

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Don't put me in one of your crummy categories



You know, so many of our problems come from putting people in categories. I'm a feminist, for example, and that means to some people that I hate men, can't cook or sew, don't approve of housewives, wear oxford shoes, and according to Rush Limbaugh, am a "femi-Nazi."

Believe it or not, I say thank you when a man opens the door for me, but I'll open the door for anyone who might find it difficult or may be behind me.

Nearly 30 years ago, when I was the only woman on the Knox County Board, some of the men were teasing me about being a feminist and I asked them, "How many of your wives breastfed your children?" Few of them had. And of course, I did. What a natural, healthy and handy way to feed infants. My son was born while I was president of the Rockford League of Women Voters and I was joined by two other board members who had babies about the same time. Board meetings were a riot of taking turns nursing and caring for our little ones, even though League members in those days were characterized as sexually frustrated old biddies. Americans are still brainwashed to believe that women can't think and be feminine at the same time. I could breastfeed, of course, because I was not working outside the home. So there.

And I have a photo of my daughters in their Churchilllette (pom-pom) outfits, which I made, even though I was a single, working mother at the time. All my daughter had to say was, "I don't think my mother can make our outfits," and I was off and running. I've made dresses and a suit for myself and dresses for my daughters, men's shirts, knit caps and scarves. So there.

On the subject of hating men, I've been accused of a lot of things, but never that. Enough said.

I'll admit that housework is not always my top priority-it will wait, you know. Comedian Phyllis Diller has a rule in her house, that it's okay to write in the dust on the tables, "just don't put what year." So when I do my housework, the change is

dramatic and rewarding.

Cooking is a joy when I'm organized, have the time and it's for a special occasion. After 43 years of trying to be creative about meals, buying the ingredients, preparing the meal and cleaning up afterwards, I'm quite tired of it. That must be why my husband looked at me one evening and said out of the clear blue, "Caroline, should we just sell the kitchen?"

It's such an amazing world with the internet. Several weeks ago a woman from Boulder, Colorado e-mailed me because she had found my column with three of my favorite recipes on some web-site. She asked if I had the recipe for cranberry bread from a Holland-based company, My Great Recipes, because she had loaned her card to someone and it was never returned. The company is no longer in business, apparently, and I don't know how she figured out I had the series of their cards. But, yes, I replied, will cranberry nut bread do? She was thrilled and I mailed it to her, and not only that, I made it myself.

One of my daughters called while I was making the bread. She asked, "What are you doing, Mom?" I told her. Dead silence. "No, Mom, really, what are you doing?"

"I'm baking bread, from scratch, sifting flour and everything," I answered. She laughed hysterically, "Are you using that same old flour sifter we used for years?" "Oh, yeah," I answered, "the one that sifts everything three times at once, it's pretty snazzy." And I admit, it was a bit dusty.

This holiday season, let's try to remember the source of so many of our problems, our prejudices, our wars, our hatreds. It's putting people in categories on the basis of their gender, physical handicap, color of skin, place of birth, religion, political affiliation - pick a category, any category. Until we learn to give people a chance to be known as individuals, we are being unjust. It's hard, but we have to keep trying.

Best wishes for a peaceful holiday season.

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