

Dogs in the dictionary

'A dog is a man's best friend.'

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "In the oldest proverbs and phrases dogs are rarely depicted as faithful or as man's best friend, but as vicious, ravening, or watchful". Beginning in the 18th century, and gaining ground in the 19th century, by the 20th century language and attitudes towards dogs had shifted in recognition of their love and companionship.

In this column, I look at some of the more familiar dog-related phrases and idioms which are in use today.

Valentine's Day will soon be upon us. Is it a case of 'puppy love'? Puppy love is an infatuation often associated with childhood or early adolescence.

Since we are in the heat of summer, what about 'dog days', an expression that refers to the hottest weather which zaps our energy, making it harder to work and exercise. In the northern hemisphere, this adage has been expanded to refer to the dog days of August, when summer heat combines with peak humidity.



Let sleeping dogs lie - greyhounds are known for sleep startle.

Now that we are back from summer holidays, think of the person in your office who just won't let go of a subject or point of view. You can describe them as 'like a dog with a bone', referring to the possessiveness and resource guarding of a dog with a bone or other precious treat.

Had a tough day at work or play? You are 'dog tired'. With the average dog sleeping between 12 and 14 hours per day, our dogs often seem tired and in need of sleep.

Had a good night's sleep? You've 'slept like a dog', a phrase that pays homage to the ability of our dogs to sleep anywhere, anytime, and often deeply.

Following on from that, 'let sleeping dogs lie'. Many dogs, especially greyhounds, are known for their ability to sleep startle, awaking suddenly from sleep with an aggressive growl and gnashing of teeth. If you caution someone to let sleeping dogs lie, you are warning them not to interfere or disturb a situation because they are likely to cause trouble.

If you are a top performer in your field, you 'run with the big dogs'. An extended version is that 'if you can't run with the big dogs, you'd better stay on the porch', meaning if you know you don't have the skills or talent to compete with the best in the field, it is best not to enter the competition in the first place.

Remember that if you excel in your field, you might be the 'top dog'; the leader of the pack who is the most powerful in your group.

And, finally, since we have many competitors in Dogs New Zealand, let us remember that 'every dog has its day', which has come to mean that everyone in their lifetime has a moment of glory. Some are lucky enough to have more than one... 