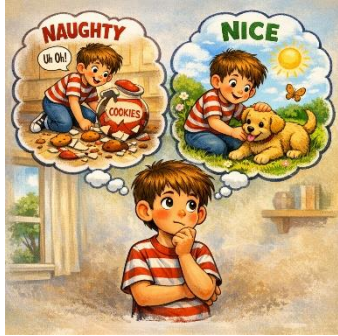


EVERY MARRIED WOMAN IS A HUSSY AND MOST MEN HAVE WORN THONGS

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Many years ago, I took a graduate course in applied linguistics. Among the many interesting things that I learned about the dynamics of English language usage was that words often deteriorate from their original meaning, such as the word *hussy*. I had sometimes heard that term as a youth, usually spoken by members of my parents' generation, and I knew it was far from a flattering expression.

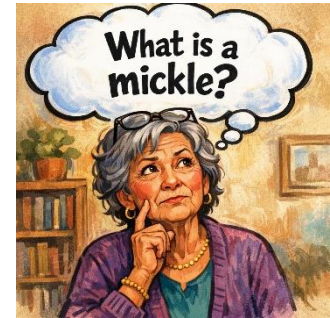
So, I was fascinated to learn that, a few centuries ago, *hussy* was the common word for housewife! Try to imagine someone today asking a female head of household (including a retiree!) what she does for a living, and she responds, "I'm a hussy!" Hmm, no, I can't either.



Actually, hundreds of common words today once meant something completely different. You might then have admired a *gossip* (singer in the choir), thinking she was *awful* (inspired awe). As a child you were *silly* (innocent). As you grew up, you were a *punk* (young boy) or a *fair maid* (attractive, unmarried virgin). You may well have been *nice* (foolish), or you might have been *naughty* (had nothing). As you grew older, you could have become successful and *smug*

(well dressed). With luck, you found a *bully* (sweetheart) and when *senile* (any person of old age), you could have fondly recalled those warm summer days when you wore *thongs* (sandals).

Words and expressions continually fall out of fashion over the generations, becoming unfamiliar to the next. You may remember most, or all, of these expressions: "You sound like a broken record." "He doesn't know s*** from Shinola." "More than Carter has Little Liver Pills." "In like Flynn." "It's the cat's pajamas." "Little pitchers have big ears." However, even if you do know them, the odds are extremely high that your children do not. Similarly, few of us may understand this Scottish proverb that George Washington once wrote: "Many mickles make a muckle." (Combined small efforts result in a big result.)



While these and hundreds of other words or expressions may have changed meanings or disappeared, many other expressions can be *prestigious* (old meaning: tricky). To illustrate, figurative language with a non-literal meaning (idioms) has confused many a newcomer who is attempting to learn English. Consider such expressions as, "She let the cat out of the bag," "Bite the bullet," "Get cold feet," or "Ants in your pants." A stranger to our culture could conjure up an image completely irrelevant to the speaker's intent.

Culture and language are ever-changing. Last year, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* added 5,000 new words! Included are ones you may know: *cancel culture*, *dad bod*, and *dashcam*. Other additions may be unknown to you, such as *rizz* (charisma), *jorts* (denim shorts), or *doomscroll* (scrolling through news on a smartphone).

Above are but a few examples of the transformational dynamics of language. With apologies to Bob Dylan, "The words they are a changin'."