

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 734: Turnaround Time

A couple of weeks back, the results of Week 728 marked the first Invitational ink for Edmund Conti of Raleigh, a longtime wordplay aficionado who says he had been “meaning to enter ever since the New York Magazine Competition shut down.” (That was seven years ago, Ed. Glad you finally took the plunge.) Anyway, Ed has come up with a word game called Bananagrams, in which he writes a rhyming couplet containing two words that are anagrams of each other, and the reader has to figure out what those words are. A one-right-answer contest doesn't work for The Invitational, but that won't stop the Empress from exploiting it.

This week: Write a rhyming couplet containing two words that are anagrams of each other. And don't make us guess what they are. The example at right is by Washington Post Magazine humor columnist Gene Weingarten, opining on what is just about his favorite subject besides toilet fill.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets a copy of Ed Conti's “Quiblets,” a brand-new collection of terse verse, and the inkworthily named “The Ed C. Scrolls,” a little book of poems on more spiritual themes (“Concerned about the hereafter? / Well, don't be. / It will be there with joy and laughter. / You won't be.”).



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

It's known that any sapient guy
Likes the line that panties supply.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that 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 or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Oct. 15. Put “Week 734” 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. 3. 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. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Kevin Dopart.

REPORT FROM WEEK 730
in which — reflecting on the online effort to compile definitions in limerick form (now past 44,000) for every word in the Oxford English Dictionary — we asked for “activities that make entering The Style Invitational seem like a constructive use of one's time.” A handful of Losers didn't notice the context and thought we wanted them to explain why entering The Invitational IS a constructive use of one's time, though 99 percent of the entrants took it as we meant it: to describe even bigger wastes of time than entering The Invite. Among the former group, 32-time Loser Lawrence McGuire of Waldorf swears that “a twenty-something thin blonde admirer” heard him called by his name in the local library, and almost came up to introduce herself, but shyly vanished before she summoned the courage. Ah, yes, that oh-so-troublesome Loser groupie problem.

- 4** Counting the stairs on the escalator. (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- 3** Becoming the world's leading authority on a person chosen at random from the Akron, Ohio, phone book. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)
- 2** the winner of the Float'n Firefly toothbrush with the flashing red light: Writing letters to the editor about grammatical mistakes in the classified ads. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

AND THE
WINNER
OF THE INKER
Metrobus-spotting.
(Anne Paris, Arlington)



MORE FROM THE FRITTERATI

- Playing Poor Man's Pac-Man: Type a row of periods, then hold down Backspace and watch that cursor gobble 'em all up. You win every time!** (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)
- Martin van Buren-bashing.** (Randy Lee, Burke)
- Rotating the air in your tires.** (Bill Spencer, Baltimore)
- Using a flight simulator program to visit all the airports in the world in alphabetical order by airport code.** (Michael Turniansky, Pikesville, Md., currently virtually en route from AAE [Les Salines airport, Algeria] to AAF [Apalachicola, Fla.]
- Alphabetizing your days-of-the-week underwear.** (Russell Beland)
- Counting the days since Christmas.** (David Moss, Arlington)
- Filming a shot-by-shot re-creation of every episode of “The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour,” using Pez dispensers for the performers.** (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)
- Compiling the Klingon dictionary entirely in double-dactyl format.** (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
- Reenacting the Civil War draft riots.** (Larry Yungk, Arlington)
- Doing a study examining whether fingertip width is correlated with nostril size in the higher vertebrates.** (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)
- Buying the Gonzales2012.com domain name.** (Chuck Koelbel, Houston)
- Entering a 12-step program for dodecaphobia.** (Russ Taylor, Vienna)
- Trying to pay for that item advertised for .99 cents with a penny.** (Paul VerNooy, Hockessin, Del.)
- Setting the Guinness record for time spent reading the Guinness Book of World Records.** (Russell Beland)
- Swapping perfectly healthy kidneys with your identical twin.** (Russell Beland)
- Drawing 500 tiny circles on a piece of paper, then saying “Pop” as you press each circle with your thumb.** (Jay Shuck)
- Collecting a napkin from every restaurant you visit, but not labeling them.** (Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)
- Stopping the DVD, frame by frame, to verify that there really are 101 Dalmatians.** (Russell Beland)

- Bootlegging audio recordings of “live” Britney Spears concerts.** (Dan Colilla, Pittsburgh)
- Digging a canal across the narrow part of Oahu.** (Russell Beland)
- Well, I'm actually pretty proud of the time I perfectly reconstructed, using wood glue and tweezers, a shattered pecan shell whose pieces were mixed with bits of other pecan shells, so I guess this doesn't qualify.** (Michael Peck, Alexandria)
- Setting up a logbook in your bathroom to verify that the toilet bowl cleaner really works for 1,000 flushes.** (Russell Beland)
- Corrowing your eyebrows.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)
- Finally learning how to program my Commodore 64.** (Randy Lee)
- Weighing yourself before and after restroom visits, and plotting the difference on a graph.** (Martin Bancroft)
- Foreplay — Kobe Bryant.** (Kevin Dopart)
- Reading 10,000 fictional racehorse names and carefully evaluating each one based on humor and originality.** (Jay Shuck)

Next Week: Doo Process, or Hoot Cuisine

Brad Paisley's Country Road Finally Takes Him Home

PAISLEY, From C1

band mates are here, too, from back when he was a scrawny, squeaky-voiced kid performing at WWVA-AM's Jamboree USA concerts. There are also relatives, family friends, former teachers and even a former prom date, who is showing off pictures in which Paisley is wearing a black tuxedo with a lavender bow tie. Lavender! (“It was 1991,” he says with a shrug.)

The stage is decorated with gold and brown streamers and balloons. There are folding chairs and banquet tables and slices of cake and centerpieces made of crumpled gold tissue and chocolate-brown stars. Lots of expensive cameras and hot lights angled just so and student production assistants scurrying about.

Paisley is handed a microphone. Cameras flash. He looks uneasy, particularly when people — *his* people — applaud. “I can't believe how many of you actually showed up,” he says. “I think we should just do a reunion. We should stand there and talk; it shouldn't be about me.”

And then: “Let's get to know each other again. I haven't seen you in years.”

And, like a valedictorian: “We made it!”

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Glen Dale is an old post-industrial town hard by the Ohio River, between Wheeling and Moundsville. There's a hospital here, along with a car dealership, a drive-in theater, a couple of churches and two aging motels. It's a well-mannered and well-manicured place, with tree-lined streets, neatly mowed lawns and a steady population that's currently at 1,552, according to the city clerk. It's a friendly place, too: A few minutes after meeting you for the first time, Joe Blair, a Paisley family friend, just might invite you over to his house for a beer.

“It's going to be great to let people see a little bit of where I grew up,” Paisley says. “Though in many ways, it's just like where everybody else grew up.”

He was an only child, born to Doug and Sandy Paisley, a state Transportation Department administrator and a grade-school teacher, respectively. He was 8 when he got his first guitar, a gift from his grandfather. It was a Sears Dualelectro Silvertone that now hangs from a wall at the Paisley home here. A preternaturally gifted guitarist and an eager singer, Paisley began performing at those radio station Jamboree USA events in Wheeling when he was all of 10. (By 12, he was already writing his own songs.)

“The guitar was bigger than Brad was,” says Ron Retzer, who was in the Jamboree band and is 20 years Paisley's senior. “There was no doubt that he had talent, but the thing that amazed me is that he didn't have the opinion that he knew it all. He was always learning. He was a sponge.”

Paisley shrugs off the suggestion that he was some sort of phenom. “It was good for 10,” he says, “but I was no Taylor Swift or LeAnn Rimes or any of these kids that have



BY KATE ROBERTSON FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Brad Paisley laughs as someone points to the turnout for his reunion invitation to the Class of 1991, which exceeded the actual 15th reunion.

done well and had major careers. Even by 17, I wasn't ready. It took a lot of work.”

At Marshall, Paisley was an exceptionally shy B-minus student who never got into trouble and, he says, never had so much as a drop of alcohol. (He's still not much of a drinker, Paisley says, noting that his hilarious 2005 hit, “Alcohol,” was social commentary about what he sees from the stage when his fans imbibe.) He started playing country music when country wasn't cool, but by his senior year, he had become fairly popular as the genre boomed. “I was the guy who knew how to play that stuff,” he says. “God bless Garth Brooks and Clint Black, who saved me from ridicule and gave me a way to be cool instantly.”

After high school, he went to West Liberty State College for a year before transferring to Belmont University to study the art and business of music. In 1999, Arista Nashville released his debut, “Who Needs Pictures,” which produced a pair of No. 1 singles (“He Didn't Have to Be” and “We Danced”), went platinum and netted Paisley the top new male vocalist trophy at the Academy of Country Music Awards.

It also persuaded the city fathers here to name a street after Paisley, who has since established himself as one of modern country's most formidable triple threats — a singer-songwriter-guitar slinger who floors you with his ferocious instrumental work as easily as he does with his writing and singing.

“He's always been a great kid. He was never a braggart about his talent. That's not who Brad is. He's just a kind and compassionate person.”

Linda Brinkman, one of Paisley's high school teachers

Especially his writing, which can be playful and witty (“Celebrity,” “Ticks,” “Online”) but also sincere and sentimental (“He Didn't Have to Be,” “She's Everything”).

Old-timers adore him, contemporary country fans love him and Nashville salivates over him: Paisley — who has sold more than 7 million albums and cranked out nine No. 1 singles — is nominated in five categories at next month's Country Music Association Awards, including entertainer and album of the year.

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Paisley is hiding out inside his tour bus, a luxury-appointed 45-foot vehicle with hardwood floors, soft leather seats, a plasma TV connected to a satellite dish and a large master bedroom that appears to be in a serious state of disarray. He's wolfing down cheese

pizza and antipasto salad during a brief break from shooting; in between bites, he's flashing back to his 17-year-old existence.

“I certainly didn't have the most awkward or troubled high school experience of anybody I know,” he says. “But it wasn't necessarily a charmed one, either. You have this incredible insecurity at that age, wondering what you were going to wind up looking like, let alone what you're going to do with your life. You're just a year or two away from moving out, or at least from starting to get your independence and becoming a legal adult. But you don't feel like one. To top it off, everyone's telling you to live it up, this is as good as it gets, that high school — these are the best days of your life. That made me want to shoot myself.”

He smirks. “This is as good as it gets? . . . That's the worst thing you can tell a kid. Unless they're loving every minute of high school, don't tell them that. The birth of your first child — now *that's* some of the best days of your life.”

Paisley recently had his first child with Williams, the “According to Jim” star who first landed on the cultural radar in late 1991, when she starred in “Father of the Bride.” (She played the bride; 12 years later, she became one.)

Is that the proud father's photo of his boy, William Huckleberry Paisley, on a shelf at the front of the bus? “That's actually not my son,” he says. “That's the picture that came

in the frame, which was a gift. But it might as well be him, since they all look like that.”

Anyway, Paisley says, “No one I know peaked in high school.” But he's the one who is immortalized, in glass, on the Marshall Wall of Fame, alongside the likes of Mr. Frederick Tweedle and Dr. Gary L. Buskirk. He's the one who managed to get more folks from the Class of '91 to come back to Marshall on a Monday night than came for the 15-year class reunion on a weekend.

One of them is Bridget Jordan. She went to the prom with Paisley — and 16 years later, he put her in “Letter to Me,” fudging a line about something that never happened. “When you get a date with Bridget, make sure the tank is full / On second thought, forget it — that one turns out kinda cool,” Paisley sings.

“We didn't run out of gas on any of the dates we went on,” she says. (Paisley confirms that he made up the detail.) Jordan is now a teacher, the mother of two, and surprised and flattered to have been included in a song that will soon be all over country radio. She'll likely show up in the video, too, when it's released next month.

In high school, she says. “Brad was really funny. In business law class, he got the teacher off track a few times with his wit. But he was always respectful. He wasn't the class clown.”

What else wasn't he? Muscular! “He's bulked up,” she says with a giggle.

But in many ways, Paisley is still the same. That's what everybody says, anyway.

“He's always been a great kid,” says Linda Brinkman, who taught Paisley in Speech I and Speech II. “He was never a braggart about his talent. That's not who Brad is. He's just a kind and compassionate person.”

Paisley says Brinkman helped him get over his stage fright, which is why he included her in “Letter to Me,” singing: “You should really thank Ms. Brinkman, she spends so much extra time / It's like she sees the diamond underneath / And she's polishing you till you shine.”

If he felt uncomfortable in his own skin 16 years ago, then just imagine how he feels now, posing for pictures and signing autographs for the people who walked the halls with him here.

“Off-balance,” he says. “Of all people in this entire country, I would think that these folks would be the absolute last people to want that sort of thing. I mean, they were there when I slipped and fell on the ice at a hockey game. They saw me dateless at *many* dances. They have the yearbook; they've seen the pictures of me semi-mulletted and malnourished.”

This is how it should go down, he says: “They just walk up and say, ‘Hey, pal, congrats on everything — but you realize we know you're a dork.’”

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM Hear clips of Brad Paisley songs at washingtonpost.com/music