

Tales from Hillside Farm

by Suzy Sharpe

The Sun



July 2021

Solstice

The word “Solstice” is derived from the Latin words meaning “Sun” “standing still.” A Solstice occurs when one of the Earth's poles has its maximum tilt away or toward the Sun, the a solstice itself lasts only a moment but, has been seen a significant time of year in many cultures, and has been marked by festivals and rituals since pre-historic times.

A Solstice can be seen as a time to reflect on your personal growth and the meaning of the season of light and growth. This is the moment each year when there is the most light available to us. It's a time of renewal and abundance, a time of expansion. In winter it represents the symbolic death and rebirth of the Sun.

The Summer Solstice marks our arrival at midsummer - the heart of the season. Up until this point, the sun has been waxing and nature's energy has been building: reaching the pinnacle of this crescendo is a cause for great celebration, but it's also tempered with the knowledge that the cycle must continue and the dark half of the year is calling once again. At the summer solstice, the Oak King surrenders his crown to the Holly King, the sun starts to wane, and night slowly begins to overshadow day.

Different cultures and religious traditions have different names for the summer solstice. Midsummer, Litha, St. John's Day. In some ancient Greek calendars it started the New Year and the one-month countdown to the opening of the Olympic games.

In ancient China, the summer solstice is associated with “yin,” the feminine force. Festivities celebrated Earth, femininity, and the “yin” force.

Before Christianity, Europeans welcomed Midsummer with bonfires. It was thought that bonfires would boost the sun's energy for the rest of

the growing season and guarantee a good harvest.

It was also believed fires help banish demons and evil spirits
Native American tribes including The Sioux, performed a ceremonial
sun dance around a tree while wearing symbolic colours which
continues today.

In Estonia the sun was the hatched egg of the enchanted swallow, an
emu's egg bursting into flames in Australia, and a golden piece of bacon



for the Nama people of South Africa.

In Ireland, the Midsummer fires were lit at sunset after being sprinkled with holy water. In Ireland and Scotland bonfires were lit in memory of the Baal fires, a name derived from either Celtic sun god Bel (bright) or the Saxon word bael (fire). These bonfires were believed to boost the ebbing power of this life-giving, mysterious solar fire. In Irish folklore, fairies took the form of whirlwinds to try and extinguish these powerful Baal fires but throwing burning wood in their direction usually discouraged them. Children joined hands and leapt through the embers to symbolise the growth of corn and harvest abundance. Farmers drove animals through the ashes to protect them from disease. On the Isle of Man, blazing furze was carried around cattle for the same purpose.

17th-century poet, Naogeorgus, explained at Midsummer that special straw covered wheels were set on fire, and rolled down a mountain, so that it appeared if the sun had fallen from the sky and was rolling along the horizon, and in so doing, taking away all bad luck, especially if they plunged into water at the bottom. This wheel rolling represented the beginning of the sun's declination. This practice dated back to the 4th century, recorded as a ritual followed by the pagan community of Aquitaine, France. Similar rituals were described around 530 by a British monk in Gloucestershire. Christians then transferred the tradition to 24th June and rededicated it to St John the Baptist.

The custom of burning wheels is also reported on in Thomas Naogeorgus' book *Regnum Papisticum* from 1559. Here is an English translation of the respective Latin verses:

Some others get a rotten wheele, all worn and cast aside
Which covered around about with strawe and tow, they closely hide;
And caryed to some mountaine's top, being all with fire alight,
They hurle it downe with violence, when darke appears the night :
Resembling much the sunne, that from the heavens down should fal,
A strange and monstrous sight it semes, and fearful to them all.
But they suppose the mischiefs all are likewise throwne to hell,

And that from harmes and daungers now in safetie here they dwell.

There are more than 3000 stone structures worldwide, symbolic of our obsession with the sun. Many have been constructed in line with the thresholds of sunrise and sunset but some align with the sun just once a year, usually at a solstice. Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain dates from approximately 2900BCE, and is aligned with the winter solstice sunset and to catch the Midsummer sun's rising.



Poetry

The last line of this poem often rings in my head

You can hear Mary Oliver reading this poem [HERE](#)

The Summer Day - Mary Oliver

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?



Birds in Shakespeare: “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

The ouzel cock, so black of hue
with orange-tawney bill,
the throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill---

The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
the plainsong cuckoo gray,
whose note full many a man doth mark
And dares not answer “Nay”---



Sonnet 18 - William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.



Bed In Summer - Robert Louis Stevenson

“In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.
I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people’s feet
Still going past me in the street.
And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?”





Midsummer By Oliver Wendell Holmes

Here! sweep these foolish leaves away,
I will not crush my brains to-day!
Look! are the southern curtains drawn?
Fetch me a fan, and so begone!

Not that, - the palm-tree's rustling leaf
Brought from a parching coral-reef
Its breath is heated; - I would swing
The broad gray plumes, - the eagle's wing.

I hate these roses' feverish blood!
Pluck me a half-blown lily-bud,
A long-stemmed lily from the lake,
Cold as a coiling water-snake.

Rain me sweet odors on the air,
And wheel me up my Indian chair,
And spread some book not otherwise
Flat out before my sleepy eyes.

Who knows it not, - this dead recoil
Of weary fibres stretched with toil, -
The pulse that flutters faint and low
When Summer's seething breezes blow!

O Nature! bare thy loving breast,
And give thy child one hour of rest, -
One little hour to lie unseen
Beneath thy scarf of leafy green!

So, curtained by a singing pine,
Its murmuring voice shall blend with mine,
Till, lost in dreams, my faltering lay
In sweeter music dies away.



Summer By Christina Georgina Rossetti

Winter is cold-hearted
Spring is yea and nay,
Autumn is a weather-cock
Blown every way:
Summer days for me
When every leaf is on its tree;

When Robin's not a beggar,
And Jenny Wren's a bride,
And larks hang singing, singing, singing,
Over the wheat-fields wide,
And anchored lilies ride,
And the pendulum spider
Swings from side to side,



And blue-black beetles transact business,
And gnats fly in a host,
And furry caterpillars hasten
That no time be lost,
And moths grow fat and thrive,
And ladybirds arrive.

Before green apples blush,
Before green nuts embrown,
Why, one day in the country
Is worth a month in town;
Is worth a day and a year
Of the dusty, musty, lag-last fashion
That days drone elsewhere.



Folklore & Myth

An Inuit Legend – Crow brings daylight

A long time ago, it was always dark in the north where the Inuit people lived. They thought it was dark all over the world until an old crow told them about daylight. The people begged the crow to go and bring them daylight, but he didn't want to. He said it was a long way and he was too old to fly that far. But the people begged until he finally agreed to go.

He flew for a long time until his wings were tired. He was about to turn back when he saw the dim glow of daylight in the distance. As he flew towards the dim light it became brighter and brighter until the whole sky was bright and he could see for miles. The exhausted bird landed in a tree near a village, wanting to rest. It was very cold.

A daughter of the chief came to the nearby river. Crow turned himself into a speck of dust and drifted down onto her fur cloak. When she walked back to her father's snow lodge, she carried him with her. Inside the snow lodge it was warm and bright. The girl took off her cloak and the speck of dust drifted towards the chief's grandson, who was playing on the lodge floor. It floated into the child's ear and he started to cry. "Why are you crying?" asked the chief, who was sitting at the fire. "Tell him you want to play with a ball of daylight," whispered the dust. The chief told his daughter to fetch the box of daylight balls. When she opened it for him, he took out a small ball wrapped a string around it and gave it to his grandson. The speck of dust scratched the child's ear again, making him cry.

"What's wrong, child?" asked the chief. "Tell him you want to play outside" whispered Crow. As soon as they left the snow lodge, the speck of dust turned back into Crow again. He put out his claws, grasped the string on the ball of daylight and flew into the sky, heading west. Finally he reached the land of the Inuit again and when he let go of the string, the ball dropped to the ground and shattered into tiny pieces. Light went

into every home and the darkness left the sky.

They thanked Crow for bringing daylight to their land. “I could only carry one small ball of daylight, and it’ll need to gain its strength from time to time. So you’ll only have daylight for half the year.”

So that is why, it is dark for one half of the year and light the other. The people never forgot it was Crow who brought them the gift of daylight and they take care never to hurt him - in case he decides to take it back.



The aim of this project is to research a different bird each month however this month have focused on the Sun. I enjoy gathering poetry, songs, facts, stories and information to further understand, discover and share ways in which we can help them in the wild.

More of my work can be found on my [website](#) including greetings cards, prints, printmaking, original drawings, paintings and related products.

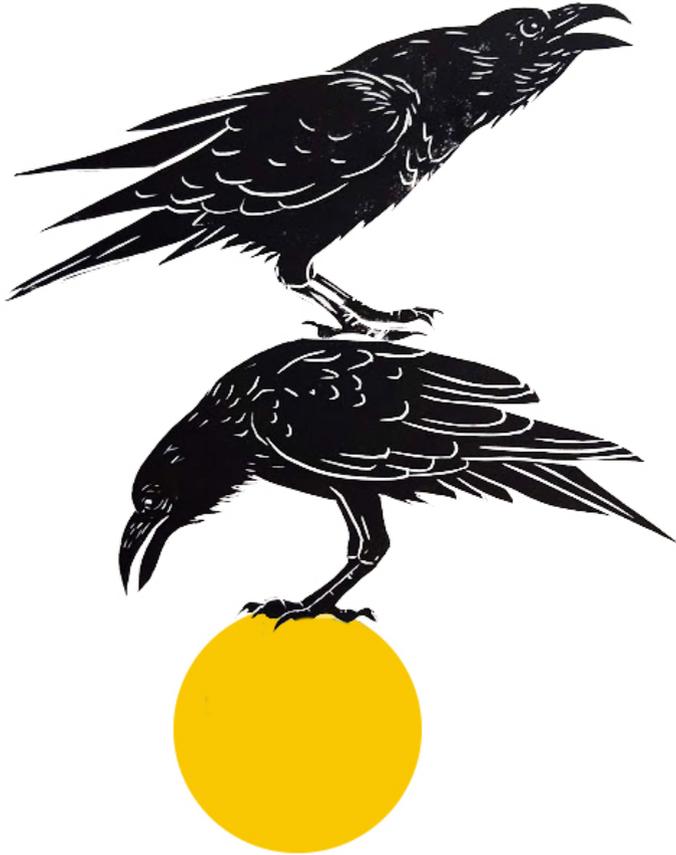
What can we do to continue to protect our beautiful world and its inhabitants?

1. Join conservation groups
2. Support Charities who protect habitat and wildlife
3. Encourage good practice in Fishing, Farming and Land management
4. Vote with your purse, dont support bad practice in anything.
5. Sign petitions to protect Birds and habitat
6. Share your love of wildlife with friends and family
7. Sign petitions to end persecution and improve understanding
8. Dont use pesticides or poison in the Garden
9. Let the grass grow, insects love dandelions and daisies.
10. Grow wildflowers and plant native trees.
11. Encourage insects to your garden

Some links for further information:-

[British Trust for Ornithology](#)
[RSPB](#)
[Birdlife](#)
[The Wildlife Trusts](#)
[The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust](#)
[Help Wildlife](#)
[Plantlife](#)

SEE YOU IN



August

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