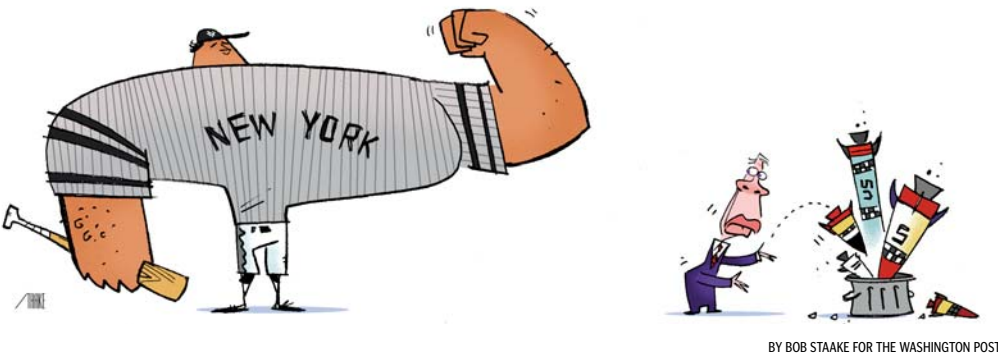


The Style Invitational

Week 605: Truly Stupendous Ideas



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Jose Canseco and Jimmy Carter: One had a bigger arms buildup.

Orville Wright and Oprah Winfrey: One got just a few minutes of air time.

Marlon Brando made an offer they couldn't refuse. Marion Barry wishes he'd refused that offer.

This week's contest, suggested by Ace Loser Brendan Beary of Great Mills: Name two people with the same initials (the people can be living or dead, real or fictional) and explain how they are similar or different, as in the examples above. The winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets, courtesy of Loser Dave Komornik of Danville, Va., a lovely black and white ceramic plate commemorating the "Exposition de Paris 1900." This is clearly a genuine French antique, as you can tell by the inscription on the back, which says: "California Pantry™ Classic Ceramics: (c) 2003 Made in China." 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, April 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 property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published May 8. 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 Forsyth, Mo.

Report from Week 601, in which we asked for untruthful anecdotes to answer actual "Editor's Query" questions from the Washington Post Magazine:

♦ **Second runner-up: Tell us about a disastrous or funny experience you had involving food:** One evening I took my young daughter to a local restaurant. On our way to wash up, we saw an enormous rat. Despite my screams, the rodent headed straight at my daughter. Maternal instinct took over and I began kicking it for all I was worth. Employees and regulars came over, but instead of helping me, they helped the rat! Evidently it was some sort of pet. Named Chucky something. Restraining order or not, I'll never go there again. (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

♦ **First runner-up, the winner of the microscope slides of rat brain tissue: Tell us of a time you overcame tremendous self-doubt:** I recently went through a rough period in my life and I really began to doubt myself, especially with regard to women. Fortunately, a friend told me about a support group for people with low self-esteem, and I joined. And it worked! Turns out it was all women, and they were so desperate for approval that, within a week, I boinked them all! I'm back, baby! (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker: Tell us about an event that prompted you to change your life:** Some years ago I was in L.A. on a trip with my parents, and a thin, oddly dressed man approached me and asked if I wanted "to go to Neverland for a special slumber party." He gave me the creeps, so I ran away. Years later, I saw this same man on TV — it was Michael Jackson! I vowed right then that never again would I allow my suspicious nature to deprive me of an unforgettable life experience. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

♦ Honorable Mentions:

Tell us about a disastrous or funny experience you had involving food.

I was at a dinner party when the man next to me began gasping for breath. I tried the Heimlich with no success, so I cut a hole in his throat with a penknife and stuck a straw in the hole to facilitate his breathing. Was I embarrassed to find out later that he only had asthma! (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Lindsay Topmoeller was the prettiest girl in pre-K, and glue was all the rage: eaten with paper or just directly from the bottle. But to win Lindsay I knew I needed more: melted crayons. Lindsay was chewing her ponytail as I approached. "These are for you," I said, handing her my colorful creation. "Yum," she said. "The secret ingredient is Cerulean," I whispered. She smiled. She picked her nose. I picked mine. Then I went home. (Dan Nooter, Washington)

Dining in a fashionable downtown establishment, I was approached by none other than the Empress. She touched my shoulder and said, "I knew of your prowess with a pen, but am taken aback by your Adonis-like frame and Hollywood looks. Please take me home and rub that delicious-looking pesto all over me." To which I replied: "As much I would love to, your Highness, I must refuse. Deadlines are looming and I have a witty anecdote to write." (Kerry Thorn, Rockville)

On a trip to L.A., I sat near Ricardo Montalban at Spago. After he left, I tried to take a partly chewed pickle off his plate, hoping to add it to my collection of celebrity food. Unfortunately, another diner had the same idea. After a rather violent tussle, I stood with the pickle, only to discover — after all that — the celebrity had in fact only been Fernando Lamas! (Jeff Brechlin)

I read the "Life Is Short" entry today, about the man who kissed his wife on the forehead in church when Mass was ended and then heard a voice two rows behind say, "Get a room." I blushed in shame: I was the man who said that. The woman totally misunderstood my comment. I only wanted to watch. So I'm sticking to videos from now on. (Bill Moulden, Frederick)

Tell us about a moving act of kindness you experienced or witnessed.

After I mugged an elderly woman and stole her purse, I looked over my shoulder and saw a boy on crutches leaning over, struggling to help the woman up. The boy fell down, obviously in pain, but he continued to comfort the woman and said he had a cell phone and would call for help. I turned and ran back to them, knelt down, grabbed the cell phone and ran like hell. (Cheryl Furst, Falls Church)

The company where I worked 30 years went bankrupt and my retirement disappeared with the CEO. I sold my home to pay for my elderly mother's care. My Social Security benefits

were cut so much I couldn't feed my grandchildren, living with me since their mother was imprisoned for funneling money to a terrorist group, Amnesty International. Fortunately, a compassionate, generous individual came to my assistance. George W. Bush personally provided . . . (George Laumann, Arlington)

Tell us about an event that prompted you to change your life.

The morning after the lottery drawing, I informed my boss that he was an incompetent fool. I told my wife that it would be worth half my fortune just to avoid her ugly face for one more day, and dismissed all my sycophant friends and family. It's amazing how much a one and seven look alike. You going to eat that? (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Years ago I went on a Mediterranean cruise, which was not a success. One night, feeling despondent and a little drunk, I placed a plaintive message (with my address) in a bottle I dropped overboard. Well, no, I never received a reply, but now I use e-mail and have lots of friends from all corners of the world. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

She was pale, raven-haired, with remarkably gleaming teeth. I offered her a drink. She said, "I never drink . . . coffee or alcohol." She lured me outside Club Sabertooth for an intimate stroll in the moonlight. "Can I ask you a personal question?" she said.

"Uh, sure."
"Are you familiar with the Book of Mormon?" I haven't tasted coffee in months, and, boy, am I tired. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)
Hmmm. Nothing stands out as really life-changing. I guess I'm just an ordinary girl. — Christine Jorgensen. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Do you really think that if I (a) had a life, or (b) were capable of changing it, I'd spend a week churning out page after page of stupid drivel for the chance to win a couple pieces of sliced rat brain? (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Tell us about a time you overcame tremendous self-doubt.

My teenage daughter screamed at me: "You're so stupid. You don't know anything!" Well, since she was so smart and knew everything, and I didn't, I was about to retire from life and become a hermit. But I thought I'd give it another try and try to overcome my stupidity; I went back to high school, and now I know everything, too. (Mike Paulson, Falls Church)

My weight has always been up and down, and I was always a bit concerned with my appearance. Then one day, as I stood naked in front of a full-length mirror, I decided simply that I was happy with my body, and if the people gawking at me in Wal-Mart's furniture aisle didn't like it, then that's their problem. (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

Next Week: Take a Letter — Again, or Wordsmithrth

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Taken Aback by Gift Requests

While Miss Manners bemoans the epidemic of greed that is spreading throughout society, others are trying to do something about it. As appalled as she at the demands of those who consider every occasion of their lives to be a fundraising opportunity and their well-wishers as a source of income, they are thinking of ways to opt out.

The cheapest way would be to skip parties where they are told to fork over cash or certain items. What are the disappointed so-called hosts going to do about it — turn over their gift registries to collection agencies?

But the anti-greed brigade is composed of nicer people. They honestly want to celebrate their friends' birthdays, graduations, engagements, weddings, housewarmings, babies and such, and would have thought of giving them presents had the celebrants not preempted this privilege.

So they go along with the constant instructions to give and donate, only balking when encountering a particularly outrageous example. And there is no dearth of those. From the number of people who festoon their invitations with requests for specific goods and cash, you would think that panhandling had become one of the social graces.

Not to dignified people, of course. Miss Manners is grateful to find so many who refuse to forfeit their self-respect, and are alarmed at the pressure to do so. Their acquaintances insist on interpreting their celebrations as demands for presents and demand, in return, that they finish the job by registering the particulars. To escape being greedy while not insulting their greedy friends, they adopt one of the following plays:

1) Asking for donations to charity instead of presents.

Examples: "My fiance's being a Type-1 diabetic has greatly affected our lives, so we are asking for donations to a juvenile diabetes foundation." . . . "My 10-year-old has decided she doesn't want gifts from her friends at her birthday party, she wants them to bring something (food, toys) that can be donated to the local animal shelter." . . . "When our son became a bar mitzvah, we included an information sheet describing two charities our son chose."

2) Asking for something inexpensive or homemade.

Examples: "We are telling people to write a short poem about love." . . . "We thought it would be wonderful to receive wine and champagne

glasses — symbols of celebration we could use again and again over the years, selections available to suit any budget, leaving all color and style choices up to the giver."

3) Asking not to be given presents. The standard example is putting "No gifts" on the invitation, but the whimsical favor "Your presence is our present."

All of these ideas are unselfishly meant, and Miss Manners hates to throw a damper on them. But the first makes trouble when the guest disagrees with the worth of the designated cause, and the second when the guest considers the task to be a nuisance. The third is unfortunately often now interpreted to mean that cash is expected rather than goods.

More importantly, all of them say, "You owe me, but I'm going to let you off easy." And they have transformed a gracious custom into a flat-out debt.

Here are a few things the un-greedy can do:

1) Come to agreements with relatives and with the parents of other children about limits on exchanges.

2) Refrain from naming minor present-giving events on their invitations, and only announcing adult birthdays, engagements and anniversaries when the guests are assembled.

3) Accept whatever they get graciously, and then quietly give what they can to charity.

Dear Miss Manners:

What is the appropriate response to impertinent comments from strangers regarding one's appearance, such as "You look tired" or "Why the long face?"?

As Miss Manners believes that impertinent strangers should be ignored, she doesn't understand why people keep asking her what to say to them.

Still less does she understand why she keeps thinking of things. In these cases, it would be, "Yes, it's very tiring to hear that," and "Because I don't happen to have a short face."

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 husband had an affair almost two years ago. I am having trouble letting go. We went to a marriage counselor and decided to work on our marriage.

Everything is going well except that I keep bringing up the affair. My husband worked with this woman and has since changed jobs and no longer sees her.

I, on the other hand, see the woman around town quite often.

I want to go up to her and talk to her, but I wouldn't know what to say.

I feel that once I say something to her I will be able to close this chapter in our lives and move on.

Am I wrong to think this? Please help!

Want to Talk

It might help if you actually script out how a confrontation might go. Just take a piece of paper and write down a dialogue. I'll start:

You: Tiffany, do you know who I am?

She: Yes.

You: I can't believe you did this to my family and me. How could you have an affair with a married man?

She: I really don't want to talk to you. (Walks off.)

You: He's my husband!

I'm trying to demonstrate that in a real-life dialogue, you only get the satisfaction of controlling what you say. The other person seldom cooperates.

I won't say that you are wrong to want this confrontation — in fact, I can completely understand why you want it. If I thought it would end your interest in this affair, I'd tell you to go for it.

I can say with some certitude that a confrontation probably won't be satisfying in the way you expect, because it doesn't speak to your most basic issue. This is about you and your husband. At some point, you have to muster the strength to move on, mainly because you don't have a choice. Keeping this woman on your mind is permitting her to stay in the middle of your marriage.

If this feeling continues, then I hope you'll take this issue to your marriage counselor. Why? Because this affair is not over, at least not for you.

Dear Amy:

About that husband who ignored his wife when she

was fat and became nice when she lost weight? Well, that husband could be me. My wife outweighs me by 40 pounds, and it has been that way for 10 years.

Her weight has destroyed my social life and our sex life. I go skiing, hiking and swimming and do other physical things alone as she cannot participate with me. I travel alone because I am too embarrassed to be with her. I am in senior management but don't host backyard parties because I am ashamed. My wife also snores and is sloppy and lazy.

Go to marriage counseling? Well, we did that 10 years ago but the counselor told us it was my fault!

Since then I decided to shut up about her weight and just ignore it. But she is gaining more, and now I don't know how long I can take it.

Serious

Well, if counseling didn't work for you 10 years ago, then by all means, don't ever try that again — even though your counseling ended just as her weight ballooning began. Hmmm.

Hellooooo? Back you go.

Because feeling resentful and ashamed of your wife seems to be making you increasingly unhappy and her increasingly fat, counseling is exactly what you need. If she won't go with you, go by yourself, preferably to someone who has expertise in working with men.

This time, if a counselor says "It's your problem," don't interpret it as "It's your fault." Learning the difference between those two statements would be a start.

Let me make a plug here for Dr. Phil McGraw's program "Staying Alive in 2005." Ways to jump into his latest "weight-loss challenge" are available on www.DrPhilDietPlan.com.

Perhaps support and encouragement will do the trick. Silence, rejection and shame didn't work, so it's worth a try, don't you think?

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 (D)
♠ K 6
♥ 6 2
♦ 8 7 5 4
♣ A K J 9 7

WEST
♠ J 7 3 2
♥ 9 8 4
♦ K 10 9 3 2
♣ 3

EAST
♠ A Q 10 9 4
♥ 3
♦ Q J
♣ Q 10 8 5 2

SOUTH
♠ 8 5
♥ A K Q J 10 7 5
♦ A 6
♣ 6 4

The bidding:

North	East	South	West
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♥	3 S
3 NT	4 ♠	5 ♥	All Pass

Opening lead: Choose it

Today's deal, from the ACBL Fall Championships, had enough points of interest to appear twice in the tournament's Daily Bulletin.

When Matthew Granovetter, editor of Bridge Today magazine, wrote up the deal, he noted that a spade opening lead would beat South at five hearts. Many Wests led the singleton club, however.

Most Souths took dummy's ace, drew trumps and cashed the ace of diamonds, on which East dropped the queen. On the next diamond West had to put up his king, swallowing East's jack like a crocodile opening its jaws. If instead West played low, East would be end-played when his jack won, forced to lead a club into dummy's K-J or let the king of spades score.

At one table, South found a way to stop West from executing the "crocodile coup." After

South won the club lead, he ran all his trumps. Dummy's last five cards were the K-6 of spades, K-J of clubs and a diamond, and East had to keep the A-Q of spades and Q-10 of clubs, hence only one diamond. South then cashed the ace of diamonds, took the king of clubs and exited with the jack, forcing East to give dummy the 13th trick with the king of spades.

That was plus 650 to North-South, but another North-South pair did even better: North played at 3NT and got a club opening lead, won by his seven. He cashed seven hearts and the ace of diamonds, saving the king of spades and A-K-J of clubs, and East was stuck. He kept the Q-10-8 of clubs and the bare ace of spades, whereupon North led a spade and end-played him. Making six, plus 690!

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