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Tuesday, November 7

How to win over your mother-in-law

BY HOWARD MCEWEN

I went out for a walk last week when I saw six women beating up my mother-in-law. As I watched the pummeling, her neighbor said, "Well, aren't you going to help?"

"No," I said. "Six of them is enough."

Or how about, "How do you stop your mother-in-law from drowning?"

"Take your foot off her head."

Mother-in-law jokes are fun. I've enjoyed them. I've told them. But now they're not so funny. My mother-in-law is in the intensive care unit.

My wife, the woman I love and have pledged fealty to, is hurting. This takes all the joy out of a good mother-in-law joke.

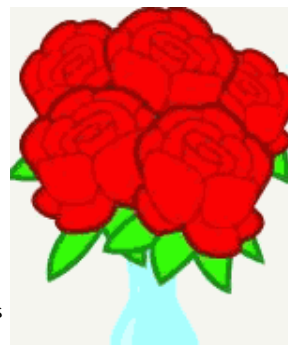
My mother-in-law has driven me nuts for years. But I can't escape the fact that she was integral to creating and forming the mind and psyche of the woman whom I married and who is raising my own two daughters.

I read in a biography of Ronald Reagan that on Nancy's birthday, he would send his own mother-in-law a bouquet of roses for bringing Nancy into the world.

Upon further research I did discover that Nancy's mother lived in Chicago while the Reagans lived in Los Angeles. Those 2,000 miles I'm sure were key to a nice mother-in-law relationship.

But many of us don't have the Gipper's luxury of distance. The old lady may live right down the street or a couple hours drive away. She can drop by, pop in or "just be in the neighborhood." And when she does, she's sure enough going to offer a healthy mixture of unwanted advice, criticism, condescension and disapproval - usually aimed at the son-in-law.

I don't think a son-in-law can truly understand a mother-in-law's



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behavior. That is, until a young man takes his own daughter out on a date - in a van.



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The instincts are the same. Men simply are more physical protectors. They want to save their daughters from unwanted danger, sexual advances and babies. Once the daughter is safely in a loving marriage that is minimally functional he feels his job is done.

That's where the wife takes over. The newly minted mother-in-law feels the need to protect her daughter from all the mistakes that her husband has made. She does it out of love. That's not to say it isn't a sick and twisted form of mother-in-law love. But it's love none the less.

Sooner or later your mother-in-law is going to be laying in a hospital. Your wife will wonder if this woman who nursed her, bandaged her knee and comforted her through adolescent break-ups is no longer going to be there for her.

Maybe you should send her some flowers. After five or six years, her suspicions over your behavior may even subside. They may score you some points and she'll get off your back.

Howard McEwen, CFA, blogs at www.thepureinvestor.blogspot.com.

posted by Susan Forman on 11/07/2006

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