

## *Did you ever wonder where some of those "old sayings" came from?*

In George Washington's days, there were no cameras. One's image was either sculpted or painted. Some paintings of George Washington showed him standing behind a desk with one arm behind his back while others showed both legs and both arms. Prices charged by painters were not based on how many people were to be painted, but by how many limbs were to be painted. Arms and legs are 'limbs,' therefore painting them would cost the buyer more.

Hence the expression, 'Okay, but **it'll cost you an arm and a leg.**'

(Artists know hands and arms are more difficult to paint)

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As incredible as it sounds, men and women took baths only twice a year (May and October) Women kept their hair covered, while men shaved their heads (because of lice and bugs) and wore wigs. Wealthy men could afford good wigs made from wool. They couldn't wash the wigs, so to clean them they would carve out a loaf of bread, put the wig in the shell, and bake it for 30 minutes. The heat would make the wig big and fluffy, hence the term 'big wig.' Today we often use the term '**here comes the Big Wig**' because someone appears to be or is powerful and wealthy.

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In the late 1700's, many houses consisted of a large room with only one chair. Commonly, a long wide board folded down from the wall, and was used for dining. The 'head of the household' always sat in the chair while everyone else ate sitting on the floor. Occasionally a guest, who was usually a man, would be invited to sit in this chair during a meal. To sit in the chair meant you were important and in charge.. They called the one sitting in the chair the 'chair man...' Today in business, we use the expression or title '**Chairman**' or '**Chairman of the Board.**'

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Personal hygiene left much room for improvement.. As a result, many women and men had developed acne scars by adulthood. The women would spread bee's wax over their facial skin to smooth out their complexions. When they were speaking to each other, if a woman began to stare at another woman's face she was told, '**mind your own bee's wax.**' Should the woman smile, the wax would crack, hence the term '**crack a smile**'. In addition, when they sat too close to the fire, the wax would melt . . . Therefore, the expression '**losing face.**'

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Ladies wore corsets, which would lace up in the front. A proper and dignified woman, as in '**straight laced**'. . . Wore a tightly tied lace.

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Common entertainment included playing cards. However, there was a tax levied when purchasing playing cards but only applicable to the 'Ace of Spades.' To avoid paying the tax, people would purchase 51 cards instead. Yet, since most games require 52 cards, these people were thought to be stupid or dumb because they weren't '**playing with a full deck.**'

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Early politicians required feedback from the public to determine what the people considered important. Since there were no telephones, TV's or radios, the politicians sent their assistants to local taverns, pubs, and bars. They were told to 'go sip some ale' and listen to people's conversations and political concerns. Many assistants were dispatched at different times. 'You go sip here' and 'You go sip there...' The two words 'go sip' were eventually combined when referring to the local opinion and, thus we have the term '**gossip.**'

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At local taverns , pubs, and bars, people drank from pint and quart-sized containers. A bar maid's job was to keep an eye on the customers and keep the drinks coming. She had to pay close attention and remember who was drinking in 'pints' and who was drinking in 'quarts,' hence the term '**minding your P's and Q's**'

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I'll bet you didn't know the following:

In the heyday of sailing ships, all war ships and many freighters carried iron cannons. Those cannons fired round iron cannon balls. It was necessary to keep a good supply near the cannon. However, how to prevent them from rolling about the deck? The best storage method devised was a square-based pyramid with one ball on top, resting on four resting on nine, which rested on sixteen. Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon. There was only one problem...how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding or rolling from under the others. The solution was a metal plate called a 'Monkey' with 16 round indentations.

However, if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it. The solution to the rusting problem was to make 'Brass Monkeys.' Few landlubbers realize that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled.

Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannonballs would come right off the monkey. Thus, it was quite literally, '**Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.**' (All this time, you thought that was an improper expression, didn't you.)

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Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today of **carrying a bouquet when getting married.**

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Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children-last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "**Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.**"

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Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying "**It's raining cats and dogs.**"

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There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how **canopy beds** came into existence.

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The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying "**dirt poor.**"

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The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they kept adding more thresh until, when you opened the door, it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway. Hence the saying a "**thresh hold.**"

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In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while. Hence the rhyme, "**Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old.**"

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Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special.. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man "could bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "**chew the fat.**"

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Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, **tomatoes were considered poisonous.**

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Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "**upper crust.**"

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Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence **the custom of holding a "wake."**

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England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (**the "graveyard shift"**) to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "**saved by the bell**" or was considered a "**dead ringer.**"