The Style Invitational

Week 549: Show Us Your Best Quantities



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The acher: the amount of driveway shoveled before you realize you're not going to be able to move any of your limbs tomorrow.

The milli-helen: the amount of beauty needed to launch one ship.

The wynette: a measurement of willingness to "stand by your man" even when he shouldn't be stood anywhere. 10 wynettes = 1 hillary

This week's contest was suggested by inveterate contest-suggester Russell Beland of Springfield: Come up with novel units of measure, and explain or quantify them. A preemptive note: Don't bother sending in screaming mini-screeds like "25 Hitlers = 1 My Boss."

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins Gotta Go!, a nuisance-shooing device that makes your phone click as if there were a call waiting for you on call-waiting. 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. Snail-mail entries are not accepted. Deadline is Monday, March 22. 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 11. 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 Phyllis Reinhard of East Fallowfield, Pa. **Also:** As The Empress browsed the archives last week during The Invitational's 11th-birthday festivities, she realized that a number of the parenthetical names that used to grace this column have disappeared in recent years. What's the matter, you grow up or something? We are under new management here, you know. If you haven't had ink in the past two years, but won at least a few bumper stickers before that, make a note of it on your entry in this week's contest. Best of these wins a fabulous talking and singing toy toilet donated by (zzzzz) Russell Beland of Springfield, with eyes that pop up out of the tank and make googly motions. (We mean the *toilet* has these; Russell's eyes stay in the tank where they belong.)

Report from Week 545, in which we asked you to spell a word backward and redefine it, somehow relating the definition to the original word: As predicted, this contest drew thousands of entries, many of which canceled each other out: lots of eeknay and seeknay and notsob, aybud and noxin and Lotipac and notrubillah and innumerable others. You know that brilliant, perfect word you thought of? Three dozen other people sent that one, too.

♦ Fourth runner-up:

Onisac: a dark, often smoke-filled chamber in which elderly homo sapiens deposit their nest eggs before dying.

(Peter Metrinko, Plymouth, Minn.)

♦ Third runner-up: Suoixon: A sickening attempt to give your baby a unique name; pronounced "Susan." (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)

◆ Second runner-up:

YMRA: A place where you can fight with the boys, you can have a meal ready to eat, you can do anything you're told. Just don't tell us you're gay.

(Mike Connaghan, Alexandria)

♦ First runner-up, the winner of the model of the human ear: Nword: Something that gets you in really deep trouble. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ And the winner of the Inker:

Skrod: Fish that are always swimming upstream. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

♦ A dictionary of Honorable Mentions:

ATOYOT: A mysterious brand of car visible only from your rearview mirror. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.; Russell Beland)

Citoruen: A car marketed to the overanxious.

(Richard Grantham, Melbourne, Australia)

Dopi: The dwarf who walked around with wires hanging out of his ears. (Lennie Magida, Potomac)

DTs: Another unfortunate side effect of careless drinking. (Milo Sauer, Fairfax) eFink: An online writer known for ad

hominem attacks. (Michael Cisneros, Centreville)

Elppin: A shy little creature that becomes visible only when cold. (Tom Witte)

Evol: Evil cleverly disguised. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Frawd: Deception by a man who claims to be Prince Charming but turns out to be dumpy, sleazy and gropey. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Godpal: How your Yorkie sees you.

(Dave Zarrow, Herndon) Imaim: A city that prides itself on its sense of danger and edginess. (Brendan Beary)

Ippississim: Taking a leak in the river. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

Knud: The sound of an NBA player's head hitting the backboard.

(Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.) K104: A radio station with half the power it had four years ago. (Dave Komornik, Danville, Va.)

Low-a: President Bush's National Guard grade. (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

Mixam: A blended proverb, like "You can lead a gift horse to water, but you can't look him in the mouth." (Chris Dovle)

Nagev: A desert where all animals can survive. (Tom Witte)

Naive: Paying for what you can get for free from your tap. (Dawne Holz, Ashburn)

Nari-gari: Political suicide resulting from an attempt to enact Mideast

policy. (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls) Notnow: Food you'll want maybe in an hour when you're hungry again. (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

Nug nuts: A doofus who sits on his own Taser. (Chris Doyle)

Ottelits: The denressions made in carpet by high heels. (Richard Grantham)

Palrub: Something to do in the sack with a friend. (Jane Auerbach)

Partyboob: A flirtatious woman whose embrace carries hidden danger (e.g., the CEO's trophy wife). (Jeff Brechlin)

Ragluv: A crude question a Cockney man asks a woman who disagrees with him. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Regoob: What your nose does after you pick it. (Steve Church, Charlottesville)

Resol: Someone who pays a cobbler \$10 to get new bottoms on a pair of flip-flops that sells for \$5.99 at Wal-Mart. (Roy Ashley)

Rev. o'BMOC: What happens to the campus playboy when middle age

settles on him. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel) Rewolfyam: To take a second helping of sweet potatoes at Thanksgiving.

Saib: A make of car that is pulled over frequently for no apparent reason. (Tom Witte)

Sexrex: The Persian porno king. (Chris Doyle)

Sillyrama: What the shoe box scene of tropical flora you made when you were 9 looks like to you when you're 10. (Nancy Israel, Bethesda)

Sinnet: The Anna Kournikova Web ring. (Peter J. Konowicz, Valrico, Fla.)

Sllop: Pundits' election predictions. (Michelle Bowen-Ziecheck, Chicago)

Sniksder: A candy bar reintroduced every fall amid great fanfare about its new formulation, but which always leaves the same bad taste in your mouth. (Stephen Stockum, Washington)

Spoort: A game in which politicians play with soldiers' lives to win elections. (Joe Cackler, Falls Church)

Timov: The name of this year's world vodka-drinking champion. (Tom Witte)

Top Lop: The notorious Cambodian beheader. (Chris Doyle)

Trilf: A would-nymph. (Tom Witte)

Yenom: The deadliest poison of all. (Tom Witte)

Yessydo: The long, strange journey called marriage. (Tom Witte)

Yssis: The ancient Egyptian god of

interior design. (Tom Witte)

Next Week: Sister Cities, or Municipal Bonding

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Form vs. Function

he advantage promised by electronic invitations, known as e-vites, is to simplify the task of assembling people socially. Hosts get the word out quickly, guests check off their preferences, and—poof!—the party is arranged, all except setting out the drinks and cleaning up the mess.

Simplification does not have the automatic appeal to Miss Manners that it seems to arouse in everyone else. For example, she does not see how romance has been enhanced by the elimination of such frills as roses, compliments and yearning, down to the simple matter of "Do you want to do it, or don't you?'

Nevertheless, she is willing to consider if evites do, indeed, solve a problem of which she is

only too aware. The social routine that once worked—hosts setting down the terms, graciously but firmly, and guests gratefully but firmly (and, most important, immediately) accepting the offer with all its terms or declining—doesn't anymore. Hosts and guests both hedge. Hosts put in strictures that are incomprehensible ("casual festive"), unconscionable ("cash bar") and indignant ("not transferable"), and guests ignore the terms, including not only those of time and dress but even such crucial ones as who was invited and when or whether they had to accept or decline.

Considering that the point of partying is enjoyment with people one likes, this has produced an increasingly divergent and disgruntled relationship between hosts and guests. Clearly reforms are needed.

Miss Manners would prefer to reform the people concerned, as she considers the traditional requirements reasonable. However, if others can solve the problem by reforming the ritual, that might make the exchange workable. So she will put aside, for the moment, her fondness for the prettily written, engraved or spoken invitation, and consider the electronic version in terms of its efficiency.

Does it state the terms in a way that is both charming enough to entice the guest and clear enough to indicate that it is to be taken seriously? Does it compel a quick response?

It certainly makes a quick response possible, although not compelling, as one can tell from the "Not Yet Replied" lists that are posted. It does not necessarily inspire gracious ones, judging from the hedging replies that are posted in full for all to read. The follow-up nagging e-mail, "You Have Not Yet Responded," doesn't seem to do much better. Furthermore, there are ways for guests to add guests, which could easily lead to the host's

nightmare of losing control over the size of the

THE WASHINGTON POST

So much for enforcement. An invitation that includes a "Take Me Off the Guest List" feature, the information that "you may have been invited as part of a group" and the option to avoid all subsequent invitations from the same host may be said to lack charm. It just doesn't produce that glow of flattered anticipation that comes from the sense that you are particularly wanted on an occasion that will be special. Somehow, the daily barrage of mass e-mails with their notions of fun and pleasure never do.

Dear Miss Manners:

Is it rude to say to someone, "Did you intend to [name of the activity involved]?" For example, "Did you intend to step on my foot?" The word in question here is "intend."

I'd really appreciate your input. It will help us with our efforts to create a household of respect.

You are almost there. All Miss Manners asks is that you give one another the benefit of the doubt (while retaining the pressure to apologize) by phrasing it as, "I'm sure you did not intend to step on my foot," stressing "sure" as strongly as "in-

Dear Miss Manners:

I am a front-desk clerk at a small hotel, which, luckily in these difficult economic times, has a full roster of frequent quests.

If I had a nickel for every time one of them made a comment on the order of, "So, are you included in the price of the room?" I would have a boatload of nickels. I can handle the ones who are joking, but it's the ones who brag about their lovely wife and beautiful children and then start leering at me who make me want to tell them where to go, which a Gentle Reader should not do. What do you suggest?

You may be surprised to hear (from Miss Manners, at any rate) that this is a rare situation in which you can tell such people where to go. The polite way would be to say stiffly, "You might want to look elsewhere, sir. This is a respectable hotel, not the kind of accommodation you are seeking."

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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DEAR ABBY

Dear Abby:

My mother was unloving and downright cruel to all of her children, but now that we're over 18, she has suddenly decided she wants to have relationships with us. (I haven't even told her that so much suffering and heartache, but I don't know how to tell her to leave me alone.

She recently showed up at my house. I don't know how she got my address, because I didn't give it to her and I never return her calls. I don't understand how she can act like everything is fine between us and get angry with me for not calling her back.

Mother has never in her life said the word "sorry." I am at a loss as to how to deal with her. Angry and Confused in Phoenix

I have heard from readers who cut themselves off from their parents after abusive childhoods and later regretted that there was no closure. I have also heard from people who did it and have no regrets about it at all.

If you feel that any aspect of your relationship with her is salvageable, consider trying to heal it. However, if that is not possible, tell her plainly that you want to be left alone, and if she doesn't cooperate, you will be forced to get a restraining order. Then do it.

Dear Abby:

My niece, "Debra," had her breasts enlarged before she was even 20, and she dresses to draw attention to them. She's so proud that she pushes them out even farther, which makes her posture appear abnormal.

We are modest people, and we felt especially uncomfortable last summer at a family beach party where she pranced around in a thong!

Now we have a messy situation. Debra has accused a male family member of behaving inappropriately toward her. He denies ever thinking "that way" about her, but admits he couldn't help looking at her breasts "because they were on display all the time."

EAST

♦ 83

East

Pass

Pass

♠ AJ98

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♥ J 10 8 4

N-S vulnerable

NORTH

♥ Q 6

♠ A K 2

♣ J 5 4 2

SOUTH (D)

♥ A72

♣ A K 3

West

Pass

Pass

All Pass

Opening lead — ♠ K

◆ QJ10954

North

WEST

♠ KQ72

♥ K953

♦ 76

♣ Q 9 7

The bidding

South

1 ♦

5 ♦

♠ 10 6 5 3

My sister, Debra's mother, refuses to accept that her daughter is in any way responsible for this mess, and says the man involved is completely at fault. I blame Debra.

Is it fair for a girl to dress seductively and then inappropriately?

Modest in Colorado

Let's stop assigning blame and assess what's really happening. For years, Debra probably felt something was lacking. Since she has had her enhancement surgery, it appears she has been overcompensating. The episode with the thong bikini at the family beach party is an example of a girl who once felt invisible and is now flaunting her assets.

However, when someone prominently puts something on display, it's unrealistic to expect viewers to wear blinders or look away. Debra can't have it both ways.

My neighbor runs a licensed day-care center in her home. She does a good job and has lots of children in her care. Some of the children are the same ages as my kids, and they often spend an afternoon or a whole day playing at my house. Should I be concerned about being responsible for her "clients" when she is paid to take care of them? Is there a liability issue that I need to confront? It's an awkward situation for me, and I'd like to hear your thoughts.

Liable in Svracuse

To heck with my "thoughts." Contact your insurance agent today. If a child is injured on your property, there is definitely a liability issue!

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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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

xperience is one thing you can't get on the easy payment plan: Only a veteran West would defeat today's contract. Cover the East and South cards. You lead the king of spades: three, nine, four. What next?

The actual West led another spade. South ruffed and knew he'd be safe if a defender had Q-x in clubs. For an extra chance, though, South led a trump to dummy, ruffed a spade and led a trump to dummy. When trumps broke 2-2, South ruffed the last spade and took the top clubs.

South then exited with a club. When West won, he was endplayed, forced to lead a heart from the king.

Even a West with long experience might not see the end play coming, but West can apply a basic defensive principle: When dummy is weak, a defender should avoid any play that might help declarer.

Then the defenders will eventually get their tricks.

West knows that if South has a second spade loser, he can't get rid of it quickly: West has stoppers in hearts and clubs. So West need not try to cash another spade and clearly shouldn't risk a heart or club shift.

Forcing declarer to ruff is usually a safe, "passive" defense, but not here. West must exit with a trump. South then lacks enough entries to dummy to strip West of all his spades. If South draws trumps, takes the top clubs and leads a club to West's queen, West can exit with a spade and live to

score a heart trick. This defense might fail if South's low club were a low spade, but then South would have bid 3NT. And yes, East could have overtaken the first spade for a heart shift.

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