

The Style Invitational

Week 569: Murphy's Lore



BY BOB STANKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's contest comes to you directly from the plaintive pixels of up-and-coming Loser Eric Murphy of Chicago, who e-mailed the Empress: "I just signed a lease for a new apartment with my girlfriend, and her grandparents are not especially keen on the idea.

1. What could I say to them to allay their fears?
2. If I were to propose to said girlfriend, what methods should I avoid?
3. If the two of us made it all the way to the altar, what statements should I leave out of my wedding vows?"

Give Eric the advice he deserves on any of his questions.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a bizarre vinyl LP record titled "Chevrolet Sings of Safe Driving and You," dating from the mid-'60s and intended for driver's ed classes. It features soupy folk-style arrangements of such classics as "Cities and Towns (Driving in City and Heavy Traffic)" and "Gentle Things (Adverse Condition Driving)." 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. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 8. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks 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 Aug. 29. 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 Danny Bravman of Potomac.

Report from Week 565, in which we asked for songs, set to well-known tunes, that might substitute for the hard-to-sing "Star-Spangled Banner": From the look of a large number of entries, you'd think we'd won independence from France.

◆ Third Runner-Up: To "Wonderful World":

Don't care much about diplomacy;
We don't bother with complexity.
We cut issues down to black-and-white;
There's a 50-50 chance we're right.
But we're sure our every cause is just,
And if everyone were more like us
What a wonderful world this would be.
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

◆ Second Runner-Up: To "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General":

We never disagree with anything our government might say,
We work from 9 to 5 and watch the tube for the rest of the day.
We function like automatons built to support society,
And that is why our life's so hard to face in full sobriety.
On Friday night we all get drunk, and Saturday, and Sunday, too,
To give us strength to go back and restart the whole workweek anew.
We're pegs who squeeze ourselves into the holes they've built to fit us in,
We are the very model of a patriotic citizen.
(Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

◆ And the winner of the Inker: To "Hello Muddah":

Hello Daddy, hello Mommy,
We're not Nazi, we're not commie.
All the world thinks we're a bully.
They don't seem to want to understand us fully.
Hello Mommy, hello Daddy.
Our great nation's not the baddie.
Put an end to this idea:
Give the finger to Iran and North Korea. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

To "Do-Re-Mi":

Dough, a buck, the mighty buck.
'Ray! A cheer for U.S.A.,
Me, a fan of Uncle Sam,
Far and near he leads the way.
Sow the seeds of freedom wide,
La-di-da, we run the show.
Tee us off? You'd better hide!
And that brings us back to dough (oh-oh-oh).
(Chris Doyle)

To the chorus of "You've Got a Friend":

You can shop anytime in the Land of Liberty,
The whole country, oh yeah, baby, is one big bazaar.

Winter, spring, summer or fall, It's waiting for you at the mall.

Crashed your hard drive? No need to worry: You've got a car.

(Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

To "Frere Jacques":

Our love of freedom, love of freedom
You can't quench, you can't quench.
Yes, this tune is stolen, but we're very glad that

We're not French, we're not French.
(Roy Ashley, Washington)

To the Kit Kat jingle:

Give me a break, a big tax break,
Break me off a piece of that de-fi-cit.
(Grover Norquist, Washington)
(Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

To "One" from "A Chorus Line":

One superpower nation,
Betcha Britain's sorry now
One stunning Declaration,
A Constitutional wow!
Amendments to serve and protect you
(unless you're gay)
It's just so great to be here in the U.S.A.!
One rough election season,
Makes you want to flee the nest,
But America is second best to none, son.
Hang on! Don't move to Quebec yet,
Quittez non! We're not quite a wreck yet,
We're still the one!
(Sara Simons, Washington)

More Honorable Mentions appear on washingtonpost.com.

Next Week: **Get Whack!** or **Go Ogle a Pair**

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Don't Go There

Disparaging tourists is such a popular summer pastime that even tourists who are in the very act of touring like to have a go at it. "This place is overrun with tourists," they will say in disgusted tones. And there are more of them than they think, because they fail to count themselves.

If this amuses them Miss Manners is not one to interfere, provided they do not insult their fellow tourists to their faces. But she has noticed that this disparagement of their own kind suggests a way of thinking that is likely to lead to post-holiday etiquette problems for all who travel.

When the residents of a tourist attraction criticize tourists, it is for such crimes as crowding and littering the area, dressing as if cities were beaches and supporting the local economy. (No, wait. That last one isn't quite it. It is for supporting the local economy by buying souvenirs and snacks instead of patronizing sensible businesses that sell things real people need, such as lawnmowers, dishcloths and stepladders.)

But when tourists criticize one another, it is for not enjoying themselves. This does not mean getting in the way of their critics' enjoying themselves, although there is an element of that. The charge is, uncharitably enough, that other tourists are not enjoying their own vacations.

"Look at them," they will say of one another. "They have no real interest in being here. They don't even know what they're seeing. They don't care. All they want is to be able to brag to their friends at home that they've been here. That's why they're taking pictures all the time and sending all those postcards. It's just to prove that they've been here."

Backpackers and those in hotel suites say this of one another. People visiting a place for the second time say it of people visiting for the first time. And everyone says it of people traveling on tours—especially the other people who are on their tours.

What worries Miss Manners is that they thus plant in themselves the extraordinary notion that telling people at home about one's trip is a real and desirable possibility—that it is so much of one that huge numbers of people invest the better part of their disposable time and money in setting up what Miss Manners can tell them will be a social disaster.

Nobody wants to hear about anyone else's trip. The only thing they dread more is looking at the pictures from such trips. Here is the conversation family and

friends want to have with the returning tourist:

"Have a good trip?"

"Yes, it was great."

"Good weather?"

"Well, it rained one day, but we were going to museums then anyway."

"Okay, then. Good to have you back."

Of course, the tourist who did have a great trip is bursting with things to say and show. For that, it is no use to corner those alleged folks back home who are supposed to be impressed. The only people who genuinely want to listen are those who have been there themselves or are planning to go, and the trade-off is that they expect equal time to tell of their adventures and impressions.

Tourists should therefore treasure other tourists. They are the only ones who will want to listen to them.

Dear Miss Manners:

I love red wine, but it always leaves an unsightly stain on my lips and teeth. This makes me hesitant to drink it in public, because whenever I smile I'd reveal a mouthful of purple teeth. Is there a way to drink red wine without turning one's mouth purple?

Quick! Somebody run and get the soda water! You could, ah, gargle with it. Well, no. Good thing this isn't the household-hints department.

Not that etiquette will be much help after the fact. Miss Manners can only tell you what it says you can't do. You can't ask for a straw. You can't whip out a mirror and inspect yourself. You shouldn't even try using a knife blade as a mirror (as one Gentle Reader once suggested) because it is not polite to brandish knives around during dinner.

So she suggests that you learn to drink by putting the lower rim of the glass beyond your lower lip and raising your upper lip and teeth out of the way. However, if you cannot manage this without looking as if you are gargling, Miss Manners recommends drinking milk.

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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TODAY'S HOROSCOPE | Jeraldine Saunders

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)

You may be sensitive to the mood of others and feel the need to referee disputes. Being a tower of strength is your special talent today. Peace and harmony will be easy to achieve. Invite friends over and socialize.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Use others as a sounding board and you may receive more enlightenment than you thought possible. Investigate potentials and perform research. Friends can offer an objective perspective and help you solve a puzzle.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

Temporary tensions give way to a more congenial mood, so ignore minor spats. Your opinion has value and can smooth troubled waters. Cookouts in your back yard will prove most satisfying.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

Passions may be thwarted early on. It is a better day for mental pursuits than physical ones, but the object of your affection should be loving and amorous this evening.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Accept challenges as a mental exercise and competitions as a test of skill. Be as objective as possible if others wish to debate. A few pleasant surprises could brighten your day.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Rest your weary wings today and bask in the admiration of someone special. Late-day trysts should run smoothly. You might discover something helpful if you organize paperwork or balance the checkbook.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Test your values by speaking your mind. Others will show you the flaws as well as the beauty of your ideas. The late afternoon and evening are

perfect for romantic overtures.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

Changes in plans are possible, but don't let this ruffle your feathers. Things are likely to work out to your advantage. Your unique outlook could be fascinating to a significant other.

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Handle emotional issues with care and sidestep confrontations. Use energy constructively, and clean out closets rather than dredge up dead issues. Harmony is the key word late in the day.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Be impervious to prodding from others. Those closest to you may be argumentative early in the day, but the atmosphere quickly shifts to a tranquil mode, and seductions are possible. Buy that small item you want.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

It is a good day to crusade, seek new vistas, unusual ideas, and fresh faces. Keep an open mind, as others may have shockingly different views. Try walking a mile in someone else's shoes.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Get tasks done early in the day, then take advantage of a late-day mood shift when sociability reigns. Cozy get-togethers with friends or amorous encounters with lovers are possible.

IF AUG. 1 IS YOUR BIRTHDAY: You are drawn to the unusual and avant-garde. Others may tantalize you with mysterious ways and pique your interest, but maybe that is just a surprise birthday party in the works. There are special powers and talents lurking beneath the surface, which you can use to charm others. A bit of indecision about financial matters is a signal that you should wait to make changes.

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DEAR ABBY

Dear Abby:

My sister informed me that her daughter was pregnant and was being married at the courthouse. They live in Kansas. I live in Florida.

The day after the ceremony, my sister e-mailed me, expressing anger that I did not acknowledge her daughter's "special day." Keep in mind that I have never known her kids, as we have lived so far apart all of their lives. Her other daughters have called me every name they can come up with, trying to make me feel bad for "forgetting" about the event. I don't feel I was obligated to do anything, especially when my sister announced it would be "parents only" at the ceremony.

Who's out of line here, in your opinion?

Distant Aunt in Titusville, Fla.

Since you weren't invited to the wedding, you had no obligation to send a gift. It would have been nice if you had marked the occasion with something—a token gift. However, since you are now being "called every name they can come up with," I wouldn't blame you for going from distant aunt to an even more distant one.

Dear Abby:

I am a 65-year-old grandmother who had a colostomy a little over a year ago. It wasn't because of cancer or a life-threatening illness. It was because of lack of muscle control from having children.

I care for my grandchildren two or three times a week, a 2-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl. How do I explain this to a 4-year-old? I don't want to scare her. From the time she was able to walk she came into the bathroom with me, and now she's curious about why she can't anymore. Is there a way you can explain this to a child? Thanks for any advice you can give.

Grandma in Bristol, Conn.

Dear Abby:

My sister and I are having a debate. I say you do not need to tip hairdressers if they rent their station and take 100 percent of the fees they charge. I say that tipping is only for people on commission. She disagrees.

I want to send my new hairdresser a tip if I'm wrong.

"Curly" in Chesterfield, Mo.

When in doubt, the wisest policy is to ask if tips are accepted. In many beauty salons, tips are welcomed even by the owner. For color, cuts and permanents, the usual amount is 15 to 20 percent. For a simple wash-and-set or blow-dry, it's 15 percent. In addition, regular customers give their hairdressers—and manicurists—gifts at Christmas. So haul out your wallet; your sister is right.

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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