

# Are You a Ma'am or a Miss, Dear?

It's so easy to address a man. If his voice no longer squeaks and has a deeper timbre, and he has a bit of fuzz on his chin, people tend to say, "Yes, Sir," "Can I get you anything else, Sir?" "Will that be all, Sir?" Simple, respectful, non-controversial.

But a woman? What to say? If she's very young, does a store clerk call her "Ma'am?" Or is "Miss" appropriate? What if she's married? When she's forty-five, she most likely hears: "What can I get you, Ma'am?" She may find that perfectly appropriate, although some women are uncomfortable with the term. Why? It's a good word. Maybe they've heard it used in a sarcastic way, with a drawl.

When I was twenty years younger, I was usually called "Ma'am" and I didn't question that.

After all, in many countries, the woman is always addressed by a stranger as though she were married. The French will call a woman of any marital status "Madame." In Dutch, it is always "Mevrouw." In Spanish-speaking countries, a stranger will say "Senora." These terms go for a woman of any age although, for the very young, it may be a variation of a term of endearment.

Most languages make a distinction between married and unmarried women. For men, it is always the same, married or not. This may have a history – in many cultures, women were considered the property of men, whether those men were their fathers or their husbands.

As I've gotten older, clerks and waitresses will often address me as "Dear," and it offends me, especially if it is accompanied with a sugary smile. It is as if they are assuming

senility because of my white hair, and they hope I can stumble back to my car and drive home without running smack-dab into a telephone pole.

We all know people who say "Dear" to everyone and, if it's someone they know and indeed like a lot, it seems appropriate. Although even then, I feel a slight twinge. I have a name. Use it, please.

I recently spent a week in a hospital. Several nurses and aides called me "Dear," and even "Sweetheart." They talked to me in a superficial way. Those who called me by my name, perhaps asking first how to pronounce it, were much more personable. They explained things and engaged me, as I did them, in conversations that made us equals.

When visiting friends and relatives in nursing homes, I hear sugary terms almost routinely. Yet, each person has a name, and it is respectful to call him or her by that name. It makes people feel a little taller, a little less helpless.

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experience long-lasting nerve pain or vision loss. It is recommended that everyone over 50 years old should be vaccinated.

Back in the old days, it was common practice to give infants a vaccination called DPT (Diphtheria-Pertussis-Tetanus). It is now referred to as TDaP. Several years ago, the CDC issued the recommendation that everyone over the age of 65 should take another shot. It is stressed that immunity to pertussis (whooping cough) diminishes over time. For this reason, it is especially important for anyone who will be near an infant to get vaccinated.

Years ago, when I visited my Dutch grandparents in their retirement home, everyone addressed each other with Mr. or Mrs., and their last names. It was not appropriate, except among very good friends, to use a first name.

If a younger staff member had called my grandfather by his first name, Willem, he would have been so offended that he would have reported that worker. I was impressed by this custom, because it gave so much dignity to the elderly people in that home.

We're not that formal in this country, and that seems to fit our lifestyle. Use a name if you know it, or ask. But I, as many of you, have trouble remembering names. In some homes, people use name tags. It eliminates that embarrassment of "I should know you," and makes it much easier to engage that person in conversation.

The key is respect.

– Mieke Tazelaar

The Vaccination Clinics at AG on April 20<sup>th</sup> and September 21<sup>st</sup> will both offer pneumonia, shingles, and TDaP vaccinations.

Medicare covers flu shots and the older pneumonia vaccine. Coverage for vaccinations varies among Medicare Advantage plans. Contact your insurance company for detailed info on coverage. Bartell Drugs has available for a nominal sum a small number of shingles shots for customers who don't have insurance coverage. Although vaccinations are indicated for most of us, there are exceptions. It is a good idea to check with your primary care physician.

– Tom Downs

## STRAIGHT ARROW NEWS

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