

THE BOY WHO COULDN'T COUNT TO THREE

When Melville Schwartzan was two years old, his Grandma Moses suffered a coronary while cradling the youngster in her arms, and dropped the sleeping toddler on his cranium. The blow left no permanent scars or mental deficiency; the only aftereffect was that the child couldn't count to three.

For example, at age four, Melville's mother asked him to count the fingers on his hand. The boy gleefully shouted "One...Two...Four...Five!" His parents, although concerned, assumed the problem would correct itself in time. But it only seemed to worsen, as Melville began to show signs of confusing the entire concept of the number three: a triangle became a square; the holy trinity became the holy quartet; not to mention the number of times Melville remained at an empty school waiting for three o'clock to roll around.

In desperation, Melville's parents took the boy to a neurologist, who gave him a thorough going-over and found nothing wrong with the child, except for a swallowed penny lodged at the base of his urinary tract. He recommended that Melville be taken to a good psychiatrist.

The psychiatrist determined that the best way to cure the boy of his mental block was to barrage him with as much material containing the number three as possible, and prescribed heavy doses of "Three Blind Mice," "The Three Little Pigs," and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." But none of it took affect. His parents finally resigned to accept his affliction and give him as much love as they could.

Aside from this one problem, Melville grew into a healthy and intelligent lad. He even entered college a year earlier than the rest of his peers, though few people realized this was because he refused to acknowledge his third birthday.

Then one day, while buying fresh-baked matzo in the city, Melville asked the kindly baker how to get to the nearest organ-doner branch.

"It's over on Third Street," said the baker.

"What?" said Melville.

"I say it's over on Third Street," the baker said again.

"What?" Melville repeated.

Eventually, Melville was escorted out of the bakery, and decided to find the place on his own. Thinking that the baker had been trying to say "Fourth Street," Melville wandered past Third and instead found himself in an alley, where he was beaten to a pulp by three whistling Negroes, who also snatched the penny from his urinary tract.

The traumatic event shocked Melville out of his lifelong disability, and last Christmas, his parents received a postcard from their long-missing son, who said he was now living in a three-story house in the tri-state area with a wife and three beautiful children. Their only concern was when Melville added that his wife's name was Phylis, Francesca, and Gretel.

Steven Kelly