

Urban Legends

FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES
KENTUCKY BUILDING
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
BOWLING GREEN, KY 42101

*Susan Quisenberry
Urban Folklore
Dr. Burt Feintuch
October 31st, 1983
FA 57*

Urban legends are stories that relate to contemporary life. They are based on modern society, and are usually quite believable to the average person. When looked at closely they reflect a person's susceptibility to the wife-like legends. The following are two stories told to me by friends.

A couple of years ago a female student at the University of Kentucky was reading the Classifieds of the Lexington Leader. She was in the market for a car and was searching for a bargain. She noticed an ad for a Mercedes 450SL in very good condition and a recent model. The amazing thing was that the ad said its cost was \$1. She couldn't believe it, so out of curiosity she called the owner and set up an appointment to see the car. The next day she went to the house to see the car. The car was just as described, in sleek condition all the way around. The girl thought what the heck I've never driven a Mercedes, I'll ask if I can drive it around the block. The lady who owned it readily obliged her request. After she had driven it, believing the ad to be misprinted she asked about the cost. The woman said \$1, just as the ad stated. The girl couldn't believe it and asked again - she was given the same reply. The arrangements were made and she purchased the car. After she had the keys in her hand she asked the former owner why the car was only \$1. The woman

replied, "My husband took off with his secretary to the Bahamas. He later had the gall to call me and asked for me to ~~send~~ sell the car and send him the money. So I did and he'll get his \$1. This story points out the greed and revenge aspects of a persons personality. The personality of the student is not the prominent issue. The man involved in the story is the brunt of the joke. Because of his infidelity and greed his wife's revenge seems justifiable. The woman is made out to be the hero by putting the man in his place, and providing a car for the young woman. Realistically it seems the woman would have kept the car or sold it for its true value. The story is believable, I should know I fell for it until I read the same story in Psychology Today. It provides an excitement for the one who hears it, and a hope that ~~it~~ he will be as fortunate some day. This legend is the kind that is willingly accepted because of the positive excitement it provides.

A friend recently told me a story that was told to him by his cousin. His cousin told him that a family he knew went camping. Whenever they camped they took the family dog along. They owned a Winnebago and took no other vehicle along when camping. So when they needed to leave the campground they had to drive their Winnebago. When they camped they always kept the dog out side on a leash tied to the camper. On ~~a~~ a recent camping trip they decided they needed to go into town to pick up a few things. They proceeded

to drive the camper along the rugged back road. They heard a bumping in the rear of the camper, but paid no attention to it. But finally after five minutes of continuous bumping they stopped the camper. The father told the son to jump out and check out the problem. Well, the son jumped out and went behind the camper, only to find his dog laying strangled to death behind the Winnebago. The story shows the rush-around lifestyle of this culture. The convenience of this life is shown in the lavish Winnebago instead of a more rugged camp experience. Even camping is pitted in luxury today. It also ~~also~~ displays the thrill of the cruel and grotesque. When this story is told it receives a seemingly negative reaction, yet there is always laughter after the initial shock. People revel in the idea of a dead pup due to the carelessness of its owner. The story exemplifies the preoccupation contemporary society holds with the grotesque. The legends presented here comment on the aspects of modern society. The preoccupation with greed and horror are present in all levels of society. Their popularity and believability ~~is~~ a unanswerable part of the contemporary pattern of life.