

TO LOVE, HONOR... AND NEGOTIATE

Marriage is a series of transactions: You cook, I'll do the dishes.
You raise the kids, I'll earn the money. You watch HBO tonight, I get PBS tomorrow.
Two couples on the deals they've made, for better or for worse.



The author and his wife, Dana Corsello, the first female rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in San Francisco.

The radiant and the irradiated at home in San Francisco.



She's a Big Cheese. He's a Little Annoyed

BY ANDREW CORSELLO

MY WIFE IS RADIANT. IT comes naturally to her. Yes, she's very beautiful, and that beauty is the first thing people notice and discuss about her. But hers isn't the radiance of a model or a starlet; it's a radiance that emits warmth—*love*—as well as light. What Justice Stewart said of obscenity can be said of Dana's radiance: Words fail, but you know it when you see it. *Yup, there it is.*

Dana's in the radiance business. Literally—she's an Episcopal priest. And while she's been radiating throughout the three years of our courtship and the 11 of our marriage, something's changed in the last nine months. Thanks to this ever-crescendoing glowiness, I am typing these words while looking out at San Francisco Bay from the top floor of a big and beautiful house I could never afford were I actually required to pay for it. It ought to go without saying that I type with glee. Yes, it ought to. And yet, despite the Jiminy Cricket perched on my shoulder yelling *stop the whining!* until he's red in the face, there is a degree to which the bounty of my wife's radiance has left me feeling, well, a little irradiated.

As well as robbed of one of my favorite punch lines. "And what do you do, Andrew?" I've been asked at countless cocktail parties over the years, and if I'd not yet reached that evening's joke quotient by introducing Dana as "my first wife," I'd said, "Oh, I'm a preacher's wife." I was quick with that joke because I could afford to be; because as everybody around us

presumably understood, I was the dynamic force in the life we were building together, the sun around which all else revolved. I suppose this arose in part from our relative incomes; my annual earnings always doubled and sometimes tripled hers. But mostly it arose from my being a magazine writer—from years of training and straining to be a voice, the voice, in the stories I wrote, and in my own domain.

Perhaps I should mention that I have a big fat ego. Huge. Hungry. Hairy in all the wrong places. Want to see it? Be glad to show it to you. That's who I am. It's how I do. Yet in terms of the algebra of our marriage, the ego has always...worked. Since I can do what I do for a living from anywhere, it's Dana's job prospects that determine our geography. And the ego has always blinded me to the fact that my wife has dragged me all over the continental U.S. The ego is what's allowed me to look in the mirror each morning and think, *There he is, the Big Enchilada*, even as I've trailed my woman like a lapdog.

But then suddenly, last summer, everything changed. After a rigorous, nearly yearlong winnowing process, St. Luke's Episcopal Church in San Francisco named Dana as its first female rector. In August we moved from Richmond, where for eight years she had been the associate rector of a large urban parish. Christian vow of poverty? Please. The job comes with a rectory, which is another way of saying that we live—for free; we don't even pay our own freaking utility bills—in a giant house adjacent to Pacific Heights. The wonders my wife's radiance has wrought! Extraordinary private schools (Episcopal, ♦

Cheap Tricks

FAMILY VALUES

Every Tuesday Tex-Mex chain Chevy's feeds kids for free at most locations (chevysfreshmex.com).

Children will love the free weekly story time at Pottery Barn Kids (every Tuesday from 11 to 11:30 A.M., potterybarnkids.com) and the free craft sessions at educational supply store Lakeshore Learning (every Saturday from 11 A.M. to 3 P.M., lakeshorelearning.com).

To stretch your clothing dollar, join the Sears KidVantage program, which lets you exchange worn-out children's items from Sears for new garments of the same size—no questions asked (sears.com).



TASTY TIDBITS

A Starbucks “tall” is not the smallest of all—the coffeehouse honors off-menu requests for its eight-ounce “short cappuccino,” which costs up to 30 cents less.

AMC Theaters lets you cash in points for popcorn (amcentertainment.com), and the Purple Points program from high-end confectioner Vosges can turn the dollars you spend into a tour of Paris (vosgeschocolate.com/purple_points).

Each February IHOP holds its famed National Pancake Day (ihoppancakeday.com) and has given away more than 10.1 million buttermilk pancakes since starting the event in 2006.

Want to fill up on the cheap at home? A satiety index published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* says the most filling food is the humble—and eminently affordable—boiled potato.

of course) that we would otherwise have had little chance of getting our sons into. The list goes on.

You know where this is going, right? Yup: I did nothing to procure this wonderful life, I couldn't have done it if I tried—and I DON'T LIKE IT. Something within me, something disoriented and not a little bit petty, keeps protesting that this is not the deal I signed up for, that this is not my beautiful house; yes, even that this is not my beautiful wife!

And I know where you're going: just an unreconstructed chauvinist pig who can't handle his wife wearing the pants. But I think something else, more fundamental, less about power and more about self-understanding, is going on.

Dana now runs one of the signature churches in one of America's signature cities. She's a persona, a

position, the face of that church. And the face of our marriage, our family, our life. In San Francisco, it's crazy but I swear to God it's true, I am no longer the magazine writer Andrew Corsello. I am no longer even Andrew Corsello, period. I am the spouse of the rector of St. Luke's Church. She took my name when we married, and now she's *taken* it; in this town, “Corsello” means her, and it's only by her beneficence that I'm allowed to partake of it.

I expected people to perceive my wife differently in San Francisco than they did in Virginia. She's running the show now, and that commands a qualitatively different kind of regard. I also expected that, as in Virginia, our social life would be largely, even entirely, a function of our church life, especially with us living in the church [CONTINUED ON PAGE 220]

The Deal We Couldn't Refuse

BY CARLA POWER

GAZE UP AT THE FLUORESCENT strip lighting in the surgeon's office, willing the Beatles on my iPod to keen even louder for Dear Prudence to “come out to play.” I need them to drown out the sound of hypodermic needles being stripped from their wrappers, to out-sing the crisp *clack* of some giant stapler-like thingy being readied to pierce flesh. I begin to make deals with God: If it's benign, I'll sponsor an Indian schoolgirl's education. If it's benign, I'll help Julia really nail her multiplication tables. I'll call my mother more, do more dishes, compost for our nonexistent garden.

Biopsies are recent inventions, but negotiating with God must be among man's most ancient ones. Of course, my prebiopsy bargaining was just pleading in disguise: faux brokering between the entirely powerless—a supine woman, clinging to the paper strip down the middle of a doctor's examining table—and the all-powerful, whether one calls it God, the Fates, or “the luck of the draw.”

To cut a real deal, both parties need some power. Gangsters and parents both know this well. When Marlon Brando, as Don Corleone, promises to make someone “an offer he can't refuse,” it's a bargain struck at gunpoint, another deal-that's-not-one. As a mother, I've used this thuggish tactic more than I'd like to admit. “That's the deal” is a common slogan in our home. When my husband or I use it, our daughters



A fruitful negotiation: The author and her British husband, Antony, in London.

know they've reached a red line, not to be crossed. It is bedtime. That gerbil cage needs cleaning.

Time was, women cut far fewer deals than they do today. In the past, when they remained dependent on their fathers or husbands, their lives were less about striking deals than hoping for the best. Fairy princesses—those perfect models of traditional passivity—don't cut deals. Whether they're sweeping floors while their sisters swan off to the ball or marrying the prince, both drudgery and love fall on them from great heights. Deals don't happen in dictatorships, where, let's face it, most of those princesses live.

Real live women negotiate. Over the past century, we got the vote, the Pill, washer-dryers, and anti-discrimination laws, giving us choices, freedoms—and the ability to strike any number of deals. Nowhere is this more true than in the arena of relationships:

In November 2009, the Obamas revealed in *The New York Times* that their own partnership is a series of negotiations, a deft balance between his political ambitions and her own professional and familial ones. When Michelle said that the equality of a union “is measured over the scope of the marriage; it’s not just four years or eight years or two,” it seemed clear that the post-White House era could very much be hers. Their bald acknowledgment of the brokering involved in their marriage wasn’t a sign of two lawyers at work but two equals in love.

To be sure, the traditional blueprint for “marrying well”—her beauty, his paycheck—still proves popular. In my leafy London neighborhood, I know women who have made such deals. They often seem calmer than I am, and they’re inevitably sleeker, with taut skin and trainer-honed bodies. Many of their husbands leave the house before dawn to catch the Hong Kong markets when they open, returning home late, ruffling their kids’ hair while they sleep. These women vacation on small and exquisite islands, but they’re never sure when they’ll reach them, as they are tethered to their husbands’ timetables. That’s the deal.

When I met the man I was to marry, he certainly didn’t seem like a deal. Lacking height, a hearty handshake, and career ambitions, he didn’t conform to the traditional notions of a catch. Antony was a slight, suburban-born Englishman, a dead ringer for Christopher Robin in *Winnie the Pooh*. When we met, he was languidly pursuing a history doctorate, but his keenest aspiration was really to reread Proust—for the umpteenth time—and see as many movies as possible. His vast stores of warmth took time to find, guarded as they were by those twin emotional weapons favored by the British male, irony and reserve. I spent a weekend parsing a document that turned out to be a love letter but which I’d thought was some sort of philosophy essay laced with liner notes from a Prince album.

He was low-key, this Antony. While I suggested we move—to New York, New Delhi, anywhere, really, for an adventure—he was happy to stay in his hometown, London, and to abandon his doctorate for a quiet job in the British civil service. Once I fell for him, I knew I’d have to plan on a life outside the United States. It wasn’t just his job that was strictly

British. His character was, too. I knew that it wouldn’t be easy to make the switch from his calm, structured life to the cut-and-thrust of the American job marketplace. In the land of *Let’s Make a Deal*, nobody would have the patience to wait for Ant’s brilliance to shine through his self-effacing manner.

Sometimes I’m stupid enough to think we should make a more conventional deal. During the boom, with millions making millions, my husband remained content with his modest take-home pay. “You’re smart,” I’d occasionally nag. “Why not be a banker and make us rich?” His reply was succinct: “Nine weeks of vacation, and job security.” In my heart, I knew they were both key to my own treasured freedoms: to travel, and to freelance. And when the financial market crashed, and FOR SALE signs blossomed in London’s bankers’ neighborhoods, I was reminded once again of his wisdom and my foolishness.

His ambitions were tame—except those he had for me. When I got a chance to leave London to study in New York, he said, “Go.” Once there, when I was offered a Manhattan-based magazine job, he was hardheaded: “Stay.” When the chance for a summer in Cairo came up, he said, “Go.” Even now, 15 years on, married, with two children, he still wants me to keep going. The other

week, as I planned a few days in Pakistan for a story, he was busy arguing that I should tack on a short hop to Kabul. “Go,” he urged. “Go.” “Are you trying to get me killed?” I teased him. No, he just knew a few days there would help me with a book I’m writing. I didn’t go, fretting I’d miss home too much. That panicked him, for he worries I’ll get so enmeshed in our family that I won’t do the two other things I love to do: write and report. “I want you to stay the woman I married,” he’ll murmur. “You need to hit the road again. Go.”

These urgings, of course, only make me want to stay. That said, I know that even if love lasts, deals don’t. To stay married we’ll doubtless have to broker new deals, and newer ones after that...till death do us part. Making deals with God may be a nonstarter. Done right, making deals with your spouse never ends. **Q**

Carla Power is at work on a book about the Muslim women’s rights movement.



WHEN I MET ANTONY, HE CERTAINLY DIDN’T SEEM LIKE A DEAL: HE WAS LACKING HEIGHT, A HEARTY HANDSHAKE, AND CAREER AMBITIONS.



TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Take Home Depot’s free clinics on everything from installing a ceiling fan to planting a vegetable garden (homeimproverclub.com) or Williams-Sonoma’s free cooking classes (register at your local store).

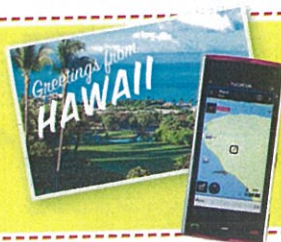
Here’s a capital idea: Any student who resides in the District of Columbia is eligible for college tuition grants from the U.S. government (osse.dc.gov).

The rest of us can access free online video classes from Yale (yale.edu) and MIT (web.mit.edu).

Ready to hit the books? Many university libraries hold sales near the end of each term.

And any ivory-tickler near South Orange, New Jersey, should make sure to hit the annual piano sale in March at Seton Hall University (973-275-2966 for info).

THE GIVE-O-WAY!
My Blue Heaven



Go ahead and get lost! **Nokia** is giving a winner and a friend each a Nokia X6 smartphone—with voice-guided and turn-by-turn navigation with Ovi Maps—and a nice place to try it out: Hawaii (trip includes airfare, rental car, and seven nights at Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea). To enter for a chance to win, go to oprah.com/deals. For abbreviated rules, see Shop Guide. (Any O reader can get 10 percent off the \$399 Nokia X6 with code **OPRAH10** at nokiusa.com.)