

Nip It in the WHAT?!

By Dennis Payton Knight

It's bud, bud, nip it in the BUD! By definition, *nipping in the bud* is something gardeners do to promote favored blossoms by limiting competition from others. More often, the expression refers to stopping a bad habit early, but the way it is often spoken describes what a dog does to a mailman.

As much as I appreciate you, dear reader, please don't *pour* over my words with a u, but *pore* over them with an e, for whatever's right or wrong. Pour over them only if you think ketchup would help.

When something smells good it *whets*, not *wets*, your appetite. And that feeling in your tummy is not *hunger pains*, it's *hunger pangs*. Here is yet another gastronomic phrase I urge you to get right: it's not *baited breath*, with an i. Without the i, *bated breath* means you momentarily abate breathing to swallow your sardine. Then it *is* baited breath with an i.

As fast and as sozzled as you may drive, you can't *collide* with a telephone pole. A collision represents the violent meeting of two moving objects. You can, however, *crash* into a telephone pole. It's dramatic nonetheless, and only one of you will get the ticket.

When it comes to language, a proper grammarian *toes the line*, with an e, and would be embarrassed to be caught *towing the line* with a w. Toeing the line with an e means following rules. Maybe towing the line with a w has something to do with tugboats.

Then there's that coulda-shoulda-woulda cliché. If you say *could of* done anything, you shouldn't. It's *could have*, *should have* and *would have*, but you can contract them and say could've, should've or would've.

Ours is a *dog eat dog* world, not *doggy-dog*, and with it you get the whole *kit and caboodle*, not a *kitten capoodle*. In whatever way you take it, it is not *for all intensive purposes*, unless you're an actor or an auctioneer. Otherwise, you should proceed calmly and *for all intents and purposes*.

If you are a wrestler, that *elbow toss around your neck* is probably an *albatross*, which I believe would be a fowl, with a w, and not a foul with a u. If you want the ring judge to be fair to both you and the albatross, you should hope he is *disinterested*, not *uninterested*.

I, for one, have mishandled many delicate situations with *tenderhooks*. Now I've learned the word is *tenterhook*, and it has to do with hanging cloth. My *slight of hand* was worthless until I acquired an e, promoted it to *sleight of hand*, and finally finished magician's college. Speaking of things cunning, Webster once declined to recognize the word *snuck*, but the verb has since *sneaked* itself into so many vocabularies it has made it to the dictionary regardless.

And *regardless* reminds me. Next time you hear someone say *irregardless*, not even a word, nip him in the you-know-what.