



Houseguests can be great

By **SALLY D. KETCHUM**
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“Why don’t you come up some-time and see me?”
—Mae West, 1933

“Fish and visitors stink in three days.”
—Benjamin Franklin, 1736

There is a reason for the phrase “Up North.” Clearly it means that people “Down South” come “Up North” and stay with us. But, it’s my fault, you see. I never merely hug and say good-bye to folks. I always seem to add, “Come on up and see us sometime.” Should I practice reticence and just shut up?

To be truthful: I love houseguests. Make that *most* houseguests. I have appreciated the pleasure of hosting many perfect guests, for dinners, for the day, for a week or so, and on one occasion, a summer. There are painful exceptions, of course. Yet, as hosts, we must endure.

Let me tell you “Houseguest Reality Tales” — horrors to the host.

■ Dr. Bull, Ph. D., M. S., M.B.P. — Keen on the academe, one knows that Dr. Bull is a Doctor of Philosophy, a Master of Science, but he is also an M. B. P.— Most Boring Person. Doc Bull is a pelecypodist — save the walk to the dictionary. It means he is an expert on bi-valves — on clams. Really.

And don’t we wish he would clam up! Perhaps the fault is mine — I always thought that bi-valves had something to do with bicycle tires. Worse than Doc Bull going and on about pelecypods in Puget Sound, he arrives punctually for dinner with peculiar hospitality gifts — last year it was a crocheted rooster to cover my beloved Wedgwood teapot.

“American folk art,” he noted.

Moreover, although Doc Bull arrives, he never lets us know when

he is leaving. Unlike his clams, his visit is open-ended. Sadly, like his clams, he is tight-fisted.

■ Crewel Catherine, Established Knit-Picker. Crafty Catherine arrives with her duffle bag and a large Tupperware craft crate. She nests in the largest chair in the family room — her vacation station — and surrounds herself with various TV tables and good light. She stays there, with needlepoint or crewel, chatting and tatting, forging croquet for crochet. She is so firmly entangled in her macramé that helping in the kitchen, joining in a swim, or helping with grocery shopping for dinner is out of the question.

She occasionally interrupts her chatting and tatting by issuing orders such as, “Hook up that video for me,” “Drop dairy foods and double desserts” and “Needle the kids to be on time.”

She leaves seven potholders, a macramé bracelet which ensures a good love life and a sweater sleeve later.

Bo Fox, bailiff for a downstate court, is the opposite. He not only participates in the party, he is the party. Ol’ Bo can eat. He eats before hors d’ oeuvres. He is browsing in the fridge before I can say “chips,” let alone remember whether the “s” in hors d’ oeuvres is silent. No cold brew for Bo — he always arrives, and never leaves, with a large, handled bottle of good vodka. It even stays by his bedside, like a companion dog (thus lending truth to the “hair of the dog” expression).

Bo eats his way through preprandial offerings, he cleans his plate, and endures a brief digestive hiatus while others finish, and then he wades in with relish to finish their plates. Bo once finished off five barbecued stuffed pork chops after he had eaten three from his own serving. We have witnesses.

Irish Bo is happily married to Maria and their many children visit with sleeping bags which nest in extraordinary places about the

or grating



house. One night, exhausted after cooking for Bo’s clan and finding three bagged children in my bed, I sought refuge in a quilt in the hammock in the yard. As July has its way, the sun rose earlier than I wanted, and squinting, my first sight was Bo, sober and showered, shaven and pink-faced, dapper in

starched white shorts, hoisting his handled jug to his lips, and belting “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning.” It made me wish I was in Oklahoma.

Yet, these are the rare exceptions. Selective about memories, I choose to recall long, late feasts; story-telling guests; camaraderie by

the fire after cold, windy sails; and saying good-bye to visitors I’d like to keep.

The ancients understood the importance of hospitality. Homer wrote the rules: good Greeks welcomed travelers with food, drink and hospitality before they even asked for names.

Aeschylus philosophically mused, “What is pleasanter than the tie of host and guest?”

What indeed. Enjoy the summer — and your summer guests —just as long as that tie doesn’t become a noose, er, nuisance.

Sally D. Ketchum is a local freelance writer .

A guide to gracious hosting

- Determine arrival and departure dates, even if you have to ask directly.
- Clean and empty fridge and freezer as much as possible. Stock with easy-to-cook and versatile foods and snacks.
- After bathrooms are clean, clear counters of family items, put out attractive flowers or a candle and arrange minimal cleaning supplies in a close cupboard or under the sink.
- Tactfully discuss bed times ahead of the first evening.
- Be alert to read the signals of guests. Are they weary and would like rest and enjoy low-key activities? Or are they energetic and want to explore local shopping or water or golf?
- Ask about any food allergies. Better safe than sorry.
- Explain which linens guest should use. Be clear. Wooden racks, usually used for drying, are inexpensive and can use used for guests’ towels in their own rooms.
- Put a selection of reading materials a basket in the guest room.
- Arrange a bowl of goodies for the guest room. Avoid soft fruit; it beckons flies. Mixtures of wrapped candies, mints and trail mix satisfy guests when dinner is late. Also leave bottled water.
- Two meals work best after coffee, juice and rolls are offered early mornings. A good brunch and hearty dinner will keep folks happily fed. (Again, make snacks available.)
- Decide what policy works best for you, the host. “Help welcome in the kitchen” or “Stay out of my way.” Be firm if necessary.
- Plan ahead for rain or boredom. Rent a variety of videos if you don’t know the entertainment tastes of guests. Classics are always good. Board games are worth the investment, too.

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