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That's a good idea; at least, I think it is. We've been married for more years than Coke has varieties of soda pop, and people often ask us the secret of our matrimonial longevity.

(They don't ask that often, actually. Just sometimes. In fact in the past year I think only one person has actually come right out and asked us for the secret of staying married for a long time. But I can tell people are interested.)

I think the reason we have stayed married to each other for so long is that we are both so steely-jawed and decisive. We don't dither.

At least I'm pretty sure that's the reason. We hardly ever waver over choices and because we both know that the most reliable benchmark of good mental health is the ability to make a decision and stick to it.

We haven't always been so decisive. At our wedding when the minister turned to me with his "Do you promise to take this man et-cetera" question, I think I said, "Can I get back to you on that?"

Several years later as we were preparing to drive to the hospital for the delivery of our first-born, the Squire had an indecisive moment. He tied my shoes for me and asked tenderly, "Are you sure you want to go

Shirley Whittington



through with this, sweetheart?"

Since those wobbly early days, we have learned the wonderful strength that comes from firm resolution. This decisiveness is the glue that holds our marriage together. It certainly isn't the food or the friendly courteous service.

Decisions. Goodness knows married life is fraught with them, as in, "Good Morning! Coffee? Instant? Perked? Drip? De-caff? Coffee mate? Milk? Cream? Sugar?" What a way to start a day.

We often grocery shop together, and there's another hint for those of you who would stay wed at least until you've run through your supply of personalized matches. Shopping together prevents one partner from yelling, "Where the hell did all the money go?" at the

other. And you always know who's to blame for the impulse purchases like the imported lemur's milk cheese.

The last time we shopped we were expecting all the kids home for the weekend, so that left Pop pondering pop (sugar free? caffeine-free? cans? bottles? disposables? return for deposit?) and me considering chips.

Any way you slice it, a potato is a potato. But once it's deep fried and packed in aluminum foil, a potato's identity multiplies like a Spielberg Gremlin. One must decide between hot barbecue and plain barbecue; between sour creme 'n' onion and salt and vinegar or party pak, ripples or old fashioned.

I made my decision and moved on to personal care items, where I squinted at the

labels on the shampoo bottles. "How would you describe my hair?" I asked the Squire who had just finished agonizing over butter, whipped butter, salt-free butter, low-cal margarine, regular margarine, and all vegetable oil margarine in decorator tubs or plastic bags.

I persisted. "Be honest. Would you call my hair hard to manage? Oily? Dry-damaged? Or just limp and fine? I need to know."

"I'd go for normal," said the Squire. "It certainly isn't kinky."

That narrowed the choice down to Extra Strength, Wheat Germ and Honey, Self-Adjusting, Protein Re-Moisturizing, Balsam Enriched and Anti-Dandruff. I picked one, then steeled myself to deal with roll-on or stick, leaf or endive, canned or fresh, fresh or frozen, boxes or bags.

I know it sounds unbelievable, but decision-making comes easily after a while. When faced with a sea of choices, one must either think or sink.

Good decision making is essential to a good marriage. As the Squire himself put it, "We decided years ago that I would look after all the big decisions and she would look after all the small ones. So far, nothing big has come up.

You sure can't please 'em all in this business

IT'S extremely difficult, as any columnist knows, to please all of the people all of the time. In fact, if this column had done so, it would be extinct. Half my readers get so mad at me that they can't wait to read the next column, so they can get madder. The other half sort of enjoys it, forgives my lapses and looks forward to what the silly twit is going to say next.

In the last couple of weeks, I've had some letters from both sides. A Manitoba editor is thinking of canceling the column. Reason? "Too many columns dealing with personal matters." I quote bits from his letter:

"While it is understandable that family members are dear to Bill Smiley...I feel our readers might tire of how the grandboys are behaving. Once or twice a year would be sufficient!"

I should be so lucky. You are quite right, sir. Once or twice a year would be sufficient, for the grandboys' visit.

And from Vancouver, a young mother writes to say, "Keep on writing about your family and grandboys. I love these columns."

The editor was fair. He added: "Columns, other than family-related, are good and have received favorable comment from our readers." Thanks.

I get letters from religious people who accuse me of being the right-hand man of the Devil, when I jestingly remark that God must have been out to lunch when he was drawing up the menu for this year's winter.

I get letters from other religious people who send me dreary tracts and letters full of Biblical references, with the hope that I will

Bill Smiley



print the lot.

And I get letters from still other religious people, mostly clergy, who enjoy quibbling with me over a point but urge me to continue writing as I do, to make people think.

But on the whole, it is not exactly a dog's life. I remember receiving a fairly vicious editorial blow from a weekly editor who said I wrote too much about teenagers, because I was a school teacher.

I retorted with a bit of tongue in cheek. In high dudgeon, he cancelled the column. It's still going. I wonder if he's still the editor of that paper, deciding what his readers can read. (Had a number of letters from his subscribers supporting me, none supporting him.)

I receive letters from places like Baker Lake, N.W.T., excoriating me for talking about the tough winters down here, which to them is almost the deep south.

And I get a letter from my kid brother retired and living in Florida, with pictures of the house, flowers, pool and an outline of his day: coffee and morning paper, walk down the beach with the dog, etc. The swine. Wait till the Florida flies get to him in July and he

wants to come north and visit for a month. No room at the Smiley inn, little Smiley.

On the whole, the letters I get are delightful. A typical example came in the other day from Bill Francis, Moncton, B.C. He says such nice things about the column that I blush even to read them, and would never put them in print.

But more to the point, his letter is witty, informative, alive. He's no chicken, a W.W.I infantry private. I'll quote a bit.

"Though obviously a man of sound common sense, I wonder how, in your youth, you got involved in flying a fighter plane, let alone risking combat in one. (Ed. note: me too!) I remember during those war years, watching a young fellow land his old Avro Anson like a wounded pelican in the middle of our freight yard and walk away from the wreck looking a little sheepish. Soon after, and nearby, another boy flew his Harvard trainer at full speed into a grove of trees one foggy morning. He didn't walk away from that one."

Speaking of education, he says he attended five different schools and doesn't think much of today's big schools. Of the new permissiveness: "Anti-social behaviour today

may be blamed on everything from sun spots to Grandpa's weakness for women and hard liquor, which all agree is a vast improvement on the concept." A strapping at school and another at home for being strapped at school.

His last school was graded "superior," because it taught to Grade 11. Equipment consisted of a tray of mineral specimens, the remains of a cheap chemistry set, and a leather strap, but managed to turn out a number of people who went into the professions.

Bill Francis says: "The school's rather good record was due not only to excellent instruction, but also do to drawing, from a radius of five miles around, those whose eyes were fixed on distant goals and whose legs were equal to hoofing it back and forth. There was nothing wrong with my legs and I lived nearby."

"Just a little light upstairs, they said; a handicap I've learned to live with."

"Now, some seventy years later and a little wiser, I have become just an old fellow round whom the wind blows in the laugh of the loon and the caw of the crows and the wind whistles by so dreary and cold, in chilling disdain of ways that are old. But this feckless old fellow just putters around and heeds not the wind nor its desolate sound. Cares not a whit for what the winds say; just listens for echoes of things far away."

I think that is wise and honest and real. May I feel the same. I'll be in touch, Bill Francis. You're a literate man with some brains in your head. An unusual phenomenon.

Convert-to-rent program okayed by Queen's Park

George Taylor, MPP for Simcoe Centre, announced today that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has made funds available to the City of Barrie and the Town of Penetanguishene under the Convert-To-Rent Program.

This program offers 15 year, interest-free loans of \$7,000 per unit, to assist in the conversion of non-residential buildings such as warehouses, second floor space above stores and vacant school property.

City of Barrie will receive \$98,000 to convert the second and third floors of the Queen's Hotel on Dunlop Street to fourteen apartments. There will be seven bachelors and seven one bedroom apartments available under this provincial loan.

Town of Penetanguishene will receive \$280,000 to make forty apartments from a vacant commercial building on Main Street. There will be five bachelors, 24 one bedrooms, 10 two bedrooms and 1 three bedroom.

Taylor said "I am very pleased that Barrie and Penetanguishene are able to participate in this program. Good rental accommodation is needed in these areas and I know the apartments will be occupied immediately."

Grant comes at good time for local 'Friends'

A recent Environment 2000 grant to the Friends of Wye Marsh has enabled work to continue towards clarifying the Underwater Viewing Window and pond at the Wye Marsh Wildlife Interpretation Centre.

The pond was recently drained and the banks were stabilized by decreasing the slope and applying a rip-rac layer of rocks. A small settling pond was also constructed to clarify the water in a

feeder stream before it reaches the main pond.

The work was completed for the Friends of Wye Marsh by Jones Construction of Waubaushene.

The Underwater Window should be re-opened in mid-July. Visitors can once again expect to observe common fishes, invertebrates, turtles and other aquatic life of the marsh. The Friends of Wye Marsh is a cooperating association which assists the Canadian Wildlife Service at Wye Marsh.

It was a busy seven days for OPP

Midland OPP, during the week ending July 16, handled a total of 161 general occurrences.

Included in investigations were 24 thefts, two cases of shoplifting, nine assaults, four break-ins and two cases of wilful damage.

North Simcoe Newsbriefs

Motor-vehicle accidents amount to 14, say OPP

During the week ending July 16, Midland OPP investigated a total of 14 motor-vehicle accidents on area highways.

As a result of a number of these collisions, three persons suffered a variety of injuries.

Exhibition of artwork extended

An exhibition of artwork by Timothy Laurin at the Centre d'Activites francaises in Penetanguishene has been extended to Thursday,

July 26.

Clay and glass vessels made by the Penetang artist are on display at the centre at 63 Main St.

Pack a lunch and have a ball

A reminder that the 16th Annual Senior Citizens' Picnic will be held in Springwater Park, Midhurst on Wednesday, Aug. 1 from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Sponsored by the Simcoe County Recreation Department and the Simcoe County Senior Citizens' Advisory Committee, the picnic is the one big event where seniors in the County can get together to enjoy entertainment, play games or just meet with old friends amid the beauty of Springwater Park.

All Senior Citizens in the County of Simcoe are invited to attend.

Bring a lawn chair and your lunch. Tea, coffee and soft drinks will be provided free of charge.

Guide to Papal visit is distributed

Area residents will be receiving in the mail or by some other means a guide to the visit here on Sept. 15 of Pope John Paul II.

Distribution begins today.

Residents of Midland and Penetanguishene, Tiny Township and Tay Township, Port McNicoll and Victoria Harbour, Medonte Township, Flos Township, Elmvale, Coldwater, Orillia, Barrie and Collingwood will receive one of the 50,000 guides.

Included will be an application form for the courtesy cards drivers will need to enter and leave the Midland area on Sept. 14 and Sept. 15.

Also included will be a special telephone number which will become active after Aug. 1. Questions about anything connected with the pope's visit here can be answered by telephoning the special number.

Every household in the 13 municipalities is to receive a copy of the guide.

At risk

Lots of people are talking about the stupidity of combining alcohol and boating and the Royal Life Saving Society Canada (RLSSC) is happy about it. The evidence is clear - boaters who drink are exposing themselves to incredible risks.

Approximately one third of annual drownings involve small boats. Of this number it is estimated that about 50 per cent of the victims had consumed alcohol.

While the facts are not popular with those who consume alcohol, one cannot argue with the fact that alcohol impairs judgement. The ability to make clear quick decisions in an emergency is essential.

The Royal Life Saving program includes a course in boat rescue specifically designed for small boat operators. The course includes a variety of simulated accidents in which the boater can test his response to emergencies.