

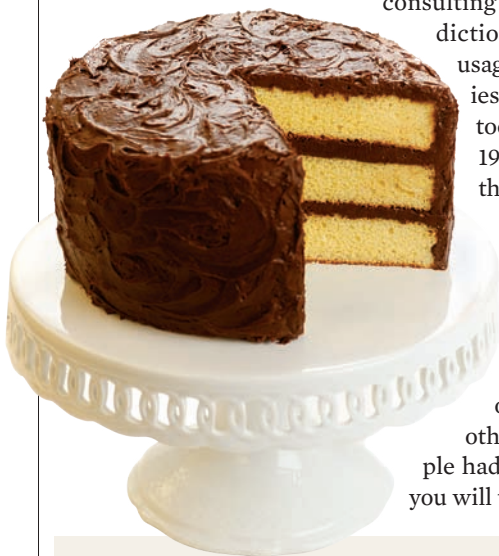
It's Idiomatic

HAS THE WORLD GONE TO HELL IN A HANDBASKET? IF SO, DON'T HEM AND HAW. Hitch your wagon to a star...

We'll bet dollars to doughnuts you've heard—and even used—a few phrases like these. When it comes to knowing their origins, make no bones about it: **Steven Price '62**, author of *Endangered Phrases: Intriguing Idioms Dangerously Close to Extinction* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2011), is the bees' knees.

Price is a writer specializing in guides, catalogs, and collections of quotes and stories, mostly about horses. But he's versatile—a jack of all trades, one might say—with a knack for creating useful handbooks on other subjects, such as *What to Do When a Loved One Dies*, also published by Skyhorse.

Last year, Skyhorse's publisher, Tony Lyons, approached Price about creating a collection of idioms and their origins. Price obliged, and began to research, consulting a host of



usage, and watching quite a few movies and television shows. Literature, too, is a rich source of idioms, with 19th-century poets and Shakespeare the unwitting creators of quite a few.

These days, Price finds that a major appeal of idioms is nostalgia. "As I came across any number of phrases and expressions," he writes in his introduction, "I heard in my mind's ear the voices of my parents and grandparents and others of their generation. Other people had the same reaction, and I suspect you will too." **B** —KAREN MCCALLY

Quiz Kid

How many of the idioms, whose origins are described below, can you identify? (Source: Steven Price, *Endangered Phrases: Intriguing Idioms Dangerously Close to Extinction*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2011).

- 1.** Meaning to make peace or settle differences, this expression refers to a ritual practiced by American and Canadian native tribes at the end of hostilities.
- 2.** A person who's so ignorant that s/he can't even make Boston's most famous dish is a person who _____.
- 3.** Used to convey "delighted surprise at finding someone whose appearance was unanticipated," this expression is the title of a 1950 hit by popular singer Eileen Barton.
- 4.** This expression, which means to become useless, refers to the fate of chickens or other farm animals who've outlived their utility.
- 5.** Meaning "the whole thing," this expression, originating in the early 19th century, refers to all the parts of a working musket.
- 6.** Meaning "to get into an argument," Price writes that this expression "appears in an 1865 poem by Algernon Swinburne to describe the domestic disagreement of a heifer and her mate."
- 7.** An idiom of fairly recent origin, this one is used to express disgust. It originated in Southern California in the 1970s and was made famous nationally in a 1982 hit single by father-daughter duo Frank and Moon Unit Zappa.
- 8.** Used to describe "an effete and spoiled goody-two-shoes young man," this expression refers to the title character of an 1886 best-selling novel by the author and playwright Frances Hodgson Burnett.
- 9.** Meaning "subjected to a harsh scolding or punishment," this idiom refers to a device used to remove excess water from clothing in the days predating washing machines equipped with spin cycles.
- 10.** Meaning "noisy confusion," it appears in this quote, from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "When shall we three meet again / In thunder, lightning, or in rain? / When the _____'s done, / When the battle's lost and won."

ANSWERS

1. Bury the hatchet
2. Doesn't know beans
3. If I knew you were coming, I'd have baked a cake.
4. Go to pot
5. Lock, stock, and barrel
6. Lock horns
7. Gag me with a spoon
8. Little Lord Fauntleroy
9. Put through the ringer (or, wringer)
10. Hurly burly