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Society Journal

***Colorful Language of the Rural Midwest,  
with special emphasis on Missouri and Missourians***



**Editor's note** : this collection has been growing, and is at present seriously underorganized. Enjoy your browsing, as we seek a way to bring this rich variety into some order. We are considering topics, occasions and structure as organizing principles. We're not the only ones doing this. The New York Folklore Society offers an excerpted list from collector James Spears:

<http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic31-1-2/collect.html>

Here we collect specimens of vernacular phrasal display, a minor genre of oral tradition and verbal folk-art. These are expressions of somewhat fixed but flexible form, adaptable to particular situations and social needs — expressing sorrow, solidarity, exasperation, etc. Expressions suited to negative occasions far outnumber those for happier moments. Maybe because we don't need fixed expressions to help us get through good things. It's harder to write a personal letter of condolence than one of congratulation, I think.

These expressions *\*are\** both individual property (they are often called “grammaw’s sayings” or “jim-bob-isms”) and recognizable as an archive existing apart from the individual who uses them. It's like being a folk musician — a given performer gets credit for having a big repertoire and playing it well, but that doesn't mean s/he made all those songs up. It's about knowing the stuff and how to use it, a social skill as much as an artistic gift.

There has been very little academic study of this material. For those who are so inclined, here's an article on the subject:

**Davis, Adam Brooke. Vernacular Phrasal Display: Towards the Definition of a Form. Oral Tradition 26:2 (October 2011).**

Most readers are going to be interested in the collection itself. You'll find plenty below.

As a sidebar, there's the separate but related genre of “catchphrase,” which is a fixed expression that can be deployed in a given situation to invoke or imply a larger narrative. Pop culture abounds in these of course, and they come and go rapidly (who remembers the Alka-Seltzer commercial tag, “I can't believe I ate the whole thing”?) But the same process plays itself out in much smaller cultures. For example, in many families and groups, there's an expression that's used in certain circumstances — after talking over some disaster, my grandmother would announce a change of subject with brutal firmness, saying, “Well now, besides that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the play?” Here we collect such occasion-linked sayings of folk and micro-communities, along with the stories behind them...

Much of this material is of course offensive — “color” in language is often achieved by “off-color” expression. If you are easily offended, stop reading now. If you are not easily offended, there is a **sub-page with truly extreme expressions**. Folklorists do not recommend or approve of such expressions, any more than a physician approves of diphtheria. However, the violation of taboo is one of the ways in which speakers give force to their expression, and dysphemism is a genuine and durable feature of language use. This is certainly familiar where tabooed speech is one of the ways of drawing group boundaries, of deliberately giving offense to those who are not like “us,” whom we would just as soon frighten off, or leave simply mystified and excluded, as in the case of thieves' cant or military slang (<http://www.temple.edu/isllc/newfolk/military/speech.html>). However, what we collect here is largely the usage of groups with real but fluid boundaries, where there is pleasure both in the familiar expression (which may be less vivid to its users than to those for whom it is a novelty) and in ingenuity of invention.

We intend this informal and collaborative collection in the tradition of the great Ozark collector Vance Randolph, who collected the expressions “ugly as a mud fence stuck with tadpoles” and “pretty as a speckled pup” — as well as the stories in the (in)famous “Pissing

*in the Snow.” Now, as Randolph well knew, some of our Victorian-era ancestors were imaginative, vivid and sometimes profane, in ways that often surprise people who suppose that culture is subject to a straight-line, one-directional process of coarsening and decay. Here’s abundant and compelling evidence to the contrary. If salty talk offends, you definitely want to hit your browser’s “back” button now . You were warned.*

### **Recent correspondence:**

“J. Kuehl” wrote on January 9, 2015:

My grandpa was born and raised in Kentucky, and had a few colorful sayings I had never heard before. One that sticks out in my mind, and perhaps sums up how I’ll always remember him was ” Just cuz there’s snow on the roof, don’t mean there ain’t a fire in the fireplace”. The first time I heard him say this was one day when he was flipping through the channels on his tv and stopped briefly on a news channel that had a very attractive woman reading the news.

My dad grew up in a very rural area here in Illinois, and when something would make him laugh hard, he would exclaim ” I ain’t laughed so hard since the hogs ate my brother!”

May 13, 2013:

Alabama Grandma: “Two heads are better than one, even if one IS a sheep’s head.” Giving scant credit to someone with a better idea.

Scottish toast: “Here’s to us. There were damned few like us – and all of them are dead.” Meaning there’s no one left alive equal to (or like) us. The ultimate brag, We’re the BEST!

Vella Dailey [vella.dailey at gmail dot com]

January 26, 2013:

“He’s work brickle.” It means that someone is so brittle, that if he had to do some work, he’d just break apart.

Andy Scully

St. Joseph, MO

April 8, 2009: Two recently collected specimens from Kirksville:

-He was tall enough to stand flat-footed and kiss a giraffe/screw a flying buzzard

-About as much fun as a bucket of warm calf-slobber.

On March 10, 2009, Roberta Schwinke ([erschwinke@osageconnect.net](mailto:erschwinke@osageconnect.net)) wrote:

I fear you have created a monster here! Nevertheless, I can't resist adding a few:

Someone who is one bubble off plumb might also be one brick shy of a load, or His bread is not quite done. (Does this relate to Half-baked?" Nutty as a fruitcake, or just "fruitcake."

Back in the '50's we would say to couples going out on a date, "Don't do anything I wouldn't do – and if you do, name it after me."

The couple might say, "Let's don't and say we did." or "Let's do and say we didn't."

Got on him like ugly on a ape.

Scarce as hen's teeth

Old as dirt

Slick as a whistle

Slow as molasses in January

Dishwater blonde (description of hair color)

Fine as frog's hair

Look what the cat drug in! (Affectionate greeting)

More (whatever) than you could shake a stick at.

A family might live so far out in the woods they had to keep their own tomcat. And the house could be too small to swing a cat in. But there's more than one way to skin a cat. Also "nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs." (That one might come from Mark Twain)

If "if's" and "Ands" were pots and pans, there'd be no work for tinkers.

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.

Whistling girls and crowing hens always come to some bad end.

Now these are specific to my family as far as I know. We "hold no truck with" procrastinators, re:

"Wait" (weight) is what broke the wagon down.

"May bees (maybe) don't fly in January.

"A "well" is a hole in the ground, if it rains long enough it'll fill it up.

If someone yelled "Hey!" – Cows eat hay – fodder's cheaper.

Grandma was not "persnickity" (nit-picky). If something was not quite right she might say "It'll never be seen on a galloping horse."

When a cold east wind blew, "That wind is comin' right down through the peach orchard!"

Grandma had an old cow named Reddy. When asked “Are you ready?” the family would invariably reply “Reddy’s calf.”

Just one more old tale: Uncle Levi walked to the store at Crook to get a few things. He was coming home, carrying his purchases in a poke, picking his way down the muddy road, when he dropped his poke and everything in it. “Jesus Christ and God Almighty,” he shouted. Looking up, who should he see approaching but the parson. “What did you say, Brother,” the good parson asked.

“Oh,” Levi replied, “I said cheese and crackers got all muddy.”

Thanks for the laughs, and for jogging my memory.

On January 26, 2009 Dent County native Matthew Flett wrote:

*Great Site! Made me laugh out loud several times. I really enjoyed reading through all the sayings, they reminded me of several from my youth (and later) in Dent County, Missouri. I'd like to share some of them if I may..... Most of these are pretty crude, so beware. This type of expressive usage of language, as well as the lifestyles that spawned much of it are dying out in rural Missouri, more's the pity in my opinion, so thanks for taking the time to record some of them here.*

When asked “Do you miss working at the sawmill, Bill?” Bill replies **“Yeah.....miss it like a chapped ass!”**

**“Slicker than coon shit on a tin roof”** (Have heard this used in multiple ways, by referring to something that is really slippery, like ice on a road, or referring to something that is really impressive, like a brand new car. )

“He’s really **Cuttin a fat hog in the ass**” or more commonly just **“Cuttin a fat hog”** (This means someone is doing really doing well, usually financially)

“He took off **like a tall Indian going to shit**” (meaning moving with a purpose)

**“That’s another rat needs killin”** (Meaning “We’ve still got that to do, but probably not today”)

“Here comes Bob, and he’s really **carrying the mail**” ( Bob is moving quickly)

**“Six of one, half dozen of the other”** (This means loosely, “Doesn’t make any difference to me” as in “Do you want to go to the Bank first, or Wal-Mart? to which one would reply, “Six of one, half dozen of the other”

He or That **“looks like a plateful of hammered dog shit”** (Some body or Something is looking rough)

**“I feel like I got shot at and missed, and shit at and hit”** ( This means loosely, ” I had a rough night / day / week”

**“I’m gonna slap the shit outta you, then slap you for shittin”** (One of my mother’s favorites, usually said in a joking manner when one of us children were pestering her, but common in usage all around my hometown of Salem, MO. The broad meaning of this statement is that you are about to be chastised thoroughly by an elder.)

Rachel Gholson, who **is** folklore at Missouri State University, writes:

These were used in Gainesville MO (Still are) specifics are available from Tonja Cox ([phoenixfire870@centurytel.net](mailto:phoenixfire870@centurytel.net))

My dad was hungry all the time and he would say he was ready for a piece iof meat about as big as a mule’s lip from his eyes down.

And he was hungry enough to eat the north end out of a south bound skunk.

He always said it was colder than a well-digger’s butt in January.

–Couldn’t say shit if he had a mouthful

-lasted about as long as a fart in a whirlwind



–shaking like a dog shittin’ peach seeds and razor blades

–so ugly she had to sneak up on a glass of water to get a drink

–your kid’s so ugly you have to hang a pork chop around his neck to get the dogs to play with him.

–Your kid’s so ugly you can’t let him play in the sandbox because the cats keep trying to bury him.

–you look like your face caught on fire and someone put it out with: an ax / toothpick

–when it was supposed to rain, grandpa would say it was going to “come a toad strangler”

–Grandma always knew when it was going to rain because the frogs started hollering “knee deep, knee deep, better go round”

And from R. Anderson of Springfield MO: as useful as an ashtray on a motorcycle

Finally, I had a high school boy friend who would (in St. Louis MO 1980s) say variations of ...colder than a mole on a witch’s tit in a brass bra

At the 2008 annual meeting in Hannibal, John Fisher remembered that his mother had a name for these expressions, a word he’d never seen written, but pronounced as “eddered” sayings. And one of hers was “tall enough to hunt geese with a rake.”

At the same meeting, Dave Para remembered “snow ass-high on a tall Indian.” He later wrote:

“My friend, Judy Scrivner, from Boonville, originally from Hannibal, once said someone was dumber than a box of hair. I asked her where she learned it, and she couldn’t remember. I also heard “He is so tall he could fart in a martin house” from someone, it might have been Grandpa Jones in a conversation.

I can also tell you of a practical joke exchange. Grandpa Jones and George Lindsey (“Goober”) had a series of sending each other odd things in the mail. I don’t know how far it escalated, but I do know that Lindsey once sent Grandpa a prosthetic leg. However, one of the more devious ones I know came from some colleagues in community radio. My friend Frank had a friend from Columbia who had moved to Louisville who pledged some money to the Louisville NPR station in my friend Frank’s name, and Frank got the bill for the pledge. So in retaliation, Frank subscribed to a number of porno-type catalogs (believe me, I didn’t get any titles) for things like sexual paraphernalia and alternative sexual practices, and he subscribed to them in his friend’s name, but changed the last digit in his street address by a value or two so his friend’s neighbors would get them by mistake and also seeing his name on the label.

I also know another guy from Nyack, New York, who was quite the prankster. He had a lumber company, and during the energy crisis of the 1970s, one of the employees bought a high mileage Japanese car. So, his fellow employees conspired to add a gallon of gas to his tank secretly every day and then listen as he was amazed at the tremendous mileage he was getting for a couple of weeks. Then they started taking a gallon out each day and watching his response then.”

Claude Barton recalled his courting days, and hearing the girls he’d been sparking give what they thought was a private estimate: “Slow as a freight train” and “cold as a block of ice.”

Michelle Pierce writes: “I have a quote from my mother to which I cannot find reference anywhere. My mom was the youngest of 5 girls born to poor white folk that migrated from Paragould, Arkansas to Flint, Michigan in the 1920’s, her father seeking and finding work in the auto industry. My favorite of her’s that I have yet to find published was, “slow down honey, you’re poppin’ around like a poot in a skillet”. (She graduated from cast iron to copper bottom but only for show. haha)

My dad’s family was quite refined. My mom could be fancy when required but deep in her soul, she could be as “uncouth” as the best of them. Put her in a cocktail dress with a martini and a cigarette and she could charm the most ostentatious academic in the room. Put her at the kitchen table with her sisters and...well, she was the bright, funny, kind-hearted woman my father fell in love with.

Many thanks for your web site of colorful and familiar sayings!”

**Anonymous, 12-17-07:**

“Picking the flyshit out of the pepper” — that’s when someone’s arguing about unimportant details. Most people would call it “nitpicking” — but maybe they don’t know that “nits” are baby lice, and they’re really small, so that you have to go over your kid’s hair with a “fine toothed comb” to get them out.

**From a Maryville MO contributor, Bob Bohlken, at the 2007 meeting in Jefferson City:**

“Cold as a thundermug in January.”

“Looks like a sack of cats headed for the river”

**Andrew Weaver said “This page is funnier than a green turd in a pickle barrel.” He adds:**

I heard it from one of my relatives, but I can’t remember which or when. I am from rural Tennessee originally, and my family was fraught with colorful regional euphemisms, which is why I found your page so entertaining. For example, Uncle Pat was “mean as a sack full of wet cats” when he “had a snoot full” (inebriated). He had a dog named Buzzard who was “useless as tits on a boar hog” because he “couldn’t fight his way out of a wet paper sack”. His wife, Aunt Reegie, was “ugly as a bucket full of worms” and smelled “like a Turkish whore”. Their kids were also “uglier than a mud fence” and “lower than a snake’s belly in a wagon rut” and “would steal the pennies off a dead man’s eyes” (mean and prone to acts of larceny). We were “poor as a church mouse” most of the time and were all so skinny you “couldn’t hit us with a handful of corn”.

My brothers were so mean they “would wade through hell to fight a circle saw”. And on and on.....(11-3-07)

A few more.....

Mad enough to chew horse shoes and spit nails

Grinning like a mule eatin’ saw briar

Grinning like a possum eatin’ sour persimmons

Cussing like a San Diego sailor

So skinny she had to jump around in the rain to get wet

When she cooked, the house stunk like she was boilin’ cats

Got beat with a ugly stick when she was born

High as a cat’s back (drunk or expensive)

Horny as a Texas toad

Shaking like he was shittin’ a log chain (or peach pit, take your pick)

Some of these are as old as my grandma’s toes and twice as corny.....

-Andy

**recent arrivals:**

“God willin’” or “God willin’ and the creek don’t rise” — a pious acknowledgement that you expect a certain thing to happen, or to be done, but that “man proposes, God disposes,” and “there’s many a slip ‘twixt the cup and the lip.” A Middle Eastern version of the sentiment runs, “Put your faith in Allah, but tie your camel to a tree.”

“Hanging fire” — when a situation is unresolved, for example, if we don’t know how a court case is going to be decided, it’s hanging fire. Refers to firearms from before the era of self-contained cartridges; damp powder or poor maintenance could cause slow ignition of the

powder. Here's how Mark Twain used the phrase in *The Innocents Abroad*.

*And the great sash they wear in many a fold around their waists has two or three absurd old horse-pistols in it that are rusty from eternal disuse — weapons that would hang fire just about long enough for you to walk out of range, and then burst and blow the Arab's head off.*

**Irvin Rice ( [landCRice@webTV.net](mailto:landCRice@webTV.net) ) wrote on 8-17-07:**

During and ever after the depression of 1933 ff my Uncle would invite people over to his house to share what little they had to eat (as did many families) and his expression for making do with what they had was: "We'll knock an egg in the head and fry a dishrag."

Undecided: "Geeing and hawing"\*

Worthlessness accompanied by disappointment: "Shucks" (worthless as corn shucks)

In a hurry; "hightailing it." Like a horse or a dog excited and running with their tail up.

"He ate so much it made him poor to pack it."

"She is so bucktoothed she could eat a tomato through a picket fence."

"Even the gas he passes has muscles" Heard a version of this in Texas.

"Carry me over to the store" means give me a ride in your car to the store.

A pig in a poke (southern for "bag")\*\*

"That would make a rabbit smack a bear."

"He goes bear hunting with a switch."

"He could ruin an anvil with a rubber hammer."

"There are more ways to kill a bear than choking him with butter."

Ed notes:

\*"Gee" is the traditional command to a horse to pull to the right, and "haw," to the left. In a world that knows little about horses, rendering these nonsense syllables, sound-patterning asserts itself, and alliteration turns it into "hem and haw"

\*\*"Poke" is an ancient word; its diminutive form, however, is common — the "pocket" is a little sack.

received 8-16-07:

My favorite is "He was born in the middle of the week looking both ways for Sunday." I heard this from my college roommate in the 70s. I think he got it from his dad in Birch Tree, Mo.

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received 7-11-07:

Missouri outdoor columnist and conservationist Leonard Hall (b. Seneca, 1898) records his great aunt's expression "small potatoes and few to the hill" as referring to a person of little worth. It is not clear whether the phrase is ancestral to or derivative from the more familiar and widespread "small potatoes" to refer to insignificant matters more generally, but usually linked to money and financial dealings (*Poosum Trot Farm: An Ozark Journal*. Caledonia Press, 1949)

received 3-22-07:

Here in the Canadian Maritimes I hear these two quite often for a cold day:

"Colder than a whore's heart"

"So cold out I saw a lawyer with his hands in his own pockets!"

I saw "nervous as a whore in church" on your site but we use "sweating like a whore in church."

Also, for wasted time, I hear the old folks say "May as well stick my thumb up my arse and whistle" — for example, "No use trying to fix that old tractor, may as well stick my thumb up my arse and whistle"

For when something has been that way a long time I hear "...since Christ was a cowboy" — "Billy's been working there since Christ was a cowboy!"

My father-in-law says "Safe as a toad in god's pocket."

Then there's a couple more that I remembered, used to say you're thirsty: "dry as a burnt boot" or "dry as a popcorn fart."

Troy (tippytoes@gmail.com)

received 2-3-07:

this mostly would have been Leflore county in Oklahoma; dad was born in 1930; I was born in 72 so as far as I know [these expressions] are alive and well to this day

John Greenfelder writes:

"My dad used to often describe things (particularly unattractive women) as '40 miles of bad road,' and particularly rainy days or quick downpours as 'raining like a 2 cunted cow pissing on a flat rock'

or possibly describe a storm as 'a turd floater'. We often used the phrase 'can't dance, too wet to plow' as a 'why not' sort of answer.

e.g. "Wanna go to town and see the movie?"

"Sure. Can't dance, too wet to plow."

zgreenfelder(at)gmail(dot)com

received 8-3-05:

Dedra Mancilla ([dedram@hotmail.com](mailto:dedram@hotmail.com)) recognized some of the items here as overlapping with her mother's expressions, and contributed the following list.

"When I called Mama to ask her, said she grew up hearing them from her mother, Dona (she pronounced it Doe-nee...lol) Medlin, born in 1892 in Jasper, GA in Pickens County, which is in north GA.

But Mama grew up hearing them in the 30's in Sycamore, GA, which is in south GA.

To be accurate though, I'd have to say they originated in my grandmother's north GA roots, with Mama hearing them growing up in the 1930's in south GA. "

*High as a GA pine (drunk)*

*She smelled like a French whore (strong perfume)*

*Nervous as a whore in church*

*You don't know him him/her from Adam's house cat*

*He'll do it come hell or high water*

*He'd do it or die*

*Hell, I wouldn't walk out my back door to see them, if they were playing in my back yard (a band or singer she didn't care for)*

*Hell, I wouldn't walk to the corner to see them if you paid me (again, any entertainer she didn't like)*

*Might as well be pissing in the wind*

*If that don't beat a hen 'a rootin' with a rubber beak*

*She's built like a brick shithouse*

*She's so ugly she could haunt houses*

*He's barking up the wrong tree*

*Nervous as a longtailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs*

*If I had a dollar for every time he said that I'd be rich*

*Goes around with his nose stuck up her ass (she would use this to describe boyfriend/girlfriend who was crazy about the other or either a employee trying to stay on good terms with boss)*

*Don't know his ass from a hole in the ground\**

*So tired I don't know if I'm coming or going*

*Shut up 'fore I half kill ya!*

*This steak is as tough as whit leather*

*So drunk he couldn't pour piss out of a boot*

*That pitcher couldn't hit the damn broad side of a barn*

*His stomach is so big, I bet he hasn't seen his tallywhacker in years*

*She act's like an old dog in heat*

*Better to be pissed off than pissed on*

*I'll just take a whore's bath (to bathe standing at bath room sink)*

*I'll be damned if I do and damned if I don't*

*Find a rich old man with one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel (her dating advice to find a husband)*

*Hell, you can learn to love him! (after being told you didn't care for someone she thought was "well off")*

*Hell will freeze over before that will happen*

*Had her nose turned up like she smelled shit*

*Bet you a dollar to a doughnut*

*Does a cat have a ass? (her reply if she was asked what she thought was a obvious question)*

*I'm old, but I ain't dead*

*She/He thinks her shit don't stink ("uppity" people, she called them)*

*He's probably "hopped up on dope"*

*Hell, he don't care about you, you know he wouldn't piss on ya if you were on fire!*

*Might as well wish in one hand and shit in the other,& see which one gets filled up the fastest*

*He/She drives like a bat outta hell*

*My stomach was so tore up, I shit like Mooney's goose*

*So poor had to borrow from Peter to pay Paul*

*It's as cold as a witch's tit*

*So hard of hearing, he couldn't hear himself fart*

*So hungry, I'm just about to cave in*

*So hungry, my stomach is purely growlin'*

*So hungry and weak, I'm fixin' to pass out*

*He's so dumb he can't get out of a shower of shit*

*So damn slow, he'll meet himself coming back*

*I'm gonna beat ya ass till ya nose bleed's*

*Has a face only a mother could love*

*Haven't seen hide nor hair of him*

*Madder than 400 hells*

*Hotter than 400 hells*

*That kid is so pug nosed, he would drown if it came a good rain*

\*A surely apocryphal story about this expression. At the Naval Academy at Annapolis, an instructor in English composition received a midshipman's paper in which the words "burrow" and "burro" were confused. The instructor wrote in the margin: "A *burro* is an ass. A *burrow* is a hole in the ground. An officer of the United States Navy is expected to know the difference."

received 3-23-04

In the March, 2004 issue of Missouri Conservationist, Professor Michael B. Dougan of Arkansas State University wrote:

“...Mother, who would have been 103 if still alive, used as her favorite expression, “Well puke, buzzard, puke.” I have imparted this vulgarity and the reason for it to students for more than 30 years.

Buzzards will stuff themselves in the course of their cleanup operations. If threatened, they often need to lighten the load, so to speak, and can do so with the accuracy of an old-time tobacco spitter.

Their gastric juice is so strong that it can blind an animal and take paint off a car or truck. Those who would run afoul of a turkey buzzard in the middle of the road may well find themselves unleashing even more direful curses.”

In response to a query from the editor, Dr. Dougan added:

Mother (Helen Frances North, 1901-1991), was born at home just outside of Neosho, Mo (Newton Co). Her mother and grandmother were school teachers — this is the Northern side of the my family. She was the granddaughter of a Union army veteran from Wisconsin (a large number of them stayed in Mo after the war). Mother was not “country,” in the Ozark sense of that, but Ruth Tyler (now there’s a story — I did the bio of her in MO BIO) was a longtime dear and close friend. Mother married my father, W.L. Dougan, about 1922. He was a native of Salem (Dent Co); his mother, Ida Woodside Dougan, well, that’s a long story....

Curiously, the other things I have from mother on instant recall are “in a condition,” or “the family way,” for pregnancy. And in the 1930s she “gathered” ads for the Minor & Mechanic newspaper. No one I have talked to in MO or Ark has ever heard that one. I used it in my new book, Community Diaries; A History of Arkansas Newspapering, 1819-2002.

Oh Yes, when cursing: Hells Bells.

So why the puking buzzards, I know not except she spent time down at Rocky Comfort.

[mdougan@astate.edu](mailto:mdougan@astate.edu)

received 3-23-04

“My dog ain’t in that fight” I lived in Moberly MO for three years (I’m a Beverly Hills Girl) and it was the best time of my life. I loved the older people best and their version of “None of my business” is as above.

Melissa Penney [melissashears49@yahoo.com](mailto:melissashears49@yahoo.com)

received 12-10-03

I am from the south and guess i take for granted all of the funny sayings. when i am in the north, i will say something that i find normal, only to have people look at me as though the turnip truck just dropped me off around the corner. i didnt see a date on your site, but i have a few that i didnt see that i think are good.

have to go to the bathroom: “gotta piss like a stepped on bull-frog”

useless: “worthless as hen shit on a pump handle”

cold: “throw some glass in that pneumonia hole” (close the window)

received 9-24-03:

Jim White writes:

*Delivered-To: adavis@truman.edu*

*From: "White, James" <James.White3@AIG.com >*

*Your site made me laugh SO hard. Both my parents are from S.C. and I grew up hearing them talk like this & just took it for granted that everyone did, until I got out on my own. When I repeat things to friends from "up north" it invariably causes a lot of laughter.*

*Some that I didn't see in your site:*

Blew up like a jackas\_ on a 10-acre lot (lost his/her temper)

Has more \_\_\_\_\_ than Tom's got peanuts.

I'm not sure I understand all I know about it .(meaning we both know you're lying to me)

Sounds like somebody beating a baby with a cat (irritating noise/voice)

You can take that & put it back in the horse (bad food)

Sounds like a breedin' jackas\_ in a tin barn (irritating noise/voice)

Blew up like a jackas\_ in a tin barn (lost his/her temper)

Isn't that the cat's as\_?! (something amazing/unique)

Ask her what time it is & she'll tell you how to build a clock (someone who talks too much).

That would make a rabbit hug a hound. (good food)

Ain't you the one, Pearly Mae? (slight cut down to someone on their high horse)

NOW you're diggin' where there's taters. (someone who's getting the hang of something)

Sounds like pigs eating their young (irritating noise/voice)

Too lazy to hit a lick at a snake.

So cold I saw dogs stuck to the sidewalk (implies their pee froze in mid stream)

She's got 2 brains – one's missing and the other's out looking for it.

Like throwing a match in a gasoline tank (someone losing their temper or creating mass confusion)

She could fuc\_ up a one-car funeral.

Cue the dance girls. (someone getting ready to try to create a big impression)

That's when the lightening hit the merry-go-round (when things went off track)



*There are lots more. I just can't think of them all now. Hope you find these as amusing as I remember them being!*

### **Colorful (that is “off-color”) Language**

*ed. note: Maledicta is a journal for language scholars. It focuses on taboo and transgressive usage. If you're not a sociologist, anthropologist or linguist, it can be slow going. But there are gems for the nonspecialist. Here are some bits of colorful speech and inventive abuse culled from various issues. WARNING: virtually all the items below are offensive to some, many of them to just about everybody. We don't make the folklore, we just report it.*

“Hotter than two rats fucking in the sun”  
(Benjamin Z.)

“Happy as a baby in a barrel of tits.”

“Busy as a whore in the navy yard.”

“He had a smile that could sell used snuff.”

“I can't lose this election unless I get caught in bed with a dead girl or a live boy.” (LA Gov. Edwin Edwards).

“Ugly as a hatful of assholes.”

“The best part of you ran down your mama's leg.”

“Slick as deerguts on a doorknob.”

“If she was any dumber, we'd have to water her.”

“I wouldn't piss in his ass if his guts was on fire.”

“He's one of the vilest maggots ever to bore holes in carrion.” (anonymous, re: journalist Pete Hamill)

“She's got a face like a blind cobbler's thumb.”

“If I'd ordered a dozen sonzabitches and they sent me only him, I wouldn't feel shortchanged.” (auto industry executive)

“A buzzard shit on a log, and the sun hatched him.”

“I want it so quiet in here I can hear a rat pissing on cotton” (army officer to enlisted men).

The stuff on this page is comparatively tame. The same warnings apply as previously, but this time more emphatically. If you want the truly vile expressions, click [here](#).

### **More colorful phrases**

Ben Oesterreicher writes: ([oestreichb@hotmail.com](mailto:oestreichb@hotmail.com)) “I love language and its remarkable flexibility, diversity, and endless possibility.”

When asked how I liked something I did not like, I may respond “like a sunburn.”

How is the new boss? Was he nice? “yep, like a sunburn!”

On a scale of one to ten, you're ugly/dumb/etc. as shit.

Thanks for the help. You're handy like a tool-belt.

You're as awkward/graceful as a three legged duck.

You're as quick as grandma running backwards.

It's as hot as a whore house on dollar day.

It's as hot as your mom yesterday.

Ninjas always fight together. (I'm not sure what it means, but I've heard it five times and used it once.)

That'll make you sick as a pile of dead babies.

"Where's Chuck?" "Six inches into work by now." That's the answer if Chuck is with a girl.

Chuck must have had an oral enema this morning, he's been talking shit all day.

I promised my heart to one woman. Grandma's dead so you're outta luck.

That's UFB. Un Fucking Believeable.

You're as quick as yesterday.

Yesterday called, it wants its information back. (When someone delivers old news)

That's a young shirt/outfit/etc. (When someone's clothing is too small.)

That boy's quick enough to turn around and kick himself in the ass.

That girl's a six or seven. Six or seven kicks to the face wouldn't hurt. (when they aren't attractive)

You're as goofy as purple shit.

Eleven kittens couldn't lick that boy clean.

You're as weak as seven days.

Two of the editor's mother's frequently repeated and affectionate observations on her son:

If you had a brain you'd be dangerous.

Another wit and you'd be a halfwit.

And from the editor's father:

Go piss up a rope! (expresses impatience; personal experience suggests the person using this phrase is to be taken very seriously indeed).

Every little drop counts, said the old lady as she pissed in the ocean.

—Bonnie McNett ([bmcnett@adams.net](mailto:bmcnett@adams.net))

Heavy as a dead priest.

I look like Annie off the pickle boat. (i.e., a mess)

She looks like death eating a cracker.

You look like death-warmed-over.

You look like refried shit.

He's been rode hard and put away wet.

There is more way than one to choke a hound.

I feel like I was eaten by a wolf and shit out over a cliff.

I feel like I've been shot off my horse and dragged through the sagebrush.

It's like the woman with a nosebleed, if it ain't one damn thing it's another.

He could talk the dogs off of a meat truck/gut wagon.

It could knock a buzzard off a shitwagon. (i.e., revolting, foul)

It would gag a maggot. (ditto)

He would steal the shitball from a blind tumblebug, give him a marble and put him on the wrong road home.

He'd want a new rope to be hung. (i.e., picky)

So drunk he couldn't find his ass with both hands and a highway map.

Drunk as a boiled owl.

So fat he'd have to send out a search party to find his weewee (or insert your favorite euphemism here).

He's as useless as dried spit.

He's so horny, the crack of dawn isn't safe. (N.W. PA.)

It's like trying to push a wet rope up a hill.

She has round heels. (i.e., promiscuous)

Her driveway doesn't go all the way to the road. (i.e., crazy)

He's half a bubble off plumb. (ditto)

Crazy as a shithouse rat.

Queer as a three dollar bill.

Gay as old dad's hatband.

Doesn't know baby shit from butterscotch/ shit from Shinola/ shit from applebutter (i.e., dumb, naive)

Dumb as a box of rocks/bag of hammers.

Dead as a hammer.

Sharp as a bag of wet mice. (i.e., stupid)

I could chew nails, and fart tacks. (i.e., angry)

I'm as mad as spit on a griddle.

He ran quicker than Moody's goose!

That's the long way 'round Kelly's barn (i.e., the hard way to do a thing)

I'm as busy as a farmer with one hoe and two rattlesnakes.

I'm going to beat you like a rented mule!

It's as plain as a pig on a sofa.

Went to the outhouse to do his business and the hogs ate him. (i.e., I don't know where he is)

He wouldn't say "suiee" if the pigs were eating him. (i.e., uncomplaining [positive] or nonassertive [negative])

He wouldn't say "shit" if he had a mouthful. (mealymouthed, sanctimonious, self-righteous).

You're so sharp we can stick you in the ground and so green you'll grow. (i.e., you think you're a lot smarter than you are)

Tighter than Dick's hat band. (i.e., a miser)

Too much candy for the penny. (i.e., too good to be true).

Couldn't hit the side of the barn from the inside with all the doors shut.

So poor they'd skin a flea for its hide and tallow.

When you're up to your ass in alligators, it's hard to remember that you came to drain the swamp.

Shit fire and save your matches! (wow!)

Well, I'll be dipped in shit/ shitdipped. (I'm surprised/dismayed)

Don't let the (screen)door hit you in the ass on the way out (i.e., you can leave, you're not welcome — can be said jokingly to someone who's been finding fault)

I didn't let the (screen)door hit me in the ass on the way out (i.e., I left in a hurry).

I'm off like a prom dress. (I'm leaving)

Scattered from hell to breakfast.

Here he comes, hell(bent) for leather (i.e., fast)

Don't piss on my head/leg and tell me it's raining! (don't tell me nonsense). *This one has been popularized by Judge Judy.*

Hotter than a June bride in a featherbed.

Hotter than a two dollar pistol.

Wound up tighter'n a two-dollar watch (i.e., excited)

The Devil's getting married.(Cincinnati, Ohio) (i.e., the sun is shining and it's raining at the same time.)

Lazy man's load (i.e., tried to carry too much at once)

Slicker than snot on a glass eye.

Wish in one hand, shit in the other (see which gets filled up quicker). (i.e., wishing gets you nowhere; the second clause is frequently assumed to be understood and omitted.)

Quit milkin' it children, it's a steer. (equivalent to "beating a dead horse," with implication that the people involved don't understand the

situation)

**Colorful similes, metaphors and verbal illustrations collected by a Missouri veteran (USN 1950-54, Pensacola FL and Canal Zone):**

“Uppity as shit on a stick” (or “hot shit on a stick”)

“Too dumb to pour piss out of a boot with the instructions printed on the heel.”

“Slick as pig snot.”

“Quiet as a spider pissing on a blotter.”

“Lower than snail shit.”

“She thinks her shit don’t stink”

“Nervous as a whore in church.”

“Fast as a sailor on a 4-hour pass.”

“Uglier than three pounds of shit in a two-pound sack.”

“You’re gonna shove a bee up his ass” (a warning that you are about to irritate someone)

From: “epenhallegon” <epenhallegon@attbi.com>

Date: Mon, 1 Apr 2002 21:43:06 -0600

When Nature Calls it is sometimes described as: “Dropping the kids off at the pool.”

**Other euphemisms for bodily needs:**

Digging for gold (i.e., picking one’s nose)

“The man you’re rolling those pills for is dead.” (i.e., quit picking your nose.)

“I gotta go see a man about a dog.” (i.e., I have to urinate)

**Ending a Story:**

My great grandmother was given to telling long and complicated stories of exciting events from her childhood. She commonly ended these stories “and then we all laughed and went home.”

Jim Vandergriff

jhv7@home.com

**Useless as...**

“...tits on a bull”

“...a fart in a windstorm”

Mabel McCormick, b. Webster Co. KY 1913

## **Busy as...**

“...a cat covering shit”

“...a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest”

“...a one-armed paper hanger”

Mabel McCormick, b. Webster Co., KY 1913

## **Love**

“There’s no jar doesn’t have a lid somewhere” — that’s what grammaw would say when one of the girls was complaining about not having a boyfriend.

*CJ, Cape Girardeau*

## **Temptation**

When the subject of temptation came up, my grandmother would say “Get thee behind me, Satan — and push , *push!*”

## **Bad News on Top of Bad News**

*In my family, when we hit a patch of bad luck (you’re late for an appointment, so you get a speeding ticket, so you’re even later, so you doublepark and get a parking ticket, and getting back in the car you’re so mad you slam the gearshift too hard and it comes off in your hand...) — well, we say, “and ol’ Shep got holt a some dead horsemeat, and it kilt ‘im.”*

*Here’s the story we’re referring to:*

An old farmer hardly ever leaves home; he’s a bit of a worry wart, one of these people doesn’t trust the world to keep on turning if he doesn’t keep an eye on it. But this one time he just has to go to the city for a few days. His first evening in his hotel, he calls home, and his hired man answers. And our farmer says, “So, everything all right at home?”

“Jus’ fine, boss, ‘cept you know your dog? Ol’ Shep got holt a some dead horsemeat, and it kilt ‘im.”

The farmer’s rattled, of course; that dog was a good old friend. But then it occurs to him to wonder “Where did Shep get holt of dead horsemeat?”

“Well, boss, the horses died when the barn burned, and ol’ Shep got holt a some dead horsemeat, and it kilt ‘im.”

“The barn burned? How’d the barn burn?”

“Well the barn caught from the house, and when the barn burned, ol’ Shep got holt a some dead horsemeat, and it kilt ‘im.”

“Good Lord! You mean to tell me the house burned?”

“That’s right boss. The horses died when the barn burned, and ol’ Shep got holt a some dead horsemeat, and it kilt ‘im.”

“How in creation did the house burn?”

“We’re not altogether certain boss, but we’re guessin’ it was the candles on the coffin set the house on fire, and of course the barn caught off the house, the horses died when the barn burned, and ol’ Shep got holt a some dead horsemeat, and it kilt ‘im.”

“The coffin? What coffin?!!”

“Well, boss, about your wife...”

And how you develop it depends on your storytelling skills and the patience of your audience.

## **Breaking Bad News**

Two old bachelors live together, a quiet pair, with their elderly mother. The one is inordinately fond of his cat. One day while he’s away on business, he calls home and says to his brother, “So how’s Toodles?”

“Oh — Toodles died.”

Thunderstruck, the traveller absorbs the shock, and then splutters at his heartless brother: “What’s the matter with you? Don’t you know when you’ve got bad news like that, you have to break it gently?”

“Well how am I supposed to do that?”

“Well you know I’m going to be away for two weeks. You could tell me on the first day that Toodles is on the roof and you can’t get him down. And the day after that that you tried coaxing him with food, but he won’t come. And the day after that that he’s not looking well, and after that that he seems to be deteriorating, and then, then the day after that, then I’d be ready for it. Do you understand now?”

“Yes. I’m sorry.”

“Okay. Well, that’s over (*sniff*). How’s everything else?”

“Well, I guess I should tell you, um, Mom’s on the roof.”

So when there’s bad news to break, we broach the subject with “uh, Mom’s on the Roof.”

### **Making the Best of a Bad Situation**

There’s a golf-fanatic, just lives for the game. In fact, it’s ruining his marriage, the way he disappears all weekend, every weekend, never coming home till after dark. His longsuffering wife tries to be understanding, but he can never keep an agreement to limit himself. One beautiful Sunday, she has plans for an outing together, but he tells her he already made plans to go golfing with his buddy Charlie.

“That’s it,” she says, “I’m leaving you.”

“No, wait,” he answers. “Listen: Charlie and I have been playing together for fifteen years. After all those thousands of rounds, we are absolutely tied. We have to decide this thing. I’ll play this last game, and that’s the end of it — really: I’ll sell my clubs and be done with it forever. And when I come home, we’ll go to dinner at the best place in town. And dancing too. Please! I swear! Just this last game!”

She looks at him balefully. “You be home by six o’clock. If you’re one minute late, it’s over. I’m leaving you.”

Eagerly he promises, and off he goes. She puts on her finest dress and pearls, and waits. And waits. And waits. Six o’clock comes and goes. So does seven, eight. Finally, at ten-thirty-seven, he comes limping in, sweaty, exhausted, bedraggled. “That’s it,” she tells him. “It’s over.”

“Wait!” he pleads. “I can explain: you know my friend Charlie — the one I’ve played with every week for fifteen years? On the third hole, Charlie — are you listening? *Charlie had a heart attack, keeled over and died!*”

Shocked, she claps her hands to her cheeks. “Oh that’s horrible!”

“You’re telling me! You know how it was after that: hit the ball, drag Charlie; hit the ball, drag Charlie...”

### **Changing the Subject**

When I was a little girl, my mother would oftentimes say in a very serious tone, “All seriousness aside....” then she would say something very somber and I would catch the tone in her voice and become somber myself. My Mom was a real wit with a wonderful sense of humor. It took me quite awhile before I realized that she was joking around with me.

Francie Wolff, Interlibrary Loan

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### **When Nature Calls...**

When excusing himself to step around the corner to urinate, my granddad would say “I’m going to make a river.”

“Shaking hands with an old friend.”

“Shaking some dew off the lily.”

**From a Ballwin, MO Contributor:**

You’re pissing in the ocean  
(Not being effective)

He's as honest as he needs to be  
(Don't trust him)

Useless as tits on a bull/ a milk-bucket under a bull.  
(Worthless)

He ran through the ugly forest and hit all the trees.  
(Ugly)

Faster than a New York Minute  
(really fast)

Sliced so thin it has only one side  
(very thin)

That's a fart in a windstorm  
(too little/not effective)

Don't blow smoke up my ass  
(Don't lie – also don't try to flatter me; one theory suggests it's a reference to a tobacco-enema, used certainly by Native Americans for various human ills, and later by Euro-Americans for sundry disorders in cattle)

Quick as a cat on a hot tin roof  
(Fast – Tennessee Williams of course got his title from this one)

You're a day late and a dollar short  
(You missed your opportunity)

You can't get there from here  
(What you're talking about won't work; comes from a shaggy-dog story about a traveler asking directions out in the country)

He's got brass balls  
(he has courage/nerve; a bi-dialectal speaker used this phrase to define the Yiddish term *chutzpah*)

I don't know whether to shit or go blind  
(I'm confused, busy)

You better measure twice and cut once  
(originally a carpenters' proverb; be very careful before doing or saying something you can't undo)

Couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a bass fiddle  
(Clumsy/dumb)

Let's send it up the flagpole and see who salutes  
(a proverb heavily used in business circles in the 50's; "let's give it a try and see if we get any results." The metaphor is similar to that in the phrase "trial balloon")

Let's get down to where the rubber meets the road  
(Let's get down to real issues)

Your ass sucks wind  
(You're useless)

Poor as Job's turkey  
(penniless)

Money burns a hole in his pocket  
(Spendthrift)

The devil to pay and no pitch hot



(Sailors' lore: the "devil" was the keel; "pay" meant to caulk or waterproof. The same usage appears in "between the devil and the deep blue sea" – used to refer to a dilemma offering no "wiggle-room"). We've got a serious problem)

If he fell into an outhouse he'd come up smelling like a rose.

(Very lucky, charming or charismatic; sometimes clipped to inoffensive form "he'll come out smelling like a rose")

He got to:

First base = Kiss

Second base = touching, fondling above the waist

Third base = touching, fondling all over.

Home run = the obvious

About as lucky as a rabbit in a kennel full of hound dogs

(Unlucky)

It's come-to-Jesus time

(reference to the sometimes emotional "invitation" or "altar call" portion of Baptist church services; "It's now or never")

Quiet as a one-handed clap

(Very quiet)

He's running seven ways from Sunday

(Out of control)

I'm going to kick you six ways from Sunday (and into the middle of next year).

(a thorough beating)

Not worth a tinker's dam

(useless; two theories on the phrase: 1) tinkers were proverbially foul-mouthed, so their swearing didn't count for much; 2) a tinker mending a pot would form a small clay dam to hold the liquid solder in place, which would be discarded after the repair).

He died once but Hell wouldn't have him

(really mean)

'Till Hell won't have it"

(emphasis on the fourth word – used for some situation that goes beyond the endurable, or people who just don't know when to quit:

"They're going to keep talking about this till Hell won't have it.")

### **Similes (colorful comparisons from various folk-sources):**

Shit-eatin' grin (in an aside in *Rationale of the Dirty Joke*, (p. 730) **Gershon Legman** states that the full original phrase was the much more vivid and intelligible "grinning like a fox eating shit out of a wire brush.")

Cool as the other side of the pillow.

Cool as a blue moose (collected in Joplin, although of course the moose is not Native to the state)

As long as Pat stayed in the army.

As crooked as a barrel of fish hooks.

As restless as a worm in hot ashes.

As quick as a duck on a June bug.

As rough as a cob (*i.e., uncultivated, gauche*).

As noisy as a cow in a rail pile.

As dumb as a coal bucket.

As happy as a 'coon in a cornfield with the dogs all tied

Built like a depot stove *(of a woman — attractive, I think).*

Her face would stop an eight-day clock

Go on about your rat-killin' *(leave me alone, quit wasting my time).*

Not much hand for work like killing rattlesnakes (lazy; this was said, surprisingly, of Abraham Lincoln in his youth)

A groundhog case *(something one must do).*

Weasel words

*(according to animal lore, weasels suck the insides out of eggs, leaving an empty shell. Weasel words are not merely cowardly, but words that withdraw the intent and forcefulness of what's just been said: "I'll kick their butts — that is, if there aren't too many.")*

Tight as a tick. *(full or drunk)*

Hair like a last year's bird nest.

He's just as happy as if he had good sense.

She's limber as a dishrag.

On him/her like white on rice/like stink on shit/like flies on shit

He's so poor he'd have to borrow money to buy water to cry with.

He's wild as a peach orchard hog.

Ugly as homemade sin.

*A dead ringer (many apochryphal stories — a "ringer" is a racing term for a dishonest substitute; for example, you enter a slow horse in a number of races, and let people decide it's a loser. Then you enter a much faster, identical animal in another race, and bet heavily on the ringer. A hanging offense on the frontier.)*

A good run is better than a bad stand.

Apples don't fall far from the tree *(that is, the offspring are like the parents).*

As many as Carter had little liver pills.

You haven't got the ambition God gave an earthworm.

They haven't got a pot (to piss in)(or a window to throw it out of).

They're no better than they should be. *(their behavior is typical for their class — not a compliment)*

Better than a black land farm.

Blind in one eye and can't see out of the other.

Not the sharpest tool in the shed/the brightest crayon in the box. (the rock group "Smashmouth" used both traditional expressions in their hit, "All Star")

(Caught) between a rock and a hard place. (*same sense as “between the devil and the deep blue sea;” no wiggle room or alternatives*)

Cock of the walk. (*pretty much the same meaning as “King Shit of Turtle Island” — a vain male, or a provincial celebrity*)

Dance with the one that brought you. (*used by Molly Ivins re: Texas politics — an honest corrupt politician can be bought only once, and stays bought. More generally, expresses the sense that one should stick to one’s agreements and alliances*)

Don’t shit in your own nest.

I’ll be all over you like a cheap suit.

I’m gonna open up a can of whoop-ass/ you just bought/won yourself a five-gallon pail of whoop-ass.

Get your ears lowered (*haircut*)

Got enough money to burn a wet mule.

Happy as a dead pig in the sunshine.

Hard fight with a short stick.

He got his neck rung twice and he’s still a-floppin.

He got pulled before he was ripe.

He has a hollow leg (*big appetite*).

He has a deep well.

*(a very sinister threat — heard in a context where it was not clear whether it was meant literally or proverbially. The sense is, “Do not come into conflict with this person. He will kill you and your body will not be found.”)*

He is Hell on wheels.

*(a preacher’s reference to the rolling brothel/casino cars which toured on the western rails).*

He kicked the bucket.

*(according to multiple sources — though possibly apocryphal nonetheless — a hog was leg-strung from the smokehouse beam prior to having his throat cut. The beam was called a bucket, and in its death throes, the hog would kick at it. Unpleasantly vivid if true. ).*

He/she would take the quarters off a corpse’s eyes. (*is this custom still practiced?*)

I am going to slap you to the back side of nowhere.

It’s back of beyond.

If brains were lard, he couldn’t grease up a good size skillet.

If that kid don’t leave home I’m going to break his plate (*apparently refers to a leaving-home ceremony*).

Two-dog night.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Wake up and smell the coffee.

Wipe your nose and pull up your socks. (*quit complaining*)

Like a duck on a June bug.

Look what the dogs have dragged in and cats won’t eat/ What the cat dragged in and the kittens wouldn’t have.

Close the barn door (*zip your fly*).

Slap'n'tickle (*euphemism for copulation*)

Rock'n'roll (*ditto, originally. Same for "jazz"*)

Serious as a heart attack/cancer.

She can't help being ugly but she could have stayed home.

Her face looks like an unmade bed/like thirty miles of bad road.

Raining like a cow pissing on a flat rock.

I gotta whiz like a racehorse.

Sour as a lemon gargle.

That's a new wrinkle (on my old horn).

The kid can tear up an anvil with a rubber hammer.

Slick as a jar full of eels.

There may be snow on the roof, but there is still fire in the furnace (*older folks are capable of passion*)

Wait broke the bridge (*he who hesitates is lost*).

Well-heeled (*prosperous — lit., he can afford to have his shoes repaired. Contrastively, someone whose luck has run out is said to be "down-at-heel"*)

When you lie down with dogs, you are going to get fleas,

You can't touch pitch and figure not to get dirty

**More colorful expressions:**

Slick as grass through a goose

useful (useless) as breasts on a boar hawg

scarce as hen's teeth

..just like tryin' to push a rope...

There's more hams on a hog than you think there are.

That dog won't hunt

Finer than a frog's hair split three ways.

He's crookeder than a dog's back leg.

It's so good it'll make you slap your granny

She's meaner than Moody's goose.

He's dumb as a stump (or dumb as a fence post).

It's hotter than 400 hells.

Close the door! Was you raised in a barn?

Who died?! (bad smell)

So nervous he couldn't find his ass with both hands and a road map.

Empty wagons rattle (somebody who talks a lot without saying anything)

about as much as a tomcat needs a marriage license

“The rooster crows, but the hen lays the egg.”

a room so small “you couldn't yell at a cat without getting a mouthful of fur.”

Something totally out of place is sometimes described as “like socks on a rooster.”

On a female who has made a bad marriage: She sure drove her ducks to a bad market.

“hotter than hell stewed down to a half-pint

it'll “last about as long as Pat was in the Army

(lazy person's name) wouldn't work in a pie factory. ”

Hotter than two-forty Hell / six shades of Hell. ”

Shit fire, and call the Captain!

“Getting money out of me right now would be like trying to shove butter up a wildcat's ass with a hot poker.

How about “Is a frog's ass watertight?

“Jest like squirrels, the woods is full of them”...

Better than snuff and not near as dusty ”

On being drunk, he was plumb knee walking! ”

she's tougher than woodpecker lips?

Does a fat baby fart! .....as in “of course”

Slicker then Owl shit

hot as a witch's tit in a brass bra

make like horse shit and hit the trail

more useless then a one legged man in an ass kicking contest

faster then a deacon in a whorehouse

sharper then an old maid's tongue

he's so tight he squeaks when he walks.

“So good it would make a rabbit spit in a bulldog's eye.”

“You sound like a hog in a coal pile.”

“You’ve rode that wagon till the wheels have fallen off!”

“Won’t pull a greasy string out of a cat’s ass”

“Your gravy is so bad that the dog licked its butt to get the taste out of it’s mouth!” (Bad cooking)

“He’s tougher than a pine knot.”

“so skinny they had to turn around twice to throw a shadow”

“squeeze a nickel ’til the buffalo shit”

so far up the holler, they have to pipe the sunlight in.

she’s so ugly she’d make a freight train take a dirt road.”

“yeah, and if a frog had wings it wouldn’t bump it’s ass on the ground” ”

“hasn’t got the sense to bell a buzzard”

” so good it’ll make your tongue slap your brains out”

“Feelin’ finer than a frog hair split four ways.”

“That’s your ass talking ’cause your mouth knows better.”

Shiverin’ like a dog shittin peach pits.....

happy as a new born tick on a fat hound”

big enough to fight bear with a switch

woods-colt: a baby born to an unmarried woman

woods-kitty: skunk

come-along boy/girl = a baby born to an unmarried woman

And she didn’t have enough clothes on to wad a shotgun ..

“Couldn’t make a plug for a dog’s ass#%&\* with a shit for a pattern”.

“sucking on hind tit.”

Lyndon Johnson was reputed to have said that he had “generals that were so dumb that they couldn’t pour piss out of a boot if they had the instructions printed on the heel”!! Current in KY c. 1920.

That house is so small you couldn’t change your mind in it.

Who peed in your Cheerios? (why are you in such a foul mood?)

F\$#&ed up as Hogan’s goat (In a very bad way)

I will if it harelips hell! (I most certainly will)

If’n it had been a snake, it would have bit ya (why is this a favorite of senior waitresses?)

“That’s enough to make a jack-rabbit jump up and spit in a bull dog’s face.” when talking about hard liquor, or a frustrating situation.

“That looks like rat-shit rollin’ off a rocky mountain.” when talking about the job I did cutting his lawn, or bad carpentry.

“If I had a dog that looked like you, I’d shave his ass and make him walk backward” an ugly kid comment.

He and God went to school together. (he’s ooold)

“It’s snowin’ down south (to a girl: your slip is showing)

“Steel’s down” was when your zipper wasn’t up.

“Falling off the roof” referred to a ladies time of the month.

So buck toothed he could eat corn-on-the-cob through a key hole.

Crazier than a run over dog.

Tougher than a one eared alley cat

So ugly she’d run a dog off a meat wagon.

Sorry as a two dollar watch.

(a bout of diarrhea) Doin’ the green apple two-step

You need to count your fingers after shaking hands with him

I didn’t know whether to shit or go blind so I closed one eye and farted

He could cut himself with a picture of a razor

He carries a flat rock in his pocket to fart on and save the grease.

Didn’t know if he should scratch his watch or wind his ass

Drunkern’ seven dollars

Drunker than Cooter Brown’s goat

So hungry I could eat a horse and chase the rider

So hungry that I could eat the south end of a north bound skunk.

like trying to poke a cat out from under the porch with a rope”

So hungry I could eat a cat turd fried in snot

That’s so good it would make a puppy pull a freight train

Tastes so good it’ll make you fight your grandma

Hungry ’nuff to eat a bowl of lard with a hair in it

Tastes so good it’ll make your tapeworm stand up and bark

Big eater: he’s got both feet in the trough

You look like you been drawn through a knot-hole backward

I cain’t sing and its too wet to plow.

He wuz a shakin like a dog passin razorblades

And you can bury that advice in a Mason jar.

Shakin' like a hound dog shitting peach seeds

If you can't hunt with the big dogs stay on the porch

If you ain't the lead dog the scenery never changes

I ain't had this much fun since the hogs ate junior...

Mosquitoes big enough to stand flat footed and screw a turkey.

As anxious as a o e-eyed cat watch'n two rat holes.

Dead as 4 o'clock

If my aunt had balls she'd be my uncle.

She's so fat it takes two dogs to bark at her

(raining on a sunny day) Devil's beating his wife behind the door

It's so dry, the trees are bribing the dogs."

Rrunnin' like their feet was on fire and their asses was catchin'.

Only difference between a woman and a vulture is that a vulture circles at least once before it chews your ass out!

Couldn't fall out of a boat and hit water.

Fits like a saddle on a sow

Uglier than a lard bucket full of armpits

Ugly as a mud covered fence with a crow on each end

Uglier than a mud fence/uglier than 1000 toads on a mud fence

A face like a bulldog chewing a wasp

I'll hit you so hard your children will be born dizzy....

"I'll be on you like a hobo on a ham sandwich"

Well, butter my butt and call me a biscuit!"

### **Idioms and lore from *The Woods Colt: A Novel of the Ozark Hills*.**

#### **Thames Williamson. NY: 1933 (paperback, 1954)**

On its appearance, the novel was extravagantly praised in *Time* (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,882539,00.html>), though in this literary historian's opinion, it has not stood the test of time. The dialect, while linguistically authentic, is intrusive, and while the author is at pains to avoid romantic and sentimental views of the backwoodsfolk, he sometimes errs in the opposite direction,



depicting them as more uniformly degenerate and vicious than would be sustainable in any close-knit society. Flannery O'Connor said: "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic."

Part of the contemporary – and enduring – appeal of the novel is ethnographic. It makes sometimes heavy-handed efforts to incorporate verbal and other lore from the Ozarks plateau. Much of what the reader finds is easily confirmed by other sources; these may stand as witnesses in favor of the authenticity of items not (yet) recorded independently. What follows may well include inventions of the author; however, as the novel is dedicated to Vance Randolph, one might assume that Williamson would at least have proceeded with caution. *Si non e vero, e ben trovata*

The title-idiom is explained on the flyleaf; a "woods-colt" is "what you-uns call a bastard, only our way of sayin' it is more decent."

### **Idioms:**

"She's between hay and grass" said of a girl whom the main character regards with sexual ambivalence – unsure if she's yet old enough to be regarded as a legitimate object of desire.

"Dry as Kansas" (no rain; probably refers to prohibition, rather than to the physical aridity of the plains)

"The melon's busted" – the situation cannot be reversed.

"Dogs in the smokehouse" a situation that is turning bad, getting out of hand. Similarly, "The hounds'll be in the skillet." I once saw my father's German Shorthair wolf seven steaks like that.

"the whole kit and b'ilin' of 'em." "Kit and boiling" is an obscure phrase, though the very similar and more familiar "kit and caboodle" is used the same way.

"You'll raise Hell and put a chunk under it." The second, less familiar phrase may indicate the original intention of "raise Hell" – to do something difficult and which would be objectionable to many people, by means of strength rather than wildness.

"Here's luck to the duck that flew over grandpappy's barn" (a toast)

"Scarce as wild hogs" possibly an ironic reference to the danger of assuming a free-ranging hog is fair game, but just as possibly indicating that feral hogs had become scarce.

"Doesn't know any more about it than a dead horse knows about Sunday."

"Since Heck was a pup" a long time

“pore-hawgin’ along” an indifferent response to “how are you?”

“Now I’m beginnin’ to see, as the blind man said when he fell in the kettle of soap”

“catfish is his main holt” i.e., favorite; Mark Twain uses the phrase “main holt” to refer to a dog’s preferred strategy in a fight

“nothin’ but a hollow log with nary a rabbit in it” i.e., a disappointment

“safe as eggs in a basket and no weasel round.”

### **Signs and other nonverbal lore:**

If you see a spider in the middle of the path, there is a letter waiting for you.

Find iron where lightning has struck, and form it into a ring, which guards against arthritis. The speaker recommends wearing a buzzard’s feather in one’s hat as much easier and just as effective.

Bend over a mullein stalk. If your love is true, it will grow upright again. Or build a fire of hickory sticks. If your live is true, it will burn clear and steady.

When you hear the first dove of the season, you will soon take a journey in the direction from which you heard the call.

When you hear an owl hoot in the afternoon, rain will follow within forty-eight hours.

The call of a whippoorwill or the bellowing of cattle presages a death (though the speaker acknowledges that these things happen all the time without any notable mortality).

When lightning bugs fly high, expect fair weather.

Squirrels should be skinned while still warm.

A woman who makes a fist with the thumb outside dominates her husband, and one who places the thumb inside obeys him.

### **Root hog or die.**

*We get a lot of questions about this one. It's used in a variety of circumstances, either excusing unpleasantness or counseling stoicism and courage — the general sense is, "you've got to do what you've got to do." The earliest print citation is from a minstrel tune of 1856, though the usage suggests it was already proverbial:*

*Root, Hog, or Die (1856)*

*Words and Music: Anonymous*

*As sung by Ordway's Aeolians*

*I'm right from old Virginny wid my pocket full ob news*

*I'm worth twenty shillings right square in my shoes*

*It doesnt make a dif of bitterness to neider you nor I*

*Big pig or little pig, Root, hog, or die.*

*CHORUS: I'm chief cook and bottlewasher, cap'n ob de waiters;*

*I stand upon my head,*

*When I peel de Apple dumplins.*

*I'se happiest darkee on de top ob de earth*

*I get fat as possom in de time ob de dearth*

*Like a pig in a tate patch dar let me be*

*Way down in old Virginny whar its Root, hog, or die.*

*CHORUS*

*De Boston dandies dey look so very grand*

*Old clothes hand me down gloves upon de hand*

*High heel boots boots moustaches round de eye —*

*A perfect sick family ob Root, hog, or die.*

*CHORUS*

*De Boston gals dey de beat dem all*

*Dey wear high heel shoes for to make demself's tall*

*If dey dont hab dem de Lor how dey'l cry*

*De boys hab got to get dem or else Root, hog, or die.*

*CHORUS*

*De Shanghie coats dey're getting all de go*

*Whar de boys get dem I realy dont know*

*But dey're bound to get dem if dey dont hang too high*

*Or else dey make de Taiors run Root, hog or die.*

*CHORUS*

**SHARE YOURS: give us the expression, the situation, and the story**

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The South, which runs from Virginia south to Florida and west as far as central Texas. This region also includes West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and parts of Missouri and Oklahoma. The Midwest, a broad collection of states sweeping westward from Ohio to Nebraska and including Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, parts of Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, and eastern Colorado. The Southwest, made up of western Texas, portions of Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and the so Missouri's culture blends elements from the Midwestern and Southern United States. The musical styles of ragtime, Kansas City jazz, and St. Louis Blues, developed in Missouri. St. Louis is also a major center of beer brewing; Anheuser-Busch is the largest producer in the world. Missouri wine is produced in the nearby Missouri Rhineland and Ozarks. Missouri has been called the "Mother of the West" and the "Cave State"; however, Missouri's most famous nickname is the "Show Me State," as Missourians are known for being skeptical. Contents. Etymology and pro Early Missouri historian Louis Houck writes: "The territory from the Great Bend of the Missouri south to the waters of the Arkansas and east toward the Mississippi was the country of the Osages for several centuries before the advent of the Europeans. Here was their hunting ground. Over the high plateaux of the Ozarks and in the deep valleys cut through the plateaux by water they reigned as masters." Houck waxed poetic in describing the beauty of the tribe's surroundings, many of which are reflected in the paintings of the first white artists to visit the West. A wide street separated the various clan groups; the chief's lodge sat in the middle. The street ran east to west through the center of the village, laid out to follow the path of the sun, the giver of life.