

IB Today was unable to include this article by JAMK teacher, Vesa Korhonen in the January 2009 issue due to space restrictions but felt we should include it on its own so everyone has a chance to enjoy reading it.

Month by Month

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Can't help noticing that, around this place, each month of the year has its own properties. After been looking them for over forty years, I can't help writing it all down. This may also considered to be a warning for those of you, who never let the city lights out of your sight. This may not be the right country to try that for the first time...!

After completing the New Year Party we have January, a Monday lasting 31 days, to deal with. Dark, cold, somewhat depressing. Featureless, which also means that you can't remember much of it. At this time, most often, the snow becomes a serious problem. First, you need to move it away from your doorstep and your pavement (if any). Next, you have to move away the snow you already have moved away so that you'd be able to go back to the previous item with the snow which arrived during the next night. And so on. Fortunately, the snow is something you can pack very tightly. This usually solves the problem for about two months, at least.

If you're lucky you may get a glimpse of Sunlight in January. But it does not give you much warm. However, it definitely may block your view when approaching a crossroad by car, for example. Wearing sunglasses at a time when daylight lasts about five or six hours (maximum) feels quite stupid, but after having had some kind of havoc you do it, anyway.

February really re-introduces the sunlight. By mid-February you can (again) see around you by the end of the working day. It feels like you're living and breathing again. Daytime temperatures also regain values supporting human life, even though at night the very cold can still be there. This results some nice effects, such as ice droplets scattered around the trees. Actually the Finnish phrase for February, "helmikuu", "the month with pearls", is derived from these shiny, icy items.

February is also the month which is shortest of them all. Normally 28 days, with sometimes (in practice, once in a four years) a bonus day, #29, included. Stay aware of this anomaly! Carefully

look your calendar to avoid nasty surprises. It is especially important if you're having a winter holiday around the change of the month. Don't miss a day of your leave.

March may have several different faces. It has known to happen that the snow just disappears and the first flowers pop out from their hideaway. But also having more, more, more snow and/or temperatures below -25 centigrade is nothing surprising. At this point you may notice that all the snow you have shoveled away since the beginning of January has now turned to steel-hard packs of ice. Soon you look for an axe or anything of that kind to be able to continue your snow job, to enable you to leave your house or apartment. But, fortunately, this mess with it is about to end. Afternoon Sun may get really hot in March, and it may bring up the memories of the last summer. Also if you're for skiing, or at least interested in trying, then this is the month to hit it. Go north, really north, I mean, beyond the 65th latitude. If you do, you may find places and people you could never have imagined to exist in this country.

April finally turns the page from winter to spring for sure. The Sun forces its warmth to everywhere, at the same time exposing the enormous layers of dirt in your windows, both the home and the car. It also converts the remaining shiny snow to a mass of grayish sand-water dirt which floods around and penetrates everywhere. And appears to be there to stay. There is no way to have the right clothes on for the whole day. Cold morning turns to a nice day which evolves to unbearable hot afternoon, at least when considering your wool-spiked head/hand/footgear. So losing a scarf or a glove is quite normal, don't let it ruin your day. But if you manage to lose a whole pullover, however, then you probably have had it. Still, you should not let that bother you. Try to stay calm. It is known that for some of us the rising light of spring may be even harder to bear than the dark, rainy autumn.

May is the month when the first green items start to appear outside. It is also both the end and the beginning, especially for many of the younger people. Schools are getting closed, even technically it sometimes may take couple of days of June before everything is done and forgotten. On the other hand, new positions for the next autumn are applied and gained. For many this is the time they realize something's going to change, but they can't be sure what will be ahead.

It should also be noted that the 1st of May, the May Day, quite often provides the opening of the party season lasting some seven weeks from then. End of the school celebration fits in this scheme quite well.

June is in many ways the high point of the summer. Everything's going up and growing, the world is full of light green, fresh items, smiling people. Even the rain is so warm and soft that you can't but enjoy it. The climax of this high time is "Juhannus", the midsummer feast. For many of us it indicates the start of the summer holiday season, and with a total departure from the working routine. It's a kind of weird national sport to try to live life as dangerous and fast as possible for the three days of celebration. And the media logs the results by counting the number of injured and dead in real-time, minute by minute. However, soon the ongoing holiday season smoothes the edges of this irrational behavior.

July, the bulk of the Finnish summer holiday, brings the summer to the point of matureness. Hot, bright afternoons provide the required flow of extra heat which keeps us running during the below-minus-20-centigrade periods of the winter. However, there still is some black shade in the light. Obviously watching the light green growing process in June makes the stationary colors of July to appear as stopped, almost decaying samples of the world.

Arriving of the August indicates many of us that the virtually ever-ending circle of going-to-school – studying – working – whatever is about to continue. The wild also starts its amazing process of shutting down. At the beginning of August the green color is the one to rule. At the end of the month there are visible signs of green items turning to yellow, red and orange, the colors of "ruska" arriving. In the evening you can't help noticing that the path of the Sun meets the horizon quite much sooner than it used to do couple of weeks ago. But the nights of August are still short and warm.

September is the time for getting steady. Whatever you're doing, now you do it for real, without extra free time or holidays. The change in color, outside there, continues. At the end of the September, not much green items are left. And October makes it all fall. Leaves, now totally yellowish, fall down to the ground. This is exactly what happens to the thoughts of many of us. A dark rain, on days and nights, is another falling item.

But there is also another kind of October, which occurs every now and then. The month with shiny blue skies and bright sunsets reflecting all the colors now stripped away from the trees. The darkness of night seems to be avoiding the remainders of the sunlight. Stars, and perhaps even the moon, give their own contribution to the battle against black. The rain appears to have moved away for good. Once you've lived a month of this kind, you always believe it must come back some year.

November may give us the first wisps of snow around the mid-areas of the country. In the north, you may already be skiing at that time (see “March” above). Shiny evenings, like those on October, may continue. But since the sunrise now appears before the end of the working or school day, for most of us, the evening light is no longer there for you to wonder but perhaps for half an hour or so. But that point you already know you can make it to the end of this month, and then there's something special about to appear (the Christmas is coming). The chill of the first frozen nights is also somewhat refreshing. You don't even mind scratching the car windows because the shining frost looks so nice. However, that feeling will pass when you've done it couple of more times.

December, the holiday season month, usually gives the first remainder about snow even for the southern part of the country. At that time, however, the snow just looks great after the dark, wet three-month period just about to end. The December, somehow, is also associated with unfinished business. Holidays, the Christmas season and sometimes even the Finnish Independence Day (6th Dec.) totally confuses your schedule, both in private life and at work. An even if it is quite common to have a deadline “by the end of the year”, it is not uncommon to postpone this deadline when one realizes it cannot be met.

As the year goes on, things keep changing at a fast pace. During a month the wild, the light, the temperature, they all may change a lot. After seeing it through for a couple of times, you usually have some idea about what is going to appear around the next turn of the month. But you can't be quite sure. Living north far enough confirms what you may already know: Everything is changing continuously, but, in fact, at the same time it always stays the same. And that is perhaps the reason why you love it.