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Summertime, and the Livin' is Easy

By LAURINDA KEYS LONG

Say the word “summertime” and many Americans will break into song.

Sometimes it's a snippet of an old rock 'n' roll tune about going to the beach, riding in an open-topped car or surfing, or it's a ballad from longer ago about fishing or dancing under the moonlight.

Thoughts of warm days, relaxation and fun, often of romance, definitely trigger a musical synapse in the American brain. The late 20th century phenomenon of summer rock concerts—starting with the 1967 Monterey pop festival in the so-called “Summer of Love” and the 1969 Woodstock rock festival in rural New York—has reinforced the connection.

One of the most common songs an American may start humming, singing or whistling in a Pavlovian

response to the “s” word is a jazz lullaby from a 1934 American opera by a Jewish composer from New York and set in an impoverished African American fishing village called Catfish Row, somewhere in the South.

The name of the song is *Summertime*. The writer: George Gershwin, with lyrics by his brother, Ira, and DuBose Heyward. The opera: “Porgy and Bess.” As in most operas, there is a love triangle, intrigue, temptation, betrayal, a knife fight, bad weather, multiple deaths—and gorgeous music. The lullaby, *Summertime*, is first trilled by a mother to her baby while the neighbors gamble with dice in the background. It's so pretty that Gershwin placed the song three times in the opera, the last time to soothe the fretting child after both parents have apparently died.

So what has all that got to do with *Those Lazy*,



DAN GOULD © AP/WWP



Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer that Nat King Cole sang about in 1963, all about pretzels, bikinis, soda, hot dogs and beer? Why has this lullaby from such a sad story been a staple for American singers from Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald through Janis Joplin to Fantasia Barrino, whose version put her over the top to win the *American Idol* television contest in 2004?

It's all in the words and the music. *Summertime* is a blues lullaby. And contrary to its name, much of blues music is not blue, or sad; instead the singer sings to cheer up herself and her listeners. The melody of *Summertime* evokes a lazy, relaxed feeling, as if it's a hot afternoon. The lyric, whether true or not, portrays an idyll: easy living, abundant crops, fish jumping right into the boat. *Pa's rich; Ma is good looking...So hush little baby, don't you cry.*

There's a contrast in much American popular music between the hard, workaday world and the promise of summer respite, of slower moments when nothing is required because it's just too hot to move or when nothing can be expected until the cool of the evening. Otis Redding said it for everyone in *The Dock of the Bay*:

Sittin' in the morning sun. I'll be sittin' when the evenin' comes. Watchin' the ships roll in and I watch 'em roll away again...Sittin' on the dock of the bay, watching the tide roll away. Just sitting on the dock of the bay, wastin' time.

It's definitely a blues song. He's out of work, far from home, and the blues change-up moment has him calling out in anguish that he's got nothing to live for. But the





My favorite moment of summer was clambering with my sisters into the back of my Uncle Charles' truck and heading from Los Angeles up to the central California town of Bakersfield, where he and my Aunt Mozelle lived in a mobile home. It was tiny and cramped, but they lived on the outskirts of town where I could ride my aunt's bike along the dirt rows between orchard trees and crops in the morning, listening to birds and planning my future. On the ride back, I stopped at the local library to check out books to read during the warm afternoons. In the evening my uncle would cook hamburgers, hot dogs, steaks, corn on the cob and potatoes on the charcoal grill outside. We would watch the stars while laughing and listening to stories and jokes. The mobile home had a small kitchen, so my aunt improvised meals that could be made on the stovetop or in her electric broiler.

Here is Aunt Mozelle's recipe for pizza on toast:

- 1 slice of bread
- 1 ounce of cheese: Mozzarella, Muenster or Swiss
- Garlic powder
- A pinch of oregano
- 2 teaspoons tomato juice or tomato sauce

Broil one side of bread and turn over. Place cheese on unbroiled side and top with seasonings. Pour tomato juice or sauce over all and place under the broiler until the cheese is melted.

—Laurinda Keys Long, Editor, SPAN



KATHY WILLIAMS © AP/WIDEWORLD

song ends with the singer clinging on, resolving to *remain the same*.

A marked contrast is The Lovin' Spoonful's 1966 hit, *Summer in the City*, rated by most list-makers as the greatest summer song. "*Hot town, summer in the city, back of my neck gettin' dirty and gritty*," growled the lead singer, John Sebastian. His staccato keyboard punching throughout the song is anything but relaxing. It makes the hearer want to tap his feet despite the sweltering heat and conveys the restlessness before the respite of nighttime. Then a change-up to a more languorous mood with the words, "*But at night it's a different world*." That dissatisfaction turned to happiness is rock 'n' roll with an echo of the blues.

The quintessential summertime band, of course, was The Beach Boys, a West

Coast group of five young men who just wanted to sing about cars and girls, and an occasional time-out for surfing. None of that jazz-blues sadness-turning-to-gladness for these guys. It was *Fun, Fun, Fun*, pure rock 'n' roll with a bouncing beat that made you dance or kept your head bobbing as you listened on the car radio, with the top down, heading to the beach. Listening to Beach Boys records and videos decades later reveals that they were often singing off-key and were dorky dancers. Yet, even those who were teenagers stuck in summer school or summer jobs remember those as fun days because those words and that music still play in their heads.

The same themes and fun-loving joy comes through 30 years later in Will Smith's *Summertime* rap video with DJ Jazzy Jeff. "*Put your car on cruisin'*

Summers at my grandparents' rambling home in Plymouth, New Hampshire are among my fondest childhood memories. Our family summer dinners were a celebration of the bounty of their enormous garden, with fresh corn, tomatoes, carrots, peas, blackberries, strawberries, zucchini...you name it, it thrived in my grandparents' back garden. My Gran never failed to send us home for the fall with a cooler full of containers of pasta sauce—a distillation of the most delicious tastes of summer that we could enjoy all winter. I still make the recipe every year at the height of summer when tomatoes are at their best. As I follow the recipe card written in her handwriting, beginning to teach my son the recipe I learned alongside my Gran, I can close my eyes and be transported back to those wonderful childhood summers of cooking and gardening and learning about the outdoors.

Gran's Big Batch Tomato Sauce

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 3 onions, thinly sliced
- 2 green peppers, diced
- 3 carrots, thinly sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 5½ kilograms fresh tomatoes, peeled and diced
- One, 340-gram can tomato paste
- ¼ cup brown sugar (packed)
- 2 teaspoons oregano
- 1 ½ teaspoon basil
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons salt

In a large (7.5-liter) Dutch oven, cook onions, carrots, green peppers and garlic in olive oil over medium heat until tender. Do not brown.

Add tomatoes and remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil over high heat.

Reduce heat to low. Partially cover pot and cook for 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Makes 4 liters. May be frozen for up to a year.

—Elizabeth N. Fitzsimmons, Information Officer, U.S. Embassy



National Park Service © AP/WIDEWORLD



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like that 'cause it's summertime...Put the top down so everybody sees you," advises Smith, in a lyric not much different from the Beach Boys'. He raps about barbecues, dancing in the park, playing in the water sprinkler, meeting a summer romance, *a break from the norm*.

Of course, the biggest break from the norm that summer brings is no more school. In America the summer break lasts from the end of May until early to mid-September. It gives three full months for long family vacations, a part-time job to earn some cash, a chance to go to summer school for extra credits to graduate early (*It is an option*.), with plenty of time to spare for swimming, picnicking, playing, relaxing, hanging out, sleeping late, whatever. It surely is impossible for teachers to control kids on that last day of school, and many of those who have afternoon classes just cancel them and let everyone go early. The joy of that sudden release from the ordinary, the anticipation of all that fun and freedom actually translates into screaming as the hordes rush from the classrooms. Alice Cooper's guitars and voices screamed along with them in the 1972 *School's Out*. That who-cares summer attitude is in the lyric: "*We got no class, and we got no principals, we got no innocence, we can't even think of a word that rhymes*."

Unfortunately, as The Beach Boys so poignantly pointed out, they can't all be *California Girls*, so what do those East Coast kids do in the summer, with all that humidity and sidewalks that burn tired feet, as The Drifters lamented in *Under the Boardwalk*? This song is about the wooden quay that runs above the beach in East Coast cities. Souvenir shops, carousels, sellers of hot dogs and French fries are close enough to hear and smell as the singer sits on the sand under the boardwalk with his "baby."

In the midst of the 1960s civil rights movement, as black Americans marched and staged sit-ins, there was also joy

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When I was young, before a sing-songy melody meant an incoming cell phone call, it meant something else: the approach of the ice cream man. A standard in every American town, he sits in a boxy van plastered with pictures of ice cream cones, sundaes and other treats, and cruises through the neighborhood, signaling his presence with a megaphone placed on top of the roof. In India, he might get drowned out. But in the quiet of a leafy, green American suburb such as my home town in New Hampshire, it was often the only sound breaking the silence of a lazy afternoon.

I looked for the ice cream man most often at the town pool. My mother would pack my siblings and me off to the pool every sunny day, where we'd launch into a dizzying routine of swimming lessons, playground activity and free swimming, halting only once an hour for the 10-minute lifeguard break and... the ice cream man. When the sound was heard peeling around the bend, all the kids would run out of the pool, dripping, quarter coins in hand, and line up in the parking lot, each of us hoping that the spot we chose would put us first in line when the van pulled up. We all had our favorites—the popsicle, the orange slush, the ice cream sandwich.



LYNN ISCHAY © AP/WIDEWORLD

Mine was the Cornetto, the neatly packaged vanilla ice cream in a sugar cone with a surprise nugget of chocolate hiding at the bottom. If I managed it right, I could eat all the way down to the chocolate before it melted. When the ice

cream man pulled up his window and rolled away, seeking more hungry customers, we dashed right back into the pool.

—Anne Lee Seshadri, Director, American Center, New Delhi

Here is a recipe for traditional strawberry shortcake:

- 1 quart strawberries, sliced
- 1 cup sugar
- One-third cup shortening (fat, to make the dough flaky)
- 2 cups of flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ¾ cup milk
- Margarine or butter, softened
- Sweetened whipped cream

Mix strawberries with 1 cup sugar; let stand 1 hour. Heat oven to 232 degrees Celsius. Blend shortening into the flour, 2 tablespoons sugar, baking powder and salt until the mixture resembles fine crumbs. Stir in milk. Smooth dough gently into a ball on a lightly floured, cloth-covered board. Knead the dough 20 to 25 times. Roll it to ½-inch thickness. Cut it into 3-inch diameter circles and place them about an inch apart on an ungreased, flat, cooking sheet. Bake until golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Cut the cakes crosswise while still hot. Spread with margarine. Fill and top with strawberries and whipped cream. Makes six servings.

—Steven P. Kerchoff, Information Resource Officer, U.S. Embassy



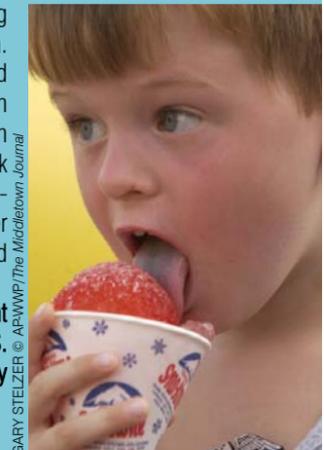
KURT HEGRE © AP/WIDEWORLD

When I think of summer memories, I think of the smells: fresh cut grass, alfalfa hay and sheep's wool. My family lived in rural southern Oregon, where the summers were hot and dry and the economy was agricultural. My five-member family was part of the 4-H youth organization, which lasted the entire year, but took up most of my time in the summer. Between measuring out food to walking our sheep around the neighborhood as if they were dogs, it was a source of much hard work and pride (and embarrassment for a want-to-be-hip 12-year-old), which ultimately resulted in our family's first champion ribbon.

I remember the long hours of grooming the sheep, the pain of a 68-kilogram animal stepping on my bare feet, the pride of winning that big purple ribbon, and how grown-up I felt taking my winnings to the bank to open my first bank account.

The long days at the fairgrounds invariably involved convincing one of my parents to give me quarters, which I would save up to spend on snow cones. I had a fascination with these mounds of ice in a paper cone drizzled with brightly colored sugar water of mysterious flavors like blue raspberry. I still have never seen a blue raspberry. Once the cone was in your hand, it was a race to finish it before it melted and started dribbling down your hand and arm. However, it was a fine art to avoid the drips and getting a "brain freeze," that sharp sensation in your head when you eat or drink something cold very fast. I eventually mastered this skill after enduring many brain freezes and a blue-stained tongue and arm.

—Diane Brandt, Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy



GARY STELZER © AP/WIDEWORLD

Graduation Time

Graduation day is such a fun and momentous occasion in America that it's now celebrated, not just in high schools and universities, but in junior and lower schools, in church schools and even nursery schools. It seems that parading across a stage while one's name is announced over a microphone, while friends and family applaud and take photos, receiving a certificate of educational accomplishment and having a congratulatory party afterward is one of the happiest days many Americans can remember. Education has always been important for Americans, and free public education for all, with many opportunities for higher learning, are supported across the nation among all ethnic, religious and economic groups. And, of course, graduation from high school

David Bloch (from left), Shonali Bedi, Miguel Soland and Peteras Vaicius at the commencement ceremonies at Stanford University in 2005.

or university is exciting because it is a transition, to summertime fun and relaxation, a job, career, university, married life or travel.

Most graduation ceremonies—called commencement because of the connotation of beginning adult life—take place in late May. The planning starts in February. For larger universities, such as the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles—with 8,000 graduates this year, 40,000 guests and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger as the keynote speaker and honorary degree recipient—it's all about organization.

Tickets for the Baccalaureate Dinner, which follows an interfaith celebration and benediction for students the day before graduation, went on sale just after classes began for the final semester. Then there are graduation fairs, rehearsals, sendoff parties, placement of orders for the souvenir DVD, renting of the cap and gown (about \$40 for a bachelor's regalia, with option to buy at \$600), hotel rooms booked for out-of-town family bringing gifts, and practicing of speeches by the valedictorians, the students with the highest grade point averages.

Large institutions have a mass ceremony for all degree recipients, at which the guest speaker, university leaders and honorary degree recipients would make appearances; then each school or department holds a separate ceremony on campus for its own graduates, with the students' names called out and individual processions. This is usually followed by a tea or lunch. In the evening, graduates party with their friends.

In most cases, the all important degree certificate is not handed to the student at the ceremony, but mailed afterward once the final grades are tallied.

—L.K.L.

For more information:

American Graduation Traditions

<http://www.brownielocks.com/graduation.html>

LINDA A. CICERO/Stanford News Service



I grew up in Alabama, often spending summers at my aunt's farm in south Georgia. One of my fondest summer memories is of picking blackberries in July. At home, we neighborhood kids would take our buckets to the open spaces at the end of the street—now long since filled with houses. Even more fun was picking berries along the road and in the fields at my aunt's farm. There, we knew to rustle the foliage very well to be sure no rattlesnake was hiding in the dense, thorny bushes. As the buckets filled, our hands stained purple and scratches crisscrossed our arms, but what we took home was such a special treat. We ate berries as we picked, but far better was taking them home for my mother and aunt to make the most delicious blackberry cobblers.

A cobbler is a deep dish fruit pie made with a pastry crust on the bottom and one on top of the fruit.



Blackberry Cobbler

- 4 cups blackberries
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons flour
- Pat of butter, if desired

Line the sides of a 1- to 2-inch baking dish with pastry (see recipe right).

Fill the pastry-lined pan with blackberries (other berries or fruit could be substituted). Add sugar and flour mixed together. Add a pat of butter if desired. Cover the berries with another layer of pastry. Crimp the bottom and top layers of pastry together along edge of the pan. Make a long slash in the pastry top so steam can be released. Cook in oven at approximately 175 degrees Celsius, for 30 to 40 minutes.

Cold Water Pastry

- 2 cups flour
- ½ cup butter or shortening
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 5 or 6 tablespoons cold water

Sift flour and salt. Chop in the butter or shortening until the mixture is broken into grainy pieces. Add water sparingly in several places in order to avoid getting any part too wet. Mix and form into a ball. Mixture should be very dry. Place the ball on a floured board and roll to desired thickness (like a thin chapati).

—M. Elizabeth Thornhill, Deputy Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy



HILLY SCHIFFER © AP/WIDEWORLD

“Last one in is a rotten egg!!! Yaaaaayyyy!!” And with a mad dash we ran off the end of the small pier and plunged into the freezing waters of a northern Minnesota lake. June. School was out and the family was on its annual holiday to a fishing resort near the Canadian border, a 960-kilometer drive in the family car from our home in southern Minnesota. After a brisk swim it was time to load the fishing gear into the boat and head out across the lake to the waterlily patch where we would catch a mess of perch for the evening's all-camp fish fry.

Perch—the little green and golden fish that inhabit the shallows. A fillet is just a couple of bites. But mmmmm tasty. We would catch a netful in an afternoon and bring them back as our contribution to the weekly outdoor grill and buffet for all the residents of the resort. Skinned and de-boned, the tender white morsels were spread on the charcoal grill and just roasted to perfection. Maybe a little salt and pepper, but the natural fresh taste enhanced by the billowing smoke was all it took to make a platter fit for a king. And kings we felt like as we dug in and feasted to our heart's content.

—Richard Boyum, English Language Officer, U.S. Embassy

For more information:

Log on to SPAN's Web site for links to the songs in this article and more summer music and videos.

<http://span.state.gov>

Entertainment Weekly's top 100 summer songs

http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,293609_1,00.html

ShePlaysMusic.com's top 40 summer songs

<http://www.sheplaysmusic.com/she-plays-musics-top-40-summer-time-songs-of-all-time/>

About.com's top 10 summer songs

http://classicrock.about.com/od/recommendationsandreviews/tp/summer_songs.htm

and hope, as evinced by *Dancing in the Street*, the summer of 1964 hit by Martha and the Vandellas, one of the many talented African American singing groups emerging from Motown Records in Detroit, Michigan. The music says, never mind the temperature or the sweat, just go outside and dance in a giant block party. Each neighborhood could turn on the radio and have its own Woodstock, play songs everyone remembers, invent new dance steps, make new friends, party out on the

front porch, knowing one could stay up late, in the coolness of the evening, because it's summer, and we can sleep in tomorrow.

Summer's here and the time is right for dancin' in the street...

All we need is music, sweet music. There'll be music everywhere.

There'll be swingin', swayin' and records playin' and dancin' in the street.

It doesn't matter what you wear just as long as you are there...

PAUL SAKUMA © AP/WIDEWORLD



PEGGY GREEB

My sisters and I spent every summer on our grandparents' farm in Stinking Creek, Kentucky, where we swam in the muddy creek, hunted crawdads and salamanders, aggravated snapping turtles, chased fireflies. We toted laundry baskets out to the clothes line and picked blackberries in the humid heat. We peeled apples, hoed the garden, slopped the hogs, plucked feathers off chickens for dinner. We shucked corn, boiled corn, popped corn, canned corn.

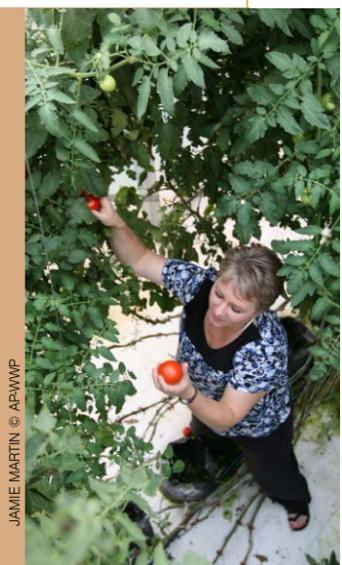
In the evenings, as the sun set behind the highest ridges and mist rose from the creek, we sat on the cement porch steps and picked blood-swollen ticks off the hounds and squashed the ticks with our bare feet. We listened to our grandfather's ghost stories and the adults' memories of the past, absorbing our identity from those stories. We were a family of coal miners and farmers, midwives and moonshiners, school teachers and Pentecostal snakehandlers. Outsiders called us hillbillies. We called ourselves

mountain people.

At night our grandmother came upstairs to tuck us into clean sheets that smelled of the summer sun and pulled quilts up to our chins, quilts that she'd pieced together herself with swollen, arthritic fingers. She stroked our foreheads as she listened to our bedtime prayers. “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”

My family has recipes for fried squirrel, boiled racoon, turtle soup, as well as chicken and dumplings or fried apples, but I'll tell you what I remember best: picking tomatoes direct from the garden, when they were hot from the sun, sprinkling them with a little sugar, and eating them right there, so fresh and juicy that the seeds ran down our arms and fell back into the black, loamy earth. It was the taste of summer and youth and happiness.

—Melody Carnes, writer, California



JAMIE MARTIN © AP/WIDEWORLD



Living most of my life in the Midwest we would quite often spend a summer vacation camping somewhere on a lake in Wisconsin. It was always a wonderful experience: Setting up the tent, hiking the trails, swimming and fishing in the lake with waters so clean you could sometimes see the fish as they approached your bait. The greatest memory of it all though was the breakfasts in the morning. There is nothing like the smell of bacon, eggs and a pot of coffee mixed with the fresh morning air and it always tasted so much better than at home around the kitchen table.

Then there were camp beans that we would slow-cook all day for the evening meal:

- Start with a large cast-iron Dutch oven filled with beans that have been soaked in water overnight.
- Add lots of onion, bacon cut into bite-size pieces, barbecue sauce, brown sugar and a bit of mustard.

It's very important that the lid to the oven is a tight fit. To be safe, wrap aluminum foil around the outside to ensure a good seal.

Then, next to the previous night's campfire, dig a hole large enough to accommodate the oven with room for the leftover hot coals from the fire. Line the bottom of the hole with the hot coals. Put the oven on top and then surround the pot with more hot coals. Lastly, cover the rest of the pot and coals with a layer of dirt from the hole. After five or six hours of enjoying the day's activities you will return to camp with a voracious appetite and an awesome pot of hot baked beans.

To make this a vegetarian meal, just omit the bacon.

—Larry Dakins, computer services entrepreneur, California

The Call of the Outdoors

Camping with kids takes extra effort—but it's worth it.

A summer tradition for many Americans is the family camping trip. Thousands of public campgrounds have been set up in national and state parks. They are equipped with barbecue pits, showers, toilets, even electrical and waste disposal hookups. Rangers keep the peace, provide safety tips and organize nature appreciation hikes and evening campfire talks on the flora, fauna and geology of the area. All this makes it easy for Americans to get away from the city and explore their forests, deserts and seashores. Many travel in large mobile homes or smaller “campers” fixed on truckbeds. Others travel by car, or hike, and pitch a tent, cooking outdoors and sleeping under the stars like the pioneers and explorers of old.

Waking up to the sound of a rushing river, the chirping of birds and squirrels in the trees overhead, and the smell of fresh fish and eggs being cooked over an outdoors charcoal fire are memories carried for a lifetime and passed down through generations. Learning to ford a river boulder by boulder; to catch a fish after an hour of patient waiting; to follow a forest path and recognize the names of trees are experiences that stimulate the imagination, help children learn self-reliance and an appreciation of nature. Floating on an inflated raft in a pool formed by a waterfall, swinging over the water from a tire rigged up to a tree branch, the awesome wonder of the starry night sky with no earthly lights to dim its brightness, cuddling up in a sleeping bag in a tent among one's brothers and sisters, shivering to the slightly scary hoot of an owl or yip-yip of a coyote as giggles and kicks lead to sound sleep. These are the memories of summer.

—L.K.L.

