

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 776: An Act of Sunny Side



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Had to take my Hummer off the road, but it makes a great backyard greenhouse.

The neighbors got foreclosed on and moved out, but now I can wash the car naked in the daytime.

Grandkids don't visit so often, but neither does my ex-wife.

Things aren't going so well for a lot of us right now, you know? The Handbasket Express is standing room only. But who better than a bunch of confirmed Losers to make the best of a lousy situation? Or so predicts Loser Since Week 22 Elden Camahan, who (optimistically) suggested this contest: **This week: Note the silver lining in some otherwise disappointing turn of events**, as in Elden's examples above.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives an original 1974 copy of "The Memoirs of Mason Reese," a book including not only dozens of pictures of the then-8-year-old commercial pitchman and human Cabbage Patch doll, but also Mason's alleged pronouncements on such issues of the day as pot smoking (he was against it). You know how some adults look nothing like their childhood photos? Well, at right is Mason then and now.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt, classic or current version. 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 or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 11. Put "Week 776" 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. 30. 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 results is by Kevin Dopot. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Chris Doyle.

REPORT FROM WEEK 772

in which we asked readers to alter a literary passage so that it could be understood "by Los Angeles residents under 40," as an L.A. Times reader wrote in a letter to the editor complaining that there were too many hard words in a certain movie review.

Lots of first-time entrants this week, from all over the country and beyond. Not many from L.A., though.

This was a space-eating contest, so more Honorable Mentions — including a phrase-by-phrase translation of the opening paragraph of "A Tale of Two Cities" (along with the original) — appear at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

LET THERE B-LIT: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Francis Bacon: "If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties."

Jay Shuck, Minneapolis: "You think you're sure? I mean really, you're SURE you're sure? Well, I am, like, SO SURE!"

Pliny the Elder: "The lust of avarice has so totally seized upon mankind that their wealth seems rather to possess them than that they possess their wealth."

Mae Scanlan, Washington: "When money rules, you guys are fools."

Jane Austen: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

Karen Zachary, Arlington, a First Offender: "Everybody knows that a rich single dude wants to be married. Not."

Shakespeare: Who is Silvia? what is she, That all our swains commend her? Holy, fair, and wise is she; The heaven such grace did lend her, That she might admirèd be. Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.: Who is Sylvia? What is she, That all the dudes now dig her? Holy cow, she's hot! I see The doctor's made her bigger, And she's about a double-D.

Psalms 52: "Thy tongue devised mischief's; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou loves evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. Thou loves all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue."

David Kleinbard, Jersey City: "Liar, liar, pants on fire!"

Ernest Hemingway: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn."

Jeffrey Contompassis, Ashburn: "There's this woman who's expecting a baby and something bad happens, like a miscarriage or something, and she had already bought some shoes in anticipation of the birth, so she puts them in the classifieds to sell them and they're still good as new because the baby was never born."

The winner of the maybe-working radiation detector: William Shakespeare: "Et tu, Brute?"

Elisa M. Nichols, Kensington: "Bitch set me up!"

T.S. Eliot via Kathy Hardis Fraeman, Olney: When I get old, I'm going to roll up my pants, eat a peach, and go to an art gallery.

Edgar Allan Poe: "A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul — a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which lessons of by-gone times are inadequate and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key."

Chuck Smith, Woodbridge: I am sooooo wasted.

Poe via LuAnn Bishop, West Haven, Conn.: So, it's really late, and I'm totally bummed out thinking about my dead girlfriend, when then this big black bird hops in my window and says: "Fahgedaboutit!"



Someone ate up the borgasmord! Mason Reese in 1973, just before his "Memoirs" — this week's prize — were published, and this past June.



BY LUIGI NOVI

Geoffrey Chaucer: "Whan that aprile with his shoures soote The droghte of march hath perced to the roote . . . Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages."

Beverly Sharp, Washington: "It's spring break . . . ROAD TRIP!!!"

Walt Whitman via Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.: Whoa, dude! The president got shot! We need to get some metaphors going RIGHT NOW.

Thomas Jefferson via: Russell Beland, Springfield: Us Americans, so that we can have a better country, one that's fair, where we're not yanking each other's chain, and to make sure nobody messes with our homeboys, and to keep things righteous, have worked up a few rules here . . .

Beverly Ellis, Manassas, a First Offender: Sometimes stuff happens and a group of people have to stop being a part of the group they used to belong to and go do the stuff they want to do because it's their right to do what they want to do and to be respected just for living and they gotta tell everybody what's going down and why the shakeup is taking place.

David Kleinbard: It's plain to see, you ain't better than me. God gave us a right to be free. You ain't the boss of me. Shake my branch, I'll kick you out of my tree.

G. Smith, New York: You're not the king of ufl!

With the two First Offenders here and two more on the washingtonpost.com supplement, The Style Invitational has logged its 4,000th Loser since the contest began in March 1993. No, we haven't been keeping score. We have Losers for that. See the exhaustive statistics at their own Web site, www.gopherdroll.com.

See more Honorable Mentions at www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

Next Week: Always Looking for Sects, or Eschatological Humor

A Summertime to Yield for Bicyclists

BIKING, From C1

downtown office on a blue Breezer Villager that she calls Babe, after Babe the Blue Ox. "I'd like to see it get back to being a way of getting around."

Shopping by bike, she says, "feels more like an adventure than a chore." The other day, she tied a milk crate to her rack, biked to a hardware store on Pennsylvania Avenue and carried home a flat of flowers on the crate.

Riding to the office, sometimes "I wear heels and skirts," she says, "and I'm not the only girl in town who does. It's like, Why not? I'm not running. I'm just using the pads of my feet. . . . People need to see bikers dressed like that, so they can say, 'I can do that.'"

She says: "When you first take off your training wheels, the first excitement of being allowed to ride to school — that was the first level of freedom. I think that's something you never lose."

This is the summer of bike-parking attendants at Nationals games, of a new fleet of communal unisex Treks at the U.S. House of Representatives, of a proposed bike-share program in the city, of street musicians strapping keyboards and speakers to milk crates on beater bikes, of thick, bright orange German-made contraptions pedaled by diplomats, with metal child-seats built on back and metal cargo carriers installed in front.

This is the summer when every day you witness astonishing feats of two-wheeled conveyance of everything from 30-packs of Bud Ice on the handlebars to gift baskets of fruit on the homemade wood-and-PVC-pipe trailer behind. This summer it makes perfect sense that columnist Bob Novak, after hitting a pedestrian with his Corvette, should have the police called on him by a lawyer commuting by bicycle.

Your first three-speed was a Schwinn. It was built to live as long as you did — except you left yours behind in some dank, enchanted basement of discarded Flexible Flyers, little red wagons, scooters, badminton nets, croquet mallets and fishing poles.

This is the summer you realize you need it again.

What's happening is, the American conception of the bicycle-as-toy

and the bicycle-as-sports-equipment is being infiltrated by the European notion of the bicycle-as-transportation and the Asian notion of the bicycle-as-cargo-hauler.

The idea has dawned that, guess what, contrary to biker dogma of the 1970s and 1980s, you don't have to break your back with drop-down handlebars and obsess over ever-lighter space-age frames. The totemic two-wheeler is no longer the Specialized Roubaix Elite Triple with the carbon frame and the 30-speed Shimano drivetrain for \$1,949.99, last seen tearing down Beach Drive on weekends, bearing lawyers and lobbyists in full spandex peloton plumage. And good riddance to the 1980s' and 1990s' craze for tank-treaded, double-suspension mountain bikes. The only time you ever found yourself "off-road," dude, was on the C&O Canal towpath.

Hybrids came along, of course, a compromise between road bikes and mountain bikes. Now hybrids have been refined and gussied into "commuter bikes," made by such companies as Jamis, Breezer and others, costing a few hundred bucks up to \$1,000.

The handlebars are set higher than the seats, so you sit upright and comfortable. What a concept. The reign of the purists is over, and all the accessories they forbade are permitted again. There are baskets in front and racks in back. There are chain guards so you don't get grease on your slacks, and skirt guards so you don't catch your dress. Kickstands are no longer a heresy punishable by sneering. Fenders are back, along with mudflaps, so you don't get a splatter trail up your back on rainy days. On some of the models, front and rear lights come installed.

Basically, it's the 1969 Schwinn Racer, with more gears.

The bike industry's fresh supply of new-old bikes is being supplemented by the tectonic forces of Craigslist and eBay unearthing vast midden heaps of old-old Schwinn, Raleighs, Huffys, Peugeot, Sears Roebuck Free Spirits and so on. They have the advantage of being cheap and retro-hip.

"There's a whole new clientele" choosing these bikes, Charlie McCormick, founder of City Bikes, says of this summer in Bicycle Washington. "People who haven't been riding for years and years are going back to it. It's all right to show up at



BY BILL O'LEARY — THE WASHINGTON POST

With the wind in her hair and a basket ready for filling, architect Alexandra Dickson says shopping on two wheels "feels more like an adventure than a chore."

a barbecue on a bike. You're not marginalized. It's cool."

A bicycle is a minimalist sculpture, an object that is also a concept, sparsely rendered in a few lines and curves. The old ones have a certain special elegance. Never discount the aesthetic motive when it comes to biking — even commuter biking.

"My friends call it the Cadillac of bikes," Bryce Pardo says of his green and white 1969 Schwinn Racer. It is locked to a parking sign on the sidewalk of K Street, where he works with an international exchange program. He commutes from Capitol Hill in his dark slacks, button-down shirts and work shoes.

Ah, the fat tires, the fenders, the molded plastic hand grips, the "S" on the saddle. Pardo got the bike on Craigslist for \$75 and added a vintage-looking rearview mirror from eBay. Emily and Chris Leaman ride fixed-gear bikes. Favored by messengers, now adopted by hipsters, these direct-drive machines have pedals that move with the wheels, like a child's tricycle. Sometimes they have no brakes. The way to stop is pedal backward. They are the most extreme expression of the pared-down, low-maintenance, re-

tro ideal. Wheels, steel and a chain. And beautiful.

Emily rides hers to work at Washingtonian, Chris to the State Department. This evening they've ridden to Whole Foods on P Street NW, where the bike rack is full, and the parking meters and parking signs, invented for cars, also are tethering shoppers' bicycles.

Into their messenger bags they pack hummus, guacamole, pita chips and wine. They are biking down to the Mall to picnic and watch "The Candidate" at Screen on the Green, another lovely night in Bicycle Washington.

Found and lost, lost and found. What Bicycle Washington affords this summer is redemption, for both rider and bike.

It all began for Ed Cacic with a Mt. Shasta Capella that he got about 17 years ago when he was 11, growing up in Columbia. It was a nice hybrid, large for the boy, and he rode it a lot. Then he got his driver's license.

Nothing beats driving, until Cacic realized he was arriving at work every morning mad and stressed.

A couple of years ago, he hauled out the dependable, upright Mt. Shasta. He started riding from Pet-

worth to his job as a computer applications developer for a law firm at 10th and K.

The first day, he had to stop five times on the hills going home. Within two weeks, he didn't have to stop anymore.

"I went from hating my commute to having the commute be what I was looking forward to all day," says Cacic, now 28. "I come into work happy."

So happy that: "I found my commute was not long enough."

So he moved to Alexandria. That commute is about 15 miles round trip, 30 minutes each way. He got studded tires to ride in the snow. He does 2,500 to 3,000 miles a year.

While shedding 40 pounds, he calculated he also was saving about \$4,500 a year — before the recent jump in gas prices.

He has invested about \$1,500 of the savings to upgrade the Mt. Shasta. Old bike, new accessories: He's got two panniers — one doubles as a backpack, the other holds a full-size grocery bag — plus a utility bag on the rack. The panniers carry his work shoes and a change of clothes. He rides in faded spandex and showers at the office.

He packs a lunch, a breakdown kit, lights, a CO₂ tire inflator, latex gloves in case he has to handle his

chain. On the handlebars is a bell, an air horn for really obnoxious or dangerous motorists, and a GPS device that he mainly uses as a speedometer.

He kept the Mt. Shasta's friction-shifters because he considers the old system more durable and lower-maintenance than the new index gears.

He wears a helmet, and also goggles, to which he has attached a tiny rearview mirror: "Probably the best \$15 I ever spent."

"I love D.C.," he says. "A big part of being in love with the city is biking it."

His favorite part of the morning commute is cresting the hill on the Mount Vernon Trail bike path near Reagan National Airport. That's the moment the monuments suddenly come into view.

Now it's the end of the day. Heading home, he cruises the Mall on Madison Drive. As he pedals over the 14th Street bridge, planes swoop toward National while boats ply the Potomac River. "You get quite the vista," he says. "At night you can see the Nationals' stadium."

He turns onto the Mount Vernon Trail and follows the river toward Alexandria. Bikers are coming and going. They have left the cars behind, and it is quiet along the river.