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Style Invitational Week 1417: Dead Letters, our annual obit-poem contest

Time for commemorations with 2020 hindsight; plus poems using the year's new words

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(Bob Staake for The Washington Post)

By Pat Myers

Dec. 30, 2020 at 10:13 a.m. EST

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(Click [here](#) to skip down to the inking poems based on new dictionary words)

Linda Tripp (1949-2020), Clinton scandal figure

**Linda Tripp, world-famous buttinsky ,
Dropped a dime on M. Lewinsky.**

So 2020 is behind us. And it may be hard right now to glance back on it, especially for The Style Invitational's traditional top-of-the-year contest. So many lives to commemorate — but our Loserbards' brand of wry, even funny wistfulness might be just what we need right now.

This week: Write a poem of no longer than eight lines (plus an optional title) about someone who died in 2020, as in the mini-example above by Washington Post Ewwlogist Gene Weingarten. Google "deaths 2020" and you'll find many lists of those who won't be joining us this week. (And if you're, say, thinking of writing an ode to The Late 2020, the Empress promises she won't narrow her eyes and hiss, "Is that a *someone*?") **Note:** The Invite is a humor/light-verse contest, so we don't want straight-out sobbers; the verses should be leavened with wit and even a laugh. But neither should they be nasty or gloating. We have enough hurt in our world right now.

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Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1417 (no capitals in the Web address). **Deadline is Monday, Jan. 11;** results

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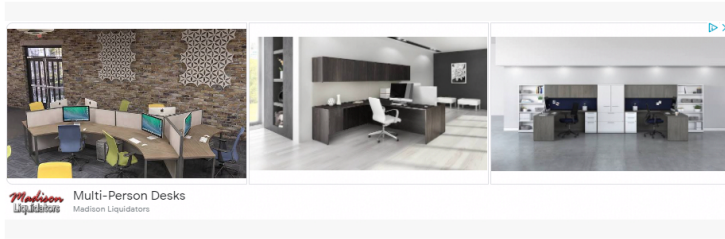


The mask was supposed to say "NYC strong," but came our reading like "NYC crotch"; This week's second prize.

appear Jan. 31 in print, Jan. 28 online.

Winner gets the Clowning Achievement, our Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a **face mask with one of those classic Judaica Fails**, like last year's menorah socks with seven candles. This one was supposed to say "NYC *shtark*" — "strong" in Yiddish — but someone placed the Hebrew letters left to right, giving them no Hebrew or Yiddish meaning, except that reading them right to left gives you the pronunciation "crotch." Donated by Loser Edward Gordon.

Other runners-up win their choice of our "For Best Results, Pour Into Top End" **Loser Mug** or our "Whole Fools" Grossery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-after Loser magnets, "No Bility" or "Punderachiever." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. The headline "M-Wahaha" is by Chris Doyle; Beverley Sharp wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev; "like" the Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; and follow @StyleInvite on Twitter.



The Style Conversational: The Empress's weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. See this week's, published late afternoon on Wednesday, Dec. 30, at wapo.st/conv1417.

The "You're Invited" podcast: Eight half-hour episodes, including dish from the Empress and the Czar, and tips from top Losers. See bit.ly/invite-podcast.

And from The Style Invitational four weeks ago ...

M-Wahaha: Poems with new dictionary words

In [Week 1413](#) the Empress once again asked our Loserboards for poems featuring words and phrases added recently to [Merriam-Webster's online dictionary](#).

4th place:

Cryosphere, *the part of Earth's surface where water stays frozen*

Ice fields of Antarctica are disappearing quickly,
And pretty soon the penguins could be looking kinda sickly.
With global warming on the rise, our planet's cryosphere
Might first become a swimming pool, and next a dryosphere. (*Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.*)

3rd place:

Iatrophobia, *fear of doctors*

I have severe iatrophobia —
Who knows what diseases they're carrying?
But I think I can freeze my deep fear of MDs
When it comes down to whom I'll be marrying. (*Jesse Rifkin, Arlington, Va.*)

2nd place

and the clam-flavored Clamdy Canes:

Impostor syndrome, *persistent doubt about one's ability and fear of being discovered to be incompetent*

"Bid your impostor syndrome adieu,"
Said my therapist, Dr. Leroux.
"You'll still feel like a fraud,
But that isn't so odd,
For, in your case, it's perfectly true." (*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)

And the winner of the Clowning Achievement:

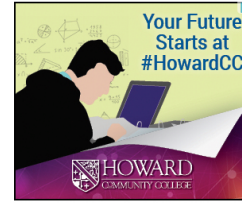
Useful idiot, *a naive person who can be exploited politically*

I had a useful idiot; for years he kissed my bottom.

swashbuckler is still the quintessential American action hero



5 **Perspective**
Trump's exit may be too late to save the presidential movie



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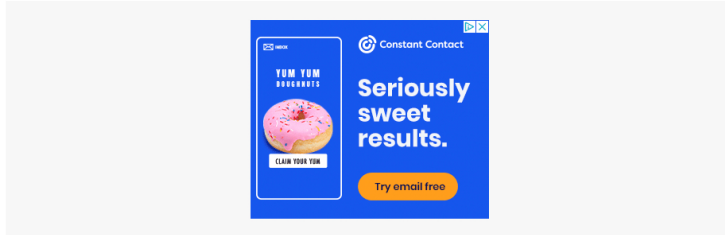


I need a favor? Two or three? Well, every time I got 'em.
But now he's on his way out and I'm feeling kind of miffed.
Those millions that he's in my debt? I'm likely to be stiffed.
— V.P., Moscow (*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

Bury 'em, Webster! Honorable mentions

Canna, *as in cannabis*

Because his house calls cause such dread,
My doc now brings me canna bread.
For this, I am his biggest fan — a
Touter of his bedside manna.
(*Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.*)



Most anything that's **canna**,
I admit that I'm a fan a'.
With "herbal" skin cream I anoint,
But I like it better in my joint.
(*Sam Mertens, Silver Spring, Md.*)

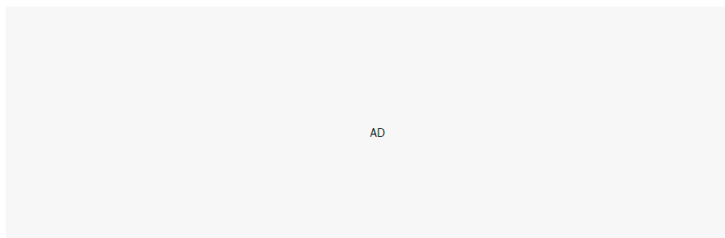
Deepfake, *an elaborately doctored photo or recording*

So what if this keepsake
Is only a deepfake?
A Photoshopped image that shows me in bed
With a naked George Clooney
Doesn't mean that I'm loony —
A loon would've put him in PJs instead.
(*Melissa Balmain, Rochester, N.Y.*)

When Trump starts conceding
And stops his impeding,
Reveals what he's hidin',
Congratulates Biden,
Accepts the results,
Appeals to adults,
You'll see how they make
The perfect **deepfake**.
(*Frank Mann, Washington*)

Greige, *gray-beige*

A husband came back from the store:
"I've got greige paint you sent me out for."
"Are you some kind of dope?
Can't you see this is taupe?"
And she pointed him back out the door. (*Hildy Zampella, Alexandria, Va.*)



Iatrophobia, *fear of doctors*

Urgency-flurgency,
Virus-responding group —
All of your meetings Trump
Seems to omit.
Could be a symptom of
Iatrophobia:
Fear that your docs will say

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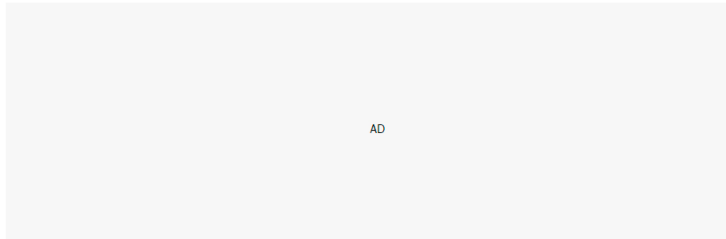
"You're full of [alternative facts]."
(Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

Iatrophobia's my curse,
My home I had to flee,
For what location could be worse
Than Baltimore, MD? *(Mark Raffman)*

The **iatrophobe** suffers from gastric distress
But fears doctors will just do him harm,
So he's treating himself at the new CVS,
Where he may well be buying the pharm. *(Chris Doyle)*

Hydroxychloroquine can treat malaria or lupus.
It's not a cure for covid, though our leader tried to dupe us.
The drug has many side effects like headaches and depression.
It's rather like the president — so use it with discretion. *(Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore)*

WFH, working from home
WTF I WFH
Each and every day.
OMG IDK
How I can live this way.
IMHO FWIW
I'm sure I'll make it through.
OK G2G TTYL
My Zoom meeting's in two. *(Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.)*

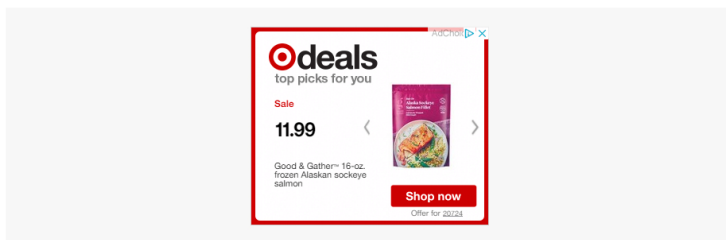


Kids gonna **body-shame**, that's what they do.
So I have two heads, one more than you.
But I couldn't care less — what the hell do I care?
I got a good-lookin' head, and another to spare. *(Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)*

Please keep **physical distance** — that's so
You'll be safer wherever you go.
Experts say that it's smart
To stay six feet apart,
Or you might end up six feet below. *(Jesse Frankovich, Lansing, Mich.)*

CV, coronavirus
At a job interview,
What you don't want to do
Is to give them your CV
By going "Ah-choo!" *(Sarah Walsh, Rockville, Md.)*

Melissophobia, fear of bees
"Melissophobia"! How glad I was
To hear this word — to know, when folks avoid me,
It's just because they're frightened of my name:
My personality is not to blame!
Oh how this knowledge comforted and buoyed me!
(Then, hearing "fear of bees," I lost my buzz.) *(Melissa Balmain)*

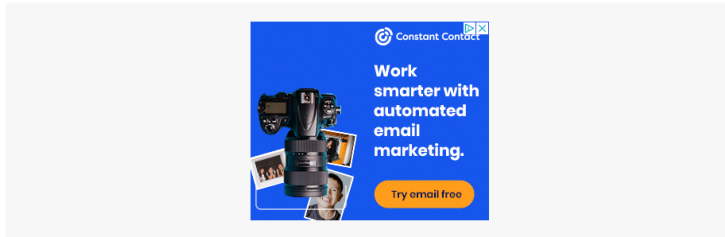


Truthiness, maintaining without evidence that things are true
If QAnon truthiness spreads to this city, it's
Likely to grow and produce useful idiots. *(Chris Doyle)*

Cryosphere, the part of Earth's surface where water stays frozen
You cry for the summit without any snow;
With sea levels rising, you cry for the bay,
And hundreds of species with nowhere to go —
Yet nowhere, with temperatures rising, to stay.
You don't have to cry for the cryosphere, though;
It cries for itself as it's melting away. (*Alex Steelsmith, Kailua, Hawaii*)

I fled to far frontiers
Where bare ice pearly;
That suited me fine —
Of all the **cryospheres**
In all the world,
She walks into mine. (*Brett Dimaio, Cumberland, Md.*)

An unworldly young woman named Deb
Bought a teddy bear straight from Zagreb.
When it came, it was stuffed
With what ought to be puffed!
When gift shopping, avoid the **dark Web**. (*Hannah Seidel, Alexandria, Va.*)



Finna, "fixin' to"
If you're finna gettin' thinna
You should cut back on your dinna.
But if you're gladda growing fatta
Then by far you're our big winna. (*Jon Gearhart, Des Moines*)

Losing weight, though I'd once been a gainer,
Is so easy, it couldn't be plainer —
I just eat, eat and eat
Any meat, meat or meat;
Every **paleo** meal's a no-grainer. (*Frank Osen*).

Thirsty, desirous of attention
KFC was so thirsty for hype
That it made a short movie (what tripe!)
'Bout a buff Colonel Harlan —
Should have said, "Look here, darlin',
I'm a leg man, and you're just my type." (*Mark Raffman*)

To "Be Our Guest"

Anti-vax, anti-vax,
We don't trust your deep-fake facts,
So give us herd immunity while you just grind your axe.
Just a minute on the lips, but forever, microchips!
Luciferin, that's suspicious — please believe me, for my wish is
To be free, to be pure, not injecting your manure
And we sure don't trust that Fauci and his hacks.
Sure, that covid's a test for me, but my body knows best for me:
Anti-vax! Anti-vax! Anti-vax! (*Ann Martin, Brentwood, Md.*)

Still running — deadline Monday night, Jan. 4: Our retrospective in which you can enter any of 25 recent contests. See wapo.st/invite1416.

DON'T MISS AN INVITE! [Sign up here](#) to receive a once-a-week email from the Empress as soon as The Style Invitational and Style Conversational go online every Thursday, complete with links to the columns.

0 Comments



Pat Myers

Pat Myers is editor and judge of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post's page for clever, edgy humor and wordplay. In the role since December 2003, she has posted and judged more than 700 contests. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook. [Follow](#)

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