

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 840

in which we sought contemporary phrases for life's situations: As usual in autumn, Washingtonians often turned their thoughts to their beloved football team. (These entries were written before last Sunday's win, but we're afraid they're still pretty valid.)

THE WINNER OF THE INKER

Returning the Favre: Exacting revenge on your ex-employer. (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

CRAWLING UNDER THE BAR: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Flossing the piano keys: Obsessing about cleanliness. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Tweeting for Godot: Putting out incessant Twitter posts to zero followers. (Chad Pridgen, Marshall, Va.)

Forgetting your Yiddish: Paying retail. (Rick Haynes)

Maverrecking: Making a name for yourself while dragging everyone else's through the mud. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Reinventing the spork: Redoubling your efforts on a lost cause. (Craig Dykstra)

Taking the Skins and the points: Throwing your money down the toilet. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Getting waterloosed: Sitting down on the toilet in the dark and finding the seat is up. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Beating the wrap: Managing to open a CD. (Ken Gallant, Conway, Ark.)

Zorning it: Accepting any and all degradations from an incompetent and/or egomaniacal boss, as long as the paychecks keep coming. (Chad Pridgen)

Shouting AFLAC: Having your ideas completely ignored in a business meeting. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

2 the winner of the giant flamingo-shaped pen: Dining with the King: Grabbing a Whopper Jr. from the dollar menu. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

3 Playin' the Redskins: Sure to score. "When Janet typed her number into his cellphone, Tony knew he was playin' the Redskins." (Craig Dykstra, Centreville; Ira Allen, Bethesda)

4 Kicking your heels up: Visiting the gynecologist. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

Putting in your Delhi order: Calling tech support. (Chris Doyle)

Forecasting a wintry mix: Providing advice that's so vague you won't be blamed for the outcome. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Giving him the Nobel: Heaping praise on someone you hope will be worthy of it one day. (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.; Mark Richardson, Washington, a First Offender)

Giving your seat to Buddy Holly: Barely escaping disaster. (Chuck Smith)

Recapping: For many guys, "doing" their hair in the morning. (Kevin Dopart)

Aardvarking: Working to get your name moved to the top of a list. (Barry Koch)

Third-and-inches at FedEx: A hopeless situation. (Russ Taylor)

Riding out the Strom: Waiting for someone to, um, retire. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

Burning the ice cream: To attempt something not worth doing — and screw it up. (Jean Traub, Alexandria, a First Offender)

Makin' coffee in

Springfield: Going naked. (Craig Dykstra)

Falcon around: Pulling a hoax. (Craig Dykstra)

Bachmanning: Opened one's mouth and had something gross and embarrassing spew out: "I Bachmanned all over my new shirt." (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

Fondling the porcupine: An action benefiting neither the giver nor the receiver. (Jim Noble, Lexington Park)

Outing Dumbledore: Providing irrelevant background information. (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

Dry-cleaning the blue dress: Trying to get over a relationship. (Russell Beland)

Preventing swine flu: Playing hooky from school or work. (Russell Beland)

Marrying Liz Taylor: Showing a total lack of originality. (Russell Beland)

And Last: Changing the fonts: The new "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." (Russ Taylor; Steven King, Vienna; Jeff Contompassis, Ashburn)

Next Week: Food for Naught, or Queasine



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 844: Healthy choice

Town hall: A forum in which American citizens may air their views in the hallowed tradition of democracy.

Town hell: What we got this year. (Week 800)

As the raging-like-strep health-care debate shows little prognosis for recovery anytime soon, we thought we'd use that robust option for the theme of this year's annual retrospective contest.

This week: Enter any Style Invitational from Week 790 through Week 840 (except for Week 793, which was the same contest for the previous year, and Week 798, the obit poems, since we'll be asking for them soon). There are two restrictions — preexisting conditions, if you will: (1) You may submit only one entry per contest (so you can still send 49 entries, if you want to make us sigh in exasperation). (2) And each entry must pertain in some way to health care or health-care policy. Don't make us deny your claim to ink.

You may refer to events that have occurred since the contest was printed; for contests that ask you to use The Post from a certain day or week, use today's or this week's. You can find all the contests at

www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives — just in time, for once — a lovely "Scream Christmas" necktie depicting the Edward Munch icon doing his/her thing, but wearing a Santa hat. It's really, um, colorful! Gotten rid of by 145-time Loser Beverly 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 Loser 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, Dec. 7. Put "Week 844" 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 Dec. 19. 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 Jeff Contompassis; this week's honorable-mentions name is by Craig Dykstra.



TIEGUYS.COM

NOOO, NOT 'THE CHRISTMAS SHOES'!!! This week's second prize.



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



CAROLYN HAX

A losing dogfight

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:

My boyfriend and I split up a few months ago. We had a dog together. (He adopted, but I was the co-parent.) I love this dog. My ex has recently moved, which makes it more difficult to see the dog, since I no longer have keys. But my ex seems to be making it even more difficult, not responding right away to my e-mailed schedule requests (which I send at least two to three days before), and when he does respond, he's too busy to come home to let me see the dog.

It makes me really sad that the dog is alone when he could be with me. I'm not living somewhere where I can have the dog overnight more than once in a while. (I had to move out when we split up.) I don't expect my ex to cater to my schedule, but some acknowledgment and accommodation would be nice. Any suggestions on how to share custody of the dog? I don't want to fight or get ugly over it. I just want to see the dog.

D.C.

I can't believe I'm saying this — I see pets as extended family — but I think you need to give up.

He's making it clear that he's not going to let you see the dog, and your continuing to try is only making you miserable. Dogs aren't kids; they live in the present, so it's not like with a child, where your visitation failures could be seen as a personal betrayal. Visiting is just for you, and you're not getting anything out of it.

Consider volunteering at a shelter if you miss your connection with dogs, and try not to look back.

Dear Carolyn:

It has been the toughest period of my life, and I don't know how I would have made it through without my mother and mother-in-law. My husband is in the States for work, my son and I are overseas because of my work. My mom and MIL have given up months of their lives and left their families behind to move in with me and help raise our son. And it's not just our son they've been taking care of; Mom was my rock during my recent miscarriage, MIL just nursed me through the swine flu. There are no words for what these women have done. We're moving back home in a few weeks, and I want to do something to thank them. I've asked them what they'd like as special treats — a year's worth of pedicures? Monthly gift certificates to favorite restaurants? Skywriting singing their praises? They both insist that they want nothing more than for me to do the same for my son and his family someday. Even my biggest ideas feel inadequate. Gah. Any suggestions?

London

Nothing beats writing down your thoughts in a card or letter. Anyone with money can get someone a year's worth of pedicures (Carolyn Hax, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071), but a letter requires time, thought and paragraphs of individual detail. And most important, it can be kept in a drawer for the rest of their lives, allowing them on their bad days to quickly lay hands on proof that they're valued by someone.

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.

After a makeover, American History's back in fashion

BY JACQUELINE TRESMOTT

It's one year to the day since the National Museum of American History reopened with its remodeled, reorganized central core. And if attendance figures are to be believed, the renovation has been an unqualified success.

By Saturday, 4 million people will have strolled past the museum's signature giant metallic flag, which leads the way to the real Star-Spangled Banner and its new presentation. That's an increase of about 33 percent over the roughly 3 million visitors the museum received in 2005, the last full year it was open. Thanks to better signage and clearer sightlines, these visitors have easily found Thomas Jefferson's lap desk, now 233 years old, not to mention that green Muppet called Kermit the Frog, now 40.

The museum's popularity is not surprising, what with \$85 million having been spent to spiff up its exhibitions and space. However, the throngs also returned because they missed an important stop on the Washington history circuit. The museum had stood on the Mall for 44 years when it closed in 2006. It was kind of dark and confusing, but stuffed with treasures — the steam locomotive John Bull, Duke Ellington's compositions and Dorothy's ruby slippers from "The Wizard of Oz." No matter how jumbled its critics labeled it, the American History museum was consistently drawing crowds in 2002, when a blue-ribbon commission concluded it



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

A POPULAR ATTRACTION: Since last year's reopening, above, 4 million people have visited.

needed an overhaul of its identity, physical spaces and subjects. And so, museum planners proposed a five-story atrium off the Mall entrance and stressed the need for an overhaul of its signature galleries.

"People do come to the Smithsonian to connect with the national experience and to get a sense of the meaning of what it means to be part of the country's history," said Brent D. Glass, the museum's director for seven years. "We are hoping they come away with a greater historic literacy and understanding of the connections between the themes."

During the past year, history was also happening outside the museum's walls, Glass admitted,

which pushed a lot of people through the doors. "With the election and the financial crisis, people were focusing on history much more. People were talking about how it was unprecedented to have an African American and women running, and how unprecedented the recession was. So people wanted to know about the Great Depression and the civil rights movement."

Next week, to accommodate visitors on the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving (typically the Mall's busiest days), the museum will close at 7:30 instead of the usual 5:30.

Among the achievements of the past year: a new documents gallery; the enduringly popular first ladies display was renovat-

ed, reopening last December; the maritime hall reopened. And, to mark the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, the museum gathered 60 important objects associated with him in one gallery. Special shows, such as one focusing on the Scurlock Studio, a Washington photography business, and the Bracero Program, a history of Mexican farm workers in the United States, were mounted. Drawing from the 3 million objects in the collection, the curatorial staff changed small cases, such as one dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Hawaii's statehood.

A bonus came when two Hollywood movies with a connection to the museum were released: "Julie and Julia," about

the cooking icon Julia Child, who donated her original kitchen to the museum, and "Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian," which featured Gen. George Custer's jacket and Muhammad Ali's boxing gloves.

Making costumed characters a regular part of the museum experience has also been a crowd-pleaser.

In the first year since the museum reopened, one out of every four visitors has had what Glass calls "personal contact" with living history theater, special tours with docents and hands-on carts. The visitor might run into Mary Young Pickersgill, the Baltimore seamstress who sewed the Star-Spangled Banner. Or one of the black students who sat down at the segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, N.C., in February 1960, providing a catalyst for the civil rights movement.

The tweaking will continue, Glass said. For years, critics have wondered why the museum doesn't have a detailed timeline of American history's facts, people and events. That's still in the future, Glass said. In the meantime, close to Christmas week, the museum will introduce an interactive table with events that changed the nation. The subjects will cover culture, politics, military and technology.

"People are interested in the technology, as well as the context. For now, it meets our purpose and invites people to make comments," said Glass. "My hope is that people will argue about what was left out."

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DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU

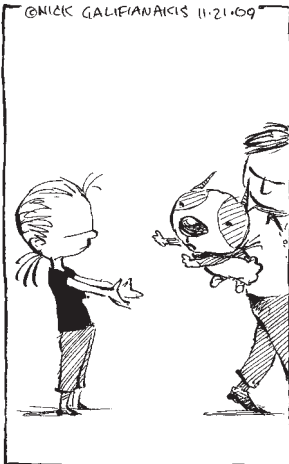


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A BAND REUNITES AT 9:30 CLUB, PLUS A FORMER 'IDOL' PERFORMS

The Jesus Lizard's decade away from the scene seems to have paid off, David Malitz writes. The alt-rockers revived rock-and-roll at its finest. At the Patriot Center, Dave McKenna writes, former "American Idol" contestant Chris Daughtry can't shake off his nice-guy image, no matter how hard-rocker he tries to act. Read more about both the Thursday night shows at washingtonpost.com/postrock.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST