

SHELL SHOCKED

Another Scoop for Oprah Winfrey

By Art Stevens

I was sweating profusely. The moment of truth was at hand – the moment I had dreaded for years. I was in such deep denial that I thought I would never have to deal with it. But I had decided to tell all to Oprah Winfrey. I figured that if Lance Armstrong could do it so could I. The make up is on and I'm being called onto the set.

Oprah: Art, I thank you for having the courage to allow me to interview you on such a sensitive subject. May I assume you're doing this out of your own free will and are not being coerced in any way?

Art: Yes.

Oprah: Then let's get on with it. I'm going to start out with "yes-no" questions, just as I did recently with Lance Armstrong.

Art: Fire away.

Oprah: Yes or no, during all the years you've written your column for the *Islander* have you ever plagiarized?

Art: (sighing deeply) Yes.

Oprah: Yes or no, have you used columns without attribution from Mark Twain, Dear Abby, Dave Barry, Leonard Lyons, Simone de Beauvois, Al Capp, and Millard Fillmore?

Art: Yes.

Oprah: Yes or no, have you repeatedly denied rumors and insinuations that you were stealing columns from other writers?

Art: Yes.

Oprah: So let's get to the bottom of this. Over the years you've built up a following of ten readers. Don't you think you've betrayed your loyal readers by using material from other writers?

Art: That is my main regret. These ten readers have followed my columns for more than twenty years and they chose to believe that all my material was original and written by me.

Oprah: Then why did you engage in this wholesale subterfuge?

Art: Because I really can't write worth a damn. I wanted to be famous. I wanted to be the life of cocktail parties and be socially accepted. So when people found out that I was a columnist for the Islander and wrote about the great frog jumping contest I figured Mark Twain wouldn't mind. I craved public adulation. My readers envied me and my ability to write drivel and trivia. I was caught up in the literary world and since words wouldn't come to me naturally I used the words of other writers.

Oprah: So how do you plan to redeem yourself after letting down your ten readers?

Art: I plan to be more discreet in using other writers' columns. I shouldn't have told my massage therapist the truth because she blabbed it all over town. At the moment I'm an outcast in Sanibel and need to restore my reputation to that of being a plodding, boring writer. People have always recognized me when I stand in line to buy penny postage stamps. I need them to respect me again.

Oprah: I assume you realize you've been banned from appearing at the Sanibel Writers Open Mike? Shouldn't this one situation alone dash your spirits?

Art: It truly breaks my heart. I used to read my columns regularly there to the two remaining people: the waiter and the dishwasher. They seemed to appreciate my humor although I was reading a column I stole from Dave Barry.

Oprah: Art, my parting message to you is to always tell the truth and you will feel good about yourself.

Art: Thank you for having me on your show, Oprah. This has been a truly cathartic experience. In the future, I will only steal from lesser known writers.

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