

# The Style Invitational

WEEK 125: ASK BACKWARD VI

Tinker to Evers to Packwood	One. Definitely Only One.	The world is my dumpster.	Mickey Mantle's liver
Three men and a crayfish	Apollo 178	Grant's pants	Colon Powell
Very, very fat mice	♀ ÷ π		The sweet smell of defeat
Here's a hint: It's yellow.	Fred and Ethel Van Beethoven	Sally Struthers and Homer, the blind poet	Because it wouldn't work the other way



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

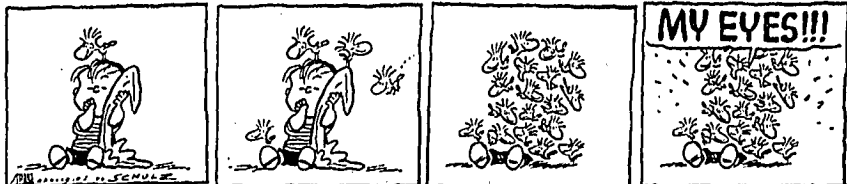
**This Week's Contest:** You are on Jeopardy! These are your answers. What are the questions? First-prize winner gets an autographed copy of "Dave Barry Slept Here," his handsome, hardcover volume on American history, entirely in Japanese. Runners-up, as always, get the coveted Style Invitational losers' T-shirts. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper stickers. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to the Style Invitational, Week 125, The Washington Post, 1150 15th

St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071; fax them to 202-334-4312; or submit them via the Internet to this address: losers@access.digex.net. Internet users: Please indicate the appropriate Week Number in the "subject" field. Entries must be received on or before Monday, Aug. 14. Please include your address and phone number. Winners will be announced in three weeks. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, appropriateness or humor. No purchase necessary. The Faerie of The Fine Print & The Ear No One Reads thanks Ken Krattenmaker of Landover Hills for today's Ear No One Reads. Employees of The Washington Post and their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

## REPORT FROM WEEK 122

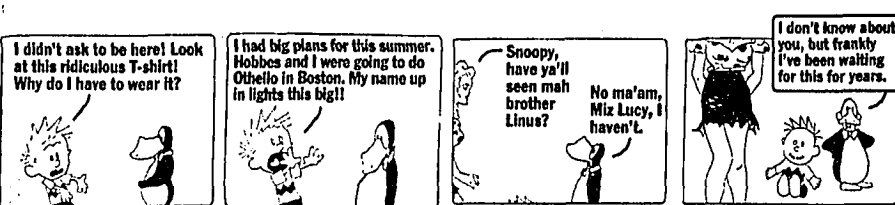
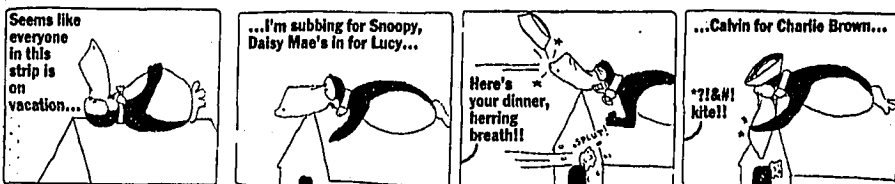
In which you were asked to come up with a new plot development for "Peanuts." But first, a brief logistical note. In the last three years, The Style Invitational has become something of a Washington Institution, in the sense that St. Elizabeth's is something of a Washington Institution. We have been getting increasingly disturbing mail from persons who are Fine Just Fine Just A Little Bit Upset Is All; they are alarmed at the prospect of the Invitational going on August sabbatical as we did last year. Relax. The Czar has enlisted the services of a trusted toady. She will run the next few contests with the same finely honed sense of humor that has made this contest into a cherished part of the lives of thousands of individuals with borderline personality disorders. And last, thanks to Harry J. Hewson of Dale City, who points out that "Bob Staake" is an anagram for "A B.O. Basket."

### ◆ Second Runner-Up:



(Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

### ◆ First Runner-Up:



(Story and artwork by David Harr, Clifton and Ewa Skoczylas, Centreville)

### ◆ And the Winner of this framed, signed Bob Staake fax art:



(Sarah Worcester, Bowie)

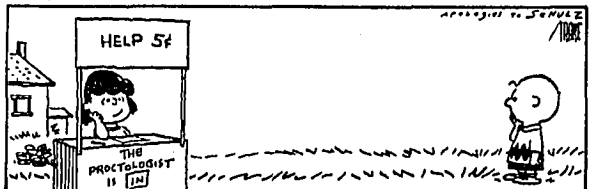
### ◆ Honorable Mentions:

**Snoopy dies after heroically saving little April Patterson from drowning.** (David Avagliano Treber, Silver Spring)

**The "Peanuts" strip is the subject of a boycott by PETA when they determine that Snoopy's doghouse does not afford him adequate sleeping space and ventilation.** (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

**Spike, the desert-dwelling dog, discovers peyote.** (Glenn Conton, Jennifer Garrison and Henry Kivelt, Burlington N.C.)

**Snoopy the Vulture eats some rotted meat and dies.** (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)



(Bill Moulden, Frederick)

**Charlie Brown appears in a charity baseball game featuring Cal Ripken Jr. and beans him, ending the streak.** (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)

**After years of pining for her with unrequited love, Charlie Brown finally gets a letter from the cute redheaded girl. It is a restraining order.** (Paul Styrene, Olney)



(Jon Frandsen, Takoma Park)

Next Week: Why is Poop Funny?

## MISS MANNERS

# Too Much of a Good Thing

By Judith Martin

As if etiquette weren't unpopular enough, Miss Manners occasionally has to argue against compassion and forgiveness.

It's so unfair. She feels like the high-school debating champion who has been assigned "Resolved: The school year should be extended, homework should be increased, and instead of a senior prom, there should be a review session the night before graduation to check that seniors haven't forgotten what they crammed for examinations."

Miss Manners against compassion? Isn't she always nagging people to do nice things for others and refrain from hurting their feelings? Isn't that what etiquette is all about?

What hurts Miss Manners's own feelings is the slanderous claim that given a conflict between the letter and the spirit of the etiquette rule, she would merrily throw over the principle to stick by the rule—especially if this offered an opportunity to stick it to someone else.

"I'd like to thank you now," a dignitary of Miss Manners's acquaintance told her guest of honor publicly during an official meal, "but I suppose Miss Manners would disapprove." Oh, right. As if it were Miss Manners's purpose in life to stamp out gratitude on technical grounds.

As for forgiveness, etiquette is the inventor of the apology, a device expressly designed to cancel misdeeds. Unlike its successor, the punitive damages settlement, the apology is available free (although flowers are always welcome). Etiquette also supplies the polite response to an apology, a gracefully murmured, "I'm sure it wasn't your fault," and "Of course, I knew there must be some explanation."

Yet—wait while Miss Manners takes a deep breath—there is such a thing as fostering bad behavior by misplaced compassion and forgiveness. There, she said it.

When all transgressions are automatically explained away and immediately wiped from the record, there soon is no standard of good behavior. The more tolerant and understanding the society becomes, the worse the situation seems to get.

People of widely varying political views have noticed that the criminal-justice system suffers from the same horrifying and unintended consequence. Miss Manners is not the only person to be puzzled that modern juries are increasingly sympathetic to criminals—and the society in general reluctant to hold criminals' records against them—while the citizenry from which those juries are drawn is increasingly terrorized by crime.

Her own habit of suspecting the best of people has her worrying that this comes from a kind but mistaken sense of manners. Decent people now feel obliged to consider everyone innocent after being proved guilty.

Faced with the individual instance, they generously make allowances—just the sort of allowances for which Miss Manners is always pleading. That the person who did wrong perhaps didn't realize it. Or probably had a good reason.

The catch is that when this is used as a general rule, rather than as an exception, it defines crime out of existence. Either there was a sociological or psychological reason for committing any crime, or it was an irrational act. It seems as wrong to condemn someone who was merely the instrument in an inevitable chain of cause and effect as it does to convict a crazy person. There isn't anyone else on the docket.

Miss Manners does not want to pursue this point

in respect to crime. She tends to be an old softy herself. Only when the argument is used to disarm etiquette of its one protection—the option of showing disapproval of people who behave rudely, mostly by avoiding them—does she start foaming at the mouth.

When people maintain that you can't expect this person to be polite because he's had a difficult life, or that one not to be rude because she is too busy to be bothered with etiquette, they give notice that everyone has license to be rude.

When they treat transgressors as members of society in good standing, they destroy the usefulness of reputation as a guide to character. It sounds polite to whitewash blemished records, on the grounds that someone who did wrong "has suffered enough" (been caught) and "paid his debt to society" (been convicted). But if personal history never counts, society only ends up assessing people less fairly, by using that easily manipulated, ersatz substitute—image.

Miss Manners objects, and not only because society needs protection. She objects philosophically too. So there.

The manners system, no less than that of morals, is based on the presumption that human beings have souls and free will and all that good stuff. Sure, they are influenced and handicapped by the circumstances of their lives. However, it is ultimately their ability to control their behavior, rather than merely to be acted upon by events, that gives human beings their dignity.

Puppets with no autonomous power, and therefore no responsibility, would not merit respect—that one offering of etiquette that everyone on the street admits craving. Their lives would be merely records of the way they were buffeted about by the past. No credit would be due to the virtuous. If there are no bad reputations, there can be no good ones either; if there are no villains, there are no heroes, either. There are merely the lucky and the unlucky.

Miss Manners isn't really arguing against compassion, which is one of the foundations of her calling. She is only warning against overusing it at the expense of another such value, respect.

### DEAR MISS MANNERS:

I'm having an ongoing disagreement with my club members concerning the placement of large cloth napkins when giving a formal luncheon or dinner.

I was taught that napkins are to be folded and placed on the left of the silverware or stuffed in the water goblet, but never forced into the smaller wine goblet where they flop over most ungracefully—but which my friends say is proper.

### Genie Reader:

Miss Manners is about to make a lot of enemies—perhaps even you among them—by taking your side. Well, sort of taking your side.

The fact is that Miss Manners loathes napkins stuffed into drinking glasses. They remind her of handkerchiefs stuffed into jacket breast pockets, which in turn makes her worry what will happen if the gentleman sneezes and he doesn't want to use his show handkerchief, and there goes her appetite. However, she is well aware that stating these prejudices infuriates otherwise polite people who have never thought to demur when she only tells them how to run the world or their lives.

Miss Manners apologizes that she cannot interest herself in whether the silly thing is hanging out of the water glass or the wine glass. Napkins belong on the service plate or to the left of the forks.

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## Bridge

By Alfred Sheinwold and Frank Stewart

"My partner drives me nuts," a reader says. "I can handle her criticism when I goof; she's the better player, and I guess she has to vent a little spleen. What bugs me is that even when I make my contract, she finds something to carp about."

West cashed two diamonds and led a trump. Our reader drew trumps and led the ace and a low club.

"Even I knew not to finesse with the queen when West had opened the bidding. When the king fell, I made the contract. I expected praise, but partner sniffed as if it were beginner's luck. What can I do to please her?"

Nothing. Get a new partner. Bridge is more enjoyable when your partner says nothing at all when she can't say something pleasant.

If your partner makes the wrong play, say "Tough luck." If she makes the right play for the right reason, count yourself lucky to have such a partner. If she makes the right play for the wrong reason, as today's South did, compliment her just the same.

West might hold the king of spades, not the king of clubs, and South's play might lose the contract. At Trick Five, South should lead the queen of spades.

If West has the king, he'll surely cover, and South will then play East for the king of clubs by finessing with the queen; but when West actually plays low on the first spade, South takes the ace of spades and leads the ace and a low club, playing West for that king.

North-South vulnerable

NORTH

♦ A 9 6 2

♥ K 10 5 4

♦ 10 4

♣ 9 4 2

WEST (D)

♦ J 8 7 3

♥ 9 6

♦ A K Q 6 5

♣ K 7

EAST

♦ K 10 5 4

♥ 8 3

♦ J 8 3 2

♣ J 10 8

SOUTH

♦ Q

♥ A J 7 2

♦ 9 7

♣ A Q 6 5 3

The bidding:

West North East South

1 ♦ Pass 2 ♦ 2 ♥

3 ♦ 3 ♥ Pass 4 ♥

All Pass

Opening lead: ♦ K

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## ANN LANDERS

### DEAR ANN LANDERS:

I am recently retired and on occasion watch TV talk shows. I am shocked and appalled at the filthy language, teenage girls wanting to have babies at 14, mothers being abused by their teenage children, men sleeping with teenage baby sitters, sisters sleeping with each other's husbands and mothers dating teenage boys, not to mention the fights that break out on the air. (One TV host has had his nose broken twice.)

Why does the Federal Communications Commission allow this garbage? What has happened to morals? It seems as though the talk show hosts are competing to see who can be the most shocking in that never-ending scramble for the highest ratings.

I don't care if this is the '90s—that is no excuse for bottom-of-the-barrel programming. We, the viewers, should speak out against it. It breaks my heart to know this trash is shown across the country 24 hours a day.

Whom can I write to, and what can I do as a citizen to help get this junk off the air?—Greenbelt Dear Greenbelt:

Write to the sponsors of the offending programs. Hit 'em where it hurts—right in the pocketbook. Send your letters to the company chairmen. The addresses are on the packaging of the products. Tell them you will not buy their products as long as they sponsor trash.

For those who are interested in an excellent book on how TV has failed us, I offer this passage: "The problem is more urgent than ever, for all of us—broadcasters, parents, public officials and teachers. We have abandoned our children to a wasteland of vacuous, often violent and openly consumerist TV programming that represents none of the values we claim to cherish and that threatens our future."

That passage is from a new book I am pleased to recommend. The name: "Abandoned in the Wasteland—Children, Television and the First Amendment." The authors are Newton N. Minow and Craig L. LaMay. Publisher: Hill and Wang. The price is \$20.

### DEAR ANN LANDERS:

My married friend has been using me to mask her illicit affair. Whenever we go out, her lover just "happens to show up."

She also keeps me updated on her outings so that I don't call her at home when she is out with her lover. I suspect she tells her husband that she is out with me. I have confronted her about this, but she gets angry and says I'm a rotten friend. Is there a solution for me?—Winnipeg, Manitoba Dear Winni:

She's no friend; she's a user. Winnipeg is a big city with lots of lovely people. Surely you can do better.

### DEAR ANN LANDERS:

My husband is an intelligent, well-educated man, but when we are with friends, he invariably monopolizes the conversation, gets off the track and becomes belligerent if he is interrupted.

People listen to him to be polite, but I know by the expressions on their faces that they are bored. I have tried to tell "Walter" in a nice way to let others speak, but he feels my criticism is unwarranted. How can I get him to stop doing this? I am—Embarrassed in Fort Lauderdale Dear Embarrassed:

Sorry, dear, I know of no quick fix for terminal bores. People who have no clear sense of how they come across are hopeless.

When Walter pauses for a few seconds to come up for air, jump in with "John, Henry, Bill, Jane, what are your opinions?" Try it, and good luck.

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