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GENE POOL

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Invitational Week 10: It's Our Birthday. Party Like It's 1993.

As the Invite turns 30, enter your choice of contests from our year of infancy. Plus winning jokes-as-poems.

22 min ago



A painting of a chicken crossing the road in the post-expressionist style of Belgian artist Floris Jespers, created on our demand in 20 seconds by the AI Dall-E 2 system.

Greetings. Fifty years ago, I entered the New York Magazine Competition, which was pioneered by the great Mary Ann Madden. It was a sophisticated weekly reader-participation humor contest. The challenge changed every week.

When I was about 19, I entered for the first time. The challenge was to string names and names of things together in a 25-item list that would return to the original name through clever associations. “Bob Hope, Hope diamond, Marilyn Monroe, JFK, LBJ, Ezra Pound...” I sent one in that included the link “...U.S. Grant, Ford Foundation ...,” which I thought very clever, because it was. It wound up getting published *but attributed to someone else*.

At that moment I bitterly and somberly vowed to myself, in a way only a teenager can, that I would someday steal Mary Ann Madden’s contest idea and run it in another publication, only in a version that was more rude and more naughty and objectively funnier. And thus, 22 years later, The Style Invitational was born out of anger, teenage revenge fantasies, pettiness, and blatant larceny. I was proud.

And now here we are, celebrating our 30th anniversary. The Empress doesn’t want me to say this, because she is a stickler for absolutely verifiable truth, but I will say it anyway: I believe the The Invitational is the longest-lived uninterrupted humor contest in American history. Pat worries that there might be some shmendrick contest out there in, say, some weekly shopper that lived longer. True, and Abraham Lincoln might have once secretly married a Slovenian stripper, but, you know.... I will say that The Invitational passed the New York Magazine Competition for longevity long ago. It folded in 2000 after 973 contests. *We*, however, are on the equivalent of week 1,528.

On this day, we bring you back to yesteryear. You are invited to enter any of the contests from Year One. It will be easy to find them. We’ll tell you how below.

On to The Invitational, by the Empress, Pat Myers, and the Czar, Gene Weingarten.

INTRODUCING

The Style Invitational

WEEK 1

SHEDDING THE SKINS?

Now that change is coming anyway to the Redskins, dare we at last consider *The Big Question?* Should the team change its name?

There are two valid sides to this issue.

Side One: Tradition. The name is venerable. If you change it, much plastic and polyester merchandise instantly would become obsolete.

Side Two: Race libel. The name is brutishly demeaning to an ethnic group that has been indiscriminately plundered for centuries. It defines a proud and accomplished people by the single characteristic of the pigmentation of their skin.

Being typically pandering journalists, we take no position ourselves. We merely suspect the Redskin name is doomed, and when that occurs, we wish to be ready with an alternative.

So give us one. Come up with a new name for the team. Entries will be judged on humor, originality and appropriateness to Washington.

**HERE ARE TWO
EXAMPLES:**



The modest debut on the front of The Washington Post's Style section on March 7, 1993, seeking a new name for the Washington football team, a question that wouldn't be settled (if badly) till 2022.

Winner of Week 10, euphemisms: **Vomiting: Unplanned reexamination of recent food choices** (Erik Johnson)

Winners of Week 19, change a phrase by one letter: **“Beat me up, Scotty”: The last words of Commander James T. “Kinky” Kirk.** (Joseph H. Engel; David J. Zvijac)

Winner of Week 39, new Crayola colors: **Govern Mint. Description: Please refer to specification Mil-Q-17983245, Rev. G, w/Appendix J, which details the hue, tone, shade, tolerance, refraction, reflection, intensity and brilliance of this color.** (Paul Styrene)

Specifically:

For Week 10: Enter any of the 43 Style Invitational contests from 1993 (exceptions below); see all the contests and previous results on the Losers’ [Master Contest List](#) at NRARS.org. (Click “Reverse Order” at the top of the page to see the 1993 contests at the top of the list; you can look at either plain-text versions or PDFs; obviously use the latter when you need to see a picture.) That first year offered a great variety of what would become Invite perennials: neologisms, cartoon captions, jokes, “joint legislation,” slogans, limericks, Ask Backwards. As always, you may enter a total of 25 entries. **Don’t pretend you’re living in 1993;** when a contest asks for, say, a new Crayola color for the 1990s, transpose that to 2023.

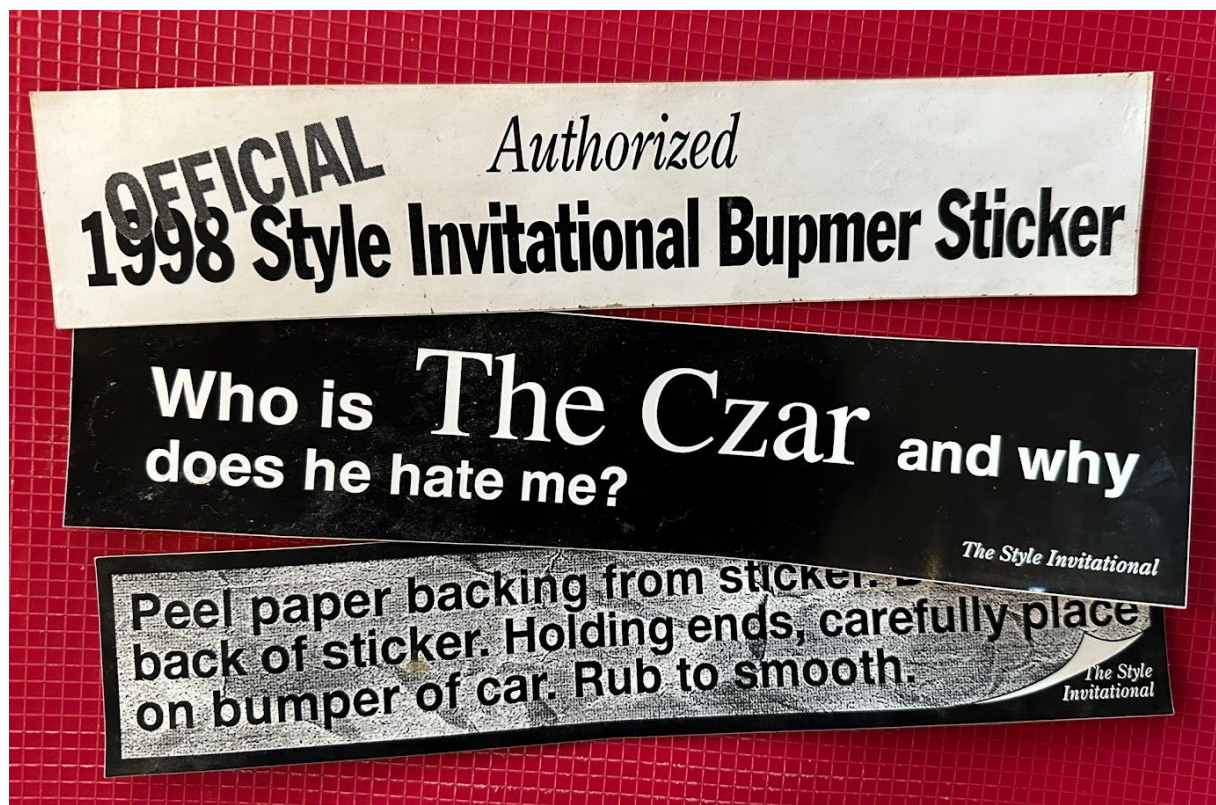
—**For Week 5,** “joint legislation,” use the last names of [the current Congress](#) rather than the one listed.

—**Don’t enter Week 25:** The photos in the caption contest wouldn’t be clear enough to reprint.

—**For Week 33,** given our breathtaking new independence, you can “quote” any writer, not just someone who writes for The Washington Post.

[Click here for this week’s entry form.](#) Please read the EZ formatting directions on the form, so we don’t have to blahblah them here.

Deadline is 4 p.m. ET Saturday, March 18. Results will run here in The Gene Pool on Thursday, March 23.



The winner receives some genuine vintage Style Invitational bumper stickers, above, which were awarded to honorable-mention winners until the Empress deposed the Czar in 2003 and switched to refrigerator magnets. First Offenders receive the [Fir Stink for their first ink](#): a smelly tree-shaped air “freshener.”

Cracks Poetic: The Pokes (poem-jokes) of Week 8

In [Week 8](#), we took one of the Czar’s favorite pursuits – writing jokes in the form of rhyming poems: pokes for short. We’d invited all kinds of jokes as source material – old, recent, and original – and gave ink to some of each, but

we soon realized the best jokes were those we hadn't heard a million times before, jokes that, unavoidably through familiarity, telegraphed the punch lines. We had to reject a few excellent poems because — inadvertently — they were too similar in subject, substance, meter, tone and punchline, to pokes Gene had already written and published.

Third runner-up:

A lad asked a pirate, "Please, sir, tell me why
you're missing a leg and a hand and an eye."
The pirate responded, "A peg leg thar be —
the work of a cannon that tore off me knee.
"The hook is a badge from our bloodiest raid,
I lost me poor hand to a scurvy dog's blade.
"Days after, while watching the stars in the sky,
A seagull flew over and pooped in me eye."
On seeing the lad give a quizzical look,
Said the pirate: "I wasn't yet used to me hook."
(*Bob Kruger, Rockville, Md.*)

Second runner-up:

A weeping young woman, just newly a wife,
Told her dad, "Hubby's dandruff is spoiling my life!"
"Oh, just give Head & Shoulders — it'll work in a jiffy!"
But alas, the young lady stayed sobby and sniffy.
Her dad tried to console her, but sadly he failed —
"I just don't know how to give shoulders!" she wailed.
(*Jon Ketzner, Cumberland, Md.*)

First runner-up:

A father was washing his car with his son,
Until, at long last, the boy said,
"The car's much improved, but this isn't much fun —
Could you please use a sponge now instead?"
(*Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.*)

And the winner of the [socks that look like pedicured feet in sandals](#):

The portraits on the White House walls glared down on 45
As he patrolled the halls one sleepless night.
To Washington, he said: “Hey, George, if you could come alive,
What would you have me do so things go right?”
The hero squared his jaw and said, “Why, sir, you must not lie!”
But that advice was greeted with a sneer.
And moving down the hall: “Well, let’s give Jefferson a try.
What would you have me do if you were here?”
The answer: “Help the common man, not just the well-to-do!”
And, scowling, 45 replied, “Hell, no!”
And down the hall to Lincoln: “Okay, Abe, now how ’bout you?”
— “Well, sir, perhaps go out and see a show ...”
(*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

Verse and Verse: Honorable Mentions

A dying man lay still in bed,
When suddenly he raised his head.
A lovely smell was wafting by –
The fragrance of his favorite pie!
Transfixed, he stumbled to his feet
And went to find the tasty treat.
Into the kitchen made his way
Where, in a pan, the hot pie lay.
He went to slice it with a knife,
When all at once, in came his wife.
She slapped his hand. “For goodness’ sake!
You put that down – It’s for the wake!”
(*Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore*)

The grizzly sniffles sadly as she slides into her seat.
She’s left all other bears behind — they’d mocked her mammoth feet.
The waiter comes to take her order; trying not to cry,

She tells him, "I'll have salmon, please, and one — — blueberry pie."
"Of course," the waiter answers. "But what's up with the big pause?"
"You too?!" she wails — and shreds the booth. "At least they come with claws!"

(Coleman Glenn, Huntingdon Valley, Pa.)

Mrs. Bullet was so filled with glee
To tell Mr. Bullet: "You see,
The doctor said soon,
Perhaps in late June,
I'm going to have a BB!"

(Kevin Ahern, Corvallis, Ore.)

Each day, Irv eats his lunch outside, sitting on a bench.
He shares with all who join him there, a quintessential mensch.
On one Passover afternoon, he offered to extend
Some matzo squares to someone who it seemed could use a friend.
The man was blind, and with the matzo placed upon his lap,
He ran his fingers over it and said: "Who writes this stupid crap?"

(Judy Freed, Deerfield Beach, Fla.)

"Just learned each hand has twenty-seven
Bones," Ann tells her classmate Kevin.

"If I'm unlucky on a date,
My hand," says Kev, "has twenty-eight."

(Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.)

A Pravda contest's asking folks
To write and send in Putin jokes.
But rather than acclaim and cheers,
The winners all get thirty years.

(Chris Doyle)

I thought he loved poetry — he seemed decent and mellow
When I agreed to come up and see his “Longfellow.”
I collected my wits, saying, “This will not do —
I was expecting an epic, but *that’s* more like haiku.”
(*Jon Carter, Fredericksburg, Va.*)

I have good news and bad news,” the lawyer averred.
The collector of art asked him, “What’s the good word?”
“Your wife bought some pictures for only two grand,
But she says fifteen million is what they’ll command.”
Said the client: “Sounds great! But there’s *bad* news, you said?”
“Sir, the pics are of you and her sister, in bed.” (*Mark Raffman*)

The world began in darkness, but it didn’t seem quite right,
Which led our God to thunder out: “And now, let there be light!”
The light was quite spectacular, which led Him then to say:
“I don’t know what *you’d* call it, but I’m calling it a day.”
(*Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.*)

It is rare to spot an elephant hiding in trees—
Take a peek, as you stroll through the wood, at it.
Why is that a phenomenon one seldom sees?
It’s because they’re uncommonly good at it. (*Duncan Stevens*)

Todd showed his wife how he felt:
He inked “Wendy” below his belt.
One day while in a urinal stance,
He saw something just by chance.
Next to him a wiener read “Wendy”
But looked all wrinkled and bendy.
When Todd said, “Your wife’s Wendy, too?”
He heard, “No, she’s Wenfendoyazoo.”
(*Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.*)

I spotted a baseball—it arced through the night—
Asked a pal, “Hey, bud, if you’ll permit me,
Why’s it seem to become, in the course of its flight,
So much bigger?” And that’s when it hit me. (*Duncan Stevens*)

A pastor, priest, and rabbi made a bet,
Their proselytic talents to compare.
The pact was sealed, the challenge to be met:
Go off into the woods, convert a bear.
The three came back, and first declared the priest:
“I gave the bear Communion – host and wine!”
The pastor, next: “I, too, have saved the beast.
He’s baptized in the river, now he’s mine.”
The rabbi, bruised and battered, offered this:
“I wish I hadn’t started with the bris.” (*Mark Raffman*)

Everyone gasped at the beautiful girl –
To gaze upon her took no urgin’.
She gets her good looks from her father, it’s said:
He's a famous top-notch plastic surgeon.
(*Rick Bromberg, Fairfax, Va.*)

Our town Romeo reminisces
The giving of hundreds of kisses:
The guy always fretted
That he might get wedded,
So there are a lot of near-Mrs. (*Kevin Ahern*)

Cassandra knew: being a seer can stink.
No one listened, and folks threw debris at her!
Just like her, I once shouted, “Titanic will sink!”
Then they ushered me out of the theater. (*Duncan Stevens*)

A manager was in a bind. His CEO said, “Yes,
We have to cut our overhead. You need one worker less.”
“Oh, what an awful quandary. And such a bitter pill!
I have to let a good soul go. Will it be Jack or Jill?”

The manager decided that he’d leave the ax to fate:
He’d bid farewell to one of them, whichever came in late.
But both came bright and early, so the boss his task he nursed:
He’d let the awful deed befall the one who clocked out first.

At close of day, they’re both at work. Jill caught her boss’s eye:
“You’ve seemed upset all day today. Can you please tell me why?”
“I must lay you or Jack off now.” “And that’s why all the fuss?
You’ll simply have to jack off, as I’m late to catch my bus.”
(Nan Reiner, Boca Raton, Fla.)

A C-section baby of yore
Had a habit that grew into lore.
Every time he left home
He tended to roam
Through the window instead of the door.
(Leif Picoult)

Why must our matey walk the plank?
He’s irked the captain with his stank.
But it’ll be a problem nevermore,
As he’ll soon just wash up on shore.
(April Musser, Georgia)

I’ll donate my body to science.
I think it would really be cool.
My parents, you see, had a passionate wish

That I'd end up in medical school.
(Jonathan Jensen)

A naked woman robbed a bank,
And cops arrived to build a case,
But witnesses all drew a blank
When trying to describe her face. *(Chris Doyle)*

Zombies are a fearful sight, they're called the Walking Dead;
They love to cozy up and eat the brains out of your head.
They might invite their friends to come and have a little taste,
Because as they so often say, a mind's a terrible thing to waste. *(Beverley Sharp)*

My grandpa: "Life today: it sucks! Time was," the oldster said,
"We'd hit the store with two, three bucks, and walk out with some bread,
And milk, perhaps, a cup of joe, whatever might enamor us.
No matter, now, what place we go, they've rigged up those darn cameras."
(Duncan Stevens)

It took me years of "sit up straight,"
"Please close your mouth while chewing,"
"No burps" and "do not lick the plate"
At meals, as he'd been doing.
Then just when I'd taught right from wrong
To Hubs, our first kid came along. *(Chris Doyle)*

I abhor all body shaming
And I'm a lover, not a hater,
But Yo Mama so fat
Her belt size is "Equator"! *(Jon Carter)*

I received a request at work today;
It was really quite bizarre.

"Sign up now for a 401K" —
I could never run that far!
(Karen Lambert, Chevy Chase, Md.)

The man showed up quite promptly at the doc's
Wearing merely plastic wrap (and socks).
The psychiatrist – a quack and a putz –
Declared, "I can clearly see you're nuts!"
(Richard Franklin, Alexandria, Va.)

Windmill 1: "Hey there, Joe, wanna go to a show?
Black Sabbath is coming here, man."
Windmill 2, with a grin: "Awesome! Score! I'm so in!
You know I'm a big metal fan." *(Duncan Stevens)*

"To be or not to be" was not the question.
"To be" was off the table; on it, her friends
Who fed a man, his hands a mess, chin
Just dripping with the juice of fellow hens.
What dreams might come did not disturb her sleep;
Her mortal coil was doomed to be off-shuffled.
Whatever fate the afterlife might keep
Was not a cause for getting feathers ruffled.
The challenge: with a minimum of harm,
If not to win, to make the farmer lose.
A busy highway ran beside the farm.
En route to chicken heaven, she could choose
To fatten or be flattened when she died.
She crossed the road to reach the other side. *(Coleman Glenn)*

And Last:

The Empress walks into a bar,
Where she sighs as she sits by the Czar.
"Well, if golf were their game

All these ‘pokes’ would win fame:
Every one of them’s well below par.” *(Coleman Glenn)*

The headline “Cracks Poetic” is by Chris Doyle; Duncan Stevens wrote the honorable-mentions subhead.

Still running – deadline 4 p.m. Saturday, March 11: **Our Week 9 contest to use all the letters in a movie title to make a new movie.** [Click here](#) or type in bit.ly/inv-week-9.

Sunday, March 19: Ingest foodstuffs with genuine Losers! This month’s Loser Brunch will be at the Spanish Diner, José Andres’s home-cooking place in downtown Bethesda, Md. (free parking in the garages). The Empress and Royal Consort plan to be there. More info and RSVP at [Our Social Engorgements](#) on the Losers’ website, NRARS.org.

Banter and share humor with the Losers and the Empress in the [Style Invitational Devotees](#) group on Facebook; join (tell them you came from The Gene Pool) and the Devs will anagram your name every which way. And see more than 1,000 classic Invite entries in graphic form, also on FB, at [Style Invitational Ink of the Day](#).