

Who Said That?

By Ralph Keyes

We are no less likely to be vague about the origins of quotations about dogs than we are to be vague about the origins of quotations in general. Who said “Love me, love my dog”? Or that a man biting a dog is news? Was it Harry Truman who thought your only friend in Washington was a dog? Did Charles de Gaulle say that the better he knew men, the more he liked dogs? These were some of the questions that confronted me when I set out to explore the roots of familiar quotations. The answers were not always what I expected.

Love me, love my dog.

This has been identified as an old proverb, possibly Italian, or Spanish or French or English, or all of them. It is commonly thought to come from an 1150 sermon by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), who referred to the saying as a proverb. (The dog breed was named after an earlier St. Bernard.) Sir Joshua Reynolds later painted a picture inspired by this saying, and P.G. Wodehouse wrote a story using it as his title.

Verdict: Proverbial wisdom publicized by St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

When a dog bites a man, that isn't news. When a man bites a dog, that's news.

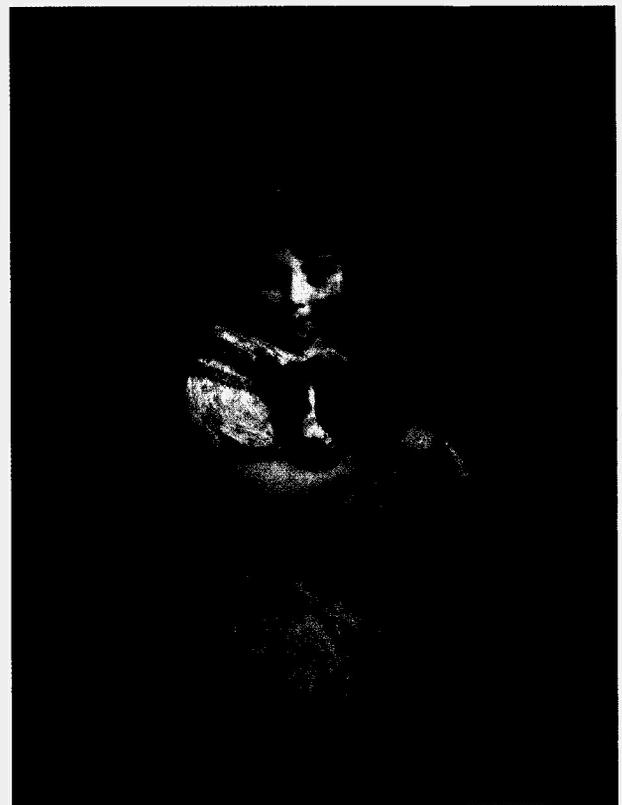
By legend, this was the response of *New York Sun* city editor John Bogart (1845–1921) to a cub reporter who, in the early 1880s, asked him to define “news.” The author of a 1918 history of the *Sun* credited Bogart with this comment. It was recalled when he died in 1921. The observation has also been attributed to *Sun* editor Charles A. Dana; to its first managing editor, Amos Cummings; and to early-20th-century British press baron Lord Northcliffe (Alfred Harmsworth). Whoever first defined news as “man-bites-dog” may have got that notion from Oliver

Goldsmith's *An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*. In this 1766 poem, a kindly man in Islington is bitten by a dog whom he'd befriended. To the consternation of all, “The man recovered of the bite/The dog it was that died.” This popular bit of doggerel was adapted in many forms, including one in which a man actually bit a dog. Lexicographer Eric Partridge believed that this might have inspired the classic definition of news. *Verdict:* Someone at the *New York Sun* apparently said this in the late 19th century, John Bogart being the leading suspect, perhaps inspired by an Oliver Goldsmith poem.

If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.

Truman Library archivists question the common attribution of this quip to the 33rd US president. They point out that Truman spent much of his young manhood on a farm, where dogs were helpers more than pets. Harry and his wife, Bess, had no particular fondness for dogs, and gave away the two that were given to them while they lived in the White House. So why is “If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog” so routinely attributed to Harry Truman? Because the script of Samuel Gallu's 1975 play, *Give 'em Hell, Harry*, had Truman saying, “You want a friend in life, get a dog!” This script was subsequently published in book form. A few years later, *New York Times* correspondent Maureen Dowd attributed the remark to Truman (with “Washington” taking the place of “life”), as did President Bill Clinton. Clinton's predecessor, George H.W. Bush, more accurately credited the quip to “some cynic.”

Verdict: An old saw put in Harry Truman's mouth.



Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Miss Jane Bowles* (commonly referred to as *Love Me, Love My Dog*) 1775. Oil on canvas.

The better I get to know men, the more I find myself loving dogs.

This observation is generally credited to Charles de Gaulle, apparently on the basis of a 1967 attribution in a *Time* magazine article about a collection of the French president's remarks. In centuries past, many other French natives have been credited with the same basic thought. They include the inimitable letter-writer Madame de Sévigné (Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné, 1626–1696), the revolutionary writer Madame Roland (Marie-Jeanne Philipon, 1754–1793), author-politician Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), author Alphonse Toussenel (1803–1885) and author Louise de la Ramée (1839–1908).

Verdict: Charles de Gaulle was the most recent spokesperson for a long-standing Gallic take on humanity.

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