

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



Week 655: Laughing Inside

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The atmosphere that I create I ask you now to tolerate: I think it's just something I ate.

They say everyone has a novel inside him. Well, They of course are full of it, but They are closer to the truth in the case of newspaper reporters, who often were lit'ry types in school and then found their prose in demand only insofar as it told about Wednesday night's sewer board hearing. Their only recourse: Hide the literature IN the sewer story. Your job: Find it. This week: **Take any article appearing in The Washington Post or online on washingtonpost.com from today through April 3 — the more serious and/or mundane its headline, the better — and write a funny poem or other passage using only words that appear in that article.** You can change punctuation or capitalization, but not the letters in the word. You can't use a word twice unless it's in the story twice. Include the story's date and page number if you are using the ink-and-paper Post; if you take your story from the Web site, please copy the article (or the portion you are using) onto your entry, so we can verify that the words you are using are actually there, and not just you-wish-were-there. The example above is from today's Ask Amy column.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives the genuine Vader-looking welder's helmet that was donated by Russell Beland, won by him, then foisted back on us again.

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 by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, April 3. Include "Week 655" 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 April 23. 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 651

In which we asked you to add another character to a book or movie (new title optional) and describe the resultant plot. Some Losers just changed the title and came up with a totally different plot, forgetting the original characters. They lose, and we don't mean Lose. Just lose.

4 "Fun With Dick and Jane and Raskolnikov": See Spot. See Spot run. Run, Spot, run. Run, run, run. Run from the howling pangs of guilt that sear your soul. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

3 The New Testament: Widely considered to be the least talented of the Thirteen Disciples, Ringo nonetheless lands all the hottest babes. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

2 The winner of the book "The Adventures of Peter Pangler Puncker 'Discovering the Pumping Heart' ": "Harold and the Purple Koran": Harold uses his crayon to show kids the acceptable way of sketching Muhammad: Just draw his house and say he's inside. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)



AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

1 "Moby-Dick and Flipper": After killing the whale that cost him his leg, Captain Ahab pursues the dolphin that once splashed him at Sea World. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

NOT ENTIRELY DEVOID OF MERIT

"Back to the Future": John DeLorean steals his namesake time machine to persuade his younger self to stay at GM, changing history so the DeLorean car no longer exists. Doc Brown and Marty McFly instead use a Ford Pinto, with tragic results. (John Johnston, St. Inigoes)

"Harry Potter": Late in the seventh book Harry learns he has a twin brother, Larry, who was separated from him at birth. Larry then tells Harry the story of his life, in extraordinary detail, through a whole new series of books, movies, action figures and backpacks. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

"Brokeback Jungle": After Tarzan/Lord Greystoke returns to civilization, he meets Jane's brother James. Tarzan then experiences feelings he doesn't fully understand, although he has seen this sort of thing once or twice back among the bonobos . . . (Douglas Frank, Crosby, Tex.)

"Cast Away Too": A pair of fishnet stockings washes ashore on the island. Wilson the volleyball, longing for net, calls them Ginger and Mary Ann. These three disappear to the other side of the island, leaving the stranded FedEx engineer to seek solace from Little Buddy Coconut. (Wilson Varga, Alexandria)

"Make Way for Ducklings": Effete liberals hit the dirt as Dick Cheney pursues Mrs. Mallard and her family across Boston Common. (Kevin Dopart)

"The Perfect Storm, With Pat Robertson": With the help of his trusty sidekick God, the Reverend moves a super-typhoon from the North Atlantic to San Francisco Bay, where they've basically been asking for it. (Brendan Beary)

Robert Altman's "M*A*S*H": Hawkeye Pierce (Donald Sutherland) is joined by his TV twin (Alan Alda), who drives down morale at the 4077th with his self-righteous moralizing about war and sexism. (John Johnston)

"The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse": The Fifth, Willie Shoemaker, comes up just short in his furious last-minute charge, so the jockeys for the winning trifecta are Famine, Shoemaker and Pestilence. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

"Gandhi and Norton": As the Mahatma's assistant, Art Carney spends hours trying in vain to prepare a simple rice dish. Gandhi finally explodes in a rage and punches him out. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

"No, Shoot THIS Piano Player": Yanni takes over from Charles Aznavour in the barroom . . . (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

"Crikey, It's Genesis!": Rugged reptile-taunter Steve Irwin is brought in by a worried Adam to curb Eve's fascination with a snake. With aplomb,

Four weeks ago, we asked for more Loserly names for the too-polite "Honorable Mentions" category. The Empress, being a member of the two-X-chromosomes part of the population, was taken with several readers' suggestions that she use various names in rotation. As Loser Paul Cloutman of London quoted the Dodo (his own name suggestion) from "Alice in Wonderland": "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes." This week's heading is by Seth Brown of North Adams, Mass. He wins a toy germ donated eons ago by Paul Kondis of Alexandria.

Steve snares it in a Hessian sack [burlap bag, in the U.S. translation], thus taking away human guilt. (Duncan Seed, Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire, England)

"Syriana": John Madden uses the Telestrator to explain the plot. (Bob Grossman, Columbia)

"Psycho": Things don't go as planned for Norman Bates when he surprises Janet Leigh and Lou Ferrigno in the shower. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

"2001": After HAL has killed all but one of the crew members, a HAL Corp. tech support staffer finally picks up the phone. (Pam Sweeney)

"Woodstock": That nerdy guy at work, the one who claims to have been at Woodstock, shows up in a shot of the audience. Well, I'll be. (Russell Beland)

"Rumplestiltskin": Soon after evil Mr. R dies in a fit of anger, his son brings suit against the miller's pretty daughter. E. Pierce Stiltskin seeks the return of \$1.5 billion in spun gold and straw, claiming she exercised undue influence over his father. (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)

"Macbeth": Macduff, Thane of Fife, invites his distant cousin Barney Fife to help investigate Duncan's murder. It turns out that only Barney can see Banquo's ghost, who keeps trying in vain to give him hints. (Brad Alexander, Wanneroo, Australia)

"One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and Cuddles": A man survives another day in a Stalinist work camp by talking to an imaginary six-foot chinchilla. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

"One Fish, Five Thousand Fish": Dr. Seuss adds Jesus to his book. (Peter Metrinko)

"The Burgundy Letter": Sean Taylor joins the story, spitting on anyone who disagrees with him. He is forced to wear the letter A, but not for adultery. (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

"The Seven Musketeers": Weary Porthos, Athos and Aramis welcome the fresh reinforcements. Now they can take on Cardinal Richelieu aided by Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po. (John Shea, Lansdowne, Pa.)

"Thirteen Angry Men": The jurors' anger erupts into gunfire when Yosemite Sam cain't stand no more infernal yammerin'. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

Next Week: Ask Backwards, or Reverse Ordure

Sleepless in College Park (Because of Work)

COMMITMENT, From D1

The numbers do not astonish Pouya Dianat, 20, or Montana Wojczuk, 26, however.

"My job here is the most important thing I do," says Dianat, a staff photographer for the Diamondback, the student newspaper at the University of Maryland in College Park. A junior workaholic who has been known to sleep overnight in the office, he says, "I want to be the best. Any girlfriend would have to put up with that. . . . If she stumbled in front of me, I might get interested. Otherwise, no."

Wojczuk breezed through jobs in advertising, retail sales and grant-writing before ending up as an assistant in a talent and literary agency in Manhattan. "A relationship takes so much time and energy, and there's so much stuff I want to do with my career," she says. "I'm not that interested in looking."

Are they saying there's no use in starting to look until they're ready to stop looking? Not exactly, says Philip Morgan, professor of sociology at Duke University. They're simply being strategic: "Active looking requires altering their routine in some way, and they're not willing to do that yet."

Even flirting with the idea of a relationship requires effort, sometimes more than they're willing to give. "Sometimes I make plans to have a drink with someone, but I'm too tired," says Tiffany Sharples, 24, who works at a travel magazine in Manhattan. "Or a press event comes up at the last minute, so I cancel. Things get stymied before they get off the ground."

All of this raises questions among those a generation or two older. Are our grown children simply afraid to love? Afraid of the potential for either being hurt or hurting someone else? Maybe. Many of them have been in at least one relationship that ended badly or dragged on longer than it should have. They've also observed a fair number of marriages fall apart, from those of their parents or friends' parents to their own friends.

Instead, their friends are their partners. "I go into most social situations just wanting to expand my circle of friends," says Kate Campbell, a senior and 21-year-old reporter for the Diamondback. "I'd rather do that than troll for guys."

Relationships, they say, imply commitment, and commitment can consume too much personal space and time. College students talk about couples they know who take courses together, eat all their meals together and sleep together. That togetherness continues after college, says Matt McFarland, a 25-year-old sales rep who lives in Rockville. "I have guy friends who can't go out on Friday nights, or have to leave parties early. Who needs that?"

McFarland works 65 hours a week. He also goes to the gym three or four times a week and spends Friday and Saturday nights in bars or clubs. He and his buddies aren't lonely, he says. "There's a lot of casual hooking up."

Hooking up, an uncommitted sexual en-



BY LOIS RAIMONDO — THE WASHINGTON POST



BY NIKKI KAHN — THE WASHINGTON POST

She says/He says: Ele Izadi, above, thinks "all guys want is the physical." Matt McFarland avers, "I have guy friends who can't go out on Friday nights, or have to leave parties early. Who needs that?"

counter, has become synonymous with dating, says Ele Izadi, a 21-year-old senior and Diamondback writer. Easy to do and carrying no obligations, it's a convention that is tailor-made for the time-pressed. And it has turned Izadi off to any relationships at this time. "All guys want is the physical," she says.

Some singles still date occasionally. But after the second or third date — or hookup — with the same person, they find they must confront a question: "What are we?" Leah Veneziano, 25 and a sometime TV guest host in Philadelphia, is in that situation with a guy whom she has seen four times. "He's moving toward a relationship, and I don't want those restraints." She is about to call it off.

"Why start something now that has no destination?" asks sophomore Brendan Lowe, 20, the Diamondback's deputy news editor.

Could it be that this generation takes relationships too seriously?

If so, we shouldn't be surprised. From their preschool days on, they've heard messages of boundless opportunity and high expectations: First the perfect school record, then the perfect job. Why settle, then, for anyone but the perfect mate?

The phrase "in time" is key, says Jeffrey Arnett, a research professor at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., who has spent much of his career studying what he calls

"emerging adults."

"We've given them the freedom to take their time to decide what their adult life is going to look like. We don't have the expectations anymore that they should be married at 21 and have their first baby at 22. Fifty years ago, that would have been normal, but now, what's the hurry?"

The researchers at Pew, a nonprofit initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts, were pursuing a larger project about online dating when they came across the young-singles data: 38 percent in committed relationships and 38 percent neither in committed relationships nor looking for them. Twenty-two percent were not in relationships but looking.

Wojczuk, the agent's assistant in New York, is certainly in no hurry. "I aspire to have it all," she says, "and not just in my career but my appearance, my activities and, at some point, a partner who reflects my best self."

And what kind of man would that be? "Someone who's really smart and driven, but leaves work at work. Someone who goes out in the world, who likes the arts and doesn't take himself too seriously. Someone who gets my jokes, has a sense of humor and can get me out of my worry."

She admits she has "a lot of expectations. I'm sure I'll come to the point where I'm willing to compromise."

Until then, she's enjoying her girlfriends.

ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

My husband and I were both raised in a Christian church, but over the years, first independently, then as a couple, we have decided that there is no religion in which we feel comfortable. In fact, I think it's safe to say that neither of us believes in God or any other higher being.

My husband's family is very religious. Mine, not so much.

When we visit my husband's family, they like to have a group prayer before meals. We participate out of respect for them.

However, when they are guests in my home, I find it inappropriate that they initiate a group prayer. It seems presumptuous to me.

I'm pretty sure that my mother-in-law at least is aware of our lack of beliefs. Maybe I should just indulge them, but it concerns me more when they are part of a larger group of guests at my home who may or may not feel comfortable with prayer.

I just feel that it is rude to initiate group participation in something that I see as very private.

My husband is content to indulge this, but it is important to me that our lack of beliefs be respected just as much as we respect their many beliefs.

Wouldn't it be more appropriate for them to say a quiet prayer to themselves or pray together separately prior to the meal?

How do we inform them of our wishes without insulting them?

Caroline in Baltimore

If your husband's family weren't prayerful Christians but Muslims who needed to pray in a specific way at specific times, would you be tolerant of them in your home — even though you didn't share their beliefs?

I think you would.

If your husband's family chose to bow their heads and chant a Buddhist prayer before tucking into the salad, would you sit and wait quietly until they were finished? Or if they tended to break into a full-throated version of the Neil Diamond song "Cracklin' Rosie" before their meal (as my family tends to do), would you tolerate that?

I think you would.

Presumably, your in-laws were very religious before you joined the family. If you want them to stop doing something they've always done, then you're going to have to let them know.

Now, as you play that conversation in your head, doesn't it sound a lot easier and more respectful to be tolerant during prayer time? Rather than ask them to stop doing something they've always done, you should tell them that you respect their desire to pray but that you

and other nonbelieving guests won't be joining them.

Then just sit quietly and go to your happy place or disappear into the kitchen to check on the roast until they are finished.

Dear Amy:

I'd like to comment on the letters from teachers who let kids eat lunch in their classrooms.

I am a senior in high school, and I ate lunch with pretty much the same people throughout my years. There was always fighting and back-talking; I was never into the gossip.

Over the summer, most of my friends changed. They started partying, drinking and hooking up with random people. That's never been a temptation to me, so I decided to change the people I surrounded myself with.

The music department at my school is a great place for anyone to eat lunch, and the teachers become friends with anyone who decides to go there. It's really casual and open to anyone, even if they don't play an instrument. Every day there are different people there, having different conversations.

I have grown to love the non-pressured atmosphere and it has really opened me up to a whole new group of people.

The best part is playing music with everyone after we finish eating. Teachers who open up their classrooms can create an atmosphere where so many kids can finally feel comfortable and express themselves.

Marie From Michigan

I'm so happy that you found your "voice" in the music room. Remember to thank the teacher who makes this possible, okay?

Dear Amy:

I am responding to a letter from "Grant" about soliciting specific gifts for children's birthdays.

I would never presume to tell anyone exactly what to give my children. However, I think most parents appreciate suggestions about topics particular children enjoy. I have printed such hints on invitations to parties, such as "Connor loves dinosaurs, Legos, books and non-violent games."

This gives present-buying parents a clue of where to start.

Beth

Your gift suggestion is nicely done, offering guidelines instead of specific requests. Parents of very young guests would appreciate it, I'm sure.

© 2006 by the Chicago Tribune Distributed by Tribune Media Services Inc.