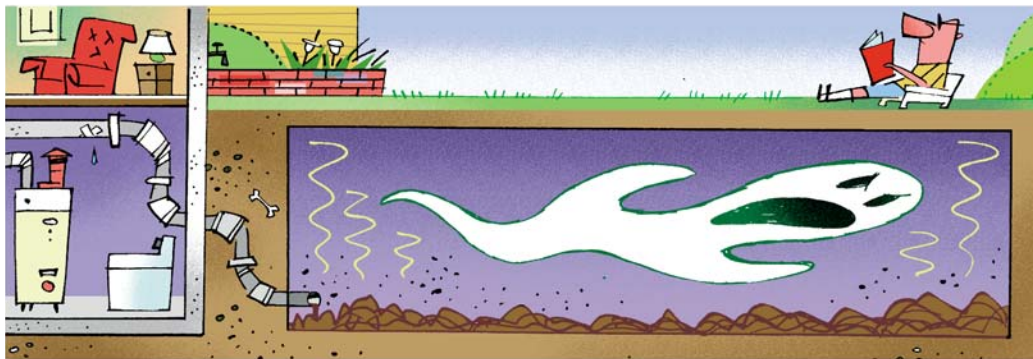


# The Style Invitational

Week 508: Letter Rip



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Doltergeist:** A spirit that decides to haunt someplace stupid, such as your septic tank. (David Genser, Arlington)

**Giraffiti:** Vandalism spray-painted very, very high, such as the famous "Surrender Dorothy" on the Beltway overpass. (Robin D. Grove, Pasadena, Md.)

**Sarcasm:** The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the recipient who doesn't get it. (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

**Coiterie:** A very very close-knit group. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

**Reintarnation:** Coming back to life as a hillbilly. (Barry Blyveis, Columbia)

**This week's contest** has been suggested, over the years, by literally dozens of clueless readers from around the country. These people's only contact with The Style Invitational occurs online, and consists entirely of having read the excellent entries like those above, ripped off from a long-ago contest. They have evidently concluded that The Style Invitational is a dreadfully boring and unimaginative contest that, week after week, for years and years, has been inviting readers to **take a word from the dictionary, add, change or delete a single letter, and redefine the word.** And so every so often, out of the blue, we get an entry from one of these people! This has been going on for years! These people's entries are invariably terrible. So finally, we decided, what the hell. Here we go. One more time. First-prize winner gets an amazing prize donated to The Style Invitational by the Post's Food section: Four promotional place mats produced by the Australian meat and livestock industry. Each depicts, in the style of a different classical artist, people eating lamb chops. It is priceless.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted. Deadline is Monday, June 8. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week

number in the subject field. Contests will be judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post.

Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Thos. Witte of Gaithersburg.

## Report from Week 504,

where you were invited to come up with schmaltzy last lines appropriate to Style's "Life Is Short" Sunday feature.

Fifth Runner-Up: **But she looked at me and said, "It's okay, Mommy, my fish is in Heaven with Grandpa."** (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

Fourth Runner-Up: **And I reflected on how "Torah" and "Koran" are spelled, realizing that the two religions differ not one bit in the middle, only at the fringes.** (Leonard Greenberg, Sterling)

Third Runner-Up: **Now I know that a Full House beats anything.** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

Second Runner-Up: **"Father," I decided, means more than just combining "fat" and "her."** (Patrick Sheehan, Wheaton)

First Runner-Up: **As a quadriplegic, maybe I can't clap my hands or stamp my feet, but I'm happy and I know it, and I can shout "Hurray!"** (Beth Baniszewski, Cambridge, Mass.)

And the winner of the book and calendar of celebrity gravestones: **And then it came to me that today is nothing more than tomorrow's yesterday, and I was no longer afraid.** (David Ronka, Charlottesville)

Honorable Mentions: **Sometimes the cook needs the chicken soup the most.** (Joseph Romm, Washington)

**If there are two sides to every equation, then I am the equal sign.** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

**And I realized, at last, that it's time for a nice long swim in Lake Me.** (Kelly Hyson, Wheaton)

**And that is why I measure my life not in years, but in smiles.** (Brian Barrett, Bethesda)

**By then, it hardly seemed to matter.** (Dan Rosen, Washington)

**I decided to give each and every one of my Beanie Babies a hug, even the ones that have lost 90 percent of their value.** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

**Crying is sighing squared.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

**A crack in your Dale Earnhardt collector's plate affects the value only if you plan to sell it. Ever.** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

**Saying goodbye can be just as beautiful as saying hello.** (Leigh Schneider, Weston Act, Australia)

**And now I know why "diapers" is an anagram of "despair."** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

**What followed was an unearthly silence, like when a tree falls and there is no one to hear it, except this time it was I who wasn't there.** (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)

**Because light reflecting off a gin bottle will never match the sparkle in a baby's eyes.** (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

**You see, little Josh had painted the dog as a birthday gift to me.** (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

**Fatherhood is a man's job.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

**Now the only thing that comes between me and my spouse is a hyphen.** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

**Next time around, I will be that swan.** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

**Because when you look out a window, you never know who is looking back in at you.** (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

**And I realized I had known it all along.** (Dan Rosen, Washington)

**As that little girl looked at me across the room, I wished I'd had a hundred kidneys.** (J.D. Berry, Springfield)

**After all, the White House isn't just white. It's also a house.** (Beth Baniszewski, Cambridge, Mass.)

**When I laughed at death, it just sat there, like it didn't get my little joke.** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

**I knew then that the space bar is no place to meet someone.** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

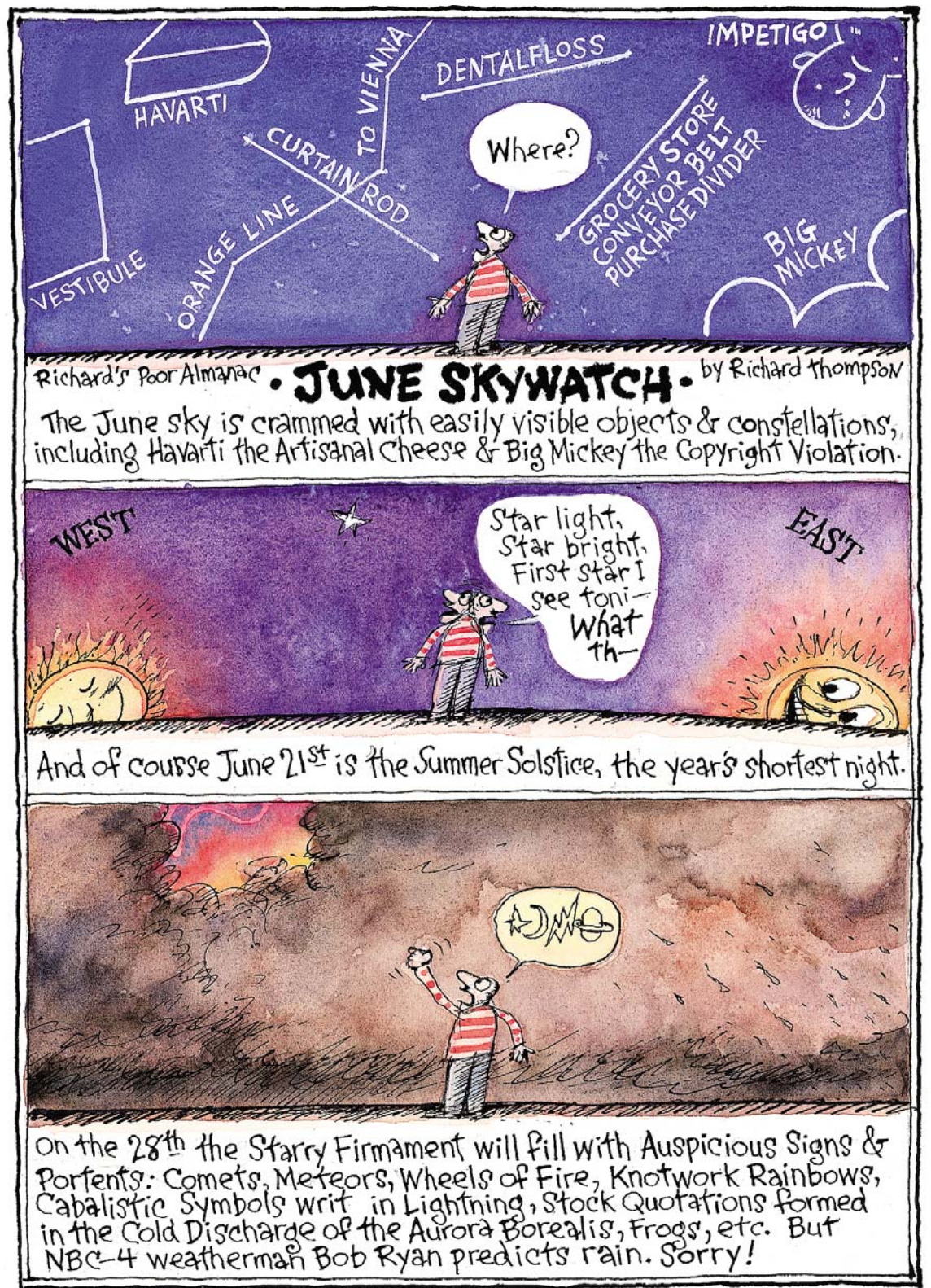
**Sure, my wife is pregnant. But I am pregnant, too, with love and concern for her.** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

**I look forward to God's explanation.** (Paul Kraft, Bethesda)

**Tears, after all, water the soul.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

**Happiness lies somewhere in the middle, between zero and infinity.** (Kevin Mellema, Falls Church)

Next Week: Squanderlust



Richard's Poor Almanac • **JUNE SKYWATCH** • by Richard Thompson  
The June sky is crammed with easily visible objects & constellations, including Havarti the Artisanal Cheese & Big Mickey the Copyright Violation.

And of course June 21<sup>st</sup> is the Summer Solstice, the year's shortest night.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> the Starry Firmament will Pill with Auspicious Signs & Portents: Comets, Meteors, Wheels of Fire, Knotwork Rainbows, Cabalistic Symbols writ in Lightning, Stock Quotations formed in the Cold Discharge of the Aurora Borealis, Frogs, etc. But NBC-4 weatherman Bob Ryan predicts rain. Sorry!

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### Summertime, and the Clothing Is Skimpy

Respectable people did not used to appear any the less respectable as a concession to summer heat. They had summer wardrobes made of lighter materials, but these featured the same items as their winter counterparts, including ties and jackets, long skirts and stockings.

Of course, that was back before air conditioning. Now we have desperate and indignant pleas that human survival would be at stake if anyone had to stagger from air-conditioned transportation to air-conditioned buildings wearing more than tank tops, shorts and sandals.

Miss Manners does not mention this out of any yearning for the fortitude of yore. Those people must have been nuts.

But she finds the relationship between the progression of technology and the progression of style to be curious. As the methods of producing clothing went from tedious handwork to mechanized mass-production, tailcoats and embroidered, elaborately draped dresses were abandoned for jeans and basic-black shifts. In architecture, for that matter, increasingly powerful equipment and more flexible materials marked the change from an immense variety of fanciful buildings to the ubiquitous unadorned box.

Ah, well. Miss Manners doesn't pretend that hers is the prevailing taste. If it were, the bustle would be back, and ladies could use their stair machines to practice walking with a train.

All she asks is that some effort be made to conform to the standards of our own times, which still distinguish between dressed and undressed. There must be a summer compromise between running around in practically nothing in order to stay cool and looking dignified while passing out.

But attempts to loosen easily definable dress codes always bring more problems than they solve. No sooner are concessions made than they are abused. When word goes out that ties and jackets are no longer required, out come the T-shirts and jeans. If those are permitted, out come the tank tops and shorts.

Part of this stems from confusion. Most people have a pretty good idea what business dress is, but—as is obvious at any informal social event—everyone has a different definition of genuine casual, and, even after all these years, no one has ever found out what "business casual" means.

The rest is bolstered by argument, mostly about creativity and comfort. Miss Manners

doesn't mind the visual part of the summer slops nearly as much as having to listen to versions of "Nobody can tell me what to wear because I'm grown up now and I won't wear any of those grown-up clothes that would make me look old."

She would have thought that at least she would be spared the summer buzz of complaints about how tourists and co-workers dress, but strangely, even the self-proclaimed rebels care about such things. As it is difficult to proclaim independence for oneself but not others, they put it in different terms: Those half-dressed people are fat, sweaty, provocative, showing off, smelly, hairy, threatening-looking and so on.

Yes, those are some of the things that benefit from a few bits of light cloth. Unless these people are on the beach, where it is inoffensive because that is the dress code.

Dear Miss Manners:

**My family and I had taken my mother to church in her parish, where I am unfamiliar with the parishioners. As we lined up for Communion, I noticed that a lady in the next line over had a good-sized cockroach crawling on the back of her sweater.**

**I didn't want to disturb her in a moment of prayerfulness, but I worried that if I tried to remove the bug myself, it might cause a commotion. I ended up not doing anything, but felt guilty about it. What is the correct thing to do when one notices that a stranger has something distasteful on her clothing?**

Slapping people around in the Communion line probably would cause a commotion, Miss Manners agrees. In fact, it is a dangerous tactic to spring on the unsuspecting at any time or place, and should be reserved for greater and more immediate threats than are posed by a distasteful cockroach. Even at a propitious time, you should say quietly, "I believe there is a bug (the polite term) on your sweater—shall I brush it off for you?"

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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