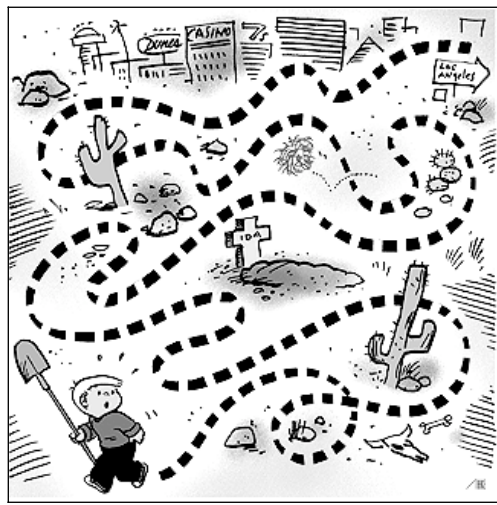


The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 690: Funnies: How Time Flies



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST, WITH APOLOGIES TO BIL KEANE

One week after escaped felon Billy Keane was captured in a Las Vegas motel, the oddly convoluted map in his possession led police to the shallow grave of Ida Know, 24.

Little Billy of "The Family Circus" has been 6 years old for 46 years. Kevin Dopart of Washington suggests that we pull Billy — or any of his comic strip neighbors in The Washington Post — out of his time warp to a different age, era or place, and provide a short storyline or dialogue or caption. Don't just say "Garfield is a saber-toothed tiger." Please don't send actual comic strips. You can use any comic that appears regularly in The Post, including "Doonesbury" and "Dilbert," which aren't on the daily comics pages.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives, thanks to Russell Beland of Springfield, a ceramic Smoking Baby, in whose mouth you put little match-size "cigarettes" and light them and smoke comes out. (Russell has been 6 years old for only 43 years.)

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called this week) get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 4. Put "Week 690" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Dec. 24. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Martin Bancroft of Rochester, N.Y. The revised title for next week's contest is by a whole buncha people.

REPORT FROM WEEK 686A

When we asked what ought to be done with the now-famous Ugly Painting by Fred Dawson of Beltsville that was awarded as a Style Invitational prize to Art Grinath of Takoma Park, who returned it to us, reporting that "frankly, it frightened my cats": Unfortunately, since today's page has no color, you will have to go to www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational to appreciate the painting (and some of today's results) in all their flaming glory. Most frequent suggestion this week: It's the perfect decor for the Gitmo interrogation room.

4 Donate it to the Hohner Co., to commemorate the first human born with a harmonica in her mouth. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

3 Use it as a fundraising poster to help find a cure for Sudden Infant Hand Syndrome. (Hopli Auerbach and John Garner, Greenbelt)

2 I need the painting back — it's a portrait of my wife that Fred Dawson painted in 2003 that was lost in our recent move to Minnesota. (See family photo, bottom of Page D1.) (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

AND THE WINNER OF THE UGLY PAINTING

I should get it because everyone thinks you'll give it to me because that would be funny, but then people will think you would never resort to such a cheap and easy laugh, so they'll be sure you won't give it to me, and that's when you'll fool them. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)



MONA LOSERS

The NEA could use it for a commercial pleading for more arts education funding. This could be the most effective ad since the one with the crying Indian standing in trash. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

This rare painting of a young Ronald McDonald would make a priceless addition to my Happy Meal collection. (Rich Carlson, Bowie)

If you give this painting to me, I'll take care of it even better than that other one — and it won't be no accident. — Steve Wynn, Las Vegas (Brendan Beary, Great Mills; Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

I would gaze upon this fine portrait from time to time for renewed inspiration as I continue to chase my dream of becoming a professional artist's muse. The painting, with its simple, unaffected subject and its perfect dimensions, is the ideal replacement for the missing windowpane in my bathroom. (Sylvia Betts, Vancouver, B.C.)

Isn't everybody getting tired of that old skull-and-crossbones poison symbol . . . ? (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

My mother-in-law deserves this picture because she wouldn't be seen dead with something like this. And she's dead. Bwahahaha. (Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

The painting should be neatly packed in a box labeled "PROOF THAT GREENHOUSE GASES CAUSE GLOBAL WARMING" and then delivered to the White House. The box and painting will disappear, never to be seen again. (Dennis Lindsay, Seabrook)

This ought to be hanging in the Loo, or whatever that French museum is called. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

Send it to the art correspondence school on the matchbook with a letter saying, "I couldn't draw Binky, but I painted this. Do I qualify?" And you will! (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

I should get the painting because then I'll have a matched set over my fireplace. (Michael Canty, Yorktown, Va.)



BY MICHAEL CANTY

It's proof to my students that if they don't study hard and master art appreciation, they'll end up stuck in Iraq. (David Dalton, Arlington)

Title it "Muhammad's Mother." Go to Paris and ship the picture, courtesy of the French government, as a gift to the Taliban. They'll take it from there. (Andrew Hoenig)

It should be the last thing Saddam Hussein is allowed to see before the blindfold goes on. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

"Fred Dawson" is an anagram for "Dwarf Nosed," and judging by the nose in the painting, this is clearly a cross-dressing self-portrait. These are now illegal in Virginia. Make him take it back. (Jeff Brechlin)

You should send this painting to Stephen Dudzik of Olney, who's been dying from an attack of pleonasm ever since 1994, when he complained in Week 48 about this "rare parasitic worm" in a successful attempt to be given a Loser T-shirt. (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrills)

There are some scuff marks on my rec room wall that form an uncanny image of the Circumcision of Christ. That creeps me out even more than Fred's picture, so send it to me so I can cover it up. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

I want this painting because I believe it contains a clue to another New Testament mystery: Did Mary have a really ugly sister? — Dan Brown (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

The painting could be used as part of the Turp by Numbers kit, wherein the home artist removes each color in turn, eventually revealing a perfectly good canvas. (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

Because I have just learned that it's absolutely impermissibly tacky to put family photos on the wall, and so I need something to put on the hook. (Jan Hyatt, Severna Park)

Maybe there is a Rembrandt underneath, so we better take off the top layer of paint just in case. (Art Grinath)

And Last: I should get it because I've discovered I like scaring my cats. (Art Grinath)

Next Week: Whatever Were They Thinking?, or Lafterthoughts

Rebuilding Childhood Obsessions With Legos

LEGO, From D1

"You go into what we refer to as the Dark Ages, when you stop playing with them as a kid, but come back to them as an adult. Some people stop at 12, then break out their Lego sets again at 30," explains model builder Eric Hunter, 36, who landed his dream job a year ago at America's only Legoland, in the Southern California coastal town of Carlsbad. Hunter and the other master model builders work in a Carlsbad shop filled with some 2,000 floor-to-ceiling bins full of virtually every piece Lego has created, in every color (that would include the seven shades of pink). Outside in the theme park, their obsession with detail is why a small black Lego rat can be found in the New York subway display, and why Secret Service men on duty in mini-D.C. all look alike and sport tiny earbuds.

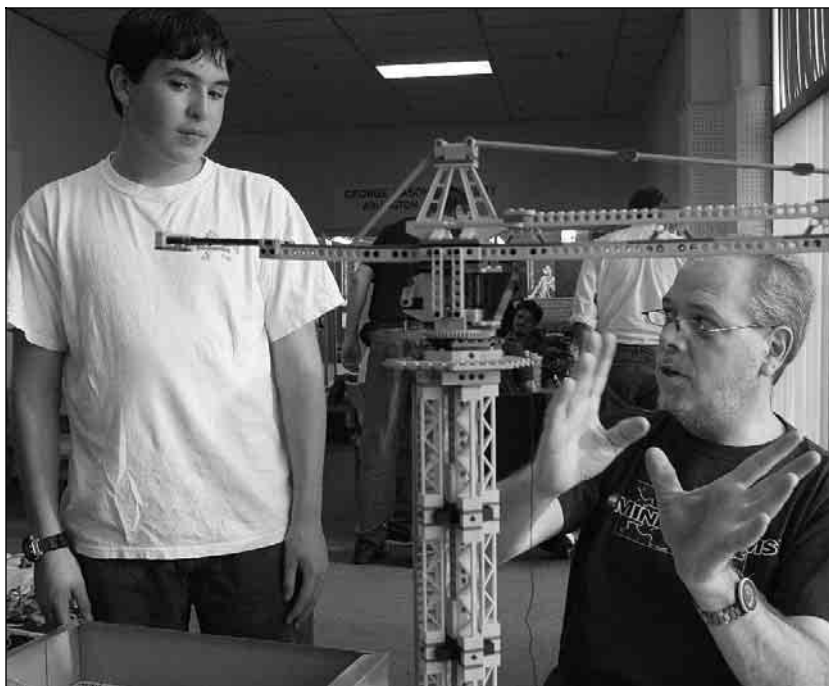
"I have Lego thoughts and dreams," Hunter says. "I'll be driving down the freeway and I'll see a building and think, 'Can I build that out of Lego?'"

His work is focused on a planned Las Vegas exhibit, due to open next spring in the park's Miniland U.S.A. Designers expect to use more than 2 million bricks to build miniatures of famous Vegas hotels and casinos, complete with a tacky wedding chapel and Lego showgirls.

Hunter is painstakingly putting together a miniature Excalibur Hotel, which, he notes cheerfully, has 2,200 windows and 28 turret styles, details gleaned by a Lego reconnaissance team dispatched to Vegas to study and photograph the real thing.

Patience is a given for AFOLs, as Adult Friends of Lego are known. Hunter spent a decade building his dream car out of more than 10,000 pieces: a '91 Acura NSX that he fell in love with while working in a carwash. His Lego version was two feet long and a foot high.

When he learned Legoland was holding a national competition to hire a new model builder, Hunter made it to the semifinals with the scorpion he assembled when given a bucket of 2,000 Lego pieces and 45 minutes to build any animal. He'd taught himself to make a sphere out of squares, the required skill test for any model shop hire. Hunter lost the contest, but networked in the Lego community and visited the park



ABOVE AND RIGHT BY RICH LIPSIC — THE WASHINGTON POST



BY FRED GREENAWALD FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Designer Mariann Asanuma tries to replicate one of the MGM Grand's lion statues at Legoland's model shop in Carlsbad, Calif. The shop has 2,000 tubs filled with Legos.

often enough that the model shop manager remembered him when another opening came up later. The pay is modest — top scale is about \$45,000 a year — but there's a 10 percent employee discount on Legos, a perk that adds up with a hobby that AFOLs say can easily devour thousands of dollars a year.

The model builders take turns running inspection before the theme park opens each morning. In Miniland, they make sure the presidential motorcade zipping along Pennsylvania Avenue hasn't been crushed by a renegade possum overnight, and that no seagulls have strategically bombed the White House. They make sure enthusiastic AFOLs haven't pinched any of the discontinued bricks — transparent ones are particularly coveted — for their private collections.

And they smile at their own inside jokes, such as the home brewery that

the model builders constructed and hid atop the model of the Kennedy Space Center, and the Elvis impersonator amid the crowd of mini-commuters at Grand Central Terminal. Then there's the Lego body of Jimmy Hoffa, buried where no tourist will ever see him, deep within a column of the new Freedom Tower in fake Manhattan.

It's an attention to detail shared by the AFOLs who gather for a monthly play date in a deserted lounge at George Mason University's Arlington campus, where a dozen or so fans brought their Legos by the giant tub and jumbled boxful on a recent Saturday.

Georgetown mathematician Judy Miller's onion-domed reproduction of St. Basil's Cathedral posed delicately beneath the yellow crane that Abraham Friedman was building higher and higher. Michael Harrod smiled bravely when a clumsy neighbor accidentally



Above, some reconstructive surgery on a Dudley Do-Right who was decapitated. Left, Abraham Friedman, 50, talks building blocks with Alex Valentino, 13, at a Lego social club in Arlington.

decapitated his Dudley Do-Right of the Mounties sculpture.

"We used to have rules, bylaws, a lot of bureaucrats and heavy structure, and it killed us," Friedman, a software developer, says of the Washington Metro Area Lego Users Group, or WAMA-LUG. "We used to have two-hour meetings and we'd argue and discuss things forever. So we dissolved the constitution, got rid of the rules. Now we're just a social club. We hang out and build things."

Besides showing off their latest projects and discussing construction challenges, members also share sorting strategies. Dan Rubin, a 27-year-old lawyer from Silver Spring, prides himself on his system of sorting by shape, rather than color, the 400,000-some Lego pieces that his fiancée has consigned to their basement.

"It's easy to become obsessive about acquiring a certain piece instead of building," observes Magnus Lauglo, who is just coming out of a nine-month castle phase to concentrate on military vehicles. His green tanks reflect a love of military history and technology rather than a political statement, Lauglo says, adding: "I don't build in a sociopolitical vacuum, though. It's impossible to build these and not be aware there's a war going on."

Friedman is casting a critical eye on his finished crane. Judging from the width of the boom and the size of the mini-figure construction worker standing on site, he quickly calculates that the crane is not to scale: It wouldn't be high enough to erect a skyscraper in real life. He is disappointed, but considers the four hours he spent building it well spent.

"Just the act of snapping the pieces together is so satisfying," he explains, not even looking down as his fingers connect one brick to another. "That click when they go together."

TODAY'S HOROSCOPE

Holiday Mathis

Aries (March 21-April 19)
You whiz through the day in a state of chronic excitement. Get the defac. And trying to be Zen only makes matters worse. You're better off burning energy by running up the side of a mountain.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
Well-intentioned types try to flag you down and show you a few things. But you're too busy living up to your potential to stop and try to figure out how to imitate someone else's.

Gemini (May 21-June 21)
Civic duty is an important responsibility, and one you take personally. Realizing that if you do nothing the bad guys might win, you choose to do something. Once you're on your way, others follow your lead.

Cancer (June 22-July 22)
The success of your creative process depends on a key person — a naysayer, a critic, a buzz kill. Unless you know what's weak about your project, you can't build on its strengths.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)
Be watchful of the person who extends grand promises. Either this person can afford to follow through, or has no intentions of doing so and can, therefore, afford any size of lie.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
As usual, you're packing the schedule with ambitious endeavors. Greatness, like nature, is not exact. The less you try to be perfect, the more you get right.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)
This is the moment to get your visionary plan in place — you'll visualize your success every day for between five and 10 minutes. At the end of a year, that's as if you spent an entire workweek meditating on your greatness.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)
If you can't easily explain your intentions, perhaps they're still not clear even to you. Once you break it down into concise action steps, you're on your way!

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
The light bulb of innovation clicks on for you, brightening your outlook and helping you see your path more clearly. Don't be surprised if it leads you to another country!

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
Delegating is always hard for you, because nobody does it quite like you. Today it'll be downright impossible, so don't even try. Wake up early, stay up late, and do it yourself from sunrise to sunset.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
Your excellent taste guides others. Why is it your job to point out the glaringly obvious or inexcusably bad? It just is. State your piece quickly, like someone pulling off an adhesive bandage.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)
The difference between going with the flow and being passive is something only you know in your heart. One has to do with timing and the other has to do with fear.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY, NOV. 26: This is a silly birthday, and the random acts of comedy keep on coming. This humor breaks the spell of hyper-seriousness, which is like a disease, limiting your creativity, ability to make money and self-concept. Once the "spell" is broken, you'll notice good news in the financial, career and love fronts. Libra and Cancer people adore you.

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