Joy, courage, loss and maple syrup: From a year's worth of columns, memorable quotes

By Sean Kirst, The Post-Standard

on December 31, 2012 at 8:25 AM, updated January 02, 2013 at 1:37 PM

After more than 20 years as a columnist for The Post-Standard, this annual tradition remains a favorite yuletide task: On New Year’s Eve, I offer a few of the memorable quotes gleaned from a year’s worth of columns:

• Jan. 2: “To us, she was a saint long ago. What the church did, it’s just a formality.” — Eleanor Edwards, 80, a Mohawk woman who spent much of her life in Syracuse, on the canonization of Blessed Kateri (GOTT-a-lee), the first native saint.

• March 5: “You can’t go out with him anywhere without someone coming up to say something to him about it.” — Anne Tzivani on her husband, Harry, 87, a General Electric retiree and a courtside attendant at Syracuse University basketball games who’s achieved fame because of his distinctive orange coat.

• March 12: “What we’re having is the kind of weather they usually have in Philadelphia.” — Horticulturalist Terry Ettinger, reflecting on one of the mildest Syracuse winters in recorded history.

• April 7: “Think before you speak. Spend less than what you make. And whatever happens, try to make the best of what’s going on.” — Mike Leonard, on the philosophy of his 87-year-old grandfather, Max Leonard, a Tioga County maple farmer and a Regional Market regular who kept the business going despite family tragedy.

• May 4: “They were amazed, but I thought it’s good that we show them we can care about each other, as we want them to care about each other.” — Rabbi Daniel Fellman, on the reaction of children from Temple Concord to the rabbi’s friendship with Imam Yaser Alkhooly and Mohamed Khater, leaders of the Islamic Society of Central New York.
• May 23: "You can't take everything. That's the problem." - Nick DeMartino of Syracuse, on the quiet ordeal of emptying a Wadsworth Street home where his parents had lived for more than 60 years.

• June 6: "You have something that belongs to us." — Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association, recalling the words of the late Dorothy Webster, an Onondaga Nation clan mother whose persistence led the OHA to voluntarily return native remains and sacred artifacts to the Onondaga.

• June 11: "My son, on his 14th birthday, didn’t say, 'I want to get picked on, I can’t wait to get pushed around, so I’m going to tell people I’m gay.'" - Tracy Rodemeyer of suburban Buffalo, speaking about her son Jamey, who committed suicide at 14 after being taunted about his orientation.

• June 25: “The whole deportation system thrives on secrecy.” — Aly Wane, 35, of Syracuse, who was born in Senegal and raised in the U.S., on why he went public with his status as an undocumented immigrant.

• Aug. 6: "A lot of these young people, no one’s ever taught them how to hang a curtain or start a lawn mower, but they know how to shoot a gun.” — Sandy Cooper of Elk Street in Syracuse, where frustrated neighbors rallied to stop gunshots and other acts of violence on their block.

• Aug. 10: “You’re tired? Well, I’m tired, too. Three hundred years’ worth of tired.” — The words of the late Saundra Smokes, a longtime columnist and editorial writer with The Herald-Journal and Post-Standard, from one of her columns, written in 1992, that we reprinted following her death in August.

• Sept. 5: "Every time he saw me make a mistake, it left a little burn mark on him.” — former Gov. Mario Cuomo, speaking of why he believes his son Andrew does a better job as governor.

• Sept. 23 — "I’ve never once heard you say, ‘Why me?’ Not once, ever since you got this, have you complained.” — Lori Ruhlman of Skaneateles, speaking across a table to her husband Tom, a former business owner now in treatment for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and a related form of frontotemporal dementia.

• Oct. 3: "To suffer all she suffered, and to still be successful, that is the one message we want to convey to every child in the neighborhood.” — Otis Jennings, former Syracuse parks commissioner, on why he organized an effort to erect a sculpture of Libba Cotten, a folk music legend, on Castle Street.
• Nov. 7: “I’ve seen a heart turn to stone over the period of a summer.” — Timothy Jennings-Bey, director of trauma response for the United Way of Central New York, speaking to how quickly children can be hardened by cruelty, neglect and despair.

• Dec. 5: “These guys are living and breathing what happened to them for the rest of their lives.” — Lori Casler of Union Springs, on the importance of remembering the amputees and other wounded at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where Lori’s son, Kyle, was admitted after losing a foot and part of his leg to a bomb in Afghanistan.

• Dec. 21: “Goodbye, Annie darling, I’ll always love you.” — Dr. Fred Roberts, 92, after the Dec. 11 death of his wife Ann, whom he married before World War II. Fred, a revered Syracuse pediatrician, died five days later.

Sean Kirst is a columnist with The Post-Standard. You can read his memorable quotes from 2011 here.
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