



Renaissance Terrace  
215 Bearden Place  
Knoxville, TN 37917  
P.O.Box 3025  
Knoxville, TN 37927

Renaissance Terrace Staff:

Patricia Benn, Administrator  
Michelle Franklin, Dining Services  
John Tidwell, Environmental Services  
Katie Kinney, Recreational Activities  
Tim Howell, CEO SCHAS

## February Birthdays

In astrology, those born between February 1–19 are Water Bearers of Aquarius. Water Bearers are deep-thinking intellectuals, unafraid of new ideas. Their strong sense of community makes them good friends. Those born from February 19–28 are the slippery Fish of Pisces. Selfless Pisces are very wise and empathetic. These deep emotions also make Pisces talented artists.

## *Once Upon a Time* cont. from pg. 1

The brothers Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm, famous for their collection of fairy tales, also believed that many of the stories they found had existed for centuries before they wrote them down. They listened to old-timers tell the beloved tales “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella,” “Hansel and Gretel,” and “Snow White” and then transcribed their versions of the tales into print. The Brothers Grimm were the first scientists of folklore. They even took positions as librarians and historians at the University of Göttingen in Germany.

It would be wise on Fairy Tale Day to choose a story collected by Wilhelm Grimm, for this brother’s birthday falls on February 24. If you’ve grown tired of the same old tales, then perhaps you can read a new tale, such as “The King of the Golden Mountain” or “Hans My Hedgehog.”



**Mend a Broken Heart Month**

**Library Lovers Month**

**Bubble Gum Day**  
February 1

**Groundhog Day**  
February 2

**Celebration of Love Week**  
February 10–16

**Valentine’s Day**  
February 14

**Love Your Pet Day**  
February 20

**Tooth Fairy Day**  
February 28

# Renaissance Terrace

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## Once Upon a Time

Once upon a time, it was decreed that February 26 would forevermore be Fairy Tale Day. Whether you fancy woodland sprites, fire-breathing dragons, princesses locked in high towers, or talking animals, fairy tales and the lessons they impart are integral parts of every culture.

Scientists have traced the first fairy tales back to an era before the written word. An old folktale entitled “The Smith and the Devil,” which is about

a blacksmith selling his soul to the devil in order to gain magical abilities, dates back to the Bronze Age—6,000 years ago. Researchers from the New University of Lisbon in Portugal believe that this ancient tale was shared orally in a language that does not exist today. It is no surprise that fairy tales are so old. The purpose of these stories, after all, is to teach children clear distinctions between good and evil and right and wrong. Fairy tales

are, in essence, morality tales filled with magic and wonder as a means to attract the attention of a young audience. Yet, adults are no less in need of morality tales.

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## Underwater Weddings

With Valentine’s Day falling in the middle of February, it is no wonder this month is known as Wedding Month. The city of Trang in Thailand has capitalized on lovers yearning to tie the knot on Valentine’s Day by offering a unique setting for a wedding—under water! Every year from February 13 to 15, couples flock to this

tropical seaside destination to take part in an underwater group wedding ceremony. On the 13th, couples are greeted at the airport by Thai dancers in traditional dress and then paraded through the streets of Trang to the cheers of spectators. On Valentine’s Day, couples are boated to the island of Koh Kradan, where

they take part in a traditional Thai wedding ceremony. Then—for qualified divers only—comes the big event. Tuxedoed grooms and brides dressed in white gowns don their scuba kits for the underwater ceremony in the protected, pristine waters of Thailand’s Andaman Coast.

## The Original Castaway

On February 1, 1709, Alexander Selkirk was rescued from an island after being stranded there for four years. His return to England inspired the novelist Daniel Defoe to write his masterpiece *Robinson Crusoe*.

Selkirk was a hot-tempered navigator of the ship *Cinque Ports*. When conditions on board got bad, Selkirk tried to raise a mutiny against the ship's young captain. Unfortunately for Selkirk, he was abandoned on Más a Tierra island off the coast of Chile. Selkirk expected another friendly ship to arrive within days, but another ship did not arrive for four years and four months. Amazingly, Selkirk survived. He ate fish, crayfish, and the many goats that inhabited the

island. While food and shelter came easily, keeping his sanity was more difficult. When a ship arrived on the horizon to save him, it was navigated by none other than William Dampier, a buccaneer under whom Selkirk had sailed on the *Cinque Ports*. In England, Selkirk found it difficult to reintegrate into society. He often mused that he was happiest alone and penniless on his island.

Daniel Defoe was intrigued with Selkirk's story and so wrote a romanticized version of it in *Robinson Crusoe*. This story has often been criticized for its colonialist suppression of an indigenous culture. Perhaps we should celebrate February 1 as Alexander Selkirk Day and forget Robinson Crusoe.

## Many Happy Returns

February is Return Shopping Carts to the Supermarket Month. Shopping carts are abandoned in the strangest of places: alongside roads, in ditches, under bridges. Today is the day to put those shopping carts back where they belong. It is estimated that two million shopping carts are taken from supermarkets each year, and with one shopping cart valued at \$100, that's \$200 million rolling away.

If pushing a shopping cart back to a supermarket all the way from a highway is too much to ask, you can start by returning shopping carts from the parking lot. Unattended carts can do a lot of damage to cars. Furthermore, studies show that abandoned shopping carts lead to people throwing other trash into parking lots. Returning carts fosters good citizenship!

## Hard to Swallow

The last Saturday in February is International Sword Swallowers Day, a holiday not for the faint of heart or throat. Sword swallowing is not an illusion or trick, but an incredibly dangerous feat that takes years of practice. If done incorrectly, it can end with hospitalization or even death. Professionals, however, only suffer the occasional sore, or "sword," throat. The key to sword swallowing is to not swallow at all! One must completely relax the throat and esophagus and suppress the gag reflex, not an easy feat considering our throats have built-in nerves designed to eject foreign objects in our esophagus. Sword swallowers do not start with swords but practice with spoons, knitting needles, and coat hangers, which makes it no less difficult.



### Notable Quotable

"It is far better to be alone, than to be in bad company."

~ George Washington, American president



## The Year of the Pig

*Xin nián kuài lè!* That means "Happy New Year" in Chinese.

February 5 ushers in the Year of the Pig, a very auspicious year in Chinese culture. Why does the pig represent wealth and good fortune? Perhaps the chubbiness of the pig indicates prosperity. Or maybe it is because wild boars are known to be fearless and will run headlong into any situation, usually winning out in the end. With pigs held in such high esteem, it may be surprising to learn that the legend

concerning the pig is not very flattering.

The legend states that when the Jade Emperor declared that he was selecting animals for the zodiac, all the animals rushed to his palace to be included. But the pig journeyed slowly, and when he arrived, the gates were shut. However, the other animals pleaded with the Jade Emperor to let him in. He conceded, and the pig was allowed to enter but was made the last sign of the zodiac. Despite the pig's hardships, he still

triumphed and was added to the zodiac.

The Chinese New Year's celebration lasts not for one day, but for two whole weeks. February 19 brings the five-day-long Lantern Festival. The displaying of lanterns is a major event, and one of the most popular pastimes of the Lantern Festival is guessing at riddles. Riddles are written on lanterns, and the answers to these riddles often involve blessings for the family and good fortune, reinforcing the major themes of the Chinese New Year.



### Notable Quotable

"I am fond of pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down to us. Pigs treat us as equals."

~ Winston Churchill, former prime minister of the United Kingdom



## Animal Magnetism

Match the Chinese zodiac animal sign to its personality traits.

- |            |                                  |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Rat     | A. Polite and imaginative        |
| 2. Snake   | B. Wise and attractive           |
| 3. Rooster | C. Intelligent and charming      |
| 4. Sheep   | D. Confident and brave           |
| 5. Tiger   | E. Hard-working and kind-hearted |

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. B; 3. E; 4. A; 5. D

## A Sneeze for the Ages

Among his many scientific achievements, Thomas Edison is also known to have opened the very first film recording studio on February 1, 1893, in West Orange, New Jersey. His Black Maria studio (named after the cramped, dark police

paddy wagons known colloquially as "black marias") was the testing ground and laboratory for his kinetograph, a forerunner to the movie camera. His first famous film recording is known as *Fred Ott's Sneeze*; he filmed a mere four silent seconds of Fred Ott

rearing his head backward in a hearty *kerchoo*. Once his marvelous film was released to the public, Edison was contacted by a number of actors, jugglers, magicians, and other performers begging him to capture their work for posterity.