

## SANIBEL SHELL SHOCKED

### I Met a Martian at Bailey's

By Art Stevens

I met a Martian at Bailey's the other day. How did I know he was a Martian? Because he told me so, that's why.

Now, hold on a second. Before you think I've gone loony from eating too much blackened fish let me explain. After all, it's not everyday any of us gets a chance to meet up with an alien from another planet and have a good guy's talk. In fact, it's as rare as Lee County giving Sanibel everything it wants.

I was at the produce section looking at lettuce when I heard a voice say to me: "Do you think the tomatoes are ripe?" I turned around and saw an average looking guy wearing shorts, a t-shirt and a Yankee baseball cap. I told him that I had just put the tomatoes in my shopping cart because they seemed ripe to me.

He said that where he came from tomatoes didn't grow and that he had to come to Bailey's to get them. Trying to be friendly I asked him where he was from, assuming he'd say Minnesota, Wisconsin or something like that.

"I'm from Mars," he said.

I stared at him long and hard and he didn't blink or giggle as though he was kidding around. He looked dead serious which was when I began wheeling my shopping cart away from him.

He followed behind me. "Look, Art, I'm sorry if I upset you but I really am from Mars."

"How did you know my name?" I asked. "Is this a joke? Who put you up to this, my editor at the Islander?"

"No," he said. "No one put me up to this. I chose you to disclose my identity because I felt you would understand. Whenever we come to Earth to shop we never reveal ourselves because no one will believe that we're from Mars."

"If you're from Mars, then I'm from Pluto," I said. "Please stop putting me on. I'm just shopping for..." "You're shopping for a dinner party you're having tomorrow evening and your wife is at Timbers picking up shrimps at this very moment."

I stopped in my tracks. “How did you know that? The only people who know about our dinner party are in Fort Myers.”

He looked at me as though I was dense. “We Martians can look at people from Earth and immediately know everything about them. I know all about you – your past, your thoughts and your total personality make up. Please don’t ask me to reveal facts about your past. They may prove embarrassing to you. Just take my word for it that I’m from Mars.”

I was flabbergasted but still skeptical. “Okay, to prove it, just tell me one thing from my past that no one else knows.”

He sighed. “Do you remember that incident when your dad yelled at you when you were ten and you took a walk into the woods? Do you remember what you did in the woods?”

My face turned white. “How in the world did you know about that? I never told that to another living soul.”

He picked up a tomato and squeezed it gently. “This one looks ripe. It alone is worth the long trip from Mars. I’ll tell, you, Art, it takes two hours of Earth time to get here now. At least that’s better than it was a few years ago when it took up to four hours. Soon, we’re told, it will take no more than fifteen minutes.

“Anyway, no, you never talked about that incident to another living soul. But we Martians have the ability to look into your face and immediately know every single thing about you. Do you believe me now?”

I still wasn’t convinced. “Can you give me just one ounce of proof that you’re really who you say you are? Just one thing that makes you different from me? After all, you look just like any other person in this supermarket.”

“Well, we need to reconfigure our genetic make up while we’re on Earth. Otherwise, we’d scare the living bejesus out of you all. But, yes, there’s one way you can tell.” With that he removed his Yankee cap and sure enough there were two small antennas growing out of his head. They kind of glowed and gave off an eerie light.

My jaw dropped. It was true. The guy was indeed from Mars.

“But why do you come here?” I stammered.

“To shop”, he said.

“You come all this way to shop? Don’t you have what you need in Mars?” I asked.

“Good God, no,” he replied. “We can’t get ripe tomatoes, venison, Smucker’s cherry preserves – and lots of things. Those of us who can afford space travel go down to Earth at least a couple of times a year to shop at Bailey’s and Macy’s.”

“But you speak just like me? I assume you have your own languages on Mars. How did you learn to speak such fluent English?”

“We learn languages the same way you on Earth do. Berlitz Language Schools.”

“But I thought there was no life on Mars.”

He chuckled. “That’s what we wanted you on Earth to believe. Whenever you send space cameras our way we just stay indoors that day. We really don’t want you to know what’s going on in Mars even though you’re still hundreds of years away from actually being able to travel through space.”

“If that’s the case then why are you revealing yourself to me today? I’m a columnist for the Islander. Don’t you think that the very first thing I would do is to write a column about this incident?”

“And how many people do you think would believe you? We know Earthlings very well by now. We’ve been visiting your planet for centuries. We look like you and talk like you. We just have to wear hats to hide the transmitters we’ve developed that allow us to assimilate.”

“Haven’t you revealed yourselves to others during all this time and not just to me?”

He sighed again. “We’ve tried here and there. But every time we do and the person we reveal ourselves to tells others that he’s met with Martians he winds up in one of your mental hospitals watching Captain Kangaroo for hours at a time. It just doesn’t pay.”

“Well, I’m going to be the exception. I’m a respected journalist and people will believe me when I tell them I met a Martian and we had a pleasant conversation in the produce section at Bailey’s.”

The Martian began to walk away from me. “I truly enjoyed our conversation but it’s now time for me to go. I’m off to Sonoma to bring back some of their grapes. We’re trying to develop our own Martian wine. We’re close but not there yet. Great meeting you but I fear that when you tell people you’ve met a Martian you’ll have the same fate as others we’ve told in the past. I hope you like old Captain Kangaroo videos. And by the way, LeBron James is having a hell of a year, isn’t he?”

And then he actually disappeared. He didn't just walk away, he disappeared. But I really did meet him and talk to him. And he convinced me that he was from Mars after my initial skepticism. So I can hardly wait to share this experience with all of you, which is why he singled me out in the first place.

I assume you will believe me when I tell you that I spent twenty minutes shooting the breeze with a Martian..... Won't you?