was still recovering from the brutality of docetaxel chemo (it kills your taste buds and your hair and the sensation in your fingers and toes, and wrecks your stomach; the doctors never supply full advance details of what it will be like). But she was tough. The night I met her, at a pre-Christmas party,

dinner and saw a movie the evening after that. We grew closer as the months rolled by, and it began to seem natural to treat every 21st as a special day. One rule we set was that we would always spend the 21st together if that could conceivably be arranged. If any lecture trip of mine included a mensiversary, she would come, too. (That rule took her to Cambridge and Berkeley and Santiago de Compostela.)

When we finally decided to marry, we set a date as close to our December mensiversary as we could: Monday, December 22, 2014. Three years after that first phone call.

The sad twist was related here seven months ago. By pure coincidence it was on a mensiversary, our 35th, that her oncologist told her the cancer was back to stay and couldn't be fixed. From then on we knew we had no time for any slow procession of anniversaries. We needed life to be sped up by a factor of 12.

In December 2015, the 48th mensiversary of our meeting was immediately followed by the happy occasion of our first wedding anniversary. (We didn't know it was our last.) By another pure coincidence, the last real conversation we ever had, at the hospital a month later, was on our 49th mensiversary. Next day she was transferred to a hospice, incoherent from morphine and tranquilizers. She never saw our 50th (or her 50th birthday — when she died on January 30 this year she was only 48).

The 21st of September would have been our 57th mensiversary, and I still miss her intensely. But because of that twelvefold speed-up of observances — one of her hundreds of good ideas — we made the most of the time we had. ■

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Dynamics of Relational Attachment**
By Michael A. Diamond



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she sure didn't seem like a sick thing. A dynamic, witty, 6-foot-tall rock climber with a bleached-blond crew-cut and sparkling personality, she talked animatedly about ecology and Scotland and her love of the countryside. (Once, seeing a man dump trash out of his car in the parking area at a beautiful spot near Loch Lomond, she gathered up the trash, opened his car door, threw the trash inside, and told him to take it with him. He was furious but drove off with it anyway. Why take chances with a 6-foot woman whose eyes flash like fire.)

I asked Tricia for her phone number before she left the party, and called her the next evening. We had