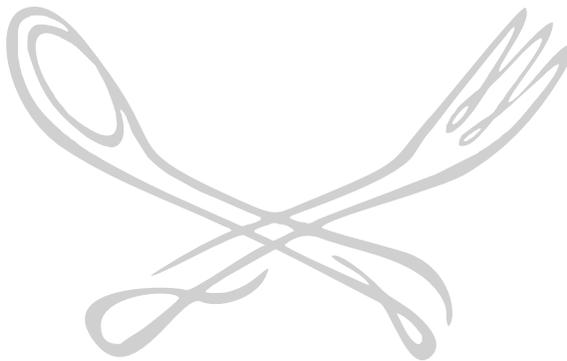


WHEN IT COMES
TO SPOONING,
I'M A FORK

**AND OTHER TALES FROM THE FRONT LINES
OF MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD**

MARC PREY



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*For my wife, Jennie, and sons, Beau and Jack.
Thank you for all your love and support.*

“Behind every great man is a woman rolling her eyes.”

-Anonymous

Introduction

Growing up, I always dreamed that one day I would write the next “Great American Novel.” To show how clever I was, I even told myself I would title it “The Next Great American Novel.” Hey, I was fourteen at the time.

I am now well into middle age and I have yet to accomplish this goal. To date, I have not even written the next “Shockingly bad, suitable only for use as fireplace kindling in the event the power goes out” novel. I chalk this up to a short attention span and a long honey-do list.

What I have been able to accomplish, however, is the compilation of a series of short, amusing tales from my own life as a husband and father. The events described in these stories took place during the first fifteen years of my married life, when I was, arguably, a standard-issue adult male. Of course, that is not to say that I was completely mature or without fault. Fact-of-the-matter is, I remain, to this day, very much a work-in-progress.

In compiling these stories into a memoir, of sorts, I did not intend that it serve as a parenting or relationship “How to” guide. I understand that book stores already have plenty of them. Instead, I have accumulated a collection of short, humorous and, occasionally, moving anecdotes from my own experience as a husband and father in hopes that you, the reader, might find something relatable and, perhaps, even inspirational. If you leave with nothing more than a smile or a chuckle, that is perfectly fine. If you also learn something



along the way, whether about yourself or the person snoring next to you, that's even better.

Each of the stories contained in this book is, to the best of my recollection, accurate and complete, warts and all. This, despite the directive from my lovely wife to write her thinner. Some of the stories have appeared previously in print and electronic magazines, others have never before seen the light of day. But all reflect the life and times of an average American male with a wife and two kids, struggling to maintain mastery over a domain that was never really under his control to begin with.

I hope you enjoy it. And if not, there's always the "How to" section of your local book store.

Chapter One

DO YOU COME HERE (TO WORK OUT) OFTEN?





So there I was at the gym, determined to reverse the first signs of a beer-belly, when an attractive, young brunette woman toting a small, transistor radio struck up a conversation. It went something like this:

“Is my radio bothering you?”

“No, not at all.”

“If it is, I can dial it down a bit.”

“No, its fine.”

“Okay,” she said, “but let me know if you change your mind.”

“Actually, if you’re willing to take requests, I wouldn’t mind a little rock-and-roll.”

“Not a fan of country music?” she asked.

“Well, it only brings up bad memories,” I explained. “You see, my girl just left me for my best friend and my dog died when the guy repossessing my pickup truck ran it over.”

This elicited an honest chuckle, and soon we were chatting like old friends. As our schedules seemed to coincide, over the next few weeks we became workout pals, sharing stories about our families,



jobs and significant others in between improving our physiques. At the time, I had a serious girlfriend and, though unintentional, conversations with my workout pal frequently led me to be late for our dates.

When the girlfriend discovered that my workout pal was female, she was none too pleased. Despite my assurances that the relationship was plutonic, she insisted that I find someone else to converse with at the gym. Or better yet, change gyms altogether. Instead, I changed significant others, and just over a year later my workout pal became my wife.

How did I know that this slender girl with the transistor radio was the one? It wasn't the fact that she owned a pickup truck and drove it like Richard Petty. Or the fact that she had purchased her own house at the ripe old age of twenty-two.

No, the moment that comes to mind occurred during one of our very first dates. We were walking through a crowded art gallery following dinner at a trendy restaurant when she suddenly burped. Loud enough that it echoed against the walls of the previously silent room.

I looked about the gallery and immediately noticed a variety of pursed lips and furrowed brows on the faces of the snooty patrons.

Before I could process the situation further, my future bride turned and punched me in the arm.

“Disgusting!” she exclaimed with mock indignation.

“Sorry,” came my sheepish reply.

And that was that. I was hopelessly smitten.

Not simply because this cute, little waif had belched in public, but also because she possessed the cojones to pass the blame on to me. What guy wouldn't appreciate such spunk?

So there you have it. From that moment on, I knew we were meant to be together. Just like I knew that somewhere out there, a country music artist was singing about losing his girl, his dog and his pickup truck.

Chapter Two

A WORLD VIEWED THROUGH MAN EYES





I profess to being nothing if not a typical American male. In other words, I'm generally clueless when it comes to the female persuasion. I have tried to figure them out, but I've found it's easier understanding fluctuations in fuel prices.

So, it should have come as no surprise when, shortly after taking my marriage vows, I stumbled upon another significant difference between the sexes.

This discovery took place after my bride asked me to fetch the tweezers from a drawer in our bathroom. At the time, she was deployed across our bed, performing what appeared to be maintenance on her feet (like most men, I don't ask when it comes to a woman's feet), and I was strolling by on my way to the reading room.

Once in the bathroom, I searched the drawer from front to back but failed to locate the tweezers. So, I returned to the bedroom and offered her the nail clippers.

"These aren't the tweezers," she said.

"The tweezers aren't in the drawer. I thought these might work."

"The tweezers are in there," she replied.

I immediately took offense to her implication. "No they're not. I looked."

"Did you look with normal eyes?" she asked. "Or, did you use your *man eyes*?"



So there you have it. MAN EYES. I had never heard the term before, and it hit me square in the face, not unlike the first time I realized my parents weren't practicing celibacy.

Was there really such a thing as Man Eyes? How come I had never noticed the distinction before? Was I using them all of the time?

Of course, it was possible my wife was wrong. The theory required testing.

Before I could ponder the matter any further, my wife pulled me into the bathroom and opened the drawer. Then she moved aside a brush, a box of Q-tips and...there were the tweezers!

Like the cartoon character I sometimes appear to be, I performed a perfect double-take. In return, she offered me a sarcastic little smile.

“Obviously, you *were* using your man eyes,” she declared. With that, she turned and marched triumphantly back into the bedroom.

So maybe there was some substance to the phenomenon, though it's funny that I don't ever remember the eye doctor saying: “Now read off the top row, but make sure you don't use your man eyes.” And I wasn't altogether convinced my wife didn't carry the tweezers into the bathroom in the palm of her hand.

When I finished my reading break, I pressed her on the subject. She explained in her matter-of-fact way that men don't always think when they are looking for something – particularly if a woman initiates the search. We tend to place our brains on auto-pilot, which naturally leads to the deployment of man eyes. I suppose it might also account for our refusal to stop and ask directions.

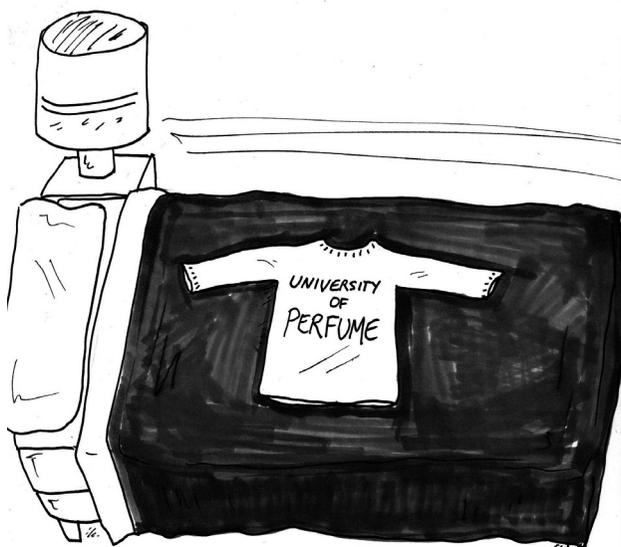
Later that same week, I returned from a quick trip to the market with a half-gallon of natural vanilla ice cream. My favorite.

“Why didn’t you buy French vanilla?” she asked – French vanilla being her favorite.

“This isn’t French vanilla?” I replied, examining the package.
“Darn, I must have been using my man eyes again.”

Chapter Three

THE SWEATSHIRT OFF MY BACK





Sweatshirts are hotly contested turf in my house. I wouldn't say I'm obsessed with my sweatshirt collection – certainly no more so than I am with my hairline (pause to check for fallen follicles), but I do like them a lot.

My favorites are heavy and gray and emblazoned with the logos of my favorite college and sports teams. I also have fancier sweatshirts that work well as evening attire when matched with a fresh pair of jeans and clean, white sneakers. Then there are my yardwork sweatshirts, some rattier than others, each no longer qualified to remain in my standard rotation.

When you live in the Midwest, a good sweatshirt can be critical to a man's wardrobe. They are great for bumming around in during the winter, they work well with a pair of shorts on cool, spring days and, of course, they are mandatory attire on football weekends.

The problem is, my wife likes them too.

Shortly after we were married, I discovered one of her many golden rules with respect to clothes: "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is also mine."

Now, this is fine when it comes to borrowing a t-shirt from my endless supply, assuming ownership of a shirt that no longer fits me or wearing my coat when we are out on an unexpectedly cool evening. But when it comes to my sweatshirts – that's another thing altogether.



You see, she doesn't just wear them proudly, as I do. No, she has to stretch the cuffs out and roll them up, occasionally splitting them at the seam. Then, she yanks the bottom of the sweatshirt down so that it covers as much of her southern territory as possible. Finally, while wearing one of my pride-and-joys, she often chews absentmindedly on the collar, a seemingly-cute habit that leaves the collar frayed and, well, chewed on.

But worse than all these transgressions, when she's done with them they are returned smelling as if they were just used as mops in the Bath & Body Works store at the mall. And no amount of washing seems to completely eradicate that feminine odor.

Recently, I ordered a new sweatshirt from a catalogue circulated by my alma mater. Great colors, a cool version of the school logo, extra-thick cuffs – everything a sweatshirt maven could want. It arrived in the mail a few days before the weekend telecast of the big game, which I planned to watch at a buddy's football party.

The morning of the game, I threw it on and immediately recognized the pungent smell of soap mixed with perfume. EGADS!

“Honey?” I called out.

“Yes?” she answered, walking into the bedroom.

“Did you wear my new sweatshirt?”

“Oh, yeah. I threw it on yesterday before I ran to the market.”

“But I'm getting together with the boys in an hour to watch the big game.”

“So?”

“So it smells like...you.”



“And that’s a bad thing?”

“Not if you’re a woman. But in case you haven’t noticed...”

“Oh, big deal. You’ll be the nicest smelling guy at the party, that’s all.”

“Right...Just what I was hoping for.”

So, now you see what I have to deal with.

As for the football party, it didn’t go all that badly. I even got hit on once or twice.