

CAROLYN HAX

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:

I think I'm giving up dating again. Dating is horrible (maybe it's worse in D.C., but I don't know). I keep hoping to meet people who aren't trying to meet supermodels or have their fantasy women in their heads. I feel like dating is a surefire way to lower self-esteem, and I just don't think the potential of finding a companion is worth shuffling through all the jerks out there. I'm 30 now; do the men get more mature at a certain age, or should I just get a few pets and travel the world?

Washington

Get a few pets or travel the world. The two combined make for a rough life for you and your pets (and a posh life for your dog-walker).

But anyway. Anyone looking for a meaningful relationship is going to meet more people who aren't compelling than people who are. True of both sexes, any location. It's not a problem with the people or the place, it's a problem with the mission. You're looking for special — therefore, the vast majority of candidates will fall short. Axiomatic.

If you're tired of disappointing results, then change your mission — from finding potential life companions to, say, engaging fully in your day-to-day life, where friendly Metro banters is an end unto itself. Then you'll find the world a much more bountiful place.

That might not help much as a life plan, but it's a good moment to live in when you're fed up with the status quo. Once you're in a happier place of broader expectations, then you can start to think again about where you want your expectations to be in the longer term.

By the way — people get more mature. When the fishing seems bad, it's not fair to blame it all on the fish.

Hi Carolyn:

I'm moving in two weeks to a state where I don't really want to live, so my husband and I can pursue our academic careers. I've committed to live there for two academic years, but I'm heartbroken to leave what has come to be my home. I'm trying to look on the bright side — it's two years, and we'll be in a better position to get better jobs than — but I'm struggling. I know I need to work to build community, find a church, make friends, but I honestly feel like I'm getting too old for this and I want to put down roots. What would you advise?

Seattle

Sure, you can build community, find a church, etc. — or find community, build a church — or, you can just hold your nose and get through it.

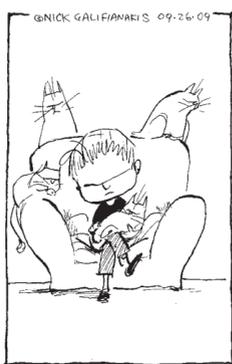
Or you can reason that it'll be easier to focus on your studies when there's nothing tempting you away from your desk.

Or you can schedule alternating trips to explore your new home, and to visit the old one. Having things to look forward to makes time rocket by, instead of just fly, as it probably will no matter what you do.

In other words, it's two years, a blip, and there's nothing wrong with giving yourself permission to do whatever it takes to get yourself to the other end. Just don't bash the place to its denizens. That's bad geographic sportsmanship.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or tellme@washpost.com.



©NICK GALIFIANAKIS 09-26-09

BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Style Invitational »

REPORT FROM WEEK 832

This year's backward crossword puzzle: Once again, we're printing the best entries from among the 2,000 we received, choosing two clues for some words while skipping a number of others. The crossword's constructor, Bob Klahn, helped choose the winners. You have to puzzle out some of these: For instance, the clue for "HOPE" needs you to read it as "ho P.E." You're on your own for the rest.

ACROSS

1. HUBRIS: The presumption that one is a cut above everyone else. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

7. BLAB: Where thiamine and riboflavin are made (Rob Cohen, Potomac)

14. UNMADE: Some general assembly required (Larry Yungk, Arlington)

Chased but still chaste (Roy Ashley, Washington)

15. ROSE: A thorny problem for baseball (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

16. PEA: The best line on a jock's report card (Chuck Koelbel, Houston)

19. ETC: And that singer for the band Chicago (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

20. BARON: Nobleman shooting nothing but blanks (Peter Boice, Rockville)

21. SPRIT: A ghost with one eye missing. (James Noble, Lexington Park)

22. ILSA: Reply to "How do you feel, private?" (Joel Lipman, Wilmington, Del., a First Offender)

26. EPCOT: Manifest Disney (Chris Doyle)

29. ECRU: A color the human male cannot distinguish (John Shea, Lansdowne, Pa.)

30. TOWRITEOURCLUES: Anagram for "erotic owl uterus" (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

33. SPASM: Junk mail sent by a jerk (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

34. STOAT: ABA's preferred alternative to "weasel" (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

35. YEN: The movie short that Streisand really wanted to make (John O'Byrne)

36. BIB: Octogenarian's dinner wear (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

40. SIS: 1/2 of the Pleiades, familiarly (Kevin Dopart)

45 Third place: RAMBO: Sure way for White House limo driver to get fired (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

Halftime smell in the St. Louis locker room. (Chris Doyle)

53. MEDEA: Precedes "you busted" (Stephen Dudzik, Olney; Ward Kay, Vienna)

54, with 52A. GEST AREA: Womb (Jeff Contompasis)

57. BIJOU: Had both a bar- and a bat mitzvah. (Tom Murphy, Bowie)

68. Winner of the Inker: REARUP: Proctologist's "Say ah" (Jim Lubell, Mechanicsville)

69. MET: 1962 inspiration for Nat. (Ira Allen)

70. GOOD: Bad advice for Joplin and Hendrix (Dean Evangelista, Rockville)

DOWN

1. HUH: What Napoleon said when he saw Elba (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

3. BMW: Bush Number Two (Ben Aronin, Washington)

4. RAWBARS: Dan'l Boone's vittles on the trail (G. Smith, New York)

5. IDEA: Store selling "furniture concepts" (Chuck Koelbel)

7. BRONCOS: Slightly irregular Veg-O-Matics and Ginsu Knives (George Vary, Bethesda)

New euphemism for "nice set of lungs" (Jeff Contompasis)

8. LOO: Snorkeler's emoticon (Chuck Koelbel)

10. BEES: Sting's college grades (Stephen Dudzik)

12. RETIRE: Drop out of Weight Watchers (Yuki Henninger, Vienna; George Vary)

18. HOPE: Exercises in rope-climbing, pole-dancing, etc. (Celeste Johnson, Hyattsville, a First Offender)

22. PELT: What PETA types may do to someone wearing one (Tom Murphy)



THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

If a hospital ran an English restaurant, the food would improve.

Week 836: Other People's Business

- Congress
- A hospital
- A Wall Street investment house
- McDonald's
- Match.com
- The Kohler bathroom fixture company
- A sperm bank
- A college English department
- Microsoft
- The Redskins

It's time to get away from our string of pure-wordplay contests with this idea courtesy of Do Anything for Inki Loser Peter Metrinko: **Describe what might happen if any of the above institutions (a) were run by an institution of your choice or (b) ran an institution of your choice.** Your choice may be an institution from the list, too.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a 1994 paper-doll book called "Bill & Al's Excellent Adventure," which, let's just say, is not quite as reverent toward No. 42 as the earlier Bush paper-doll book prize was toward No. 41 (the latter, for example, lacked a bustier and fishnet stockings). Donated by Beverley Sharp.

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 or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Oct. 5. Put "Week 836" 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. 24. 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 Dave Prevar; this week's Honorable Mentions name, which we have no place for but should be "Thin Hints," is by Mike Ostapiej, who sent it to us from Baghdad.

ONLINE DISCUSSION Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

A Woman's Individuality: Elegant or Provocative?

FASHION, From Page C1

plunges almost to the navel, for example. Or an especially slouchy pair of trousers. In those instances, his clothes look as though they are straining, yearning to be something more exciting and daring than what they are. They're striving toward youthful rebellion but are held back by a mature understanding of the trouble that youthful insolence can cause.

The clothes teeter on the edge of something audacious, but never seem to have the guts to go all the way. Change, as we all know, can be unnerving.

Prada, on the other hand, is fashion's skydiver. She relishes every opportunity to leap off a cliff. It is as though at the beginning of each season, she jots down a list of rules, a set of cultural mores, and then sets out to challenge them.

For spring, she takes a grand, shimmering fabric out of which many a designer would construct something well-mannered like a luncheon suit, and cuts a pair of walking shorts and a matching jacket. She can't be bothered to hem either. She can't be bothered even to trim the stray threads from the raw edges.

She uses a gently faded print of palm trees and boardwalks on the kind of short shorts that might be found on a marathoner. Or maybe they are modeled after pant taps and it's a case of the boodier merging with the street. In any case, there was no stripper pole in sight; so breathe easy for the moment.

Instead of crystal-adorned dresses, Prada gives her audience garments of strung-together chandelier teardrops. And, Chris Rock notwithstanding, she takes Lucite shoes off the street corner, covers them in a jingle-jangling cache of giant crystals and declares them posh.

Waffle-textured swing jackets topped bloomers. Beach-print coats were cut with three-quarter sleeves. It was all a bit like Peggy Guggenheim meets Palm Beach meets the boardroom meets that scene from "The Phantom of the Opera" when the chandelier crashes to the floor.

The motivating force in Prada's aesthetic is reinvention. Over the years, her collections have shifted from being encrusted with baubles to being positively barren. Sometimes they have exuded a teasing pleasure in feminine wiles and then they have been nearly asexual



PHOTOS BY MARIA VALENTINO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Miuccia Prada's spring 2010 line had inventive silhouettes, such as floaty backs, short shorts and beach-print coats cut with three-quarter sleeves.

and then have gone back to being wholly exhibitionist. Prada has suggested that a woman can be a Deauville beach bum with glistening tanned skin or a sturdy fisher-girl in heavy woolen suits and waders.

Through all the changes, Prada



Giorgio Armani keeps a bubble miniskirt utterly demure by adding discreet shorts underneath in his spring collection.

tests the integrity of classic shapes, standards applied to femininity and presumptions about sexuality. If Armani tries to help a woman find her visual individuality while still adhering to decorum, Prada encourages her to redefine decorum itself.

Both are motivated by the tension between good taste and the desire for individuality. If Armani tries to help a woman find her visual individuality while still adhering to decorum, Prada encourages her to redefine decorum.

The style of an Armani presentation doesn't change. The models walk down a center aisle, often holding a handbag from the collection just so. It's a little QVC in that regard. One could almost imagine a scroll across the back of the runway encouraging the audience to "Buy now! Only 5 remain!" The models walk, pause, turn and repeat until they reach the end of the runway and step off into the shadows.

Their walk is choreographed, but it isn't demeaning. Armani always gives his models their dignity. They are young women doing a job of showing off clothes. They are not sashaying along like sexpots. They aren't somnambulating with a glassy-eyed stare. Their eyes don't look dead. As one watches them move along, you think, yes, there are synapses firing in that pretty little head.

For Armani, the woman is inextricable from the clothes. And ultimately that is why his customers stay with him. The clothes don't break any rules. No matter how much Armani tries — and sometimes all one sees on the runway is all of that effort — he is not the renegade. Not anymore. But that's okay. His clothes give his customers cover so that they can be the

rule-breakers if they like. Cloaked in the familiar and the tasteful, they can sneak into center of power and be provocative.

At Prada, the models look young and unsure. For spring, they wore their hair in two self-consciously messy ponytails. Their lips were lacquered red; their skin was smooth, poreless and, at times, virtually bloodless. They looked a bit like unblinking dolls.

Prada desperately, adamantly does not want her audience to notice the women in these clothes. It is the garments that make the statement. Every protest, every quibble with the status quo, every nagging question is discernible in the seams, the fabric and the accessories.

Could a woman, one who is essentially cloaked in cultural foment, ever fling her way into the center of power, into the mainstream? Probably not. At least not now. But she doesn't need to. Because even if her voice can't be heard from the fringes, everyone can see her clothes.

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM For more on this season's fashion weeks, visit washingtonpost.com/fashion.