

Birth

I guess I shouldn't take it personally, but I've often wondered why no one ever invites me to their birth. I mean the birth of their child, of course. I'm a likeable enough guy, and for as long as I can remember friends and relatives have been gleefully populating the world around me. I wonder why no one ever thinks, "Hey, let's invite Dave. He's a great guy." But truthfully, I wouldn't go. Too messy for my tastes and I can't imagine ever speaking with the mother again, so tongue tied would I be in her presence afterward, having witnessed something so intimate from the bottom up, so to speak. But still, it would feel nice to be asked.

Now the first person to say I'm full of it will be my wife, who has always insisted I was invited to the birth of our daughter and that I refused the honor. But try as I might to explain, she's never accepted that I didn't feel welcome. Oh sure, the doctor invited me during a pre-natal parents meeting, but fathers were then just being allowed into the delivery room and I could tell the fellow really didn't want me there. Call it a guy thing, but a fellow knows when another man would rather deliver a baby without any help. The way I read the Obstetrics Journals I found in the fathers' waiting room, I'm convinced most baby doctors like to work alone. Honest.

Many folks have the birthing process forced upon them. When my older neighbor, Willard, worked as a toll collector on the New York State Thruway, he turned around one morning to get his coffee and no more than ten feet away a woman sat on the floor of the booth having a baby. Or so she said. Willard learned years ago in his partying days to never believe a woman sitting on the floor.

"Is there something I can help you with, Miss?" Willard asked politely.

"I'm having a baby!" she screamed.

"Yes, M'am," Willard said courteously, as he had been taught in his Basic Toll Collector Training.

At that point the woman screamed at Willard again and told him to get ready. Willard offered to leave and go for help, to the drug store or the gas station down the road or anywhere for that matter.

"Am I ten centimeters?" she moaned.

Willard knew what she meant, but was unfamiliar with the metric system. He explained he had always meant to learn it, but life was peculiar and other responsibilities had intervened and ...

"Am I ten centimeters or not? I need to know if I can start pushing," she shouted.

"Now look, young lady," an exasperated Willard said, "I just don't know how big a centimeter is."

"Neither do I," the poor girl cried.

That's when Willard called me on my cell phone to ask how big is ten centimeters in America.

"Four inches," I told him. I wouldn't have wanted to be there with Willard, but I guess consulting by phone is OK.

"Start pushing!" I heard Willard shout at the other end of the telephone line.

I have to admit I was a little envious when our local newspaper wrote Willard up as a hero. There he was in the photo with a big dumb grin on his face down at the hospital with Mom, Dad and the baby. Not a single mention of my consult appeared in the article.

Had Willard bothered to tell the reporter that a friend and expert of sorts had accomplished a metric conversion in his head, I might be getting more invitations to the delivery room. Of course I'd decline, but I'd feel happy to know someone cared enough to invite me to their birth. And if pressed by anxious parents, I'd offer my cell phone number and say I'm doing only telephone consults these days.

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