



THE 4TH HOLE

A Housewife's Work is Never Done

One of the difficulties in training husbands is the fact that men just don't understand what makes women tick. That's no surprise to anybody but how is it relevant on the golf course? The problem is the prevalence of a common but generally undiagnosed condition: Maternal Awareness Instinct Disorder (MAID). It is characterised by an excessive tendency to multi-focus and multi-task, and is brought on by years of caring for a household and its inmates. Here are some typical manifestations of MAID:

My husband will say to me, 'Have you seen my blue, long-sleeved jumper, the nice one you got me for Christmas last year?' And I'll answer, 'Yes, darling, I think it's on the back seat of your car where you left it after golf yesterday.' Which turns out to be where it is. 'Thank you,' he says, amazed. 'How on earth did you know that?' How did I know that? Years of practice noticing and remembering the location of stray gloves, schoolbooks, cricket bats, scraps of paper with important telephone numbers on them, and the like.

Or he will say to me, 'It's cold in the house. I think we should turn up the heat,' and I'll say, 'It'll warm up soon. The boiler just came on.' 'How do you know?' 'Because I heard it'

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(we are two flights up from the basement). 'That's astonishing,' says he. No it isn't. Not after years of listening for babies crying, feverish children calling in the night, the scraping sound of chair-on-floor as my son pushes back from his desk fed up with doing his prep, the quiet click of the front door as my daughter creeps in late from a night on the town.

Is being a MAID a gift or a curse? I am not sure. It was useful when I was raising a family, but it turns out that this heightened sense of awareness is a major liability on the golf course. It is an affliction which rarely affects the men, for the things that distract me on the golf course are things my husband is blissfully unaware of. Sometimes, just to test that theory, I amuse myself by walking right up behind him while he is taking his shot, or noisily readjusting my golf bag when he is about to drive. He is oblivious to my antics.

Men of his generation have always had the luxury of devoting themselves totally to the project at hand, and they have developed the habit of becoming completely absorbed, to the exclusion of the outside world. It would take much more than merely his wife approaching him to distract such a man from anything, let alone his next golf shot. In fact, his wife approaching him is probably the thing *least* likely to distract him!

Most middle-aged women, on the other hand, have spent their entire adult lives practicing the art of knowing where their loved ones are at any given moment, and just what they are doing. When I took up golf, I had had those antennae up for twenty-five years. How was the simple act of swinging a golf club going to break this habit of a quarter century? And anyway, if it did, who would find my husband's jumper when he next mislaid it—which of course has begun happening with increasing frequency in recent years?

Little by little I have been able to persuade my husband of the merits of my argument: that years of honing my 'awareness' skills have taken their toll on my capacity for single-minded concentration, but that far from this being a

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defect that I should ‘get over’, on the contrary these skills are the very ones that helped me shepherd our children safely to adulthood. So now, whenever he noisily jams his golf club into his bag when I am about to drive, and he grumbles when I ask him to stop, I simply say ‘Once a mother, always a mother’, and he knows what I mean.

There is another aspect to the wife-and-mother thing, and it has to do with being a ‘maid’ with a small ‘m’. Every one of us has spent untold hours cleaning up mess, usually the mess of others. Cleaning up mess is so excruciatingly boring that it leads to serious avoidance tactics: try to persuade your family not to make the mess in the first place.

On the golf course this heritage manifests itself in several ways. Take the question of divots. Most of the men golfers I know try to take a divot on their approach shots in order to put back-spin on the ball. After all, it’s what the pros do. For many women, however, taking a divot goes against the habits of a lifetime, and after ten years of golf I still have an aversion to the practice. So strong is my reluctance to hit the ground, that for years I pulled my arms up as I swung through the ball, topping it every time.

My long suffering pro, Dave Wilkinson of London’s Knightsbridge Golf School, has a very effective solution to this problem: simply tee up your golf ball *on the fairway* until you conquer the problem. Not allowed in competitions of course, but if you’re playing that badly it’s probably a good idea to give them a miss for a while. From time to time in the years since learning this trick I have resorted to it again, and it never fails me.

Here’s another pitfall: women learn to do things efficiently. They put things ‘on the stairs to go up’ to avoid making unnecessary trips. They group their errands by location so as to finish them as fast as possible. And here is what many women do, at their peril, on the golf course: when their ball is in a bunker and the rake is rather far from their ball, they enter the bunker where the rake is lying and drag it behind

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them as they walk towards their ball, efficiently smoothing their footsteps as they go. The rake is then near to hand when they have taken their shot. Unfortunately, this constitutes 'testing the condition of the hazard' and incurs a two-stroke penalty. I know it saves time and steps, but the founding fathers of golf obviously never had to run a household.

Finally, one positive effect of all this tidying up is the automatic instinct to repair pitch marks on the green. I will not say that men don't do this. In fact they usually do. But many a woman cannot set foot on the green without casting an eagle eye around for the tiniest indentation in need of her ministrations. The fact that this behaviour might simply be evidence of a housewifely obsessive/compulsive disorder isn't important. It's beneficial for the course. So by the way, just in case you aren't sure about it, the technique for repairing a pitch mark can be found in Appendix F.