

CLARENCE AND ESSIE

By Fred Hobbs

Quiz shows and trivia contests often pit the women against the men in a Battle of the Sexes. These games are loads of fun, but for committed couples, the daily routines and surprises that spring up during a life together range from hilarious to tragic with several possibilities in between. Thus, “battle” may be too harsh a word to apply to relationships between the sexes. Perhaps “ongoing encounters.” Or, does that imply an even more hostile tone?

Apparently, a genius is required to produce the most accurate description of the difference between men and women when it comes to matrimony. Albert Einstein puts it this way: “Men marry women with the hope they will never change; women marry men with the hope they will change. Invariably, they are both disappointed.”

That was the initial expectation and the more rewarding later experience of Clarence and Essie Crutchley of Strawberry Point, Iowa, married now for 52 years. Clarence learned early in the game to put the toilet seat down and trim his nose hairs.

Essie discovered that when Clarence asked, “Can I help with dinner?” he really meant “Why isn’t it already on the table?” They agreed mutually that anything said six months ago is inadmissible in an argument. In fact, all comments become null and void after seven days.

When the Crutchleys drive to see relatives in Des Moines or Davenport, Clarence invariably turns away Essie’s advice on the proper highway exit by reminding her that Christopher Columbus didn’t need directions, and neither does he, even if they wind up in Cedar Rapids.

The Crutchleys were blessed with two children; a boy, Elmer and a girl, Peggy Sue. The parents worked well together rearing the kids when they were little. Clarence even learned to change diapers and Essie refrained from cringing when Clarence tossed the wee ones in the air, always catching them at just the right moment.

As the children neared adulthood, Clarence and Essie took decidedly separate paths in giving advice to the younger generation. When Peggy Sue asked what to do if her boyfriend walks out, Essie replied succinctly: “Close the door.” And she added: “Honey, just remember, girls don’t make fools of boys; most of them are do-it-yourself types, already.

Clarence’s fatherly advice to Elmer centered on the feminine mystique. “You’ll never really figure out why women think the way they do,” he said. “If something you said to a girlfriend can be interpreted two ways and one of the ways makes her sad or angry tell her you meant the other one.” And, you may have noticed that when we are going out and your mom asks me if I like what she is wearing, I always assure her that anything she wears is fine. Really.

“Mom loves that and so will your girl.”

Of course, Clarence and Essie delivered the obligatory “birds and the bees” talks at the appropriate times and settings.

Today, the elder Crutchleys have settled into that cozy relationship that most couples enjoy who have celebrated Golden Wedding Anniversaries. No more serious concern about the Battle of the Sexes.

Life is good for Clarence and Essie and all the 26,522 real folks who live in those premier residences for active seniors (and you know where they are.)