

## Learning to Swear

My dad taught me how to swear. He didn't say he was going to teach me. He just did it as I watched and listened.

That was his way. Don't do what I say you're supposed to do, but watch me and listen. Learn by imitation, only don't tell anybody you're learning anything. Try not to let your mouth hang open in wonder, because then everybody will know you're paying attention and learning in admiration and knowing what to do with new language by instinct, by intuition instead of just being a dumb kid watching and listening.

I was eight or nine then.

I watched him revise mechanisms in the engine compartment of the family car. It's important, the way he worked on a car, to know how to swear. The more different swear words you know, the better you can do with it. Avoid repetition.

Be aware of what you're saying. Then, if you must repeat, deliver repetitions of a word or phrase with different tones, with different emphases. If you get skilled enough at it, you can even make ordinary words sound like swear words, especially if you deliver them in the center of a swear-phrase, like, "son-of-a-....., sweet little sucking dog puppy, simply loving his black and white mummy for the sake of sustenance, dog-hound, dropped wrench, under my car bas....," stuff like that. It takes practice.

If a nut gets stuck on a bolt and won't come off, then you swear it off, or if you're in a hurry and want to use your time efficiently, you swear at everything ahead of time, warning it ahead of time, you're coming, get ready, and if you lose a wrench under the car, because you throw it at a nut that won't come off, and it bounces around until it finds a way clear to the ground, you swear as you crawl around under there.

I guess that keeps your clothes from getting as dirty, or better yet, if your wrench stops on its way down in some almost-impossible place to reach, if you swear enough maybe it makes it easier to reach. I don't really know how that works, because I didn't participate at that time, just watched and listened and didn't ask any questions about how it all worked.

I wish I had taken a notepad and pencil out there where we worked on the car. I could have written everything down to remember better, even if I didn't know how to spell most of the words. I probably could have written them by sound and

figured out the spelling later as I grew up, but most of it was so fast, I couldn't have kept up, and my dad would probably ask what the paper and pencil was about, then spank me with a stick, and swear at me, because I wasn't supposed to know words like that or use them ever, even if dirt flew in my eyes when I skidded my bicycle on the dirt road above the house, and I fell off, and dirt flew in my eyes and hurt like ....

It was years before I learned what some of the words meant, but that didn't matter much because I didn't need to know what they meant before I used them effectively. It's more my tone of voice when I said them, yelled them out, and the expression on my face, so mad I could chew up bat .... and spit it right in the teacher's face (for example), in her eyes even, asking me a question like that in front of everybody, when she should know I don't know the answer and wouldn't say it if I did.

Other kids might ask me what the words of swearing meant, but most of them listened and learned and used the words and then figured out later what they meant, like I did. Nobody wanted to admit they didn't know what the words meant. I don't know about the other kids, but some of the words, I don't really know what they mean yet.

But what it's about when anybody swears is clear by the context of the moment. It's about frustration or anger or promises to all the forces in heaven about what's going to happen (usually to the entire universe) if everything doesn't go like you think it should go or telling someone or something what you think they or it is really worth, if that worth isn't much or even less than that.

Everybody knows I'm swearing even if they don't know a literal translation of every word of the stream that comes out of my mouth. The more I say without hesitation and without repeating what I've already said, the higher I rank in competition, if there's competition, and most of the time, there is, and some of it isn't even friendly competition.

It was a long time before I learned there were times when, even if the audience was appropriate for swearing, I didn't have to swear, and a long time after learning that before I learned that, often, communication improved if I left all the swear words out even if it made me look like I didn't know as much as other guys, who swore freely all the time.

I think It's almost always guys who use swear words to enhance their speaking and usually not girls or women, though times do change mores.

I know I'm often out of date, way later than the current mode of language use and unaware of what is the latest acceptable mode of verbal expression. It's become more

important to me to be able to make myself understood than to fit into acceptable, current modes of expression.

I talk nicely to my guitar, even when I make big mistakes in my music and feel frustration trying to take over my emotions. I've gradually learned that guitars and singing don't respond well to frustration, anger, hatred and swearing.

Other types of my creative work usually need more soft-talking, too. In any situation, how I choose to talk or write depends on what I hope to achieve in communication.

What I hope to achieve now is never frustration, anger, or hatred, all of which are abetted by swearing, but gentler, more effective communication. My guitar and my computer appreciate gentle communication. I think people do, too.