

Mr. Contestmaster, fellow Toastmasters, and welcome guests; I am here to pay tribute to my wife, Ann, who brought two things into my life -- sensitivity and class.

My life before Ann is reflected in poetry I wrote at the time. You might think that anyone who wrote poems about things like **flowers** and **Spring** must already possess some substantial degree of sensitivity -- but you'd be wrong!

For example:

**Flowers ...** by Raymond G. Wilson

I love to pick flowers,  
colored flowers, and those as white as snow.  
I love to pick flowers,  
pretty flowers. It kills them you know.

**Spring ...** by Raymond G. Wilson

Spring is here and I suppose  
we'll see the robin, leaf and rose.  
Things like these are signs of Spring,  
all but one a welcome thing:  
the bug that just flew in my nose.

And, of course, there was romantic poetry;

Dear, you're something special  
of all the girls I've dated  
I've seen the doctor,  
and suspect you're mononucleated.

One of the girls I dated was a political activist, to say the least. I wrote the following verse while she was protesting against the existence of a defense system:

Sugar is sweet.  
Violets are blue.  
Roses are red  
And so are you

And those were poems I wrote while at my best! At my worst, I wrote stuff like:

Diseased, disheveled, damned and bit  
by a mangy dog in a rabid fit.  
Swill and slime and wallowing swine,  
sweating bodies in bloody brine.  
Life is stinking, crude, and vile,  
so, don't tell me, you fool, to smile.

I was feeling a little low when I wrote that....

In fact, my whole life at that time was at a low. I was accomplishing nothing -- doing nothing but going to one party after another, one affair after another. ... I was miserable. (give practiced insincere look -- eg., "are they buying this?")

I'd often wake up mornings to find my clothes strewn all around the room  
and I'd still be in them....

Then Ann came along and changed all that. The first time she saw me she tried to pick me up. She turned to her girl friend and said, "get him."

A short time later she did just that. I gave her an engagement ring with the following poem:

Ann, object of all the love this mortal man can give,  
So it shall always be, as long as we both do live.  
This ring, the circle never ending means that we'll never part.  
The diamond, pure and permanent, is like what's in my heart.  
Now, let your sweet mind linger  
    on this thought before I close:  
this ring is for your finger  
    and will never fit my nose.

I was wrong -- it fits perfectly. ..

Once we were married, I started calling her cute things like "lamby-poop" and telling her that I worshipped the face she walked upon.

One day she realized what I really was saying, and then it was all over. Now I am quite accomplished in the call of the male *americanus domesticus* -- "Yes, dear!"

Many devout Christians -- as Ann and I are -- feel they can name the day they were "saved"; that is, that their salvation was guaranteed. Ann can name the exact moment she was saved -- it happened with the words, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." Accepting the idea that salvation requires that we bear our crosses, most people who know us see me as Ann's sure ticket to heaven.

The Christian bible commands wives to submit to their husbands. I tried that on Ann. Unfortunately, she had also read the *second* part of that passage which says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church". She pointed out to me that Christ *died* for the church, and that means I should drop dead!

Nevertheless, Ann does submit -- not to slavery, not to my selfish will -- but to the responsibilities of wife and mother. Oh, she went the equality route for awhile, but then decided that she did not deserve the demotion.

She gave me three beautiful children, two boys and a girl, all bright and athletic. Most important, like their mother, they are really good people.

One day I told Ann how happy I was that our nine-year old daughter seemed to be growing up just like her. Ann smiled and noted that pretty soon she'd be of dating age and meeting guys just like me. -- I bought a gun.

Actually, I decided to have a mother-and-daughter talk with my daughter. I pointed out to her that she wasn't complete -- that little girls came in two shipments -- and that her second shipment of parts would be arriving during the next few years.

She asked me what boys got for their second shipment. -- I answered, "a dirty mind".

At that point, Ann calmly stepped in and rescued us both. She tossed me out of the room and gave Kim her own explanation. Kim's growing up just fine, listening to her mother.

I'm happy it's Ann who's the leading influence in our daughter's life. My imprint shows up in the boy's behavior -- and whether that is for better or worse is a judgment call. ..

Remember that I said Ann brought class into my life. I did not say how much of rubbed off on me. For example, one morning at breakfast, one of my sons asked, "Dad, what's class?"

Ann smiled like she couldn't wait to hear me try to answer this one. I said, "Son , class is when you do not use your pancake to blow your nose."

Well, that boy went on to be accepted at one of the classiest class schools in the world -- the preppies' prep school -- Phillips-Andover. He works a bit there too, often answering the phone. He's easy to recognize by the way he answers: "Phillips-Andover . It's your dime; spit!"

I love my wife, mostly for loving me in spite of everything.

And this year I found a truly romantic way to show it (for I have really become a romantic son-of-a-gun). On Valentine's day, I rose early and prepared her a special breakfast -- heart-shaped pancakes and sausage patties. I placed them in front of her with a card inscribed with the immortal words of the author of kudzu, "I stepped in something in the barnyard of love and can't scrape it off-a my heart. ,.

Mr. Toastmaster!!!