

By ANNE DONNELL

I'm curious about why we say "What in Sam Hill" and "Hot as blue blazes." Please give us an explanation of these, as they seem pretty far-fetched to me, and I say them! -Man with "Wild" Speech

What in Sam Hill is this guy talking about? Just joking; our QP of T (Question Person of Today) has asked about expressions commonly used, which means they are effective. The user believes they work and believes the listener, and less frequently the reader, understands them. And we do, don't we?

As to the origins of these two, it's the old, familiar story of sources with various explanations. The snarly forest of the origins of words and phrases is not easily penetrated; the treasures hidden stay hidden. Mostly.

Sam Hill is categorized as a euphemism for the devil. It's also called a minced oath, an expression that softens the taboo words by replacing them with acceptable language. There are various guys named Samuel Hill or just Sam Hill who have been nominated for the honor of being THE Sam Hill: a character in German opera (*Der Freischütz*), an adjutant general of Kentucky sent to sort out the Hatfields and the McCoys, a perennial candidate in Connecticut, and a surveyor whose swearing was Olympic level. Many seem to think, Wikipedia tells us, the best explanation is the Sam Hill Mercantile Store in Prescott, Ariz., where salespeople and customers often remarked, "What in the Sam Hill is that?" while looking at the variety of articles for sale. The building is still standing on Montezuma Street.

All of the above could be wrong.

Now, blue blazes has been sorted out by none other than Evan Morris, the "Word Detective," in his March 28, 2011, column, in which he includes some word history and also disputes a reader's idea that the blue of blue blazes refers to the fire of lime kilns. "Beginning in the 19th century, however, 'blazes' began to be used to mean specifically 'the fires of hell' and, by extension, things similarly intense and merciless... 'Blue blazes' is simply another metaphorical

use of 'blazes' as a euphemistic oath..., in this case coupled with 'blue' as an elaboration and an intensifier, giving 'blazes' a bit more weight. The choice of 'blue' is probably largely due to the alliterative charm of having two initial consonants... But the fact that it's well-known that the hottest fires burn with a blue flame probably played a role as well."

FYI Big, grabby Texas claims blue blazes.

MYSTERIOUS ASPECT TO CHECK OUT WHEN YOU VISIT ROMANIA: "The Living Fires (Focurile Vii in Romanian) can be found in the Romanian village of Lopatari... Living Fires can be as high as 20 cm and represent a natural phenomenon unique in Europe. They are blue flames burning in places where the soil is cracked and kept alive because of the gas that comes to surface." From Romanianinsider.com. Well, mince my oath.

ONLINE DEPARTMENT *"Redneck Medical Dictionary" (Thanks, P.K. and C.G.) [I know, I know. Sometime earlier I wrote about avoiding disparaging terms like redneck (and blonde, though it seems half of American females, and some males, liberally use the bleach), but these jokes keep coming in, and people keep walking around in shirts labeled Redneck Pride or something, so what in Sam Hill or blue blazes am I to do? Be a little straw in the wind?] Rednecks have the lowest stress rate because they do not take medical terminology seriously. You are going to die anyway, so live life. Artery – the study of paintings Bacteria – back door to cafeteria Barium – what doctors do when patients die Benign – what you be, after you be eight Caesarean Section – a neighborhood in Rome Cat Scan – searching for kitty Cauterize – make eye contact with her Colic – a sheep dog Coma – a punctuation mark Dilate – to live long Enema – Not a friend Fester – quicker than someone else Fibula – a small lie Labor Pain – getting hurt at work Medical Staff – a doctor's cane Morbid – a higher offer Nitrates – rates of pay for working at night Node – I knew it Outpatient – a patient who fainted Pelvis – cousin of Elvis Post Operative – A letter carrier Recovery Room – place to do upholstery Rectum – nearly killed him Secretion – hiding something Seizure – Roman emperor Tablet – a small table Terminal illness – getting sick at the airport Tumor – One plus one more Urine – opposite of you're out*

"Some Southern State Jokes" (Thanks, A. R.) A Florida senior citizen drove his brand new Corvette convertible pushing it to 80 mph, enjoying the wind blowing through what little hair he had left. Looking in his rear view mirror, he saw a Florida State Trooper, blue lights flashing and siren blaring. Pulling in behind him, the trooper got out of his vehicle and walked up to the Corvette and said, "Sir, my shift ends in 30 minutes. Today is Friday. If you can give me a new reason for speeding -- a reason I've never before heard -- I'll let you go." The old gentleman paused then said: "Three years ago, my wife ran off with a Florida State Trooper. I thought you

were bringing her back." "Have a good day, Sir," replied the trooper. □ A senior citizen in Louisiana was overheard saying, "When the end of the world comes, I hope to be in Louisiana." When asked why, he replied, "I'd rather be in Louisiana 'cause everythang happens in Louisiana 20 years later than in the rest of the world." □ A young man from Mississippi came running into the store and said to his buddy, "Bubba, somebody just stole your pickup truck from the parking lot!" Bubba replied, "Did y'all see who it was?" The young man answered, "I couldn't tell, but I got the license number." □ A man in North Carolina had a flat tire, pulled off on the side of the road, and put a bouquet of flowers in front of the car and one behind it. Then he got back in the car to wait. A passerby studied the scene as he drove by, and was so curious he turned around and went back to ask about the problem. □ The man replied, "I got a flat tahr." The passerby asked, "But what's with the flowers?" The man responded, "When you break down they tell you to put flares in the front and flares in the back. I never did understand it neither." □ A Tennessee State trooper pulled over a pickup on I-65. The trooper asked, "Got any ID?" The driver replied, "Bout whut?" □ A Texas sheriff pulled up next to the guy unloading garbage out of his pickup into the ditch. The sheriff asked, "Why are you dumping garbage in the ditch? Don't you see that sign right over your head?" "Yep," he replied. "That's why I'm dumpin' it here, 'cause it says: 'Fine For Dumping Garbage.'"