

# “WORD FAMOUS”

BY Fred R. SHAPIRO

Which Syracuse alumni and faculty have created the most memorable quotes? Here’s a look, according to the editor of the *Yale Book of Quotations*



DELMORE SCHWARTZ

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY IS KNOWN FOR A WIDE RANGE OF DISTINGUISHED programs and a remarkable diversity of truly notable alumni in many fields. The contributions of these individuals have made a deep impact on our culture. One way to contemplate the influence of Syracuse people is through the words they wrote or uttered—their famous quotations. I am in a unique position to assess the quotational legacy of Syracuse’s affiliates, because I recently edited *The Yale Book of Quotations* (Yale University Press). In that volume, I attempted to collect all well-known quotations and use state-of-the-art research to trace their origins more accurately than other reference works have done. I present here Syracuse-related sayings that were included in the YBQ and some that I added, using similar research techniques to those underlying that book.

## Literary Treasures

Looking at the list of eminent alumni and faculty members, one is immediately struck by how many important writers studied or taught at the University. Their key passages, from landmark novels, short stories, and poems, include the following:

He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage.  
—Stephen Crane, who attended in 1891, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895)

May memory restore again and again  
The smallest color of the smallest day:  
Time is the school in which we learn,  
Time is the fire in which we burn.  
—Delmore Schwartz, faculty member, 1962-65, “For Rhoda” (1938)



## SHIRLEY JACKSON

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.  
—Shirley Jackson '40, "The Lottery" (1948)

Maybe I just don't understand poetry. I admit it's not the first thing I reach for when I pick up something to read.  
—Raymond Carver, faculty member, 1980-83, "Cathedral" (1983)

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy.  
—Jay McInerney G'86, *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984)

For what links us are elemental experiences—emotions—forces that have no intrinsic language and must be imagined as art if they are to be contemplated at all.  
—Joyce Carol Oates '60, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* (1993)

These were the lovely bones that had grown around my absence: the connections—sometimes tenuous, sometimes made at great cost, but often magnificent—that happened after I was gone. And I began to see things in a way that let me hold the world without me in it. The events that my death wrought were merely the bones of a body that would become whole at some unpredictable time in the future. The price of what I came to see as this miraculous body had been my life.  
—Alice Sebold '84, *The Lovely Bones* (2002)

## Pop Culture Classics

Turning to more popular arts, I see that Syracuse graduates have furnished some of the most resonant catchphrases and film lines and song lyrics of modern times. Legendary television host Dick Clark '51, the star of *American Bandstand* and many New Year's Eve broadcasts from Times Square, ended programs with this phrase:

"For now, Dick Clark ... so long."

Also a giant in the music world is rocker Lou Reed '64:  
"Hey babe, take a walk on the wild side."  
—"Walk on the Wild Side" (1972)

But Reed isn't alone among Syracuse alumni known for their songwriting prowess. Felix Cavaliere '64 of the Young Rascals co-wrote the following hit with Eddie Brigati:

"All the world over, so easy to see!  
People everywhere just wanna be free."  
—"People Got To Be Free" (1968)

"HEY BABE..."





“Serenity now!”

While those words may get you singing, Aaron Sorkin '83, creator of *The West Wing* among other productions, may have you shouting out the following line from his 1989 play *A Few Good Men*. Repeated in the film of the same name, it became the most repeated movie quotation of the last 25 years:

“You can’t handle the truth!”

There were two additional well-known TV catchphrases used by Syracuse alums. Peter Falk G'53, who played the seemingly muddleheaded homicide detective Lieutenant Columbo, always turned away after questioning the episode’s suspect, but would invariably turn back and say, “Oh, one more thing ...” (*Columbo*, 1971-91). And Jerry Stiller '50, portraying Frank Costanza in the October 9, 1997, episode of *Seinfeld*, memorably yelled “Serenity now!” in a misguided attempt to control his blood pressure.

A final pop-culture quote was furnished by cartoonist Robert Mankoff '66. In a *New Yorker* cartoon published May 2, 1993, Mankoff showed a businessman talking into the telephone:

“No, Thursday’s out. How about never—is never good for you?”



## Political Prowess

In the realm of politics, Syracuse alumni have produced some highly eloquent sound bites. Belva Lockwood, who graduated from Syracuse University precursor Genesee College in 1857 and later ran for president of the United States on the National Equal Rights Party ticket, was the first woman admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. Arguing for this right for female lawyers, Lockwood said in a speech to the National Convention of Woman Suffrage Association, Washington, D.C. (January 16-17, 1877):

“The glory of each generation is to make its own precedents.”

Another leader of the women’s movement, former National Organization for Women president Karen DeCrow L'72, who will join Lockwood in the National Women’s Hall of Fame when she’s inducted this fall, wrote in *Sexist Justice* (1974):

“During the Renaissance, women were not allowed to attend art school. Everyone asks, where are the great women painters of the Renaissance?”

Speechwriter-columnist-author William Safire '51, H'78 wrote in his 1975 book *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House*:

“A man who lies, thinking it is the truth, is an honest man, and a man who tells the truth, believing it to be a lie, is a liar.”

Syracuse's highest-ranking politico alum is U.S. Vice President Joe Biden L'68. Biden's words have not always come out smoothly, but in an April 26, 2007, debate among Democratic presidential primary candidates in South Carolina, he quipped a response that has been ranked by one scholar as the sixth greatest presidential debate one-liner of all time. Asked by NBC's Brian Williams if he could reassure voters that he had the discipline to avoid verbosity on the world stage, Biden's answer, in its entirety, was:

"Yes."

"Yes."

## Gridiron Gusto

The Syracuse Orange men are, of course, renowned for their achievements in athletics. Alumni in sports have had their share of quotations. Hugh "Duffy" Daugherty '40, longtime football coach at Michigan State, is remembered for this remark in the *Los Angeles Times* (October 5, 1963):

"Football is not a contact sport; it's a collision sport. Dancing is a good example of a contact sport."

Jim Brown '57 was named by *The Sporting News* in 2002 as the greatest professional football player ever. He also excelled at baseball, basketball, and track and field. His best sport? That would be lacrosse. Also significant as an actor and a social activist, Brown, quoted in *Life Magazine* (October 25, 1963), said about football (or was it about life?):

"A lot of times you'll hit a pile up. And because there are a lot of guys around, the defense thinks they have you. So they relax. Then with movement, no specific thing, but just movement of your body and legs, you find yourself getting free. In other words, you never feel that you're caught until you're down."

JIM BROWN

## Ingenuity Unleashed

The Syracuse people I have quoted are, as I have said, a highly diverse group, but they are united by their qualities of boldness and innovation. Those themes are nicely summarized by a final alumnus, representing the sciences: namely, artificial heart inventor Robert Jarvik '68, who stated in *The New York Times* (May 26, 1987):

"Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them."

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