

Annual Renewal

Caryn Hacker-Buechel, ACSW, DCSW, explores this season of rebirth.

I wait. Dressed in a pink and white fuzzy suit, round tail (unfortunately misplaced) down by the back of my knees, near where the long zipper ends. An overly large bowtie is held in place by an extremely old elastic band and sags just under my chin. A large, pink, starched apron dotted with images of jelly-beans covers my fuzzy belly. I put my white gloves on after carefully placing furry covers over my athletic shoes and I wait. I stare at the bunny head on the manager's desk and it stares, unblinking and stoic, back at me. Soon we will be one. I will, once again, place that huge rabbit head over mine and help the Easter Bunny bring some joy to children at The Naples Sailing & Yacht Club.

For five years I have breathed life into that empty pelt and inhaled the

stagnant, plasticized aroma of inner bunny molding and leftover sweat (from previous human assistants). I absolutely love this gig. I silently hop and wiggle and dance my way through this annual spring event and quietly challenge myself to bring my bunny energy forward and have not one child cry at the sight of the distorted red rabbit lips, overly huge teeth or floppy rocket-ship ears. I love hearing the children giggle in delight as the bunny offers a hand to dance, a colorful egg or an unconditional hug. I am once-removed from my normal state and delight in the freedom of anonymity, for I am (at that time), the bunny.

Donning that suit and its frivolous persona is part of my personal April ritual. This month is complete with holiday celebrations and creative new

beginnings. As Naples' temperatures rise to an average of 86 degrees, new life pushes forth in a variety of concrete and symbolic venues.

The birth of freedom can be celebrated on April 7 in the form of the Passover Seder. The re-telling of the journey from slavery in Egypt to independence in the Holy Land is concretely symbolized in the traditional beauty of the Seder plate with its six physical representations of Jewish life, including the hard-boiled egg. Central to this religion is the vital importance of every human life, as symbolized in the egg, which is an ancient fertility symbol and a food eaten at Jewish funerals. The Torah states that all commandments can be broken in order to save a life.

April 8 brings the opportunity to celebrate Easter. Once again, the egg



Credit: Zoonar/Thinkstock

is a featured symbol of renewed life; however, its plain hard-boiled exterior is dressed in decoration, given as a gift or consumed during the traditional meal. The old Latin proverb, "Omne vivum ex ovo" (All life comes from an egg), celebrates the importance of existence and symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The retelling of this vital story is a combination of sadness, mourning, rebirth and new hope and remains the key event (for Christians) in all of history.

Earth Day (April 22) and Arbor Day (April 27) mark celebrations that involve, not exactly an egg, but a seed. The 42nd anniversary of Earth Day promotes the message that our Earth needs help now. Our planet's issues related to climate change and pollution in our waters and air continue as a serious threat to our existence. Our life and that of generations to come are directly related to our ability to employ "green" concepts to our environment, including the buildings we construct and the food we eat. Arbor Day celebrations encourage the planting and care of oxygen producing trees. These efforts play an important role in reducing carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and moderating ground temperatures.

In essence, April offers the ability to sprout an idea, grow a spiritual awakening or celebrate a rebirth. Naples' resident, Suzanne, did just that. When faced with the pain of a biological son who, in his adulthood, chose to alienate her from him and his family (including grandchildren), she dealt with her immense pain by birthing a group to help many. Alienated Grandparents Anonymous (www.aga-fl.org) is a Naples sprout of an organization that is assisting hundreds of parents and grandparents (statewide and moving across the nation) who, like Suzanne, must cope with the tremendous sadness of a family split into non-communicating parts. Mental health professionals provide monthly didactic information and emotional support is offered for all participants.

April provides so many wonderful possibilities for celebration and awareness of newness and rebirth. How will you celebrate its beauty? Plant a garden and watch the seeds sprout? Visit the zoo and observe the just-birthing babies? Watch a colorful sunset and search for a green flash? Attend a house of worship and offer a prayer? Visit a support group and renew your sense of

peace? Or... be the bunny? Either way, allow your energy and acts of conscious kindness to permeate our planet and plant the seeds for our fabulous future.

Caryn Hacker-Buechel, ACSW, DCSW, began writing books and articles for growing minds during her 30-year career as a psychotherapist and motivational speaker.