

FROM RAGS TO RICHES . . . AND BEYOND

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In the August, 1984 issue of *Word Ways*, John Henrick took the pedestrian phrase FROM BIRTH TO DEATH, and presented twenty more colorful equivalents for it, including such phrases as FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE, FROM BASKET TO CASKET, and FROM SQUALL HEARERS TO PALL BEARERS. Each of the equivalents was logologically interesting, using such devices as alliteration, rhyme, transposition of consonant sounds, metaphor, and/or metonymy.

I was able to add a considerable number of examples to Henrick's collection of phrases. That fact set me to thinking about the general problem which Henrick had particularized. It seemed to me that it should be possible to refurbish almost any cliché involving a contrast, in a similar fashion. To test my theory, I decided to see what I could do with the well-known phrase FROM RAGS TO RICHES. Over a period of several days, I found nearly 300 equivalents, using devices such as those enumerated above. My list, not ordered in any particular fashion, follows:

From a little to a lot
 From least to most
 From wretches to riches
 From famine to fame
 From poverty to property
 From whining to winning
 From scrounging to lounging
 From digging ditches to hoarding riches
 From a mission to a mansion
 From dearth to wealth

 From begging to binge-ing
 From many rags to moneybags
 From pauper class to upper class
 From many in shacks to money in stacks
 From poor to Porsche
 From scraps to scrips
 From underprivileged to upper-privileged
 From schlimazel to mazel tov
 From ne'er-do-well to e'er-do-well
 From a hovel to a heaven

 From a great dole to a great deal
 From nothing to everything
 From being a servant to having servants
 From porridges to Porsches
 From charity to surety

From welfare-ing to faring well
 From workless to worryless
 From cold meals to gold deals
 From mills (tenths of cents) to millions
 From bills (that you owe) to billions

 From handouts often to tens of thousands
 From no maids to diamonds
 From relief chiseler to riches for real
 From owing to owning
 From nil to all
 From street Arab to oil-rich Arab
 From financial plight to financial might
 From sad sacks to money sacks
 From a few cents to affluence
 From less to more

 From peasant underclass to pheasant under glass
 From privation to approbation
 From lo, pence! to opulence (an anagram)
 From filthy wretch to filthy rich
 From beggar to banker
 From privation to profusion
 From woe to dough
 From a sacked checker to an exchequer
 From lack to luck
 From debit to credit

 From doom to boom
 From bound and in stocks to stocks and bonds
 From sans un sou to insouciant
 From destitution to restitution
 From squalid to solid
 From down-at-the-heels to well-heeled
 From famishing to flourishing
 From the crash to more cash
 From torn stockings to silk-stockings
 From distress to possess

 From insolvent to insouciant
 From low water to high tide
 From broken fortune to luck 'n' fortune
 From a money pinch to a money pouch
 From inferiority to superiority
 From a bare subsistence to a sure existence
 From dives (low, cheap places) to dives (a rich man)
 From a starving, ill-paid soul to a starring, well-paid role
 From balance-sheet zeros to financial heroes
 From money hassles to many castles

 From peculiar dross to pecuniary redress
 From some pittance to a princely sum
 From ciphers to sapphires
 From Skid Road to Park Avenue
 From poorhouse to palace

From knave to knight
 From hard up to hoard? yup!
 From hobo pennies to polo ponies
 From a loyal workin' stiff to a royal park 'n' staff
 From fool's gold to walls o' gold

From the valley of despair to a prized villa
 From Pooorsville to a villa in Paris
 From a Bowery bum to a dowry "plum"
 From a needy bairn to a greedy baron
 From losing with a pair o' dice to lazing in a Paradise
 From immersion in rags to Persian rugs
 From a workhouse to a dream house
 From big bums to large sums
 From trash to cash
 From losing to grossing

From just a touch to blessed with much
 From a minor hobo to a major-domo
 From healthy but poor to wealthy for sure
 From beagle droppings to regal trappings
 From a healthy chump to a wealthy champ
 From bankrupt to bank holdup
 From gloom to boom
 From financial ruin to a monetary reign
 From broke to brocade
 From a poor Robin Hood to a store-robbin' hood

From mobocrat to plutocrat
 From checks that bounce to huge accounts
 From beachcomber to bank owner
 From human scum to a giant sum
 From frugal to regal
 From time payments to prepayments
 From yearnings to earnings
 From a flat wallet to a fat wallet
 From piles of unpaid bills to piles of \$1000 bills
 From sans sous to Sans Souci

From financial embarrassment to an embarrassment of riches
 From strapped for dough to money to blow
 From too little mazuma to the wealth of Montezuma
 From penurious to pecunious
 From tribulation to trillions
 From the plucky poor to the lucky rich
 From hunger pains to capital gains
 From fortitude to plenitude
 From dreams of money to streams of money
 From straitened circumstances to straightened-out circumstances

From bouncing checks to cruise-ship decks
 From crisis to Croesus
 From a ratty cellar to a Rockefeller
 From indigence to independence
 From the blight of poverty to a knight with property
 From hard up to holdup (proving that crime does pay!)

From wretches so seedy to riches, indeedy!
 From filth to wealth
 From unbalanced budgets to shiny gold nuggets
 From sordid to splendid

 From debtor's prison cells to gushing oil from wells
 From indigence to affluence
 From precious little to precious metal
 From skinny waifs to money safes
 From squalor to splendor
 From threadbare coats to large bank notes
 From a wolf at the door to a bull on the stock market
 From patches to riches
 From in the dumps to holding the trumps
 From quicksands to thousands

 From tenements to opulence
 From out at the seams to living one's dreams
 From scurvy to marvy
 From hand-me-downs to a thousand crowns (British silver coins)
 From trials to trillions
 From starveling to princeling
 From a being base to a Ming vase
 From nothing to earn to money to burn
 From wino to rhino (money)
 From being in a mean way to having ways and means

 From ill-to-do to well-to-do
 From as poor as a church mouse to a richly-furnished house
 From mumper to mogul
 From hunger faintings to rare old paintings
 From scrimps to scrips
 From tatterdemalions to a lotta simoleons
 From nihility to infinity
 From stalling creditors to sterling credit
 From down in the dumps to over the humps
 From trivial stuff to more than enough

 From hobo to nabob
 From chicken feed to checks, indeed
 From heavy fines to heavenly fineries
 From cupboards bare to bucks to spare
 From adversity to prosperity
 From a sleazy beat to Easy Street
 From mere hints of money to here - mints of money
 From forfeits to profits
 From weeping to reaping
 From a little bouillon to a lot of bullion

 From dilapidated to revalidated
 From hobo cadgers to heavy ledgers
 From slim pickings to portly kings
 From a homeless tyke to a business tycoon
 From hoping to reaping
 From the wish to the cash
 From assistance to assets

From needing subsistence doles to reaching financial goals
 From loans to owns
 From sad and low to a wad of dough

From charred trash to hard cash
 From many indigents to money instruments
 From clown to crown
 From a filthy lacker (one who lack) to filthy lucre
 From bare sustenance to real substance
 From sad vagrancy to hard currency
 From chiffonier (a ragpicker, in French) to chevalier
 From chiffonier to cavalier
 From chiffonier to financier
 From minus to plus

From jobless to joyful
 From flat (apartment) rats to fat cats
 From paying the fiddler to calling the tune
 From litter to glitter
 From park bench to Park Avenue
 From lying low to flying high
 From forlorn to reborn
 From growing old in tatters to owning all that matters
 From squalid to splendid
 From crumbs to sums

From financelessness to fanciness
 From a street-Arab "chic" to a rich Arab sheik
 From facing debts to placing bets
 From cleaning stables to owning sables (fur coats)
 From a wet gutter to a jet-setter
 From a nobody to a somebody
 From owing debts to owning jets
 From misery to mastery
 From layoffs to payoffs
 From hardships to lordships

From shack to cash (a phonetic reversal)
 From humility to hauteur
 From cheap huts to the heights
 From desperation to aspiration
 From out of a job to boy, what a snob
 From down below to up above
 From only one's self to truckloads of pelf
 From peanuts to palaces
 From hardship to hard cash
 From holes in one's socks to Mr. Got Rocks

From dreadful to delightful
 From ruin to rule
 From out of work to a wealthy jerk
 From begging to bragging
 From city slums to goodly sums
 From living on charity's quarters to living in wonderful quarters
 From just mush to real plush

From poor boy to great joy
 From luckless lad to Lady Luck
 From a measly few dimes to the really good times

 From poverty-stricken to honest gold-brickin'
 From human flotsam to humongous flotillas
 From human jetsam to zoomin' jet-setter
 From merely drunken drifters to money to the rafters
 From cheap, inner-city "digs" to a winner - pretty big
 From a little gutter to a lot better
 From unemployed to overjoyed
 From ordure to verdure
 From jalopies to jillions
 From pennies to monies

 From zilch to zillions
 From Satan's claws to Santa Claus
 From satanic clauses to Santa Clauses
 From malevolent provenance to benevolent Providence
 From a tragic life to a magic life
 From Satan to Santa (an anagram)
 From fall to rise
 From a dog's end to a godsend (an anagram)
 From no dough for noodles to oodles of dough
 From nixed to fixed

 From fetid to feted
 From a grave situation to a saved situation
 From beastly rags to costly raiment
 From without pay to with payout (an anagram)
 From raggedy to uppity
 From underling to "wonderling"
 From scrimping to scillions
 From Skid Row to skillions
 From nix to checks
 From nix to bucks

 From underdog to the whole hog
 From nuttin' to struttin'
 From taking to giving
 From dingy cellar to penthouse dweller
 From a bread line to cloud nine
 From miser to master
 From bread lines to gold mines
 From barely making it to merrily raking it in
 From penury to luxury
 From savers laid low to rivers of dough

 From hardships to ships coming in
 From austerity to prosperity
 From "starvation" dinners to gigantic winners
 From an empty plate to silver plate
 From being flat broke to 'twas just a joke!
 From faking wealth to making wealth
 From mendicants to stick-up men (so, crime doth pay!)

From real short of money to we're rich, my honey!

From nix to max

From remnants to eminence

From taking freebies to giving rubies

From a child in sorrow to a golden tomorrow

From horrendous to humongous

From humbleness to haughtiness

From tin cups to gold crowns (comparison of chemical elements)

From parsimony to money 'n' Paris

From potluck to pot o' gold

From potluck to good luck

From skimping to skillions

My experience with the cliché FROM RAGS TO RICHES suggests strongly that it is, indeed, possible to take any phrase revolving around a contrast of opposites or of complementary concepts, preparing a long list of equivalents for it. The problem is, therefore, not an immensely challenging one. The realm of contrasts does, on the other hand, offer us more difficult - and, therefore, logologically more worthwhile - problems with which to test our mettle.

One such problem is that posed by the fact that some words present two or more opposites or complementary concepts. This circumstance was brought home to me vividly many years ago by a rebus puzzle contest in which one of the objects depicted was a sign reading OPPOSITE OF "OUT". The obvious answer was IN, but that answer did not help solve the puzzle. The word desired eventually turned out to be from the realm of baseball: SAFE. Since seeing that rebus puzzle, I have paid particular attention to multiple opposites and complementary terms. RIGHT, for instance, is the antithesis of both LEFT and WRONG; LIGHT contrasts either with DARK or with HEAVY; and EITHER may be matched either with OR or with NEITHER.

Some terms have a multiplicity of correlatives. To revert to Henrick's interest in DEATH for a moment, I can relate that word to BIRTH, LIFE, REBIRTH, RESURRECTION, SICKNESS, SLEEP, and CATALEPTIC TRANCE. Readers will probably be able to find some further matches for DEATH. My own interest, however, is not in a run-of-the-mill example, particularly one as grisly as death. Instead, what I am seeking is the one concept for which a larger number of opposites and complements can be adduced than for any other concept. What might that concept be?

I advance the term MAN, for which at least 21 matches exist: God, child, woman, animal, officer, superman, world, nature, future man, machine, mouse, boy, preman, wife, material, universe, ape, society, environment, monkey, and automaton. Each is logical in a particular context; for example, MAN versus OFFICER is appropriate if rank in a military force is the issue. How many additional contrasts involving MAN are there? Is there any other term which invites a larger number of comparisons? I invite readers to think about this problem, submitting their findings to the editor for future publication in **Word Ways**.