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Q: When someone quits drinking, why are they said to be "on the wagon"?

A: Before pavement was a regular feature of cities and towns, a water wagon made the rounds and sprayed the dirt streets lightly to keep down the dust. Somebody once had the image of climbing "on the water wagon" (like climbing "on board" to join something) and the image took hold in the popular imagination.

Implicit in the idea of being on the wagon is the idea that you can always jump off! Perhaps because of this, being on the wagon has always had a rather temporary sound to many of us.

If you have questions for the Vine Line, write to:
Editorial Dept., PO Box 1980, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y., 10163-1980