

## THE STARRY SIDE

## Fistful of data

BY GREELEY WELLS

The width of your fist can answer quite a few amazing questions. The stars, moon and sun really don't move much; they are basically the stable background for our earth's rotation. It's our own planet's spinning movement that we can measure with a fist.

**At arm's length, one fist equals about one hour of movement** and 10 degrees of the sky measurement. This means that the sun and stars and moon will move the width of an outstretched fist in an hour. Also, as a predicting tool, the fist will predict that between 10 pm tonight and 10 pm tomorrow night, the moon will have moved one fist-width, a fist away from or closer to a star, etc.

*Your fist?* Yes. At arm's length, everyone's fist appears the same size in the heavens—to your *own* eyes. Little fists on short, outstretched arms appear the same as giant fists on long, outstretched arms.

This measurement is a generality, like most of the things in the sky and nature. The square of Pegasus is squarish, the summer triangle is only close to equilateral, and the "circles" of our orbits are actually ovals. But like other astronomical generalities, the fist provides a close-enough estimate of where the moon will be the next night. It's approximate, but quite useful. If you are told something is 20 degrees from something else, that's two of your fists. And because a fist is just about 10 degrees of the

sky, a finger is about one degree.

**I sometimes try to estimate the time of sunset** by the number of fists (hours) the sun is above the horizon. I'm even right sometimes! So get out there with your friends and neighbors and show them some fists!

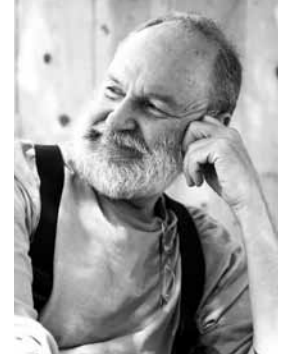
Now what's up in this beautiful night sky in March, April and May? Well, it's the heart of winter's end and the beginning of summer: spring! The Big Dipper is in the north, going from right to left over the top of the North Star each month, first east, then overhead in April, then west in May.

**The bright star Arcturus** is "pulled along" by the handle of the Dipper. Follow the arch of the Dipper's handle

to find Arcturus east and south of the handle's end. By April, Arcturus is almost overhead. Leo the lion is parallel with the Dipper and is also overhead at its zenith. The bright Jupiter also starts overhead right in front of Leo and moves west with him.

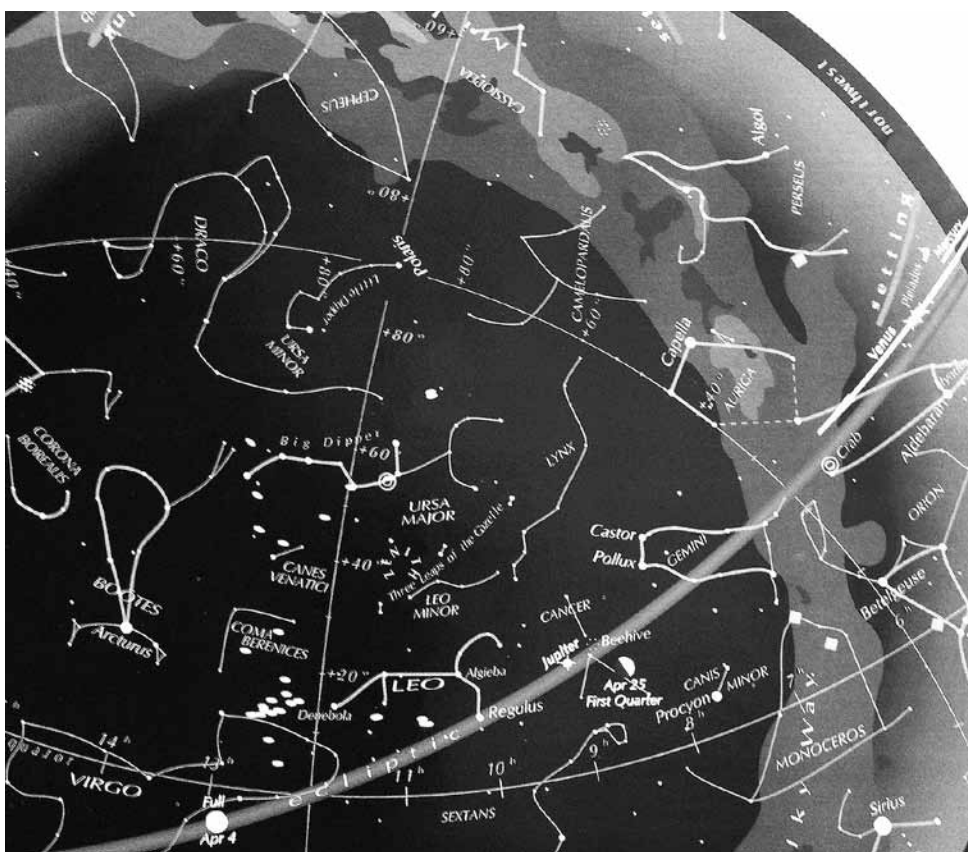
**Orion and his entourage** make their way from west of center, to down in the west, and then out of sight, taking winter with them. Only the twins, Castor and Pollux, are left standing on the northwestern horizon line to remind us of bygone winter.

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Illustration: Guy Ottewell's *Astronomical Calendar* 2014.



## Greeley's Sky Calendar

## The planets

**Jupiter.** The "star of the show" this season is actually a planet: Jupiter is up almost all night, strikingly beautiful, and overhead the whole season. Earth passes between Jupiter and the sun, a position that puts Jupiter closer to the earth than it will be again until 2019. It's the brightest and best in the sky for this year besides Venus. Jupiter started east in February and slides west as the season matures.

**Saturn** rises in the northeast in May and continues to move up as the next seasons unfold.

**Venus** is in the sunset in April and higher in May—beautiful and bright and short-lived.

## Other events of note

March 20 is the vernal (spring) equinox. This is one of the two symmetries between the extremes of the solstices. It is the first day of spring.

The lunar eclipse on April 4 will be visible throughout the northern US—the moon will get red with the earth's shadow over it. Visible during the afternoon until moonset, it's worth a quick look or concentrated study. With sunlight and moonlight, exposures for cameras of all kinds should be easy. A long-lens image would be wonderful. Find some foreground to make it even more interesting.

The Lyrid meteors are favorable on April 23. They radiate from Lyra, where Vega is the brightest third of the summer triangle, up overhead. About 4 am is the best time to watch them.

Here's a great little guide for celestial events—<http://www.iflscience.com/space/sky-watching-event-guide-2015>. Thank you, Jack Duggan!

## BACK IN TIME

## Dad's scary hospital experience

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

When I was about eight years old my dad was in bed for several days with a bad cold or the flu. Our family physician, Doctor Heckman, no longer made house calls as he had when my older brother and two sisters were born in 1916, 1918, and 1920. He would stay overnight and perhaps enjoy his favorite pastime of fishing the Squaw Creek or Applegate River before returning home the next day.

This time Mother had to take Dad to Medford, where Doctor Heckman promptly sent him to Sacred Heart Hospital. Poor Mother returned home late that afternoon, very worried, and said for me to hurry and feed our chickens and gather eggs while she milked the cow. My brother and sister were not there to help—they were living with my Aunt Clara in lower Applegate so they could ride the school bus to Jacksonville High School.

After our chores, Mother and I crossed the Applegate River on a footbridge and walked the quarter-mile upriver to the McKee (my maternal grandparents) home, where we could make a phone call to find out about Dad. It turned out he had a serious ear infection requiring mastoid

surgery. I was so frightened! I thought any surgery in those days could be fatal and had heard so many stories I thought my dad might die.

**Mother assured me that Dad would be all right**, but told me that she and Grandma were taking Grandpa's car to the hospital and might not return until the next morning, so I would have to stay with Grandpa. I liked Grandpa, but I was very upset to be left behind.

The next day Mother said I could go with her to see Dad. It was a cold day so we had to bundle up, especially since our old car was "open air" with no top. It had only a front seat with a wooden bed built on the back for hauling things like firewood and sacks of chicken feed.

**I thought we should have taken Grandpa's car**, a Durant sedan that Uncle Ernest (mother's oldest brother), a car salesman, had helped get for Grandpa. I first rode in it after my uncle moved his family to Klamath Falls and Grandma wanted to visit them, so Mother drove Grandma, my sister Gladys, and me to my uncle's for an overnight stay. I wanted another ride in that car and kept begging

Mother to borrow it, but she refused.

**So I pouted for most of the drive** to Medford in our old car. When Mother had to stop at a stop sign, she found out that our car brakes were barely working. My pouting then turned into real fright. Mother drove in low gear all the way up the hill to the hospital. I wonder what was going through her mind about all the debt—the doctor, the hospital (no insurance in those days), and an old car in need of repair.

**At the hospital we entered a large room**, called a ward, filled with male patients. Dad was propped up in bed in the middle of the room and very glad to see us. A nurse came in and angrily told my dad that he was not to move his bed. She ignored Mother and me, keeping up her tirade at Dad as she shoved the bed back against the wall.

When the nurse left, Mother asked Dad what in the world was going on. He explained that he was very cold, so had moved his bed away from the cold brick wall and a window. My dad was of a gentle nature and avoided trouble. He



Photo, above: John Byrne and cousin Patrick Folley making a living.

Photo, right: Pearl and John Byrne aka Mother and Dad.



had probably never been "chewed" out so much. I could not believe seeing my mother so calm about the incident and Dad, still in some pain, beginning to see some humor in it. Dad was still cold, though, so mother found a kindly nurse to help get Dad get warmed up. It took a long time before Dad thawed out and became more comfortable. When he got drowsy, we kissed him good-bye and quietly left.

Mother went slowly down the hill through Medford, always in low gear. I kept telling her she should have taken Grandpa's car.

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