



LEAP YEAR

Extra day requires no leap of faith

There's solid math behind the addition every four years, and pop-culture trivia, too

McCLATCHY-TRIBUNE INFORMATION SERVICES

Why do we add 24 hours to our calendar every four years? And why do we do it in February? What are your chances of having a leap-year baby, and what famous faces are "younger" than they look? We leap into

the details about 2012's extra day.

The why of it

A leap year is a year in the Gregorian calendar with one extra day added to the end of February, making the shortest month of the year 29 days long.

Leap day was established

to keep the seasons and the calendar in sync. A year is measured by the amount of time it takes the sun to return to the spot directly above the Earth's equator. Although it actually takes 365.2422 days, we round it to 365 for practical purposes. But that results in an error of 0.2422 days, or almost 6 hours, per year. After 100 years the calendar would be off by 24 days, but a leap day every four years makes up for the inaccuracy. To further keep the

calendar in sync, years that end in "00" are a leap year only if they are divisible by 400. So 2000 was a leap year, but 1900 was not.

Julius Caesar is said to be the "father of leap year" because he introduced a fix to the 355-day Roman calendar with his 365-day Julian calendar. His astronomer, Sosigenes, added the extra day to every fourth February. Why February? It was the last month of the year in Roman times.

By the numbers

» The chances of a leap birthday are 1 in 1,461 — long odds for getting the short end of the stick. Imagine waiting four years for your real birthday and hearing endless jokes about being 3 when you're really 12.

» The gap between two leap years can be eight years at the turn of most centuries. It happened between 1896 and 1904 and will happen again between 2096 and 2104.

Leap continues on E2

TELEVISION

Blue-Eyed Butcher brings Houston murder to Lifetime

By Lana Berkowitz

As far as Lifetime cable movies go, *Blue-Eyed Butcher* may have a more lurid title than most, but the stabbing scenario of an unhappy marriage that ends in violence seems familiar.

What makes this movie intriguing for Texas audiences is that it is based on the 2003 murder of a Houston man who was tied to his bed and stabbed 193 times before being buried in the backyard. His wife was convicted and sent to prison. During the trial, the prosecutor brought the bloody bed into the courtroom and re-enacted the killing while strad-

dling her colleague, who was tied spread-eagle.

It is apparent from the first scene in the cable film where this story is headed. However, we are taken back to the time Susan (Sara Paxton), in a bikini top and cutoffs, met shirtless Jeff Wright (Justin Bruening) during a beach volleyball game. They are not perfect. She has worked in a strip club. He indulges in illegal drugs.

When Susan says she is pregnant, Jeff hesitates before he says they should get married. Marriage is hard, they decide, but soon another baby is on the way.

The movie drags a bit while it is established that Jeff is a hard-working party boy who is a bully at home. Susan is depicted as a trapped-at-home wife who can't please her husband. They have two preschool children.

The killing scene is gruesome. When she drags the body outdoors to plant near the house, it gets creepy. And if you remember news reports, the family dog plays an important role.

Jeff is missing for a week before Susan abandons her cover-up efforts and confesses to a family member.

At the trial, Susan's attorney says it was

Butcher continues on E2



Jack Zeman

Sara Paxton plays Susan Wright in the Lifetime *Blue-Eyed Butcher*.

BLUE-EYED BUTCHER

When: 7 p.m. Saturday
Channel: Lifetime



File photo

Blues musician Chris Whitley suffered for his art, but left behind a body of work and dedicated fans. His life will be explored in the documentary *Dust Radio*.

DOCUMENTARY

Filmmakers hope to shed light on amazing musician Chris Whitley

By Andrew Dansby

Having lived and suffered for his art in places as far flung as New York, New Orleans and Dresden, blues musician Chris Whitley returned to Houston in 2005 to die.

Fourteen years earlier, Whitley had released an album to widespread acclaim, but in his last days he was broke, owning only a backpack, a spare set of clothes and two National resonator guitars. He'd chased his muse at the cost of a comfortable life and left behind a body

of work that was obscure, yet admired.

Now two filmmakers — one who captured Whitley's early career, one who documented his final years — have decided to unite their independent films about Whitley. They hope a single panoramic movie will put a deserving light on a 20th-century iconoclast who could become the 21st century's first great musical cult figure.

The challenge Michael B. Borofsky and Jonathan Mayor face is formidable. Such documentaries

are often labors of love, requiring money for publishing and production, with no promise of profit. Their film is, in this sense, not unlike a Chris Whitley album: art made for the sake of making art.

When complete, the film, titled *Dust Radio*, will likely present an unflinching portrait of the artist without the soft-lit redemption of a cinematic biopic. "This one doesn't have a happy ending," Borofsky points out. But Mayor promises "a thorough character study about a fascinating and

amazing guy."

The film is being made through a relatively new model. Borofsky, a veteran music documentarian, says that years ago *Dust Radio* would've been funded by backers who could have demanded say in the film's development. But with slumping DVD sales and diminishing advances, documentaries like *Dust Radio* have become more difficult to finance.

So after several false starts, the filmmakers united their material and

Whitley continues on E2

STAR

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SMILE FOR THE CAMERAS

Shoppers celebrate opening of TCH Pavilion

More than 150 ladies and a few "dragged-there" husbands celebrated the opening of the Texas Children's Pavilion for Women at Tootsies. Between Tony's pastries and Skinny Margaritas, Rachel McNeill and Laura Robertson perused the spring fashions while a runway presentation took place. A little lights-and-camera action took place



LINDSEY LOVE

as TLC taped its show *The Little Couple*, which features TCH neonatologist Jennifer Arnold. While the pavilion is officially open, babies won't be birthed there until spring.

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Rachel McNeill, from left, Cris Daskevich and Laura Robertson



Dr. Jennifer Arnold, left, and Christy Brunton

Get involved

Volunteer, donate or learn more about today's featured charities:

Avance: www.avance.org

Camp for All: www.campforall.org

Texas Children's Pavilion: www.women.texaschildrens.org

Lurid details draw interest

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self-defense. Prosecutor Kelly Siegler (Lisa Edelstein) says there is a monster hiding behind the demure, blond hair and blue eyes and does not let the jury forget that Jeff was stabbed 193 times.

The courtroom bed scene is re-enacted but without a lot of comment. It will probably get more attention in the special *Beyond the Headlines: The Susan Wright Story*, which will air after the movie. It was not available for preview.

In *Blue-Eyed Butcher*, Susan cries a lot; Siegler gets in her face. Crime sensationist Nancy Grace makes a cameo appearance.

Verdict: Guilty. At the conclusion, it is noted that Susan will be eligible for parole in 2014.

My verdict: The movie was



Jack Zeman

Lisa Edelstein plays prosecutor Kelly Siegler in the new Lifetime movie *Blue-Eyed Butcher*.

average cable fare, but it made me sad.

I have been entertained by my share of Lifetime movies, but knowing that real



Melissa Phillip / Houston Chronicle

The real Kelly Siegler has tried several blood-and-sex cases that Lifetime may be interested in.

families are still dealing with the aftermath of this mess hit a sorrowful spot.

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KELLY SIEGLER + LIFETIME = GENIUS

Kelly Siegler, the prosecutor played by Lisa Edelstein in the film *Blue-Eyed Butcher*, has not seen the TV movie about Susan Lucille Wright, who was convicted of murdering her husband, Jeff Wright.

She declined to watch a preview copy and share her thoughts on the Lifetime cable movie. However, Siegler offered a quote: "I am anxiously waiting to see the movie, worried that it won't accurately portray the murder of Jeff, the deceptive lies Susan concocted to try and get away with what she did or the true nature of their relationship."

Prosecutor Siegler worked several blood-and-sex cases that would make perfect fodder for the Lifetime channel.

Her cases have been featured on TV crime series such as CBS' *48 Hours Mystery*. Siegler also worked on cases featured in Pinnacle Books' *Under the Knife* by Karen Roebuck, about a plastic surgeon who shot his wife; *No Safe Place* by Bill G.

Cox, about a public safety officer who hired help to kill his wife; and *Strangler* by Corey Mitchell, about a murderer who called a newsroom to reveal where he left the body of a 16-year-old.

There is also *A Wife's Revenge* (St. Martin's Paperbacks) by Eric Francis, which is based on the Wright case.

There were plans for a TV series, *Laws of Chance*, based on Siegler's life, but the series did not get past the pilot stage.

In 2008, Siegler left the prosecutor's office after a failed bid to become elected Harris County district attorney. She began a private practice based in Houston.

There are more eye-opening Siegler cases for screenwriters to revisit, including the State of Texas vs. Bhogeshwernand Sharma: Sharma said he was a Hindu spiritual guide who could rid women of evil spirits with a womb-cleansing ritual. He was convicted of sexual assault.

Lana Berkowitz

Wrote complex songs about sex, religion and death

Whitley from page E1

turned to Kickstarter, a Web-based program in which artists seek donations, which are rewarded through a tiered system of gifts, favors, credit or merchandise. Their fundraising program ends Friday at dustradiomovie.com.

"There's never been a time like this," Borofsky says. "To not give up on a project like this and have a kind of life preserver tossed to it, it's incomparable. It used to be you had a patron or you had backing. Now you have laymen, people no different than you and I, but who want to love and preserve and extend this story. It's not only gratifying to have them reach into their wallets, but it's given us faith in what we

feel we've been charged to do in their eyes."

Adds Mayor, "We want to try to do something aesthetically that deals with some of Chris' values and the way he saw things as an artist."

Whitley was born in Houston on Aug. 31, 1960, to two artists. His youth was nomadic; he spent time in Dallas, Oklahoma and Mexico, among other places. He was 31 when he released *Living With the Law*, a bracing roots album that — with its ghostly vocals and furious, yet controlled guitar playing — sounded like little else released in 1991. As a writer, Whitley created surrealistic, cryptic songs about sex, religion and death. His was a quicksilver inspiration that informed a diversified discography, which in-

cluded bluesy recordings, dark rock albums, others made with turntables and electronics, and some with a jazzier bent.

"He was really singing to almost a spiritual underclass," says rock and jazz guitarist Vernon Reid, a friend of Whitley's. "So many of us walk away hidden within ourselves. He was a voice for that, in terms of this electric kind of Americana. ... People took potshots at Chris all the time; he was an artist who was put in that 'failed potential' category, which is unfair. The people who felt connected to him felt it in a deeper way than other artists who just have fans who like their music. I think he's one of the most thoroughly misunderstood musicians ever."

Whitley's posthumous renown is likely to exceed

the attention afforded him in life. John Mayer is perhaps the most famous student of his work. After Whitley's death Mayer wrote in *Esquire*, "it registers as one of the most underappreciated losses in all of music." Dave Matthews, another admirer, once said, "I feel more passion for his music than I do for my own."

Whitley's life mirrored the restless sensibility of his muse. He struggled

with addictions and was ousted from apartments. Surrounded by family and loved ones, Whitley died of lung cancer at the Houston home of a friend and manager who paid for part of his hospice care. He left behind a messy discography that included 12 albums on at least six labels, some of which have fallen out of print.

His music brought him little financial success, almost by design. "I just

sort of gave up on where my stuff fits in," he told the Chronicle three months before he died. "I'm just trying to do what's natural for me and pushing myself a bit. Evolving.

"I don't have the money, but I do have more freedom. ... Some people should be making pop music. I don't make music for that reason. I can't write a pop song if I have to."

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Year is good and bad for those born leaplings

Leap from page E1

» Norway's Henriksen siblings are recognized by the *Guinness Book of Records*. The three siblings were born on three consecutive leap days — Heidi Henriksen, 1960; Olav Henriksen, 1964; and Leif-Martin Henriksen, 1968.

Leap-year plots

A leap-year birthday plays an integral part in one of Gilbert and Sullivan's most famous operas — *The Pirates of Penzance*. As a child, Frederic was indentured to a band of pirates until his 21st birthday. But once the day arrives, the pirate king announces that Frederic has served only five birthdays, not the 21 required, because his birthday is Feb. 29.

Other leap-year-related stories:

» *Leopold's Long Awaited Leap Year Birthday*, by Dawn Desjardins.

» *Leap Day*, by Wendy Mass.

» *The Leap Year Girl*, by Berta Ruck.

» *It's My Birthday ... Finally! A Leap Year Story*, by Michelle Winfrey

Whitaker.

» *Leap Year Book*, by Barbara Sutton-Smith.
» *Leap Year at the Coffee Shop*, by Michael Louis Eads.

Blessing or curse?

Being born on leap day isn't always fun and games. In nonleap years certain countries legally recognize Feb. 29 birthdays on Feb. 28 or March 1, resulting in hassles with birth certificates, driver's licenses and entry fields on websites.

But many leap-day babies report benefits to playing the "leap day card," receiving free meals, free admission and discounts.

Famous leaplings

Someone born on leap day may be called a "leapling." They usually celebrate their birthdays on Feb. 28 or March 1 in common years.

In 1988, Time magazine proclaimed Superman to be born on Feb. 29, making the superhero a leap-day baby. Other leaplings:
» 1980 — Simon Gagne, Canadian hockey player and NHL All-Star.
» 1976 — Ja Rule,

American rapper and actor.

» 1972 — Saul Williams, American rap poet and actor.

» 1972 — Antonio Sabato Jr., Italian-born soap star whose credits include *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Melrose Place* and *General Hospital*.

» 1968 — Bryce Eric Paup, NFL defensive player of the year in 1995 and a four-time Pro Bowl selection.

» 1960 — Motivational speaker Tony Robbins.

» 1944 — Dennis Farina, ex-Chicago policeman turned actor with memorable roles in *Get Shorty* and *Law & Order*.

» 1940 — Billy Turner, trainer of Seattle Slew, winner of the U.S. Triple Crown in 1977.

» 1936 — Astronaut Jack Lousma, a crew member of the Skylab 3 flight in 1973 and Columbia Space Shuttle in 1982.

» 1916 — Dinah Shore, American singer, actress and television personality.

» 1904 — Jimmy Dorsy, jazz prominent American jazz clarinetist, saxophonist, trumpeter and big band leader.

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