

The Style Invitational

Week 542: Discombobulate Us



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A buffet table where the food is doled out so sloppily that it ends up mished into an oleaginous mess resembling the contents of someone's stomach: Smeargasbord (a neat pairing of "smear" and "smorgasbord").

Friday marked the retirement of a Washington Post institution: nice-guy columnist Bob Levey, who for more than 20 years, five days a week, represented The Post's public-spirited, helpful, friendly, avuncular side with his fundraising drives for Children's Hospital and Send a Kid to Camp; his action-line phone calls on behalf of readers who'd been given the runaround; and his monthly neologism contest, in which Bob would come up with some familiar, funny object or situation that didn't yet have a name. For example, here's an actual winner from November 2001, by Susan Eaton of Taos, N.M.: **The reluctance of ketchup to come out of the bottle: Redicence.** As Bob noted: "What a tangy merger of 'red' and 'reticence'!"

As a salute to that last aspect of his job—not to mention a blatant ploy to draw his regular contestants over to The Style Invitational—we offer This Week's Contest: Come up with both an object/situation and a neologism for it. But here is the catch: Bob, in addition to being a nice guy, is a tasteful guy. A grown-up guy. Your neologism should be something that Bob would never have stooped to print in his column, though it also cannot be something The Washington Post won't print at all. Be sure to explain your entry.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins an exceptionally rare, vintage "The Uncle Loves Me" Style Invitational T-shirt in an unlovely lime green. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt in a menacing blood red. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after new Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312 or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries are not accepted. Deadline is Monday, Feb. 2. Put the week number in the subject line of your

e-mail, or you risk being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are 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 Tom Witte of Montgomery Village.

Report from Week 538, in which The Empress welcomed entries for any previous contest: either new entries (which could refer to recent events) or old ones rejected by the old regime. She was deluged with both varieties (this page could have been filled with Michael Jackson jokes alone), and at least some previous rejects did gain The Empress's favor this time around. We won't tell you which ones.

♦ **Fourth runner-up:** *High school team names for real towns: The Boring (Md.) Examples of the Many Benefits of the Metric System* (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **Third runner-up:** *Change a word by one letter and redefine it: Whoroscope: "February will bring many new social engagements, as will March, April, May . . ."* (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

♦ **Second runner-up:** *Fractured syllogisms: A watched pot never boils. An unwatched pot boils away all its water. Therefore you'll never be able to cook spaghetti.* (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

♦ **First runner-up, the winner of the man's-butt salt-and-pepper shakers:** Rearrange words of a movie title: **"Report Minority": The New Jersey Highway Patrol training film (also known as "Suspects the Usual")** (Charles D. Star, New York)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker:** *Combine any two halves of words hyphenated in that day's paper: Epipha-thing: The sudden moment of clarity when you realize your vocabulary, like, sucks.* (Drew Knoblauch, Falls Church)

♦ Honorable Mentions:

Cutesy signs for men's and ladies' rooms: At the Ernest Hemingway Museum: Haves and Have-Nots. (Helene Haduch, Alexandria)

Bad first drafts of famous lines: Go ahead, punk. Enrich my life! (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

Change a quote by one letter: "There's got to be a moaning after." —Marquis de Sade (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Children's books we'll never see: "Where's Jacko?" (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Movie prequels: "Babette's Snack": A domestic servant finds some coins in the gutter and spends them on popcorn for her employers (140 min.; subtitles). (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrells)

"So" jokes: Iraq had so many weapons of mass destruction we can't even begin to count them. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

"Is that your ... or ...?" insults: Is that your breath or do you use Tic Tacs as suppositories? (Paul Kocak, Syracuse, N.Y.)

A sequence of related objects in which the last connects to the first: Steve Spurrier / NFL coach / Jim Mora / Sodom and Gomorrah / Saddam Hussein / Spider hole / Spider-Man / Peter Parker / Peter principle / Steve Spurrier

John Holmes / large organ / grand piano / instrument / guitar / Django Reinhardt / Ringo Starr / Best, Peter/ John Holmes (both by Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Useless actual facts: Despite all the words in the Eskimo language for "snow," and all the words in the English language has for "urine," neither language has a word for "yellow snow." (Danny Bravman, Potomac)

Obituary headlines for celebrities: Robert Palmer: Simply Irresuscable (Bob Dalton, Arlington)
Martin Luther Added to Diet of Worms (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)
Marlon Brando Sleeps With the Whales (Jeff Martin, Gaithersburg)

Collective nouns: a BUNCH of panties, a HORDE of prostitutes, a SEA of mediocrity (all by Russell Beland, Springfield)

a BUSHEL of nuclear energy (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Change a word by one letter and redefine it: Neverlad: The new, court-ordered name of Michael Jackson's amusement park. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)
Owboy: A guy who's into S&M with spurs and lasso. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Agency mottoes: The Justice Department: We're not blind, we just have a lazy eye. (Sanford D. Horn, Alexandria)

Ways to make life more complicated: Make every month have the same number of days. That would be 30.41667, except for leap years, when it would be 30.5. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Take two names or entities, extend one: Baskin-Robbinsn Crusoe: Castaway is stranded on a dessert aisle. (Drew Knoblauch, Falls Church)

Cocktails named for celebrities: The Eleanor Holmes Norton: A photograph of a stiff drink (Michael Clem, McLean)

Things you shouldn't say . . . to Saint Peter: "Say, aren't you the guy who denied Christ three times?" (John Shea, Lansdowne, Pa.)

. . . in a job interview: "Five years from now? Hell, I won't be here, that's for sure!" (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

A line to slip into the next State of the Union address:

"I want to reiterate that last point, because I don't think it was iterate enough." (Josh Borken, Bloomington, Minn.)

Cartoon descriptions: Steve Irwin's baby wipes. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

Double dactyls: Hurrier Scurrier, Stephen Orr Spurrier, You coached the Gators to glory galore. You came to Washington, Hired the same players and Incomprehensibly, they couldn't score. (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

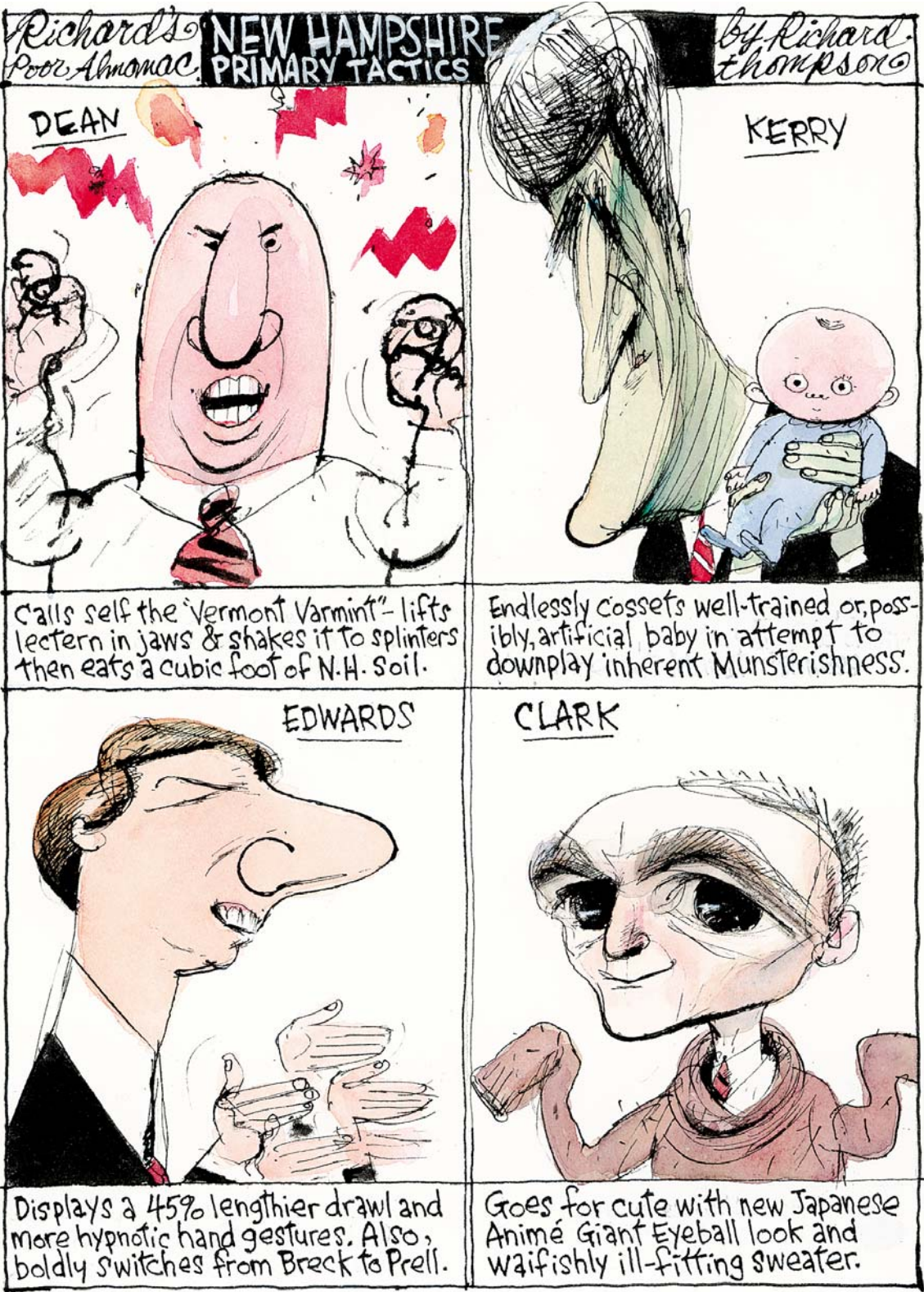
Rearrange the words in a movie title: Tin Cat on a Hot Roof: The Tennessee Williams classic, unchanged but retitled after PETA protests. (Roy Ashley, Washington)
Beneath the Apes of the Planet: A day in the life of a hooker. (Tom Klippstein, Scottsville, Va.)

The offspring of any man and any woman: The child of Johnny Hart and Gloria Steinem would need a man like a fish. (Danny Bravman, Potomac)

Revised, upbeat endings to films: Thelma and Louise's car is really Chitty Chitty Bang Bang! (Mark Young, Washington)

Ask Backwards: Answer: Because It Could Cause Asphyxia. Question: Why won't the FDA authorize Botox injections in the buttocks? (Marc Naimark, Paris)

And Last: A blues song about a Washington area woe: Oh, the Czar he be retirin', Mmm, have you heard the scoop? Oh, the Czar he be retirin', Now I can't win by sayin' "poop." Instead of body functions, Got to write about the news, I got the Empress Don't Like My Juvenile Humor blues. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)



MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Weddings: That's Entertainment

Those who want to protect the institution of marriage from mockery should shift their fearful attention from would-be marriage partners to weddings. It is not the couples yearning for marriage that scare Miss Manners, but those who are actively planning to enter into it.

After all, nobody can figure out why this person wants to marry that person or that sort. Despite centuries spent pondering the curious phenomenon of people choosing marriage partners who don't suit onlookers, it remains unfathomable.

But the current practices common in the ceremonial expression of marriage indicate clearly how most people regard the institution itself. As negligible, Miss Manners would say.

This attitude is by no means limited to people who decide that they do not need to get married in order to cohabit and/or to have children. It can be read in the choices made by brides and bridegrooms who are not only getting married but making a huge fuss over doing so.

Naturally it is not the weddings that they consider negligible. On the contrary, these are deemed to be of such enormous importance that a couple can easily put a year's planning and all of their financial resources (and then some) into producing a series of wedding events. They cherish—and do everything they can to foster—the belief that such a momentous festival requires everyone fortunate enough to be allowed to witness it to make major commitments of time, attention and money.

And they insist upon observing what they are pleased to call traditions, the foremost of which seems to be choosing what they want to receive as presents.

It is just the getting married part—the actual ceremony that marks the legal and often religious act of marrying—that is treated as malleable. The wedding has become a great blast of a party, which is stuck with a slow start when everyone is expected to curb the fun and pay attention. Symbolizing the relative importance of the activities, brides now dress for the parties that follow, in strapless ball dresses, rather than donning the often impossibly elaborate but still somewhat modest wedding

dresses that long symbolized the dignity of the occasion.

Increasingly, the marriage doesn't even really take place at the wedding, where a marriage previously legalized may be a mere reenactment serving as the excuse for a big wedding. (By that standard, brides who postpone getting married until after the birth of a child, because of the importance of fitting into the wedding dress, seem positively sentimental.)

To whatever extent possible, the ceremony has become part of the couple's pageantry of personal display. As they inevitably declare, "We want this to be about us." So begins the reworking to "personalize it" with their own script. Not infrequently, this includes jokes and all-too-private reminiscences. Officiants, too, contribute their share in the spirit of undercutting the solemnity to make the ceremony entertaining. And guests recognize this with their applause.

Miss Manners acknowledges that this approach to weddings is consistent with the society's belief that vows and loyalties are binding only in regard to the amount of entertainment they continue to yield.

The idea of channeling the couple's commitment into the traditions of the society has been reversed, so that weddings have become opportunities for them to show off to society.

She wishes them well. Just don't expect her to shed the traditional tear over the significance of it all.

Dear Miss Manners:

Here is a problem I enjoy having. What is the polite response to being told that my girlfriend is beautiful?

"Thank you" seems presumptuous and sexist, since I had nothing to do with it. "I agree" sounds smug and ungrateful. I am at a loss.

"She has a beautiful character and a beautiful mind." If you say this in a dreamy voice, it will not only flummox the commenter, but, Miss Manners promises, enhance your private life.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

E-W vulnerable			
NORTH			
♠	J 8 3 2		
♥	Q 8 4		
♦	A J 3		
♣	9 5 4		
WEST (D)			
♠	7		
♥	A K 7 5 2		
♦	8 7 4		
♣	A 8 7 3		
EAST			
♠	5		
♥	J 10 9 6 3		
♦	Q 10 9 5		
♣	Q J 10		
SOUTH			
♠	A K Q 10 9 6 4		
♥	None		
♦	K 6 2		
♣	K 6 2		

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	4 ♠
All Pass			

Opening lead: ♥ K

"I was South in the enclosed deal," a reader writes, "and when I went down at four spades, my partner—who happened to be my husband—gave me a look like Cotton Mather might have given a Salem woman in the stocks."

South writes that she ruffed West's king of hearts at the first trick, drew trumps, cashed the king of diamonds and finessed with the jack. East took the queen and shifted to the queen of clubs, and the defense got three clubs to defeat the contract.

"I know we'd have beaten four hearts if I'd passed. We'd get a spade, a heart and two diamonds. But I thought my bid of four spades was automatic. Did I deserve the accusing look I got?"

My fan need not be concerned over her bid. Anyone who would pass four hearts as South deserves

to watch East-West make game when North-South could make a slam. North was unhappy not with South's bid (I hope) but with her play. South can make four spades by end-playing West but must execute two loser-on-loser plays. South can start by pitching a diamond at Trick One instead of ruffing.

If West shifts to a diamond, South takes the king, draws trumps with dummy's eight, ruffs a heart, cashes the K-A of diamonds and ruffs a diamond with a high trump.

South can then return a trump to dummy and lead the queen of hearts, discarding a club. When West takes the ace, he must lead either a club, letting South's king score, or a heart, letting South ruff in dummy and discard a club. Either way, South loses only three tricks in all.

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Next Week: **Dead Letters, or Odes and Ends**