

# The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

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## Style Invitational: As we primp for our 20th anniversary, we bring out the dead (poems)

By [Pat Myers](#),

There's no new contest this week, because four weeks from now — on March 3 (Feb. 28 online), when the results would have run — the Empress will devote this entire space (and more!) to a celebration of the Style Invitational's 20th anniversary. We'll look back at the Invite's greatest hits, especially from the past 10 years: the best of the song parodies, neologisms, horse names, limericks, "joint legislation," cartoon captions and dozens of other classic contests. We'll also tell you about the Losers, the unlikely community of contestants that's been active since Year 1 with a calendar of social events, a vigorous competition for most ink, a set of meticulous online standings, and a Facebook page that numbers almost 500 members. And there just might be a few peeps from the Czar, the E's predecessor and the originator of this contest, whom she mercifully sent into retirement nine years ago.

(Note to readers of the print edition: The Web address given on this week's Sunday Style page to The Style Conversation, my weekly online column about the new contest and results, doesn't work this week, while the page is undergoing some improvements. (It goes to last week's column instead.) Instead, access it [here](#).

### Report from Week 1004

Our annual contest for poems about those who died in the previous year: Frequently noted was that Dave Brubeck is taking five and much longer; that Sherman Hemsley moved on up; that Robin Gibb's no longer stayin' alive; that Vidal Sassoon and Phyllis Diller were hair today, gone tomorrow; and that go-go pioneer Chuck Brown was, of course, gone-gone.

In a rare but not unprecedented move, we present two Inkin' Memorials today; the second one, a song parody, appears only online so we could include a link to a YouTube clip of the 85-year-old original song.

### The winners of the Inkin' Memorials

#### Ferdinand A. Porsche (1935-2012), designer of the Porsche 911

When Porsche first designed his car, he cleverly employed  
The insights he had garnered from the works of Sigmund Freud.  
A car, as Porsche understood, was outwardly metallic,  
But in the heart of man it was organic flesh, and phallic.

And so he built it long and strong, he built it fast and loud,  
To make the rich unmanly man feel powerfully endowed.  
Though Freud had said that now and then cigars are just cigars,

Ferdinand, the businessman, knew cars are not just cars.  
(Robert Schechter, Dix Hills, N.Y.)

### **Jean Harris, convicted of the murder of Scarsdale Diet doctor Herman Tarnower**

(To ["Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man"](#))  
Fish gotta sink, birds gotta fall;  
You gotta love me or no one at all.  
Can't help pluggin' that man of mine.

Life is a banquet; that's what they say.  
How could you take my sugar away?  
Can't help pluggin' that man of mine.

Hungry, weak, and sad  
Makes a girl go mad.  
Haven't had one taste! But you've been free – to cheat on me.

Herman, you might have avoided my barbs  
If you had just let me snack on some carbs.  
Can't help pluggin' that man of mine.  
(Nan Reiner, Alexandria, Va.)

### 2. Winner of the [toilet-shaped coffee cup](#): **Edward Archbold, who died after winning a roach-eating contest**

Hey, the next time that someone approaches  
With a contest to eat the most roaches,  
Though the prize may be nice,  
I suggest you think twice,  
'Cause it might be your big *buenas noches*.  
(Nan Reiner)

3. A eulogy for **Sally Ride** is not off-base;  
I wouldn't halt one, though perhaps I'd pause it  
To ponder how she managed a career in space  
Yet all the while remaining in a closet.  
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

### 4. **Thomas Kinkade**

Go very gentle into that good night  
With houses quaint where Pollyanna lived.  
"Rage? Nah," said the Painter of the Light.  
(Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

### **Digging deeper: honorable mentions**

#### **Marvin Miller, head of the Major League Baseball Players Union**

When crafty Marvin Miller led the MLBPA,  
'Twas then that players' salaries went rocketing away.  
He made some people very rich, but there's one problem: That's  
The reason that it costs a hundred bucks to see the Nats. (Nan Reiner)

**Earl Scruggs** saunters up to the Heavenly Gate.  
There's a banjo audition. How easy is that?  
Saint Peter's on harp and his playing sounds great,  
But an angel joins in on guitar — and he's Flatt. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

**Murray Lender**, of the People Chosen,  
Made a fortune large in bagels frozen.  
We'll always miss him dearly, even though he  
Made us like his product: round and doughy. (*Kathye Hamilton, Annandale, Va.*)

**Donna Summer and Robin Gibb**  
People stuck in the '70s fervently shouted,  
"By music we won't be misled!"  
But two passings have shown what the sane never doubted:  
That disco is certainly dead. (*Matt Monitto, Elon, N.C.*)

**Joe Paterno**, once revered,  
Whose earthly days are through,  
Will sadly be remembered most  
For what he *didn't* do. (*Mae Scanlan, Washington*)

**Jack Klugman**  
For years you entertained us by annoying Felix Unger;  
But all things pass (and you, alas, weren't getting any younger).  
With neatnik versus total slob, will either one convert?  
I guess you get the last laugh, 'cause you're both immersed in dirt. (*Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.*)

**Letitia Baldrige, etiquette expert and Jacqueline Kennedy's chief of staff**

(To ["Camelot"](#))

It's true! It's true! The transcripts make it clear:  
Civility's gone AWOL this year.

The House and Senate almost come to blows now;  
Repubs and Dems don't ever vote as one;  
We're sad to say that that's the way it goes now  
In Washington.

The politicians say just what they think now;  
They're slandering their colleagues just for fun;  
But frankly, we get dizzy from the stink now  
In Washington.

Washington! Washington! I know it sounds a bit absurd,  
But in Washington, "etiquette" is now a dirty word.

To tell the prez "You lie!" is off the "rude" charts,  
"Go (blank) yourself" are words that tend to stun;  
Ms. Baldrige, please come back --  
It seems we've lost the knack  
Of treating people civilly right here in Washington. (*Beverley Sharp*)

**Ray Bradbury**  
Ray's friends flew like madmen the length of the drive  
And arrived at the funeral parlor at 5.  
"Alas," said the owner, "it's over and done:  
I did the cremation at 4:51." (*Christopher Lamora, Guatemala City*)

I heard you at the Fillmore, heard you at Winterland,  
I heard you with Bob Dylan, I heard you with the Band,  
You took a load off Annie, you took a load for free.

Financially, O **Levon Helm**, you took a load off me. (*Nancy Lasner, Washington, a First Offender*)

### **Antisa Khvichava**

She claimed to be one hundred thirty-two  
(It's hard to tell if that was really true),  
But thanks to luck, good health and proper genes,  
She'd pass for someone in her hundred-teens! (*Brendan Beary*)

### **Helen Gurley Brown**

To her magazine readers she wanted to show  
That it's fun and fulfilling to act like a ho.  
(*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

### **Arlen Specter**

Now that really he's a specter,  
No one chivvies, snipes or chides  
That former GOP defector  
Arlen's once again switched sides. (*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)

### **Don Cornelius**

He introduced soul music to the nation,  
But now, alas, Don's soul train's left the station. (*Howard Walderman, Columbia, Md.*)

Said **Jean Harris**, "This new Scarsdale Diet  
Is amazing! You really must try it!  
With just four rapid rounds  
I shed 200 pounds!  
(Now I just hope the jury will buy it.)" (*Christopher Lamora*)

### **Robert B. Sherman, Disney songwriter**

Earthworms over earworms crawl,  
Since it's a pall world after all. (*Kevin Dopart*)

### **John Demjanjuk, Nazi guard**

Living in our own backyard,  
Was innocent, he often said,  
But all his witnesses are dead. (*Robert Schechter*)

### **Mike Wallace**

He runs up to the Pearly Gates,  
A microphone in hand.  
He shoves it in Saint Peter's face  
While shouting, "I demand  
An answer to my question, Saint!  
Is Jesus on the take?  
Did Moses rob the Israelites?  
Was Solomon a fake?"  
Peter cries, "Get out of here!  
I won't take this abuse!"  
But Wallace barges past the gates,  
And then all hell breaks loose. (*Robert Schechter*)

### **Lady Sybil of "Downton Abbey"**

Downtony-Powntony  
Lady S. Branson  
Expired in childbirth on

Brit TV screens.

She's not the only one;

Characteristically

Contracts expire, thus

Gory death scenes. (*First Offender Chris Hansen, London, who saw this before Americans did and delivered a spoiler unto the Empress*)

Higgledy-piggledy

**Carmen Basilio,**

Champion boxer whom

Death has outfoxed.

Lightweight pneumonia bugs

Unpugilistically

Knocked him right out. Now this

Boxer's been boxed. (*Dixon Wragg, Santa Rosa, Calif.*)

**Alex Karras**

Every gig he tried, he was a keeper;

Surely he could tackle Mr. Reaper.

If you think so, you are sadly wrong-o;

God sent one last Candygram for Mongo. (*Nan Reiner*)

**Mickey Mouse Club's Don Grady and Ginny Tyler**

Meeska, Mooska, Mouseketeer!

Don and Ginny disappear. (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.*)

**Newsweek** was a magazine.

It comes in print no more.

I fear that too soon, "get some ink"

Will be a metaphor. (*Ken Gallant, Conway, Ark.*)

**NFL linebacker Junior Seau**

In professional football, our top-rated sport,

Former players lead lives that are painful and short.

So it's not that surprising when one of them dies

From repeated concussions that speed his demise.

Let us pray for a change in this dangerous game

So I never again pen a couplet this lame:

"Into linemen and running backs Junior would plow,

Making skull-crunching hits, and he'd never Seau." (*Chris Doyle*)

**Sylvia Kristel, star of the softcore "Emmanuelle" films**

I. You never held back, you gave it your all,

And you added new meaning to the words "Kristel ball." (*Phil Battey, Alexandria*)

I saw "Emmanuelle" when just a teen

And wondered: All my life where had you been?

The title song was one that kept me humming

While visions of Ms. Kristel kept me, uh, very happy. (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village*)

**Elliott Carter**, past his hundredth year, liked to compose IT

Pieces where DOES two different N'T groups

Played different WORK movements

At different IN speeds POETRY

At the same THAT time

That WELL overlapped EITHER. . . (*David Williams, Dunbar, W.Va., a First Offender*)

### **Art Modell, owner of the Cleveland Browns (until he moved them in 1996)**

On a winter midnight dreary, while snow blew in from Lake Erie,  
Art came up with a new theory he had failed to find before.  
"My team needs some warmer weather! Sever this cold Cleveland tether,

Question 'where,' no longer 'whether': We are heading for the door!"  
Like a flame there came the answer, as he led them out the door:  
"We are going to Baltimore!"

Frantic fans fumed, "This is treason! Keep them here for one more season!"  
But Art gave not cause nor reason, heading for that warmer shore.  
All the so-called football mavens dubbed Art's newly minted Ravens  
Flightless, fightless Cleveland cravens – faded Browns, who could not score.  
Yet in the 2000 season, Art's team was the Super Corps!  
They were part of Baltimore.

Now Art's taken one last flier, joining legends all admire,  
Halas, Rooney and the Squire – men who made pro football soar.  
Though "the Move" is still debated, on Lake Erie's shores berated,  
In Charm City celebrated, there's one voice fans can't ignore.  
Loudly, proudly, hear the players voice their deep, unfeigned rapport:  
Quoth Art's Ravens – "Baltimore!" (*Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.*)

### **And dead last: The rejected obit poems of 2012**

Dear Loser: For Style Invitational swag,  
Like the bobblehead Lincoln and Grossery Bag,  
You pored over dozens of newspaper obits  
For wry and hilarious no-one-would-know bits  
To put in an ink-worthy limerick or ode  
About people who've gone to their final abode.  
Your poems have been read by no other than me,  
And then tossed in the trash can. – Yours truly, The E. (*Chris Doyle*)

**Still running — deadline Monday night — is our backward-crossword contest. See [bit.ly/invite1007](http://bit.ly/invite1007).**

*Visit the online discussion group [The Style Conversational](#), in which the Empress discusses today's new contest and results along with news about the Loser Community — and you can vote for your favorite among the inking entries, since you no doubt figured the Empress chose the wrong winner. If you'd like an e-mail notification each week when the Invitational and Conversational are posted online, write to the Empress at [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) (note that in the subject line) and she'll add you to the mailing list. And on Facebook, join the far more lively group [Style Invitational Devotees](#) and chime in.*

**Next week's results: Send Us the Bill, or No Year's Resolutions**, our Week 1005 "joint legislation" contest. (The alternative headline and today's honorable-mentions subhead are both by Jeff Contompasis.)

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