

Invitational Week 53: Dead Letters, our annual obit poem contest

Write a funny verse about someone who died in 2023. Plus a Kook's Tour of new material from lots of previous contests.

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AND

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JAN 4, 2024



See Gene's poetic tribute to Al Jaffee (1921-2023) — famed for his last-page fold-in cartoons in Mad Magazine — in the intro to today's Invitational.

Hello. Today, we bring you the Invitational Gene Pool, of course, but first, a Gene Pool Gene Poll. Startlingly, this one will actually have some relevance to today's main event. Ready?

In memory of the creator of both Mad Fold-Ins and “Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions.”

You ask Al Jaffee if he is dead.

He yells “NO!” all testy and curt --

"I'm just in bed! A flower bed!

It's comfy here, under the dirt.”

For Invitational Week 53: Write a witty rhyming poem of no longer than eight lines about someone who died in 2023. Here's [a list of eighty notable ex-beings that might help you](#), but you can Google “deaths 2023” and do your own research; winners of the Darwin Awards have inspired numerous Invite tributes over the years. And you should also check out the obit poems that got ink a year ago in our [first Invite contest on Substack](#).

[Click here for this week's entry form](#), or go to bit.ly/inv-form-53. As usual, you may submit up to 25 entries for this week's contest, preferably all on the same form.

Deadline is Saturday, Jan. 13, at 9 p.m. ET. Results will run here in The Gene Pool on Thursday, Jan. 18.

The winner gets — as befitting this solemn exercise — this **dog-hindquarters-motif toothpaste dispenser; just push it over an open tube of toothpaste and squeeze it out the butt.**



It's especially effective on the canine teeth. This week's prize. (Temu.com)

Back in the Pool: Another go at 24 contests from '23

In Week 51, we invited you to enter or reenter any or all of The Invitational's contests from the first half of 2023, everything from one-liners to neologisms to cartoon captions to elaborate song parodies.

Third runner-up: From [Week 16](#), “breed” two racehorse names and name the “foal”:

Eastbound x There Be Dragons = Westbound! (*Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park, Md.*)

Second runner-up: From [Week 6](#), captions for any of seven varied pictures:



Sheila stepped up her search for the elusive purple peephole eater. (*Jon Gearhart, Des Moines*)

*First runner-up: From [Week 9](#), use all the letters in a movie title to name a new movie:
DIRTY DANCING > DANG! GRANNY CAN GRIND IT!: Baby's bubbe enrolls in hora
lessons at the retirement home, and is an instant hit! (Judy Freed, Deerfield Beach, Fla.)*

And the winner of the 2024 calendar [Dogs Pooping in Beautiful Places](#):

From [Week 10](#), to enter any contest from 1993:

Divide the world into two types of people:

Bold, iconoclastic freethinkers, and

People who play "adieu" as their first Wordle word.

(Karen Lambert, Chevy Chase Md.)

Rediddly-squat: Honorable mentions

From [Week 1](#), poems about people who died in 2022

[Robert J. Vlasic](#) (1926-2022)

As a connoisseur of things preserved

For people that his business served

Mr. Vlasic would no doubt be tickled

To know if his remains were pickled.

(Neil Kurland, Elkridge, Md.)

David Riston (1972-2022), *snake collector*:

A house that's full of pets is nice,

But full of snakes? He paid the price.

He wouldn't settle for a score;

He bought one hundred twenty-four.

He then sequestered every snake,

But all it took was one mistake.

They finally found him — poisoned. (Gasp!)

And was he dead? You bet your asp.

(Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

From [Week 4](#), Questionable Journalism: Choose a sentence from an article or ad, then follow it with a question it might humorously answer.

Real sentence: A: The city prohibits begging in that area under an ordinance from 2010.

Q: Why were Capitol Police officers called to the House floor during Kevin McCarthy's run for Speaker? (*Judy Freed*)

A: The llamas were dressed in a reindeer theme with antler headbands, glittery halters with tinkling bells and poinsettia-adorned wreaths.

Q: Mr. Santos, did you have pets when you lived in Brazil? (*Judy Freed*)

A: "We still had a lot of fun. It's not like it ruined the day."

Q: "Mr. Trump, sir, do you regret the violence that followed your January 6th speech?" (*Judy Freed*)

Week 5, a "circle of hell" and a punishment to fit the crime

For people who use "funny" names at Starbucks: "There's a Get Out of Hell ticket here for Mr. Jack Meehauf. Sorry, that's obviously a fake name. Next!" (*Roy Ashley, Washington, D.C.*)

People who put pineapple on their pizzas will reside in a circle of Hell where George Will is eternally explaining that the pineapple (from neither a pine tree nor an apple) is not a product of European colonization and oppression, but is actually, somewhat counterintuitively but also quite clearly, an outgrowth of mid-19th-century socialist proposals to reorganize European colonialist economic systems. (*Jeff Hazle, San Antonio*)

Week 8, "pokes," old jokes told as rhyming poems

"You're saying the bank's turned me down for a loan?"

The stunned tightrope walker let loose a deep groan.

The banker's explanation was barely comprehended:

"When your balance is outstanding, credit cannot be extended." (*Pam Shermeyer, Lathrup Village, Mich.*)

When she said she was leaving him, he tried to smile.

He asked her why, and she said that she'd been told

That he was twice convicted as a pedophile.

Said he, "That's a mighty big word for a twelve-year-old."

(*Howard Walderman, Columbia, Md.*)

The thing that's best about the Swiss?

I can't be sure, but maybe this:

Their flag? And if it isn't thus,

It's still at least [a great big plus](#).

(Jesse Frankovich, Laingsburg, Mich.)

Fella calls his wife late one Sunday eve.

"Sorry, honey, I'm staying with my old friend Steve."

"No problem," she coos, "it's perfectly all right" —

And then says to her lover as he pushes in tight,

"My husband is staying at your house tonight."

(Jon Ketzner, Cumberland, Md.)

A man with a frog at a bar

Made a claim that was rather bizarre.

He said, "Not to sound classless or shady,

But my trained frog can please any lady."

He turned to a lass on his left,

Said his frog, as a lover, was deft.

She guffawed and said, "Ha. Fat chance."

He replied, "No, he's good at romance."

She then saucily told him to prove it,

And unbuttoned her skirt to remove it.

She lay down on the wooden bar counter

And waited for Froggie to mount her.

The frog did nothing but croak.

He made nary an effort to poke.

The man told the frog, "Do your thing.

Have a fun romp, an amorous fling.

Get up there and do as you may —

She's waiting for your big display."

But the frog continued to loll,
And the man, with a measure of gall,
Said, “Miss, he forgot how to score.
Would you mind if I show him once more?”
(*Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.*)

Week 9, use all the letters in a movie title to name a new movie

Top Gun > Go Up on Pot: A Navy jet pilot feels the need — the need for weed. (*Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.*)

The Shining > The Insight: A movie star realizes he may have been overacting, just a little. (*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

Animal House > A House Minus Assholes: Congress adjourns and leaves town for the holidays. (*Mark Raffman*)

Aladdin > Did Anal: An adult film of a lad in a lad. (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.*)

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York > Lost in New York! Lost in the West! Lost All! No Term 2! Now, the Law! Trump ruminates as he watches TV. (*William Kennard, Arlington, Va.*)

Week 10, enter any contest from our first year, 1993

Finish this joke: A nun, a rabbi and an atheist are taking a tour of the White House ... and Trump is there to greet them.

He says to the nun, “How come your outfit hides your gams?”

He says to the rabbi, “What’s with the funny hat?”

And he says to the atheist, “Why don’t you believe in me?” (*Leif Picoult*)

Divide the world into two types of people:

Women who keep their big fat mouths shut, and

Women who aren’t my type. – D.J.T. (*Steve Smith, Potomac, Md.*)

Rename the Washington Redskins: The Virginia Commanders (*Jeff Contompasis*)

Ideas for statues: A one-foot Donald Trump statue labeled “World’s Tallest Statue.” (*Leif Picoult*)

Modernize an old quote or expression: I coulda been a contender. I coulda ... had a participation trophy! (*Lee Graham, Reston, Va.*)

Modernize an old quote or expression: I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man ... wearing Crocs. (*Lee Graham*)

[Week 11,](#) a picture made by the Dall-E AI tool



The DARTH Side of the Moon (*Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.*)

[Week 12](#), Mess With Our Heads: “Bank headlines” that reinterpret real headlines

Real headline: 9 Predictions for how we’ll eat in 2024

Bank head: Top forecast: chewing, then swallowing (*Karen Lambert*)

Week 14, make up new words using letter sets from the NYT Spelling Bee game

PADINOT > Opiñata: A thin-skinned pundit who falls apart as soon as critics take a crack at him. (*Kevin Dopart, Washington, D.C.*)

PILNORU > Pro Rip: Competition category in the World Flatulence Invitational (*Stu Segal, Southeast U.S.*)

LCEMOPT > Loptop: A guillotine. (*Neil Kurland*)

Week 15, snappy answers to stupid questions

Q: Sir, have you been drinking?

A: Yes, but I didn't inhale. (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village, Md.*)

Q: Is that your baby?

A: No, it's my mom. She had a time travel mishap. (*Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.*)

Week 16, "breed" two listed racehorses and name the foal to refer to both names

Fleet Feet x Point Proven = P.D.Q.E.D. (*Eric Nelkin, Silver Spring, Md.; Chris Doyle*)

Auguste Rodin x Low Expectations = The Gates of Heck (*Perry Beider, Silver Spring, Md.*)

Justice Department x Miracle Worker = Felon Keller (*Jesse Rifkin, Arlington, Va.*)

Ready Shakespeare x Litigate = [Exit, Sued by Bear](#) (*Jonathan Paul*)

Top Recruit x Escalation = Hire and Higher (*Eric Nelkin*)

Blocked x Alternate Reality = Milk of Amnesia (*Judy Freed*)

Hit Show x Infinite Series = Magnum, Pi (*Jesse Frankovich*)

Yellow Brick x Fleet Feet = Auntie Enema (*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)

Ben Franklin x Stormy Entry = 1,300 Benjamins (*Mark Raffman*)

Week 18, "breed" two inking entries from Week 16 to name a "grandfoal"

The Three Scrooges x Porn to Run = The Three Splooges (*Jesse Frankovich*)

USS Constipation x Storm Suer = Restraining Ordure (*Jeff Contompasis*)

Fonzie Scheme x Hanky Panky = Hump the Shark (*Neal Starkman, Seattle*)

Week 19, write song parody lyrics that are “sung” by a certain politician

Donald Trump sings his [2023 Christmas message](#).

(To “[Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas](#)”)

Have yourself a merry fucking Christmas, ring your jingle bell,

While I pray you radicals will rot in hell.

Have yourself a merry fucking Christmas, sing your happy tunes

While we lose our nation to you lefty loons.

[Bridge] Here we are — Biden’s lazy years,

Crooked, crazy years gone by.

Faithful fans who are dear to me

Will adhere to me or possibly die (of natural causes).

Soon enough, I’ll be back in the White House — doesn’t matter how.

And Jack Smith can take his final bullshit bow.

And have yourself a merry fucking Christmas now. (*Judy Freed*)

I’ll Be Trumpier the Second Time Around

To (Love Is Lovelier) “The Second Time Around”

Written and performed by Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore

I’ll be Trumpier the second time around,

And my enemies I’ll run into the ground.

On Election Day there’s nothing we won’t do,

If the ballot box won’t favor us, we’ll win it in a coup.

When America returns to being great,

You will love it in my autocratic state.

Who can say what miracles might happen once I’m crowned?

There are those who say

We still have laws in play.

They won’t get in my way ...

The second time around.

Week 20, clerihews about current events

Senator Josh Hawley

Has strong views on how men should be manly, by gawly—

Though, when a right-wing mob is advancing, this particular man who fears for his butt'll

Ignominiously scuttle. (*Duncan Stevens*)

Week 24, tweak an ad slogan to use it for another product

You'll love the way we fly: Delta Airlines

You'll love the way we fry: Prison systems of Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, and

Tennessee (*Kevin Dopart*)

Celebrate the Moments of Your Life: General Foods.

Celebrate the Movements of Your Life: Colace Stool Softener. (*Chris Doyle*)

Week 25, change one or more letters in a word to F

Mofotonous: Like some rap lyrics. (*Tom Witte*)

And Last: *Anagrams for people or institutions:*

The letters of THE INVITATIONAL LOSERS

rearrange to HAVE NOSTRILS IN A TOILET (*Chris Doyle*)

And Even Laster: *Bank headlines*

Headline: Fun Is Dead

Bank head: 'We made a promise when we killed The Style Invitational, and we've kept it!' Post editors say (*Richard Wexler, Alexandria, Va.*)

The headline "Back in the Pool" is by Jon Ketzner; Jesse Frankovich wrote the honorable-mentions subhead.

Still running — deadline 9 p.m. ET Saturday, Jan. 6: **Our Week 52 contest to enter any of 25 contests from the past half-year. Click on the link below.**



The Invitational, Week 52: Replaying Around -- The 2023 retrospective, Part II

[PAT MYERS](#) AND [GENE WEINGARTEN](#)

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