

My Days Are Filled With Numbers

By Tom Smith

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4234 Tres Ninos
Las Cruces, NM 88011
(575) 635-5194
tom@tomsmithplaywright.com

Characters

Josh, 13
Grandma, 70-something

Time/Place

Today
Josh and Grandma's House

My Days Are Filled With Numbers

GRANDMA

You're late.

JOSH

I know, Grams. It was the Sunday edition. They're heavier so I can ride my bike as fast, remember?

GRANDMA

It's Sunday?

JOSH

Yes.

GRANDMA

But yesterday was...

JOSH

Saturday.

GRANDMA

I know that. Today's Sunday. Sunday. I can't keep track of anything since I retired. Days don't mean what they used to.

JOSH

I brought you an extra copy.

GRANDMA

The print is too small.

JOSH

I can read it to you.

GRANDMA

Fine.

JOSH

Did you eat this morning, Grandma?

GRANDMA

Yes.

JOSH

What did you have?

GRANDMA

Oatmeal.

JOSH

We're out of oatmeal. You ate the last of it on Friday.

GRANDMA

I had oatmeal.

JOSH

Did you have toast? The bread is out.

GRANDMA

No. Yes. I had toast.

JOSH

(counting the slices) You did. You had two pieces. Let me get you more coffee.

That's my grandma. She's 70-something. I don't really know her exact age. She's taken care of me since my ma went to prison. She'll be out sometime in the next two years. I haven't seen her for a while now. Grams and I used to visit, but three years ago they took away her license so we don't have any way to get to the prison anymore. I get my driver's permit in two years, and I hope that I'll be able to pick my mom up when she gets released.

GRANDMA

I have an empty cup, Toby.

JOSH

I know, Grams. (hands her coffee) I'm Josh. Toby is my uncle. Grams confuses me with him sometimes. She's got dementia. It's a condition where you forget stuff and you get confused. Sometimes it's scary. Like last week, when she left the stove burner on. Sometimes it's funny. (she farts) See? She doesn't even care that she farted! I take care of her. It takes a lot of focus. I have to count things constantly. The money in her wallet. The slices of bread in the bag. The number of oranges and apples and bananas.

GRANDMA

This print is too small!

JOSH

I'll read it to you, Grams!

Since she can't remember things too well, I need to know everything about everything so I can tell if she's eaten or not. Or paid the electric bill. Or taken

too many vitamins. I've become really good at just scanning things and knowing how many there are. And my math grades have improved a lot. My days are filled with numbers.

GRANDMA

Josh!

JOSH

All right, all right. What do you want to start out with? The front page? Arts and Entertainment?

GRANDMA

The puzzle page.

JOSH

All right. (he opens the paper). What do you want first? Trivia? Crossword? Sudoku?

GRANDMA

Trivia.

JOSH

The topic today is world history. There are five questions. Here's the easy level. How many states are there in the United States of America?

GRANDMA

50.

JOSH

Correct. Level two: How many countries make up the United Kingdom?

GRANDMA

4: Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

JOSH

Correct. Level three: What country lies between Malaysia and Indonesia?

GRANDMA

Singapore.

JOSH

Level four: What Asian country has the same name as a state in the United States?

GRANDMA

Georgia.

JOSH

Good job, Grams. Only one left. What country's name is derived from the Latin word meaning "Southern?"

GRANDMA

I was very good in Latin. I took it for five years in high school.

JOSH

I know, Grams.

GRANDMA

I came in second place for most accomplished in Latin. I was the first girl to ever get that highly ranked. Latin was considered a language better suited for boys. But I always believed that there should never be a difference between what boys could do and what girls could do. My brothers studied Latin, so I did too. It's a shame you kids grow up today without learning it. It's so helpful.

JOSH

Do you want me to read the question again?

GRANDMA

Australia, deriving from the Latin word, Australis.

JOSH

Does this make any sense to you? She can't remember what she had for breakfast ten minutes ago, but she remembers what rank she got in Latin, like, 60 years ago!?!

Perfect score, Grams. Except for Tuesday, it was a clean sweep this week. Do you want to move onto the crossword?

GRANDMA

No, you do that one that you like. I'm going to go shower. Then I'll make a grocery list so we can go out shopping. We need more eggs.

JOSH

We're fine with eggs, Gram.

GRANDMA

I think we're running out.

JOSH

We have 7 left.

GRANDMA

And we're out of oranges.

JOSH

That's true. But we have a lot of tangerines. Twenty two to be exact. And 4 green apples, 5 red apples, 4 bananas, 1 lime, 1 lemon, and 64 grapes. That's the fruit bin. In the veggie drawer we have 5 green onions, 6 carrots, 1 red pepper, 14 mushrooms, and ½ of a head of lettuce.

You'd think that it would all be confusing for me. I mean, sometimes I'm wrong on the numbers, like if Grams eats something and I'm not here to see it. But usually I'm pretty spot on.

It's comforting in a way, having all these numbers in my head. It reminds me to think about all the things we do have rather than the things we don't have: like, we have 7 eggs, not we've eaten five eggs.

This is Sudoku. I'm addicted to it. I have books and books and books of these puzzles. Have you seen them? You fill in missing numbers in the boxes. You can't repeat a number either this way or this way or in one of these boxes. I play every single day.

I think I like it so much because I can get the numbers out of my head do something with them. Like, (filling in a number) 7 eggs, 5 red apples, this one could be either 6 carrots or 1 red pepper. But I think it's 1 red pepper, and this one is 6 carrots. (he quickly finishes the puzzle).

Someday, I'm going to find out if there's a world championship of Sudoku. I know I could win it. Then I could take that money and hire someone to count everything for me. 2 years until my driver's permit. 738 days until my mom gets out of prison. 4 more weeks of school before vacation.

GRANDMA

(off) Toby?

JOSH

1 grandma. 1 Josh.

GRANDMA

(off) Toby?

JOSH

1 day at a time.

End of Play