

COLLOQUY

This issue of Word Ways has no “Answers and Solutions” section. Instead we are having a contest where everyone who solves a puzzle will have their name entered into a pool and before October 15th one name will be drawn for a book prize. If you solve more than one puzzle you will have extra chances for the prize. The book will be *Making the Alphabet Dance* and is signed by the author A. Ross Eckler (who is not eligible for the prize). You may email us your solutions at wordways@butler.edu .

SOLOMON GOLOMB comments: In his excellent article on heteronyms, James F. Carley omitted one interesting category, of words ending in -ower, such as flower, glower, shower, tower. When pronounced with a long o sound, they mean a person or thing that flows, glows, shows, or tows; but when pronounced to rhyme with power, they mean blossom, evil stare, sprinkle, or tall structure. (They can be nouns with both meanings.)

SUSAN THORPE received an interesting email from Simona Mkrtshjan regarding long words with just one vowel. It concerns *A Homovocalic Survey* WW 2005 page 128, in which Susan offered MKRTSCHJANS, with 11 letters, as the longest word with just a single vowel..... Simona writes ... I am a Mkrtshjan. My family of Mkrtshjans are the folks referred to by the longest univocalic A-word in English (from your Survey). This delights me immensely. Just a note about the origins - it's a German transliteration of an Armenian name. My father was a POW (Soviet Army) in Austria following WWII. The more common transliteration of this name in English-speaking countries is Mkrtchyan. I don't see it as much of an improvement, except for the fact that the TSCH tetragram is hard on American eyes and the j really is pronounced like a y. Mkrtshjan itself is a modernization of the name commonly transliterated as Mukerditchian - derived from the word "mukerdich," Armenian for "baptized."

DON HAUPTMAN writes: I enjoyed Tristan Miller's clever and amusing set of “spelling alphabets” that defeat their purposes (Word Ways, May, page 154). But I can perhaps claim to have invented, or at least anticipated, this mischievous technique. Growing up in the 1950s, I routinely overheard my parents on the phone, spelling our family name and clarifying the two sound-alike letters, as follows: “P as in Paul, T as in Thomas.” At some point, I decided that it would be more fun to say “P as in polychromatophilic, T as in tergiversation.” But I soon learned to deploy the joke only in appropriate situations.

DARRYL FRANCIS sent the following news item:

The German language has lost its longest word thanks to a change in the law to conform with EU regulations (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe)

Rindfleischetikettierungsueberwachungsaufgabenuebertragungsgesetz - meaning "law delegating beef label monitoring" - was introduced in 1999 in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. It was repealed following changes to EU regulations on the testing of cattle.

German is famous - or notorious - for making compound words, often to describe something legal or scientific. They are known in Germany as "tapeworm" words. The 63-letter word came into being as a result of efforts to combat BSE, or "mad cow disease" and was given the abbreviation RkReUAUG - itself something of a tongue-twister. But with the EU calling a halt to the testing of healthy cattle at abattoirs, the need for the word vanished.

The search is now on for the language's new longest word, German media reported. Among the contenders is said to be **Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitaenswitwe**, meaning the "widow of a Danube steamboat company captain".

However, experts say such long words are so rarely used they are unlikely to make it into the standard German-language dictionary.

The longest word to be found in the dictionary is **Kraftfahrzeughaftpflichtversicherung**, meaning "automobile liability insurance".

SCOT MORRIS contributed the following: No English dictionary has been able to adequately explain the difference between COMPLETE AND FINISHED. However, in a recent linguistic conference held in London, England, and attended by some of the best linguists in the world: Samsundar Balgobin, A Guyanese, was the clear winner.

His final challenge was this: Some say there is no difference between COMPLETE and FINISHED. Please explain the difference between COMPLETE AND FINISHED in a way that is easy to understand.

Here is his answer: "When you marry the right woman, you are COMPLETE. But, when you marry the wrong woman, you are FINISHED. And when the right one catches you with the wrong one, you are COMPLETELY FINISHED!"

His answer was received with a standing ovation lasting over 5 minutes and it entitled him to receive an invitation to dine with the Queen, who decided to call him after the contest. He won a trip to travel around the world in style and a case of 25 year old Eldorado rum for his answer.