

The Style Invitational

Week 591: Dead Letters



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

We're here to pay respects And there is just no way to mask it. It's just too bad, dear Rodney: Please stop spinning in your casket.

This week's contest is our second annual request for rhyming poems about notable personages who have died in the past year. Poems longer than four lines need to be fabulously wonderful; those four lines or fewer need merely be fabulous. An Internet search on something like "notable deaths 2004" should yield dozens of useful lists of the newly unliving.

addresses of their yachts. (Losers, of course, are more often associated with their snachts.) 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, Jan. 10. 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 property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Feb. 7. 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 Josh Borken of Bloomington, Minn.

Report from Week 587, in which we asked for various entries, in various forms, to supplement The List, The Post's so-hip-you'll-never-understand-what's-in/what's-out guide (published yesterday):

- Third runner-up: Popular yellow accessory: Lance Armstrong bracelet. Unpopular yellow accessory: Terry Nichols. (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)
Second runner-up: Turning over in 2005: The Bush Cabinet. Overturning in 2005: The Bush Supreme Court. (Russell Beland, Springfield)
First runner-up, the winner of the plastic egg of Jasmine-Scented Angel Snot: In: Faith-based programs. Also in: Faith-based pogroms. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)
And the winner of the Inker: In: The Army you have. Out: The secretary of defense you have. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Honorable Mentions:

- Out: Mistletoe. In: Trigger finger. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)
Economic fears: Big box stores. Epidemic fears: Big pox stores. (Peter Metrinko)
Deflating: U.S. bonds. Inflating: Barry Bonds. (Jack Cackler, Falls Church)
Out: United States of America. In: States of America. (Tom Boyle, Laurel)
Out: Going to a fight and having a hockey game break out. In: Going to a fight and having a basketball game break out. (Marty McCullen)
Out: Sanctions for other countries' prisoner abuses. In: Sanctioning your own country's prisoner abuses. (Lloyd Duvall, Roslyn, Pa.)
Increasing: Teenage driving accidents. Decreasing: Teenage parking accidents. (Marleen May, Rockville)
Sad: Having to recall 9/11. Bad: Having to redial 911. (Russell Beland)
Out: Photocopying your butt. In: Scanning your butt and enhancing it with Photoshop. (Ben Schwab, Severna Park)
State Department under Colin Powell: Increasingly irrelevant. FCC under Michael Powell: Decreasingly irreverent. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)
Covered by insurance: Botulism in your stomach. Not covered by insurance: Botulism on your forehead. (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)
Out: Arming for foreign scrapes. In: Scraping for foreign armor. (Joseph Romm)
Half-time peep show: Janet Jackson. Full-time peep show: Paris Hilton. (Tom Witte)
Buoyant: Homer Simpson. Syncing: Ashlee Simpson. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)
Out: Toe rings. In: Ring tones. (Roy Ashley, Washington)
In: Seven Brides for Seven Brothers. Out: Seven Grooms for Seven Brothers. (Melissa Yorks, Gaithersburg)
Promised: Tax relief. Guaranteed: Tycoon engorging. (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)
Out: Orange alert. In: Pink alert. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

- Greek sex: Alexander. Geek sex: Kinsey. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)
Out: Burkas. In: Kevlar. (Eric Murphy, Chicago)
Out: Civil rights. In: Uncivil righteousness. (Tom Witte)
Out: Motivational speaking. In: Motivational spanking. (Chris Doyle, Freeport, Bahamas)
People who disagree: NHL players and owners. People who care: (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)
Reality: Living with your wife. Reality TV: Living with someone else's wife. (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)
"Unfortunate" Lemony: Jude Law. Fortunate Limey: Jude Law. (Brendan Beary)
Show About Wretches: The Bachelor. Show About Retches: Fear Factor. (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)
Out: MP3s. In: MP-5s. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)
Down: U.S. dollar. Up: U.S. dolor. (Stanley Halbert, Lawrence, Kan.)
Red skin: Symbol of ozone depletion. Redskins: Symbol of end zone depletion. (Tom Witte)
Supreme Indianapolis Colt: Peyton Manning. Supreme Indianapolis Dolt: Ron Artest. (Chris Doyle)
Out: Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. In: Patriotism is the first refuge of the scoundrel. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
Lights on: Dubya's Christmas tree. Nobody's home: Dubya's Cabinet. (Brendan Beary)
Gay Marriage: Elton John. Day Marriage: Britney Spears. (Stanley Halbert)
Foolish notion: Capturing bin Laden by invading Iraq. Foolish nation: United Red States of America. (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)
In: Brian Williams. Out of here like a West Texas windstorm, like a polecat in a pile driver, like a . . . hey, wait, I've got more . . . : Dan Rather. (Brendan Beary)
Czar: Week after week with no ink. Empress: Week after week with no ink. (Thad Humphries, Warrenton)

Next Week: Gadget if You Can, or Our Own Devices

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Be My Guest

These past holidays were only the beginning. Throughout the year, you will be expected to keep on attending events with non-negotiable dates at which presents are expected and the guest list is chosen for reasons other than the company's presumed compatibility.

As Miss Manners recalls, such occasions were once limited to weddings, which lasted for about four hours on a single day, and children's birthday parties, which lasted about two hours that felt like 12 to the host's parents.

Furthermore, the weddings were rationed to one per bride for her lifetime. Any subsequent marriages she cared to enter were supposed to be performed quietly. (Gentlemen could have innumerable all-out weddings with as many sequential brides as they could persuade, on the grounds that no one noticed a bridegroom's appearances.) Children were allowed only one birthday party a year, not counting cookies brought to kindergarten, and were supposed to stop after 21 years.

So what did people do with all that time hanging on their hands? How did they keep from brooding or getting into trouble? For that matter, how did they get into the kind of trouble that led to those subsequent marriages?

They partied. And by that, Miss Manners does not mean that they went to fundraisers, support groups, book club meetings and office gatherings, however jolly or worthwhile these may be. Taking turns, they gave and went to parties whose sole purpose was for everyone to have a good time. No money changed hands and presents were not expected. Guests did not march in, each handing over a bottle of wine at the door.

This sort of party has become a rarity, crowded out by occasion-events that people orchestrate in honor of themselves or members of their immediate families. Adult birthday parties, not counting cakes at the office, extend the pattern of children's parties throughout life. Weddings are interminable, even for lasting marriages. No sooner has the succession of engagement parties, showers (both elevated from optional informal gatherings to major events), pre-wedding dinners and post-wedding brunches ended than it begins all over again with anniversaries, reenactments and renewals of vows. And successive marriages start the full cycle again.

Miss Manners does not grudge people celebrat-

ing the events of their lives, although a bit of restraint in scheduling them might be in order, out of mercy for their relatives and friends. But she cannot help but notice what distinguishes these from plain parties:

1) Rather than being given simply for the pleasure of entertaining others, they are explicitly announced as being in honor of oneself or of one's spouse, parents or children.

2) Presents are most definitely expected, and often solicited in the form of registry cards or instructions on the invitation itself.

3) Not content with this barter system of entertainment for goods, hosts often seek to escape any outlay by asking guests to contribute refreshments or, when the event is held in a restaurant, to pay their own costs.

It would appear that there is no angle that has not occurred to today's hosts. Except, possibly, the pleasure of their guests.

Dear Miss Manners:

I recently received a promise ring from my boyfriend, and it has come up that we are not sure which hand I am supposed to wear it on. He has heard the right hand, so as to keep the official ring finger free until the appropriate time. I have heard it should be worn on the left, so as to hold a place for the future engagement ring. Which hand, historically, is correct?

Historically, to be "promised" was another way of describing being engaged. Romantic limbo did not exist, certainly not with a symbol saying "this finger reserved for a future engagement."

So Miss Manners supposes your question depends on what the gentleman promised to do. If he promised to marry you, it would be suitable to wear his ring on your left hand, even if it will be upgraded when he is ready to fulfill the promise. If the question is still open, you might want to keep the spot open as well.

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.

© 2005, Judith Martin

ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

I am almost 20 years old and am in a three-year relationship. He is in the Navy and stationed in California while I attend college in Virginia. We see each other occasionally, but plan to get married once I graduate.

I always have had low self-esteem. It usually does not rear its ugly head unless an event sparks it. I have made vast progress.

My boyfriend looks at magazines (I'm sure that I do not have to reveal what kind—not too lewd, just gorgeous women in little or no clothing).

I cannot understand why this gets me so upset and makes me feel like a nothing. Is it too much to tell him no more magazines? Though he probably would still keep them, just without telling me.

What can I do? I feel irrational, possibly because my feelings are. Life would be so much easier if I could just let go and be more carefree.

Esteem-Challenged

Life would be easier for all of us if we could just let go and be more carefree. Until that joyous day arrives, however, you and I are going to have to make do with our reactions and feelings, just as they are.

I'm not sure why you think your response to your boyfriend's soft-core hobby is irrational. Hating to see him perusing Field & Stream would seem irrational to me. This reaction seems pretty rational—in fact, judging from the mail I receive on the subject, it's darned near universal.

I think you would make great strides, with him and in general, if you could stop blaming yourself for how you feel and start being honest about how you feel. Your guy may not have any idea of how women tend to react to skin magazines—if not, it's time you educated him.

I don't think you should turn this into a litmus test of your relationship, necessarily, but if I were you, I would be watching how he responds. If he just doesn't get it, then you might want to ask yourself if your fragile self-esteem is capable of taking this hit from a guy you love.

One suggestion: You might want to handle this in a thoughtful, carefully worded e-mail. Writing your thoughts down might help you assess their validity.

Dear Amy:

I never thought I would write to an advice column, but I could certainly use your opinion.

My son recently announced that he is getting

married again. This would be his third marriage. He divorced the first two. He is over 50 years old. He was the one at fault in both cases and has never been faithful to his wives.

I barely know his new fiancée, but I feel sorry for her in the light of his past.

Should she be warned? And in what way?

I know he would never forgive me, but she deserves better.

Mom

Obviously the person who should really hear from you is your son, but I gather that he probably senses your disgust and keeps his distance.

If you get the chance, you should have a private talk with his latest fiancée. You should wish her well but tell her that your son has a terrible track record and although you certainly hope he has changed, you have your doubts.

You can bank on some version of this getting back to your son, and you can also bank on this couple getting married, so be very judicious, realizing that what you say will affect your relationship with both your son and his future wife.

This isn't quite the kind of "I've got the motor running, so let's pull a 'Thelma and Louise.'" Grab your bags and run for the hills!" warning you might want to issue, but this sort of thing often backfires on the messenger.

Dear Amy:

I read your recent letter about nice children being bullied, teased and pushed around at school.

My granddaughter said that was happening to her, and I said to tell them that you know why they act that way. It's because they don't get enough love and you think that is sad and feel sorry for them. She said that worked for her.

A Loving Grandma

I think that is a perfect explanation for why bullies act the way they do. Responding to a bully with confidence—especially before things escalate—is a great technique, and I'm so glad it worked for your granddaughter.

Ask Amy is written by Amy Dickinson, a journalist who has worked for NBC News, Time magazine and National Public Radio. Send questions via e-mail to askamy@tribune.com or by mail to Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.

© 2005, The Chicago Tribune

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

Today's North-South conducted a magnificent auction. If only they'd had the right cards for it . . .

North-South were using a popular bidding style in which a new-suit response at the level of two forces to game. At North's second turn, he could bid only two spades "to save room." South's three diamonds was an attempt to show his pattern, and after two ace-showing cue bids, North leaped to slam.

It was all very scientific, but at least two losers seemed likely. South took the ace of diamonds and cashed the A-K of trumps. The suit broke 3-2, but when South next took the ace of clubs and ruffed a club, neither the king nor the queen fell. Since South could see no way to avoid losing a

diamond, he conceded down one.

I dislike the "two-over-one" style for several reasons. The problem in today's auction was that neither player ever made a bid that limited his strength. They both kept groping until they reached a 28-point slam.

Still, South could take 12 tricks with the friendly lie of the cards. After South takes the top trumps, he leads to the ace of clubs, ruffs a club, cashes the top hearts and ruffs a heart in dummy. East, with the high trump, must follow suit.

South then ruffs a club, gets back to dummy with the king of diamonds and leads dummy's last club at Trick 12. If East discards, South ruffs. If East ruffs, South discards his last diamond and wins the 13th trick with a trump.

© 2005, Tribune Media Services

The bidding: South West North East 1 ♠ Pass 2 ♣ Pass 2 ♥ Pass 2 ♠ Pass 3 ♠ Pass 4 ♠ Pass 4 ♦ Pass 6 ♠ All Pass

Opening lead: ♦ J

See THAT IT'S DONE RIGHT

Home Sense. Thursday. Home. The Washington Post

See WHERE TO EAT

Dining. Sunday. The Magazine. The Washington Post