

# SHELL SHOCKED

## *IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES*

By Art Stevens

I've had it with my wife. We have too many conflicts and irreconcilable differences. It's just not working out.

For example, just last week she dangled a participle during a routine conversation. I was truly shocked and offended. How could she do that?

Do you think that can't be topped? Well, listen to this. About a month ago she took a phone message for me and wrote down an incorrect time for the call. She wrote 3 a.m. and not 3 p.m. Imagine my embarrassment when I returned the call and inquired as to why it was made in the middle of the night. The response sent me reeling. It was 3 p.m., not 3 a.m.

And imagine my distress when my wife misplaced my reading glasses. She mistook them for her own and was actually wearing them when I searched all over the house for them. She gave me such a lame excuse for absconding with my glasses that I didn't speak to her for ten minutes.

I admit I may be fussy and compulsive. But that's no reason to put cottage cheese on the middle shelf of the refrigerator when I categorically told her to put it on the top shelf. I told her that in order to find items in the fridge without rummaging through all the food we needed to alphabetize them. The top shelf consists of foods starting with the letter "a" and going through "g". The middle shelf includes foods starting with "h". The top shelf is filled with foods like apples, bananas, carrots, dates, eggs, franks and grease. I searched and searched for the cottage cheese on the top shelf and couldn't find it. Imagine my chagrin and distress to find the cottage cheese on the middle shelf instead. It simply didn't belong on the middle shelf. Now that's not too difficult to comprehend, is it?

The other day I asked my wife to bring me back a chocolate bar from Bailey's. And she did. But she shouldn't have. She should know by now that when I ask her for a chocolate bar I'm merely sublimating my feelings. I may have asked her to get me a chocolate bar but she should have known that I really didn't want one. In fact, I was asking for her sympathy as I struggle with a diet. That was the real message I was sending. So what does she do? She buys me a chocolate bar.

You'd think that after so many years of being married she'd understand me somewhat. But it seems that married couples who have been married a long time have communications breakdowns. What else could explain my wife forgetting to remind me to take out the garbage last week? I rely on her to let me know what the recycling schedule is. If she forgets, which she did last week, then the garbage bags sit in the container one extra week. And then the container will fill up and become overloaded with garbage bags. What will we do then?

I challenged my wife to a debate as these problems mounted. I suggested that we debate the issue of whether or not she's a good wife. Naturally, I would take the con position while she would offer a weak rebuttal taking the pro position. She refused to debate. She said that after all these years she didn't have to defend herself as a good wife.

She then challenged me to a game of Trivial Pursuit with the winner getting the house, our money and the cars. I accepted. We fought tooth and nail down to the wire and it came down to the very last question. The question which she would have to answer to win the game was from which team was Babe Ruth traded to the New York Yankees. I thought I had her.

When she replied "the Boston Red Sox" I felt she had cheated. There's no way in the world she should know the answer to that question. She hates sports and usually throws the sports section away until I retrieve it.

"How in the world did you know the answer to that question", I demanded.

"I have no idea. I just knew it," she said.

I refused to turn over the house, my money and the cars until the matter could be adjudicated by an impartial panel. We agreed that our handyman, pool guy and pest control specialist would make up the panel. We invited them into our living room and I made a case as to why she couldn't possibly have known about it and she made a case as to why she could.

The panel sent us out of the room and deliberated for about an hour. Undoubtedly, they would add that hour to their bills. They then sent for us and told us their decision.

They said that my wife won the arbitration. They pointed out that you didn't have to be a sports enthusiast to know that Babe Ruth was traded from the Boston Red Sox to the New York Yankees. They said that even people who couldn't care less for sports knew the answer to that question.

I thanked the panel for their impartial judgment and display of fairness and fired them on the spot. After all, there are many other handymen, pool inspectors and pest control people in Sanibel.

However, I did abide by their decision. I began the process of turning over the house, my money and the cars to my wife. But something intervened. I found myself on the floor begging for forgiveness and offering to turn over a new leaf.

My wife fell for it and I averted inconvenience and a crisis. But the irreconcilable differences began to surface again. You guessed it. The very next morning she put cottage cheese on the middle shelf of the refrigerator.

