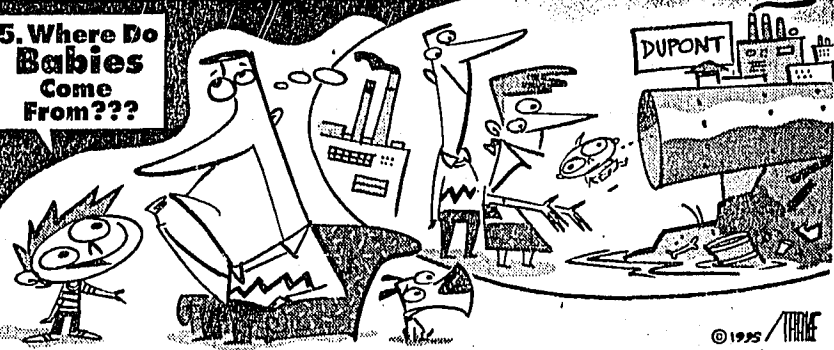


The Style Invitational

WEEK 123: WHY IS POOP FUNNY?

1. Why is the sky blue?
2. How do airplanes fly?
3. Where does dust come from?
4. Where does the sun go when it sets?

5. Where Do Babies Come From???



This week's contest was proposed by Jean Sorensen of Herndon and her 8-year-old son, Bobby. Jean wins a brand new 1995 Toyota Tercel with sunroof and driver-side air bag, and Bobby wins a real live pony named Mike. Jean and Bobby suggested you come up with creative answers to any of the five numbered questions above that might be asked by a 5-year-old. As an example, they quote from a book of Calvin & Hobbes cartoons, by Bill Watterson: "Why is there wind?" Calvin asks. "Trees sneezing," his father answers. Hm. Now that we examine their letter carefully, it would appear that ALL of Jean and Bobby's examples come from Calvin & Hobbes cartoon books. So, this is really not their idea at all, but Bill Watterson's idea, and he doesn't need a car or a horse, being a famously reclusive mega-millionaire. So, in fairness, we need to scale back the prizes a little. Jean wins "Moose Shish-ka-Poop," a plastic meat skewer with an elegant moose-doodly motif at the top, and Bobby wins a can of soda made from grass, a fine product of the People's Republic of China.

First-prize winner of Week 123 gets a matching pair of lamps made from genuine used AMF-approved tournament bowling pins, a value of, we don't know, how does \$50 sound? 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 123, 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, July 31. 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 would like to observe that we have begun getting tormented letters from people who don't know what The Ear No One Reads is and want to find out. We feel their pain. The Faerie of the Fine Print & The Ear No One Reads wishes to thank Stephen Dudzik of Silver Spring for today's Ear No One Reads. Employees of The Washington Post and their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 120

in which we asked you to come up with bad analogies. The results were great, though we feel compelled to point out that there is a fine line between an analogy that is so bad it is good and an analogy that is so good it is bad. See what we mean:

- ◆ Fourth Runner-Up: *Oooo, he smells bad, she thought, as bad as Calvin Klein's Obsession would smell if it were called Enema and was made from spoiled Spamburgers instead of natural floral fragrances.* (Jennifer Frank, Washington, and Jimmy Pontzer, Sterling)
- ◆ Third Runner-Up: *The baseball player stepped out of the box and spit like a fountain statue of a Greek god that scratches itself a lot and spits brown, rusty tobacco water and refuses to sign autographs for all the little Greek kids unless they pay him lots of drachmas.* (Ken Krattenmaker, Landover Hills)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up: *I felt a nameless dread. Well, there probably is a long German name for it, like *Geschpooklichkeit* or something, but I don't speak German. Anyway, it's a dread that nobody knows the name for, like those little square plastic gizmos that close your bread bags. I don't know the name for those either.* (Jack Bross, Chevy Chase)
- ◆ First Runner-Up: *She was as unhappy as when someone puts your cake out in the rain, and all the sweet green icing flows down and then you lose the recipe, and on top of that you can't sing worth a damn.* (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- ◆ *And the winner of the framed Scarlet Fever sign: His fountain pen was so expensive it looked as if someone had grabbed the pope, turned him upside down and started writing with the tip of his big pointy hat.* (Jeffrey Carl, Richmond)

- ◆ Honorable Mentions:
- ◆ *He was as tall as a six-foot-three-inch tree.* (Jack Bross, Chevy Chase)
- ◆ *The hallostones leaped from the pavement, just like maggots when you fry them in hot grease.* (Gary F. Hevel, Silver Spring)
- ◆ *The politician was gone but unnoticed, like the period after the Dr. on a Dr Pepper can.* (Wayne Goode, Madison, Ala.)
- ◆ *He spoke with the wisdom that can only come from experience, like a guy who went blind because he looked at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it and now goes around the country speaking at high schools about the dangers of looking at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it.* (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- ◆ *She caught your eye like one of those polyn hook latches that used to dangle from screen doors and would fly up whenever you banged the door open.* (Rich Murphy, Fairfax Station)
- ◆ *She was sending me more mixed signals than a dyslexic third-base coach.* (Jack Bross, Chevy Chase)
- ◆ *The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't.* (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- ◆ *McBride fell 12 stories, hitting the pavement like a Hefty bag filled with vegetable soup.* (Paul Sabourin, Silver Spring)
- ◆ *Having O.J. try on the bloody glove was a stroke of genius unseen since the debut of Goober on "Mayberry R.F.D."* (John Kammer, Herndon)
- ◆ *From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and "Jeopardy!" comes on at 7 p.m. instead of 7:30.* (Roy Ashley, Washington)
- ◆ *Her hair glistened in the rain like nose hair after a sneeze.* (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
- ◆ *Her eyes were like two brown circles with big black dots in the center.* (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- ◆ *Bob was as perplexed as a hacker who means to access T:\fw.quid\55328.com\aaakk\ch@ung but gets T:\fw.quid\55328.com\aaakk\ch@ung by mistake.* (Ken Krattenmaker, Landover Hills)

- ◆ *Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.* (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)
- ◆ *Her date was pleasant enough, but she knew that if her life was a movie this guy would be buried in the credits as something like "Second Tall Man."* (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- ◆ *Long separated by cruel fate, the star-crossed lovers raced across the grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left Cleveland at 6:36 p.m. traveling at 55 mph, the other from Topeka at 4:19 p.m. at a speed of 35 mph.* (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)
- ◆ *Upon completing kindergarten, Lance felt the same sense of accomplishment the Unabomber feels every time he successfully blows up another college professor.* (Anonymous, No city please)
- ◆ *They lived in a typical suburban neighborhood with picket fences that resembled Nancy Kerrigan's teeth.* (Paul Kocak, Syracuse, N.Y.)
- ◆ *John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.* (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- ◆ *The thunder was ominous-sounding, much like the sound of a thin sheet of metal being shaken backstage during the storm scene in a play.* (Barbara Fetherolf, Alexandria)
- ◆ *His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.* (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
- ◆ *The red brick wall was the color of a brick-red Crayola crayon.* (Jennifer Frank and Jimmy Pontzer, Washington and Sterling)
- ◆ *After sending in my entries for the Style Invitational, I feel relieved and apprehensive, like a little boy who has just wet his bed.* (Wayne Goode, Madison, Ala.)
- ◆ *Winning the Style Invitational is sort of like finding a flaming bag of dog poop on your porch. In fact, some weeks it's EXACTLY like that.* (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)
- ◆ *That Chuck Smith! He slays me! He's a regular O.J.* (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- ◆ *And Last: Sometimes I get really annoyed when entries get published and they don't even follow the rules of the contest.* (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Next Week: **It's No Use**

MISS MANNERS

The Unspeakable E-Word

By Judith Martin

"Do you have to use that word? It's not the idea that turns people off, so much as the word. Can't you think of a better way to put it?"

Miss Manners clapped her hand over her little rosebud mouth. What offensive word had slipped out? Had the standards of the times gotten to her without her realizing it? Was it time for her to bite the soap?

Etiquette. That was the word. Strong men and women are frightened of the word "etiquette." (Miss Manners would have referred to them as ladies and gentlemen, as is her habit to encourage gentle behavior, but she didn't want to scare them even more.)

Those who have complained to Miss Manners about her vocabulary are not advocates of rudeness, perhaps not even (there is a difference) practitioners of it. On the contrary, they are the very people who have come to agree with her about the rudeness problem, either because they have observed the state of society for themselves, or because Miss Manners has wrestled them to the ground, so to speak.

They are painfully aware that we have a serious problem with the way people routinely treat one another. Some are working actively to encourage better behavior in their professional societies, their schools, their religious organizations, their local government. Others just go around deploring everything in sight, which Miss Manners supposes is also a contribution.

Yet they never mention the E-word except to disavow etiquette, which they are careful to do explicitly. What they say they want is civility, decency, consideration for others, common sense, people making others feel comfortable, good sportsmanship, tact, collegiality, congeniality, respect, fairness—"but of course, not etiquette."

Biting her lip to keep from bursting into tears, Miss Manners tries to find out why they want to disassociate themselves from her cause, when we all seem to be working for the same goal. Why not etiquette?

"Because etiquette is about forks," is the inevitable answer.

This is a shorthand way of saying that etiquette is snobbishly picaresque—the hobby of otherwise useless people whose idea of fun is to set up vicious social traps so they can sneer at good-hearted folk who have only been trying to live out their honest lives in peace.

To such dastardly behavior, they give a name that defines polite and considerate behavior. Who has the vocabulary problem here?

Familiar as the fork retort is to her, Miss Manners has never ceased to be puzzled by it. Everybody eats. Every society has rules about eating. Our own are extremely simple compared with the short, infamous late Victorian period of table-tool specialization—an era when silver was relatively cheap and plentiful, and there were no software stores to supply the need for specialized gadgets to do tasks that don't need doing.

True, there was that little matter of an Industrial Revolution, and people always use periods of social upheaval to play identification games with toys. But that was a long time ago. Now we do this with cars

and brand-name clothes. Has that given a bad name to driving and dressing?

Anyway, that period was an exception to the rule that the less industrialized the society, the more complicated are its eating rituals. What is truly bewildering to Miss Manners is that the very same people who hate the E-word are the most eager to praise and preserve the rituals of societies they consider more authentic than their own, whatever that means. Believing in the importance of cultural tradition for others, they only spurn the manners beloved of their parents or grandparents.

Table manners, even ones as streamlined as ours now are, are particularly onerous because they are examples of etiquette that has to be learned by rote. You can't deduce it from first principles. You can't make it up for yourself. Memorizing rules isn't as exciting as freedom.

Miss Manners admits this, although she wonders whether it is all that exciting to figure out how to eat breakfast. Be that as it may, she gently suggests that people making up their own rules, and deciding which courtesies they want to obey and which they don't, is exactly the problem that has been identified as incivility and lack of consideration.

Given the choice, people will naturally drop the courtesies they find inconvenient or incomprehensible, without regard to other points of view or unconsidered consequences. The opportunities for misinterpreting the motivations of others are rampant, and even the most kindly intentioned may find that they inadvertently offend.

Tell people to be more considerate, and they grow back that, of course, they are already being that. Ask that they follow the rules of etiquette, and they at least understand what is required.

This is why Miss Manners insists on the word. With a bit of practice, one can even get used to saying it without blushing.

DEAR MISS MANNERS:

I'm standing at the counter waiting to buy some books and happily reflecting on the fact that I'm finally able to walk again, although painfully, after recent bilateral bunion surgery.

A man in an electric wheelchair glides in and stops micro-inches from my feet. I turn to him and laughingly say, "Don't roll over my feet," to which he snarls, "Give me a break, you patronizing bitch!"

After I pick my jaw up off the floor, I try to explain about the surgery, but he is not even pretending to listen.

Was I being patronizing? Was my sincere but humorous attempt to warn him away from my feet a faux pas? What should I have done besides pick up my books and flee in embarrassment to hide in the corner until he left?

Gentle Reader:

Is this what we call empathy? Both of you have suffered from not being able to walk, and both of you have learned from experience.

Unfortunately, what you have both learned is to live on the attack. While the other person's rudeness here is appalling, Miss Manners is not about to excuse yours, which she fails to find the least bit amusing. The proper thing to do after improperly insinuating that a perfect stranger is unable to conduct himself properly is to apologize.

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Bridge

By Alfred Sheinwold and Frank Stewart

The beginner spends years learning good habits: second hand low, third hand high, etc. The "serious" player unlearns all habits.

The difference shows in a hand taken from the amusing "Jenny Mae the Bridge Pro" by Martin Hoffman and Matthew Granovetter. Jenny loses the first spade to the king, and back comes the nine of hearts.

West wins and leads a spade to dummy. Jenny runs the clubs, and West discards two hearts as East throws three. Dummy's last five cards are diamonds.

Now the beginner leads a low diamond from dummy, planning to unblock by playing the queen. But Jenny has an uneasy feeling about this simple play.

"What I am doing," thinks Jenny Mae, "is playing the diamonds so as to lose only to the ace and king . . . and not to the nine. If the nine drops early, there's no problem. But what if one opponent has four diamonds that include the nine and one or both of the top diamonds?"

If Jenny leads a diamond to the queen, West wins and returns a diamond. East allows dummy to win with the jack; and East then wins the next two diamonds for down one.

Jenny therefore leads the jack of diamonds from dummy, and the defenders cannot defeat the contract.

This 126-page book is a bit advanced for some readers, but everybody will enjoy the Damon Runyon style and the bridge situations. Copies available from C&T Bridge Supplies, 3838 Catalina St., Los Alamitos, Calif., 90720. \$8.95, plus \$2 for shipping and handling.

North-South vulnerable

NORTH (D)

- ◆ AJ
- ◆ Q
- ◆ J 10 8 6 5
- ◆ A K Q J 2

WEST

- ◆ 10 8 6 2
- ◆ K 6 5 2
- ◆ K 3
- ◆ 10 6 5

EAST

- ◆ K 5 4
- ◆ 9 8 7 4
- ◆ A 9 7 4
- ◆ 8 3

SOUTH

- ◆ Q 9 7 3
- ◆ A J 10 3
- ◆ Q 2
- ◆ 9 7 4

The bidding:
 North East South West
 1♦ Pass 1♥ Pass
 3♣ Pass 3NT All Pass
 Opening lead: ♣ 2

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Vision Quest

NOTED WITH, From F1

I became too cool for the room. To put a fine point on it, I went Hollywood.

Then, one day, the light dawned. It all began at a downtown bookstore. As I headed for the exit, a woman awaited me with a breath-mint smile. Of course, I had become used to such behavior. I smiled back.

She looked deep into my opaque lenses as she held open the door and, in a breathy voice Sharon Stone might use to lure Michael Douglas to his doom, asked, "Have you ever considered a career in modeling?" I was flattered but not surprised. I shook my head. "Think about it," she crooned. "We get a lot of call for your 'type.'"

My type? Middle-aged, graying and significantly out of shape? The only exercise I get these days is writing the monthly check for my health club dues. But since I was wearing The Glasses, I had to agree—I was a "type."

She explained she was a talent scout and that her agency might spotlight me in magazine ads, TV commercials, catalogues and, oh yes, movies.

I suddenly realize that this was my "Schwab's drugstore moment." I had been discovered. I pictured myself in a small role at first—just a walk-on, but when the director spotted the Armanis, he'd give me a line or two. Suddenly I'd be in a love scene with Michelle Pfeiffer.

I celebrated my good fortune that night, at Planet Hollywood—naturally. My friend Thom got really excited about my prospects. "Let's put out a beefcake calendar," he proposed. "Think of it, a whole year of middle-aged men!" I'd be January. He'd be February. Talk to my agent, I said.

So I called the name on the card, the Senior Vice President for Talent Development. As it turns out, the S.V.P.F.T.D. doesn't take calls from "types." And the receptionist recommended I make an appointment so he could "evaluate my potential." I told her about Harvey. Was he a "type?" she asked. A Karl Lagerfeld-type, I said. "Bring him," she said.

The night before the meeting, my wife suggested a special beautifying ritual. I told her not to worry. The Glasses would be enough. "What happens if they want you to take them off?" she asked.

I can now attest to the curative power of crushed cucumber cleansing cream and alpha hydroxy moisturizer. The next morning, my skin was shiny and bright as the paint on the Maserati I'd buy when I hit it big. I donned my eyewear, climbed into Harvey's Range Rover (more impressive than any Mazda) and

cruised on out to Tysons Corner to seize the day.

The agency was in a nondescript building in a distinctly unglamorous office park. Inside, its reception area was crammed with a plethora of "types." Cindy Crawfords, Naomi Campbells, Lou Gossetts and Andy Garcias. Then there was the second tier: the neighborhood grocer-types, the legal secretary-types, the Gen-X/slacker-types and a not-so-darling bunch of tots with stage mothers in tow. We joined them on folding chairs and filled out our Potential Talent Questionnaires.

Naturally, the agency wanted to know the basics: height, weight, hair color, etc. But basics have little to do with "potential." To measure so elusive a quality, there were essay questions: *Why do you want to become a Model, or Actress?* Too much time on my hands, I scribbled. I have no idea, Harvey wrote. *What do you feel are the most important qualities for a Model, Actor, or Actress to possess?* A full head of hair, I scrawled. I have no idea, Harvey wrote. *Do you feel you have what it takes to be successful in this industry?* I have the right sunglasses, I wrote. I have no idea, Harvey wrote. *What one word best describes you?* Perfection, I wrote. Punctual, Harvey wrote.

Then we sat and watched as prospect after prospect was called into private offices, no doubt to elaborate on their questionnaire answers. Finally, after an hour, they called our names and we were ushered into separate rooms.

The Glasses and I sat down across from the S.V.P.F.T.D.—a different one than on the card, but, hey, any of them could see I had the right stuff. I expected him to eyeball me for photogenic qualities and check that my fingernails were clean. Instead, he launched into a spiel about the 5,000 new faces needed to fill the demands of the burgeoning cable industry. The agency would train me, he said as he whipped a contract from a huge pile, and for a mere \$350 down payment, would personally recommend me to the "board." Should I pass muster, I would be given the opportunity to enroll . . . for another \$1,200. But, he warned, I'd have sign up fast, because they had only one space left!

Clearly, I had been caught up in a classic scam: Round up a flock of pigeons and separate them from their bills. Having sold cemetery plots to work his way through college, Harvey recognized the setup immediately. That's when he pointed out that I had been right all along: The woman had approached me because my eyewear spoke to her. The problem was, they were screaming, "Sucker!"