

*Most people do not change behaviour
because someone scolds them.*

LIFE

DATING GIRL Couple fight over food



JOSEY VOGELS

Dear Dating Girl,

I am married to a wonderful man, but there is one thing that is becoming a big issue between us: he can't stand that I am a vegetarian. He knew I didn't eat meat when we were married, but I think he thought it was a phase I would grow out of. I have been vegetarian since I was 15. I am now 35. It is not a phase. Still, we are constantly getting into fights about this because he loves to cook and hates the fact that I won't eat meat. Sometimes, I get so worn down by fighting about it that I will force myself to have a little chicken or fish. But I can't help feeling resentful. I feel he should respect my beliefs and choices. He feels I am being stubborn by not allowing us to enjoy the kind of meals he likes to prepare. I know it sounds like a trivial thing, but it's starting to tear away at our marriage. Am I being unreasonable? Do you see any way we can resolve this?

Suffering an Eating Disorder

Dear Suffering,

I know it feels like a trivial dispute, but when you consider how much of our quality time with a mate revolves around enjoying food together, I can understand how this can become a pretty major dispute in your relationship. Especially since he loves to cook. That said, it must feel very hurtful to have him be so dismissive of something that is obviously important to you.

To me, it's a question of beliefs over convenience and, well, I believe that beliefs have the edge in this one. Perhaps you can research some challenging vegetarian recipes to satisfy his love of cooking. And, when he isn't willing to provide a vegetarian alternative, perhaps you can cook together and you take care of your own dietary needs.

Dear Dating Girl,

I am 28 and my guy is 42. We've been living together for seven years. We were both straight when we got together. However, a year after we met, we hooked up with another couple. Ever since then, I've been with several women and he doesn't mind as long as we're both present for it. Lately, I've noticed he's been getting into a lot of "she-male" pornography. Despite all of this, he says he still loves me and wants to be with me. It worries me that he only sticks around not because he is into me, but because he knows I accept him as bisexual and he is afraid of no one else will.

Looking For A Straight Answer

Dear Looking,

I think you're right – a relationship in which your guy thinks it's okay for you to constantly sleep with other women while he spends more and more time looking at pornography is a little out of whack. I'm sure your guy does love you and wants to be with you. You also may be right that he is sticking around at least in part because you accept him in ways that other less-judgmental women might not. Ultimately, what's most important is that you're sticking around for the right reasons.

Email questions to letters@joseyvogels.com or send snail mail to Dating Girl, The Gazette, Arts & Life Section, 1010 Ste. Catherine St. W., Suite 200, Montreal H3B 5L1. Personal replies cannot be provided.



VINCENTO D'ALTO THE GAZETTE

Jovette Francoeur refills her shampoo bottles at Coop La Maison Verte, a habit that helps cut down on the need for plastic bottles.

HECTORING PEOPLE is usually a pretty ineffective way to get them to see your point of view. That's why I love it when guests check out my bathroom to evaluate its 'greenness'

Shut up and eat your dinner

It happened again the other night. A dinner guest pointed out, with unconcealed relish, the blatant environmental crime in my bathroom. Right there in full view: a dozen or so plastic bottles of shampoo, conditioner and body wash in my shower.

How could I possibly buy so much plastic, considering I write an environmental column for The Gazette, she asked incredulously. Of course, she was right. It's not like I could plead ignorance. I know that unnecessary use of plastic is evil. I suppose I should be making my own shampoo by mixing some boiled soap nuts with dried gooseberry and herbs, and keeping it in a hand-carved bamboo bottle or something. I could use soap instead of body wash to reduce packaging, my friend hectored. At the very least, I could be saving energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by refilling empty shampoo bottles with generic hair products at my local health food store. She had me cornered. But instead of graciously thanking her for her "green tip" and vowing to change my ways, what did I do?

I tried, rather lamely, to defend myself. I spoke of the widely differing hair needs among my family members (one needs volume, one needs straightening, one needs moisturizing, and one is addicted to the smell of tropical fruits). I pointed out that in the event of a pandemic, we could live in our house for many months and then emerge malnourished but with clean, well-managed, fruity-smelling hair. I noted that even if we all used the same hair products, we would use the same number of plastic bottles over time.

MICHELLE LALONDE
GREEN LIFE

When none of these excuses washed (or even conditioned), I did what I should have done in the first place. I told my friend to shut up and eat her dinner.

In the almost two years I've been writing this column with my colleague Monique Beaudin, this kind of thing has happened more times than I care to recall. Friends, colleagues and family members love to point out every little thing I do or don't do that doesn't match the greenest standards of behaviour.

Of course, I find this ceaseless teasing and harassment hilarious and enlightening, and I simply can't get enough of it. "I thought you were the Gazette's environment reporter; isn't that a recyclable toilet roll in your waste basket?" "Is this your stack of print-outs? Don't you write an environment column?" "Did you leave the heat on in the living room again, Miss Green Life?"

When I pitched the idea of an environment column a few years back, someone suggested I call it "Queen of Green." It's a catchy moniker, but I didn't like the implication that I considered myself royally green. A good portion of my readers are much

greener than I am. I know, because I hear from them regularly.

I recently got an email message from a reader who says she stands at the checkout line and berates people for buying toilet paper made from virgin forests. I have heard from others who knock on car windows to ask motorists to stop idling. While I admire these peoples' courage, I am not sure how many minds they are changing.

I am greener now than I was two years ago, though I have a long way to go. I've learned a lot from the people we have interviewed for this column. For example, I now own a rain barrel. I use reusable bags, a reusable coffee mug, and washable hankies most of the time. I stopped burning wood at home. I eat less meat, shrimp and tuna. I got an energy audit on my house and I even bought carbon credits to offset the greenhouse gas emissions from a flight I took this winter.

So I am trying, but I'm no Queen of Green. I still enjoy a typically wasteful North American lifestyle. There's the air conditioner; too many flights (for which no offsets were purchased), long car trips, overconsumption in general and the shampoo bottles in particular.

But this is neither a mea culpa, nor a horn tooting. It is a reflection on how we can effectively influence those around us to live greener lifestyles. With all due respect to my witty friends and more courageous readers, scolding doesn't work for most people.

In fact, back when we started this column, there was concern in some corners that a hectoring environ-

ment column would turn people off. We agree, and we try to remain conscious of it.

If you start nailing people on every picayune aspect of their lifestyle that doesn't meet the most stringent standards of pure environmentalism, many will turn the page.

So this column is a place to find ideas for living a more environmentally aware lifestyle in Montreal. We generally presume our readers want to do that. It's also about issues in the news that affect our ability to do that. If it starts to take on a hectoring or "greener than thou" tone, please let us know.

Most people don't change behaviour because someone scolds them. Some change when they get information. Others change once they notice enough of their friends or people with whom they identify have done so. Recycling or bringing reusable bags to the grocery store used to be something only "eco-freaks" did, but now it's just normal.

I know hectoring doesn't work, because right after that dinner party, I felt a perverse urge to go out and buy more shampoo.

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ADVENTURES IN CAR SHARING

Thinking about joining Montreal's car-sharing service, Communauto? I'll tell you about my experiences as a new member on our Green Life blog at montrealgazette.com/greenlife

Routines do not have to enslave, they can enrich us

Always, I make great plans for holiday weekends: I'll get my recipe files in order; I tell myself. Tackle the listing pile of magazines in the clutter of my study. Check out shops in a neighbourhood I want to know better.

In the end, I hardly ever follow through on those plans. The time passes and before I know it, it's late in the final day of the long weekend and I'm crossing off from the list in my head the errands that didn't get done – and won't.

It's not that I'm indolent. But I'm undisciplined – and unable to function properly in the absence of structure. Without a proper timetable, I am a shiftless procrastinator.

Tell me to be somewhere by 7 and I'll be there. Okay, maybe by 7:05. But I'll be there. Call on me to get something done without giving me a deadline – and it's another story. I'll find 100 excuses not to do it, 1,000 things I'd rather do.

In much the same way as, 25 years after lighting up for the last time I still call myself

SUSAN SCHWARTZ
on routines

"I believe that the more we do, the more we're capable of doing."

a smoker who is currently not smoking, I think of myself as an idler made happily industrious by the demands of my work.

I wonder sometimes whether in retirement I will feel the way I do now on days when there are no outside claims on my time – unmoored, wearing flannel pyjama pants at 4 p.m. as I stare out the window and wonder where the day has gone.

"Up early or late, it never matters, the day gets away

from me," observed Freddy, a layabout in a 1950s Grace Paley short story called The Contest. "Summer or winter, the shade of trees or their hard shadow, I never get into my Rice Krispies till noon."

That could be me. Much as I admire, even envy, people disciplined enough to get things accomplished all on their own, I crave an imposed routine: not the kind of routine that means doing the same thing at the same time each day, but a steady thrum of activity whose momentum carries me along the day.

"Dana would say that she loves routine," mused Dave, Dana's husband in The Age of Grief, the tender 1999 Jane Smiley novella about the vagaries of love and family life. "That is how she got through a biochemistry major and, after all, with an ironclad routine that included hours of studying, but also nourishing meals, lots of sex and irresponsible activities with me. Her vision of routine is a lot broader than most people's

is. You might say that she has a genius for knowing what has to be included."

I believe that routine need not enslave us; if anything, it can enrich us. It is the everyday, sometimes mundane, details strung together that infuse our days and, in turn, our lives, with meaning: rising in the morning because we believe there is a reason to, whether it is to go to work or to volunteer or to care for people who need us, making the bed, straightening the spaces we inhabit so we will be drawn back to them, to the aroma of dinner, to our place at the table.

And unless we take on Sisyphean tasks or allow them to be foisted on us, I believe that the more we do, the more we're capable of doing. Certainly I know the flip side: the people on whom I rely least tend to be those with the fewest demands on their time.

Among the most enduring of human sorrows is the longing for a time gone by, Elizabeth Kaye observed in

her 1995 memoir, *Midlife: Notes From the Halfway Mark*, now out of print. At 50, she still sometimes mourned the loss of her youth, she wrote, but had accepted the fact that each stage of life has its value as well as its price. Looking forward to the future, she found herself surprisingly prepared to think about her own mortality.

"I want to, because I'm one more person who elevated procrastination and sloth into an art through sheer dint of practice," she wrote. These days, "I have no patience with sloth and I don't procrastinate much and I try not to waste time. My life has improved accordingly. I'm not surprised. I've always been one of those people who does better on a deadline."

We're all on a deadline, of course – our only real choices whether to use the time we have wisely or to waste it, to heed the ticking of the clock or to choose not to hear it.

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