

GNU DUNG

OR

20/02/2002

Two things this month prompted this dissertation. First, the twentieth of February, 2002, passed without incident. Second, as I passed McDonalds I noticed a promotional sign in the window for the "Junior Big Xtra" hamburger.

Let's deal with McDonalds first. As I passed the sign, I immediately thought, "oxymoron".

Several years ago, nobody knew what an oxymoron was. Now the oxymoron, a "figure of speech with seeming contradictions", is apparently used purposefully by McDonalds. They must have labeled the "Junior Big Xtra" knowing that it was contradictory. Or did they? Classic oxymorons are "jumbo shrimp", "military intelligence", "postal service", or "plastic glasses". There are other less common oxies: "good grief", "small crowd", and "childproof". I have two favourites: "tight slacks" and "12 ounce pound cake".

But people being people, there are queries that illustrate oxymorons. Steven Wright, the deadpan comedian, is the master of these. One that is definitely belongs to him is, "How deep would the ocean actually be if it wasn't full of sponges?"

Here are a few others, and I have no idea whether they can be attributed to him or not.

"When you transport something by ship it's cargo. Why, when you transport it by car is it a shipment?"

"Why do they stale date sour cream?"

"If Beckers is open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, why do they have a lock on the door?"

And my favourite, "Why is brassiere singular and panties plural?"

That's oxymorons. Palindromes is a whole 'nother story. That's words or sentences that spell the same thing backwards or forwards. A few classics are: "Madam, I'm Adam", "Able Was I Ere I Saw Elba", and "A Man, A Plan, A Canal: Panama!"

2002 is a palindromic year. The twentieth of February of this year is a completely palindromic date. 20-02-2002.

Palindromes are an old word form. The Greeks wrote on fountains, "Nipson anonmemeta me monan ospin", which

apparently means "Wash the sin as well as the face", which is good work if you can do it.

Here are some less common English ones. They're less common because most of them make no sense. "Did Rose call lace sordid?" "God! A red nugget. A fat egg under a dog!" "Sit on a potato pan, Otis." Then, my favourites; "Doc, note. I dissent. A fast never prevents a fatness. I diet on cod", which at least hangs together a little. "Seepy baby pees", which describe my grandson's diapers. Also "Gnu dung" just because it sounds nice, and for the councilor in Ward 9, "Aha! Monica met a mate. Mac, in Omaha".

As if palindrome construction wasn't difficult enough, there's a form called a word unit, in which the words form a palindromic sentence, but are not in themselves palindromes: "Women understand men. Few men understand women." This is clearly untrue, but it's an artfully constructed sentence. Then there is "You can cage a swallow can't you, but you can't swallow a cage, can you?", which is even better.

Finally, there's no definition for this, but here it comes: "Two plus eleven" and "One plus twelve" not only yield the

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