

A woman's role



People have been asking me recently if I have taken up the very kind offer from Stephen Okula when he invited me in the March issue to his Tenerife home for a chat on the maintenance of USGA spec greens.

Well, despite his generosity, I have decided to decline on the grounds that it is impossible to walk down a beach at any of the Canary Islands without being visually assaulted on a regular basis by a series of out of condition Bavarians wearing nothing more than a back-pack. Quite a traumatic experience for us Brits, especially after that most traditional of Canarian meals, the Full English Breakfast.

But before our Editor receives a mass of complaints from the greenkeepers wing of the Naturists Association of Deutschland, may I point out that my comments are not to be taken too seriously, as has been the unfortunate case in the past.

However the following anecdote, I can assure you is entirely factual and was recounted to me by my Brother the celebrated portrait artist, Leonardo McDivot.

My brother has a long-standing female friend who confided to him a story that had been an acute embarrassment to her for a long time. With her resolve severely diluted by a cheap bottle of wine she recounted this horrific tale in the strictest confidence. This he then told to me in not quite such strict confidence and with a total and blatant lack of confidentiality I will now faithfully relate it to a few thousand greenkeepers in the hope that she is not a regular reader of this publication.

She was seeing a young man who was to become her future hubby and the time had arrived when she was

required to meet the family. As we are all aware this can be the most stressful of duties at the best of times but in this case the family was of English nobility background and the house a stately affair complete with gazebos, orangeries, servants quarters, lodges and such like.

So the day arrived and she pulled up outside the ancestral home in her Mini Metro. Having coped with the initial introductions and navigated her way through the tea and cucumber sandwiches without too many lapses of etiquette, she was then required to tackle the evening dinner. This in keeping with normal protocol in the land of the gentry was a ceremonial affair that entailed dressing up in full ball gown regalia.

Towards the end though, she found it necessary to excuse herself to the powder room. At this point events started to take on a somewhat surreal perspective. This is a very delicate subject but I will try to explain what happened as inoffensively as possible. To her absolute horror the product of the preceding meals steadfastly refused to disappear no matter how many times the chain was pulled.

Panic then started to set in and as time was elapsing her stressed brain was blowing up the problem to global proportions. Convincing herself that she had committed the most heinous crime imaginable against polite society, her behaviour became utterly irrational and using large quantities of toilet paper she picked up the offending object and lobbed it out of the window. Having reassured herself that the nightmare was finally over, she brushed herself down, regained some composure and went back down to rejoin the family in the dining room.

The problem was she did not find them in the dining room. They were in the conservatory gazing up at this strange object that had suddenly splattered itself all over the glass roof.

In telling of this girl's painful experience I wish to highlight the difference between the cerebral workings of men and women. Placed in a similar situation most men would not become overly worried and would either:

a) Forget about it, reasoning that the butler would probably sort the problem out, or,

b) Especially if he is a greenkeeper, take the top off the cistern and relish the prospect of carrying out some on the spot adjustments with the ball valve to effect a permanent cure to the problem.

That is not to say that we men are in some way superior to our female counterparts. Far from it. It is just that we have a different way of viewing things.

For instance, I am of the opinion that if most men were left to their own devices it would not be long before a deep rooted basal instinct would kick in and we would degenerate into a life of concentrated drunken slobbery. I myself have found this particular desire difficult to control on many occasions. But as we have our female brethren to guard over us, they manage by way of a superior strength of will and prolonged verbal persuasion to discourage these genetic urges and instead lead us down the path of domestic duties.

Some may argue that their brains are incorrectly wired leading to a series of illogical conclusions based on nothing more than women's intuition. This is clearly untrue. For example, when my dearly beloved moved into a previous abode of mine that had resisted all my attempts to sell, she drew my myopic attention to the fact that the sparse black and white furnishings and stark empty spaces devoid of all feelings of homeliness were not helping me in my quest to attract the punters.

I was also made aware, in a brutally frank manner of the fact that vacuuming the carpets on a quarterly

basis was generally considered insufficient. It was also pointed out to me that my theory of living in conditions of total squalor would help me build up long term resistance to disease was not necessarily conducive to a quick sale.

Having made a few simple refinements such as the addition of cushions, flowers and what I considered the most tasteless of all, little cheruby type ornaments, a path was beaten to my door by eager buyers with full-asking-price bundles of cash in hand. So in this instance it was I, a fairly typical male who was unable to reach a conclusion based on simple logic.

Intelligence can and should not be rated on the ability one has in tackling an IQ test.

For example, ask me who came second in the 1973 British Open and I could relay such information of unmitigated boredom to my heart's content.

Ask me what colour would look good with magenta and I would fumble about hopelessly for an inept answer. Given my position of Head Greenkeeper in charge of not only a golf course but also several areas of flowers and assorted shrubbery, what ability do you think would be most appropriate?

My amazing talent to recall in detail the picture of Neil Coles striding down the last fairway at Troon, complete with ill fitting trousers and hideous jumper, several shots behind Tom Weiskopf or my equally amazing lack of talent at deciding what shrubs would look most impressive adjacent to the Captain's parking spot. With all due respect to Neil Coles, the ability to visualise horticultural artistry would win every time. Put the wife in a similar situation and she would notice those little details that are completely invisible to us males. The Captain's Rover, she would observe, always seems to come in a colour that matches his hearing aids and planting

would be appropriately harmonious.

Which finally brings me to my long-winded conclusion. The current trend of encouraging women into the world of greenkeeping is long overdue and should be encouraged at every opportunity.

Of course it is not only for a women's ability to design planting schemes that we should employ and promote. It is also for all the subtle touches that can be so lacking in the male of the species and simply because a different perspective on problems can often be the key in which to solve them. But it doesn't stop there. Have we not all noticed how supply companies are deploying that most fiendish of sales tactics, the female rep. Well maybe it is time the tables were turned. My wife can haggle with a man to the point where agreeing her terms is the only viable alternative to a nervous breakdown. Her powers of persuasion are incredible. I still spend many hours awake at night trying to comprehend how she managed to get the mortgage in my name yet the house in hers. She, like many of her associates, can go on a shopping spree of frightening proportions and yet still convince me by some obscure logic that she has saved me a fortune.

Employ women to do your purchasing and that 10% discount you were so chuffed at getting will be a thing of the past. 20% or 30% will be the norm.

So I say to all my macho colleagues out there Go Forth! Remove those tacky calendars given to you each year by the tractor spare's company and employ the fairer sex. You have the word of Sandy McDivot (and proud of it), I promise, you will not regret it.

Sandy McDivot.
Head Greenkeeper: Sludgecombe Pay and Play.