How my wife won the snore wars... and I avoided going under the knife

By Mark Palmer

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Admittedly, it’s early days — but there’s a chance that life is returning to normal in our household. And it’s all down to a piece of plastic with a hole in it.

What’s more, this simple contraption might just have saved me from two general anaesthetics and an unwelcome surgical snip to the back of my throat, while my wife can hope the nightmare of sleepless nights could be a thing of the past.

Living with a snorer is not easy. In fact, scientists believe snoring leads to sleep deprivation on such a scale that mental health can be badly damaged. Not, of course, for the snorer but for the wretched soul who shares their bed.

Quite honestly, if you were to ask my wife what is the one thing she would change about me — from a very long wish-list — she would say my tendency (habit, rather) to make the entire house shake, rattle and roll almost as soon as my head hits the pillow. Well, didn’t she hear this coming, you may well ask, given that we were married four years ago? To which the answer is an emphatic ‘no’, because in those days I slept without a murmur.

Then, one weekend, we went for a short break in a countryside hotel and I awoke on the Saturday
morning to find my wife was not lying beside me. Perhaps she had got up early and was taking a pre-breakfast stroll. But, to my horror, I found her curled up in the bath, with a blanket and a couple of towels spread over her.

She looked uncomfortable. I felt uncomfortable. 'I tried and tried to stop you, but you just turned over and started all over again,' she said.

I said: 'Terribly sorry. It won't happen again.'

Maybe I had overdone it on the rib-eye steak and profiteroles at dinner. But the next night, the exact same thing happened.

My hope was that once we were back in our familiar bed, back in the old routine, the snoring would stop. It didn't. And, at one stage, both of us dreaded going to bed because of what was in store.

She wouldn't drop off because of the noise and I would get only chunks of rest because she would frequently wake me up. Once, she threw a glass of water over me.

‘You drink too much,’ she said one morning. And it seemed a fair point. I drink most nights, often the best part of a bottle of wine. So I gave up for a month. And did the snoring continue? Does Simon Cowell have an ego?

On some nights, I was kicked out of the marital bed and told to sleep on the sofa, and on other nights she would storm out of the room muttering obscenities.

From time to time she would leave leaflets and advertisements on my desk. And I duly bought various sprays, nasal strips and fancy lozenges, all of which proved a waste of money. Then I made contact with a recovering snorer in West Sussex who told me that a few years ago his marriage was about to implode because of his snoring.

In desperation he started wearing a mouth guard at night, which forced his jaw and tongue forward in such a way that it opened his windpipe. It worked. In fact, it worked so well that he bought the UK franchise of the company: Snoban Healthcare.

So I tried it and it did the trick — at first. But my snoring found a way around it. On some occasions, I just spat out the guard in my sleep and honked like never before.
How it works: The snorewizard moves the jaw slightly forward to improve the flow of air

Front and back view: The mouth guard has a flap over your teeth to hold it in place and it a hole at the front that allows you to breathe normally

I went to see my GP. She sent me to a specialist at London’s Charing Cross Hospital, who put a wire with a light on up my nose. Then he said he wanted me in for a pre-op examination to see if removing or reducing my uvula would do the trick. This is the ball of soft tissue that dangles at the back of the throat that can vibrate and lead to snoring.

The specialist explained I would be out of action for a day because I would need a general anaesthetic for this fact-finding manoeuvre, after which, if appropriate, I would have to undergo the main operation under another general anaesthetic. Now, I don’t like the idea of general anaesthetics. This goes back to when I was 12 and about to have my tonsils out. As I was going down to the operating theatre in a lift at the Royal Berkshire Hospital I saw someone had written on my wrist-band ‘removal of appendix’.

Thankfully, I managed to point out the error just before the anaesthetist got down to business.

In any event, operations to cure snoring don’t always work and you have to put up with a sore throat for several weeks afterwards. Far better, I realised, would be to lose weight, tighten up the neck muscles and drink less vino — all things which directly contribute to snoring.
But that would mean a complete change of lifestyle and I wasn’t sure I was ready for such a revolution — certainly not after spending an hour with a nutritionist who told me that a diet mainly of nuts and goats’ milk, with a sprinkle of dried apricots on high days and holidays, would be good for my snoring.

He said I would have to cut out all coffee, all booze and all excuses. The thought of that operating theatre suddenly seemed appealing.

Then, at the last moment, I spotted yet another snore-solving ad. This one guaranteed positive results ‘or your money back’. It’s called the Snorewizard and is a mouth guard but with a couple of crucial differences. Like others, it moves the jaw slightly forward to improve the flow of air; but unlike others, there’s a flap over which your teeth sit, which holds it in place.

And, crucially, it has a hole at the front that allows you to breathe normally.

The rubber is soft — you don’t need to immerse it in hot water and then bite on to it so that it fits to the shape of your teeth — and it costs a mere £44.99, compared to the £420 I was quoted by my dentist for a custom-made job.

For the first few nights I found it uncomfortable to sleep with a chunk of plastic in my mouth, but the joy of waking and realising my wife was not about to speak darkly about our future more than compensated.

I have since discovered that senior figures in the Sleep Unit at the Oxford Centre for Respiratory Medicine, which is part of the NHS Churchill Hospital in Oxford, are almost as impressed by the Snorewizard as I am.

Dr John Stradling, who heads the unit, says its construction is ‘cleverer than you think’ because even if your jaw drops during sleep, the device will stay in place.

It certainly beats a painful operation.

snorewizard.co.uk or 0800 528 3278.