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Season of the spat

Tempers flare as temperatures rise in summer

BY SAMANTHA MARSHALL

IF THERE'S ONE THING Yandouba and Daniel Monahan can agree on, it's this: Nothing beats a brisk hike up the hills of the Hudson Valley on a bright July day. But the moment the pair sets foot on the trail, the bickering begins.

"My husband always wants to go on a detour or take the toughest route, even if it's not on the map, and it's my job to stop him so he won't break his damn neck," says Ms. Monahan.

Welcome to the season of summer spats, when fine weather and free time foster fun, togetherness and friction between even the most loving couples. Whether she wants to lie by the pool and he wants to play 18 holes of golf,

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Season of the summer spat

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or he wants to go the beach and she prefers a bike ride, tempers can flare amid the expanded options for recreation and the pressure to make the best use of the remaining sunny days.

The happily married Monahans, both real estate brokers in Manhattan, enjoy a good nature trail so much that they organized the NYC Hiking Group three years ago so that others could share the love. Most Saturdays, the couple can be seen leading a group of about a dozen like-minded city folk up a trail on Breakneck Ridge or Bear Mountain.

But part of the weekend ritual typically involves a prolonged stop at a fork in a path while the pair hotly debates which turn to take and the rest of the group look on. After a few awkward minutes, the battle is over and Ms. Monahan prevails, sort of.

"Dan just shuts me up by saying, 'Yes, ma'am,' then goes off and does what he wants anyway," she says.

Cold comfort

OF COURSE, not all of the disputes between partners involve the great outdoors. Air conditioning is the main bone of contention between Debra Condren and her husband, who has it on full blast in every room.

"The rest of us are forced to wear wool sweaters in the height of summer," says the author of the career-

advice book, *Ambition Is Not a Dirty Word*.

Over time, Ms. Condren has learned to accept the wasted energy and constant freezing cold because her heat-sensitive husband, a lawyer, spends much of his time working from home and needs the cold to stay alert. He contends that the rest of the family can always add more layers to keep warm, but it won't do

Air conditioning is the main bone of contention in one household

for him to walk around the apartment naked. He's also concerned that his wine collection will spoil.

Meanwhile, Ms. Condren has declared her home office a Freon-free zone. She'll also get a break from the full-time freeze later this month, when the family will rent a beach house outside San Francisco that relies on sea breezes, not air conditioning, to keep the temperature comfortable.

Most of these squabbles are benign, but how couples handle extra leisure time and high expectations can also highlight problems in a re-

lationship that remain hidden during the busy winter work schedule.

"Summer is a time for consolidating closeness in a relationship, or not," says Penny Donnenfeld, a Manhattan-based psychologist who often sees referrals spike in September as couples deal with the fallout. "That's not to say it's not a time of good experiences, but I don't think it's a slam dunk."

Going too far

A CASE IN POINT is the executive whose fastidious wife makes him shower outside at their Hamptons summer home because she finds him too messy. Or the husband who is hosting a corporate retreat at his Long Island beach home and constantly criticizes his wife's efforts at organizing and catering the event. Both are now clients of Manhattan divorce lawyer Nancy Chemtob.

Fueling the tensions are the social demands, when invitations pour in for barbecues, picnics and weekends away.

Some couples find they'd rather spend time with friends than each other. Others get accustomed to spending their weeks at the summer home in Connecticut or at the Jersey shore while their spouse stays in the city and hits the bar scene from Monday through Thursday.

"If a person is going to have a fling, it usually starts in the summer," points out Ms. Chemtob, adding that August is one of her

TIPS TO KEEP A COOL HEAD

TO KEEP an argument from getting too heated, do something that removes you from the immediate situation and gives some extra perspective. Drink a glass of water or wash your face to cool down.

Never argue in front of the children, and develop a code to discuss disagreements privately. Think about what you're going to say and how you're going to say it.

When planning a vacation, don't assume your needs are identical to your spouse's, and **don't make your spouse guess** what you want. Express clearly what it is you'd like to get out of a summer trip, and be prepared to spend some of the vacation time apart, if necessary. Also, don't make a sacrifice, like going to a golf game that doesn't interest you, and then be resentful about it. The vacation isn't going to be perfect at every moment, but having a wide range of emotions, including exasperation, doesn't mean it's an unsuccessful trip.

—PENNY DONNENFELD, *Psychologist*



busiest months.

Of course, strong bonds can keep couples together, despite their bickering.

Hospitality consultant Alan Philips looks forward spending weekends in Bridgehampton, L.I., with his girlfriend of four years. But an ongoing dispute revolves around the restaurant choices for breakfast. As co-founder of the Sky Group, whose clients include Rande Gerber's bar and lounge empire, Mr. Philips gets a belly full of fancy food every night of the week, so he'd

rather start his mornings with a simple egg sandwich and a cup of regular coffee at a modest beach bum diner.

His better half prefers to stay on the scene, hitting a gourmet brunch spot like Pierre's for smoked salmon eggs Benedict and a Bellini. "She has expensive tastes," he says.

For the most part, though, he gives in. "If this is my biggest problem, so be it," he says.

COMMENTS?
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