

TWELVE

By Anne Sloan

When one considers that there are 385 million hits for the number 12 on Google, trying to write a 500 word essay is, to say the least, intimidating. I guess it would be important to learn why the number 12 has such a deep significance in our lives.

The number 12 is the most ancient of the "combination numbers," being the first actual combination which can be made without duplication in the Arabic numeral system. The word *twelve* is a native English word that presumably arises from the Germanic compound two-lif or "two leave" meaning that 2 is left after one takes away the base 10.

Now that we have a little background, where do we go from here? First of all, the familiar twelves: there's a dozen eggs, or a dozen donuts. We won't go into the bakers' dozen here. We have twelve noon and twelve midnight. There are 60 seconds and 60 minutes and 24 hours, all divisible by 12. We're lucky we only have 12 months in a year!

Somehow the western world and the orient agreed upon 12 signs of the Zodiac. There are 12 inches in a foot and our rulers are just that long unless you're working with a yardstick which is still three twelves. The number 12 in mathematics is far and away too intense and involved to go into in this paper.

When we think about God, the divinity of the great monotheistic religions I don't think I need to tell you how the number 12 fits here. There were 12 tribes of Israel and the number sealed from each tribe was 12,000. Jerusalem had twelve gates upon which were 12 angels. Jesus chose twelve apostles and in Catholic tradition we read of a woman encompassed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. This could go on *ad finitum!*

Song writers, novelists, poets and movie moguls have all been inspired by the number 12. We just finished with the 12 days of Christmas, Shakespeare wrote "Twelfth Night," the Aeneid and Paradise Lost both have 2 sections of 12 books each. And then there's 12 Angry Men, Cheaper by the Dozen, Ocean's Twelve and 12 Monkeys. This category would offer enough material for at least one book.

Now into outer space, Jupiter has 12 moons and 12 men have walked on our big moon. We find some twelves in our anatomy. There are twelve pairs of ribs in the normal human body and 12 cranial nerves. Which all happen to be on edge right now thinking about the number 12.

We could probably never imagine everything and every place where the number 12 would be present. Suffice it to say that we hope we won't have a "number" assignment for at least 12 months.