

4-16-2024

## Lord of the Flies, As Replayed in My Dining Room

Renee Burns Lonner

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### eCommons Citation

Lonner, Renee Burns, "Lord of the Flies, As Replayed in My Dining Room" (2024). *Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop Blog*. 23.

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# Lord of the Flies, As Replayed in My Dining Room

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Tuesday April 16, 2024

By Renee Burns Lonner

My husband has been playing poker with the same group of guys — minus the couple who have died — since he was 13. These boys played poker in middle and high school *instead* of going to class, not after class. Somehow, they all went to college, graduated and became

professionals. I still cannot figure out how.

Fast forward to middle age. Steve's poker group began meeting monthly in our dining room soon after we were married and I observed a species I had never seen before. They spoke a language all their own. No one called another one by his actual name — and it was not as if their nicknames were intuitive (hardly in the realm of Bob for Robert). Apparently, it was too much trouble to call my husband by his last name — necessary because his first name was shared by several others in the group — so they just dropped the first letter. One guy's name morphed into a dark reference to his near-drowning accident as a child — his name became Fish. Yes, as we say, men and women are equal but not the same. Truly. And it's not just their names — they have their own language, a shorthand developed over decades of deciphering each other's grunts. Like chimpanzees.

I noticed I had entered a different culture the first time my husband asked me to join a few of them for dinner before the game. I'm the only female and ok, I'm a slow-ish eater. When they finished, they simply asked for the check. I looked down at my plate and asked for a to-go box. The next month, I had the good sense to order my dinner and the to-go box at the same time.

It is in this context that my husband told me last week that one of the guys who used to play with them a long time ago would be rejoining the group. They had lost a member of the group and needed one more or they would not have a game. Then he added that the long-lost member had recently been diagnosed with a neurological disorder that affects cognitive abilities, does not drive and his wife would be bringing him and picking him up. At that point, I stopped laughing inside about this group of now-old middle schoolers and told him that I didn't think that was a good idea. In fact, I thought it was kind of mean — after all, poker moves quickly and this man's mind may not.

My husband waved aside my concerns and told me that their long-lost poker player was thrilled to be included. And that his wife would pick him up immediately if anything went south. Once again, I was reminded of the fact that my husband and I are opposites. I am cautious, almost always have the long view, plan my little heart out and — to boot — I'm a therapist, concerned with how people feel, how they are going to feel if x or y happens.

And the obvious point here? He loves to gamble — not usually for money, rather the concept. He and his golfing partner bet on how many strokes each will take to get to the next hole, how many squirrels will go after their lunch, whether the fourth of their foursome will be just on time or late. You get the idea. So he's gambling that all will go well with this returning poker player. Should I tell you that I hate gambling in general, in all forms — or is that perfectly obvious by now?

So I left to do an errand as his poker buds arrived, thinking “This is going to be a disaster. I’m glad the man’s wife is a lovely person and lives close.” I returned home a couple of hours later, with the game still going on. Wow, it sounds pretty normal in my dining room, I thought as I walked in. The returning poker player was looking intently at his cards. There’s the usual laughing and speaking in tongues.

At about 10 p.m. the game broke up and as the last guy left, my husband closed the door and sighed, “He cleaned our clocks. Won most of the hands. All the guys want him back for next month’s game.”

— Renee Burns Lonner

Renee Burns Lonner is a management consultant for television newsrooms and a licensed psychotherapist based in Los Angeles. Her published work has appeared in many professional publications. During the pandemic, she shifted to humor writing and has been published by Medium, LOL Comedy and the Erma Bombeck Writers Workshop blog. In 2021, she published her first humor book *If You Give a Man a Tesla: A Parody* and is currently working on a collection of essays.