

DANIEL J. MORGAN: THE DEAN'S DREAM

Valerie K. Couch*

THE IMAGES

A cutthroat trout lurking below the surface. A jackalope hat rack. A pair of buffaloes butting heads. A pile of rocks. A Wyoming University banner. A withered plant. A rescue dog's portrait. A Humane Society poster. A human head and neck made of Styrofoam and sporting a polyester tie. A pioneer-era desk. A pile of books old and new on torts, products liability, consumer credit, and trial techniques. A slew of New Yorker cartoons. A model sailing ship. A child's drawing. A child's photograph. Obituaries. A poem. A prayer.



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All of these can be found in Professor Dan Morgan's faculty office. More clearly than a photograph of the man himself, Dan Morgan's office creates the image I will call *The Dean's Dream*.

Oklahoma City University President, the Honorable Robert Henry, used the phrase *The Dean's Dream* at law school graduation in May 2014. Announcing retirement a few weeks prior to the graduation ceremony, Professor Morgan had made it clear: Freedom called. Wyoming trout streams called. His grandchildren called. His wife called, with passports in hand. Iconic teacher, mentor, scholar, and friend, Dan Morgan was stepping away from a world that had benefited from his full attention and benign skepticism for 33 years. President Henry called Professor Morgan "a dean's dream," alluding to the many ways in which a dean could rely on Dan. Now, more like a dean's nightmare, his announced departure created the virtually impossible task of finding someone who could approximate Dan Morgan's unique—and uniquely needed—contributions to the life of our school.

THE -ISMS

One contribution to our school community has come in the form of Morganisms, colorful sayings now permanently and liberally sprinkled throughout the conversations of our faculty. We will remember and use Morganisms for their enigmatic diversity, mysterious effect, and blunt force. Here are a few, with etymology and translations courtesy of Professor Michael Gibson:



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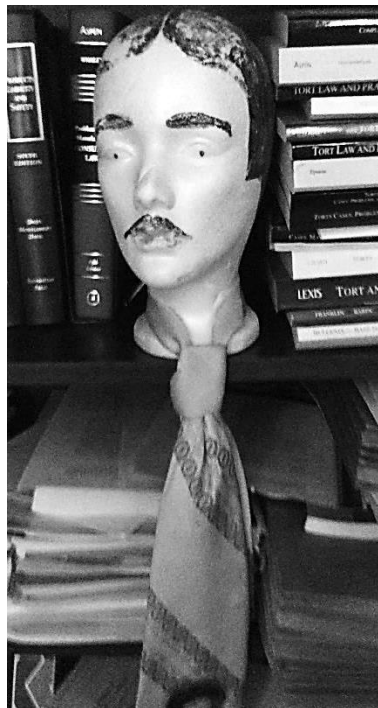
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"He doesn't know 'Straight up!' from 'Sic 'em!'"

Probable origin: A dog who hasn't yet learned the difference between the command to sit straight up and the command to attack a burglar, an angry biker outside a bar, or a proponent of tort "reform."

"You better come loaded for bear."

Competent bear hunters carry large-caliber rifles and plenty of ammunition.



"I [insert past tense action verb] 'til who laid the chunk."

Unknown origin. Probable translation: "I [did something] for a long time."

"He's as crazy as a peach orchard boar."

Orchards produce fruit. Fallen fruit ferments. Boars are big, mean-tempered hogs that gobble fermented fruit "'til who laid the chunk" to the point they can't tell "Straight up!" from "Sic 'em!"

"I don't chew my cabbage twice."

Unknown origin. Probable translation: "I only say things once."

"I'll be there in three shakes of a dead lamb's tail."

Probable translation: "I'm promising to be there right away, but you should know as well as I do that it's going to take me a whole lot longer than you expect." Frequent use: "I'm going to see a man about a horse, so I'll be there in three shakes of a dead lamb's tail."

"That sucks pondwater."

In humid areas, most ponds are covered with green slime most suitable for consumption only by ducks. In Wyoming, ponds in pastures range from plain muddy to sufficiently alkaline to kill cattle.

"I was as busy as a one-legged man at an ass-kicking contest."

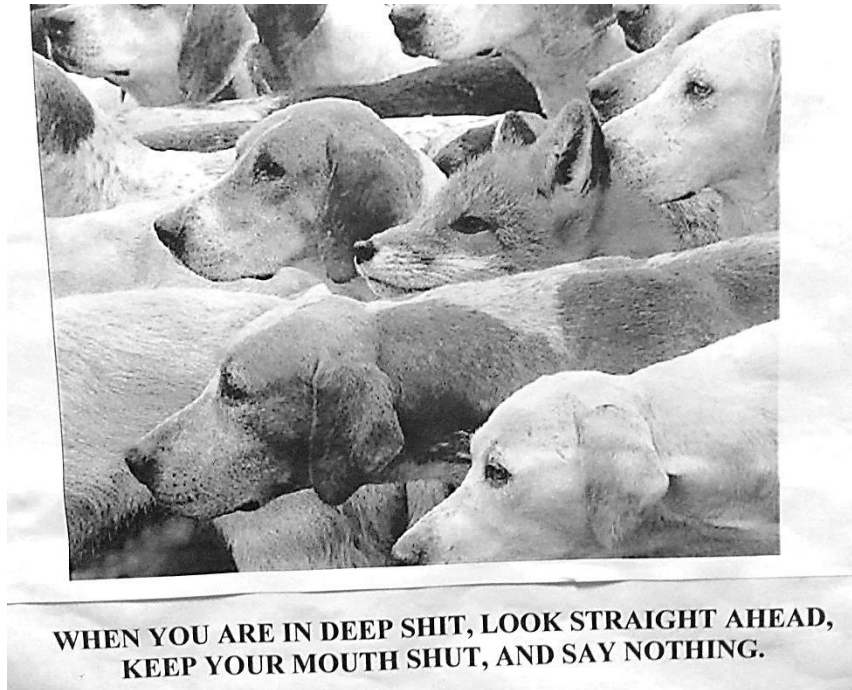
Translation: "I was as busy as a one-armed man at a [wall]paper-hanging contest."

"He was as scared as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rockers."

No translation needed.

"It's too muddy to plow, and I can't dance."

Translation: "I just spent three hours (a) in a faculty meeting, (b) deciphering consumer credit regulations, or (c) grading, so I am incapable of doing anything productive for the rest of the day."



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"I'm going to nail his heiniecaboo to a telephone pole."

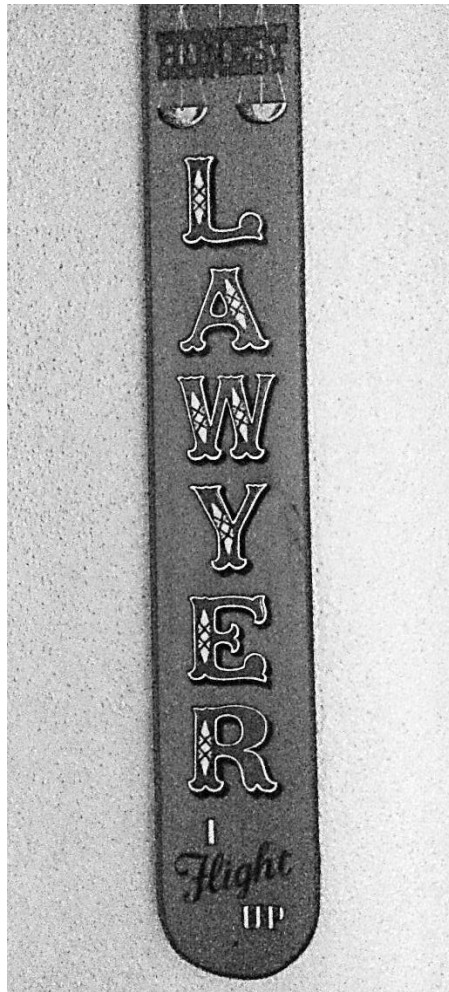
Uncertain etymology. "Heinie" is American slang for "buttocks"; during World Wars I and II, it was an insult directed at Germans and German-Americans. "Caboo" probably is a contraction of "caboose," which is the rear end of a train. Under either origin, someone is going to be hoisted by the seat of his pants and hung out to dry in a prominent, public place.

We are grateful to Professor Gibson for his translations, derived after years of observation and sincere effort to understand his colleague, Dan Morgan. After decades of usage, however, the Morganisms have taken on a pliant character and provide the faculty with phrases of infinite utility.



THE INTERESTS OF STUDENTS

No serious tribute to Dan Morgan will omit what drove his every action as a member of our faculty: the interests of students. It is significant that, although I have been dean only two years, I have known Dan Morgan for more than twenty. And that is so because, as a member of the legal community, I became aware over the years of Dan's involvement with law students through the Inns of Court, the Oklahoma County Bar Association, the Oklahoma Bar Association, moot court competitions involving the bench and bar, and service projects.



Everywhere lawyers were doing good, Professor Morgan was there with law students in tow. His own capacity for friendship and his devotion to advancing the legal profession through education and professionalism made him a perfect model for students. For the legal community, Dan was the well-recognized and welcome face of Oklahoma City University School of Law. We saw him, like a shepherd, herd his flock of students into green pastures and watched him nurture and strengthen them while carefully exposing them to the elements. It was clear that he knew the students well and made sure others did also. Judges, practicing lawyers, and community leaders relied upon Dan Morgan to bring future lawyers into our midst. This allowed us to benefit from their energy and perspectives and gave us opportunities to welcome them as members of our profession. But primarily, Dan's

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actions created bridges for his students as they transitioned into their careers as lawyers. The best interests of his students guided his every action. Several generations of law students have relied upon Dan Morgan—and will continue to rely upon him—to open doors of opportunity and provide the mentorship needed to help them succeed.

As a new dean, I have relied on Dan for his humor, his kindness, his indulgence, his institutional memory, his friendship. Yes, he can be counted on for colorful commentary at the moment needed. He can be counted on for apt images and evocative reminders of life's complexity. And he can be counted on for undiluted devotion to the things that matter most. The hearts and minds of students. A poem. A prayer. These are all at hand when Dan is near. He is a dean's dream.

