



Arts & Entertainment Books Movies Music Museums Theater & Dance TV Comics Going Out Guide Crosswords

Arts and Entertainment

# Style Conversational Week 1455: Congratulations — you lose

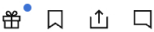
After the but-of-course 2020 hiatus, the Losers’ Flushies awards return with songs, plaques and a brain toss



The Empress (in tiara, of course) joins Style Invitational Losers Sarah Walsh, Matt Monitto and Duncan Stevens in Duncan’s song “Sam’s Enchanted Entries,” a parody honoring 2020 Loser of the Year Sam Mertens, at this year’s Flushies awards. (Over to the left are hep cat Jesse Rifkin and the ultra-generous host, Steve Leifer.) (Donna Saady)

By Pat Myers

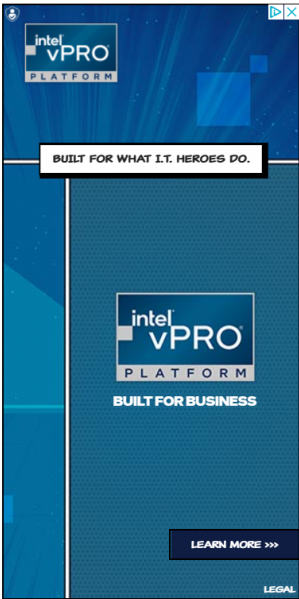
September 23, 2021 at 5:12 p.m. EDT



The organization is officially (whatever that might mean) the [Not Ready for the Algonquin Roundtable Society](#). But for a couple of decades now, the loose affiliation of contestants and fans of The Style Invitational is usually called the Loser Community, or just the Losers.

Pretty much founded back in Year 1 (1993) by contestant Elden Carnahan, who oversees the operation to this day, NRARS encourages a spirit of friendly Invite competition with an elaborate set of [Loser Stats](#), culminating each year with an awards fete, the Flushies. And this year’s fete — the 25th! — was one of the most enjoyable ever, at least since I’ve started crashing the party in 2002. For one thing, we were celebrating both this year’s and last year’s winners; the 2020 Flushies didn’t happen, just as so much else didn’t happen. And for another, the (all vaxed) 60 of us relaxed comfortably on the spacious and shady patio of Loser Steve Leifer in Potomac, Md.

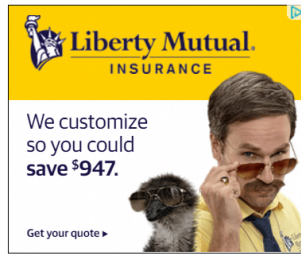
Year 27 Loser of the Year Sam Mertens wasn’t able to be there, but we “honored” him all the same: I read a sampling of his classic ink, and we serenaded him in absentia with “Sam’s Enchanted Entries,” a parody penned by Loserbard Duncan Stevens. Right after that, the “7” balloon on the wall was changed to an 8, and we turned the love on Year 28 LOTY Jonathan Jensen, who had come down from his home in Baltimore. After we sang “Jonathan Jensen” to the tune of “Suddenly Seymour” (thanks, Duncan and Mark Raffman) Jon — who plays string bass in the Baltimore Symphony — performed an “acceptance speech” in the form of an original song that puts his award in the proper perspective:



## MOST READ ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT >



in original song with pants and shirt in the proper perspective.



My house is full of statuettes and trophies that I've won;

My Grammys and my Pulitzers I polish just for fun,

Influential journalists have covered my career,

But it simply can't compare to being Loser of the Year.

I pal around with royalty, I mingle with the best,

At every fancy party I am sure to be the guest,

My name in glossy magazines will frequently appear,

But it simply can't compare to being Loser of the Year.

I've been to every continent, adventure for to seek,

I've marveled at the sunrise on a Himalayan peak,

I've paddled up the Amazon, explored the wild frontier,

But it's nothing like the thrill of being Loser of the Year.

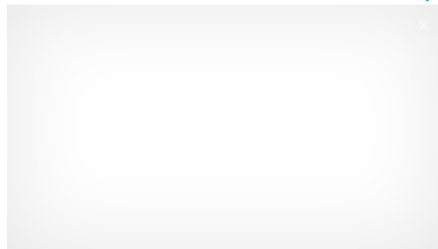
I've reached the highest pinnacle a person can attain;

At last I know for certain that my life was not in vain;

And if I die tomorrow, I can face it with good cheer ...

Because I've lived to earn the accolade of Loser of the Year.

ADVERTISING



So ... kindly bow or curtsy if you see me drawing near —

And give due respect and honor to the Loser of the Year.



## 1 Nobel Prize in literature awarded to Abdulrazak Gurnah

2 American Shakespeare Center cancels fall season amid reports of internal strife



3 **Review**  
Dave Grohl's 'The Storyteller' is just as upbeat as you'd expect



4 The best things to do in the D.C. area the week of Oct. 7-13



5 'Futures' comes alive in the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building



**Every app.  
For everything you  
dream up.**

Upgrade now

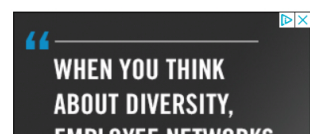


## The Opinions Essay newsletter

Get notified of new installments in Opinions' long-form commentary series.

Sign up

By signing up you agree to our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)







Lavishly decorated cookies in a toilet paper motif — there was also a gorgeous cake decorated as a toilet paper roll — were made for the occasion by Loser Pia Palamidessi, a retired pastry chef who came in from Cumberland, Md. They were tasty, too. (Donna Saady)

Along with the Loser of the Year honors and those for of Rookie, Most Improved (sic), Least Improved, etc., Elden and team recognized the Losers who'd reached some ink milestone in the past March-to-March — 50 inks, 100, etc. (2,200 if you're Chris Doyle) — not by throwing rolls of toilet paper at them, as per previous practice, but by tossing a [rubber human brain](#) at one, then having that person toss it to the next honoree and so on.

"Oooohhhh, I wish I'd been there!" you are no doubt crying as you tear at your hair in woe. Well! Thanks to Loser Sarah Walsh, you can see [video of the whole shebang](#) in the Style Invitational Devotees Facebook group. (Yes, you do have to join the group, but it's a private group — nobody else on Facebook can see you — and you don't even have to use your own name, and you can just lurk. Sign up at [on.fb.me/invdev](https://on.fb.me/invdev) and, where you answer the questions, you can tell me or my co-admin Alex Blackwood that you just want to watch the videos and we won't announce you to the other Devs, if you prefer.) **Time stamps for music highlights:** "Sam's Enchanted Entries," 38:50; "Jonathan Jensen," 1:00:30; Jonathan's "acceptance speech" song: 1:04. Before each of the tribute songs, I read a sampling of Sam's and Jonathan's ink. Since Jon's first Invite ink was his anti-Trump parody "A, You're Abominable," we sang that too. That's around 51:00.

My deepest thanks to Steve and Jackie Leifer, who offered up their home for this thing and have *offered it again*, to all the organizers and helpers, and of course to everyone who came out to celebrate this crazy joke thing we keep on doing every week. **For details on future events** — the annual brunch and tour in Gettysburg, Pa., Oct. 17; Indian food at Aditi in Alexandria's Kingstowne section, Nov. 14 (should I bring the Czar?); and forward, see "Our Social Engorgements" at [NRARS.org](https://NRARS.org).

## Can I get an amend?\* The 'first drafts' of Week 1451

*\*Non-inking (too long; didn't fit) headline by Jeff Contompasis*



Jonathan Jensen displays his Year 28 (2020-21) Loser of the Year plaque. Jonathan, a musician with the Baltimore Symphony, sang an original song as his "acceptance speech." (Sarah Walsh)



**EMPLOYEE NETWORKS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO ANY ORGANIZATION.**

PETER AKWABOAH  
Chief Operating Officer for Technology, Operations and Firm Resilience

Watch Now

**WE ARE**  
Morgan Stanley

### MOST READ



**1** Senate report gives new details of Trump efforts to use Justice Dept. to overturn election

**2** **Perspective**  
Carolyn Hax: Brother's girlfriend dominates every conversation



**3** Secret trove illuminates the lives of billionaires



**4** Covid-19 live updates: Immunity weakens faster in men than women after Pfizer vaccination, study finds



**5** Pfizer, BioNTech ask FDA to authorize vaccine for children 5 to 11



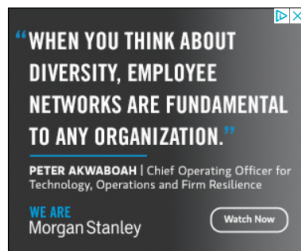
**Every app.  
For everything you  
dream up.**

Upgrade now

Even with my contest judging weekend a bit squished by the Flushies — not to mention a whopping 2,200 entries — I had a ball judging [Week 1451](#), “first drafts” of famous quotes, and found myself laughing out loud constantly. Not surprisingly with such a large pool of entries, from about 250 entrants, many Losers chose the same quote to “prewrite” (though because I shuffled all the entries alphabetically, I don’t know if a single person tried a bunch of variations on the same line). Despite flocks of similar jokes on “Frankly, my dear” or “To be or not to be,” I usually could choose one version that I found funnier than the rest. But for a few — “Fourscore and seven years ago,” “The first rule of Fight Club” — it was fun to juxtapose varied approaches to the same line.

It’s the first Invite win and the 19th blot of ink overall for Relative Newbie Marli Melton of our Carmel Valley, Calif., Loser Bureau (which consists of Marli Melton), who did Adm. Farragut one pithier, though [quite a bit less assertively](#), with “Torpedoes?? Damn.” The three runners-up, however, are veterans of the Losers’ Circle: Rob Huffman (Emily Dickinson’s “Because I could not stop for dea ...”), Danielle Nowlin, updating T.S. Eliot’s Prufrock with “I grow old ... I grow old ... I shall wear the tops of my trousers at the level of my nipples,” and Jesse Frankovich, changing the side-dish palate of Hannibal Lecter from fava beans and chianti to jelly beans and Yoo-Hoo, each have ink totals in the triple digits, with Jesse headed toward four.

**What Doug Dug:** “You’re right, lotsa good ones,” Ace Copy Editor Doug Norwood messaged me yesterday. Doug seconded my choices for all four top winners, and also singled out Mark Raffman’s clarification of the 1970s Big Mac jingle; Marni Penning Coleman’s “woman is like a tea bag” joke, playing on the one attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt; Steve Bremner’s gospel-untruth “In the beginning was the word, and the word was ‘aardvark.’”; both Hildy Zampella’s and Duncan Stevens’s takes on “The first rule of Fight Club”; Jonathan Paul’s biological “You say potato”; and of course the And Last: John Klayman one-upping Jeff Bezos on the importance of your subscription to The Washington Post.



**The Czar Turn:** I hadn’t run my shortlist of entries past my predecessor, Gene Weingarten, as I sometimes do, but I knew he’d like the results, and this morning I sent him a link to this week’s Invite. Sure enough, the deposed Czar found the results “excellent ... many made me LOL and quote to Rachel. And because I am [a glassbowl], I am going to opine that none of the winners were as good as some of the Hons. You are welcome.”

Of course, I don’t consider someone a glassbowl just because he has different favorites from mine (unless the person continues with “you obviously don’t understand what’s funny”). But had the Czar still been running things, four of these five would have gotten the top ink (though their writers might not have received their prizes until months later). In no particular order:

In the beginning was the word, and the word was ‘aardvark.’ ” (Steve Bremner)





“My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. You’ll be hearing from my attorney.”  
(Steve Leifer)

“Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, mine has the best sliders.” (John Hutchins)

“The first rule of Fight Club is newest member brings the doughnuts.” (Duncan Stevens)

“The only thing we have to fear is a collapsing bank system, plus huge unemployment, dust all over the Great Plains, and some nut in Germany.” (Stephen Dudzik)

**Gene, by the way, has published his final humor column for the Post Magazine** this week, after 21 years and more than 1,000 columns — and before that, more than 500 Style Invitationals, which he Czarred until I deposed him in December 2003. Gene will be turning 70 in ... ooh, a few days. He’ll still be writing major stories for the Magazine, such as the works that earned his two Pulitzer Prizes: “[Pearls Before Breakfast](#),” his experiment with how people interact with art out of context, in which virtuoso Joshua Bell set up his violin case for tips and played outside a Metro station; and “[Fatal Distraction](#),” the harrowing examination of how loving, caring parents can manage to forget a child in a parked, overheating car.



In this last column, Gene generously salutes some of the humorists who’ve influenced his comic sensibility. But it goes without saying — though that’s never stopped me! — that his style has had a huge influence on my own, and, I’m sure, that of many others.

## Definitely a good idea: This week’s contest, Week 1455

Ever since I started Empressing almost 18 years ago, I’ve repeatedly (as in 800-plus times) plumbed the Style Invitational archives for contests that we might try again; this search has become far easier with the advent of Loser Elden Carnahan’s [Master Contest List](#), which includes links to all the results as well. Many of the topics over the past 28 1/2 years were specific to events of the time; some would now be out of date (e.g., stock table abbreviations that are no longer used); some were successful but might well have used up all the good answers; and some, alas, just didn’t pan out. ([Week 43](#), “[What Does God Look Like?](#)” — better left ineffable.)



Perhaps “used up all the good answers” kept me from revisiting the “good idea/bad idea” wordplay contest since Week 1091 in 2014 — which was a redo of Week 105 from 1995. In any case, I’m bolder now, less fretful and more optimistic, or at least hopeful. There were so many good answers all the way down the list both times that there must also have been lots of good ideas that missed getting ink. And of course, seven years down the road from last

time, you have a new world of experiences and language to play with.

The point of the contest is utterly clear from the examples, and so I'm pleased to present more of them: ink from both previous contests. See the full results in these links [for Week 105](#) (plain text) and [for Week 109](#).

**Report from Week 105 [1995], in which we [the Czar] asked for good idea-bad idea scenarios.** But first we wish to once again protest a torrent of crude jokes from people who seem to think this contest dwells in the gutter. Please be advised that The Style Invitational will never stoop to rewarding sophomoric, adolescent humor.



Fifth Runner-Up — Good idea: Shampoo. Bad idea: Shampoop. (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

Fourth Runner-Up — Good idea: Wash hands after using toilet. Bad idea: Wash hands using toilet. (Jay Snyder, Chantilly)

Third Runner-Up — Good idea: Taking back the streets of Washington, D.C. Bad idea: Taking the back streets of Washington, D.C. (Steve Hazelton, Reston)

Second Runner-Up — Good idea: Have a documentary on the civil rights movement narrated by James Earl Jones. Bad idea: Have a documentary on the civil rights movement narrated by James Earl Ray. (Jerry A. Pohl, Rockville)

First Runner-Up — Good idea: In business meetings, express yourself. Bad idea: In business meetings, express your milk. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

And the winner of "Standing Firm" autographed by Dan Quayle:

Good idea: Showing pictures of your kids at a private party. Bad idea: Showing pictures of your privates at a kids' party. (Ira Moskowitz, Lanham)

Honorable Mentions:

Good Idea: Purchase a dog at the pound. Bad idea: Purchase dog by the pound. (Patrick G. White, Taneytown)

Good idea: Saving the spotted owls. Bad idea: Saving the spotted owls in little plastic baggies in your freezer. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

Good idea: Drive right, pass left. Bad idea: Drive right past cop. (Kevin Mellema, Falls Church)

Good idea: Presenting fresh, shiny faces to the teacher each morning. Bad idea: Presenting fresh, shiny feces to the teacher each morning. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

Good idea: Calling your mother. Bad idea: Calling "You mutha!" (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

Good idea: Acquire a foreign tongue. Bad idea: Acquire a foreign tongue in your wedding reception line. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Good idea: Getting great marks because of your class in "The Social Structure." Bad idea: Getting grate marks because of your class in the social structure. (Tom Albert, Alexandria)

And Last: Good idea: Post humor contest winners. Bad idea: Posthumous contest winners. (J. Calvin Smith, Laurel)

Plus these, both from Elden, in retrospective contests:



Good idea: Being chaste around the Oval Office. Bad idea: Being chased around the Oval Office.

Good idea: A cheap motel. Bad idea: A cheap mohel.

#### **Forward to 2014:**

**In Week 1091**, we repeated a contest from way back in 1995, in which we asked you to cite a “good idea” and turn it into a “bad idea” with a small wording change. The Empress was utterly shocked to find that a large number of entries concerned the reproductive and excretory systems. What sort of operation do you think we run here?

The winner of the Inkin’ Memorial: Good idea: Give a bowl of irises to your wife. Bad idea: Give Ebola viruses to your wife. (Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

2nd place: Good idea: Groom nails before your best friend’s wedding. Bad idea: Nail groom before your best friend’s wedding. (Jan Forman, Falls Church, Va.)

3rd place: Good idea: Use power tools to keep your car functioning properly. Bad idea: Use power tools to keep your ear functioning properly. (Larry Carnahan, Arlington, Va.)

4th place: Good idea: Reply to all sensitive emails. Bad idea: Reply All to sensitive emails. (Eric Yttri, Arlington, Va., a First Offender)

Almost good/bad enough: honorable mentions

Good idea: Celibate before marriage. Bad idea: Sell a bit before marriage. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

Good idea: Snowed in with your date. Bad idea: Snowden with your data. (Mike Gips, Bethesda, Md.)

Good idea: 3 square meals a day. Bad idea: 3^2 meals a day. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

Good idea: Eating some beef with a side of potatoes. Bad idea: Eating some potatoes with a side of beef. (Larry Gray, Union Bridge, Md.)

Good idea: Add “in bed” or “dressed as Elvis” to a cookie fortune. Bad idea: Add “in bed” or “dressed as Elvis” to the Oath of Office. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Good idea: Reusing plastic grocery bags as dog poop bags. Bad idea: Reusing plastic dog poop bags as grocery bags. (Dinah Tabbah, Annandale, Va., a First Offender)

Good idea: Keeping a supply of Head & Shoulders in the bathroom. Bad idea: Keeping a supply of heads and shoulders in the freezer. (P. Diane Schneider, Clinton, Wash., a First Offender)

Good idea: A sightseeing tour to see a jungle refuge for gorillas. Bad idea: A sightseeing tour to see a jungle refuge for guerrillas. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.)

Good idea: Uncle Sam wants you. Bad idea: Your uncle Sam wants you. (Rob Huffman, Fredericksburg, Va.)

Good idea: Speed reading. Bad idea: Read, speeding. (G.T. Bowman, Falls Church, Va.)

Good idea: Timeshare condominiums. Bad idea: Timeshare condoms. (Ray Gallucci, Frederick, Md.)


Good idea: Eat every carrot and pea on your plate. Bad idea: Eat every carrot and pee on your plate. (Kathleen DeBold, Silver Spring; Mike Dailey, Ocean Isle Beach, N.C.)

Good idea: Continuing oversight of the Secret Service. Bad idea: Continuing oversights of the Secret Service. (John Glenn, Tyler, Tex.)

Good idea: Posting a picture of you hanging out with your member of Congress. Bad idea: Posting a picture of you in Congress with your member hanging out. (Rick Haynes, Ocean City, Md.)

0 Comments

Gift Article




By Pat Myers

Pat Myers is editor and judge of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post's page for clever, edgy humor and wordplay. In the role since December 2003, she has posted and judged more than 700 contests. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook. [Twitter](#)

MORE FROM THE POST


### CIA creates new ‘mission center’ to counter China

Today at 8:00 a.m. EDT




### Federal judge blocks enforcement of Texas law banning abortion as early as six weeks

Today at 6:40 a.m. EDT




### Idaho’s governor left the state. His lieutenant governor took power and banned state vaccine mandates.

Oct. 6, 2021




### Slurs and monkey sounds blare near a Black family’s home. Some wonder why it’s not a ‘hate crime.’

Oct. 6, 2021




### Ask Amy: Dad is stealing son’s medical cannabis

Perspective · Today at 12:00 a.m. EDT



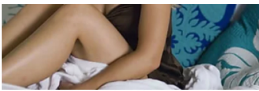


PAID PROMOTED STORIES




#### Viewpoint | The end of America's empire won't be peaceful

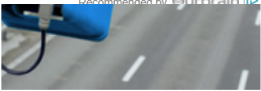
The Economist



#### These Movie Scenes Are The Most Paused In History

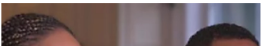
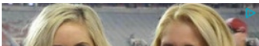

Gazillions

Recommended by 



#### Big Change In Washington Leaves Drivers Fuming

Auto-Savings







**See 2021's Best Credit Cards**  
NerdWallet



**Worst Colleges In America  
(Maryland Tops The List)**  
bonvoyaged.com



**[Photos] At 33, This Is What  
Ray Rice Is Left With**  
The Finance Chatter