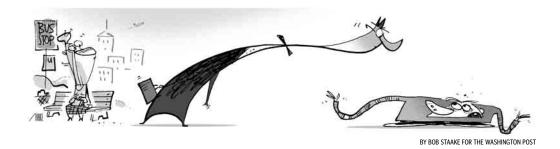
The Style Invitational Week 576: Well, Excuuu<u>use Us!</u>



Being short: "That's just because I'm a twin. My brother stood on my head for nine months.'

Being stingy: "You see, I need to save all my money so that when I die, my estate can pay for a really lavish funeral, for the comfort of my many

This week's contest was suggested jointly by Margaret Bechtel of Annandale and Russell Beland of The Pool Margaret Goes To. The idea is to come up with new excuses for any common human shortcoming or imperfection.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a board game named Loser, "for people who aren't afraid to laugh at their mistakes. And their friends." Donated by Erika Reinfeld of Somerville, Mass., who readily admits that it seems pretty lame," it includes a stack of cards, each asking if the player has done some" loserly thing (e.g., lost his wallet, failed to vote, "had a monster hickey you couldn't hide").

Runners-up all 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 Monday, Sept. 27. 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 Oct. 17. 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 572, in which we asked for limericks based on words beginning with aito ar-, to contribute to the very-long-term "Omnificient English Dictionary in Limerick Form" project. You can soon see many of the entries to this contest, in addition to the winners, at www.oedilf.com. They will no doubt include the several fine verses about the word "anus" that the Empress didn't even try to include here, because the Empress would like to remain an employee of The Washington Post Co.

♦ Fourth runner-up:

To shoot with a bow with the best, Ancient maids cut off part of the chest. Now their mythical name Means a strong, warlike dame: An amazon (Greek for "no breast"). (Louis Spector, Winnetka, III.)

♦ Third runner-up:

Warmongers step up, take a bow, The world's in an unholy row. The big guns are booming And mushroom clouds looming. You've created **apocalypse** now. (Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

♦ Second runner-up:

Now these beetles are marvelous things, In the kingdom of bugs, they're the kings. This is true of them all Except ex-Beatle Paul, Who is **apterous** now—without Wings. (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

♦ First runner-up, the winner of the alligator-claw back scratcher and alligator-head letter opener:

When Reagan and Thatcher shared glory, The press back then missed their love story. Ronnie said she was hot, And believe it or not, Maggie said to him, "I, amatory." (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

♦ And the winner of the Inker: It's in vain that the teenagers try All their **algebra** skills to apply. Though they can, on occasions, Solve *x* in equations, They still haven't figured out y.

(Brendan Beary, Great

♦ Honorable Mentions:

A sentence begins on a track But suddenly changes its tack. Let's put a sleuth on This anacoluthon And—whoa, get a load of that rack! (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

There's a type of bird men used to hail As a burden that meant you would fail. It was called albatross, But with Bush Senior's loss Some have said that it *should* be named quayle.

(Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Just as baby gets bigger each day, So the grocery list grows the same way: It starts off with "Pampers &" Often that ampersand Leads to more money to pay. (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

Said the frog to the princess from Texas: "Would you care for amplexus, Alexis? Though I cannot convince You that I am a prince, Still frogs know how complex human sex is." (Mary Ann Henningsen, Hayward, Calif.)

When the windflower wilts in Gethsemane And the weeds are regaining hegemony, The gardener will turn To the maidenhair fern, With a frond like this, who needs anemone? (Chris Doyle)

His CDs are arranged A to Z And he numbers his clothes 1-2-3. Everything in his mind Is precisely aligned; He is **anal-retentive**, you see. (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

Now you know I won't slip you no jive, But that **andalusite**, man alive! There's no ifs, ands or buts-I've completely gone nuts For this Al₂SiO₅! (Brendan Beary)

Pythagoras, rod and reel dangling, Couldn't keep all his tackle from tangling. His plight he lamented Until he invented A theorem to simplify angling. (Tim Alborn, Washington)

I ask what the deal with my toes is, The doc says it is **ankylosis**. But toes are in front! To be really blunt,

This doc don't know ankles from noses. (Mike Connaghan, Alexandria)

Church and state are like light in a prism: Far more beautiful after the schism. Some take issue with this, And promote antidis-Establishmentarianism. (Dan Seidman, Watertown, Mass.; Seth

You've got funny stuff right in your eye. You can't clean it out—don't even try!

It's just goo, not a tumor, Called the aqueous humor. (What a cornea jokester am I!) (Dave Zarrow)

Lawvers' **archives** hold motions and pleas: Bankers' archives store records of fees. A Realtor's, deeds; A botanist's, seeds; Noah's ark-hives: just one pair of bees. (Paul Cowan, Greensborough, Australia)

Archnemesis

I'll bash in his bwains with a thud Then I'll bathe in his wascally bwud. Then you can constwue That I made bunny stew Or my name is not Elmer Q. Fudd. (Dan Nooter, Washington)

With arithmetic clearly you see What the sum of two numbers will be. With logic it's rife (Unlike in real life, Where one and one tend to make three). (Chris J. Strolin, Belleville, III.)

A fleet can be called an armada. The big one from Spain was tostada. The wind and the Brits Pounded Spain's into bits. It won a big zilch (which means nada). (John Held, Fairfax)

Arrangement can be first to last, Or future, then present, then past. It's the order that matters: Left to right; formers, latters; Or sober, then tipsy, then gassed. (Hamdi Akar, Broad Run)

That gray metal **arsenic** is best To bump off an unwanted pest. Whether rat, bird or mouse, Beetle, cricket or louse . . . Or welcome-outstaying houseguest. (Paul Cowan)

More Honorable Mentions appear on washingtonpost.com.

Next Week: Thine Ad Goest Here, or Ad on a Grecian Urn

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Politic Displays of Affection

he American public has grown too cynical to believe that a politician whose wife gazes at him with rapt adoration in public must be a nice fellow. They figure cannily that the wife has surely heard it all before, so she's faking to make him look good, and they are not to be fooled into thinking this means anything. Or she's just been programmed.

Of course, she can't look bored, either, thus proving once again that being a politician's wife is a no-win situation. (Politicians' husbands are not used in this way, because it would be assumed that they are the brains of the outfit and their wives have been programmed to be out front.)

What this sophisticated public now demands is that politicians make public declarations of love for their wives. Only then can they be deemed nice. And so they do.

"I'm lucky enough to be married to the most wonderful woman in the world!" the politician shouts to the crowd. Wild applause. Then comes a joke or two about how she's really the brains of the outfit. Wild applause. "We've been married for X years!" Wild applause. "Honey, I love you!" he shouts to her. They blow kisses at each other. As soon as they can reunite, they hug and kiss

to wild applause. And they cannot take a step together without locking hands like high-school-

Surely Miss Manners cannot be the only person who finds this in dreadful taste. But maybe she is, judging from all that applause.

She understands that in a society where divorce is common, it is considered an achievement, if not a miracle of selflessness, to keep a marriage going. Also, much as we love gossip, it is a relief to have evidence that there is not yet another scandal brewing.

She approves of the overdue acknowledgement that spouses are often major behind-thescenes factors in the success of a political career. Unless the marriage is a farce, there are bound to have been numerous professional contributions, as well as personal support.

So why does she object to public declarations of marital affection?

Because they are icky.

Exactly because we do believe in the bond of marriage, extolling one's spouse is nearly as gauche as bragging about oneself. The "nearly" is in there because one can modestly admit to being proud when others praise the spouse. To praise one's own spouse to others is a play for reflected glory: "Notice that this wonderful person

The "We can't keep our hands off each other" demonstration is another form of marital bragging: "You may have settled down, but we are spending decades in a honeymoon fever.'

Some leeway is allowed to those actually in the first stages of romantic love, but even they are supposed to exercise some control. Expressing affection in front of others has the unflattering implication of "We wish you weren't here so we could really go at it."

Finally, it doesn't prove anything except an absence of manners. We all know that lack of character is not incompatible with being adoredeven by someone who does have character, more's the pity. And we have seen enough hand-holding couples split for good to suspect that at least some of them let go as soon as we stop watching and applauding.

Dear Miss Manners:

Here is a conundrum faced frequently by would-be gentlemen who travel:

A woman in front of you in the boarding line is towing onto the plane a totally unreasonable amount of carry-on luggage. When she reaches her seat, she discovers, to nobody's surprise, that she can't even lift her suitcase off the floor. What course of action (or inaction) would you suggest for the gentlemen in such a situation?

It depends on whether the gentleman wishes to help the lady with her suitcase or punish her for having brought it aboard. Miss Manners gathers you favor the latter, and is at least grateful that you wish to do it in a gentlemanly way.

In that case, you should spring up and say soothingly, "Here, let me help; that's much too heavy for you." As the lady smiles gratefully, you may add, "I'll get a flight attendant who can check it for you.

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 wife, "Jenny," and I married 12 years ago because she was pregnant. I knew she had been promiscuous as a teenager, but I thought I could cope with it. Now, after two children, I have second thoughts. When we married, Jenny weighed 115 pounds. (She's 5 foot 1.) Now, after two children, she weighs 170 pounds, and her clothes are size

I am frustrated at the fact Jenny cares so little about her appearance. Yes, we all change, and I understand that. But I get furious when I think my wife gave up caring about her appearance when I put the ring on her finger. It looks like she got her man, so now she's complacent. I am insanely jealous because I feel like Jenny wanted to look good when she was chasing boys, but she doesn't

Talking about it and counseling haven't helped. I know these are not healthy feelings, but they are in my heart. I'm thankful for my wife and kids, but I also feel cheated. Please don't tell me that weight gain is biological. There are plenty of thinner moms around. What can I do to help her see my point of view?

Tied to a Heavy Ball and Chain

If counseling hasn't helped, I'm not sure I can, but I'll try. Perhaps your wife's problem isn't complacency. Has it occurred to you that she could be feeling depressed, stressed and trapped? You describe your marriage as more of a shotgun wedding than a love match. She now has two children to raise, and a husband who resents the fact that she wasn't a virgin bride. On top of that, she has put on 55 pounds—and losing that much weight is a daunting challenge.

If you really want your wife to get back in

shape, my advice is to dwell less on what she's eating and more on what's eating her. Stop harping on her past, which she can't change, and start talking about your future and the fact that you want her to be healthy and feeling good about herself. Tell her you love her and keep repeating it. Find activities you can do together that will help her become more physically active and give you time to communicate with each other away from the children. Perhaps then she will be more receptive to making positive changes in her lifestyle.

Dear Abby:

I work in a nursing home. Yesterday there was a note left that said a resident would be going out for dinner with his family, and to have him ready at 1 p.m. and expect him back at 7 p.m.

What would you consider dinner, Abby-lunch or supper? Half the staff consider it the evening meal. the other half consider it the noon meal. We are . .

Curious in Pennsylvania

Depending on the part of the country where you were raised, "dinner" can be either lunch or supper. Where I was raised, "dinner" meant the evening meal. My Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines dinner as "the principal meal of the day." "Supper," as defined by Webster's, is "the evening meal, or a light meal served late in the

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.Dear Abby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

NORTH ♠ Q 4 2 ♥ ÅKQ104 ♦ A8 **EAST 1**0 **♥** J86 ♦ QJ7632 ♣ A 9 4

SOUTH (D) ♠ AK9753 **¥** 2 **♦** K 5 4 ♣ Q 10 8

WEST

♠ J86

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N-S vulnerable

The bidding:

West South North East Pass Pass All Pass Pass 4 Opening lead -Choose it

n Annapolis tour guide dressed in colonial-era garb ■ slipped on the job, broke his wrist and had to go to the hospital. In the ER, the doctor who saw him was startled: "Sir, just how long have you been waiting?"

In today's deal, West gingerly led the 10 of diamonds against South's game—and he's still waiting for his club tricks. South took the top diamonds, ruffed his last diamond in dummy and drew trumps. He next discarded two clubs on dummy's top hearts. When East's jack fell, South had 14 tricks. He settled for 13, throwing his last club on the 10 of hearts.

It wasn't the right time for a "safe" opening lead. North's bidding had promised a good hand with a five-card heart suit and spade support, and West's weak heart holding made it likely that South could use the hearts for discards. West needed to make the most aggressive lead possible, hoping to cash or establish defensive tricks in a hurry.

If West's hearts were, say, Q-J-9-3, he wouldn't be as afraid of the hearts and could afford to lead the passive 10 of diamonds. As it was, West should have led the deuce of clubs.

East takes the ace and returns a club, and West scores his jack and king. Since the powerful dummy suggests the defenders' best chance for a fourth trick is in trumps, West leads the 13th club

When East obliges by "uppercutting" with the 10 of trumps, South must overruff with an honor in his hand, and West's J-8-6 of trumps are worth the setting trick.

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