

Here Comes The Pope!

by Roz Warren

The Pope is coming, and Philadelphia is getting ready.

Pope Francis will be in town from September 26 - 27, which the locals have begun referring to as "Pope Weekend." Large sections of the city will be closed to traffic, all major highways in and out of Philadelphia will be shut down, and you won't be able to take public transport without special Pope Passes.

In other words, normal life will be thoroughly disrupted.

As a result, a lot of folks are dreading Pope-a-Palooza. In fact, I have plenty of friends who plan to leave town until the whole thing blows over (while collecting a bit of Pope Profit by renting out their homes to incoming Catholics). But I'm sticking around.

In fact, I can't wait for Pope Weekend.

Because I'm a devout Catholic?

Actually, I'm an atheist Jew. But I always love it when ordinary life takes a turn for the unusual.

In the words of that great philosopher Hunter S. Thompson: "when the going gets weird, the weird turn pro." Which is to say that those of us who are a little quirky tend to be in our element when regular life is put on hold.

I always got a kick out it when our teachers went on strike and school was closed for two weeks. I have fond memories of major blackouts, where you have to climb 12 flights to get to your apartment and eat all the ice cream in the freezer before it melts.

And I always enjoy it when a major winter storm shuts down the city.

The oncoming Pope is just like one of those great big Weather Events that brings ordinary life to a stand still. I'm really looking forward to seeing what happens when everybody is stranded and there's a hug influx of non-Philadelphians and Normal Life as we know it goes right out the window.

Events like that, I've found, tend to bring out the best in people. Neighbors help each other out. Strangers connect. People are given many opportunities to be kind, and they usually rise to the occasion. When thousands of Pope seekers turn up in Philly, the City of Brotherly Love will have the chance to show the world how hospitable we can be.

Or not.

I look forward to seeing how we do.

Other people plan to follow the Pope's progress, hear him speak, and/or attend the Mass that he's giving on the parkway.

My goal for Pope Weekend is simpler. I plan to walk my dog on the Schuylkill Expressway.

Given that they're planning on shutting down the Schuylkill, I can't wait to meander along with the Yorkie-poo on the road I've spent so much time whizzing along on in a car.

It's a once in a lifetime opportunity! (Assuming that the police and Secret Service let me do it.)

And of course I'll be attending my pal Janet's "Pope-luck" dinner, which is the potluck dinner she's holding on Pope weekend for all

the friends who can manage to get to her suburban home despite the closed roads.

I trust that Pope Weekend will offer plenty of other opportunities for the fun and unusual. And while my friends who are Catholic savor the Pope's rare visit to these shores, I plan to enjoy them all.

(Roz Warren is the author of OUR BODIES, OUR SHELVES: LIBRARY HUMOR.)

