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I'll Never Understand My Wife

by Steven James



I'll never understand my wife.

The day she moved in with^① me, she started opening and closing my kitchen cabinets, gasping, "You don't have any shelf paper! We're going to have to get some shelf paper in here before I move my dishes in."

"But why?" I asked innocently.

"To keep the dishes clean," she answered matter-of-factly. I didn't understand how the dust would magically migrate off the dishes^② if they had sticky blue paper under them, but I knew when to be quiet.

Then came the day when I left the toilet seat up^③.

"We never left the toilet seat up in my family," she scolded. "It's impolite."

"It wasn't impolite in my family," I said sheepishly.

"Your family didn't have cats."^④

In addition to these lessons, I also learned how I was supposed to squeeze the toothpaste tube, which towel to use after a shower and where the spoons are supposed to go when I set the table. I had no idea I was so uneducated.

Nope, I'll never understand my wife.

She alphabetizes her spices^⑤, washes dishes before sending them through the dishwasher, and sorts laundry into different piles^⑥ before throwing it into the washing machine. Can you imagine?

She wears pajamas to bed. I didn't think anyone in North America still wore pajamas to bed. She has a coat that makes her look like Sherlock Holmes^⑦. "I could get you a new coat," I offered.

① move in with: 搬进来和……一起居住

② 我不明白灰尘怎么就会魔法般地从盘子上离去。

③ 没有把抽水马桶盖放下来。

④ 这句话的意思是她家里有猫，把马桶盖放下来是为了怕猫掉进马桶。

⑤ 她把调味品按字母顺序排列好。

⑥ 把要洗的衣服分成不同的几堆。

⑦ Sherlock Holmes: 舍洛克·福尔摩斯

- ① 到处背着一个小型货车一般大小的尿布包。
- ② 意思是她讲话简洁干脆。
- ③ playpen: *n.* (供婴儿在里面玩耍的) 游戏围栏
- ④ oddity: *n.* 古怪的人
- ⑤ snicker at: 对……窃笑
- ⑥ bumper sticker: 粘贴在汽车保险杠上的小标语
- ⑦ warranty registration cards: 产品质量保证书的登记卡
- ⑧ check: *v.* 在……旁边打钩

“No. This one was my grandmother’s,” she said, decisively ending the conversation.

Then, after we had kids, she acted even stranger. Wearing those pajamas all day long, eating breakfast at 1:00 P.M., carrying around a diaper bag the size of a minivan^①, talking in one-syllable paragraphs^②.

She carried our baby everywhere—on her back, on her front, in her arms, over her shoulder. She never set her down, even when other young mothers shook their heads as they set down the car seat with their baby in it, or peered down into their playpens^③. What an oddity^④ she was, clutching that child.

My wife also chose to nurse her even when her friends told her not to bother. She picked up the baby whenever she cried, even though people told her it was healthy to let her wail.

“It’s good for her lungs to cry,” they would say.

“It’s better for her heart to smile,” she’d answer.

One day a friend of mine snickered at^⑤ the bumper sticker^⑥ my wife had put on the back of our car: “Being a Stay-at-Home Mom Is a Work of Heart.”

“My wife must have put that on there,” I said.

“My wife works,” he boasted.

“So does mine,” I said, smiling.

Once, I was filling out one of those warranty registration cards^⑦ and I check^⑧ “homemaker” for my wife’s occupation. Big mistake. She glanced over it and quickly corrected me. “I am not a homemaker. I am not a housewife. I am a mother.”

“But there’s no category for that,” I stammered.

“Add one,” she said.

I did.

And then one day, a few years later, she lay in bed smiling when I got up to go to work.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Nothing. Everything is wonderful. I didn’t have to get up at all last night to calm the kids. And they didn’t crawl in bed with us.”

“Oh,” I said, still not understanding.

“It was the first time I’ve slept through the night in four years.” It was? Four years? That’s a long time. I hadn’t even noticed. Why hadn’t she ever complained? I would have.

One day, in one thoughtless moment, I said something that sent

her fleeing to the bedroom in tears. I went in to apologize. She knew I meant it because by then I was crying, too.

"I forgive you," she said. And you know what? She did. She never brought it up again. Not even when she got angry and could have hauled out the heavy artillery^①. She forgave, and she forgot^②.

Nope, I'll never understand my wife. And you know what? Our daughter is acting more and more like her mother every day.

If she turns out to be anything like her mom, someday there's going to be one more lucky guy in this world, thankful for the shelf paper in his cupboard.

① 字面意思是拖出重炮。这里是夸张和比喻的说法，意思是她可以翻旧账大闹一气，但她却没有这样做。

② forgive and forget 是一个惯用词组，意思是不念旧恶，不记仇。这里拆开用，起到了强调的效果。

About the author

Steven James (1954-) is one of the U.S.'s most innovative storytellers. He has written more than twenty books and is a full-time speaker, having appeared more than 1,500 times throughout North America, Europe and Asia since 1996. With a Master's Degree in Storytelling, he shares his unique blend of drama, comedy, and inspirational storytelling at events across the country. His debut novel of psychological suspense, *The Pawn*, reached #10 on the CBA fiction bestsellers list and is a finalist for the 2008 Christy Awards. In addition, he has written numerous critically acclaimed nonfiction books and hundreds of articles and stories that have appeared in more than 80 different publications.

Exercises

Questions for comprehension

1. The line "I'll never understand my wife" appears three times in the article. What are the things about the author's wife that he doesn't understand?
2. What was the author's wife trying to do when she moved in with him? Did the author think that the shelf paper would keep off the dust? What does the dialog between the couple suggest about their habits and personalities? When the author said he knew when to be quiet, what did he mean? Was he afraid of his wife? Or was he convinced by his wife?
3. Why did his wife look so shocked when the author left the toilet seat up? What was the author's reaction to that? What did that tell us about his wife's family and her upbringing?
4. What were the other lessons that his wife taught him? What kind of changes was his wife trying to bring to his life? What was his attitude towards these lessons? Did he really mean it when he said "I had no idea I was so uneducated"?

5. Why did the author find his wife wearing pajamas to bed a strange thing? Why didn't he give her a new coat? Why did she refuse to change the coat for anything else?
6. How did his wife's life change after she became a mother? Why wouldn't she take her friends' advice and let her baby cry? How did the author look at his wife in her new role as a mother?
7. Why did the author's friend snicker at the bumper sticker on the back of their car? What was the author's reaction to that? Why did the author's wife object to her being categorized as a "homemaker"? What is the difference between a "housewife" and a "mother" in her mind?
8. When his wife told him she hadn't slept through the night in four years, what was his reaction? Why hadn't she complained before?
9. What happened when he had to beg for his wife's forgiveness? Did he hurt her feelings terribly? How do you know? Did his wife forgive him? What kind of quality did that show about his wife? Is it easy to really forgive and forget?
10. Did it worry the author that his daughter was getting more and more like her mother? Why did he say his future son-in-law would be a lucky guy and should be "thankful for the shelf paper in the cupboard"?

Questions for discussion

1. What do you think is the proper role for a woman in the family? Should she be primarily a housewife or a homemaker or a mother? Are there any differences between these roles?
2. Do you think the author really means it when he says that he doesn't understand his wife? Does he find his wife strange throughout their married life? How does he view their differences eventually?
3. When the author talks about his wife's strange behavior, is he complaining or actually singing her praises? Does he consider himself lucky or unlucky to have married such a woman?
4. Is the tone adopted by the author ironical or humorous? Give examples.