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Leap Year Birthdays: Uncommonly Good!

Cathy Dausman



Four Leap Year babies and one "oh, so close" gather in Orinda to celebrate. The cards they hold show their age in Leap Years. Back row, from left: Leanne Parsons, Jim Wiltshire, Bronwyn Hutchison; front row: Olivia Morris and Isabella Friedli. Photo Andy Scheck

Isabella went to Florida when she turned "one" and says her parents have a "special surprised planned" this year. With a sister born near Thanksgiving and a brother born between Christmas and New Year's, Wiltshire's birth date was less unique in his family. And this year, "although it's taken me 80 years to become an adult," he says his daughters are throwing him a dinner party.

Expectant mothers sometimes anguish over delivering a Leap Year baby. Kate Hutchison said she was "even willing to share my [late February] birthday," rather than have Bronwyn on February 29th. Kathryn Morris agreed, "When I was pregnant, [Olivia] was overdue and I was desperate to have the baby...the one day I don't want to give birth is the 29th [of February]."

To put that special birthday in perspective, just talk to Leanne Parsons. She missed being a Leap Year baby by one hour. Parsons, who was born by cesarean section, said her dad wanted her to have a February 29th birthdate, but her mother did not. "Since my mom was the one pregnant with me for nine months she won, and at 11:00 p.m. February 28th I was born," she said. "I have always wished that my dad had gotten his way."

Wiltshire recalls crossing the International Date Line while at sea on one birthday. He had a friend in the maritime industry whose birthday was also February 29. For years, the two competed to see who could telephone the other first with birthday greetings.

In contrast, Bronwyn had not met anyone sharing her special day until Lamorinda Weekly put out the call for Leap Year babies. She now knows three others, and one near-miss. Although younger Leap Year folk may be anxious for their special birthday to come around, Wiltshire has learned to be patient, and philosophical. "A few of us are just a bit slow regarding the aging process, and I guess that can't be all that bad."

Leap Year Traditions

Years divisible by four are Leap Years in the Gregorian calendar. Centuries not divisible by 400 are not Leap Years. Thus, 2000 and 2400 are leap years, while 1800, 1900, 2100, 2200, 2300 and 2500 are not.

Under early English law, February 29th was ignored and had no legal status.

Leap Years are considered unlucky for marriage.

Scotland supposedly passed a law in 1288 allowing women to propose marriage during Leap Years. By tradition any man who declined a Leap Year proposal had to pay a fine, often a pair of gloves (to hide the woman's hands, bare of any engagement ring).

Guinness Book of Records verifies one family who produced three consecutive generations born on February 29:

- Peter Anthony Keogh was born in Ireland on February 29, 1940;
- Son Peter Eric was born on the Leap Day in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1964.
- Peter's daughter, Bethany Wealth, was born in the UK on February 29, 1996.

A Norwegian family named Henriksen holds the official record for number of children born on February 29: three. Karin Henriksen had daughter Heidi in 1960 and sons Olav in 1964 and Leif-Martin in 1968.

Leap years also appear with varying rules in the Julian, Chinese, Jewish, Persian, Islamic, Bahai, Hindu and Ethiopian calendars

2012 is also a leap second year.

A leap second is measured by an atomic clock, and added to or subtracted from Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) to make it agree with astronomical time.

A leap second compensates for slowing in the Earth's rotation.

The first leap second was added to atomic clocks in 1972.

A positive leap second will be introduced the end of June, but that's probably another story...

(online sources: Time and Date, Leap Year Day)

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