

The Style Invitational

Week 592: We Got Gamy



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

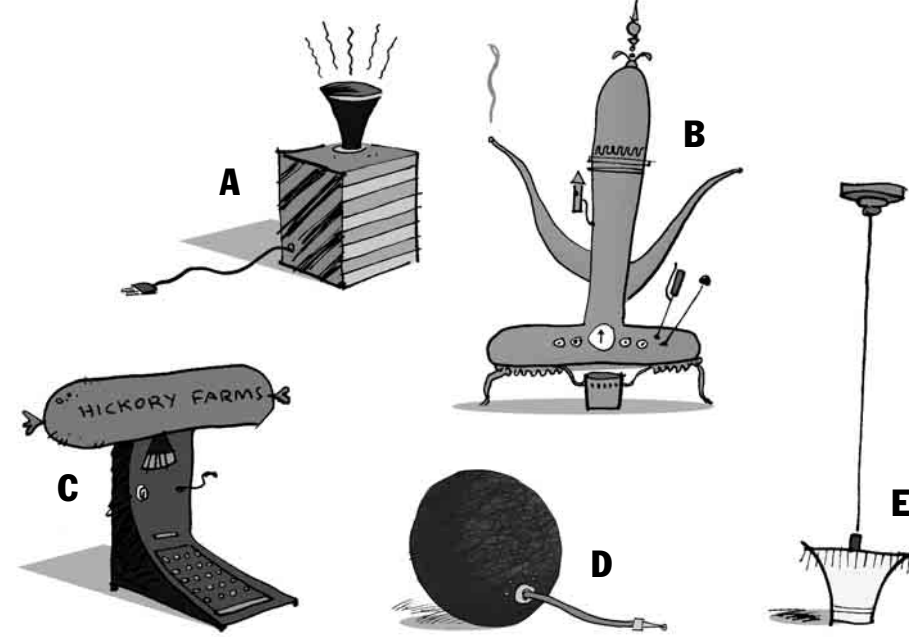
At one point in the coming weeks, tens of millions of Americans will turn away from the seediness and despair of their daily lives and devote their attention, for several hours, to an event of momentous historical importance. We refer, of course, to the set of commercials before, during and after the Super Bowl, which is some sports contest that exists as the framework on which to hang these ads. In the XXXVIII-year history of the game, the commercials have become increasingly complex, expensive . . . and tasteless. Last year's included one about a dog biting a man in the crotch, and one about a horse fart. What should the Commercial Powers That Be come up with this year? Offer us a concise idea for a commercial, or some innovative halftime entertainment (you may remember that there was a halftime show last year), or some inappropriate sponsors, or some ideas for improving the game itself. Results will run on Super Sunday, Feb. 6.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives three dozen brand-new Groucho glasses-and-noses, donated by Loser Mike Connaghan of Alexandria. Just think of how you can transform, say, your wedding into an event that everyone will remember! Especially when you get the photo album back.

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 Tuesday, Jan. 18. 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. 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. The idea for this week's contest is from Brendan Beary of Great Mills.

Report from Week 588, in which we asked you to identify these items that cartoonist Bob Staake had left for us under the tree: Many Losers identified Cartoon E as a spiritual Lamp Unto My Feet, or the new Ikea Pmal, or the latest in Australian room decor; and Cartoon C as a regulator of congressional pork.



Third runner-up: Cartoon A: A Bucket of Warm Spit: The perfect gift for the person you wouldn't give anything to. Dick Cheney had several of these under his tree this year. (Michelle Stupak, Elliccott City)

Second runner-up: Cartoon C: While ham radios continue to be popular, the salami radio never caught on. (Roger and Pam Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)

First runner-up, the winner of the Dracula plate from Romania: Cartoon B: The latest fad at wedding receptions: coffee urns that not only boil water but also dance along to the inevitable "YMCA." (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

And the winner of the Inker: Cartoon E: The community theater couldn't afford lavish props for its "Phantom of the Opera." (John Conti, Norfolk, Mass.)

Honorable Mentions

Cartoon A

If you can't teach your loved one to put the toilet seat back down, the least he could do is buy you this low-energy electric butt dryer. (Herbie Lee, Santa Cruz, Calif.)

Ralph Nader's publicity box: It squawks loudest when disconnected. (Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

Cartoon B

The Eternal Flamer: Tombstone of the French performer Le Petomane, aka Le Fartiste. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

I don't know what it is, but it says it's from my Secret Santa in Yucca Mountain, Nevada. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Thomas the Tank Engine after an unfortunate incident with the railroad mob. (Jack Cackler, Falls Church)

Cartoon C

Swiss Army field trials proved the suppository-injector attachment rather unwieldy. (Tom Boyle, Laurel)

Wonco's Ultimate Party Pot: Have a New Year's bash to remember with this espresso/infusion/fondue/bong. (Beverly Miller, Clarendon, Vt.)

When a new leader of Quebec is selected, this machine sends up the official puff of white smoke. (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

In Ukraine, everyone is ordering the new samovar with the built-in dioxin detector. (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

R2-D2's ex-wife. (Roger and Pam Dalrymple)

Captain Nemo's Nautilus machine. (Russell and Maureen Beland, Springfield)

Whistler embarrassed his mother by painting her seated on a toilet. (Barry Blyveys, Columbia)

All women really want from men: A full cashbox and a big sausage. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Antique laptop: The first machine to introduce us to the term "log on." (Richard

A. Creasy, Winchester, Va.)

Sausagemaking and politics are linked in this replica of an Ohio voting machine. (John Conti)

Instrument to be used Aug. 2: If the ground meat doesn't see its shadow, then we have six more weeks of summer. (Danny Bravman, St. Louis)

Cartoon D

Navel oranges now come equipped with their own nutritious umbilical cords. (Jeffrey Dyorkin, Chevy Chase)

She'll shed tears of delight when she casts her eyes on the Tammy Faye Mascara Dispenser. (Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)

Paul Hamm's emergency helium supply. (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

His analysts' report concluded that you can't get blood from a stone, but the president ordered them back to the drawing board. (Tom Campbell, Highland Park, Ill.)

The Balco lab tests its "clear" on an olive. (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

"Mommy, how come all the other bombs just have short fuses and I gotta wear this?" (Dave Komornik, Danville, Va.)

For Christmas, Spot wore a stocking on the end of his tail. (Russell Beland)

Cartoon E

Did it ever occur to you that bats are "blind" because they just don't get enough light? Well, this new device . . . (Cheryl Furst, Falls Church)

For parties where people just won't let loose: a lampshade that puts *itself* on its head. (Larry M. Furse, Woodland, Calif.)

After a week in Washington, Diogenes abandoned his quest. (Karen Napolitano, Gaithersburg)

The Real Slim Shady. (Phyllis Reinhard)

The favorite act of the flea circus was always the high dive. (Ross Elliffe)

The constant teasing made Sarah-Plain-and-Tall want to dig a hole in the ground and crawl into it, but she made it only halfway. (Niels Hoven, Berkeley, Calif.)

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Giving Good Behavior a Sporting Chance

It's just an impression, but Miss Manners has the idea that there is more rude behavior associated with professional basketball than with, say, national spelling bees.

Could it be the difference in maturity of the participants? The society's adulation of physical triumphs and suspicion that there is something weird about mental success? The cumulative influence of an educational system that deemphasizes disparity in intellectual achievement on the grounds that it is discouraging to others, while maintaining rigorous standards for being allowed to play school games?

Or is it that Miss Manners has not seen enough of either activity to be aware of how softhearted athletic stars really are and how viciously competitive the spellers?

Fortunately for her, it is not necessary to dig into a morass of social issues to discover why people so often behave badly in competitions. They do so because it is only natural, and they have not been required to be unnaturally polite. On the contrary, the belief lingers, in spite of massive evidence to the contrary, that it is good to get rid of ugly feelings by expressing them.

Perhaps; but there is still a difference between sneezing into one's handkerchief and sneezing into other people's faces.

The sad part is that it was once the world of sports that did a good job of teaching civilized competition. The very name of good sportsmanship was used in other contexts to define propriety under adversarial circumstances.

A situation in which the sides have no real quarrel but are merely testing their more-or-less evenly matched skills in repeated contests is ideal for teaching the kind of restraint that is required to settle serious differences. The restraint involved is key in conducting conflicts—military, legal and political, among others—that do reflect deep differences.

It is then that most people have to be reminded that no matter how bitter the contest, the boundaries of civilized behavior must be respected. This is crucial not only to preserving our humanity but also to preserving the possibility of resolving the conflicts and returning to peaceful coexistence. Nothing can be settled other-

wise, unless one side is able to prevail by utterly destroying the other.

That is seldom possible, much less desirable, even in outright warfare. Yet that is the spirit in which even games are now conducted. Etiquette rules are tossed aside on the grounds that they interfere with expressing the pure enmity that is felt—which is exactly what these etiquette rules are designed to do. Far from paving over the source of the conflict, etiquette enables the opposing sides to deal with those sources instead of their scorn for one another.

Miss Manners has never shared the naivete of believing that it is the task of athletes to live their lives as roles models of character and propriety. All she would hope is that they conduct their own business of playing sports in such a way as to again provide their fans, as well as people in other adversarial situations, with the example of good sportsmanship.

Dear Miss Manners:

My colleague and I are perplexed about a set of napkins she has purchased. In one corner of each napkin, there is what appears to be a buttonhole. We were puzzling over what its use might be. A horrifying possibility occurred to us—could it be that the manufacturer intends the buttonhole to be used to secure the napkin to the uppermost button on a diner's shirt?

Miss Manners is sorry to inform you that your horrified guess is correct. Contrary to what our parents and grandparents told us, the world was not perfectly behaved before our generation came along and spoiled everything. The napkins were incorrect then, and there were also sloppy eaters who were indifferent to that fact.

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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ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

I feel embarrassed, confused and annoyed. My boss invited everyone from the office to her lavish 60th birthday party. She went all out by renting a large hall, providing catered treats and hiring a band for dancing. She sent invitations that stated, "No presents, please, your presence is your gift." Therefore I did not bring a gift to the celebration. I believe she is financially very comfortable and lives in an upscale neighborhood. The day after the party, she visited my cubicle, saying she couldn't believe all of the wonderful gifts that everyone had given her! She then named each co-worker of mine and told me what each person gave her, raving about the fantastic gifts and generosity. From what she said, I believe I am the only person who did not provide a gift. What's going on here? Should I have given her a gift despite what the invitation stated?

Annoyed

Whether your boss is financially comfortable and doesn't "need" gifts is not the point. Whether she thanked co-workers in your presence isn't the point. You honored her stated wishes—even if others didn't—and that's the point.

I know that people think "no gifts, please" is a minefield, but it isn't. If a person goes to the trouble to offer a no-gifts clause on an invitation, then I think it's a good idea to honor it. Instead of a gift, a nice congratulatory card would have been thoughtful. As it is, I think you should send your boss a note thanking her for including you in her birthday celebration and noting a few details, such as how lovely it was and how much fun you and everyone around you had at the party.

People who ignored the "no gifts" instruction should still be thanked for their gifts, of course. That she did so in your presence might have been a little thoughtless, or perhaps it was a conversation starter and she was hinting around, trying to see if you had a good time.

Dear Amy:

Our family recently celebrated the birth of a new baby. As the fraternal grandmother, this is what I will remember about the event: Early on, I sent a gift certificate to a maternity store so the new mother could choose something special to wear. This was followed with another gift card to the baby shop. There was a baby shower—I wasn't invited.

During the birth event, we stood by in support, sent flowers, prepared meals for the family's return home from the hospital. Several offers of home visits or assistance were politely refused, as the maternal grandmother took over. An offer to take an older child to my home, to provide some new-parent adjustment time, was grudgingly accepted.

Subsequent offers to visit are met with this response: It's not necessary; mom and baby need

adjustment time. Everything is under control.

Okay. What's the message here? Please, some advice for a grandmother who now suffers from postpartum depression. I fear further family relationships will be affected by my feelings about all of this.

Grandmom

Sometimes a new mother draws her own mother into the drama surrounding the birth because that's where her comfort lies, and although that might explain some of your daughter-in-law's behavior, that's no explanation for why you weren't invited to the baby shower.

I think you should talk with your son about this—after all, he is your closest and most intimate connection to this baby. You should share some of your feelings and tell him that you're feeling a little left out. You don't mention it in your letter, but I get the feeling that your son and his wife are perhaps blending a new family together. That might be a little overwhelming for everyone. You don't seem to know your daughter-in-law very well.

All of this distance might be her doing, but I hope you'll give her a little more time to settle in, while continuing to try to read her cues and be attentive to the child.

Dear Amy:

I am writing in response to a recent letter from a dad in St. Louis who is divorced and who said he feels closer to the kids down the street than to his own 15- and 17-year-old children. My wife and I divorced after she had an affair, when my son was 2 years old. From the time my son was 2, I visited with him every other weekend, on vacations and holidays, went to school events and called him every day.

I told my son every day that I loved him, and I never said anything bad about my ex-wife to him. Our vacations were low-budget and included camping.

The key is to always let your children know how much you love them and how important they are to you. Make as much time for them as possible.

My son died last year in a car accident, at age 18. I am so glad that I did the best I could.

Loving Dad

I have heard from many dads who say they've done everything possible to stay close with their children, even though they may not live together. Your son was well loved during his lifetime, and that's the whole point.

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

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

E-W vulnerable		
NORTH		
♠ Q 10 9 2		
♥ A K 10 7 2		
♦ None		
♣ K Q 9 4		
WEST		
♠ 5 3		
♥ Q J 8 6 4		
♦ A K J 8 5		
♣ None		
EAST		
♠ J 8 4		
♥ 9 5 3		
♦ Q 7 4		
♣ J 8 7 6		
SOUTH (D)		
♠ A K 7 6		
♥ None		
♦ 10 6 3 2		
♠ A 10 5 3 2		

The bidding:

South West North East

1 ♣ 1 ♦ 1 ♥ Pass

1 ♠ 2 ♦ 4 ♠ Pass

4 ♥ Pass 5 ♦ Pass

6 ♠ Pass 7 ♣ All

Pass

Opening lead: ♦ K

Lynn Deas is one of the world's top woman players. I dislike referring to anyone as a "woman player" (even though many top women choose to play mostly in women's events), but especially a fierce competitor such as Deas. While she suffers from a debilitating illness and plays in a wheelchair, she continues to win major titles.

Deas was today's declarer in a World Championship. North-South brushed aside West's bidding—and its warning of possible bad breaks—and reached a bold grand slam. West led the king of diamonds, and the commentators, who could see all four hands, announced that the 4-0 trump break rendered the slam hopeless.

Deas ruffed the first diamond and cashed the king of trumps.

When West discarded, Deas took the A-K of hearts, throwing a diamond and a spade, and ruffed a heart. She cashed the A-K of spades and led a spade to the queen, as East followed suit.

Deas next led another heart from dummy. East had to ruff, else Deas would score her five of trumps and win the last four tricks on a cross-ruff. Deas overruffed with the 10, ruffed a diamond and led another heart, and again, East had to ruff to prevent South from ruffing with the five of trumps and crossruffing. Deas overruffed with the ace and led her last trump to dummy's queen, drawing East's last trump. And dummy's 10 of spades won the 13th trick!

It was a remarkable effort by a future Hall of Famer.

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Next Week: **Hyphen the Terrible, or Breaking Our Words**