

DIVERSIONS

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

Contestimonials: Product reviews from Week 1098

BY PAT MYERS

In Week 1098 we invited you to write a creative review of one of five products offered via Amazon.com. Some Losers launched into full-blown odes to paper clips and Pringles; see those and more honorable mentions at bit.ly/invite1102.

The winner of the Inkin' Memorial

"Universal Paper Clips 72210": Universal paper clips, my tentacle! Instead of neatly fastening documents here on Naxerine Bb, these paper clips instantly melted due to the heat of our binary suns. Amazon's delivery service, however, was surprisingly good. (Melissa Balmain, Rochester, N.Y.)

2nd place and the solar dancing turkey

"Pringles Original, 5.68 Oz.": My Pringles can came in the mail and it worked great as a maraca. But did you know that one side of it comes off fairly easily? The styrofoam-like innards slid out of my maraca and onto the floor, and the dog ate some. Should I call poison control? (Mike Gips, Bethesda)

3rd place

Pringles: They're the best rehydrated potato flake, maltodextrin, disodium inosinate, monosodium glutamate, wheat, corn and potato flour, pressed amalgamate chiplike food product on the market! I'd eat them even if they didn't have "natural flavors." (Warren Tanabe, Annapolis)

4th place

"Westcott 12-Inch Wood Ruler, Beveled Edge": I have been teaching at Our Lady of Mercy for 45 years and have found this ruler to be quite satisfactory for students who cannot conjugate a Latin verb properly. Also great for "making room for Jesus" during the slow songs at school dances. Five stars! (Danielle Nowlin, Fairfax Station)

Removed from cart: honorable mentions

UNIVERSAL PAPER CLIPS 72210

The silver color and "smooth finish" are so classy, I've been using them as gifts to friends as tie clips, earrings, credit card holders — and my wife has literally been speechless since she laid eyes on her anniversary necklace! (Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

This product is hopelessly confusing. I can never tell whether the small inside loop is supposed to go on top, or the big outside end. Where is the instruction manual? (Ken Gallant, Conway, Ark.)

Very disappointed — one star. First, they're *not* made from paper. Second, they don't clip anything — not my hedges, not my coupons, not my nose hair. (Bruce Niedt, Cherry Hill, N.J.)

WHITE CLOUD COTTON BALLS, JUMBO, 200 CT

They are *really* soft, that's true. But as a die-hard White Cloud customer, I really wish they stuck to their traditional toilet paper. I'm never quite sure the cotton balls are all out. (Mike Gips)

I can't believe you call them durable for everyday cleanup — when I used them to scour my frying pan, they fell apart in a minute! (Edward Gordon, Austin)

I could not be happier! My kids wanted a white Christmas, so I ordered 8 billion bags — and Amazon got them here way early, by drone! — Byron Brown, mayor of Buffalo (Todd DeLap, Fairfax)

These make excellent ear swabs: Just glue two of them to each side of a pencil and *voilà!* — Prince Charles (Mike Gips)

[with Pringles] If you want to surprise your little happy campers, try squeezing melted chocolate and a White Cloud cotton ball between two Pringles. They'll never forget their first n'mores! (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

WESTCOTT 12-INCH WOOD RULER, BEVELED EDGE

This ruler is not accurate! I tested it with my boyfriend (he's an engineer) and he swears it's off by two inches. (Rob Cohen, Potomac)

It looked good when I bought it, but when I used it to redesign my bathroom, it clearly was defective. My toilet is now hanging over my bathtub, and the hot-water spigot on my sink still doesn't fit right. I was planning on using this ruler to



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

New contest for Week 1102: Let's get Sirius

Ping-Pong Radio: Play-by-play and analysis of global table tennis tournaments. Station doubles as a metronome if commentary is disabled.

Punxatooie: For a few weeks around Groundhog Day, this station plays such fare as "Me and My Shadow," "Muskrat Love," "Here Comes the Sun" and "How Much Wood Could a Woodchuck Chuck?"

Banging and Twanging: The best guitar riffs from 1970s adult films. Perfect background music to accompany your homemade videos.

While broadcast radio stations become more and more similar — it's not that unusual to find three local stations playing "Animals" simultaneously — the satellite and online radioverse finds more and more niches: There's Silver Fox Wiccan Radio, advertising "magical music, inspiring invocations, guided visualizations, meditations and wyse words." Or you might enjoy Spectro Radio, "The Happiest Station on Earth. Disney music from the Disney parks, Disney movies, and more." (We might not.)

But of course, there's always room for something else to "narrowcast": This week, at the suggestion of 178-time Loser Mike Gips: **Suggest a new radio channel and describe it, as in Mike's own examples above.**

Winner gets the Inkin' Memorial, the Lincoln statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives an unbelievably fabulous prize, even though it is in no way applicable to any Style Invitational readers: It's the 2015 **Dull Men of Great Britain calendar**, published by the Dull Men's Club. Each month features a Dull Man and his passion: Mr. July, for example, is David Morgan Burford, Traffic Cone Collector; April's Dull Man has a museum in his home of 20,000 milk bottles. The large wall calendar also highlights such occasions as Rubber Eraser Day (April 15) and the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America Convention (July 22). But that is far from all! Loser Melissa Balmain, who donated this calendar, managed to get it personally inscribed by Leland Carlson, the Dull Men's Club's highest official — the assistant vice president: "Dear Loser: Be happy with second place — it's the second mouse that gets the cheese."

Other runners-up win their choice of a yearned-for Loser Mug or the ardently desired "Whole Fools" Grocery Bag. Honorable mentions get a lusted-after Loser magnet designed by Bob Staake: either "The Wit Hit the Fan" or "Hardly Har-Har." First Offenders receive a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or, if you were born in the 19th century, fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 22; results published Jan. 11 (online Jan. 8). You may submit up to 25 entries per contest. Include "Week 1102" in your e-mail subject line or it might be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. The headline for this week's results and the honorable-mentions subhead are both by Kevin Dopart. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev, and click "like" on Style Invitational Ink of the Day at bit.ly/inkofday.

STYLE CONVERSATIONAL The Empress's weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. Especially if you plan to enter, check it out at wapo.st/styleconv

perform surgery on my cat, but now I'm going to have to rethink that. (Neal Starkman, Seattle)

THIS RULER IS REALLY HARD TO USE. DO YOU HAVE ONE WITH LARGER NUMBERS AND MORE SPACE BETWEEN THE MEASUREMENT LINES? (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

I am very disappointed in this company's lack of quality control. I only discovered the variance in "twang-tone" after I bolted a dozen into my Ruler Twang-a-Phone (patent pending). (Todd DeLap)

You know what they say — Westcott rulers rule, and Eastcott rulers drool! Go Westcott! And you Eastcott sissies better not get on here and write negative reviews and that means you tyler i know where you live!!!! (Danielle Nowlin)

PRINGLES ORIGINAL 5.68 OZ.

I was pleasantly surprised at how crunchy and fresh-tasting these Original Pringles were, considering that they've been sitting around in a can for the past 47 years (quite a good price for such a rarity, too). It's a testament to the advances in food processing and preservatives that made Pringles possible. (Scott Berkenblit, Baltimore)

This product is an essential part of my survival kit: I use the empty can to hold water, create animal traps, or make a loud popping noise signaling my presence. The one time I actually brought some chips

with me, they attracted a bear, but I did use the can to store my severed left thumb and an ear. (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

These arrived all twisted out of shape. The only way to straighten them out was to leave them in a steam room overnight under a brick. Hardly worth the effort. (Martin Bancroft, Bellevue, Wash.)

I have never found a use for the chips, but the container makes a perfect gerbil casket. (Robyn Carlson, Keyser, W.Va.)

Whenever you find yourself at a social gathering trying to explain the determinant of the Hessian matrix of a differentiable real function of two variables, nothing beats an Original Pringle as a perfect visual aid. This has proven so popular that I always bring a full 5.68-ounce can. Party on! (Kevin Dopart)

SOLAR DANCING TURKEY

I bought six for Thanksgiving so we could each have our own little turkey. My plan was we'd watch them dance, and then we'd wring their necks, pluck and gut them, and toss them into the fryer. The ad never said THESE TURKEYS ARE PLASTIC. (Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church)

Dances just like chicken. (Julia Shawhan, Silver Spring)

Still running — deadline Monday night: Our yearly retrospective contest. See bit.ly/invite1101.

POST PUZZLER

No. 245

BY DOUG PETERSON EDITED BY PETER GORDON • FIREBALLCROSSWORDS.COM

ACROSS	33 Song on the album "This Is Sinatra!"	DOWN	12 It hangs around bad scenes	34 Confucian work
1 Blond Muppet girl on "Sesame Street"	37 Wring (out)	1 "A Salt With a Deadly ____" (1988 rap album)	13 Author of the 1977 sequel "Oliver's Story"	35 NBA opener?: Abbr.
12 Old Kellogg's cereal brand	38 Word with cavity or spray	2 One who's into rolling quarters, briefly	14 Some versatile materials	36 Novel ID
15 Longtime Teri Hatcher co-star	39 Mix it up	3 Drive to End Hunger organization	22 Bit of paronomasia	41 Maze runner
16 Siglo de ____ (era of Cervantes and El Greco)	40 Like some shark teeth	4 They, to Dorothee	23 Capital	42 Subjects of history
17 Factor in chemistry	42 Smears with ink	5 Household helper with a random-walk algorithm	24 "Tootsie" Oscar nominee	43 Pump liner
18 Short contraction?	44 Ultimate goal	6 Strapped	25 Seasoned salts	45 Spread out
19 Kandinsky contemporary	45 Name of the Goldfish crackers mascot	7 "Goodness!"	26 Part in a cast	47 Arizona county named for a tribe
20 Tragedy set in Corinth	46 Fall off	8 Mondale's 1976 debate opponent	27 Its male star also performed in "Feet of Flames" and "Celtic Tiger"	49 Animal on a Gordon's gin label
21 Menu warning	47 Large amounts	9 Diva delivery	28 Flip	50 Vault setting
23 Ten-spot halves	48 "Just like that!"	10 Card's quality	29 Yemeni capital	51 Natatorium event
24 Hardly polished	49 Address in Kingston	11 Glass-half-empty type	31 Stok: Abbr.	55 TV lawman Ramsey
25 Far from home, in a way	52 Address in Kingston debuted one day before "ER"			
28 Lack of cheer	56 Business letter abbr.			
30 Page's Google co-founder	57 Like modern tablet technology			
31 Silk fabric with a wavy appearance	58 Maiden name preceder			
32 It may fall on Valentine's Day	59 Major leak?			

Answer to last week, No. 244

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HOROSCOPE

BY JACQUELINE BIGAR

HAPPY BIRTHDAY | DEC. 14: This year you express interest in travel and other cultures. You may take frequent trips out of town. If you are single, you could meet someone from out of the blue, such as at the bank. Be open to new people who might not be your usual type. If you are attached, the two of you will see your life quite differently. Respect your differences, and try out new ways of compromising. You will become best friends as well as lovers.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) Use the morning to make calls to loved ones with whom you normally don't get to chat. Find a retreat or go to a movie.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Not everyone is as upbeat as you are. An interaction may test your good mood. Make plans that you have been postponing.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) You can try to hide out at home, but you probably won't be able to maintain a low profile. A loved one might come through with a caring gesture. Enjoy the moment.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) You'll be ready for whatever the day brings. Set the tone by making calls to loved ones. You might want to catch up and brainstorm about holiday shopping. Your energy will

bring people together.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) Funds continue to be a predominant theme. You might need to cover a lot of bases. Make sure your wallet can go the whole way. Recognize that there will be unexpected costs.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) You'll achieve exactly what you want. You might be surprised by your innermost desires. Your intuition will help you with a parent, roommate and/or loved one.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) When you greet change, you also will be letting go of some of the past. Be sure that you want to proceed. You'll accomplish much by the end of the day.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) Prioritize, as you may have a

limited amount of free time. Someone you admire will give you quite a compliment. You might have difficulty saying thank you, but use your imagination to find the right response.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) Pressure builds around a responsibility, and you might not see a way out. Don't give up. Add to your sense of peace by soaking in a hot tub; make it your gift to yourself.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) Reach out to someone at a distance. You have an understanding that goes way past the norm. You two can discuss nearly anything. Consider giving yourselves the gift of getting together.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) A good friend will want to spend quality time with you. Make it your pleasure, as the two of you always have a good time together.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) You tend to put loved ones on a pedestal. Make a point of being more realistic and avoid putting people in that position, as they are likely to fall off.

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House run by cats sickens visitors

Dear Amy: We have a family situation that comes up every year during the holidays. My son and his wife have no kids. Their animals are treated like their children.

Every year we are invited to their house for a holiday dinner. Their cats have free roam of the house and their litter box is in the kitchen, next to where we sit down to eat.

That is bad enough, but while we are there the cats use the litter box and then jump up on the counter (where their food is) to eat and also to be petted — all while my daughter-in-law makes the dinner. We get so sick at this sight that we barely eat any dinner.

We look forward to spending time with them and have made a slight reference to the cat litter box, but our daughter-in-law is not about to change. To her, these cats are her kids.

We are worried that if we say anything, the relationship with my son will suffer. What should we do?

Stuck in the Litter

Where I come from, we have a saying about not doing something in the same place where we eat. Not only should the litter box not be near where

humans eat, but it should also not be near where the cats eat.

Even if these cats are de facto "children," having your kids eating on the counter and climbing all over the place isn't exactly good parenting.

Do not expect this couple to change the way they do things, but you can ask them to make a small temporary accommodation. You could frame this as a particular sensitivity of yours and say, "Can you do me a favor and move the litter box to the next room while we're here? Would the cats be okay with that?"

If your relationship is so tender that it cannot survive a simple and temporary shift, then you really need to work on the relationship. If nothing works — or if you chicken out (most likely), offer to treat them for dinner out, followed by dessert and coffee at their house.

Dear Amy: My wife and I invited my niece and her fiance to visit. They live 300 miles away, so we offered to pay their airfare. They said they would like to drive, so I told them I'd give them the money we would have spent on airfare.

My wife feels that we should

cover only the cost of driving, which would be less. I felt we had already committed to spending the higher amount and I'd rather they got the extra money than the airline. My wife feels I spoil my niece, and the argument isn't going away. How should we settle the disagreement?

Up in the Air in LA

This isn't really about the cost of airfare vs. driving, or even about spoiling your niece. This is about you and your wife learning how to negotiate and agree about expenses.

In this case, you seem to have already committed to giving money to this couple. (I'm not sure what your motivation is to give them money over and above covering the cost of the trip, but it is generous.) You and your wife should agree on this sort of expenditure before you make the commitment. Agreeing doesn't mean that you overrule her and do what you want; it means that you talk, listen, negotiate and agree before you spend.

Write to Amy Dickinson at askamy@tribune.com or Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.