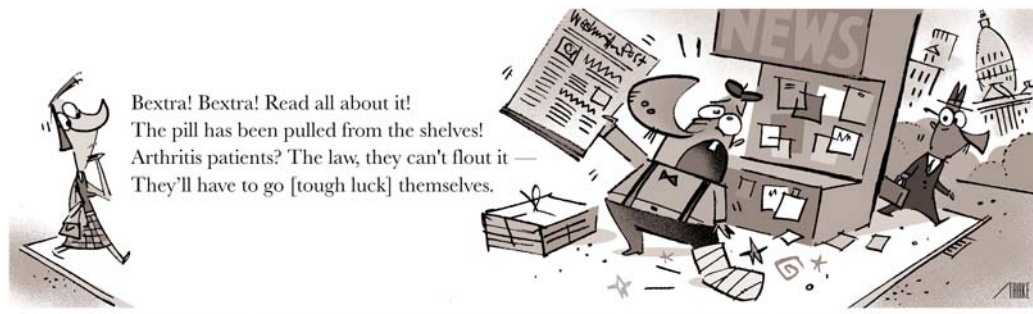


The Style Invitational

Week 606: The News Could Be Verse



Bextra! Bextra! Read all about it!
The pill has been pulled from the shelves!
Arthritis patients? The law, they can't flout it —
They'll have to go [tough luck] themselves.

"Another Pain Reliever Pulled; FDA Warns of Risk in Entire Class of Anti-Inflammatories," The Washington Post, April 8
BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's contest: It's National Poetry Month, and once again, in the Invitational's ceaseless mission to Raise the Cultural Literacy of Our Readers, we invite you to translate the fine prose of Washington Post articles into verse, as in the example above. Choose any article appearing in The Post or on its Web site from April 17 through April 25. If you're using the printed Post, please include the date, page number and headline; if you're freeloading from the Web, give the date and also copy in a bit of the article. As always, long poems must deserve the extra space; if you send "The Waste Land," you'd better be T.S. Eliot.

The winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets a pair of cuff links with a real working analog clock on each one, plus the legend "Time Is Money," donated by Russell Beland of Springfield.

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 25. 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 May 15. 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 Dave Zarrow of Herndon.

Report from Week 602, the perennially in-demand contest in which you alter a word or term by one letter, or transpose two letters, and redefine it: It's a good thing the Empress was sensible enough to limit it to words originally beginning with A, B, C and D, since she was inundated with far too many good entries to run here. So below, except for the winner and runners-up, are only the A's and B's; the Honorably Mentioned C's and D's will appear next week. Those who think the Empress is playing favorites when they read the same names over and over must realize that, of the two Losers inking most often below, one person submitted 104 entries, and the other one 296. So most of their stuff ended up in the trash, too.

♦ **Fifth runner-up: Alexandria: A town known for its buffet restaurants.** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

♦ **Fourth runner-up: Galgebra: Arithmetic. — L. Summers, Cambridge, Mass.** (Chris Doyle, Raleigh)

♦ **Third runner-up: Bucolip: Amish trash talk ("Thy cow is so thin, she gives evaporated milk, whatever that be").** (Michael Fransella, Arlington)

♦ **Second runner-up: Steroid belt: A home run.** (Dan Seidman, Watertown, Mass.)

♦ **First runner-up, the winner of the Boyfriend's Arm Pillow: Apocalypstic: The little smudge I came home with on my collar that makes my wife act like it's the end of the world.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker: Defenestration: A ruse to divert the cop's attention while you throw the evidence out the window.** (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

♦ **Honorable Mentions (listed in alphabetical order of the original words):**

Abelionist: Cain. (Michael Fransella)

Accidental: Caused by a Freudian slip. (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

Dadmit: To acknowledge paternity — In the end, Bill Cosby finally dadmitted. (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

E-donis: A man who's extremely handsome, or so he says in the chat room. (Tom Witte)

Algebra: What the Little Mermaid wears over her chest. (Kyle Hendrickson, Frederick)

Aliass: A body double for a nude scene. (Tom Witte)

Alter Geo: The vehicle most likely to sport the bumper sticker "My Other Car Is a Porsche." (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

Nambush: How the Swift Boat Veterans helped sink John Kerry. (Bruce MacKenchnie, Annandale)

Amoebra: An undergarment that lifts and separates and separates and separates. (Eric Murphy, Chicago)

Wankylosaur: This species went extinct because it just wasn't as interested in mating. (Brendan Beary)

Santagolism: A form of threatening mind control that parents practice on their children every December. You better watch out! (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

Antibeater: An extra-small white undershirt. (George Vary, Bethesda)

Panteater: A particularly potent flatulence. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Anthology: A collection of Flemish literature. (Brendan Beary)

Antioxidant: Something that repels the female of the species (e.g., overpowering after-shave, constant BlackBerry-checking). (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Antipirant: Mace. (Will Cramer and Julie Thomas, Herndon)

Auntiques: That crocheted tea cozy and the scented stationery. (Deborah Guy, Columbus, Ohio)

Mantonym: Word pairs describing identical traits positively in men but negatively in women (e.g., "stud"/"slut"; "assertive"/"bitchy"). (Mike Cisneros, Centreville)

Capoplexy: A life-threatening condition caused by having one's offer refused. (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

Arbyss: The deepest part of the stomach, reserved for two Giant Roast Beefs, large Curly Fries and a chocolate shake. (Danny Organeck, Alexandria)

Archenema: A high colonic. (Chris Doyle)

Fattire: Items from the Lane Bryant catalogue. (Michelle Stupak)

Tautomatic: The Botox alternative from Ronco. (Jeff Covell, Arlington)

AWOOL: A lamb on the lam. (Tom Witte)

Ayatoljahl: A holier-than-thou person given to pointing out that he was right all along. (Brendan Beary)

Avalunche: Bulimia. (Brendan Beary)

Avant-harde: Before the Cialis kicks in. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

Avoirdupoise: Self-confidence with one's plus-size body — Queen Latifah displays plenty of avoirdupoise. (Brendan Beary)

Bananab: A fruit that can be peeled from either end. (Brendan Beary)

Bandwagon: The intense pain of knowing that the Skins won't get to the Super Bowl this year. (Fred Souk, Reston)

Raptism: After the introduction of the folk Mass, it was only a matter of time. (Jan Stowell, Washington)

bAAr: Where only nonalcoholic drinks are served. (Tom Witte)

Barelycorn: Watered-down whiskey. (Brendan Beary)

Branacles: The dried bits of cereal stuck like glue to the bowl you should have rinsed before leaving for work. (Walt Johnston, Woodstock, Md.)

Lastard: The moron who leaves the empty milk carton in the fridge and never replaces the toilet paper. (Brendan O'Byrne, Regina, Saskatchewan)

Bilingual: Speaking both English and Street. (Lyell Rodieck, Springfield)

Bilateral: Talking out of both sides of your mouth. (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)

Bilk of Rights: The Patriot Act. (Greg McGrew, Leesburg)

Binocular: Having both the A-bomb and the H-bomb. — G.W.B., Washington (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

Blimbo: Someone who's both dumb and fat. (Peter Metrisko, Chantilly)

Booboo: A small scar left by breast surgery. (Fred Souk)

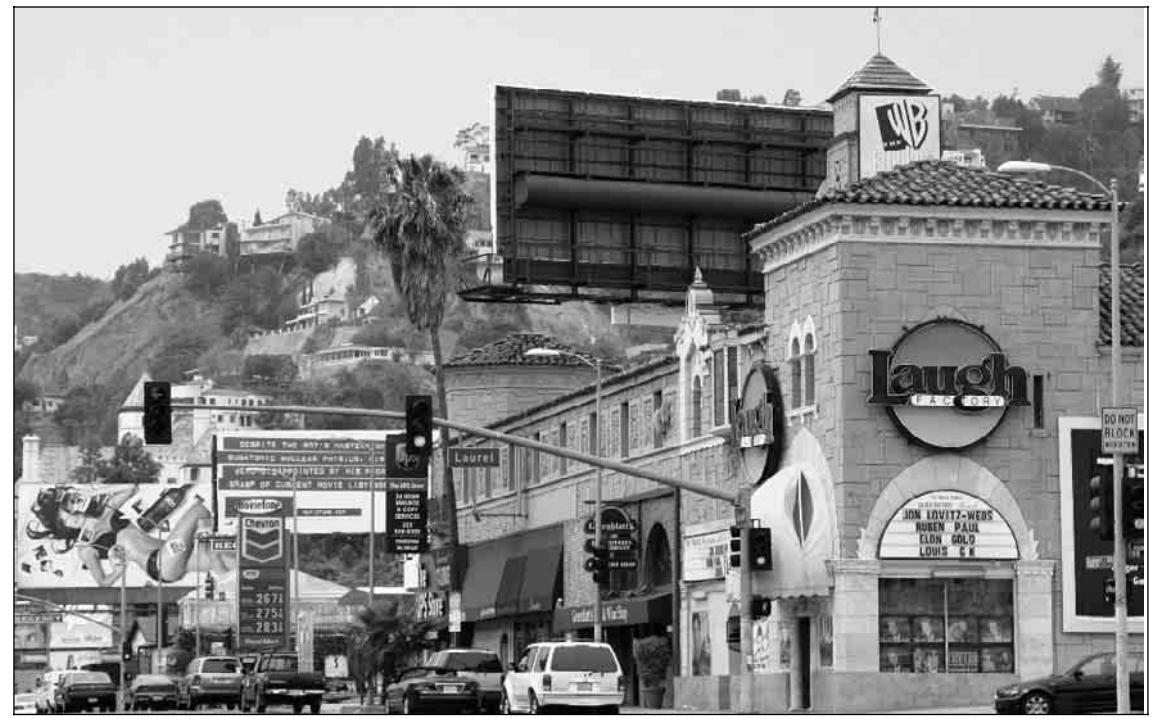
BoltUN: A slap in the face to a former friend. (Danny Organeck)

Bong mot: A profundity unable to be appreciated by the non-indulging (e.g., "Hey, far out how, like, the caked-up ketchup around the bottle? It's, like, Africa, man"). (Mitchell Singer, Los Angeles)

Breck-and-mortar: Helmet hair. (Peter Metrisko)

Brontesaurus: A dinosaur that died out from a broken heart. (Scott Campisi)

And the Anti-Invitational: Xxylophone: A percussing instrument; **Zebra:** The largest cup size offered. (Bertram H. Lowi, Southampton, N.Y.)



PHOTOS BY JONATHAN ALCOORN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Michael Jackson's accuser participated in a comedy summer camp sponsored by the Laugh Factory, shown above.

The Path to the King of Pop

JACKSON, From D1

person apartment to a sprawling ranch. They became accustomed to limos, these children, who at one time were so poor that their mother claimed she put plastic bags on their feet instead of shoes.

"I now know how to travel," the mother says in a meandering aside about what she later calls "luggages." She claims that once, returning from a luxury hotel on a private jet with the King of Pop, she carried her possessions in a garbage bag.

You see images of some of her many homes on what the prosecution calls "surveillance" tapes, which it offers into evidence Friday to bolster the mom's case that Jackson's people stalked and filmed her. In silent, eerie images, you see the mother talking to someone in a car. You see her father appearing to drag a hose across his lawn, and a grainy image she says is her boyfriend is walking along a sidewalk. You see her daughter coming home from school wearing a backpack; she turns and sees the camera. ("She looks frightened," the mom interjects from the stand. The judge strikes the comment.)

This is our secret fear, all of us, that someone might be watching us when we think we're alone. That we might have our own secret paparazzi, filming our shopping trips and our weight fluctuations, knowing us and judging us as the whole world knows and judges the family of the accuser now.

The Old Way of Life

Apartment 208 in the East Los Angeles walk-up could hardly be more different from Neverland. No Ferris wheels, no topiary, no fairy-tale allusions.

It's in a residential area not far from a commercial strip with shops such as "Paga Poco Discount Store" and "The Elegant Lady." The painted-number sign on the two-story building is peeling. On the back of the building graffiti has been scrawled in Spanish, and in the littered alley there's a white wall with these handwritten words: JESUS I AM THE WAY AND THE LIFE.

What must it have been like when Michael Jackson's limousine pulled up to this apartment? That teenage girl doing a dance routine right now on her patio across the street — did she watch with envy? Did the children feel special when they walked down the creaky carpeted steps of their apartment building, and saw the limo through the bars on the front door?

"I was like, dang, that's cool," the accuser says in a tape played in court about the first time he saw the limo.

Inside the apartment building, the hallways are arched and vaultlike. Candy wrappers are crammed on a windowsill. A child shrieks behind a door. A plastic bandage hangs from the banister like a droopy flag.

No. 208 has a small living area, a kitchen and a bathroom. According to the kids, the entire family of five slept in the same room. The mother says they paid \$425 a month.

According to the three kids, this wasn't a happy home. They testified their father beat them and their mother. On the stand, the daughter calls her father by his first name in a stony voice, as if he were a rude acquaintance. Family friend Jamie Masada testifies to seeing bruises on the mother's face and neck, which she tried to cover with makeup. The couple were married for 17 years; they separated in 2001 and later divorced.

The mother claims that Jackson's people moved her out of her East Los Angeles apartment against her will in 2003 as they were preparing to send her family to Brazil, a trip that never took place. You see the inside of the place on one of the tapes the prosecution shows Friday. The camera pans around the shabby main room, where window blinds are in a heap on the floor.

A man is vacuuming the carpet and in the kitchen, a guy in a blue shirt that says Dino's Moving & Storage removes the silverware tray from a drawer and puts it in a box on the floor. The camera shows the cleaning products under the sink, then returns to show the cabinet is empty. We see the back of the moving truck, with a mattress and a chair inside.

The mother says Jackson's people did away with things connecting her family to the famous pop star, including letters he had written to her son she says she hid in a pot containing fake Gerber daisies. If you believe her story, Jackson's people were essentially trying to erase anything incriminating, including her own family.

You wonder who remembers them. You knock on an apartment with a mat that says WELCOME. The door opens a crack. Someone peers out, then slams and locks the door.

A woman answers another door. She wears a blue nightgown. It's noon. She says she doesn't speak much English, but she recalls a bruise on the mother's cheek.

"She have problem with husband," she says.

Another tenant says the family was "always fighting, always fighting." She says the mother was a good woman, attended church, knew who her kids' friends were. The boy was a "gentleman" with a "clean mind." She remembers him getting sick and "white" and losing his hair. She remembers his hair growing back, and him getting handsome again. She remembers he told her daughter he knew Michael Jackson. The girl didn't believe him.

The Fateful Call

In the summer of 1999, the three kids enrolled in the Laugh Factory's comedy summer camp for underprivileged children. Jamie Masada, owner of the Laugh Factory, has been holding summer camp at his nightclub on the Sunset strip for almost 20 years. The place is dark and spacious, with red vinyl seats and couches.

Masada is a small man with sympathetic brown eyes and a thick accent. He's originally from Iran. He says he tends to befriend his campers, and in 2000, when the boy became ill, the Laugh Factory held two fundraisers for him. According to testimony, the boy had to have chemotherapy and radiation, as well as endure the removal of a massive tumor and one of his kidneys. The hospital where he was treated, Kaiser Permanente, is a few miles east of the Laugh Factory on Sunset Boulevard.

The pediatric unit, where Masada recalls visiting the boy almost daily, is decorated with a banner of children carrying balloons. There's a waiting area with a foosball table and a child's drawing that says, "Thank-you nurse and doctors."

Here in the boy's hospital room, Masada says, he offered the emaciated child \$50 bills to entice him to eat. When the boy pointed to the television and said he wanted to meet his "idol," Masada knew he had to make it happen.

The boy was in his hospital room when the phone rang. "I asked who was this?" the boy, now 15, recalled from the stand last month. "And then they said they were Michael Jackson."

A New Face, a New Home

The mother met her second husband, a major in the U.S. Army Reserve, in July 2002, and they married a year later. For a while, the mother and her children split their time among their apartment in East L.A., the major's one-bedroom in a neighborhood called Koreatown, and the mother's parents' home in El Monte, a suburb east of the city. In part because of this, the kids switched schools a lot.

The accuser's younger brother, now 14, said on the stand last month that he had attended six schools, not counting the time he was doing independent study, and the time he lived at Neverland and didn't study at all.

The house in El Monte, where the grandparents lived for 34 years, is a one-level place on a dead-end street. There are multicolored roses behind a fence, which has a latched gate, and a dog barks tinnily when you try to open it. A sign reads "No trespassing"; a neighbor says



Graffiti marks the top of the back of the East Los Angeles apartment building once inhabited by the family of Michael Jackson's accuser.

that's for the reporters who come around.

The children's names have been carved into the concrete of the sidewalk, along with the name of their dog, Rocky. It's dated 2000, the year the boy got sick, back when their messy lives were still private.

In November 2003, the new family — mom, the kids and the major — moved to West Los Angeles. They were starting a new life. They rented an apartment with a balcony next to an athletic field with a sign that says "University High Wildcats."

The place is not far from Beverly Hills and it's nothing like Soto street. It has an elevator to take them to their second-floor apartment, No. 201. No graffiti, no bars on the windows. The five of them lived here for about nine months. Sometime around their arrival, the mom got pregnant. Then she and the major got married. The neighbors remember the diminutive woman and the stocky man, who seemed always to be in military uniform. The two young guys in the apartment below them hated the new family. They were noisy.

"My roommate and I couldn't stand it — we were so happy when they left," says Steve Parker, 29. "I could hear her yelling at him and him yelling at her, her crying." He says he had to go up there a lot and bang on the door. He says he would see the kids awake late at night.

The woman who lived down the hall from 201 says she greeted the mom in the hallway sometimes and asked when she was due. They never spoke at length and she can't say the mom did anything remarkable, except once. The mom gave her a worn, fake plant in a pot. The woman says it gave her a rash on her arms.

About a month later, she noticed the family was gone. These days, when the accuser's mother gets to the witness stand, she acts as though she never wants to leave. She calls Jackson a "golliath"; she tells the defense attorney not to raise his voice. She turns to the jury and confides details of her life: She's "just a regular person." She has a "tender spot" in her heart for people over 50. She has "never missed Ash Wednesday, never." She will "never say no to love."

The Jackson people took advantage of her, she says. She trusted them. "I wanted friends so bad," she says. She brings up her ex-husband and moans: He "always told me nobody loved me."

You get the sense this woman has real reason to moan and sigh, but you don't know exactly what that is. You also get the sense that her moment in front of the jury, expected to continue Monday, is something she's been waiting for all her life. After so many moves, so much disorder, it's as if she's found a home.

Next Week: Sui Genesis, or In the Big Inking (plus the C's and D's)