

## What's So Wrong about Being Clear-Minded?

**By Larry LaRue**

The most dangerous aspect of talking to a wife is you can never be certain when she's actually listening.

A few weeks ago, Marie caught me staring off into space and asked what I was thinking, and I answered truthfully. Nothing. Then I told her about one of Jerry Seinfeld's bits, where he said he could answer the question most women wondered.

What are men thinking?

"Nothing," Seinfeld said.

It got a big laugh, but it was also true. And it's not just that we often aren't thinking. Marie is always curious, for instance, when I come home from covering a baseball game. What did good friend Kirby Arnold and I talk about?

Nothing.

In truth, we might have talked about baseball, our day, politics, who had the best lead to his story – any number of topics. Those conversations, however, only last a minute or two each, coming between pitches, between innings.

I tend to talk in a stream of consciousness. If it comes to mind, it often comes out of my mouth. This has led, more than once, to incredibly foolish utterances.

A month ago, for instance, two women in the press box were talking about men, and one of them said her former boyfriend's name had been unpronounceable. A thought came to mind.

"I'd guess that means you never called his name out in the night," I said.

She spit up soda and laughed – thank God! – but I realized not everyone would have. My mind needs a good editor.

This is not to say that men don't think deeply – we do. It's just an effort, and in the moments between working out the issues of the world, we tend to come off like a cat staring out a window.

Occasionally, that signals something complex is going on. More often, it means we're doing what many of us do best.

Nothing.

Knowing that is one thing. Having people accept it about you is another.

When I came home from work this week, Marie told me she'd spent time on the telephone with her brother and sister-in-law. Naturally I asked what they'd talked about.

"I told Alyce what you said about men thinking nothing," she said. "And she thought that was interesting. So we started talking about the men we know and whether we could see them thinking nothing."

Marie's brother – and Alyce's husband – Dave, is always thinking. About his next project at work, about whether he should rewire his house or build a brick patio for his mother, or a photo he'd like to take and how he could set it up.

"We decided we can't see Dave thinking about nothing," Marie said, and I had to agree. David's mind is rarely at rest.

"Then we talked about Richard," Marie said. Her younger brother.

Richard is a numbers man, a devoted father who loves working with his son, Riley. For Richard, all of life is a puzzle that can be solved with careful study, and he's constantly thinking.

"We decided we can't see Richard thinking nothing," Marie said.

I should have seen this coming; of course, but did not.

"Then I told Alyce I could see you thinking about nothing, and she said 'Yes, I can see that, too,'" Marie said.

So the other men in the family are thinkers and I'm a lump? That's my identity?

"No, we know you think," Marie said. "We can just both see you thinking about nothing."

It was true, but it was not a thing I wanted to be known for. "How," I asked, "did the topic of me thinking about nothing come up?"

"I just told her what you said when I asked what you were thinking," Marie said.

Again, my fault entirely. Asked a direct question, I'd answered honestly. I just never thought everyone would agree with me so entirely.

It bothered me a little. So I sat in an easy chair and stared out the window. Before long, one of our two cats joined me, hopping up on the sill and gazing out into space, as thoughtless as an apple.

"Oh, shut up," I said.