

Birthdays

Literary Arts

Life Experiences

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Birthdays

Birthdays have always been special for me. I was born February 29, 1948, a Leap Year. Leap Year is unique in that it occurs every four years; I must wait four years for my *real* birthday. Over the years some people have not understood why I get so excited when there is a Leap Year. I suppose some think that since I am no longer a child, the excitement about a birthday should not be. In “off years”, I like to celebrate February 28 through March 1 because somewhere in time between those two dates, I come into being. During a Leap Year, I celebrate *all month*. As I celebrate my nineteenth birthday in 2024 (nineteen times four, of course), I hope to celebrate *all year*!

Growing up, I distinctly remember two Leap Year celebrations. At age twelve I went to a Girl Scout meeting on the afternoon of my birthday. My troop leader kept me after the meeting to talk about some topic and also to give me something to take by my grandmother’s house. I wanted to get home because I knew that my mother had baked a cake for me and it would be delicious. But I could not object so I listened, and I obediently went to my grandmother’s. Before I could leave for home, my grandmother decided to re-braid my hair so she took out a comb and brush, and I had to sit down and not complain. When I got home, our living room was full of my friends, including my fellow Girl Scouts. They had

changed into party dresses, lace-trimmed socks, and Sunday shoes. My younger brother had on a suit, as did some of the other guys who had been invited. My mother helped me to freshen up and get dressed. It was a very nice surprise party of which I still have some photos.

The second special Leap Year party was my sweet sixteen. My mother and father decided that I could celebrate by having a party at a local establishment that served food in the front and had an area for dancing in the back. I was allowed to invite many friends and classmates to a casual evening of fun and a great time of doing all of the latest dances. The party was great fun, and I appreciated it because my mother and father had rented the facility, provided the refreshments, and allowed me to invite lots of friends at a time when their finances did not allow for many extras.

I have some great memories of my prior eighteen Leap Years. Almost everyone that I have ever met or spent any time with remembers that February 29 is my birthday. My hometown friends, high school and college classmates, former co-workers, students that I taught over a thirty-two-year career, church members, Facebook friends . . . all remember that my birthday is February 29. I receive cards and calls and invitations to lunch and dinner during a Leap Year. My family always does something special that is sometimes serious but often hilarious and entertaining. When my husband was working, he came home one day telling me

about a young man he was interviewing for a job. Seeing my husband's last name, the young man asked if my husband knew me. When my husband answered, "Yes", the young man proceeded to tell him that I had been his high school teacher and that my birthday is February 29. I think the young man mentioned that to validate that he knew me; my husband seemed to think that it was as if the young man wanted to make sure that my husband knew the important date. The young man did get the job base on his merits, not because he knew about my birthday.

I vividly remember one Leap Year encounter, though, that was unique. A Highway Patrol Officer at the DMV, while processing my license renewal, typed in information, looked at it, then started again. After several tries to complete my renewal, he came over to talk with me. I knew exactly what was happening. As the officer tried to put my birthday into the system for the future renewal date, the system rejected every attempt. His solution was to change my birthday to February 28 so there would not be a problem. What? His solution was going to create a great problem for me because that would not be my actual birthday. I told him that he could *not* change my birthday. My driver's license shows my DOB as February 29, with the expiration date as February 28 for every renewal cycle.

There have been some embarrassing moments for some with their math skills, or lack thereof, when hearing the date and details of my birthday. One year, upon hearing that my birthday is Leap Year, a man asked, "How old are you? 20?".

I just looked at him because surely, he had heard that my *true, real, actual* birthday came every *four* years. I tried to figure out his logic: If I were twenty Leap Years old, that would be twenty times four, then I was really looking great for 80 years old! Or if I were twenty, then twenty divided by four would mean that I had only observed five Leap Years, and clearly, I looked and was older than twenty at the time. At the time, I was observing twelve or thirteen Leap Years; that is, I was forty-eight or fifty-two years old. We both laughed it off!

When I reach twenty Leap Years, I think I will celebrate with a big party. I have four years to decide! For twenty-nine days this past February I wore purple, lavender, or amethyst, the color of the February birthstone. I plan to continue to wear a little purple, lavender, or amethyst all year, and I am going to celebrate the rest of this Leap Year by being with family and friends and doing things that I truly enjoy!