The Style Invitational

Week 526: Conventional Wisdumb

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

They say that the saddest words are "what might have been." Nah. What are the real saddest words?

They say that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Surely, not the root of *all* evil. What else is the root of evil?

"What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar," said Vice President Tom Marshall. There must be some product this country needs more, right?

"Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration," said Thomas Edison. There's probably a more accurate formula, no?

This Week's Contest was suggested by Chuck Smith of Woodbridge. Answer any of the above questions. First-prize winner gets an "Armpit of America" T-shirt from Battle Mountain, Nev.

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, Oct. 13. 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 Brendan Beary of Great Mills, Md.

Results from Week 522, in which you were asked to come up with concepts for a "flash mob," those spontaneous, Web-generated, pointless gatherings of strangers. But first, a brief public service announcement:

> Readers frequently ask the Czar why some contest results extend to the full length of the page and others take up less space. The answer is simple: The Czar will publish only those entries worthy of print; if the results of a particular contest are weak, that contest will be allotted less space. Occasionally, in fact, when the results are *really* weak, it becomes necessary for the Czar to *pad* the space himself, with gaseous, self-referential monologues, to create the visual illusion of editorial substance. He generally accomplishes this with elaborate explanations of his job, as though everyone is dying to know the minutiae of the judging process. Yes, this is boring and assaultive and a waste of newsprint, but the alternative is unthinkable: a Style Invitational so brief, so abbreviated, that Washington Post sachems might conclude that the contest is past its prime and kill it in favor of one of those slap-happy, advertising-driven marketing features that are all the rage; or, worse, yet another "I'm such a little ninny please help me cope with my superficial life" advice column, proving that we are have become a squishy-soft, naive, decadent society of increasing irrelevance to a world more hardened by adversity, more willing to embrace change in a global renaissance that will pass us by. The Czar, in short, is always placing the readers, and his country, first.

Back to the "flash mob" results.

♦ Third Runner-Up: **Meet at a Safeway and celebrate a Redskins win by pouring Gatorade on each other's heads.** (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

♦ Second Runner-Up: **Show up for the Marine Corps Marathon, and at the starting gun, race off in all directions.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

♦ First Runner-Up: **Show up at a McDonald's and have every person try to order something McDonald's doesn't sell—a Whopper with cheese, a mocha grande, a 1987 Cadillac, a pound of fava beans, a John Deere tractor, etc.** (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

♦ And the winner of the Jackie Chan action figure:
Assemble at my house today at 3 p.m. with a rake. Silently rake and bag leaves for 20 minutes. At 3:20 lift your rake over your head and shout, "Boomchukkalukkalukka!" Extra bags are on the picnic table in the back. Don't forget to take the bags of leaves with you when you go! (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrills)

♦ Honorable Mentions:

Sell out a showing of "Gigli." Stand up and walk out after the coming attractions. (Danny Bravman, Potomac)

Bring foam "We're No. 1!" hands, air horns, etc., and watch and root for chess players at Dupont Circle. (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church)

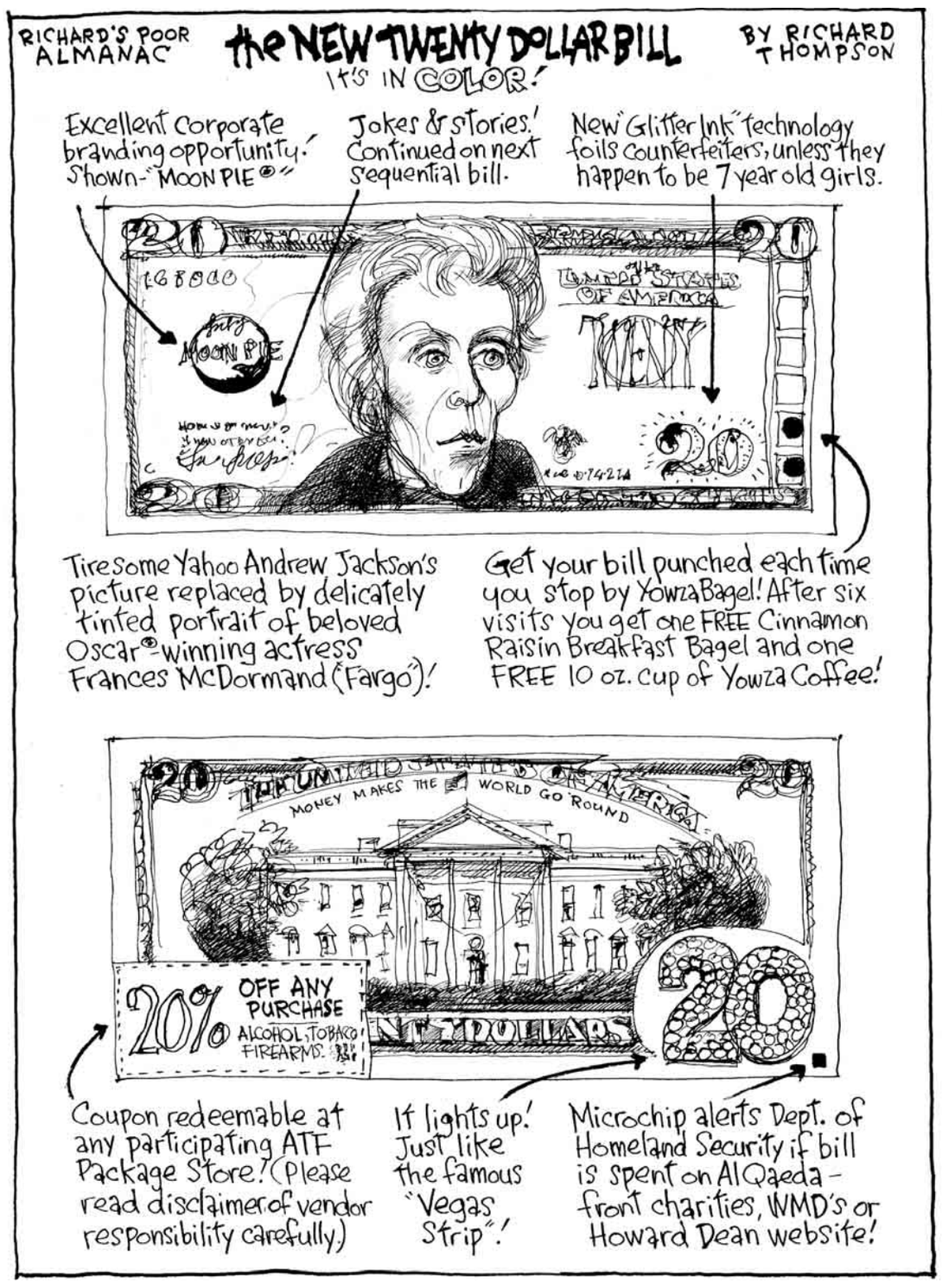
Go to every Safeway in the area and buy up all the hearts of palm. Do this every week for two months, then stop. See if you can get them to, like, order waaaay too much hearts of palm. (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church)

Go to Hains Point, stand over "The Awakening," and shout encouraging things like "Hang in there, Jimbo, help is on the way." (Mark Young, Washington)

Go to a Krispy Kreme and "spot" each other, like at a gym, while eating dough-nuts. "One more, one more! Embrace the pain!" etc. (Bird Waring, New York)

In some public place, a whole mess of people start reading each other The Washington Post article that described the flash mob phenomenon. Then they all say things like "Whoa, dude, we gotta try that." (Scott Kominers, Bethesda)

Next Week: **Funny? Hardly.**



DEAR ABBY

Dear Abby:

I am an 11-year-old girl who feels like I have lived long enough and it's okay to die. A girl at my school, "Kim," pressured me to give her my telephone number and the names of the boys I like. She gets her friends to threaten, corner and question me.

Now I get crank calls at least once a month. My mother called Kim's mother, but she accused me of treating her daughter badly! Kim has lied and hurt me severely. I don't know what to do. Please help.

Wanting to Move Out of California

If there is teasing, threatening, stalking or bullying going on at school, your teacher should be informed. If that doesn't put a stop to it, your parents should take the problem to the principal and, if need be, to the school board. You have a right to go to school without being cornered or intimidated.

Your mother should also arrange a get-together with Kim's mother and, without making any accusations, get to the bottom of what's going on. It will be time well spent.

Dear Abby:

I am 27 and have been happily married to "Brian" for four years. Our first child is due in November. I couldn't be more excited about this baby. The problem lies with my husband. While I am sure Brian wants a baby and will love our child with all his heart, I am not sure he's ready for parenthood.

I realize that no one can ever be truly prepared for the life changes a baby can throw your way, but I'm afraid this is not the right time in Brian's life for it. He swears he is ready and has no regrets about my pregnancy. He claims that this is what life is all about. But I can't shake the feeling that my husband is not as ready as he claims.

I love Brian and know he'll be a great dad. However, I fear that our child may drive a wedge between us when he realizes that the baby's needs must come before his own. How can I be the mom I want to be and still keep my husband happy?

Excited but Worried in Tennessee

Since your husband has said repeatedly that he's happy about impending fatherhood, believe him. Relax and enjoy your baby. There will probably be times when you both may feel trapped and wish you could live life more spontaneously. All parents feel that way at times—and when they do, they find a babysitter and spend some adult time with each other.

I urge you not to obsess about the negative. That, more than anything else, could drive a wedge between you.

Dear Abby:

You printed a letter from a woman who signed her letter "Mother of Invention." Years ago, my son, Jim, forgot my birthday, and I also sent my daughter-in-law a sympathy card with a note saying I didn't know my "negligent" son had died.

A few days later, a large bouquet of flowers arrived. Attached to the flowers was this card:

"Sorry to hear about your loss. He was a great son. We will always remember him for his timeliness. Love, Jim and Susan"

My thanks to "Mother of Invention" and to you for printing that letter. It brought back memories.

Mother of a Great Son in Pennsylvania

I like your son's sense of humor. I'll bet that was the last time he forgot your birthday.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

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TODAY'S HOROSCOPE | *Jeraldine Saunders*

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
What you need is strength of purpose, and a female friend may supply just that today. Someone is helpful in creating a job plan. Something you see and hear is inspiring.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
Fiery Mars in line to your sign gives you an opportunity to show what you're all about and how passionately you care for a loved one. If single, your rough exterior hides a loving heart.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
On a deep level, you're aware of changes that have to be made. Talking makes it easier. Your gift for learning and passing on information is at hand and can be used to good effect.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
Saturn's influence shows a tough demeanor but inwardly a nature self-effacing and fair. Meeting someone like-minded could be the beginning of a rewarding and satisfying friendship.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
Gladiator Mars and unpredictable Uranus, your ruling planet, double your ambition and determination. It's a time to turn plans into successful action. Love could get complicated.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
Hiding your true feelings under a bushel has many fooled. But now is the time to come out in the open and be true to yourself. Focus on people who are good for you.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) Friends and partners are surprised by your inner strength and willpower. Your tenacity gets results at home and at work. A loving partner catches you with a revealing question.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
A plan you devised has a lot going for it. Be businesslike and get things in writing. Sharing responsibility at work has positive fallout, particularly where children are concerned.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
The powerful Neptune-moon-Uranus position gives reassurance and brings some home truths. It could make life more rewarding and pleasant. You have new ambitions, and children play a part.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
Working from home offers new possibilities. Mars is affecting your creative vein and moving you into the fast lane. You could be missing a deadline.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
Partners could insist on the truth and finances being put in order. Plans for a party are going well. It's not what you say but what you leave out that counts.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
Loving attention is a balm to you. What really matters is your good health. An older friend has a warning to do with a property matter. A friendship with a Pisces could become meaningful.

IF OCT. 5 IS YOUR BIRTHDAY: You're a thoughtful person; words are your weapons. A good networker and people person, you'd make an excellent reporter. This will prove to be a testing year for your talents, and hard work and honesty will be rewarded. Emotionally, there should be satisfaction and, if single, a possible new love. January and February promise romance; December holds unexpected interest.

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BRIDGE | *Frank Stewart*

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH (D)
♠ Q 2
♥ A Q 4 3
♦ A 10 9 8
♣ A J 3

WEST
♠ 9 6 4
♥ J 6
♦ K 7 5 4
♣ Q 9 7 4

EAST
♠ 8 5
♥ K 10 9 8
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ K 8 6

SOUTH
♠ A K J 10 7 3
♥ 7 5 2
♦ 3
♣ 10 5 2

The bidding:

North	East	South	West
1 NT	Pass	4 ♠	All Pass

Opening lead: ♥ J

"You've been touting 'transfer' responses to 1NT," a pupil said to me, "but my partner won't use them. He says he'll forget and we'll look like roosters trying to lay eggs."

Natural bidding skills are more vital to success than conventions. Still, bridge is changing, and better bidding methods emerge. If you don't use transfers and a few other simple gadgets, you're fighting with one arm.

If North-South had been using transfers, South would have bid four hearts, forcing North to bid four spades. With North declarer, any lead except a trump would have helped declarer. As it was, South played four spades, and West led the jack of hearts through dummy. South struggled but lost two hearts and two clubs.

Do you see a way South could take 10 tricks?

South should take the ace of hearts and draw trumps, pitching a heart from dummy. He next leads a diamond . . . and plays dummy's 10!

East wins with the jack but must yield the contract with any return. If East leads a club, South gets two club tricks. If East cashes the king of hearts, dummy's queen scores. If East returns the queen of diamonds (best), South takes the ace, leads the nine to pitch a heart and wins his tenth trick with the eight.

If you use a barrel of conventions, you must spend mental energy to remember them. Keep your methods simple and use only conventions that meet a three-way test: (1) Is the convention easy to remember? (2) Can you use it often? (3) Can you afford to do without the bid's natural meaning?

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