

# The Style Invitational

## REPORT FROM WEEK 737

In which we asked for songs to commemorate an occasion other than Christmas or Hanukkah, set to a well-known tune. Song parodies are an exacting genre — there are millions of them out there, but few very good ones. The finest not only match the originals' meter and rhyme schemes (and often play cleverly off the original lyrics), but also build up to a strong ending, basically a punch line. The definitive parodies may be those from *Mad* magazine of the 1960s and '70s, but the tradition endures. One specialist is Loser Barbara Sarshik of McLean, who over the years has penned a whole Passover's worth of fabulous "Seder Songs" set to show tunes; you can see them at [www.barbarasarshik.com](http://www.barbarasarshik.com).

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

## Week 741: Well, What Do You Know?



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**At the supermarket: "Express lane" is a term meaning "Do not under any circumstances have your money ready."**

It could be true that everything YOU need to know you learned in kindergarten. But the rest of us, we're afraid, need a broader perspective. **This week: Tell us what Major Life Lessons can be derived from any of these venues or situations.**

1. From watching a presidential campaign debate
2. On the pot
3. At the DMV
4. At the supermarket
5. From having the flu

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets, in the spirit of the season, Poo-Pooing Santa Claus, who ejects jolly little red and green candies from a ho-ho-hole in his pants. It would be nice if we could get the Inker to do this too, but he has no pants.

**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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 3. Put "Week 741" 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 Dec. 22. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Today is National Express Day. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's contest was suggested by Russell Beland, who remembered a contest like this from seven years ago. The revised title for next week's contest is by Brendan Beary. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Russ Taylor of Vienna.

## 2 The winner of the Slang Flashcards: Valentine's Day (to "Under the Sea")

You wonder what you should do to  
Make me want your body more,  
Why the red lace thong you bought me  
Is still lying in my drawer.  
How could you be more alluring?  
Babe, you haven't got a clue.  
Just sit tight and listen closely  
To the things that you should do:

Take out the trash, hang up your pants.  
It wouldn't hurt to iron a shirt to  
Get more romance.  
Don't buy a case of fine French wine,  
Just grab a jug of 409!  
I will be lusting, when you are dusting.  
Take out the trash!  
(Barbara Sarshik)

## AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

The Running of the Bulls (to "If I Only Had a Brain")

I could drink Amontillado  
To work up my bravado  
And quell my fear of pain.  
Partly drunk and wholly crazy,  
I could be all Hemingway  
If I ran the bulls in Spain.

Oh I perhaps could die,  
But what a way to go!  
Yes, the end could be a mess,  
but even so,  
I'd be so drunk, I'd hardly know!

Yes, the notion is outlandish,  
For bulls ain't Ferdinandish,  
At least not in the main.  
But each year, fellows pour in  
To risk trampling and gorin'  
As they run the bulls in Spain.

Though my sprint is more a  
waddle,  
There's courage in a bottle  
For something so insane.  
I could prove I'm really macho  
Or else end up as gazpacho  
If I ran the bulls in Spain.  
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

## BUMMING A FEW HARS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Public Radio Pledge "Week"** (to "Simple Gifts")  
'Tis the gift that's expected,  
'tis the gift based on guilt,  
'Tis the gift on which public radio is built.  
But when they beg, interrupting all the news  
'Tis hard to be willing to pay those dues. (Ira  
Allen, Bethesda)

**Super Bowl Sunday** (to "A Wonderful Guy")  
I can't wait until Super Bowl Sunday —  
Mountains of munchies  
and drinks with the lads.  
Not that I claim to care squat for the game,  
I'm in love with the wonderful ads!  
Most of them featuring flatulent horses,  
Bodily functions or kicks to the nads,  
Lavish campaigns  
in which tastelessness reigns;  
I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love,  
I'm in love with these juvenile ads!  
(Brendan Beary)

**Thanksgiving** (to "There's No Business Like Show Business")

There's no turkey in Tofurky,  
It's faux turkey, you know.  
Vegans like to eat it on Thanksgiving  
Stuff it with some couscous and some dough,  
Add some sprouts and shout, "Hey, this is  
living,  
And it tastes great, too!" but I say, "Whoa —  
We're meat, people, not wheat-people,  
Let's eat what's apropos  
We're atop the food chain, so let's act the part:  
So eat real turkey, the neck and heart,  
Offal's awful good, so grab a fork and start  
The Great Carnivore Show! (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan,  
Minn.)

**Bastille Day** (to "Y.M.C.A.")  
Louie, try not to shake.

I said, Louis, things are simply not jake.

I said, Marie should have served more than  
cake  
The peasants are revolting.  
I said, Louis, it's quatorze juillet.  
I said, Louis, for your hair a bad day.  
You can't fall back on an auto-de-fe  
The inmates are in charge.  
Come on, let's have . . . Bastille Day,  
Come on and let all those bon temps roulez. . .  
(George Vary, Bethesda)

**Easter** (to "Just a Closer Walk with Thee")  
Just an Easter Bunny now,  
No religion! Holy cow!  
The Passion's gone from it somehow.  
It's just an Easter Bunny now.  
(Mike Dailey, Centerville)

**The Day After Christmas**  
Take me out to the mall now,  
Take me out to buy Peeps.  
Christmas was over a day ago,  
Easter's coming in three months or so,  
So we'll stock up on chocolate bunnies,  
And a small marshmallow bird,  
'Cause it's one, two, three months until it's  
March twenty-third!  
(Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)

**Easter** (to "Revolution")  
Oh, has there been a Resurrection?  
Well, you know  
They gave the tomb a good inspection,  
Well, you know,  
They found the stone was rolled away.  
Just goes to prove the old expression:  
That you just can't keep a good man down,  
And you know He's gotta be Our Lord . . .  
(Leslie Horne, Greenbelt)

**Columbus Day**  
Ten million, nine million, eight million  
Indians . . .  
(Kevin Dopart, Washington)

**Halloween** (to "It's a Long Way to Tipperary")  
There's a wrong way to dress your daughter,  
There's a wrong way, you know.  
Make your daughter dress like she oughter,  
And not like some two-bit ho.  
Goodbye, Cinderella,  
Hello, Britney Spears.  
There's a wrong wrong way to dress your  
daughter  
When she's just seven years.  
(Mae Scanlan)

**National Pomegranate Month** (to "That's  
Entertainment")  
The fruit that is currently hot  
Helps your heart, and unthickens your snot  
Dulls your pain, even better than pot  
That's pomegranate!  
(Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

**And Last: The publication of The Style  
Invitational** (to "Saturday in the Park")  
Saturdays in The Post,  
Jokes that make the ombudsman cry!  
Saturdays in The Post,  
Obvious that things are awry:  
Poop jokes, rude jokes, almost lewd jokes:  
I look at them and I scream,  
"This is just so wrong!  
These are stupid! Mine were better!  
Can't I ink here?" Yes, I can,  
But I've been waiting such a long time . . .  
(Bob Dalton, Arlington)

See many more Losing special-occasion parodies at [www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational](http://www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational).

Next Week: So What's to Liken? or Jesting the Contrast

## Tsongas, Forging Victory Out of Loss

TSONGAS, From C1

And yet, down in that dark basement, she will now lead the spartan life of a political newcomer, serving the people she has come to love.

Tsongas never would have found Lowell had it not been for Washington. The oldest of four girls and daughter to a career Air Force colonel, she was born in Chico, Calif., and reared in Texas and Japan, Germany and Virginia. But it was that concept of home, real home, that she lacked — until she met Paul and her life's new trajectory was set.

There she was, a student at Smith College in 1967, living during the summer break with classmates in Georgetown, one of whom worked for a Republican congressman, Brad Morse of Massachusetts. Paul Tsongas worked for Morse, too. When the Smithies threw a party, Paul went.

It was the only party that Paul ever attended willingly in his life, Niki would say later. But there's no doubt it was the most important. When the two went out on a date afterward, he spoke of going back home to Lowell to run for city council.

"It all seemed very exciting to me," Tsongas says, sitting in her still-empty congressional office. "I had never been close to local political races. . . . I was drawn to Paul's intensity. There was a tremendous sense of purpose. And he was the handsomest man I'd ever met."

Two years later, her dashing young man, brimming with ambition, fulfilled his promises and ran for city council. He won his seat, and the same year they were married.

Thus began a partnership that would carry the couple beyond the city council, through the congressional race for the fifth, followed by his successful run in 1978 for the Senate.

"It was a shared undertaking," Tsongas says. "I wasn't here casting votes, but it was a shared commitment to service and family, which you work through on a daily basis. We knew the district quite well and thought it was important to promote it."

decided to step away from politics, to return home, to get better.

Paul underwent treatment, joined a law firm in Boston. Niki finished the law degree she'd put off while taking care of the family and the political campaigns. Tsongas realized that she faced the prospect of becoming the sole caretaker, the breadwinner, the woman who'd have to put three kids through college — alone.

Her oldest daughter, Ashley, remembers her mother studying for the bar in a closet in the family home to escape the household's noise. In time, Tsongas would open a law practice, taking time to care for her recovering husband, attending the kids' sporting events and helping out with Lowell community projects.

It is true that her recent victory wouldn't have drawn national press had Paul Tsongas not decided to enter the 1992 Democratic presidential race. He was a long shot — a Massachusetts politician of Greek origin, just like another politician whose race left the party badly burned the last time around (see Dukakis, Michael, the tank ad).

Indeed, when Paul sat a family friend down and said that one of two things was happening — either he was running for president or Niki was expecting another child — the friend leaped up and hugged her.

But we know the rest of the story. Despite early success, he was no match for what was to become the Bill Clinton juggernaut. He dropped out after brutal defeats in the Illinois and Michigan primaries. Tsongas returned home, to life in Lowell. And his cancer returned as well, ending his life in 1997.

"The thing that really strikes me about my mom was she was strong and the rock but also very real," says Ashley, now 33 and a policy director for Oxfam America. "When she was sad, she was sad. There wasn't ever any pretending. It was a matter of you acknowledging what's hard and keep going. Some people fall apart. But if she was going to cry, she'd cry and then stop and everything got done."

In her husband's passing, Tsongas became a woman driven to boards and charities, driven by a sense of doing good for the sake of good. Joining the administration of the local community college, she brought in speakers such as George



1992 PHOTO BY PETER MORGAN — REUTERS

H.W. and Barbara Bush, Rudy Giuliani and Walter Cronkite. She headed Lowell's Merrimack Repertory Theatre board and the United Way of Merrimack Valley. In 2001, trustees of the city's American Textile Museum held a black-tie "Hats Off to Niki Tsongas" gala that raised more than \$110,000.

Having toyed with the possibility of an earlier run, she seemed an obvious choice to replace 5th District Rep. Marty Meehan, a Democrat, when he decided to give up his seat.

"I think she has been looking for and finding ways of giving back to the community," Ashley says. "As she worked more, she set her sights broader and broader. This was the next logical step."

Logical, yes. Easy, no. Though she had worked in Lowell, she had moved to Charlestown, Mass., some years back, to be closer to her daughters. Running for office required her to return home. She called upon Dennis Kanin, who had run her husband's presidential campaign, to now run her race. Last May, she kicked off her campaign with a bus tour across the district.

Though the Tsongas name carried weight, she still struggled to shake off her competitors in a crowded Democratic primary. She won with 36 percent, narrowly defeating her nearest competitor by five percentage points.

For the general election, Tsongas mounted a door-to-door campaign while Sens. John Kerry and Ted Kennedy put their immense fundraising clout behind her. There were visits by Rep. Harry Waxman (D-Calif.), whom she had known from Paul's days in the House, and a memorable evening when Clinton, once her husband's arch rival, came to speak on her behalf.

There was also the notable presence Jim O'Brien — president of the Boston chapter of the Ireland Chamber of Commerce in the United States — with whom Tsongas



BY CHARLES KRUPA — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Niki Tsongas with daughters (from left) Molly, Ashley and Katina. Left, husband Paul, who died in 1997 of cancer.

has a close friendship.

She beat her Republican challenger, Jim Ogonowski, on Oct. 16 with 51 percent of the vote.

But the final weeks of her campaign and her ultimate victory were tempered by another personal loss.

In late September, her younger sister, Suzanne Sauvage, passed away while sleeping in her Brooklyn home. (A cause of death has not been released.)

Tsongas had once dealt with loss and moved on, and now she was

called to do so again.

"I still haven't taken it in," she says somberly. "But the one thing you learn is that you have responsibilities that supersede personal issues. You learn to deal with very difficult choices."

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