

April

Photo © Heatherjo Gilbertson



April

Wait Long Enough and a Pattern Emerges

Today the river cannot decide
which course to take,
like a young woman rushing out
the door, then back again
to change her shoes.

Greg Watson

☞ “I don’t tell the popular narratives, the commercial narratives, that one is supposed to tell as an African American writer, and there is a price to be paid for that.”
—David Haynes, former Saint Paul writer and teacher

APRIL						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1

29 Monday

Passover begins

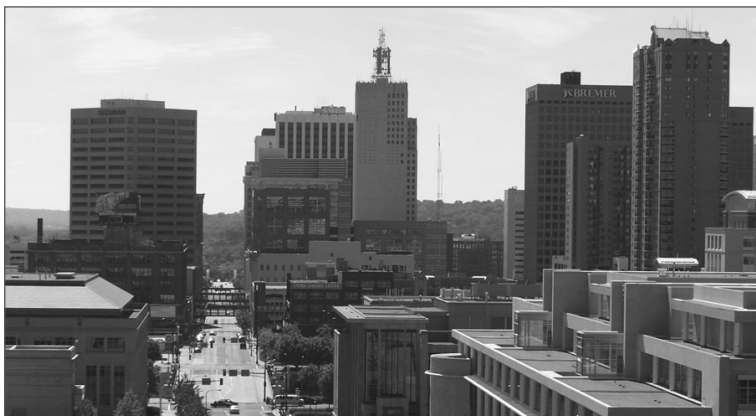
30 Tuesday

🌱 Denzil Carty, Episcopal priest and civil rights activist, was born today in 1904

31 Wednesday

1 Thursday

April Fools’ Day



Downtown with First Bank in the distance

<p>2 Friday Good Friday</p>	<p>Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra</p>
<p>3 Saturday</p>	<p>Saint Paul Winter Farmers' Market Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Minnesota RollerGirls (Bout)</p> <p> Eddie Benton Banai, a founder of the American Indian Movement and Red School House, was born today in 1934 </p>
<p>4 Sunday Easter</p>	<p>Street Poetry The worms have been up all night writing long lines of crazy, unintelligible poetry in the street. Drunk on spring, they dry out in the sun. <i>Mike Hazard</i></p>

Can't Nobody Make a Sweet Potato Pie Like My Mama

Rose McGee

Every holiday, every barbecue, every church social, and Lord knows for every somebody or another's funeral, the unspoken expectation has always been that my mama makes the sweet potato pies. Calling her pies delicious is an understatement—they are heavenly.

Today, close to a hundred people are packed practically elbow to elbow in Mama's little five-room, tin-roof house in Jackson, Tennessee. None of her pies are being served because not a single one of us ever thought to keep a batch tucked away in the freezer. Instead, as is customary, everyone is waiting with a Southern style of patience for some of the church ladies to usher themselves into Mama's cozy little yellow-and-white gingham-accented kitchen, hauling in their own sweet potato pies. Each woman believes hers is the best and warrants first-to-be-served for today's special repast—Mama's funeral.

Peeking out the window and much to my surprise, I see seven distinguished elderly women, each wearing a white hat, a white dress, white shoes, and white gloves ceremoniously lined up on Mama's front porch, about to make some type of grand entrance. Looking closer, I realize these are Mama's cooking rivals and closest friends! A further cue of "All rise" becomes an unspoken command. Everyone stands to attention in stone military silence as the packed Red Sea living room begins parting, making way for the ladies' entrance. Each is carrying a colorful woven basket containing sweet potato pies.

Within minutes, sweet potato pie is being served. Definitely not hungry, but graciously, I nibble from a slice brought in to me by Mama's favorite niece, who now resides in Saint Paul, Minnesota. As Cousin Mary Louise continues serving slices of pie in a Northern sort of way, I am desperately wishing this whole funeral ordeal will hurry and come to closure. I'm given another slice of pie. I nibble a bit more. Not a bad flavor, but slightly too much nutmeg for my taste. Nothing like Mama's. Doesn't even come close. I only want Mama's pie. I only want Mama back.

Nobody could or ever will be able to make a sweet potato pie like my Mama.

Traditional Sweet Potato Pie

Rose McGee, *Owner of Deep Roots Gourmet Desserts*

Ingredients (makes two 9" pies):

- 1 stick of butter, softened
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 4 medium to large sweet potatoes, cooked
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup milk (whole, evaporated, or condensed)
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1 tablespoon nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon lemon extract
- 2 unbaked pie shells

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Use a hand or stand mixer.

1. In a large mixing bowl, blend cooked sweet potatoes with sugar. Blend in eggs.
2. Now blend in soft butter.
3. Add next 5 ingredients; mix well.
4. Pour into pie shells.
5. Reduce heat to 350° F and bake 60 minutes or until well set.
6. Remove from oven. Allow to cool and firm up before eating.

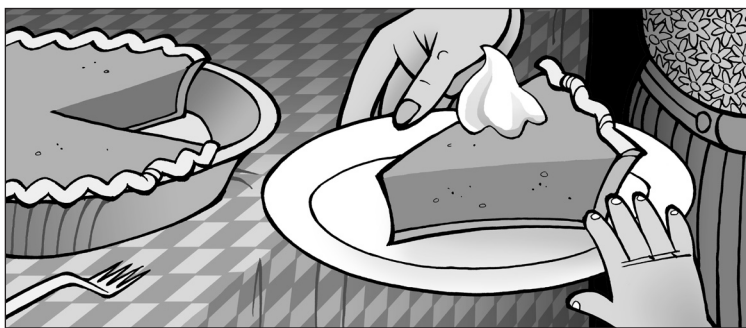


Illustration © Kirk Anderson

Yum: Sweet Potato Pie

☞ “I have a feeling that when my ship comes in, I’ll be at the airport.”
—Charles M. Schulz, Saint Paul native and cartoonist

APRIL						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1

5 Monday

Saint Paul Almanac Reading Series

6 Tuesday

7 Wednesday

8 Thursday

 Melvin Calvin, Nobel Prize-winning chemist, was born today in 1911



Red-winged blackbird on the Mississippi River bank in Saint Paul

9 Friday

10 Saturday

Saint Paul Winter Farmers' Market
Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra
Minnesota Opera *Salome*

11 Sunday

Urban Expedition: Ghana

The octagonal Highland Water Tower, built in 1927, is 134 feet high and holds 200,000 gallons of water in a steel tank.

Landmarks

For my parents

Ann Iverson

I. The Cathedral

After Mass she made pot roast and potatoes
and we sat in silence at the harvest table.
What I didn't know is that all of her life
she tucked away pieces of palm
inside of drawers and books,
pockets and glass knickknacks.
A certain kind of holiness
I keep finding years after her death
dusty, braided and frayed like the edges of a river.

II. Sanitary Farm Dairies

The last of the real milkmen slowly go out.
When my father lost 35 years of pension from the
merger, he slowly raked the yard.
A two hour job took him all day;
he stopped often to take long drags
from generic cigarettes.
After she died, he stopped
tending the yard altogether;
the weeds grew up
as he sat in the corner of his kitchen
memorizing the small portrait
offered by the window.

III. Downtown Saint Paul

Amazing then, at 47
I can wish myself
right back into her arms
as I did when she would leave
on Monday nights to shop
downtown Saint Paul.
From my bed, I would listen
for the click, click of her soft heels

on the sidewalk of an autumn night
the brush of packages against her coat.
In my life, have I ever felt more safe
than those evenings upon her return?

IV. Harriet Island

Some people climbed the fence
and scaled the slanted rock
that keeps the mighty water contained.
I was afraid of the rushing darkness;
the under currents which would
take me in and swallow.
My mother in her navy blue turban
told me this was so.

VI. Harriet Island, Spring 1965

When the others had gone to mass
at the Cathedral, shiny and domed
up off the hill,
we strolled the island
just the two of us
father and I
while the Mississippi
bent and lulled, groaned its size,
a giant woken from a deep, deep sleep.

I was too small to notice the high water
in that year of great flooding
how the edge of the familiar
is swallowed by what is never known.

He reached into his pocket
for pennies and nickels
secretly dropped them on the grass
where, with my keen eyes, I would find them.

All of this before the pain of our lives
rose above sea level.

👉 A Century Ago: A special ceremony is held on April 15, 1910, to open the Saint Paul Hotel and its grand ballroom, fine dining area, roof garden, and elegant rooms.

APRIL

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1

12 Monday

🥊 Billy “The St. Paul Thunderbolt” Miske, heavyweight boxer, was born today in 1894

13 Tuesday

14 Wednesday

15 Thursday

Minnesota Opera *Salome*



Mississippi River bank and tree

16 Friday

 Walter H. Deubener, inventor of grocery bag handles, was born today in 1885

17 Saturday

Saint Paul Farmers' Market
Minnesota Book Awards

18 Sunday

Minnesota Opera *Salome*
Saint Paul Conservatory for the Performing Arts

Saints' Stadium

Sebastian Tippet

Wind up. Pitch. Crack. The smallest white speck in the stadium sails all 408 feet. The crowd screams in unison. Home run!

Sometimes I make it seem like it's not that exciting, but some things are more exciting unsaid. Every time I go to the Saints' stadium, there's a new feeling. On the opener, it's always exciting; playing a rival, it's always intense; but my favorite is when you're on the edge of your seat. Imagine this: 5-4, man on second base, two outs. The ball is hit, sailing into left field.

It drops in front of the fielder. He bare-hands it and whips the ball past the cutoff to ricochet in front of the catcher's glove, where it makes a strong bounce. Thousands of breaths are held while dust surrounds home plate. When it clears, he's touching the plate, and the ball is set lightly on his forearm. The call comes. Safe!

Of course, if you're excited now, imagine being at the game.

Another thing I love is being a family. For two hours, every single person in that stadium is a friend cheering his or her heart out. Saving seats, giving each other peanuts, talking friendly to strangers. At my first Saints game, I asked my mom, "Why are they all so nice?" and my mom said, "Because we're winning."

That made me even happier. Maybe if we all were at a Saints game, the world would be better. Maybe.

You should really go to a Saints game.

Poem for the State of the City

April 21, 2009

for Mayor Chris Coleman

Carol Connolly, Saint Paul Poet Laureate

Fire flood torture greed. Our world came close
to crashing in this avalanche of disasters.
Some man made. Some not.
We bid adieu now to what is past.
We stand here above sea level,
safe on ground solid for over a century.
Safe, we are, but not naïve. We know
tough times when we see them. We know
that greed, at last, has lost its gloss.
Workers arrive at just the right moment,
the sun pours light into the deep holes
they dig with the grace of an Andahazy,
the precision of a brain surgeon,
holes big enough to bury a dead horse.
This dig will deliver all sorts of new power soon
to this old neighborhood. Soon
these mighty excavations will be invisible
under a sidewalk of fresh concrete.
Somewhere in this city, someone is working
on a poem full of hope and resolve.
It will be stamped into this new concrete soon.
At noon on a sunny day, with his part
in delivering this new power nearly done,
a young man tips his hardhat,
lifts a small folding chair from his truck,
sits with his lunchbox, and for a while,
turns his face to the sun.
The trees, long out of leaf on this city street,
are beginning to green.
The decades-old lilac bushes are in bud
once more, and we know for certain.
We will keep our world moving.

☞ “Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different.”—Kate Millett, Saint Paul native and writer

APRIL						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1

19 Monday

🎮 Joe Mauer, professional baseball player, was born today in 1983

20 Tuesday

Minnesota Opera *Salome*

21 Wednesday

22 Thursday

Earth Day



Bridge joining Harriet and Raspberry islands

23 Friday

Fourth Friday at the Movies

Saint Paul Art Crawl

 Arthur Farwell, noted composer, was born today in 1872

24 Saturday

Saint Paul Farmers' Market

Minnesota Opera *Salome*

Saint Paul Art Crawl

Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra

25 Sunday

Saint Paul Farmers' Market

Saint Paul Art Crawl

 Father John A. Ryan, activist priest, teacher, and writer, was born today in 1869

Saint Paul's new Midway Stadium opens on April 25, 1957, with a day-night doubleheader.

The Possibilities are Endless: To Include Typos

Suzanne Nielsen

I sit on the front steps of 761 East Third Street, waiting for the trolley to pull up to “experience the wonderful housing opportunities in Dayton’s Bluff.” The woman next door comes around the corner and I show her the ad in the Dayton’s Bluff District Forum April issue; I even read her the bottom line in 22-point bold type: “This ad is no April Fool’s joke! Don’t miss this great tour!”

“It don’t start here,” she says.

I follow her to her back door; she goes inside, grabs a flyer, and hands it to me. THE POSSIBILITIES TOUR, it’s titled, and it says the tour started at 798 East Seventh Street at noon. I run to my car, light a smoke, and race over a few blocks. My watch reads 12:03. There’s the trolley, one seat left.

I hop on and sit next to Earl. No—wait, he lives on Earl; we ride right by his house, and then he points out Aunt Sally’s house on Beech Street. Next to it is the first house on the tour, although the flyer says it’s the third house (gotta love typos). 930 Beech. I used to live at 916 Beech. Now it’s a chiropractic office. The house on the left is where Deets and Walter lived with a lavender bathroom. “Ya gotta be careful in this neighborhood,” Earl man says.

We pass Haag’s Superette, now boarded up. I remember writing notes in cursive, signing my dad’s name for a pack of L&M’s.

“Careful of what?” I ask Earl man.

“Of the hoodlums,” he says.

This is the city. There are hoodlums, prostitutes, and ministers. Not all people wear slim-fitting khakis; not everyone has a car born in the current decade.

Out of the eleven houses on the tour, three are category ones, meaning the structure is danger free. The others need serious maintenance. All are under \$100,000 and within a two-mile radius of each other.

As we drive through the neighborhood, I think I see Don Hauser’s mom hanging clothes in her back yard. I think I hear Trudell’s car engine rumble and McKenna’s dog howl. Once an East Sider, always an East Sider.

Back at 798 East Seventh, the Community Council Office, we end our tour an hour later. Inside, I grab free cookies and coffee. “We have to save our community,” a young woman says. “We have to save these



Dayton's Bluff: Full of historic homes

houses, or builders will come in and tear them down. They'll build houses like those in the suburbs."

"What's wrong with the houses in the suburbs?" I ask.

"Well, have you ever been to the suburbs? All those houses are designed to keep people from getting to know one another."

I think about this and know what she means.

"You got to be careful of those neighborhoods. You could live there for decades and never know who lives next door to you," she says.

I get back in my car and drive past all eleven houses again. I recognize I've just experienced the wonderful housing opportunities in Dayton's Bluff, where the possibilities are endless, regardless of hoodlums or typos. Ya gotta be careful of this neighborhood, I think, not of hoodlums, but of memories.

☞ “After you’ve done a thing the same way for two years, look it over carefully. After five years, look at it with suspicion. And after ten years, throw it away and start all over.” —Alfred E. Perlman, Saint Paul native and president of the New York Central and the Pennsylvania railroads

APRIL

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1

26 Monday

27 Tuesday

28 Wednesday

29 Thursday

Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra
Festival of Nations

🌐 Alana Blahoski, Olympic ice hockey gold medal winner, was born today in 1974



Schmidt beer sign on the West Side

<p>30 Friday</p>	<p>Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Festival of Nations</p>
<p>1 Saturday May Day</p>	<p>Saint Paul Farmers' Market Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Festival of Nations Como Memorial Japanese Garden opens</p>
<p>2 Sunday</p>	<p>Saint Paul Farmers' Market Festival of Nations</p>

Good Vibrations

Andrea Taylor Langworthy

My husband and I have a favorite restaurant, Pazzaluna, in downtown Saint Paul. The Italian eatery has happy-hour pizza and wine specials that keep us coming back. Even better, its energy is so good that a bad mood can be lifted just by walking in the door. Last week, I realized the source of the good vibes. As they say in real estate: location, location, location. Pazzaluna is located in the same place once occupied by Frank Murphy, a women's clothing store.

As many times as I have eaten at Pazzaluna, I hadn't made this connection until I finalized dinner plans with a friend last week. She wasn't sure where the restaurant is. "On the corner of St. Peter and Fifth," I said, "where Frank Murphy used to be." When the words popped out of my mouth, they surprised me. *Aha!* I thought. *Now I know why the restaurant has such great spirit.* Frank Murphy had been a favorite shopping place for the women in my family. So chic and up-to-date that it could have been in New York City. So lucky for us that it wasn't.

Just a few days after that conversation with my friend, an obituary caught my eye. Sadly, Frank Murphy's daughter had passed away. Once again, I remembered the many trips I took to that lovely specialty store. When I shopped there with my mother, this woman often helped us. When my teenage friends and I stopped in to look for dresses for dances, she never acted as if we were in the wrong place and should browse in the junior department of Dayton's instead.

Frank Murphy's give-away sales were world-famous. Held in the ballroom of the Saint Paul Hotel, just across the street, they received extensive news coverage. Because I couldn't bring myself to try on clothes in a giant room with no privacy and the possibility of television cameras, I never braved one of the sales. I'd seen the news reports, though: Hand-to-hand combat among crazed women ready to do battle over articles of clothing held no appeal for me. But my sisters, always stronger than I, were able to hold their own and bring home bargains galore.

Frank Murphy was the go-to spot for special occasions. When my daughter was a freshman at St. Thomas and lived on campus in a dorm, she called to tell me about a formal winter dance. Of course, she needed a new ensemble. She and I headed to Frank Murphy, the same store where we had found the fancy frock for her high school senior prom. "If you can't find the perfect party dress at Frank Murphy," I told her, "then the dress doesn't exist"—the same thing my mother had said to me.



Pazzaluna

In fact, years before, when my parents had divorced, my mother was down in the dumps. My year-younger sister and I knew just the pick-me-up she needed. We borrowed Mom's car and drove to Saint Paul, where we found three lovely outfits at Frank Murphy. Of course, being teenagers, we had no means to pay for Mom's gifts, so we put them on her charge account. And had them gift-wrapped.

When my husband and I meet our friends for pizza at Pazzaluna next week, I'll ask if they can feel the vitality and sparkle of the place. I'll tell them my stories about the building's previous tenant and propose a toast to the Murphy family, which made sure the women of my family were, as my mother would say, "Dressed to the nines."



Frank Murphy's dress shop in 1948

To that Old Lady

Katie Ka Vang

To that old lady
who had a river of sons.
drowned her luck in a piece of silver
to make a plantation of opium
and farm animals

To that old lady
who prospers as the empress of her table
guiding her sons in the Right direction
Left— Left—Left-right— Left,
pricking her teeth clean,
digging out the unnecessary
before decaying starts

To that old lady
queen of knives,
her sharpness surpasses
any sheath of a king.
Sharpened for survival

To that old lady, who carries
hundred pound struggles in her
heart, mind, bones, like a whisper
and pours it like fuel igniting life

To that old lady who
will dream in eternity
of crashing waves,
rippling mistakes
across the bodies of water
of her grandchildren

To that old lady who
was forced into marriage
and still set off sailing for
riches

To that old lady who
never learned to read, write,
type, ride a bike, or drive,
the movement is in your walk,
the pounding is out of your chest,
the writing is on your skin,
the reading is in your body

To that old lady who
will never have a mausoleum
for her offspring to bury her in,
You Will Rest Everywhere.

Irv Williams: A Life in Music

Pamela Espeland

In the spring of 2009, Irv Williams is playing a shiny new tenor saxophone. He has a young miniature schnauzer named Ditto who, in Irv's words, is "very exuberant about everything." He's writing new songs for his next CD, his fifth since 2004. He has two regular weekly gigs, one at the Dakota Jazz Club in Minneapolis and the other at Il Vesco Vino on West Seventh in Saint Paul. He's making plans to celebrate his birthday with parties at both the Artists' Quarter in Saint Paul and the Dakota.

On August 17, 2009, Williams—fans call him "Mr. Smooth"—turned ninety. He has lived in Saint Paul for forty-seven years, moving here in 1962 to be closer to his job at the Sherwood Supper Club, now long gone. Most of the clubs he has played over the years—Cassius's Bamboo Room, the Flame Bar, the Red Feather, Freddie's, the Crystal Coach, the Top of the Hilton, Suzette's—have shut their doors, been torn down or redeveloped.

Williams could have left town, hit the road with Duke Ellington, Count Basie, or Louis Armstrong, ended up in New York, and become a star. Instead, he chose to stay and become part of Saint Paul's history.

Along with playing at every jazz club in the Twin Cities since the 1940s, Williams has taught in the public schools, lectured at the University of Minnesota, and mentored many musicians. In 1984, he was the first jazz musician to be honored by the State of Minnesota with his own "Irv Williams Day." His picture appeared on the Celebrate Minnesota state map in 1990 (he appears on this year's *Almanac* cover; take a look).

Williams was named an Arts Midwest Jazz Master in 1995 and is a member of the Minnesota Jazz Hall of Fame. He plays a new sax because his old one is now in the "Minnesota's Greatest Generation" exhibit at the Minnesota History Center.

Acclaim is appreciated, but for Williams, it's all about the music. His first instrument was the violin, which he played as a cute little kid growing up in Cincinnati and Little Rock. The older he got, the more other kids teased him for playing a "sissy instrument." They also called him "Ir-vinee" because his name was Irvine, with an *e* at the end.

Williams dropped the violin and later the *e*. By the time he was eleven, he had switched to clarinet and then to tenor saxophone. He started playing professionally at fifteen. He attended college as a pre-med student, with plans to be a doctor like his father, but music's pull was too strong. Besides, there was plenty of work for young sax players during the Big Band era of the 1930s and early '40s. When World War II began, Williams joined



Irv Williams

the Navy and came to the Naval Air Station in Minneapolis with the U.S. Navy Band.

He had ample time to practice his horn and explore the Twin Cities. On his first weekend here, he met the great bassist Oscar Pettiford and his family. Pettiford introduced Williams to the local jazz scene and places like Buford's BBQ and the Elk's Rest. Williams remembers, "We walked into the Elk's Rest, I didn't have a horn, and a guy named Rail says, 'You can play my horn.' So I played it and their mouths dropped open. I always like that."

Two marriages and nine children followed. When money was tight, Williams worked two jobs: dry cleaner by day, jazz musician by night. Today he's free to spend as much time as he wants on his music. He walks and talks a bit slowly, and he admits to having problems with getting tired, but many people believe he has never sounded better.

After all these years as a musician—Williams started playing violin at age six, so he's had eighty-four years of playing and practicing, learning and trying to get better every day—does he still enjoy it? "I enjoy it more than ever now," he says. "I can't slack off. I have to put every ounce of myself into my music. That's what I do. It keeps me going—myself and my dog."

His tone is breathy and warm. Sometimes his playing is like a kiss on your cheek or a gentle hand on the back of your neck. He's a master of the love song. The next time you and your sweetheart are alone together, if you're old enough, forget the R&B and play a little Irv.

A Poem Called "Life"

Allison Rudolph

life
own my life
live for a reason
kind
reach my goal in life
respectful
let my soul fly like the wind
think
yelling, screaming
fun
free
smart
guide my own life
make hard decisions
have ideas
draw
parents
a home
wildlife
hunting
fishing
day
night
—life

April

This poem was written by my 9 (now 10)-year-old daughter. She is definitely a Saint Paul girl; we live and play in Saint Paul and wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world. I just think this poem was really special and should be shared.

—Michelle Rudolph