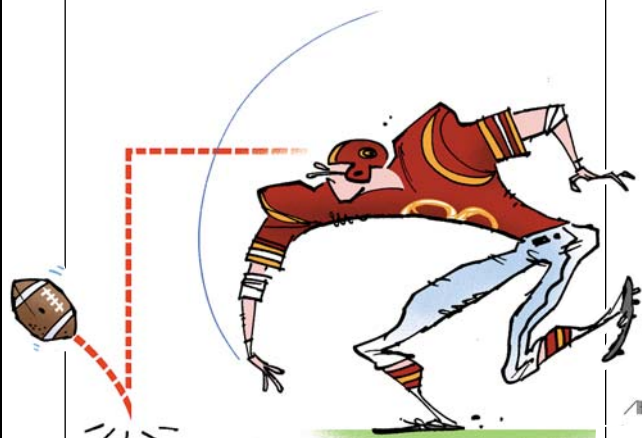


The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 686: Thank It Over



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Redskins play just once a week.

Snot doesn't taste bad.

Not everybody at The Washington Post has mature judgment.

When we report the results of this contest four weeks from now, it'll be a few days before Thanksgiving. Russell Beland of Springfield suggested: To make sure you'll have something interesting to say when the relatives ask around the dinner table and put everyone on the spot: **Tell us some things to be thankful for.**

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a bobblehead presumably supposed to represent President Bush, wearing a flight suit. The base says "Mission Accomplished." It's from the same people who sent the Schwarzenegger-in-a-dress bobblehead some time ago. That one was better, but this one has a certain nothing as well.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called this week) get one of the all-new 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, Oct. 30. Put "Week 686" 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 Nov. 19. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. Both the Honorable Mentions name and the revised title for next week's contest are by Tom Witte of Montgomery Village.

REPORT FROM WEEK 682

In which we asked for songs for a product, company, organization or agency, set to any Beatles song: Every John, Paul, George and Ringo offered a jingle for Viagra set to "A Hard Day's Night," or a deodorant ad to the tune of "Do You Want to Know a Secret?"

3 For Rogaine (to "Help")
When you were younger, so much younger than today, You never heeded any thought of wearing a toupee. But now your hair is merely tufts around your dome; It's not just thin — your next of kin refer to you as "Chrome." Don't let pattern baldness be your bane! We can save your disappearing mane! We can grow your hair back with Rogaine! Try Rogaine, you'll see. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

MERSEY KILLINGS

For the Whizzinator drug test cheating device (to "Come Together")

**He play pro baseball
He chock full of steroids
He take peptide hormones
He got arms like tree trunks
He say "Homers, I hit eighty-three!
But it ain't worth nothin'
If they sample my pee!"
Whizzinator delivers perfect pee.** (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

The CIA (to the end of "I Will")

**... And when we waterboard you,
Your cries will fill the air.
Fess out loud so we can hear you.
There's no lawyer sitting near you.
And the things you say — sincere, they will be!
Ah, your guts you'll spill.** (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

Dell Laptops Hey, dude, you got a Dell.

**It's the laptop of your desire.
Remember to trade the battery in,
Lest it begin to catch on fire. . . .
And anytime you feel the heat, hey dude, retreat,
Don't think that they're only trying to test us.
And don't you know that it's no joke —
When you see smoke
You'll wish that your clothing was asbestos.
Ow ow ow ow ow, ow ow ow ow . . .** (David Smith, Santa Cruz, Calif.)

Maxwell House (to "Maxwell's Silver Hammer")

**Joe's a bit morose, virtually comatose,
Doesn't want to work.
Late night, early morn, his eyes drooping
low-oh-oh-oh,
Maxwell House's roast, drink it when you need it most,
Sugar, cream or black.
How'd you like it, Jack, that first cup of
jo-o-o-oe? . . .
Sip! Sip! Maxwell House's coffee
Can get you out of bed.
Slurp! Slurp! Maxwell House's coffee's
Been known to wake the dead.** (Daniel Bahls, Brighton, Mass.)

2 The winner of the jar of Sultan's Paste (for Energy): Ikea (to "Norwegian Wood")

**These dressers and shelves,
Though they look nice,
Don't build themselves.
Packed flat in a box,
Tight as we could: Ikea wood.
Wordless instruction sheets may have
you pulling your hair;
If you're not careful, your bookshelf may
end up a chair.
You'll, when you are done,
Have a screw loose more ways than one.
If something drove you
Crazy for good, Ikea would.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)



AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

Mel Gibson's production company:
**He loves Jews, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!
Mel sometimes will imbibe;
What he said he didn't mean.
He doesn't hate the tribe,
He merely loves John 3:16!
And when he argued
That the Nazis weren't that bad,
That was only
His impression of his dad. Truuee!
He loves Jews, yeah, yeah, yeah!
He loves Jews, yeah, yeah, yeah!
And with remorse like that,
You know you can't stay mad.** (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

**I don't want to leave this cow,
You know I believe this cow . . .** (George Vary, Bethesda)

Date.com (to "Eleanor Rigby")

**Poor lonely spinster,
You'll be a princess with money to match.
Oh, what a catch.
Drug-addled dropout,
You'll be James Bond with a boat and a master's
degree.
That's what they'll see.
All those lonely people, where do they all come
from?
All you lonely people, who log on Date.com.** (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

Dermablend Dark Tone Cover Cream (To "Get Back")
**You know that Michael Jackson used to be a brother,
Livin' out the pop star dream.
He sang us "Black or White" and morphed into the
other.
Now he needs our special cream.
Get Black. Get Black. Get Black the way that you
belong.
Get Black, Michael!** (Howard Spindel, Portland, Ore.)

NRA (to "Happiness Is a Warm Gun")
So what's to change? — Wayne R. LaPierre, Arlington (Chris Doyle)

Transportation Security Agency (To "Helter Skelter" — and you didn't remember it even had a tune)

**Now you put your computer in a bin and your bag on
its side,
Put them all on the belt and they'll go for a ride,
And your shoes and your jacket — you might see
them again.
See that trash can, throw in your drink now,
And your face cream; don't make me think now.
Tell me, tell me, tell me any jokes, I'll get meaner.
You can't get around me, I'm an airport screener.
Helter skelter . . .** (Valerie Matthews, Ashton)

FOR LOTS MORE, EQUALLY SINGABLE

Honorably Mentioned parodies, visit washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

Next Week: Punkin'd, or The Gourds Must Be Crazy

When the Nest Empties, So Does The Address Book

EMPTY NEST, From D1

cluding people who don't have kids. There's the baritone in the church choir whom you sing next to on Sunday but have no idea what town he lives in, or the clerk in the office where you work who knows nothing about your kid other than what she has seen in the photos on your desk.

They're not your best friends. You may or may not agree with them politically, and you probably don't return their phone calls right away. But they provide, at least, continuity to your life, as well as a certain level of caring, and what you do with them gives some form to your otherwise frenzied weeks. When the baritone moves out of the area or the clerk gets promoted to another department, the loss can be palpable.

Losing acquaintances formed through your children can be especially poignant, because there's a good chance that as you scrambled your way up from bank teller to head of securities, those other parents you saw on game days were really the only community you had.

An odd thing happens to middle-class managers, lawyers, consultants and other professionals who organize their children's social lives with the same diligence they apply to their jobs. They are convinced they are the quarterback when in fact it's the kids who, by the time they're in middle school at least, are calling the plays. Parents used to organize their children's social lives. Now children organize their parents' social lives.

Mark Van Putten's last child, Tyler, left last month for Virginia Tech. From the time Tyler was 10 he swam for a competitive summer league in Reston, where the family lives. At weekend meets Mark, 53, would chat with other parents poolside. Occasionally he would also run into one of these parents at the grocery store or post office. He didn't become close friends with any of them, but "they gave me a sense of place," he recalls.

He didn't think much about this until Tyler, at 17, took a job this past summer to earn money for college, and stopped swimming. "I realized my summer Saturdays were missing something," Mark says. His wife, Colleen, 51, president of the swim

team association, had sunk deep roots into Reston since the family moved there 10 years earlier; he had not. As president of the National Wildlife Federation, Mark was always working — 70 and 80 hours a week. Now an environmental consultant based at home, he recently joined the boards of two associations in order to form new ties.

It's not uncommon for careers to consume people in Washington, and some of them devote themselves to pushing their children into similar lives of scheduled, credentialed achievement. For members of that contingent community, the only things in common are real estate prices and their children's training to be competitors like themselves.

The children may change with each custody battle or remarriage, and the communities created by the children change, too: when a kid leaves preschool for elementary school, then middle school, then high school; when a son announces that he no longer wants to go to Hebrew school or a daughter starts driving, and carpooling with other parents is no longer necessary.

"It's all the things that aren't there anymore," says Anny Rosenthal, a single mom of two living in Bethesda. "It's the Cub Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the basketball team. . . . With each stage, you say 'We've gotta stay in touch' but you don't."

Rosenthal's oldest son, Isaac, left two months ago for the University of Missouri. In no time, Cameron, her second child, will be gone as well. With one child gone and the other perched to go, she feels like a young adult again, recently graduated from Boston University's law school, working in Washington and wishing she knew more people.

At 57, she has more of a life, but who is there to have it with? "My kids are my emotional center," she says, "but I don't want to put that burden on them as they get older."

She decided to do something about this a month ago and threw an "empty(ing) nesters' brunch" one Sunday, "empty(ing)" because some guests still had a child at home as she did. Twenty-five people showed up — a doctor, journalist, librarian, economist and historian among them. Anny was the one person they all knew. They ate frittata, bagels and cream cheese, and fruit salad,



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL WILLIAMSON — THE WASHINGTON POST

With one child gone and another about to leave, Anny Rosenthal has time to lavish on her dog, Rory. She finds herself wishing she had more of a social life.



"My kids are my emotional center," Rosenthal says, "but I don't want to put that burden on them as they get older." Her son, Isaac, has left for college.

and tried to find things to talk about.

Conversation is easy when your kids are in school together, because everyone in your little circle of parents shares the same information and probably the same goals. You can brag about Becky making the basketball team and it doesn't sound like gloating (although it is), because the person you're talking to probably knows how hard she worked to get there. Or you can bemoan the fact that she wasn't picked for the team, safe in the knowledge that the other parents already know it.

Competition can be fierce when everyone in the same neighborhood or soccer league has the same goals. Some parents can commiserate about these stresses, others may delight in them.

But say Becky goes on to college and then, much to your disappointment, drops out. What do you say then to the parent who hasn't seen you or your daughter in several years and asks about her welfare? Do you tell the truth, risking embarrassment, or say something lame like, "I really don't know"? It's like when you change jobs, then bump into

someone several years later who is still at the company you left. You can quickly run out of things to talk about.

Fifty years ago, according to Hopkins's Cherlin, there were more structures, particularly in cities, that brought people together around shared values, including people of very different backgrounds and classes. Deals were made and reputations established in groups like the Rotary Club. Friendships were formed in the League of Women Voters and outlasted the child-raising years. This was, of course, before men changed jobs frequently and women moved into the workforce in large numbers. Families entertained more regularly in the home and parents had more children. All of these factors meant that Americans were more rooted in their communities and enjoyed friendships that were both more plentiful and deeper.

"If we lost a few situational friends back then it didn't matter so much," Cherlin says. "Now, situational friends are almost the whole ballgame."

This is not as bleak as it sounds. Contingent friends contribute to a full life. Joe's dad may help you find another job. Meredith's mother may hear that your brother is looking for a used car and say she has one to sell.

And contingent friendships can turn into something deeper. Susan Henriques-Payne discovered this when her daughter Sydney rowed

for Georgetown Visitation, beginning her freshman year. Susan and Sydney rose at 4 a.m. and drove to a spot on the Potomac so Sydney could practice with the team — five days a week, six months a year, for four years.

"It was worse than church," Susan jokes.

Regattas took place in early spring, frequently several states away. Parents would set up tents at a designated site along the river. Soup had to be made, chicken grilled and cookies baked and decorated in school colors — not to mention the coffee and hot chocolate that could not, under any circumstances, be allowed to run out, because it seemed to always rain on the day of a regatta and never get above 25 degrees. You didn't walk to each other's tents, you slid in the mud, clutching at your overcoat.

You did all of this, all day, even though your child probably rowed for a total of six minutes, only 30 seconds of which was within your view. Under such circumstances, "you're damn right we bonded," says Susan.

Susan, a former human resources manager, and her husband get together for dinner now with two other couples and a single father they met during Sydney's crew days. "We've realized that at this stage in our lives, you don't just meet people," she says. "You have to work hard to commit, especially being Washington families."