

You Can't Sound Out %!@# But We All Know What It Means

By George Cunningham

I am not against cussing. In fact, I am rather in favor of it. There are times that call for a few good cuss words, and nobody wants to be caught during such times, linguistically unarmed and unable to defend themselves.

Back in the old days, it was easy. Cuss words came in different categories. There were cuss words for kids, such as “darn” and “heck” and even “gosh darn it.” These kiddie cuss words gave young people the opportunity to learn how to cuss without actually cussing. By using the kiddie cuss words, they prepared themselves to use the real cuss words when they grew up. It gave them something to which they could look forward.

Then there were the adult cuss words, like “damn,” and “hell,” and if you were really mad, “son-of-a-bitch.” These words were used mostly among men and only sparingly among women. It was considered disrespectful to use these words in front of women, and if a cuss word slipped out unexpectedly in front of a lady, a man was expected to immediately apologize for any disrespect he may have shown. Only extreme circumstances made such words acceptable in front of the gentler sex, which is now apparently known as the gentler gender.

There were words beyond that – fighting words at the time – that would only be used among men and then only under extreme circumstances. Often these words would be followed by a physical altercation.

The system was not perfect. There were foul-mouthed people around even then, who would cuss in front of women and unload a string of expletives with little forethought or consideration of others. But they were recognized for whom they were and shunned by the rest of society.

Our problem today is that we are running out of good cuss words. I am quite aware that the language changes, but one type of speech needs to supplant another, not do away with it altogether. The problem with cuss words is overuse.

When 9-year-old little girls are dropping the F-bomb on their playmates during recess, that word no longer qualifies as a cuss word. Cuss words have become filler words – words some people use when they are too slow-witted or addled to think of what to say next.

Filler words used to be words such as “er,” “uh,” and “you know.” Now they are the F-word, the S-word, the MF-word, and the AH-word.

Since the traditional cuss words are no longer effective as cuss words, we need some new, politically correct cuss words to take their place.

For instance, if you confronted an obnoxious person, you could say, “get away from me, you whale-killer,” and if you were really mad, you could call him or her a “whale-killing, SUV-driving, redneck.” (Redneck is one of the ethnic slurs that’s OK to say.)

For exclamatory cuss words, for when you smash your thumb with a hammer, you might say “Oh, Osama bin Laden, but that hurts,” or maybe if you overslept you could say “Aw, death-merchant tobacco executive, I’m going to be late for work.”

Of course, we would have to be careful to limit the use of such expletives. We don’t want the children to pick them up and ruin them before we get a chance to use them ourselves.

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