

Fall Marriage

Contest celebrates fun side of love

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

What do a sock, fertilizer and a trench coat have to do with husbands and wives showing their love for one another?

All three "tools" helped couples illustrate their love — and all three are cited in stories submitted to Worldwide Marriage Encounter's "Love to be Wacky Contest."

Contestants were asked to submit by Sept. 2 stories illustrating "the wackiest thing I ever did to prove to my spouse that I loved him/her."

The couple judged to have the best story will win a weekend of lodging, dinner and entertainment. Runners up will receive a "Romance Starter Kit," or other prizes.

John and Belinda Brasley, of Bath, have been collecting local entries for the contest. As of Sept. 7, they had received approximately 20 essays they will now send on to organizers of the national competition, Belinda said.

Belinda explained that the idea behind the contest was to help counter the seemingly endless stream of bad news about marriage and families in the media. "(Marriage Encounter) wanted to do something to show some good things about marriage, some positive things," she said.

A judge at the national level, Joe Charest of the Gable Group in San Diego, Calif., noted that the family "is something that's critical to society, and the foundation of the family is the marriage relationship."

Charest said he and other national Marriage Encounter officials had dreamed up the contest as something to boost the family's image, and to have a little fun. But he acknowledged that he did not know how many entries have been submitted since essays were being handled by numerous couples across the country like the Brasleys. His hope was for at least a few hundred entries.

Among the few stories that had already reached him, Charest reported one that stood out involved a \$25,000

telephone call.

Apparently a certain husband, Charest explained, was working at the Arctic Circle and had been away from his wife for some time. One night he went to a casino night and won \$25,000 in scrip — or paper money — which he cashed in on Christmas Day to make a long, intercontinental phone call to his wife.

Belinda Brasley said she has also received some unusual entries. In one case, one husband kidnapped his wife from work, not telling her where they were going, then treated her to a weekend at a hotel.

There were also the three entries involving a sock, fertilizer and a trench coat.

The sock entry tells the story of a wife who was suffering from a terrible head cold. After she ran out of tissues at church, her husband gave her his sock to use. "She realized how much he loved her that he would give her his sock," Belinda commented.

The fertilizer was cleverly used by one husband who made a romantic pattern on the lawn. When the fertilizer took effect, he had his wife look out to see an area of the lawn in the shape of a very green heart with their initials in it.

As for the trench coat, one Halloween husband took the kids trick-or-treating. While he was getting them to bed after returning home, his wife put on a trench coat, a wig, and dark glasses — and nothing else — then went outside to the front door, rang the bell and "surprised" her husband.

"He didn't recognize her at first," Brasley quipped.

Charest laughed upon hearing about



the trench coat entry. "I imagine we'll get a few of those," he said.

Once all the entries are accounted for, Charest said some may be published as part of a collection. He also said that depending on the response to the contest this year, it may become an annual event.

"We're always looking for something that might be fun," he said.

And that means married couples who didn't enter this year will have a chance to think up some wacky tokens of love for the next time around. Some good places to start might be the laundry hamper and your local garden shop.

Pledge to help poor takes pair from vows to Worker house

By Paul Grankauskas
Catholic News Service

CHANCELLORSVILLE, Va. — At their wedding, John and Polly Mahoney pledged more than to remain faithful to each other.

"We made a life commitment to serve the poor," said John Mahoney. "We did it as part of our wedding vows."

After 11 years of living out their vow in the Washington Catholic Worker community, the Mahoneys moved in September 1993 to Chancellorsville, opening the first Catholic Worker house in the Arlington diocese. They are now hoping to start a retreat house.

The couple met in Boston, where John had taken temporary vows as a Franciscan and was working with the poor. Polly was helping runaways in her home. They met at a prayer meeting and developed their common interest in serving the poor.

Their work led them to what was to be a three-year commitment to Catholic Worker, a lay movement dedicated to nonviolence, simplicity of life and service.

"Catholic Worker is not usually a lifetime commitment," Polly said. "There are a few people like John and me who make it a lifetime commitment."

The Catholic Worker home in Washington served as a transitional shelter for the homeless. But as other shelters opened, the Mahoneys found their work being duplicated and they decided to move. They agreed to focus on offering retreats for the homeless and the poor — those who otherwise might not be able to afford the experience.

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