

LIVING WITH A NUT

It will soon be our 33rd wedding anniversary. That is a long time. Looking back, I am amazed that we persevered for so long. We both knew within a few years that this was not a marriage made in heaven. We would not have married if Fran had not been pregnant, though back in 1981, we may have decided to live together. We had a great deal in common. We enjoyed each other's company.

When I came to Boston in 1979, I was running away from a woman with whom I no longer wanted to have a relationship. I still was hurting because of Sylvia's rejection seven years earlier. I could not figure out why Barbara wanted me so much, and Sylvia did not. I struggled to know what love was. I loved Sylvia. Sylvia did not love me. There were traits that I had (frugality for one), that drove us apart. There well may have been other qualities that came between us. I can't take all the credit.

Whether it was cultural or biological, I did not want to be alone. When Sylvia and I separated, I was fearful that I would not find anyone. A friend reassured me that I would. Thankfully, he was right. Over the next few years, I met several women whose company I enjoyed, and a few with whom I could see myself living out the rest of my days, but working things out would have been complicated. Then Barbara came along. It was exciting, convenient, fulfilling, but it was clear to me that I did not want to spend the rest of my life with her. This was one of the reasons I wanted to leave Washington.

Then along came Fran. We had "a good time" together. In fact, such a good time, that Fran became pregnant. And we worked things out, even though they were complicated, and on July 26, 1981, we were married. For the second time, the honeymoon was not all ecstasy and love making. We went away—to Maine—and we had a pleasant time. Then, we returned to our respective jobs, and to the condo on Harvard Street that I had bought. A loser. Fairly early, we had differences of opinion.

Then along came David, on November 4, 1981. We were both ecstatic. Fran was a good mother, and she reciprocates by saying I was a good father. She was also a good social worker and returned to work as soon as child care arrangements were made. There were tensions. Fran made it clear that she felt I should do more. I felt I was doing my part. I cannot remember when the bickering started. Perhaps it was always there. I do remember Ruth Unger commenting about it. My cheapness was a factor. Fran's lateness was a factor. And Fran's overbuying was also a factor. And Fran's constant claiming that my children are not relating to David. Over time, I just shook my head, and gave up. Fran wins because Fran insisted that she knew about people, and I did not. She had been in analysis. Arguments, complaints, blaming, accusing. And David caught in the middle. The result: David became depressed. I also became depressed, but I had my job, my outside interests. And I kept a journal. I just found a journal from 2003 and read the first entry: July 17: "...These past weeks have been overwhelming. The sale of 16 Greenough, the purchase of 77 Pond...But there are lots of tensions. The same tug of war with Fran. Both thinking we are doing more than the other. Who is controlling? What goes where? But we'll work it out.

We try to say nice things to each other, but it is becoming less frequent—limited to birthdays and anniversaries. On rare occasions, a Friday night will be pleasant, with a minimum of nit-picking. It is amazing how often Fran can find something wrong with whatever it is that I do. A serving spoon is missing, the wine is not quite right, there is no room on the table for a dish.

These days, we hardly talk to each other. There is an undercurrent of hostility. Sometimes it is not an undercurrent. It is a huge wave, which washes over us. Constant faultfinding. Constant bickering. Constant criticism.

We have so little contact, yet we manage to spend the time in disagreement. I can't believe how long it takes Fran to do anything. If I put something down, she will inevitably put it somewhere else.

I am beginning to suspect that the fact that she comes to bed between 5 and 7 am, getting up around 1 or 2 pm, is a way of avoiding contact. When she gets up and I am at my desk, she hardly says a word. If I am aware that she is up and greet her, she does not respond. When I ask her why she doesn't respond, she answers that she did not hear me.

One of the biggest areas of conflict deal with "time." Fran is incapable of getting anywhere "on time." Yesterday, she had an appointment to see her therapist at 2:40 pm. Fran sat down to lunch at about 2:15 pm. At 2:30 pm, I reminded her of her appointment. She replied it is her problem, not mine. True. Of course, when we have to go somewhere together, it is my problem as well. Our worst arguments are generated by her keeping me waiting, and her unrealistic concept of how long things take.

Fran asked me to take her to a doctor's appointment. I sat in front of the house for 15 minutes waiting for her. When she came down, I drove quickly. She said she is not in a hurry., despite the fact that she was late. On another occasion, she was late, and I drove up Brookline Avenue, thinking it would be faster. Fran became hysterical, convinced that I am taking a route that would take longer, on purpose.

For years, Fran asks me to wake her up at a certain time. I wake her up, and she does not get up. A half hour later, I wake her up again. She gets angry at me for "reminding" her. I bought her an alarm clock. David had bought her an alarm clock a year ago. She seldom used it, and when she did, she was confused because it had "too many bells and whistles." In fact it also had a vibrator which shook her as well as a loud alarm.