"We all quote."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

By David Isaacson

Who said “nice guys finish last”? Most of you think that you know the answer and, if you look the phrase up in John Bartlett’s well-known *Familiar Quotations*, you confirm that this is the title of a 1975 book by Leo Durocher, outspoken manager of the Dodgers. But, if you consult Ralph Keyes’ *Nice Guys Finish Seventh: False Phrases, Spurious Sayings, and Familiar Quotations* (HarperCollins, 1992), you learn that on July 5, 1946, Durocher had a conversation about baseball with Red Barber. At one point, Leo made the statement that “nice guys couldn’t be counted on.” Barber challenged that comment and asked Durocher if he knew a nicer guy than Mel Ott, manager of the Giants, to which Durocher responded, “The nice guys over there are in seventh place. Well, let them come and get me.” By the time this line was quoted a few months later, it had become “nice guys finish last.” Possibly the oft-repeated phrase is what Durocher meant—at least Keyes thinks so—yet, he never said it!

This example is only one of many that occur in the frequent process of misquotation and of misrepresentation. Nearly everyone, for example, thinks that W.C. Fields said, “Any man that hates dogs and children can’t be all bad.” But, according to Keyes, Leo Rosten first used this line when introducing Fields at a banquet in 1939. Fortunately, most patrons who take the time to verify or check a quotation at the Central Reference Department in Waldo Library are not trying to confuse; they simply wish to locate the source or wording. However, even when people think they know the correct source and phrasing, they can be wrong. It turns out, for example, that William Congreve, not Shakespeare, said that “music has charms to soothe a savage breast” Shakespeare did say that “music oft hath such a charm to make bad good and good provoke to harm.” Take note, however, that neither of them said, “Music has charms to soothe a savage beast.”

The University Libraries has numerous quotation books besides such familiar titles as Bartlett’s. An assiduous quotation finder usually needs to examine several of the sources to verify some quotations. Much preferred, of course, are the books that have keyword indexes rather than those which arrange the quotations by topic or by author. Such indexes make it relatively easy to match “music” and “breast” rather than scan the hundreds of entries assigned to music or taken from Shakespeare.

Of course, some perusers of quotation books are doing so because of the amusing, varied, and intriguing examples that they find. Others want to locate something that will “spice up” a presentation, or to identify a famous individual’s memorable lines that also support a key theme of a speech or paper. Some come because they have seen a quotation and want to find out more about the author. Reference librarians are occasionally stumped because the quotation was originally created for a poster, a T-shirt, or a card—and not excerpted from a famous book or speech. However, Waldo Library includes general collections of quotations as well as those that focus on a time, a place, a subject, or even a type. Some are highly reliable; others are clearly whimsical, unsystematic, and unscholarly. Here, for your future examination and use, are a representative sample of the diversity that exists in one library collection:

- *Dictionary of Quotations* (Delacorte Press, 1968)—compiled and annotated by Bergen Evans, the Northwestern University English professor who hosted a number of radio and early TV programs about language;
- *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service* (Library of Congress, 1989)—unusually useful because its quotations are verified for Congressmen and staff by reference librarians at the Library of Congress;
- *The Quotable Woman* (Facts on File)—three broad-ranging compilations of quotations made exclusively by women from the time of Eve to the latest revision in 1992;
- *The Cynic’s Lexicon* (St. Martins Press, 1984) by Jonathan Green and *The Devil’s Dictionary* (Stemmer House, 1978, first published in 1906) by the sharp-tongued Ambrose Bierce—nice contrasts to the preceding titles since cynics and satirists will have their say; and
- *Soul Doctors: The First Dictionary of Psychological Quotations* (Being Books, 1994)—one of many collections devoted to a particular discipline or subject.

Another way to find quotations, if you are confident as to the author, is to see if the library owns a concordance to that author’s works. These tools include all the key words used by an author, arranged alphabetically, with reference to the specific titles in which the words are located. Heavily used are the concordances to the Bible and to Shakespeare, which have been in existence for decades. With the advent of the computer, dozens of new concordances have been produced including those for William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad, George Bernard Shaw, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Elliot, and other well-known writers.

Moreover, if you’d like sage advice from a retired reference librarian who devoted a great deal of his professional life to hunting down quotations, Anthony W. Shipp’s *The Quote Sleuth: A Manual for the Tracer of Lost Quotations* (University of Illinois Press, 1990) is highly recommended. The book is a cornucopia of reference librarian “trade secrets” that Mr. Shipp has graciously shared with anyone who opens its covers.

The books cited in this brief commentary are available in Waldo although most of the books are located in the non-circulating reference collection—along with several dozen other titles! Finally, consider well Charles Spurgeon’s advice, “He who never quotes is never quoted.” On the other hand—and there is always another hand and another quotation—Rudyard Kipling shrewdly observed, “He wrapped himself in quotations—as a beggar would enfold himself in the purple of emperors.”