

DIPPING INTO QUIPPING Puns Deployed in Everyday Life

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Ilise Benun, a longtime professional colleague, is a consultant who helps freelance creative people generate more business and revenue.

After being out of touch for a while, Ilise and I reconnected last year. To update me on her activities, she sent links to four websites. But at that moment, my office was about to be cleaned and, as a safety precaution, I turned my computer off. I wanted to recover all the tabs via the “reopen last browsing session” feature. So as a reminder, I wrote on a Post-It Note: “4 Ilise.”

A few seconds later, I realized the double meaning. Thus proving that we professional punsters do it even unconsciously!

This is another compilation of Puns In Real-Life Situations—or, appropriately, PIRLS. I’ve written on this topic in *Word Ways* before, most recently in the May 2013 issue.

These articles tend to emphasize my own creations. But in the past year, it’s become a lot tougher to come up with something truly new—and thereby be able to claim credit for originality.

As usual, I did an Internet search on each of my candidates—then reluctantly deleted more than a dozen that I had intended to include. To my chagrin, I had discovered that, as at a high-school prom buffet, others had beaten me to the punch!

For example, whenever I’m asked about a thorny computer problem, I archly remark, “I can’t solve that. I’m not Becky the Techie.” I deemed that a rather clever coinage—until Googling turned up numerous techies named Becky.

Among other puns I had thought of, optimistically placed in an early draft of this article, and then found online, in some instances on numerous sites: *disappear into the ether, it makes your blood broil, omen to that, sons of pitches, worth a pique, yes icon.*

Thus we see that a punster’s lot is not an easy one. There are too many ingenious people out there who have anticipated you. Of course, language is fair game, filled as it is with words and phrases that are just waiting to be manipulated into punny new forms.

After considerable research and vetting, however, I’ve concluded that the following are reasonably original. And all the stories are true.

A few years ago, kale chips suddenly began appearing everywhere. I was amazed at how expensive they are: \$7, \$8, \$9 for a tiny package.

One day at a local upscale grocery, I decided to try them nevertheless. Two young women spotted the item in my possession. One pointed and squealed: “Ooo! Kale chips!”

“At these prices,” I riposted, “they should give you *Pauline Kael*.”

Both gals appeared bewildered, so I explained. Alas, confirming the dismal state of cultural literacy these days, neither had ever heard of Pauline Kael.

On receiving surprising news, I sent a message to a friend that began with “OMFG!”

She replied, “I’ve never known you to swear or curse.”

“Well,” I countered, “I just did so . . . *initially*.”

Another friend was eager to meet for dinner at a sushi restaurant. I wrote back: “Japanese cuisine isn’t my favorite, but I’ll do it for your sake.” (Yes, this one works only in written form.)

Below, more specimens, which you’re welcome to use as occasions warrant:

- I complained to an e-mail correspondent that he had ignored the substance of my earlier message. “Neglect like that is tantamount to substance abuse.”
- Offering a recommendation to someone I knew would stubbornly resist: “Try it; you’ll spike it!”
- A business partner asked if I could write something on a rush basis. “As the Heineken logo said: I’m on the case.”
- About a person who habitually makes cutting and malicious remarks: “A tiger cannot change its swipes.”
- When a retaliatory action became the subject of gossip: “After all, revenge is best . . . dished.”
- Submitting almost anything for approval: “As they say at apiary competitions, you judge the bee!”

Then there was the time I expected a visit from my then-girlfriend. I thought she would be delighted to see me. But immediately upon entering my apartment, she impatiently announced: “I need an outlet to charge my cell phone.” I showed her where that could be done. Then: “I need another outlet for my Kindle.” This task was also readily accomplished. Finally: “I need a third outlet for my wireless modem.”

Not missing a beat, I quipped: “I thought I have the plug and you have the outlet.”