

The Day the Groundhog Changed His Mind

It's February in Vandersploon County on the banks of the Vandersplaatan River. Folks in those parts are pretty excited about the great annual Groundhog Day celebration.

The small town of Vandersploon was founded in 1777 by the Vandersploon Family who own the factory that employs the townsfolk.

The Vandersplaatan River that flows through the Vandersploon Township is owned by the Vandersplaatan Family who also arrived in 1777 and discovered gold in the flowing stream.

Ira Vandersploon became the first Mayor and Ida Vandersplaatan was the Director of the Water Works. The Vandersploons needed the water to run their factory. The Vandersplaatan needed the town laws to protect their river. The townsfolk paid a small annual fee to fish for food for the evening meal. It was a happy arrangement for two-hundred and forty-four years.

Groundhog Day was coming. The factory would be shut down for a day. Every Vandersploonian would gather in the town square in old world costumes for the annual event. Parades would happen, food would be plentiful, dancing and games would be engaged in as they awaited the uncertain presence (or absence) of Vander, the resident GroundHog.

One traditional game was the competition of guessing what Vander would do. The Vandersploon team always said that Vander would see his shadow and go back into his hole. Then, there would be six more weeks of winter. The Vandersplaatan Team always said that it would be a cloudy day and Vander would not come out of his hole; and so, Spring would come early. This was a momentous year because, with a score of 122 to 122, the friendly rivals were tied in their guesses throughout the years.

The day dawned and in the twilight morning hours, before the day revealed its weather conditions, the whole population of Vandersploonians emerged onto the village square. There was Vander's hole in the ground, decorated around with garlands of flowers, turnips and carrots. Happiness and cooperation abounded, music and merriment prevailed.

Meanwhile Vander was in his hole waking up. He heard the celebrations and decided that he would come out this year to see the sun and cast his shadow. Crawling cautiously up his tunnel, just the tip of his tiny ears emerged above the ground.

"There he is! screamed Karl Vandersploon. "I saw him, I saw him!"

At that, Vander was startled and slipped quickly back into his hole to rethink the whole situation. Everyone whirled around to stare at the spot where Vander lived.

“There’s no groundhog there!” cried Vladimer Vandersplaatan, who did not see the tiny ears.

“Yes! I saw him, too” said William Vandersploon.

“No, you did not!” shouted Hans Vandersplaatan, joining the outcry.

“I didn’t see him, either!” hollered Elizabeth Vandersplaatan.

“Yes, I did!” retorted Karl.

“No, you didn’t!” argued Hans.

“Did, too!”

“Did not!”

And so it went on, with many an angry voice saying unseemly things. Insults were hurled, food was thrown, and people were even shoved around.

Vander had thought that he would venture up to see the sun that day and winter would last six more weeks. But, when he heard all this commotion, he changed his mind about coming out that year. He just went back to sleep, and Spring came early.

After that, the two families built separate schools for their children, and separate shopping stores, and spoke separate languages. The Vandersploonians moved to the center of town and the Vandersplaatanians moved across the river.

Generations of children grew up wondering why they could not play with each other. Fortunately, one day, Greta Vandersploon overcame all odds and became Mayor of the township. She fell in love with Zander Vandersplaatan, who managed the factory. The townspeople took a vote and renamed the town, Vandersplatspootonia. Vander’s ancestors took turns coming out one year and not coming out the next year to keep the competitions evenly tied.

And just recently, Vander’s great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter, Vanessa, emerged to see her shadow and there was six more weeks of winter.

Everyone lived happily ever after.

THE END

Fun Facts About Groundhogs

Did You Know?

- Groundhogs are also called 'woodchucks' and whistle pigs'
- They are mammals, rodents, and in the 'ground squirrels' family
- Groundhogs have heavy, furry bodies 14"-20" long with 7" for their bushy tail
- They can be 'grumpy' and aggressive, showing long front 'buck' teeth
- Groundhogs keep a 'watch groundhog' always on guard when they are feeding on plants
- They can swim and climb trees
- Groundhogs live across central Alaska, Canada, and the U.S.A.
- Adults dig deep, long *burrows* for safety, nesting, and *hibernation* (winter sleep)
- They can remove up to 700 pounds of dirt to make their tunnel burrows
- The burrows have a separate side tunnel for a 'poop chamber'
- During hibernation, their heartbeat slows from 80 beats/minute to 5/minute
- Groundhog Day tradition was brought over by Germans: *"if a 'hedgehog' appears on Feb. 2 (Candlemas religious holiday), it is a sign that snow will last until May"*
- The *groundhog* replaced the European *hedgehog* in the tradition, starting in 1886 in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania
- *Punxsutawney Phil* is the official resident groundhog in this largest of all groundhog day celebrations
- *Punxsutawney Phil* is not accepted as an accurate weather forecaster (except in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, where people say he is right 75%-90% of the time!

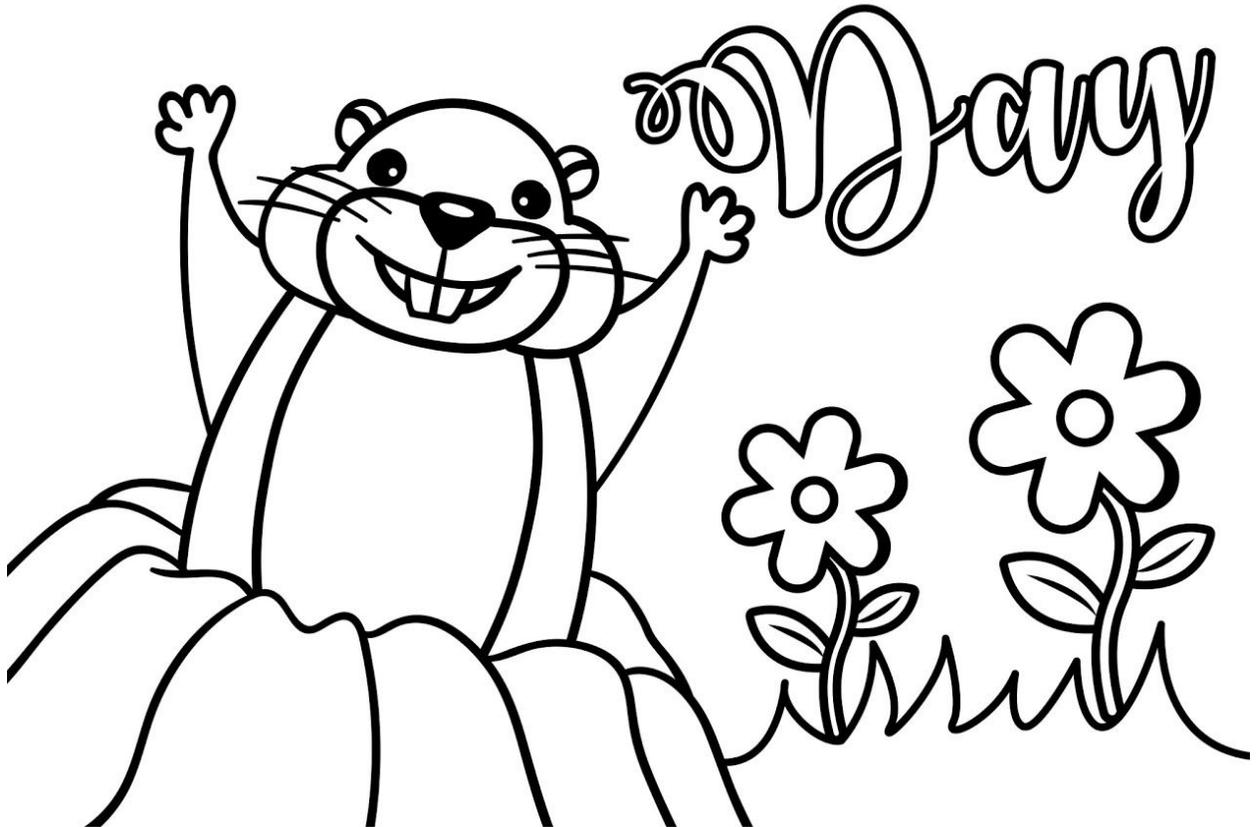
How many pounds could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

Answer: 700 pounds!

Traditions of countries keep the memories of the culture alive for the next generation.

HAPPY

GROUNDHOG



Help the Groundhog Find His Way Out!

