

KNIFE SUPERSTITIONS

By LRV 2007

I was raised by my grandparents and was always interested in their superstitions. Many of these were based on safety and I found were really an easier way to remember not to do something. Walk under a ladder, open an umbrella in the house, walk behind a horse etc all seemed to make some sense. One of these superstitions was always interesting to me. My grandfather being from the "Old Country" had many superstitions but never handing a knife directly to someone always seemed a little strange to me. He would always put a knife down on the table or desk and allow me or others to take it from there. It wasn't until recently that I discovered that other than for safety reasons there were other superstitions out there relating to knives. This is a collection of what I've been able to find. Some are very similar to one another but different enough that I thought they were interesting. The most common by far was exchanging a gift knife for a penny.

Giving a knife as a gift

- A knife as a gift from a lover means that the love will soon end.
- If a friend gives you a knife, you should give him a coin, or your friendship will soon be broken.
- Never give a knife as a housewarming present, or your new neighbor will become an enemy.
- To make a present of a knife or any other sharp instrument unless you receive something in exchange.
- Giving a knife as a gift you should tape a penny to it so as to not sever the relationship.
- "It is common to include a penny, often taped to the blade, with a knife given as a gift which the receiver is to return as "payment.""
- Scotland: Knives, if requested as a wedding present, would always be given with a penny.
- Also, if a lover gives you a knife as a present you will soon split up!
- In some cultures giving a knife as a gift is considered a sign of respect and trust. This is especially true in Finland where various non-governmental organizations, clubs and even government agencies traditionally give a *puukko* (a Finnish fixed-blade hunting/outdoor knife) as a gift to trusted employers or contacts. The puukko is always presented handle first as a sign of trust and friendly intentions.
- Never give a knife as a housewarming present, or your new neighbor will become an enemy.
- If some-one gives you a knife, you are supposed to pay them, or else it cuts the relationship. This is a strange corruption of a custom where a person would let another know they were being challenged in a duel by giving them a knife. It seems to date back to medieval France

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- A common superstition is that the acceptance from a friend of a knife should be accompanied by a gift, like a penny or a pin, so as not to “cut” the friendship. One then “buys” the knife.
- When someone gives you a knife as a gift, always give a penny for it or you will cut yourself badly.

Drop

- A friend of mine will not pick up a knife if she drops it and will only let someone else pick it up for her because it will cause bad luck!
- if you drop a knife both man and woman are coming
- A knife on the floor, = stranger to the door...(cross your fingers when picking it back up to break the meeting)
- Knife falls, gentleman calls;
Fork falls, lady calls;
Spoon falls, baby calls.
- The dropping of a knife foretells the visit of a man friend in the near future
- If you drop a knife on the kitchen floor, company will be arriving from whichever way it is pointing
- If you drop any silverware, than guests will be coming.
Knife=man Fork=woman spoon=child
- Dropping silverware causes company. Drop a spoon and the company will be female, drop a fork and the company will be male. Dropping a knife will break the spell.
- Icelandic: If someone drops a knife, while cleaning fish, and the knife points to the sea, that presages good fishing when next you go to sea.
- Russian: If a knife falls to the floor, it is a sign that someone male will come to visit. Drop a fork or a spoon and someone female will soon appear. "If you don't want them to come, you have to immediately knock three times with the utensil on the table and say 'stay at home'"
- Whereas a knife dropped in both Bulgaria and Britain is presumed to forecast a male visitor to the house, in the British Isles the theme is extended two steps further: a dropped fork predicts the arrival of a woman, and a dropped carving knife means a policeman will be paying a visit.

Cooking/food

- Stirring liquids or powders with a knife is often considered unlucky. One rhyme says, "Stir with a knife, stir up strife".
- If you cut hot cornbread with a knife, you'll cut your luck
- It is bad luck to stir anything with a knife. "To stir with a knife, is to stir strife".

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- Never cook with a knife, it causes a cut in a friendship.
- Pennsylvania-Germans: It may cause pain or stitches in the side to stir anything with a knife.
- One may not pierce the bread of a pregnant woman with a knife or fork, or else the child's eyes will be poked out.

Table

- It will cause a quarrel if knives are crossed at the table.
- As early as 1646 reference is made to a superstition of laying a knife across another piece of cutlery.
- If you lay a fork flat on the table with the tines up, do not rest a knife on edge using the tines to support it. If you do, you and whoever you're eating with (or whoever you next eat with if you're alone) will quarrel
- Crossing your knife and spoon on your plate after you have eaten is an indicator that the food tasted horrible and that you wish bad luck on the cook

Household

- A knife placed under the bed during childbirth will ease the pain of labor.
- To guarantee a boy the husband was to stick a knife in his pregnant wife's mattress. For a girl put a skillet under the bed.
- or stuck into the headboard of a cradle to protect the baby_to grave-so the dead would not be defenseless in the next world.
- In Greece a black-handled knife placed under the pillow is used to keep away nightmares.
- In some zones of Southern Italy many people put a knife in the door frame, in order to keep bad spirits out from the house (source: my wife - she comes from there!)
- To scare away evil sprits, Chinese women may sleep with knives under their bed. Often a piece of paper cut to resemble a pair of scissors is hung from bed curtains and tiger skins are hung over the bed.

Handling

- It is bad luck to close a pocket knife unless you were the one who opened it.
- Always close any knife you open. Never close any knife someone else has opened.
- Supposedly the Kukhuri is supposed to draw blood before its put back in its sheath or all kinds off bad crap is to befall you...

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- I was always told a knife isn't truly yours till you have drawn blood with it. Seeing as I used to be fairly accident-prone, I think that means I have a lot of knives floating around
- This isn't a superstition or a myth, it's good knife handling practice, always hand a knife back to someone the same way they handed it to you. In other words, if they hand you a closed pocket knife so you can cut a string or whatever, don't hand them an OPEN knife, close the knife and give it to them. Countless times people have asked me to borrow my knife because they know I always carrying a pocket knife, they'll cut what they need, and hand me an open knife, blade first! Not only bad manners, but dangerous as well.
- In many places in the United States it is considered bad luck to hand an open, folding blade knife to someone. This is especially true in more rural areas where carrying a pocket knife is as common as carrying a set of keys. This may stem from safety issues. It is also believed that allowing someone to close a folding blade knife that you have opened is bad luck.
- In some parts of America, it is considered bad luck to sharpen a knife, or any blade, after dark.
- Never share a knife when skinning game with friends or family.
- "My grandmother would never say "thank you" when she was given a plant as a gift or handed a knife. She believed that the plant would die and she would cut herself, respectively. She would also never point her finger at a plant because it would then begin to wither and die. Also, to this day, opening an umbrella indoors is a BIG no-no in my family."
- When handing a knife to someone, do not open it. This will lead to a quarrel of sharp words.
- If it is open, lay it down and let them pick it up. Do not hand it over.
- When you lend out a knife, make sure it is returned the same way.
Turkey: Sharp items such as a knife or a pair of scissors are deadly and believed to carry harmful djinns. They should not be handed straight over to someone else but left on a surface, from where the other person takes them. If putting them down is not possible at least give them a gentle spit to scare off the djinns, before handing them over.
- I've also heard several superstitions related to knives. The one I remember best one from a Turkish friend. When I first met her I remember her saying, "I can't take the knife from you like that if we're going to be friends." I asked why and the response was, "In Turkey (and Greece) friends never hand each other knives, you put it on the table and I take it." I don't know if it was true but it reminded me of the concept of handing off scissors handle first so it made sense.

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Knife ownership

- Just as with swords, regional and cultural superstitions exist regarding the treatment of knives that are used in combat. One common superstition states that it is bad luck to return a combat knife from its sheath without using it to draw blood. A variant myth exists surrounding drawing a knife (e.g. a sgián dubh) without drawing the blood of a cultural enemy (e.g. an Englishman). Sometimes these superstitions are actually attempts to insult the culture of the supposed believer.
- Some cultures believe that a knife does not belong to an individual until it has 'bit' them, or tasted their blood. Believers in such superstitions may intentionally prick a finger on the blade of a knife rather than risk a later, accidental cut. According to this superstition, the knife will stay sharp longer and is less likely to accidentally cut its owner once it has tasted his or her blood.

Rituals and superstitions

- If you ever accidentally tap a knife against a horseshoe (except if it's on a horse), tap it twice more. There are some kinds of imps that are attracted by the sound of one such tapping, but three close together drives them away.
- In all my years, I've never met a more superstitious person than my Dublin-born mother, Lena O'Flaherty.
- It was bad luck to put shoes on a table or chair, place a bed facing the door, bring lilac into the house, cut your fingernails on Sunday, give a knife as a gift, or wear green - except for a bit of Shamrock or ribbon on St. Patrick's Day.

In the account of the Stefansson Arctic Expedition of 1908-12, Ilav, an Eskimo who had been a source of help and information, told how he had first become acquainted with the local superstitions about killing animals when he wintered with Eskimos named Kaxotox and Kunnak and Kaxotox's father at the Horton River. He had killed a wolf and when he returned home that evening and reported the event, the father said he must not eat cooked food or drink tea for five days. All new to Ilav but the old man told him if he broke the rules he would either die, be very sick, or suffer great misfortune. He soon broke the rules but noticed no difficulties. When he later killed a polar bear the old man informed him that he must not work with wood the following day. As a charm the old man wanted to hang a crooked knife from the roof. Ilav refused the well-meant assistance.

- As such, the knife plays an important role in some initiation rites, and many cultures perform rituals with a variety of knives, including the ceremonial sacrifices of animals. Samurai warriors, as part of bushido, could perform ritual suicide, or seppuku, with a tantō, a common Japanese knife. An athame, a ceremonial black-handled knife, is used in Wicca and other forms of modern witchcraft.

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Sailors

- Sailors also tried to ward off the bad luck of getting killed with various sorts of charms, talismans etc. Roman Catholic sailors carried images of saints, in particular St Elmo, St Christopher and St. Nicholas. The majority of the Anglo-American sailors kept a specific type of knife on or close by to them, this knife had a black handle and a guard. They also carried a sixpence or a dime.
- When you're stuck in the doldrums, drifting with no wind, you shouldn't whistle to call up the wind, but you could try sticking a knife in the mast. No one knows for sure where this superstition came from. Maybe some poor sailor got so frustrated after weeks without wind that he stabbed the mast. The next day a wind came and the superstition was born.

The wedding cake.

- By sharing their wedding cake with the guests, the bride and groom are said to be "breaking bread in kinship". The bride's knife means that she is ready to take on the responsibilities of keeping her own household. The wedding cake was originally lots of little wheat cakes that were broken over the bride's head to bestow good luck and fertility.