

and never tells his wife



by Philip Wylie

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"WHAT EVERY Woman Knows" is the title of a J. M. Barrie play that deeply moved audiences a few decades ago. It concerned a subject all women do know—and wise ones never discuss: the intense struggle wives secretly make to help their husbands realize their full potential.

Today, with strength but in silence, millions of worthwhile wives continue that effort. But the concealed contribution of wise husbands to their marriages has never been the subject of a similar play. Indeed, the self-discipline and quiet fortitude which mark true masculinity are often brushed aside, ignored, even laughed at.

Some husbands, as a result, have lost the art of being husbands. They no longer possess the inner courage and calm to conceal from their wives certain things that all mature males keep to themselves.

Instead, too many modern husbands childishly reveal and even flaunt emotions, ideas, thoughts and acts that every man knows—but no real man lets his wife discover, if he can possibly help it.

Some wives who have read this far may begin to rankle. I can hear some muttering, "My husband better not have any secrets from me!" Let them read on then, and perhaps become ashamed of any premature indignation. For here are 10 examples of the sorts of things I believe good husbands should keep to themselves:

1. There are times in the career of every man when he feels anxiety, even fear, about the future of his job, his business or his professional career—times when nothing would be accomplished by adding his wife's worry to his own. On such occasions, a mature husband keeps his fears to himself.

2. No matter how tired a considerate man may be when he comes home from work, he will refrain from expressing annoyance at a wife's statement that she, too, is bone-weary. "Woman's work"—even if it doesn't include a paid job—is mighty tiring. But many a husband tends to think his wife has it easy, comparatively speaking. She, at least, can take a break—for coffee, to read or visit with a neighbor—almost as she pleases.

Perhaps he cannot. Even so, an understanding husband, however weary, will not resent the same condition in his wife—or beef about it.

3. Most wives experience difficulties during menstruation. Its regular occurrence gives many wives considerable physical distress, at least at times—and such suffering is often accompanied by emotional symptoms: self-pity, short temper, argumentativeness, depression and so on. Such circumstances can be frustrating and irritating to any husband. But, again, a real man will never mention to his wife his negative reactions.

4. Among the commonest and deepest discouragements faced by a married man—and one he will keep to himself if he is courageous—is the way his family takes his efforts for granted. They expect him to work hard all his life to support them, and he expects to do it. Society and the law support that expectation. But when the family

takes his breadwinning as a matter of course, he will not voice his resentment about it. There is no satisfaction in begged-for gratitude.

5. A wise father will be aware that his children compete for his affection. Sometimes—though the situation is abnormal—a wife may even compete with her own offspring for her husband's time, attention and love. But that such struggles occur, no mature man will openly acknowledge.

6. He will avoid a pitfall in marriage which has trapped many husbands. It is this:

His wife will often sharply criticize her own relatives or friends. But a tactful husband will avoid agreeing with her—let alone adding his own complaints to hers.

Why? Because such criticism by a wife is usually a sort of unconscious test of her spouse. When her relatives or friends behave badly, she is embarrassed and consequently feels insecure. She brings up the faults of those dear to her, in front of her husband, to make sure he is able to bear them loyally. If he just grins and says nothing, she is reassured. But if he "gets in the act"—agrees, even adds his complaints—his wife becomes more embarrassed and insecure about him. Tolerance, especially for people close to a wife, is vitally important to married contentment.

7. Arguments about money are the primary cause of matrimonial trouble. An intelligent husband avoids them. No two people feel exactly the same way about money. To every husband, every bride will seem either too careful or too careless. And no matter which his wife seems to be, it will cause some resentment in him. Yet, if he realizes the imperfections of us all, and the differences between us all, the sympathetic husband will keep his resentment to himself. Only if a wife remains disastrously careless or unendurably careful about money will it be necessary to discuss the subject. For nearly all wives try their best (and early in marriage, many will over-try) to do with money what they think is right and what they think their husbands want.

8. No sensitive husband will take for granted his physical condition or his prowess as a lover. He will endeavor through the years to maintain his personal attractiveness. He will also try to keep alive the imagination, brilliance and romance of the honeymoon by not allowing married love to become dull, automatic, routine.

Focus of sex admiration on youth causes many husbands to neglect themselves in a sort of lazy "revenge" for the simple fact that as wives grow older their years begin to show more. "Growing older together" can and should be part of the original purpose of getting married—and is one of its mellowing, compensatory charms. But many husbands who find their wives are no longer "glamourpusses" use that circumstance as a sort of excuse to allow themselves to grow fat, flabby, unkempt—and disinterested as lovers.

There is nothing sadder than the middle-aged marriage in which the husband has retreated from his wife as a lover and abandoned his physical

self-respect simply because the years have left superficial marks upon her. A real husband marries a woman and a person—not an everlasting beauty queen. He will, then, neither mention nor even react to the irreversible effect of time on her, for he will have anticipated and discounted it when he asked her to marry him. If he fell in love with her, not merely her looks at age 20, time can do nothing to her for him to resent, anyway. In that case, he will always keep himself—and his loving—at the most attractive possible peak.

9. He will never admit his sorrow when, at last, his wife reaches that time in life when she is no longer able to bear children. Menopause is difficult enough—emotionally, psychologically and often physically—for every wife without having her husband remind her that it is upsetting to him, too. Here, again, is a natural event which, when it occurs, will have been anticipated by the steadfast husband. And he will hide his own moments of sadness in the very act of comforting his wife in hers.

10. Perhaps above all else, the wise husband knows (and keeps to himself) the fact that no woman is above jealousy. Wifely jealousy is often petty, unwarranted, even absurd. But the husband who tries to make his a happy marriage will avoid anything that gives rise to jealousy.

A husband who has been "indiscreet" will—out of regard for his wife if for no other motive—keep such matters to himself. Whatever a husband may think about sex ideals, a wise one will protect his own wife against the workings—real or imaginary—of her potential for jealousy.

Since jealousy is fear, a woman exhibiting it is showing cowardice, which is shameful. No real husband gives his wife occasion, real or imagined, to act in ways that make her ashamed of herself.

There, then are 10 examples of "what every man knows" that I believe he should keep to himself. And I think most women will agree with my list—and even agree that the list implies some virtues too often lacking in many husbands.

My list also implies another important truth—one which many people today seem unaware of: men have deep feeling. In their fashion, they are as sensitive as women. Sadly enough, in this age, men usually try to pretend otherwise.

Men are, or should be, far more perceptive of the inner emotions of other people, especially their wives, than most boys are brought up to be. I've tried to show how such depths of honest male feeling can be used for a better appreciation of what a wife is, and of what goes on inside her.

For I think the time has come to abandon the idiotic American notion that sensitiveness is sissy. It is not. Instead, it is the quality which most truly demonstrates real masculinity. Its constant employment for understanding in marriage and, when it is needed, for the disciplined use of silence, is anything but sissy.

It requires the full and deeply understood use of yet another quality, one which the world admires both in men and in women: courage.