

Columnists

Zoning out on daylight saving time in Beverly

By Esther Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. -

I've long wondered if Beverly isn't in the wrong time zone. Grab a map of the country with the time zones delineated.

See how precariously near we are to the edge of the Eastern Standard Time Zone? Really it's the North Shore of Boston — and, ok, the entire state of Maine — and then whoosh, our time zone drops off into the ocean. But if we joined up with say, Nova Scotia, we'd be on the far western edge of the Atlantic Standard Time Zone — an altogether better place zone-wise.

Think about it, the sun rises last when you are on the western edge, and therefore, sets last. Take Michigan: it resides happily on the western edge of our Eastern time zone and experiences its final flash of sunlight a full hour after we do here in Beverly. Instead of the sun blinking out at 4:15 p.m. in December, it sets around 5:15 p.m. Sure, the sun rises an hour later than it does here, but, I'd gladly trade a bit of early, child-waking, sunlight for afternoons that stay lit into — the afternoon.

I floated my time-zone-jumping theory by the meteorologist for a national weather Web site. She didn't share my enthusiasm for the idea. She suggested that I might actually prefer to live closer to the equator where there are not such large fluctuations in the annual amount of daylight. She then encouraged me to get a globe and a flashlight to better understand the entire sun/earth/afternoon-playground-possibility before I made any rash decisions. But who needs globes and flashlights when you have young, house-bound, impressionable children?

"You," I told my 4-and-a-half year old daughter as I positioned her in the middle of our living room, "are the sun."

"And you," I said to my almost-2-year-old daughter who was wandering around the room, "can be a satellite or an asteroid or even a lost tool kit."

"I'll be the earth," I continued, "and our house is where my shoulder is. And now, Mommy will demonstrate why Beverly has annually fluctuating daylight hours."

With that I executed a series of bends at my waist.

"Each year the earth tilts towards the sun, and then back away from the sun. Look, the top is tilted away from the sun." I gasped, in a half-backwards bend. "See how far away our house is?"

"We in our house!" cheered my youngest.

"I mean my shoulder! Look at Mommy's shoulder. It's far from the sun."

My older daughter stared at me.

"Am I still the sun?"

"Yes Sweetie, you're doing great as the sun!"

Then, while still bending backwards, I began to spin in little, ungainly circles.

"Each time I spin around it's one day. Wheee! It's daytime in Beverly. Whooo, now it's night!"

My youngest daughter began to spin in place.

"I spin too!"

"Finally," while bending and spinning I began to walk in a larger circle around my sun daughter, "each year while I tilt and spin I also revolve around the sun! See, how it must be summer on my shoulder?" I inverted myself and leaned in towards my daughter while spinning and narrowly missing slamming my head into the television.

My daughter, in her solar stillness, looked on.

I could tell deep educational lessons were hitting home, though, possibly not about the earth's orbit, but rather a quiet contemplation about her mother's sanity.

Exhausted and dizzy I concluded the lesson. Whom was I kidding? We weren't switching time zones or moving to the equator.

The good news is that we do spring forward into the fabulous extended version of daylight saving time this Sunday. For few days, the hour we lose when we spring forward, simulates the western edge of a time zone — at least for parents of small children.

While the rest of the world gets an extra hour of sleep when we 'fall back' in November, parents across the country know they are in for a miserable three to five days. Those 6:30 a.m. wakers are just as excited and full of charming, boundless energy at 5:30 a.m. But now it's our turn. And for a few days, before the little ones reset, the 6:30 a.m. wake-ups happen at 7:30 a.m., bedrooms stay darker in the morning, and it will be sunnier in the afternoons. Despite our unfortunate eastern placement, come Monday morning, we might be able to believe that the slow tilt back towards the sun, and spring, is underway. Or, we can all move to Nova Scotia.

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