



CAROLYN HAX

Making the right call

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:

I have a happy marriage with one seemingly silly problem that keeps getting bigger: I've asked my wife countless times not to call me at work unless the matter is urgent. She doesn't do it as often as she used to, but she still calls about non-urgent matters every other week or so. At this point, the principle is more annoying than the distracting chitchat.

Nashville

I agree that it's about the principle — not to mention annoying, easily avoidable (yoo-hoo, e-mail?), and therefore possibly even a power grab on her part. You say this is "one" problem, and I'll take your word for it — but if she shows other signs of keeping you on a short leash, then there's probably more to her calling than chitchat.

That said, one call every other week strikes me as minuscule in the scope of a marriage, the kind of thing presumably you'd be willing to brush off. So the question becomes, why the "presumably" can't be presumed. Is your work (or brain wiring) such that interruptions break your concentration for long after the call ends? Is your supervisor on your case? Or...? If it is something concrete, have you made that plain to your wife?

Meanwhile, has she explained her reasoning? Have you encouraged the truth — i.e., set a precedent of not batting her down for admitting difficult things like "I'm lonely" or "I'm insecure"?

If neither of you is upfront about your reasoning, or if neither of you has a real reason beyond digging in to make a point, then your small problem starts to resemble the tip of a big one.

Carolyn:

My job requires complex thought, and getting a personal call (from anyone) can derail my thought train for a long time. My work phone doesn't have caller ID.

It isn't just about my wife; I don't like anyone calling me socially at work. Everyone else in my life respects that request.

My wife is very chatty in general, so it isn't just that she's keeping tabs on me. She can be a tad possessive of my time, but we're working on this with relative success.

I will ask her if there is something else behind the calls.

Nashville Again

"Possessive of my time" certainly fits the description of "something else." I think she's wrong to call even if she believes — even if you are — being uptight. She should say so vs. playing dumb.

To address that, though, you can only round up the usual suspects: accept it as the aforesaid "small price"; work around it (do you have the juice to get the phones upgraded?); or bring the possessiveness thing to a counselor's couch. That seems extreme — unless, of course, your frustration already is.

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 FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 837

In which we asked you to combine two comic strips and tell about the result:



... and "Dagwood Sandwich," featuring Brandy from "Liberty Meadows"

(Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

The actual "Blondie" from Feb. 25:



COMBINED FROM "BLONDIE," BY DENNIS YOUNG AND DENIS LEBRUN, KING FEATURES SYNDICATE; AND "LIBERTY MEADOWS," BY FRANK CHO, CREATORS SYNDICATE

2 the winner of the switch-hitting Mickey Mantle flip book: The genius monkey from "Watch Your Head" visits "Doonesbury" and gets the strip canceled by every paper in the country when he's mistaken for the long-awaited Obama symbol.

(Kevin Dopart, Washington)

3 "Beetle Nuts": Marcie and Peppermint Patty are at Camp Swampy, dressed in fatigues. Marcie: "I won't tell, sir." (May Jampathom, Oakhurst, N.J.)

4 (Linda Miku, Tucson)

PEARLS ON THE TRAIL



COMBINED FROM "MARK TRAIL," BY JACK ELROD, KING FEATURES SYNDICATE; AND "PEARLS BEFORE SWINE," BY STEPHAN PASTIS, UNITED FEATURE SYNDICATE; ALL THE TEXT IS BY LINDA MIKU

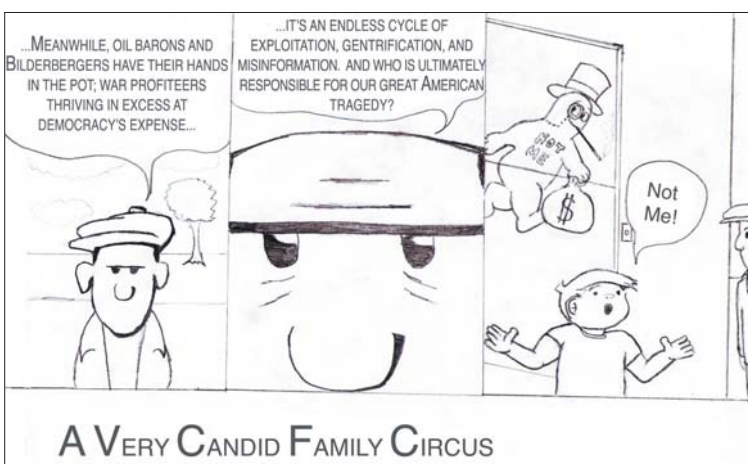
SLIGHTLY OUT OF TOON: HONORABLE MENTIONS

A rear view of Cathy, standing nude in court before Judge Parker. She says: "But everything I tried on made me look fat!" (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

"Dennis the Phantom Menace": A bratty little masked boy exasperates his parents and neighbors while thwarting global drug rings in his neighborhood. (David Friedman, Silver Spring, a First Offender)

Andy Capp, Hagar, and the Jester from "The Wizard of Id" are sharing a drink. Hagar says, "Yeah, they've just about drained all the fun out of alcoholism." (Larry Yungk, Arlington)

If "Dilbert" were imported to "Close to Home": Astonishingly, the character Dilbert is now drawn even worse. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)



(D'Juan Nash, Waldorf) APOLOGIES TO DARRIN BELL, CREATOR OF "CANDORVILLE," DISTRIBUTED BY WASHINGTON POST WRITERS GROUP; AND JEFF AND BILL KEANE OF "THE FAMILY CIRCUS," KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

Combine "Judge Parker" and "Rex Morgan, M.D.," to get the slowest malpractice case in history. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

"Earl's Before Swine": The Crocs solve Grandpa Pickles's cat problem. (Kevin Dopart)

'Other Suns (A Trilogy)': Just short of a three-part harmony

DANCE REVIEW FROM C1

Twenty years ago a partnership like this would have been unthinkable. A decade ago it would have been unachievable. Yet modern dance in China has developed with astonishing speed. The Guangdong Modern Dance Company, China's first, took off in 1992 with support from the provincial cultural bureau. Five years later it made a respectable if uneven Kennedy Center debut, excelling in technique, though the choreography was less than memorable. The mainland now boasts a few full-time troupes, enjoying state funds to varying degrees. In Guangdong, for example, the dancers live and work in a state-supported compound with other artists. Government money is \$200 million.

But it can't buy ego. That's what was missing from the Chinese dancers in "Other Suns."

The first section, which sucked you into a gloriously rich, colorful, spinning world, was entirely the Jenkins dancers; Jenkins created it in California. Liu Qi, deputy director of the Guangdong troupe, created Part 2. The finale was shaped by both troupes and both directors during a residency in China, and the whole was massaged further still when both

troupes got together before the work's September premiere in San Francisco.

It's crazy when you think about it — the quiet, detail-oriented Chinese paired with the earthy, free-spirited Jenkins dancers. Jenkins, the tall, wild-haired matriarch of the West Coast contemporary dance scene, was one of Twyla Tharp's earliest dancers in the experimental 1960s. She has a lot of Tharp in her still — the scattered focus onstage, the affinity for minimalist music (most of "Other Suns" accompaniment was by her frequent musical partner Paul Drescher), and the way she pumps her dancers for movement ideas.

That's a pretty communal thing, come to think of it, but it didn't seem to be part of the Chinese process. When one woman bent to one side in the Guangdong section, then arched the other way with a great sweep of her leg, it was like a gust of wind rushing in. But I did not pick up a sense of emotional involvement. The dancers were lovely to look at, all long, elegant lines and terrific flexibility, evidence of ballet training (the predominant form of Western dance in China, far predating modern). But I wanted to see them move. To heck with the careful leg placement, the precise control of weight, the unison



NIKKI KAHN/THE WASHINGTON POST

MODERN SENSIBILITY: The Chinese dancers' technique was flawless, but they lacked emotion.

born of rigorous practice. I was out for blood, metaphorically speaking, and not a drop was spilled.

Individual expression is the heart of modern dance. Technique has its place, of course, but most dancers make their mark by setting free their personalities. The artistic interest is in what you can dredge up out of your insides and thrust into a leg extension; what feelings squeeze out from a contraction of the torso, what condition of the spirit you fold into a fall.

But expressiveness isn't easy in

a society where individual freedoms are still dodgy. Just ask Shen Wei, one of the most exciting young choreographic talents in this country and a recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant. A founding member of the Guangdong Modern Dance Company, he was spied on for making friends with Taiwanese dancers and kept home while Guangdong toured abroad. Perhaps China picked up such cat-and-mouse pointers from the Soviets; it was this kind of jerking around that drove Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov to flee to the West. Like

them, Shen eventually left his homeland, and now runs his acclaimed Shen Wei Dance Arts in New York.

Modern dance as we have known it here for more than a century may never be a natural fit in China. There is a lot of cultural and political history to overcome. But as it gradually becomes all right to think independently and creatively, to indulge in a little confrontation, one hopes that deeper expressiveness will gain a foothold in Chinese modern dance.

kaufmans@washpost.com

WASHINGTONPOST.COM

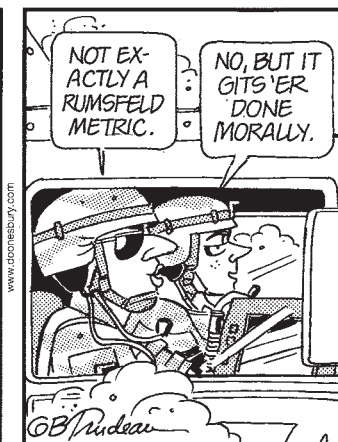
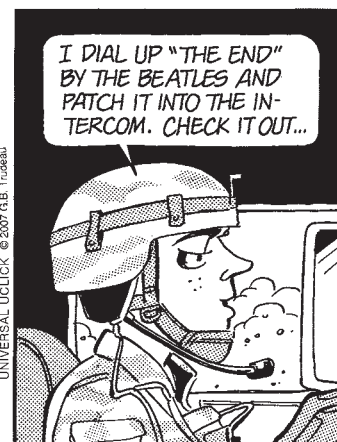
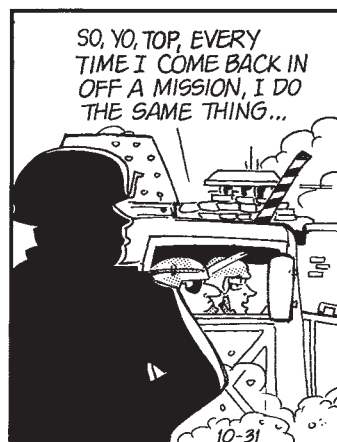


'TUNA' IN THE DESERT

With typical vaudevillian flair, the denizens of small-town Texas make their way to Sin City. Read Nelson Pressley's review of "Tuna Does Vegas," at the Warner Theatre, at washingtonpost.com/style.

DOONESBURY FLASHBACKS

BY GARRY TRUDEAU



UNIVERSAL UCLICK © 2009 G.B. TRUDEAU