

The Style Invitational

Week 585: It's Parody Time



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

O Condi, you're faithful, loyal to your gov'ment, Now go mark our territ'ry around the world ...
(To "O Come, All Ye Faithful")

The results for **this week's contest** will appear during Christmas week, so let us offer, in the holiday spirit of goodwill, some advice—as constructive and unifying as Loserly suggestions always are—to our nation's leaders (or the loyal opposition) as we prepare for the next four years. This advice will be set to the tune of some winter holiday song, either religious or secular. It will not be stolen, Grinchlike, from other parodies of Christmas carols. Versions of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" are subject to combination with other people's entries.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets a large wall-hanging craft-type item depicting a rabbit wearing a straw picture hat. But, see, the rabbit itself is *made* out of another straw picture hat. You could hang this on your front door, wreath-style. Of course, you could also hang up six dead fish on your front door, wreath-style. Who are we to say what you should put on your front door?

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, Nov. 29. 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 Dec. 21. 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 Scott Campisi of Wake Village, Tex.



(CECIL J. CLARK, ARLINGTON)



(MARY MCCULLEN, GETTYSBURG, PA.)

Special Announcement: The Honorable Mentions for this week's contest—and possibly last week's, depending on our remaining stock—will each receive one of the All-New Loser Magnets pictured here. Well, okay, they're not technically All-New. They feature the same pictures by Bob Staake as the All-Old Loser Magnets, just in different colors (and a new little crown on the little lady, there). But they do have All-New slogans, which the Empress lifted from the ranks of losing entries for Week 536 (for the back of the Inker) and Week 575 (for the back of the Loser T-Shirt), respectively.

Report from Week 581, in which we asked you to think of evil or stupid practices that a business might perpetrate. About half of you took this as an opportunity to vent hair-tearingly about actual insanities you've witnessed, including the ever-popular waiting on hold with tech support because you can't connect to the Internet, and hearing a repeated recording directing you to a Web site; and numerous sightings of drive-through bank lanes that featured Braille keypads. The remainder were fanciful—at least as far as we know: The Empress cannot guarantee that there isn't some sign on some bus somewhere that says, "Illiterate? For help, write to . . ."

◆ Third runner-up: True story: I once went to an Italian restaurant where the restrooms were marked *Donne* and *Uomini*. I figured that *donne* was the plural of *don*, and so . . . (Wayne Rodgers, Satellite Beach, Fla.)

◆ Second runner-up: Peep shows that won't start when you put the money in because "I think you know why." (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

◆ First runner-up, the winner of the SpongeBob SquarePants sponge, plus a Loser pen: Replace the candy in the checkout lane with kittens and puppies. (Stanley Halbert, Lawrence, Kan.)

◆ And the winner of the Inker: "Due to the increase in Metro ridership, all commuters will now be required to make reservations at least 24 hours in advance. Please arrive at the station at least 30 minutes before scheduled departure to receive your seating/standing assignment." (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

◆ Honorable Mentions: IMAGINED EVILS

Installing automobile GPS devices that give directions in a choice of two voices—Porky Pig and Betty Boop. (Peter Metrinko, Plymouth, Minn.)

A large scale in a restaurant with an arrow pointing to a mark that says, "You must weigh less than this to order the Triple Death by Chocolate dessert." (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Certain confessional booths designated for only mortal sins. (Chuck Smith)

Furniture stores institute a "you sit, you buy" policy. (Eric Murphy, Chicago)

Restaurants suggest a tip of 5-pi percent. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park; Danny Bravman, St. Louis)

"If you are deaf, press 1 . . ." (Maja Keech, New Carrollton)

Sell each produce item in a different novel wall. Grapes: 4 cents each. Coconuts: \$7.23 per cubic decimeter. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Along with the Levitra prescription, include condoms with wrappers that take four hours to open. (Josh Borken, Bloomington, Minn.)

Emergency number is 1-800-271-8684; Press 1 for medical emergency, Press 2 for fire . . . For an electrical fire, press 1; for burning wood, press 2 . . . (Art Grinath)

Encourage people to pay for debt consolidation services with a credit card. (Art Grinath)

Display canned tomatoes with the canned pears and peaches instead of with canned vegetables, since, technically, they ARE fruit. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

A housing developer could honor world culture by naming all the streets in a suburban subdivision after, say, famous Indians and Serbs, e.g., Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Boulevard, Željko Joksimović Way. (Peter Metrinko)

Free cold medicine with the rental of any heavy machinery. (Russell Beland)

Pay toilets also have coin slots inside for pay toilet paper. (Chuck Smith)

Grocery stores could put Aunt Jemima pancake mix in the ethnic-foods section. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

And the first-ever Anti-Invitational winner: Add a half-cent to every price at dollar stores in Virginia so that, with the 4.5 percent sales tax, each item costs exactly \$1.05. (Russell Beland)

TRUE EVILS

Large-size bras are always hanging on the lowest, almost-on-the-floor racks, causing us top-heavy shoppers to have to bend over, losing our balance. This is evil. (Christy Miller, Charlottesville)

Drive-through liquor stores: for when you're too drunk to walk. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

Hey, ladies, don't you just love those feminine-product disposal units stuck at nose level right next to the toilets in public bathroom stalls? (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

When applying for a job as an English teacher for foreign students, a friend of mine was handed a form that said at the top: "If you are unable to read English, please ask for a translator." (Dot Yufer, Newton, W.Va.)

In a warehouse store in Nebraska a while back, I wandered into the feminine-products area. And there, on a support beam, between the tampons and the sanitary napkins, was a shrink-wrap/card display of ice picks. (Don Critchfield, Washington)

In a CVS, the sign over the aisle read: Candy / Snacks / Diet Aids (Jessica Lynne Mathews, Arlington)

I like how supermarkets now sell freshly brewed coffee—and have those little platforms by the checkout keypad slanted just enough for your coffee to slide off while you pay. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

Banks are happy to lend you money when you don't need it. (Jack Cackler, Falls Church)

Publish KidsPost in the same section as Tell Me About It, The Style Invitational and stories about sex toys. (Russell Beland)

And Last: From the Metro section of the Oct. 24 Washington Post: "Maryland education officials have notified Prince George's County that it cannot use federal money to provide extra tutoring because a large number of its public schools are falling behind under the No Child Left Behind law." (Rosie Behr, Baltimore)

Next Week: **Perversery Rhymes, or Where the @\$% Is Thumbkin?**

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Halving It All

If the holiday gerunds—decorating, cooking, shopping, stuffing—seem daunting, it is probably because you have neglected to do the first one, and have skipped to doing the last.

The last is grouching. The first is pruning. Many people who neglect their ordinary duties to friends, relatives, acquaintances, colleagues and society during the year try to make up for it during the holidays. In a frenzy, they feel they must send cards to all the people with whom they failed to keep in touch all year, throw parties whose guest lists consist of those whose hospitality they failed to reciprocate all year, and give presents or money to all others whom they have disregarded all year.

It becomes too much for them. So they don't get it all done and proceed right to the grouching about the burden of celebrating what are, after all, supposed to be holidays.

Miss Manners, who has run up no such debts, is saving her sympathy for those who also keep up during the year, but feel extra-expansive at the holidays. They have understandably accumulated a great many friends this way, and enjoy doing special things at this time. And they have wider circles of acquaintanceship, and use the holidays for an annual check-in.

They also might find that it adds up to too much. It is on their behalf that Miss Manners makes the following recommendations for holiday pruning.

Cards: Drop from your list anyone of whom you have no mental picture. An out-of-date picture—the way they looked when you were in college, or when they lived across the street—will do, but if you cannot conjure up any, you needn't greet them. They are probably equally puzzled about you, only responding to your greetings. When cards arrive a week or more after you sent yours every year, they are trying to drop you, and you should let them.

Greetings from commercial establishments and from people who do mass mailings to those they hardly know may also be safely dropped. These are people who want to send you their message, not to hear yours.

Presents: People who do not enjoy receiving presents indicate this by ignoring the ones they

are given, criticizing their presents, asking the donor to exchange them or trying to head off the impulse to choose presents for them by posting their shopping lists. This distaste should be respected by desisting from the practice.

Guests: People who show up at annual parties and are not heard from the rest of the year are clearly making duty appearances of which they should be relieved by the host. Even inquiries about why their invitations were not forthcoming should be interpreted as mere attempts at politeness on the part of people who clearly do not yearn for one's company.

These measures may seem harsh, but Miss Manners considers it to be in the spirit of the season to be thoughtful of others. And that includes the thoughtfulness of leaving people alone when they are not grateful to be remembered.

Dear Miss Manners:

I dress very modestly, for a variety of religious and moral reasons. I have no problem explaining why I dress as I do to those who are really interested.

However, I can tell quickly when someone is trying to pick a verbal fight or start a political or religious debate in a place where that would not be appropriate. In these cases I'd rather not explain. How do I politely respond without explaining?

What is the question to which you need a response? "How come you don't dress more lewdly?"

The answer to that would be a frozen stare. However, if you are referring to a particular symbol, such as wearing a headscarf, you need only say pleasantly, "It's my custom," and, to any follow-up questions, "because it is my custom." Miss Manners still recommends practicing that frozen stare in case of prolonged questioning or speculation.

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 am a gay man, out of the closet at work, at college and with friends. I'm out to everyone except my family, which has made it clear that being gay is unacceptable.

I spent years trying to change my sexual orientation, which I now know to be about as achievable as changing the color of my eyes.

I don't know how to come out to my family, or if I even should. The only family member who knows said, "They'll only hear what they want to hear, and they don't want to hear this."

A friend recently asked me what would happen if I were in a relationship. Would I hide forever or come out by saying, "Folks, meet my boyfriend!" He said I should come out for ME, not for them.

Right now I'm confused. One of my family members is disabled and I don't know if the news would kill him. What's the wisest thing to do?

Almost Out in Canton, Ohio

In all the time I have been associated with this column—and it's decades—I have never heard of anyone "dying" from being told that a family member is gay. In fact, the family usually has had some inking by the time the person chooses to say it.

In your case, the "wisest thing to do" would be to contact Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays and request information about how to come out to your family. At the same time, ask for literature that will help your family understand that sexual orientation isn't something a person "chooses" on a lark, nor is it something for which a person should be punished. PFLAG can be reached at www.pflag.org; or by e-mail, info@pflag.org; or at 1726 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

I hope members of your family are willing to

broaden their perspective. If not, the loss will be theirs, because it appears you already have other sources of emotional support. Good for you, because people who are happy and involved with others live fuller, more productive lives than those who stay locked in emotional isolation.

Dear Abby:

I'm a widowed 48-year-old grandmother, raising three beautiful grandchildren, who has been lucky enough to find a really special man I'll call "Dale."

I have had four major relationships in my life. The last two have ended with their deaths. The first—my late husband—died in a work-related car accident. The second died of an aortic aneurysm.

Dale has proposed marriage and I said yes; however, my doubts are linked to the adage, "Things come in threes," and I'm afraid I'll lose him too. If this seems silly, I'm sorry. I loved both of the men who died, and after the last one I swore never to love like this again. However, God says, "Never say never." Can you help me?

Gun-Shy in Phoenix

Consider this: The only thing sillier than bowing to your superstitions would be to sacrifice a mutual love out of fear. You can't change what happened in the past, but if you think positive and concentrate on the present, the future will take care of itself. In a sense, we all place our bets and take our chances because in life there are no guarantees. The secret is to think positive.

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

N-S vulnerable			
NORTH (D)			
♠ A 10 9 8			
♥ Q J 3			
♦ 5			
♣ A Q J 8 2			
WEST			
♠ J 6 2			
♥ K 10 9 7 5 4			
♦ A J 4			
♣ 3			
EAST			
♠ K 7 5			
♥ 6			
♦ Q 10 9 3 2			
♣ K 10 6 4			
SOUTH			
♠ Q 4 3			
♥ A 8 2			
♦ K 8 7 6			
♣ 9 7 5			
The bidding:			
North	East	South	West
1 ♣	Pass	1 NT	2 ♥
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Dbf	All Pass	
Opening lead: ♥ 7			

Today, players from all over the world enjoy bridge on the Internet. Many sites exist, but today's deal arose on OKbridge, the first site and still the biggest and best.

When North-South got to 3NT, East doubled because he knew South wouldn't be able to set up North's clubs. West led a heart, and South put up dummy's queen and continued with the ace and queen of clubs. East ducked, and South next led the eight of spades.

East played low, and South misguessed by letting the eight ride. Perhaps South hoped West had the king of spades and East, therefore, had the ace of diamonds, but West took the jack of spades and returned a spade. When South finessed, East won and led the ten of diamonds, and South went down

three, losing 800 points.

All four players were experts (world-class players practice on OKbridge), and many kibitzers were present—and speculating about who was at fault for the result. Did North or South misbid?

My view was that North's competitive bid of three clubs was questionable, but South's cue bid of three hearts, looking for 3NT, was an error. South's 1NT had already limited his hand. When he bid three hearts, it meant North had a choice between defending against two hearts and playing at game.

OKbridge offers its 19,000 members services including daily tournaments, a player-rating system, exhibition matches and an online magazine. Go to www.okbridge.com.

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