D2 Sunday, October 3, 2004

The Washington Post

## The Style Invitational Week 578: Ask Backwards

	The	Wynken and	Victoria's
	Plexiglass	Blynken but	secret
	Ceiling	not Nod	broccoli
Const -	Only on Wednesdays and alternate Mondays	The Coveted Loser Muffler	Tom DePlay
	Fahrenheit 9.1	Bill Clinton's right ventricle	Because she's not tall enough
JET /	Cell phones	A 1995 Ford	About as
	that play the	Escort and	much as
	"Moonlight"	a Rolex	Alex Trebek's
	Sonata	Oyster	mustache.

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Back by Loserly** demand after a 49-week absence, it's The Style Invitational's most perniciously recurring contest—this is its 21st appearance—but its first under the Empress. You are on "Jeopardy!" Above are the answers. Send us the questions to any or all of them. First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins one of the most bizarre toys we have ever encountered: a beanbag donkey whose mouth consists of a large zipper, as if it is being gagged. Open this zipper and you pull out an empty shell of a fabric elephant, still attached to the mouth of the donkey. You're supposed to then shake all the beans into the elephant skin and transform it from a donkey into an elephant, à la Zell Miller. But we think it looks way cooler with just the elephant skin hanging out of the donkey's mouth. Or vice versa.

Other runners-up win a 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, Oct. 11. 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. 31. 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 574,** in which we asked you to tell us some practical jokes that are likely to backfire. One common answer: Vote for Nader. A special Blind T-Shirt goes to Roy Ashley of Washington, who sent in a joke involving peanut butter and a toilet that was so disgusting, it grossed out . . . the Czar.

**Third runner-up:** Send your husband to the bank with a wad of cash and a deposit slip after writing on one of the bills: "I have a gun. Don't panic. Just give me all the money." He'll be so puzzled about the teller's reaction until he's finally let in on the joke! (Kyle Hendrickson, Dunkirk)

**Second runner-up:** When a colleague shows up with a new hairstyle, stare concernedly at the person's head and ask, "Have you retained counsel?" (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

#### ♦ First runner-up, the winner of the book "Bad Hair":

Load the kids in the car and tell them you're taking them to Disneyland. Sing Disney tunes along the way. Then drive them to an abandoned parking lot and tell them it has been shut down and demolished. Blame their Sunday school teacher. (Bird Waring, New York)

♦ And the winner of the Inker: If you're white and you're going on a first date with that cute African American co-worker, show up in blackface! (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

## ♦ Honorable Mentions:

Once you and your wife are ready to make a baby, keep sneaking birth control pills into her orange juice every day. After three months of practically nonstop effort—the activity increasing by the month as the desperation increases—you can both have a big laugh and cancel her appointment with the fertility clinic. (Cynthia Simonson, Potomac)

## **MISS MANNERS**

Judith Martin

# A Collision Discourse

t seems un-American to have etiquette restrictions on discussing politics informally, among friends, colleagues and anyone else who will stand still long enough. How else are the citizens supposed to thrash out the plethora of complex issues of our time and arrive at judicious and reasoned decisions?

Well, we could study one another's T-shirts and bumper stickers. We could glean understanding from those who shout down candidates before anyone hears what they have to say, and those who start cheering them before anyone hears what they have to say. Or we can just snap out opinions at one another, and remark upon the stupidity of anyone who doesn't agree.

Since this is what we do anyway, it strikes Miss Manners that etiquette hardly needs to caution that political conversation can be volatile. Conversation? What conversation?

When was the last time you heard political talk that included such phrases as "You do have a point there" or "I hadn't thought of that" or "Tell me more about how that would work"?

Miss Manners can sense the derision felt for these wimpy statements. Why would you say such things unless you didn't know what you were talking about? Anyway, you don't win by making the other person look smart. And you certainly don't win by showing yourself to be so unsure of your beliefs that you can be talked out of them.

She doesn't doubt that this assessment is true for people who are running for office. What puzzles her is why the electorate is more interested in demonstrating that it already knows everything than in delving for information and exchanging ideas.

Perhaps it is because we are so used to observing and participating in conflicts in which sides are chosen ahead of time, anything short of total endorsement constitutes disloyalty, and the object is to win. In law, sports, debates, and business and international negotiations, partisanship is a given.

Even then, the particular rules that apply mandate that each side be allotted a fair chance, limit the tactics that can be used, and require a show of respect for the opposition and for the presiding authority. No one believes that this represents true open-mindedness, but the forms

- provide order and dignity that prevent the proceedings from deteriorating into melees.

Candidates, their staffs, and voters who have made up their minds should take the same approach. One reason for etiquette's wariness about political discourse is that they often don't. Respect for opposing views is in short supply these days.

But if there weren't a great many people reserving judgment, we could all go to bed early on Election Night. These are the people whom etiquette hates to prevent from talking politics. In theory, they could trade information and insights, and all come out the wiser.

The practice, however, is miserable. Gentle Readers report being hounded by acquaintances and strangers declaring and demanding views, berating the opposition and belittling their supporters.

So perhaps Miss Manners needn't put a ban on discussing politics—but only on political polemics, posturing, prying and engaging others in conversations they do not want to have.

#### Dear Miss Manners:

I was told that in the old days, the initial engraved on a woman's silver flatware was the first initial of her maiden name because it was generally supplied by the bride's parents. The person who told me this is very believable and a historian by profession. However, when I tell people that this is what I've heard, they seem surprised to hear that it's not the groom's last name. Could you tell me what the rule was, if any?

Believe your believable historian. In the old days, a lady would collect her silver long before marriage, and, not yet knowing the bridegroom, had her own initials put on it. Miss Manners considers this an even wiser practice in the new days, when the lady might want to collect back her silver after the marriage.

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 met "Monique" six years ago and immediately fell hard for her. We dated for about a month. At the time she was also seeing someone else. Then one night Monique called me and said she was only going to date one guy, and it wasn't me.

Three and a half years later, she called me out of the blue and said she wanted to see me again. I was thrilled. We dated for a month; then Monique told me she didn't want to have a relationshin. I Abby, I was raised to help ladies, especially those living alone. I was taught that when help was needed to fix a flat tire or to do some heavy lifting, to step forward without being asked. Has the world changed so much that I was off base in doing this?

Your comments would be appreciated. We live in a small neighborhood where most people help each other and get along well. However, their reactions really bothered me. Hurt Neighbor, Coweta, Okla.

tents with Silly String. Everybody gets a kick out of Silly String, and your friend will be laughing so hard, he'll be gasping for breath. (Brian Feldman, Chantilly)

Use herbicide to spell your favorite teacher's name on the football field. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

When cooking for vegetarians, shape the tofu like the animal of your choice and impale it with a fork before serving. This way your guests know you're sympathetic to their cause. Bonus: Use herbs to garnish the face with a stricken expression. (Erika Reinfeld, Somerville, Mass.)

Send your wife a clown-face ice cream sundae to cheer her up at work. Write a romantic poem on an oversize card: "Chocolate is brown, Cool Whip is white, I'm ready to jump your hot body tonight!' (Erika Reinfeld)

Tip for the college-bound: Admissions boards are impressed by funny—nay, humorous, jocular, waggish—designs you can make on the SAT answer sheet (heh heh, "Number Two pencil"!). (Mike Connaghan, Alexandria)

Phone the Amish and ask them if their refrigerators are running. Get it? They don't even have refrigerators! (Russell Beland, Springfield)

After removing your patient's mole, tell her, "You'll never believe what that mole really was" and hold up a dead cockroach with tweezers. After she comes to, she'll thank you. After all, laughter is the best medicine! (Jean Sorensen, Herndon; David Iscoe, Washington)

For kids: Next time your dog throws up, put it in a baggie with some crumpled loose-leaf paper and bring it to school. Your teacher will howl with laughter when you tell her, "See? My dog really did eat my homework!" Then finally maybe *you'll* be the teacher's pet. (Jean Sorensen)

During a funeral, where the minister asks those rhetorical questions like "Why do good people sometimes die young?" leap to your feet and squeal, "Oooooo, ooooo, I know, I know. Pick me!" (Peter Metrinko, Plymouth, Minn.)

Instead of placing a tack in a teacher's chair, set up a dirty hypodermic needle. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

Once a week or so, take in the seam a little around the fly of your husband's underwear. When you can't stand his ego anymore, tell him. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

Go up to homeless people sleeping on the street and see if you can give them hickeys without waking them up! (Russell Beland) Send a coded message in a Style Invitational entry that threatens national security. Then call the FBI and CIA and let them know that more will follow unless your entry wins. (Wayne Rodgers, Satellite Beach, Fla.)

Tell your wife, when she's not out working one of her three part-time retail jobs, that you've quit your own job so you can spend more time with her. (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

For Halloween, give the kids two malted milk balls attached to a big Tootsie Roll. (Stephen Dudzik)

At a wedding reception, make a toast to the groom for being a good sport and going through with the wedding even though they found out the bride wasn't pregnant after all. (Jefferson Baker, Odenton)

When your toddler wants to push the button in the elevator, let him. As soon as he does so, scream, "Not *that* one! That's the one that makes the elevator blow up!" Little kids get so excited about getting to hear a big noise. (Tom Witte)

When the female cop pulls you over for a Breathalyzer, say "Having me blow a little tube for a woman—that's role reversal for ya!" (Gary Patishnock, Laurel)

S'pose you've got these two blokes in your band, and one plays lefty. Right before the show, switch their guitars! Great stuff, this. (P. Best, Liverpool, England) (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

On your daughter's eighth birthday, tell her that her biological parents will be arriving later in the day to take her back home. (Kyle Hendrickson)

To break the tension at your child's next soccer game, bring a whistle and blow it just as the opposing team is about to score. The soccer moms will think it's hilarious. (Marleen May, Rockville)

E-mail the executive editor of The Washington Post informing him that you have "tracked down the vermin that called the Empress of The Style Invitational a whore" and that, per her instructions, his two front teeth are in the mail. Then sit back and wait for your next ink. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

**And Last:** Send in a poem to The Style Invitational that says: In the year two thousand four / We lost our Czar and got a . . . wait, I'm not going to pull that one again. (Elliott Schiff, Allentown, Pa.)

Next Week: T Hee Hee, or Lose Threads

was hurt again.

Seven months later my phone rang. It was Monique saying she wanted to see me. She came over and said we should get married because her daughters need to live in a better neighborhood. She now says that was a "crazy" thing for her to say, because it started our "third relationship" off on a bad note, with me wondering if she loves me or my house.

It has now been more than a year. Monique says she loves me and wants commitment. She is 30 and has been divorced three times. I love her, but the way she treated me in the past makes me question whether I should trust her. Should I throw caution to the wind and propose anyway?

Crazy About Her In Mobile, Ala.

No. Pay attention to your misgivings. They are the voice of your intuition trying to warn you. If you are determined to marry her, do not propose without first having consulted a lawyer and drafted a prenuptial agreement. It won't save you from the risk of heartache, but it could save you from economic disaster later on.

#### Dear Abby:

I am in my 70s. My wife and I live in a house across the street from two middle-aged ladies. Recently some limbs from one of their trees fell onto their lawn, so I went into their yard to remove them. Rather than welcoming my help, they were upset that I went into their yard without being invited. You weren't off base; you are a gentleman of the old school. Your neighbors, however, may have been raised to be independent and not to rely on a man's help for anything.

Feeling as they do, they should have posted a "No Trespassing" sign on their property. However, now that you know how they feel about their "turf," don't go into their yard unless invited—if then.

### Dear Abby:

I have a short-sleeve red "church" dress. What color shoes should I wear with it? It's almost impossible to find a red shoe that matches. Should I wear black or tan/taupe?

Kimmie in Auburn, Ala.

During the spring and summer, accessorizing with tan or white would be attractive. In the winter, accessorizing with black would be acceptable. Or take your dress to your shoe repair shop and ask if a pair of your shoes could be dyed to match it. (I have done it and was very pleased with the results.)

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. © 2004, Universal Press Syndicate

### **BRIDGE** | Frank Stewart

live in a typical small Southern town, a jewel set in the west Alabama countryside. The phone book has one yellow page, people ask how you are—and actually listen when you tell them—and there's no place to go where you shouldn't.

In today's deal, South went someplace he shouldn't have—and got into trouble. When West led the king of diamonds against four spades, South won and saw that with luck in trumps, he might have only one loser. So South led a trump at Trick Two.

When West discarded, South wanted to reverse course. But East took dummy's jack with the queen, cashed the ace and led the 10, sacrificing his third trump trick but drawing two of South's trumps for one. South then took in all five trumps, a heart, a diamond and two clubs. Down one.

East could have achieved the same result by exiting with a heart after he took the queen of trumps. When South tried to ruff hearts in dummy, East could overruff the third heart and cash the ace of trumps to hold South to nine tricks.

South should leave the trumps alone. Since he has no side-suit losers, he can afford three losers in trumps. What South must not do is let the defense draw some of his trumps.

At Trick Two, South starts a crossruff: ace of hearts, heart ruff, diamond ruff, heart ruff. East can overruff with the 10, but if he leads a diamond, South can continue his crossruff effectively. Nor can East prevail by leading the ace and queen of trumps; then South loses two trumps and one trick in the end.

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The Washington Post





## The bidding: South West North

• A

🗣 A 3

SouthWestNorthEast1  $\bigstar$ 2  $\heartsuit$ 4  $\bigstar$ All PassOpening lead:  $\blacklozenge$  K

Both sides vulnerable

🔶 K J 5 4 2

🗣 K 10 6 4

SOUTH (D)

98763

♥ A J 5 4 2

EAST

AQ10

♦ J976

🐥 J 9 5 2

♥Q9

NORTH

♥ 3

WEST

None

🐥 Q 8 7

**♥** K 10 8 7 6

♦ KQ1043

♦ 852