

# The Style Invitational

Week 597: Ecccsibits



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**The Spa Museum.** A collection of devices and products used by Americans trying to look sleek but unwilling to exercise or eat right. The exhibits are viewed from a moving sidewalk.

**The PETA Anti-Zoo Zoo.** A fascinating look at the other side of zoo life, including footage of animals engaged in obsessive-compulsive behavior, footage of famous animal rampages and a documentary about children making hideous faces at animals (or is it hideous children making faces at animals?).

Send enough of the neutered bull elephant and the first ladies' dresses? Peter Metrisko of Chantilly suggests that you come up with some alternative museums and exhibits for the nation's capital, as in the examples he supplies above. Obviously, entertaining and clever descriptions are going to win out in this contest over the nice mere germs of ideas that sometimes manage to get ink in these columns.

First-prize winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a heavy glass polyhedral paperweight, nestled in a lavish latched velvet box, bearing the name of Shin Ki-nam, chairman, Uri Party, Republic of Korea. This

is truly a gorgeous item, and especially poignant since Mr. Shin no longer holds this post; he resigned last summer after revelations that his father was a collaborator during the Japanese occupation.

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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Tuesday, Feb. 22. 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 March 13. 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 Chris Doyle of, at the moment, Auckland, New Zealand. (Chris is continuing to send in entries from cyber-cafes around the planet as he makes an extended world tour. This is only one reason Chris has almost 600 blots of ink and you do not.)

**Report from Week 593**, in which we asked for "Job's comforters," things that someone might say ostensibly to make another person feel better but wouldn't exactly do the trick. Almost everyone weighed in with some form of "You're *much* better in bed than your sister."

♦ **Third Runner-Up: Look at it this way, Mia: At least your daughter married a movie star.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **Second Runner-Up: You should be glad the parole board turned you down, because recidivism is really high these days.** (Chris Doyle, Auckland, New Zealand)

♦ **First Runner-Up, the winner of the scary T-shirt from the makers of the Loser T-Shirt: Oh, look, your tourniquet perfectly matches your shoes . . . er, shoe.** (Cecil J. Clark, Arlington)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker: I'm sure your husband will be fine. That's the same place where Mike Tyson did his time, and nobody bothered him.** (Rob Poole, Ellicott City)

♦ **Honorable Mentions: Sure, Joe, your wife's having someone else's baby. But at least she's still a virgin.** (Russell Beland)

**I can't believe your husband ran off with the nanny. Oh well, at least you know she'll be good with your kids if he marries her.** (April Musser, Atlanta)

**On the bright side, how many sons know the difference between a triple salchow, a triple lutz and a triple toe loop?** (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

**Hey, security cameras put five pounds on everybody.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

**Do they make you look fat? Absolutely not—I'm sure you'd look way fatter without them.** (Russell Beland)

**I hear the governor refused the stay of execution. Oh, boy, are you ever gonna eat well tonight!** (Chris Doyle)

**At least with that look, nobody's going to think you're an idiot.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

**Aw, that's not true, I think your baby's cute—he looks like a little Woody Allen.** (Monica Mikulski, Potomac)

**So what if you lost by 30 points—even if you'd lost by just 1, you'd still be a loser.** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

**I know you're upset that your wife left you to be with a woman. But just think, those fantasies of yours are probably coming true right now!** (Kyle Hendrickson, Dunkirk)

**You think paying bail for your kid was expensive—think of what that first year at Yale is doing to my bank account!** (Karen Shimansky, Emmitsburg, Md.)

**At least being sent to Guantanamo means you'll be spared the embarrassment of a public trial.** (Greg Pearson, Arlington)

**It's a shame about your cat, ma'am, but if you just hose out that wood chipper real good it'll run like new.** (Greg McGrew, Leesburg)

**So that was your daughter in that porn video I saw? Oh, well, let me tell you that she was really good at what she was doing!** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

**Look at it this way: Those five interceptions you threw were all completions!** (Richard Lempert, Arlington)

**Look on the bright side, Adam: Once you're done toiling in the field, I'll make you a great apple pie.** (Laura Shumar, Lafayette, Ind.)

**I know you're sad that your mom's aged so poorly. But hey, she looked great when she was young—just like you.** (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

**Too bad about that poisoned soup, President Yushchenko. At least the whole world recognizes your face.** (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

**She got the promotion over you? Well, only you got to sleep with the boss.** (Chris Doyle)

**Ha, those fools don't realize they'll have to hire an entire hutful of kids to do your job.** (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)

**Hey, in a few more years you won't even notice your Alzheimer's.** (Russell Beland)

**Aw, come on, honey—I really do want us to work through whatever you were bitching about this time.** (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

**You know, if we could have kept on just one more employee. . .** (Russell Beland)

**Hey, troops, don't feel bad about not finding any WMDs. I got reelected anyway. (G.W.B., Washington)** (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

**Sure, you're dead, but at least first you got a little ru-ru.** (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)

**"The chance that any one of us will perish in a tidal wave, hurricane, earthquake or other natural calamity is very, very low. . . . A person is more likely to die by falling from a tall building, slipping in the bathtub or being legally executed." (The Washington Post, Jan. 16)** (Jeff Evan, Millsboro, Del.)

**And last: Hey, Empress, you know how we are always having that battle where I accuse you of favoring just-clever over funny, and you accuse me of favoring just-funny over clever? Well, we won't have to fight this week! Because these aren't funny or clever!** (The Czar (Ret.), Ekaterinburg)

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### Romance With Strings Attached

**W**ho belongs to whom, and for how long after they are no longer both in love?

This is a question that once was not asked. In simpler times, as Miss Manners recalls in her simple way, you were either engaged, married or free to fool around with whomever you pleased. Teenagers who tried to expand human property rights to such intermediate stages as "going steady" or "being pinned" received a remarkable lack of sympathy from their elders.

"Why tie yourself down?" they would demand in their stern, parental way. "You should be playing the field."

Miss Manners is not quite so simple as to have believed that all the field players were unattached. But all of those who genuinely were were considered to be in the game.

Well, times have changed, she admits (rarely), along with the definition of fooling around. The sexual revolution may not have created universal satisfaction and contentment, as it promised; it may not have made romance carefree, as it promised; it may not have rid the world of tension and jealousy, as it promised; and it may not have made people more likely to stay in marriages that they entered into for more serious reasons than lust, as it promised.

But it did expand the notion of human property rights. Miss Manners is astonished at what modern people now consider romantic poaching.

"The man of my dreams has come into my life," writes one Gentle Reader, "and during the courtship, he revealed to me that 17 years ago he briefly dated my cousin, but that they were not intimate."

"Since then, my family has found out about our relationship, and this particular cousin says that she cannot believe that I would date this man. Please allow me to mention that this same relative dated and had a baby with this man's brother."

"Do you feel that I should break up with this man out of respect for my cousin?"

A gentleman writes that he met "a charming and attractive young woman at a wedding I attended unattached. She was there with an entertaining gentleman that she introduced as her 'friend.' The two of them were chummy with each other, but I would not describe them as being very close. By appearance, it looked like a first or second date.

"We exchanged business cards so that she might send me a couple of pictures that she had taken dur-

ing the reception.

"I am very sensitive to the sanctity of the relationships of others, so I wonder if it is appropriate for me to contact this woman and say that it was very nice to meet her and I would appreciate the opportunity to get to know her better, but only if she is not dating the other gentleman. Put another way, can I communicate my interest to a woman while acknowledging that she is currently attached, with the hope that she might return that interest at some time in the future if she is no longer seeing someone else?"

There were many other such inquiries. The lady who undertook to comfort the gentleman her roommate dumped and now felt it would be a betrayal if she responded to his otherwise welcome overtures. The groomsman who was told by the bridegroom to stay away from his ex-girlfriend. And so on.

Miss Manners is all for romantic ethics, and she appreciates her Gentle Readers' gentle feelings. But she is afraid that if romances can only occur with the sanctions of previous or tenuous connections, the world will go around a lot slower than it should.

#### Dear Miss Manners:

**Friends and I seem split as to whether you should tip the owner of an establishment. Fifty percent of us feel it is all right to leave owners a tip if they are working, and obviously vice versa for the other 50 percent. Does it make a difference whether it is a bar or an eating establishment? What if it is a combination of both?**

Professional opinions on this issue are also split 50-50.

Miss Manners, along with the rest of the Etiquette Mavens' Council, believes that it is beneath the dignity of the owners of establishments to accept tips. The owners of establishments are quick to deny that their sense of dignity is so high that there is not plenty of room for money to be slapped on top of it.

*Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at [MissManners@unitedmedia.com](mailto:MissManners@unitedmedia.com) or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.*

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## ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

**My sister is marrying her husband again after 11 years of wedded bliss, except this time in the Catholic Church after their annulments were finally granted. They were previously married by a justice of the peace.**

**She didn't have a formal wedding ceremony, and no family members were invited to that occasion. However, I gave her a wedding gift those many years ago. Now she is going for the hoopla—white gown, tuxes, a trek down the aisle, music, flowers, formal reception and a guest list of 150.**

**I should note that this is her third marital partner and that she had the fancy to-do with her previous spouses.**

**My question is, what would be an appropriate gift this time around? Note: She told me to ask you.**

*Little Sister*

Surely your sister and her husband aren't expecting wedding gifts, right? I think you should assume that this whoop-de-do is really intended to be a public celebration of their love and commitment because anything else seems too shallow to contemplate.

According to the "Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette," the happy couple is already defying convention in numerous ways. That doesn't make this celebration a bad thing by any means, but I don't think they should compound their gaffes by also expecting wedding gifts. Many couples who re-marry or re-re-marry make it clear that they just want to share the day with friends and family and that no gifts are expected. That seems about right to me.

I think you should ask your sister what she wants, what she expects and why. You are not obligated to re-gift the couple, but you might want to honor their day by making a donation in their name to the church. Surely they would love that, right?

Dear Amy:

**I'm responding to a letter from a mother who was concerned because her daughter had accepted an engagement ring from her live-in boyfriend, whose divorce was not yet final.**

**This is so wrong on so many levels. I agree with you that the mother should try to act neutral. However, an anonymous letter to the guy's wife and also to his boss about what is happening would be in order (this should have been done when they first moved in together).**

**The daughter is blinded to reality. Most likely she**

**is young and dumb, so it's up to the caring family to intercede surreptitiously. If financial, emotional and possibly work-related repercussions occur for him, then so be it.**

**If this were my daughter, who I love unconditionally, throwing some gas on a volatile situation may be what's needed for her to see the light.**

*Sad and Mad Dad*

This is the worst idea I have ever heard. I would counsel a mom to go and punch a lothario directly in the nose before I would suggest that she send an anonymous letter.

First of all, I would be surprised to find a boss who would or could weigh in on an employee's personal conduct that isn't illegal but merely sleazy. Secondly, attempting to anonymously damage a person's reputation is so cowardly. If you throw gas on a situation and the wind shifts, guess who gets burned?

Dear Amy:

**I have to respond to the letter from an older lady who wondered whether to tell her daughter who her biological father really is. You advised her to tell the truth, and while that is an excellent answer, it didn't go far enough.**

**For years I worked with adoptees and birth parents, helping them to find each other and counseling them afterward.**

**One important reason for people to know their true parentage is medical history. More and more conditions and diseases are found to have a genetic component. It is critical to have the correct information, especially regarding conditions that could be life-threatening.**

*Sue*

Thank you for affirming the idea that—in most cases—knowing the truth about one's parentage is best.

*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](mailto:askamy@tribune.com) or Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.*

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## BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

**I**'ve begged and pleaded and offered my services free, but she's as obstinate as death."

Dr. Ed Fitch, our club president, was talking about Minnie Bottoms. Her old bifocals make her mix up kings and jacks, often to her opponents' chagrin. Ed, an ophthalmologist, has tried to get Minnie to accept a new prescription for glasses. "She thinks her old ones are lucky," Ed sighed.

"She may be right," I said. Minnie's glasses had won a match in a team event. At both tables South landed at four spades, and West led the 10 of clubs. Dummy's queen won, and South threw his jack of clubs on the ace of hearts and led a diamond: nine, queen . . . At one table West took the king and led a heart, and South ruffed and cashed the ace of diamonds.

When the jack fell, South took the A-K of spades and led good diamonds. He lost two trumps and a diamond.

"Minnie was West at the other table," Ed told me, "and when South finessed with the queen of diamonds, Minnie played low!"

"She thought her king was the jack," I smiled.

"South cashed the ace of diamonds," Ed went on, "and when the jack fell, he could've taken the A-K of trumps and forced out the king of diamonds. But South hated to pass up a 'sure' overtrick. He ruffed a diamond, expecting East's king to fall."

South was stunned when East overruffed and gave Minnie a club ruff. Minnie then led a trump, and South had to lose a diamond to her king and a trump to East. Down one.

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