

“I Didn’t Know That”

by **Karlen Evins**



(Why We Say The Things We Say)

God Bless You

Come holiday time, Thanksgiving in particular, I think of Tiny Tim. (No, not the tip-toeing, tulip-man, but the one from the Scrooge story.) As we approach the season for family gatherings and all things “thankful,” you may want to get a head start (and a head’s up) on the saying, *God Bless You*.

Funny expression if you think about it. We end our letters with it. We wish it to total strangers without thinking. And for the oddest of reasons, we all but sing it in unison when somebody in the room sneezes.

Ever wonder why?

Some credit St. Gregory the Great for originating the custom at the time of the plague, where sneezing was symptomatic. But the more colorful origins date back even earlier.

Ancients once believed that under physical or emotional duress, the body and soul could literally part. (This theory also gives us our expression *to be beside oneself*.) In the case of a simple sneeze, it was held (and some doctors attest today) that the body was as close to death as it could be while still technically living. (In that split second, we are minus the breath in our lungs, and our hearts get a momentary pause.)

Some say the blessing was one of gratitude for the heart starting again. But the more superstitious believed that a good sneeze could literally blast your soul right out of your body, leaving the body wide open and vulnerable for evil spirits to enter. *God Bless You* was said to protect the sneezing person from wandering entities that might take up residence while the soul was out of pocket. By invoking God, one kept the body protected long enough for the rightful soul to make its way back, while sending trespassing evil spirits along their merry way.



Based on the book
I Didn't Know That!
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