



## Happy Birthday to NOW!



*Walter McKenzie for xSELERatED*

Celebrating anniversaries of significant moments throughout our lives provides a chance to reflect on the past, appreciate growth and accomplishment, strengthen our personal relationships, and even create renewed context for what we look forward to in the future. There's developmental milestones we make note of in childhood, from first words to first steps to first day of school. There's first dates, first loves, engagements and marriages. Then there's milestones like a graduation, a first job, becoming parents and losing our own parents. We fill scrapbooks full of awards and trips and other significant memories we want to enshrine for future remembrance. But there's no more significant and cyclical anniversary than birthdays.



Birthdays have been significant throughout human history for various reasons, evolving from ancient rituals to the diverse celebrations of today. Each year marks the passage of time and acknowledges our journey through life. When we are the focus of a birthday celebration, with gifts, good food and good wishes, it helps us feel special and recognized. It communicates that we matter to others, reinforcing relationships and our connection to groups and shared experiences. maintaining community integrity. Sure they're based in the past. But think about it; they celebrate who we are in the present moment.

I remember my first birthday party. I was invited to my friend John's across the street. As her eldest child, my mother prepared me for the ritual, setting my expectations for the event. We got the best gift ever to bring to the party, and everything went well, until it was time to leave. For all my Mom's efforts to socialize me, she wasn't prepared for my meltdown when I was told I had to leave the gift behind for John. I was so excited buying it, I thought it was mine to show everyone and then take back home. That was one long walk back across the street for both of us. I can look back and laugh, appreciating my innocence in that moment.



## Universal and Personal Significance

Birthdays offer perspective; the perfect opportunity for self-reflection, connecting the dots of life, and looking ahead with fresh eyes. In these ways, we rekindle our hope and optimism for the future, making meaning for ourselves.

The combination of universal and personal significance explains why birthday celebrations have endured and adapted across diverse cultures and throughout history. Some interesting, culturally specific milestone birthday celebrations include:

- In Japan: Seijin no Hi (Coming of Age Day) celebrates turning 20 as a significant milestone marking the transition into adulthood. Celebrated on the second Monday in January, this day involves a formal ceremony where those turning 20 years old gather at city hall, dressed in traditional attire, to hear a speech about their new responsibilities. Many then visit a shrine to pray for good fortune or celebrate with friends.
- In South Africa, gifting a Key for a 21st birthday is seen as a key coming-of-age milestone. It's customary to receive a key as a gift, symbolizing the unlocking of doors to adulthood, freedom, and autonomy.
- In Denmark, the 25th birthday for an unmarried person is marked by friends and family dousing them in cinnamon. If still unmarried at 30, they receive a lot of pepper (though usually as a gift, not a dousing).
- On a child's first birthday in Malta, a unique tradition called the Quccija takes place, wherein various objects symbolizing different professions are laid out on the floor, and the baby is encouraged to crawl and pick one. The chosen object is believed to foretell their future career.
- Longevity noodles and peach buns are eaten in China to celebrate birthdays and symbolize a long life. These include long egg noodles (长寿面) and steamed buns made to look like peaches, representing longevity and immortality.
- Quinceañera in Latin America is a celebration for 15-year-old girls signifying their coming-of-age and readiness for womanhood. The celebration often involves family and friends, with the birthday girl designating a "court of honor" for choreographed dances. Some also celebrate a "doble quinceañera" at 30.



## Technology Expands the Experience

There's other ways birthdays have evolved over time. Modern technology provides shortcuts and conveniences that can check off the birthday box in short order with efficiency and expediency:

### Digital Greetings

- **Social media posts:** Platforms like Facebook and Instagram are commonly used to share birthday wishes, photos, and messages, reaching a wider audience.
- **Video messages and e-cards:** Personalized video messages or interactive e-cards add a personal touch and are easily sent via email or messaging apps.
- **Celebrity shout-outs:** Services like Cameo allow users to request personalized video messages from celebrities, adding a unique element to birthday celebrations.

### Virtual Parties and Experiences

- **Video conferencing:** Platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype enable virtual gatherings, connecting friends and family across distances.
- **Virtual activities:** Online games, cooking classes, escape rooms, and karaoke sessions can be incorporated into virtual celebrations, offering engaging experiences.
- **Immersive experiences:** Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are used to create immersive birthday experiences, such as personalized filters, virtual backgrounds, and interactive elements within birthday posts and events.

### Digital Gifts and Experiences

- **Digital gift cards and subscriptions:** Online gift certificates to streaming services, food delivery apps, or other digital platforms have become popular alternatives.
- **Online fundraising:** Some dedicate their birthdays to raising money for charities or causes, replacing traditional gifts with a philanthropic focus.
- **Personalized tech gifts:** Technology enables thoughtful and customized gift options, such as engraved USB drives and custom-branded portable chargers.

### Conveniences for Busy Friends and Family

- **Birthday reminders:** Social media platforms and calendar apps provide birthday reminders, minimizing the chance of forgetting a loved one's birthday.

- Streamlined planning: Digital invitations and event planning tools simplify organizing birthday parties, both in-person and virtual.
- Effortless memory collection: Digital platforms allow guests to easily share photos and videos from celebrations, creating a centralized digital album.

#### Additional Ways

- Personalized video messages and e-cards.
- Playlists of songs from a birth year.
- Digital gift cards.

But birthdays mean more than checking off another year. Striking a balance between technology and personal connection is crucial in fully benefiting from their celebration. When possible, in-person gatherings strengthens relationships and renews connections. Even brief face-to-face interactions can significantly enhance the quality of longterm relationships. There's no substitute for celebrating in person!



### **Making New Memories**

Making new memories on a birthday is an excellent way to celebrate the here and now. Once in a lifetime travel and novel experiences make your day extra special. Consider the possibilities!

### **For adventure and nature lovers**

- Jackson Hole, Wyoming: ideal for those who love the outdoors, offering hiking, wildlife viewing, skiing, snowboarding, and horseback riding.
- Yellowstone National Park: a great option for adventure and nature enthusiasts, especially those on a budget, with geysers, hot springs, and opportunities to see wildlife (just up the road from Jackson Hole).
- Joshua Tree National Park, California: offers hiking, rock climbing, backpacking, and stargazing in a unique desert landscape.
- Queenstown, New Zealand: known as the adventure capital of the world, it's perfect for bungee jumping, skydiving, and ziplining.
- Patagonia: ideal for adventurers, nature lovers, and romantics, with stunning glaciers, pink flamingos, and an opportunity to explore the region's wilderness.
- Galapagos Islands: a once in a lifetime wildlife encounter, perfect for those who enjoy snorkeling and seeing unique animals.

### **For history and culture enthusiasts**

- Rome, Italy: boasts ancient ruins, historical landmarks, museums, and Italian cuisine.
- New Orleans, Louisiana: a vibrant city known for its music, food, culture, and Bourbon Street.
- Kyoto, Japan: a thriving city with many historical, cultural and modern wonders to see.
- Machu Picchu, Peru: an iconic historical wonder offering trekking, stargazing, and spiritual ceremonies.
- Charleston, South Carolina: the flavor of the antebellum south with Fort Sumter just off the coast and wonderful lowland cuisine.
- Lisbon, Portugal: offers cobbled lanes, castles, and a rich culture with a relaxed ambiance.
- Sydney, Australia: combines beautiful beaches, vibrant culture, and iconic landmarks.

### **Other unique options**

- Bora Bora: known for its luxurious overwater bungalows, white-sand beaches, and opportunities for both relaxation and adventure.
- Maldives: offers luxury resorts, over-water villas, and a serene setting.

- Santorini, Greece: offers breathtaking views of the island and the surrounding water, steeped in history and Mediterranean culture.
- Napa Valley, California: ideal for wine lovers, with vineyards, gourmet dining, and luxurious spas.
- Tuscany, Italy: a rustic wine region with all kinds of natural beauty to explore.
- Safari in Maasai Mara, Kenya: offers wildlife, wilderness, and seclusion through game drives.
- Hot air balloon safari in Serengeti, Tanzania: provides a unique view of the landscape and wildlife.
- Antarctica Cruise: for those seeking a unique and memorable experience.

Invite travel companions and make memories together!

Birthdays mean the most when everyone is in the moment, so avoiding distractions whether in person or online and giving your full attention to listen actively and respond in real time is important. Studies demonstrate that simply having a phone in plain view during a conversation can reduce feelings of closeness and trust. Designating specific times and spaces as "tech-free zones" (not unlike a family's "no phones during dinner" rule) can make space for everyone to celebrate in the moment.

The meaning of a birthday evolves over time. These days I find joy celebrating them with my grown children, being in the moment, appreciating everything about them. How are you celebrating yours these days, and how can you make them more about today and tomorrow? Because even though birthdays (like all anniversaries) are marked by some date in the past, they're all about the now.

**IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NOW!**

# Our June Resource from Heather Lageman: The Birthday Celebration Revolution!



## The Profound Power of Birthday Celebrations: Why Truly Celebrating Birthdays Is Essential for Our Well-Being

*"The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate."*  
-Oprah Winfrey

Remember when you were a child, and your birthday felt like the most magical day of the year? Turns out, your seven-year-old self was onto something profound. While we might feel a bit silly getting excited about birthdays as adults, research shows that celebrating birthdays is actually one of the most psychologically beneficial things we can do - and it's way more important than just an excuse to eat cake (though a hot milk sponge cake with rainbow sprinkles is pretty amazing too). 🍰

## The Secret Psychology of Birthday Magic

Here's what's really happening when we celebrate birthdays: our brains are getting a massive dose of validation, connection, and joy all wrapped up in one delightful package. Being appreciated and loved boosts self-esteem and confidence, reminds you that you're special, and valued by those around you.

Birthday celebrations function as natural psychological checkpoints - built-in moments for reflection, gratitude, and goal setting. They're like annual software updates for our sense of self-worth, reminding us that we matter and that our existence is worth celebrating. When someone takes the time to acknowledge our birthday, they're essentially saying, "Your life has meaning, your presence in this world makes a difference, and you belong here with us."

Heather Lageman for xSELErAtED

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