



Our Favorite Expressions

Serie 9 ©

by John Grierson

1. Monday

“Loose Cannon”

Someone who is a dangerous nuisance, a rebel, out of control can be described as a loose cannon. The origin of this expression is, again, from the world of sailing ships, but in past centuries, those equipped with cannons had to be very carefully tied down and kept under control. If a cannon came loose, it could cause damage and injury. Some say that Boris Johnson is a loose cannon. He does not seem always to be in control of what he says.

2. Tuesday

“No Smoke Without Fire”

If something looks suspicious, then the chances are that it might be.

This politician has been accused of lying. He has been caught lying before. So there's no smoke without fire.

3. Wednesday

“Three Sheets To The Wind”

If someone is seen to be seriously drunk, it can be said that he - or she - is three sheets to the wind. In sailing, or yachting, the strange thing is that ropes, not sails, are called sheets. If three such sheets are not properly attached to a sail, a sailing ship will stagger and lurch about like someone drunk

So - Tom has been here in the pub for hours. He's obviously three sheets to the wind.

4. Thursday

“Cold Enough To Freeze The Balls Off A Brass Monkey”

This is heard in very cold weather and like so many English expressions, this, too comes from the world of old fighting ships. In those ships, a tray called a "monkey", was used to hold cannonballs on warships in between the 16th and 18th centuries. Supposedly, in very cold temperatures the "monkey" would contract, causing the balls to fall off. Nothing at all to do with testicles! One might say, therefore, “The temperature today is supposed to go down to minus 10 degrees. That's cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey”.

5. Friday

“Having Your Cake And Eating It“

This is an expression to be used to describe someone who is trying to want more than he or she deserves or is reasonable, or that one cannot or should not try to have two incompatible things or thoughts. It can also mean to have all the benefits of a situation when, in fact, having one thing means that you cannot have the other. Once you have eaten your cake, it is gone, and you can't eat it again. For example - he wants to stay with his wife but still see his girlfriend – talk about having your cake and eating it!