

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 784: Words to The Wiseacres



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Running red lights, scofflaw delights. Enforcement pix, his butt's in a fix.

Quickly to bed, quickly to rise: That's how Viagra works for old guys.

Secretions have no secrets.

Self-help guides have been around a long time. "The Wisdom of Amenhotep" was a hot seller in Egyptian scrollstores around 1500 B.C., and the Old Testament's Book of Proverbs dates from sometime in the thousand years after that. (The Empress's favorite, 26:11: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." What, you thought dogs weren't as gross back then as they are now?) Ben Franklin presented wonderfully pithy versions of much of the same advice in his Poor Richard's Almanacs (e.g., "Make haste slowly"). And Loserphenom Kevin Dopart suggests we carry on the tradition. **This week: Give us some proverbs for 21st-century life**, as in Kevin's examples above. We're not looking for cynical takes on syrupy platitudes; we already did that contest at least once. And if some procrastinating pastors find something to rip off for their next day's sermons, we ask only that they give us credit.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets a set of frog and dolphin pens that are, we admit, far too nice for an Invitational prize: Push a button and they make frog and dolphin noises (respectively) AND flash red lights. We are sure that they will be especially welcome in Catholic school classrooms. Donated ages ago by Dave Prevar of Annapolis.

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. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air freshener (Fir Stink for their First Ink). 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. 6. Put "Week 784" 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 Oct. 25. 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 Beverly Sharp. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Mike Ostapiej of Tracy, Calif.

REPORT FROM WEEK 780

in which we asked for jokes about places, of the classic "You know you're in . . ." type. Needless to say, some entrants took an expansive view of what constitutes a "place." We didn't mind.

4 You know you've arrived in Los Angeles when everybody is better looking than you are, even the person playing "2nd Ugly Guy" in the movie they're shooting across the street. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

3 You know you're in Rome when everybody seems to be doing the same thing. (John Shea, Lansdowne, Pa.)

2 the winner of the "Democrat" and "Republican" dog bandannas: You know you're in New Jersey when you've been there for two days and haven't heard a joke about New Jersey. (Brian Cohen, Potomac)

ATLAS SHRUGGED: HONORABLE MENTIONS

You know you're in Gaithersburg when a sign in a restaurant window says "We Speak English." (Melissa Yorks, Gaithersburg)

You know you're on I-95 when going from Connecticut to New Hampshire covers 140 miles and takes 2½ hours. You know you're on I-495 when going from Connecticut to New Hampshire covers five miles. And takes 2½ hours. (Brendan Beary)

If you walk into a restaurant decorated with boomerangs and order a pint of Foster's and some prawns on the barbie, you're definitely in one of those fake Australian pubs in the States, mate. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

You know you're in Key West when everyone in the bar knows the words to "Coconut Telegraph" except for Jimmy Buffett, who happens to be singing it. (Ed Gordon, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.)

If there are 19,000 people here, and all but three of them are white, and the remaining three are always on TV, it must be the Republican National Convention. (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

You know you're in Zimbabwe when the toilet paper holders dispense local currency. (John Flynn, Olney)

You know you're in Wasilla when the diner's most popular dish is Wholesome Small-Town Arms-Bearing God-Fearing Heterosexual Mooseburger. And that's on the kids' menu. (Anne Paris, Arlington)

You know you're in New York when a violinist playing the Bach Passacaglia in the subway is ignored — because of faulty intonation in the second movement. (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park)

You know you're in the William J. Clinton Presidential Library because all the books are in brown paper wrappers. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

You know you're in Dick Cheney's inner circle as the first pellets hit your face. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

When your neighbors think Sarah Palin was once the mayor of a metropolis, you know you're in Ponder, Tex. (population 500). (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

You know you're in China when announcing your affiliation with Democracy Now is grounds for arrest. Oh, wait, that was St. Paul. — Amy Goodman, New York (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)

You know you're in Casablanca when a woman says, "Play it again, Sam," and everyone in the bar tells her she's saying it wrong. (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

You know for sure where you are if you drive by a series of signs: Suu Kyi / Can kiss our butts / Democracy? / You think we're nuts? / Myanmar Shave. (Russ Taylor)

You know you're in Paris when the women wear stiletto heels not to look sexy but to minimize their chances of stepping in dog poop. (Marc Naimark, Paris)

You know you're in Berkeley, Calif., when the city council considers banning the Salvation Army for excessive militarism. (Chris Doyle)

You know you are in the free autonomous People's Democratic Republic of South Ossetia when we tell you so! And you will like it there, da? — V. Putin, Gori (Brendan Beary)

When everyone around you has a Long Island accent, you're at the University of Maryland. (Andy Wardlaw, Burbank, Calif.)

You know you're at Area 51 when you max out your frequent-abduction miles. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

You know you're in Alaska when you think abstinence means "abstain from wearing a condom." (Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

You know you're in Missouri when you see a sign that reads, "Welcome to Missouri." (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

You know you have arrived in Bangalore when your fingernails grow by half an inch during the cab ride home. (Ankit Srivastava, La Jolla, Calif., a First Offender)

You can tell you're in the D.C. area if the kids complain that there isn't enough snow to make a snowball and they're bored, what with school being canceled all week and all. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

You know you're in France when your leg of lamb arrives unshaven. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

You know you're in California when the horns on antique cars go "arugula." (Phil Frankenkeld, Washington)

You know you're in northern Montgomery County when the McMansions are no longer touching each other. (Scott Slaughter, Mount Airy, Md.)

You know you're in France when they don't have French fries, the French toast comes out just like good ol' American toast, and I can't get anybody to give me a French kiss! What's wrong with these people? (Jon Graft, Centreville)

If you found an extraordinarily powerful political husband-and-wife team who exercised complete control over their party, and the husband is a former president and the wife a failed presidential contender, all despite being dogged by a background of scandals and legal issues, well, you just might have been in the Philippines. (Russ Taylor)

You know you're in Las Vegas when your prime rib dinner cost just 99 cents, yet somehow your weekend cost you \$11,000, your car and your wristwatch. (Tom Witte)

Next Week: Our Greatest Hit, or The New-Word Order



It writes! It ribbits! It lights up! Half of this week's second-place prize.

Gucci Aside, Milan Pops With Panache

FASHION, From C1

of dollars for it, especially when the U.S. economy is in the tank? This is not a small issue for a company that generates close to a quarter of its revenue in North America.

Often the garments on the Gucci runway failed to exude the exceptionalism that should distinguish a luxury label from a mainstream brand such as Zara, Club Monaco or J. Crew. But to be fair, perhaps it is not that Gucci has failed to rise to the rigors of a luxury label. It may be that mass-market merchandise has gotten especially good. J. Crew is manufacturing its cashmere sweaters in Italian mills, and the Gap has Patrick Robinson — formerly of Giorgio Armani, Anne Klein and Paco Rabanne — designing its sportswear. To paraphrase designer Michael Kors: If you're going to put a \$1,000 price tag on a pair of trousers, there'd better be voodoo in those pants.

There was no voodoo on the Gucci runway. But the problem with the label goes deeper than a few ill-conceived frocks. And it is particularly disheartening because of the company's history.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Gucci was a shell of a company. The knock-offs of its handbags sold by street-corner vendors were virtually indistinguishable from the bags sold in its shops. All of them lacked finesse and sophistication and were overwhelmed by tasteless logos. The company had fallen into such dire straits that it could barely pay its bills.

Gucci made a remarkable turnaround under the leadership of designer Ford and chief executive Domenico de Sole, becoming a billion-dollar, publicly traded brand defined by slithering sex appeal. It built up a deep store of goodwill within the industry because of its ability to nudge fashion in new directions and bring sizzle to the enterprise, which also brought customers and investors.

The company's formula for success was based on keeping an eye toward long-term success. De Sole closed well-performing but embarrassingly dowdy stores. Ford produced highly edited and focused runway presentations. And both men understood how to balance the smoke and mirrors of fashion marketing with the nitty-gritty of moving the merchandise.

Ford and de Sole left the company in 2004, forced out in a tug of war for control with the company's owner, PPR. Since then, Gucci has dismantled its reputation for womanly sizzle — a sensibility with many admirers but admittedly limited commercial appeal. Even under de Sole and Ford, shoes



The 30th anniversary of Versace was cause for reimagining the designer's signature Medusa image, above, and incorporating zippers for peekaboo decoration, right.



Dsquared2's look for spring draws from a 1970s silhouette, and models were sporting Breck girl waves.



PHOTOS BY MARIA VALENTINO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

and handbags were responsible for the vast majority of revenue. Giannini, whose background is in accessories at Gucci and, before that, Fendi, has continued to place the sales emphasis on leather goods. She has made the ready-to-wear, which defines the overall image of the company, vaguely girly, rocker, mod, tomboy, whatever. It changes with the wind.

Worse, a serious case of the uglies has struck Gucci boutiques, which are dominated by merchandise covered in logos and Gucci horse bits.

Financially, Gucci continues to do well. In 2007, revenue was 2.18 billion euros (about \$3 billion), up 11 percent from 2006. That

may be the result of an increase in the number of stores from 219 to 233. Opening stores can increase sales, but de Sole advised caution in that regard just days before stepping down as the company's CEO. In 2004, he told The Washington Post:

"You need huge discipline with stores and communications. Image is very important. When you're successful, everyone wanted to carry Gucci. I only sold to Neiman's, Saks. . . . You can get drunk with sales."

Gucci will doubtless continue to turn up in red-carpet photos as celebrities are plied with free handbags and one-of-a-kind gowns. The company may continue to do just fine financially by selling double-G logo wallets to



Fendi's collection was heavy on lacelike fabric with translucent materials and other fabrics covered in crushed silk flowers.

tourists, expensive handbags to soccer moms and classic loafers to those who appreciate their comfort. The Gucci bottom line is not in danger.

But the Gucci legacy that had been reclaimed, the la dolce vita part that had placed the company at the forefront of the fashion pack has been lost again.

Dsquared2, Dolce & Gabbana

Echoes of the old Gucci sensibility drifted down the runway at Dsquared2 on Thursday in a show inspired by "Charlie's Angels." The designers, Dan and Dean Caten, focused on the silhouettes and styles of the 1970s, from three-piece suits and flared jeans to A-line skirts with kick pleats. Frankly, it was the best the '70s have ever looked.

The models' hair, set in soft Breck girl waves, bounced along as the models walked the runway in jean blazers, denim skirts, a crisp white halter dress with gumball buttons, a gray pantsuit with a silver vest and an especially glamorous white jersey gown cinched with a gold patent-leather harness that caged the torso. It was a collection that made fashion fun, but one could also imagine wearing virtually any of the blazers and trousers to an office and feeling polished but not dull.

There was nothing, nothing, nothing dull about the Dolce & Gabbana show Thursday. Not from the front-row celebrity lineup that included Matthew McConaughey, who stars in an eye-catching fragrance advertisement for the brand, to the cowbell-shaped shoulders on the jackets coming down the runway.

The advertisement is mostly about McConaughey and his naked chest, which one assumes has been doused with eau de Dolce. The collection was a marriage of pajamas and baroque style. (No, I'm not making this up. The designers said this is so, and we've

got pictures of pajama tops and brocade bell-shaped skirts as proof.)

The slinky blouses looked dramatic juxtaposed with the ornate skirts that were often pinched to the side like a ball of taffy that someone had given a yank. There were luscious jackets with circular sleeves and shoulders that rose up high enough to brush the earlobes.

The colors were magnificent, and the richness enticing. The odd shapes were startling but not off-putting. If you came upon these jackets in a boutique, you'd try them on. You'd twirl in the mirror. And you'd probably put them back on the hangers. But still . . . something would have struck a chord. Perhaps it's the idea of combining extremes: a skirt that's a bacchanal of color, texture and shape, with a languid top meant for bed. And while most folks will never wear those particular clothes, they can be inspired by them.

Fendi, Versace

At the Fendi show later that day, designer Karl Lagerfeld focused on full skirts and waists cinched tight with belts that appeared to be 10 inches wide. The skirts — and, in some cases, dresses — were often made of lacelike fabric with geometric cutouts, translucent materials and other fabrics covered in crushed silk flowers.

It was a pretty, genteel collection from a house that specializes in handbags and furs and whose ready-to-wear often looks like a stepchild. This time, the collection had a joyful sensibility.

The season closed with the Versace presentation Thursday night. The collection recalled one of the most memorable dresses created by the late Gianni Versace: the gown worn by actress Elizabeth Hurley that was seemingly held together by giant safety pins. The beauty of the scandalous dress was that it revealed nothing while making the revelation of everything a constant threat.

The collection presented by his sister, Donatella Versace, who now heads the label, used zippers as both functional closures and decorative flourishes. They provided a similar peekaboo effect. On her daytime dresses, which the rest of the world would wear for cocktails, the zippers were open and sculpted into the shape of hearts.

In celebration of the house's 30th anniversary, the signature Medusa head was incorporated into illustrations by Julie Verhoeven. In the resulting prints, the heads have been re-imagined in pastel shades and cast against a fanciful backdrop that is more Alice in Wonderland than Gorgon.

The print is used on short dresses with sculpted skirts that stand away from the body as well as on gowns encrusted with crystals at the bodice. It is a collection that speaks to the Versace style, not as it was but as it has evolved in the hands of Donatella Versace. It is proof that just because a house has moved on from its past, it doesn't have to lose its panache.

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM Find full coverage of the spring collections at [washingtonpost.com/fashion](http://www.washingtonpost.com/fashion).