

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 684: Backtricking

Skrod: Fish that are always swimming upstream.
eFink: An online writer known for ad hominem attacks.
Nword: Something that gets you in really deep trouble.

Here's an elegantly simple contest we did 139 weeks ago that produced a wondrous bounty of results, including the conveniently short examples above, by Losers Tom Witte, Mike Cisneros and Russell Beland, respectively: **Spell a word backward and define the result, somehow relating the definition to the original word.** The backward versions of proper nouns are welcome. You can see the results of the original contest, Week 545, at www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational. Don't send those entries again, please, even though this leaves you with only tens of thousands of other words to choose from.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives the book "Everything I Ate: A Year in the Life of My Mouth," which contains a photograph of each thing the author ate for all 366 days of 2004, from Cheerios to blanquette de veau. (If the Empress had compiled this book, it would have been twice its 496 pages.)

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, Oct. 23. Put "Week 684" 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 Nov. 12. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The Honorable Mentions name is by Tom Witte. The revised title for next week's contest is by Phyllis Reinhard.

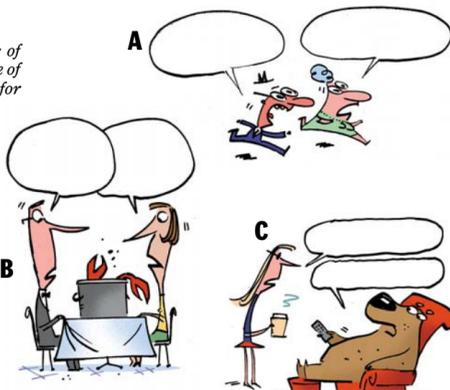
REPORT FROM WEEK 680

In which we asked for dialogue to fill the balloons of these four Bob Staake cartoons: Lots of people — one of whom gets ink — went with the Goldilocks theme for Cartoon C.

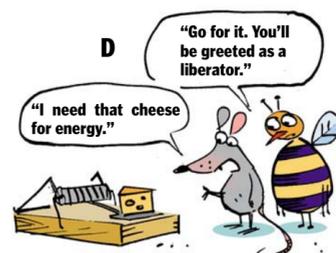
4 Cartoon C: "The ranger called again. 'I told you I never saw that hiker. Want some of this power bar?'" (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

3 Cartoon A: "It's not what you think, dear — I mistook your bra for my toupee!" "Just stay away from me — it hurts to run right now!" (Kerry Humphrey, Woodbridge)

2 The winner of lunch with the Empress at the "Waffle Shop" in Alexandria: Cartoon B: "Is this a good thing to eat on Yom Kippur?" "Okaaay, Senator Allen, let's back up a little..." (Kevin Dopart, Washington)



AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

FOOLING IN THE BLANKS

CARTOON A

"Soylent Green is spinach!" "Is that why we've got the runs?" (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

"Isn't it great how much gas we're saving by jogging to work?"

"I just think it's dumb to have to run right beside you so we can use the HOV lane." (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)

"I hear caffeine may increase excitability, but I have yet to see the evidence."

"Mm-hmm." (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

"Our shadows are freakishly distorted!" "I knew if they messed with Pluto there'd be repercussions!" (Stephen Dudzik)

"These hurdler's stretches would be easier if we changed out of our church clothes."

"It'd also be nice if you didn't leave your socks lying around the room." (Greg McGrew, Leesburg)

"Quick! before they run out of flying hats!" "Oh, no! I think I see a 'sold out' sign on the fingers booth!" (Joe Newman, Middletown, Conn.)

"Hurry up, they're right behind us!" "I miss the days when The Post just called to ask us to subscribe." (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

"But see, Empress, wait, what made my entry the best was that the bartender was in fact a chicken, and —"

"Russell, you gotta get a life!" (Jeff Brechlin; Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

CARTOON B

"What did I do wrong here?" "I think the recipe meant put the lobster in beer, dear, not put beer in the lobster." (Ed Gordon, Hollywood, Fla.)

"You're the one who wanted to go out." "Yes, but I thought dinner and a horror movie would be separate events." (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

"Madame Zena, shouldn't you be using a crystal ball for this?" "Usually I do, but it's my husband's bowling night." (Elliott Schiff, Allentown, Pa.)

"They didn't give us any lobster picks."

"We could use our noses." (Roy Ashley, Washington)

CARTOON C

"Mother is visiting this weekend." "Okay, but I can't promise I won't disembowel her." (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

"Here. One beer: not too hot, not too cold, yada yada yada."

"Okay, great. Now go make the bed. And remember, not too hard this time." (Jessica Lynne Mathews, Arlington)

"Decaf?" "Yeah, otherwise, I'm up till February." (Jay Shuck)

"Ease up, Martha, I'm not feeling well. And I AM man's best friend."

"I am not a man. You are not my best friend. So take your own #3%\$& urine sample to the vet." (Judith Cottrill, New York)

"You call it hibernating, I call it vegging out — you're watching people play CARDS, for pete's sake!"

"You call it antiquing, I call it paying good money for someone else's junk. You're going to DUM-FRIES, for pete's sake!" (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

CARTOON D

Mouse: "Your dad gave me this present." Bee: "Oh, good. I thought he didn't approve of our relationship." (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

"We face this Weapon of Mouse Destruction every day."

"As your national security adviser, I suggest you learn to make your own cheese." (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

"I think the people who live here are trying to kill me."

"Well, maybe they don't know you're lactose-intolerant." (Kerry Humphrey)

"What is this, some kind of trick?" "Yeah, looks like the old bait-and-squish." (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

"Hmm, this'll be tough."

"Hey, try pollinating a Venus fly trap." (Jay Shuck)

"In that sleep of death what dreams may come When we have shuffled off this mortal coil..." "Hey, buddy, can you hurry it up? I'm on day 20 of a 21-day life cycle, and I'm hungry!" (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

"I knew it was you, Fredo. You broke my heart!" "Michael, ya gotta believe me! They said you wouldn't get hurt. They just wanted to scare you. But I never thought it would be... a trap." (Cy Gardner)

Next Week: Ticket to Write, or Apple Turnovers



By Howard Walderman, Columbia

The New Loser Magnets

Here's the latest generation of Loser Magnets for Honorable Mention winners, created of course by the Honorable Bob Staake. The wording was suggested by Losers long ago in the form of titles for HM results. These magnets will do us for about another year; suggestions are always welcome for the next set.

By Dave Zarrow, Herndon

John Grisham's Autograph, on an Angry Letter

LETTER, From D1

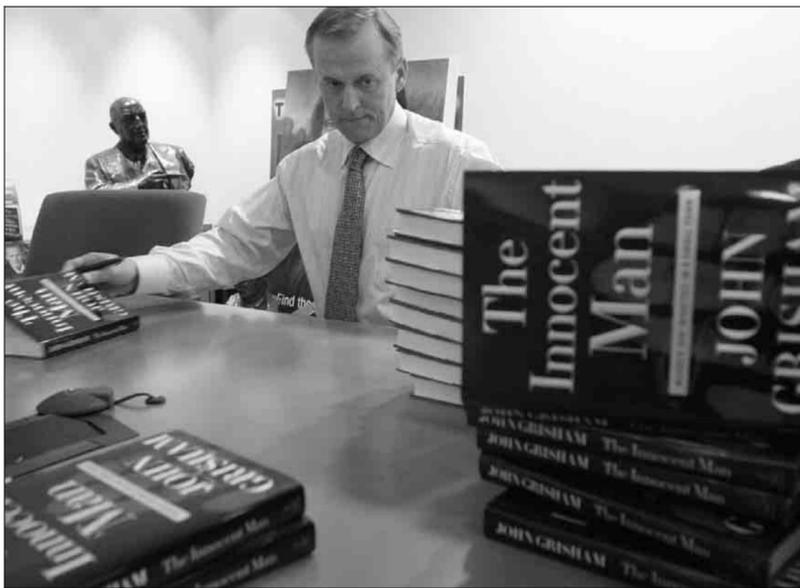
"You would have to be legally blind not to see the signs," said Tom Woodson of Piedmont Virginia Parking, which oversees the lot. "If this had been New York City, where could you park for \$5 an hour, let alone \$5 a day?" Where indeed. But this, in some respects, is about more than the near-towing of a fancy car and its famous owner.

Despite Grisham forking over \$95 and having the extreme good fortune of his car being unhooked before it was taken off and locked behind a chain-link fence somewhere, often with a menacing dog at the ready, the former lawyer in him was not about — or able — to let the matter drop.

In the more than 10 years since the 51-year-old author and his family moved to this increasingly rarefied community where thousand-acre horse farms are not uncommon and citizens genuflect to all things Jeffersonian and are polite to a fault ("After you," "No, after you") is frequently heard as call-and-response), Grisham has been a model of good citizenry. He financed the building of a state-of-the-art Little League complex on his estate south of town (and serves as its commissioner), generously donated to the local Legal Aid Justice Center, spent \$5 million to establish the Rebuild the Coast Fund in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and recently gave a reading (along with Stephen King) to raise money for the Senate candidacy of James Webb. A self-proclaimed "moderate Baptist," he attends church every Sunday (incidentally, the only day he shaves) and is so involved in the private school his two children attended that he continues as chairman of its board and even acts (along with another local celebrity, Howie Long) as a groundskeeper of sorts, painting the lines on the football field for no fee.

So, perhaps partly out of some feeling of entitlement and in keeping with a track record as someone who seeks to achieve social justice wherever he can, whose writing template often pits good (Little Guy) vs. evil (Big Guy), Grisham wrote a rather childish letter two weeks after the incident to one Allan H. Cadgene in San Francisco, owner of both the Market (where Grisham and his wife were having lunch with friends) and the "crummy little parking lot" in question.

In the letter, he informed Cadgene that he spent \$300 a week on a



John Grisham signs copies of his new nonfiction book, "The Innocent Man," earlier this month.

variety of things at the Market (a consortium of refined establishments that offers its patrons hand-made chocolates and hand-rolled Mennonite butter, more cheeses than the law allows, organic meat, Lavazza coffee, fine cookery, Italian tables, exotic flowers and the freshest in seafood and baked goods); he complained that the main (and free) parking lot "has not expanded in proportion to the increase in retail activity"; he questioned Cadgene's sanity in "shaking down his own customers for a few bucks a day to park" at the adjacent lot; and he threatened to stop shopping there altogether. "I refuse to pay to park when I'm either stopping by for coffee or spending \$300 a week on food."

Cadgene, a lawyer himself, was cool in his response, reminding Grisham that "neither land in Charlottesville, Porsches or books are free" and informing him that the lot in question was under a long-term lease to Adelphia, the cable company, when the Market first opened. When that lease ended, though, "we offered to lease all or part of the 'crummy little parking lot' to our Main Street tenants at less than Adelphia was paying, and in fact less than our cost," Cadgene wrote, adding that "neither Gabe nor I felt

that it was unreasonable for our tenants to contribute to costs which will benefit their business."

While Cadgene agreed with Grisham that sanity might be at issue here, in his view it was the "business judgment of our tenants that should be questioned." (In fact, two weeks before the incident, two of the tenants were prepared to take over 11 of the 25 parking spaces, but never concluded the deal.) Seeking the last word, it would seem, Cadgene not only circulated both Grisham's letter and his response to all concerned parties, he also reimbursed Grisham "for your inconvenience" — in the event the tenants "didn't have the good business sense" to do so.

When the tenants received copies of the correspondence, they were not pleased. One wanted to distance himself, another pleaded ignorance, a third complained about employees who park in the free lot when they are supposed to park elsewhere, and yet another, Kate Collier, the owner of Feast, could not recall seeing Grisham or his wife around the Market since that day, clearly worried that they might not be back.

No one was more bemused about the whole affair than Cadgene's partner, Gabe Silverman. "Bubbie,"

he said early one morning, sipping his coffee and looking across at the lot that had been so maligned and had stirred so much emotion, "if John Grisham were living in New York City, he would know better than to expect anything to be for free, especially parking. Even a lawyer, you would think, wouldn't argue with that."

That particular lawyer, as it turns out, had more he wanted to say. As someone who had once gone after Hollywood and Oliver Stone in particular (for "moral blindness"), not only did he not regret sending the letter — "Absolutely not," he boomed over the phone — but the version he sent was mild, frankly, compared with earlier drafts that he said were "libelous" and "defamatory." Grisham sends about two or three letters of this nature a year, but usually lets his wife read them and "suggest ways for me to tone it down." It's a form of therapy, he confesses, a way of "getting things out of my system." He had, he admitted, parked in that same lot a number of times before without incident, "didn't notice any new warning signs" — a quiet confession of guilt in itself — and was startled by how quickly the tow truck showed up. "A friend of mine happened to look up and the

car was already being raised," Grisham said. "Somebody must have phoned" — subtly implying someone out to get him, or wreak havoc with his day — "because the wrecker was there within 10 minutes. The only reason I was able to stop it was because the driver had stopped to check something."

"Prickly" is how he characterized the letter he received from Cadgene. "You see this kind of thing in New York all the time — furious tenants and a landlord who is out of town and out of touch with reality." He underscored what he said in his original letter: Much as he enjoys his double macchiatos, "I am not going to pay to park there."

And what about the \$95 check Cadgene sent? Was he planning to cash it?

No, he wasn't, but he was planning to fire a letter back. "This will probably turn into a [bleeping] contest," he predicted with a laugh, "that will last a year."

While that would no doubt continue to be a form of welcome comic relief, doing simple math might be the more rational (albeit less democratic) way of resolving the matter. If John Grisham, whom Charlottesvilleans appear to either genuinely like or, at least, like having in their midst (other than one woman who wildly claimed a few years back that he and a friend were part of a conspiracy "to inflict emotional distress" and defame her good name, the basis for an \$11 million nuisance suit that was unsuccessful), indeed spends more than \$15,000 a year at the Main Street Market, perhaps the tenants, who fuss with each other (and Cadgene and Silverman) about all sorts of issues, could somehow find a way to celebrate his new offering — "The Innocent Man: Murder and Injustice in a Small Town" — by giving him his own parking space.

Stay posted.

In the spirit of full disclosure: In August 2004, I was towed from a separate parking lot by a different towing company (Lethal Wrecker) from the one that was attempting to tow John Grisham's car. In my situation, there was no Honor Box. But when I discovered that I was being overcharged by \$55, I decided, on principle, to sue. I not only won the case but also became known, for a period of time around these parts, as a citizen's hero, as the Guy Who Took on Lethal... and Won.

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

West dealer
Both sides vulnerable

NORTH		EAST	
♠ 10 8 6 5 3	♥ A Q 9 8 5	♠ K Q 9 4 2	♥ 7
♦ None	♣ 10 5 2	♦ A 10 8	♣ J 8 7 4
WEST		SOUTH	
♠ A J	♥ J 10	♠ 7	♥ K 6 4 3 2
♦ K Q J 9 7 6	♣ A K 6	♦ 5 4 3 2	♣ Q 9 3

The bidding:
West North East South
1 ♦ 3 ♣ (!) Pass 4 ♥ (!)
All Pass

Opening lead: ♣ K
If you want a perspective of modern bridge, look at today's deal from the 2006 World Open Teams final. The deal arose as the team led by Christal Henner-Welland tried to rally against Rose Meltzer's sextet.

At one table, West for MELTZER opened one diamond, and North for HENNER-WELLAND jumped to three clubs, conventionally showing length in both major suits. East had no obvious call, and South leaped to four hearts. West might have doubled, but no action was safe: East might have held nothing. West passed, and though East may have suspected his opponents were out stealing, he passed also.

The result was down one after West led the king of clubs. South had only three losers but only nine winners.

The 100-point penalty did little to compensate MELTZER for the result in the replay, where West for HENNER-WELLAND started with one club, merely showing a strong hand. North-South competed in hearts, but West had a chance to show his diamonds, and East-West reached six diamonds and made it for 15 IMPs to HENNER-WELLAND. (MELTZER eventually won the match and the world title.)

Players have always known the value of preemption, but the philosophy of modern bidding emphasizes it. Advances in theory now let capable, practiced pairs reach accurate contracts more often — provided they have a free run. So many modern players employ a hyperactive competitive style: They enter the auction freely, wielding an array of gadgets. They try — often successfully — to make life miserable for their opponents.

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