Our Father's Way With Words

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Preface

Every parent shapes the way the child views his world, and learns to express himself within it. For some, the view is of a malevolent world filled with forces which threaten him, and the expression becomes one of fear and distrust. For others, the view is of a benevolent world within which life is to be celebrated. And here, the expression is one of joy and gratitude. By sheer accident of our births, we have been fortunate enough to have parents who shaped the latter view.

Most of these parental influences remain tacit, never to be identified and talked about "in so many words." In this work, however, we have tried to bring these implicit parental influences into explicit relief. The volume is a statement of the love and appreciation we share for our parents.

The vehicle we have selected for this statement is a lexicon of our Father's slang, colloquial, and idiomatic use of the English language. While this work in one sense has been in preparation over the course of our lives, we didn't begin the "Master List" of over 300 terms until January of 1984.

A verbal dialogue leading to the decision to write has been ongoing in recent years, particularly during those times we have shared as brothers apart from our parents. We have been to the summit of Mt. Mitchell, N.C., on an 11-mile day hike, snorkeled off the coast of Panama City, camped in the mountains of North Georgia, and canoed down a river near the Alabama-Mississippi border. We have spent less adventurous but equally entertaining social hours in either of our homes. Inevitably and often, the conversation has turned toward Dad's influence on our thinking and speaking, and to his vivid deployment of the English language in its vintage Southern American version, tempered by a flair that is only his.

Then a moment occurred in late January, 1984, that served as the actual point of departure for *Our Father's Way With Words*. Richard sent Joel a

birthday card. The card assured the Atlanta brother that a mail-ordered gift was forthcoming, on the condition that "some pipsqueak at this outfit doesn't screw up the order." Almost as he read this tongue-in-cheek rendition of Dad's slang terms, Joel was on the telephone to Dick with the idea for this book, and the project was underway.

Over the first three quarters, the research took the form of compiling the Master List. We each kept our own compilation of terms, comparing them as we got together, and spending several hours in long distance consultation. Joel purchased some dictionaries in February. He shared the then 150-word list with Mother in March to receive her input. He saved all the correspondence from Mobile, and noted new terms occurring in phone conversations with Mom and Dad. Meanwhile, Richard paid careful attention to his interactions with Dad in Mobile, and augmented his list regularly.

Most of all, however, the last year has been a process of learning to listen to ourselves as we interact with others on a daily basis. For our informal conversation is replete with many of the phrases that appear in this volume. We learned, too, to fantasize how Dad might react in situations as they occurred to us, and found that we could recall many phrases in that manner.

The Master List was transported to 4×6 cards in the early Fall, and the actual writing began, in Mobile and Atlanta, after Thanksgiving. The project was completed on the morning of December 20.

Our Fathers Way With Words is presented as a Christmas gift, at the completion of a year's labor of love, just after our parents' 48th wedding anniversary, and just prior to our Father's 68th birthday. With this volume we honor him, and thank him for shaping our view of the world in the manifold positive ways he has.

Decatur, Georgia
December 20, 1984

Introduction

If the external goal of this lexicon has been to honor our Father, the internal goal certainly has been to conduct a serious inquiry, with an eye to the humorous, into Dad's use of the language. But even beyond that, we bring together in these pages the collective images that serve as an apperceptive mass out of which we have drawn for understanding and meaning in our adult lives.

We also have attempted to make *Our Father's Way With Words* informative in the lexicographical sense. This is not true scholarship, however. Most of the etymological studies are lifted verbatim from one or more of our limited sources. But reading this volume *will* make one more informed about the origins of some everyday words and phrases, often with some rather surprising discoveries, if not edifying.

Usage and Linguistic Levels

There was a time when words were thought to be hard, fixed entities for which there were right and wrong uses. Ancient linguistic philosophers felt there was an intrinsic connection between a word and that for which it stands. Modern studies more aptly reflect the truth, however, that language rests upon use; any word or phrase is a symbol, and if used long enough by enough people will become standard. Further, what is standard for one person may be slang or colloquial for the next, much more so from generation to generation.

Identifying levels of usage, then, is closer to the truth about language, but has still at best a transient component that requires periodic reworking. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, designed by a century's worth of scholarship to be *the* English dictionary of all time, is obsolete in many areas today.

Thus it needs to be clear that the words and phrases we investigate here are not being labeled sub-standard or inferior, and that many of the terms we call "slang" or "colloquial" have the force of standard usage in the sub-culture that provided them to us.

For the purposes of *Our Father's Way With Words*, we define *standard* usage as the oral or written use typified by educated persons when they are using the language cautiously. *Colloquial* here means the use of language in more informal contexts such as conversation. *Slang* refers to newly coined terms or newly arrived at meanings for old terms, that are shared within a particular sub-culture. This latter type of language, over time, either passes into disuse or comes to have a more formal status.

Further, the reader will note that many terms are treated here that are standard English, without any apparent colloquial significance. And that is because they mean something of special significance to each of us, and typify some locution of Dad's which we then attempt to elaborate.

Formative Factors of Father's Use of English

We have concluded from our year-long immersion in this project that there are at least four primary influences on Dad's use of English.

1. What is most clear is that he is a product of the American South and its rural, agrarian roots. Though he never lived on a farm, phrases like "Up Mule!" and "clean his plow" reflect this heritage.

2. Father's active pursuit of athletic excellence in college and beyond helped shape his speech. Some of the phrases in Chapters 4 and 5 probably came straight out of the Mississippi College Choctaws' locker room of the late 1930's.

3. The War Years. Feedback from one of Joel's colleagues noted the strong military influence evident in the volume. But Dad never served in the military, excepting a stint with the Mississippi National Guard. What that says profoundly is how much more nationalized was this century's awareness and support of the military during and before the Second World War. And this, while our parents were in their early to mid-twenties in age. Thus terms like "operation," "in commission,"

and "conk out" reflect the fact that when the world was at war, everyone's speech was affected by it.

4. Love of family. Many of the terms here have meaning only for the Hitt family, and reflect Dad's love for us and the various endearment-phrases that evolved from that. No one outside of four persons can fully appreciate Chapter 1!

Other Works Consulted

We have been dependent on five other lexicographical efforts to furnish much of the information on the following pages. They are:

- *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1979) – textual notation [NWD].
- Boatner and Gates, *A Dictionary of American Idioms* (1975) – textual notation [DAI]
- Chapman, *Roget's International Thesaurus* (Fourth Edition) (1977) – textual notation [RIT].
- Holt, *Phrase and Word Origins* (1961) – textual notation [PWO].
- Wentworth and Flexner, *Dictionary of American Slang* (1960) – textual notation [DAS].

Where we do not indicate the source, the reader may assume [NWD], unless the statement is clearly our own ("we believe the phrase to mean ...").

Finally, we hope that our parents and others who may see these pages gain a fraction of the enjoyment that has been ours in composing them.

Abbreviations

ant.	antonym
c.	*circa*; about, approximately
cf.	compare

e.g.	for example
esp.	especially, that I
ML	Master List (of all the terms)
q.v.	which see (the term has a separate entry)
syn.	synonym
var.	various

Chapter 1

The Family Portrait: Terms of Endearment, Affection, and Warmth

Some of our fondest memories consist of the words and phrases by which Father expressed his affection toward Mother, ourselves, and toward others in general. We open our volume with a look at some of his favorite terms of endearment for the immediate family.

Attaboy!

This is one of Dad's favorite terms of encouragement and support. While we are uncertain as to whether Mom has ever been the recipient of "attagirl's," both of use are familiar with this admonition from the day we first connected solidly with a whiffle ball in the back yard. The occasion for adding the term to our list was during a 5/2/84 phone conversation between Atlanta and Mobile, wherein Joe was informing Mom and Dad he had in fact been able to arrange his schedule to meet them at the Atlanta airport for a layover the following morning. The reply from Mobile was swift and energetic: "Attaboy!".

Bunny

The most commonly used term of endearment of our Father for our Mother, and one we've heard almost no other couples use anywhere.

Daddyo

"An affectionate term of direct address for any male who is hip, understanding, or sympathetic, whether a father or not" [DAS]. Originally from bop use around 1946, the term entered our Father's vocabulary at some unknown time as a self-reference. Understanding and sympathetic, for certain: whether this man can be called "hip" is open to question! However, Joe recalls Dad's imitation of hipness quite well.

There was a time when Joe beat on bongo drums as an accompaniment to the top-40 tunes played on his 45 RPM record player. This behavior generalized soon to other objects: his thighs, a chair, his brother, the kitchen refrigerator. Joe recalls Dad imitating playing a manual drum roll to the refrigerator door, and crying, "Hear that jive, Mama?!" Hip indeed, Daddyo!!

Dick and Joe

These are the nicknames by which we were known as we were growing up. Around extended family circles we became known as "Little Dick" and "Little Joe," to distinguish us from Uncle Dick, Dad's oldest brother, and from the three other Joel's in the family, respectively. Sometime later we adopted the more mature "Richard" and "Joel" and the rest of the family has flip-flopped between the terms ever since.

Heifer

A heifer is a young cow that has not yet borne a calf. We think Dad uses this phrase to address someone affectionately (not just limited to a female) whom he wishes to admonish in jest. Certainly each of us was called a "heifer" countless times: "You haven't finished that thing yet? Why, you heifer, you!" Similar use to "rascal" (q.v.).

José

This is the most common nickname for Dad to use of Joe, at least in the old days. Maybe the "Latinizing" influence at work here is the San Antonio-Houston days, and the proximity to Mexico the family had there. It would be interesting to know how early Dad began using José. Joe was there, mind you, but the exact occasion eludes his recall.

Knothead

We think this term was applied equally to us, but that's conjecture. Dad might well have thought that one of us was more knotty in the head than the other. As a term of endearment, this term was used differently by Dad than [DAS] lists it: "An incompetent or stupid person." The term has been used at least since 1950 in this country.

Did I Show You Where I Skinned My Knuckles?

This interrogative sentence has been used countless times by our Father to sucker his still naïve offspring into getting hit in the face with a wadded up napkin. The scenario usually went something like this.

During some lull at the dinner table (perhaps after dinner), the question would be posed to one of us. The curious target would lean over to get a closer look at the alleged injury. But just then the hand with the imaginary injury moved away, exposing our Father's hand which held a napkin wad, behind which was a thumb – cocked and ready to fire. But by the time all this was realized, it was too late. One of us had just caught it between the eyes.

Mother Dear

Dad's "Little Helper" (cf. letter to Joe, 11/23/84). While he is most likely to say "Evelyn" or "Bunny" in direct address, if he turns to one of us he often switches to this endearment in the third person. For example, he might holler to us in the back yard, "Mother Dear said to tell you to wind it up and get ready for dinner." (This often was said in a falsetto, mock-feminine voice.) But that was just the first call. The second call was slightly more pointed. The final call was a gruff, "Knock it off and get in here!"

Nighty-Night
Nighty-Poo
Nighty-Night Poop-Poop

Good night! An interjection, each of these phrases is well known around the Hitt's at bedtime.

Peckerwood

Just as surely as the letter "q" is followed by the letter "u", the word "peckerwood" is preceded by the word "you." So the phrase is "You Peckerwood,"

which is an exclamation roughly equivalent to "You son of a gun." For added emphasis, "You Peckerwood, You" is sometimes used by Dad. Use of this phrase usually indicates pleasant surprise.

Poop-Poop

An affectionate phrase for either of the knotheads (q.v.). Derivation is unknown. Frequently added to "nighty-night" (q.v.).

Pow!

This is the sound a gun makes when a round is fired. In our youth, our Father would obtain maximum effect with this word by articulating it during a belch. At the same time, he would form his right hand into the shape of a gun, and fire his hand with the "pow!". Thus, a common body noise is transformed into an entertaining event.

Rascal

"A scoundrel, rogue; scamp. Now usually used jokingly or affectionately, as of a mischievous child" [NWD]. We trust Dad *was* speaking affectionately the myriad of times he spoke this word to us. The tone of voice and facial expression convinced us so. He often preceded and succeeded the word with the second personal pronoun, to let there be no mistake as to whom the affection was directed. (Cf. similar use of "you" with "Peckerwood".) Thus, "Why you Rascal, you!" (upon being shown a straight-A report card, e.g.).

One might suppose this to be a word with only a recent history. Consider, please, the Middle English *rascaile* meaning "scrapings, dregs, rabble," and which in turn derives from the Latin *rasus*, "scraped."

Rascallion

This form of "rascal" was sometimes used for variation. It is a word spoken by Dad several thousand times, and probably by no one else even once in the history of the world. He is invited to disprove our assertion, perhaps by saying one of his brothers so labeled one of his own sons, but we'll place our bets on this one as Dad's coinage alone.

Ricardo

This proper noun is a substitute word for "Richard."

Shaver

Our Father used this term to apply to either Dick or Joe, we believe, usually modified by "little." But in fact we recall him saying it more of the neighbors' tots or to a given lad he might encounter or refer to. "Bunny, whose little shavers are those in the yard?

Slugger

This noun was used by our Father in our childhood to call either one of us. For example, rather than say, "Dick, you have a telephone call," he might call out, "Slugger, telephone!" Use of this word usually indicated that our Father was in a good mood. It is derived from baseball vocabulary, of course, and occurred quite early on our master list (ML #29).

What a Bunch of Foolishness!

This phrase, which means exactly what it says, is often used by our Father to sum up an evening of fun and jollity.

Chapter 2

Comings and Goings: Salutations, Farewells, and Rude Awakenings

Greetings and good-byes are important ritualized ways persons mark their time together. They are the parentheses we draw around our proximity, the beginning and ending of our dialogue. Hello, may we hallow our togetherness; Good-bye, may God be with ye.

Be-Bye

A term of farewell indigenous to our family, or to the extended family, we are uncertain. But we are certain we've never heard anyone say good-bye this way except when our Father addresses our Mother, or, less often, one of us. At the beginning of a work day as one of Uncle Sam's G-Men, Dad might say "Be-Bye" as he left the house. Mom's response might typically come, "Be careful!"

Heidi Heidi Heidi!

A corrupted pronunciation of "Howdy," our Father might greet anyone approaching his door with a spirited string of "Heidi's." He's not been known to greet total strangers in this manner, but if he knows you only a little, he's liable to salute you as though he's known you all his life. This is one of the endearing features of his personality to us, even if it did hold us up on our vacation trips. You see, Dad would frequently be the last person to return

to the car after a pitstop on the road. Finally he would come and start the car, beaming broadly as he announced that so-and-so in the service station had a second cousin who used to be the sixth grade teacher of the guy he was at Quantico with seven years ago! How he could find that out and pee, too, we never could understand.

Hey, Man!

This salutation was used in a 3/3/84 phone call to Mobile, after Joe identified himself. Maybe he said "Man" because in those initial fleeting seconds he couldn't decide which of us it was, since we sound similarly in voice tone over the telephone.

Hold Down the Fort

In the moment of leaving to run an errand, Dad frequently exhorts Mom or one of us to do this. After all, when the Commander leaves his post, the rest of the troops have to be eagle-eyed and watch out for the Indians

Hold 'Em in the Road

In the reverse situation from "hold down the fort" we frequently heard this admonition. We would hear this phrase were Dad staying home and one of us were leaving. In fact, "hold 'em in the road" is probably something Joe hears as he leaves Mobile to return to Atlanta. We suppose it derives from the need to hold all the wheels of the car on the road in order to have a safe journey. Hence the meaning is "drive carefully!"

Hubba-Hubba!
Rise and Shine!
Up and At 'Em!

These are the famous phrases constituting Dad's postdawn trilogy of reveille cries, enjoining us to cease and desist all slumber and begin another day. And when the day consisted of getting ready for school, the phrases were abhorrent to our ears, like fingernails on a blackboard. The last thing we wanted to do was show a leg, at least not just now, please – only another fifteen minutes . . . please!

Yet his smiling tone was such that somewhere in our unconscious we knew that if we could only come alive and greet the day, it would be good, and we would be glad for it.

Note that Dad's use of the term "hubba-hubba" departs from its original meaning, which was decidedly not a wake-up call. Thus [DAS]: "An expression of approval and delight, or calling attention to a sexually attractive girl or woman." Saying "hubba-hubba" was akin to giving a wolf-whistle. It was originated by WWII military personnel in training with Chinese pilots in Florida, if you can believe that. The term comes from the standard familiar Chinese greeting, "how-pu-how." It was popularized by none other than Mr. Bob Hope in his weekly radio show broadcast from various military bases during the war. The term became obsolete following the War. . . . That is, became obsolete until Dad turned on the bedroom light one morning and started the rude awakening! [DAS]

Take it Easy

This is an admonition, plea, command, or advice to another to relax, to stop worrying, to become calm and unemotional, or to enjoy life and accept it as it is. Now it is often used on parting, in place of saying good-bye [DAS]. Dad uses this most of the time upon parting.

Sleep Tight

The phrase most often is coupled with one of the "nighty-night" phrases (q.v.). None of the lexicographers we've consulted refer to it.

Turn In

What might Father mean when he utters this verb phrase? Does he mean to make a turn into or to enter? to point (the toes, e.g.) inward? to deliver or hand in? to inform on or hand over, as to the police? to give back or to return? to fold over or double? No, no, no. All he means by "it's time to turn in" is that it's time to go to bed.

Chapter 3

Not By Bread Alone: Eating, Food, Culinary References

With gratitude we can recall that we were one of a diminishing number of families that broke bread together. For all its reward, one of the regrettable features of the mobility and technology of our day is the Diaspora of the nuclear family. We're spread out geographically now, and the rich symbolism of sharing a meal together is revivified only periodically. But our memories serve us well. Food is physical nourishment. And sharing it together nourishes the soul, and nourished ours.

Bread

The dictionary meaning of this transitive verb is "to construct or erect, as a house, ship, or wall." But what's an everyday verb like this doing in our lexicon? Wait ... what figure looms in the late-night shadows of the kitchen? And what is his activity? It's Father, and ... he's ... building something. At 12:00 midnight. Won't the noise wake up the household if not the neighborhood? Won't the hammering and the sawing cause a ruckus? And why in the kitchen of all places??? Because there is no hammering, or sawing. And because the kitchen is precisely where the bread and mayo and swiss cheese and bologna are found. Our Father, you see, is "building a sandwich!"

Fitting

Joe remembers distinctly calling Dick in early 1984 to check out this one: "What would you say about a scrumptious meal upon its completion to compliment Mother of her cooking?" Dick hesitated a little less than two seconds, then pronounced, "Fittin'!" More often than not, Dad affixes one of the adjectives "mighty" or "real" to the term. Or a typical letter from Mobile might state, "We really put away (q.v.) the groceries (q.v.) here last Sunday. Real fittin'."

Full As a Tick

This disgusting simile describes the state people are in after a normal Hitt meal. When our Father proclaims that he is "full as a tick," we know he is through eating . . . until later in the evening.

Groceries

Quite familiar to each of us is this term for food, prepared and on the table. It is usually referred to retrospectively: "We really put away the groceries, didn't we?"

Polish Off

This is colloquial for "to finish (a meal, a job, etc.) completely and quickly: [NWD]. This transitive verb almost exclusively applies to food ingestion around our household. "I think I'll polish off this sandwich I built before I hit the yard again."

It also may be used to refer to an easy defeat, as in "the San Francisco Giants polished off the Atlanta Falcons last Sunday."

Put Away

After Mother finishes a load of clothes they are quickly folded and put away. Richard tries to put away the abstractions of geometric topology to enjoy (at least part of) his weekends. The KJV of the New Testament translates the Greek for "divorce" as "put away" (Luke 16:18). Someone who lands in the slammer is sometimes referred to as put away. A man had his dog put away (put to sleep) because he was old and unhappy [DAI].

But none of these catch the way we fondly associate this term with Dad. something needs to be said for "putting away the groceries." Now the uninitiated reader probably thinks this is what you do when you get in from

Delchamps or A&P with several bags. No. It's what you do on site at the dinner table, for it means simply to consume food or drink [NWD] and, we might add, to bring the meaning more in line with our Father's appetite, in large quantities!

Ummmm Boy Heidi!

Exclamatory phrase of delight, pleasure, enjoyment, frequently said in association with food being ingested. This was one of our early listing, ML #22.

Vittles

When we consulted with Mother in March, 1984, she supplied this term, which we don't recall Dad using. It's a synonym for food or other provisions, esp. when prepared for use [NWD]. In this sense, the term seems to have been superseded in Dad's vocabulary by "groceries."

The word is given obsolete or dialect usage. It formerly was spelled "victual" (still pronounced *vit'l*).

The Middle English *viataille*, "provisions," is an ancestor of the word, as in ultimately the Latin *victus*, "food," *vivere*, "to live," and *vita*, "life."

Chapter 4

Fatherly Support: Encouragements, Admonishments, and Minor Scoldings

The infant owns the world. He is the center of his universe.

The child discovers the stove is hot, and bumps up against his limits.

The adolescent tests the values he is handed, and chooses how he is to be.

The adult becomes his own person, separated from the nurturance that guided him, but forever indebted to it.

Bow Your Neck

An admonition to be strong in the face of adversity. This term would occur particularly when extra effort is being called for. We had never thought about the precise manipulation of the cervical spine called for here, but after gyrating our heads around a bit, it does seem possible that by raising the shoulders, tucking the chin, and pulling the head as far back as possible, the neck is placed in a state of flexion, and feels "bowed." This is a little like the way a cat flexes his thoracic spine when assuming a "fight or flight" posture, only we lack the flexibility our feline friends enjoy. Thus there is some delightful hyperbole in the phrase. We probably were encouraged to

bow our necks moreso in relation to non-physical than physical activity. For example, we had to bow our necks to have this volume ready by Christmas.

Get It Off Your Chest

whenever one of us was burdened with something or looked “down in the dumps” (q.v.), we were encouraged to “go ahead and get it off your chest.” Growing up in this kind of emotionally supportive environment was one of the treasures we received from our parents. The phrase has a related saying which we never heard, “Make a clean breast of . . . ,” but which carries the same concept.

Get The Show On The Road

Ready to leave for church, Dad, but finding the boys “straggling behind” (q.v.) a little? Try hollering this down the hallway and see how fast they move: “C’mon, let’s get the show on the road!”

Grit Your Teeth

This term has connotations similar to the two phrases above, with an additional one that it alone carries. If one of us were to stump a toe on a door jam and buckle over in agony, Father would grimace in empathy with us and say, “Grit your teeth! Grit your teeth!”

In addition to being emotionally supportive, that was neurologically helpful as well, Dad. Our sensitivity to perception of feeling at any one place is inversely linked to the amount of “static” our brain senses from other parts of our body. So tensing up the jaws and biting down with one’s teeth actually “distracts” the brain from the pain signals it is receiving from the injured area.

So, thanks for the sound physiological advice!

Keep Your Chin Up

This phrase is accorded standard usage by [NWD], and means to bear up bravely under trying circumstances. It should be noted, however, that it is humanly impossible to keep your chin up and to bow your neck at the same time.

Muscle Up

An encouragement to "steel oneself" (q.v.) for an arduous task: "Muscle up, now; you can do it if you really want to."

Put Your Nose To The Grindstone

A grindstone was originally a millstone between two of which a grain was ground. It evolved to refer to a revolving stone disk used for sharpening bladed tools and shaping and polishing things [NWD]. Don't put your nose to the grindstone to shape or polish it, though – OUCH! Put your nose to the grindstone if what you intend is "to work hard and steadily" [NWD].

Put Your Shoulder To the Wheel

We could not locate this one anywhere in the literature. It is synonymous with putting your nose to the grindstone, so far as we are aware.

Snap It Up: Make It Snappy

"Hurry up!" 1934: "Drop over to the main drag and snap it up." Chandler, *Finger Man*, p.30 [DAS]. Either of these phrases could occur close to the end of Dad's patience, if we were in the act of testing it.

I'm Going To Snatch (Or Yank) A Knot In Your Tail

There is no dictionary help on this one. Joe also has asked some knowledgeable colleagues if they've ever heard of it. They mostly just started at him as though he were strange. But these words uttered in aggravation toward Dick or Joe as young boys struck the fear of God in their hearts. While Dad did not discipline us in any corporal manner, the threat of having a knot snatched in our tails could create an instant lump perceptably the size of a grapefruit in our respective throats. The snatch or yank never came to be. But it didn't need to. Our whimpers testified that the threat was ever as devastating as whatever the act might have been. The original self-fulfilling prophecy: "I'm gonna snatch a knot in your tail!!" And it was done.

Steel Yourself

As a transitive verb, to steel something is to "make hard, tough, unfeeling, etc." [NWD].

Dad would exhort one of us to "steel yourself to get through this ordeal," or the like.

Tough It Out

This slang phrase means "to remain unyielding in the face of difficult, adversity, etc., often in a brazen or defiant way" [NWD].

The situation in September, 1979, was grave. Joel watched the computerized radar screen on Atlanta's TV station indicate that the eye of Hurricane Frederick was passing quite close to 3867 Camellia Drive. He was to "tough it out" by staying home instead of evacuating. Mom and Dad "steeled themselves" (q.v.) for the occasion and rode it out. Regrettably, there was no way to "steel" the wood shed out back, which took quite a shellacking! (q.v.)

Chapter 5

Learning About Hustle: Sports And Athletic Phrases

Athletic competition rightly perceived builds character. While "the game of life" is a hackneyed old phrase, the parallels between what happens on the athletic field and in the real world are myriad. Of course, we never knew that when Dad was teaching us how to play a better game of baseball. But even so, in his patient instruction he was preparing us to get along better in that larger game that continues beyond the 9th inning.

A Can Of Corn

We have had little success tracing the origin of this baseball expression. The Braves announcers spent the better part of a game during the late 1984 season debating this one, we suppose to keep from falling asleep while their heroes fell further in the rankings. They speculated that baseball games originally were played on farmlands with a corn field marking the "homerun fence" and that the phrase had its origin in that context.

The term refers to a routine fly ball hit to an outfielder. Use of the expression is restricted largely to the moments when the fly ball is in the air. For example, it would be unusual for someone to say, "I hit a can of corn yesterday," The purpose of this phrase seems to be on-the-field communication.

Clean His Plow

This verb phrase means to defeat someone soundly. The contest must be one-sided for this phrase to be appropriate. The derivation is uncertain, and the phrase does not occur in any of our dictionaries.

Clobber

Strictly American, the verb is accorded standard usage by [NWD], although it does appear in [DAS]. Its original meaning, "to beat or hit repeatedly" or "to strike with great force" has been generalized to mean "to defeat decisively." We think of Dad using the term in both senses: "Murphy really clobbered the ball today, didn't he? It didn't make any difference, though – the Braves still got clobbered."

Cream

This transitive verb is almost synonymous with its cousin, "to powder" (q.v.), though the latter applies almost exclusively to hitting a baseball. One can powder a fast ball by hitting a solidly and forcefully, but if one creams something it means "to beat, thrash, or defeat soundly; to hurt, damage, as by striking with great force." Thus, "they powdered the ball so well that the team really creamed their opponents." Also, the second meaning is addressed by pointing out that one car would not "powder" another car but could, in a grinding collision, "cream" it.

Drop Your Apron

This expression refers to the principal component of good form in fielding a ground ball – getting down on the ball. Our Father would shout this to us as we were about to field a ground ball. It was his colorful way of reminding us to move toward the ball so the ball was in front of us, then to bend our knees, bend our backs, keep our heads *down*, and have our gloves toward the ground.

In the American Legion District finals in Jackson, Ala. (1958), Joe performed these maneuvers to near perfection in right field . . . shortly before turning around and chasing the ball to the fence. Three runs scored, we lost the game, and Mr. Clikas didn't speak to him until next season.

Go To School

This is an intransitive verb phrase used by our Father. It means "to learn *a posteriori*," that is, through observation or experience. We were often encouraged to learn the different types of pitches an opposing pitcher had by "going to school" on our teammates at the plate. However, use of the phrase is not restricted to sports.

Get On Your Horse

Use of this expression is almost exclusive to baseball. Roughly translated, it means "run!" However, the term must be employed in the proper setting. It seems to apply only in the situation of a long fly ball which needs to be chased down, at great speed, by an outfielder. Our Father would use this expression, at high volume, to let us know we had to cover a lot of territory to catch a fly.

Hustle

This is an important concept in Dad's philosophy of self-actualization, with the prototypical reference in the game of baseball. Now, the concept as he developed it has nothing to do with the most common slang uses of the term. We're not concerned here with begging, stealing, prostituting, or with unethical and aggressive schemes for making money [DAS].

Rather, "hustle" is the principal component of a competitive athlete, the energetic drive to perform as well as one is able. You hustle at all times, even if you're 5 runs ahead with 2 outs in the bottom of the 9th ("It ain't over 'till it's over" – Yogi Berra). As a batter, for example, hustle would include running out all flies and grounders, no matter how routine. As a fielder, hustle would include running to obtain the best position to back up plays, and never giving up on fouled balls and home runs until you are sure they are out of play. You run onto the field; you run off the field. You play for every out as though the game hinges on it.... And you catch all fly balls with both hands (remember when the pros did, too?). In the game of baseball we learned that people with exceptional ability who lacked hustle would be mediocre players. And a team of average ability who hustled their hearts out might outperform their stronger opponents (though it was difficult for the hustling 1953 Zimmerman Electric little leaguers to believe that, with our 0-14 record!).

Therein lies the "life-applicable" truth about hustle. When Dad was inducted into the State of Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame, he was interviewed

by a local newspaper reporter. In the course of the questioning, Dad was asked what he considered the most important ingredient for athletic success. The reply was "desire." We have always been taught that we could attain what we want in life if we truly desire it – that is, if we hustle for it.

Never Up, Never In

This is a proverb used by Dad which probably dates back to his basketball playing days. The meaning is, of course, if a basketball does not have a sufficiently high trajectory, it won't go in the basket. By the time we came along, though, this proverb was used primarily in the sport of throwing wadded up waste paper into a trash basket, where the same principle applies.

Pill

In addition to the standard meanings of this noun, our Father uses this word as a synonym for a baseball, and on rare occasions, for any spherical or round object. For an example of the latter, Joe heard the term during a game of Trivial Pursuit played in Mom and Dad's motel room in Atlanta, September, 1984. Mother rolled the die and neglected to move her round piece the number of spaces indicated by the pips (q.v.) on the die. Father said, "Move your pill Evelyn."

Powder

This is a transitive verb used in reference to striking a baseball with a bat, using such force that the baseball is nearly pulverized, or converted to powder (if we might exaggerate). For example, Dad might say, "Way to powder that ball, Joe," if he hit a line drive into an outfield gap.

Shag

This transitive verb is commonly used in baseball to refer to chasing after and catching balls after they are hit, especially in batting practice. There may be some connection between this use of the word and the dance called the "shag," which was popular in the late 1950's.

Shellacking

American slang for (1) a whipping; flogging; beating. And (2) a thorough defeat. They don't know this term in West Virginia, apparently, for when Joe queried Ceree about it, she said, "Doesn't it have to do with applying a coat of varnish?"

The former meaning has been around since 1930: "'Shellacking' . . . and numerous other phrases are employed by the police as euphemisms." Lavine, *Third Degree*, p.3. [DAS]

The second meaning has become a sports slang term to refer to a rout the likes of which the Atlanta Falcons of 1984 have brought into fresh relief for us all!

Soldier Out

As used by Dad, this term is an intransitive verb phrase. It means to stand at the plate, much like a soldier at attention, and watch a called third strike go by. "Soldiering out" is considered a cardinal sin second only to not hustling, so in our baseball playing days, if we struck out, we tried to make sure we went down swinging.

Squeak By
Squeak Out
Squeeze By
Scrape By
Edge Out

We've never heard Dad say "Squeak through," although [DAI] lists that as the only rendering, and [NWD] lists it as primary over the less frequent, "squeak by." It is colloquial, and means "to succeed, get through, survive, etc. by a narrow margin or with difficulty." [DAI] says "to be successful but almost fail; win by a small score." The notion of the strenuous effort that may be involved is best communicated by "eke out."

We first thought this term, "eke out," wasn't to be found in any of the sources, but found out we were misspelling it is "eek out." The difference in emphasis between "eke out" and all the other phrases is subtle. A victory has been eked out only if it's been "earned with difficulty," esp. as in getting only a little return on a lot of hard work [DAI]. The connotation under dire circumstances is also important here, as in "Fred eked out a bare living by farming on a rocky hillside."

Up Mule

This phrase is used as an imperative, usually addressed to a golf ball. For example, if a golf ball is putted too weakly, perhaps on an uphill slope, Dad would shout "Up mule! Up mule!" while the ball is still rolling to encourage the ball to continue toward the cup.

The phrase certainly has an agrarian origin where it was applied with equal rigor to the actual animal when he wouldn't pull the plow with the same intensity the farmer was desiring.

Chapter 6

Getting From Point A to Point B: Verbs of Motion and Movement

We have pulled 15 verbs of motion out from the general listing of verbs and verb phrases. These words seem among the most colorful Dad uses, and some of them are among the most frequently occurring. Together with the 50 general verbs that follow in the next section, verbs and verb phrases comprise the largest group of words in the entire volume. Without further adieu, we shall barge right on into them.

Amble

Ah, to amble. To move about unhurriedly and in a leisurely manner [NWD]. To have that certain attitude about life that causes one to move as though by hurrying one might miss something of importance. If more of us gave up our frenzied pace for ambling, we'd be healthier in every way.

The verb comes from the Latin *ambulare*, to walk (cf. our "ambulate"), and came to designate that smooth, easy gait of a horse who raises first both legs on one side then both on the other [NWD].

In Dad's vocabulary, "amble" frequently occurs as the participle "ambling." It can be said sincerely, as in "Let's amble over to Sears," but can also be used sarcastically. Thus, if one of us were due back an hour ago

from an outing and Mother became worried, Dad might comment, "Oh, he'll come amblin' on in here directly, Bunny." (Cf. "saunter.")

Barge (On) In

A barge is a large boat, usually flat-bottomed, used for carrying heavy freight on rivers or canals [NWD]. These crafts move in a slow, deliberate, if clumsy manner. As a verb, "barging" means "to move slowly and clumsily, to come or go in a rude, abrupt, or clumsy way" [NWD]. But [DAS] picks up the meaning we most often associate with Dad's use of the term: "to walk or enter a place without hesitation or ceremony; to intrude" (from about 1934); or "to interrupt," esp. a conversation in order to offer one's own opinion or advice when not requested to do so; to butt in.

The most recent use of this term occurred in a 3/25/84 letter to Joe: "As soon as we finish Arise and Build *[a facet of DWBC's building program]* we will barge full speed ahead on that."

Barrel (On In)

[DAS] is most helpful with the etymology of this intransitive verb which means "to go at high speed" [NWD]. Specifically, if someone came "barrelling on in," it originally meant he was in an automobile, and the barrel in question is that of an engine cylinder! [DAS] suggest an original student coinage of this term around 1930, i.e. when Father was in the 8th or 9th grade, and that the term first applied to souped-up hot rods.

Fog

As an intransitive verb, this means "to move fast; to run, as a horse or a man; to hurry." [DAS] documents student usage from c. 1930, but earlier cowboy usage. The image is that the object is moving at such great speed as to be only a fog or a blur. If Joe makes it to Mobile from Decatur in 6 1/2 hours, e.g., he was really "foggin' on it."

Gallavanting Around

The concept of gallantry is at root here. To be gallant is to be showy and gay in dress or appearance, high-spirited and daring in act, and even polite and attentive to women in a courtly way. To gallivant, then, is an intransitive verb originally used to designate gadding about with members of the opposite sex, but now more often referring to going about in search of amusement or excitement. The latter is the meaning we hear Father assign

the term usually occurring in the present participle. However, almost any sojourn, even to the shopping mall and back, can have this label affixed to it: "Did you have fun gallavanting around Springdale?" [NWD].

Mosey (Along, On Down)

"To stroll, amble (q.v.), or shuffle along; to go away, move along." [DAS] says it occurred as early as 1829, and [NWD] and [PWO] are fairly convinced the derivation (ready for this?) is from the verb "vamoose," which itself derives from the Spanish *vamos*, "Let's go." None of the sources listed the "...on down" phrase, but that seems characteristic of Dad. Thus, "Let's mosey on down to the fellowship hall and see what's cooking down there."

Saunter

To walk about idly; stroll. An interesting etymological point is that the Late Middle English *santren* meant "to move, meditate."

Scamper

To run or to go hurriedly or quickly. From the now obsolete scamp, to roam. The Latin sl excampare meant "to decamp," a combination of *ex* ("out") + *campus* ("a field of battle"). Thus if Richard goes scampering across the campus at USA, he draws on two words from the same Latin root to do so!

Scoot

Colloquial verb, transitive or intransitive, meaning "to go or move quickly; hurry (off) dart" [NWD].

Dad enjoys slipping this echoic verb in to add some emphasis to a statement. He would become quite vexed if one of us were lingering a little longer than we should to get to an appointment on time. Thus "You'd better scoot or you'll be late." Does Mother Dear need a loaf of bread to fix lunch? "Dick, how 'bout scootin' up to the store and get a loaf for your Mother?" Is there a sale on at the Mall? "I'll scoot you over to Bel Air and we'll have a peak."

Stagger

Here is a standard verb in everyday use which Dad takes and inserts into a letter used context, but one that makes perfect sense the moment he says it. There is overstatement to his use of "stagger" that is characteristic of

his elocution. Thus in a phone call to Joe on 5/26/84 Dad stated, “I finally got busy in the yard after I staggered out of bed this morning.”

Tag

This verb enjoys both transitive and intransitive use in Dad’s colloquial vocabulary. In its transitive use, the word describes the act of hitting a baseball hard. Thus, “Way to tag that ball, Ricardo!” In its intransitive use, the word describes what one does if he follows close behind a person or thing: “I don’t know where we are, so let me tag along behind you.”

Traipse

The derivation of this interesting verb is unknown to [NWD]. When Hector Nations used it in the Alliance Theater’s production of the Southern drama, “Foxfire” in October, 1984, Joe whipped out his program and wrote the word on the cover, recognizing it as a favorite term of Dad’s. The traipse is to walk, wander, tramp, or gad,“ and is colloquial, most likely originating in Southern dialect. But we don’t believe we’ve ever heard it used except in the present participle form” “He was traipsin’ along without a care in the world.”

Trek

As an intransitive verb, this is the only term in the entire volume with a (South) African derivation, which in turn derives from the Dutch *trekken*, “to draw” [NWD]. In South Africa to trek is to travel by ox wagon, thus the sense of drawing the wagon. The verb has now come to mean to travel slowly or laboriously, and in colloquial use, means to go, esp. by foot.

The South Africans also use it as a noun, as we do. There it’s the journey made by ox wagon; here, it’s any journey or leg of a journey. Thus Father writes Joe on 8/19/84 that “Leo and Sarah want us to trek up to Pineville for a visit.”

Trickle

To flow slowly in a thin stream or fall in drops; to move, come, go, etc. little by little.

The second sense is the one most familiar to us, esp. in the present participle: “There were a lot of folks who came tricklin’ in after the opening hymn today.”

Truck

The slang use offered by [NWD] is not exactly Dad's: to walk in a carefree, leisurely manner; stroll. For Dad rather employs this intransitive verb to describe rapid movement. Consider a fullback "plowing into" (q.v.) a defensive line, emerging full speed to race thirty yards for a score: "Man, he was really trucking after he got through that line." Now, that's no leisurely stroll! Thus [DAS] comes closer to Dad's usage with "to go somewhere; to leave; to move."

Mother has also contributed that this verb also means "to jitterbug," in whatever variation it existed around 1935 (the date according to [DAS]).

Straggle

"To stray from the path or course or wander from the main group." To answer Mother's inquiry as to one of our ETA's, Dad might well reply, "Oh, he'll come stragglin' in here directly."

The noun form "straggler" is also a favorite.

Dad has probably said the word at every Azalea Trail Run he's attended: "Bunny, there aren't going to be but a few more stragglers coming by; let's leave."

Chapter 7

A Piece of the Action: Other Verbs and Verb Phrases

Anchor

As transitive verb, this word is in everyone's vocabulary. [NWD]: "To keep from drifting, giving way, etc., by or as by an anchor." We include it in this lexicon because for each of us there is a fond memory of the necessity on automobile trips of everything being "anchored" before forward motion can ensue. A package rattling, a suitcase handle tapping, or any object regularly shifting positions in the back seat all were adequate cause for a spontaneous pit stop to "get that thing anchored back there."

Further, as recently as Dad's 7/8/84 letter to Joe there is another use of the term. Joe had just returned from his Blue Ridge Parkway bicycle tour. "Glad you enjoyed your vacation and glad you are anchored down again."

Bear Down

This is what one might do after "bowing his neck" (q.v.). Occasions for bearing down do not fit any one type of activity. The last few turns of a wood screw call for bearing down, lest one strip the head of the screw. An entire athletic team needs to bear down in the final moments of a game if they are slightly behind. In recent years the Atlanta Braves have forgotten the meaning of bearing down during the months of August and September! Richard and Father had to bear down to finish painting Richard's house,

and Richard and I have been bearing down on the lexicon, to finish it by Christmas.

Buckle Down

This term has nothing to do with automotive seat belts, which one buckles *up*. Here we are concerned with the exertion of concentrated effort to accomplish a task. It is close in meaning to "bear down" (q.v.). It would have never made it into the lexicon had Dad not used it in a 10/14/84 letter. He had slacked off somewhat in his teaching load at the Sheriff's Office recently. Thus, "I need to buckle down there and get some classes going that they are asking for." Bow your neck, Dad.

Bump Into

This verb phrase refers to the kind of collision we *like* to have, not the kind Joe had in February, 1984 (cf. "plow"). To bump into someone simply means you encountered him: "I bumped into the Jumonville's at the Mall today."

Burn The Candle At Both Ends

This is one of a few phrases denoting frenetic overactivity, and is usually the result of having "too many irons in the fire" (q.v.). It could also be the result of plain and simple procrastination, we believe, though that is just conjecture inasmuch as we've never experienced that state personally. Ahem.

Bust A Gut

Not a very pretty sight, were it literally to happen. We think this applied to rip-roaring laughter, as in "splitting my sides." It might also apply to the strenuous exertion of physical effort.

Charge

This is one of those action verbs that Dad uses in the present participle form "charging." An [NWD] definition comes close to Dad's usage: "An attack with great force and speed; onslaught; onset." If Joe arrives non-stop from Atlanta, he may be said to have "come chargin' in here." If someone is expected but not yet arrived, he may "come chargin' in here directly." The derivation most likely is from the field of battle where the cry of "charge!" signaled the rapid onslaught of cavalry [NWD].

Chime In

"To join in or interrupt, as a conversation; to be in accord, agree." Note that this phrase is given the status of standard usage by [NWD]. We had thought initially it would be listed as slang or colloquial, but enough persons apparently have "chimed in" over the years for the term to move up to standard usage. We like the metaphor of "sounding off in harmony" as the Emperor grandfather clock in the dining room does faithfully (*almost* always) on the quarter hour.

Someone who chimes in is in concert with the stated flow of conversation, casting some doubt on [NWD]'s initial sense of a chimer as an interrupter. Think of the distinction between one who chimes in on a conversation and one who "barges into" (q.v.) a conversation. Chimers are not bargers!

Cluck

Used as an intransitive verb, the word usually suggests the sound of a hen calling her chicks or brooding. [NWD] suggests that a person can "cluck his disapproval." But can a motorized vehicle "cluck?" To be sure, for when Richard went to Cincinnati and back in early September "the pick-up clucked along fine" (Dad's letter, 9/10/84).

Conk Out

Holt says that there may be a Russian origin for this aviation term which originally referred to "the stalling of a motor." [NWD] gives it a slang standing in all 3 of the senses we remember: (1) to fail suddenly in operation, as a motor (it was running fine and conked out on me); (2) to become very tired and fall asleep (Dad conked out while watching the Falcons lose); (3) to die (that dog's so old he could conk out anytime). The other use of the word we recall occurs in [DAS] and derives from its original British meaning of "the head" or "the nose." It now can mean "to hit a person on the head" (Dick got conked on the head accidentally when Joe raised the 8-iron in a practice swing – cf. Parkfairfax, Alexandria, Va., c. (1956).

Cooking

Joe insisted on this participle staying in the list even though we are not certain how frequently our Father uses it. But *if* he uses it, it is probably in one of these two senses: (1) "Now you're cooking!" would mean "now you're getting it right," "now you're on a roll," or "now you're really performing well." However, this meaning is not found listed by any of the lexicographers

consulted. (2) "Let's see what we can cook up," in the sense of conducting, inventing, or devising something. ([NWD], colloquial.)

Crank Up

This verb phrase, always with the preposition "up," is another one of those mechanical terms that slides over in its colloquial use to refer to activity of humans. It means simply "to get started or get moving faster" [NWD]. E.g., "for the longest time he was just piddlin' around (q.v.), but he's getting cranked up on the project (q.v.) now."

Cut Loose

This verb phrase means to act or speak without restraint. The phrase seems to come from cutting a ship's moorings so that the ship is not restrained.

Cut The Mustard

Not a one of our word-smiths has included this term in their listings. The closest we find to it is "cut no ice," meaning "having no effort, make no impression" [DAS]. This latter phrase is evidently derived from the harvesting of ice – a job that must be done at top speed while weather conditions are favorable. Joe has a slight variation to the meaning of the mustard phrase. He thinks a knife unable to cut through mustard would be totally useless and inadequate, and thinks the phrase carries that sense with it: not enough, not adequate, etc. Thus "we're going to need a heavier hammer. This one just won't cut the mustard."

Dump

None of our faithful lexicographers quite knows the sense in which we heard Dad use this transitive verb in his 6/26/84 postcard mailed from San Juan. They all acknowledge the well-known slang and colloquial references. As a noun, a dump is any shabby unattractive building or even a whole city or town; quarterbacks dump passes into the flat all the time for short gains; and one lover dumps another when things don't work out. But the closest sense we find to the present meaning is [DAI]'s "drop off," "to take someone part of the way you are going." Hence, Dad says, "Dick dumped us off at the airport while the chickens were beginning to stir. . . ." You can almost see a ramp emerging from the car and Mom and Dad sliding down it!

Face The Music

A verb phrase meaning "to go through trouble or danger, esp. because of something you did; accept your punishment." Synonymous phrases are "pay the piper," "make one's bed and lie in it," "take one's medicine" [DAI].

Holt reports, as our parents surely will remember, that in "Follow the Fleet" (Irving Berlin, 1936), Fred Astaire sang, "Let's face the music and dance." This suggests a reference to the kind of courage necessary to face the footlights and the orchestra in the pit. But Thornton in an out-of-print American Glossary (1912) finds its use as far back as 1850 as army slang, "an allusion to the Rogue's March played when a culprit was being drummed out of the service" [PWO].

Finagle

Often accompanied by "around," this means "to get, arrange, or maneuver by cleverness, persuasion, etc., or esp. by craftiness, trickery, etc." [NWD]. The derivation is uncertain, but [DAS] quotes a 1926 usage. "He finagled around and found a way to get out of the job he was assigned by the boss."

Fling

To "take a fling at" or "have a fling at" refers to a trial effort or attempt at something [DAS, NWD]. When we shot B-B's at tin cans in the backyard last Christmas, he could have said, "Let Joe have a fling at it, Dick."

Gut It Out

To persevere with courage.

None of our dictionaries list this phrase. An example of its usage is, "I know it's not easy for you – hang in there and gut it out."

Harp

This is an intransitive verb meaning "to persist in talking or writing tediously or continuously (on or upon something)" [NWD]. Though afforded standard usage, we've not heard the work much outside of Dad's speech. It seems unfair to take the melodious sounds made by the harp (played so beautifully, e.g., by Judy Beattie of the Atlanta Symphony) and derive from that a sense applied to someone who persists to the point of weariness.

Some Baptist preachers we've known have been harpers, but none, of course, in our own blood line, and assuredly not one of the present writers. And an election year is replete with harpers, most of whom have now been silenced.

Hit A Lick

This imperative sentence usually means "do it briefly." Our Father uses it in specialized situations though. One use is as an instruction to operate a machine or power tool for a very brief period of time, as in a trial or test. For example, after performing a tuneup on a car, Dad might say to one of us to "hit it a lick," meaning to crank the engine briefly to see if all is well. Another use of this phrase occurs when he wants to relieve someone from a repetitive chore. If someone is freezing ice cream using a hand crank freezer, Dad might say, "Let me hit it a lick" to indicate it was his turn.

Hit The Sack
Hit The Hay

To go to bed or sleep. Both make the [NWD] volume as slang. Of the two phrases, "hit the sack" was the one we heard most nights during our youth. [DAS] indicates "hit the hay" is common since c. 1910, but "hit the sack" first enjoyed common usage in the military during WWII.

Hump

"Church has kept us humping," Father comments in his April 4 letter of this year. They were making preparations for Dr. Gage [an evengelist] to come the next week for a 4-day revival, and were quite busy with preparations.

[DAS] says the use of this verb to mean "to move quickly, to hurry," dates from 1845 but is "not now common." They list a more frequent slang use which the modesty of the present writers prevents us from making explicit. Suffice it for us to quote comedian Joe E. Brown at the Copacabana on 10/6/56: "I miss the circus. I miss watching the elephants' trunk and the camels hump" [DAS]. We miss you, too, Joe E.

Originally, the phrase as Dad uses it took the form, "hump yourself" according to Holt. The Oxford English Dictionary relates it to the aggressive arching of an angry cat's back (cf. "bow your neck," 12), and thereby to a now obsolete phrase, "get your back up." [PWO]

Kill

As a transitive verb, the meaning here has been stretched in many directions by our language, away from its literal rendering. A dozen oysters can be killed if one polishes them off (q.v.). If there's just one drink or portion left, the host may ask you if you'd like to kill it. You may kill your chances for success by blowing an opportunity. Ceree and Joel went to hear a live comedian at Atlanta's Comedy Spot – that's right, he killed us! And when we went camping in October it was essential, before retiring, to kill the fire. Legislation is killed before it's passed; a newspaper story may be killed by the editor before it's published. In fact time itself may be killed, not by an active pursuit, but just by farting around (q.v.).

The association we have with Dad's use of the word, however, is expressed as "to cause (an engine, etc.) to stop; to turn off (as a light)." Thus, "better kill the engine and check the timing once more." [NWD, DAS].

Muster

To summon or call up.

"I'll finish the lawn as soon as I muster up the stamina to get back out there."

Muscle

This word is included as a transitive verb and is not found in any of our sources. Joe is not certain that this is an actual term of Dad's, but it sounds like something he has used.

The situation is one calling for brute force, where one really has to bear down (q.v.) on something, e.g., a lid that has rusted on a jar and won't come off. How to remove it? – "You're just going to have to muscle it off."

Nickel And Dime It To Death

To make a feeble effort that is useless or self-defeating to your goal (not in any sources).

The omission from our dictionaries of this graphic phrase probably is a function of its length. Nevertheless it has a catchy, lively quality that we like, and it is one we've heard Dad use time and time again.

Some hyperbolic examples that come to mind of this phenomenon are raking leaves with a small rake in a mid-October wind storm, watering a

row of azaleas with a mason jar, and trying to fill up the gas tank of a Winnebago with the engine still running!

Peel

Although "peel off" appears in [DAI], it is accorded standard usage in [NWD] as a aeronautical term meaning "to veer away from a flight formation in an abrupt maneuver." Though Father's driving is considerably slower than that of a jet fighter most of the time, he nonetheless might say, "We'd better peel off at this next exit to stock up on some groceries (q.v.)."

On the other hand, if he doesn't see an exit with a "food" sign, he might exhort Mother to "keep your eyes peeled for somewhere we can peel off." This use of the past participle of the transitive verb means "cut away or stripped off," and applied to the eyes means to keep them wide open, i.e. "peel back the lids." The latter usage is not found in any of our sources, but is an everyday occurrence with Father.

Perish The Moment

A verb phrase used as an exclamation, meaning "Let us not even think of it; may it never come true."

Perk

"To function well, to go smoothly; said esp. of motors, as an automobile" [DAS]. Since c. 1925. From "percolate." "The bug is perking along on all cylinders since Dick tuned it up for us."

Piddle

To piddle is a child's term for "to urinate," so it is a euphemistic diminutive word coming from "piss." Its other meaning is to dawdle or trifle, as in "to piddle the time away." [NWD].

We recall "piddlin' around" as the most frequent word combination, as in "We're going to be late if y'all keep piddlin' around in there."

Pipe

Slang. To pipe up: "To speak up or say, esp. in a piping voice." To pipe down: "To become quiet or quieter; stop shouting, talking, etc."

Plow

With the preposition “into” this transitive verb means “to begin work vigorously,” as in “Let’s plow into the shrubs and see how many we can trim before suppertime.”

More commonly, it means “to collide forcefully” as in the statement Joe can truthfully make this year, “Mrs. Choi plowed into the right side of my Datsun on February 5.”

Poke

This transitive verb is used by Dad in a few specialized situations. For example, if our family cooked out, after dinner Dad would go out and “poke the coals” (with a poker, we assume). He also uses “poke” in situations where “put” or “place” might be more common. As an example, he might “poke the Buick in the garage.”

Powder One’s Nose

This is a term referring to almost anything Mother may need to do prior to going out. Typically, we might hear Father say, “we’ll be all set as soon as Mother finishes powdering her nose.” The exact phrase is not included in any of our sources, suggesting limited or regional use.

The similar “powder one’s puff” is listed in [DAS] as “to go to the bathroom; to urinate,” in reference to “the traditional female excuse when withdrawing to the ladies’ room, i.e. to apply make-up.” [DAI] lists “powder room” as “the ladies rest room.” The phrase has a touch of the male sexist implication that men spend a percentage of their lives waiting on womenkind to get ready. Ceree might advocate that she spends a percentage of hers waiting on Joe to powder *his* nose! Ahem.

Raise Cain

American slang. “To create a great commotion; to cause much trouble.” “Bunny, do you suppose those dogs are going to quiet down, or are they going to raise Cain all evening?”

Raring To Go

“To rate” in this colloquial sense means “to be eager, enthusiastic,” and is used in its present participle form as “raring to go.” It is a dialect form of

the intransitive verb "to rear" meaning "to rise or stand on the hind legs, as a horse." Thus, "ever since we've had the tickets we've been rarin' to go."

Read The Riot Act To

The Riot Act referred to in this expression was an English law, passed in 1715, providing that if twelve or more persons were assembled to the disturbance of the public peace, they must disperse on proclamation (reading the Riot Act) or be held guilty of a felony. This expression has grown to mean to command or stop doing something regarded as wrong, warning that continuation will bring punishment.

Saw Logs

This appears in [NWD], [DAS], and [DAI] as "saw wood," but we've always and only heard "saw logs." [DAI] also lists as a Southern term "saw gourds" though that one has eluded us as well. This verb meaning to snore or sleep clearly comes "from the resemblance of the sound of snoring to that of wood being sawed. However, the term probably originated from comic strips, where a drawing of a saw going through a log traditionally is shown to represent both snoring and sound sleep" [DAS].

Scoop Up

This transitive verb phrase sounds like something you might want to do to a grounder or some ice cream, but our Father uses it more to mean to pick up someone, usually in a car. His is the only use of the verb in this way of which we are aware. Thus, "Evelyn is at the beauty parlor and I'm going to scoop her up at 3:00 o'clock."

Scout

To go in search of something; hunt.

This is a standard verb but one we include because it's so frequently used: "Joe, see if you can scout around for that wrench I set down. Well, it didn't take long for you to scout it up."

Scrimp

To scrimp something is to make it too small, short, etc., which recalls the carpenter's cliche, "I've sawed this board off three times and it's *still* too short!" This is a transitive use of the verb.

But to scrimp (intransitive) means to be sparing and frugal; try to make ends meet; economize. Thus Dad might refer to having to "scrimp on savings" in order to afford an item.

By the way, this is one of those relatively few English words with a direct derivation from a Scandanavian tongue. Thus the Swedish *skrympa*, "to shrink," is in the background here.

Send

We thought the term originated in the late 50's when Sam Cooke popularized it (cf. "You Send Me"), but [DAS] set us straight on that. The verb is granted slang usage by [NWD] as "to make very excited or exhilirated; thrill." For Dad, the term was always used in the first person and always a negation: "I don't know about you, but that music doesn't exactly send me." A tone of disgust rounds out the picture here.

The history of the term discloses an original use in reference to jazz singers c. 1935, whose music would "send" its listeners. Then the term "sender" gained popularity, though we've never heard it in use. But Satchmo did: "It's a funny thing how life can be such a drag one minute and a solid sender the next" (Louie Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, p. 126).

Shower Down

Nowhere do we find this phrase as such. But while en route to work one day in the late Summer, Joe pulled out to pass a string of cars. As he depressed the pedal to the floor the words "shower down" popped into his head, and another phrase had been added to this list.

The meaning under [NWD]'s "shower" entry that comes closest to Dad's use is "a sudden, abundant fall or discharge, as of tears, meteors, rays, sparks, etc., but also "an abundant flow; rush (a shower of compliments). But to "shower down" on the accelerator seems to belong to our Father and few others.

Sit Down

This is a verb phrase meaning to exert great force or strength: "You really have to sit down on it to get it to budge." Not found in any of our sources.

Sit Tight

This means to wait patiently, to remain calm; to await results [DAS]. Our Father might insist that he do something by saying, “Just sit tight and let me handle this.”

Get Squared Away (Or Around)

We would have thought the etiology of this phrase to be in the language of the carpenter or woodworker who knows better than anyone the necessity of having his boards cut to exact right angles. Wrong! This is a nautical term, and more specifically a sailor’s term. It refers to arranging the ship’s sails so that they catch the wind directly from behind. This is known as sailing “before the wind.” [DAI, NWD].

Hence, in the colloquial use our Father employs so frequently, the meaning is “to get ready, put in order” [NWD]; “to put right for use or action” [DAI]. Thus, “Give us a jingle (q.v.) when you get squared away, Dick, and we’ll head on over.”

Squeeze Blood Out Of A Turnip

As far as we city-slickers are aware, there is not any blood in a turnip. Therefore squeezing some out of one must be damned near be impossible. This would be true even if you were to rare back, bow your neck, muscle up, and bear down (cf. all). What then is being asserted of something that is like “squeezing blood out of a turnip?” Why, it’s a lot of effort with little results. Frequency of use by Dad is uncertain; it is unlisted by any of the lexicographers.

Stretch Out

This term made the list late in the year (11/4/84) when Ceree said, “I think I’ll stretch out for awhile before I start supper,” in telling Joel what time to come over. The term is interesting in that it has taken on a completely new sense during the running boom of the 1970’s. It now refers among that population to the stretching exercises performed before and after the workout. Thus there are frequent occasions when Joe stretches out, runs, stretches out . . . and then stretches out.

Give It A Whirl

An American colloquial verb phrase, "to try something; make an attempt." Syn., "take a fling at" (q.v.).

Chapter 8

Ups and Downs: Phrases, Denoting Mood, Affect, and Stamina

> Both my body and my emotions were given to me and it is a futile for me to condemn myself for feeling scared, insecure, selfish or revengeful as it is for me to get mad at myself for the size of my feet. I am not responsible for my feelings, but for what I do with them. – Hugh Prather

And what our Father did with his feelings was to express them in a most colorful and sometimes dramatic fashion. We only wish that in this listing of some of our favorite phrases of his, we could somehow convey the facial expressions, hand gestures, body English, and vocal inflections that accompanied them.

Have A Ball

This phrase can occur whenever Mom and Dad have had an especially good time . . . not necessarily a single evening out, to be sure. A week's vacation in the Bahamas, a tour of the Rockies, or a trip to South America, can each be a "ball."

Bright-Eyed and Bushy-Tailed

Though uncertain, we think it could be a horse that is the referent animal in this phrase. This could have been used in conjunction with our parents' awakening us with the Hubba-hubba calls ("let's be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed!") or the phrase could be used of anyone to describe a perky energetic demeanor: "She must be feeling more chipper (q.v.) – she sure looked bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at church yesterday."

Bushed

Another term that might have eluded our list had it not cropped up in a 9/16/84 letter to Joe. Dad had been over at Richard's house since Noon, sanding and scraping old paint off the house while awaiting the professor's arrival from his softball tournament. Dick arrived at 3:30, after playing 4 games, and Dad said he was "bushed." Dad was apparently in the same condition inasmuch as he adds, "I'll be ready to help again in a couple of days."

Chipper

[NWD] lists this as colloquial, meaning "in good spirits, sprightly, lively," and is one of Dad's favorite words. Has someone had a "bug" (q.v.) recently? Hope he's feeling chipper soon. Does another appear preoccupied, down, or listless? Why, he doesn't look very chipper, does he? Why so glum, chum? The onomatopoeia of this word is wonderful. It *sounds* like what it denotes, just as "glum" sounds like its opposite. Holt [PWO] says the term could have derived from "chipmunk" but that is speculative. The meaning of the term could likely come from a sound made by the chipping sparrow, which sounds like the word "chip." The term might also derive from "English dialect forms akin to *chirrup* and *pert*. "To chirrup" (variation of chirp) is to chirp repeatedly, or to make a series of sharp, sucking sounds with the lips, as in urging a horse on [NWD]. "Pert," on the other hand, means bold in speech or behavior; saucy; forward. It has derivations through Middle English to the Latin *apertus*, "open." (The latter is the root for the name of that part of Joe's hoped-for camera known as the aperture. If his hopes are realized, he'll surely be chipper when he sees it!)

"Chipper" is unrelated to several other colloquial uses of "chip." For example, a "chippy" is American slang for a "promiscuous woman, a prostitute" who may or may not be chipper in transacting her services with her clients. But who cares?

"A chip off the old block" is a child who resembles its parents. Holt suggests the allusion here is probably not to the wood of the family tree. A ship's carpenter is a 'chip,' and has been so since the early days. Depending on the degree of the ship is listing to and from, the ship's chip may not feel chipper. A "chip on one's shoulder" is American from about 1840, and refers to the dare of flicking off a wood chip, in order to do which one would have to come within range of the chip-bearer's fists [PWO].

There are chip shots in golf, cow chips in the field, poker chips on the table (hence "cash in one's chips," "chip in," be "in the chips"), and in recent years, thanks to the semiconductor industry, chips (integrated circuits) in your digital watch.

Chirp

"To speak in a lively, shrill way" [NWD], is close to our sense of this term, but misses something else altogether. We can imagine Father using the term of Mother or other females but not readily of other males. I.e., "Mother had a good shopping spree – she's really chirpin' away."

[DAS] happily provides some confirmation of the primarily female reference with this term. To chirp, that is, is "to sing, said of a female singer, usually professional," and an early usage is dated at c. 1930.

While there probably are as many male birds as female, and while the more sonorous songs emanate from the male of most species, we suppose the delicate and melodious quality of our feathered friends' voices are more suggestive of traditional notions of femininity. After all, it's difficult to image Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra as "chirpers." They are crooners. And Frankie Lane didn't chirp, either. He "belted out" his notes!

Chomping At The Bit

Another equestrian metaphor wherein we suffer from our urban upbringing in having difficult with the meaning here. The dictionaries do not help us. We can suppose that a horse when anxious or excited displays this behavior. It is closely related to "raring to go" (q.v.), and seems to mean restless, eager, or anxious to begin or do something.

Dead To The World

This term in its c. 1875 inception was a synonym for the state of extreme drunkenness to the point of passing out [DAS]. Now the more common use, and the one we associate with the term as Dad uses it, is "sound asleep."

Die Laughing

[DAS] along has an entry that carries our meaning, "to laugh uncontrollably," and cites usage from 1943. Hearty gales of knee-slapping laughter are the common fare when members of the Hitt clan congregate, whether our immediate or extended family.

One rare evening at Uncle Dick's house several years ago, Richard and Joe remarked on the joyousness of the three Hitt brothers telling story after story of the old days at MC, and how they still can "die laughing" as they share one after another anecdote.

Fed Up

Having had too much of something; at the end or your patience; disgusted; bored." Syn. "sick and tired." [DAI].

Field Day

Similar to a "ball," this term is used to refer to a day "of enjoyably exciting events or highly successful activity" [NWD], though we'll wager Father might use it to refer to less than a whole day of same, as in "Boy, we had a field day at that garage sale."

Fit To Be Tied

A colloquial adjective phrase for "frustrated" or "angry" [NWD]. "The coach was fit to be tied when his team failed to score on fourth down." The coach in question, here, obviously has never been Tom Landry of the Dallas Cowboys, at least not to any empirical verification. But the coach probably *was* Pat Dye of the Auburn Tigers when his team failed to score against Alabama this December 1. Dad may well have been fit to be tied at that time, too!

Flabbergast

To make speechless with amazement; astonish. [NWD] gives this verb standard usage now. It is first known in 18th century slang, so it is quite old.

It may be derived from "flabby" + "aghast." "Aghast: is cognate with "ghost." So the original meaning could have been "weak in the knees after having seen a ghost" [PWO].

Note that we've never heard this word except in the first person, as "that sure flabbergasts me," or most often in the past participial form, "I'm just flabbergasted."

Frazzle

This colloquial verb in the infinitive means "to wear or become worn to rags or tatter; fray." Also, "to make or become physically or emotionally exhausted." Our Father refers to nerves as becoming frazzled under conditions of frustration or weariness. He may say then that he is "worn to a frazzle" (q.v. "worn to a frazzle", "worn to a nub," 47). Most frequently, however, he is likely to refer to a thing as being the stimulant for the frazzled condition by placing the present participle of the verb before the word. To wit, "Dick, see if you can figure out what's out of whack; I can't get the frazzlin' thing to work to save my soul."

Gall One's Butt or Read End

In Dad's progression of terms for anger, this is the pinnacle, the apex, the wrath than which there is none more wrath-er. The concept is arrived at in 5 logical steps:

1. In and of itself, gall is an essential body fluid known also as bile, a greenish fluid secreted by the liver and stored in the gall bladder. To the taste, this is an exceedingly bitter substance.

2. Thus we can refer to rude boldness or audacity as "gall," such as "he had the gall to ask if he could borrow the lawn mower when he hasn't returned the other tools yet."

3. The skin surface can be "galled" if it is injured or made sore by rubbing – what we also call "chafed." A bearing race is galled if the bearing nut it too loose and the ball bearings make the race pitted. Applied to one's mood, "galled" means "irritated, annoyed, or vexed" over something.

4. But what if your whole rear end was galled – OUCH! A galled butt would generate ultimate vexation toward the person doing the galling. This is worse yet than grating on nerves, setting the teeth on edge,

getting under the skin, going against the grain, or rubbing the wrong way!

5. Finally, to see Father utter this phrase with all the affective disdain evidenced by his clenched teeth and guttural voice tones is to confirm that this is no mild ire indeed.

Get A Kick

A "kick" could be anything that gives one a thrill or excitement. Drugs, sex, violence, and hard rock music are kicks for some; a good book, food, dress, sleep are kicks for others. Dad might refer to himself as getting a kick from almost any pleasureable activity. Usually, it is a kick "out of," and usually out of an event in the recent past. Thus, "we got a kick out of your letter this week." [NWD]

Irk

Not a colloquial or slang word, but quite standard. It's been around since its Middle English ancestor *irken*, and today means to annoy, disgust, irritate, etc. [NWD]. We place it in our progression of anger verbs as stronger than "peeve" (q.v.), if for no other reason than the way it sounds when pronounced!

On A Low Limb

This prepositional phrase means feeling down or depressed, often due to illness. It means the opposite of "chipper" (q.v.).

Out Of This World

An adjective phrase, and slang, for "wonderfully good or satisfying; terrific; super" [DAI]. We think the most usual instance in which we've heard this phrase may be over the dinner table, where Dad pronounces a dish of Mom's "out of this world" to keep from overusing the word "fittin'"! But a trip to the Bahamas, a good TV show, or a special evening on the town may all be so far out that they are "out of this world."

Peeved

"Irritated; annoyed" [NWD]. American coinage from at least 1926, it became "peeved off" with the latter term enjoying fairly wide use c. 1936–WWII. This was a euphemism for "peed-off," though it is the older of the

two terms. As our parents used it, “peeved” expressed a very mild irritation or annoyance.

Perk Up

“To get or give back pep, vigor, health, or spirit; become or make more lively, liven up [DAS]. “Mama was feeling on a low limb but has perked up here lately.”

Poop Out
Pooped

We are surprised that once again what appears to be a common (and we thought recent) word has a rich history which traces back to the Middle English *puopen*, “to make an abrupt blow, sound, gulp.” It is of echoic origin, therefore. It is slang for “to cause to become exhausted, out of breath, etc.; tire.” It usually occurs in the passive voice. Thus, “Whew! I’m really pooped out after finishing that cleanup job.”

Sickening

Adjective for “disgusting or revolting” [NWD]. The degree of disgust or revolt can be communicated by how much the mouth sneers and how long the initial “s” sound is drawn between the teeth. Try it!

Split My Sides

[NWD] has an entry for the adjective “side-splitting:” “Very hearty – said of laughter; causing hearty laughter (i.e. a side-splitting comedy).” No one has ever been observed actually to split his or her sides while laughing, although Aunt Charlie has come close in any number of thigh-slapping convulsions at family reunions over the years. For this reason, the adverb “nearly” is inserted before the phrase, to show that no splits actually occurred in the person’s sides. Hence, “I nearly split my sidesi when Mother saw the smoke filtering through the mail slot” (cf. Parkfairfax, Alexandria, Virginia, c. 1954, and Dad’s all-time practical joke on Mom that nearly broke up their marriage).

Steamed

Colloquial. “To seethe with anger, vexation, etc.; fume.” “I was really steamed by the whole matter.”

Tickle
Be Tickled (To Death or Pink)

The verb “tickle” often is used in the passive voice with a slang intensive to signify extreme pleasure, gratification, or delight [NWD].

Tucker

This past participial form of the verb “to tuck” is a colloquial reference meaning “to tire out; weary.” It does not correspond to any current meanings of the infinite “to tuck.” [NWD] suggests it derives from a now obsolete meaning, “to punish, rebuke,” so that if one is feeling “tuckered,” the weariness and fatigue is not unlike the feeling of being punished.

Under The Weather

An American colloquialism for “not feeling well; somewhat sick; ailing” [NWD]. It once meant “somewhat drunk,” also. The phrase derives at least from 1850. [PWO]

Dad’s use of the term is only in reference to illness, and is usually said of another person. (He is not wont to call attention to his own infirmities, though he is the first to acknowledge another’s with genuine concern.) Thus “Try to hold it down a little this evening, boys; your Mother’s feeling under the weather.”

Up To Par

In good or normal health or physical condition [DAI]. The word “back” frequently precedes this phrase.

Worn To A Nub
Worn To A Frazzle

A nub is a knob or lump, a small piece, and is a variation of the old *knub*, which latter became *knob*. [NWD] When Father asked in the 3/25/84 letter whether Joel gets “a hint that we are worn to a nub,” the DWBC was embroiled in the frenetic activity surrounding their pledging money toward their new building fund, and our parents were in the center of that activity.

The image conveyed by this graphic participle phrase is one in which activity has worn one down and drained off one’s energy reserve, so that the person is all but about to collapse in a heap. However, fatigue in the service

of one's church, as also in relation to one's work, is accorded the highest ethical status by our Father (cf. Chapter 9).

Chapter 9

Pipsqueaks And The Protestant Ethic: References To Intelligence, Work, and Duty

Each man's work will become manifest,
For the day will disclose it.

1 Cor. 3:13 (RSV)

The genesis of this project lay in our intrigue with Dad's slang references to incompetence, irresponsibility, sloth, and outright stupidity. Many of our favorite entries in this volume have to do with his devaluation of those who do not perform their prescribed duty, or in the case of automotive mechanics, do not provide the promised service for which we pay them our money earned by an honest day's work.

At the opposite end of this moral spectrum, we were taught that fidelity to one's duty in work and in life, realized by the sweat of one's brow, is indeed next to godliness itself. The closing entry for Chapter 8 was "worn to a nub." There we observed that "fatigue in the service of one's church is also in relation to one's work, is accorded the highest ethical status by our Father."

Finally, the theological presuppositions need to be teased out here. Our Father stands deeply rooted in the Protestant evangelical tradition. As such,

there is fundamental emphasis on faith as the means of one's justification. The faith-stance is simply and profoundly the belief that there is a trustworthiness to the ground of life. But, as Calvin insisted, if that faith-stance does not also issue forth in good works, and good work, there is reason to question the veracity of the faith to begin with. In the latter instance, exercise caution: you may be dealing with a jughead, a crackpot, or even a pipsqueak.

There follows close to 50 terms that serve as vehicles for this world view we have described.

Amaze

Here is a verb in everyone's vocabulary, meaning "to fill with great surprise or sudden wonder; astonish" [NWD]. But on Dad's lips, it can take on a special meaning over and above the everyday sense. Dad can say it with a certain tone of voice that implies not only being astonished but also quite a bit peeved at the subject as well.

For example, 95-98% of the DWBC voted in favor of building program, but "it amazes me that less than 5phase of it) (cf. letter of 3/25/84). Amazing, indeed, but also downright aggravating . . . and not faithful to one's commitment.

Asinine

By no means colloquial or regional (cf. Latin *asininus*, "ass"), this nevertheless is a term of disgust we associate very fondly with Dad. It is the simple adjective for "of or like an ass, esp. having qualities regarded as characteristic or asses; hence, stupid, silly, obstinate, etc." [NWD].

Baloney

Slang. It means "foolish or exaggerated talk or behavior; nonsense" [NWD], while the interjective use means "nonsense!" and is an exclamation of skepticism.

This is one of the early phrases we learned to say, along with its cognate phrase "that's a bunch of baloney!" without fearing that lightning would strike us. Anything stronger raised that fear.

For both of us, we grew up thinking that "baloney" was the correct spelling for the sausage meat which, when combined with American cheese,

lettuce, and mayo, and placed between two slices of white bread, became our standard lunch-box staple for years.

Beats Me
Beyond Me

"I can't figure out how to put this frazzling (q.v.) thing together . . . Beats me! (The directions were probably written by a pipsqueak (q.v.), that's why, Dad.) He might also say they are "beyond me," although it's not clear how an entity can be both beyond one and beat one at the same time. It is also noteworthy that something can only beat or be beyond the first person. That is, "it's beyond me how this check-out clerk can be so slow," but it can't be "beyond you" or "beyond him."

Beautiful

A sarcasm meaning its opposite, this term can be used interchangeably with "that's just great!" to denote frustration or disapproval. A wrench holding a nut slips off under load: "Beautiful!" A card in the mail notifies that an urgently needed item is out of stock: "Beautiful!" A 3rd-and-3 Bartkowski pass sails precisely through Alfred Jenkins' arms: "Beautiful!"

Bump On A Log

All logs have bumps in the natural state, before they go through the early stages of the milling process. And if everything in life has some purpose, it is difficult to imagine what purpose these bumps might serve. We can only conclude that we are better off for having bumps on logs in that they have given us a wonderful metaphor for describing someone in the inactive state, someone from whom one wishes for initiative but gets only silence or laziness, or both. Thus, "I can't figure out why they pay him just to sit there like a bump on a log." None of our wordsmiths list this one, but it's a favorite of Dad's.

Charger

[NWD] states the obvious: "a person or thing that charges." (It adds that a charger may also be "a horse ridden in battle or on parade"). But the thing or person that charges is what we're after here, and the term as Dad has used it over the years is closely aligned with someone who has a lot of "pep" (q.v.) or who is a "real live wire" (q.v.), an energetic person.

We have a good example from Dad's correspondence of the past year: his 4/22/84 letter describes [a certain Baptist evangelist] as "a charger – full speed ahead with a lot of pressure." This particular charger was not held in the fondest esteem by our Father, since apparently his messages were long, drawn-out redundancies (cf. "harp," 31). Dad comments that "if you've heard him once, you hear the same next time. . . . I heard him seven times. . . ."

More often, though, a "charger" is someone admired and held up as a model to be emulated, the contrary model to the "bump on a log" as mentioned in the prior entry.

Cheapskate

Synonymous with tightwad, this is a term for a person unwilling to give or spend money (i.e. a miserly person). While we grew up with a decidedly positive connotation placed on frugality and planned savings, it is the case here as well as in many areas of life that too much of a good thing can be bad. Hence the pejorative value attached to the present term comes through

Chew Him A New Rear End

Chew is used here as in the phrase "to chew someone out." The rear end is a general area of unpleasantness in expressions like "pain in the rear end" and "kick in the rear end." In order to chew someone a new rear end, one must be more than peeved, and more than irked. It requires a higher level of anger and frustration. One must rant and rave, almost without control.

After taking one of the Buicks to Grady Buick's service shop several times to get the same electrical problem in the dashboard fixed, and after discovering that it was still not fixed, we recall our Father calling the service manager and really chewing him a new rear end!

Contraption

This noun may have originated as a fusion of the word "contrive" and some word ending in -ption (like "deception"). It means a contrivance, or a makeshift gadget. It can be used humorously, but our Father usually uses it in connection with displeasure or disgust with a mechanical object.

Crackpot

An eccentric or mentally unbalanced person with ideas that don't make sense to most other people [NWD, DAI]. It has colloquia usage. Dad could also use the term to refer in an exaggerated way to someone with whom he has had a less than satisfactory transaction, or for whom he lacks admiration. E.g. "a crackpot store clerk" or a "crackpot lawyer." See also "screwball," "oddball," in this chapter.

Crap

A vulgar American slang term that derives in original usage as a synonym for fecal material. As we most often recall the term, it means "nonsense, falseness, insincerity" or "something useless, inferior, worthless, etc.; trash, junk" [NWD]. Thus "I think that salesman fed us a bunch of crap if you want my opinion on the matter." Or, if you were snowed by the salesman and actually purchased his product, you might get home only to find "that salesman sold us a bunch of crap."

Doodle-E-Squat

This term originally meant "money" and sprang up around carnival communities [DAS]. The phrase also appears often in Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*. Our memory of its use around home is that it was said fast, in three rather than four syllables, as in "doddly-squat," and enjoyed a broader application than monetary reference alone. While it is true if one is broke he might not have doodle-e-squat, it is also the case than an ignorant person might not care doodle-e-squat (or give a damn, either), and the errant Falcons of 1984 haven't *done* doodle-e-squat.

Eager Beaver

Widely used since c. 1940, the term was mostly used by Dad to refer to a desirable quality of initiative and industry in a person. But [DAS] makes it almost a derisive reference: "One who seems overly diligent to his coworkers or acquaintances; an extremely diligent, ambitious person; esp. one who tries to impress his superiors by his diligence and eagerness to serve." That is, a "brown-nose." [NWD] straddles the fence with "a person with much, or too much, industry, initiative, or enthusiasm" (slang). We think the positive connotation is in line with Dad's use of the term.

Fart Around

Except for [NWD] our lexicographers are silent on this one. No words are emitted, as it were, on this favorite locution of our Father by our slang dictionaries. A "fart" is mentioned as slang in [NWD] for a "person, esp. an old one, regarded as a food, nuisance, etc.," although when Katherine Hepburn calls Henry Fonda an "old fart" in *On Golden Pond* she means it affectionately (for she was fonda Henry, you see). Ceree sometimes calls Joel a "fart" and hopefully means it with equal affection, only without the gerontological prefix, "old," we trust.

Sniffing out (whew!) the etymology of this term confirms to our surprise that is has been passed (again, excuse us, please) as a verb through the Middle English *ferten* from the Old English *feorten*, the Old High German *ferzan*, and the Indo-European root *perd-*. The latter derives at last from the Greek *perdonai*, though it is not found as a noun until Middle English. But in any event, it is clear that people have been farting around a long time before our Father pointed it out!

As he uses the term, of course, the gaseous emission is not what he's talking about. Someone who farts around is engaging in aimless activity that lacks goal direction, or avoiding systematic completion of a task. Note that there is some movement here. Someone farting around on something is not completely inert, as we found the "bump on a log" (q.v.) to be. Timely illustrations might be that Joe has farted around all Fall without raking his leaves; Dick farted around all Summer before the house got painted.

Fired Up

An archaic meaning of this verb phrase is "drunk," from c. 1850. It can also mean "angry" but this is not Dad's meaning of it. The term rather means a person who is full of directed energy and ready to meet a designated challenge. Thus "we heard so-and-so's speech and he was really fired up." This comes from the WWII Air Force use of firing up an engine [DAS]. Formerly, in the days of cigarette consumption in our family, a person in the act of smoking would be "fired up," and a match or a cigarette lighter would be (what else?) "fire."

Fogy

Derivation is uncertain; the term means "a person who is old-fashioned or highly conservative in ideas or actions" [DAS], as in "he's just an old fogy – don't pay any attention to what he says." Note pejorative connotation as

contrasted with the more affectionate "fart," and the even more affectionate "codger" (q.v.) ch. XI). In Scotch this was an old slang word for an invalid soldier, or a person becoming stupid with age [PWO].

For The Birds

What's for the birds? A feeder full of millet and sunflower seed? A stone birdbath in the backyard? Ripened berries on shrubbery or trees? No. In the slang, anything ridiculous, foolish, worthless, or useless is for the birds [NWD]. The birds here may be equated with "crazy people," as [DAS] suggests. The term is in use at least since 1952.

Go-Getter

Colloquial; it means an enterprising and aggressive person who usually gets what he wants [NWD]. One of the most flattering things that can be said of a person in commenting on his directed energy. This is related to a "live wire" (q.v.), although the latter could have the energy without the enterprise.

Guts

"Grit" was used form c. 1800–1935 to signify daring, courage, perseverance, or vigor. Now somewhat archaic, it has been replaced by the more gritty "guts." This is an admirable quality and is said with high respect: "It really takes some guts to stand in on that plate after he just got dusted off." The word can also be applied derisively as in, "The manager has some guts to keep starting his second baseman when he's been 2-for-33 recently."

The term is reported by Holt to have once been so vulgar that the equivalent term, "intestinal fortitude" coined in 1915 by John Wilee, Ohio State's head football coach who "used it as a protest against the lurid language of gridiron and locker room," of which "guts" was a part [PWO].

Have A Lot On The Ball
Be On The Ball

We were again astonished to discover this term has evolved into American and British slang in a parallel fashion. On our side of the Atlantic it surely derives from the skillful pitcher whose fastball, curve, and slider "dance" to vigorous spin he applies. But in England, Holt notes, the term derives in collegiate slang from "the close and clever following of the ball in soccer." That is, "he's really on the ball."

Know One's Butt-End From Third Base

Someone is clearly in bad shape if he doesn't know his butt-end from third base. The phrase, always used in the negative sense, is Dad's equivalent for "he doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground." When Dick recently was taking the narcotic Percodan to get through the pain of some wisdom tooth extractions, we would not be surprised if Dad said, "It sounds like Dick doesn't know his butt-end from third base, Evelyn."

More often, however, the use of the term is to indicate ignorance or stupidity.

Irons In The Fire

If one undertakes several "projects" (q.v.) at once, he may end up in the state of having too many irons in the fire. The adjective modifier " too many" almost always occurs, along with "iron" being in the plural. That is, it would be unusual to hear someone say, "I'd like to go out tonight, but I've got an iron in the fire."

Holt says the phrase derives from the heating of laundry irons and the danger either of damaging one by leaving it in too long, or of finding that those around the edges are not so hot. The latter seems to fit in better with the metaphorical sense intended by the phrase.

The phrase is old, appearing as a Scotch proverb in the 17th century [PWO].

Jughead

This is slang for a foolish or stupid person [NWD]. [DAS] adds a prior meaning of "a mule, esp. an Army mule," citing farm and Army use. From this use, the term picks up its particular reference to mule-like qualities, i.e. stupidity.

Knucklehead

More common in the Marine Corps and the Navy originally, this term makes it into [NWD] as colloquial for "a stupid person or fool." It's been around since WWII [DAS].

Live Wire

One of our favorite phrases in this volume, we've not heard this one anywhere else in spoken English, nor found it listed by any of our word-smith consultants. This is the "hustler" (q.v.), off the athletic field and in real life – the man of action, a dynamo, ball of fire, the eager beaver who is a take charge kind of guy. An energetic 3-year-old, a Texas evangelist, a spirited businessman, may each be called a live wire by Dad, and in all likelihood would be called a "real" live wire.

Loose As A Goose

Some looseness is desirable. One friend said to Joe recently, "I like him a lot better since he's become loser." We all know that "tight" kind of person who feels constrained and inhibited, as though if he were accidentally to smile his face might crack. That's the meaning Joe's friend had.

But some looseness is undesirable. If unrestrained celebration became what [NWD] calls "sexually immoral, lewd," that's bad. And if you get the same feeling of someone you get about a loose wheel or a loose tooth – that he is "not firmly fastened down" – he may be "loose as a goose." This phrase has no derivation whatsoever other than its convenience of rhyme. It usually refers in our understanding to one who is "eccentric, nutty," who "has a screw loose somewhere" [NWD, DAS].

Malarkey

In use since c. 1935, this word describes insincere, meaningless, or deliberately misleading talk; also, nonsense [NWD, DAS]. It is strictly American slang with one early 1945 quote as follows: "Hollywood is in the business of manufacturing malarkey as well as movies."

We grew up hearing about two items that might as well have been vegetables, for they always came in bunches – baloney or malarkey. Thus, "you believe what you want, but personally I think it's a bunch of malarkey." Dad would often utter this word with a tone of disgust.

[NWD] cites a possible derivation from an Irish surname of the same or similar spelling.

Man In The Moon

Whoever this man is, we believe him to be borderline retarded in intelligence, because stupid people were always being compared to him, and we

suppose, always stupid males. (E.g. "he went on and on with this highfalutin (q.v.) garbage, but I think he knows about as much as the Man in the Moon." The "about as much" is almost obligatory when Dad uses this phrase. Again, as with many of the phrases in this chapter, there is the scent of derision in the air.

Ned In The First Reader

This was a very early phrase on our list (ML #5). The only source that came close to having it was [DAS], which offers that "First Reader" is railroad slang for a conductor's trainbook.

Mother saved us from total ignorance of its derivation. We had originally recorded it as "Ned and the first reader." She pointed out the error when I showed her the list on March 9 while in Mobile. She explained that "Ned" was a child character in the first grade reader in use when Mom and Dad were in elementary school, like the "Dick and Jane" characters of our own school days.

Thus for Father to say "he's got about as much to say as Need in the First Reader," means that someone's articulation consists of little more than "see Spot run." "I am tired." "I will eat now." "The tree is green and pretty."

This entry is done.

Nerves Of Steel

Why this phrase is left out of our sources is beyond us (q.v.). This is a phrase probably used of men most of the time, courage being a stereotypically male attribute. Any moment calling for composure in the face potential adversity may call for nerves of steel.

Nincompoop

Your guess is as good as ours, on derivation. Nobody even lists it except Holt who says scholars can only surmise the origin. The first man who uttered this word in anger or disgust at another probably would have said it sounded like a good idea at the time, as the man said to the judge in defense of his inebriated dive through a plat glass window.

Nevertheless, Holt ventures that the form *ninny* means a simpleton (perhaps derived itself from "innocent"). Also somewhat plausible is some earlier form that may have sounded like "non-com," suggesting a derivation from the lowly non-commissioned officer [PWO].

Dad uses the term to refer both to persons for whom he feels genuine disgust, but also affectionately to those whom he loves. For example, as an imitation of its use, I recently called Richard and said, "Hello, Ricardo, you 'ol Nincompoop?"

Oddball

American slang noun for "an eccentric, queer, or old person; a screwball; an intensely introverted person; a creep; a nonconformist."

As an adjective: "eccentric; disorganized; prone to blunder; unreliable" (common since c. 1945) [DAS].

Pep

This noun is derived from the name of the condiment, "pepper." It means "energy, vigor, liveliness, spirit." Since c. 1915, with wide slang use during the mid 1920's. Common enough since c. 1930 to be considered colloquial. The American emphasis on youth, action, and mobility makes "pep" a major virtue; thus many products are advertised as supplying it. A "live wire" (q.v.) has it by the bushel.

This word recently was used as a verb to describe a certain Baptist preacher's effect on a group of people. The preacher was H. Leo Eddleman. The site was Pass Christian, Mississippi. The date, mid November, 1984: "Leo was there to preach to them – pep them up – a couple of times" (cf. letter, 11/21/84). Thus he who has pep can disseminate pep. Right on.

Pipsqueak

This term was ML #1, and is one of our all-time favorite words in Dad's slang vocabulary. In [DAI], it is given a neutral, descriptive sense: "If the club is really democratic, then every little pipsqueak has a right to say what he thinks." But we shall see that Dad gives a very negative connotation to the word.

The prefix "pip-" is interesting and in wide use in other ways, none of which seem to contribute to the meaning of "pipsqueak." Did you know that any small seed, like that of an apple. orange, or pear, is a pip? Or did you know that the starlike shoulder insignia worn by certain British army officers is called a pip? Do you know those diamond-shaped divisions of the skin of a pineapple? Yep – pips again. And how about the individual figures

or spots on playing cards, dominoes, or dice? More pips (cf. the phrase "pip value" of a card).

But in "pipsqueak" we are rather concerned with a different meaning. "To pip" is to peep or chirp, as a young bird does; and as a transitive verb "to pip" is to break through a shell, as with a hatching bird. Now, combine the prefix "pip" with the noun "squeak" (a thin, sharp, high-pitched sound), and you've added insult to injury indeed.

How small or insignificant a person a pipsqueak must be! Here is the quintessentially negligible, the person whose noteworthiness could be rolled into a lump and dropped into a gnat's navel, with room left over for the Declaration of Independence, *including* the signatures.

Our Father gives it this sense of smallness, but adds more. To call a person a "pipsqueak" by Dad is to pronounce him summarily incapable of carrying out his designated service or duty. A Sears mechanic installs a set of new tires with the lug nuts of the wheel on backward (causing a severe shimmy at 40 mph): that's a pipsqueak mechanic. A mail-order company sends you the right order but the wrong size: a pipsqueak filled the order. A service station attendant cleans your windshield with an oily, greasy rag. Not until you are heading down the Interstate and it begins to rain do you discover your windshield was cleaned . . . by a pipsqueak!

Pissant

The term eludes all our sources, but is a common term of disgust or dissatisfaction for someone.

Poor

In the sense of "worthy of pity" or "unfortunate." In a September phone call, Father referred to the 1984 Atlanta Braves as "poor." But simple print doesn't capture his voice inflection, with the first word drawn out in a higher tone of much sympathy, as in "Poooooor Braves." The tone makes this quite a sarcastic term.

Put His Heart In It

Putting parts of the body hither and thither is a popular colloquial use of the English language. If you think about it, a person can put his back to a task, put his finger on a thought, put his best foot forward, put his foot down, put his foot in his mouth, put his hand to a project, put his hand

to the plow, put his head in the sand, put his shoulder to the wheel (q.v.), put his nose to the grindstone (q.v.) put his head next to someone else's (i.e. put their heads together), and even put himself in someone else's place. [DAI]. The important thing to remember is not to do too many of these things at one time or you could put yourself in the hospital.

Dad's phrase we recall is not in any of our wordsmith's works. If a man "puts his heart into" something, he is doing that task to his utmost, both in effort and in will. He's sincerely engaged in something he's committed to, and even if he fails, the quality of the effort is seen as a reward in itself.

Screw

As a transitive verb this word can mean various kinds of activity, some of which "lie beyond the scope of our present inquiry." (That's a writer's device for getting out of dealing with a topic you don't have time to deal with. In our case, it's a topic which would violate the stringent standards of decency which attend this volume. After all, this lexicon is rated "GP" and is open to the general public without regard to age.)

When our Father uses this verb, he means "to take advantage of, to treat unfairly; to cheat, trick or swindle." It usually occurs in the passive voice; i.e. we be the screw-ee. Thus in the 2/5/84 phone conversation in which Joe related the news of his car wreck earlier that same evening, the subject turned to automobile insurance. Father told of his displeasure with his former company by pronouncing that "we dropped *[company name deleted]* when they tried to screw us."

Screwball

Slang since c. 1935 for "a person who seems erratic, irrational, unconventional, or unbalanced." As an adjective it can mean "peculiar, irrational" [NWD]. After its introduction, [DAS] notes, the term probably had an intermediate sports usage wherein a screwball was "an eccentric baseball player," after the pitch of the same name (what Ernie Johnson likes to call a "scroogie").

The term is considered more tolerance than "nut" or "crackpot" (q.v.).

Spry

An adjective that applies esp. to an elderly person for whom the passage of years might otherwise have drained his or her energy: "full of life; active,

nimble, brisk, etc." [NWD]. Thus, "He's real spry even though he's no spring chicken" (q.v.).

Squat To Pee

There is humorous saying that "real men don't eat quiche." Whether this is valid or not, in the eyes of our Father, real men don't squat to pee. Squatting to pee is assuming the female position for that bodily function, you see. Real men stand up, take aim, and cut loose (q.v.). So to say "he squats to pee" would be similar to saying "he is a sissy," at the very mildest.

Squirt

A colloquial noun for a small or young person, esp. one who is impudent; a whippersnapper [NWD].

Note that while a "shaver" is a boy or lad, also, there is no pejorative connotation as would occur if the shaver happened also to be a squirt. It is thus defensible that all squirts are shavers who are not squirts. If so, the parents of the latter class are to be commended.

When The Spirit Moves Him (Or Her)

Sadly lacking in our sources, the term occurred quite early in our list (ML #20), and is one of Dad's favorite adverbial phrases. It means literally "when he decides on his own" and implies that the decision may not be open to influence by external sources.

The phrase historically is a by-product of the Protestant evangelical tradition, with its insistence on fideistic (faith-centered) access to the will of God. But theological influences notwithstanding, people waiting for the spirit to move them have been a source of considerable consternation for our Father over the years. Thus Dad uses the phrase in moments of moderate impatience or disgust, with the added implication that the person who is "waiting for the spirit" is actually procrastinating and ought to be more decisive, prompt, considerate, etc.

Thus a typical use might be: "Jo-el, I thought the delivery was due early this afternoon." "Evelyn, it was, but I guess he's gonna wait for the spirit to move him."

Chapter 10

When The Shoutin's Over: Interjections, Interjectional Compounds

A spirit of enthusiasm has always characterized our Father, and our entire family. Actually, the phrase "a spirit of enthusiasm" is etymologically redundant, since "enthusiasm" derives from the Greek *enthusiasmos*, from *en* + *theos*, the term thus meaning "to have god in one."

The following brief list of 21 terms catches a part of that spirit. Most of these terms are not isolated to our Father's vocabulary; in fact some of them may be used more often by Mother. To be sure, they are in large part American in the broadest sense. But they nevertheless remind us of Dad's energy and spirit in reacting to the moments of our living.

Bless My Soul
Bless My Stars

These first two terms may in fact be Mother's more than Dad's. They are exclamations of delight, particularly in the face of unexpected surprise, as when desired by unannounced company is greeted at the door.

Crying Out Loud

Often with the preposition "for" preceding it. The phrase "for crying out loud!" is a euphemistic exclamation on the order of "son of a biscuit-eater" (which Holt mentions, though it's new to us). In the latter phrase people

think you are going to say, "son of a bitch." The phrase "for crying out loud" is euphemistic for "for Christ's sake." Hence we each quickly picked it up as a "safe" term ot use when expressing surprise, and often surprise at another's stupidity. Holt believes the term was an American coinage of the 1920's. [PWO]

For Pete's Sake
For The Love of Pete
For Heaven's Sake

More expressions, without the euphemistic factor, signifying surprise or astonishment, often at another's stupidity.

Goodness Gracious

"Goodness!" is an interjection with the "gracious" thrown in for alliterative embellishment. The first word is a euphemism for God. [NWD] This is an exclamation of surprise or wonder. Contrast another euphemism for God, "Good night!" which can express similar surprise, but can also denote disgust or anger [DAS].

I Just Declare

This can be preceded by "well," and is used to express surprise or astonishment.

I Swanee
I'll Swanee
I'll Just Swanee

As far as we know, you don't do anything if you "swanee." You're simply offering an expression of mild astonishment or surprise. The phrase can mean anything from "You don't say?" to an outright "Damn!" depending on the emphasis with the voice amplitude and inflection.

The lexicographers are silent here. Joe has found no one who has heard of it, suggesting regional isolation of the term to the Deep South. It probably is euphemistic for "I swear," and "swanee" is probably the Suwannee River, the 250 mile long river winding from South Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp across North Florida to the Gulf of Mexico. This is the river immortalized in Stephen Foster's "Way Down Upon the Suwannee River," written in the 1850's. Pronounced "swanee" in the Deep South, the name of this river

became well known in the latter half of the 19th century, and probably found its way into this phrase.

Have Mercy

As an interjection, "mercy" is a mild exclamation of surprise, annoyance, etc. [NWD]. "Lord have mercy!" increases the force of the exclamation.

Holy Cow
Holy Mackerel
Holy Moses

Holy SmokeThese are interjectional compounds that express emphasis, astonishment, consternation, relief, pleasure – they cover a multitude of sins! We've never heard the rendering of "holy cats!" offered by [DAI] and [DAS]. And these two works, assuming they have heard of the four phrases we list, don't include them, meaning they don't consider them used widely enough. We heard "holy cow!" and "holy smoke!" the most. "Holy cow!" and "holy smoke!" are euphemistic forms of "holy Christ!" according to [DAS].

How 'Bout Them Onions?

Dad uses this exclamation as a colorful variation of "how about that." The origin eludes us, and the phrase is absent from our sources

Merry Christmas

This phrase is capable of being said in any month of the year. It usually does not occur upon the actual presentation of a gift except, of course, around December 25th. It can occur any other time whenever Father is giving anybody anything. Can't locate that magazine you were perusing earlier, Dick? Dad finds it and flips it onto your lap with a "Merry Christmas!" Haven't been able to locate a favorite brand of cocktail sauce, Mom? Dad buys it while browsing one day and hands it to you when he comes in the house: "Merry Christmas!"

My Lands O' Goshen

Another exclamation, not found in our sources.

My Stars

Another exclamation, not found in our sources.

Sakes Alive

[NWD] does list this one as a mild exclamation of astonishment, surprise, or annoyance.

You Don't Mean To Tell Me

This is probably Mother's term more than Father's and means "You don't say?"

Wow

As a transitive verb, this word can mean "to elicit enthusiastic approval, esp. from an audience" [DAS], as in "He really wow'd 'em at the performance last night." Dad's use of the term, as a solitary interjection – "Wow!" – can occur over good food, or any pleasing activity or sight. It has been in use since the 1920's [DAS].

Chapter 11

A Little of This ‘n’ That: Miscellaneous Words and Phrases

Despite racking our noggins, we found that a whole flock of terms (68 in all) don’t fit readily into any of the previous ten chapters of this project. So rather than try to invent categories just for Buncombe, we decided to put the whole wad into this miscellaneous chapter. Otherwise we would be working on this slew of words until the cows come home, or even until the Winter of the deep snow (which in Mobile could be forever).

Lastly, if you’ve been all ears, then you already know what 11 of the things are, because they appear in this introduction. Now, here’s the poop on the last 68. Ten-four?

All Ears

This describes the attitude of undivided attention one might give to what another person is saying. “Go ahead – I’m all ears,” informs the party that you will hang on his every word as he speaks

Avalanche

This standard word for a mass of rocks, snow or earth that suddenly and swiftly tumbles down a mountainside can also be applied to anything that comes suddenly in overwhelming number [NWD]. This is not true slang

or even colloquial speech, but Dad may use it as an alternative to "flock," "slow," or "wad" (q.v. all).

Beat The Band

[DAS] says this adverbial phrase has been used since c. 1900 to signify doing anything "excessively, intently, or remarkably." [DAI] specifies the meaning to 2 uses: "at great speed; with much noise or commotion." According to [PWO] the precise derivation has to drown out a brass band." Our association with this term in the broader sense, as in "he's been working on that project to beat the band."

Beaucoup

This term is pronounced "boo-koo," and usually occurs in the plural, "beaucoups." Thus, we've got beaucoups of groceries to put away over the holidays." It now has gained admittance to [NWD] as an anglicized word for "very much or very many." Mother tells us she can remember this term being used by R.A. and Mama Lou during her younger years

Bit

We learned at an early age that 25 cents is "two bits" and 50 cents is "four bits." Joe even recalls a haircut on Holcombe Avenue costing "six bits," around 1958.

A bit originally referred in British slang to any small coin (as a "threepenny bit") but came in the South and West of the United States to refer to the Mexican *real*, which was valued at 1/8 Peso (hence, 12-1/2 cents). A short-bit was 10 cents, a long-bit 15 cents, though neither of us recall Dad using the latter two senses [PWO].

Brogans

This is the plural of brogan (no kidding), which means brogue, i.e. a man's heavy oxford shoe. Our Father uses "brogans" more generally, though, to refer to most any leather-type pair of shoes

bug

The proverbial bug who was snug in a rug has piled (excuse the pun) out and assumed many other guises. Sometimes law enforcement personnel "bug" a room to record conversation secretly, esp. in the TV episodes of same. An

enthusiast or devotee of a hobby is a "bug," as Joe was an amateur radio bug for many years. If one gawks in amazement, he's likely "bugeyed." But before out get bugged by our babble, we'd better bug off with all this and get to the meanings we associate with home. They are two-fold:

1. When Mother has a cold or virus, Dad is most likely to report she has a "bug."
2. And the Volkswagen people, in commissioning their post-war sub-compact a "Beetle," insured that any compact car could be labeled as "bug" henceforth.

Thus Father's telephone questions to Joe in early February included, "How's the bug running?" That's all . . . we'll but out now.

Calamity

This noun refers to "deep trouble or misery; any extreme misfortune bringing great loss and sorrow; a disaster" [NWD]. It is standard English, but a favorite word of Dad's.

Chicken

When Dad related (post card, 6/26/84) that "Dick dumped us off (q.v.) at the airport while the chickens were beginning to stir Sunday," we knew it was early! Getting up with the chickens has never been on our lists of favorite things to do. Left to our respective body clocks, we've always been a couple of hours behind the rest of the world. Joe still marvels at how, in his younger days, he was dressed, sitting upright, and even cogitating somewhat, for a 7:00 A.M. Algebra class his freshman year at Auburn.

Codger

This term is colloquial for "a queer, eccentric, esp. elderly fellow" [NWD]. This is probably a variation of "cadger." To cadge, by the way, is to "beg or get by begging; to sponge."

We think Dad usually would prefix this term with the modifier "old," as in "he's an old codger who's been around as long as I can remember." Used this way, the term drops the derogatory implication and picks up a humorous or even affectionate meaning: "Why, you old codger, you!" (Cf. [PWO].)

Clip

A clip in the sense we hear Dad use it is “a rapid pace.” We believe he always prefixes the modifiers “pretty good” when using it. This is given standard usage in [NWD].

Commission (In or Out Of)

To be in commission is to be “in use; in fit condition for use” [NWD]. [DAI] helps us understand that these terms probably derive from the naval use meaning “to put into active service,” as when a ship is commissioned, or has been in commission for several years.

Commotion

Though not slang or colloquial, the word still makes our list because it is one we’ve heard so frequently at home. Any noisy rushing about or stirring around, particularly by a group, can be labeled a commotion [DAI]. Dad might likely use it as hyberbole. E.g. were he lying down in the bedroom and we were laughing in the den, he might emerge sleepy-eyed with the querie, “What’s all the commotion about?”

Conniption Fit

An American colloquialism meaning “a fit or anger, hysteria, etc.; a tantrum.” Holt surprises us by tracing it all the way back to 1833, but finds no derivation outside American sources.

Coon’s Age
Coon

“A coon’s age” is colloquial for “an indefinitely long time” [NWD] (cf. also “until the cows come home” and “winter of the deep snow,” this chapter). The coon in question here is a clipped form of “raccoon.” [DAI] lists also a “dog’s age” as a synonym, but we don’t recall ever hearing it. “Month of Sundays” is another synonym we are familiar with. None of the literature comments, however, on how the coon became the animal of choice here. We don’t believe it has anything to do with how long a coon lives.

Early in the project Joe wasn’t certain if the coon referred to may have been the derogatory reference to blacks. This term traces at least to 1887, according to [DAS]. It, too, is a clipped form of raccoon, “which Southern Negroes were supposed to enjoy hunting and eating.”

Crud

This term is from the Middle English *crudden*, "to curdle." Crud, then, is curd, with the middle letters reversed. In its American slang rendering it has come to denote "any coagulated substance, caked deposit, dregs, filth, etc."

Hence in his 3/10/84 letter commenting on a recent clean-up project, Dad says "I cleaned about an inch of crud off the air conditioner fan blades." We think this meaning of crud was so entrenched in the family that we did not also use it in the other sense talked about in [NWD]. It can also mean "an imaginary disease or vaguely identified disorder or ailment." That more likely was called a "bug" in our house.

Dinero

This of course is money and is an anglicization of the Spanish word. [NWD] says its slang use in American English originated in the Southwest U.S., with its proximity to Mexico. That makes us wonder if Mom and Dad may have picked it up in the San Antonio-Houston days.

Dire Straits

"Terrible or dreadful difficulty or distress," we believe, but not located in any of our sources. A strait is a narrow passageway of water between two larger bodies, such as the Bering Strait, and [NWD] does record a meaning as difficulty or distress, but without any reference to the "dire" kind.

The phrase always occurs in the plural. If you get into a single stressful situation, you do not enter a dire strait . . . you're already in dire straits. You also never are in straits without their being dire, as in "Boy, the Falcons have gotten into straits this season." No, believe it: they're in the direst kind of straits.

Dry As A Bone
Dry As A Gourd

Really, really dry; I mean we're talking parched. Which is to say, like parchment – the dried skin of an animal used to write on. We're talking arid here, a high and dry, dusty, juiceless, sapless desert. Like Saharan, man. The bone-dry, gourd-dry moments of life are the dehydrated, dessicated, evaporated, sunbaked moments, as a result of which one gets that scorched,

seared, withered and shriveled feeling. Do you catch our drift, Daddyo? Like it's total anhydrosity to the max!! [RIT, NWD]

Eyes Like Saucers

This means "wide-eyed." It's not listed by any of our sources. A person with eyes like saucers has just been amazed, startled, surprised, or frightened. This actually is part of the physiological response to danger in most animals. The sense of sight is critical in the "fight or flight" response to danger, and to widen one's eyes or fix them intently on the object of fear is simply to maximize their usefulness to the moment at hand.

Additionally, the stereotypical black person as cowardly and forever fearful of his world was portrayed in early Hollywood firms by the actor having "eyes like saucers." Stepin Fetchit spent a portion of his on-camera time with his eyes fixed in this mode.

Flare-up

A 2/26/84 letter to Atlanta netted us this phrase, when Dad related that Mother had another "flare-up of her bug." Probably because of its cognate status to "flame," the word is most often applied to the most common inflammatory process of the body, arthritis.

Flock

This term almost never refers to animals like "goats," birds, or sheep, living, feeding, or moving together" [NWD], if Dad has spoken it. He speaks rather of humankind: "Did you see that family? Boy, heidi, they had a flock of kids, didn't they?" It can also apply to inanimate objects: "I don't know how many presents are under that Christmas tree, but there's a whole flock of 'em."

Hell Or High Water

This phrase is usually preceded by "come," and means "no matter what happens; whatever may come" [DAI]. Typically, Dad might say, "We'll be there come hell or high water." Parishioners at Enon Baptist Church, 1965-1968, where Joe pastored during seminary days, used to promise they would be at church "if the Lord don't come and the creek don't rise." Only they were dead serious . . . on *both* counts! (Recall that the church lay nestled in Rush Creek Valley, and that to avoid the long way around a ridge, some

parishioners forded the creek in their cars. When the creek was really down, Joe crossed it in the Corvair.)

Highfalutin

This an altered form ([NWD] thinks) of "high-floating," with the insertion of the intrusive vowel "a" in ridicule of oratorical speech. It means "ridiculously pretentious or pompous." What a wonderful coinage! [DAS] traces it from c. 1850 but its true derivation is uncertain.

Hog Heaven

This phrase means a state of great contentment or pleasure. If something really sends you (q.v.), this might be the place you are sent.

In Tow

This term is given standard usage by [NWD], "in one's company or retinue" being close to Dad's meaning. Thus, "Mother went shopping with her two sons in tow." In this example, however, the towing sometimes took the form of dragging us by the ears!

In′-spectors

This is a term we've included only because of a special meaning it has to the sons of an FBI agent. Every year or so, Dad would come home and announce solemnly to Mother that "the In′-spectors are coming." Tension would grip their faces. What that statement meant was that a small group of higher-ups from Washington would shortly drop in and go over the Mobile office with a fine-tooth comb, and Dad and his colleagues would spend from now to then getting ready for them.

Now Joe understands what Dad felt. Every two years the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAH) comes and spends a week at Parkwood. We do everything but spit-shine the patients getting prepared for them! The In′-spectors. Part of spending your life in a bureaucracy.

Jag

This noun means a binge or spree: "I've been on a beer jag" is an example of its use. However, as our Father uses the word, the spree can be any activity engaged in repeatedly or continuously. Thus, "I've been on a cleaning jag" would be an acceptable usage.

Jingle

A phone call, plain and simple. [DAS] quotes from a 1949 film, "Any Number Can Play": "We never hear from you, not even a jingle."

Jug

From c. 1815 this slang word referred to the local jail. As in "he spent the night in the jug." But recall the word used of a bottle of whiskey or bourbon, as in "he went to the jug for a shot." Maybe the man who spent the night in the jug went to the jug for one too many [DAS, NWD].

Just For Buncombe

You could have knocked us over with a feather when we found this phrase to have not only dictionary entries, but with a precise historical derivation as well.

Buncombe is "talk that is empty, insincere, or merely for effect" [NWD]. Felix Walker was a representative to the 16 Congress (1819-1821) from Buncombe County, North Carolina. Early after his arrival in the capitol, he made a long-winded and rattling speech before his colleagues, feeling it his duty to "make a speech for the people of Buncombe" [PWO]. Believe it!

In our Father's usage, the term is extended to apply also to any activity done for no particular reason or to no explicit end, often in answer to a question. Thus, we might hear this interaction. "Why do you want to do that, Dad?" "Oh, just for Buncombe."

Nip And Tuck

This phrase means to close, even, or critical as to leave the outcome in doubt [NWD]. The earliest form of this equivalent of "neck and neck" is the phrase "tip and tuck" (American, 1832).

Noggin

[NWD] says this is American, and is colloquial in usage. It is a synonym for the head. But its occurrences seem to be limited to times when the head is referred to as the seat of intelligence (or lack of it), and as an object for hitting and striking.

Thus one might be exhorted to "use your noggin for something other than a hat rack." The synonym "bean" and "noodle" may also be used

interchangeably in this sense. But the other use is perhaps more in line with Dad's meaning. We usually heard the word invoked following a head-banger of an accident. Thus, a use of the term c. 1954–1955 in our family might have been, "Boy, Joe really bumped his noggin when he walked into that tree" (cf. Parkfairfax, Alexandria, Virginia).

Okeydoke
Okeydokey

A slang variation of "OK." The first form came into use around 1930, the second around 1945, according to [DAS].

Operation
Operator

"Operation" is probably derived from the military frame of reference to a center where strategic maneuvers are monitored or supervised. Uncle Dick's workshop in his backyard in Jackson could be called "quite an operation" [NWD].

An "operator" in our slang sense is not someone who says, "Number, please," nor is it a person who works a machine. It is one who is "a clever persuasive person who generally manages to achieve his ends" [NWD]. They are often referred to as "slick." "He's a slick operator who's been dabbling in several businesses over the years."

Out Of Pocket

This phrase usually refers to a person who is not where they might normally be expected. For example, someone would be "out of pocket" until Thursday if they are going to be out of town until then. When Joe chatted with Mom and Dad 12/16/84 to discuss Christmas travel plans, Mom mentioned that Richard had left town for the weekend and hadn't tried to call before he left. But Dad reminded her, "Oh, we could have been out of pocket, Evelyn."

Out Of Whack

An American colloquial phrase for "out of proper condition," in use since at least 1899 [NWD, DAS].

Outfit

This term is ML #2, right after "pipsqueak." It refers to "a group of people associated in some undertaking or activity, as a military unit, business, ranch, etc." Fully American, and now standard usage.

This is one of the words Richard and I have used in jest over the years to ignite a flash of recognition in the fact of the other that we are imitating Dad's manner of speaking. In fact, this project was born out of Joe's birthday card for 1984 which notified him that his mail-ordered gift would be arriving soon, "if some pipsqueak at this outfit doesn't screw up the order." Immediately thereafter, Joe called Richard and the idea for this volume, and the research began.

Poop

"The pertinent facts; information." "Did you hear any poop yet on the Auburn game?"

The other meaning of "poop" in our household is "to emit flatulence." Once again, your enterprising etymologists are pleased to report that this word didn't just pop up yesterday. It has a rich history which traces to the Middle English *puopen*, "to make an abrupt sound, blow, gulp." It is thus of echoic origin [NWD].

Project

Among other meanings, this noun is in everyday American usage as "an organized undertaking, a special unit of work, research, etc., as in school, a laboratory, etc." [NWD]. With Dad, we heard this term applied to a wide selection of activities, usually around the house. Cleaning shrimp, raking leaves off the roof, helping Richard paint his house, waxing the car – all of these would be "projects." Further, a simple routine task that runs into snags could be commented on as "turning out to be a real project." But one must be careful, for several projects in process at once could turn out to be "too many irons in the fire!" (q.v.).

We considered entitling this volume "The Project" before settling on the present designation.

Quiet As A Church Mouse

This a colorful simile our Father uses. Since a mouse is a pretty quiet creature to begin with, a church mouse must be especially quiet. The phrase is not found in our sources.

Rambunctious

"Wild, disorderly, boisterous, unruly, obstreperous, etc." [NWD]. This earlier form of the word was "robustious." American origin from c. 1833 [DAS].

Ship-Shape

A standard English adjective for "having everything neatly in place, as on board ship; trim.

Shocker

"A person or thing that shocks; a sensational story, play, etc. [NWD]. Dad's 9/9/84 letter reported a "shocker" in the news of Lawrence Appling's heart attack in Salt Lake City while attending a convention. Mr. Appling was to die later that same week. He was a good and decent man.

Slew

An American colloquial noun for "a large number, group, or amount; a lot" [NWD]. Syn. "flock" From the Irish *slaugh*, "a host."

Slim

This noun (not an adjective) word used sarcastically by our Father has tickled (q.v.) us many times. It can refer to anyone who is excessive in girth. As an example, we can remember passing an overweight man standing on the sidewalk while we were riding to church. Dad said, "Hey Slim," pretending to address the person when actually there was no chance of being heard by the addressee. This use is typical.

Small Fry

Colloquial for a child of either sex, and also for an unimportant person or group of persons, as in persons lacking prestige or ranking. Here's a passage from 1900: "A large dressing room with conveniences not enjoyed by the small fry actors overhead." Dreiser, *Carrie*, p. 293 [DAS].

Snazzy

Slang for "stylishly or showily attractive; flashy." [NWD] says that a possible derivation is sn(appy) + (j)azzy. We'll buy that! The usage first noted c. 1940 with this quote from a Sears catalog in 1942: "Snazzy colors that boys like" [DAS].

Spin

"A ride or pleasure trip in a motor vehicle" [NWD]. This is contrasted in our lexicon with "scoot" which refers to the action of purposely going somewhere (q.v.). Cf. "scooting up to the store" vs. "going for a spin."

Spit And Image

This term usually is pronounced "spittin' image." It is colloquial for "the perfect likeness or exact image, as of a person." The French have the same idea in saying, *Il est son pere tout crache*, "he is the very image of his father" (literally "all spat"), while the Germans say, "as if cut out of the face." There is evidence of a proverb from around 1400 that says, "as like one as if he had been spit out of his mouth." All this, courtesy of [PWO] and word-smith Holt.

No one suggests what Joe read in a publication somewhere, that Southern black slaves said "spirit and image," which with the phonetics of the dialect became shortened to "spittin' image." With all the other evidence abounding, this seems highly speculative.

Sprig

"A little twig" [NWD]. "Have a little sprig of mint with your tea."

Spring Chicken

An Americanism for "a young chicken, esp. one only a few months old, used for broiling or frying." Here is a cornish hen of slang!

The term refers in its slang usage to "a young or inexperienced person, esp. such a woman" [NWD]. [DAS] makes the term apply most commonly to a female, but notes it can apply to males as well. Thus in the 1880 book *My Life*, Jack London says, "I was no spring chicken in my way of the world. . . ." Note that the term almost always occurs in the negative.

Squib

Richard called Joe in the early Fall and asked if he had the word "squib" on the list. Joe had just added it a few days earlier, confirming that we've developed some ESP over the year of collaboration on this work!

This is another one of those terse monosyllabics with which Dad peppers his elocution. "Squib" refers to "a short, sharp, usually witty attack in words; a short news item filler" [NWD]. Dad uses the term more generally to refer to any short piece one might "fire off." That is, "Why don't you write a little squib thanking her for the gift?" The adjective "little" is obligatory. But speaking of "fire off," did you know that originally a "squib" was a type of firecracker that burns with a hissing, spurting noise before exploding?

Ten-Four

Dad often utters this radio lingo in the interrogative, as in his 3/3/84 message on Joe's answering machine, "If you come in before midnight, give us a call, 10-4?" (He usually resists the urge to go on to say, "Over and out!") Dad most often uses the term in ordinary conversation, usually as plans have been finalized at the point of departure from another person. This is his confirmation that all parties are in agreement with the plan.

Thing

Joe thought of this term early (ML #8) in that Father will use it in almost any conversation to refer to a previously mentioned object, rather than repeating the name of the object. This is a standard use of the noun, of course, but a primary feature of Dad's conversational style. An example would be his requesting to have a look at something someone else is holding: "Let me see the thing when you're through."

A "thing" may also be an object of dissatisfaction or disgust in which case his tone of voice changes as he spits out the word vigorously: "Evelyn, let's just take the **thing** back, dump it in their laps, and tell them to give us one that works!"

Three Sheets In The Wind

[DAS] has also listed "four sheets in (or to) the wind." Whichever, the person who has three or four sheets in the wind is snookered. This is an old phrase which goes back at least to Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840). The expression refers to the sheet of a sail, the short horizontal ropes

that let out the sail and hold it in position (vs. the vertical ropes, halyards, used to pull up the sails). If three sheets were allowed to get loose, the sail would flop around and the ship might stagger (q.v.), if you will. [PWO].

Tiger

[NWD]'s entry here describes the familiar beast *panthera tigris*. But Dad most certainly has reference *felis catus*, the ordinary domestic and proliferated cat of any neighborhood. We once had a cat Octavia Drive named "Tiger." But the generic reference to cats as tigers predated "Tiger" being pegged such. Over the years, every stray that has wandered up to our door and looked pitiful (q.v.) has been called "tiger" by our Dad. Again, Dad's clever use of overstatement is at work here: "Word's getting around, Evelyn; another tiger is at the door looking for a free meal!"

Tit For Tat

Tit, as used in this expression, is a variation of the word tip, which means to strike. Thus the expression "tit for tat" literally means "blow for blow." It is also used to mean "retaliation in kind."

We believe, however, that the first use of the expression can be attributed to a young woman who lived some time ago. For you see,

> There once was a woman who begat,
> Three brats named Nat, Pat, and Tat.
> She had fun in the breeding,
> But pain in the feeding,
> When she found there was no tit for Tat.

Two Cents
Two Cents Worth

One's opinion, advice, or remark [DAS], used with a preceding possessive pronoun. E.G., "let's stay long enough to put in our two cents worth and then clear out." The phrase "two cents" worth and then clear out." The phrase "two cents" can mean "something not important or very small; almost nothing" [DAI]. "I'm so disappointed I could walk out of this show for two cents." Or, "I wouldn't give you two cents for the whole thing."

Until The Cows Come Home

This phrase means a long, long time, on the theory that cows cannot be depended on to come home unless driven. An 1874 variation adds "in the morning," making it even less likely to happen [PWO]. We don't have a firm sense of this phrase from our past, but know that we heard it occasionally.

Up To Snuff

This phrase frequently occurs in the negative, and means "up to the usual standard in health, quality, etc." [DAI]. It is synonymous with "up to par." "Snuff," the tobacco preparation, and "sniff," are both from a Teutonic root meaning "smell." The figure conveyed here is that of the olfactory sense being able to discern quality.

Wad

This is American slang for "a large amount, esp. of money" [NWD]. [DAS] cites a 1900 use in Dreiser's *Carrie*: "Made a lot of money, hasn't he? Yes, wads of it." But [DAS] cites its use from 1885-1920 as now being obsolete. This would seem to be in error, and we prefer [NWD]'s judgement of giving the phrase current slang status.

Furthermore, our Father like to use it in the generic sense to apply to a large amount of anything, and has so used it a was of times to our memory, often with the adjective "whole preceding it. Thus, "Dick came back from his diving trip with a whole was of new shells." (Cf. also "flock," "slew.")

Whistle, Clean As A

This phrase antedates 1800, according to Holt, who comments, "if it can be proved that the select of making willow whistles was known to 18th century boys, too, then the slippery smoothness of the denuded stick might certainly have suggested "clean as a whistle." Dad uses the phrase to refer to anything that is exceptionally clean.

Whistle, Wet One's

"To have a drink, esp. of liquor" [DAI].

The derivation is as uncertain as its use was common around our house, esp. if one were thirsty for water; "Let's take a break and wet our whistle."

One etymological theory is that there were tankards of old that would somehow emit a whistle when they were empty. Refilling the container would stop the persistent whistling.

An opposite conception is the fact that moistening the mouth and lips greatly enhances the quality of your whistle, as any experienced birder knows. Joe recalls, too, the grammar school of filling the mouth with soda crackers and then attempting to whistle "The Star Spangled Banner." Very few tones were emitted; many, many cracker bits were. Some were expelled with great force onto his fellows, amid gales laughter. Occasionally a crumb would be inhaled and the would-be whistler would wish he hadn't played the game at all.

But the theory bearing the most weight with Holt is that "whistle" was ancient slang for the mouth or throat.

Winter Of The Deep Snow

This is a phrase which indicates an imprecise time period long ago. We wonder if use of this phrase in this way is restricted to the Sun Belt. In Buffalo, New York, if someone said, "I haven't seen him since the winter of the deep snow," he may mean last month.

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