Farewell, Blue Yodeler

Obituary

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by Floyd O. Merryl

With the passing last week of Jimmie Rodgers, the country lost a great performer. But it’s a testament to the kind of man he was that many of his fans will take the loss personally, as if that Blue Yodeler, as we like to call him and will remember him, was a friend of ours. Thankfully, we’ve got his records to keep us as mementos.

Jimmie Charles Rodgers was born in Meridian, Mississippi, in 1897. His mama died when he was just a kid, and Jimmie was raised by relatives in Mississippi and Alabama. When he was a little older, he returned to Meridian to live with his father, Aaron, who was a maintenance foreman on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad.

Jimmie had no rigorous musical training, but he learned to sing and play guitar. Still a boy, Jimmie proved to be a nonconformist. He secretly organized a traveling show. When Aaron Rodgers found out, he had the good sense to foli.

His son’s plans—he tracked Jimmie down, and dragged him home. But the stunt was more than the bumbling behavior of an unruly kid. Jimmie showed the same initiative again, formulating a second plan to get out on the road and sing. He charged a pricey canvas tent in his father’s name and hit the road to make music. His father might have understood Jimmie’s love of music, but he probably didn’t want the boy to deplete himself about a musician’s life. He set out again to pry his son from the road. Soon Aaron got Jimmie a job as a waterboy with the railroad. Within a few years, Jimmie was a brakeman on the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad. Now Jimmie was a steady working man. But he never lost his love of music.

Jimmie came down with the deadly respiratory disease called tuberculosis in 1924, when he was 27 years old. As a consequence of that abominable disease, he had to quit his railroad job. Ever resourceful, Jimmie organized a traveling show and played across the Southeast. He worked as a brakeman again and later as a switchman but couldn’t keep those jobs because of his tuberculosis. But his travels gave him a look at the whole panorama of Southern music. In 1927, Jimmie went to Asheville, North Carolina, where the city’s first radio station had just hit the airwaves, and he played on the radio and earned himself a weekly slot. The exposure served him well in subsequent months. He recorded songs for a record company. One of them, “Blue Yodel,” sold like hotcakes and made Jimmie Rodgers a star.

Propelled by fame, the Blue Yodeler traveled the country for the next few years. It was hard times for the nation. But while so many people were on the dole and looking for work, Jimmie was living his dream. He was making music, touring, and starring in a movie short called “The Singing Brakeman.” Eventually, his illness caught up with him. During a recording session in New York City last week, he couldn’t get through all of his songs. He took the day off to recover, but Jimmie was in a race against time. So before he’d sung his last song, Jimmie Rodgers was gone. But in a few years as a recording artist and a few more as a performer who rambled around the country, he made such a mark for posterity that we’ll never forget him. Jimmie leaves behind his wife, Carrie, and daughter, Carrie Anita, and a legion of fans and recordings.

Farewell, Blue Yodeler.
Definitions

1. abominable
   (ə'bəmənəbl) (adj.) disgusting, detestable
   Unfortunately, there are many _____________ ideas circulating on the Internet.
   SYNONYM: hateful, detestable, nauseating
   ANTONYM: praiseworthy, delightful, charming

2. bumbling
   (bəm'liŋ) (adj.) blundering and awkward; (n.) clumsiness
   The _____________ burglars were so inept that they actually left some of their own money at the home they were planning to rob.
   The old cartoon character Mr. Magoo was well known for his _____________.
   SYNONYM: (adj.) clumsy, stumbles
   ANTONYM: (adj.) forceful, effective, skillful, adroit

3. consequence
   (kən'skwəns) (n.) a result, effect; importance
   Does he truly comprehend the _____________ of his actions?
   SYNONYM: outcome, consequence
   ANTONYM: cause, source

4. delude
   (də'laod) (v.) to fool, deceive; to mislead utterly
   Don’t _____________ yourself into thinking that you will become a famous concert pianist just because you played one song at the school’s talent show.
   SYNONYM: trick, hoodwink

5. dote
   (dōt) (v.) to give out in small amounts; (n.) money, food, or other necessities given as charity; a small portion
   Let’s _____________ out scraps of food to the hungry dogs.
   The people at the homeless shelter lined up to receive their weekly _____________.
   SYNONYM: (v.) ration, allot, distribute; (n.) handout

6. engulf
   (ən'gəlf) (v.) to swallow up, overwhelm, consume
   The truck was _____________ in flames after its fuel tank exploded.
   SYNONYM: encompass, immerse

7. foil
   (fōl) (v.) to defeat; to keep from gaining some end; (n.) a thin sheet of metal; a light fencing sword; a person or thing serving as a contrast to another.
   The police will _____________ the criminals’ plot.
   SYNONYM: (v.) frustrate, thwart, counter; (n.) rapier
   ANTONYM: (v.) aid, abet, assist, advance, promote

8. formulate
   (fər myə lāt) (v.) to express definitely or systematically; to devise, invent; to state as a formula
   The town board will _____________ a tax policy.
   SYNONYM: define, articulate, frame, specify

9. initiative
   (i nitə tiv) (n.) the taking of the first step or move; the ability to act without being directed or urged from the outside
   Dad is proud of my _____________ with chores.
   SYNONYM: leadership, enterprise
   ANTONYM: laziness, sloth, shiftlessness

10. memento
    (ma mə nət') (n.) something that serves as a reminder
    This cap is a _____________ of our recent trip.
    SYNONYM: memento, souvenir, token

11. nonconformist
    (nən kən'frəməst) (n.) a person who refuses to follow established ideas or ways of doing things; (adj.) of or relating to the unconventional
    Jake, a _____________, is not swayed by opinion.
    SYNONYM: (n.) maverick, individualist, bohemian
    ANTONYM: (n., adj.) traditionalist, conventionalist; (adj.) traditional, conventional, conservative

12. null and void
    (nəl and void) (adj.) without legal force or effect; no longer binding
    This contract becomes _____________ at noon.
    SYNONYM: canceled, repealed, abolished
    ANTONYM: in effect, binding

13. panorama
    (pan a rəm'ə ə) (n.) a wide, unobstructed view of an area; a complete survey of a subject; a continuously passing or changing scene; a range or spectrum
    Displays of old picture postcards present an entertaining _____________ of twentieth-century life.
    SYNONYM: overview
14. posterity (pa' ster' at) (n.) all of a person’s offspring, descendants; all future generations
   Let’s keep the photo album for _____________.
   ANTONYMS: ancestry, ancestors, forebears, the past

15. pry (pr') (v.) to pull loose by force; to look at closely or inquisitively; to be nosy about something
   We can use this tool to __________, the lid off a can of paint.
   SYNONYMS: snoop, meddle

16. refurbish (ri far' bish) (v.) to brighten, freshen, or polish; to restore or improve
   _____________.
   SYNONYMS: remodel, renew
   ANTONYMS: dilapidate, run down

17. resourceful (ri sidz' fel) (adj.) able to deal promptly and effectively with all sorts of problems; clever in finding ways and means of getting along
   _____________.
   SYNONYMS: inventive, ingenious, skillful
   ANTONYMS: uninitiative, incompetent, dull-witted

18. rigorous (rig' es as) (adj.) severe, harsh, strict; thoroughly logical
   “Boot camp” is the nickname for the place where new soldiers receive __________ basis training.
   SYNONYMS: tough, trying, challenging, rigorous
   ANTONYMS: easy, lax, indulgent, tiresome

19. subsequent (sub' sa kwent) (adj.) coming after, following in time, place, or order
   The country enjoyed peace and prosperity in the years ___________.
   SYNONYMS: later, following, ensuing
   ANTONYMS: previous, prior, preceding

20. unerring (un er' bio) (adj.) making no mistakes, faultless, completely accurate
   Even a pilot with __________ judgment can be surprised by sudden changes in the weather.
   SYNONYMS: sure, certain, unfailing
   ANTONYMS: faulty, fallible, unreliable

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Choosing the Right Word

Select the **boldface** word that better completes each sentence. You might refer to the passage on pages 126–127 to see how most of these words are used in context.

1. In devising the Constitution, the Founding Fathers sought to “secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our (posterity, falls).”

2. Our foreign policy embraces a vast (consequence, panorama) of aims and objectives, problems and concerns.

3. Here I am on my first vacation in years, and I have to put up with this (abominable, bumbling) weather day after day!

4. All these things in the attic may seem like a lot of junk to you, but to me they are priceless (mementos, nonconformists) of childhood.

5. Sasha was pleasantly surprised with all the perks, such as free tickets, that the producers (doled, foiled) out to the actors.

6. She hopes to win the election by convincing voters that the city’s troubles result from the (unerring, bumbling) policies of the present mayor.

7. With his serious face and his dignified way of speaking, he is an excellent (foil, memento) for the clownish comedian.

8. It is too late to attempt to (formulate, refurbish) the old city charter; we must have a completely new plan for our city government.

9. Since you have failed to carry out your promises, I must tell you that the agreement between us is now (resourceful, null and void).

10. By coaxing and questioning hour after hour, Tom finally managed to (pry, delude) the big secret from his sister.

11. When we reached the top of the volcano, the (panoramic, resourceful) view was well worth the five-hour hike.

12. The war that began with Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939 spread until it had (refurbished, engulfed) almost the entire world.

13. Brad is the kind of (rigorous, resourceful) quarterback who can always come up with something new when it is a matter of victory or defeat.

14. My father, an electrical engineer, is an expert at computing (rigorous, abominable) math problems.

15. We worked several hours shovel ing dirt and removing roots, hoping to (engulf, pry) the tree stump loose from the ground.
16. Why is it that such hardworking, self-reliant people now have to depend on a (posterity, dole) of food and other necessities from charitable agencies?
17. We all know that it is a long time since the speeding laws in our community have been (rigorously, subsequently) enforced.
18. Do you think the United States should take the (initiative, dole) in trying to bring about a compromise peace in the region?
19. The lawyer made the point that her client had been at the scene of the crime before the murder but not (null and void, subsequent) to it.
20. If you think that you can get away with selling overpriced products to the people of this town, you are (deluding, refurbishing) yourself.
21. He may look like an ordinary man, but he is in fact a figure of real (panorama, consequence) in the state government.
22. One of the signs of a truly democratic nation is that it gives protection and freedom to (initiatives, nonconformists) who espouse unpopular views.
23. "We must (formulate, engulf) a plan to deal with this new situation and carry it out as quickly as possible," the president said.
24. Perhaps he doesn't seem to be very bright, but he has an (abominable, unerring) instinct for anything that might make money for him.
25. Many comics get laughs for their (unerring, bumbling) antics on the stage.

**Synonyms**

Choose the word from this Unit that is the same or most nearly the same in meaning as the **boldface** word or expression in the phrase. Write that word on the line. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. a contract that is considered **invalid**
2. to discuss it at our **next** meeting
3. **creative** use of recycled materials
4. must pass a **demanding** exam
5. prepare an answer for the defense
6. a dramatic **vista** of red rock formations
7. devised a **perfect** plan
8. a precious **keepsake** of Sally's childhood
9. if we decide to **spruce up** the kitchen
10. huge waves that **envelop** the tiny beach

**Antonyms**

Choose the word from this Unit that is most nearly opposite in meaning to the **boldface** word or expression in the phrase. Write that word on the line. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. declared **valid** by the courts
2. to **demolish** the old building
3. due to my **flawed** sense of direction
4. **lovely** behavior for a twelve-year-old
5. waves that **retreat** from the dunes

**Completing the Sentence**

From the words in this Unit, choose the one that best completes each of the following sentences. Write the correct word form in the space provided.

1. A truly __________ administrator always seems to be able to find an effective way of dealing with any problem that may come up.
2. Like so many other young people, he has been __________ into the false belief that there is an easy way to success.
3. Professional baseball players get themselves into shape for the upcoming season by undergoing a __________ training period each spring.
4. The first meeting will be in the school auditorium, but all __________ meetings will be held in the homes of our members.
5. You may think that the crude way he has behaved is slightly amusing, but I think it is __________ and inexcusable.
6. Huge clouds of smoke and ash from the active volcano __________ the sleepy little villages that nestled on its flanks.
7. From the observation deck of the skyscraper one may enjoy a sweeping __________ of the city.
8. What a disappointment to hear that dull and __________ speech when we were expecting a clear, forceful, and interesting statement!
9. Many an artist whose work has been overlooked in his or her own lifetime has had to trust to __________ for appreciation.
10. All that you will need to __________ that dilapidated old house is lots of time, lots of skill, lots of enthusiasm, and lots of money.
11. As a tennis player, Sue doesn’t have much speed or power, but she hits the ball with ____________ accuracy.

12. Since I was able to prove in court that the salesperson had lied to me, the contract I had signed was declared ____________.

13. These old photographs may not look like much, but I treasure them as a(n) ____________ of the last summer my entire family spent together.

14. During World War II, food became so scarce in Great Britain that the government ____________ it to consumers in very small amounts.

15. Anyone who ____________ into someone else’s business runs the risk of opening a can of worms.

16. The alert employee ____________ an attempted robbery by setting off the alarm promptly.

17. At the time it occurred, that mistake didn’t seem to be too important, but it had ____________ that still hurt me today.

18. We must ____________ a detailed response that leaves no doubt about our position on this important issue.

19. Rather than sit back and wait for the enemy to attack him, the general took the ____________ and delivered the first blow.

20. The term ____________ was first applied in the 1600s to English Protestants who disowned from the Church of England.

Writing: Words in Action

1. Look back at “Farewell, Blue Yodeler” (pages 126–127). Suppose that you are a musician who traveled with Jimmie when he was a boy. You want to persuade his father, Aaron Rodgers, that Jimmie should continue to travel with the show and hone his skills as a musician. Write a letter to Aaron Rodgers supporting your position. Use at least two details from the passage and three Unit 5 words.

2. “Music has charms to soothe a savage beast.”—William Congreve
   It is a common sentiment that music soothes the soul. Do you agree with this statement? Should music always “soothe” the soul, or does it have other purposes? What roles does music play in contemporary life? In a brief essay, support your opinion with specific examples from your observations, studies, the reading (refer to pages 126–127), or personal experience. Write at least three paragraphs, and use three or more words from this Unit.

Vocabulary

in Context

The following excerpts are from The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume I by Edgar Allan Poe. Some of the words you have studied in this Unit appear in boldface type. Complete each statement below the excerpt by circling the letter of the correct answer.

1. … upon the subsequent disposal of the trinkets and jewels … it was found that we had greatly undervalued the treasure. ("The Gold-Bug")
   A discovery made ____________ to an action occurs
   a. after
   b. previously
   c. suddenly
   d. gradually

2. … and I fell down in the bottom of the car, trembling with unmitigated terror. Indeed, I now perceived that I had entirely overdone the business, and that the main ____________ of the shock were yet to be experienced. ("The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal")
   Consequences are:
   a. fears
   b. reminders
   c. results
   d. memories

3. … I should have been unable to accomplish even as much as I had now accomplished, and the wonderful adventures of Hans Pfaal would have been utterly lost to posternity, I had therefore every reason to be grateful. … ("The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal")
   Posternity refers to things in the
   a. future
   b. news
   c. basement
   d. present

4. … [Looking dizzy around, I] was ____________ struck with the idea of our being among breakers; so terrific, beyond the wildest imagination, was the whirlpool of mountainous and foaming ocean within which we were engulfed. ("Ms. Found in a Bottle")
   Someone ____________ by the ocean is
   a. fishing in it
   b. thrilled by it
   c. floating on it
   d. immersed in it

5. … [There still remained in his possession a small remnant of his patrimony; and, upon the income arising from this, he managed, by means of a rigorous economy, to procure the necessities of life. ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue")
   A ____________ economy is definitely NOT
   a. energizing
   b. lenient
   c. stimulating
   d. invigorating


Interactive Quiz
Snap the code, or go to vocabularyworkshop.com