

BY PAT MYERS

Loserdom: A look back

INVITATIONAL FROM 1

"Loser" emblazoned across coveted runner-up T-shirts. They've offered up the funniest, cleverest, smartest (and sometimes grossest) material over a huge variety of genres — from sonnets to neologisms to Your Mama jokes — for no material reward for their "ink" (Loser-speak for a published entry) except for paper-thin refrigerator magnets and the occasional cheap tote bag, coffee mug or owl-vomit bolus. Which is a good thing, considering newspaper budgets these days. (See Page 9 for more about the Losers and their remarkable community.)

This week we look back on some of the best entries of the past decade, just as the Czar

did 10 years ago. And once again, you get to try to top any of them yourself.

Oh, that "mewling and puking" in the first paragraph? Yeah, I stole it from Shakespeare, as I like it. Larceny is part of our proud tradition: The Invitational itself was shamelessly patterned after the venerable New York Magazine Competition, which the Czar entered as a youth, failed to win, and solemnly vowed to someday plagiarize for a great metropolitan daily.

The NYMC died several years ago, after 973 installments. We're now at Week 1011.

Yeah, do the math. We used to be Number Two, but now we're Number One.

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THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 1011: Top these!

As we did in our similar 10th-anniversary retrospective, we invite you to **try your hand at any of the contests** mentioned in this look back. For contests referring to that day's or week's paper, use this week's; for contests about something "in the news," etc., use the current news. For obit poems, however, write them about people who died in the specified year; for the horse names, use the list presented that year (you might not be able to find the earlier ones). You're permitted to reenter your entries that didn't get ink the first time around, but do you really think I'll prefer them to the ones I chose for this greatest-hits anthology?

For further details on the individual contests mentioned today, along with links to many of them, see the Master Contest List maintained by Proto-Loser Elden Carnahan of Laurel at bit.ly/in-vitecontests. (You can also find many contests online by Googling "Style Invitational" "Week [whatever].") There's also likely to be much discussion about them on the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook.

Also, see the Empress's online column, the Style Conversational (washingtonpost.com/styleconversational), for her reflections on the retrospective and the new contest, as well as Loser Brunch news.

Winner gets the Inkin' Memorial, the Lincoln-statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives, in return for topping all but one of the incredibly good entries that will run in four weeks, a little plastic PooPen ("Your #2 Pen!"), which is brown and bumpy and shiny. Donated by Robert Schechter.

Other runners-up win their choice of a yearned-for "My Cup Punneth Over" mug or the ardently desired Grossery Bag ("Almost Valuable Player"). Honorable mentions get a lusted-after Loser magnet. First Offenders receive a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday night, March 11; results published March

31 (online March 28). No more than 25 entries per entrant per week; this week they can be for a single contest or for many, as long as the total number of entries doesn't exceed 25. Include "Week 1011" 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/inviterules.



THE NEOLOGISMS: WE GIVE YOU OUR WORDS

Among the myriad humor genres the Invitational has indulged in, it is probably best known for neologism contests, in which you make up a new term, usually by altering one or more existing words, and give it a zingy definition.

Tom Witte, 55, a civilian employee of the U.S. Corps of Engineers' Topographic Engineering Center, is the Nabob of Neologism. Since his debut in Week 7, the aptly named Witte has amassed 1,200 blots of ink.

Change a word by one letter:

Guiltar: A musical instrument whose strings are pulled by your mother. (*Frank Mullen III, Aledo, Ill., 2003*)

Epigramp: A maxim that brands the speaker as an old codger. "If God had wanted women to wear pants..." (*Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md., 2007*)

Sparadigm: A model panhandler. (*Kevin Dopart, Washington, 2009*)

Spell a word backward:

Skrod: Fish that are always swimming upstream. (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village, 2004*)

Nword: Something that gets you in really deep trouble. (*Russell Beland, Springfield, 2004*)

Words ending in -ion:

Percy-cution: Giving your child a name he will hate for the rest of his life. (*Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa., 2006*)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The neologism "Pectacles: gladiator movies," a runner-up entry by Brad Alexander for Week 907 (move a word's first letter to the end).

The word must contain the letter block THRE (in any order):

Jethrogenous Zone: Appalachia. (*Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich., 2009*)

With POLE: Gestapoleemics: Calling your political opponents Nazis. (*Chris Doyle, 2010*)

With NOEL: Groucholenses: How to look at the world through nose-covered glasses. (*Eric Fritz, Silver Spring, 2011*)

Portmanteau (overlapping) words: Treadmillstone: The unused home gym that keeps staring at you. (*Rick Haynes, Potomac, 2008*)

Palindrome terms:

AHA HAHA: When you finally get the joke. (*Tom Flaherty, Culpeper, Va., 2010*)

Move a word's first letter to the

end: Carecrows: Women who are so devoted to their men that they frighten them away. (*Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf, 2011*)

Move the last letter to the beginning: Snipple: Babies agree: the Best Stuff on Earth. (*Kyle Bonney, Fairfax, 2011*)

Combine the beginning and end of two words from the day's paper:

Prob-solutely: A definite maybe. (*Kyle Hendrickson, Frederick, 2006*)

Ignorial: A monument that nobody visits. (*Robert Schechter, Dix Hills, N.Y., 2012*)

Words containing W, I, T, T and E (in celebration of Tom Witte's 1,000th ink):

Wattleship: A seniors cruise. (*Tom Witte, 2009*)

THE VIRAL INVITATIONAL

Has anyone ever forwarded you an e-mail of Bad Analogies Written by High School Students? Or a list of funny neologisms, like "sarchasm," from the "Mensa Invitational"? Or have you seen on Facebook that meme of the Hokey Pokey in sonnet form?

Yup, they're actually all Style Invitational winners that have gone viral.

● The "Bad Analogies" list has been circulating nonstop for 17 years, with of course no attribution to the Invitational or to the (chronologically) adult writers who got ink in Week 120. The list includes such Invite gems as "Her hair glistened in the rain like nose hair after a sneeze" (Chuck Smith); "Her eyes were like two brown circles with big black dots in the center" (Russell Beland); and "Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever." (Jennifer Hart).

● The Post sometimes gets credit, if incorrectly, for an amazingly viral list of **neologisms** from 1998 in which a real word

has been changed by one letter. The list is usually topped by "Sarchasm: the gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the recipient who doesn't get it" — Tom Witte's winning entry of Week 278. It's often paired with another 1998 contest, to give new meanings to existing words (e.g., "Coffee: A person who is coughed upon," by David Hoffman). The two lists — with no credits to the authors — continue to pop up online literally almost daily, often with bogus items added, and often under the inexplicable name "Mensa Invitational."

● One Invite entry, however, has brought its author remarkable fame: Jeff Brechlin's Week CLXI winner from 2003 — the **Hokey Pokey** in the form of a (shortened) Shakespearean sonnet — has been reprinted in a zillion places, set to music at least twice, and performed at Shakespeare festivals. One man sent Brechlin a video of his 2-year-old son reciting the whole thing. "I've spent hundreds and

hundreds and hundreds of hours over the last decade writing SI entries," says Brechlin, 54, who lives in Eagan, Minn., and develops training materials for a health-care company, "but my 15 minutes of fame all stems from the 15 minutes it took me to write this thing."

The Hokey Pokey,
by Jeff Brechlin

O proud left foot, that ventures quick within
Then soon upon a backward journey lithe.
Anon, once more the gesture, then begin:
Command sinistral pedestal to writhe.
Commence thou then the fervid Hokey-Poke,
A mad gyration, hips in wanton swirl.
To spin! A wilde release from Heaven's yoke.
Blessed dervish! Surely canst go, girl.
The Hoke, the Poke — banish now thy doubt
Verily, I say, 'tis what it's all about.

Cheers to the Losers

BY DAVID MONTGOMERY

The Sunday brunch reservation for about 15 guests at Buddy's Crabs & Ribs in Annapolis is booked under the name "Losers."

One by one, the diners write their names in crayon under printed labels, which they stick to their chests: "Hello, I'm a Loser."

Dion Black, 37 — a Washington lawyer when he's not crafting gags for a ridiculously passion-inspiring Washington Post humor contest — fingered one of the labels and recalled the time the silly stickers yielded an epiphany: The week's assignment had been to coin and define a word or term with a palindrome. He came up with "Nametag-Gateman," whose meaning he recites by heart two years later: "The conference organizer who won't let you enter until you've ruined your jacket with adhesive paper."

Clever, but Black was still a Loser, by the merciless code of this society, because he did not *win*: He came in third. He was given the choice of receiving a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or a Loser Mug.

"We've had some spectacularly cuckoo prizes," says Nan Reiner of Alexandria, 57, another lawyer at the brunch, wearing a decorative pin she fashioned out of four Loser Magnets. "There was the mink baculum. Do I have to translate?"

Yes, please.

"The penis bone of a mink."

It's about the size of a sewing needle, and Reiner won her very own in November for coming in second with the suggestion of a question to which "mink baculum" could be the answer: "What does Donald Trump give his fired employees instead of a golden parachute?"

Black continues: "Nobody does this to get a penis bone or a T-shirt that doesn't fit."

"Speak for yourself," says Stephen Dudzik, 56, of Olney, an engineer wearing a bright yellow Loser T-shirt.

Some are born Losers, some achieve Loserdom

No reasonable person would have predicted 20 years ago that a newspaper humor contest trafficking in quirky wit and questionable taste would spawn a durable community with its own folkways, lingo, rituals and traditions, independent of the newspaper itself.

The brunches, rotating monthly among Washington, Maryland and Virginia, are just a teeny taste of the communal life of a Loser. "The Invitational is a very odd way to build a corps of friends and associates, but that

is what's happened," says Elden Carnahan, 60, a federal employee from Laurel, a founding pillar of the Loser community.

Since the beginning, 4,600 people have gotten "ink," which is to say, they saw their names mentioned in print or online for at least one submission deemed worthy by the original contest judge, the Czar (columnist Gene Weingarten), or his successor, the Empress (editor Pat Myers). Of those, many dozens have built Loser culture. (Early on, they styled themselves the Not Ready for the Algonquin Roundtable Society — a reference to the New York literary snarkpit starring Dorothy Parker's crowd.)

A pre-Internet newsletter called Depravda gave way to an e-mail user group called Losernet and a Facebook page, Style Invitational Devotees, with 495 members. Losers hail from all 50 states and 33 foreign countries. (The foreign count may be skewed by Losers who file even when they vacation abroad: "I remember the panic of 'What if I can't find an Internet cafe to send the stuff in?'" says Chris Doyle, 68, of Ponder, Tex.,

Contests are lost, friends are won and everybody knows your name

a retired chief actuary for the Department of Defense.)

One Loser wedding and one Loser funeral have been attended by fellow Losers, not to mention other milestones. Carnahan walked into a Cheesecake Factory not long ago and found a surprise 60th-birthday party thrown by his daughters — and attended by "my church people, my family and my Losers," he says. "It was really the three groups most important to me."

Periodically, a dozen or more Losers take weekend field trips called Loserfests. One year it was to New York, where they stayed in the Algonquin Hotel.

Annual Loser Olympics are staged at the Gambrills home of Sarah Worcester Gaymon, 59, a retired information technology specialist for the Library of Congress. The athletics include tennis, HORSE (renamed LOSER) and distance water balloons. Last year the swimming pool event was to maneuver a wood block representing the doomed cruise ship Costa Concordia.

Carnahan is the statistician. On vast spreadsheets, he has recorded each week's contest challenge, as well as the

names of all who have earned ink, on the Web site NRARS.org. This project allowed Russell Beland, 55, a deputy assistant secretary of the Navy from Fairfax, to invent the Flushies — an annual awards ceremony to salute Loser of the Year, Most Imporved (sic), etc. Song parodies are sung, toilet paper is flung.

At last count, Beland led the league with 1,516 lifetime inks, followed by Doyle with 1,452. The winningest Loser in recent years is Kevin Dopart, 56, an engineering consultant from Washington.

In spite of rivalries, friendships form. "The first time I met Mae [Scanlan] was at a brunch," says Beverley Sharp, 69, of Montgomery, Ala., a former French teacher recently ranked No. 12 with 369 lifetime inks. "I said to her, and I meant it, 'I knew from reading your entries I was going to like you so much.'"

"It's fun to meet somebody whose writing and wits you've been reading for weeks and weeks," says Scanlan, 81, a retired photographer and a light-verse ace from Washington, ranked No. 26 with 213 lifetime inks. "I have what I call the pastor test. If I wouldn't want my pastor to see it, I don't send it in."

A modicum of fame comes with being a Loser. Chuck Smith, 66, of Woodbridge, a personnel contractor for the Environmental Protection Agency wore a Loser T-shirt to the Nissan Pavilion one time and someone asked, "Do you know Chuck Smith?" At a Dave Barry book-signing, he asked the author to make it out to Chuck Smith, and Barry said, "Chuck Smith from Woodbridge?" Smith recalls.

Senior officials in the Pentagon have commented favorably to Beland on his contest zingers.

So it is not surprising that, at the recent Sunday brunch, a woman in the restaurant comes over to hail the Losers. Someone informs her that yes, the great limericist Brendan Beary, 51, a Navy software engineer from Great Mills, is in the house.

"Really!" says the Losers fan. "You guys are great!"

But it's really not about the fame, says Loser Black.

"If it weren't for this contest, there is no shot of me meeting any of these people," he says.

After a friend of Black's was killed in a car accident, he ran a half-marathon in 2011 to raise money for the ASPCA, one of her favorite charities. He announced it on the Style Invitational Devotees Facebook page. Of the \$3,000 he raised, \$2,500 came from Losers. He gets emotional talking about it.

"That's community," he says.

No joke.

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BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

From Week 836, if one institution ran another: If a hospital ran an English restaurant, the food would improve.

THE ART (OR THE 'ART') OF THE INVITATIONAL

BY PAT MYERS

While the Invitational is primarily a "word person's" game, it's the macabre cartoons by the semi-manicured freelancer Bob Staake that establish its zaniness to the unwary.

Bob started illustrating the Invite's weekly contest in 1994, and he has drawn close to 1,000, not to mention dozens of Invite caption contests. In the meantime, this weekly taint on his résumé has inexplicably failed to keep Bob from picking up pocket change and a house/studio on the Cape Cod waterfront as the writer and/or illustrator of more than 50 children's books, among them the bestsellers "The Donut Chef," "Look! A Book!" and "The Red Lemon," and regular appearances slumming on the cover of the New Yorker. His favorite Invite cartoons are sprinkled through these pages.

But the Loser Community itself is also responsible for some of the Invitational's most memorable pictures. Perhaps the most striking came to us when Fred Dawson of Beltsville took the Empress aside at the 2005 Loser holiday party and whispered: "Would you like to see a really bad painting? I did it myself." For a long time af-

ter that, if you Googled "world's ugliest painting," you would see the portrait of Red-Haired, White-Faced, Joker-Mouthed, Drumstick-Armed Girl that Fred, a 68-year-old retiree, donated as a prize.

The winner regifted the Ugly Painting, then won it right back in a contest for what to do with the thing. It eventually went to someone



Ugly Painting stamp

who'd painted a mirror image. The Ugly Painting became an icon for the Loser community, featured on the Losers' name tags at Loser brunches. And Loser Stephen Dudzik even made them into genuine U.S. postage stamps through Zazzle.com.

At a Dave Barry book-signing, the Loser asked the author to make it out to Chuck Smith, and Barry said, "Chuck Smith from Woodbridge?"

BY PAT MYERS

THE RECURRING CONTESTS

These two hardy perennials rank among the Invite's most widely entered contests every year.

Horse 'breeding'

Every year since 1995, upon the suggestion of Loser and racing enthusiast Mike Hammer, we've presented a list of horses eligible for that year's Triple Crown and asked you to "breed" any two and name their "foal" based on a clever combination of their names. Before the Empress instituted a 25-entry limit, some Losers would submit 500 names in a week. Since 2006, there's also been a spinoff contest for "grandfoals" from the winning entries.

Among the notable nags of the past decade:

Rock Hard Ten x Read the Footnotes = Centimeters (*Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax, Week 552, 2004*)

He's a Lumberjack x Lawyer Ron = Chop Suey (*Rich Muenchow, Bethesda, Week 656, 2006*)

Love Me Tendon x Crude Remark = In Sinew VIII (*Russell Beland, Springfield, Week 660, 2006, from the first grandfoal contest*)

Months Ending in R x Nats Blow Another = Days Ending in Y (*Pam Sweeney, Germantown, Week 712, 2007, another grandfoal*)

Pyro + Mapmaker = Your Heatin' Chart (*Cy Gardner, Arlington, Week 759, 2008*)

Pitched Perfectly x Gone Astray = Don Larceny (*Andrew Hoenig, Rockville, Week 810, 2009*)

D' Funnybone x Lethal Combination = Manslaughter (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Week 863, 2010*)

You're A-Peein' x Excessive Passion = The Whizzer of Id (*Malcolm Fleschner, Palo Alto, Calif., Week 867, 2010 a grandfoal*)

'Joint legislation'

Every two years, with each new session of Congress, we have a contest to create a "bill" that combines the names of two or more (sometimes many more) congressional freshmen. Among the spicier sausage-making:

The Foxx-Stenholm resolution, stating that no daughter of mine is leaving the house dressed like that. (*Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Week 590, 2005*)

The Bright-Lee-Fleming- Massa-Cao-Fudge Bovine Biofuels Development Act (*Dudley Thompson, Cary, N.C., Week 799, 2009*)

The Rush-Farr-Oliver-Waters-Slaughter-Towns-Kaptur-Hastings-Castle-Kildee-King Act to commemorate the achievements of William the Conqueror in 1066. (*Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park, Week 861, 2010, in an off-year contest in which only longtime members of Congress could be used*)

The Duncan-Pearce Act to reform CIA interrogation techniques. (*Christopher Lamora, Guatemala City, Week 903, 2011*)

The Johnson-Hanabusa Act, which that would make self-gratification a federal crime. (*Matt Kane, New York, Week 903, 2011*)

PUN AND INK A SAMPLING OF THE BEST OF THE LAST DECADE

Mess With Our Heads, our perennial contest for a "bank head" reinterpreting an actual Post headline:

Post head: Compelling Body of Art Bank head: Simon Explains Real Reason for Reunion With Garfunkel (*Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City, Week 583, 2004*)

NASA Breaks Ground With Craft/ Next Time, Agency Plans to Point Rocket Skyward (*Mike Hammer, Arlington, Week 583*)

American's Dream Comes True/ Man, 37, Shows Up Naked and Totally Unprepared for Meeting (*Michael Levy, Silver Spring, Week 756, 2008*)

Ask Backwards, our perennial contest in which we give a list of answers and you give the questions:

A. Dick Cheney but not a training bra. Q. What needs wiring to provide chest support? (*Michael Kidwell, Silver Spring, Week 497, 2003*)

Week 516 (2003): Unwise things to say in given situations: To a waiter: "You call this lemonade, jerko? It's barely yellow! Bring me some better stuff!" (*Milo Sauer, Fairfax*)

Week 519 (2003): Only-in-Washington pickup lines: Your beauty renders me as powerless as Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton. (*Cindy Burnham, Alexandria*)

Week 531 (2003), inspirational statements turned cynical: You can do anything if you want it bad enough. That is why we see so many people who can fly. (*Elden Carnahan, Laurel*)

Week 532 (2003), four-word movie pans of a movie or other work: "I Am Curious (Yellow)": It was meaty (other) (*Mike Gips, Bethesda*)

"The Sound of Music": DOA, dear. (*Jeffrey Scharf, Burke*)

Week 537 (2004): Write an irresponsibly sensationalistic headline for an actual Post story: 60 KILO-TONS OVER PYONGYANG! (actual headline: "U.S. Sending 60,000 Tons of Food to N. Korea") (*Elden Carnahan, Laurel*)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Redskins' work-ethically challenged Albert Haynesworth was frequent Invite fodder. (This was from a complicated contest in Week 881, 2010)

an, Laurel)

Week 547 (2004), things an existing brand name would be bad for: Wachovia is a good name for a bank but a bad name for a cemetery. (*Michael Cisneros, Centreville*)

Week 551 (2004), feed a phrase into Google's translation tool, then translate the results into English: Original: I am the worst president elected ever.

Back from French: I am the worst president never elected. (*Kevin N. Mettinger, Warrenton, Va.*)

Week 557 (2004): The difference between two people with a common element in their names: Marilyn Monroe vs. Marilyn Quayle: One reputedly slept with Jack Kennedy, and the other has slept with . . . well, he's no Jack Kennedy. (*Brendan Beary, Great Mills*)

Week 568 (2004): Groaner puns on book titles: Did you hear that the school system demanded a PC version of the Harper Lee novel? "Tickle a Mockingbird." (*Wayne Rodgers, Satellite Beach, Fla.*)

Week 580 (2004), combine two countries: The Netherlands + Fiji = Netheriji: I don't know much about it; I've been warned since age 12 not to

play with Netherijians. (*Brendan Beary*)

Week 608 (2005): Snappy answers to rude questions: Do you play basketball? No, do you sumo-wrestle? (*Six-foot-tall Beth Morgan, Palo Alto, Calif.*)

Week 648 (2006): Stupid questions for product hotlines: To Unilever Corp. "Why do your Dove Bars taste like soap?" (*Kevin Dopart, Washington*)

Week 669 (2006): Bad advice to new arrivals in the United States: If you are asked, "Do you advocate the overthrow of the U.S. government by force or violence?" the correct answer is "Violence." (*Mark Eckenwiler, Washington*)

Week 670 (2006), compare two words differing by one letter: Bra and bar: Only one of them will open to serve drinks to minors. (*Art Grinath, Takoma Park*)

Week 688 (2006): Six-word stories: My wife's suicide note: ungrammatical, naturally. (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village*)

Dead Letters, our annual obit-poem contest: *South African leader P.W. Botha:* Apartheid rule is not a way To gather healthy karma. I bet that Mr. Botha may Be heading someplace warma. (*Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D., Week 695, 2007*)

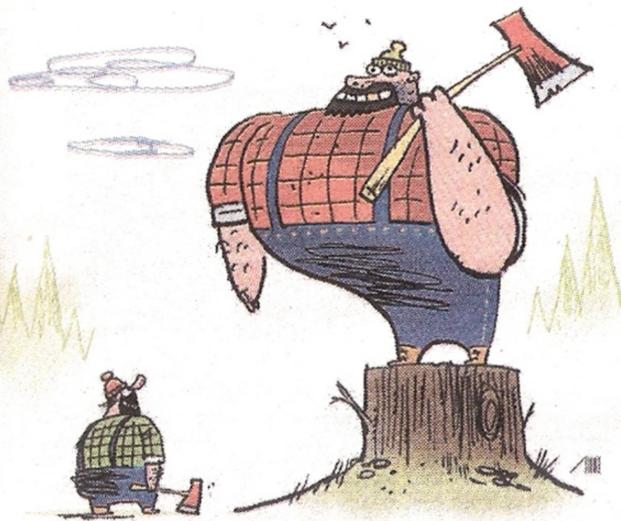
Week 698 (2007): Job interview questions: Applicant: "Say, those girls in the photos on your desk, are they seeing anyone? Well, not the fat one, but those other two?" (*Russell Beland, Springfield*)

Questionable Journalism, our perennial contest in which you find a sentence in The Post and supply a question that it could answer: Post: They must also not appear partisan. Q. In addition to being partisan, what's expected of a U.S. attorney?



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 828 (2009) puns on company names: Swansong Dinners: Healthy frozen entrees for those final Death Row meals. (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

STAX: Patron saint of lumberjacks, example for the Week 869 (2010) backward-crossword contest.

(Russell Beland, Week 706, 2007)

Week 736 (2007): Questions for the "Car Talk" guys: When I get my 2004 Mustang up to about 85 miles an hour, I hear a high-pitched whining off to my right that persists until I wind down to 60. What can I do to shut her up? (Chris Rollins, Cumberland, Md.)

Week 749 (2008): New meanings for existing words: Cremate: Coffee-Mate's unsuccessful initial brand name. (Kevin Dopart)

Week 794 (2009), Onion-style headlines: Palin Is Prime Cause of 3rd-Quarter Drop in U.S. Jaws, Analysts Say (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)

Week 805 (2009), bad names for given types of products: A bad name for a candy bar: Herpes Kisses (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

Week 855 (2010), children's books that will never be published:

"You Were Adopted, but You Weren't Our First Choice" (Beverley Sharp, Washington)

Week 871 (2010), alter a movie title: Four Weldings and a Funeral: A man attaches a set of rocket engines to his Chevy and momentarily achieves his dream of driving a flying car. (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)



BOB STAAKE/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Style Invitational from Week 674, two kinds of "caboose" in an example for a limerick contest. Originally published Aug. 6, 2006.

HIGH FIVES: THE LIMERICKS

It's not that hard, really, to write a limerick, even to adhere to the strict rhyme and meter that mark the five-line comic form. But the Loser Limericists turn the genre into art: After reading the more than 10,000 verses submitted to our 14 limerick contests so far (not counting one for bad limericks), we're convinced that the Invite bards are the best limericists in the English-speaking world.

Two of our best Losers ever, Brendan Beary and Chris Doyle — Brendan, 50, is a software engineer for the Department of the Navy, and Chris, 68, is the retired chief actuary of the Department of Defense — are so overwhelmingly good at this genre that in 2006 we invited them to a Limerick Smackdown (Beary squeaked out a 5-4 vic-

tory). Here are two of their greatest:

From Limerixicon 1, Week 572 (2004), limericks featuring a word beginning with ai- to ar-:

It's in vain that the teenagers try
All their algebra skills to apply.
Though they can, on occasions,
Solve x in equations,
They still haven't figured out y .
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

From Limerixicon 8, Week 674 (2006), featuring words beginning ea- through el-:

Jocasta rolled over in bed,
Out of breath, and contentedly said,
"I have not been that had
Since I slept with your dad"
To the suddenly edified Oed.
(Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

Week 891 (2010): Palindrome sentences (allowing for homophones):

Quoth Raven: "Nevermore!" ...
BLAM! ... Nevermore Raven quoth.
(Peter Jenkins, Bethesda)

Week 900 (2011): "Dear Blank, From Blank" notes: Dear Leonardo: Your fly is open. — Sincerely, Mona Lisa (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

Week 902 (2011): Put a positive spin on a line from The Post:
Original: Maine's governor told critics Friday to "kiss my butt" ...
Spun: Maine's governor found it in his heart to turn the other cheek ...
(Dixon Wragg, Santa Rosa, Calif.)

Week 923 (2011): New chemical elements: Platitudinum: A metal that becomes more dull each time it is used, yet somehow is never discarded.
(Beth Baniszewski, Cambridge, Mass.)

Week 951 (2012), pair a word with itself or its homophone: Fact shun faction: The Fox News Channel lineup. (Kathy Hardis Fraeman, Olney)

Week 955 (2012), pair a word or phrase with its anagram: Satellite radio salaried toilet: Howard Stern. (Melissa Balmain, Rochester, N.Y.)

Our perennial contest to compare any two items from a list we supplied: "Michael Phelps and Bristol Palin: Each got into trouble after doing some dope. (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y., Week 972, 2012)

Week 975 (2012), "debunk" a "Sixth Myth" about any of a dozen topics: White people don't lack rhythm, they just hear a different drummer — and *he* lacks rhythm. (Tom Witte)

Week 996 (2012), combine two magazines: Astronomy and Astrophysics + Nuclear Physics: Sure, it has pictures of heavenly bodies, but I buy it for the particles. (Gary Crockett)

THEY'RE SLAYING OUR SONG: THE PARODIES

Inspired wags have been fitting new, funnier words to old songs since Oog and his crazy brother Moog turned the Hymn to the Rain God into a ditty about mammoth poop. But the Invitational's 13 parody contests embody the genre at its finest — in songs about everything from same-sex marriage to the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, set to everything from "The Ride of the Valkyries" to "Walk Like an Egyptian" to the Nokia ring tone.

The Invitational's hundreds of parodies would fill a heck of a book, but we have room to share only two, both from back in 2004 but, alas, still utterly timely. The contest was for a song whose lyrics better reflect today's America than the national anthem's do:

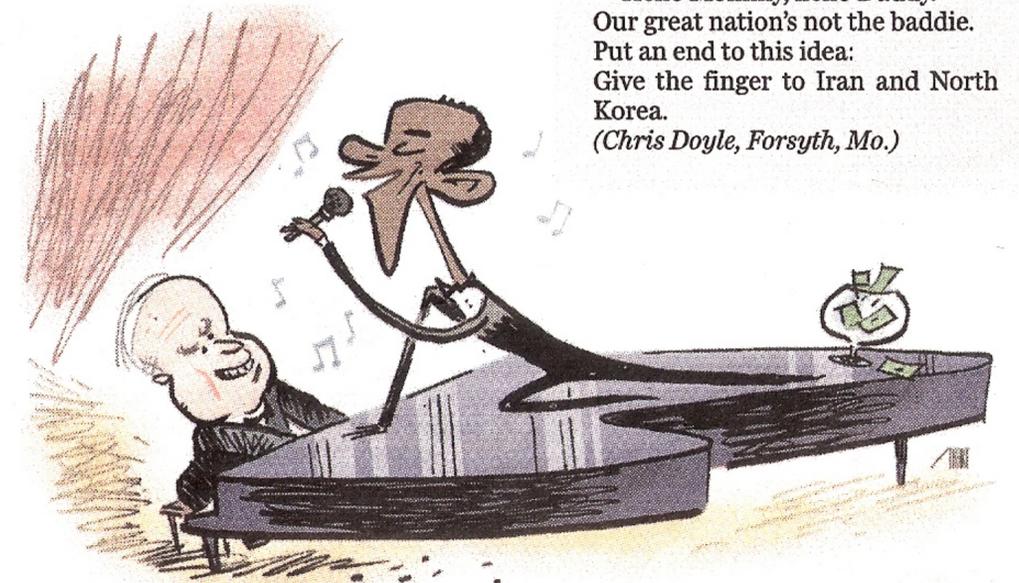
To "Be Our Guest" from "Beauty and the Beast":

We're the best! We're the best!
From Bombay to Budapest!
If you dare to disagree, we'll place you under house arrest!
We are strong! We are sure!
Patriotic to the core.
We're delighted and excited 'cause our states are all united!
Stripes and stars! Stars and stripes!
We will always be the types
To know our destiny is manifest!
So say it long and loudly, sing it strong and proudly,
We're the best! We're the best!
(It is France that we detest!)
We're the best! We're the best! We're the best!

(Barbara Sarshik, McLean)

To "Hello Muddah, Hello Fadda":
Hello Daddy, hello Mommy,
We're not Nazi, we're not commie.
All the world thinks we're a bully.
They don't seem to want to understand us fully.

Hello Mommy, hello Daddy.
Our great nation's not the baddie.
Put an end to this idea:
Give the finger to Iran and North Korea.
(Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)



BOB STAAKE/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Style Invitational Week 785, a contest for song parodies about the 2008 presidential campaign, Oct. 4, 2008.