

Proverbs in The Funny Pages

by

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Folklore and The Media
Course Project

November 20, 1996

prov·erb

prov·erb (prōv'ûrb') *noun*

1. A short, pithy saying in frequent and widespread use that expresses a basic truth or practical precept. See synonyms at saying.
2. **Proverbs** (*used with a sing. verb*) *Abbr. Prov., Pr Bible.*

[Middle English *proverbe*, from Old French, from Latin *prōverbium* : *prō-*, forth. See *pro*¹ + *verbum*, word.]¹

Proverbs are like answers to life's little mysteries. These answers have come about due to real-life research done by people wiser than ourselves and passed down from generation to generation as helpful hints or maybe even warnings as to life's difficulties. They may sound corny coming from a senile Aunt Tilly or even inappropriate when Dad passes one on after losing the big game, but more often than not, they are the truth.

The morning paper has been a staple of American households for many years. Not everyone may agree on which section is their favorite, it could be the sports section, the front page or *Ann Landers*, but almost everyone takes a turn reading the comics. Why is that? Why do people have an almost religious devotion to following the antics of Dennis, the laziness of Beetle or the conquests of Hagar? The comics relate basic events and emotions that we all face, but in a way that is non-threatening and enjoyable. They often boil down the complexities of modern life to a three or four panel slice of the truth. The comics often use proverbs to relate these little truisms.

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For the Folklore and Media Course Project it was my intention to show the extent to which the daily comics use proverbs as the main focus for their story lines. I chose to use the Louisville Courier Journal as my proving ground. The Courier Journal has a wide selection of strips in its comics section so I chose to only use the humorous strips and thus eliminated the "Soap Opera-type" strips such as *Rex Morgan M.D.* and *Mary Worth*. The time frame was to be 20 consecutive days (Monday through Sunday) beginning on Sunday, September 29, 1996 and continuing until Friday, October 18, 1996. The time-frame had to eventually be expanded to November 6 to obtain 20 samples, bringing the total to 39 days. This showed that on average there is a proverb in the paper almost every other day.

On quite a few occasions the proverbs were not what one could call "straight proverbs" but had been slightly modified to fit the story. An example of this twisting of the proverb would be the *Beetle Bailey* that was featured on Thursday, October 17th: "You've just got to forget what your mother taught you. NEVER look before you leap."

Going into this project, I felt that the majority of the characters spouting off the proverbs would be women. Characters such as the wise old grandmother or the wise Viking mother, but in fact, the majority of proverb dispensers were men (see table 3). This may have been influenced by the presence of *Ziggy*, everyone's favorite bald, no-neck whiner. *Ziggy* had a tie with *Hagar the Horrible*

for the greatest number of proverbs for the time frame in question. Since *Ziggy* typically has no female characters, the strip definitely had a sway on the gender issue. Hagar in fact only got in two of the five proverbs from his own strip, the other three being dealt by his wife, Helga. Two of Helga's comments came from strips entitled, "Listen to Your Mother: Helga Tells it Like it Is." Even in comic strips proverbs get passed down from generation to generation.

The relationship of the proverb dispenser and the recipient did vary somewhat. In the case of *Hagar the Horrible*, all of the proverbs were spoken of between family members. *Ziggy* always tended to speak directly to the reader as opposed to another character. Several strips had proverbs being shared between friends and there were even occasions of strangers and co-workers "spreading the truth."

In conclusion I found that proverbs are definitely a device commonly used to tell a story in modern-day comic strips, although not to the extent I had previously thought. The proverbs tend to be passed on as they are in real life, from family member to family member. There is some variation in how the proverbs are told. Some are spoken almost verbatim to their common versions, but some are twisted to show a particular point in the context of the strip. The comics do indeed provide truisms on an almost daily basis, so if your Aunt Tilly has moved on to another plane of existence and you need to hear some words of wisdom, open the funny pages and start reading.

Total Count
(Table 1)

Comics	Total Count
B.C.	0
Beetle Bailey	1
Blondie	1
Cathy	0
Dennis the Menace	2
Family Business	3
Family Circus	0
For Better or For Worse	1
Fox Trot	0
Funky Winkerbean	0
Garfield	0
Hagar the Horrible	5
Hi and Lois	0
Marmaduke	0
Peanuts	2
The Wizard of Id	0
Ziggy	5
TOTAL	20

Time Spread of Proverbs In Comics
(table 2)

September

Total: 2

29	30
1	1

October

Total: 17

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
2	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

November

Total: 1

01	02	03	04	05	06
0	0	0	0	0	1

Dispenser of the Proverb
(Table 3)

GENDER	QUANTITY
MALE	13
FEMALE	7

Relationship of the Dispenser and the Recipient
(Table 4)

RELATIONSHIP	QUANTITY
STRANGER	2
FRIEND	4
CO-WORKERS	3
SIBLING	0
PARENT-OFFSPRING	4
SPOUSE	2
CHARACTER-READER	5

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

BY
LYNN JOHNSTON

HELLO, I'M LOOKING FOR A BOOK THEY TALKED ABOUT ON THE RADIO THIS MORNING... IT'S ABOUT A MAN WHO MEETS A WOMAN DURING THE WAR.

SURE! WHAT'S THE TITLE?
I DON'T KNOW.
THE AUTHOR?
I DON'T KNOW.

IS THE PUBLISHER CANADIAN? AMERICAN? IS IT FICTION? NONFICTION? NOVEL? DOCUMENTARY? BIOGRAPHY? NEW OR OLD RELEASE?
I DON'T KNOW.

BUT THEY **DID** SAY IT HAD A HARD, BLUE COVER. YES. THE COVER IS DEFINITELY BLUE!

I'M SORRY...BUT I'LL NEED MORE INFORMATION.
WHAT? YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT A BOOK IF IT'S ON THE RADIO!!

SLAM!

STRANGE... SHE SEEMED LIKE A NICE WOMAN.
YEAH... BUT IT'S LIKE YOU SAID, EL...

...YOU CAN'T TELL A BOOK BY ITS COVER!!!

Sunday, October 20, 1996

THE FAMILY BUSINESS



Tuesday, October 1, 1996

THE FAMILY BUSINESS



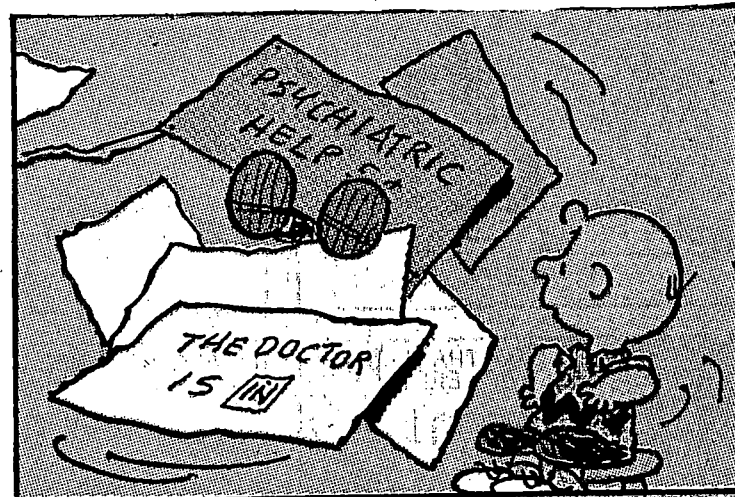
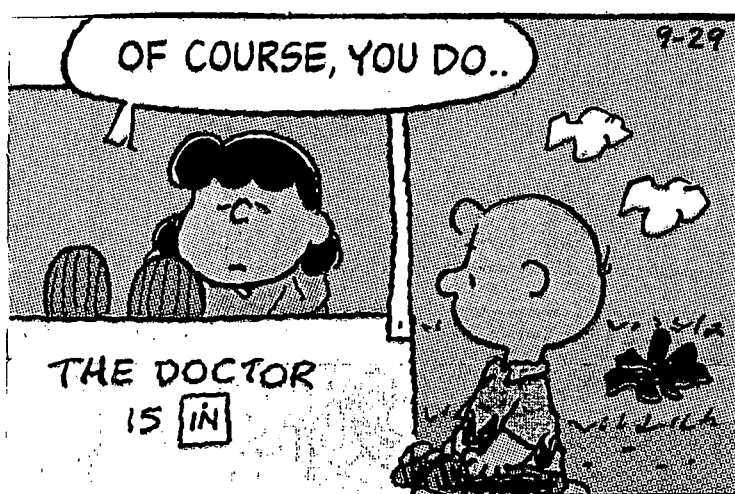
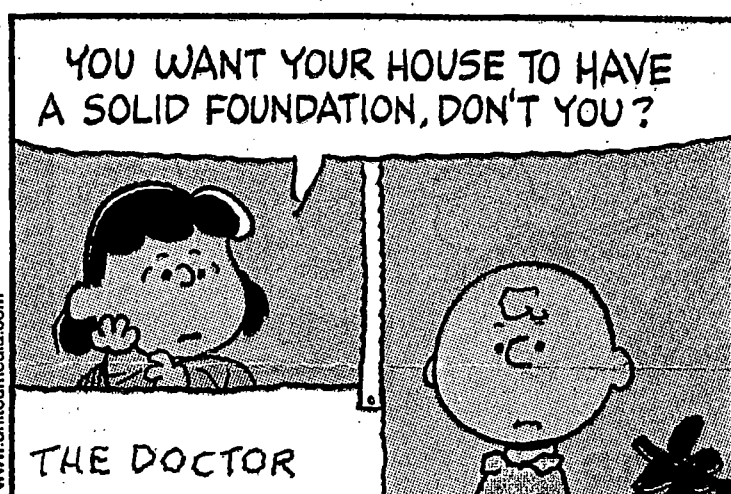
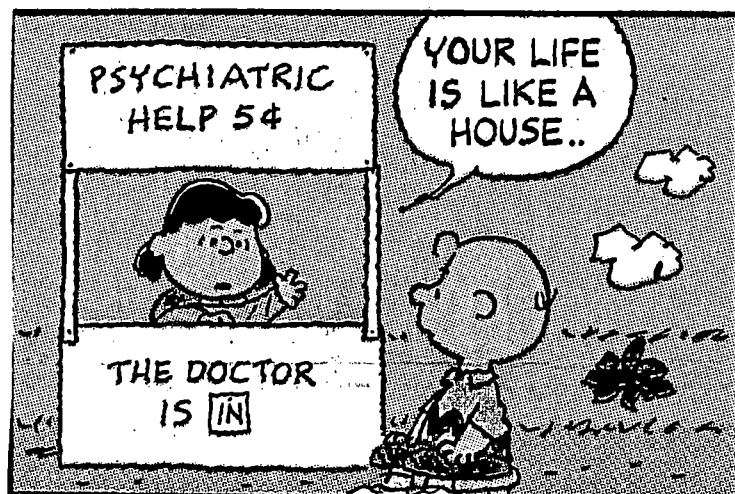
Monday, October 7, 1996

THE FAMILY BUSINESS



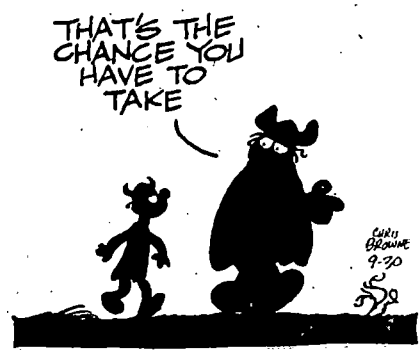
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PEANUTS



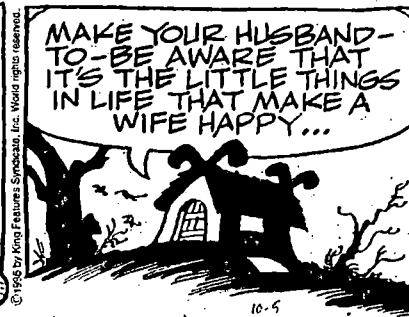
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HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



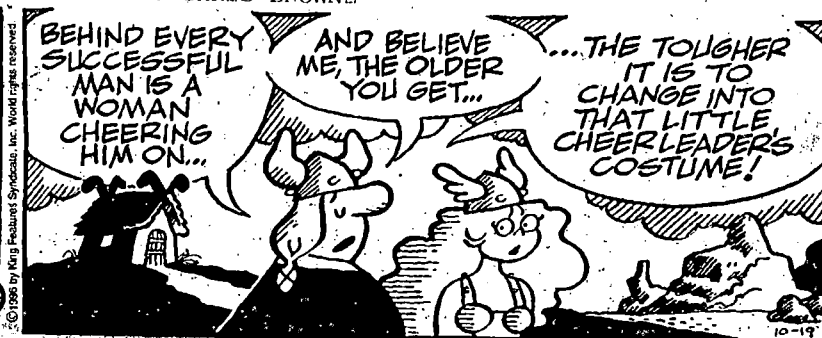
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HAGAR THE HORRIBLE BY CHRIS BROWNE



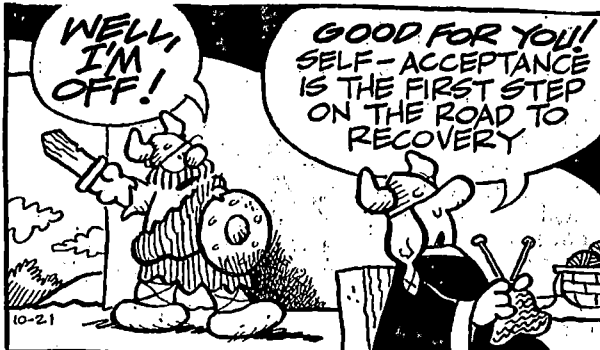
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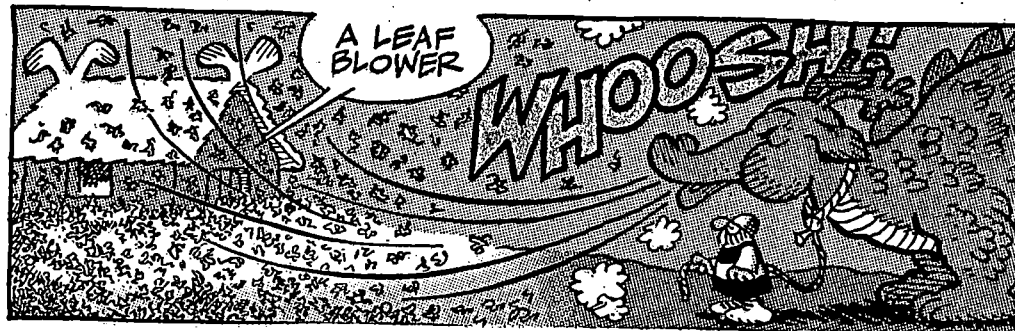
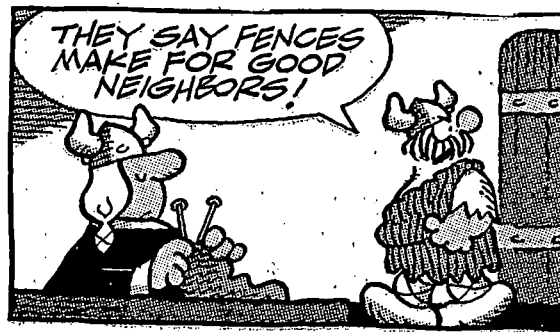
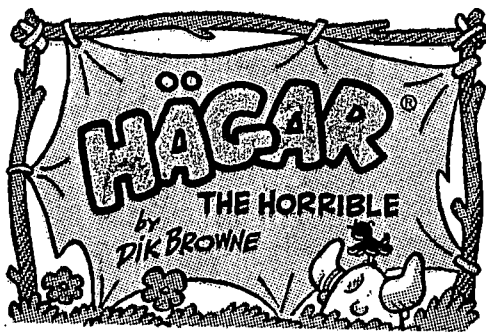
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE BY CHRIS BROWNE



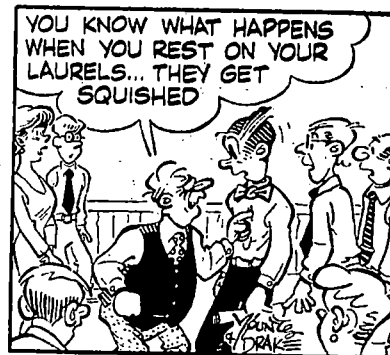
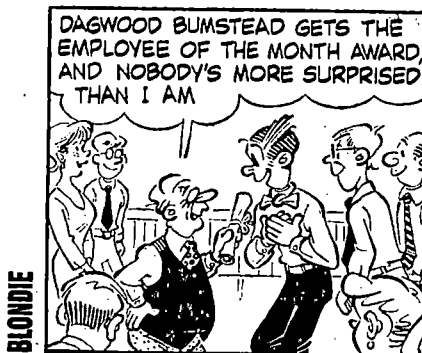
Saturday, October 19, 1996

HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



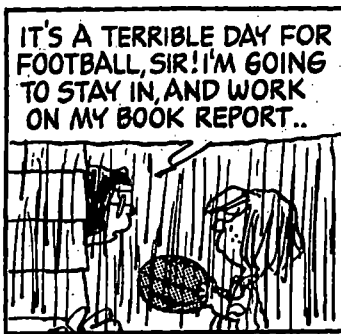


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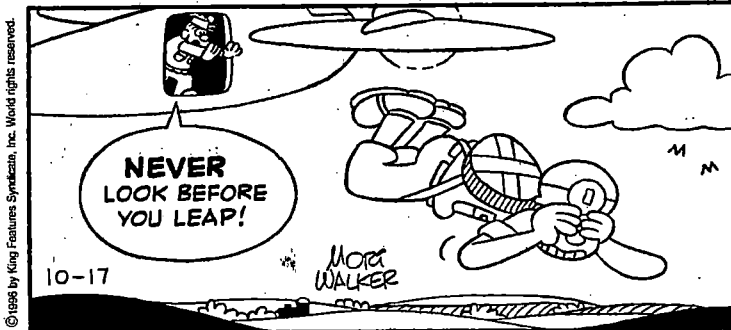
Friday, October 18, 1996

PEANUTS



Wednesday, October 16, 1996

BEETLE BAILEY



Thursday, October 17, 1996

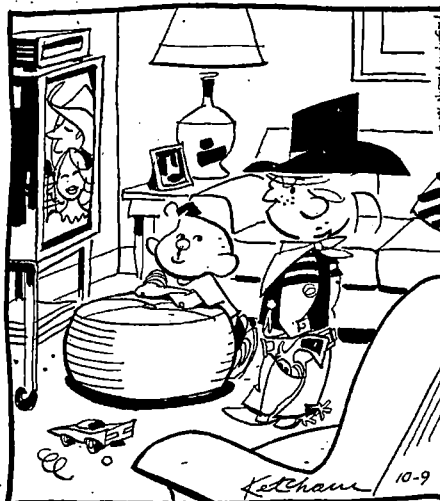
DENNIS THE MENACE



"I'm not supposed to let any CATS out of any BAGS."

Tuesday, October 1, 1996

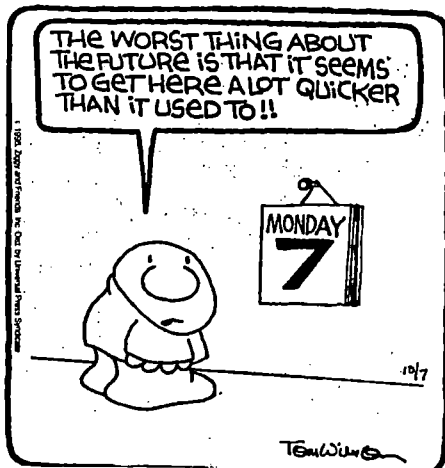
DENNIS THE MENACE



"That's the reason I wear a BLACK hat... 'cause the cowboy with the white hat always gets the girl."

Wednesday, October 9, 1996

ZIGGY



Monday, October 7, 1996

ZIGGY



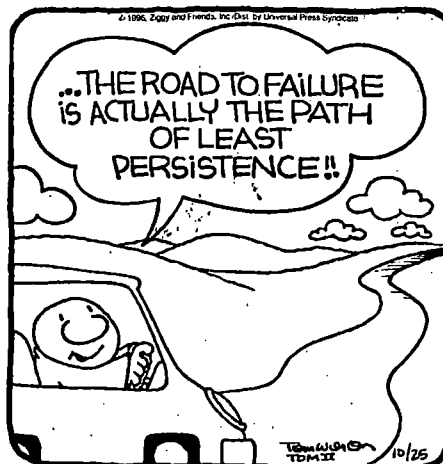
Wednesday, October 16, 1996

ZIGGY



Monday, October 21, 1996

ZIGGY



Friday, October 25, 1996

ZIGGY



Wednesday, November 6, 1996