

FILE 7

Listening 1

Interviewer In the studio today we have Kathy, who works as a freelance researcher for dictionaries. She's just taken a little time off from her busy day job to produce a book on etymology, or the origin of words, with the title *Words We Use*. It's a well-written and beautifully-presented volume which tells the reader where many well-known words and expressions come from. So, what gave you the idea for the book, Kathy?

Kathy Well, it was a eureka moment, really. Not that I was in the bath or anything! At a dinner party one evening, some friends started asking me about where certain words came from, and they seemed really interested in some of the stories that I was telling them. I didn't think much about it at the time but when I got back to my office the following Monday I suddenly thought, well, if the people at the party found the subject interesting, then maybe other people would too. So, I decided there and then to write a book that explored the origin of words and colloquial expressions.

Interviewer Kathy, you're going to tell us one of the stories in your book about a well-known expression, aren't you?

Kathy Yes, the expression is 'The real McCoy'.

Interviewer First of all, just in case any of our listeners haven't heard it before, what does it mean?

Kathy Well, if you describe something as 'The real McCoy' it means that it is the real thing. It's not fake or false in any way.

Interviewer And where does this expression come from?

Kathy Well, the first question is who or what was McCoy? In North America, there were several well-known people who had this surname. So the question is which of them gave their name to this expression? There was an Elijah McCoy, who invented all kinds of machines in the late nineteenth century, and a Bill McCoy, who was a well-known smuggler of alcohol in the 1920s. But probably the most likely person to have given his name to this expression is Kid McCoy, who was a boxing champion in the 1890s. The story goes that because so many other boxers imitated him, they pretended to be him and used his name to fight in small towns all over America, he started advertising himself as 'the real McCoy'.

Interviewer So you think that's the real explanation?

Kathy Well, perhaps, but we can't be sure. However, research has shown an earlier use of a similar phrase, which I personally think is probably the true origin. A Scottish whisky company called Mackay and Company – used the slogan the 'real Mackay' to advertise their product, and there are plenty of examples of this expression being used in Scotland and abroad, for example in Australia. It seems to me very possible that the phrase was then 'transported' to America and got changed in the process from Mackay to McCoy.

FILE 7

Listening 2

1

Interviewer What do you wish had been different about your childhood?

Chris Well, my family weren't very wealthy at all, but I can't say that I ever noticed. I was happy enough. I was a spoilt only child, which suited me at the time, but is now something I regret. Another child in the family might have made me a less selfish person, which is what I hate most about myself. It'd be easy to complain about the poverty but you simply don't miss things if you're not aware of them. So, how can I regret that now?

2

Interviewer Is there anything you regret about your education?

Chris Well, I more or less did what my parents told me to do, which was study hard and go to university. Looking back though, perhaps it would have been better not to have finished school and then immediately started university. I wish I'd had some time off in between. I wouldn't have got a job, but I could've gone round the world, or maybe done some voluntary work abroad which would have helped me to be a bit more mature before I started university.

3

Interviewer Were you very immature then, I mean when you started university?

Chris Totally. I remember I cried when my parents dropped me at my accommodation, at my hall of residence. I'd never had that kind of freedom and responsibility, and I didn't know how to cope with it at all. At parties, I didn't know how to socialize, and how to talk to people. I was pretty miserable. Luckily after the first term, which I hated, I then learned quite quickly, and in the end, of course, it was the most wonderful time of my life.

4

Interviewer Did you enjoy what you studied or do you wish you'd studied something else?

Chris Well, I originally wanted to study medicine but I didn't get good enough A-levels so I didn't get a place, and I chose biology instead. But actually I don't regret it at all. I mean I'm glad I didn't become a doctor – I don't think I have the social skills to deal with people, and working in a laboratory with a few other people suits me perfectly.

5

Interviewer In what ways are you different now from the 18-year-old you?

Chris I've discovered a lot about myself that I wasn't clearly aware of at 18 and this insight means I'm much happier about myself. I tend to run away from conflict and from making decisions. And I prefer to be on my own. That's something I now accept about myself, but back then it really worried me. I forced myself to go to parties even though I hated them.