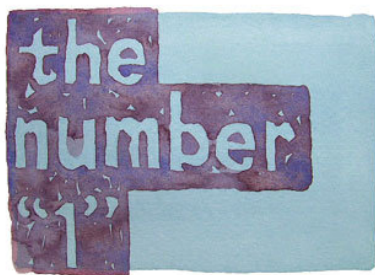


Story for performance #974
webcast from Sydney at 07:44PM, 19 Feb 08



Source: AFP, 'RU4 real? \$15m for plates', *The Age* online, 19/02/08.

Tags: [chance](#), [storytelling](#)

Writer/s: [Sophie Townsend](#)

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She tells me that she remembers hearing the first one—number one—a long time ago now. She tells me number one was important to hear. She remembers the broadcast—how in some ways it felt like the first day at a new school, everything so rich and full with potential for greatness or disaster. She could imagine the others who were listening at the same time but in their own separate rooms and how for them she imagines number one is a distant memory. And then for others—those that came later—number one doesn't even exist. But for her it was the beginning, and she thinks beginnings are important, even when they are swamped by the middle, and the end.

She is worried for me tonight. It's number 974. She thinks I might be getting tired. She wonders if I want to be free or if I don't want that at all, or that perhaps freedom doesn't even come into it. She tells me that she was listening last night and it worried her that I couldn't read the story. She thought I had managed it well, played it cool, but she thought she could also detect an underlying anxiety. She wondered how I had slept last night. Was I restless and worried that my illiteracy would be permanent? Would I have to play the radio for the next 28 nights? She hoped it would not come to that. She thinks people are expecting more.

And so she had an idea for me. She has lent me a book of nursery rhymes and said I should place it beside my bed before I went to sleep so that I could test myself on something easy when I woke this morning, and then I could plan for the day.

'Mary had a little lamb,' is what I read.
'Its fleece was white as snow.'

Relief filled my body, but it was brief. I thought about the numbers for today: the numbers nine, seven and four came into view. I felt again that fitfulness that I had experienced during the night (she was right about that), a sort of churn in my stomach that became more and more intense as I searched for the prompt. I painted it with a shaky hand, and uploaded it as usual for all to see.

I ask her why she thinks this number has made me so worried? She looks in her numerology book for some guidance:

The number four: Indicates a likelihood of confusion and lack of imagination. Also related to having fixed opinions.

The number seven: Very reserved and stubborn. Will not accept criticism.

The number nine: Scattered thoughts and ideas without a sense of logic.

This does not help my unease. I ask her to close the book, and I try in particular to forget the words 'lack of imagination' and 'very fixed opinions.'

Something is not right. I wonder if it is the prompt. Is it too difficult? I don't think so, but it's possible to catch a writer on an off day and then I have a problem on my hands. Maybe it's one of those days? I will not, cannot, change the prompt but, as I bite at my nails, it bites at me.

I get on with my day, as I must. There is work to be done. I cannot wallow in this fear. I tell myself that I have had 973 goes at this now, and that jitters will not be tolerated so close to the end. Still, it nags at me. 'Will the story strike a chord, will it ask questions, answer questions, say something, try to say too much? Will it try to project what is going through my mind so close to the end but still a few weeks off?'

I am a little tired of course, after this long journey, and friends have gathered round these last few weeks to ask me, 'Do you think you'll be alright?' and to them I say 'I am afraid.' I wonder if anyone can quite comprehend what it means to be so close to the end, because I don't know myself. One of the writers says that it means freedom and spontaneity, but sadness as well, loss as well. 'But', the writer said, 'I'm only guessing.' Of course she is only guessing. Everyone is only guessing.

There is a gamble every day on it being alright, on it being able to be read (on being able to read it). Perhaps a little anxiety should be expected. Perhaps it has nothing to do with the meaning of the numbers or the writer or the deadline at all, but a cumulative anxiety accreting over these past 973 nights. Maybe it's not me at all, but the anxieties of all those writers, wrapping around me like thick cigarette smoke. Each day, I have heard, there is someone anxious—'Will she like it? Will she like me? Will I be accepted, rejected, loved or spurned?' and perhaps it is just all of this fear coming to find me.

I read 'Mary had a little lamb' again, making sure that it wasn't just a fluke the first time, or that my memory was simply being jogged by the picture of the blonde girl with the sheep. I find that I can read, and that is a good sign.

I ask her to look at the numerology book again. She tells me that she hadn't read me the complete entries. She hadn't read the positive trait of each number.

Nine says: a giving nature (it will be submitted).

Seven says: a perfectionist (never a bad thing).

Four says: foundation for achievement (the prompt was good).

Perhaps 974 will be okay. And then there will be 27 left.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sophie Townsend.