

# The Style Invitational

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

### Week 659: Tell Us a Fib



Lord, it's hard to know the truth! If Judas was good, is Satan just misunderstood?

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Geeks around the world have been unnaturally excited that this is National Poetry Month, ever since a Los Angeles writer named Gregory K. Pincus invited readers of his blog (gottabook.blogspot.com) to write poems whose syllables per line match the Fibonacci sequence, that mathematical expression of nature's elegance. The challenge quickly spread through the geek network and then the literary network, and then the geek/literary/potty network of the Losers, specifically Brian Barrett of New York, to the Empress. **This week: Compose a six-line poem with the following number of syllables per line: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8,** as in the example above. **In addition, because we are just more demanding here: It must be about a person or topic currently in the news, and two successive lines must rhyme.**

Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets two repurposed alcohol-related items: an empty beer bottle that once contained some of the home-brew of Loser Ben Schwab of Severna Park; it is labeled "Divorce Dark: Bitter, Expensive, Lasts for Years"; and (oh my, the Empress is so generous) a promotional plastic martini shaker labeled "GapBody Bra Bar, Fashion Week, Bryant Park."

**Other runners-up** win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions (or whatever they're called this week) 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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, May 1. Put "Week 659" 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 21. 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 Seth Brown of North Adams, Mass. The name for the Honorable Mentions is by Mark Eckenwiler of Washington.

## REPORT FROM WEEK 655

In which you were asked to take any article appearing in *The Post* or on [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) during the week, and use only the words appearing in it to write your own poem or other funny thing: This is an enormously time-consuming task, and not surprisingly relatively few readers took us up on the challenge. Also not surprisingly (because we've had luck with similar contests before), those who did tended to come up with very good results.

**3** *Leyland Chats Up Storm With Writers* (Associated Press blog, March 26)  
"You, writer, over there. The muscular one. Scratch my behind."

Many of the cactus baseball press grimace when they get their first hardcore assignment. But some veteran reporters don't care; it's a nice, grassy area. "If I would've told them to wash my colon, they would've done it. If it was my own behind I would've done it myself — but this was a rental," Detroit Tigers Manager Jim Leyland deadpanned. He turns and playfully sprays reporters with his scent. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)



BY JULIA EWAN — THE WASHINGTON POST

**2** *The winner of the big black scary welder's helmet: Embryonic Stem Cell Success: In Mouse Experiment, Cells From Testes Are Transformed* (March 25)  
For Males who would indeed New Women be, So easily are Testes passed from Them; More difficult for Girls to be a He, To grow a Staff, to cultivate a Stem. For Those who a good Stem would still pursue, A Sperm Cell cloned from Embryos may serve With added Hormones, Tissues could prove new (But getting Human Cells requires Nerve.) Or Organs to transplant one may yet find Donated by a Human Male most kind. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

## AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

But first, a short quiz:

**Q.** Why does a retired actuary in Missouri have 15 Inkers — fifteen! — and you have none?

**A.** Because you, smart cookie that you are, would never (No. Sorry. Never.) have composed each of the following from the words of the article headlined "Moussaoui Says He Was to Fly 5th Plane" (March 28)

(1) How many lawyers does it take to fly a plane? Two: one to pilot it and one to make numerous objections to the motion.

(2) In a secret speech to screen writers in London last week, Osama bin Laden had this to say: "I consider the four best motion pictures in history to be 'An American in Paris,' 'Going My Way,' 'Airplane' and 'I Know What You Did Last Summer.' They were extraordinary, you know what I'm saying?" Later on he asked many questions: "Tell me, is 'Chicago' the stunning spectacle everybody says it is? I was told the new hit 'Crash' is really good. Is that right? As crazy as it sounds, even 'Life of Brian' was fun for me — a great pleasure, indeed." Who knew?

(3) Airplane and Crash: What are the only two motion pictures Moussaoui is not allowed to have in his cell?

(4) You: American, stunning-looking, great lips, looking to get it on. Me: French man, straight, former pilot, a bit crazy and far-out. Dream date: Making it in the can on a Paris-to-Miami flight. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth Mo.)



## NO SHIRT, SHERLOCK

*Senate GOP Fears Frist's Ambitions Split Party*  
He could not build consensus On divisive border fences. And what about Dubai? His own caucus won't comply. If I were Senator Bill Frist, I would sure be getting . . . angered. (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

*School Board Seeks Input From Public Parents and students held meetings to look into putting the Fairfax County School Board on the moon. The community views the effort a public service.* (Mary Presswood, Alexandria)

*Chess column*  
When Paris mates with the bishop It will go the way it should: With a prophylactic ready (Unprotected is not good.) And he is resigned to her measures, But a further defense wants she: An elegant amber blindfold — How he does it, she wants not to see. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

*Fate of Metro Extension, Toll Road Ignites Interest in Unelected Panel*  
The Highest Authority, From His glass-walled airport boardroom, Overlooks the scores of smartly clad commuters. They are teetering on the edge of disaster, Crossing the line quickly and efficiently. "Their agendas, worries and complaints," He said, "Are, by any standard, the Dulles." (Alison Franklin, Ellicott City)

*Brain Development and Intelligence Linked, Study Says*  
A federal study reported yesterday that intelligent children appear to develop brains. (Brad Alexander, Wanneroo, Australia)

*Rice, Straw Press Iraqis to Forge Unity*  
Prime Minister Tony Blair Slept in Bed of Straw; to Have Dinner of Rice and Kurds; Hoped for More (Ken Gallant, Little Rock)

*Sins of Commissions*  
The Bush challenge: Trying to make Osama Only a has Bin. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

*For Jack's a Jolly Good Fellow!*  
Opened a kosher deli: Tradition! Scholar of Talmudic Studies, Religious on a Friday night: Tradition! Not your average criminal. Contributions of a hamster to the Northern Mariana Islands' growing sex trade. Well, not so much tradition. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

*Senators Back Guest Workers*  
With bipartisan support, Congress voted to provide a "blue card" for immigrants who would offer for three years to meet the needs of House and Senate members. (Brad Alexander)

*And Last: Sewage Tested for Signs of Cocaine*  
Washington Post officials declined to comment on drug use by the Czar, but did offer this: "He is in the john a lot." (Chris Doyle)

**Next Week: It's Post Time, or Do We Not Breed?**

# War Letters Open A Window on A Mother's Past

WAC, From D1

her widowed mother's apartment in Sun City, Fla. There, in an old army footlocker tucked back in a closet, she unearthed a stack of letters. There were more than 150 of them. "I started sitting on the floor, reading them to her," Christine recalls. "I realized she had this whole life . . ."

*I am stationed somewhere in Italy, much to my surprise. We live in a convent. . . . Several little orphans go to school in this building and my heart just aches for them. They bring their lunch every day and all they have is a crust of bread. I am well and safe, so don't worry about me. — Dec. 10, 1943*

Christine, now 57, felt a small give in a window frozen shut. She tried to pry it open, peppering her mother with questions. What did you do, what did you see, whom did you love, what did you feel? The answers were minimal. Eleanor would claim that she didn't remember, or it wasn't important. "Maybe it was modesty," Christine speculates. "But maybe some memories are lost simply because you don't share them."

Days before Friday's memorial service at Arlington, she sits at the kitchen table of her gray Victorian in Montclair, N.J., where an American flag flutters from the front porch. She wonders what she can say as her mother's ashes are borne to the grave. "I don't have the stories," she laments. "She loved popcorn and fudge and shoes. She had hundreds of shoes."

In the memorial program, Christine cited Psalm 145:4. "One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."

Did she have any regrets? her only child wondered. Only two, Eleanor said. She wished she had had a real wedding gown instead of the teal wool suit she was married in, and she was sorry she had never seen India. Her husband, Col. Noel Brown, had served there during the war, and had painted such a vivid picture, Eleanor always wanted to

go. Christine felt the same pull, and visited India on her own 20 years ago.

Christine's own children are busy teenagers now, and they never ask about her life beyond motherhood, about her career as a high-powered executive, or about her adventures as a military brat living in postwar Japan or beneath a thatched roof in rural France, before settling in Alexandria. "I realize I don't talk much to my kids," she admits. Her 15-year-old daughter wanders into the kitchen. "Did you ever know that I went to India?" Christine asks, and Laura says no, she didn't, but she doesn't ask for more details, and Christine volunteers none. Her mother's girlish letters make similar wide turns and abrupt stops, the breezy banalities suddenly pierced by moments of darkness and despair.

*Tonight I'm going to the opera with a group of girls. It is 'Madame Butterfly.' — Jan. 10, 1944*

And then, barely a week later:

*There are several cases of typhus here in the city so they have made it off-limits to all military personnel. . . . Every Friday night we have to powder all our clothing and bedding. — Jan. 18, 1944*

Eleanor's cancer went into remission after intense radiation treatments, and she was soon back to playing golf and bridge with her friends. Christine took the letters and yellowed newspaper clippings and stray photographs home to Montclair, becoming the amateur historian of a life unexplored.

Over the past three years, she meticulously organized her mother's memorabilia, carefully photocopying each letter and tucking the originals in plastic sleeves. She catalogued and indexed them, filling six black binders. She listed each movie Eleanor mentioned seeing, and wonders now if she should rent them all and watch them herself. She went on the Internet to learn more about the WACs, and discovered how controversial they had been in their time, how a suspicious



American public largely believed that the 150,000 women who volunteered were prostitutes or loose women whose real mission was to sexually service the boys overseas. Newspapers falsely reported that large numbers of the women were returning pregnant. The ugly rumors were so rampant that Congress demanded to know how many WACs were pregnant or infected with venereal disease. The real statistics quickly convinced the lawmakers that commendation, not condemnation, was in order. Christine shared some of her research with her mother.

"She stopped and said, 'That's why Daddy didn't want me to talk about it!'" Christine recalls. It was when they were in Japan, Eleanor told her daughter, right after the war, that her husband demanded she stop mentioning her stint in the WACs. His service was treated as a source of pride; hers, one of shame.

Christine examined each fragment of information she discovered in the footlocker and tried to find meaning: The newspaper clips about her mother's meritorious service plaque, the engraved silver box she was presented as president of a golf club, her swift promotions in rank — her mother, Christine realized, must have been a competent manager long before she was a self-effacing homemaker who took pride in her perfect gravy. And while nev-



Above, Christine Brown, in from New Jersey for her mother's funeral at Arlington National Cemetery, says goodbye to Jay Milner, who grew up with her at Fort Belvoir. Despite her mother's modest wishes, Brown elected to have a service with military honors, citing Psalm 145: "One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." Eleanor Brown served with the 6716 WAC Headquarters Company in Naples.

er analyzing it or debating it, Eleanor clearly saw the cruel irony of war and understood that liberation and survival were separate ambitions.

She wrote about her few days' leave in Rome, and the locket she was sending home blessed by the pope. She talked about having breakfast in bed at her hotel and then touring St. Peter's, where a priest pointed out the kittens in a painting of "The Last Supper" and remarked how sad it was that starving Italians were now forced to eat their own beloved house cats. She

described courtyards blooming with orchids and camellias while people scavenged the bombed ruins of their cities.

*Sunday night I visited one of the big hospitals with several other girls. . . . Most of the fellows that I saw had just been sent back from the front with frozen feet. . . . They were all such nice fellows and so young. It made me feel as though I never wanted to complain about anything again. — Feb. 1, 1944*

She wrote about a St. Patrick's

Day dance and about longing on a dreary day to be sitting in a cozy chair next to the fire back home.

*I write you about the parties and dances because I am not allowed to write you about the places I go or what actually goes on over here. Don't worry about me because I am well and happy, only I wish this war would end soon so I could get home again. — March 16, 1944*

She mentions a beau killed in action, revealing her sorrow, but not his name.