

The Style Invitational

Takes a Break



BY BOB STANK FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week C: No contests until mid-January. Instead, Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the All-Time Stars of The Style Invitational in 100-Word Autobiographies That Contain One (and Only One) Falsehood. The revised title for next week's column is by Tom Witte of Gaithersburg.



BY STEPHEN DUDZIK

JENNIFER HART

■ Jennifer Hart, a daughter of the South, was nurtured on Moon Pies, grits and inexplicable fritters, and has a drawl as thick as mole-asses. She graduated from the same Texas-prison-town university as Dan Rather. Her likes include romantic candlelit TV dinners, sock monkeys, robots, carnivorous plants and poop jokes. Her dislikes are world hunger, misplaced commas and having one's eyes cauterized. Her hidden superpower is Ultra Gullibility. Currently, Hart is copy editor for an Arlington weekly newspaper that is expanding so rapidly, it will soon crush and consume The Washington Post. Don't say I didn't warn you. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)



BY JIM HOGAN

MIKE GENZ

■ What do you get when you cross Waco, Tex., and Elizabeth, N.J.? A slow-talking urban schizophrenic. At 4, I spoke Portuguese so fluently that my parents were afraid I would become a Brazil nut. Then we moved to Greenwich, where I had a mean time growing up. The less said about my school career the gooder. I found work as a police officer to be arresting. I courted my bride even before I became a lawyer. Our two boys luckily take after their beautiful and brilliant mother. I enjoy being a parsley farmer but am afraid my wages will be garnished. (Mike Genz, La Plata)



BY BARBARA COLLIER

JONATHAN PAUL

■ I can say "Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllantysiliogogoch" well enough to ask directions, not that I did, which is why I missed the monster onion exhibition. My father once brought home a lemon the size of a rump roast—assuming a rump roast was the size of a cabbage. He was born in a log cabin, where giant fruit would have provided festive counterpoint to the long Utah winters. I sing opera, read Proust and am married to the great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Tim Bobbin, author of "The Ecclesiastical and Lay-Miser's Speculum," as you suspected. She says I have inexpressive feet. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)



ROBIN GROVE

■ When I was growing up in Oregon, my instructors suggested that my nascent literary and creative talents were perhaps not yet worthy of the Pulitzer I would later achieve. As an artistic alternative to ecoterrorism, I developed instead some musical skills that led to my selection as the state's representative to an elite Disneyland marching band. However, discovering that Disney's mandatory uniform would consist of an ensemble not unlike that donned by author David Sedaris in his memorable role as a Macy's Christmas elf, I chose instead ample later opportunities while acquiring Harvard and law degrees, and, through Style entries, to attract well-deserved public humiliation and embarrassment. (Robin Grove, Pasadena, Md.)

Next Week: Meet the Parentheses



ANN LANDERS

Dear Ann:

My grandfather passed away recently at the age of 84 after a long illness. At the funeral service, the minister went on and on about how it was my grandfather's final wish that all his children and grandchildren join the church and become "saved." He tried to lay a guilt trip on us by saying if we did not join the church, we would not see our grandfather in Heaven.

Ann, I loved my grandfather very much, but I never did share his religious beliefs. Nor do I believe that I am "lost" or in need of being saved. I resent the minister's use of the funeral service to convert people who do not wish to be converted.

Please tell ministers that a funeral service is a time for grieving and saying goodbye to our loved ones. It is not meant to be an opportunity to recruit new members to the church. Thank you, Ann.

Resentful in the South

I can understand your resentment. That tasteless and inopportune attempt to recruit new members to the church was ham-handed at best, an insult to the bereaved. If the minister, out of a sense of religious duty, thought it was imperative that he try to "save" you, he should have approached you after the service and suggested a private meeting.

Dear Ann:

I am a middle-aged woman with three lovely children and a soon-to-be ex-husband, "Joe." It all began a few years ago when my children went away to college. I was alone all day, every day, and Joe traveled on business frequently. He taught me how to use the Internet so I could entertain myself. It was fascinating at first, and then I became addicted and was online 24 hours a day. I couldn't get enough.

As the months passed, I met a very special man. We chatted for hours on end and became very close. I soon found myself madly in love. When we met, it was magic. When I asked Joe for a divorce, he was shocked. He never saw it coming. His reaction surprised me. I was not aware that he cared so much.

And that's my problem, Ann. I find myself caught between a new, passionate lover and a comfortable, set-in-his-ways husband. Should I settle for what I have with Joe, or is it time for me to move on?

Needing Romance in Ohio

Your signature tells me almost as much as your letter. You are looking for a little excitement in your staid, comfortable, ho-hum life. Please don't be so quick to dump solid (but not so peppy) Joe for an unknown quantity. Give this matter a great deal of thought before you make a move. With the scant detail you have offered, I vote for staying with solid, steady Joe.

Dear Ann:

I know you informed your readers that it would not be possible to write to "Any Service Member" this year due to the anthrax scare and other mail problems. However, you might be interested to know there is a way to send virtual holiday greetings to our servicemen and -women overseas.

Please tell your readers to log onto the Navy LIFELines Services Network at www.LIFELines2000.org or go directly to <http://AnyServiceMember.Navy.mil>. These sites will allow participants to select from any of the five branches of the military and send personal greetings. Those who would like a response can include their own e-mail address. Just thought you'd like to know.

Cmdr. Rudolph Brewington, USNR, Washington

Thank you so much for this information. I am sure my readers will be grateful for the opportunity to send e-mail greetings to our servicemen and -women overseas. Bless them all, and bless you for letting me know.

To find out more about Ann Landers and read her past columns, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Good Conduct Time, Extended

Each year at this time, certain people, among whom Miss Manners has the honor of counting herself, feel obliged to deliver themselves of the annual goody-goody message.

When normal people occupy themselves by playing with their new toys, or, more likely, trying to get them to work or to figure out where to return them, and by making revolting announcements about what effect the amount of food they have been eating is having on their digestive equipment, this narration will still be going on in the background.

Be grateful, not greedy; think of those less fortunate than you; count your blessings; is there any more of that cranberry ring left; it's all about the children; remember the spirit of the season; it's more blessed to give; maybe just another taste of that pie but not more

than a sliver; think about the spiritual aspects not just the material ones; it's the thought that counts, drone, drone, drone.

Is it possible that this year will be different?

Not that the pontificators will finally turn it off and admit that they are as selfish as everybody else, devoutly as many may have wished this to happen. The new aspect could be that everybody else—perhaps including some of those who have been speechifying—may be ready to admit that the seasonal clichés are not as unrealistic and hypocritical as they previously appeared. Fresh from the novel experience of widespread selfishness, people might be ready to admit that the cynical assessment of themselves and everybody else as selfish could be unrealistic.

This year, plenty of people have been

thinking of others, counting their own blessings and putting the children first. Economic considerations have dampened the spirit of materialism, but even among those who can afford it there seems to be a slackening of the acquisitive spirit. Vulgarly and violence no longer seem as attractive as courtesy and kindness.

Naturally, we all hope this won't last. Or, as everyone keeps saying, the terrorists will have won.

Some of it has already subsided as the initial shock was absorbed. Acquisitiveness, vanity and appetites for various kinds of excitement are human qualities that no amount of exhortation or fright is going to suppress.

But there are other human qualities that have of late been doubted or disparaged. The person who devotes his or her life to others

will be said to be acting to assuage a feeling of guilt; the parent who sacrifices for a child will be said to be forcing the child to act out his or her own unfulfilled dreams. When people announce that they want to be free to be their true selves, they mean to behave pigishly, Miss Manners has noticed.

Surely the goodness that broke out among us in September is also part of people's true selves. Her goody-goody message is that they should not be hypocritical and feel they have to deny and suppress this for the sake of form.

Dear Miss Manners:

My class had a Christmas exchange. The gifts should cost about \$5. We drew names out of a box, and on the day of the party, I found out that Emily got my name. I was

disappointed to see that as a gift I had gotten a broken wind-up toy. I told the teacher, but she could do nothing about it. My mother told me to give the broken toy back to Emily and tell her that I was not the Salvation Army. I do not think it was fair that I had to spend \$5 on a gift for the gift exchange and get nothing back in return. What should I do/say to Emily?

"Thank you."

Feeling incorrect? Address your etiquette questions (in black or blue-black ink on white writing paper) to Miss Manners, in care of The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20001

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