

Urban legends



First thoughts

1. What is an urban legend?
2. Where do legends come from? How are they spread?

The organ thieves

In 1994, the Las Vegas police reported a disturbing series of crimes along the Vegas strip. The first victim was an Ohio man in town for a sales convention. At the bar in his hotel, the man happened to strike up a conversation with an attractive young woman. According to the man, the two hit it off, sharing several drinks over the course of a couple of hours. At some point, the man passed out, and when he came to, he found himself lying in a hotel bathtub, covered in ice. There was a phone on the floor beside the tub, with an attached note that said, "Call 911 or you will die." He called an ambulance and was rushed to the hospital, where the doctors informed him that he had undergone massive surgery. A gang selling human organs on the black market had removed one of his kidneys.



There's a good chance that you've heard this story, or some variation of it. Thousands and thousands of people have passed on news of the Las Vegas "organ thieves" over the course of 10 years. Word of mouth, e-mail, and even printed fliers have relayed it. However, there is absolutely no evidence that any such thing ever occurred, in Las Vegas or anywhere else. This fictional story is an urban legend.

An urban legend is any modern, fictional story, told as truth, that reaches a variety of people by being passed from person to person. Urban legends are often false, but not always. A few turn out to be true, and a lot of them were inspired by actual events but have changed from person to person. Urban legends are usually a combination of humor, horror, warning, embarrassment, or morality. In the story of the organ harvesters, you can see how some of these elements come together. The most outstanding feature of the story is its sense of horror. The image of a man waking up lying in a bathtub full of ice, with one less kidney is a scary thought. The story also includes a moral lesson. The businessman ended up in the unpleasant situation only after going to drink at a bar and then flirting with a mysterious woman.

Vocabulary and expressions

<i>Strike up</i>	- To start.
<i>Hit it off</i>	- To get on well with someone.
<i>The black market</i>	- The trade of illegal products or services. E.g. Selling ivory.
<i>Moral lesson</i>	- A lesson that guides people in what's right and wrong.
<i>Flirt</i>	- Behave as though attracted or trying to attract someone.

Expression - To find yourself somewhere

Look in the first paragraph at the following sentence '*he found himself lying in a hotel bathtub*'.

To 'find yourself somewhere' means that you **realize you are somewhere that you didn't intend to be**, or you **didn't know you had come to**. Look at these common examples:

*I suddenly **found myself** on the wrong side of town.*

*We fell asleep on the train and woke up to **find ourselves** in Busan.*

*I **found myself** lying on the floor of my bathroom after a long night of drinking!*



1. Do you think the Las Vegas story is true? Why?
2. What is the moral lesson of the story?
3. There are often moral lessons in urban myths. For example, 'don't talk to strangers'. What other moral lessons could be in urban myths?
4. Would you ever pick up a hitch hiker?
5. If a stranger knocked on your door late at night, would you answer it?
6. Do you know any urban myths?
7. Look at the following pictures of urban myths. Do you know what they are?



8. Which of these do you think are true?
9. Are there any Korean urban myths?
10. Are urban myths a good tool for teaching kids how to behave?