

Waiting for My Wife

Ben Killingsworth

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Contemplating whether John Wayne ever went to a baby shower is of high rank among idle thoughts enlisted for literary—or at least journalistic—service. And Ben Killingsworth put it to good use in one of the 101 weekly columns he wrote for the *Idyllwild Town Crier* (CA), included in this collection.

And had Wayne gone, Killingsworth wonders, would he have ambled over to the expectant father and called him “pilgrim”?

The questions are a nice touch, prompted by Killingsworth’s own invitation to a shower; a good way to lead into musing about how, on an emotional level, “fathers have babies, too.”

It’s the way of column writing, especially for small-town weeklies, to take the ordinary and transform it into something more. It’s more difficult than it would seem, and Killingsworth does it well, on a hit-and-miss basis. Killingsworth, who took up column writing after fifty-five years in law enforcement, has been recognized by the California Newspaper Publisher Association and the National Newspaper Association.

Taken one at a time, once a week in 400- or 500-word doses, over morning coffee at the local restaurant in the town of 3,500 in the San Jacinto Mountains, the misses are forgiven and forgotten by the time the reader gets to the cash register. The hits become the talk of the town.

However, when 101 of the columns are bunched together in 301 paperback book pages, the bar is higher. Columns are, by design, tailored for fleeting attention, but in book form they are like a long hike with uncomfortable stumbles between vistas.

A conversation Killingsworth has with trees is one-sided to the extreme. Observations about how people eat are unappetizing. And bemoaning the end of chivalry because he saw a woman taking trash to the dump tends to convict him on a charge of male chauvinism, which he denied, brought against him by a woman in another column.

He does best when he’s writing from the male perspective, as in a he-man description of his heart attack in a column entitled, “The Siren Tolls for Thee.” He describes finding himself lying on an imitation leather seat in the American Legion bar thinking, “please don’t let me die lying here in this bar—I don’t even drink, for Pete’s sake.”

“A couple of days later, I had a new friend,” he says. It was an implanted cardioverter defibrillator.

In the title piece, “I’m waiting for My Wife,” he strikes a blow for men everywhere. He tells of trailing his wife, Nanci, as she made her way from gift shop to gallery and then to another gift shop and another gallery, ad infinitum. Usually, he waited for her outside, along with other men who were waiting outside for their wives. And to universal understanding, one would announce to the others that “I’m waiting for my wife.”

Sometimes male chauvinism is justified.

THOMAS BEVIER (February 20, 2012)

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