

SANIBEL SHELL SHOCKED

## **A Life Shattering Question: Is It Late Afternoon or Early Evening?**

By Art Stevens

A friend of mine called to get together one day. He suggested that we meet in the late afternoon. I told him I preferred to meet with him in the early evening.

“What’s the difference?” he asked. “They’re both the same.”

“No they’re not,” I said. “The late afternoon is earlier than the early evening. I prefer to meet in the evening part of the day rather than the afternoon part.”

He said: “So if we meet at 5 p.m. is that the late afternoon or the early evening?” I thought a long time about this very deep philosophical question.

“The late afternoon ends at 5:30 whereas the early evening begins then,” I said in an earnest, knowledgeable tone suggesting that the answer to that question was never in doubt.

“Okay, let’s go along with your supposition. If I show up at 5:45 p.m. I assume that’s the early evening. But if we made our appointment for 5:20 then that’s still the late afternoon?”

“Yes,” I replied. “That’s about it.”

My friend was not to be denied. “Is there a dictionary definition that says that the term late afternoon extends only to 5:30 p.m. and not beyond?”

This is why I hated my friend, even though he was my friend. He was constantly second guessing me. “I’m not aware of any precise definition that makes the case that 5:30 p.m. is officially the end of late afternoon. But in actual practice it is. Late afternoon is really just a concept. It has no dictionary defined end. But I definitely think that it would be stretching things to say that 6:30 p.m. is still the late afternoon. Most people I know would regard 6:30 as the early evening.”

“But,” my friend persisted, “why should the definitions for such concepts as late afternoon and early evening be arbitrary? If you arranged to meet someone in the late afternoon and he showed up at 5:45 p.m. wouldn’t you be annoyed?”

“Look, why don’t we just pick a time and meet then? This way there won’t be any misunderstanding as to what constitutes late afternoon and early evening,” I said. “Let’s just meet at 6 p.m. at the usual place.”

My friend couldn’t let it go. “What if two people agreed to meet in the late afternoon and one showed up an hour and a half before the other? Don’t you think the guy who was there first would be very annoyed with the guy who showed up later? I

don't think the second guy could use as an excuse that he was on time because he had arrived at the outer limit of the late afternoon."

I told my friend that I would meet him at 6 p.m. whatever he wanted to call that time period and needed to get off the phone so that I could do research on the definitions of late afternoon and early evening. My friend said he was going to play golf instead and for me to let him know what I came up with.

I went to several dictionaries to look up late afternoon and early evening. Not a single dictionary defined these terms. One dictionary defined afternoon as "the part of the day from noon to sunset." Did this mean that Scandinavians who experienced daylight until midnight or later during the summer months considered 10 p.m. as still being the afternoon?

The same dictionary defined evening as "the period of decreasing daylight between afternoon and night" -- or "the period between sunset and bedtime."

It also defined night as "the period between sunset and sunrise." My natural question then became what if I went to bed really early -- like 9 p.m.? Does that mean that evening ends for me at 9 p.m. and night begins simply because I went to bed?

What if my neighbor went to bed at 11 p.m.? (And played his TV set loudly at that before he did?) Does this mean that night begins for me at 9 p.m. while still being evening for my loud neighbor? How could it be possible that night begins at different times for different people in the same time zone?

But there doesn't seem to be the same confusion about when late morning ends and early afternoon begins as there is for late afternoon and early evening. It's generally understood that late morning ends at twelve noon and early afternoon follows immediately. There's no such rule governing late afternoon and early evening even though I had volunteered to my friend that 5:30 p.m. was as good a guess as any.

One dictionary defined the terms "morning" and "night" as being the same time period. This dictionary's definition of morning is "the first or early part of the day lasting from midnight to noon or from sunrise to noon." And the definition of night is "the period between sunset and sunrise." That means that 3 a.m. is both night and morning. This then begs the question as to when to say "good night" and "good morning".

I blamed my friend for this ridiculous research I was doing just so I could show him that I knew everything. I could have learned a complete foreign language in the time it was taking me to do this. Why couldn't we have started our phone conversation by picking an exact time to get together instead of getting into a debate about late afternoon and early evening? Can you imagine Oprah Winfrey and Barbara Walters debating this issue?

I felt I was closing in on the meaning of life but shut the dictionaries instead. The simple fact is who gives a damn?

When I met my friend at 6 p.m. I asked him if he knew the difference between a brook and a stream. That ought to lead to tons more discussion, debate and research.