UNLUCKY 13 (OR IS IT?)

by Michelle Horwitz, 16

Miami Beach High

Superstitions, strange phobias, unruly fears: They have been around for as long as anyone can remember. Some people make it a habit to avoid walking under ladders, some kiss the roof of their cars as they drive under a light changing red, and some throw spilled salt over the left shoulder. Especially on Friday the 13th.

Why is Friday unlucky and not Saturday or Tuesday? Probably because Friday's poor reputation goes back to the beginning of history. It is said that Eve tricked Adam into eating the forbidden apple on this day. In Rome, Friday was Executioner's Day (later known as Hangman's Day in Britain). Friday, in the Middle Ages, was the witches' Sabbath.

But Friday got its name from the Norse deity worshiped on that day, Frigg. The Norse called this day Frigg's Day. But then Frigg was cast out as a witch, and the day became again a Sabbath for witches.

And what about that 13? It's allegedly pretty unlucky, too. Many cities do not have a 13th Street; many blocks do not have a house numbered 13 and most buildings don't have a 13th floor; many hotels skip room 13.

Thirteen is known as the Devil's Dozen. It is said those with 13 letters in their names will have the devil's luck (Jack The Ripper, Jeffrey Dahmer, Charles Manson). A fear of 13 comes from the Romans and Greeks, who stole the idea from Egypt that there were 12 stages in life and then a stage in death—the 13th stage.

A Scandinavian legend says when an uninvited guest arrived at a god's party, the number of guests became 13. There the favorite god was killed by his own brother. The idea that "if 13 guests sit down to dinner, all will die within the year" derives from this tale.

Scientists say there is no reason for fear; folklore tells us the history and superstitious people swear Friday the 13th really is unlucky. So this Friday, watch out for black cats, ladders and sidewalk cracks. Tie a rabbit's foot or a four-leaf clover to your belt, and face the day. And remember, we've got another one coming in July.

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