

# The Style Invitational

Week 548: Inklings



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

- Little Dickie Cheney's mother could never keep track of that child.**
- Little Denny Kucinich kept sneaking snacks from the broccoli jar.**
- Little Georgie Bush tore up the neighbor's garden because his best friends told him the Great Pumpkin was hidden in it.**

**This week's contest:** If we only knew then . . . As The Style Invitational turns 11 years old today, up-and-coming Loser Erika Reinfeld of Somerville, Mass., suggests that you tell us about certain people's childhood experiences and behaviors that hint at their destinies, as in the examples above.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a copy of the fine book "Wind Breaks: Coming to Terms With Flatulence." Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after 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](mailto:losers@washpost.com). Snail-mail entries are not accepted. Deadline is Monday, March 15. 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 April 4. 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 Joseph Romm of Washington.

**Report from Week 544**, in which we asked for Valentine's sentiments from one particular person to another:

- ♦ Third runner-up: *From Poseidon to Medusa:* **Oh, how I'd love to run my fingers through your snakes.** (Lloyd Duvall, Roslyn, Pa.)
- ♦ Second runner-up: *Yrs.,* —*Calvin Coolidge to wife Grace* (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)
- ♦ First runner-up, the winner of the Frederick's of Hollywood teddy: *Laura Bush to Jacques Chirac:* **The courtly way you kissed my hand, The media were all agog! Though, Valentine, I always thought The lady had to kiss the frog.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)
- ♦ And the winner of the Inker: **A Valentine, some hugs and pecks, A night of wild, illicit sex. As your pastor, I must say, Miss Prynne, you've earned yourself an A.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

- ♦ **Honorable Mentions:**  
*From Michael Jackson:* **Your face upon my pillows Was angelic; it's amid My memories of Neverland— Here's looking at you, kid.** (Bob Dalton, Arlington)
- Joey Buttafuoco to Amy Fisher:* **Hey, baby, wanna give it another shot?** (Mark Young, Washington)
- To Alice from Ralph:* **Between my fits of apoplexy I find your kisser rather sexy.** (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)
- In three days I return from war, My Josephine to savor, Ah, ma cherie, please bathe no more: I like a lot of flavor.** —*Napoleon* (Arthur Litoff, York Springs, Pa.)
- To Sir, with love, Marcie** (Erika Reinfeld, Somerville, Mass.)
- Dearest Elizabeth, I've won you, My heart would yearn for no other, But promise me, at Pemberley, You'll keep me safe from your mother. Yrs, Fitzwilliam Darcy** (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)
- To Vincent van Gogh from his girlfriend Rachel:* **If you would be my Valentine, I would give you my heart, love. What will you give me?** (Charles Star, New York)
- Mary Matalin to James Carville:* **Your reptile face, your Creole drawl, Like some crude yokel from the sticks— You'd still be my strange bedfellow Regardless of your politics.** (Brendan Beary)
- Yo, Desdemona—Up for a little hankie-panky? —Othello** (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)
- From Juliet to Romeo, and vice versa:* **KaPuLet14: omg, ur a qt montadude: i want some booty** (Erika Reinfeld)
- Auguste Renoir to Rosie O'Donnell:* **O! ma cherie, I shall paint you all mooshy, So no one will know you're très grande in the tushie.** (Mary Ann Henningsen, Hayward, Calif.)
- Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett Browning:* **Sure, happy Valentine's Day. Look, I'm trying to watch the game. Just give me the final total, okay?** (Roy Ashley, Washington)

- You two naughty boys, you Watson and Crick, Now come over here, and show me right quick! Let's add to that double and make it a triple, We'll twist us together with nary a ripple. Your hogging the credit, it sure still is ranklin', But let's drop it tonight—Love, Rosalind Franklin** (Mike Connaghan, Alexandria)
- To J from J: You gave my career a new chance While the prudes, at my boob, looked askance. So give me a call When your own ratings fall, And I'll reach out and pull down your pants.** (Walt Johnston, Woodstock, Md.)
- The ark is astir on this Valentine's Day. An animal's missing, I'm sorry to say. A gerbil, perhaps, but that still needs confirming. Noah, my sweetie-poo, why are you squirming?** (Chris Doyle)
- Ken, my old friend, we're finished, it's clear, After 43 years, it's over between us. Not only didn't you have a career, They'd even forgotten to give you a decent haircut.** (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.; Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)
- From Kermit to Miss Piggy:* **My love for you is sugar-cured, You stop my heart from achin'. It's even easy being green When I bring home the bacon.** (Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)
- At last you're king, at last I'm queen, (Let's not dwell on how); And no man born of woman will Separate us now. With sound and fury, Lady Macbeth** (Tom Kreitzberg)
- For Valentine's, my dear Clarice, I hope you'll offer me your heart. But I would settle for a piece Of any other body part. —Hannibal** (John Holder, Rock Hill, S.C.)
- And last: Hey, Czar of The Style Invitational. You got Losers to tremble and fear ya. As Empress, I'm more inspirational: Happy Valentine's Day in Siberia.** (Chris Doyle)

Next Week: **Put It in Reverse, or Ynnuf Is Ynnuf**

**For convenient Home Delivery call 1-800-873-1097 x100**

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

# The Illusion of Etiquette

**W**ho can resist someone with a big dream and the determination to pursue it?

Apparently only Miss Manners. And she is the very person to whom so many turn in the hopes of making their dreams come true.

Readers confide in her about their dream weddings, the dream of giving a husband or wife a special present, the dream of paying off the mortgage, the dream of surprising parents by sending them on a trip for their wedding anniversary, and sometimes just the dream of a gala evening with all their friends in a luxurious restaurant.

Ah, yes, Miss Manners is happy to sigh with them all about how wonderful that might be.

But then comes Part 2 of the Great American Dream: The dream of making someone else pay for it.

"Money is tight," says the lady who wants to get her husband a boat.

"I can't afford to pay for everyone's dinner," says the gentleman planning to throw a restaurant party.

"My mother doesn't need presents," says the devoted child, "so I would like to tell people to give her cash."

"We're working on our first million!" declares the jubilant couple who are marrying again in midlife.

So with the dreams come the schemes: "What is the polite wording on the invitation to say we want monetary presents?"

"How can I tell guests that they are expected to pay without appearing to be a cheapskate?"

"What are the rules for having a money tree?" "Some people have still not sent anything—what is a tactful way of reminding them?"

There was a time when Miss Manners believed that she could ignore these queries. She is not in the business of whitewashing extortion, which is just as well, because there is no way to avoid looking cheap and greedy when you are shaking people down.

And she thought these attempts would be quickly doomed. Who would just hand over money on demand except when there was a gun involved?

But people are handing over their money, and not just from the delight of helping others realize their dreams. It seems that they do feel a gun held to their heads—the cold steel of social propriety. They give because they think etiquette demands it.

So Miss Manners gets the blame, and not even a percentage of the take. No wonder she wants to expose social scams.

However, she does not want to discourage conviviality or generosity. All she asks is that suggestions to buy, sponsor or contribute to other people's dreams be stripped of any idea of social obligation and weighed with businesslike objectivity.

Is the admission fee to a party likely to yield the entertainment value that could be purchased elsewhere? Do you feel the sort of affection for these people that makes you want to pay their bills?

If so, fine. Just don't think that etiquette has anything to do with it.

**Dear Miss Manners:**  
**What to do about a new trend: the "almost RSVP," as in almost did not bother, but did RSVP at the last possible hour?**

**The practitioners of the "almost RSVP" adhere to the letter of the etiquette law—that you must RSVP to a dinner invitation—but not the spirit of the law, which says that you should reply in time to allow the hosts to plan on entertaining you.**

**After a recent spate of guests calling the night before the party after 8 p.m. to RSVP, I am considering putting a deadline on my invitations. I don't consider a phone call after 8 p.m. the night before adequate notice that they will be joining us for dinner (plus needing directions, further instructions and a complete guest list and guest history).**

**Can I just tell them that I did not plan on them because I did not hear from them? Or start including an RSVP deadline on future invitations?**

These people did not adhere to the letter of the etiquette law, Miss Manners assures you. That requires an answer immediately upon receiving an invitation—with, at most, half a day to consult a spouse.

Unfortunately, there is also a law—almost as often disobeyed—against assuming that guests are so rude as to have to be given deadlines. What you can do is to say sadly, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I assumed you were away, since I hadn't heard from you, and made other plans. I'll try you another time."

**Dear Miss Manners:**  
**Is the correct form of address for a female U.S. president "Ms. President" or "Madame President"?**

Neither. It is Madam President. Miss Manners hopes this will be useful to you and, sooner rather than later, to the nation.

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

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## DEAR ABBY

- Dear Abby:**  
**My husband, "Todd," and I have been happily married for four years and together for six. We have a daughter (mine from a previous marriage) and a beautiful little boy together. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Todd loves both children equally. Despite some tough financial times over the past two years, we are a happy family. Our problem? Todd's mother. She's a negative, bitter woman who insists she "can't possibly" show our daughter the same love she shows our son. She sends affectionate notes to our son, none to our daughter. She shops at discount stores for our daughter and only the best shops for our son. She sent our son a beautiful handmade toy and our daughter a pencil—yes, a pencil!**  
**Please understand this isn't about gifts or the amount she spends. It's about the obvious disparity. Even worse, she's always saying that Todd couldn't love our daughter the way he does our son. Need I tell you the damage this has already done to our daughter?**  
**We are at our wits' end. Todd is ready to just walk away from his mother. I know we can't change the way she feels, but are we wrong to insist that she not show it so openly to our daughter? Help. Please.**  
*—Ready to Walk Away*

**My question is, do you think she'll understand that I don't have a lot of space in my house? Do you have any ideas about where I could put her things? Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions.**  
*—Without Mom in Washington*

Your mother left her things to you because she wanted you to enjoy them. Of course she would understand if you cannot use them all. She didn't intend for them to be a burden but a blessing.

Since there are more things than you need or want, please consider sharing the rest with other relatives who can appreciate their sentimental value. If that's not possible, donate them to a charity—possibly one that raises money to fight the disease that took her. I can't think of a more worthwhile use for them than that.

**Dear Abby:**  
**My long-divorced father was befriended by a well-to-do family from another country that has lived in the United States for a few years. They invited him to accompany them on a four-week visit to their country. While there, they talked him into marrying (on paper only) one of their sisters so that her child could get a U.S. visa. The child has now arrived in America. My father thinks he did a wonderful thing. I think he was used. What do you think?**  
*—Concerned in Minnesota*

I think your father committed immigration fraud. Please consult an immigration attorney on his behalf immediately. What I think is less important than what federal officials will think if they get wind of his "good deed."

*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](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.*  
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## BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH (D)	EAST
▲ A 10 7 2	▲ Q J 3
♥ Q 6	♥ J 10 9 3
♦ A Q 5	♦ K J 10 2
♠ A 10 8 4	♠ 7 2
WEST	EAST
▲ K 9 8 6 4	▲ Q J 3
♥ 7	♥ J 10 9 3
♦ 8 7 6	♦ K J 10 2
♠ K Q 6 3	♠ 7 2
SOUTH	
▲ 5	
♥ A K 8 5 4 2	
♦ 9 4 3	
♠ J 9 5	

The bidding:  
 North East South West  
 1 NT Pass 4 ♥ All Pass  
 Opening lead — ♦ 8

Cy the Cynic has little use for modern bidding techniques, no matter how theoretically sound. Cy defines progress as trading one nuisance for another. As South, Cy leaped to four hearts over North's 1NT. Modern experts would employ a "transfer" response of four diamonds, forcing North to bid four hearts. The idea is to protect North's "tenaces," such as the A-Q of diamonds, from immediate attack. When West led the eight of diamonds, Cy frowned, pondered and played low from dummy. East took the ten and led the queen of spades. Cy took the ace and cashed the three high trumps. When West discarded, Cy carefully led a fourth trump to East. Cy ruffed the spade return and led the nine of clubs. West played the king, and Cy took dummy's ace and forced out West's queen of clubs. Cy could then win the diamond return with the ace and take the 10-8 of clubs to pitch his last diamond. He claimed the contract, sweating hard. Transfer responses are well worth using. If North-South used them here, North could make four hearts without much effort. East would lead the queen of spades, and North would take the ace and cash the three high trumps. He'd then be safe by leading a fourth trump, but even if he started the clubs next, he'd make the contract. West would play an honor, and North would take the ace and force out West's remaining club honor. When West shifted to a diamond, North would play low from his hand and would then have time to discard a diamond on the fourth club.

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