

I had a birthday this week. Writing this is the first time I have ever voluntarily provided that information. But, in this year (or years) of strange life a lot of unusual happenings have occurred.

It isn't age that is the issue in my avoidance of birthday celebrations. I have nothing at all against other people's parties and enjoy indulging in cake and ice cream with several family members.

It is, instead, the fact that a birthday focuses attention on the person who is celebrating that day. I really dislike attention. I think most, if not all, of us crave the notice of others when we are young children. I suppose that many individuals retain this characteristic all their lives. But, with some of us, there may be reasons we attempt to avoid being in the spotlight.

Like many people I sometimes indulge in a little self-analysis. I have come to the conclusion that my dislike of attention dates back to the first grade. We were encouraged to say a rhyme or sing a song during "show and tell."

Unfortunately, the song I chose went like this: "Sy's been drinking cider and he's acting mighty gay; gave his Ingersoll away. Oh, oh, what will the neighbors say? He told a naughty story about a chicken with one leg, Who drank some boiling water and laid a hard boiled egg."

At this time in history, even the words of the song need explanation to many people. "Gay" meant only happy or glad. And an "Ingersoll" was a pocket watch.

When my mother heard about this, she told me that such songs were not for singing at school and that it would be good if I didn't listen to so much I heard when her younger brother was visiting.

I decided then and there that keeping a low profile was the best way to avoid confusion about what to say and to whom.

It doesn't work that way with everybody, though. I know a person who is still great at entertaining other people in late middle age. And his first exposure to unfortunate song choices took place when his Sunday School teacher asked for suggestions for a hymn to sing. He said he thought "Pistol Packing Mama" would be a good song to start with.

So, I avoid birthday galas as much as possible.