

The Winner is Father

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News: . . . the Transit Authority announced that, if the okay is given to proceed with the project, it will require four years for completion. That's the news. And now back to the Marv Mink Show.

Marv: Hello, and welcome back. This is the Marv Mink Show. If you were listening during the last hour you heard our guest Nolan Simmons outline his views on the increased role personal computers will have in the education of our children. Fascinating man—maybe we can get him back again.

This last half-hour will be open line. I'm sure you don't want to hear another of my tirades on the world's ills, so call in and you can go on your own personal gripes . . . Richard, you're on the air.

Caller: Hello, Marv. Am I on?

Marv: You sure are. What's troubling you?

Caller: Marv, I don't have anything to complain about, but I sure enjoy your show. That last guy was great! Anyway, I work in my little wood shop in the evenings and I'm a regular listener of yours. I've heard you enough to know you hate sentimental stuff. So I'm a little hesitant to call, because I don't have any great thing to say or profound question to ask. But Marv, don't cut me off. I'll only take a minute. I just had to call and announce that two hours ago my wife gave birth to a six-pound, four-ounce baby girl. And that has made me the happiest man in the world. I'll hang up now so you can get on with your other calls.

Marv: Oh, good. Just what the world needs—a “Happiest Man.” I’ll tell you what the world needs. It needs more guys who know that if we don’t get on the ball, nobody will be happy at all. Old Richard needs to quit smelling the roses and start pulling some weeds. I can’t believe it. Fifty thousand watts being used to announce the birth of a baby! It’s no wonder this country is in such bad shape. We’ve got a bunch of know-nothing people out there who can’t see the big issues because they are too busy bragging about having a baby. We’ll see how happy that guy feels as he watches that baby grow up in a world as corrupt as this one . . . Yeah, go ahead, you’re on the air. What’s on your mind? Probably how to get your cat to eat the new calorie-free cat food. What is the world coming to? Go ahead.

Caller: Hey, Marv, lighten up. I’ve never heard you so ornery. You must have sat down on the wrong side of your microphone. Give the guy a break. Maybe what this country needs is more guys who feel they are the world’s happiest men. Marv, quit being so cynical. Just relax and listen to what I’ve got to say and don’t get upset. I just wanted to congratulate Richard on his new little girl. But I feel like I’m seven times happier than him because my wife and I have seven beautiful children.

Marv: Seven! Haven’t you ever heard of family planning!”

Caller: We sure have, and we’re still planning—to have two or three more.

Marv: That’s disgusting. And just who’s doing the planning? You? I’ll bet your wife isn’t.

Caller: Oh, yeah. We plan together. She always wanted a big family. She loves being a mother, and there’s nothing in the world that is as much fun as being a father. You know that, Marv. I’ve heard you mention your two daughters, so you know what it is. Hey, I’ve gotta go, but I challenge old Richard who just called in. I’ll bet I’m happier than he is.

Marv: Okay. If you say so . . . I’m glad he hung up before I had to cut him off. I give up. Ignorance is bliss. What’s the use? I try to talk sense, but maybe tonight we’ll just turn the phone lines over to the village dumbbells who want to talk about “happiness.” . . . Jim, you’re on the air. Don’t tell me you’re happier than our last caller because you have twelve kids. Man, I can’t believe it! Two’s enough for me. I love ‘em, but I just wish . . . Oh, well, I guess being a family man isn’t my thing. But anyway . . . so you’ve got twelve.

Caller: No. We don’t have twelve. We just have one. But it took us twelve years to get that one. The first year we were married it broke our hearts when we found out we couldn’t have a baby. We kept praying and hoping, but it just didn’t happen. Then just a year ago we adopted a little boy, and I’m holding him on my lap now. He’s grabbing at the phone. I wish you could see him, Marv. Today the final papers were signed. I just didn’t know until we got this little guy how I could ever love anyone so much more than I love myself. I’m glad

Richard is now a father, but there is no way he could be as happy as I am. Even that guy with seven can't be as happy as me. When it comes to happiness, I'm the champ.

Marv: Ah, well! We're on a roll. Let's just go ahead and waste the entire half-hour. Okay, so this guy thinks he beats out everybody so far. Let's limit our calls to men. You gals leave the calling to the men. Then later, when we need some people who understand big problems, we'll let you ladies take over the show . . . Hello. You're on the air.

Caller: Marv, I've been listening, and I love what I'm hearing. I've never called in before, but tonight I can't hold back. I don't think these other guys know what real happiness is. I'm the father of three. My former wife has them living with her. I know that doesn't sound like a happy story—as a matter of fact, it has completely broken my heart. When Judy and I married we dreamed we'd be the happiest couple who ever lived. But it just didn't work out. I don't know exactly what happened, but everything fell apart. There was a lot of bitterness. But today, when I took the children back after having them for the weekend, Judy met me at the front door and we stood there and talked. She seemed to have a different spirit about her. She told me that the children like being with me and that they love and respect me. I've never heard anything that meant more to me than hearing that. Just before I turned to go, each of the two smallest ones hugged me and said, "Thank you, Daddy. I love you." Then there's Nick, our fourteen-year-old—he has resented me since the divorce, and that hurts. But as I was about to go, he asked, "Can you come to my game Thursday?" Before I could answer, Judy quickly said, "He told me he always tries harder when his dad is there." I looked into his eyes and choked out the words, "Sure, son, I'll be there. I'll always be there." He smiled, and something deeply meaningful went between us. My tears were flowing as I turned to go. Then Judy said, "Thanks, Sid, for being such a good dad." Excuse me, Marv. I can hardly talk here . . . but anyway, that sure did make me happy—maybe even the happiest man in the world.

Marv: Hmm! That one hit me hard. I knew what he meant when he said that somehow everything fell apart. I just hope that I . . . well, that I can keep being there for my girls. But that's personal, and I'm not gonna uncover my heart. The rest of you can go on expressing your feelings, but I've found you can't trust feelings, so count me out. That's what Sarah has done. Anyway, when it comes to happiness, well, I'm a long ways from being a winner. Maybe our next caller will be our winner.

Caller: Marv, I sense a real human streak coming out of your supposedly hard shell. But as you continue to air applications for the happiest man, I feel I'm your winner. A lot of people would disagree, and at times I would too. But right now, this very moment, I feel I'm indeed the world's happiest man. You see, I'm married to my childhood sweetheart. During my life, I have had a history of having all my dreams come true. Just about everything I've ever wanted, I've got. Even this year's Super Bowl winner was my team.

Marv: Well, no wonder you're so happy! My team didn't even make the play-offs. We'll put you down as a potential winner. Thanks for bringing up sports. Sports, I understand—it's family life that baffles me. Thanks for the call.

Caller: No, no, I'm not finished. I didn't call to discuss sports. Charleen and I have three teenage children. All of them are ideal kids. I'm a supervisor at work and have had several promotions. But two months ago, while I was playing basketball during my lunch hour, I suddenly felt exhausted. The next day I didn't have the energy to get out of bed. Charleen drove me to the doctor. One exam led to another. I hoped for the best, but I got the worst—I've been diagnosed as having bone cancer. They have filled in for me at work, and things are going fine there. My overriding concern has been the family. Charleen has been brave, but at times I hear her crying in the night. The children couldn't seem to bear the news when I told them. They never want to discuss the subject. They try to act cheerful, but there is gloom in their eyes. They've never wanted much in the way of fancy clothes and that, even though we've given them good things. I think all they've really wanted from me was for me to just be a good dad.

But the reason I called isn't to burden you with these things. I wanted to call because just an hour ago the three children came to where Charleen and I were sitting in the front room. They said they wanted to talk. The oldest, Kevin, had been appointed spokesman. As best I recall, he said, "Dad, we, uh . . . we've been, uh, thinking, and, uh . . ." His voice broke, and for a second or two he was silent. But then he took a deep breath and continued. "Dad, we need you. We've done some praying, and we feel you won't die."

The others nodded their agreement, and Kevin continued. "But we don't know what will happen. So we, uh, well, we want you to know something. You see, Dad . . ." Kevin then began to sob, as did the other two and Charleen. Finally, he continued. "You see, well, it's just that you're the best father who ever lived. And whether you stay here with us or die, we promise you that we'll live our lives in a way that will make you the proudest man who ever lived."

None of us could say more. Charleen and I stood up by the three kids. I held Kevin in my arms and never wanted to let go—then Clark, and then thirteen-year-old Laura. Then I held my sweetheart. Finally, all five of us were in one big embrace.

Marv, as we stood there as one family, for just a few minutes there I knew what heaven is like. And knowing that makes me feel that I'm your luckiest, most blessed, and happiest man."

(Silence filled both phones. Then the caller spoke softly.)

That's it, Marv. And Marv, I sense that things aren't so good for you and Sarah. Hold on to her, Marv. Hold on to her. And to all you other guys out there, take real good care of your wife and those . . . those . . . uh . . . those wonderful children. See you later, Marv.

Marv: Hmm! I feel like I should sign off and go home. At least I wish I could go home. But . . . Who's next? . . . You're on the air.

Caller: Marv, I don't know if I can pull myself together after that. I agree, that guy's the champ. But I had a good few minutes today, myself. My wife had to go out tonight and I was home alone. At least I would have been home alone if it hadn't been for our three-year-old and the seven-month-old twins. I can manage the fast food place where I work, but, man, getting the kids fed and bathed and in bed—that takes more than an MBA! But I did it! Then I cleaned up the kitchen and vacuumed. I mean, things were standing tall when Maggie came home. When she walked in the front room and heard the quiet and saw the order, you should have seen the look on her face. I'm learning my father did most things better than I do, but I'm a better house-husband than he is. And the way Maggie looked at me and hugged me tonight makes me feel that I'm at least the minor league happiest man in the world.

Marv: Well, a happy house-husband. Maybe I should have been a bit more helpful. But too late now . . . Hello. You're on the air.

Caller: Good show, Marv! I didn't intend to call, but what I've heard those other fathers say has got me all emotional-like and made me start thinking about my own dad. I've shed a lot of tears already today, because we buried him this morning. He was seventy-eight and had been failing for the last few months, so it wasn't a shock; but the tears came, because I'm sure going to miss him.

Marv: Quite a dad, huh?

Caller: Well, yeah. He was quite a dad. His life was kind of tough. He married Mom when they were both young. In ten years they had six children. One day he went to work as usual—and never came home. I guess the pressure was too great. We didn't see or hear from him for forty years. Then nine years ago somebody knocked, and when I opened the front door I saw this man on the porch looking at me and grinning. I knew as quick as I looked into his eyes that he was my dad.

Marv: Wow! Home after forty years. So what next?

Caller: Well, I just acted like he'd been away at work that day, and I asked him to come in. It was quite a shock to Susan when I called her into the room and said, "Honey, this is my dad." A few minutes later our two married children happened to drop by, because it was Susan's birthday. As the first one came in I said, "Charles, I'd like you to meet your grand— father." I did the same when the second one came in. I've never seen as many shocked expressions as I saw that night. Later I called each of my five brothers and sisters and told them that Dad had come home.

In the days that followed we learned that he was not well and could not care for himself. For the next four years he stayed with Susan and me for a while and then with his other sons and daughters. And like I say, we buried him today.

Marv: No hard feelings about his deserting you?

Caller: Oh, yeah, of course. But all that's painful water under the bridge. We had nothing to gain by having bad feelings. But by forgiving him we could gain a father. And you know, Marv, next to a mother, there just isn't anything in this world that a child of any age can have that is as wonderful as having a father. And now for the past nine years we've had a father. We came to love him with all our hearts.

Marv: Didn't you have a desire to tell him to hit the road?

Caller: Oh, no! No, no! You see, Marv, he's our father. Yeah, I would have liked to have him around in all my growing-up years. He would have come in handy on a number of occasions. Life can be tough without a father. But I'm glad he finally came home, and even though today is a sad day I still feel like having my dad come home has made me the world's happiest man.

Marv: Well, I don't know about all that. That guy has a more forgiving heart than I do. I think if that had been my father I would have told the old guy, "Hit the road, Jack." . . . Hello. You're on the air.

Caller: Come on, Marv. You think you're tough, but I'll bet you'd have done just what that guy did.

Marv: Well, I'm not sure. Who knows? My dad was always there. But that didn't seem to do me a lot of good. He and I didn't see eye to eye. To him, everything was either black or white. He had his mind made up on every issue. About the only time we talked it was a contest of wills. That's why I joined the navy when I was eighteen. I wanted to get away. I never thought I'd miss the old guy, but I did. Even now as I think of him I find myself feeling more sure of just who I am.

Caller: Is he still alive?

Marv: No, he died two years ago. And you know, they talk about life after death and I don't know much about that, but the funny thing is that each year that goes by I find myself becoming more like him. It's sort of like he still lives through me. But wait a minute! The longer this show goes, the more I feel like I'm letting my heart get in the way of my head. So, I'm gonna say less and let you happy guys do all the talking. I challenge all you guys who feel like you're the happiest man alive! . . . Go ahead, you're on.

Caller: Hey, Marv! You're confirming what I've suspected for the last year. You're not the hard guy you try to be. At heart, you're a softy.

Marv: Don't be too sure. If I was a softy, then maybe . . . Well, let's get on with it, here. Do you have a claim to happiness, or are you just calling to psychoanalyze me?

Caller: No. Well, yeah. I do. I'm not married, and I have no children and I'm free. Marv, that's happiness.

Marv: Come on, fella. When you've known marriage like I have and you've got children like I do—and then suddenly when you know you're losing all that, you can't stake any legitimate claim to happiness. Anyway, I'm not here to judge, but I'm taking you off the list of the candidates for the world's happiest man. . . . Hello.

Caller: Marv, this is Gail.

Marv: Gail, didn't you hear our rules? If you've been listening you know this is an all-male show.

Caller: I know, but don't cut me off. I called to talk about a man, so that ought to qualify me to speak.

Marv: Okay. For you, we will make an exception. Who is this man about whom you desire to speak?

Caller: Oh, Marv, he is the world's greatest man.

Marv: Oh, yeah! Who is it?

Caller: Marv, he is my husband, and he's the handsomest guy in all of Cedar Falls. He is an athlete, and tonight at dinner he was voted the number one "one-on-one" basketball player in our family. Our oldest son didn't vote for his father, but for himself. That one negative vote didn't go over well with my sweetheart, so they are out on the driveway court now settling the issue.

Marv: So you've got a hoop out there?

Caller: "Yes, we do. John—he's my husband—he puts a hoop up before he plants a lawn. He loves basketball with a passion. Of course, he loves tennis nearly as much, but he can't beat me at that so he takes pride in his basketball prowess.

Marv: So you're a tennis star?

Caller: Yeah, I'm pretty good. John insists that we all do a lot of playing together, so we are all pretty good at most sports—even hopscotch.

Marv: When you find out who wins the game, let me know and I'll come down and thrash the winner. I'm from Indiana, so you know I've got the credentials.

Caller: Hey, they're coming in. I'll ask who won. My husband is smiling. He must have won.

Marv: Hey, Gail, put your son on and let me ask him.

Caller: Okay. His name is Jason.

Marv: Hey, Jason, how did you do against the old guy?

Caller: He beat me.

Marv: He beat ya?

Caller: Yeah.

Marv: Why'd you let him do that?

Caller: Well, he was the referee too, and that helped him down the stretch.

Marv: Is he a good player?

Caller: Oh, sort of. But he was mostly just lucky. But tomorrow night I'll get him.

Marv: Tomorrow? Do you play every day?

Caller: No, not usually. Just two or three nights a week.

Marv: Sounds like you and your dad spend a lot of time together. Is he a good father?

Caller: Yeah, he's the best.

Marv: The best? What makes you think so?

Caller: I dunno. He's a good man, and he's fun to be around.

Marv: Put your mom back on . . . Sounds like your husband spends a lot of time with you and the children. Does he ever work?

Caller: Oh, yes. He was just made a vice-president at General Electric. But he's a clock watcher there. He says he works his head off while he's on the job and then hurries home to do the more important things, such as being a husband and a father.

Marv: You mean things at home are more important to him than things at work?

Caller: Well, in a way. He does well at work. But he says that if he left General Electric they'd keep going just fine without him, but if he ever left me and the children, we'd miss him forever. He has a saying behind his desk at work that says, "No other success can compensate for failure in the home." Marv, I've got to go. He's in teasing the children and they're having so much fun I need to get in there and protect them.

Marv: Hey, before you go . . . Tell him he has been drafted as a candidate for the title of the world's happiest man . . . Sounds like quite a guy. I wonder if General Electric knows that one of their VPs is a clock watcher who considers his family more important than their big-screen TVs? How would it be to be the family "one-on-one" champ? How would it be to be any kind of champ in your own home and to have your wife feel like she was married to a . . . Anyway, we've got time for one last call. Hello. You're on.

Caller: Marv, it's Sarah.

Marv: Sarah . . . You've never called before.

Caller: Marv, please come home.

Marv: I thought that last week we decided . . . or, uh, you decided that that was it. It wasn't worth it.

Caller: I've been listening. Marv, please come home. The girls and I . . . we need you. We love you and we need you.

Marv: I, uh, I'll be there in an hour. No, Sarah, make that forty-five minutes . . . It's news time. This is Marv Mink. We have a winner. The winner is me and every father everywhere.