

Terms of endearment (7, 12, 13)

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Have you noticed the number of aging men who drive Mustang convertibles and other sporty cars? My brother-in-law, a little older than me, loves cars, and he likes to reminisce about them. He can tell you the make and model of everything on the road in the 40's and 50's and he fondly recalls the days of autos equipped with "fender skirts" which would be considered too feminine these days, especially on the aforementioned Mustang or other testosterone-dripping SUV's that guzzle wanton amounts of gas.



Many automotive terms have disappeared, just like the proverbial dodo bird. Remember "curb feelers" and "steering knobs?" Curb feelers scrapped the curb and provided audible warning that you were close enough to park. Now, we have video and beepers. The steering knob was a round ball-like attachment to the wheel, enclosed with your hand, often decorated with ladies smiling in their swimsuits. It's now illegal. A driver might turn his car too quickly with it and thereby cause a crash while staring intently at the swimsuit.

I actually use a steering knob now for my disability. The lawyer in me wants to apply this analogy to argue the case for medical use of marijuana. Once you retire, you should be able to do whatever you want with your body. No one else is that interested in it except perhaps your spouse. Pierre Burton, Canada's great author, smoked pot for decades, and it didn't harm his creativity or production.

But back to cars. Do you remember "Continental kits?" People used them as rear bumper extenders and spare tire covers. They made your puny Dodge look as cool as a swish Lincoln Continental.

Then there's the term, "emergency brakes." At some point in time, it became un-cool to label a car part with the inflammatory descriptor, "emergency." Emergency flares are okay, but "parking brake" is more politically correct. "Used cars" are no longer "used." They are "pre-owned." Does that work for divorcees? Another term you never hear anymore is "foot feed," the expression for an accelerator; if you were in a hurry, you would simply floor it.

A sign of affluence was to brag about something that was "store-bought" because people often made their own clothes and food. A store-bought dress or store-bought candy was impressive to your impoverished friends. Now, bragging rights depend totally on the store name itself. Store owners are clever. They print their names on the clothes. Some sew on special symbols such as a pelican or a crocodile and then mark up the cost of the material by 100%. This is amazing when you realize that all of the stuff is actually made in China or India.

I still use the term, "cool." This dates me. Do you remember "groovy?" How about "the cat's meow?" And when was the last time you heard the phrase "in a family way" whispered to express disapproval? "She's not even married, and she's in a family way." People don't care much anymore. There have been movie actresses in "a family way" with multiple partners without getting married. "Pregnant" was considered too graphic in the old days. We talked about storks so much in my family that I wanted to become an ornithologist.



"Divorce" was another taboo term. Now, half the people I know are divorced. People who didn't marry before the age of twenty-five were "confirmed bachelors" or "career girls." Finally, how you say goodbye also dates you, so I will sign off with "later, dude."