

The Style Invitational

Week 531: Your Cynic Duties



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Every dark cloud has a silver lining. But lightning kills hundreds of people each year who are trying to find it.

When birds fly in the right formation, they need only exert half the effort. Even in nature, teamwork results in collective laziness.

That which does not kill you postpones the inevitable.

There are no stupid questions, but there are a lot of inquisitive idiots.

This Week's Contest was suggested by Joseph Romm of Washington. Joseph directed us to www.despair.com, a Web site featuring wonderful parodies of dippo inspirational posters, such as the ones above. That's your challenge: Come up with a saying that sounds as if it's going to be inspirational, but winds up being cynical, misanthropic or sad. First-prize winner gets a fabulous promotional CD of the Bob Graham 2004 "Charisma Tour," featuring songs promoting Bob Graham, "The 44th U.S. President," including "The Bob Graham March." Bob Graham was the first of the Dems to drop out of the race.

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, Nov. 17. 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 Russell Beland of Springfield.

Report from Week 527, in which you were asked to come up with amusing things to say to defuse tension in some potentially embarrassing situation

- ◆ Fourth Runner-Up: (When realizing your fly has been open for some time) **Sorry, I thought this was casual fly day.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)
- ◆ Third Runner-Up: (When realizing your fly has been open for some time) **My God, you were able to open my fly with the power of your mind?** (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up: (After calling your wife by another name during sex) . . . **that's what I want to name the baby, if it's a girl!** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)
- ◆ First Runner-Up: (To the boss, when caught visiting adult Web sites) **I'll have you know this is not an "adult" Web site. Why, these are mere girls—18 years old, tops.** (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg)
- ◆ And the winner of the a soap dish shaped like a bathtub, plus a pen shaped like the continental United States: (To the doctor during a prostate or OB/GYN exam) **Yes, yes! Oh, yessssss! Huh? Oh, nothing. I just saved a bundle on car insurance.** (Mark Young, Washington)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

When realizing your fly has been open for some time:

Gosh, I could have sworn that was MY fly I zipped up at the urinal. (Peter Levitan, Sherman Oaks, Calif.)

It's easy to understand how this happened—all my other trousers zip up from bottom to top. (Michael Rae, Potomac)

I'm not sure being a zipper tester is worth the extra money. (Chris Hill, Santa Fe)

You know, you're the sixth person to mention that today. (Colette Zanin, Greenbelt)

After committing a social error in an elevator:

If you think that's embarrassing, try growing up with an alcoholic father. (Amanda Matos and Aaron Van Roy, Vienna)

Excuse me. As I'm sure you've all noticed by now, someone in this elevator has committed a social error by wearing white shoes after Labor Day. That someone is me. I apologize. As for the deafening and noisome flatulence I've been emitting while delivering this apology, that is entirely natural and nothing to be ashamed of. Have a good day. (Christopher L. Parkin, Silver Spring)

Third floor, men's windbreakers, watch your step please. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

I guess the cardinals have elected a new pope! (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

Thank you. I'll be here all week. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Ladies and children first when the doors open. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Now, what if that had been sarin gas? I want you all to think about that. If we're not prepared, the terrorists win. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Hmm. Poignant, a bit husky, with a hint of melodrama and an excellent nose. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

When calling your wife by another name during sex:

Would you rather I were making love to HER using YOUR name? (Howard Tenenbaum, Silver Spring)

BMW or Lexus? (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

To a cashier, after being told your credit card has been rejected:

It's always about money with you, isn't it? (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

To the boss, when caught visiting adult Web sites:

All I did was type into a search engine, "hot naked boobies." Who knew this filth would come up? (Josh Borkin, Bloomfield, Minn.)

You are not going to be happy about this, but after weeks of research I have determined that our firewall is useless at preventing employees from visiting adult Web sites. Will you contact security, or shall I? (Kyle Hendrickson, Mitchellville)

You are a pig, I have no respect for you, I plan to behave in an insubordinate fashion, decline assignments, resist improvement, all the while attempting to infect co-workers with a spirit of mistrust and dissatisfaction. There—now you can fire me for a less embarrassing reason. (Kyle Hendrickson, Mitchellville)

Holy cow, it looks like terrorists have hacked Billy Graham's Web site! (Don Jernigan, Shreveport, La.)

After rear-ending someone at a stop light:

According to Dr. Einstein, you actually backed into me. (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)

I only did that, madam, because I felt your bumper made you look fat. (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

I've been trying to get your attention to tell you your taillights are all smashed in. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

That's the last time I let my 7-year-old change the brake pads. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

To the doctor, during a prostate or OB/GYN exam:

I'm dilated to meet you. (Ben Schwalb, Severna Park)

STAND-IN! Dang, where's my stunt double when I need her? (Margaret Virkus, Oak Hill)

Thank you, SIR. May I have another? (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

If something bites your finger, don't worry, that's just Irving. (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

Does this count as a date? If so, which base are you on? (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

When your spouse catches you in bed with someone else:

Wait a minute—this ISN'T just a dream? (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)



MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Act Your Age, and Vice Versa

Social problem No. 1: Children are growing up too fast. Elementary school students are routinely exposed to sex and drugs, and not just in the television shows they see and the video games they play. Ten-year-olds are dressing like world-weary tramps and thugs. The young are extremely touchy about being treated with respect. At a tender age, they start rebelling against authority.

Social problem No. 2: Adults are refusing to grow up. Middle-aged people are watching animated shows, playing games at work, collecting stuffed animals and paying high prices at restaurants for comfort food. Businessmen protest against wearing business clothes to work, and partygoers protest against wearing party clothes to parties, all with the claim that they feel comfortable only in their simple and sturdy play clothes. They are insulted at being treated with respect. At an advanced age, they are still rebelling against taking responsibility.

It has thus become possible, Miss Manners notes, to go through one's entire life dissatisfied with one's own age and pretending to be another.

It strikes her that there might be possibilities here of arranging a swap. Children would be in charge of running things, keeping their sins private and their tastes privileged, while adults would forfeit respect but gain respite from responsibility.

Or has that already taken place? In the manners realm, it would certainly seem so. It is a favorite complaint of adults that children don't know how to behave toward them, but it seems to Miss Manners that the little ones are learning the manners that the big ones are teaching them.

These stem from the great modern prudery, which is not about sex (as you may have noticed) but about age. Adults have taught children that it is rude to notice that they are much older than the children themselves.

"Don't call me 'sir'—that makes me feel old." "I'm not Mrs. Wiggleson; that's my mother-in-law. Everyone calls me Muffin."

"Why are you getting up? Do I look as if I'm too old to stand?" "How dare you offer me a senior citizen rate!"

Adults who are busy assuring one another that they look implausibly young, taking drastic meas-

ures to sustain the illusion, and condemning aging and death as the result of improper health care and attitudes, are not going to take this sort of thing from the young. What they are teaching is that any violation of the elaborate hoax that nobody ever ages is an insult.

Having defined the teen years and twenties as the only desirable ages to be, they can hardly be surprised that children share their pretensions. As each age group ridicules or deplores the other's falsifications, an idea of how their own look might arise.

Each has its excuses, Miss Manners understands. Children can't remain in the artificial comfort of childhood when they are so blatantly exposed to the harshness of the real world. And adults who are beleaguered by the harshness of the real world naturally want to retreat to the comforting artificial one.

Dear Miss Manners:
My daughter is having Thanksgiving dinner at her home this year. She is planning on no TV football games during dinner and, when the football game is on, the volume will be on "mute." Is this correct? She also plans on having games. Help!

Your daughter wants to have live conversation at the family holiday table, and afterward she expects people to play games with one another rather than slump around separately watching strangers play games?

Has she no sense of tradition? As your daughter is the hostess, you must go along with her outrageous wishes. You may actually find yourself feeling thankful for this sociable treat. The only help an unsympathetic Miss Manners offers you is to suggest that the dinner be scheduled after the games—or before or after a particular game in which this crowd is most interested—and that the other guests be warned.

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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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

People often ask me whether bridge is headed down the same path as the dodo. They cite the rising median age of the American Contract Bridge League membership, the many competing leisure activities and the disparity between the expert tournament game and social play.

Bridge will always be around because it's that good a game. In fact, I predict a revival of interest in such intellectual pastimes and a new generation of players discovering bridge's beauties and challenges. Part of the game's salvation may lie with the Internet: I see many young players on OKbridge, an Internet site that has 19,000 members.

When I watched today's deal on OKbridge, East's double of four spades was horrible. He couldn't be sure of beating any other con-

tract—or even of beating four spades. Sure enough, South ran to five diamonds: He played safe for 11 tricks and made 12 when the defense slipped.

Would four spades go down? Say East leads a heart, and North ruffs in dummy, takes the A-Q of clubs, ruffs a heart and leads the king of clubs. West ruffs, and North throws his last heart. He ruffs the heart return and leads the king of trumps, ducked. North can then escape for down one by abandoning trumps, losing three trumps to East but keeping control. If instead North goes for broke and leads another trump, he loses control and goes down three.

To check out OKbridge, which offers many outstanding services, including tournament play, go to www.okbridge.com.

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Next Week: **You Got Questions, We Got Answers**

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