

Ocracoke humor runs deep in islanders' veins. Whether on the deck of a sailing vessel, on the porch of the general store, at the Coffee Shop, or around the kitchen table, Ocracokers can often be heard telling stories about their neighbors, their kinfolk, and themselves...and laughing heartily.

Below is a sampling of tales I have heard. Some are funniest when shared orally, and maybe you had to know the people to fully appreciate a few of the stories. Of course, some of them will be funnier than others...but they all will give you a glimpse into Ocracoke Island humor. I hope you enjoy the following stories.

Ocracoke men are sometimes called by their first name plus their father's nickname. For example, Robert Dozier Tolson (son of Benjamin Henry [Hank] Tolson) was routinely called Rob Hanks.

The following story has been told on Ocracoke for several generations.

Ocracoke native, Captain Thomas Franklin Gaskins (Tom Franks), was approaching a draw bridge in his schooner. The bridge tender, in his role as river sentry, called down, "What's your destination?"

"Pasquotank," was the reply.

"What's your name, captain?"

"Tom Franks."

"Who's your mate?"

"Rob Hanks."

"And your deckhand?"

"Ben Franks."

What are you carrying?

"Pine planks."

The bridge tender, it is said, thinking the captain was being insolent, cursed out Capt. Gaskins and threatened to not open the draw for him.

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This story is told about a group of teenagers in the early 1960s. Five or six boys and girls had driven a car down to Springer's Point (in those days there was a sandy lane from the edge of the village to the sound shore). The car soon mired down in the sand and mud. The teenagers' efforts to push the car out were unsuccessful. It wouldn't budge. Finally a boy asked one of the others to pray. "That's the only way we'll ever get out of here," he said.

His friend obliged. "Dear God, please help us get our car out of this god-damned mud," he intoned.

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Jake loved to mess around with cars, trucks, and engines. As a result he was always begomed\* with grease and oil. His mother-in-law remarked, "Jake will never have aches and pains in his joints. He's too well oiled."

\*begomed is an island term meaning smeared or covered

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A Hatterasman was separated from his wife while visiting Morehead City, and became anxious when he couldn't find her. He contacted the police. "What's your wife's name?" the officer asked. "Her name is Nel-wee [Nellie]...and she has a big bel-wee [belly]," he reported.

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The same Hatterasman was once accused of stealing an anchor. The judge addressed him: "Sir, will you please take the stand."

"I might as well, your honor" he said. "I've been accused of taking just about everything else."

When questioned about the missing anchor, which had been found in his possession, the accused answered, "Your honor, I do have the anchor, but I didn't steal it. I found it floating in the sound."

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Some years ago a "Camp Meeting" and revival were being held on Hatteras Island. Sails were improvised to create a tent, and crude wooden benches were built. Several of the young men from Ocracoke decided to take their skiffs to the meeting. One man arrived at the shore, prepared to climb into the skiff already "three sheets to the wind."

"What?" asked one of the others, "You're going to a camp meeting, and you're drunk already? You need to repent and ask to be delivered from drunkenness."

"Well," he replied, "I believe if I'm going to do something, I ought to be well prepared, and I should make an early start of it."

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An Ocracoker was traveling by bus down the Eastern Shore of Virginia in the 1930s, on his way home after working months in Philadelphia. As they approached one stop, a decidedly unattractive woman was standing on the steps of the general store. "My oh my," the Ocracoker murmured, "that may be the ugliest woman that ever drew a breath."

His seatmate turned to the islander and uttered only three words: "That's my wife."

Trying to recover, the Ocracoker corrected himself. "I wasn't talking about the woman standing on the steps. I was talking about that younger woman behind her."

"That's my daughter," was the icy retort.

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Two sisters were known throughout the village for their obsessive house cleaning. Whenever they could, they enlisted their husbands to help them. The women were even accused of getting their men to back out the screws on the kitchen cabinets so they could clean behind them!

In the springtime major cleaning was more a formality than a necessity since both houses were always immaculate. One husband wandered down to the docks in the afternoon to take a break from spring cleaning. "Well," inquired a fisherman, "how is it going?"

His terse reply: "I found one fly wing."

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Many years ago a Hatteras native was stationed at the Portsmouth Life Saving Station. His wife came with him. The surfman was given a few days leave, and he and his wife decided to take their sail skiff back to Hatteras.

In Pamlico Sound the man's wife fell overboard, but the husband didn't realize what had happened until he looked back. The woman was wearing a hoop skirt, and she was floating on the surface, hardly even damp from the waist up. Her husband said she looked just like a buoy!

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Three brothers were accustomed to "nipping" and playing poker now and then.

All three attended a revival, and two got religion. They began testifying. "I am so glad I gave my heart to the Lord," one brother offered.

"Jesus is coming soon," the other brother testified, to which the first brother added, "He has one foot in the sound, one foot on land, and the other foot in the ocean."

The third brother got laughing so hard he fell on the floor and had to crawl out the door.

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One mama decided to order a new pair of shoes for her young son. She wrote a letter to the mail order company. "Dear Sears," she penned, without any mention that she wanted to order shoes, "He don't want black, he wants brown. He don't want 9s, he wants 11s."

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Ocracoke got telephone service in the 1950s. A representative from "Ma Bell" came to the island to promote the new technology. "You can connect with your neighbors and friends just by picking up the receiver" he told one islander.

"Then you'd better connect me to heaven," she replied. "This one over here has died, and that one over there has one foot in the grave."