

RANDOM SAMPLES

LOTS OF LUCK WHEN IT'S FRIDAY THE 13TH

Originally published in *The Blade* on Friday, March 13, 2009

BY RYAN E. SMITH
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Merv Sharfman takes the items out of the plastic bags one by one. There's a 1969 penny, a ticket stub from a New Kids on the Block concert, a silver bullet, a pocket comb, a rusty shoehorn ... the list goes on.

Some of the stories behind them have been forgotten, but what's important is this: They are lucky and they are his best comfort on days like today.

Or maybe you didn't notice. Today is Friday the 13th. You can bet the date has been circled on Mr. Sharfman's calendar for quite some time. That's because the 66-year-old attorney from Sylvania Township has paraskevidekatriaphobia — fear of Friday the 13th — and he's got it bad.

"I try not to go to court," he says. "There was one point in my career where I wouldn't even come into the office."

Mr. Sharfman says he's always been this way, and not just about Friday the 13th. Don't even think about opening an umbrella in his office - lucky number 711, of course - or putting a hat on the bed (an ill-fated act, it seems).

This is a man who once drove backward for about a block in Chicago to avoid crossing the path of a black cat. Any time he runs back into a room to retrieve something he forgot, he sits down and counts to 10, then does it again by "one onion, two onions ..."

VIDEO

[Merv Sharfman talks about his phobia](#)

Poke fun at him if you want, but I'd think twice. There's a little bit of Mr. Sharfman in all of us, whether it's a lucky piece of clothing we own, or a tendency to knock on wood, or a certain ritual we have for watching sports.

A 2007 survey by the Associated Press and Ipsos found that 13 percent of Americans feared walking under a ladder or having a bridegroom see his bride before their wedding. Slightly smaller numbers were wary of black cats, breaking mirrors, opening umbrellas indoors, Friday the 13th, or just the number 13.

Life would be easier if we didn't have to worry about such things — or even had a good, logical reason for worrying about them — but what can you do? Superstitions are like faith. They can't be proven but they can't be disproved either. Once they get in your head they can be hard to shake, even when their origins are unknown.

"I don't know what most of them mean," admits the affable Mr. Sharfman. "They're my mother's phobias."

But they have a hold over him anyway, meaning that it doesn't matter why the 13th is considered ominous, whether it has to do with Norse mythology or the Last Supper or the day Mr. Sharfman got married. (Just kidding on that last one; that was a Saturday, not a Friday, which is totally different and apparently acceptable.) All that matters is that historically the 13th has meant bad mojo and probably will bring more in the future.

Which explains why you can find Mr. Sharfman carrying his bags of talismans on days like today, to offer a little bit of help. What it doesn't explain is why, among all the trinkets, coins, keys, and other odds and ends in his lucky bags, there's also a Neiman Marcus credit card. What makes that so lucky?

Mr. Sharfman's response: "I have it in this bag and my wife doesn't have it."



Contact Ryan E. Smith at: ryansmith@theblade.com or 419-724-6103.

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)