



CAROLYN HAX

## The mysteries of an 'unexplained' breakup

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

**Dear Carolyn:**  
How do you know when to just accept a breakup or press for more answers? My girlfriend very suddenly and abruptly ended things without much explanation. While we had our issues and I don't feel that things were perfect, they were not that bad, either

Columbus

"Without much explanation" means there was some explanation, right? It's tough to answer you without knowing what she said — i.e., without knowing whether she stunted on the explanation, or whether you just didn't hear what she wanted you to hear. In the latter case, it's not unusual for people to keep hounding their exes till they get satisfaction — which is always futile, not to mention unfair.

So I'm loath to say something that might be used (if not by you, then by others) as justification to start hounding.

Even without knowing anyone's exact words, I will say that in most cases (99.99 percent), it's best just to accept the breakup as an explanation unto itself. There's often a gap between the truth and what you're told anyway, and even where there's no gap — when you get the full 2-by-4 to the ego — there's a limit to how useful that information will ultimately be. There's always some element of this: Some people fit together, some don't.

In the .01 percent of cases where details would be useful, you still need to accept the breakup. But you are entitled to ask, "Just for my own peace of mind, after which I promise never to bother you again, was there something I could have done differently? If I mistreated or aggravated you, I'd like not to do the same thing to somebody else."

Again, a generic answer, but to be more specific, I'd have to, ah, press for more information . . .

**RE: Columbus:**  
What are the rules when there is NO explanation?

Anonymous

No explanation is pretty cold stuff. For someone to cut you off without so much as a crumb of information, and for you to be surprised by that, one of a few things has happened:

1. You totally missed that you were dating someone with major maturity and communication issues, and so you may have a few of your own that need attention;
2. You have just been awakened from a state of chronic wishful thinking about the other person and/or the relationship;
3. You were blinkered by someone very manipulative, which could have happened to anybody, but good luck getting details;
4. You were abusive and the other person fled for safety.  
If I missed one, jump in.

**Re: No explanation:**  
5. You were told already, on multiple occasions, and just didn't listen!

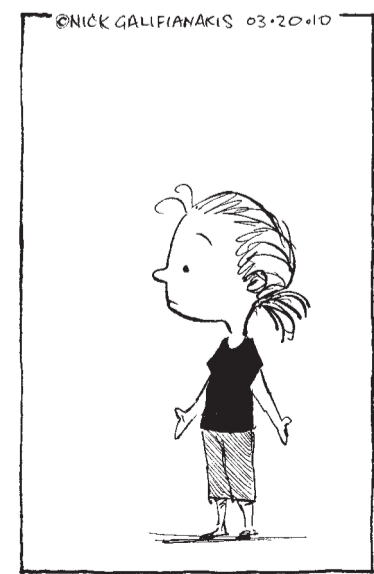
Anonymous 2

It seems to me that when you dump someone in exasperation like this, you say, "I have tried several times to explain X and Y, and it doesn't seem to get through, so I'm leaving. Goodbye." I guess some people can be obtuse or willful enough to convert that very clear statement into, "My girlfriend abruptly ended things without much explanation."

But in that case, I'd put it this way: 5. You're delusional.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on [www.washingtonpost.com/discussions](http://www.washingtonpost.com/discussions).

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or [tellme@washpost.com](mailto:tellme@washpost.com).



BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

**REPORT FROM WEEK 857** in which we asked you to produce new words or phrases containing a block of three consecutive letters of the alphabet — backward. Seems that challenge was a bit more daunting than its forward-looking predecessor.



**Flingpong:** Having your own affair to get even with a cheating spouse. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

**2** the winner of the "Sweeney Todd" Peeps diorama: **Burpon:** Carbonated whiskey. (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park)

**3** **Zyzzag:** Path created during a DWI test when the cop makes you walk 20 steps while reciting the alphabet in reverse. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

**4** **Intellectual DChillity:** The newly revised term for "governmental retardation." (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

### PON SCUM: HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Ghostponement:** A stay of execution. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

**Barf-edit:** To blue-pencil all 2,000-some pages of the health-care plan. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

**Colon-music:** A prettier term than "farting." (Dion Black, Washington)

**Boybandonment:** Finally tossing the 'N Sync posters. (Tom Witte)

**Soonmom:** Teenager's unit of time, roughly equivalent to the half-life of carbon-14. (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

**Coccyx winks:** Stupid butt tricks. (Kevin Dopart)

**Jihades:** Where suicide bombers end up. (Tom Witte, Rick Haynes, Potomac)

**Keg-fed:** On the fraternity diet. (Erik Wennstrom, Bloomington, Ind.)

**Enmail:** Dial-up. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

**ABCbabbie:** "The View." (Mae Scanlan)

**Fedhora:** The Romanian hat dance. (Tom Witte)

**Inkjinx:** The fate of an athlete who gets on the cover of Sports Illustrated. (Jack Clark, Westfield, N.J.)

**Iraqpot:** A cauldron for a stew that's heated for seven years. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

**Marshmallow-vulture:** The kid who'll eat the ones that fall off the stick. (Kevin Dopart)

**Songfester:** An even grosser term for a catchy tune than "earworm." (Mae Scanlan)

**Snottonmouth:** The failure of one's mustache filter. (Dave Prevar)

**Ponderosé:** A posh dude ranch. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

**Fedgerdmain:** The congressional budget process. (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

**Glazed Dnwnuts:** Stockholders, these days. (Mae Scanlan)

**Snoutspend:** Pay through the nose. (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)

**Next week:** Same OED, or The punabridged dictionary



DC COMICS, 1977

Well, you're all heroes to us, too. And usually pretty comical.

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAFE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## Week 861: It's incumbent upon us

The Watt-Eshoo-Inouye Sex-Change Regulatory Act (Carol Vance, Washington)

Every two years, at the beginning of each session of Congress, the Style Invitational invites readers to combine the names of two or more freshman members (and sometimes, oddly, newly departed ones) to create "joint legislation." That's not often enough for some Losers, such as Mark Eckenwiler of Washington, who suggests an off-year contest so that we can exploit the colorful names of the incumbents as well. So we'll do sort of the converse of the freshman contest: This week's pool of legislators includes only those who were elected to their seats before 1994, the first year we ran the freshman contest. The example above is from the time we used the entire Congress, way back in Week 5, in 1993; it's the only entry from that contest whose legislators are all still in their original seats. (And it demonstrates that while you might not be able to stay young forever, you can sure stay juvenile for 17 years.) The longtime incumbents:

Ackerman, Akaka, Andrews, Bachus, Bartlett, Barton, Baucus, Becerra, Bennett, Berman, Bingaman, Bishop, Boehner, Bond, Boucher, Boxer, Brown, Burton, Buyer, Byrd, Calvert, Camp, Castle, Clyburn, Coble, Cochran, Conrad, Conyers, Costello, Deal, DeFazio, DeLauro, Diaz-Balart, Dicks, Dingell, Dodd, Dorgan, Dreier, Duncan, Edwards, Ehlers, Engel, Eshoo, Faleomavaega, Farr, Feingold, Feinstein, Filner, Frank, Gallegly, Goodlatte, Gordon, Grassley, Green, Gregg, Gutierrez, Hall, Harkin, Hastings, Hatch, Herger, Hinchey, Hoekstra, Holden, Hoyer, Hutchison, Inhofe, Inouye, Johnson, Johnson, Kanjorski, Kaptur, Kerry, Kildee, King, Kingston, Kohl, Leahy, Levin, Lewis, Lewis, Lieberman, Linder, Lowey, Lucas, Lugar, Maloney, Manzullo, Markey, McCain, McConnell, McDermott, McKeon, Mica, Mikulski, Miller, Mollohan, Moran, Murray, Nadler, Neal, Norton, Oberstar, Obey, Olver, Ortiz, Pallone, Pastor, Payne, Pelosi, Peterson, Petri, Pomeroy, Rahall, Rangel, Reid, Rockefeller, Rogers, Rohrabacher, Ros-Lehtinen, Roybal-Allard, Royce, Rush, Scott, Sensenbrenner, Serrano, Shelby, Skelton, Slaughter, Smith, Smith, Specter, Spratt, Stark, Stearns, Stupak, Tanner, Taylor, Thompson, Towns, Upton, Velázquez, Visclosky, Waters, Watt, Waxman, Wolf, Woolsey, Young, Young.

**Winner gets the Inker,** the official Style Invitational trophy. **Second place gets a comic book** we're surprised we hadn't heard about before: **This 1970s series** was about a group of Nazi-fighting World War II heroes — one for each branch of the services — who called themselves the Losers because they kept getting refrigerator magnets with stupid cartoons on them. **No, it was because men had died under their command. Whatever, this is an original comic, sealed in plastic, and was donated by Fighting Loser Peter Metrinko.**

**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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, March 29. Put "Week 861" 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 to be published April 17. 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 Mark Richardson; this week's honorable-mentions subhead was sent by both Judy Blanchard and Roy Ashley. The idea for limiting the congressional pool to old-timers was suggested by Michael Kilby in The Style Conversational.

**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://washingtonpost.com/styleconversational).

### TV PREVIEW

## 'Food Revolution' regurgitates worst of reality pap

BY HANK STUEVER

Afflicted with the kind of warm-hearted caring that requires the constant presence of a TV crew, British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver went to Huntington, W.Va., last fall to help people eat better. The city had recently been singled out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as the nation's unhealthiest (read: porkiest), and Oliver, whose previous work includes the "Naked Chef" series and a show where he reinvented British school cafeteria food, arrived babbling about a "revolution."

Well, you can imagine how eagerly the people of West Virginia respond to a foreigner with meticulously ruffled hair and a funny accent telling them to hand over the fries.

Anyone who has ever tried to pry chicken nuggets from their child's grip has been met with the same stubborn resistance seen in "Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution" (premiering Sunday night). Also there's the added suspicion of outright scorn. Not a word is spoken at "Food Revolution's" outset about our culture's politicization of food — the whole arugula divide, the high cost of eating right, the class issues over portion size, the constant character judgments strewn between a fine meal and the drive-thru.

Red state, blue state; I don't know about you, but I'm tired of trying to get the nation to eat right. It's tempting to just let folks keel over in a puddle of country gravy if they like, dead from clogged arteries or scurvy (or both).

"Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution" has all the problems of most network reality pap, in that the show feels pounded into submission by too many manipulative ABC producers. Its "moving" attempts at charity ooze the opportunism seen in "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." And it has a certain hectoring quality, a la "SuperNanny," that obscures its educational aim. In its zeal to show America to itself, it helps America make fun of itself.

Oliver appears to quite honestly blunder into that last mistake. By choosing Appalachia, which already has certain esteem issues over stereotyping, the star chef and fresh-food advocate has bitten off more than he chew, PR-wise. It goes wrong from the start at the Rocky n' Rod morning show at a country radio station (aka "93.7 the Dawg"), where DJ Rod lays into Oliver: "We don't want to sit around and eat lettuce all day. Who made you king?" (Oliver leaves the station grumbling that Rod is a "grumpy old git.")

Of course there's an irresistibly watchable quality to this, and it gets better when Oliver arrives to start his revolu-



HOLLY FARRELL/ABC

**FOODIE FOR THOUGHT:** Chef Jamie Oliver takes "Food Revolution" to the nation's unhealthiest city, Huntington, W.Va.

tion at an elementary school and meets the lunch ladies — Paulie, Millie, Linda, Louella and one feisty head cook named Alice Gue — just as they're serving up "breakfast pizza" (eggs, sausage, gooey cheese) to 450 kids. Oliver is disgusted, of course, and only more so a few hours later at the lunchtime chicken nugget feeding frenzy.

"It's that kind of food that's killing America," he announces.

"You don't have processed food in England?" Alice snaps back.

"God, yes, and it's killing England, too," he replies.

Unfortunately for Alice, the school board has agreed to give Oliver's methods a one-week tryout. Unfortunately for Oliver, he discovers that school lunch funding is meticulously micromanaged

by this unheard-of entity called the USDA, which has determined that french fries count as a vegetable. (Bollocks!) Nevertheless, Oliver whips up a lunch the next day of roast chicken and wild rice. Alice and her team offer an alternative of pepperoni pizza, which counts for two grains and a vegetable. Guess which one the schoolkids go for?

Then the local newspaper reprints some choice statements Oliver made in the foreign press about his trip to the United States, including: "They are all anemic with information. Like, when you meet these people, they are not stupid. They are not ignorant. It's just they have never had food from scratch in their life."

True! But offensive! While the anemically informed townsfolk ready the

anemic hanging rope, Oliver sits on the recess playground and tearfully tells the camera that he sincerely loves these people and wants to help. To its credit, "Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution" is committed to Huntington for the duration of the season, instead of packing up and moving on to de-donutize the next hickville. I take Oliver at his word and guiltily look forward to seeing whether any of these people will manage to eat something that isn't golden brown.

I would also like to try some of this breakfast pizza.

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**JAMIE OLIVER'S FOOD REVOLUTION** (one hour) debuts at 10 p.m. Sunday on ABC.

### DOONESBURY FLASHBACKS BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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