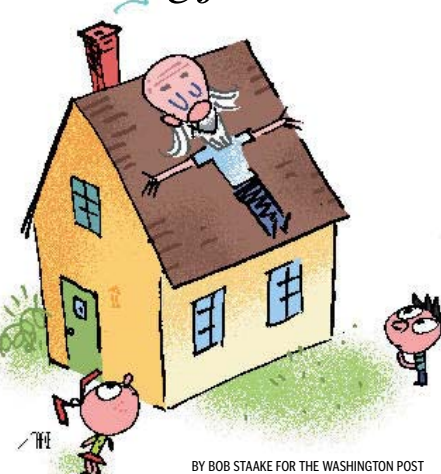


# The Style Invitational

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

### Week 773: Always Looking for Sects



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Frisbeetarianism** is the belief that when you die, your soul is flung onto a roof and just stays there.

And perhaps that's where the soul of the famously atheistic George Carlin is currently residing. If one can believe a single phrase occurring in dozens of obviously copied Internet hits, Carlin "invented the parody religion Frisbeetarianism for a newspaper contest." Unfortunately, it wasn't ours. Fortunately, it's your turn: This week: **Coin a religion or belief system and tell us its basic tenet or distinguishing characteristic.**

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives "Brides Behaving Badly," a collection of wedding photos from what must have been the alumnae of the Tonya Harding School of Elegant Department and Apparel.

**Other runners-up** win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. 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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, July 21. Put "Week 773" 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 Aug. 9. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's contest was suggested by devout Frisbeetarian Andrew Hoenig. The revised title for next week's results is by Tom Witte. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Kevin Dopart.

## REPORT FROM WEEK 769

**In which we asked for portmanteau words — words combining two words in which at least two letters overlap: Most people had no trouble noticing that the words had to begin with a letter from S to Z; those who sent entries from all over the alphabet (a group that may or may not include a Mr. Chuck Smith of Woodbridge) should hold on to them for when we repeat this contest with other letters, providing we are still here and all that.**

**Among the most common words offered was "soporifiction," variously defined as the works of Henry James, Dostoevski, Thoreau and Danielle Steel. A special telegraphy prize goes to the (we swear) eight-time Loser who sent "Yodelegate: To delegate to another the task of yodeling" AND "Sugarlic: Sugar stored next to a bag of garlic" AND "Swedental: A Swedish dental plan."**

## BOTTOMFOOLERY: HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Stormt:** To interrupt the "Lost" finale to broadcast weather warnings for some county 100 miles away. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

**Stripper diem:** Daily expense allowance for conventioners. (Pam Sweeney)

**Satantrum:** The toddler's meltdown from Hell. (Bob Kurlantzick, Potomac)

**Scarecrowd:** A parade of fashion models. (Larry Yungk, Arlington)

**Sebummer:** A prom night zit. (Dave Komornik, Danville, Va.)

**Semensch:** The ideal sperm donor. (Stacey Kenkermath, Alexandria)

**Sepsisters:** Siblings whose relationship is beyond dysfunctional. (Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church)

**Shishkabul:** The grilling of prisoners in Afghanistan. (Dave Prevar)

**Siblingo:** The secret language spoken between twins. (Kathy Hardis Fraeman, Olney)

**Simpledge:** "Yes." (Dave Prevar)

**Slothario:** A man who lures women to bed just to sleep. (Russell Beland, Springfield; Patrick Mattimore)

**Spamputate:** To delete the entire junk mail basket. (Ari Unikoski, Tel Aviv)

**Spinacheerios:** A healthy cereal that didn't prove very popular with children. (Emery Walters, Reston, a First Offender)

**Spongengeneration:** The move-back-home Gen-Y. (Dave Prevar)

**Springsteenchilda:** Even if you weren't born to run, you'll run. (N.G. Andrews, Portsmouth, Va.)

**Stigmatata:** The disgrace of a teenage girl caught stuffing Kleenex in her bra. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

**Substandardize:** Bring everything down to the lowest common denominator. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

**Sudafederales:** Brave agents who protect our nation from smuggled foreign cold medicines. (Pam Sweeney)

**Successpool:** Where you have to go to get filthy rich. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

**Syphilisterine:** For when bad breath is the least of your problems. (Chris Rollins, Cumberland, Md.)

**Tattoops:** "It's supposed to be ROSE, not ROSSI!" (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

**Testosteronearsighted:** Having an affliction that prevents men from seeing dirty dishes in the sink. (Kathy Hardis Fraeman)

**Theologymnasts:** Those who perform amazing leaps and twists of logic to make Scripture seem to justify their political views. (David Komornik)

**Thesauristic:** A charmingly simple dictionary; coarse; lacking refinement; unsophisticated. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

**Threnodynamics:** The art of putting on a lively funeral. (Lars Wiberg, Rockport, Mass., a First Offender)

**Timpanini:** Italian drum rolls. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

**Warmadillo:** Fresh Texan roadkill. (Kevin Dopart)

**Tornadoesence:** An unpredictable, destructive force of nature that can leave houses in shambles; i.e., adolescence in general. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

**Torquemadam:** The head dominatrix. (Chris Doyle)

**Wiretapestry:** The drapes in the FBI building. (Rick Haynes)

**Twelfthirsty:** The time when the women at the bar begin to look better. (Michael Mason, Fairfax)

**Ungodyricist:** A sinner-songwriter. (Marc Boysworth, Burke)

**Undressay:** "Dear Penthouse Forum . . ." (Marc Boysworth)

**Upholsteroid:** An overstuffed recliner that takes up half the family room. (Michael Turniansky, Pikesville, Md.)

**Wonderbrahman:** Director of costume design for Frederick's of Bollywood. (Chris Doyle)

**Urinalmost:** What results from the "ready-fire-aim" approach. (Dan Ramish, Vienna)

**AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER Treadmillstone:** The unused home gym that keeps staring at you. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

**Velcro-Magnon:** The cretin at the party who just won't leave you alone. (Pam Sweeney)

**Vermillionaire:** A guy who drives a Bentley but whose accounts are deep in the red. (Russell Beland)

**Viagrarian:** A farmer who can plow the land for four hours without stopping to rest. (Roy Ashley)

**Virtuoso-so:** One who gives a surprisingly disappointing performance. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

**Vituperationalize:** To justify one's harsh criticism of others, particularly in an election year. "We meant only to educate the voters about my opponent's lack of patriotism," the candidate vituperationalized. (John Shea, Lansdowne, Pa.)

**Vomitvah:** A fraternity initiation rite. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

**Whalecher:** A man who peeks into the dressing rooms at Lane Bryant. (Emery Walters)

**Whomily:** A lecture on the moral rightness of good grammar. (Chris Doyle)

**Worshippodrome:** A megachurch. (John O'Byrne)

**Xenamby-pamby:** The Warrior Princess's prissy sister. (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

**Yiddishabille:** Same black suit and black hat, but no shirt. (J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.)

**Zentertainer:** A performer who receives applause only in the form of one hand clapping. (Brian Herget, Annandale, whose only previous ink was in 1996, when he won a T-shirt)

**Note:** The "genuine, if nonworking, geiger counter" we offered as the runner-up prize last week turns out to be a genuine, and possibly working, ionization chamber, according to reader Stu Newman of Bowie. This device measures roentgens of radiation, 1,000 times the strength of the milliroentgens that a geiger counter counts. So "I'm certainly glad that the donor's husband failed to get any measurements with that device," Stu says.

**Next Week:** A Knack for Anachronism, or History in the Mocking

## How a Naturalist Got to the Root of His Deep Depression

MABEY, From C1

terms. Physical disease has a purpose — often it is caused by a pathogen that thrives on the sick. But depression, he writes, "seems to have no connection with the biological business of living at all. And what it did to me was unearthly, in that it negated, cut dead, all the things in which I most believed: the importance of sensual engagement with the world, the link between feeling and intelligence, the inseparability of nature and culture."

Which brings us back to barn owls. Perhaps his illness, he speculates in the book, is some sort of human version of a phenomenon seen in that saucer-eyed bird: Faced with peril, it faints. This "vegetative retreat" offers a period of inward protection, and the owl awakes when the threat passes. But for Mabey, the faint lasted from 1999 to 2001.

Today, frankly, it is difficult to think of Mabey as morose, or even 67. He has a round and boyish face, essentially unlined and crowned with a mop of hair. He is chatty and given to smiles. He lives in an idyllic setting, a 400-year-old cottage as organic as its surroundings, the walls made from the clay dug from the garden (leaving a duck pond) and crowned with a picture-postcard thatched roof. There are an orchard, a walled vegetable garden, herbaceous borders and rose bowers. A converted shed serves as a comfortable writer's lair.

Giving a tour, he shows where he uses a mower to nibble paths in and around a meadow "like an herbivore" and stops at a wooded corner of the meadow to lift two bell jars sheltering self-seeded bee orchids. "Darwin thought they would become extinct. They're showing no signs whatever of becoming extinct," he muses. He places the jar back over the orchid with the tenderness of someone who cares about his world once more.

Mabey's breakthrough book was his first — "Food for Free," a guide to foraging that has sold half a million copies since it was first published in 1972 and is credited with helping to stir a modern interest in Britain's countryside. In the 1980s, he wrote a biography of Gilbert White, the 18th-century naturalist and cleric whose "The Natural History of Selbourne" is considered the model for environmental writing.

A decade later, Mabey tackled his most ambitious book, "Flora Britannica," in which he tells the social and cultural history of his country's native plants. This followed the death of his mother, for whom he had been caring in the family home where he had lived almost all his life.

After "Flora Britannica" was published in 1996, Mabey found that, for the first time in his life, he had finished a book without ideas for others ready to fill the creative void. He was, he says, "exhausted, played out" and he started to question the value of his work.

Moping developed into clinical depres-



PHOTOS BY VICKI COUCHMAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

sion, and he began receiving therapy, of which he later wrote: "The idea that discussing or simply understanding an illness will in some way make the hard-wiring that caused it disappear is, as most people who have been through it acknowledge, wishful thinking." He tried repeatedly "to exorcise my depression" by immersing himself in the countryside "but all I felt was a kind of rebuke."

So he went to bed and closed the curtains, stirring only to drag himself to the pub to drown his sorrows. He let the phone ring and the mail pile up, a tactic that brought debt collectors to the door. In this fetal state, he formed "an escapist fantasy" of fleeing to the wilderness, living by his foraging skills. "It was a ludicrous dream," he writes, "and mostly I just lay there, curled up in the 'crash

position' they demonstrate to you on aircraft, scared stiff and praying hopelessly that the turbulence would pass."

On three occasions he checked himself into a psychiatric hospital, St. Andrew's in Northampton. This turned out to be the same institution where one of his literary heroes, the 19th-century nature poet John Clare, had been committed for the last 23 years of his life, after a diagnosis of lunacy caused by "years addicted to poetical prosing."

"I've left my own old home of homes," Clare wrote in a poem called "The Flitting," and Mabey recognized that feeling of displacement. After his third hospitalization, Mabey's doctors would only discharge him into the care of friends. Thus he found himself living in a series of homes in Norfolk, a



Richard Mabey moved to a 400-year-old cottage in the English county of Norfolk and explored his depression in the same manner that he ponders nature. "I wanted to view it through an ecological prism and look at it as a biological state," he says. His new life and new work, including a sequel to his book "Nature Cure," are helping keep his demons away, he says.

county marked by shingle beaches, intensive agriculture, low flat terrain and Dutch-style windmills. His sister decided to sell the family home that had been his refuge — and, later, his dungeon — and he found himself adrift in the world.

But as that door closed, another opened. Mabey fell in love with an old acquaintance, Polly Munro. And as she left to go on a previously planned vacation, she made a request that proved to be pivotal: She asked Mabey to keep a journal that she could read when she got back.

He did. He wrote about the garden, and the birds, and the wooded preserve he had created at his old family home, but he also wrote about events he attended and his political views and his days as an undergraduate in Oxford. "The more I wrote," he tells readers, "the less my life seemed to resemble that of the marginalised voyeur I'd cast myself as."

By the time his sweetheart returned, "I realised I'd written what was virtually a short book, and that I had my life back again."

Over lunch in the village pub, Mabey says "Nature Cure" is a story of passage, from one physical place to another, from one emotional state to another.

The Chiltern Hills of his childhood are revered in England as a place of particular beauty, a hilly upland of hedgerows and meadows and woods and quaint villages. His move to the flat, wet landscape of Norfolk put him in the middle of an entirely dif-

ferent environment that Mabey observes keenly. He gives us wild horses and cranes and a marshland plant named hornwort, which actually fizzes with oxygen on hot days, singing like "Aeolian harps."

"I was having to learn to live in two ways which had not been available to me before, with a degree of independence that I hadn't had before and also — and this is where the nature bit comes in — the experience of getting ill and getting better," he says. "It changed my perception of what writing was about."

In the United Kingdom, "Nature Cure" was short-listed for the prestigious Whitbread Prize, sold well and has been reissued in paperback. In the United States — where memoirs of personal crisis may be more commonplace — it has gone largely unnoticed, though it is still in print. "To say it sank like a stone," says Mabey, laughing, "would assume it was above the surface to start with."

Back in the garden of the home in Norfolk he and Munro have shared for the past five years, he points out a wildflower he has encouraged to grow amid the grass. Hayrattle, it's called, and because it's semi-parasitic it stunts the grass and prevents it from taking over. Mabey's new life and new work, including a sequel to "Nature Cure," are his hayrattle, keeping the demons away.

He said he is "ever vigilant" against the melancholy returning. "I think it unlikely because I have an infrastructure in my life I didn't have before. But I'm a moody person, I probably have as many bleak days as the next person, so I'm not complacent."