

# 'Leaplings' celebrate big-time this year!

By Parker Knox

Patrick Wadley will be having only his second birthday next Wednesday. For Stan Lewison it will be his 18th.

John Grayson has a birthday that day, too, but he has learned it's best to celebrate one's birthday year-round, rather than focusing on one particular day.

They are among the unique individuals who happened by sheer luck – whether one considers it good luck or bad – to have been born on Leap Year Day, Feb. 29, which appears on a calendar only once every four years.

Except in Marj Thompson's house in Brookings, that is! She is another "leapling," and all of her life she has always drawn a box on the February page of her calendars and added a 29th day in those years when one didn't appear there naturally.

Patrick, whose parents, Darin Wadley and Holly Haddad, are both music professors at USD, will be eight years old on his second birthday Wednesday, and the family plans to celebrate heartily with invited guests.

"When he was 5, we

showed him a calendar," his mother explained, "and now he understands the situation completely." His older brother has always given Patrick a bad time about having so few birthdays, but the second grader at Jolley School in Vermillion has been a willing classroom example and enjoys being a sort of novelty.

Last year his teacher used Patrick's birthday situation as a teaching lesson about Leap Years.

The family has celebrated in his "off years" whenever the parents' schedules allowed, but this year they will do it on the precise day, and they will do it up big.

Vermillion area farmer Stan Lewison, even in years when his birthday didn't occur, often celebrated with his good friend Norman Jensen, whose birthday is on March 1.

Stan's daughter, Tricia Heien of Pierre, remembers her mom always made a bigger celebration of Stan's birthday in years when it occurred, but Stan enjoyed joking he had two birthdays – Feb. 28 and March 1.

Last year for his non-existent birthday he was surrounded nevertheless

by family and good friends for supper and some serious games of 10-point pitch. This year they will get together for a party on March 3.

Up at Onida, Karen (Rawstern) LaFurge remembers that, when her real birthday came around, "Mom and Dad made sure it was extra special." She said she always felt "a little special" because she has a Leap Year birthday. "Now that I'm an adult we still make my real birthday special," she added.

"Mom will sometimes make my favorite supper of meatloaf, baked potato and green beans, or we go out for supper," Karen said. "If time and weather permit, my brothers and sisters come and celebrate with me. I turn 11 this year. I don't know what the day will hold, but I'll celebrate it with family and friends. That's what life is all about!"

Vermillion city councilman Grayson has spent much of his life easily waving off happy-birthday wishes. "Thanks, but I don't get one this year," he has frequently said, "as if dismissing the whole thing will prevent the realities of time, aging and gravity."

When asked when he celebrates, he usually replies that it's best to celebrate year-round. "Why limit the celebration of one's birth to a single day?" he said.

As he was renewing his driver's license recently, Grayson wondered at first why the clerk asked him how old he would be this year until he realized she had noticed his Feb. 29 birth date. "Good catch!" he told her. "Most people never pick up on that."



Kim Reins, who has her eighth birthday this year, tells people that perhaps she hasn't aged but she is "wise beyond my years."

The speech language pathologist at Sanford Vermillion Medical Center said her dad told her he really wanted to name her "Kimber Leap Koelling" to mark her Feb. 29 birthday, but her mother wouldn't allow it, so they settled on "Lee" as her middle name.

Because her sister's birthday is Feb. 21, the family traditionally celebrated on the weekend between their two birthdays. "As an adult we have celebrated my birthday on Feb. 28 because March 1 is an entirely different month, and it just isn't the same," she said.

There's no denying Kim's favorite birthday party of all time. When she turned 5 (actually 20) and was attending Bethel College in St. Paul, she and friends decided to have a true five-year-old's

party. They put her hair in pigtails and went to a Chuck E. Cheese restaurant where they used tokens to play games all evening and ate pizza. For gifts that year she received My Little Ponies, a giant cowboy hat made from foam and Barbie dolls.

Quite the joker her dad! He told Kim she couldn't date until she was 16 in Leap Years. She ignored that advice and is married with two kids as she approaches Birthday No. 8.

Thompson, who is the former Marjoanne Schmidt who grew up in Pierre, said her parents typically wished her a happy birthday on March 1 in non-Leap Years. "Growing up, I didn't think it was all that different," she recalled, "and I think that was because I did get a birthday party every year with classmates, cake and presents."

Now she is approaching 28 and will be having only her seventh actual birthday. "People seem to get excited when they hear I am a Leap Year baby," Thompson said. "I still celebrate my birthday every year with family and friends."

Nancy Peck in Pierre will be 14 on Feb. 29. She said having a birthday on the 29th is actually fun, "and it is surprising the number of people who remember your birthday

that way."

As she was growing up, Nancy's family would always celebrate on the 28th. "But of course when I turned 21, I celebrated on both the 28th and the 1st," she said. "I do remember that once when there was a Feb. 29, the newspaper had a picture of me and an article about the poor little girl who had a birthday only once every four years."

Black Hills State student Bailey Kusser, who hails from Highmore, celebrated her Feb. 29 birthday with her cousin (Feb. 28) and her older brother (Feb. 18), so the family regularly had one big birthday party for all.

"People who are aware of my birthday are always making jokes about me acting my age, which technically is toddler years," she said. "This year I will be 5!"

This time around Bailey won't even be in the United States on her birthday. Her BHSU women's basketball team will be on a trip to Costa Rica next week. "On the other hand it will be difficult not being with my family on that day," she admitted.

Out in Custer Katie Paulsen remembers celebrating her brother Mitchell's Feb. 29 birthday every year. "He never liked it when he was a kid," Katie said. "I would often remind him that he was only 1 since officially he had had only one birthday. Now that he has gotten older I think he enjoys it much more since he will always be forever young."

For Mitchell there was one distinct advantage. Because the driver licensing computers would be technologically confused if it listed his 21st birthday as being on a Feb. 29, the state always listed his birthday as being on Feb. 28. "Thus," Katie said, "the year he turned 21 there was no Feb. 29, so he got to turn 21 a day early!"

If you run into people celebrating birthdays next Wednesday, it might be best to wish them "Happy Birthday." And do it four times because they won't have another until 2016.

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