

The Style Invitational

Week 586: God's Will (and Won't)



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

If God hadn't wanted us to be hugely obese, God wouldn't have invented the Clapper.

This week's contest comes from longtime Loser Roy Ashley of Washington. In the tradition of that classic example of short-sightedness, "If God had wanted us to fly, He would have given us wings," Roy suggests that you complete either of the following:

If God hadn't wanted us to —, God wouldn't have —.
If God had wanted us to —, God would have —.

Warning: This is already well-explored territory. The Empress had better not receive stolen quotes from Dave Barry ("If God had wanted us to spend our time fretting about the problems of home ownership, He would never have invented beer") or from innumerable Web sites ("If God wanted me to touch my toes, He would have put them on my knees"). If you think you may have heard it somewhere, don't share it here.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a 2005 "Nuns Having Fun" wall calendar, which includes photos of 1950s-era nuns in full habit who are playing tug-of-war, piloting a speedboat, sharing smokes, etc.

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, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 6. 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. 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 Russell Beland of Springfield.

Report from Week 582, in which we asked for updated, edgy nursery rhymes or children's songs: A large number of entries had Jack and Jill going for water and ending up with daughter; all of the following, while perhaps not classic, seem to be at least novel.

Third runner-up: Hey diddle diddle, the admen will fiddle With products that some will impugn. That's why they now call 'em "dried plums" When they used to call 'em "prune." (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

Second runner-up: Jack Sprat was getting fat, His wife said, "Lose the gut!" His corset laced, he lost the waist and grew a giant butt. (Jim Mall, Chicago)

Honorable Mentions: Barry smoke crack and I don't care, Barry smoke crack and I don't care, Barry smoke crack and I don't care, Elect him anyway. (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

To Wal-Mart, to Wal-Mart, my town's only store. I swear that there used to be others before. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

To market, to market, to buy a fat hog, "We're sorry, your congressman's out for a jog." (Jim Mall)

(I.) "Jack," said Jill, "I'm on the pill, With condoms don't you bother." Jack believed, but was deceived. Now Jack's a brand-new father. (Walt Johnston, Woodstock, Md.)

(II.) George and Dick took out a stick To slay the Evil Axis. And now, my dears, there's four more years For lowering our taxes. (Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

(III.) John and John have now withdrawn And one went to Nantucket. John fell down and lost the crown, And John drawled, "Well, just [bleep]!" (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

Bye baby bunting, Daddy's gone a-hunting. Gone to get some crinoline To wrap the baby's bunting in. (No animals were hurt in the construction of this nursery rhyme.) (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Little Osama sent in a bomba And racism now has found sway, We think that a turban is clearly disturbin', And no one recalls Tim McVeigh. (Seth Brown)

"Marion Barry, quite contrary, How did your legend grow?" He smoked and he snorted, and then he retorted, "Why, I've been framed by a ho." (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Ring around Fallujah We hate to have to noodge yah Ashes, ashes, we'll burn your town! (Dan Blitz, Gaithersburg)

Calista has no body fat And Kate is really lean, And so betwixt them both They weigh 'bout one-eighteen. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Mary had a little limb, She needed a prosthetic, But her health plan wouldn't pay. Now isn't that pathetic? (Peter Metrisko, Plymouth, Minn.)

I'm a little G-spot, short and stout. Where am I hiding? Come find out. When I get all steamed up hear her shout: Find me now or just get out! (Scott Campisi)

Monday's child is none too bright, Tuesday's child is midmlin', Wednesday's child is ADD, Pump him full of Ritalin. (Peter Metrisko)

There was a crooked man and he had a crooked smile, An undisclosed agenda was his crooked little style. He made us all afraid of each person in the world, Afraid that any minute we'd be dipped in oil and berled. (John Conti, Norfolk, Mass.)

Ding dong bell, Someone's in the well. But it's a family paper, So her name I cannot tell. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts All on a summer's day, The Knave of Hearts, he stole the tarts And lived to rue the day. The Queen of Hearts, through unwashed parts, Was spreading plague around. The Knave of Heart's bubonic warts Soon put him in the ground. (Jeff Brechlin)

Deedle deedle dumpling, Private John Went to Iraq without armor on. Now it's one leg off and one leg on, But Rumsfeld's still at the Pentagon. (Jack Cackler, Falls Church)

The itsy bitsy camera went up the water spout, On came the shower, and washed the camera out. "Aah!" screamed the coeds, stampeding for the door. And the techno-savvy pervert went back to jail once more. (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

I love you, you love me, we're a Happy Family With two nice dads and a little boy and girl And that just makes some Christians hurl. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

Peter Piper packeted, u . . . Peter Piper picketed, u . . . Peter Piper pocketuded, u . . . Wait, I'm not finished! (G.W.B., Washington) (Jack Cackler)

The nurse takes the cow, The nurse takes the cow, Santorum said it would come to this, The nurse takes the cow. (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie, Dissed the girls and made them cry. When the boys came out to play, Georgie Porgie said, "Hey, I got 61 percent of the white male vote, so who cares about a bunch of whining feminists anyway?" (Jack Cackler)

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Present Company Excepted

"You're not paying attention to me!" As an accusation made by a parent, lover, teacher or boss, this used to be a serious charge. It led to the following pithy exchange:

- "I was, too." "Then what did I just say?" "That I wasn't paying attention." "No, before that." "Before that?" "Yes, before that." "Don't you remember?"

"I'm asking if you do." But by this time, the accuser didn't remember exactly, either, and so the original discourse was resumed with the understanding that the wool-gatherer was on notice to look alert.

As this system worked fairly well, Miss Manners is astonished that parents, teachers, lovers and bosses now seem to be admitting defeat. At meetings and in classrooms, restrictions against using telephones and personal keyboard devices are being eased. Parents and lovers who used to express outrage at those who so much as diverted their gaze are more likely to say wearily, "Oh, go ahead," when told, "Let me just check my messages."

Why should their children, students, partners and employees pay attention when in possession of electronic alternatives? Those who are ignored may not put it that way, but they concede that modern distractions are more formidable than previous ones, which were limited to the solitary pursuits of doodling and daydreaming or the social ones of whispering and eye-rolling.

Miss Manners is puzzled at this acceptance of being snubbed to one's face. There is hardly a more direct insult than the demonstration that anything—even a solitary game, or an unknown messenger—would be better than having to endure listening to what is being said.

Acquiescence on the part of the speaker strikes her as evidence of a lack of confidence—but of a sort that should not be confused with desirable humility. The society having accepted the idea that nothing is worthwhile unless it is entertaining, people are naturally worried about their ratings. Why wasn't the parental lecture or the classroom exercise so enthralling as to hold its audience spellbound?

The argument that banning electronic distractions is unenforceable speaks to the same misplaced insecurity. Relatives and others with mere personal ties have been imbued with the idea that nothing is more important than work, the neglect of which would have dire consequences, so the necessity of keeping up with work trumps any claims they may have. Meanwhile, bosses and teachers have been imbued with the idea that nothing is more important than family, who are likely to suffer dire consequences unless they are permitted to

keep in constant touch. Whether any of the slighted individuals is worth anyone's attention, Miss Manners cannot say. Statistically, she would guess that the chances of real-life talk being at a higher level than most e-mail and voicemail is pretty good.

But she can and does say that it is rude to ignore someone who is present in favor of someone who is not. Unless it is out of consideration to give that person a chance to check his or her own messages in the hope of finding more interesting company.

Dear Miss Manners:

On an RSVP there is a request to reply by a certain date. Under this line there is a line to write my name, but the line always starts with a preprinted "M." What is the purpose of this and how is it to be used? I would really appreciate an answer.

So would the hosts, to the extent that they have all but written it out for you. In a generous burst of erroneous formality, they have even provided the first letter of your presumed honorific, Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms. In a less charitable mood, they threatened you with a deadline.

Personally, Miss Manners answers formal invitations correctly, with her own little hand. But all you have to do to use the card is to add what letters you like to the "M" and add your name.

Dear Miss Manners:

My husband passed away just after last year's holidays, in January. There are some people I hear from very seldom, but definitely at Christmas. First, is it proper for me to send holiday greetings when I have been widowed less than a year? Second, how do I inform others of his passing?

It doesn't seem proper to just write inside the card (if I'm sending it) but I wondered if I should have a small card or note to include with the Christmas greeting that informs them of my husband's passing.

You may certainly be in touch with your acquaintances at Christmas, and you should absolutely let them know about your husband. But that is the reverse order of importance.

A Christmas card is not the proper means by which to announce a death. Even a religious one announces itself as primarily celebratory. Miss Manners recommends that you write plain notes telling your sad news and wishing your friends the best.

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 9-year-old stepson, "Bryan," is turning into a feminine little boy. He knows all about girly products and what is on sale at the mall. Bryan's mother treats him like a baby. All they do at their house is sit around and watch TV. She has no friends, and neither does Bryan. He does not get involved with anything; he is exactly like his mother.

When Bryan is at our house, we try to get him involved in activities, but the boy is lazy and doesn't want to participate. Then he tells his mother that his father yells at him. My husband does yell, but only to get Bryan off his butt to do something. The result is Bryan wants to spend very little time with us because of his mother's constant babying. At our house, he has chores and we make him help with things. At her house, she does everything for him.

How can we make Bryan less feminine and involve him with friends and activities? "Wicked" Stepmom in Pennsylvania

It is a parent's job to help a child be the best that he (or she) can be. That does not mean the father remaking the child in his own image, and that may be what the boy is resisting. Bryan is not particularly "masculine," and he's not interested in what you and your husband are trying to force him into. Your insistence on trying to make him fit your mold may be what is driving him away.

Instead of yelling at him to get "off his butt," if you need his help with chores, say exactly that. ("Bryan, I need your help with something.") And since he isn't interested in the usual "boy things," perhaps it's time you and your husband expose the boy to art, music and dance to see what does turn him on.

If none of the above does the trick, then some professional counseling for the three of you to es-

ablish a healthier level of communication is in order. You may be able to help Bryan be more social, but don't count on changing the core of who he is.

Dear Abby:

My wedding is scheduled for the fall of next year. My parents are paying for the whole thing. My problem is my grandmother. She has never shown any interest in me and doesn't know me from a hole in the wall. She has been verbally abusive to my father throughout his entire life. She even told him once that he was a "mistake" and she didn't even want to have him.

I do not want this woman at my wedding, but I know my father wants her there. My dad feels that since I am her only granddaughter, she should be present. I have nothing but anger toward her because of the way she has treated my father and her indifference toward me.

Who should decide whether the mean old bag will attend? Since my parents are paying, does my father get the final say? Oh, did I mention that my mother does not want Granny there, either? How should this be handled? Hates Granny in Maryland

My advice is to be a lady and be gracious. Your father has his reasons for wanting his mother to come to the wedding. Please find it in your heart to grant his wish without giving him further heartburn. On your wedding day, you will be so busy with your wedding party and your husband, you'll hardly even know the woman is there.

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

Table showing card distribution for NORTH, WEST, EAST, and SOUTH (D) with suit and rank symbols.

The bidding: South West North East
1 NT Pass Pass
All Pass
Opening lead — ♠ 7

"I feel like I'm diagonally parked in a parallel universe," Unlucky Louie told me. "When I have a judgment decision in the bidding, whatever I do is wrong."

Louie sat North (needless to say) in today's deal and wound up double-parked. When Louie heard his partner open 1NT, he passed, not wanting to scream before he was hurt. But East doubled, and two passes followed.

"Would you have run to two spades?" Louie asked me.

"Your hand should take a trick or two at spades," I replied cautiously, "but won't take any at no-trump."

Louie slunk away, and I suspected he'd passed—and had gotten a parking ticket. I got the full story from Ed, our best player, who'd been West. When Ed led a low heart against 1NT doubled, East won and shifted to the six of dia-

monds—by no means an obvious play. Ed won and returned a diamond, and East rattled off five more diamonds as Ed pitched three clubs and a spade. Next came a heart, and Ed cashed the queen, king and eight. East threw the seven of spades.

South, with room for three cards, thought he'd better keep the K-Q of spades, hence he let go the K-Q-J of clubs. West then led a club, forcing out the ace, and when East took the ace of spades next, he had a club to cash. Down six, minus 1,700 points.

"If Louie runs to two spades," Ed sighed, "he may not even be doubled. Best defense beats him two tricks—we can take three hearts and two diamonds, and then a third diamond from East lets me score the 10 of trumps—but Louie loses 200 points at worst."

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Next Week: Mess With Our Heads, or Boldface Lies