
On the Defense

CINDY STRANDVOLD

I'm a stay at home mom. So there. Deal with it. Sorry, I admit I tend to get a little defensive about my choices in life. It's just that I get so tired of meeting new people and answering the inevitable question. "And what do you do?" Those five words are all it takes to send me into a tail-spin of inferiority and self-doubt. Given the reaction my answer often gets, you can hardly blame me.

"Oh really? Isn't that nice," they say. And then I get the LOOK. I'm sure you know what I mean. The raised eyebrow. The little smirk. The eyes scanning the room for someone more interesting to talk to.

I've heard all the snappy comebacks. Like the one that says, "I'm raising the next generation to change the world. And what do you do?" But I never have the guts to say anything like that. Instead, I smile politely, wanting to shriek, "Wipe

that look off your face. It's not like I sit around eating bonbons and watching daytime TV! Just because I don't get paid, doesn't mean my job isn't important!"

I hate the LOOK.

I also hate another question people often ask. "And what is your degree in?" I know people who feel inferior because they didn't go to college. That's not my problem. I went to college, all right. Even graduated with honors. I just hate to admit it.

I could lie and say my degree is in Aerospace Engineering or Pediatric Neurosurgery. But if I tell the truth I have to answer General Home Economics. I cringe when I say it.

Usually I try to mumble the General Home Economics part and quickly add, "with a minor in Human Development



..... "I looked on child rearing not only as a work of love and duty but as a profession
..... that was fully as interesting and challenging as any honorable profession in the
..... world and one that demanded the best I could bring to it." - Rose Kennedy

and Family Studies." Not that it helps.

It wasn't that I was particularly looking to hone my homemaking skills. My degree only required one cooking and one sewing class-and offered a little of everything else. That was its attraction. Every time I took an interest survey, I scored high across the board. I couldn't imagine picking just one thing to do for the rest of my life. So at the time, taking a general approach seemed like a good idea.

During my four years of college, I received a broad education in subjects ranging from Creative Writing and Spanish to Statistics and Anatomy. I have no regrets on that score. What I learned has stood me in good stead for many years. See, even now I'm defending myself. It's the name. General Home Economics sounds so lame, and like the fact I played the accordion as a kid, it's embarrassing to talk about.

Not long ago, a chirpy young man on the other end of the phone announced he was calling on behalf of the Alumni Association of my alma mater. Would I take a few minutes to update my records?

Great. I know exactly what's coming, and it's not the monetary solicitation I dread. I frown at the phone, debating hanging up. From experience, I know if I refuse to answer the questions now, they'll just call back another day. Might as well get it over with. Steeling myself, I reluctantly agree.

He confirms my contact information after the canned spiel touting the College of Applied Human Sciences. (When I was there it was the College of Home Economics. I wonder how long ago they changed that?) Then we move on to the tricky stuff. "I see your degree was in . . ." The chirpy voice pauses in disbelief. ". . . General Home Economics?"

"Right," I answer stoically. Then I think, if they can change the name, why can't I? Why couldn't I have a degree in General Applied Human Sciences? It's vague enough to not sound too dorky.

"And are you working in your field?" the caller asks next.

Hmm. Good question. Exactly what kind of career did my degree prepare me for anyway? I'm not even a very good cook. The familiar defensiveness kicks in. My face feels hot.

This is where I usually mutter something about not working in a "real" job. But this time I got mad instead. Why on earth was I allowing some punk college kid to make me feel inferior? So what if I'm a stay at home mom with a four year college degree in General Home Economics? I'm also a highly creative, multi-talented, intelligent woman. I happen to like me. And I wouldn't be who I am if it weren't for all my experiences in forty-two years worth of living-even the embarrassing ones.

In that split second I decide it's high time to suck it up and start valuing those experiences instead of trying to pretend they never happened. Am I working in my field? Absolutely.

I chirp back, "Why, yes, I am!"

"Excellent." I picture him checking the proper square on his survey. "And what is it you do?"

"I'm a stay at home mom." Long pause.

"I see," he murmurs. I suppose there's no little box for this response. He stammers something about young children.

My shoulders shake in silent laughter. I don't bother to clarify that my kids are now 16 and 13. I figure that bit of information might send him over the edge. And no, I didn't make a donation, although maybe I should have. After all, thanks to his phone call I found something I'd been missing for a long time. My self-respect.



Cindy Strandvold lives in a 111-year-old house with her husband, two kids and three cats. She prefers chocolate chip cookies to bonbons. She has no time for television thanks to her passion for working on the children's book she aims to get published someday.

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