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TED BROWN
Column

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As I was watching the news one night, one of the newscasters used the expression 'to the nines.'

The more common use of that expression is generally "Dressed to the Nines," meaning someone who is very fashionably and elaborately dressed, generally in reference to a woman.

I became curious to its origin, so I set about researching it on the internet.

It was first recorded from the 18th century, and one explanation was "to the nines" was used to signify reaching a standard of nine on a scale of one to ten - not perfect, but pretty close to it.

Other sources suggest it was originally "dressed to the eyes," which in medieval English was "to then eyne."

It's suggested that "eyne" was later bastardized to "nines."

That research led me to find other number nine expressions.

How about the expression "The whole nine yards"?

That one seems to have originated from Second World War fighter pilots. Apparently, the length of the ammunition belt feeding the machine guns in the Spitfire fighter was 27 feet, or nine yards.

When a pilot had fired all his ammunition at the enemy, he'd say he'd thrown

"the whole nine yards" at him.

Other references included football jargon (but nine yards doesn't really work) to the length of material in a man's three-piece business suit - which apparently is more like five yards.

I'm going with the fighter pilots, as it sounds the most logical.

Another expression was "On Cloud Nine" which is used when someone is euphoric, on top of the world.

The most common explanation for this one comes from the U.S. Weather Bureau.

Apparently, they describe clouds with a number sequence, Level Nine being the very highest cumulus clouds, which look like big white puffy mountains floating in the sky. If you're on 'Cloud Nine' you're floating on the top of one of those 'mountains.'

Searching phrases brought up references to other lines, like "Letting the cat out of the bag," which many claim was a reference to the cat o' nine tails, a whip used to discipline sailors in medieval times.

If a sailor said something he shouldn't have, it was said his words had caused 'the cat to be let out of the bag,' meaning the whip was pulled from its canvas storage bag.

Also, we hear the expres-

sion 'enough space to swing a cat in here,' suggesting there's lots of space in a room. It's another reference to the cat o' nine tails, meaning there's enough space to whip someone.

I also came across the expression "Waiting for the other shoe to drop," used to describe apprehension.

It was attributed to a depression era boarding house where one of the boarders came in late and dropped his shoe on the wooden floor while getting into bed. Realizing the noise might wake the others downstairs, he took the other shoe off silently and got into bed.

After several minutes, someone downstairs yelled up, "Drop the other one man! I can't get to sleep, waiting for the other shoe to drop!"

We use these expressions every day without thinking, and I know I'm only scraping the tip of the iceberg when it comes to these origins, because there's more than one way to skin a cat when it comes to researching them.

But come hell or high water, these explanations are the real McCoy, and can pass muster, even though some may disagree and become mad as a hatter.

I'll just tell them to mind their own beeswax, because the whole lock, stock and barrel are a different kettle of fish.

Consequently, someone will probably be left holding the bag, while another will cry all the way to the bank over this pile of malarkey...

- Ted Brown is a freelance columnist for the IFP. He can be reached at ted-bit@hotmail.com.

THE WAY WE WERE



EHS photo

In this 1950 photo, a Canadian National freight train travels south into the Georgetown junction on what was the original Hamilton-North-Western Railway line. Engine 5607 is pulling the train past the Georgetown train station, now owned by VIA Rail and used by both Via and GO Transit. By the time of this photo, the line was owned by Canadian National Railway, but was eventually abandoned in 1975. Text courtesy of Heritage Halton Hills.

Motorcycle season is here and together we can save some lives

It will not be long until motorcycles are on our roads again. Motorcyclists enjoy the open roads and camaraderie of a special community. They can hardly wait each year to put two wheels to the pavement and enjoy the freedom.

Motorcycle enthusiasts come in all shapes and packages - lone riders, riding clubs and motorcycle clubs - all sharing the same enthusiasm for the common enjoyment of getting out of the four-wheel cage and away from the daily hum existence of life. Feeling the open air and wind in their faces.

Each of them has a spouse, father, mother and/or a child at the end of their journey, waiting for them to make it home safely. They are also your

friends and co-workers, so take heed this season; watch out for that person on two wheels.

These bikers will be coming to our cities and towns, staying at hotels, motels, plus eating at restaurants, buying goods and services, while bringing economic advantages to all communities.

There are countless numbers of charities that are supported by motorcyclists each year, coming from all areas of the province. Please, respect those rides and help protect the participants.

Too often, there are actions taken by some municipal councils or even individual establishments to ban some motorcyclists because of what they wear. We urge everyone to think about that. Do we want to be a soci-

ety where any individual or group is forced to leave a place or cannot purchase an item simply because of their chosen dress code?

Yes, there are those in law enforcement who will try to convince the public that those wearing patches are somehow the boogeyman. Reasonable people know that motorcyclists whether wearing a patch or not are our neighbours, co-workers and relatives, who have families, just like they do. This is unnecessary, costly profiling of to a valued segment of our population!

When you see that biker on the road, give him or her a wave. See them for what they are: fellow citizens simply out enjoying the day, their way.

Doak McCraney,
Guelph

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