

The Style Invitational

Week 601: Anticdotes



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

One November I was at a dinner party at my boss's house. Dinner was running late, so I decided to grab a snack in a room off the foyer. Imagine my surprise when the boss stormed in with his tattletale kid, acting all "what do you think you're doing" this and "how dare you" that, just because I'd polished off the brat's stupid Halloween candy. You'd think the guy would thank me, what with all the news about obese kids.

This week's contest (and example) come from Jean Sorensen of Herndon, who's an avid reader of The Washington Post Magazine's Editor's Query feature, which each week invites reader recollections of a given type of experience. Unfortunately for the Magazine, its ethics require that the recollections be true. The Style Invitational uses a different standard: the standard of "As long as it's funny and the Empress can't be sued." So: **Give us an untrue anecdote** in response to one of the actual Editor's Query topics below. Eighty words max.

1. Tell us about a disastrous or funny experience you had involving food.
2. Tell us about a moving act of kindness you experienced or witnessed.
3. Tell us about an event that prompted you to change your life.
4. Tell us about a time you overcame tremendous self-doubt.

While respondents who get Magazine ink receive \$50, the winner of this contest receives the infinitely more valuable Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. And first runner-up gets two genuine glass microscope slides containing cross sections of rat brain tissue, donated by Loser and former psych major Eric Murphy of Chicago.

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, March 21. 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 10. 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 (as of next week) Kihel, Hawaii.

Report from Week 597, in which we sought ideas for museums and exhibits as alternatives to Washington's same-olds: First, though, the Empress would like to report an e-mail entry she received Feb. 22, in the middle of the entry week for that contest: "Secretary of Logical Scientific Analysis, whose duty is to stand still for four more years and take the mushroom treatment (i.e., being kept in the dark embedded in excrement)." An odd museum exhibit, to be sure; it turned out to be an entry for Week 584 (new Cabinet posts) from Peter Fahey of Port Washington, N.Y. It was electronically dated Nov. 15, 2004. An actual snail could have brought it faster. Okay, give the guy a magnet.

◆ **Third runner-up: The Myth of Rube Goldberg:** This exhibit displays models of the famed cartoonist's intelligently designed window-cleaning, pencil-sharpening and picture-taking machines. The exhibit debunks the notion that Mr. Goldberg invented these machines himself: Given their complexity, they had to be created not by man or nature, but rather by an unspecified Guiding Force. Sponsored by the Dover, Pa., School Board. (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

◆ **Second runner-up: Museum of Crime Scene Police Tape:** Move along, there's nothing to see here. (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

◆ **First runner-up, the winner of the paperweight honoring the shamed Korean politician: The Museum of the Ordinary:** A tribute to the dull, rote, workaday lives lived by the vast bulk of Americans. Exhibits include a three-bedroom, two-bath split-level, a four-year-old minivan, a secondhand spinet piano no one actually plays, a VCR with the time blinking 12:00, a half-completed TV Guide crossword and a \$78 tax refund check. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **And the winner of the Inker: Dumb Art On Oaks:** Christo and Jeanne-Claude drape some of the most beautiful trees in Washington with saffron-colored fabric that's covered in finger paintings by their kid. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

◆ **Honorable Mentions:**

The FIB Museum: Shows videos of such famous declarations as "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky," "I am not a crook" and, of course, "Read my lips—no new taxes." (Milt Eisner, McLean; Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

The Rugs Gallery: Hairpieces through the centuries. Now on exhibit: "Hell Toupee: The Sad Tale of Jim Traficant." (Chris Doyle, Christchurch, New Zealand)

The Gallery of Forensic Celebrity Art: With the aid of the latest computer-aging techniques, the images of facially knifed celebrities are altered to show how they would look if they had allowed themselves to grow old naturally. For example, instead of looking like a face painted on a bongo drumhead, Joan Rivers looks like a KFC drumstick. (Carolyn Steele, Annandale)

Mount Lillian Vernon: Tour the birthplace of his-and-hers towels, the "[your name here's] Kitchen" aprons and the over-the-door jewelry organizers. Make sure you stop by the blacksmith's shop, where the first personalized toilet paper roller was made. (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

The E Pluribus Museum: For the lazy tourist, a single building with one or two pieces from every museum in the Washington area. Be sure to see the dinosaur bone, the picture of a Calder, the Indian spear and that parachute. Don't forget to check out the gift shop gift shop. (Eric Murphy, Chicago; Tom Witte)

The Panhandlers Museum: A history of Washington money-grubbers from the back streets to K Street to Capitol Hill. Audio exhibits include such classic pitches as "I need money to refill my crack patch prescription" and "My fellow Americans, the \$100 million needed to renovate the Capitol Rotunda, in order to house the Style Invitational Losers Museum, is a small price to pay to ensure the very freedoms we as a nation blah blah blah..." (Bruce MacKechnie, Annandale)

The William Henry Harrison Library: Contains both official documents from his presidency. (Russell Beland)

The Electronic Voting Technology Museum: After the museum changed to a ticketless entry system, admissions jumped to more than 8 billion visitors last year. (Martin S. Bancroft, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

The National Errand's Pace Museum: Dedicated to America's daredevil couriers. At the Imax theater, see "To Fly Off the Handle": Experience the white-knuckle thrill of being suddenly cut off by bicyclists swerving dangerously close to your vehicle as you tour the nation's capital. Rated R for language and gestures. (Kyle Hendrickson, Dunkirk)

The DMV Portrait Gallery: The worst driver's license photos of all time. (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

Coming soon to the **National Irony Museum:** "Nature's Art": sculptures created from the dismantled nests of bald eagles. (Bruce Mullinax, Great Falls)

The Toddler Museum: Endless entertainment for the under-3 set. Be sure to see the popular Pile of Gravel and Bits of Leaves in the Parking Lot! While away the hours at the Squirrel and Pigeon Zoo. And take in a show at the Same 22-Minute Video Over and Over Again Theatre. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

The National Museum of the Indian American: Experience the history of Hindu Americans in the United States with no mention, of any sort, of how they came to be here in the first place. (Russell Beland)

The Hall of Precedents: Exhibits range from "Plessy vs. Ferguson" to "Well, Your Brother Certainly Never Flunked Chemistry." (Brian Barrett, New York)

The Paradise Museum: The complex includes a pink hotel, a boutique, a swinging hot spot and a tree exhibit. Admission \$1.50. Taxi service available. (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

On the Offensive

If someone cuts into line, even if it is a bunched-up line without a clearly defined track, others in line assume the intention is to cheat and do not hesitate to voice their indignation. One person knocking against another in a crowd is apt to provoke an angry response even after an apology is offered. Even politeness can provoke a bristling reaction, as when deference shown to age is taken as a slur.

So why is it that the most blatant and direct insults so often meet with tepid confusion?

Miss Manners has no desire to bring back the duel. She warmly approves of the restraint that is shown when someone lets a slight go by out of a sympathetic understanding of the psychological state of the offender. And she certainly does not countenance returning rudeness with rudeness.

But she is amazed when people allow themselves to be insulted with impunity. It is not as though they fail to notice or mind. They seem to be uncertain that they are right to take offense, so they do little or nothing.

Some cases in point:

"I have a relative who is very into health and dieting," writes a Gentle Reader who was "always able to keep up with her during athletic endeavors until the past year, when I have been recovering from an illness. I have been unable to exercise much and I am now very overweight, although I'm working very hard to lose the extra pounds. She would like me to come see her, but during a previous visit, she greeted me at the door, looked me up and down, curled her lip when her gaze fell on my Rubenesque hips, turned on her heel and refused to speak to me for the rest of the day."

Another Gentle Reader reports that he was "about to relate a story at a recent dinner party, when the friend to my left blurted out, 'Does this have an end anytime soon?'" He does not expect an apology, he said, although even the offender's escort suggested one was necessary, "but I'm still miffed."

A Gentle Reader who was shopping for curtains was mimicked by a saleswoman whose suggestion she declined. "The saleswoman then comically mocked what she presumed to be my thoughts, saying in a deep voice: 'Oh, I don't want to have anything to do with that stupid idea!'"

All of these people report having been under-

standably shocked into silence. What they could have said at the time was a harsh "I beg your pardon!" or, in extreme cases, "How dare you!" What should follow is a refusal to deal with that person short of an acceptable apology.

Even on reflection, Miss Manners's Gentle Readers doubt the legitimacy of their own hurt. The lady whose relative snubbed her because of her weight writes that she "would like to delay seeing her until I look better," the gentleman whose story was cut short is wondering whether he can be cold to the offender or "should I get over it and act as if nothing happened?" and the mocked shopper merely withheld the expected contradiction.

Hardly the one to argue for harsh behavior, Miss Manners simply believes that the effort to cause deliberate and dramatic offense should be clearly registered as offensive. Even the most forgiving victims owe it to the rest of society to make it clear that such behavior is intolerable.

Dear Miss Manners:

Could you kindly answer how one properly eats a baked apple? Is it cut with fork and knife or with spoon?

A properly baked apple is so ready to surrender that Miss Manners would consider attacking it with a knife to be cruel use of excessive force.

The standard implements for dessert, a fork and spoon, are exactly what you need, as the side of the fork easily cuts the weakened skin of the apple and the spoon deals with the squishy part. At least these implements are supposed to be standard. Miss Manners will overlook the substitution of a salad fork for a dessert fork, provided you do not try to pass off a teaspoon as a dessert spoon. Where that habit came from she cannot imagine, but a dessert spoon must be larger, and the only passable substitution would be an oval soup spoon.

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:

My friend's mother recently died. Every time someone dies, I get this major anxiety about being forced to attend the most morbid ritual in existence — the funeral. I understand that most people need this type of event for closure or to say their goodbyes, and I respect that. I just cannot stand being a part of it.

Filing past a dead person one by one literally makes me ill, and I have nightmares for weeks afterward. Even when I go to the funeral and stand at a distance, I feel this way.

When I tell people I don't feel comfortable going to funerals, they become offended and make rude comments and/or try to make me guilty, as if going to this is my responsibility or job.

When my time comes, I do not expect this kind of ritual. My family is aware of what I want and respects it.

My question is simple — how do I explain to people that I do not want to be a part of this kind of event? Am I the only one in the world who feels this way?

At a Dead End in Ill.

You might have a phobia known as necrophobia, which would cause your dramatic reaction to funerals. You probably aren't helping matters, however, by explaining a point of view that you should perhaps keep private. For instance, if you refer to funerals as "the most morbid ritual in existence" to loved ones of a person who has recently died, then I can imagine how that would offend them.

However, no one should try to persuade or force you to go, or make you feel guilty for not going.

There are plenty of ways to show your respect in the event of a death. If you decide not to attend any public events or services, you should send a warmly worded note or card expressing your sympathy.

At the risk of being your armchair psychiatrist, you might have this reaction because of a negative experience you had when you were young. Phobias are protective mechanisms against experiences you perceive to be dangerous. This is an issue you could probably successfully explore in therapy, and even if your opinion of these rituals didn't change, you would at least understand what causes your reaction.

Dear Amy:

My husband's ex-wife is driving me crazy! After nine years of not being married to him, she still finds ways to contact him. She wants tax advice,

calls his work phone on his birthday to send her best wishes, sends Christmas cards, e-mails the "thought of the day" to him, etc.

She lives across the country, their son is an adult and she has no reason to be involved with our lives, yet she does it. I think, because no one has told her to stop!

She has been remarried two other times, but she refuses to let go of my husband's last name.

I have an ex, too, yet would not think of disrespecting his marriage with interferences such as these. I have asked my husband to ask her to stop the calls, e-mails, etc. He thinks that if he ignores them and does not respond, she will stop. It has been nine years, Amy. She isn't slowing down, either.

What do you make of this behavior? There are times when I think he is right to ignore her acting like an idiot, yet every once in a while she really makes me want to scream.

Any suggestions?

Blood Pressure Rising in Calif.

I'm trying to figure out how, exactly, this person is driving YOU crazy when your husband is the point of contact. You don't say that she calls the house or hectors you on a quiet Sunday afternoon.

I know this relationship might seem inappropriate to you, but in the scheme of things, it sounds pretty benign. I think there are a lot of us who hear from former college friends, distant cousins or even exes, and though these relationships might not be current, we might hold something of a soft spot for the people who were once dear to us — the parents of our children, for instance.

If your husband really disliked this ongoing contact, he would ask his ex to stop it. He's the one you should have the beef with. He should respect your feelings, but I also think you could be more tolerant of this relationship — especially since it's not going anywhere. At the very least, ask your husband to stop telling you about this contact, since it bothers you so much.

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

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH			
♠	10 7 3		
♥	A Q 10 5 3		
♦	2		
♣	K J 7 3		
WEST			
♠	Q 4 2		
♥	J 7		
♦	K 7 6 4 3		
♣	A 5 2		
SOUTH (D)			
♠	A K 8 5		
♥	K 9 8		
♦	Q 10 8		
♣	10 9 4		

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦	Pass
1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
1 NT	Pass	4 ♥	All Pass

Opening lead: ♦ 4

The United States sent a good Open team to the 2004 Olympiad in Istanbul, though maybe not its best. In a controversial move, Nick Nickell's team, winner of the Olympiad Trials, was allowed to choose whether it would play in Istanbul or, due to security issues, in the 2005 Bermuda Bowl in Estoril, Portugal. The team will go to Estoril.

Still, when chance pitted the United States against defending champion Italy in the round of 16, many thought the match was the true "final." Italy won and went on to take the gold medals.

In today's deal, the U.S. North-South made a heart partial. In the replay, Italy's North-South got to four hearts on an artificial auction that made South the declarer: North's one diamond was a transfer, show-

ing hearts. West led a diamond, and East won and led a trump. Declarer took the A-K and next let the 10 of clubs ride. East took the queen and got out with his last trump. South then forced out the ace of clubs, and West exited with a club (not best).

Declarer took two clubs, leaving dummy with 10-7-3 of spades and two trumps, and him with A-K-8 of spades and Q-10 of diamonds. Each defender had three spades. West had K-7 of diamonds, East J-9.

When dummy led a trump at Trick Nine, East, declarer and West all three spades: If either defender threw a diamond, South had ways to set up and cash a diamond trick. South then took the top spades and ruffed a diamond in dummy—and the 10 of spades was good. Making four!

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Next Week: **Site Gags, or Hall Monikers**