

both. Turns out he'd been lying on his good ear for 30 years' worth of late-night fights.

My favorite tale of marital deafness though comes from my sister Nan who, widowed in her mid-40s, fell in love with and eventually married a widower 13 years her senior. She joked tirelessly about what a saint she was for signing on to see him through his twilight years.

One day not long after the wedding, Nan was standing in their kitchen while not ten feet away her groom sat with his back to her, watching the Early News on the tube.

"Are you done in the bathroom?" she asked him. She'd throw all the towels in the washer if he said yes.

"Not anytime soon," he said without turning around.

"Uh, OK. Well when WILL you be done in there?"

"Maybe by Tuesday."

She turned and gave a deadpan look to the cat, who gave it right back to her.

"Chuck, what I'm asking is, ARE YOU DONE IN THE BATHROOM?"

"There's a 30% chance," said Chuck — at which point Nan put her head down to reach for a pot in the lower cabinet and muttered, "It's gonna be a LONG 20 years..."

"I heard that!" cried Chuck and there she was, caught red-handed talking behind his back to the cat — AND offering the proof:

Deafness really is the basis for all marital bliss — or at least for some pretty good laughs.

Write Terry at tmarottacomcast.net or PO Box 270 Winchester MA 01890. If you would care to leave a comment on her blog Exit Only you'll find it at www.terrymarotta.wordpress.com.

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ON THE HOME FRONT: Think comedy's hard? Try therapy

By Terry Marotta

GateHouse News Service

Posted Oct 23, 2009 @ 07:19 AM

QUINCY — Well not to me it isn't. I've been getting people to laugh since I was 4 years old and first began doing my imitation of the old "faster-than-a-speeding-bullet" Superman prologue, which I'd rattle off in tights and bunched underpants, a dishtowel around my neck for a cape.

To my mind, it's not hard to make people laugh, provided you don't mind sacrificing your dignity. In fact, if you asked me for an epigram depicting one true thing, I'd say this:

"Comedy is easy. Therapy is hard."

I found out just how hard when I was first enrolled in counseling under the "I'm OK, You're Crazy" plan.

Maybe you're familiar with it.

Doing therapy under the "I'm OK, You're Crazy" plan occurs when someone you live with suggests you get counseling, although he personally wouldn't open up in a therapist's office if you dragged him there in chains and threatened to pull out all his nose hairs.

To be plain, my husband, whose nose hairs I have occasionally eyed, said he thought I should seek treatment.

Because I seemed sad, he said.

"Hey, all humorists are sad down deep," I retorted, though I knew he was right: I was sad. My mom had died not long before, and I guess I felt too young to face life without her.

Plus, she didn't just die. She died in my living room. During her own birthday party. Within 20 minutes of when I offered the toast by reading a letter which her dad had written her when she was off in college, her own mom newly dead, and she homesick, grief-struck, eating too much chocolate and failing history.

My reading it aloud these 60 years later at her party made my steely mom cry. She never, ever, cried, and I somehow concluded that hearing the letter read brought on her death.

So, yes, I was sad, if not plumb crazy. And I began seeing this counselor to try to feel better.

Every week I drove to her office, all unwilling. Every week she asked me how I was. I could only tell her how everyone else was. I told her a million stories, most of them funny.

I entertained the daylights out of us both, but I wasn't getting at the problem. I think we both knew that, so, after 18 months, I quit.

And 12 years passed, and I was funnier than ever, still in full flight from every kind of sadness that had ever come my way.

Then one day my oldest friend called to say she was doing counseling — over the phone of all things — with a gifted therapist in Colorado, who was at first reluctant to work with someone in such an unorthodox manner.

"But it's helping!" my friend said, and one day added, "You know, you should do it, too."

And so? And so I am doing it, though God knows it isn't easy.

I can't seem to sit still as I talk to this faraway therapist. But because we're on the phone, she doesn't know this. Sometimes I scrub toilets while we talk. Sometimes I strip small pieces of furniture.

Once though, she got wise to me.

"Are you driving?" she said.

I was driving, all right.

But I am doing it, as I wish my mom could have done it, to ease her own aching heart.

I'll say it again, and you can take it from this old vaudevillian: Comedy really is easy by comparison. Therapy is very, very hard.

Write to Terry at terrymarotta@verizon.net or c/o Ravenscroft Press, P.O. Box 270, Winchester, MA 01890.

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Terry Marotta: Holiday don't-buys

By Terry Marotta

GateHouse News Service

Posted Dec 07, 2009 @ 05:13 PM

Before the lean times came, people chose all kinds of outlandish gifts for holiday giving.

I'm talking bras studded with diamonds, super-powerful flashlights that can send a beam of light across 600 yards of darkness into the bedroom window of some poor guy trying to take his socks off, body scans that reveal all the things that will one day kill you.

Luxury items, in other words.

But 15 months into this downturn, very different gifts are being offered:

Now it's all novelty items, "novelty" meaning you can get past the crucial 60 seconds it takes the recipient to open the thing and be three rooms away with the eggnog before it either breaks or is discovered to be utterly useless.

Some such items are: teensy flashlights so small they're only good for shining inside people's nostrils and not very far inside them either, small battery-powered radios shaped like professional football players and a 15-inch stuffed bear holding a guitar who sings "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" when you push its button.

But comfort ye my people because I bring you glad tidings of great joy: To succeed at holiday gift-giving, you don't have to worry about what you SHOULD give the people on your list; instead, just focus on what you SHOULDN'T give them and all will be well.

Those things to stay away from are these:

One, DNA kits promising to show where on God's green earth your ancestors came from. Save your money. The cheek swab hurts like hell and we all come from Africa.

Two, self-improvement books, which send a very bad message when you give them as gifts: You Talk Too Much, You're Boring, Should You Be Eating That? These are the inferences hidden in all such tomes, and who needs to hear that over the holidays?

Three, nonfiction in general. People are always giving my poor husband 1,000-page histories of this or that. It's like assigning someone a term paper over winter vacation. (At the same time, it should be said that there's no finer magic carpet than a book, so gift certificates are safe - and if the person spends the whole amount on Cream-Cheese-Double-Fudge Lattes in the bookstore café, well that's not your business.)

Four, music. Music is as iffy as books unless you're going the gift-certificate route and the person has an iPod, because CDs are on the way out, babe. By 2015 they'll be nothing to play them on, and a whole nation of people over 30 will be using them as coasters.

And finally ...

Five, any type of compression garment for the female in your life, because corsets, as they have been called since dinosaur times, also send a very bad message. Your lady will get spitting mad just trying to don the thing - and you'd better hire someone to help her get out of it unless YOU want to be on hand for that even more troubling exercise. Off the body these compression garments are the size of tea cozies. I myself was talked into buying one once and I am here to tell you: it's too tight even for my cat.

So print this list, head for your favorite discount drug store and remember: Just about everyone is glad to get a big pack of gum and a brand-new tube of lip balm.

Write Terry at terrymarotta@verizon.net or c/o Ravenscroft press P.O. Box 270, Winchester, MA 01890; then go to her blog "Exit Only" to see her cat and the compression garment sharing the same patch of real estate.

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