

## SHELL SHOCKED

### Optimism Isn't For the Faint of Heart By Art Stevens

Sanibel has some fascinating social clubs, not the least of which is the Optimists Club. I tried attending a meeting recently but was denied admission because I was too pessimistic.

The guy at the door asked me if the glass was half full or half empty. I told him I didn't see any glass but would settle for a Styrofoam cup instead. He tried again. He asked me if I thought the future is rosy and things were going to be great. I told him that what will be will be.

That still didn't sit well with him and he told me that I couldn't attend the meeting if I brought despair, futility, and pessimism with me into the room. I told him all I was bringing was a sandwich in case I got hungry. He told me to leave until I found the seeds of optimism. I told him I had some sunflower seeds with me and invited him to have some.

Mind you, I wasn't being stubborn or inflexible. I truly wanted to believe. What can be better than optimism? Well, maybe a glass or two of a good red wine at the right moment. But he just wouldn't let me in. I tried a bit of persuasion.

"Look, I'm hopeful, upbeat, and anticipate only favorable outcomes. I have a sense of humor that carries me through the worst of times. But I'm also realistic. I temper optimism with a healthy dose of reality."

He looked at me as though I had just violated his sacred oath. The fact is I truly wanted to be an optimist but needed this group to jump start me. I just wanted to attend the meeting and try to understand what makes optimists tick. Do they really put a positive spin on even the direst happenings? I wanted to try some of that medicine myself. Hard times call for hard measures.

He said that optimists had strong belief systems and didn't want to be dissuaded by agnostics like me. He said that optimists' meetings were sunny, inspiring and full of hope. If I could come back another day with a different attitude I would be welcome.

Well, it's not often that I'm turned away from a meeting. The only other time I was denied entrance to a civic gathering was when the group decided I wasn't enough of an Elvis Presley look-alike. But if I'm rejected by an Optimists Club what else could be in store for me?

I decided that I needed to become an optimist. I went home and said to my wife: "Dear, everything will be fine. We're going to get through this recession and come out of it better."

She said: "Better than what? We're doing fine. We've got our health, we're having fun and we love Sanibel. What's so bad about that?"

"But, dear, "I said, "don't you see? Things can be even better than they are now. We've just got to be optimistic. You get it? Optimistic."

She said: "But I am optimistic. Always have been. And so are you. You've never complained or said woe is me. You've always kept your chin up through the good times and the bad."

"I did?"

"Yes, you did."

“Then why won’t the Sanibel Optimists Club let me attend their meeting? They say I’m not optimistic enough to attend their meetings.”

My wife got angry. “Not optimistic enough? You go back and tell them that if they don’t let you in I’m coming after them with a baseball bat full of optimism. The idea.”

I waited a week and returned to the Optimists Club meeting. The same guy at the door recognized me. He asked me again if the glass was half full or half empty. I told him that not only was the glass half full but that if he didn’t let me in my wife was going to come after him with weapons of mass destruction. He smiled and opened the door for me.

“Welcome to the Optimists Club. And remember, optimism is not for the faint of heart.”