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REAL-ly messing up at home

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Things are a bit touchy on the home front these days. And it all stems from putting the emphasis on the wrong word, possibly even the wrong syllable. The whole thing's nothing more than a misunderstanding, if you want to know the truth.

The TV was on in the kitchen, tuned to one of the morning shows. I was sitting down, having some coffee, glancing at the headlines, while my wife Neetha was making herself an egg.

The weatherman on this particular morning show, an exuberant, full-of-life kind of guy, was out on the street, trading quips with regular people who'd come out to wave at the cameras so the folks back home would see them.

Neetha commented, sort of out of the blue: "Apparently he's just destroyed since he lost his wife."

Now, I was surprised by this comment for a number of reasons. I did not know that this particular weatherman had lost his wife, and I sincerely thought that that was a shame. Nor did I know that Neetha was up to speed on the personal lives of various television personalities, and was surprised that she had this nugget of information to share with me. Which is why I said, "Really?"

You need to know how that "Really?" came out. It was not a flat "really." I did not say it in the tone used by that woman, the one who's on every voicemail system in the world, and sounds like she wouldn't get rattled even if her headset were on fire. What I said was more along the lines of "Real-ly?" with a strong hit on the first syllable.

So let's go through the exchange again:

Neetha: "Apparently he's just destroyed since he lost his wife."

Me: "Real-ly?"

Which explains why Neetha's next comment was along the lines of: "You find it surprising, do you, that a man who'd recently lost his wife would feel a bit upset?"

You can probably guess it was going to be difficult for me to recover from this, but I want you to know I gave it my best shot. I tried to explain that I was merely surprised by the news, that I did not know about this weatherman's misfortune, nor was I aware that she had been reading about him, but I think I may have been drowned out by: "So what would you be doing? Dancing in the streets? Throwing a party? Joining a conga line?"

Something like this happened a few years ago, when our kids were little and we were on a family camping trip south of the border, and we'd abandoned our Hibachi for a bar and grill that served great chicken wings. We had grabbed a table in the back, away from the action.

Neetha had excused herself to visit the facilities, and her trip back took her past the bar. When she sat down, she said, "Some guy just tried to pick me up."

And I said, and I can not begin to tell you how wrong this response was: "You're kidding."

After all, this was the mother of my children, and we were on a family holiday, and it struck me as terribly inappropriate that someone would be putting the moves on my spouse at such a time. But I can tell you, it would have been a whole lot better had I said: "I'm not surprised, but just the same, please point out this bloke so that I may give him a thrashing."

The fallout from that comment (not from the one I should have made, but from the one I did make) lasted some time. Actually, right up until a few moments before the incident with the weatherman.
