

## GOFF ON GOLF

*Marsha Henry Goff*

Some wise someone—I wish I could remember who—once said that golf was a good walk spoiled. Ray and I can buy that. He golfed for the first and last time over a decade ago. The place: Oklahoma. The clubs: borrowed right-handed clubs for a left-handed guy. The temperature: 117° in the shade. The shoes: black loafers polka-dotted with the white salty residue of evaporated sweat. The score: he's not telling.

As for me, I golfed three times with my friend Jean before she quit inviting me to play. I think she thought I'd improve with practice; instead, I got worse. The most serious problem with my game can be solved with balls that have the ability to swim to shore, since any ball I'm lucky enough to hit heads immediately for water. I think it's because I'm a Pisces.

Can you spell divot? Before I played golf, I didn't know what a divot was; now I am the creator of scores of them. The first time I created one, Jean said, "Put your divot back in the hole." I dutifully picked it up and carefully placed it in nearest hole with a flag. "Not that hole," Jean said impatiently, "I mean the hole you made with your club." Why didn't she say so in the first place? A golf course does have more than one hole to choose from, you know . . . especially when I'm on it.

The bad thing about golf is that there is no graceful way to recover when you're trying to drive the ball hard and miss it completely. It's happened to me leaving me with my feet pointed north, my stomach west, shoulders south and head east. On those occasions, I looked exactly like Gumby.

Golf has its own special language which you must learn in order to play effectively. The most important golf term I learned isn't "Fore!" When I do connect with the ball, I rarely hit it far enough to injure anyone but my partner, which might explain why Jean doesn't ask me to play anymore. The esoteric phrase that proves most useful to me is, "Do you want to play through?" And they always do. One man was apologetic about it, however, explaining that he promised his wife he'd be home for dinner that evening. We were then on the seventh green of a nine-hole course and it was 10:30 in the morning.

For some reason I can't explain, "Women and Children First" applies to leaving a sinking ship or exiting a burning theater, but not to the golf course. I suspect this is because women assume that for men golf isn't so much a game as it is a place to conduct serious business. Most of us gals are out on the course having a great time hitting-or-missing the ball and enjoying the sunshine and birdies (the ones in trees, not on scorecards), while believing that the male foursome behind us is busy finalizing a

corporate merger or solving a business crisis of massive proportions. Naturally, we're going to let them play through.

I've often wondered how my friend John manages to be such a successful businessman when his sport of choice is tennis. In fact, he is so enthusiastic about the game that when he told me a tennis ball is a lot larger and softer than a golf ball and that you get to use a really big racquet to hit it, I thought I might take up tennis in place of golf. The problem with tennis, however, is that—unlike the golf ball that patiently lies where it falls waiting for you to slowly stroll up and try to smack it again—the tennis ball expects you to hit it while it's still moving! Get real!