

By ANNE DONNELL

Recently I saw a cartoon (by cartoonist Doug Hall) on CHURCHlaughs.com in which the word "wallow" was used. There was a seated group with a man standing in the back and a man in front pointing to a board which read, "The last shall be first, and the first, last." The caption for the cartoon was the comment of the guy standing in the back, "I don't want to be first or last. I want to wallow somewhere in the middle." That word "wallow" is one I almost never hear, yet I think we all still know what it means. Hey, you could do a column on "outdated words and phrases"? -A Good Friend

Great cartoon, noting a long-established human failing. We really do want to stay safe, hidden in the crowd, whether it's opinion, fashion, or politics. The verse cited is Matthew 20: 16. "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (New International Version).

Antiquated words like wallow or, one I read the other day, hoyden (an unruly young girl), are interesting because they reflect both our propensity for change and for avoiding change.

I think back to 50 plus years ago and remember how hilarious we young things thought it was to see the old folks return for college reunions. Many had what we considered clothing styles and hairdos of the distant past. They had resisted change. And yet here they were in the midst of what must have once seemed to them a distant future. Fully aware of change they had chosen to retain parts of the past they liked.

So do we all, and that includes our language use. We laugh at the gap between what's said by teenagers and what's said by grandparents of teenagers. Now factor in all the groups of varying ages and influence (writers of great works, for example, surely have more widespread influence than most of us, and who knows how we should measure television personalities) and we see a language that still retains the rather antiquated wallow and allows for rap.

I found a blog by Suzanne Woods Fisher on old-fashioned words. She'd like to revive kerfuffle, flibbertigibbet, scuttlebutt, babooshka, caddywompas, fritter, hodgepodge, hobnob, moxie, tomfoolery, lollygag.

Here's some she thinks are fading – sneakers, record players, pin curls, ice box, house coat, bumpershoot, galoshes.

Online there's also a "Gran Slang" dictionary to help the young understand the old, but, as one commentator says, all Gran's words are in good dictionaries.

English features many words that are difficult and seldom used; I feature examples of those most weeks in BW (Bigtime Words). As to how antiquated words like that are – difficult to assess. Most were never widely used, but have continued to exist.

Your personality decides whether you're interested in being "with it" or "out of it." You'll find your age group still understands your favorite words and expressions. You can talk to them until you've outlived them all. Then it's speak to the canary (or dog or cat or fish) or, be careful now, younger people. That probably includes family.

ONLINE DEPARTMENT "Aphorisms" (Thanks, J.A.) *Aphorism: a short, pointed sentence expressing a wise or clever observation or a general truth; adage.*

1. The nicest thing about the future is that it always starts tomorrow.
2. Money will buy a fine dog, but only kindness will make him wag his tail.
3. If you don't have a sense of humor, you probably don't have any sense at all.
4. Seat belts are not as confining as wheelchairs.
5. A good time to keep your mouth shut is when you're in deep water.
6. How come it takes so little time for a child who is afraid of the dark to become a teenager who wants to stay out all night?
7. Business conventions are important because they demonstrate how many people a company can operate without.
8. Why is it that at class reunions you feel younger than everyone else looks?
9. Scratch a cat and you will have a permanent job.
10. No one has more driving ambition than the boy who wants to buy a car.
11. There are no new sins; the old ones just get more publicity.
12. There are worse things than getting a call for the wrong number at 4 am - it could be the right number.
13. No one ever says "It's only a game" when their team is winning.
14. I've reached the age where the happy hour is a nap.
15. Be careful reading the fine print. There's no way you're going to like it.
16. The trouble with bucket seats is that not everybody has the same size bucket.
17. Do you realize that in about 40 years, we'll have thousands of old men and old ladies running around with tattoos? (And rap music will be the Golden Oldies!)
18. Money can't buy happiness -- but somehow it's more comfortable to cry in a Porsche than in a Smart Car.
19. After 60, if you don't wake up aching in every joint, you are probably dead!
20. Always be yourself. Because the people that matter don't mind, and the ones that mind, don't matter.

BW (Bigtime Word) lapidate – stone to death. Sounds so much nicer than it is. Just don't be telling people you'd love to be lapidated.