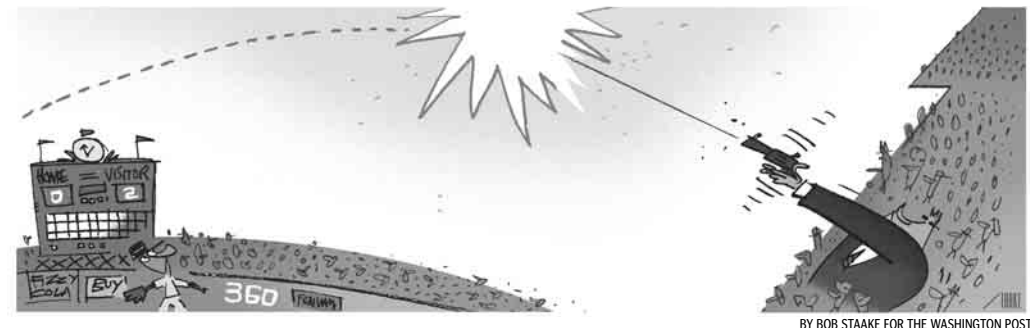


# The Style Invitational

Week DC: Top of the Inking



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**The Secret Service orders the shooting down of pop flies. Presidents no longer have to travel to Baltimore to make fools of themselves on Opening Day. The percentage of city residents who use crack will decline as the percentage using steroids increases.**

We couldn't resist reverting to Roman numerals this week for a contest about Washington, where 2005 will be remembered—barring the unspeakable—as The Year Baseball Came Back. **This week's contest:** Tell us some ways that the city will change now that we have the Nationals, as in the examples above, which are by Russell Beland of Springfield.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets, for once, a really nice prize, courtesy of Loser Ken Gallant of Little Rock: an 8-by-10 photo taken outside the "Washington American League Base Ball Club" sometime in the mid-1920s; in the foreground, fans admire a trophy that honors either Washington's only World Series victory (1925) or the league victory.

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 Monday, March 14. 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 April 3. 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 Tom Witte of Montgomery Village.

**Report from Week 596,** in which we asked you to rearrange some of the words from that day's Ask Amy advice column—it concerned whether to confront a parent who was screaming at her child during skating practice—to form some new thoughts. Some readers may have been a wee bit puzzled by the Empress's example for this contest, since most of its words, such as "gas" and "ammunition," were not exactly to be found in that Ask Amy column. So she accidentally used the next Sunday's column, okay? At least this week nobody sent in an entry that had the same joke as the example.

♦ **Second runner-up: Dear Maegan: Mom and I are having a tough day, so don't come home. The neighbors have food. Scream if you have your child. —Dad** (Eric Murphy, Chicago)

♦ **First runner-up, winner of the Indian joke book and comic book: For parents of young children, life is like a roller coaster, but with more screaming and throwing up.** (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker: Many witnessed my public embarrassment, but it occurred to me to ask for a recount; people would have benefited (compassion—that's my mantra). My challenge was a roller coaster that went on and on until I was stopped cold by an abrupt and awful result, made by a crazy group jokingly referred to as "adults." A tough day. Was it their place to intervene? I don't think so, but the impact of that changed my career forever. So I went home. (A. Gore, Nashville)** (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

## ♦ Honorable Mentions:

**When in the Course of . . . . . (people-something? act?) . . . it can become . . . just . . . Dear me, this is not as easy as I thought. (T. Jefferson, Charlottesville, Va.)** (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

**I'm losing my temper and no one stopped to help me look for it.** (Alyson Yee, Arlington)

**I'm community college educated, and happy to.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

**Me, myself, and I. Me, myself and I. Not my parents. Not my children. Not neighbors, friends, or strangers. Never he, she, we, you, they. It's only me, me, me. Wow—is this a scream for help or what?** (Jeff Covel, Arlington)

**Tough break in that one, Coach. Now, I have to ask: Are you aware that you could use some help on offense, or is this just not the right career for someone as stupid as you?** (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

**Do you drink enthusiastically? Is your life a roller coaster ride of throwing up in public and affectionate behavior with strangers? Wow, college is fun! Don't be shocked, parents. That used to be you.** (Kurt Stahl, Frederick)

**Public parking is just not allowed on Sunday. What are you, crazy? And one more thing: We lose a lot. (D. Snyder, Potomac)** (Russell Beland)

**I hope Tonya Harding stopped demonstrating the mantra "We all can use a break sometimes."** (Barbara Hoss Schneider, Bowie)

**Screaming crazy responses in church can result in them throwing you out. But what fun—and you can drink in the parking lot until your parents come to get you.** (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

**I would not have experienced so much bullying if the other children hadn't seen Dad come to Career Day in Mother's things and with a painted face, and didn't get to hear him say, "I work Michigan Ave."** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

**A bully made an impression on me—he stepped on my face.** (Peter Metrinko)

**I am usually a three, but with no food and throwing up I can, maybe, get to be a one. It's important for my career. (C. Flockhart, Beverly Hills)** (Russell Beland)

**Dear Amy:** I have not stepped out of my home in three years. I am not socially experienced, and being in a public place is very trying. I know I have to get help, but how? —Crazy at Home  
**Dear Crazy:** Perhaps I should not say so, but I was the same way. What I found is, you can not ever have anyone as affectionate and giving as food. It never humiliates or berates like people do. So what if I lose my figure, or people in Michigan can see my can when I'm in Chicago? The point is, I am happy. You should be also. (Brendan Beary)

**Don't point in public. Just scream and make fun of the stupid crazy people.** (Eric Murphy)

**Children should be seen and not had.** (Chris Doyle, Dunedin, New Zealand)

**I don't care to say "throwing up"; I like "abrupt food recall" more.** (Russell Beland)

**I was once affectionate with a young woman, the neighbors' daughter. When I took her home, her mother attempted to intervene. Her daughter gently said, "Hey, Mom, if you think I'm that easy, why don't you get involved? You know—group lessons?" I was shocked, but her mom directly offered to engage in "inappropriate behavior"—regularly, enthusiastically, and with different objects! The impact of that made an impression on me. Or did I just imagine it?** (Fred Rogers, Latrobe, Pa.) (Bob Dalton)

**Throwing young children in church is a fun way to get out your aggression.** (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

**I am not dangerous to a daughter. Only a boy is food. (J. Dahmer, Hell)** (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

**Don't you recognize that I'm a people-person, you stupid, crazy woman?** (Russell Beland)

**"Mantra" is my mantra, as it is easy for me to recall.** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

**A group of stupid, dangerous skating-career bullies threw temper tantrums, and have now stopped skating. It's crazy! What is the point? And what to do? Maybe if enough people or their coach would intervene and berate these offending children, they would come to the rink, put on skates, demonstrating an important value: Skating is supposed to be fun. But the bullies didn't get it, so I went home. (NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, New York)** (Bob Dalton)

**When I write about my but it humiliates me. (J.D. Quayle, Indianapolis)** (Russell Beland)

**Dear Amy:** I didn't have a dad as a child, and much of my adult life I was looking, in an inappropriate way, for that sort of figure. You could say I'm very "experienced"—friends, neighbors, the parking lot boy, just about anyone. My behavior is an embarrassment but I don't know how to stop. —EB  
**Dear Easy:** I'd like to get right to the point: What would you think about being with a woman? I can be called at 435-2005; I get out of work at three. (Brendan Beary)

**What are YOU looking at—some stupid joke? Look to your right: Maybe "Ask Amy" can help you get a life.** (Steve Fahney, Kensington)

**And Last: This is your mantra: Losing is the only thing.** (Chris Doyle)

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### The Hole in the Loop

**T**he cry of lost souls echoes through the electronic wilderness: "I can't reach a human being! I have to talk to an actual person! What can I do to reach a human being?"

This desperation does not go unheeded. There is always a soothing response:

"Your call is important to us."

"Click on Frequently Asked Questions."

"Please listen to the following options."

"For assistance, visit our Web site."

"All of our operators are busy assisting other customers."

"Oh, no, they're not!" the exasperated customer shouts into the void. "There are no such operators. You put your customers in an endless loop, going from one recording to another until they get back to the beginning—if anyone can make it back before getting cut off. And don't tell me about your Web site, which never responds to my questions, if it responds at all. There's no human being running that. It sends me the answer to a question I didn't ask—sometimes days after I didn't ask it."

Miss Manners' inclination is to pour out her sympathy. It is a plight that surely falls under her mandate of comforting those afflicted by the callousness of others. Besides, like everyone else, she has been caught in such fruitless loops.

In the etiquette business, we are forever carrying on about the need for a personal touch, however much of a burden it is to put pen to paper instead of firing off a preselected message. (Anyone who has ever sent a sympathy card instead of writing a condolence letter, or a thank-you note with little more than the rote "Thank you for the . . ." message, loses the right to criticize businesses for sending standardized responses.)

Etiquette's prejudice for the personal is commonly mistaken for a blanket antipathy toward technology, and indeed toward progress itself. Such is not the case. Miss Manners cannot bear to fire her horse, but she believes it would be exciting to risk a horseless carriage after he retires.

She is on record as having been first to defend such useful appliances as the telephone answering machine (when others were decrying people who "screened their calls" instead of leaving this door open all the time) and the cellular telephone (which is still being condemned as show-off, although most of the population now has them). Naturally, Miss Manners demands that these items be used politely, as she does in connection with everything from kid gloves to hockey sticks. When they are not, she blames the misuser rather than the tool.

And now she is going to become the only con-

sumer to defend recorded messages. But at least she promises to do this in a halfhearted way.

Not everything needs talking over. Many questions can be predicted. Properly programmed, recorded voice messages can be faster and more accurate than people. They don't call you by your first name. They don't recognize your voice if you call back too often.

Of course, a business that uses them is obligated to make human beings available for special cases, not to make the operator option another dead end. Beyond that, it is obligated to have such operators equipped with the judgment and authority to solve problems.

That is the crux of the consumer service problem: that a business's live people, when one reaches them, are rarely equipped to weigh an uncommon problem judiciously and offer a solution. The unspoken deal was that businesses would save money by using recordings and spend some of it on training the people they are supposed to have available. Few have lived up to the deal.

#### Dear Miss Manners:

**I was at a restaurant when a solitary diner loudly admonished the neighboring table for talking too loudly. The two ladies in question were at the table next to me and their conversation was not intrusive in the least. They, as well as I, were nonplused by this comment.**

**No one responded to the complainer and, after a startled look of disbelief, all went back to their meals and conversations. Should something have been said to this person?**

You mean that someone should have admonished this person for the rudeness of having admonished others?

Satisfying as you may have found that, Miss Manners is afraid that it would have made your complaint difficult to define. The two ladies could have responded by saying, "We are so sorry to have disturbed you" and turned back to their meals. You could have said, "Perhaps you might want to have the waiter move you to a secluded table." But as you are not allowed to quash rudeness with rudeness, you were all best off tending to your dinners.

*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:

I am 15 years old and I attend a small, private Christian school. Most of the kids there are very nice and have high morals.

A new girl came to school this year, and I made an effort to accept her as I would any other kid. But once she had established friendships, she began acting in a way that came as a shock to some of us at this school. She talked about sex a lot and at inappropriate times. She used foul language in the presence of teachers and at lunch.

At the homecoming dance, she danced in a way that made me sick. I don't want to have a holier-than-thou tone or sound like I'm oblivious of this behavior in the "real world," but she regularly disgusts my friends and me.

I wish she wouldn't behave like this in school. Because of the size of the school, it is hard to avoid her, and I feel like someone needs to confront her.

What should I do?

*Disgusted in Chicago*

This week's lesson comes from the Bible. Jesus's message to the world was one of acceptance—and of leading by example. Can you try to do the same?

I don't mean that you need to let this girl's behavior dominate you, but that you can privately say, "That sort of language offends me," and give her an opportunity to adjust.

This girl might need some good examples in her life. Instead of telling her that she disgusts you, why don't you assume that she is someone who could perhaps use some gentle guidance? I know it's a tall order for 15-year-old girls to step out of the "group think" that tends to infect high school kids, but you really don't want to be "holier than thou," mainly because it just doesn't help.

You should let the teachers and staff of your school handle this girl's public behavior. For ideas of how you might respond to her in a truly Christian way, you can ask your school counselor for guidance—and re-read the New Testament.

#### Dear Amy:

**I employed a handyman for several small jobs. His work**

**was good and we became friendly. I even invited him to join my weekly poker game.**

However, after noticing that my pain medication (with codeine) was missing on two occasions, I put an alarm on my medicine cabinet—and caught him attempting to steal my medication a third time!

Needless to say, I asked him to leave and not come back.

In one fell swoop, I lost a friend, a handyman and a poker buddy!

My wife says that he obviously needs help and that I should have tried some kind of "understanding, intervention-type" approach.

What do you think I should have done?

*Confused in N.Y.*

I think people have an idea that they can just get together and have "interventions." Interventions are much more challenging to host than weekly poker games. For an intervention to work, it should be carefully planned and preferably guided by a substance-abuse counselor. If you're interested in going this route, you could start by contacting a local chapter of Narcotics Anonymous for support.

Even if you don't go this far, you could still reach out to this man to acknowledge what happened and see if there is any support you can give him. If he is drug-seeking to the extent that he needed to help himself to your codeine, he could be in the throes of a serious problem.

Most likely, you won't be able to fix his problem, but your friendship might provide the kind of steady influence that will inspire him to get help. Obviously, if you have him in your home again, you must keep your medication under lock and key. I would want proof from him that he is in treatment before giving him access.

*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** found today's deal in the files of my colleague Alfred Sheinwold, who died eight years ago this week. It was a deal I had sent him near the start of our collaboration in 1986.

I had noted that South could win the first heart in his hand and give himself an extra chance by leading a diamond next. If West rose with the ace, South would have at least two diamonds, four clubs, two hearts and a spade. If instead West played low, dummy's queen would win, and South could then take a spade finesse, winning two spades, four clubs, a diamond and two hearts.

If East had the ace of diamonds, South could still finesse in spades, hoping for three spades, two hearts, a diamond and four clubs.

Freddy Sheinwold was more than a great writer. He was a player, editor, bidding innovator and ad-

ministrator, and he never stopped being a fine analyst. At the bottom of my 3-by-5 card, he penciled a note: "All clubs."

Freddy's analysis was on target, as usual. South should not lead a diamond at the second trick: He has nothing to lose by cashing four clubs first, forcing the defenders to discard. If somebody discards a diamond, South may have an easy time.

As the cards actually lie, West, who must discard twice, can throw one spade but has no good second discard. If he throws a diamond, South can make an overtrick. If West throws a heart, South can afford to set up the diamonds or finesse in spades, losing only four tricks in all. If West throws a second spade—especially if he stews about it—South can guess well to drop the king.

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Next Week: Ecchsibits, or Gallerrhea