



My Best Friend

I was recently rereading some past issues of On Course, to brush up on some midsummer turf-survival tips, and I happened along Peggy Czerkies' article from 1998 and Cheryl Maibusch's from 1999. Two MAGCS presidents, Kevin and Bob respectively, had asked their wives to offer the spouse's perspective on our profession. Both ladies responded with insightful and thought-provoking comments that I would encourage you, gentle reader, to revisit.

*Time for another
MAGCS First Lady
to offer up some
chicken soup for
the superintendent's
soul.*

Five years have passed since then and I was struck with the thought that perhaps it was time for another MAGCS First Lady to offer up some chicken soup for the superintendent's soul. After all, it's August, we're bone-tired and nearly as stressed as our greens. Certainly aid and comfort are just across the dinner table.

Wait a minute, it's August! The animals, I mean, the kids have been home all summer, I've been doing that summer work schedule thing, her job is as busy as ever, this may take some charm and persuasion.

Me: "Pleeeeee honey."

She: "Are you crazy?"

Me: "C'mon, it'll be fun."

She: "NO!"

Me: "Listen, I'm dying here. I'm running out of ideas for president's messages."

She: "Your problem—not mine! Anyway, what can I say to all those people except they need to spend more time with their families."

Me: "Okay, that's a start, I'll tell you what—let's go out to eat, you and me, and I'll interview you. You don't need to actually write anything, you can just tell me what to do." (This was particularly clever of me, I thought.)

She: "Well, I don't know . . ."

Me: "C'mon sweetie, you pick the restaurant, I'll get some paper and a pencil."

She: "Wait a minute, if I'm going to do this thing, I have some conditions."

Me: (Uh-oh.) "Sure baby, whatever you want."

She: "You really must be desperate. Alright, number one: there is to be NO editing of what I have to say, you have to promise to print it exactly the way I say it. I know you, you have a way of sugarcoating things. Condition number two . . ."

The Interview*

Me: "Oh Light Of My Life, we've been married for over 20 years. What observations can you share with a significant other who is, shall we say, less experienced in being involved with someone in this profession?"

SHE: "So, I'm old, huh. You're off to a good start, and it's been 22 years. Let's start by being frank; it's sports, so it's a boys club. Don't couch things in nongender-specific terms. You're not asking me to speak to the one or two guys out there who are married to female superintendents because there

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aren't many. You boys need to work harder at being inclusive. You are light years behind the rest of the world in embracing diversity. It's a game played by white boys, run by white boys and all the work is done by the wonderful Spanish-speaking workers you guys should be paying a lot more."

Me: "C'mon Nancy, I can't print that."

SHE: "Then we're done, and did you forget condition two already?"

Me: "No, Oh Pearl Beyond Price, but let's be reasonable, things are changing. There have never been more women in golf management positions, and the demographics show that more and more cultural diversity is finding its way into the workforce."

SHE: "Now you're talking like a politician. Do you think Tiger Woods is a magic eraser for years of elitism? My point is that you boys are slow off the mark here, and don't hand me that 'golf is steeped in tradition and by nature slow to change' crap, take off the blinders and wake up. Outreach initiatives like The First Tee and Sunshine Through Golf are great, but don't forget you're making up for lost time. These programs have to succeed and you boys need to do more to nurture them."

Me: "Okay, okay, back to my question about your observations..."

SHE: "You want me to give advice? Okay, here's my advice: girls, go to the course with them in the summer. You'll learn that they really aren't having an affair. They work hard and they truly love their work. A golf course is a beautiful place to be and deep down they want to show it off. In fact, they'll actually talk to you as you travel the course together. The course in the evening is magical, he might even get romantic and cuddle a bit."

Me: "Jeeze Nance..."

SHE: "Condition two!"

Me: "Oh, Flower of my Heart, you're killing me here. Let me see if I can get you to open up a little bit..."

SHE: "Sarcasm?!"

Me: "... and ask you to comment on what you've learned about my line of work over the years."

SHE: "You know that before we met I had never set foot on a golf

course in my life, so I really knew nothing about what you do for a living. Honestly, I was, and still am, amazed at the amount of knowledge in a wide variety of disciplines you need to keep a golf course maintained properly. The phrase 'jack of all trades' comes to mind, but I know you boys don't like that because you've been working at upgrading the image of your profession. Maybe you boys would achieve that better if you took a day off once in a while, like your boss does."

Me: "Nance!"

SHE: "I know, I know, but it's true. You're the one who keeps harping on mentoring and delegating and finding qualified people to share the load. Practice what you preach. I'll admit you're getting better, maybe by the time you've done this for 30 years you'll have figured out how to do your job in a 40-hour week—like a normal person."

Me: "Maybe. (But then I'd have to spend more time at home.)"

SHE: "I heard that."

Me: "Last question, Oh She Who Must Be Obeyed, do you have anything good to say about golf course management?"

SHE: "You're getting a little edgy and I'm not sure your last endearment met the spirit of condition two, but no matter since you're starting to pout. Darling, I know you work very hard to put on a good show. It's a lot like that, isn't it—a show. Each day is different and seemingly insurmountable obstacles come out of nowhere, but you pull it off—don't you? I know deep down you love to wade in there and be 'the guy' fixing, tweaking and holding it together. You've told me countless stories of near misses that used to make me wonder why you stayed with it. I know now that dodging the bullet is what makes you get up at 4:00 in the morning and despite your moaning and groaning it gets your blood pumping."

"You've also told me how hard it is to produce something that is judged by such subjective terms, how despite pristine conditions everywhere else, something like a poorly raked bunker can ruin a golfer's round, and depending on who that golfer is, ruin your day. I guess I'll

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—Nancy Behnke

never truly understand all of the nuances, but what I do understand, and what I know you understand too is, it's a journey. Bad days will pass, they always do, but when they come it's good to have a friend to come home to."

End of Interview

Well, that went well.

Excuse me, I have a kitchen to remodel—condition eight.



**The views expressed in "On Course with the President" are solely those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents, its officers, Board of Directors or employees.*