For almost five years—1,825 times—Rocky had repeated that perform-
ance. Yet I hadn’t learned what it took the dog about a year to
learn: I had elected my wife “chairperson” of the “take-the-dog-to-
the-fireplug” committee. I wondered what would have happened if she
hadn’t walked Rocky. Poor Rocky. And poor living room rug, too.

One night I watched her fold bath towels—the fat, fluffy orange
ones—and place them in the closet. The next morning the same towels
were piled in the clothes hamper. Only one person—our third son—
had showered the night before, and obviously he had used four towels!
On seeing the towels, my wife exclaimed in exasperation, “I feel like a
slave around here!” She asked our son how he could possibly have used
so many towels. He replied, “I took two showers, one after the other.”

“You took two showers? Even so, why four towels?”

“Because I don’t like drying off with damp towels,” he responded,
surprised that his mother even questioned him about it. His attitude
was: she washes them, I use them. It seemed inconceivable and a little
frightening, but our home had become a place where I rested, the
children played and she worked.

The bird, the dog, and dirty towels—like white blips on a green radar
screen—showed me something I didn’t want to see: that it had been
easy to
1. take my wife for granted;
2. let her be taken for granted by the children;
3. expect her to perform nasty chores repetitiously;
4. act as if she existed only to take care of the house;
5. allow her to take total responsibility for housework;
6. perpetuate chauvinistic attitudes in the children;
7. remain blind for years to inequality in the house; and
8. do all of the above while professing to be a liberated husband.

There’s truly a difference between enlightenment and liberation: one
means thinking about it; the other means doing something about it. I’ve
discussed human liberation with a number of husbands who advocate
feminism, and I’ve found it’s much easier for husbands to discuss libera-
tion than to apply it. As long as males talk in general terms about
“women’s potential” and “equal rights,” we fail to come to grips with the
particulars that surround us daily and which cry out for our attention.
Such an approach reduces liberation to a theory and keeps it at a safe
distance where husbands don’t have to make a personal effort to change.

In a recent group discussion, one woman said her husband keeps
insisting that he wants her to be a person, an individual in her own
right. She asked, “How can I be a person when I’m ‘blessed’ with five
children and all the housework? How can I be ‘free’ when he never helps
or offers to help me with all this responsibility? I know he thinks he
meets it when he says he wants me to develop my own potential, but he
hasn’t gone far enough in his thinking to realize the part he needs to play
in my liberation.”