

The Style Invitational

WEEK 573: Thine Ad Goest Here



BY BOB STAKER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Thou anointest my head with Brylcreem; my Super Big Gulp runneth over.

This week's contest was suggested by Stephen Dudzik of Olney, who found on the Internet a "Product Placement Bible" (excerpted above) by Raphael Carter of Minneapolis. Surely there are plenty of biblical and other literary passages, poems, etc., that could similarly benefit from product placements. Have at it.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a ceramic toothbrush holder in the shape of a bathtub with an elephant sitting in it, deep in swirling ceramic water, brushing its ear with a ceramic brush, donated by Kevin Mellema of Falls Church. 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 by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Tuesday, Sept. 7. 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 Sept. 26. 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 John O'Byrne of Dublin.

Report from Week 569, in which Loser Eric Murphy of Chicago e-mailed us: "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? And (3) if the two of us made it all the way to the altar, what statements should I leave out of my wedding vows?"

Along with hundreds of suggestions from total strangers, the Empress also received advice for Eric from Eric's own parents, Andrea and John Murphy (don't vow, "I will support you on my royalties from The Style Invitational"); Eric's own fiancée, Emily Leskinen (tell the grandparents, "It's really not a big deal—I plan on living with *all* my girlfriends before marrying them"); and even Eric's own self (don't propose by saying, "If you say no, I'll just suggest another newspaper contest for ways to take my revenge"). Won't the Murphys' Thanksgiving dinner be delightful this year.

♦ **Third Runner-Up:** *How to explain to her grandparents that you're living together:* "This way I won't have to get her drunk anymore to get her to come home with me." (Greg Pearson, Arlington)

♦ **Second Runner-Up:** *What not to include in the wedding vows:* "Mother, may I?" (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ **First Runner-Up, the winner of the LP "Chevrolet Sings of Safe Driving and You":** *What not to say in the proposal:* "Darling, there is no one else in the entire world better than you who would be interested in me." (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker:** *How to explain to her grandparents that you're living together:* "But you see, sharing a closet is the most convenient way for me to wear her clothing." (Mai Nguyen, Clinton)

♦ **Honorable Mentions:**

What could I tell the grandparents?

"Yeah, I know the saying about free milk, but I do plan on marrying your cow someday." (Brian Feldman, Chantilly)

"Hey, it's not like I'm still doing her sister or nothing." (Russell Beland)

"She'll be safe with me. I always sleep with a Beretta under my pillow." (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

"Let me put it in terms you can relate to: We're not living in sin, we're getting the Early Bird Special at the Conjugal Diner." (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

"The country is having trouble defining marriage. We're waiting for a clear definition." (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

"Hey, it's only temporary—once my grad school tuition is all paid, I am just so out of there!" (Russell Beland)

"If it'll make you feel any better, I'm still in my evaluation phase, and she's probably not going to make the cut. I'll keep you posted." (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

"Don't worry, anything she's got I must have already contracted." (Russell Beland)

Tell them that if they're truly concerned about what is going on in the apartment, they can pay \$9.99 a month like everyone else and log on to www.ericmurphyandhishotgirlfriend.com. (Joseph Romm, Washington; Robin D. Grove, Chevy Chase)

If I were to propose to said girlfriend, what methods should I avoid?

Don't point to a mark you made on the bathroom scale and say, "Once you're this thin, will you marry me?" (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Don't surprise her by unrolling the toilet paper, writing "Will you marry me?" and rolling it back up. Trust me, this never works. (Russell Beland)

Don't carve the proposal with a pen-knife into the underside of the toilet seat. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown; Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

And don't say any of these:

"Honey! When you finish the dishes, bring me a beer and, uh, there's something I want to ask you about." (Larry Phillips, Falls Church)

"Of course, asking you to spend the rest of your life with me is a formality. It's not like I'd ever let you get away, so don't even think about it." (Brendan Beary)

"Can you please shake these pompoms and say 'Goooooo, Eric!?' I've always wanted to marry a cheerleader." (Seth Brown)

"If my next question is 'Will you marry me?' will your answer to that question be the same as the answer to this question?" (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

"There's a gift certificate for \$150 at Rings-R-U's waiting to be picked up. They do take plastic. Oh, and you'd better use your card, because mine's maxed out." (Elden Carnahan)

If the two of us made it all the way to the altar, what statements should I leave out of my wedding vows?

Don't proclaim, "I am Eric Murphy and I'm reporting for duty!" (John Deupree, Silver Spring)

Leave out, "If there is anyone present who . . ." Nowadays there's always some joker who wants to be the star of your wedding video. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

When the preacher asks, "Will you love her, honor her, comfort her . . ." don't say, "Okay, no problem." (Chris Doyle)

"For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, in beauty." (Erika Reinfield, Somerville, Mass.)

"With this ring, I thee own." (Chris Doyle)

"Till death do us part, restraining orders be damned . . ." (Brendan Beary)

"Till death do us part, that is, assuming that the multiverse doesn't experience a splintering dimensional shift that puts us in separate universes. . . . I mean, I don't really see what I could do about that." (Scott Campisi)

"For richer or for poorer, in totally hot and totally not . . ." (Elden Carnahan)

"If, hypothetically speaking, I were to catch you fooling around with another woman, I would remain calm and understanding." (Seth Brown)

"From this day forward, I will use my own makeup." (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

And Last: "And when we have grandchildren, I promise not to be a nosy buttin-sky like *some* people we know." (Joseph Romm, Washington)

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

To Everything, There Is a Season

Time to start the social season. Gentlemen, please remove your baseball caps. Ladies, please remove your, ah, baseball caps. And it might be a good idea if all of you could locate your shoes.

Miss Manners's idea of a social season does not consist of parties given to honor a perfume or an illness, worthy and dressy as those events may be. Neither does it consist of "Why don't we catch a movie?" or "Come on by, I think I've got some pizza in the freezer, and if not, we can order in," comforting and easy as those events may turn out to be.

There is nothing wrong with either of these, except that the first isn't really social, and the second is how you spent the summer season. The onset of autumn is supposed to suggest that one could bestir oneself once in a while and do something more.

Didn't we learn that in school? Summer's end brought the resolve that this school year one would keep up with the assignments and never have to go into a panicked frenzy. Applied to social life, it seems to have the same success rate.

Yet people crave change, which is why we have seasons in the first place. Places with insignificant temperature changes may brag about their perfect climates, but even perfection requires contrast to be appreciated. Theirs, which they may neglect to mention at the time, tend to be hurricanes and earthquakes.

(It is also why we have rules to go with the seasons. The white-shoe season is about to end, and Miss Manners doesn't want any flak about it.)

And it is why we still have two popular styles of entertaining, even if they have deteriorated. We used to have Formal and Informal. Now we have Showing Off and Not Bothering. Showing Off is for weddings, proms, business and fundraising; Not Bothering is for seeing people you really care about for the sheer pleasure of it. Miss Manners finds something wrong with the priorities here.

The argument in favor of not exerting oneself on behalf of family and friends is that it is more casual, comfortable and spontaneous. And she agrees that relaxing among friends is indeed a wonderful thing.

But not when they are so spontaneous that they don't show up when they said they would, or show up when they said they would with people they haven't mentioned. Or so comfortable that they

take telephone calls and watch television instead of talking. Or so casual that they forget to reciprocate or they expect their guests to pay.

The basic rules of hospitality remain in effect regardless of the style. And indeed, people are now being as cavalier about formal events as about informal, although that was not the idea.

Discounting rudeness as an advantage that one can enjoy among friends still leaves not dressing up, not making elaborate arrangements and not planning much ahead. Admittedly, these can all be pleasures. But don't people who share them deserve a treat now and then?

Dear Miss Manners:

During the day earlier this summer, I attended an invitation-addressing event for a charity function at the home of a woman in our community. Upon arriving, we walked through the beautifully appointed home to the back yard. We were informed that the hostess "just can't have people in her house" and were directed to sit in the back yard.

Given the importance of the task, I stayed for as long as I could stand the heat and then left. I trust that I behaved appropriately, but was there anything else I could have done?

Added the lady to your list as a beneficiary. If her house is not fit to receive visitors, or if she is not allowed to bring anyone home, she may be in need of charitable assistance. If she doesn't think others are good enough to be in her house, she needs to acquire some charity.

The hostess's announcement eliminated the possibility that she thought, however mistakenly, that the garden would be more pleasing to her guests. So Miss Manners would not have blamed you for saying (in a gracious tone that seemed to blame your delicate constitution), "I'm so sorry, but I'm afraid I'm a bit warm in your lovely garden; I think I'll take my envelopes home, and drop them by when I'm done. Anyone is welcome to join me."

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:

I'm writing about the letter you printed from "Fed Up in Richmond, Tex.," whose husband's idea of an evening out or a day off is getting drunk. I hope she takes your advice to go to Al-Anon.

I fell in love and married a man who exhibited similar drinking behavior. It became worse during the 20 years we were together. I was verbally abused, humiliated and, at the end, feared for my safety as well as the children's.

I was very naive. He convinced me that I was crazy, threatened my family and threatened to take off with the children if I left. At age 40, I finally found the courage and strength to do it.

It took lots of counseling, but I now understand that I was caught up in his sickness. I regret that I wasted my youth on this man. I hope "Fed Up" opens her eyes and won't be caught up as I was in what domestic violence counselors call "the honeymoon cycle." That's where you bring his behavior to his attention, he promises he'll change, it's a great month or so—and then he starts drinking again. I look back over those years and see a bad movie filled with heartache for me and my children.

It wasn't easy, but it has been worth it. I am now treated with the love and respect I deserve. My children and I are happier than we've ever been. I'm a stronger person now, and we're blessed with a wonderful man who saw us through outrageous court battles, restraining orders, stalking and intimidation tactics.

"Fed Up" deserves love and respect, too. But she and her child won't get it from her spouse if she doesn't DEMAND it. I wish her strength, courage and no regrets.

Reborn in Portland, Ore.

I, too, hope that "Fed Up" will take your letter

to heart and find help before her husband's problem escalates to the point that your husband's did. Addiction problems cannot be ignored. If the problem isn't addressed, it doesn't "level off"; it grows worse until the addiction takes over the lives of everyone around the addict. I'm pleased that you finally found the strength to free yourself and your children. Thank you for writing.

Dear Abby:

I'm 14 and my name is "Pearl." I just found out that I might have chlamydia. I really like this guy and I need to know if I should tell him. What should I do? I am a little scared. Please answer soon.

Needs to Know in Lancaster, Calif.

You should be examined by a doctor right away. If you do indeed have chlamydia, your partner must be notified so he can also be treated.

Ask your mother to schedule an appointment for you. If you cannot talk to her about this, then call the county health department and ask for the location of the nearest clinic where you can be treated confidentially. Do not put it off. If you have chlamydia and aren't treated, it could cause fertility problems for you in the future.

Since you are sexually active, it is important that you learn to protect yourself against an unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases so that you are not reinfected or infect others.

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

Both sides vulnerable
NORTH
♠ A 5 2
♥ K Q 9 8 6
♦ 5 4 2
♣ 9 5

WEST
♠ Q J 10
♥ 5 3
♦ K 9 6
♣ 10 8 6 3 2

EAST
♠ 9 8 6 3
♥ A 10 4 2
♦ Q 8 7
♣ Q 7

SOUTH (D)
♠ K 7 4
♥ J 7
♦ A J 10 3
♣ A K J 4

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 NT	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♦	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
3 NT	All Pass		

Opening lead: ♣ 3

"I think we'll ever learn where Cy worked?" Unlucky Louie asked me. Cy the Cynic's former job is a mystery. He won't talk about it—except to give gag answers to queries.

"Were you a gardener, Cy?" "No," he'll reply, "but I once managed a plant."

"How about a marriage counselor?" "No, but I served as a makeup artist."

"Did you raise cattle?" "No, but I was a stock analyst."

When I watched Cy play today's 3NT, I didn't put much stock in his analysis. He took the first club with the king and led the jack of hearts, winning, and a heart to the king and ace.

Cy won the club return, led a spade to dummy and cashed the queen of hearts hopefully. When

West discarded, Cy tried a diamond to his ten. West won and returned a spade, and since Cy couldn't get back to dummy for another diamond finesse, he took only two hearts, two spades, three clubs and a diamond.

Cy says he never captained a fishing boat but spent time as a casting director. How would you cast about for nine tricks?

At Trick Two South leads his seven of hearts to dummy's eight! If East takes the ten, South forces out the ace later and has nine tricks.

If the eight of hearts wins, South can't be sure of setting up the hearts; he next leads a diamond to his ten. If West returns a spade, South takes the king and leads the jack of hearts. East ducks, but South later reaches dummy with the ace of spades for another diamond finesse. When the diamonds lie well, he makes an over-trick.

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Next Week: **Timeline Rhyme Lines**, or **Historical Pairspectives**



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