

The Marriage Refs

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**FOUR COUPLES RECEIVE
ADVICE FOR SOME
FAMILIAR PROBLEMS**

“After 10 years of marriage, I realized the comedic potential of this topic is quite rich. This is the way marriage should be; everybody needs a ref.”

— Jerry Seinfeld, describing his NBC reality show “The Marriage Ref”

Remember the old playground staple, “First comes love, then comes marriage...”? Well, whoever wrote this little ditty neglected to mention that, not only does the baby carriage often come along, but also a host of nagging issues that go with the territory of making the sacred union of marriage work on a daily basis. Bad driving, thunderous snoring, poor communication, cleaning up (or not) after oneself... all are common culprits for otherwise happily married folks. At least, they are for the four local couples with whom we spoke. In the spirit of love and compromise, we put together a team of professional marriage counselors—The Marriage Refs—to address the relatable issues these couples face as they live, love, co-exist and, *well*, basically try not to strangle each other as they work toward wedded bliss.

MEET THE REFS



DR. BARBARA WINTER, PH.D.

Dr. Winter received her master's and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology from Nova Southeastern University and completed her professional training at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. This Boca Raton-based psychologist is also a certified sex therapist and hypnotherapist. Her professional philosophy is holistic and very straightforward: “(My mission is) to help people improve their emotional, sexual and spiritual health,” she explains. “We all pick certain people for a reason.”



DR. CARYL KEATING, PH.D.

With offices in Delray Beach, Boca Raton and Palm Beach, Dr. Keating specializes in integrative psychology for individuals, couples and families. She received her master's and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology from Nova Southeastern University. She believes that a life crisis can be an opportunity for growth and that a couple that works through conflicts often forms a more meaningful and healthy relationship.



LORI SARVIS, L.C.S.W.

Sarvis received her master's degree in social work from Washington University in St. Louis and is certified in both hypnotherapy and sex therapy. The Deerfield Beach practitioner says she loves the dynamics of working with couples. “You have two different personalities and there's just so much more going on in a session,” she points out. “Of course, you also have to make sure it doesn't become a “War of the Roses.”

MEET THE COUPLES

LAURA AND BEN GIFFIN

CITY: Lake Worth
YEARS MARRIED: 26
CHILDREN: Ryan, 22; Kiernan, 20; Braden, 17 and McKay, 14
THEIR ISSUE: The devil is in the details—Laura needs them and says Ben doesn't provide enough of them.



While Laura and Ben Giffin have been in love since meeting at Atlantic High School in Delray Beach, some niggling details persist. Or rather, a lack of them. You see, Laura likes descriptions, information, feedback... And Ben's mind simply does not operate this way. Consequently, he says that whenever Laura asks a question, his response is never adequate and that, ultimately, she launches into what he and their four sons affectionately call “The Spanish



“She wants to know all the details and I feel like I’m under a spotlight. I just don’t think about the details.”
— Ben Giffin

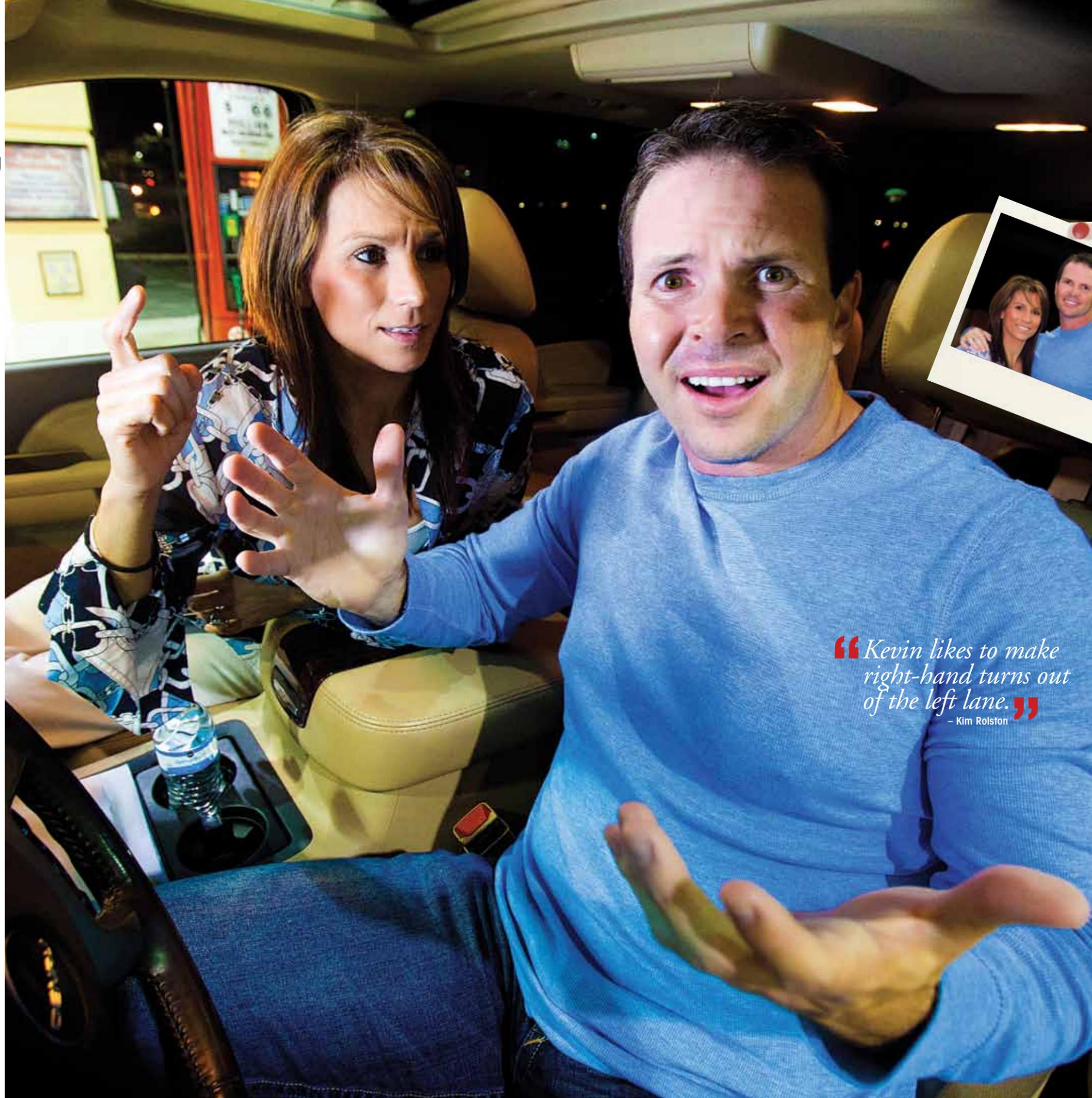
Inquisition.” Whether it’s cooking a meal in the kitchen or taking one of their sons to baseball practice, Laura needs details. For example, after a baseball practice, she’ll ask how it went. “I’ll say, ‘It was good.’” Ben explains. “But she wants to know all the details and I feel like I’m under a spotlight. I just don’t think about the details.” Says Laura: “It’s frustrating because I always have a nagging curiosity and a need to know more and be more involved.”

THE REFS WEIGH IN

DR. WINTER: Laura and Ben are a good example of Venus and Mars, Dr. Winter says. Women are persistent about receiving details and men, on the other hand, couldn’t care less about them. When men have a conversation, it’s simply a means to an end. For women, though, it’s a means to connect. Her advice for Laura? “Either ask Ben before he leaves to come back with details or give it up and (vent) to her girlfriends.”

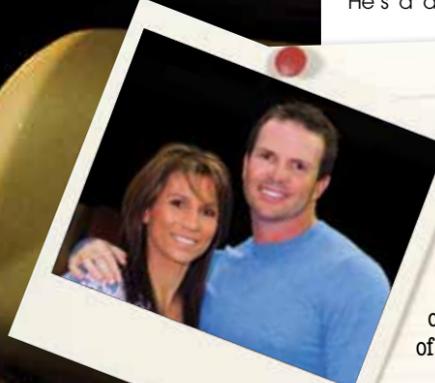
DR. KEATING: Research shows that women are more sentimental and have a better memory for details, Dr. Keating points out. She suggests Laura and Ben turn their question and answer sessions into a game. For example, “Tell me the five best and the five worst things about your day.” She wants Ben to keep one thing in mind: “Remember, if she’s asking a lot of questions that means she really cares about you.”

LORI SARVIS: While it’s understandable that Ben doesn’t want to be grilled the minute he walks in the door, Sarvis says, she also understands that Laura needs a certain amount of information from her husband. She suggests Laura give him time to unwind before quizzing him. “The man needs to understand that women really do need more information,” she explains and suggests that a few rules would help. “Maybe allow her to ask three or four very specific questions—but not ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions.”



“Kevin likes to make right-hand turns out of the left lane.”
— Kim Rolston

You probably recognize Kevin Rolston from his co-host gig with Wild 95.5 FM’s über-popular morning radio broadcast, “The Kevin, Virginia and Jason Morning Show,” and you likely know Kim as the “Mexican Queen,” to whom he often refers. Joking aside, Kevin and Kim have been married for 10 years, have three kids and remain head-over-heels in love. He’s a devoted husband and father; she’s



KIM AND KEVIN ROLSTON

CITY: West Palm Beach
YEARS MARRIED: 10

CHILDREN: Colin and Caitlin, 13; Canon, 3

THE ISSUE: Each thinks the other is the worst driver in all of South Florida.

a schoolteacher and supportive wife and mom. All is wonderful. Until they get in the car. “Kevin likes to make right-hand turns out of the left lane,” Kim says. Kevin counters that accusation with a memory he has of Kim driving their kids. “I passed them in my car and all I could see were the twins’ heads,” he says, alleging that his wife is a multitasker, even when behind the wheel. “Kim was leaning over. It was like a ghost was driving the car.”

THE REFS WEIGH IN

DR. WINTER: Dr. Winter admits she’s impressed with Kim and Kevin if this is their sole marital issue. “If this is the only place they disagree, I would leave their criticisms on the road,” she says, adding that multitasking is never a good idea while driving. “Although, women are far superior to men in that area.”

DR. KEATING: “Distraction is the greatest enemy” when it comes to driving, Dr. Keating says simply. “In the car, multitasking increases distraction which increases the likelihood of an accident.”

SARVIS: In addition to always ensuring their kids are buckled in properly, Sarvis suggests the couple take a defensive driving course. “It’s a good way for them to grab some together time.” She also recommends they follow one hard and fast rule when together in the car. “Whoever is driving is the one in control. The other one has to put tape over their mouth. Nagging increases anxiety in the car.”

“If I’m cleaning, Mike will help, but he never initiates it.”
— Laura Alonso



LAURA AND MIKE ALONSO

CITY: West Palm Beach
MONTHS MARRIED: Eight
CHILDREN: None, but they're planning a family
THE ISSUE: Laura feels stuck doing all the cooking and cleaning.

When Laura and Mike met through mutual friends it was clear that they'd each found their soul mate—the relationship felt very natural. They dated for about a year before deciding to tie the knot and life has since been great for Mike, a field supervisor for his family's contracting business, Alonso and Associates, and Laura, a bartender at Oshea's Irish Pub in West Palm Beach. But there's this one little issue... While they both work really long hours, the household chores are not split equally. Rather, Laura says she's always the one to make sure the house gets cleaned. "If I'm cleaning, Mike will help, but he never initiates it," she says. "I'd agree with that," admits Mike. Then there's the matter of cooking meals. Laura says that, not only is she the chief housekeeper—she's also the head chef. Here, Mike counters, "I would cook more if she didn't hate all the food I cook."

THE REFS WEIGH IN

DR. WINTER: "Research indicates that regardless of how much a woman works, she is often responsible for the household," says Dr. Winter, adding that learning to live together is an ongoing process. "Couples need to learn how to move around the house, how and when to be in each other's spaces and, most of all, what is the best workable division of labor." Also, she says that Laura needs to learn how to delegate.

DR. KEATING: Dr. Keating suggests that Laura and Mike create a checklist of chores for which each is responsible, and that they reward themselves for cleaning the house by going to a nice restaurant. Or invite friends over for dinner. "That will motivate you to do the grunt work and also allow you to enjoy your nice clean home." In terms of their cooking issue, she recommends making preparing meals fun. "Try new recipes designed for two or experiment with theme nights such as vegetarian or Thai."

SARVIS: Sarvis recommends that Mike and Laura write down the household chores each week and then split them down the middle. "Get together and compromise. Pick a cleaning day and do it together," she says. She also suggests turning cooking into a project. "Go online to find a new recipe or go to a bookstore and pick out a new cookbook."

Greg Jones will never forget the first time he saw Callie, whom he met through a mutual friend. "She pulled up in this little red car," he remembers. "I said, 'Wow!'" After a disastrous first date—Callie was having a bad day—they decided to try again, went for lunch and six years later were married. Now they work together running the family business,

Gregory Jones Architecture. Their marriage is successful because they share goals and values and try not to sweat the small stuff—even if it means she wears earplugs to sleep because he snores. "I've tried everything!" she says. In defense, Greg says, "I'm not *attempting* to snore." Then there's the matter of loading the dishwasher. Greg gets in trouble for not meeting Callie's standards. "I might put things in a place that's not as effective or efficient as she would like," Greg says. Callie admits she's very particular, pointing out that, "Everything has its own place."

THE REFS WEIGH IN

DR. WINTER: Dr. Winter says that as long as Callie's complaints aren't disguises for bigger issues, there's a compromise to be made because the marriage seems healthy. "(Callie) loses a bit on both ends. She's not happy with the bedroom and disappointed with the dishwasher," she says. "Since Callie goes the extra distance to wear earplugs, Greg could take the extra time to learn to load the dishwasher to his wife's satisfaction."

DR. KEATING: Dr. Keating believes Greg should see a specialist regarding his snoring to rule out a medical problem such as sleep apnea. As for Callie's need for the perfectly loaded dishwasher, she suggests Callie ask herself if the machine is sufficiently loaded, even if it's not perfect. "Perhaps acceptance is the answer," she says, adding that Callie could try and teach Greg to load it the way she prefers. And, she says, "Remember to praise, praise, praise people when teaching them new skills."

SARVIS: Sarvis' concern with Greg's chronic snoring is that, over time, it can affect the couple's intimacy. She suggests that Callie try hypnotherapy to transform the sound of Greg's snoring into something akin to a lullaby. "It would actually lull her to sleep instead of keeping her awake," she explains. When it comes to the dishwasher-loading issue, Sarvis has two suggestions: "Callie just has to do the loading herself. Either that or they could switch to paper plates and just throw them in the garbage when they're done eating." ◦

CALLIE AND GREG JONES

CITY: Boynton Beach
YEARS MARRIED: 17
CHILDREN: Tristan, 15
THE ISSUE: A toss-up between Greg's snoring and Callie's insistence that the dishwasher be loaded *her* way.



“*I'm not attempting to snore.*”

— Greg Jones