



CAROLYN HAX

An on-task household

While I'm away, readers give the advice.

On dividing household responsibilities fairly:

In general, I have found that the best way to divide responsibility is to work on a scheme that adds up to 150 percent, with both sides taking more responsibility than they think fair.

Absent that, just take responsibility for as much as necessary to put matters to rest — think of it as your share, plus a cut to world peace, pay it forward, gracias a la vida, whatever works for you, and enjoy the satisfaction of being free of bitterness and also the secret pleasure of being the one in control.

Works for me.

Tucson

On dividing household responsibilities fairly, cont'd in perpetuity:

To the uninitiated, "how messy she is" sounds like one of those things one can "learn to live with" given true love and commitment. The reality after 10 or 15 years is dramatically different, especially when life delivers items that increase the chores and lessen the time available to do them: kids, pets, house, yard, a job outside the home.

One person ends up assuming responsibility for endless work, the other does what they consider their fair share (in this case, mowing the lawn occasionally). One person is constantly picking up while the other complains about the general lack of order; one person does all of the cooking while the other complains about the inadequacy of meals or meal times and feels no responsibility to help with the dishes; one person tries to organize or even move shoes out of the walkway while the other complains about the "invasion of personal space"; one person harbors growing resentment for being treated like a servant while the other feels growing resentment for being nagged about what they consider to be someone else's work. Both resent the other for being lazy and messy.

Ultimately it's not about the chores, but something no amount of love or commitment can survive. One person is self-involved and both are resentful because their needs are not being met. If it was just about the chores, you could simply get a maid, but the "me first" attitude negatively affects every part of daily living. It's so much bigger than whether they put the cap on the toothpaste.

G.

On dealing with unwanted personal calls at work:

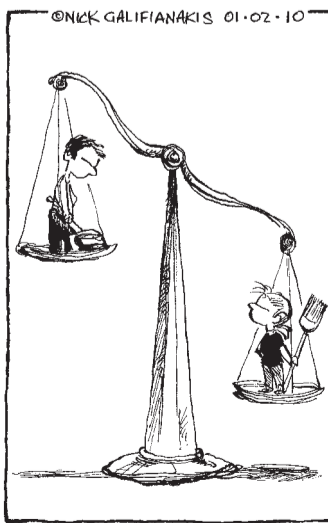
What kind of jobs do these people have that they can take all these personal calls at work? In 20 years of marriage, I probably called my husband at work a dozen times; two I specifically remember were "I'm in labor," and "The house is on fire."

Anonymous

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20007, or tellme@washpost.com.

ONLINE DISCUSSION

Carolyn Hax's weekly Web chat is at noon Fridays at www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 846

in which we asked for end-of-year holiday letters from well-known people:



We took first place in several competitions this year, and never once finished worse than second! And isn't it nice that the team will have lots of time with family after the holidays? I know I will. — **Best wishes, Jim Zorn** (Peter Metrinko, Gainesville)

2 the winner of the soap that looks like a bag of water with a goldfish in it: It was a helluva year. Good news, though — I'm finally in the inner circle. — **Dante** (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

3 Happy Hanukkah, everyone! Sorry about the bulk mailing, but I'm getting into the spirit of "doing more with less" this season. Bernie has recently moved into a big house in North Carolina — and would you believe there's a bathroom in every room! — **Ruth Madoff** (Jim Noble, Lexington Park)

4 Sorry to learn of Sparky's demise, though he'll make it to nearly 50 in dog years. Your mother's passing must be quite a shock, too, but at least she won't see it coming. . . . **See you in the future!** — **Nostradamus** (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

EPISTLE-WHIPPED: HONORABLE MENTIONS

The past year has been sooo hectic, so we're looking forward to kicking back at our reunion with the moon shot crew next year in Houston! — **Michaele and Tareq** (Hal Handerson, Arlington, a First Offender)

Hi, all of Taylor's friends! I just wanted to let you know that Beyoncé had one of best years of all time. — **Kanye** (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

This year's big news, of course, has been my new job. Yeah, it's just a secretary position, but there's lots of travel to interesting places (first class!) and fabulous business dinners. And my new boss is HOT! Happy holidays — **Hillary** (Chuck Koelbel, Houston)

What a great year we've had! Three of our children have left the nest, but the other four will be with us awhile. We had a great visit with Uncle Sam this year, and can't wait till he comes to see us again. — **General Motors** (Ed Gordon, Georgetown, Tex.)

Buon natale from Hotel Omerta in Palermo! What a year — justice has triumphed

at last! To my dear family and friends who supported me: **Gracie mille!** I will never forget. To those who didn't: Trust me, I won't forget you either. — **John Jr.** (Stephen Gold, Glasgow, Scotland)

. . . and imagine, our darling daughter Elin was able to beat Tiger using his own clubs! — **The Nordegrens** (Pie Snelson, Silver Spring)

I did a lot of work with Jewish charities this year — I'm so glad they felt they could come to me for help. — **Bernie M.** (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

Merry Christmas to the girls in Hollywood! I'm now involved with a foreign royal — we met on his private island. He's hairier than I like 'em, but you should see his muscles! — **Ann Darrow** (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

. . . and a Happy New Year to you! Now, if you could take a moment, could you let me know:

1. Did my holiday newsletter meet your expectations? (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree)

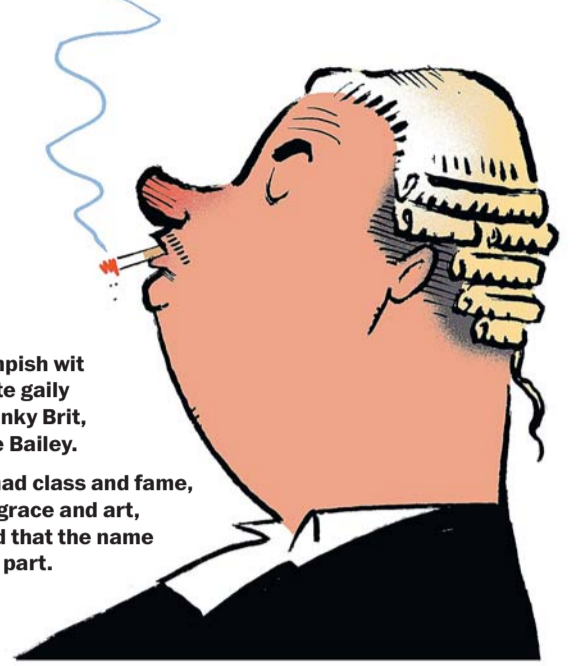
2. Thinking of other holiday newsletters, would you say this one was . . .
— **J.W. Marriott Jr.** (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

Next week: Questionable Journalism, or Take News for an Answer

Second prize: A cute trinket made of a chopped-off body part.



THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



With just a bit of impish wit John Mortimer quite gaily Gave to us that cranky Brit, Old Rumpole of the Bailey.

Because Sir John had class and fame, And he wrote with grace and art, Few people noticed that the name Was a nether body part.

BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 850: Dead letters

The year was barely half over when the Blathering Class began noting that 2009 seemed to be an especially big year for celebrity deaths. Perhaps that might have more to do with an ever-broadening definition of celebrity, but in any case, you'll have plenty to work with in our annual contest.

This week: Write a humorous poem about someone who died in 2009, as in the example above by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gene Weingarten. Also this week: In response to the plea of Uberoser Russell Beland (who doesn't think much of the Empress's poetry-judging ability), we bring back an old contest as a second option — give us a humorous, short obit headline for someone who died in 2009.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets the cute critter (suitable for wall hanging) pictured here, sent to us by Howard Walderman of Columbia, who wrote that he found in his attic "the enclosed trophy for winning Week 307. Described as a 'genuine cow-hoof flask,' it has been in storage for a decade. . . . I am 'regifting' it; perhaps it is unique, ugly and useless enough to be re-awarded as a contest prize." Now that we can run photos of prizes, you can see that it's no flask. It definitely has some hoof in it, though.

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. 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, Jan. 11. Put "Week 850" 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 Jan. 30. 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 Kevin Dopart; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Jeff Contompas.

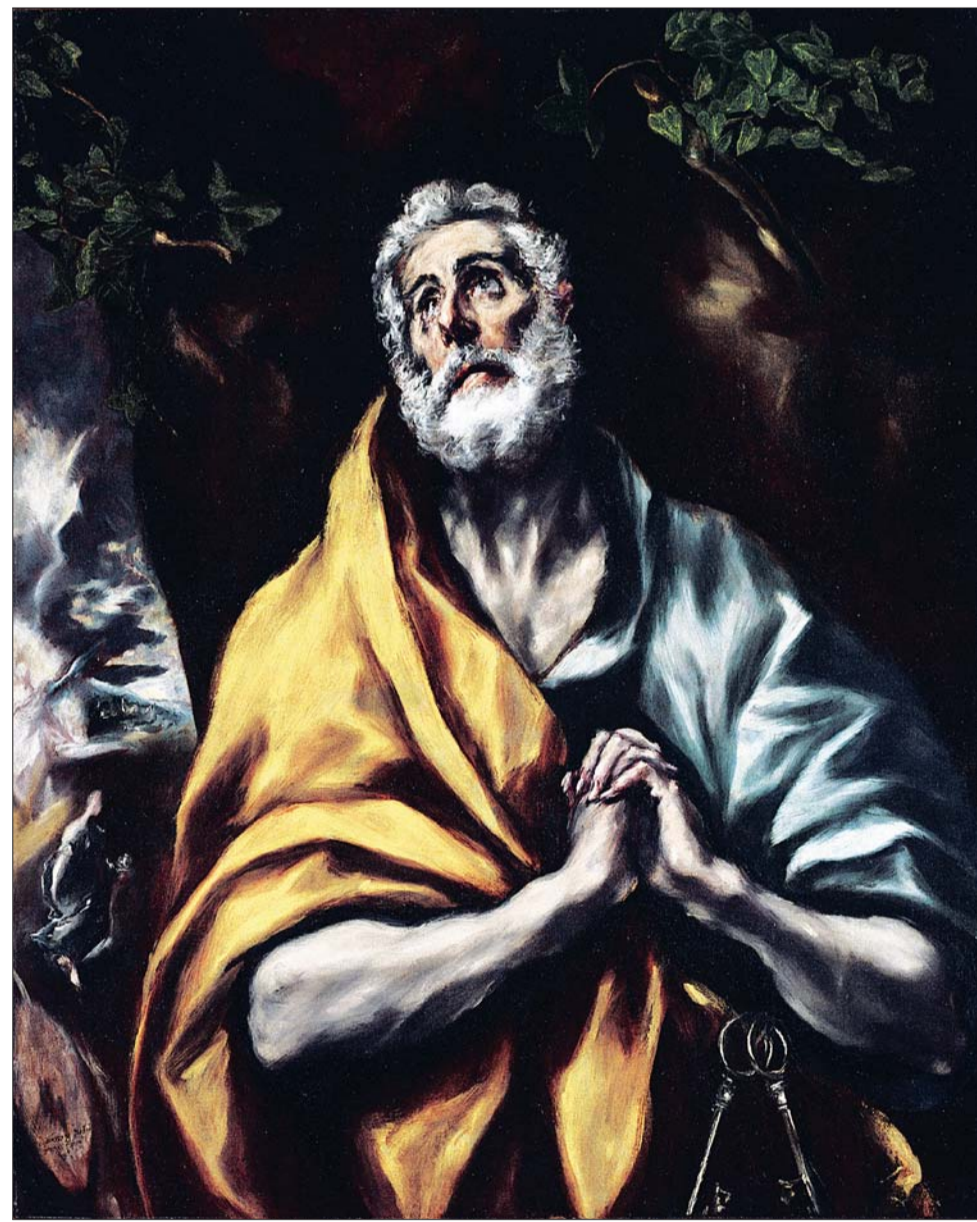
Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at [washingtonpost.com/styleconversational](http://www.washingtonpost.com/styleconversational).

Magdalene is far more than a blur in the background

PHILLIPS FROM C1

stands in the foreground of this painting bewailing the three times he denied Jesus as his master. Our little figure is his fellow disciple Mary Magdalene, the prostitute who has just discovered her resurrected savior's empty tomb — she'd gone there to anoint the body and is still carrying her trademark ointment jar — and is now rushing off to give her friends the news. (You can just see the torchlit tomb far off behind her.)

What we see as forward-looking "style" in this painting may be less about a new look than the traditional content it is made to carry. Part of that content involves space and depth. Because of the strange games El Greco plays with scale, he's got to find a way to make clear that the Magdalene is a full-size figure in the distance, not a puppet by Peter's elbow. The painter does that partly by making all the subjects close to us much sharper and more natural than subjects farther back — from the sharp-focus, highly rendered ivy in front, to Saint Peter himself, to Mary Magdalene, to the almost indecipherable tomb in the far distance. This range of treatments gives us a clue to how un-modern this picture really is: Instead of coming up with a consistently new way of viewing the world — a unique and personal optic to look at it through — El Greco is building a picture around the different jobs he's got for its components. He wants the Magdalene and Peter side by side on the surface of the picture, so resurrection and repentance can be aligned in people's minds. But he also wants to register the space that sits between his figures as his picture tells its story. He also needs his rushing woman, however small, to register as a sex worker in her working clothes. (In El Greco's day, making a picture of this saint was often the barest excuse for showing a beautiful girl.) By painting the Magdalene gorgeously, stylishly, El Greco could appropriately boost her sex appeal. His brushwork is a good stand-in for a brothel's flowing silks. It's also a decent substitute for



PHILLIPS COLLECTION

divine light. El Greco's white paint is where he goes most wild. It's all over the Magdalene, almost defining her form. It sticks to Peter's keys (the keys to papal Rome, and thus this Catholic

saint's crucial equipment), to his face and beard and especially his eyes as they fill with sanctified tears. That white paint almost obliterates the angel just behind Mary Magdalene, who brought

her news of Christ's rising. El Greco's angel is flashy and unreal, in properly modern style. But its flash may be about religious realism.

gopnikb@washpost.com

Griffin rings in 2010 with vulgarity

For the second straight year, comedian Kathy Griffin ushered in the new year by saying something vulgar on CNN.

During the network's live New Year's Eve broadcast from Times Square, Griffin was joking with co-host Anderson Cooper about how to pronounce the first name of "balloon boy" Falcon Heene when she mumbled something that sounded like the F-word. Cooper shook his head and said, "You're terrible."

The network says in a statement that it regrets that profanity was used on the show. Griffin says in a statement that people should just add her to the list of "serious reporters" who had trouble pronouncing the name "Falcon." During the same show a year ago, Griffin ruffled some feathers when she yelled off-color comments at a heckler.

— Associated Press



CNN issues an apology after Kathy Griffin's off-color comment.

LADY IN WHITE: El Greco uses the color all over the stylishly dressed Magdalene, left, almost defining her form. She registers as a sex worker despite being obscured by distance.

DOONESBURY FLASHBACKS BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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