

# SHELL SHOCKED

## *Coffee, Tea or Milk*

By Art Stevens

My wife is a former airline flight attendant and although she hasn't flown for a number of years, she can't get out of the habit.

Whenever we have a dinner party, she insists on giving our guests seat numbers when they arrive.

She always overbooks dinner parties and bumps those who are the last to arrive. But she does it graciously. She offers them the choice between coming back the following week or a free dinner at a nearby Sanibel restaurant. When I complain to her that we can't do that to friends she maintains that she's simply following airline regulations. And then she announces that there will be a one-hour delay until the start of dinner due to microwave mechanical difficulties.

But what really gets me is when she escorts some of our guests into a "first class" section in our dining room and all the others are invited to sit on the floor in the living room – the penalty they pay for coach class accommodations.

I catch her in the kitchen and tell her she's got to remember that she's no longer a flight attendant and can't treat our guests this way. She gazes at me steadily, and then blinks her eyes as though coming out of a deep trance.

"Oh, my God. Am I doing it again? I just can't get out of the habit. But I'll try. I'll really try."

Then for a half hour or so, all is well. She serves dinner and mingles with the guests. Then it starts to rain outside and my wife is at it again. She calls for everyone's attention and says:

"The Captain has asked me to remind our passengers that due to unexpected turbulence, you are requested to keep your seat belts securely fastened. If you move about the cabin, please fasten your seat belts when you return to your seats."

Our guests begin to murmur. They're used to my wife's unusual dinner party behavior. Everyone, including me, humors her and simply goes with the flow.

The next night she charges me two dollars for a set of ear phones when I turn on the TV set to watch a movie. She also shows me where she keeps the life jackets and oxygen masks in the event we have to evacuate our home or there's a sudden drop in cabin pressure.

She's put signs on the bathroom doors saying "vacant" and "occupied".

And she insists on describing our home to me in detail every night during dinner saying I should learn every feature of our wide body model for my personal comfort.

"Honey," I say. "Enough. Can't we be just like everyone else and call a home a home, not a wide body model?"

She looks at me apologetically and says, “I just want to make your flight as comfortable as possible. Can I get you a blanket or a pillow? Delta’s ready when you are. Would you like chicken or fish for dinner? (Yes, even she remembers when airlines actually served food.) Coffee, tea or milk?”

I tried being patient and gentle with her, but one night when I arrived home she had chained the door from the inside. I rang the bell. No response. I pounded on the door. Nothing. I shouted.

Finally, my wife sweetly told me from behind closed doors that I was on standby and that she would do whatever she could to get me on board.

The situation was becoming alarming. Friends refused our dinner invitations. They told us they’d rather collect shells. My relationship with my wife was getting desperate. I decided I would try to reason with her one more time.

“Sweetheart, we can’t go on like this. This is not a plane. It’s our home. There’s no need for me to eat off a tray. We have a beautiful dining room table. There’s no reason to put seat belts on. We’re on the ground and nothing will cause me to fall. Can you understand all that?”

I think I was beginning to get through to her because her eyes began to focus more sharply. Just then our house was swept up in a tornado and began flying over Sanibel. I obediently fastened my seat belt and never questioned my wife again after that.

