

By ANNE DONNELL

Today's that extra day on which, if babies are born with cruel families and friends, they'll receive birthday presents only at four-year intervals. Tennessee's own Dinah Shore is among those born on Feb. 29. With a kind family. There's also another skip that those living as the 21st century turns into the 22

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will discover. No year divisible by 100 has February 29, unless the year is divisible by 400. 1900 and 2100 aren't leap years, but 2000 is. And, before women were "allowed" to believe themselves the equal of men, Feb. 29 was the day women could kneel before their choices and propose marriage.

Well, we're moving from no birthday presents and rare proposals to a continent almost never visited. Here's more from my friend Laura Triebold's excellent account of the recent trip she and her husband Dave took to Australia and New Zealand. This is "Antarctica," journal entry #13.

"I have no desire to visit Antarctica, but have always been fascinated by those who have dared to brave the elements. Shackleton's story has amazed me [Sir Ernest Shackleton (1874–1922) one of the heroes of polar exploration].

On a flight home from Europe we were forced by rough weather to fly north over the North Pole, and the scenery below held both Dave and me spell bound for nearly an hour. So desolate and so beautiful.

"Christchurch is the jumping off point for explorers and scientists who now fly to Antarctica. People flying from NZ must first take a 2 day survival course and will fly in a Hercules C130 equipped with web seating for the 7 hour flight. I have already talked a bit about the Antarctic Museum and the Canterbury Museum. Both have fascinating stories to tell. Canterbury tells the stories of the first explorers and the Antarctic Museum tells the current story.

"Captain Cook discovered the southern most part of South Island NZ in 1771 and came within 1100 km of Antarctica. Antarctica was actually discovered in 1821. Following was a brief period of intense exploration, 1837-1843, by Capt. Ross, who never really set foot on the continent. From 1843 until 1900 only the sealers would hunt and sail the area. Robert Scott (English) lead the first sponsored expedition to explore the area. For transportation the many explorers used

dogs, Manchurian ponies, and finally motorized vehicles. There were intense problems with all the transportation methods. Scott started in 1909 to find the actual South Pole; he traveled within 97 miles. Roald Amundson (1872-1928), a Norwegian, had been disappointed to find that Admiral Perry was the first to get to the North Pole (1909), so he started for the South Pole and was the first to reach it, 12-14-1911. Amundson had an advantage as he thoroughly understood the needs of the sledge dogs and techniques of handling them. Scott arrived in 1912 only to find he was not the first. Scott and his entire party perished on the return trip.

“The first arctic huts were built in 1908. By 1929 a Ford Tri-motor plane had flown over the pole, and in 1935 the first Northrup monoplane landed. A variety of land vehicles have been used over the years, including Ferguson Tractor Model TE28 (1955-1958), Polaris Sno-Traveler, and the Tucker Sno-Cat 743 with a 134 kilowatt Chrysler motor that will travel 25km/hr and pull a 2.7 ton load. The last dog left Antarctica in 1994.

“The NZ Government runs a research basin at Scott Base; the USA is in charge of McMurdo Station. The two areas are 3-5 kilometers apart. [A kilometer is slightly more than .6 mile.] Both are used extensively for research. Scott Base, established in 1957, has a summer population of 85 and 10 in the winter. McMurdo Station, also established in 1957, can support a population of 1200. 3 wind turbines have just been installed to supplement the solar panels and diesel fuel. Currently the wind turbines have decreased the diesel usage by 11%.

“There are 4 months of total darkness. The soil is filled with fossils and classified as cold desert soil. There are areas of visible soil. The average ice depth is 6000 feet with the some areas covered with 15,000 feet of ice. There is an active volcano called Mt. Erebus, last eruption in 2008.

“I certainly admire those who chose to explore and study in Antarctica. As I look out over the snow covered Wisconsin landscape, I recognize that today's 19F temp and 8 inches of blowing snow are all that I care to endure.”

ONLINE DEPARTMENT (Thanks, A.A.) • *Just before the funeral services, the undertaker came up to the very elderly widow and asked, “How old was your husband?” “98,” she replied. “Two years older than me.” “So you're 96,” the undertaker commented. She responded, “Hardly worth going home, is it?” • The nice thing about being senile is you can hide your own Easter eggs. • I feel like my body has gotten totally out of shape, so I got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and start exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted,*

gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for an hour. But, by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over. • An elderly woman decided to prepare her will and told her preacher she had two final requests. First, she wanted to be cremated, and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Wal-Mart. "Wal-Mart?" the astonished preacher exclaimed. "Why Wal-Mart?" "Then I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week." • My memory's not as sharp as it used to be. Also, my memory's not as sharp as it used to be. • Know how to prevent sagging? Just eat till the wrinkles fill out. • It's scary when you start making the same noises as your coffee maker. • These days about half the stuff in my shopping cart says, "For fast relief."

ONE MORE (Thanks, J.W.) The local news station was interviewing an 80-year-old lady who had just gotten married for the fourth time. The interviewer asked her about her new husband's occupation. "A funeral director," she answered. He then asked her first three husbands' occupations. She answered proudly she had first married a banker, then a circus ringmaster, next a preacher, and now a funeral director. The interviewer, quite astonished, asked why she had married four men with such diverse careers. Smiling, she explained, "I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go."