

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Heaven help "the surrendered woman"

Good grief it's happening again. A ditsy woman has written a book saying she was a shrew, a nag, domineering, controlling, all those awful things we can say about a woman. The same qualities in a man of course are called strong, decisive, managerial, smart, blah, blah, blah.

Apparently the author was never happy with her husband, who wouldn't get a job, was basically lazy, wouldn't pay the bills, do housework or take care of the children even when he was home and she was out working. Her answer? Completely surrender herself to the creep. Now, she says, he feels really smart and in control and she is as happy as she has been her whole married life. I don't think it will work for longer than 24 hours, but she has written a book about how well her marriage is working now and is having workshops telling other women if they will just "surrender" to their man, everything will be hunky-dory. She was actually interviewed by Katie Couric on the Today Show. Katie thought she was nuts too.

We've heard all this before, you know. Remember the gal in the 1970's who wrote the same kind of book (*The Total Woman*) about how to keep our men interested in us? Like it's all our responsibility to keep the marriage exciting. She suggested things like getting naked, wrapping ourselves in Saran Wrap and greeting our man in this outfit when the poor tired guy came home from work. Another idea was to greet him with nothing on but white boots and a teensy, tiny apron. She wrote that having sex in a different place, like the dining room table, might perk things up.

I always wondered what the children would be doing while all this was going on. Or how the neighbor would react when I greeted him or her at the door with nothing on but Saran Wrap. When the book came out, and it was a sensation, a few of us women laughed hysterically thinking about the consequences of this woman's ideas. For one thing, we were sure that if we greeted our husbands in any of these outfits they would either collapse laughing or just call up the little men in white coats.

But seriously, my generation was taught this same philosophy in the 1950s. Lots of my friends, including me, got married under this assumption and you know what? I doesn't work. None of us, men or women, should be nags, controlling, verbally or physically abusive. But women my age and older have discovered the hard way that all men and women aren't the same. A marriage is as unique as we are individuals.

I can't count the women I've known who spent their lives supporting their men, keeping house, cooking, helping them through school, raising the children, doing all the things a "good" woman is supposed to do. And how do they find themselves in mid-life? Alone. After all this, their husbands have found someone younger and "more interesting." Not having worked outside the home, they are at a loss. Some are able to pick up the pieces and some aren't. As women, we do ourselves a favor by being ourselves and using our abilities, whatever that may entail.

The older I get, the more I realize how unusual my parents are. They are now 92 and 93. In the 1940s, my mother became active in the Kewanee League of Women Voters. She testified before the State legislature. She became involved in local government issues. By the early 1960s, she was state president of the Illinois League of Women Voters. Since we lived in Kewanee, she traveled to the League office in Chicago once a week and usually stayed overnight by herself in the Allerton hotel. One day while she was gone I asked my father, "How come you let Mother do this League job and go to Chicago?" (Notice the word "let.")

He summed up the whole woman's liberation movement when he answered with a smile, "Well, you have to keep these old Phi Beta Kappas busy." (Phi Beta Kappa is a scholastic fraternity for those in college with top grades.)

First, my father is a secure guy. He wasn't

the slightest bit threatened by my mother's intelligence and activity, in fact he was very proud of her. How lucky they both were and are. They are the model of a marriage of mutual love and respect which has lasted 68 years.

And you know what? "Surrender" is not

in my mother's vocabulary. Somehow even without the Saran Wrap, my father has never had a dull moment.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at 342-1337 or cporter@galesburg.net.