

IPSE DIXIT: Mockingbirds Don't Have Canaries

By Edward J. Walters, Jr.



My wife, Norma, grew up in McDonoghville, right across the river from New Orleans. (McDonoghville was subsumed into Gretna — a fact that she is not happy about to this day. Just ask her.)

Anyway, her grandmother, Mary Strohmeier, also from McDonoghville, who never had a bad word to say about anyone, used a phrase that I have always loved and have stolen. Here's the scenario. Somebody does something really stupid, or says something really stupid, and you know that person's father or mother says, or does, the same really stupid kind of thing all the time. Instead of saying something bad about both the parent and the child, she would stand there, shake her head, smile and say, "Mockingbirds don't have canaries."

I use it all the time, mostly when I encounter some lawyer pulling the same sort of stunt his or her father or mother did. It's happening more and more often as I encounter more and more lawyer offspring.

The mother of our former *Journal* Editor Eddie McAuliffe used this one: "He didn't lick that up off the ground."

You know when someone says "bless her heart," that someone is actually saying "what a dummy," but kinder.

So I thought I'd ask some of our members if they had any great catchphrases or shibboleths (I knew I'd use that word someday) they like to use. Here's a few from other lawyers and some famous names.

"He is seldom right, but never in doubt."

"There's never enough time to do it right, but always enough time to do it over."

"The right to be heard does not automatically include the right to be taken seriously."

"Once a camel gets his nose in your tent, all of a sudden you've got the whole camel in your tent."

"If you shoot at the king, kill him."

"It's a bad workman who blames his tools." (Blaming associates, staff, computer, judge, clients and others when things go bad and it was your fault in the first place.)

"The world is round . . . and sometimes it's a fast trip."

"The harder I work the luckier I get."

"Good judgment comes from experience. Experience comes from bad judgment."

"Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt" (Abraham Lincoln).

"Success is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration" (Thomas Alva Edison).

"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions" (Albert Einstein).

"As we know, there are known knowns: things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns: things we know that we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns: things we don't know we don't know" (Donald Rumsfeld).

"I can explain it to you but I can't understand it for you" (Frank Maraist).

"Always take the high road. It's far less crowded" (Warren Buffett).

And one I use all the time, which I stole from my partner Darrel Papillion who grew up in Eunice: "If he'll steal an egg, he'll steal a chicken." ♦



Edward J. Walters, Jr., a partner in the Baton Rouge firm of Walters, Papillion, Thomas, Cullens, L.L.C., is a former Louisiana State Bar Association secretary and editor-in-chief of the *Louisiana Bar Journal*. He is a current member of the *Journal's* Editorial Board and chair of the LSBA Senior Lawyers Division. (walters@lawbr.net; 12345 Perkins Rd., Bldg. 1, Baton Rouge, LA 70810)