

# The last word on the last day

Today is the last day of 2008. It is only fitting that the last column is dedicated to famous last words, since we will soon be uttering the last words of this trying year.

President-elect Barack Obama particularly savored the last words of his acceptance speech at the end of an arduous campaign: "... and where we are met with cynicism and doubts and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can."

The response from the crowd was overwhelming.

Other historical figures gave us memorable "last word" quotes before catastrophic events. George Armstrong Custer is purported to have said, "Everything will be all right," just moments before engaging his small group of soldiers in a battle with the entire Sioux Nation. Everything was anything but "all right."

More recently, Dean Baker of the Economic Policy Research Center said, "I think we stopped the financial collapse," after the infamous bank bailout. That comment will go down in the annals of history as truly "famous last words."

Over the years, some of the famous, the infamous, and even the common folk had a lighthearted view of the end of their lives. The proof can be found in the quotes of their last words and/or allegedly planned epitaphs.

"Either that wallpaper goes, or I do," were the last words of writer Oscar Wilde, who died Nov. 30, 1900.

"Here lies John Yeast. Pardon me for not rising," an epitaph found on a tombstone in Ruidoso, N.M.

"Here lies Lester Moore, four



**You can't beat a system you can't understand**

By Sam Bari

slugs from a forty-four. No Les, No Moore," an epitaph allegedly composed by the man's wife, Boothill Cemetery, Tombstone, Ariz.

"I Told You I Was Sick," epitaph written in advance of his death by B. P. Roberts of Key West, Fla., May 17, 1929-June 18, 1979.

The epitaph of Luther Burbank 1849-1926 said, "I don't feel good."

We cannot possibly forget legendary actor Lionel Barrymore whose last words were, "Well, I've played everything but a harp." Or, novelist Dorothy Parker whose epitaph read, "Involved in a plot."

The local sheriff had a sense of humor when he ordered, "Here lies a man named Zeke, second fastest draw in Cripple Creek," written on the deceased man's tombstone.

Then there was the epitaph in a cemetery at Girard, Penn., that said, "In loving memory of Ellen Shannon, aged 25, who was accidentally burned March 21, 1870 by the explosion of a lamp filled with R.E. Danforth's Non-explosive Burning Fluid."

In a less morbid vein, former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair's exit from 10 Downing St. will be immortalized by images of his wife as she gave her undignified final blast at the press: "I don't think I will miss you a lot." Those last words made journalistic history.

Responding to an attending doctor who attempted to comfort

Revolutionary War General Ethan Allen on his deathbed by saying, "General, I fear the angels are waiting for you," Allen said, "Waiting are they? Waiting are they? Well... let 'em wait."

The famous last words of P. T. Barnum of Barnum and Bailey Circus fame were, "How were the receipts today at Madison Square Garden?" The man was known for taking business seriously.

Just before his death on May 29, 1942, actor John Barrymore said, "Die? I should say not, dear fellow. No Barrymore would allow such a conventional thing to happen to him."

Lady Nancy Astor said, "Am I dying or is this my birthday?" when she woke briefly during her last illness and found all her family around her bedside. Leave it to the British to be most inventive in their final moments.

Sir Winston Churchill did not disappoint when he said, "I'm bored with it all," before slipping into a coma from which he never recovered.

The Americans were also known for memorable last quotes. Actor Humphrey Bogart said, "I should never have switched from scotch to martinis," just before passing on Jan. 14, 1957.

The usually dour German composer Ludwig van Beethoven said, "Friends applaud, the comedy is finished," as his final statement.

The ultimate assumption was made by the eternally optimistic Roman Emperor Vespasian, who said, "Woe is me. Me thinks I'm turning into a god," during his last moments.

For reasons that are beyond comprehension we all want to have the last word before we leave this system that we can't understand.



**Christmas musical**  
Kindergartners at Melrose School perform their annual Christmas play for family and friends, complete with sign language and dance movements. Photo by Andrea von Hohenleiten

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## History

Continued from previous page

25 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, December 27, 1983

More than 300 penguins are expected to brave the icy waters at Mackerel Cove on January 1 at noon for the eighth annual New Year's Day plunge.

The Jamestown Senior Citizens Nutrition site held a Christmas party for 102 senior citizens Thursday, featuring a turkey dinner with all the trimmings

15 years ago

The Jamestown Press was not

published this week.

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, December 30, 1998

1998 in Review. (The following stories had these headlines: Megaport plans were unveiled, A proposed fisheries center was downsized, The finance director was made permanent town administrator, A historic battery was rescued, Taxes went up for the first time in two years, Harbor board wades into deep water, And water was everywhere, but ..., New school standards frustrate parents, Native Americans halt road work, Land bank legislation went to Statehouse twice, Relocation of the highway

barn draws neighbor protests. A reduction in bridge token cost was proposed, Skateboard park plans disintegrated, the fire marshal tosses council out of Town Hall, Pre-school won national recognition, Town Clerk resigned; a new clerk was hired.)

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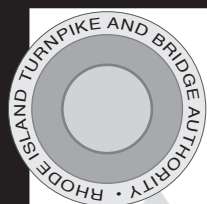
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