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The Washington Post

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, 2010

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THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 848

In which we asked for rhopalic sentences, ones in which each successive word is one letter longer. The question arose online on The Style Conversational soon after the contest was announced: Do hyphenated words count as one word or two? The Empress, with uncharacteristic leniency, ruled: either.



MUSIC

I do fun, cool stuff mostly: noogies, pantsing, spitballs, shoe-lacing, hand-buzzers, elbow-farting, towel-snapping, nipple-twisting, flower-squirting . . . – G.W. Bush, Dallas (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

() the winner of the three lollipops with 🚽 various critters embedded in them: **Dogs NEVER wonder whether burglars** underwent mitigating, exculpating, early-boyhood, gender-related disappointment. (Beverley Sharp, Washington)

Go out(,) West, urged Taylor swiftly. (Kevin Dopart. Washington)

My bra fits lower, dammit, because gravity's heartless. (Lois Douthitt, Arlington)

STRETCHING IT: HONORABLE MENTIONS

We are agog after Tiger's wrecked **Cadillac discloses infidelity,** triple-bogey extramarital relationships. (Chris Doyle)

The weak vegan senses: Sauteed reindeer satisfies completely! (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.

King Midas dreamt, feeling giltless. (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

"Oh, lie once again, please!" lustily entreats Gabriella, Pinocchio's adventurous acquaintance. (Mark Richardson, Washington)

Ice, salt, limes, shaker, tequila = blissful margarita perfection. (Craig Dvkstra, Centreville

One word today equals "Salahis": "chutzpah." (Pat Kanz, Ocean Pines, Md.)

I am not with child — merely heavier. Imbecile. (Paul Buckley, Bowie, a First Offender)

Palin writes notably readable biography: Republican womanifesto. (John O'Byrne, Dublin

Big-bank asset relief: nothing ventured, something shanghaied. (Kevin Donart)

"Bo, you been fired!" Little Richard candidly announced. (Chris Doyle

"I do," she says. Groom silent. (Chuck

To his wife, Woods needed ironing. (Elwood Fitzner, Vallev Citv, N.D.)

"I Am Sam, Play Again": Seuss's rhyming revision refreshes 'Casablanca." (Kevin Dopart)

Tiger should endorse Fidelity. (Joe Neff, Warrington, Pa.)

"I am not King Fairy," Oberon growled. (Chris Doyle)

Fly life cycle: larvae; maggots; pupation; emergence; Cronenberg. (Stephen Dudzik, Olnev)

U Nu, the only Burma leader elected, provides countless palindrome enthusiasts interminable entertainment. (Chris Dovle.

"Oh, you heel!" cried direly injured Achilles. (Beverley Sharp)

Best two-worder: Snow blows. (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)

Best three-worder: Global warming: chilling. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

Best four-worder: Re 848: This sucks. (Beverley Sharp)

And last: Why Xmas wasn't widely enjoyed: Rhopalic sentences **interfered.** (Beverley Sharp)

MORE HONORABLE MENTIONS FROM WEEK 847

Find a sentence in The Post and supply a question it could answer:

You'll just get a more expensive blur. What if I purchase an impressionist painting at Sothebys instead of Wal-Mart? (Kevin Dopart)

There's a lot of pride in Warren. Okay, if it's not vanity, why does he think that song is about him? (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

There's nothing like a few good explosions to transcend pesky language barriers. Briefly, what is your view on diplomacy, Mr. Bin Laden? (Beverley Sharp)

What kind of accommodations are you willing to tolerate? What's the first thing you're asked at Motel 5? (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Isolated shower late. What's the romantic forecast if I dare tell my wife that her favorite red dress makes her look chunky? (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

The administration and some of the nation's largest banks have hastened to part company in recent weeks. Can you think of an example of that old saying about a fool and his money? (Russell Beland)

With proper instruction, you'll get the hang of it in no time – and on your next attempt, you'll be able to do it entirely on your own. What was the best advice Onan ever received? (Chris Doyle)

I'm really worried. What did Alfred E. Neuman say about the decline in magazine readership? (Russell Beland)

Next Week: Homonymphomania, or **Earily Familiar**

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST Week 852:

his week's results are for rhopalic sentences, ones in which each successive word

Small, Let's get

is one letter longer. Predictably, a lot of people found it hard to write a rhopalic sentence in something approaching natural English syntax, let alone make it funny and clever as well. And just as predictably, a number of Losers took right to this contest. So, by perhaps unpopular request, we'll do it again, backwards and in high heels:

This week: Write a rhopalic sentence (or fanciful newspaper headline) in which each successive word is one letter shorter. Hyphenated words or phrases may count as one word or more.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a necktie depicting some sculpture by a guy named Rodin that looks exactly like the Inker except that it is missing the paper bag over its head. From **Beverley Sharp of Washington, who** happens to own five Inkers but does not tend to wear neckties. Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or vearned-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. 25. Put "Week 852" 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 Feb. 13. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their imp relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results and this week's honorable-mentions subhead are both by Craig Dykstra.

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



The in-law name game

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn:

I just got married and my mother-in-law wants me to call her Mom. Calling her by her first name is not an option. I already have a Mom. I consider myself a relatively flexible person, but, on this issue, I can't budge. Any suggestions?!?

Brooklyn

Talk to her. Your reason for not wanting to use Mom is perfectly reasonable and – this is the part you say to your mother-in-law openly - no reflection at all on your fondness for your mother-in-law. It's about your attachment to your mom, period. Then invite your

mother-in-law to help you think of something you both would like — the way people who don't like "grandma" will come up with nanna/noni/yia-yia/grams/ noonoo or whatever else. If she comes from any strong, old-world tradition, that could yield a really nice alternative.

If she won't play, if it's "Mom" or bust, then this is about more than a name — I'd venture either a power play or a culture clash. In any case, it would be in your own best interests to deal with the larger issue instead of getting hung up on the name.

Re: "Mom":

My in-laws informed me after our marriage that it was disrespectful of me to call them by their first name, or Mr./Mrs. Lastname, and that I should call them Mommy and Daddy.

I spent five years assiduously not calling them anything, then we had children and I call them Amah and Akong (grandma and grandpa). And they wonder why their children don't have close relationships with them!

Anonvmous

This reminds me of past letters from people very intent either on being called Mom/Dad, or on making sure they're the only ones with that title. The pressing need to acquire the trappings of intimacy seems to have 100 percent correlation with the failure of that intimacy ever to come to pass.

BY ANNE MIDGETTE

sembled a group of players to perform, among other things, the scherzo from Tchaikovsky's



Dueling visions of balalaika repertory in area orchestras

in full uniform. This orchestra's brass section is, however, mainly professional musi-

Smith. Woodbridge

The largest balalaika orchestra outside of Russia is based in Arlington. The balalaika orchestra that won the international competition "Music Vladivostok 2007" is also based in Arlington. They are two different orchestras. And apart from their instrument, they don't have much in common.

The balalaika is a triangular Russian folk instrument, like a three-stringed guitar. It's ubiquitous in Russia, rare here, and generally thought of in both countries as an emblem of ethnic mueven kitsch. Peter sic, Trofimenko, the conductor of the American Balalaika Symphony (the second of the above-mentioned groups) describes the stereotypical audience as "people who just want to play the theme from 'Dr. Zhivago' in colored shirts, with vodka toasts."

But in the late 19th century, an aristocrat named Vasily Andreyev decided that the instrument belonged in the concert hall, and as-

Fourth Symphony. (The Tchaikovsky family got a court injunction to prevent such desecration.) And there have been balalaika orchestras ever since: ensembles of 50 or more players on different sizes of balalaika and domra, the instrument's round cousin, complete with conductors and an assortment of other traditional wind and percussion instruments. There are a handful of them in the United States. Two of those happen to be based in the D.C. area.

On Saturday, the American Balalaika Symphony will be featured at Strathmore as the winner of the "Great Strathmore Giveaway," a competition the center put on to help celebrate its 25th season. The prize: appearing for one night in the concert hall. (This is no small thing: Factoring in technical staff and promotion, the evening is costing Strathmore about \$27,000).

Arlington's balalaika concentration is partly a matter of ASHINGTON BALALAIKA SOCIETY

MORE TRADITIONAL: The Washington Balalaika Society plays about "75 percent Russian," says the group's Max McCullough.

chance. The Washington Balalaika Society, the city's older balalaika orchestra, was founded in 1988 when Max McCullough, an executive with IBM (since retired), moved here from Houston, where he had been a leader of the Houston Balalaika Society. McCullough discovered that, although there are balalaika orchestras "in the gosh-darnedest places," there was none in the nation's capital. His society began as a group of eight friends playing in his basement; within a couple of years, membership was up to 25.

In 2001, there was a schism when Trofimenko, a balalaika soloist and sometime leader of the Washington Balalaika Society, had his own ideas about the direction in which the group should go. He ultimately left and founded the American Balalaika Symphony. Relations are not particularly warm between the institutions.

The Washington Balalaika Society focuses on traditional instruments, traditional costumes and a repertory that is "75 percent Russian," McCullough says, "because we think that's what audiences come to hear."

The American Balalaika Symphony seeks to move beyond the traditional ethnic repertory, to the point of including a full complement of symphonic wind instruments. "The scores that we play are highly sophisticated symphonic scores," Trofimenko says. "We have music from jazz and pop tunes through to Baroque or a symphony by Mehul."

American conservatories generally don't include training on the balalaika. Most players in these largely amateur groups have no Eastern European background and come to the instrument relatively late, some with experience on the guitar or violin. Edith Poetzschke, 84, who has been playing domra with the American Balalaika Symphony since its inception, originally played the mandolin. Another player, Rick Netherton, the leader of the contrabass balalaikas, is a police officer in Falls Church who sometimes shows up to rehearsal

cians.

Both orchestras include a couple of ringers from Russia who also give lessons, and each orchestra is led by a conductor who trained in Russian conservatories. Svetlana Nikonova of the Washington Balalaika Society used to lead the Andrevev Balalaika Orchestra. Trofimenko still works part of each year in Ukraine.

The distinctive timbre of a balalaika orchestra was certainly one of the things that caught the attention of Shelley Brown, Strathmore's vice president of programming, in selecting the American Balalaika Symphony as the winner. "It's a tremolo, shimmery sound," she says. "I thought it would showcase the hall, and [the hall would] make them sound really good."

Trofimenko has great ambitions for the American Balalaika Symphony, which has already won a couple of awards. He hopes to expand ever further into a broader repertory, to encourage composers to write for the distinctive orchestration. But in applying to the Strathmore competition, he ultimately opted for a Russian program, "to play it safe," he says. And it was lucky he did. "What set the group apart," Brown says, "is that there was a unique fit between ensemble and the program they put together, which used traditional instruments and had a mostly traditional content."

In short, you can take the balalaika out of Russia, but the American Balalaika Symphony has a way to go before getting Russia out of the balalaika.

WHAT?

midgettea@washpost.com

JK! TRY TO.. TO KEEP UP

I'M. ONE

WITH TBI

Dear Carolyn:

In the context of making big decisions, you said in a column a while back, "Learn which you value more, the person or the place." How can you value one more than the other without being resentful of what you gave up? Anonvmous

You don't blame other people when you don't get what you want.

Let's say you're deciding whether to move for someone. If you resent the person for forcing this decision, then you just view that resentment as a point in favor of staying put.

But if you resent the cosmic forces that prevent you from having both person and place, then I think you need to tone down your sense of entitlement. Every choice means choosing against something else. That's just how it works. Some people are stuck facing more sacrifices than others, too, but that's also just how it works.

If you're afraid a choice will hurt someone, prioritize your responsibilities, then choose, explain, hold firm.

So details matter here. But the general answer is that if you own your choices — "I could have stayed home, but I chose her" then resentment is beside the point.

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





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