

# The Style Invitational »

## REPORT FROM WEEK 816

in which we asked you to send original sentences or phrases that, when submitted to the Google search engine, would generate at least 1 million hits: Well, we learned a few things pretty quickly — but not quickly enough — about Googling. We'd known from the start that, even if the phrase is submitted without quotation marks, the same set of words in a different order would generate varying numbers of hits: "John, Paul, George and Ringo" (but not in quotes) got 367,000, while, oddly, "George, John, Paul and Ringo" brought forth 522,000 (within quotes the numbers were 58,000 and 363). So far, so good. Part of the game. What we didn't know was that the exact set of words, submitted at different times, would get wildly varying numbers of hits. The example for this contest, "Susan Boyle, the latest Pussycat Doll," got 4,910,000 hits when we checked it on May 5; on May 11, Loser Jeff Contompassis reported on The Style Conversational that it had coughed up a mere 206,000. On June 4 it's up to 2,230,000. So we're using the honor system for some of the phrases below. The Google inconsistency was only one reason that numerous Losers reported hating this contest. They also found it hard to produce much funny stuff. Hence the short list of results and the nice big chunk of Dave Barry.



- 2 the winner of the fairly wholesome joke book with the mildly off-color title: Trump has the same hair on his behind. (J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.)
- 3 It's our biggest sale ever since last week's sale. (Dave Zarrow, Reston)
- 4 Put me on the Call Me at Dinner list. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

## MILLION-TO-1 SHOTS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Have you had your autopsy yet?** (Beverly Sharp, Washington)
- Does a girlfriend in Second Life still count?** (Jacob Aldridge, Gaythorne, Australia)
- This is NOT why I invented the Internet. — Al Gore** (Craig Dykstra, Centerville)
- I know meh when I see it.** (Mike Turniansky, Pikesville, Md.)
- My stimulus package came with, you know, no stimulus thing.** (John O'Byrne, Dublin)
- Some men have one extra, others one too few.** (Rick Haynes, Potomac)
- The Benefits of Tooth Decay** (Rick Haynes)
- You can lower your own IQ.** (Dudley Thompson, Cary, N.C.)
- Obama Administration Bails Out Obama Administration** (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)
- And we loved with a love that was more than a love, I and my Robert E. Lee.** (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)
- We really need more sarcasm in our lives.** (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
- It's Talk Like a Somali Pirate Day!** (Kevin Dopart)
- Post Points helped me find true love: 1,070,000 hits** (Jon Grantham, University Park)
- The day after today is the next day of the rest of your life.** (Chris Doyle)
- Almost Last: The only Google I like is Barney.** (Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)
- Also Almost Last: I need that Inker . . . for a friend.** (Dave Zarrow)
- And Last-Last: This may be the worst contest ever if you need to use this.** (Russell Beland, Fairfax)
- Next Week: Floppies, or Split Definitives**

**ONLINE DISCUSSION** Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational discussion at [washingtonpost.com/styleconversational](http://washingtonpost.com/styleconversational).

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## Week 820: Be Mister Language Person

**Dear Mister Language Person:** At restaurants, I often order the soup du jour. My question is, what is "jour"?

**A.** It is a French word meaning "bat spleens."

**Q.** Please explain the correct usage of the phrase "real good success."

**A.** It is used in sports broadcasting to connote that somebody has had an unusual amount of good success, and it should always be followed by the phrase "Boy, I'll say." For example:

**Announcer:** This Gomez has had real good success hitting the ball.

**Color Person:** Boy, I'll say.

**Q.** What is the function of parentheses?

**A.** Parentheses are used to include information that helps the reader understand the sentence better:

**Confusing:** Former president Nixon says he feels "no bitterness" toward his former political enemies.

**Clearer:** "Former president Nixon says he feels 'no bitterness' toward his former political enemies. (What a liar!)"

**Q.** Like many people, I am troubled by the part of "Humpty Dumpty" that goes: "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." Why does it mention horses? Does anybody seriously believe that if a bunch of horses saw a giant egg broken into pieces, their response would be: "Hey! Let's try to reassemble this!"?

**A.** You have given this a lot of thought.

**T**his week we pay homage to (i.e., fill space by stealing at length from) some guy named Dave Barry, who used to write funny things for newspapers every week, and still might subscribe to one (he remains a dog owner, after all). Dave also did a valuable service for many years by edifying the semiliterate public with his "Ask Mister Language Person" columns, whose Q's and A's are excerpted above. **This week: Supply a Mister Language Person-type question and answer. Mister Dave Barry himself will choose the winners from among the finalists.** Note that sometimes there's a straight question with the joke entirely in the answer; sometimes the joke's almost entirely in the question; and sometimes both ends are funny, like a baboon's. We'll consider all types.

Winner gets (besides the Approval of Dave) the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a high-fashion off-the-shoulder jersey-style dress, right, handmade with great care and detail from two Loser T-shirts by 40-time Loser Barbara Turner of Takoma Park, who models it here. Barbara has also added some Chinese lettering that labels the wearer as "game-losing people."

**Dress to Lose: Barbara Turner with the prize she created.**



**Other runners-up** win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or Loser Mug. 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 Inker). 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, June 15. Put "Week 820" 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 July 4. 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 in the Style Conversational discussion group by Jeff Contompassis (who also penned this week's Honorable Mentions name) and by the anonymous "katmandu1"; the revised title for next week's contest is by Russell Beland.

BY LOSER PETER METRINKO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Gary Walters, right, talks about the time staff greeted George H.W. Bush — wearing surgical masks. Below, Walters and Bush 41 chat with Little Leaguers in 2001.**



LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL



BY MICHAEL TEMCHINE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# 37 Years in Background, but Always in on the Action at White House

USHER, From Page C1

an administration. Walters was asked to speak by his father-in-law, Henry A. Earp, 86, an Ashby Ponds resident. Earp introduced his son-in-law, 62, a University of Maryland graduate with a degree in business and a minor in criminology. After a stint overseas as an Army lieutenant, Walters joined the uniformed division of the Secret Service in 1970, then called the Executive Protective Service. He served as an assistant usher from 1976 to 1986 and was appointed chief usher in 1986 by Ronald

Reagan, a post he held until his 2007 retirement.

Walters's presidential memories go back to the waning hours of the Nixon administration, when demonstrators' voices could be heard beyond the White House gates. Nixon had instructed that, when he walked back to the residence from his office on his final full day in power, "he didn't want to see anyone on that last trip," Walters recalled. The security officer on duty was told to keep himself hidden behind a large granite pillar, "sort of like a squirrel does behind a tree," and the press corps was locked in the briefing

room until Nixon had passed by.

He recalled a phone call from Gerald Ford early one Sunday morning, reporting he had no hot water in his shower. But instead of demanding an immediate fix, Ford said it had been that way for a couple of days, and there was no need to rush. "His response stunned me," said Walters. "He said, 'I've been using Betty's shower.'" He refers to Gerald and Betty Ford as "two of the most approachable people you could ever meet."

Jimmy Carter was much more exacting about house systems.

When Carter ordered White

House thermostats set to 65 degrees, the one very large and drafty window in the tiny usher's office made the room frigid. Walters had the thermostat cover removed and the thermometer painted red at a perpetual 65. "We didn't want to defy the president," Walters said, "but we didn't want to freeze."

As for Ronald Reagan, "what you saw is what he was," recalled Walters. He said Nancy Reagan and her decorator, Ted Graber, made their inaugural move-in day the most organized of all. "Some thought she was a hard person to work with, but that was not the case. She always

knew what she wanted. She was easy to work with."

When the springer spaniel Millie was about to birth her puppies, Walters moved a mattress into the White House beauty parlor so Barbara Bush could spend the night waiting. When George H.W. Bush got sick from a stomach virus on a state visit to Japan, Walters organized a gag upon the president's return to take the edge off his embarrassment. When members of the residence staff assembled to greet the returning couple, they all were wearing surgical masks.

Walters said he marvels at Bill Clinton's memory for names and faces. He described a life-saving mission in which he had to save the Clinton's cat, Socks, from near death when his harness got caught in a tree.

At the end of the presentation, there was hearty applause from the 130 Ashby Ponds residents in attendance, a few of whom knitted through the entire talk. There were a few questions.

Have you written a book? "My wife doesn't want me to," said Walters, who lives with his wife, Barbara, in Great Falls, "but historians do. We are still negotiating."

Which president was the most difficult?

"They were all difficult because they were all different," said Walters, ever the soul of discretion. "As for their personal lives, it will stay personal; it's up to them to divulge that."

## CAROLYN HAX

Adapted from a recent on-line discussion.

Dear Carolyn:

I work from home, and have been trying to get my fledgling art business off the ground for the past three years. Unfortunately, my family does not view what I do as work. To them, I am dutiful daughter /stay-at-home mom /homemaker. My phone rings several times a day with calls from aging parents who live far away and won't move closer to me, or college kid who is suffering latest crisis. Often they just want to blow off steam and I am the only ear available.

I knew I would be the caregiver to my parents eventually, and I know my kid will continue to become more independent. I'm torn! Part of me feels guilty for not wanting to listen when I know there will come a day when there will be no more calls, and part of me is so frustrated at the endless interruptions.

My work is artistic in nature and I need quiet time to concentrate. I know if I were at a normal 9-to-5 job they wouldn't dare disturb me unless EMS was involved, but they view what I do as an interruptible hobby. What can I say (respectfully) to get them to respect my time?

Orlando

Nothing. It's not about them, or your phone.

Figure out a schedule for your workday that best lends itself to productivity, including blocks of work and breaks in between.

Then, apply your schedule to the phone. If it's work time, don't answer the phone (mute the ringer if necessary). If you're on a break, answer. You can use your breaks to check messages to see if anyone really needs you. And if you're concerned about emergencies, you can check your messages during work hours anytime you get to a natural break in the workflow.

It's not as if you've picked up every ringing phone in your life; you do, presumably, have a mouth full of food occasionally, and go to medical appointments, or just the bathroom. So you can do this call-rescheduling without explanation, certainly without apology, and without putting a dent in your role as caregiver and ear, which you do seem to value.

In fact, serving as caregiver on your terms, not everyone else's, might be enough to make you the happy listener you wish you could be.

Playing two roles well is a matter of organizing your responsibilities in a way that doesn't divide your attention. That, in turn, is a matter of recognizing you can be supportive without being at everyone's beck and call. That, in turn, means you're the one who needs to start respecting your time.

Dear Carolyn:

Is it wrong of me to be [peevish] that the very first question my MIL asked upon hearing I was pregnant was, "Was it planned?"?

N.J.

No, but please don't hold it against her forever. Everyone benefits if you go into this with the frame of mind that mulligans are good. Give them freely. Ideally you'll receive as freely as you give, but there's no guarantee you will. So, just set the example and reap the internal benefits, at least.

And, congratulations!

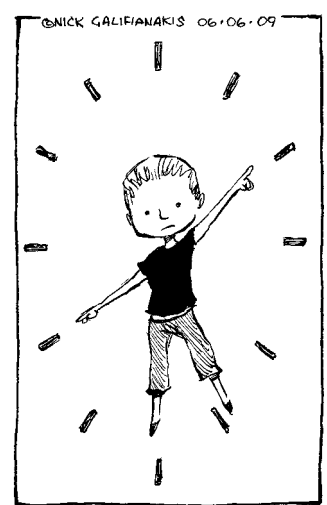
Re: "Was it planned?": "Geez, Mom, I don't even know whose it is!"

Anonymous

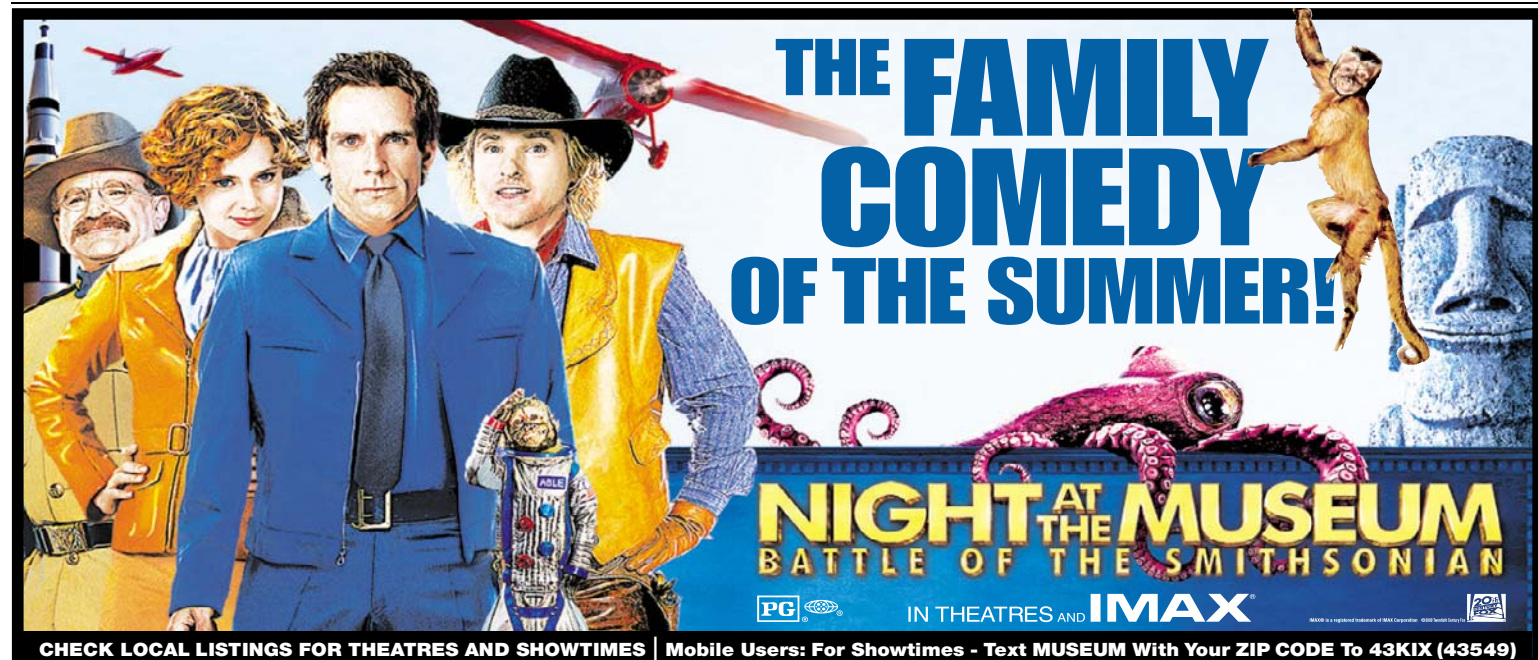
Nice when you guys do the work for me.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on [www.washingtonpost.com/discussions](http://www.washingtonpost.com/discussions).

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BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



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