

21st February 2008

Birthdays

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Birthdays. My birthday. Only a few days away now and I can affix another year onto my steadily-increasing age. I'm going to be 37. Nothing special about 37, except that it falls somewhere between 30 and 40, or more accurately between 35 and 40.

Some birthdays are more important than others of course. "Sweet 16" is a huge shindig for most, although really it's only because it is when a teenager can finally get their driver's licence. 18, 19 or 21, depending on where you live, is of course the age when you can begin to legally drink alcohol. But each country is different, and what we might call a birthday might be called a rite of passage somewhere else.

In Australia, at the age of thirteen, the aborigines go on a *walkabout* as a rite of passage, where they follow the same route (or *Songline*) as their ancestors, while living in the wilderness for six months.

In older times boys were not considered men until they completed their "conscription" - this usually happened when they turned 17 or 18 years old.

Other rites of passage include adolescent circumcision, scarification, *Bar Mitzvah*, a debutante ball or similarly a *Quinceañero* (as it is known in some Spanish-speaking regions of the Americas), and the *Poy Sang Long* ceremony (held every year in Myanmar and Northern Thailand, where boys take monastic vows). There are too many to mention, and some too gruesome to go into detail, but you get the idea.

Contrary to happy birthday celebrations, for some having a birthday can be another reminder of the inevitable saggy skin, "doesn't work like it used to", maybe I should reserve a plot of land now, complex. I'm not a gerontophobic, but I certainly don't jump up and down in joy at the sight of yet another grey hair or another inevitable "smile" wrinkle (which I of course prefer over the "frown" wrinkles) that seem to appear overnight.

What am I going to do this year to celebrate my birthday? I thought about just ignoring it. Many people don't announce their birthday. They just don't like the attention, I suppose. But I can't see anything wrong with having one day as "my" day; a little sprinkle of attention has never hurt me. What's wrong with someone shouting "Happy Birthday!", "Thanks for being you!", "Thanks for being here with us!"? I personally don't see anything wrong with being appreciated. Perhaps Alice in Wonderland had the right idea celebrating "unbirthdays". What do you think?

Oh, and one more thing. I know that here, in Spain, it is the birthday boy or girl that brings in sweet treats to their place of work. That just seems all wrong to me! Buying other people treats on my own birthday? What happened to birthday cake with my name on it?