



Donuts: 12 Dozen Makes One Gross

Last month's Whither Zither was nothing but a batch of quotations from all over the place. I like collecting quotations for many reasons, but one is that taking a sentence out of context and displaying it with an attribution at the end is like putting a frame around a picture. As a matter of fact, it's like putting a frame around anything, in a way. Take a small picture frame with no back -- just totally empty, so you can see through it -- and carry it around the house, holding it against the bar of soap, the tangled USB cable, the shoe, and see if it doesn't give the item an artistic glow. When you think about it, that's one way photography (drawing, painting, songwriting) can be used, as a sort of frame. And then if you use a theme to choose these new art pieces -- in the case of my quotations of last month, a length limit and vaguely musical thrust -- you end up with a conceptual grouping. Walk around and photograph things with, say, an "L" shape that are blue in color and you may end up with something.

Wading through my computer files, such as they are, I come across odd collections I've made using some semblance of that approach, and tonight I found a whole page of infosnacks about the number twelve. Apparently that was the qualifier I was using in my wanderings: it can be anything as long as it has to do with twelve. The secondary consideration, as with last month's quotes, was that it was best if it had something to do with music. That made the project at least somewhat appropriate for Whither Zither, though I probably wasn't thinking about it at the time. More likely it was a song idea that never made it off the ground because of the difficulty of rhyming "twelve."

Now, all the little one and two digit numbers have large importances, when you stop to consider. I mean, good heavens, ONE! Or FOUR! Or my oh my, TWO! My interest in TWELVE seems to have started with the fact that I do

play a 12-string guitar, as I've mentioned here before. And my first 12-string guitar, a Harmony which I still own 45 years later, has 12 frets. Moving on into music theory, there are 12 semitones in the chromatic scale. In other words, if you plunk a middle C on a piano, then go up one ivory at a time (don't forget the black ones) until you plunk the one right before the NEXT C on the piano, you will have plunked 12 times.

The most common blues progression of all is known as the 12-bar blues progression, because it is a pattern of three chords placed in very specific locations over 12 measures (bars) of music.

A good ol' LP record has a diameter of 12 inches, and the first LP my musical partner Lou and I released in 1980 had 12 songs on it. We were 12 years old at the time ha ha.

In other twelvish* music news, the Beatles produced 12 studio albums. A few popular songs based on the number are the old gospel song, "12 Gates To The City" and of course "12 Days of Christmas." "Until the Twelfth of Never" was made popular first by Johnny Mathis in 1957. This song apparently was based on the popular expression, though I'm sure I heard it in the song before hearing it on the street. ("Would you like to go to the prom?" "Sure, if it falls on the 12th of never.") I always thought this was an odd usage, because "the seventh of never" has more assonance, and "the ninth of never" more alliteration. And either of those numbers are easier to say than "twelfth," which is really a wretched tongue tangler.

But twelve is the largest one-syllable number, and that probably has something to do with it. And that isn't twelve's only distinction, by a long shot.

If you have a jar of marbles all the same size, any one of them (except for those on the periphery) is touching 12 other marbles. A cube has twelve edges (I counted!). There are many other mathematical properties of 12 that are interesting (it's the smallest number with exactly six divisors, its proper divisors being 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 12), but most of them I don't understand. There are 12

12 Musical Birthdays on the 12th

12 January 1930 Glenn Yarbrough
12 February 1935 Ray Manzarek
12 March 1948 James Taylor
12 April 1930 Tiny Tim
12 May 1929 Burt Bacharach
12 June 1928 Vic Damone
12 July 1943 Christie McVie
12 August 1959 Suzanne Vega
12 September 1943 Maria Muldaur
12 October 1969 Martie Seidel
12 November 1945 Neil Young
12 December 1915 Frank Sinatra

cranial nerves in a human (I didn't count). There are 12 face cards in a deck, 12 long years of school before freedom, 12 steps to recovery in AA (I counted), 12 signs of the zodiac. TWELVE is the name of a Patti Smith album released in 2007. There are 12 strikes in a 300 game of bowling, 12 pairs of ribs in most humans, 12 months in a year and numbers on a clock. 12 inches in a foot. 12 is the maximum wind speed on the Beaufort scale; in most places there need be 12 jurors on a jury. The Neelakurinji is a flower which bathes the hills of South India in blue once every 12 years. 12 people have walked on the moon. The "12-ounce curl" is slang for the exercise of drinking a beer. A dozen is the usual gaggle of roses, eggs, and donuts, though formally, a group of 12 things is called a Duodecad. I guess 13 formal donuts is a Baker's Duodecad.

In my business of rhyming, the word "twelve" is almost a great gift, but not quite. The word "self" and its variations (myself, herself, etc) often pops up as needing a rhyme, and with "elf" and "shelf," you've just about exhausted the possibilities. "Twelfth" and "self" is probably close enough for rap or Dylan, but not a true rhyme. "Twelve" has the common rhymes of "shelve" and "delve," but you don't get back to "self" until you use "twelves" and "selves." That works, but the opportunity to use it has never come up for me. Maybe that's my next challenge (In the fairyland of big shoes, the elves themselves wore twelves)...

**I like the word "twelvish." It's a good name for a Preteen Idol: Twelvish Presley.*