

# Bizarre beliefs range from sex to weather

By Kate McElroy

Battalion Staff

The musical group Devo reminded us of the old schoolyard superstition: "Step on a crack, break your momma's back." But there are more superstitions more complicated and bizarre than the standard lore. Here are some of the more off-the-wall beliefs that are mentioned in various books about folklore and superstitions.

## Weather superstitions:

— If it snows on Christmas, Easter will be green.  
— If you see a dog eating grass, it's going to rain soon.  
— Sleep with a flower under your pillow tonight — the weather will be fair tomorrow.

## Sex and Superstitions:

— Peel an apple in one long strip, throw it over your left shoulder, and the peel will fall in the shape of your future husband's initial. (The book didn't specify which initial, and obviously this one pertains to women).  
— Men who kill glow-worms are forever doomed to tragic love affairs.

— A burning sensation of the right cheek is welcomed by men and women; it's a sign their lovers are thinking of them.

— If a woman obtains the root of a wolf's tail, she must soak it in water; the lotion it creates should then be rubbed on her right breast to ensure her lover's sincerity.

— Two spoons in a saucer foretell a wedding.

— If an engaged woman drops her fork, the marriage is off.

— A woman with a mole on her left breast is irresistible to men, but ...

— A woman should beware of a man with a mole on his left shoulder.

— If a couple is photographed together, their relationship will collapse.

## Animals and Superstitions:

— Cut off the tip of a dog's tail and carry it with you — that dog will never harm you.

— If you see a stray dog on your lawn, cross your fingers and hold them tight, and the dog won't defecate on your property.

— Hold your breath and bees won't sting you.

## Evil spirits and superstitions:

— If you shiver, someone is walking over the spot where you will be buried.

— Spitting is a protection against witches.

— Witches are not only fond of black cats, but also of black sheep (thus the term "the black sheep of the family.")

## Miscellaneous superstitions:

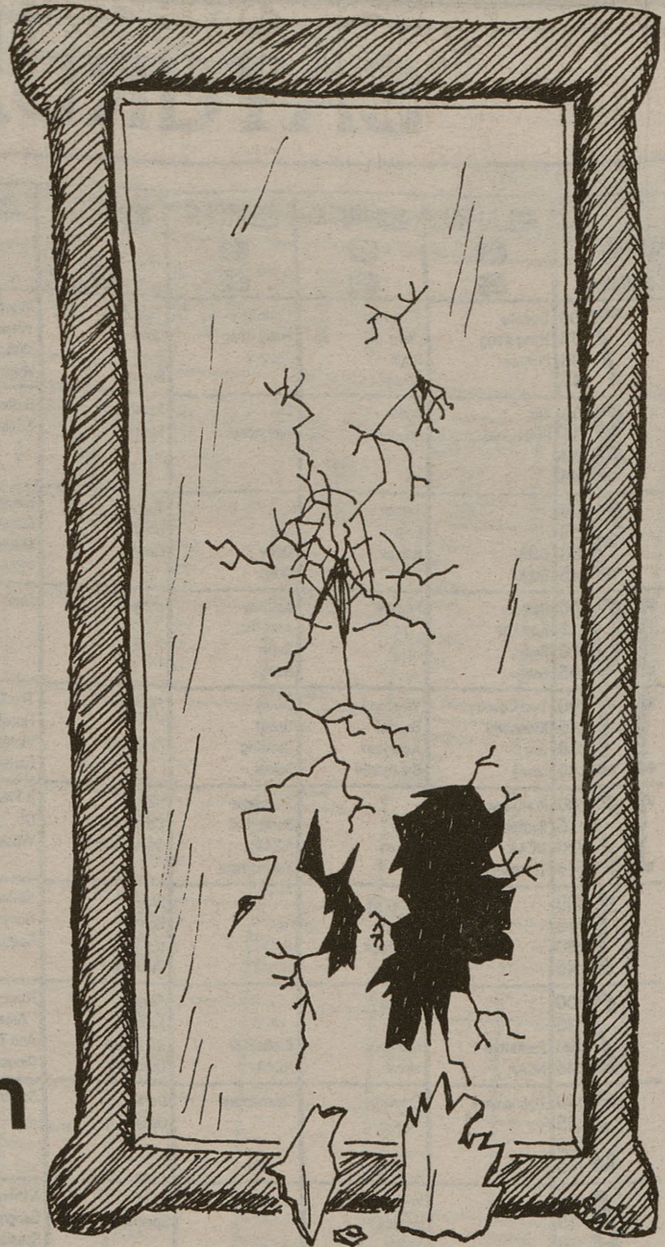
— If your knee itches, you will kneel in a strange church; if the sole of your feet itches, you'll walk over a strange ground; if your elbow itches, you'll sleep with a stranger.

— Touching the hump of a hunchback will bring success, especially if you touch him while making the sign of the cross.

— If two persons wash in the same water, it's bad luck.

— The opal gem is bad luck to the owner unless he was born in October.

— A baby should never look in a mirror before he's four months old; to look before then will cause rickets.



## Luck sours on Friday 13th

By Ruth M. Daly

Battalion Reporter

Students leaving for spring break Friday will probably see the day as a particularly good T.G.I.F. and disregard the superstition that it's bad luck to start a journey on a Friday.

But this Friday is bad news for the superstitious — it's Friday the thirteenth.

The superstition that Friday is an unlucky day originated with the Scandinavians. It was the festival day of the goddess Freya, the goddess of love, and only unlucky for those who disregarded her festivities to follow their own pursuits.

In Europe, Friday was hangman's day; it was the day criminals were executed.

Superstitious Christians consider it an unlucky day because Christ was crucified on a Friday.

However, it's good luck to die on Friday, be buried on Saturday and be prayed for on Sunday.

Thirteen generally represents misfortune, bad luck, contradiction, death, disaster or ruin.

Ancient holy men regarded the number as sacred, so they didn't mention it. This hesitation led common people to believe 13 was evil.

Superstitious Christians consider the number unlucky because 13 men were present at Christ's Last Supper.

Even today some sailors regard the thirteenth day of the month as such a bad day that they don't like to leave port on the thirteenth, especially if it falls on a Friday.

Dr. Joe Graham, a folklore teacher at Texas A&M Universi-

ty, said people are superstitious today because superstitions give them some sense of control over their lives.

Even though the original meaning of some superstitions may be forgotten, Graham said, superstitions provide ways to explain why bad things happen.

There's an "after this therefore because of this" logic behind superstitions, Graham said. If something bad happens to someone and he remembers that he walked under a ladder or that a black cat crossed his path, the person can blame his misfortune on the superstitious incident.

For example, Graham said, if a telephone pole falls on a person's car and the person remembers a black cat crossed his path, the person then has a legitimate explanation for his bad luck. This reasoning helps him feel he has some control over his life, and so he thinks he can avoid future unfortunate events by avoiding black cats.

Graham said that superstitious people stay home on Friday the thirteenth to avoid bad luck.

He said that in the United States and similar cultures, the home is considered a safe place. Superstitious people in these cultures believe they can control what will happen to them when they're at home, Graham said.

Graham said that today, even some rational people have superstitious rituals.

Some students, for example, use their "lucky pencil" for exams and wear their "lucky underwear" on test days.

And people tend to pray more

when they're in trouble, Graham said, so they can find some help from beyond and gain control over their futures.

## Superstitions have vague, often forgotten origins

By Kate McElroy

Battalion Staff

Sometimes the story behind a superstition can be as bizarre as the superstition itself. These beliefs, like old family feuds, are still followed even though no one knows how they began. Most of today's superstitions are so old that even scholars aren't sure of their origins, but here's an attempt to trace some of the more common ones, as explained by some folklorists.

**Friday the 13th:** There're many explanations why this day is bad luck — here's another one. Friday is bad because it's the day Christ died; this weekday is still considered sacred by many Christian sects, especially during Lent. Thirteen is a bad number because Judas Iscariot was considered the thirteenth person at the Last Supper. Also that number connotes disorder: threes (like triangles) are balanced, with the next balanced number being four (that of rectangles). A well-balanced number is 4 sets of threes or vice-versa — the number 12. However, thirteen throws that balance into disarray. So the combination of these two bad luck superstitions is dangerous.

**Walking under the ladder:** When a ladder is up, the wall on which it leans, the ground and the ladder form a triangle, which is symbolic of the Holy Trinity. To go under the ladder is the equivalent of breaking the trinity, an action sure to bring bad luck.

**Salt over the shoulder:** The evil connotation about spilling salt on the table has a historical background. Many years ago salt was a valuable commodity, used in trading and as a flavoring and preservative agent. It also served as a sort of baro-

meter, because salt that is hardening foretells rain. It was hard to come by, and because of this, spilling salt was a no-no.

The evil spirit in this superstition is the devil. Some believe he lurks behind one's chair at the table, waiting for an opportunity to do harm — when salt is spilled, it gives him a chance. It's necessary for the superstitious to throw some of the spilled salt hastily over the left shoulder to

*Friday is bad because it's the day Christ died; thirteen is a bad number because Judas Iscariot was considered the thirteenth person at the Last Supper.*

catch the devil in the eye and cause him such discomfort that he would abandon his evil intentions.

**Knocking on wood:** Some say this practice is started because the cross of Christ was made of wood, therefore all wooden objects have an aura of holiness. Others say the superstition is a relic of the prehistoric worship of tree gods. Old legends tell of the Olympic gods who frequently turned mortals into trees when the desperate humans needed safety. So it's natural for those who believe in Olympian deities to go to a tree when pursued by unseen dangerous forces.