



CAROLYN HAX

Mother-in-law fence mending

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:
I just sent out invitations for my son's second birthday. My mother-in-law responded that she was happy to receive an invitation, considering she was not invited to his first birthday party.

I did not send out formal invitations last year (it was a brunch at our house with my family), and, when I mentioned the brunch several weeks prior, she said she would be out of town. She said she still should have been invited. Her comments about this are driving me to go take a swim in bacon pants.

Cleveland

Don't forget the shark-infested waters. She should have been invited. Maybe she would have liked the chance to change her plans. I certainly won't defend her guilt-tripping strategy; anyone in her position needs to stop peck-peck-pecking and just say it — "You really hurt my feelings last year" — and be done with it.

But from the way you phrased your question, it sure sounds like you heard she'd be away, said a private "Phew," and went ahead with your preferred plan of having only your family. This is your notice: She feels left out, and your "body language" (the written version of it, at least) says you wish you could leave her out more. Be the bigger person — admit you screwed up, and mend the fence.

Dear Carolyn:
Not sure if more details make a difference: My son's birthday fell on Thanksgiving last year, so my family came to our house to celebrate the holiday and the birthday that long weekend (they live eight hours away). My in-laws live 15 minutes away and decided to fly to California to spend the holiday with my brother-in-law. My husband mentioned when they planned the trip that they would be missing our son's birthday, but they went ahead anyway. She is mad because I (and not my husband) did not formally invite her anyway.

You read between the lines correctly. I do not like my mother-in-law. And I could have moved the birthday celebration to another time, but then my family would not be there. Yes, I chose my family over my in-laws. My conscience is clear about this decision.

But I will apologize to mend the fence (and then take that swim).

Cleveland again

I still think your mother-in-law's comments are petty, but now I'll add that they're directed at the wrong person. Where's your husband — is he sticking up for you here?

I also still think you need to apologize, since you did do the happy dance when you heard she'd be away — but the substance of your apology should be a little different from what I suggested before. Now, it's: "I should have realized how important this was to you and held a separate celebration when you returned."

That's not only credible as something you could and should have done, but it also gives you a chance to say, "Please, though, in the future, tell me what you're upset about so I have a chance of making it right. A year later, there's just so much I can do."

It's both a bona fide attempt to mend the fence, and a return of the ball to her court.

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.



BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL



Women are like flashlights: Ones with two D's aren't always the brightest, but they'll do when the lights go out. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

HACKSIMILES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

A man is like the Loch Ness Monster: You suspect there's something under the surface, but no one's ever seen it. (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

Men are like dowers: They make all their decisions with just one thing, and once in a while even get it right. (Kevin Dopart)

Men are like ringtones: A lot of the time, you'd rather just switch to "vibrate." (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

Men are like the women in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": They come and go. (Edmund Conti, Raleigh)

Women are like kidneys: They always go to the bathroom together. (Russell Beland)

Women are like IRS auditors: You get more attention from them when you earn a lot. (David Kleinbard)

A woman is like the Pillsbury Doughboy: soft and pliable — until she gets burned. (Michelle Stupak)

Women are like closing pitchers: It takes a lot of effort to warm them up just for a few minutes of service. — W. Beatty, Hollywood (Kevin Dopart)

Women are like members of Congress: They'll do what you want, but you'll have to plead long, hard and loudly, and it's very, very expensive. (Jim Noble, Lexington Park)

Women are like an E-ZPass: The toll for entrance is always

REPORT FROM WEEK 854
in which we asked for jokes in the venerable simile form "men are like . . .," "women are like . . .," etc., in eight categories. **IMPORTANT NOTE TO THE EASILY OFFENDED:** Yes, we realize that many of the jokes below are based on sexist stereotypes and attitudes that do not apply to a great many men and women, and certainly not to you.

2 the winner of the classic children's book "The Gas We Pass": Men are like Swiss army knives: No matter how useful they appear, they mostly just pick teeth and open beer bottles. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

3 Teenagers are like a freshly bottled wine: They might be palatable seven years from now. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

4 Men are like the TV yule log: They're easy to turn on, but you're not going to get much warmth out of them. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

exacted later. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Women are like barbed-wire fences — easy to become entangled with, but extremely difficult to get over without a lot of pain. (Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

Dogs are like trips to Cleveland: Each day is like a week. (Russell Beland)

Dogs are like Losers: They have just one use for The Washington Post. (Kevin Dopart)

Cats are like Visa cards: They're everywhere you want to be. (Ray Gardiner, Olney, a First Offender)

Cats are like the Empress Josephine: They'll do anything for a little shrimp. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

Cats are like Unitarians: They're always questioning my authority. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Coffee is like life: Early on, we accept cheap "instant" gratification; later on, we have the patience to wait for the most expensive beans to come out of an animal butt. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

Starbucks coffee is like Barack Obama: hot, black, and what you shouldn't have if you want to balance your budget. (Peter Metrinko, Gainesville)

Teenagers are like a sci-fi film fest: Plenty of battles, the world keeps ending, and their dates are from another planet. (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park)

Teens are like crops planted in poor soil: You can only hope they'll grow out of it. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Teenagers are like modern art — neither as dumb nor as deep as people make them out to be. Just something hanging around the place. (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

Teenagers are like my 1992 Honda Accord: It's super-loud, it's started smoking, it takes forever to start in the winter, and its trunk smells like a dead squirrel. (Josh Borken, Minneapolis)

Facebook is like that White House dinner for the Indian prime minister: It's free and anyone can join in. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

Facebook is like a pair of nylon panties: synthetic intimacy. (Barbara Turner)

Facebook is like a hangover: You can end up asking yourself, "HOW do I know this person?" (May Jampathom, Oakhurst, N.J.)

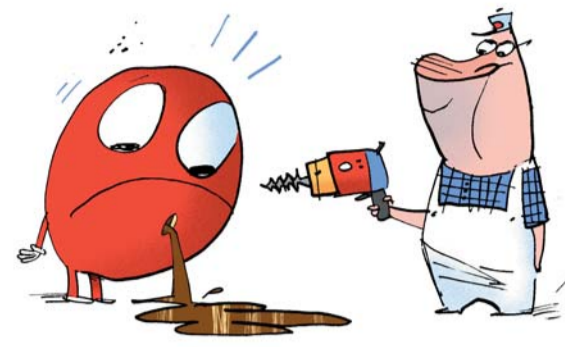
I am like a glass of cabernet: mildly amusing, with an earthy aroma. (Bird Waring)

I am like the Empress: I'm dark-haired and make a lot of jokes, but I never get my name printed in The Style Invitational. (Melissa Yorks, Gaithersburg)

Next week: The news could be verse, or Headline Muse

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

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 858: Same OED

Embase: The chocolate inside the hard candy coating.

It's Part 2 of a contest we started in 2007. Here's a list of words that Loser Ne Plus Ultra Russell Beland has found in another small section of the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. If you know what any of them mean — for example that an exossation is "a depriving of bone or fruit stones" — good for you, but we don't care.

This week: Make up a false definition for any of the words listed below. You may use it in a funny sentence but not in an unfunny sentence.

Ebulum	Embase	Feague	Gallon
Echeneis	Emunge	Fennamuck	Gast
Eclégme	Endship	Festlino	Gemew
Ecod	Enew	Fewterer	Gestning
Effatum	Eruke	Fibutor	Gleimy
Effray	Etik	Findhorn	Governall
Eglatere	Exerce	Fistic	Greal
Eldouranion	Exossation	Flème	Hastif
Elatcha	Fand	Fourbe	Haye
Elixivate	Fazle	Galeche	Hicket

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place scores the book "The World's Worst: A Guide to the Most Disgusting, Hideous, Inept, and Dangerous People, Places, and Things on Earth."

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, March 8. Put "Week 858" 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 March 27. 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 Chris Doyle of Ponder, Tex.; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Brad Alexander of Wanneroo, Australia.

Arms and the Woman: Wrestling for fun and charity

ARM-WRESTLING FROM CI

up in this outfit where she's barely wearing anything," says Hoyt Tidwell. "She's got a sword, a gun and a knife strapped to her!"

Outgrowing its venue

The first league, the Charlottesville Lady Arm Wrestlers (CLAW), began in February 2008 at the Blue Moon Diner. Each wrestler arrives with an entourage in tow, including a manager who heckles the crowd for "CLAWbucks" (purchased two for a dollar) that are used to place "bets" on fighters. (The real money winds up with a local charity.) T-shirts are sold, carousing is enjoyed. There's even a house band, Straight Punch to the Crotch.

It wasn't long before the spectacle outgrew the diner's backroom. The first match drew a crowd of 75; the last one in July — relocated to the parking lot — had 700. The line wrapped around the block. Neighbors watched the action from their roofs.

"I have sometimes been moved to tears to see what comes of it," says Hoyt Tidwell. "I never expected it."

Hoyt Tidwell is a single mother who writes and directs videos for online commercials and spends a third of her time with the theater company she co-founded, the Performance Exchange Project. Now she's helping women across the nation get their first taste of the arm-wrestling league, as they become inspired through Facebook and a few serendipitous meetings.

Susan Nuss of Taos was staying at a bed-and-breakfast in Sautee, Ga., when she happened to sit across from Hoyt Tidwell at breakfast. "She was wearing a CLAW T-shirt, so I asked her what it was," Nuss recalls. Now the 44-year-old has started her own league, Taos BRAWL.

Karie Miller, 28, had belonged to Chicago's Sideshow Theatre for only a few weeks when the nonprofit performance group held a brainstorming session for quirky fundraising ideas. Miller had just moved from Charlottesville. The Chicago League of Lady Arm Wrestlers came to fruition in February 2009.

Exchanging advice

Jacinta Bunnell was selling her feminist coloring books at a crafts sale at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., when Lilly Bechtel began thumbing through her wares. "Because she saw what I made, she started telling me about this women's arm-wrestling in Charlottesville," says the 38-year-old. "Her mom was involved with it, arm-wrestling as 'The Crone.'" The two teamed up, and last February the inaugural Hudson Valley BRAWL took place.

Each league has its own Facebook



RICK ROMANCITO/TAOS NEWS



BILLY HUNT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE WEAKER SEX? HARDLY: Above left, Florence NightenHELL (Molly Bearden) and Terra Wrist (Megan Keller) face off in November in Taos, N.M. Above right, Jennifer Hoyt Tidwell competes as C'ville Kniewel in Charlottesville.

page and the women are in frequent contact with one another, offering advice. (Q: Where does one buy an arm-wrestling table? A: \$100 at Ultimate Arm Wrestling.) While there are slight variations on the concept in each city — the champ in Taos wins a WWE-style belt, while the Windy City winner wears a tiara and a sash — each group tries to stay true to the essence of the original CLAW.

It's more than following the four pages of intricate rules written by Charlottesville lawyer and CLAW referee Jude Silveira. Each match sponsors a different local cause, from youth music programs to teen pregnancy initiatives. "It's blossoming in all of these cities because it's such a clean idea," says Miller.

A clean idea, yes, but a hilarious one to take part in. All wrestlers compete free of charge, and if there is admission — typically \$5 — the proceeds benefit the chosen charity. The matches are over pretty

quickly. It's usually the best three out of five, with the ref calling the shots and three local celebrity judges deciding any ties.

The characters the women cook up are far-ranging — Jackie O'Nasty? Strawberry Shivcake? The ref and judges can easily be swayed by CLAWbucks from the crowd. Oh, and let's not forget the monitor sitting under the wrestling table. His sole job: looking at butts. Wrestlers who get up from their seats are disqualified.

"One tournament, we happened to have two characters who were both housewives," Bunnell says. "One was named 'Bunnie Bruiser.' She was a '60s housewife with a beehive, an apron, Jell-O molds and martinis. She was up against 'Tough Love,' a working-class mom in curlers and terry-cloth robe. She shed it — only to unveil another terry-cloth robe.

"It was our longest standing bout,"

Bunnell says. "They were in a gridlock. The tension and screaming, I have never heard it get so loud. They lasted through the entire song of 'Fight for Your Right (to Party)' by the Beastie Boys."

Just as in Charlottesville, these groups are outgrowing their venues. There are hopeful whispers that Hoyt Tidwell will host a national tourney in Charlottesville in August.

If that happens, Nuss and the broads of Taos will be ready, though she can't help giggling at the thought of one particular matchup. "Here's the thing: One of our girls wanted to be 'Pushy Galore' but there was already a 'Pushy Galore' in Hudson Valley," she says. "So there's a chance there could be a national event where 'Pushy Galore' wrestles 'Pushy Galore.'"

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DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



COLONEL! THE... JERRY, WHATEVER IT IS, I'M JUST GOING TO ROLL WITH IT.

SIR? TODAY I MET LEVON PUGGS, III — THE FINEST NASCAR DRIVER OF HIS GENERATION!

THAT USO TOUR WAS THE BEST THING THAT'S HAPPENED FOR BASE MORALE IN MONTHS! SO GO AHEAD — TRY TO RUIN MY DAY!

THE USO CHOPPER JUST WENT DOWN. NICE JOB.

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