

**“I Wish I’d Said That”.**

Firstly, thanks Peter for those kind words old mate. It may be true that I have given a lot of my time and energies to this Association over many years. I can honestly say, however, that I have always got more out of the OBA than I have put in. This Association and its members hold a very special place in this old bloke’s heart.

Secondly, my sincere thanks to the committee for giving me this opportunity to entertain you, at a dinner which is especially meaningful to my classmates and me – our 50<sup>th</sup> year out of school. I hope that my ramblings don’t disappoint.

I have always been fascinated by the English language, and by the way in which a particular arrangement of words - in stories, poems, letters, or even simply in a spontaneous statement, can evoke such strong emotions in people. Think how enduring and evocative are such statements as “In the beginning ...”, “Friends, Romans, countrymen ...”, “I had a dream ...”, “There was movement at the station ...”, or even simply “Crikey!”.

I have been collecting quotes for about 50 years. At last count they number over 1100, divided into the categories Wisdom, Wit and Whimsy. My purpose tonight is to entertain so I’ll give Wisdom a miss and concentrate on Wit, with a sprinkling of Whimsy.

But first I thought that I’d break the ice with some anecdotes of our beloved teacher Charlie Goffet who, with his mate Lennie McRae, graced our committee in its early years.

At school, during the lunch break, or recess, Charlie would duck out and go to the Town Hall pub for a couple of beers. Harold Beard was worried about his possible slide into alcoholism, which was thought to be an issue with one of the other teachers, whom I shall call Mr Brown. Harold called Charlie into his office and said, kindly, “Charles, I am worried about your drinking. I’m afraid that you may be heading the same way as Mr Brown.” “Oh no”, Charlie earnestly replied. “He goes round the back of the Tech Drawing sheds and up the side path. I go out the front door.”

Charlie had been writing letters to the editor during one particular period, protesting a planned tall building in the city. He was our Publicity Officer at the time, and apologised humbly at one committee meeting for his inactivity in that role. “However”, he promised, “if they build that monstrosity I shall throw myself from its roof, and pinned to my jacket will be a note saying ‘Please go to the Old Boys’ dinner, City Hall, Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August.’”

After one committee meeting had been closed, and a couple of blue jokes told by other committeemen, Charlie quietly commented “My maternal

great-grandmother has noted that my language has coarsened considerably since I have been attending these meetings.” That said, I must say that none of the Committee had ever heard Charlie swear.

Charlie used to walk down to David Jones, from his flat in Barker Street, to buy his beloved French loaf, and other provisions. As a favour, he used to also buy a dog biscuit mix for his neighbour – one of those mixes made up of small coloured shapes. One day his sense of mischief again got the better of him and, as he ordered the biscuits, he implored the young lady behind the counter “Please put a lot of those green crosses in. The Bishop is especially fond of those when he visits for tea.” “Oh, Mr Goffet”, the distressed young lass exclaimed, “those biscuits are for dogs!” “Are they?” Charlie said with mock surprise. “Oh dear.”

I have fond recollections of visiting Charlie from time to time, for what he called our ‘matinées’, which were really just relaxed, free-range talk sessions. I would arrive at his door with a bottle of champagne and a tin of Baltic sprats, and Charlie would have thick slices of French loaf, buttered ready. He would always greet me at the door of his neat bachelor flat with the apology “Please excuse my humble abode. It’s like a Chinese brothel ... 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty.”

Now, back to the quotes.

I’ll start with my favourite quote of all.

Jack Gibson, ‘super coach’, is well known for his success as a rugby league player and, especially, as a coach. Jack also collects quotes and has published them in numerous, wonderfully enjoyable books.

However, some of the things that he has said have also found their way into quotes lists. For example, it was Jack who said that Andrew Ettingshausen was so fast that “he could switch the light off and be in bed before it got dark.” When a co-commentator, at the State-of-Origin game in 1988, remarked on the number of empty seats Jack said “Yeah, that’s what they call a partial sell-out.” Of the controversial, late referee Barry Gomersall Jack said that same night “His limitations are limitless.”

On Parramatta’s legendary tough forward Ray Price he said: “He doesn’t know the meaning of the word fear ... he doesn’t know the meaning of a few other words, too.”

When Parramatta won their first premiership, after 34 years in the competition, Jack went onto the stage at the celebrations. The crowd waited in expectation of the victory speech. Jack simply said “Ding, dong, the witch is dead,” and left the stage. Simple, memorable.

So all that is by way of leading up to my favourite quote. Jack’s wife once said to him “Jack, I think you love football more than you love me.” Jack replied, “Yes dear, but I love you more than basketball.” He gets my eternal

respect for that.

Sport has provided me with many of my favourite quotes.

Soccer crowds will often set up a chant, when a favourite player does something clever “Fred Smith, there’s only one Fred Smith.” Well Andy Gorams was the goalkeeper with Rangers, who was reported, mid-week, as being mildly schizophrenic. The following Saturday, when he saved a goal, the Kilmarnock fans set up a chant “Two Andy Gorams, there’s only two Andy Gorams.”

When the Patrick Thistle soccer manager was told a concussed striker did not know who he was, he said: “That's great, tell him he's Pelé and get him back on.”

Here are a couple that come from Aussie Rules. Former Hawthorn Australian Rules Football coach Allan Jeans said of the legendary player Dermott Brereton “Dermott knows that much, he not only knows the name of the unknown soldier, he knows the name of the bloke who shot him.”

And, in a TV program on men’s health, I found this treasure from Simon Madden, another Australian Rules football legend "My father died at home, 56, mowing the lawn. Apparently it's hereditary, so I've given up mowing the lawn."

Max Baer was a great heavyweight boxer, and a real character, renowned for his sense of humour. He collapsed in the lobby of a hotel with what was to prove a fatal heart attack. A bellhop raced to his side and said: “Mr. Baer, shall I get the house doctor.” Max said: “No kid. Better get me the people doctor.” Then he died.

You have to admire someone who will use his dying breath to crack a joke.

It was often said that comedian Bob Hope was not naturally funny. He was said to simply have good script writers. Well, on the night he died he put that rumour to rest. With death imminent, he was asked if he wanted to be buried or cremated. “Surprise me,” he said.

Which makes me think of another aged comedian, the great George Burns. When he was about 98 he had to decline an invitation to open the Australian Rules season in Melbourne. Instead, they used an impersonator, who was pushed out into the centre of the football ground in a wheelchair, complete with cigar, and rug over his knees, by a buxom ‘nurse’. He said “I've been thinking about Heaven and God. I am told that God is neither black nor white, neither man nor woman. I am beginning to believe that God is Michael Jackson.”

Another American comedian from the past was Jack Benny, who was renowned for being a tightwad. He and Milton Berle did a comedy sketch on the latter’s show where Jack was held up by a robber who thrust a gun in his back and demanded “Your money or your life.” There was a long period

of silence. The robber shouted "I said: your money or your life," to which Jack replied "I'm thinking about it."

Hollywood is a great source of quotes. Groucho Marks said, to his partner during a dance, "I could dance with you till the cows come home. On second thoughts, I'd rather dance with the cows till you come home." As he left a Hollywood party he said to the hostess "I've had a wonderful evening, but this wasn't it." It may have been the same party where he told an unattractive woman, who insisted that they had met before "I never forget a face, but in your case I'll make an exception." A fat lady gushed "Oh I just love nature," to which Groucho replied "That's loyalty, after what nature did to you." And, finally: "Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read."

I really like this anecdote from Arnie Schwarzenegger. He said "I went to the dentist. I said, 'My teeth are turning yellow, what should I do?' He said, 'Wear a brown tie'."

While we are in Hollywood, here are a couple of vitriolic quotes by columnists about ladies of the silver screen. Elsa Manchester wrote, of Maureen O'Hara: "She looked as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth - or anywhere else." An equally uncharitable Dorothy Parker described a performance by Katharine Hepburn in these terms: "She showed the whole gamut of emotions from A to B." The same columnist was approached at a party by a woman who told her, sneering at a fellow guest "I can't bear fools." Ms Parker replied "That's odd, your mother could." You have to admire someone who could conjure up a riposte like that.

Johnny Carson was obviously not impressed with Chevy Chase's comedic talents when he said "He couldn't ad lib a fart after a baked beans dinner."

W C Fields was renowned for his drinking. He once said (and I wish I could do a good impersonation, but I can't) "A woman drove me to drink and I didn't even have the decency to thank her." He gave the following advice to travellers. "When travelling, always carry a flagon of whiskey in case of snakebite and furthermore always carry a small snake." He once complained "In the wilds we lost our corkscrew and were compelled to live on food and water for several days."

Frank Sinatra was also an authority on booze, and said "I feel sorry for people who don't drink. When they wake up in the morning, that's as good as they're going to feel all day." Dooby dooby doo .... But the last word must go to Dean Martin, who made his living playing the tipsy crooner. He once said "I don't drink any more. Then again, I don't drink any less either." Dean also once said "You're not drunk if you can lie on the floor without holding on."

Undoubtedly, though, the classiest quote on alcohol is given by Madame Bollinger, one of the grandes dames of Champagne. She said "I drink

Champagne when I'm happy and when I'm sad. Sometimes I drink it when I'm alone. When I have company, I consider it obligatory. I trifle with it if I'm not hungry and drink it when I am. Otherwise I never touch it - unless I'm thirsty."

Back to Hollywood. Zsa Zsa Gabor, who knew a thing or two about the subject of matrimony, said "Husbands are like fires. They go out when unattended."

And finally, as we leave Hollywood, a few words from the legendary producer Sam Goldwyn: "Why call your baby Arthur? Every Tom, Dick and Harry is called Arthur." It was also Sam who said: "If I did that, I'd be sticking my head in a moose." And again "We have all passed a lot of water under the bridge since then."

Another, who shared Sam's penchant for malapropisms, was Lawrence Peter (Yogi) Berra, American baseball Hall of Fame member. Yogi said "When you come to the fork in the road, take it." Ahhh, grasshoppers, good advice for life. He also said "I really didn't say everything I said," and "The ballparks have gotten too crowded. That's why nobody goes to see the game any more."

We heard a few acerbic comments by critics earlier. Here are a few more.

Gore Vidal on Ronald Reagan: "A triumph of the embalmer's art."

Orson Welles on Donny Osmond: "He has Van Gogh's ear for music."

Noel Coward, when told an acquaintance had blown his brains out: "He must have been a frightfully good shot."

Mark Twain, on a foe "I did not attend his funeral; but I wrote a nice letter saying I approved of it."

Golda Meir, stateswoman and (apparently), wit "Don't be humble: you're not that great."

Dorothy Parker, on being told that former US President Calvin Coolidge was dead "How could they tell?" Ouch!

Australian comic Brian Doyle, of Australian politician Alexander Downer "If he was a street, he'd be a dead end."

This next quote is well known but I feel I must include it for its enduring wit. Lady Astor said to Winston Churchill: "If you were my husband, I would put poison in your coffee," to which he replied "Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it."

Here's a quote from a movie that I'm sure many here can relate to. One of the (ageing) Musketeers, in the movie *D'Artagnan's Daughter*, said "What's nice about haemorrhoids is that you forget the rheumatism."

Gentlemen, I'm about to close. I hope you have enjoyed the snippets from

my collection that I have chosen for this special night.

My final quote will be about education, which seems appropriate tonight. This is one that I'm still trying to understand, so I'll say it twice. "Education is the process of moving from cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty."

That's enough of the quotes. I have many more, but time is passing.

I'll finish up with the words of a poem, and then with the words of a song – both inspirational. Firstly, the final lines from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 'Ulysses'. These words apply to all Old Boys, but especially to those of us occupying the *front* tables. They speak to who we are, and what we're made of, what 'the Boss' would have called 'esprit de corps':

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,--  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

And finally, from the lyrical master Bob Dylan, my blessing to you all:

May God bless and keep you always  
May your wishes all come true  
May you always do for others  
And let others do for you  
May you build a ladder to the stars  
And climb on every rung  
May you stay forever young

May your hands always be busy  
May your feet always be swift  
May you have a strong foundation  
When the winds of changes shift  
May your heart always be joyful  
And may your song always be sung  
May you stay forever young.

Thank you.