



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 47

TOPICS

Retirement communities, American superstitions, fling vs. throw vs. toss

GLOSSARY

to retire – to stop working after a certain age, usually 65 in the U.S.

* When we retire, we'll sell our house and move to Hawaii.

retiree – a person who retires or stops working, usually after a certain age

* How does it feel to be a retiree after working at the same company for 45 years?

senior – an elderly person; in the U.S., often used for someone over 65 years old

* Seniors get a discount if they eat at the restaurant before 7 p.m.

snow birds – people who live in cold places and who move to warmer places for the winter months

* In this town, we get a lot of snow birds from Ohio, Michigan, and Minnesota.

Sun Belt – the states in the southern and southwest part of the U.S. where the weather is warmer

* Our company has plans to build new housing developments along the Sun Belt.

on purpose – to do something intentionally or deliberately; to do something because it was your choice

* I'm sorry you fell over my bicycle, but I didn't leave it in your way on purpose!

superstition – a believe in something that will bring you good or bad luck

* One of the team's superstitions is that they'll only win a game if they wear the same color socks.

itch – an uncomfortable feeling on your body that makes you want to scratch

* I have an itch in the middle of my back. Can you scratch it for me?



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sidewalk – the path where people walk next to the road

* My mother always tells me to walk on the sidewalk and not on the road.

crack – a line on the surface of something

* We can't use that plate for the dinner party because it has a crack in it.

rabbit's foot – the foot of a rabbit that people believe will bring good luck

* Rubbing your rabbit's foot will give you even more good luck.

to blow out candles – to put out the fire on sticks of wax that you light for celebration, such as on a birthday cake

* Okay, everybody. Let's sing "Happy Birthday" while Maria blows out the candles.

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

"Take my wife – please!"

This is a joke from a famous U.S. comedian from the 20th century, Henny Youngman. Youngman's jokes were usually "one-liners." A one-liner is a joke that is just one sentence, and often uses an expression that has more than one meaning. Youngman's most famous one-liner is this one: "Take my wife – please!"

The expression "take my wife" can have two meanings. One meaning is "consider my wife" or "take my wife as an example of what I'm talking about." We sometimes use this expression to give the person we're talking to an example of the idea we are discussing. For example: "I think everybody is afraid of something. Take my wife. She's afraid of the dark and still sleeps with the light on."

The other meaning of "take my wife" is "take her away from me," something we would say with something you don't want anymore. Henny is saying, "I don't want my wife anymore. Please take her from me!" The joke is funny because you don't know which meaning Henny is using until the last word, "please." You would only say "please" if you were using the second meaning (take my wife away from me), which of course is the funnier one.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 47.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 47. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the hot and beautiful City of Los Angeles, California.

Today's Café, we're going to talk about retirement communities, special places that are built for people who are retired, or no longer working. We're also going to talk about some common American superstitions. And, as usual, we'll answer a few questions. Now, let's get started.

As always, we remind you to go to our website at eslpod.com. There you can find information about this podcast and a complete Learning Guide, which includes all the words and vocabulary and definitions that we'll be using today, as well as a complete transcript of this podcast.

Our first topic today is retirement communities. These are places that are built especially for people who are older and who are no longer working. To retire, "retire," means to stop working, to leave your job, usually permanently, that is when you are not going to go back to work again. In the United States, this usually happens for people who are at the age of 65. That's the common retirement age for many companies. You can leave your job when you are 65 years old. Sometimes it's 62 years old. In some companies people retire even earlier. They leave their job if they have enough money to live on.

People who are older and who are retired are sometimes called retirees, "retirees," the singular would be retiree, with two "e"s at the end. And, that is someone who is retired; it's a noun to describe a person who is retired. People who are over the age of 59, 60, 62, it depends, are sometimes called seniors, "seniors." A senior, singular - seniors, plural - is a person who is considered older. There isn't one age that is common; usually over 60 or 65 someone is called a senior. We'll sometimes call them a senior citizen. A senior citizen, that's the same as a senior, which is now, I think, a little more common to say senior instead of senior citizen.



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There are many different places where someone can go. Many people live in their own house or apartment that they've always lived in, but some people move. They sell their house and they go somewhere else. If you are in good health, you can still do all the things that you need to do on your own, you might move to a retirement community and that would be a special town or a place that's built for people who retire.

Many of these retirement communities are built in Arizona and in Florida, the states of Arizona and Florida here in the United States. The reason is very simple: it's warm in Arizona and it's warm in Florida. Also, Arizona and Florida have often traditionally been considered cheaper places to move to because there's so much land, for example, in Arizona, which is mostly a desert so there aren't a lot of people that want to move there, and so this was a place where many of these communities were built because the land was cheap and because, most importantly, it's warm. Remember that most Americans live in states like New York or Illinois, Minnesota, places that are cold during the wintertime, very cold, and when people retire they want, many times, to move somewhere that is warmer.

Sometimes there are people who live in one house during the winter and they move back to their other house in the northern part of the United States during the summer because although it is warm in the winter in places such as Arizona, it is very, very hot in the summer. We call people who move during wintertime, snow birds. Snow, "snow," birds, "birds," is the name for someone who leaves their northern house in the northern state, colder state, and goes to a warmer southern state. Of course, birds also move south to get away from the cold weather, and so, that is where we get the term snow bird.

One of the most famous retirement communities in the United States is called Sun City, "Sun" City. Of course, sun is something that you have a lot of in Minnesota - in Arizona. The states that have warmer weather, especially in the winter, are sometimes called the Sun Belt, "Sun Belt," two words. That describes states that are located in warmer climates, places where you have warm weather, Arizona, New Mexico, probably Texas would all be part of the Sun Belt.

Well, the city, Sun City, is located in Arizona, and it was built especially for people who want to retire. One of the things about places like Sun City is that there are very few children. In fact, many of these cities don't want families with



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young children moving there because, of course, young children can often make noise, like my neighbors' children do almost every day, and some people who are retired, who are older, they don't want to listen to that noise and so they want to live in a place where there are very few children, and Sun City is one of those places.

The population of Sun City is about 40,000, about 40,000 people. Only three percent - I'm sorry, .3 percent of those families, those people who live there, have children under the age of 18, so that's less than one percent of the whole city have children. And, that is, what we would say, something that is done on purpose. When we say something is done on purpose, "purpose," we mean that it is intentional, that it is something that they wanted to do; it was not an accident. So, if you want to move to the United States and live somewhere that's very warm and that doesn't have any children, has mostly people who are older, then Sun City is for you. Maybe, someday, you'll see me at one of those communities - not too soon, I hope!

Our second topic today is an interesting one. It's about superstitions. A superstition, "superstition," all one word, a superstition is a belief that someone has about good luck or bad luck. Something good is going to happen if you do this; something bad will happen if you do this. These are superstitions. They're things that people believe that will bring them good luck or bring them bad luck. For example, we've talked before in our podcasts about crossing your fingers, to put one finger in front of the other. This is something that is a superstition. It is the belief that if you put your fingers one in front of the other, cross your fingers, that you will have good luck. Sometimes we even use that as an expression, "Cross your fingers that I win the lottery," means you should be hoping for, you should be wishing me good luck. Of course, crossing your fingers will not help you win the lottery really, but it's a belief that people have traditionally. And, even though logically or rationally, we know that these things aren't true, many people still do them. They still believe in them.

So, I thought I'd talk about some of the most common ones here in the United States. Some of these, of course, maybe common in your country or in other countries that you know of. I thought I'd start with weddings since August is a very common time, the summertime, to have weddings in the United States. June, I think, is the most popular month for weddings in the U.S., but all during the summer. people have weddings. And, there are some superstitions about weddings.



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One superstition is that the person - the man who's getting married, we call him the groom, "groom," should not see the woman that he is marrying, who we call the bride, "bride," before the wedding begins, especially if she is in her wedding dress. So, traditionally the bride and the groom dress in different rooms and they don't see each other until the wedding begins, what we would call the wedding ceremony, "ceremony," the actual time that the two people get married to each other. This is becoming less and less common, partly because couples who are getting married like to have pictures taken with their family and it's often easier to do that before the wedding than after the wedding. So, when I got married, many, many years ago, my wife and I had our pictures taken before the wedding so I did see her before the wedding, which is probably why I have such bad luck! The superstition is that you will get bad luck, bad things will happen to you. Of course, that's not true, mostly.

Another superstition is that the bride, the woman getting married, should wear something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. It's a little rhyme, a little poem, and these are, again, it's a superstition that a woman getting married should wear something old, perhaps from her mother's wedding dress or from their grandmother; something new, which is pretty easy because the dress itself is usually new; something borrowed from someone else, someone lends you something, for example, some jewelry, a necklace or earrings; and finally, something blue. I don't know why something blue, the color blue, but that could, again, be anything that the bride is wearing or perhaps her hair could be blue.

Some more obvious superstitions that you probably know about: the number 13 is considered very unlucky in the United States and in other countries. In fact, in many buildings, there is no 13th floor, there is no 13th level. You get in the elevator and the number will go 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, but there will be no 13th floor, and this is, again, because of the superstition that 13 is an unlucky number so you will not see the 13th floor in some buildings, older buildings in the...in the United States. That's not as common any more. I was the 13th member of my family, my parents and my ten brothers and sisters, so I was the youngest, number 13, and that's why I have such bad luck. Look what happened to me. Now you see it's clear that this is true!

Another number superstition is the seven-year itch, the seven-year itch. To itch, "itch," is when there is something bothering you on your skin and you have to



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take your hand and rub your skin, we would say scratch, “scratch,” your skin. That's when you have an itch, something that's bothering you that you need to scratch. Well, the seven-year itch describes a superstition that a man, after he is married for seven years, will want to get a new romantic partner, perhaps even a new wife. This is the seven-year itch. My seven-year itch was a few years ago and I didn't feel any itching at all but that is a superstition that at year seven when you're married, something - the man may want to leave the marriage.

There are several other superstitions about bad luck and good luck, many of them are very common among children especially, but some adults also believe these, or at least act as though they believe them. Walking under a ladder, “ladder” - a ladder is something that you would climb up to get to the top of a building. To walk under that ladder is considered bad luck. Also, seeing a black cat, a black cat is considered bad luck. If you see one you may have bad luck according to the superstition. One that I remember when I was a child was stepping on a crack, “crack.” A crack is a break, it's when there is a separation in the ground, usually on a sidewalk, “sidewalk,” all one word. A sidewalk is where you walk in front of a house and usually it is made of brick or stone or concrete. And, sometimes when the sidewalk gets old, after many years, there is a crack in the sidewalk or in between the two blocks there is a crack, a space, a separation, and the superstition is that if you step on a crack that you will have bad luck. And, I remember that one when I was young. I would always jump over the cracks so I didn't step on them.

Other common superstitions include breaking a mirror. If you break a mirror you'll have, I think the usual number is seven years of bad luck if you break a mirror. It's also considered bad luck to open an umbrella, “umbrella,” an umbrella inside. So, if you're inside of your house and you open the umbrella, which normally you use outside of the house so the rain does not hit you. but if you open it inside. that's considered bad luck.

There are also some things that are for good luck, one of them, traditionally, is to have the foot of a rabbit, what we would call, simply, the rabbit's - a rabbit's foot. And, a rabbit's foot is supposed to be the foot of a rabbit that you - that - of course, the rabbit is dead, you wouldn't want a live rabbit in your pocket! But, a dead rabbit's foot is what you put inside your pocket for good luck. I had one of these when I was young. And, another superstition for good luck is blowing out candles. To blow, “blow,” out, two words, means that you use your breath to put out, or to blow out, a flame - a fire on top of a, usually, a cake, a birthday cake.



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So, the tradition is that you put candles on top of your cake, one candle for every year of your age, so for me it would be a huge fire. And, the person who is celebrating the birthday has to blow very hard and if you get all of the candles out, then your wish will come true. Well, I blew out all the candles in my birthday cake last year and I can tell you that my wish did not come true. I did not get a phone call from Angelina Jolie. She did not call me. We did not go on a date, and so my wish did not come true. So, don't believe that one.

Now, let's answer a few questions.

Our first question today comes from Carlos, “Carlos,” in Brazil. Carlos has a couple of questions. He wants to know the difference between some similar words. The words that he wants to know are fling, “fling,” throw, “throw,” cast, “cast,” and toss, “toss.” Well, let's talk about those. Those words all mean to throw something, to take something, usually in your hand and to move it to another place by moving your hand quickly and putting it in the air. That is to throw something. Some of these words, fling, cast, and toss, are used in particular situations, usually with specific things that you are throwing.

To fling something, “fling,” means usually that you are throwing something very fast and very hard, sometimes because you want to hurt another person. You want to hit them, and so you fling a plate or a cup or something that you can use to hurt them. That would be the most common use of the word to fling. To cast, “cast,” is a word that you might use if you are throwing something into a lake or into the ocean. “He cast his wedding ring into the ocean and said, 'I no longer love my wife.’” That doesn't actually get you a divorce, however. You can't just to throw your wedding ring in the ocean. You're still married. I tried that. So, to cast is just to throw something, usually into water - a river, a lake, an ocean, but you could also use it for other things, but that's one of the more common uses.

To toss, “toss,” is similar to fling. Usually, it's when you are giving something to someone and you are throwing it very slowly, usually you do that for a very short distance. So, if there are just two or three feet in between, you might toss something. If you are asking someone to throw something to you, you might use that verb, to toss, also, such as “toss me that pen,” means throw that pen to me. You wouldn't say, “cast me that pen,” or “fling me that pen,” you can say throw and toss, but not fling or cast. Thank you, Carlos, for that question.



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If you have a question, email us at eslpod@eslpod.com and we'll try to answer it in a future English Café.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on the English Café.

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