



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 55

TOPICS

Genealogy, Bill Cosby, to get down on your knees vs. to get down on one knee

GLOSSARY

blood relative – someone who is related to you because they were born into your family, rather than to be related by marriage

* Sandy and Douglas grew up together in Houston, but I'm not sure if they are blood relatives.

miniseries – a television drama show that is shown in several parts

* Do you know how if this miniseries is has four or five episodes?

ancestor – a family relation from the past, usually those who are older than your grandparents

* She used to tell all of her friends that one of her ancestors was a king of Norway, but I don't think anyone believed her.

to trace (one's) family tree – to find out who one's family relations are, from the past and present

* We both have the same last name but we'll have to trace our family trees to know if we're related at all.

hyphenated American – Americans whose family comes from another country or a specific cultural group

* It's not uncommon for many proud Americans to identify themselves as hyphenated Americans and to recognize their heritage.

cemetery – graveyard; a place where dead people are buried

* Each time we drove by this cemetery when I was young, my older brother would tell me ghost stories to try to scare me.

birth certificate – an official document that records someone's birth

* He was in shock when he saw on his birth certificate that his mother was only 17 when he was born.



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Mormon – a member of the Mormon church, a religious group begun in the United States in the 19th century

* The official name for the Mormon church is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.

stand-up comedian – a person who tries to make people laugh by telling jokes in front of an audience

* Eddie took a year off from school to try to make it as a stand-up comedian.

to tell a joke – to say something that is intended to make people laugh

* He wanted to tell a joke at the beginning of his presentation, but I tried to convince him that it wasn't a good idea at a serious meeting like this one.

album – a round, flat disk that has a collection of sound recordings

* We went to the used records store and bought some great old albums.

cartoon – a TV show or movie that is made with drawings, rather than real people

* After school, my brother always wanted to watch cartoons instead of doing his homework, but my mother never let him.

upper-class – the group of people in a society with a lot of money and high status

* The principal of that private school told me that all of the upper-class families in town sent their children there, but that didn't impress me.

to get down on (one's) knees – to beg; to ask someone for something; to ask for forgiveness

* If you want Olivia to forgive you, you'll have to get down on your knees to tell her how sorry you are.

to get down on one knee – to kneel; to ask someone to marry him or her

* Gina couldn't believe it when her boyfriend got down on one knee in the middle of crowded restaurant to ask her to marry him.



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WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

“There’s a black sheep in every family.”

The expression, “black sheep,” is commonly used to describe a member of a family who is a “disgrace,” or who does bad things or is a failure. If there is someone in your family who has been in trouble with the police or who gambles and loses all his or her money, you may hear someone say of that person: “He (or she) is the black sheep of that family.”

The color black, in the U.S. and in other western societies, usually represents things that are bad or evil, while the color white is usually used for good or pure things. As you probably know, in old movies, the “villain,” or the bad person who causes trouble is traditionally dressed in black, while the “hero,” or the good person who saves others from the villain is dressed in white.

The color black is used in entertainment in other ways. If someone describes a movie as a “black comedy,” you know that it is a funny movie, but one that has a serious or tragic side. People can be “blacklisted,” which marks them as an undesirable person and they are not, for example, hired for a job or allowed to come into a place of business.

The word “black” has been used a lot to describe bad or sad events in history. In 1929, for example, the stock market in the U.S. “crashed,” or declined to a very low level very quickly. That day is now known as “Black Tuesday.”



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 55.

This is English Café episode 55. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On this Café we're going to talk about genealogy, or the study of your family tree and why that's so popular in the United States. We're also going to talk about one the most popular, well-known comedians and actors in the U.S., a man by the name of Bill Cosby. And, as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started.

If you haven't visited our website recently, go to eslpod.com. You'll find some new things on our website. You will also find information about the Learning Guide for this podcast episode. That is an eight to ten page guide that includes all the vocabulary and definitions of the words we talk about on each podcast. It also includes additional definitions, culture notes and a complete transcript of this podcast.

Today's topic is genealogy. Genealogy, "genealogy," is the study of your family and where your family came from, more importantly, who your relatives are. We use that word, relatives, to mean anyone who is connected to you because of either blood or marriage. A blood relative, just like the blood that is in your body, a blood relative is someone who is related to you, is one of your relatives because you have a common father or a common mother or you have the same grandfather or maybe the same great-great grandfather. That would be someone who is a blood relative. Someone who's a relative by marriage would mean that they are considered your relative because they married someone who is your blood relative.

The study of genealogy, what we usually call your family tree, has become very popular in the United States. It started to become popular, I think, especially in the 1970's and one of reasons is because of television. There was a very famous and very popular television movie. It was what we would probably call a miniseries. Mini, "miniseries," that's when you have a television show that is on more than one night. It's more than one episode, but it's not a complete season.



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It doesn't last for 20 or 30 weeks. It's usually three, four, maybe five nights when you have this what is actually a long television movie.

Well, this miniseries in the 1970's that got people interested in genealogy was called Roots, "Roots." And, Roots is book, originally was a book by an author named Alex Haley, and it was made into a miniseries. They made it into a movie. And, it's the story of a man who is trying to find his relatives, what we would call his ancestors. An ancestor, "ancestor," is someone who was born before you, sometimes many years before you, but is one of your relatives.

This is the story of an African-American who, we would use the verb, traces his family tree. To trace, "trace," means to research, to investigate your family tree, to find out who your ancestors were, who your relatives were. Well, this was the story of...began as the story of an African slave, someone who was brought over to the United States in the 19th century to work as a slave. It follows that person's story and it is...was a very popular, very popular television show. Very good television show, showed the history, in part, of slavery in the United States, especially in the south of the United States. It got other people interested in finding out where their relatives, their ancestors came from.

United States, of course, is a country of immigrants, for the most part. Most people here come from another country. One of things that it, I think, produces in Americans, is it makes them want to where they came from, or at least some Americans. They want to feel a sense of history. They want to know what their history is. And, I suppose it's a little like someone who is adopted, someone who is brought into a family and made part of the family. You always wonder where your parents went, where your original parents are, and that's a little bit about what Americans think. They...many of them want to know and have a connection with the home country, or the country where their ancestors came from, their relatives came from.

They are many Americans who identify themselves not just as Americans, but as what we would call hyphenated Americans. A hyphen, "hyphen," is that little line that you put in the middle of a word. When you're connecting two words and making them one word, we many times use a hyphen in English. Hyphenated comes from the word hyphen, and it refers to a word that has a hyphen in it. We say it is hyphenated.



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A hyphenated American is an American who identifies himself or herself using the country where their ancestors came from. So, in my case, for example, I would be an Irish-American because my ancestors came from Ireland. Someone else may be a Chinese-American because their ancestors came from China. You could be a Mexican-American, a Canadian-American, a Pakistani-American. Any country outside of the United States could be the first part of your hyphenated identity.

Well, this is, as I say, popular among many Americans, to identify themselves, so they want to know where their roots are. The word roots is the same word we use for a plant or a tree, and it describes what is below the ground, what is down into the earth, into the dirt, those are called the roots, that go into the ground, into the earth.

My father was very interested in genealogy beginning in the 1970's, and so we spent a lot of time as a family, when we were traveling across the United States on vacation, going to places to find out more about our relatives, our ancestors. We spent a lot of time on our vacations in a cemetery, or in cemeteries. Cemetery, "cemetery," is a place where you put bodies after they die. I remember when I was nine or ten years old we would be on vacation in the summertime, my father was a teacher so he had vacation in the summer, and we would go to different cemeteries and look at the tombstones. A tomb, "tomb," is the place where you put the body in the ground in a cemetery, and a tombstone is the piece of rock or stone, it could be wood, that has the name of the person, usually the year they were born and the year that they died. So, we would go to these cemeteries and look at the tombstones looking for McQuillans or people who we thought were related to us. So even now, many years later, when I go on vacation, I always go to the cemetery to see if I can find any of my ancestors.

When you are tracing your family tree, you usually look for what are called vital records. Vital, "vital," records has to do with the records of your life, and these are usually the birth records, the death records and the marriage records. The birth records are called birth certificates. A birth certificate is a piece of paper that says where you were born, what hospital or what place you were born. We use that same word, certificate, when we talk about marriage. When you get married you get a marriage certificate. This is something that the government keeps a record of. And, very similar to marriage is death - I mean you get a death certificate when you die. So, you're born, you get married, and then right after you get married you die!



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Well, these are the things that someone who is tracing their family tree would look at. There are many other things that people look at, and one of the most popular places that Americans go to trace their family tree is the library, or the database now, of the Mormon Church. The Mormons, “Mormons,” are a group of people, a religion that is very popular in the State of Utah. Utah is in the western part of the United States. And, this is a very interesting religion, an American religion. Part of the Mormon religion, which is also called the Church of the Latter Day Saints - the Church of the Latter, “Latter,” Day Saints, meaning the more recent saints. A saint is a - usually a very holy person - a good person who has died.

Well, the Mormon Church, part of their religion has to do with investigating their ancestors, the people who have died who are their relatives, and so they keep very good records. These are records not just of people who are Mormons, but anyone who might be related to a Mormon. So, it is possible to use their database, or their library, to research, especially if you are an American, to research your family tree.

We'll talk now about a very famous American comedian. His name is Bill Cosby, “Cosby,” is his last name, Bill Cosby. Bill Cosby is a comedian. He started his career, we would say, he started his life, his work life, his career in entertainment as a comedian. He was a stand-up comedian. A stand-up, “stand-up,” comedian is someone who goes to small clubs, comedy clubs. They're like bars that you have a comedian who is telling jokes. The verb we use is to tell a joke. And, they stand up in front of people and they tell jokes. And, many of the most famous comedians and actors, who are in comedies in the United States, started as stand-up comedians. They are sort of like musicians, where they go and play in front of very small groups of people at clubs and bars, and they get more popular and they go to bigger clubs and bigger bars and so forth.

Well, Bill Cosby started as a stand-up comedian, a stand-up performer, started recording comedy albums. An album, “album,” is normally a collection of music, but it can also be a collection, in this case, of jokes. Albums used to be something that we would call records, and now everything is on compact discs, on CDs. He started as a comedian making albums. I remember when I was only six or seven years old my older brothers and sisters, this was back in the early 1970's, they would have these albums by Bill Cosby and they would listen to him. And, he was very popular. He eventually had a cartoon series. A cartoon, “cartoon,” is a television show or a movie where you are looking at drawings,



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pictures, not actually human beings, such as Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck. The Disney Company has many famous cartoons.

Well, Bill Cosby had his own cartoon series, his own cartoon show. It was called Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids, and it was actually an educational cartoon. He tried to teach certain lessons, certain ideas for young people, and I watched this cartoon series when I was growing up. I should say that Bill Cosby not only is a comedian and an actor, he also has a doctorate degree in education from Columbia University, which is one of the best universities in the United States. So, he's a very smart man. He has this television show in the 1970's, this cartoon series called Fat Albert, and then he became very famous, even more famous in 1980's when he had a regular television show called the Cosby Show, and that was a show about an African-American family, a black family that was an upper-class family.

The term upper, "upper," -class, "class," refers to someone who is rich, someone who has a lot of money. You can be upper class, you can also be middle class, someone in the middle, and you could also be lower class, although we don't use that word, lower-class, as much any more. We would probably say working-class for those who are poor, who don't have a lot of money.

Well, this was a story about a(n) African-American family, and it was on the television for eight years. So, there were eight television seasons. It is very popular, one of the most popular television shows in the 1980's in the United States. It was a comedy. That is probably one of the things that most Americans know Bill Cosby for is that television show. People who are older, like me, remember his comedy albums and his cartoon.

Now, let's answer a few questions. Our first question comes from Luan, "Luan," from Vietnam. Luan wants to know the meaning of the expression "to get down on your knees." Your knees, "knees," are in the middle of your leg, they connect the two parts of your leg. To get down on your knees is the same as to kneel, "kneel," which means that you put your knees on the ground. And, this expression, to get down on your knees, means to ask someone for a favor - to beg them for a favor. To beg, "beg," means to ask someone and to hope that they will say yes. So, you get down on your knees when you are asking someone for a big favor. Of course, you don't normally physically get down on your knees. The expression is, however, to show that you really are asking this person to help you, for a favor.



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There's another expression that means something different: to get down on one knee. To get down on one knee means to put only one of your knees on the ground, and that expression is related to a man asking a woman to marry him. To get down on one knee then means to ask a woman if she will marry you, usually a man to a woman. That, of course, is the beginning of the end!

Well, this is the end of our podcast. I want to thank you for listening. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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