

# Lifestyle

## Gender stereotyping a pain

By DIANA GERBER

The other day I read one of those advice columns you see in most big city papers. It contained a series of letters in which men and women gave their views on a letter which appeared previously. The whole fuss, it seems, began with a pregnant woman who was forced to stand, obviously uncomfortably, on a bus as many others, men and women alike, sat comfortably ignoring her.

This reminds me of many a friendly discussion I have had with people of the opposite sex regarding the difference between chivalry and chauvinism. In the society in which I grew up, these two terms are not as far apart as they might seem.

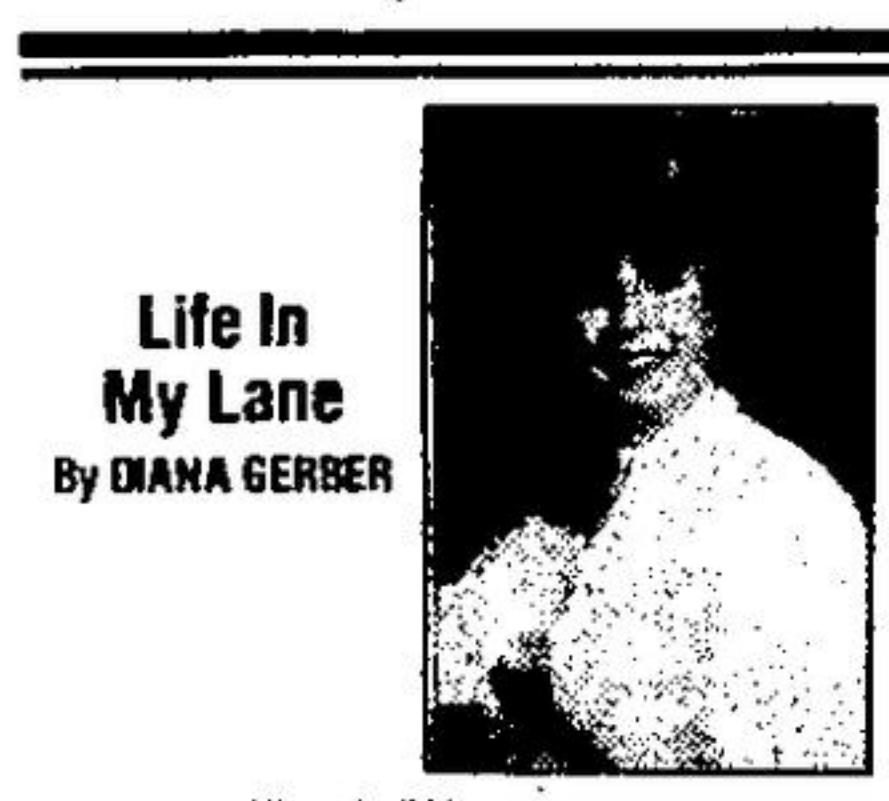
I am not threatened when a man opens a door for me, nor am I annoyed when he holds my chair or offers his arm for me. In fact, I kind of like it. It can really make me feel special and attended to.

However, I also am a young lady who grew up in a family of six, four of whom are boys. In my household, when there were chores to be done, we all helped, male or female, and did our share. Therefore, when there is work to be done now, it is only natural for me to do my part in the labor.

This is where the conflict arises. Is a man, by letting me, oh dear, break a sweat, not fulfilling his chivalrous duty? Or would he be an absolute cad if he did not rush past me to clear all obstructions, such as doors, from my path? What, pray tell, is the difference in these, and why is this whole matter such a touchy subject?

Personally, I can say that I don't mind a man opening a door for me because I would assume that he believes I could do it myself, were he not around. At least I should hope so. I often open a door for colleagues, male and female, myself.

There are other situations where I do feel threatened,



Life In My Lane  
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though. For example, when I go grocery shopping with my husband, he insists on lugging, off-balance, 10 out of the 12 bags, of course the heaviest ones, and "letting me help" by carrying the one with the corn flakes (oh, heaven!) and the one with the bread (well, rye is a heavy dough!). To silly old me, it would only make common sense for us to carry an equal amount, give or take a bag.

I hate to hurt his feelings, but I would and could carry the bags myself if he were not there. I hope this would not make me out to be some kind of cavewoman in his mind, but it is true. I have a fair amount of strength in my arms.

I'm just asking the men in the world to accept that I'm not trying to prove anything to them in doing my share. I was born after the last cinder of the last burnt bra was extinguished, and have never even considered setting a match to my own.

Men should also understand that I don't expect them to prove themselves to me either. If I'm ahead of them in the hall, they should not feel obligated to rush

past me to get the door. This is a pressure that they should feel relieved of. If I get there first, it is my pleasure to clear his way.

This all leaves me back with the poor woman standing on the bus.

One ignorant person wrote in saying that women had been trying for years for equal rights, and now don't like the lack of benefits accompanying that standing. To this bitter soul I would ask, if a man were standing in the aisle who was obviously ill, white as a sheet and shaking with weakness, would you not give up your seat for him? I bet the answer would be yes.

I guess the moral of the story, boys and girls, is not to do polite things for someone just because they are of a certain gender. So, next time you are planting a tree, before you say, "No dear, you don't have to worry your pretty little self with this old hole. I'll be down the four feet in no time!" remember that you would have forced your brother to do his share of the work. If she's offering, let her help. Even if she's not offering, it's sometimes alright to expect aid.

And on the other hand, if someone is in need, give them the help required. Don't look first to see if that person is male or female, because each situation, each person is different. Follow your instincts of common politeness.

Now, please excuse me, everyone. I have to go help my husband with the laundry. I don't think he could handle it alone. Then again, I don't think Hulk Hogan could either.

Say: "I saw it in The Herald"

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