

## **What's that you say? Compiler of idioms had `a fire in her belly'**

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LOS ANGELES - After all those years of slinging hash and refilling coffee mugs, May Pare found herself "up to her eyeballs" with a collection of sayings that would "blow the mind" of someone trying to learn English.

They were the likes of "pay through the nose," "using elbow grease," "having a hollow leg" and "being lower than a snake's belly." There was "heads will roll," "press the flesh" and "keeping your eyes peeled."

She had hundreds of these sayings, many of them overheard and scribbled down while she was waiting tables at Shakers restaurant in Glendale, north of Los Angeles, where she's worked on and off - but mostly on - for the last 30 years.

The result of her work is a self-published, 363-page book that deals exclusively with body part idioms, in chapters ranging from butt to breath and head to toes. Not only is Pare one of the restaurant's most popular waitresses (many customers wait until they can get one of her tables), but she also is now something of a celebrity in her small world.

The book, "Body Idioms and More", is designed to help foreign-born students who might "throw up their hands" in dismay at the odd sayings, some of which give no clue to their real meaning. Think how "having a frog in my throat" would sound to the uninitiated.

Pare (pronounced Paray) is a scholar of the English language, her specialty both as a student and as a college teacher in her native Thailand. Later, she earned her master's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, with a specialty in English as a second language.

She never bandied that talent around at the coffee shop, even among the regulars. She just took notes.

"I've learned a lot from just being here at the restaurant," Pare said as she took an afternoon break from waiting tables. "I picked up a lot of expressions from customers and co-workers."

Over the last few months the book has evolved into something of a coffee-counter project, with customers helping edit the latest edition and waitresses checking the manuscript for spelling errors.

Pare hopes to parlay her modest success (she'd like for the book to be picked up by language classes) into a shot at doing something other than jotting down food orders.

"I knew there was a need for it," she said of her book. "And I needed to do

something else so I could get another job. I didn't have anything I could put on my résumé."

Pare first sensed the need to define idioms about 10 years ago when she told one of her cousins a joke with an idiomatic punch line. When the cousin looked baffled, Pare told him she was just "pulling his leg."

The look did not change.

"He didn't get it," she said. "I told him this is the way people talk."

So began her research into idioms. Over the years she collected enough to compile a book, which she had printed in Thailand during one of her visits there.

That small order turned out to be a mere first draft of her anatomical opus.

It was about then that Shakers regulars like Jim Oliver and Japhet Ward came on the scene to help Pare prepare the book for its second printing.

Oliver, a 68-year-old artist, drops into Shakers ("Breakfast All Day") about once a week, usually Sunday. He'd known Pare casually for years, but they had not become good friends because he always ate at the counter, while Pare waited tables.

"I had no idea of her background except that she was a good waitress," Oliver recalled. "Then one day she said she wanted to show me her book, the first edition. I took it home and started reading it, and when I noticed some mistakes I started taking notes. And then I began taking the notes in to her and she was very appreciative. I just sort of fell into being a help to her."

One example of Pare being slightly off point was the definition of having "a stone face," which in the first edition was described as an "ugly face."

"I showed her that it meant immobile or without expression," he said. "When she saw the difference, she was just thrilled." New definition in the second edition: "Like stone, i.e., without expression, cold, granite-like, hard, immobile."

The story was much the same for Ward, who studied music at UCLA but spent the better part of his 76 years as a clocker during early morning workouts for thoroughbreds at Hollywood Park racetrack. He'd been coming to Shakers for years, and had known Pare for 19 of them.

"I sit at tables, a lot of times with May as my waitress," he said. "We've been friends for a long time, so if she had a question about a certain word or sentence, I'd tell her what I thought was correct."

Meanwhile, news of the book slowly spread through Pare's customers. Susan

Dougherty, the retention coordinator at Glendale Community College, bought a copy and sent it to the head of the college's English as a second language program.

"We have a lot of sayings that don't make any sense," she said. "A lot of people come here from other countries who are educated, but not in our colloquialisms. I found it fascinating to see a whole book just on body parts. I didn't know there were so many."

Pare, meanwhile, is beginning to think about her next idiomatic project - perhaps clothes or food - even as she hopes that an English as a second language program will include her book in its curriculum.

Pare has ordered 7,000 copies of the book's second edition and has vague plans for the new year. With luck, that does not include Shakers, despite all those years of taking orders.

"I shouldn't have been here this long, but time goes so fast," she said. "I appreciate having this job. I'm thankful. But I should move on."

She said she'd like to do workshops with foreign-born students trying to learn English and its many shadings. A good example, she said, is the English-language idiom "from your lips to God's ears."

The closest she could come in Thai was: "I hope it turns out to be true."

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#### EXPRESSION LESSON

Here is a selection of entries and definitions in May Pare's book:

Fire in your belly: Enthusiasm/driving force/passion for what you are doing.

Rub elbows with: To interact socially with.

Face the music: To suffer the unpleasant consequences, especially of one's own actions.

A hair-trigger temper: A tendency to become angry very easily.

Lose your head: To become confused or crazy about, to lose emotional control over something.

A six-pack: Toned stomach muscles.

Powder your nose: A polite or humorous way of saying "to go to the toilet."

On your toes: Alert, ready to act.

A sharp tongue: A tendency to reply sharply or sarcastically.

Love handles: Extra flesh around your waist.

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