



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

Footloose and Fancy-free

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

English has many **idioms** to express close connections. If two people are extremely close and do everything together, we say they are joined at the hip. If two people are very similar to each other, we say they are two peas in a pod. And when two people marry, we say they tied the knot.

If you are tied down, that means there are important things you must do, and those things prevent you from doing something else. For example, you can be tied down by your employment or some other **tasks**. You can be tied down for an afternoon, a week, a month, or for years, depending on the situation.

For example, you might say, "I'm going to be tied down here for the next few hours." But you might also say, "He didn't get married because he didn't want to get tied down." In this second example, tied down refers to a long period of time.

But what about those people who haven't tied the knot and are not tied down? What expression can we use to describe them?

The following exchange gives the answer:

A: *I think Michael would be a great match for Ellen.*

B: *I think he would too, but I don't think he's ready. Maybe in a few years.*

A: *You think he's too young?*

B: *Not really, it's just that he doesn't want to be tied down. He wants to travel and be, you know, footloose and fancy-free.*

A: *Sounds kind of nice, actually!*

Footloose and fancy-free means that you do not have serious **commitments**. It expresses freedom and being without serious worries. Some people may connect the expression with young people who do not yet have serious responsibilities in their lives.

American dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster says the first known use of fancy-free dates to 1590 and first meant being free from romantic attachment. The first known use of footloose came in 1650. In the 1800s, footloose and fancy-free were combined into one expression in American English.

Footloose and fancy-free is the title of numerous songs, and Footloose was a popular American musical film released in 1984. The movie is about a teenager who moves to a small town where dancing is not permitted. But the teenager wants to dance and set his feet free.

Whether you're feeling tied down or footloose and fancy-free, that's it for this week's *Words and Their Stories*.

I'm Andrew Smith.

Andrew Smith wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

idiom -n. an expression that has a meaning that is different than the individual words might suggest

hip -n. the sides of the body between the legs and the waist or the bone that is in that place

pea -n. a round, green seed that is a common food

pod -n. a part of a plant that contains seeds, especially peas

task -n. a job that is given to someone and that needs to be done

commitment -n. something that a person has a responsibility to do

We want to hear from you. Do you have similar expressions in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.

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