

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



Ribbled: Amused someone with a dirty joke. "The Aristocrats" ribbled the audience constantly, except the lady who'd thought she'd be seeing a Merchant Ivory film."

Week 642: It's Open Season

The Empress was alerted recently, by chronic Loser Roy Ashley of Washington, to Merriamwebster.com's "Open Dictionary," to which anyone can submit a new word and a definition. Most of the entries so far are pretty lame; they're often unnecessary variations on existing words, such as "occupate" to mean "occupy." You — yes, you personally — can do much better: **Come up with a brand-new word and its definition. And the word must begin with O, Oh, okay, O, P, Q, R or S.** Make sure that Google is not already overflowing with uses of your "new" word. It's okay to use an obscure existing word if your definition has nothing to do with the real one.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets a colorful dreidel-motif hospital scrub shirt handcrafted by sometime Loser Marleen May of Rockville, who has to work her nursing shift tonight, the first night of Hanukkah, because, you know, Jews get to work on Christmas.

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 Tuesday, Jan. 3. Include "Week 642" 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 humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Jan. 22. 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 Russell Beland of Springfield.

REPORT FROM WEEK 638

In which we asked for ideas for holiday movies or TV specials that would counter their usual sappy themes:

4 "A Cockroach Christmas": Ernest the bug tries desperately to find a morsel of food, but the house has been sterilized by the germ-obsessed lady of the house, and his family can't even celebrate Christmas because they're getting exterminated. (Sasha Lamb, Washington)

3 "Bill Nye's Physics Phun With Santa": The Science Guy disintegrates the Santa myth as he uses a blowtorch and a hot dog to demonstrate reindeer thermodynamics at the speeds needed for Kris Kringle to stay on schedule. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

2 The winner of the "Christmas With the Kranks" Advent calendar and the book "Christmas's Most Wanted": "Holy Guacamole!": When they decide they've seen a miraculously appearing Nativity scene in a bowl of mashed avocado, the Hernandez family learns how to make a little extra Christmas green. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

1 AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

"Apocalypse Noel": Captain Benjamin Willard dog-sleds deep into Yukon Territory to assassinate deranged Colonel Nicholas Klaus, who has appointed himself Santa to a devoted Inuit tribe. (P.H. Stevenson, Scottsville, Va.)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

"Not a Creature Was Stirring": The doors are shut at the soup kitchen on Christmas Day after no one volunteers to help out. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

"Mr. Potter's Revenge": George Bailey watches as an interstate is built past Bedford Falls, the industries move out of town, the residents move to the suburbs, his savings and loan is accused of redlining, and finally a Wal-Mart is built on the outskirts of town and decimates what remains of the central business district. (Christopher P. Larsen, Portland, Ore.)

"Christmas in Iraq": Join our troops for the ceremonial lighting of the Yule detainee. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

"Put It on Lay-Away": This year's hottest toy is the Baby Farts 'n' Giggles doll, and the biggest toy store in town doesn't have any — on the shelves, that is. The manager has plenty in his office, though, because he knows some moms will do just about anything to get one! (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

"New Year's Zero-Tolerance Eve": Live from Washington! Watch as D.C. police arrest every driver who's smiling. 0.08% fun! (Jeffrey Contompasis, Ashburn)

"A Holiday Dirge: The Ghost of Christmas Future" shows Scrooge a band of zealots insisting on terminology meant to exclude Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. His view of mankind confirmed, Scrooge sends the Cratchit family to debtors' prison and uses Tiny Tim's crutch for firewood. (Dave Kelsey, Fairfax)

"Axmas, or Shop Till You Drop": A trip to the mall on Christmas Eve becomes last-minute chopping for this group of teens. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

"Miracle on 14th Street": A Washington lady, infused with holiday spirit, bestows some special gifts on visitors from the surrounding suburbs. (Roy Ashley, Washington; Martin Mould, Springfield)

"Red Nose of Death": Taunting from peers turns North Pole outcast Rudolph into a psychotic loner obsessed with revenge. (John Johnston, St. Inigo, Md.)

"Santa Clausewitz": Santa and his team of reindeer are redeployed to Iraq. Their platoon gets lost in the fog of war. Unfortunately, Rudolph, with his nose so bright, makes an excellent target at night. (Cecil J. Clark, Asheville, N.C.)

"The 87% Solution": Holiday classics improved with having the ending cut off. The box set includes the Grinch leaving with all the loot; Frosty melted; and George Bailey ready to jump off the bridge. (Kevin Dopart)

"Terry Schiavo's Animated Christmas Special." Two hours of videotape showing Terry's delight as her parents dangle ornaments and sing

Christmas classics. Viewers at home are encouraged to sing along and wave at Terry. (P.H. Stevenson)

"Be the Grinch": Contestants vie to see who can break into the most houses on Christmas Eve and relieve their victims of presents and decorations. (Robert Gluck, Herndon)

"The Loneliest Candle": Rejected from Teleflora the week before Christmas as too limp, a sad candle is rescued from the dumpster by a homeless man, and achieves blazing glory as the source of a fatal three-alarm fire on skid row. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

"Kathie Lee Gifford's Desert Island Christmas": Tom Shales gives this special his highest recommendation, as Kathie Lee is stranded with the "Survivor" cast and they kill her for meat. (John Johnston)

"The Bipolar Express": A young boy finds that the exhilaration of candy canes and sugar plums can come crashing down in disappointment and loneliness. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

"The Love Yule Never Know": Originally made as a tender, open-minded love story, but when PBS rejected it the show went to Fox as a no-holds-barred exposé of the relationship between Santa and the third elf from the left. (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

"A Death Row Christmas": It's Christmas Eve, and the men on death row plan their last meals and share anecdotes about the children they'll never see again. When words spreads that the governor will pardon one of them, a fight breaks out; but peace is restored once they realize it's just another of the warden's holiday pranks. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

"A Michael Brown Christmas": When Charlie's father is put in charge of the "Peanuts" holiday pageant, he loses the script, ignores the puddles on the stage, and shows up late for the performance. But what a nice suit he's wearing! (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.; Joseph Romm, Washington)

"Two Eyes Made Out of Coal": A snowman waits, lonely, despondent, in an empty field, knowing that a warm front is on the way. (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

"Elf-B.I.": Agents go undercover at the North Pole to hack into Santa's naughty/nice database as part of their stepped-up surveillance of the citizenry. They see you when you're sleeping, they know when you're awake . . . (Brendan Beary)

"Gift of the Magnificent Seven": Yul Brynner sells his hair to buy a holster for Robert Vaughn's gun while Robert Vaughn sells his gun to buy a comb for Yul Brynner. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Next Week: What's the Small Idea? or Too Clever for Worth

At Christmastime, the Yearning Curve Is Steep

WISHES, From D1

overcoat, and asks to keep his name out of the paper, says his personal business is his own, and he is so far away from that island Christmas wish that his eyes grow smaller, and he asks instead for a bottle of cologne.

And two Santas, a woman Santa and a man Santa, walk into the coffee shop and their bellies are stuffed with square pillows, which are crooked and begin to slide. And they tilt back as they walk to keep their bellies from falling. They order a sandwich and some coffee. And they sit by the fireplace, and although they are not requesting wishes, the people around them, adults mostly, smile, perhaps because the two Santas remind them of wishes they made long ago.

Not far away from the Santas, a woman in a black fur coat sits eating soup, and when asked what she really wants for Christmas, she says socks and Estee Lauder makeup. No, dig deep: What does she really want if she could have anything in the world and if her wish were not being edited. She sits up and her complexion of sadness brightens, uplifting her face more than any makeup, and the woman, 34, says with barely a whisper what she really wants for Christmas is diamond earrings and for her husband, who left her for another woman, to come back home.

Some people wait a lifetime to get their Christmas wishes, picking up lucky pennies as they go, squeezing the life out of lottery tickets. If there is one time of the year when they can stop and open that window of wishes, it is the time when the snow is falling and James Brown is on the stereo singing, "Santa Claus, Uh! Go straight to the ghetto," and a child is asking why the woman singing "Silent Night" on the radio is singing "Sat-ur-day night."

And you tell him the story of the Silent Night, so that he will grow up and know the "real meaning" of Christmas is a time to give to others, visit the sick and pray for world peace. But it is also a time of the year to wish big wishes. And believe that those pure wishes made on Christmas will come true.

So this is when you decide to go out into the snow and ask them what they want — not what their children want, but what the children inside them want — if wishes still came true this time of the year and there were no bills to pay and the economy felt more dependable and the world were nice.

On Fenton Street in Silver Spring, you push open the door of the salon advertising Dominican stylists, and Ana Cruz, 35, is sitting alone at the reception booth and she smiles. You ask her what she really wants and she says: "What I really want for Christmas is more business for my salon."

She is from El Salvador and never finished high school. After she came here she

worked in a hotel and then a restaurant, then she went to cosmetology school. On the radio someone is singing, "Yo no se vivir sin ella," I don't know how to live without her. And Cruz is explaining that she advertises Dominican stylists because the black women in Washington love to get their hair done by Dominican stylists because they have magic fingers that can wet-set a head and stick it under a dryer and — poof! — just like a granted wish, it comes out of the dryer straight, with no need for a relaxer. And the white women come in for haircuts, but the "Spanish girls, they come when they have somewhere special to go."

In the braiding salon two doors down, Zena Amadio, 22, is not hoping so much for customers as a Christmas wish. What she wants most is to go to New York and see the Christmas lights because she has never seen them before. On the television hanging in the corner, someone is advertising a drug for restless leg syndrome. "Help make peace with your legs. Ask your doctor for . . ."

Amadio, who has long braids under a red hat and a happy smile, says she remembers Christmas in the Central African Republic, from which she moved a year ago. "Everybody is cooking for Christmas," she says, "and eating, and everybody is happy, and they go to church to pray in the morning of Christmas Eve."

Next door sits Bryan Miranda, 18, and at first he looks happy when you walk into his small satellite-dish shop. He is sitting behind a desk, with black curly hair, trying to look professional and trying not to watch the television behind him that is beaming an NBA game from the past, featuring Larry Bird and Robert Parish and Kevin McHale. And there is a young Reggie Miller at the free-throw line and you think you are stuck in time because you know that even though Reggie Miller just made a three-point shot with his signature style, he will never win an NBA championship. Miranda is trying not to look at the game because to turn around and lean on the desk and look at television while he waits for business is to look "un-professional." The shop is dark and empty and he is trying to make the most of his work.

He lights up when you ask him what he wants for Christmas. At first he says he wants a new president. "I'm 18. I pay rent by myself. I have no parents. What I make in my job in one month, one check goes straight to rent and the other check goes to food, transportation and bills. I have no pocket money." He dropped out of high school, went to boot camp. He talks about the problems with his colon. "Stress-related. I'm going to die before I'm 25." And he talks about how he was born in El Salvador and his mother brought him here when he was 2. And how nobody loves him and he "don't have no friends."



Tom Thomas, with wife Mary at the Kefa Cafe in Silver Spring. At 4, all he wanted was a tricycle; at 72, he'd love a trip to Paris.

But then his cell phone rings: "Hey, baby," he says. "I'll call you in an hour. Okay?"

Who was that? Thought you said you didn't have any friends.

"Well, you gotta have somebody who tells you they love you."

And Robert Parish, who still looks mean, is making another free throw. And the snow is beginning to fall. And Miranda looks up and says, "You know what I really want for Christmas?"

What?

"I wish for a whole new life."

All Tom Thomas, whose mother named him twice — "so I wouldn't forget my name" — wants for Christmas is a trip to Paris to see the lights. Thomas, 72, can't think of anything more. Nothing about Christmas presents has excited him as much as the time when he was 4 and living in Tacoma, Wash., and he asked for a tricycle for Christmas.

And he got it! Except it snowed.

"I was very disappointed," he says. "All I could do was ride it in the living room. I haven't really wanted anything since, except to get some of my writings published. I would say world peace, but I'm not sure that's going to happen." So he sits next to his wife, Mary, in the Kefa Cafe in Silver Spring, where an article he wrote for the Tacoma Voice hangs on the wall. In the article, he writes that the owner there "always arranges the sunlight especially for me." And the sun is shining, a few minutes later, on Tom Thomas as he stands in the doorway of



Bryan Miranda, an 18-year-old who works at a satellite-dish shop and says he has no parents, wants "a whole, new life."

the cafe and Christmas music is playing.

There is Cedric Givens running in the street in a gray shirt and red gloves and sunglasses, spinning like he's in a street ballet, circling the four corners of H and Sixth NW, spinning as he jogs. Running in place, running in time, to his own beat and the harried Christmas shoppers pass him and they do not stop and glance at him and you wonder why no one notices the man jogging in circles in the middle of a busy intersection. The light changes from red to green and the cars do not hit him. And still he spins, listening to his own Christmas music, spinning until he decides to run backward up H Street, spinning in and out of traffic, spin-

ning in and out of Christmas wishes. He played defensive back in school. "I should have made the pros, but that is a different story," he says, still jogging, backward.

And there is Burnita Hayes, 49, leaning on the counter of the pawn shop in Langley Park, waiting to see the manager; the shop is like the last stop for long-ago wishes — tarnished flutes hanging next to forgotten violins and guitars with broken strings, among promissory notes and broken-engagement rings.

Most people who bring their rings into the shop choose to sell them rather than pawn them, says clerk Lourdes Paulino, 22. "They want to get rid of them right away."

Still the sad diamonds glitter as if they are dying stars and dead wishes. And Paulino, who is from the Dominican Republic, is saying that what she really wants for Christmas is a brand-new apartment and a car and \$10,000 in her bank account.

Why \$10,000?

"Because I don't want to ask for too much." Then she adds: "I want them to stop the war in Iraq and all the soldiers to come back home."

And Hayes is still in the pawn shop. And she has a greater wish than any of them because she has lived long enough to know.

"My wish is to breathe. To wake up. Material things can be replaced. I can't. Once I'm gone, I'm gone."

The snow, now turned to ice, is beginning to fall faster. And the days before Christmas are getting shorter. And the tarnished flute is still hanging beside the forgotten violin with its broken string near the case where the broken diamond rings are still trying to shine, glittering as if they still hold hope.