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Fire Saying

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“Fire Saying”
Folk Belief

Informant: Katherine DeBry is my older sister. She is in her late 20s, a high school history teacher, graduate of USU, and is originally from Ferron, Utah. She is the middle child, having two older brothers, a younger sister (me) and a younger brother. Growing up she wanted to be tough, like her older brothers, and saw herself as a tomboy. As she got older, she grew in her love for being tough, but in a more independent way, rather than a masculine way. Katherine is a strong and independent woman with a passion for animals, history and the outdoors. She loves to read, learn, and memorize random facts. Katherine also enjoys camping, fishing, and riding horses, all while helping other people learn to do so. She currently lives in Ferron, Utah and works in Carbon County as a teacher as well as a field archeologist for the Forest Service in Emery County.

Context: I interviewed Katherine over the phone while she was heading home from work. We both used our phones; phone calling being the most common form of communication between us because of distance. We have both grown up with this piece of folklore since we were little so at the mention of “playing with fire,” she knew exactly what I was looking for and immediately started talking about when she first heard it. It took some time to actually state the full saying and the context behind it because the saying was interrupted by other memories. Katherine first heard the saying when she was about four years old at a family reunion in Mount Pleasant, Utah. One night, she had been playing with fire, either with a roasting stick or a piece of wood, and our grandma warned her about playing with fire. She wasn’t sure where Grandma learned the saying, she suspected Grandma made it up as a way to protect her children and grandchildren. The saying was normally shared with young children, as well as joked about with adults, because many from all age groups find it difficult to refrain from playing with fire. Katherine said she believed the saying well into her teens, mostly because one of our brothers, when he was young, had trouble sleeping at night without wetting the bed. Consequently, he was one of the first to start playing with fire. She continues to share it with friends and family, both young and old, on camping trips or during outside activities when there is a fire present. While she knows it isn’t factual, she still finds it amusing as well as habitual to say it at any outdoor gathering.

Text: If you play with fire, you’ll pee the bed.

Texture: Over the phone Katherine stated the saying with a monotone voice, without much emotion or attitude. It wasn’t until we talked about the memories and the fact we actually believed it that she began to laugh. Growing up I remember Katherine using the saying in a tone of warning, especially when she believed it. If she were saying it to young children, she would most likely say it with a facial expression of high eyebrows, tight lips, and folded arms with a warning tone. Not necessarily a strict tone, but more of a mature, “I know better than you do” kind of tone. But if she is with older company, she uses it in a sarcastic tone, stating it more out of fun and play tagging it along with, “when I grew up, my family always said….”, or if
someone gets burned by the fire she might say it in a sarcastic tone along with “well you do know, that if…”.

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